

MEDIA RELEASE

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Borroloola welcomes newest citizens during Australia Day celebration

There are few similarities between the bustling streets of London and the unhurried pace of life in the remote Roper Gulf community of Borroloola, but it is a contrast that has been embraced by two of Australia's newest citizens.

As part of Australia Day festivities in the community, approximately 650 kilometres south-east of Katherine, Roper Gulf Regional Council hosted a citizenship ceremony at which British ex-pats Mark and Lesley Wakeling pledged their commitment to their adopted home.

Mr Wakeling, who is the Council's Pool Municipal Supervisor in Borroloola and former professional soccer coach, explained that obtaining citizenship had been the final step in a journey that began when the couple first arrived in Australia in 1999.

"For us, becoming citizens was about being in the right place to settle down and get it done, and now's the time," he said.

While the tyranny of distance and wet season weather prevented the affable couple's family from attending the ceremony, Mr Wakeling thanked the Borroloola community for welcoming him and his wife with open arms.

"It was special becoming citizens out here in front of our friends," he said.

"We don't have any family here for the day, but they were here in spirit.

"Citizenship kind of means that we belong now; this is our home now."

Mayor Tony Jack said Australia Day was an opportune time to unite communities, learn from the past and forge a sustainable future for every Australian.

"January 26 means something different to every person who calls this part of the Top End home, but I truly think it is a day that we should take advantage of to strengthen our resolve and open an honest dialogue to create a greater community, both at a local level and as a country," he said.

"Today will be remembered as an extra-special Australia Day celebration for two well-known members of the Borroloola community after they pledged their allegiance to Australia and became the Roper Gulf region's newest citizens.

“On behalf of the Council, I’d like to congratulate Mark and Lesley on their decision, which is not one made lightly.”

The celebration continued across the Council’s 186,000 square kilometre Local Government Area when recipients of the 2017 Australia Day Local Government Awards were announced.

Presented to the individuals and events that have provided outstanding contributions to their respective communities during the past 12 months, Mayor Jack said the awards recognised those who had been “prepared to step up because they understand that a community cannot reach its full potential if people sit on the sidelines”.

The winners are:

Barunga

Young Citizen of the Year: Jeffrey McDonald

Citizen of the Year: Peter Wordsworth

Community Event of the Year: Joint Barunga and Manyallauk Community Development Program Katherine Christmas street party parade entry

Beswick

Young Citizen of the Year: Harrietta Forbes

Citizen of the Year: Leon George

Community Event of the Year: Walking with Spirits Festival

Borrooloola

Young Citizen of the Year: Nikita Baker

Citizen of the Year: Jacky Green

Community Event of the Year: 130th anniversary celebrating the arrival of the Magistrate and Mounted Police in Borrooloola

Bulman

Young Citizen of the Year: Cordell Scrubby

Citizen of the Year: Richard Forbes

Community Event of the Year: NAIDOC Week Festival

Jilkminggan

Young Citizen of the Year: Shadonia Baker

Citizen of the Year: Desmond George

Community Event of the Year: Jilkminggan School football competition

Mataranka

Citizen of the Year: Judy MacFarlane

Community Event of the Year: Mataranka Fishing, Sporting and Recreation Club barra competition

Manyallaluk

Citizen of the Year: Alison Andrews

Community Event of the Year: Joint Barunga and Manyallauk Community Development Program Katherine Christmas street party parade entry

Ngukurr

Young Citizen of the Year: Alexis Roberts

Citizen of the Year: Kathy Huddleston

Community Event of the Year: Yugul Mangi Festival

Numbulwar

Young Citizen of the Year: Declan Murrungun

Citizen of the Year: Dale Murrungun

Community Event of the Year: Numburindi Festival

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For further information, or for more photos from Australia Day celebrations across the Roper Gulf region, please contact the Communications Co-ordinator on 0427 674 212 or at roper.governance@ropergulf.nt.gov.au.