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Gurindji Land Handover Marks 50 Years of Progress

August 17, 2025

— *Categories: Human Rights*

The event was the outcome of nearly a decade of protest by Aboriginal stockmen, domestic workers, and their families who walked off Wave Hill Station in 1966. The group, led by Lingiari, set up camp at Daguragu, calling attention to poor working conditions, unequal pay, and the loss of their traditional lands. What began as an industrial dispute developed into a wider struggle for land rights.

The handover at Wave Hill in 1975 was described at the time as a recognition of the Gurindji claim to their traditional Country. The action followed eight years of the Wave Hill Walk Off, which attracted national attention and became a catalyst for later land rights legislation in the Northern Territory.

Historical accounts note that more than 200 Gurindji, Mudburra, and Warlpiri people joined the original strike in 1966. The protest was one of the first of its kind in Australia and maintained momentum for years despite limited resources. The group remained at Daguragu until the government formally transferred land back to the Gurindji people.

Today, the anniversary of the handover is marked by the Freedom Day festival, held annually at Kalkarindji. The festival began as a local commemoration of the strike but has grown into a larger gathering that attracts visitors from across the country. This year's event, scheduled for August 22 to 24, marks the 50th anniversary of Whitlam's visit and the return of land.

Organisers describe the festival as a recognition of the importance of the strike and its legacy. The Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation, which oversees community matters, has said the story remains a significant chapter in the national record. Vincent Lingiari's descendants

continue to participate in the commemorations, which also feature cultural performances, community activities, and historical exhibitions.

While the Wave Hill Walk Off and subsequent land handover are often cited in historical accounts of Australia's twentieth century, the commemoration now serves as a reminder of the events that led to one of the earliest formal returns of land to Aboriginal people in the country.

This year's 50-year milestone ensures that the events at Wave Hill remain recognised in Australia's historical timeline, with the annual Freedom Day festival providing a platform for remembering the Gurindji strike, the handback, and their place in national history.