

An audience with the PRIME MINISTER of AUSTRALIA, the Honorable Kevin Rudd and the MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, the Honorable JENNY MACKLIN

Touching down on the Walgett tarmac was the biggest air plane to land at the airport. The largest aircraft that the community of Walgett have ever seen land, were for carriers of stock and food during flood times.

The Right Honorable Mr Kevin Rudd Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Housing Mrs Jennifer Macklin visited Walgett on Friday 22nd of February 2008.

The Official Party of the Prime Minister and the Minister attended a scheduled meeting at the Walgett Shire Council Chambers. They were invited to have breakfast with invited community members before official talks commenced.

Invited guests attending were Mr George Fernando (Chairperson WAMS), Ms Jessie Richardson (Practice Manager, RN), Mr George Rose (OAM), Mr Richard Lake, Mr Timothy Creighton, Mrs Thelma Thorne, Wendy Spencer (Dharriwaa Elders Group), Mr Ray Kent, Victor Beale (Walgett Shire), Des Jones (Murdi Paaki Housing), James McCormack, Joe Flick, Tom Warren (Indigenous Coordination Centre), Deborah Walford (Walgett Community College), Elizabeth Simpson, Rodney and Kathy Robbins (Orana Haven), Bert Gordon, Fredrick Walford (Community member), William Kennedy (DEST), Harry Hall (Walgett Senior) and Felicity Taylor-Edward (Prime Minister's Department).

George Rose officially welcomed the dignitaries to country and to the Walgett Shire.

Topics discussed were housing, education, employment and sport. The Prime Minister stated he wasn't here to talk he was here to listen to the people's stories. He took his own personal notes throughout the session despite having his PA on site. He engaged well with those present and expressed an interest in the communities concerns and issues.

WAMS Clinic Manager Jessie Richardson presented the Prime Minister with a package of pictorial reports, literature and the updated WAMS staff profile. She reminded him of his visit to Walgett when he was Leader of the Opposition and showed him the WAMS pictorial report that depicted this. He was also presented a scarf and other memorabilia from Ms Walford on behalf of the Primary School.



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An unscheduled visit at the Prime Minister's request resulted with the entourage receiving a tour of both the local Primary School and St Joseph's Catholic School.

The Prime Minister and the Minister's visit to the Primary School provided a window of opportunity for students, staff, parents and teachers to speak one on one with the official party. The Prime Minister did not disappoint the excited students. After a meal of curry and damper it was time to move on.

The political party and dignitaries were escorted to Gingie Village where they met with the locals. The Prime Minister and the Minister happily chatted with the kids and posed for photos upon request.

The next port of call was to Namoi village where the Prime Minister engaged in conversation with members of the community. He openly asked questions and expressed an interest in employment strategies for Walgett youth.

Students from St Joseph's school offered the Prime Minister rosary beads and literature. He spoke to the pupils on the importance of gaining a good education to shape yourself for future endeavours. The Prime Minister happily posed with students for photographs.

The entourage then departed for the Airport. They were met with staff from the Walgett Special One Co-operative and briefly discussed their concerns relating to the welfare of local farmers, produce and stock.

QUEST the Labrador is trained with the bomb squad and travelled to Walgett the evening before with his handler, Mark, to ensure the Ministerial party was going to be arriving in a 'bomb' free environment. Security guards provided on-ground surveillance the entire visit and were always metres away from the Prime Minister. Included in the official party were television and tabloid representation from Canberra to record and document the event.

The overall consensus was of a positive nature with the majority of the public commenting on how obliging, down to earth and easy going the Prime Minister and the Minister were.

Walgett farewelled the Ministerial gathering as the Air Force Base plane flew off to another destination in Queensland.