



Social advocate, Greens candidate drowns in Samoa

Source:By Danielle Cronin

One of the ACT's fiercest advocates for social justice has drowned in Samoa while holidaying with his family.

Father-of-two Charlie Pahlman, 44, was snorkelling on the reef off Savai'i Island when he was hit by a freak wave and drowned on January 19 [Samoan time].

He was the deputy director of the ACT Council of Social Service and stood as a Greens candidate in the 2004 ACT election.

He also worked with Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation and a range of other social, community and political groups.

Greens MLA Deb Foskey said members were still coming to terms with Mr Pahlman's sudden death. "Canberra has lost one of its fiercest advocates for social justice and the Greens have lost a valuable member," Dr Foskey said yesterday.

ACTCOSS director Ara Creswell said the organisation was devastated by his death. "His passion for social justice, his ability to bring diverse groups of people together in a common striving for better community relations, his unswerving commitment to the recognition of indigenous rights, his sense of our shared obligation to the environment, and amidst all this, his love for his family and friends inspired us all," she said.

Mr Pahlman - who was born in Sweden on November 22, 1960 and emigrated to Australia with his family when he was 10 years old - came to Canberra in 1996 and took on the role as community organiser for Oxfam Community Aid Abroad ACT.

He had previously worked with non-government organisations in Laos and Thailand for 10 years, helping local communities campaign against large-scale dams in the Mekong region.

Bangkok-based Towards Ecological Recovery and Ecological Recovery spokesman Witoon Permpongsacharoen said he hoped that people could carry on with a "little bit of Charlie-spirit within".

"It was because of Charlie's great energy, empathy for all people, enthusiasm for debate, constructive outrage and love of life that Terra and the people of the Mekong region are now mourning the loss of a great friend ...," he said.

Mr Pahlman was the beloved partner of Pam Boyer, loving father of Tina and Kari, close friend of their mother Christine Pahlman, son of Anna-Lena and Ragnar, brother to Andrew and admired friend of many.

The life of Charlie Pahlman will be celebrated on Monday at The Abbey in Federation Square from 2pm and Corroboree Park Hall in Paterson Street, Ainslie from 6.30pm. The Charlie Pahlman Memorial web site address is www.charlie.pahlman.com.

Source: The Canberra Times, 27 January 2005

