The Indigenous Business Review

ISSUE 1 | AUGUST 2024

ANALYSIS

Indigenous leaders key to renewables development

TOP 10

Indigenous tourism businesses making a difference

A billion opportunities with Rosli Wheelock

Listening to you. Understanding your business.

At CommBank we believe successful partnerships are built on a foundation of trust and understanding. That's why we take the time to really get to know you and your business. With our strong commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and communities, we can support you through every stage of your organisation's development and growth.

Find out how we can work with you.

Simone Kenmore
Executive Manager of Indigenous Business Banking
simone.kenmore@cba.com.au

Indigenous Business Banking website
www.commbank.com.au/business/indigenous-banking

Supply Nation RED OCHRE PARTNER

CONTENTS

Cover image: Fortescue's Rosli Wheelock by Noongar/Yamati photographer Robyn Jean

FOUNDATION PARTNERS

BHP · Fortescue · MINERAL RESOURCES

The Indigenous Business Review

Editorial: editor@theibr.com.au
Advertising: advertising@theibr.com.au
Managing Editor: Zak Kirkup
Publisher: Reece Harley

The Indigenous Business Review is a 100% Aboriginal owned company; part of the National Indigenous Times group.
theibr.com.au

2 Prowse St,
West Perth,
Western Australia,
6005

The Indigenous Business Review

My grandfather's Aboriginality meant that for much of his life it was illegal for him to own or operate a business in Western Australia. The same is true for most Indigenous people across our country. There isn't the same level of intergenerational Indigenous business leadership and wealth.

The Indigenous Business Review celebrates the daily achievements of Indigenous entrepreneurs and professionals across Australia. It highlights the rapid growth of the Indigenous business sector and the increasing presence of Indigenous people in senior executive and board director roles within major firms.

Australia stands on the precipice of a new chapter in our history, one where more Indigenous people are taking their rightful place in the business sector. The Indigenous Business Review will shine a light on their inspiring contribution.

The Indigenous Business Review has been two years in development. Throughout that time, co-founders Wayne Bergmann and Clinton Wolf have been exceptional supporters and tireless advocates for the concept. I am also grateful to Publisher and Managing Director Reece Harley, my colleagues and contributors who have worked to bring this publication to life. Most of all, my deepest thanks go to our foundation partners, production and print partners, and advertisers.

In this first edition, it is my hope that most of the businesses and individuals mentioned are new to most readers. Australians deserve to witness the depth, maturity, and exceptionalism of Indigenous businesses that, until now, haven't had a dedicated publication promoting them and their issues.

Printed every second month, and available year-round online, I invite you to walk alongside us.

Welcome to The Indigenous Business Review.

Zak Kirkup
Managing Editor

Kokatha Aboriginal Corporation members.

$96m contract sets new record

BHP means business with Olympic Dam mine deal, writes **David Prestipino**

BHP has made a groundbreaking $96m deal with South Australian company Intract Australia for industrial cleaning at its Olympic Dam mine. This is the largest stand-alone contract BHP has ever signed with an Indigenous business.

This record contract is part of a combined $156m awarded by BHP's Copper SA business over five years. Indigenous-owned Platinum Civil Construction also secured a $60m joint civil contract with Arabana-owned Zancott Knight.

These transformative deals highlight BHP's commitment to spending $1.5bn over four years with Traditional Owner and Indigenous businesses by mid-2027.

Intract's workforce at Olympic Dam, a site 560km north of Adelaide, is now 50 per cent Indigenous and growing thanks to the recent contract, with 20 per cent of the company's workers being women.

For CEO John Briggs, a proud Yorta Yorta man and one of the three original founders of Intract, the deal means more stable, long-term jobs for Indigenous people. "Our vision when we started Intract was to form a business that would not only open doors for Indigenous training and development but deliver stable and long-term employment for Indigenous people," Mr Briggs says.

Intract's Indigenous workforce at Olympic Dam will reach 40 FTEs, offering stable employment and career pathways for Indigenous workers, while enhancing training and development for First Nations people.

Platinum Civil Construction, with 65 per cent female employment, has seen rapid growth from a small to medium-sized operation in just three years.

Managing director Kiara Johnson credits BHP's support for this expansion. "I was born and raised in regional South Australia, and through a lot of hard work I have been able to build Platinum to what it is today, with BHP's support," she says.

Ms Johnson, the first Indigenous woman in SA to own and manage a civil construction company, aims to provide more jobs for First Nations women.

"Seventeen years ago I was working for a contractor at Olympic Dam, and I was the only female out of about 30 people in the company," she says. "Now, I own and manage a business that essentially delivers this same contract."

BHP Copper SA asset president Anna Wiley emphasises BHP's focus on increasing its spend with Indigenous and Traditional Owner-owned businesses.

"We see the positive impact these partnerships have on the businesses and their employees, and in the local communities where we operate," she says. "The new contract with Intract continues the partnerships we have with a range of Indigenous and Traditional Owner-owned businesses in South Australia."

Ms Wiley highlighted Intract's growing reputation and footprint at Olympic Dam since the company began work there.

"More than half of Intract's workforce at Olympic Dam are Indigenous employees," she says. "They are highly regarded for their commitment to providing economic opportunities, mentoring, and training for Traditional Owner communities."

BHP spent more than $54m with local Indigenous suppliers at Olympic Dam last financial year, creating significant opportunities for Indigenous businesses and shared benefits for local communities.

The Kokatha people, Traditional Owners of the land surrounding Olympic Dam and three pastoral stations, were formally awarded Native Title over the area in September 2014 after a 20-year journey. BHP supported the determination and agreed to award sub-leases over the pastoral stations to the Kokatha people as part of an Indigenous Land Use Agreement.

With financial support from BHP, Kokatha has been upgrading infrastructure on the pastoral stations to refurbish them as fully operational cattle stations.

Glen Wingfield, Kokatha heritage services manager, emphasises the importance of reconnecting with the land. "Our people have a strong and ongoing connection to the area, so the sub-leases not only provide us with an opportunity for economic empowerment but also get us back on to the lands, which are an important part of our culture," he says. ●

Indigenous groups pivotal in renewables development

Renewables race gives Indigenous entities a spot on the grid, as David Prestipino discovers

Australia's race to net-zero emissions by 2050 means that Indigenous groups are becoming key partners in sustainable wealth-creation projects.

"It can't happen without us, there's no way," says Chris Croker, a Luritja man from Central Australia.

Mr Croker, a senior executive and strategy adviser, is an expert in Indigenous economic development and infrastructure construction. He knows the renewables revolution can change the course of First Nations communities for generations. As co-chair of the First Nations Clean Energy Network with Karrina Nolan, a descendant of the Yorta Yorta people, they've influenced the government's approach to First Nations engagement in the green energy transition.

Australia's vast natural resources mean the road to net zero runs through First Nations territories, with over 60 per cent of future clean energy projects on land and sea where First Nations people have legal rights and interests.

Several First Nations players, having missed opportunities during the mining boom, are now actively seeking stakes in the renewable revolution.

Changing energy sources and decarbonising electricity is a radical transformation. Federal Climate Change and Environment Minister Chris Bowen recently called it "the biggest economic transformation our country's undertaken since the industrial revolution." At Parliament House, Mr Bowen launched the Network's Powering First Nations Jobs in Clean Energy report, stressing that Indigenous ownership in Australia's transition is essential.

"We will have failed if First Nations people are not benefiting from projects on First Nations land, and more broadly," Mr Bowen said. His comments highlight the government's shift towards meaningful Indigenous involvement, inspired by successful models in Canada, where First Nations own or are partners in over 200 clean energy projects.

Emerging government incentives, like the Capacity Investment Scheme, now include merit criteria around First Nations engagement. However, significant funding for First Nations capacity, consent,

First Nations Clean Energy Network co-chairs Chris Croker and Karrina Nolan.

Picture: Rio Tinto

collaboration, co-design, and co-ownership is still missing from the federal budget's $23b clean energy funding. Legislative modifications could ensure First Nations consent and cultural heritage rights are legally protected.

Mr Croker believes the budget has missed an opportunity to signal to clean energy proponents that First Nations communities are vital partners. "We need to work together to ensure co-benefits and local outcomes," he told IBR. This includes Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from First Nations communities regarding projects on their land.

Without FPIC, investment in Australia's clean energy sector is uncertain. Mr Croker notes that big investors are wary of projects lacking prior informed consent from First Nations groups. His personal involvement in solar-powered water systems in central desert communities, which have spurred Indigenous tourism, showcases the positive impacts of renewables on remote towns.

The First Nations Clean Energy Network, led by Mr Croker and Ms Nolan, aims to ensure Indigenous communities benefit from the next economic gamechanger. However, the global race to net zero is fast-paced, and navigating it requires Indigenous input at every level. Ms Nolan criticised the federal budget's $23bn Future Made in Australia Act for lacking certainty and First Nations involvement. She emphasised that Indigenous groups' territorial assets should be central to renewable strategies at both federal and state levels.

Mr Croker insists both sides of politics recognise the necessity of Indigenous co-drivers in the net-zero journey. "We're all more energised now," he says, emphasising the need for government reform, improved industry engagement, and community empowerment.

Global examples show that First Nations involvement in renewable projects is critical. "There is huge economic potential in renewable energy for our people, and for our country," Ms Nolan says. "Establishing and incentivising the right partnerships with First Nations is an investment decision."

Other advanced economies understand that emission targets must include First Nations participation. Mr Croker questions the lack of action on the ground despite the government's talk of partnerships. He stressed the importance of jobs, business, and wealth generation for Indigenous communities.

> "It can't happen without us, there's no way ... We need to work together

Clean energy proponents are already engaging with Indigenous organisations in renewable energy zones (REZs), but many communities lack the capacity to negotiate and ensure benefit-sharing. Mr Croker highlights the need for investment in First Nations communities to respond effectively to these developments. During a recent visit to a Native Title organisation in the Pilbara, he observed the overwhelming pressure from private investors on Indigenous groups. "They don't have the capacity to respond," he says, noting the influx of project developers and the need for support to build capacity.

Modelling shows that moving to the clean energy industry requires up to one million workers, with about 40,000 being Indigenous. Mr Croker called for investment in skills development, training, and employment for First Nations people.

"Investing in those areas will benefit the wider community and First Nations people," he says.

Professor Robynne Quiggin, a steering group member of the FNCEN and Net Zero Agency Advisory board member, stresses the importance of establishing free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) more permanently for First Nations.

"It starts with consent," she says.

Joe Morrison, CEO of the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, notes that projects are de-risked when First Nations organisations are deeply involved.

"Real equity in First Nations businesses is critical," he says.

National Native Title Council chair Kado Muir highlights the opportunity for the clean energy revolution to address historic injustices by involving Traditional Owners as equity partners in projects.

Whether the renewable energy revolution can bring prosperity and self-determination for First Nations will become clearer when Mr Bowen releases the government's First Nations Clean Energy Strategy. ●

KEY PLAYERS IN RENEWABLES TRANSITION

Chris Croker & Karrina Nolan

The First Nations Clean Energy Network has amassed more than 1000 members, has support from organisations like the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation and National Native Title Council and, critically, the ear of government since forming in 2022. Together, its two co-chairs are experienced policy advocates and developers of clean energy projects, with an insatiable desire to have Indigenous groups and communities at the heart of the country's future clean energy economy. It wants Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), equity and genuine beneficial partnerships in projects, economic benefits, job opportunities in communities, access to clean, lower-cost and reliable power, and successfully advocated governments to develop a First Nations Clean Energy Strategy as a priority under the National Energy Transformation Partnership, which Chris Bowen will deliver in coming months.

Chris Bowen

No one will have to be more compromising, canny and combative in the country's clean energy transition than the Federal Climate Change and Energy Minister. His new Capacity Investment Scheme will tempt the states into several renewable energy projects, but long delays to generating new supply sources and the cost of producing them with ageing infrastructure will be a constant headache amid the headway. While recent government reform and schemes will help combat emissions during the transition, he will face heat from the Greens over climate action and the Liberals ahead of a 2025 election. But one thing is certain – Mr Bowen believes Indigenous communities must be at the centre of the "biggest economic transformation our country's undertaken since the industrial revolution".

The miners

The **Chris Ellison**-led Mineral Resources is looming as a major player, after recently acquiring substantial stakes in lithium companies for the battery metals crucial to the energy transition. Mineral's big four rivals – BHP, Rio Tinto, Fortescue and Hancock Prospecting – are all on their own different transformative paths, but sticking mostly to the metals needed for decarbonisation. BHP's Olympic Dam site is a 500-year operational proposition, given current extraction rates there. Billionaire **Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest** is transforming the iron ore producer to a green hydrogen titan, while his private company Squadron Energy holds the most renewable power assets in Australia. Green steel is also a looming priority for Pilbara iron ore titan Rio Tinto.

Greg Combet

The experienced Combet's appointment as chairman of the Net Zero Authority, which oversees our transition to a net-zero energy system and industrial base, brings extra weight. He also manages the independent $212bn national sovereign wealth fund, which includes $2.1bn for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land and Sea Future Fund.

Martijn Wilder

The specialist climate change investor and founder of Pollination has the trust of several key government ministers, evidenced by his rise to chair Labor's $15bn National Reconstruction Fund, which will power Labor's renewables transition strategy. Mr Wilder previously chaired the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and was founding director of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

David Morris

An environmental lawyer specialising in mining, gas and cultural heritage groups, Mr Morris heads the Environmental Defenders Office, which has imported resource development via lengthy and costly legal battles with Santos' $5.8bn Barossa gas project in the Timor Sea and Woodside's $18.85bn Scarborough gas project in WA. The EDO received $8.3m in Labor's 2022 federal budget.

Virginia Marshall

The first Indigenous person on the Climate Change Authority, an independent statutory body that provides the federal government with advice on greenhouse gas reduction targets included in new or adjusted NDCs (nationally determined contributions).

OTHER INFLUENCERS

Cissy Gore-Birch
Indigenous Carbon Industry Network co-chair.
Bevan Mailman
Desert Springs Octopus co-chair.
Andrew Dyer
Australian Energy Infrastructure commissioner.
Aboriginal Clean Energy Partnership
Influential advisory group Pollination, the Kimberley Land Council, Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation and MG Corporation have partnered on the East Kimberley Clean Project, Australia's first 100 per cent green energy, hydrogen and ammonia export project.

Women leading the way

Australia's rich cultural history is keenly sought by visitors and locals wanting to learn about their back yard

Dianne Bortoletto

A global spotlight shone brightly on Australia's Indigenous stars when Sydney hosted the 2000 Summer Olympic Games, and much of the growth in Aboriginal cultural tourism has happened in the years since.

Many credit Elder from New South Wales, Dunghutti-Jerrinja Nation, Aunty Margret Campbell, with spearheading the movement.

In the 1960s, Ms Campbell participated in Aboriginal youth programs such as the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs and benefited from mentoring provided by Indigenous politicians and campaigners such as Charles Perkins, Esther Carroll and Elizabeth "Trixie" Rowe.

This inspired her to become NSW's first Aboriginal-owned tourism operator in the late 1990s, when she took tourists on a "whale dreaming" cruise, decoding how Traditional Landowners lived in and around the harbour. Since then, Ms Campbell has seen a huge shift in Indigenous cultural awareness over the last two decades.

Today, Ms Campbell's Dreamtime Southern X walking tours explore the foreshore around The Rocks, a place where the Gadigal had established campsites when the First Fleet came to shore in 1788.

"I don't want to dwell on the invasion, I just want to talk about my lived experience," Ms Campbell says.

"I'm positive and upbeat. Many visitors on my tours are embarrassed to ask questions at the start, as they think they should know about our country's history.

"I make them feel comfortable and tell them they can ask the silliest or most serious questions. There are no wrong questions; I'm not going to judge."

Over in Western Australia, Wola Gija woman Bec Sampi is the head guide at Kingfisher Tours, where she reveals stories of the Kimberley region in a way possible only for someone born, raised and educated with 65,000 years of intergenerational stories.

As a child, Ms Sampi's playground was Purnululu National Park, where she gained a wealth of cultural and geographical knowledge from her Elders.

She's an advocate for Aboriginal rights around Australia and founder of Garingbaar Native Bush Botanicals, which makes beauty products infused with bush lavender, coconut oil and other ingredients.

In Western Australia's capital city, Dale Tilbrook pioneered Indigenous tourism in the late '90s, drawing on her retail experience to seize the opportunities surrounding the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

From selling authentic Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games-endorsed returning boomerangs, her business has evolved over three decades and she is now considered an authority on bush tucker. Read more about Ms Tilbrook on page 30.

Cross over to the Northern Territory to Sarah Dalby, a tour guide and art teacher through Maruku Arts, Australia's only Anangu-owned regional gallery and cultural centre.

Ms Dalby captures the immensity of the landscapes and legends that surround Uluru, her place of work, and has been doing so since she was a child and learnt the skills from her Aunty. Join one of Ms Dalby's experiences and you'll hear the stories behind dot painting and discover the importance of sourcing Aboriginal art ethically and responsibly, just two things she is passionate about.

Also in the Northern Territory is proud Arrernte woman Nova Pomare, general manager of Standley Chasm – Angkerle Atwatye. For the past five years under Ms Pomare's management, Standley Chasm – Angkerle Atwatye's operations have flourished with annual tours increasing from 30 to almost 300, the team growing from 12 to 23 members and now six Aboriginal guides are employed. Further, the whole operation is powered with an off-the-grid generator that will be 100 per cent solar powered by the end of the year, sustainable use of natural spring water, recycled grey water and the use of biodegradable plates for large groups to negate water use from washing dishes.

> **Being on Country is powerful ... sharing what I know is amazing**

Born and raised in Alice Springs, as a little girl, Ms Pomares says she was always at the Chasm with her grandmother and visiting her Aunty and Uncle who ran the business in the '70s. "Standley Chasm was one of my first jobs as a teenager, so growing up, I always knew how important the business was to my family," Ms Pomare says. "Now, it's come full circle. Fulfilling a caretaker role like this for our Country is a dream come true. It's also an avenue for Aboriginal employment and we're proud to support our local mob."

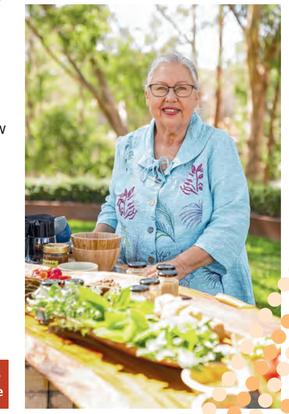
From the Top End down to the Apple Isle, Carleeta Thomas is the esteemed lead guide at Wukalina Walk in Tasmania/lutruwita's northeast. She studied hairdressing before being headhunted to join the Aboriginal-owned company.

"I never thought of doing anything like this. Of talking about myself and my culture," Ms Thomas says. "But I like being able to connect with guests on every level. I'm sharing what I know and learning every time I take a tour."

Fresh out of high school, Ms Thomas, a pakana woman, became a guide on the experience, the first Aboriginal-owned tour in Tasmania.

"I was really lucky for the Elders to see something in me at such a young age," she says. "Being on Country is powerful. Learning about my culture and being able to share what I know is amazing." ●

Visit discoveraboriginalexperiences.com or state tourism organisations to find out more



Clockwise from main: Carleeta Thomas, Aunty Margret Campbell, Bec Sampi, Nova Pomare and Dale Tilbrook.

Support through a global reach

Supply Nation celebrates an impressive 15-year milestone, writes **Kate Russell**

Congratulations to the National Indigenous Times on the launch of this new voice for First Nations businesses.

Partnerships that promote the capability, excellence and values of our suppliers and entrepreneurs to a wide audience both in Australia and internationally are very much needed and welcomed.

The Indigenous business sector is growing strongly. Its contribution to the economy, jobs growth and positive social impact is increasingly acknowledged by a broad cross section of government, business and community interests.

This year, Supply Nation celebrates a significant milestone as we mark our 15-year anniversary.

We will also record this year more than 850 member organisations, and last year, we facilitated $4.1bn worth of spend into Indigenous businesses.

Our members are committed to supplier diversity and procurement from Indigenous-owned businesses.

In July, we added our 5000th business to our Indigenous Business Direct database, accessible to everyone looking to source products and services from verified Indigenous-owned businesses.

Opportunities for greater international engagement are also significant and we currently have programs in place to develop strong collaboration with First Nations organisations in the United States, Canada and New Zealand.

Next year we launch a strategy to increase commercial engagement with South-East Asia markets.

In collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade we have recently released a report that provides new information on Indigenous businesses creating success in international markets.

Supply Nation has a legacy that we can all be proud of, and that will be on show at our annual trade show, Connect, this year in Meanjin (Brisbane) as we help to position businesses to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the Olympic Games in 2032.

And, as we look to meet these opportunities and challenges of the future, what legacy will we leave at the conclusion of the next 15 years?

While the future remains unwritten and stories yet to unfold, we can and must enhance the potential of every Indigenous Australian through economic empowerment.

Commitment to a values-based approach to business, the importance of sustainability and protection of natural assets are increasingly recognised as fundamental to future economic growth.

As we look to a world that places increasing importance on environment, social and governance issues, Indigenous knowledge must be incorporated into decisions that impact economic growth. This is particularly relevant when we look to grow our clean energy and renewables sector as well as sustainable tourism in regional and sensitive natural environments.

The values and culture of our business leaders equip us well to meet future challenges and forge success.

Despite numerous and recent setbacks, I am optimistic that given the strength of our resolve and determination, Indigenous businesses will have significant, critical and positive impact on shaping a successful economy over the next 15 years to the benefit of all Australians.

It will require us all to work together, and I look forward to that. ●

■ *Kate Russell is Chief Executive Officer, Supply Nation*

OPINION | Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price

Let's enable our young to rise above

My aim: economic independence

Money doesn't buy happiness.

Whoever said that was probably right, but I suggest that economic independence just might. It's my conviction that economic independence enables one to rise above the paternalistic low expectations that have been thrust upon them as an Indigenous person, and that this may well put them on a trajectory to happiness.

Enabling economic independence, however, requires that we address both sides of the coin. We must discourage welfare dependence on one hand, and encourage wealth creation, employment and business enterprise on the other.

While it might sound a world away from economics, minimising welfare dependence demands that we consider seriously the environments our young Indigenous people are growing up in.

It is human to take the path of least resistance unless we have good reason to do otherwise. And let's be honest, relative to welfare, the path to economic independence is not the least resistant; it's usually downright hard work. The child whose environment is safe, purposeful and includes caring role models who exemplify hard work is afforded the good reason they need to buck the path of least resistance and work towards economic independence.

Needless to say the opposite is also notoriously true.

If we care about Indigenous economic independence, then we need to care about getting young Indigenous people away from dysfunctional home environments. I am optimistic when I see educational institutions that recognise this and are willing to run boarding school facilities for this very reason, like Yipirinya School. Unfortunately, the current government has not given adequate consideration to the actual needs of these schools, so we have not seen the progress I am convinced we could otherwise be seeing.

This then leads us to the second aspect of economic independence which is to encourage Indigenous wealth creation and business enterprise. I think of the founder of Blackrock Industries, Steven Fordham, an Indigenous man who faced plenty of challenges both in his personal health and when he started his business. Steven is a poignant reminder of the need to defy the victimhood narrative that quite frankly destroys wealth creation. He didn't buy into dependency rhetoric and blame someone else for his plight – instead he used hardship to shape his goals for the future.

The outcome of that was to look beyond himself and he now runs a successful private enterprise and started the project Second Chance for Change which provides long-term employment opportunities for previously incarcerated Indigenous men.

While some people like Steven can see past the narrative, there are plenty who can't.

It is therefore incumbent upon us to change the narrative for them, and to work at improving the environments that our young people grow up in.

So while money doesn't buy happiness, economic independence gets us a long way there, and when we start to see that in our country I, for one, will be very happy. ●

The Federal Government was also asked to contribute to this edition, however, due to changes in the Ministry, this did not occur. A contribution will be made in the next edition.

The Indigenous Business Review

Let's drive commerce

The best platform for advancing Indigenous communities is business

Alex Sanderson

More than 60,000 years ago, the world's oldest living culture created one of the most sophisticated trading systems ever seen. Domestically, Indigenous communities developed and utilised trade routes that spanned Australia, facilitating the exchange of goods such as ochre, tools, food, and ceremonial items. Internationally, communities engaged in trade with neighbouring countries. For instance, the Yolngu people from Arnhem Land traded with Indonesian fishermen. For thousands of years, Indigenous Australians thrived in an economy they established and controlled.

However, the arrival of British colonisers in 1788 marked a devastating turning point for Indigenous Australians and their flourishing trade networks. Reduced from businesspeople to slaves, they were systematically locked out of the job market and exploited on missions. In contrast, immigrants who sought better economic opportunities were welcomed and quickly secured employment. As the rest of Australia prospered economically, Indigenous Australians were systematically left behind.

Policies designed to suppress Indigenous advancement, such as those that led to the Stolen Generations, continue to cast a long shadow over our communities. Despite decades of government efforts to reverse the damage, these past policies still negatively affect Indigenous Australians in areas such as health, the law, and education. The Productivity Commission's latest data on Closing the Gap shows little progress towards achieving its goals in successfully getting Indigenous Australians on an equal playing field with the rest of Australia, with only five out of the 19 targets on track.

The failure of the 2023 Voice referendum further underscores the inability of governments – whether Labor or Liberal – to achieve the meaningful change that has been sought for many years. It is becoming increasingly clear that Indigenous Australians must move away from relying solely on government intervention. Instead, we should harness the power of the private market, combined with a community-led approach, to drive change ourselves.

Indigenous Australians have long been passionate about effecting change in our communities, often channelling efforts into fields like health, law, and social work. These areas are undeniably crucial, offering vital support and advocacy for those in need. However, I argue that business, too, can be a powerful vehicle for change, with a far-reaching impact on social outcomes.

The Snapshot Study 3.0 by Melbourne University indicates that the Indigenous business ecosystem fosters opportunities for Indigenous employment and self-determination, and supports the creation of intergenerational wealth within communities.

Since the introduction of the Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) in 2015, over $9.5bn has been spent on Indigenous businesses. More than 64,000 contracts have been awarded to over 4000 Indigenous enterprises. This policy has stimulated Indigenous entrepreneurship, business growth, and economic development, providing Indigenous Australians with more opportunities to participate in the economy.

The benefits have been profound. There have been higher employment rates among Indigenous Australians and significant growth in Indigenous businesses due to increased access to government and private enterprise contracts. The economic benefits derived from the IPP have had a positive ripple effect on Indigenous communities.

Money spent on Indigenous businesses doesn't just reward shareholders. Statistics from Supply Nation show that for every dollar of revenue within an Indigenous business, $4.41 of social return is generated, uplifting community members. These businesses employ a combined 116,795 people, paying $4.2bn in wages and are also 100 times more likely to employ other Indigenous people.

Lastly, Elders who lost their identities as a consequence of the Stolen Generation find their identities within their businesses.

In today's rapidly evolving world, the business sector presents unique opportunities for driving sustainable, systemic change for our communities. Indigenous people passionate about effecting change should consider the benefits of pursuing careers in business, leveraging our natural entrepreneurial skills and commercial acumen to uplift our communities, just like our ancestors did thousands of years ago. ●

About Alex:

Alex Sanderson is a business contributor of the Indigenous Business Review. He is the founder and president of UNSW First Nations Business Society, where he works with UNSW Business School and industry in recruitment and retention strategies of First Nations students and an executive education facilitator at the Australian Graduate School of Management.

BHP

"HELPING MY PEOPLE GET THE JOBS THEY WANT. TO ME THAT'S BIG."

ABORIGINAL BUILDING & CIVIL CONSTRUCTION ACADEMY

Discover how Peter and his colleagues are helping Aboriginal people find and excel at work in the building and construction industry.

Scan for more.

Left to right: Tomika Johnson, managing director Waddi Group; Alisi Tutuila, chair Aboriginal Housing Company; Simone Kenmore, executive manager, CBA Indigenous Business Banking; Bianca Broadhurst, chief people officer Australian Institute of Sport; Kate Russell, CEO Supply Nation; and Jasmine Newman, managing director Killara Services.

Social impact of financial services

CBA leads the charge in supporting Indigenous business growth, **David Prestipino** discovers

Indigenous Indigenous businesses are at the forefront of economic prosperity in their communities, with female-led ventures playing a significant role. In 2022, the Indigenous ecosystem contributed $16.1bn to the national economy, supporting 13,693 businesses and employing 116,795 people who received $4.2bn in wages.

CBA supports Indigenous businesses in a number of ways, including through their Indigenous Procurement and Engagement team led by Executive Manager Lucy Brereton, a proud Worimi woman, together with Simone Kenmore, a proud Yankunytjatjara woman.

"Our vision is a thriving Indigenous business sector, building intergenerational wealth and economic independence for Indigenous people and their communities," Ms Kenmore says.

"Our approach is Indigenous-informed and led, based on listening to our customers and acting on their feedback."

Access to capital is a major challenge for many Indigenous business owners due to historical exclusion from economic participation. CBA addresses this with solutions like Stream Working Capital, which uses unpaid invoices as loan security. Impact Services, a labour hire company in Western Australia, benefits from this program, enabling operational stability and growth.

CBA's Women in Focus, led by Fiona McAuley, amplifies female perspectives and supports established and emerging leaders. The annual Women in Focus Conference ensures representation from Indigenous women, providing opportunities to connect and generate new ideas. The initiative also includes editorial coverage, research reports and the Leading Women podcast, highlighting successes and challenges.

Notable Indigenous business leaders featured by Women in Focus include Kate Russell of Supply Nation, Amanda Healy of Kirrikin, Liandra Gaykamangu of Liandra Swim and Tanya Denning-Orman from SBS.

Ms Kenmore emphasises that generational wealth creation for First Nations communities can be achieved by strengthening their businesses.

After 27 years in the not-for-profit and public sectors, she joined CBA in 2022 to have a greater impact by supporting Indigenous businesses.

"The social impact of our Indigenous businesses is broad, with communities benefiting directly," Ms Kenmore says.

The Indigenous Procurement Policy aims to increase contracts awarded to Indigenous-owned businesses, driving growth in government and corporate supplier diversity targets. CBA's Indigenous Procurement and Engagement team supports this initiative.

An example is Yaala Sparkling, a native botanical-infused drinks business founded by Wiradjuri woman Tara Croker and her mother, Mel. CBA now supplies Yaala Sparkling across its cafes.

CBA's tailored financial services and culturally-appropriate engagement, including the Indigenous Business Concierge and specialised programs for Indigenous women, help customers thrive.

Partnering with organisations like Supply Nation, CBA launched the Indigenous Business Education Series in June to strengthen business capabilities for a sustainable sector.

"Giving back to the Indigenous business sector is crucial," Ms Kenmore says. "These are some of the best businesses in Australia; they just so happen to be Indigenous businesses." ●

Leader inspires change

Fortescue's general manager First Nations Rosli Wheelock.

Get to know Fortescue's trailblazer in First Nations engagement, writes **Zak Kirkup**

Rosli Wheelock's journey to becoming a prominent figure in the mining industry and a key player at resource giant Fortescue is a testament to his resilience, vision, and commitment to Indigenous empowerment. His story is not only inspiring but also reflects the broader efforts of Fortescue to integrate First Nations values and business practices into their operations, culminating in a remarkable $5bn investment with Indigenous service providers and suppliers.

Early life and career beginnings

Mr Wheelock, a Badimaya/Wajarri man, grew up in Broome, Western Australia, spearing, and enjoying the freedom that those early days of growing up in the Kimberley had to offer.

His early life was shaped by the rich cultural heritage of classic Broome, as well as the challenges of Kimberley life. While his career began in the pearling industry, seeking more stable employment and driven by a desire to contribute more significantly to his community, he enrolled in a Certificate III in Geoscience Practices at his local TAFE, setting his sights on the mining and resources sector.

"I started mining in my early 20s," Mr Wheelock recalls.

"Mining just made sense to me personally because of the fly-in, fly-out arrangement, and it offered a clear path for career advancement."

His early days in the state's biggest industry were marked by a commitment to continual learning and development, completing a degree in Mine Engineering and recently earning a Global Executive MBA.

Rise through the ranks at Fortescue

Mr Wheelock's career at Fortescue spans over a decade, during which he has held numerous leadership roles. Starting off as a technical services superintendent in 2011, he quickly advanced through the ranks, as he pressed to always do more – a common theme of his life. He served as the production superintendent at Cloudbreak and later as the mining manager at both Fortescue's Cloudbreak and Solomon mines, where he oversaw critical operations and drove significant improvements in efficiency and

safety. In his role as general manager Eliwana, Mr Wheelock was instrumental in the operational readiness and management of the Eliwana Mine. His strategic vision early on, and his hands-on style saw the successful commissioning and operation of the site in December 2020.

In March 2023, Mr Wheelock took on the role of Fortescue's general manager First Nations, where he has been instrumental in consolidating the miner's First Nations functions into a cohesive unit. This strategic move has streamlined processes and enhanced the company's engagement with Indigenous communities, ensuring that Fortescue's initiatives have been both more co-ordinated and more impactful.

Passion for Indigenous empowerment

Throughout his personal and professional life, Mr Wheelock has been passionate about creating opportunities for Indigenous people. His efforts align perfectly with Fortescue's commitment to fostering Indigenous employment, training, and business development, with some of the most ambitious targets for Indigenous engagement.

"We have a huge amount of talent within our organisation, and it's recognised which has given the opportunities that those individuals deserve on their own merit," Mr Wheelock says.

"It's not because I'm Aboriginal that I am in this critical role; it's because of my track record in running operations, managing teams and solving complex problems. However being Aboriginal does give me unique and diverse perspectives."

Mr Wheelock's personal journey of continuous professional development and his rise to leadership positions within Fortescue serve as an inspiration to many Indigenous people. He embodies the potential for success when opportunities are made available and supported by strong organisational commitment at every level.

Fortescue's $5bn commitment to Indigenous businesses

Fortescue's "Billion Opportunities" program, which began in 2011, is designed to boost Indigenous business participation across the company's entire supply chain.

In August this year, days before this magazine was launched, the initiative saw over $5bn in contracts awarded to more than 190 Indigenous services and suppliers. In the 2023 financial year alone, there was more than $505m spent with Indigenous-owned businesses. Such a significant milestone underscores the company's dedication to fostering Indigenous economic independence and meaningful participation well ahead of its time.

Time and again, Fortescue has demonstrated its commitment to seeing Indigenous-owned businesses get a bigger share of the pie when it comes to their operations and engagement, but it's not without effort.

As Mr Wheelock says, "We have to make sure we're helping Indigenous-owned businesses remove roadblocks or where they're having issues. Our Aboriginal business development team, that's their task, to help ensure they're supporting these companies. We're really proud of this achievement.

"Even in Perth, it's not just about where our operations are. We've got things from coffee beans to stationery, we look for wherever there's opportunity for Aboriginal businesses to be involved with our organisation."

The broader impact of Fortescue's initiatives

Fortescue's approach to Indigenous engagement extends well beyond business contracts. The company has over 1400 Aboriginal employees and ensures that there is comprehensive cultural awareness training and support for Indigenous heritage across the company.

These efforts are all part of Fortescue's broader strategy to integrate Indigenous perspectives into all aspects of their operations. "It makes you realise, when you take a step back and go, wow, we've actually achieved some pretty incredible outcomes," Mr Wheelock says.

Net zero commitment

Fortescue's dedication to sustainability is encapsulated in its ambitious goal to achieve real zero terrestrial emissions by 2030 without the use of carbon offsets. This initiative is a testament to the company's forward-thinking approach and its commitment to reducing its environmental footprint.

"Fortescue emits more than 2.5 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent each year," Mr Wheelock notes. "Our $US6.2bn investment in achieving Real Zero by 2030 is a significant step towards mitigating climate change and setting a new standard in the industry."

The integration of Kooya's electric all-terrain vehicles, for example, into Fortescue's operations is a tangible example of how the company's sustainability goals align with its commitment to supporting Indigenous businesses. This collaboration with an Indigenous-owned business not only contributes to reducing carbon emissions but also ensures that Indigenous enterprises play a central role in Fortescue's decarbonisation journey.

A vision for the future

Mr Wheelock's vision for the future is closely tied to Fortescue's ongoing efforts to uplift Indigenous communities through meaningful engagement and sustainable practices. His leadership and dedication continue to drive positive change within the company and beyond. "We are incredibly proud of our approach to First Nations engagement, whether it's through business opportunities, employment, or cultural heritage support," he says. "The journey has been challenging but immensely rewarding. I look forward to continuing this work and making a lasting impact."

Above: Members of Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation Linda Camille, Jocelyn Hicks, Sue Boyd and Judy Hughes (L-R) with Fortescue Founder and Chairman Dr Andrew Forrest AO and Elizabeth Gaines. Left: Representatives of Fortescue with some of the hundreds of Indigenous suppliers which support the business.

Main picture: Robyn Jean

From left to right: Tania Stevens, John Haast, Dino Otranto, John Sandy, Ricky Sandy, Renee Wally, Maudie Jerrold, Rodney Adams, Anne Jacobs, Jill Tucker, Mark Kouwenhoven, Johnita Sandy and Allery Sandy.

"We've actually achieved some pretty incredible outcomes

Rosli Wheelock's story is a powerful reminder of the transformative impact that dedicated individuals and forward-thinking companies can have on Indigenous communities in Australia. Together with Fortescue, it's these alignments of similar values and dedication which continue to lead the way in Indigenous engagement and environmental sustainability, and Mr Wheelock's role will undoubtedly be central to their ongoing success. With a strong foundation in operational excellence and a deep commitment to Indigenous empowerment, he is poised to help further Fortescue's vision of creating a sustainable and inclusive future. His work not only benefits Fortescue but also sets a benchmark for other companies in the industry to follow and helps lift up Indigenous people across the country. ●

CARING FOR COUNTRY

TOGETHER AT WODGINA

ABOUT US

At Jutiya Landscaping, we specialise in helping our corporate clients increase the beauty of their surroundings by creating lush and welcoming outdoor spaces, for entertaining, sport, relaxation and visual appeal.

We create beautiful native designs by combining seasonal colour, landscaping, and maintenance. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that you are completely satisfied with the end result of your project and with our on-going maintenance.

JUTIYA LANDSCAPING

Caring for Country

PARTNERED WITH MINERAL RESOURCES

Aboriginal businesses are contributing billions to Australia's economy

Taking care of business

Brendan Foster

Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chief Executive Tim Milsom is passionate about empowering First Nations businesses and growing the Indigenous economy. Mr Milsom helped set up the Perth-based Chamber in 2018 with Indigenous leaders and entrepreneurs, including current chair Gordon Cole.

"I got a phone call from Gordon who said he wanted to set up a chamber of commerce but said, 'by the way, we've got no money'," Mr Milsom laughs. "I used all my contacts to help set it up and found them a hub at Princess Margaret Hospital, which was the old chief medical officer's house. We managed to encourage 10 Aboriginal businesses to work out of those premises, and at the time, those 10 businesses were probably employing about 35 people and turned over about $3-5m. Today, those businesses are still there, turning over something like $90m and employing 450 staff between them. So, we know it works."

The Noongar Chamber, which advocates for Aboriginal businesses to increase their participation in the economy, now has more than 600 members.

Mr Milsom identifies the number one barrier facing First Nations businesses as access to finance. "There are a lot of really clever businesspeople that just were not given a chance, and it's those people we advocate for and want to see in business," he says.

> **"We are the fastest-growing sector in Australia**
>
> Tim Milsom, CEO, Noongar Chamberof Commerce

"We help Aboriginal businesses get into business from helping them with an ABN to GST to a bank account and then policies and procedures they can get access to. We have a toolkit for Aboriginal joint ventures, which helps them with some of the pitfalls associated with starting up a business. We advocate for free trade agreements, intellectual property and rights for Aboriginal businesses."

Despite calls from some First Nations businesses, academics and the Greens to overhaul the current federal government's Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP), Mr Milsom believes it is adequate for now. Under the current IPP, 3 per cent of all contracts and 1.75 per cent of the value of all contracts must be awarded to businesses at least 50 per cent owned by Indigenous people.

"The business sector is still fledgling – it's growing, but if you put it up to, say, 10 per cent, then you create a real problem because there aren't enough Aboriginal businesses out there to fulfil the 10 per cent spend because you're talking billions of dollars," he says.

Mr Milsom emphasises that First Nations businesses don't get the recognition they deserve when it comes to contributing to the Australian economy. In April, the University of Melbourne's latest Indigenous Business Snapshot showed Indigenous businesses contributed more than $16bn to the Australian economy, employed 116,795 people and paid $4.2bn in wages.

"When I first started there were a few Aboriginal businesses but not that many ... but now we are the fasting-growing sector in Australia. The Aboriginal community has woken up that they can be in business, and they've got a competitive advantage because there is a policy that says government will spend 4 per cent of its procurement on Aboriginal businesses. It's the oldest culture in the world, and for years we almost denied it." ●

Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chief Executive Tim Milsom with Renee Braedon, Craig Walker and Sentana Wyatt from Indiji Corp Cultural Impact. Picture: Cole Baxter

Maurice Longbottom
Rugby Sevens

You've already made us proud, Maurice

QANTAS
Spirit of Australia

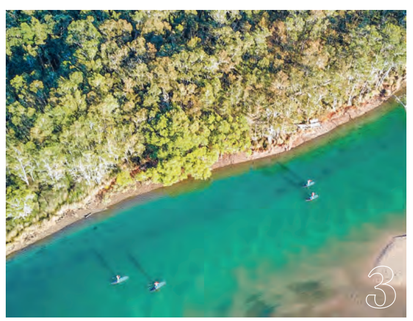
AUSTRALIA

10 tourism businesses making a difference

Unforgettable Indigenous holiday experiences can deepen cultural understanding as well as sustain communities, generate employment and training opportunities and protect the environment. Dianne Bortoletto explores 10 businesses making a positive impact

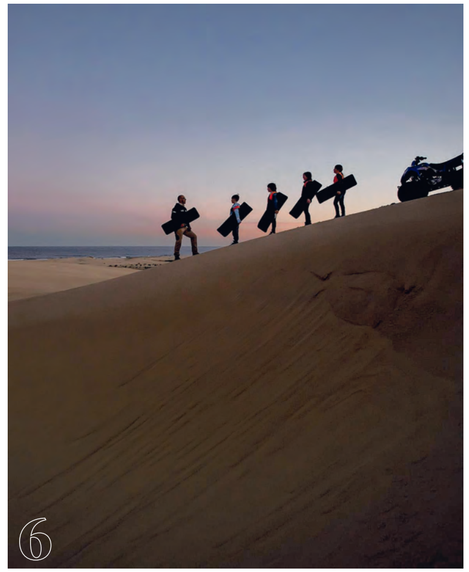
1 Mandingalbay Authentic Indigenous Tours offers a Hands On Country Eco Tour that shows how the Mandingalbay Yidinji have sustained the land and water southeast of Cairns for millennia. The Djunbunji Land and Sea Rangers are determined to reverse the damage from recent overuse and the introduction of foreign floral and fauna species and have spent years working with scientists to catalogue plants, animals and culturally significant sites. As a result, the rainforest region is once again thriving. Ranger guides hold encyclopaedic intel of the Trinity Inlet and have an eagle eye to spot birds, fish and saltwater crocodiles.

2 Dreamtime Dive & Snorkel Reef Recovery Days combines ancient stories of the world-renowned Great Barrier Reef with eco-certified diving and snorkelling safaris. On-board expertise comes from marine biologist and Indigenous cultural guides, as guests come face-to-fin with some of Australia's most amazing marine life. The Indigenous cultural guides have been supported to become marine biologists, engineers and skippers of the vessel itself. The Dreamtime crew is drawn from across North Queensland as well as from the Indigenous education program, Shoreline. It creates employment pathways for young Indigenous Australians looking for a career in the tourism and hospitality industries.



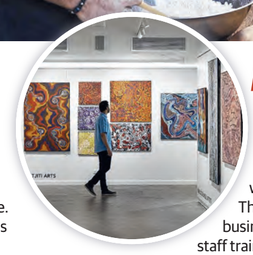
3 Wajaana Yaam Gumbaynggirr Adventure Tours offers stand up paddleboard tours, kayak and walking tours in Coffs Harbour on the NSW mid-north coast. Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung man Clark Webb created the social enterprise eco-tourism business to help fund not-for-profit Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation (BMNAC), which runs NSW's first and only bilingual school of an Aboriginal language, as well as language programs in 20 schools across the Coffs Harbour region. The tour business also offers employment options for graduates of the school, creating a circular economy.

4 Wula Gura Nyinda Eco Cultural Adventures offers kayak and wildlife tours, stand up paddleboard tours, four-wheel drive, and a new multi-day walking tour with overnight camping at Dirk Hartog Island. UNESCO World Heritage site Shark Bay is where desert and ocean meet. Bordered by more than 1000km of untouched beaches, it's Australia's largest bay and most westerly point. Owner and operator Darren "Capes" Capewell regularly runs youth cultural camps in the pristine wilderness that includes bush survival skills, sharing knowledge, life skills and insights, and campfire stories that build resilience and confidence in young people.



5 Mabu Mabu's restaurant Big Esso in Melbourne's Federation Square is nourishing locals and tourists with lipsmacking food highlighting native ingredients. Torres Strait born chef and founder Nornie Bero has a dream to make native ingredients the hero of the Australian kitchen. What began with a stall at the South Melbourne Market has expanded to a retail, catering and dining empire that employs 80 people. The Indigenous owned, women-led and LGBTQIA+ business is working towards a sustainable and socially driven supply chain. Mabu Mabu means "help yourself" and "Big Esso" means "the biggest thank you".

6 Sand Dune Adventures leads quad bike tours on the largest coastal sand dunes in the Southern Hemisphere, about 2.5 hours north of Sydney. The entire dune system moves inland an astonishing 4.5m a year. Zoom across some of the 4200ha of sacred coastal land while learning why it's so special to the Worimi people. Profits are poured back into the local Indigenous community funding employment, housing, education, health and more. Owned and operated by the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council, the ultimate goal is to preserve stories, culture and heritage across this part of the state.



7 Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia is more famously known as a stunning place to stay when visiting Uluru. The Northern Territory business has a dedicated staff training program at the Ayers Rock Resort that provides employment pathways and launches the careers of young Indigenous Australians in tourism, hospitality, horticulture and retail.

8 **Mabu Buru Tours** introduces guests to the rich land ancient culture of the Yawuru and Karajarri people. Based in Broome, Mabu Buru also donates profits from some of their tours to an Aboriginal not-for-profit organisation dedicated to ensuring the survival and preservation of Indigenous culture through continued practice and knowledge sharing.

9 **Maruku Arts** in Uluru runs an organic dot painting workshop taught by local Anangu artists. They sell art from its local community Mutitjulu, and since 1984, sends staff to remote communities in Central Australia in the NT, SA and WA to purchase woodcarvings. In 2019 alone, Maruku Arts has invested $1.5m into 22 different communities across the central and western deserts, funding tour guides and environmental training, among other cultural facets.

10 **Waringarri Aboriginal Arts** in Kununurra is one of Australia's oldest Aboriginal arts centres. Waringarri Arts facilitates programs that engage youth and community members in creative activities that help participants understand their Indigenous culture as well as deal with issues such as grief and trauma.

Visit discoveraboriginalexperiences.com.au or state tourism organisations to find out more about Indigenous travel experiences

Partnerships for a better tomorrow

In March 2023 we introduced our reusable art bag range across all Woolworths Supermarkets. From the sale of every bag 20 cents goes to the Yothu Yindi Foundation to help support the education of Yolngu students in Arnhem Land, NT.

Learn more about our partnerships here.

Woolworths Group

YOTHU YINDI FOUNDATION

Fresh as
By Nungala Creative

"This artwork celebrates the joy of fresh food. Colourful, vibrant fruit is paired with emu, kangaroo tracks and mob; reflecting country."

Woolworths is proud to partner with Jessica Johnson a Warumungu, Wombaya woman and the founder of Nungala Creative. Now residing on Gadigal Land, she was born on Larrakia country and spent her formative years on Ngunnawal / Ngambri / Wiradjuri country.

NUNGALA CREATIVE

The Indigenous Business Review

PROFILE | First Nations Businesswoman of the Year

It's time to champion women

Through Burbirra, Dr Karen Demmery is helping women overcome trauma and live their best life

Brendan Foster

The journey to entrepreneurship started for Aboriginal woman Dr Karen Demmery with a strong desire to help First Nations women deal with trauma after battling drug and alcohol addiction herself.

The Proud Wiradjuri Nemba Barkindji woman recalls the moment when she had to get clean.

"I was standing in the lounge room one day talking to my son and I said something to him and the look on his face said, 'Who are you and what have you done with my mother?'" she told the National Indigenous Times.

"So, I left town, got clean and began my decades-long healing journey. I realised that there was limited support available for people dealing with trauma, so I started Burbirra to help other people, especially women, to heal their trauma and live their best life."

The 100 per cent Indigenous-owned and operated business delivers impactful training and development programs specialising in trauma and healing, cultural awareness, and essential soft skills across a broad range of government agencies and for-purpose sector organisations.

As part of her journey, she took on numerous different jobs in the public service, however, none of these were the right fit. After getting fired from several of these jobs she realised that many women she worked with had similar issues in dealing with trauma and that they needed help.

She knew it was time to work for herself.

Dr Demmery says she started out working from her Brisbane lounge room having no idea what she was doing. More than four years later, the Queensland-based business has grown from her lounge room to employing five staff.

"Having no idea what I was doing in the business was tough," she says. "But through a lot of trial and error and several setbacks we now have a business which is flourishing.

"At Burbirra we understand and care about people.

"Our mental health and trauma training impacts lives and heals generations."

Dr Demmery knew the business model was a great idea but says, "The best kept secret doesn't bring in cashflow." She had to overcome several barriers and challenges to get the business off the ground.

"I knew the product I delivered was amazing and life-changing, but there was marketing, sales, networking, systems, accounting, tax, and lots of other things I had no idea about," she says.

"I still am not great at half of those things but I have amazingly great humans around me who help me out with those.

"I didn't know anything about business, and not having anyone who would break down the steps for me, so I had to figure a lot out myself and I drove other people mad by asking thousands of questions to try and figure it out.

"And an amazing thing happened, the more I showed up and asked people who knew more than me for help or advice, the more they shared with me."

Dr Demmery's journey towards getting a PhD in Women Conversations, Yarning, Connection is extraordinary given she got kicked out of school in year 9.

She started doing a Cert I, II, III and IV, two diplomas, and a grad certificate on Indigenous trauma and recovery practice, Masters of Indigenous Health, before completing her doctorate.

The 53-year-old's persistence and drive have paid dividends after being nominated for Indigenous Businesswoman of the Year at the upcoming Supply Nation Diversity Awards.

"I am nominated with two amazing, trailblazing sistas who I am in awe of," she says.

"I love seeing us all win. Showing up is winning, so if me being a bit more visible helps another sista to get the confidence to show up, that's the win right there."

Dr Demmery says it is important that more First Nations women are becoming more prominent in the business world.

"I am all about helping advance economic sovereignty and personal fulfilment for women," she says. "We might need to learn the fundamentals of business structure and processes, but we know how to connect and care.

"If a woman can make an extra $500 a month that adds to her family's ease of buying food, fuel or footy boots, then we should all be championing women to get involved.

"I got kicked out of school in year 9 and I am the shyest person you could come across, so if I can do this, any of my sistas can."

Dr Karen Demmery, First Nations Businesswoman of the Year.

I am the shyest person, so if I can do this, any of my sistas can

Temali Howard and her son Jackson.

Sharing food is good for the soul

Following her heart led Temali Howard to nourishing others – not just with food, writes Dianne Bortoletto

In Kununurra in Western Australia's northwest, a social media trend of grazing tables soon became a side hustle. Temali Howard liked how happy it made her feel to nourish people with beautiful displays of food, and she realised she had a natural talent for it.

Blak Tapas started as a catering company, then added a pop-up lunch service, and has now expanded to a bricks and mortar venue. Recently opened, Blak Tapas Bush Foods Cafe is a new social enterprise that provides hospitality training in paid employment, as well as career development and mentoring to build skills in teamwork, communication, service, resilience and more.

The cafe is supported by Job Pathways, a not-for-profit organisation funded through the federal government's National Indigenous Australians Association (NIAA), engaged to deliver job pathway programs in the Kimberley in northwestern Australia. Indigenous Business Review caught up with Ms Howard in Kununurra just before the doors to Blak Tapas Bush Foods Cafe opened.

"My passion is to develop personal goals with program participants – it's more than just teaching participants how to be a barista, use a knife, food safety and the like," Ms Howard says. "I want Blak Tapas Bush Food Cafe to be

a safe place for Aboriginal people to come and work. We don't have many Aboriginal-owned businesses in town, especially ones that offer a career pathway. We'll be working on goal setting to identify what career objectives might look like, develop the importance of working, how to be valued in a team and how to work in a team."

Nurturing people has been at the core of Ms Howard's working life. As a young, single mother, her first job was as an education assistant. Extending her role, she took disengaged, older students under her wing, encouraging them to read to younger students and offering support.

Her caring nature was soon noticed, and she was encouraged to apply for a job in the justice system.

For 16 years, Ms Howard worked in various roles in youth justice, legal education, advocacy, family violence and child protection. In April last year, she resigned from her full-time government job to focus on Blak Tapas.

Broome-born and Bunbury-raised, she is a descendant of the Jaru and Kija people in the East Kimberley. She says it was her "liyan" that called her back to Broome.

"Liyan is a term that Kimberley people talk about; to me it means 'heart space', like your inner spirit," she says.

"In Bunbury, I didn't have a connection to my Aboriginal family, and I had a really strong yearning for those relationships. I knew I had to move to Broome to be close to my extended family if my son and I were to build a relationship with them and reconnect to our culture.

"My grandparents were a part of the Stolen Generation, taken from the East Kimberley region. I feel at home here. When a job offer came up in 2007, I transferred from Broome to Kununurra and have been here ever since."

From tapas boxes to setting up proposal picnics and magical sunset tasting events during the Ord Valley Muster (held in May), Ms Howard has big, heartwarming ambitions. It's easy to see how her skills and experience, utilised around a kitchen bench, could create a non-confronting environment for deep conversations.

An overall objective of Job Pathways is to develop the participants' self-confidence so they can go out and gain employment in other places. "With my advocacy and justice experience, I deliver similar kinds of information to program participants, but instead of a workshop setting, it's in the kitchen," she says. "Once participants move on from Blak Tapas, the mentoring will continue and we'll provide ongoing support for a successful future."

Blak Tapas Bush Foods Cafe focuses on creating dishes with native ingredients such as house-made dukka with boab nut and dried mango, pistachio and salt bush, slow-cooked kangaroo curry, kangaroo samosas, crocodile and lemon myrtle spring rolls, and chocolate wattle seed cake with Ord Valley Hoochery rum caramel. ●

■ *For more information, visit facebook.com/blaktapas*

From coal miner to eco entrepreneur

Brendan Foster

Proud Wiradjuri man Nathan Dureau has transitioned from underground coal mining to running an eco-friendly cleaning products company. At 35, he recalls his journey into the chemical industry began around seven years ago, sparked by the birth of his first child.

"Around the time we were having our first kid, I went down a rabbit hole with household chemicals, which opened my eyes to what we use around homes and businesses," he told the National Indigenous Times.

Collaborating with innovative chemical engineers, Mr Dureau was inspired to create environmentally friendly products. His Aboriginal heritage and passion for sustainable practices led to the founding of Banyar Jagun with his wife in 2021.

Mr Dureau ensured his products were cruelty-free, vegan, and biodegradable. They are made from plant-based ingredients, free from toxic chemicals, parabens, alcohol, and palm oil.

"We have been chipping away at it for a while, then did some research to prove what we are doing is non-toxic," he says. "But seeing how horrendous and toxic many products are was worse than I thought."

Convincing consumers of the safety and efficacy of his products has been challenging. Mr Dureau notes that shoppers often default to brand-name products without understanding their contents.

"To change people's minds is a whole kettle of fish in itself. That's been the most difficult part," he says. "Everyone claims their products are eco-friendly, but it can be hard to navigate the truth."

Despite these challenges, Mr Dureau has developed an impressive range of products, including an all-surface cleaner, bathroom cleaner, dishwashing liquid, disinfectant spray, floor cleaner, hand and body wash, hand sanitiser, multipurpose degreaser, produce wash, toilet cleaner, window cleaner, and antibacterial spray.

Some of his products are now available in almost 1000 Woolworths stores nationwide, thanks to a successful pitch at a Supply Nations event.

"We got in with the room sprays and linen sprays, which is a different category from our normal products," he says.

"We partnered with Woolies to use one of the room sprays and another fruiter one, so we've got two products there now."

Mr Dureau emphasises that getting products into stores is just one part of the challenge; getting them off the shelves is crucial. Competing with big brands that spend heavily on marketing requires strategic efforts.

He also recounts the business struggles during Covid-19, including navigating bureaucratic hurdles.

"Even though we had all the approvals, we had to get registered with the TGA because of Covid. We had to stop trading until everything was approved," he says.

"We were around 88 on the approval list, which delayed our sales and cost us contracts."

Despite these setbacks, Mr Dureau remains optimistic. "We started great but lost a lot of contracts because we couldn't sell for a while.

"But we are still hanging in there." ●

Nathan Dureau, founder of eco-friendly cleaning products company Banyar Jagun.

The Indigenous Business Review

Pioneering the use of native ingredients

Bush food is dear to Aunty Dale Tilbrook's heart and she loves to share her knowledge

Dianne Bortoletto

On the fringes of Perth in the Swan Valley is where you can find Wardandi Bibbulmun Elder Aunty Dale Tilbrook, a trailblazer when it comes to business.

Ms Tilbrook has been operating a business highlighting native ingredients, Indigenous art and other products for close to 30 years. It began about three years before the Sydney 2000 Olympics when Ms Tilbrook and her mentor, the late Ken Colbung AM MBE, walked the streets of Circular Quay finding stockists for their handmade returning boomerangs, targeting high-end souvenir stores and galleries. They designed special hangers so the boomerangs could be displayed with the feet pointing down, like a rainbow.

"We spent ages designing the hangers, they were a work of art unto themselves. You see, the rainbow serpent features in a creation story, so it was important to Ken to have the boomerang displayed the right way," Ms Tilbrook says. "They weren't painted, they were plain, and came with very detailed instructions on how to throw them so they would return. SOCOG, the Olympic Committee, gave us special swing tags to hang on them as official merchandise, we did quite well from that."

Ms Tilbrook and Mr Colbung's first business success was not by accident. "I'd worked in London at the head office of Debenhams department store for 10 years, and then Aherns department store in Perth for about eight years, so I had experience in retail, buying and merchandising and I was always thinking at least a year in advance."

She later opened Maalinup Gallery with her brother Lyall, selling authentic Aboriginal art, gifts and souvenirs.

In their Swan Valley shopfront, which Ms Tilbrook intentionally chose for its visible location on the busy West Swan Rd, they received an unexpected delivery.

"A courier came with a box of locally made quandong jam, and I didn't remember ordering it, but I paid for it, and when I displayed it in the store it looked lonely, so I started looking for other bush foods," Ms Tilbrook says.

"We eventually discovered who the delivery was intended for, which wasn't us and we sorted it all out, but it got me interested in supplying bush foods.

"I'd always been fascinated by bush plants, but I saw them as mostly medicinal, using eucalyptus oil for colds and the like, and I used to make my own concoctions. As a teenager I remember making Turkish rose petal jam, I loved making my own things, and I was an avid reader."

Ms Tilbrook was born in Port Hedland to an English mother and Wardandi Bibbulmun father. They lived in Derby, Broome, Narrogin and Perth before Ms Tilbrook went travelling abroad. "Even though London was very different to regional WA, I loved living there and I enjoyed using it as a springboard to travel to other places," she says. "At that point in my life in my 20s and early 30s, I'd lived in London longer than any other place, and I've never lived on a permanent basis on my country – Wardandi Bibbulmun which is around Busselton."

Aunty Dale Tilbrook, the force behind Dale Tilbrook Experiences.

Relishing and sharing knowledge about native foods, Ms Tilbrook represents the Swan Valley region at every opportunity, travelling as far as Turin, Italy, with the Swan Valley and Eastern Region Slow Food Convivium to Terra Madre to cook at Australia on a Plate for 100 people, and presenting a Bushtucker Masterclass.

"I was also part of the Swan Valley contingent which launched the Swan Valley Trails in Singapore in 2019. My trail is Bushtucker and Beyond."

For the past 18 months, the siblings have been settled in a new shop in the Swan Valley at Mandoon Estate Winery where Dale Tilbrook Experiences offers insightful bush food tours and tastings.

"For years we did bush food catering, and we don't do that any more, but I'm very passionate about educating the world about Australian native edibles, it's an important part of my cultural journey," Ms Tilbrook says.

"I know a lot about bush food. It's very dear to my heart. From my Elders I've acquired a lot of knowledge and have backed that up with my own research." ●

Award-winning Indigenous garden transforms Sydney Airport

Public space now a haven

The cultural bush landscape won a prestigious landscape architecture award.

David Prestipino

An immersive cultural bush landscape at Sydney Airport, embodying Indigenous culture, design, and native species, has won the 2024 AILA NSW Landscape Architecture Award for Infrastructure. This prestigious accolade highlights the project's innovative approach to Indigenous engagement and development, transforming the airport into an unexpected tourist attraction in NSW.

The revitalised 9500sqm public space at Terminal 1, featuring 12,500 native plants, provides a tranquil haven for over 40 million annual passengers and 300,000 airport employees, offering a serene escape from the nearby tarmacs and terminals.

The Hassell-led project was co-designed with Jiwah, a First Nations cultural landscape and design company, and First Nations-owned Imbue Studios, which oversaw construction. The Indigenous-led, not-for-profit group Wildflower Gardens for Good managed the installation and ongoing maintenance of the naturally-designed planting areas, enhanced by the Gujaga Foundation's embedded cultural language and interpretational elements throughout the site.

The new centralised plaza delivers an ecologically rich landscape while balancing the challenges of a transport interchange, circulation, and aviation operations. Environmental, community, and social benefits have blossomed since the forecourt's completion in late 2022.

Wildflower co-CEO Roman Deguchi highlighted the project's uniqueness in allowing Indigenous knowledge and talent to shine at each stage. "What this project has created for Wildflower is an opportunity for our people to become custodians once again, and you can see the benefit of that as this green space continues to flourish," he says. "The unique proposition of this project from design, install, and care allowed Indigenous knowledge and talent to shine, while creating opportunities for our young people to be involved in high-profile, beautifully designed collaborative projects that open doors to real reconciliation." The project challenges the conventional approach of a Connection with Country process, with a three-tiered First Nations approach putting social value at the forefront of the design. This included First Nations organisations co-designing, delivering, and providing ongoing care for the site.

Hassell principal Jason Cuffe emphasised that the co-design, delivery, and ongoing care by First Nations organisations ensured visitors to Sydney had a memorable experience underpinned by and celebrating Country. "Passengers are greeted with a place that is not only defined by the tones and textures of the surrounding landscape, but also the culture that has cared for this Country for thousands of years," he says. "It provides an ecologically rich planting palette that supports insects and pollinators, like bees and butterflies, transforming the transport interchange into a space defined by landscape and culture."

The project won the 2024 AILA NSW Landscape Architecture Award for Infrastructure, with the jury commending Hassell for involving First Nations firms throughout all stages of the project and continuing to be custodians of the site. "This led to an immersive landscape experience for visitors to the airport, reducing urban heat in a highly urbanised precinct," they said. "Committing to ongoing maintenance managed by Wildflower is also commended, ensuring the project is maintained with a level of care that has seen the planted areas flourish. The project sets an achievable benchmark for others, demonstrating how to design with Country and care for Country in a highly visited public space."

Sydney Airport specialist design manager Lisa Airth says the International Forecourt had exceeded expectations. "This is a genuine exemplar of a First Nations design and delivery method," she says. ●

One iconic boot.
One piece of leather.
Made in Australia.

That's the way we've
always done it.

R.M. Williams

HANDCRAFTED IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 1932