

# NIT

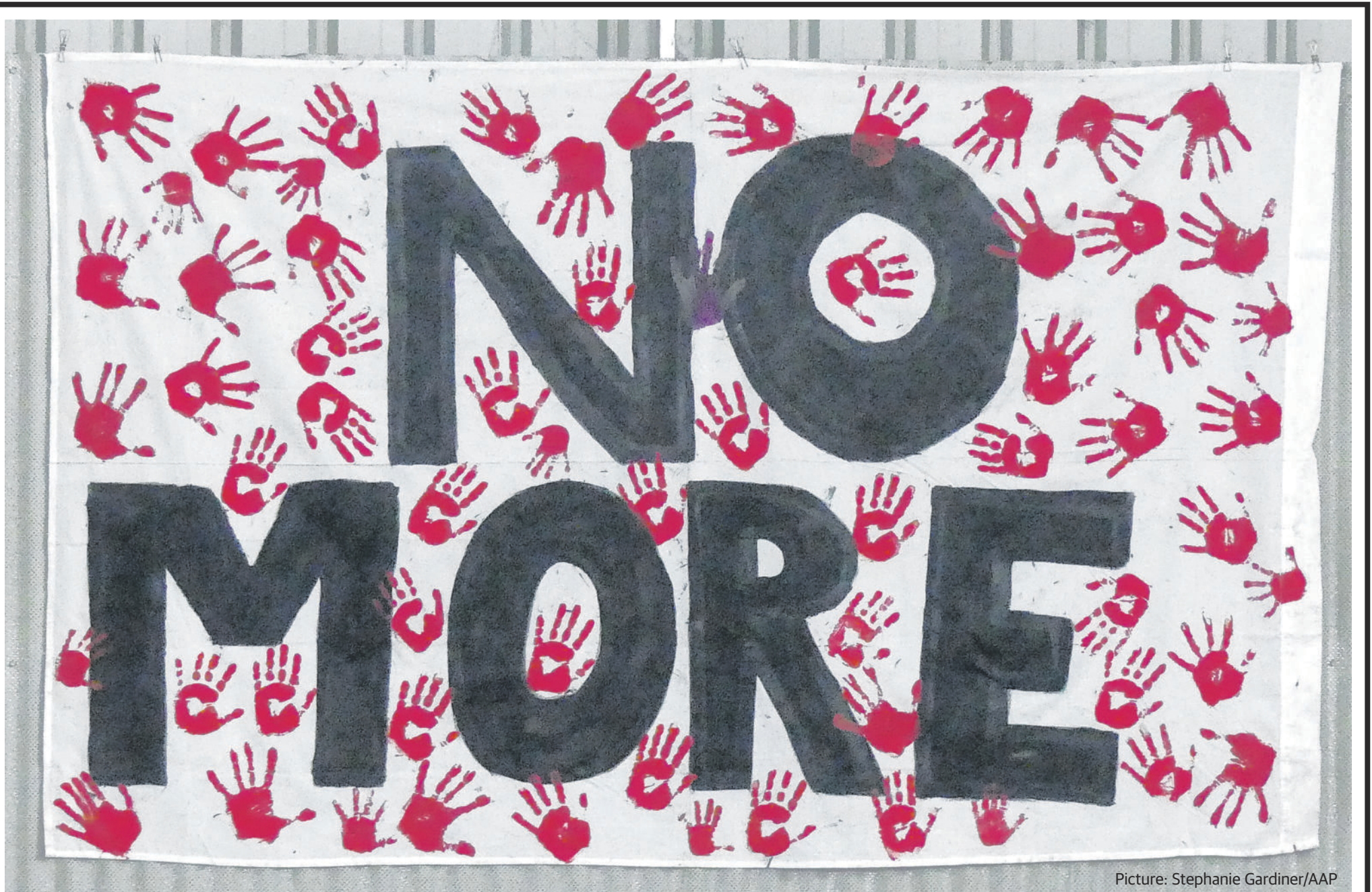
NATIONAL INDIGENOUS TIMES



## Ready to rock

Footy stars' sportswear campaign focuses on strength

STYLE UP  
BEGINS PAGE 9



Picture: Stephanie Gardiner/AAP

# Aboriginal leadership the key in plan to end violence

**DECLAN BRENNAN**

A landmark national strategy aimed at tackling the disproportionately high rates of domestic, family and sexual violence affecting Indigenous women and children, committing more than \$200 million to community-led solutions and long-term systemic reform, has been unveiled by the Federal Government.

Our Ways — Strong Ways — Our Voices: National Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Plan To End Family, Domestic And Sexual Violence 2026-2036 represents the first dedicated national plan of its

kind developed in partnership with First Peoples and State and Territory governments.

While it sits alongside the existing National Plan To End Violence Against Women And Children 2022-2032, it is tailored specifically to the needs and experiences of First Nations communities.

The 10-year strategy responds to devastating national data showing that Indigenous women are seven times more likely to be victims of intimate partner homicide and 27 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than non-Indigenous women, with the figure rising to 41 times

more likely in regional and very remote areas.

Funding of \$218.3 million over four years will support up to 40 Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver specialist, culturally grounded, community-led services.

These include mobile crisis response teams, assistance for people leaving violent situations, ongoing support post-separation, therapeutic care, and behaviour change and outreach programs for men and boys.

Aunty Muriel Bamblett, a Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Boon Wur-

rung Elder and co-chair of the plan's steering committee, said the initiative was the first written by First Nations people, for First Nations people, and that significant reform was needed across justice, health, housing, child protection and other systems that affect safety.

Steering committee member and Associate Professor at Curtin Law School, Hannah McGlade, described the plan as "historic".

She told National Indigenous Times it was shaped by "Aboriginal women's own advocacy and leadership", which "really does promote and recognise

Aboriginal women, Aboriginal people's voice, self-determination and agency, as well as Aboriginal-led solutions".

"We want to see strengthening of evidence and research, and we want to break cycles of harm through strengthening housing and financial security. Those are some of the essential aspects of the plan . . . these are very important for Aboriginal people," Dr McGlade said.

Social Services Minister Tanya Plibersek said the plan "builds on years of advocacy by Indigenous communities and survivors" and represents a

**CONTINUED PAGE 3**

# Business still 'unfinished'

DECHLAN BRENNAN

Eighteen years after the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, survivors and advocates are urging renewed action to address "unfinished business" in truth-telling, healing and justice, even as focus in Canberra has shifted inward amid debates over Closing the Gap priorities.

More than 100 members of the Stolen Generations gathered in Canberra this month to mark the 18th anniversary of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 apology.

At a commemorative breakfast, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese reflected on that moment, saying: "When we look back to that extraordinary day 18 years ago, we are looking back to the fulfilment of a promise."

For many survivors, that day,

February 13, 2008, was deeply personal and emotional.

Aunty Elizabeth Miller, who was taken from her family at birth and adopted into a non-Indigenous household, said reconnecting with her birth culture later in life was transformative.

She told National Indigenous Times: "I can now say I am a Dhungatti woman from Kempsey, New South Wales."

"It was really deep and emotional for us." After gathering in front of Parliament to hear the apology, she returned to work, reading a poem she had written to her CEO.

"I read a poem out and did a speech about the Stolen Generation — in front of everybody there — which is very brave of me, I thought," Aunty Elizabeth said. "But, by seeing the apology,

it gave me the adrenaline to go back and talk about it."

The PM stressed the apology was long overdue and was held back by former leaders "who feared that saying sorry would be calamitous for our country".

"It was anything but," he told survivors in Canberra.

"Our nation came together, united in the fundamental decency that I believe remains our truest guiding light. The apology was a moment of catharsis, and it was a moment of healing."

Addressing the crowd, Ngunawal Elder Aunty Violet Sheridan warned First Nations children were still being removed from families.

"We cannot say 'never again' when we continue the same pattern under different names," she said. Despite the anniversary's

significance, survivors and advocates made clear that healing and justice were far from complete. Shannon Dodson, CEO of The Healing Foundation, noted only 6 per cent of the Bringing Them Home report's recommendations had been implemented.

"Many survivors here are telling us they are ageing, they've already lost brothers and sisters, and that is not OK (that) we haven't seen that justice and healing," she said.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy announced funding of \$87 million over four years for targeted support services, including family tracing and reunification, collective healing programs, improved access to records, trauma-informed health and aged care, and pathways to

redress. She said the Government "recognises the strength of Stolen Generations survivors" and the ongoing need to respond meaningfully to their experiences.

"Sadly, for many of our people, the distress and hurt continues today," she said. "This is why understanding and supporting the needs of the Stolen Generations is so important."

Steve Larkin, chair of The Healing Foundation, called for a co-ordinated, accountable national approach to reforms survivors had sought for decades.

"Survivors deserve affordable aged care that doesn't trigger trauma," he said. "They must not be penalised with higher aged care costs simply because they have received redress payments for their past mistreatment."

## Search for father at an end for Stolen Generations survivor

JARRED CROSS

It's not quite six months since the two days which changed Damien Briggs' life.

Receiving a name, then confirmation a few weeks later, ended a wait of more than 50 years for answers about who he was.

Mr Briggs shared his story publicly for the first time at a gathering of 200 people in Naarm/Melbourne on the 18th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, delivered in Parliament on February 13, 2008.

For decades, Mr Briggs, born in 1973, "knew nothing about what had happened to me" in the early years of his life.

"I was subject to removal from my birth family, my Aboriginal family, my cultural identity, and I was placed into a children's home at the age of five months," he said.

At age three, Mr Briggs was placed into foster care before being adopted by a non-Aboriginal family in the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

He left that home, where he had suffered traumas he didn't share, at age of 14 with \$7 in his pocket to start the search for his father.

"At the age of 14, having had an absolute gutful of the treatment I received from my adopted family, I decided that it would be safer for me on the streets," he said.

Decades of searching failed to provide his father's name.

After years just trying to survive, Mr Briggs said he moved

to the Northern Territory, completed studies, was able to "shake" his substance addictions, and secured fulfilling work in Aboriginal communities, returning to Naarm about nine years ago.

Ms Briggs more recently wrote a Yoorook Justice Commission submission and began working with Stolen Generations support service Connecting Home as part of reparations processes. He'd lost some pages of his adoption records needed for the paperwork.

"In my new application for the adoption records I asked for any information about my father to be released to me. Of course, I expected nothing," an emotional Mr Briggs said.

"A few months went by, and on that day, September 8th 2025, my records came through. To my surprise, to my shock, I finally saw my father's name for the very first time. It said at the very bottom, 'Father: Gary Briggs, Mooroopna'."

On October 2, confirmation came from Aunty Bev Murray, from Stolen Generations support service Link-Up Victoria.

"My 38-year search for my father and my Aboriginal family was over," Mr Briggs said.

Mr Briggs is a Yorta Yorta and Gunai Kurnai man. Sadly, his father had already passed away. Mr Briggs has been able to reconnect with family.

A few of them were in the room listening to him speak at Preston City Hall, 18 years on from when then-prime minister Kevin Rudd delivered the apology in Parliament. Link-Up



Almost 40 years after leaving his adopted family in search of his father, Damien Briggs finally got the answer he'd been seeking. Picture: Jarred Cross

and Connecting Home, in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency and the City of Darebin host the anniversary event annually. Personal stories from survivors, and reflections are shared before a ceremony at the city's Stolen Generations Marker and a lunch.

"I guess there's no denying that it still impacts us today...18 years on," Mutti Mutti, Boon Wurrung and Yorta Yorta woman and Stolen Generations survivor Aunty Eva-Jo Edwards said after a showing of Mr Rudd's apology. Aunty Eva Jo was there in Canberra on the

day. "For me, my removal was yesterday... It took everything away from me. My siblings, my culture, my identity... it continues to impact me every day."

Her children and grandchildren still grapple with the impact.

In wrapping up the speeches at Preston City Hall, Aunty Eva Jo said while days like the anniversary were important, it was crucial to remember saying "sorry" meant you were not going to do it again.

Mr Briggs works as a team leader of cultural programs with VACCA.

He told National Indigenous

Times he felt privileged to be at the table trying to help other children avoid situations like those he experienced, and holding others to account.

"I'm very lucky to be able to sit at the table and really push and make sure there are no shortcuts taken, that all the information is actually gathered from our families and is captured and quoted properly," he said.

"Fighting for the rights of our children and making sure no one loses connection with their family and their cultural identity, that is what's important."

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Associate Professor  
Hannah McGlade.

## FDV plan focuses on strong families

FROM PAGE 1

shared commitment to working together to ensure safety across all communities. SNAICC — National Voice for our Children — welcomed the plan's clear focus on community-controlled solutions and family strengthening.

SNAICC chief executive Catherine Liddle said the strategy's emphasis on prevention could reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering out-of-home care, noting that "when families are supported to be safe and strong, children are safer too".

Advocates emphasised that while the plan's launch is a vital first step, long-term, sustained funding is essential to ensure its success and meaningful impact on the ground.

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence chief executive Kerry Staines said: "Our call now is for immediate and sustained government action to ensure the plan's success."

"We have the answers," she added, "but our services are stretched."

Ms Staines said investment must match the scale and urgency of the challenge to allow the family violence prevention and legal services sector to continue to play its part "in ensuring the safety of our mob. Communities cannot wait another decade for change."

The Coalition raised concerns key Closing the Gap data on family violence remains unavailable.

Target 13 of Closing the Gap calls for the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal women and children to be reduced by at least 50 per cent by 2031, yet there has been no data update since 2018/19.

Analysis Page 6



Prime Minister Anthony Albanese delivers a statement on the yearly Closing the Gap Report in the House of Representatives. Pic: Lukas Coch

# Closing Gap report yields a mixed bag

DECLAN BRENNAN

The Federal Government's newest Closing the Gap report sparked criticism and cautious optimism this month as data showed mixed results across key targets, while substantial funding commitments were unveiled for Indigenous health, jobs, education and remote communities.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese used the annual address to confirm just four of the 19 Closing the Gap targets were on track, while another six were improving.

Several critical areas, including incarceration rates, suicide reduction, and child protection, were moving backwards, with only five years left to meet the 2031 deadlines.

Addressing Parliament, the PM said the Government was "clear about where there is more to do" but urged against framing the report as a failure, arguing that dismissing progress would "ignore the leaders and communities who are changing lives".

"Failure is a word for those who have stopped trying — or given up listening," he said.

"I make this clear today: I am not contemplating failure.

"Our Government is not contemplating failure."

He highlighted economic participation and land rights as areas showing progress,

including job creation initiatives and legal recognition of land and waters subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights.

The Federal Government also unveiled a funding package to bolster frontline Indigenous services.

Chief among them was a \$144 million upgrade for more than 100 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in cities and regional areas, aimed at strengthening health infrastructure.

Scott Wilson, Deputy Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks, said: "We welcome this Government's significant and much-needed investment in health infrastructure, health workers and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities."

"Closing the Gap requires genuine partnership.

It requires sustainable funding for our organisations, a transformation of the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC — National Voice for our Children, said the early childhood focus "reinforced what we know to be true — closing the gap starts with our children".

She argued the funding placed "the story of children

... at the heart" of the Government's strategy, though she acknowledged educational outcomes depended on broader supports such as housing, employment and food security.

The Government also expanded the Low-cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme — which reduces the cost of 30 everyday items in remote stores — with additional funding, a measure supporters say will help tackle food insecurity, a long-standing social determinant of health in remote communities.

"One-hundred-and-thirteen remote stores have already signed up to the scheme in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland," Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy said.

"Now, even more remote stores will be able to sign up and pass on lower prices to their communities."

Independent Senator Lidia Thorpe said the latest incarceration data was shameful, and urged the Government to introduce funding levers to compel States and Territories to eliminate policies that did not align with the Closing the Gap agreement.

"Without enforceable accountability, it has become little more than a reporting exercise, documenting State violence

while our children are stolen and our people are caged and killed in custody at rising rates," she said.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services said the Government's continued focus on dialogue with States and Territories, while meaningful reform was delayed, was dangerous.

"We need decisive action and leadership from the Prime Minister to address Closing the Gap failures — something that he should not shy away from and instead work with us directly to improve," NATSILS acting chair Nerita Waight said.

"We are calling on the Prime Minister to step up and call a national summit on youth justice so we can make meaningful progress in closing the gap, not just gloss over the worsening incarceration gap."

Senator Kerry Liddle, then the shadow minister for Indigenous Australians, said the Government was only "continuing to invest in programs introduced by the former Coalition government", and argued delivery under the current plan had been too slow.

She said tracking of commitments and outcomes must continue, warning that "delivery has too often been too slow and fallen short of expectations".

# Report indicates racism embedded in universities

GIOVANNI TORRE

The release of the Australian Human Rights Commission's Racism@Uni Final Report last week confirmed "what First Nations learners, educators and academia have been saying for decades — racism in universities is multi-faceted, systemic, and pervasive", says the national peak body for First Nations education.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation said it was "deeply concerned" but not surprised by the study's findings.

The study found racism was "deeply embedded" in Australian universities, and had profound impacts on students and staff.

More than 76,000 students and staff from 42 universities across the country participated in the study, which revealed particularly high rates of racism were experienced by students and staff from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Maori, Pasifika, Palestinian, Jewish, African, Asian, Middle Eastern and Muslim backgrounds.

The report, titled Respect At Uni: Study Into Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Racism And The Experience Of First Nations People, was commissioned in May 2024 by the Federal Government. It found Indigenous re-

spondents reported experiences of racism at rates over 80 per cent; 70 per cent of respondents reported experiencing indirect racism, including hearing or seeing racist behaviour directed at their community; 15 per cent of respondents reported experiencing direct interpersonal racism at university; only 6 per cent of people who experienced direct racism made a complaint to their university, with many citing a fear of consequences; trust in university complaints systems was extremely low; and racism occurred at similar rates at all Australian universities.

NATSIEC is undertaking national community consultations in partnership with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium — the national network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in higher education — to ensure the forthcoming national First Nations Education Policy reflects the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and university staff.

"The findings of the Racism@Uni report reinforce the urgency of that work," NATSIEC said.

NATSIEC urged the Federal Government to ensure First Nations education leadership was formally included in the

implementation and oversight of reforms.

NATSIEC chair Ray Ingrey noted universities held "enormous power" in shaping public discourse and future leadership.

"This report makes it clear that racism is not incidental," he said.

"For First Nations peoples, this is not new information. Our communities have long understood that these long-standing institutions cause harm unless they are intentionally redesigned.

"We will work with the Australian government and NATSIEC to ensure First Nations leadership is at the table."

NATSIEC chief executive Sharon Davis said the data was "confronting but it is not surprising".

"More than 80 per cent of First Nations respondents reported experiencing racism in universities. That has real consequences for mental health, academic progression and workforce participation," they said.

"Racism is not just interpersonal behaviour. It is embedded in curriculum, governance, complaints systems and leadership structures.

"If we want universities to be places of genuine learning and critical thought, then we must address whose knowledge is centred, whose voices are believed, and who carries the burden of

fixing systems that were never designed for them.

"NATSIEC stands ready to work with government and the sector to implement the recommendations. But we will not accept reform that excludes First Nations education leadership."

Race Discrimination Commissioner Giridharan Sivaraman said the findings of the Racism@Uni Study were deeply troubling and revealed universities were falling short of their duty of care.

"The insights and data from this study highlight that racism at university is not confined to isolated incidents or individual behaviour — it is systemic," he said last week.

"Racism is pervasive across the sector, affecting many groups in serious ways.

"The study confirms particularly high rates of racism are experienced by First Nations, Jewish and Palestinian students and staff at Australian universities."

The report makes 47 recommendations for government and universities, calling for a "coordinated, sector-wide approach aligned with the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework".

The recommendations focus on five interconnected out-

comes: A national framework for anti-racism in universities; inclusive and safe universities, free from racism; accountable universities with trusted, accessible complaints systems; an inclusive curriculum and teaching; and diverse leadership and workforce.

While universities have made progress in some areas, the study's findings indicate anti-racism policies remain "fragmented" and accountability mechanisms are largely ineffective. Only 11 universities were found to have advanced anti-racism strategies.

Mr Sivaraman said the report provided a "clear, evidence-based path forward". Higher education peak body Universities Australia said the accounts shared by staff and students through the Racism@Uni Study were "deeply troubling".

The organisation supported the report's calls for a national working group to develop a coordinated action plan for the sector, to "translate its findings into consistent standards, stronger accountability and measurable progress across all institutions".

"Universities Australia stands ready to work constructively with the AHRC and the Government to ensure this work begins without delay and delivers meaningful, transparent change," it said.

## Call for Elders to help detained kids

CALLAN MORSE

A respected Tasmanian Elder has called for senior Aboriginal intervention to support Indigenous youth detained at Northern Tasmania's troubled Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

Indigenous rights activist and Amnesty International campaigner Uncle Rodney Dillon says Indigenous youth detained at AYDC need Aboriginal Elders around them to ensure their safety, and the safety of AYDC staff.

This month, seven of AYDC's population of 18 were Indigenous.

Mr Dillon said he'd advocate for an Elders council "to help calm the kids and give the kids some direction in there".

"We need to keep the kids safe, (is) the first thing, and we need to be able to have systems in place to rehabilitate these kids," Mr Dillon told National Indigenous Times.

"We also need good medical evidence on what's caused them to go in there."

The centre was thrust into the national spotlight earlier this month after staff participated in two hours of joint stop-work action over what unions labelled chronic safety risks and severe understaffing.

Less than 24 hours later, a fire broke out at the facility, which led

to two staff allegedly being assaulted, with one requiring hospital treatment.

Health and Community Services Union Tasmania State secretary, Robbie Moore said the facility was operating three staff down when the incident took place, with usual short-staffing protocols not followed.

"Usually when they're down on staff, procedures are put in place," he told the ABC.

"But my understanding is that they did not put in a number of those procedures, including limiting where children could go to at that time."

Mr Dillon said if the Tasmanian Government continued locking up young people, it needed to ensure it led to desirable outcomes.

"We've got to have outcomes for these kids for when they come out," he said. "There's no good of putting kids in any facility if they're coming out worse."

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data suggests on an average night in the June quarter 2024, First Nations young people aged 10-17 in Tasmania were 2.6 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people in the State.

During the same reporting period the rate of First Nations young people aged 10-17 in detention in



Tasmanian Elder Uncle Rodney Dillon. Picture: The Mercury

Tasmania was 3½ times the non-Indigenous rate, according to the AIHW.

The situation comes shortly after Tasmanian Custodial Inspector, Dr Grant Davies, uncovered systemic problems at AYDC.

"It's completely unacceptable that vulnerable children at Ashley are still being forced into regular isolation. This has significant impacts on the mental health and development of children," Greens Children and Young People

Spokesperson Cecily Rosol said.

A Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People spokesperson told National Indigenous Times there were "a number of Indigenous-led programs" at the AYDC run with the support of Ashley School, Programs and Operational staff.

They said a new arrangement with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre would see an Aboriginal education worker deliver weekly individual support to Aboriginal

young people. "A DECYP Aboriginal liaison role is also being established in response to a Commission of Inquiry recommendation to support and work with Aboriginal children and young people in detention," the spokesperson said.

Mr Dillon questioned whether the reasons for young people entering the youth justice system were truly understood.

"Lots of times it's medical reasons why the kids are going in there," he said.

# Yugambeh 'guerilla poet' used language as protest

JOSEPH GUENZLER

**WARNING:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised the following article contains the name of an Indigenous person who has died.*

On February 12, award-winning Yugambeh poet, author, artist and activist Uncle Lionel Fogarty died aged 68.

A proud Mununjali man of the Yugambeh nation born and raised in Cherbourg, Uncle Lionel became one of Australia's most recognised poets and a longstanding figure in the land rights movement and the fight against Black deaths in custody.

He remained deeply connected to the Beaudesert region and to his Jagun (Country), carrying that connection into his writing and activism for more than four decades.

Uncle Lionel's first collection, *Kargun*, was published in 1980, beginning a literary career that would span 14 collections and earn national and international recognition.

His most recent major accolade came in 2023, when he received the Judith Wright Calanthe Award at the Queensland Literary Awards for *Harvest Lingo*. The collection was also shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

In 2025 he was presented with a Red Ochre award for lifetime achievement at the First Nations Arts and Culture Awards, recognising both his literary output and his mentoring of emerging First Nations writers.

Uncle Lionel was known for what he described as "guerilla poetry", breaking the rules of the coloniser's language to ensure Murri truth was heard. He used English not as a constraint but as a tool to dismantle systems that sought to silence Aboriginal voices. His writing carried themes of racism, land rights and ongoing injustices faced by Aboriginal people.

From the 1970s onwards, he was active in grassroots movements for land rights and against Black deaths in custody. He worked alongside newly formed Black organisations, including the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Housing Service. The death of his younger brother Daniel Yock, who died in police custody in 1993, remained a driving force behind his advocacy.

Uncle Lionel travelled internationally and built a reputation as an award-winning poet, yet remained grounded in community and protest spaces across Brisbane and beyond.

A GoFundMe page established by his son, Moojidi, on behalf of his direct family, is seeking support to give him a "beautiful send-off", with many families expected to travel to Cherbourg for the memorial and burial.



Liam Alexander Hall on January 26. Picture: Kitty Byrne-Hemsley

# Identity of alleged terrorist revealed

NATASHA CLARK & GIOVANNI TORRE

The man accused of throwing a bomb into a crowd at the Boorloo/Perth Invasion Day rally in an alleged act of terrorism was identified as Liam Alexander Hall this month after the magistrate found continuing a suppression order was "not in the interests of justice".

WA Police allege the 32-year-old threw a "fragment bomb" filled with ball bearings and screws into the crowd on January 26. Earlier this month he became the first person in Western Australian history to be charged with a terrorism offence.

WA Police Commissioner Col Blanch said prosecutors would allege it "was a nationalist and racially motivated attack ... targeting members of the Abor-

iginal community, First Nations people".

Mr Hall was not present on February 17 for the second hearing of his case, the ABC reported, with his lawyer Simon Freitag referring to a doctor's report which found he was not fit to attend.

Magistrate Lynette Dias said: "Given the serious nature of these charges and fundamental principles relating to open justice, I do not consider that issues relating to the accused's interests and his personal circumstances are such as to justify displacing the usual practice of naming accused persons ... It's not in the interests of justice to make a suppression order."

Speaking in Parliament on the day Mr Hall was named, Kimberley MLA Divina D'Anna criticised what she

described as a "hierarchy of outrage" following the alleged terrorist attack.

Ms D'Anna, a proud Yawuru, Nimanburr and Bardi woman, said some political and public voices had failed to respond with the same force they would have shown in other circumstances.

"Those same voices who are quick to condemn violence elsewhere remain silent on January 26 — and that silence speaks volumes," she said.

In Parliament, Ms D'Anna said political leaders must respond consistently to acts of violence.

"We cannot have a hierarchy of grief," she said. "If we are to be credible in our condemnation of terrorism and political violence, we must condemn it consistently, regardless of who the victims are."

WA Opposition Leader Basil Zempilas did not publicly comment in the days immediately following the incident.

Ms D'Anna called on political leaders to hold themselves to a higher standard; "One that refuses to exploit division and refuses to stay silent when violence is directed at communities we claim to represent."

Premier Roger Cook moved a motion in Parliament on the same day — the first sitting day for WA Parliament this year: "That this House condemns in the strongest terms the alleged act of terror that took place in Perth on January 26 and calls on the Western Australian community to unite against behaviours that promote hate against people based on their race, ethno-religious origin, sex, sexuality, religion or disability."

# Taylor's shadow cabinet reshuffle reinstates Price

DECHLAN BRENNAN

Jacinta Nampijinpa Price has been elevated to the shadow cabinet, less than six months after being removed from the frontbench over controversial comments about the Indian diaspora in Australia.

Meanwhile, South Australian Senator Kerrynne Liddle, who has pushed the Federal Government on spending and accountability, was removed from the Indigenous Australians portfo-

lio, replaced by non-Indigenous MP Julian Leeser.

Following the Liberals' decision to depose Sussan Ley, new leader Angus Taylor reshuffled the shadow cabinet on February 17, rewarding factional allies and promoting Senator Price to shadow minister for small business, skills and training.

Speaking on The Karl Stefanovic Show, Ms Price said, "I'm back baby", and declined to apologise for remarks she made last year that drew widespread crit-

icism. In September, she falsely claimed Labor was bringing in Indian migrants to win votes.

Ms Price said she had been "thrown under the bus" by colleagues after losing her role when she refused to back Ms Ley's leadership. She told the podcast she wouldn't be joining One Nation, despite "everyone" urging her to, and defended its leader, Pauline Hanson — who was found in 2024 to have breached the Racial Discrimination Act — as "not a racist".

"Elections are won on the middle ground, and I see myself as centre right," she said. "One Nation is a little more right. I'm happy where I am."

Ms Liddle's work in the Indigenous affairs portfolio was seen as less culture-war focused than her predecessor, Ms Price. She had pursued issues around the APY Lands, land council funding and department waste.

Mr Leeser had left the shadow cabinet in 2023 and is a vocal supporter of Indigenous rights.

# Decade-long safety fight

**ANALYSIS**  
**ANTOINETTE BRAYBROOK &**  
**HANNAH MCGLADE**

The launch this month of the first dedicated national plan on violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Canberra marked a decade of campaigning.

It was clear increased policy commitment and investment, as well as transformation of institutions, was needed.

We are Indigenous women who led advocacy for this plan and worked for decades on the front line for women's safety, advocating for services, reforms and calling out the discrimination so many First Nations women still experience.

Our Ways — Strong Ways — Our Voices was led by First Nations women, including women with lived experience, who understand the impacts of violence, which is a form of discrimination according to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The national marks a firm commitment from the Commonwealth, States and Territories to Aboriginal governance, with an action and implementation plan to be developed.

At the time of print, there

have been eight Australian women killed this year — four of them Aboriginal.

The most recent was an elder in Albany, WA, and all the victims were Aboriginal or culturally and linguistically diverse. And yet we make up about 3 per cent of the national women's population.

The over-representation is staggering. Women's need for advocacy and support is critical. The specialist Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services are Federally funded services that have worked on the front line of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's and children's safety for more than a quarter of a century and have been the first door for thousands of Aboriginal women affected by violence.

As such, we have considerable expertise, trust and confidence, and this must be supported to expand services further so more women and children can thrive, not just survive.

There is a critical opportunity now for the Commonwealth Department of Social Services under the standalone plan launched to strengthen this work by providing funding to expand case management, counselling

and vital early intervention programs to complement the legal services they are funded to provide by the Attorney-General's Department.

These services are essential to building and maintaining trust and confidence for women to disclose violence, for breaking social isolation, and creating additional culturally safe access points to support that prioritises women's safety. Only last month, Sophie Quinn, 25, who was seven months pregnant, was shot dead. Her ex-partner, Julian Ingram, is accused of murdering Ms Quinn, and her her aunty Nerida Quinn and partner John Harris.

Ingram had been charged with domestic violence allegations in relation to Sophie, and was out on bail at the time she was killed.

The problem of systemic discrimination against Aboriginal women in the justice system will not go away of its own accord.

We need bolder responses and law reforms.

The WA Family Violence Legislative Reform Evidentiary Act 2020 — which came after the murder conviction and subsequent release of abuse victim Jody Gore — goes some way to

ensuring this violence is better acknowledged in the justice system. Yet we clearly need Aboriginal family violence experts appointed to provide reports to courts for women.

This is particularly important because coercive control laws implemented across Australia are leading to more Aboriginal women being "misidentified" or racially profiled as perpetrators, and prosecuted as such.

We warned this would happen but were ignored in the rush to pass the laws.

Increasingly, Aboriginal women are blamed and punished for the violence they experience, with their children, even as babies, taken by the "welfare", never to be returned.

Many families are never reunited and do not experience safety in out-of-home care.

That is why Aboriginal family violence advocates must always be engaged, and we call for a mandatory notification process to ensure mums are referred to an FVPLS whenever child protection become involved.

We also call for an end to closed court processes that remove children, while mothers are denied any natural justice or ability to

respond. Aboriginal elders and respected people must sit with the courts to advise on appropriate responses.

The launch of the plan was accompanied by an announcement by Minister for Social Services Tanya Plibersek of \$218 million over four years for up to 40 Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to deliver specialist support services. It's important existing organisations that have the expertise and frontline experience are further supported to grow and meet the demand. This plan is a real opportunity to finally make progress on ending violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Its success depends on governments listening, working with us, and remembering our self-determined leadership and knowledge is critical to its future.

**1800 RESPECT (737 732)**  
**13 YARN (13 92 76)**

**Antoinette Braybrook AM is the CEO of Djirra, co-chair of Change the Record, and a proud Kuku Yalanji woman.**  
**Dr Hannah McGlade is a Kurin Minang human rights expert and law academic.**

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## Victorians urged to throw hats in the ring for First Peoples' Assembly vote

**DECHLAN BRENNAN**

The First Peoples' Assembly — the elected body representing Indigenous people in Victoria — is preparing for its third election, and has called for Traditional Owners to nominate.

Having negotiated the country's first Treaty — with the Victorian Government — the assembly's election will open on March 21 and run until April 12, to elect 34 members across its two types of seats: general seats and reserved seats.

Nominations opened on February 16, and close on March 2.

Candidates will be elected to 22 general seats by enrolled First Peoples across five voting regions in Victoria: 10 members from the Metro region, and three members each from the North East, North West, South East, and South West regions.

Elected members will sit under Gellung Warl — meaning "tip of the spear" in Gunaikurnai — forming the new Aboriginal governance structure.

Under this framework,

the First Peoples' Assembly, along with a new permanent truth-telling body and an accountability commission, will oversee policies aimed at closing the gap in Victoria.

Assembly co-chair Ngarra Murray this month called on Traditional Owners of all ages and backgrounds to consider nominating as candidates.

The Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Dhudhuroa woman said "generations of Blak resistance and activism" had secured Treaty last year, and the next generation of leaders needed to "step up and make sure Treaty improves our peoples' lives".

"Our people have built this democracy from the ground up," she said.

"Through Treaty, we can now use our local knowledge to come up with and deliver practical solutions for our communities.

"This means we can get better outcomes because Aboriginal people know what does and doesn't work for us."

All Traditional Owners

of Country in Victoria, or First Peoples who are not Victorian Traditional Owners but have lived in Victoria for three of the past five years, are entitled to vote in the elections.

Furthermore, all First Peoples who are currently incarcerated can also cast a vote.

"When so many of our Elders were denied the right to vote and had decisions about their lives made on their behalf, we all have a responsibility to get involved to make sure Treaty delivers for mob," Ms Murray said.

While all successful candidates will be elected for a four-year term, the Coalition has vowed to abolish the Assembly and tear up the Treaty if it wins office in November's State elections.

Despite broadly agreeing to the apology delivered to First Peoples in December, the Opposition voted against it, citing the mention of Treaty in relation to the gap.

Learn more, nominate to be a candidate, or enrol to vote in the Treaty Elections online at [treatyelections.org](http://treatyelections.org).

Families reveal human cost of prison staff shortages

# The bleak reality of a broken system



Pictures: Office of Inspector of Custodial Services

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**NATASHA CLARK**

Eliana received a phone call from her brother inside Hakea Prison on Monday, February 16.

He told her the prison had been in lockdown for days, and he did not know when he would be allowed to call home again.

According to Eliana, prisoners spent three consecutive days confined to their cells for 23 hours. Over the following four days, men were briefly released only to make short phone calls of two to three minutes before being locked in again for most of the day.

Although not formally recorded as consecutive full lockdowns, she said the conditions remained largely the same.

"We're told the lockdowns are due to staff shortages," Eliana said. "These lockdowns are stripping my brother of basic daily entitlements like having a shower, family visits and access to sunlight."

Concerns about prolonged confinement at Hakea are not new. Last year, a follow-up report by Inspector of Custodial Services Eamon Ryan found conditions at the prison "entirely unacceptable", nearly a year after a 2024 inspection raised concerns prisoners were held in inhumane conditions.

Similar concerns were outlined in the 162-page report, which found staff shortages led to frequent lockdowns keeping men confined for long periods with limited access to fresh air, showers and recreation.

The report detailed overcrowding, with prisoners sleeping beside toilets, and said men faced "immense difficulty contacting family".

Mr Ryan told National Indigenous Times conditions at Hakea "have probably got worse" since his last report.

"I am aware that there have been recent staff shortages that have caused increased restrictions and lockdowns, which is terrible," Mr Ryan said.

Consistent lockdowns undermine rehabilitation, he said.

"When the regime is like that, it's just a warehouse. It's just holding them in prison ... Reha-

bilitation is simply not happening when they're only getting out of their cell for one or two hours a day."

A Department of Justice spokesperson said: "Average out-of-cell hours at Hakea, including recreation time, have increased since November 2024 and, subject to disruptions, social visits are running five days a week with no significant backlog ... The safety and well-being of all prisoners remains the highest priority and prisoners with known medical conditions receive the required care.

"Even during recent adaptive routines, all prisoners have had access to phones and have not been confined to their cells for 23 hours over a consecutive three-day period."

However, family say confinement is only part of the impact. Even inside locked cells, access to basic medical care can become uncertain.

Loretta's partner — a Noongar man — was born with a congenital heart defect and requires regular specialised antibiotics. Earlier this month, during what she described as a severe cardiac episode, he struggled to breathe while confined to his cell. She said he repeatedly pressed the in-cell intercom used to request medical assistance.

Initially he was responded to by prison staff and received medical attention.

She said he pressed the cell-call system again when his symptoms worsened but received no reply. "He started panicking. He thought he was going to die in there," she said.

The Department of Justice responded that it does not comment on individual prisoners "but has reviewed Hakea Prison records and reiterates that medical incidents are responded to promptly, with appropriate medical assistance provided".

Families say the fear and uncertainty inside locked cells is real.

Hakea staff have contacted Loretta regarding his heart condition, questioning its permanence. She says the tone of those calls suggested disbelief.

“

Rehabilitation is collapsing at Hakea ... the current path fuels cycles of trauma, suicide and injustice.

Megan Krakouer



"If someone's got heart problems, work on it straight away, don't try and see if they are lying," Loretta said.

"When they ring me and ask these questions, I say 'excuse me, look at his hospital records'. He has had heart problems since he was a baby."

Her partner's health issues are compounded by the couple's inability to stay in contact, with lockdowns preventing calls or visits.

"It makes me emotional because I know what he goes through, but I can't feel his pain and be with him," she said.

"If something does end up happening to him, I will be making the prison accountable."

For many Aboriginal families, those fears are shaped by history. Western Australia has one of the highest rates of Aboriginal deaths in custody nationally. Several of those deaths have occurred at Hakea Prison.

Robyn is a Noongar woman whose relatives and friends have been incarcerated at Hakea. "When our kids go into custody, we expect them to come out good, having had time to learn from their mistakes,"

she said. "But the ones that do come home, they come home very angry at the system, and they rebel in the community."

Robyn criticised what she described as broken government promises to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people, saying reform must begin inside prisons.

"This Government has aligned itself to fix a generation that they ruined right from the get-go," she said. "This Government has made it clear that it wants to help Aboriginal people, when at the very core of it, it starts from the jails."

She said current prisoners have told her that up to four men are sleeping in cells originally designed for two.

"It's heartbreaking," Ms Collard said.

The Department of Justice said "most cells at Hakea are built to accommodate multiple beds and there is bedding available for all prisoners ... there are no general living unit cells accommodating more than three prisoners".

Prison reform advocate Megan Krakouer says the conditions described by families reflect deeper systemic failures within WA's prison system.

"Rehabilitation is collapsing at Hakea," Ms Krakouer said.

"High rates of self-harm, limited programs and chronic staffing shortages demonstrate that people risk leaving prison worse off than when they entered. This must end — the current path fuels cycles of trauma, suicide and injustice."

She described the failure to act on repeated watchdog reports as systemic.

"Premier Roger Cook and Corrective Services Minister Paul Papalia have been warned repeatedly by the prisons watchdog that Hakea is buckling under strain and inhumane conditions. Their failure to act decisively is not neglect — it's a systemic failure that endangers lives and fuels despair."

National Indigenous Times contacted Mr Cook and Mr Papalia for comment and received responses from a State Government spokesperson,

who said population growth and tougher laws were contributing to pressure on the system.

"Western Australia has the toughest family and domestic violence laws in the nation and the fastest-growing population, which has resulted in significant pressure on the prison system," the spokesperson said.

"The State Government is investing to meet both immediate and long-term demand, with more than \$435 million committed for major expansions at Casuarina and Acacia prisons, which is set to add almost 700 beds to the system. \$4.7 million has also been allocated to long-term custodial infrastructure planning."

On Sunday, February 8, Eliana had to settle with contact with her brother via a video call. Her visit had been cancelled again. "He just looked so pale," Eliana said. "He looked psychologically and mentally unwell. 'He told me 'I don't know how much more I can tolerate of this'."

Eliana's brother's case is among more than 40 in which complaints have been formally escalated by the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA.

"For years, ALSWA and other organisations have warned the WA Government about the harsh and inhumane conditions at Hakea Prison," an ALSWA spokesperson said.

"Since December 2024, we have lodged formal complaints with the Commissioner of Corrective Services on behalf of more than 40 clients detained at Hakea. These complaints detail endemic overcrowding, relentless lockdowns, unhygienic conditions and inadequate access to mental and physical health care. As of February 2026, clients continue to report being confined to their cells for entire days or receiving only minimal time out.

"The Government's failure to resolve these ongoing lockdowns and inhumane conditions represents a systemic breakdown. ALSWA holds grave concerns that without urgent intervention there will be further deaths and serious unrest inside Hakea Prison."



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# STYLEUP

**ALSO INSIDE**

Treasure trove of drawings opens

**P12**

Rappers ready to roll

**P12 & P14**

## Show of strength

Footy stars' sportswear campaign is a perfect fit

Jaime Chapman  
and Shaylee  
Bent. Picture:  
Chris Gurney



# Going from strength to strength

**JARRED CROSS**

Growing up, NRLW stars Jaime Chapman and Shaylee Bent didn't have the prospect of playing professionally in a national competition, because it just didn't exist.

Fast forward to 2026 and the close friends are teammates at the Titans, and have run out together for the Indigenous All Stars and the Sky Blues in State of Origin.

They have also represented Australia with the Jillaroos.

Chapman and Bent have teamed up again as faces of Australian activewear and sports accessories brand Rockwear for its 2026 campaign Strength, Your Way.

They're joining rising track star and Dunghutti woman Bella Guthrie and Pilates instructor Charlotte Barge for the campaign.

Rockwear said the collaboration stemmed from "shared values around confidence, authenticity and empowering women to move in ways that feel right for them".

It also coincides with Rockwear's International

Women's Day celebrations, with Chapman and Bent due to take part in the brand's Sydney event on Friday, March 6.

Strength, Your Way is celebrating women at the top of their field, and what strength means to them.

"For me, it's being a proud Indigenous woman competing in a male-dominated sport, defying all the odds. We're representing not only ourselves, but women in general, and Indigenous women," Chapman told Style Up.

"It's pretty amazing to see that we can be involved in a campaign like this, something that I never thought was possible."

Chapman wants all women to celebrate their authentic selves.

"Especially in the world that we live in today, the more that we can empower each other as women . . . we're going to be unstoppable," she said.

"Promoting, supporting each other, and pushing each other to do better is a very special thing."

In her work in communities



Models and NRLW stars Shaylee Bent and Jaime Chapman.



Pictures  
**Chris Gurney**  
All clothing by  
**Rockwear**

striving to be your best, particularly in sport, is a reward in itself, not a sacrifice.

Bent is equally pleased to align with a brand promoting not just fashion, but one with a unique athletic approach.

"What (Rockwear) is promoting is strength — we're strong, we're athletic," she told Style Up. "It's not just for the look; it's actually for performance as well."

Bent said she would see Rockwear in shops when she was younger, but did not know for sure if its products were for her, in an athletic sense.

Now, they're for everyone. Growing up as one of seven kids, with three older brothers, football was a part of Bent's life from the beginning. But while male players like Greg Inglis were there as an inspiration, women were missing.

"I did any sport possible, but because I didn't see girls, I

didn't see ladies playing, I didn't think that could be me," Bent said. "To think now that we're playing on the big stage, these young girls that are coming through actually have someone to look up to, that's doing what they want to do... to aspire to something," Bent said.

Chapman put it all simply - "You can't be what you can't see". For both women, being able to do it together is pretty special.

"Growing up, I struggled getting out of my comfort zone... I'm really grateful to have her," Bent said of Chapman.

"I'm so glad Rockwear has given us the opportunity to do it together."

Chapman said "not everyone gets the opportunity to work alongside their best friend".

Rockwear has released some Strength, Your Way pieces, with more to come throughout the year.



and with young First Nations girls, the speedster wants them to know the game has come forward in leaps and bounds, and offers growing opportunities for them to seize with both hands. She reminds them

# A 'monumental' collection

GIOVANNI TORRE &  
DAVID PRESTIPINO

*This article contains the names of people who have died.*  
In 1945, sixteen Aboriginal men working at Birrundudu Station created 810 crayon drawings, commissioned by anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt.

The men documented their extensive knowledge of Country, ancestral creation, history, and ceremonies of the region.

The exhibition Birrundudu Drawings at the University of Western Australia's Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery showcases more than 100 of these works on paper, none of which have been exhibited before, as well as a contemporary response by Jimmy Tchooga.

The exhibition, presented with The Berndt Museum as part of Perth Festival, is the result of years of engagement with descendants and communities connected to the artists, who have helped bring the stories and cultural significance of these drawings back to life.

The exhibition also marks the 50th anniversary of the Berndt Museum, an Indigenous-led cultural institution that cares for a vast collection of works of art, ancestral objects, and archives.

Descendants of the artists



**Birrundudu Drawings.** Pics: Giovanni Torre, courtesy The Berndt Museum

and other community members travelled to Boorloo/Perth for the exhibition launch on February 13, opening the event with a performance sharing one of the many stories told by the artworks.

At the launch, Berndt Museum co-director and Palyku academic Dr Jessyca Hutchens told National Indigenous Times the value of the exhibition was "almost unquantifiable".

"It's an absolutely monumental archive of Aboriginal knowledge that comes from various desert

communities who all found themselves at this remote cattle station called Birrundudu, where just 16 men produced this incredible archive of knowledge of their ceremonies and life stories and their custodial responsibilities, creating 810 drawings in just three months at this remote station," Dr Hutchens said.

"The works have rarely been seen, and this is the first time they've been exhibited publicly.

"So in essence, they've kind of been hidden away for over 80 years, and over the last few



**A work by Nyininy and Jaru man Splinter Dardayi Yani Jangala.**

years, they finally began to be reconnected with all of their descendants and communities and people with cultural ties to the drawings, and they're really finally coming back to life."

Birrundudu Station sits 695km south-west of Katherine on the Western Australia-Northern Territory border, and the commissioned artists came from a diverse spread of cultural and language groups across both areas.

Descendants of the artists and their affiliated communities in Balgo, Billiluna, Halls Creek, Kalkarindji (Wave Hill), Lajamanu, Yuendumu and Mparntwe (Alice Springs) were engaged during the four-year development process, with some families seeing the works of their ancestors for the first time.

This was the case for artist Paddy Padoon Jangala's grandson, Robert McKay.

"We didn't go looking for them," Mr McKay said. "It's like they came looking for us."

The Berndt Museum co-director and Yamatji man Dr Stephen Gilchrist said the works were even more remarkable for being created at a time when so much Indigenous art was rapidly and deliberately being dispersed and destroyed.

"Now, their descendants and communities can bring story, song, place and ceremony back to life," he said.

**Birrundudu Drawings is now open and runs until April 4 at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, UWA. A book of the artworks has also been published.**

## Dem Mob bring Pitjantjatjara raps on national tour

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Dem Mob, the first hip-hop group to rap in Pitjantjatjara, have released their new single, Dream, as they embark on a national tour.

Formed in the remote APY Lands of South Australia, the group are known as performers and educators, using hip-hop to empower young First Nations people and challenge the systems that marginalise them.

Their work centres land, language and legacy, pushing back against narratives that frame remote communities through deficit.

Dream continues that direction while reinforcing their assertion of Indigenous and remote presence.

Blending sharp rap verses with layered vocals, the track follows the energy of their recent triple j-playlisted single Suit Vibes.

The group outlined what the song is intended to capture.

"Dream is for the ones who refuse to sit back and wait," Dem Mob said.

"It's about believing in yourself, manifesting more, and putting in the work while you're still wide awake.

"Because the future don't

### TOUR DATES

**Thu 26 Feb** - Great Northern - Cavanbah / Byron Bay  
**Fri 27 Feb** - Miami Marketta - Yugambeh Land/Gold Coast  
**Sat 28 Feb** - Nortons - Gubbi Gubbi Land/Sunshine Coast  
**Fri 20 Mar** - La La Land - Dharawal Land/Wollongong  
**Sat 21 Mar** - King Street - Mulubinba/Newcastle  
**Sun 22 Mar** - Crowbar - Eora/Sydney (all-ages)  
**Fri 10 Apr** - 170 Russell - Naarm/Melbourne  
**Sat 11 Apr** - Croxton Hotel - Naarm/Melbourne  
**Fri 17 Apr** - Tanks Arts Centre - Gimuy/Cairns  
**Fri 24 Apr** - The Tivoli - Magandjin/Brisbane  
**Sat 25 Apr** - The Princess - Magandjin/Brisbane (all-ages)  
**Sun 26 Apr** - Empire Theatre - Jagera, Giabal & Jarowair Land/Toowoomba  
**Fri 1 May** - Liberty Hall - Eora/Sydney  
**Sat 2 May** - Keystone 1889 - Wiradyuri Land/Bathurst  
**Sun 3 May** - Blue Mountains Theatre - Darug Land/Springwood

come from luck — it comes from your daily moves."

The rise of Dem Mob has included performances in Australia and overseas.

From their breakout single Still No Justice, which addressed deaths in custody, racism, and youth hope in Central Australia, the group have appeared at WOMADelaide, Primavera



**Dem Mob are on tour until May.**

Sound in Barcelona, and SXSW Sydney.

They have performed at the Lincoln Center in New York and the Toronto International First Nations Music Summit while supporting national acts including Seth Sentry and Regurgitator.

In three years, Dem Mob have received 10 South Australian Music Awards, including best hip-hop act, best Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander artist, best music educators and best regional artist, alongside the APRA Emily Burrows Award and the

Helpmann Academy's Elise Ross Prize.

The group's work has also connected to education outcomes in remote communities.

Dem Mob have spoken at conferences across three continents about hip-hop as an education vehicle, and last year their work assisted in the opening of the new Fregon Anangu School in far north South Australia on the Anangu Lands.

Collaborating with ARIA award-winning rapper Barkaa, they delivered

songwriting, performance and stagecraft workshops that supported students to create and perform original work at the opening concert.

Dem Mob will take the single on the road through regional and major venues across Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

The tour began this month with shows at Westernport — Bunurong Land/San Remo, Volta — Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung Land/Ballarat, and All Seasons — Djandak/Bendigo, and runs until early May.

## Exhibition focuses on Aboriginal creativity

PHOEBE BLOGG

The Art Gallery of Western Australia's major new exhibition I AM will celebrate the depth, diversity and creative strength of Aboriginal artists, featuring new, recent, and rarely seen works from the State Art Collection.

I AM brings together more than 60 works and centres on personal and shared stories that elevate Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives on the world and our place in it.

I AM reflects the dynamism of First Nations art, from deeply rooted traditions to bold contemporary expression.

Highlights include paintings by Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori and Emily Kam Kngwarrey that depict the rhythms of Country; bark paintings by Wandjuk Marika that recount creation stories; a major glass installation by Yhonnice Scarce addressing the history of atomic testing in Australia; and portraits and mental maps by Julie Dowling, Dianne Jones, Gordon Bennett and Dallas Fletcher.

"I AM is an exhibition about identity and personhood. How we know ourselves, how we make sense of the world around us, and how we navigate the two is the overarching theme of the show," said AGWA's curator of Indigenous art, Carly Lane.

"Person-centred, the exhibition brings together the art of many expressive, inquiring minds.

"In a way, these works are an imprint, an echo, and a silhouette of the artist."

Themes woven into the exhibition include connection to Country, culture, history and lived experience.

It features artists from regions across Australia, including the South West, the Kimberley, Arnhem Land, the Tiwi Islands, and the Western Desert region.

I AM will run for 18 months, with two major rotations introducing new works in August, and again in early 2027, ensuring the exhibition continues to evolve and offer fresh perspectives.

The exhibition opens on Saturday, February 28 and runs until October 24, 2027.

# Dancer finds culture, identity & voice united



Maddison Fraser Picture: Daniel Boud

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Joining Bangarra Dance Theatre has been a significant step for Maddison Fraser.

The Palyku and Yindjibarndi dancer describes the experience as deeply affirming, bringing together her identity, culture and artistic voice in one place.

She told National Indigenous Times the company's foundation in cultural integrity and connection had given her confidence as an artist.

"Becoming part of Bangarra is really meaningful for me, both personally and professionally," she said.

"The company holds such strong artistic and cultural integrity, which I believe will encourage me to keep deepening my understanding of movement, intention, and the responsibility that comes with sharing cultural stories on stage. It feels like a quiet confirmation that my ancestors are walking alongside me and guiding me on a path where I can share stories through movement while staying connected to culture, identity and community."

Fraser joined Bangarra as a guest artist in 2025 for its premiere season of Illume at the Sydney Opera House, and was later appointed as a company dancer.

For her, movement provides a powerful channel to communicate what words cannot.

She believes in using her craft to honour ancestors, uplift the next generation, and maintain the cycles of cultural knowledge.

"What I enjoy most about dancing is that it allows me to connect to my culture and express stories through movement when

words are not enough," she said.

"Being able to share what I have learnt and inspire the next generation is something I value deeply."

Fraser's artistic foundation was laid at NAISDA Dance College, where she completed her Advanced Diploma and explored the connection between movement, cultural responsibility and Country.

Her training included cultural residencies in Moa Island in the Torres Strait and Nynyikay in East Arnhem Land, which deepened her connection to her own heritage.

"My time at NAISDA shaped me as an artist by teaching me how to turn something I've always felt — a calling to movement — into a powerful form of communication," Fraser said.

"Being immersed in these communities gave me the space to reflect on my own connection to culture back home in the Pilbara."

Before joining Bangarra, Fraser built a strong portfolio, appearing in Song Spirals by Rosalee Pearson at Darwin Festival and Sydney Opera House, and dancing in Jasmin Sheppard's The Cord — among other performances.

Fraser is enthusiastic about her role in Bangarra's upcoming production Sheltering. "I'm really excited to be part of Sheltering, particularly (Bangarra artistic director) Francis Rings' Sheoak," she said.

"The movement, combined with the beautiful and powerful soundtrack, reflects the strength and resilience of the Sheoak tree, its deep roots and branches symbolising connection, community, and growth. I'm thrilled to now have the opportunity to bring my own voice to this work, as well as honouring those who came before."

## Piece asks what we inherit, and what we pass on

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Proud Wuthathi, Meriam and Yadhghana singer-songwriter Toni Janke will bring her latest work, Inheritance, to the Queensland Performing Arts Centre's Cremorne Theatre for a one-night-only performance on April 2.

Janke is recognised for her contributions to music, storytelling and Indigenous advocacy.

Presented in collaboration with the Brisbane Multicultural Arts Centre, Inheritance is her debut on the Cremorne stage and offers an immersive blend of music, spoken word, and performance. The work



Picture: Ange Costes Photography

explores the intangible legacies passed down through generations.

Framed around the metaphor of a precious jewel,

the production delves into cultural memory, values and identity, and poses a central question: "What do we truly inherit — and what will we choose to pass on?"

Janke will be joined by rising Indigenous dancers Tjilala Brown-Roberts and Harold Pascoe, with choreography by Jeanette Fabila of Bangarra Dance Theatre's Dance Clan.

She described the role of story and song in shaping her cultural journey.

"When I was growing up, singing and storytelling were such an important part of our culture, and still are today," Janke, pictured, said.

"While spoken word can

convey truth, music and song captivates the spirit.

"Together they weave memory, history, and emotion into something that you don't just hear, but you actually feel and experience."

Janke said Inheritance was about "reclaiming voice and visibility".

"It's about showing that advocacy and artistry are not separate — they're intertwined," she said.

Janke acknowledged the significance of the venue in supporting Indigenous performers.

"I'm really looking forward to performing in the Cremorne Theatre, which has been a special and vibrant space for

First Nations voices for many years," she said.

Cultural advisor Ruth Ghee and dramaturg Dr Angelina Hurley also lend their guidance to the production, ensuring cultural and artistic integrity remain central.

With a career spanning more than 35 years, Janke's storytelling is grounded in experience and creative expression.

Presented by QPAC and BEMAC, Inheritance continues a longstanding partnership focused on uplifting diverse cultural narratives through live performance. Tickets are available via the QPAC website or by calling 136 246.

# Baker Boy ready to hit stages

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Baker Boy is returning to stages across the country, with a national tour celebrating his second studio album *Djandjay* kicking off in April.

The announcement follows his performance at the AFL grand final alongside Snoop Dogg.

The proud Yolngu artist said the tour would showcase his most ambitious live production yet, with months of preparation going into building the show from scratch.

"I did a full production rehearsal for the last three days," he said.

"We've been working on the live show rebuild.

"It was just so many ideas . . . but then we just kind of started building step by step."

The shows will feature a 75-minute set and include what

## BAKER BOY DJANDJAY TOUR

**Thu 09 Apr** King St Bandroom – Mulubinba/Newcastle

**Fri 10 Apr** Liberty Hall – Warrane/Sydney

**Sat 11 Apr** – The Triffid – Meanjin/Brisbane

**Sun 12 Apr** – The Cooly Hotel – Cullunghutti/Coolangatta

**Thu 16 Apr** – Theatre Royal – Castlemaine

**Fri 17 Apr** – The Barwon Club – Koornoo/Barwon Heads

**Sat 18 Apr** – Northcote Theatre – Naarm/Melbourne

**Fri 01 May** – Mayberry – Gulumoerrgin/Darwin

**Sat 02 May** – Alice Springs Brewing Co – Mparntwe/Alice Springs

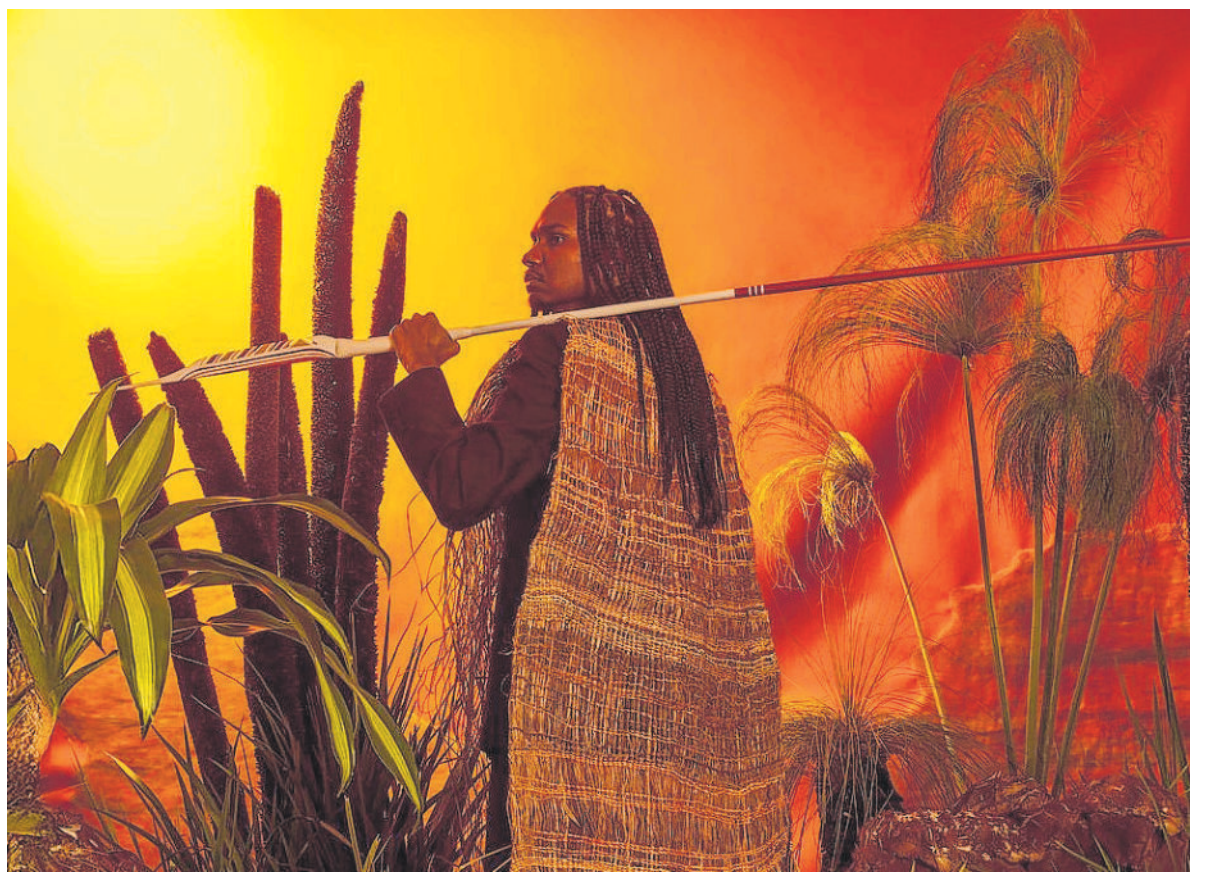
**Festival Appearances**

**Sun 08 Mar** – WOMADelaide 2026 – Tarradanya/Adelaide

Baker Boy calls a "full EDM moment" — *Dance Of The Yidaki*.

"I'm going to be taking it on the *Djandjay* tour . . . and we finish the whole tour with *Mad Dog*," he said.

This tour will be the first time Baker Boy has taken



Baker Boy Picture: Sulaiman Enayatzada

complete creative control of the stage.

"I've never really dived into music like I have in this record and worked on the whole live show," he said. "Now everything is precise and has really cool stuff on stage."

Beyond the performance, Baker Boy said the significance of the tour ran deep.

"A few phone calls from family just remind you that

you're not doing it for yourself, you're doing it for all the young kids back home," he said. "And that is especially for those young mob that are looking for that inspiration."

The tour begins in Newcastle and includes stops in Sydney, Magandjin/Brisbane,

Coolangatta, Barwon Heads, Naarm/Melbourne, Darwin and Mparntwe/Alice Springs. An appearance at WOMADelaide has also been confirmed, with more dates expected.

Tickets and details are available at [handsometours.com/tours/baker-boy-2026](http://handsometours.com/tours/baker-boy-2026).



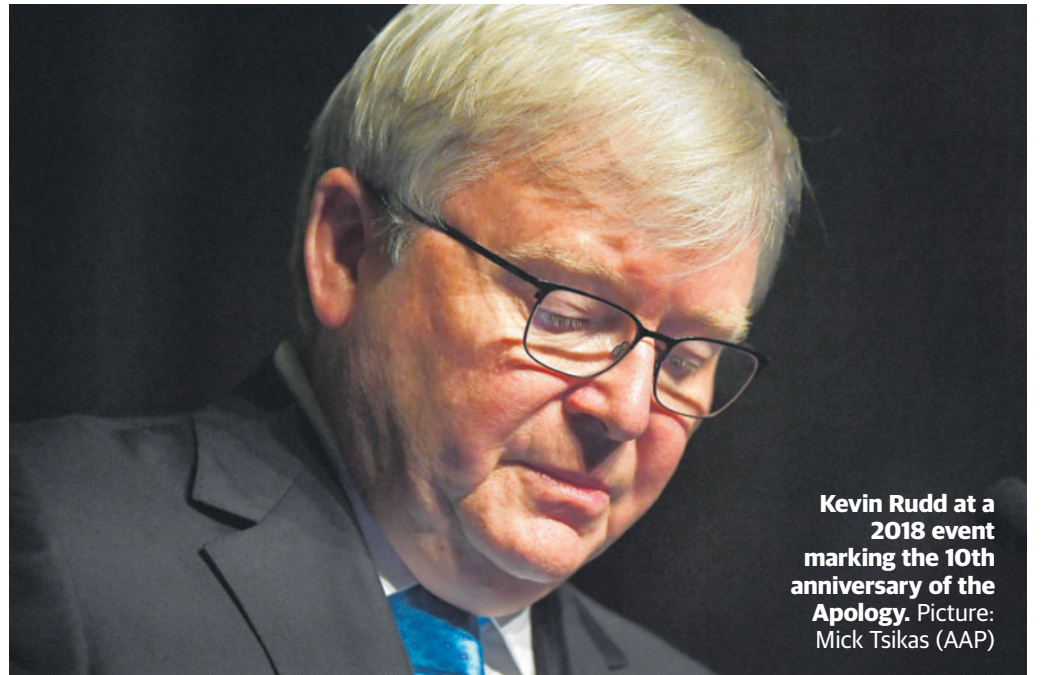
## For our veterans

We're for welcoming, appreciating, and thanking those who have served in the defence of our great nation.

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# Apology did nothing to end removal of children



Kevin Rudd at a 2018 event marking the 10th anniversary of the Apology. Picture: Mick Tsikas (AAP)

**BJ NEWTON**

Eighteen years after the National Apology, the systematic removal and racial targeting of Aboriginal children is worse than ever.

The promise of February 13 2008 — that our children would be safe, families respected, and past harms acknowledged — did not interrupt the colonial machinery of child removal. It authorised it.

On that day, then-prime minister Kevin Rudd stood before Parliament and apologised to Stolen Generations survivors and their families for the forced removal of thousands of Aboriginal children throughout the 20th century.

Applause erupted. For many, the apology symbolised a new beginning: restorative justice for political violence and child abuse, and a future where the threat of child protection departments ritualistically removing children would be a distant memory.

It wasn't. The removal intensified. For perspective, the Bringing Them Home report recorded 2419 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in 1993.

By the time of the apology in 2008, the number had more than tripled to 9070.

In 2024, it more than doubled again to 19,987 First Nations children, not including the 3000-odd on guardianship orders.

This reality was foreshadowed through the Apology Day speeches given by

the PM and Opposition leader.

Both spouted rhetoric of othering Aboriginal people and mutualising blame for past and present injustices that signalled the lack of genuine accountability.

Rudd reduced genocide to a “blemished chapter” and “stain” to be removed “from the nation’s soul”.

He promised “new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed . . . in a true spirit of reconciliation”, focusing on a better future through mutual responsibility, reconciliation, and distancing the State from its enduring human rights violations.

Dr Brendan Nelson’s response was more explicit: his reply contained overtones of paternalistic white saviourism that presented removal as protection and assimilation as superior.

He argued “rescuing” children was motivated by “kindness”, and “saving” children from “squalor” was a “necessary part of public policy in the protection of children”, thus absolving State culpability under a guise of good intentions while positioning poverty as a justified reason for forcibly removing Aboriginal children.

This framing matters.

It constructs a moral universe where governments can claim to protect Aboriginal children while continuing to remove them through policies underpinned by racial bias and colonial logic.

In about 2012, jurisdictions across Australia adopted Structured Decision Making tools. These are risk

assessment instruments imported from the US to investigate and substantiate allegations of child abuse and neglect.

These tools, sold as objective, are now proven racist.

They disproportionately classify Aboriginal families as high-risk, and make removal routine under bureaucratic box-ticking.

The danger of SDM is so widely recognised Queensland and New South Wales have suspended its use, with other jurisdictions considering the

“  
Governments still fail to recognise genuine accountability for their role in instigating Aboriginal child abductions

same. If thousands of children were removed based on racially biased tools, logic would demand immediate restoration. Instead, once removed, children are trapped in systems designed to keep them from going home.

This is the continued legacy of previous governments responsible for the Stolen Generations.

Nowhere is this more visible than in Closing the Gap Target 12: to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHc by

45 per cent by 2031.

It is failing because governments refuse to stop removals and refuse to restore children held in care.

If, in 2008, governments were truly committed to not repeating the past, they would have gazed inward to confront the ongoing colonial operations and motivations that enable removal.

They would have critically examined contemporary policies and practices.

Instead, the apology ignored the mass removal happening at that time, thus absolving government of any responsibility for the reason Aboriginal children are removed.

Just the previous year, the Howard government launched the Northern Territory Emergency Response, suspending the Racial Discrimination Act to target remote Aboriginal communities under the pretext of suspected child sexual abuse.

Nelson framed the NTER as a victory, and proof the government can “save” Aboriginal children, challenging Rudd to do the same.

This narrative continues today. Governments still fail to recognise genuine accountability for their role in instigating Aboriginal child abductions, instead hiding behind illusions of reform, unachievable targets, and the lie of protecting children.

More than 200 years of evidence shows State control harms children.

The Government’s priority has never been Aboriginal

self-determination; it has been to complete the colonial project at the expense of Aboriginal human rights.

The apology could have catalysed truth-telling about contemporary child protection practice and a commitment to reunification.

Instead, it was a symbolic gesture that enabled the youngest Aboriginal generations to be abducted and disconnected from family and culture.

If we heed Rudd’s call, “that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again”, then the measure is simple: governments must stop removing Aboriginal children and restore those currently in OOHc to their families.

This requires child and family welfare grounded in Aboriginal sovereignty, rights-based practice, and anti-colonial, anti-carceral logic.

It needs government to stand to the side while Aboriginal families and communities reclaim and exert authority to care for their own children without the fear of legal abduction.

No more empty promises. No more empty apologies.

Restoration is not optional — it is the only evidence “Sorry” meant anything at all.

**BJ Newton is a proud Wiradjuri woman and associate professor at UNSW Sydney. She leads the Bring Them Home, Keep Them Home research. In partnership with Aboriginal organisations, her research drives sector-wide impact through truth-telling, generating new evidence, community-led initiatives, and advocacy.**

## New data shows long way to go to close the gap

**NIGEL BROWNE**

Closing the Gap data released this month confirms what many of our communities already know — despite more than a decade of commitments, too many disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians are not improving, and in some cases are worsening.

Only a small fraction of targets are on track.

In the Northern Territory, the gaps remain deep and in some areas are widening — particularly in Aboriginal

incarceration rates, life expectancy, child protection involvement and suicide.

These are not abstract statistics.

They represent lives, families and futures.

These ongoing failures demand genuine leadership and meaningful partnership — not distraction.

Yet recent public debate in the NT has been dominated by culture war politics rather than the structural reforms needed to eradicate inequality. An announcement mandating students sing the

national anthem in English at school assemblies speaks to symbolic politics, not addressing the chronic educational disadvantage facing many Aboriginal children.

Symbolism does not close gaps.

Investment, reform, and partnership do.

If we, as a nation, are serious about Closing the Gap and lifting outcomes for everyone in the NT, our priorities must reflect the scale of the challenge before us.

This means real, sustained

investment in health, education, housing and justice reform — designed and delivered in genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities at every step.

The reality is that we cannot sit and wait any longer.

While our Government continues to focus on symbolic gestures, Aboriginal Investment NT remains focused on what truly drives change, building economic strength from the ground up.

Every day we work alongside Aboriginal

Territorians to invest in community-led enterprises, grow assets, and support self-determined economic futures — the way it should be.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples beyond the Territory deserve that same opportunity.

Real progress comes when our people have the power, the resources, and the opportunity to shape their own futures.

That is where our focus must remain.

**Nigel Browne is the chief executive officer of Aboriginal Investment NT.**

# History must not repeat

MERVYN DAVIS

On January 26, a community march in Boorloo/Perth organised to mark Invasion Day was attacked when a handmade bomb was thrown into the crowd.

The throwing of the device, allegedly concealed in a sock and designed to explode upon impact, has led to a charge of an act of terror.

WA Police Commissioner Col Blanch alleged there was evidence the man charged — Liam Alexander Hall, 32 — was self-radicalised and not only accessed “pro-white, male pro-white material online”, but “that ideology is prevalent across his access to the internet”.

He said the incident appeared to be “a nationalist and racially motivated, attack . . . targeting members of the Aboriginal community, First Nations people”.

It is tempting to think of this as a one-off event, but we need to remember racist attacks are not an aberration, and white supremacist acts of terror are an endemic response to local and global movements of justice and Blak resistance.

It is imperative, in our struggle for truth, justice and a healthy democracy, that we never forget the brutal legacy of white supremacy and racism so

we are better able to diagnose its disease and eliminate it.

Bombings or attempted bombings by individuals and hate-fuelled groups are not new. In the US, groups such as the Ku Klux Klan were synonymous with the civil rights era of the 1950s and 60s — more specifically towards Martin Luther King’s ministry of love and justice and the African American struggle in the South to end segregation and demand equality.

Unfortunately, the Make America Great Again crusade of recent times has attempted to undo decades of domestic and foreign policies and initiatives that have helped shape the US and other western countries such as Australia to become fairer, more just and racially and gender inclusive.

For example, US President Donald Trump, with a recorded history of misogyny, has left the door open to extreme social unrest through anti-cohesion rhetoric and policy.

Immediately upon re-election he led an attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives on the basis of false and nonsensical claims of reverse racism. This has stirred up the old and inspired a new white resistance to equality.

As such, racism and discrimination have been given permission to breathe openly in

our 21st century, giving way to violence towards Indigenous and Jewish peoples, Black Americans, migrants, LGBTQIA+ communities and many other religious and vulnerable minority groups around the world whose only crime is seeking safety and equality under the constitution.

It’s alleged Mr Hall devised a weapon packed with ball bearings and screws as well as an explosive liquid, which he threw into the crowd.

It is painful to think what might have happened had the device gone off — especially mere weeks after the massacre at Bondi.

Perhaps the rise of hatred should hold no surprise when someone like Mr Trump, who holds the highest office and position in one of the world’s most powerful nations, can broadcast so effectively unchecked sexist, racist and bigoted behaviour.

When we shrug off and respond as if the President of the US was being facetious in a post on social media depicting the Obamas as apes — as happened recently — you can be sure liberal democracy is almost on the brink of extinction.

For vulnerable First Nations communities and other minority groups the signs are evidently clear — the masks and the gloves are off. We are not

safe, nor have we ever been because racism and white supremacy are alive and well.

A little more than a week after the attempted Invasion Day attack, Senator Lidia Thorpe moved a motion in the Senate and noted that the Federal Government had a duty to protect all people equally from racism, discrimination, hate speech and violence.

In presenting the motion, Senator Thorpe called on Parliament to commit to urgent action.

“It asks the Parliament to say clearly to First Peoples, ‘We hear you, we believe you, we recognise that racism and hatred directed at you are real and rising,’” the Gunnai, Gunditjmara and Djab Wurrung woman said.

Legal academic and Bibbulmun Noongar woman Dr Hannah McGlade described the attempted bombing as a “hate act”.

“Imagine if this had detonated and killed innocent women, children, Elders on that day, how we would be feeling as a society,” she implored.

During the height of the Civil Rights Era, and coinciding with non-violent demonstrations led by Martin Luther King, there were numerous bombings in the town of Birmingham, Alabama targeting African-American homes and institutions. The

attacks were overseen by staunch white supremacist and segregationist Eugene “Bull” O’Connor, the Commissioner of Public Safety, and they eventually earned the town the inglorious nickname “Bombingham”.

The most searing reminder of these shameful and horrible events occurred on September 15, 1963, when four young African-American girls were killed in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing.

Fast forward 60 years and on January 26, 2026 at Perth’s Invasion Day rally, Aboriginal children, women and Elders had a potentially lethal explosive device thrown at their feet. We got lucky that day, but may this shocking event remind us that history, regardless of the years of distance and how painful, shameful and unbearable it is to face, is never far away.

If we are to eliminate this very real and rising problem, we must first not be afraid to name it — and shame it — for what it is.

In remembering those four precious Black girls, alongside awareness of our own clear and present danger, let us ensure some history will not repeat.

**Mervyn John Davis Jnr is a Dunghutti and Kamilaroi man, entrepreneur, and thought leader whose work bridges business success with systemic reform**

**BHP**

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## Boost for business education centre

JARRED CROSS

Melbourne University's dedicated First Nations business education, research and policy arm Dilin Duwa will benefit from a \$1 million partnership with ANZ.

Announced February 16, the bank will fund scholarships to the university's MURRA Indigenous business masterclass program for established business leaders and managers, sponsor global forums, and help deliver education workshops to a different regional community around the country each year.

Dilin Duwa offers the masterclasses to those in the business graduate certificate or master degree.

ANZ head of First Nations business banking and proud Yankunytjatjara woman Simone Kenmore said the bank's impact grows "when we support the ecosystem to thrive".

"We recognise the importance of self-determination for First Nations businesses in achieving sustainable impact both within their communities and across the broader Australian economy," she said.

The partnership is also slated to benefit the bank's business customers.

The support is a four-year commitment.

It comes as part of ANZ's 10-year Fuelling the Fire First Nations strategy, launched in mid-2025.

An accompanying report identified a potential \$232 billion annual revenue contribution to Australia's economy by 2050.

Dilin Duwa director Professor Michelle Evans said the centre was delighted with the support from ANZ.

# Companies hold key to economic barrier

REECE HARLEY

Global human rights leader Martin Luther King III has declared that the stalling of Indigenous economic advancement is not a failure of talent, but a failure of gatekeepers to dismantle "structural barriers".

Speaking at a forum hosted by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia and CareerTrackers earlier this month, Mr King argued the corporate sector holds the keys to the next phase of the civil rights struggle: economic justice.

"You decide who gets experience, who gets mentorships, who gets visibility, who gets promoted, who gets trusted," Mr King told the room of executives.

"You're not just employers. You are architects of the next generation of leadership".

Mr King addressed the persistent lack of Indigenous representation in senior Australian leadership, where First Nations people hold just 0.4 per cent of executive roles. He rejected the notion this disparity stems from a lack of capability within the Indigenous community.

"This gap is not a reflection of ability. It's not a lack of aspiration. It's not a shortage of talent. It is the result of structural barriers," Mr King said.

He identified these barriers as existing in "education pathways, in recruitment practices, in access to networks, and in assumptions about who belongs in positions of influence".

Drawing on the legacy of his father, Dr Martin Luther King Jr, he reminded the audience "true compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar".

"It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars really does need restructuring," he said.

"This is a hard statement. But I believe it's a necessary one because symbolic commitments are not enough. . . . What matters is whether we redesign systems so that opportunity flows to



Martin Luther King III. Picture: Renee Nowytanger

those who have been denied it for far too long."

Mr King urged Australian businesses to move beyond viewing Indigenous employment through the lens of corporate social responsibility or benevolence. "Justice is not a zero-sum game. Inclusion is not charity. Diversity is not a burden. Diversity is a competitive advantage," he said.

"Inclusive companies outperform because they draw on a wider range of ideas, experiences and perspectives. Inclusive economies grow because they do not waste talent."

He argued that when a nation "systematically overlooks the talent of its First Peoples, that nation is operating far below its true capacity".

Reflecting on the American

civil rights movement, Mr King noted that moral persuasion was rarely enough to drive systemic change without economic pressure. He cited the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott as an example of economic reality driving social outcomes.

"In Montgomery, the ridership of public transportation was 60 per cent Black folk. So, when 60 per cent decide not to ride . . . You about to go out of business bankrupt," Mr King explained. He noted the bus companies eventually integrated not necessarily because "it's the right thing to do", but because they faced a "huge deficit".

Mr King invoked his parents' vision of the "beloved community", stressing that this concept "is not sentimental".

"It's structural; it shows up in

policies, it shows up in pay cheques. It shows up in boardrooms. And it shows up when a nation decides that no group will be left behind," he said.

He called on Australian leaders to turn "aspiration into action", noting that "aspiration alone does not change systems".

"Dad used to say the moral arc of the universe is long but bends towards justice . . . he was also very clear that the arc does not bend by itself. It bends because people decide to bend it."

Mr King concluded his address with a series of questions for the Australian business community. "Will you build pathways or preserve barriers? Will you see Indigenous talent as a risk or as a resource? Will you treat inclusion as an obligation or an opportunity?" he asked.

## Change depends on representation at the table

OPINION

ADAM DAVIDS

For a long time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success has been most visible at the edges of Australia's economy, in sport, the arts and culture. These spaces matter deeply. They carry story, pride and continuity. But recognition on its own does not shift power, and visibility without opportunity does not change systems.

Too often, Australia's economic life has continued without us in the rooms where real decisions are made.

That is why a different kind of conversation matters now. One that moves beyond Indigenous art on boardroom walls and asks a harder question: who is sitting at the

tables where capital flows, policy is shaped and futures are decided?

This month in Sydney, CareerTrackers has convened Indigenous university students and graduates alongside leaders from business, government and higher education to talk seriously about leadership, careers and the future of Australia's workforce. The focus is not symbolism. It is preparation. Capability. And the systems required to turn talent into opportunity.

Across Australia, Indigenous people remain significantly under-represented in professional and leadership roles. Even among those who are employed, far fewer First Nations Australians work as professionals or managers compared to non-Indigenous Australians. At the most senior

levels, representation is close to invisible. This is not because talent is lacking. It is because pathways into influence remain narrow, inconsistent and too often informal.

Where people work, and at what level, shapes everything that follows. It affects income, security, confidence and intergenerational opportunity. It also shapes whose voices are heard when decisions are made. When Indigenous people are absent from professional and leadership roles, institutions are poorer for it, and so is the country.

CareerTrackers exists to change this reality. Through paid, structured internships aligned to university study, Indigenous students enter workplaces as emerging professionals, not as gestures. They gain experience, networks and confidence inside

organisations that shape Australia's economic future — law firms, banks, engineering companies, consultancies and public institutions.

The impact is real. When Indigenous students are supported to complete university and transition into professional careers, families become more secure, younger siblings see new possibilities, and opportunity starts circulating where it has long been absent. This is not theoretical. It is happening now, graduate by graduate, workplace by workplace.

That is why Martin Luther King III's visit to Australia earlier this month matters. Not as a symbol, but as a reminder that economic participation is a civil rights issue.

Around the world, history shows that when communities previously

excluded from professional and leadership roles gain access to them, economies grow stronger and societies become more resilient.

The shift is already under way. CareerTrackers alumni are now lawyers, engineers, consultants, senior public servants and executives. Some are stepping into boardrooms. They lead with excellence, and in doing so they open doors for those who follow.

This is not just about individual success. It is about changing the institutions that shape our country. Representation must move beyond walls and into decision-making. Because when Indigenous voices are present at the table, Australia is better for it.

**Adam Davids is the chief executive officer of CareerTrackers**

# Cleaning up & giving support

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Wiradjuri man Hayden Charles is one of Australia's rising Indigenous business leaders, overseeing a national commercial services group that spans cleaning, construction, maintenance and security.

As managing director and co-founder of Indigenous Commercial Cleaning and PSG Holdings, Mr Charles has built a network of more than 500 employees operating in all States and Territories — about 12 per cent of whom identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

ICC launched in 2018 after Mr Charles saw the limitations of helping people individually through church and community work.

He told National Indigenous Times he wanted to create a business that could offer hundreds of people meaningful long-term employment.

"If I could only help 30 people each year, why not start a company and help 300 people find jobs and give them a healthy income?" he said.

"So they could go to doctors without having that barrier of having no income." From small

cleaning contracts in hostels and retail outlets, ICC has grown into a national company, later acquiring PSG Holdings to expand opportunities.

PSG now services a broad range of clients, including government departments, tourist sites, and remote infrastructure projects.

The structure of the business is deliberately interconnected.

Cleaning, maintenance and security services are integrated to allow employees to move between roles and access additional training.

"It's a massive business sector because we are in a service industry, so cleaning works with maintenance, maintenance works with security, and it all works together," Mr Charles said. "If we can employ people to do one job and train them up to do another job, that would be great, so that they can have two things."

PSG's client list includes major facilities such as the Australian Taxation Office in Queensland, Reef HQ Aquarium, and the Department of Human Services in WA and NT.

Its cleaning division is part of a larger network delivering con-

struction and fit-out projects, including recent work for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Art Gallery of NSW.

Becoming a business owner at 19 gave Mr Charles early insight into the challenges of being young, Indigenous, and ambitious in a space that wasn't always welcoming, but over time, he's seen a shift.

"It's become important for other people to start listening to Aboriginal ownership and the whole culture behind it," he said. "Indigenous business owners usually want to help their community and change their community."

That sense of responsibility drives the company's employment model, which prioritises culturally safe workplaces and long-term development.

Mr Charles said the goal was not just to offer jobs, but to create career pathways.

"It's been very interesting trying to find Indigenous people to work in a cleaning job," he said.

"A lot of people see it as a dead-end job where you either go to uni, do four hours of cleaning each week, and get paid; or you retire; or you're the single mum



Hayden Charles

who has eight hours of the day when the kids aren't home cleaning."

To shift this perception, ICC and PSG offer routes into other areas, including cadetships in heritage construction and events security.

Current placements include cadets working at Parliament House and Old Parliament

House in Canberra, gaining hands-on experience while completing university.

Mr Charles said the focus was on creating a new cycle of opportunity driven by education, employment and health.

"It feels good to see that ripple effect — passing down knowledge to knowledge and hoping it works out with everyone."



## NOTICE TO GRANT MINING TENEMENTS

### NATIVE TITLE ACT 1993 (CTH) SECTION 29

The State of Western Australia HEREBY GIVES NOTICE that the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, C/- Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration, 100 Plain Street, East Perth WA 6004 may grant the following tenement applications under the *Mining Act 1978*:

Tenement Type	No.	Applicant	Area*	Locality	Centroid	Shire
Exploration Licence	27/756	MCCLAREN, Kym Anthony	9BL	17.5km E'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 29' S Long: 121° 30' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Exploration Licence	59/2995	MINING EQUITIES PTY LTD	22BL	60.4km W'ly of Mt Magnet	Lat: 27° 57' S Long: 117° 14' E	MOUNT MAGNET SHIRE, YALGOO SHIRE
Exploration Licence	59/3019	DANAKALI LTD	21BL	86.6km NE'ly of Paynes Find	Lat: 28° 51' S Long: 118° 26' E	MOUNT MAGNET SHIRE, SANDSTONE SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3311	HARBOUR EXPLORATION PTY LTD	9BL	131.1km N'ly of Southern Cross	Lat: 30° 3' S Long: 119° 10' E	YILGARN SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3327	HARBOUR EXPLORATION PTY LTD	1BL	109.2km N'ly of Southern Cross	Lat: 30° 15' S Long: 119° 7' E	YILGARN SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3328	HARBOUR EXPLORATION PTY LTD	1BL	105km N'ly of Southern Cross	Lat: 30° 17' S Long: 119° 9' E	YILGARN SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	24/5922	RAMSAY, Paul Brian	9.99HA	18km N'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 17' S Long: 121° 17' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	24/5925	DE LA MONTAGNE, Queenie Kathryn	9.99HA	20.4km N'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 15' S Long: 121° 16' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	24/5933	HASTIE, Joel Michael William	9.48HA	4.7km SE'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 28' S Long: 121° 21' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	29/2726	SENTINEL EXPLORATION LTD	198.47HA	5.2km SW'ly of Menzies	Lat: 29° 43' S Long: 121° 0' E	MENZIES SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	51/3435-S	GRASSER, Peter Henk	9.88HA	40.9km SE'ly of Peak Hill	Lat: 25° 48' S Long: 119° 4' E	MEEKATHARRA SHIRE

**Nature of the act:** Grant of prospecting licences which authorises the applicant to prospect for minerals for a term of 4 years from date of grant. Grant of Special Prospecting Licences, which authorises the applicant to prospect for minerals for a term up to 4 years from the date of grant. Grant of exploration licences, which authorises the applicant to explore for minerals for a term of 5 years from the date of grant. **Notification day: 11 February 2026. Native title parties:** Under section 30 of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), persons have until 3 months after the notification day to take certain steps to become native title parties in relation to applications. The 3-month period closes on **11 May 2026**. Any person who is, or becomes a native title party, is entitled to the negotiation and/or procedural rights provided in Part 2 Division 3 Subdivision P of *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). Enquiries in relation to filing a native title determination application to become a native title party should be directed to the Federal Court of Australia, 1 Victoria Avenue, Perth WA 6000, telephone (08) 9268 7100. **Expedited procedure:** The State of Western Australia considers that these acts are acts attracting the expedited procedure. Each licence may be granted unless, within the period of 4 months after the notification day (i.e. **11 June 2026**), a native title party lodges an objection with the National Native Title Tribunal against the inclusion of the statement that the State considers the grant of the licence is an act attracting the expedited procedure. Enquiries in relation to lodging an objection should be directed to the National Native Title Tribunal, Level 5, 1 Victoria Avenue, Perth, or GPO Box 9973, Perth, WA 6848, telephone (08) 9425 1000. For further information about the act (including extracts of plans showing the boundaries of the applications), contact the Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration, 100 Plain Street, East Perth WA 6004, or telephone (08) 9222 3518.

\* - 1 Graticular Block = 2.8 km<sup>2</sup>



## NOTICE TO GRANT AMALGAMATION APPLICATIONS

### NATIVE TITLE ACT 1993 (CTH) SECTION 29

The State of Western Australia HEREBY GIVES NOTICE that the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, C/- Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration, 100 Plain Street, East Perth WA 6004 may grant the following amalgamation applications under the *Mining Act 1978*:

Exploration No.	Applicant	Amalg No	Area	Locality	Centroid	Shire
57/793	ESTUARY RESOURCES PTY LTD MONTAGUE GOLD PROJECT PTY LTD	749940	2.02HA	68.2km NE'ly of Sandstone	Lat: 27° 24' S Long: 119° 33' E	SANDSTONE SHIRE

**Nature of the act:** Grant of amalgamation applications which authorises the applicant to explore for minerals. **Notification day: 11 February 2026. Native title parties:** Under Section 30 of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), persons have until 3 months after the notification day to take certain steps to become native title parties in relation to the applications. The 3-month period closes on **11 May 2026**. Any person who is, or becomes a native title party, is entitled to the negotiation and/or procedural rights provided in Part 2 Division 3 Subdivision P of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). Enquiries in relation to filing a native title determination application to become a native title party should be directed to the Federal Court of Australia, 1 Victoria Avenue, Perth, WA 6000, telephone (08) 9268 7100. **Expedited procedure:** The State of Western Australia considers that these acts are acts attracting the expedited procedure. Each amalgamation application may be granted unless, within the period of 4 months after the notification day (i.e. **11 June 2026**), a native title party lodges an objection with the National Native Title Tribunal against the inclusion of the statement that the State considers the grant of the licence is an act attracting the expedited procedure. Enquiries in relation to lodging an objection should be directed to the National Native Title Tribunal, Level 5, 1 Victoria Avenue, Perth, or GPO Box 9973, Perth, WA 6848, telephone (08) 9425 1000. For further information about the act (including extracts of plans showing the boundaries of the applications), contact the Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration, 100 Plain Street, East Perth WA 6004, or telephone (08) 9222 3518.



## NOTICE OF PROPOSAL TO RENEW MINING LEASE

### NATIVE TITLE ACT 1993 (CTH) SECTION 29

The State of Western Australia HEREBY GIVES NOTICE that the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, C/- Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration, 100 Plain Street, East Perth WA 6004 may renew the following mining lease under section 78(2) of the *Mining Act 1978*:

Mining No.	Renewal of Term No.	Applicant	Area	Locality	Centroid	Shire
M 24/29	747838	PADDINGTON GOLD PTY LIMITED	844.81 Ha	1.4km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat 30° 22' 53" S Long 121° 3' 38" E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
M 26/27	748346	NORTHERN STAR (SARACEN KALGOORLIE) PTY LTD NORTHERN STAR (KLV) PTY LTD	7.98 Ha	1.9km SE'ly of Kalgoorlie	Lat 30° 45' 30" S Long 121° 29' 14" E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY

**Nature of the act:** The renewal of mining lease, which authorises the applicant to mine for minerals for a term of up to 21 years. **Notification day: 11 February 2026. Native title parties:** Under section 30 of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), persons have until three months after the notification day to take certain steps to become native title parties in relation to the notice. The three-month period closes on **11 May 2026**. Any person who is, or becomes a native title party, is entitled to the negotiation and/or procedural rights provided in Part 2 Division 3 Subdivision P of *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). Enquiries in relation to filing a native title determination application to become a native title party should be directed to the Federal Court of Australia, 1 Victoria Avenue, Perth WA 6000, telephone (08) 9268 7100. The mining lease may be renewed if, by the end of the period of four months after the notification day (i.e. **11 June 2026**), there is no native title party under section 30 of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) in relation to the area of the application for renewal. For further information about the act (including extracts of plans showing the boundaries of the application for renewal), contact the Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration, 100 Plain Street, East Perth WA 6004, or telephone (08) 9222 3518.

## Foundation boss recognised for stellar leadership

**GIOVANNI TORRE**

First Nations Foundation chief executive Leah Bennett is the recipient of Women & Leadership Australia's 2026 NSW Award for Excellence in Women's Leadership, announced on Tuesday, February 24.

The Australian Awards for Excellence in Women's Leadership were created in 2014 to honour women leaders nominated by the public for their outstanding contribution and lasting impact across business, government, and community in delivering positive outcomes for women, girls or other groups facing disadvantage.

Ms Bennett, a proud Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa woman, is head of Australia's only national Indigenous-led financial literacy and education provider.

Her work focuses on how economic systems can be redesigned to support self-determination, trust and long-term financial security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Ms Bennett said she felt "incredibly humbled and honoured" to have been selected for the award, and "grateful to the First Nations women who've received it before me. . . Their strength and selflessness have opened doors many of us now walk through".

"I think for me, when I was younger, at no point did I think to myself, I'm going to become the CEO of an organisation," she told National Indigenous Times.

"I think throughout my career, my attitude has always been to say yes to every opportunity that's come up. I spent 14 years working in dealing with financial crime, within the financial services sector.

"When I've been asked to participate on a project or something along those lines, for me, it's built experience. I would always say 'yes, I want to get involved in that'.

"In 2018 I joined the superannuation industry in the midst of the Royal Commission, and found out all the horrible

things that were happening to our community. My attitude was 'I want to serve our community, and I want to do something about this'.

"Since then, it's just been so many doors opened and so many opportunities given to me to step into spaces to advocate for our community and I've said yes to absolutely every opportunity to do that."

Ms Bennett said nothing that she has achieved would have been possible "without the love and support of good leaders".

"I think that's really important to highlight. I didn't just get here because of hard work and determination.

"I got here because people surrounded me with love and believed in me," she told National Indigenous Times.

"I'm still kind of shocked myself when I think about this award, and I think about the journey that I've been on to sit back and go, 'oh my goodness'. Since 2018 — almost a decade — I find myself leading an organisation I absolutely love and care so much about, with an incredible team of people."

Women & Leadership Australia general manager Karen Surmon said the award recognised Ms Bennett's "outstanding leadership in advancing the financial wellbeing and economic empowerment of First Nations peoples across Australia".

"Leah drives initiatives that benefit NSW communities while contributing to national programs through the First Nations Foundation," she said.

"She has pioneered culturally safe practices in superannuation, led industry-wide initiatives to remove barriers for First Nations members, and developed programs like Train the Trainer, which is scaling nationally, starting with communities in NSW to ensure lasting impact."

Along with Ms Bennett as the NSW Award winner, Women & Leadership Australia has also announced the national, State and Territory award recipients.

# Funding helps STEM thrive

Fortescue's grants programs are helping bring practical learning opportunities to life for students in the Pilbara.

At South Hedland Primary School, a Fortescue grant is supporting the expansion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics learning in engaging and practical ways.

With a shared focus on community and education, the school used the funding to develop a practical STEM program connecting classroom learning with real-world challenges students could see and understand.

The funding has enabled the school to expand its STEM club and invest in new resources, including scientific equipment, renewable energy kits, and environmental testing tools, helping make learning more engaging and interactive for students.

Fortescue director of approvals, communities and services Rosli Wheelock said investing in education played a vital role in building strong regional communities.

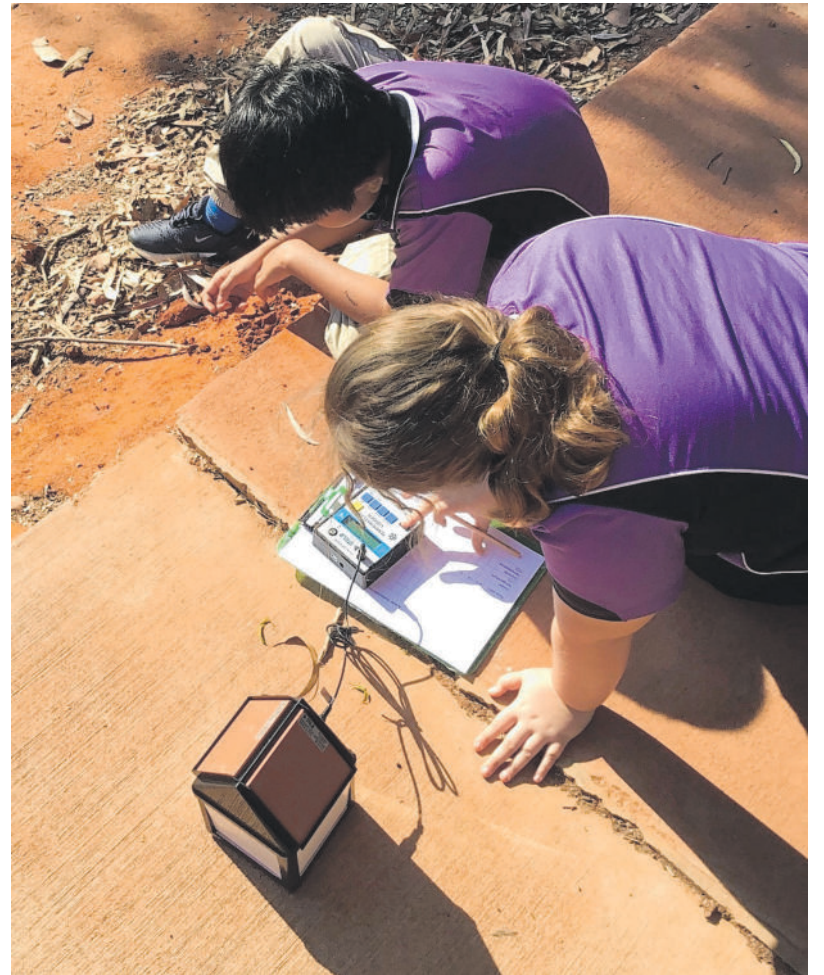
"In the Pilbara, education and opportunity go hand in hand. By supporting programs like this at South Hedland Primary School, we're helping young people build the skills, confidence and curiosity they need to thrive in a changing world," he said.

"Hands-on STEM learning connects students to real challenges in their own community and shows them that innovation, problem-solving and future pathways have a place right here in the Pilbara."

Throughout the year, students explored topics linked to life in the Pilbara such as renewable energy, climate science and housing design.

By working with real tools and taking part in inquiry-based learning, students are developing problem-solving skills and gaining a stronger understanding of how STEM is used in their own community.

South Hedland Primary School principal Lee Pereira thanked Fortescue for its support, and emphasised the benefits of STEM learning.



South Hedland Primary School students in the STEM program.

"Fortescue's support has allowed us to expand STEM learning beyond the classroom through the establishment of an after-school STEM Club. Students are enthusiastic, curious and thriving as they explore STEM in a hands-on way," she said. "Early exposure to STEM is critical in building the skills and curiosity students need for future learning and careers.

"Programs like this help lay strong foundations for innovation and future STEM pathways."

Beyond technical skills, the program is helping students build confidence and curiosity by encouraging them to ask questions, test ideas, and work together on solutions. It has also helped students who may not have previously considered STEM pathways discover a gen-

uine interest in these subjects. Learning has also extended beyond the classroom, with students taking their ideas home and encouraging small but meaningful changes such as reducing energy use and recycling.

For South Hedland Primary School, the partnership has helped students see themselves as capable problem solvers and innovators, building a stronger connection between what they learn at school and how STEM may help shape the future of the Pilbara.

This is one example of how Fortescue grants are supporting the next generation across the Pilbara. Applications for the next round of Fortescue Community Grants will be open from March 1-30.

**This report was produced with the support of Fortescue.**

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## SPORT

## Chasing his dream

JARRED CROSS

“Wiradjuri Warrior” Jarrah Blackmore is jumping on planes for world championships and international competitions well before his first year of high school.

Later this year, the Boorloo-based martial artist will head to Abu Dhabi with the globe’s most talented, and not for the first time.

Introduced to the sport by a friend four years ago, Jarrah balanced jiu-jitsu and soccer for a while before focusing solely on his newer passion.

“I really like it more,” Jarrah told National Indigenous Times.

He trains six to seven times a week in a sport he says teaches respect, discipline, to be brave when things can get a little scary, and to have fun along the way.

His commitment so far has earned him a 111-30-10 record, and close to 40 gold medals alongside local, regional, State championships, with top-placed finishes at national and international competitions, including first in Oceania.

In 2025, Jarrah was the highest-ranked Indigenous male in the world-class AJP international organisation.

He has reached his grey-black belt — an advanced level for junior jiu-jitsu.

Becoming a black belt and world champion is the ultimate dream, Jarrah said.



Jarrah Blackmore

“What I like about it is I get to travel with all my friends and family,” he said.

“You make friends, you have to listen and be respectful to your coaches.

“If you’re going to spar, you can’t be silly. You have to train harder than you’re sparring.”

Jarrah trains at Perth Martial Arts Centre, a strong, family-focused team environment, according to his father.

“He’s so dedicated,” Jarrah’s dad, Gordon Blackmore said.

Over the past couple of years Mr Blackmore has seen how the sport benefits young participants — from respect and discipline to emotional regulation, growth, and self-belief.

His son’s development, commitment to chasing his dreams, and importantly, enjoyment, is the “win in our eyes”, he said.

Future world champion or

not, Mr Blackmore is deeply proud of his son’s preparedness to take on a challenge and make his own path.

“Win, lose or draw. I don’t care,” Mr Blackmore said.

“Stepping onto those mats, that’s more than I could do. In Abu Dhabi (for the 2025 AJP World Jiu-Jitsu Championships last November), and there’s thousands of people there. . . I couldn’t do it.

“Words can’t describe the feeling you’ve got seeing your kid step out and do what he does and loves.”

Those big competitions come with some nerves, Jarrah admitted.

Regardless, he’s got his eyes on this year’s world championships in Abu Dhabi where he’s aiming to improve on last year’s result — a 9th-place finish in his age group.

## Social media amplifies harassment aimed at stars

JARRED CROSS

Former NRL star Timana Tahu says social media has made racism directed at players “louder” since his time in the game and it is even more prevalent than headlines suggest.

The dual-code international, who played 250 professional games between club and representative league and union from 1999-2016, works in management of elite Indigenous pathways at the NRL.

Speaking on the Uluru Dialogue’s Hi Society podcast, Tahu told host Allira Davis he had had his own experiences with racism throughout his career, but the issue had intensified.

The NRL and NSW Rugby League have worked to issue sanctions when those responsible are able to be identified through their online accounts, with suspensions and in one case a lifetime ban handed out.

Players subjected to racism, particularly those with a greater profile at the professional level, should not have to should

der the responsibility for ending its presence in the game, Tahu told National Indigenous Times.

On Hi Society the two-time premiership winner, NSW State of Origin, Kangaroos and Wallabies representative discussed his early life and career as an athlete, what shapes a successful club, Indigenous representation, and racism.

It was hard for players to stand up to racism, he said, when the backlash could outweigh the support they received.

“We can go through the past of all the athletes that stood up against racism and they’re still copping it to this day, Tahu said.

“Standing up, you’ve gotta have some guts.”

Tahu said it had become louder since his time in the game.

For every example publicised, there were more “people don’t see or hear about”, he said.

Tahu said Cronulla halfback Nicho Hynes had already faced racism this year.

He added organisations were

“We can go through the past of all the athletes that stood up against racism and they’re still copping it to this day.”

Timana Tahu

doing an effective job addressing the issue, and said

the NRL had measures in place, and its integrity unit was focused on addressing abuse.

“You can’t think about the short game, that I’m going to make a difference in two weeks,” Tahu said for players taking a stand.

“It’s a long game.”

Tahu told National Indigenous Times: “There’s only a certain amount of energy for our players to combat this.”

“At the end of the day, they’re players and they’ve got a job to do. And to be distracted by

online comments, racism and backlash, it’s not their job. It’s someone else’s job.”

Tahu said within the competition, clubs celebrating culture and diversity were the ones reaping rewards.

“The successful teams that you see in the NRL today are the ones that were receptive. When you’re in a club that’s successful, they look at equality and diversity in their teams,” he said.

As a teen Tahu spent time living in Aboriginal Hostels, first in Bourke and later Newcastle.

He quickly entered the Newcastle Knights system, and made his NRL debut with them within a few years.

Tahu had two stints with Parramatta either side of a move to union, before joining Penrith and finishing his rugby league career back in Newcastle.

Among his representative honours, Tahu has played for both New Zealand Maori, through his father, and Indigenous All Stars, through his mother.

He’s keen to see more First

Nations coaches take on top jobs around the league. Immortal Arthur Beetson was an early trailblazer, coaching the Roosters, Redcliffe, Cronulla, Queensland and Australia.

The women’s game has proved a more recent successful platform. Ronald Griffiths, now an assistant in the Knights’ men’s set-up and Indigenous All Stars coach, and Scott Prince, are NRLW premiership coaches; Dean Widders was in charge at the Eels in recent years; and Barkindji and Ngapuhi/Ngati Hine Maori woman Jess Skinner serves as head coach of the Jillsaroos.

Laurie Daley reassumed his role as the NSW Origin coach in 2025.

Dave Elliott is an assistant with Queensland and coaches the Dolphins’ Queensland Cup side.

“The NRL can only do so much. (Clubs) are the ones . . . that have to make those decisions when they’re picking coaches,” Tahu said of increasing representation in the men’s competition.