

# NIT

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS TIMES



## Fashion festival

Ebony Noire designs debut on catwalk in Naarm

STYLE UP STARTS PAGE 9

CALL FOR REAL ACTION OVER RISE IN DISCRIMINATION

# INQUIRY INTO RACISM & HATE



**DECLAN BRENNAN**

A Federal Parliamentary inquiry will examine rising racism, hate and violence directed at First Nations people amid growing concern about both extremist attacks and systemic discrimination across Australia.

Announced this month, the investigation will be conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs after Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy wrote to the committee, requesting it begin the inquiry

and report back by September 15.

The committee will examine the nature, scale and impact of racism, hate and violence directed at Indigenous people, including systemic racism, the role of online platforms and measures designed to prevent discrimination. It will also consider threats from ideologically motivated extremism and review how intelligence and law enforcement agencies respond to those risks.

It comes just weeks after an alleged terror attack targeting First Nations people and supporters at an Invasion Day rally

in Boorloo/Perth on January 26. Police allege a man threw an explosive device at a crowd of about 2,500 people. Authorities have classified the incident as an alleged act of terrorism.

It also follows other recent incidents, including last year's attack on Camp Sovereignty in Naarm, where neo-Nazis allegedly assaulted people at the sacred site. At least 15 people were charged in connection with that incident.

Senator McCarthy said many Indigenous Australians were experiencing fear and anger following these events.

"I know this has been a diffi-

cult time for families and communities," she said. "This inquiry ensures they can have their say and their experiences will be heard by the Parliament."

Committee chair Senator Jana Stewart said the investigation would help identify practical actions to combat racism.

"First Nations people in Australia deserve to live free from racism, hate and violence," she said.

"This inquiry is an important opportunity to understand the nature, prevalence and impact of racism in our communities and to identify practical actions

for combatting racism and reducing individual and collective harm."

Independent senator Lidia Thorpe welcomed the inquiry but warned it must deliver meaningful outcomes rather than becoming another report without action.

She cautioned that Indigenous communities have repeatedly participated in investigations and inquests without seeing lasting change.

"From deaths in custody, to child removal, to the destruction of Country, we have stacks

CONTINUED PAGE 3

A buffel grass fire.

# Call to declare buffel a weed

JARRED CROSS

A delegation of Traditional Owners from APY Lands and central Australia travelled to Canberra this month to meet with Federal politicians and to urge action on a “silent creeping killer” — buffel grass.

Critics describe buffel grass, a popular cattle feed, as an invasive weed causing major impacts to the landscape.

It’s already a declared weed in South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Delegation member, Wiradjuri man, and Invasive Species Council Indigenous Ambassador Richard Swain said buffel grass had taken over 26 per cent of the mainland, and this could rise to 70 per cent.

“It’s a silent creeping killer,” he told reporters.

“It’s a weed that is a boom for the cattle industry, and a bust for Country. It’s a bust for tourism, health, and firefighting.”

Mr Swain said Aboriginal people must have a voice to speak for their land.

The delegation met with independent senator David Pocock and Greens senator Sarah Hanson Young, as well as the offices of Environment Minister Murray Watt, Agriculture Minister Julie Collins, and Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy.

The delegation has called for the grass to be listed as a key threatening process and a weed of national significance, and urged practical measures like establishment of a national buffel co-ordinator, and an action plan with research and on-ground restorative, reduction controls.

“If we don’t get it listed as a weed of national significance, we won’t have the ability to find



Buffel grass has been labelled “a boom for the cattle industry, and a bust for Country” by Traditional Owners from APY Lands and Central Australia.

a control method to stop this weed from killing Country,” Mr Swain said.

Buffel grass has its defenders as critical for the cattle industry.

Cattle Australia chair Garry Edwards told the ABC: “There’s literally billions upon billions of economic value and landholding that’s attached to the fact that buffel grass exists.”

Mr Swain said action wasn’t intended to wipe it out entirely.

“Getting it listed as a weed of national significance will give us research. We’re not trying to stop farmers from having this, but it’s escaped the gates,” he said in Canberra.

He described buffel grass as “pollution”, also spread by flooding, animals and through the air.

Traditional Owners also say buffel grass is a major fire risk.

Senator Pocock told the Senate on March 12: “For First Nations communities, this is

not only an ecological crisis, but a cultural one.”

The issue also “speaks to something bigger”, Senator Pocock added, as “Australia has already lost so much of our incredible biodiversity”.

“We’ve lost so much nature on a continent as extraordinary as this one,” he said.

SA’s Department of Primary Industries and Regions says buffel grass is invading rangeland, eliminating native species, and a fire hazard.

The NT Government says it grows rapidly in central Australia, creating environmental damage and increasing fire risks and damage to Aboriginal culture.

The Arid Lands Environment Centre describes buffel grass as a rapid spreader and “one of the worst invaders of arid ecosystems worldwide”.

A Federal Government spokesperson told National Indigenous Times buffel grass management was a govern-

ment priority, with Federal funding for its management already in place, alongside other measures.

The National Indigenous Times understands a key threatening process assessment, to have buffel declared as invasive, is under way and that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee has requested more time to collect data, compile evidence, and conduct public consultation, with the assessment now due on April 30 2027, to be handed to Mr Watt.

Mr Swain said flooding in central Australia had created a “green carpet” in desert Country — leading to increased spreading of buffel grass, in cases risking centuries-old desert oak trees.

Eastern Arrernte Traditional Owner Camille Dobson said buffel “is having a huge impact on our culture, on our plants, our ability to gather bush foods and collect medicines”. “It’s killing Country,” she said.

## Farewell to a powerful trailblazer in arts and television

GIOVANNI TORRE

One of Australia’s most influential arts and creative sector leaders, Widjambul Wiyegal woman from the Bundjalung Nation, Aunty Rhoda Roberts AO, passed away peacefully on Saturday on her beloved Bundjalung Country, following a period of illness.

At SBS, Ms Roberts was a defining force over many decades. Joining as a young journalist, she made history in 1989 as co-host of First In Line with Michael Johnson, becoming the first Indigenous presenter on prime time Australian television, and later hosting Vox Populi. She played a key role in major SBS milestones, leading coverage of NITV’s launch as a free-to-air channel in 2012, and becoming SBS’ inaugural Elder-in-Residence in 2021.

An award-winning producer, artistic director, journalist, broadcaster, actor, curator and adviser, Ms Roberts’ career was characterised by landmark achievements across Australia’s cultural institutions and on the international stage.

Her work included co-founding Australia’s first national Aboriginal theatre company, the Aboriginal National Theatre Trust, and serving as creative director of Awakening for the Sydney Olympics Opening Ceremony. She held many leadership roles, including creative director of Sydney’s New Year’s Eve celebrations, inaugural head of First Nations programming at the Sydney Opera House, co-founder and artistic director of the Dreaming Festival, co-founder of The Deadlys, and creative director of the Parrtjima Festival. In 2016 Ms Roberts was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the performing arts and for advancing contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy said Ms Roberts “inspired so many Australians, especially First Nations Australians in the media and creative arts”.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said: “Rhoda Roberts’ generosity enriched Australians’ lives, her wisdom enlarged our nation’s understanding.”

SBS director, First Nations, Tanya Denning-Orman, said: “Rhoda, our fiercely proud Bundjalung woman, reminded us of the shoulders we stand on and the importance of the work we do. Stunning in so many ways, seeing her on prime time TV inspired me, and many others.”

# Facts show gap widening

DECLAN BRENNAN

The Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap dashboard released last week revealed Indigenous incarceration rates continue to rise sharply, the proportion of children assessed as developmentally on track has declined, suicide rates are worsening, and there has been no improvement in youth detention rates.

The data sparked a call from Indigenous organisations for a major shift in policy settings across Federal, State and Territory governments, warning current approaches will not meet targets by 2031.

Productivity Commissioner Selwyn Button said overall progress remained uneven.

"These results highlight the importance of governments continuing to implement the commitments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," the Gungahri man said.

Only four Closing the Gap targets are on track to be met, including land and sea country rights; access to high-quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education; and strong economic participation.

Five are improving but not on track, while two show no change from the baseline.

Four key targets are worsening: suicide; incarceration; the number of children developmentally on track; and children in out-of-home care.

A Federal Government spokesperson acknowledged the numbers overall showed "significantly poorer results in remote areas" which "underscores the need for State and Territory governments to take action to improve outcomes in areas where they hold the levers for change".

The data "reinforces the need for all governments and Coalition of Peaks partners to continue working together" under the national agreement, they said.

Suicide rates have risen markedly, with the rate for males almost doubling since 2011. In his Closing the Gap address last month, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese acknowledged the scale of the crisis, particularly in regional and remote communities, and announced \$13.9 million to boost national support line 13 YARN.

Independent Senator Lidia Thorpe said the data showed



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese delivers a statement on the annual Closing the Gap Report last month. Picture: Lukas Coch

the Closing the Gap agreement was failing.

"Until accountability is built into the system, and until the Federal Government takes responsibility and does its job, Closing the Gap will remain a fundamentally ineffective framework that fails our people," she said.

"National leadership means stepping in and ending harmful policies. The Albanese Government needs to act."

Nerita Waight, acting chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, said governments continued to pursue policies which drove up incarceration rates, "all in the name of political point-scoring".

In 2025, the national imprisonment rate reached 2,500.2 per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults — 16.7 times that of non-Indigenous adults. For children and young people, the disparity is 23.4 times higher.

Ms Waight called on the Government to take "decisive action". "There are levers to

pull in terms of the funding agreements with State and Territories that will drive real policy change and improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially our children," she said.

While the Federal Government has maintained youth justice settings are a State responsibility, legal advice obtained last year has challenged that position.

The proportion of Indigenous children assessed as developmentally on track across all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census has fallen to 33.9 per cent — more than 20 percentage points below non-Indigenous children. In remote areas, this drops to 16.5 per cent.

SNAICC — National Voice for our Children CEO Catherine Liddle called on governments to urgently recommit to agreed reforms, arguing while there were a number of successful programs working to help children, "government backing is haphazard and often short-

term". Progress on healthy birth weight has also stalled, now showing no improvement from the 2019 baseline.

Ms Liddle said this was a "devastating" revelation.

She said a the continued decline in developmental outcomes "should be a wake-up call".

"When children are falling behind in social, emotional and cognitive development, it tells us the system is failing them," Ms Liddle said.

In the Northern Territory, which has some of the worst metrics in the country, the gap continues to widen. It has some of the highest incarceration rates in the country for adults and children; more than half of Aboriginal people live in poverty; and 43 per cent live in overcrowded housing.

Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory CEO Donna Ah Chee said the data reflects entrenched disadvantage, noting for many Indigenous people in the NT, the statistics were a reflection of what they already knew and ex-

perienced daily. "AMSANT is clear that strengthening the Aboriginal community-controlled sector must remain central to Closing the Gap," she said. "We have a proven model: when Aboriginal organisations control the design and delivery of services, people are more likely to access care, trust the system, and stay connected to support."

For Ms Waight, while solutions are already well understood by Aboriginal communities, the political will is lacking. "When are States and Territory governments going to realise that over-policing Aboriginal communities and making it easier to lock children up is making communities more dangerous and making outcomes worse?" she asked.

"We need the Prime Minister to step up and show leadership, because right now, States and Territories are in an appalling race to the bottom, and our communities have the most to lose."

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## Inquiry launched into rise in racism and hatred

FROM PAGE 1

of reports gathering dust," she said. "Setting up an inquiry is the easy part. Acting on it is what counts."

The Victorian senator also said the inquiry must examine systemic discrimination embedded across major institutions.

"We know there are major issues in health care, social ser-

vices, justice, education, and it goes on," she said. "While we often talk about fixing these through improved service delivery, we rarely have an honest discussion about the role racism plays."

Racism, however, is not confined to extremist groups or online abuse, with several senators arguing it is also present inside Australia's Parliament.

This month, Senators Thorpe, Mehreen Faruqi and Fatima Payman called on Senate President Sue Lines to intervene over what they described as growing racism and abuse in the chamber. In a letter to the president, the three senators said they had repeatedly faced racism and hostility in the Senate and were often reprimanded when they attempted to call it out.

"Over the years, we have repeatedly faced racism inside the Chamber," they wrote.

"Yet we are the ones targeted for calling out racist conduct, forced to withdraw truthful statements about racism, and regularly told we are out of order and out of line."

The group has called for reforms including mandatory anti-racism training for parlia-

mentarians and changes to parliamentary standing orders to address discriminatory behaviour.

Senator Thorpe said that Parliament should be setting a standard for the rest of the country to follow.

Stark findings on racism in Australian workplaces  
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# Pressure on Feds to scrap controversial development plan Lee Point in spotlight after Labor change



Protesters at a Hands-off Indigenous Land rally. Picture: AAP

DECLAN BRENNAN

Pressure is mounting on the Federal Government to reconsider the controversial Binybara/Lee Point development in Darwin after Northern Territory Labor this month reversed its long-held support for the project, prompting renewed calls from Larrakia campaigners and politicians for the plan to be scrapped.

Under the proposed Defence Housing Australia project about 800 homes would be built across a 131ha coastal site north of Darwin, an area of deep cultural significance to Larrakia people and part of the Kenbi Dreaming track. Environmentalists also say the area provides habitat for endangered species, including the Gouldian finch.

For years the development has faced opposition from Larrakia Traditional Owners, community groups and environmental advocates.

The issue intensified earlier this month when NT Labor publicly shifted its position on the project in the lead up to the Nightcliff by-election, acknowledging community concerns.

NT Labor leader Selena Uibo told the National Indigenous Times since the party's defeat at the last election — and noting not one house had been built on the site since 2024 — they were calling for a “moratorium on the current DHA housing project until the NT Planning Commission completes a comprehensive area plan for the whole of Lee Point that properly considers the



Lidia Thorpe and Larrakia, Kungarakan, Gurindji woman Laniyuk. Picture: instagram @senatorthorpe

views of the community and Traditional Owners”.

“Territory Labor supports development, but development works best when it has community confidence and planning certainty. This way, we can avoid another decade of dispute, legal challenge and political fighting while the site remains stuck in limbo,” she said. “Our Federal Labor colleagues are aware of this position.”

Independent Senator Lidia Thorpe, a long-time critic of the

development, said the reversal highlighted the growing pressure on the Albanese government to intervene.

“Larrakia Traditional Owners have opposed this project from the beginning and have not given consent for the destruction of their Country,” Senator Thorpe said.

“The Albanese Government should cancel this project and put a stop to the destruction of Binybara/Lee Point once and for all.”

Larrakia activists have also

urged Federal ministers to step in, arguing the Territory Government's new stance should prompt action in Canberra. Larrakia woman Laniyuk, from the Protect Larrakia Country collective, said the party's shift validated the long-running campaign against the development.

“NT Labor now acknowledges our Elders and community were right to oppose this destructive project,” she said. “The next step is to ask their Federal Labor colleagues to

intervene so this vision for returning Lee Point to the care, ownership and protection of Larrakia people can be realised before more damage is done.”

Despite the mounting pressure, the Federal Government has not indicated any change to its position on the project, despite State and Territory Labor parties often being in lockstep with their Federal colleagues.

The office of Defence Personnel Minister Matt Keogh — whose portfolio includes DHA — did not respond to questions put by National Indigenous Times about whether the Government would reconsider the development after NT Labor's shift.

The DHA's work has already faced legal and regulatory challenges. Last year the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal ordered clearing at the site to stop while a challenge by Larrakia Danggalaba Elder Tibby Quall proceeds, after finding flaws in consultation processes around Indigenous artefacts discovered at the site.

Meanwhile DHA has signalled its intention to continue with the project. A spokesperson said the agency was awaiting the outcome of Mr Quall's matter before the tribunal — expected to be determined in April — but indicated construction could begin in areas outside the dispute.

“This matter is in relation to one area within the Lee Point development and proceedings will not impact commencement of construction in areas outside of that scope later this year,” they said.

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# Woman dies in her cell

NATASHA CLARK

The mother of a 35-year-old Aboriginal woman who died in Perth's Bandyup Women's Prison claims guards ignored her daughter's screams for help before her death.

Other women in the unit reported hearing the woman calling out for help in the early hours of Monday, March 16, with accounts relayed to her mother, "Shelly", suggesting the calls continued over several hours.

"They told me the guards waited a long time before checking on her," said Shelly, who did not want her real name published.

"When they did, she had been gone for an hour."

National Indigenous Times contacted WA's Department of Justice for comment but received a response saying the matter was subject to a coronial inquiry and it would not be appropriate to provide further detail.

Shelly's daughter was a mother of two who battled mental health issues and substance addiction over the past decade.

On New Year's Day in 2025, she suffered a stroke that

caused "cognitive impairment". Shelly had been fighting to secure proper medical and mental health care for her daughter outside prison.

In a letter seen by National Indigenous Times, she wrote to a magistrate's court late last year — copying in government agencies, a private lawyer, and advocacy services — seeking urgent intervention, including a court-ordered rehabilitation program and a plenary guardianship order.

In the letter, she warned her daughter was at risk of harming herself and unable to manage her own medical and personal decisions.

She also raised concerns with prison staff about whether her daughter was receiving adequate medical and mental health support.

Shelly says she was reassured by non-custodial staff her daughter "was getting all the help she needed and on the right medication".

Fractured phone calls with her daughter in recent weeks alarmed Shelly that something was wrong. "She did not sound good, she sounded very stressed out," she said.

Despite her distress, she

“  
The whole system is under enormous pressure . . . Bandyup is operating at over 100 per cent capacity.”

Inspector of Custodial Services Eamon Ryan

always asked her mother to tell her children she loved them.

Advocates say the woman's death reflects broader concerns about the treatment of Aboriginal women in custody.

Proud Bibbulmun Noongar woman and United Nations human rights lawyer Dr Hannah McGlade said she was not surprised by the conditions.

"Bandyup prison has a long history of violence and cruelty to Aboriginal women, and I have recorded and written about some of those instances which would shock anyone today," Dr McGlade told National Indigenous Times.

"Yet to hear this poor woman died, reportedly in utter anguish and pain, and was crying out for help and was ignored is devastating."

Dr McGlade compiled evidence and interviews for an academic chapter on the treatment of Aboriginal women in prisons, including two incidents at Bandyup.

A 2018 investigation by the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services found a woman gave birth alone in a locked cell at the prison after calling out for help for more than an hour, in what the inspector later described as a systemic failure.

In the same year, a young Aboriginal woman in acute psychological distress was transported from Bandyup naked and handcuffed while menstruating, with Dr McGlade noting she was escorted by male officers. Dr McGlade is calling on the WA Government to invest in healing spaces for Aboriginal women to prevent further deaths in custody.

"This State has the blood on its hands of vulnerable Aboriginal women who are suffering from psychosocial distress and disability," she said.

"We have no healing centres

in Noongar Boodja, and people are dying as a result." Inspector of Custodial Services Eamon Ryan said Western Australia's prison system was over-stretched.

"The whole system is under enormous pressure with record populations, but also significant custodial and non-custodial pressures," Mr Ryan said.

"Bandyup is operating at over 100 per cent capacity."

A report by the Inspector of Custodial Services last year also found prisons across Western Australia were operating with too few health and rehabilitation workers, leading to delays in care.

Around one in five health roles were vacant, the report said, along with more than a quarter of rehabilitation and reintegration positions.

Against that backdrop, the circumstances surrounding the woman's death are now expected to come under further scrutiny. Her death is now the subject of a coronial inquiry, which will examine the circumstances surrounding her care in custody.

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## Youth justice in 'crisis' as harsh laws take a toll

DECLAN BRENNAN

Australia's youth justice system is in crisis, a Senate inquiry has been told, as experts and advocates warn punitive policies are failing to improve community safety while driving more children into detention.

The inquiry, examining youth justice and incarceration across the country, has heard increasingly tough-on-crime approaches are prioritising political narratives over evidence, with children facing harsher bail laws and longer sentences.

Witnesses said these measures ignored the underlying causes of offending and risked entrenching cycles of disadvantage, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who remained vastly over-represented in detention.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency has called for national minimum standards for youth justice, included raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 without exceptions, and banning the detention of children under 16.

"The implementation of national minimum standards for youth justice is essential given the experiences of incarcerated Aboriginal children

and young people," VACCA submitted to the inquiry.

"This is even more pressing as . . . several states have recently enacted laws that are likely to result in a substantial increase in incarceration rates of Aboriginal children and young people."

SNAICC — National Voice For Our Children CEO Catherine Liddle said youth justice decisions were being driven in "response to media perceptions of youth crime waves", rather than what "evidence shows is an appropriate or safe response to children who need support".

"In a crisis, you cannot keep dismissing child justice as exclusively a State and Territory issue," she said. International scrutiny has also intensified.

In January, the United Nations Human Rights Council, during its five-yearly universal periodic review of Australia, raised concerns about the "almost constant increase" in the number of people held on remand and the country's "very low age of criminal responsibility".

A joint submission from Dr Hannah McGlade, Professor Fiona Stanley, Professor Carol Bower, Professor Patricia Dudgeon, Dr Jocelyn Jones, Dr Sharynne Hamilton and Dr Hayley Passmore said they



Parkville Youth Detention facility in Victoria. Picture: Declan Brennan

were deeply frustrated at being asked to contribute to yet another inquiry examining the same issues.

"We want to be clear that we are appalled at the number of inquiries, all of which come up with the same or very similar recommendations, that have been ignored by every State and Territory nationally," they said.

"We have to confess that we are cynical that your inquiry will make any difference to one of the most punitive youth 'justice' systems in the world."

Experts have condemned recent policy responses as re-

actionary, and called for Federal intervention in youth justice systems across the country.

"It is well within the responsibility and jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Government to change the way Australia's incredibly expensive child protection and youth justice systems are funded to encourage policies like community-led prevention and early intervention services that keep children with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin," Ms Liddle said.

Data from WA's Commissioner for Children and Young

People highlights worsening outcomes for children across the State, including declining mental health, rising poverty and significant developmental gaps.

Commissioner Dr Jacqueline McGowan-Jones warned by missing early warning signs a child is struggling, they are being set up for "far more serious harm" later in life.

"School exclusion, youth offending and long-term mental health challenges are the predictable outcomes of problems we could have addressed with early intervention," she said.

# Springs fight goes to trial

JOSEPH GUENZLER

The case brought by Nagana Yarrbayn Wangan and Jagalingou Cultural Custodians to protect the Doongmabulla Springs from the impacts of Adani's Carmichael coal mine will proceed to trial after the Queensland Government failed to challenge a landmark Court of Appeal ruling.

The State had 28 days to seek leave to appeal the decision to the High Court, but allowed the deadline to pass this month without filing a challenge.

The recent unanimous judgment of the Queensland Court of Appeal now stands as settled law in the State, confirming Aboriginal cultural rights under the Human Rights Act can be enforced and relied upon in determining whether the Government has failed to protect sacred sites and the environment.

The ruling followed a lengthy legal fight in which the Cultural Custodians sought to hold the State accountable for its handling of environmental protections around the Carmichael mine and the springs.

The springs are a groundwater system more than 500,000 years old, and recognised as a Matter of National Environmental Significance.

Senior cultural custodian Adrian Burragubba said the Court of Appeal decision had



Doongmabulla Springs and Senior Nagana Yarrbayn Cultural Custodian, Adrian Burragubba.

created a pathway for the case to finally be heard.

"This is a huge breakthrough. The Court of Appeal decision has opened the pathway, and we will bring everything we have to the fight to save Doongmabulla," Mr Burragubba said.

He said the case centred on the Queensland Government's role in approving the mine and failing to act on scientific evidence warning of harm to the springs.

"They issued the environmental protection conditions on the

mine, they refused to act on the evidence of harm, and they spent two years trying to shut us down before that evidence could be heard," Mr Burragubba said.

He said the trial would finally allow the scientific evidence to be tested in court.

"Now we go to trial. The independent scientific evidence of the threat to the springs will finally be heard in court," he said.

"That is what we have fought for — to get the Government to

do its job to protect the springs and to respect our rights as the custodians."

Independent expert evidence has been provided by Professor Matthew Currell of Griffith University, and Professor Adrian Werner of Flinders University regarding potential impacts to the springs.

Mr Burragubba also rejected claims by Adani that the legal action amounted to "lawfare."

"That just disrespects the

court and this profoundly important decision — and Adani is not even a party to this case," he said.

"This case is about the State's failure under its own laws and environmental approvals to protect a sacred site of immense ecological and cultural significance from the destructive impacts of the coal mine."

The trial will proceed in the Supreme Court, and no hearing dates had been set as National Indigenous Times went to press.

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## Report urges long-term vision for homelands

GIOVANNI TORRE

A new report commissioned by Aboriginal Housing NT and released on March 12 urges governments to work with the Aboriginal community-controlled homelands sector to develop a long-term vision and increase investment in housing and infrastructure across the Northern Territory homelands.

The report was funded by the NT's Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development.

Homelands are small, often remote Aboriginal living areas outside larger communities and towns. Between 6000 and 10,000 Aboriginal Territorians live on around 400 homelands.

Research conducted by the Menzies School of Health Research indicates Aboriginal people living on homelands have better direct and indirect health and well-being outcomes.

The report found ageing housing stock, policy uncertainty, and limited infrastructure and maintenance were "major challenges" for

homelands communities and organisations that supported them.

Housing on many homelands was ageing and in very poor condition, and their remoteness made building and maintaining homes costly and logistically complex.

Homeland service providers highlighted significant funding constraints, workforce shortages, limited infrastructure and complex reporting requirements.

Independent Member for the electorate of Mulka, Yingiya Guyula said governments must listen to homelands residents. "We can see all around us that government policies are failing," Mr Guyula said.

"It is time for the government to listen to the people about what we are saying is needed for our people."

The report's key recommendations call for Aboriginal Housing NT, the homelands sector, Land Councils and the Federal and Northern Territory governments to work together to agree on a "shared long-term strategic policy" for homelands aligned

with commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing.

It report also recommends "a more holistic approach" to homelands investment by linking housing policy with broader social and economic outcomes, including employment, community governance, health and wellbeing.

NT Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Steve Edgington told National Indigenous Times the Territory Government acknowledged "the important role homelands play for many Aboriginal Territorians".

"Work relating to homelands continues to occur within existing program settings, including the administration of the Northern Territory Government's Homelands Services Program and the delivery of the Australian Government's previously announced funding initiatives," he said.

National Indigenous Times contacted the Federal housing minister for comment.



Trees were unlawfully felled on Gumbaynggirr Country.

# Forestry to pay compo

**ALEXANDRA GIORGIANNI**

The Land and Environment Court of NSW ordered the State's forestry corporation to pay Yurruungga Aboriginal Corporation \$450,000 in compensation this month for destroying culturally significant protected trees in Wild Cattle Creek State Forest on Gumbaynggirr Country.

The Forestry Corporation of NSW was convicted on March 13 of breaching the Forestry Act 2012 during operations between June and July 2020.

The Land and Environment Court found FCNSW had failed to identify, map and record six giant trees and three hollow-bearing trees deemed culturally significant for the Gumbaynggirr peoples, before forestry operations.

Though not criminally negligent, Justice Nicola Pain ordered FCNSW to pay compensation to the YAC for restorative justice activities and bio-cultural repairs.

It's believed to be the first time FCNSW has been ordered

to make financial restitution for cultural harm.

Multiple Gumbaynggirr representatives provided testimony to the negative impact of the illegal tree removals, which the court considered in determining "cultural harm".

Case filings reported Dean Kelly of the Budaabang clan of the Gumbaynggirr Nation and CEO of YAC had suffered "significant mental anguish and distress" after observing the stumps of the felled trees.

"It was evident to him that the post-harvest landscape in the immediate vicinity of the felled trees was significantly damaged," the document read.

Mr Kelly argued unlawful removals had compromised species of flora and fauna that had cultural significance, "severing ancestral ties, disrupting symbiotic relationships, and causing irreparable cultural loss."

The loss of the giant trees was also described as "death by 1000 cuts" by Dr Chels Marshall, a Traditional Owner and knowledge holder in Gumbaynggirr Country and a cultural ecologist.

Dr Marshall highlighted the damage caused to Gumbaynggirr culture, intergenerational knowledge, and identity such as the loss of the habitat for Gumbaynggirr totem species, and the loss of giant trees used as points or location guides.

The court ordered FCNSW to pay YAC to undertake a range of restorative justice projects, including a healing ceremony; site repair plans; cultural mapping; ecological assessments; formation of a Gumbaynggirr Forestry working group, and the training of rangers as Gumbaynggirr guardians. FCNSW will also cover all related costs, such as transport, venues and catering.

It was also ordered to publish notices in selected national, State and local newspapers acknowledging the offences and penalties.

The court also directed the organisation to engage independent consultants to review its logging processes and training.

Spokespeople from Bellingen

Environment Centre believe this case opens doors for future compensation claims for cultural harm against FCNSW.

"Though it's their 14th criminal conviction, this is a landmark decision because for the first time, (FCNSW) must carry out court-approved restorative justice actions for their admitted forestry breaches, in this case in Wild Cattle Creek State Forest, in 2020," spokesperson Ashley Love said.

BEC was represented in court as amicus curiae (friend of the court) by Dr John R Corkill, and asked the court to hear from Gumbaynggirr Elders.

The Court agreed and authorised a restorative justice conference last April involving Gumbaynggirr Elders and YAC, which recommended appropriate restorative actions. BEC president Cath Eaglesham said it was unusual for the organisation to appear as amicus curiae.

She said the court's decision to accept written evidence on the forest's ecological values and the community's views

was significant for future cases.

"We are glad that Forestry Corporation has been held to account, and thrilled that Gumbaynggirr people will be able to use this money to 'put things right' and protect places of cultural significance," Ms Eaglesham said.

"BEC congratulates Aunty Alison Buchanan, Gumbaynggirr Elders and YAC for securing these positive outcomes from these admitted offences."

Dr Corkill said he expected other First Nations people to seek similar claims from FCNSW following this case.

"We now have a court determination that the existing mechanisms are criminally deficient and need to be overhauled," he said.

"We know Forestry Corporation doesn't abide by the law, so sadly, this won't be the last of the illegal destruction we see from this government-owned enterprise.

"They have proven themselves criminally incompetent time and time again."

## Tassie Indigenous youth incarceration crisis

**CALLAN MORSE**

New Department of Education, Children and Young People data indicates Indigenous children and young people continue to be disproportionately represented in northern Tasmania's Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

Recently released DECYP figures indicate on average, 19 children and young people were detained at Ashley in the final quarter of 2025.

National Indigenous Times understands that 20 young people are currently detained at AYDC, with 35 per cent of detainees Indigenous.

Selina Maguire of Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation said "the continued overrepre-

sentation of Aboriginal young people in youth detention in Tasmania is deeply concerning and reflects broader systemic challenges that must be urgently addressed".

"We know the solutions already exist within our communities — grounded in culture, connection to Country, and early intervention," she said. "It is time to invest in Aboriginal-led approaches that prioritise healing, prevention, and real pathways forward for our young people."

Greens children and young people spokesperson Cecily Rosol labelled the figures "distressingly high".

"When the Liberals announced they would close Ashley five years ago, there

were nine children at the centre daily," Ms Rosol said.

"The Rockliff Government keeps saying they're reducing the number of young people at Ashley, but this data shows that's just not true. In fact, their policies are continuing to make things worse."

The Greens said the number of children at AYDC is 17 per cent higher than the same time the previous year. They say it is also at its highest level since there were 21 children in the centre daily in the June 2024 quarter.

"The Liberals' 'tough on crime' approach is failing. It isn't reducing crime — all it's doing is seeing more young people locked up," Ms Rosol said.

"Given the Commission of

Inquiry found there was a current risk of child abuse in Ashley, the Liberals should have been decreasing the number of children detained there — and closing the centre as soon possible.

"But the number of children at the Centre is increasing, and work to close the facility has been repeatedly kicked down the road and mismanaged. It's disgraceful."

The data comes as the National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, SNAICC — National Voice for our Children, called for nationwide reform of the country's youth justice system.

"There are steps the Federal Government could take right now that would have an imme-

diated effect on the numbers of our children being incarcerated in youth justice," SNAICC chief executive Catherine Liddle told the Senate standing committee on legal and constitutional affairs on March 16.

Ms Liddle said early intervention to prevent child removal "will prevent our children from entering youth justice systems".

Tasmanian Minister for Children and Youth Jo Palmer said the Tasmanian Government is committed to a youth justice system which achieves better outcomes for young people and their families and keeps the community safe.

The Government also said Indigenous-led programs continue to be offered at AYDC.

# Urgent action call on cervical cancer

GIOVANNI TORRE

A world-first study, called Accelerating cervical cancer elimination in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women: a modelling study, revealed this month that without urgent, targeted action, cervical cancer will not be eliminated in Indigenous communities until 2047 — 12 years later than the Federal Government's 2035 target.

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women globally.

It is caused by persistent human papillomavirus infections but can be prevented through vaccination and screening.

In the study, published in *Lancet Public Health*, researchers used existing data to project the date cervical cancer will be eliminated amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, then modelled interventions to see which would have the biggest impact on elimination timings.

The researchers found a targeted screening blitz, focusing on Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander women who have never been screened before, could bring cervical cancer elimination forward to 2036.

Lead author Associate Professor Megan Smith, from the cancer elimination collaboration at the University of Sydney School of Public Health, said "at current rates, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women will wait an extra generation to see cervical cancer eliminated in their communities — but the gap is not inevitable".

"Our research shows that a targeted screening blitz would almost entirely close the gap, protecting a whole generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women," she said.

The study also reinforced the importance of Indigenous-led approaches, with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, Health Workers and community leadership central to delivery.

Senior author Associate Professor Lisa Whop, a Wagadagam Gumulgal woman from Yardhura Walani, the National

Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Research at the Australian National University, said Australia "cannot claim success in cervical cancer elimination until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples benefit equally".

"We need to act now," she said.

"This isn't about inventing new solutions but backing what communities already know works.

A concerted effort, funded by government and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, will help to overcome longstanding inequities in cervical cancer screening."

The researchers recommend that specific interventions such as self-collection and community-based point-of-care testing should be used to make screening as accessible as possible.

Associate Professor Smith said "the gap in cervical cancer is not about biology — it's about access, and access can be fixed".

"Self-collection is a game

changer because it gives people real choice and means that women don't necessarily have to go to a clinic to get tested," she said.

Associate Professor Whop said there is already good evidence that self-collection is helping to increase screening rates and "with more investment and partnership it could be key to eliminating cancer within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within a generation".

Federal Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health, Rebecca White, told *National Indigenous Times Australia* is "on track" to become one of the first countries in the world to eliminate cervical cancer and the Federal Government is "determined to see that goal achieved for all communities".

"In 2023, the Albanese Government launched the National Strategy for the Elimination of Cervical Cancer in Australia, backed by a \$48.2 million investment over four years to improve preven-



Associate Professor Lisa Whop.

tion, screening and follow-up care," she said.

"Improving access to screening in First Nations communities is central to this work, including through self-collection, this is already helping to increase participation, particularly in communities where screening rates have traditionally been lower.

"We are also supporting initiatives such as point of care HPV testing to deliver screening and co-designed campaigns that support culturally safe care."

The Assistant Minister noted the Federal Government has provided \$197.9 million to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to improve cancer outcomes for First Nations people, including participation in cancer screening.

Ms White said the Government will "continue working alongside First Nations communities, health services and health practitioners as we progress toward eliminating cervical cancer".

## Cultural Flows fund welcomed in basin

JARRED CROSS

Aboriginal organisations in the Murray-Darling Basin this month welcomed Federal funding for Cultural Flows planning and projects.

Fifty projects from Queensland to Victoria have secured grants from an available \$20 million along the waterways of the country's largest river system.

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's Cultural Flows planning for cultural economies grant program was set up to support planning and development of skills to access and manage water in the Basin — including water-dependent business plans.

Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DJAARA) in central Victoria will pilot a Cultural Flows management plan with its grant through its water enterprise DJANDAK.

"Our aim is for Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung People) to make decisions for gatjin (water) on Dja Dja Wurrung Country," DJAARA interim chief executive Cassandra Lewis said.

"Since colonisation, Traditional Owners have not had a say in how water is managed — despite our cultural responsi-



Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations chair Brendan Kennedy. Picture: Doug Gimsey

bility to care for Country for future generations. This grant will enable us to pilot a Cultural Flows management plan which will articulate the values that are important for Djaara, and what water is needed to support and protect those values."

Grants funds cannot be used to buy water entitlements, with recipients having two years to complete their projects.

The health, access and Traditional Owner rights concerning the Murray-Darling have long been a source of frustration for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The Murray Darling Basin

Plan was introduced more than a decade ago, with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority preparing for their 2026 review.

Nearly 200 senior leaders from communities, First Nations, government, and science and industry met and discussed the plan at the 2026 Basin Leadership Summit earlier this month.

Last year, the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations successfully saw a NSW fractured rock water resource plan struck down in the Federal Court, with the judgment highlighting the need for water law reform to better

protect First Nations rights and interests.

MLDRIN, a confederation of Sovereign First Nations from the Southern part of the Murray-Darling Basin, has secured grant funding for eight projects.

"MLDRIN is delighted to see the ongoing impact the Echuca Declaration, which first defined the concept of 'Cultural Flows' in the Southern Murray-Darling Basin in 2007, continues to have," chair Brendan Kennedy said.

"This is one of MLDRIN's many living legacies for the basin and beyond. We look for-

ward to seeing all participating Nations articulate their aspirations to inform the 2027 Water Act Review."

In 2007, the Echuca Declaration defined Cultural Flows as water entitlements "legally and beneficially owned by the Indigenous Nations of a sufficient and adequate quantity and quality to improve the spiritual, cultural, environmental, social and economic conditions of those Indigenous Nations", and an inherent right.

The declaration also stated First Nations had always been and remained sovereign over their own lands and waters.

The DCCEEW said it acknowledged the significant impact of colonisation on First Nations access to water, and that Indigenous people owned less than 0.2 per cent of surface water entitlements at present.

The Federal Government announced a \$100 million Murray-Darling Basin Aboriginal Water Entitlements Program "to help address these impacts" last October.

Environment and Water Minister Murray Watt said: "Through this (Cultural Flows) program, we're able to support First Nations communities with the right support to access, own and manage water entitlements that will have cultural, environmental, social, spiritual, and economic benefits."

Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests interim chair Kay Blades, said funding "supports ownership and management of water for cultural, spiritual, social, environmental and economic outcomes".

# Maori Queen receives Whadjuk visitors

REECE HARLEY

A delegation from the Whadjuk Aboriginal Corporation was formally received by Her Majesty the Maori Queen at Turangawaewae Marae, Aotearoa, last week, marking a significant cultural exchange between Noongar and Maori leadership.

The visit was part of a study tour examining Maori economic development and governance, including engagements with Waikato-Tainui and its commercial arm, Tainui Group Holdings.

Turangawaewae Marae, on the banks of the Waikato River in Ngaruawahia, is the official residence of the Maori monarch and the heart of the Kiingitanga movement. Established in the 1850s, the movement sought to unify Maori tribes and protect land and sovereignty during colonisation, and remains a central institution in Maori political and cultural life. The marae hosts major annual gatherings, including the Koroneihana, which commemorates the coronation of the Maori monarch.

Proceedings follow a structured process beginning with mourning and remembrance before shifting, after a shared meal, to dialogue about the future. The Whadjuk delegation took part in this process in accordance with tikanga (Maori cultural protocol).

After a performance by Noon-



The Whadjuk delegation presents a booka (kangaroo-skin cloak) to Maori Queen Kuini Nga wai hono i te po. Picture: Kiingitanga.

gar dancers Ash Penfold, Honey Webb, Theo Kearing and Kaed Kearing, the delegation presented a booka, or kangaroo-skin cloak, to the Queen.

The cloak — Wirin Across The Waters — was created on Noongar Country and symbolises connection between peoples separated by ocean but united through shared values.

It was designed by Ballardong Noongar artist Tamara Hayden.

The presentation was led by Whadjuk Aboriginal Corporation chair Charne Hayden, supported by deputy chair Wayne Ryder and fellow delegates.

Mr Ryder acknowledged the

significance of the occasion and the responsibility of representing Noongar people internationally. The exchange reflects a strengthening relationship between Whadjuk and Maori leadership, with both groups exploring opportunities for collaboration across economic development, governance and cultural exchange.

Last year, the Maori Queen was welcomed to Boorloo/Perth by Noongar leaders like many of her predecessors. Last week's visit marks a continuation of four decades of warm and growing relations between Maori and Noongar communities.



Noongar cultural dancer Ash Penfold.

# System fails kids: report

DECLAN BRENNAN

Systems in Queensland are failing vulnerable children, the State's Indigenous children's commissioner has warned, citing punitive laws, rising demand and instability as key drivers.

The concerns are detailed in the 2025 Queensland Child Rights Report, released last week by the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, which found many children are entering the child protection system because families cannot access support early enough.

The report attributes this to increasing demand, instability for children already in care, and gaps in early family support.

While the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care in Queensland remains below the national average, it has steadily increased.

Despite making up about 9 per cent of the State's child population, First Nations children

account for nearly half of all children and young people in OOH.

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner Natalie Lewis says stronger protection of children's rights is critical.

"Children's rights are human rights, and governments have a responsibility to protect them in law, policy and practice," she said.

"Monitoring rights and how they are promoted and protected for our children gives us an objective and consistent test for policy and practice, with goals that don't shift."

The report also highlights how children move between multiple systems — including child protection, youth justice, education, housing and health — with government responses remaining fragmented. It calls for a whole-of-government children's plan for Queensland.

The findings come amid criticism of Queensland's data transparency, after the State failed to report child protection

data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in January's Report on Government Services.

The department described this as a "temporary situation" linked to a new client information system.

In February, SNAICC — National Voice for our Children chief executive Catherine Liddle questioned how the department could reach a point where it could not account for children in its care. "The Queensland department have dropped the ball on this one, and our children will end up paying the price," she said.

Last year, the Queensland Government said the severe over-representation of Indigenous children in OOH would be a central focus of a major inquiry.

The ongoing \$20 million commission of inquiry, led by former Federal Court judge Paul Anastassiou, is examining harm caused by the system.

Queensland has also faced criticism over youth justice,

recording the highest number of Indigenous children and young people in custody nationally. Experts have linked this to tougher "adult crime, adult time" laws.

Of the 452 Indigenous children in detention nationwide on an average day in 2024-25, 207 were in Queensland. First Nations children are 27 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous children and, while comprising less than 10 per cent of the youth population, account for 71 per cent of those in detention.

The report outlines significant disadvantage among young people in custody.

One in five has been under a guardianship or permanent care order, 38 per cent have a parent who has been imprisoned, and 70 per cent have experienced domestic and family violence. More than 70 per cent have a suspected or diagnosed disability, while 47 per cent have a mental health disorder.

Youth Advocacy Centre CEO Katherine Hayes told National

Indigenous Times last year "human rights in Queensland over the last three or four years have been decimated".

"Some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Queensland, in particular children in the youth justice system, have been denied basic human rights over the last few years," she said.

"This has led to a complete devaluation in Queensland of upholding human rights for those who need it the most."

Nearly 8000 young people were held in watch houses in 2023-24, 59 per cent of them Indigenous, with an average time in unsentenced detention of 48 days.

Commissioner Lewis said the system was failing to address the underlying causes of youth offending.

"Most children who come into contact with youth justice have experienced trauma, poverty, instability, disability and unmet support needs," she said. "Punishment alone will never address those realities."



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# STYLEUP

FASHION,  
BEAUTY &  
LIFESTYLE

## Style in spotlight

Ebony Noire designs on  
Melbourne Fashion Festival's  
Beyond Blak Runway  
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Picture: Mike Tarr

# Designers dress for success

## PHOEBE BLOGG

One of Australia's largest fashion events, the PayPal Melbourne Fashion Festival, triumphantly returned in 2026 to showcase emerging and established creatives from across the country.

The festival's Beyond Blak runway reflected the event's focus on spotlighting emerging First Nations designers, models and brands.

The all-Indigenous runway featured celebrated designers and brands including Delvene Cockatoo-Collins, Ebony Noire, Flash1A, KingKing Creative, Lazy Girl Lingerie, Lychee Alkira, Take Pride Movement, Tarsha Davis and Yapa Mali.

Curated by Mob in Fashion, the event championed creative expression, cultural leadership and career

progression for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander talent.

With a strong First Nations focus, the symbolism of culture and Country was felt right down to the runway's carpet flooring, which was created by official partner Godfrey Hirst in collaboration with Dreamtime Flooring and First Nations designer Josh Deane.

First Nations designers and brands including MAARA Collective, By Josh Deane and Ngali also featured throughout the festival.

Deane, whose brand featured in the Joywear Runway, said his goal was "to show my community that this path is possible even without a traditional background".

"I didn't study fashion and I dropped out of school, so this brand is built on years of hands-on hustle," he said.



The Beyond Blak runway at Melbourne Fashion Festival. Picture: Lucas Dawson

"While I want to inspire my community, I also want to reach people outside of it. I want allies to wear the brand as a genuine, non-tokenistic show of support turning fashion into a bridge for real connection."

The theme of collaboration was also felt loud and clear through many designers' work with artists and artisans.

Yuwaalaraay designer and

creative director Julie Shaw proved this with MAARA Collective's collaboration with Kija and Ngarinyin artist Rebekah Treacy.

"Rebekah's print is inspired by the striking rock formation and colours of Yawuru Country, where she resides in Western Australia," Shaw said. "We've carried that inspiration and respect for the landscape through the

collection into draped silhouettes and sculptural pieces that emulate the rock formations of the land."

Shaw said 2026 marked the sixth year MAARA Collective has appeared on the MFF runway. "I'm always floored by the amount of sheer talent of our First Nations brands that continue to create and push boundaries and show up," she said.

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# Biennale 'about who we are'

ALEXANDRA GIORGIANNI

Yindjibarndi Elder and artist Wendy Hubert travelled from the Pilbara to Penrith to create a garden installation for the 25th Biennale of Sydney, with Penrith Regional Gallery welcoming her alongside Juluwarlu Art Group and the Yindjibarndi Rangers on March 7.

Yindjibarndi Nyinyart at Wendy's Garden is a collaborative installation created in the garden of Lewers: Penrith Regional Gallery, which was commissioned for the 25th Biennale of Sydney: Rememory. The theme explores how acts of remembering, personal, familial, and collective, can reclaim histories that have been erased or overlooked.

In collaboration with the Juluwarlu Art Group and the Yindjibarndi Rangers, Ms Hubert created a new multidisciplinary installation including a suite of her paintings with video projection, sound, and a large-scale indoor/outdoor "garden" installation.

The outdoor installation transforms the gardens at PRG into an immersive, on Country-inspired experience which reflects the immense regeneration efforts taking place at Ngurrawaana while reimagining four important Yindjibarndi sacred sites, such as Munguu (anthills) and Thalu (increase sites).

She travelled nearly 5000km from Ngurrawaana in the Pilbara, WA, taking 53 hours. The journey, documented in a daily blog, also involved transporting cultural materials from the homelands on Yindjibarndi Country.

When asked about her invitation to the Biennale, Ms Hubert said it was amazing.

"I gained this wonderful heritage call, and I didn't think I had it, but I do have it. And that's the amazing part of it all, and I'm in a good place," Ms Hubert said.

Reflecting on the Biennale's



Wendy Hubert explains her paintings Picture: Alexandra Giorgianni

theme of Rememory, Ms Hubert spoke about her early life and how those experiences shaped the installation.

Born at Red Hill Station on Guruma Country in WA, she spent her early years living on the station, as well as Minderoo Station. The memories of those early landscapes remain central to Ms Hubert's work. She explained the installation resonates with the Biennale's theme, recalling the gardens of the stations where she grew up, which were filled with exotic plants such as mango and passionfruit.

"As a teenager, I went back to my mother's mother, and I stayed there. I never went back to station life because that was

my father's life," Ms Hubert said. "I think of how beautiful it was. Sometimes it was too good . . . (although) I had to eat with a fork and knife, and I learned that with my dad, because I'm really a bush kid."

As an homage to the stations of her early life, an existing banana tree at PRG will also feature in the installation.

Lorraine Coppin, a proud Yindjibarndi woman from the Pilbara and CEO of Juluwarlu Aboriginal Group Corporation, also shared her thoughts ahead of the opening. "(Ms Hubert) wanted to create and share with everyone the stories and the practices of our ceremonies back home. When she paints, she paints these stories," she

said. Acting as artistic director and creator of the garden installation alongside Ms Hubert, Ms Coppin was happy to be included in the Biennale. "We got really excited because people want to showcase and share our story," she said.

"You can see there's a lot of work that went into the garden display, with rocks coming from home, a lot of the plants from home. We obviously borrowed some from the (local Dharug people) here, who contributed to our garden display, and we set it up as we would see back home."

Ms Coppin emphasised the importance of the installation materials coming from their home in the Pilbara.

"The colour of our Country is different to here. The plants of our country are different to here, and we want to showcase that. "Hopefully, they will get a better understanding of why Country is so important to us, why plants and animals are so important for our survival.

"Sharing this will help you to be our messenger, to help us in return for the next generation. It's about survival for us, about who we are as Aboriginal people. . . We are one."

**Sydney 25th Biennale: Rememory. March 14 to June 14. Free entry. At Lewers: Penrith Regional Gallery, White Bay Power Station, Art Gallery of NSW, Campbelltown Arts Centre and Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney.**

## Music nominees 'honoured'

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Many Indigenous musicians have been recognised among the finalists for the 2026 Queensland Music Awards, highlighting the growing impact of Indigenous voices across the State's contemporary music scene.

The finalists were announced this month, with the awards recognising excellence across 20 categories including pop, hip hop, electronic, jazz, rock and visual storytelling.

Judged by a panel of more than 100 Australian and international music industry professionals, the Queensland Music Awards celebrate artists shaping the sound of Queensland and the wider Australian music landscape. Homegrown Indigenous artists have been nominated across multiple genres.

The nominees include GLVES in

electronic; JJ4K in hip-hop and soul/funk/RnB; Say True God? in hip-hop and soul/funk/RnB; SOULCHLD in jazz; Loki Liddle for Music Video of the Year; BADASSMUTHA in pop and soul/funk/RnB; Jem Cassar-Daley in pop; Selve in rock; Djawarray in the world category; and Denzel Kennedy in hip-hop.

Samoan/Tongan hip-hop artist JJ4K described the nomination as a major milestone in his career.

"It's an absolute honour! Honestly speechless!" he said.

"I started this while I was working two jobs and just getting by, now people are recognising my music enough to say it's impacting a MASSIVE part of Australia and especially one I call home."

The Magandjin/Brisbane-based artist said the recognition reflected years of dedication to his craft.

"It means everything. I've poured

my stories, my triumphs, tribulations and everything into it," JJ4K said.

"The thousands of hours I've poured into trying to perfect my craft is speaking for itself now, from years of learning to rhyme a million different ways, to learning how to produce different sounds to shape how the audience feels in a song."

Kalkadoon hip-hop artist Denzel Kennedy is also among the nominees this year.

"It's a big honour to be nominated for the hip-hop award," Kennedy said.

"I'm up against some incredible artists, and it feels great to be recognised for my art and efforts."

The awards ceremony will be held on Wednesday, April 22 at Miami Marketta on the Gold Coast.

It marks the first time the Queensland Music Awards are being hosted outside Brisbane.



Samoan/Tongan artist JJ4K is nominated. Picture: Joseph Guenzler

# First Nations style in the sp



Ebony Rose Kruger's Ebony Noire designs at the Melbourne Fashion Festival. Pictures: Lucas Dawson

## PHOEBE BLOGG

First Nations designer Ebony Rose Kruger returned to the Melbourne Fashion Festival this year to debut the new collection of her brand Ebony Noire on the Beyond Blak runway.

Kruger told Style Up the idea for the name Ebony Noire was conceived at a music festival.

"My friend knighted me Ebony Noire meaning . . . ebony as in black wood and noire as in black in French," she said.

"My mob are Central Desert Arrernte from Mparntwe and Te Atiawa and Ngati Kahungunu from Aotearoa.

"My career as a designer has only just begun . . . However, my craftsmanship has been developing for around four years, and creativity has always been there.

"Even as a child I was precise with visual work.

"I used to win colouring competitions and could sit down and finish a whole colouring book in a day, which

took a lot of focus for a five-year-old."

Kruger said that patience and attention to detail are evident in her design work "through strong construction and the way I think carefully about every part of a garment".

She said that while she had previously been involved in MFF behind the scenes, it was not until Mob in Fashion provided her with a new opportunity that she truly spread her creative wings.

"I've been working backstage as a dresser and assistant stylist for a couple of years now, and I've always thought of it as training for when I eventually become a designer," she said.

"Going back to 2021 with Mob in Fashion was my first time being involved with Melbourne Fashion Festival, so to then come back a few years later and debut my first collection with them felt like a really big full circle moment."

"The opportunity came about when I went to visit Rhys, the

director, and Garth, the head stylist. They had just moved into a new Mob in Fashion building and with my studies nearly finished it felt like the right time to reach out and reconnect."

She said she initially went into the meeting with no expectations.

"We were talking about what everyone had been up to, and I showed them some of the designs I'd been working on at uni," she said.

"Looking back on it now, I basically pitched myself to them."

Kruger chose not to officially name her new collection, but rather dedicate it to her family and what they reflected.

"I didn't give the collection a formal name, but in a way I dedicate it to my grandparents. I had them in mind a lot throughout the whole journey," she said.

"The creative process happened very quickly.

"I didn't leave myself a huge amount of time, but I was lucky

that over the year I'd already been jotting down ideas and sketches, so when the opportunity came up, I could dip back into those in what felt like a bit of a creative emergency.

"At the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) we're really taught to begin with a strong concept and develop the idea fully before moving into making. That means researching fabrics, trimmings, and thinking through how the garment will be achieved through construction and pattern making.

"I use a mix of draping and pattern making depending on the garment."

Kruger said her inspiration comes primarily from "life experiences and the environments I'm exposed to".

"The people I meet, the creative scenes I'm part of, and my own identity all shape the way I design," she said.

Passionate about connecting with and inspiring other

emerging designers, Kruger said more funding within the First Nations fashion sector would help many more designers reach their creative goals and further their careers.

"More funding would definitely help. Fashion can be really expensive, especially when you're trying to develop collections, source fabrics and experiment with construction," Kruger said.

"A lot of emerging First Nations designers have incredible ideas but limited resources to fully realise them.

"I'd also love to see more shared creative spaces. A few friends and I who are emerging designers have been talking about forming a cohort, and having access to a shared sewing space or studio would make a huge difference.

"Spaces like that allow designers to collaborate, learn from each other and develop their work.

"More platforms, mentorship and industry exposure would

# Spotlight at MFF



help emerging First Nations designers build long-term careers in fashion.”

Looking ahead, Kruger is eager to develop her brand whilst staying true to her core values of wanting to design more bespoke pieces, specifically for those working within the creative industry.

“At the moment I’m mainly focused on getting myself out there more and continuing to develop my work,” she said.

“I don’t really plan on being a huge label.

“I want to be a personal designer.

“I’m interested in designing bespoke pieces for other creatives like musicians, performers or even vogueurs so we can make garments that feel personal to their identity.

“I have a street performance project coming up where I’ll be costume designing, which I’m really excited about . . . Other than that, I’m just continuing to develop new ideas and slowly working on new pieces as I move forward in my practice.”

“

A lot of emerging First Nations designers have incredible ideas but limited resources to fully realise them. More platforms, mentorship and industry exposure would help . . .

**Ebony Rose Kruger**

# Home debut after DC show

## PHOEBE BLOGG

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts will open its Season 2 program this April with the Australian debut of All That Country Holds, a major exhibition bringing together 10 senior artists from across the Kimberley in a powerful homecoming presentation.

PICA has been presenting cutting-edge contemporary art since 1989. Its mission is to nurture artists and audiences through creative risk-taking, collaboration and critical exchange.

Running from April 19 to June 14, PICA's Season 2 program centres the power of First Nations art and storytelling through All That Country Holds, alongside the return of the REVEALED: New and Emerging WA Aboriginal Artists exhibition presented at PICA under the custodianship of the Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of WA. Jointly, these exhibitions showcase the work of over 100 Aboriginal artists from across WA.

The Australian debut of All That Country Holds follows the exhibition's world premiere in Washington DC in late 2025. Arriving at PICA in



Featured artist John Prince Siddon. Picture: Michael Jalaru Torres.

April, the works will now be presented publicly in Australia for the first time.

Curated by Noongar woman Zali Morgan, with curatorial and cultural guidance from Lynley Nargoodah and Dora Griffiths, and presented by

Kimberley Aboriginal Art and Culture, All That Country Holds features 42 artworks of various media that reflect the richness and diversity of six Kimberley art centres.

Deeply connected to the Country on which the artists

have lived and worked, the exhibition brings together new works shaped by experience, memory and enduring connection to place.

Developed through an initiative to support artists to expand their practice and explore creative capabilities, the exhibition includes works by Ben Galmirri Ward, Angelina Boona Karadada, Mervyn Street, Evelyn Malgil, Jan Gunjaka Griffiths, Miriam Baadjo, Leah Umbagai, Marylou Orliyarli Divilli, Pauline Sunfly, and John Prince Siddon.

PICA chief executive Hannah Mathews said presenting All That Country Holds alongside REVEALED in Season 2 offers audiences an opportunity to witness the powerful innovation and intergenerational continuity taking place in First Nations artistic practice in WA.

"Bringing All That Country Holds together with REVEALED at PICA creates a powerful dialogue between emerging and established First Nations artists, tracing not only the strength of contemporary practice in Western Australia, but the pathways that make artistic growth possible," she said.

"This season is also shaped

by the generous support of the Ungar Family Foundation, our inaugural season patron.

"Artists like Mary-Lou Orliyarli Divilli embody that journey, having previously exhibited as an emerging artist in REVEALED and now returning to PICA as an established artist featured in All That Country Holds.

"Her inclusion is a reminder of why sustained investment in artist development, mentorship and opportunity matters, and of the extraordinary outcomes that can emerge when artists are supported to expand their practice over time," Ms Mathews said.

Ms Morgan said All That Country Holds is grounded in stories of labour, memory, survival and sovereignty.

"(It) is a powerful exhibition exploring the Kimberley Country through each artist's perspective," she said. "For many, their knowledge of place has been shaped by years spent working as stockmen and cattle workers, moving across and caring for land in ways that inform a distinctly lived visual language.

The season will open with a free public launch on Friday, April 17 with PICA After Hours from 6-8pm.

KUJUNGKA LA PALYAMARNKU – Working together to make it better

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# Student of design has true test on runway

PHOEBE BLOGG

Tarsha Davis has only just begun studying a bachelor of fashion design but faced an exam like no other last month — debuting her designs on a Melbourne Fashion Festival runway.

The emerging First Nations designer told Style Up she couldn't have imagined it a year ago.

"This will be my first runway production, which I never really saw myself doing until about six months ago. I am currently a full-time student studying a bachelor of fashion design, and I'm only one semester in," she said.

"I am loving the learner experience, and there are still so many pathways I want to explore, but I do think this will be the first of many runway collections. I saw a call-out to work with Mob in Fashion for the PayPal Melbourne Fashion Festival and just felt a really strong pull towards applying.

"I had very little ready at the time, but knew I could get it done during semester break. Mob in Fashion have been very welcoming and supportive. I can't wait to do it all again, knowing what I know now."

On the runway Davis presented garments inspired by Country and culture.

"The collection draws on woven forms and basket-based patterns that run through the garments, jewellery, and printed textiles," she said.

"I learnt my traditional basket weave with my aunty on our Country a few years back. I used the pattern from the inside of our Balji (basket) to screen print garments with matching woven accessories.

"I decided to use our Balji for my first ever runway collection to set a precedent in the way it captures cultural continuity, land rights, lineage, and responsible stewardship. I am inspired by my Country, the way it heals, teaches, and sustains us.

"I am in awe of the community I have around me, friends and family who have been ceaselessly working on the frontlines of First Nations justice movements. I hope they feel represented, if not in the work itself, at least in seeing the results of having invested in me."

Appearing on the event's Beyond Blak runway last week, Davis said she was honoured to share the runway with other inspiring designers.

"Everyone is bringing their own unique voice and style, which makes the show that much stronger. It really captures the talent and diversity of our Mob around



A matching set designed by Tarsha Davis at Melbourne Fashion Festival. Picture: Lucas Dawson.

the country. "The designs in this runway are mostly block-shaped patterns aiming to reduce fabric waste. I've tried to use any scrap materials in the jewellery and accessories.

"Creating garments that hold story and memory also encourages an emotional connection to our wearables that extends the life of a garment.

"I try to have a low-waste impact in my design work, but I think the biggest influence culture will have is actually in the storytelling and advocacy made possible through fashion."

Davis said she has been

expressing her culture through art since her early teenage years. "I've always been creative, but I started expressing my culture through art when I was about 17 or 18. It was deeply personal, and I didn't start practising professionally until I was in my 30s," she said.

"I aspire to share stories of grief, protest, and cultural pride, while contributing to broader movements for land justice, conscious consumption, and cultural continuity. I am also motivated by innovation, systems thinking, and social justice.

"I hope to model ways of working that address

over-production while promoting First Nations culture where it intersects with current industry priorities in circularity. Ultimately, I would like to build a creative practice or business that sustains me financially without compromising my values."

Davis said while she is unsure how the brand will evolve, she will continue to reflect her creativity, culture and community throughout her designs.

"Whether it grows into an Aboriginal textile art practice, fashion label, or social enterprise, the intent will remain the same," she said.

## Rapper's album talks belief

JOSEPH GUENZLER

The sophomore album of Wiradjuri rapper YNG Martyr — CHALANT — is set for release on Friday, March 27.

The single REAL GEEK offered an early look at a project that signals a shift in direction for the artist.

With more than 350 million global streams to his name, YNG Martyr has built a reputation as one of Australia's most visible hip-hop exports.

He has performed at major festivals including Falls Festival and SXSW, and toured alongside international acts such as Iann Dior and DC The Don.

On CHALANT, YNG Martyr moves away from the mystique often associated with modern hip-hop and leans into a more direct

approach. Known for his instinctive understanding of trends and online culture, he frames the album around a simple message of self-belief and individuality.

A lot has changed since his 2023 debut album Lovesick, with the rapper finding love, touring internationally and returning home with renewed confidence.

"It was really good to see people in the flesh who love my music," YNG Martyr said.

"To play these songs and see the real-world impact of writing music from an island on the other side of the world."

Created organically and driven by a desire to make boastful and energetic tracks, CHALANT leans into underground sounds and genres such as rage and jerk while maintaining the sharp

delivery that defined his acclaimed performance on triple j's Bars of Steel.

Gaming references run throughout the record, reflecting YNG Martyr's early days freestyling in Call of Duty lobbies.

"We went from join the server, here's the I.P / to breakin' veins with that pick just like an IV," YNG Martyr said. "We got creative with that s..t. I had to find peace / now it's diamonds on my bezel of my timepiece."

With CHALANT, YNG Martyr positions the project as a statement of self-assurance. "When people hear CHALANT, I want them to learn something about themselves," he said.

"You don't need to be super cool to do super cool things. You don't need to be anything that you're not."

## Recipes more than food

JOSEPH GUENZLER

A cookbook celebrating Indigenous food knowledge and cultural storytelling will be launched in Redfern on Tuesday, March 31.

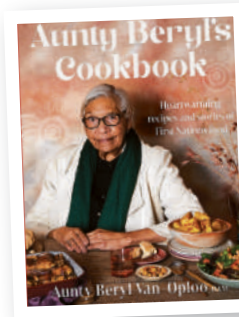
The National Centre of Indigenous Excellence has announced the release of Aunty Beryl's Cookbook: Heartwarming Recipes And Stories of First Nations Food, bringing together decades of culinary knowledge from respected Gamilaroi Elder Aunty Beryl Van-Oploo OAM.

The cookbook draws on more than 40 years of her work supporting community, mentoring young people and promoting Aboriginal food culture through hospitality training and cultural education. There are traditional and contemporary recipes alongside stories from Country and

reflections on culture, identity and passing knowledge between generations. Aunty Beryl's career has included mentoring hundreds of young people through culturally grounded training programs and community initiatives connected to food and culture. The cookbook works as a collection of recipes and a reflection of the relationships and knowledge built through community kitchens and cultural teaching.

"Food is more than something we put on a plate, it connects us to our families, our Country and our identity," Aunty Beryl said. "This cookbook is my way of sharing the stories and flavours that have shaped my life and the lives of so many young people I've worked with."

The launch will be at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Redfern. Pre-orders for the cookbook are through Murdoch Books. Copies available at the launch.



# Arts group celebrates 50 years

ALEXANDRA GIORGIANNI

Australia's leading national performing arts training organisation for First Nations people, NAISDA, recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, with powerful cultural performances and the launch of a refreshed identity created in collaboration with Aboriginal artist Uncle Jeffrey Samuels.

Held on Darkinjung Country at Kariong, NSW, the event united alumni, current students, cultural tutors, knowledge holders, community partners and arts leaders to honour NAISDA's founding vision and its enduring role in creative and cultural preservation.

The celebration also marked two decades of NAISDA on Darkinjung Country, with senior cultural tutors from the Dätiwuy Community in North East Arnhem Land and Moa

Island in the Torres Strait gathering alongside Darkinjung knowledge holders to share culture and performance in a historic first.

"It is a deep honour to stand with you this morning as we do celebrate 50 extraordinary years of NAISDA," Gary Field, proud Wiradjuri man and deputy chair of the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council, said.

"It has nurtured generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and leaders, grounding them in culture while giving them the wings to stand on stages . . . across the globe," he said.

"NAISDA is proof of what happens when community vision is sustained by courage. It's a belief that collective pride prosper . . . it is with enormous pride that this legacy has been built, and it's the generations to come who get to walk through these



Senior cultural tutors Vaughn Wapau and Jeanette Fabila. Picture: Alexandra Giorgianni

doors that will have the benefit of the first 50 years."

A defining moment was the unveiling of NAISDA's refreshed identity, created in collaboration with Samuels, creator of the original Giddigool (Dancing Man) logo.

An enduring and much-loved symbol since the 1980s, the Giddigool logo was redeveloped to better align

with the inclusive values of modern-day NAISDA.

"Over time, the logo has evolved in different ways, reflecting his own journey and reconnecting with Uncle, we understood that the Giddigool representation had shifted over the years from his original intent," proud Jerrinja and Wandi Wandiaan woman and guest speaker,

Shahni Wellington, said. Chief executive Kim Walker said the heart of NAISDA is its inclusivity and cultural purpose. "It brings everyone from all nations, from all walks of life, from all economic strands, together and gives them the opportunity to have the arts and culture as a career opportunity," he said.

## environment plan

seeking relevant persons' input



### our activities

Chevron Australia is planning to undertake site investigation surveys within areas associated with the future development of Gorgon backfill fields - Chrysaor and Dionysus (C&D) and Chandon - located in Commonwealth waters off the northwest coast of Western Australia, in water depths between 125 m to 1370 m.

The petroleum activity includes geophysical, geotechnical, and environmental surveys, which are indicatively scheduled to commence late-2026/early-2027 and are estimated to take approximately four months to complete.

The feedback we receive during consultation will inform and enhance the Gorgon Backfill Fields Site Investigation Surveys Environment Plan, which must be accepted by the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) before activities may commence.

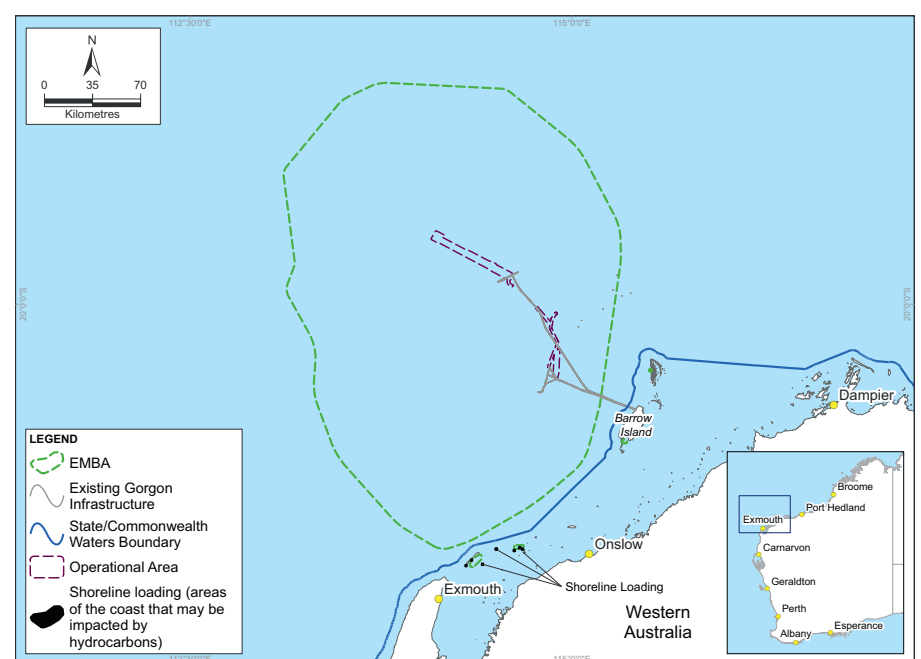
### environment that may be affected (EMBA)

As part of our environmental assessment and consultation process, we create maps to provide geographical context for relevant persons to determine if their functions, interests or activities may be affected by an offshore petroleum activity during planned activities (e.g. routine or contingency operations) or from an unplanned event (e.g. emergency scenarios).

The map shows the C&D and Chandon operational areas (OAs), based on an ~750 m radius buffer around the proposed survey areas, and the EMBA, which is based on worst-case unplanned hydrocarbon release (oil spill) scenarios resulting from a vessel collision.

The EMBA has been defined through combining multiple oil spill model simulations for the unplanned release scenario under different weather and ocean conditions. This means that in the highly unlikely event an unplanned release does occur, a geographical area much smaller than the EMBA would be affected.

The majority of the potential environmental impacts and risks arising from planned activities would occur within, or within proximity of, the OAs. Chevron Australia has systematic control measures to prevent and mitigate emergencies and to reduce the impact of planned activities on the environment, including ecological, social and cultural sensitivities.



### we want to hear from you

We are now seeking feedback and input if you consider your functions, interests, or activities may be affected. This may include Traditional Owners and Custodians with a spiritual and cultural connection to land and sea Country, local community members, and those involved in commercial or recreational fishing and tourism.

Please contact us by **10 April 2026** to be included in consultations. Visit [australia.chevron.com/feedback](https://australia.chevron.com/feedback), call tollfree on **1800 225 195** or scan the QR code for more information.



# It takes a village to help girls & women

REBEKAH RASMUSSEN

Samoa has taken its village-based approach to justice for women and girls to the global stage, outlining how community leadership, national legislation and local investment are shaping support systems across the country.

The Pacific nation recently presented its approach during the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, where more than 50 countries shared national experiences on improving access to justice for women and girls.

Samoa used the forum to highlight how justice systems extend beyond formal courts and government institutions into villages and communities where

decisions affecting families are often made.

Samoa's Associate Minister for Women, Community and Social Development, Tilafono David Hunter, addressed the Ministerial Roundtable on *Access to Justice for All Women and Girls: Enablers and Barriers*, outlining Samoa's community-centred model.

Mr Hunter said Samoa's approach recognises the importance of ensuring justice systems are accessible within everyday community settings.

"Samoa recognises that justice must not only exist within courts and national institutions, but must also be accessible within the villages and communities where women live and where decisions affecting families are made," he said.

The approach combines



Samoa at the United Nations forum. Picture: Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa

national legislation, traditional leadership and community governance structures to strengthen support and protection for women and girls.

A legal framework supporting this work is the *Family Safety Act 2013*, which provides protection orders and co-ordinated responses from police, courts and social services for survivors of domestic violence.

The District Development Program allocates funding directly to districts to support locally identified priorities.

Through this program, 20 per cent of district development funding is dedicated to Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion initiatives.

This represents approximately 10.2 million Tala annually for community-led initiatives supporting violence prevention,

inclusive participation and safer communities.

Another central initiative is the Village Representatives Program, where each village has both a female and male representative who serve as trusted links between communities and government services. These representatives assist families in accessing legal awareness programs, support services and other government assistance.

Collaboration between village councils, traditional leaders, civil society organisations and community advocates also strengthens prevention and response efforts.

These partnerships extend services beyond formal institutions by providing legal awareness initiatives, legal aid support and psychosocial services for survivors of violence,

and those living with disabilities. Mr Hunter said these initiatives are helping strengthen a whole-of-society response to preventing violence and improving access to justice.

Samoa's participation at the UN forum also included the delivery of the country's official statement by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Mulipola Anarosa Molioo, which focused on justice, inclusive governance and stronger protections for women, children and families.

"Around the world today, millions of women and girls still ask a simple question: Will justice reach me?" she said.

"Justice must not exist only in law. It must be visible in our communities, supported by policy, and strengthened through deliberate national action."

## Strength of generations central to nation's story

OPINION  
SHEYENNE VON SENDEN

Every March we celebrate Women's History Month which is a time to recognise the pioneering women who have shaped our societies.

Across Australia we see many well-deserved tributes to women who have blazed trails, who have pushed for change and broken barriers in politics, business, academia and sport. But if Women's History Month is truly about recognising the women who have shaped this country, then Australia's First Nations women must be at the centre of that conversation.

For generations, First Nations women have carried families and communities through some of the most difficult chapters of Australia's history. They have been knowledge holders, carers, leaders and advocates. Many were exploited and pushed into physically demanding labour, working in roles traditionally reserved for men and demonstrating the strength, capability and endurance they held.

At the same time, they were navigating policies that fractured families and disrupted cultural connections. They experienced — and continue to experience — racism, discrimination and systems that were never

designed for them. Despite this, many First Nations women continued the work of holding communities together and passing on knowledge wherever and however they could. Yet their contributions remain largely absent from the mainstream story of women's leadership in Australia. And still, they led.

That resilience was shaped through survival. They raised children and grandchildren while re-learning or holding onto culture and identity. They passed down language, knowledge and values where they could. They advocated for their communities long before governments or institutions were ready to listen.

Much of this leadership never appeared in newspapers or history books. It happened around kitchen tables over cups of tea, on verandas, on riverbanks and around campfires. It happened through caring for family, supporting community, and holding onto culture and identity despite generations of policies designed to break those connections.

Across Australia, First Nations women have also played critical roles in major social and political movements. Many of the advances we see today in areas such as land rights, community-controlled health services and education have

been shaped by the advocacy and leadership of First Nations women.

At the same time, we should be careful not to romanticise this resilience. Too often First Nations women are praised for being 'strong' without acknowledging why that strength was required in the first place. Strength has often been a response to systems that made survival harder than it should ever have been.

Women's History Month should be an opportunity to broaden the stories we tell about women's leadership in this country. Because First Nations women have always been leaders, whether or not institutions chose to recognise it. Their leadership exists in the protection of culture, the raising of generations, the defence of community and the ongoing fight for justice.

If we are serious about recognising the women who have shaped this country, then the strength and leadership of Australia's First Nations women must sit at the centre of that story. This piece is for the many strong First Nations women whose strength and resilience live on through generations.

**Sheyenne Von Senden is a First Nations social worker and lecturer in the Northern Territory whose work focuses on colonisation, decolonisation and culturally responsive social work practice.**



Sheyenne Von Senden's mum and nana.

# Caution on the way to Treaty

SEAN GORDON

Recently the New South Wales Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, David Harris, stated in Parliament that Aboriginal people in NSW may not yet be ready to progress a Treaty.

There may be some truth in that observation.

NSW Treaty Commissioner Naomi Moran has rightly pointed out in response many Aboriginal communities across NSW are still having important conversations among themselves about Treaty, conversations about sovereignty, land, governance and what justice should look like. Those are profound discussions and they must be led by Aboriginal people themselves, not rushed by political timelines.

But if Aboriginal communities feel cautious or uncertain, we must also ask why. The responsibility does not sit with Aboriginal people alone. It sits equally, and in many respects more heavily, with successive NSW governments.

We do not need to look far back in our history to see this.

In 1983 the NSW Parliament passed the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, landmark legislation intended to provide a form of compensation for historic dispossession by returning land to Aboriginal ownership through the land

council system. More than four decades later, much of the promise of that legislation remains unrealised.

Today there are around 60,000 unresolved land claims across NSW. At the current rate of approximately 500 claims processed each year, it would take well over a century to resolve them. The estimated cost to settle these claims is around \$600 million.

This is not a failure of Aboriginal communities. It is a failure of government.

In 2019 the NSW Government introduced the State Environmental Planning Policy (Aboriginal Land), a reform I had advocated for over nearly a decade while serving as CEO of the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council.

The intent of the policy was clear: to help unlock the economic and social potential of Aboriginal-owned land by creating a planning pathway that recognised the unique status of land returned under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

It was meant to remove barriers, not create new ones. Yet today the SEPP-Aboriginal Land sits largely stalled in a bureaucratic quagmire.

Instead of enabling Aboriginal landowners to activate their land for housing, economic development and community benefit, the policy has become entangled in slow planning processes,

inconsistent application across agencies and a lack of co-ordinated government commitment to make it work.

This again illustrates a broader pattern.

Governments often announce reforms designed to empower Aboriginal communities, but too often fail to follow through with the practical implementation required to make those reforms meaningful.

Until governments demonstrate the capacity and commitment to deliver on the policies they have already created, it is hardly surprising that many Aboriginal people approach the idea of Treaty with caution.

Successive governments have failed to implement the legislative, planning and policy reforms needed to unlock the economic and social potential of Aboriginal-owned land. Instead, complex planning systems, slow claim processes and bureaucratic inertia continue to restrict the benefits that were originally intended under the Act.

The complexity only deepened following the recognition of Native Title after the landmark High Court decision in *Mabo v Queensland (No.2)* and the introduction of the Native Title Act 1993.

In NSW, Native Title and Land Rights can intersect in ways that require Native Title



Indigenous business leader Sean Gordon at Uluru in 2017. Picture: AAP

to be extinguished before land councils can fully activate land for economic development. At the same time, the slow progress of Native Title determinations across the State continues to create uncertainty and frustration for Aboriginal communities seeking clarity over their land rights.

Layered on top of this was the NSW Government's Local Decision Making initiative, a policy that promised community empowerment but ultimately lacked the sustained authority, structural reform and long-term commitment required to genuinely support local Aboriginal governance.

When viewed together, these realities help explain why many Aboriginal people across NSW approach the idea of Treaty with caution.

Too often what has been offered by governments has been piecemeal reform, commitments made without the long-term political will required to deliver

genuine self-determination.

So, while it is true that Aboriginal people must take the time to talk with each other about Treaty, as Commissioner Moran has outlined, governments must also reflect on their own role in creating the conditions that have led to this caution.

If governments are serious about Treaty, the first question should not be whether Aboriginal people are ready.

The first question is whether government is ready.

Ready to resolve the unfinished business of Land Rights and Native Title.

Ready to honour past commitments.

And ready to genuinely empower Aboriginal people to determine their own futures.

**Mr Sean Gordon AM, a proud Wangkumarra and Barkindji man, is the CEO of Yadha Muru Foundation and an adviser to the Commonwealth Bank, Woolworths, Steadfast and the Insurance Council of Australia.**

## Procurement ripe for Black-cladding exploitation

HANNAH MCGLADE

According to a recent report of Supply Nation launched in Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia accounted for \$2.1 billion in Indigenous procurement spend, representing 36 per cent of total national spend with Supply Nation suppliers.

You might think this would mean good news for our State; increased Aboriginal employment opportunities and Aboriginal wealth surely would improve the dire situation we see in relation to Aboriginal inequality. But that's simply not the case.

Black-cladding, the practice where so-called "Aboriginal" companies are largely operating as white businesses, is widespread.

Very often, companies promoted as successful Aboriginal businesses have superficial commitment to social impact and are absent in Aboriginal community life.

Clearly the Indigenous procurement policy has grown some genuine Aboriginal businesses (and individual wealth) in the for-profit sector, but isn't it time for government to turn its attention to growing the

community-owned enterprise sector where profits will be invested back into the community? The very same issues I saw first-hand as a youth social justice activist in the 1980s and working for the WA Aboriginal Media Association continue to affect communities today.

Aboriginal incarceration, deaths in custody, violence against women, child removals, suicides and destruction of sacred lands are all pressing issues, along with the crisis of methamphetamine addiction blighting families' lives.

It's shocking, even with so many Noongar kids being removed today, where addictions and family violence are present, we have no on-Country Healing centres to turn this around.

Economic empowerment advocates simply don't engage in the lived experiences of so many Aboriginal people, particularly the urban dispossessed. These policies are avoiding necessary public scrutiny even though the promise that this wealth will "trickle down" to the people is highly questionable.

Take the recent sale of Indigenous Land and Sea

Council subsidiary Voyages Indigenous Tourism, which included the Ayers Rock Resort and Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre in Far North Queensland, to an American private equity firm.

It was painted as a win-win for the ILSC even though it barely recouped the costs of having purchased Ayers Rock Resort for a sum way above its market valuation at the time, and it is estimated the accumulated net loss over the 15 years of ILSC ownership was just under \$101 million and the accumulated capital expenditure on the asset over the period was \$250.5m.

These funds were supposed to be used to buy land for Aboriginal people whose native title was extinguished under the Native Title Act. This loss of land reparations to many dispossessed people is shocking, to say the least.

We now know from the ANAO \$70b in Commonwealth exemptions were granted by the National Indigenous Australians Agency so Commonwealth departments can avoid using Indigenous businesses. And yet still we're supposed to believe the Indigenous procurement policy is changing Aboriginal

lives. The Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations is tasked with ensuring integrity, yet it also relies on people's self-identification of Aboriginality, when we know this kind of "honour system" routinely leads to fraud and exploitation. It has in Australia and in Canada, which recently saw 2000 "Aboriginal businesses" removed from the Indigenous business registry in the face of widespread concerns.

According to Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Federal Government's commitment includes extending and strengthening the IPP with \$23.9m over five years from 2024-25, to boost opportunities for First Nations businesses to grow and create jobs.

Under new criteria, businesses must show they are at least 51 per cent First Nations owned *and controlled* (or registered with ORIC) to access Commonwealth IPP contracts.

Additionally, the Government will work with regulators to identify opportunities to improve mechanisms to report Black-

cladding. Ultimately, none of this goes far enough to address Black-cladding and fraud.

Aboriginal nations must be empowered to determine who is recognised as Aboriginal according to the three-part Aboriginal identity test set out in the High Court's *Mabo* decision (1992) and accepted in policy for decades.

And we need a clear requirement of social impact on the part of Aboriginal businesses to Aboriginal communities they claim to be a part of. It's not too much to ask. After all, they are the reason for this system of government/taxpayer/corporate supported program of business opportunity through the IPP and other Reconciliation promises.

The alternative — the status quo — means the growing divide between a minority of people benefiting from individual wealth creation and the majority who have not, and whose lives continue to endure the systemic failure of the country's commitment to genuine racial equality and human rights.

**Dr Hannah McGlade is a Kurin Minang human rights expert and law academic.**

## Economic inclusion the missing driver in growing gap

OPINION REECE HARLEY

Five years into the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the national data points to uneven and fragile progress. Of the targets with sufficient data to assess, only a small number are on track, while several are either improving too slowly, showing no change, or worsening.

The emerging picture is of a framework constrained by structural weakness. Outcomes linked to economic security are not yet strong enough to anchor progress across the system.

Employment outcomes illustrate both the potential and the limits of current settings. Nationally, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed increased between the 2016 baseline and the 2021 census, and the Productivity Commission assesses the employment target as on track nationally. At the same time, the data shows uneven outcomes by remoteness, with employment participation worsening in remote and very remote areas. This unevenness matters, because employment and income security sit upstream of many of the targets that continue to deteriorate.

Those downstream indicators are stark. The commission reports that adult incarceration rates, child removal into out-of-home care, children's developmental outcomes at school entry, and suicide rates are all worsening nationally. These outcomes are not isolated failures. They reflect pressures on families and communities that are closely associated with economic insecurity, housing stress and limited access to stable employment.

The policy architecture of the national agreement recognises these interconnections. Economic participation, employment and community-controlled development are embedded across multiple targets and priority reforms.

The Indigenous economy itself is not marginal. The Productivity Commission draws on national Indigenous business data showing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses make a substantial contribution to the Australian economy, employ a large workforce, and pay billions of dollars in wages annually. The commission also highlights evidence that Indigenous businesses are significantly more likely to employ Indigenous people than non-Indigenous firms. This is not incidental. It is structural.

The commission's reporting underscores that national averages conceal deep variation. Outcomes worsen with remoteness across multiple targets, including employment, incarceration and child protection. These are precisely the settings where local economies are thinner, labour markets are weaker, and Indigenous-owned enterprises can play an outsized role in creating employment and retaining wealth locally.

Without stronger economic engines in these places, progress elsewhere is unlikely to compensate.



Yolngu businessman Nathan Djerrkura.

# Tourism dreams set to come to life

PHOEBE BLOGG

Yolngu man Nathan Djerrkura is following his dream to operate an eco-tourism venture.

Mr Djerrkura grew up at Buymarr Homeland, a small beach community near Nhulunbuy, in north-east Arnhem Land, where he is creating new economic opportunities for his family and community.

He recently completed a MAR20324 Certificate II in Maritime Operations (Coxswain Grade 1 Near Coastal) through Charles Darwin University (CDU) TAFE.

The accreditation, alongside funding support from National Indigenous Australians Agency to purchase a fishing vessel, will see the family business,

Buymarr Getaways, launch the first Yolngu-owned and operated fishing charter in the region.

Mr Djerrkura said the process of launching a remote tourism business has seen its challenges — but is well worth the effort.

"I can see my family's vision coming together," he said.

"When my father, Gatjil Djerrkura OAM, established Buymarr in 1985, he had a dream to develop opportunities to allow family members to live and work on their country.

"By building our capability through training and development, and ventures such as Buymarr Getaways, I'm excited to share Yolngu culture with visitors to East Arnhem Land while supporting my family's

aspirations to create opportunities to live and work on Country full time."

With the new vessel and certification, Mr Djerrkura and his family will launch Buymarr Getaways Fishing Charters this year, operating tours at Buymarr homeland.

He said having the opportunity to study locally through CDU is exactly what the region needs. "The CDU staff here know the community and ensure they are offering courses that are in demand and meet the needs of our community," Mr Djerrkura said.

"We live regionally and remotely, studying here helps cut travel costs and supports skills development and training needs of the region.

"I am looking forward to supporting other people in our community and my family by ensuring they also get the training they need to help run their business' and support our communities by upskilling their knowledge and experience."

CDU associate vice-chancellor East Arnhem Region Alice Doyle said this highlights the importance of the university being embedded in the region.

"CDU can support existing business and new business like Buymarr Getaways to become established by offering the necessary training," Ms Doyle said.

A second cohort of maritime students begin training in Nhulunbuy this month.

## Ochre Ventures fills longstanding space

GIOVANNI TORRE

Ochre Ventures, Australia's first specialist venture capital fund dedicated to First Nations entrepreneurship, is working to address a longstanding gap in the Indigenous business landscape, with a \$100 million funding target and a growing portfolio of high-impact investments.

Venture analyst and proud Dhungatti man Aidan Devitt said the fund was established to tackle the "missing middle" in business finance.

"We feel like venture capital is very important to meet that missing middle," Mr Devitt told

Indigenous Business Review.

"We have a lot of our people who can access grants to help them start their business, and those grants play an important role early on. At the other end of the scale, banks come in once there is sufficient revenue and collateral. But between those two points, there is a real gap."

That gap, he said, often emerged once a business had outgrown grant funding but was not yet in a position to secure traditional debt finance.

"That's where we come in," Mr Devitt said. "We provide access to equity capital. In return, we take a minority stake and then work alongside the

business to grow and scale its value."

As of December, Ochre Ventures had made five investments, including follow-on investments in two portfolio companies where growth has accelerated.

"We can see the traction," Mr Devitt said. "They've gone through a growth spurt, their market positioning has improved, and we get really excited about their prospects."

One of those investments is Cooee Cookies, founded by Terri-Anne Daniel.

"She started from something very simple, sharing an allergen-free Christmas cake recipe on Facebook," Mr Devitt

said. "A local IGA asked for 50 cakes, and from there she identified a real opportunity. Today, her business has diversified into pet foods and secured customers like Qantas. "What I'd like to see is more founders like Tezzi, where we can provide capital and expertise, build strong businesses, and create role models for our people."

Ochre Ventures is now actively seeking Indigenous founders and aligned investors, including governments and philanthropists. "Providing access to the right kind of capital at the right time is critical if we're serious about growing the Indigenous business sector," Mr Devitt said.

# Indigenous people face racism at work

DECHLAN BRENNAN

More than half of Indigenous employees continue to face race-based comments and assumptions at work, new research shows.

The findings, published March 11, came less than a week after the Federal Government announced an inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at First Peoples, which will examine the nature, scale and impact of racism targeting Indigenous people, including systemic racism, the influence of online platforms, and measures designed to prevent and respond to discrimination.

The data from the Centre for Indigenous People and Work (CIPW) at the University of Technology Sydney, published under Gari Yala 2 (Speak The Truth) and released on Wednesday, found 60 per cent of Indigenous employees experience racism in Australian workplaces.

In a survey of more than 1100 Indigenous people, only 40 per cent said their workplace was culturally safe. A quarter described their workplace as culturally unsafe, while 35 per

cent said it was only moderately safe.

Earlier, Professor Nareen Young, director of CIPW, had called on the Government to ensure the Senate inquiry included racism in the workplace. On March 11, she said the data from Gari Yala 2 showed that although there had been some improvement since the first report in 2020, "racism and lack of cultural safety remain widespread".

Some indicators have improved. More employees now feel safe to share their identity — 79 per cent in 2026 compared with 72 per cent in 2020 — and seven of nine forms of racism have eased slightly, declining by between 0.4 and 1 per cent per year.

However, several key measures show little or no progress. These include unfair treatment (38 per cent in both years), high cultural load (63 per cent compared with 64 per cent), and the fact that only 21 per cent of workplaces offer both anti-racism training and formal complaint processes.

Without further policy or legislative change, it could take another 118 years for Indigenous

workers never to hear racial slurs and jokes at work, Professor Young said.

"The increasing numbers of our mob in work where they had previously been excluded from employment market participation has been a great achievement but these workplaces need to be made safe. No one should have to suffer vilification and ridicule as part of their conditions of employment."

Gari Yala 2 was backed by the NAB Foundation. Head of First Nations affairs at NAB, Samantha Webster, said the research and report showed the "power of listening to lived experiences, backing it up with strong data to help people feel safe, respected, and able to contribute fully at work".

"Trust grows when First Nations peoples can see their experiences reflected," she said.

"The research builds credibility in the system and gives leaders clear evidence to act on, not just good intentions."

Earlier this month, Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee chair, Senator Jana Stewart, said First Nations people in Australia

"deserve to live free from racism, hate and violence".

"This inquiry is an important opportunity to understand the nature, prevalence and impact of racism in our communities and to identify practical actions for combatting racism and reducing individual and collective harm," the Mutthi Mutthi and Wamba Wamba woman said.

"If we are serious about community safety, we must confront the environment in which hatred grows."

The survey found some of the most effective actions for addressing workplace racism were among the least commonly used, including recognising Indigenous dates of significance.

However, Professor Young said these actions were less strongly associated with lower levels of racism than measures focused on internal policies and procedures.

Instead, she claimed organisations appeared more comfortable investing in actions that signal a commitment to change rather than undertaking deeper reforms to internal systems and workplace culture.

## Bush food knowledge protection

JACKSON CLARK

Aboriginal leaders and researchers are calling for stronger protections to ensure Indigenous people have greater control over traditional foods and the knowledge connected to them.

The push was outlined in an Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health piece by six Aboriginal academics and one non-Indigenous researcher with expertise in bush foods, traditional Indigenous medicines, policy and law.

As Australia's native food industry continues to grow, the authors argue First Nations people must have a genuine say in how native foods are accessed, used and commercialised, while also sharing more fairly in the benefits.

Lead author Dr Luke Williams, a Gumbaynggirr man and University of Queensland researcher, said native plants remain deeply connected to Aboriginal identity, health and culture.

The authors are calling for laws to ban misleading Indigenous branding, the creation of a certification mark for genuine Indigenous products, an Indigenous-led national industry body, and regional hubs to support local bush food businesses.

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# Beauty from the bush

## PHOEBE BLOGG

Yaye — a 100 per cent Aboriginal-owned bath and skincare brand which incorporates traditional bush medicines into its products — was announced this month as the winner of Power Retail's inaugural Top First Nations Small Business Award.

Held as part of the 11th annual All Star Bash at Melbourne's Crown Palladium on March 12, the award presentation brought together the country's leading retailers to celebrate innovation, performance, and industry leadership.

This year marked a significant milestone with the introduction of the new First Nations category, developed in partnership with Aboriginal Retail Australia, which recognises the growing impact of First Nations-led businesses in Australia's retail sector.

The award was created to champion First Nations-led enterprises which are achieving both commercial success and meaningful community impact through e-commerce and modern retail.

Darwin-based Yaye was recognised for its strong e-commerce growth and use of traditional bush medicines in modern retail products.

Founder Melissa Cole said she felt incredibly honoured to have won.

"Through Yaye, we're sharing the power of native Australian botanicals and bush medicines through premium skincare and amenities, while creating opportunities for First Nations businesses across retail and procurement," she said.

Aboriginal Retail Australia chair Liz Liddle said the award



Yaye founder Melissa Cole accepts Power Retail's inaugural Top First Nations Small Business Award.



represents an important step forward for recognition within the sector.

"The Top First Nations Small Business Award sets a new

benchmark for inclusion and recognition across the retail sector," she said.

"For the first time, First Nations retailers are being recognised through an industry award that acknowledges the contribution and entrepreneurship of First Nations brands. Celebrating First Nations retailers alongside Australia's leading brands helps drive opportunity."

Ms Liddle said Yaye stood out for its strong growth and commitment to developing its e-commerce capabilities while expanding wholesale opportunities over the past 12 months.

The category attracted a strong group of finalists representing a diverse range of First Nations-led brands across Australia, including Clothing The Gaps, Gardening on Country, Kakadu Organics, Melbourne

Jerky, Songlines and Yaala Sparkling, as well as Yaye.

"This new category reflects the evolving retail landscape and our commitment to highlighting diverse businesses that are shaping the future of Australian e-commerce," Power Retail founder Grant Arnott said. "We were honoured to present this award to Yaye and can't wait to see how their business continues to evolve."

## Carbon & nature repair forum focus

### CALLAN MORSE

Indigenous carbon project delivered a powerful industry statement at last month's 2nd annual National Indigenous Carbon Forum.

Hosted by the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network (ICIN), the Forum combined with the 8th Savanna Fire Forum, held late last month in Larrakia Country in Darwin.

At the event, the ICIN called for greater support for Indigenous-led carbon and nature repair market method development, an Indigenous-led carbon project start-up fund, and greater recognition of the right of Indigenous communities to free, prior and informed consent of a carbon project.

MC Stan Grant guided participants through the three-day event under the theme 'Strong Roots, Strong Futures'.

"It's really inspiring for me, I feel more optimistic whenever I'm at conferences like this," he said.

ICIN co-chair and Jaru/Kija woman, Cissy Gore-Birch opened the forum, saying Indigenous carbon projects are creating many new employment opportunities for mob working on Country.

"They support our Old People, our Elders, to hand down traditional fire knowledge down to next generations and provide an opportunity to reconnect with Country," Ms Gore-Birch said.

Ms Gore-Birch said the event's theme, 'Strong Roots, Strong Futures' reflected in the ICIN's evolution.

The organisation, which started with one 0.6 co-ordinator in 2018, has grown to include 35 member organisations supported by six staff nationwide.

"We hold a space for informing Indigenous-led discussions about critical policy developments, led by our members," Ms Gore-Birch said.

"We can't do this on our own, so we need our allies to work alongside us.



ICIN director Sarah Parriman speaks at the second National Indigenous Carbon Forum alongside ICIN co-chairs Cissy Gore-Birch and Dean Yibarbuk and ICIN directors Suzanne Thompson and Tristin Maroney.

"We are working at the interface of western policy and science and our own cultural systems.

"We have come together to be the leaders in this space."

Political figures attending the Forum included Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarn-dirri McCarthy and the Assistant Minister for Climate Change and Energy and Assistant Minister for Emergency Management, Josh Wilson.

In her address, Senator McCarthy said ICIN's leadership in hosting these forums was central to building a strong, informed and connected carbon industry.

"These events create opportunities to come together, share experiences, learn and influence the direction of the sector," she said.

"You are shaping its future and ensuring that traditional knowledge remains at the heart

of that future. Your communities are showing world-leading climate solutions through connection to Country.

In his keynote address, Mr Wilson said an announcement would be made in the coming months regarding new savanna fire management methods.

"This year we intend to settle the legislative scheme reforms that respond to the Chubb Review," he said.

# Choctaws raise the bar

REECE HARLEY

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma generated an estimated \$US4.1 billion in economic impact in 2023, supporting nearly 27,000 jobs across the State, according to newly released figures.

The analysis, compiled as part of the nation's regular economic reporting, illustrates the scale at which modern tribal enterprises operate, combining government services, commercial businesses and large employment bases that extend far beyond their own citizens.

For the Choctaw Nation, the numbers reflect a broad economic ecosystem that includes gaming, hospitality, health care, retail, construction, professional services and community programs in south-eastern Oklahoma.

Together, these activities are estimated to support 26,847 jobs Statewide.

Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton said the figures demonstrated the nation's role not only as a government serving its citi-

zens, but as a major economic driver for the wider region.

"Every job created and every dollar spent reflects our commitment to building opportunities for our tribal members and strengthening the communities where we operate," Chief Batton said.

The Choctaw Nation is one of the largest federally recognised tribes in the US, with more than 230,000 enrolled citizens, and operates one of the country's most extensive tribal business portfolios.

Its business operations include Choctaw Casinos & Resorts, which has grown into a major hospitality and tourism network in Oklahoma.

While gaming remains an important pillar of many tribal economies in the US, tribes such as the Choctaw Nation have increasingly diversified their economic strategies.

Today, Choctaw enterprises span sectors including manufacturing, information technology, defence contracting, construction and professional services, in

addition to tourism and hospital-ity.

The economic impact study found tribal spending flowed widely across the State economy, supporting suppliers, small businesses and contractors in multiple industries.

For many observers, the scale of the Choctaw Nation's economic footprint highlights the potential of Indigenous-led economic development when supported by strong governance, long-term planning, and sovereign rights.

In the US, tribal governments operate under a framework of tribal sovereignty, allowing them to establish enterprises, negotiate commercial partnerships, and operate government services for their citizens.

This framework has enabled several tribal nations to build substantial economic bases over the past three decades.

Economic development strategies increasingly focus on diversification, long-term asset creation, and employment pathways.

The Choctaw Nation's eco-

nomie results are also attracting attention internationally, particularly among Indigenous organisations exploring models for economic self-determination.

In Australia, Canada and Aotearoa/New Zealand, Indigenous economic development has accelerated through land rights agreements, native title settlements and Indigenous procurement policies. However, few Indigenous nations outside the US have yet reached the scale of commercial activity of the major American tribal enterprises.

Choctaw Nation leaders say the economic impact figures ultimately translate into investments in housing, health care, education, and cultural programs for their citizens.

Revenue generated through tribal enterprises helps fund public services across the Choctaw Nation's jurisdiction in south-eastern Oklahoma, including workforce development programs, health care, youth initiatives and infrastructure development.

For Chief Batton, the results

reflect a long-term strategy centred on community prosperity.

"Our success is measured not just in economic numbers, but in the opportunities we create for our people and the strength of our communities," he said.

For international observers of Indigenous economic development, the Choctaw Nation's \$US4.1b impact offers a striking example of the economic scale Indigenous governments can achieve. Tribal economies in the US continue to provide some of the most advanced examples of Indigenous-led commercial development in the world.

In many regions, they are becoming central drivers of regional development.

The Choctaw people are one of the original Indigenous nations of the south-eastern US, with ancestral homelands across what are now Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana.

Long before European arrival, the Choctaw maintained complex political systems, agricultural economies and extensive trade networks throughout the region.



## 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	08/3747	MARDIE MINERALS PTY LTD	81BL	42.6km E'ly of Onslow	Lat: 21° 30' S Long: 115° 29' E	ASHBURTON SHIRE, KARRATHA CITY
Exploration Licence	15/2157	STEHN, Anthony Paterson	1BL	93km NE'ly of Southern Cross	Lat: 30° 47' S Long: 120° 9' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Exploration Licence	16/646	PRITAM GOLD PTY LTD	1BL	29.1km SW'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 29' S Long: 120° 47' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Exploration Licence	29/1262	MT IDA LITHIUM PTY LTD	10BL	99.2km W'ly of Leonora	Lat: 28° 46' S Long: 120° 19' E	MENZIES SHIRE
Exploration Licence	63/2549	FORRESTANIA RESOURCES LIMITED	30BL	112.1km SE'ly of Marvel Loch	Lat: 32° 7' S Long: 120° 23' E	DUNDAS SHIRE
Exploration Licence	70/6771	FLEET STREET HOLDINGS PTY LTD	19BL	35.8km N'ly of Mukinbudin	Lat: 30° 35' S Long: 118° 7' E	MOUNT MARSHALL SHIRE, MUKINBUDIN SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3226	GOLDEN HORSE MINERALS (AUST) PTY LTD	26BL	13.1km W'ly of Marvel Loch	Lat: 31° 27' S Long: 119° 21' E	YILGARN SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3230	GOLDEN HORSE MINERALS (AUST) PTY LTD	8BL	6.4km SW'ly of Southern Cross	Lat: 31° 16' S Long: 119° 17' E	YILGARN SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3299	STRANGE, Vernon Wesley	2BL	149.3km W'ly of Menzies	Lat: 29° 36' S Long: 119° 30' E	MENZIES SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3300	STRANGE, Vernon Wesley	1BL	148.2km W'ly of Menzies	Lat: 29° 39' S Long: 119° 30' E	MENZIES SHIRE
Exploration Licence	77/3301	STRANGE, Vernon Wesley	1BL	149.8km W'ly of Menzies	Lat: 29° 40' S Long: 119° 29' E	MENZIES SHIRE
Exploration Licence	80/6195	GOLDEN PEAK RESOURCES PTY LTD	15BL	21.5km S'ly of Halls Creek	Lat: 18° 25' S Long: 127° 42' E	HALLS CREEK SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3572	RAMSAY, Paul Brian	9.99HA	27.7km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 37' S Long: 121° 4' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3573	RAMSAY, Paul Brian	9.99HA	25.9km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 36' S Long: 121° 3' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3574	DE LA MONTAGNE, Queenie Kathryn	9.99HA	27.5km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 36' S Long: 121° 4' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3575	DE LA MONTAGNE, Queenie Kathryn	9.99HA	25.6km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 35' S Long: 121° 3' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3576	DE LA MONTAGNE, Queenie Kathryn	199.38HA	24.3km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 35' S Long: 121° 4' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	24/5712	BONNEY, Derek Neil	195.52HA	4.3km W'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 26' S Long: 121° 16' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	24/5947	ANNEEN PTY LTD	121.34HA	22.6km N'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 14' S Long: 121° 16' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	24/5952	ANNEEN PTY LTD	110.62HA	24.6km N'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 13' S Long: 121° 16' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	24/5953	ANNEEN PTY LTD	109.35HA	23.5km N'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 14' S Long: 121° 16' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	24/5954	ANNEEN PTY LTD	187.89HA	21.8km N'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 15' S Long: 121° 16' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	24/5957	MORGAN, Glyn Thomas	110.26HA	25.6km NE'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 13' S Long: 121° 15' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	39/6556	FLEMING, Leo Glenn	198.92HA	28.4km W'ly of Laverton	Lat: 28° 39' S Long: 122° 6' E	LAVERTON SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	39/6557	FLEMING, Leo Glenn	199.75HA	27.6km W'ly of Laverton	Lat: 28° 38' S Long: 122° 7' E	LAVERTON SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	57/1558-S	BROWN, Lachlan James	9.82HA	13.2km SW'ly of Sandstone	Lat: 28° 3' S Long: 119° 11' E	SANDSTONE 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 March 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 June 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 July 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 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
Mining Lease	24/1023	FLEMING, Leo Glenn	11.49HA	4.3km SE'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 27' S Long: 121° 21' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Mining Lease	24/1024	FLEMING, Leo Glenn	6.40HA	14.1km SW'ly of Broad Arrow	Lat: 30° 30' S Long: 121° 11' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY

**Nature of the act:** Grant of mining leases, which authorises the applicant to mine for minerals for a term of 21 years from notification of grant and a right of renewal for 21 years. **Notification day: 11 March 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 June 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 tenements may be granted if, by the end of the period of 4 months after the notification day (i.e. **11 July 2026**), there is no native title party under section 30 of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) in relation to the area of the mining tenements. 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 77/25	749041	SALVATION GOLD PTY LTD	57.09HA	5.1km SE'ly of Marvel Loch	Lat 31° 29' 49" S Long 119° 31' 57" E	YILGARN SHIRE
M 77/26	747877	BARTO GOLD MINING PTY LTD	22.51HA	1.1km NE'ly of Marvel Loch	Lat 31° 27' 33" S Long 119° 29' 46" E	YILGARN SHIRE

**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 March 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 June 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 July 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.

Please Note - Not all Intention to Grant Notifications are published in the National Indigenous Times. For more information, please contact the Department above.

## School gets \$20m windfall

Woodside has committed \$20 million to support upgrades to the Roebourne District High School in WA's Pilbara region.

Chief executive at the time, Meg O'Neill, said funding was directed towards programs that deliver tangible benefits for the sustainability and liveability of the company's host communities.

"Our investment in the Roebourne District High School upgrades builds on our long-term commitment to positive regional education outcomes through the Karratha and Roebourne Education Initiative," she said. "The education of our young people in a culturally appropriate environment which sets them up for success was a key consideration in our decision to support the upgrade."

Woodside's contribution derives from a \$50 million commitment to the WA Government's Resources Community Investment Initiative (RCII) which will see \$20 million to the school upgrades over five years, subject to execution of the relevant project funding arrangements, and

\$30 million allocated to the Perth Concert Hall redevelopment and

That contribution followed the announcement of Woodside Anniversary Grants to 10 organisations from the City of Karratha. Worth up to \$100,000 each, the grants are designed to deliver positive outcomes and commemorate both Woodside's 70th anniversary, as well as four decades of operations in Karratha.

Newly appointed CEO Liz Westcott said Karratha is where Woodside's "Western Australia story began and we understand that being a part of the community is centred on developing strong relationships and making meaningful contributions".

"We have done this for 40 years and look forward to continue supporting projects and programs that provide local solutions to local challenges," she said.

In 2022, Woodside and its Joint Venture participants allocated additional funding of up to \$65 million over five years for regional community development in WA.

Together with Woodside's RCII commitment, the two investment streams total \$115 million.

Woodside Anniversary Grant recipients include: St John Ambulance WA to help purchase new ambulances and lifesaving equipment across its Karratha, Roebourne and Wickham operations; Yaandina Community Services for the installation of air-conditioning in its Roebourne residential detoxification facility; Yinjaa-Barni Art to support upgrades at its Roebourne art studio; the WA Centre for Rural Health to deliver a business case to support the development of a Centre for Applied Research and Education (CARE) hub in Karratha; Reach Us Pilbara for the purchase of equipment for its Karratha cancer support services centre; and Juluwarlu Group for the delivery of the Yindjibarndi Wellness pilot program for Jadas and Gurri.

Other beneficiaries include Karratha RSL for the installation of solar panels, battery storage and new air-conditioners; Pilbara for



Roebourne District High School chaplain Beth Smith, Roebourne District High School principal Liz Ritchie, now former CEO Meg O'Neill, WA Premier Roger Cook and Kevin Michel MLA.

Purpose to support the delivery of cultural competency training for community service providers; Karratha Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services to assist with the upgrade of storage facilities to support year-round storage of firefighting

equipment; and Dampier Community Association for the purchase of kitchen equipment to support the activation of the Dampier foreshore kiosk.

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

# Rising with the tides

DIANNE BORTOLETTO

The best tourism businesses deliver authentic experiences, creating memories that last long after the holiday ends. They come from a deeper place, a place of connection and stories.

It's how Rosanna Angus' business, Oolin Sunday Island Cultural Tours, was born, along with a desire to build a future for her people, create economic sovereignty and share what has always belonged to them.

Based in Cygnet Bay, north of Broome on Western Australia's Dampier Peninsula, Oolin Sunday Island Cultural Tours navigates the planet's largest tropical tides as it cruises through Jawi country, through King Sounds Middle Passage to Sunday Island, telling the story of the "Tide Drifters".

The history of Ewuny (Sunday Island) is little known. Originally a sea cucumber and pearling station relying on Aboriginal labour and Indigenous knowledge of the reefs, Sunday Island Mission was established in 1899 and closed in the early 1970s.

The tour follows the journey of Angus' ancestors in those pre-Mission days. On rafts made from mangrove wood, they would navigate the constant shifting waters and whirlpools metres wide to hunt for fish and trade on the mainland.

The tour ran aground before it set sail when the pandemic struck. In 2021, it started in earnest, and like the king tides, it keeps rising.

In 2023, Angus claimed gold in the Top Tour Guide category at the Australian Tourism Awards, a national accolade that's validated everything her business represents. "I love bringing people to Jawi country," Angus said.

"Aboriginal tourism is the top of the list of what visitors want to do when they come to WA.

"Tourism is not only a business opportunity but an oppor-



Rosanna Angus of Oolin Sunday Island Cultural Tours. Picture: Jarrad Seng

tunity to build relationships, network, create immersive experiences, build partnerships, bridge the gaps and provide a level of cultural understanding."

Angus is possibly one of the most over-qualified tourism business owners in the Indigenous tourism sector.

When she established herself as the Dampier Peninsula's first Indigenous female owner-operator guide, Angus held a Diploma in Primary Education and a Bachelor of Applied Science in Health Care Administration and Management. In December 2025, she completed an MBA from Adelaide University.

The eldest of six, the proud Bardi Jawi woman grew up in One Arm Point on the Dampier Peninsula, with an ingrained responsibility to care for her family. At 13, she was sent to boarding school in Perth, leav-

ing at 16 to return home and help Kooljaman (accommodation and camping) at Cape Leveque ready itself for tourism.

"The community decided they wanted tourism. There was 10 of us, and we'd jump on the tray back and go to work building paperbark cabins and doing landscaping, that sort of thing, I loved it," Angus recounted.

Closed since COVID, Kooljaman was Angus' first taste of tourism.

At 18, she became a single mum, and moved herself to Darwin with her baby to study and work. Since then, her career has spanned primary school teaching, healthcare and outreach work, and volunteer work. She's served on numerous councils, committees and boards, all as a single mother of three. Nowadays, she counts six grandchildren.

To Angus, individual success

means little without broader systemic change.

She served on the board of the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Council board from 2017 to 2023, an organisation created to support Indigenous tourism businesses. She has also been a corporate director of the Bardi and Jawi Prescribed Body since 2008, and a board member of the Kooljaman Land Aboriginal Corporation since 2007.

Angus sits on the current board of Tourism Western Australia where her expertise can help shape policy and strategy to grow authentic Aboriginal tourism.

"Tourism is the vehicle, an enabler, and business can be all shapes and forms in tourism," she said.

"We are bringing kids into the industry, some are not confident talking so we're showing them that there's opportunities to

work in the back end with marketing, for example."

A repeated theme throughout Angus' career is that she has never been satisfied with a single stream of impact.

In 2025, she launched Lanje, a skincare line she developed in partnership with Dr Pia Winberg at PhychoHealth and in collaboration Marine Bioproducts Cooperative Research Centre. Lanje products use pearl oyster, Kakadu plum and seaweed extracts sourced from Bardi and Jawi country.

Her entrepreneurship combines culture and commerce, tradition and innovation, and personal success and community benefit. She's building businesses that strengthen cultural practice and employ locals while attracting international acclaim. The tides that once carried her forebears continue to swell with new possibilities.

# State that leads the way

REECE HARLEY

Western Australia accounted for \$2.1 billion in Indigenous procurement spend in 2024-25, representing 36 per cent of total national spend with Supply Nation suppliers, according to a new report launched March 12 in Boorloo/Perth.

The report, State of Indigenous Business WA Insights, was launched at the Waalitj Hub in Lathlain by Supply Nation chief executive Kate Russell.

Ms Russell said the WA report builds on Supply Nation's national procurement data and focuses specifically on the opportunities and challenges facing Indigenous businesses in WA.

"Every year, Supply Nation launches our State of Indigenous Business Sector report, which looks at the national procurement trails, how much is being spent, where and by who," she said.

"That report found that last financial year, in 24-25, we set a new national record. It had over \$5.83 billion for contracts were spent between our members and our suppliers."

She said the WA report "dives deeper into that national data" and "looks specifically at the west coast".



Supply Nation CEO Kate Russell at the report's launch.

"It looks at the insights, the opportunities, and the challenges facing the west coast mob," Ms Russell said.

"It showcases some of the deadly local businesses, and it's our hope that it creates a real sense of pride and opportunity for Indigenous businesses."

The report states that Western Australia continues to play a critical role in Australia's Indigenous business ecosystem, with procurement activity in the state accounting for more

than a third of all national spend with Supply Nation suppliers in 2024-25.

Ms Russell said the findings confirmed the scale of WA's role.

"Thirty-six per cent of the national amount ... confirms that WA continues to play a critical role in Australia's Indigenous business sector."

The report identified mining as the dominant driver of Indigenous procurement in the State, accounting for about

\$1.1 billion in spend in 2024-25. It also found WA suppliers received more high-value contracts than any other State or Territory, with 306 transactions valued at more than \$1 million.

Another of the report's major findings is the strength of female-owned Indigenous businesses in Western Australia. The Supply Nation CEO said WA is the national leader for procurement with female-owned Indigenous businesses.

"They received a total of \$708 million worth of procurement spend, which is almost half all the spend with female-owned Indigenous suppliers," Ms Russell said.

The printed report states that female-owned Indigenous businesses received 73 per cent of WA's transactions over \$1 million, with the mining sector accounting for \$572m.

Ms Russell said that result reflected the growing economic influence of Aboriginal women in business.

"That's an incredible achievement, and it shows that Aboriginal women are having a profound impact and continuing to drive economic power, and the greater self-determination in the state, as they have done for generations," she said.

The report also points to ongoing structural barriers.

It states that small-to-medium-sized enterprises accounted for 87 per cent of total WA procurement spend, but that Supply Nation members showed a clear preference for suppliers with annual revenues above \$10m, suggesting smaller and younger businesses face barriers to accessing high-value opportunities.

It also highlights a geographic imbalance, with \$1.6b directed to city-based suppliers compared with \$546m to rural and remote businesses.

The report said procurement was more likely to flow to certified suppliers, reinforcing the importance of verification, building capability and broader participation across the sector.

Ms Russell said Supply Nation had increased its focus on WA in recent years, including reopening its State office and increasing staffing levels.

She said Supply Nation now has 84 members headquartered in Perth and 1,244 suppliers based in the State, and will bring its Connect event to Boorloo in August.

"There's a lot to celebrate in WA," she said. "There's also significant opportunities for increased contracts. Supply Nation is committed to showcasing and supporting the best in the west."

## Supporting the next generation.

### Challenge accepted.

In the Pilbara town of Roebourne, new facilities at Roebourne District High School are creating modern learning spaces where culture sits at the centre of education.

Woodside contributed A\$20 million to the school's redevelopment through the Resources Community Investment Initiative, building on long-term support for education through the Karratha and Roebourne Education Initiative.

The project includes new classrooms, science facilities, a library and a dedicated cultural hub supporting language and cultural programs.

Woodside continues supporting local organisations delivering health, cultural and community initiatives which support people across the Pilbara.



## New statue preserves NRL record in bronze

JARRED CROSS

Alex Johnston's eclipsing of the NRL's all-time try-scoring tally this month has taken a permanent place at Rabbitohs headquarters.

The First Nations and Papua New Guinean winger crossed over for his 213th NRL try seconds into the second half against the Roosters on March 13, edging past North Sydney and Manly great Ken Irvine's record, which had stood for half a century.

Last Monday a life-size bronze statue was unveiled in front of Rabbitohs' centre of excellence at the Heffron Centre in Maroubra.

Johnston thanked those involved in the "absolute honour", including Danny Taibell — whose donation brought the statue to fruition.

"The majority of my footy career has been overwhelmingly positive — the support I've gotten. But along the way, there's been a few fans that have s... on me. There's been a few coaches that have s... on me, the media s... on me. And now the pigeons can s... on me," Johnston joked.

Johnston has ended the season as the league's top try-scorer on four occasions.

It wasn't until recent seasons the prospect of beating Irvine's record crept into his mind, he said.

As well as Australian fans celebrating, "it's gone mad on the streets" of Papua New Guinea, Johnston has been informed, receiving a letter of congratulations from the nation's Prime Minister James Marape.

"That 10-20 seconds, I was on top of the world. It was the best feeling ever," Johnston said.

Speaking ahead of his record-breaking game, Johnston spoke to NRL.com about the possibility of creating history.

"For Indigenous people, Papua New Guinean people, young kids, hopefully it just gives them a little bit of inspiration to see someone like them breaking a record like this," he said.



Shanell Dargan shows off the new IBF International title belt with her close-knit crew, including her son Oryn. Picture: Huynh Ngoc Honh

# Fighter Dargan is on top of the world

ANDREW MATHIESON

An injury to Shanell Dargan's back had threatened to end her dream title fight, but the new world champion's spirit would not be denied.

The 32-year-old stunned Shannon O'Connell inside just two rounds for a technical knockout win for the vacant IBF International Bantamweight belt at The Star Sydney casino on 26 February.

The triumph skyrocketed Darnell up the world rankings of the top 10 fighters under the 54kg female weight category.

"To be honest, I was planning on a 10-round war," Dargan told National Indigenous Times. "I knew Shannon was

tough, but I just did everything right and I knew in my training how strong I felt and the power that I possessed could be too much for her to handle.

"On paper, I shouldn't have been able to beat her... but what I have internally inside of me is a will to win because I have been struggling my whole life and this was always going to help me get out of tough things I went through when I was younger."

Doubts on the main event were first raised three weeks out from the Wiradjuri and Mununjali woman's biggest fight of her career, straining the lumbosacral joint, the lowest and most crucial part of the spine that connects the last two

vertebrae. The joint acts as a major transitional point for transferring weight through the pelvis bone when throwing forward punches.

"I had a pretty bad injury when I pulled my L4, L5-S1 where I had to go to the physio like every second day to try and get it working," Dargan said.

"That was a bit scary, first because when I did my back, I could hardly walk and move, but just with perseverance and listening to my physio and to my body, I made sure that I did absolutely everything that was asked of me.

"I had to adapt with my training and accept things with my strength and conditioning, but I was able to get going again."

Dargan, who claimed a sixth straight win after just one victory in her first four professional contests which included two draws, has since won eight from the last nine times she has stepped between the ropes.

As Dargan received her title belt, she had her nine-year-old son, Oryn, close by, proudly holding up the Aboriginal flag. Dargan said the moment was about pride in their culture, but also a life lesson to inspire Oryn — a budding soccer junior — to seize his own dreams.

"People ask me 'what's your why' and I say my little boy... Without him, his love and my love for him, I wouldn't be where I am today."

Read the full story [www.nit.com.au](http://www.nit.com.au)

## Superbikes trailblazer feels he was born to ride

GIOVANNI TORRE

Young Noongar student Lauchy Williams is blazing a trail in motorsport.

At just 16, the Boorloo-based racer has become the youngest competitor in the 600cc Supersport class for the 2026 Australian Superbike Championship and the first Indigenous racer in ASBK history.

Lauchy's journey began on a CRF125 in his sister's backyard before evolving into a disciplined pursuit of elite performance. His development spans supermoto training, extensive track time, and rapid progression through junior and State categories. He is the first known Indigenous State champion road



Lauchy Williams will ride in the Australian Superbike Championship.

racer in Australian history, with major results including double WA state titles in the 150 Junior and 300 Production classes, a 150 Junior lap record at Collie

Motorplex, and podium finishes in the TERRA Darwin 600cc SuperSport Championship.

In 2025, supported by Onyabike Adventures and Mintox

Racing, he stepped on to a new Yamaha R6 and delivered immediate results.

"I feel as though I was born to race motorbikes. It's in my blood," Lauchy told National Indigenous Times.

"Racing for me is spiritual. I become one with the bike where nothing else matters. There's no other feeling like it.

"I am so happy that I have been able to win four State championships in the last two years. My ambition moving forward is to become the first Indigenous Australian Superbike Champion."

In 2026, Lauchy entered the national arena with Stop & Seal Racing for his debut ASBK season, marking a big moment

for youth and Indigenous representation in Australian motorsport.

Lauchy will compete across Australia's premier circuits as part of Stop & Seal Racing, the reigning No.1 team in the ASBK Supersport series, led by team boss Robbie Bolger.

He says his rise in the sport is driven by cultural pride, family influence, and thousands of hours of training.

With professional coaching, structured fitness programs, and the backing of Stop & Seal Racing, Lauchy is positioned not only to compete but to inspire.

"I would like my success to inspire all young Indigenous men and women to follow their dreams in life," Lauchy said.

## SPORT

# Legend loved by all

## Football great used his talent to inspire and help others

JARRED CROSS

A giant of football, the late Bill Dempsey, is being remembered as one of the greats on the field and a very special man off it, who touched countless lives.

Dempsey passed away aged 83 in Boorloo / Perth on March 15.

Respected widely in the game as a remarkable year-round footballer, he debuted at the top level as a teenager with Darwin Buffaloes in 1959 before joining WAFL club West Perth the following year. He spent most of his career in the west over winter and in the Territory through the summer months, in effect playing two seasons a year.

A member of the Stolen Generations, Dempsey rose to greatness and left a permanent mark on Australian sport.

He played close to 500 senior games, earning a best-and-fair-est and Simpson Medal at West Perth, captaining both West Perth and Darwin, and collecting six premierships split evenly between clubs in a near two-decade career between 1959 and 1976. His honours including inductions into the Australia Football, WA Football and AFLNT Halls of Fame — including as an inaugural legend in the Top End.

Born in the small town of Birdum, 500km south of Darwin, Dempsey carved a legendary legacy into footy. He was named in the Indigenous Team of the Century in 2005.

Dempsey's brother, John Paterson, told National Indigenous Times his brother was born under a tree and went on to achieve remarkable feats in football. Dr Paterson said his brother saw football as the vehicle he could use to make a difference in the lives of others.

"He'd rather help people get better housing, get a good education, get inmates out of prisons and hopefully on to a better life ... social justice and human rights passion was one of his other main drivers. Football was a vehicle that he used to get those stories out there," Dr Paterson said. "He wasn't looking for attention, the attention drew itself to him with all these achievements. He wouldn't want us to be sad and sombre. It's all about celebrating his life, and that's what we'll do."

"Off the field, he was very generous, kind-hearted. People warmed to him because they saw him as a mentor, a coach, a leader, somebody down to earth that they could go and have a yarn with," he



Graham 'Polly' Farmer and Bill Dempsey at West Perth.

Picture: The Farmer family

said. Dr Paterson noted players such as Maurice Rioli, Lyndsay McGuinness, Benny Vigona and Basil Campbell were among those Dempsey offered to guide as they entered the WAFL.

Dempsey even opened his doors to young players arriving in Boorloo/Perth. Dr Paterson described his brother as "generous, resilient, unselfish".

Darwin Buffaloes wrote: "From his early days in Darwin to the heights of the WAFL, Bill was a man of immense resilience, skill, and character. He leaves behind a legacy that will continue to inspire generations of players, particularly those following in his footsteps from the Top End."

His original club paid their respects to a man who had a "profound" impact on the game, and his family.

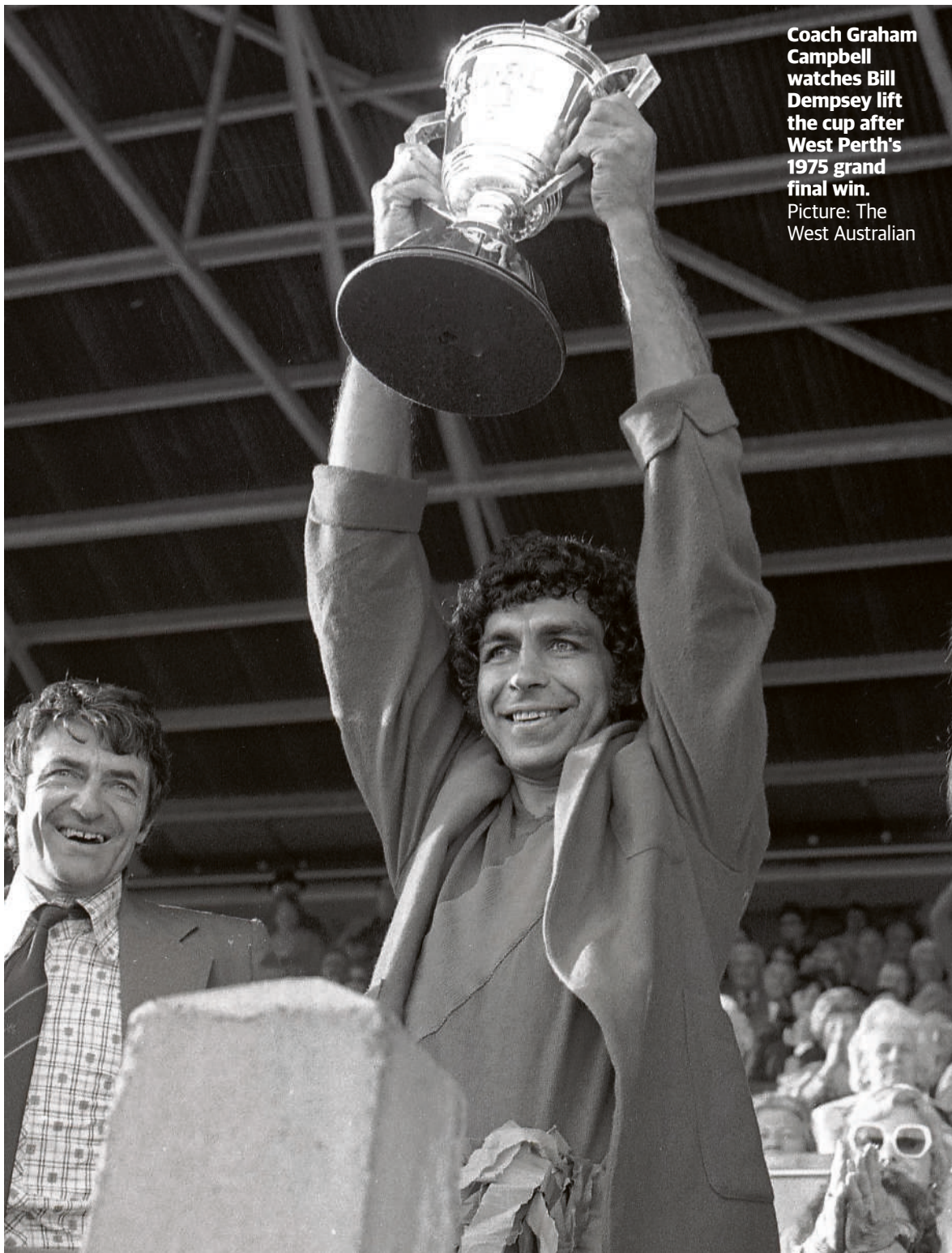
West Perth remembered Dempsey as "without question, one of the greatest players ever to wear the red and blue".

"On the field he was a warrior of the ruck and a rock in defence," the club wrote in an obituary. "Off the field he was something even greater—a man whose character defined what it meant to be part of the West Perth family."

Falcons president Jimmy Caffieri said: "In a world where sporting heroes can sometimes feel distant, Billy was the opposite — approachable, genuine, and deeply decent."

"Great footballers are remembered for what they did on the field. Truly great men are remembered for how they made people feel," he said.

"For those of us who had the privilege to know him, Uncle Billy will always be remembered as both. A champion of West Australian Football League football, a



Coach Graham Campbell watches Bill Dempsey lift the cup after West Perth's 1975 grand final win. Picture: The West Australian

cornerstone of the West Perth Football Club, and one of the most decent human beings you could ever hope to meet."

In 1968, Dempsey was joined at West Perth by fellow future Hall of Famer and Indigenous trailblazer Graham "Polly" Farmer, returning west from the VFL.

The pair's friendship carried on long after they hung up the boots.

Kim Farmer, Polly's daughter, told National Indigenous Times Dempsey was the patriarch of his family, and a much-loved man.

"People loved Bill," Ms Farmer said. She said anyone who approached him was greeted with warmth and a list of stories to tell.

"He's one of those people that made everyone feel special, and everyone feels like they've lost a really close friend."

Dempsey was also involved in the Polly Farmer Foundation, which works to empower and mentor Indigenous students through school.

His granddaughter is an alumni and tutor with the foundation.

"He believed in the pursuit of education for young Aboriginal people to succeed. Bill was very intrinsic in the foundation," Ms Farmer said.

The foundation described Dempsey as a "true giant of the game, a loyal friend, and a man of immense character" whose legacy will live on in those he inspires.

"Bill's impact on Australian football and the communities he represented was immense. His extraordinary career across Western Australia and the Northern Territory, his leadership on and off the field, and his role in paving the way for future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players will never be forgotten."

In 2022, Dempsey was the year's honouree for the AFL's Sir Doug Nicholls Round.

The AFL acknowledged Dempsey as a "trailblazer for stars coming to the game from the Northern Territory".

AFLNT chairman Sean Bowden said Dempsey was a person who made others' lives better and remains a beloved figure.