

Desert designs

STYLE UP **STARTS PAGE 9**



NIT

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS TIMES



Chairs of the four NT Land Councils Matthew Ryan, Warren Williams, Cherelle Wurrawilya, and Austin Wonaemirri. Picture: Anna Miers (Central Land Council)

'BASIC RIGHTS BEING DENIED'

DECHLAN BRENNAN

Call to make NT Govt accountable

The Northern Territory's four land councils have joined growing calls for the Federal Government to impose "real consequences" on the Territory Government over its failure to close the gap, arguing Aboriginal people continue to bear the cost of poor outcomes despite decades of reform efforts.

Meeting in Barunga this month — 38 years after Territory leaders issued the landmark Barunga Statement calling for a treaty — representatives from the Northern Land Council, Central Land Council, Tiwi Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council gathered to mark the 50th anniversary of

the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

The land councils said many of the challenges confronting Aboriginal people remained unchanged, and pointed to incarceration, overcrowded housing, rising living costs in remote communities, and deaths in custody as ongoing issues driven by structural racism.

ALC chair Cherelle Wurrawilya said Aboriginal people were still seeking basic rights and services.

"Safe housing, healthy communities, a justice system we can trust," she said. "The basic rights that every person in Australia should enjoy."

The Northern Territory remains the worst-performing jurisdiction on Closing the Gap targets, with only five measures showing improvement.

"Almost half of the land mass in the Northern Territory and 85 per cent of our Territory coastlines are Aboriginal-owned," NLC chair Matthew Ryan said.

"We have our land and sea rights, but our people are still fighting an endless battle for our very existence."

The intervention call comes amid mounting concern about the direction of Territory policy under the Country Liberal

Party Government, which has faced criticism from Indigenous, legal and human rights organisations over a series of reforms they say are punitive and inconsistent with the recommendations of previous royal commissions and inquiries.

At the same time, the Territory's Indigenous incarceration rate has continued to rise.

More than 90 per cent of prisoners in the Northern Territory are Indigenous, with almost half of those in custody being held on remand.

The NT Government has also drawn criticism over its

approach to consultation on child protection, land rights, and cultural heritage reforms.

In a joint statement, the four land councils urged the Federal Government to hold the Territory accountable for what they described as a failure to spend Commonwealth funding in ways that produced meaningful improvements for Aboriginal people.

They also called for more funding to be directed to Aboriginal community controlled organisations, arguing they was trusted by communities and best placed to deliver services and programs.

"We know the solutions,"

CONTINUED PAGE 3

LANDMARK VICTORY FOR TEAR-GASSED INMATES **REPORT PAGE 7**



Jean Moran called for cultural authority, family knowledge and community voices to be placed at the centre of Native Title processes.

Call for grassroots lead in Native Title

JOSEPH GUENZLER

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Summit this month heard a call for cultural authority, family knowledge and community voices to be placed at the centre of Native Title processes during a session on restoring authority within recognition systems.

The session *Our Truth. Our Power. Our Future: Restoring Cultural Authority Within Native Title*, was presented by Juanita Johnson and Jean Moran.

Ms Johnson is a Birri Gubba and Widi Elder with ancestral ties to the Gungahlu, Kukatj and Tagalaka peoples, with community connections through Cherbourg, Palm Island and the Magandjin Aboriginal community.

Ms Moran is a First Nations Yuin, Worimi, Cammeraygal and Barada-Barna woman, descended from King Boco (or Boco) and grounded in enduring cultural and community connections.

Their presentation explored the gap between the intent of Native Title and the lived reality for families who have had identity, records and authority

shaped by systems outside their communities. Native Title was framed as a process to recognise Lore, Law and connection to Country, but the presentation argued legal recognition did not always reflect lived identity, family knowledge or community acceptance. Ms Moran said the



session came from personal experience, family history, and cultural responsibility.

"Our presentation was about our truth, our power, our future and restoring cultural authority within Native Title," she said.

"We wanted, from grassroots Elders, to speak about our family and what we had to face.

"There were so many layers that we had to overcome."

The presentation traced how colonial systems disrupted Aboriginal families through protection and assimilation policies, forced marriages, removals, renaming, and reclassified identity. The women argued exclusion was not incidental, but systemic.

They also described how records could be incomplete or disrupted, with archives sometimes overriding oral history, lived truth and cultural knowledge passed through families.

Many families now face a gap between administrative identity and lived identity.

"We had to stand up for our identity," Ms Moran said. "There were so many hurdles, so many gates that you've got to walk through just to get your foot at the table."

The session raised concerns about the way Native Title determinations were shaped.

One slide showed 672 Native Title determinations across Australia, with 530 listed as consent determinations, 57 as litigated court trial determinations, and 85 as unopposed determinations.

Those figures were used to question whose voices shaped agreements and whose voices

were missing. The presentation did not reject Native Title, but argued recognition systems should work alongside community truth, rather than replace it.

Ms Moran and Ms Johnson noted culture was often present in the system but not leading, Elders were included but not always empowered, and decision-making often centred systems instead of community.

National Indigenous Times previously reported on Ms Moran's journey to trace her family ties, including her discovery her lineage connected back to King Boco of Saltbush Park, in the Mackay region, and her fight to have him included on the BKY Native Title Apical List.

The experience later led her into Federal Court, where she represented herself in her push to be part of the inner circle of decision-making.

"If you're not happy with what you hear at the end of that gate, you have no choice but to go and spend money out of your own pocket and get yourself a lawyer and a barrister," Ms Moran said.

"That's exactly what I did, to be recognised and to stand up to get my grandfather resurrected on his own Native Title."

Funding for Native Title cut in change of model

GIOVANNI TORRE

The Federal Government's National Indigenous Australians Agency has announced significant funding cuts to Native Title Services across the country, coming into effect July 1.

National Indigenous Times understands the NIAA did not communicate the formula used to determine funding in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines published on February 9, and instead revealed it once the funding decisions were announced on May 28-29.

Central Desert Native Title Services chair Dr Guy Singleton said last Thursday that the NIAA advised Central Desert Native Title Services on May 29 of a 24 per cent reduction to funding levels, taking effect on July 1.

"Our ability to deliver core statutory functions under Part 11 of the Native Title Act (1993) will be materially reduced, including the facilitation of agreement-making, future act matters (including heritage services), compensation matters and broader protection and advancement of native title rights and interests," he said.

"This reduction puts at risk Native Title Parties' ability to exercise their native title rights, including proponent negotiations, agreement making and heritage approvals.

"Native Title Parties in the Central Desert region remain heavily reliant on CDNTS for support and services. Many do not have their own staff and have limited funding.

"We are currently in discussion with the NIAA on rectifying this issue, though presently no agreement has been reached."

Central Desert Native Title Services is one of 14 services impacted by the new model.

National Indigenous Times understands the NIAA has conceded the funding formula may need review, but the cuts take effect in less than two weeks.

National Indigenous Times sent questions to the NIAA requesting details on the funding cuts, the funding formula, and on communication between the Agency and Native Title services. The NIAA did not directly answer any of the questions.

In its response, the agency noted it "funds 14 native title representative bodies and service providers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in native title matters".

It said the Federal Government would provide \$409.6m over the next three years for core native title functions.

Judge finds family's approach to sentencing 'utterly humbling'

Police officer avoids jail for killing teen with vehicle

DECHLAN BRENNAN

The first New South Wales police officer in the State's history to be held criminally responsible for the death of an Aboriginal person during a police operation has avoided prison time.

Benedict Bryant, found guilty over the fatal collision that killed Dunghutti teenager Jai Kalani Wright, was sentenced in Sydney this month to a two-year intensive corrections order, requiring him to complete 500 hours of community service. He was disqualified from driving for three years.

Jai Wright died aged 16 on February 9, 2022, after he was thrown from the allegedly stolen trail bike he was riding when it collided with Bryant's unmarked police vehicle.

The Dunghutti teenager, described by his family as vibrant, funny, witty and loved by many, later died in hospital from severe head injuries.

Bryant was found guilty last year of dangerous driving occasioning death after a judge-alone trial, becoming the first known NSW police officer to be held criminally responsible for the death of an Aboriginal person during a police operation.

Handing down the sentence, Judge Jane Culver acknowledged the profound loss suffered by Jai's family. "No sentence can ever measure the value of a human life, especially not a life tragically lost so young, a life not fully lived, a life that matters," she said.

Jai's mother, Kylie Aloua, previously said she didn't want Bryant to go to prison so his family won't suffer the same loss they did, something Judge Culver described as eloquent "in a way that is utterly humbling".

In a victim impact statement prepared by Ms Aloua and read



Family and friends of Jai Kalani Wright outside the Darlinghurst Courthouse in Sydney last November. Picture: Tom Wark/AAP

by the judge, she described the ongoing impact of her son's death. "Every ambulance siren, every police siren, every rushed footstep takes me straight back to that moment," she wrote.

"He will never reach adulthood ... I will never be a grandmother to his children. The loneliness is overwhelming. I'm not living, I'm surviving."

Turning to address Ms Aloua, a visibly moved Judge Culver told her: "Your son certainly mattered, and continues to matter."

The judge found Bryant had shown little remorse, stating he appeared "predominantly occupied with appealing his future sentence" and concerned about anti-police sentiment. Bryant remains a serving

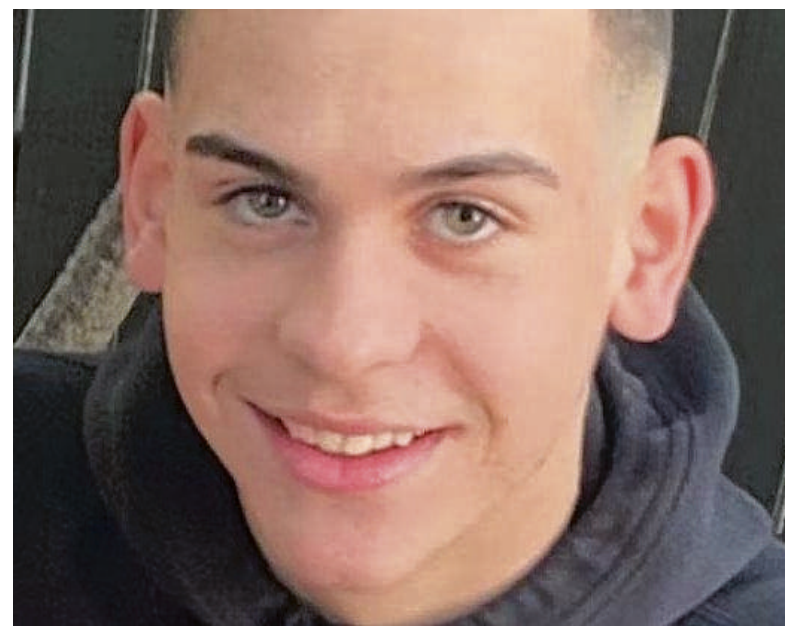
NSW Police officer, and intends to appeal.

Speaking after the sentencing, Jai's father, Lachlan Wright, said the family was relieved the legal process had reached its conclusion.

"This has been a long, long journey," he said. "It's a hard day because you go through a lot of memories of Jai so to have family support is very important and that's what got us through all that."

He said retribution in the form of a punitive sentence wasn't what was important to the family.

"That wasn't what it was about for us", he said. "This shows that something went terribly wrong and people have to be held accountable."



16-year-old Jai Kalani Wright died in hospital after the crash.

During the trial, prosecutors argued Bryant effectively created a roadblock by positioning his vehicle in the path of the trail bike "without authorisation or reasonable grounds", leaving Jai with no realistic way to avoid a collision.

The court heard police communications had instructed officers not to pursue the motorcycle about a minute before the crash.

"The accused had relevant information that would allow him to conclude that the rider of the trail bike would go to considerable lengths to avoid capture," Crown prosecutor Phillip Strickland said during closing submissions.

"The fact that the accused knew about that directive ...

should have acted to him as a specific warning."

The prosecution argued Bryant, who had more than 20 years of policing experience, should have anticipated that Jai would not stop.

Judge Culver ultimately accepted the Crown case, finding: "The accused so seriously failed to properly manage the vehicle that he created a real danger."

The matter took years to reach court after police prosecutors initially declined to lay charges. In 2024, NSW State Coroner Teresa O'Sullivan suspended the inquest into Jai's death and referred the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions. A month later, Bryant was charged. **with AAP**

Land councils ask Canberra to take strong stance

FROM PAGE 1

TLC deputy chair Austin Wonaeamirri said.

"We need a government that listens to us and respects that we know what will work for our people and communities."

The call adds to a growing chorus of organisations urging

Canberra to take a stronger stance on the Northern Territory's Closing the Gap performance.

The Commonwealth provides about 80 per cent of the Territory's funding, giving it significant influence over policy and service delivery.

Last year, the family of the late

Northern Territory Supreme Court Justice James Henry Muirhead called on Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to intervene and override what they described as the "regressive actions currently being pursued by the Northern Territory Government" on justice and incarceration.

Speaking in Mparntwe/Alice Springs last month, Mr Albanese said governments needed to work together to achieve lasting improvements for First Nations communities.

"I would say to the Northern Territory Government, that you'll get better outcomes if you have an inclusive approach

and you have buy-in to these issues, and that's why that consultation and engagement is so important."

"We want to see, though, outcomes which are appropriate."

"We do think that everything possible should be done, of course, to keep children safe."

"That's the No.1 priority."

Report on State's child protection system sparks concerns

DECHLAN BRENNAN

A landmark inquiry into Queensland's child protection system has triggered fierce debate over the future of Indigenous child welfare, with First Nations advocates warning several key recommendations risk undermining decades of reform aimed at keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children connected to family, culture and Country.

The Queensland Commission of Inquiry into Child Safety handed down 52 recommendations this month after examining a system under significant strain. The report found the number of children in residential care had more than tripled over the past decade, with Queensland now housing almost as many children in residential care as the rest of Australia combined.

However, much of the debate has centred on the inquiry's recommendations relating to adoption, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, and its conclusion racism is not a factor in decisions to remove Indigenous children from their families.

The inquiry recommended changes to ensure adoption is not restricted by a child's cultural background or ethnicity, and proposed establishing adoption as a third permanency pathway for all children in out-

Leaders slam Qld inquiry

of-home care. "The commission notes the strong submissions from First Nations stakeholders against adoption, however, it considers it would be inappropriate to exclude one cohort of children in out-of-home care from this option," the report states.

First Nations child welfare organisations say the recommendation raises serious concerns given the legacy of the Stolen Generations.

SNAICC — National Voice for our Children chief executive Catherine Liddle said the proposal was deeply troubling.

"This flies in the face of everything we know from the experience of Stolen Generations and multiple investigations since the Bringing Them Home report," she said.

The findings on racism have drawn a strong response from Indigenous leaders.

The report concluded there

was no evidence that "racism is a motivating or causal factor in decisions to remove Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families", despite Indigenous children being placed in out-of-home care at 9.3 times the rate of non-Indigenous children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up about 8 per cent of Queensland's youth population but account for almost half of all children in state care.

National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Sue-Anne Hunter rejected the finding. "Under the National Closing the Gap Agreement, our governments have already accepted that this overrepresentation is driven by colonisation, trauma and systemic racism," she said.

"For racism to be dismissed in this report shows exactly where the issues lie in Queen-

sland." Ms Liddle described the conclusion as a "slap in the face to all our families".

"What does the Commission of Inquiry see as the explanation for the vast and unacceptable over-representation of our children in the child protection system?" she asked.

"This finding is quite frankly inexplicable."

Another flashpoint is the inquiry's criticism of the ATSICPP, which prioritises keeping Indigenous children connected to family, community, culture and Country.

The report argued the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety had shown a "tendency to give tacit priority to achieving the objectives of the ATSICPP in priority to an evaluation of the child's best interests".

Advocates say the inquiry fundamentally misunderstands

the principle. "We want to be incredibly clear ... The ATSICPP does not interfere with the safety of a child; it enhances the protections," Ms Hunter said.

She argued where the Queensland Government had "misapplied" the ATSICPP, the answer was not to reduce its standing, but to "apply it properly".

"When it comes to the safety of our children, the ATSICPP is always considered alongside the paramount principle — it's not one or the other," she said.

While welcoming some reforms, Indigenous leaders say the report's most significant legacy may be the broader debate it has reignited about self-determination, systemic racism, and who should decide what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Many are now calling for greater investment in community-controlled organisations, arguing they remain best placed to keep families together and address the underlying causes of child removals.

"We know what works best for our families. Our community-controlled organisations play a crucial role in providing a safe and supported space, and keeping our kids connected to culture and family," Ms Hunter said. "They must be properly funded to be able to deliver meaningful family-led decision making, early intervention and prevention programs."

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Daughter of nuclear survivor to review sub deal

NATASHA CLARK

First Nations leader Karina Lester cites her father's painful survival of nuclear testing as a poignant reason for joining former environment minister Peter Garrett in a crowd-funded review of Australia's biggest defence deal, AUKUS.

"As a second-generation survivor of the 1953 British nuclear tests at Emu Field, I urge all our mobs who have been tested on, mined on, threatened with nuclear waste dumps or fear the impacts on our people, country and culture to find your voices and speak up strong in this public inquiry," Ms Lester, a proud Yankunytjatjara woman, said this month.

The independent inquiry into the \$368 billion deal will hold public hearings, with a report due in October.

Ms Lester joins Mr Garrett, former defence chief Admiral Chris Barrie, ex-WA premier Carmen Lawrence, and Australia Institute co-CEO Leanne Minshull on the panel.

The Morrison government unveiled the AUKUS deal in September 2021, partnering with the United States and United Kingdom.

Billed as a historic security pact, AUKUS would give Australia nuclear-powered submarines for the first time, replacing the ageing Collins-class fleet and scrapping the French submarine contract. At the outset, the three countries had yet to decide how Australia would acquire the submarines.

The Albanese Government announced the so-called "optimal pathway" in March 2023.

Australia planned to buy at least three US Virginia-class submarines from the early 2030s, before moving to build a new class of British-designed, Australian-built SSN-AUKUS submarines. However, that plan has shifted again.

Australia had been set to receive a mix of second-hand and new Virginia-class submarines from the US, including at least one new vessel.

After talks in Singapore earlier this month between Defence Minister Richard Marles and US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, Australia confirmed it will instead buy three second-hand, in-service Virginia-class submarines.

Mr Marles defended the change, arguing it will simplify the transition, cut complexity, and deliver significant savings.

The Government insists the broader AUKUS plan remains on track, including the scheduled rotation of US and UK nuclear-powered submarines through HMAS Stirling in Western Australia from 2027.

Ms Lester believes the inquiry will dig into the cost to taxpayers, nuclear waste storage, and the impact on Australia's relationship with China.



A petition at this year's Barunga Festival called for Traditional Owner-led governance of the Roper River.

Call for Indigenous governance of river

NICOLE BROWN

Traditional Owners from across south-east Arnhem Land used this month's Barunga Festival to build support for Indigenous-led water governance, collecting signatures calling for greater recognition of Aboriginal voices in decisions affecting the Roper River.

Members of the Ropa Woda Governance Council spoke with festival-goers about the importance of protecting the river system and the aquifer which sustains it, and encouraged support for Traditional Owner-led governance arrangements.

RWGC's stall featured a petition urging the Federal Government to formally support the council and recognise the role of Traditional Owners in planning for and protecting the waters that have sustained communities across the region

for thousands of generations.

The campaign builds on the Ropa Woda Governance Council Declaration, launched in May 2025, which called for Traditional Owners to be given formal roles in decision-making processes relating to water management across the Roper River catchment.

Representatives at the festival included Cecilia Lake from Mangarrayi Country, Melissa Andrews-Wurramarrba from Alawa Country, Rembarranga Elder Miliwanga Wurrben, and Karlisha Ponto from Mangarrayi Country.

The council was established in May 2025 when Traditional Owners representing the 13 clan groups of the Roper River catchment came together to create a unified voice for water governance.

For RWGC members, the festival was an opportunity to gather support, listen to com-

munity concerns, and share their vision for the river system's future.

Ms Andrews-Wurramarrba said many people at the festival were eager to learn more about work being undertaken by Traditional Owners.

"We're giving people more information and understanding about why we're here, why we're protecting the water, why it's important to us," she said.

"There's been a lot of Traditional Owners signing the petition and a lot of munanga mob (non-Indigenous people) too."

A key focus of the campaign is raising awareness about the environmental challenges facing the river system and the importance of safeguarding the aquifer that feeds it.

"A lot of people living in the Northern Territory don't know what's happening with the aquifer that feeds the river. This is why we're here to

inform people about the issues impacting the Roper River," Ms Andrews-Wurramarrba said.

The Roper River is one of northern Australia's most significant river systems, supporting communities, cultural practices, biodiversity and economic activity across a vast area of south-east Arnhem Land.

Council members say ensuring Traditional Owners have a meaningful role in water governance is essential to protect cultural values and environmental sustainability for future generations.

The campaign also highlights the importance of passing knowledge to younger generations.

The council is set to take its campaign to the national stage.

"We're thinking of taking the petition down to Canberra later in the year," Ms Andrews-Wurramarrba said.

Truth-telling plan urged for unfinished business

DECHLAN BRENNAN



Prime Minister Anthony Albanese receives message sticks from Travis Lovett. Picture: Dechlan Brennan

Kerrupmara Gunditjmara man Travis Lovett completed a 900km Walk for Truth from Naarm to Canberra late last month, using the journey's conclusion to urge the Albanese Government to establish a national truth-telling commission.

The former Yoorrook Justice Commissioner arrived at Parliament House after 39 days on the road, joined by supporters and carrying message sticks from the countries traversed during the walk.

Almost 6000 people participated in the journey, while more than 10,000 signed an open letter backing a national truth-telling process.

Addressing supporters on the

steps of Parliament, Mr Lovett said:

"This is the moment that has come to meet you, this walk has reached the steps of Parliament, but it must not be allowed to end at the stone and glass of this place. Let this be where the country turns its face towards the truth, let this be where the delay ends. . . I ask this country to walk the next part with us."

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese accepted the message sticks and described reconciliation as "unfinished business", acknowledging there was still a "long way to go".

However, he stopped short of committing to a national truth-telling body, instead promising the government would continue to engage with First Nations leaders.

Fears policy could worsen things for kids

DECHLAN BRENNAN

The overwhelming majority of submissions to a Northern Territory parliamentary inquiry into proposed child protection reforms have urged the Government to reconsider changes critics say will “ultimately place more children at risk”.

The reforms follow the death of five-year-old Kumanjayi Little Baby in April.

In response, the Country Liberal Party Government introduced amendments to the Care and Protection of Children Act and commissioned a review into the department’s handling of the case. The government argues the legislation will make child safety the primary consideration through a new “universal principle”, placing “the best interests of every child first, regardless of background”.

The proposed changes would alter the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement

Principle, which seeks to ensure Aboriginal children removed from their families maintain connections to family, community and culture.

The inquiry received 150 submissions, with the vast majority opposing the Bill and calling for broader consultation.

NT Children’s Commissioner Shaleena Musk supported reform but warned the rushed process and lack of consultation risked worsening an already struggling system.

“I am extremely concerned by the lack of transparency and expedited process that is being undertaken to significant reform that will have serious and deleterious long-term effects,” she wrote in her submission.

Ms Musk said neither she, Aboriginal leaders, nor other key stakeholders had been consulted before the Bill was introduced. It shows only 17 per cent of Indigenous children in out-of-home care in the NT are placed

with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relative or kin — the lowest rate in Australia.

SNAICC — National Voice For Our Children chief executive Catherine Liddle said the proposed legislation would “exacerbate existing weaknesses in the system and ultimately place more children at risk”.

She argued public debate around the reforms had wrongly suggested the ATSICPP placed culture ahead of child safety, saying the principle recognised Aboriginal children’s safety and wellbeing were strengthened through connections to family, community and Country.

“If governments are serious about child safety, they must listen to the people who know what children need to thrive,” Ms Liddle said.

Concerns were echoed by Professors Fiona Stanley AC and Marcia Langton AO, who argued decades of evidence showed child protection systems devel-



NT Children’s Commissioner Shaleena Musk. Picture: AAP

oped without Aboriginal leadership consistently failed.

“The evidence demonstrates that responses centred on crisis intervention, administrative control and child removal do not reduce harm — instead, they contribute to its reproduction across generations,” they wrote.

The Central Land Council said the current system was failing children and families because it “favours punitive measures against families and removal of children over care and support”.

While supporting reform, the council argued the focus should be on improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal families and com-

munities rather than making it easier to remove children from their homes.

It also said the process was inconsistent with the NT Government’s commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

NT Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro has defended the legislation and criticised its opponents.

“We are unapologetic in our approach,” she said. “I cannot understand how anyone can argue with making the safety of a child the No.1 priority, and to those people who think that that’s what the old Act did, they’re just absolutely wrong.”

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Senator to tour State in quest for justice

DECHLAN BRENNAN

Independent senator Lidia Thorpe has announced a State-wide Truth and Justice Tour to continue conversations about truth-telling and First Peoples' justice across Victoria.

The announcement this month came in the wake of former Yoorrook Justice commissioner Travis Lovett's Walk for Truth and criticism of the Federal Government's lack of action on truth-telling.

The tour, which begins on Wurundjeri Country in July, will see Senator Thorpe travel throughout metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria over 2026 and 2027, hosting dedicated forums for First Peoples alongside broader community events open to all Victorians.

Planned stops include Naarm/Melbourne, Gippsland, Geelong, Warrnambool, Horeb and the State's south-west, with additional locations to be announced.

Senator Thorpe said the tour would build on growing public interest in truth-telling.

"This tour is about looking at the truth of what we experience in this country as First Peoples, and creating space for honest conversations about justice and the future we want to build together," the Gunna, Gunditj-mara and Djab Wurrung woman said. "As a Senator for Victoria, I want to connect with communities across the State about what matters to them and what kind of future they want for their kids, so we can build solutions together from the grassroots up."

The forums are intended to provide a direct line between Victorians and the Federal Parliament, with Senator Thorpe describing the tour as an opportunity to remain accountable to the people she represents.



Mechelle Turvey, centre, has received the Medal of the Order of Australia for her work with Indigenous communities. Picture: Rhiannon Clarke

Honours recognise years of advocacy

NATASHA CLARK

Indigenous advocate and anti-violence campaigner Mechelle Turvey received the Medal of the Order of Australia this month for her work with Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

The King's Birthday Honours recognised Ms Turvey's advocacy and community work, particularly in the years after her son Cassius' death.

Cassius, a 15-year-old Noon-gar/Yamatji boy, was attacked while walking home from school with friends in Middle

Swan in October 2022. He died in hospital 10 days later.

His death triggered national grief and outrage. Thousands gathered at vigils, honouring his life and demanding an end to racism and violence.

Since then, Ms Turvey has emerged as a leading voice for healing, cultural safety, and stronger support for victims of crime and their families.

The Medal of the Order of Australia, or OAM, recognises Australians whose service stands out for particular distinction.

Ms Turvey received the

honour "for service to the Indigenous communities of Western Australia".

She serves as assistant director of Aboriginal Affairs at WA Police and founded the Take 5 training program to help police recruits better understand the needs of crime victims.

Ms Turvey said listening was central to building trust with the Aboriginal families and communities.

"Listening matters as much as action. . .yarning is the best building tool, far more powerful than a hammer," she told The West Australian.

"It's not about quick fixes; it's about trust, repairing harm, and ensuring Aboriginal families feel seen and heard."

Ms Turvey said she wanted to continue "supporting Aboriginal families through trauma and strengthening culturally safe practices".

This honour follows Ms Turvey's earlier recognition as Western Australia's 2024 Australian of the Year.

She continues to call for compassion, understanding, and community-led change, keeping Cassius' memory at the heart of her advocacy.

Tear gas case win as High Court awards \$50k each

DECHLAN BRENNAN

Four Aboriginal men who were unlawfully subjected to tear gas while detained as children at the notorious Don Dale Youth Detention Centre secured a landmark victory in the High Court this month, bringing a 12-year legal battle against the Northern Territory Government to a close.

The four men were exposed to CS fogger tear gas by a prison officer in 2014 after a violent incident at the Darwin facility. The gas was deployed during a confrontation between staff and another detainee, Jake Roper, whom officers sought to "temporarily incapacitate".

In 2020, the High Court ruled that Josiah Binsaris, Keiran Webster, Ethan Austral and Leroy O'Shea were entitled to damages after being exposed to the gas. A Northern Territory Supreme Court judge later

awarded the four men \$200,000 each in exemplary damages. However, the NT Court of Appeal overturned that award last year after the Northern Territory Government argued the amount was manifestly excessive.

On Wednesday, June 17, the High Court rejected the Court of Appeal's decision, although it limited the exemplary damages to \$50,000 each.

"The Northern Territory had a duty to ensure the physical, psychological and emotional welfare and safe custody and protection of all detainees in the detention centre," the majority of the court found.

"Knowing that Don Dale was unfit for purpose. . .it was for the Northern Territory to provide adequate training to its officers to ensure they could respond lawfully and appropriately to serious misconduct by a detainee held in Don Dale.

"The Northern Territory manifestly failed to do so and, in so doing, is to be inferred as having also failed to ensure its officers could maintain their professional discipline in the face of provocative and intimidatory conduct by one detainee."

Mr Austral was awarded a total of \$90,000 and Mr Binsaris \$70,000, while Mr O'Shea and Mr Webster were each awarded a total of \$100,000 each.

On August 21, 2014, Mr Roper escaped from his cell within the Behaviour Management Unit and damaged property.

Guards ultimately decided to use CS gas to regain control of the situation.

When discussing how to deal with Mr Roper, court documents show one of the guards saying: "Let the f...er come through because while he's coming through, he'll be off balance. I'll pulverise the little

f...er. Oh s...., you're recording."

The four plaintiffs were exposed to the gas while locked inside their cells. The NT Supreme Court previously found they were assaulted, handcuffed and taken to a basketball court, where they were "hosed down to remove any residue of gas".

Court documents show the gas was deployed 10 times inside the unit, which had no windows, air conditioning or running water for drinking or washing hands.

When asked if he intended to "gas the lot of them", the Director of Correctional Services replied: "I don't mind (sic) how much gas you use."

If used in large enough concentrations, CS gas "can cause serious injury or death", a training manual for officers said, noting it can cause "extreme burning of the eyes, irritation of the nose and

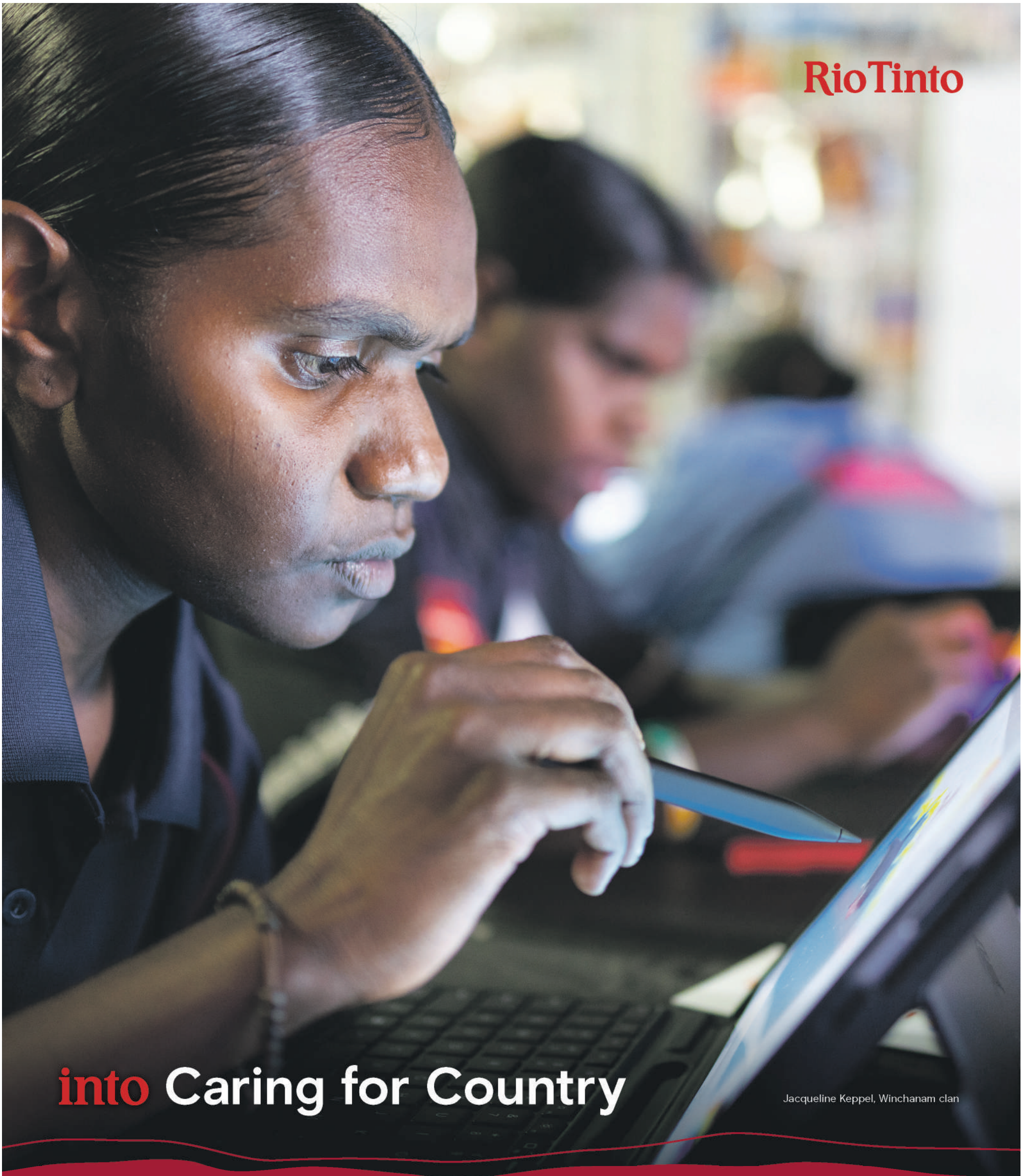
throat, tightness of the chest, difficulty in breathing, possible fear of suffocation, dizziness, vertigo and nausea".

Mr O'Shea, who was asthmatic, shared a cell with Mr Webster. In his affidavit, he stated he feared he was going to die after the gas was deployed.

"My throat was burning, I was choking, my eyes were stinging and my nose was running. Keiran looked like he was throwing up," he said.

"After they sprayed the tear-gas, I felt complete fear. I thought I was going to die. The worst thing was not knowing how long it was going to last and how long we were going to have to sit in there and burn."

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency welcomed the ruling, with Civil Managing Lawyer Andrew Roberts saying the decision "recognises the seriousness of the NT Government's conduct".



RioTinto

into Caring for Country

Jacqueline Keppel, Winchanam clan

Together, we're supporting communities to share knowledge and culture in new ways.

Indigital and Rio Tinto are partnering with communities in Weipa, Aurukun, Napranum and Mapoon on a co-designed Caring for Country initiative. Blending cultural knowledge with digital technology, the program supports communities to strengthen language, share knowledge and build skills for a sustainable future.

STYLEUP

FASHION, BEAUTY & LIFESTYLE

Country stories

Designers highlight their heritage at KAFTA **P12-13**

ALSO INSIDE

Dancers on pointe at Opera House **P10**

New single packs an emotional punch **P11**



Dancers perform in Triptych.
Picture: Ven Tithing



Amrita Hepi performs in Rinse.
Picture: Zan Wimberley

Dance in limelight in Sydney

PHOEBE BLOGG

Following critically acclaimed international seasons, two celebrated First Nations choreographers have arrived home for limited seasons of contemporary dance works at the Sydney Opera House.

Bundjalung and Ngapuhi artist Amrita Hepi makes her return with solo dance-theatre piece Rinse, and Bungandij and Ngarrindjeri choreographer Lewis Major will present the Sydney premiere of Triptych, a triple-bill of short works.

Sydney Opera House director of programming Brenna Hobson said the venue “couldn’t be more proud to

invite Amrita Hepi and Lewis Major home to celebrate their international success”.

“The local contemporary dance scene is thriving internationally, and the Sydney Opera House is privileged to celebrate an ecosystem that champions not only excellence, but a uniquely Australian perspective,” she said.

Running from September 10-12, solo performance Rinse combines a highly physical dance vocabulary with an evocative text.

The work, created by Hepi with acclaimed theatre-maker Mish Grigor and with sound design by composer Daniel Jenatsch, approaches the

history of dance through a powerful decolonial lens.

Rinse has toured extensively since its debut — premiering as the first Australian work ever performed at the Festival d’Avignon — with seasons across Europe, the UK and Canada.

Renowned for her expressive experimental dance works, Hepi has twice received the people’s choice award at the Keir Choreographic Award, and in 2018 was named one of Forbes Asia’s 30 under 30.

From September 16-19,

Triptych presents three luminous and award-winning short works — Prologue, Unfolding and Epilogue.

This mixed bill is a mesmerising fusion of movement, music and light.

Performed by four dancers, the interplay between lighting and sound design sits at the centre of the production, with the works linked thematically by ideas of duality and connection.

Major is considered one of Australia’s leading choreographic talents, with

works performed across six continents to widespread acclaim.

After years of collaboration and mentorship under Russell Maliphant and Hofesh Schecter, Triptych is Major’s own opus and has accrued more than a dozen award wins — including best dance (Adelaide Fringe Festival, 2025) and the Spirit of the Fringe Award (Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2024).

Triptych will also be performed at Arts Centre Melbourne from September 23-26.

A dancer performs in Epilogue as part of Triptych by Lewis Major. Picture: Alessandro Botticelli.



Pigram receives Red Ochre Award

NATASHA CLARK

The Pigram Brothers have helped shape the sound of modern Broome.

Their music has captured the town’s salt water, humour and spirit in a way that has reached far beyond WA’s Kimberley region.

One of the brothers, singer-songwriter and guitarist Stephen, was recently recognised with one of Australia’s most important First Nations arts awards: the Red Ochre Award for lifetime achievement in artistic excellence, at the First Nations Arts and Culture Awards in Sydney.

Pigram Productions referred to Pigram as the “grandfather of our branch of the family tree”.

His work includes theatre, film, live shows, and community arts.

He has written songs with his father Eric Pigram, Uncle Jimmy Chi, Kuckles, Scrap Metal and The Pigram Brothers.

As a music director and composer, he worked on the landmark theatre shows Bran Nue Dae and Corrugation Road.



Stephen Pigram received the Red Ochre Award at the First Nations Arts and Culture Awards.

He also worked on the films Bran Nue Dae and Mad Bastards, both of which are closely connected to the Kimberley’s culture.

Pigram Productions said Pigram’s career had involved some of Australia’s top arts organisations.

“As a featured artist, he has performed with leading Australian arts organisations including The Black Arm Band, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Australian String Quartet, and Tura New Music,” the organisation said.

Pigram was elected a writer full member of APRA in 1989, inducted into the WA Music Hall of Fame in 1993, and awarded the Centenary Medal in 2000 for services to Indigenous music.

He has supported the wider arts community through his work with the Aboriginal Arts Board and Arts WA. Pigram Productions said Pigram gave special thanks to his older brother Alan, who was at the awards ceremony and still worked in music and storytelling through Pigram Music Pty Ltd.

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Marlene Gibson's work on a Naarm tram. Pic: James Morgan

Indigenous artworks get people moving

JARRED CROSS

A Naarm (Melbourne) icon is sharing First Nations art, stories, culture, reflections and visions for the future while taking others, literally, along for the ride.

Six trams will take to the city's tracks as a moving canvas of works for the next 12 months, as First Peoples Melbourne Art Trams launched its 2026 edition this month. Wadawurrung Elder and senior artist Marlene Gilson's work *Happy Families — Time When We All Lived Together* was exhibited at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024.

It's now a little closer to home, stretched across the Legacy Tram of 2026.

"It's an honour to see it on the tram. Who would have thought that my artwork would be going all over Melbourne, putting our people out there?" Aunty Marlene told National Indigenous Times.

Aunty Marlene has presented solo exhibitions in Ballarat, Melbourne and Sydney; was commissioned for the 21st Biennale of Sydney in 2018; and saw some of her work illuminate the Sydney Opera House in 2021.

Her paintings and practice are celebrated expressions on connection to culture, Country and Indigenous perspectives and place within historical narratives.

Natasha Carter, Mitch Mahoney, Jenna Mayilema Lee, Zena Zada Cumpston and Sonja Hodge join Aunty Marlene as featured artists.



Kamilaroi/Samoan artist Becca Hatch has released cinematic new track *Daylight Robbery*.

Hatch drops a knockout new track

PHOEBE BLOGG

Becca Hatch has continued to rise with the release this month of her new single *Daylight Robbery*, a cinematic and emotionally charged track capturing the chaos, intensity and vulnerability of a connection which refuses to fade.

Following the breakout momentum of *Garden (Bang Goes The Drum)*, the proud Kamilaroi/Samoan artist has delivered a track which cements her as one of Australia's most compelling new voices.

Written by Hatch alongside Patrick Byrne (Beso Palma), mixed by Cam Parkin and mastered by Klaus Hill, *Daylight Robbery* blends Hatch's signature fusion of R&B, electronic textures and bold pop production with raw emotional storytelling.

At its core, *Daylight Robbery* explores the contradiction of being unable to let go of someone who still holds power over you. It is a song about impact, memory, and the dangerous pull of chemistry, even when logic says otherwise.

Throughout the song Hatch strives to transform heartbreak into something euphoric, reckless and impossible to ignore.

"*Daylight Robbery* is about a love that leaves an imprint on you; someone you can't forget, even if they might not be the best for you," she said.

"It's about being overtaken by feeling and impact. Like being hit suddenly in the face or the gut."

"Sometimes we meet people

that leave a mark on us, and even after they're gone, parts of them still linger.

"The song lives in that tension of knowing someone has the power to hurt you, but still feeling drawn to them anyway."

"There's something addictive about connections like that, and I wanted *Daylight Robbery* to feel emotional, dramatic and a little reckless."

Hatch has built a reputation for genre-bending soundscapes, deeply personal songwriting, and commanding live performances.

Hatch is a 2024 National Indigenous Music Awards winner, a multiple ARIA nominee, and recipient of the 2025 APRA professional development award.

Garden (Bang Goes The Drum) was a breakout moment, landing on 47 editorial playlists worldwide including the cover of Spotify's R&B Connect and Big Ancestor Energy.

The release also secured a triple j first play on *Home And Hosed*, more than 460 radio spins on more than 40 stations, and more than 130,000 Spotify streams.

Hatch's rise has been defined by a string of career-defining moments on stage.

In late 2024, she was personally invited by Coldplay to perform her original verse on their song *We Pray* during two sold-out Sydney stadium shows in front of crowds exceeding 80,000 people.

She has also shared stages with global artists including Tinashe and Mahalia, and given standout performances at *Beyond The Valley*, *Strawberry Fields* and the NRL half-time show.

Olympic gear honours First Nations

JARRED CROSS

Australian Olympians in Los Angeles and on the French Alps at the next summer and winter Olympic Games will don gear honouring the First Nations athletes who have come before them.

Noongar artists and father and son Peter Farmer Sr and Peter Farmer Jr, and Torres Strait Islander artist Alick Tipoti have created the Australian Olympic Committee's official team artwork.

Titled *Doonch-doonch*, Kaymelan, Together, using both Noongar and Zenadth Kes (Torres Strait) language, the work honours the 66 known First Nations athletes

to have competed at previous Olympic Games.

This is "carried together as a wave, an expression of unity across land, sea and sky. Across generations, communities and cultures it represents one shared story", as explained by the Australian Olympic Committee.

The artwork will feature on team uniforms for the 2028 Summer Games in LA, and the 2030 Winter Games in the French Alps, after 11 First Nations athletes competed at Paris in 2024.

It was unveiled at the same time the AOC and its Indigenous advisory committee launched its Stretch reconciliation action plan. The AOC said the

unveilings "represent the next chapter of its commitment to reconciliation through sport".

"I'm extremely excited to be part of this project. As an artist for the athletes, I want them to feel proud and strong knowing this artwork was designed with thought and care when it comes to culture," Farmer Jr said.

The AOC launched its inaugural Indigenous athlete scholarship program at its annual general meeting earlier this year.

"The AOC Stretch RAP makes clear that reconciliation is not something we acknowledge only on special occasions — it is something we embed in our decisions, our



AOC advisory Indigenous advisory committee chair Patrick Johnson, Torres Strait Islander artist Alick Tipoti and Noongar artists Peter Farmer Sr and Peter Farmer Jr. Picture: AOC

sport, our workplaces and our communities," two-time Olympian and AOC Indigenous Advisory Committee chair Patrick Johnson said.

The announcement came amid resistance efforts at the planned Olympic stadium

development site in Magandjin for the Brisbane 2032 Games, with the Goori Camp Embassy vowing to continue efforts to protect Barrambin/Victoria Park after police moved supporters from the Sacred Fire site early on June 1.



Creative glimpse of Country

PHOEBE BLOGG

The 2026 Kimberley Aboriginal Fashion Textiles and Art runway showcased the talents of 14 First Nations creatives and 60 models from nine communities across the northern WA region.

KAFTA executive director, Belinda Cook, noted this year was “the first KAFTA has presented as an Aboriginal Corporation, so it was a major step and cemented the organisation”.

“We are finalists in the upcoming NIFA Award Business Category, and hope that this will bring recognition to the collective community model we have built, and inspire other regions and communities to build their own programs,” she said.

This year’s event, hosted at Broome’s Town Beach Jetty on May 31, was managed by Rhiana Powers, a proud Yawuru, Jabirr Jabirr, and Gija woman.

“Rhiana began as a support

team member, back of house and has quickly and naturally stepped into a leadership role, overseeing the whole event program this year,” Cook told Style Up.

“Rhiana’s trajectory to a board member of the organisation and producer of the runway speak to the core purpose of KAFTA: to see Kimberley creatives taking up leadership roles, building industry for the Kimberley community and being recognised for the rich skills and knowledge they bring to the creative sector.”

Made by Kimberley people, celebrating Kimberley Country, the KAFTA runway event strives to highlight the remarkable Aboriginal-led creative industries in

the region, and supports the growth of the Kimberley Aboriginal fashion sector for future generations.

“Fashion is a way for us to carry our culture back,” KAFTA chairperson Agnes Pigram told a crowd of hundreds gathered on Broome’s Town Beach jetty for the event.

Featuring both designers and art centres, the 2026 runway included Nagula Jarndu Designs (Saheli Collection), Yarraliny Designs Yarraliny, Bidyadanga



Community Five Tribes Desert to the Sea, Mulardy Designs (Ocean & Wet Season), Dusty x My One (Kimberley Country Magic x My One), Halls Creek Job Pathways Hub (Ngaringga Larna Collection), Roxanne Dolby (Leah Collection), Shonte Molyneux (Sonder), Kwobardak Beautiful Designs (Kwobardak), Bibi Nganju Designs (Djugun Woora), Nangarri Designs (Vio & Olly), Jalayimiya, Jaymee Lee Chaquabor, and Marra Worra Worra.

Jaru woman and debut designer, Romenica Long, garment Desert Flowers, was inspired by the Country around her East Kimberley hometown of Halls Creek.

“I just love the way the desert dresses itself,” Ms Long told Style Up.

“My design showcases where I grew up, and spent most of my childhood with my grandmother. I used to travel around everywhere with her, so it is also a reminder of my family connections.”

Presenting the latest fashion,

textiles and art innovations from around the Kimberley, the catwalk welcomed not only designers and models but also dancers and performances.

KAFTA is a powerful platform for cultural expression, economic empowerment, and community celebration, deeply rooted in the heart of the Kimberley.

The commitment to local engagement ensures the benefits of the event directly benefit the community, fostering a strong sense of community and pride.

Attending family, media and audience members were thrilled to watch the runway and Town Beach Jetty provided a vibrant outdoor runway and a beautiful backdrop of the Kimberley sunset.

With several First Nations photographers, make-up artists, hairstylists and event crew being part of the event, First Nations excellence was championed on and beyond the runway.

When it came to the designs



that walked the runway, each creative showcased their distinctive style via culturally crafted clothing collections.

The designs featured on the runway presented a mix of

vibrant hues and distinctive prints. Storytelling was at the forefront of each and every collection, whether it was personal experiences or influences of local flora and fauna, these designers were

inspired to tell a story through the collections they presented.

Popular First Nations designer Brodie George impressed audience members with her swimwear and lifestyle brand Jalayimiya,

Pictures

Kristy Brittain
Halina Storm Kolatowicz
Kacey Umbagai

showcasing four artworks across her brand's signature beachside silhouettes.

"KAFTA builds self-belief within the community.

"It encourages people, particularly women and girls, to take up space, feel beautiful and celebrate themselves in garments that might not typically be worn in remote communities," Ms George told Style Up.

"Fashion becomes a form of self-expression. Women and girls learn how clothing can help tell stories, celebrate culture and showcase creativity. It inspires people to think differently about textiles,

design and the many ways culture can be represented through fashion.

"More than anything, KAFTA is a celebration of one another. It creates opportunities, builds confidence and reminds us of the importance of supporting and uplifting our communities"

Since its inception in 2022 the KAFTA runway has grown into one of the most successful runways for First Nations designers.

Celebrating culture and contemporary storytelling, KAFTA has continued to propel creatives to new opportunities.

Sharing culture through community.

Challenge accepted.

In Roebourne, artists of Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Country are sharing stories that reflect culture, identity and connect to Country.

Where We Come From is a community-led exhibition developed with FORM and supported by Woodside, strengthening knowledge and understanding of culture in the Pilbara and across Western Australia.

In 2025 the exhibition attracted more than 3,300 visitors, who engaged in storytelling, workshops and cultural learning.



Scan the QR Code to read Woodside's 2025 Social Contribution Report



Sharon Warrie, Art Development Camp. Perth 2025. Photo by Marnie Richardson courtesy of FORM.

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Play takes look at a key figure in history

PHOEBE BLOGG

The world premiere of Muruwari playwright Jane Harrison's *Bennelong In London* comes to Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf 1 Theatre this July.

The acclaimed writer and singular voice behind *The Visitors* and *Stolen* reunites with STC resident director and Wilman Noongar man Ian Michael — hailed by *Limelight Magazine* as “the most exciting new director of this generation” — to tell the story of one of Australian history's most important figures.

Making his STC debut, Gamilaraay actor Googoorewon Knox (Hamilton, *Big Name, No Blankets*) will play *Bennelong* alongside Biripi, Worimi, Wodi Wodi and Walbanga man Guy Simon (*The Visitors*, *The Tempest*) as a tenacious young actor who is preparing to audition for the role of a lifetime.

Set between present day and the 1780s, *Bennelong in London* depicts a time-bending conversation and burgeoning friendship between two First Nations men seeking to understand each other, themselves, and the art of auditioning. Harrison has



Guy Simon

taken “a playful — yet serious — approach to history and laced it with a contemporary character”.

“Diving into the archives and then inventing — this is what I love about playwriting, that you can build new worlds from old and that an audience will go with you on that ride,” she said

Michael is “honoured to bring *Bennelong* in London to Sydney audiences, on the traditional lands and waters of the Gadigal of the Eora Nation, where so much of this story began”.

“It has been a privilege to work again with Jane Harrison after directing her



Googoorewon Knox plays the lead role in Jane Harrison's *Bennelong* in London.

work *Stolen*, and to once more be part of bringing her compelling storytelling to the stage,” he said.

“*Bennelong* remains a vital figure in Australia's history — a man who stood between worlds at a moment of enormous change — and this production invites us to reflect on questions of identity and whether we can reconcile with our history, told through deep truth-telling and humanity.

“*Bennelong In London* asks us to engage with the dark

history of this country while affirming the resilience and continuing strength of First Nations voices and storytelling.”

The play tells the story of *The Actor*, played by Simon, who is preparing to audition for the role of a lifetime playing one of Australia's best-known figures.

As he readies himself, his imagination conjures to life *Bennelong* (Knox) himself, a man forced to navigate his way through two cultures colliding at breakneck speed.

Both travel to the 1780s where *Bennelong*, now a young Wangal man, is abducted by Governor Phillip.

Bennelong becomes his go-between with the Eora people and later, the first Aboriginal man to visit Europe and return and, eventually, the husband of a woman named Barangaroo.

Tickets are now available to *Bennelong* in London, which plays at Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf 1 Theatre from 18 July.

Journey Among Men presents cultural belongings

PHOEBE BLOGG

The Koorie Heritage Trust will present *Journey Among Men*, an exhibition of cultural belongings which brings together eight emerging and established First Nations artists in a powerful exploration of culture, connection and wellbeing.

Journey Among Men will run from August 22-November 22 at Koorie Heritage Trust, Birrarung Building, Fed Square.

Developed over two years, the project brought artists together on Country across Victoria to share cultural knowledge, creative practice and lived experience. The exhibition represents the culmination of this shared journey.

The exhibition features new works by emerging artists Earl Handy, Mitchil Harding, Cahill Kennedy, Iluka Sax-Williams and Lewis Wandin-Bursill, alongside established artists Mick Harding, Brendan Kennedy and Kevin Williams.



Brendan Kennedy and participating artist Cahill Kennedy.

Journey Among Men demonstrates the importance of intergenerational knowledge-sharing and the value of creating together on Country.

Developed as a mentoring and cultural development program for First Nations men, it fostered the exchange of cultural knowledge, creative practice and lived experience while supporting participants to strengthen cultural

connections, build skills and confidence, and develop meaningful relationships.

Journey Among Men recognises the important role cultural practice can play in supporting social and emotional wellbeing.

Through time spent on Country, making, learning and sharing together, participants created spaces for connection, reflection and healing while strengthening cultural identity

and belonging. The exhibition will showcase the artworks, stories and experiences that emerged through the process.

Artists were commissioned to create cultural belongings using materials sourced from Country and techniques including carving, incising, burning, and pigment application.

The resulting works have evolved through mentoring relationships, engagement with historical collections, and ongoing connections to family, community and Country.

“What I have found over the years is that a lot of young men — and they're older men now — just being around the older fellas, they pick up things from them, learning how to make artefacts, boomerangs and things like that,” Kevin Williams said.

“Some of them are still doing that to this day.”

Bridging “the old” and “the new”, *Journey Among Men* foregrounds the continuity and

living presence of First Peoples cultural practice while challenging colonial museological approaches to display and interpretation.

Rather than positioning cultural belongings as historical artefacts, the exhibition presents them as expressions of a living, evolving and enduring culture.

An exhibition catalogue and accompanying film have also been produced as part of *Journey Among Men*.

“I extend my deepest thanks to all participating artists for their generosity, dedication and ongoing collaboration throughout this program and the development of the exhibition and accompanying publication,” Koorie Heritage Trust chief executive Tom Mosby said.

“Their willingness to share cultural knowledge, artistic practice and lived experience has shaped a powerful exhibition that celebrates culture, resilience and connection.”



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Family loses contact with Papua activist

ANDREW MATHIESON

The family of a prominent West Papua activist has lost contact with its matriarch who has been missing in the occupied territory since mid-May.

Free West Papua campaigners claim Indonesian military have kidnapped and threatened Yasinta Moiwend, a Marind tribeswoman, affectionately known in environmental circles as Mama Yasinta.

The disappearance coincides with Indonesian censors banning a recent documentary which features Ms Moiwend, a revered figure in Papuan society.

The film, *Pesta Babi*, which focuses on the Merauke sugarcane megaproject, explores claims Indonesia is destroying West Papua's ancestral forest for profit. Considered moderate, the film does not discuss the view that most West Papuans seek

freedom and independence from Indonesia.

West Papuan activists say Indonesia has done everything it can to destroy the documentary.

Ms Moiwend was said to have travelled to Jakarta to file a police report against the head of the Merauke Legal Aid Institute, allegedly claiming her personal data and image had been used in the film without her permission or consultation, and requested that screenings be stopped.

In a series of social media video posts, Ms Moiwend had publicly distanced herself from *Pesta Babi*, saying she was unfairly exploited by the filmmakers.

However, it cannot be ascertained whether these allegations were of her own free will or made under duress.

One of her adult children suspects pressure was placed on their mother's life after she was widely discussed in the Indone-

sian media in connection with the film.

A video statement about Ms Moiwend's whereabouts was sent to Indonesian media six days after her disappearance.

"We from Mama Yasinta's family want to clarify that starting from Sunday, May 24, 2026, we lost contact with her," one of Ms Moiwend's daughters said.

The Head of the Greenpeace Forest campaign team, Arie Rompas, confirmed Ms Moiwend's family made the video.

According to one of Ms Moiwend's daughters, the family suspects there were parties which had established communication and planned to take the environmental activist out of her village in Kampung Wogekel, in the South Papua province, without their knowledge.

The daughter said the family had suspected Ms Moiwend was sent by boat to Merauke.

However, the family also



Activist Yasinta Moiwend recently fronted media before later disappearing in West Papua. Picture: Kurniawan Fadilah / detikcom

received information two days after their last contact that Ms Moiwend was on a jet plane to the Central Papua province.

According to Ms Moiwend's daughter, the family only learnt of these developments after several military personnel and district officials returned from Merauke to Kampung Wanam in a helicopter.

She also conveyed Ms Moiwend had planned to meet with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto.

The family has allegedly requested that the Witness and Victim Protection Agency, the National Commission on Human Rights, and the National Commission on Violence Against Women monitor Ms Moiwend's whereabouts.

"Until now, we do not know Mama's condition — whether she is safe in Jakarta or (if she's) being intimidated," Ms Moiwend's daughter said.

United Liberation Movement of West Papua chairman Benny Wenda said the 62-year-old activist had "clearly been kidnapped" by the Indonesian National Armed Forces.

"Against her will, the Indonesian State has forced Mama Yasinta to issue a statement retracting her involvement in the film," he said.

"For West Papuans, this is not a new phenomenon. Indonesia has always used any means they can to divide our spirit: bribery, threats, arbitrary arrests, beatings and torture.

"Those who they cannot silence, they simply kill.

"Mama Yasinta is just like the elders who were forced at gunpoint to vote against West Papuan independence during the 'act of no choice'."

Ms Moiwend has actively voiced opposition to the expansion of the food industry in South Papua.

Residents get access to clean fresh water

REBEKAH RASMUSSEN

Fijian residents of the Nabuna Settlement in Lekutu, Bua now have access to clean drinking water after more than 50 years of relying on a nearby spring.

The Nabuna Settlement Water Project was completed this month through the Fijian Government's self-help program under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

The project cost more than \$19,000 and will support 16 households and more than 40 people.

Nabuna Settlement Water Committee president Joji Dua said families had waited generations for reliable access to water.

"For more than 50 years, our families depended on the spring for our daily water needs," he said.

"It was a routine that many generations grew up with, carrying water back to our homes every day.

"There were times when accessing the spring was challenging, especially during bad weather."

The new water system provides clean, safe, and reliable water closer to homes in the settlement.

The project was officially commissioned in Bua by Fiji's Minister for Rural and Maritime



A new water project is supporting 16 households in the Fijian village of Nabuna. Picture: Fijian Government

Development and Disaster Management Mosese Bulitavu.

The ministry said the new water supply was expected to improve health, reduce the burden of fetching water, and provide greater convenience for families in the settlement.

Mr Dua said elderly residents and children were among those most affected by the former arrangement.

"Today, we are grateful because our people now have access to clean water close to their homes," he said. "This project has

brought real change to our lives."

The self-help program supports community-driven projects designed to respond to local needs in rural and maritime areas.

The Nabuna Settlement Water Project was delivered as part of efforts to improve basic infrastructure and living standards in communities.

Mr Bulitavu said access to safe and reliable water remained central to community wellbeing.

"Water is life," he said.

"It is essential for our health, our livelihoods, our children's

education and the overall wellbeing of our communities.

"No family should have to struggle daily to access clean drinking water."

The minister said the project would have a direct impact on daily life in Nabuna.

"This investment may seem modest in cost, but its impact on the lives of the people of Nabuna is significant and far-reaching," Mr Bulitavu said.

The project also forms part of the ministry's broader approach to inclusive and resilient rural

development. Mr Bulitavu said the Self-Help Program allowed the Government to work directly with communities on practical local projects.

"Through the self-help program, government continues to partner directly with communities to address their most pressing needs," he said.

"These projects are not only about infrastructure; they are about empowering communities, improving living standards and creating opportunities for sustainable development."

LAUREN STEFANOU

New South Wales has a serious police violence problem.

A reckoning is long overdue — but it won't happen until we have an independent police watchdog with more teeth.

Responding to horrific accounts of police brutality, including an incident where police bashed an Aboriginal man after an unlawful arrest, breaking his ribs and puncturing his lung, NSW Premier Chris Minns said: "We have a strong, robust, independent investigatory body in New South Wales with oversight of the police and public officials, and I think the public should have confidence in those bodies to do their job."

These words are cold comfort for communities who are routinely subject to over-policing and disproportionate use of punitive police powers, with little avenue for recourse.

The NSW police watchdog — the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission — is severely constrained by inadequate resources to investigate the vast majority of police complaints, and frustrating limitations on its powers.

Most complaints against NSW officers are investigated by NSW Police. If the LECC is unsatisfied with a complaint investigation, it can ask police to investigate further, but they are not obliged to do so.

When police decide not to take disciplinary action

Time to give watchdog sharper teeth

“

Police violence is systemic. It is not an unfortunate by-product of the system, but a feature that is ingrained by design.

complaint against police, it faces barriers in accessing information. The NSW Police Force has mounted court challenges to resist providing information to the watchdog.

Even where the LECC finds serious misconduct, the matter is referred back to police to decide if officers will face any consequences. It's

little wonder the public is increasingly losing trust in police.

Police violence is systemic.

It is not an unfortunate by-product of the system, but a feature that is ingrained by design. Police brutality is much more common than most people realise — and is inflicted against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at grossly disproportionate rates.

When Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT clients find some measure of justice after experiencing police misconduct, it's usually through a settlement in the civil law system, meaning no charges are laid. Too often, they are required to sign a gag order before they can access compensation. Silencing victims only serves to mask the true extent of police

misconduct. The criminal legal system is even less capable of delivering justice.

Earlier this month, NSW Sgt Benedict Bryant was sentenced for dangerous driving causing the death of Dunghutti teenager Jai Wright. It was the first time a NSW officer had been held criminally responsible for causing the death of an Aboriginal person in custody.

This followed four years of tireless advocacy from Jai's family, supported by our lawyers, who advocated for the Coroner to refer Sgt Bryant's actions for prosecution.

Initially, NSW Police and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions declined to lay charges.

It was a hard-won, historic outcome, but it shouldn't be up to grieving families to lead the fight for accountability.

How many cases of police violence and misconduct will never see the light of day?

How many police officers will never have to answer for misusing their power?

Communities should be able to trust they will be safe when interacting with police.

They won't have that assurance until police are held accountable for their actions.

If the Premier wants the public to have confidence in police oversight, he must give the watchdog the power to bite.

Lauren Stefanou is the principal solicitor (policy, strategy & advocacy) at the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT).

More power must be given to those who know what our children need

DR JAMES BEAUFILS & DR TODD FERNANDO

“

Aboriginal communities have never needed the state to teach them how to care for children.

Queensland's child safety inquiry exposes deep failures within the child protection system and risks reopening old wounds through expanded adoption recommendations.

Yet adoption is only one of several concerns emerging from the report, alongside unresolved questions about self-determination, the transfer of authority to Aboriginal communities, the role of culture in child wellbeing, and the continued reliance on state-centred approaches to permanency and care.

The real question is this: who gets to decide what permanency means for Aboriginal children? The answer offered by child protection systems is courts, departments and legislation.

The answer offered by Aboriginal communities is family, kinship, culture and Country. These are not simply different solutions. They are fundamentally different understandings of care, belonging and responsibility.

And right now, only one of them carries the force of law.

Contemporary child protection debates offer a familiar set of false choices. Either children remain in

unsafe situations, or they are removed. Either families succeed on their own, or the state intervenes. Either children are reunified, or they require permanent alternative arrangements such as adoption.

These binaries leave little room to imagine different ways of caring for children.

Aboriginal communities have never needed the state to teach them how to care for children.

They have always possessed systems of governance, accountability and kinship that predate — and outlast, every child protection framework Australia has ever built.

Across Australia, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations have demonstrated the importance of community-led responses that strengthen families before crises escalate. Kinship care networks care for thousands of children, often with limited resources and support. Elders play vital roles in maintaining

family connections, cultural identity and community accountability.

The question is not whether alternatives exist. The question is whether governments will ever trust them — or whether “community-led” will remain a slogan dressed up as policy.

In our recent work with the Barkindji community in Menindee, New South Wales, community members developed what became known as the Minintitja Care Model.

Rather than beginning with risk assessments, statutory thresholds and removal decisions, the model begins with relationships.

Children are understood not as isolated individuals but as part of families, kinship systems, communities and Country. Responsibility for children is not held solely by parents or government agencies. It is shared across families, Elders and community members who hold obligations to support, guide

and protect children throughout their lives.

Importantly, the model does not deny the need for safety.

Rather, it asks a different question. How can communities be supported to resolve challenges before removal becomes necessary?

This shifts the focus from intervention to prevention. From surveillance to support. From risk management to relationship building. From statutory authority to community responsibility.

Such approaches challenge a foundational assumption of contemporary child protection systems — that governments are best placed to determine what is in the interests of Aboriginal children.

Increasingly, Aboriginal communities are asking a different question: What would happen if governments transferred greater authority to those who know the children, know the families and remain accountable to the community long after statutory involvement has ended? Some will call this radical. It is not. It is the principle that underpins self-determination. And it is increasingly recognised internationally as essential to improving outcomes for Indigenous children and families.

The Queensland child safety inquiry has framed this as a debate about over-reliance, outcomes, shortages, adoption and colonial intervention. It is not simply that. It is a debate about power. Until governments are willing to transfer real authority — not just consult, not just “partner,” but genuinely cede control — debates about adoption will keep treating the symptom while ignoring the disease.

Aboriginal children deserve safety. They deserve stability. They deserve permanence. But they also deserve to know who they are, where they come from and who they belong to. Governments will insist they face a choice between safety and culture. They do not. For Aboriginal children, safety and culture have never been separate. Governments that treat them as opposites have always been asking the wrong question.

Dr James Beaufils is a senior research fellow at the Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research and the Faculty of Law University of Technology Sydney. He is a Gundungurra man from the Pejar area and Kanak from New Caledonia. Dr Todd Fernando is a 2026 Paul Ramsay Fellow, senior researcher, and policy strategist focused on social justice, systems reform, and structural change in Australia.

Move to change systems

NICOLE BROWN

A growing movement is challenging the way economic development is designed and delivered in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with increasing calls for a shift away from dependency-based systems towards models grounded in sovereignty, self-determination and community control.

The issue emerged strongly at this month's Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Summit, where First Nations leaders, practitioners and researchers explored how existing funding and governance structures can unintentionally limit long-term economic outcomes for communities.

At the heart of the discussion was a simple question: what is the difference between funding communities and transferring decision-making authority?

First Nations Economics managing director corporate and governance Shaun Cumming believes lasting economic prosperity in First Nations communities will only be achieved when communities have authority over the decisions that shape their futures. He argues too



Shaun Cumming spoke at the AIATSIS Summit.

often funding goes into communities without a corresponding transfer of power, and said communities should be "setting the direction from the start, not being brought in once the key decisions are already made".

"In practice, that means communities deciding what matters, what success looks like, and having the ability to change things if something isn't working," he said.

Mr Cumming said the goal was to create systems that responded to community priorities rather than expecting communities to adapt to externally designed frameworks.

Despite decades of invest-

ment, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to face barriers to economic self-determination.

For many Indigenous communities, the challenge extends beyond economics. Generations of policies have often positioned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as participants in systems designed by others rather than architects of their own futures. While significant public funding has flowed into programs over decades, many communities still experience lower rates of employment, business ownership, home ownership and economic participation than the broader

population. At the same time, community organisations are frequently required to navigate complex reporting obligations, short-term funding agreements and changing government priorities. This can leave leaders focused on securing the next funding round rather than investing in long-term economic strategies, institution building and intergenerational wealth creation.

The result is a cycle where communities are expected to deliver outcomes without always having the authority, resources or control needed to shape them.

"A lot of the time, priorities are decided before communities have had a chance to shape the problem," Mr Cumming said.

"Funding cycles are short, so local organisations carry a lot of delivery risk but don't control the investment. Success is usually measured through compliance rather than whether communities are actually stronger at the end."

The discussion highlighted the importance of community-controlled institutions and governance structures which place authority closer to communities.

"There are some strong exam-

ples already showing what this looks like," Mr Cumming said, pointing to Indigenous-controlled finance institutions in Canada and community-controlled organisations across Australia.

Participants heard economic sovereignty is about not just access to funding, but ownership, governance, capability and ensuring economic benefits remain within communities for future generations.

Mr Cumming believes meaningful change requires governments and investors to involve communities before priorities are established.

"It's not about adding more consultation. It's about changing the sequence so authority sits in the right place," he said.

Mr Cumming remains optimistic about the future, particularly the next generation of First Nations leaders.

"We're seeing more First Nations leaders working across policy and industry, and at the same time not separating economic development from culture, governance or identity," he said. "There's also a stronger expectation that systems should change, rather than people having to adapt to them."

"That shift matters."

PKKP sign fresh agreements for Fortescue mining

REECE HARLEY

Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura Traditional Owners will own new mining equipment, including haul trucks and electric excavators, and lease it to Fortescue under agreements approved by the PKKP community this month.

The fleet hire arrangement sits at the centre of a new Native Title agreement and co-management agreement which replaces the original land access agreement PKKP signed with the miner in 2010.

The PKKP community voted in favour of the changes at a Native Title authorisation meeting in Karratha on June 11. The equipment will support Fortescue's Pilbara operations and create a long-term revenue stream for the PKKP Aboriginal Corporation, expanding its commercial activities and giving the group a direct stake in the economics of mining on its Country.

It is the second time in two years the PKKP have secured co-management arrangements with a major Pilbara iron ore miner.

The group are the Traditional Owners of Juukan Gorge, where Rio Tinto destroyed two 46,000-year-old rock shelters in May 2020, triggering a Federal parliamentary inquiry, an exodus of Rio Tinto executives, and a global reckoning over heritage protection in mining.

PKKP signed a co-management agreement with Rio Tinto last year.

PKKP Enterprises chairperson and Pinikura Traditional Owner Terry Drage said the new agreements would create a lasting legacy.

"This is a landmark agreement that strengthens protections for our Country and heritage while creating long-term economic opportunities for our people," Mr Drage said.

"Through initiatives like the mining fleet arrangement, we are securing a stronger future for the next generations and taking an active decision-making role in how mining is carried out on our Country. Not as a silent partner, but as a true partner."

"We have always said we are not opposed to mining, but it has to be done in the right way with Traditional Owner decision-making front and centre."

"These agreements are going to create a lasting legacy for our people."

PKKP Aboriginal Corporation chairperson and Puutu Kunti Kurrama Elder Sandra Hayes noted the negotiation took three years.

"We have updated our original land access agreement that we signed with Fortescue in 2010, and we've replaced it with a new Native Title Agreement and co-management agreement," she said.

"The co-management agree-



Andrew Forrest, Terry Drage, Sandra Hayes and Dino Otranto.

ment we've signed with Fortescue builds on the agreement we made with Rio Tinto last year and has a number of protections for our Country and our heritage."

The co-management agreement commits both parties to work together through every stage of mining, from exploration through construction, operation and closure.

It establishes co-manage-

ment committees for specific mines and developments, early sharing of heritage information and mine plans, a clear decision-making process whereby Fortescue requires key approvals such as section 18 consents to disturb heritage, and active site protections including buffers, blast management and fencing.

"One of the key parts of the co-management agreement is

that Fortescue and PKKP need to share information much earlier about mining activities and heritage so we have the best chance of protecting important places, and so Fortescue can carry on with certainty," Mr Drage said.

The Native Title agreement also covers tenure related to Fortescue's decarbonisation activities and a modernised mining benefits framework.

Boost for prawn project

GIOVANNI TORRE

A 100 per cent Indigenous-owned and operated foundation received a \$500,000 grant this month to scale up a native giant freshwater prawn project in Far North Queensland.

Hope Vale Foundation was among four Queensland producers to share in \$2 million through the latest round of the Coles Nurture Fund.

Foundation general manager Rachelle McIvor said the grant would help the 100 per cent Indigenous-owned and operated not-for-profit move from a successful hatchery trial to building its own hatchery and grow-out ponds on its 19ha research and development farm near Cooktown, creating new jobs and helping bring an Australian-grown native protein to wider markets.

"We've already proven this



can work, with our hatchery trial producing around 200,000 juvenile prawns when we were expecting about 20,000 and now this funding helps us take the next big step," she said.

"Cherabin is something our community knows and loves, but many Australians haven't had the chance to experience it yet. It's a beautiful native freshwater prawn and we think it has a really exciting future as an Australian-grown native protein.

"This project is about much more than prawns. It's about creating meaningful jobs that suit our community, building



Hope Vale Farm directors Kaylene Bowen, Rachel McIvor (general manager), Malcolm McIvor, Cheryl Canon and Bruce Woibo. Picture: Hope Vale Foundation

skills and opening up future opportunities for local people to be part of the supply chain.

"Because the pond water can also be reused to irrigate crops on the farm, it gives us a connected system that links aquaculture and agriculture on the same property."

Coles Group chief commercial and sustainability officer Anna Croft said the round 14 Queensland recipients reflected the ingenuity, ambition and practical problem-solving of local producers.

"We're proud to support four Queensland small and medium-sized businesses with \$2 million in grants to help bring their ideas to life," she said.

"Each recipient is tackling a real challenge in their business or industry, whether that's reducing waste, improving efficiency, creating new opportunities for regional communities or developing more sustainable ways to produce food."

The Queensland recipients are among eight small and medium-sized businesses

across Australia awarded grants of up to \$500,000.

Since 2015, the Coles Nurture Fund has awarded more than \$43 million to 127 Australian businesses, for projects that support sustainability, efficiency and growth. The latest round marked the biggest amount awarded to Queensland producers in a single round, with total support for Queensland businesses growing to \$9.7 million.

Businesses are encouraged to apply for the 15th round when applications open in January.



Shannon Motlop's Aboriginal Community Harvest at work.

Native fruit firm celebrates plum job

DAVID PRESTIPINO

Adelaide-based Creative Native Foods has expanded its commitment to Indigenous-led procurement, placing one of its largest Kakadu plum orders of the year with Larrakia-owned harvesting business Aboriginal Community Harvest.

The purchase, sourced directly from Larrakia harvester Shannon Motlop and his team in the Northern Territory, typifies growing demand for native ingredients while supporting greater Aboriginal participation in Australia's emerging native foods supply chain.

Industry analysts continue to identify native foods as a significant growth opportunity for regional and Indigenous econo-

mies. The University of Sydney estimated Australia's native food industry was worth \$81.5 million in 2019-20, with demand continuing to increase in food service, retail, tourism, wellness and export markets.

Creative Native Food's Kakadu plum order — one of the company's biggest single purchases of the fruit this season — aligns with a broader strategy to ensure Indigenous businesses are central in the industry's growth, creating commercial opportunities that extend from Country to consumer.

Owned by Wiradjuri entrepreneur Terri-Anne (Tezzi) Daniel, Creative Native Foods is Australia's biggest distributor of native ingredients, supplying restaurants, hotels, tourism operators

and food manufacturers nationwide.

Its procurement model is built on direct relationships with Indigenous harvesters.

The fruit was harvested during Damibila, one of the seven Larrakia seasons, when bush fruits ripen across parts of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland.

"Kakadu plum is one of Australia's most special ingredients, and we want to make sure it's sourced the right way," Ms Daniel said.

"Backing harvesters like Shannon and his brother means the people doing the work on Country are the ones building the business.

"That matters to us, and it should matter to anyone cook-

ing with these ingredients."

Aboriginal Community Harvest, operates across multiple harvesting regions through agreements with Traditional Owners and harvesting permits, including partnerships with the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation in West Arnhem Land.

The fruit is harvested by hand and is renowned for its exceptionally high vitamin C and antioxidant content.

For Mr Motlop, commercial growth and cultural continuity remain closely linked.

"Loved by children for its tart green plum flavour and valued by adults for its medicinal properties, Kakadu plum is . . . one of world's most nutrient-dense fruits," he said.

NIT

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Language at heart of culture for Maori

JOSEPH GUENZLER

The sixth National Indigenous Empowerment Summit, held this month in Magandjin/Brisbane, focused on Indigenous-led solutions in education, employment and economic development, with self-determination, cultural authority and practical action at the centre.

AUAHA founders Andre (Te Arawa, Tainui, Taranaki) and Gaylene (Ngati Porou) Ahipene used their keynote speech to place Te Ao Maori (Maori people) at the centre of self-determination and economic development.

AUAHA, a Maori cultural services and solutions enterprise based in Australia, was formed after the couple identified a need for cultural identity and reclamation among Maori living abroad.

Mr Ahipene said Maori self-determination began with language.

"It all centres around Te Ao Maori, the Maori language," he said. The keynote address

framed culture not as an addition to development, but as knowledge, design, story, language, identity and economic power. It also linked cultural value with economic value, arguing inherited knowledge and cultural practice were assets for future economies.

Mr Ahipene said AUAHA's work required confidence to speak from a Maori position.

"In terms of the work that we do, it's really about having that knowledge, having that insight and having the courage to be able to share that as well," Mr Ahipene said.

The presentation placed mana motuhake (self-determination) within a wider discussion about cultural authority and Indigenous enterprise.

Mr Ahipene said the term spoke to identity, pride, and direction.

"If we centre that on the language component, we look at terms like mana motuhake," Mr Ahipene said.

"Our own pride, our own integrity as a people, as individ-



AUAHA founders Gaylene and Andre Ahipene. Picture: Joseph Guenzler

uals, it sort of leads us into that direction."

He said capability is not about making Indigenous businesses more Western, but giving people tools to grow without leaving themselves behind.

That included business skills, financial confidence and governance knowledge, while keeping tikanga (customary practices), cultural safety and community responsibility at the centre.

Ms Ahipene said she saw shared values between Maori and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the summit.

"The similarities that I see

between us, the Maori people and our Mana Whenua (cultural authority), or our Indigenous people here, is really the respect," Ms Ahipene said.

"The respect that they have for their Elders, for the knowledge that has been passed down, you can see that it's been instilled in them really deep and they still live in it.

"Even though we come from different lands, different places, we are the same people with the same struggles and the same fights and the same victories also."

Mr Ahipene said strong communities were built through strong people, and economic de-

velopment needed to begin from that base.

The keynote speech also placed Country, cultural authority and intellectual property at the centre of economic futures.

Mr Ahipene said Maori and First Nations peoples in Australia could learn from each other by normalising culture in shared spaces.

"If we continue to indigenise every space that we go into, if we continue to recognise and see each other in our practices, in spaces other than our own ancestral lands, then it's really about prioritising just normalising culture," he said.

Corporation's change at top

REECE HARLEY

A new chief executive is set to take the reins at one of Australia's largest and most sophisticated Indigenous corporations.

Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation recently announced current chief operating officer Paul Martin will step up to chief executive officer to replace Rhian Oliver, who is leaving after four years in the top job.

Chairperson Wanyubi Marika framed the move as planned succession rather than disruption.

The COO role was created about 18 months ago to build executive depth.

"It has been a privilege to work with RAC and the Rirratjingu community over many years," Mr Oliver said. "I'm proud of what the organisation has achieved, and confident that it will continue to grow and deliver strong outcomes for the future."

Mr Martin said he was honoured to take on the role.

"RAC plays an important role for its members and the wider region, and I look forward to working with the board, staff and community in the years ahead," he said.

The corporation represents the Rirratjingu clan, Traditional Owners of land on the Gove Peninsula in North East Arnhem Land, and it carries one of the most significant



Incoming Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Paul Martin with deputy chairman Makungun Brendan Marika.

legacies in the Australian land rights story.

In 1963, when the Commonwealth excised land from the Arnhem Land reserve for bauxite mining without consulting Traditional Owners, Rirratjingu leaders including Roy Marika helped drive the creation of the Yirrkala Bark Petitions, the first traditional documents formally recognised by the Federal Parliament, and now counted among Australia's founding constitutional records. The 1971 Gove land rights case, *Milirrpum v Nabalco*, grew from the same fight and helped lay the groundwork for the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976. Mr Marika

founded the corporation in 1984 to administer mining royalties and build a pathway to economic independence for the clan.

Four decades on, RAC runs commercial subsidiaries from its Nhulunbuy office and delivers community and cultural programs across North East Arnhem Land from Yirrkala, channelling proceeds from mining and business investments into services for members and a future fund.

The corporation is the largest non-government financial backer of the No More family violence campaign, and it stages the annual Yarrapay Music Festival at Yirrkala.

FNF and bank set to boost financial literacy

JOSEPH GUENZLER

People First Bank marked National Reconciliation Week this month by announcing a partnership with First Nations Foundation to support financial literacy and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

FNF works to strengthen financial literacy and long-term prosperity for Indigenous people through programs designed to support financial wellbeing.

The bank has signed a two-year agreement with the foundation to support practical education, educator training and Financial Wellness Outreach events in communities across the country.

Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa woman and FNF CEO Leah Bennett said the support would help strengthen financial education for communities.

"First Nations Foundation's financial education programs — headlined by our flagship

community initiative, Financial Wellness Outreach — are rooted in fairness, equality, and accountability," she said.

"We strive to bring like-minded organisations and major institutions together to unite under a common cause, to improve service delivery and to give Mob the tools and knowledge that they need to write their own money stories."

The partnership will support the Foundation's My Money Dream online financial literacy program, its Train the Trainer program and Financial Wellness Outreach events.

People First Bank chief customer officer Maria-Ann Camilleri said the FNF record in practical financial literacy made it an ideal partner.

"We're delighted to be working with the First Nations Foundation to help deliver grassroots programs that have meaningful impacts for people's futures," Ms Camilleri said.

FMG backs driver training

Mining company Fortescue recently partnered with Bloodwood Tree Association to help more people in Port Hedland gain the skills, confidence and support needed to get their driver’s licence.

The two-year, \$160,000 partnership will support the continuation and expansion of Bloodwood’s driver training program, helping reduce a key barrier to employment, education and independence in the Pilbara. Program participants



Jasmine Lockyer & Teagane Ramirez on the driving program.

receive practical driver education, supervised driving opportunities, mentoring and

further support, with Fortescue’s funding enabling more evening and weekend sessions. Bloodwood Tree Association is a trusted community organisation delivering culturally appropriate support services for vulnerable and disadvantaged community members across Hedland.

Bloodwood’s acting chief executive Kelly Gould said demand for driver training support remained strong. “This partnership with

Fortescue gives us the ability to expand when and how the program is delivered,” she said. “By offering more evening and weekend sessions, we can better support people who are balancing work, family and other commitments, and help them keep progressing towards their licence.”

Fortescue’s director of approvals, communities and services Rosli Wheelock noted getting a driver’s licence was “a significant milestone that

brings with it a sense of freedom” which “can also provide greater access to employment and education opportunities” for people in the Pilbara. “By supporting a locally led and culturally responsive initiative, we’re investing in a practical, community-driven solution that delivers measurable outcomes for individuals, families and the wider community,” he said.

This report was produced with the support of Fortescue.



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	15/2177	BRADLEY, Joseph Robert	7BL	22.3km NW'ly of Coolgardie	Lat: 30° 46' S Long: 121° 3' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Exploration Licence	15/2188	NORTON GOLD FIELDS PTY LTD	6BL	14.7km W'ly of Kalgoorlie	Lat: 30° 45' S Long: 121° 19' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE, KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Exploration Licence	29/1335	DALLA-COSTA, Melville Raymond	1BL	62.6km SW'ly of Leonora	Lat: 29° 8' S Long: 120° 45' E	MENZIES SHIRE
Exploration Licence	37/1595	EMERALD RESOURCES (WA) PTY LTD	21BL	99.5km NE'ly of Leinster	Lat: 27° 27' S Long: 121° 33' E	LAVERTON SHIRE, LEONORA SHIRE
Exploration Licence	38/4073	RICHMOND, William Robert	1BL	121.9km N'ly of Laverton	Lat: 27° 32' S Long: 122° 10' E	LAVERTON SHIRE
Exploration Licence	57/1499	AVANTI EXPLORATION PTY LTD	6BL	61.6km N'ly of Sandstone	Lat: 27° 26' S Long: 119° 11' E	SANDSTONE SHIRE
Exploration Licence	70/6686	CLAW MINERALS PTY LTD	47BL	70.8km NE'ly of Dalwallinu	Lat: 29° 57' S Long: 117° 17' E	DALWALLINU SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3590	FORRESTANIA RESOURCES LIMITED	102.39HA	33.4km SW'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 38' S Long: 120° 54' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3600	FORTUNA RESOURCES PTY LTD	159.71HA	28.5km N'ly of Coolgardie	Lat: 30° 42' S Long: 121° 3' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3601	FORTUNA RESOURCES PTY LTD	90.61HA	28km N'ly of Coolgardie	Lat: 30° 42' S Long: 121° 4' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3605	FORRESTANIA RESOURCES LIMITED	192.24HA	33.6km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 40' S Long: 121° 1' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3606	FORRESTANIA RESOURCES LIMITED	122.52HA	33.5km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 40' S Long: 121° 1' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3608	WEST AUSTRALIAN PROSPECTORS PTY LTD	196.72HA	31.1km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 38' S Long: 120° 58' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	16/3609	WEST AUSTRALIAN PROSPECTORS PTY LTD	195.85HA	32.8km S'ly of Ora Banda	Lat: 30° 39' S Long: 120° 58' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE
Prospecting Licence	25/2893	FLEMING, Leo Glenn	9.96HA	36.2km NE'ly of Kambalda	Lat: 30° 56' S Long: 121° 52' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	26/4864	FLEMING, Leo Glenn	159.55HA	25.4km N'ly of Kambalda	Lat: 30° 58' S Long: 121° 37' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY
Prospecting Licence	26/4866	READ, Joshua Samuel	17.35HA	20.9km SE'ly of Kalgoorlie	Lat: 30° 51' S Long: 121° 39' E	KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CITY

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 exploration licences, which authorises the applicant to explore for minerals for a term of 5 years from the date of grant. **Notification day: 17 June 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 **17 September 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. 17 October 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

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

*** – 1 Graticular Block = 2.8 km²**



NOTICE TO GRANT AMALGAMATION APPLICATIONS
NATIVE TITLE ACT 1993 (CTH) SECTION 29
The State of Western Australia HEREBY GIVES NOTICE that the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, C/- Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration, 100 Plain Street, East Perth WA 6004 may grant the following amalgamation applications under the *Mining Act 1978*:

Exploration No.	Applicant	Amalg No	Area	Locality	Centroid	Shire
29/771	MT IDA LITHIUM PTY LTD	757859	17.89HA	82km NW'ly of Menzies	Lat: 29° 6' S Long: 120° 31' E	MENZIES SHIRE

Nature of the act: Grant of amalgamation applications which authorises the applicant to explore for minerals. **Notification day: 17 June 2026. Native title parties:** Under Section 30 of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), persons have until 3 months after the notification day to take certain steps to become native title parties in relation to the applications. The 3 month period closes on **17 September 2026**. Any person who is, or becomes a native title party, is entitled to the negotiation and/or procedural rights provided in Part 2 Division 3 Subdivision P of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). Enquiries in relation to filing a native title determination application to become a native title party should be directed to the Federal Court of Australia, 1 Victoria Avenue, Perth, WA 6000, telephone (08) 9268 7100. **Expedited procedure:** The State of Western Australia considers that these acts are acts attracting the expedited procedure. Each amalgamation application may be granted unless, within the period of 4 months after the notification day (**i.e. 17 October 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.

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



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	16/613	FORTUNA RESOURCES PTY LTD	2.51HA	30.7km N'ly of Coolgardie	Lat: 30° 41' S Long: 121° 4' E	COOLGARDIE SHIRE

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: 17 June 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 **17 September 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. 17 October 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.

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Finke fanatic still kicking up dust

JARRED CROSS

The 460km two-day, off-road Finke Desert Race ripped through the red dust of Central Australia for its 50th anniversary this month, and Arrernte man Alan Henderson has been there for half of them.

Born in the Red Centre and turning 50 this year, Henderson watched on in the early days as a child.

His first time racing in the Finke was in 1998, returning to the start line on the South Stuart Highway every year since, with very rare exceptions.

There are a few more aches and pains these days, he joked, but Henderson's not in it to win it, only to improve on the years gone by.

"It's a bit of an addiction," Henderson told National Indigenous Times.

In 1976 the Finke started as a "there and back" challenge from Mparntwe/Alice Springs to the Finke River, raced by a group of local motorbike riders. Half a century later it's grown to have hundreds of contestants racing every year on bikes and in cars and buggies along sections of the old Ghan Railway to the small community of Aputula before turning around.

It has a reputation as one of the most testing, difficult courses, across some of the most remote corners of the world.

It's estimated more than 12,000 people camp along the racetrack to watch each year.

"So, when you're looking at putting four to 500 bikes on a 220k track, plus the cars also race the same track ... you can imagine the track deteriorating," Henderson said.



Alan Henderson says he'd love to see an Indigenous team take part in the Finke Desert Race.

"It's got bulldust, rocky sections ... it's got everything.

"The dust, then the traffic, everyone trying to squeeze on that track and do their best, that's where all the fun begins."

Henderson remembers his first race on a 250cc two-stroke. He quickly made his mind up to come back the next year, and he did, on a KTM 540, top of the range at the time.

Henderson is now based in Darwin.

It meant a "nice and convenient 15-hour drive down the Stuart Highway" to get there, he said with a laugh, and an opportunity to come home.

An outright top-40 finish around 20 years ago was Henderson's best result on paper.

Last year he finished second in his class — the 45-54

age bracket. For an amateur rider, that was a decent result, he said — as was the milestone he notched up in this year's June 5-8 event.

"I'm not there to win it, but I'm a little bit competitive," Henderson said before the race.

"Each year I like to look to improve on a few things I can do a little bit differently.

"You learn a few things each year.

"I got second in my class last year, so that's another little incentive. Trying to just aim and get a top five in my class is something I sort of aim and strive for.

"That's my goal.

"I'm 50 this year. So, I'm 50 on the 50th Finke, and I've raced 25 of them. When you have a bit of a snapshot at that, that's not too bad of an

effort." While he's "hanging in there", it's always a tough call to say whether Henderson will be at the start line again in another year, admitting it would be difficult to walk away.

There are other ambitions, however. "It's always been my dream to one day, once my riding is over, to create an Indigenous team," Henderson said.

"Try and get some funding and set up a bit of a team to make the race accessible to our fellow brothers and sis-

ters. I've just got to finish one day, that's all."

For the moment, it's camaraderie and a "Finke Family" which keep drawing Henderson back.

"When you see people waving you, cheering you on, when you have a stack of people just pop out of the blue from nowhere and help you up with the bike, pat you on the back and tell you to keep going with a stubby in their hands, that's the sort of stuff that makes it the event it is."



Upton aims to take skipper's role in her stride

JARRED CROSS

Tamika Upton won't be changing anything about her game and will lead by example as the new Broncos captain.

Upton feels she still has a bit to learn, but is welcoming the challenge of replacing NRLW legend Ali Briginshaw in leading her side, and their premiership defence, starting on July 4.

The Barada full-back, 29, has let her football do the talking throughout her career, and is widely considered the women's game's best with a stellar CV including two Dally M Medals, premierships, and representative honours.

Upton is no stranger to leadership roles, leading Newcastle to the 2023 premiership as vice-captain before returning to Brisbane in 2025, and was appointed her home State's skipper for this year's State of Origin series.

"(Broncos coach Scott Prince) has been pretty clear on that with the captaincy — nothing is to change and you lead by your actions," Upton said this month, "and that's what I'm hoping to do, and still be the same player, and yeah, bring that sort of difference this year."

"We've got really good leaders at this club, and I think

that's what makes this club successful. So, I know I'm not alone out there."

She said her role in the No.1 jumper has meant a lot of on-field talk, although not much is needed in their side, and there are already demanding teammate standards, "so I think nothing really changes with that".

Briginshaw, a Brisbane veteran, Queensland and Jillaroos great, stepped down from captaincy of the reigning premiers this month. She is more than confident of Upton succeeding.

"Tamika is the pinnacle of the game, she sets very high standards of herself and those

around her," Briginshaw said. "It made it a lot easier to step down as captain, knowing that Tamika is here and the team will be in safe hands.

"She's the right person for this, and I know she is going to take the team forward in the best way possible.

"All of her family is really proud of her and as a club, we are all very proud of her too."

Upton, a Rockhampton product, began her career with the Broncos in 2019 before a three year patch with Newcastle, bringing back-to-back premierships, between 2022 and 2024.

She returned to her original club ahead of the 2025, culmi-

nating in her fourth premiership last October.

Upton has made 50 NRLW appearances, represented Queensland across seven Origin series, run out eight times for Australia and twice for the Indigenous All Stars. "I think that's probably going to be the biggest adjustment, is just the off-field stuff," Upton said.

"I'm pretty well supported by a bunch of great leaders here, and Princey's really supportive ... it's going to be good learnings for me this year, and I know I have a lot to work on, but I'm ready for that challenge."

The Broncos' season starts against the Cowboys on July 4.

SPORT

Legend honoured

Ruckman enters Hall of Fame

JARRED CROSS

The late David Kantilla, a Tiwi trailblazer and towering figure in South Australian and Northern Territory football, was inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame this month.

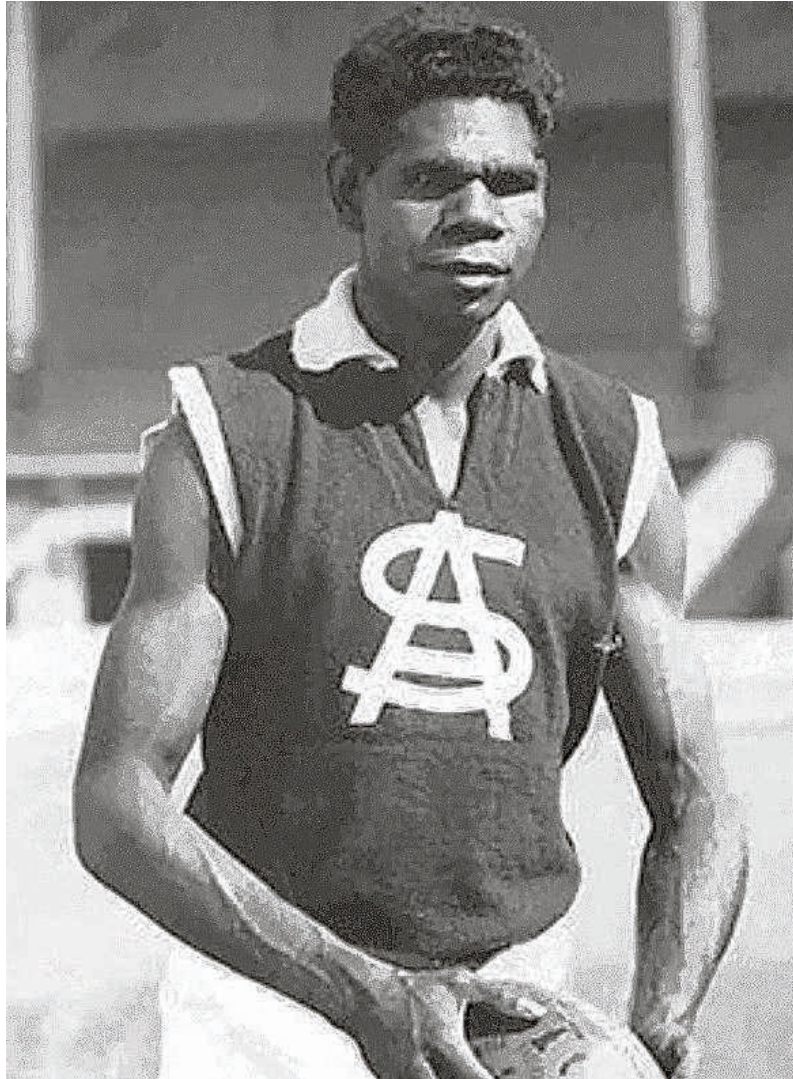
Already holding a long list of honours, Kantilla's recognition and legacy in the game grew further at the AFL's ceremony as he joined the game's most decorated list of names.

Already a Hall of Fame member in South Australia and the Territory, Kantilla — whose tribal name was Amparralamtua — remains a revered player for his high-leaping, thrilling contributions as a ruckman.

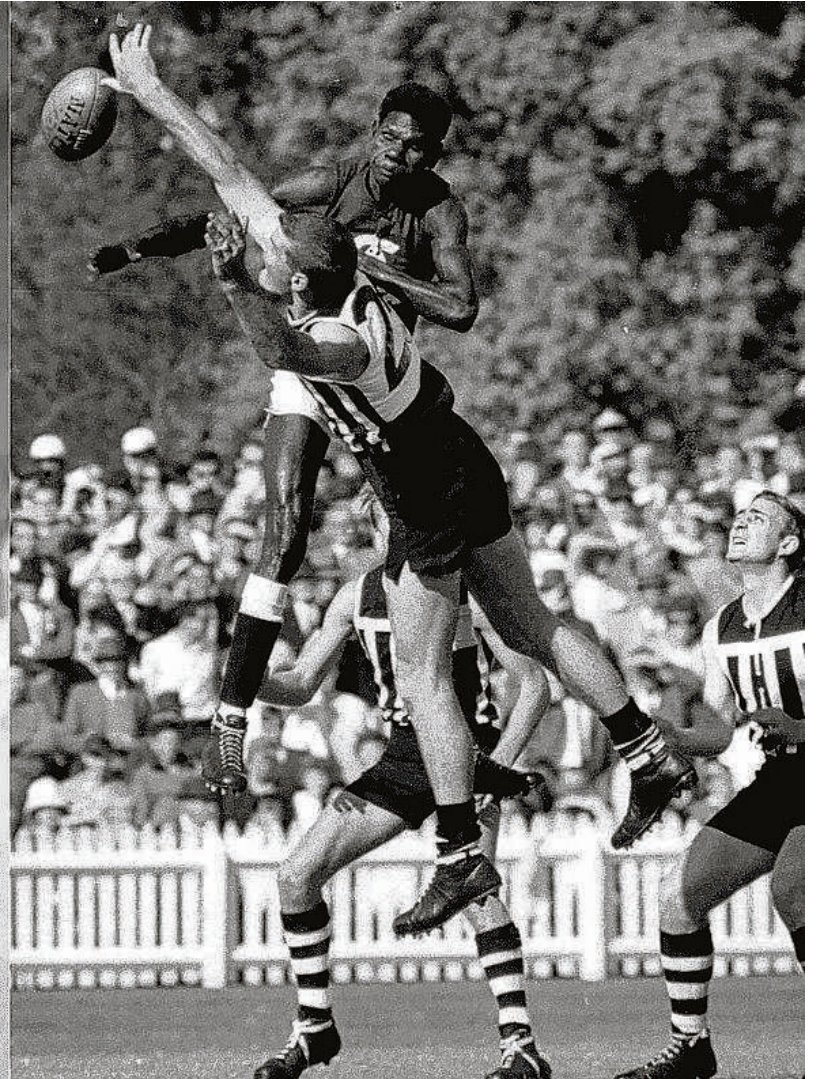
He was made a Legend of the AFLNT Hall of Fame almost 30 years ago, and is a member of football's Indigenous Team of the Century.

Originally from the Tiwi Islands, Kantilla played with St Mary's in the Top End before being recruited by South Adelaide in the SANFL for the 1961 season and in doing so, carving a path as both a First Nations player and NT talent to take his abilities across borders. He led the goal kicking for the Panthers in his first year, and was the club's best and fairest in his first two seasons.

In his induction package at the ceremony, South Australian historian Michael Sexton explained Kantilla's arrival at a struggling South Adelaide and initial policy conditions requiring the club to make regular



Tiwi trailblazer David Kantilla has been inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame. Pictures: South Adelaide Football Club



reports back to the Department of Native Affairs in the NT, as he was a ward of the Catholic Church.

Kantilla is recognised as the first Indigenous footballer to play 100 SANFL games, was grand final best-on-ground in South Australia's 1964 premiership, and is a member of the club and State's Halls of Fame.

In some records, Kantilla is recognised as the SANFL's first ever Indigenous player.

He represented South Aus-

tralia in State football on four occasions.

Kantilla would return to St Mary's where he would retire a four-time premiership winner in the green and gold. It is estimated he played 180 games for St Mary's, and was named vice-captain and ruckman in the NT's Team of the Century.

Kantilla died in a motor vehicle accident in 1978.

Accepting the induction on behalf of their late uncle, Kantilla's nephew Ron Pupang-

mirri, joined by his brother Dean, said he "loved what he did" and "loved to play footy".

"I'm humble and proud to be here to receive my uncle's award, on behalf of my Kantilla family and the whole Tiwi Islands," Ron Pupangmirri said.

Kantilla joins the likes of Graham 'Polly' Farmer (Legend status), Bill Dempsey, Stephen Michael and Maurice Rioli as trailblazing Indigenous players in the Hall of Fame, as

well as more recent talents such as Peter Matera, Andrew McLeod and Michael O'Loughlin.

2025 Hall of Fame inductee and former Panthers teammate, Peter Darley, recounted Kantilla as an athlete, with the "ability to jump over most people from standing still".

"Giving him a bit of a run up, he could go over the top of anybody. He had a remarkable pair of hands on him," Darley said in the video piece played at the ceremony.

Three decades on, Nationals back where it all began

JARRED CROSS

In 1996, 13 students from Newcastle University's Wollotuka Institute started a class project to bring a handful of others to their campus for some sport.

Thirty years later, it's become a national annual event and one of the country's biggest for First Nations students — the Indigenous Nationals.

Now it's returning to where it all started for a special anniversary, bringing more than 500 people to the 2026 UniSport carnival next week.

Aunty Trish Neal was among the founders, studying a diploma in Aboriginal Studies at the time.



University of Newcastle won last year's Indigenous Nationals.

"At the first games we had a team from Wollotuka, a team from the University of Western Sydney, three students who were very, very tall from UNE (University of New England) who came down here to play basketball, and one student

from the University of Canberra, and that was it," Aunty Trish said.

"It's absolutely amazing to see hundreds of students from all around Australia."

Aunty Trish is now a lecturer at the Wollotuka Institute, and more

than 30 universities regularly attend the Nationals.

Wollotuka Institute head Loren Collyer said this year's 30th Nationals was a celebration of the founders and those who had been there over the journey.

"Indigenous Nationals has been built by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students over decades, and is an event for us, and by us," she said.

"Every participant brings their own story, their own community and their own identity, and together, that's what makes this event so powerful."

University of Newcastle also host the event as reigning champions.

The Nationals will feature

basketball, netball, volleyball and touch football.

Raymond Kelly Jr has been around since the start.

"I remember the first Indigenous Nationals being a lot of fun — some teams were extremely competitive, and others were just there for the cultural sharing and social events," he said.

Mr Kelly was a 15-year-old watching his mum, current Wollotuka Elder-in-residence Aunty Amanda Kelly, compete.

He has since participated himself, and stuck around as a coach and mentor for Newcastle students.

The Indigenous Nationals take place from June 29-July 3 at the University of Newcastle.