

The Indigenous Business Review

ISSUE 7 | AUGUST 2025

Forging a new model

BHP backs traditional owner-led growth through Emu Nest

ANALYSIS

The Federal Government is failing Indigenous Procurement Policy

TORRES STRAIT

Time and Tide launches Thursday Island transport venture

Accelerating Indigenous business through tailored solutions

 **CommBank Indigenous Business Banking**

CONTENTS

Supply Nation LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE UNDER SCRUTINY	4
---	---

Audit Fallout SYSTEMIC FAILURES IN COMMONWEALTH PROCUREMENT	8
--	---

Talwali FROM CROP TO CUP	11
--	----

Cover Story EMU NEST AND BHP REDEFINE PILBARA PARTNERSHIP	15
--	----

Cairns to Couture PARIS DEBUT SHOWCASES CULTURE	18
---	----

Time and Tide TORRES STRAIT TRANSPORT	20
---	----

Superannuation WEALTH, SUPER AND THE LONG GAME .	24
--	----

Benang ATCO CONTRACT POWERS AHEAD	28
---	----

FOUNDATION PARTNERS



**The
Indigenous
Business
Review**

Editorial: editor@theibr.com.au
Advertising: advertising@theibr.com.au
Managing Editor: Reece Harley
Publisher: Indigenous Business
Review NIT Pty Ltd

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

2 Prowse St,
West Perth,
Western Australia,
6005

The Indigenous Business Review

This edition of the Indigenous Business Review captures a sector growing in size, influence and strategic clarity.

Indigenous businesses are building capability, creating jobs and contributing to the national economy. The businesses featured in this issue are reshaping the economic landscape.

But progress is uneven. A recent federal audit revealed that most large Commonwealth contracts intended to support Indigenous participation fail to meet mandated minimum employment requirements. Exemptions are routinely granted without explanation and compliance monitoring is weak.

There is also concern about how institutions represent the sector. When **Supply Nation** invites arms-makers and the Defence Department to its Leadership Roundtable but does not include Indigenous-owned businesses, it raises questions about whose voices are shaping policy and priorities.

The strength of the Indigenous business sector has never come from institutions alone. It comes from leaders like **Amanda Healy**, who is using decades of experience to mentor the next generation. From innovators like **Grace Lillian Lee**, whose Paris Couture debut showcased the commercial and cultural potential of Indigenous fashion. And from community-focused enterprises like **Time and Tide** in the Torres Strait, and **Kakadu Organics** in remote Northern Territory, both proving that location is no limit to ambition.

Benang's new contract with ATCO highlights the value of long-term commercial partnerships. **Muguriyarra**, a contractor in the northwest, is turning joint venture success into independent growth. **North West Alliance**, a 50 per cent Aboriginal-owned partnership between Palyku Traditional Owners and Veolia, is now the largest Aboriginal waste company in the Pilbara, generating over \$100 million in economic impact. **Talwali Coffee** is rethinking sustainability at the earliest point of the supply chain via innovation powered by cultural values and renewable energy. Indigenous businesses generate \$42.6 billion in annual social value.

ANZ and Deloitte estimate the Indigenous economy, worth \$16.1 billion and currently growing at an average of 7.3 per cent over the past five years, could reach \$50 billion by 2035. Indigenous businesses are stepping up: government systems built to support them must do the same. •

Reece Harley
Managing Editor



No seat at the roundtable

The inclusion of weapons manufacturers and the exclusion of Indigenous voices at a Supply Nation leadership gathering has raised ire and eyebrows.

| Dechlan Brennan and David Prestipino

Supply Nation's decision to not include any Indigenous-owned businesses while inviting weapons manufacturers and the Department of Defence to its newly reconvened Leadership Roundtable has drawn sharp criticism from Indigenous business leaders and federal politicians.

The roundtable, revived this year after a pandemic pause, is a key initiative of the not-for-profit Supply Nation, which promotes supplier diversity and growth of First Nations businesses.

Although the forum had been described as a "mechanism to test concepts and programs prior to broader implementation", none of the 15 roundtable appointees represented Indigenous businesses.

Supply Nation said the roundtable was not meant to address broader Indigenous economic issues, but to support its 5000-plus members in improving procurement practices.

This explanation has not eased concerns.

Senator Kerryne Liddle, federal opposition spokeswoman for Indigenous Australians, says the

timing is troubling as insolvency rates rise.

"Of course, it's a concern when (there is) no Indigenous representation at a Supply Nation roundtable," says Liddle, an Arrernte woman who is South Australia's first Indigenous MP. "Now is not the time to reduce focus on Indigenous business."

While acknowledging Supply Nation's work, she says it "cannot be all things to all businesses".

"There is much to learn from the two-thirds of Indigenous businesses not registered with Supply Nation," she says. "We don't engage these [small and medium-sized enterprises] nearly enough."

The Murri Chamber of Commerce has called for a reassessment of how federal support is distributed through Supply Nation, which receives government funding to promote Indigenous enterprise.

"When two-thirds of Indigenous businesses aren't even on Supply Nation's list, you've got to ask — who's actually being served?" said Chair Adam Williams.

He said the process often felt like





"ticking off a checklist for someone else's annual report," with rigid certification requirements that didn't reflect how business operated on Country.

"Culturally, our mob values relationships, trust and face-to-face support - not faceless bureaucracy," he said.

Williams argued that funding should go to organisations grounded in community and trusted by local business owners, not just those with national branding.

"As regional chambers, we're boots-on-the-ground—building real relationships, advocating for our people, and ensuring our voices aren't sidelined," he said. "We bring cultural accountability and lived experience, not just statistics."

Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network CEO Naomi Anstess says excluding Indigenous businesses contradicts Aboriginal-led decision-making and the co-design commitments of Closing the Gap.

She says Blak-to-Blak trade is powerful and sustainable, and that the roundtable's composition reflects a "blatant erasure of our legitimacy and right to lead".

"True allies make space for us to lead. When the focus is on what non-Indigenous corporates can do for us, it sidelines our autonomy," she says.

Anstess also criticised the lack of support for Indigenous-to-Indigenous trade, often led by underfunded grassroots chambers.

"These organisations are building an economy that uplifts all of us," she says. The roundtable sends a message that "we are not seen as equals".

"This exclusion is structurally damaging and reinforces a colonial hierarchy," she says. "With this announcement, Indigenous businesses are treated more like a database than stakeholders."

The inclusion of BAE Systems and Boeing Defence Australia has added to tensions, especially amid the war in Gaza.

Independent senator Lidia Thorpe condemned the presence of arms manufacturers.

"It is completely inappropriate," says the Gunnai, Gunditjmara and Djab Wurrung senator.

"Weapons companies have no place on a roundtable for Indigenous business. They use performative Reconciliation Action Plans to black-clad their role in global violence."



“ We are not seen as equals

Thorpe says these companies cannot promote reconciliation while supplying weapons used in overseas conflicts.

"This is about reputation laundering, not reconciliation."

BAE Systems supplies arms to the Israeli government. Israel's Prime Minister and former defence minister are subject to ICC arrest warrants for alleged war crimes in Gaza.

Despite this, BAE has been chosen as a finalist for Supply Nation's Corporate Member of the Year award, to be announced at Supply Nation's Awards Gala in Sydney in August.

The company manufactures about 15 per cent of each F-35 jet, including the rear fuselage and electronics. The Israeli Air Force has used these jets in Gaza strikes.

It also supplies Israel with missile launch kits, F-16 gunsight tech and components for 155mm artillery

shells recently used in the conflict. In response to the backlash, Supply Nation defended the roundtable's purpose. "The aim is to co-ordinate voices on supplier diversity and procurement from Indigenous businesses," a spokesman says.

Supply Nation says it uses "different forums and mechanisms" to engage Indigenous suppliers and stakeholders.

"The roundtable builds capacity among our member network and helps test programs before broader rollout," it says. "Corporates and government departments involved are showing leadership in supporting Indigenous business."

Participants were selected through consultation, criteria development and expressions of interest.

Membership fees, sponsors and event partners are published on Supply Nation's website.

For many Indigenous business leaders, the message from this decision is one of exclusion, not inclusion. ●



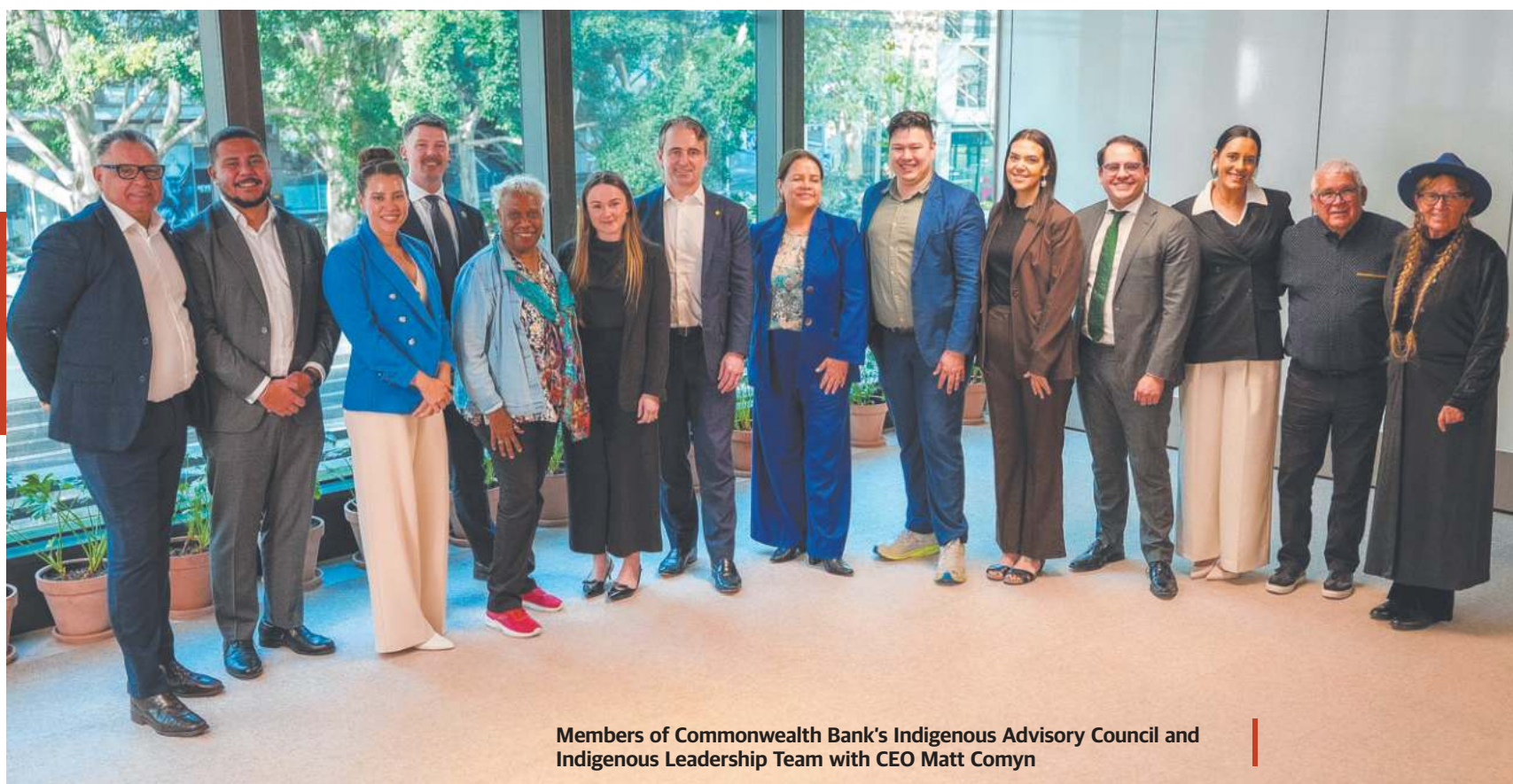
\$600,000 **FOR YOUNG MINDS** **AND BIG FUTURES**

Fortescue is backing future leaders at Hedland Senior High School with a major investment in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Technology (STEAM) — helping local youth thrive in the classroom and beyond.



LEARN MORE

fortescue.com



Members of Commonwealth Bank's Indigenous Advisory Council and Indigenous Leadership Team with CEO Matt Comyn

CommBank sets \$100m target

Commonwealth Bank has launched its FY26–28 Reconciliation Action Plan, setting out a strengthened series of commitments aimed at deepening engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in employment, procurement and community partnerships.

The launch coincided with a formal event in Sydney marking 10 years of the bank's Indigenous Advisory Council.

The event, held on Gadigal Country, brought together Indigenous leaders, community stakeholders and bank executives. In his keynote address, IAC chair Sean Gordon reflected on the decade-long role of the council in shaping CommBank's reconciliation journey.

"A decade of continuous advice, advocacy and accountability is no small achievement," Gordon says. "It demonstrates a genuine willingness from this organisation to listen, to be challenged and to grow."

The IAC, established in 2014, provides strategic guidance to the bank on Indigenous matters and ensures First Nations perspectives are present at the highest levels. Along with Gordon, its current members are Mick Gooda, Bronwyn Bancroft, Mayrah Sonter and Gail Mabo.

The new action plan outlines more than 50 measurable actions. Key highlights include:

- Spending a cumulative \$100 million with First Nations businesses between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2028
- Recruiting 150 First Nations peoples each year

A new action plan is strengthening support for the community, writes **Reece Harley**

through targeted employment pathways

- Expanding Indigenous customer support and cultural capability training across the organisation
- Embedding Indigenous engagement principles to ensure shared decision-making and co-design

Gordon says the introduction of Indigenous engagement principles marks a shift from transactional consultation to genuine partnership.

"True reconciliation isn't just about what you do for Indigenous people, it's about what you do with us," he says.

"Reconciliation can't be bolted on. It must be built in. It must be embedded in how we hire, how we lead, how we invest and how we serve."

The RAP has been formally endorsed by the Commonwealth Bank board and is supported at the executive level. CEO Matt Comyn maintains regular dialogue with the IAC through the CEO Advisory Council.

The launch comes at a time when the role of the financial services sector in advancing Indigenous economic inclusion is under increasing public focus.

Advocates say the sector's reach gives it significant

potential to drive change, provided commitments are backed by delivery.

First Nations Foundation chairman Ian Hamm has previously emphasised the vital role that the private sector must play in advancing Indigenous economic participation and he has called for sustained investment across the economy.

"It is only logical, and necessary, for the private and community sectors to make substantial and meaningful efforts to uplift Aboriginal people by way of the economy writ large," he says.

"Aboriginal Australians are some of the most clever, industrious and able people that this country has and we, as a nation, are wasting this invaluable resource."

The RAP also includes commitments to improve access to banking services for Indigenous customers, strengthen place-based partnerships and increase financial literacy support in community-led contexts.

Career development initiatives for Indigenous staff will be enhanced, including mentoring programs, leadership opportunities and cultural support networks.

Gordon closed the event by encouraging all parts of the organisation to move from policy to impact: "Let the next decade be defined not just by plans and policies, but by impact," he said. "By Indigenous bankers thriving in this workforce, by Aboriginal businesses flourishing in our supply chain and by communities seeing the Commonwealth Bank not as a transaction but as a trusted partner." •



The Australian National Audit Office has found significant gaps in the handling of fraud investigations; National Indigenous Australians Agency chief executive Jody Broun vowed to implement the agency's recommendations

Contracts fail on inclusion

Billions of dollars worth of government work is not going where it should, write **David Prestipino and Dechlan Brennan**

A federal audit has found that the majority of large Commonwealth contracts designed to support Indigenous employment and enterprise have failed to comply with core requirements of the Indigenous Procurement Policy, raising concerns over oversight, exemptions and accountability within the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The Australian National Audit Office reported that 1475 federal contracts, with a combined value of more than \$70 billion, were granted exemptions from the Indigenous participation requirements between 2016 and 2023. These rules require that at least 3 per cent of a contract's workforce be Indigenous, or that an equivalent value be spent on goods or services sourced from Indigenous-owned businesses.

The policy applies to contracts valued above \$7.5 million, provided that more than half of the contract value falls within one of 19 designated sectors, including construction,

healthcare and environmental management.

According to the audit findings, close to 70 per cent of applicable contracts were exempted from the Indigenous participation rules. In many instances, exemption decisions were poorly documented. A third of these exemptions cited "other" as the reason, without providing further clarification.

Compliance monitoring was also found to be limited.

Only 21 per cent of contracts subject to the participation rules were reviewed for compliance. Among those, just one in four was found to have met the requirements.

Auditors concluded that the high rate of exemptions and the low level of compliance checks significantly undermined the objectives of the Indigenous Procurement Policy.

The audit also found that the NIAA had not updated its contractor guidance materials since July 2020, despite changes to federal reporting



NIAA is progressing reforms to enhance guidance, training and technology systems to support more robust administration of the Indigenous Procurement Policy," the spokesman told the Indigenous Business Review.

The spokesman also pointed to reforms announced by the government last year to tighten eligibility criteria and improve transparency for Indigenous suppliers. Since its inception, the policy has resulted in the awarding of more than 80,000 contracts to Indigenous businesses, valued at \$11.4 billion.

Opposition spokeswoman for Indigenous Australians Senator Kerryne Liddle called for a full review of the policy, including how Indigenous businesses are defined for procurement purposes.

"It is clear the current policy settings are not achieving their intended purpose," Liddle says.

"We must strengthen safeguards against black-cladding and ensure genuine Indigenous participation in Commonwealth contracting."

Independent Senator Lidia Thorpe also raised concerns about the lack of accountability for exemptions.

"When most contracts are exempt and almost none of the remainder are reviewed, that is a systemic issue," she says. "The government must disclose who approved the exemptions, why they were granted and whether they align with the policy's original goals."

NIAA chief executive Jody Broun wrote to the Auditor-General in May 2023 confirming that the agency would implement the original audit's recommendations.

However, the ANAO's latest review found significant gaps in the handling of fraud investigations and closure processes.

Auditors reviewed five fraud investigation closure reports. Of those, three had not been approved by a senior officer; one was undated; and most did not include documentation of lessons learned.

No performance metrics for fraud investigations were tracked between July 2020 and December 2022.

In the 2021-22 financial year, the NIAA funded more than 1000 external providers to deliver about 1500 activities under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, at a cost of \$1.03 billion. The IAS is the primary Commonwealth framework for delivering programs aimed at



Anti-fraud measures remain inadequate

improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

A case study in the audit details a fraud allegation involving improper loans made to senior executives of an Aboriginal corporation using Commonwealth grant funds. The NIAA initially chose not to pursue a formal investigation, citing difficulty in verifying the source of funds, the relatively low amount of money involved and improvements in governance under new leadership. The case was later reconsidered when it was found that the value of the alleged misuse may have been higher than initially reported.

The Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the audit confirmed

longstanding concerns from Indigenous businesses about insufficient oversight in federal procurement. Chairman Gordon Cole said Indigenous businesses would continue to engage constructively with the system while pressing for improvements.

"It is concerning that standards of reporting and anti-fraud measures remain inadequate," Cole says. "Australia has the capacity to manage these processes effectively, and we expect government agencies to meet that standard."

The ANAO's latest report makes seven recommendations to improve policy administration, transparency and compliance.

The NIAA has agreed to implement six of them in full and most of the seventh. Planned actions include updated contractor guidance, expanded staff training and upgrades to digital systems that are used to track participation data.

Auditors noted that the use of exemptions continues to increase. While some were found to be valid, others lacked a clear rationale or supporting documentation. The report concludes that the excessive and poorly managed use of exemptions impairs the policy's capacity to deliver meaningful economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians. ●



NIAA chief executive
Jody Broun

requirements during that period. The NIAA is responsible for administering the policy and co-ordinating Indigenous procurement across Commonwealth agencies. It was established in 2019 and operates under the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

This latest audit follows a 2023 report from the same agency that identified widespread weaknesses in contract oversight, fraud prevention and risk management within the NIAA. That report recommended seven reforms, all of which the agency agreed to adopt.

Former minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney also directed the agency to establish a dedicated "Integrity Group" to strengthen internal governance.

The group has not yet been established.

A government spokesman says the agency is working to implement the new recommendations and improve compliance across the system. "The



Photo: Father and daughter,
Naomi and David Appleby from
Walaja Raw Bush Honey.

Going to great lengths to support local producers

Since 2015, the Coles Nurture Fund has awarded more than \$40 million in financial support to 119 small and medium businesses to drive innovation, sustainability and growth.

Indigenous-owned family business Walaja Raw Bush Honey was awarded a \$330,000 grant to create a new, medicinal grade, premium Melaleuca honey that is sustainably made on Yawuru Country.

"This grant will make a huge difference to our company and hopefully the health and wellbeing for

the many Australians who can purchase this unique Kimberley honey. The enzymes from the honeybees combined with the pure melaleuca nectar produce a natural antibacterial quality, which in turn gives this honey it's medicinal properties.

"We're confident this investment will also help enhance Indigenous knowledge and create local employment opportunities," said founder David Appleby.

coles.com.au/nurturefund

coles nurture fund

Grounds for coffee optimism

An idea floated in a pandemic-era Zoom chat is reaping rewards, writes **Dianne Bortoletto**

Starting a coffee company wasn't on Drew Paten's bingo card. Paten, a proud Gunai (East Gippsland) man who grew up in Naarm (Melbourne), says the idea came from a group chat.

Every Wednesday, he and friends would have a Zoom call to check in on each other during the COVID-19 pandemic and the idea percolated from there.

Paten and his two friends and business partners, Dr Shannon Kilmartin-Lynch (a Taungurung man) and Jordan Carter (a Ngarrindjeri/Wemba Wemba man), kept the idea brewing, adding layers to it until they decided to go for it.

"My work was with mentoring youth, young mob," says 28-year-old Paten.

"Shannon just said out of the blue, 'why don't we do something with this', holding up a coffee cup, and then Jordan said 'we could make coffee'.

"He has a background in systems engineering and he's never talked about coffee before, so it was a bit random.

"We joked around about it, then started saying 'imagine if', 'what if', thinking about what we could do with it, and the more we talked about it, the better the idea became.

"It was too good not to give it a go."

Four years ago, the trio did just that, and Talwali Coffee Roasters came to life.

Talwali means "clan relations between neighbouring clans", an apt name for a product known for bringing people together.

Through the Coles Nurture Fund, Talwali Coffee Roasters has been granted \$400,000 to help it become the first Indigenous-owned business to grow



Talwali Coffee business partners Jordan Carter, Drew Paten and Shannon Kilmartin-Lynch, below



coffee locally, using an innovative system powered by renewable energy. The Coles Nurture Fund, which is now in its 11th year, has awarded more than \$40 million in financial support to 119 Australian producers in a wide range of industries.

The idea of the Coles Nurture Fund is to help recipients turn innovative ideas into real-world solutions that benefit producers, the environment and customers.

Currently awaiting patents for the technology for the coffee growing process, Paten is tight-lipped on the new technology but he has promised to keep us informed.

Meanwhile, the trio has paused the coffee roasting business while they undergo research and development.

"We are looking at how we can innovate the industry,

be creative and lean on sustainability. Coffee is quite a wasteful industry," Paten says.

"We are cautious and conscious that we are quite new to the industry, but we want to see if coffee-growing in Australia can be a full end cycle of sustainability, using solar and reutilised energy, which is part of our testing. It's new ground."

They plan to test growing coffee in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

The dream, Paten says, is for Talwali Coffee to utilise profit to give back and contribute to community spaces.

"The big dream is to become a leading force in the coffee business and not just secluded as an Indigenous business, where we feel pigeonholed, but to be recognised for a quality of product and not just our identity," he says. ●

Turning kelp into culture

Selina Colgrave among strands of drying kelp; Tarkiner indoor plant spray products

| Callan Morse

A new Aboriginal business is making waves in Tasmania's far northwest by utilising a natural product that has washed ashore for millennia.

Tarkiner is a proudly First Nations-owned indoor plant food product made from organic bull kelp harvested on the traditional lands of the Peerapper people.

The Aboriginal business enterprise was founded by the Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation last year.

CHAC chair Selina Colgrave says in establishing Tarkiner, conversations were held around culture, community and Aboriginal economic self-determination.

"One of our main stipulations was that profits from the product go back into culture," Colgrave says.

"And the hardest thing was, 'how do we keep servicing our community and be an Aboriginal corporation that represents the community, but also makes money?'."

"So we had a few really important things that we wanted to stay true to when we started going into Aboriginal business."

Colgrave says through the support of Wesfarmers' Building Outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Businesses Fund, Tarkiner's establishment engaged multiple Aboriginal businesses to become one of three Aboriginal-owned products to be stocked by Wesfarmers' Bunnings Warehouse.

"Throughout it, we engaged an Aboriginal lawyer; we engaged an Aboriginal marketing company; I think even the director for our advertisement was a black fella," Colgrave says. "We're very proud of that fact."

Tarkiner harnesses the power of kelp as an organic fertiliser. The product also has deep cultural roots in northwest Tasmania.

Tarkiner in 2023 formed a partnership with Seasol and Bunnings to develop and distribute a First Nations owned organic kelp plant food product, Tarkiner indoor plant food.

"With kelp being highly culturally significant in Tassie with the baskets ... it's a product that's been



used by Aboriginal people for thousands of years," Colgrave says.

"And it just so happens to be an amazing fertiliser."

The product's name also has deep cultural roots. "One of the most important things for the community was that we call it Tarkiner, because the Tarkiner people were the first peoples of here, where we get the kelp," Colgrave says.

In addition to the spray, CHAC has also established Tarkiner tourism, which offers tours and culture workshops; and the Tarkiner Centre of Excellence, a dedicated kelp research and product improvement facility which is in development stage.

Tarkiner is now available from Bunnings Warehouse. ●

Fortescue is backing two award-winning innovators, write **Dianne Bortoletto** and **Zak Kirkup**



Sharna Collard, at left, in red, and Eva Stewart receive their accolades at Western Australia's 40Under40 awards for their achievements in the resources and transport sectors

Recognition rewards inspiring leadership

Two of Western Australia's most dynamic young Aboriginal businesswomen, Eva Stewart of Australian Indigenous Group and Sharna Collard of Kooya Fleet Solutions Australia, have been recognised for their leadership, innovation and impact at the prestigious 40Under40 Awards.

The annual awards celebrate Western Australia's rising stars across all sectors, acknowledging those who are not only excelling in their fields but also contributing meaningfully to the broader community.

Stewart, a proud Pinikura woman, was recognised for her outstanding achievements as managing director of AIG, a company that delivers a range of services across the resources sector. Under her leadership, AIG has grown its capabilities and presence across the Pilbara. It has a strong focus on creating employment and training pathways for Aboriginal people.

Sharna Collard, a proud Noongar woman and chief executive officer of Kooya Fleet Solutions Australia, was recognised for her contribution to building one of Australia's most successful Aboriginal-owned fleet companies.

Collard continues to give back to the Aboriginal

community by sharing a percentage of Kooya's profits with the Bibbulmun Fund, a community-based fund established by Kooya and Kulbardi Pty Ltd. Both Stewart and Collard are breaking new ground and providing a powerful example for future generations of First Nations entrepreneurs.

"Winning a Business News 40Under40 award as an Aboriginal woman in business is more than personal recognition — it's a celebration of resilience, culture and community," says Collard.

"It's proof that our stories, values and leadership belong at the forefront of business and innovation.

"I hope this recognition inspires other First Nations women to know that their voice and vision are not only valid, but vital to the future of business in this country."

Fortescue has played a significant role in supporting the growth of both businesses through long-term contracts and commercial partnerships. Under the company's commitment to sustainable Indigenous procurement and capability-building, it has partnered with hundreds of Aboriginal businesses over the past decade, spending more than \$5 billion with Aboriginal businesses and suppliers in recent years. ●

**Build stronger
careers, together.**
Challenge accepted.

From early career pathways to international assignments and executive development, Woodside supports First Nations employees at every stage.

Most recently, Jenayah Elliott returned from a two-year international assignment in Houston - broadening her global perspective and stepping into a new level of personal and professional growth.

Whether it's stepping into new environments or growing into leadership, our people are shaping the future.



Scan the QR
code to hear
Jenayah's story.



Australia's leading energy company





REWRITING THE RULES

Emu Nest, a multifaceted enterprise, holds lessons for any ambitious entrepreneur

Dr Blaze Kwaymullina and Ezekiel Kwaymullina

| David Prestipino and Reece Harley

What began as a creative outlet during a time of hardship has grown into one of the most compelling Indigenous business success stories in Australia.

Rooted in cultural values and driven by a clear sense of purpose, Emu Nest is a family-led group of companies transforming not just the Pilbara economy, but the way Aboriginal business is imagined across the country.

Emu Nest, founded in 2007 by the Kwaymullina family, Palyku Traditional Owners from Western Australia's inland Pilbara, began as a co-operative writing project. Through a family trust, members co-authored children's books, pooling royalties to support relatives in need. From this humble and deeply cultural starting point, Emu Nest has grown into a multimillion-dollar investment group, employing more than 140 people and generating more than \$150 million in economic value for the Pilbara region over the past decade.

Today, Emu Nest stands as a powerful example of what happens when Aboriginal values, kinship networks and entrepreneurial thinking combine to build sustainable, culturally grounded businesses.

A different way of doing business

The early days of Emu Nest were not about business in the conventional sense. They were about storytelling, family and sharing resources. But through this creative work, the Kwaymullina family began to gain valuable experience in managing revenue and intellectual property and in collaboration. By 2012, they were exploring microenterprises, small ventures that served as testing grounds for everything from governance to market strategy. ➤

The Indigenous Business Review

➤ These early enterprises weren't just profitable; they were also culturally affirming.

And they taught the family something crucial: that economic success and cultural integrity need not be in conflict.

"There was never a moment where we separated business from our values," says Emu Nest chairman Dr Blaze Kwaymullina. "Every decision we made, we asked ourselves 'how does this serve our people, our Country and the spirit of who we are?'"

This guiding philosophy remains central to Emu Nest's operations today. The group's investments are assessed not only on commercial merit, but on their capacity to generate value — economic, social, environmental, cultural and spiritual — for Aboriginal communities.

North West Alliance: the cornerstone

A turning point came in 2013 with the formation of North West Alliance, an Aboriginal-owned and operated company that would soon become the region's largest Indigenous provider of waste services. The group's first major customer was BHP, which in December 2014 awarded NWA an integrated waste management contract across all its Pilbara operations. That initial investment and trust from BHP was pivotal: it provided NWA with the commercial foundation and operational scale needed to grow, build capability and deliver lasting regional impact.

"North West Alliance gave us a platform," says managing director Ezekiel Kwaymullina. "It allowed us to co-invest with other Traditional Owner families and start building real long-term value, not just for ourselves but for the wider community."

Today, NWA operates four waste transfer stations and it delivers industrial-scale services to some of Australia's largest resource companies. But beyond its size, what distinguishes NWA is its model: one that integrates employment, supply chain development and pro bono community services into a single cohesive business strategy.

Garbage bags to gourmet blends

One of Emu Nest's more unexpected ventures emerged from a casual



conversation with a procurement officer. While discussing waste services, the officer asked if the family could also supply coffee. They could — and they did.

That exchange led to the creation of Australian Indigenous Coffee, now supplying BHP offices and sites across Australia, as well as a growing number of national clients.

The business has also become a platform for Aboriginal baristas, roasters and entrepreneurs, offering training, mentoring and employment opportunities.

"Coffee is a conversation starter," Blaze says. "But it's also a vehicle for building capability, brand and belief in





Blaze and Ezekiel Kwaymullina, left; and the North West Waste Alliance crew, below
Artwork: Ambelin Kwaymullina

what Aboriginal enterprise can be."

Like all of Emu Nest's businesses, Australian Indigenous Coffee exists not just to generate profit, but to also circulate value. It supports employment and builds skills and reinforces the idea that Aboriginal businesses can lead in any sector if given the opportunity.

Measuring what matters

For Blaze and Ezekiel, impact is more than a buzzword; it's a discipline. The group has developed a formal Impact Framework that quantifies its direct Aboriginal economic contribution. That includes Aboriginal wages, subcontractor payments, pro bono

services and dividends to Aboriginal investors.

While others may opt for complex social return models, Blaze prefers a simpler metric.

"Just count the money going into Black hands," he says. "That's where the impact starts. The rest is important, but if we're not creating real, measurable wealth in our communities, then we're not really shifting the dial."

This practical lens also guides Emu Nest's critique of government policy, particularly around procurement. While preferential procurement has been instrumental in creating market access, the family says it's often misunderstood as an endpoint rather than a stepping stone.

"Preferential procurement is a bridge," Ezekiel says. "But the question is: a bridge to what? If it's not leading us to Aboriginal-owned, culturally strong, high-performing enterprises, then it's just tinkering at the edges."

The Vision: Aboriginal economy 8.0

To answer that question, Emu Nest has developed a bold vision for the future: Aboriginal Economy 8.0. It's a strategic framework that maps out what a thriving, self-determined Aboriginal economy could look like in the decades ahead.

Economy 8.0 envisions: Connection: Strong networks between Aboriginal families, businesses, Native Title groups and global Indigenous communities.

Control: Governance structures that put economic power firmly in Aboriginal hands, resisting black-cladding and tokenism.

Mobilisation: Active participation in high-value sectors — waste, energy, agriculture, tech — guided by kinship and cultural reciprocity.

"We don't want to slot into someone else's model," Blaze says. "We want to design a system that starts from who we are and what we need. That's where real power lives."

This vision is not abstract. Emu Nest is implementing it through its investments, business models and partnerships. Its approach challenges mainstream assumptions about risk, scale and structure and it replaces them with culturally driven models of value creation.

Challenging the status quo

But the road hasn't been easy. Blaze is outspoken about the challenges facing Aboriginal businesses under current regulatory and funding structures. He points to how narrow definitions of "Aboriginal business" can sometimes penalise those seeking capital or scaling their impact.

"The whole space is being approached from a very narrow aperture," he says. "We're squeezing business structures together to meet arbitrary definitions, often in ways that stifle innovation or limit autonomy."

He says this has contributed to an "ecosystem of scarcity" where lateral

violence is inadvertently amplified, and true collaboration between Aboriginal businesses is discouraged by competitive funding environments.

"To get out of this cycle, we need to build something bigger. We need a shared vision that's not controlled by government or industry but by us."

Partnership done right

One example of that vision is Emu Nest's partnership with BHP. Through purposeful procurement approach RISE, BHP spent a record \$700 million with Indigenous businesses in 2023–24, a 75 per cent increase in just one year. North West Alliance is one of BHP's longest-standing Indigenous contractors.

"Our relationship with NWA spans more than a decade," says BHP head of global Indigenous procurement, Jessica Simpson. "They're not only thriving; they're also lifting others up along the way creating commercial and social value simultaneously."

Emu Nest's story demonstrates what's possible when procurement is paired with real investment, shared values and long-term commitment.

A model for the future

Ultimately, the Kwaymullina family doesn't claim to have all the answers. But they do offer a model, and a mindset, that others can learn from.

They hope other Aboriginal families will see what they've built and adapt it to their own needs, values and visions.

"Business is ceremony," Blaze says. "It's how we bring spirit into the world."

In Emu Nest's case, that spirit is collaborative and courageous and unapologetically Aboriginal. It's a business model grounded in reciprocity, not extraction; in kinship, not competition.

And it may just be the best way forward for building a better kind of economy — one designed by and for Aboriginal people, for generations to come. ●

Passion always in fashion

Designer Grace Lillian Lee made waves in Paris recently, writes **Maria Marouchtchak**

Taking to Paris Couture Fashion Week for her historic debut of The Guardians, Meriam Mer artist and designer Grace Lillian Lee encapsulates what it means to be an empowered and self-determined creative, academic and businesswoman.

Becoming the first Indigenous woman to present her works at the prestigious global fashion event was no easy feat.

Receiving minimal support, Lee did everything she could to achieve the significant milestone.

Speaking to The Indigenous Business Review, Lee reiterates what many successful business owners stand by: it's "taken years of dedication, blood, sweat, and tears".

"This has never been a side project. It's been an intentional, committed life choice to back myself and believe in the vision," she says.

Without following the rule book, Lee says she had to create her own path.

"I started with a passion for fashion and culture, and a deep desire to create space for others," she says.

"Over time, my practice evolved from making garments to activating community, storytelling and cultural exchange. It's been a journey of listening, learning and growing.

"Today, the business is a hybrid of art, fashion, education and enterprise, all grounded in cultural integrity and led from community."

Her company, Grace Lillian Lee Productions, operates with a dedicated three-person core team, motivated by purpose and bringing Indigenous storytelling and creations to the forefront.

"While the permanent staff is limited, we collaborate extensively with a broad network of artists, designers, cultural leaders and industry professionals such as multiple fabricators, accountants, bookkeepers and lawyers," she says.



Grace Lillian Lee with former Bangarra dancer Luke Currie-Richardson; Lee's colourful designs were showcased in her exhibition, *The Guardians*, at Paris Couture Fashion Week 2025

Pictures: Wendell Levi Teodoro

"This flexible model allows us to scale effectively, depending on the scope of each project and maintain a close-knit, agile approach to creative production and community engagement."

Along with running GLLP, Lee founded First Nations Fashion and Design and Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, two organisations focused on supporting "the development and sustainable growth of First Nations representation, access and growth in the fashion and design sectors".

For her business journey and for expressing her culture and talent through her creations, Lee was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Design from the University of Technology Sydney in May.

Marking another achievement, Lee highlighted the power of collaboration and collective action in elevating First Nations business owners, long disempowered by Australian systems.

"Collaborations have been key in opening doors, not just for myself, but for our broader community," she says.

"Being based in regional or remote areas can make visibility and access a challenge, so it's important to be clear about where you want to position yourself and who you

align with. Strategic partnerships allow us to tap into networks, share resources and gain industry expertise."

Having worked with brands and organisations including Carla Zampatti, Nike, Star Trek, Bangarra, Australian Ballet, Brisbane Festival, Australian Fashion Week and leading universities, museums, galleries and land councils, Lee emphasises the ripple effects that come from meaningful collaboration.

"These collaborations help centre our voices and give First Nations creatives a seat at the table, where decisions are made and where our stories can reach global audiences," she says.

When discussing how governments and industries can better acknowledge Indigenous fashion as a distinct economic sector, Lee says embedding First Nations voices at every level is imperative to driving growth and long-term sustainability.

"Indigenous fashion represents thousands of years of design, innovation and cultural leadership, not a passing trend," she says.

"To support this, long-term structural investment is essential across the ecosystem, including scholarships, international exchange programs, business development



“It’s been a journey of listening, learning and growing

and sustainable funding models that enable First Nations people to grow and lead."

Lee says governments and industry have an important role in creating genuine opportunities for First Nations people to lead the sector, not merely participate in it.

"Strong succession planning and meaningful involvement in decision-making at all levels are key," she says. "Addressing the current fragmentation across states will help avoid duplicated efforts and unlock the benefits of collaboration."

"Instead of further reports reiterating known challenges, what is needed is co-ordinated practical action."

"By investing in our capabilities and supporting First Nations leadership, governments and industry can work alongside us to build a future rooted in culture, creativity and self-determination."

Speaking on the power of cultural expression within fashion, Lee reflects on the deeper purpose behind cultural

expression and the impact it has on audiences and industry alike.

"They're at the heart of everything we do. As First Nations people, we are natural storytellers, whether through movement, song, fashion, or ceremony," she says.

"These elements give life to our collections and connect audiences to something deeper."

"Our showcases aren't just about garments; they're full-bodied cultural experiences that carry meaning, memory and message. When people witness that, it resonates."

"It creates an emotional connection that adds value, not just culturally, but also in how the work is perceived commercially."

"It's about sharing who we are, through every form available to us."

Delving into her debut collection *The Guardians*, which was inspired by her previous collection *DreamWeaver: Guardians of Grace*, Lee describes the collection as "a love letter to those who walked before her".

"It honours the role of cultural guardianship and the strength we carry as First Nations people through design, movement and presence," she says.

"The collection was showcased in Paris Couture Fashion Week 2025 and brought to life with the support of Mitu Wines, Australia Council for the Arts, Epson, First Nations Fashion + Design, MI Haven, TL Paris, 229 Lab and our incredible creative team."

Acclaimed French designer Jean Paul Gaultier and Metropolitan Museum of Art lead curator Andrew Bolton were among those who attended exclusive previews ahead of the showcase, a testament to the widespread recognition of Lee's dedication during fashion week.

"There has been growing interest from collectors, stylists and international curators who are recognising the work not only as high fashion but also as powerful cultural storytelling," Lee says. "We're proud to see this collection resonating across industries and borders, reflecting the global relevance and strength of First Nations design." ●



Strait line to success

An island-hopper ferry service is improving lives and livelihoods, writes **Dianne Bortoletto**

Sometimes business ideas aren't born but are requested out of necessity, which is the case with Time and Tide, a bus and ferry transport company servicing Ngurapai (Horn Island) and Waibene (Thursday Island).

Ngurapai, in the centre of the Torres Strait, hosts the region's airport. Waibene is where most of the services are located, along with the main population.

Time and Tide is a 51 per cent Aboriginal owned business supported into operation by an altruistic, non-Indigenous investor who, by chance, met Thursday Island Elder Willie Wigness via a competitor ferry service.

"Meeting our business partner, Stewart Moreland, came out of left field, totally by chance. I say it's a godsend," Wigness says.

"You see, for decades, the islands were serviced by two ferry companies, and then one stopped, and the other ferry company became very expensive for the locals.

"I had many people coming to me as the Elder of Thursday Island asking me to start a ferry company, so I sat down

with some of the Elders from other islands and from Cape York, and then we met with the Torres Strait Regional Authority for funding support."

Thursday Island residents rely on ferries to travel between islands, to the airport, to reach the hospital and schools, and to Cape York.

Moreland, who has business interests in Brisbane, was looking to help the locals of Thursday Island, and after an unfruitful meeting with the only ferry operator at that time, he was introduced to Wigness.

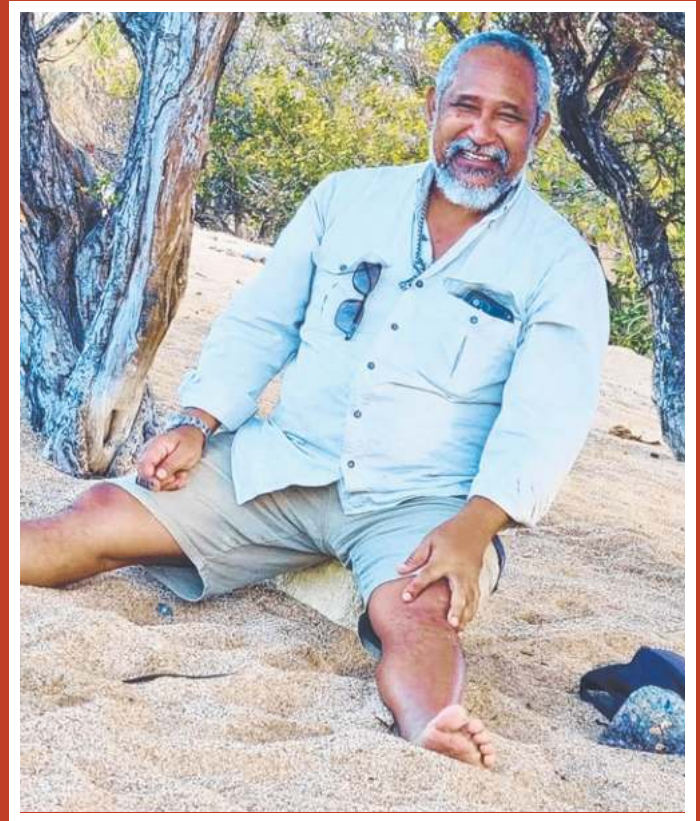
"Oh, we are connected at the hip now. We have become great friends," Wigness says.

"He took me to Brisbane to show me how the ferries there work and showed me some of his projects that he works on.

"It really opened my eyes up; it's a different world.

"I said to him that five, ten and twenty thousand dollars is a lot of money to us, but compared to the projects he works on, it's like a dollar.

"He is very good and gives me lots of good advice on business and how to deal



Elder Baba Zorro, far left at centre, has a ferry named after him; the MV Baba Wiggy; passengers on a Time and Tide ferry on Torres Strait; Thursday Island Elder Willie Wigness says: 'Our philosophy is not to rush things; take it step by step.'

I know I can help families. That makes me happy

with negativity and challenges." Time and Tide has faced some negativity and challenges from its competitors since it commenced ferry services at the end of February.

The business motto of Time and Tide is Putting Families First, a motto that's become a way of life.

Sales, marketing and tourism manager Sabrina Akee, also the daughter-in-law of Wigness, says family is everyone.

"Family is everyone on the islands, and our business is for everyone, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Customer service is everything," Akee says.

"We help people with their luggage getting on and off the bus and take their luggage from the bus onto the ferry, and off the ferry and onto the bus to the airport.

"We also have a courtesy bus; we check with people on the ferry if they need a lift when they arrive on Thursday Island, and then our bus will take them there.

"When they are ready to go, they can call and give us their address to be picked up.

"If we see passengers from the other

ferry waiting for a lift, we ask them if we can drop them off somewhere in our courtesy bus.

"It's 'passin', which means good manners, respect."

Time and Tide has a team of 12 that includes skippers, bus drivers, deck hands, ticketing and sales and marketing.

It runs two vessels, both named after Indigenous Elders; Marine Vehicle Baba Wiggy and MV Baba Zorro.

"It wasn't an easy road to get here," Akee says.

"The other ferry service has been around for a while and they see us as a threat and competition, and for me, I see it as good to have competition, but they have put up lot of resistance.

"We don't let that stop us though, because we're providing a service that people want and people need, and when I see happy customers, oh, it lights me up inside. I just smile.

"I love my work.

"I never thought I'd be working for a business run by my family. This business a reason why I'm here," says the mother of two.

"I know I can help families. That makes me happy, serving the community and families, living the motto of our company."

Wigness says the business has been organised into phases, and that it is close to reaching phase two, 75 per cent capacity.

"Our philosophy is not to rush things; take it step by step," he says.

"We are reaching our profit margin, but we are not at full capacity yet.

"We hope to reach phase three, full capacity, early next year.

"We have a 10-year plan that includes more ferry services, charters, tourism cruises and giving back to the community.

"We want to make our service like the ones Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane has, in a remote community, the last front line. That's the goal."

When the time is right, when Time and Tide is a stable and sustainable business, there is a plan to transition ownership for it to become 100 per cent Aboriginal. •

WORKING ON **COUNTRY**

Together at Wodgina

ABOUT US

Buru Rehab is a Kariyarra-majority Indigenous owned mining and civil earthworks provider with a core focus on Indigenous social outcomes through mining rehabilitation earthworks. We strive to provide the highest quality rehabilitation outcomes for our clients whilst maintaining a core focus on giving back to Country and providing opportunity for local Aboriginal people and businesses.

www.bururehab.com.au



**BURU
REHAB**

Mining Earthworks and Civils

PARTNERED WITH



**MINERAL
RESOURCES**





Kirrikin on the runway at La Moneda Cultural Centre, Santiago Chile, in celebration of 80 years of diplomatic bilateral between Chile and Australia.

Leverage a legacy

A Wonnarua wonder woman is taking mentoring to the next level

David Prestipino

Another chapter in Amanda Healy's storied career is afoot. Healy's transition to chair of Warrikal from the role of CEO follows eight years leading the company she co-founded in 2016 — a business that started as a kitchen-table idea and grew into one of Australia's most successful Indigenous-owned engineering firms.

The legacy of Healy, a Koori woman from the Wonnarua nation of the NSW Hunter Valley, is well intact, her leadership underscored by a determined desire to connect Indigenous businesses, offer training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in Western Australia's resources sector and championing female representation at executive levels.

Healy's career began in human resources management, working with companies such as BHP, Rio Tinto and WMC Resources, before she established award-winning enterprise Maxx Engineering in 2004, later sold to multinational engineering firm ThyssenKrupp in 2015.

As CEO and founder of luxury Indigenous fashion

label Kirrikin, she continues to help Indigenous artists succeed by transforming their works into globally recognised fashion statements, bridging culture and commerce and returning all profits to them.

At Warrikal, a major goal was growing First Nations employment: 20 per cent of its diverse 2000-strong workforce is now Indigenous, an example of Healy's success in building the capacity of her employees and colleagues and mentoring those workers who are on the up.

"Everybody I've worked with over the past 45 to 50 years has taught me something, even if it was 'you know that's not how I want to work'," Healy told the Indigenous Business Review on her 67th birthday last month.

While the growth of Warrikal had been "quite remarkable" after a game-changing \$350 million contract with Fortescue Metals Group in 2021, Healy will shift gears on the board, focusing on mentoring and developing a new generation of Indigenous workers and entrepreneurs.

The Warrikal chair will be heavily involved in two mentoring programs: one for Aboriginal people to advance into technical or management roles and another for women to progress in business.

Healy says there is no one-size-fits-all method to the company's empowerment programs, and that unique

approaches are required. "It is the furthest thing you could imagine ... if you look at the history of our people, we had at least 250 different groups and languages and approaches to life," she says. "And as many different people as there are, that's how many different ways you can do business."

"For me [mentoring] is about shaping their knowledge and experience, getting exposure in different businesses so they understand the various elements."

"We'll also use external, formal training, and one-to-one mentoring, which will play a very big part for our women."

"We're currently reviewing our operations to see how we can partner better with other Indigenous businesses, too."

"We've helped a lot develop over the years, but there's still a lot to be done and a long way to go to where we need to be."

On the broader Indigenous business landscape, the award-winning entrepreneur says she is sad at the disunity too often present across the sector.

"I'm a little bit over the complaining that goes on within our own community about what's right and what's wrong in business, and who and who isn't allowed to do business," she says.

"We're all one mob and we have to look after each other. We tend to pull each other down before we would support each other ... and it's getting worse, but we have to do it as a community." ●



Amanda Healy
Picture: Mark Flower

Funds break barriers

The superannuation sector has been slow to act on the needs of Indigenous members but it is now making progress

| David Prestipino

First Nations Australians are being systematically excluded from accessing their superannuation – in retirement, during hardship, and even after death – according to new research from Super Consumers Australia and Mob Strong Debt Help.

The report, which surveyed 99 First Nations consumers in the Eastern Arnhem region and consulted 19 financial counsellors nationwide, has revealed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are twice as likely to have unclaimed or lost superannuation compared to the national average, often experiencing discriminatory policies and rigid regulatory designs which often lock them out of their own money.

It concludes that Australia's \$4 trillion super system is failing Indigenous people.

Early super access, identity verification, cultural competence, data collection and representation are just some of the issues funds must address.

A recent Choice analysis found that lost and unclaimed super disproportionately affects areas with high Indigenous populations. Some leading funds are now taking steps to address longstanding barriers.

One major fund will begin collecting Indigenous member data this year. Others have joined the First Nations Superannuation Working Group, a coalition that includes super funds, financial counsellors and Indigenous

organisations. The group aims to dismantle systemic barriers contributing to lower retirement savings, disengagement and missed intergenerational wealth opportunities.

Founded in 2013, the group is led by the First Nations Foundation, Australia's only Indigenous financial literacy body. FNF hosts summits, courses and outreach programs. It works closely with industry and

regulators including the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority and the Australian Taxation Office.

New FNF managing director and proud Wiradjuri woman Leah Bennett says many Indigenous communities still lack direct contact with financial institutions.

"If you're willing to take First Nations peoples' money, you must be willing to serve them," she says

As services move online, the digital





From far left, 2025 First Nations Super Summit attendees including Leah Bennett (centre); TelstraSuper CEO Chris Davies; and Rest Super's Teesha Erickson and Anthony Ludlam at a First Nations Foundation Financial Wellness Week event in Townsville

divide leaves vulnerable members behind. Bennett says it is crucial for First Nations voices to be included in designing solutions, rather than having policies imposed.

"It's about relationships and community engagement. Boards need to take responsibility for fairness across all super members," she says.

Among the working group's members is REST, one of Australia's largest funds. Many of its 2 million-plus members are in casual or low-income roles. Yet like most funds, REST doesn't know how many of its members are Indigenous, because that data isn't collected.

REST chief strategy officer Tyrone O'Neill says the fund is working with government to address kinship structures and preservation age rules, and that it is simplifying paperwork to reduce barriers.

"In super, we usually only have a person's name, date of birth, tax file number and sometimes gender. We know almost nothing else," O'Neill

“ It's about relationships and community engagement

says. "We're trying to provide better support, because First Nations members are missing out on the full benefits of super."

While investment constraints exist, O'Neill says REST also considers social and environmental impacts when choosing where to invest, including how companies operate on Indigenous lands.

"Working respectfully with Traditional Owners is an important

part of our strategy," he says. REST has also rolled out cultural awareness training. A quarter of its 600 staff has completed the course.

TelstraSuper, which manages a total of \$27 billion for 85,000 members, is also adjusting its operations. CEO Chris Davies says its work began in 2018 through a partnership with the FNF and its Big Super Day Out, where fund reps visit Indigenous communities to better understand members' needs.

"We've since changed policies and procedures to reduce barriers," Davies says.

TelstraSuper was among the first to adopt Austrac guidelines allowing alternative ID forms for Indigenous members and it has embedded cultural training.

In 2020, the fund appointed James Perkins, its first Indigenous board director. He says superannuation must go beyond simply building wealth.

"It should reflect who we are, honour our cultural responsibilities and support the economic

empowerment of our people," Perkins says.

"We're committed to reshaping the system to be more inclusive and accountable to First Nations voices."

Meanwhile, the ATO has been urged to notify families when super accounts exist for deceased members, a step towards preventing unclaimed benefits from disappearing.

Payday reforms coming in July 2026 will also require employers to pay super at the same time as wages, reducing billions in unpaid contributions.

For those unsure whether they have unclaimed super, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission MoneySmart website (www.moneysmart.gov.au/find-unclaimed-money) offers a trusted search tool. The path to equity in super is complex, but progress is finally being made, by listening to community, removing barriers and embedding Indigenous perspectives in the system. ●

Kakadu can-do an inspiration

Remoteness should be no barrier to success, an acclaimed exporter tells **Dianne Bortoletto**

From one of the tiniest and most isolated communities in the world, Kylie-Lee Bradford began building her empire.

It started about a decade ago with her late mother Sheril Cahill in Patonga, in a small community that fluctuates from four to six families in Kakadu, Northern Territory. Together they created Kakadu Tiny Tots, a unique organic baby clothing line featuring hand-painted art from the Kakadu region.

Bradford appeared on Shark Tank Australia and turned down an investment offer, saying she had to stay true to her vision of creating impactful change. She grew and evolved the business into a successful venture that has products stocked in more than 100 shops across Australia.

Native botanicals were explored and a skincare and food range was created including products such as moisturising Kakadu plum face mist, calming body lotion, native dukkah, native jam and chutneys, Miracle Healing balm, bush candles and more.

But this is far more than just a skincare and native food business. Bradford's mission is clear: to

empower women, preserve cultural heritage and create lasting social impact by uplifting communities through sustainable business practice.

Known today as Kakadu Organics, the business has matured into a cultural wellness company that can name major companies Qantas, Accor, Canva, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council and Supply Nation as customers.

Two years ago, the reach of Kakadu Organics expanded beyond our shores, exporting skincare and bush foods to Britain, and all of its food products can be found on the shelves of Ryan's Grocery stores in Singapore.

At the time of writing, Kakadu Organics is named as a finalist in the 2025 Supply Nation Supplier Diversity Awards for Indigenous Exporter of the Year.

Supply Nation, Australia's largest verified directory of Indigenous-owned businesses, also facilitates connections between Indigenous businesses and corporate and government members.

"This is the first time we've entered any award," Bradford says.

"Being recognised as a business in a





Kylie-Lee Bradford with some of her Kakadu Organics teas; the range includes skincare and food products; a native-infused macadamia oil

rural and remote community is incredible.

"Growing up in metro, you have access to so, so much more than you do in rural and remote communities.

"I hope it's an inspiration for other women to see, from a little handmade business that has grown and now sold internationally; it means it can be done.

"We work as a team and as a collective, so this award nomination is for all the women we work with."

Through Kakadu Organics, Bradford champions First Nations women by coaching and mentoring and fostering entrepreneurship and leadership while promoting cultural preservation.

"I wanted to carry on my mother's legacy, working in community with women, in sustainable communities," she says. "We believe in the strength of women helping women, in the power of shared knowledge, and in the importance of standing together.

"We know that when women rise, entire communities rise with them."

A portion of every purchase from Kakadu Organics goes back to supporting Aboriginal women, in give-back programs that aid economically and also encourage the passing on of traditions, stories and wisdom to

We believe in the strength of women helping women

future generations. Bradford has a ready-made workforce: three daughters aged 21, 13 and 10, and a 16-year-old son. Her older children work in her new bricks and mortar shop in Samford Village in Brisbane. "I'm most proud of our journey so far; my commitment to my family and my kids, for them to see me on stage or on TV and making them proud," she says.

With qualifications in life coaching, trauma-informed care, mental health first aid, tourism and events, and a diploma from Murra Business School, Bradford has an expertise that is broad and deeply rooted in community

values. She uses her knowledge and experience to support other Indigenous women in the bush.

"Knowing the logistical nightmares of having a remote business, I want to help other Indigenous women to create microbusinesses in a sustainable way," she says.

"I spend most of my time coaching and helping women now, and from there, I'm able to provide a platform, Kakadu Organics, that puts their products into the hands of consumers.

"Importantly, our model pays suppliers up front and we don't pressure women to supply minimum amounts, which is important for those wild harvesting botanicals. For example, one month, we might only buy 10 items.

"It's the same with the artists we work with.

"We'll pay them to commission artwork, rather than just paying them a 10 per cent royalty every time a drink bottle is sold.

"I'd love to see more women in rural and remote communities have the support to develop products and help them reach corporate clients." •

Benang powers ahead

David Prestipino

Indigenous business Benang has secured more work with ATCO Australia, winning a contract to install new gas infrastructure across Perth's northern suburbs.

The contract for the award-winning business will initially be for three years, followed by a two-year option. Benang will be undertaking the installation of gas mains and services to residents, land developments and commercial premises.

The multidisciplinary contractor will also replace ageing infrastructure, including gas mains and associated services.

Benang managing director and CEO Jasmine Kadic says the contract is recognition of a competitive tender, consistent delivery and commitment to safety, quality and Indigenous business leadership. She says it builds on the company's existing relationship with ATCO Gas and its capability to scale sustainably across Western Australia.

"We're excited about the opportunities this project brings, from employment and local business engagement to our continuing investment in traineeships and apprenticeships," says the proud Wadjuk/Ballardong woman from a long line of Indigenous leaders and Elders within the Noongar community.

Benang, founded in 2018, services the water, power, gas and mining sectors.

Environmental considerations are embedded in all projects.

The business has expanded to more than 50 staff; it has invested in cutting-edge technology and was last year named Indigenous Business of the Year at the annual WA Business Awards.

Kadic says Benang already provides services to ATCO under a previous agreement and that the latest contract will further grow employment and local business partnership opportunities as well as the company's annual traineeship and apprenticeship programs.

"This partnership with ATCO strengthens our shared vision for community advancement, infrastructure



Partnership opportunities: Damir Kadic, Benang general manager and founding director and Benang managing director and CEO Jasmine Kadic alongside ATCO Australia executive general manager of gas operations Russell Godsall and ATCO general manager construction Mark Turner

improvement and sustainable opportunities for local people," Kadic says.

"It is also a tribute to our team's dedication and the support of partners like ATCO who value long-term impact.

"We believe sustained, long-term partnerships like this with ATCO create long-term change and opportunities that are only made possible by the tireless dedication from our team at Benang and the continued support and opportunity provided by ATCO."

ATCO executive general manager of gas operations Russell Godsall says the contract to Benang reinforces the quality of work it has previously delivered and that it will continue to help drive its growth.

"It was evident Benang could deliver to our project requirements, and they won the competitive tender based on the price, quality of work, commitment to

safety and proven track record," Godsall says. "We're also pleased to be supporting an Indigenous business that has grown significantly since its establishment in 2018."

Godsall says Benang's growth and success is a testament to the quality of its work, project delivery and focus on safety.

"While we have been committed to actively supporting Indigenous businesses – and frequently attend events held to showcase such businesses – we are delighted with the commercial outcomes for both parties from these transactions," he says.

To support the local community, Benang has established partnerships with organisations, including Noongar Mia Mia, which provides housing for the Aboriginal community; Zonta House, supporting its efforts against domestic violence; and zero2hero, contributing to youth mental health initiatives.

Muguriyarra director Jaiden Hayes aims to show “a path for the younger generations” through business ownership and leadership

Digging deep to build a future

| Dianne Bortoletto

Indigenous civil contractor Muguriyarra, located in Onslow and servicing the mineral-rich Pilbara region, was initially established as a 50-50 joint venture in 2022.

After an introduction between JLAH Contracting and NTC Contracting, facilitated by Mineral Resources (MinRes), it was evident that the two companies shared similar values and goals.

Motivated by a desire to provide a future for young people in the region, Thalanyji man Jaiden Hayes founded JLAH Contracting, an earthmoving business, which among others, also employed his father and daughter.

NTC Contracting managing director Jason Varcoe says it was important to find the right partner to also support the local community, which has always played a major part in the company's 100-year history in the region.

“It's a big decision to pick a partner. It's not a decision

you make lightly. We've been considering it for a long time and wanted to find someone with similar values, and Jaiden has been a good match,” Varcoe says.

An earthmoving plant operator and driver by trade, Hayes navigated the challenges of setting up a small business, leaning on Varcoe's experience.

“Starting out as a business owner was about more than just chasing opportunity; it was about showing a path for the younger generations,” Hayes says.

“At Muguriyarra, workforce development means investing in our younger generation. We want to create pathways by training young people on Country, helping them get licensed and giving them hands-on experience with machinery and civil works.”

The name Muguriyarra comes from the Thalanyji name for Mount Murray, a mountain also known as Sleeping Elephant Rock.

“Muguriyarra is a Thalanyji company, but we have expanded into the Pilbara; my dad is now part of the company, so we also have a Ngarluma connection,” Hayes says.

The goals for the joint venture from the onset were to grow Muguriyarra, purchase rather than hire equipment and to create opportunities to recruit and train staff, some which have already been realised.

A year ago, with its continuing growth, Muguriyarra expanded its reach across the Pilbara and Gascoyne and has secured contracts with other major mining companies; its first was with MinRes Onslow Iron which enabled the joint venture to become operational.

Muguriyarra has received main roads accreditation as well as ISO 9001, 14001 and 45001 accreditation for quality, environmental and health and safety management respectively. It will soon apply for a building licence to become a licensed building contractor to continue to grow its capability and accreditations.

“Being able to work with dad in my own business helps both of us in both employment but also learning and teaching,” says Hayes. “When they see someone from their own community running a business and leading projects, I hope it sparks something.” •

Training, consultancy for inclusivity

White Australia's Black history has been highlighted in a new cultural competency e-learning module

| Dianne Bortoletto

As sure as the tides, Mundanara Bayles is forever moving, always inching forward.

Bayles, who has more than 20 years' experience working for Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations in NSW and Queensland, is the co-founder and managing director of BlackCard, a cultural capability training organisation. She was awarded Supply Nation's Indigenous Businesswoman of the Year in 2023.

As a proud advocate for her people, Bayles is on a mission to ensure her legacy follows in her father's footsteps. She is connected to Wonnarua, Bunjalung, Birri-Gubba and Gungalu peoples.

Her family has been active in the Aboriginal movement since the 1960s and they have been storytellers on radio since the 1980s. Her father, the late Tiga Bayles, and a grandmother Maureen Watson pioneered Blak media and started Radio Redfern some 40 years ago.

Inner-Sydney Redfern is in Bayles' blood: it's where she grew up with her

eight sisters before moving to her father's Country in the early 90s, Birri-Gubba and Gungalu (Queensland).

"When I think about the lack of black representation in the media, for example, why don't people know the names of a lot of our trailblazers? That motivates me," Bayles says.

"We recently launched our e-learn cultural confidence online training, which is designed to make all Australians feel proud of this country's long history."

Guided by Elders, BlackCard provides cultural training, tours and consultancy grounded in Aboriginal knowledge systems aimed at empowering organisations to build ethical, inclusive practices through a deep understanding of Aboriginal values, responsibilities and connection to land.

"The training goes beyond 1788 and colonial narratives to share Aboriginal terms of reference and ways of knowing that have existed for tens of thousands of years," Bayles says.

"This world-class learning





Mundanara Bayles' podcast *Black Magic Woman* is the first Indigenous podcast to be signed by iHeart Radio. BlackCard's first client was the NRMA, far left; and Cassy Saunders, a BlackCard tour guide

“ We don't gloss over the hard truths

experience will spark greater awareness and pride in the fact that we live in a country that's home to the world's oldest living continuous culture.

"We don't gloss over the hard truths, but if you look at our history clock that we developed where every minute on the clock face is one thousand years of history, the time since colonisation is 11 seconds."

The clock in BlackCard's module one shows the ice age of 50,000 years ago, the decline in megafauna 20,000 years ago and how the Great Barrier Reef was formed between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago. David Attenborough makes an appearance to confirm the dreaming stories of the reef are matched with what science has shown.

"It's incredible. Those dreaming stories have been passed down through 2000 generations, and they were factually correct," she says.

"We need to remember Aboriginal peoples survived two ice ages; it's a history that not many people know about."

As the clock ticks, it shows the introduction of agriculture, the last volcanic eruption in Australia and the separation of Tasmania from the mainland some 10,000 years ago.

There are references to other global historic moments, including the pyramids of Egypt, Jesus Christ and the first international trade 1000 years ago between Indigenous Australians and the Macassans from Indonesia.

Developed by respected Aboriginal Elders, educators and authors Dr Lilla Watson and Dr Mary Graham, the BlackCard program aims to strengthen participants' ability to work effectively and respectfully with all people, in particular with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The high production values, gamification and multimedia mix of video, graphics, voiceovers and imagery kept me engaged as I completed the first module. I was particularly moved by a powerful speech by Stan Grant that shows how history is viewed differently by Indigenous people.

With three modules available titled White Australia has a Black History, Our Shared History and Understanding Ancient Protocols, BlackCard's training modules have been intentionally created to be Sharable Content Object Reference Model compliant to work within the learning management systems and intranets of large organisations.

"Our first client was NRMA, and

LinkedIn is looking to include our e-learn in their LinkedIn Learning," Bayles says.

"The only other Indigenous Rights course on LinkedIn was developed by an Indigenous academic in Canada. There's nothing about Indigenous Australians, yet," says Bayles, the voice behind the podcast *Black Magic Woman*, the first Indigenous podcast to be signed by iHeart Radio.

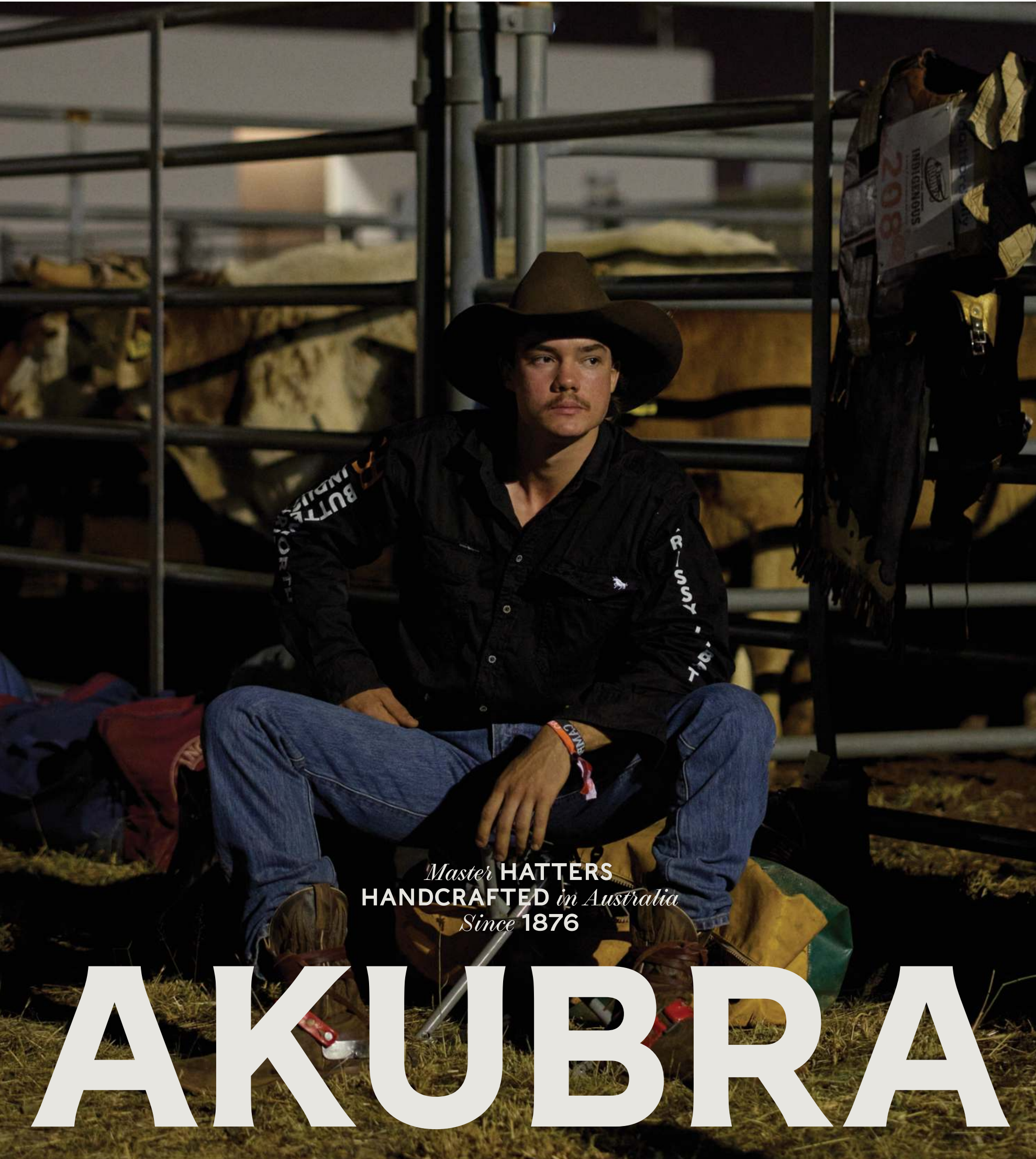
"I was excited when iHeart signed my podcast, but then I told them I want my own network, that I wanted to do this my own way," Bayles says.

Soon after, in partnership with ARN's iHeart, BlakCast was launched, Australia's first podcast network dedicated to the stories of Indigenous Australians.

The BlakCast network launched with podcasts including *Black Magic Woman*, *Yarning Up*, *Curtain the Podcast*, *Unapologetically Blak*, *Meet the Mob*, *Coming Out Blak* and *Find and Tell*, the first co-production with iHeart, which won Best New Australian Podcast.

Season two of *Find and Tell*, hosted by Bayles, is out in mid-August.

Bayles says she self-funds BlakCast through BlackCard. •



Master **HATTERS**
HANDCRAFTED *in Australia*
Since 1876

AKUBRA