

The Indigenous Business Review

The background of the cover is a photograph of a man and a woman standing in front of a large, light-colored tree trunk. The man, on the left, is wearing a dark polo shirt with a white Indigenous pattern and the letters 'PKKP' on the chest, and dark jeans. The woman, on the right, is wearing a similar dark polo shirt with the same pattern and 'PKKP' logo, and blue pants. They are both looking directly at the camera. The background shows a clear blue sky and some green foliage.

ISSUE 13 | AUGUST 2026

THE BLAKPRINT

Blak business
worth \$3.4bn
to Territory

TAKING FLIGHT

Indigenous-
owned airline
enters FIFO
economy

A fleet of their own

Juukan Gorge owners
buy mine equipment

BHP



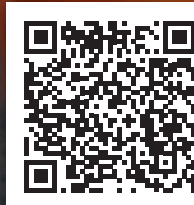
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The Indigenous Business Review

A striking pattern runs through this edition: Indigenous businesses and Traditional Owners are no longer just working in the economy. They are buying it.

PKKP, the Traditional Owners of Juukan Gorge, will own the haul trucks and electric excavators working **Fortescue's** Pilbara mines, with the miner leasing the fleet from them. **Yindjibarndi Water** is leading the \$1.1bn acquisition of the Dampier desalination plant, putting a majority Indigenous-owned business at the centre of the West Pilbara's water security. **Gumatj Corporation** has bought Nhulunbuy's shopping centre as East Arnhem Land prepares for life after mining. **Altura Airlines**, co-founded by **Dr Amanda Healy**, has put majority Indigenous-owned aircraft into the skies above the resources economy. Trucks, water, retail, aviation. These are assets, not contracts.

The **BlakPrint Report** from the **Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network** proves what that ownership is worth. Blak businesses added \$3.4bn to the Territory economy last financial year, 10.1 per cent of Gross Territory Product. And if those same businesses were non-Indigenous owned, the Territory would be \$542m worse off and 8701 Indigenous people would lose their jobs. As chief executive **Naomi Anstess** puts it, Blak ownership is not symbolic. It materially changes economic outcomes.

The same conviction runs through the founders in these pages. **NLA Trucking's Nicole Appleton**, who had to film herself driving a truck before a lender would believe the finance was for her, now turns Indigenous drivers into owner-operators. **Allpro's Tyson Hubbard** chose an apprenticeship over incarceration and now trains the next generation. **Karlka Pastoral** is building a **Nyiyaparli** beef brand on Nyiyaparli Country.

Ownership is no longer an aspiration. It is the strategy.

Reece Harley
Managing Editor



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We're brewing up a storm



Indigenous drink makers produce some of Australia's finest spirits, wines and beers, and there's untapped potential to do much more. Dianne Bortoletto reports

If Indigenous businesses held 3.8 per cent of the Australian beverage industry, matching their share of the population, it would be valued at about \$2.7bn a year creating 22,000 jobs and have gross output of about \$6bn.

There are about a dozen First Nations beverage producers making their way into the industry.

Those who control most of the shelves, taps and venues Australians buy their drinks from gathered at The Oriana at Circular Quay during NAIDOC Week to launch the Beverage Reconciliation Industry Network Group (RING).

RING brought together Coles,

Endeavour Group, Lion, Asahi Beverages, Suntory Oceania and Australian Venue Co, which hosted the group's first in-person event to mark 50 years of NAIDOC, to launch the network's purpose and future direction.

Reconciliation Australia chief executive Karen Mundine was among the guests, the Brolga Dance Academy performed, and MC and keynote speaker Toni Janke issued the challenge.

"Through business, we make influential decisions every single day, through employment opportunities, investment, innovation, supply chains, education and so on," Ms Janke said.

"Imagine if we could fully unlock

Indigenous entrepreneurship and the enormous potential that we know exists in our communities."

Coles head of Indigenous affairs, Kamilaroi woman Sara Stuart, said the network was built for exactly that job.

"Reconciliation is bigger than any one company," Ms Stuart said. "By working together, we can create stronger relationships, greater consistency, and a more meaningful, lasting impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."

Coles Liquor general manager commercial Sophie Went said: "NAIDOC Week provides a fantastic opportunity to champion and celebrate Aboriginal and



Photos from the launch of the Beverage Reconciliation Industry Network Group at The Oriana at Circular Quay in Sydney, held to coincide with NAIDOC Week.

Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements. By showcasing the Indigenous-owned brands we range at Liquorland and coming together at the inaugural RING event, we can amplify First Nations businesses, share their stories with our customers and create meaningful opportunities for recognition, connection and growth."

The alcohol beverage industry is one of the largest consumer sectors in the country. The most recent whole-of-industry estimate, 2017 research commissioned by peak body Alcohol Beverages Australia, put its contribution at \$70bn a year, creating 595,000 direct and indirect jobs across manufacturing, logistics, retail and hospitality, with total output of \$158bn.

Those figures are likely to have increased since then. The spirits sector alone contributes \$15.5bn in added value and supports more than 50,000 jobs.

Producers ready

The businesses showcased on the night need no case made for their quality.

Beachtree Distilling Co, led by Bundjalung woman Kirra Daley and Kamilaroi master distiller Steve Grace from Caloundra on Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi Country, was named World's Best Craft Producer at the World Gin Icon

Awards in 2024 and 2025. "Every bottle we craft tells a story of the land, our culture, and our dedication to blending tradition with science," Ms Daley said.

Mt Yengo Wines sells more than 5000 cases a year and exports to the US. The label was founded partly to challenge the stereotype linking Indigenous people and alcohol misuse.

"We want not only Australia, we want the world to walk with us," said co-owner and Palawa artist Wayne Quilliam.

Bidja Wines pairs First Nations winemaker Craig Cromelin and Wiradjuri co-owner James Stephens with the century-old Rutherglen house Buller Wines. They are part of a national roll call that is growing every year.

Munda Wines, founded by Wirangu and Kokatha man Paul Vandenberg, became South Australia's first Aboriginal-owned label and won the First Nations Exporter award at the 2025 Australian Export Awards.

In spirits, former AFL star and Larrakia man Daniel Motlop's Seven Seasons has taken Green Ant Gin to national distribution, and Wiradjuri man Mitch Lowrie's Dharawal Distilling Co is crafting gin and vodka from botanicals foraged on Dharawal Country in the Illawarra.

In beer, Jarrah Boy, Indigenous owned by Monero Ngarigo man Dale Vocale and

co-owner Isaac Harrison, brews all-Australian lagers with native yams and jarrah honey stocked through Dan Murphy's and BWS. First Hand Beer has put its Outback Lager on national shelves, and Supply Nation-certified wholesaler Indibrew helps corporate buyers bring Indigenous beverages into their procurement.

Turn on the taps

Coles is backing the producers with shelf space. Its Liquorland stores stock Mt Yengo, Bidja and Seven Seasons.

Dan Murphy's, owned by Endeavour Group, stocks Seven Seasons, Beachtree, Jarrah Boy and First Hand.

Lion, Asahi and Suntory Oceania bring the production scale and distribution muscle that can take a craft producer national. The network formalises what the best of these partnerships have shown, that shared learning and collective action move faster than any company working alone.

"When enough organisations come together, like this industry RING, and decide that recognition, inclusion and respect for First Nations people is a priority, we create change," Ms Janke said. "We change the conversation. We change the industry, which in turn changes the nation." •

FIRST NATIONS DRINKS MENU

Majority Indigenous-owned drinks businesses featured in this story, and where to find them:

- **Beachtree Distilling Co | Caloundra, Queensland**
Certified organic gin, vodka, rum and whisky from Bundjalung woman Kirra Daley and Kamilaroi master distiller Steve Grace. World's Best Craft Producer at the World Gin Icon Awards, 2024 and 2025. beachtree.com.au
- **Mt Yengo Wines | Hunter Valley, NSW**
Australia's first majority First Nations-owned wine brand, with artwork by Palawa artist and co-owner Wayne Quilliam on every label. Stocked through Liquorland and exported to the United States. mtyengowines.com.au
- **Munda Wines | South Australia**
Founded and owned by Wirangu and Kokatha man Paul Vandenberg. South Australia's first Aboriginal-owned wine label and winner of the First Nations Exporter award at the 2025 Australian Export Awards. mundawines.com.au
- **Bidja Wines | Rutherglen, Victoria**
Majority Aboriginal-owned label chaired by First Nations winemaker Craig Cromelin, produces seven varietals plus finger lime and rosella spritzers in partnership with Buller Wines. bidjawines.com.au
- **Seven Seasons | Darwin, NT**
Green Ant Gin, Bush Apple Gin and Native Yam Vodka from former AFL star and Larrakia man Daniel Motlop, with botanicals harvested by Indigenous communities. seven-seasons.com.au
- **Dharawal Distilling Co | Bellambi, NSW**
Gin and vodka built on botanicals foraged on Dharawal Country by founder and Wiradjuri man Mitch Lowrie. Poured in around 30 venues in Sydney and the Illawarra. dharawal.co
- **Jarrah Boy | Victoria and Queensland**
Wholly Indigenous-owned lagers brewed with native yams and jarrah honey, founded by Monero Ngarigo man Dale Vocale. Stocked through Dan Murphy's and BWS. jarrahboy.com
- **First Hand Beer | Sydney, NSW**
Outback Lager in cans carrying the artwork of Indigenous co-founder Mark Lake-Kilpatrick. Stocked through Dan Murphy's. firsthandbeer.com.au
- **Indibrew | Wollongong, NSW**
Supply Nation-certified wholesaler founded by Yadihagana and Wuthathi man Joe Procter, supplying wine, spirits and its own IndiBrew Beer to corporate and government buyers. indibrew.com.au

Growing ON COUNTRY

ABOUT US

Jaliyarnu Yinta Landscaping Services (JY) is a 100% owned and operated Robe River Kuruma (RRK) business providing landscaping and horticultural services, with a core focus on delivering quality ground maintenance outcomes across the Pilbara's mining and resource sector.

Owned and managed by RRK Elder Georgina Bobby, JY specialises in mining camp grounds maintenance, site weed control, vegetation and horticultural management. JY are committed to providing reliable, professional and culturally grounded services to clients, while caring for Country and creating meaningful opportunities for local Aboriginal people.

www.rrkac.org.au/business/jaliyarnu-yinta



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Yindjibarndi splash cash on water deal

The Millstream aquifer is on Yindjibarndi Ngurra (country)
PICTURE: YINDJIBARNDI WATER

Yindjibarndi Water will lead the acquisition of the 8-gigalitre-per-year Dampier Seawater Desalination Plant in the West Pilbara, after reaching agreements with Rio Tinto and the West Australian government that put a majority Indigenous-owned business at the centre of the region's water security.

Perth-based Affinity Capital has partnered with Yindjibarndi Water's nominee entity, Yindjibarndi WaterCo, to raise the capital for the purchase through its funds management arm, the Pilbara Water Fund.

The deal gives the Yindjibarndi People a long-term economic stake in critical water infrastructure and a pathway to operating it. It also delivers a climate-independent water source designed to relieve pressure on the Millstream aquifer, where decades of groundwater extraction for the West Pilbara Water Supply Scheme have damaged cultural sites and ecology.

Yindjibarndi Water chairperson Michael Woodley said the agreement

Purchase of Dampier desalination plant helps secure region's water security, writes **Reece Harley**

was the result of a longstanding drive to protect water on Yindjibarndi Ngurra, or country.

"As witnesses of the impacts of groundwater over-abstraction on cultural sites and the ecology at Millstream, Yindjibarndi Elders have always put water on the agenda of every discussion," he said.

The company was formed in 2021 as a majority Yindjibarndi-owned entity to find a solution to over-abstraction at Millstream. It commissioned independent scientific and cultural studies and presented them to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation in 2024, leading to a partnership agreement with the state government and the Water Corporation under which groundwater bores are being relocated away from culturally and environmentally sensitive

areas. Those studies also identified additional sustainable groundwater sources on Yindjibarndi country that may help meet future demand.

"This agreement will strengthen water security in the West Pilbara, sustainably diversify water supplies for the Water Corporation and Rio Tinto, and deliver much-needed environmental relief while preserving Yindjibarndi cultural heritage at Millstream," Mr Woodley said.

"This is another step on the Yindjibarndi path to self-determination by delivering a secure, long-term economic return and, over time, enabling us to grow operational capability through employment, training and contracting arrangements."

Mr Woodley acknowledged the West Australian government and Rio Tinto as partners in the agreement, along with capability partners The Right Water

Company and Affinity Capital.

Rio Tinto remains responsible for managing construction of the plant, which is expected to be fully operational in 2027. Water from the plant will supply the West Pilbara Water Supply Scheme, operated by the Water Corporation, which delivers drinking water to homes and businesses across Karratha, Wickham, Roebourne, Dampier and surrounding areas, as well as major industry, including Rio Tinto's operations.

Yindjibarndi Water is 60 per cent owned by the Yindjibarndi People through Yindjibarndi Wealth Pty Ltd, with The Right Water Company holding the remaining 40 per cent.

The acquisition builds on a run of milestones for the Yindjibarndi nation. In May, Yindjibarndi Energy Corporation, a partnership between Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation and ACEN Corporation, achieved financial close on a 75-megawatt solar project in the West Pilbara and signed a 30-year power purchase agreement with Rio Tinto. ●



From left: Jeffrey Graham, Sheena Graham, Yvonne Green (seated), Bevan Thompson, Harold Graham and Pauline Graham.

PICTURE: DAN JONES

Bringing the world a little closer

Indigenous Canadian delegation welcomed in the Goldfields. Giovanni Torre and Dan Jones report

The Goldfields Aboriginal Business Chamber hosted a six-day visit by a delegation of Indigenous leaders, economic development professionals, government representatives and young changemakers from British Columbia and Yukon, Canada.

The visit formed part of the British Columbia/Yukon Young Indigenous Leaders Exchange Pilot Program to the Indo-Pacific, developed in partnership with Global Affairs Canada and the BC First Nations Centre of Excellence for Economic Development. A centrepiece was GABC's Indigenous business networking event, Connecting the Goldfields and Canada, which brought Indigenous business leaders from across

the world together in Western Australia.

The opportunity arose after Harlan Schilling, the deputy chief of the Daylu Dena Council and CEO of the BC First Nations Centre of Excellence, attended Yuwa 2025, hosted by GABC in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. The relationships formed during his time in the Goldfields inspired the inclusion of Kalgoorlie in the delegation's itinerary alongside Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.

GABC said the city and region's inclusion marked an "incredible opportunity to showcase the strength of our Aboriginal communities, businesses, culture and leadership to an international audience".

Mr Schilling, from Lower Post, British Columbia, was recently the elected chief



Top, from left., Bayja Morgan-Banke, Angela Wesley, Charliez McLaughlin, Olivia Schilling, Amy Lachance, Kianna Loots and Priya Shinha; below, from left, Katie Weldon, Priscilla Tucker and Shaneane Weldon



for the Liard First Nation in Watson Lake, Yukon.

"If you take a look at the things that are happening in Canada, specifically with UNDRIP, the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous People, it's actually empowered First Nations at the leadership level," he told Indigenous Business Review.

"I run the First Nations Center of Excellence of Economic Development. Leonard Joe runs the First Nations Forestry Council. Caleb Bain runs the First Nations Energy and Mining Council. These are tools for all 204 First Nations within British Columbia, but also a tool for the 630-plus First Nations all across Canada."

The delegation comes from an

“Human rights are the missing link between policy and outcomes in communities

Indigenous economy of growing scale. Statistics Canada puts economic output attributable to Indigenous people at \$48.9bn in 2020, up from \$41.7bn in 2012, across an estimated 60,000-plus Indigenous-owned businesses. Leaders have set a target of growing the Indigenous economy to \$100bn.

Mr Schilling said there were "certain things that are happening here in Australia that even now, as a leader for First Nations for the last nine years, that I continue to learn today".

"Being welcomed into Australia, this is my third work trip, and every single time I'm hearing more and more about what the Indigenous people are doing and knocking down walls and barriers that we still have in Canada," he said.

"So, the fact that it's the industry and business level that has incorporation that you have knocked down these walls is the complete opposite in Canada, where we've done it on the governance side.

"The resources that the world needs are from our traditional lands. So, to be able to be a driving force in that ... it shows that we are in the rightful place that we need to be."

Another guest was Javen Marchant, 22, of the Squamish First Nation, founder of Swakwel Industrial Products, an Indigenous-owned building materials supplier working with contractors and First Nations across western Canada. Through Swakwel he develops partnerships with Nations that reduce project costs while creating revenue-sharing opportunities that return value to communities.

"Everyone before me for the last four or five generations has been an entrepreneur," he told Indigenous Business Review.

"I saw a gap in the industry, specifically in my province, where UNDRIP has been legislatively implemented, and it gave Indigenous business an upper hand in our industry, which is the first time ever.

"I'm the first person in my family where it's been a good thing to be (an) Indigenous person in business. I've been an entrepreneur since the beginning of high school."

Indigenous rights advocate Sheena Graham, a proud Ngadju woman from Norseman, WA, used the event to launch her new venture, the Corporate Indigenous Rights Advisory, an

Indigenous-led advisory firm that works with mining companies to strengthen how they recognise, manage and uphold the human rights of First Nations people.

Ms Graham, CIRA's founder and managing director, said the advisory was "focused on human rights standards in the mining sector".

"After working for 20 years in diplomacy, human rights, anti-corruption, and sustainability, it became very clear that human rights really is the missing link between policy and outcomes in communities," she said.

"Indigenous peoples, we have collective human rights in recognition that our identities are tied to our culture, which is tied to our lands, our waters, and our connections to the animals and the waters and all the plants around us. If we lose those connections, we lose our identity, and we are lost to history.

"Mining has significant impacts on those important relationships with our lands and waters ... if we don't protect them through human rights, we risk losing our very cultures that sustain us."

Ms Graham compared experiences with the visiting leaders.

"There're very different approaches between Australia and Canada, and I would say the one other thing we have in common is human rights is not necessarily at the centre of it," she said.

"For example, in Australia, there are rights around negotiation and having a seat at the table with mining companies, but there is no right to free, prior and informed consent.

"Unless regulations have been designed to comply with human rights, they will fall short of human rights. So, if a mining company is focused on compliance with government permits, they will fall short of human rights unless they take additional steps to comply with human rights standards as well."

Through the six-day program, delegates engaged with Aboriginal businesses, cultural tourism operators, educational institutions, community organisations, local government and the resources sector. GABC said the itinerary was designed to "showcase the innovation, resilience, and depth of Aboriginal economic participation in the Goldfields and to create a foundation for long-term Indigenous-to-Indigenous partnerships between Australia and Canada". ●



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Landmark deal in the Pilbara

Traditional Owners sign fleet leasing agreement with Fortescue, writes Reece Harley

The Traditional Owners of Juukan Gorge will own the haul trucks and electric excavators that will be working onsite at Fortescue's Pilbara mines, via a leasing arrangement approved by the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura community at a native title authorisation meeting in Karratha in June.

The fleet hire arrangement anchors a new Native Title Agreement and Co-Management Agreement that replace the Land Access Agreement PKKP signed with the iron ore miner in 2010. PKKP will own the equipment outright, with ANZ supporting the purchase through the Buriya Capital funding program, and Fortescue will lease the fleet to run at its Pilbara operations.

The arrangement creates a long-term revenue stream for the PKKP Aboriginal Corporation, supports the growth of the group's commercial activities and gives Traditional Owners a direct stake in the economics of mining on Country.

After Juukan Gorge

PKKP 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.

The destruction was carried out under a valid section 18 consent granted under Western Australia's Aboriginal Heritage Act, and it exposed how little protection the law gave the places Traditional Owners hold most sacred. The group signed a Co-Management Agreement with Rio Tinto last year, ahead of the fifth anniversary of the destruction. With the Fortescue agreements approved, PKKP holds co-management arrangements with two of the Pilbara's biggest iron ore miners.

"We have always said we are not opposed to mining, but it has to be done in the right way with Traditional 

Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura community chair Sandra Hayes

**Fifteen years.
\$7.1bn in
contracts to
Aboriginal
businesses.
\$1bn in the last
financial year**

➤ Owner decision-making front and centre,” said Terry Drage, a Pinikura Traditional Owner and chair of PKKP Enterprises.

“These agreements are going to create a lasting legacy for our people, and we are really proud that we have signed this with Fortescue so that we don’t have to rely on the government or courts to protect our important places.

“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,” said Sandra Hayes, a Puutu Kuntj Kurrama Elder and chair of the PKKP Aboriginal Corporation.

“The Co-Management Agreement 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 negotiation with Fortescue took three years to make sure the agreements reflected a shared understanding, so we know what they need, and they know what we can and cannot accept.”

The deal

The Co-Management Agreement commits both parties to work together through every stage of mining, from before exploration through construction and operation to closure.

Co-management committees will oversee specific mines and developments. Heritage information and mine plans must be shared early. A defined process governs decisions where Fortescue requires key approvals,

such as section 18 consents to disturb heritage or major environmental approvals, and important sites are to be protected through 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 adds tenure arrangements for Fortescue’s decarbonisation activities and a modernised mining benefits framework, with the fleet deal, which Fortescue describes as unique, at its centre. After 15 years of bringing Indigenous businesses into its supply chain as

contractors, the company will now lease mining equipment from the Traditional Owners of the Country it mines.

The \$7.1bn program

The agreements cap a milestone year for Fortescue. The company spent more than \$1bn with First Nations businesses in the 2026 financial year, and its Billion Opportunities program, which turns 15 this year, awarded more than \$1bn in contracts in the same fiscal year adding to the \$7.1bn in contracts to First Nations businesses since 2011. Fortescue confirmed the milestone in its 2026 financial year reporting, listing more than \$7.1bn in contracts awarded to Australian First Nations businesses among the year’s highlights alongside the PKKP agreements themselves.

When the Indigenous Business Review



Left and above: Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura country in Western Australia's Pilbara region. PKKP's fleet is already at work at Fortescue's Eliwana iron ore operation 90km west of Tom Price



profiled the program in August 2024, it had just passed \$5bn in contracts to more than 190 First Nations businesses, with annual spend of \$505m in the 2023 financial year. The cumulative total has since grown by more than \$2bn, and the annual figure has almost doubled. Fortescue's then general manager First Nations, Rosli Wheelock, said the program deliberately reached beyond the mine gate.

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

"Even in Perth, it's not just about where our operations are. We've got things from coffee beans to stationery,

we look for wherever there's opportunity for Aboriginal businesses to be involved with our organisation."

The company then employed more than 1400 Aboriginal people, and Indigenous-owned Kooya put electric all-terrain vehicles into Fortescue's operations, an early marker of the overlap between the miner's decarbonisation push and its Indigenous business commitments. The PKKP fleet deal scales that overlap up to haul trucks and excavators, and hands the ownership to Traditional Owners.

Fortescue chairman and founder Andrew Forrest AO said the company had never seen native title agreements as simply a transaction. "The custodians of that Country should have a genuine voice in what happens there and share in the opportunities it creates," Dr Forrest

said. "This agreement creates new opportunities for PKKP to build business capability. They can participate directly in the success of our operations as they strengthen their people. That is the kind of long-term economic participation that helps communities build their own future. I want to acknowledge the leadership of PKKP and the spirit in which these negotiations have been conducted. We have taken the time to listen to one another, understand what matters and build an agreement that will endure."

The fleet PKKP will own includes electric excavators, and the Native Title Agreement covers tenure for Fortescue's decarbonisation work as the company invests \$US6.2bn (\$8.6bn) in reaching Real Zero scope 1 and 2 terrestrial emissions by 2030 without

carbon offsets. "As Fortescue continues to grow and pursue our Real Zero decarbonisation ambitions, we want to do it together as partners, working together to protect heritage, create opportunity and support the next chapter of development in the Pilbara," Dr Forrest said.

A true partner

"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." ●

BILLION OPPORTUNITIES: 15 YEARS IN NUMBERS

2011
Fortescue launches Billion Opportunities program to bring First Nations businesses into its supply chain, from haul roads to head office stationery.

2023
Annual spend with Indigenous-owned businesses reaches \$505m.

2024
The program passes \$5bn in contracts awarded, across more than 190 First Nations businesses. Fortescue employs more than 1400 Aboriginal people.

2026
Fortescue spends \$1bn with First Nations businesses in a single financial year. Cumulative contracts reach \$7.1bn as the program marks 15 years.

June 2026
PKKP become owners of haul trucks and electric excavators leased to Fortescue, with ANZ backing the purchase through the Buriya Capital funding program.

Create shared value with Indigenous Peoples globally.

Challenge accepted.

The Tlingit story of the Box of Daylight tells of Raven, who brought light to a world once shrouded in darkness. By releasing the sun, moon and stars, Raven made it possible for people to see and for life to flourish.

This powerful story is reimagined in the artwork (pictured below) by Alaskan Tlingit and Athabascan artist Crystal Worl.

At Woodside, we are inspired by stories that illuminate connection, culture and shared understanding.

Woodside's Indigenous Peoples Strategy 2026–2030 reflects this commitment, setting a clear vision for respectful relationships, meaningful engagement and shared value wherever we operate.



Scan the QR code to explore the Strategy and learn more.





Awake the sleeping giant

Aboriginal businesses added \$3.4bn to the Northern Territory economy in 2024-25, a contribution nearly the size of the Territory's entire Public Administration and Safety industry, according to a landmark report launched in Darwin on Thursday.

The BlakPrint Report, released by the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN) at the opening of its new Darwin Business and Employment Hub in Winellie, is the first comprehensive measurement of the economic footprint of Aboriginal business in the Territory.

Its headline finding is stark: Blak

Indigenous businesses could contribute an extra \$6bn to the NT economy, writes **Reece Harley**

businesses generated 10.1 per cent of Gross Territory Product last financial year, employed 11,600 full-time equivalent workers, and contributed an estimated \$843m in tax revenue across all levels of government.

"Blak Businesses are not operating on the margins of the economy – we are a \$3.4bn economic asset and a growth engine for the Territory," said Naomi Anstess, NTIBN chief executive.

The economic activity added by Blak businesses in 2024-25 came within

\$75m of the gross value added of the Public Administration industry, the second-largest sector in the Territory behind mining.

On employment, the comparison is more striking again. The 11,600 FTEs employed by Blak businesses exceeds the 11,200 FTEs of the construction industry, the largest market sector employer in the NT.

"The question is no longer whether Blak businesses contribute to the economy," Anstess writes in the report's

foreword. "The evidence is now clear."

The report takes direct aim at the way Aboriginal economic participation has been discussed for decades. "For too long, Aboriginal economic participation has been framed through deficit language, disadvantage, dependency and gaps to be closed," Anstess writes.

The Productivity Commission's 2025 Closing the Gap data found the NT was the worst-performing jurisdiction in the country, and Anstess warned in January that weak audit independence lets governments push the blame for those failures onto Aboriginal organisations. BlakPrint supplies the counter-evidence at scale.

Behind the findings sits a piece of 

The Indigenous Business Review

economic infrastructure that did not exist before this project: the Blak Economy Model (BEM), Australia's first computable general equilibrium model built to represent an Indigenous economy.

CGE modelling is the framework used by Treasury and governments across the country to assess major policies and projects. Traditionally these models contain one representative household and one representative firm.

The BEM, developed by Deloitte Access Economics with Yamagigu Consulting over four years of work with NTIBN, introduces a second household and a second firm, both Indigenous, into the model.

For the first time, the distinct behaviours of Blak businesses, their hiring patterns, their supply chains and cost structures can be traced through the entire Territory economy.

The model was built on data contributed by Aboriginal businesses through NTIBN member surveys, one of the largest Blak business data samples ever compiled in the NT.

The definition applied was deliberately strict: a Blak business must be at least 51 per cent Indigenous owned, managed and controlled, and based in the Territory. On that definition, Deloitte Access Economics estimates 854 Blak businesses were operating in the NT in 2024-25.

Anstess, an Erubam Le and Gomeroi woman born and raised on Larrakia Country, was confirmed as NTIBN chief executive in January after leading the organisation on an interim basis. She said the project represented Indigenous data sovereignty in action.

"For generations, Aboriginal businesses and communities have understood the value we create. BlakPrint is the first time we have been able to measure it at this scale and with this level of economic rigour."

Jay Edmondson, a partner at Yamagigu Consulting, said the report established an entirely new evidence base for Aboriginal economic development.

"The BlakPrint report is a groundbreaking piece of Aboriginal-led research that transforms how we understand the Aboriginal economy in the Northern Territory.

"Grounded in extensive engagement

with Aboriginal business owners and Aboriginal data sovereignty principles, it provides an unprecedented evidence base for Aboriginal economic development policy and investment."

Ownership premium

The report's most consequential finding may be its second scenario, which isolates the value of Indigenous ownership itself. The modelling asked what would happen if the Territory's Blak businesses were instead owned by non-Indigenous operators, hiring at average NT rates.

The answer: the Territory economy would be \$542m worse off, and 8701 Indigenous people would lose employment.

"Blak ownership is not symbolic. It materially changes economic outcomes," the report states.

The mechanism is straightforward. NTIBN member survey respondents reported an average Indigenous headcount of 56 per cent, against a Territory-wide average of 6 per cent.

Some 91.4 per cent of respondents said they were more likely to hire Indigenous people, and 48.4 per cent sold most of their goods and services to other Blak businesses. That combination of hiring preference and tight procurement links draws thousands of workers into the economy who would otherwise remain outside the labour market, where the Indigenous unemployment rate sits at 21 per cent against a Territory average of 6 per cent.

The wage effects flow directly to households. The modelling found Indigenous ownership delivered an additional \$24m in income to Indigenous households in 2024-25, equivalent to a 15 per cent uplift in real wages per Indigenous FTE across the economy.

Just over half of the ownership premium, \$291.5m, comes from industries that would simply cease to exist without Indigenous ownership: Aboriginal tourism, Indigenous consulting, Care for Country and the creative industries. Aboriginal tourism and Indigenous consulting alone account for 97 per cent of that figure.

One survey respondent put the philosophy plainly: "Being able to set our mob up for success is paramount. Building an Indigenous empire where our mob can lead and look after our



mob. Uniting our brothers and sisters in business and rising together to be fully self-sufficient."

The ownership findings land in the middle of a national reckoning over who benefits from Indigenous procurement. The report is blunt about the implication: Indigenous ownership influences economic outcomes, which "emphasises the importance of Indigenous ownership verification and certification processes to ensure procurement policies are implemented as designed and opportunities are genuinely flowing through the Indigenous economy."

The timing is pointed. The report launched on the first day of the new financial year, the same day that the federal government's strengthened Indigenous Procurement Policy took effect, lifting the eligibility threshold to 51 per cent First Nations ownership and control, the same test BlakPrint applies. Those reforms followed sustained pressure over integrity, including ANU

research published in December showing half of the IPP's contract value, around \$7bn, had flowed to just 18 companies, and industry moves in late 2025 to tighten Supply Nation verification.

Anstess, who also chairs the National Indigenous Business Chamber of Australia, told this publication in December that the concentration findings were "not a success story but a structural red flag". BlakPrint now gives that argument an economic foundation: if ownership itself generates \$542m and 8701 Indigenous jobs in one jurisdiction, contracts flowing to businesses that meet the definition on paper only represent measurable economic loss.

Head count

The report grounds its modelling in the businesses driving the numbers.

Stedman's Construction, based in Maningrida and operating since 1989, has grown from four employees to 50



The BlakPrint Report is released by the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network at the opening of its new Darwin Business and Employment Hub in Winellie on Thursday



under the ownership of Chris Stedman, a Warumungu man. The company prioritises local Indigenous employment in a remote community where opportunity is often limited, retaining construction and civil skills on Country and turning first jobs into sustained workforce participation.

AKJ Services, founded by Larrakia woman Jessie Risk in 2018, has grown into a major civil construction company while supporting Risk's brothers, father and mother to become business owners in their own right through employment, training, subcontracting and investment. The company maintains at least 30 per cent Indigenous employment across all levels, funds engineering scholarships, and brings hundreds of Aboriginal students onto its sites each year through self-funded industry days.

Rusca Bros, the Darwin earthmoving, construction and environmental enterprise founded by Sid Rusca and his wife Jenny in the 1970s, now employs 200 people under the leadership of the

next generation, with nearly half its workforce Indigenous. Of its 14 apprentices, 12 are Aboriginal. The intergenerational transfer is already visible: Sid Rusca's grandson has established his own fencing business, Bulmeka, servicing Darwin, Palmerston and the rural area.

The \$6bn question

The report's third scenario models what happens if the Indigenous economy reaches parity with the Indigenous share of the Territory's population, growing from 10.1 per cent to 30 per cent of GDP by 2035.

The modelling puts the prize at an additional \$6bn each year for the NT economy, equivalent in scale to the entire mining sector today, and \$43bn in net present value terms.

Reaching the target would create 17,200 additional FTE jobs across the Territory by 2035, 13,000 of them Indigenous positions.

The gains would then compound

across generations. Drawing on research linking parental employment to children's schooling and future earnings, the modelling estimates an intergenerational dividend of \$2.2bn to 2035 and a further \$6.1bn between 2035 and 2050, as the children of newly employed workers enter the labour market at higher rates.

"If we are serious about rebuilding the Territory economy, growing the private sector and creating prosperity that reaches every part of the Territory, then growing the Blak economy must be part of that future," Anstess said.

Reform agenda

The report is blunt that the growth scenario will not materialise on current settings. It sets out five recommendations to the NT and Australian governments.

First, strengthen the NT government's Aboriginal Procurement Policy and the federal IPP, tightening exceptions on major projects, introducing enforceable

compliance mechanisms and public reporting, and setting minimum Indigenous workforce benchmarks. The report calls for federal IPP targets to keep expanding in line with growth in the Indigenous economy, going beyond the trajectory to 4 per cent by 2030 announced this week.

Second, re-establish the NT government's Aboriginal Business Development Program as a dedicated, Aboriginal-controlled grant and capability program, including quarantining 30 per cent of mainstream business grant programs for Blak businesses.

Third, require all NT government-funded major projects to include set-asides or provisional sums reserving specific opportunities for Blak business procurement.

Fourth, develop a Northern Territory Indigenous Economic Development Strategy with legislated targets, formally embedding private Blak businesses as a central pillar of economic development policy and mandating Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles.

Fifth, provide long-term, indexed funding to NTIBN and the National Indigenous Business Chamber of Australia to grow the sector in the Territory and nationally.

The findings carry weight beyond the Territory. The BEM creates a replicable framework that can be applied to Indigenous economies in other jurisdictions, and NTIBN has signalled the modelling will improve as data collection deepens over time.

The project was funded by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, Shell Australia and the National Indigenous Australians Agency, with governance oversight from the NTIBN Board and delivery led by Anstess, general manager Deb Anstess-Vallejo and lead strategic growth and projects Sharna Petherick, alongside Cedric Hodges of Deloitte Access Economics and Shivaan Bardolia of Yamagigu Consulting.

"The report shows that growing the Blak economy is fundamental to growing the Territory economy."

Anstess closes the report with a line that doubles as its thesis.

"Every economy leaves a footprint. This is the BlakPrint of the Northern Territory." ●

Songlines embraced by tourism

Leanne Dolby

Tourism Australia will embed First Nations Songlines into its global brand identity and work to convert record international interest in Indigenous experiences into bookings, under its new Reconciliation Action Plan covering July 2026 to June 2029.

The agency's sixth RAP, its third at Stretch level, sets out 21 actions to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures at the centre of how Australia is marketed across its 16 key international markets. The plan builds on strong demand. There were 3.4 million trips incorporating First Nations activities in 2024, a record high, with 1.2 million taken by international visitors. Chair Penny Fowler said the agency wants

First Nations cultures shaping travel decisions from the outset. "As travellers 'dream' and make plans to travel here, we are ensuring First Nations cultures increasingly become part of that decision," she said.

Central to the plan is the Songlines project. From September, artwork by Wardandi, Wadjak, Ballardong, Wagl Keip Noongar artist Melissa Riley-Tago will be woven into Tourism Australia's brand identity and carried through marketing in global markets, honouring 65,000 years of cultural knowledge.

The commercial engine remains Discover Aboriginal Experiences, the agency's collective of 51 businesses offering more than 200 experiences, 68 per cent of them First Nations owned. Tourism Australia has committed to 28 formal two-way partnerships with

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or organisations through the program by March 2029.

Managing director Robin Mack said experiences in the collective "are all First Nations led on Country and are often located in regional and remote areas".

"Tourism enterprise enables First Nations peoples to live on Country, providing jobs for community, keeping language strong, ensuring the stories of their ancestors and their Songlines continue to be shared now and in the future," Mr Mack said.

The new plan also tackles the gap between interest and action. By June 2028, Tourism Australia will deliver research into why international visitors who express interest in Indigenous experiences choose not to book them, alongside work to quantify the brand

value First Nations cultures deliver to Australia as a destination. Each international office will report on its market's knowledge of First Nations tourism by late 2027, and the agency will contribute to the creation of a national First Nations Tourism Week by 2028.

Tourism Australia has also set a target of 3 per cent First Nations employment by June 2029, and will lift addressable procurement spend with First Nations businesses to at least 3 per cent, worth \$650,000.

Reconciliation Australia CEO Karen Mundine said the agency was well positioned to lead. "With its past experiences and ongoing commitments, Tourism Australia has the potential to drive considerable reconciliation outcomes across its sphere of influence," Ms Mundine said. •

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Gumatj Retail general manager Michael Yunupingu

Retail therapy for Gumatj clan

Gumatj Corporation has acquired the Captain Cook Shopping Centre in Nhulunbuy, bringing one of

East Arnhem Land's key community hubs into Traditional Owner hands as the town prepares for life after mining.

The 1366sqm site at 9 Arnhem Road will be renamed the Gumatj Retail Precinct and forms the first major step in a new retail vertical for the Yolŋu-owned corporation, led by Gumatj Retail general manager Michael Yunupingu.

Mr Yunupingu said the precinct was "an important part of building a more resilient and locally controlled economy beyond mining, particularly as the closure of Woolworths places further pressure on access to essential goods".

"Our vision includes developing local supply chains through initiatives such as the expansion of Yirrkala Farm, helping provide fresh produce, strengthen food security and ensure more value remains within the community," he said.

Traditional Owners have big plans for the shopping centre in Nhulunbuy, writes Nicole Brown

Mr Yunupingu spent the past 12 months preparing for the role, completing licensee training, shadowing operators at the Gove Warehouse and Post Office, and working with the previous owners on the handover.

"For Yolŋu people, this business represents much more than a retail operation. It creates new opportunities for employment, skills development, economic participation, and long-term community growth," he said. "The work we have undertaken is not just about operating a successful business; it is about creating opportunities that Yolŋu families can be proud of, take ownership of, and actively contribute to."

Gumatj CEO Klaus Helms OAM said the acquisition was "a defining moment for Gumatj Corporation and a powerful

statement about what Indigenous-led economic development can achieve".

"Securing this significant community asset into Traditional Owner custodianship gives us the ability to shape the future of this precinct, grow local enterprise, create employment and ensure the wealth generated in our region stays in our region," he said.

Established in 1987, the centre has long served Nhulunbuy and surrounding communities. Its tenants include Gove Warehouse, Australia Post and Rafiki's Cafe, a central meeting place for dining and community life in the town.

Shoppers and tenants would see changes within six months, Mr Yunupingu said, with local markets and community-led programmes designed to support regional businesses. Over five

years, the priority is expanding the range of goods and services beyond the essentials the town relies on.

"At full scale, Gumatj Retail would provide greater choice, support more locally owned businesses and create a stronger retail network that keeps more value within the region," he said.

Mr Yunupingu said it was too early to put a firm number on the jobs the precinct would create, but opportunities would grow as the offering expands, including direct employment alongside work experience, training and enterprise pathways into retail management and business ownership.

Gumatj Corp was established in 2007 to advance self-determination for the Gumatj clan and wider region.

"I also hope that when Yolŋu families understand the effort that has gone into reaching this point, they feel inspired to pursue their own goals, and believe they too can make a positive contribution to our future," Mr Yunupingu said. ●

Connecting to Country

Covering more than 830,000 hectares of Nyiyaparli Country and running around 10,000 head of cattle, Karlka Pastoral is a growing Indigenous-led pastoral enterprise focused on economic self-determination, care for Country and community employment.

Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC (KNAC) is the native title body representing the Nyiyaparli People's interests across around 37,000 square kilometres of land and waters in the east Pilbara region of Western Australia. KNAC manages Kutawa (Ethel Creek), Marillana and Walagunya stations on their behalf, vast rangelands of spinifex and ancient rock formations.

For the KNAC board of directors, it is important to keep exploring innovative ways to connect their young people and other marlpa with station life, working cattle and the ongoing care for Country.

"Many of us have grown up working on stations, and this partnership creates exciting opportunities for our kids to have those experiences, to build those skills, and to do it on our Country," said KNAC Chairperson Leonard Stream.

Pastoral program aims to help young people build skills in the outback. Reece Harley reports

To support this vision, KNAC has partnered with Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) to deliver a three-year Collaborative Co-Innovation Program designed to support sustainable pastoral development, Indigenous employment and new market-led opportunities in the Pilbara.

The program brings MLA and Karlka Pastoral together to co-design and implement an innovation strategy that strengthens long-term business performance while delivering social, cultural and environmental outcomes.

"Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC is pleased to partner with MLA to support the aspirations of Nyiyaparli People, to deliver pastoral industry employment pathways for our mob and to embed the land management and caring-for-Country practices of traditional owners," said KNAC chief executive Cate Ballantyne.

Over the life of the program, KNAC and MLA are working across several

fronts. Training and employment pathways for Nyiyaparli and other local Aboriginal people sit at the centre, with engagement reaching into schools and early-career development.

Alongside that are regenerative land management and conservation with Kutawa Field Officers, and carbon management and emissions reduction, from baselines to pathways towards better environmental performance.

Value chain

The program is also exploring cultural and eco-tourism tied to the stations, and vertically integrated value chains, including a Nyiyaparli branded beef that tells the story of Country, culture and community.

The program is guided by a jointly managed governance framework, with clear milestones, performance indicators and regular reviews to keep outcomes aligned with both business objectives and industry benefit. Evaluation will

follow MLA's triple bottom line framework, capturing economic, environmental and social impacts.

The collaboration is designed to support Karlka Pastoral's growth and to generate insights that can inform other Indigenous-led and northern pastoral enterprises across Australia. By testing new approaches to market development and sustainable land management in a real operating environment, the program aims to contribute practical, transferable knowledge to the wider red meat industry.

"This partnership recognises the strength of Indigenous leadership in pastoral businesses and the opportunity to co-design innovation that delivers commercial success while respecting culture and Country," said Joshua Whelan, MLA's project manager, innovation capability.

"Working together with Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation allows us to support pathways for Indigenous employment, sustainable land management and new value-adding opportunities that can benefit the broader industry."

With a commitment to reconnecting



Niyaparli young people to Country, and to opportunities to learn about the pastoral industry, developing a training program became the priority. Over two days before it began, senior Niyaparli members met at Kutawa with industry trainer Steve Burke of Horsepower Training Services and Richard Gratte, pastoral innovation manager at KNAC, to yarn about developing mentors and engaging young people.

The initial pilot, delivered with Karlka Pastoral and the Newman Horse Club, offered horsemanship and stockmanship training at Parnpajinya (Newman). Being close to town, it was easy for people to come and connect with the team and take part in regenerative stockmanship. Further funding from MLA and the Pilbara Innovation Partnership allowed Burke to run multiple cattle-handling sessions and station visits during mustering to build on the mentors' skills.

Building mentors

During this time, young marlpa Jesse Wheelock, Tyros Handley and Tristan Flanagan all joined the Karlka Pastoral team, working on practical skills and



Main picture: Ethel Creek station, in Niyaparli Country in the east Pilbara region, is one of three stations managed by the Karlka Niyaparli Aboriginal Corporation. **Above:** Young Niyaparli people are being given the chance to work with cattle as part of a program launched by Karlka Pastoral and Meat & Livestock Australia.

“This partnership recognises the strength of Indigenous leadership

livestock handling with plenty of hands-on learning throughout. As an outcome of stage two, Burke invited two of the mentors to co-facilitate a training week at the Muresk Institute in Northam, a chance to accelerate their “development of capacity under pressure” and build capability to mentor and guide others through regenerative stockmanship.

Regenerative stock management is a key focus, creating a calm and controlled environment for livestock and handlers. It extends the sessions beyond the yards and gives mentors the chance to work with young people and connect on Country. The first few months have already produced results. Senior Niyaparli men have made on-Country visits to consult on the project’s approach. A stockmanship development project is under way at Parnpajinya and Kutawa, with participants learning in a live cattle-yard environment. Three Niyaparli participants are now employed by Karlka Pastoral, and two took part in further training at the Muresk Institute from June 8 to 12.

“We look forward to working with MLA to co-design the next chapter of our pastoral business,” Mr Stream said. ●

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The Minister for Indigenous Australians
Malarndirri McCarthy with Allpro
Plumbing owner Tyson Hubbard

Apprenticeship path to success

Tyson Hubbard's plumbing career began with an ultimatum. In his early twenties, with footy fading and police trouble mounting, his cousin Wayne Dargan and close family friend Rowan Tobler were running the Koori Job Ready program and had plumbing apprenticeships on offer.

"If I don't take that apprenticeship on, I was probably going to be looking at getting incarcerated," he said.

"I ended up taking it on and never looked back. Construction was really good for me. It got me out of the house and cleared my head."

Today Hubbard owns Allpro Plumbing Solutions, a Liverpool company specialising in siphonic stormwater and pressurised and hybrid rainwater

systems, with 19 full-time staff and jobs ranging from \$1000 school repairs to million-dollar contracts. All nine apprentices are Aboriginal, most of them local lads.

A proud Wiradjuri man from southwest Sydney with family connections to the south coast and inland New South Wales, Hubbard grew up in public housing in Miller and was the first tradesman in his family. "I can't change the way we grew up. It honestly got me to where I am today," he said. "Everyone just sort of stayed close because we didn't have a whole heap."

Tyson Hubbard has built a thriving plumbing business from scratch, writes Reece Harley

Hubbard was foreman on the Parramatta stadium build when his employer went under, and Lendlease asked him to stay on and sign the job off. Allpro followed, with his wife leaving teaching to run the office. "She's like the second mum for all the apprentices," he said.

This year the company will qualify its first homegrown tradesman. Rowan junior is the grandson of the late Les Tobler, who started Koori Job Ready, and the son of the man who helped get Hubbard his own start. "That's four generations of people being together

and creating opportunities, with many more to come," he said.

Eight of his apprentices were once expelled from schools they now service. "The same kid that was sitting in a detention centre, no one wanted a bar of him, is now back there fixing the toilets," he said. One first-year nearly cried when a former teacher walked up and hugged him.

His advice to kids eyeing a trade: "Don't be scared to put your hand up and get out there and try. A trade's just a platform. AI will never replace a trade."

Hubbard left school early and has completed four university courses since starting the company. "There's nothing wrong with learning, nothing wrong with bettering yourself," he said. "I want to see our people build this place." ●

A new dream takes flight



Indigenous-owned Altura Airlines targets remote and regional Australia, writes Zak Kirkup

A new majority Indigenous-owned charter airline began flying on Tuesday, with its founders planning to add Airbus A320 jets from 2027.

Altura Airlines commenced operations on Tuesday flying Dash 8 aircraft from its Perth headquarters to service the mining, energy and government sectors across regional and remote Australia.

The airline was founded by Dr Amanda Healy, a Wonnarua woman and co-founder of Indigenous maintenance and engineering company Warrikal, alongside aviation executives Michael Evans and Phil Garcia of Maroomba Airlines.

Dr Healy said the company was established to deliver more than aviation services.

"Altura Airlines was created to connect people, projects and communities while creating meaningful opportunities for Indigenous participation, employment and economic empowerment," she said.

"As a majority Indigenous-owned charter airline, we are proud to bring a different perspective to Australia's aviation industry, one that combines operational excellence with genuine partnerships, exceptional service and a long-term commitment to the regions where we operate."

Altura's fleet has Dash 8-100,





Altura Airlines is based in Perth and will provide charter operations in Dash-8 turboprops for fly-in fly-out workforces in the resources and energy sectors, and government and executive travel. Inset, the airline's founder Amanda Healy



Dash 8-300 and Dash 8-400 turboprops, providing charter services for FIFO workforces, executive travel and project mobilisation. The company plans to introduce Airbus A320 jet aircraft from 2027, subject to regulatory approvals, allowing it to carry higher-volume workforce movements for the resources and infrastructure sectors.

Mr Evans said Altura had been built around the operational expectations of customers in regional and remote Australia.

"Our customers operate in environments where reliability, responsiveness and safety are critical to maintaining productivity. They need an aviation partner that understands those operational realities and consistently delivers," he said.

"Our strategy is to grow alongside our customers by expanding both our fleet and operational capability, ensuring we continue to meet the evolving needs of Australia's mining, energy, government and regional industries."

Mr Garcia said the airline's commercial success was directly linked to creating broader opportunities for regional Australia.

"We understand that aviation is a

“We are proud to bring a different perspective to the aviation industry

critical part of our customers' operations. Our role is to provide dependable aircraft, responsive service and the confidence that comes from working with an experienced aviation partner," he said.

"By combining deep aviation capability with genuine community partnerships, we're building an airline that delivers lasting value for our customers, our people and the communities we serve."

Altura operates under Australia's aviation regulatory framework with safety management systems and maintenance programs supported by pilots, engineers and operational personnel with backgrounds in regional and remote aviation.



From left: Birra-Li Warner of Yiramilan Art, QIBN chief executive Paul Graham and Nerinda Warner of Yindyamarra Innovations.

A Gateway to prosperity

The Queensland Indigenous Business Network's Indigenous Business Gateway has been recognised as an Indigenous business directory

under the Queensland Procurement Policy 2026, giving government buyers a formal channel to find verified Indigenous suppliers across the state.

The recognition means businesses listed on the Gateway sit within one of the directories government agencies can draw on to meet Indigenous procurement commitments under the policy.

QIBN is the statewide representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, established to fill a gap as the only Australian jurisdiction without a dedicated independent body representing Indigenous business interests. Supported by the Queensland government, the network provides advocacy, verification, business support and connections between Indigenous

Accreditation is putting Queensland's Indigenous businesses on the map, writes Zak Kirkup

suppliers and government and corporate buyers. Queensland is estimated to be home to more than 3000 Indigenous business owner-managers.

QIBN said the Gateway was developed to increase the visibility of verified Indigenous-owned businesses, providing buyers with a trusted platform to discover capable suppliers in real time while helping businesses access new procurement opportunities.

"This recognition represents an important step in strengthening Indigenous procurement across Queensland and reinforces QIBN's role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to participate in government and industry supply chains," the organisation said.

The announcement comes early in the

tenure of new CEO Paul Graham, a Gangalidda man and chartered accountant with more than 25 years of senior leadership experience across the corporate, education and not-for-profit sectors. Graham has flagged procurement as central to his agenda.

"QIBN has an important role to play in championing Indigenous business, strengthening procurement and supply chain opportunities, and ensuring our members are supported to participate in the significant economic opportunities ahead, including those emerging in the lead up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games," Graham said on his appointment.

"I look forward to working with the board, members and partners to continue strengthening opportunities

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, and to help ensure QIBN remains a strong and influential voice for Indigenous business growth, leadership and economic empowerment."

QIBN co-chair Julie-ann Lambourne said Graham's appointment came "at a significant time for QIBN as it continues to grow its impact and position Indigenous businesses to benefit from emerging opportunities across Queensland".

The network's three-year strategic plan commits it to establishing regional business hubs, an annual Queensland Indigenous Trade Fair, and a statewide Indigenous business database, with the Gateway as its central digital platform connecting members to public and private sector buyers.

QIBN is encouraging Indigenous businesses to become verified members to secure a place on the Gateway.

Expressions of interest are open through QIBN's website. ●



Nicole Appleton's NLA Trucking is proudly 100 per cent female and Indigenous owned

Nicole keeps on truckin'

In 2016, Nicole Appleton applied for finance to buy her first truck. The lender asked her to submit a video of herself driving it and changing gears.

"They didn't believe the finance was for me, so we complied," Ms Appleton says.

"They'd presumed it was a phoenix application for my bankrupt husband, except I didn't have a husband, I was single.

"Then they questioned what would happen if I decided to get married and have kids, who would drive the truck? That's when Kathryn told them that they'd crossed a line. You see, she was

How an Indigenous woman built a \$20m trucking firm from the ground up. Dianne Bortoletto reports

one of the first women to work as a finance broker, so she empathised with my situation, and my finance was approved the following day."

The truck, a custom-built pink rigid, arrived that year, and NLA Trucking was born.

A decade on, the proud Ngarrindjeri woman's company puts up to 120 trucks a day on Victorian roads, predominantly servicing the construction industry, and turns over more than \$20m a year.

NLA Trucking owns 30 pieces of equipment, including 11 trucks, utes and trailers, and describes itself as Victoria's only transport and plant hire company that is 100 per cent female and Indigenous owned.

The rest of the fleet belongs to owner-operator subcontractors, many of whom have struggled to find work anywhere else.

"Our subcontractors include Indigenous people, some who have their

own trucks, people with disabilities, veterans, refugees, and even those who have been to jail," Ms Appleton says.

"One time, these two men showed up together, in their truck that they had bought together, which is highly unusual in itself, but even more unusual was that they still had their ankle monitors on.

"They were determined to turn their lives around and didn't want to go back to jail, so I gave them a chance, and they have both done so well, each buying their own trucks separately, married with kids."

Last year the company launched the Path to Business Ownership pilot, a six to 12-month program that takes 



Nicole Appleton started NLA Trucking in 2016 and now puts up to 120 trucks a day on Victoria's roads,

➤ Indigenous drivers from employment to truck ownership. Participants start as NLA employees, build driving hours and business skills under mentorship, then get support to finance their own vehicle and secure steady contracts. The goal is a generation of Indigenous owner-operators with assets, income and independence.

It is the pathway Ms Appleton had to build for herself, starting from a childhood where an asset of any kind was unimaginable.

Her mother had her at 17, in Adelaide, with her father out of the picture. The first 10 years of Ms Appleton's life were spent in commission housing with her mother and grandmother, then in Melbourne in a series of rentals her mother could rarely afford, moving 12 times in the space of six years, one eviction after the next.

Her grandmother had been taken from her own family as a child, part of the Stolen Generations, and raised without a



I'm really proud to be a role model to our kids ... to show them that Indigenous people can do anything

loving family environment to pass on.

"My mum was a child herself when she had me, trying to figure things out, it wasn't easy," Ms Appleton says.

"It wasn't until I was born that my grandmother's maternal instinct came to life, and when I found that out, it all made sense and I understood intergenerational trauma."

She is direct about what she took from watching her mother struggle.

"To be honest, seeing mum and her life

was like seeing what not to do, so that's what I did," she says.

"Having a mother who always struggled, always in the shadows, I learned that you need to take what you've got and use it to do better, to be better, not blame it on parents, or go through life with a victim mentality, which just makes you miserable and everyone around you miserable."

When her grandmother died at 52, Ms Appleton and her mother moved to

Melbourne to live with her grandfather's brother, sharing a bedroom while she finished primary school and started high school. She finished Year 12 at 17 with a dream of studying law, but instead went into the workforce to support her mother.

"I knew I had to contribute and help mum out, she wasn't any good at managing money, always broke, so when I was still at school, I got a job in hospitality, and then when I was 18, as security at a nightclub, and then a plain-clothed security catching shoplifters," she says.

Security work meant facing down aggressive drunks and drug users, including one who threatened her with a dirty syringe. It also turned her off the partying scene for good. When a chance



came to drive a small truck, she took it, enjoyed it, and upgraded to an HC licence so she could tow a trailer.

Job hunting as a 19-year-old woman with a truck licence produced its own absurdities. Transport companies assumed she was there to ask about a job for her husband. She found work with an international tier one asphalt company, where the workforce of Maltese, Italian and Greek men seemingly had never seen a woman truck driver before.

"They didn't talk to me for six months, but they finally accepted me and we became like family," she says.

"When my mother died from a rare form of cervical cancer, she was just 42, they shut down the asphalt plant, and all came to her funeral."

It was her boss at the asphalt company, an Italian named Rino, who planted the idea of buying her own truck.

"To be honest, I'd never even considered it, but I thought why not? So Rino helped me find a finance broker, a supportive woman, Kathryn, another Italian, and she's still my finance broker today," says the mother of two.

The finance battle came next, then the pink truck, then building a client base while established competitors tried to squeeze her out. She recounts rivals undercutting her quotes at a loss, following her sales rep to appointments to pitch for the same contract, and sending four sales representatives to lean on one of her clients.

"They were prepared to do jobs at a

loss to see me out of business. They didn't like that I was a woman and that I was doing things a bit differently," Ms Appleton says.

As an owner-operator she turned over \$200,000 in her first year. NLA Trucking now turns over more than \$20m, employs a growing team, and recently purchased its own warehouse.

The recognition has followed. NLA Trucking won the Kinaway Sistas in Business Award in 2023, was a 2025 Supply Nation finalist for Indigenous Business Woman of the Year, and in 2026 collected the Women in Business Award at the Victorian Small Business Awards, and the honour Ms Appleton values most, Indigenous Business of the Year at the 36th Ethnic Business Awards. The awards were founded in

1988 to celebrate migrant enterprise and added an Indigenous category in 2010.

"I was so impressed with the process for the Ethnic Business Award. Attending is by invitation only, it's not a popularity contest or based on who sells the most tickets, the winners are chosen genuinely," she says.

Self-taught in every aspect of business, Ms Appleton runs the company on family values and grit, and measures success by the culture as much as the fleet.

"We treat each other well, there are no dramas, we give people a chance," she says. "I'm really proud to be a role model to our kids to show them that women can do anything, that Indigenous people can do anything." ●

A proud moment in the sun

BHP honours its Indigenous employee of the year, writes **Reece Harley**

Gudang Yadhaykenu man Gavin Corrie has been named BHP's Indigenous Employee of the Year, taking out the top individual honour at the mining giant's 2026 FIRE Awards in Tarntanya (Adelaide).

Mr Corrie, a remote maintenance supervisor at the Goonyella mine in Queensland's Bowen Basin, was at the awards night at Adelaide Zoo when his name was read out.

"Sitting there among so many talented and inspiring people, I honestly wasn't expecting it," he said.

"My first reaction was shock. It took a moment for the news to sink in, and then it was quickly followed by a feeling of pride and gratitude. I felt honoured to be recognised, particularly knowing the incredible contributions Indigenous employees make across BHP every day.

"Standing there at the Adelaide Zoo that night was a truly special moment, and one I'll never forget."

Mr Corrie was born on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait, with family ties to the Wuthathi people of Shelburne Bay and the Yupangathi people of the Pennefather River region. He grew up in Cairns, where he completed an electrical apprenticeship before entering the resources sector. He has spent eight years with BHP.





Main picture, Gavin Corrie with his BHP Indigenous Employee of the Year award. Left: Award winners Georgia Aisthorpe, Gavin Corrie, Kodie Graham, Sedisha Chatfield and Tyson Brown.

He said mining offered a chance to challenge himself and build a better future for his family, and the industry delivered more than he expected once he got his foot in the door.

"The variety of roles, the technology, the teamwork and the chance to work with people from different backgrounds really appealed to me," he said.

"What has kept me in mining is the people. Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to work alongside great leaders, mentors and colleagues who have supported my development and challenged me to grow."

In a maintenance environment teams rely on each other every day, and Mr Corrie takes pride in building that culture.

"Watching someone step up and succeed is one of the most rewarding parts of what I do," he said. "At the end of the day, it's not just about the work we complete. It's about the people we develop along the way and the family and friends we go home to."

He credits his mentors, his teams and family for shaping his leadership, and quotes Thomas Edison on the value of getting things wrong: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

"Leadership isn't about being



Leadership is learning, growing, and showing up better every day

perfect," Mr Corrie said.

"It's about learning, growing, and showing up better every day. My kids keep me grounded, reminding me to lead by example, both at work and at home."

He said the award belongs as much to the people around him as to himself.

"For my family, it was a moment of immense pride. They've been there through every challenge and success.

"For my community, I hope it reinforces the message that Indigenous people can achieve great things in any field while staying connected to who they are and where they come from.

"If this recognition inspires even one young Indigenous person to pursue their goals, back themselves, and take up opportunities that come their way,

then that means more to me than the award itself."

The FIRE Awards, standing for First Peoples, Inclusion, Recognition and Excellence, recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and allies across BHP's Australian operations. The 2026 ceremony was held ahead of NAIDOC Week, whose theme this year, 50 Years of Deadly, marks five decades of celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, culture, leadership and resilience.

"It's a chance to reflect on how far we've come, acknowledge those who paved the way before us, and recognise the work that still lies ahead," Mr Corrie said.

"Their efforts have created pathways

that people like me have been fortunate to walk today."

BHP employs one of the largest Indigenous workforces in the resources sector, reporting 2475 Indigenous employees across its Australian assets in 2025, or 8.96 per cent of its workforce, with a target of 9.7 per cent by 2027.

BHP Vice President Indigenous Affairs Allan James said Indigenous employees "make an enormous contribution to BHP every day, bringing valuable perspectives, knowledge and leadership to our business".

"The business has been on a path of listening, learning and being honest about where we can improve. The most important thing is that we keep making progress together," Mr James said.

Mr Corrie is optimistic about the Indigenous leaders coming through, and his advice to young people weighing up the industry is simple: back yourself and give it a go.

"Your experiences, values and cultural knowledge are strengths," he said.

"Don't let self-doubt hold you back. Seek out mentors, ask questions, and lean on people who want to see you succeed. There is a place for you in this industry, and the next generation of Indigenous leaders will play a huge role in shaping its future." ●

How our boots
come together is
what really sets
them apart.

R. McWilliams

HANDCRAFTED IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 1932