

# ReconciliationNews

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Inside this year's  
**Indigenous  
Governance Awards**

From humble beginnings to  
**empowered  
communities**

Professor Mick Dodson AM,  
**Reflections from the road**

Hook, line and sinker-governance  
**in the Torres Strait**



**Reconciliation**  
AUSTRALIA



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Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to elders both past and present.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this publication may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.

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As the national organisation building relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians, Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the elders both past and present.

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit, non-government organisation. Your active contribution and financial support helps us develop innovative programs and resources.

This magazine is compiled by Reconciliation Australia to share reconciliation stories, issues and opinions. Feedback and story ideas are always welcome along with names and addresses of people who would like to receive the newsletter. Please email us at: [enquiries@reconciliation.org.au](mailto:enquiries@reconciliation.org.au)

**Cover image: Shania Sinclair and Jeremiah Kirby from The Marruk Project, Category B award winners in the 2014 Indigenous Governance Awards. Image by Wayne Quilliam.**



**Reconciliation  
A U S T R A L I A**

# CEO's message

As another busy year comes to a close, we reflect on some of the organisations and people who are doing great work to empower their communities—I'm especially pleased that my first edition of *Reconciliation News* as CEO celebrates the success of these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

In my first few weeks as the new CEO of Reconciliation Australia, I have witnessed first-hand the best of what is happening in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations around the country. I was honoured to attend the Indigenous Governance Awards event in Melbourne in October, which recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and what they are capable of achieving in their communities.

This issue of *Reconciliation News* celebrates the 10 year partnership of the Indigenous Governance Awards with BHP Billiton, and highlights a leading Central Australian women's group and an up-and-coming theatre troupe who received top honours this year.

Over the past decade, Professor Mick Dodson AM, Chair of the Indigenous Governance Awards has attended every site visit as part of the judging process. In this issue, he shares his reflections of his time on the road and the importance of strong Indigenous governance.

There are also stories from past winners and finalists like the Traditional Credit Union, who are doing excellent work in Arnhem Land. Developed by a group of Aboriginal Elders they provide financial services and educational programs to residents of Arnhem Land communities disadvantaged by a lack of banking and other financial services. We hear from Jason Eades who was CEO of The Koorie Heritage Trust when they won the first Indigenous Governance Awards in 2005. He shares his thoughts on good governance being a journey, not a destination, and the importance of governance to achieving the outcomes we need in our communities.

*From humble beginnings to empowered communities* is a reflection from the Co-ordinator of the NPY Women's Council, Andrea Mason, and explores the council's involvement with an initiative to create a genuine and balanced partnership between Indigenous organisations, governments and corporate Australia. The aim is to design a new model of governance and engagement for their communities, which will increase individual responsibility.

While we celebrate the success of the Indigenous Governance Awards, we also acknowledge the people who have worked towards creating positive change and strived for better relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over many years. Reconciliation Australia's longest serving Board Director, The Hon Fred Chaney AO, will relinquish his role at the end of this year. Fred's directorship dates back to 2000, when Reconciliation Australia was established. Earlier this year, his dedication and advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples saw him named Senior Australian of the Year, fitting recognition for an exceptional reconciliation leader.

I would also like to acknowledge Ms Leah Armstrong, and her brilliant work as former Chief Executive of Reconciliation Australia. She has brought considerable skills to the role in building and maintaining strong respectful relationships and extending the organisation's networks across many different sectors. There is no doubt that the organisation is where it is today due to her diligent governance and passion for reconciliation—big shoes that I now have to fill.

I look forward to starting the new year in this role and working together with Reconciliation Australia's staff, Board and partners across Australia to achieve a reconciled, just and equitable Australia.

**Justin Mohamed, CEO Reconciliation Australia**



**Justin Mohamed. Image by Emma Hedditch.**

A close-up portrait of a smiling man with a grey beard and short hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a blue shirt. The background is a plain, light color.

# Hook, line and sinker— governance in the Torres Strait

Image by Lindi Heap.

**845 kilometres north of Cairns and 73 kilometres south-west of Papua New Guinea, sits the largest volcanic island in the eastern Torres Strait—Erub Island. A friendly and welcoming community, Erub Island is surrounded by reefs and sandy beaches, and its unique reef structure makes it a fishing haven. It is also the home to Reconciliation Australia Board director, Kenny Bedford who lives on and represents the remote island of Erub (Darnley) on the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA). Kenny is also Portfolio Member for Fisheries, President of the local fisheries body—the Erub Fisheries Management Association.**

I grew up on Erub at a time when we had no running water, power or sewerage and limited radio communication, so I am able to appreciate how far we have come in terms of community infrastructure development. As a remote group of islands however, we have a tremendous logistical challenge delivering the same basic levels of service that most Australians enjoy.

Growing up, my grandad, George Mye, was an outstanding leadership role model for me as a community leader and political representative for our people and region. He was a dedicated and self-taught leader and he did a lot to raise the profile of Torres Strait Islanders on the Australian mainland and within governments. His work greatly benefited our people and region, and

continues to inspire my work within the Torres Strait community.

One of the challenges I regularly face is negotiating the management arrangements in Torres Strait Fisheries. There are a number of different stakeholders involved including state, Commonwealth and Papua New Guinea governments, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous fishing sectors with varying access rights to commercial and traditional fishing resources.

The arrangements are very complex and more often than not it is very difficult to find agreement on how best to manage our fishing resources. Defending our right to traditionally harvest our turtle and dugong for consumption is also under growing pressure from outside forces.

It is important for Torres Strait Islander families and communities to make better use of the resources on our doorstep for our economic benefit. We have always been a proud seafaring people who need to look back at the opportunities out there in our waters. In my leadership roles, one of my key objectives is to increase our Torres Strait Islander participation in commercial fisheries. As a recent graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program I can use this opportunity to look for ways to help our fishers better access our resources more efficiently. This is important because commercial fishing represents our best opportunity for economic development and benefit.

# Reflections from the road

Over the past decade, Professor Mick Dodson AM, has attended every site visit as Chair of the judging panel for the Indigenous Governance Awards. From remote Australia, to our busiest cities, Mick reflects on his visits to finalist organisations for the Indigenous Governance Awards and why it's time to talk about success.



Professor Mick Dodson at the Ngnowar Aerwah Aboriginal Corporation site visit.  
Image by Wayne Quilliam.



Too often the public narrative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face in this nation, particularly in the media and policy discourse, is one of deficit. It is too often a picture of failure by Indigenous peoples and our organisations. Yet, from what I have heard and seen as Chair of the judging panel for the Indigenous Governance Awards—nothing could be further from the truth.

I have been involved as a judge in the Awards over the course of 10 years, and I wish all Australians could see and hear what I have seen and heard on the site visits over that time. I truly believe that if they did, many would hold a completely different view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For a start, the reality I see through the Indigenous Governance Awards is starkly different from the public discourse we have had to endure for far too long. The dialogue I hear focuses on success and achievement. It speaks of innovation and resilience; and is founded on trust and respect.

From what I have seen, it is clear that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to take the lead, anything is possible. Every finalist we've had, represents the best of what is happening, not just within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but across Australia as a whole. These organisations are leaders—innovative and strong—tackling issues head on from which others have shied away.

Take for example the 2014 finalists:

The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) is getting more and more of our kids into university;

Girringun Aboriginal Corporation is reviving traditional land management and decision making processes to protect against new and modern challenges;

The Institute for Urban Indigenous Health is using evidence and data to revolutionise the delivery of Aboriginal health services;

Ngnowar Aerwah Aboriginal Corporation is delivering world class drug and alcohol services in the remote east Kimberley;

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is using culture to see our children grow up resilient and strong;

And Waltja provides a way for strong women from Central Australia to speak up and deliver critical services to their communities.

Outside of incorporated organisations The Marruk Project is uniting the multicultural Swan Hill community through sharing Aboriginal culture, and The Muntjiltjarra Wurrugumu Group is taking the lead in determining how best to create positive change in Wiluna.

The 2014 finalists demonstrate how progress can be made. They are indisputably delivering results and are examples of self-determination and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leading positive change. They symbolise viable solutions to the numerous social and economic issues affecting Indigenous Australia. With their determination, vision and courage they are changing the dialogue from one of deficit to one of triumph.

The best Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations do what all good organisations do—provide reports, hold meetings, manage finances, develop their people and write long term strategic plans. But they also do something that mainstream organisations can't do. They put culture at the heart of everything they do. The interests of the people they serve is what drives them. This is why, very often, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations succeed in creating positive change in their local communities where outsiders have failed.

But more importantly, the best Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are creating a new history for the future. It's not a history to replace or forget our history over the past two centuries, but rather this is a history of success and achievement that our kids and grandchildren, and those after them will not only remember and celebrate but will also proudly replicate.

The finalists in the Indigenous Governance Awards are an inspiration to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to many other Australians. They are the key to our control over our progress, on our terms.

For too long Aboriginal communities have been dictated to and pushed around. We have had all responsibility taken away from us and instead had rules and regulations imposed upon us by colonists. We have existed in this country for not just 200 plus years, but at least 60,000 years. We have survived and thrived.

We don't need constant departmental interference from governments. Our people

are perfectly capable of creating and enacting our own rules and regulations and determining our own destiny. By allowing Aboriginal communities to exercise the right to self-determination and through our leadership we will encourage others to prosper.

Looking back on 10 years of the Indigenous Governance Awards I believe the Chairwoman of the 2012 winner, NPY Women's Council's Yanyi Bandicha, said it best: "We're no strangers to governance". The ingenuity and legacy of thousands upon thousands of years of governance is something I have had the privilege of witnessing as part of the Indigenous Governance Awards over the last decade, and the finalists are living proof of this legacy and ingenuity. They demonstrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led organisations and projects are effective at finding solutions to complex issues—issues that have long confounded governments and mainstream organisations.

Put simply, they are the vanguard of the new discourse and it's time we take note of their success.

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*Professor Mick Dodson AM is a member of the Yawuru peoples, the Traditional Owners of land and waters around Broome. He is Director of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University, Professor of Law at the ANU College of Law and has undertaken a sabbatical as the Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam Harvard Chair in Australian Studies at Harvard University.*

*Professor Dodson has been a prominent advocate on land rights and other issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. He was Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and in 2009 he was awarded Australian of the Year.*

*Mick is a former Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia and has been Chair of the Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel since its inception in 2005.*

*For more about the Indigenous Governance Awards visit [www.reconciliation.org.au/iga](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/iga)*



# Good governance is a journey, not a destination

Jason Eades

**The Koorie Heritage Trust won the first Indigenous Governance Awards in 2005. Jason Eades, the CEO at the time, reflects on his experiences and the importance of good governance.**

Attending events, conferences and meetings is a daily activity that provides me with the opportunity, or rather the privilege of receiving a number of Welcomes to Country. I love the tradition and even more the words of wisdom that are shared with us. At one event recently the Elder reminded us of the importance of slowing down, spending time with friends and family and taking the time to

self-reflect. I must confess that I don't spend enough time slowing down or reflecting. So when the invitation came from Reconciliation Australia to reflect on an event from nearly a decade ago it was a welcome reminder.

Let me firstly set the scene. The Koorie Heritage Trust is an Aboriginal cultural centre located in Melbourne's CBD. It was formed 25 years ago on the principles of reconciliation and its motto is "Gnokan

Danna Murra Kor-ki" which translates to "give me your hand my friend and bridge the cultural gap". Prior to receiving the award, The Koorie Heritage Trust had been through a great period of change. Its inaugural CEO had retired, it had moved location into a magnificent facility and its programs were expanding. The Board recognised in this process the need to revise its governance processes



Jason Eades with Luke Sayers at the launch of PwC. Image courtesy of Jason Eades.

and policies. Up until this point, many of the Board's way of doing things had become standard practice, but anyone coming in had no easy reference point. It was like having all these unwritten rules that the Board operated to, but as a new comer I had no idea of until I had stumbled across them. The Board and management worked together with some outside assistance to develop not only its

governance manual but a broader set of policy and procedures across the whole of the organisation.

The Awards came to my attention through an advertisement in the Koori Mail. At the time I remember thinking we should apply as it would be a great way to test the rigour of our governance processes. Never a truer thought—the Awards are probably the most rigorous I have ever been involved with. My stand out memory of the whole process was meeting with the judging panel. Sitting across from Mick Dodson as he and his colleagues asked us questions to ensure what we had said in our application was real, felt like being in a court room being cross-examined. A little intimidating, but above all you were left with no doubt that the panel wanted to make sure that the governance you presented on paper actually worked in practice.

The events of the actual Awards day are all a bit of a blur now. Being the inaugural winners there was lots of interest from the media and for days following we received countless emails congratulating us. But the real impact was much more than this. It provided the *trust* with independent verification of the governance system in place, something that the *trust* was able to use in discussions with funders, supporters and sponsors. I would also say that it was great for the whole organisation. Collectively staff, management and the Board all felt an immense level of pride in achieving the award. It also provides confidence to our biggest stakeholder—the community that the organisation is well managed.

The Awards also provided constructive feedback on ways in which the governance of the organisation could continue to be improved. It allowed us to focus on the areas we could strengthen and reminded us that governance is a continual process. It is not something that we could just tick the box and forget. It's the continuous journey and the process that is important, not just the destination.

From a personal perspective the Awards have kick started me on a journey that has seen me become interested in governance and the importance of governance to achieving the outcomes

we need in our communities. I have had the pleasure of working with the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute as they have gone through the journey to establishment. Three years ago I was invited to attend a forum in Tucson, Arizona and gain an international perspective of governance from countries who have a similar journey to ours.

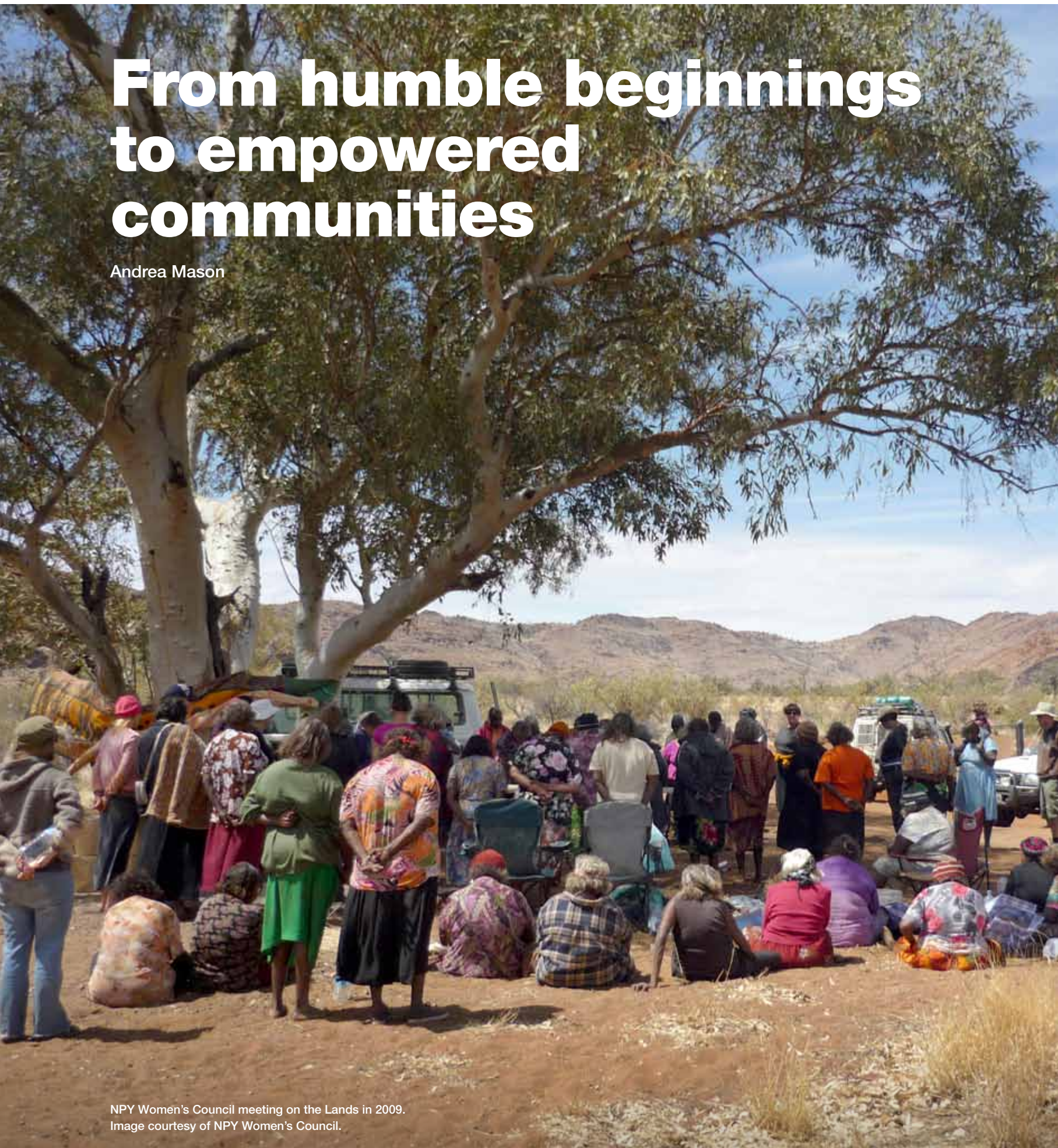
“From a personal perspective the Awards have kick started me on a journey that has seen me become interested in governance and the importance of governance to achieving the outcomes we need in our communities.”

Today I am the CEO of PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting, a new business in the PwC network that is seeking to bring new insights to address some of the bigger issues confronting our community. In the 12 months up to the opening of the business, the lessons I had learned through my journey in the governance space have helped me navigate the complexities of putting into place the right governance structures. Governance is one of the key areas of our business plan as we know that in order for our business to grow and succeed, our governance needs to also grow and evolve with us. I am excited by what lies ahead and the continual learning. I look forward to remaining connected to the governance conversations and seeing our communities realise our collective dreams.



# From humble beginnings to empowered communities

Andrea Mason



NPY Women's Council meeting on the Lands in 2009.  
Image courtesy of NPY Women's Council.





**Andrea Mason is the Co-ordinator for the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council who won the Indigenous Governance Awards in 2012.**

**Andrea is committed to delivering long term positive change to the communities across the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands. This is a responsibility she has been delivering since joining NPY Women's Council in 2008. In April 2010, prior to a seven months acting period, she was appointed permanently to the position of Co-ordinator.**

**Andrea's relationship to the NPY Lands is strong, both professionally and personally. Her mother's people are Karonie people in Western Australia and her father was born in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands between Jameson and Warburton. Andrea believes her role as Co-ordinator is one of being a custodian for the hopes and dreams of the women of the NPY Lands and so she is committed to doing all she can to see those dreams realised.**

Cast your mind back to the opening of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and the moment 330 women from the desert region of Australia, most from the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands, entered the Olympic stadium. It is these women with whom I work: the members of NPY Women's Council.

In 1980, Mantatjara Wilson (dec.) propelled the idea of starting a Women's Council in the NPY Lands with a cassette tape, on which she recorded a message which was copied by the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. Her message was sent to women across the NPY Lands, inviting them to come together, sit down and talk. Around forty women came to that momentous first meeting.

The reasons why NPY Women's Council was formed are best explained in the words of Tjunmutja Myra Watson (dec.), a senior woman at that time and our inaugural Chairperson: "We must sort out our problems and we must speak out strongly... If we don't talk up for ourselves, our rights, we get nowhere."

Thirty-four years later, the need for strong Aboriginal voices still exists. Here in the NPY Lands, many Anangu and Yarnangu feel that their voices are still not heard by governments. It is therefore with great passion and belief that we are one of the eight regions participating in Empowered Communities. The Empowered Communities initiative seeks to create a genuine and balanced partnership between Indigenous organisations, governments and corporate Australia, where everybody is working together on a level playing field and towards a shared strategy.

Since the first meeting of the Empowered Communities Indigenous leadership group in June 2013, we have been working together (as well as with other leaders and organisations in our regions, corporate partners and government representatives) to design a new model of governance and engagement for our communities. In October this year, we presented our report and recommendations to the Australian Government.

The primary aim of Empowered Communities is to increase individual responsibility, or as Noel Pearson puts it: to assert our right to take responsibility. For me, Empowered Communities aligns and brings together under one framework the key components of Indigenous led governance: self-management (organisational led responsibility), self-determination (family and community led responsibility) and determining-self (personal led responsibility). I believe these ideals galvanised together under a broader framework of social, cultural and economic rights and responsibilities will enable Anangu to achieve the best kind of country and the best kind of future.

Our vision for Empowered Communities in the NPY Lands is to increase the capacity of our people to lead healthy and meaningful lives, in safe communities, where people are meaningfully engaged and have improved life choices in all areas that matter in our communities, including: education; law and culture; health and wellbeing; training and work; access to justice; housing and accommodation; social, economic and community development; and where the

needs and aspirations of young and vulnerable people such as babies, children and the elderly are met. For true empowerment to occur, improvements in these areas must be meaningful, long term and sustainable.

### **Collaboration, the glue of Indigenous-led governance**

Central Australia has a long and proud history of Aboriginal activism and action. Some of the first Aboriginal organisations in Australia were formed in our region, many with the aim of providing a stronger voice for community members, and NPY Women's Council itself is founded on a collaborative model, an approach that has given us many successes. For example, in 2005 NPY Women's Council, General Property Trust and the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS – a unit of Tangentyere Council) formed the 'Opal Alliance', which brought about the introduction of Government-subsidised Opal fuel in Central Australia to overcome the scourge of petrol sniffing. As a result of this work, the Opal Alliance was awarded the 2007 National Drug and Alcohol Award for Excellence in Prevention. A 2008 study reported a 94 per cent reduction in inhalant abuse in the southern region of the Northern Territory and inhalant abuse in the region remains low.

In my experience, Aboriginal women in these remote communities are hardwired to collaborate. It is therefore no surprise that the members, directors and staff of NPY Women's Council take a united cross-border approach, working together to maintain and build a better future for all individuals in our communities. My hope is that Empowered Communities will prompt governments to join with us and other Anangu organisations to look past these borders, to break down bureaucratic silos and to address systemic issues. Just as we need collaboration at an *organisational and governmental* level, I believe we also need collaboration at an *individual and grassroots* level. The challenge here—to use a camping analogy—is that no one wants to be the first person out of bed, because that person ends up doing most of the work themselves for the group: collecting the firewood, starting the fire,

heating up the billy and so on. In contrast, when you have a critical mass of people, the work is shared (the raging campfire and hot cups of tea come more easily). We must apply this collaborative approach to all areas where change is needed, for example: building a critical mass of parents in our communities who actively support their children every day to be ready for, and to participate in, school; or supporting cultural enterprises to succeed locally and to collaborate on regional partnerships.

**“In my experience, Aboriginal women in these remote communities are hardwired to collaborate.”**

### **The four Rs: Relocation, Reconciliation, Redistribution and Reconstruction**

I recently re-read a book by American civil rights activist John Perkins, in which he describes his theory of the 'three Rs' of effective community development: Relocation, Reconciliation and Redistribution. Perkins' environment is far removed from my work in the NPY Lands. Nonetheless, his experiences of working in communities have resonated strongly with me and, together with a fourth R: Reconstruction, they offer me ideas on which to reflect given this current discussion.

#### **The first R: Relocation**

To me, this principle speaks of relocating to a new optimism of determination and direction. For example, at NPY Women's Council, our early years were focussed on advocacy and working with our members in areas of highest need and disadvantage. Today, we see the importance of relocating to other places, such as working with and empowering people long before they ever reach the cliff's edge of requiring crisis intervention.

In regards to this principle of relocation, Indigenous governance and cultural rights must be consistent with cultural safety as well as a person's individual safety. Certainly I have seen the pride that exists in our communities when all these aspects are respected in ordinary community life. However, if there is inconsistency and a person's safety is under threat from other rights, whether from domestic and family violence, child abuse, financial abuse, seeking employment or receiving an education, then individual safety is the paramount right, and it must be respected. For those (like myself) who are committed to the principle of relocation, this prioritising of rights is essential, not just morally, but because of the evidence we have today explaining the short and long term harmful effects on individuals of domestic violence, child abuse, lack of educational attainment and lack of meaningful engagement in the community including unemployment.

#### **The second R: Redistribution**

Whilst redistribution sounds like a concept more at home in economics theory than community activism, the type of redistribution I believe we need is one where there is a greater balance in the investment of services and programmes working to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I understand that 80 to 90 per cent of non-Indigenous organisations investing in Indigenous initiatives are investing in opportunities that are based in non-Indigenous organisations. So why is this occurring?

The Indigenous Governance Awards, co-convened by Reconciliation Australia and BHP Billiton, offer many examples of Indigenous incorporated and non-incorporated organisations leading positive change in their communities. NPY Women's Council is proudly on this list.

Based on information collected by NPY Women's Council, between 2000 and 2008 the deaths of 15 Indigenous women in our region were directly linked to domestic and family violence, whereas there has been only one such death since 2008. In recent years, there has been a significant coordinated, cross-sector and cross-border response to domestic and family violence in Central Australia and NPY Women's Council has played a significant role in this



effort to reduce the number of deaths in this area. It is my belief that NPY Women's Council could substantially increase the impact of its work in reducing violence in our communities. However, to do this, we need a significant investment by organisations and individuals with significant means. Surely as a starting point, a 50/50 distribution between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations of Indigenous related investment funds is a fairer balance than the current distribution?

It is difficult to ignore the positive opportunities that could flow if we reduce both the severity and incidence of domestic and family violence. In addition to the obvious benefits for women, families and communities living in a safer and more supportive environment, we would also be able to redistribute time and money spent, for example, on developing safety plans for victims of violence towards more life affirming initiatives, like resilience-building activities with families or towards ventures to increase economic opportunities so that more people have an opportunity to work.

### **The third R: Reconciliation**

There have been many Australians over the years who have called for true reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: the campaigners of the 1967 referendum; Australians who walked across bridges in 2000; and the ongoing call to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Australian Constitution. To create an environment where the Empowered Communities vision can become the reality, there must be a rebalancing of responsibility between governments and Indigenous people that puts into effect the prioritising and resourcing of Indigenous led leadership and responsibility. If this could happen, this would be a very modern and practical step in regards to reconciliation in action.

### **Hope, action and the fourth R: Reconstruction**

The interconnected principles of Relocation, Redistribution and Reconciliation can only lead to change if they are put into action. To be effective, I believe this action must be led locally, by Anangu. This year, a number of NPY Women's Council members have been

leading a mental health literacy project: Uti Kulintjaku ('to think and understand clearly'), an idea they developed in the first place. One of the lessons shared by a mental health professional as part of this project was that 'hope and action' are the antidotes to trauma, and so armed with this advice the women are developing resources to help community members address trauma as well as to build hope.

My hope is that with the support of developments like Empowered Communities, we will see many more local initiatives like our Uti Kulintjaku emerge from our communities in sectors such as employment, enterprise, child health and education. These ground-up initiatives in my view will be evidence that this new governance model is reconstructing a new kind of hope and action in individuals, communities and organisations across the NPY Lands and in the seven other Empowered Communities regions. I believe if this was supported to occur, then a child born into the post Empowered Communities world would have better life choices, and that is surely something worth supporting.



Tjawina Roberts, Julie Porter, Andrea Mason, Nyunmiti Burton, Carlene Thompson, Kunbry Peipei, Janet Jennings, Margaret Smith, Roslyn Yiparti, Yanyi Bandicha of the NPYWC during the Indigenous Governance Awards site visit in 2012. Image by Wayne Quilliam.





# Banking done right

Cathy Hunt from TCU and Geoff Walsh from BHP Billiton with TCU's Indigenous Governance Award. Image by Wayne Quilliam.

The idea for the Traditional Credit Union (TCU) was originally developed by a group of Aboriginal Elders to provide financial services to residents of Arnhem Land communities who were disadvantaged by a lack of banking and other financial services. Since opening their first branch in 1995, the TCU has grown to a network of 16 branches.

Winners of Category B in the Indigenous Governance Awards in 2008, the TCU share their reflections on winning the award and how it has helped the communities they serve.

## What did it mean for the Traditional Credit Union winning the award?

In 2008 Traditional Credit Union (TCU) won the award category B in the prestigious Indigenous Governance Awards. The rigor around the assessment of applicants in this award leave us very proud and humbled to sit among the growing list of some of the most successful and respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in the country.

The TCU is Australia's only Aboriginal owned and operated credit union. We were developed by a group of Aboriginal Elders with the specific intention to provide financial services to residents of Arnhem Land communities disadvantaged by a lack of banking and other financial services.

Since we opened our first remote branch in Milingimbi in 1995, we have expanded to provide banking products and services to over 7,500 members.

We operate branches and facilities in 16 locations:

- Casuarina (Head Office)
- Alice Springs (Service Centre)
- Katherine (Service Centre)
- Milingimbi
- Gunbalanya
- Gapuwiyak
- Galiwinku
- Maningrida
- Minyerri
- Ngukurr
- Ramingining
- Wadeye
- Warruwi
- Borroloola
- Numbulwar
- Wurrumiyanga-Nguiu



### What were the benefits to the TCU from winning the award?

The award provided us an opportunity to reflect on what we do and how we do it. Reflection always has benefits as it is like a stocktake. Why are we successful and how we can be even more successful, what is working and what needs to change. In such a fast past world of business, it's important to find time to do this.

Winning the IGAs gave us an opportunity to showcase this achievement to our stakeholders, such as government bodies, our members and our staff. It is a validation that we are what we say we are and do what we say we do. It is an example that benchmarked against others we have exceptional governance in place.

The award prize also enabled our CEO and our Chairperson to travel to the Native Nations Institute in the United States. On arrival they were provided with an overview of the Native Nations in the United States and the socio-economic conditions in Indian countries today. From this trip, our CEO Cathy Hunt saw just how other communities were affected by similar issues that faced our own. Cathy believes: "To have had the opportunity to see these communities who are different but have similar if not the same problems facing them as our people do was an eye opener. Things such as diabetes and other health issues, substance abuse, housing shortages, unemployment, education, are all issues for the Indians as well. We have made some great connections and opened up our eyes to global issues."

### What were the flow-on effects to the communities TCU serve?

The TCU is seen as a 'best practice' example of service, employment and training opportunities for remote Indigenous people who have very few opportunities of real jobs.

Winning the award inspired confidence in our stakeholders, comforted in the knowledge that we have rigor around our governance policies procedures and practices. We remain a successful business today and maintain a continuous improvement approach to good governance.

As a result of winning the IGAs and the resulting recognition by industry and other businesses, TCU continue to be invited to many organisational gatherings, events and conferences to inspire others and talk

about good governance. Our successes inspire other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations to work toward excellence for sustainable business practice.

### How does the TCU's financial literacy education support the people of your communities?

Our mission is to provide personalised quality financial services for the Indigenous people and organisations in remote communities of the Northern Territory. This sees the TCU also playing an active role in financial counselling referral and financial literacy education. We actively assist members with good money practices such as how to minimise bank fees, save money and set up a budget.

We also provide a vital and substantive employment and training service in the communities in which we operate. Approximately 80 per cent of our 85 employees identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and speak the local languages of the customers they serve. 100 per cent of our employees in remote communities are Aboriginal.

TCU members live in communities where many people are welfare dependent and have been for most of their lives; where facilities such as schools and clinics are limited; where jobs are few; and where housing is heavily overcrowded. In operational and social terms, we face some unusual challenges.

We support members and staff who want to budget and save for special purchase but who face pressure from family to share their earnings every time they get paid.

Indigenous communities are the most affected by financial exclusion. For 20 years TCU have been and remain committed to providing education through financial literacy to the communities we service. Our aim is to increase the knowledge and participation of Indigenous people in all sectors of banking.

One of the ways we do this is by providing employment and training to Indigenous people in remote and urban locations.

TCU is also a registered training organisation under Australian Quality Training Framework, committed to continuous improvement in the training of all its employee and community members. The TCU workforce strategy incorporates an extensive understanding of the learning needs of Indigenous individuals

and communities. Many of our remote Indigenous staff have English as a second, third or fourth language, and are mentored and coached throughout their employment in a Certificate II or III in Financial Services. Our staff are then able to pass on the skills and knowledge they have developed in culturally appropriate member services.

In this way, TCU privileges Indigenous preferences by working in 'two worlds' with a vision for training and skills development based on 'two-way' learning, expressed in simple language and is primarily relationship-based, rather than mere knowledge transfer. We provide real jobs and learning experiences that filter through the community through family connections and banking services.

Micky Wunungmurra, Chairperson since 2004 says: "It was with great pride for TCU and our members that we accepted the Indigenous Governance Award in 2008. Excellence in governance through the passion of our workforce has enabled TCU to continue to provide banking services in remote communities where no cash banking service currently exists, to provide employment and training opportunities for Indigenous staff in remote communities and to develop the capacity through the education of individuals living in remote communities for better understanding of financial services. Indigenous people believe in ceremony and these awards give us reason to celebrate the achievement of a sustainable business developed for Indigenous people by Indigenous people. This recognition makes us very proud."



One Mob dancer at the Smoking Ceremony at TCU Casuarina Head Office Opening. Image courtesy of Traditional Credit Union.

# Indigenous Governance Awards finalists

**“The [Indigenous Governance] Awards have got, for me at least, a number of functions. First and foremost they celebrate peoples’ success in governance, and not just celebrate it but honour what they’ve done and scream that from the rooftops.”**

***Professor Mick Dodson AM, Chair, Indigenous Governance Awards***

Created in 2005 by Reconciliation Australia in partnership with BHP Billiton, the Indigenous Governance Awards identify, celebrate and promote strong Indigenous governance. This year, we received a record number of high-quality applications—113 across two categories. Category A demonstrates outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in Indigenous incorporated organisations, and Category B for outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in non-incorporated initiatives or projects.

From some of our remotest communities to biggest cities, this year’s eight finalists really demonstrate strong leadership, good management, effective partnerships and brave, creative thinking.

## Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience



The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) provides an innovative mentoring program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to support them through high school and into university. Professor Mick Dodson says, “AIME clearly tap into youth culture and this not only enhances their effectiveness but also their credibility. I’m impressed that the organisation is clearly Indigenous led and the initiatives are Indigenous instigated.”

AIME delivered their first program in 2005, when 25 Sydney-based high school students were mentored by 25 volunteers from the University of Sydney. Incorporated in 2008, AIME is now Australia’s largest education support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students.

## Girringun Aboriginal Corporation



Girringun Aboriginal Corporation, who received a Highly Commended award in Category A, is a trailblazing organisation caring for over one million hectares of land and sea in North Queensland, protecting the interests of the nine Traditional Owner groups it represents.

At the heart of Girringun’s work is keeping knowledge and culture alive and passing down the skills of elders. “Culture is critical to the way we operate. The Girringun mob are all about looking after and managing their own country in their own way. We want to empower the next generation of leaders to look after their own country”, says Phil Rist, Girringun’s CEO. Testament to Girringun’s trailblazing success is their eight years of negotiation to secure Australia’s first co-managed Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), declared in 2013.

## Institute for Urban Indigenous Health



The Brisbane-based Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (UIH) is taking on one of the greatest challenges in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs—better health for Indigenous Australians. Marsha



Milliken, an IGA judge who visited IUIH saw that: "IUIH draws strength from Elders and the community. The management team recognises the importance of maintaining community confidence as well as confidence of the Board and individual members."

The IUIH has set itself the task of 'closing the gap' in health and well-being outcomes for urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—a gap which remains approximately nine years for Indigenous people living in south-east Queensland.

While that alone is a daunting challenge, IUIH is also working to ensure Indigenous Queenslanders can access comprehensive and effective primary health care that is culturally safe, whilst working to decrease the dependency of its health services on grant funding from government.

### **Ngnowar Aerwah Aboriginal Corporation**



Ngnowar Aerwah Sobering up shelter and Night Patrol staff. Image by Wayne Quilliam.

Founded in 1985, Ngnowar Aerwah Aboriginal Corporation is based in Wyndham, in Western Australia's remote east Kimberley region. It delivers crucial drug and alcohol services to the community, including a sobering up shelter, rehabilitation centre, night patrol, safe house and community centre. Its reach goes well beyond delivering services and it is well known as a solution provider, contributing to the long-term wellbeing of the whole community. Ngnowar Aerwah believes: "It is important to us that we lead a community-wide response to what is a whole-of-community issue. That requires strong leadership, willing and able advocates and thoughtful solutions."

Growing from a small tin-shed to a pillar of the community, Ngnowar Aerwah serves thousands of people and has helped to achieve a 35 percent decrease in domestic violence in the community.

Ngnowar Aerwah is supporting its community to thrive—delivering crucial services, employing passionate people and contributing to the wellbeing of the community.

### **Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**



Ruby and Deklan from VACCA's mobile playgroup in Melton, Melbourne. Image by Wayne Quilliam.

Founded on the principle of the right of self-determination for Aboriginal people, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is the

oldest Aboriginal child and family welfare organisation in Victoria. Operating for 38 years, they provide crucial services to reinforce Aboriginal culture, encourage best parenting practices and advise government. VACCA's CEO Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett AM, says: "We embed culture in all our programs in recognition of Aboriginal people's rights to their culture, and our services are culturally attuned to empower our families and communities to look after our own."

The organisation's focus on cultural safety and connectedness is a strong part of its vision and purpose. VACCA firmly believe that embedding culture is integral in achieving positive outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people, families and the community.

VACCA has lobbied successfully for changes to Victoria's child protection laws. It has also succeeded in advocating for the inclusion of special provisions based on the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination and self-management in the state's Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.

### **Muntjiltjarra Wurrugumu Group**



IGA judges with members of the Muntjiltjarra Wurrugumu Group in Wiluna. Image by Wayne Quilliam.

The Muntjiltjarra Wurrugumu Group is breaking down communication barriers between the local Aboriginal community, industry and government agencies in Wiluna, Western Australia. The project is supported by the Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement, formed with a memorandum of understanding between the Australian Government and the Minerals Council of Australia.

The project has enabled the Wiluna people to have greater control over how external agencies and industry work with the local community. Driver licensing, unpaid fines, vehicle registration and a lack of personal identification cards are some of the issues the group tackles on a regular basis. IGA judge Eddie Cubillo believes the group's success comes from working with community. "The Group's strength lies in that they're culturally connected and that comes through in their decision making and how they go about working with their community and showing community control."

In 2013, the group designed and delivered a unique baseline survey to understand why Wiluna community members struggled to deal with external agencies. The group's work has spurred Rosslyn Hill Mining to run its own pilot project to provide future employment opportunities in the mine for the local community.

# And the winners are...

After a long and extensive judging process, the winners of this year's Awards were announced at a special event held at BHP Billiton in Melbourne on 30 October. This year's winners, Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (Category A) and The Marruk Project (Category B) are shining examples of Indigenous organisations succeeding at the very top level.

## Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation

Waltja is an initiative of the region's women leaders to support and advocate for remote communities over a 90,000 square kilometre area. Waltja addresses the severe economic disadvantage experienced by its community members and provides crucial services to help the community grow, including training and employment opportunities, and projects to maintain family and culture.

Waltja also raises money and invests it locally in social initiatives to benefit its community. Investment schemes that have made a difference include disability support care, emergency relief and a 'culture car' that can be hired by families to attend significant cultural events. This financial independence means the organisation can provide services and resources considered too minor by government funding programs but are considered essential by the communities it serves.

Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi is Luritja language, and means 'doing good work with families' and the name really captures the Waltja story—highlighting the important influence and leadership women have in communities.

Kate Lawrence, Waltja's community engagement manager says "The women who founded Waltja in the very beginning had a very clear aim that they wanted to have a resource centre that would service remote communities and help start really positive initiatives, and they wanted some way for women to be able to speak together but with one voice about what's happening, the conditions in Central Australia."

Waltja's agenda is driven by a Board of Directors, made up of Aboriginal women from its member communities. The foundation for their corporate philosophy is the leadership of strong Aboriginal women, a focus on families, support for community

self-management and self-determination and improved services for communities. Waltja Chairperson, April Martin suggests that Waltja's success is due to the women who run it, "women are strong with their culture and knowledge and with the language and with ceremonies as well and teaching the young ones—leading the way."

Glenda Humes, a 2014 Awards judge who visited Waltja says: "Waltja is a very innovative organisation, they have responded to their local conditions by doing things the Waltja way, which includes helping everyone who needs help, regardless of what community they come from."

**Category A winner: Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation. (L-R) Professor Mick Dodson AM, The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Rachel Tilmouth, April Martin, Wendy Brown, and Kate Lawrence. Image by Wayne Quilliam.**







### The Marruk Project

Engaging members of community is a key piece of The Marruk Project's work. The Marruk Project uses performing arts to strengthen culture and create opportunities for Elders, young people and community members to get to know each other by sharing their histories.

Local theatre productions are used to explore and share cultural knowledge with the project's audience in Swan Hill. Using acting, puppetry, dance, live music and video, the project raises cross-cultural awareness and develops the skills of participating performers through the re-telling of creation stories.

Since its beginning in 2009, The Marruk Project has performed annual productions to highlight the value of culture to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audience members. A 2011 production of *A Platypus Dreaming* was one of the project's most successful, playing to an audience of 800 people.

Angela Frost, of The Marruk Project, believes the project's success is due to

the collaboration between these groups.

"There is a really strong group of Elders and young people who work together and also separately to decide the vision of what we do and why we do it."

"More and more young people have been given the opportunity to lead, so Elders have really handed on that responsibility to young people to not just only make decisions about how we should create work, who should be involved, what stories we should tell, but also handing on cultural responsibilities like Welcome to Country," Angela says.

"We need more things like this. It's difficult to measure what it achieves: it builds tolerance, it builds an abhorrence for racial discrimination and it fosters that community value for multiculturalism," said Indigenous Governance Award Chair Mick Dodson.

But it's not just the winners that should be congratulated on their efforts. Each finalist has truly succeeded at the very top level. Category A's Highly Commended award

**Category B winner and highly commended:**  
**The Marruk Project and Muntjiltjarra Wurrungmu Group. (L-R) Professor Mick Dodson AM, Cianna Chaplin, The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Latiesha Chaplin, Shania Sinclair, Imparja Pettit, Stacey Petterson, Jeremiah Kirby, Regina Ashwin and Baydon Clayton.**  
**Image by Wayne Quilliam.**

winners Giringgun Aboriginal Corporation's trailblazing success is driven by the Elder's desire to keep country, people and culture strong on behalf of nine Traditional Owner groups in North Queensland. The Muntjiltjarra Wurrungmu Group, Highly Commended in Category B, is helping break down communication barriers between the local Aboriginal community, industry and government agencies.

"Certainly this round of finalists are up there with the best of them—it's such as a high quality. It seems with each round of the Awards, the quality of governance, organisations and projects and the quality of people doing the governance and running the projects is excellent. It gets better and better each time," says Mick Dodson.



# A night of nights



(L-R) Louise Jonas, Nigel D'Souza, James Atkinson, Muriel Bamblett, Helen Kennedy, Connie Salamon.



Prime Minister The Hon Tony Abbott MP.



Mick Dodson AM and Sean Choolburra.



Jesse Gardiner.

All photos by Wayne Quilliam.



Justin Mohamed and Leah Armstrong.



Jack Manning Bancroft, Bronwyn Bancroft and Ella Bancroft.



(L-R) Mick Dodson AM, Leah Armstrong, Prime Minister The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Tony Cudmore, Tom Calma AO, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion.



Finalists of the 2014 Indigenous Governance Awards.



(L-R) Stacey Petterson, Guy Singleton, Regina Ashwin, Jason Stern, Leah Armstrong, Jen Dawson, Djapirri Mununggirritj.





# The power of community legal education

Professor Megan Davis delivers the 2012 Narm Oration at the University of Melbourne. Image courtesy of the Indigenous Law Centre.

**Community legal education is about empowerment. When people understand the laws and policies that impact upon them, they are better able to assert their rights and obtain access to justice. And when people working in the justice system are kept informed of developments, they are better able to obtain justice for their clients.**

Since 1981, the Indigenous Law Centre, at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), has been providing First Nations peoples with accessible and affordable information on important and relevant legal issues. Through a comprehensive research program and their two high profile publications—the Indigenous Law Bulletin and the Australian Indigenous Law Review—the Centre also provides a voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in what can often be a complex legal system.

The Centre is led by UN Expert Member and Professor of Law, Megan Davis. As a leading intellectual and constitutional lawyer, Professor Davis has worked hard to ensure the Centre's flagship publication, the Indigenous Law Bulletin, covers the topics most relevant to Indigenous people both here and overseas.

"The *Indigenous Law Bulletin* is unique in Australia. It is the only legal publication in

the country that is dedicated to sharing information about Indigenous legal issues—whether it be in the area of criminal law, civil law, human rights law or other areas," she says. "The legal issues affecting Indigenous communities are increasingly complex and part of the role of the Bulletin is to explain those complexities in a way the community can easily understand.

"Our experience has been that community legal education has played a critical yet undervalued role in achieving incremental change," Professor Davis explains.

Indigenous Law Centre Associate and President of the Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory, Mr Russell Goldflam, echoes Professor Davis' comments on the importance of community legal education.

"For Northern Territory criminal law practitioners like myself, in a jurisdiction where over 80 per

cent of prisoners are Aboriginal, the Indigenous Law Bulletin is of particular value.

"Frequently, an article or note in the Indigenous Law Bulletin concerning a legal development from another jurisdiction sets us onto a new and potentially productive line of argument or research," Mr Goldflam says. "Many of us practice in regional or remote areas, without ready access to well-stocked law libraries or opportunities to engage in reflective debate."

The Indigenous Law Centre is calling on the community to support its community legal education work by subscribing to its journals. A year's subscription to the Indigenous Law Bulletin includes six issues and costs as little as \$20 (for students) and \$49.50 for community and not-for-profit organisations. The November/December edition due out in late December is a special edition on Constitutional recognition.

# salt water fresh water

ABORIGINAL  
CULTURAL  
FESTIVAL

australia day  
26 january 2015  
9am - 5pm  
coffs harbour  
botanic gardens

GUMBAYNGGIRR

DUNGHUTTI

BIRIPI

WORIMI

salt  
water  
fresh  
water



alcohol & smoke free community event . gold coin entry

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