

A Billiluna family enjoying their new access to Starlink internet. Credit: KRACLN

Billiluna surges ahead with the fastest internet in the Kimberley

When slow internet speeds are proving frustrating you probably wouldn't think to drive 200km south on the Tanami track to the small First Nations community of Billiluna. But, surprisingly, that would be your best bet with the community now recording the fastest internet speeds in the Kimberley.

A recent speed test by the installers confirmed Billiluna's service is three times faster than Broome, while in neighboring Yiyili, connectivity speeds have doubled those recorded in Broome.

The upgrade is part of a broader project led by the Kimberley Remote Aboriginal Community Leaders Network, aimed at

connecting First Nations communities to the digital world.

The program is delivering high-speed internet to communities that have faced years of slow, unreliable or nonexistent service. Starlink systems are now live in Billiluna, Yiyili and Ringer Soak, Pandanus Park, Muludja with two more installations to come at Yakanarra and Bayulu in the coming months.

Each Starlink setup provides free Wi-Fi within a 50 metre radius, giving residents immediate access to banking, online schooling, telehealth and communication tools.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Halls Creek's front-row seat to the 2028 eclipse

COMMUNITY YARNS

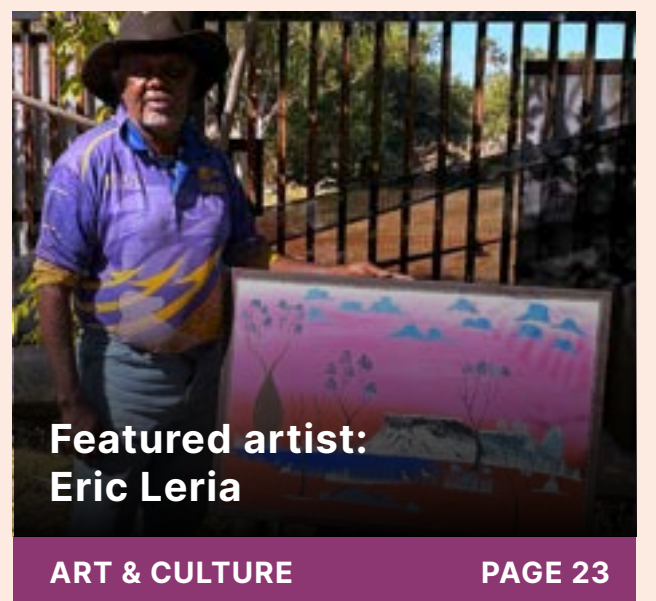
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AI tools raise red flags for Indigenous education

NATIONAL NEWS

PAGE 20



Featured artist: Eric Leria

ART & CULTURE

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Indigenous stars named in WA's State of Origin Squad

SPORT

PAGE 32

Halls Creek Emergency Contacts

Life-Threatening Emergency
000 – Police, Fire, Ambulance

State Emergency Service (SES)
132 500 – Floods, storm damage, fallen trees, leaks

Halls Creek Police Station
9168 9777 (Use 000 for emergencies)

Halls Creek Hospital
9168 9222

Fire & Rescue / DFES Kimberley
000 – Emergencies
9168 6000 – General enquiries

Main Roads WA
138 138 – Road conditions & closures

Shire of Halls Creek – After-Hours
9168 6007

Horizon Power
13 23 51 – Power outages

Water Corporation
13 13 75 – Water & sewer issues

Editor's Note

Welcome to 2026 Shire of Halls Creek! It's been an almighty wet season so far and the landscape has greened up beautifully (check out page 26 to see Warmun's verdant canopy). Send us your snaps if you've been out bush or somewhere special during the rains and we'll make sure they're published.

In our third edition we look at all things tech - including new public wi-fi for a number of our remotes, AI learning in schools and big changes to come for the Aboriginal Environmental Health portfolio. As usual we have plenty of incredible art on display from our talented artists around the Shire, as well as a feature on the boom in First Nations romance writing across Australia.

There are some challenging but important reads in this edition too, so content warnings for pages 19 and 21. As always, in these tumultuous times, we focus on good news yarns to share as well - including new CCTV cameras headed for Halls Creek, a potential drop in scabies in the Shire and a solar power farm being explored by Horizon Power in our (very) sunny home.

With the new year upon us I encourage you to get in touch with your contributions; be it articles, photographs, news, poems or art. Wat Na! is what we make it - so get involved! To submit a story please email watnanews@hcshire.wa.gov.au

Watch or listen to the Shire of Halls Creek's monthly Council meetings

Meetings are open to everyone and are a great way to better understand how decisions are made, what issues are being discussed, and how Council works on behalf of the community. Whether you tune in regularly or just from time to time, staying informed helps keep our local democracy strong.

Council meetings are held monthly at the Council Chambers in Halls Creek, starting at 4:30pm.

No meeting in January	23 July
26 February	27 August
26 March	24 September
23 April	22 October
28 May	26 November
25 June	10 December



Wat Na! is created and published by the Shire of Halls Creek with help from local contributors. Thank you to everyone who shared their stories, ideas and photographs.



Captured in the Shire of Halls Creek



Trainees at Halls Creek Aquatic Centre



Artists Patrick Mung Mung



Healthy Skin Week II



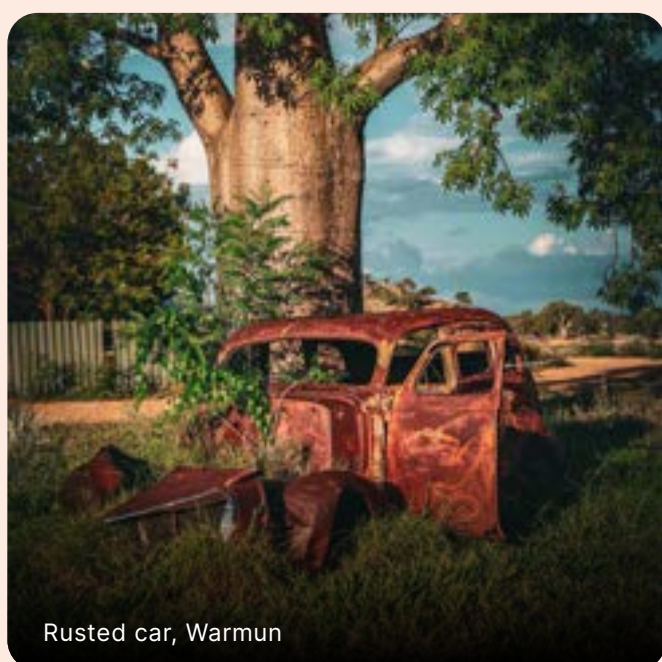
A Tourism workshop hosted by the Shire



Bouganvillea, Halls Creek



Cool as Boys, Turkey Creek



Rusted car, Warmun



Wat Na! first edition in Halls Creek



Old friends, Balgo

Share your adventures around the Shire of Halls Creek! Tag your posts with **#WatNaHallsCreek** on Instagram, or email your favourite shots to **watnanews@hcsire.wa.gov.au**

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which the Shire operates and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and emerging; for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of First Nations peoples across the country and are instrumental in shaping our collective futures.

A hopeful year ahead for Halls Creek

As we warm up to 2026, I would like to wish everyone across the Shire of Halls Creek a happy, safe and hopeful year ahead.

A new year is always a chance to pause, reflect and think about what you'd like to achieve as the months start racing forward. In our Shire I see much to be proud of, and much to look forward to, in 2026.

Within the next month or so, in time for the footy season, we expect to see the completion of the Oval upgrade, with contractors from NewGround based in Halls Creek over the wet season to ensure the new turf is growing just so.

This is a long-awaited project for our district (thank you for your patience) that will deliver a renewed space for sport (both professional and amateur), community events and gathering together. We all know the oval is a key piece of infrastructure for our town and one that reflects the strong value

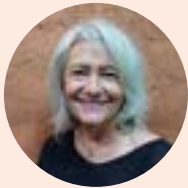
our community places on connection, activity and shared, outdoor spaces. I'm really looking forward to celebrating the completion of this project, perhaps hosting a town party and exploring some creative ways to mark the upgrade.

This year will also mark a significant milestone for our new Council, with the adoption of the new Shire Strategic Community Plan and Halls Creek Placemaking Plan. These plans, developed and written over 2025, are the result of extensive community and stakeholder consultation, and they will guide decision-making, investment and priorities for the Shire in the years ahead. Most importantly, they reflect what we heard from you about what matters most in your home and district, what needs improvement and what kind of future you want to see for this gorgeous place.

Beyond major projects, 2026 will continue to focus on practical outcomes for our communities. Our teams

will be delivering new and already established health and environmental initiatives, animal management drives (including free desexing), and a suite of recreational programmes at the Rec centre and Pool. We'll also be busy with the bread and butter of any remote Shire – roads, garbage collection and re-opening the library.

We know that challenges remain in our district, but, along with our partners in the community, we're energised to tackle them. Distance, cost pressures and access to services continue to shape daily life in the East Kimberley, but we also know that our Shire is resilient, generous and deeply connected, to the land and each other. In this fragmented modern world, resilience and connection are real superpowers.



WORDS BY SUE LEONARD,
CEO, Shire of Halls Creek

Community Grants & Support

The Shire of Halls Creek provides \$45,000 each year to support local events and community-led activities. See what's available below:

Facility Hire Waivers

Free or discounted hire of Shire facilities for community events. Pre-approved support includes NAIDOC Week and the Halls Creek Rodeo. Other events, including cultural activities and funerals, can apply.

Sponsorships

Funding for larger events that benefit the community. Pre-approved sponsorships include the Business Excellence Awards and East Kimberley Aboriginal Achievement Awards.

Small Community Grants (\$500–\$1,000)

Cash grants for local projects such as community celebrations, youth programs and small improvement projects. Grants also support national and commemorative events, including ANZAC Day, Armistice Day, Reconciliation Week and National Sorry Day. Funding is available on a rolling basis until funds are used.



Healthy Skin Week II visited Yiyili, Red Hill and Yardgee in late November. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Early signs of decline in scabies cases after Healthy Skin Week II

Health workers are reporting early signs that scabies and other preventable skin diseases may be decreasing in communities across the Shire of Halls Creek following Healthy Skin Week II.

The three-day outreach program at the end of 2025 visited Yiyili, Yardgee and Red Hill, delivering coordinated health, hygiene and environmental services. While final data is still being compiled, public health officials say anecdotal observations from clinical staff in the field point to fewer cases of infected scabies, sores and boils compared with previous years.

During the week, clinicians completed 76 skin checks across the three communities. Staff reported noticeably fewer scabies-related presentations. A similar trend has also been observed at the Yiyili Clinic in recent months.

“This is a promising sign,” said Lawi Too, Head of Aboriginal Environmental Health for the Shire of Halls Creek.

“The next step is to work with public health officials and other providers to gather clinical data to support these anecdotal observations. If skin infections are decreasing, that’s a huge win for our district and families.”

Skin infections remain one of the most common health issues affecting children in the Shire of Halls Creek. WA Health and WACHS data show First Nations children in remote Kimberley communities experience skin diseases such as scabies and impetigo at far higher rates than children living in other parts of Australia. In some remote settings, health providers report that as much as half of all children can be infected with serious skin issues at any one time.

Health experts say these conditions are closely linked to overcrowded housing, limited access to functioning bathrooms and laundry facilities, hot weather, and the ease with which infections spread

between children. If left untreated, skin infections can lead to serious complications, including rheumatic heart disease and kidney problems.

A range of providers collaborated on Healthy Skin Week II including the Shire of Halls Creek, WACHS, Nirrimbuk Aboriginal Corporation, Nindilingarri Aboriginal Corporation, Yura Yungi and Orange Sky Laundry.

While challenges remain, including household waste management and pest control within homes, service providers agreed Healthy Skin Week II had proven its value and they looked forward to Healthy Skin Week III, sometime in 2026.

“When we [service providers] are able to collaborate and work together like this, I think we can achieve some really powerful things,” said Too.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Rheumatic Heart Disease still threatens Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley despite a decline in other States

New data from Queensland shows a sharp drop in new diagnoses of Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) in its north-west region — from 99 cases in 2021 to just 15 reported so far in 2025. The findings follow a targeted community-led health programme focused on improving hygiene, housing and access to care. The result is being watched closely in remote regions such as the Shire of Halls Creek, where rheumatic fever remains a persistent problem, especially among children and young people.

Globally, RHD remains a major public health problem in disadvantaged and remote communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 55 million people worldwide live with RHD. Each year, the disease causes approximately 360,000 deaths, mostly in low- and middle-income countries.

RHD is preventable. It typically begins in childhood after repeated infections with

group A streptococcal bacteria — often a simple throat infection or skin condition — that are untreated or poorly treated. If left unchecked, the infection can trigger an immune reaction, inflaming and permanently scarring the heart valves.

In most high-income countries, RHD has all but disappeared thanks to improved living conditions, widespread access to antibiotics and better public health standards. But remote and Indigenous communities in Australia — including in the Kimberley region — continue to experience high rates of acute rheumatic fever and RHD.

Lawi Too, Head of Aboriginal Environmental Health at the Shire of Halls Creek, said it was disappointing RHD continued to be so prevalent in the Kimberley and the Shire.

"When we are seeing other countries and other States doing well at combating this disease, we must learn from them

and continually update our methods and ideas to tackle it."

The drop in Queensland's RHD rates offers a promising model for Halls Creek and similar communities. By targeting root causes — overcrowded housing, lack of washing facilities, and limited access to timely medical treatment — authorities have shown case numbers can fall dramatically over a relatively short time.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Supplied: Heart Foundation



Fat erupts around home. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Fat down the drain causes messy and costly damage

Residents are being urged not to pour cooking fat, oil or grease down their sinks after a recent incident saw fat erupt around a home, causing serious damage and health risks.

While cooking fat may go down the drain as a liquid, it quickly cools and hardens inside pipes. Over time, this builds up and blocks household plumbing, including toilets, showers, laundries and kitchen drains.

The Shire of Halls Creek Environmental Health Lead Dean Graham said the results can be messy, expensive and dangerous to health.

"When fat blocks pipes, it has nowhere to go and can force its way back out into homes and yards," Graham said.

"We've seen a mixture of sewage and grease spill around houses and inside houses, creating serious hygiene and health issues that are completely preventable."

Graham said blocked pipes can attract pests such as cockroaches, cause ongoing bad smells and lead to costly repairs for households and the Shire.

Graham urged residents to let cooking fat cool, pour it into a container and put it in the bin.

"Please don't tip fat down the sink or toilet. The bin is the safest place for it," he said.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Halls Creek students shine on Sydney cultural trip

A group of Halls Creek District High School students travelled to Sydney in November as part of the latest Girls from Oz (g-oz) Travel Program, joining students from across northern Australia for a week of learning, performance and cultural exchange.

Eight students and two staff from Halls Creek took part in the program alongside young people from Bidyadanga in Western Australia and Lockhart River and Kowanyama in Queensland.

The week included workshops at NAISDA Dance College, visits to the

Google Sydney headquarters, and a highlight performance on stage at the Sydney Opera House with the Australian Girls Choir.

Girls from Oz has worked in partnership with Halls Creek District High School since 2009, delivering donor-funded performing arts programs on campus each year. The organisation runs one week-long program each school term, focused on engaging girls and young women, with the next visit to Halls Creek scheduled for March 2026.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Girls from Oz trip to Sydney. Credit: Girls from Oz



New CCTV cameras confirmed for Halls Creek

Halls Creek will receive four new CCTV cameras after the Shire was identified as a priority location under a State Government community safety commitment.

The funding will support the installation of cameras in high-priority areas of town, with locations identified by the WA Police Force to help deter antisocial behaviour and improve public safety.

The announcement comes amid ongoing concerns about crime in the town, particularly theft and break-and-enter offences, which have remained a persistent issue for residents and local businesses.

Sue Leonard, CEO of the Shire of Halls Creek, said the additional cameras would support local efforts to improve safety.

“This funding will help strengthen community safety in Halls Creek and provide additional support for police and emergency services,” Ms Leonard said.

The Shire will now work with local police and the State Operations Command Centre to progress the project. The funding forms part of the State Government’s 2025 Closed-Circuit

Television (CCTV) Election Commitment, which will deliver 64 new cameras statewide.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



A CCTV camera in action. Credit: TechCube

Grants closing soon for community laundries in Shire of Halls Creek

Organisations working with remote communities in the Shire of Halls Creek and the East Kimberley have only weeks left to apply for Federal Government funding to deliver community-led laundry facilities, with grants closing in February.

The \$11.4 million Remote Community Laundries Project will fund up to 12 new or upgraded mobile or fixed laundries across Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia, including in remote Kimberley communities.

The laundries will provide free access to commercial-grade washing machines and medicated detergents, aimed at improving hygiene and reducing the spread of preventable illnesses.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Senator Malarndirri McCarthy said the facilities were designed to improve

health outcomes while responding directly to community needs.

“These fit-for-purpose community laundry facilities will help reduce the spread of preventable infectious diseases and improve health outcomes,” Senator McCarthy said.

Limited access to washing facilities in remote communities is linked to high rates of skin infections, which can lead to serious illnesses such as trachoma, acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

Senator McCarthy said the program had been developed in partnership with First Nations communities to ensure local priorities were reflected.

“By partnering with First Nations communities, we’re ensuring these services are designed to reflect their priorities,” she said.

The project is also expected to create employment opportunities through the construction, operation and ongoing maintenance of the laundries.

“This project will also create job opportunities in remote communities during the establishment and ongoing operation of the facilities,” Senator McCarthy said.

Organisations applying for the grants must work in partnership with First Nations communities and demonstrate strong local engagement.

Applications close at 2pm (AEDST) on Friday, 13 February 2026.

Further information and application details are available through GrantConnect.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Borroloola laundry opening. Credit: Aboriginal Investment Group



Yiyili Starlink set up and speed test. Credit: KRACLN



Billiluna surges ahead with the fastest internet in the Kimberley

Article continued from page 1

The program also supplied new laptops and subscriptions for unlimited data, McAfee security and Microsoft 365.

Project lead Jamie Treloar said the change to residents' lives has been immediate.

“Not having internet access in our fast-paced modern world is a real disadvantage and impacts people’s ability to hunt for a job, do internet banking, access telehealth or fill out essential government forms,” said Treloar.

“Having good internet access makes it possible to stay in community and still participate in the modern world, including attending meetings and appointments, distance learning, and

staying up to date with the news and weather events.”

A recent report from RMIT university found close to half of remote Aboriginal communities in Australia have no mobile service at all — with many making do with a shared public phone or a single smartphone that is handed around the community.

Yiyili resident Sean Cox told the ABC that the new internet access was “really good” and had allowed people to make phone calls in their own houses rather than trudging around the community looking for service.

“It’s made life much easier, it’s pretty good, on the laptop they gave us we can do teams meetings, check our email, it’s made a big difference,” he said.

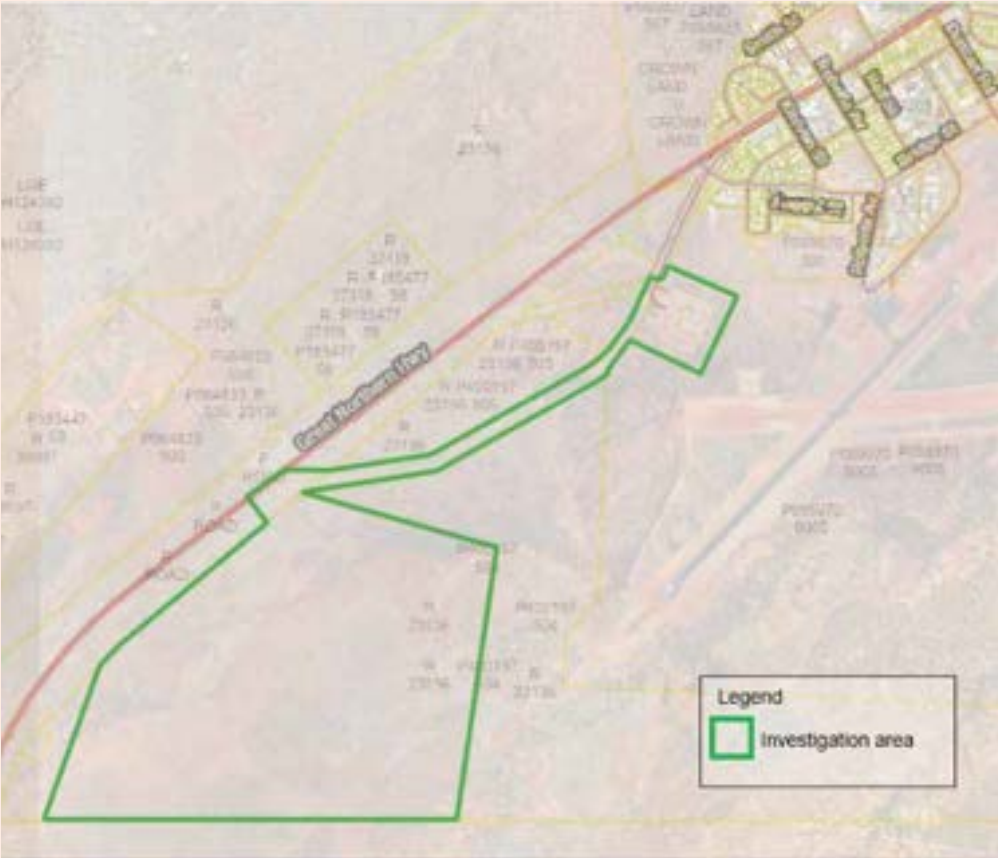
“It’s made a huge difference in the

community. When the rain comes, we can be very isolated. And if we go hunting or fishing, we can get bogged. Now we can call back for help.”

Minister for Indigenous affairs Malarndirri McCarthy said digital inclusion for First Nations people was an important part of Closing the Gap.

“Most Australians take for granted their ability to access online services for essentials like healthcare, education and banking...Our investment will ensure more remote First Nations communities can access these same supports.” the Minister said in a written statement.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



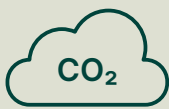
3,400 hours

of sunshine in Halls Creek each year,
one of the highest totals in Australia



Diesel & Gas

The main sources of power
currently used in Halls Creek



7,500 tonnes

of CO₂-equivalent emissions
produced per year in Halls Creek

Renewable energy options being explored near Halls Creek

Horizon Power is exploring whether Halls Creek could be a suitable location for a solar power farm, as part of broader efforts to improve energy reliability and reduce reliance on diesel generation across the Kimberley.

The proposed site is near the existing Halls Creek power station along the Great Northern Highway, including Reserve 23136 (Lot 9005 on Deposited Plan 69970) and Lot 504 on Deposited Plan 400197, Road 37118.

As part of early planning, Horizon Power is inviting Aboriginal people in Halls Creek with knowledge of cultural heritage sites or stories in or near the proposed area to get in touch. Information can be shared with Horizon Power’s Traditional Owner Relationships and Reconciliation team via TORR@horizonpower.com.au.

Shire of Halls Creek CEO Sue Leonard said renewables are the future and Halls

Creek wants to be part of a progressive story.

“We are blessed with amazing sunshine in our Shire and harnessing that to lower our power costs makes great sense.”

Solar power projects on both a big and small scale are becoming increasingly common across the Kimberley. In Warmun the Kimberley Communities Solar Saver (KCSS) program has seen some homes equipped with roof top solar panels. Bidyadanga, Ardyaloon and Yungngora have also taken part in the scheme, with more Kimberley communities set to join in 2026.

Halls Creek is particularly well suited to solar energy, recording around 3,400 hours of sunshine each year, one of the highest totals in Australia.

Earlier this year Western Australia’s Energy and Decarbonisation Minister Amber-Jade Sanderson said expanding renewable energy in remote areas is a key priority for her government.

“This investment demonstrates the Cook Government’s commitment to ensuring our renewable energy transition is available for all Western Australians, no matter where they live,” Minister Sanderson said in a statement.

“As this renewables program expands, we will be another step closer to providing safer, more reliable, and equitable power solutions for First Nations people across Western Australia.”

More information on the Halls Creek Future Energy Systems project is available at www.horizonpower.com.au/halls-creek-fes.

From city stores to our Remotes: free, brand-new clothing headed for Halls Creek communities

National charity Thread Together is expanding its work into the Kimberley, partnering with communities including Mulan and Yiyilli to provide access to brand new clothing and footwear for people doing it tough.

Thread Together is a not-for-profit organisation that collects brand-new, excess clothing from major Australian retailers and redistributes it to people experiencing homelessness, financial hardship, domestic and family violence, disaster recovery and social disadvantage.

Prior to the charity's inception in 2012, excess stock from many clothing brands in Australia was sent to landfill.

The charity receives donations from well-known brands including David Jones, Country Road, The Iconic, Bonds, Big W and Cotton On.

As part of its Kimberley expansion, Thread Together will work alongside

community organisations to deliver clothing where it is most needed. With the nearest Kmart more than 600 kilometres away from the Shire, access to affordable, appropriate clothing can be a major challenge, especially for large families.

“What’s most important to us is that we provide access and choice of brand new clothing to the communities, providing new clothes for new beginnings,” said Anthony Chesler, CEO of Thread Together.

“That’s why partnering with local charities is so important, because they know the needs of their community best.”

Thread Together staff plan to visit the Kimberley in the first quarter of 2026, but pallets of clothing have already begun arriving ahead of their trip.

The Shire of Halls Creek will support the local rollout by assisting with logistics and storage. They are also helping identify appropriate local charities and community organisations to partner with Thread Together.

“I find the work this charity does very admirable and I see a lot of need for their services on the ground in our Shire,” said Shire of Halls Creek CEO Sue Leonard.

“Fresh clothing can really empower people, especially if they are going through a difficult time or trying to change their life. We are very excited that they have decided to branch into the Kimberley, and that Mulan and Yiyili are among their first partnerships.”

Thread Together said in 2026 they hope to partner with an additional 16 remote communities in the Kimberley, including Warmun, Ringer Soak and Balgo in the Shire of Halls Creek.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



With the nearest clothing store six hours away in Alice Springs, Nikisha now has access to essential clothing thanks to brand donations through Thread Together, which has already built strong partnerships across the NT. Credit: Thread Together



Gija men visiting Victoria to discuss Men's Shed and other programmes with their local counterparts. Supplied: Warmun Art Centre

Proud Gija men lead the way on landmark Victorian visit

A group of senior and emerging leaders from Warmun has returned home after a powerful interstate visit focused on leadership, healing and long-term change for Gija men and their families.

Late last year, six Gija Ambassadors, alongside Shane, co-manager of the Gija Men's Place, travelled to Melbourne, Castlemaine, Bendigo and Melbourne University as part of a leadership and cultural exchange.

The men met with Aboriginal organisations, community leaders and academics, joining more than 50 Aboriginal men from across the country to share stories, listen deeply and begin shaping a new national Men's Network.

The emerging network is focused on practical and cultural solutions to challenges facing Aboriginal men, including strengthening economic opportunity on country, ending family violence, reducing alcohol and drug harm, lowering suicide rates and protecting culture for future generations.

Throughout the week, the Gija delegation spoke about their responsibilities as men, fathers, uncles and leaders, carrying with them the stories of their families, ancestors and community. They also took time to learn from others, building connections grounded in respect and shared purpose.

Participants described the emergence of a respectful space for honest conversations about trauma, accountability and healing between men.

The visit has already sparked momentum, with plans underway to continue developing the Men's Network as a brotherhood committed to positive change and mutual support across communities.

Local leaders said the men represented Warmun with pride, demonstrating the power of Aboriginal men leading solutions for their own communities.

WORDS THANKS TO WARMUN ART CENTRE

Five-day childcare support announced for First Nations children

Families across the Kimberley are set to benefit from a major change to childcare subsidies, with the Federal Government announcing expanded support for First Nations children.

Under the new arrangements, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will be eligible for up to five days a week of subsidised childcare, regardless of their parents’ work or study hours. The change provides 100 hours of subsidised care per fortnight per child, removing previous activity test requirements that limited access for many families in regional and remote areas.

The announcement was made as part of broader early childhood reforms aimed

at improving access to education before children start school.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy has previously said early childhood investment is critical to improving long-term outcomes for children and families, particularly in regional and remote communities.

Peak body SNAICC – National Voice for our Children welcomed expanded access to early learning, with chief executive Catherine Liddle saying:

“Closing the Gap starts with our children, and this all starts with early childhood education and care. We know investing in early education and care not only sets

up our children to thrive, it makes all the difference to their life outcomes and builds stronger and resilient families.”

Research consistently shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to start school developmentally behind their peers, making access to quality early childhood education a key factor in addressing long-standing disadvantage.

Families are encouraged to speak with local childcare providers or Services Australia for more information about the changes.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Federal Indigenous Minister Malarndirri McCarthy visits an early learning centre in the NT. Supplied: Malarndirri McCarthy

Artwork by Indigenous children at Little Nuggets Early Learning Centre in Halls Creek. Supplied: Little Nuggets

Childcare changes: What families need to know

Who is eligible?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–5 who attend an approved early childhood education and care service.

What’s changed?

Eligible children can now access up to 100 hours of subsidised childcare per fortnight, equivalent to five days a week.

Do parents need to be working or studying?

No. The subsidy applies regardless of parents’ work, study or training hours, removing the previous activity test.

When does it start?

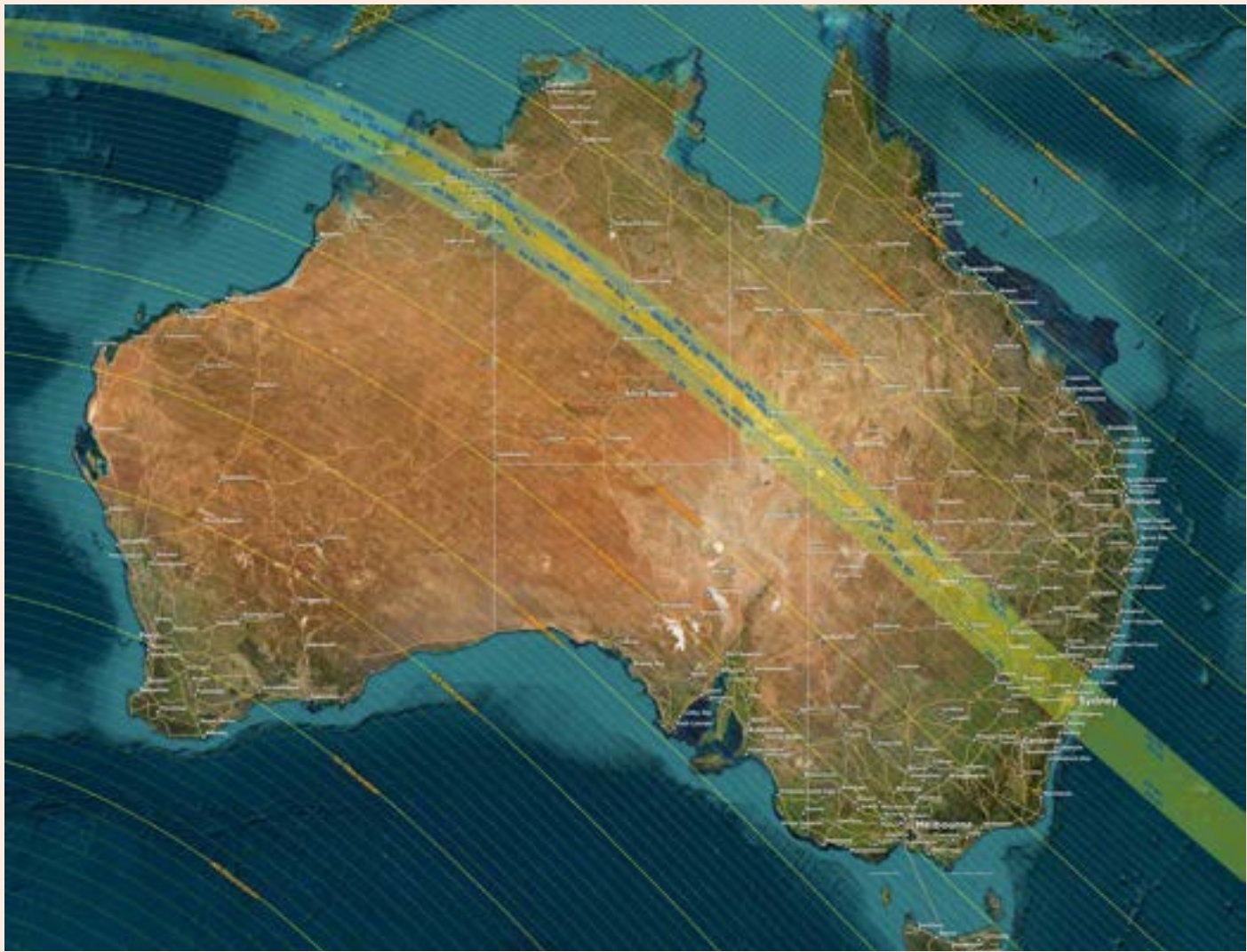
The changes were announced in early 2026 and will be rolled out nationally from January.

What does it cover?

The subsidy applies to approved childcare services, including long day care and family day care.

How do families apply?

- Families should:
- Check their details with Services Australia
 - Speak directly with their local childcare provider about available places and enrolment



The path across Australia of the solar eclipse on 22 July 2028 . Credit: Michael Zeiler /GreatAmericanEclipse.com



5 Minutes & 10 Seconds

Totality duration in the Kimberley,
depending on your location.



2023 Ningaloo Solar Eclipse. Credit: Tourism WA

Under the path of totality: Halls Creek’s front-row seat to the 2028 eclipse

A total solar eclipse in July 2028 is expected to give the Shire of Halls Creek one of the clearest and longest views in Australia, placing the East Kimberley in a strong position for national as well as global attention.

Total solar eclipses visible from the Australian mainland are uncommon, with only a small number of regions falling directly under the path of totality each century.

Forecast modelling shows the 2028 eclipse (less than 1000 days away) crossing the Australian continent from the north-west before sweeping through the Northern Territory, inland Queensland and central New South Wales. Within Western Australia, the East Kimberley will sit inside the narrow band where the sun will be fully obscured. Halls Creek is positioned near the centre of that track, which is expected to deliver several minutes of total darkness.

The timing of the eclipse is significant for northern Australia. July falls in the dry season when skies are historically clear, humidity is low and cloud cover

is minimal. With an unobstructed horizon and very limited light pollution in Halls Creek and our remotes, our district offers ideal viewing conditions.

Australian astronomers have noted that events of this scale reliably draw international interest. Eclipse watchers frequently travel, in their thousands, to remote locations for optimal visibility, often booking accommodation and transport years in advance. Northern Australia is expected to receive strong tourist demand, including from specialist tour groups that follow eclipse paths around the world.

Coastal centres such as Broome and Exmouth are expected to attract large crowds, but inland regions like Halls Creek offer longer totality and reduced weather risk. The open landscape and high probability of clear skies make the Shire one of the most favourable inland viewing points in the country - especially for those who don’t want to be jostling with crowds.

If projected conditions hold, astronomers say the 2028 eclipse will be one of the most accessible large-scale astronomical events to pass over Australia in decades.

Wanting to prepare for this unique opportunity, the Shire of Halls Creek held the first in a series of tourism workshops in December 2025 to begin planning for the 2028 solar eclipse. The session brought together local stakeholders, tourism operators and Indigenous tourism bodies to discuss opportunities and early preparations. The workshop was well attended, with many locals sharing innovative and creative ideas for tourism ventures, experiences and services they hope to develop ahead of the eclipse.

For anyone interested in joining in eclipse preparations, please contact the Shire to take part in the next Tourism Workshop.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Aboriginal leadership a priority in big changes coming for Aboriginal Environmental Health services



Lawi Too, the Shire's Head of Aboriginal Environmental Health. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Aboriginal Environmental Health services across Western Australia are set for a major shake up, with a new service model expected to reshape how support is delivered in remote communities from 2027.

The WA Department of Health is finalising a redesigned Aboriginal

Environmental Health program following several years of review and co-design with Aboriginal organisations. The changes aim to move services away from short-term, task-based work and towards long-term, practical improvements that support healthier homes and safer living environments.

Aboriginal leadership will be key to the new programme, as will instituting evidence-based services with a long-term, sustainable focus.

For the Kimberley, where environmental health challenges are often intensified by remoteness, climate extremes and ageing housing infrastructure, the changes are expected to have a direct impact on day-to-day living conditions in communities.

The updated model focuses on outcomes that matter on the ground, including functional housing, climate resilience, emergency response, animal and pest management, and stronger coordination between services.

Lawi Too, Head of Aboriginal Environmental Health at the Shire of Halls Creek, said the shift was an important step for communities.

“This is about getting back to the basics that keep families healthy, like safe homes and working infrastructure, and making sure services are shaped by community needs,” Mr Too said.

Throughout 2026, the program will transition toward new service arrangements, with existing providers reviewed to ensure they align with the new approach. Community workshops and consultations are planned as part of the process.

New long-term contracts are expected to begin on 1 January 2027, marking a significant change in how Aboriginal Environmental Health services are delivered around the state.

The Shire will soon be calling for applications for people passionate about Aboriginal Environmental Health to join its team.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



The Shire town crew kicking off for 2026. They have also been assisting with works and preparation on the Oval. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek



In conversation with KRACLN

In the Shire of Halls Creek, Warmun, Ringer Soak, Balgo, Mulan, Billiluna & Yiyili are all members of KRACLN. But what is it, and what does it do? The Kimberley Remote Aboriginal Community Leaders' Network (KRACLN) is a newly established, community-designed network representing the 19 largest remote Aboriginal communities across the Kimberley region of Western Australia.



The Kimberley covers more than 423,000 square kilometres, yet it is home to a relatively small population of around 40,000 people. There are 19 Remote Aboriginal Communities with a population of more than 100 that are classified as Tier 1 Communities who are members of the KRACLN network. Leaders in these communities carry significant responsibility, they are the link between their people and government, service providers, funding bodies, and support organisations, while also managing the realities of isolation, limited resources, and restricted access to essential services.

By 2018, Tier-1 community leaders recognised they needed stronger support. Many were working in isolation, facing shared challenges without a coordinated way to advocate or learn from one another together, they identified the need for a formal network

that could bring leaders together, strengthen relationships, and amplify their collective voice. Importantly, the leaders themselves asked for help—seeking an organisation they could trust to walk alongside them.

In early 2022, those leaders elected Nirrumbuk Environmental Health and Services (NEHS) to assist and support them in bringing this vision to life. NEHS was a natural choice: an Aboriginal organisation with more than 30 years of proven success working across the Kimberley, and a strong track record of supporting remote communities through respectful, long-term partnerships. NEHS agreed to take on the coordination role, and the Kimberley Remote Aboriginal Community Leaders' Network (KRACLN) was formally established.

Regular Members' meetings, on-Country visits, and ongoing communication ensure KRACLN stays connected to what is happening in each community. The administration team supports this work by researching opportunities, building partnerships, and helping turn ideas into action. While KRACLN responds directly to Member priorities, it is also proactive in identifying opportunities that may benefit the Network as a whole.

This approach is already delivering positive outcomes. Five communities now have access to high-speed Starlink connectivity where there was previously

very limited access to Information, Communication Technology (ICT).

Partnerships such as Threads Together have supported school sports programs and helped families access essential clothing during times of need. These achievements reflect KRACLN's commitment to practical, people-centred outcomes and long-term relationships.

Another strong priority raised by Members is the need for regular forums. With funding support, KRACLN is preparing for its next Forum in April 2026 in Broome. Careful planning is underway to ensure all Members can attend, respecting cultural and seasonal commitments while managing complex regional logistics. These Forums give leaders the space to share experiences, shape agendas, and speak collectively to decision-makers.

Looking ahead, KRACLN remains committed to strengthening remote Aboriginal communities by acting as a trusted link between leaders and the systems that serve them. With the guidance of its members and the support of NEHS, the Network continues to grow toward the vision first shared by community leaders – stronger voices, stronger connections, and stronger Kimberley communities.

**WORDS BY JAMIE TRELOAR,
KRACLN PROJECT MANAGER**

Important notice: New timetable, means more class time for students

Families, parents, carers and guardians are advised of the following changes for 2026:

- School finish time **Monday–Thursday: 2:35pm.**
 - Early finish will now be on **Friday at 12:50pm** (not Wednesday).
- Form / Morning Routine: **8:10–8:20am.**
 - Recess: **10:30–10:50am (20-minute break).**

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
	SCHOOL STARTS	8:10	8:10	8:10	8:10
	RECESS 10:30 - 10:50				
	For pick up assistance, please call HCEI: 0482 809 983				
	LUNCH 1:00 - 1:30				EARLY CLOSE
	SCHOOL FINISHES	2:35	2:35	2:35	12:50

Kitchen upgrade boosts Mulan community hub

Upgraded kitchen facilities at the Mulan community office have made a big impact, locals say, helping the small East Kimberley community host programs, meetings and gatherings in a more welcoming and practical space.

The works, funded by Horizon Power, have improved the functionality of the office, making it better suited to supporting the expanding range of programs now being delivered in Mulan. These programmes include the Youth Program, RJED job creation initiatives, Paruku Cultural Maps, Housing for Health activities and Recreation Officer training.

In a media release Mulan Aboriginal Corporation said the upgraded facilities have strengthened the role of the office as a central hub for the remote Aboriginal community, located east of Halls Creek and home to around 100 residents.

For the first time, Mulan was able to host a whole-of-community NAIDOC

Week celebration on site. The new facilities have also supported important community meetings, including a full gathering with visiting officers from the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Department of Communities Child Protection and Family Support, allowing for more productive discussions and deeper cultural exchange.

“These upgrades are helping us present a strong, professional image while keeping culture at the heart of how we operate,” a spokesperson for Mulan Aboriginal Corporation, Ms. Shirley Brown said.

“Sharing food, hosting visitors, and coming together as a community are central to who we desert mob are. Horizon Power has helped us strengthen that.”

Ms Brown also acknowledged the role of the energy provider in supporting the

community’s long-term goals.

“Mulan Aboriginal Corporation would like to give a very big shout-out thank you to Horizon Power,” she said. “This investment strengthens community life today and it supports our vision for the future as well.”

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Women in Mulan prepare a feed for the community. Supplied: Mulan Aboriginal Corporation



Study lead: Professor Leonard Harrison. Credit: MediaNet



Infant and toddler swimming lessons at the pool. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Remote Indigenous infants have a superpower - a rich and diverse gut

A new study has found babies in remote First Nations communities are born with a natural health advantage, starting life with healthier gut bacteria than many other Australian children.

The research, led by the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in partnership with the Peter Doherty Institute and Elders in the Northern Territory, compared the gut health of Indigenous and non-Indigenous infants.

Researchers found Indigenous babies in remote areas had a richer and more diverse mix of healthy gut bacteria. This “gut microbiome” plays a key role in digestion, immune strength and long-term health.

Study lead Professor Leonard Harrison said the findings challenge assumptions

about early health in Indigenous communities.

“Indigenous infants start life as some of the healthiest Australians, but statistics show this drastically changes over time,” Professor Harrison said.

Chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at much higher rates than other Australians and are a leading cause of early death.

Researchers say these diseases are linked to westernisation, particularly processed diets high in sugar, fats and additives. In non-Indigenous communities, these diets are known to reduce the diversity of healthy gut bacteria.

Professor Harrison said the study found

Indigenous babies were not born with gut bacteria linked to chronic disease.

“The richer and more diverse a person’s gut microbiome is, the less chance they have of developing chronic diseases,” he said.

“Our team wants to understand how we can preserve the remarkable gut microbiome First Nations Australians are born with and protect them against chronic disease later in life.”

Professor Harrison said protecting this early health advantage could play an important role in closing the health gap.

“Preserving this natural health advantage would be a major step in improving long-term health outcomes,” he said.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

UN slams lack of access to juvenile prisons in NT and WA as “major red flag”

Serious concerns persist over the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, children, and migrants, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has said, after being denied access to multiple facilities in both WA and NT.

“The gross overrepresentation of First Nations peoples in the prison population, the shocking detention of children as young as 10, and the punitive approach to migrants are human rights crises that continue to plague Australia,” the Working Group said in a statement concluding an official visit to Australia.

The experts urged Australian authorities to engage in comprehensive reforms to reduce the imprisonment of First Nations peoples, raise the minimum age of detention to at least 14 years, and end the mandatory detention of persons with irregular visa status.

“First Nations people make up just 3.8% of Australia’s population, yet they account for 35% of those imprisoned in the country.”

The Working Group said Indigenous women are imprisoned at over 20 times the rate of non-Indigenous women, and over 30 indigenous persons have died in custody this year. During their visit, the experts heard reports that over-policing and racial profiling persist despite being prohibited.

“Addressing this crisis requires authorities to work in genuine partnership with First Nations communities to co-design solutions, from early intervention, including prior to contact with the criminal justice system, through to reintegration after detention—rather than relying on punitive approaches,” they said.

They noted the rising remand population as the country’s most pressing concern.

“42% of prisoners are unsentenced, and many are kept in detention due to disadvantage from discriminatory practices, homelessness and social

conditions rather than risk to the community,” the experts said.

The Working Group noted that the minimum age of criminal responsibility was 10 years old in several jurisdictions in the country.

“Keeping children as young as 10 in adult prisons is inhumane,” the experts said.

They called for a complete ban on the use of spit hoods, restraint chairs, and solitary confinement against children – practices prohibited under international law.

The experts regret that they were denied access to detention facilities in the Northern Territory and to youth detention facilities in Western Australia. This undermined the Working Group’s important role and prevented the wider public in Australia from hearing concerns from these regions.

A final report on the visit will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2026.

WORDS COURTESY OF THE UN WORKING GROUP ON ARBITRARY DETENTION



Banksia Hill is Western Australia's only detention centre for juveniles. Credit: ABC News: Manny Tesconi

AI tools raise red flags for Indigenous education

Indigenous history and knowledge must not be distorted as artificial intelligence reshapes classrooms, new research warns.

A study from La Trobe University has raised concerns about the growing use of generative artificial intelligence in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, warning the technology risks stripping cultural knowledge of context, authority and connection to Country.

The research comes as artificial intelligence — computer systems that can generate written answers, images and summaries based on large amounts of data — has taken Australia and the world by storm in recent years. Tools such as ChatGPT are now widely used in schools, workplaces and everyday life.

But researchers say speed and convenience should not come at the expense of cultural integrity, particularly when teaching First Nations histories and cultures.

The study was led by Dr Scott Alterator, Associate Professor of Indigenous Education at La Trobe University, and published in the British Journal of Sociology of Education.

Dr Alterator said generative AI had “great potential to support classroom teaching, but it also runs the risk of perpetuating cultural ignorance and tokenism”.

He said while the Australian curriculum requires Indigenous perspectives to be included across subjects, many teachers struggle with confidence and cultural understanding in this area.

“Australian education faces a critical challenge in incorporating Indigenous perspectives and contexts into classroom instruction, and emerging technologies like GenAI add to these complexities,”

Dr Alterator said.

The study found that AI tools often separate Indigenous knowledge from the people and communities who hold it, removing essential cultural context, and in many cases, meaning.

“This separation undermines the cultural and custodial aspects of accessing and using Indigenous knowledge, which are fundamental to its integrity and proper transmission,” the study states.

Dr Alterator said the research was not about totally rejecting new technology, but about using it responsibly and respectfully.

“It is crucial that these tools enhance, rather than undermine, the sharing of Indigenous knowledge in classrooms,” he said.

Researchers say Indigenous voices, lived experience and community authority must remain central to teaching First Nations history, with AI used only as a support tool — not a substitute.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Recent graduates of Halls Creek District High School. Supplied: Halls Creek District High School



A recreation yard at Casuarina Prison and cell. Credit: Custodial Services WA



Roebourne Prison. Credit: Custodial Services WA

Indigenous deaths in custody reach 45-year high as leaders warn of a national crisis

Indigenous deaths in custody have reached their highest level in 45 years of national monitoring, with 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people dying in custody across Australia in 2024–25, according to new data from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC).

The AIC’s annual Deaths in Custody in Australia report recorded 113 deaths in custody nationwide last financial year. Indigenous people accounted for 33 of those deaths, the largest annual figure since records began in 1979.

Western Australia contributed several cases to the national total, with six Indigenous deaths in prison custody and one in police custody during the reporting period. Across the nation 90 deaths occurred in prisons, 22 in police custody or custody-related operations, and one in youth detention.

New South Wales recorded the highest

overall number of deaths in custody, prompting their State Coroner Teresa O’Sullivan to issue a rare public statement. She described the figures as a “profoundly distressing milestone.”

“These are not mere statistics. Each of these deaths represents a person whose life mattered and whose loss is felt deeply by families, loved ones and communities across the state,” she said. “They are individuals whose deaths demand independent and careful scrutiny, respect and accountability.”

Since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, at least 617 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have died in custody.

Independent Victorian Senator Lidia Thorpe described the figures as a “national disgrace,” calling them a shocking indictment “in a country that claims to be Closing the Gap”.

“In these horrific figures, I see violent colonialism perpetrated by hollow politicians desperate for votes and power,” the Gunnai, Gunditjmara and Djab Wurrung woman said. “How many more of our people do we need to bury before governments stop sacrificing our lives for political gain?”

The AIC report notes that long-term patterns of over-representation remain unchanged. Indigenous Australians continue to die in custody at disproportionately high rates and remain over-represented in prisons, particularly in states such as WA.

The full report is available on the Australian Institute of Criminology website.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

“Nan teaches me things like language and painting.”



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Featured artist



Halls Creek artist Eric Leria with one of his recent landscape paintings. Credit: Yarliyil Arts Centre



Eric Leria: from droving tracks to canvas

Eric Leria is a Gooniyandi and Walmajarri man with strong ties to country and culture in the Kimberley. He grew up on Louisa Downs Station, between Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, where as a young man he was a skilled drover and horseman. Louisa Downs is one of the long-established cattle stations of the East Kimberley, with a history closely tied to Aboriginal labour, pastoral life and the region's development. He also has a long history in the rodeo scene, using his station skills to compete in annual rodeos.

Today, Eric lives in Halls Creek at Mardiwah Loop. Here, he has used his

considerable creativity and practical skills to develop his home and property using recycled materials and hand-crafted techniques.

Eric loves to paint the country where he spent much of his life as a drover — Louisa Downs Station. His works are grounded in lived experience, shaped by long days on horseback, close observation of the land, and a deep familiarity with seasonal change. His paintings often carry a sense of movement and memory, reflecting both the physical demands of station life and the enduring presence of culture and story on country.

Alongside painting, Eric creates traditional boomerangs, fighting sticks, and didgeridoos, continuing practices passed down through generations. His iconic style reflects an intimate understanding of land, lore and Dreamtime, blending cultural knowledge with the working life he has lived.

WORDS AND IMAGES COURTESY OF YARLIYIL ARTS CENTRE



Follow Yarliyil Arts Centre on Facebook & Instagram @yarliyilarts

Broome publisher Magabala Books set to publish first-ever Aboriginal romance anthology



Broome-based publisher Magabala Books is developing what is believed to be Australia’s first anthology of romance stories written by First Nations authors, creating new space for Indigenous voices within one of the world’s most popular literary genres.

The anthology, slated to be published in 2027, brings together a collection of love stories that centre First Nations perspectives on relationships, identity and everyday life. The project aims to broaden the scope of Indigenous storytelling beyond history and trauma, while remaining grounded in culture and lived experience.

Romance fiction dominates global book sales, yet First Nations voices have been largely absent from mainstream romantic publishing, Aboriginal authors say. Editors involved in the Magabala project say the anthology will reflect the diversity of First Nations communities, with stories set across different places, generations and experiences.

‘Romance is the most popular fiction genre in the world, and though it has been often overlooked, it remains the genre of optimism and hope, community and connection,’ said

Magabala Publisher Rachel Bin Salleh in a statement.

“With this anthology, we hope to explore the unique intersection of genre romance and love through First Nations storytelling; we hope to find new voices and rediscover familiar favourites; and we hope to showcase the creativity and artistry of the genre and its writers. In short, we hope to fall in love.’

Wiradjuri author Anita Heiss said the anthology responds to a clear gap in Australian literature. Heiss herself has written many romance stories, often under the pen name “Koori Bradshaw”, referencing Sex and the City’s iconic Carrie Bradshaw.

“Many of our authors have been busy rewriting the history books,” Heiss said. “That is a real priority and a necessity in terms of truth-telling in Australia.” Heiss told the ABC.

She said romance offered writers the opportunity to explore other aspects of storytelling, including joy, connection and personal relationships, which are equally important parts of lived experience.

Magabala editors have said there has

never been a First Nations romance anthology published in Australia and they are keen to hear from writers who might not usually consider working in the genre.

Dulgubarra-Yidinji writer Skye Cusack, who has two novels scheduled for release in 2027 (one with Magabala & one with Penguin Random House), said romance writing creates space to explore identity alongside relationships.

“For a long time in the industry that’s been the only expectation and the only request of First Nation writers — to talk about pain,” Cusack told the ABC.

"Blackfellas are hilarious and they're romantic and they are silly and we can be all sorts of things, just like any other human being on the planet."

Magabala Books, which has been publishing First Nations stories from its base in Broome for more than three decades, is known for supporting Indigenous voices across fiction, non-fiction and children’s literature.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Author Anita Heiss. Supplied: Anita Heiss



Romance Author Skye Cusack. Supplied: Skye Cusack Instagram.



Magabala Publisher Rachel Bin Salleh. Supplied: Rachel Bin Salleh



Moses Obah Japanungka with painted skateboard "deck". Moses is the son of notable senior artist, Susan Peters Wangamirr Nampitjin. His work often combines traditional aboriginal totems and symbols with elements of contemporary graffiti art. Credit: Yarliyl Arts Centre

Beyond the canvas: locals custom paint skateboards in Halls Creek

Yarliyl artists are noted by many as being very experimental, original and always looking for new ways to express culture and creativity.

Some art centres are famous for a regional style and for faithfully maintaining stylistic traditions, this however is not the case at Yarliyl.

Our artists are diverse, curious and innovative in finding new ways to explore traditional knowledge and stories. The same good stories told for thousands of years, but also contemporary Indigenous concerns and new ways to artistically express culture and country.

Not so long ago, our studio assistant,

Nathan Stretch mentioned that we should try something fun for the young men – something that would be a change from the usual paintings on canvas.

Nathan is family for a number of our key artists and supports production through studio and artist support work – it’s a key job at the art centre.

We talked about it among some of the artists and we liked the idea of making something that would capture the imagination of people who perhaps may not otherwise invest in artwork.

This has certainly been the outcome – on many occasions tourists or visitors have purchased a ‘deck’ for a son or

grandson who loves skate culture but may not otherwise want to own artwork.

It also bridges the gap in a kind of nervousness that some people have making decisions about art purchases – the decks seem a little more whimsical, less serious, but still original one-of-a-kind artwork. They join the dots between the artworld and everyday popular culture.

Quite a few of our artists have worked on these – Eric Leria, Moses Obah, Shirley Yoomarie, Samantha Brown, Susan Peters and Matthew Leahy.

WORDS AND IMAGES COURTESY OF YARLIYIL ARTS CENTRE



International Womens Day 2026

#GiveToGain | Friday, 6 March 2026 | 10am – 2pm | Civic Hall, Halls Creek

Join the Halls Creek community to celebrate International Women’s Day 2026, recognising the strength, leadership and contributions of women across our region.

The event will include guest speakers, community stalls, activities and opportunities to connect.

Service providers, volunteers, and community members interested in contributing to planning please email watnanews@hcshire.wa.gov.au



Sisters artists Frances and Geraldine from Balgo. Credit: Warlayirti Artists, Balgo

Balgo sisters first artistic collaboration

Sisters Frances and Geraldine in Balgo have collaborated on their first collaborative artwork together, choosing to paint their parent’s Country.

Describing the work, Geraldine said: “We have painted bush mangarri (foods), including bush raisins and desert flowers during the cold weather in Nynmi.”

In the early 1990s, Geraldine lived out in Nynmi, where their parents taught her and Frances how they hunted and lived off Country back in the days before kartiya (white fella) came along.

WORDS BY WARLAYIRTI ARTISTS - BALGO

Tips for taking better photos on your phone

1. Clean your lens

Phone lenses collect dust and fingerprints, which soften images. A quick wipe can instantly improve sharpness and contrast.

2. Use natural light whenever possible

Professional photographers rely on light more than gear. Shoot near windows or outside at dusk and dawn, and avoid using the phone flash.

3. Tap to focus and adjust exposure

Tap the main subject on your screen before shooting. Most phones let you adjust brightness, helping avoid shadowy faces or blown-out skies.

4. Get closer instead of zooming

Digital zoom reduces quality. Move closer to your subject and crop later to keep more detail.

5. Keep it steady

Camera shake causes blurry photos. Hold your phone with both hands, brace against something solid, or pause your breath as you shoot.

Got a great photo? Send your images to watnanews@hcshire.wa.gov.au and you might see your photo featured in an upcoming edition.



An aerial image of Warmun after the rains over the New Year, 2026. Supplied: Warmun Community Inc

Indigenous art recognised as "historical evidence" in frontier massacre research

“Art holds what paper didn’t. It carries what was passed on when there was nowhere else to put it.”

That is how Kalkatungu artist Ricky Emmerton describes the role of Indigenous art in preserving histories that were ignored or erased from Australia’s official records.

New academic research co-authored by Emmerton and academics from James Cook University argues that Indigenous visual art should be recognised as legitimate historical evidence, particularly in documenting frontier massacres.

The study focuses on Battle Mountain Memorial, a major work by Emmerton depicting the 1884 killings on Kalkatungu Country in north-west Queensland. For decades, colonial accounts described the event as a minor skirmish, while Kalkatungu oral histories maintained it was a massacre. The researchers argue

Emmerton’s work asserts historical truth where colonial written archives failed or deliberately obscured events.

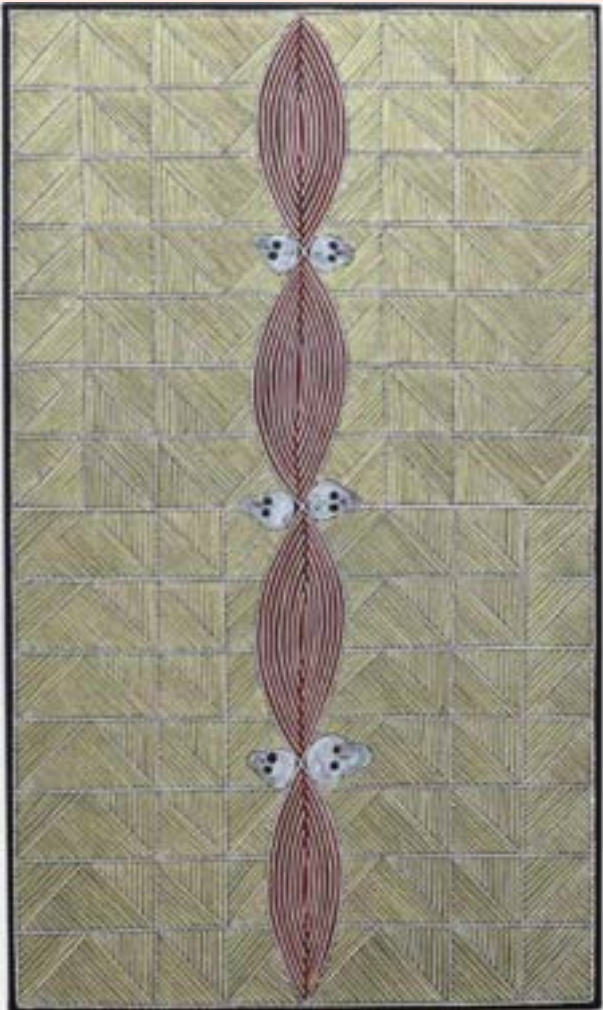
According to the study, Indigenous artworks do more than commemorate past violence. They function as records of knowledge passed down through families and communities, carrying memory, place and testimony across generations.

"The past doesn't sit still," Emmerton said. "It moves with us."

The study challenges traditional historical approaches that trust colonial documents over Indigenous knowledge systems.

Rather than filling gaps in the record, the study suggests Indigenous art actively reshapes historical understanding by questioning who has been allowed to define evidence and authority.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Black Mountain Memorial, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 112 x66cm by Emmerton



Aaron Taylor, part of the First Nations team at Murdoch University. Credit: Supplied, Murdoch Uni

Family legacy drives Noongar language revival

A family with deep roots in Noongar culture is helping bring the Noongar language back into everyday use at Murdoch University in Perth.

Noongar language is considered at risk, with relatively few trained teachers across its 14 language groups. In response, Murdoch University’s Boordawan Movement has launched Noongar language lessons on campus for First Nations staff and students.

Aaron Taylor, part of the First Nations training team, said the work continues a family legacy started by his mother, Noongar Elder Marie Taylor, who wrote the first Aboriginal language course ever taught at an Australian university, also at Murdoch.

“Language is identity, when we speak Noongar, we’re not just using words — we’re connecting to our ancestors, to Country and to each other.”
Aaron Taylor said.

He and his cousin Dylan Collard are teaching the classes, aiming to strengthen cultural pride, preserve local knowledge about land, kinship and seasons, and ensure Noongar continues to be spoken into the future.

WORDS COURTESY OF MURDOCH UNIVERSITY NEWS



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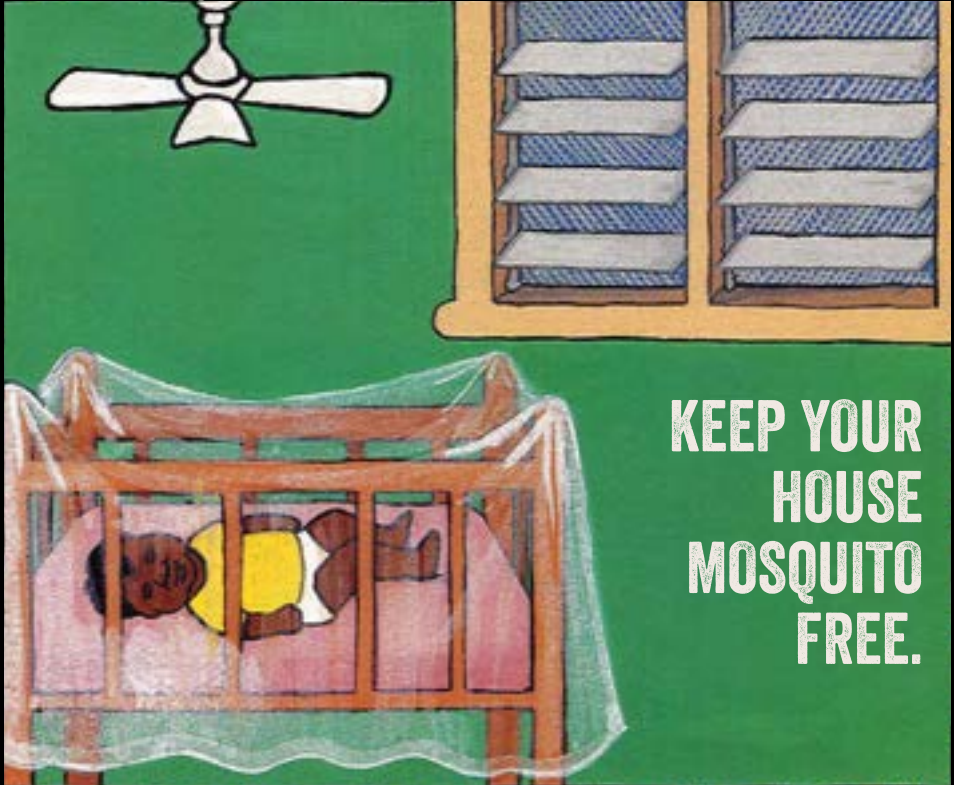
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Government of Western Australia
Department of Health

This poster is supported by the WA Department of Health.
Fight the Bite is an initiative of the Government of South Australia.



Elite athletes visit Warmun School. Credit: Garnduwa

Share a Yarn x Garnduwa brings elite athletes to the Kimberley, inspiring local kids

In September 2025, Garnduwa partnered with the Australian Institute of Sport's (AIS) Share a Yarn program to deliver a week-long engagement across the East Kimberley, bringing elite Aboriginal athletes to some of the region's most remote communities.

Centred around the East Kimberley Interschool Athletics Carnival in Kununurra, the visit included school and community sessions in Frog Hollow, Doon Doon and Warmun, along with a cultural immersion day at Mirima National Park. Each visit focused on connection, learning and empowerment through sport.

More than 100 students took part in athletics activities, school visits and yarns with the athletes. For many young people, it was the first time meeting elite sportspeople who shared their

cultural background and could speak honestly about hard work, resilience and pride in identity. The message was simple and powerful: where you come from does not limit where you can go.

Garnduwa worked closely with the AIS to overcome the logistical challenges of delivering programs in remote areas, including long travel distances and complex scheduling. Strong planning, trust and local leadership ensured the program was delivered respectfully and safely, with community voices guiding every engagement.

The cultural immersion day at Mirima National Park provided an important opportunity for visiting athletes to connect with Country, learn about local culture and language, and deepen their understanding of the Kimberley. For the athletes, the experience strengthened

their own cultural connection and sense of responsibility as role models.

The collaboration demonstrated the power of national and regional organisations working together to create equitable opportunities for young people. It also highlighted athletics as an accessible pathway that can build confidence, leadership and aspiration.

For Garnduwa, the partnership reinforced a clear message: Kimberley kids deserve the same opportunities as those in metropolitan areas. The lessons from this visit will help shape future programs and pathways, ensuring Kimberley youth can see what is possible and have the support to pursue it.

WORDS COURTESY OF GARNDUWA



Sisters Frances and Geraldine Balgo. Credit: Warlayirti Artists—Balgo



Jasmin Stewart joins the Cats for the 2026 AFLW Season. Credit: Cats Media

Geelong Cats secure Jasmin Stewart

Geelong has strengthened its AFLW list, securing experienced forward Jasmin Stewart as a delisted free agent during a busy finish to the trade period.

Stewart is the third new addition for the Cats, following a trade with St Kilda for defender Nicola Stevens and the signing of Alissa Brook as a free agent. The 26-year-old brings 42 games of AFLW experience and is known for her strong goal sense, pressure acts and tackling ability.

Originally drafted by Fremantle with pick four in 2018, Stewart played 22 games for the Dockers before

stepping away from elite football in 2022. She returned home to Western Australia and starred with Claremont in the WAFLW, earning best-on-ground honours in a premiership win.

Stewart re-entered the AFLW in 2023 with Port Adelaide, where she played a further 20 games across three seasons. A proud Jaru woman, Stewart now arrives at Geelong with renewed drive and experience, set to add strength and depth to the Cats’ forward line in the upcoming season.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Painted mural celebrates footy legends

A striking new public artwork is taking shape at Midland Gate, with the first stage of the Midland Legends Mural now underway. Located along Great Eastern Highway near the Commonwealth Bank entry in Perth, the mural celebrates local football icons while honouring culture and community pride.

Developed in collaboration with the Fremantle Dockers and supported by the City of Swan through its community cultural grants program, the project recognises Michael “Sonny” Walters — a proud Noongar man, Midland local and AFL star. Sonny’s journey from grassroots football to the national stage represents resilience, leadership and cultural pride.

The artwork is a collaboration between WA artists Brendan Lewis (HOPE Perth Studios), who created the lifelike portrait, and respected Noongar artist Jade Dolman (JD Penangk), who brings cultural storytelling and traditional elements to the piece.

Stage two will be added in early 2026, featuring Nic Naitanui, further reflecting Western Australia’s rich sporting and cultural legacy.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Indigenous players unveil new guernsey numbers for 2026 AFL season

Indigenous players across the AFL have been assigned new guernsey numbers ahead of the 2026 season, marking fresh chapters in their careers.

After wearing number 15 in his first season at Fremantle, Shai Bolton will now pull on the iconic number 10 jumper, previously worn by club legend and close friend Michael Walters. Walters retired at the end of the 2025 season after an outstanding career that included 239 games and 365 goals for the Dockers.

Walters said passing on the famous number was a proud and meaningful moment.

“It’s such a proud moment for me to hand over my old number to someone of Shai’s ilk,” he said.

“He’s a human highlight reel and I can’t wait to watch the number 10 running around for many years to come.”

Fremantle also confirmed numbers for emerging Indigenous talents, with Leon Kickett wearing number 19 and Ryda Luke number 40.

Elsewhere, Callum Ah Chee will retain number 4 at Adelaide, Jack Ison will wear number 30 at Carlton, Jamarra Ugle-Hagan takes number 9 at Gold Coast, and Melbourne recruit Latrell Pickett will wear the historically significant number 33.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Michael Walters has passed his famous number 10 jumper to close friend Shai Bolton. Credit: Fremantle Dockers



Bradley Hill. Credit: Richard Wainwright/AAP

Indigenous stars named in WA's State of Origin squad

Western Australia will field a strong and proud team when State of Origin football returns in February, with several of the game's leading Indigenous players named in the squad.

AFL stars Charlie Cameron, Bradley Hill and Kysaiah Pickett have been selected to play for WA, joining Shai Bolton, who was announced earlier.

The match against Victoria will be WA's first State of Origin appearance since 1998, bringing back a much-loved tradition in Australian football.

All four players have strong ties to Western Australia. Bolton played his junior football in Forrestdale and with South Fremantle, Hill came through Quinns District and West Perth, and Pickett began his football journey in Quairading. Cameron, now a star forward, also has a long connection to WA football through Swan Districts.

Other Indigenous players eligible for selection include Bobby Hill, Tim Kelly, Callum Ah Chee, Lawson Humphries and Liam Ryan, giving WA plenty of depth and talent.

Indigenous footballers have always played a vital role in State of Origin history. Past WA greats include Graham "Polly" Farmer, Peter Matera, Jeff Farmer, Maurice Rioli Sr and brothers Jim and Phil Krakouer, who helped shape the game.

Western Australia will host Victoria at Optus Stadium in Boorloo/Perth on Saturday, February 14. The match is expected to draw strong local support and celebrate the rich history of football in the state.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF