

Halls Creek Hawks celebrating after winning the 2022 Grand Final. Credit: Timbee Photography

Footy's coming home to Halls Creek Oval

After three long years, the Oval is finally complete. The Shire of Halls Creek will throw open the gates on June 19 for a community reopening event, marking a major milestone for one of the town's most important public spaces.

The celebration will kick off at 10am at Halls Creek Oval, with free food, a smoking ceremony and speeches running through until 1pm. There will also be kids' games and kick-arounds, giving young players the chance to be among the first back on the grass.

The Oval's closure left local football without

its home ground, putting pressure on players, clubs and families across Halls Creek and surrounding communities.

Halls Creek has produced more than 10 AFL and AFLW players in the past decade, cementing the town's reputation as one of the Kimberley's great footy factories.

Gold Coast Suns player and Halls Creek local Jy Farrar was among those who spoke publicly about the importance of getting the oval back, telling the ABC there was "no way" he would have made it to the AFL without the oval and the community around it.

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Welcome Senior Sergeant Christina Johnston

COMMUNITY YARNS

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Trachoma declared eliminated in Australia

NATIONAL NEWS

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Featured Artist: Melissa Yoomarie

ART AND CULTURE

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Announcements ahead of the 2026 Sir Doug Nicholls ALF Round

SPORT

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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 and Rescue / DFES Kimberley**
000 – Emergencies
9168 6000 – General enquiries
- Main Roads WA**
138 138 – Road conditions and closures
- Shire of Halls Creek – After-Hours**
9168 6007
- Horizon Power**
13 23 51 – Power outages
- Water Corporation**
13 13 75 – Water and sewer issues

Editor's Note

Some news is forgettable, some entertains you, but precious little stays with you for days.

The World Health Organisation's declaration that trachoma has been eliminated in Australia is one of this country's greatest public health achievements. A disease that stole the sight of Aboriginal children for generations — and lingered in our Shire long after much of Australia forgot it existed — is gone.

Aboriginal health workers, environmental health teams and remote communities made that happen, including our very own Musa Mono, who spent sixteen extraordinary years sharing health information across our Shire.

His farewell story is on page nine, read it alongside the trachoma feature and you'll see what sustained, unglamorous, brilliant work looks like. We already miss you, Musa.

Also this month, ten Gija men from Warmun travelled to Darwin with their ochre and earth paintings carrying stories of Country, memory and identity. Led by Patrick Mung Mung, the first Warmun piece sold within hours. We're proud of you fullas!

Community Grants and 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.



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.



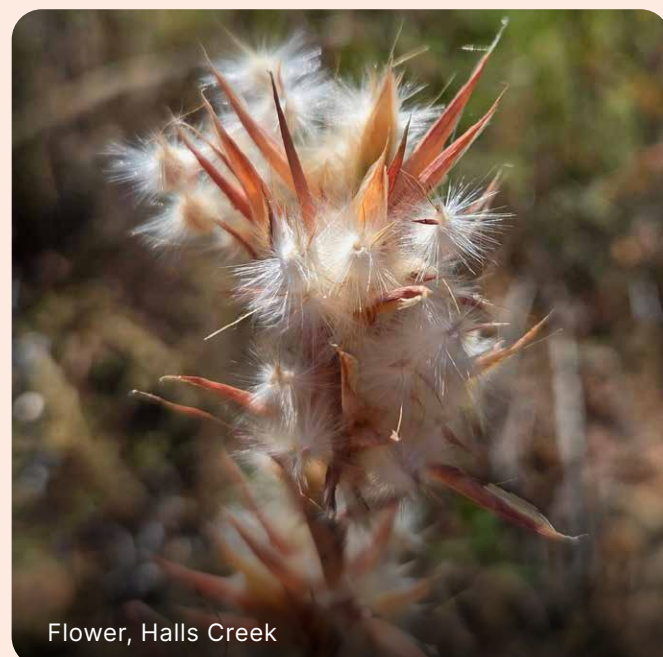
Captured in the Shire of Halls Creek



Blokes in Warmun



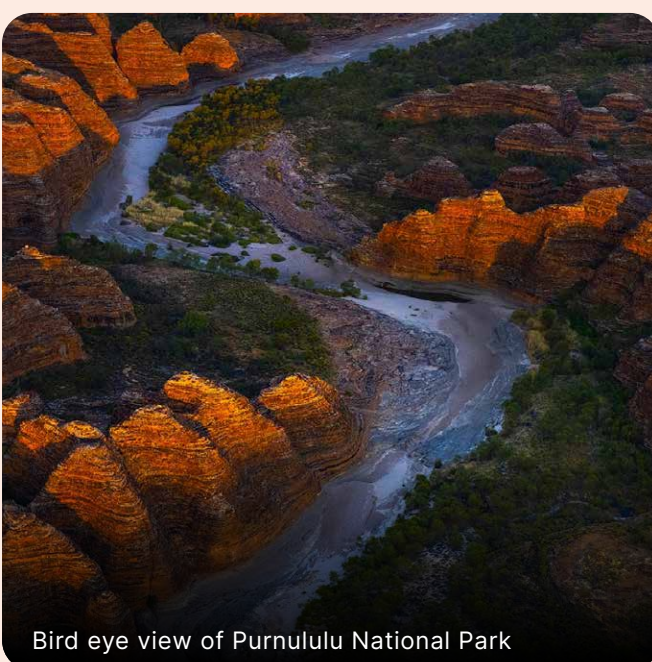
Kids in Halls Creek



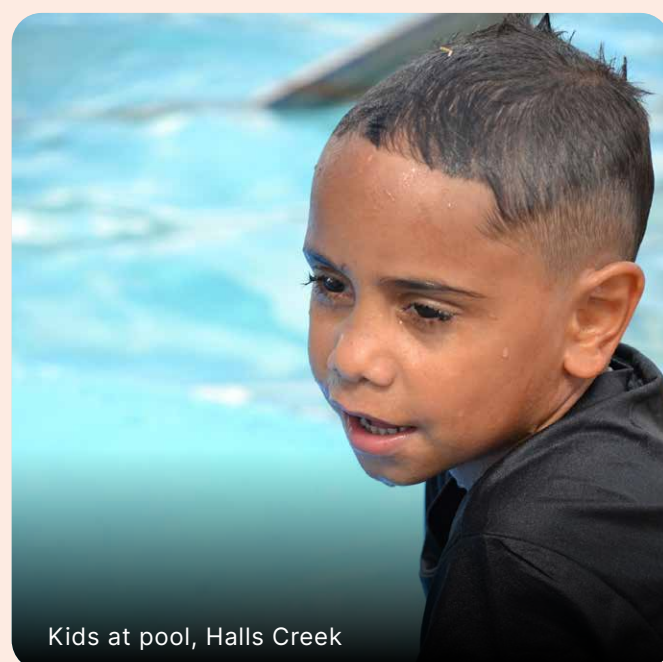
Flower, Halls Creek



Kids at Yiyili Aboriginal Community School



Bird eye view of Purnululu National Park



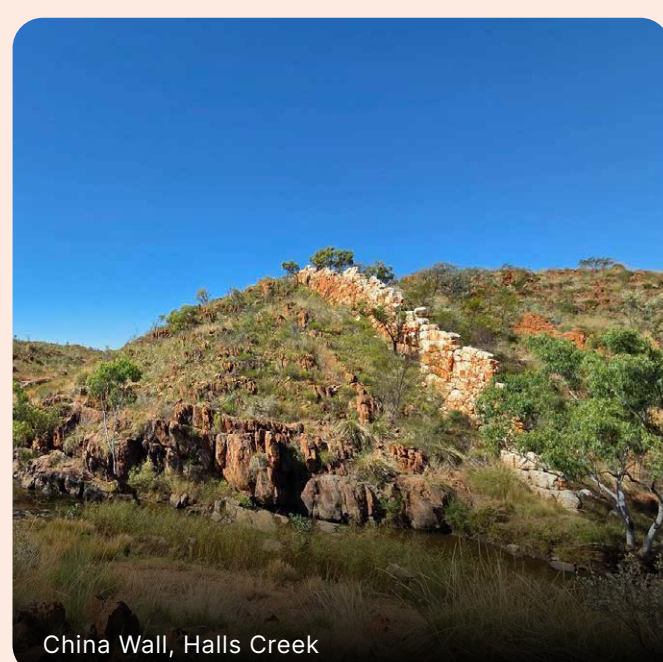
Kids at pool, Halls Creek



Camel Bush Wildflower, Halls Creek



Gija Country



China Wall, Halls Creek

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.

Big job ahead as Census rolls into remote Halls Creek communities - New local recruits join Australia's biggest count

Counting every person in the East Kimberley is no small task, with thousands of kilometres to cover and dozens of remote communities. Ahead of the August 11 Census, the 2026 rollout is already well underway across the Halls Creek region, where staff will be working across the community through July and August to assist people to complete the Census.

In 2021, parts of the Kimberley were undercounted after staff shortages and missed deliveries meant some residents were unaware the Census was even taking place, local media reported at the time.

With funding, housing and essential services tied directly to accurate population data, local leaders warned that missing people from the count could have long-term consequences.

To support a good Census outcome for The Shire of Halls Creek the 2026 rollout has commenced and is travelling far and wide to ensure everyone is counted. For the seven remote communities in the Shire of Halls Creek, the accuracy of the Census will rely heavily on the skills and knowledge of local residents, organisers say.

To support this, teams of local Community Field Officers will be employed by the Census to work with communities to help gather important data.

More than 30,000 workers are being recruited nationwide to deliver the Census, and in districts like Halls Creek, time, preparation and face-to-face engagement remains critical.

Locally, that work will be led by Michelle Mackenzie and Jenny Rivers, the former of whom was recently appointed as Halls Creek Local Engagement Officer.

Based in Halls Creek, Jenny brings strong Kimberley connections and previous Census experience. In 2016 she was the Remote Areas Mobile Team Leader, helping to organise field workers on the ground and determine which areas workers need to go.

"I enjoy working for the Census and getting local people involved from around Halls Creek," Jenny says. "It is good to be part of the Census team and engaging with people."

In the coming weeks Jenny will travel across Bililuna, Warmun and Yiyili to talk with people about the Census.

In recent weeks the Halls Creek-based Census teams have visited Balgo and Mulan, where they met with community people, corporations, schools, clinics and local organisations.

But officials acknowledge that challenges remain. Remote communities rely heavily on local workers to support people through the

forms and build trust around how the data is used. A knock on the door from a friendly, familiar face can make all the difference over a knock from a stranger.

For Jenny, the message to locals is straightforward. "Getting the messaging out about the importance of the data collection so that everybody understands why the Census is important."

Census organisers are keen to emphasise that personal information is protected and not shared with agencies such as police, Centrelink or housing.

Shire of Halls Creek CEO Susan Leonard says getting an accurate count this year is not just a bureaucratic exercise — it has real consequences for what the community receives.

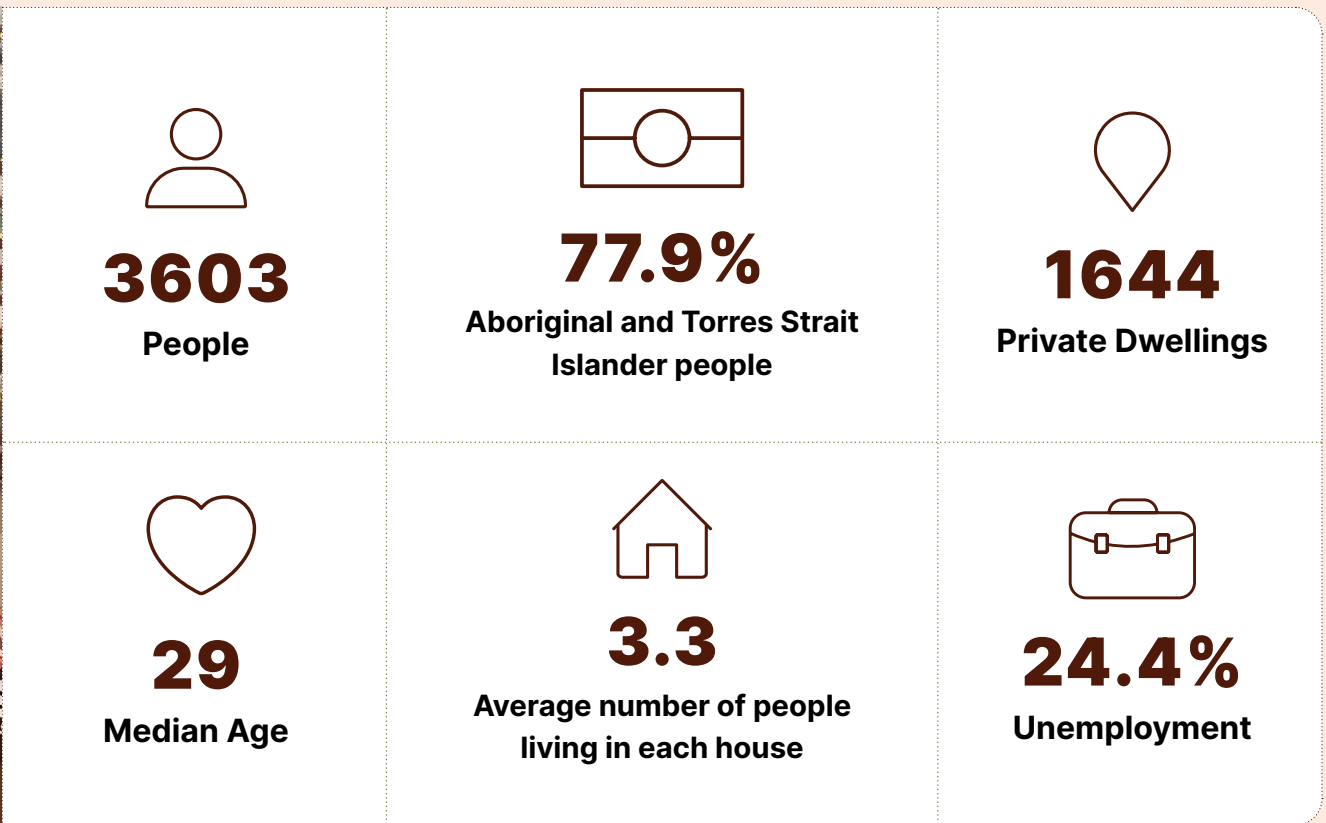
"Every person who gets missed is a person the government doesn't know is here," she says.

"We've seen what happens when that count falls short. Less funding, less services, less of everything. This is our chance to make sure Halls Creek and every community around it gets what it deserves."

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Jenny Rivers, Halls Creek Local Engagement Officer.
Credit: Shire of Halls Creek



Data from the 2021 Census for the Shire of Halls Creek



Senior Sergeant Christina Johnston with local kids. Supplied: Christina Johnston



From farming in Boyup Brook to Officer in Charge of Halls Creek - we welcome Senior Sergeant Christina Johnston

My name is Christina Johnston, and I am honoured to introduce myself as the Officer in Charge of Halls Creek Police Station. It is a privilege to take on this role and to serve such a resilient, welcoming and culturally rich community.

I grew up in the small country town of Boyup Brook as part of a third-generation farming family, alongside my older sister, before attending boarding school in Perth. These experiences shaped strong values around respect, resilience and looking out for others. Both of my parents were actively involved in the community, instilling in me a strong sense of service from an early age. Sport also played an important role in my upbringing, teaching me the value of teamwork, discipline and commitment. These foundations ultimately led me to join the Western Australia Police Force in 1998, seeking a career that was not only challenging, but genuinely meaningful and centred on serving others.

Over the years, I have worked in both metropolitan and regional areas, with postings including Meekatharra, the Dampier Peninsula and Derby. I was promoted to the rank of Senior Sergeant in 2015 and undertook the role as Officer

in Charge of the Perth Watch House the main custodial facility for WA Police. Then the Officer in Charge of Central Regional Operations Group commonly referred to as the Riot Squad before a stint at Police Air Wing as the project manager for the 'Drone in a Box' program. My career has been enhanced with unique experiences including working with the FBI for three months researching child abuse investigations within remote Native American Reservations and being the tactical commander for the Acacia Prison riot.

Outside of work, I enjoy an active outdoor lifestyle and spending time hiking, camping and swimming, which help me stay positive and balanced. I also enjoy travelling, both across Australia and overseas, and I am looking forward to exploring more of the Kimberley and becoming part of life in Halls Creek.

Halls Creek is a place with a strong sense of identity, deep traditional history and an enduring connection to Country. My team and I are committed to working alongside community members, Elders, local organisations and service providers to support safety and wellbeing for everyone who calls this place home.

A priority for our station is positive community engagement, particularly

with young people. We recognise that preventing youth crime cannot be achieved by police alone. We work closely with the Education Department, Youth Justice, local youth services and community groups to provide constructive opportunities, build pathways and address issues early. Initiatives such as Blue Light discos, sporting activities, movie nights and school engagement remain important ways to build positive, respectful relationships.

We also continue to address issues that cause harm within the community, including sly grogging, drug dealing and domestic and family violence. In this space, we take a zero-tolerance approach to violence and focus on intelligence-led policing, partnership and harm reduction. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own home, and support is available.

I am proud to lead a dedicated and hardworking police team who are committed to serving Halls Creek. Our aim is to be approachable, visible and responsive, and to work with the community rather than separate from it. I look forward to meeting many of you over the coming months and to strengthening the partnerships that make Halls Creek a safer, stronger place for all.

WORDS BY CHRISTINA JOHNSON

Footy's coming home to Halls Creek Oval

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Now, after extensive maintenance and turf work, the new grass has taken strongly and the oval is looking healthy, green and resilient. The surface will still need time to bed in properly, contractors have advised, with the Shire stipulating usage should be limited to no more than 15 hours a week while the grass continues to strengthen.

Shire of Halls Creek CEO Sue Leonard said the reopening would be a proud day for the whole community.

"This oval means so much to Halls Creek. It is where children learn to kick a ball, where families gather,

where local teams build pride, and where some extraordinary football journeys have begun," Ms Leonard said.

"We know the closure has been difficult and frustrating; for the community and for us at the Shire. To see the new grass growing so strongly, and to be able to welcome people back onto the oval, is a really important moment."

Ms Leonard said careful management would be needed in the coming months to protect the new surface. "It still needs time to fully establish. We will be managing use carefully so the community can enjoy it now,

while also protecting it for many seasons to come."

Ms Leonard also issued a strong warning about protecting the new surface. "It is extremely important that everyone treats the oval with respect. No cars, scooters or motorbikes on the grass — ever. The work that has gone into restoring this oval has been enormous, and expensive, and it is up to all of us to protect it."

The Halls Creek Oval reopening event will run from 10am to 1pm on June 19, with free food, a smoking ceremony, speeches and kids' games. Entry is free.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Preparing the new Halls Creek oval. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Roads crew working east across the Shire

The Shire of Halls Creek has kicked off its 2026 opening-up works, with crews moving across the road network following the 2025/26 wet season.

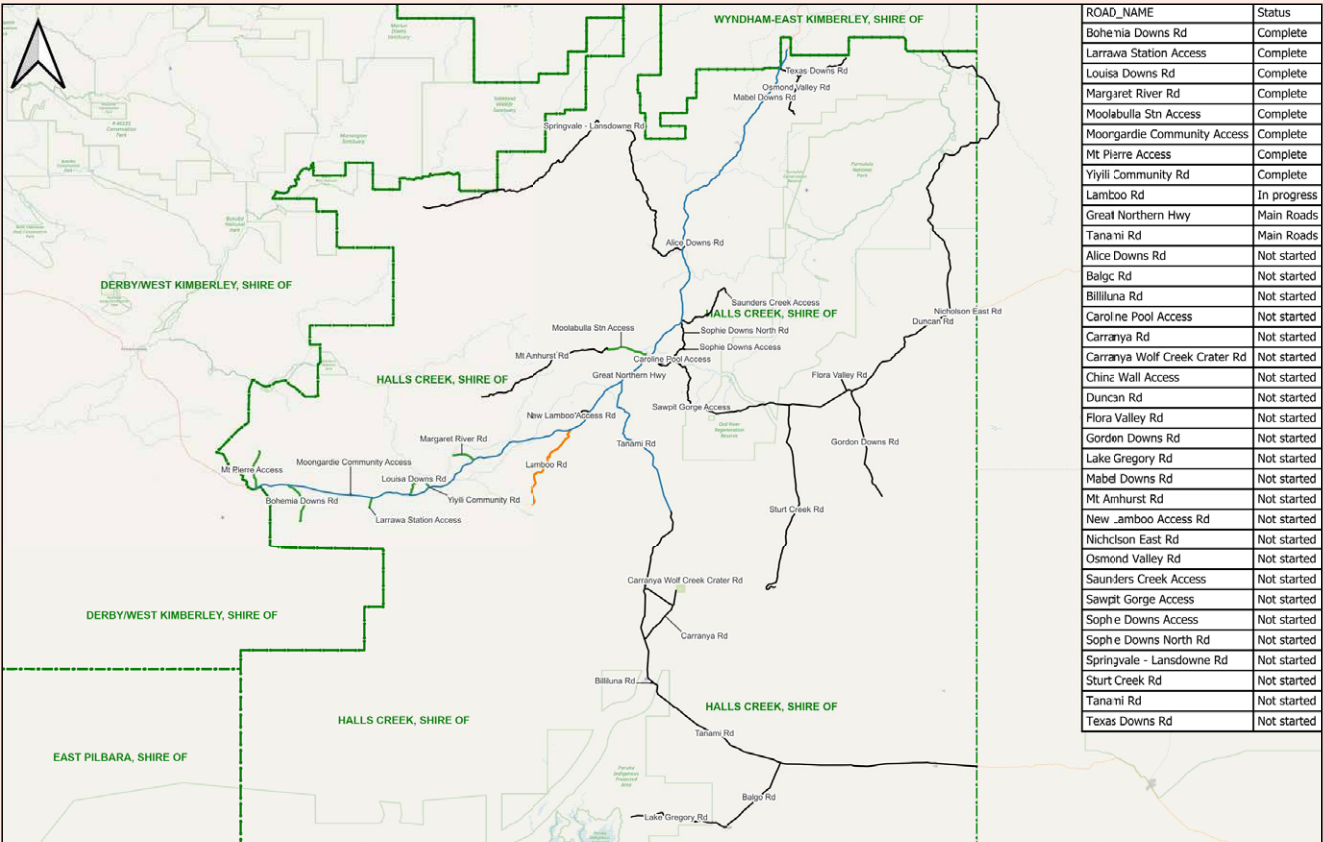
The work focuses on temporary repairs to make roads safe and trafficable ahead of permanent fixes later in the year. The Shire is carrying out the program in partnership with local contractor THEM Earthmoving.

Teams started at the Shire's western boundary and have been working east. Roads completed so far include:

- Mt Pierre Access Road
- Bohemia Downs Road
- Moongardie Community Access Road
- Larrawa Station Road
- Louisa Downs Road
- Yiyili Community Road
- Margaret River Road

Lamboos Road is currently underway, with New Lamboos Road and Mt Amhurst Road scheduled for late May and early June.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Road Maintenance Program update. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek



A passenger arriving at Halls Creek Airport. Credit: AMS

The airstrip that keeps Halls Creek connected

Halls Creek Airport was built in 1948, near the site of today's township, at a time when sealed roads were decades away and the nearest major centre was a journey measured in days. It has been part of the town's story ever since.

In its early years, the airfield operated with three unsealed gravel runways. The main runway wasn't sealed until 1997 — a change that made year-round access far more reliable and allowed regular passenger flights and emergency aircraft to operate regardless of conditions.

The airport's role in medical evacuation has roots that stretch back well before it was built. In 1917, Kimberley stockman Jim Darcy was seriously injured in a riding accident near Ruby Plains Station, south of Halls

Creek. He was brought into town, where there was no doctor. The local postmaster attempted emergency surgery guided by Morse code instructions from a Perth physician more than 2,800 kilometres away. The doctor then rode and chartered his way toward Halls Creek in an extraordinary overland effort. Darcy died before he arrived. The case became one of the founding arguments for what would later become the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

That history is still playing out. Today, Halls Creek Airport is an active base for RFDS responses and air ambulance flights across the East Kimberley. When distance and time are the difference between life and death, the runway matters.

The airport also carries the everyday load

that keeps a remote community functioning. Regular passenger and charter flights connect Halls Creek with Broome, Kununurra and Fitzroy Crossing. Pastoral stations, Aboriginal communities and local services depend on those routes for workers, freight and mail. In the wet season, when roads close and road travel becomes unreliable across the region, aviation is often the only consistent link in or out.

Since 2010, Aerodrome Management Services has partnered with the Shire of Halls Creek to maintain the airport's safe and compliant operation — supporting emergency services, local industry and the surrounding communities the airport has served for more than 75 years.

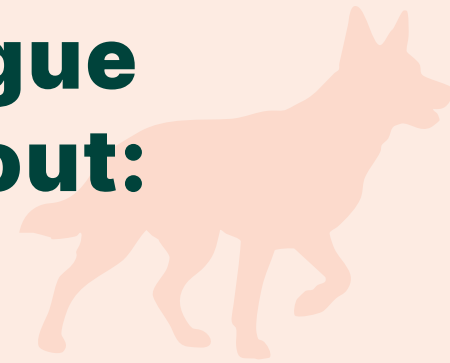
WORDS BY EDGAR DE NOBREGA



Halls Creek airport from the air. Credit: North West Regional Airport



Sixteen years, multiple floods, a plague of dogs and trachoma nearly wiped out: Musa Mono is leaving Halls Creek



The flood, the dogs and a hard decision

Ask Mono which moments stand out across sixteen years and the 2011–12 Warmun flood comes up quickly. Not just for the scale of the disaster, but for an unexpected consequence that required an especially difficult call.

When the entire community was evacuated, many residents were forced to leave their dogs behind. Shire rangers moved in to feed the animals, but over time, the pets began to revert to their “wild” or feral state. Unvaccinated, unfed and unsocialised, they became dangerous.

"What looked like pets turned into wild animals," Musa says. "They weren't friendly, they weren't vaccinated, and then they started attacking people and attacking other dogs. The animals were doing what they had to do to survive without people to help them, but we had to make the hard decision to put these animals down."

Dogs have remained a persistent challenge throughout his tenure. Community attachment to animals is strong — "people are very kind, they always keep the puppies and raise them up," Musa says — but that affection can spiral.

Households with seventeen dogs were not unheard of in the 2000s. In recent years, huge desexing programmes have neutered hundreds of animals across the Shire, and Musa believes the dog problem may finally be on its way to being manageable.

The Shire's Director Health & Regulatory Services is heading south — but not before reflecting on the campaigns, crises and community bonds that kept him here far longer than he ever planned.

Musa Mono arrived in Halls Creek in November 2010 with a clear understanding of what he was getting into. The Shire had a policy: if you wanted the job, you flew in for your interview so you could see the place with your own eyes and make an informed decision. Musa came, looked around, and left convinced he would not be back.

Then the job offer arrived. And he fell in love

with the Shire. "It wasn't the plan to stay long-term," he says with a gentle laugh. "But the community really accepted me. That made it easy."

Now over 60 and preparing to retire to Collie in WA's south-west, Musa is wrapping up his tenure as the Shire of Halls Creek's executive director of health and regulatory services. It is a key leadership role he has grown into over more than a decade and a half, from frontline community health officer to acting CEO for a total of just over a year. He migrated from Zimbabwe in 2008, worked with Katherine Regional Aboriginal Health and Related Service before landing in Halls Creek, and will join the Shire of Merredin as his final posting before retirement.



Environmental Health team out and about in the Shire. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

From 47 per cent to eradicated – The trachoma story

One of Musa's proudest achievements is also one of the most quietly extraordinary public health stories in the Kimberley.

When he arrived, trachoma prevalence in the region was running at around 47 per cent. Working with the Department of Health's trachoma programme, the Shire's environmental health team helped bring that figure down to close to five per cent, and now it has been declared “eradicated” by the World Health Organisation (see age X for more). It is the kind of result

that takes years of house visits, health education and sustained infrastructure work — the unglamorous, repetitive labour that environmental health runs on.

He also led a major campaign against rotavirus in children and helped coordinate the Shire's COVID-19 vaccination effort, a period he describes as genuinely difficult. "There was so much mis-messaging and disinformation," he says. "We were trying so hard to convince people to get vaccinated, but it was a huge public health challenge."

From projector in the living room to Facebook in seconds

When Musa first started covering the communities around Halls Creek, the job was almost entirely physical. He would load up a 4WD with a projector and supplies, and drive out to Balgo, Mulan and other surrounding communities, delivering health presentations to residents in their own living rooms or school classrooms. He'd return to Halls Creek on weekends, then head back out for another week on the road.

Sixteen years on, that picture has changed entirely. "Now if we want to show people things, we just sit in the office and put it on Facebook," he says. A single social media post or update to the Shire's website can reach hundreds of residents in seconds — people who once would have had to wait for someone to drive out and knock on their door with critical health information.

He values efficiency, but is careful not to overstate what technology can't replace. When it comes to working with community elders, he says, there is still no substitute for turning up in person, sitting down, talking through what's coming, and explaining what programmes the Shire is planning to run.

"Talking face to face is still the best way to communicate to people,"

he says. The relationships built over years of those visits, he believes, underpin everything else the environmental health team is able to achieve, and why the community has trust in their programmes, ideas and advice.



A career built in Halls Creek

Musa arrived as a qualified environmental health officer and left as an executive director with postgraduate qualifications in urban planning and regional development, a course the Shire funded fifty per cent. He completed it in 2018.

"Halls Creek has been very good for my career," he says. "I started as an aboriginal health officer and then I went into executive leadership. My career has developed in leaps and bounds."

He is leaving, he says, partly because life has moved him to a new stage — he has a property in the south to prepare for retirement — and partly because he believes the organisation deserves fresh thinking.

"I want someone else to have the chance of this office. I can keep things running the way they are, but a fresh mind will come up with new things. Over 16 years, I have shared all the ideas I have, it is someone else's turn to make a difference."

But the departure is not without grief. "I have been so at home here that I am sad about going," he says. "When you are going to a new job, you wonder if the community will be as accepting. When you have felt at home in a place —" he pauses. "I have close relationships in the community and I will miss my colleagues."

He plans to come back soon — but strictly as a visitor. "I would love to see the beauty of this place not through a work lens. Over the years I would visit these beautiful waterfalls and tourist places - and my mind was constantly on the health infrastructure, has the rubbish been collected?"

I just want to come back and enjoy the majesty of it all - work free."



Musa taking part in Shire meetings. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

'You're not really isolated'

Those early years on the road also gave Musa a perspective on remoteness that many newcomers lack. Before coming to Australia, he had worked in remote, impoverished regions of Africa. By comparison, he found The Kimberley manageable from the start. "There is so much more infrastructure here," he says. The housing, the vehicles, the internet and digital tools: what feels genuinely isolating to someone arriving from a capital city felt, to him, like a workable base.

People thinking about a move to remote WA often cite isolation as the deterrent, but Musa has little patience for that framing.

"Some people say isolation, but I say you're working with people everyday, you're surrounded by people all the time in a small place. You're not really isolated at all."

His immediate family is scattered across the world; Zoom and FaceTime have long made

distance manageable. The Shire's provision of air-conditioned housing and a vehicle, he says, takes the hard edges off the climate. "It's always summer if you want to take the right approach."

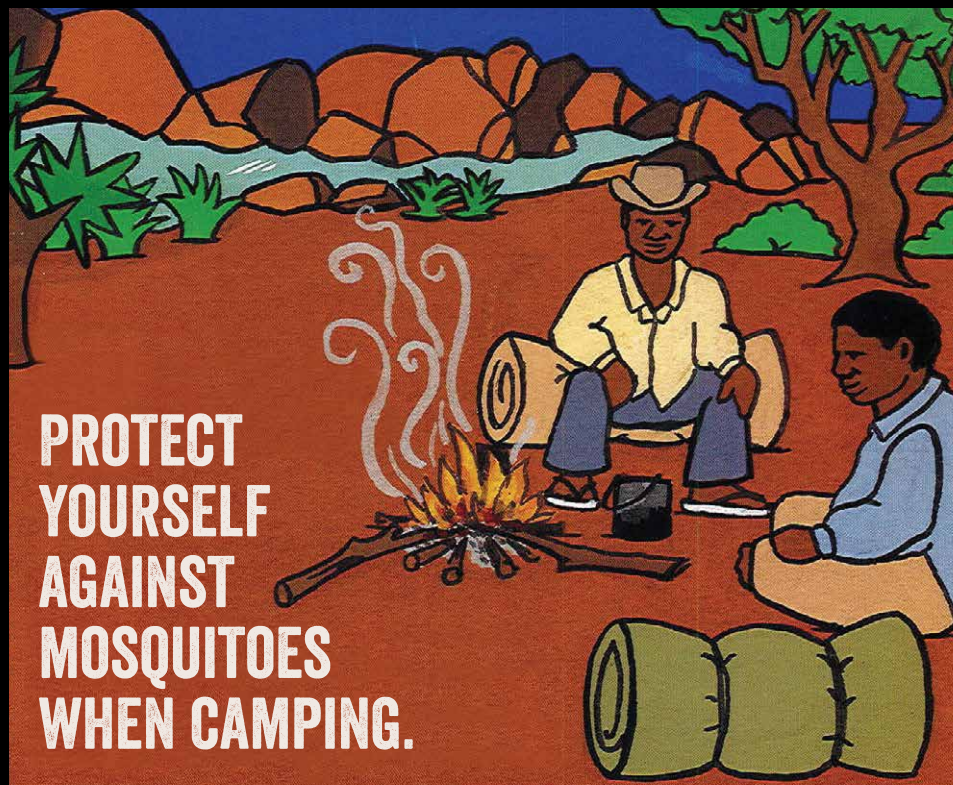
He is similarly relaxed about the town's reputation for crime. "A lot of it is kids being naughty," he says. "In other parts of the world when someone steals a car they strip it or sell it. Here they just drive around. They are looking for thrills and they are opportunistic — it's not hard crime." In sixteen years, he says, he has never felt afraid or threatened.

He attributes much of his experience to the culture of the Shire itself.

"The team felt like everybody was family. But the wider community has always felt very welcoming and accepting of me, right from the start. I've felt very at peace and at ease here, over my years."



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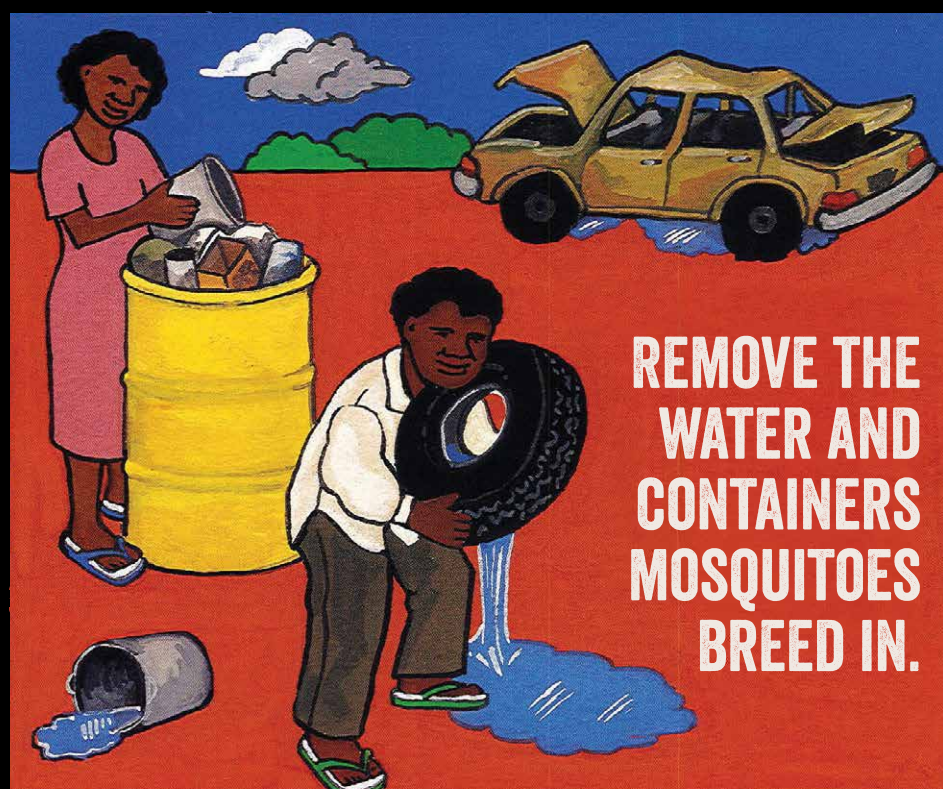
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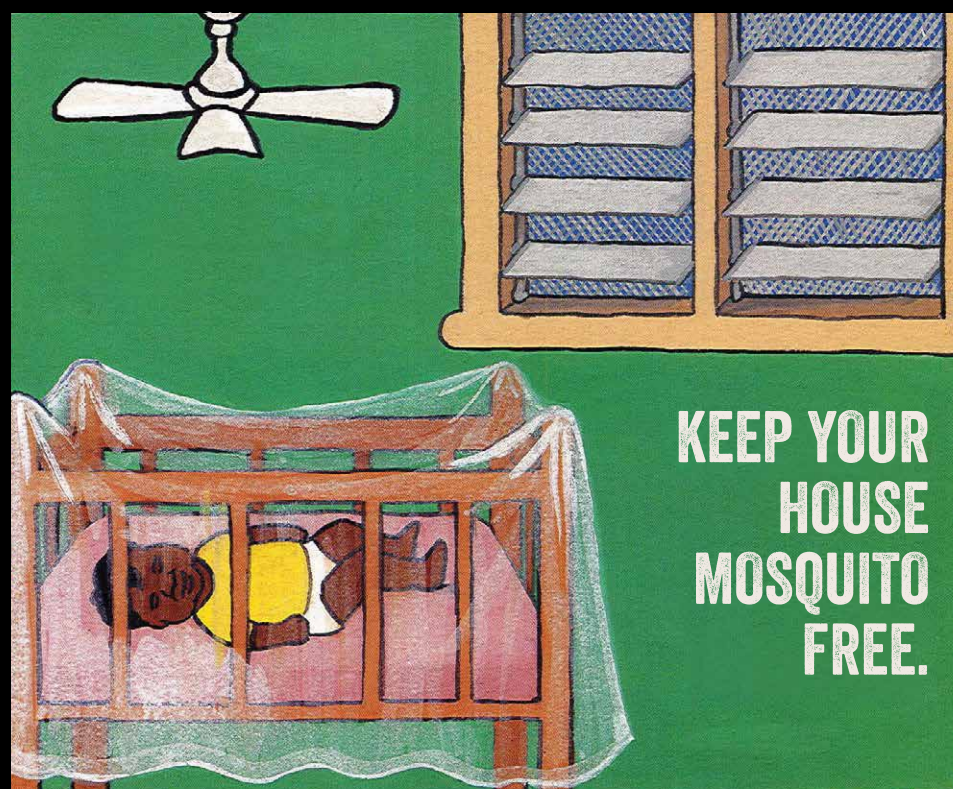
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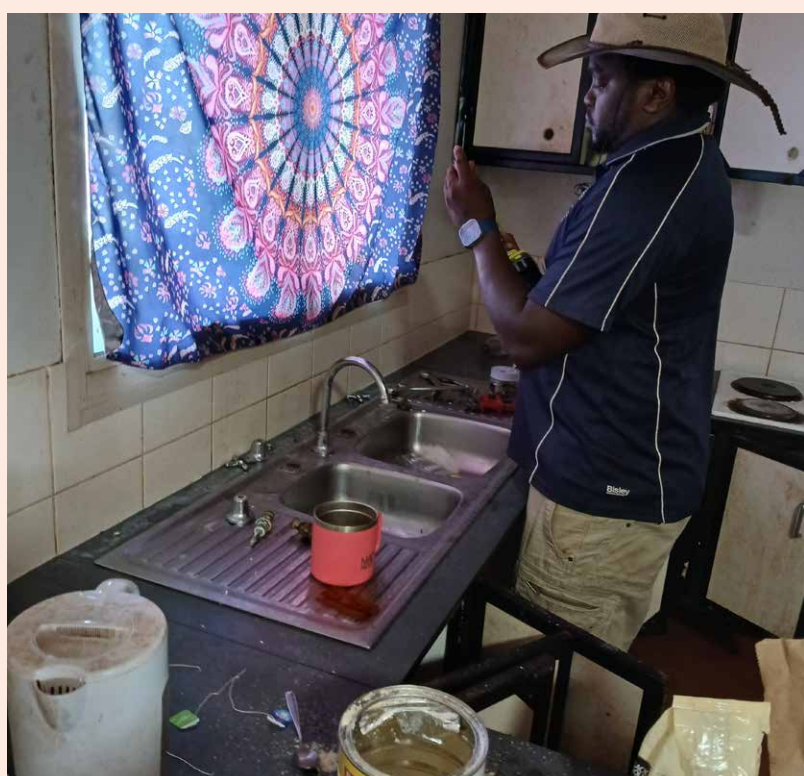
For more information, contact the Kimberley Population Health Unit
9194 1630, your Community Health Clinic or Aboriginal Medical Service.

www.healthywa.wa.gov.au / **FIGHTTHEBITE**



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.



Halls Creeks Environmental Health team out and about. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

A day in the life of a Shire of Halls Creek Environmental Health Worker

Across regional Western Australia, shires are increasingly moving toward locally based, Aboriginal environmental health teams, recognising that local knowledge is key to improving public health outcomes.

In Halls Creek, that shift is already playing out on the ground.

Before most of town has stirred, environmental health workers are on the move, heading out to protect the health of families across town and out bush.

For Aboriginal Environmental Health Officers at the Shire, the job is hands-on, varied and deeply local, focused on helping communities make choices that support health and wellbeing every day.

A typical morning might start with checks around town. Workers inspect rubbish sites, monitor standing water where mosquitoes can breed, and follow up on issues raised by families.

But the role goes far beyond inspections. Environmental health workers run education sessions on hygiene, food safety and healthy housing, working with schools and clinics, and helping families reduce risks inside and around the home.

They are also on the front line of public health, from mosquito monitoring and vector control through to helping prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

By mid-morning, the job often shifts out bush. Workers travel to remote communities across the Shire, sometimes camping out, checking facilities, supporting local action plans and making sure essential services are working safely.

For Dean Graham, Head of Environmental Health at the Shire, the strength of the model is clear.

“Our Aboriginal environmental health workers bring deep understanding of community. They know the people, the places, and how to communicate in a way that actually connects,” he said.

“That local knowledge is critical. It builds trust, and without trust, you cannot deliver real health outcomes.”

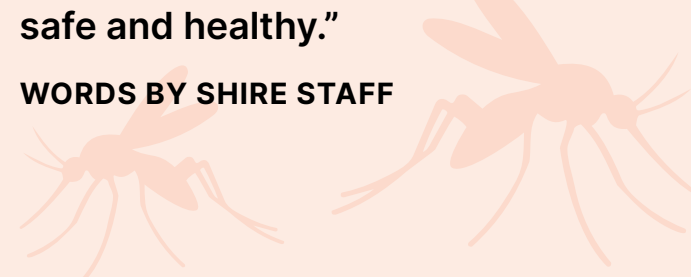
Afternoons are often spent planning and reporting, tracking health data, evaluating programs and working with other services like Yura Yungi and WA Country Health to coordinate responses.

From helping families tackle everyday health risks to running community workshops and building long-term partnerships, the work is constant and often unseen.

“It is practical work, but it makes a real difference,” Mr Graham said.

“At the end of the day, it is about keeping communities strong, safe and healthy.”

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF





Scenes from planning meetings across the Shire this past year. Supplied: Shire of Halls Creek

Splash park, skate park and town centre upgrades move closer

A new splash park, skate park and major upgrades to Pioneer Park are one step closer for Halls Creek, after Council endorsed a major new Place Making Plan at its March 2026 meeting.

The decision allows the Shire to begin tendering for various projects linked to the plan, including the next stages of town centre and recreation precinct upgrades.

The Halls Creek Place Making Plan was developed throughout 2025 and was shaped by extensive community engagement and consultation about what the town needs now, and into the future.

The plan is not a single project. It is a long-term roadmap for how Halls Creek can grow, attract investment, improve public spaces and create better places for families, young people, Elders, visitors and local businesses.

Key projects identified in the plan include:

- New splash park
- Skate park
- Major upgrades to Pioneer Park
- Improvements to the Recreation Centre
- A vibrant and welcoming main street
- Better parks and playgrounds
- Safer streets
- Cultural gathering spaces
- Airport upgrades
- Town branding
- More regular events

The plan is built around four themes: a united town, a beautiful and respected place, a safe and healthy community, and a prosperous and equitable future.

Shire of Halls Creek CEO Sue Leonard said the plan gave the community a clear direction after years of discussion about what Halls Creek could become.

“This plan is about turning community hopes into a practical roadmap,” she said.

“Halls Creek has enormous strength, culture and potential, but we need clear planning and strong partnerships to make sure future investment delivers real benefits for local people.”

The timing is important. The sealing of the Tanami Road, now only a few years from completion, will fuel tourism and investment opportunities for the Shire. Ongoing town centre works and major recreation upgrades all create a rare opportunity for Halls Creek to position itself as a stronger regional hub, economic consultants found.

The plan also responds to long-running challenges, including limited infrastructure, the need for safer public spaces, youth activity, community pride, tourism readiness and economic development.

Key early priorities include progressing the splash park and Pioneer Park upgrades, planning for a skate park, improving how the streets look and feel, adding clearer signage,

and working with partners to bring more life, colour and activity into the heart of town.

“We know people want to see action, not just plans gathering dust on a shelf,” said Ms Leonard.

“Endorsing the Place Making Plan means we can now move into the next stage, including tendering for key projects, seeking funding and working with partners to deliver visible improvements for the community.”

The plan also highlights the importance of culture, Country and local identity. Proposed projects include a cultural hub, stronger storytelling regarding local history, public art, walking trails, better signage and spaces where people can gather, learn, celebrate and connect.

The Shire says the plan will guide future funding applications, partnerships and staged works over the coming years.

The next four pages of Wat Na! share eight key pages from the Place Making Plan, giving residents a closer look at the vision, priorities and projects proposed for the future of Halls Creek.

If you would like to view the report in its entirety, it is available on the Shire of Halls Creek website.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

PLACE MAKING PLAN

PLACE
REBRAND

A place rebrand can revitalise Halls Creek by reshaping its image and attracting new opportunities.

Halls Creek has developed a reputation among outsiders that is complex and often polarised. The town is frequently associated with high youth crime, property theft, and break-ins – issues that have tarnished its image for visitors and essential workers. High levels of disadvantage further contribute to a narrative of dysfunction and vulnerability. Alongside infrastructure investment, it will be essential for the community to collaborate to create a shift in perception.

Place branding is about shaping and communicating a positive identity for a location to influence how it is perceived by residents, visitors, investors, and other stakeholders.

This involves more than just a logo or slogan – it requires consistent and cohesive messaging, visual elements such as colours and themes, and engaging initiatives like events and programs. When done well, place branding builds pride within the community, attracts tourism and investment, and creates a strong, unified story that resonates both locally and beyond.

Halls Creek has much to be proud of, including:

- **Gateway to iconic attractions** – Positioned near Purnululu National Park, Wolfe Creek Crater, Lake Gregory and China Wall, Halls Creek is an important destination for eco-tourism and cultural experiences.

- **Deep connections to culture** – Locals maintain a strong connection to culture and history, offering rich stories and traditions.
- **Community spirit** – Despite challenges, local leaders and youth demonstrate pride in their land and culture, driving grassroots efforts for positive change.

By working together, the Halls Creek community can counter negative stereotypes and reposition itself as a welcoming destination.

Key drivers to underpin a Place Rebrand, are captured on page 39.



Music in the Park



Movies in the Hall



Art in the Park



King of the Kimberley

PLACE
ACTIVATION

Reflect and reinforce identity and values of Halls Creek.

- A cohesive Town Brand with consistent colours and landscaping themes.
- Upgrade tourism wayfinding and signage.
- Reinstate the Town Walk and create additional cultural history walking trails.
- Colourful artworks on shop fronts and blank walls.
- Progress the Hidden Histories Project: Truth-telling in the Halls Creek Shire.
- A permanent garden of local species, including food and medicines used for ceremony, art, tools, weaponry and infrastructure.

PROGRAMMING
AND EVENTS

Energise the community, restore pride, and foster belonging and optimism.

- Daily programming for all ages: mixed basketball, art in the park, workshops.
- Regular local activities to bring the community together: movie nights, music/cultural festivals.
- High profile annual regional events to put the town on the map (Wolfe Creek Crater).
- Capitalise on signature events with national profile to build legacy infrastructure (2028 Solar Eclipse).
- Small grants/mentoring to help locals run activities.
- Community-led volunteer initiatives to strengthen local skills and capacity.

ADVOCACY

Reposition Halls Creek as a must-visit destination and compelling investment proposition.

- Develop an Investment Prospectus and compelling narrative, showcasing future growth opportunities.
- Support/advocate for tourism marketing campaigns – put Halls Creek on the itinerary as a worthwhile destination for passing visitors.
- Advocate for policy reforms aimed at reducing the high cost of doing business in remote communities.

MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS

Platforms to highlight, promote and reinforce local success stories.

- Regularly share uplifting news and achievements from the community to build pride and shift perceptions.
- Maintain consistent messaging and a unified voice across all channels – local, regional, and national media, social platforms, and the official website.
- Celebrate community through imagery: Use photography from local events and everyday life to reinforce positive narratives and showcase Halls Creek’s vibrancy.
- Release a community newspaper to foster pride and combat misinformation.



PLACE MAKING PLAN

SAFER STREETS

Realign Great Northern Highway to slow traffic and mitigate the risks of increasing volumes of large road trains and caravans passing directly through town. Safer pedestrian connections around town and to outer-lying communities are also a high priority.

The Great Northern Highway is a National Highway Route, but it also functions as Halls Creek’s Main Street. It features several safety hotspots particularly around the Duncan Road intersection, the service station and outside the local supermarket. With traffic volumes expected to increase following the Tanami Road upgrades, these issues are likely to escalate, highlighting the urgent need for targeted safety improvements.

Great Northern Highway Realignment
The Streetscape Concept advocates for a proposed realignment of the Great Northern Highway to create a safer environment for pedestrians, and more welcoming and comfortable environment for visitors and local business operators.

Footpaths, Lighting and CCTV
Pedestrian activity is high throughout the day and into the night, particularly along routes to and around Mardiwah Loop and Lundja (Red Hill) communities. Key priorities include:

- Prominent places close to busy roads, including Great Northern Highway, have no footpaths, poor lighting and no formalised pedestrian crossing points.
- Enhancing the town’s CCTV network to support local police efforts in crime prevention, management and deterrence.

Duncan Road Deviation
The Old Halls Creek area holds deep cultural significance for the community, with a strong preference for roads in the district to remain unsealed. A proposed link road connecting freight movements to the Tanami Road prior to reaching town will help preserve these cultural values, while also reducing the number of road trains entering via Duncan Road, alleviating safety concerns at this intersection.

Heavy Haulage Deviation
A high volume of road trains currently pass through the heart of town at all hours, and this is expected to increase as economic activity grows following the Tanami Road upgrades. In the longer term, a Heavy Haulage Route Deviation remains a critical consideration to mitigate safety risks and reduce freight traffic through town.



TRAFFIC:
VEHICLES PER DAY
(2018-2024)

Current
Daily Traffic
76vpd
43 light vehicles
33 heavy vehicles

Future Post-Sealed Tanami
300vpd
Shire of Halls Creek Daily Traffic
Light and heavy

194%
Projected future daily
vehicle movements in
and out of Halls Creek

PLACE MAKING PLAN

POSITION FOR PROSPERITY

The sealing of the Tanami Road is more than a transport upgrade – it's a game-changer for the Shire of Halls Creek. It has the potential to drive inclusive growth, create local jobs, and build long-term resilience in one of Australia's most disadvantaged regions.

The Tanami Road will open up exciting new economic opportunities for the Shire, in mining, agriculture and tourism. Halls Creek currently lacks critical infrastructure to ensure it is positioned to leverage this opportunity.

The Economic Impact Assessment¹ confirmed that without direct investment in the Shire to harness these opportunities, much of the benefit could flow elsewhere. To ensure the Shire of Halls Creek captures the full value, targeted action is needed.

Several strategic infrastructure investments will ensure the Shire is well positioned to capitalise on these opportunities. These have been highlighted in the Place Making Plan.

Halls Creek Business Park

The Shire continues to attract interest from potential investors across a range of industries, with Halls Creek ideally positioned as a hub for the freight and logistics sector. To support this demand, the Shire has identified 32 hectares of land for the development of a Business Park. Obtaining planning approvals and headworks funding, will unlock new opportunities by freeing up land to create additional industrial lots to accommodate logistics, warehousing, mechanical services, and tyre-fitting businesses.

Short Stay Accommodation

Investigate alternative sites close to town for a caravan park, including vacant land south of town and/or on existing properties around town. Upgrade camping facilities, including amenities at Old Halls Creek will provide important infrastructure for self-contained campers.

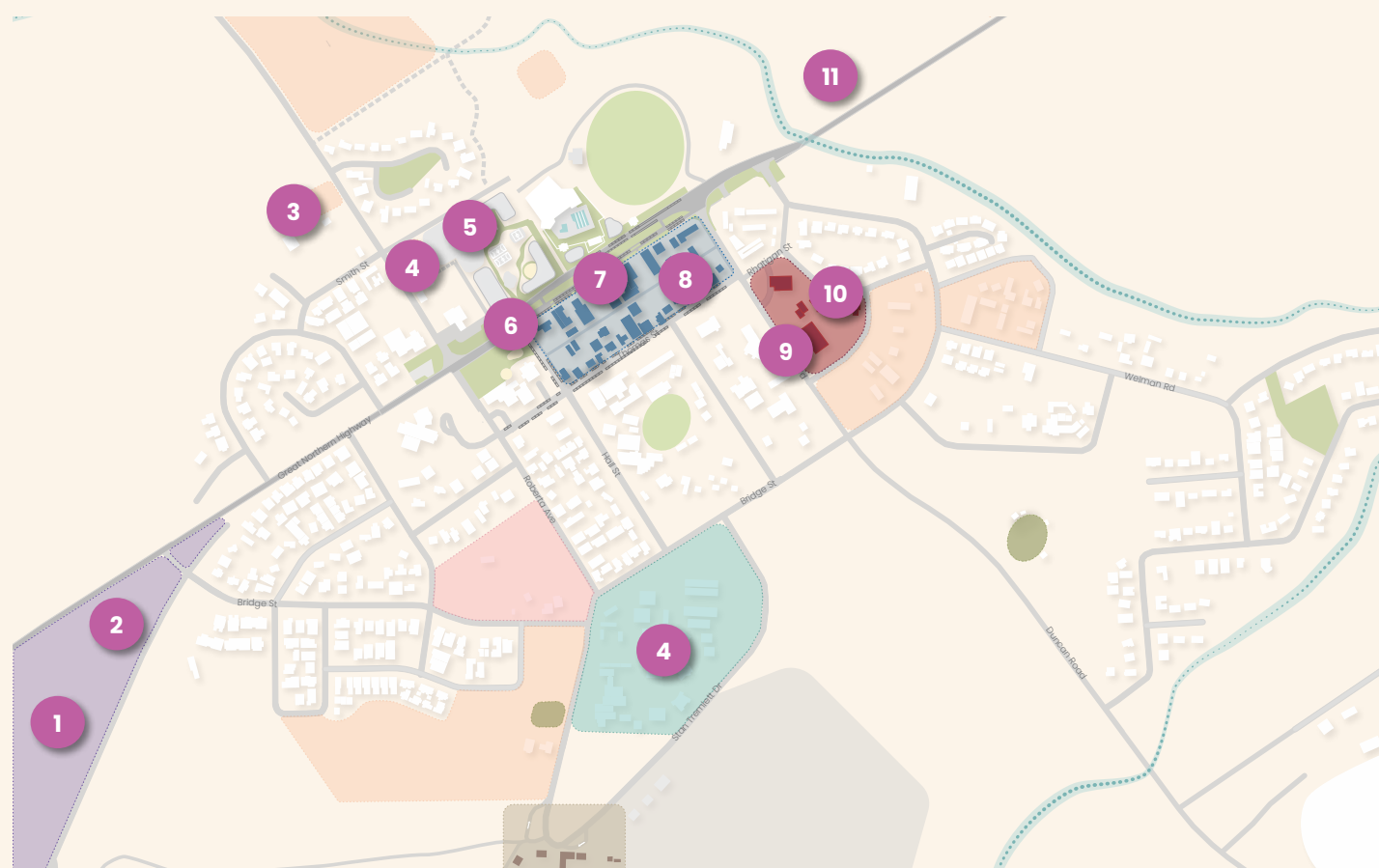
Housing

A severe housing shortage has led to overcrowding, poor health outcomes, and safety concerns. These challenges also make it difficult for organisations to attract and retain staff, and many essential services are either absent or operated remotely. Potential future housing sites have been identified in the Place Making Plan, for future exploration. A Lazy Lands strategy within town could further unlock additional sites suitable for immediate development within town.

Aboriginal Economic Development

A cornerstone of the Cultural Hub is a purpose-built multi-use cultural centre that could serve as a catalyst for the growth of Aboriginal tourism, featuring exhibition spaces, a visitor centre, and cultural learning opportunities. It would be a vibrant platform for partner organisations and new operators to share and celebrate Aboriginal heritage, stories and traditions. The precinct will also accommodate co-working spaces and meeting rooms to support training and emerging enterprise across hospitality, retail, and tourism.

¹ Economic Impact Assessment of Sealing the Tanami Road, Hatch, August 2025



1. Funding to establish the Halls Creek Business Park.
2. Potential Recycling Waste Water Treatment Plant.
3. Liaise with Main Roads to relocate the works depot and free up land for future housing.
4. Opportunity site for future housing innovation (i.e. Warmun single housing quarters).
5. Progress an Illustrative Masterplan for the Cultural Centre.
6. Future micro business, co-working and training spaces.
7. Main street upgrades will improve amenity and stimulate investment in retail.
8. Policy/scheme reviews to enable shop top housing for employees within the retail/mixed-use commercial precinct.
9. Alternative future dump point.
10. Transition industrial uses to the Halls Creek Business Park, to free up land for housing.
11. Renew current Planning Scheme, transition land currently zoned for a caravan park into housing.

PLACE MAKING PLAN

BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES

Trees are a highly valuable commodity in Halls Creek. The community wants more trees for shade and comfort, and established trees should be retained as a first priority - wherever feasible.

Situated in a desert environment, all infrastructure in Halls Creek is challenged by water scarcity, harsh climate and long-term maintenance. The extreme conditions and history of infrastructure damage, coupled with limited budgets for upkeep, demand smart approaches to design. Waterwise landscaping such as native drought-tolerant plants and permeable surfaces, will further support a reduction in maintenance costs.

Design landscapes to honour Jaru and Kija culture by creating safe, welcoming spaces for gathering, yarnying and community life to reignite the spirit and beauty of the local landscapes.

Landscape Design

The Streetscape Concept proposes an extension of the median strip along Great Northern Highway, and upgrades to adjacent open spaces.

Planting Strategy

Planting combines iconic Kimberley natives with community-identified species to provide shade, seasonal colour, bush tucker, and cultural expression. Feature trees such as Boab, Ghost Gum, Kurrajong, Mango, and Poinciana define the character of streets and public spaces. These are supported by flowering shrubs, bush foods, grasses, and groundcovers that reflect Country and provide habitat for native wildlife.

Performance and Maintenance

The plant and materials selections are proven to withstand Kimberley conditions. Native species reduce water demand, and standard fittings enable simple replacement.

Local Business Procurement Panels and Contractor Training

Training and panels are recommended to support sustainable maintenance and employment opportunities.

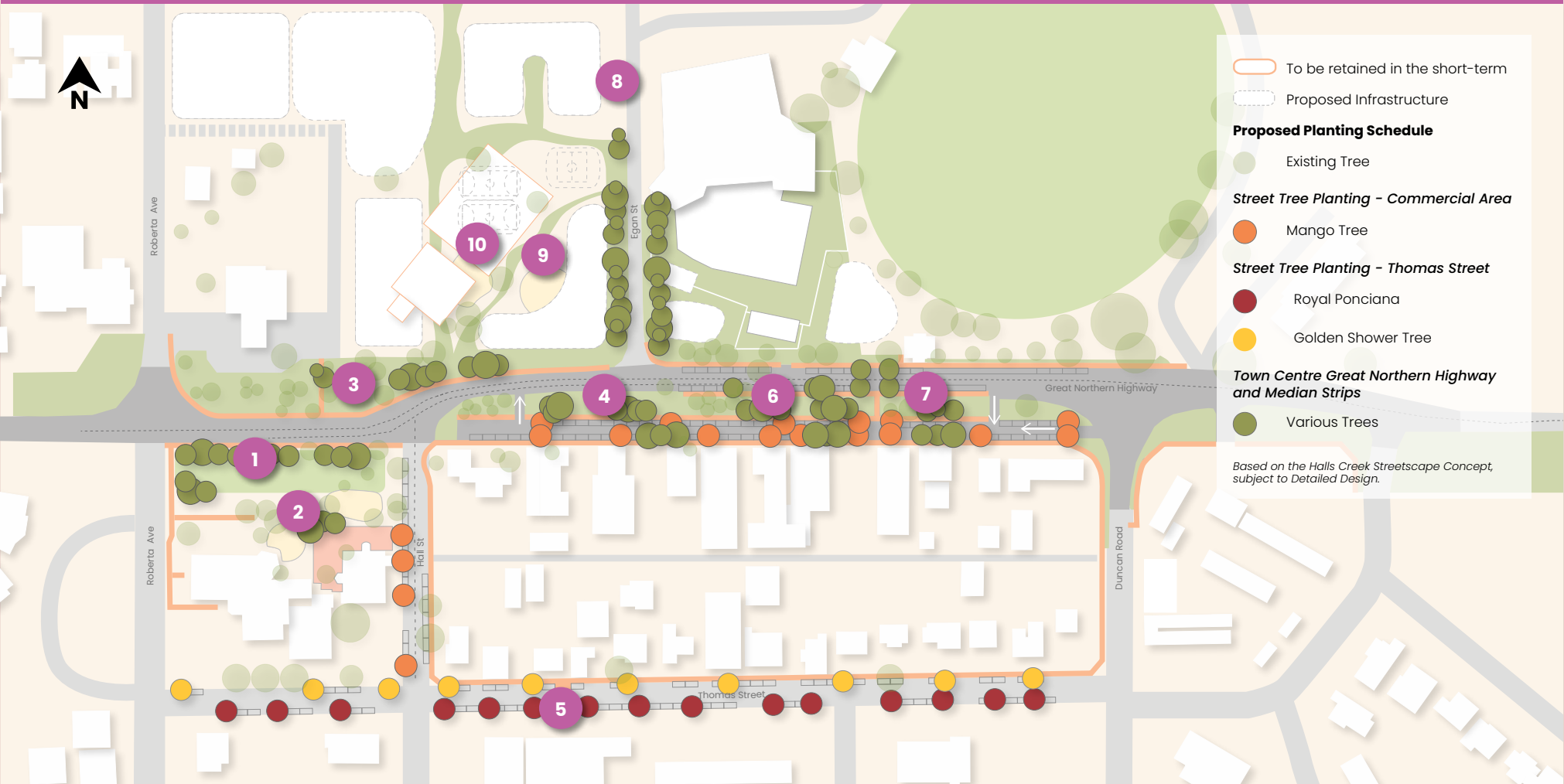
Streetscape Maintenance Policy

This policy will set clearer standards around the presentation of properties in high profile areas.

Cultural Integration

Design the streetscape to host cultural artworks and storytelling, with layouts and materials that enable cultural expression while delivering everyday community amenity.

Future detailed design should explore opportunities to capture and reuse water efficiently, and ensure that all gathering areas are culturally sensitive, functional and inviting despite climatic constraints.



- | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Cultural artwork and story telling. | Snappy Gums. | plantings such as Royal Poinciana or Golden Shower Trees. | 7. Bush tucker species with nutritional value (Bush Apple and Pindan Walnut). | 9. Yarning circles, BBQ's and firepits for gathering and sorry business. |
| 2. Feature local stone to define gathering areas, medians, and garden beds. | 4. Expand the median strip to slow traffic, extend landscaping and gathering spaces. | 6. Feature Mango Trees (Kensington Pride) as a low growing, easy to maintain street tree with good nutritional value. | 8. Permeable surfaces incorporated to manage wet season runoff. | 10. Textured finishes for slip resistance, safety, and cultural expression. |
| 3. Native feature plants - Silver Paperbark and | 5. Install kerbing nibs along Thomas Street to make space for feature | | | |



Halls Creek Magistrates Court is one of many regional courthouses to close for three months. Credit: ABC Kimberley - Ted O'Connor



Chief Justice Peter Quinlan and former Attorney General John Quigley, visiting the Halls Creek office of the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA Ltd. Credit: Aboriginal Legal Service WA

Warmun, Halls Creek courts to close

Remote residents across the Shire of Halls Creek face significantly longer trips to attend court, with sittings in Halls Creek, Balgo and Warmun affected by a three-month regional court shutdown ordered by WA's top judges.

A public note published in May said that relying on police officers for court security was no longer practicable and many regional courts across the state would have to close.

Without court security, "the court cannot sit at that location at all", the note says.

The changes will take effect from June 1, with affected circuits formally vacated until August 28.

The note lists Warmun, Balgo and Halls Creek among affected locations, with Kununurra named as the designated home court.

That means most criminal matters involving people from the Shire will be moved to Kununurra, unless audio-visual link or other arrangements are approved.

The impact will be especially sharp for Balgo, where in-person court sittings have already been suspended for almost two years because of security concerns.

Since that suspension, Balgo residents have had to travel the long, unsealed Tanami Road to Halls Creek for court. With Halls Creek now also affected, some residents may instead face the much longer trip to Kununurra.

Lawyers have previously warned the lack of local court access is already hurting vulnerable residents, and is especially dangerous for child protection matters or protection orders in cases of domestic violence.

Aboriginal Legal Service WA senior managing lawyer Sally Oliver told the ABC last year that remote arrangements meant some clients were unable to get proper legal advice.

"They're at risk of getting terms of imprisonment and not knowing essentially why," she said.

"We cannot help explain this quite alien justice system to them if we're working remotely."

The judges said the interim arrangements were necessary to ensure critical court functions could continue in regional WA, but acknowledged they would cause "significant disruption and inconvenience" to court users in affected locations.

The arrangements are expected to remain in place for three months.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

\$11.7m water boost for Halls Creek

Halls Creek's drinking water supply is set for a major upgrade, with \$11.7 million in State and Federal funding announced to expand the town's groundwater network.

The project, announced on May 13, will see four new production bores equipped and connected to the existing system through about 3km of pipeline, delivered by Water Corporation on Ngarrawanji Country.

Halls Creek sources its drinking water from groundwater aquifers replenished by rainfall — but reduced and less predictable rainfall linked to climate change has affected groundwater recharge and lowered the sustainable output of several existing bores.

Shire of Halls Creek CEO Sue Leonard welcomed the investment as a significant step forward for the community.

"Access to safe, reliable drinking water is fundamental to everything we do in Halls Creek — our health, our families, our economy and our future. This investment recognises that and we're grateful to both governments for backing our community," she said.

Federal Environment and Water Minister Murray Watt said groundwater sources were increasingly vulnerable to variable rainfall.

"Expanding Halls Creek's borefield not only improves the supply scheme's reliability but also, importantly, its sustainability too," he said.

WA Water and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Don Punch said reliable drinking water was essential for regional communities. "By expanding the borefield and improving supply reliability, this investment is helping to futureproof water services in Halls Creek, ensuring the community has access to safe and secure drinking water for years to come," he said.

Once completed, the expanded borefield is expected to supply hundreds of additional kilolitres of water each day, supporting peak demand, essential services, liveability and economic activity. Construction is expected to take about 12 months.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Mural promoting facial cleanliness to eliminate trachoma, Warburton, WA. Credit: World Health Organisation

After more than 100 years, trachoma has been declared eliminated in Australia. Aboriginal health workers did it.

It took fifty years, a legendary eye doctor, and generations of hard work from Aboriginal families. But the World Health Organisation has made it official; trachoma is gone from Australia.

The World Health Organization has officially declared trachoma eliminated in Australia — a landmark moment for Aboriginal communities across the Kimberley, the NT and South Australia who have lived with the disease for generations.

Trachoma is the world's leading infectious cause of blindness, according to the WHO. The bacterium gets into the eye through flies and close contact with infected children. Repeated infections over childhood scar the inside of the eyelid until the eyelashes turn inward and scratch the surface of the eye. Left untreated, it leads to permanent blindness. A child in a badly affected community could be reinfected thirty or forty times before they reach adulthood.

Mainstream Australia wiped out trachoma

more than a century ago — not through medicine, but through running water, functional bathrooms and decent housing. Aboriginal communities were left without those basics for decades longer. Overcrowded homes, broken washing facilities and poor access to clean water meant the disease kept circulating long after the rest of the country had forgotten it existed.

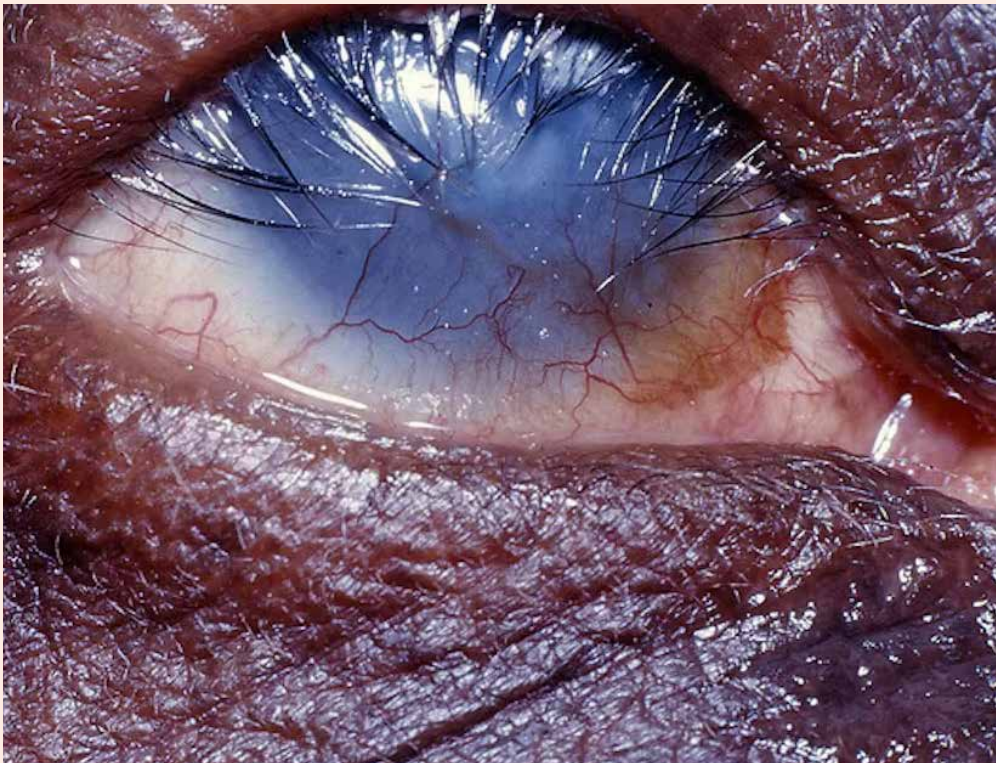
In at-risk communities, trachoma prevalence in Aboriginal children aged 5–9 fell from 14.9 per cent in 2009 to 1.5 per cent in 2024, according to the Australian Government. Those numbers represent kids who will keep their sight.

The campaign stretches back to 1976, when eye surgeon Fred Hollows drove

through remote communities alongside Aboriginal health workers as part of the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program. Between 1976 and 1978 the team visited more than 465 communities. The Fred Hollows Foundation says more than 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were screened and treated in that original two-year push. It was the foundation on which everything that followed was built.

Lawi Too, acting head of Environmental Health for the Shire of Halls Creek, said the declaration carried deep meaning for communities across the Shire.

"Trachoma stole the sight of people in our communities who should never have gone blind,"



Trachoma eye. Credit: Fred Hollows Foundation



University of Queensland. Credit: Gabi Hollows

he said. **"It was a disease of neglect. Its elimination is one of the most significant public health achievements in the history of remote Australia and we should not understate that."**

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation CEO Dawn Casey said the credit belonged to the health organisations that had stayed with the work decade after decade. "Our ACCHOs will remain vigilant and continue their work to monitor for any potential outbreaks across our communities."

Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy said the result showed what was possible when local communities led the response. "This is an important step in Closing

the Gap in health outcomes," she said.

"It shows that long-term, community-led solutions can and do deliver lasting change."

Fred Hollows Foundation CEO Ross Piper said the lesson of the trachoma campaign should shape how Australia approaches every complex health challenge in remote communities. "Enabling community leadership and ownership of solutions is the only way to solve complex issues like trachoma," he said.

Health authorities are urging continued monitoring — the disease can return where housing and water infrastructure deteriorates. But the declaration stands. Finally, trachoma is gone.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



An Aboriginal patient undergoing surgery for Trachoma. Credit: Fred Hollows Foundation



Justice Louise Taylor. Credit: Supplied

'I did not inherit a pathway into the law' - from Kamilaroi country to the courtroom

Kamilaroi woman Justice Louise Taylor grew up watching the law bear down on her people. Now, she runs the court.

Her father was born and raised in a housing commission in Millers Point, Sydney. Her grandfather was a wharfie and her grandmother ran a pub. There was no money, no connections, no obvious road into anything but grinding poverty.

But Russell Taylor saw tertiary qualifications as the key to unlocking a different life. He became the first Aboriginal person to obtain an MBA, and went on to spend three decades as a senior public servant — eventually the most senior Aboriginal person in the Commonwealth public service.

He raised his daughter Louise to carry that same fire. "It's no surprise, then, that I was raised to be nothing other than proud of my identity, with a strong sense of obligation to contribute to bettering the lives of our people," she has said.

Louise grew up in inner-city Sydney, her family originally from the New England country of New South Wales — Kamilaroi country. She moved to Canberra during high school and never really left. She was inspired to study law for the chance to speak to power with knowledge — in particular as it relates to Aboriginal people.

After graduating, she practised almost exclusively in criminal law, specialising in family violence and chasing perpetrators away from vulnerable Aboriginal women, girls and children.

She is regularly described as a natural-born leader — down to earth, quick witted, and entirely disinterested in pompous nonsense.

In 2023, Justice Taylor became the first Indigenous woman appointed to a Supreme Court anywhere in Australia. This month she takes on the role of Chief Magistrate of the ACT Magistrates Court, the first Aboriginal person to do so.

"The statistics are not just numbers to us,"

she told a packed courtroom at her Supreme Court swearing-in.

"They tell the stories of our families and our communities. It makes sense to me, then, that we must participate as more than just subjects in the legal system foisted upon us."

Then she offered something quieter, aimed at every young person who has ever walked into a room and felt they had no right to be there.

"Even when you feel like a tourist in the profession, you must carry yourself as if you belong, because you do."

Taylor has a husband and four children, and has often spoken about the weight of grief in Aboriginal communities — a burden, she says, that her father carried in his life (he passed away in 2023), and that Aboriginal communities continue to carry disproportionately. She carries it too. And she carries it onto the bench.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

How does Budget 2026 affect Indigenous Australians?

\$1.2 billion over five years

The 2026 Federal Budget, unveiled in mid May, includes \$1.2 billion for First Nations measures. Funding is focused on areas including jobs, food security, family safety, education, health and wellbeing, with the government saying the money is aimed at improving Closing the Gap outcomes and backing community-led design.

More remote jobs

\$299 million going toward expanding the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program. The aim is to double the number of new jobs created through the program from 3,000 to 6,000 by 2030.

Cheaper groceries in remotes

\$27.4 million in extra cost-of-living support to reduce the price of 30 essential grocery items in remote communities, plus \$32.7 million to help remote stores keep food fresh when weather, distance and transport delays.

Support for short-term accommodation

Aboriginal Hostels will receive \$48.3 million to continue providing short-term accommodation.

Health services and Birthing on Country

\$144.1 million to meet the infrastructure needs of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services and \$44.4 million for 10 existing Birthing on Country services. These investments are aimed at strengthening culturally safe health care on country.

Safety for women & children

Nearly \$220 million will go toward delivering Our Ways — Strong Ways — Our Voices, Australia’s first standalone national plan to end violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. This includes \$167.6 million over four years for up to 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to deliver community-led services for women and families experiencing domestic violence.

Education pathways

The Budget includes \$23.8 million to extend Indigenous Boarding Provider grants, supporting First Nations students who complete school away from home in 2027. It also includes wider education funding, including support for the Clontarf Foundation’s school engagement program for young First Nations men.

And in our Shire?

Under the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program, projects are already listed for Yiyili, Mulan, Halls Creek/Tjurabalan and the East Kimberley, including roles in administration, plant operation, youth support, maintenance, language work, pest control and weed management.

Some groups say the Budget does not go far enough

While there is major investment, First Nations organisations and experts have raised concerns about gaps in housing, children’s services, disability support, legal assistance and deeper structural reform. “The government talks constantly about Closing the Gap, but you cannot close the gap while underfunding the services and solutions that our communities know work.”said Sentaor Lydia Thorpe while Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC stated “The impact of missed opportunities is going to be felt by families. That’s a no-brainer.”



Featured Artist



Featured Artist Melissa Yoomarie with various artworks. Credit: Yarliyil Art Centre

Melissa Yoomarie: the colours and stories of Country

Melissa Yoomarie is a Walmajarri woman who grew up in Billiluna. She is a skilled and talented painter whose meticulous style and dedication to cultural stories has been achieved through commitment, passion and lots of hard work.

She regularly paints for long hours in the Yarliyil studio and produces many detailed and accomplished works.

Both her parents are from Billiluna, so it is an important ancestral Country for her.

Melissa grew up among artists and learned about culture and country through storytelling, traditional food gathering and painting with other family members.

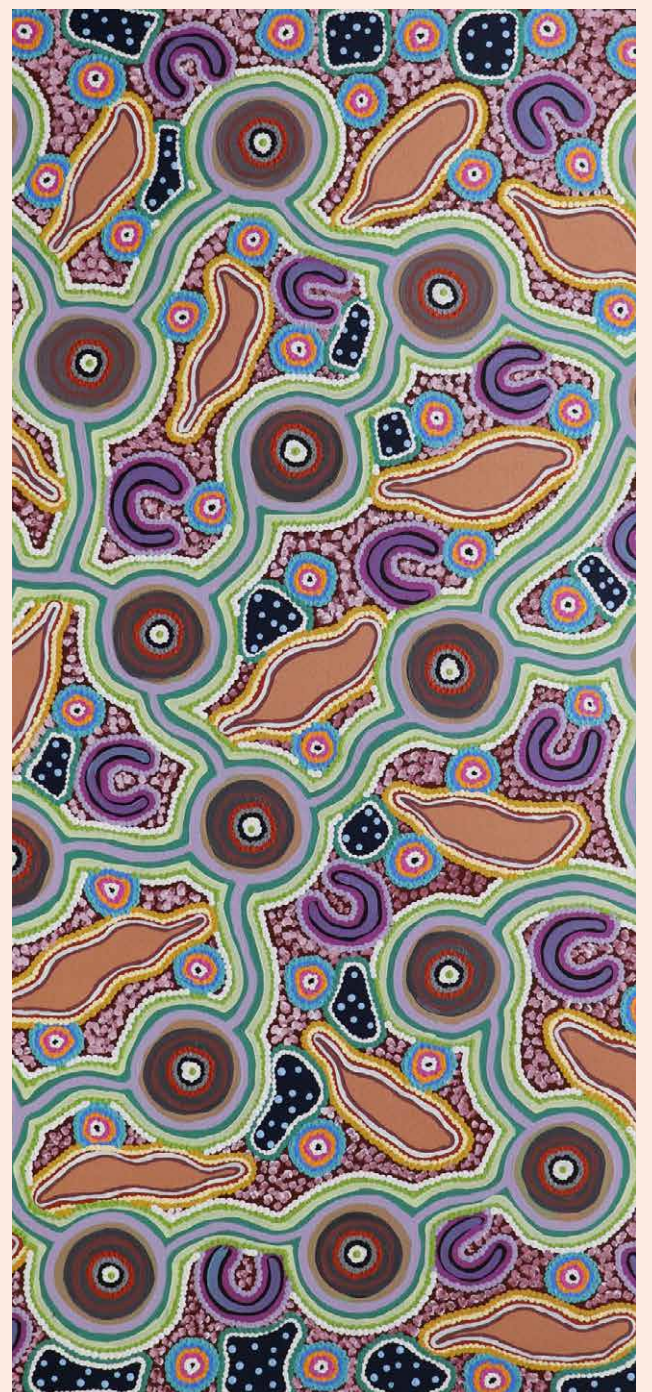
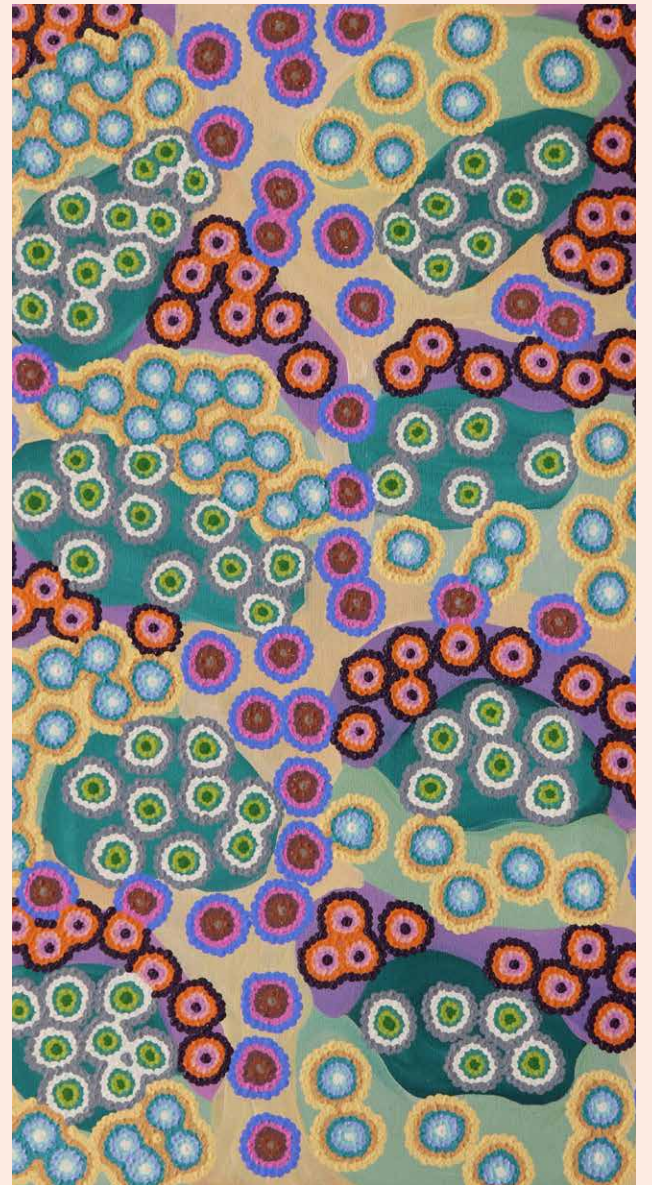
Melissa makes colourful paintings that reflect her country, and all the colours that come and go with the seasons.

She thinks a lot about how her country looks at different times of the year. The way the landscape changes from bright orange with blue skies and then as the wet season approaches, the skies become greyer, but the land becomes vibrant and colourful with green grasses and every colour of wildflower.

Melissa believes that painting is a good way to keep knowledge and stories alive for kids, grandkids, and families, and also to share culture with the rest of the world.

"Our paintings get sold to people who take them all over Australia, and even to other countries - our culture travels with them. I also have other family who are painters at Yarliyil Arts and it's good, we come together and all work on keeping culture strong and using our art skills to help support our families. My artworks show my grandparents' country in Billiluna, ceremony stories and bush foods"

WORDS BY YARLIYIL ART CENTRE

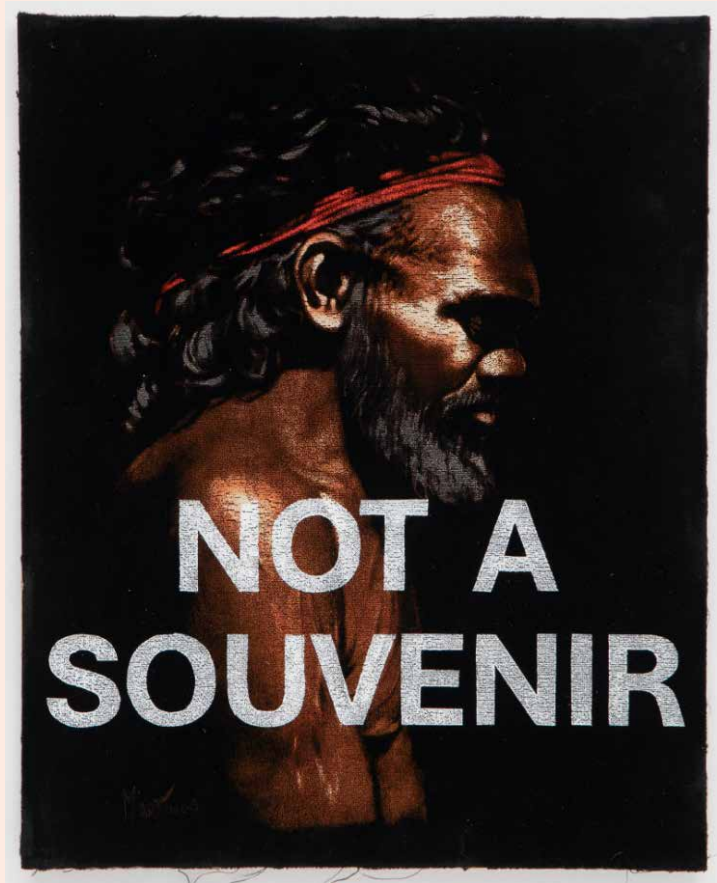




Artist: Melissa Yoomarie



Artist Tony Albert. Credit: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney



From thrift shops to high-end art, Tony Albert's long reckoning with 'Aboriginalia'

In May one of Australia's most decorated contemporary Indigenous artists opened his biggest exhibition yet at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. The title — Not a Souvenir — is pointed, political, and very Tony Albert.

But before the national and international success, a young Aboriginal boy started collecting souvenirs stamped with stereotyped and kitsch portraits of Aboriginal people.

Growing up in suburban Brisbane in the 1980s, young Tony Albert — whose family had deep roots in the Girramay, Yidinji and Kuku Yalanji peoples of north Queensland — rarely saw Aboriginal faces in his real life, or on the screen, so the souvenir tat scrounged from op shops carried a special significance.

Over the years, Albert continued collecting cups, figurines, playing cards, ashtrays and more, all bearing images of Aboriginal people depicted by non-Indigenous, mass-market hands.

It wasn't until his teenage years that he was fully able to grasp the troubling politics of what he'd been collecting, and until his 20s to find a use for it.

When he coined the word Aboriginalia and began making art from the objects, something clicked, artistically.

"I felt like I'd found my medium," Albert told the Guardian newspaper this month. "There was something that was me that was really shining through in this work."

More than 3,000 of those objects are now at the heart of Not a Souvenir, and the MCA is inviting the public to contribute to the collection, which Albert keeps at his Brisbane studio.

"I try to challenge the idea of what Aboriginal art is," Albert told the Art Gallery of New South Wales. "There's this perception of dot art being pan-Aboriginal. Even in a traditional concept, my people never ever did dot paintings."

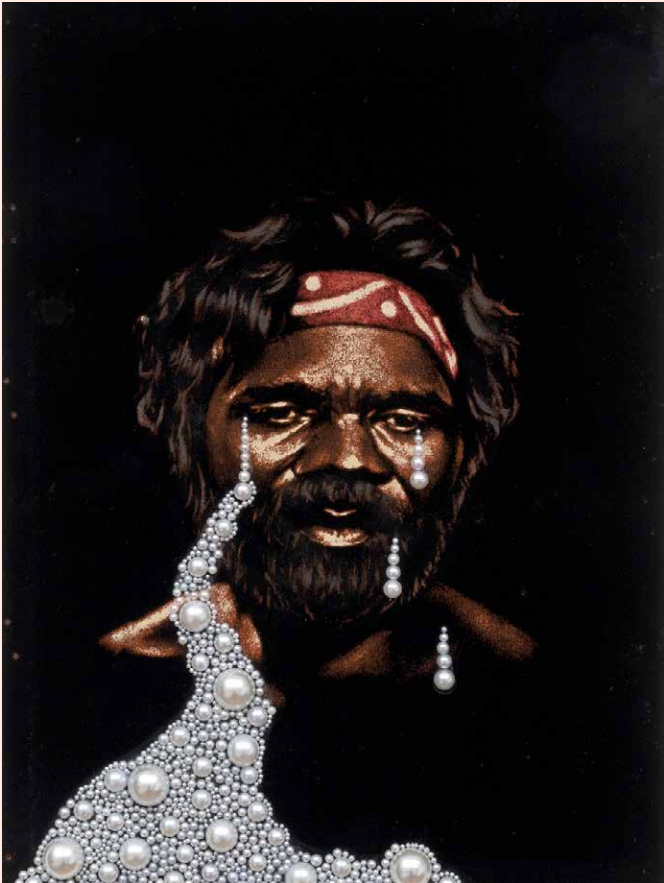
And yet his work, while provocative, is far from angry. "I've had people meet me that have been terrified that I would be this very aggressive kind of person — like, 'God, we thought you hated white people'," Albert told the Guardian.

Not a Souvenir caps a remarkable two years: Albert served as inaugural First Nations curatorial fellow for the 2024 Biennale of Sydney and artistic director of the 2025 National Indigenous Art Triennial. In December, the French Ministry of Culture named him a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters.

"Optimism isn't the absence of struggle; it's the decision to keep imagining," he told Art Asia Pacific last year. "For me, hope is an act of resistance."

Tony Albert: Not a Souvenir is at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, until 19 October 2026.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



1) Not a Souvenir 2) Sorry-2008 3) Tony Alberts Story Place 2023 4) Ashtralia #8 5) River of Tears III 6) History Repeats 2022 7) Superheroes



**GIVE UP
FOR GOOD**

**They're the best
reason to keep at
quitting the smokes.**



**keep at
quitting**

For help and support:



health.gov.au/GiveUpForGood





Gija Men's Exhibition in Darwin. Credit: Warmun Art Centre

Gija men take their stories to Darwin

A new exhibition celebrating Gija men's art and culture opens in Darwin this month — and Warmun Art Centre is behind it.

Patrick Mung Mung & The Gija Men's Show opens at Outstation Gallery on May 22, bringing together ten male artists from Warmun: Patrick Mung Mung, Michael Budbarria-Mung, Mark Nodea, Tommy Carroll, Dwayne Jessell, Jonathon Malgil,

Troy Drill, Cecil Mosquito, Lazarus Johnson and Peter Gooloou Thomas.

At the centre of the show is senior Gija Elder, Traditional Owner, lawman and artist Patrick Mung Mung — recognised by Warmun Art Centre as the guiding star of the exhibition and the last man of his generation. His presence in the show carries deep cultural weight.

Together, the artists share stories of

Country, identity, memory, history and cultural strength. Four of the men travelled to Darwin to help hang the works themselves — and one piece sold on the very day it went up on the wall.

Patrick Mung Mung & The Gija Men's Show, Outstation Gallery, Darwin. Open from May 22, 2026.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



About the artist – Patrick Mung Mung

Patrick Mung Mung is a senior artist at Warmun Art Centre and an Elder at Warmun Community in the East Kimberley. Born at Spring Creek, he spent many years working as a stockman on Texas Downs Station — and was the last worker to leave when it closed in the 1970s.

He paints with natural earth pigments on canvas, drawing on deep knowledge of Country and cultural memory of family, land and work. His practice carries the influence of the previous generation of Warmun artists — among them Rover Thomas and Paddy Jaminji — in its raw directness and bold composition.

Like his late father, the celebrated George Mung Mung, Patrick is a powerful

cross-cultural communicator. When George passed in 1991, it fell to Patrick to accompany his father's carving Mary of Warmun to Canberra for the exhibition Aboriginal Art and Spirituality at the High Court of Australia. That journey marked a turning point — the moment Patrick stepped into his father's role as senior artist, law and culture man.

He began painting that same year. In 1998, he was instrumental in establishing the artist-and-community-owned Warmun Art Centre. Since then, Patrick has led Gija performances of the Gurirr Gurirr across Australia and in Paris and Canada.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Tennis comes to Halls Creek and Warmun

Tennis West brought its East Kimberley regional roadshow to Halls Creek and Warmun last week, giving local kids the chance to pick up a racquet — many for the first time.

The team stopped at Warmun Ngalangangpum School on the way through, delivering tennis to 20 students, before arriving in Halls Creek for a community Come and Try session that drew more than 30 children. The following day, three classes and 48 students at Halls Creek District High School got a taste of the basics.

Tennis West Schools and Pathways Officer Charlotte Connon said the engagement from students was outstanding. "We didn't come across one student who wasn't willing to give tennis a go," she said.

The visit was also about leaving something behind. Tennis West worked with the Shire of Halls Creek's Sport and Recreation Officers to ensure the community has the equipment and capability to keep delivery going between visits — with the long-term goal of building toward year-round tennis in the region.

The wider East Kimberley roadshow covered more than 1,000 kilometres in four days, reaching over 300 students across five schools, with 62 per cent of participants identifying as First Nations.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



A Tennis Australia camp at the rec centre in May. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek



Pictured Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, LeBron James, Bronny James. Credit: Collage by Bill Lucas

Lebron, Bronny not enough to defeat MVP Shai

Basketball fans around the world witnessed something truly special this NBA playoffs. LeBron James – widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time – suited up alongside his son Bronny James for the Los Angeles Lakers. It was a historic first: a father and son playing together in the NBA playoffs. The pair performed admirably, helping the Lakers eliminate the Houston Rockets in the first round.

But waiting in the second round were the reigning champs: the Oklahoma City

Thunder. Led by likely MVP Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, a silky Canadian guard who is this season's Most Valuable Player, OKC dismantled the Lakers four games to none. In the series finale, Shai poured in 35 points, with fellow Thunder star Ajay Mitchell adding 28. Los Angeles simply had no answer.

The James family were writing a beautiful story. OKC just wouldn't let it have a happy ending.

WORDS BY BILL LUCAS

Bryce Cotton to make Boomers debut in Perth



Basketball star Bryce Cotton will make his Australian Boomers debut at RAC Arena in Perth during the upcoming FIBA World Cup qualifiers.

The six-time NBL MVP will wear the green and gold for the first time when Australia takes on Guam on July 3 and the Philippines on July 6.

Cotton, who became a sporting favourite in Western Australia through his time with the Perth Wildcats, said representing Australia meant a lot to him and his family.

"Australia has embraced me from day one," he said. "I'm grateful for the chance to wear the green and gold."

The Perth games will give the Boomers a chance to bring Cotton into the national team as preparations build towards the 2027 FIBA World Cup.

Fans will get to see Cotton make history in the same arena where he thrilled Wildcats supporters for more than nine years.

WORDS BY BILL LUCAS



WE ALL LOVE FOOTY!

LET'S LOOK AFTER OUR NEW OVAL

BY 19TH OF JUNE, OUR NEW OVAL WILL BE READY!



PLAY HARD – BUT PLAY FAIR.

Give it your best.
Respect the game and each other.



AFTER THE SIREN, SHAKE HANDS.

Win, lose or draw – that's the way.



NO FIGHTING. NO HUMBUG.

No shame job.
Walk away.



NO DRINKING OR GROG AT GAMES.

Keep your mob and our community safe.



LOOK AFTER KIDS AND FAMILIES.

Kids and old people come watch too.



PUT RUBBISH IN THE BIN.

Keep our Oval clean and tidy.



RESPECT PLAYERS, UMPIRES, OLD PEOPLE AND EVERYONE.

Show respect. It makes our community strong.



THE GRASS IS FOR FEET ONLY.

No cars, motorbikes or scooters on the Oval.



LOOK AFTER THIS PLACE – DON'T WRECK IT.

No wrecking up the Oval or changerooms.



KEEP IT CLEAN.

Look after toilets, changerooms and all facilities.



RESPECT SECURITY WORKERS AND GATE MOB.

They here to help keep everyone safe.



EVERYBODY GOTTA GET HOME SAFE.

Look out for your mob.
Look out for others.

THIS OVAL IS FOR ALL COMMUNITIES.
WE WAITED LONG TIME FOR FOOTY TO COME BACK.

LET'S KEEP IT GOOD FOR EVERYBODY.

KICK-OFF 19 JUNE



New support for First Nations football ahead of 2026 Sir Doug Nicholls AFL Round

The 2026 AFL Sir Doug Nicholls Round ran across two weeks from Thursday, May 14, to Sunday, May 24, covering Rounds 10 and 11 of the AFL season.

The Sir Doug Nicholls Round is one of the AFL's most important celebrations, recognising the contribution First Nations people have made to football and communities around Australia. Across the two-week round, clubs wore specially designed Indigenous guernseys created by First Nations artists and players, while also sharing stories celebrating family, Country and culture.

In the lead-up to the round, the AFL announced several new initiatives aimed at supporting First Nations players and increasing Indigenous representation across the game.

One of the biggest announcements was the

launch of a new First Nations Impact Fund, with around \$300,000 to be invested each year in partnership with AFL clubs. The AFL said the funding would support grassroots football, help create safer and more welcoming club environments, and provide more opportunities for First Nations players, staff and communities.

The AFL also confirmed the Indigenous All-Stars team would return again in future years after a successful comeback in 2025. The return of the team was welcomed by many supporters and former players, celebrating the talent, pride and legacy of First Nations footballers from across Australia.

The league also began looking at new ideas to help increase the number of Indigenous players at AFL level, including the possibility of giving clubs an extra player list spot specifically for First Nations talent.

The announcements came at a time when the number of Indigenous players in the AFL had declined, from a peak of 87 in 2020 to 62 in 2026, leading many former players and leaders to call for stronger pathways and better support for young talent.

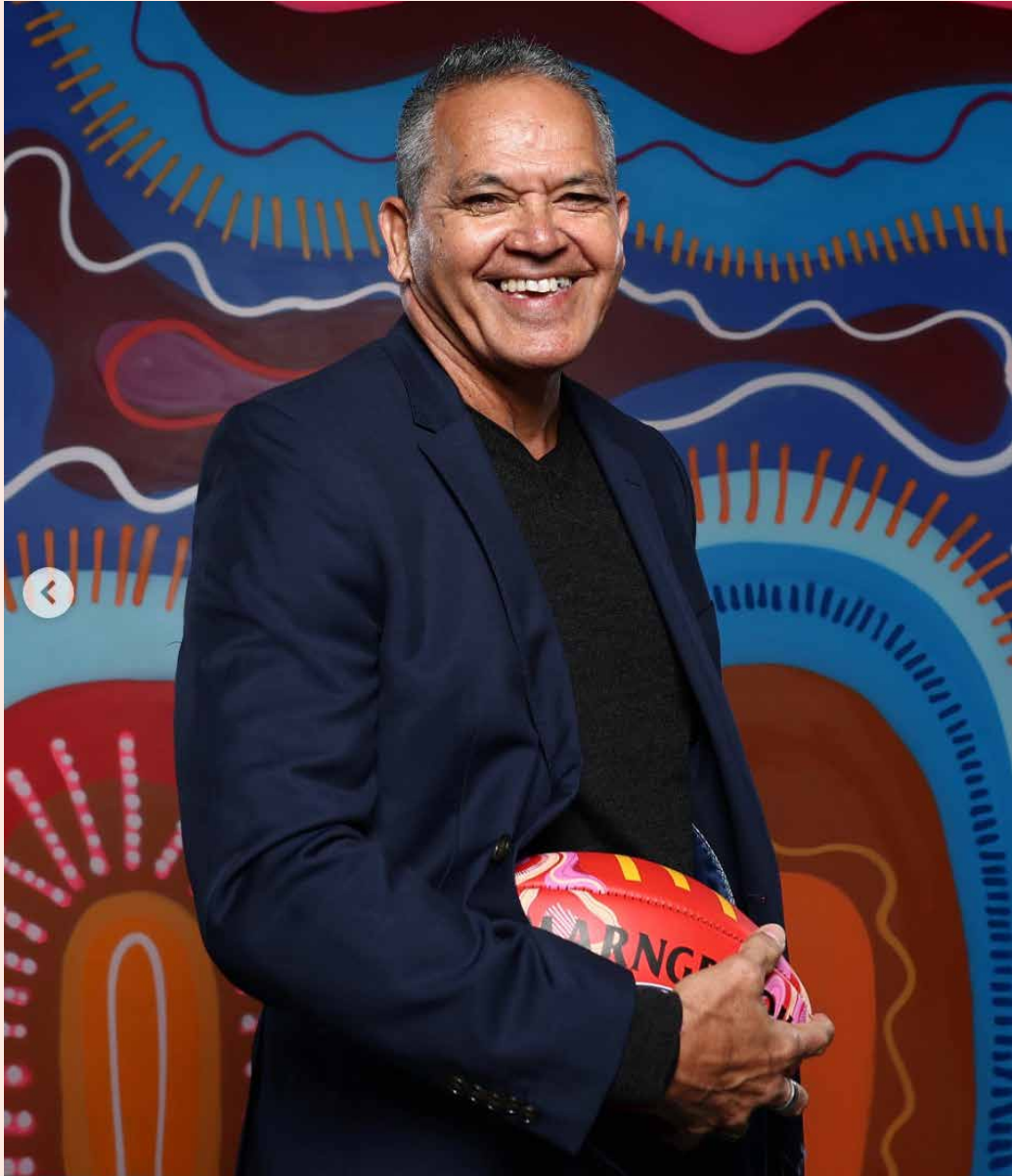
There was also discussion around the make-up of a new AFL subcommittee formed to address the issue. Some former players raised concerns about limited Indigenous representation within the group, particularly from Western Australia, the state that has produced the most top level Aboriginal talent in the game's history.

Despite the concerns, many saw the announcements as an important step towards strengthening opportunities and support for future generations of First Nations footballers.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Players wearing their clubs Indigenous guernsey design for the Sir Doug Nicholls Round. Credit: Seven



2026 Round honouree Michael McLean. Credit: AFL Instagram

2026 Sir Doug Nicholls Round honouree is Michael McLean

This year’s Sir Doug Nicholls Round honouree is Michael McLean, one of the AFL’s great First Nations players and an important voice for change.

Known by many as “Magic” because of his skill and talent on the field, McLean played 183 AFL games for Footscray Football Club and the Brisbane Bears, later becoming a two-time club champion and respected leader.

Off the field, McLean also helped push for stronger action against racism in football during the 1990s. He was one of the leading voices supporting the introduction of the Peek Rule, which aimed to better protect players from racial abuse and make the game safer for all players, today and for future generations.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Who was Sir Doug Nicholls?

Sir Douglas Nicholls was an important Aboriginal leader, pastor and football player who helped change Australia for the better.

Born in Victoria in 1906, Sir Doug was one of the first Aboriginal players to play top-level Australian Rules football. He played for Fitzroy Football Club in the VFL during the 1930s, where he became known for his speed, skill and sportsmanship.

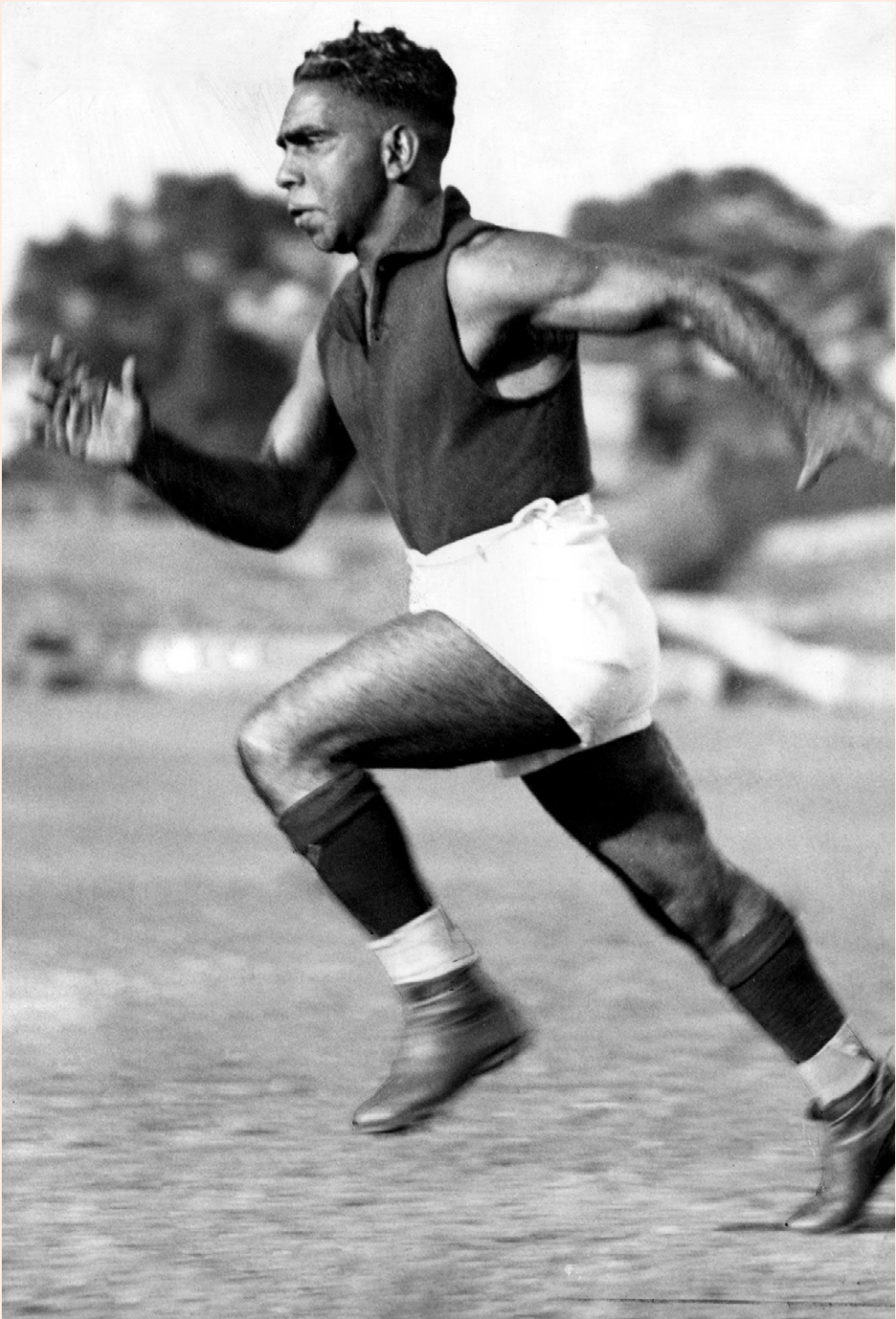
But his impact went far beyond football. He stood up for Aboriginal rights, fairness and equality, supported families and communities, and became a strong voice for First Nations people across Australia.

In 1976, he made history as the first Aboriginal person to be appointed Governor of an Australian state.

Today, the AFL honours his legacy through the Sir Doug Nicholls Round, which celebrates First Nations players, culture and contribution to the game.

AFL.com.au is releasing a five-part series called ‘Sir Doug – The Story of Legend’, available from Saturday, May 28.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Sir Doug Nicholls Round. Credit: Age



Halls Creek football legends Ash Johnson, Shane McAdam, Sam Petrevski-Seton and Jy Farrar. Credit: Collage by Bill Lucas

A little town with a big footy legacy

Halls Creek has a football record few towns in Australia can match.

For a community of our modest size, the number of players linked to the Shire of Halls Creek who have reached the AFL and AFLW is extraordinary.

Jy Farrar, Shane McAdam, Ash Johnson and Sam Petrevski-Seton are among the names integral to the Halls Creek football story, while ABC Kimberley has reported the town has produced more than 10 AFL and AFLW players in the past decade, dubbing Halls Creek “a football factory”.

It is a record worth celebrating, because Halls Creek is not a big regional centre with expensive facilities, private schools, specialist academies or easy access to weekly competition.

It is a remote East Kimberley town more than 3000 kilometres from Perth. From here, football talent has always had to travel further, leave earlier and fight harder to be seen.

Shane McAdam put it plainly when he spoke to the AFL Players’ Association about the depth of talent back home.

“So many boys back home now, they could easily be on an AFL list, but it’s just so hard to leave the community and leave everyone and everything you know behind.”

That divide is at the crux of the Halls Creek footy story. The talent is here (in spades), but the pathway is never simple.

Petrevski-Seton’s story shows how young the football journey can start here. He joined the Halls Creek Cowboys when he was

seven and was playing senior football for the Halls Creek Hawks by 13.

That is why the return of Halls Creek Oval matters. After three years of closure, the town is getting back the ground where young players can train, test themselves, be watched, be coached and imagine what might come next.

For a town that has already sent so much talent into the national game, the reopening of the oval on June 19 is not just good news for local sport.

It is the return of a pathway for talented young boys and girls across the Shire.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF