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Indigenous organisations wow judges in awards program

Eight of Australia's top Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations have been selected from a record pool of nominees in the prestigious 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards (IGAs).

The 2012 IGAs attracted over 100 applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned organisations and projects—more than tripling the number from the previous awards program in 2010.

An independent judging panel chaired by Professor Mick Dodson had the tough job of selecting just eight finalists.

“Indigenous governance is really improving and our finalists represent the best of what is happening in Indigenous communities,” Professor Dodson said.

“We're very pleased with the enormous response. We received a record-breaking 107 applications and the standard of quality was also very high.

“They are true success stories, achieving clear results in what are largely very challenging environments.”

Included in the eight finalists is a women's council who work to strengthen the economic, emotional and social wellbeing of women and families living in traditional homelands across South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia; and a youth development and leadership program in the Northern Territory.

While the 2012 finalists represent a diverse range of services, each has been developed from the ground up and are genuinely owned and driven by the communities and members they represent.

Judges will visit each finalist throughout August and September with the winners announced at an Awards event at BHP Billiton in Melbourne on the 12 October.

Held biennially, the IGAs were created in 2005 by Reconciliation Australia in partnership with BHP Billiton, to identify, celebrate and promote strong leadership and effective governance.

Further information: www.reconciliation.org.au/iga

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2012 Indigenous Governance Awards finalists

Category A: Outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in Indigenous incorporated organisations

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation (NPY Women's Council)

Runs programs in and services more than 25 communities and homelands spread over a vast 350,000 square kilometers of the NT, WA, and SA

NPY Women's Council is one of Australia's oldest and most respected Aboriginal organisations. Established in 1980, NPYWC works to strengthen and promote the health, safety and culture as well as the economic, emotional and social wellbeing of women and families of the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara lands. While it began as an advocacy organisation, NPYWC is now a major provider of human services to Anangu and Yarnangu people in its tri-state region. It remains a strong voice for members on issues such as substance abuse, domestic and family violence, child protection, policing and other safety issues, and the needs of young people. NPYWC provides innovative opportunities for economic participation and cultural transmission, always adhering closely to the values and aspirations of its members. Numerous community, health and safety initiatives, as well as the award-winning Ngangkari (traditional healing) and Tjanpi (fibre art) projects demonstrate how this organisation reflects the strength, creativity and resilience of its desert base.

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

Melbourne-based, representing members nationwide

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. SNAICC was established in 1981 following the First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar, elected its first national executive in 1982 and opened its office in 1983. Based in Melbourne, SNAICC has a small team of dedicated staff headed by a CEO, and is governed by a National Executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Their executive is drawn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled children and family services across the nation, with representation from each state and territory. SNAICC is funded by the Australian Government and derives some income from membership fees and sales of resources. Recently, SNAICC gained Deductible Gift Recipient status, allowing it to seek philanthropic funding and donations. SNAICC also receives significant pro-bono support. SNAICC's mission is to provide a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families through a national body which

represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services and promotes the rights, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC)

Yuendumu, Willowra, Nyirripi and Lajamanu, NT

Formerly known as the Mt Theo Program, WYDAC was established as a grassroots community outstation rehabilitation program in 1993 to address chronic petrol sniffing in the remote Northern Territory community of Yuendumu. Led by founders and Order of Australia recipients Peggy Brown and Johnny Miller, WYDAC has since transformed itself into a substantial and diverse multi-million dollar organisation.

Current programs focus on youth development and leadership, employment and training, juvenile justice diversion, and respite and rehabilitation across the communities of Yuendumu, Willowra, Nyirripi and Lajamanu. By championing ongoing and effective partnerships between Kardiya (whitefellas) and Yapa (Warlpiri), WYDAC has not only eliminated petrol sniffing in the community, but has developed a strong, effective and principled governance model.

Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation

(Western Desert Dialysis)

Alice Springs, remote dialysis services throughout central Australia NT/WA

WDNWPT was established in 2003 by people from the Pintupi Luritja language group to improve the lives of people suffering from end stage renal failure and to strengthen families and communities by helping people on dialysis to return home to their remote communities.

Their name means *making all our families well*. By establishing dialysis and support out bush, WDNWPT enables people to return home, participate in community life, contribute to their families, look after country and pass on their cultural knowledge.

WDNWPT began with an auction of extraordinary paintings, some painted by directors of the organisation, which were auctioned at the Art Gallery of NSW, raising more than a million dollars. This self-generated funding allowed the directors to design a ground-breaking service in the way they wanted it for their communities, rather than in the way a mainstream service would be developed. They set it up, funded it, proved it worked and have since gained support from government on the basis of this success.

Since inception, WDNWPT has been inundated with demand to expand its services throughout Central Australia. The organisation now has hemodialysis facilities in Alice Springs, in Walungurru (Kintore), Yuendumu and Ntaria (Hermannsburg), as well as a mobile renal dialysis truck. There are 12 indigenous directors, two of whom are dialysis patients, who regard the aim of the organisation as a way to 'hold on tight' to their family

members who are suffering from kidney disease and to create a viable future for their communities.

Yawoorroong Miriuwung Gajerrong Yirrgeb Noong Dawang Aboriginal Corporation
(MG Corporation)
Kununurra, WA

As the leading Indigenous organisation in the East Kimberley, MG Corporation receives and manages the entitlements and benefits transferred under the Ord Final Agreement (OFA) to the Miriuwung and Gajerrong people (MG people), the native title holders over their traditional country in the East Kimberley. The OFA provides a broad package of measures to create a platform for future partnerships between the MG people, the Government of Western Australia, industry and developers, for the benefit of the wider community and the East Kimberley Region. Using the provisions of the OFA and MG Corporation's Aboriginal Development Package, MG Corporation's mission is to build a strong economic and social base for the MG people while protecting and enhancing MG culture and heritage. The Board of MG Corporation has five Indigenous Directors, including a Chairperson, and two independent Directors. MG Directors are nominated by the Dawang Council, representing the 16 Dawangs (communities) within the MG membership. Additional advice is provided to the directors by the Garralyel (Elders' Council) which is often asked to weigh in on important board decisions. Today, the majority of MGs funding is self-generated from fee-for-service activities, primarily MG Services and the MG Land and Water team. The number of staff has increased in the past two years from 12 to 40, and more than 70 per cent of staff are Indigenous.

Category B: Outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in a non-incorporated initiative or project

Martumili Artists

Newman, WA, servicing Martu artists residing in the communities of Kunawarritji, Punmu, Parnngurr, Irrungadji, Jigalong, Warralong and Newman.

Established in 2006, Martumili Artists represents artists from seven Martu communities in the East Pilbara region. Martumili Artists has become a high profile, nationally recognised arts enterprise, providing services and opportunities to more than 300 artists. The rapid growth and achievements of Martumili are emblematic of the artistic and creative energy – combined with the entrepreneurship of Martu people – in growing a highly valued, culturally appropriate organisation.

Martumili has a unique structure as an unincorporated organisation. It is governed by a committee of 12 - two Martu artists or cultural leaders from each community - who provide key strategic direction to the art centre and to Martumili staff, as well as liaison with the Shire of East Pilbara.

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The Shire of East Pilbara provides significant support, through the skills and expertise of staff, administrative systems, financial oversight, infrastructure and utilities and strategic assistance. Martumili's success reflects the determination of its artists to establish an entity safe from dysfunction.

Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly

Represents the Community Working Parties of Bourke, Brewarrina Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Dareton/Wentworth, Enngonia, Goodooga, Gulargambone, Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge, Menindee, Walgett, Weilmoringle and Wilcannia, NSW.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly's governance charter "expresses our resolve to manage our own affairs, build sustainable communities and determine our own future. It demonstrates the depth of our resolve to make real improvements in our well-being...Establishing jurisdiction involves governance arrangements at the regional and community levels within the Australia's federal system of government. These arrangements will flow from further consultation, discussion, debate and deliberation by communities.

MPRA was established as a regional governance structure to support Community Working Parties (CWPs), governance bodies in the 16 Murdi Paaki region communities. The Assembly comprises Chairs (or their representatives) of these 16 CWPs. MPRA develops a Regional Strategic Plan, the information for which is sourced from the 16 communities. Priorities are identified by the MPRA and then implemented with the aim of providing capacity for governments and service providers to invest effort that will effectively address disadvantage in the region. The Assembly's Charter of Governance, rather than any incorporation legislation, provides the regulation, the goals and objectives, the functions and principles which guide its operations.

Yiriman Project

Fitzroy Crossing, servicing the Kimberley region, WA

The Yiriman Project has variously been described as a 'youth diversionary program', a 'cultural maintenance project' and 'a way to heal young people, heal country and heal community'.

Since 2000 Yiriman has worked with young people, their elders and other generations across four cultural groups in the Kimberley region. Yiriman is governed by senior cultural advisers from these groups and is managed by the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC).

The Yiriman Project started when Karajarri, Nyikina, Mangala and Walmajarri elders in the West Kimberley became concerned about young people who were harming themselves with drugs and 'grog' and getting in trouble with the law. They set up the project to help take young people, elders and other members of the community on trips to country.

“Yiriman is like a school for our young people – learning our duty of care for country. We [are] caring for country, cleaning waterhole, hunting kangaroo, looking after bush foods. When you don’t go to country you don’t care. It is like a dead heart and weed grow. Take Aboriginal man out of country and it will die. Every waterhole should have a black man. Young people have a right to know that it is their duty of care to look after country. Yiriman doing a proper good job. Yiriman understand we got to look at our old people, use a different school” (*Yiriman worker, 2010*).