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who have blazed a trail & those who are keeping the flame alight

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We acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

About Women's Agenda

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Women's Agenda is an independent daily news publication 100 per cent owned and run by women. Our team of journalists and researchers provide a vital perspective across daily news events and current affairs, including across politics, media, business, tech, climate, health and leadership. Published by Agenda Media Pty Ltd, founded by Angela Priestley and Tarla Lambert, this team also publishes Women's Health News and runs a growing podcast network, events, roundtables and regular research reports. Get in contact with our team at contact@womensagenda.com.au



Founder's Note

In celebration of NAIDOC Week 2023, Women's Agenda is proud to present a powerful feature that shines a light on the extraordinary achievements of First Nations women in Australia. This collection of stories celebrates the resilience, courage, and unwavering spirit of Indigenous women who have shaped our nation's history and continue to shape its future.

In this feature, we profile six senior Aboriginal women who have fearlessly agitated the status quo, challenging systemic barriers and paving the way for future generations. These trailblazers have made significant contributions to their communities and beyond, leaving an indelible mark on the fabric of our society.

Equally important is the spotlight we shine on six younger Indigenous Australian women who are carrying the torch of progress forward. They stand on the shoulders of those who came before them, upholding the legacies of their ancestors and maintaining the momentum of positive transformation.

At this pivotal point in history, with Australians poised to cast their vote on constitutional recognition of First Nations people and the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to have a voice on policies that impact them, these stories become even more crucial. They offer insights into the ongoing struggles, triumphs, and aspirations of Indigenous women, providing a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and the urgency for change.

Understanding stories like this are not only essential for First Nations people; they are vital for every member of our diverse society. They allow us to challenge our preconceptions, learn from the past, and forge a more inclusive future together.

We extend our gratitude to the incredible women who make up this feature. We hope their stories resonate with you, inspire you, and encourage you to play an active role in advocating for meaningful change.

Angela Priestley and Tarla Lambert Co-Founders, Agenda Media



Linda Burney is a trailblazer in Australian politics, whose resilience, compassion, and a commitment to social justice has been demonstrated in numerous ways over several decades. As a proud member of the Wiradjuri nation, Burney is a powerful voice for Indigenous Australians and marginalised communities across the country.

Born in 1957 in Whitton, New South Wales, Burney's early experiences of racial discrimination fuelled her determination to challenge injustice and bring about meaningful change.

Her political career began in the New South Wales Parliament, where she became the first Aboriginal person to be elected to the Legislative Assembly in 2003. During her time in state politics, Burney held various ministerial portfolios, including Community Services and Education, and spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable populations.

In 2016, Burney made history once again when she won the seat of Barton in the Australian House of Representatives, becoming the first Aboriginal woman to be elected to the federal parliament. Since then, she has continued to advocate tirelessly for Indigenous rights, social equality, and progressive policies. Her strong advocacy for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians has been instrumental in pushing this issue to the forefront of national discourse. In 2022, she was appointed Indigenous Australians Minister in the Albanese government and its chief spokesperson on enacting a Voice to Parliament.

Burney's ability to connect with people from all walks of life is a unique gift. She is well known for bridging divides and fostering dialogue, enabling her to effectively represent her constituents and champion their interests.

Beyond her political achievements, Burney's personal story resonates with many Australians. Her openness about her own family's experiences with trauma, including the loss of her son, helped break down the stigma surrounding mental health.

Linda Burney has become an inspiration for countless Australians, particularly for Indigenous youth, who look up to her as a role model and see that their voices can make a difference. Her unwavering determination to create a fairer Australia continues to shape the nation's political landscape and pave the way for a more inclusive future.

Professor Megan Davis

Professor Megan Davis is a proud Cobble Cobble woman from the Barrungam nation in southwest Queensland. She is a distinguished academic and human rights advocate who has made significant contributions to the fields of law, constitutional reform, and Indigenous rights.

Currently serving as a Professor of Law and the Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Davis has dedicated her career to promoting the rights and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including as a key architect of the Uluru statement from the heart.

Megan's work focuses on constitutional law, international law, and human rights and she has played a crucial role in advancing the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in the realm of constitutional reform. She was likewise instrumental in the establishment of the influential Indigenous-led referendum campaign for the constitutional recognition of First Nations people. Her ability to bridge the gap between academia and activism have been pivotal in driving positive change.

Davis has also held various key positions within national and international organisations. She served as a member and Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and played a vital role in shaping the global discourse on Indigenous rights, earning her immense respect and influence on the international stage.

Davis continues to champion issues such as self-determination, treaty, and constitutional recognition. Her strong endorsement of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament is a current pursuit, with Davis suggesting the framework is the first step to true reconciliation.

"If you don't have the commonwealth at the table, you're not going to have a robust treaty", she said in June.

Pat Anderson

Alyawarre woman Pat Anderson has been fighting for the rights and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for decades. She was raised in Darwin and began working for the Woodward Royal Commission into Aboriginal Land Rights as a legal secretary in the early 60s.

She obtained a degree in literature at the University of Western Australia around the same time, becoming one of the first Aboriginal graduates of that university.

Over the next few decades, Anderson's profile as a respected national leader grew as she worked to advocate for better education and health for Aboriginal children.

She became the CEO of Danila Dilba Aboriginal Health Service in Darwin, a community-based health provider that served the local Biluru people.

During that time, she also helped establish the Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance of the Northern Territory (AMSANT), the representative body for the Aboriginal Community-controlled Health Organisations in the Northern Territory.

In 1997, she helped create the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Aboriginal and Tropical Health — a research facility that generated educational activities aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The centre eventually split in 2003, separating into the CRC for Aboriginal Health and the CRC for Tropical Health and Medicine. Since 2018, Anderson has been the Chairperson of the Lowitja Institute —the country's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research.

The Institute combines Aboriginal organisations, government agencies and academic institutions to provide funds in support of collaborative, evidence-based research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and to develop stronger research capabilities among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Anderson has been publicly acknowledged with a range of awards, including the Public Health Association of Australia's Sidney Sax Public Health Medal in 2007 and the Human Rights Community Individual Award from the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2012.

In 2020, she delivered the Gandhi Oration at the University of New South Wales, where she spoke about the importance of establishing a Voice to Parliament through the Uluru Statement.

"We are Australia's first people, this is our place, and we're not going anywhere," she said.

Most recently, as a member of The Voice referendum working group, and the co-chair of the Uluru Dialogue, Anderson has expressed her desire for politicians to take a step back and allow the public to "have a real conversation, a real discussion."

"It's the Australian public who now have the authority to decide 'yes' or 'no' and when they get into the solitude of that polling booth, there's just them and their conscience," she said.

Mechelle Turvey

Mechelle Turvey rose to national prominence in October 2022, when her 15-year-old son, Cassius Turvey, was allegedly chased in the street and attacked with a metal pole while walking home from school. Cassius suffered from serious injuries and died in hospital 10 days later. Four people have since been charged with his murder, and have been committed to stand trial.

Following his death, there was an outpouring of grief across Australia, and numerous rallies and vigils were held, demanding justice for Cassius and for those who experience racially-motivated violence. At the time, Mechelle Turvey addressed these events, calling for calm amid the ongoing fight for justice, and issued a heartfelt statement that asked people to stand alongside her. "I don't want any more violence. I'm the only person who can get justice for my son. Stand alongside me, and I appreciate everyone, but I need to call out for calm. I am angry. Cassius' friends and family are angry. But I don't want any form of violence at any of these rallies in the name of my child," she wrote.

Mechelle Turvey has displayed nothing but warmth, strength and compassionate leadership amid her grief, and has since taken up a voluntary advisor role with the police in Western Australia, to help victims of crime and their families.

She has also donated thousands of dollars to community youth groups that had played a role in supporting Cassius during his young life that was cut devastatingly short. The groups honoured by her donations are Koya Aboriginal Corporation, Binar futures, the Lawn Mowing Boys, and the SCYC.

Professor Marcia Langton OA

Professor Marcia Langton AO is a descendent of the Yiman of Queensland, and one of the most distinguished academics in Australia. She is an anthropologist and geographer and has been the Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne for over 20 years. She is recognised for her instrumental work in changing and modernising how the resources sector engages with Indigenous people, particularly when it comes to negotiating agreements.

Langton is a member of the First Nations Referendum Working Group that has been tasked with advising the federal government ahead of the referendum on the Voice to Parliament. She is also the coauthor of a report (alongside Professor Tom Calma) on the Indigenous Voice Codesign Process, which was handed to the Morrison government in 2021. This report has become known as the blueprint for the Voice to Parliament and was the result of 18 months of consultation with 9,478 people and organisations.

Langton is a central figure in the 'Yes' campaign for the Voice, a position she has risen to after being at the forefront of academia, and the fight for progress for Indigenous people across Australia for decades. Her voice in the media is strong, clear and influential.

In 2021, Langton was vocal about the need for the federal government to establish a standalone plan to reduce violence against Indigenous women and children. "I mean this. Lives are at stake. Lives are being lost because people who think they know better than us will not listen to us and will not act on our advice," she said.

"If you go to a typical country town, what you'll see is the main services are all run by white people and all the Aboriginal leaders are marginalised," she said. "They are not even invited to the table."

Sandra Creamer

Proud Waanyi/Kalkadoon woman, Adjunct Professor Sandra Creamer AM is a lawyer and CEO who has long advocated for human rights, especially for Indigenous peoples.

Professor Creamer has worked with Indigenous women in Australia and globally, and believes it is important to empower Indigenous women for self-determination, equality of their rights as well as how they can challenge issues that affect their communities.

Wearing many hats, she engages on climate change and Indigenous rights as a lawyer with the United Nations and has been recognised with an Order of Australia for her leadership for First Nations women on issues of health, rights and self-determination.

She's the CEO of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA)-- and Adjunct Professor of Public Health at the University of Queensland. Professor Creamer is also the former co-chair of the international organisation, the Global Women's Caucus, and works with the International Indigenous Women's Forum.

All the more impressive is the fact that Professor Creamer has overcome immense challenges in her personal life as well. At 33years-old, she courageously left a domestic violence relationship and raised four children as a single mum. Her inspiring resilience led her into becoming a solicitor, making history in 2020, at age 59, as the first Queenslander to have her admission moved by her son.

"As a single Mum, I am so proud of all my children. Joshua has achieved so much...he helped me raise his brothers and sisters when I became a single mother," she told <u>Women's</u> <u>Agenda</u> at the time. "Having him admit me as a solicitor is surreal and it actually brings tears to my eyes."

Her son, Joshua, even described his mum as "the most humble person I know" despite the many obstacles she'd had to overcome to pursue her legal career.

"Born in Mount Isa, the youngest of 12. Her mother died when she was a baby. Mum was only one of two Indigenous kids in her boarding school, the first two Indigenous students to ever attend the school; she was asked to leave in grade nine."

"In a domestic violence relationship for over a decade. I still remember my stepfather pinning her against the wall with his forearm while he repeatedly punched her with the other fist," Joshua said.

"She is an important role model for all those Indigenous mothers out there whose dreams were never supported and who put their life on hold for their families."

Amelia Telford

Amelia Telford is a young Bundjalung woman with a passion for environmental advocacy and a dedication to empowering Indigenous youth, who has subsequently become a prominent figure in the fight against climate change.

Following high school, Amelia recognised the absence of Indigenous representation in climate change discussions and activism. To address this gap, she made the bold decision to defer university and focus on developing a program within the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC), aimed at supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in leading climate action and implementing sustainability initiatives within their communities.

Telford says she envisions a future where a network of young leaders from all corners of Australia come together to advocate for their land and demand stronger action on climate change. As the Indigenous Coordinator for the AYCC, she has expanded the Indigenous Program significantly; including intensive training and mentoring for up to 50 Indigenous young people nationwide, engaging an additional 40 high school students, and fostering collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Through her leadership, Amelia has become a driving force behind the Indigenous youth climate movement. Her work has not only empowered Indigenous voices but has also fostered collaboration and understanding between different communities to pave the way for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Amelia's achievements and commitment to environmental justice have garnered widespread recognition, earning her the title of Youth of the Year in 2014. In 2015 she was also awarded the Bob Brown Foundation Young Environmentalist of the Year and the Australian Geographic Society's Young Conservationist of the Year to add to her 2014 National NAIDOC Youth of the Year award.

Amelia's conviction inspires young people across Australia, highlighting the power of advocacy in effecting meaningful change.

Mikaela Jade

Cabrogal woman Mikaela Jade knows the power of being a descendant of the world's oldest storytellers. While at university, she studied a range of sciences, including Indigenous Land Management, Indigenous Studies, Environmental Biology and Applied Cybernetics.

In her first job as a national park ranger, Jade realised there was so many Indigenous stories and histories that had to be shared and preserved. She wanted to maintain significant cultural sites through meaningful storytelling, but she didn't yet know how.

One day at university, Jade encountered augmented reality (AR) for the first time. Soon after, she began researching and reaching out to digital technology companies around the world to learn more about the capabilities of AR.

Her research culminated in her founding Indigital Edutech, Australia's first Indigenous education-tech company specialising in AR, almost ten years ago.

Indigital delivers digital skills programs and training in augmented and mixed realities, AI, and machine learning to help close the digital divide for Indigenous people.

Jade's aim is to use digital technologies to preserve 80,000 years of human knowledge while engaging First Nations peoples to equip them with skills and jobs. "I've always wanted to tell stories on country through augmented reality, it's just taken a while for the tech to catch up with my vision," she said in 2018. "We're still focused on how to push tech for the betterment of the Indigenous community across Australia, and I feel so lucky to be part of this community."

More recently, Jade developed Indigital's flagship program – Indigital Schools – aimed at primary and high-school students. In the program, students learn from local Elders as they develop digital skills.

Jade became a member of the Pathway to Diversity in STEM Review last year, and has already graced important world stages, including the United Nations (UN) in New York, where she spoke about the impact of new technologies in Indigenous communities.

Jade has received numerous awards for her work, including the Schwab Foundation Social Innovators of the Year award and the ANU Indigenous Alumna of the Year.

Today, she is a member of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Metaverse Governance Steering Group and a delegate on the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

She was also nominated as the 2023 ACT Australian of the Year.

Brooke Blurton

Noongar-Yamatji woman Brooke Blurton has led an incredibly prolific life in her young 28 years.

Her public profile exploded in 2021 when she became the first Indigenous and bisexual to head "The Bachelorette". At the time, she was working as a facilitator of Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid in Melbourne.

Since then, the youth worker and mentalhealth advocate has been busy spreading her good vibes, co-hosting the podcast Not So PG with Matty Mills and competing in a new series, called The Challenge Australia.

In 2022 she released her memoir, Big Love, where she details her experience of intergenerational trauma, racism and homophobia.

She is known for her transparency, often speaking out about political and social issues. Earlier this year, she expressed her belief that Australia Day should be abolished. In April, she told the Herald she has always been a strong advocate for the Voice to Parliament. In 2019, she was part of the youth dialogue, pushing for the Voice and the campaign work that comes along with that.

"For me, the Voice will determine a lot," she said. "A "yes" vote would mean that change is happening. A "no" vote will be reflective of the racism in our country and how we treat First Nations people." Most recently Blurton spoke on Women's Agenda's "The Crux" about using her platform to encourage social change and how she stays grounded. She had just completed a live coaching session with Kemi Nekvapil on Nekvapil's new Audible original podcast, Power Talks.

"I always ask myself why I do what I do," she said. "I think that kind of helps with reflecting and then going back and being like, 'Yes, this is a part of me and who I am.'"

"I think I always sort of revert back to why I would be doing something, and does it bring me joy? Does it share or educate people on something?"

Karen Iles

Karen Iles is a Dharug Aboriginal woman and the director and principal solicitor at Violet Co Legal & Consulting. She is a prominent advocate for law reform and has been vocal over the past 12 months about the need for a minimum duty for police to investigate reports of serious crimes like aggravated child sexual assault.

It was revealed in a report by Guardian Australia last year that Queensland and New South Wales police have failed to investigate a series of alleged sexual assaults against Iles, when she was a 14year-old girl.

The alleged sexual assaults have not been investigated by police since Iles first reported in 2004 when she was in her 20s. This is despite Iles taking action with repeated follow ups and more recently, complaints to police integrity bodies. Iles has spoken to **Women's Agenda** about her campaign for law reform, saying "there must be a duty [for police] to 'do something' and that duty needs to be legally enforceable to provide victims with certainty that police will take them seriously".

"The community is shocked there is no legal standard to investigate reports of such serious crimes like aggravated child sexual assault."

Violet Co Legal & Consulting is an Indigenous and woman-led organisation that Iles founded to improve outcomes for women and First Nations people dealing with the legal system. Iles was recently appointed by the federal government to be a director at Our Watch, a national organisation leading change in the practices, norms and structures that lead to violence against women and children.



Artist Sally Scales is a Pitjantjatjara woman from Pipalyatjara in the far west of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in remote South Australia. She works for the APY Art Collective, a group of Indigenous-owned cultural enterprises.

Elected as Chairperson of the APY Executive Board Council in 2019, Scales became the second woman to ever hold the position. She's worked with the APY Art Centre Collective as well since 2013 in cultural liaison, elder support and spokesperson roles.

Scales is also part of the youth leadership team for the Uluru Statement reform, having been involved in the Referendum Council's Constitution regional dialogues in Ross River, Adelaide and the national convention in Uluru in 2017. Since then she's been involved with the Uluru Dialogue leadership.

In recognition of the impact she's had as Chair of the APY Executive Board Council and in the leadership team working with the Uluru Statement reform, Scales was nominated by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard for the BBC 100 Women list, and ultimately named amongst the prestigious group. "Sally is a creator of both wonderful art and human understanding. By enlightening and enthusing others, she catalyses the many changes needed to end the pernicious combination of racism and sexism," Julia Gillard said.

In addition to her already long list of achievements, Scales is an independent elected board member of the Australian Children's Television Foundation and a board member on the Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board. She's a foster mum as well.

In 2022, Scales spoke with <u>Art Guide Australia</u> about the inspiration behind her art, how art and culture surrounded her growing up and the desire to continue the legacy of her Elders.

"For me, it was really about looking at my own lineage, my grandmother and my mother's style, and weaving that into it," she said. "But I also realised that I'm very much a contemporary artist—there's so much that I like in the world of seeing artists who are so different in their own styles. I like not being very similar to others."

Kristal Kinsela

A proud Jawoyn and Wiradjuri woman, Kristal Kinsela is a leading supplier diversity expert and recognised business leader. Bringing over 18 years of business expertise to every partnership, Kinsela's latest venture is a Youtube series- Meet the Mob- profiling and promoting Indigenous businesses to her client base.

The powerhouse series is what led Kinsela to be named Agenda Setter of the Year in Women's Agenda's 2022 Leadership Awards. With her self funded passion project, Kinsela is raising the profile of Indigenous businesses, advocating to break the unconscious bias and showcasing Blak Excellence in Indigenous business.

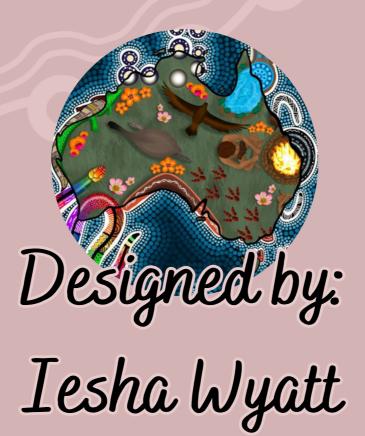
Some Meet the Mob interviewees include Carol Vale, Dixie Crawford, Jasmine Newman, Leroy Wilkinson-Maher, David Williams, Mundanara Bayles, Kieran Shirey, Mitchell Ross and Leesa Watego.

Each video is a short interview conducted by Kinsela with questions that explore Indigenous business leaders' motivations, purpose and legacy. The interviews are designed to introduce Indigenous business to Corporate and Government Australia. Back in 2020, Kinsela told AGSM's 'Business of Leadership' podcast what she sees for her own legacy, saying it "will see the growth of our sector and the number of sustainable Indigenous businesses skyrocket. We are the future, and everyone will do business with us."

Kinsela has been hard at work on fulfilling that legacy and is no stranger to creating a big impact on Indigenous communities and business leaders across Australia. She founded and runs her own multi-million consultancy business and authored a book on Indigenous business procurement, Supplier Diversity How, based on her proven approach.

In her own consultancy, Kinsela is the trusted adviser to corporate and government clients, working closely with leaders to articulate their supplier diversity vision, change organisational culture, develop procurement policies, and connect them with talented Indigenous businesses.

Her work has come with much recognition as well. In 2017, Kinsela was awarded NSW Aboriginal Woman of the Year and Supplier Diversity Advocated of the Year. Then, in 2019, she was named Indigenous Defence Leader of the Year and appeared in the 2019 AFR 100 Women of Influence list. This year, she was a State Finalist in the Telstra Best of Business Awards in the Indigenous Excellence Award.



lesha Wyatt is an emerging Yued Noongar artist working in both painting and digital mediums, with a background in fine art and graphic design. With a love for recreating traditional techniques in modern technologies, she uses symbols to condense complex stories into powerful visual images. Currently employed parttime as a social media officer as well as a freelance artist, she is working towards building her portfolio and making a name for herself with the goal of eventually working on her art full time.

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