YMAC NEWS

News from Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

ISSUE 54 | November 2026





Yamatji Marlpa ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
ICN 2001

KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIPS

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Front cover photos: The men's breakout session at the 2026 Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at the Yule River Meeting Place (image: Sam Gibbs).

Geraldton Senior High School students perform traditional dancing (image: 65Thirty Events and Entertainment).

Please be advised this publication may contain images and names of deceased people. We sincerely apologise for any distress this may cause.

Hello and welcome to issue 54 of YMAC News



Miss Natalie Parker, Co-Chairperson – Pilbara Region



Mr Peter Windie, Co-Chairperson – Yamatji Region

In this edition, we:

- Provide updates on our on-Country meetings and their Calls to Action
- Highlight Yamatji students working on the Elders' Film Project
- Share updates from our Rangers.

We also post regular updates on current news and issues affecting native title and Traditional Owners on our website. Visit ymac.org.au to stay up-to-date, or subscribe to email updates by visiting the website, clicking on 'Media & Publications' and then 'Subscribe' on the pulldown menu.
You can also scan this QR code.

Follow us on LinkedIn at tinyurl.com/ymaclinkedin.

We are always on the lookout for interesting and informative news. If you have stories or photos you would like to share, please reach out to us by emailing editor@ymac.org.au

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians throughout Western Australia, and on whose Country we work. We acknowledge and respect their deep connection to their lands and waterways. We honour and pay respect to Elders, and to their ancestors who survived and cared for Country.

News from the CEO

Welcome to our latest edition of *YMAC News.*

It has been another busy and productive year for YMAC, and as we head into AGM season, I encourage members to get involved in our upcoming Annual Regional Meetings (ARMs). The Pilbara ARM will be held on Monday, 23 November in South Hedland, and the Yamatji ARM on Friday, 27 November in Exmouth. Both meetings will include elections for new Directors, and I look forward to seeing as many of our members as possible participate. More information can be found on page 4.

I am pleased to share that YMAC has secured Lotterywest funding to renovate and refurbish our Geraldton office. This long-awaited project will help strengthen our presence in the heart of Geraldton and create a more welcoming and functional space for members, staff and visitors. We were pleased to join the Hon Don Punch MLA and Caitlin Morgan from Lotterywest for the funding announcement, and you can read more about the project on page 5.

Over the past few months, we have held our two key on-Country meetings: the On-Country Bush Meeting at the Yule River Meeting Place in Port Hedland in July and Yamatji on-Country in Geraldton in September. These events continue to grow in strength and significance, providing important opportunities for communities to come together, identify regional priorities and shape their Calls to Action that reflect local aspirations.

We are proud to support First Nations communities across the Yamatji and Pilbara regions as they continue to advocate for place-based solutions and partnerships that help deliver meaningful progress on Closing the Gap. You'll find coverage of both events in this edition.

This edition celebrates the appointment of two new Principal Legal Officers, Maimbo Chilala and Pauline Gartlan, who will share the role through a permanent job-share arrangement. Both bring extensive experience and a deep commitment to achieving positive outcomes for Traditional Owners. We congratulate them on their appointments and invite you to learn more about their journey on page 15.

Earlier this year, YMAC hosted it's 2026 YMAC Native Title Forums – Let's Talk About *WATER*! which focussed on the important issue of terrestrial (i.e. inland) water rights, access and allocations. The outcomes and recommendations, developed directly from the forum discussions, are now available on page 17 and in full on our website at ymac.org.au/native-title-forums. Water remains one of the most significant and complex issues facing Traditional Owners, and YMAC will continue to monitor developments and keep PBC's and members informed.

And finally, as another year draws to a close, I would like to thank our Board, Regional Committee's, our members, PBC's, partners and staff for their ongoing support and commitment through 2026. YMAC offices will be closed over the holiday break from Monday, 21 December 2026, reopening on Monday, 4 January 2027.

On behalf of YMAC, I wish you all a safe and enjoyable time with friends and family and look forward to another year of working with you all in 2027.



Simon Hawkins,
YMAC Chief Executive Officer



SAVE THE DATE

YMAC 2026 Annual Regional Meetings

YMAC's Pilbara and Yamatji Annual Regional Meetings (ARM) are a great opportunity to meet up with other members, hear about the work we have done over the past 12 months, have your say about important issues, and vote in annual elections.

If you cannot attend, YMAC encourages you to give your proxy to an attending member.

For more information on proxies, please refer to the Annual Regional Meeting notice that will be mailed to Yamatji Class members for the Yamatji ARM and Pilbara Class members for the Pilbara ARM.

2026 Pilbara ARM

MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER

Arrive at 10.00am for a start at 10.30am SHARP

Youth Involvement Council HQ
34 Lawson Street
South Hedland, WA 6722

2026 Yamatji ARM

FRIDAY, 27 NOVEMBER

Arrive at 9.00am for a start at 9.30am SHARP

Mandu Mandu East Room,
Ningaloo Visitor Centre,
2 Truscott Crescent
Exmouth WA 6707

Please contact the Perth Office on (08) 9268 7000 or the Geraldton Office on (08) 9965 6222 for further information

or to confirm your attendance for catering purposes.

YMAC is not funded to pay travel allowance for the attendance of members at this meeting | Lunch will be catered

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Refurbishment project progressing for historic Geraldton building

Work is continuing on YMAC's heritage-listed Geraldton office following the announcement of $1.4 million in Lotterywest funding to support its refurbishment. The project will strengthen First Nations governance, support leadership development and enhance opportunities for community connection.

The refurbishment will support the revitalisation of one of Geraldton's significant heritage buildings, ensuring it remains an important part of the city's future while honouring its history.

Once completed, the upgraded facility will provide modern workspaces, meeting and boardroom facilities, improved accessibility and cultural design elements that celebrate Aboriginal identity, leadership and connection to Country.

The project is expected to benefit more than 20 Aboriginal organisations by creating opportunities for greater collaboration, stronger local decision-making and improved service delivery across the region.

YMAC Co-Chair Mr Peter Windie said the project represented far more than a building refurbishment.

"This investment will help transform historic building into a place where Aboriginal organisations, leaders and communities can come together to make decisions, share knowledge and strengthen connections."

He said the building would become a welcoming and culturally safe space supporting First Nations governance,



Minister Punch, YMAC Co-Chairperson Peter Windie and Caitlin Morgan from Lotterywest mark the announcement of $1.4 million in Lotterywest funding to support the refurbishment of YMAC's heritage-listed Geraldton office (image: Tash Gillespie).

service delivery, training, community meetings and cultural activities for many years to come.

Located in the heart of Geraldton's CBD, the refurbished building will also increase the visibility of Aboriginal leadership and culture within the city, creating opportunities for education, reconciliation and community understanding.

"Having a dedicated, culturally governed space in the heart of Geraldton is incredibly important. It will provide a place for Aboriginal people and organisations to gather, collaborate and lead, while also creating opportunities for the broader community to engage with and learn about Yamatji culture and history."

The project is scheduled for completion in December 2027 and will create a lasting community asset that supports Aboriginal organisations, leaders and communities throughout the Mid West for generations to come.

YMAC gratefully acknowledges Lotterywest's support in helping bring this important project to life.

Place-based solutions highlighted at the 2026 Yule River bush meeting

The Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at the Yule River Meeting Place was held on Wednesday, 29 and Thursday, 30 July on Kariyarra Country.

More than 500 people attended from across the region, joining Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Ministers and senior representatives from all levels of government.

This year's event focussed on place-based solutions and improving the delivery of programs aligned to the *2024 Yule River Call to Action and Solutions Roadmap* and the *2025 Community Priorities*.

On behalf of the community, Yule River Working Group members Henry Lockyer and Zoe Little presented the key priorities identified during the meeting to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Hon Don Punch, Minister for the Pilbara Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, Commissioner for Children and Young People Jacqueline McGowan-Jones and other senior government representatives. They called on governments to work alongside them to create lasting change and improve access to essential services for their communities.

Mr Lockyer said long-term funding certainty was critical to addressing the issues raised by the community.

"Everything we discussed here yesterday and everything we discuss here each year comes back to a failure of the system. We are left in the wake of this systemic failure, and we are left to pick up the pieces," Mr Lockyer said.

"One practical change would be to take a genuinely generational approach to funding, giving our organisations the confidence, certainty and stability they need to address the complex issues our peoples and communities continue to face."

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Hon Don Punch acknowledged the concerns raised by community members and reaffirmed his commitment to working alongside Pilbara Aboriginal communities to progress the priorities identified at the meeting.

"Again, I give a commitment that I will be back again formally in six months to review our progress on the outcomes from this meeting, said Minister Punch.

"I also give a commitment that if you need me to follow up on a matter, you can contact me and I will respond to that and I will give the answer that I can give."

Community members also raised issues around housing, education, traditional language preservation and water quality during a Q&A session with senior government representatives.

Mrs Doris Eaton, YMAC Deputy Co-Chairperson, Pilbara Region – Board of Directors, encouraged all Aboriginal people from across the Pilbara to come together as one.

"I thank YMAC for bringing us to Yule River, and I thank the Yule River Working Group. We work so hard to get where we are, but we need your support," said Mrs Eaton.

"When we're all standing together, we'll achieve something. We can't do this as individual families. We're all fighting for one cause."



Yule River Working Group members Terry Jaffrey and Henry Lockyer presenting concerns from the Men's breakout session to the wider community (image: Sam Gibbs).

The meeting also recognised the 80th anniversary of the Pilbara Strike, with the Yule River Working Group paying tribute to those who led the historic movement, and a moving story-telling performance by Patrick Churnside and Big hART. A record 31 information stalls took part in this year's event, providing opportunities for information sharing and community engagement.

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) coordinates the Yule River Bush Meeting under the direction of its Pilbara Regional Committee and in consultation with the Yule River Working Group.

YMAC extends its appreciation to the Town of Port Hedland, the Pilbara Development Commission, and Lotterywest for their support of this year's event.

Find out more on the YMAC website at ymac.org.au/events/yule-river.



Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Hon Don Punch responding to the community's calls to action (image: Sam Gibbs).



Mrs Doris Eaton, Deputy Co-Chairperson, Pilbara Region – Board of Directors of YMAC opening the Annual On-Country Bush Meeting at the Yule River Meeting Place (image: Sam Gibbs).

Water health and safety consultation

This year's Yule River meeting also included an important discussion about water health and safety in remote communities, facilitated by the Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance (PAHA) with representatives from the Water Corporation.

Jon Griffin, Regional Manager, Aboriginal Community Water Services at the Water Corporation heard from the community on water health and access to safe drinking water.

Concerns were raised about the high financial cost of needing to buy bottled water because tap water isn't safe to drink; water testing and how it is carried out; parasites, chemicals and high calcium in the water making it undrinkable; outdated legislation; and the lack of water due to the drying out of rivers across the Pilbara.

Mr Griffin acknowledged the importance of the consultation and encouraged participation as a way forward in improving the management of water in the region.

Yamatji On-Country drives action for change

The award-winning Yamatji on-Country event was held at Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation on Wednesday, 23 and Thursday, 24 September, with over 500 community members coming together to talk about the issues facing their communities and the next steps needed to deliver real, lasting change.

This year, the Yamatji community have called on all levels of government to join with them on a new approach to delivering on the *2025 Yamatji On-Country Call to Action*, through the delivery of three dedicated, agenda-free community spaces.

These spaces would be purposefully distinct – one each for men, women, and youth – but built on one shared foundation.

The spaces would support healing, connections, belonging and navigation for First Nations people in the region, without recreating the institutional pressures that exist elsewhere.

The Yamatji community called on both the State and Commonwealth governments for investment in capital works to establish these three fit-for-purpose and locally designed community hubs, as well as long-term resourcing over the next five years that would give community the ability to set up these spaces without imposing a specific service delivery agenda.

Community representatives shared the proposal on Day Two of this year's meeting.

Co-Chairs of the Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance (MAOA), Jamie Strickland and Chloe Collard, explained these holistic community spaces would be First Nations-led.

Ms Collard shared that priorities for women in the region included having a space for generational healing, truth-telling, and the strengthening of culture.

"It is about sisterhood, bringing collective strength, and recognising and responding to the intergenerational trauma that is still being carried forward in our families and communities," Ms Collard said.

For men, Mr Strickland shared this space could include drug and alcohol services, preventative support in the family and domestic violence space, and on-Country programs for men, including young men.

"What we are asking for today is a commitment to provide funding towards this project," said Mr Stickland.

"We are also asking for a commitment that you will come back to our community in six months, so that we can better work through some of our ideas and – as a community – develop some specifics around exactly what these spaces need to look like.

"What we know is that we need these spaces. We know they need to be Aboriginal-led and controlled, and we know they need to be run by our community for our community. Consultation is non-negotiable."

MAOA Co-Chair Jamie Strickland (image: 65Thirty Events and Entertainment).



Carnarvon community representative Gail Bellotti presenting to government on Day Two of Yamatji on-Country (image: 65Thirty Events and Entertainment).



Community members also made clear their urgent concerns for the Carnarvon community.

Gail Bellotti spoke passionately about her concerns for the Carnarvon community, saying, "Our nannas are at our wits end. Drugs and crime are taking over our town and invading the homes of our families. Our nannas are caring for their grandchildren and trying to keep their children alive.

"They are carrying grief, trauma, poverty, housing stress and child safety fears while being sent from agency to agency with no clear help.

"I stand here today and call on the WA Ombudsman's office to commence a full, whole-of government investigation into the systemic failure that is besieging Carnarvon.

"It must examine racism, unsafe decision-making, housing failure, child protection practice, policing responses, justice pathways, service gaps and the absence of accountable leadership."

Senator Sue Lines, WA Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Hon Don Punch, Member for Geraldton Kirrilee Warr MLA, and Commissioner for Children and Young People Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, were in attendance and also spoke in response to community presentations and the Call to Action.

In his presentation, Minister Punch announced the ACCO Transition Pipeline, a new State Government project aimed at strengthening Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in the region, as a response to the 2025 Yamatji on-Country Call to Action Statement.

YMAC Co-Chair Mr Peter Windie said this year's Yamatji on-Country once again demonstrated the strength of community-led conversations and decision-making.

"It was great to see so many people come together to share their ideas, experiences and aspirations for our region. The discussions over the two days highlighted the importance of community having a strong voice in shaping our future," Mr Windie said.

YMAC extends its appreciation to Lotterywest for their support of this event.

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Hon Don Punch presenting to the Yamatji community on Day Two (image: 65Thirty Events and Entertainment).





Yamatji on-Country wins national AIATSIS Award for Excellence in Contemporary Innovation

YMAC representatives accepting the award in recognition of the Yamatji on-Country initiative, AIATSIS Awards. L-R: YMAC Co-Chair Mr Peter Windie, Project Officer Ken Capewell, Communications Coordinator Tash Gillespie, Projects Coordinator Henry Sims, Yamatji Regional Manager Chris Dann (image: Liora Fletcher).

YMAC is proud to announce that our Yamatji on-Country initiative has been recognised nationally, winning the Excellence in Contemporary Innovation Award at the prestigious 2026 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Summit on Yugambeh Country, Gold Coast Queensland.

The award recognises projects that have made tangible and positive impacts in education; health; galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM); and social awareness through innovative approaches and meaningful community outcomes.

While the award was presented to YMAC, the recognition belongs to the many Yamatji community members, Elders, young people, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs), the Mid West Aboriginal Organisations Alliance (MAOA), and partners who have shaped and strengthened the initiative year after year.

Developed under the guidance of YMAC's Yamatji Regional Committee, Yamatji on-Country is a community-led event that brings together First Nations people from across the Mid West, Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia to meet on Country, share knowledge, identify priorities and develop solutions grounded in culture, lived experience and local leadership.

YMAC Co-Chairperson, Peter Windie, said the award reflects the strength and leadership of Yamatji communities and the impact of community-led approaches.

"This award belongs to our communities. Yamatji on-Country exists because our Elders, young people and community leaders continue to come together, share their knowledge and shape solutions for the future.

"What makes this initiative so powerful is that it is led by community, with solutions grounded in lived experience and local leadership. It is a model that is culturally grounded, practical and delivering real outcomes.

"I am particularly proud of the role our young people have played, with their leadership and ideas continuing to shape the future of the initiative."

YMAC would like to thank everyone who has contributed to Yamatji on-Country over the years, acknowledging that the award is a shared, significant achievement and a testament to the power of community-led solutions.

As the initiative continues to grow, YMAC remains committed to supporting community voices, strengthening partnerships and ensuring that future generations have opportunities to lead, contribute and thrive.

For more information, visit ymac.org.au/events/yamatji-on-country

Yamaji students reconnect with culture through the Elders Film Project

Students from across the Yamatji region are reconnecting with culture through the Yamatji on-Country Elders Film Project, a youth-led initiative developed in response to one of the key priorities identified by young people at Yamatji on-Country: reconnecting to culture.

The project brings together students, Elders, teachers, YMAC staff and filmmakers from Ardiol Creative to create a series of documentaries that capture cultural knowledge, personal histories, language and connections to Country. Along the way, students are building practical filmmaking skills while learning directly from Elders and community members.

YMAC is working with five schools across the region: Champion Bay Senior High School, Geraldton Senior High School, Mullewa District High School, Exmouth District High School and Carnarvon Community College.

Since August, students have participated in filmmaking workshops covering documentary production, cinematography, sound, lighting, interviewing and storytelling. They are now preparing to begin filming on Country with Elders and community members during Term Four.

At Yamatji on-Country 2026, students from Champion Bay Senior High School, Geraldton Senior High School and Mullewa District High School shared updates on their projects and what the experience has meant to them. Exmouth District High School and Carnarvon Community College were unable to attend.

According to YMAC Project Officer Ken Capewell, the project is about far more than filmmaking.

"The Elders Film Project isn't just about making films. It's about creating connections between generations, strengthening cultural knowledge, building students' confidence, and ensuring important stories continue to be shared into the future."

The completed documentaries will provide a lasting record of the knowledge and stories shared by Elders, while helping strengthen cultural connections for the next generation.

YMAC acknowledges and thanks Lotterywest, Minister Punch and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Midwest Development Commission, City of Greater Geraldton, Water Corporation, Horizon Power, Iluka, Rio Tinto, JHM Group and Vac West for their support of the Elders Film Project.



Students from Exmouth DHS practice setting up a mock interview (image: Tash Gillespie).



Mason and Jai from Geraldton SHS practice using the audio equipment (image: Tash Gillespie).



Charli from Mullewa DHS practices on the audio equipment (image: Tash Gillespie).



Luke from Ardiol Creative teaches Jack and Harmoney from Champion Bay SHS how to use the camera equipment (image: Tash Gillespie).



Dan and Luke from Ardiol Creative teach the students from Carnarvon Community College about filmmaking (image: Tash Gillespie).



Students from Mullewa DHS, during their youth presentation on Day Two at Yamatji on-Country (image: 65Thirty Events and Entertainment).

Healing Country: Nungingay Springs restored for future generations

For generations, Nungingay Springs has held deep meaning for Nanda people, a waterhole on Murchison House Station that Elders once tended and where younger generations still feel the pull of family connection.

In recent years however, the site had fallen into disrepair: feral goats pushed through broken fencing, concrete had been poured into the waterhole itself, and the damage was a source of real heartache for Traditional Owners who carried memories of the spring in better days.

That story has now taken a turn for the better.

In 2025, following an application by the YMAC Heritage team on behalf of Nanda Aboriginal Corporation, works funded through the WA Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage's (DPLH) Preserve, Promote, Protect Our Aboriginal Sites grant program were completed at Nungingay Springs. Debris was cleared, the old fence pulled out, and a new galvanised fence with a pedestrian gate installed, giving the waterhole the protection it has long needed while still allowing appropriate access.

The work was carried out by Pepper Contracting, a Geraldton-based First Nations owned business, with Nanda Traditional Owners on site throughout to monitor the works and ensure they were done right. DPLH's Midwest team helped facilitate the project.

The significance of this project reaches well beyond a new fence line and best captured in the words of the Nanda Board: "Rehabilitating this site has been an act of healing Country."

For Nanda people, the restoration of Nungingay Springs represents far more than physical conservation. It is about caring for a place of deep cultural importance, honouring the experiences of Elders who worked on the station, and of younger generations still finding their way back to Country through family ties.

Bringing together Murchison House Station, DPLH and Nanda Aboriginal Corporation through the planning, works and monitoring stages has also strengthened relationships built on trust and mutual respect, a genuine, shared commitment to looking after this special place that will outlast the project itself.

There's also a flow-on benefit for the local community. By engaging a First Nations-owned contractor to carry out the works, the project supported local economic opportunity and helped build capacity within the Aboriginal business sector in the Mid West, proof that heritage protection and community strength can go hand in hand.

Nungingay Springs now stands protected, its future far more secure than it was just a couple of years ago. It's a project that shows what's possible when Traditional Owners, landholders and government agencies come together with a shared purpose, turning a site of concern into one of pride, and a story of damage into one of renewal.

YMAC congratulates Nanda Aboriginal Corporation, Murchison House Station, DPLH and Pepper Contracting on a project that has protected culture, strengthened community, and helped heal Country for generations to come.







Black Pepper Contracting staff and Nanda Aboriginal Corporation representatives installing new fencing at Nungingay Springs (image: Nanda Aboriginal Corporation and DPLH).



YMAC celebrates 50 years of Deadly during NAIDOC Week

This year's NAIDOC Week theme, '50 Years of Deadly', invited us to celebrate the strength, resilience, and achievements of First Nations peoples over the past five decades while also looking ahead to the future.

It was an opportunity to recognise the leaders, communities, and movements that have shaped the journey so far, and to consider the role we all play in supporting the next generation.

At YMAC, this theme resonates deeply with the work we do every day.

Through supporting native title outcomes, protecting rights and interests, and helping Traditional Owners manage and care for Country, we are privileged to work alongside communities that continue to demonstrate extraordinary leadership, determination, and vision.

Throughout the week, YMAC staff across our regions came together to celebrate and learn in a variety of ways.

Congratulations to the Geraldton team on delivering another successful Elders' Morning Tea in Carnarvon, as well as representing YMAC at the Carnarvon Family Day with an engaging community stall.

In the Perth office, a highlight was a NAIDOC morning tea, where staff were fortunate to be joined by guest speaker Ashley Reid from Yawu Consultancy.

Ashley's presentation on *Walking in Two Worlds: STRONG* provided valuable insights about leadership, cultural identity, and community empowerment, encouraging us to think about our connection to NAIDOC Week and ourselves.



Ashley Reid from Yawu Consultancy presenting to YMAC Perth office staff during NAIDOC Week (image: Sam Gibbs)



Guests enjoying the NAIDOC Elders' Morning Tea in Carnarvon (image: Chris Dann).

An update from the Nanda and Baiyungu-Yinnigurrura Rangers

Since the last edition of YMAC News which announced the establishment of the Nanda and Baiyungu-Yinnigurrura Ranger Programs, both programs have continued to take shape, with new team members, stakeholder engagement and on-Country activities underway.

The Nanda Ranger Program is building strong momentum, with a Ranger Coordinator and part-time Operations Assistant now in place. The program has established a core team of five Rangers and five Cultural Advisors, supported by a broader pool of up to 16 participants who can be engaged as required.

The Nanda team has also started working with a range of stakeholders, including flora and fauna activities with Bush Heritage Australia and marine debris clearing with Tangaroa Blue. A ranger base has been established in Kalbarri, and two vehicles are now part of the program fleet.

For the Baiyungu-Yinnigurrura Ranger Program, establishing the team has taken a little longer, but good progress is being made. With the Ranger Coordinator commencing in November, a part-time Operations Assistant appointed, and a pool of six Rangers and three Cultural Advisors has been established, and one vehicle in the program fleet, with plans to expand as the program develops. Stakeholder engagement has also begun, while the search continues for a suitable ranger base in Carnarvon and/or Exmouth.

With the foundations now being put in place, both programs will continue building their teams, partnerships and opportunities to care for Country.



Nanda Ranger Program representatives L-R: Colin 'Ned' Ryan, Sharkquia Kelly, Irene Kelly, and Carrum Mourambine

YMAC's new Principal Legal Officers



YMAC Principal Legal Officers Maimbo Chilala and Pauline Gartlan (image: Tash Gillespie).

YMAC are pleased to announce the appointment of Maimbo Chilala and Pauline Gartlan as YMAC's Principal Legal Officers (PLO's) through a permanent job-share arrangement.

This appointment brings together two highly experienced legal professionals who will share responsibility for the strategic leadership and delivery of YMAC's Legal portfolio, while continuing to advance outcomes for Traditional Owners across our regions.

Just as importantly, it reflects YMAC's commitment to supporting flexible and inclusive leadership pathways.

Senior job-share arrangements remain relatively uncommon, yet they offer organisations an opportunity to retain experience, support career progression and recognise the many responsibilities people balance beyond the workplace.

Maimbo and Pauline's appointment demonstrates that leadership can be both high performing and flexible, creating benefits for our people, our organisation and the Traditional Owners we serve.

Congratulations Maimbo and Pauline and on your appointments. We look forward to seeing the impact of your shared leadership.



Water and Waterways: the law, pathways to management, and the anthropological lens symposium

In July 2026, YMAC staff attended the Anthropological Society of Western Australia's (ASWA) water symposium, *Water and Waterways: the law, pathways to protection, and the anthropological lens* at the State Library of Western Australia.

The symposium focused on practical issues of recording and protecting waterways, the interface of legislation related to water and the varying cultural values of water locally and internationally.

Attendees heard and reflected on how the states manage water, how miners use water, and shared successful outcomes gained in native title processes for protecting and managing waterways. The symposium discussed emerging and leading anthropological methodologies and explored strategies for developing better protections for water under current legislative and industry frameworks in Western Australia.

Presenters included John Southalan a barrister and mediator, who provided the legal context of water as sites and what rights in water can be recognised under current laws, and what opportunities are available to negotiate water protections.

Ngadju cultural leader Les Schultz discussed how he protects Ngadju Country through his roles with the Ngadju Native Title Aboriginal Corporation and the Ngadju Bunna Ranger Program.

Ellendale Pool, located within the Southern Yamatji Native Title Determination (image: Tash Gillespie).

Former Chair of the Water Corporation Mike Hollett shared his expertise on water management processes and leverage points in negotiations, especially with miners, with a focus on ways of keeping water on and in Country.

Associate Professor and Anthropologist Sally Babidge from the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland discussed the potential and conceptual approaches to anthropological analyses of water in extractive contexts in Australia and overseas.

Anthropologist Dr Eddie McDonald shared his research into the Gnangara Mound artesian basin and on rivers. He shared his successes in satisfying section 5(b) of the Aboriginal Heritage Act and referred to anthropological research relevant to the protection of inland waterways in Western Australia.

YMAC Senior Anthropologist Corey Herrmann attended the symposium and found it an informative event for his work with Traditional Owners.

"The quality of information shared, the tangible tools it imparted, and the ability to translate those learnings to the provisions of our various roles in our organisation related to the protection, management and recording of water and water values were of great benefit," he said.

YMAC Native Title Forums Outcomes and Recommendations: Water is not a commodity

Outcomes and recommendations from the 2026 Native Title Forums – which focussed on Traditional Owner terrestrial (i.e. inland) water rights, access and allocations – have been released.

Feedback gathered from the forums had a strong message emerge from attendees: Water is not just a commodity; it is fundamental to culture, Country, community wellbeing, and future prosperity. However, First Nations people continue to have very limited control over how water is managed or used.

Participants highlighted several major concerns, including the absence of legal pathways for First Nations peoples' water rights, fragmented government decision-making and notification processes, consultation processes that lack transparency, meaningful action and feedback, and regulatory systems, particularly in relation to mining, that prioritise compliance over long-term cultural and environmental outcomes.



The panel of presenters at the Perth Native Title Forum in 2026 (image: Tash Gillespie).

Structural barriers to participation were also emphasised. Limited resourcing, complex legal and technical frameworks, and short consultation timeframes restrict the ability of Traditional Owners and PBCs to engage effectively. These challenges are compounded by climate change, which is increasing competition for water and intensifying risks to Country.

Overall, the forums underscored a clear expectation that government move beyond consultation toward genuine partnership and shared decision-making.

Attendees from across YMAC's regions identified a number of outcomes and opportunities for State Government in this space:

1. Respectfully and meaningfully recognise the importance of water to First Nations people and its criticalness to not only environmental but cultural survival.
2. Rethink the necessity and prioritisation of related legislative reforms.
3. Establish clear and concise statutory pathways for Aboriginal water ownership and control, including for cultural flows and related community wellbeing.
4. Overcome the persistence of siloed and opaque approaches undertaken by State departments/agencies responsible for water governance.
5. Require improved and earlier engagement with Traditional Owners and their representative organisations on water governance matters (including water licencing notifications).
6. Afford Traditional Owners and their representative organisations adequate time and resourcing to genuinely participate in water governance matters.
7. Ensure regulation delivers positive long-term outcomes (and not legacy risks) for First Nations people and Country.

Read these outcomes and recommendations in full on the YMAC website at ymac.org.au/native-title-forums.

Middamia on-Country trip strengthening culture, wellbeing, and future opportunities

A recent on-Country trip, supported by the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism and Sport (DCITS) through their Connecting to Country program, has delivered significant cultural, community and planning outcomes for Middamia people, providing a valuable opportunity for members to reconnect with Country and one another.

Around 40 participants, including 20 children, attended the trip. For many, the experience provided a valuable opportunity to spend time on Country, share knowledge, and reconnect with family, culture, and community.

Feedback from participants indicates the trip had a positive impact on wellbeing, with attendees valuing the chance to reconnect with culture, family, and place.

The gathering provided an opportunity for Elders and community members to share stories, experiences, and cultural knowledge, helping to preserve and pass on important traditions to future generations.

Yingarrda Elder Mr Thomas Dodd reflected on the positive outcomes of coming together on Country.

"Stepping onto Country with family filled me with energy, strengthened our connection and gave us something meaningful to carry on for years," he said.

The trip generated important cultural heritage outcomes, with several locations identified as priorities for future site preservation and restoration work. YMAC will continue working alongside the Middamia Aboriginal Corporation Board to explore cultural heritage funding opportunities that support the protection and management of these significant places.

An important achievement of the trip was the documentation of people, places and stories through photographs and video recordings. This material will





help preserve cultural knowledge for future generations and will be shared with Middamia members at the 2026 Annual General Meeting, providing a lasting community resource.

Through discussions with participants, several priorities for future development were identified, including opportunities to leverage native title rights and interests to support cultural, social, environmental, and economic outcomes for Middamia people. These conversations helped shape a shared vision for future growth and community benefit.

The trip also strengthened relationships with stakeholders across the region, creating opportunities for ongoing engagement and collaboration in support of shared objectives.

Overall, the on-Country trip demonstrated the value of investing in activities that support cultural connection, preserve knowledge, strengthen wellbeing, and create pathways for future opportunities. The outcomes achieved will help inform ongoing cultural heritage, environmental and community development initiatives for Middamia people.

The Middamia on-Country trip allowed participants to connect to Country and culture (images: Ken Capewell).





New Ngarlawangga and Rio Tinto agreement delivers ongoing opportunities for future generations

Ngarlawangga people celebrated recently as they entered into an Interim Modernised Agreement with Rio Tinto.

The agreement modernises the Participation Agreement between Ngarlawangga Aboriginal Corporation (NAC) and Rio Tinto, and delivers stronger cultural and environmental protections, and decision-making arrangements designed to support Ngarlawangga people now and for generations to come.

It provides Ngarlawangga people a greater voice in decisions affecting Country and culture, and a strong foundation for Ngarlawangga people and future generations.

YMAC is pleased to have supported NAC in this work. The agreement will:

- Establish a new co-management approach for Ngarlawangga knowledge and priorities to inform how Country is protected and managed.
- Deliver stronger support for Ngarlawangga priorities, community aspirations, and opportunities for future generations.
- Provide dedicated, long-term support for culture and community development initiatives determined by Ngarlawangga people.
- Establish a process for NAC and Rio Tinto to work together when planning and carrying out mining activities, with stronger consideration of Ngarlawangga cultural heritage, environmental values and responsibilities for looking after Country.
- Sets out ways of working together in cultural and heritage management within the agreement area on Ngarlawangga Country in WA's Pilbara region.

The signing marked the continuation of a strong partnership between NAC and Rio Tinto. The occasion was celebrated at a ceremony at Giles Point with bushtucker and dancing, attended by the Ngarlawangga community and Rio Tinto executives and staff.

Ngarlawangga Aboriginal Corporation is pleased to sign the agreement and continue working with Rio Tinto to build a strong future for Ngarlawangga people.

"This agreement builds on our long-standing relationship with Rio Tinto and reflects a shared commitment to working respectfully together," NAC shared.

"Most importantly, it creates lasting economic and cultural opportunities for our children and grandchildren, stronger protections for Country and culture, and a greater role in decision-making will help Ngarlawangga people build capability and capacity, pursue community priorities, and shape a strong future."

Ngarlawangga people will now work with Rio Tinto towards the full modernised Participation Agreement. This will further strengthen safeguards for Country, and ensure Ngarlawangga cultural heritage is protected and passed on to future generations.

Above: Ngarlawangga people with YMAC staff and Rio Tinto Iron Ore staff celebrating their new Interim Modernised Agreement, on Ngarlawangga Country (image: Heather Dowling).

Project agreement signing ensures lasting benefits for Nyangumarta

In September 2026, the Nyangumarta Warrarn Aboriginal Corporation (NWAC) and Rio Tinto marked a major milestone through signing a Project Agreement for the proposed Winu copper-gold mine on Nyangumarta Country, in the Great Sandy Desert 300 kilometres south of Broome.

This was the culmination of years of negotiation, planning, and community consultation.

YMAC supported NWAC throughout the negotiations, providing advice and assistance to help ensure Nyangumarta people's rights, interests and aspirations were represented throughout discussions on the proposed project.

The agreement builds on the Project Planning Agreement signed in 2023 and is the result of more than five years of engagement between Nyangumarta people and Rio Tinto.

The co-designed agreement sets out how they will both work together throughout the planning and potential development of the proposed mine.

It establishes processes for incorporating Nyangumarta knowledge, priorities and perspectives into decision-making and outlines measures to avoid and minimise impacts on Country, the environment, and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The project remains subject to regulatory approvals and a final investment decision.

Nyangumarta Elder Margaret (Nyaparu) Rose said the decision had been carefully considered by the community.

"We've spent more than five years at the table with Nyangumarta people and Rio Tinto to make sure every voice is heard and everyone has all the information they need to make an informed decision," Nyaparu said.

"Making sure our Country and culture are looked after has been at the heart of every conversation we've had about Winu."

A key focus of the agreement is ensuring Nyangumarta people continue to have a meaningful role in decisions affecting their Country throughout the life of the project.

Nyangumarta Elder Charlie Wright said the agreement would help ensure Nyangumarta people remained involved as the project progresses.

"This agreement gives Nyangumarta people a seat at the table for the life of the project to ensure our culture, heritage and Country is respected," Charlie said.

"Through the opportunities with the project, we want to see our young people get jobs and training, our businesses get work, and our community sharing in the benefits from development on our Country."

The proposed Winu mine is expected to create opportunities for training, employment and business participation.

For Nyangumarta people, the signing represents an important step forward, providing a framework for ongoing involvement in project planning while supporting the protection of Country, culture, and community interests for future generations.



Nyangumarta Warrarn Aboriginal Corporation, Rio Tinto, and Sumitomo Metal Mining representatives preparing to sign the Winu Project Agreement (image: Rio Tinto – supplied).



Nyangumarta Warrarn Aboriginal Corporation and community members gathered alongside representatives from YMAC, Rio Tinto, and Sumitomo Metal Mining (image: Rio Tinto – supplied).

Strengthening skills for protecting Country

Earlier this year, two Nyangumarta Rangers, Roberta Hunter and Vallerina Aspro, joined 22 other First Nations Rangers from across northern Australia at the inaugural Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Masterclass in Darwin.

The advanced two-day training brought together experienced Rangers from Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland to strengthen skills in detecting and responding to exotic pests, diseases and weeds.

As the first group of Rangers in Australia to complete this new training, participants gained hands-on experience in early detection surveillance techniques, strategic survey planning, pest and disease identification, wildlife sampling, and laboratory-based biosecurity practices. They also worked through real-world scenarios designed to build confidence in responding to biosecurity threats and protecting Country.

Following the Masterclass, attendees were congratulated on their strong engagement and reminded that they had played an important role in shaping the future of the program as the inaugural cohort.



Nyangumarta Ranger, Roberta Hunter, at the Darwin Biosecurity Masterclass (image: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry).



Nyangumarta Ranger, Vallerina Aspro, at the Darwin Biosecurity Masterclass (image: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry).

YMAC caught up with one of the Nyangumarta Rangers, Roberta Hunter, to hear about her experience as a ranger, what she learned during the masterclass, and how the Nyangumarta Rangers plan to apply their new knowledge on-Country.

Can you tell us a little about yourself, your role as a Nyangumarta Ranger, and what you enjoy most about working on Country?

I started up with the Rangers at the beginning in 2015. I enjoy walking around (2ha plots) and seeing what animals have been there, going out on-Country and looking after it, and how we monitor and look after all the animals.

We enjoy ourselves going out on-Country doing different things and learning all the time. It's good fun. We share our stories when we sit down by the fire or travelling and visiting other people's Country.

Why did you want to attend the Biosecurity Masterclass in Darwin in February 2026?

I like learning about the coastal side and seeing what the other Rangers are doing round the Top End, how they manage their Country. I like to go out on boats and see what they do with the ghost nets and see the art they make.

You make lots of friends and you learn different things.

Before attending the masterclass, what did you already know about biosecurity, and what were you hoping to learn?

I was interested to learn more about the ghost nets – how they clean them up and the art they make from it – and learn about the different mussels and cockles that wash up from overseas. Learning about all the marine debris that washes up from everywhere. I wanted to go out on the boat and see how they monitor it on the water.

What were some of the most valuable skills, ideas, or information you gained during the training?

I learnt lots from mixing with other rangers and sharing knowledge and stories. It was a good and happy masterclass.

How will what you learnt at the Masterclass help you in your work as a Ranger on Nyangumarta Country?

Our team works differently to the other Top End Rangers but we all care for Country the same way. I was inspired and motivated from the workshop to share what we learnt with our team.

Did you have the opportunity to connect with Rangers or land managers from other parts of Australia? What did you learn from them?

Yes, it was good to catch up with Ranger friends from Mapoon, Yirrkala and the Ghost Net team.



Nyangumarta Ranger, Vallerina Aspro, at the Darwin Biosecurity Masterclass (image: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry).



Nyangumarta Ranger, Roberta Hunter, on Nyangumarta Country (image: Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation).

What does it mean to you to contribute to caring for Country and your community?

For me it's good. I learnt a lot from biosecurity, and I love to look after the coastal side. Looking after the coastal side we have the shorebirds, turtles and all the sea creatures. I like doing the marine debris clean-up to make the coast clean.

What message would you like to share with young Nyangumarta people who might be interested in becoming Rangers in the future?

I would like to say, 'come and join the Rangers, it's fun.'

When you go out on-Country, you see different places, you learn lots and you'll be happy on-Country. It's good to do both sides – coastal and inland side.

If you look after Country, Country will look after you. Ranger work is the best job in the world. You get to try different bush foods and experiences on exchanges. You never stay in one place, you go out to see different places, you make friends, and inside you feel happy.

News from | Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

YMAC NEWS

Country, Culture, People, Future

About us

YMAC News is produced by Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation.

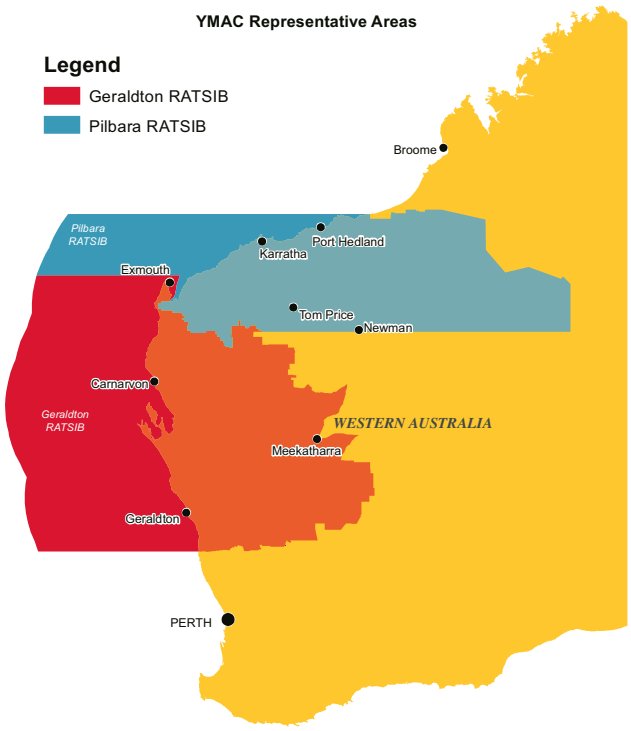
We are an Aboriginal Corporation and the Native Title Representative Body for the Mid West, Murchison, Gascoyne and Pilbara regions of Western Australia.

YMAC Vision 2026-2030:

Protecting Country, language and culture, we come together as one, united and strong.

Our purpose:

Walking together we champion rights, Country, language, and culture; provide education and awareness and create opportunities for a better tomorrow for First Nations peoples.



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