




University of Tasmania

Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Engagement

2021 - 2024

UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA 





*Tasmanian
Aboriginal people are
referred to in this document as
Aboriginal, or
palawa / pakana. The term Indigenous
is used to refer collectively to Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander people
in Tasmania and Australia, and
to Indigenous, First Nations,
and Aboriginal people
internationally.*

📍 Two Tree Point,
Bruny Island

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Tasmania acknowledges the palawa/pakana and Gadigal/Wangal people, the traditional custodians of the land upon which we live and work, and their enduring cultures and knowledges. We recognise that decisions and practices affecting the future of Indigenous education and research are vital to the self-determination, wellbeing and livelihood of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to shaping the Australian society in which we live.

We recognise that the advancement of Aboriginal Business is a collaborative endeavour between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and an initiative that is the responsibility of every member of the University community.

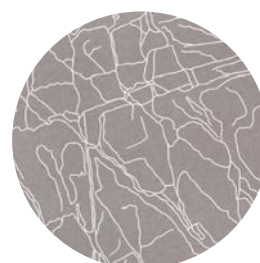
Cover image: Aboriginal Dancers from left, Mitchem Everett, Harley Everett and Craig Everett - Sandy Bay

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Foreword by the Vice Chancellor

Professor Rufus Black

I am delighted to write this foreword for the Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Engagement 2021-2024. This strategic plan is the result of extensive engagement and consultation across the University community, which gathered feedback on the previous successes and aspirations for improvement of our Aboriginal engagement initiatives. The plan provides the foundation of our commitment to the palawa/pakana people of Tasmania, and Gadigal and Wangal people on whose country our Rozelle campus is based.

The 2019 Apology to Tasmanian Aboriginal People was a moment in which we could take stock of the past, and look to a shared future where renewed emphasis can be placed on the values, engagement, and accountability that we have to Aboriginal People. This document draws on the success of the Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Engagement 2017-2020, previously led by Distinguished Professor Maggie Walter. It maintains strategic foundations established through Aboriginal community consultation, and builds on these through review and evaluation to create an enduring partnership.

The new Strategic Plan seeks to build our academic focus for Aboriginal student success, increase support and training to Indigenise our curricula, enhance cultural safety and governance across the University, and develop an Aboriginal Research Strategy. The plan asks how we can embed Aboriginal success more deeply into the core operations of the University. It explores how we can do this across workforce diversity, access to study, research, and governance.

Our approach to Aboriginal Business is very much aligned to the University's overall Strategy. We are an institution that is committed to our place-based mission to improve the future for all Tasmanians and to contribute to the world in ways can do distinctively from Tasmania. The Plan focuses on how we can make this sort of difference through positive impacts in the community, and by enhancing our understanding of the unique human history of lutruwita/Tasmania.

Sharing accountability for success and encouraging innovation, will make measurable improvements in Aboriginal enrolment, retention, and attainment, and champion social inclusion and cultural participation through improving access and equity across our campuses. In this plan we commit to initiatives that will reach across all areas of our University. These initiatives will further boost the great work that our people already undertake in learning and teaching, student success and wellbeing, community engagement, and the growth of scholarly networks with Indigenous communities and Peoples across Australia and the world.

The next three years in which we implement the goals and recommendations in this plan will coincide with our ongoing move of the Sandy Bay Campus to the Hobart CBD, and our continuing transformations in the North and North West of Tasmania. In the course of these transformations, we have a wonderful opportunity to work together in ways that are meaningful for Tasmanian Aboriginal people. More than this, the plan will be transformative for the many that will come to work and study at our University in the future, activating new facilities and enriching our University community with deeper understandings of the Tasmanian Aboriginal culture that is at the heart of a place-based University.



I thank Professor Greg Lehman and his team for the collaborative leadership that brought together Aboriginal staff and their colleagues from across Riawunna, People and Wellbeing and each of our Colleges and Divisions to progress our vision of a University that welcomes and embraces Indigenous peoples, cultures and aspirations as our own. I hope that we all continue to share in the optimism for the future detailed in this important document.

Growing Strong: the next five years

Professor Greg Lehman - Pro Vice Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership

The Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Engagement 2017-2020 was the first university-wide strategy for Aboriginal Business at the University of Tasmania. Developed in consultation with an Aboriginal Policy Working Group, the Plan established a series of principles, actions, organisational structures and cultures in order to create a whole-of-institution approach to engaging and supporting the educational success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities.

The Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership commenced a review of the Strategic Plan in March 2020. Detailed evaluation of performance outcomes, together with surveys Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and a wide range of staff provided critical understanding of awareness, perceptions and aspirations. A series of individual and focus groups discussions included key University stakeholders from senior executives to front line teaching and support staff. Our findings documented the success of the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan. Of sixty-five strategic actions, thirty-five were completed, and twenty-four were well progressed. Qualitative feedback from students and staff illustrated a significant shift in the climate of the University; embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and prioritising initiatives.

Completed strategic actions involved implementation of recommendations from the 2015 review of the Riawunna Centre, focussed on delivery of high quality Aboriginal community and student engagement, enabling and support services, including establishment of a range of prizes and scholarships and high visibility cultural facilities. Other actions included commencement of curriculum audit and Indigenisation processes, cultural competency workshops and a range of Aboriginal employment programs and planning; an audit of research capacity, HDR mentoring, research and pathways development; strengthened research ethics and protocols; international engagement, public lecture series; enhanced online presence; and Indigenous inclusion in senior management structures.

The 2021-2024 Strategic Plan builds on these foundations, continues successful initiatives, and addresses gaps in implementation. This new plan also targets strategic growth areas and will serve as a framework for the development of Action Plans across the University to translate our aspirations into tangible and positive outcomes for students, staff and community.

The University is committed to providing a rigorous, world-class education for Indigenous students within a culturally safe and supportive environment focussed on scholarship and success. Our Indigenous graduates will possess the capability and confidence to participate and lead across the full spectrum of professions and vocations.

This is not only essential for the self-determined livelihood of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The benefits of Indigenous knowledges are important to all who value a sustainable future.

Our focus is strongly place-based, involving partnership with knowledge holders to draw on perspectives and experience with local, regional, national and international relevance. At the same time, we will respect and invest in our staff to retain and grow Indigenous talent across our workforce.

Course curricula throughout the University will be shaped to ensure that all students can share in the rich cultural knowledges and histories of palawa/pakana (Tasmanian Aboriginal) people. This will be achieved in partnership with knowledge holders across the Academy and Community through innovative paradigms of teaching, learning and research. Importantly, our approach will acknowledge and support the recovery of Tasmanian Aboriginal knowledges, cultures and livelihoods following the impacts of colonisation.

Adopting and maintaining a collaborative, university-wide approach to Aboriginal Business, harnessing the talent of our diverse teams across the University's Colleges and Divisions, and working together will consolidate our progress and deepen our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success



Our Vision and Goals

Our vision for Aboriginal engagement at the University of Tasmania is to:

- Shape the University of Tasmania so that our institution is welcoming, respectful, formative and supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. We will do this through continual improvement of Aboriginal community engagement, student recruitment, retention and success;
- Mature the University's capability to recognise, represent and desegregate Indigenous cultures, knowledges and communities across teaching and learning, curricula, research and governance, to become intrinsic to our programs and facilities;
- Provide all staff and students with meaningful connections to Indigenous peoples, cultures, knowledges and communities. We will do this to enable understanding of and respect for Indigeneity and Indigenous lifeworlds as essential to the values and experience of our University community

The University will accomplish these outcomes through actions guided by several key principles:

palawa/pakana-centred

As a place-based university, our focus is on outreach and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to realise their personal and community aspirations. As the University of Tasmania, our primary obligations are to the palawa/pakana people on whose Country we have grown. We also respect and support the Gadigal and Wangal people who host our Rozelle campus.

As a place of learning, our strategic initiatives prioritise palawa/pakana people and their knowledges as *primus inter pares* (first among equals), by growing and valuing diverse relationships locally, regionally and statewide. Our partnerships are guided by Tasmanian Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and Elders, and extend to Indigenous and First Nations people across the world.



Collaborative

The success of Aboriginal Business at the University of Tasmania is the product of collaborative engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with colleagues who bring their own diverse knowledges, experiences and cultures to the challenge of our strategic goals. These collaborations are led by the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership through an Aboriginal Leadership Group and an extended network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, in partnership with the University Council, Executive, Divisions and Colleges, and the Riawunna Centre. Student engagement and success, Indigenisation of curriculum and pedagogy, research design and delivery and equitable participation in governance are shared responsibilities for all members of the University community.

Support and Teaching

As a smaller institution, students at the University of Tasmania have greater opportunity to access and build relationships with teaching and professional staff over the years of their studies. Sustained and personalised care and learning is critical to the retention and success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. Quality relationships are founded on ensuring that University staff are culturally informed and competent; that the University environment is culturally safe; and that diversity of cultural knowledges and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as their sexual, gender and intersectional identities, are respected.

A Model for Innovation and Success

The programs and initiatives of the University of Tasmania stand as national and international models for innovation; to recognise and value Indigenous cultures and knowledges, and to make the livelihood and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples a central concern.

Through a commitment to excellence and continual improvement, we aim to deliver lasting benefits to Tasmanian Aboriginal students and communities, and to Indigenous people across Australia and the world.

Our Strengths

The University of Tasmania brings significant capabilities and resources to the task of implementing Aboriginal Business:

- We have a small, but growing group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who are passionately committed to working together to enhance the success of Indigenous students and to empowering their communities to achieve self-determined aspirations;
- Riawunna is acknowledged as a Centre recognised for innovation and leadership in academic enabling through the Murina Pathway Program, student support and wellbeing, community engagement and cultural events. The Riawunna Team are champions for visibility of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture across the University's campuses and facilities;
- Evidence gathered from a broad cross section of University staff points to a shared appetite for positive change, an affirmative organisational climate for attaining Aboriginal Business goals, and a readiness to be accountable for achieving success;
- Favourable structural foundations across key domains have been established by success in the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Engagement 2017-2020;
- The Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership has prioritised Aboriginal Business as a core consideration in the University's policies, strategies and procedures; and is critical to providing leadership and advocacy for Indigenous staff and students at the University;
- There is strong research awareness and output pertaining to Indigenous interests at the University, and increasing participation in research activity by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and communities;
- The University has experienced sustained growth in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments, including an increasing cohort of higher degree by research candidates;

- A wide range of scholarships and bursaries have supported enrolment growth. In particular, the Senior Indigenous Research Scholarship program has been successful in bringing palawa/pakana knowledge holders and community leaders into the University to share and extend their skills and expertise;
- Local, national and international networks of Indigenous stakeholders, scholars, professional staff, organisations, community and advocates continue to grow;
- The University community includes academics who are internationally renowned for their research expertise in areas pertaining to Indigenous people, including Indigenous Data Sovereignty, colonial history and international law;
- Commitment to the advancement of Aboriginal Business and Reconciliation exists at the highest levels at the University of Tasmania, with the University Council, University Executive Team, and Academic Senate serving as active advocates for positive change.



📍 Inaugural Pro Vice-Chancellor Aboriginal Research and Leadership Professor Maggie Walter farewell celebration. Sandy Bay, Tasmania

Our Challenges

A background of historical and structural legacies, together with gaps in outcomes from the previous Plan and opportunities for growth must be addressed in order to maintain progress and meet performance targets: ets:

Senior Staff

There are currently few senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at the University.¹ All will have reached retirement age by 2025. These staff undertake a wide range of specialised roles. Without effective succession, this poses a critical risk to Aboriginal Business through loss of:

- accumulated organisational knowledge;
- personnel with rapport, experience and skill in leadership and governance;
- mentors and role models for early career staff;
- leadership for Indigenisation of curricula;
- research expertise and supervisory capacity;
- competitive advantage for research funding;
- deep understanding of community challenges and aspirations;
- cultural leadership.

¹Senior staff are defined as HEO 10 or Academic C and above.

Indigenous Workforce

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed at the University in 2020 was 1.22%.² This is:

- significantly less than the 3% target required by Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020, and only 62% of the parity target in the University of Tasmania Staff Agreement 2017-2021;
- exacerbated by a staff turnover rate nearly twice that of non-Indigenous staff;³
- Limited by current Aboriginal community capacity to access recruitment.
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at all levels will be required to guide development and delivery of effective programs.

Cultural Diversity and Engagement

The impacts of colonisation and consequent political struggle by Tasmanian Aboriginal people to establish public acknowledgement of contemporary Aboriginality and rights have left a legacy of tensions relating to many social, cultural and political issues. The University must address these challenges in a way consistent with justice and equity, funding agreements and community expectations. Our success will direct implications for staff and student recruitment, retention and wellbeing by ensuring the University is an inclusive, safe and rewarding place to study and work

Cultural Safety

Many factors influence the University's ability to retain and accumulate Indigenous staff. Culturally safe work and study environments are critical requirements for a fulfilling life. Our dynamic social and political setting demands a continuing focus on maintaining and developing cultural safety for all members of the University community.

² By headcount.

³ University of Tasmania 2019 ISSP Performance Report.



Collaboration and Cultural Load

Despite wide support for Aboriginal Business at the University, sustained impact will require that responsibility is shared with non-Indigenous personnel as part of a whole-of-University approach. This will minimise the potential for over-reliance on a small number of Indigenous staff and 'burn out'. Similarly, there is risk that opportunity created by prioritisation of Aboriginal Business may be vulnerable to changes in leadership or funding environments in the medium term. Managing these risks requires embedding of the strategic initiatives in this Plan as 'business as usual' across all relevant University programs.

Governance and Leadership

While significant progress has been made in the creation of an executive role of Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership as a member of the Provost's Executive Group and Academic Senate, further opportunities exist for Indigenous participation in governance across executive management teams and University Council. Leading practice initiatives in Australia has resulted in the establishment of roles including Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), Associate Provost (Indigenous) and Associate Dean (Indigenous). Opportunity for these initiatives at the University of Tasmania will be influenced by organisational scale and development initiatives and limited by current workforce issues outlined above.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Graduation Scarves

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

We want the University of Tasmania to be known nationally and internationally as a tertiary institution providing rigorous personal and academic support for Indigenous students, in a learning environment that celebrates culture, diversity, aspiration and success. To do this, we need to enhance cultural safety and inclusivity, and strengthen our focus on academic progression in order to increase retention and completion rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across the 2021-2024 period by 10%.

OUR CHALLENGES

There is an under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments at the University, and disparities exist in retention and completion when compared to outcomes for all students. Currently Tasmania is falling behind national trends of improvements in Indigenous student success. The effectiveness of initiatives to increase enrolment, retention and success relies on effective service delivery and evaluation to ensure continued alignment with changing demographic, regional and cultural needs and aspirations.



Aboriginal Students and Staff at Graduation, Cradle Coast campus

HOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Continued delivery of high-quality services through the Riawunna Centre is essential to maximising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success. These are established by a Riawunna Operational Plan, and include community engagement, pathways and enabling programs, scholarships, supplementary tuition and personalised support. Successful student support will be based on strength-based approaches to academic engagement and achievement.

To further enhance student success, there are several priority actions that will be implemented through this strategy.

1.1 Aspirational engagement with pre-tertiary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.

- Close networking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in late primary and secondary schools and their families by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with successful experience of higher education will occur in collaboration with school teaching staff and Aboriginal Education Services⁴ to monitor progress and aspiration, design individualised pathways into university courses, and facilitate enrolments.
- Pathways initiatives will culminate with an intensive approach to actively engage Year 11 and 12 students in cooperation with University Colleges.

1.2 Enhanced service provision through Riawunna

- Additional capacity for academic engagement will be provided to Riawunna to support student success. This will include enhanced academic leadership and increased numbers of student support staff with graduate experience.
- Academic skills assessment will be conducted during Orientation Week for commencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to facilitate personalised learning support.
- All students will be contacted and offered academic and personal assistance by Riawunna, with Aboriginal Student Advisors embedded with College teams to deliver discipline-based support.
- Establishing and maintaining regular student contact will be a key performance indicator for student support staff.

⁴The Tasmanian Department of Education delivers a range of Aboriginal education programs across all schools. Independent and Catholic schools have similar programs.

1.3 Prioritise academic skills development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- Emphasis will be placed on academic learning, writing and research skills. Enabling programs will prepare students for undergraduate success, while also recognising and supporting a range of cultural and development outcomes appropriate to the University learning environment.
- The Riawunna Tutorial Program will deliver individually tailored academic support for undergraduate students throughout their course of study to recognise and respond to each student's academic, cultural and personal needs.
- The Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership will conduct annual Higher Degree by Research recruitment and support workshops to increase post graduate enrolment and success.
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Society, based on a partnership model between staff and student leadership, will be resourced to facilitate academic, cultural and social participation in University life.

1.4 Enhancing College Capability

- The Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership will support Riawunna student success initiatives by facilitating programs to increase College capability to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic and cultural needs.
- Colleges will encourage and support maintenance of cultural competency amongst all staff and students. The Office will maintain networks with alumni to extend community involvement in this initiative.
- All Colleges will provide culturally safe study spaces for students to enhance retention and success in collaboration with the Riawunna Centre

1.5 Embedding of Aboriginal Business in University Colleges

- The success of a university-wide approach to student success will involve creation of Aboriginal Engagement Action Plans in each College, consistent with this Strategic Plan.
- Strategic initiatives will be resourced by the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership, ensuring

provision of sustainable, evidence-based programs of relevance to each College. Resourcing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement and student support initiatives across the University will be co-ordinated with Riawunna.

1.5 Periodic evaluation and continuing improvement of Aboriginal student services

- Regular surveys will be facilitated by the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership to monitor student success data, student experience, wellbeing, and perspectives on service provision across Colleges to inform continual improvement service design and delivery.
- Data availability will be facilitated by the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor through the Aboriginal Business Website for Colleges to monitor gaps in Aboriginal student recruitment, retention and success.
- Regular reporting by Executive Deans will assist in monitoring the effectiveness of College Action Plans.
- Annual reporting, analysis and operational planning will assist the Academic Division to monitor and co-ordinate initiatives to optimise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student performance and experience on a continual improvement basis, rather than through infrequent reviews.



📍 (from left) Jodi Haines, Kellie Clifford and Uncle Dougie Mansell, Riawunna's Murina Pathway Program, Sandy Bay campus.

2. Learning and Teaching

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

The University of Tasmania aims to be one of Australia's leading higher education institutions in its development and delivery of Indigenous knowledge and cultural perspectives across curricula. All graduates need to be competent to critically engage with Indigenous people's culture and experience. To achieve this, we must increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and knowledge holders available to support student learning across all relevant disciplines. This will boost the capability of Colleges to ensure that our courses are sensitive to, and inclusive of Indigenous knowledges, enabling 50% of first year undergraduate students to complete an assessment item on Indigenous knowledge and culture relevant to their discipline by December 2024.

OUR CHALLENGES

Indigenous scholars worldwide have long argued that universities should be inclusive and representative of Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies and pedagogies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should have access to learning that is cognizant and respectful of their cultures and traditions. All students of higher learning should have access to and explore Indigenous lifeworlds and knowledge systems if we are to overcome the structural disadvantage experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

Ongoing consequences of colonisation through normalised racism towards Indigenous people, prevalence of misconceptions, and devaluing of Indigenous culture act to maintain gaps in social and economic outcomes. Our University, as a shaper of outlook and a broker of knowledge, has an obligation to lead educational processes to positively impact on Indigenous futures.

HOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Riawunna Centre's Murina pathway program will continue to build palawa/pakana knowledges as foundational to its teaching program. An audit of the Bachelor of Arts has been completed and new Indigenous Lifeworlds units have been successfully introduced. Increasing cultural awareness and competency of teaching staff in relation to Indigenous cultures, along with Indigenisation of curricula across all courses are recognised as our highest priorities. A range of actions are required to realise these opportunities.

2.1 Curriculum Indigenisation

Each College will form a Curriculum Indigenisation Working Group to guide course development across all disciplines.

- Resources will be provided by the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership to each College to support systematic audits of Indigenous content and perspectives across all undergraduate and graduate courses, assessing quality and identifying requirements for staff development and embedding of relevant content.

2.2 Collaboration and sharing of resources

- Annual dialogue will be facilitated by Colleges across their Schools on embedding Indigenous content within their curricula, with emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches that best recognise Indigenous epistemes.
- Outcomes will be monitored through Academic Senate with advice from the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership.

2.3 Course development focused on Indigenous contexts

Schools will identify opportunities to revise existing course content and develop new units focussed on the history, culture, knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with particular focus on palawa/pakana (Tasmanian Aboriginal) people and informed by broader international Indigenous contexts.

- In consultation with Riawunna, Colleges will increase the number of Aboriginal knowledge sharers available to support Schools with inclusion of Aboriginal cultural perspectives across curricula.

2.4 Indigenous representation and leadership

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on Course Advisory Committees will be increased and led by these staff wherever possible.
- Schools will be supported by the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership to review and incorporate Indigenous scholarship, and supported by the Riawunna Centre to engage with palawa/pakana perspectives



📍 Rob Anders, Indigenising Curriculum
On Country, Geilston Bay

2.4 Inclusion and participation of Indigenous students

- College staff will engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alumni and students enrolled in their courses to ensure that course content acknowledges and responds to their cultural needs.

2.5 Cultural competency of teaching staff

- Professional development of College staff will be supported by the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership to ensure high levels of cultural competency and cultural safety for students across curricula delivery and pedagogy.

3. Research

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

Several research programs at the University engage strongly at national and international levels with Indigenous communities and colleagues. This provides a base for growing our reputation as an institution delivering high impact research for the social, cultural and economic benefit of Indigenous peoples. Our research also contributes to fields in which Indigenous knowledges offer important insight to responding to national challenges. Examples include history, data sovereignty, fire, natural area and marine resource management. This success needs to be deepened and extended across other disciplines and sectors.

Indigenous research undertaken by, and in collaboration with Indigenous academics and communities can contribute powerfully to closing the gap in social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participatory and collaborative research supports Indigenous self-determination and addresses the need for improved data related to Indigenous people, while protecting Indigenous data sovereignty. We need to maintain a sustained increase in Indigenous research-related outputs and achieve a 50% increase in the number of research-active Indigenous staff by 2024.



(from left) Huw Peacock, Dr. Jacob Pröhn and Dr. Michael Guerzoni, Award Winning Aboriginal researchers, Sandy Bay, Tasmania

OUR CHALLENGES

In the past, academic inquiry has mostly recognised Indigenous people and their culture as objects of research. Where a development agenda has existed, it has often been established with insufficient input from Indigenous people. In such cases, research methodologies and resultant data can contribute to structural limitations on Indigenous empowerment and limit recovery from the negative impacts of dispossession and oppression.

HOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We require an Indigenous Research Strategy to recognise and harness our existing research capability, identify priorities that build on our research strengths, and respond to gaps in our ability to address matters of local, regional, national and international importance to Indigenous people.

The University requires a framework that builds the capacity of Indigenous communities to influence and participate in our research activities, and increases the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and Indigenous-led research utilising methodologies and informed by Indigenous axiologies.

There are several key actions that will be required for the implementation of an Indigenous research plan.

3.1 Establish an Indigenous research hub at the University of Tasmania

- Building on research strengths, secure funding to consolidate collaborative research projects that impact positively on Indigenous social and economic success and cultural development.
- Develop and implement innovative strategies to embed Indigenous knowledges and methodologies as intrinsic elements of the University's research capability; especially in areas that sustainably impact social wellbeing and natural systems management.
- Undertake community consultation to identify research priorities and ensure that new research initiatives are developed in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and researchers.
- Leverage existing relationships and develop new partnerships with community organisations, government and industry to create new opportunities for impactful Indigenous research

- Conduct workshops and develop digital resources on Indigenous knowledges, methodologies and research ethics for all relevant University researchers.
- Provide training in Indigenous knowledges and methodologies, and in engaging Indigenous communities to all applicants for research funding on relevant topics.
- Ensure research design, governance and execution are consistent with national guidelines.⁵

3.2 Attract and retain Indigenous academics

- Through expansion of the Indigenous Academic Fellows Predoctoral Program, and implementation of the University's Aboriginal Employment Plan, recruit, train and support research-active Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics across all Colleges, with emphasis on participation in national and international scholarly networks.
- Encourage and provide academic staff with capacity to apply for grants that support creation of higher degree by research opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

3.3 Provide academic skills development opportunities for Indigenous academics

- Establish discipline-related support teams for early career Indigenous academics to develop research capacity and improve track record through publication and participation in research activity

3.4 Prioritise research for Tasmanian Aboriginal communities.

- Focus research effort on identifying and responding to the needs and aspirations of palawa/pakana people, particularly with regard to COVID-19 recovery, economic participation, and overcoming barriers to higher education access and success in local and regional areas.
- Directly involve Tasmanian Aboriginal people and support the development of capacity to participate in research governance, and prioritise communication of research outcomes and return of benefit to Indigenous communities.

⁵ Including the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies, and the NHMRC Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders.

4. Higher Degrees by Research

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

The University aims to be an institution of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher degree by research (HDR) applicants, known for providing rigorous and sensitive supervision and training opportunities in a culturally safe, innovative and world-class research environment.

We must actively seek to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates and enhance dedicated support mechanisms to maximise completion across all disciplines. Each candidate must, on completion, have demonstrated competency in academic communications, teaching and Indigenous research methodologies.

OUR CHALLENGES

The current disparity in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completing HDR significantly exceeds the disparity in undergraduate completions, representing an urgent priority. This is a major obstacle to recruitment of Indigenous academic staff and negatively impacts on all aspects of Aboriginal engagement and success in higher education. Inadequate research training also contributes to low workforce participation of Indigenous lecturers, researchers, academic support and senior professional staff and executives.

HOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The University must build on initiatives that contribute to undergraduate success by ensuring that these translate to proportional improvements in graduate enrolment and completion. Three actions are identified to improve HDR outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

4.1 Attracting more Indigenous students as HDR candidates.

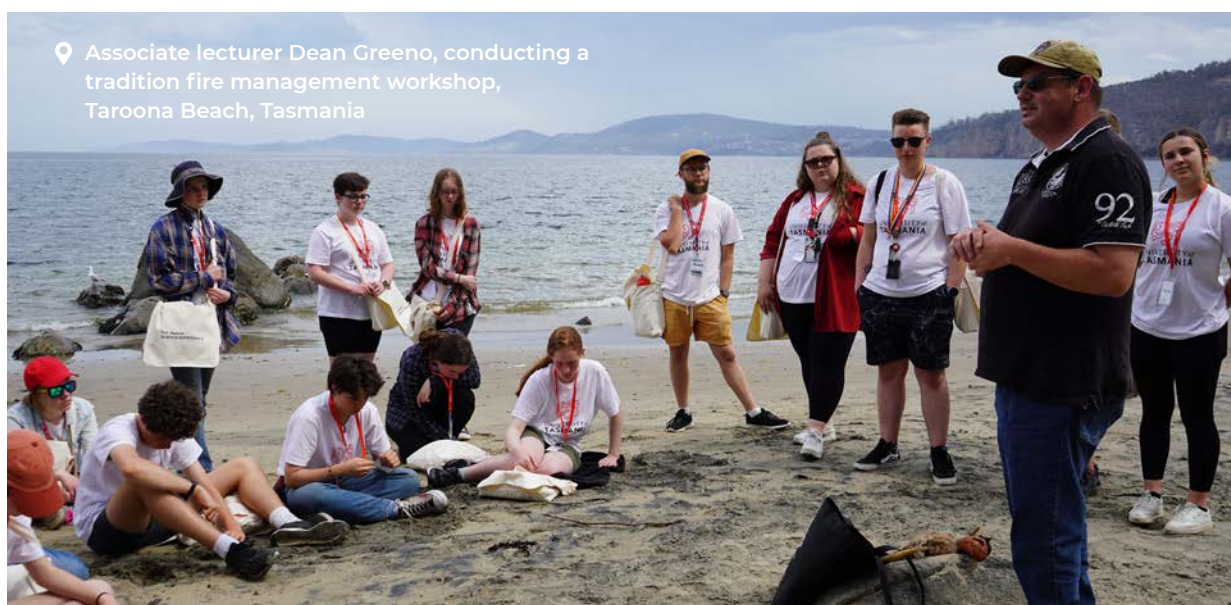
- Create a HDR pathway program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates to be undertaken prior to commencement of candidature to improve completion rates. It will be particularly important to support flexible pathways for Indigenous people with relevant public and community sector experience into HDR programs. Encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take up HDR studies in fields outside of traditional areas of interest will also be important to facilitate Indigenous participation and leadership in Indigenisation of curricula across a range of disciplines, and to increase Indigenous participation across all professions.

4.2 Improve the support offered to Indigenous HDR students.

- Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR supervisor training program, inclusive of modules on Indigenous knowledges and methodologies to improve completion rates. This will be available online for all supervisors of Indigenous students and relevant Graduate Research Office staff to complete.
- An appropriately qualified Aboriginal HDR support role will be maintained by the Office of the PVC Aboriginal Leadership to provide individualised support to both coursework and research students.
- HDR scholarships for Indigenous students will continue to be expanded at nationally competitive rates. Mentorship from Elders and Indigenous knowledge holders will be facilitated to assist HDR candidates to critically engage with Indigenous knowledges.

4.3 Academic skills development.

- Establish a specialised Indigenous HDR training program in collaboration with the Graduate Research Office to ensure that opportunities for teaching, publishing and conference presentations are created and tailored to the individual needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates.
- HDR candidates and aspiring undergraduate students will to be linked to national and international Indigenous capacity building opportunities by the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership



5. Employment

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

The University is committed to increasing Indigenous participation across our workforce over the life of this Plan. Increasing the number and quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees will require proactive strategies for recruitment. It will also be critical to reduce the current disproportionate annual rate of separation from employment by Indigenous staff to parity with all staff. Substantial improvements in the quality of the University working environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be necessary to effect this.

The University's Aboriginal Employment Plan 2021-2024 acknowledges the University's People Strategy target of 3% Indigenous employment by 2024. Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020 calls for a corresponding target, along with appointment of Indigenous people to at least one 'senior executive role'.

OUR CHALLENGES

Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across Australian universities is a prerequisite for building and maintaining culturally safe and supportive working environments. Inclusive and strengthbased representation of Indigenous culture in the workplace also facilitates student success and wellbeing. The Universities Australia strategy also includes commitments to ongoing development of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, supported by appropriate policies and procedures to contribute to the retention and wellbeing.

HOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The University has responded positively with the establishment of a Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership. The Office of the PVC collaborates with the People and Wellbeing portfolio and all Colleges to grow our Indigenous staff cohort across the institution. There are four focus areas identified as priorities in achieving this:

5.1 Support for workplace environment and wellbeing.

- The University will develop and socialise a cultural safety framework, including support mechanisms and accountability structures

• Staff will be supported to build cohesive and safe cultural relationships through a range of academic and professional development opportunities. The unique contribution of knowledges and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be recognised as important to the intellectual and social capital of the University

5.2 Increasing Indigenous employment to 3% by 2024.

- Divisions and Colleges will be resourced to adopt proactive measures to enhance Indigenous employment and retention. Attraction and selection initiatives will be focussed on building talent pools and reducing employment barriers. Targeted and identified positions will be created to facilitate competitive appointment of Indigenous staff.
- Internal career development and succession planning pathways will support the growth of internal talent.
- Indigenous employment pathways will be developed, including internships, cadetships, and research assistants. Academic Predoctoral Fellowships will be expanded to retain PhD graduates.

5.3 Building a connected community for success.

- A Working Group will be established to share expertise and successful practice, and to monitor progress on implementing the Employment Plan.
- People and Wellbeing will work with University leaders to gain stakeholder input into action plans and funding commitments, with emphasis on mentoring opportunities and a whole-of-university approach. The Working Group will design an evaluation tool to assess success of the Employment Plan.
- Personalised exit surveys and Indigenous Alumni relations will be enhanced to better understand reasons for separation and to consolidate success.

5.4 Providing resources and funding.

- Dedicated staffing resources will be provided to support employment initiatives. Information and other resources will be shared to support capacity building. Funding will be committed to support achieving targets within Divisions and Colleges.

6. Community

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

As a place-based university, we must continue to develop diverse collaborative relationships with Indigenous people, especially with palawa/pakana and Gadigal/Wangal communities in order to acknowledge, preserve and present Indigenous knowledges and histories for the benefit of those communities. This will require ongoing capacity-building led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, in collaboration with University colleagues.

OUR CHALLENGES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are critical stakeholders in the life of the University, both as the custodians of the land on which our facilities are located, and of the culture, knowledge, and history that informs our teaching and research. It is important, therefore, that we engage with and listen to Indigenous people to ensure that the University incorporates axiologies, ontologies, epistemes, and methodologies into our teaching, learning and research practice in a respectful and meaningful way.

Effective and ongoing community engagement also aligns student support with changing needs and ensures that culturally sensitive and appropriate approaches are validated by community members.

The University also has a responsibility to engage with and receive advice from palawa/pakana and Gadigal/Wangal communities on the provision of training and support for students and staff relating to cultural safety, awareness and competency. These relationships are also essential to our role in increasing understanding and respect for Indigenous people and culture in broader Tasmanian and Australian society.

Affirmational and strength-based pathway, enrolment and student success programs require positive relationships between the University and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure that our campuses, facilities and programs are perceived as sensitive and welcoming to Indigenous people.

HOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are three overarching themes that we must address to meet our obligations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

6.1 Cultural safety and competency.

- The University will ensure that the research and learning environment is safe and welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students and communities, and all Indigenous peoples by fostering adequate understandings of First Nations cultures, values and rights.
- Cultural training will be available for staff at the University and a requirement for leadership roles. All staff and students entering the University community will have opportunities to undertake initial and periodic refreshment training.
- On Country experiences will be an essential component of the experience of all staff and students at the University through either virtual or actual participation.
- Cultural safety protocols frameworks will be developed to inform guidelines and procedures relating to eligibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and services; interpretation and representation of Indigenous culture on campus; incorporation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives across curricula; use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and treatment of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property in teaching and research



7. Governance

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

The University of Tasmania requires meaningful and effective engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in its governance processes, decision-making systems and leadership roles at all levels. To achieve this, the University will ensure that opportunities are created for Indigenous participation of staff, students and community members in governance and leadership roles. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with substantial experience at the University will be recognised as holders of valuable perspectives on organisational culture and practice. Indigenous community members and their Elders will be acknowledged as authorities on matters of cultural protocol.

OUR CHALLENGES

Sustainable and progressive organisational change at the University that serves the legitimate interests of Tasmanian Aboriginal people in particular, and Indigenous people more broadly, must be guided by the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in senior leadership roles, on committees, and in other decision making processes. Understanding and incorporating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are essential to ensuring philosophies, policies and procedures of the University meet the self-determined needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and communities.

Strategies, procedures, reporting and funding accountability will be strengthened by the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members in appropriate governance structures.

HOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Progress has already been achieved through the establishment of the Pro Vice Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership as an identified executive role with membership on Academic Senate and Academic Division management. Indigenous governance can be extended by a number of further initiatives:

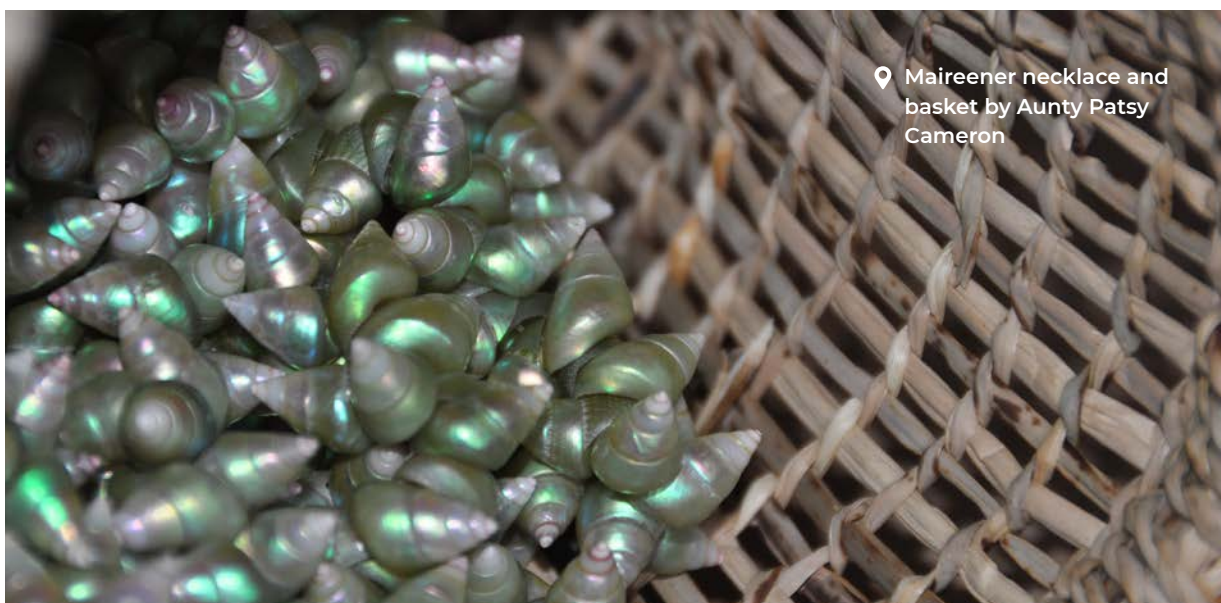
7.1 Increased Indigenous participation in University governance.

- An additional identified executive role will be created to deepen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in academic programs.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff will be directly involved in implementation plans and accountability mechanisms for Colleges and Divisions in addressing the performance requirements of this Strategy.
- Two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff should be included wherever possible in membership of committees responsible for the governance of teaching and learning, research, international and corporate programs. This reduces excessive demands and inappropriate expectations and accountabilities on individuals.
- Priority should be given to inclusion of a Tasmanian Aboriginal person of high standing as a member of the University of Tasmania Council and maintaining such membership as vacancies occur

7.2 Embedded operational planning.

Divisions and Colleges will establish operational goals, resource requirements and performance targets through their own Aboriginal Engagement Action Plans consistent with this Strategy. These plans will be developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and with the advice and support of the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aboriginal Leadership and the Riawunna Centre.



📍 palawa/pakana Ancestral
Country, Little Musselroe Bay



Measuring Our Progress

The Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Aboriginal Leadership will facilitate the development of Action Plans across Colleges and Divisions based that positively impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success, and demonstrate progress across research, learning, teaching and community engagement initiatives. These plans will be instrumental in allocation of resources to support strategic initiatives, and will establish accountabilities for agreed performance measures. The Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Aboriginal Leadership will be responsible for co-ordinating evaluation and reporting on the success of this Strategic Plan.



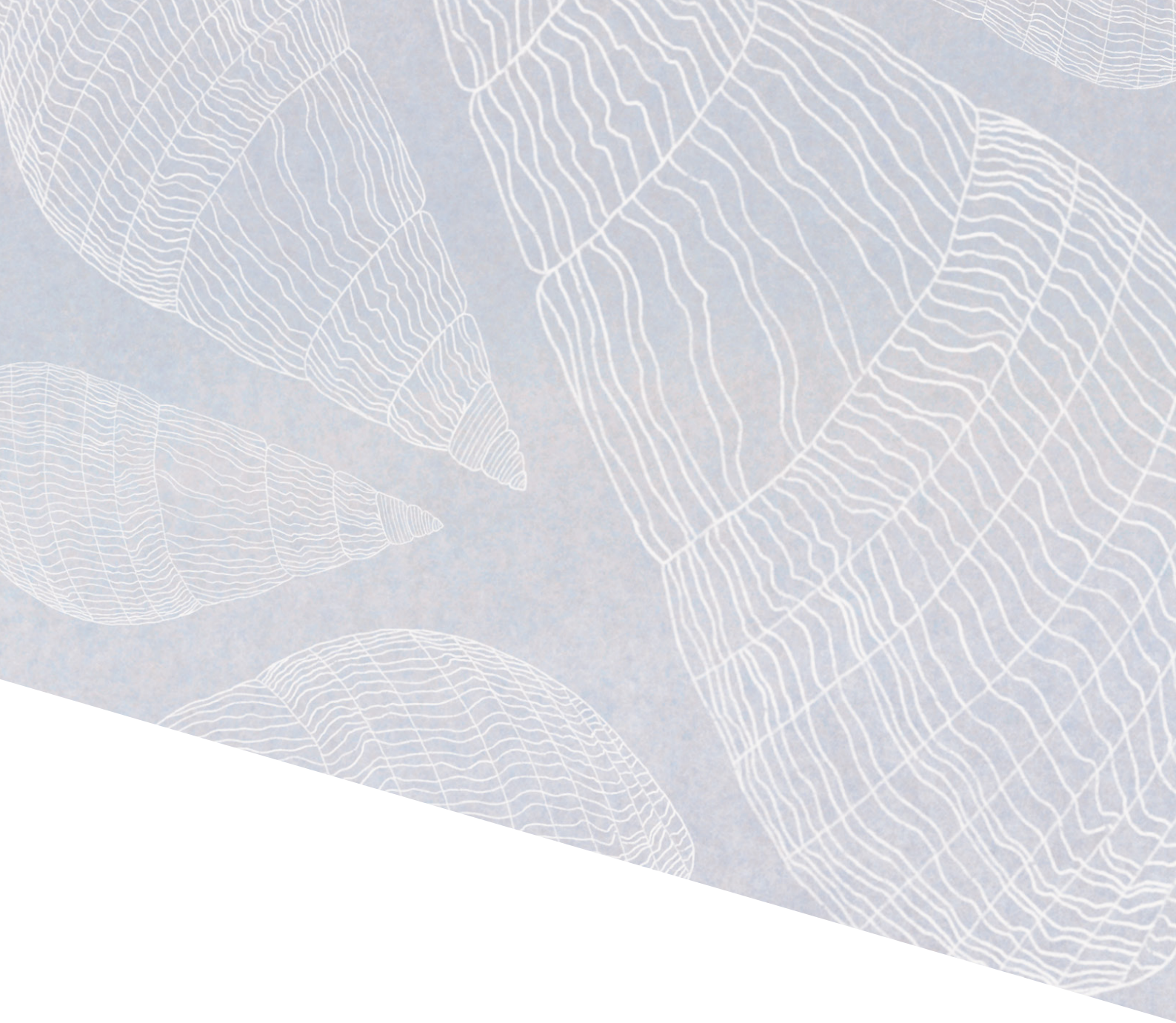
📍 (from left) Aunty Ollie Ralph, Aunty Dawn Blazely, Uncle Murray Everett and Aunty Brenda Hodge, Tiagarra, Devonport

The University thanks Aunty Ollie's family for permission to publish this photograph as a mark of respect for her life of dedication to education and sharing of culture. We acknowledge the unique value that all Elders bring to the University community

About the Artist

Caleb Nichols-Mansell is a proud pakana man living and working in pataway/Burnie, and has a long association with the University's Cradle Coast campus. Caleb is currently studying a Bachelor of Business and provided the successful submission for student artwork to represent this Strategic Plan. Caleb's passion lays with photography and digital art, where he explores his relationship with Country and captures intimate details within the landscape as the inspiration for his work.





Contact

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