



## Reflecting on the National Indigenous Legal Conference

**Members of the Hub team report back on their experience at the 2024 National Indigenous Legal Conference, hosted by our friends at Tarwirri – the Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria.**

The 2024 National Indigenous Legal Conference was held from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December here in Melbourne. NILC offers an opportunity to get together for a stock-take on the year for the national legal community working in relation to Indigenous justice.

Last year we attended NILC in Sydney and spoke to law students the day following the failed referendum on the Voice to Parliament. Now, a year later, we heard stories of on-the-ground resistance and grass-roots nation-building practices, in the absence of hoped-for Federal reforms.

We loved seeing Hub Advisory Council members sharing their expertise:

- Yuin barrister **Tim Goodwin**'s opening keynote set a tone of thinking big and thinking strategically about how we work towards law reform that aligns to First Peoples' aspirations for justice in Australia, using the disappointing learnings gained from the referendum to shape our approach to affecting broader cultural change.
- **Tony McAvoy** (Wirdi) spoke about his current work as an Australian Law Reform Commissioner on the Inquiry into the Future Acts Regime in the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth). The Australian Law Reform Commission has made a call for submissions to their [Inquiry](#), responding to matters highlighted in the [issues paper](#).
- **Karri Walker** (Niyaparli) spoke about her work as a Senior Lawyer at the First People's Assembly of Victoria, alongside **Dr Alister Thorpe** (Gunai, Yorta Yorta, Gunditjmara and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung). They shared their work on cultural governance, the construction of a robust organisation framework, and the institutional authority provided by an elected Victorian Indigenous Assembly.

Hub Research Assistant Claire Bredenoord shared her highlights from attending:

*Djab Wurrung man and Chair of the Treaty Authority (Vic) Jidah Clark spoke to the opportunities for treaty at the interface between Aboriginal Lore, Law and cultural authority and the settler legal system. His discussion of how treaty could make the implicit explicit in law really pushed me to think about how settler law can increase its capacity to recognise inclusive and flexible modes of governance and decision-making.*

Our friends **Nick Espie** (Arrernte) and **Samara Fernandez-Brown** (Warlpiri) used their presentation to raise awareness for the Justice for Walker campaign and the [Dhadjowa Foundation](#). The Dhadjowa Foundation was formed in 2021 by First Nations people who have experienced the death in custody of family members and is intended to provide strategic, coordinated and culturally appropriate support for First Nations families whose loved ones have died in custody.

Within the conversation of the Indigenous legal community's future in Australia, we at the Hub agree with the consensus expressing the need to keep the fire burning. There were cheers from the audience as we heard about the tough work done by Aboriginal Legal Services. **Amy Saunders, Tracy Onus Bamblett** and **Denise Lovett** of the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation discussed the significant *Onus vs Alcoa* Case. Amy Saunders and Tracy Onus Bamblett described the trials of resisting the destruction of Indigenous land and culture against government, business and wider community interests, reminding conference attendees that important work in Indigenous law and advocacy is rarely easy, fast or simple.

Paul Hausia (Wurundjeri, Tongan), Indigenous Engagement Coordinator from the Hub said:

*"Hearing from esteemed speakers like barrister Tim Goodwin and Brian Bero from Jaramer Legal was both inspiring and thought-provoking. Their insights into the challenges and triumphs of Indigenous legal practice reminded me of the importance of resilience, cultural connection, and the ongoing pursuit of justice.*

*The conference also highlighted the hard work and dedication that Tarwirri put into making this event a reality. Their commitment to creating a platform for Indigenous voices in law is truly commendable and serves as a reminder of the power of collaboration and community."*

NILC is intended to bring together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous legal professionals, scholars, activists, law students, graduates and community leaders from across the country. As such the Hub urges Indigenous and non-Indigenous MLS students interested in working in Indigenous law and advocacy to attend in 2025. Keep an eye out for future NILC events:

James Griew (Minang Noongar), Research Assistant from the Hub said:

*“Attending NILC, I saw the conference as a great opportunity for people interested in entering the space of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal issues, and for people who might have some academic understanding to get some insight into practice in this space.”*

Congratulations to the Tarwirri Committee including **Andrew Williams, Art Pitchford, Candice Jackson, Niamh Whitford, Anton D’Amico** and **Tekan Cochrane**.