

Your way forward for Native Title

# MESSAGE STICK

2025

Vol 1



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The cover image was captured by Reilly Wilson-Neil at Millstream Falls, Ravenshoe on Jirrbal Country.*





NQLC acknowledges the  
Traditional Owners of our  
representative region.

We recognise their  
continuous relationships to  
the lands and waters, and  
pay our respects to Elders  
past, present and emerging.



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North Queensland Land Council welcomes new staff across our Units.



# MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD



Justice Erin Longbottom & Dir Angie Akee. To read about this article please go to page 9.

To begin, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout NQLC's representative footprint and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. I pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the traditional owners who have successfully obtained their native title rights and interests. Your perseverance and dedication are truly commendable, and your achievements are a testament to your unwavering commitment to your heritage and land. Our staff have worked tirelessly to secure these native titles, and their hard work does not go unnoticed. We deeply appreciate their commitment and efforts.

Even though some of our staff are not traditional owners, their dedication to ensuring our people are properly represented and have access to their lands, seas, and waterways is invaluable. Their contributions are a vital part of our collective success.

I would like to give special recognition to Leon and the executive team for their exceptional leadership and guidance. Their strategic vision and steadfast dedication have been instrumental in navigating the complexities of native title claims and ensuring our organisation remains focused on its mission. I also extend my gratitude to the board members for their leadership and decision-making, which have been crucial in steering our organisation forward. Their insights and governance have provided a strong foundation for our continued progress.

## Governance for Growth

Corporate governance is a cornerstone of our mission, ensuring we operate with integrity and accountability. This includes comprehensive board training and regular policy reviews to equip our board members with the necessary skills and knowledge. We are currently reviewing our strategic plan, core policies, and rule book. This process ensures our governance framework remains relevant and effective, allowing us to refine our strategies and better support our mission.

Adherence to corporate governance standards is paramount. It maintains the trust and confidence of our stakeholders, demonstrating our commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. Through these efforts, we aim to strengthen our governance practices and enhance our capacity to deliver on our mission. Together, we will continue to build a strong and resilient organisation that advocates for the rights and interests of our people.

## Working Together for Country

We are actively collaborating with the Cape York Land Council (CYLC), Queensland South Native Title Services (QSNTS), Gur A Baradharaw Kod (GBK) Torres Strait Sea and Land Council, and Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) to discuss the future of native titles in Queensland. A united voice for native title rights is essential, and these partnerships strengthen our advocacy efforts.

Engaging with local government and Aboriginal councils helps address local issues effectively. We are also exploring the formation of a treaty among native title bodies, reinforcing our commitment to self-determination and sovereignty. Through these efforts, we aim to ensure that native title rights and interests are recognised and respected across Queensland.



# Mabo Centre

Leon and I had the privilege of travelling to Boorloo (Perth) for the official opening of the Mabo Centre on 4 March 2025. This event marks a significant step towards strengthening First Nations leadership in land and sea rights.

The initiative honours the legacy of Dr Eddie Koiki Mabo and is supported by Indigenous leaders, researchers, and industry partners. The Centre will offer training, research, and leadership development to help Traditional Owner groups maximise the economic, social, and cultural benefits of native title agreements.

It represents a new era in First Nations leadership, empowering Traditional Owners to leverage their land and sea rights for success.

With its research-driven approach, Indigenous-led governance, and commitment to self-determination, the Mabo Centre aims to shape a more equitable future for First Nations communities across Australia. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Gail Mabo representing her father, Dr Eddie Koiki Mabo, and her son William Mabo for promoting Torres Strait Islander culture on the day.



## National Native Title Council

The NQLC continued to be actively involved in the work coordinated by the National Native Title Council (NNTC). Leon (CEO) and I, as the Chair attend NNTC meetings as one of the 14 native title representative bodies/service providers across Australia. The agenda is focused on the challenges arising from legislation and provides a united voice that aims to influence changes to legislation.

The Chair and CEO are members of the Land and Sea and Cultural Heritage Committee. The CEO performs the role of Co-Chair on the Cultural Heritage committee.

At the latest meeting held in Brisbane, in the absence of the NNTC Chairperson Mr Kado Muir, Leon filled in as Acting Chairperson for the meeting.

A key announcement from the meeting was the launch of the Mabo Centre and partnership with Melbourne University. 'Traditional Owner groups and First Nations organisations will be supported to enable better economic outcomes for communities through land and sea rights in a newly formed First Nations-led partnership'.

## Progress & Our Vision Forward

I encourage all members and common law holders to take a greater interest in NQLC. To promote our organisation, we plan to use newsletters and a documentary on our history, acknowledging the contributions of past and present members.

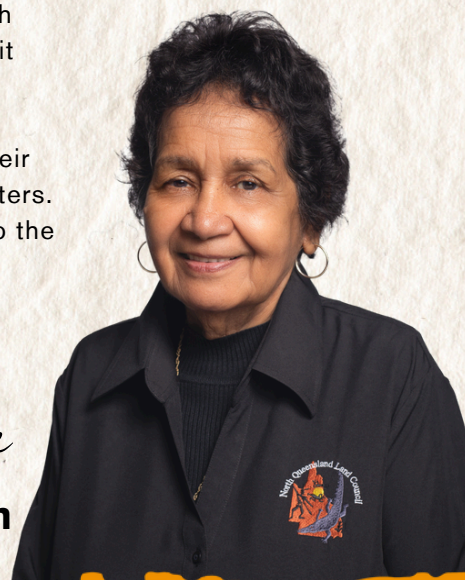
Ward members play a crucial role in connecting with constituents and I encourage all constituents to engage actively with their ward representatives.

2025 has started with a hive of activity. As we move swiftly through the 3rd business quarter, work is lining up well for the move into the 4th business quarter and preparation for key Operational and Strategic activities.

In closing, the NQLC team remains steadfastly committed to our vision of a region in which the native title rights and interests of every native title holder have been legally recognised, and in which Aboriginal people benefit culturally, socially, and economically from the secure possession of their traditional lands and waters. I commend this report to the members.

*Angie Ahee*

**NQLC's Chairperson**





# EXECUTIVE UPDATE

**Countrymen and Countrywomen,  
Wanjirra! (pronounced wan-ji-da)**

Hello everyone, this report sees NQLC work during the festive season which correlates with the wet.

I trust our families are all happy and healthy, and your time with loved ones has supported your cultural connections

The festive season is now done, which for us means we are in the wet season.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge those loved ones who we have lost during the past months and welcome our newborn into our clan groups.

## Progress in Motion

At the land council, we have been working hard to progress all our work. Our current service arrangements have continued with the expressed intent of achieving our goals – doing the work that needs to be done. For me as the CEO, the work has been busy, and I am blessed to have the support and commitment from the members who make up NQLC staff. This report comes at the closing out of my second year of my contract. During this time, I have been working with the team to address organisational culture, change management, build new teams and manage the day-to-day business challenges.

I am happy to report that our efforts are paying off and members can be confident that the staff at NQLC are amongst the best in the business and we are your way forward in Native Title. Attention and focus is still being applied to our core business – progress is being made toward the new Enterprise Agreement. Our IT system is receiving attention and the quality of staff on board has resulted in an improved operational response to our IT strategy gaps. Our payroll system was also changed in 2025 – changes within our “friendly finance team” has brought new energy to the organisation and improvements into the processes.

## Strengthening Community Ties

As our teams continue to work with our clients, I have been busy myself engaging with other local service providers. I wish to report that our partnership with Wuchopperen Health Service has promoted positive relations between the services. Our CEO breakfast has continued, and I have attended their annual service blessings.

At the end of 2024, NQLC Media Officer Reilly Wilson-Neil also connected with the Yarrabah Men's group – to promote Men's Health and social and emotional wellbeing.

In 2025 I am hoping to attend a number of other stakeholder engagement activities, to promote NQLC and demonstrate our support for local events in our region.

## QLD Representative Body Alliance

NQLC has continued its active participation with the QBRA and remain committed to promoting the benefits and advantages of being a member –and generating one Native Title voice for Queensland. A very beneficial process, the Alliance has continued to meet and provide a forum for strategic issues for Native Title, to engage collaboratively and be united in our work with the Queensland State Government.

Following the 2024 State Elections and the shift to a Liberal National Party government, QRBA is refining its agenda and connecting with the new Minister and Department Heads.

NQLC is dedicated to securing Native rights and advocating for traditional custodians.

*Leon Yeatman*  
**Chief Executive Officer**





# CLAIMS UPDATE

2025 has started off with a bang, and the Claims Team has been hard at work. We would like to thank all our traditional owners for their dedication and commitment, which has greatly progressed our claims.

I also want to thank my staff for their tireless efforts. Our team is passionate and dedicated to assisting common law holders in securing their cultural rights and interests. We are proud of the progress we've made together.

## Staff Movements & Opportunities

I'm pleased to share some recent updates from within the Claims Team as we continue building our capacity to support Traditional Owners across the NQLC region. First, I'd like to welcome Kate Galloway and Isabella (Bella) Borchert-Jonker to the team. Both bring valuable skills and fresh energy, and I'm confident they'll make strong contributions to our work. You can read more about them on page 15. I'm also excited to welcome Sandra Roberts as our new Operations Manager. Sandra will be working closely with me to identify areas for improvement and strengthen our operational efficiency across the Legal Unit.

I'd also like to congratulate Ashley Jan on his well-deserved promotion to Senior Legal Officer. Ashley's dedication and professionalism have been outstanding, and I look forward to seeing him continue to thrive in her new role. While it's always hard to say goodbye, we also farewell Louise Keepa, who has moved on to new opportunities. We wish her all the best.

Looking ahead, I will soon be advertising several roles to support the continued growth of the team, including:

- Senior Legal Officers
- Legal Officers
- First Nations Engagement Officer
- Paralegals

If you or someone you know may be a great fit, please recommend our careers page on the NQLC website.



Scan the QR Code to  
visit our job listings.

## Native Title Claims Updates

### Jirrbal

On 15 March 2025, the Jirrbal People celebrated the Jirrbal #4 Part A Consent Determination at the Wondecla Showgrounds. NQLC congratulates them and acknowledges the efforts of all involved. A new Applicant has been authorised to continue work on the remaining areas of the claim. **You can read more on page 8.**

### Djungan People #5

We have recently issued a meeting notice to the Djungan People for their upcoming Authorisation Meeting on 30 April 2025. The meeting is to authorise a number of important issues relating to the progression of the Djungan People #5 claim. If you are a Djungan person, head to the NQLC website for further information about this meeting.

### Other Claims

The Claims Team continues to work towards outcomes on all of other matters with the Applicants.

*Jasmin Phillips*  
**Principal Legal Officer**





# Milestone for Jirrbal

## Consent Determination #4 Part A



Jirrbal Applicant Members - Left to Right - Back: Tasha House, Joshua Weare, Sarah Cronin, Kurt Noble & Brad Gosam  
Front: Jenneatte Miller, Phylis Grant, Vivian Woods & Tonya Grant.

On 15 March 2025, Jirrbal People held an on-country celebration to mark the Jirrbal #4 Part A Consent Determination of native title, which was officially recognised by the Federal Court on 6 September 2024. The celebration took place on Jirrbal country at the Wondecla Showgrounds, providing an opportunity for the community to come together and celebrate this incredible milestone.

NQLC congratulates Jirrbal People on this significant achievement. We acknowledge the hard work, dedication, and strength of all Jirrbal People, including those who provided connection evidence to support the claim, and the Jirrbal Elders, past and present, who have paved the way for this outcome.

Before the celebration event, the Jirrbal #4 claim group authorised a new Applicant to continue the important work on the remaining areas of the Jirrbal #4 claim that are yet to be determined. NQLC looks forward to working closely with the new Applicant members.







Warrick Gosam



Cyril Haines, Bradley Go-Sam & Joey Rassip



NQLC PLO Jasmin Phillips & Jirrbal Elder Lillian Freeman



Jirrbal Elders - Lillian Freeman & Flo Izzard



Jirrbal Shirts



Gooliwana Bana (Wild River) Dancer



Michelle Weare, Nancy Bowie & Michael Gosam



Gooliwana Bana (Wild River) Dancers





# Celebrating Justice Erin Longbottom



I would like to congratulate the Honourable Justice Erin Longbottom who was appointed to the Federal Court in December 2024. Before being admitted, Justice Longbottom was working with a number of our common law holders in securing evidence for their claim.

On Friday, 21st February, NQLC Chairperson Angie Akee and our First Nations Engagement Officer, Jenny Joyce, had the privilege of attending the Welcome Ceremony for Justice Erin Longbottom at the Federal Court of Australia in Brisbane.

For Jenny, this was her first time at the Federal Court, and was awed by the amazing speeches that highlighted Justice Longbottom's journey to the bench.

The ceremony featured addresses from esteemed members of the legal profession, sharing heartfelt and inspiring stories about Justice Longbottom's career and character. After the formal proceedings, guests were invited to a morning tea, where Jenny and Angie had the opportunity to connect with judges, barristers and other attendees. A special moment was seeing the gifted shields to Judges at the Consented Determinations of the Niwagi and Wanjur Majay peoples.

Jenny first met Justice Longbottom while working on lay evidence gathering for the Gia and Ngaro Peoples Claim in 2024. "I have so much respect and admiration for Erin and her gentle way with our clients, and she has left a lasting impression with me."

Jenny Joyce, First Nations Engagement Officer

## Landmark Gumatj Claim Decision – Commonwealth v Yunupingu

Readers may have seen recent media coverage of a new native title compensation decision by the High Court of Australia in *Commonwealth v Yunupingu* (the Gumatj Claim). Dr. Yunupingu, on behalf of the Gumatj Clan, sued the Commonwealth for compensation for extinguishing native title over Gumatj lands in the Gove Peninsula, Northern Territory. The claim focused on whether the Commonwealth was liable for extinguishing native title in a territory. The Court ruled that it is, as the Constitution requires the Commonwealth to pay compensation when it acquires property.

This case confirms that native title is property under Australian law and underscores that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be treated equally regarding their property. While the case doesn't directly apply to native title in the states unless extinguished by the Commonwealth, its long-term effects are yet to be seen. At NQLC, we are considering the implications for our region.

Kate Galloway, Senior Legal Officer





# EDST UPDATE

2025 is flying by and so has my time at NQLC. I celebrated my 8 year anniversary at NQLC on 13 February 2025 and have really enjoyed my time with NQLC and our clients and plan to continue to do so for quite some time.

Below are updates for the Future Act Mining and Exploration (FAME) Unit and PBC Support Unit that make up the Engagement and Development Support Team.



## New Team Additions

FAME Unit is currently advertising for a senior legal officer which is a critical need for the FAME Unit. PBC Support Unit is also advertising for an administration officer. All NQLC employment opportunities are advertised on the NQLC website if you know anyone that is interested.

FAME Unit had an intern Mariah Mills who joined us on 16 September 2024 for a work placement for her Practical Legal Training. She is an Indigenous woman from Far North Queensland and we were pleased to be able to provide this contribution to Mariah getting closer to obtaining admission as a solicitor in Queensland. After a very positive work placement FAME Unit offered Mariah a position as a paralegal on a casual basis and you can read more about Mariah on page 15.

FAME Unit has also recently welcomed Loraine Healey as an administration officer to the team. Loraine has a strong background in business administration and has quickly settled into the team. You can read more about Loraine on page 15.

## FAME's Future Plans

The FAME Unit, led by John Cecchi, is collaborating with stakeholders like CSIRO and AUSIMM on critical mineral projects and early engagement with claim groups and PBCs. They are also preparing a submission for the ALRC's review of the Native Title Act and developing a toolkit for PBCs, set to roll out in early 2026. **You can read more on page 12.**

## PBC Support Update

The PBC Support Unit, led by David Jesudason, supports 32 RNTBCs and assists three native title claim groups. They offer governance, compliance, strategic planning, and capacity development support, and help update rulebooks and policies. The 2025 National Native Title Council/NQLC PBC Forum has been postponed to August 2025 due to severe weather. **You can read more on page 13.**

*Julia (Jules) Taylor*  
**Manager Engagement and  
Development Support Team**





# FAME UNIT UPDATE

John Cecchi is the FAME Unit Senior Legal Officer – Coordinator and leads our FAME Unit team in providing services to claim groups and Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs) for all future acts and cultural heritage matters as they arise.

## Critical Minerals

NQLC through the FAME Unit is engaging with Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and James Cook University in relation to the potential impact of critical mineral projects which may also involve re-purposing of existing mining sites that may not trigger the right to negotiate.

NQLC is also engaging with Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AUSIMM) to present this year with National Native Title Council for the national conference in Perth about early engagement with claim groups and PBCs in August this year. At the conference last year, NQLC were specifically requested by AUSIMM to present to talk about engagement with Indigenous clients.

FAME Unit also are engaging with the State about how to manage early engagement with critical minerals. With a heavy focus in Australia on the need for mineral security and financial benefits to exploration companies to identify resources these projects will likely become more frequent in the NQLC region.

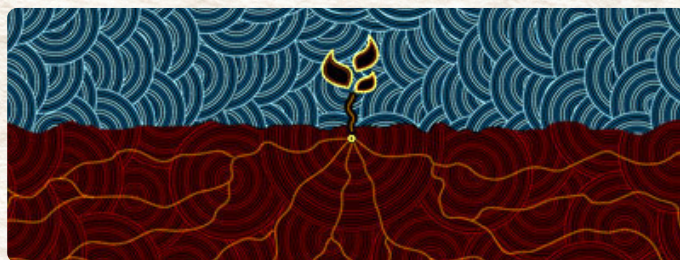
## FAME Unit Toolkit

This project is significantly advanced with the service provider to develop the FAME Unit future act toolkit which has been in the pipeline for quite some time. This will also be an interface to assist PBCs with the future acts regime,

## Native Title Act Future Act Review

The ALRC has commenced a review of the future acts regime of the Native Title Act. FAME Unit will be meeting with the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) before making submissions to ensure NQLC's concerns about the functionality of the regime are taken into consideration.

There was an issues paper issued but after 4 meetings with ALRC FAME Unit are now focusing on a full submission on the paper once released later this quarter rather than providing additional comments on the issues.



access to template letters for replying to notices, a save storage option for all agreements and also reminders and assistance for invoicing under agreements and the Native Title Protection Conditions. We are hoping to roll this out to PBCs in early 2026 and will be contacting some groups to assist with the trial in late 2025.



*John Cecchi*

**Coordinator Future Acts Mining  
and Exploration (FAME) Unit**



David Jesudason is the PBC Support Unit Senior Legal Officer – Coordinator and leads our PBC Support Unit team in providing services to Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs).

The PBC Support Unit offers corporate support to the 32 Registered Native Title Body Corporates (RNTBCs) within the NQLC RNTB area. PBCSU is also assisting 3 native title claim groups to develop policies and establish their corporations to be the RNTBC upon a successful determination of their claim.

## Corporate Groups

Many RNTBCs are experiencing the need to establish operational arms/subsidiary corporations and charitable trusts to better manage risk as they expand their business operations and/or enter agreements with large financial and employment benefits.

Creating a corporate group includes developing corporate group governance policies and operational policy suites; services agreements between entities and registering entities with the Australian Charity and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC).

If your PBC is going through expansion these are matters that should be considered before operational changes and PBC Support Unit can provide assistance on request.

## NQLC Tribunal PBC Forum

The 2025 National Native Title Council/NQLC PBC Forum has been postponed until August 2025 due to the severe weather events that occurred in and around Townsville in February.

The PBC Forum is an event hosted by the National Native Title Council organised by PBC Support Unit that invites every PBC in the NQLC area to a forum once every two years. This year we have invited PBCs to discuss and share their success stories as 'Peer to Peer Learning' sessions with ORIC, National Native Title Council, National Native Title Tribunal, AIATSIS & National Indigenous Australians Agency.

PBCs will be contacted once the new date and venue have been set for Townsville and there will be funding available for 2 representatives from each PBC and also those presenting.

The support that PBC Support Unit can provide PBCs relates to governance capacity, structuring and compliance but also support for strategic and business planning, grant fund writing and other capacity development support.

If you would like to discuss the services of the PBC Support Unit please contact us on [pbcsupport@nqlc.com.au](mailto:pbcsupport@nqlc.com.au)

## Rulebooks, Policies Reviews & Updates

PBC Support Unit continues to assist PBCs in conducting comprehensive reviews of their rulebooks and policies. Currently, we are working with 4 groups to tailor policies and procedures to their needs.

Two PBCs have replaced their rulebooks this year and another two PBCs have approached the PBC Support Unit with a request to replace their rulebook to be compliant with the 2021 NTA Amendments Act. If you have still not updated your rule book and would like assistance please contact the PBC Support Unit.

*David Jesudason*  
**Coordinator PBC Support Unit (PBCSU)**





# NEW STAFF UPDATE



**Kate Galloway**  
**Senior Legal Officer**

With over 35 years of experience as a lawyer and 25 years as a legal researcher and educator, Kate excels in analysing, advising, advocating, and strategising on land tenure, recognition of First Peoples, and corporate governance. A nationally renowned law professor, she is celebrated for her leadership and innovation in legal education. Kate has authored influential publications and spoken at major conferences, sharing her pioneering insights. Her dedication to advancing legal education and social justice has earned her a distinguished reputation.



**Isabella Borchart-Jonker**  
**Legal Officer**

Bella is a proud Mamu woman who joins the Claims team as a Legal Officer after completing an Associateship with Judge Fantin in the District Court at Cairns. Originally from Kabi Kabi, Turrbal and Jagera country around the southeast of Queensland, Bella completed her Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws (Honours) at the Australian National University before moving to Gadigal country where she worked in corporate law for two years. She has a passion for native title work, especially in North Queensland, and is excited to bring this to the team.



**Miriah Mills**  
**Paralegal**

Miriah has Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, with ties to the Gugu Badhun Nation and the islands of Mabuiaig, Dauan, and Mer (Murray). She completed a Diploma of Higher Education at JCU in 2020 and is currently studying a Bachelor of Arts/Laws at JCU, Cairns, set to graduate by the end of the year. Employed as a Paralegal in the FAME Unit, Miriah has a background as an admin officer, JCU Ambassador working primarily with Indigenous youth, and has interned in Employment Law.



**Melissa Fenech**  
**Accountant**

Mel is a Chartered Accountant with a rich and varied career. She began her professional journey in banking before transitioning to accounting, and has even taken on the unique role of a FIFO Haul Truck operator. Her extensive accounting experience spans public practice across multiple sectors and entities, and she has also served as a FIFO Minesite accountant. Beyond her professional achievements, Mel is a dedicated mum of three, balancing her career with her family life.



**Michael Stoddart**  
**IT Officer**

With extensive experience in Health, Finance, Administration, and ICT, Michael has held roles such as State ICT Manager and Acting CEO, working closely with Indigenous health services and aged care. Moving to Queensland 14 years ago as a Senior Clinical IT Project and Systems Manager in Metro South Brisbane, implementing AI-based systems and contributing to Telstra Health's Patient Flow Manager. Michael holds a Master's in Business Systems, a Diploma in Business. Moving to Cairns 3 years ago to follow his passion for IT.



**Gennah Grimaudo**  
**HR Officer**

Born and raised in Cairns, Gennah earned a Bachelor of Business with majors in International Business and Human Resources from James Cook University. She is transitioning from the construction industry, where she gained experience in steel fabrication, to the not-for-profit sector. Gennah is excited to join the NOLC team!



**Jennifer Yalo**  
**Accounting Officer**

Jennifer is a detail-oriented finance officer skilled in managing budgets, tracking expenses, and ensuring accurate financial reporting. She enjoys meeting new people, understanding different cultures, bush walking, and fishing. Jennifer is also a passionate advocate for children diagnosed under the spectrum.



**Loraine Healey**  
**Admin Officer - FAME Unit**

Meet Loraine! Born in Papua New Guinea, Loraine spent her childhood growing up between Gordonvale and remote communities, from Thursday Island to Kowanyama. With a solid background in administration and small business, she's now excited to bring her fresh, fun energy to the FAME unit. We're thrilled to have her on board!



**Lyn Lake**  
**Finance Officer**

Lyn has 15 years of experience in accounting, primarily in bookkeeping, and has spent over eight years working for a non-profit organization. She began her career as a job placement officer, working under the guidance of a mentor. Originally from Sydney, Lyn brings a wealth of knowledge and dedication to her role.









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