



THE NEXT GENERATION: STRENGTH, VISION & LEGACY

6-13 JULY 2025

JEZZINI PROPERTY SERVICES

This interview, held in celebration of NAIDOC Week, is proudly sponsored by Jezzini Property Services.

Jezzini Property Services is a family-run commercial cleaning and facilities management company founded in 1984 by Mr Bill Jezzini. Over the years, the company has managed a wide range of facilities including town halls, libraries, depots, and admin buildings.

Now led by his son, Managing Director Michael Jezzini, the company continues to grow by embracing new technologies and best practices. Michael also serves as the main point of contact for all clients. Mr Bill Jezzini remains active as Chief Operations Officer, overseeing key sites like the Ashfield Civic Centre.

With a 40-year flawless track record, Jezzini Property Services is proud of its reputation for excellence. The company is committed to supporting First Nations communities through respectful partnerships and a strong focus on reconciliation. Learn more at jezzini.com.au.

NAIDOC WEEK is a time to celebrate and recognise the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It's also a time to listen deeply—to voices of leadership, legacy, and truth that guide us toward a more just and equitable future.

In this spirit, we sat down with **Blake Cansdale, National Director of ANTAR**, to explore what it means to honour Elders, empower the next generation of change-makers, and embed truth-telling in all levels of policy and practice. His insights offer a timely and powerful reminder that genuine reconciliation requires both courage and action—from all of us.

Firstly, how can we honour the cultural knowledge and leadership of past generations in contemporary decision-making?

To honour the cultural knowledge and leadership of past generations, we must begin by listening. Before we act we need to understand where we come from, how we got here, and wisdom our Elders and 'olders' offer about where we go next.

"We stand on the shoulders of giants—those who led with integrity, kept culture alive, and made decisions grounded in country and kin."

Their knowledge systems must not be treated as historical artefacts, but as living frameworks that continue to guide us today.

Our Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) should be investing equally in cultural resurgence and navigating Western bureaucracies. We cannot allow compliance to compromise cultural governance. We must be unapologetically culture-forward in our personal and professional decision-making.

We also need to create opportunities for Elders and knowledge holders to share their stories and ensure those stories are preserved and passed on. With every decision we make, we must reflect on the legacy we are leaving behind, particularly those of us in leadership. After all, with great privilege comes great responsibility.

Lastly, we need prioritised investment in First Nations



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governance models and representative bodies that protect and promote our people's sovereignty and self-determination.



What does leadership look like for the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander change-makers?

The next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are stepping into their responsibilities with boldness, urgency, and deep cultural pride.

For them, leadership is not about formal roles and titles; it's about disrupting systems that have never served us and breathing new life into our collective vision for justice, rights, and respect for our people.

These changemakers are radically principled. They challenge the status quo and

refuse to compromise their values to make others comfortable. Their strength lies in their cultural grounding—in knowing who they are and where they come from. They are confidently walking in three worlds: their local First Nations communities, dominant and overarching non-Indigenous systems, and the global community, which is increasingly turning to First Nations knowledge and leadership to counter the rot of capitalism.

We see them fusing ancient cultural practices with new technologies—amplifying truth-telling through digital storytelling, and centring culture, Country and community in their leadership. They are less focused on politics in a typical sense, and more on people (healing, relationship-building, and restoring collectivist systems of care and responsibility).

They are ten feet tall and forged in fire—continuously rising with purpose and resolve, connected to Country and guided by their ancestors.

They are succeeding without compromising who they are.

ABOUT

BLAKE CANSDALE



Blake is a proud Anaiwan man and the National Director of ANTAR. Dedicated to empowering First Nations Communities, Blake has a background in legal practice with experience in public policy, lecturing, Aboriginal affairs, business management, Aboriginal land planning and development, land acquisition and land management.

ANTAR

ANTAR is a national advocacy organisation working for justice, rights and respect for the First Nations peoples of Australia. We do this primarily through campaigns, advocacy and public education. To learn more about ANTAR's work, visit <https://antar.org.au/>.



What barriers still exist for young Indigenous leaders, and how can we collectively dismantle them?

The colonial project is not a relic of the past—it is ongoing, embedded in our institutions, laws, media, and national psyche. For young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, this means stepping into leadership, not just with vision and talent, but prepared to navigate systemic racism, structural inequality, and chronic underinvestment in areas that matter most to them.



Bar a few notable exceptions, First Nations peoples in Australia still lack democratically elected representative bodies at most levels. Decisions about our futures are too often made without us, or through shallow consultation that fails to meet the standard of free, prior and informed consent under the UN Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Young mob face compounding barriers: underfunded ACCOs, limited access to services and infrastructure in rural and remote communities, intergenerational trauma, widespread systemic racism and limited culturally meaningful career pathways. These are not abstract issues—they directly shape our people's health, opportunity, and wellbeing from an early age.

On top of this, conservative media and political voices continue to stoke fear, hate and division towards our communities, often vilifying our leaders when they speak uncomfortable truths. The courage it takes for young mob to stand up and speak out in the face of this targeted and often vile opposition should not be underestimated.

So how do we dismantle these barriers? We start with real investment—in our young people, in our ACCOs, in systemic reforms and representative structures that enable selfdetermination and economic empowerment of Australia's first peoples. We need to embed UNDRIP into domestic law, build far

greater infrastructure and opportunity in our communities, and stand firm against racism wherever it rears its ugly head. And perhaps above all, we need to find common ground. We need to work together to create a shared vision of the future—one that we can all build together and be equally proud of.



What role does truth-telling play in building a future grounded in respect and equity?

I have hope for our young ones—that they will inherit a nation grounded in respect and equity, where they are safe and feel a deep sense of belonging. I do not believe this can happen unless Australians confront our shared history of



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ABOUT RECONCILIATION NSW

Reconciliation NSW

Reconciliation NSW is the peak body for reconciliation in NSW. Our members include First Nations and non-Indigenous people working together to advance reconciliation in their communities.



STRATEGIC VISION

Our vision is for an inspired, educated and reconciled NSW. We believe Reconciliation must be underpinned by truth telling and integrity and led by First Nations voices.

OUR MISSION

To unite, lead, and inspire NSW communities toward Reconciliation.

OUR PURPOSE

To partner with communities, organisations, and government to embed Reconciliation into our everyday lives.

colonisation—including the ongoing impacts of a system that still produces clear winners and losers to this day. Until First Nations culture is genuinely respected and valued (not least because it is the oldest living culture in the world), I do not feel that we can claim to be moving forward as a society.

Truth-telling has increasingly entered national discourse in recent years—in political speeches, corporate strategies, and public policy. But what is often missing is the depth, sincerity, and accountability that truth-telling demands. Whilst there is a clear growing emphasis on truth-telling, the concept and practice are nothing new. Our people have been speaking truth to power since invasion, recounting stories of dispossession, despair, resistance, resurgence, resilience, strength and success.

Whether in landmark reports like 'Bringing Them Home' and 'Yoorrook', or in yarns around the dinner table or the local footy club, truth-telling has always been with us in one form or another. Yet still we hear many Australians continue to say, "Why didn't we know?"

In my view, the answer is simple—they weren't listening. If we want to see a future grounded in respect and equity, this needs to change.



How can we ensure that the voices of young people are not just heard, but acted upon in policy, funding, and governance?

The first step is addressing the structural barriers that continue to silence or sideline First Nations voices—I spoke to this earlier. When mob speak up, it must be within systems that are culturally safe and deliberately designed to draw out our truths in ways that ensure they are heard, respected, and acted upon.

We need strong First Nations leadership shaping policy, funding, and governance within all sectors (public, private and community)—leaders who are culturally grounded, technically capable, and accountable to



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community. However, we also need empowered, independent, self-determining representative bodies that can advocate for and with young people in culturally strong and politically effective ways.

At the local level, we must invest in relationships. Change happens where trust is strong. We need more intentional spaces for truth-telling and cultural exchange—not symbolic engagement but sustained substantive community-led dialogue.

Treaty is also key. It offers a pathway for restoring rightful power to First Nations peoples—to care for Country, fulfil cultural

responsibilities, and thrive in contemporary Australian society on our own self-determining terms.

“And as much as we talk about truth-telling, we must now turn our attention to truth-listening,

which does not happen in a vacuum. Just as truth-telling requires courage and cultural labour, truth-listening requires preparation. It is not instinctive, nor is it guaranteed through good intentions. It is something we must ready ourselves for.

In my opinion, it is time for Australia to start genuinely preparing itself for truth, and for us to get on with the unfinished business of reconciliation.



This interview was conducted by Carly Bush and Erin Boyd from Reconciliation NSW as part of NAIDOC Week 2025. It was generously supported by Jezzini Property Services.

We extend our deep thanks to Blake Cansdale for sharing his time, insight, and leadership.

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