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Support for enterprise is at risk

The Australian, Australia



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OPINION | SENATOR JANA STEWART

First Nations people and businesses are driving Australia's economic growth, annually contributing \$16.1 billion in revenue, paying out \$4.2 million in wages and employing more than 116,000 people. Our economy is expanding rapidly via businesses that are thriving in construction, renewable energy, native food, fashion, IT and tourism.

First Nations enterprises generate significant social and economic value, creating \$4.41 for every dollar spent, and they are up to 100 times more likely to employ First Nations Australians. We're also excelling internationally: First Nations exporters generated more than \$670 million in 2022-23.

With the right support, this success can continue. But as we approach the 2025 federal election, all of this is at risk. Since 2022, the Albanese Labor government has invested in strengthening families and communities, focusing on sustainable opportunities that empower First Nations Australians.

We're building a Future Made in Australia, unlocking investment and ensuring First Nations businesses benefit from the clean energy transition. More than one million jobs have been created under Labor, more than any government in a single term. Our remote jobs program is creating 3,000 jobs in communities neglected under a decade of Coalition rule.

The First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program now has 300 enrolments, and we've expanded the Indigenous Ranger Program, creating

1000 new jobs, including 770 for First Nations women. We're strengthening the Indigenous Procurement Policy, expanding Indigenous Business Australia's leverage capacity, and investing in business coaching for First Nations women. More than 34,000 First Nations people have accessed free TAFE courses and new scholarships are helping First Nations students enter psychology and healthcare.

Meanwhile, Peter Dutton and the Liberal-National Coalition push a narrative of dysfunction, undermining our achievements and harming our young people's sense of identity. They've already flagged cuts to government spending. Our communities know who will bear the brunt. Scrapping funding for ceremonies like Welcome to Country is just the start. What else will they cut? How will this affect our businesses?

We've seen what happens when conservatives take power. In New Zealand, the conservative National government has abolished the Māori Health Authority, reversed language and culture funding and dropped Indigenous cancer targets, while its economy declines.

At this election, we have a choice: a government that supports First Nations success or one that undermines it. Only an Albanese Labor government will deliver the investment and opportunity our communities deserve.

■ *Senator Jana Stewart (Mutthi Mutthi and Wamba Wamba), Labor Senator for Victoria*



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Senator Jana Stewart says 770 First Nations women have started work in the Indigenous Ranger Program

Indigenous business has flourished under the Albanese Labor government, contributing to the economy, creating jobs and fostering optimism