

Stronger In Our Way

East Kimberley Men's Forum 2026



10-11 June, 2026
Home Valley Station
Balanggarra Country

Image: @salty_one_here



The Gathering

BIG FIRE, BIG DREAM

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50 men. Two days on Country. One space to connect, reflect and heal.

Big Fire, Big Dream was the third annual East Kimberley Men's Forum coordinated by Kununurra Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation (KWAC) in partnership with Gawooleng Yawoodeng Aboriginal Corporation (GY).

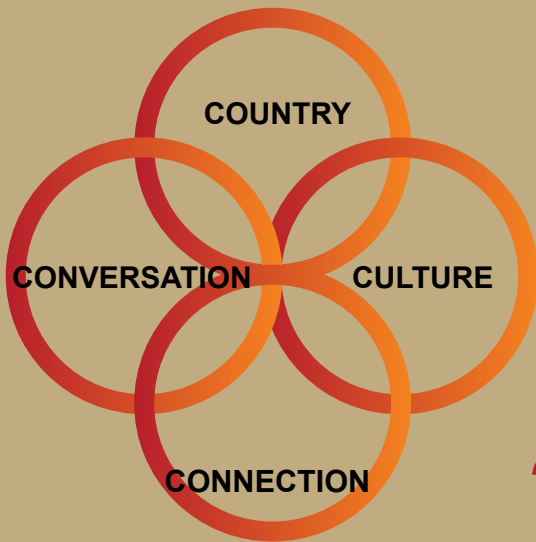
For the first time, the Forum was held entirely on Country — responding directly to what men told us following the 2025 Forum.

Over two days, 50+ men came together away from the pressures and distractions of town to yarn, listen, fish, share food, exercise, create and talk openly about some of the challenges affecting men, families and community.

The Forum explored social and emotional wellbeing, violence, alcohol and other drugs, gambling, relationships, responsibility and healing — grounded throughout in culture, Country and the lived experience of Aboriginal men.

What happened on Country

Overview of the event



Being on Country changed the nature of the gathering. Men camped together, gathered around the fire, went fishing, shared meals and participated in facilitated conversations and activities designed to create space for reflection and healing.

“Country does half the healing for us.”

Jeremy Donovan shared the story behind Big Fire, Big Dream and the idea that the fire within us can be used destructively — or cared for so that it provides warmth, nourishment and connection.

Associate Professor Clinton Schultz explored holistic social and emotional wellbeing, responsibility and accountability, encouraging men to recognise what they can control and address challenges one at a time.

Troy Reardon shared his lived experience of addiction and recovery, opening conversations about alcohol, drugs and particularly gambling, and practical ways men can seek support and make change.

Darryl Gardiner explored the cost of violence and how experiences of trauma can shape behaviour, while reinforcing that learned behaviours can be changed and cycles of violence can be broken.

GY Men's Group caught and cooked a traditional feed which created a strong platform for men to connect.

Lowell Hunter (Salty One) brought the Forum to a close through collaborative sand art, with men moving together across Country to create one artwork — physically connecting culture, Country, creativity and wellbeing.



What we heard

Six messages came through strongly

Connection in

Culture: Connection (to Country, culture, each other and family), reflection on the power of connecting with other Aboriginal men and hearing their stories.

Aboriginal culture, Country, story, lived experience, relationships and community connection are to be central to future men's forums.

Accountability & Responsibility:

While the impact of trauma and how it shapes men was recognised, accountability for behaviour is strongly emphasised and we can all create positive change.

Country is healing: Country is central to healing, creating a reflective space where men were safe to be honest and vulnerable, actively participating in facilitated sessions and also connecting with one another around the fire or while fishing.



Being present is crucial:

Men need to be present in order to deal with any challenges. Both being on Country and practicing breathwork exercises were two ways that men learnt to be present.

Truth in vulnerability:

Honesty and vulnerability of stories shared, enabled men to relate and identify the truth of their own trauma and learned behaviours. Men reflected that they rarely had healthy opportunities to express their feelings and instead relied on self-destructive coping responses.

Change can happen (one step at a time):

Men understood that we can overcome challenges if we identify problems that face us and deal with them one at a time. Men learnt coping strategies and know that they can reach out to someone when they need support.

"It's a powerful thing to be able to listen and learn off other people."

"You have to heal yourself before you can truly help others."

"When you motivate yourself, you motivate others."

Keep the fire going

The Forum is two days. The work continues.

Big Fire, Big Dream reinforced something KWAC and its partners continue to hear from men: healing cannot be confined to a once-a-year event.

Men need regular opportunities to connect with other men, culture and Country; safe places where they belong; trusted Aboriginal workers and role models; and practical pathways to support when they are dealing with alcohol and other drugs, gambling, relationships, parenting, violence or other challenges.

The learnings from Big Fire, Big Dream will inform the continuing development of men's work in Kununurra, including:

- regular gatherings and connection through the Men's Space;
- ongoing fishing, cultural activities and time on Country;
- stronger connections between men and local social and emotional wellbeing supports;
- opportunities for sport, fitness and positive social connection, particularly for younger men;
- strengthening the capability and visibility of local Aboriginal men's workers; and
- continuing an annual Men's Forum grounded in Country, culture and Aboriginal leadership.



When Aboriginal men have the space to connect with Country, culture and each other, difficult conversations become possible. Big Fire, Big Dream showed what can happen when that space is created.

