



Year in Review 2025

Reflections on 2025

Teya Dusseldorp

Executive Director

There have been moments of hope throughout 2025, even in the face of extreme harm to our environment and violent ruptures in the social fabric of our society.

The thousands who joined the Walk for Truth in Victoria reminded us that there are many Australians prepared for the hard work of confronting the difficult truths of this country, backing the calls of First Nations people for social and climate justice.

The diversity of people who flocked to Bondi, to share the grief with Jews who had been so brutally targeted and to be guided by their light, showed us how to move together with humanity, transcending what divides us.

These courageous steps in truth telling, healing and connection model how we can collectively imagine a

different sort of future. Our partners, working from the grassroots, are attempting to bring that imagined future into reality.

Please read more about our partners in this Year in Review. Each group holds a vital piece of the puzzle to ensuring people and places can thrive. Their work reveals how different parts of the system connect, and how change in one area can open possibility in another.

Time to share, listen and deepen relationships are practices that sit at the heart of long-term change and ones that we aim to cultivate and nurture into the future.



Tom, Teya, Marta and Joe Dusseldorp

Tom Dusseldorp

Board Chair

Another amazing year at Dusseldorp Forum with phenomenal progress on strategic initiatives that contribute to an Australia where people and places can thrive.

A key development of the Forum's strategy was the greater inclusion of climate initiatives and I am pleased to say that we have learnt a lot, met some extraordinary climate champions and supported some milestone initiatives.

We've heard from our partners how climate pressures are impacting on people's health and wellbeing, housing and infrastructure, local jobs and economies, food and water security and the sustainability of our natural environments. Yet, only 5% of Australian philanthropic funding is directed to climate solutions and environmental protections. At Dusseldorp Forum, supporting this work now makes up 37% of our overall giving. This has grown steadily over the past two years and reflects our decision to resource those innovating for a sustainable and resilient future.

As our climate commitments have grown, so has our support for community-led solutions. First Nations people hold deep knowledge about caring for Country and the wellbeing of communities. Yet nationally, First Nations-led organisations receive less than 1% percent of philanthropic

giving. At the Forum, we are working to shift this. In 2025, First Nations-led initiatives made up 30% of our overall giving. This share has increased year on year, acknowledging the powerful outcomes of our First Nations partnerships.

We are grateful for the work of our climate partners in 2025. From Groundswell Giving's network of climate changemakers, shifting public debate and policy, to Supercharge Australia leading innovation in green energy, there have been many wins to celebrate.

Looking ahead to 2026, we are excited to welcome new First Nations climate partners, including Just Futures Collab and a nationally significant project in the West Kimberley, to serve as a model for stewardship of Country and climate resilience across Australia.



Tom, Teya, Marta and Joe Dusseldorp

Climate and Environment



5%

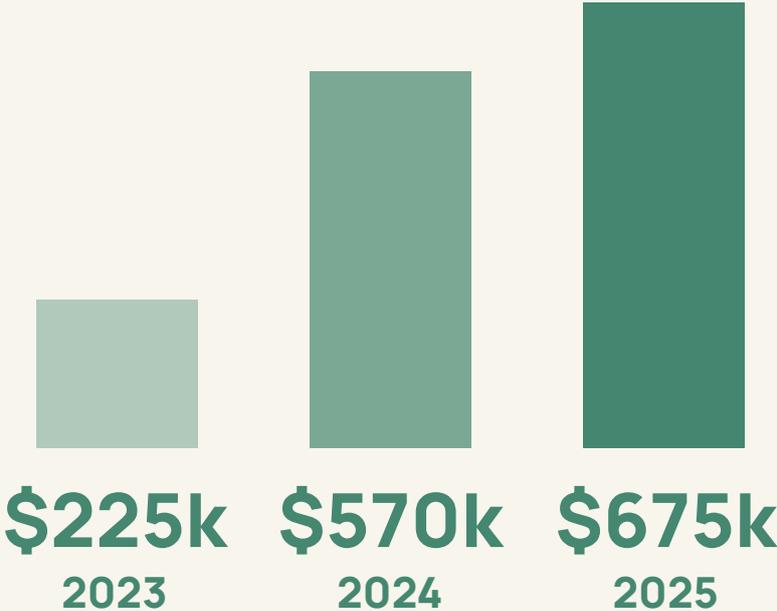
of overall giving in Australia is directed to climate and environment*



37%

of Dusseldorp Forum's giving is directed to climate and environment

*AEGN Report, Environment and climate giving trends 2024



Dusseldorp Forum's climate and environmental giving

Education Grounded in Place

The Nawarddeken Academy successfully registered a secondary school at both Manmoyi and Mamardawerre outstations. For the first time, senior students living in the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, in Arnhem Land, NT, were able to pursue formal secondary education on their homelands.

This achievement came a few months before the ten-year anniversary of the Nawarddeken Academy. Meaning, in less than a decade, Traditional Owners and Elders secured local, bi-cultural education for every child in the Warddeken IPA, from early learning through to Year 12. This is testament to the power and integrity of place-based, community-controlled approaches, as well as the strength and commitment of a network of supporters.

“This is a bush library; this is where you learn your knowledge.”

Ross Guymala, Bininj teacher at Nawarddeken Academy

To the east of the Warddeken IPA, the movement grows.

This year, Homeland School Company, took exciting steps towards realising a similar and inspired vision for bi-cultural, on-Country education across the Djelk IPA. They appointed a school principal, employed their first classroom teacher, and most

recently, held a series of development workshops for their first custom curriculum, grounded in intergenerational knowledge and the local seasonal calendar.

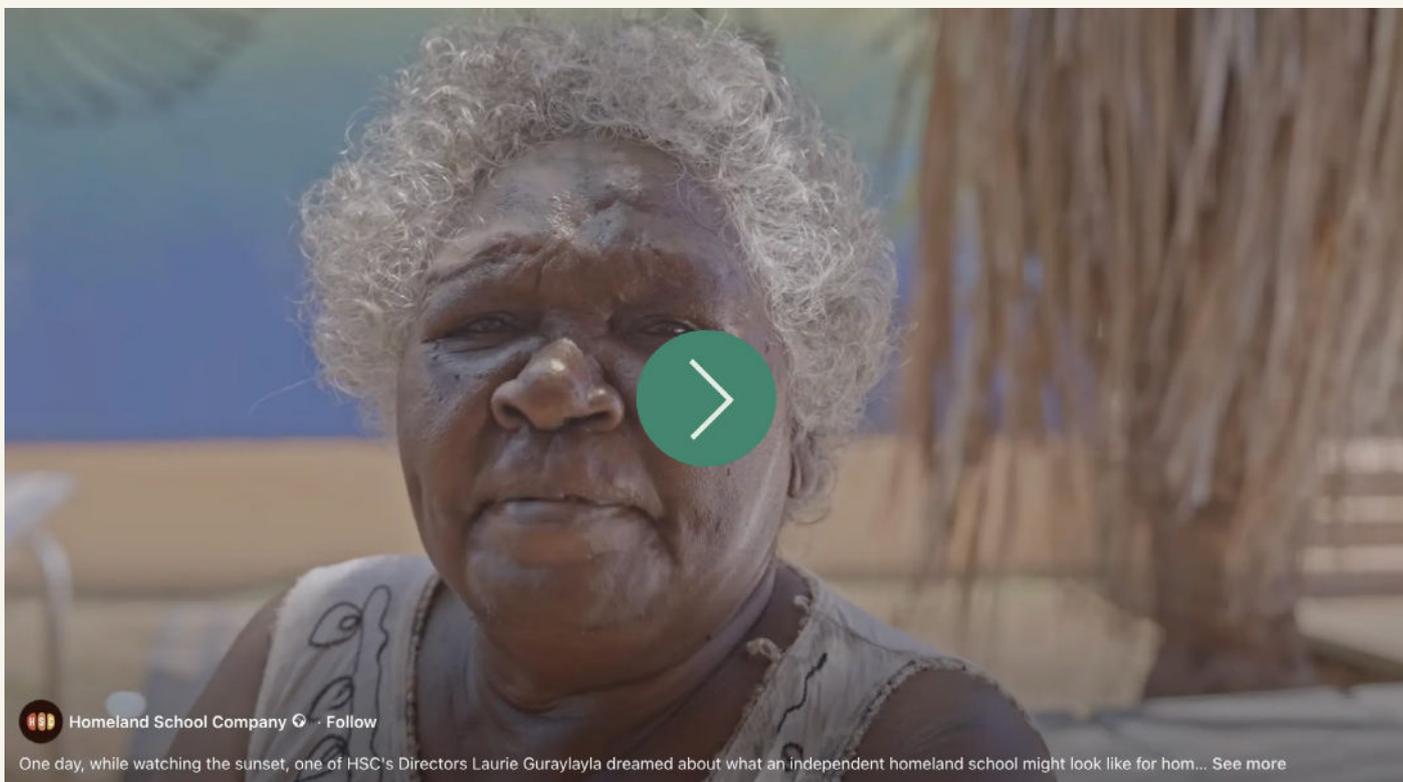
It is expected that the first independent primary school in the Djelk IPA will be opened in early 2026.

“By setting up independent schools on the homelands, we’re thinking about how our old people’s knowledge can be respected, and how we can teach the young ones on Country.”

Dale Pascoe, Chair of Homeland School Company



Nawarddeken Academy students with their seasonal calendar



To learn more about the Homeland School Company, you can listen to a recent ABC Radio [interview here](#) or watch a short video above.

Nawarddeken Academy and the Homeland Schools Company are enabled by the [Karrkad Kanjdji Trust \(KKT\)](#), established by Traditional Owners of the Warddeken and Djelk Indigenous Protected Areas to support their vision for healthy Country.

KKT serves as a shared resource to eight First Nations community-controlled organisations in West and Central Arnhem Land, one of the largest Indigenous estates in Australia, supporting the preservation and revitalisation of culture, and the conservation of over 50,000 square kilometres of land and sea Country.

One of KKT's six funding pillars is 'Educating future custodians', recognising that on-Country, bi-cultural education enables First Nations children and young people to walk confidently in both worlds.

Dusseldorp Forum has been committed to the vision of the homeland communities of West Arnhem Land for more than 10 years and, beyond long-term funding provides governance, strategy and advocacy support to both KKT and Homeland School Company. When invited, we spend time on Country, are committed to ongoing cultural learning and respect First Nations self-determination.

Collective action to protect democracy

The Mannifera Collective is playing a steady and important role in strengthening Australia's democracy at a time when trust in institutions is under pressure and social cohesion is increasingly fragile.

Across Australia, communities are leading efforts to rebuild trust, strengthen participation and renew democratic institutions. These efforts are often creative and grounded in local experience, yet they remain fragmented and under-supported. In response, Mannifera, in partnership with Dusseldorp Forum, the Australian Democracy Network and other

state-based partners, launched the Democracy 100: Mapping 100 ideas to strengthen Australia's democracy roundtables in 2025.

The Democracy 100 roundtables create a space for people working across civil society, advocacy, research and community organising to come together and share ideas. The roundtables held in Adelaide and Perth brought together diverse voices to explore what is needed to strengthen democratic life, from civic education and participation to institutional reform and accountability. These conversations focused on practical ideas and lived experience and helped build connections across sectors and places. With strong interest and momentum, Mannifera is continuing this work into 2026.

Mannifera marked its fifth birthday in 2025. Over five years, the collective has grown to 27 members across Australia and has delivered more than \$5.6 million in grants to 67 civil society organisations. During this time, Mannifera has also convened

more than 90 connection-building and learning events, creating space for funders and partners to share insights and deepen collaboration.

You can explore the work of [Mannifera's 2025 partners here](#).

A healthy democracy creates the conditions for a fair and equal society. It ensures people can shape the decisions that affect their lives, rather than having those decisions made for them. When participation is broad and inclusive, power is shared more evenly, and systems respond to real needs on the ground.



Dr Mary Graham, Michelle Maloney, Harriet McCallum, Julianne Schultz and Teya Dusseldorp

Each year, Mannifera members come together for an annual muster, a few days of shared learning, relationship building and collective grantmaking. The muster, in 2025, was held on Yugambah Country in Southeast Queensland, where members spent time with First Nations leaders who shared stories of Country and governance principles relevant to democratic reform.

“Over tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal peoples have evolved a complex, refined, multifaceted system of obligations and dispositions. More than simply relationships, these thoroughgoing connections set in a system of poetic ordering enable people to manage the tensions of human interaction without resorting to domination and hierarchy. This relationalism offers another way of being and governing on the Australian continent.”

Dr Mary Graham and Morgan Brigg, 2020

Mannifera's support enabled the work of 15 organisations, alongside multi-year and rapid response funding that enabled partners to act quickly in a changing political environment. This support strengthened advocacy across key areas of democracy, including public debate, transparency, accountability, fair economic policy, and inclusive participation. Partners used this backing to shape policy, engage decision-makers, lead national campaigns, and counter disinformation.

Beyond funding, Mannifera helped strengthen the democracy ecosystem itself. By deepening collaboration and connection across civil society, they supported a more coordinated and effective field. Their continued investment in First Nations-led initiatives also advanced economic inclusion and community-led solutions, contributing to a stronger, more responsive and participatory democracy.

Dusseldorp Forum has been a member of Mannifera since 2022. In addition to funding, we contribute time and internal resources to governance, strategy and shared learning. We believe collective approaches matter. Strong relationships build trust, deepen accountability and allow us to align efforts, reduce duplication and amplify voices calling for change.

First Nations Leading Change



> 1%

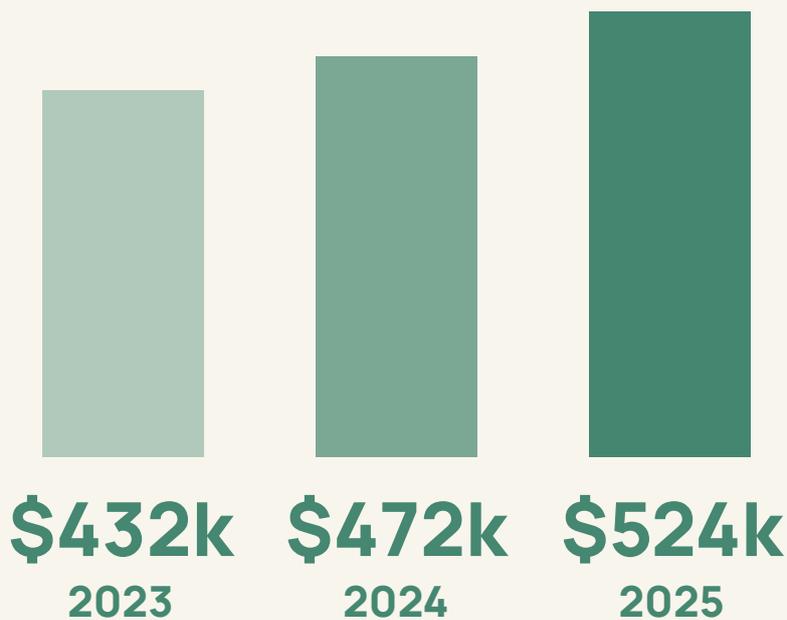
of overall giving in Australia is directed to First Nations led and controlled organisations*



30%

of Dusseldorp Forum's giving is directed to First Nation's led initiatives

*Philanthropy Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Funders Reporting Survey 2022-2023



Dusseldorp Forum's giving to First Nations led initiatives

Enriching the soil of systems change

Throughout 2025 we explored, alongside an inspiring group of people and organisations, how we might go deeper to shift systems shaped by dominance, hierarchy and harm, toward systems built on healing, healthy relationships and collective care.

This began in April, in Melbourne, where we gathered with Tatiana Fraser from Canada's Systems Sanctuary to learn about Scaling Deep. Scaling Deep is an approach to systems change that focuses on what sits beneath the surface: our values, relationships and ways of working together. While systems change efforts are focussed on scaling up – shifting policy and scaling out – spreading successful innovations, scaling deep is the underlying personal and cultural work that creates the conditions for change that enrich the soil from which change can flourish.

It's the slow steady work of deepening relationships that recognises the significance of context, building connections that bridge diverse communities and it prioritises inner work and healing as integral to meaningful, lasting change.

The gathering acknowledged that relational ways of working have always been part of systems change in Australia, but they are often overlooked and hard to measure. Our learning systems do not always capture what matters most.

A hands-on workshop explored how this kind of work is already showing up in place-based initiatives across the country. Participants shared experiences from [Hands Up Mallee](#), [Fire to Flourish](#) and [Collaboration for Impact](#). They noted that early signs of progress are often seen in relationships: stronger trust, better collaboration and deeper cultural connection. These changes may be quiet, but they signal that something important is taking hold and creating the foundation for long-term shifts in power, decision-making and community wellbeing.

These ideas were carried into [Woor-Dungin's](#) Cultivating Connections Forum, which brought together First Nations leaders, community organisations, philanthropic partners and international practitioners.



Mia Bates and Julie Williams in conversation at the Haumanu workshop, Aotearoa

Throughout the afternoon, Shaun Middlebrook generously hosted, sharing Woor-Dungin's Decolonising Wealth: Cultural Audit & Toolkit and reminding us:

“We are focused on changing systems not because it’s the trendy thing to do, but because it is the right thing to do. We don’t want to be back here in 20 years talking about recommendations that haven’t been implemented.”

Shaun Middlebrook, Woor-Dungin

A conversation between Tatiana Fraser, Commissioner Travis Lovett from the Yoorrook Justice Commission, and Tasha Ritchie from [Accountable Futures Collective](#) explored truth-telling, healing and power through relationship.

The journey continued in Auckland, Aotearoa, where we took part in workshops introducing the [Haumanu Framework](#). Haumanu is a restorative approach to systems change grounded in mātauranga Māori, Western knowledge and intergenerational wisdom. Haumanu means to restore and rejuvenate. The framework offers shared concepts, processes and practices that help people work with collective trauma as it arises, and design systems that support wellness and wholeness.

Two First Nations partners joined us on this learning journey: Julie Williams, Mt Druitt Community Engagement Lead at [Mouny Youth and Community Services](#), and Mia Bates, Youth Engagement Coordinator at the [Accountable Futures Collective](#).

Mia reflected on how language carries meaning. A week earlier on Noongar Country, she learned words that hold multiple ideas at once, including a word for river that also means umbilical cord, and another that means both Country and the creation of life. These experiences highlighted how Indigenous languages express connection in ways English often cannot. In Aotearoa, she heard similar ideas through Māori concepts of aliveness and interconnection. This deepened her understanding of Haumanu's focus on relationships close to us, and on small, grounded places where change can begin.

We returned with practical ways to build connection, strengthen practice and work more carefully together. These learnings travel back into community work, shaping how we gather, listen and act.

Dusseldorp Forum remains committed to learning that deepens understanding. We create space to listen carefully, learn alongside partners and share what works.

Truths that Change the Story

In 2025, the Yoorrook Justice Commission concluded Australia's first formal truth-telling inquiry led by First Peoples, marking a historic milestone in Victoria's journey toward truth, justice, and Treaty.

The Commission completed four years of hearings and evidence-gathering, documenting the lived experiences and truths shared by First Peoples across Victoria.

Its final report was delivered to the Victorian Parliament, providing a comprehensive public record of the impacts of colonisation and clear recommendations for a more just shared future.

Deputy Commissioner Travis Lovett led a 500+ kilometre Walk for Truth from Portland to Parliament House, bringing truth-telling into towns and communities across Victoria. Thousands of people participated along the route, including local school groups, community organisations, and supporters, building shared understanding and public momentum for truth and Treaty. He formally presented the Commission's report at the conclusion of the Walk for Truth, with message sticks collected from Traditional Owners across the state and presented to Premier Jacinta Allan.

“Truth-telling is an act of respect and an act of national repair.”

Deputy Chair and Commissioner of the Yoorrook Justice Commission

With support from Dusseldorp Forum, Yoorrook launched an independent, non-government digital platform to hold the Commission's testimony, evidence, and findings.

Developed in partnership with the State Library of Victoria and the Victorian Indigenous Research Centre, the Yoorrook collection is now in perpetuity as part of the state's official records. The platform stands as the authoritative public archive of the Commission's work and



Travis Lovett with students from St Patrick's Primary School, Port Fairy

continues to support education, reflection, and accountability.

Dusseldorp Forum supported UTS Impact Studios to partner with the Commission to produce a curriculum-aligned episode of the [Hey History!](#)

focused on the Walk for Truth. The episode supports Stage 2 and 3 history learning and invites broader audiences to engage with the realities and ongoing impacts of colonisation.

The episode received a Gold Signal Podcast Award in the Kids Single Episode category, recognising its impact and quality at a critical moment for truth-telling and Treaty processes.

In a truly historical moment in November, Australia's First Treaty with Aboriginal People was signed in Victoria.

“Today marks a turning point in our nation’s history, a moment where old wounds can begin to heal and new relationships can be built on truth, justice and mutual respect.”

Victoria's First Peoples' Assembly co-chair Ngarra Murray

In 2026, Travis Lovett will pick up his walking poles once again as he embarks on a National Walk for Truth from Melbourne to Canberra to bring the lessons from Victoria's Truth-Telling and Treaty success to the steps of the Commonwealth Parliament House.

Timeline of 2025 Highlights



January

[Our Place](#) released their [Evaluation Report](#), showing that when schools become central hubs for learning and wrap-around support, participation increases and children and families are better connected to education and life-changing services.



February

[Groundswell's](#) Caring for Country program concluded generating over \$1million in support for 30 First Nations led climate initiatives and spawning, the [Just Futures Collab](#), an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island-led giving circle activating resources for climate justice. families are better connected to education and life-changing services.



March

[Learning the Macleay](#) hosted the [Yuwa Nyinda Youth Summit](#), bringing together 140 community leaders, service providers, and locals. They heard from 384 young people across 27 cultural backgrounds from the Macleay Valley, sharing what they need to fulfill their dreams.



April

Partnering with the [Centre for Public Impact](#), we ran four [Story Circles](#) connecting theory and practice across sectors. We also launched a [story-kit for changemakers](#), distilling years of research into stories' power to transform systems.



May

[Mounty Aboriginal Youth and Community Services](#) grew their direct support for young people through programs, advocacy and community engagement, while backing young people as leaders driving systems change efforts.



June

[Surfers for Climate](#) launched the 'SAVE BEACHWATCH' campaign and secured an early win for water quality testing on Sydney's beaches, with the NSW Government recommitting funding to the program.



July

Pete Cooley shared how IndigiGrow, a First Nations-owned nursery and social enterprise in La Perouse, is working to bring back native plants that have shaped the landscape and the lives of its people, for thousands of years.



August

PLACE shared insights from their Community Roadshow and Listening Tour that visited 53 places and engaged with 75 initiatives. To compliment this we published a content series, From the Ground Up, that celebrates communities at the heart of the place-based movement.



September

New partner: The Accountable Futures Collective aims to change systems so they stop harming generations of young people. They bring young people and adults together to solve the accountability void - what's missing between the promises to young people and their experience in reality.



October

Supercharge Australia hosted its annual Innovation Challenge Awards, recognising Liberate Minerals for its high-efficiency, low-emissions approach to processing critical minerals, while marking three years of innovation in renewable energy, with 41 startups supported and more than A\$100 million raised.



November

ChangeFest held in Walayup, WA, celebrated place-based change efforts across the country. It was a valuable moment to connect with partners and learn together how to build thriving, just and resilient communities, shaped by the people who live there.



December

Wilya Janta's first Explain Home, lands in Tennant Creek. The community designed home shaped by culture, climate and community leadership is a shift towards practice that could set new standards in remote Aboriginal housing.



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