

## MEDIA RELEASE

MONDAY 31 OCTOBER 2022

### NORTHERN TERRITORY 2023 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

**2023 NT Australian of the Year – Samuel Bush-Blanasi (Beswick Community)**  
**2023 NT Senior Australian of the Year – Bernard Tipiloura (Tiwi Islands)**  
**2023 NT Young Australian of the Year – Jahdai Vigona (Darwin)**  
**2023 NT Local Hero – Sacha King (Darwin)**

Awards event livestreamed via a link available at [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au) or on ABC iView

**Monday 31 October 2022, 7:45pm (Central Time), Darwin:** The 2023 NT Australian of the Year Awards have been announced today at the Darwin Convention Centre in the presence of Her Honour the Honourable Vicki O'Halloran, Administrator of the Northern Territory and The Honourable Natasha Fyles, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory.

The four NT recipients will join those from the other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2023.

**The 2023 NT Australian of the Year is Samuel Bush-Blanasi, Chair of the Northern Land Council.**

Raised as a proud Mayili man, 60-year-old Samuel Bush-Blanasi has worked for decades at local and national levels to empower Indigenous Australians.

As Chair and Deputy Chair of the Northern Land Council, he has been instrumental in securing sea country rights in Arnhem Land for traditional owners, and the incorporation in 2022 of the Aboriginal Sea Company (ASC).

The ASC is the first of its kind and will enable traditional owners to oversee commercial fishing, aquaculture and other fishing-related activities along the Arnhem Land coastline. It will provide employment and enable Aboriginal people to manage profitable and sustainable fishing.

Samuel has also supported native title claims, recently overseeing the historic hand-back of the remaining half of Kakadu National Park to 14 clan estate groups.

Nationally, he's pushed for reform of the Australian Constitution, joining forces with Indigenous leaders to host dialogue and develop the historic Uluru Statement from the Heart.

**Suicide prevention campaigner Bernard Tipiloura is the 2023 NT Senior Australian of the Year.**

Tiwi Island elder Bernard Tipiloura is a suicide prevention campaigner whose efforts over 20 years have led to a dramatic drop in suicide rates.

The Tiwi Islands had one of the highest suicide rates in the world in 2006, reflecting the impacts of colonisation and deepening problems with 'gambling, gunja and grog'.

Bernard began his work to strengthen cultural identity and connection to country. He and wife Lynette Johnson visited schools each week to encourage young people to be proud of who they were and draw strength from their homeland.

He was a key contributor to the Healing Foundation's *Stories from Community* report that analysed the fall in suicide rates in the Tiwi Islands and at Yarrabah in Queensland as a result of community-led programs.

Now aged 83, Bernard donated a kidney when he was 60, volunteered and worked at the Red Cross until he was 80 and remains an avid anti-smoking campaigner.

### **The 2023 NT Young Australian of the Year is First Nations community leader, Jahdai Vigona.**

Jahdai Vigona knows an individual can make a change much bigger than themselves. A proud Tiwi Islands man, he is passionate about improving the lives of Indigenous people.

He believes Aboriginal people are best placed to deliver better health outcomes to Aboriginal communities as they understand the services that are needed. He's at the forefront of delivering health messages and mental health programs that educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on how to seek help.

Jahdai has been a presenter at government forums, research summits and community events and is well sought-after for his public speaking. He encourages Indigenous people to use their voice, and for those voices to be heard.

Currently chair of the 2022 NT Youth Round Table, 21-year-old Jahdai has been recognised with several awards including the 2021 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year and 2022 NT Young Achiever of the Year Award.

### **Social worker and founder of Two Two One Mental Health Charity, Sacha King, is the 2023 NT Local Hero.**

Darwin social worker Sacha King set up her own charity in 2019 after she noticed a lack of mental health services in the Northern Territory. The region has almost twice the amount of mental health patients per capita than the Australian average and the lowest number of services.

Two Two One delivers accredited mental health training and community workshops to close gaps in the delivery of mental health services and education.

Sacha also organises events for young people around Darwin that create safe spaces where they can relax, share stories and access services and support.

The 'GO (Girls Only) Night' brings girls together with women from different backgrounds to connect and develop life skills, while the Darwin City Launch series offers local disadvantaged youth a sporting outlet on Saturday nights.

Sacha, aged 32, also coordinates events for the Annual Mental Health Week. Funds raised go to running Mental Health First Aid courses in schools.

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand congratulated the award recipients from the Northern Territory.

“The NT award recipients are exceptional individuals committed to creating better futures – for their country, for community and for people,” said Ms Brand.

“We look forward to welcoming them to Canberra for the national Australian of the Year Awards to be announced on 25 January 2023.”

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

**ENDS.**

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**PHOTOS:** From the awards announcement event can be downloaded as available after approx. 8:30pm Darwin time from this link (credit NADC/Salty Dingo):  
[221031 NADC NT - Media Distribution photos \(high res\)](#)