

**MEDIA RELEASE
6 NOVEMBER 2023**

2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS FOR NORTHERN TERRITORY ANNOUNCED

**2024 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory - Blair McFarland (Alice Springs)
2024 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory - Yalmay Yunupingu (Yirrkala)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory - Peter Susanto (Darwin)
2024 Local Hero for the Northern Territory - Witiyana Marika (Yirrkala)**

Awards event livestreamed via australianoftheyear.org.au

Monday 6 November 2023, 7:30PM (Darwin time): The 2024 Australian of the Year Award recipients for the Northern Territory have been announced at a ceremony in Darwin this evening.

The four Northern Territory recipients will join those from the other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2024.

The 2024 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory is Blair McFarland, Founder of Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service

Blair McFarland has spent decades fighting to improve the health and lives of some of the most disadvantaged youth in Australia.

Blair moved to Central Australia in 1986, and over the next two decades he gained a deep understanding of the lives of Indigenous people in the region. The petrol-sniffing epidemic of the 90s caused him to set up Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS) in 2002.

CAYLUS was instrumental in developing youth programs, orchestrating the roll-out of Low Aromatic Fuel (LAF, or Opal) and implementing the Federal Low Aromatic Fuel Act. The combination of these activities resulted in a 95 per cent reduction in volatile substance misuse.

Now 66, Blair's passion and commitment to Central Australia is reflected in his participation in politics, advocacy, local radio and community services. In 2008, he received the Prime Minister's Award for Outstanding Contribution in Drug & Alcohol Endeavours by the Australian National Council on Drugs.

Teacher, linguist and community leader, Yalmay Yunupingu, is the 2024 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory.

Gentle, generous and funny – Yalmay Yunupingu touches many lives in north-east Arnhem Land. As a teacher and linguist, she guided teaching at Yirrkala Bilingual School for four decades, retiring in March 2023.

Often called the mother of the school, Yalmai started by translating Dr Seuss books at the community library into her local Yolngu Matha language. She qualified as a teacher and, with her husband (of Yothu Yindi fame), forged a bilingual teaching approach to make young people strong in their Yolngu language and culture.

A respected elder, 67-year-old Yalmai is in constant demand for consultations, projects and her traditional healing work. She helps everyone, always with a smile on her face.

In 2005, she was awarded a 'Teacher of Excellence' by the Northern Territory Department of Education and was an Honorary University Fellow at the Charles Darwin University. Since retiring, she has been teaching the next generation about traditional healing.

The 2024 Young Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory is 17-year-old medical student and community volunteer Peter Susanto

When he was two years old, Peter Susanto astounded his parents by translating words from Bahasa Indonesia into English. In 2022, he started a medical degree at Charles Darwin University, aged just 15.

Peter's intelligence is phenomenal and he's proudly represented the Northern Territory at many competitions. At age 12, he won a second place in the RoboCup National in Melbourne, competing against Year 11 and 12 students. He was also the first Territorian to represent Australia in the International Brain Bee Olympiad, a competition about the brain and neuroscience, and came third in the world.

Peter has a generous spirit and love for his community. Since 2015, he and his sister, Eva, have sold Indonesian snacks at Nightcliff foreshore to raise money for charities, including The Fred Hollows Foundation and Indonesian orphanages. Peter also volunteers with several community groups and is an active member of the Nightcliff Swimming Club.

Musician and filmmaker Witiyana Marika is the 2024 Local Hero for the Northern Territory.

Witiyana Marika has lived his life celebrating and teaching his culture. The 62-year-old Rirratjingu (Yolngu) elder is best known as one of the founding members of famous rock band, Yothu Yindi. Witiyana is also celebrated for his acting roles, other musical projects, cross-cultural education and being a leader of his people.

Most recently, Witiyana was the senior cultural advisor to the film *High Ground*, which he also co-produced and starred in. Although the movie's story is fictional, its roots are fact and portray the stories of the massacres of Indigenous people. Witiyana's involvement in the film reflects his strong belief in truth telling and sharing Indigenous and Australian colonial history.

A senior Dirritay and Dhalgarra (ceremonial leader) and a teacher of songlines and ceremonies for his clan, Witiyana is known for being generous and inclusive with his cultural knowledge and continuing the practice of Yolngu Nation Cycle and Rom (lore).

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the Northern Territory award recipients.

"The award recipients for the Northern Territory are an extraordinary group of individuals," said Mark.

“Witiyana and Yalmai are passionate keepers of culture, Blair continues to fight for those most in need of support, and Peter proves the future is in very good hands, not just through his abilities, but his spirit.”

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards, visit australianoftheyear.org.au.

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PHOTOS: From the awards announcement event can be downloaded as available after approx. 8:15pm Darwin time from this link (credit NADC/Salty Dingo): [NT Media Distribution photos - High res](#)

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