

## Statement by Supply Nation

### Michael McLeod Appointed as Inaugural Patron of Supply Nation

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Date	22 November 2024
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Supply Nation Co-Founder and longest serving Board member, Michael McLeod, has retired as a director but has been appointed as the organisation's inaugural Patron.

The Supply Nation Board would like to acknowledge the substantial contribution by Michael McLeod to Supply Nation and the introduction of supplier diversity procurement principles to Australian business and are delighted he has agreed to continue supporting Supply Nation as its Patron.

Celebrating its 15-year anniversary, Supply Nation and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned businesses it supports have benefited from Michael's expertise, guidance and cultural wisdom provided to the organisation since its inception.

Michael and Co-Founder Dug Russell's vision to establish a model based on the United States National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) to empower the growth of Indigenous business in Australia was a pioneering achievement.

Supply Nation, then named the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC), was established in 2009 and supported by 13 Indigenous-owned businesses.

Supply Nation's Indigenous Business Direct, the largest national database of verified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, now lists over 5000 suppliers from every state, territory and sector of the Australian economy. These Indigenous businesses back the concepts and principles championed by Michael.

Over 800 corporate, government and non-profit members have also joined the organisation and are committed to the vision Michael and Dug helped to found.

Michael's early efforts have resulted in tangible and significant benefits to diverse communities. By driving economic and business growth, supporting self-determination, and advancing reconciliation goals, meaningful progress has been made toward closing the gap.

A successful entrepreneur in his own right, Michael's business journey coincided with the explosion of the internet, technology and communications in the early 1990's. The digital economy is recognised as a critical contributor to empowering remote communities and creating equitable participation in the prosperity of our nation.

In partnership with his friend Dug Russell, Message Stick Communications was founded in 2003. Message Stick Communications is now Australia's pre-eminent Indigenous owned ICT managed service provider, with over 20 years delivering bespoke technology solutions to public and private sector organisations. Message Stick Communications advises clients across all areas of ICT architecture, including cybersecurity governance, risk and compliance.

The establishment of Message Stick Communications and awareness of the challenges faced by Indigenous businesses prompted a submission to the *House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into Developing Indigenous Enterprises*. The submission recommended the establishment of a supplier diversity model to empower procurement with Indigenous-owned businesses.

Michael has now formed the Message Stick Foundation, a national not-for-profit dedicated to empowering First Nations youth to build their lives and claim their hopes for their future. The Foundation has been created with one singular purpose: to give First Nations youth, a voice, a purpose and a future.

The organisation will create culturally safe, purpose-built youth centres for First Nation's young people in urban and regional areas, starting in the ACT. The Foundation will provide emergency accommodation, resources and culturally informed healing programs guiding them towards positive pathways.

Michael wishes to devote more time to his lifelong passion and build opportunities that he struggled to find in his youth.

The contributions that Michael has made to creating real and positive change to Indigenous business success, education and jobs growth cannot be understated.

Supply Nation's Board, Leadership Team and employees wish Michael the very best in this next phase of his remarkable journey.

### **About Michael McLeod**

Michael was stolen from his family as a baby and spent his early life in institutions. Addicted to drugs and alcohol at an early age, Michael lost his youth and the opportunity for an education that might have afforded him an earlier chance at a stable future.

Michael first met his mother at his father's funeral. By his mid-twenties, he was dealing with severe substance abuse and living on the streets of Sydney until his mid-thirties.

Faced with a dark and uncertain path with no means to break the cycle of addiction, a chance meeting resulted in the personal revelation that no one could really help him but himself. This resolution has since seen Michael clean and sober for over twenty years.

Michael is a Ngarrindjeri Monaro man from South Australia and Southern NSW. He is Chair, Director and Co-Founder of Message Stick Communications, and Chair and Director of the Indigenous Defence Consortium (iDiC),

### **Quotes attributable to Michael McLeod**

"Our youth are falling through the cracks at alarming rates, and we need to give them something I and many others were not afforded, a safe space, support to heal, mentoring and help with life skills. We want our youth to have pride in their identity, off the streets, back to school, employment ready and out of the justice system. As one young woman said to me recently 'we need what we have on the inside (Juvenile Detention), more on the outside' and that is exactly what Message Stick Foundation will provide."

"I have always been of the strong belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses achieving financial independence can break the back of poverty and lack of opportunities. Commencing a business and the knowledge it provided, helped me lose my demons and embark on the start of a life I could be proud of."

Michael McLeod, Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Message Stick Foundation

## About Message Stick Foundation

[Message Stick Foundation](#) is a national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to empowering First Nations youth. The goal of the Foundation is to break the cycle of disadvantage and help the next generation of First Nations youth to build their lives and claim their hopes for their future.

The Foundation will create and operate purpose built safe spaces in urban and regional areas across Australia where First Nations youth can access services, resources and culturally informed programs that will guide them towards a positive pathway.

## About Supply Nation

[Supply Nation](#) is Australia's leading supplier diversity organisation. Since 2009, Supply Nation has worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and procurement teams from government and corporate Australia to help shape today's rapidly evolving Indigenous business sector. Supply Nation's rigorous verification process provides peace of mind by ensuring that all businesses listed on Indigenous Business Direct are not only Indigenous owned but are regularly audited for changes in company structure. Supply Nation's support, combined with a range of business tools, helps our members develop their supplier diversity practices, and build a strong, successful, and sustainable Indigenous business sector.

Supply Nation has a zero-tolerance approach to any commercial fraud, dishonest or anti-competitive behaviour that impacts the successful growth and reputation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned businesses. Allegations of fraudulent behaviour, including the unauthorised use of Supply Nation's brand and logos signifying Certified and Registered business will be investigated.

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