



**6** THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN,  
JUNE 8-9, 2024  
theaustralian.com.au

# THE NATION

## Scholarship star does himself, and this nation, proud



ELIZABETH PIKE

A long process of “rediscovery” inspired the Acknowledgment of Country delivered by 15-year-old Jacobi Fernando to Anthony Albanese and a crowd of hundreds on Friday.

The address was years in the making for Jacobi, a proud Gomerioi young man from Moree in northern NSW, who performed the acknowledgment in both Gamilaraay and English at the Economic Outlook Luncheon, hosted by The Australian and Sky News at the Crown in Sydney.

The milestone marks an important moment for the year 10 student, who has been boarding at St Gregory’s College Campbelltown since 2023 thanks to an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship.

“As a young Aboriginal man I was never one to be given assistance and support,” Jacobi told the crowd. “But to be given the opportunity to attend the school of my dreams and be open to a number of great opportunities, I cannot thank AIEF enough.

“Not only have they supported my enrolment into the school of my dreams, AIEF has assisted me through their ongoing support and facilities that they have made available for me as not only a student but also an individual.

“They have helped me and directed me to take the steps necessary to achieve my goals and aspirations of assisting communi-



JOHN FEDER

**Student Jacobi Fernando**

ties and influencing the youth of our nation.”

Speaking to The Australian before the event, Jacobi said he spent years studying Gamilaraay

dictionaries to relearn the language spoken by his nan.

The talented sportsman and peer leader, who has won numerous school awards, admitted the process of rediscovering language was “difficult” but ultimately rewarding given the opportunity to speak in-language before Australia’s top dignitaries this week.

“Not many 15-year-olds get to speak in front of the Prime Minister,” he said. “(So) I just want to say thanks to everyone who has made this opportunity possible.

“The AIEF has opened up my life to so many opportunities, it’s helping me become the person I want to be ... and I’m grateful for everything they have done.

“I also want to give thanks to my family and especially my mum, she is a great influence in my life,” he said.

As the eldest of seven siblings from a rural town of 7000 people,

Jacobi said the Indigenous scholarship program had helped him make leaps and bounds.

He said he hoped to attend university and study PE teaching to “support other young people” through the unifying power of sport. When he graduates from year 12 in two years time, he will be the first person in his immediate family to complete secondary education.

His story is one of many championed by the AIEF as it celebrates 15 years of impact this year, alongside the remarkable results of fellow scholarship students demonstrated in its 2023 annual report.

From 2008 to 2023, the AIEF has supported more than 1200 graduates and current students from more than 400 Indigenous communities across every state and territory, with a 94 per cent retention and year 12 completion rate as of 2023.