



July 7, 2023

**Media Release**

**Contract signed to build Baaka Cultural Centre**

A significant step forward has occurred in the \$9.5 million Baaka Cultural Centre project with the contract to build the centre, at 44 Reid Street Wilcannia, being signed.

Chairperson for the Baaka Cultural Centre Corporation, Rhonda Hynch, said it was exciting for everyone involved with the project over many years marking the continuation of a long-held dream for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

“By signing the contract it’s not all about me. I’d like it to be about all the members of the board that sits with me now and those before me. I’d like to thank everybody else that has helped the board put this together especially Grant Leslie (Baaka Cultural Centre CEO), Greg Hill (Central Darling Shire Council GM) and everybody else that worked in the background to make this a success,” she said.

The successful contractor is David Payne Constructions Dubbo.

Construction is expected to start towards the end of this month. It is estimated that about 20 workers will be on site at any given time, and this will include Indigenous workers.

The project is being funded by both the Australian Government (\$4,150,000) and NSW Government (\$5,438,000).

The Baaka Cultural Centre will repurpose the Knox and Downs building in the centre of Wilcannia. Baaka Cultural Centre CEO, Grant Leslie, said the aim of the centre was to bring awareness to the culture and traditions of Aboriginal people of the middle and lower Darling River region and to support cultural initiatives in the wider community.

“It will be a keeping place for important Baakantji artefacts and be a place for past, present and future artists to display their works. It will include a language lab with the intent to help to preserve local dialects. The centre has a range of strategic objectives that include employment and economic development opportunities for Aboriginal people living in the Far West. This is an exciting time for the Far West,” Mr Leslie said.

Central Darling Shire Council General Manager, Greg Hill, thanked the Australian and State Governments for their funding support and welcomed the historic signing of the contract.

“The Baaka Cultural Centre will be a tremendous asset to the Wilcannia community and Central Darling Shire. The benefits it will bring to our community and economy are significant. We are all very much looking forward to seeing the building works start.” Mr Hill said.

Subject to the construction program the building is expected to be completed by the end of October 2024.

ENDS. Media Contact: Gabrielle Johnston 0472 787 022