

Samuel Bush-Blanasi

Chancellor, I have the pleasure of presenting Samuel Bush-Blanasi, who has been awarded the Honorary Doctor of Letters.

Mr Bush-Blanasi is a resident of the Wugularr (Beswick) community in the Katherine region and a proud Yolngu man through his mother, grandfather and grandmother whose country is the Blue Mud Bay region in east Arnhem. He is the current Chair of the Northern Land Council (NLC). Mr Bush-Blanasi is also 2023 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory.

For over three decades, Mr Bush-Blanasi has been an active member of the NLC, serving nine terms including three terms as Deputy Chair. He is currently serving his fourth consecutive term as NLC Chair of the 78 elected members comprising the Full Council. Mr Bush-Blanasi has extensive board and committee experience. In 2022 he was appointed co-Chair of the interim board to establish the Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation. He is a long-serving board member of the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, a member of the Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory Aboriginal Corporation and a member of the Governing Group of the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory.

Over his career Mr Bush-Blanasi has represented and promoted the interests of more than 51,000 Aboriginal people

across the Top End in areas such as public policy and law, education, health and business. He was the driving force of historic changes to the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, passed by the Australian Parliament in December 2022, the most significant reform since the Act's commencement in 1976.

Following the historic Blue Mud Bay High Court decision in 2008, Mr Bush-Blanasi secured the authority of Traditional Owners across the NLC region, the Tiwi Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council in March 2022 to establish the Aboriginal Sea Company, an innovation in Aboriginal economic development and self-determination.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr Bush-Blanasi was responsible for pushing the NT and Commonwealth governments to introduce biosecurity zones across the Territory in early 2022, a successful initiative that saved lives, slowing the spread of the virus and giving more time for Aboriginal people in remote communities to get vaccinated.

Mr Bush-Blanasi has always supported the primacy of the interests of Traditional Owners, traditional law and ceremony, caring for Country, and 'two-way' learning for young people. Mr Bush-Blanasi was instrumental in establishing the NLC's 'Community Planning and Development' program which supports self-determination for communities investing in their

own future, and in the NLC's continued operation of the highly successful Learning on Country Program.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to advancing the interests and safeguarding the wellbeing of First Nations women, children, men and families across the Northern Territory, Charles Darwin University council awards Samuel Bush-Blanasi the title of Honorary Doctor of Letters.