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Circulation

Distributed every Wednesday to all households in Port Hedland, South Hedland, Newman, Marble Bar, Nullagine and Wedgefield. On sale for \$1.70 at selected stockists.

Responsibility for editorial comment in this edition is taken by Amanda Keenan, 27-29 Dampier Terrace, Broome 6725. Printed by Colourpress Pty Ltd, ABN 17 009 172 276, West Australian Newspapers, Herdsman Print Centre, 54 Hasler Road, Osborne Park 6107. Phone 9361 5401.

Published by
Regional
 NEWS BRANDS
 A division of West Australian Newspapers Holdings Ltd



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Royal honour for champion of regional WA

CAIN ANDREWS

Former Nationals leader Brendon Grylls has been recognised in the King's Birthday Honours List, receiving one of Australia's highest awards in acknowledgement of a political legacy he says still sees strangers stop him in the street.

Mr Grylls, who served as WA Nationals leader and championed the controversial Royalties for Regions program through multiple terms in Parliament, said the Member of the Order of Australia honour belonged to the team around him as much as to himself. "It's had a long running influence," he said.

"I still get people across the street every day to talk to me about it, and say thank you, and so this recognition is probably for all of that team that put that together and helped create that unique moment in history."

The Royalties for Regions scheme, which redirected a portion of mining royalties into regional WA communities, was fiercely debated when the National Party launched the policy in 2008 before it was enshrined in law the following year.

Although critics were vocal at the time, Mr Grylls said the passage of time has settled the argument. "I'm very proud of it," he said.

"It was highly contested at the time. Plenty of my political opponents and others had strong opinions on it. I walk down the street of anywhere in regional Western Australia today, someone would stop me and say thank you."

The recognition comes 17 years after the program's introduction, yet Mr Grylls says its impact continues to attract attention well beyond



Brendon Grylls is on the King's Honours List. Pic: Michael Wilson

WA's borders. "I get stopped in Perth a lot as well, people remember. Just this week, someone from the Eastern States actually said to me that it's quite remarkable how prosperous your little country communities look," he said. "The legacy is still being talked about some 17 years on."

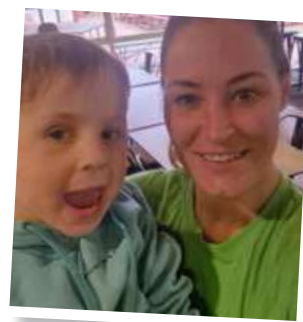
Mr Grylls said the future looks bright for the Pilbara, describing the region as the most powerful economic engine in the country.

"The region is the strongest economic driver in Aus-

tralia, without a doubt. Mining continues to go from strength to strength and it's helped us weather difficult economic storms," he said.

The former politician said he was most excited by the potential to have something take up space on his wall next to all of his wife's achievements.

"My wife is incredibly smart and talented, and she's got a wall full of degrees. I actually never finished my degree, so the only thing I've got on the wall is a forklift ticket," he said.



Amber Escott and son Hunter.

Mother puts in hard yards for autism

PHOEBE SOLON

Newman mother Amber Escott walked more than 200,000 steps throughout May to raise understanding of autism, following her four-year-old son Hunter's diagnosis.

The walk is in conjunction with Walk for Autism, a national campaign organised by Aspect (Autism Spectrum Australia) that encourages Australians to get active while supporting more autism-friendly communities.

Averaging an impressive 7000 steps a day, Ms Escott and her walking team had also raised close to \$2000 through donations, a sum that will go towards supporting services and programs that help autistic people live and thrive.

The 7000 steps a day represents the 70 per cent of autistic people who experience mental health challenges, often linked to living in environments that are not autism friendly.

Ms Escott said she chose to take on the challenge as a simple but meaningful way to raise awareness for autism, while also pushing herself physically.

"It felt achievable alongside daily life, but still purposeful, especially knowing each step contributes to greater understanding," she said.

The awareness walk comes at a pivotal time as new YouGov research shows a quarter of Australians believe autistic people should change to fit in with society, rather than be supported.

Health investment questioned after diphtheria outbreak

CAIN ANDREWS

Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia chair Vicki O'Donnell has blamed the ongoing diphtheria outbreak in the Kimberley and Pilbara on the State Government's lack of long-term environmental health investment.

The potentially fatal disease had not been seen in regional WA for more than half a century until earlier this year. The outbreak is disproportionately affecting Aboriginal people, with more than 94 per cent of cases in the 2026 outbreak occurring among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

While vaccination remains a critical tool for preventing severe illness and death from the disease, Ms O'Donnell said addressing the underlying

structural drivers of ill health would stop the spread of the disease and help prevent further outbreaks.

"To reduce rates of disease we need parity in community infrastructure, essential services and living conditions including housing, water, sewerage and waste management," she said.

The AHCWA said the outbreak was being driven by crowded conditions and limited access to showers, clean clothes and bedding.

"The solution to curbing the current spread and preventing future outbreaks lies in the Aboriginal Environmental Health Model of Care," they said.

"The model is built on six core domains, including Healthy Homes, which ensures that essential 'health hardware'—such as functioning showers, laundry facilities and

wastewater removal systems — are routinely assessed, maintained, and repaired."

Ms O'Donnell said existing skin infections — often caused by group A streptococcus — were already primary drivers of Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease.

"It is unacceptable that our people continue to suffer from ARF and RHD, diseases that are entirely preventable through improved living conditions", she said.

Two-thirds of these cases present as cutaneous diphtheria, where bacteria spread through direct contact with infected wounds and sores.

It has recently declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance,

The pre-existing high burden of skin infections in many Aboriginal

communities is a significant driver of transmission in this outbreak, as the diphtheria bacteria frequently infects existing skin lesions.

Inadequate housing and crowded living conditions often result in the breakdown of essential health hardware — such as functioning showers, laundry facilities and reliable hot water — which directly hinders the regular washing needed to prevent the spread of bacteria and undermines the effective management of skin infections.

The WA Country Health Service, the Department of Housing and Works, the Department of Communities, Health Prevention Minister Sabine Winton, Health Minister Meridith Hammat and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Don Punch were contacted for comment.



Vicki O'Donnell Picture: KAMS