



## Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia

### Introduction

The Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum Alliance (NAAKPA) was established in August 2018, bringing together nine Aboriginal Corporations currently harvesting Kakadu Plum in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The consortium was created to consolidate the Kakadu Plum Industry and to position Traditional Owner led enterprises so they can scale up production and become leaders in the research, harvesting, processing and marketing of Kakadu Plum both in Australia and internationally.

The Australian bushfoods industry was estimated to be valued at \$14 million annually in 2007<sup>1</sup> however, only a small proportion of this value is channelled back to Indigenous communities. Recent reviews suggest only 1% of the bushfoods Industry is produced by Aboriginal people<sup>2</sup>, despite growing demand both domestically and internationally. Aboriginal communities play a critical role, not only in understanding the importance of bushfoods through Traditional Knowledge, but also protect the integrity of bushfoods through Indigenous value systems. Non-Aboriginal enterprises in the bushfoods space tend to exploit Traditional Knowledge without consideration for Indigenous value systems, resulting in an environment where native food cultivars are sold overseas to establish overseas production opportunities. For example endemic Australian finger limes are now grown in a number of different countries (Italy, France, USA) as is Australian Lemon Myrtle (Israel) and macadamia nuts of which Australia produces less than 25% of the global \$1 billion USD annual supply. Investing in the capacity of Aboriginal enterprises to manage and produce Kakadu plums and other native foods, ensures that endemic native foods remain an Australian industry.

By forming an Alliance, Aboriginal enterprises have been able to take a more proactive role in the Kakadu Plum Industry by sharing information about harvests, quality and processing technologies and collaborating on common issues such as protecting Traditional Knowledge and bioprospecting.

Over the last 12 months, NAAKPA ([www.naakpa.com.au](http://www.naakpa.com.au)) has been able to create a centralised point of contact for buyers to directly engage with Aboriginal enterprises, undertake benchmark Food Safety audits (HACCP certification) for enterprises and deliver structured approaches to food testing for quality. These measures have contributed to the growth of the sector; the NAAKPA consortium harvested more than 20 tonnes of Kakadu plum fruit, with a farm gate value of \$600,000 in 2019, as well as an additional \$156,000 of processed Kakadu Plum powder.

In addition, NAAKPA has provided a platform for collaboration with other agencies to improve supply in the Kakadu Plum industry, and create economic opportunities in northern Australia. These collaborations include developing quality benchmarks for wild harvest, utilising technologies to improve food provenance and traceability and strengthen production capabilities for Aboriginal enterprises. Other agencies NAAKPA is working with include;

- Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation,
- IP Australia,
- National Measurement Institute,
- Australia's Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO),
- University of New South Wales,

---

<sup>1</sup> Emerging Business Models for the Kakadu Plum Industry, AgriFutures 2017, <https://www.agrifutures.com.au/wp-content/uploads/publications/18-003.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 'Bush food industry booms, but only 1 per cent is produced by Indigenous people'; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2019-01-19/low-indigenous-representation-in-bush-food-industry/10701986>



- Austrade (Tokyo)
- SAI Global

NAAKPA enterprises are making a difference for communities on the ground- for example in the remote Wadeye region some 250 women participated in the 2019 harvest, with a total amount of \$140,000 paid out to harvesters and flowing directly back into the community.

NAAKPA enterprises are also involved in exporting Kakadu plum products, with 3,000 units of Kakadu Plum yoghurt already sold to retailers in Japan. Furthermore, NAAKPA enterprises are making commercial and collaborative connections with functional food manufacturers in Japan.

Moving forward the challenge for NAAKPA enterprises is to build further capacity within their communities to scale up their operations and lead the future growth and development of the native food sector. The current climate in investment and funding for the bushfood sector is tiny compared to the rest of the food sector and where funding is available, it often seems to favour research and production lead by non-Aboriginal enterprises with Traditional Owners playing only a reference role. The formation of NAAKA demonstrates Aboriginal enterprises are able to consolidate and provide leadership to deliver economic outcomes not only to their communities but also contribute to the greater northern Australian economy.

#### Submission on 4. Strategies for the enhancement of economic development opportunities and capacity building for Traditional Owners of land and sea owner entities.

- a. Provide funding support for Aboriginal enterprises forming cooperatives and mutuals. Cooperatives and mutuals are businesses which create value to share amongst their members and their communities. These organisational structures facilitate co ownership and control equally amongst members and this type of business approach should be promoted and supported amongst Traditional Owners to encourage current and future business growth. Cooperatives and mutuals also create an environment where shared values and principles can be consolidated and further developed enhancing the ability of Traditional Owner groups to progress their own interests.
- b. Provide funding and grants for capacity development directly related to economic activities specifically for the bushfoods sector; this includes short courses in horticulture, food processing, food safety as well as general business administration. NAAKPA enterprises have expressed interest in building capacity in these areas, as services for these technical abilities are not easily accessible in regional and remote areas. This long range investment in capacity building will be critical as the industry continues to scale up.
- c. Provide funding for Traditional Owner led research into the bushfoods sector. More than 95% of foods produced for consumption in Australia are from introduced exotic species. Many of these food species have had considerable investment into their production, however, very little has been invested in Australian bushfoods. Furthermore, current food safety and food production for Australian native foods comes from Traditional Knowledge belonging to Aboriginal people, and this knowledge is often tied to value systems which also need to be considered if the industry is to continue to grow. In the past research into bushfoods has been driven by non-Aboriginal people who often lack sensitivities to Aboriginal value systems generating distrust, frustration and 'misappropriation'. There is a need to empower Traditional Owner groups so that they are able to control research into Australian native foods, rather than be left to the mercy of non-Aboriginal



researchers seeking access to Traditional Knowledge and biological resources. Research funding utilising industry levies can be established for the Kakadu Plum bushfood industry, however, like other agricultural sectors this also needs financial support from government.

- d. To help protect Traditional Knowledge from 'misappropriation' it is important to support fair and equitably value for contributions Aboriginal people make to value-added products. The Nagoya Protocol is a framework which supports fair and equitable sharing of benefits from bioprospecting and biodiscovery and while Australia is a signatory to the Protocol, the Protocol is yet to be ratified. Therefore NAAKPA supports and encourages Australian governments to harmonise and ratify the Nagoya Protocol.
- e. Some jurisdictions in Australia have bioprospecting and biodiscovery frameworks in place ensuring benefit sharing arrangements, however, these are not always to the benefit of Aboriginal people. For example in Queensland, under the Biodiscovery Act 2004, commercial bioprospectors are required to enter into benefit sharing agreements with the Queensland Government, excluding Aboriginal people. In the Northern Territory under the Biological Resources Regulations 2006, commercial bioprospectors can either enter into Agreements with the NT Government or enter into a chain of agreements which involve the Lands Trust and Traditional owner groups. While this framework does provide benefit sharing opportunities with Traditional Owners, it appears more onerous for commercial bioprospectors who have to first negotiate agreements with Lands Trusts and then negotiate agreements with Traditional Owners before accessing biological resources. In this way the current regulations inadvertently encourage bioprospectors to bypass agreements with Traditional Owners in favour of agreements with the Northern Territory Government.
- f. Planning, developing and investment to improve infrastructure connecting Aboriginal communities to main stream supply chains is needed. Many Aboriginal communities are remote and isolated from communication and transport channels, making the cost of transport of goods and services more expensive. This lack of connection adds to the isolation of many communities and inhibits there economic growth. Investing in better transportation infrastructure will connect not only Aboriginal businesses but also Aboriginal people with the rest of the country.

#### Submission on 5. The principle of prior informed consent

- a. Providing more support for Traditional Owner enterprises to have control of research and resources so that principles of prior informed consent are practiced and monitored.
- b. Investment into governance capacity building for Aboriginal enterprises will strengthen principles around prior informed consent. In addition, this will strengthen the operations of Aboriginal bushfood enterprises who require access and permission to harvest from Traditional owner lands. Growing demand for Kakadu Plum has resulted in growing investment into prior informed consent frameworks for NAAKPA member enterprises.
- c. Ratification of the Nagoya Protocol will support the broader adoption of Prior Informed Consent and Benefit sharing concepts amongst commercial bioprospectors. This will help normalise prior informed consent considerations when accessing Traditional Knowledge and native biological resources.



- d. Fair and equitable playing field when applying for funding grants and investment. Many Aboriginal enterprises are added onto applications for funding with non-Aboriginal organisations as leading interests. Sometimes Aboriginal enterprises are not even aware when they are recorded as benefactors of research grants. Sometimes perceptions of low expectations of Aboriginal enterprises results in Aboriginal lead projects being overlooked in favour of non-Aboriginal lead projects.

This submission is a joint submission made by the following Aboriginal Organisations who are all members of the Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum Alliance;

1. Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation
2. Thammarrurr Development Corporation
3. Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation
4. Mercedes Cove Aboriginal Corporation
5. Mamabulanjin Aboriginal Corporation
6. Milari Aboriginal Corporation

For further information please refer to the Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum Alliance website: [www.naakpa.com.au](http://www.naakpa.com.au) or please contact the NAAKPA Secretariat;

Paul Saeki  
Kakadu Plum Business Development Manager

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]