

A Kakadu Plum opportunity for bush tucker industry development



March 2017: With health attributes and food preservation qualities, the bush tucker fruit Kakadu Plum has become a valuable crop for indigenous Australians who have co-designed harvesting protocols to ensure the growing industry is environmentally sustainable and in their control.

Highlights

- Kakadu Plum is a growing ‘superfood’ from northern Australia with valuable health and food preservation qualities, including high levels of Vitamin C.
- The Traditional Owners for Wadeye have developed and implemented harvesting protocols to ensure the industry is sustainable.
- Local indigenous Australians are employed in the industry and growing demand means more job growth is possible.
- Queensland researchers have shown that Kakadu Plum can improve the shelf-life and colour retention of fresh cooked prawns.

Kakadu Plum is an Australian native bush fruit that is receiving international acclaim for its nutritional and health properties, and a new industry is being carved out around it. Kakadu Plum grows in the Northern Territory and is a traditional food source and medicine for the indigenous Wadeye community.

As demand grows, harvesting of Kakadu Plum is changing from a traditional food gathering activity for local consumption to a larger scale commercial activity in the Thamarurr region. This increased community concerns about the impact that

continued harvesting might have on the health of trees and the sustainability of the emerging industry’s practices.

The National Landcare Programme has supported a successful partnership between the Traditional Owners for Wadeye, Thamarurr Rangers, the Palngun Wurnangat Association, EcOz environmental consultants and Territory Natural Resource Management to identify ways to improve the sustainability of wild harvest methods and encourage practice change.

Consultation with traditional owners identified how to sustainably harvest the plums and avoid damage caused by poor harvesting techniques.



Senior Ranger Angus Melpi with Kakadu Plum fruit and fruit products popular for their taste and healthy properties.

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Best practice harvesting

Consultation and research findings were used to develop best practice harvest protocols, a training program and induction processes for harvesters, and a monitoring system.

The 2016 season saw 157 pickers complete the training program and harvest 5.4 tonnes of fruit valued at \$270,000. Importantly, the majority of pickers followed the best practice protocols, and, where damage did occur, Traditional Owners asserted their right to close some areas.

Six local indigenous people are now employed in part time roles and five more are volunteers.

Connection to country

At the same time as providing economic opportunities for local people, the industry is encouraging greater connection to country, family and culture. On a broader scale, demand for the fruit both nationally and internationally far exceeds supply, bringing opportunity for further industry development.

Providing a purpose and an income, the project has encouraged family groups to go out together on their own country harvesting plums. This has supported opportunities for inter-generational transfer of knowledge, improved connection to country and land management activities such as fine scale mosaic burning and weed management.

Building scale and sustainability

The next steps for this growing industry are to centralise efforts, build supply and create capacity across northern Australian.

Given the geographic scale of arable land for Kakadu Plum, centralised hubs that streamline harvesting efforts and consolidate the fruit for processing would assist the industry's advancement.

There are more job opportunities for indigenous Australians in rural parts of northern Australia. The industry is looking out for more people to get involved, and so efforts to mobilise, upskill and engage communities are required to increase the amount of plums harvested.

The underlying opportunity here is also one of social development. Kakadu Plums presents the opportunity for an indigenous industry that empowers people, provides jobs, and works to close the gap.



Get on board!

Interested in getting involved or want to find out more? Then please contact us.

Territory NRM

Karen May
0427 611 972 | karen.may@territorynrm.org.au
www.territorynrm.org.au/

NRM Regions Australia

Kate Andrews
0403 604 823 | kate@nrmregionsaustralia.com.au
www.nrmregionsaustralia.com.au