



**“Every food has a culture behind it”**

**- Ben Tyler, Kakadu Kitchen**



**NT Greens Position Paper  
Indigenous horticulture**

**August 2020**



## Growing the Indigenous horticulture and bush foods industry in the NT

*“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge has contributed to the commercial development of over 15 bush food species, including macadamias, desert raisins and Kakadu plums. Bush food products include nursery seedlings, new plant varieties and gourmet sauces and jams. These commercial pathways form part of a ‘bush food commercialisation system’. There is little legal support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests in this multi-million dollar system. The meaningful involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the legislative and administrative processes that shape the system can provide an avenue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to assert their diverse bush food interests.”*

- Ninti One Ltd, Alice Springs

A [growing movement](#) around Australia has the potential to provide enormous cultural, economic, health, food security and environmental benefits – for NT Indigenous communities and the NT as a whole. Wild-harvested and cultivated native (indigenous) foods and medicines are major opportunities for remote communities.

Aside from commercial development opportunities, Indigenous communities like Milingimbi, are trying to establish (or re-establish) [community gardens](#) to provide healthy, fresh, affordable food in place of expensive, unreliable and unhealthy imported food.

- There are more than 6,500 types of native food in Australia, with only 13 that are FSANZ (Food Standards Australia New Zealand)-certified and developed for local and international markets.
- A 1993 study “Traditional Aboriginal Medicines in the Northern Territory” identified over 160 native plant species used for healing purposes.
- The Australian native bush food market is currently valued at \$20 million annually but it is estimated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently make up only 1-2% of the market presence.
- According to DENR, there has been a relatively long history of small scale commercial use of Kakadu plum (anmorlak; Terminalia Ferdinandiana) in the NT, dating back to the late 1990s when it was bought in small amounts for its nutritional value.

‘Bush’, ‘indigenous’ or ‘native’ foods in the NT include fruits like [red bush apple](#) (*andjarduk*), [bush tomato](#) (*kutjera*), [green plum](#) (*andudjmi*), blackcurrent bush (*andjurrugumarlba*), wild grape (*makorkorl*), cocky apple (*wulngum/pamkujji*) and [kakadu plum](#) (*anmorlak*); leaves, flowers and nectar (e.g. *kapok* and Fern Leaf *Grevillea*); tubers like water lilies (*andem*) and yams; seeds like wattleseed and peanut tree (*dundil*); nuts, and spices like pepperberry and lemon myrtle.

*NOTE: many of the food and medicine species discussed in this paper grow across multiple Indigenous language areas, so will have multiple different Indigenous names. Where one Indigenous name is used, this should not be taken as the only name for that species.*

### Traditional food ‘key to remote health’

Research increasingly confirms the important health and other benefits of sourcing and consuming traditional foods. For example, the paper, “[Traditional food availability and consumption in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory](#)”, reports that a nutritious diet including traditional foods plays a key role in protecting against chronic disease for Indigenous people living in remote communities.

### Caring for Country

Maintaining bush foods in the wild means looking after their environment and controlling introduced pests and diseases, limiting land clearing and managing fire regimes. All this work is best done by the NT’s many existing and potential Indigenous Rangers groups, which currently do not have guaranteed long term adequate funding.

*“Akatyerre only grows in certain places. It grows out where the soil is the right soil for it to grow on. When people go out collecting it they know where to go, where the plants grow. Changes have come because of roads being put down and cattle being put on the land. A lot of it gets destroyed by cattle and people driving over the top. This is mucking up the system of how they used to grow in the first place...Killing off of bush foods, introduced grasses (and fire), hard-hoofed animals. We’re always stressing how the plants are going to be destroyed.”*

- [Veronica Dobson](#), quoted in *Aboriginal people, bush foods knowledge and products from central Australia: Ethical guidelines for commercial bush food research, industry and enterprises*. Ninti One Ltd & CSIRO, 2011

### Ethical expansion and commercialisation

The First Nations Bushfood & Botanical Alliance Australia was established as a result of the national conversation that took place amongst 120 First Nations attendees at the inaugural Indigenous Native Foods Symposium in Sydney 27-28 November 2019. Alliance membership is based on First Nations people and businesses.

Conversation at the Symposium identified that in 2019, Indigenous Australians represent fewer than 2% of the providers across the supply chain and acknowledged that nearly 98% of Aboriginal land owners aspire to be leaders in the native food industry. In 2020, this is not acceptable, given that much of the Industry relies on the supply of unprotected Indigenous knowledge and returns little to our people.

A [National Indigenous Bushfood Statement](#) was issued at the end of the Symposium which had a number of actions including forming this national First Nations peak industry body.

It is fundamentally important that Indigenous people, communities and organisations are at the forefront of the native foods movement and that all cultural knowledge / intellectual property (IP) rights are respected and protected.

*“We strongly encourage everyone involved in the Australian bushfood industry to do the right thing by Indigenous people - by doing things the right way for the right reasons, it’s vital to avoid Indigenous exploitation and to maintain the cultural integrity of Indigenous foods being commercialised. We all have a big job ahead of us in working out the best practices for Indigenous bushfood IP within different commercial business models.”* - [Ben Tyler, Kakadu Kitchen](#).

**Indigenous-led organisations like Ninti One Ltd and First Nations Bush Foods & Botanical Alliance Australia are best placed to ensure the industry grows both ethically and sustainably.**

There are currently very few Indigenous-controlled commercial growing (horticulture) or commercial wild harvesting enterprises based on native foods across the NT. Most examples focus on kakadu plum (or gubinge), and green plum:

- A kakadu plum [wild-harvest centre](#) was established in Wadeye, hosted by the Palngun Wurnangat Association Inc. As many as 300 community members were registered to pick, with authority from relevant Traditional Owners.
- Kakadu plums have been [shipped from Arnhem Land](#) in a business first for Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, involving 150 people from the community harvesting plums.
- In the case of the green plum, the fruit is wild-harvested and has only just been successfully propagated by the Aboriginal-owned [Gulkula nursery in Gove](#), in East Arnhem Land. One cultivation model being considered for the green plum is enrichment planting, where additional trees are planted in areas where the green plum naturally grows, as is occurring with kakadu plum in the West Kimberley.
- A project to expand the Kakadu plum industry in Northern Australia has [received a \\$500,000 grant](#) from the Australian Government. Participants include Indigenous Resource Centres and Communities, Charles Darwin University and Kindred Spirits Enterprises – Traditional Homeland Enterprises.



## NT Greens proposals

Supporting the sustainable collection, cultivation, harvesting, processing and commercialisation of indigenous/native/bush foods and medicines by Indigenous communities and Indigenous-owned businesses across the NT.

Greens proposals, with costings and employment (indicative):

The Greens NT support the wholistic and accelerated expansion of the Indigenous-owned and sustainably managed native foods and medicines sector in the NT. The key elements and outlays of the policy are:

- The establishment and ongoing operation of community gardens and native plant nurseries at Aboriginal communities across the NT. Previous community garden initiatives have failed when funding was withdrawn, so capacity building is essential. The capacity of communities to grow gardens alongside developing skills to grow products for sale could ensure sustainability beyond external funding (\$5m/year, ongoing);
- The establishment and ongoing operation of a 'Centre for the Development of Indigenous Native Foods and Medicines' (CDINFM) in the NT, based around the leadership of the First Nations Bush Foods & Botanical Alliance Australia (\$5m/year, ongoing);
- Assistance grants to Aboriginal communities and enterprises seeking to commercialise native foods and medicines, based on business plans co-developed with 'CDINFM' (\$5m/year, ongoing);
- Legal and other support, including the establishment of a peak legal working group, for the protection of Indigenous knowledge and Intellectual Property (IP), based on the foundational work done by Ninti One Ltd and the First Nations Bush Foods & Botanical Alliance Australia (\$1m/year, ongoing);
- Ongoing, expanded funding for Indigenous Rangers groups across the NT to help maintain the ecosystems and ecological processes that underpin the sustainability in the wild of native foods and medicines (\$10m/year, ongoing).
- First Nations-led Central Desert Wild Harvest Hub in Alice Springs – machinery and HACCP certification to get to the next step in supply/value chain (\$1m, ongoing).

**Total cost:** \$27m/year

### Employment outcomes:

- 0.75 FTE at each of ~ 100 NT Indigenous communities (urban and 'remote'): 75 FTEs
  - CDINFM operations: 5 FTEs
  - Continuation and expansion of Indigenous Rangers groups: ~ 1000 people
  - Seasonal harvesters and processors: 500 part time/casual jobs
- Total (full time, part time and casual):** 1580 jobs

### Policy Aims:

- Improved health and food security for Indigenous communities;
- Maintain or restore Indigenous cultural knowledge and management and protect Country and species;
- Create jobs and income for Indigenous communities and build diversified, resilient Indigenous economies which include native foods and medicines, land management, and arts and cultural enterprises;
- Development of commercial skills and career pathways for Indigenous people, communities and businesses;
- Enhance the NT's global reputation as a place of unique natural and cultural values and Aboriginal-led enterprises.
- Expand opportunities for sustainable agriculture in the NT based on unique native foods.

## Resources and references

[The potential of law to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests in bush food commercialisation](#) Ninti One Ltd, 2015.

[An inclusive governance framework for bush food commercialisation](#). Ninti One Ltd, 2015.

[Strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests in the development of new native plant varieties](#). Ninti One Ltd, 2015.

[Strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests in gourmet bush food product development](#) Ninti One Ltd, 2015.

[Intellectual property and related legal issues facing the Australian Native Food Industry](#). Uni of Queensland, 2018.

[Indigenous Knowledge: Issues for protection and management](#). Discussion Paper. Terri Janke and Company. Commissioned by IP Australia & the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, 2018.

[A statement from the First-Nations-Bushfood body](#) in response to the Orana Foundation database of Indigenous plant knowledge. [www.firstnationsbushfoods.org.au/](http://www.firstnationsbushfoods.org.au/)

[National First Nations bushfood body calls to become custodians of the Orana Foundation native food database](#). First Nations Bush Foods & Botanical Alliance Australia is putting its hand up to offer a safe and culturally appropriate home to the native food database developed by the Orana Foundation.

Nutritional characteristics of native Australian fruits: Kakadu plum and green plum as examples. *Nutridate* (2018), 29 3: 8-12.

[Australian Native Food and Botanicals](#): ANFAB is the peak industry body representing the interests of people and businesses involved in the native food and botanicals industry - traditional and new indigenous plant products.

Bush foods [fact sheets](#) (by ANFAB)

[Aboriginal people, bush foods knowledge and products from Central Australia: Ethical guidelines for commercial bush food research, industry and enterprises](#). Merne Altyerre-ipenhe (Food from the Creation Time) Reference Group. 2011.

An-Me Arri-ngun: The food we eat. Traditional plant foods of the Kundjeyhmi people of Kakadu National Park. Gundjeyhmi Aboriginal Corporation. 2018.

<https://tasteofthetopend.com/category/bush-tucker/>

[Emerging business models for the Kakadu Plum Industry](#) Australian Native Foods and Botanicals, 2018.

[Cultivation and sustainable wild harvest of bushfoods by Aboriginal Communities in Central Australia](#). A report for the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. 2004.

[The New Crop Industries Handbook Native foods](#). Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Canberra. 2008.

[Buchanania obovata: An Australian Indigenous food for diet diversification](#) (Green plum). Selina FYFE, Michael NETZEL, Ujang TINGGI, Eva BIEHL and Yasmina SULTANBAWA. *Nutrition & Dietetics*. 2017.

[Plum pickings: An ancient fruit promises a new food industry for Australia](#). (Green plum). Uni of Queensland, 2018.

[Meet the Kakadu plum: an international superfood thousands of years in the making](#). *The Conversation*. 2019 [Author makes mistake of saying Kakadu plum (*Terminalia ferdiandiana*) is same as Green plum (*Buchanania obovata*).

Management Program for Kakadu Plum 2019-2023. A plan for sustainable use and livelihood opportunities from a native food plant. DENR. 2018.



## Existing NT native foods enterprises and advocates

[First Nations Bush Foods & Botanical Alliance Australia](#)

[Kakadu Kitchen \(Ben Tyler\)](#)

[Kungkas Can Cook \(Raylene Brown\)](#)

[Red Centre Enterprises](#)

[Maningrida Wild Foods](#)

[Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation](#) (with The Australian Superfoods Group)

[Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum Alliance \(NAAKPA\)](#)

[Gulkula nursery \(Arnhem land\)](#)

[Indigigrow](#) Native Bushfoods & Plants

[Remote Indigenous Garden Network](#)

[Aboriginal Bush Traders - Darwin](#)

[Uniquely Australian Foods](#)

[Ninti One Ltd](#)

[GULP/Taste of the Top End](#)

[www.nt.greens.org.au](http://www.nt.greens.org.au)  
office@nt.greens.org.au  
0424-028-741