

PROJECT UPDATE WORK EXPERIENCE PILOT PROJECT (WEPP) April 2020

The Alekarenge Work Experience Pilot Project (WEPP) commenced this year and established operations with Alekarenge residents and staff prior to Covid-19 travel restrictions taking place. Hygiene practices, distancing and all recommended precautions are being strictly adhered to.

Del and Neil Norris have been employed as project supervisors and mentors by Alekarenge Horticulture Pty Ltd (AHPL) and are progressing the training and employment program. They are well suited to the role, with a broad range of professional experience in farming, crop/stock management, community services, construction and project management.

Four community members have been employed by AHPL and have begun fencing, irrigation and horticultural plot development on the lease area. Arrangements are being finalised with job service provider RISE/Ngurratjuta for Job Seekers to be fully involved in WEPP activities when appropriate.

The WEPP includes: a 130ha lease area (with water licence) and is designed to provide on-the-job training in:

- Fencing
- Irrigation
- Plant health
- Marketing
- Horticultural plot development
- Weeding
- Propagation and establishment
- Transportation



Clearing the Training Centre grounds



AHPL staff installing irrigation line at the farming area

The project intends to have three cohorts of trainees: Cohort 1 - primary school students, Cohort 2 - senior school students both linked to the project by a school horticulture garden program; and Cohort 3 - job seekers via RISE/Ngurratjuta. The unique facility is aimed at training and employment pathways while also to

producing marketable fresh food for sale locally and through markets in Alice Springs, as well as seedlings for nearby horticultural developments.

The WEPP is part of a long-term holistic plan to develop viable and sustainable primary industry on the Warrabri Aboriginal Land Trust (ALT) to support the emergence of a commercial and economic base, providing employment for local people on their own land and terms, and enabling the flow-on of commercial and social benefits to the whole community.

As the pilot for future Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency (ALEDA) projects, the WEPP will assist in building capability and capacity so that Traditional Owner's and local Aboriginal residents can, in the first instance, be engaged as workers (at all levels) in ALEDA projects and, ultimately, take over operations of the projects within a generation. The WEPP project envisages that a percentage of people will emerge who can attain higher education qualifications, and over-time become Managers and Agronomists.



First stages of plot development

A trial is underway with Australia's largest garlic producer Australian Garlic Producers (AGP) and Coles Group. Australia currently imports significant volume making Australian grown garlic ideal for high-value ripening windows and import substitution.

In addition to this, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is in final negotiation with Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation to begin an exciting new relationship of joint agricultural activities including the establishment of bush foods and bush medicine plots at the WEPP. Julalikari are based in Tennant Creek and have an established nursery and a seed bank of native foods.



First stages of plot development

The project's practical educational program and jointly prepared curriculum with the Alekarenge School has also commenced this year. The student participants have begun work developing seedling plots in the Training Centre grounds. We aspire for these teenagers to ultimately become the future workers and operators of the proposed ALEDA projects on the Warrabri and Iliyarne Aboriginal Land Trusts.



Students bringing the old nursery back to life



Training Centre nursery established up by the trainees (left) and the first turnip shoots sprouting for the winter crop (right)

The WEPP intends to build community resilience by supporting food security, food sovereignty and self-sufficiency. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for improved self-sufficiency with fresh, affordable and healthy food. This week a coalition of leading Aboriginal organisations has called on the national cabinet to guarantee food security during the pandemic as some stores are running out of fresh food between their weekly deliveries.

The training and commercial facility is perfectly placed to alleviate these sorts of pressures, while providing a link between the community and nearby horticultural developments. The tailor-made approach to job services is designed so that over time, the employment outcomes and objective of assisting remote Aboriginal people to engage in commercial projects on their land trust estates can function in reality.



Alekarenge School participants at welcome lunch (before social distancing was advised)