



GRANT SUPPORTS TOURISM DREAM



UNCLE Walter Palm Island has a dream. The Manbarra Traditional Owner Group elder longs for the day when his people can operate a thriving tourism business that brings visitors to breathtaking North East Bay on Palm Island.

And with support from an NQ Dry Tropics Engaging Traditional Owners grant, tourists may soon get to savour this tropical paradise, while learning about the traditional Aboriginal way of life.

Growing up in North East Bay

NORTH East Bay was a beautiful place in which to grow up, Uncle Walter said.

“As a little boy I learned how to hunt and live off the land, eating coconuts and shellfish,” he said.

“I grew up eating cockle soup, plums, damper, and bush tucker.

“My uncle used to cut down big-leafed trees that were straight and long, and he used to make me spear sticks to go spear fishing out on the reef.

“Mullet, rock cod, whiting, sand fish... we took them back to the beach and cooked them on coals.

“My grandfather used to do his initiation walks around the bays and over to the other side of the island.

“He would follow his ancestors’ tracks, and the old people used to do initiations and go right around the

island to all the sacred sites. At each sacred site, they had to pass a certain test to become a man.”

Uncle Walter is passionate about recording this history and sharing it with visitors while they experience the traditional Aboriginal way of life.

The goal is a full cultural experience – not the average lazy beach holiday.

“We are planning an eco tourism venture to show how the old people used to live, sleeping under the stars” he said.

“How they used to hunt and how they used to know where to find water, find bush tucker, and live off the land and sea.

“We want to share this information with tourists at North East Bay.

“When you go to these places you appreciate the stillness and the way it was back then.”



Grant helps Traditional Owners realise dream

NQ Dry Tropics, through its Engaging Traditional Owners Devolved Grants program, is helping Uncle Walter and Manbarra to achieve their goal thanks to funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

An \$8,500 grant supported the group to produce a video promoting tourism opportunities at North East Bay, and funded members to capture and record important history and local Traditional Ecological Knowledge about the island.

This is one of 18 grants devolved to local traditional owner groups in the Burdekin Dry Tropics region since 2014.

"This project is about Manbarra's independence and right to live back on country," Uncle Walter said.

"It is also about learning and understanding how our ancestors used to live.

"We are going back in time. I am the only one left with this knowledge now. I won't be around in



NQ Dry Tropics Senior Project Officer Ian Sinclair (left) discusses the plan with Uncle Mark and Uncle Walter (right)

40 years, so it is good to share that knowledge and the language and the stories my father told me – and that he learned from his grandfather, ancestors and uncles.

"I have to pass the knowledge on to the next generation of Manbarra people.

"With tourism we can make our own money, develop ourselves, and gain independence and a sense of belonging through our own knowledge and our own understanding of country.

"The knowledge we are gathering is strengthening my sense of identity... who I am."

An opportunity to foster understanding

UNCLE Walter believes the venture is an important opportunity to raise awareness and understanding about the challenges that Manbarra and other groups have faced during Palm Island's turbulent history since European settlement.

"We have to show the world and show the people how we evolved and how we lived, that we are not bad people and show the good side of our people," he said.

"We had to change from living our traditional way, to learning how to live in the European colonialist world,

with two systems of law – customary and colonial.

"Members of different tribal groups from all over Queensland were sent to Palm Island as punishment – and that history needs to be told and understood.

"Different tribes such as Yarrabah, Cherbourg, Woorabinda had their own little area, and Manbarra had to relocate.

"We had values, we had laws, we had customs, we had beliefs.

"We weren't savages or wild people.

"I would like to tell

people thinking of visiting Palm Island to come see us, understand us, and experience our traditional way of living.

"We have a wealth of knowledge to share.

"For us, it's about independence and self determination."

Uncle Walter thanked NQ Dry Tropics for supporting his dream.

"Thank you, NQ Dry Tropics, you have opened the doors up for me and for Traditional Owners to revive understanding of their country."



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