

CHARLES STURT: INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENEUR SCALE UP PROGRAM

CASE STUDY:

KEMPSEY HEALTH FOOD SHOP AND CAFE ABORIGINAL CONSERVATION & AGRITOURISM

Aboriginal Conservation & Agritourism (ACA) stands as a testament to the dreams and aspirations of Kera and Robert. The overarching aim of ACA is to celebrate and promote the positive elements of Dunghutti culture, health, and wellbeing through conservation, agritourism, and supply of healthy foods, all aimed at "Building a sense of community".



COMING INTO THE PROGRAM

As dedicated health service workers, Kera and Robert nurtured a dream to not only promote Indigenous Culture in the wider Kempsey community but also embody the limitless potential of entrepreneurship with the mantra that 'life is too short to not take every opportunity and run with it'. Their 22-acre property between Kempsey and Crescent Head serves as the canvas for a multi-faceted venture including cultivating Bush Tucker, supplying food product to the Kempsey Health Food Shop and Café, maintaining Native and European bees for honey production and propagation for pollination, and establishing tourist accommodations to support health and well-being. The immediate focus is on introducing Indigenous ingredients into the menu and the store shelves at the Kempsey Health Food Shop and Café.

"We see the Macleay Valley as a promising hub for native foods, simultaneously highlighting the positive facets of our Dunghutti culture through the avenues of food and agritourism."

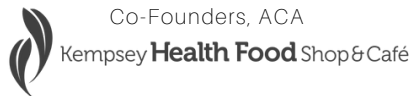
Their ventures roadmap, grounded in thorough research reveals critical gaps in the Macleay Valley. The absence of Aboriginal operated agribusinesses, limited tourist accommodations and few experiences promoting local Dunghutti culture. While a high tourist destination, the focus is on the coastal fringe, with less attention on Kempsey. The need and opportunities for growth of the agritourism sector in Kempsey have been mentioned in Council plans. A scarcity of local suppliers of bush tucker, with none being Aboriginal operated and owned, contributes to limited availability in local food stores. Additionally, urban dwellers are seeking quality locally grown food and health facilities. These insights contributed to the foundation for their entrepreneurial journey and the aim of the ACA.



"We're excited about this new chapter in our lives and the challenges it brings. With the support of each other, our family, community, and partners like CSU, we're committed to moving forward on a path of growth and success."

Kera Ritchie and Robert Barnett

Co-Founders, ACA



PROGRAM JOURNEY

At the inception of the Charles Sturt Indigenous Entrepreneur Scale Up Program, a decision was made early on to focus on a specific area of the overall vision for the ACA due to the time restraints of the program and as the Health Food Shop and Cafe was already in operation. Involved strategic planning, cost-efficiency measures, and the introduction of Indigenous ingredients into the menu and store shelves. Throughout the program, Kera and Robert dedicated time to ensure that costings were profit-driven. They made strategic decisions like selling off older stock, incorporating a point-of-sale square register for efficient sales tracking, and conducting cosmetic upgrades.

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IMPACT

Positive responses from regular customers affirm Kera and Robert success of incorporating clean and healthy eating with Indigenous ingredient highs into the café menu.

Over time more Indigenous ingredients will continue to be added to the menu and shelves, including products made by fellow Charles Sturt Indigenous Entrepreneurs Scale Up Program founders which will increase sales for other Indigenous business owners. It will also provide inspiration to both Kera and Robert as to what ingredients they will start producing on their land.

"We find joy in contributing to our community by creating opportunities for our youth. By leading by example, we aim to inspire the younger generation to pursue and achieve their personal goals."

They have employed two young Dunghutti Indigenous staff members, not only to bolster the local workforce but also contribute to community growth. Kera and Robert foresee creating additional training and employment opportunities as the company expands, reflecting their commitment to community development.

WHAT'S NEXT

In the upcoming 6-12 months, Kera and Robert will focus on nurturing and expanding their business, with a concentrated effort on their native and European bee hives for sustainable honey production.

They plan to gradually incorporate an even broader array of local bush foods into their menu. This not only promises a unique and flavourful experience but also aligns with their commitment to promoting biodiversity and celebrating Indigenous flavours. Excitement builds as they anticipate the launch of a new line of health and food products made from local produce to meet the growing demand for natural alternatives.

To enhance accessibility and reach within the community, Kera and Robert are expanding their product selection, and are also attending local markets, shows and community markets. They have recently improved their online shop to provide a seamless and enriched digital shopping experience. This aims to strengthen and reinforce their brand, supporting sustainability and catering to the diverse preferences of the community.

As Kera and Robert navigate the exciting journey ahead, their strategic initiatives not only promise business growth but also signify a continued dedication to community engagement, sustainability, and the vibrant Indigenous flavours that define their presence in the Macleay Valley.



Kera and Roberts' long langstroth beehive



Oshiarna and Kaylee, recently employed in the Kempsey Health Food Shop and Café



"We cherish the heartbeat of the Dunghutti community, weaving a vibrant tapestry of rich culture and positive spirit that defines the Macleay Valley. Our journey goes beyond business, celebrating resilience, cultural wealth, and the flourishing positivity that resonates throughout our remarkable home in the Macleay Valley."

Kera Ritchie and Robert Barnett

Co-Founders, ACA



Kempsey **Health Food** Shop & Café