



Contribution to Indigenous communities

Submission List

This submission contains:

1. the submission form
2. three bound copies of the submission



The Prime Minister's awards for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships, 2007

Special award - Contribution to Indigenous Communities

1. The Partnership

When Tiwest Joint Venture commenced mining for mineral sands at Cooljarloo, near Cataby north of Perth, in 1989, a 13ha freehold block of land adjacent to the mine was ceded to a newly formed group called the Billinue Community Aboriginal Corporation Inc (Billinue), providing them with a community base in the heart of their traditional land.

By 1996, Billinue had established a native seed picking and preparation centre on the land, and, trading as Cataby Seeds, commenced the sale of seed to Tiwest Joint Venture for use in its post mining land rehabilitation.

The partnership between Billinue and Tiwest has strengthened and evolved, earning Cataby Seeds well in excess of \$1.1M in income for seed sales to date. Most importantly, the income has been regular and sustained, allowing for the development of an independent, self supporting village, commercial enterprise and community at Cataby.



School holidays at Billinue Village

Selection Criteria

1. How does the engagement generate positive long-term outcomes for the indigenous community and what is the evidence?

Since the commencement of mining at Cooljarloo it has been evident that Tiwest would require huge quantities of locally collected native seed for post mining land restoration. Over the 40 year mine life, this seed could have been supplied by existing regional seed merchants, but Billinue showed a keen interest in providing this service. However, Billinue first needed to obtain funding to establish the business.

Tiwest's guarantee to purchase a minimum of \$150,000 worth of seed annually from Billinue enabled the establishment of Cataby Seeds, via an ATSIC grant. This funding provided for the construction of housing, sheds, seed preparation and cleaning equipment on the freehold land held in Billinue's name. Connection of electricity to the settlement, reticulation of water and establishment of septic systems and roads now provides the permanent base for families of the Billinue community to live, and generate income continuously.

The Billinue community has now prospered for some considerable time, and Cataby Seeds has continued to generate income for the community. This has heightened community expectations, providing employment training for community members, employment opportunities in the Tiwest workforce, and expectations that Billinue schoolchildren will continue as a significant enduring component of the local primary school population.



Billinue Community members at the 10th Anniversary Celebrations of the Billinue/Tiwest Partnership

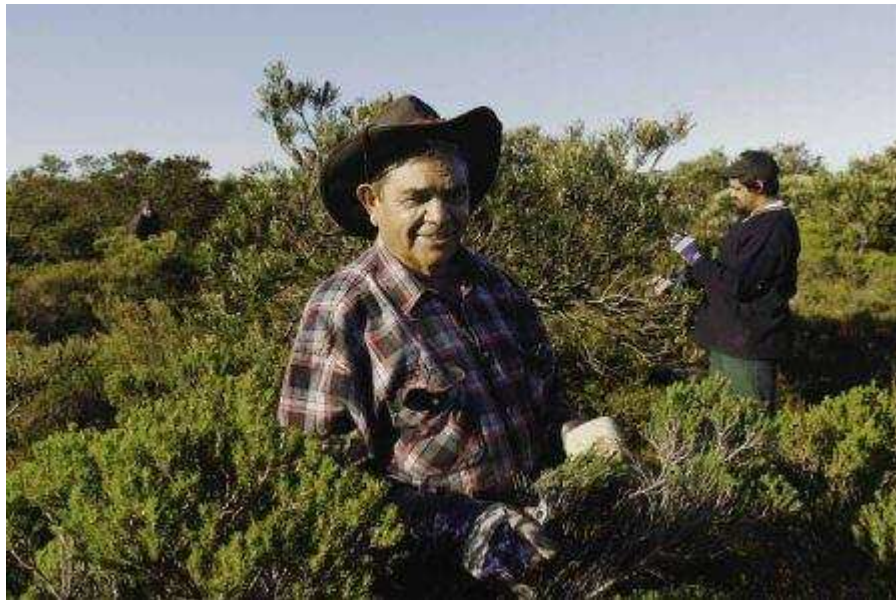
The determination of Billinue Chairman, Malcolm Ryder to operate the Billinue Community site, including the Cataby Seeds business drug and alcohol free, has enhanced Billinue's reputation as a responsible and strong employer, and branded it as an "Employer of Choice" for a range of work ready programs catering for indigenous youth from metropolitan areas.

The enduring Cataby Seeds commercial enterprise has become a working example of an indigenous business that has survived and grown, overcoming the adversities and setbacks common to all businesses, but where technical and business acumen and know how within it's workforce is gradually developed and is transferable between enterprises. Cataby Seeds employees reached this position in 2006 when they made seed sales to non-Tiwest customers for the first time, demonstrating their understanding of the product, the vagaries of the market and their confidence in their market knowledge to achieve new sales to non-core customers.

2. How does the engagement provide a genuine benefit to the business?

For Tiwest to have Cataby Seeds as a reliable supplier of native seed for its land restoration requirements, was the unquestioned key benefit from this partnership. Tiwest required huge quantities of native seed annually, preferably seed that was picked locally, and a steady reliable supply of the seed was preferable to alternative seed supply merchants from further afield. If seed came from other sources, there was a greater risk that the product was not local provenance, not fresh and the supplier unfamiliar with local plant species.

Additionally, the opportunity to work hand in hand with a locally based seed collection business, such as Cataby Seeds, and to take advantage of synergies such as saturation harvesting of seed from bush about to be cleared for mining, had obvious attractions. Tiwest's judgement was that taking some risk with a fledging seed picking enterprise such as Cataby Seeds, potentially produced benefits far superior to those that might flow from dealing with an established seed merchant. This judgement has been vindicated with Cataby Seeds growing from strength to strength in terms of reliability of supply and quality of product.



Native seed picking by Billinue community members

But there have been additional benefits that have occurred over time, not envisaged when the original Billinue/Tiwest partnership was struck.

Cataby Seeds is no different to any fledging commercial enterprise in that difficulties are encountered from time to time, and must be dealt with effectively for the business to move on. Tiwest has always wished to support Billinue through the tough times, without interfering in the business or the community, without providing handouts, but providing sufficient facilitation and support to enable Billinue to remain independent and self supporting, answerable to no one but themselves.

The delicacy of this situation has required Tiwest to develop quite different skills and approaches from those required in the normal business environment. These different skills and approaches have been used recently to good effect in negotiations with the Yued Aboriginal Community.

Tiwest and the Yued group were required to negotiate a Native Title agreement in respect of the Falcon mining leases, just to the north of Tiwest's current Cooljarloo mining operation. The Yued Group are registered Native Title Claimants for the land on which the Falcon leases lie.

The Yued Group and Tiwest were able to conclude a harmonious, ground breaking agreement, consisting of a range of employment, training, work ready programmes and scholarships that are likely to deliver positive, longterm outcomes for both parties. Tiwest's approach to this agreement was tempered in no small part by the skills developed and experiences gained in working effectively and unobtrusively with Billinue for many years. Recognition that different skills and approaches are required in dealing with indigenous communities, is now embedded in the Tiwest culture.

3. What is the variety of contributions made by the business to the indigenous community?

The 13ha portion of land ceded by Tiwest in freehold title to Billinue was part of the agreement leading to approval to mine the Cooljarloo mineral sands deposit. This land was to be the future base for the Billinue community settlement.

Early on, it was evident that Billinue wished to establish a seed picking enterprise, and Tiwest cooperated with Billinue over several years to develop the dream. To successfully secure funding for housing and seed picking and cleaning equipment, ATSIC required Billinue to demonstrate several years of continuous occupation of the 13ha block of land. During those testing years of early occupancy, Tiwest assisted Billinue with fencing, windmill and tank installation and repair, and a second hand ablution transportable for showers and toilets.



The original Billinue Settlement

Over several years, Tiwest assisted Billinue to draft a business plan for the seed picking enterprise including market surveys, projected costs and cash flows. The final business model selected justified the funding application to ATSIC contingent on Tiwest guaranteeing a minimum annual seed purchase. This guarantee was readily provided, and construction on the Billinue land began.



Modern Billinue Housing

An effective seed picking business for Cooljarloo requires intimate knowledge of over 150 native plant species. This includes not only being able to identify what are mostly obscure and poorly known taxa, but also to know when the seed is ripe, where they occur in sufficient quantities and how to pick and process the seed. During the early years of Cataby Seeds the learning curve was steep. Intensive plant identification and seed preparation training was provided to Billinue members by Landcare Services, both at York and on site at Cataby Seeds. The cost of training was borne by Tiwest.

Subsequently, a field plant identification manual was prepared for Billinue by Landcare Services and regular on site identification of patches of vegetation ready to harvest is undertaken by Landcare Services at Tiwest cost. This manual is now maintained by Cataby Seeds as a part of standard business practice. Ongoing training at Tiwest cost is provided as required to ensure retention of knowledge and to remain abreast of the ever expanding list of species to be picked.

Since initial establishment of Cataby Seeds, Tiwest continues to provide unobtrusive assistance on those occasions when it appears there is a critical need. Such occasions have included maintenance of roads and firebreaks, financial assistance with annual on site NAIDOC celebration and assistance with installation and maintenance of community equipment. Neither Billinue nor Tiwest wishes to entrench a reliance mentality, but both are keenly aware of the need for Cataby Seeds to continue to generate revenue reliably so that wages can be paid and basic community and business costs met.

4. What is the evidence of consultation with the indigenous community and other stakeholders and how well does the business demonstrate an awareness of the broad issues facing the indigenous community?

While Tiwest and Billinue acknowledge the early assistance and involvement by both parties to prepare documentation for the ATSIC grant and then establish the Cataby Seeds business, many fledging indigenous enterprises encounter serious difficulties post establishment. Failure during the operational phase may be related to a lack of independence (real or perceived), or an inability to be self sustaining due to financial mismanagement or lack of management expertise.

Billinue has dealt effectively with both of these issues. It has freehold title to the land the community is built on, and that ownership is a powerful motivator to make the associated revenue generating business, Cataby Seeds, work and sustain. Billinue workers have a clear line of sight between seed picking and preparation, sales, revenue generation, wages payment and provision of community and business essentials.

To assist in supporting the ongoing viability of Cataby Seeds and Billinue, Tiwest maintains a close, regular unobtrusive relationship with community members. There are regular technical/business meetings to assess progress on seed picking and preparation rates, and these meetings deal with technical matters that inevitably arise. Training, or the use of Landcare Services consultants occurs as necessary, to ensure the seed picking business remains uninterrupted by related issues. However, the need for such support has reduced over time from the initial provision of basic seed picking skills, to assistance with identification and location of new plant species.

Perhaps one of the critical decisions in this partnership has been Tiwest's reluctance to provide financial grants or early payments against future seed supply. Discussions along these lines have been infrequent, and were dealt with effectively and maturely. In all instances, discussions identified a way to make payment, at commercial rates for seed, upon delivery. And in this aspect, lies one of the most pragmatic solutions Tiwest has been able to utilise and Billinue has been able to benefit from, for mutual advantage.

Tiwest's normal terms of trade are for 30 days payment, ie; an invoice received in the middle of one month does not receive payment until the end of the following month. Such an arrangement could not assist Billinue to make timely payment for wages, in order to retain experienced pickers, when it is recognised that Cataby Seeds may continue to experience cash flow issues for some years. Consequently, Tiwest has agreed to provide payment to Cataby Seeds within three days of receipt of invoice, so that wages can be paid promptly. Such departure from Tiwest's terms of trade is rare.

The longevity of the Billinue/Tiwest commercial partnership has strengthened the general community's expectation that Billinue is "here to stay", and in time this has assisted with Billinue's feeling of self worth and integration into the wider community. Billinue community members participate in local sporting teams, train junior sporting teams and participate on school tuckshop rosters. Participation in annual tree planting exercises at Cooljarloo minesite, hand in hand with local community members is now common place for Billinue community members.



Local Primary School children at the Billinue Community Village

APPENDIX 1: Speech by Hon John Kobelke MLA Minister for Indigenous Affairs at presentation of commemorative plaque to Billinue Aboriginal Community

Date: Wednesday October 13, 2004 Time: 10.15am

Location: Billinue Community

Acknowledgements: First I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today. May I also acknowledge:

- Billinue elders Mal and Edna Ryder (Mal is chairperson of Billinue Aboriginal Community)
- Pat Emory, Tiwest General manager for Northern Operations
- Fellow parliamentarian, Dee Margetts MLC
- David Charles, Tiwest General Manager, Corporate Services
- Anthea Pate, Tiwest Group Leader Environment and community
- Ian Rennie, Acting CEO Shire of Dandaragan
- Shire of Dandaragan Councillors: Cr Lee Smith, Cr Michael Russell, Cr Maree Brooks, Cr Laurie Short
- Members of the Billinue Community

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be here today to celebrate the wonderful relationship between the people of Billinue and the Tiwest Joint Venture mining operations at the Cooljarloo Mine. You have worked together for the past 10 years and achieved an extraordinary working partnership that has become the envy of many other Aboriginal communities and big businesses. I am delighted to be here to represent the Gallop Government and to recognise your efforts to create a viable business arrangement that is underpinned by cultural, economic and environmental respect. You must be proud looking back on how this project has developed, since the early days when Malcolm and Edna Ryder and their family came to Cooljarloo to set up this community. Those were challenging times, when you started from scratch to build homes and the Tiwest Business Partnership. But, today, I know you are all justifiably pleased about how far you have come to create this economically sustainable and independent community. I particularly want to commend Mr and Mrs Ryder for their dedication to the creation of this community and all the years of hard work they have put in to building Billinue to the success it is today. This hard work has enabled Tiwest to fulfil its commitment to rehabilitating the mineral sands mine site land at Cooljarloo to as close as it can get to its original state. Without the professionalism of the Billinue people this would not be possible – and I know Tiwest is most appreciative of the continuing reliability of your work to supply native seeds for this rehabilitation program. This important commercial service to Tiwest has enabled Billinue community to develop into a self-supporting, independent community, answerable only to itself and not to an external 'welfare' or other system. I know this self-governance has given the people at

Billinue great satisfaction and freedom. It has earned the community a respected place as a role model for many other Aboriginal communities around the State. The WA Government is now working with indigenous people around the State to work out how we can best work together and how the voice of aboriginal people can most effectively be represented when decisions are made which affect them. The relationship between the Billinue community and Tiwest is a role model we look up to, as an example of how communities, industry and government can do business in a way that benefits everyone involved. Your partnership is also a wonderful example of the practical application of reconciliation – People working together respectfully, and understanding and accepting each other's cultures and needs. Like in all communities, I know there are still – and always will be – some areas that can be worked on and improved in your life here at Billinue . And the department of Indigenous Affairs will continue to be an advocate of your work, and stands by to provide appropriate support where it can be provided. But I am sure in your capable and committed hands, any challenges that arise will not impede on your progress as a successful business operator, and will not stop you in your mission to provide a happy and safe community for your people. I wish you all the very best for your future in this remarkable and successful business arrangement and congratulate you on your first 10 years together at Cooljarloo.