

Statement from the National Indigenous Bushfood Symposium

We have gathered from across Australia to participate in the first National Indigenous Bushfood Symposium. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the trailblazing work of the women and men who came before us. Men and women who claimed our special and unique place as the First Peoples and Knowledge holders in this country and led the way.

Our Indigenous knowledge systems have sustained us for more than 100,000 years. We assert our cultural birthright, the exclusive right, to speak for our Knowledge and country.

The Bushfoods industry is built on the Indigenous ancestral Knowledge and intergenerational nurturing and interdependent relationship with country, including all the plants, animals, landforms and waterways. Indigenous peoples' contributions must be respected, valued and given their rightful place in the industry.

Our ancestors have held this knowledge for thousands of years and have passed it down to us. It is our responsibility and obligation to continue our role as custodians. We continue to assert our sovereignty over country in its broadest sense, and our Knowledge systems. We respect the sovereignty of our brothers and sisters and their Indigenous clans and nations in relation to their country and Knowledge systems.

As First Peoples of this continent, Indigenous peoples exercise our right of self-determination. As we continue to practice our ancient methods of food production and old economies, we are also reversing our exclusion from the mainstream economy. We assert the right of participation and inclusion in both the old and new economies, as part of a just way forward and one of the ways we give to effect to our right of self-determination. We must play a leadership role in the bushfoods industry. Our cultural practices must be honoured so we can grow and thrive.

As custodians of our country, we must take a leadership role. We must be included in any development of our native plants and animals in the bushfood, botanical, agricultural and medicinal and therapeutic industries. We believe that our effective participation in the industry, its growth and development has the power to bring social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits for all. Our leadership, bringing our Knowledge systems and values, will make a strong contribution to food security and a sustainable future for country and people – as it has for generations before us.

We are concerned that our Indigenous knowledge, plants and animals have ended up in supermarkets, databases and research projects without our consent or participation. Culture and country have been exploited by the food, pharmaceutical, cosmetic and agricultural industry, research institutions and universities. We reclaim our cultural heritage, rights to water and country and our right to ethical, principled engagement with us.

We have the right to pass on this knowledge to our children, in accordance with our Indigenous Knowledge systems, including the requirements for privacy and secrecy required by those ancient systems.

This is a key pathway to economic independence and equality. We assert our rights to continue to develop our pre-existing Indigenous economies, carry them forward in accordance with our Knowledge systems, caring for country and creating intergenerational wealth, locally and in international markets.

These are the key action items coming out of our meeting:

1. Our ongoing responsibility: We need to start a national conversation amongst ourselves about our identifying our own species, our ceremonies and cultural practices that relate to us. This is a sensitive conversation that will be led by us in accordance with our Aboriginal laws.
2. Protocols to set national standards: We adopt the True Tracks principles as the foundation for cultural protocols that promote our Indigenous values and protect cultural integrity. The protocols should across all land and species management; business development, production, marketing and distribution.
3. Provenance and authenticity: We call for development of a certification mark and/or geographical indication to benefit of Indigenous producers, respect Indigenous protocols and recognise Indigenous custodianship.
4. Industry body: We need a national Indigenous controlled industry body. We call on our states and territories to support this.
5. Changes to the law: Indigenous Knowledge in bushfoods and bush products should be protected by the laws of this land and business practice. This includes intellectual property; penalties for misappropriation and implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing.
6. Education and Awareness: promote respect for our Indigenous Knowledge values and protocols.

We commit to moving this forward and call for the formation of an Indigenous working group to lead these action items and to represent us in the spirit of true and meaningful collaboration.