

HOTSPOTS FIRE PROJECT



Case Study: Returning community back to the land

The Jali people had a unique opportunity to get back in touch with country through the Hotspots Program.

A History

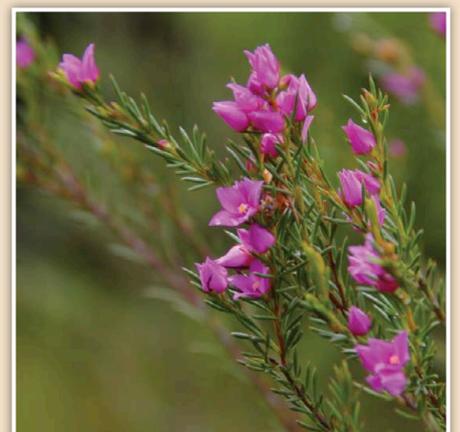
According to Bundjalung tradition, during the 1880's a group of Aboriginal people walked from Wyrallah near Lismore and crossed to Cabbage Tree Island - to take possession of the land and to clear the thick scrub for cane farming. Those who moved to Cabbage Tree Island in the 1890's were farmers and living in self-sufficient communities. The land was then set up as an Aboriginal Reserve under the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. In 1983, Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council was founded as a result of the establishment of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act NSW 1983*.

“We have had humble beginnings in this area prior to Hotspots, where the Aboriginal Land Council has had this large parcel of land for generations with minimal management.”

A SPECIAL PLACE

The Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) is the largest land owner in the Shire of Ballina. Included in the Jali LALC land holdings is a parcel of some 1,000 hectares of native vegetation located just outside the township of Wardell on the Pacific Highway. This is an area of high conservation value and is immediately adjacent to a number of residential areas of the Jali community including Cabbage Tree Island, Lumley's Lane, Old Bagotville Road & Wardell communities.

Aboriginal Heritage Officer Claude McDermott knows the value of the Jali property, and is working hard alongside the community to have this land recognised as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA).



The Hotspots Program

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) received funding to provide Jali landholders with the skills and knowledge needed to actively and collectively participate in fire management planning and implementation for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity values.



Fire as a crucial part of property management

One of the outcomes of running a Hotspots Program is being able to successfully conduct a prescribed burn. Through careful planning, and a lot of encouragement and enthusiasm on-ground, a tailored three day program was developed to meet the needs of the Jali community.

For the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and members of the Jali crew, it was important to tailor the program to meet the needs of the community and the land. The training included sessions on how to plan for and conduct

safe prescribed burns with the opportunity to complete further training and become qualified in Basic Firefighter and join a volunteer brigade.

Overall this collaborative project has resulted in the very positive achievement of engaging the LALC with fire management planning and implementation on their lands for the protection of biodiversity and cultural values whilst also assisting to address protection of life and property.



“We made it practical, as hands on as we could. We learnt from previous community based training programs and found that rather than theory, practical learning worked best.”

RFS Community Safety Officer Laurence McCoy.

Building better relationships

Hotspots provided an even ground, where both parties could benefit from the program, learning through the knowledge of experts in their field and experience from those who have lived on the land for generations.

Claude McDermott from the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) says “Hotspots is a way of returning the community back to the land. With a new range of training programs and education, that can provide the community with the skills and knowledge to be in the drivers seat for managing their own land; they can now set their own direction.”

According to local Aboriginal Heritage Officer (OEH) Ashley Moran, the Program was a means to link all agencies together to present a joint front to the community for land management, “We all have a role to do fire management practices across all landscapes, whether it is public, private or park.”

Plants, animals and ecosystems are at the core of the Jali people’s attachment to the land. The Cabbage Tree community see their land as ‘all as one’, so in order to work together they need to be consulted on a regular basis when it comes to managing their land. As Claude points out “This area is a biodiversity goldmine, and in order to protect this area we need to work in partnership.”

INTERVIEW WITH

MARCUS FERGUSON: JALI CREW

Someone who knows all about building relationships is local Programs Coordinator for Envite, Marcus Ferguson. Marcus has been working as a liaison between the Land Council and Envite for the past couple of years structuring and tailoring programs to meet the local’s needs. **“But now after Hotspots we have a great relationship with the brigade, and after the training my boys can work closely with them to do burns”** Following the program Marcus has been working hard to get the area declared as an Indigenous Protected Area, alongside OEH and National Parks.

For 30 years he has seen rubbish being dumped across his property. Now the rubbish has been removed and the land is ready to be burnt. The Jali crew have been working closely with the Wetland Care Partnership group and have conducted monitoring on Potoroo sites in the area. Burns were purposely lit in the area from stolen cars and cigarette butts, but now the gates have been put up, and the Jali crew can safely conduct their own mosaic burns, with the intent of providing good regeneration as habitat for the local Potoroos. Marcus is keen to support the Hotspots Program in other areas and his crew are willing to lend a hand,

“HOTSPOTS GOT MY BOYS BACK IN TOUCH WITH THE LAND, NOW EVENTUALLY I WOULD LIKE SEE THEM MANAGING AND CARING FOR IT.”

Acknowledgements

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Further Information

For further information visit www.hotspotsfireproject.org.au or contact the Hotspots Program on 02 8741 5555 (NSW Rural Fire Service), email hotspots@rfs.nsw.gov.au or 02 9516 0359 (Nature Conservation Council of NSW), email hotspotsfireproject@nccnsw.org.au

Credits

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