



Celebrating the native plants and Indigenous culture of Bundjalung Country



BY INSPIRING NSW
MAY 2, 2023



On Friday 21 April 2023, around 250 community members and visitors came together at the Lismore Quad on a warm rainy evening to celebrate the launch of *Our Place Our Species*, a new documentary film that celebrates Bundjalung, Widjabul Wia-bal caretakers as they work on Country to preserve the First Nations cultural knowledge that comes from being part of the land.

In the documentary that was shared publicly with an excited audience for the very first time under the night sky in the Quad, we join film-maker Mitch King as he travels on Country to meet caretakers with deep knowledge of Bundjalung culture and ecology as they discuss the Northern Rivers region's unique native plants, river systems and bush tucker.





Our Place Our Species trailer on VIMEO

Each of the Bundjalung Elders featured in the film have many years of experience in leading local efforts to preserve and protect the environment, the waterways and native plants. Their wide knowledge of ecology and desire to educate others about the importance of continuing First Nations practices for stronger and healthier communities reflects their own strong connection to Country.

The launch celebrations began with a musical performance by Sara MacDonald and a warm welcome to Country from Uncle Gilbert Laurie who shared local language and performed a smoking ceremony. The audience was then treated to two dynamic dance performances by local groups Nini Nahri-Gali and Wibjabul Jagun.



Images: Uncle Gilbert Laurie performing a smoking ceremony before Nini Nahri-Gali and Wibjabul Jagun dance troupes perform at the Quad

Introducing the film, Mitch explained how the idea for making a documentary came about through his participation as the local project lead for the Inspiring Australia-supported pilot project of the same name. Having organised a few events and yarning circles in which a community members were invited to hear from Bundjalung elders, Mitch was looking for a way to build a stronger audience for the next set of community conversations.

“I got Uncle Mick and elders to come and share knowledge at the first community gathering. What I

loved were their conversations that showed how passionate they were about their environment. But then I was invited for a visit to beautiful Namabunda Farm and I realised that we could bring Country to people in film.”

A serendipitous meeting with film-maker Karenza Ebejer, who had previously attended one of the bush tucker yarns, led to them collaborating with Lismore Quad’s producer Mykaela Baillie to develop the film.



Image: Mitch King, Delta Kay, Mykaela Baillie and Karenza Ebejer before the event begins.

With a background in performance as a dancer, creative producer and music producer, Mitch said that the process of making the film happened organically once he started talking to local elders about ecological knowledge and their roles as caretakers.

“I’m so honoured to make this film because I have never had the chance to think about looking after native bush pants before. The fact that someone asked me to do a project around native bush plants I thought sounded really awesome,” he said.

“We can learn so much from First Nations knowledge and the superior connection to Country by elders and that’s why I’m invested in making this kind of film,” said Karenza, who thanked the elders for sharing their knowledge so generously.

The team anticipates that the film will serve as a pilot that can be continued in a larger series, and is looking forward to what comes next.

Meet the elders

Mitch and Mykaela thought it was important to use the occasion of the film’s launch to bring everyone together to celebrate their knowledge and participate in a community conversation before the screening. Mitch invited everyone to share how they felt about participating in the film.

At Namabunda Farm, the film follows Mitch as he joins elders Aunty Tracey King and Aunty Lisa Bolt on a walk through their unique First Nations agriculture initiative to grow and preserve bush tucker. It was there on Country that Mitch realised he could help elders and caretakers share Indigenous ecological knowledge more widely through making a film.

“For me to be part of this film was terrific, as I am quite a shy person. But it was great to be on Country out at the farm, that was fantastic. Hopefully what people see in the film will inspire them to participate in some of the activities we offer,” said Aunty Tracey of Namabunda Farm.

In the film we meet Delta Kay whose business, Explore Byron Bay, offers cultural walking and bush tucker tours to share a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of the coast and the region’s lush rainforest and abundance of native foods.

"You feel confident on Country. It was fun to have a yarn. There is so much to say and this is a real passion of mine," said Delta.

We also meet Aunty Jenny Smith who helped set up the bush tucker educational garden at the Jarjum Centre preschool in Goonellabah that was established many years ago by her mother, Aunty Fay Smith.

"For me it was a bit of an awakening from a cultural purpose with everything I've been through in the past couple of years. As we get older our values change and we need to look inside ourselves and ask what is important. What are the things that keep us strong as a people and as a nation? And as an individual," said Aunty Jenny.

"When you see the little Jarjums wanting to learn about their culture and dance and learning about the native plants in the ground We don't have to go up to McDonalds or Coles. We've got it there in the garden. So for me, it was beautiful," she added.

Also in the film are Aunty Thelma James and Uncle Mick Roberts who both have a long history in the region of working to protect Country. They've been involved in many local projects that work with preservation and celebration of native species. Uncle Mick said he felt very comfortable walking with Mitch on Country talking about the plants and animals.

Musician Uncle Billy Smith closed the community event with more beautiful tunes.



Images: Uncle Mick Roberts, Aunty Tracey King and Aunty Lisa Bolt discuss their involvement in the film with Mitch King.

Congratulations to all involved in creating this inspiring journey into the world of native plants and their caretakers in the Bundjalung region. The *Our Place Our Species* film is sure to inspire many people to learn more about and support the range of First Nations led projects that exist in the Northern Rivers and beyond.



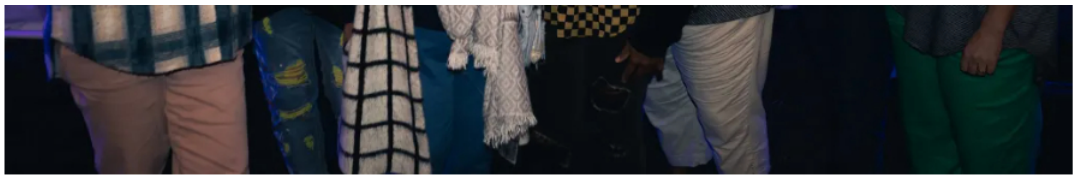


Image: Jackie Randles, Jane Richens, Mitch King, Aunty Thelma James and Uncle Mick Roberts, Delta Kay, Aunty Tracey King and Aunty Lisa Bolt and Karenza Ebejer.

The *Our Place Our Species* short film was co-produced by Mitch King and Mykaela Baille and directed by Karenza Ebejer as part of the [Our Place, Our Species pilot](#) project supported by Lismore Quad, Inspiring Australia and the NSW Government.

Guest post by Jackie Randles, Project Lead *Our Place Our Species*. Images courtesy of Kristopher Cook Photography.

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