

Commercial use of Australian native rices by Indigenous enterprises: regulatory setting in the Northern Territory

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Introduction

Australian native rices occur across Northern Territory (NT), Western Australia and Queensland.

In the NT:

- limited economic development opportunities for remote Aboriginal communities
- abundant natural resources, including Australian native rices
- bush foods and medicines are included in the NT Government's agri-business economic development strategy
- established tourism enterprises and emerging wild food enterprises can synergistically add value.

NT Government policy to improve Indigenous economic benefit include:

- Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserves Policy Framework (2017) increases opportunity for Aboriginal people to access and develop water resources.
- Support under the Aboriginal Business Development Program: \$1 million provided to 57 new start-up businesses and 24 existing businesses.
- Regional Economic Development: identify priority projects and policy priorities to enable future economic growth in the regions.

Commercialisation of native species, such as the Australian native rices, presents an economic development opportunity.



Australian native rice products.

Values: Cultural, Economic & Ecological

Traditional knowledge and cultural responsibilities

- Historic use of wild rice - grinding stones for processing wild rice on the floodplains and logs for storing wild rice by Aboriginal people.
- Ongoing management of floodplain estate.
- Underpins life-cycle of magpie geese, an important food for Aboriginal people.

Wild food and medicinal properties

Australian native rice is a delicious and attractive, highly nutritious native food.

Genetic resource for *Oryza sativa* breeding

- Australian native rices include *Oryza australiensis*, *O. meridionalis*, *O. rufipogon* and are likely to include other cryptic species.
- They are closely related to cultivated Asian rice (*O. sativa*).
- As a wild species with a broad distribution, Australian native rices may have desirable traits such as tolerance to salinity, drought, flooding or resistance to pests and diseases.

Economic potential

- Growing consumer interest in ethically sourced, healthy and native foods.
- Growing number of Indigenous suppliers, manufacturers and retailers wild food value
- High-value, low-volume, culturally identified product.

Regulations, Permits and Agreements

NT Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act

- Required for collecting, use and transfer of wild species
- "Export Permit" required to move materials for any purpose from NT.
- If bioprospecting expected referred to NT Dept Trade Business and Innovation.

Northern Territory Biological Resources Act (2006)

- Promotes the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources.
- Requires benefit sharing agreements between "resource provider" and "resource user".
- If on Aboriginal Freehold land title, referral to relevant Land Council.

Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976

- Affects commercial uses of resources on Aboriginal Freehold land.
- Requires a Land Use Agreement to access the resource with the relevant land trust, facilitated by the relevant Land Council.

Nagoya Protocol

- International agreement to protect interest of indigenous "resource suppliers".
- Evidence required of prior informed consent, benefit sharing.
- Activated when material exported to third party.

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

- Ensures equitable access to pooled agricultural materials for crop production.
- Ensures equitable access to pooled benefits from that use.
- *Oryza* is specifically named in the Treaty.

Local benefits

- Economic benefits to local and regional communities.
- Joint ownership or access to IP and knowledge.
- Development of local capacity, skills and training.
- Improved health and nutrition.
- Conservation benefits to native rice populations through direct management and trust funds.
- Social and cultural recognition with community and tourism benefits.

Importance of the regulatory environment

International examples relating to ancient grains demonstrate the maintenance of broad benefits to a range of Indigenous enterprises. Other examples show the loss of local benefit to large agribusiness. This demonstrates the importance of regulatory settings to protect local interests.