



## Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Registered Native Title Body Corporate – Native Title Youth Engagement, Indigenous Youth in Governance and Political Processes Project

By Peter Bligh, Wakka Wakka/Kullilli, AIATSIS and Dr Valerie Cooms, Quandamooka

In February 2021 Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) agreed to work with AIATSIS on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) in Queensland. The aim of the project was to examine the engagement of QYAC youth in native title and within QYAC.

QYAC took AIATSIS staff on Country with a group of younger QYAC Rangers. Following this, a range of formal and informal interviews and discussions were held and particularly in relation to their thoughts on Native Title. All of the people interviewed noted

they wanted to learn more about how the native title process works.

2021 will mark the 10 year anniversary of the first native title Determination and will also highlight the work done to engage Aboriginal youth. The partnership is part of AIATSIS' Indigenous Youth in Governance and Political Processes research work.

Some of the ways in which Quandamooka youth participate in native title processes are:

- Participating in caring for Country programs across Quandamooka lands and waters<sup>1</sup>
- Learning about and working within business
- Learning about and working within administration
- Learning about and participating in tourism on their terms as Traditional Owners
- Learning and understanding the Queensland Cultural Heritage legislation
- Learning and understanding the Native Title Act including negotiation
- Gaining more skills via staff development and training programs.

Left to right: Dr Valerie Cooms, speaking to Jacob Martin, Lordie Walker and Patrick Coolwell, Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) February 2021. Photo: Trea Mongta

With youth participation across so much of QYAC activities, QYAC has to understand the types of decisions that have to be made, who makes those decisions and how this happens within their own teams and workplace. These decisions are made all of the time by Quandamooka Rangers in a well-informed and supportive environment under the guidance and supervision of Elders.

Many of the Rangers are keen to learn about the governance of QYAC which enhances their capacity as Members. Youth guidance and experience across many areas has seen many community members take their place as Leaders. The organisation's focus on generating income to provide jobs has created an interesting range of opportunities for Quandamooka youth. The team building experiences combined with QYAC's support before and after incarceration is a crucial part of ensuring people are given opportunities to become responsible leaders within the community, despite obstacles and challenges. Everyone in the community watches the work that the rangers do and focus on how they conduct themselves. This ensures that the rangers gain confident leadership skills in a culturally safe and respectful environment. The relationships they have formed as team members and co-workers across various families will carry through into future generations.

AIATSIS first reached out to QYAC in 2020 for a comparative example of how to engage Youth in Native Title. AIATSIS conducted interviews with Quandamooka Land and Sea Management Agency (QALSMA) Rangers. (AIATSIS has agreed to provide copies of interviews

and other footage to hold in its collection, and copies for individual interviewees subject to the wishes of the project participants).

The Quandamooka Land and Sea Management Agency (QALSMA) is the Unit within QYAC responsible for the planning, management and protection of the Quandamooka Estate. The QALSMA Ranger team consists mostly of Young Quandamooka people. The Quandamooka Rangers are a valuable asset firstly because they are connected to most families on the islands, and, they are fulfilling an important role in caring for Country. The opportunity ensures rangers continue to gain skills to enhance their ability to effectively care for Quandamooka lands and waters.

Key impacts of the Ranger program include:

- Caring for Country
- Respect and recognition for leadership in work and knowledge
- QALSMA staff represent young people across all of the families on the Island.

During the interviews some of the Rangers spoke about boredom and substance abuse and how working on Country was able to not only gain the opportunity for them to provide economically for their families, but to also set an example for others.

QYAC is the largest land holder, accommodation provider and employer on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island). Prior to Native Title the main form of income was from tourism or mineral extraction. Now, caring for Country, and particularly Traditional Fire Management processes, brings funding into

QYAC to employ Traditional Owners. Our young rangers' hard work during fire prevention or fighting is second to none. It makes everyone proud to see them 'stepping up' to care for people and Country working long hours with everyone proud of their performance, commitment and professionalism. This provides a climate within which leaders can emerge quickly and confidently and are a valuable asset not only in the workplace but within families and our community as well.

We can label the investment in our youth as 'justice reinvestment' or 'succession planning' but it is simply providing an opportunity for our emerging leaders to learn as much from their Elders as possible to carry on the policy of QYAC which is to primarily focus on securing land and waters, as well as creating jobs for Quandamooka people.

**Oodgeroo or Kath Walker's poem  
A Song of Hope:**

**To our Father's Fathers the  
pain the sorrow;**

**To our children's children a  
glad tomorrow.**

QYAC will continue to ensure our children's children have a 'glad tomorrow'.

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*It has been an honour to watch our staff develop into strong community leaders, and we thank AIATSIS for the opportunity to capture this in its research.*

*– Dr Valerie Cooms.*

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<sup>1</sup> This includes Fire Management.