

QUEENSLAND TOURISM  
INDUSTRY COUNCIL

# **Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions Network**

CASE STUDIES – EDITION 7, 2015



The 2015 Queensland  
Tourism Industry Council  
Indigenous Employment Champions  
Network (supported by The Star  
Entertainment Group) represent a diverse  
cross section of Indigenous individuals and  
mainstream tourism businesses that are at  
different career and employment points in  
their respective journeys.

No two journeys are alike, no two  
outcomes the same, however, all pulling in  
the same direction, resulting in more  
Indigenous people being involved in the  
dynamic industry of tourism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Mossman Gorge Centre**  
**Dreamtime Learning**  
**Echo Entertainment Group**  
**Reef Magic Cruises**  
**Cosmos Centre & Observatory**  
**Business Action Centre**  
**Queensland Government**

(Adapted extract re: Dreamtime Learning 2015  
Queensland Reconciliation Awards Program pg 6)

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# SAME CONSTELLATION DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION

Most of us can recall from our learnings at school that Italian born astronomer Galileo (1564 – 1642) was credited with many theories and discoveries regarding the solar system. However Indigenous Australians were observing and recording the night sky thousands of years before. A local Charleville mother, daughter team have brought this ancient practice back to life at the Cosmos Centre & Observatory.

The Charleville Cosmos Centre and Observatory was opened in April of 2003 and has been firmly entrenched as a must see and do in Queensland's Outback. A variety of guided tours throughout the day and evening provide visitors with both a 'hands on' experience and spectacular viewing of all things astronomical.

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) was fortunate enough to spend some time with 'Centre' Manager **Jane Morgan** and Indigenous Night Sky Guides **Shelly Draper** and **Lisa Draper**.

Jane reflects on the journey thus far, 'This project has been eleven years in the making. I have been trying and trying to cajole Shelly for years to come and be a part of our observatory program. To her credit she resisted until now, to allow her children to complete their secondary education. The inclusion of another interpretation of

the night sky has added a whole new dimension to the Cosmos visitor experience. Our target market, the grey nomads, are very familiar with and embrace Aboriginal grounded product.' The guided tour has been a huge success and both Shelly and Lisa have won the hearts of everyone they have come in contact with.

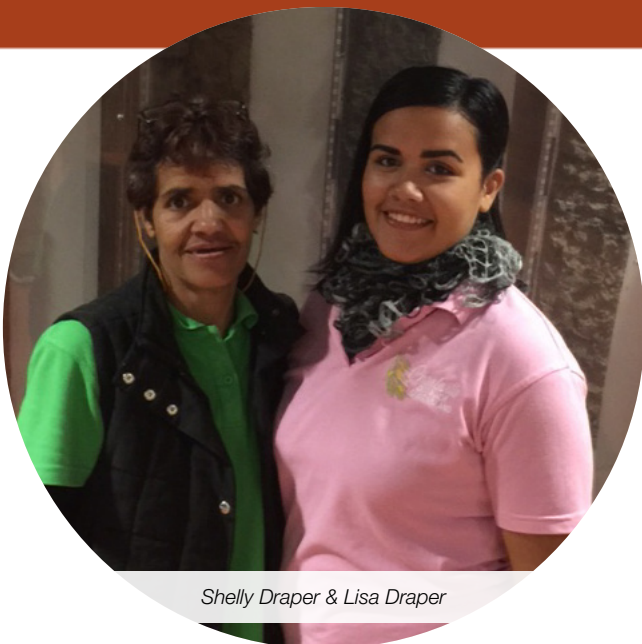
'The Indigenous interpretation of the sky is about what falls between the constellations not the constellations themselves. We have guided tours that do that, this is completely different. My goal was to setup a stand-alone Indigenous business, under the safety net of a local government Visitor Information Centre environment and let the individuals chart their course. The business model is working and so is the product, at present everyone wins and potentially this could happen in other regions in the state. Indigenous tourism content is part of Queensland's competitive advantage and we are completely committed to helping it prosper in Charleville.'

And she is completely correct. Listening and learning with Shelly and Lisa opens up an entirely different perspective of our first Australians and how their lives and dreamtime have been impacted by the stars.

**Stories are deeply connected to the sky, as are the recordings etched in cave walls – a 40 000 year relationship, now being shared in outback Queensland.**

The conversation moves to the 'stars of the show' predominately Shelly with support from Lisa, who Mum says, 'Is on a steep learning curve.' Shelly is a proud and articulate Indigenous Australian who is one of seven sisters, a bit like the 'Pleiades' in the night sky she jokes. Shelly has the honesty and personality that immediately connects with the audience, QTIC was lucky enough to be a captive audience of one.

Shelly shares the story, 'As a kid, Aboriginal people in Charleville were left out and separated from everyone else. I never accepted this and always wanted to be part of what was happening. In the early days I really did not want to learn about my culture because I felt shame for being different. This opportunity at the Cosmos Centre & Observatory has completely changed my thinking.'



*Shelly Draper & Lisa Draper*

'I now want to learn as much as I can about my ancestors and our 40,000 year old history. The more I learn and the more I read and research makes me prouder and prouder.

'I am re-connecting with my family past and present and so is my daughter and her brothers and sisters. At forty five years of age I am probably more in tune with my people than I have ever been. This is good space.

My daughter has the opportunity to be part of the tourism industry and I can help her along the way, as a mother, it does not get much better than that. Lisa is the youngest of my children and the last one I am ensuring is working. To be part of the Young clan, you have to be working. We are learning together and growing together and over and above that we are sharing with others. The story lines that makeup the night sky link us right across the planet. Both Lisa and I are looking at visiting our people in the Northern Territory to learn and share more. We both believe that the star stuff is just part of the opportunity. There is an opportunity for other Indigenous people to start micro businesses that could sell boomerangs and didgeridoos as well as local tours, it could be great for our community and great for our culture. I want my people to be proud of who they are, we should be and have plenty of reason to be.'

Not only is that a fantastic story of perseverance from all parties, it is a story of discovery. A discovery of a history that may well have been lost, but is now growing every day. Come and be part of it.

# DIFFERENT PATHWAYS, SAME DESTINATION

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is delighted to be able to profile yet another success story from the Mossman Gorge Centre, one of North Queensland's chief incubators of achievement in terms of Indigenous employment outcomes.

This year we celebrate the triumphs of three young Indigenous women, in their thirties, who are kicking more goals than Johnathon Thurston (Australian Rugby League superstar) has, thus far, in his illustrious career.

**These three are affectionately referred to, in these parts, as the deadly sisters.**

More than 85% of the employees at the Mossman Gorge Centre are Indigenous and a large portion of the team come from the local Kuku Yalanji people. However, these three are from all parts of the state and unquestionably career focused and focused on helping others being successful.

QTIC listened intently to their life and work journeys and could only marvel at the personal drive, the will to be as good as they can be and the genuine want for young Indigenous people to be contributors to community and environment together. The phrase, 'I like to look after the young ones' was repeated consistently throughout our discussions.

The conversations were wide ranging, open and bluntly honest – here are some snippets from those conversations and we begin with **Megan Paulke** who is currently the Finance Manager at the 'Centre'.

'My first job was as a cleaner under a local Community Development Employment Project. I worked for fifteen hours a week. People were impressed with my attitude and application and things just took off from there. I have had lots of jobs including, Finance Assistant; Retail Assistant/Attendant; Supervisor of Dream Time Tours; Reception roles; Purchasing Officer and now Finance Manager – four of those roles have been here at the Mossman Gorge Centre.'

Megan pauses and reflects momentarily on the journey thus far, which in turn gives QTIC the opportunity to ask about family and its impact given the full-time work commitment...

She responds, 'I am a very proud mother of a five year old son named Jamal who currently attends the local Preparatory School. His dad's job is not quite as flexible as mine, so I drop him off in the mornings before work and pick him up after school. My sister looks after Jamal whilst I go back to work and finish my day. It works really well. I also have other family members who can help if I get stuck. Home is a lot like work, everyone pitches in to get the best result. As Managers we have tried to create a supportive work environment

and further career pathways for all of the Centre's employees. This place is about people, sharing the culture and pride in being an Indigenous Australian.'

The next in line for a one-to-one is **Natalie Chapman**, Human Resources Manager and part of the fabric of the business.

'The Golden Arches (McDonalds) was where it all began for me at the age of fourteen where I had to juggle school and work. It was a great grounding and taught me that life can be multi-dimensional and I have continued that mantra throughout my life. I had a stint in State Government and that was where my interest in Human Resources (HR) began. One of my first jobs was to deliver the mail. As you know there are plenty of different departments in Government. The department which certainly had the best vibe (fun and friendly) was HR and I was hooked – that was where I wanted to be. I also wanted to develop my skills to further my career. My enthusiasm to learn was recognised and I was accepted into the ATSI Middle Management Program that gave me a taste of Employee Relations, Industrial Relations and Workplace Health and Safety. One of my first projects was to work on an Employee Relations Strategy to support Equity and Diversity within the Department. Having completed that, next on my agenda was trip to Europe. Armed with Resume in my back pocket I hit the airwaves, landed in the United



Kingdom and had a job as a Hostel (Backpackers) Manager within the first week.'

Natalie spoke about a number of other major roles and highlights and the significance of reconnecting with family on Country.

She continues, 'When I returned from overseas, I spent more time in Government, however, I became restless and decided to move to the outback, where I had the opportunity to take up a HR role in the mining sector. The Mount Isa job was a big risk. I was a member of a small HR team responsible for a largely male dominated workforce. Our department was responsible for OH&S, reward and recognition, recruitment, systems & processes, policies, employee performance and strategic direction it was a great learning curve.'

Natalie is firmly entrenched in a Human Resources career pathway, and the 'sky is the limit.'

Our final 'deadly' sister is **Rachael Hodges**, Assistant General Manager, a pocket rocket with all the qualities to take the lead role in any organisation.

Here is her story, 'I completed school in Cairns and took off to Toowoomba to commence a Bachelor of Arts Degree specialising in Journalism. I unfortunately could only complete two years of my degree as my Grandmother feel ill and passed away. This was very sad, but it created an opportunity for me to return home and help my Uncle and Aunt set up an Indigenous Art Centre

in Cardwell. It absolutely gave me the taste for business. I studied and completed a Certificate III in Business (Office Administration) and worked as an Office Administrator Coordinator for a local Aboriginal Council. Like Megan and Natalie I had a number of other jobs that helped make me what I am today.'

QTIC used this opportunity to ask about Rachel's involvement in the beginnings of the Mossman Gorge Centre.



Natalie Chapman, Megan Paulke & Rachael Hodges

She continues, 'I have been involved with this place before a sod of soil was turned. I was part of the consultation team and watched it grow from there. We had some resistance in the beginning, as always happens with new community based projects, but look at us now – over five hundred thousand people were part of the Mossman Gorge experience last year. Everybody at the Centre is so proud. A work culture has been created within our own Indigenous culture. The entire staff are seen as role models by the outside population both black and white, local and further afield. The three of us believe that Indigenous people are perfectly suited to the tourism and hospitality industry and there are many opportunities available to do a whole range of things. We just need more, doing more.'

Three women, three completely different stories and the same destination – the Mossman Gorge Centre.

# WORLD HERITAGE MAGIC

**This is a story of perseverance, vision, generosity and good old fashioned common sense.**

The perseverance of a dedicated marine biologist, the vision and generosity of a long-term Cairns Charter Boat operator and the common sense of the marriage between environment (World Heritage reef and rainforest) and the first Australians.

Reef Magic Cruises is a Far North Queensland business owned by local marine tourism identity, and Cairns local, **Tim North**. Tim has been involved in the operation of Great Barrier Reef day trips for more than thirty years; the last eighteen as Director and Proprietor.

North is renowned for innovation and the pioneering of new ideas and has now expanded to develop a new business arm concentrating on Great Barrier Reef and Rainforest Education.

Reef Magic Education focuses on creating education pathways to garner greater connections and awareness of local communities, highlighting the social, cultural, environmental and economic capital to local areas. This encapsulates education and research opportunities for students to experience their local eco systems and contribute to ongoing research projects. The aim is to provide a greater awareness of local environments and empower more sustainable communities.

The Reef Magic Education programs present opportunities for students and teachers to engage with a variety of individuals and local stakeholders to actively participate in self-discovery, place-based learning projects.

An increasing number of teachers are embracing place-based learning as a strategy that captures students' imaginations, is experiential based and advances environmental stewardship and civic engagement.

Tim works closely with the Reef Community Education Coordinator, a team of Marine Biologists and the Gunggandji Land and Sea Rangers to facilitate and deliver curriculum based learning programs.

The education projects are available to local, national and international students and are delivered across a number of reef systems and rainforests within the Cairns region. The reef component currently includes:

Norman Reef	Saxon Reef
Hastings Reef	Michaelmas Reef
Green Island	Flynn Reef
Thetford Reef	Milln Reef
Moore Reef	Fitzroy Island

The Reef Magic Education and Research programs are on offer year round and contribute to the 'Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Eye on the Reef' monitoring programs and Wet Tropics Management Authority's research monitoring programs.

While the program is open to all 'comers' student wise, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) met with Marine Biologist Marie Taylor, to specifically discuss a burgeoning Indigenous partnership with the community of Yarrabah.

'Yarrabah is a settlement about fifty kilometres south of Cairns and is positioned in a beautiful natural harbour. The local people have a real connection with the land and the sea and this project will bring them even closer







together. Not only are we in the business of teaching the marine side of things, we are working with others (Wet Tropics Management Authority) to deliver land based education as well. The program has been designed to achieve two educational goals:

1. **Create a space for relevant and applicable learnings for local reef and rainforest landscapes.**
2. **Establish opportunities to learn about ‘your’ place, to encourage and foster personal connection and understanding about an individual’s role in a community that can last a lifetime.**

We have aligned the programs to deliver on curriculum based requirements to ensure that both teacher and student satisfy the following, experimental learning; values and analysis; creative thinking; future problem solving; story – telling; inquiry learning and science in the community. We are very keen to work and share with the Yarrabah community and schools.

The Yarrabah part of all of this, is that we recognise and know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the traditional owners of the Great Barrier Reef and the rainforest. They have lived adjacent to them for tens of thousands of years. The Traditional Owners of these places hold a vast knowledge of the marine environment, marine animals, reef habitats and rainforest eco systems. The program has the potential to connect young and old and provide career pathways. Also, in the future, it will create an opportunity to deliver authentic Indigenous tourism visitor experiences. Tim has been particularly supportive throughout the project and is at present funding a significant portion from his own resources. We both want it to work, and we know it will. We need to continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure success with the Yarrabah people.’

Marie reflects on what has been shared and ask about who she believes are the key stakeholders.

Marie continues, ‘The success of any community based program is communication and transparency – everybody who needs to know has to be involved to some degree. With this project we have involved a wide variety of what we like to refer to as partners and these include, national and international schools and universities; local councils; local communities (especially the Elders in this one); the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Wet Tropics Management Authority. If we work with other communities that have other interested parties we are more than happy to have them involved. We are in the beginning stages of a long-term transformation of reef and rainforest interpretation and

understanding. It is exciting times and we are in for the long haul. I know we haven’t quite achieved all of what we envisaged yet, but we are determined to see the Yarrabah project be an absolute success. Successful in terms of seeing more Indigenous people working in the wider tourism industry, building greater strength in local networks and a stronger understanding of all aspects of sustainability – ecological, social, economic, cultural and political.’



# HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Introducing **James Patterson**, an Indigenous inspiration from Gordonvale which is located around twenty kilometres south of the Cairns' Central Business District in far North Queensland. The small sugar growing suburb boasts a resident population of almost 4500. James works as a Vocational Education Training (VET) trainer for a company called Dreamtime Learning.

Dreamtime Learning specialises in providing practical and effective training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hospitality students. It offers a comprehensive program called Choices for Change, which draws upon the skills and expertise of a number of organisations that specialise in business, literacy, numeracy, personal development, human resources, cultural competence and hospitality.

**The training framework has an emphasis on acquiring skills, building confidence and developing work habits to help the transition from non-employment to successful career pathways and opportunities.**

Dreamtime Learning has more than 280 graduates and 240 students in current training. Since completing the program 23 people have started their own business, 133 people have successfully obtained some form of employment and 153 have continued further study.

**At the recent 2015 Queensland Reconciliation Awards Dreamtime Learning and the Noorla Resort (Training and Accommodation facility) was awarded Highly Commended in the Business Category.**

James and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) met on an overcast, sometimes damp Wednesday afternoon in the tranquil surrounds of a local park in Gordonvale – ironic really, given the composure of the man, as he shared a brief, but achievement packed twenty two years of existence.

'I was born in Gordonvale and raised in both Yarrabah and Gordonvale. I attended Gordonvale Primary and Secondary School and finished my schooling at Djarragun College. While at Djarragun I completed a Certificate II in Hairdressing and my interest in the field

commenced. At that time in my life my friends were very influential and convinced me to leave school before the end of Year 12 and join them in the fashion industry. I started a Hairdressing apprenticeship in Atherton (60 km away) and did not last very long because I was too far away from my family and friends. It was hard because I did not know anyone and I was so young. I did not work for the next year because I wanted to stay at home to look after my son'.

At this juncture, QTIC seized the opportunity to get a better understanding of the quantum leap between being a stay at home dad to becoming part of a training team of an award-winning organisation.

With evident pride, James recommences, 'My cousin was doing a Certificate III in Hospitality and Tourism at Joe's place (Dreamtime Learning and Noorla Resort). I thought to myself, why don't I join him and see what it is like. Long story short – I loved it. I loved the learning, I loved the ways in which the teachers taught. Everything about it was fantastic. It got me to thinking, didn't I always like the idea of teaching, wasn't it something I wanted to do when I was young? I liked hairdressing, maybe my friends were a little too influential? Time to change my life... I set about gaining the qualifications needed to be a teacher of Vocational Training. I enrolled in the Diploma of Business course,

completed, and then enrolled in a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. That done, I was ready to move from student to trainer. Having done my training with Dreamtime Learning and achieved good results (including the 2014 Student of the Year Award) I was offered a role, the dream role for me, in the dream environment. The support network, hands on teaching techniques and mentoring help me to continually improve. I now generally work two weeks on and one week off.'

QTIC asked the 22 year old where he thought he may be in ten years' time – almost half his life again in the future.

The smile and confidence return and James continues, 'In ten years' time I will be in Yarrabah, owning and managing a Supermarket.

'My goal is to train up local kids that have not had a lot of life experiences to be good employees and eventually good managers. Then the cycle would begin again, those managers would train new local kids and so on and so on.

'Hopefully then some of those managers would move into other management roles in Yarrabah and elsewhere. It is important that all the kids in Yarrabah get a chance and I really want to help. Even though it is not far from Cairns, not many people leave the community and go to other places. Once I am comfortable that the Supermarket is working well, I would like to finish my Hairdressing training and open up a Hairdressing business in Cairns. This would give me the opportunity to provide a Cairns based work opportunity for interested Yarrabah youth. I want young people to see and know that if you are determined enough you can do anything you want, wherever you want. Maybe I will

teach hairdressing in the future. Maybe I will be part of a school program that visits schools and talks to students about career opportunities and future opportunities.'

QTIC asks James, what has been your biggest training/teaching challenge in your short career?

James replies, 'No matter how many certificates I have, even though they are really important, the biggest training challenge was teaching my Aunty. My Aunty has no certificates, but she was the one that taught me a lot when I was little. At first it was difficult, I felt nervous, but after a while we just shared and laughed and we both learnt so much.'



Noorla Resort, Ingham



# HAND FIRMLY ON THE RUDDER

**ECHO Entertainment Group Limited** is one of Australia's largest **gaming** and entertainment groups with a strong and potentially growing footprint presence in Queensland.

The company started in June 2011 after **TABCORP Holdings** separated its operations into two distinct areas:

1. **Casino** business demerged and listed as ECHO Entertainment Group Limited and stock market listed as **ASX: EGP**
2. The existing **wagering** (betting), **media, gaming**, and **Keno** businesses were retained by TABCORP

Echo Entertainment Group emerged as an organisation with four business arms including, hospitality; dining; nightlife and gaming. This mix combines the strength of one of Australia's largest publicly listed gambling companies with the drive, innovation and flair customary of an entrepreneurial start-up.

Through strategic partnerships (recently announced as a Queensland Rugby League sponsor) and deft execution, Echo Entertainment Group continues to forge a new approach and redefine the concepts of leisure while delivering experience-based memories.

The business is underpinned by the relentless pursuit of guest happiness and exceeding expectations at every contact point and in each facility throughout Australia.

Current business holdings are:

1. **Treasury Casino & Hotel – Brisbane**
2. **Jupiters Hotel & Casino – Gold Coast**
3. **Gold Coast Convention & Entertainment Centre**
4. **The Star Casino & Hotel – Sydney**

The man with his hand firmly on the rudder in Queensland is **Geoff Hogg**, a 20 year veteran of casino operations at a senior executive level. His resume is impressive. Managing Director of Treasury Casino & Hotel Brisbane since May 2008, Managing Director of Jupiters Townsville Hotel & Casino since August 2012. In May 2014 Geoff was appointed Managing Director Queensland, responsible for Jupiters Hotel & Casino Gold Coast, Treasury Casino & Hotel Brisbane, and the Queen's Wharf Brisbane development bid.

Prior to commencing with Echo Entertainment Group, Geoff worked with the SKYCITY Entertainment Group for more than 13 years in a number of senior management roles across their New Zealand properties.

He is an active participant in the Queensland business community and in particular, the tourism and entertainment industry. He currently is a member of the

Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee and is the Treasurer of Casinos and Resorts Australasia.

Over a coffee in one of the many Brisbane-based 'Treasury' eateries, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) had the opportunity to 'catch-up' with Geoff and gain a better understanding about the future direction of the organisation.

We opened the conversation with the statement that the Echo Entertainment Group had made a significant impact on the east coast of Australia and probably more so in Queensland.

Geoff replied, 'We are about jobs for Queenslanders. Currently we employ more than 3,500 team members in Queensland who are from many different cultures and speak more than 25 languages between them. Echo prides itself as being recognised as the employer of choice for people in the gaming and entertainment industry in this state. We are committed to excellence at all levels and our strategy is focused on growth'.

QTIC sought more information regarding some of Echo Entertainment Group's strategic partners and the reason why particular collaborations have been pursued.

In response, 'We have many different partners, whether they be preferred suppliers, mutually beneficial alliances or philanthropic support networks. I will highlight two

of our most recent. As discussed earlier, our Treasury and Jupiters properties are proud sponsors of the XXXX Queensland Maroons in the State of Origin series for the next three years. We are extremely excited by this partnership and our goal is to back our home team and provide themed venues and incredible atmosphere for the people who will be unable to get tickets for what is certainly to be a sell-out. It won't be quite the same as being there, however it will certainly be the next best thing. Our Gold Coast and Brisbane properties are as maroon as anybody and we thought it made sense to cement our support. As an added incentive for the Maroons to win back the shield from NSW, for every point they score we are contributing \$5,000 to Ronald McDonald House South East Queensland. As proud major partners of both the Queensland Rugby League and RMH SEQ, it's great to come together to work on this important project for regional Queenslanders receiving lifesaving medical treatment in Brisbane.

Geoff went on further to say, 'The other partnership I wish to highlight is our new agreement with the Queensland Tourism Industry Council's Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions' Network, supported by Echo Entertainment Group. Echo has initially agreed to provide \$300,000 in funding to support the network and enable it to grow its activities through to June 2016.



*Geoff Hogg, Managing Director Queensland  
Echo Entertainment Group*

**'We see that the backing of Indigenous people in the tourism industry is critical to the competitive advantage of not just Queensland but Australia as well.'**

'We are in the entertainment and accommodation industry which is an important part of the tourism industry. Our business is wishing to add and encourage Indigenous people to join our workforce, create career pathways and ensure our guests both local and international gain a true Australian experience.'

As such, this agreement is a natural fit. Echo has huge, evolving plans in this space and look forward to this journey with QTIC. We want to learn from the combined expertise of the companies that make up the network and work together to increase Indigenous participation in the industry. These are exciting times,' he added.

We also spoke with **Penny Cleland** from Capta Group of Companies, foundation member of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council's Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions' Network, about Echo Entertainment Group Limited's support and participation moving forward.

Penny responded, 'I welcome the involvement of Echo Entertainment Group in the Champions' Network. The financial contribution will help keep alive the dream of a group of volunteer employers who are committed to the employment of Indigenous people in mainstream tourism roles. We all look forward to sharing our knowledge and experiences with Echo and believe this association will be of significant benefit to the tourism industry and more importantly the visitors to Queensland.'



# 'CHAMPIONS' NETWORK' – A LONG AND WINDING ROAD

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is the peak industry body for tourism in Queensland, and widely recognised as 'The Voice of Tourism.' The business is a not-for-profit, private sector, membership-based organisation representing the interests of Queensland's tourism and hospitality industry.

QTIC works in partnership with government agencies and industry bodies at a local, state and national level, to strengthen the representation of tourism in all relevant policy forums. The membership comprises more than 3,000 regional members (individual and corporate) combined with 13 Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO's) and 20 industry sector associations.

Strategy is focused on driving sustainable business and product development, stimulating business attraction and investment, developing workforce skills and supporting tourism employment and business.

The organisation's breadth of tourism involvement includes, however is not limited by:

1. **Advocacy and policy**
2. **Industry engagement and support**
3. **Industry development**

This case study highlights a specific project and journey from the Industry Development arm of the business, entitled, the **QTIC Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions Network**. The Networks' intention is to support tourism employers to employ and empower Indigenous employees. The Network is the first of its kind in Australia and seeks to increase operators' awareness of how to encourage and maintain increased participation of Indigenous Australians within the mainstream tourism industry.

In 2015, it boasts a group of more than 20 volunteer tourism operators that have exhibited best practice in the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees. Together with the Champions Network, the organisation has developed a range of resources for tourism

operators, presented at numerous industry conferences, facilitated industry forums, provided tourism industry career path information to Indigenous students and job seekers, and identified Indigenous employment placements throughout the industry.

While the achievements have been significant with 220 Indigenous employment places being created', support provided to five new Indigenous businesses and a myriad of resources being created, it has been 'a long and winding road.'

A conversation with **Daniel Gschwind**, Chief Executive, unveils the challenges and successes of a six year young quest for employing, retaining and creating career pathways for Australian Indigenous people.

## Why did the Queensland Tourism Industry Council decide to 'go down this track?'

Daniel responds, 'Almost ten years ago, together with a handful of tourism colleagues and businesses that employed Indigenous people, we concurred that there was not enough Indigenous people involved in mainstream tourism roles.'



QTIC Indigenous Employment Annual Forum

'Collectively we devised a four point action plan:

1. **The creation of a network to support the employers of Indigenous people;**
2. **The formation of a business audit group to assist Indigenous communities to identify tourism business opportunities;**
3. **Develop a number of resources to assist employers in employing, retaining and creating career pathways for Indigenous people;**
4. **The formulation of a strategy for employing Indigenous people.**

The QTIC Board saw the value that more Indigenous people involved in tourism would create a competitive advantage for Queensland and enhance the visitor experience.

The next stage was the recruitment of businesses that employ Indigenous people and to convince them that we wanted their time and expertise for free. Thankfully, the original rationale for the project resonated strongly with the industry and we were on our way with a small group of foundation members – I am pleased to say that the majority of those members are still with us.

The next few years were ones of consolidation, some growth and commitment to developing resources. The QTIC website now has a variety of resources that assist employers in the many facets of employing Indigenous people.

**As a business we have needed to come to terms with cultural diversity, equally so have our Indigenous employees, and ensure work ground rules are established right up front.**

'Not always does the western world align with the Indigenous world, so both have had to adapt. A simple example would be punctuality, the western world is extremely structured and Indigenous people are generally far more casual and relaxed about time. This can sometimes bring with it some challenges.



QTIC Indigenous Employment Annual Forum

Another thing I have found is that Indigenous people are inextricably connected to the land (birthplace) and community and this can sometimes influence judgement calls. On a few occasions we have lost good, solid employees, which on the surface is disappointing, however, understandable.

We have taken small steps in our journey, including embedding the role of an Indigenous school based trainee in our organisation.

**We have learnt so much over the years and have often leant on the QTIC Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions Network for advice and direction. This reinforces to me that, irrespective of your level of experience employing Indigenous staff, the**

**Champions Network provides a relevant and practical support network to all business - big or small.**

What advice would QTIC give to people thinking about employing Indigenous people?

Daniel emphatically replies, 'Go for it. It works for the Champions Network and it works for QTIC. There are plenty of people with the expertise to assist and plenty of resources available on our website **[www.qtic.com.au](http://www.qtic.com.au)**.'



*Rhonda Appo & Dr Jackie Huggins AM*



QUEENSLAND  
TOURISM INDUSTRY  
COUNCIL

*The Voice of Tourism*

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