



ADVANCED MANUFACTURING GROWTH CENTRE

MEMBER PROFILE



Native Secrets was founded in 2014 by Phil and Cherie Thompson. The Dubbo-based husband and wife team of Bidjara/Kara Kara and Wailwan descent, respectively, emphasises conserving generational knowledge throughout their range of skincare products, candles, artworks and textiles.

Soon after launching Native Secrets, the couple, which also run an Indigenous labour hire company MOB Personnel Solutions, were brought north by the Gladstone LNG construction boom.

Aboriginal employee turnover was high at the 1,500-people labour site the Thompsons helped staff. The problem was exclusion with only a handful of Indigenous labourers being employed and a shortage of ways to interact with their co-workers.

The solution? Cultivating bush tucker and medicine onsite. Thompson could use the knowledge passed down from his dad to bring aboriginal and white campers to the table. Along the way, he came up with a good recipe for anti-eczema soap.

“In my experience as a child growing up in a small outback town, the best conversations between white and Indigenous were around bush foods and bush medicines,” explains co-founder Phil Thompson.

“Hopefully that would stimulate conversations between the Indigenous staff and everybody else.”

“Miners would use medicinal plant in a soap product when they are showering and hopefully they would feel good about it... You know, start that conversation?”

The idea was a good one, but the construction boom did what booms do and ended, and the Thompsons brought Native Secrets back to Dubbo.

The company has grown steadily since and earned Cherie a finalist award in the Ausmumpreneur competition in 2017, as well as a contract with Qantas.

More Aboriginal people have shared their family and community stories around bush food and medicine with the Thompsons.

“Generally, they say to me that they have not had those conversations for years and years,” Thompson says proudly.

“It is almost reigniting those conversations about what all Aboriginal people did as kids and what their traditional knowledge was.”

The company has brought a positive environmental impact into the conversation, too.

As part of the Dubbo Project for mining rare metals and rare earths, Alkane Resources, an ASX-listed resource company, has committed to environmental offsets areas for nearly a third of the project's land. This includes thinning the surrounding white cypress pine population, which steals sunlight and water from native grasses: the habitat of the rare pink-tailed worm lizard.

The cypresses' leaf oil and wood oil can make excellent skincare ointments. After 18 months of R&D with Sydney-based contractor Essential Oils Australia on formulations, it is ready for the market, and to be a part of Native Secrets' ambitious growth plans.

The company aims to grow its brand through wholesalers and distributors. From there it will target the Chinese and US export markets.

In the background jobs for local indigenous people are being created.

“It is a model that can be used in any community around Australia, because generally what Indigenous groups generally have access to is a lot of land,” says Thompson.

“And people want Australian oils because we are clean, pure, and authentic.”

In this context, deciding to become an Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre member was a “no-brainer.”

“Being part of an organisation like AMGC benefits us, because we are trying to grow our brand. It was a no-brainer for us to be involved,” says Thompson, adding that a collaborative project focussed on other sustainability efforts would be desirable.

“We identified pretty quickly that they would be a good partner. We understand their close relationship with the University of NSW around waste product recycling and reusing our bio waste is of great interest. If that was to happen, that really completes our story.”





Being part of an organisation like AMGC benefits us, because we are trying to grow our brand. It was a no-brainer for us to be involved.

Phil Thompson, co-founder