



Great Southern Plantations

A leader in indigenous employment

Through its unique forestry project on the Tiwi Islands, north of Darwin, Great Southern Limited is making a positive difference to the long-term social and economic wellbeing of Tiwi Islanders.

Working in partnership with the Tiwi people, Great Southern is building a sustainable forestry industry on the Islands which is delivering real jobs, income and training.

The mutually-beneficial project supports the aspirations of the Tiwi community to become economically self-sufficient by developing a viable forestry industry on their land. Great Southern is committed to providing the necessary skills, knowledge, tools and infrastructure to achieve a longer term goal of a majority indigenous workforce on the Tiwi Islands.

DELIVERING JOBS

Great Southern is the largest private sector employer on the Tiwi Islands, providing non-subsidised, full time employment for 25 Islanders. Tiwi Islanders represent approximately 50 per cent of the project's full time workforce – a number set to increase with the creation of further new positions to be filled in early 2007 and beyond.

Forestry

Great Southern and the Tiwi Land Council currently have permission to develop 31,200 ha of the Tiwi Islands for the establishment of plantation forestry and have to date employed 11 Tiwi forestry works crew members to assist with this program of work. The crew members, who have completed, or are in the process of completing, a three-year accredited course of training in their field of work, continue to receive comprehensive on-the-job training in all aspects of forest growing, silviculture and management techniques.

Great Southern is poised to take on another 12 Tiwi forestry apprentices this year and will add to these numbers again in the near future as plantation maintenance and management requirements increase.

Land and Sea Management Rangers

Great Southern is committed to the conservation of the Tiwi Islands by providing 100% of the wages for 8 full time trainee rangers in land and marine natural resource management.

The 8 Tiwi rangers were employed in January 2006 as part of the Tiwi Land and Sea Management Program. Managed by the Tiwi Land Council, the program aims to provide long-term employment pathways for Tiwi participants across a range of conservation activities on the islands.

The rangers are assisted in their work by a Tiwi mentor with relevant experience in land management and training. Great Southern also provides the program with on-going administrative and field support where required.



The land management rangers are working towards completion of Certificates II and III in Conservation and Land Management, delivered over two years through a recognised training provider.

Environmental

The Tiwi people have a strong connection to their land and have expertise in the management of their natural resources. Great Southern has employed Tiwi Islanders in land evaluation and environment roles to inform the plantation land selection and assessment processes and to help ensure compliance with environmental regulations.

Cultural Liaison

To help support communication, ensure the project's activities are conducted in a way that is appropriate to Tiwi culture and tradition, and to provide support and mentoring to the project's Tiwi employees, Great Southern employs full time liaison officers.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Great Southern believes a well trained and educated workforce is essential for creating a successful operation and is committed to building on the existing skills of its Tiwi employees so they are fully equipped to carry out their jobs, and pursue other life opportunities.

As well as delivering job-specific training, the company is assisting its employees to develop basic numeracy and literacy skills. Great Southern also seeks to assist the broader Tiwi community in achieving a standard of education enjoyed elsewhere in Australia, by contributing funds to the planned development of the largely government funded Tiwi College. Forestry will be a major curriculum stream within the planned Tiwi College to produce 'job-ready' graduates with the skills required to run a successful forestry operation.

ALIGNING WITH INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT VISION

The significant, long-term work opportunities being created by the Tiwi Islands Forestry Project aligns with a broader government vision for indigenous employment set out in the National Indigenous Forestry Strategy (NIFS). The strategy identifies forestry as a highly suitable industry to help solve unemployment among indigenous Australians and provides a framework for industry, government and indigenous groups to collaborate on these types of ventures.

The strategy details successful case studies, including the partnership between Great Southern and the Tiwi Land Council, observing:

'...the Tiwi Forestry Project has created a sustainable and profitable business partnership model and is already a 'real' industry generating substantial revenue.'

'Resource development projects, such as the Tiwi Forestry

Project in the Northern Territory are excellent examples of what Indigenous peoples can achieve by collaborating with a company specialising in plantation management. Projects such as this lend themselves readily to communities with land and forest resources (e.g. northern Australia).'

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

The Tiwi Islands Forestry Project currently employs a full time group of approximately 52 employees with a substantial fly in, fly-out contract workforce staff of up to 300 in peak periods. This labour base will, over time, increasingly be supplemented by a more sustainable, locally-based indigenous workforce as skills are developed.

Great Southern's work with the Tiwi community is a long term project. The employment and training program on the Islands focuses on capacity building by improving the knowledge and skills base of traditional land owners to support the gradual transfer of operations to the complete control of the Tiwi people.

The partnership is highly regarded and is seen as a model with potential for replication in other indigenous communities where the development of a similar industry is viable.

Great Southern also employs a number of indigenous employees in its beef cattle operations, located in remote areas of Australia. The company is exploring other ways in which it can expand its indigenous employment program including working with its major contracting groups to boost sub-contracting opportunities.



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