

pakana services

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY



One of the pakana services team working on North Bruny Island.



2014

It took a two minute video shot by one of his younger employees at pakana services to really bring home to John Easton just how far the Aboriginal land management business has come since its launch in August 2013.

"A while back I modified my excavator so that I can push back the topsoil at tree planting sites and create a nice, clean bed in which to plant tube stock," says John.

"Eighty per cent of the seed bank sits in that top layer of soil, so by pushing it back you're taking out 80 per cent of the weed seeds that would normally compete with young, growing trees.

"When I saw this little video shot by one of our younger workers showing not just how to strip back the top layer but also explaining how it helps young trees grow, I thought to myself, haven't we come a long way in a short time.

"When he first started, this fellow had no experience planting trees, now he's making instructional videos displaying an in-depth knowledge of tree planting that can be used to train other personnel."

pakana services is a not-for-profit social enterprise developed to provide work and training for Aboriginal people in the natural resource management, agriculture and other industry sectors. The enterprise derives income from trade, but all profits are reinvested to assist the Aboriginal community.

Its primary focus is on-ground land management activities such as brush cutting, weed control, spraying, cutpaste and hand weeding, fencing and tree planting, but pakana services will consider any work opportunity and is happy to work with other service providers and be written into contracts.

John has instilled into the culture of pakana services that all activities must be completed in a safe, professional manner and to a high standard - this is critical to the future growth and survival of the business.

pakana services provides a wide range of hands-on training, much of which results in accreditation for the trainee. It gives the participants key skills and puts money in their pockets.

"Everyone in the team likes working outdoors, being connected to country and learning new skills," says John. "And having a reason to get out of bed in the morning and take on new challenges is good for everyone's health and well-being."

Hosted by NRM South until it becomes a fully independent, self-funding enterprise, pakana's first year of operation has had plenty of challenges, but also rewards.

"There's no doubt about it, to get to the stage we're at has been tough," says John, who has worked hard at making sure people in the industry know that pakana services is ready and open for business.

The hard work has paid off and they have attracted a broad range of clients. "We've done work for a number of agencies, councils and organisations who need this kind of work done," says John. "People have been really willing to give us a try, which is great."

pakana has 10 Tasmanian Aboriginal employees on its books with a core working crew of seven casual staff, some of whom have been with the business since it started.

Being part of NRM South until the business can stand alone has allowed John to tap into resources often beyond the reach of new businesses.

"You can't put a dollar value on having access to help from the team at NRM South," he says. "It's just been so important to be able to tap into knowledge about natural resource management and the practical business management expertise needed by any organisation to be successful."

John hopes he'll eventually have 12 to 15 crew on the books so he can run two teams throughout the week. "Everyone loves an opportunity to show off their abilities, and I've instilled in the team the idea that we are only ever as good as our last job."