



Wandigalla

About this Case Study

This Case Study looks at the community of Wandigalla, its enterprises, and its energy services history. Wandigalla residents are actively pursuing their livelihood goals through the cattle industry, a CDEP program and a small art enterprise. The provision of reliable 24 hour power through the Bushlight system has made it easier to pursue these developments.

About the Community

Wandigalla is a small outstation 100kms southeast of Borroloola on the Robinson River in the gulf country of the Northern Territory. Wandigalla is the word for 'waterhole' in the local Garrawa language. The traditional owner and community leader of Wandigalla is Tony Jack who lives in this two-house community with his family.

The older of the houses was built in 1998. Prior to this residents camped in a bough shelter and then lived in the shed which was built in 1992. Just prior to the installation of the Bushlight system in June 2007 a duplex house was built, providing another dwelling for the Jack family to inhabit.

Tony Jack and his family settled in Wandigalla on a permanent basis in 1992. In part this decision was made in order to get away from the 'humbug' and overcrowding in the nearby community of Robinson River where Tony grew up.



Wandigalla residents looking at Bushlight resources during Community Energy Planning

Community Aspirations

Part of Bushlight's approach to Community Energy Planning is to facilitate a discussion with residents

installed in 2003 diesel usage dropped by about one tenth. However, the solar system was such that it only provided power during the daylight hours and the generator was still required at night time.



The upgraded Bushlight system with addition panels at Wandigalla

Bushlight System Upgrade

The Bushlight system at Wandigalla was commissioned in June 2007. At this stage it provided power only to the newly built duplex house. Because the older house already had access to some solar power from the existing system, the resource agency Mungoorbada preferred at this stage to retain the existing system.

For a period of 15 months the duplex house was enjoyed 24 hour power courtesy of the Bushlight system, while the older house was still reliant on the generator at night. However, during this time it was agreed that all the houses at Wandigalla should be powered by the Bushlight system. In September 2008, the Bushlight system was upgraded, with additional solar panels and batteries to ensure enough power was available for all the day to day needs of all households in the community.

Unfortunately, when the contractors were installing equipment as part of the upgrade a component of the EMU failed, and needed to be replaced. Short of leaving Tony's house with no power, the only alternative was to connect the system in such a way that there was effectively no energy budget, and thus limitless power. This remained the case until the replacement part could be installed. It may be expected that the sudden implementation of energy budgets would mean that residents might run out of power as they would not be used to being

restricted in this way. However, it seems that this was not the case and that power use was not excessive and remained within budget with no problems.

Community Outcomes

Wandigalla is a very active community. The gulf region is well known for its cattle industry and this is the main occupation at Wandigalla too. The cattle enterprise was established here in 2000 with the purchase of 30 cows. Wandigalla currently has 300 head of cattle, 20 working horses, and 25 breeding horses. With the closure of the meat works in Katherine some time ago, Northern Territory cattle workers are left with no local options for processing the animals. Tony sends his cattle to slaughter either by truck to Townsville, or as live export by boat from Darwin to the Asian markets.

In addition to working with his own cattle, Tony and other family members pick up work on surrounding cattle stations and are especially busy during the mustering season.

Aside from the cattle work, several Wandigalla residents supplement their income from CDEP through art sales. They sell their art in numerous outlets including through the local art centre in Borroloola and through an art gallery in Alice Springs. To pass his skills on to the next generation Tony has been teaching his kids how to paint some of the local cultural stories since they were in primary school, with promising results. Tony's son Jake Jack was recently awarded first prize for his age group in a recent competition run through Tennant Creek's art & culture centre.

As identified during Community Energy Planning Wandigalla residents have been planning to establish a road-side shop just outside the community on the Savannah Way. The Savannah Way is a collection of linked outback roads that provide a route for tourists to travel from Cairns in Queensland all the way to Broome in Western Australia. This road was officially opened two years ago heralding an increase in tourist traffic just a few hundred meters from Wandigalla. Many tourists stop and camp on the banks of the Robinson River next to the community. While most of the interaction with tourists travelling by has been positive Tony has witnessed vehicles spreading out along the river and leaving rubbish around.

To address this issue Wandigalla recently secured funding from the Northern Territory



During Community Energy Planning Wandigalla residents and Bushlight staff discuss the best place for the solar array to go

In September 2008 Tony told Bushlight that many family members connected to Wandigalla work in the mining industry just over the border in Queensland and that when they come to visit they are really impressed with the solar system and take photos and want to find out all about it. Tony is happy with the Bushlight system and with the community engagement approach underpinning the project “I think it’s been great the service from Bushlight”.

Tourist Commission to establish a rest area and campground at the river to contain the visitors and their impact on the country.

In addition, since the closure of nearby Hell’s Gate & Wollgorang Roadhousees, there is now a 380kms stretch from Doomadgee to Borroloola without fuel. Tourists have often had to seek assistance from Wandigalla through acquiring fuel or tyre repairs. In September 2008, Tony was planning to maximise the opportunities related to tourism by establishing a campground and setting up a small fuel stop that includes a tyre repair service, from which local art could also be sold to tourists.

Being such an active person, Tony Jack plays several important leadership roles in the local area. He is currently Chair of Mungoorbarda Aboriginal Corporation and has been nominated to stand as Chair of the Southwest Gulf Ward of the new Shire Council.



The cattle yards at the community



Wandigalla’s pet cockatoo ‘Limp Biscuit’ has been part of the family for two years