

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Planted outback Palms - DNA research correlates with ancient indigenous myth

New research published today in *Nature* suggests an Aboriginal myth about the origin of a rare palm tree dates back between 7,000 and 30,000 years.

The authors include a unique blending of ecology (Professor David Bowman, University of Tasmania), molecular science (Dr Toshiaki Kondo, Hiroshima University, Japan) and anthropology (Jason Gibson, Museum Victoria).

Their work builds on published research by a Japanese and Australian team that analysed the DNA analysis of cabbage palms throughout Australia, including the outback's only palm tree, *Livistona mariae* that included both Professor Bowman and Dr Kondo.

This earlier research had used molecular analyses to show that the divergence of these species occurred between seven and 30,000 years ago.

"Given these dates overlap with human occupancy, we concluded it is plausible that the seeds were deliberately planted," Professor Bowman said.

A recent translation of the pioneering German anthropologist and missionary Carl Strehlow, brought to light a myth that backs up the theory.

Strehlow worked with the indigenous people whose country surrounds Palm Valley in the late 19th and early 20th century.

In 1984 Strehlow recorded revealed an ancient Aboriginal myth that the palm seeds were brought to central Australia.

He wrote: ...There are beautiful 40 to 50 feet high palms here surrounded by gumtrees and acacias and the herbs and flowers at their base release a sharp smell. The whole scenery reminds of a botanical garden.

Palm-Creek is said to be the only place in Australia where this palm grows naturally/wild. How this palm got into the interior of Australia has not been established yet by science.

Strehlow recorded that according to traditional local beliefs, *the gods from the high north brought the seeds to that place [Palm Valley] a long time ago.*

“The concordance of the findings of a scientific study and an ancient myth is a striking example of how traditional ecological knowledge can inform and enhance scientific research,” Professor Bowman said.

“It suggests that Aboriginal oral traditions may have endured for up to 30,000 years, and lends further weight to the idea that some Aboriginal myths pertaining to gigantic animals may be authentic records of extinct megafauna.”

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