

### Wild desert tobacco : Pituri or Mingkulpa

- Historically and still today, Aboriginal people from desert regions use wild tobacco plants that are known by different names including **Pituri** and **Mingkulpa**.
- Pituri** is a natural plant that grows from Queensland right across the desert to Western Australia. In Central Australia the leaves from this plant are used for chewing.
- The scientific name of the family of **Pituri** plants is *Nicotiana spp.* Scientific names for the different types of pituri that are most popular in Central Australia are *N. ingulba*, *N. excelsior* and *N. gossei*.
- The leaves and stems from the **pituri** bush are dried and then mixed with burnt ash from specific trees. The mix is then chewed and held in the mouth for long periods of time.
- Pituri** is shared among the group and traded widely.
- Because **pituri** isn't burnt it doesn't contain all the poisonous chemicals that cigarettes do, but it still has high levels of nicotine that make it addictive and it may also cause health problems.



Pituri plant growing wild in the desert  
(*N. goodspeedii*)



Close up of pituri plant  
(*N. gossei*)

## *Tobacco from Indonesia (Macassans)*

- On the northern shores of Australia, visitors from Indonesia first introduced the practice of smoking native tobacco to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Fishermen from Macassar in Indonesia, known across northern Australia as **Macassans**, sailed to Australia in search of pearls and trepang (sea cucumbers).
- The **Macassans** acknowledged the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's ownership of their land and seas, and exchanged tobacco, pipes and other valued goods in exchange for the right to fish in their waters.
- The **Macassans** smoked tobacco through a long-stemmed pipe made from a crab claw, hollow root or a reed.
- This type of smoking became part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and ceremonial life and is still practiced today in some places.
- Tobacco from the **Macassans** also doesn't contain the poisonous chemicals that are in cigarettes, but it still has high levels of nicotine that make it addictive and may also cause health problems.



## Tobacco from Europeans

- When Europeans arrived in Australia in 1788, they introduced tobacco to many Aboriginal people. They gave it as a gesture of goodwill.
- In the decades that followed, Aboriginal people were moved from traditional lands to church, government or private missions. Tobacco was exchanged for work and to reward good behaviour.
- Many Aboriginal people worked in the cattle industry and defence forces where they were paid with rations of tobacco and food instead of money.
- Tobacco was often used to influence people to give up traditional lifestyles and to attend church. People would travel long distances to access tobacco, bringing many people to missionary settlements. It was a very popular item to sell and trade.
- Over the following years, tobacco use spread more with Aboriginal people paid in tobacco rations for services by explorers, missionaries, pastoralists, cattle farmers, miners, fishermen and anthropologists.
- Collectors, anthropologists and researchers also traded tobacco for artifacts, ceremonial objects, local language, local knowledge, oral history and cultural heritage.
- Payment in tobacco rations caused addiction and many health problems for Aboriginal people. Although the practice did slow down from the 1940s, it did not stop completely on cattle stations until the late 1960s.

