

# EL QUESTRO HOMESTEAD

*Business with purpose*

## Conserving Country and culture in the Kimberley

The Kimberley is one of Australia's – and the world's – last true wilderness areas: remote, rugged and much of it all but inaccessible. At its heart, El Questro Wilderness Park encompasses ancient ranges and deep, shady gorges, mighty rivers and arid grassy plains, lush rainforest, hot thermal springs and cool waterfalls.

It's a dramatic landscape in which the bones of the landscape are laid bare: a timeless land rich in both Indigenous and European culture.

“Together with the Traditional Owners of the land on which El Questro sits – the Balangarra people in the north and the Nyaliga in the south – we see ourselves as custodians of this precious swathe of truly wild Country. We want to preserve it for the future and share its wonders with our guests today, creating opportunities for all to discover and learn,” said Grant Wilckens, Chief Executive Officer of the G'day Group, the Custodian of the El Questro property and lodge.

In August, 2022 the G'day Group has committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 40 per cent by 2030 on a path to becoming a carbon neutral business by 2050.

“We have developed an Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Strategy for FY22-27 that will be progressively rolled out across the business. In consultation with leading sustainability experts, we've completed initial modelling to establish a baseline of our emissions, resource usage and the scale of our business to enable us to track our progress,” explained Grant Wilckens.

The company is using the internationally-recognised Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB) to guide its initial, comprehensive, five-year action plan that focuses on four areas: connection to nature; resilient and pristine environments; purposeful work; and vibrant community and culture.

“In 2023, the GRESB is conducting a comprehensive sustainability audit of the business for the first time. Our ESG progress will be detailed in an annual report to the GRESB, which will be published globally and available to compare against similar companies.”



## Indigenous engagement

El Questro operates on Crown land under a pastoral lease and special tourism leases. Its 700,000-acres are under Native Title to two regional Aboriginal groups, physically divided by the Gibb River Road. The Balangarra people obtained Native Title recognition in 2014 and are the traditional owners of the northern parts of the property. The Nyaliga people of the WANJINA-WUNGGURR Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) are determined for the southern section of El Questro.

El Questro management has engaged with both native title groups on both heritage and land use focusing on several key areas for a shared future.

In November, 2022, a landmark Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) was reached between the WAC and the Western Australian Government, which included a 99-year lease for G'Day Group to conduct tourism activities over the whole of the former pastoral lease area.



The agreement will see the G'day Group purchase carbon credits from WAC that will enable the property to operate with net zero emissions. It will also enable the company to roll out its ESG priorities, including improved waste water and land management practices.

The ILUA also guarantees ongoing employment and training for local Indigenous youth.

“Providing opportunities for Indigenous youth is part of the El Questro vision, and the property hosts a number of annual camps to support young Indigenous people from the region coming together to share culture and learning,” said Grant Wilckens.

An annual hosted camp for the Nyaliga people brings more than 200 Traditional Owners from the Top End together to celebrate and learn about each other’s art and culture traditions. There are also camps dedicated to developing employment prospects for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men; and leadership workshops for young Indigenous women.

### Taking responsibility for conservation

El Questro Homestead is the luxury base from which guests can explore the property and beyond by four-wheel-drive, helicopter, horseback, boat or on foot, and learn about the region’s abundant wildlife and endemic flora.

The Savannah Guides network of professional tour guides and tourism operators – of which El Questro is a member - fosters ecologically sensitive interpretive tourism. Members of the organisation must demonstrate a commitment to conservation values and meet strict standards of operation.

Savannah Guides are dedicated to passing on their extensive knowledge of the Kimberley to visitors. El Questro’s rangers customise itineraries for guests that may incorporate a guided private cruise along the three-kilometre-long Chamberlain Gorge, watching for wildlife such as rock wallabies, Johnston crocodiles and archer fish; or an early morning bird-watching excursion spotting some of the hundred bird species on the property, such as the resident pair of dancing brolgas or the endangered Gouldian finch.

Guests can enjoy a morning learning about bush culture, including traditional remedies, medicines and sustenance used by Aboriginal peoples over millennia; and hearing about Aboriginal and European history in the Kimberley.

While the guest experience is key, El Questro’s managers recognise that they have a responsibility for the stewardship of the land and the conservation of Indigenous heritage.

“Our ESG details the implementation of a climate risk mitigation plan across our sensitive assets, including increasing net vegetation levels,” said Mr Wilckens.

“We work with the local Fire and Emergency Services, the Kimberley Land Council, Traditional Owners and neighbouring pastoral properties to develop and implement responsible fire management plans each year. Local Aboriginal corporations are involved and historic cultural burning practices are implemented.

“Through planned, green season preventative burning, we can mitigate the frequency and intensity of wildfires and better preserve the habitat and food sources for many species. The program also provides opportunities for young Indigenous people to connect with Country, and to learn cultural and land management traditions specific to their area,” explained Grant Wilckens.

“We also take responsibility for weed control on the lease. Our Environment Manager works closely with Department of Primary Industries and Traditional Owner ranger groups as well as our own staff volunteers on the decade-long quest to remove ‘Gamba Grass’.”



## Partnering with science

“The sheer size and diversity of El Questro means there is much to be learned about the incredible diversity of geology, flora and fauna on the property.

El Questro has supported and provided in-kind sponsorship for researchers and scientists from around the world, including studies on a number of endemic and endangered species such as the brilliantly-coloured Gouldian finch – an important indicator species - which is now flourishing on the property, thanks in part to the installation of more than 50 nesting boxes and a permanent bird soak which is artificially fed in the dry season to prolong the supply of water to native birds.

“Through gaining knowledge from visiting scientists and our other partnerships, as well as our own initiatives, we aim to provide holistic care for the property and its wildlife and to create more opportunities for learning,” said Grant Wilckens.

## Waste management

El Questro supports and works with the Revive recycling business venture which employs local Indigenous people. In addition to aluminium cans and plastic bottles, obsolete lodge items such as textiles, electronics, hard plastics and furniture are also recycled at Revive, and often repurposed or turned into artworks.

“We are proud co-custodians of this unique and precious wilderness retreat and are committed to its preservation, educating others about its cultural importance, and proudly sharing its beauty with our guests,” said Grant Wilckens.

“With an increasing focus on sustainability across our business, we aim to tread lightly and minimise our environmental footprint, while allowing our guests to deepen their own understanding of – and connection to – nature in one of Australia’s most remarkable and unique wilderness destinations.

“As a business, we also take pride in bringing El Questro back into Australian hands after more than a decade of foreign ownership.”

### Other sustainability initiatives (Our mandates):

- Environmentally compliant sewage treatment plants are in operation.
- Bio-digestors onsite break down food waste and the resultant water is used for irrigation.
- All solid waste is systematically analysed for recycling and repurposing and, where appropriate, sent to Revive.
- All waste oils are sent off-site for recycling. Hazardous goods such as batteries and chemicals are disposed of or recycled at local shire facilities. Building materials and white goods are recycled and often repurposed.
- Guests are provided with reusable water bottles and single-use plastic water bottle use is minimal. Plastic straws have been eliminated. Reusable “keep cups” are used for coffee and other hot drinks.
- El Questro has committed to eliminating single-use plastics in its catering.
- Fishing tours observe best practice sustainable methods. Catch and release is customary even for permitted keep catches.
- Refillable vessels are used for guest bathroom amenities.
- Support of local schools and youth sporting groups which include Indigenous students. Sponsorship of major fundraising prizes for Indigenous sporting teams.
- Career open days for local students are held on site several times annually, where the students spend four days on the property and shadow El Questro staff as they work across a variety of hospitality and tourism-related roles.