

## **MEDIA Release**

### **SUNFLOWER AND SONG - HARVEST CELEBRATION AT THE BOTANIC GARDENS**

A glorious field of sunflowers is in full bloom right now at the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens. The brainchild of Wollongong artists Lucas Ihlein and Kim Williams and Marian farmer Simon Mattsson, this cheerful crop - nicknamed "The Beacon" - is both a stunning work of Land Art and a demonstration of farming innovation in the Mackay region.

This has been a hard year for agriculture in Australia. Widespread drought has increased pressure on farmers who are striving to be environmentally friendly and stay profitable. With increasing weather uncertainty due to climate change, it's more important than ever for farming innovations to be shared and celebrated with the whole community.

On the 23rd November, the artists and farmers will host *Sunflower and Song* - a community celebration where the sunflowers will be harvested alongside music, dance, and good food.

The event starts at 6pm and features the Diranga Gangali Aboriginal Dancers, the Sakwolo Islander Dancers, Woodbridge, and Zenith Rhythms. Farmer Simon Mattsson will discuss soil health, and the artists will screen a documentary about *Sunset Symphony in the Sunflowers*, an event which was launched with great success last year at the Mattsson family farm. Artist Lucas Ihlein says:

*Staging events like Sunset Symphony in the Sunflowers, and now Sunflower and Song at the Botanic Gardens, is a way to bring farmers and the wider public together, raising awareness of exciting new ecological farming methods being developed within the Queensland sugarcane industry.*

*Sunflower and Song* is a family night out and a chance to take some fabulous selfies with sunflowers. It's also your opportunity to learn about the innovations happening in the sugarcane industry here in the Pioneer Valley. Hidden among the sunflowers is a crop of sugarcane, and the two species have been planted together to improve the soil and create better environmental outcomes. Farmer Simon Mattsson says:

*Sugarcane and sunflowers help each other by supporting a wide variety of soil biology, which means better outcomes for both. If both species grow healthier then there is less need for the farmer to use chemicals to fix problems.*

Community and environment groups associated with *Sunflower and Song* include Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens (MRBG), Mackay & District Australian South Sea Islander Association (MADASSIA), Yuwibara descendants and traditional custodians, Central Queensland Soil Health Systems, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Pioneer Catchments and Landcare, Artspace Mackay, Australian Farmers for Climate Action, Mackay Conservation Group, Reef Catchments, and University of Wollongong. The contribution of these organisations to the *Sunflower and Song* harvest event, which is a part of the *Watershed Land Art Project*, shows the level of co-operation between many local organisations who are working towards a healthier environment.

Meanwhile, Ihlein and Williams are presenting a major exhibition at Artspace Mackay called *Sugar vs the Reef?* On show are botanical drawings, maps and diagrams, videos and photographs of the crops growing at the Botanic Gardens. The exhibition continues until 27 January 2019.

**More information can be found at the Watershed Facebook and Instagram pages as well as the blog at [www.watershed.land](http://www.watershed.land)**

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***Sunflower and Song* event details:**

**WHERE:** Meadowlands Amphitheatre, Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens

**WHEN:** Friday 23 November 2018 from 6pm-9:30pm

**FOOD:** Bring your own picnic, and food trucks are available

**TICKETS:** available through the Watershed Mackay Facebook page or at the project website: [www.watershedmackay.land](http://www.watershedmackay.land)