

---

**Title**

Mr

**First name**

Ian

**Last name**

Frape

---

**Submission details**

---

**I am making this submission as**

Other

**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

**Consent to make submission public**

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

---

**Share your experience or tell your story**

---

**Your story**

As a Wiradjuri man living on Gundungurra and Darug Country I acknowledge the Gungungurra and Darug peoples as the traditional owners and eternal custodians of these lands and give respect to the Spirits of these lands ,the Elders past, present and future.

I am an Aboriginal teacher, former Rural Fire Service Crew Leader and post graduate student at UTS studying the area of informal training of RFS volunteers.

In 2013 I lost my home in the Yellow Rock/Winmalee wildfire and have subsequently had to rebuild my family home as an owner/builder.

Firstly, in 1994 in collaboration with a colleague and fellow Science teacher at Shalvey High School David Little we began the development of a unit of work for high school students to develop their understanding of the science of Bushfire.

This project had the support and collaboration of the Western Sydney Science Teachers Association and went on to gain the support of Phil Koperberg in his role as Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, CSIRO, the then NSW

Board of Studies, Curriculum Branch of the Department of Education and senior staff of the Department of Education.

We worked on the project in our own time over a number of years, working within Bushfire Services and often visiting CSIRO in Canberra as well as a number of Government Departments particularly at the state level. David began to progressively introduce units of work into his classroom teaching and practical work with the support of the Principal and the Department.

The initial program was presented at the National science Teacher's Conference using material across the curriculum as well as visual material and the CSIRO's Sirofire bushfire prediction technology. The presentation and display proved exceedingly popular with teachers particularly from other states asking if we intended to promote it across the country.

The program ranged from Aboriginal fire use and management of Country through to the use of mathematics in the calculation of probability and rates of fire spread, the influences of topography and role of lightning as a cause of wildfire.

The topic of 'Bushfire' proved not only to have applications in Science at Stage 4 level but across all curriculum stages.

Our incentive for developing the program was the fact that bushfire could, as we have recently witnessed, impact anyone anywhere on the Australian mainland and in Tasmania. Our presumption at that stage has proven to be well founded. We also felt that all students and citizens needed this knowledge to be able to understand the nature of the Australian environment.

As time went on David and I found ourselves progressively left out of negotiations and consultations as others with their own interests and agenda's took over the development which was subsumed into the work of the Science Syllabus Committee.

In many ways we were pleased to see the topic of 'Bushfire' incorporated into the Support Document for the 1999 Science Syllabus as a 10 week unit.

Although not entirely happy with the structure and practical applications within the unit we realised that teachers always exercise a degree of originality and flexibility in how they teach.

It was disappointing that within a few short years the Unit of work disappeared from the Science Syllabus and only briefly appears in the HSIE curriculum.

I have subsequently met people who were students at the time and studied that particular unit of work who have indicate to me how valuable it was. It drew all learning together to give them a more comprehensive understanding of the application of science and mathematics in their lives.

Secondly, with regard to traditional burning practice often referred to as 'firestick'. As a firefighter I always believed that preparation for wildfire within our environment was essential but that it should be based on community understanding of purpose and cooperation. In designing 'hazard reductions' this has always been a concern, people should understand the environment, the cyclic nature of the seasons and their situation. This was always understood by our 'old people' who lived in harmony with Country and had a deep knowledge of ecologies, vegetation, landscape and communities.

In the Blue Mountains home of the Gundungurra and Darug peoples there is knowledge and experience of cultural burning and a desire for more experience and practice. However, it is no longer the deep and harmonious knowledge of the past. The knowledge is having to be rebuilt and needs to be combined with the scientific knowledge of wildfire to reestablish a foundation knowledge base on which a local landscape management programs can evolve.

The emphasis here is on the local.

In instructing a group of Australian Army Engineers in the organisation and planning of hazard reductions I found that they were amazed to realise that there was a profound difference in the vegetation communities on east facing slopes and those on western facing slopes and each had different burning characteristics that were greatly influenced by the time of day and weather conditions. They could however clearly see the luxuriant growth of wet areas along creek lines etc., which could be used for containment.

Aboriginal fire management is not an instant answer. What applies in Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia the lands of 'cool burning' is not necessarily applicable in a region such as the Blue Mountains.

Where these practises have occurred over hundreds or thousands of years guided by Elders and Ancestors there is a well established pattern and a resultant landscape and ecology.

In cases where this practise has not been conducted it will take considerable time and commitment to reestablish systems based on local Aboriginal knowledge combined with scientific knowledge. A collaboration between local traditional owners, scientists and citizens to develop a consistent pattern of land management.

The environment and landscape we have now is not the landscape of pre colonisation any number of weeds have

been introduced, numerous mammals responsible for forest floor management have become extinct or very rare contributing to the intensity and uncontrollable nature of wildfire.  
Fire has been inappropriately applied or natural fire suppressed.  
Just the other night as I drove in my driveway I saw for the first time in many years a bandicoot disappearing under a neighbours hedge. Once good 'tucker' but now a rare and valued contributor to the management of our local dry sclerophyll forest.  
We need local plans for land management.  
My University work with firefighters and experience with high school students has shown me that there is a yearning need to develop a deep knowledge of fire in this changing landscape through education.  
Until we as a Nation develop a relationship with Country we will struggle to survive.  
Yindyamangidyal.

## **Terms of Reference (optional)**

---

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

## **Supporting documents or images**

---