

Dave Owens APM and Professor Mary O’Kane AC
NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry
GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

Via email: inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr David Owens APM and Professor Mary O’Kane AC,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry.

The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation is committed to working with Aboriginal communities, government and other partners to improve our relationships with Country, and develop sustainable social, cultural and economic outcomes for Indigenous people and the wider community.

Throughout this submission the terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aboriginal’ are used in relation to the First Peoples’ of the Australian continent.

About Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation (Attachment 1)

The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation (Firesticks Alliance) provides leadership, advocacy and action to protect, conserve and enhance cultural and natural values of people and Country through cultural fire and land management practices. Firesticks values and respects country, local knowledge, protocols of Elders and ancestors and are committed to providing a supportive Indigenous led network that fosters a community of practice to maintain and share Cultural fire knowledge and practice on Country.

Firesticks Alliance partners with diverse communities, landholders, agencies and institutions across the continent. Together we are identifying pathways to apply cultural fire to landscapes, to help heal and care for Country and empowering communities through mentorship and shared understandings that are improving fire management in Australia.

Firesticks is achieving this through the following processes:

AIR – Making Space: Building understanding and recognition; sharing stories and information; connecting communities with each other; driving change.

HEAT – Facilitating Action: Delivering on ground planning; training through workshops; managing Country by burning; revitalising Country and knowledge by building community networks and recording cultural knowledge.

FUEL – Reading Country: To support learning by observation, mentoring and sharing of knowledge on Country.

Firesticks Alliance seeks to embed into the Australian consciousness, cultural awareness and understanding of the knowledge and practice of fire held by Australia’s first peoples and subsequently the importance of cultural fire management to the Australian environment and economy.

Firesticks Alliance supports Indigenous communities and their partners in building skills and knowledge of cultural burning to increase its implementation across the landscape by Indigenous fire knowledge holders in contemporary fire management contexts. In this way, capacity is enabled and increased locally for Indigenous people to share knowledge and provide ongoing guidance with their local partners, agencies and land managers. Firesticks Alliance is an Indigenous organisation with a network of cultural fire knowledge holders and practitioners that together form a community of practice. Together with Indigenous communities, Firesticks Alliance Directors and members we are custodians of traditional knowledge of Country and the practice and use of fire to maintain healthy landscapes.

Introductory Comments

The impacts of the 2019-20 catastrophic bushfire season strengthened growing calls to recognise and enable Indigenous led knowledge and practice in contemporary land and fire management. This can be supported through empowerment of Indigenous led organisations along with investment, recognition and respect for cultural authority and protocols within Indigenous led methodologies, as demonstrated by the Firesticks approach. Firesticks Alliance wrote to the Prime Minister and relevant Ministers of the Commonwealth Government on the 31 January 2020 about “The Importance of Cultural Burning to protect and enhance Country while reducing Fuel Loads and improving Bushfire Risk Management in Australia” and to seek support for our programs (Attachment 2a and 2b). In addition, Firesticks has prepared a National “Firesticks Mentoring and Training Program Investment Proposal” (Attachment 3)

The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation (Firesticks) community of practice has a wealth of knowledge and detailed contributions that it can make relating to many components of this NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry. At this stage, due to growing demands on our very limited resourcing Firesticks is only able to provide initial responses. However, Firesticks is very interested in contributing more in-depth advice to this NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry if adequately resourced and supported to do so.

For example, I was appointed to the Expert Advisory Panel advising CSIRO on the Climate and Disaster Resilience report to COAG. The Expert Advisory Panel (EAP) Chaired by Australia’s Chief Scientist Dr Alan Finkel is working in close partnership with CSIRO to provide a report on practical measures for Australian governments to improve Australia’s climate and disaster resilience. Another example of the Firesticks Alliance Community of Practice’s ability to facilitate these important discussions, can be found in the Summary Report (Attachment 4) on Fire Circle on Empowering Indigenous leadership, cultural fire and land management practices, and First Nations people and businesses impacted by bushfires.

I give thanks to some key colleagues that directly contributed to this submission: Vanessa Cavanagh (PhD Candidate), Dr Katharine Haynes, Michelle McKemey (PhD Candidate), Dr Peta Standley, Victor Steffensen and the Firesticks Alliance Board and team. Additionally, we suggest that in some cases information required to demonstrate the benefits of Cultural Fire is yet to be adequately researched or evidenced. Thus, there is an opportunity to identify some key areas for future research that will contribute significant gains to this field of knowledge.

Comments are provided below in response to NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry. We are still consulting our partners on issues and recommendations and welcome the opportunity to provide further comment to this inquiry.

If you have any questions regarding this submission, please get in contact.

Oliver Costello

Chief Executive Officer

Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation



www.firesticks.org.au

Date: 22 May 2020

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Since European colonisation land and fire management regimes have increased the risk and severity of bushfires. European colonisation has restricted Aboriginal land and fire management practices (Eriksen and Hankins 2014; Kerr 2019). Current land management trends are continuing to degrade ecosystems and reduce landscape resilience to bushfires, including inappropriate fire and land management regimes. Climate change is also increasing risk, impacts and limiting mitigation and response to bushfire (Robinson *et al.* 2016). The increasing focus and dependence on fire response capabilities without appropriate fire and land management and landscape planning regimes is of great concern.

Fire has greatly influenced the way Indigenous peoples live on, with and through their land for millennia, and underpins advocacy to sustain, rejuvenate and support 'cultural burning' as a more holistic approach to fire and land management practices. Genuine Cultural Fire Management is an adaptive management technique developed and practiced over thousands of years by our Aboriginal ancestors. It is a practice which continues today in many parts of Australia. This knowledge and practice has shaped ecosystems and landscapes through reciprocal resource and kinship relationships. These cultural practices must be led by knowledge holders with appropriate Cultural authority for that place to maintain their authenticity and cultural integrity.

These practices respond to cultural values and indicators of the Country types (cultural ecosystems). Cultural values and indicators are reflective of the cultural and natural items, values and processes of a cultural group's relationships to a particular Country. These indicators are specific to ecosystems, places, species, vegetation, soils, climate and weather

conditions. They relate to their identity, knowledge, practices, heritage, resources, society, environment, economy and spiritual beliefs. Cultural fire practices incorporate an interconnected web of these systems. Cultural fire management is a dynamic practice that continues today, and could be continued or reestablished in many areas to achieve the many benefits that can result from these practices.

In the last decade, a grass roots revival of cultural burning movement has grown, as has public awareness of cultural fire management, with 70 case studies of cultural burning in southeast Australia being documented through academic literature or the media. However, cultural burning is applied over less than 1% of the land area of Australia's southeastern states and territory, so could be considered an underutilized practice. Considering the high return on investment from Indigenous NRM elsewhere (Social Ventures Australia 2016), expanding cultural burning and Indigenous land management to appropriate areas at the landscape scale should be considered a priority for investment in southeast Australia (McKemey et al. in prep.) This will increase ecosystem and community resilience to impacts of wildfires, climatic changes and many other threats and pressures in our evolving systems.

The benefits of Indigenous cultural fire management for ecosystems have been well demonstrated through a number of studies. The restoration, regeneration and healing of plants, animals and ecosystems for the maintenance of 'healthy Country' is a primary aim of cultural burning (Darug Ngurra et al. 2019; Eriksen and Hankins 2014; Kerr 2019; Lehman 2001; Maclean et al. 2018; McKemey and Patterson 2019; Robinson et al. 2016). Cultural burning has been used for the conservation of threatened species, habitats and wetlands of international importance (Maclean et al. 2018; McKemey et al. in prep. ; Robertson 2019; Weir and Freeman 2019). Furthermore, cultural burning can be used in the management of key threats such as weeds, dieback and bushfires (Maclean et al. 2018; Robertson 2019). Cultural burning has also been used for the protection of culturally significant animals and heritage (McKemey et al. 2019). Furthermore, cultural burning can have widespread economic, social, cultural, wellbeing and political benefits. McKemey et al. (in prep.) documented 46 of these benefits in their review of contemporary Aboriginal cultural fire management in southeast Australia.

Genuine Cultural fire management will protect, maintain, heal and enhance ecosystems and cultural values as they have done for thousands of years, while also reducing fuel loads that help to mitigate inappropriate impacts of bushfire in multiple ways. Firstly, all burning reduces fuel loads during the burning process. Cultural burning often involves more patchy, frequent and low intensity fire regimes which may not reduce as much fuel during each fire burn event compared to some hazard reduction, backburning or bushfires. However, over time, the cumulative effect of Cultural burning can lead to longer-term fuel reduction and more resilient ecosystems and communities. Cultural burning may also have less long-term impacts on ecosystems than hazard reduction burning or bushfires, as it is less likely to lead to rapid changes in micro-climates and vegetation structure which can change habitat niches, (Weir and Freeman 2019), leading to long term changes in ecological communities. For example, the Banbai rangers at Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area (NSW) found that their cultural burns reduced the fuel hazard more than the neighbouring hazard reduction burn at Warra National Park or the Crown Mountain bushfire of 2019 (McKemey et al. in prep.).

Cultural burning may reduce the short-term accumulation of fine fuels, through lower intensity burning that decreases vegetation scorching. Moderate to high intensity hazard reduction, back burning and bushfires often lead to vegetation scorching that adds to the fuel loads through an increase in leaf and fine fuel accumulation post fire.

High intensity fires often promote the regeneration of some inappropriate species, adding to the longer-term fuel accumulation. This regrowth can also lead to increased fire frequency and intensity due to the vegetation structure and their impacts on other species and ecosystem. Cultural burning may reduce the growth of these species, as the lower intensity burning does not leave an environment where they can thrive at the expense of other species.

1.2 Preparation and planning

The effectiveness of current mainstream fire management in Australia is questionable. The Black Summer bushfires are indicative of a regime that is not functioning in a healthy or sustainable way. Planning and preparation strategies and actions must have greater engagement and resourcing to support Aboriginal communities as constituents, rightsholders and stakeholders.

Fuel reduction activities can create negative outcomes and must be planned, implemented and monitored with appropriate methods to adapt to increasingly changing conditions and climates.

Hazard reduction burning can be an effective management approach to reduce fuel, however these burns and backburning often involve high heat intensity fires over large areas and the use of foreign/chemicals (retardants and petroleum fuels). These can create a number of negative outcomes, including: species and biodiversity decline; reduced soil and seed viability; damaged vegetation; changes in vegetation structure and function; altered soil health; erosion and damaged or destroyed soil microbiomes. Cultural fire management achieves appropriate fire regimes as cultural indicators and burn prescriptions are based on the requirements of key assets, resources, species, habitats, places and ecosystems, not just reducing fuel loads.

Grazing can be an effective management approach to reduce fuel, but most introduced species used for grazing damage Country. Hard-hooved animals create soil erosion and compaction. Introduced species increase or alter demands on local ecosystems (fodder, water demands). And introduced species compete with native species for resources and can also contribute to the spread of invasive species (weeds and pests) negatively altering the balance of Country.

Land Clearing can be an effective management approach to reduce fuel, but can create negative outcomes such as increased soil salinity, soil destabilisation and erosion, and a reduction in the size and diversity of the physical ecosystems. Australia has the highest rate of species loss of any region in the world, partially driven by land clearing. Alternatives to land clearing should be prioritized. Green firebreaks should be investigated further (Wyse et al. 2016).

Fire and land management monitoring, planning, delivery and responses would be improved through better coordination across land tenures and government jurisdictions. Current contemporary fire management legislation and procedural systems are inadequate to effectively and efficiently enable cultural burning and appropriate fire regimes in many areas of NSW. Current complex fire management planning and approval processes take too long and are not adaptive and responsive to enable the implementation of fire in response to vegetation curing and appropriate timing to different ecosystems. These constraints limit both agencies and organisational capacity to increase burning across different land tenures to maintain appropriate fire regimes. For example, several studies have found that tight, complicated and potentially confusing rules, regulations and legislation are a substantial barrier to the implementation of Indigenous cultural fire management (Maclean *et al.* 2018; Neale *et al.* 2019; Weir and Freeman 2019; Tamarind Planning 2017; Hill 2003; Robinson *et al.* 2016; Smith *et al.* 2018; Zander 2018).

Through 'on-Country' workshops and events, the Firesticks Alliance have been repeatedly approached by landholders and land managers for support in bushfire risk mitigation on private rural, residential and public lands. The increase in public awareness of Aboriginal cultural burning has increased demand for support from landholders who appear to feel that the current system does not meet with their aspirations to manage bushfire risk or recognise and empower Aboriginal custodians to support them.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Many Aboriginal communities' lives, assets and cultural values were threatened or impacted by recent fire seasons. Greater support for Indigenous led community-controlled bushfire response capacity and capability is critical to combat future emergencies and natural disasters. Current resourcing and mechanisms are often disempowering and do not support Aboriginal community needs and values. Developing Indigenous led cultural fire and ranger programs could serve as key enabling processes to build emergency and disaster response capacity and capability within Aboriginal communities.

Following the Black Summer megafires, the Australian public psyche is highly alerted to the potential of Indigenous knowledges addressing bushfire risk. There are numerous opportunities for Government involvement in the support and development of Indigenous cultural burning programs that would be buoyed by the current momentum of the public consciousness. Cultural burning creates outcomes beyond hazard reduction and Indigenous connection to Country. If well implemented and securely resourced, Indigenous led cultural burning programs would create benefits across the spectrum of social indicators and ecosystem services including: environment, economy, education, health and wellbeing, employment, and others. Long-term, secure, adequate funding and strong Indigenous governance and leadership is key to success and must address:

- Better protection and promotion of cultural knowledge and Indigenous cultural intellectual property rights;
- Recognition and investment in Indigenous led training and mentoring programs;

- Processes that support Indigenous led and co-designed research to establish better understanding and support for cultural burning and caring for country programs;
- Ongoing investment and resourcing of Indigenous led caring for Country and ranger programs that includes cultural burning;
- Ongoing resourcing of Indigenous led caring for Country mechanisms with the active engagement of government agencies so that coordinated two-way knowledge sharing and relationship building can take place;
- government and legislative reforms to facilitate a growth in the cultural burning programs. This needs to acknowledge and respond to the current situation, whereby cultural burning is only 'endorsed' by government agencies, in the margins of current mainstream fire management policy which is restrictive in nature, and empowered from and by non-Indigenous worldviews.

The Firesticks Alliance has led or supported many projects and programs that are directly reducing the risk of and/or mitigating the impacts of bushfire, or that promote ecosystem features which are desirable from the perspective of increasing our resilience to bushfire.

The Firesticks website contains some examples:

Right Country – Right Fire podcasts: www.firesticks.org.au/podcasts/

National Indigenous Fire Workshop (NIFW) History www.firesticks.org.au/national-indigenous-fire-workshop/

NIFW Bundanon 2018 www.firesticks.org.au/bundanon-2018/

NIFW Dhungala 2019 www.firesticks.org.au/national-indigenous-fire-workshop/dhungala-2019-2/

Firesticks Alliance Films on Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/firesticksalliance>

Victor Steffensen (Mulong) has delivered training and produced many films.

Indigenous Fire Management services www.mulong.com.au/index.php/mulong-portfolio-2-fire/

Living Knowledge Place www.livingknowledgeplace.com.au/ausmap.php

Mulong Films on Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/user12381768>

Additionally there is a wealth of content from across the continent.

Australian Story - Fighting fire with fire: How Aboriginal fire management could save our bushland (QLD & National) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-9hmEiH828>

Could Aboriginal Burns Save Australia From Fires? (NSW) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIAGc3toTpg>

Indigenous fire methods protect land before and after the Tathra 2018 bushfire (NSW)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM72NtXxyLs>

Controlled Aboriginal Fires: Australia's Experience (WA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgMwDTEe1R4>

Paddocks Alight - Traditional Burning In The Lachlan (NSW)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CCMj6UAir8>

Traditional burning brings many benefits (VIC)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4S_ipR8cWM

Djandak Wi - Traditional Burning Returns (VIC)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akeB6uVKwWE>

Aboriginal wetland burning in Kakadu (2005) (NT)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXG_2JSW0FA

Traditional Burning – Biraban (NSW) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYIF4SHXsAg>

How Indigenous land burning is protecting rare mammals on Australia's Tiwi Islands (NT)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us02Wr4KQ-A>

Patch Burning: A call to return to traditional fire burning practices (TAS)

<https://www.abc.net.au/landline/patch-burning:-a-call-to-return-to-traditional/11126856>

Mooditj Boodja The Korrelocking Fire Project (WA)

<https://www.mooditjboodja.com.au/korrelocking-fire-project>

1.4 Any other matters

Firesticks, our communities and partners lead or support many key cultural fire programs. Firesticks is gathering information and seeking support and resources to provide more details on these key programs. Indigenous groups are engaged in a variety of cultural burning activities and partnerships across Australia. These groups are maintaining or reengaging with cultural fire management practices via diverse and innovative enterprises and partnerships. These activities occur across a diverse range of land tenures and management regimes on public and private lands. They can cover large remote areas to small peri urban bush blocks. In many cases, cultural burning has been re-introduced back into these landscapes for the first time in decades or centuries. Some cultural burning and Indigenous fire activities and programs are easily identified, but others may be less well defined or suppressed. We refer you to the draft paper (to be provided via further correspondence) 'Dynamic, diverse and promising: a review of contemporary Indigenous cultural fire management literature in southeast Australia' (McKemey *et al.* in prep.) where seventy case studies of contemporary Indigenous cultural fire management across southeast Australia are presented, including information on locations, agencies and Traditional Owner organisations. These projects are supported by eight policies created by governments of the states and territory of southeast Australia. However, they are mostly short-term, grass roots projects. In the absence of robust budgets or a clear longer-term

commitment by governments, future projects will continue to rely on persuasion, improvisation and intercultural diplomacy (Neale 2020). We seek to advance these projects from grass roots cultural initiatives into longer term, well-resourced, landscape-scale Indigenous lead cultural fire programs in Australia's southeast. There is general public interest, widespread media support and policies in place to support such growth, and we hope that findings of the current bushfire inquiries will also support the further expansion of Indigenous lead cultural fire management.

Fire Circle on Empowering Indigenous leadership, cultural fire and land management practices

On the 9th of April 2020 the Firesticks Alliance facilitated a virtual Fire Circle on Empowering Indigenous leadership, cultural fire and land management practices, and First Nations people and businesses impacted by the 2019/2020 bushfire crisis and their enabling partners and supporters. These bushfires had a devastating impact on Country and many First Nations people's cultural landscapes, property, businesses, heritage and natural values. The aim of this dialogue was to discuss practical measures to drive policy change given the current opportunities to raise awareness and enable positive change. The virtual fire circle was attended by around 47 participants from a range of Aboriginal communities and organisations and their enabling partners and supporters.

A Summary Report (Attachment 4) on "Fire Circle on Empowering Indigenous leadership, cultural fire and land management practices, and First Nations people and businesses impacted by bushfires" was prepared by Katharine Haynes, Wollongong University.

The Summary Report Fire Circle analysis and key points headings include:

- Need for consultation, partnership and long-term funding
- Legislation, insurance and accreditation
- Need for better understanding of sustainable land management – land as kin
- Research – Translation and communication to drive policy change
- New fire economy
- Indigenous-led regional Coordination
- Training and mentoring

Publications on Cultural burning practices and relevant issues

We refer the Commission to some publications on Cultural burning practices and relevant issues in appendix 1. Notwithstanding these publications, given the diversity of fire management issues across the nation, further consultation and research is required to adequately address many of the matters the Royal Commission is seeking to address in more detail. We concur with Williamson *et al.* (2020) in their assessment that this a most urgent forum where Aboriginal people must have a strong presence is in the context of post-disaster inquiries and commissions, including any co-design of new policies and programs created in response to the disasters.

Despite significant public support for a more widespread application of Aboriginal cultural fire management across Australia, substantial barriers limit the expansion of these programs. For example, McKemey *et al.* (in prep.) identified 70 barriers to the implementation of Aboriginal cultural burning in southeast Australia. To summarise, these barriers included lack of recognition of Indigenous cultural fire knowledge and practice; legislation and regulation; application of cultural burning; knowledge; power; protocols; lack of trust; ecological understanding; resourcing; training requirements; capacity; partnerships and agreements; bushfire risk; access to land; cultural links and protocols; public perceptions; altered landscapes; fire suppression policies; climate change; weather and infrastructure barriers. Many of these barriers can be overcome, with concerted effort from government agencies and Indigenous groups. To facilitate further growth of cultural burning, more funding, transference of power and Indigenous leadership and control is required. Such an expansion of cultural burning could include Indigenous engagement in fire management and bushfire recovery, mentoring and training, decision making and research.

National Indigenous Fire Workshop: Bundanon 2018

On 12-15 July 2018, the National Indigenous Fire Workshop was held at Bundanon in Yuin Country on the New South Wales south coast. Convened by the Firesticks Alliance and hosted by the Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks Team and Bundanon Trust, the workshop was attended by over 400 participants, mostly from across eastern Australia, but participants ranged from as far north as Napranum, Cape York in northern Queensland to Truwana in Tasmania, and from the APY Lands in Central Australia.

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop evolved from the Awu-Laya Elders fire management research project in Cape York along with the foresight and teachings of Cape York fire practitioners and respected Kuku Thaypan Elders, the late Dr George Musgrave and Dr Tommy George. Their work has gone on to inspire communities all over the country and brought people together to learn about Aboriginal fire management and appropriate research methodologies. This was the first National Indigenous Fire Workshop to be held outside of Cape York. Workshop participants learnt first-hand how to read Country, animals, trees, seasons, and understand the cultural responsibility of looking after Country. The 2018 Workshop masterclasses were delivered through practical demonstrations which focused on: Monitoring techniques and indicators; Ethnobotany; Understanding invasive native plants; Traditional dancing and weaving; Sharing of local knowledge; Cultural burning of gum tree and sand ridge Country; and Reflecting and planning for rebuilding cultural fire practice.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with over 90% of respondents reflecting that the workshop helped them connect to Country and community and increased their knowledge of Indigenous fire management practices. Over 60% of participants said they are likely to change their fire management practices because of the Workshop, with another 30% unsure of their ability to influence current practices but still very supportive of the rebuilding of cultural fire management. Each year the Firesticks Alliance delivers workshops at various locations to support the recognition and practice of Cultural fire knowledge across Australia.

Watch the film: 2018 NIFW Bundanon Trust, NSW on Yuin Country

<https://vimeo.com/302990941>

See Attachment 5 for full report on the National Indigenous Fire Workshop at Bundanon, NSW 12-15 July 2018

During the 2018 workshop and following fourteen days, 150 hectares of Yuin country were treated with the 'good fire' by local Yuin fire practitioners. The cultural burn in 2018 was very beneficial in restoring the country to health and prevented the spread and mitigated impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires on the Bundanon Trust property. This is one of many examples of the benefits of cultural burning in relation to bushfire mitigation.

National Indigenous Fire Workshop: Dhungala 2019

The Yorta Yorta people welcomed more than 400 people to their country at the opening ceremony on Tuesday 4th June 2019. The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation worked alongside the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation to plan and deliver the Dhungala 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop.

Every element of Dhungala 2019's program was a celebration of culture; Eight masterclasses gave participants a true experience of right country right fire on Yorta Yorta country. Participants got to hear local stories, share knowledge and practice cultural ways of being and doing as they moved through workshop on Woka (country) and Wala (water), waking up leafy country, burning country, monitoring, reading country, and traditional tool making, dancing and weaving. Participants shared an abundance of local food, prepared in ground ovens. At night, local musicians and dancers entertained from the stage.

Watch the films from Dhungala 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop on Yorta Yorta Country: <http://www.firesticks.org.au/national-indigenous-fire-workshop/dhungala-2019-2/>

Appendix 1: Publications on Cultural burning practices and relevant issues.

Cavanagh, V., 2020, 'Friday essay: this grandmother tree connects me to Country. I cried when I saw her burned', The Conversation, 24 January < <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-this-grandmother-tree-connects-me-to-country-i-cried-when-i-saw-her-burned-129782> >.

Cavanagh, V. and Standley, PM., 2020, 'Walking in the landscapes of our ancestors - Indigenous perspectives critical in the teaching of geography', Interaction, vol. 48, Iss. 1, pp.14.

CSIRO, no date, 'Aboriginal Wetland Burning in Kakadu' < <https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/LWF/Areas/Pathways/Indigenous-futures/Indigenous-NRM/Aboriginal-wetland-burning-in-Kakadu?ref=/CSIRO/Website/Research/Environment/Land-management/Indigenous/Kakadu-burning>>.

Cranney, K., 'Three practical ways to support Indigenous landscape burning in Australia: How can we support cross-cultural Indigenous fire partnerships to manage Australia's landscape?', February 25th,

2020 < <https://ecos.csiro.au/three-practical-ways-to-support-indigenous-landscape-burning-in-australia/>>.

Darug Ngurra, Dadd L., Glass P., Scott R., Graham M., Judge S., Hodge P. & Suchet-Pearson S. (2019) Yanama budyari gumada: reframing the urban to care as Darug Country in western Sydney. *Australian Geographer* **50**, 279-93.

Eriksen, C, and Hankins, DL., 2014, 'The retention, revival, and subjugation of Indigenous fire knowledge through agency fire fighting in eastern Australia and California', *Society and Natural Resources*, vol. 27, no. 12, pp. 1288-1303.

Falconer, S, 2017, 'The Lord Mayor's Bushfire Appeal Churchill Fellowship Report: The Return of Cultural Burning', The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Canberra.

Gammage, B., 2011, 'The biggest estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia', Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.

Hill R. (2003) Frameworks to support Indigenous managers: the key to fire futures. In: *Australia burning: Fire Ecology, Policy and Management Issues* (ed L. B. Cary G, Mackey B & Dovers S (ed)) pp. 175-86. CSIRO, Melbourne.

Kerr A. (2019) *To Burn or Not to Burn: Perceptions of Fire Management around Australia*. Macotrophic Trust, Australia.

Kost, F., 2013, 'Burning the bush: The development of Australia's Southwest Botanical Province', in M.I.J. Davies and F.N M'Mbogori, *Humans and the Environment: New Archaeological Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford University Press, UK.

Langton, M., 1998, 'Burning questions: emerging environmental issues for Indigenous peoples in northern Australia', Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University, Darwin.

Lehman G. (2001) Turning back the clock: fire, biodiversity, and Indigenous community development in Tasmania. In: *Working on country: contemporary Indigenous management of Australia's lands and coastal regions* (eds R. M. Baker, J. Davies and E. A. Young) pp. 308-19. Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

Lyngdoh Reye, R., Gilbert, R., Costello, O., Gothe, J., Webster, N., Standley, PM., Steffensen, V. and Gowers, J., 2018, 'Healing People and Country with The Knowledge of Fire: National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2018 Bundanon'.

McKemey M. B., Costello O., Ridges M., Ens E. J., Hunter J. T. & Reid N. C. H. (in prep.) Dynamic, diverse and promising: a review of the literature of contemporary Aboriginal cultural burning in southeast Australia. *Austral Ecology*.

McKemey M., Banbai Rangers, Hunter J. T., Reid N. C. H., Ens E., Costello O. & Ridges M. (in prep.) Impacts of Indigenous cultural burning versus wildfire on the threatened Black grevillea (*Grevillea scortechinii* subsp. *sarmentosa*) in southeast Australia.

McKemey, M., Ens, E., Rangers, Y.M., Costello, O. and Reid, N., 2020, 'Indigenous Knowledge and Seasonal Calendar Inform Adaptive Savanna Burning in Northern Australia', *Sustainability*, vol. 12, iss. 3, pp. 995.

McKemey M. & Patterson M. L. (2019) Aboriginal Cultural Revival through the Reintroduction of Cultural Burning and Development of a Fire & Seasons Calendar, in south-eastern Australia. In: *6th International Fire Behaviour and Fuels Conference*. International Association of Wildland Fire, Sydney, Australia.

McKemey, M.B., Patterson, M.L., Rangers, B., Ens, E.J., Reid, N.C., Hunter, J.T., Costello, O., Ridges, M. and Miller, C., 2019, 'Cross-Cultural Monitoring of a Cultural Keystone Species Informs Revival of Indigenous Burning of Country in South-Eastern Australia', *Human Ecology*, vol. 47, iss. 6, pp. 893-904.

McKemey, M.B., and Patterson, T., 2018, 'Winba = Fire: developing a fire and seasons calendar for Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area', in Smith, R (ed.) 2018, *Proceedings of Restore, Regenerate, Revegetate: A Conference on Restoring Ecological Processes, Ecosystems and Landscapes in a Changing World*, University of New England, Armidale, 5–9 February 2017, pp. 57-58.

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Neale, T., 2018, 'Digging for fire: finding control on the Australian continent', *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 79–90.

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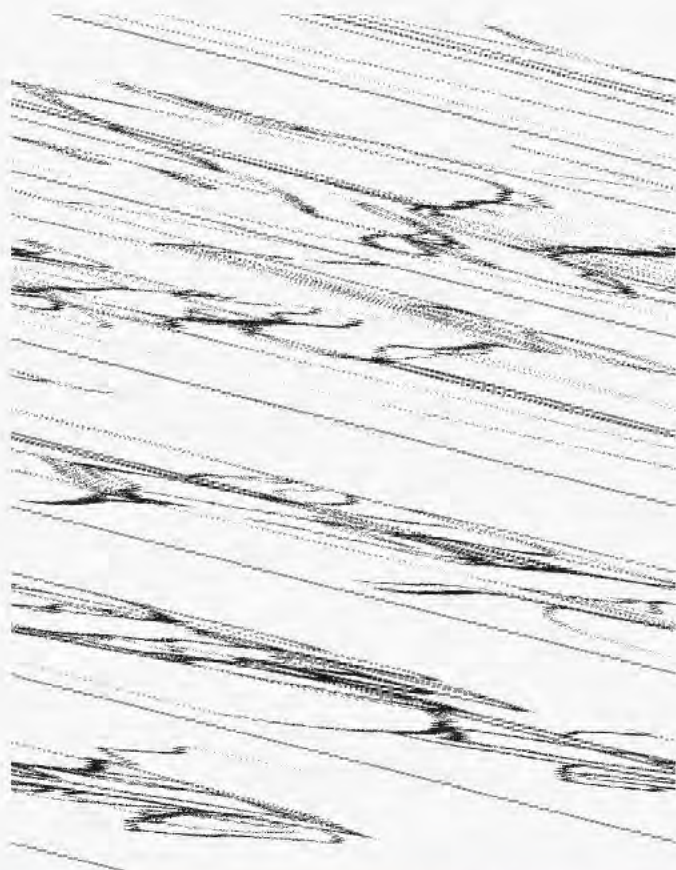
Robinson, CJ., Barber, M., Hill, R., Gerrard, E., James, G., 2016, 'Protocols for Indigenous fire management partnerships', CSIRO, Brisbane.

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FIRESTICKS ALLIANCE INDIGENOUS CORPORATION

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(ICN: 8778)

*firesticks

Supporting cultural and contemporary
burning practices for healthy communities
and healthy landscapes





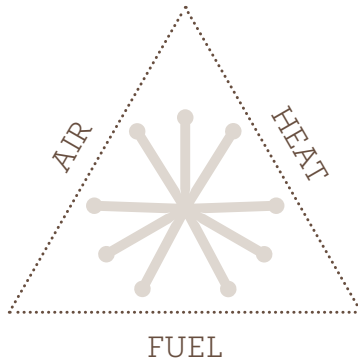
The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation provides Indigenous leadership, advocacy and action to protect, conserve and enhance cultural and natural values of people and Country through cultural fire and land management practices.

AIMS

Acknowledge and respect past and present Traditional Custodians and honour their contribution and connection to Country

- * Enable Indigenous leadership through community mentorship on Country
- * Actively develop and engage in projects to protect, conserve and enhance cultural and natural values of Country
- * Empower the local community to take an active role in decision-making by building community skills and capacity and providing a greater sense of custodianship
- * Create partnerships with industry professionals to deliver joint venture commercial and community activities that will provide mentoring and information exchange to promote capacity building with Aboriginal enterprise
- * Promote cultural safety and support best practice work health and safety procedures
- * Deliver community education, training and capacity building activities
- * Produce and share resources and stories
- * Raise community awareness, understanding and information gathering of cultural and environmental issues to create positive change
- * Build recognition of cultural practice and knowledge
- * Deliver and assist cultural values mapping and monitoring projects
- * Support traditional custodians in maintaining and building fire knowledge and practice
- * Maintain and enhance the Firesticks Alliance Community of Practice





APPROACH

Firesticks is driven by community mentoring, empowering people, communicating learning pathways and on ground land management and cultural practices to create resilient social and ecological landscapes. It is achieving this through the following processes:

AIR – Making Space: building understanding and recognition; sharing stories and information; connecting communities with each other and with land management/ fire practitioners; driving change.

HEAT – Facilitating Action: Delivering on ground mentoring; planning; training; managing Country by burning and integrating weed management; revitalising Country and knowledge by building community networks and recording cultural knowledge.

FUEL – Reading Country: Supporting future work by providing evidence for the effect that cultural fire is having a positive impact. Using appropriate monitoring methods to support learning by observation, practice and the importance of sharing knowledge (mentoring).





Bushfire Response: Importance of Cultural Burning Brief and Meeting in Canberra 11am 12 Feb 2020

1 message

Tue, Feb 4, 2020 at 11:44 AM

Dear Prime Minister, Minister Morton, Cabinet and the Bushfire Recovery team,

I writing to you and relevant Ministers today regarding the Importance of Cultural Burning to protect and enhance Country while reducing Fuel Loads and improving Bushfire Risk Management in Australia.

We see this as big opportunity to promote the positive opportunities that many Australians will support and can help deliver in their own communities.

The knowledge and practice of Indigenous lead Cultural Fire Management is one of the most effective responses to support recovery from the national bushfire crisis and mitigation of future events. Support for a Culturally accredited and Nationally recognised Indigenous Training and Mentoring Program is an essential part of the solution to keeping our community, wildlife and environment safe.

Please see attached a brief for your consideration. I would like to meet with you and offer relevant Government representatives at Parliament on 12 Feb and suggest 11am as the time.

Oliver Costello

Bundjalung Jagun

CEO, Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation

www.firesticks.org.au

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-

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WATCH the Living Knowledge Place films: <https://vimeo.com/user12381768>

LISTEN to Right Country – Right Fire podcasts: <https://www.firesticks.org.au/podcasts/>

SEE the film and report from 2018 NIFW: <http://www.firesticks.org.au/bundanon-2018/>

JOIN the FIRESTICKS ALLIANCE: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3MJBWMZ>

ENGAGE our services: <https://www.firesticks.org.au/community/alliance/engage-with-the-alliance/>

2 attachments

 **Importance of Cultural Burning Breifing 04.02.20.pdf**
639K

 **Firesticks_Alliance_flyer.pdf**
596K

MINISTERIAL ADVICE

Prime Minister – For action

Deputy Prime Minister – For action

Minister for Environment – For action

Minister for Indigenous Australians – For action

Minister for Natural Disaster and Emergency Management – For action

The Importance of Cultural Burning to protect and enhance Country while reducing Fuel Loads and improve Bushfire Risk Management in Australia

Critical Date: 04 02 2020

Reason: Bushfire Response

PURPOSE

The knowledge and practice of Indigenous lead Cultural Fire Management is one of the most effective responses to support recovery from the national bushfire crisis and mitigation of future events. Support for a Culturally accredited and Nationally recognised Indigenous Training and Mentoring Program is an essential part of the solution to keeping our community, wildlife and environment safe.

INFORMATION

Key Points

1. The Indigenous Australian cultural practice of Cultural burning can and does assist in improved fire management. There is evidence that cultural burning has helped save properties, assets and sites from the recent wildfires in Tabulam, Ulladulla, Bundanon on Shoalhaven River and Mangrove Mountain on the Central Coast while also promoting and protecting biodiversity.
2. Hazard reductions have had little effect in stopping or even slowing the progression of many bushfires. Inappropriate fire regimes, whether its wildfire, conventional hazard reduction burns, and indeed conservation burns, have resulted in a repetitive cycle of hot fires and plants growing back in such a way that leads to extreme fuel loads building up again within a short timeline. Concern is growing that such methods exacerbate biodiversity declines and in many cases only add to increasing the fire risk.
3. Conducting future cultural burns on bushfire affected areas can help to promote more appropriate regeneration of plants and discourage inappropriate regeneration. When the soil is disturbed through hot fires or land clearing, there are often outbreaks of exotic weeds and overabundance of invasive natives like bracken, Acacia and Melaleuca species. These species impact the structure of the forest influencing fire behaviour, intensity and severity.
4. Cultural Burning has considerable governance, cultural, economic, employment, education and training benefits for Indigenous led processes that meet multiple National and International legislative, policy, and strategy goals including: Indigenous Advancement and Procurement, Biodiversity Conservation, Sustainable Development and Environment and Energy.

5. Authentic cultural burns follow a sophisticated knowledge system and methodology that in its most effective form is only known to a very limited number of people. Indigenous Elders have developed cultural burning practices over thousands of years of caring for Country. This methodology can form a major part of a holistic solution to prevent and decrease the impacts of wildfire.
6. Key members of the Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation follow strict cultural protocols in relation to how they engage with communities and facilitate the returning, sharing and practicing of this knowledge. For almost two decades Firesticks members have built the capability and capacity of Traditional Owners to hold and restore this knowledge through leadership and practice on their own Country. Firesticks was established to help build structure and support around the mentoring and training of this knowledge system. Firesticks brings together Indigenous knowledge holders, researchers, fire practitioners and dedicated individuals with an aim of protecting, maintaining and returning the practice of this knowledge onto Country.
7. The Firesticks Alliance is seeking urgent investment of \$10 Million to respond to priority assessments, immediate recovery actions and organisational capacity. Followed by annual investment of at least \$25 Million in order to foster, grow and achieve its objective and strategies as outlined above. By 2023 Firesticks aims to have established over 100 highly experienced Indigenous fire practitioners across at least 20 regional hubs across the Country in an Indigenous led culturally accredited and Nationally Recognised Indigenous Training and Mentoring Program.
8. Only Traditional Custodians and cultural fire practitioners have the authority to carry out Cultural Burning. Government agencies, institutions, organisations and individuals must be stopped from applying parts of this knowledge system without following, understanding or respecting the appropriate cultural protocols, Indigenous Cultural Intellectual property and practical methodologies associated with cultural burning. In many cases these bodies have caused damage to communities, the environment and increased fire risks.
9. Firesticks has been and wants to continue working with Government agencies, institutions, organisations and individuals to demonstrate how cultural fire management is applied in the landscape, documenting and communicating the benefits.
10. New legislation, regulation and policies are required to support the appropriate application of Cultural Burning across all land tenures in Australia.

2.2 Background

Firesticks has serious concerns that agencies and organisations may misappropriate Indigenous cultural knowledge and practice. Many have shown limited or no support to date for Firesticks and may now position themselves to seek investment in Cultural burning at the detriment of Indigenous led organisations and cultural Fire practitioners.

Firesticks has major concerns that such attempts by organisations and agencies will:

- diminish the opportunity for traditional owners to lead, be employed and guide the sharing of their knowledge in a manner that respects customs and cultural practices.
- Will see non Indigenous organisations and individuals unfairly profiting off Indigenous knowledge and practice.
- Will see agencies wrongly applying cultural fire knowledge which leads to the practice being misunderstood or rejected.
- Will lead to the current situation which sees many Traditional Owners being compromised in sharing information and undertaking activities that do not follow cultural methodologies because of economic incentives.
- Achieve very little shift in the way land management is currently undertaken and will see continued mega fires impact the landscape as the Indigenous methodology and practices will not be fully shared and applied in the manner that is required to achieve the desired outcomes.

2.3 Consultation

We have consulted Environment Minister Susan Ley, Threatened Species Commissioner Sally Box and Michael Fordham, Chief of Staff for the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt AM MP, as well as Numerous State and Local Politicians, Fire Agencies and Land Managers in ACT, NSW, VIC and QLD.

CAPABILITIES

Firesticks is an Indigenous lead Australian wide network that leads implementation of Cultural Burning across Australia. Firesticks has developed an Indigenous governance model embedded in a community of practice to support the recognition and revitalization of Cultural fire lore through local, regional and national cultural fire training and mentoring programs.

Firesticks has capacity to establish an Indigenous led culturally accredited and Nationally Recognised fire management training program with suitably qualified mentors and trainers. Firesticks hold a National Indigenous Fire Workshop each year that attracts more than 500 people representing indigenous communities, as well as government agencies, land management authorities, researchers and organisations from across Australia.

Firesticks have a growing number of experienced Indigenous Fire practitioners currently supporting Cultural Burns across Indigenous Protected Areas, Aboriginal Owned, public and private Lands with very limited resourcing. Firesticks partners with Traditional Custodians and serves under their cultural authority to plan, develop, implement and monitor cultural fire management using knowledge of Country, its seasons, indicators, landscape features and climatic changes. Traditional Custodians are ready to undertake greater responsibility for land management, and delivering cultural burning across land tenures.

CONTACT OFFICER

Oliver Costello, CEO
Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation



www.firesticks.org.au



Cultural burning: healthy communities, healthy landscapes

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are warned that this document contains images of deceased people

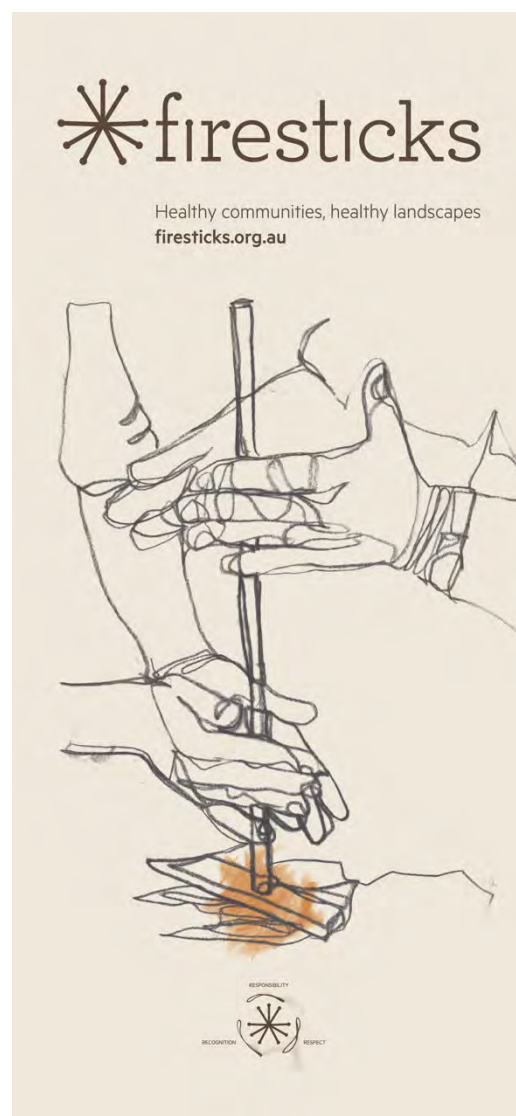
Firesticks Mentoring and Training Program Investment Proposal

1.1 Acknowledgment and Introduction

We pay respect to Country and cultural lore of Traditional Custodians. We acknowledge our elders who have led us in the right way along our path. Where ever we go, we must respect the lore of that country and the Traditional Custodians of that place. We serve under their guidance and leadership to care for country.

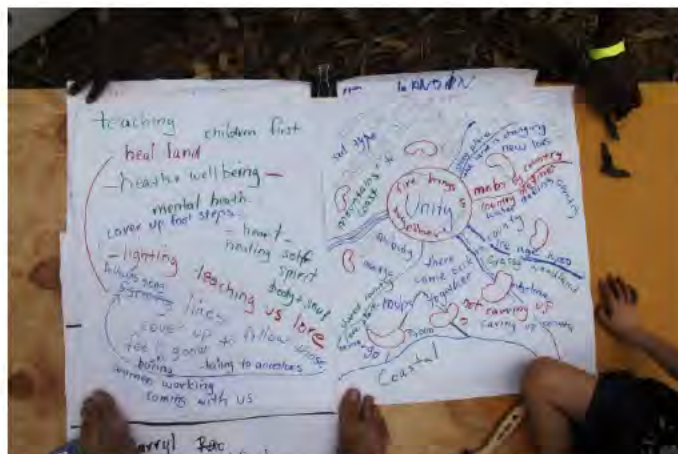
In response to Traditional Custodians rights and responsibilities to look after country and continue cultural practice the Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation (Firesticks) has developed a community of practice to support the recognition and revitalisation of Cultural fire lore through the sharing of knowledge and practice across Australia. A key element has been the delivery of local, regional and national cultural fire training and mentoring programs. Since the decline in Indigenous cultural fire and land stewardship there has been significant and increasingly negative impacts to country through inappropriate fire regimes. This has led to declines and extinction of culturally significant species, habitats and places, along with the increasing extreme high intensity wildfire. The Firesticks mentoring program methodology empowers Indigenous fire practitioners through local and regional workshops and the facilitation of the National Indigenous Fire Workshop. Firesticks partners with Traditional Custodians and serves under their cultural authority to host these workshops across Australia. These workshops have been running since 2008 and Indigenous community partners and participant numbers have increased steadily from thirty people to thousands of people having been involved. The attendance of people at these workshops has sparked projects across Australia.

This document forms the basis of a project and funding brief for supporting the recognition and revitalisation of Cultural fire management knowledge and practice in Australia, and to monitor and evaluate its effects on culture, environment and community safety.



1.2 Our stories

Cultural burning is embedded in Indigenous Australian cultural knowledge of Country, its seasons, indicators, landscape features and changes through millennia. Indigenous fire knowledge holders understand the important regenerative role that fire plays in healthy landscapes and also its destruction if not used correctly. The knowledge system is based on high level principles and Lore including that Country has authority over people and communities – and cultural burning maintains functioning and safe landscapes on Country.



We wish to thank and acknowledge key cultural knowledge keepers, the late Dr Musgrave and Dr George, *Awu Alaya* speaking Elders of Kuku Thaypan Country, located in Cape York Peninsula, Queensland. The Elders fire management research project and the sharing of their cultural knowledge initiated the now National Indigenous Fire Workshop that has enabled thousands of people to start their journey's learning about, maintaining, sharing and



1.3 The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation

The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation (Firesticks) provides leadership, advocacy and action to protect, conserve and enhance cultural and natural values of people and Country through cultural fire and land management practices.

Firesticks values and respects country, local knowledge, protocols of Elders and ancestors and are committed to providing a supportive Indigenous led network that fosters a community of practice to maintain communication pathways and shared learnings of fire on Country.

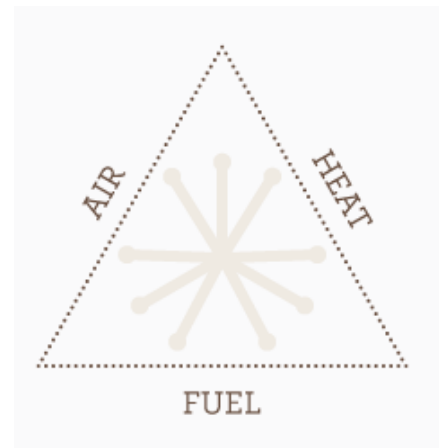
The Firesticks Alliance partners with diverse communities, landholders, agencies and institutions across the continent. Together Firesticks is identifying pathways to apply cultural fire to landscape, to help heal and care for Country and empowering communities through mentorship and shared understandings that are improving fire management in Australia.

Firesticks is achieving this through the following processes:

AIR – Making Space: Building understanding and recognition; sharing stories and information; connecting communities with each other; driving change.

HEAT – Facilitating Action: Delivering on ground planning; training through workshops; managing Country by burning; revitalising Country and knowledge by building community networks and recording cultural knowledge.

FUEL – Reading Country: To support learning by observation, mentoring and sharing of knowledge on Country.



Firesticks Alliance seeks to embed into the Australian consciousness, cultural awareness and understanding of the knowledge and practice of fire held by Australia's first people's and subsequently the importance of cultural burning to the Australian environment.

Firesticks supports Indigenous communities and their partners in building skills and knowledge of cultural burning to increase its implementation across the landscape by Indigenous fire knowledge holders in contemporary fire management contexts. In this way, capacity is enabled and increased locally for Indigenous people to share knowledge and provide ongoing guidance with their local partners, agencies and land managers.

Firesticks Alliance is an Indigenous led network of cultural fire knowledge holders and practitioners that together form a community of practice. Together, with Indigenous communities, Firesticks Alliance Directors and members are custodians of traditional knowledge of Country and the practice and use of fire to maintain healthy landscapes.

1.4 The Importance of Mentoring and Training Programs

The Firesticks Alliance provides mentoring and training programs working directly with Indigenous communities and stakeholders to support Indigenous people to maintain and increase their cultural fire management on country.

The mentoring and training programs provide significant positive outcomes for Indigenous community cohesion and pride through the maintenance and re-establishment of cultural learning pathways that increase Indigenous led cultural fire land management practices on Country. The mentoring and training program generate outcomes for employment and engagement opportunities in land management, education and research.



The mentoring methodology embodies Cultural values that deliver wholistic outcomes benefiting social, cultural, environmental and economic opportunities.

The mentoring and training program provide social and environmental benefit by reducing fire risk through increasing the number of cultural fire practitioners knowledgeable in how to manage different country types. The transferring of knowledge and continuation of culture through its practice on country provide cultural benefits

while increasing pyro-diversity provides environmental benefits for species diversity and ecosystem function.

1.4 Mentoring and Training Program Strategy



The mentoring and training program objectives are centred on improving the health and safety of Country but also support a range of additional co-benefits in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities and wider Australia.

The program employs a number of strategies to achieve this objective.

These are as follows:

- Maintain and increase Indigenous cultural fire management knowledge and practice,
- Develop and deliver a Nationally recognised Firesticks cultural fire training program
- Increase Cultural fire management in the Australian landscape led and researched by Indigenous cultural fire knowledge holders and practitioners
- Build the capacity of Traditional Custodians to take on greater responsibility for land and water management, including training agencies and community, assisting and delivering cultural burning across land tenures.
- Demonstrate, monitor and evaluate cultural burning on culture, environment and public safety

These strategies form broad overlapping themes under which specific aims and localised actions are identified with Indigenous communities and fire management stakeholders according to their needs.

1.4 Investment goals and outcomes

Firesticks seeks investment to establish an Indigenous led Nationally recognised Firesticks cultural fire management training program and culturally accredited mentors and trainers. This investment will develop accredited Cultural Fire Practitioners that are knowledgeable and competent in both Indigenous cultural fire management and western fire management. It will support Indigenous people to train and work on their country while mentoring and sharing knowledge with other cultural fire knowledge holders and practitioners from other regions.

The Firesticks Alliance requires significant investment in order to foster, grow and achieve its objective and strategies as outlined above.

A key to the success of this program investment will be the establishment of regional Firesticks Hubs. These Hubs will provide the foundations to build on the existing projects to develop and deliver a world class cultural fire management training and mentoring program. It will support accredited cultural fire practitioners to read country, burn and monitor fire regimes across the region.

This investment will:

- Enable Firesticks to formalise and produce its existing methodologies and training resources
- Enable the development and delivery of a Firesticks Cultural Fire Nationally Recognised training and mentoring program
- Enable emerging and existing cultural fire knowledge holders to be accredited and employed in delivery of the mentoring and training program

This investment will also enable the generation of 20 localised training hubs with two cultural fire knowledge holders to lead a team of four trainees at each hub across Australia. This will increase the number of culturally accredited nationally recognised cultural fire practitioners knowledgeable and skilled in the management of fire on their country, employing both cultural and western fire management knowledge and practice. In this way, each hub is resourced and equipped to provide on-going mentoring and training, generating a sustainable business model that can be delivered across Australia through First Nations leadership models. The investment will support a core team at Firesticks that will work across Australia and be embedded in their local communities on their country and work mentoring locally and Australia wide. Firesticks will partner with existing Indigenous corporations and ranger programs where they are already established and support the development of new ranger programs where there is no investment in priority areas.

1.5 Creating Fire Management training hubs across Australia

This investment will enable twenty one cultural fire management hubs to be established across Australia. It will resource these hubs and enable employment of four two full time cultural fire management ranger positions to support their training pilot programs and generate future programs that provide employment pathways for trainees in existing mentoring and training programs. Below are two case studies outlining existing initiatives.

Hunter region NSW CULTURAL FIRE MANAGEMENT Pilot MENTORING PROGRAM 2019-2022
Case study

Hunter region Cultural fire Management Pilot Mentoring program was initiated out of NSW Indigenous peoples' involvement in and attendance at Regional and the National Indigenous fire workshops. Cultural fire practitioners visited the region to work with Indigenous people in the region to mentor the methodology. Growing from the mentorship program a pilot training program was launched in 2019. This pilot project has been initiated in response to a direct need expressed by the local Indigenous community to participate full-time in Cultural fire management on their country.

Through its ongoing partnerships, in 2019 the Firesticks Alliance established a community initiative in the Hunter Region of NSW. This initiative delivers a mentoring and training program partnering with Indigenous organisations, Local Aboriginal Lands Councils, Hunter Local Land Services and Tocal college to undertake a pilot cultural fire mentorship program that aligns to elements of Conservation and Land Management qualification.

This pilot Program supports 22 Indigenous Community members to apply fire through culturally informed practices across the Hunter Region. It connects Conservation and Land Management training with Cultural Burn activities through mentorship from the Firesticks Alliance. It provides a culturally informed process that takes into consideration connection to Country, cultural indicators and reciprocity with the environment.



Denman June 2019 Photo credit: Ruth Neaves

Tasmania Cultural Fire MENTORING PROGRAM 2014-2023

Case study

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) and the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania attended the National Indigenous fire workshop on Taepathiggi Country on the Steve Irwin Nature Reserve in 2014. Since the attendance at that workshop the Aboriginal community has been able to reintroduce traditional fire practice into Aboriginal and private lands in Tasmania.

Key foundational activities undertaken after the initial workshop in QLD were:

- Community fire assessment workshops and burns with Victor Steffensen undertaken on Aboriginal Lands in a range of country types within the state and Bass Strait Islands over a large area in 2015 and 2017 involving 50-100 Aboriginal community members
- Post assessment undertaking of local community cultural burns within the Tasmanian Aboriginal community
- The continued attendance at the annual National Indigenous fire workshops by Aboriginal community and Rangers

Fire projects on Aboriginal lands are now in the fifth year of practice and are undertaken on 8 IPA properties owned and managed by the Aboriginal community including:

- Big Dog Island mutton bird rookery – Bass strait Islands
- Preminghana IPA – North west Tasmania
- Putalina IPA – Southern Tasmania
- Piyura kitina IPA – Southern Tasmania
- Cape Barren Island- Bass strait Islands
- Trawtha Makuminya Aboriginal Land- Central Highlands
- Chapel Island IPA – Bass Strait Islands
- Lungtalanana IPA – Bass Strait Islands
- Kings Run Aboriginal Land- North West Tasmania

The total combined land area of these areas is over 60,000ha. The TAC has also undertaken a fee for service project undertaking fire management on private land in the Tasmanian Midlands in threatened native grassland communities. Partnerships with the Tasmanian Fire Service and the Parks and Wildlife Service are developing and plan for the introduction of cultural burning in the World Heritage Area are underway.

Previous to engagement with the National Workshops and Victor, fire management was largely absent from the management of Aboriginal Lands, In 5 years the Rangers have acquired the skills to undertake fire practice as a core part of the management and care of land. Ongoing learning is also occurring in line with the philosophy of the 'firesticks' methodology and training opportunities are being identified and developed for the future.



Kuku Thaypan (Awu Alaya) Cultural Fire Centre of Excellence

Kuku Thaypan (Awu Alaya) Mentoring and training hub

Firesticks has a long history with the Kuku Thaypan community, the knowledge of Elders Dr. Tommy George and Dr. George Musgrave and the Fire Management Research project and their co-generative PhD "The Importance of Campfires" led to the development of the National Indigenous Fire Workshops that continue to increase cultural burning programs across Australia. The Elders started their research project in 2004. Having worked for many years recording and sharing their knowledge on country with their descendants and Victor Steffensen. The Elders capacity to fully practice and share their cultural knowledge on country was impacted by inappropriate fire regimes. In 2003 they invited a young researcher Peta Standley to assist them to document their cultural fire knowledge and undertake a research project to demonstrate appropriate ways to undertake Indigenous led research.

Firesticks aims to strengthen this relationship and help give back to the community and the younger decedents of the Elders, who are also knowledge holders by supporting them to establish a training centre of excellence where they can be resourced to continue mentoring, workshops and training to Indigenous communities across Australia on their country on Maryvalley (Thenacull) station, Cape York Peninsula, while maintaining the health of their country. This provides an opportunity for the Kuku Thaypan people to also establish cultural eco-tourism focused on cultural fire training demonstrating and interpreting their cultural and ecological landscapes. The will further enhance the mentoring and training methodologies that include; burning different country types, cultural indicators monitoring and research, threatened species management and Indigenous ethnobotany.



The Elders granddaughters on country with The Importance of Campfires co-researcher Dr. Peta Standley

1.6 Budget and resources (4-year program)

The following high-level budget is provided. See Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Investment required

Investment	Activity	Total over four years
Project management, administration, reporting, governance, insurance and other on costs	Firesticks Alliance Administration/Public Liability/Professional indemnity Insurance Project coordination, Governance Board and Fire Circle Advisory Committee Costs Training program development and delivery, monitoring and evaluation Reporting, Communications and media	\$1,600,000.00
Infrastructure and equipment	Safety, field equipment and fire management equipment asset purchases x 20 hubs @ \$5,840,00.00 per hub total over 4 years. \$146,000 per annum per hub	\$11,680,000.00
On the job trainee wages and on costs	Support to fund 100 persons to undertake on the job training over 4 years. Potential to part fund existing employment within Indigenous land management groups to support greater numbers \$52,500 per person x 100 people x 4 years	\$21,000,000.00
Fire and cultural experts to facilitate assessments, guidance, knowledge transfer and support	Procurement of Indigenous fire and cultural experts x 5 - \$100,000 per person @ \$25,000 per year scholarship x 4 years	\$250,000,00.00
Mentoring training costs (western and cultural) cultural exchange	10 Cultural Fire Mentors and Knowledge Holders (outcomes 100 cultural fire practitioners mentored and trained – costs above) trained in cultural fire and western fire training (\$24,000 per person) per year x 4 years	\$960,000.00
Cultural monitoring and research	Indigenous led cultural fire monitoring and research \$180,000 per year x 4 years	\$720,000.00
Protocol approved Ecological research	@ \$35000 per year Indigenous engagement decolonising research	\$140,000.00
Indigenous Community site/s on county demonstration cultural burning (establishment and resourcing)	Investment in site locations where cultural fire will be implemented across the four years. 20 sites initial engagement and negotiation costs	\$600,000.00
Design and development of training and education program	Existing Training materials production costs	\$300,000.00
	Education program writing specialist to assist with development of training framework and materials Nationally recognised	
Cultural Fire Hub investment @\$ 3,150,000 per hub over four years. \$787,500 per hub per annum	Cultural Fire Hub positions x 4 positions per hub. 4 Years Full time \$787,500 per annum per hub. \$196 875 allocation per role includes wages, on-costs, operating, travel, insurance, office costs, phones, PPE, vehicles x 20 hubs. Salaries will vary depending on experience.	\$63,000,000.00
Total Investment Required		\$100,000,000.00

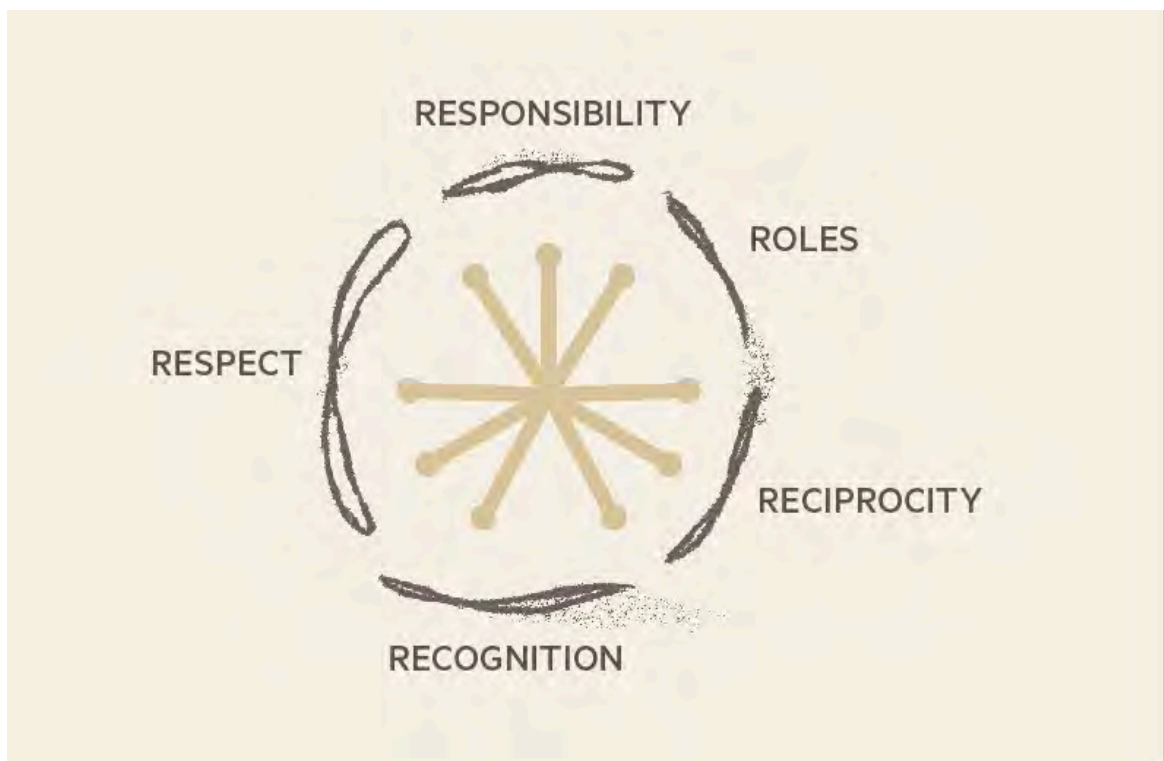
Increasingly Firesticks Alliance and its network of Cultural fire practitioners and Traditional Custodians are receiving requests by landholders and agencies for assistance in applying cultural fire on Country. Currently capacity and knowledge to undertake this work and leverage off the opportunity is limited due to insufficient investment.

We look forward to connecting on Country and continuing the cultural fire journey.

Oliver Costello
CEO, Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation



Peta Standley
Senior Researcher and Program Manager
Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation



This Project has considerable cultural, economic, education and training benefits for Indigenous Australian people. These benefits arise from the proposed components around knowledge sharing and transfer of Indigenous Australian land and water management practices including a mentoring and exchange program with Indigenous land managers from across Australia.

In Northern Australia, the reinstatement of fire regimes by Indigenous people for biodiversity, cultural and carbon benefits is now a rapidly increasing activity. Some 20 per cent of the northern savanna is owned or managed by Indigenous people and Indigenous land interest span a much greater area, through joint management arrangements and non-exclusive native title. However, traditional owners wish to employ their cultural fire management knowledge to deliver multiple services including improving outcomes for the savanna burning economy.

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Cultural burning: healthy communities, healthy landscapes

Summary Report

Fire Circle on Empowering Indigenous leadership, cultural fire and land management practices, and First Nations people and businesses impacted by bushfires.

Facilitated by Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance

Analysis and summary prepared by Katharine Haynes, Wollongong University

On the 9th of April 2020 the Firesticks Alliance facilitated a virtual Fire Circle for Aboriginal communities and organisations effected by the 2019/2020 bushfire crisis and their enabling partners and supporters. These bushfires had a devastating impact on Country and many First Nations people's cultural landscapes, property, businesses, heritage and natural values.

The aim was to discuss a number of practical measures to drive policy change given the current opportunities.

The virtual fire circle was attended by around 47 participants from a range of Aboriginal communities and organisations and their enabling partners and supporters (a list of known attendees is supplied in the Appendix).

A summary of the key points is provided below, followed by a more detailed overview with direct quotes from participants.



Fire Circle analysis and key points

Need for consultation, partnership and long-term funding

- Greater collaboration and consultation is needed with fire agencies to ensure Aboriginal groups are part of the planning and management process
- In the NSW context, greater resourcing is required to support participation of Aboriginal representatives on the Bushfire Management Committees
- Majority of funding is short-term and project-based. Need for sustainable long-term income streams that enable Aboriginal communities to be self-determining and deliver on their rights and responsibilities
- There needs to be greater collaborations at the local level, to build the capacity of Aboriginal groups with support from community members, councils, land holders and land managers
- Despite increasing levels of interest from governments a systematic and longer-term response is needed
- There needs to be a regional fire programs, rather than sporadic projects, that brings all key stakeholders and agencies together to work across different land tenures. In order for this to occur there needs to be:
 - 1) Significant investment to fully fund a training and mentoring program that supports Aboriginal-led practices; and
 - 2) Collaboration and buy in from all key agencies and stakeholders to support local Aboriginal people's knowledge, authority and responsibilities
 - agencies needed to ensure they support their staff, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to participate

Legislation, insurance and accreditation

- The need for insurance cover and OH&S requirements are significant barriers to cultural burns and enterprise development
- Cultural burning practitioners are often not 'accredited' firefighters, making it hard to get insurance cover
- Firesticks Alliance have been advocating to agencies for recognition of their training program, as the course is culturally accredited and nationally recognised by Aboriginal organisations and communities
- It was noted that other competencies could be added into the Firesticks course to bring it in line with current national accredited frameworks. However, it was felt that their cultural knowledge and practice is enough and should be recognised

Need for better understanding of sustainable land management – land as kin

- Mismanagement of the landscape was a significant factor leading to the Black Summer bushfires
- Barriers in public and agency understandings of cultural burning remain, with many people assuming it is simply another form of hazard reduction burning
- The outcomes that agencies and government wanted from cultural burning are often confused or conflict with cultural aims and outcomes
- There is a lack of understanding among many bushfire agencies and staff about the negative impacts that hazard reduction burning has on the environment
 - It applies a uniform approach that ends up homogenising the landscape, adding to the fuel load, and creating risk
- Many of the fire and land management agencies didn't understand the need to burn to restore, and were therefore leaving much of the landscape unmanaged, leading to a rapid increase in the bushfire risk
- The NSW Bushfire Environmental Assessment Code that prevents more frequent burning conflicts with cultural knowledge
- There is a need to better communicate the benefits of an Indigenous approach in order to remove barriers
- The language around fire should be changed to get away from a risk perspective, in which landscape fire is often viewed as a negative and instead framed around resilient landscapes that require environmentally and culturally appropriate fire regimes to prevent and mitigate bush fire impacts
- There is a need to promote and communicate to the broader community and agencies about the holistic benefits of cultural burning, and not only focus on biodiversity as the key difference with hazard reduction burning
 - The benefits to Country and community are reciprocal and inseparable
 - Land management should be reframed as caring for kin

Research – Translation and communication to drive policy change

- Further research is not needed to validate cultural practices. However, there is a need to produce peer-reviewed evidence that is written in the best way to communicate with and influence policy makers on the benefits of cultural practices across a broad spectrum of policy areas.
- There is therefore a need for greater collaboration with university researchers to produce materials that will influence policy change
- Without proper resourcing and capacity building, to enable Indigenous practitioners to properly collaborate, they are not being recognised as the experts and authorities of research outcomes which can lead to misappropriation and misrepresentation
- Strengthening protocols around ethical research practices are needed that foster Indigenous-led and co-designed research
- Indigenous research partners must be empowered to determine the research questions, the nature of research relationships and who should be conducting

- Funding that is accessed for research should be used to pay the research partners who are the experts and knowledge holders

New fire economy

- There are significant opportunities for Indigenous enterprises in land management and cultural burning
- The fire economy is disproportionately weighted towards recovery and response in the public sector
- More investment is needed for resilience and adaptation
- Funding is needed to grow and support Indigenous-led programs external to agencies
- There is a need to increase the number of Aboriginal staff in all land and fire management agencies to drive change from within
- There is a need for more Aboriginal-controlled or joint management lands with an increase in the number of Aboriginal people empowered to manage the land
- In order for Indigenous-led enterprises to work, more equitable power relationships are needed across fire and land management. As noted elsewhere, in order for this to be achieved governments must provide more long term funding, legislation needs to be amended and agency staff must be supported to collaborate meaningfully

Indigenous-led regional coordination

- Coordination should be led by the knowledge holders and the practitioners driving change on the ground in regional and local communities
- The creation of Indigenous regional coordinator roles would help ensure that Indigenous-led approaches deliver longer-term benefits to communities
- Decisions currently require different land and fire management agencies to come together and collaborate, which often means there is little room for the community's voice
- An Indigenous regional coordinator would ensure a strong Aboriginal voice, providing empowered Aboriginal leadership with the autonomy and resources to collaborate with agencies on a more equal footing

Training and mentoring

- The need for more training and mentoring in cultural burning
- More support needs to be provided to existing and new Indigenous Protected Areas and ranger groups
- Ranger groups can help pass on their skills to their own and other communities
- Ranger groups could undertake further training to become emergency response teams, which would help reduce disaster risk in their areas through greater preparedness, response and recovery

Background

On the 9th April 2020 the Firesticks Alliance facilitated a virtual Fire Circle for Aboriginal communities and organisations effected by the 2019/2020 bushfire crisis and their enabling partners and supporters. Forty-seven participants attended. A full list of attendees is supplied in the appendix. The bushfires had a devastating impact on Country and many First Nations people's cultural landscapes, property, businesses, heritage and natural values.

The Firesticks Alliance feels that we must learn from these events and ensure action is taken to empower Indigenous leadership, cultural fire and land management practices, and First Nations people and businesses impacted by bushfires.

The discussion centred on a number of practical measures to feed into the Bushfire inquiry:

- What are the practical measures needed to support First Nation communities to plan, manage and recover from bushfires?
- What can we learn from First Nation fire enterprises and landscape management approaches to improve our resilience and response to bushfires in Australia?
- Is research needed to support cultural burning and land management, and First Nation communities and businesses impacted by bushfires?
- If so, what research is needed, how should it be done, and who should be involved?
- What are the practical measures and supports required to grow the cultural and land management business opportunities?
- Where and how should government and non-government support be directed to support cultural burning and to support First Nation communities?
- How can this support be better coordinated to achieve long-term benefits for Country, First Nation enterprises and communities?

The transcript of the meeting was fully transcribed and analysed with a thematic coding scheme to summarise the salient points discussed by participants. The full analysis is provided below with a number of direct quotes from participants.

Key points emerging from the discussion

Need for consultation, partnership and long-term funding

The need for meaningful consultation with Aboriginal communities was discussed, to ensure partners and government organisations had a better understanding of what communities wanted. In particular, the group discussed the need to foster greater collaboration and consultation with fire agencies to ensure Aboriginal groups are part of the planning and management process. In the NSW context, participation on the Bushfire Management Committees enables community voices to be heard on management processes. This was felt to be a process where Indigenous representatives could provide advice and coordination leading to tangible benefits. However, without independent policy and greater resourcing this participation could not occur in a meaningful way.

'I think it's just having time to have some genuine and dedicated conversations around what it means for the community... 'what does successful involvement in preparedness look like... where you want to be involved, and making sure that all your partners know and understand it' Daniel Miller, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

'I think for a firefighting operation, we need to have collaboration with land councils, and custodian of land... to be part of that planning, looking at the landscape and also obviously the community and have that connection' Jamie Bertram, Rural Fire Service

'I think there's a greater role for community to play into management process that's existent and perhaps even to try and change some of the ways that we go about managing that risk' Phil Patterson, Rural Fire Service

Much of the funding received to date has been short-term and project-based. Participants discussed the need for sustainable income streams in order to invest in staff and provide career development opportunities.

'Funding that comes is sort of project-based or whatever and what we need is more of a sustainable and a bit more confidence that we can invest in staff and give people a good pathway, you know, some involvement, so it's not just a piecemeal... which is never going to attract the right people. It's hard to get mobs involved if [we don't] have confidence of being able to see some lasting sort of changes, I reckon'. Daniel Miller, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

While significant investment is made in fire and emergency services the group discussed how very little is provided to build community capacity outside of government frameworks. In particular, the group discussed the need for an improved funding model that would enable Aboriginal communities to be self-determining and deliver on their rights and responsibilities.

'Under the current funding arrangements for most of the programs and projects, they're so short-term – they're not long enough to actually build that long-term capacity. So yeah, if

we can come up with a model that's able to better resource that on-ground capacity of the rangers and Aboriginal communities to look after their land and be able to be able to prepare and respond to emergencies – fires in particular – I think that's going to set us up in a much better way into the future' Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance

It was felt that encouraging greater local level collaborations, and building the capacity of local Aboriginal groups to demonstrate practice and knowledge, would significantly build support from community members, land holders and land managers. This would also add significantly to the resilience of Country and community, as the land would be better managed and cared for and community members would know each other and have developed good working relationships. It was discussed that it would be particularly beneficial for this program to target public land managers where a lot of Aboriginal rights to land had been retained under law and where there is a significant need and opportunity for improved management. However, many Aboriginal people are not able to access that land or carry out their practices and responsibilities on it.

'... get community out on Country... it's about having that partnership and enhancing from a local point of view an involvement of mob, you know... that's where the power is going to start to grow if we've got deadly partnerships with community, with local councils who have all these large responsibilities...' Uncle Graham Moore, Yuin People, Bega Valley Shire Council

'several local councils are looking at the opportunities as well, so they're really quite positive and they want to get involved, but I think they're... maybe developing the process, making it a much more clear process of engagement, planning, and then conducting and reviewing – it seems to be a bit of a loss in translation perhaps to make that a simple process from an idea to a project completion' Dan Pederson, Lake Macquarie.

Participants described a number of successful pilot burns they had been conducting in partnership with council and noted that they were seeing increasing levels of interest from local government. However, it was felt that a systematic and longer-term response from local government was needed. It was noted how the pilot burns and workshops required significant work to organise and to ensure the right stakeholders were on the ground, only to see the momentum lost. There was a call for a regional fire program, rather than sporadic projects, with a clearer process of engagement that brought all the key stakeholders and agencies together to work across the different land tenures. The cross-tenure aspect was felt to be important, as previous examples had shown that learning practises on one form of land tenure and then trying to translate it to another led to challenges due to differing rules and legislation.

It was discussed how Firesticks Alliance had been advocating for the development of regional fire programs or hubs that can support local Aboriginal-led management. Two key elements were discussed in order to achieve this: 1) Significant investment to fully fund a training and mentoring program that supports Aboriginal-led practices; and 2) Collaboration and buy in from all key agencies and stakeholders to support local Aboriginal people's knowledge, authority and responsibilities. In relation to the second point and supporting

Aboriginal-led approaches, it was also felt that agencies needed to ensure they support their staff, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to be able to participate, even if that means stepping outside of their own policy and resource areas.

'I think getting local governments on board is critical but you need a bit of a critical mass of local community knowledge holders and practitioners that can actually deliver the burning regimes. You know, having a couple of projects here and there is not building that capacity; you need a program to do that.... We need a fully funded training and mentoring program, with fully funded people to be able to go out and start to implement those fire regimes in partnership with all the stakeholders – that's where we'll see change.... if people reflect on where we were 10 years ago and where we are now, I think it's safe to say it's a massive change but it's not good enough – we've still got to go further. We've got to actualise the idea that we've been promoting to make the change happen on the ground' Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance

Legislation, insurance and accreditation

Participants discussed that the need for insurance cover and OH&S requirements were significant barriers to cultural burns. In many cases bureaucratic planning processes had significantly delayed or prevented burns from going ahead. One participant noted how despite carrying out a number of successful 'demonstration' burns they had been unable to progress further due to a lack of insurance because they were not 'accredited' firefighters.

'...the hard part about getting insurance, for us down here in Victoria, is that you can only get insurance if you're a trained firefighter rather than what I consider myself to be as an Indigenous fire manager, which is two separate processes' Uncle Dave Wandin, Wurundjeri People

It was discussed how Firesticks Alliance had been working to grow its training program while also advocating to agencies for recognition, as the course is culturally accredited and nationally recognised by Aboriginal organisations and communities. It was noted that other competencies could be added into the course to bring it in line with the training conducted by registered training organisations such as the RFS or CFA. However, although the group could see the benefits of standardisation with current national accredited frameworks, it was also strongly felt that their cultural knowledge and practice should already be enough. Participants discussed how often OH&S concerns that had taken significant time and work to address 'evaporated' once the burn was underway. Participants felt that further advocacy and negotiation was needed to drive policy changes in OH&S and indemnity legislation, in order that the legitimacy of cultural burning practice was recognised.

'I mean, I haven't heard anyone say, "I don't trust that" – they all love the process; they just don't know how to change the policy. So I think we also need to be working at the very high levels of the people who make these policy decisions because, at the end of the day, policy is only legislation and legislation does get changed every day' Uncle Dave Wandin, Wurundjeri People

'... often people never get to that point... That's what I think we've been successful at is actually just pushing through, meeting those expectations, or finding alternative approaches – once you get people on Country burning, a lot of that stuff just washes away' Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance

Need for better understanding of sustainable land management – land as kin

Participants acknowledged that the Black Summer bushfires were due to a combination of factors including drought and climate change; however, it was felt that mismanagement of the landscape was a significant factor. Participants called for a greatly improved management approach based on the culture of the land, the ecosystems and people's connections to the land.

'Clearly, a lot of these landscapes that have burned have had way too much fuel and often have been burned in the wrong way, whether it was wildfire or prescribed fire, for decades or centuries, and so we need to, I guess, understand that there needs to be a change in the management approaches if we want to give our Country the best chance to respond to changing climates and changing land use, and so we need to sort of think about the resilience of that landscape and what actions we can take' Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance

'I think what we need here is a recognition that in order to manage land to lessen the threat of bushfire, we actually need to have a lot more management of it rather than leaving it alone' David Walker, Ecosystems and Threatened Species, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment,

Despite significant growth in support for Indigenous cultural burning - particularly following the Black Summer bushfires - participants discussed barriers in public and agency understandings of cultural burning, with many people assuming it was simply another form of hazard reduction burning.

'...we've spoken about cultural burning and [names member of the leadership team] attitude, "Well that's just hazard reduction". So, even the heads of organisations don't understand the complexities of what's involved with cultural burning and I think that's something that we've got to work on... we're trying to push this thing, but we're having a lot of trouble trying to convince people in these organisations the benefits of it but I think if we keep setting people up like we have done and supporting you guys and getting a bit of publicity, I think the organisation will learn from what you guys are doing. You should be congratulated; you're doing some great work with that stuff' Simon Curry, Rural Fire Service

It was noted that the confusion over cultural burning had been a long-term issue, that perhaps cultural burning practitioners had not countered as vocally as they could have due to the fact that they wanted progress *'we've been very pragmatic about just trying to make things work instead of actually maybe holding back a bit and saying, "Well, this isn't going to work" (Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance).*

In relation to this it was also stated that there had to be realistic expectations of what Indigenous practitioners and cultural burning could achieve. One participant noted that the wider public's perceptions since the Black Summer fires needed to be more balanced.

'...realistic expectations of what we're trying to do. We don't want to be held up as being the saviour of a community... because that's not the sort of pressure any of us want or need'
Daniel Miller, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

A significant issue was the lack of understanding among many bushfire agencies and staff about the negative impacts that hazard reduction burning has had on the environment. Participants discussed that while cultural burning aims to promote health through applying the right fire to Country, much hazard reduction burning applies a uniform approach that ends up adding to the fuel load, homogenising the landscape and creating risk. Participants also noted that the outcomes that agencies and government wanted from cultural burning were often confused or conflicted with cultural values.

'the outcomes that government might want to see from cultural burning is not necessarily the outcomes that we want from a cultural perspective, but, the long-term outcomes of being able to manage Country ends up with the same effect, sometimes over a longer term and in some cases, in the short-term... our priority is about first off, protecting Country and the biodiversity that lives within it. I think that's the message we need to communicate to people. It is not to reduce fuel loads; it is to protect biodiversity' Uncle Dave Wandin, Wurundjeri People

In response to the bushfire devastation, Indigenous practitioners now wanted to heal and rehabilitate the landscape with restorative burning. This burning would promote healthy Country, and in doing so, naturally reduce the bushfire risk. However, it was felt that many of the fire and land management agencies didn't understand the need to burn to restore, and were therefore leaving much of the landscape unmanaged, leading to a rapid increase in the bushfire risk. Furthermore, policy barriers currently exist, with fire agencies following environmental legislation in the Bushfire Environmental Assessment Code that do not allow more frequent burning.

'you can't burn most Country for 10 years or so on average across most historical forest..., under our legislation using Bushfire Environmental Assessment Code, so we have a real problem there where we need to change those frequencies. And getting back to basics about burning the bush that needs to be burned; not to a prescription that's very broad-brush... I agree with you totally – you can drive anywhere and you can see the bush is really thick. It's that mid-storey growth that's causing the problem getting into the canopy that's creating the drama. We're creating a lot of that mid-storey growth by burning too hot'
Simon Curry, Rural Fire Service

This difference in understanding was felt to be a substantial challenge, that some hoped would be countered through monitoring and evaluation that would produce further evidence. However, it was noted by others that the issue is not the need for the validation of practices, but the need to better communicate the benefits of an Indigenous approach in

order to remove barriers. Participants discussed the need to build up the knowledge and capacity of fire and land management agencies and the public in relation to applying the right fire regimes to country and the advantages of a different approach.

'... it's about translation. It's not, to me, about validating our knowledge and practice – it's about being able to communicate it so other people understand it, and so they can support us to maintain it. You know, it's been an amazing few months, really seeing... this real growth in aspirations of people outside of the Aboriginal community for us – we've got land holders and land managers from all over the country, and even the world, asking the question now, "Well, why isn't this being supported? Why can't we access these services? Why are these barriers in place?" Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance.

It was also noted that the language around fire should be changed to get away from a risk perspective, in which landscape fire is often viewed as a negative and think about resilient landscapes instead. As noted by Oliver below.

'I think "resilience" is a better word than "risk" as well – looking at the resilience of that landscape. So, how is it going to respond and recover if it's burned the wrong way? Whether it's arson, a prescribed burn, or a wildfire, or whatever it is, if that's burned the wrong way, what's its resilience going to be, and if there's life and property next to that, what's its resilience going to be? So, how long is it going to take to recover and that system or that house or whatever, the community, to recover?' Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance.

It was also discussed that further understanding in the broader community and agencies was needed around the holistic benefits of cultural burning, instead of focusing on the main difference between hazard reduction and cultural burning being around biodiversity. There was a call to promote the practice of land management as a reciprocal relationship, like caring for kin.

'I think there's a danger though focusing just on biodiversity. I think that it's been proven that there's a whole wealth of benefits, co-benefits, real benefits – whatever you want to call them, in reconnecting to Country, how the effect that has on community functioning, psychological health, physical health, all these sorts of things. I think we have to be strategic in what we pitch in the right place but that has to be coming from a greater whole that we're all around that this is not only about Country; it's about ourselves and about our communities' Michael Fletcher, Melbourne University

'...we know the participation in caring for Country speaks back to many different layers of disadvantage and structural racism that Aboriginal people face and that when we're speaking back to... maybe agency staff... people are stuck in silos and they're only seeing things from their one perspective. They're not seeing that we're coming at this from a whole-of-community understanding on why connection to Country and caring for Country is important for all these social reasons, and all these cultural reasons, and all these environmental reasons – it's not just about reducing a fuel load; it's about us surviving' Vanessa Cavanagh, Wollongong University

Research – Translation and communication to drive policy change

While participants were clear that they didn't feel further research was needed to validate cultural practices, they felt there was a need to produce peer-reviewed evidence for policy makers. It was discussed that while many Aboriginal organisations and groups were experts in terms of hands-on demonstrations and their own forms of monitoring and documentation, it was acknowledged that this was not the format best able to communicate with and convince policy makers. Participants therefore called for greater collaboration with university researchers to produce materials that would influence policy change.

'...as much as we are doing our own documentation, we need those universities to document it in a format that fits within what policy makers refer to... I can give anecdotal evidence, I can give photo evidence but to put it in a thesis or a PhD or whatever way they want to do it, you know, I'm the first one to admit that I can't do that, and we don't necessarily have anyone within our organisation that has that level of expertise to be able to present it in a way that reads the way people want to read it but still get the message through' Uncle Dave Wandin, Wurundjeri People

'I think there's a real need for using universities to develop the data, not to prove our cultural burning or anything like this, but to provide another line of evidence or another pillar that maybe some of the land managers or the administrators can look at, because a lot of the decisions are made on empirical information. So, we've really got to start framing our own questions and using universities and other research agencies to get the data we want and I think we've got to sort of reset the scene there'. Michael Fletcher, Melbourne University

One participant discussed how they felt that there had already been significant amounts of research conducted, and that the delay of waiting for 'scientific data' was delaying the process of actually getting on with cultural burning.

'... we've researched things to death in some instances, and we continue to throw money at research, whilst we're not really getting on with the subject at hand, and that is the actual cultural burning. So, my only fear is we're going to keep on waiting for the data, we're going to keep on waiting for the researchers to do their thing, whether they be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal researchers – it is important but that is my only fear that we're going to be tread-milling in this ongoing research quagmire' Den Barber, Koori Country Firesticks

It was discussed that there were increasing calls from researchers to undertake projects on cultural burning. However, it was felt that there was not enough actual ongoing work on the ground, or cultural burning practitioners who were adequately empowered and resourced to collaborate on the research. There were concerns that without proper resourcing and capacity building to enable Indigenous practitioners to properly collaborate, they were not being recognised as the experts and authorities of the research outcomes. It was felt that greater protocols needed to be put in place to ensure that Aboriginal practitioners were

empowered to determine the research questions, the nature of research relationships and who should be conducting that research.

The need for communities to be empowered to conduct their own monitoring and evaluation about what constitutes healthy and vibrant culture and Country was noted. To date it was felt that Westernised approaches had dominated. Instead, monitoring should be dictated by communities who can see and feel the health of Country as a whole.

'if we can enable communities to report on what they think is important research, I think that's the... how they keep culture vibrant through fire I think that'll be a lot better way to report on the benefit' Geoff Simpson, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

It was strongly acknowledged that academics embedded within universities needed to advocate and push harder to ensure tighter protocols around ethical research practices. In particular, funding that was accessed for research should be used to pay the research partners who are the experts and knowledge holders.

'...those of us in that academic space doing the research... we can push the conversations and put pressure for the universities and other researchers to be having very tight protocols, to be making sure that when they do access funding that funding is going to pay the people who are the actual experts and authorities, which are not academics, and I think that there's a lot to be done then in advocating for good research practices within the research community... So yeah, I think that's a big conversation too.' Lauren Tynan, Koori Country Firesticks / Macquarie University.

'I think a lot of you were probably present at that forum in December that was held at the Botanic Gardens [Sydney] where this issue of integrating academic research with Aboriginal cultural practices and fire management was talked about, and a lot of us who are academics agreed that there's so much for academics to learn about right way science and that this should really just be increasingly pursued as an initiative inside universities' Rosalie Chapple, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Overall, participants felt there was a need to build a strong community of practice that fostered Indigenous-led research to ensure that research and universities were doing the research that would further support and empower cultural burning.

'Universities are an incredible resource if we use them the right way, and not the other way around. So I think it's a really exciting time and we've got to be smart about how we do this' Michael Fletcher, Melbourne University

New fire economy – ‘a new industry, built on the oldest industry I know’ (Dan Pederson)

Participants felt that there were currently significant opportunities for Indigenous owned and managed businesses in land management and cultural burning.

‘I’ve helped develop land management business and I think that the opportunity in front of us is a new industry and built on the oldest industry I know, but there is a lot of work and a lot of opportunity right now’ Dan Pederson, Lake Macquarie.

It was discussed that the fire economy was disproportionately weighted towards recovery and response, with a much smaller proportion invested in resilience and adaptation, where it was agreed that the biggest impacts could be achieved. In particular, investment is required to support the development of more Aboriginal-controlled or joint management lands with an increase in the number of Aboriginal people empowered to manage the land. In addition to Indigenous-led programs external to agencies, it was felt that there is also a need to increase the number of Aboriginal staff in all the land and fire management agencies across Australia to drive change from within.

‘I’m obviously arguing for more investment in Indigenous-led ranger programs... and I think we need to have more Aboriginal staff in these agencies. You know, RFS is a good example... there’s not enough Aboriginal staff in RFS and you know, all these other agencies just don’t have enough community, Aboriginal community people, in them to make the change but I also think it’s important that that change is also happening outside of the agencies, and that’s why I strongly advocate for Indigenous-led ranger programs’ Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance

In order for Indigenous-led enterprises to work, more equitable power relationships are needed across fire and land management. As noted elsewhere, in order for this to be achieved governments must provide more long term funding, legislation needs to be amended and agency staff must be supported to collaborate meaningfully.

Participants also discussed how it is often argued that funding cultural burning is too expensive. However, it was felt that government funded hazard reduction burns that require fire trucks, helicopters, other equipment, and many levels of management and agencies are more expensive. From the experience of participants, it was felt that most cultural burning doesn’t require any of this expensive infrastructure, the main cost is income for practitioners which is very economical and has many other benefits for the community.

Indigenous-led regional coordination

It was stated that coordination should be led by the knowledge holders and the practitioners driving change on the ground in regional and local communities. It was therefore felt that the creation of a new Indigenous regional coordinator role would help ensure that Indigenous-led approaches deliver longer-term benefits to communities. However, it was stated that the role would operate most effectively if it was a non-government position. It was noted that often local-level decision makers within the larger organisations did not actually have the resources and authority to make decisions for the community they worked with. In some cases, decisions currently required different land and fire management agencies to come together and collaborate, which often means there is little room for the community's voice. It was noted that an Indigenous regional coordinator would rectify this situation, providing empowered Aboriginal leadership with the autonomy and resources to collaborate with agencies on a more equal footing.

Training and mentoring

The group discussed how greater training and mentoring in cultural burning was needed for Aboriginal people in general. However, it was also felt that more support needs to be provided to existing and new Indigenous Protected Areas and ranger groups. Some groups are already trained so they could pass their skills on to their own and other communities.

It was also mentioned that some Aboriginal ranger groups could undertake further training to become emergency response teams, which would help reduce disaster risk in their areas through greater preparedness, response and recovery.

'we had the idea up here... if we can get funding to be an emergency response team to natural disasters in our area. The fires down south gave us a bit of a scare because we don't have any cultural burning allowed up here and it's long overdue. We're scared of what it becomes, so we kind of want to get on top of that and see if there's any resources available out there that we could approach this and have our own response team' Justine Dillon, Guanaba Indigenous Protected Area.

It was acknowledged there are significant differences between the skills to apply fire in a low-risk cultural burning context compared to bushfire risk reduction. Although, it was felt that skills for both would be ideal, participants did not want to see a situation where a prerequisite in bushfire response is needed to conduct cultural burning.

'It's just we haven't really pushed into that space because it's so regulated and controlled and the training requirements I've found in the past have been a barrier for cultural burning so we've just got to be careful that we navigate that... having all those skills in both contexts is ideal but we don't want one to be a prerequisite for the other' Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance.

Appendix 1

Known Participants

(Note: this was an online forum and was open invite, about 47 people joined, but some people have been hard to identify, so this list is known participants)

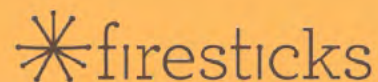
Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation
Dan Pederson, Lake Macquarie
Michael Fletcher, Melbourne University
Vanessa Cavanagh, Wollongong University
Justine Dillon, Guanaba Indigenous Protected Area
Rosalie Chapple, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Lauren Tynan, Koori Country Firesticks / Macquarie University.
Geoff Simpson, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Den Barber, Koori Country Firesticks
Simon Curry, Rural Fire Service
Dave Wandin, Wurundjeri People
Daniel Miller, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
David Walker, Ecosystems and Threatened Species, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Graham Moore, Yuin People, Bega Valley Shire Council
Katharine Haynes, Wollongong University
Phil Patterson, Rural Fire Service
Jamie Bertram, Rural Fire Service
Noels Webster, South East Local Land Services
Deb Sparkes, Centre of Excellence Prescribed Burning
Dr Peta Standley, Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation
Rod Williams, Gnibi Wandarahn College of Indigenous Australian Peoples
Tash Morton, NSW Aboriginal Affairs
Dan Morgan, South East Local Land Services
Dr Jennifer Firn, Science & Engineering Faculty | QUT | (Tjuwanda Women Rangers)
Aurora Milroy, Melbourne University
Michelle McKemey, PhD candidate, University of New England
Dr Cathy Robinson, Research Group Leader, CSIRO Land & Water
Stephanie von Gavel, Business Development Manager, CSIRO Land & Water
Chris Allen, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Jonathon Captain-Webb, Manager, Culture and Heritage, NSW Aboriginal Land Council
Glenn Storrie NSW NPWS, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Jai Sleeman, North Coast Local Land Services
Jonathan Jones, Artist, Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi peoples



HEALING CULTURE, PEOPLE AND COUNTRY WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF FIRE

National Indigenous Fire Workshop

Bundanon, 12-15 July 2018



Welcome

Widthouw murrnyang, Ngia Nundhirra Dharnyang
Gudthugal Dharrawal Ngura, Ngiugangguli
Murra Ngala barumunbala orajungya banglipa
Ngarawannyupa Waringulwundu Gaumbiwarra
Narimung Bangliya.

Ngia Gumine Yindigung Murranyangpa
Yindigungguli Magannda.

Ngia Gumine Ngiagungguli Magunnda bulliayupa
Gunna bulliaya, Dharrawal murrjang Umbarra Yuin
murringjang.

Murrjang burragu Ganamapa Ngura billa
Ngundahmurra jang Gunmbi balawilia Dha Nia
Ganmbi jang Ganama Dharan Dhurang.

Hello everyone, I see we all stand on Southern
Dharrawal Country, my people stay between
Crooked River to Shoalhaven River, the ocean and
other side of Canbwarra Mountain further to the
Shoalhaven River.

I acknowledge all you people and your old people.
I acknowledge my old people past and present, the
Cabbage Palm people, Black Duck Yuin people.

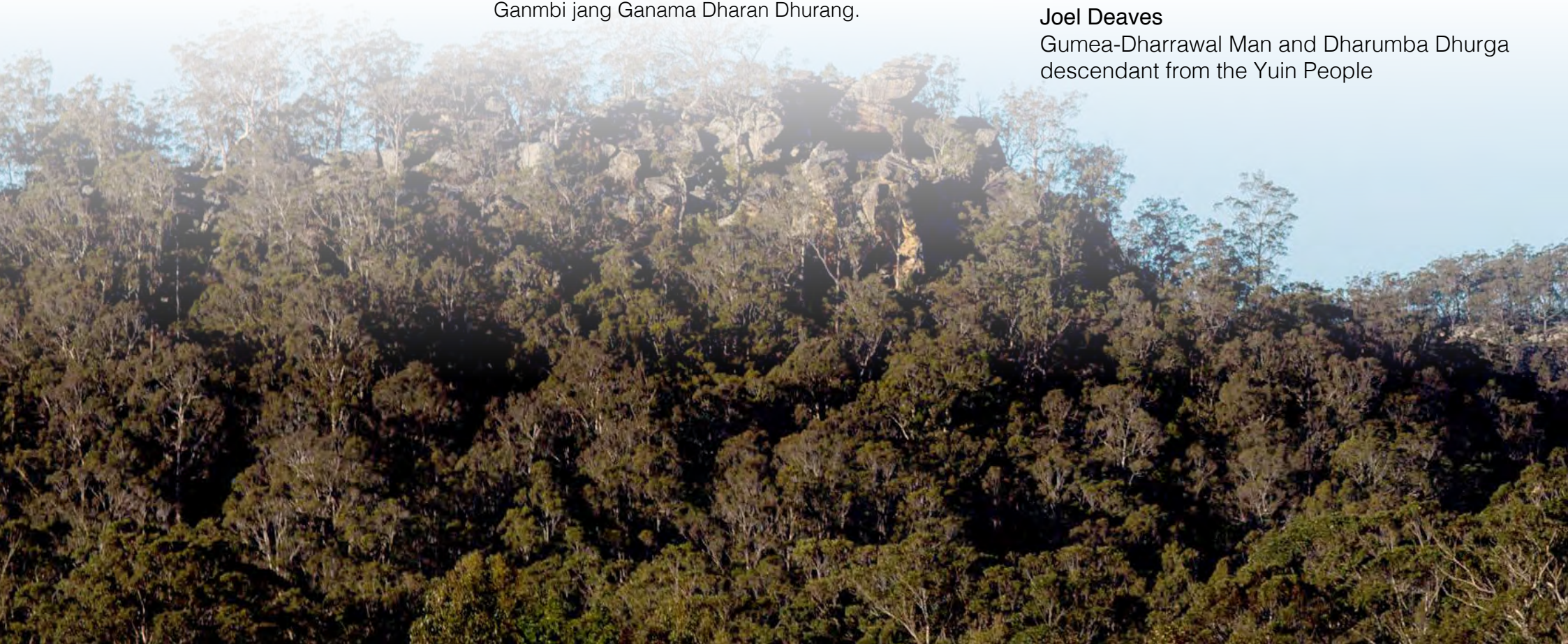
The people gather and burn country again

The black fella fire returned

The good fire burns always

Joel Deaves

Gumea-Dharrawal Man and Dharumba Dhurga
descendant from the Yuin People



Welcoming the good fire to Bundanon

Bundanon Trust has generously hosted the 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop (NIFW), partnering respectfully with local group Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks Team, Firesticks Alliance to bring cultural fire workshops to the Shoalhaven.

Bundanon's Michael Andrews said the cultural strength of the Firesticks approach is what motivated Bundanon to open the property to the group and the Workshop.

"This sort of cultural aspect brings the good fire that heals Country, and it reconnects and builds strength of Aboriginal people through connection to Country."

Bundanon Trust's CEO Deborah Ely said the facility may be better known for its strong connections with Indigenous

artists, but the relationship with fire practitioners continues to uphold Arthur Boyd's vision of the property he gave to the nation.

"He really saw Bundanon as a place where people could immerse themselves in the bush and learn from it, and he very much saw it as a place to be shared," Ms Ely said.

"He respected those Aboriginal practices and values. He would have really loved the idea that Indigenous people would be coming here, wanting to spend time on the property, returning traditional practices to this landscape.

I have no doubt at all he would think that was a pinnacle of the kind of things he wanted to see happening here."



DHARRAWAL
COUNTRY

Hello

I would like to express my sincere gratitude, respect and thanks for the efforts and support towards our Firesticks group who hosted this year's National Indigenous Fire Workshop.

There are many people to thank, those who came, supported, sponsored, volunteered, planned, partnered and ran the event.

This is a big thank you to everyone that was involved; it was a very proud moment for me and our local community.

Healing of Country took place, and a special relationship with the landscape and Aboriginal communities from afar was

formed with the reintroduction of cultural fire on Yuin Country.

Our young fellas stood tall, and walked alongside with the fire from the first day of ignition on Sunday 15th until Sunday the 29th July, when the fire rested to acknowledge, reflect and allow the healing process to continue.

A total of 150 hectares was treated with fire over fourteen days. That is amazing when you consider there were only four community members walking alongside the fire, with no fire trucks or fire suppression resources to assist.

Challenging to say the least, the ecosystem way out of balance, carpeted with a continuous fuel load and testing weather conditions.

Over 35 years of fire fuel on the ground surface, and no native grasses to hold the moisture from the dew and frost to extinguish the fire with natural containment.

Walking alongside the fire was empowering, seeing light filtered through an unharmed canopy to open space to create a germination process for our native ground covers, thick blankets of leaf litter no longer suppressing the Earth or dominating landscape.



Unveiled through the landscape was a number of Aboriginal sites, sixteen previously unknown sites including grinding grooves, shelters, rock art, open sites, marker trees exposed by opening up Country and the creation of travel corridors.

Communities came together to share knowledge, stories and networks, strengthening cultural fire alliances across the country. There are so many great stories to tell as well as memories to cherish for a lifetime.

I am grateful to the Firesticks efforts that have provided me with the inspiration, drive,

motivation and passion to continue in my endeavours to have our cultural fire practices and knowledge well respected, understood and undertaken to heal people, communities and Country.

Walawarni (safe journey)

Nook (Noel Webster)

Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks Team



Executive Summary

On 12-15 July 2018, the four-day 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop was held at Bundanon property in Yuin Country on the New South Wales south coast.

Participants came from as far north as Napranum, Cape York in northern Queensland to Truwana in Tasmania, and from as far west as the APY Lands in Central Australia. The last day of the workshop was a Cultural Fire Day that was open to the public.

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop evolved from the Awu-Alaya speaking Elders, Kuku Thaypan Fire Management research project in Cape York along with the foresight and teachings of Cape York fire practitioners and respected Kuku Thaypan Elders, the late Dr George Musgrave and Dr Tommy George.

Their work is greatly respected and has gone on to inspire communities all over the country and brought people together to learn about Aboriginal fire management and appropriate research methodologies.

This was the tenth annual National Indigenous Fire Workshop and is the first time the event has left its birthplace of Cape York and travelled to honour other communities within the Indigenous fire networks.

Workshop participants learn first-hand how to read Country, animals, trees, seasons, and understand the cultural responsibility of looking after Country.

The 2018 Workshop masterclasses were delivered through practical demonstrations which focused on:

- Monitoring techniques and indicators
- Ethnobotany
- Understanding invasive native plants
- Traditional dancing and weaving
- Sharing of local knowledge
- Cultural burning of gum and sand Country
- Reflecting and planning for rebuilding cultural fire practice.



During the Workshop and over the fourteen days that followed, 150 hectares of surrounding Yuin Country were treated with the 'good fire'.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with over 90% of respondents reflecting that the Workshop helped them connect to Country and community and increased their knowledge of Indigenous fire management practices.

Over 60% of participants said they are likely to change their fire management practices because of the Workshop, with another 30% unsure of their ability to influence current practices but still very supportive of the rebuilding of cultural fire management.

Each year the Firesticks Alliance will co-deliver the workshop in a different location to share this privileged event. The aim is to maximise the traditional learning of Aboriginal fire knowledge across Australia and to strengthen healthy people and Country through fire.

Oliver Costello

Director, Firesticks Alliance

www.firesticks.org.au



The background image shows a person in a forest, possibly participating in a workshop. The person is wearing a dark jacket and is looking down at something in their hands. The forest is dense with tall, thin trees. A white text box is overlaid on the image, containing the title and introductory text.

Introduction

This report covers the 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop held on 12-15 July 2018.

The event was attended by over 300 workshop participants along with an additional 80 Day visitors for the Cultural Fire Day.

The workshop came together under the coordination of the Firesticks Alliance with event logistics mentorship provided by Cape York Natural Resource Management and Mulong Productions.

It was hosted in Yuin Country, NSW, by the Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks Team and Bundanon Trust.

Objectives

Report Objectives

This report has been written to strengthen:

- Evidence – to provide documentation of the Workshop to organisers, participants and sponsors
- Learning – to provide participant feedback to inform future planning
- Influence – to share messages from the Workshop and continue the rebuilding of cultural fire management practices to heal Country and people.

Workshop Objectives

The objectives of the National Indigenous Fire Workshop are to:

- Connect to Country - to help heal and care for Country
- Connect to Community - to help heal and restore communities through mentorship and shared understandings that improve fire management.



History

Australia's First Peoples have a deep understanding of how to care for Country with the right fire.

A good, nurturing, beautiful fire. A cool fire, burned at the right time, in a way that protects parent trees, seasonal plants, animals and the canopy.

The Good Fire on the South Coast

With a culture enduring since time immemorial, the Aboriginal peoples of Australia developed a sophisticated and complex understanding of how to care for Country.

In comparatively recent years, when European forces first observed the Country they were impressed with how healthy the land was, with short grasslands afoot, clearings between trees and rich green canopies overhead.

The land was kept healthy by the use of Aboriginal fire practices, and being burnt in the right way at the right time.

Within the last 230 years, many of the traditional caretakers of Australia have been taken off Country, unable to openly practice cultural burning.

The results have been devastating to plants, animals and people with heavy fuel loads prone to damaging bushfires and sick Country thick with invasive species, but the knowledge of cultural fire practice which forms an integral part of connection to community and Country has been threatened.

Thankfully, these complex cultural fire practices are starting to be reapplied across the Australian landscape. A reconnection is occurring for Country and her people through the work of the Firesticks Alliance, the Mudjinggaalbaraga Firesticks Team and other cultural fire practitioners and groups across Australia.

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop has evolved from the Awu-Alaya Elders fire management project in Cape York that began in 2004, the Kuku Thaypan Fire Management Research Project (KTFMRP).

Their work has gone on to inspire communities all over the country and led to bringing people together to learn about Aboriginal fire management.



Kuku Thaypan Elders, the late Dr Musgrave and Dr Tommy George

These on-Country Workshops have been held annually since 2008 and have been developed over the years to strengthen culture and share the importance of getting traditional fire regimes back on Country.

Each year the Workshop has been hosted by a different Cape York community with different landscapes and in 2018 the opportunity was created to share this amazing community-led initiative in other parts of the continent.

Mulong and the Elders fire research project supported by The Importance of Campfires research developed and delivered these workshops until 2011.

In 2011, Cape York Natural Resource Management was formed and began to support delivery of the workshops from 2011, supporting Mulong and The Importance of Campfires until the mentorship to the newly formed Firesticks Alliance in 2018.

The workshop is now led by Mulong, the Firesticks Alliance and supported by The Importance of Campfires and Design Collaboration and Country (University of Technology, Jumbunna and Firesticks).

The vision is to bring Indigenous fire practices to the forefront of looking after our communities and environment.





Country

This year's Workshop was held in Yuin Country on Bundanon Trust estate, 20 minutes' drive south-west of Nowra, NSW.

Logistics

The National Indigenous Fire Workshop was held over four days. The coordination that went on before the event cannot be overstated.

From organising workshop leads, key speakers, performers, volunteers, transportation, participants' registration packs, communications and media, food, cooks, camping logistics, marquees, river sand for a dance circle, transporting in large amounts of firewood, through to marking out the large wombat holes in carparks for drivers to avoid.

These are but just a few of the logistics that went into organising a smooth event.

On the day before the workshop started, a huge central fire was lit in the middle of the campground to warm and cleanse the space, and welcome people who arrived for early camp-set up.

Most of those early arrivals were volunteers and people holding specific roles at the workshops.



Ignition

Welcome and Smoking Ceremony at Bundanon

The welcome dinner and smoking ceremony were preceded by a beautiful rainstorm that brought everyone into the main tent to register and meet.

Rainbows filled the sky at the Bundanon property as workshop participants moved to the main stage to enjoy a Welcome to Country in Dharrawal language by Jacob Morris and Joel Deaves.

Land acknowledgments, introductions and acknowledgments were given by event organisers Noel Webster, Victor Steffensen, Oliver Costello and Bundanon Trust's Head of Operations, Richard Montgomery.

A stunning smoking ceremony was performed by the Gulaga dancers from Wallaga Lake, led by Yuin/Monaro man Warren Foster, using native cherry branches on the central fire of the river sand dance circle.

Two young local girls, Yuin and Thunghutti sisters Colleen and Dakota Callaghan sang to the audience in their language.

Colleen and Dakota come from a very large family that continue their cultural practices through song, dance, storytellers, language and living off and caring for land.



Workshops

Workshop Masterclasses

eight masterclasses over a two-day intensive. Participants were divided into groups and each group rotated through four

On the opening day, the gum tree and sand-ridge burns did not occur until the fourth day. As the fourth day was an open day, all participants participated in cultural burns.

Workshop 1: Monitoring Techniques & Indicators

Peta-Marie Standley & Noel Webster

Workshop 2: Botanic & Cultural Walk

Vikki Parsley & Gerry Turpin

Workshop 3: Gumtree Country Burn

Victor Steffensen & Adrian Webster

Workshop 4: Sand-Ridge Country Burn

Joel Deaves

Workshop 5: Invasive Natives

Jacob Morris & Dan Morgan

Workshop 6: Firesticks Gathering Workshop

Oliver Costello

Workshop 7: Traditional Dancing & Weaving

Veronica (Ronnie) Jordan & Warren Foster

Workshop 8: Cultural Water Tour

Russell Brown



5

4

2

1

3

7

6

8

campsite

wombat
country

Approximation of workshop locations and pathway

Monitoring Techniques and Indicators

Workshop 1

Facilitators

Peta-Marie Standley has worked in government, community not for profit and Indigenous organisations in North Queensland for the past eighteen years, focused on Community Natural Resource Management.

She is close to the completion of a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Environmental Science at James Cook University, on The Importance of Campfires.

Peta has been part of the Indigenous led co-generative action research team for the Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways Kuku Thaypan Fire Management Research project since 2004.

Her work promotes the use of connected and collective action learning, multiple knowledge sets and collaborative spaces on and off Country and undertaking respectful solutions generation for solving complex social-environmental problems.



Noel Webster is a Yuin Walbanja saltwater man from the New South Wales south coast.

Commencing in 2018 as an Aboriginal community support officer for South East Local Land Services, Noel's passion is working together respectfully with other community members.

His aim is to unify Aboriginal men in creating a brotherhood built on revitalising and sustaining Aboriginal culture through the revival and sharing of knowledge.

It is hoped that through this work Noel can be an agent for change through strengthening and empowering Aboriginal communities in the Shoalhaven area.





Monitoring Techniques and Indicators Workshop 1

In this workshop participants were exposed to the complex traditional knowledge that enables People to read Country and know the right places and times to practice cultural burning.

Participants were also taught how to record cultural indicators on Country for monitoring cultural burning and were exposed to elements of the fire knowledge system of the Kuku Thaypan Elders.

They were also taught the differences between cultural burning, hazard reduction burning, environmental/ecological burning and savanna burning methodologies.

As we stood in Gum Country, Peta and Noel brought to our attention to the large amounts of leaf litter and fallen timber that indicate the poor health of the Country.

They shared that fire needs to be a part of the cycle of the ecosystem here. Gum trees shed their bark, and burning needs to follow shortly after, removing litter from the ground.

Fire can be used to destroy or 'move back to where they belong' the trees and vegetation that are not native to that ecosystem. Throughout Country, different ecosystems are made clear by the line of differing vegetation.

The interaction and segregation of neighbouring ecosystems is an important factor in knowing where and when to burn.


Which vegetation belongs in an ecosystem can be deciphered through the observation of 'parent trees'; these are the largest and oldest trees that are within the ecosystem. They indicate which type of Country the land should be, for example spotted gum, mixed gum and sand-ridge.

Cultural burning uses small, traditional, 'single ignition point' burns which are significantly safer than alternatives such as aerial incendiary bombing which produces such heat intensity that the canopy can often be burnt. Traditionally, in Kuku Thaypan lore, the canopy has always been protected.


Burning at the right time where moisture is present is important for correct recovery. After a burn, you can often see recovery in the growth of grasses, orchids, mosses and liverworts, depending on the specific ecosystem.

Utilising Indigenous methodologies allows for the development of a more in-depth understanding of Country, what our Elders have already been saying and practicing for millennia.






Western science tools can be applied to support the documentation of cultural fire and indicators read in the landscape; however this documentation, monitoring and analysis should be led by Indigenous people.




Noel shared how his mob started connecting back to cultural burning a year ago. He pointed out a patch of land which they burned the month before. The area was clear of debris and bright grasses were popping out of the soil.

Noel and his people are starting to see how it all works as they piece back together the fire calendar in this region of Yuin Country.



Peta shared examples of tools that can be used to document those cultural indicators. Noel and Peta worked with groups to help them read what they were seeing in the landscape and pointed out the recovering native species, grasses, lilies and orchids that are right for that ecosystem type, a result of the earlier cultural burn conducted in April, 2018.

Peta reflected on the privilege of working alongside the Elders and Victor, documenting the traditional fire knowledge of the Kuku Thaypan Elders, the late Dr Musgrave and Dr Tommy George.



As Noel and Peta shared with us, we carried that feeling of sacred gratitude for the snapshot into the complex knowledge systems around cultural fire practices which “cleanse the earth and heal Country.”



Botanical and Cultural Walk Workshop 2

Facilitators

Vikki Parsley is a cultural heritage consultant and Yuin Wiradjuri woman from the Yuin area. Her grandfather's mother is a Wiradjuri woman.

She grew up and had her early education in the Shoalhaven before undergoing a Bachelor of Applied Science in Parks, Recreation, and Heritage at Charles Sturt University.

Vikki has a background in government natural resource management projects and programs working with communities combined with a passion and love for Country, working outdoors, and plants.

Vikki, in her own words, was fortunate enough to grow up with Elders within her family, primarily her grandparents who were her teachers and offered her early exposure outdoors on Country, and around the plants she would grow to work with.



Gerry Turpin is a Mbabaram man with links to the Wadjanburra Yidinji of the Atherton Tablelands and Kuku Thaypan people of Cape York.

He is an ethnobotanist and manages the Tropical Indigenous Ethnobotany Centre housed in the Australian Tropical Herbarium at James Cook University, Cairns.

He works closely with a number of traditional owners on the Cape and around North Queensland, with the main aim of the centre to collect and record the ever-precious knowledge of the Elders.

He has done this while remaining involved in state government for over 30 years.





Botanical and Cultural Walk Workshop 2

In this workshop participants learned about the surrounding Country and the multiple uses of plants growing within the area.

As Vikki, a local Yuin woman shared with us her botanical knowledge it was hard not to notice in the way she talked and relayed stories that she has a deep connection to Yuin Country.

Coupled with Gerry's reflections from his knowledge in ethnobotany (the study of plants through culture), we were exposed to rich insights into traditional knowledge of plants as well as the science behind this knowledge.

Vikki reflected that, "For thousands of years' people used knowledge that has been built up, as the environment changed, that knowledge was used to adapt to change."

There is an underground network of communication between plants similar to the sharing of knowledge between plant groups; they're all interconnected.

When looking for natural medicines, Gerry shared, "The remedy grows where the problem is." Some plants can be used to fill holes in teeth, to treat stings, or for flavouring foods.



Calendar trees may indicate a separate occurrence in the environment, for example one flowering tree indicates that the mullet are fat and ready for eating, and another flowering tree indicates the whales are returning from migration.

Vikki described how changes in environmental practices have caused issues with the accuracy of indicators. She also reflected how most of the traditional rock art in the area is on sandstone and how chemical changes and unmanaged burns can destroy sacred rock art sites.

Gerry raised another issue of the significant intellectual property concerns for the traditional knowledge surrounding plant species. The rise of antibiotic resistant bacteria has seen pharmaceutical companies take interest in pursuing and exploiting traditional knowledge of natural medicines.

"Tea tree oil is an example where Aboriginal knowledge has been taken and very little benefit has found its way back to the traditional knowledge holders," Gerry explains.

As we observed the variety of plants around us, Vikki and Gerry's botanical knowledge left us humbled. Their insights gave us new eyes in understanding how rich our surroundings are.



Gumtree Country Burn Workshop 3

Facilitators

Victor Steffensen is an Indigenous fire practitioner, film maker, musician, and consultant reapplying traditional knowledge into the changing world and today's society.

Victor has been interested in traditional knowledge since he was a boy. He was inspired by his mother and grandmother's heritage, the Tagalaka people of Northern Queensland, and their struggles of losing family through the stolen generation decades.

Victor's work started in 1995 when he realised the urgent need to record the invaluable wisdom of the Elders before it was lost.

Over many years, through his love of the arts, film making, culture and environment, this has developed into Victor's life's work of re-engaging traditional practices through



Adrian Webster is a saltwater man descending from the Wandrawandian Walbanja Djiringanj and Thunghutti people.

He has spent his whole life growing up on the south coast of NSW where he has inherited a deep connection to his culture and Country.

He devotes his time to Elders and community, and to learning Dreaming stories, language, bush foods and medicine.

Adrian (Ado) is highly grateful for everything around him and enjoys giving back and paying respect to Country by spending copious amounts of time outside.

When Adrian is on Country he enjoys walking, swimming and regenerating the landscape with traditional burning practices handed down from his Elders.





Gumtree Country Burn

Workshop 3

In this workshop participants learned about the surrounding Gum Tree Country. They observed the current degraded state of the area, learned how to read signs of where to start a burn and observed cultural fire management in action.

As we stood underneath tall gums, our guides Victor and Ado drew our attention to the lack of grass underfoot. Victor stated that the Gum Country we are standing in should usually have grass.

Grasses in Gum Country should be very dark and green, and far healthier than the grassland nearby. No matter how much rain there is, grasses won't come through without being managed by the right type of fire.

Victor shared, "Trees are indicators of when to burn, the grass makes that more exact, but there's no grass here."

Traditionally, at the right time all Gum Country is burnt and the fire will go out at the other environmental boundaries but this isn't possible when the country has different health levels.

"This leads to people monitoring and researching Country that's sick, thinking that's what it's supposed to be like."



Culturally, "You burn every year for gum. They shed bark indicating when to burn, which adds fuel and shows that the rain is coming", said Ado.

He continued, "Now (July) is not usually not the right time to burn, but it is for this sick Country. That's why we're burning in July instead of April as it's far cooler and protects the soil."

"We're always following and reading Country."

"Over thousands of years, grasses take shape to Country," Victor explained. "Creating big healthy trees is a prime goal for management; most introduced grasses won't grow in the shade below these trees," reflected Ado.

Grass makes seed and is collected as food by people and animals, and then the grass is burnt off. The timing of burns yields different results.

Through traditional food and medicine knowledge we can burn correctly and move the ecosystems back into equilibrium.



Through this knowledge, we know what should be where. "Old people wouldn't let this (environmental imbalance) happen as food would not be available in sick Country," said Victor.

"They know what Country to burn and what Country not to burn."

It's not only the plants that tell this story. "The animals are in sync with the landscape, people learnt this and became part of Country, becoming managers and mediators of elements."

As Elders pass away and new people are introduced into unhealthy Country, the knowledge gap grows.

Victor and Ado opened our eyes up to a clearer way of fire management. "It's not about cycles, fuel load. It's about the Country. It's not making the decision, it's Country making the decision."

There is so much for us to relearn and the natural lore for us to connect back into.



Sand-Ridge Country Burn Workshop 4

Facilitator

Joel Deaves is a Gumea-Dharrawal man and Dharumba Dhurga descendant from the Yuin people. Joel's earliest memories are of playing with his cousins in the bush, following their Nan around while learning how to make gunyahs (traditional shelters) and eating the freshly picked berries of the Native Cherry and geebung trees.

As Joel began his schooling, he and his brother were interested in Aboriginal dancing, asking to join an emerging local dance group.

From Year three to high school, Joel and his brother enjoyed dancing and learning songs from Aboriginal men belonging to the South Coast community.

Growing up, Joel became more aware of the diversity that exists in the different tribal groups, from language to songs and dance. Consequently, Joel had a thirst to learn more knowledge and culture of his direct family and tribe.

A few years down the track, Joel heard the language of his tribal group from his Uncle who was the last speaker of the Gumea Dharrawal dialect. Joel then began learning the language from his Uncle with his cousin Jacob, setting him on a path from which he hasn't looked back.

From the learning of his language Joel's passion for continuing and returning his culture grew, not just for himself but also for his family.

Not long after, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) employed Joel where he gained experience in land management as well as cultural interpretation, carrying out guided bush tucker tours.

Noel Webster (Nook) has supported Joel through his employment at NPWS, introducing him to cultural fire through organising the 2016 Falls Creek burn. This was an important occasion for his family as it was where his grandmother lived and spent most of her time.

Joel not only understands the importance of learning his culture but also living it by continuing the cycle of learning and teaching, ensuring that there is a healthier cultural foundation and a brighter future for the upcoming generations.

In his spare time Joel is with family, speaking and restoring the Gumea Dharrawal dialect with Jacob and Adrian, or walking on Yuin Country with his cousins continuing their connection to the land just as their old people did.





Sand-Ridge Country Burn Workshop 4

In this workshop participants learned about the different terrain and the health of sand-ridge Country. Participants learned about parent bloodwoods and stringybark trees attempting to reconstruct a canopy, the variety of plants that could be used for food and medicines, and witnessed a cultural burn of the terrain which will slowly bring health back to Country.

Sitting on top of the ridge, our guide Joel gave us an awareness of the different sorts of Country we'd passed through to arrive here. From Rainforest Country, Gum Country, and now here we were in Sand-Ridge Country with its sandy soil.

This Country is the pharmacy of the Yuin people, a sandy Country holding medicinal plants within the seedbank. Currently, the Country is sick and the pharmacy is low in stock as people have continued to be disconnected from their Country.

Through correct application of cultural fire, Joel showed us how he and his community are beginning to regenerate Sand-Ridge Country and its role in providing abundant medicine.

"We burn at the right time because the Country tells us when to burn, how to burn and where to burn. The trees are the Elders in the community.

The stringybark and the bloodwood go with a certain soil type. They are the Elders of this system. If we look after the parent trees then they will look after everything else underneath." These parent trees will tell you if the Country is sick.



Joel drew our attention to the canopy, observing the lack of leaf cover. These trees were of good size, but there was hardly any shade. As the cool burn went on around us a white smoke rose, food and medicine for the canopy leaves.

"The more you burn, the more you bring back the grass, the more you burn the grass, the more the canopy grows. These are all relationships."

The top soil was peaty, dark and unhealthy with 35 years of built-up leaf debris. As Joel dug through it, he revealed the sandy soil underneath. Joel pointed out the lack of young casuarina, banksia and stringybark coming up. These trees have been missing the right heat for their growth.

Country tells us when it is the right time to burn, with Joel explaining that when the bloodwood gives us the right sign we know that the possums have finished having their babies and it is now safe to burn.

The traditional people are key because we hold this fire knowledge. When rural fire services burn they don't see that.

"The Country needs its people. Take out the people, you take out the fire, you take out the balance."

“Blanket burns may apply the same burn to several different ecosystems. Leaving Country is bad, but burning Country (through intense blanket burns) and then neglecting it is even worse.”

Our workshop over, we walked back down the ridge, leaving the young Yuin man to continue the healing fire.

Moving through the gentle white smoke, we couldn't help but feel that we had witnessed something deeply intricate and sacred.



Invasive Natives Workshop 5

Facilitators

Jacob Morris is a Gumea-Dharrawal man, part of the Yuin Nation. Growing up, Jacob learned to love and have fun in the bush while his Nanna taught him the words of his great-grandmother. Jacob's uncle, a linguist, continued to fuel a hunger in Jacob to learn his people's language.

Through language, Jacob has learned about artefacts, plants and now fire. Uncle 'Nook', Noel Webster, got Jacob into fire. His first cultural burn was in 2016 in Falls Creek, south of Nowra, on land that is a special place for his family.

At the age of sixteen, Jacob worked as an Aboriginal Discovery Ranger with National Parks and shared knowledge of Country to young people in schools up and down the Yuin coast.

In that role, Jacob kept learning so he could share more but discovered that he learned because he loved it, not just for the job. That passion is clear in the way Jacob speaks and shares about culture.

Jacob feels a deep sense of cultural responsibility and where some people may feel overwhelmed with how dense the path to healing Country is, Jacob is full of energy and drive to make that path clearer for the next generation, who will make it clearer yet for the next.

These days you will find Jacob passionately restoring fire pathways in Yuin Country and in the evenings, you will find him with his cousins, learning and documenting family language.



Dan Morgan is a Djiringanj man of the Yuin Nation. Having worked for eighteen years with National Parks, Dan joined South East Local Land Services as an Aboriginal Community Support Officer in February 2017.

Dan is passionate about cultural burning and was first inspired by Victor Steffensen at a cultural burning workshop he attended in Cape York ten years ago.

While on the Biamanga Board of Management, Dan spent six years trying to influence National Parks to consider cultural burning, making little headway.

In 2016 Dan experienced a significant cultural burn with the Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks at Falls Creek, and was reminded of the importance of caring for Country through this practice.

Dan is dedicated to working with community through traditional land management to care for Country and bring back this deeply complex and restorative practice of cultural burning.

In his recent role with South East Local Land Services, Dan has found the freedom to achieve these outcomes. He has since worked on cultural burns with the Bega Land Council Koori work crew at Wallagoot Lake and Tathra.

What drives Dan the most is the next generation's passion to be a part of this important learning and to pass on the spirit of cultural fire into the future.

When Dan's not out working with community you can find him at one of his favourite surf breaks in southern Yuin Country, where his connection to Country merges from land to sea.



Invasive Natives Workshop 5



In this workshop participants were taught about native species that have become invasive within the local landscape. Discussions occurred about the reasons behind this imbalance and how Country can be restored.

Some participants shared examples of successful invasive native management practices they have used back on their own Country.

Many people will tell you, at first glance they didn't notice it. The density of the bush. For tens of thousands of years, it was healthy and clear enough for kangaroos and wallabies to graze on the grass between the trees. Clear enough to throw a spear through.

Now so much of the Country we saw was overgrown, not just with introduced species like lantana, but also with native species; an upside-down landscape where healthy overhead canopies have been replaced by an out of place mid-story and the smothering debris below.

Our workshop guides, Jacob Morris and Dan Morgan, showed us bush dense with tea tree. With its origins closer to the coastline, tea trees now over-populate the hills at Bundanon, squeezing out the parent gums.

A huge fire went through the area decades ago and the visiting tea trees took their chance in the regrowth to overpopulate within Gum Country. The build-up of debris ever since means that this



bush is at high risk of going up in flames again, in a potential firestorm.

“We need to put fire to the Earth, put fire to the Mother,” said Jacob. “Wombats and kangaroos can’t get through here - they are locked out of their own Country. The land itself is starting to lock itself up - it looks like a jail here. Fires like the Black Sunday firestorms are preventable.”

Jacob pointed out the overgrown bush that goes on for kilometres, saying it will take generations to heal. “It’s bad enough that we’ve lost our identity. This used to be Gum Country, but the land is losing its identity, just like us.”

“The land is a reflection of the people, and people are a reflection of the land. If Mum’s not good, we’re not good.”

Not one to focus on loss, Jacob shared, “The land is messy, but helps us heal too. We are so happy to be getting back this knowledge. We are the first ones doing cultural burning here in more than 100 years. It’s a generational job.”

“We need to keep on teaching our young ones to be guardians and custodians. The seeds are still there, they are just waiting for us to wake them up.”

With greater connection back to cultural burning comes an opportunity for young people to learn ancestral knowledge while being employed to practice culture and care for Country. That’s the vision of our workshop guides.

As Jacob and Dan spoke, we couldn’t help but be moved by the depth of hurting Country we saw before us and by the opportunity our two guides see for generations of healing that will come from the revitalisation of restorative fire practices.



Firesticks Gathering Workshop Workshop 6

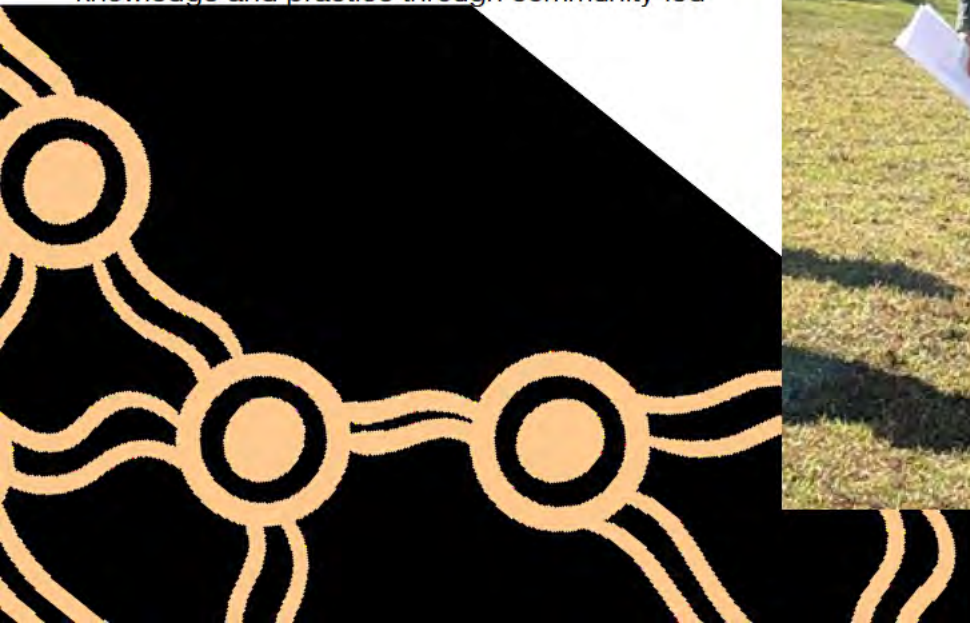
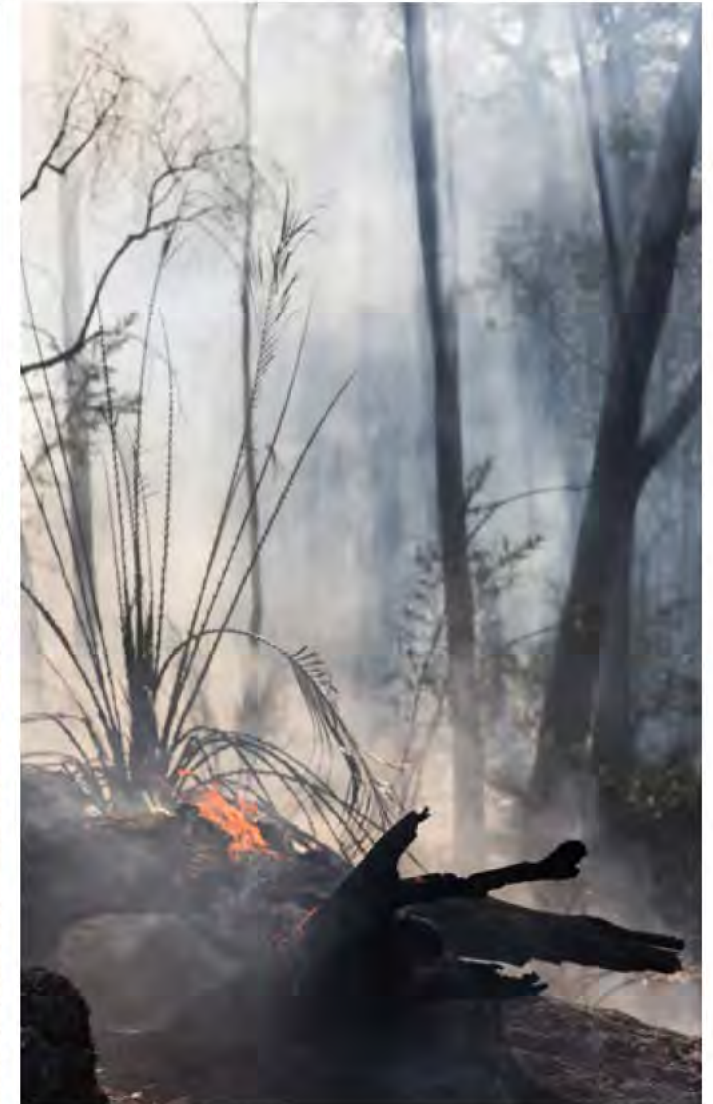
Facilitator

Oliver Costello is a Bundjalung man from Northern NSW who co-founded Firesticks in 2009, the Jagun Alliance in 2016 and Firesticks Alliance in 2018.

He has a broad range of experience from the community, private and public sectors in Indigenous cultural fire practice, Aboriginal Joint Management partnerships, Indigenous natural cultural resource management and Indigenous governance.

Oliver coordinates, advises, facilitates and directs several organisations and projects in this space.

He is passionate about Caring for Country, Indigenous leadership, empowerment, partnerships and recognition of cultural knowledge and practice through community-led





Firesticks Gathering Workshop Workshop 6

In the Firesticks Gathering workshop participants were given a broad understanding of the work of the Firesticks Alliance and community of practice, along with a connection building exercise and focus group sessions to explore questions on cultural burning, working together and vision.

Participants were asked to place dots on the Firesticks Alliance approaches and aims that they thought were most important for them or the Firesticks Alliance to focus on over the next 12 months.

As we huddled into the tent, with the winter afternoon sun descending we learned about how we came to be here at the National Indigenous Fire Workshop, and the work of the Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation.

Our workshop facilitator, Oliver (Oli) Costello, explained how the Firesticks initiative emerged in 2009, bridging fire and cultural knowledge from Elders of northern and southern Australia.

This year in February, the Firesticks Alliance was incorporated with a vision to work with groups throughout the country. This is the first national workshop to be held away from Cape York and the vision is for other nations to host the workshop from year to year, reigniting that knowledge across Country.

Oli is a firm believer in the need for people to connect not only to Country, but to each other.

“People working on cultural burning need to know each other better and think about where they’re coming from with their practice.



We need to build synergies and support each other in a respectful way.”

In the spirit of building connection Oli took us through a group activity, placing kinship/totem symbols on each of our backs. We were told to not look at the symbol on our own back and to communicate with each other without using words.

The objective of the exercise was to help each other figure out which group we belonged to. As we each walked around looking, guiding, misguiding and trying to figure out our groupings, Oli asked us after fifteen minutes if we wanted to give up and be told the answer. With one final try our group eventually figured out the simplicity of the activity.

Oli reflected how sometimes we can feel like that in life, unsure of where we stand, where we belong. “I spent a lot of time not knowing who I am, but to know who you are, where you belong, what you need to do and when you need to do it is so empowering...”

“Sometimes you need someone to share knowledge with you, that’s what community mentorship is.” With guidance and connection, we can all find our place at the right time.

With that connection established, we moved into focus groups to reflect on key questions Oli posed, including a reflection of where we were from, the benefits of cultural fire practices, working together and visions for the future.

Participants' visions included 'healing Country, healing people, culture and community', 'finding what we have lost', 'putting functional landscapes together', 'unity between nations with a common goal', 'trust between agencies and developing partnerships', and 'training the next generation to maintain Country'.

Participants were also asked to vote on which elements of the Firesticks Alliance approaches and aims they felt were the most important. HEAT – Facilitating Action and FUEL – Reading Country were the most popular fire triangle approaches.

While there was support across the board for all the aims, the aim to 'empower the local community to take an active role in decision-making by building community skills and capacity and providing a greater sense of custodianship' was seen as especially important by participants.

More information on the Firesticks Alliance can be found at www.firesticks.org.au



Traditional Dance & Weaving

Workshop 7

Facilitators

Veronica (Ronnie) Jordan is a Kalkadoon women from Mt Isa who teaches and works with her culture.

She is a proficient trainer specialising in traditional Indigenous games, traditional painting techniques, traditional coil basket weaving and also shares her expertise on bush tucker plants.

Ronnie has taught Indigenous cultural practices to a wide range of people; from children to the elderly, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

She has taught other Aboriginal women traditional weaving techniques which assisted them to reclaim this knowledge and reinvigorate culture.

Ronnie currently teaches weaving at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT).

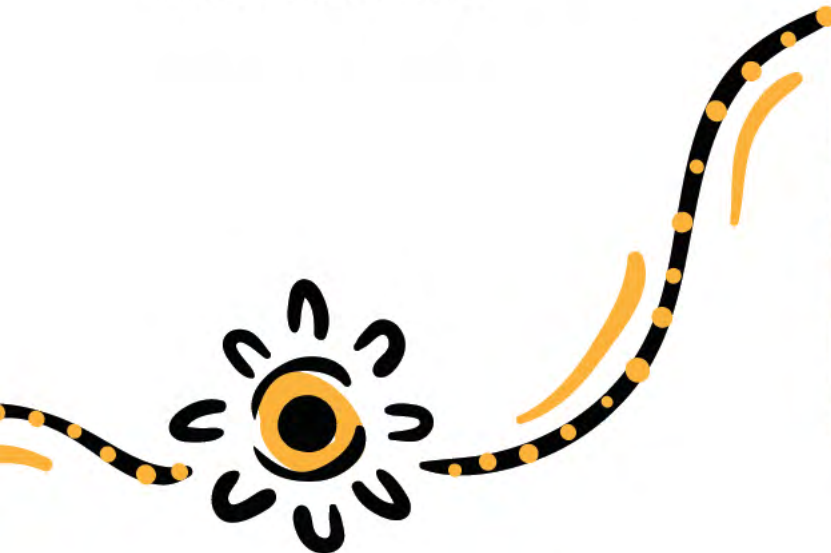


Warren Foster is a Monaro-Djiringanj man from the Yuin Nation and Wallaga Lake. He is a dancer, musician, actor and writer.

Warren founded the Gulaga Dancers, a traditional men's dance group who have performed nationally and internationally for the past twenty years.

He has worked as a cultural teacher and tour guide in south east NSW for many years including teaching dance to children in schools up and down the Yuin coast.

Warren has written fifteen traditional Dreamtime stories from Yuin Country.



Traditional Dance & Weaving

Workshop 7

In this workshop participants learned about the various grasses used for weaving and the multiple uses that woven works have across different nations. Participants were then taught a basic weave which they used to make their own jewellery. Participants also learned about the significance of cultural dance and participated in local dances on the river sand dance circle.

As we sat down on mats in the sun, our facilitator Ronnie Jordan shared her story and showed her wide range of woven pieces. Ronnie uses a diverse range of grasses and natural fibres such as riverweed, flax leaf and pandanus to make baskets, fish-traps, dilly bags and woven necklaces and bracelets.

Traditional basket weaving can take months, with the process of creating a functional material extremely time consuming.

As we gently passed around the woven pieces to each member of our group, we examined the intricacies, creativity and functionality that has gone into each piece. Ronnie told the group how the older women passed down the traditional knowledge of weaving to the younger women.

Bringing out piles of raffia, Ronnie demonstrated a coil weave technique. Soon both women and men in the group were making their own bracelets and necklaces, with Ronnie rescuing anyone who was lost in the process. There was a beautiful sense of calm that came from the looping and pulling of fibre, watching it take form.

The group members expressed gratitude for having been taught a technique that has been passed through generations.

Ronnie assured us, "I've shown everyone the same way, but each person's weave will come out unique." Sitting in our circle, there was a sense of kinship, mutual respect and family.



Moving over to the sandy dance circle, we were drawn by the stories of Warren Foster. Warren said, "Why we dance is the same reason why we burn, to bring life back into Country, to bring our ancestors... we dance for the land, our ancestors, and ourselves, to build our spirit up."

Dancing is for everyone, even the elderly get involved as they can sit back and clap with sticks while the younger are often more able to join the dance circle.

Warren pointed to the land and the trees around us and said that these trees have heard their names in the local language for thousands of years: when these are sung, it is special, continuing that connection.

"It doesn't matter which tree, they're all sacred trees. When you name them, talk to them, you can hear them, they have spirits in them; all the land does. Every tree has a story, a song, a purpose, like every one of us."

"Getting people out on Country and learning, that's how we heal, that's how we move forward together. So that we can walk into the future together."

With that inspiration, Warren had us stand up, take our shoes off and let our feet connect with the soft, cold sand. We joined in with a bird dance which included the black duck, emu, and sea eagle.

Men and women each had their own specific movements. He shared with us the importance of each of these birds, especially the black duck

which is a special totem to his people at Wallaga Lake. The men were then taught a spear fishing dance.

Warren pointed to the sandy dance circle we danced on, saying "Our time, we don't have a line like white man, we have a circle, and that circle represents the circle of life... when we have the circle, we have before we were born, our life, then we go back to Dreamtime when we die; that's the circle."

Warren had us dancing anti-clockwise. He shared, "Whenever we dance in this circle, corroboree, we move in an anti-clockwise direction, back in time, because we're going back to Dreamtime."



Cultural Water Tour Workshop 8

Facilitator

Russell Brown (Wulgaan Bunyarinarin) is from (paternally) the Dhurga and Dhawarral speaking peoples of the Djuwin Nation.

Djuwin or Yuin encompasses some thirteen Clans from Georges River in Arncliffe, Sydney, to the Murrumbidgee inlet on the Victorian border.

Maternally he is from the Gittabal/ Witabaal Peoples of the Western Bundjalung.

His Budjaan (meaning all bird life) is Bunyarinarin the Yellow Crested Lapwing Plover (his family totem).





shoalhavenrivercruise.com

Cultural Water Workshop 8

In this workshop participants were taken on the Shoalhaven River for a river boat cruise to listen to local stories, learn about “Yuin Ngurra” (spiritual, political, judicial and ecological beliefs) and be challenged to contribute to healing of Country.

As the boat left the riverbank, we were guided along the Shoalhaven waterways towards the sacred Cullunghutti Mountain, our breath stolen completely by the local landscape.

Our cultural water tour included an interpretation of the landscape by our facilitator Wulgaan, who carried stories that his family totemic had directed him to share with us.

These were precious stories of cultural knowledge on what the Country needs to make it well again, knowledge passed down from parent to child over millennia. Lifetimes of ecological management experiences through cycles dispensed as collective wisdom.

“This is sick Country, this is rubbish Country,” said Wulgaan as he pointed to the riverbank.

“This riverbank used to be thick with medicine plants – and that has all changed within my lifetime.”

Wulgaan inspires self reflection through “Gaadawahl” the Honeybee Dreaming and compared this to the way we need to work together to heal the Country.



“One bee is not going to save the hive - we need the collective. The collective wisdom is the honey, created by the collaborative efforts of all the bees. Our bees have no stingers – when they attack, they mob them by the thousands and that’s what we need to do to have impact.”

We can exchange those yarns and learn from each other and move forward with other clans and nations. No one bee can save that hive – we must come together. To search for that knowledge and experience and share it with the hive. For the benefit of all and our joint survival.”

Wulgaan reflected how we need to get back to being fire managers, fire practitioners rather than fire fighters to truly understand fire as an essential element in caring for Country.

He included how vital it is that women are active in cultural burning practices. “We need specific women’s teams, as only women can go to certain sites; we support them.”

“It is not a job, it is a shared responsibility to care for Country.”

Wulgaan shared with us valuable and ancient stories of local lore and ecological knowledge. He encouraged us to reflect on our own lore and how we can come together to connect back to and heal Country.

He also expressed the need to take action to heal Country and share knowledge for the survival of all, lest we create our own ecological hell through inaction and bureaucratic paralysis.







Cultural Fire Day Community open day

The fourth day of the workshop was set aside for a cultural fire day open to the public.

Day visitors and workshop participants witnessed cultural burns on the adjacent ridge, learned about monitoring techniques, participated in weaving and dancing, travelled along the Shoalhaven River, and attended group presentations.

Kup Murri Ground Oven Cook-up

Several members of the Murrumbung Rangers and other workshop participants volunteered their time to prepare a large Kup Murri.

A range of meats were used including wild kangaroo from Bundanon, pork, beef and lamb generously donated by the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria.

There was also large quantities of vegetables including potato, sweet potato, carrots and onions.

The meat was prepared using native herbs picked onsite including lemon myrtle, and thyme and rosemary picked from Boyd's Homestead garden.

The Kup Murri pit fire was lit the night before, with the food going in early in the morning. It came out perfectly cooked just in time for the lunch break, and was served to around 400 people.





Women's Gathering Cultural Fire Day

Women of the workshops came together to meet and share their stories about their fire practice and their personal journeys.

They wanted to have a women's only space to discuss issues specific to women, as a high percentage of the workshop attendees were male.

Many women who participated worked in fire services or as rangers. There was a strong and dynamic range of voices from around Australia (particularly the east coast). Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women were welcome in the space and shared their experiences and challenges of their work with fire.

Key messages

Some key messages that came out of the discussion included the observation that few women are working in National Parks, Rural Fire Services or on planned present day cultural burning.

The gender disparity ratio is even greater internationally, with Australia taking a leading role in creating an improved gender balance in fire management.

Men and women's roles are an equally shared space with burns and each have a responsibility to gender LORE. Women are the givers of life and

the essence and also carry the fire. This is why the importance of women burning on Country is vital for the continuance of culture and cultural practices.

Women who are on Country are there to protect and care for sacred sites as part of their cultural practice and obligation.

Women need to be more present on Country to protect their women's areas and bring back women into this knowledge and these spaces. Women reflected that cultural burning is healing for women as well as men.



It was expressed that while there has been research undertaken in Northern Australian Aboriginal land care practices, there is still little available in South East Australia. It was also noted that the knowledge of cultural burns belongs to Aboriginal people, and not to government or others.

The women appreciated the space being created at the National Indigenous Fire Workshop to discuss cultural fire and women's place in it.





Sharing Song

Throughout the workshop entertainment included cultural dancing from the Djaadjawan Dancers, a women and girl's dance group from Yuin Country, as well as singing, music, bands, a presentation on Arthur Boyd's artwork, a spear throwing competition and a Kup Murri ground oven cook-up.



Sharing Story

Bundanon & Arthur Boyd

Presentation by Jim Birkett

A generous presentation of Arthur Boyd's artwork and legacy was shared by Jim Birkett, local artist and former Education Officer at Bundanon.

Introduction and thanks to host organisation Bundanon Trust given by Victor Steffensen.

"My presentation will aim to place Arthur Boyd in the context of Bundanon, his relationship with Indigenous culture, Australian landscape and his protection of the land through his artworks.

The imagery will reference Boyd's Bundanon landscape paintings, his Bride series of artworks and a brief reference to Boyd and Fire through his Nebuchadnezzar paintings."



Arthur Boyd, Earth and Fire, 1995, photo lithograph





Response

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with over 90% of respondents reflecting that the Workshop helped them connect to Country and community and increased their knowledge of Indigenous fire management practices.

Over 60% of participants said they are likely to change their fire management practices because of the Workshop, with another 30% unsure of their ability to influence current practices but still very supportive of the rebuilding of cultural fire management.

Community Feedback

"The confidence young practitioners have based on ancient knowing is strong and will build trust amongst many."

"The workshop was helpful because I didn't know much. Only white man's fire

"Through the diversity of workshops, mix of listening/absorbing knowledge, yarning and doing. I thought there was an excellent mix of style of teaching/learning in the workshops."

"[The workshop] has certainly increased my knowledge of different indicators in different types of Country."

"Appreciating a whole new way of looking at the world and fire management. Fantastic knowledge of Indigenous presenters and leaders."

"This workshop increased my knowledge for sure as we can pass it on to future generations. It is most important for our kids not to lose connection after previous bad practices by European settlers. If they only listened to our people."

"Current practices with our agency won't allow me to change decision making at an incidental/HR but will use this knowledge if approved."

"From my agency, we need more decision makers - chief fire officer, deputy secretaries, regional fire managers and also key delivery staff (burn OIC's) to understand fire and why we need traditional owners to deliver it."

"Appreciated the ongoing commitment by NSW RFS to have as many members as possible learn, listen or come in contact with authentic cultural burning practices."

"We will look at the whole picture - it's not just about the burning but the whole situation/environment - the workshops were excellent in sharing that is extremely important."

"I found that the chance to meet with many like-minded people who share a passion for cultural





Reflection

Leeton Lee

My name is Leeton Lee and my mob is from the Thunghutti / West Bundjulong and Mualgal nations. I live in Tamborine Mountain.

My son, Kingsley, and I participated in the NIFW Firesticks workshop where we had the opportunity to learn about many things from local knowledge on plants and animals, local history and types of Country.

We also participated in a number of workshops to understand the relationships between plants and animals and the indicators for seasonal burns as part of the importance of seasonal calendars.

Kingsley enjoyed meeting and playing with other kids throughout the week also.

There were many highlights for us including:

- Time around the campfire to have cultural discussions and get to know mob from other parts of the continent
- Spear throwing competition
- Kup Murri
- Workshop rotations
- Listening to Victor speak about Country on Country was always engaging and hearing his passion for how we can look after it draws your attention in.

There was much care taken to accommodate and look after Elders wherever possible and the men's group and staff from Bundanon Trust were always happy to assist in any way without hesitation. We look forward to attending next year's workshop.



Hamish Martin

My name is Hamish Martin. I have been working in forest fire management for the past fifteen years, and now have a focus on monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

As a non-Indigenous Australian I have found this workshop really enlightening, especially the monitoring techniques session.

The western model of burning I've been working with still takes a coarse approach, with the subtle landscape changes within a burn area not being managed differently from a timing and fire regime perspective.

The Indigenous model started to show me not only the importance of recognising the finer scale subtleties driven by canopy type, but also the myriad of intangible cultural inputs which western measures just don't consider.

I work at the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and within my region I am hoping to embed Traditional Owner involvement in the planning and delivery of the monitoring program.

I hope our linkages to Aboriginal communities and their wealth of knowledge can grow and that monitoring objectives of Aboriginal peoples can be part of what we use going forward.





Reflection

National Parks and Wildlife Service

"I attended the National Indigenous Fire Workshop in Nowra, representing National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for the South Coast.

I was impressed with how the workshop was run, in terms of both content and delivery. Equally, a lot of people attended from across Australia and were comfortable in sharing their knowledge with others, including land management agencies such as NPWS.

Cultural burning in national parks is important, and this workshop provided NPWS a greater understanding of how we can support the needs of the Aboriginal community in looking after Country.

It was a privilege to witness knowledge being shared and passed on from one generation to another, there was much to gain and I believe everyone walked away with a sense of purpose."

Kane Weeks

Director South Coast Branch
National Parks and Wildlife Service



Office of Environment & Heritage

"Attending the National Indigenous Fire Workshop gave me a new understanding of how Indigenous people read the health of the Country by observing different environmental indicators.

We were also shown how the use of ongoing low intensity cultural fire can change and protect the environment by opening up choked vegetation, protect fire sensitive areas, promoting the flush of green growth, providing protection against wildfire and reducing monocultures created by wildfire germination events.

The yarning circles were a great way to hear and share stories, ideas and solutions cross culturally and across organisations. It was great to see and hear about how much the Firesticks project is connecting local Indigenous communities to their culture and connecting other organisations with local Indigenous communities to work together on fire projects.

We have promoted the Firesticks program and other local Indigenous fire groups within the 'Glossies in the Mist' Glossy Black Cockatoo conservation project, sharing firesticks with over 120 landholders, and are in the process of engaging with Gundungurra locals to see if there is already a fire team in the Southern Highlands and how the community would like to be involved with the project."

Lauren Hook

Threatened Species Officer
Office of Environment & Heritage



Office of Environment & Heritage

“The 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop was a tremendously rich and powerful experience. The event provided an increasingly pertinent opportunity for Indigenous individuals and communities to express the personal rejuvenation and deep cultural healing acquired by caring for Country with fire.

For western style land managers and fire practitioners like myself, the event provided the chance to observe Indigenous fire practices and assessments of Country, and to revisit the paradigms in which I carry into my own land management approaches.

This first hand experience allowed me to better understand Indigenous yearning to heal Country with autonomy, which is so often suppressed by the bureaucracy and politics of contemporary land management.

I will be using the powerful and emotive experiences from the Workshop to build on old and new relationships, hopefully leading to the strengthening of Indigenous land management practices in the projects and programs I am involved in.

The healing of Country and people which took place at the Workshop was evident in the proud and empowered manner in which all participants took to the event, none more proudly than local Dharrawal hosts, the Mudjingaalbaraga Men's Group.



It was an honour to be invited and hosted by this strong community, and impressive to witness the confidence and openness in which young people like Jacob Morris and Joel Deaves carried into their communication and sharing of culture.

Huge credit is owed to the Firesticks Alliance, Bundanon Trust, South East Local Land Services and the Rural Fire Service for fostering this movement and building confidence in young Indigenous people to pursue this practice for the healing of Country and communities.”

Simon Tedder

Community Engagement Officer
Office of Environment & Heritage

“Fire brings people together. Firesticks gave those young Aboriginal people confidence and experience to talk about Country, fire and its practice in the landscape. It was so inspirational (great job).

More opportunities to practice cool fire, connect with and be ABLE to talk FOR Country needs to be created for our people across the nation.

Fire, Country and Culture is THE potential growth economic industry for our people to create and be involved in, addressing lower Aboriginal employment participation rates through CULTURE (this is MEANINGFUL employment for our people).”

Geoff Simpson

Senior Scientist Community/Aboriginal Engagement
Office of Environment & Heritage

Reflection

Natural Resource Management

“2018’s National Indigenous Fire Workshop was my second attendance. After attending in 2017 I was ready to sign up for another.

The confidence and wisdom displayed by the young Yuin ranger teams after working with Oli & Victor and the Firesticks crew in preparation for the workshop was so exciting and empowering to witness.

You could feel the passion the rangers held for their Country and their commitment to bringing it back to health through the use of the right fire.

Hearing the stories from the Yuin rangers on their journey to where they are today, at a point where they can act on their cultural responsibility to care for Country with the tools that their old people used was very powerful.

The narrative that the NIFW paints has left me with confidence that I can continue on the same journey and heal my Country in the right way.”

Matthew Shanks

Policy Advisor

Natural Resource Management



NSW Rural Fire Service Association

“I attended the Nowra workshop as a minor sponsor of the event. Not being brave enough to face the cold I stayed in town and admired the campers who stayed on site.

Apart from the cold weather the whole event was a well-run and inspirational event. It was great to see Indigenous practitioners from across the Country come together to share their experiences with those attending.

The mixture of sessions provided an education and appreciation of Indigenous culture. The presenters showed great knowledge of their subjects and it was a delight to see people of all races and walks of life come together and share their experiences.

The venue and catering were fantastic and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the organisers on a first-class event.

There were many highlights, but one that stands out was an Indigenous attendee of middle age announcing it was the first time he had danced. Well done team.”

Brian McDonough

NSW Rural Fire Service Association



NSW Rural Fire Service

“Please pass on my congratulations to your team on what was a very successful fire workshop at Bundanon. The NSW Rural Fire Service is proud to be a supporter of the workshop and will continue into the future to provide resources to help make the workshops a continuing success.

It is vitally important to the NSW Rural Fire Service that the fire workshops continue into the future so we can continually learn better ways to manage the environment and protect the community from bushfire.

Since the introduction of the fire workshops, the NSW Rural Fire Service has sent people along to learn more about cultural burning

and each year our members return with new enthusiasm to implement these practices into the landscape.

Learning to put fire into the landscape when it needs fire rather than to a predetermined fire frequency is a practice that fire agencies are starting to understand and support.

I suspect major policy changes will occur in the future regarding fire frequencies due to your cultural burning workshops such as Bundanon.

The workshop at Bundanon highlighted the cultural connections to Country and from the moment I arrived the genuine coming together

of people illustrated that cultural burning is so much more than looking after Country.

It is also about looking after people and the enthusiasm and the willingness to learn that I experienced was addictive.

This workshop reached new heights in engaging communities by making it accessible to all cultures.

The learning from the workshop I experienced and the new friends I have made in this journey is something I will take away and cherish.”

Simon Curry

State Indigenous Program Coordinator
NSW Rural Fire Service

Bundanon Trust

“Bundanon Trust were exceedingly pleased to host this significant event. When we first started to yarn to Nook (Noel Webster) and his team about the idea a while back, we could see that it would prove to be an immensely rewarding experience for the organisation, for our team and importantly, for the Country.

It was clear from these early discussions that the health of the natural environment was the shared aspiration. We have, for some time now, been striving to bring back Indigenous land management practices to the Country. For its good.

The sheer generosity of the event organisers and the participants themselves, reinforced the reason for joining forces in these critical environmental efforts.

We have made many great friends and will now move forward in ensuring the good fire remains as a vital part of our efforts.

We are all stronger for our combined efforts – the Country will benefit.”

Richard Montgomery
Head of Operations
Bundanon Trust

“We learned at a workshop in Bombaderry last year that the Mudjingaalbaraga team wanted to re-learn and practice traditional skills to care for Country.

We invited them to work on Bundanon, and now we’ve welcomed 300 people to this significant Indigenous cultural event – it’s been very rewarding.

We’ve watched young Indigenous men, women and children learn about this Country, seen them grow stronger in their knowledge and confidence.

We’ve witnessed their obvious respect for their Elders and teachers and we’ve learnt the same respect.

We have joined them in laughter and enjoyed developing strong friendships and trust.

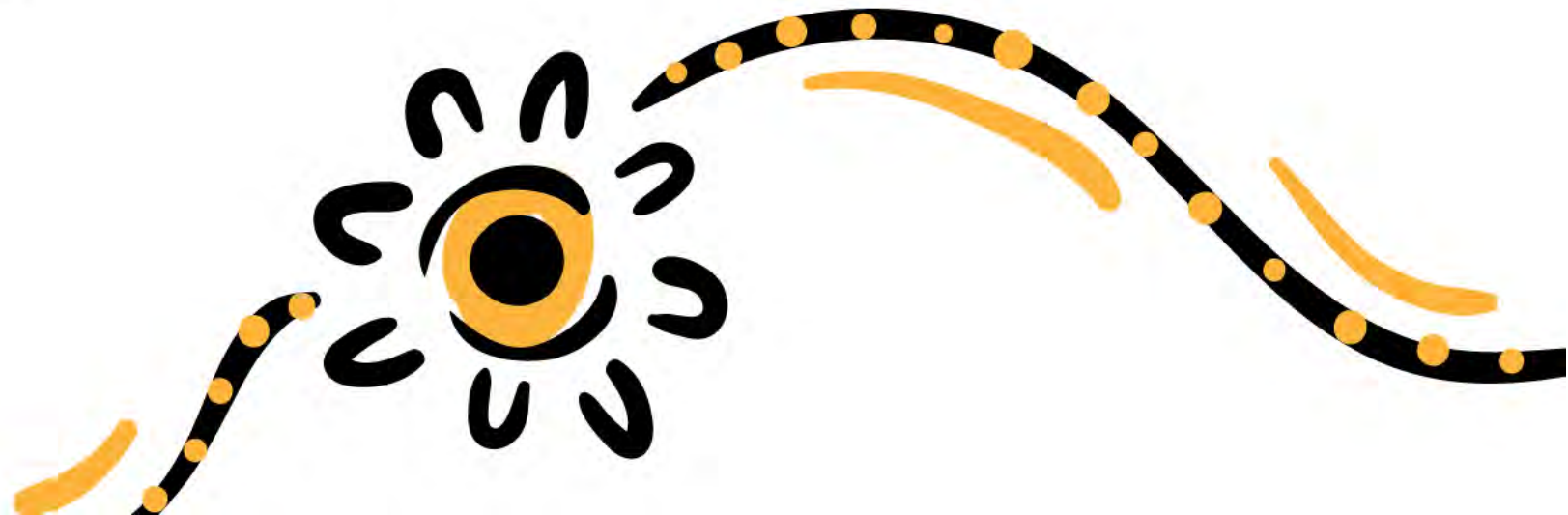
The good fire has allowed Bundanon’s Natural Resources team to discover previously inaccessible Country.

We can open some of these areas to our site visitors so that they may gain an even greater appreciation of this spectacular landscape.

We believe that we are now positioned to provide even greater ecological opportunity for native species.

We have cemented strong and ongoing partnerships with local people and a national network committed to caring for Country. The future looks bright.”

Michael Andrews
Natural Resources Manager
Bundanon Trust





Going Forward

Going forward, we hope to be able to gather the right resources and people to bring fire stories back to all the Country that needs it, and restore the fire circles that once existed throughout our cultural landscapes.

In the short term we are focused on building a sustainable and regenerative business model and mentorship program that can expand with the overwhelming demands of Country and aspirations of people.

Hopefully you will help light some fire with us.



Thank you

Firesticks Alliance, Mulong Productions, and Cape York Natural Resource Management, along with our fantastic hosts Mudjingaalbaraga Firesticks and Bundanon Trust, would like to extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to the many people who contributed to the 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop.

We would also like to thank and acknowledge our partners and sponsors, whose strong support helped ensure that this year's NIFW was such a successful event.

This year's National Indigenous Fire Workshop has been an incredibly positive way to share stories, learnings and connections, and to build momentum and knowledge about the environmental and cultural importance and community benefits of cultural fire.

There are simply too many people, organisations and community groups to thank individually, but for all of those people or groups who played a role either large or small, we acknowledge your generous contributions and assistance.

Message from Victor Steffensen, Mulong Productions

"To the Yuin Nation - I take my hat off for you, you truly represented proudly through your men, women, and children.

This workshop worked because your community and people are totally outstanding and that has inspired all the communities that attended.

The Bundanon staff were incredible and we appreciate the generosity and hard work from all of their team. It has been an honour.

To our partners and sponsors, we are so happy to have had you working with us all on the initiative and we look forward to the future.

To the rest of you, you all know who you are, thank you, you are an amazing group of people that keeps growing and growing.

I want to thank you for your efforts and spirit from the bottom of my heart and to let you all know that this cannot happen without every one of you.

Keep that good fire burning in all of your hearts for our old people and Country."

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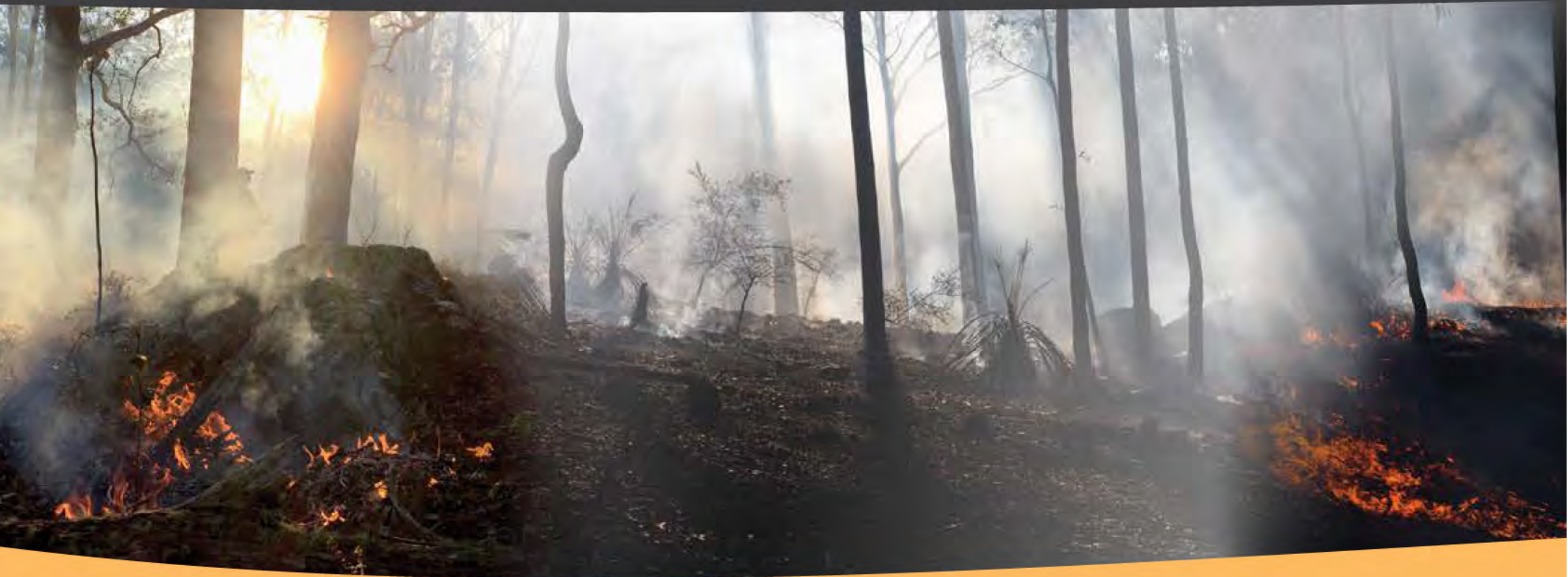
The
Importance of
Campfires



Cultural burning: healthy communities, healthy landscapes



A sincere thank you to all our sponsors and partners who made the 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop possible.



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