



# How to communicate your research with impact

## **Bethany Patch**

Senior Communications Officer  
Natural Hazards Research Australia

## **Radhiya Fanham**

Communications Officer  
Natural Hazards Research Australia

© Natural Hazards Research Australia 2023



# Overview

- Principles of clear research communication
- Case study of student-to-industry-leader: Dr Briony Towers
- Who are NHRA comms?
- NHRA comms support throughout your project



# Principles of clear research communication

1. Impact
2. Audience
3. Clarity and simplicity
4. Structure and visuals
5. Action
6. Transparency and honesty
7. Practice!

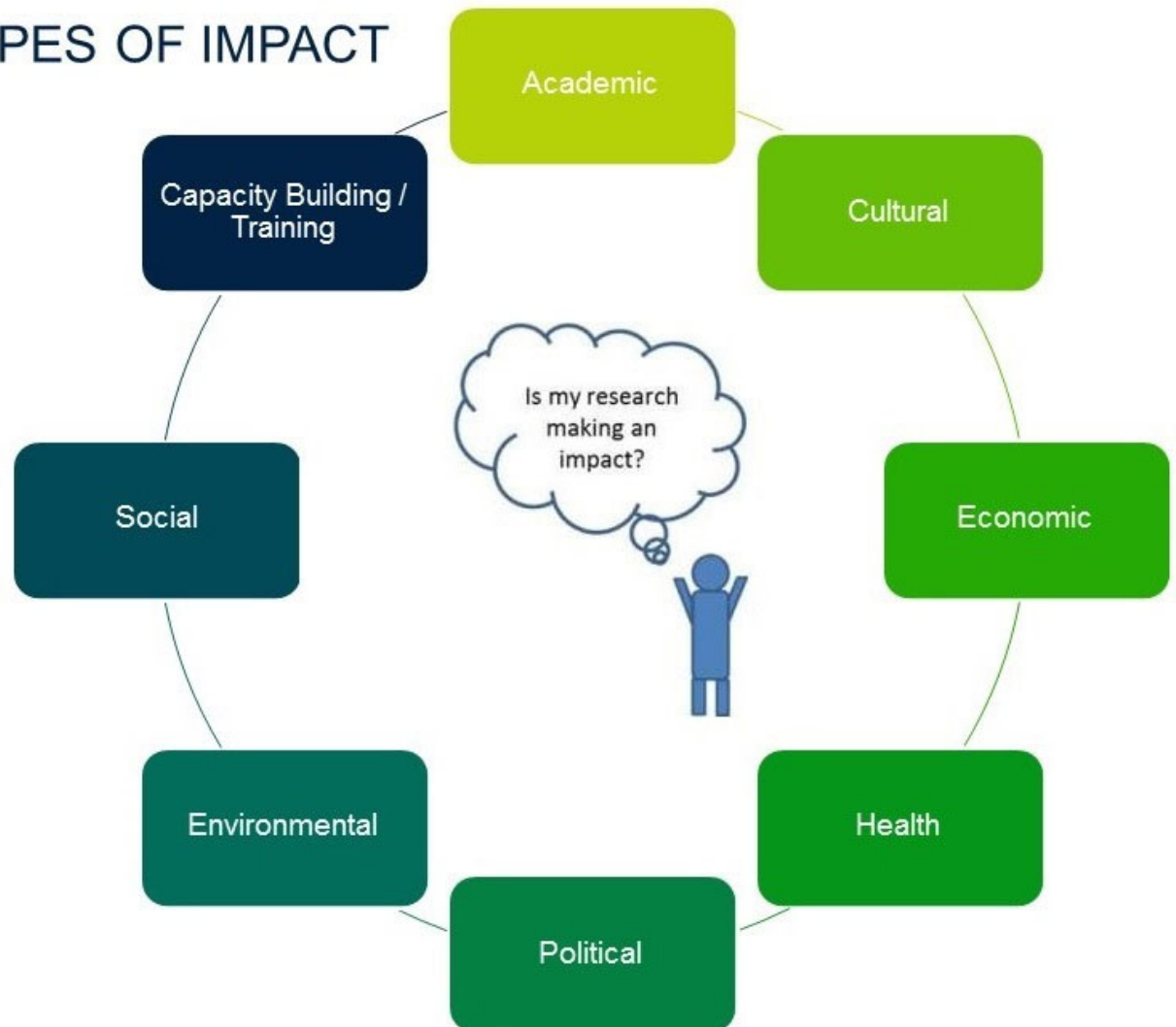
**EXPERTISE ≠ IMPACT**



# Principle 1: Impact

- Types of impact
- Start with the end in mind
- Stories are more memorable than facts
  - What is the context?
  - What is the problem?
  - What is the impact of your research?

## TYPES OF IMPACT



# Principle 2: Audience

- Who are they?
- What are their interests and jobs?
- What do you need them to know?
- Keep them front of mind!



## Principle 3: Clarity and simplicity

- Clear language – no jargon
- Keep it simple and easy to understand – aim for Year 8 level
- Zoom out to the big picture
- Put important things first!



# Principle 4: Structure and visuals

- In text – headings, bullet points etc
- Graphics – graphs and charts
- Photos – visualise your goal for them
- Videos – make one



Dr Ryan Hoult, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC





# Principle 5: Action

- Want the reader to do something with your research? Then tell them!
- Not always applicable
- Make it easy
- Spell it out and be specific



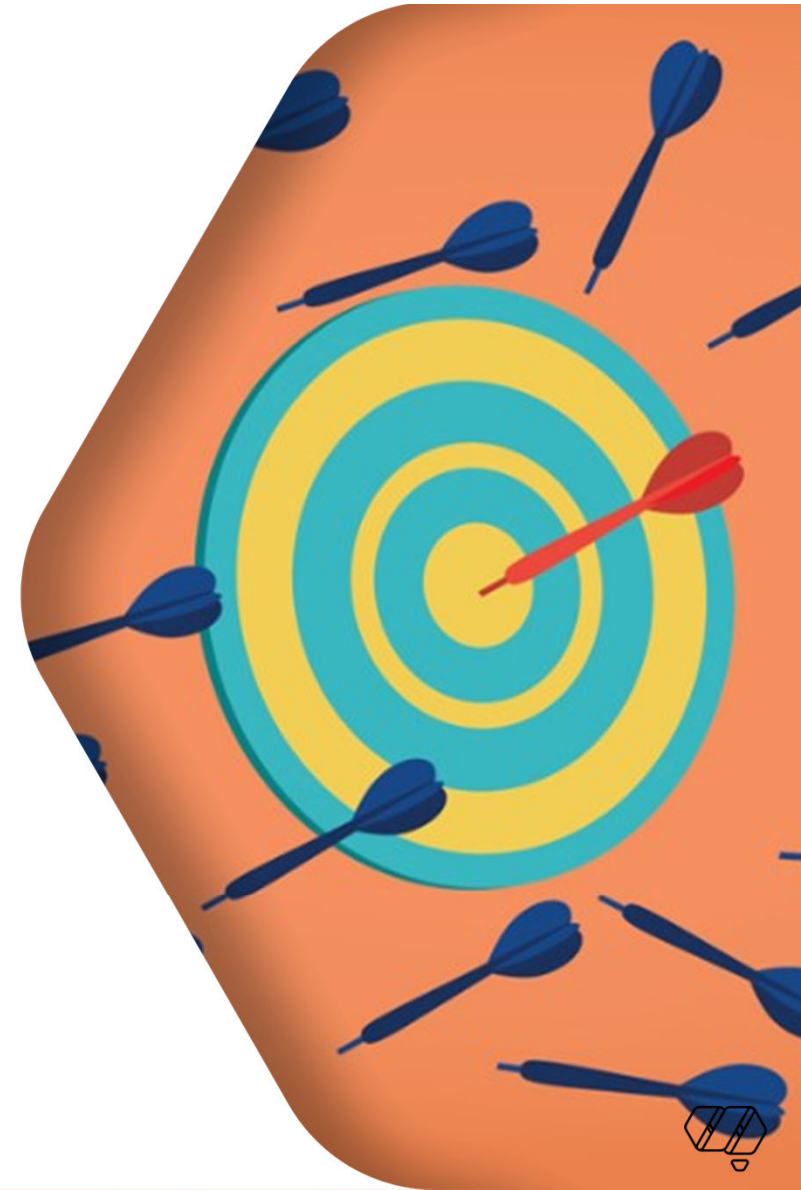
# Principle 6: Transparency and honesty

- Be transparent – methods, data, ethics, results
- Be honest – limitations, uncertainties, biases



# Principle 7: Practice!

- Don't be disheartened
- Practice often and in different ways
- Get feedback



# Principles of clear research communication

1. Impact
2. Audience
3. Clarity and simplicity
4. Structure and visuals
5. Action
6. Transparency and honesty
7. Practice!



# Case study of student-to-industry-leader: Dr Briony Towers

- Started as PhD student at Bushfire CRC
- Researcher at Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC
- Lead researcher at NHRA
- Founder of Leadrrr

bushfire CRC



We can protect children from the impact of bushfire by involving them, by talking to them.

**Dr Briony Towers**



# Early days: Bushfire CRC



Len Foster, Bushfire CRC, speaking at the 2011 Fire Australia program.

**B**ushfire CRC PhD scholar Bronny Timmins began talking to children as part of research into children's knowledge of bushfire hazards. She set up researchers into classrooms and schools to ask children what they knew about such matters, instead getting their information from parents or others close to children.

Up to December 2008, Bronny interviewed 131 children aged from 5 to 12 in high-risk locations in Victoria (Macedon and Werrandyne) and Tasmania (Dunedin and Balfour). Through the use of child-friendly qualitative research methods, such as group discussions, drawing, structured scenarios and puppet plays, the children were able to articulate their knowledge of the conditions and processes that create bushfire hazards as well as the conditions and processes that mitigate or prevent them.

Because her data was collected before the February 2009 Victorian Black Saturday fires, the children's knowledge and understanding had not been affected by the high profile of those fires.

"The research challenges the notion that children lack the abilities to participate in bushfire hazard management," says Bronny. "Schools, when provided with the opportunity to engage in fire-related discussions and activities that respect their perspectives and capacities, they are able to comprehend many of the concepts and processes that reduce bushfire risk. As such, children represent an important resource, albeit currently under-used, for the development of resilient households and communities."

Bronny's work has been recognized as an outstanding achievement in bushfire education as it will before she presented her PhD thesis in late 2011. In 2009, the Australian Fire and Emergency

In 2008, the research was used for the development of a bushfire preparedness scenario for the 'Big Risk Challenge', an award-winning online tool for children. In developing the script for the Fire and Rescue NSW 'How heavily on the nose to ensure that the game would accommodate if knowledge and misconceptions of children, it is available at <http://kids.bushfirecra.gov.au>

In 2011, the research was used by the Victorian Education Department for its Bushfire School Curriculum. The Department drew on various elements of the research, particularly findings on children's misconceptions about bushfire fuel.

ATAC also worked with State Emergency Services nationally to develop a National Threats Children's Awareness and Education program. Safety stories were created using the 15 Likert characters, based on the literature developed by the CRC, stories that was underpinned by Bronny research. The aim was to increase children's awareness of the potential dangers inherent in floods, sea cyclones, bushfires and other natural hazards. The program has received two national awards: National Significant Category Winner in the 2011 Australian Safety Communications Awards presented by the Commonwealth Attorney General, and Primary Education Video Resource in the 2011 Australian Teachers of Media Awards.

Each of the projects outlined above represent a new approach to children's bushfire education - an approach which recognizes the importance of accommodating the unique perspectives of, and capitalizing on their capacities for knowledge and action.

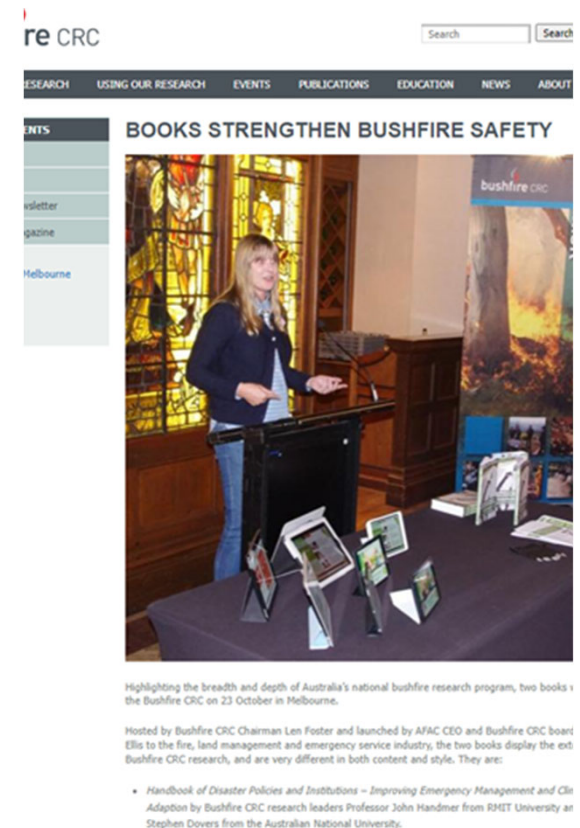
Bronny found that the most common hazard



Presentations at forums



eBook for schools (2013)



eBook launch and promo (2013)



Fire Australia (2011)

# Mid-career: Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC



## Communication and warnings

### Preparedness 01

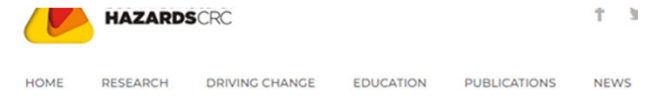
Child centred disaster risk reduction

### INTERVIEW

Videos of different lengths



'Guide to Working with School Communities' (2017)



## School-based education for disaster risk reduction

RESEARCH OUTPUTS AND ARTEFACTS 25 NOV 2020



Life in the bush: Gem Gem's next adventure. Photo: Grade 5/6 students at Stathewen Primary School

Educating children and youth about disaster risk reduction and resilience is now front and centre around Australia, based on research that has identified the valuable role that children play in the safety of their households and communities.

The importance of educating children on hazards and disasters was recognised both in the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and the 2011 National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. The Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC project [Child-centred disaster risk reduction](#), led by Prof Kevin Ronan (CQUniversity) and Dr Briony Towers (RMIT University), has evaluated disaster risk reduction and resilience programs in

BNHCRC case study (2020)



# Mid-career: Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC



Podcast episode for  
Emerging Minds (2019)



## Awards:

- Australian Safer Communities Award for National Significance (2011)
- Quiet Achiever Award (2018)
- Early Career Researcher Award (2018)
- Resilient Australia Schools Award (2019)





# Conversation articles to spread the word

**THE CONVERSATION**  
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Search analysis, research, academics...

Arts • Culture • Books • Ideas • Business • Economy • Education • Environment • Energy • Health • Politics • Society • Science • Tech



## Children aren't liabilities in disasters – they can help, if we let them

Published April 5, 2018 6:00am AEST

Picture painted by a primary school child in Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2005. UNESCO World Heritage Centre

Our world is becoming increasingly vulnerable to fire, flood and other natural hazards. While our instinct as adults may be to shield children from these possibilities, this does them a real disservice.

Lessons from El Salvador and the Philippines show that when children are given accurate, clear information in accessible and age-appropriate language, they are highly motivated to help reduce disaster risks, both at home and in their communities.

Indeed, there is growing evidence that children can play an active and positive role in making their communities more

**Authors**

- Christine Erikson**  
Senior Research Fellow, Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research, University of Wollongong
- Arianto Aneli**  
PhD Candidate, Macquarie University
- Briany Towers**  
Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University
- Emma Calgiero**

(2018)

**THE CONVERSATION**  
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Search analysis, research, academics...

Arts • Culture • Books • Ideas • Business • Economy • Education • Environment • Energy • Health • Politics • Society • Science • Tech



## Bushfire education is too abstract. We need to get children into the real world

Published January 20, 2020 8:00am AEST

Young people, like 11-year-old Finn, have directly participated in prevention and emergency relief efforts this bushfire season. Joel Carver/RAP

Children and young people have been deeply impacted by the current bushfire crisis. Schools have been destroyed and thousands of houses have burnt down. Hazardous air pollution is causing major public health concerns and the devastating impacts on animals and wildlife is leading to emotional distress.

Many children – like 11-year-old Finn who drove a boat with his mother, brother and dog on board to safety – have been directly involved in the emergency response. Vast numbers of tourists have also been affected, many of them children.

This shows how essential it is for all children and young people, regardless of their geographic location in Australia, to have appropriate education about bushfire prevention, mitigation,

**Authors**

- Briany Towers**  
Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University
- Arianto Aneli**  
Professor of Business and Environmental Education, RMIT University
- Marlene Verbe**  
Professional research fellow, University of Sydney

**Disclosure statement**


Briany Towers receives funding from the Bushfires and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre.

(2020)

**THE CONVERSATION**  
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Search analysis, research, academics...

Arts • Culture • Books • Ideas • Business • Economy • Education • Environment • Energy • Health • Politics • Society • Science • Tech



## More bushfires, less volcanoes: young Australians need to learn about more relevant disasters

Published August 28, 2020 8:00am AEST

DisasterNet

Young people are increasingly frightened by the spectre of natural hazards and disasters, but they see schools as failing to equip them with the skills they need for these events.

That's according to the recent *Our World, Our Say* national report, which surveyed 1,677 Australians aged 10 to 24.

While almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents said they have experienced at least three hazard events such as bushfires, heatwaves and drought in the past three years, a staggering 88% believe they're not being taught enough to protect themselves and their communities.

In fact, they say they're learning more about earthquakes in class.


**Authors**

- Annelle Gough**  
Professor, Centre of Science and Environmental Education, RMIT University
- Briany Towers**  
Research Fellow, Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University

**Disclosure statement**

Annelle Gough received funding from the Health and Research Institute, Cooperative Research Centre (2019-2020).

Briany Towers receives funding from the Health and Research Institute Cooperative



(2020)

# Dr Briony Towers' success – from PhD to industry leader

- Clear goal in mind
- Diverse approaches to communicating her research
- Knew her audience and developed resources for them
- This could be you!

Don't miss her NHRF23 presentation!  
Day 3: Wednesday 3 May, 9:15am

**Briony's goal =**

to include children  
in bushfire  
education and  
preparedness



More recently: Natural Hazards Research Australia

---

**BUSHFIRE  
SAFETY  
MANIFESTO**

Year 5 and 6 children's manifesto about bushfire safety – Harkaway Primary School



Who are NHRA  
comms?



# Comms support throughout your project

## **EARLY STAGES**

- Project webpage + promotion of new research
- Making connections + forming a network

## **PROJECT UNDERWAY**

- Communicating your research to the right audiences
- Mid-project needs such as participant recruitment support, promotional flyers, stakeholder briefings, etc.
- Sharing your research progress, presentations, publications, etc.

## **THE END – lots of comms!**

- Support with promotion
- Media training and opportunities
- News articles and/or media releases
- Utilisation that targets key audiences
- Sponsorship to present findings at industry events



## Community experiences of the 2022 Australian floods

Research theme  
**Learning from disasters**

Project type  
**Responsive disaster research**

## Queensland and New South Wales

Extensive and damaging flooding has caused widespread destruction in many areas across south-east Queensland and New South Wales throughout 2022. The purpose of this research is to hear and learn from the personal stories of people who were impacted or threatened by these floods.

The outcomes of the research will be provided to the relevant emergency services and government departments to reduce flood risk in future. The research is supported by the NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES).

### Downloadables

**Floods 2022\_methodology.pdf** 279.71 KB

[Download](#)

Research team Project details **Participating organisations**



# BEFORE

WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE

# SHARE YOUR FLOOD STORY

An online questionnaire is now open for you to share your flood experience, as part of an independent research project to help communities in the future.

**Every story is important.**

- Help us learn what happened before, during and after the floods.
- Your experiences can help improve flood response.

**What does participation involve?**

- Researchers are looking for people affected by flooding in NSW and Qld (between January and July 2022) to complete an online questionnaire.
- The anonymous questionnaire will take between 30 and 45 minutes to complete.

Complete questionnaire now using the QR code or URL:

[www.naturalhazards.com.au/floods2022](http://www.naturalhazards.com.au/floods2022)

## Community experiences of the January – July 2022 floods in New South Wales and Queensland Summary Report

The research summarised in this document was conducted by: **Mei Taylor,<sup>1</sup> Fiona Miller,<sup>2</sup> Kim Johnston,<sup>2</sup> Anne Lane,<sup>2</sup> Barbara Ryan,<sup>2</sup> Rachel King,<sup>4</sup> Harriet Narwal,<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Miller,<sup>1</sup> Dipika Dabas<sup>3</sup> and Helga Simon<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Discipline of Geography and Planning, Macquarie School of Social Sciences, Macquarie University, NSW; <sup>2</sup> School of Advertising, Marketing, and Public Relations, Queensland University of Technology, QLD; <sup>3</sup> School of Humanities and Communications, University of Southern Queensland, QLD; <sup>4</sup> School of Mathematics, Physics, and Computing, University of Southern Queensland, QLD



# DURING

# AFTER

