

Foundations in Indigenous Disaster Resilience

Project T5-A2

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National Indigenous Disaster Resilience



NATIONAL
INDIGENOUS
DISASTER
RESILIENCE



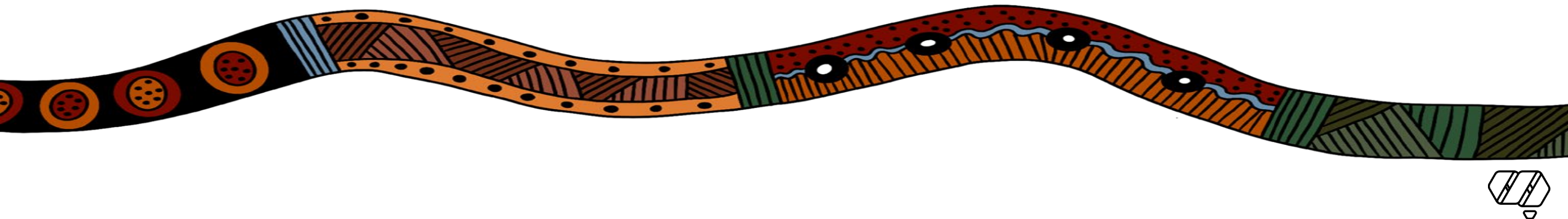
Background and context

Climate change is fundamentally reshaping the world and peoples' experience within it – more extreme events are unfolding more frequently and intensely with modelling showing that these trends will not only continue, but increase.

Our research shows that Indigenous people can be uniquely vulnerable and disproportionately impacted by disasters.

Despite this, there is a paucity of research examining Indigenous experiences of disasters.

This project seeks to investigate the experiences of Indigenous peoples and communities before, during and after major disasters.



Better understanding disasters

‘Disaster’ is a term commonly used to describe major events or incidents that cause a fundamental disruption to people’s daily lives. Yet what constitute a ‘disaster’, and to whom, may not always be the same.

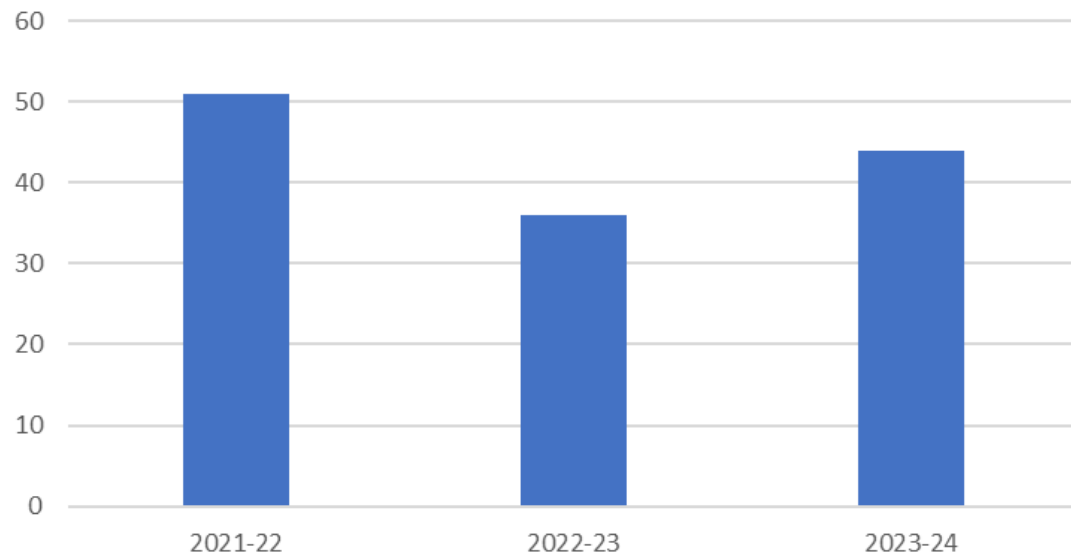
We recognise that ‘disaster’ is a large term and in need of more careful and nuanced examination.

For the purposes of our analysis, we are concerned primarily with natural hazards (fires, floods, cyclones, earthquakes, heatwaves, tsunamis). Yet our analysis of these events extends to the response from society and emergency services.

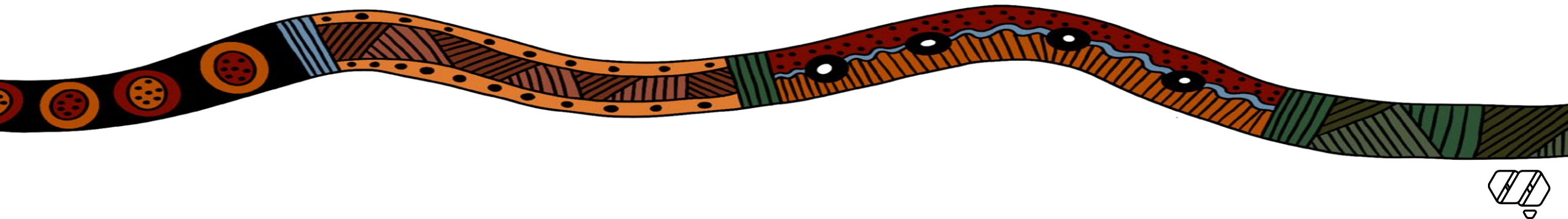
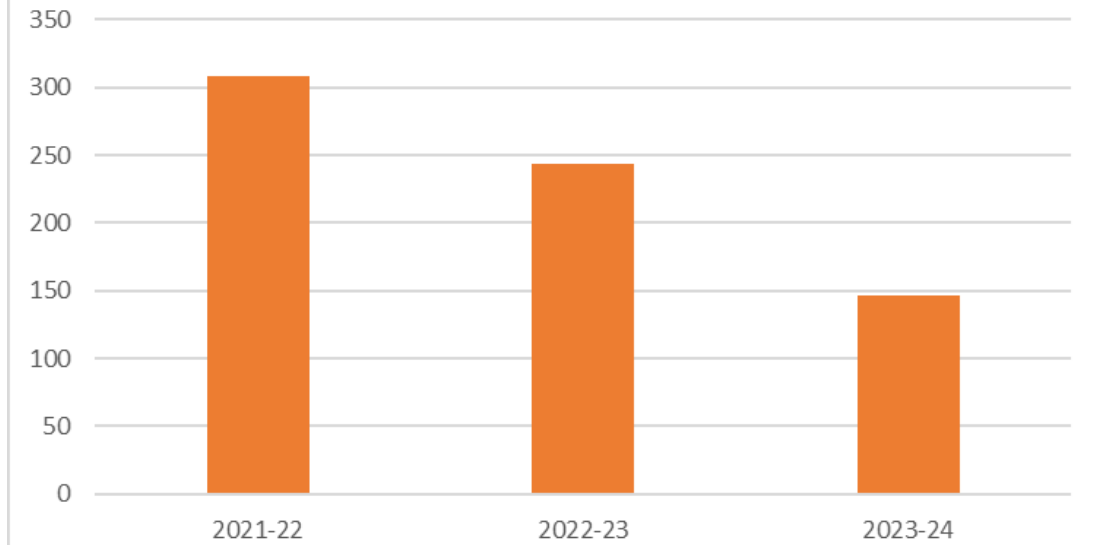
We recognise that declaring disasters does have dimensions beyond environmental and climatological, and includes political and economic reasons.



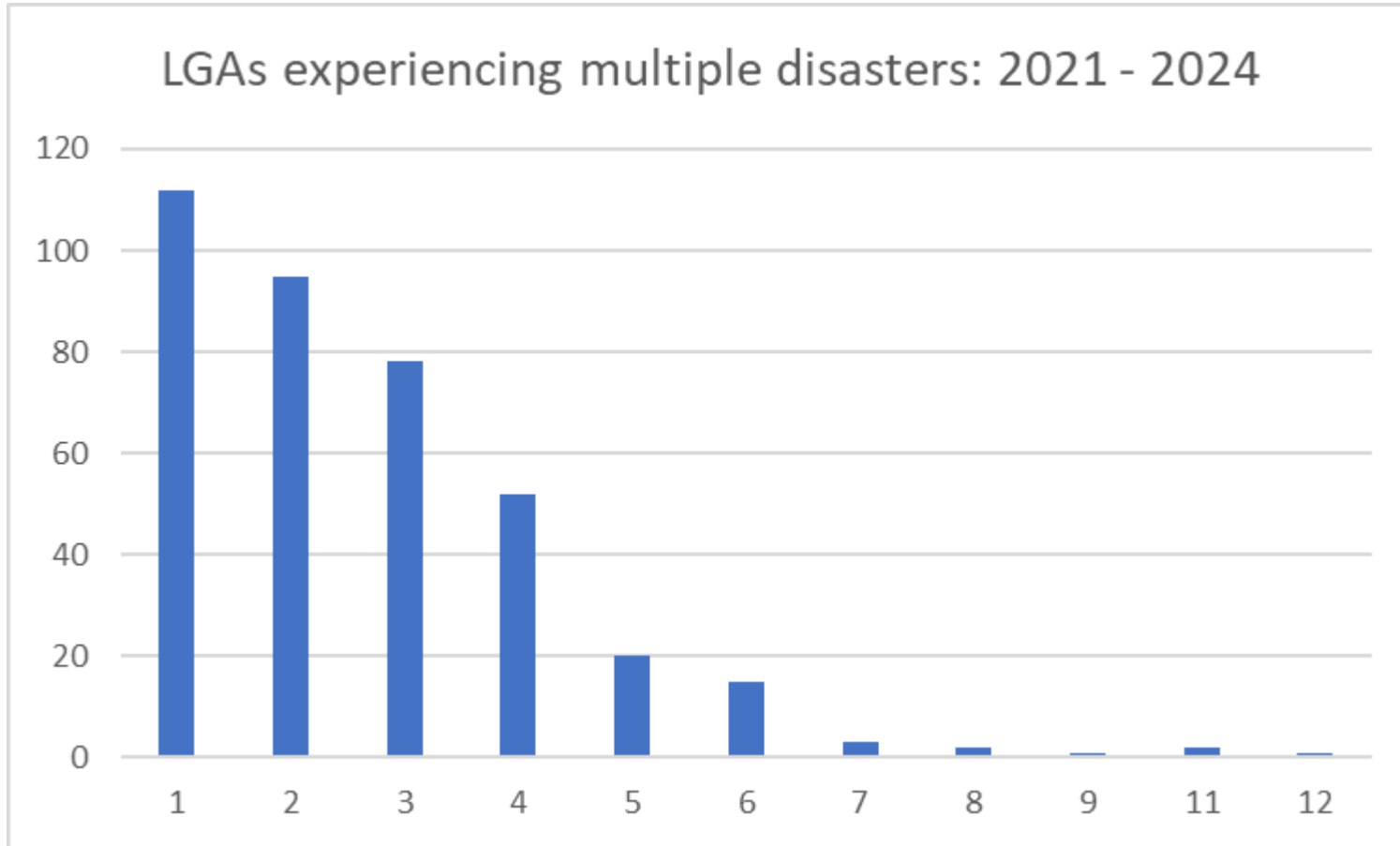
Number of disasters



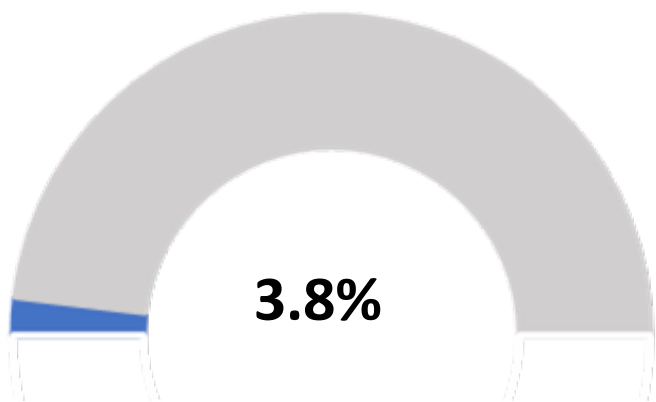
Number of LGAs impacted



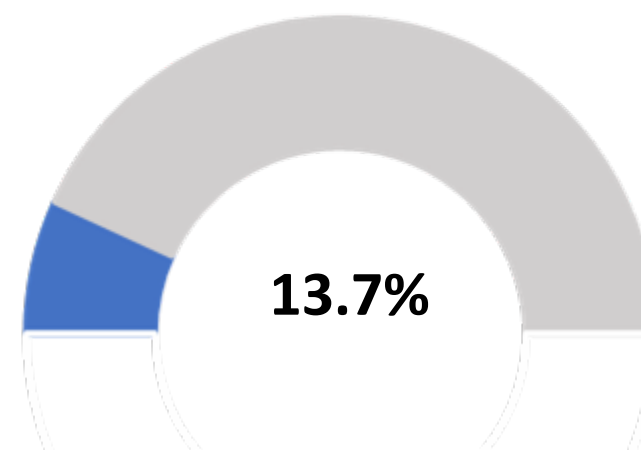
Number of LGAs experiencing multiple disasters



National Indigenous population percentage



Average Indigenous population % of disaster impacted LGAs 21-24



Recent major disaster events

Date	Name	No of LGAs	Indigenous population
September 2023	Southern Queensland fires	16	2.7% - 24.3%
December 2023	Tropical Cyclone Jasper, associated rainfall and flooding	10	8% - 98%
December 2023	Victorian floods and storms	29	0.7% - 5%
January 2024	Southern Queensland severe storms and rainfall	3	2.4% - 4.9%
February 2024	Victorian bushfires and storms	37	0.3% - 4.4%



Disproportionately impacted

Estimated percentage of indigenous households that have had their home damaged or destroyed at least once due to disaster (HILDA survey 2009-2019)

	Non-Indigenous Households	Indigenous Households
Has not experienced major disaster	90.1%	87.8%
Has experienced major disaster	9.9%	12.2%
Total	100%	100%

A significantly higher percentage of households with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander members have had their home damaged or destroyed due to disaster, relative to other Australian households



A youthful population

- More than half the Indigenous population are under 24 years of age
- One third are under 15 years of age

Fig. 2 Population pyramids for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of the fire-affected area, June 30, 2016



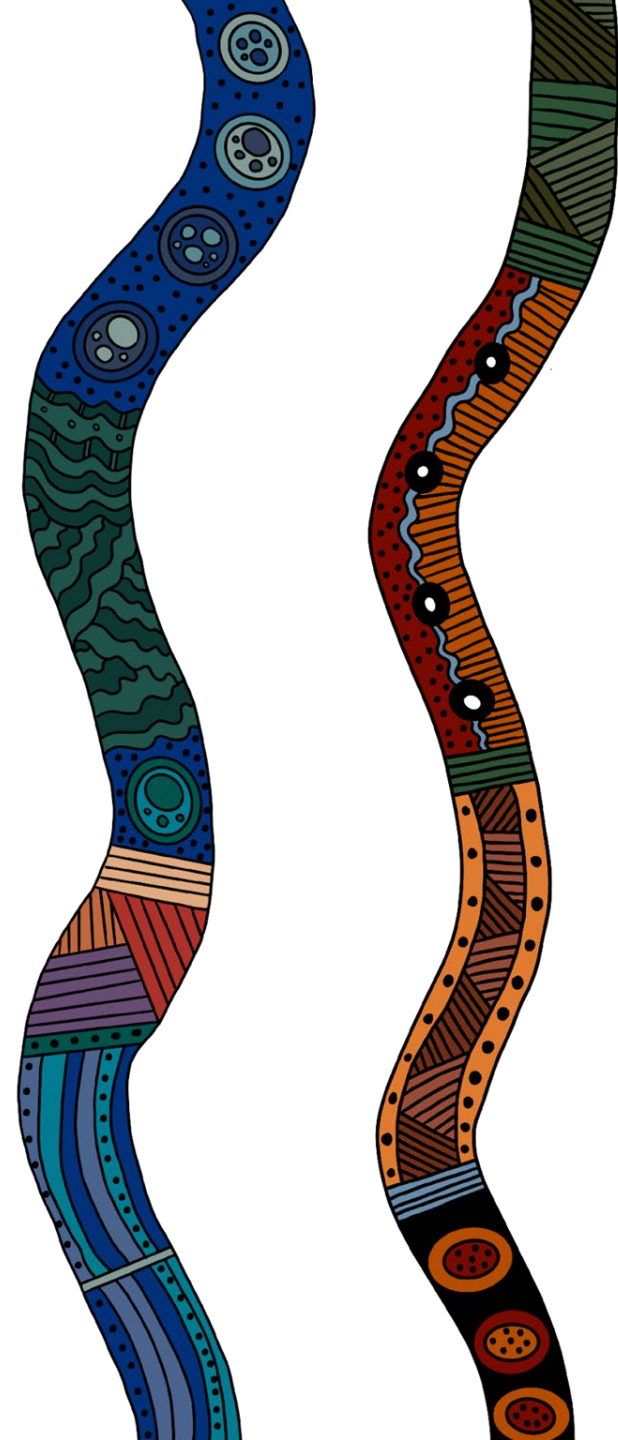
Source: Authors' calculations from 2016 Census of Population and Housing (ABS 2020) and 2016 ERP (ABS 2017b).



Greater hardship

Indigenous households are **15.4%** more likely to suffer financial hardship* following disasters than other Australian households

**Metric: unable to pay bills on time*



Historic invisibility of the impact on Indigenous peoples

Disaster	Inquiry report	Mentions of Indigenous peoples
1974 Brisbane Floods	<i>Investigation report</i>	No mention
2003 ACT bushfires	<i>Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires in the ACT</i>	<i>Historic:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">“From a historic perspective it is further argued that, through natural events such as lightning and intervention by Indigenous Australians, local environments were regularly affected by fire.”
2009 Black Saturday bushfires	<i>2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission – final report</i>	<i>Historic:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Indigenous Australian used fire for a variety of reasons, among them hunting and land management and for ceremonial purposes”“... deliberate burning has occurred since the arrival of Indigenous Australians over 40,000 years ago” <i>Fire management plans:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">“...steps are also taken to identify cultural sites, particularly sites of significance to Indigenous Australians”“Fuel breaks should be carefully selected and maintained to ensure that environmental and Indigenous cultural values are protected



Historic invisibility of the impact on Indigenous peoples

Disaster	Inquiry report	Mentions of Indigenous peoples
2010 – 2011 Queensland Floods	<i>Commission of Inquiry</i>	No mention
2015 Esperance Fires	<i>Coronial Inquest</i>	<p><i>Historic:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “... These fires do not provide the regenerative effect of fire on the Australian landscape that was provided by Indigenous burning practices of Australian Aboriginals (sic.) developed over thousands of years.”
2016 Tasmanian Bushfires	<i>Senate Environment and Communications References Committee: Responses to, and lessons learnt from, the January and February 2016 bushfires in remote Tasmanian Wilderness</i>	<p><i>Historic:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “In addition to its flora and fauna, the TWWHA is recognised for its heritage values. These include: some of the richest and best preserved Indigenous sites in Australia dating back around 45,000 years”
2018 – 2019 Tasmanian Bushfires	<i>AFAC Independent Operational Review: A review of the management of the Tasmanian fires of December 2018 – March 2019</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The post-fire period can also provide a significant opportunity to undertake surveys for Aboriginal heritage sites in areas that are otherwise inaccessible” “The regions (TWWHA) includes... a history of Aboriginal occupation extending back beyond 36,000 years”

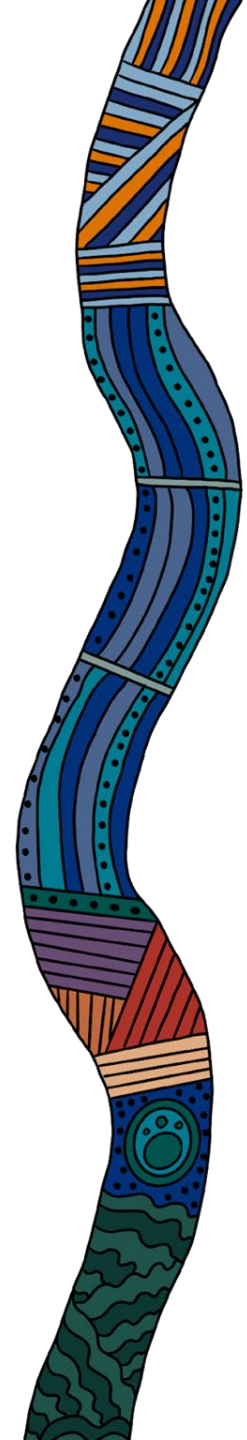
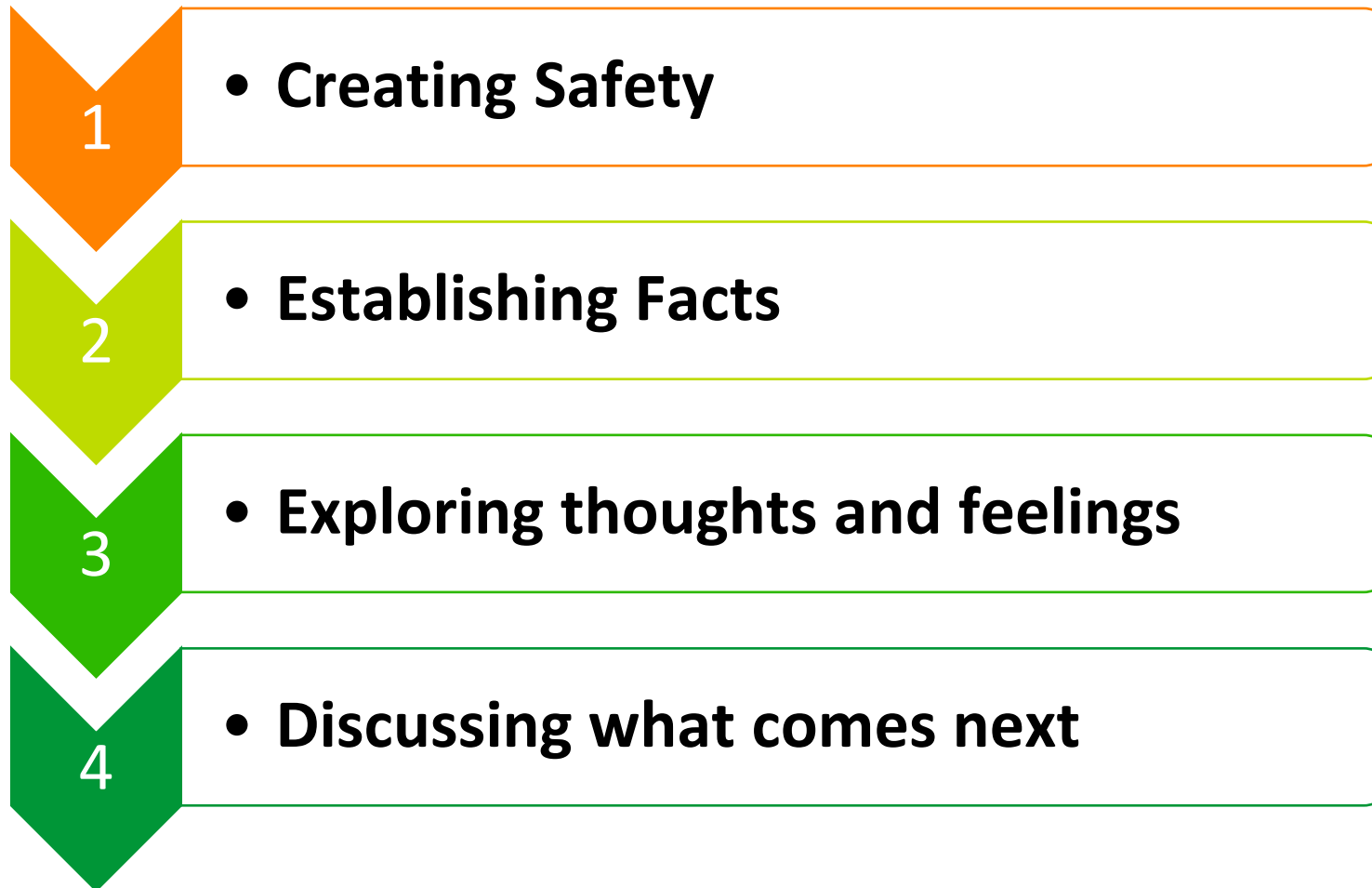


Black summer, a turning point

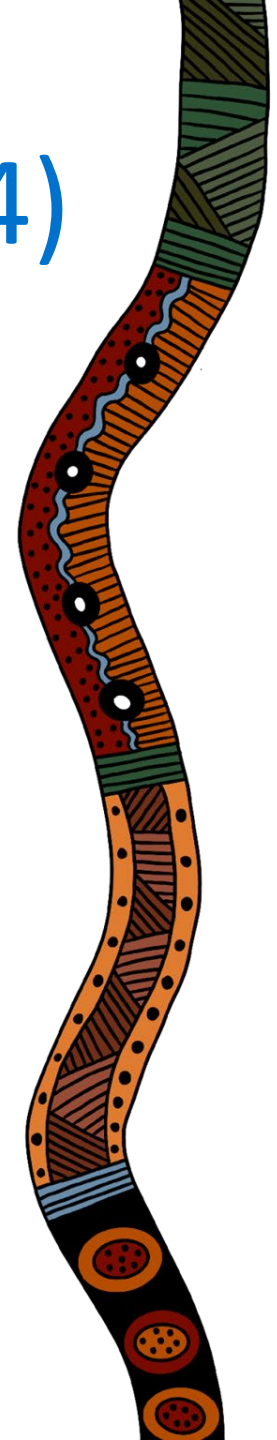
Disaster	Inquiry report	Mentions of Indigenous peoples
2019 2020 Black Summer Bushfires	<i>Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report 2020</i>	188 mentions
2019 2020 Black Summer Bushfires	<i>Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry</i>	19 mentions
2019 2020 Black Summer Bushfires	<i>Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season, phase 1 – Community and sector preparedness for and response to the 2019-20 fire season, IGEM</i>	39 mentions, include 5 page discussion on Cultural burning in the Victorian Government context
2022 Southeast Queensland Floods	<i>Southeast Queensland Rainfall and Flooding February to March 2022 Review, IGEM</i>	2 mentions, including paragraph about the preparedness and response of the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council
2022 Northern Rivers Floods	<i>2022 NSW Flood Inquiry, Volume 2: Full Report</i>	81 mentions



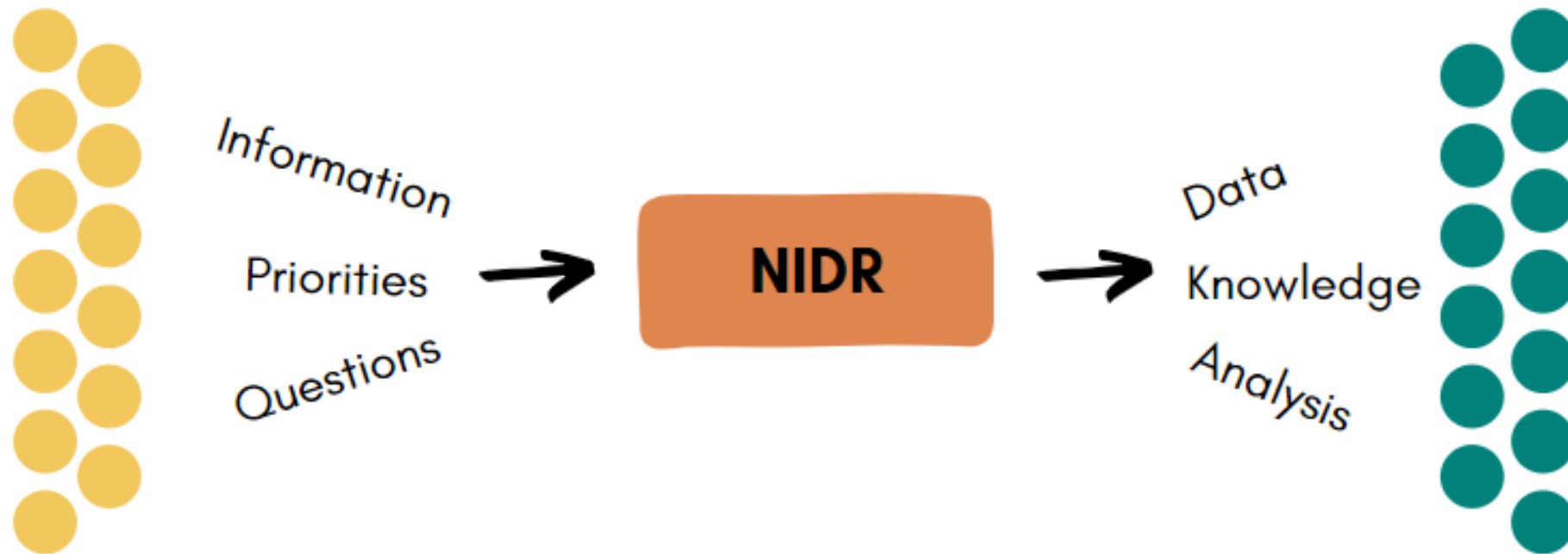
Interview methodology



Partner Communities - Phase 1 (2024)



Community of Practice



Community of Practice



Key project outputs

- Literature Review on effective models empowering Indigenous disaster resilience, climate change adaptation and best practice examples applied to other contexts
- A culturally-safe, healing-centred and trauma informed methodology for engaging with Indigenous peoples impacted by disaster
- Development of a national policy framework to guide Indigenous Disaster Resilience across Australia
- A published handbook guide for Indigenous organisations and communities, government agencies, and non-government organisations

