



# CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT IN SOUTHEAST AUSTRALIA

**Developing the foundation for an Indigenous-led and co-designed research program for land management with Traditional Owners**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The project team acknowledges the First Nations Traditional Owners as Custodians of the lands where we respectively live and work. We pay respect to their Elders, lore's, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands and waters have always been places of teaching, research and learning. We would also like to extend our gratitude to those who participated in the project's meetings and workshops for sharing their knowledge, experiences and insights with the research team. Your views sit at the empirical core of this research project and we hope that your knowledge will play an important role in the next developmental steps in supporting cultural land and fire management practice and research. We also acknowledge the ongoing work by Indigenous people to continue or revitalise cultural land management, and who continue to work hard to decolonise landscapes and research.

## LANGUAGE STATEMENT

**Indigenous:** This term is used to refer inclusively to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Nations Peoples of Australia, acknowledging that the term may inadequately reflect how members of distinct cultural, language and family groups may wish to identify.

**Aboriginal:** We have used or quoted Aboriginal for those people that prefer to identify as Aboriginal, which is common in southeast Australia.

**Traditional Owner/Custodian:** This refers to Indigenous peoples who hold traditional rights and interests over particular Country under customary lore, reflecting their ongoing cultural connection and responsibilities to that Country. While some Traditional Owner groups have Native Title Determinations or other Agreements with State and Federal Governments, we recognise that this is not the case for many groups, and we recognise their traditional rights and interests as Traditional Owners and Custodians under their customary lore.

**Traditional knowledge-holder/s:** Indigenous people who are engaged in sustaining, sharing and (re)building Indigenous knowledge traditions, including those concerning cultural land management.

**Elder:** A person who has gained recognition and cultural authority within their community as a Custodian of knowledge, story, and lore.

## Acronyms/abbreviations

ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
IK	Indigenous knowledge
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
IMT	Incident Management Team
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council



TO/s	Traditional Owner/s
CLM	Cultural land management
NRM	Natural resource management





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Cultural land management research in southeast Australia* project aimed to develop foundations for Indigenous-led and co-designed research programs to support cultural land management into the future. The project explored how to empower and enable Indigenous-led cultural fire and land management practices to improve landscape management and community resilience in southeast Australia.

To these ends, the project team convened a **Project Steering Group** (PSG) of cultural land management experts and advisors currently engaged in cultural fire management operations or research in New South Wales and Victoria. It also convened a **Government Advisory Group** and a **Research Advisory Group** to assist with advice where appropriate. As well as meetings of these Groups, the other key project activity was the conducting of several workshops in select sites to progress regional conversations regarding the potential for Indigenous-led cultural fire and land management research.

Overall, on the basis of these activities, this project concludes that research projects and institutes relating to land and fire management need to proceed from core understandings that:

- There is a widespread need for a holistic and integrative approach that recognises that all research and research outcomes impact Country and Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities are both rights-holders in relation to Country, and critical stakeholders in relation to creating resilient, healthy Country and people.
- Cultural land management is an essential part of creating well-prepared and resilient communities and landscapes anywhere in Australia.
- Research institutes, such as the Bushfire and Natural Hazard Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) or new Natural Hazards Research Australia, need to develop an Indigenous research strategy that is underpinned by foundational commitments to meaningfully support cultural land management practices. This strategy must include practical actions that can be taken immediately to empower Indigenous leadership and enhance Indigenous engagement and inclusion. Priority should be given to embedding these commitments and actions through institutional structures and resourcing decisions.

Further, this project report makes **10 recommendations** for action by Natural Hazards Research Australia and research partners to support cultural land management and Indigenous-led and co-designed research programs into the future:

1. Formal acknowledgement by research organisations of the equivalent value of Indigenous knowledge, practice, and science to Western understandings/knowledge systems. Respect and Recognition of knowledge-holders and cultural land management practice
2. Recognise the holistic and highly diverse context of Indigenous ways of being and Caring for Country



3. Make clear commitments to supporting Indigenous people to get on Country and engage in cultural stewardship practices to build the resilience of Country and people
4. Establish an Indigenous Research Strategy with dedicated research streams/project areas for cultural stewardship research within Natural Hazards Research Australia's research agenda that supports Indigenous-led research pathways.
5. Create avenues to recognise Traditional Owners as research partners/end-users of research funded by Natural Hazards Research Australia
6. Include Indigenous voice and representation in governance structures of institutions and land management agencies
7. Establish meaningful and ongoing pathways for Traditional Owner inclusion and consultation, to ensure research agendas and processes reflect Traditional Owner aspirations and priorities
8. Development of a framework of broad research principles/protocols and processes to guide more ethical and collaborative cultural land management research
9. Embed multiple aspects of capacity building into research frameworks and processes
10. Support opportunities for developing Indigenous governance, collaboration, and knowledge sharing

These recommendations are further explained in the Key Findings and Recommendations section below.

We propose a staged approach to utilising this project and these recommendations, to be guided by the project team and an interim Indigenous Research Committee (IRC) consisting of Project Steering Group members:

1. present the **key findings** and recommendations to the Natural Hazards Research Australia executive as the basis for developing an Indigenous research strategy
2. establish Terms of Reference for the **Indigenous Research Committee (IRC)**
3. work with the Natural Hazards Research Australia to identify priority recommendations and research projects for **implementation** in the short, moderate, and longer terms
4. work with the Natural Hazards Research Australia to identify the **resource requirements** to implement the recommendations and research projects
5. **co-develop** with Indigenous partners and Natural Hazards Research Australia representatives, a cultural land and fire management research agenda and priorities.



## END-USER TESTIMONIALS

**Lauren Tynan**, *Trawlwulwuy, PhD Candidate, Macquarie University*

Everything relating to land management impacts Aboriginal People. This research understands that and centres the voices and aspirations of Aboriginal knowledge holders who have been caring for this Country for thousands of generations.

This project puts Indigenous Knowledges at the centre of research inquiry leading to much needed innovation for the future of land management in Australia.

Women are often periphery in land management practices, research and decision making. As an Aboriginal woman, I feel this research understands the importance of listening to all voices when it comes to cultural land management; women, men, Elders and children. This is the only way we are going to make lasting impact for Aboriginal communities.

**Matthew Shanks**, *Taungurung, Cultural & Natural Resource Management Strategic Advisor, Taungurung Land & Waters Council*

As the interest in cultural land and fire management knowledge and practice continues to grow, it's vital that Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people are at the front and centre and are empowered to be at the front and centre, of research in this area. Momentum is building and opportunities are emerging, and we need to ensure we are empowered to define the space and set the terms of research programs and research agendas. We are the custodians of Country and we want to work with others to heal Country, but it needs to be done in ways that ensure our rights and interests are respected and protected.

To do this work, to enable opportunities to be heard and respected, requires investment and structural changes from government agencies, research institutions and funding bodies. This project has provided an important opportunity for Traditional Owners and others to make considered recommendations about how they would like cultural land and fire management research to grow, and my hope is now the recommendations and findings are supported to empower Traditional Owners to safely and respectfully utilize and embed our knowledges in contemporary land and fire management, for the benefit of all that rely on healthy Country.

**Vanessa Cavanagh**, *Bundjalung and Wonnarua, PhD candidate and Associate Lecturer, University of Wollongong*

It important that Indigenous peoples' including women's voices, rights and interests are centred in the work of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and its future institute.



**Penny Watson, *Fire Ecologist***

I think it is vital that research into Indigenous cultural land management move forward, along with practical on-ground burning and related actions. These things are important for a whole range of reasons, including for recognition of Indigenous knowledge and expertise; for conservation of cultural heritage, landscapes and biodiversity; for getting people out on country with all the personal, social, intergenerational and soul benefits that follow; for reconciliation both in general and between black and white knowledge systems. This project has highlighted the importance of Indigenous leadership in research and practice, has outlined a range of issues that need to be considered, and has pointed a way forward, in terms of both principles and practice. The recommendations will provide a solid basis for future research, and for the development of elements needed to support that research.

A side benefit of this research project was that people got together. The workshops provided a forum for knowledge and stories to be shared. The workshop I attended at Minyumai was inspiring; I left feeling happy to know that there's lots of good people working to bring Indigenous land management and cultural burning back to country. Both the workshop and the write-up process have been genuinely consultative, and professional. I really appreciated the opportunity to be involved.



## BACKGROUND

In July 2020, the Australian Government announced that funding would be available to the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC to undertake research with direct links to the bushfires which occurred in the 2019-2020 Black Summer. The Scope of this project falls under the following portfolio objective: "Objective 3: Develop the foundation for co-designed research program for land management with Traditional Owners."

Cultural land and fire management has always been vitally important to Indigenous peoples in Australia; however, they have largely been excluded from opportunities to engage in the management of their ancestral Country. This situation has begun to change in recent years, due to the continued advocacy and actions of Indigenous peoples, the growing recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights to Country, and the progressive embedding of principles of reconciliation and self-determination in many government agencies. Nonetheless, previous research funded by the CRC has demonstrated there are many barriers for those wishing to start and sustain cultural fire management projects in southeast Australia, particularly where such projects require the participation of government land and fire management agencies.

This project seeks to explore how to empower and enable Indigenous-led cultural fire and land management practices through research, with the aim of improving landscape management and community resilience in southeast Australia. To this end, the project convened expert groups and workshops to: a) **scope and identify** potential landscapes for cultural land management research; b) **build relationships** with relevant Indigenous land management organisations, Traditional Owner groups and land management agencies; and c) **provide direction** on the future governance of cultural land management research.

This research will be utilised by a number of groups, including:

- Traditional Owner groups and Indigenous land management organisations, particularly staff engaging in land and fire management activities
- Land and fire management agencies, particularly staff with operational and policy roles relating to partnerships with Indigenous communities
- Universities and research organisations, particularly staff engaging in research partnerships with Indigenous communities.



## RESEARCH APPROACH

The project explored how to empower and enable Indigenous-led cultural fire and land management practices to improve landscape management and community resilience in southeast Australia.

A central component of the project's development and execution was the Cultural Land Management Project Steering Group (CLM-PSG). The PSG was composed of delegates from key Indigenous land management organisations and Traditional Owner groups currently engaged in cultural fire and land management initiatives.

The CLM-PSG was advised by two advisory groups:

- A Cultural Land Management Government Advisory Group (CLM-GAG) with operational and policy experience and expertise in fire and land management made up of delegates from key Govt fire and land Agencies currently engaged in cultural fire management.
- A Cultural Land Management Research Advisory Group (CLM-RAG) with experience and expertise in relevant research methods (e.g., qualitative and quantitative on social and ecological benefits of cultural land management) and design (e.g., Indigenous-led research methods, co-design, action research) made up of academic researchers with relevant experience and expertise in cultural fire management research to advise the CLM-PSG and others as required

The implementation approach was to hold a series of consultative workshops or gatherings in 3 regions of southeast Australia complemented by the Project Steering Group and two advisory groups. Three regional workshops were then held for participatory consultations with Indigenous people in each of the regions (2 were on site face to face meetings and one was virtual on Zoom due to Covid-19 restrictions at the time).

The workshops followed a participatory process where participants are presented with the project and its aims and proposed themes and are invited to suggest their own expectations and topics for discussion. These topics/expectations are then summarised and form the basis for group discussions during the workshops. Groups present in plenary and plenary discussions are held following 2-3 rounds of small group sessions.

This up-front project was designed to support the development of a larger scale research program in the future. This project parallels another project focusing on Northern Australia.

The project was expected to produce written advice from the CLM-PSG on topics that included:

- possible **governance arrangements** to support the development of research relating to cultural land management practices, including arrangements to ensure protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)
- the **temporal and spatial scope** required for a defined landscape to have tangibly responded to traditional land management practices



- **risk management frameworks** that will allow fire and land management agencies to meet their jurisdictional fire and landscape management obligations
- how the **effectiveness of cultural land management** practices might be appropriately measured, and the timescales required to allow the benefits of those practices to be measurable
- potential **research landscapes and building relationships** with relevant Indigenous land management organisations, Traditional Owner groups and land management agencies in those landscapes.

### Out-of-scope

This project was not intended to do any field-based burning. That would be a future program.

### REQUIREMENTS

- Build on and enhance existing partnerships and relationships between land management agencies, Indigenous land management organisations and Traditional Owner groups
- Create opportunities to generate new and/or future partnerships and relationships between land management agencies, Indigenous land management organisations and Traditional Owner groups
- Create an environment where Indigenous land management organisations and Traditional Owner groups are actively leading and developing the project
- A shared understanding on how and in what ways government land management agencies might be expected to undertake fire risk management activities in a landscape that is under evaluation.



## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key findings and recommendations, drawn from the three community workshops and meetings with the Project Steering, Government Advisory and Research Advisory Groups, are presented in relation to five important themes that emerged.

Within these themes, recommendations 1-4 set out some broad foundational commitments for organisations and land management agencies engaged with cultural land management research and practice, including the new national centre for natural hazards and disaster resilience research: Natural Hazards Research Australia.

Recommendations 5-10 then propose a number of actions to be undertaken in support of these foundational commitments, in order to empower Indigenous leadership, decision-making, capacity- building and governance around Indigenous led and co-designed cultural land management research. The final part presents some of the critical research areas emerging from the discussions that should inform development of Natural Hazards Research Australia's research agenda and Indigenous Research Strategy.

### 1) ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, RESPECT AND RECOGNITION TO CENTRE CULTURE AND COUNTRY

Research and work around cultural land management needs to be underpinned by acknowledgement, respect and recognition of Indigenous knowledge, practice, and science. There is a need for greater understanding and empowerment of Indigenous holistic perspectives around caring for, with and as Country.

- **Recommendation 1: Formal acknowledgement by research organisations of the equivalent value of Indigenous knowledge, practice and science to Western understandings/knowledge systems. Respect and Recognition of knowledge-holders and cultural land management practice**

There is a need for official acknowledgement by Natural Hazards Research Australia and other institutions and land management agencies, that Indigenous knowledge, ways of learning and competencies are recognised, respected, and viewed as equivalent to Western science research and management approaches. To this end, Indigenous knowledge and practice must be considered and respected across all streams of research undertaken by Natural Hazards Research Australia, and not only within a dedicated Indigenous-led research stream. All research is undertaken on someone's Country.

This respect needs to extend to recognition of Indigenous knowledge-holders and knowledge-producers outside of institutional research frameworks, to support a more expansive understanding of who counts as researchers and what counts as research practice and outputs. Community practices of knowledge creation and sharing through cultural land management activities need to be better respected and recognised (including through appropriate remuneration) in relation to work conducted by land management agencies and researchers.





- **Recommendation 2: Recognise the holistic and highly diverse context of Indigenous ways of being and Caring for Country**


Cultural land management knowledge and practice are part of a holistic Country-based framework of Indigenous ways of seeing, knowing, being and doing. Indigenous Custodians, Traditional Owners and knowledge-holders understand cultural land management as expressions of cultural practice and responsibility to, with and as Country. There is a need for recognition that cultural land management is not just a question of hazard management or risk mitigation; cultural burning and hazard reduction are not the same thing, and cultural land stewardship practices extend far beyond cultural burning, to how Aboriginal people maintain connections to Country and their cultural practices to care for Country.

It is important that research institutions and land management agencies recognise that cultural land stewardship practices need to be understood within the broader context of Caring for Country as cultural practice. Cultural land stewardship is not just about the 'work' of burning or weeding or monitoring, but about broader relationalities of connecting to and caring for Country, kin, and culture. Aboriginal people maintaining their connection to Country plays a vital role in maintaining healthy and resilient ecosystems, and the loss of this relationship should be considered a threatening process that is immensely damaging to Aboriginal peoples' wellbeing. Culture and the importance of being on Country – connecting, listening, learning, walking, collecting, and sharing – needs to remain central. Protecting and restoring the health of Country is vital for cultural heritage and research should foster recognition of the importance of cultural landscapes and healthy Country. Research partners, including research institutions and agencies, need to understand this context and commit to developing the cultural competency of agency and research staff.

- **Recommendation 3: Make clear commitments to supporting Indigenous people to get on Country and engage in cultural stewardship practices to build the resilience of Country and people**

Meeting and workshop participants expressed a strong desire for more supportive institutional and agency cultures. There is a need for research that enables Indigenous leadership and aspirations around caring for Country. It is important that research is not framed around 'proving' or justifying Indigenous knowledge. Instead, respectful, collaborative, and meaningful research needs to start from a basis of aiming to enable Aboriginal people to be on Country to engage in cultural land management practices in culturally salient ways. Research aims and agendas should clearly recognise the broader benefits of cultural land management practices for cultural revitalization, intergenerational knowledge transfer, enacting cultural responsibilities to protect, nurture and heal Country and community.

It is important that there is acknowledgement by institutions and land management agencies that Indigenous cultural land management is living knowledge and culture – it requires people to be supported to actually be on



the ground, caring for Country. Cultural land management research needs to enable custodianship and help resource groups and spaces to get people together on Country, including Elders, women, and youth, to allow for empowerment and (re)generation of knowledge and knowledge systems through 'learning by being and doing' and practicing culture.

- **Recommendation 4: Establish an Indigenous Research Strategy with dedicated research streams/project areas for cultural stewardship research within Natural Hazards Research Australia's research agenda that supports Indigenous-led research pathways**

In line with the growing demand for understanding and implementation of cultural land management in the wider community, there is a clear need for an Indigenous research strategy to provide Indigenous leadership pathways to direct research focus, as well as funding and resourcing to support cultural land management projects and partnerships that help care for and create resilient Country and communities. The findings identify a number of critical areas for research that may sit within this research stream. There is particular need for research to identify key barriers and obstacles to cultural land management, especially around resourcing, insurance, liability, and policy frameworks, to help support the development of solutions to maximise opportunities for cultural land management practice.

As Cultural Land Management is a Cultural Practice of Aboriginal people and their communities, this research should support Aboriginal researchers, both community and academic based, to lead research that addresses their questions.

## 2) STRUCTURAL INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS VOICE AND INTERESTS

Throughout the discussions there was strong emphasis on the need for the structural inclusion of Indigenous voices and aspirations in relation to research organisations and land management agencies engaged with cultural land management. It is important that supportive mechanisms are developed to ensure that research agendas, approaches and processes are informed by Traditional Owners and reflect Indigenous community aims and objectives.

- **Recommendation 5: Create avenues to recognise Traditional Owners as research partners/end-users of research funded by Natural Hazards Research Australia**

Traditional Owners should be clearly recognised and supported as end-users of research produced by Natural Hazards Research Australia, whether or not it is Indigenous-focused research.

- **Recommendation 6: Include Indigenous voice and representation in governance structures of institutions and land management agencies**

In terms of Natural Hazards Research Australia, this could include the development of an Indigenous research strategy that would include the following elements:



- Appoint Aboriginal board member(s) on the skills-based board.
- Recruiting Aboriginal staff members into key roles and creating identified positions.
- Support establishment and funding of an Indigenous Research Committee that can offer advice or direction regarding the research program, events, and investment, as well as offering an oversight function (i.e., Indigenous ethics subcommittee) to advise Natural Hazards Research Australia on appropriate ethical approvals, arrangements, and standards.
- **Recommendation 7: Establish meaningful and ongoing pathways for Traditional Owner inclusion and consultation to ensure research agendas and processes reflect Traditional Owner aspirations and priorities**

A key issue is ensuring protocols are in place when identifying the appropriate Traditional Owners and knowledge-holders with cultural authority. Research institutions, researchers and land management agencies must develop and support wider process of Indigenous community consultation, inclusion, and engagement, to support Traditional Owners to identify community research interests and shape research agendas and funding decisions. There is a need to move beyond treating Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCS) or other prominent Indigenous organisations as the only port of call for Traditional Owner consultation, engagement, and research co-ordination. Researchers must show due diligence when identifying the appropriate knowledge-holders with cultural authority. Indigenous community priorities, areas of interest and support requirements vary and will evolve as programs and projects are developed, so consultation, inclusion and engagement need to be ongoing.

Processes to allow for broader engagement with, and inclusion of, Traditional Owners and communities might include:

- Support establishment and funding of an Indigenous Research Committee that could advise, broker, and support local Traditional Owner groups' partnerships with research institutions, researchers, and agencies.
- Resource an Indigenous Research Network/Community of practice to support engagement, collaboration, sharing and mentoring.
- Supporting Traditional Owners' workshops, forums, walking and talking with possible research collaborators on Country - '*creating the time and space for people to yarn*'.
- Funding scoping studies with long-term prospects to build relationships to support inclusion and engagement pathways and determine community centred research priorities.
- Factoring in realistic resources and time to build relationships with a community. For example, 30% of the funding and timeline in new partnership projects may be needed for relationship building and



maintaining relationships to build genuine engagement, inclusion and understanding of local Indigenous world views and customs.

### 3) RESEARCH PROTOCOLS AND PROCESSES

While there is Traditional Owner interest in growing meaningful, supportive research, the meetings and workshops clearly highlighted concerns around the risks associated with cultural land management research for Traditional Owners and negative past research experiences. Given the history of exploitative and extractive research around First Nations peoples, there is particular need to ensure that future research genuinely supports Indigenous aspirations, that researchers are held accountable, and that Traditional Owners are protected from exploitation and inappropriate use of their cultural knowledge. The workshop discussions stressed the need to move towards more Indigenous-led and collaborative models of research, away from extractive 'collecting' towards 'Indigenous owned or co-ownership and co-authorship'.

It was noted that Natural Hazards Research Australia should require all supported research endeavours to engage with established Indigenous specific ethics guides such as the *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*. However, there is also demand for better ethics protocols and consent processes specific to cultural land management research to be implemented or developed to support researchers and help open up research pathways. Although there is considerable diversity in local community cultural protocols and capacities necessitating some flexibility and responsiveness to local contexts, there is a need for articulation of broadly applicable research principles to help guide research programs and practices.

- **Recommendation 8: Development of a framework of broad research principles/protocols and processes to guide more ethical and collaborative cultural land management research**

There is scope to develop a more robust research ethics, inclusion, and engagement framework, drawing on existing guidance (e.g. *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*) and collating examples of best practice. Building on the Project Steering Group and Research Advisory Group established for this project the creation of an Indigenous-led research network could also help guide this process.

Principles/protocols/processes should be developed in relation to the following key issues:

- *Indigenous leadership and meaningful inclusion and engagement*
  - All research 'on Country' brings obligations to consult and work constructively with relevant Traditional Owners.
  - Wherever possible Traditional Owners should be supported to lead or co-lead cultural land management research. All cultural land management research proposals that are not Traditional Owner-led must engage Traditional Owners from the conception stage to ensure the project is co-designed and Traditional Owner supported. This process must ensure all roles and responsibilities, protocols and



resourcing are determined and agreed upon before the project starts to fully uphold and support Traditional Owner rights. This process will support all cultural land management research to be Indigenous led or co-led/co-designed and will build capacity.

- Support for Indigenous research approaches, methodologies, systems, and ways of learning.
- Establishing processes/pathways for Traditional Owners to learn what skills tools and opportunities researchers might offer them.
- There is a need to avoid assumptions that Aboriginal groups have cultural 'knowledge' ready or that they are willing to share it. Communities need opportunities and support to (re)build and grow knowledge.
- There is particular need for projects to support inclusion and empowerment of Aboriginal women as both researchers and cultural land management practitioners.
- *Trust, communication, and relationship building*
  - Developing ways that researchers can demonstrate respect and cultural competency.
  - Establishing trust can take time, and research institutes/researchers should seek to establish and grow relationships before undertaking the research and sustain these beyond the research, which may require an alteration to expected project timelines.
  - Researchers need to acknowledge difficult histories of exploitation and discrimination and engage in 'awkward conversations' about research.
  - There is need for clear communication of research agendas, objectives, and timeframes to ensure a shared understanding and expectations, and to ensure parties are kept informed throughout research.
  - Seek endorsement from Traditional Owners about new and emerging research projects occurring on Country.
- *Reciprocity and benefit sharing*
  - Having a clear and accountable benefits test for all research, to ensure that research clearly identifies and supports benefits for Country and community.
  - Capacity building needs to be supported with and through research.
  - Create standards, using existing guidance (e.g. *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*), to ensure project reporting is accessible and understandable for Traditional Owner partners – reporting should use everyday, plain language.
- *Resourcing and funding*
  - Research projects need to be structured and resourced to ensure that Traditional Owner inclusion and engagement is financially supported -





knowledge holders need to be appropriately remunerated for their involvement.

- Transparent, collaborative, and equitable funding arrangements are critical, as competitive funding models can harm Indigenous community relationships and interests.
- Prioritise funding to build capacity in communities and support grassroots organisations to be able to manage and take part in research.
- Enable long-term funding that is not tied to specific outcomes but can evolve and adapt to changes in Country and in community aspirations, capacity, and capabilities for caring for Country.
- *Protection of Intellectual Property (IP) and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)*
  - Strict and clearly defined protocols are required for knowledge-sharing, data management, access, and ownership rights.
  - Projects should have collaboration and cultural engagement agreements which protects cultural knowledge, ICIP and IP.
  - Traditional Owner endorsement of how research is used and what knowledge is reflected, such as protocols and steps to support Traditional Owner involvement and final sign-off e.g., post-research agreements.
  - Recognition that cultural knowledge (ICIP) is collectively owned by the cultural group/s and that permission is required by the knowledge holders. Develop protocols to support appropriate consultation with those with cultural authority.
  - Protocols to support research data/results being retained as the IP of the cultural group/s.
- *Knowledge transfer and intergenerational engagement*
  - Support for Indigenous systems of knowledge transfer - including support for Elders and youth to come together on Country.
  - Support for the inclusion of children and youth in research.
  - Support for different forms of knowledge sharing and research outputs, including film, music, dance, art, apps, podcasts, and games. Journal articles and academic publications are not easily accessible or digestible for the wider community
    - Co-authorship with Traditional Owners should be discussed in the knowledge dissemination plan at the beginning (and throughout) the project. This also provides Traditional Owners with copyright over the written work.



#### 4) CAPACITY BUILDING AND SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

There is a strong demand for research to both build and support recognition of Indigenous community capacity and Indigenous governance. Capacity building efforts might help develop Indigenous led research capacity, as well as supporting broader community capacity through research. In particular there is a need for investment in and support for expanding Indigenous ranger initiatives and caring for Country programs. Building community capacity (around research and business capabilities) is important in enabling communities to be funded directly, rather than funding being filtered through land management agencies.

- **Recommendation 9: Embed multiple aspects of capacity building into research frameworks and processes**

Efforts to building Indigenous-led research capacity might include:

- Supporting Indigenous pathways in academia through Indigenous scholarships
- Supporting Indigenous women with dedicated scholarships
- Support for research pathways and opportunities beyond the academy, including recognition and resourcing of existing research competencies in communities for women and men
- Funding for training, scholarships and mentoring to build research capabilities – through traditional and non-traditional pathways
- Developing appropriate tools and partnership models to allow Aboriginal people to carry out their own monitoring of Country (weeds/feral specials/native and endangered species) and the impacts of cultural burning

Efforts to build community capacity through research, including community capacity to manage Country, might include:

- Structuring research activities to create jobs and economic outcomes for local Indigenous people
- Supporting career paths for Indigenous rangers/fire officers including resourcing training, mentoring and equipment
- Funding and support for expanding ranger programs, including junior/youth-targeted and women's ranger programmes
- Funding the development of cultural calendars and building the capacity of community to lead their development
- **Recommendation 10: Support opportunities for developing Indigenous governance, collaboration and knowledge sharing**



It is important to support the development of collaborative relationships and knowledge sharing, including learning from successful initiatives, between neighbouring, regional, and trans-regional Indigenous groups, to build Indigenous governance capacity and networks.

Enabling Indigenous governance, collaboration and networking might include:

- Supporting opportunities to talk about cultural fire and land management and develop a collective voice
- Supporting opportunities for communities to share land management knowledge with other Indigenous groups
- Having Regional forums to inform wider community and agencies and develop these connections
- Having digital spaces to support community data collection, access and sharing
- Establishing an Institute of Indigenous Cultural Land Management
- Supporting the creation of an Indigenous-led Research Network/Community of practice

## 5) POTENTIAL RESEARCH AREAS

In addition to these key recommendations around research frameworks and processes, the meetings and workshops helped identify some critical areas and pathways for future research. These are extracted in brief below.

Broadly, there is a need for research to encourage wider recognition and learning around cultural land management to support how to grow the number of Aboriginal people engaged in caring for Country. There is desire to build stronger narratives around the success of existing cultural land management efforts, through exploring social, cultural and well-being benefits, and to support opportunities for growing Indigenous knowledge. There is demand from both Traditional Owners and land management agencies for better understanding the relationship between cultural land management and other land management approaches and the opportunities for removing key barriers and building a more enabling environment for caring for Country practices. With appropriate resourcing, there are significant opportunities to expand cultural land management research across bigger temporal and spatial scales.

- **Identifying and investigating barriers and enablers for conducting cultural land management practices**

While inadequate funding remains a key challenge, land tenure and permit arrangements, legal and policy instruments, insurance requirements and risk management frameworks and institutional/agency cultures can all impede cultural land management practices, particularly cultural burning. There is a clear need for research to identify and understand these barriers and to seek ways to remove these, including finding economic/financial model solutions to insurance and liability obstacles. In particular, there is a need for clearer



articulation of the relationship between cultural fire practices and the existing statutory land management context, as agencies can have difficulty understanding how cultural burning fits within their existing hazard reduction frameworks and statutory requirements. There is also a need to identify and explore those factors that enable Aboriginal-led caring for Country practices, including through analysis of successful case studies.

- **Research supporting land management agencies to better understand and create an enabling environment for cultural land management priorities and values**

The creation of a supportive, collaborative culture within government agencies is essential in enabling wider practice of cultural land management. There is a need for research to examine how agencies might improve their cultural competency and understanding of Indigenous aspirations around cultural land management, as well as to document examples of best practice and to support dissemination of agency learning.

- **Research that examines the ecological, economic and social costs of existing government-led fire management systems and policies, to identify the negative effects on Country of “business as usual”**

Research attention needs to be given to the impacts of government fire management systems, to identify where these are inadequate or are not working. There is particular desire to understand the impacts of management efforts regarding the 2019/20 bushfires on Country, including the use of fire retardants. While not Indigenous-focused research, this type of research into dominant land management practices reflects Indigenous community research aspirations to better understand current land management practices.

- **Research that examines the impact of natural hazards and land management practices on cultural heritage and cultural practice**

The impacts of both wildfires and government fire management practices on cultural heritage remains under-researched. There is a need for better understanding of how natural hazards can impact cultural artefacts, values, loss of totems etc. and how cultural assets can be best protected. How can proactive cultural practices reduce these risks and how can Indigenous people be supported to protect their cultural heritage? There is also a need for understanding how natural hazards impact practices of cultural land management.

- **Research that examines the healing role of cultural land management and post-hazard recovery**

There is a need to test and develop cultural methods for helping Country recover and increase resilience following hazards, particularly following destructive bushfires, including exploring the use of cultural fire as an important tool for ecological recovery. More research is needed regarding the protective, healing, adaptive role of the right kind of fire. Research might also explore the links between ecological, social, cultural, and spiritual healing - how healing Country can help heal and build more resilient communities.



- **Research to support Indigenous-led and culturally-appropriate monitoring, evaluation and reporting**

There is a need for more monitoring and reporting data on existing cultural land management initiatives, to support the building, adaption, and rejuvenation of Indigenous knowledge. Research is needed to support the development of appropriate monitoring processes, indicators and metrics for tracking changes and impacts in things like weeds/native animals/ endangered & totem species pre and post fire (cultural burns and hot burns) that can be carried out by Aboriginal people on Country. Research is also needed to develop better evaluation and feedback mechanisms to improve reporting practices after fire, to enable Indigenous perspectives to inform agencies' post-fire responses.

- **Research exploring the social, cultural and health benefits of cultural land management**

Greater research focus is needed around the manifold individual and community wellbeing and cultural resilience benefits of cultural land management. It is important to recognise and record the role of cultural land management activities in influencing various factors important to Indigenous wellbeing, including connection to community, Country, and opportunities for cultural practice, learning and knowledge transfer. There is a particular need for research to share learning and stories around the success of Indigenous Ranger initiatives.

- **Research supporting youth engagement and learning**

There is demand for youth-centred research, examining the benefits and opportunities for youth engagement in cultural land management learning and practice. There are opportunities for research to help develop a national policy to implement practical elements of caring for Country and cultural practices in schools and to support the expansion of cultural programs in schools. There are also opportunities for research to support and expand on existing successful Junior ranger and learning on Country initiatives.

- **Research around economics, resourcing and capacity**

Capacity assessment and mapping would be useful in identifying what communities need to achieve cultural land management goals and where the opportunities are for resourcing and for developing Indigenous enterprise around caring for Country practices. There is also a need for research around the distribution of investment/funding and the economic benefits of different land management approaches, evaluating existing funding arrangements in light of priority areas and opportunities for cultural land management investment.

- **Research to support Indigenous communities to grow and renew knowledge around cultural land management**

In addition to better recognition of extant knowledge, research can support community to (re)build and extend knowledge and learn how Indigenous science and practice offers adaptive pathways for caring for Country in light of contemporary landscape challenges and climate conditions. In particular, research could support the development of cultural calendars, and understanding around when, where and how to burn based on Indigenous





knowledge systems. Research might support community to gather oral history around environmental change and recovery and assist community to implement lessons and cultural practices. There is also an opportunity to document the diversity and health of Country and to develop benchmarks for healthy Country based on Indigenous knowledge systems. Research is needed to support the recognition, protection, and restoration of healthy Country.



## WORKSHOPS

Three workshops were held. The summaries, validated by participants, are presented in this section.

- Central Victoria – Online
- North Coast NSW – Minyurnai
- South Coast NSW – Bawley Point

The regional workshops were composed of invited Aboriginal people active in the CLM space and from relevant state and regional-based organisations. Members of the PSG and advisory groups were also invited to attend in limited numbers. Independent researchers and specialists in the CLM space also attended.

The agenda of each workshop ran over 2 days and had the following format:

- Acknowledgement of Country
- Introductions
- Setting the scene and project overview + timelines + consent
- Role of groups/circles and regional workshops
- Expectations of participants
- Grouping of expectations into themes
- Working groups then explored the themes and presented in plenary
- Summary discussions and next steps
- Evaluation

The workshop summary findings, which have been validated by participants, are presented below.

### CENTRAL VICTORIA CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

**Dates: 8-9 June 2021**

**‘There is hesitancy for real reasons because it has been negative for us in the past. How do we connect to and make these institutions work for positive reasons and understanding...’ – Central Victoria Participant 2**

#### Participants

DAY 1	
Matthew Shanks	Taungurung Land and Water Council and Project Steering group (PSG)
Shane Monk	Taungurung Land and Water Council
Billy Briggs	Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation



Atmos Atkinson	Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation
Nathan Wong	Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation
Nate Perry	Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation
Mick Bourke	Traditional Owner Community Member
Roger Fenwick	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
Michael-Shaun Fletcher	University of Melbourne
Kurt Sutton	Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
Oliver Costello	Project Convenor
Timothy Neale	Deakin University
Katharine Haynes	University of Wollongong
Tony Jansen	One Point Five Degrees

## DAY 2

Matthew Shanks	Taungurung Land and Water Council and Project Steering group (PSG)
John Bates	Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC
Shane Monk	Taungurung Land and Water Council
Lou Buckley	Deakin University
Billy Briggs	Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation
Hamish Webb	DELWP
Michael-Shaun Fletcher	University of Melbourne
Atmos Atkinson	Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation
Trent Nelson	DELWP / Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation
Daniel Miller	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
Nathan Wong	Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation
Greg Summerell	Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Mick Bourke	Traditional Owner Community Member
Oliver Costello	Project Convenor
Timothy Neale	Deakin University
Katharine Haynes	University of Wollongong
Tony Jansen	One Point Five Degrees



## Method

Workshop discussions followed a participatory approach and were a mix of group/plenary discussions and small working groups, taking place over 2 days on Teams. The discussions were audio recorded and also recorded as field notes by the workshop facilitators and these were combined with the notes generated by small breakout groups. The data was then coded into themes that emerged from reviewing the data. The coded data was then grouped and further interpreted and summarised. Where relevant quotes were extracted to illustrate certain comments and discussion topics.

## Findings

### Country, connectedness and cultural burning

There is enthusiasm to increase cultural land management, including cultural burning, particularly to increase the resilience of Country (ecological benefits) and to increase community cohesion and health (social benefits).

*'It's not just about the health of the Country. It's about the health of the people' - Participant 10*

The importance of spending time on, learning with and connecting to Country was emphasised.

*'When people are not out on Country every day you are not able to see the seasonal indicators and changes in season happening on that micro level throughout the day and weeks and months'*

*'Traditional owners always talk about themselves as being part of Country. Whitefellas take their approach as observing from the outside and removal from Country. This is not factual. It's a false lie that we can somehow be separate from Country'*

However, participants discussed how there are many barriers to getting people on Country for cultural fire or other land management practices. The key barriers identified are funding and regulations. Having Traditional Owners on Country during burns requires significant training/regulation that TOs do not want to or cannot comply with. There are significant costs that cannot be borne by TO corporations.

*'We are **still lacking to get our traditional owners on the landscape**. And some of the biggest difficulties, you know, the code of practice, the policies and the procedures around, you know, my people being able to access their own Country, to manage a Country with fire...we can't get our young people out there...as a crucial element that **I am not wearing my government hat because it's pretty stressful from time to time trying to walk in two worlds...**' – Participant 10*

*'**Getting people on Country is really hard. There are too many barriers. What do they want us to do and pull out the human rights act and do it illegally? We can get our old people and multiple people out walking Country and learning and putting fire in the landscape but we can't do this with all the regulations there. There are too many barriers**' – Participant 7*



**'Our Country's bloody sick and we need everyone's knowledge systems to really bring us forward – bring us forward together. So really, it's the concept of two, I'm saying, which are not to blame each other's perspective, but recognise both have value for us to try and understand the whole of what we're dealing with today'** - Participant 18

## Research

Participants overall had a poor impression of current academic research and limited positive experience of research projects, though there was still a clear interest in pursuing research projects. This interest does not seem to centre on generic research aims – e.g. creating new knowledge about cultural fire – so much as creating opportunities that assist and empower Traditional Owner's engagement with Country/cultural fire. The emphasis was on *'Getting our mob back on Country and being able to manage our land as our ancestors did.'*

The key benefits of engaging in research were understood to be:

- Use research on merits/benefits of cultural fire as leverage in negotiations with government and other parties, though there is a current lack of relevant research to do this
- Research projects can be useful in supporting Traditional Owners practical engagement with caring for Country, including cultural burning, by providing means to be on Country
- Research projects can be useful in supporting Traditional Owners' research skills and capacities (including to engage with research generally)
- Research projects can be useful in creating income and employment for Aboriginal people
- Research projects could identify the obstacles Aboriginal peoples face in pursuing cultural fire aspirations and develop solutions
- Research projects could help increase public and government recognition of TOs knowledge and the holism of cultural fire management, including through increasing the cultural competency of government and research staff

The key risks of engaging in research were understood to be:

- Research funding will not be comprehensive and will therefore involve free labour or compromises on Traditional Owner aspirations
- Research projects will be exploitative of Aboriginal peoples' resources and knowledge
- Research projects will focus on the priorities of non-indigenous researchers and state/government funding bodies
- Research projects could end up "testing" or verifying Aboriginal knowledge, which would be inappropriate
- Research projects will add strain to the limited capacity of Traditional Owner corporations

Participants noted that as momentum builds around cultural land management, particularly cultural burning, it is important that Indigenous people are able to 'define the space' and guide the frameworks around research:

*'It is inevitable that there is going to be more research into cultural fire. We want to make sure Aboriginal people are front and centre of that and that the right context is being explored and articulated... **We need to set groundwork on research, research practices and how research has engaged with Indigenous Knowledge and IK systems...** momentum is building and opportunities are emerging for Traditional Owner nations connecting to cultural fire research and so we need to start to define the space' - Participant 2*

*'Need to be careful it integrates across other research that is going on... So, we want this to be something complementary and not competitive in nature in any way' - Participant 11*

It was acknowledged that having a strong research base can be useful in light of the highly politicised nature of bushfire policy and research:

*'[Fire] it is such a contested space. Highly politicised. And **we don't have the evidence base within that framework to get that wedge in** and have the evidence to gain recognition' - Unknown participant, Breakout 1*

*'The research banner can have a lot of sway in the broader community. This can help with decision-making' - Participant 15*

However, it was stressed that research around cultural land management needs to start from a basis of valuing Indigenous knowledge and caring for Country practices and looking for opportunities to enable this, rather than the need to prove or justify anything.

***Enable Djaara people to go and do what they want unhindered by the need to demonstrate they are doing the right thing when knowledge is there and proven.** To get positions for our mob to grow up thinking I am going to go out and manage our Country- Participant 8*

*We don't have to demonstrate the benefits because that is actually quite disrespectful ...**Research should empower First Nations people to do what they know they have to do.** Research is seeing something that it can question, **but it's not right to be questioning knowledge.** We do a lot of monitoring and research now but we are asking the wrong questions from a Traditional Owner perspective' - Participant 8*

*'It's like **the state forces us to fight among ourselves rather than focus on our self-determination...** I would hope the future investment creates those enabling opportunities to be heard and respected. **We are the Custodians of Country and we do see what goes on. We are not happy and it makes us sick, it makes our heart sick'** - Participant 2*

*'I think it's becoming increasingly evident to every human that science is catching up to Indigenous knowledge' - Participant 2*

There was emphasis on the need to ensure that Indigenous interests and priorities are advanced and that TOs are meaningfully empowered to be engaged in





decision-making. Particular care needs to be taken to ensure that Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of thinking, and competencies are recognized and respected, and that any research doesn't just enforce or embed Western, approaches and values or exploit traditional ecological knowledge.

*'A major issue is that research developed by non-Indigenous people **continues to only measure what they see as important. That is the data that the people with power use to make decisions.** So, they set the rules of the game. We need TOs to decide what needs to be measured so we can develop the data that speaks to power'* - Participant 12

*'So how do traditional owners lead those questions and inform research programs or projects or what have you, to develop the evidence and information that we want to put forward that supports what we're seeking to achieve?'* - Participant 13

*'We have a lot of knowledge but it's not recognised. It's a different paradigm. We could risk damage by putting people through a western education. Its useful thing to think about but how do we do it in a way that brings to the fore that there are two knowledge systems acting side by side'* - Participant 18

*'Two way peace – more about getting non-Aboriginal people to learn and understand about cultural land management and the significant knowledge held by Aboriginal people. So cultural safety type courses... so Aboriginal knowledge held in the same regard as Western knowledge'* - Participant 15

*'You've got to be really clear on what the question is and what you what you want to find out... to do it meaningfully it has to mean something to the knowledge holders...if we're all doing it together and we all went into something with a different question in mind and it becomes really messy'* - Participant 17

*'More recognition of traditional ecological knowledge - not about blending this together - we need to take the strength of each' – Participant 7*

*'We need to create cultural competency within agencies and research organisations – including respect for TOs' competency'* - Participant 15

Participants pointed to the need for acknowledgement and understanding of the fact that aspects of cultural land management, including risk management benefits and cultural burning, can't be unpicked from the broader, holistic framework of Indigenous caring for Country.

*'Because I think in the government risk management systems, they are looking often for quick solutions. And what I want to try and do out of all this is to look at **how do we demonstrate the value of cultural land management as a whole and show it's not just about picking little pieces, it's about the whole and how we look after it.**'* - Participant 13

*'It's not just cultural fire that is used to care for Country -there are a number of methods our ancestors used. This is part of our cultural lore and authority'* - Unknown



*'It should be about cultural land management not just cultural fire' - Participant 15*

## Research topics

Much of the discussion was not centred on "what" topics research projects should focus upon, but rather on the benefits and risks of research generally and how research projects should be established, governed, and funded. However, some possible areas for research to help support and enable cultural burning practices were identified. Key topics identified by multiple participants included:

- Research that monitors the ecological, economic and social costs of existing dominant/government fire management systems and policies, to identify the destructive/negative effects on Country of "business as usual". Attention needs to be given to the consequences and risks of not enabling cultural land management and allowing any maladaptive practices.

*'What they are doing is a major issue that needs just as much attention as the benefits of cultural fire practices. The current approach has many negative impacts and this needs to be a focus of research as well' - Participant 11*

*Look at cost-benefit analysis. **What is the cost of not doing this?** What is the cost of letting science go and continue to direct land management? **What is the cost of that on people, on cultural identity, on the State?** That will be far greater. Benefit may take 10-40 years to prove given the level of destruction. But the cost of keeping thing the same - we could prove tomorrow? – Unknown participant, Breakout 1*

*We need to know the costs, we **need to measure the impacts on people, impacts on the staff I manage and the impacts on the landscape. People are angry, frustrated, hurting.** What are these costs...There's a ripple effect. I've had agency people join our burns and once people understand more they can see the damage from doing it the wrong way. So how do we support people to help others to see the right way in their organisations? – Participant 8*

- Research that focuses on how to grow the number of Aboriginal people engaged in caring for Country, including through formal employment

*'This is not about an agency determining what the outcomes are. It's about Aboriginal people determining what the outcomes are. I am hearing very strongly that the priority is employment, connecting to Country. Risk management is way down the list in terms of Aboriginal priorities from what I am hearing' - Participant 11*

*'What we are talking about is supporting cultural land management...It's about connecting to Country and being part of Country' – Participant 1*

- Research that identifies the 'blockers' to increased cultural fire management, including access to Country and regulation of fire use, and develops solutions to these obstacles



*'We need to really research on what the blockers are, you know, and we've got to research all that stuff. Why can't these young fellas be out on Country?' - Participant*

Participants suggested that future research topics can and should be guided by the aspirations outlined in TOCs' Country plans.

### Research protocols

There was significant discussion throughout the workshop of 'how' research should be developed and completed, with some discussion of practical measures that could be implemented by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC /research institutes towards these ends.

*'We need strong protocols within the new federal agency to ensure no research is done on Country without partnership and capacity building of the community to be actively involved in the research...[and] their involvement must be resourced' - Participant 2*

*'Decolonise the university system from within and **allow us to use Universities to achieve our goals rather than continually flowing our knowledge into universities and using it to prop them up. To flip that and turn it into a process for us.**' - Participant 6*

#### Key overall aims of research protocols included:

- That research organisations and researchers need to support Traditional Owner-led and co-designed research

*'Instead of researchers saying this would be great for you, it's better to have that conversation together and come to a conclusion together' - Unknown, Breakout 2, Group 3*

*'Traditional owners leading the questions and inquiries into different things... having that expertise acknowledged and respected on an equal level rather than it be condescending' - Unknown*

- That research organisations and researchers need to establish guidelines and processes to ensure Traditional Owners and their knowledge are protected from inappropriate use and exploitation:

*'Have to be careful about how to protect knowledge. There is a university system but not the cultural equivalent' - Breakout 1, Group 1*

*'How do we make mob safe on Country? IP has to be protected'. - Breakout 1, Group 1*

Participants pointed to a particular need for protocols around endorsement of how research is used and what is reflected.

*'How do you include an ethics requirement about what is the sign off with the mob and people you are working with in that space. Making sure that the traditional owners actually endorse that work and that they have been properly engaged and not just engaged and then verbally led or cherry picked in the way information is presented moving forward.' - Breakout 2, Group 1*



- That research organisations and researchers need to ensure that research projects are funded and structured to ensure Traditional Owner engagement and leadership is financially supported

*'We should be paid and be leading this process'. - Breakout 1, Group 1*

*'There is the funded researchers in Universities and then unfunded holders of knowledge are in the mob. How to make this a fair and equitable process? **Could there be an approach to say we are going to resource a person in an ongoing role rather than just paying someone per day to take part'**- Breakout 1, Group 1*

*'We need good funding where TOs can make their own decisions, where it's not tied to specific response or outcomes that they have to deliver on. Research grants where they get to decide what they do, what they deliver on and what they want to achieve.'* - Unknown participant, Breakout 2

- That research organisations and researchers need to understand that research with Aboriginal peoples involves developing relationships of trust and reciprocity

Participants discussed the idea of a qualification in respect for researchers-

*'It's about the mob knowing that when the researchers come to them that they have that respect - that they are not coming there to benefit themselves but to benefit the mob. If there was some way they could have some kind of respect qualification so that when they go to another mob people know they have that respect qualification.'* – Breakout 2, Group 1

Developing trust can take time and this relationship building needs to come before anything else

*'Mob needs time to know if the researcher is respectful and that they are going to do the right thing by mob and by Country'. - Breakout 2, Group 1*

- That research organisations and researchers need to acknowledge that all research is research "on Country" and therefore brings with it obligations to work constructively with relevant Traditional Owners.

*'People go off and they get they get the grant, but they don't actually talk to them all, you know, and we want to we want to stop all that stuff. And **we want people to engage and have relationships beyond that research'** - Participant 7*

*'Get them in and start the conversation. See what they want, see what the mob wants and come to an agreement. There can be common areas of research. For us its more about us being able to tell the story - to say the story from an Aboriginal perspective' - Breakout 1, Group 1*

*'TO led research can't happen without the intimate connection of the people who are involved. It can't get too academic it has to be about doing it and being involved in it – place-based applied research that is meaningful to people...' - Breakout 1, Group 1*



### The protocols and processes suggested by participants included:

- Create and fund an Indigenous advisory group that can offer advice (NOT authorisation) regarding the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC /Natural Hazards Research Australia research program, events and investment

*'We were thinking of **a leadership group with TO and Indigenous researchers** to be that reference point. If there are resources available to help guide that...'* – Participant 2

- Have Indigenous representation built into research funding and governance structures:

*'Could there be Aboriginal board members in the new institute'* - Participant 1

*'Indigenous oversight boards and ensuring that knowledge from the ground is incorporated. When you have cultural governance and corporate governance working together and collaborating you can get powerful outcomes'* - Unknown Breakout 2

- Create avenues to ensure TOs can be partners/end users in research that is funded by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC / Natural Hazards Research Australia and occurs on their Country, whether or not it is Indigenous-focused research
- Create standards, using existing guidance (e.g. Australian code for responsible research), to ensure project reporting is accessible and understandable for TO partners
- Create standards, using existing guidance (e.g. Australian code for responsible research), to ensure Indigenous peoples' intellectual property is protected within research projects:

*'just around that gathering more intellectual property...making sure that's protected, because I think that's a real big risk in this space'*

- 'flip' the normal process of researchers seeking TO partners, by establishing processes/events/pathways for Traditional Owners to learn what tools and skills researchers might offer them.

Participants suggested that researchers need to "put their skills on the table" first.

*'Do not say "I am the expert from the university" but rather say "this is the toolkit I can offer and how would you like to use it?"'*- Participant 12

*'Academics come forward and leave their egos and say 'this is my expertise, how can the mob use that knowledge'* - Unknown participant, Breakout 2

- Ensure and support budget lines within research projects for Traditional Owner leadership and engagement

*'Thinking about traineeships, scholarships, mentoring - how to empower people to take part in that research space'* - Unknown participant, Breakout 2



- Support growth and sustaining of relationships between TOs and researchers through research events and project design

It was noted that capacity building to support research leadership and engagement is important – ‘embedding *capacity building into expectations that research will be reciprocal*’- and that different levels of community capacity needs to be recognised and accounted for.

*‘TO-led research is **a really good thing in theory but hard to put into practice**. Everyone is at different levels’ - Participant 17, Breakout 1*

*‘Human ethics at universities is mostly good, but there’s no ethics approval for physical scientists. There’s no process of ensuring they engage and work with TOs or even let them know they are doing science on their Country! ... Instead of waiting for universities, how about we build up and fund TOs to develop process for checking and approving all research, seeing how they can add to it, seeing how they can be involved, building capacity?’ - Participant 2*

*‘**Need to strengthen the knowledge transfer systems. People will say they don’t have knowledge and they don’t want to share due to fear, due to historical truth of it being stolen or repurposed.** When you get people back out on Country it just flows and people are surprised themselves at what they know, what they learnt as a child and still remember and what they can share’ – Participant 2*

*‘Would a research training pathway be helpful for Traditional Owners, and what would it look like?’ - Participant 13*

*‘How much of it could be **a strategy that all programs need to report against**. So you could have a strategic operational document as well as building the capability outside so it has multiple uses’ - Participant 18*

### Empowering Indigenous collaboration and networking

This overlaps with much of the material synthesised above. Empowerment stems from funding, engagement and relationships.

One distinct issue, though, that was discussed extensively, is the negative effects of competition and competitive funding systems on Traditional Owners. The creation of a competitive funding process could lead to disagreements and division. Therefore, the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC / Natural Hazards Research Australia should develop means to foster engagement with Traditional Owners in Natural Hazards Research Australia generally and ensure there is equitable Aboriginal involvement in the design of the Natural Hazards Research Australia research program and funding decisions.

*‘As a collective [too often] we are above fighting over the small bits. We need to say if you don’t want to fund this whole program then don’t give us little bits. We need to have all of it on our terms. They are either all in or they are not in at all... Small pots of funding and a competitive funding process are damaging and cause infighting. **Fund what is needed or don’t fund anything**’ - Participant 8*





*'Competition is inherent in western systems with it seen as a good thing, especially coming out of capitalist thinking, but it's not always positive and collaboration can actually have better outcomes' - Participant 2*

Participants pointed to the need to identify and support opportunities for Indigenous communities to come together and collaborate for common objectives.

*'Government is often pitting everyone against each other with competitive process. How do we create a framework to **allow people to support each other** - those with capacity to move ahead and lead but also create space of building capacity for those who are excluded, this can create tension...It is worth thinking about how did our ancestors deal with this through sharing, ceremony - how can we learn from this and try and avoid the conflict and waste?' - Participant 1*

*'I remember five years ago, not many people in Victoria wanted to play with fire and burning, but all of a sudden there's some money getting thrown around, you know, up and up and about everywhere. Everyone's got their hands up jumping all over the top of each other trying to get that money. So it's just them, the little things of walking together, you know, going back to go forward, listening to them past elders'- Participant 10*

*'Cultural leadership groups are being set up, in some places, so that collaboration around projects and similar objectives is becoming easier. It's key to understand each other. Even when only some TOs can join, they trust that others will take the lead and bring the benefits back to all '- Unknown participant, Breakout 2*

### Insurance, risk and regulation

There was some discussion of insurance, risk, and regulation as a barrier to cultural land management practices. A key regulation identified as needing review and research is Victoria's Code of Practice of Bushfire Management.

## SOUTH COAST CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

**Dates: 11-12 May 2021**

**Location: Kioloa Bush Retreat**

**'Listen, learn, respect' - South Coast participant 13**

### Participants

Noel Webster	Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and Project Steering group (PSG)
Leanne Brook	South East Local Land Services and Project Steering group (PSG)
Lauren Tynan	Indigenous Researcher and Project Steering group (PSG)
Adam Leavesley	ACT Parks



Dean Freeman	ACT Parks
Isobel Tongs	ACT Parks
Alex McNeilly	Director, All Sustainable Futures Incorporated
Uncle Victor Channell	Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council
Shane Snelson	Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council
Clive Freeman	Indigenous Researcher and Wreck Bay Council
Sheryn Brown	Wreck Bay Council
Emily Fishpool	Indigenous Researcher
Uncle Owen Carriage	South Coast NSW Aboriginal Elders association (SCAE) and Batemans Bay Local Aboriginal Land Council
Uncle Les Owen (Day 1)	South Coast NSW Aboriginal Elders association (SCAE)
Andrew White	South Coast NSW Aboriginal Elders association (SCAE) and Batemans Bay Local Aboriginal Land Council
Dr David Bain	Threatened Species Officer, Ecosystems and Threatened Species, South East Branch Biodiversity, Conservation and Science Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Rachel Morgain	ANU/NESP and Natural Resource Management regions
Phil Patterson	NSW Rural Fire Service
Vanessa Cavanagh (Day 2)	Indigenous Researcher and Project Steering group (PSG)
Oliver Costello	Project Convenor
Timothy Neale	Deakin University
Katharine Haynes	University of Wollongong
Tony Jansen	One Point Five Degrees


## Method

Workshop discussions followed a participatory approach and were a mix of group/plenary discussions and small working groups that took place over two days. The discussions were recorded as field notes by the workshop facilitators and this was combined with additional notes generated by the small working groups. This data was then analysed and coded to identify some of the key themes and findings emerging from the discussion. Illustrative quotes were extracted where possible to help capture notable insights.

## Findings

### Representation and processes of engagement and consultation

A history of poor government-initiated consultation with Aboriginal communities was a key theme and barrier. It was felt that while Aboriginal people come to



the conversation with responsibility to care for Country, non-Aboriginal people come as part of their employment obligations, and these roles frequently change. A priority identified was to develop processes that ensure representative community engagement and 'creating the time and space for people to yarn'.

*'Conversations like these are not a common thing, first conversation had in public down here in relation to fire. Lots of venting happening and it's the first time people have talked, some Elders have been holding this in their whole lives. [Government] Institutions are fundamentally racist' - SC participant 9*

In particular, participants noted how consultation and research was often coordinated through Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), how they are often the one port of call for government organisations and university researchers. However, participants expressed that all LALCs are different, and while in some cases they are representative of the TOs and Aboriginal community, in others they are not. Therefore, processes of wider consultation were called for to ensure the voices and views of all Aboriginal people were included.

*'You can't always go through the Local Aboriginal Land Council. You have to find out who the other TOs and the Elders are' - SC participant 10*

*'The LALC do not represent Country, Land Council are a statutory body that looks after housing... research often goes through the LALC, and they do not represent individuals, do not represent community. People in the Land Councils are people from other 'Country' and they are making decisions about people from that area. This creates a lot of infighting among people and anxiety particularly with the elders' - SC participant 1*

*'We are sick of governments going to other people... we got a white woman who does full time research with us... that's bullshit. Talk with us, don't talk with the white woman who talks about us'- SC participant 11*


*'If you have to door knock 916 doors, and that's what you have to do'*

A suggested solution to address appropriate and representative consultation and decision-making, was the establishment of an overarching cultural land management committee and cultural burning working group that could sit under a TO/Elders group. This would provide a central point that agencies can come to in order to discuss issues on Country, be they environmental or social. It was noted that every group would have a different protocol around how this would work, however, in order to function for all groups, the process would be supported through permanent funding. Participants agreed with the need for better coordination if Aboriginal communities were to have accountability in decision-making processes and receive more grant money.

*'Is it time to develop new structures - are even the black structures right fit for us now?'*

*'The historical agencies we have inherited are not relevant - we need to realign them'*

Related to this, participants reflected how groups had negative experiences of having to apply for competitive funding against each other. They felt that better



community collaboration and structures to work together would mean that they would be more successful.

*'Same organisations fighting for the same pot of money is not good, they need to join together'*

It is the responsibility of government organisations to undertake the work to build and repair trust.

*'How do we create trust? Feel this should be the responsibility of the government organisation but it doesn't happen...'*

### Need for Aboriginal centred research


The mistrust of Western practices and funding models for conducting research was a clear and dominant theme at the workshop. For example, research protocols and ethics was the very first issue discussed, when, prior to the formal beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to sign the Deakin University research consent agreement. While a standard document, very similar to that prescribed by all universities, participants refused to sign, highlighting the distrust that many Aboriginal communities have of university research. Participants were suspicious of how their data would be used, and who would benefit from the information collected at the workshop. They discussed how many of them had been involved in numerous research projects where data had been extracted with little or no benefit, or cultural recognition, flowing back to community. The repetitive nature of this process was noted, with participants stating that they felt that they were continually being asked for the same information, and having the same conversations, to little avail.

*'Where do you begin? We have been researched and researched and researched. Where is the research going to go? Will, research be used to benefit us at the end of the day. The funding we get is a pittance to what goes out there. Research that can support us, then I'm 100% behind it.'* - South Coast Participant 1

*'Bottom line is that as Aboriginal people we are all tired of this. Our Elders have shared their knowledge, put in reports and whatever. Our Elders have got no faith, no trust in putting in our opinion. Trust and commitment to government from our people is not there. We are tired of talking, we want action, not words, not reports... sitting here putting in info and reports and in five years we are doing the same thing'*

Despite researchers and their institutions supposedly being the 'messengers' and the 'conduit' for informing policy change, it was felt that often the researchers and their institutions were the ones who benefited at the expense of Aboriginal communities. As stated by one participant, *'The messenger benefits too, and might need shooting sometimes...'* The research questions, and therefore outcomes delivered, were felt by participants to be the priorities of the researchers and government agencies, and not the communities themselves. Therefore, processes need to be reversed, with the research questions and processes set by the communities themselves.

The significant need for Aboriginal centred research was clear, with a large number of potential research topics discussed by participants throughout the



workshop. Importantly, none of these topics were in relation to the need to validate Indigenous practices of caring for Country. The research priorities discussed were all in relation to how caring for Country can be better supported.

*'Science wants to validate our practice, but we don't have to prove anything... it does not need to be validated, just supported'*

Strong research protocols were called for to protect Indigenous cultural and intellectual property. It was stated that current human research ethics consent forms used by universities were not good enough and could be used by universities to override Indigenous cultural rights. One participant noted that in addition to pre-research consent forms there should also be a final sign off form to ensure all parties are happy with how the research was conducted. Participants suggested that the very definition of 'research' needs to change from one where it is not about 'collecting' but co-ownership and co-authorship. It was stated that the research funders could drive this change through funding projects where the aim was to build relationships and capacity and formulate common research questions and include time and resources to undertake this important follow-up work in the co-designed and agreed research project plan.

*'Cultural induction should be mandatory before any activities are undertaken on Country'- SC Participant*

*'Be careful of the information you give and know where it is going'- SC Participant 6*

*'It's not collecting. It's co-ownership and co-authorship. And It's being diligent about understanding who speaks for Country'- SC Participant*

*'We don't trust institutions. Why? Because they appropriate knowledge and resources. We need recognition of the history and the justification for our mistrust'*

Participants called for the need for Aboriginal community members to be recognised as researchers, with the priority being to ensure community-based practices are recognised as valuable research alongside that conducted by university researchers. It was noted that most Aboriginal people would much rather talk with and work alongside an Aboriginal researcher. Therefore, alongside the recognition of community-based researchers, there is a need for more Aboriginal staff within agencies and universities. Positive partnerships with university researchers could be beneficial if conducted in the right way as defined by the Aboriginal participants/communities. As noted by Participant 1, *'researchers can open doors, they can access resources. They can do the bureaucracy and the paperwork for us so we can get on with things'*.

*'The benefit is in changing agency views, and people within agencies, people here would rather talk to a Koori researcher than a European researcher generally'*

Participants noted how they often saw calls for funding that went to non-Aboriginal and non-community researchers to fund projects that were not Country centred, and continued the status-quo of the mismanagement of Country.



*'See lots of bushfire recovery money coming and it seems like the parameters of the funding never seem to fit and I'm pissed off that money never goes to the TOs, and then you see that money going into things that causes pain to Country, to people who don't manage Country in the right way. This is overwhelming. How can we ensure research is done right, and by the right people. I want to be able to say, this is what community wants, this is who you should talk to'- SC Participant 3*

*'On the south coast 3 million for Indigenous land management - 1/2 goes to national park, half goes to land council. None of it goes to community...'*

*'The funding model is flawed. Not going back to mob who are trying to build skills and capacity. All I'm seeing is flaws in the processes.'* - SC Participant 4

While the need for more Aboriginal students and staff within the university system was discussed, the challenges of working within the academy were well voiced. One participant noted of their experience that, *'When you try and speak Country, they don't hear you'- SC participant 2*. The lack of understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing and understanding the world can make the academy a culturally unsafe and discouraging environment to study and work within.

*'There is a conflict between Western science and methods and ways of doing research, and Indigenous ways'- SC Participant 8*

## Research topics/themes

These themes were directly stated by participants when asked to write down any topics they felt were important during small group break-out sessions. Others have also been added from more general discussions over the course of the two-day workshop. The themes broadly fit under the overarching topics of 'Institutional change'; 'Research, outreach and protocols'; 'benefits of cultural practices'; Youth education and employment'; 'Cultural knowledge assets and heritage'; 'disaster response and resilience'; and 'Other hazards and climate change'.

### Social

#### Institutional Change

*'Agencies should enable practice and not put up barriers'*

*'It's a really difficult task to convince organisations like mine... to engage in a respectful way with local knowledge holders. I'm really hopeful, but we all know there are frustrations involved'*  
- SC Participant 11

- Explore high turnover of people in Aboriginal identified positions in fire and land management agencies and develop strategies to better support Aboriginal staff
- Understanding institutional racism and how to change it
- Develop a program for local RFS to engage and learn cultural safety from local TOs. PLEASE NOTE: This is not about giving away Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) but promoting respect for cultural practices



### Research, outreach and protocols

- How can we best build capacity for Indigenous / community led research
- Support the Aboriginal community to educate and inform wider non-Aboriginal community. Many TOs were overrun, overwhelmed and under-resourced to respond to the sudden demand and interest following the 2019/20 fires from the general public who want to learn and who we believe genuinely want to improve land management &/or minimise devastating bushfires.

### Benefits of cultural practices

#### Economic

*'We need a cultural economy that is our own'*

*'There must be economic benefits for communities. Bottom line is having a financial base and independence from governments. For our mob to move forward we really need our independence'*

- Develop methods to determine the social, environmental and financial benefits from community led practices for caring for Country
- Conduct economic modelling of the current status quo. How much money has gone into RFS, national parks etc. and how much of this could be outsourced to local Aboriginal land-based teams to generate income for local community?
- How to best develop business models that support caring for Country and economic development?
- What are opportunities for an Aboriginal-led enterprise around caring for and healing Country?
- Explore how much collective funding was spent to react and suppress the 2019/20 fires versus proactive investment in cultural land management
- Evidence based modelling of cultural burning and cultural land management on past landscapes and see if fires would have been as bad, cost versus benefit over 20 years, what is the financial difference?
- Cost of HR on a block versus cost of same land under TO ownership, measure economic and social benefits
- The government raised the tax for the national NDIS scheme, could we do the same for raising funds to support caring for Country

#### Wellbeing

*'We need to reset everybody's relationships with Country and with each other...'*

- What are the cultural determinates of health and wellbeing (see Finlay et al. 2021)
- Explore the links between ecological, social and spiritual healing

### School/youth

- Develop a national policy to implement practical elements of caring for Country and cultural practices in schools
- Cultural programs in schools expanded to include all students not only Aboriginal students

### Cultural knowledge, assets, heritage – tangible and intangible

- How can we best protect cultural assets from hazard and risk and how can we best support community to do this?
- How can we train local mob to protect their own assets, especially proactive cultural practices to reduce risks?

- Fund the development of cultural calendars and build the capacity of community to lead their development. Support agencies to use the information to change their current practices.
- How best to support communities to grow and renew knowledge?

## Ecological

### Recovery

*'Response of doing nothing to manage Country after fires is still a management response. Doing nothing alters it. Policy needs to change.'*

- Post fire recovery work - Test and develop cultural methods for helping Country recover following hazards, particularly following destructive bushfires. Work with community to renew and monitor practices
- Explore the use of cultural fire as an important tool for ecological recovery
- Support community to gather oral history around environmental change and recovery and assist community to implement lessons and cultural practices – ensuring ICIP stays within the Aboriginal community

### General

*'What's in our memory is the devastation of these fires and these old people are never going to see that recover. How dare people get out there and destroy Country' - SC participant 11*

- Determine the impacts of Western fire practices on Casuarina Country. These species were not burnt through cultural burning practices
- Explore the current fire management impacts on Country - Why does current fire management not work, what is going wrong?
- Develop new fire thresholds for Country - examining the range of intervals for important plant species based on Indigenous knowledge systems
- Investigate the accumulation of fuel-post wildfire and HR burns and treat increased fuel loads
- Determine the causes of the biological losses Australia is facing
- Understand and document the diversity of Country – what is currently there and what should be there based on Aboriginal knowledge. Then work with community to restore the environment
- Research how cool burning can save native bees and help them thrive
- Document the effects of HR burns on pollinators
- Enabling the translation of community priorities e.g. pollinators into government priorities e.g. endangered species that pollinate
- Document current example of best practices – where Aboriginal-led practices are thriving / understand and explore what communities are already doing and support communities to continue their work. Understand the factors that have enabled these successful examples.
- Explore the barriers and enablers across the different land-tenures for Aboriginal-led caring for Country practices.
- Understand the effects of using fire retardants on Country

### Disaster response and resilience

- At Wallaga Lake the water tanks are old, one road in one road out, no water. How can you build community resilience within Aboriginal communities like Wallaga Lake?
- How can we build community resilience in face of natural disasters through business



models and structures for resilience?

- What are the improved management outcomes if all the current separate funding for fire, floods, coastal, threatened species etc is combined? What are the improved outcomes if all money comes through TOs locally?

#### **Other hazards and climate change**

- Explore coastal erosion and rising sea levels, how can cultural land management reduce risks to ecosystems?
- Explore how best to return water to the landscape, rehydrating the landscape

TABLE 1 – POTENTIAL RESEARCH AREAS.

## Overwhelming interest in Aboriginal ways of caring for Country

Some participants, particularly the Elders, discussed how there was increasing demand from the non-Indigenous general public to know and understand Aboriginal practices of caring for Country.

*'The general public come to Elders asking questions. It's overwhelming. They are pissed off with the system. The RFS are not delivering and the general public want to learn, non-Indigenous children want to learn about burials and massacres. Non-Indigenous people want to support us' - South Coast Participant 1*

## Cultural burning

Discussion emphasised the importance of cultural burning for supporting cultural connection and revitalisation and the well-being of Indigenous communities, as well as the health and healing of Country. Participants emphasised the need for greater recognition Country from institutions/agencies of the value of cultural burning and the need to get more people on Country practicing cultural land management.

*'Cultural Burns are a way of getting people together and starting conversations'- South Coast Participant 6*

*'Fire is bringing us back to culture, healthy bush and healthy people. I can see fire as a good enterprise, young fellows enjoying living and learning culture. Fire is in our DNA, so we know what we're talking about'- South Coast Participant 7*

*'Never felt so connected to Country until I was able to do traditional burning myself. For young people we need more pathways to learn'*

*'We need to have recognition of the fires and departments. We need government to recognise our role. We know when the Country needs burning because it tells us. But no one is taking any notice of us. The royal commission has a specific place in there to look at cultural burning, we need to convince government agencies to let us do the cultural burning'*

## Need for culture and employment for young people

The need for increased cultural learning and generational transfer of cultural knowledge to young Aboriginal people was discussed by a number of participants. The unsuitability of current Western educational systems for



Aboriginal youth was noted, alongside the current lack of ongoing funding for programs within schools and the community to support Aboriginal cultural education. One participant reflected how they have seen a 40% attrition rate for their ranger program when it was delivered in a classroom setting rather than on Country (see Cavanagh 2018).

*'If we get these young people in the bush caring for Country then they get hungry for more. This gets them on Country and away from other negative influences like ice. Fire is bringing them back to their culture, healing their country and healing themselves'- SC Participant 7*

*'Biggest barriers to kids, is 'does what I learned in school help'? 'What does this certificate mean'? 'Does it benefit me?' Kids are missing out on crucial guidance from Elders and doing Western schooling, and for what benefit? They then get pushed out into society and feel they can't achieve anything. Cultural knowledge can't be written on paper. We're supposed to be giving opportunities, not pushing down Western avenues of knowing that don't work. They don't feel it benefits. White society way is not a benefit to them. My expectation is seeing kids off the streets and off drugs, and on Country, learning'- SC Participant 8*

The lack of opportunities for employment for Aboriginal young people and the need for financial independence was a strong theme. It was felt that there were many cultural enterprise opportunities for young people and while the cultural capacity, qualifications and willingness was there, the support to get things off the ground was not.

*'Aboriginal people on the south coast they're overwhelmed with qualifications and capacity, but there are no jobs, the capacity and the ambition is there, but there are no jobs'- SC Participant 7*

The power difference between those who have employed roles to care for Country and those who only have their responsibilities and obligations was discussed, *"if I work for an agency then I sell my labour"- SC Participant 5*. It was felt that this creates a crucial difference and challenge for those who cannot sell their responsibility to Country to earn a livelihood.

### Structure of new natural hazards research centre and development of research protocols

The discussion identified a number of recommendations around appropriate research protocols and the structure of the new research institute:

- Prioritise funding to build capacity in communities and grassroots organisations to be able to define, manage and participate in research
- Fund scoping studies where the aim is to build relationships and determine community centred research priorities
- Have an Indigenous Ethics Council that oversees funding, methodology and outcomes
- Have Aboriginal staff members in key roles
- Have a clear and accountable benefits test for all research



- Have a collaboration and cultural engagement agreement which protects cultural knowledge and IP
- Ensure Aboriginal people have decision making authority in relation to the research, are actively having input, or are researchers themselves
- Have written frameworks for research engagement but make them flexible
- In addition to pre-research agreements have a post-research agreement where community can sign off on the research to ensure protocols are followed
- Long-term funding that is not tied to specific outcomes but more general aspects of caring for Country and capacity building

### Advice for researchers

- Know who the appropriate cultural contact point is e.g. no good just talking to Land Council when you should have contacted Elders etc
- Have honest conversations before the project begins - what are the benefit - what are both sides trying to achieve, including talking about uncomfortable histories of colonisation.
- Always asking 'who do I need to talk to?'
- Hearing from various elders /perspectives
- Not always talking to / paying the same person
- Building long term trust and relationships
- Research needs to do the action - not just about the research outcomes
  - needs to be about forming relationships, have in a common cause, discussion again and again about who benefits, how and why?
- Universities changing structures so students have time and capacity to engage with Indigenous communities
  - o Better training
  - o Longer timeframes
  - o Payment for community to participate
  - o Knowledge-holders on research project
  - o Payment can be negotiated beyond money - e.g. fuel card
  - o Budget early in consultation with community

### How do we create community benefits and opportunities (including income)?

- Ground up community support
- Fire suppression trailers / Slip-On units for community
- Fire danger and equipment training for youth



- Launch an Indigenous-led insurance agency
- Opportunity for Indigenous enterprise
- Community cultural training - understanding our special sites
- Cultural signage and interpretation (phonetics, spelling and art = men's and women's sites)
- Employment and contracting jobs of cultural significance to Aboriginal elders and youth (Management of significant sites)
- Intergenerational passing on of knowledge and stories through practice.
- Elders paid (funding scheme) to mentor and teach and pass on knowledge
- Paid cultural leave to do necessary work on Country (like emergency services leave)
- Cultural resources e.g. apps & databases for community to monitor and map cultural heritage, ecology, etc on Country.
- Access to big data tools too - e.g. climate change data
- Access to Country
- Strong leadership and guidance
  - o To create employment opportunities
  - o To bring community together
  - o To mentor young ones
- Create clear avenues for community (e.g. researchers contacting the right people)
- Developing protocols / cultural capability

### How do we build Indigenous-led research capacity?

- Communal ownership
- Support observation and learning on Country
- Cultural supportive research institutions
- Indigenous-led
- Strong and active Indigenous-led
- Correct influences
- Elders as supervisors
- CI informing funding decisions
- Informing project delivery
- Oversight protocols determined by local TOs
- Seed funding for Indigenous research enterprise





- Rangers!
- Show research success and examples / benefits
- Building pathways between school and tertiary education
- Get knowledge practice into schools (by TOs locally)
- Acknowledge variety of knowledge
- Country-led research and Lore-led research
- Strengths based approach
- Keep driving this agenda continuously
- Acknowledge IP and oral knowledge as legitimate and valid
- Mentoring post-graduation and championing
- Identified funding streams including in CRC
- Indigenous board members on funding bodies
- More open topics from funding bodies
- Funding bodies should start with Indigenous partners and their priorities and needs
- Training in monitoring, evaluation and research (MER) - integrate Indigenous Knowledge into mainstream training
- Utilising skills and capability e.g. rangers
- Resource for practice and relationships
- Learning through experience
- Getting out on Country
- Research can take other forms - how are they recognised? E.g. film, music, art, apps, podcasts, games - articles are not accessible
- Supporting not verifying
- Create ownership plus custodianship
- Multidisciplinary Indigenous and local knowledge and practice into schools

### How to strengthen trust and enable empowerment

- Closing the gap of passing knowledge -Elders to youth
- Get on the ground. Get ourselves organised and identify who does what
- Presentation of information in everyday language
- Trusting validity of community decisions
- Longer term commitments
- Commitments from external government plus Aboriginal community



- Two-way trust (leading to empowerment) built by:
  - o Communication
  - o Honesty
  - o Transparency
  - o Listening
- Think about a logo or some way of enabling association with good practice
- What do agencies need from communities? Could this be costed and be the basis of a business
- Use of Indigenous language
- Less academic way - locate space and relationship to Country
- Trust comes from wider society and sense of belonging
- Cultural service leave
- Walking on Country - land is in us
- Help yourself before others
- Understanding your place as a researcher - access and knowledge limits
- Disempowering Western experts and knowledge systems
- Who are we empowering?
- Flipping the paradigm
- Move away from complex language / academic literature
- What do Aboriginal people see as useful from researchers and Western science paradigm
- More cultural competency
- Awareness of mannerisms and words
- Cultural change mindset (from researchers)
- White fellas learning to become accountable to Country
- Showcase what we have to offer
- Respect mob's agency over space
- Kids involved in fire
- Healing
- Mental health
- Where is the place of Country in a fair society?
- Housing and other resources - basic needs first
- What is the role of education?



## Aspiration of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC research project

Despite mistrust in government organisations who often conduct 'tick the box' exercises, participants hoped that this research would foster positive changes if it was listened to. As stated by one participant, the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and other government agencies responsible for research funding need to 'listen, learn and respect' Aboriginal people (participant 13). The process was also felt to be beneficial in terms of preparing the community to become more organised and structured to engage with research opportunities.

*'It's a tick box for the government to have these workshops, but they really just have to listen'*

*'This research document, I hope it is successful. I hope we can get behind it and it delivers, and it can support us, for non-Indigenous people too' - SC Participant 1*

*'This process is about community being organised and supporting each other'*

## NORTH COAST (MINYUMAI) CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

**Dates: 17-18 May 2021**

**Location: Minyundai Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) Centre**

**'Health and healing of working on Country is so important'**

**'The landscape is teaching us our lore. Fire can be an indicator and key management tool'**

**'There are two knowledge systems that need to be equal'**

### Participants

Robert Boota	Githabul Rangers - Border Ranges Contractors, Jagun Alliance and Project Steering group (PSG)
Teela Barker	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Justin Gomes	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Belinda Gomes	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Angus Wilson	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Corey Gray	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Clint Wilson	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Tim Williams	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Harry Wilson	Minyundai IPA Rangers
Penny Watson	Fire Ecologist



Dave Kington	Fire Management Expert
Marcus Ferguson	Jagun Alliance
Alifa Carberry	Coffs Harbour LALC - Darrunda Wajaarr Team
Narina Ferguson	Coffs Harbour LALC - Darrunda Wajaarr Team
Andrew Johnston	Jagun Alliance
David Milledge	Landmark Ecological Services
Clare Milledge	Guest
Gwen Laurie	Ngulingah LALC Rangers
Kyle Rhodes	Ngulingah LALC Rangers
Chris Brown	Ngulingah LALC Rangers
Brandan Harrington	Ngulingah LALC Rangers
Jesse Telford	Bundjalung Bush Regenerator
Silas Telford	Buckombil Bush Regeneration & Bush Foods
Simon Conner	ANU
Tremane Patterson	Banbai Rangers - Tamworth LALC
Kane Patterson	Banbai Rangers - Tamworth LALC
Oliver Costello	Project Convenor and Jagun Alliance
Tony Jansen	Project team - One Point Five Degrees


## Method

Workshop discussions followed a participatory approach and were a mix of group/plenary discussions and small working groups that took place over 2 days at the Minyumai Indigenous Protected Area centre. The discussions were recorded as field notes by the workshop facilitators and this was combined with additional notes and charts generated by the small working groups. This data was then analysed and coded to identify some of the key themes and findings emerging from the discussion. Illustrative quotes were extracted where possible to help capture notable insights. Two women's group sessions were coded separately for a gender lens.

## Findings

### Cultural burning and caring for Country

Participants emphasised the importance of cultural burning as part of Indigenous caring for Country practices, reflecting how the Australian landscape has been shaped and defined by cultural burning over long periods of time. They described how ancestors learned to read and manage the landscape and how this knowledge is being pieced back together with knowledge from the elders,



noting how communities can continue to learn from and read the landscape today. The legacy of these landscape management practices represents cultural artefacts/heritage – for example large trees that could not have survived outside of cultural burning regimes and are now threatened due to disruption of these regimes.

*Old trees represent a specific system that does not burn them down – they are cultural artefacts. When we regard them this way we will try and save them. Trees that are 400 to 1000 years old cannot come back for hundreds of years – as a society we need to value those assets more than a house or a fence that can be rebuilt more easily- plenary discussion*

- Healthy Country, cultural heritage and healing sick/upside-down Country

The discussion stressed the need to recognise that cultural burning is part of a holistic framework that brings people together to care for Country, and where Country, in turn, looks after people. As one participant reflected, *“If we have healthy land, we have healthy people. If we all come together and look after it we can be healthy in every way.”*

The importance of having cultural fire for healthy landscapes and healthy people, including for protecting cultural heritage, was highlighted. It was felt that it is easier to keep Country healthy than it is to recover the sick Country once it's lost, however participants commented that a lot of Country has not been burned under cultural management for a long time (examples shared of 30 years or more). Through disruption of cultural fire and maladaptive contemporary fire regimes landscapes have been fractured and many are now considered sick Country or upside-down Country in Indigenous ways of seeing.

*‘Most people read inappropriate fire regimes as too much fire when it may in fact be too little’*

*‘We are breaking all the laws that our old people burnt from’*

*‘Thousands of years of relationship with Country - is the basis for the landscape. This has been interrupted because so much of the landscape is unhealthy’*

*‘When you look for grassy Country around here its hard to find now. But those camping and ceremonial areas would have been kept open because they aware using them. Academics will argue that country was never grassy but its actually gone from grassy in my lifetime’*

Participants explained that altered forest structures and build-up of fuel due to the absence of cultural burns on Country creates a cycle of destructive hot burns.

*‘What about the big old Cyprus trees with cultural significance? ~ they are seen by Quandamooka people as our ancestors. Radiocarbon dating says there are up to 1500 years old. If they stood there for all that time under Aboriginal land management but now, they are gone something is wrong... Up at Nightcap there are big old swamp mahogany trees. Those trees have always been there. The mob has always protected them but now they are getting burned...That Country needs people to look after it so that when the fires come through, they won't kill those trees’*



*'If you have a big old tree and lots of small trees coming in - that big tree is telling you that those trees need to be...fire is coming, they need to be managed. Big trees are being killed by intensity of fires going through - the bush is changing and that upside down Country - that was not there...That is killing those trees. That is an indicator that collectively we are not doing this right'*

The discussion emphasised that getting people on Country to engage in cultural land management, including cultural burning, represents opportunities for health and healing Country and people – supporting both biodiversity protection and cultural heritage:

*'Grevillea and echidna are a totem for us. We wanted to look at cultural burning and impact on totem plants and animals. We did plots where we would count how many mature plants there are and then after the burn comes through what is the effect. It loved it - it just came back like a carpet. When the hot fires came it knocked out the whole mature plants, which is sad. But we are seeing regrowth - seeds and suckers coming back but most of the mature ones died. But when we burned in cultural burn, it did not affect the mature grevilleas. With the echidna, when the fire came through hot the echidna did not have time to get through Country and get a feed - so they go quick because of more feral animals. So, in the cultural burn we found that the echidnas could take their time - they did not need to rush. They had more protection after the cultural burn. It seems to have worked very well with the cultural burn.'* - plenary discussion

Participants pointed to an interest in and increasing demand for broader implementation of cultural land management, especially cultural burning, from the wider community, including private landholders and from agencies-reflecting that when people see and experience cultural burns they tend to start to understand and want more of it.

*'Farmers want to get into it and they are coming to us now for that knowledge'*

*'... so many [private] landowners want fire management that Indigenous rangers can't respond'*

### Research frameworks and protocols

Discussion recognised the importance of building Indigenous pathways into formal academia, the need for recognition, support and engagement of existing Indigenous academics and the desire for more Indigenous academics within institutions. It was noted that ideally most, if not all formal research, would be led by and involve Indigenous researchers. However, it was also recognised that Traditional Custodians and knowledge-holders needed to be meaningfully engaged beyond these academic pathways.

In light of the fact that Indigenous communities have been let down by research and researchers in the past, participants emphasised that establishing trust, accountability and transparency is vital in supporting any future research collaborations. It was noted that "Action speaks louder than words" – there is a



need to follow through and uphold community expectations around research. Participants identified a number of issues around which research frameworks and protocols need to be developed to support better or good research in the cultural land management space.

- **Supporting Indigenous aspirations and ways of seeing/doing**

*'These perspectives need to be built into the research. It's not just that those plants are native, it's about their kinship and do they belong there... It's not just 'the bush'*

*'If someone looks at spread sheet to decide when to burn, they don't understand the concept of healthy Country'*

- Participants discussed the need for researchers and research institutions to respect Indigenous ways of seeing and doing, including Indigenous law/lore. They pointed to the need to redress power imbalances in research, noting that building respect would lead to better research.
- Research questions and methodologies need to respond to Indigenous community aspirations and interests- engage with community's questions
- Researchers/institutions need to support decolonisation in defining research questions and methods
- Participants pointed to a particular need for better understanding and integration of Indigenous concepts of healthy Country and sick country / upside down country into research
- Getting on Country and 'learning by doing', conducting control trials on Country

- **Resourcing and benefit sharing**

*'So we have local knowledge holders who are resourced and have technical support or whatever they need'*

- There is a need for funding transparency
- It is essential that the research benefits Indigenous people- There is a need for clearly identified benefits for country and community
- Good research would provide economic benefits plus remuneration of those involved e.g. for rangers working on Country
- There is also a need for appropriate resourcing of the Indigenous communities involved
- There is a need to increase community interaction and help create a safe space for learning

- **Communication and engagement**

- There was strong emphasis on the need for clear presentation and communication of research agendas, objectives and expectations, including timeframes, to ensure that there is a shared understanding
- There is a need for awkward conversations about research



- Good research should keep it simple/ use plain language
- There is a need for good communication that keeps everyone informed, particularly with rangers and people on Country- putting them in a central role
- There is a need for children and youth to be engaged in research, and this engagement should happen as early as possible in the research process
- **Collaboration, cultural authority and protection of IP**
  - 'We want to be able to hold and protect that knowledge and control how it is shared'*
  - 'That cultural data needs to belong to communities and be protected'*
  - 'More ability to manage our own data. So we are not just giving it to the government and giving away our data'*
  - There is a need for acknowledgement that cultural knowledge is held by everyone in the community – it is not one person's story, but the whole clan's- researchers need to understand this.
  - Research therefore needs broad community permission- There is a need to 'Talk to ALL the elders and young fellas'
  - Getting the right people - passion
  - There is a need for agreed protocols about collaboration, particularly strict protocols about cultural knowledge sharing, data management, access and ownership to ensure that IP is protected
  - Research results become IP of community with Custodians and TOS- this is Indigenous owned knowledge

### Empowerment, networking and Indigenous governance

*'Talking land, communicating with each other and making positive connections'*

*'Not long ago we would have been more connected and talk to each other more. How do we do this? '*

In addition to the need for the protocols and processes necessary for good research practice, participants also emphasised the importance of pathways for creating an enabling environment for wider expansion of cultural fire and land management and to support co-designed and Indigenous led research. In particular participants pointed to the need to establish positive connections and identify opportunities for building Indigenous governance frameworks.

A number of possible approaches were discussed for bringing Aboriginal people together, to empower communities and build safe and supportive networks, including:

- Creating more opportunities to talk about cultural fire and land management and develop a collective voice



- Having regular workshops- coming together quarterly and/or seasonally
- Having Regional forums to inform wider community and agencies and develop these connections
- Resourcing spaces to actually get people together on Country, including elders
- Developing Country-based land management plans

Developing better communication and coordination between LALCs, including establishing pathways for regulation communication about burn plans (e.g. regular calls/sending emails)

### Research possibilities

*‘Backing up our stories with what we already know’- plenary discussion*

*‘After a fire the first things that needs to happen is resource mob to get on country to safely monitor fire impacts. Ideally this would be happening before fires as well to map and record those values before fire impacts’ - plenary discussion*

Participants identified a range of possible areas for research to support cultural land management practices. Potential research topics/themes mentioned during discussions have been grouped together under the following headings:

- Environmental / ecological / biological
- Social and cultural
- Economic
- Institutional

### Environmental/ecological/biological research

Research topics suggested	Density Tally
Cultural artefacts/heritage in the landscape and the impacts of good and bad fires on them. Including old and big trees maintained through cultural burning practices over long periods of time – the biodiversity and other roles/value of those trees	IIII
Healthy country and its differences from place to place? What does healthy country look like? Mapping it	IIII
Effect of hot fires versus cultural/cool fires on species and habitats	III
Comparing cultural burning and hazard reduction / back burning and their positive and negative impacts	III
Surveys that identify important assets – cultural / biodiversity / areas of healthy country	II
Culturally significant species and their ecosystem roles – including placing them and their relationship with endangered species and ecosystems and within wider Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems	II
How are exotic/introduced flora and fauna changing landscapes/ how does	II



fire affect them?	
Plants and their kinship communities according to IK; the structure of different forests according to IK within healthy country concepts	II
Evaluate the reduction in risk where cultural fire is practiced	I
Assessing environmental / cultural values of cultural burning landscapes eg big old trees, grassy understory, open mid story	I
The history of fire	I
How often should we burn different ecosystems	I
What threatened species are present in specific types of Country	I
Appropriate tools and partnership models to allow Aboriginal people to carry out their own monitoring of weeds/feral specials/ native and endangered species and impacts of cultural burning but generate useful data for formal and informal pathways	I
Can IPAs and other cultural managed landscapes be a buffer for protection of property that borders it?	I

### Social and cultural research

Research topics suggested	Density Tally
Healing (people) and health & community benefits of cultural fire and connecting to Country	II
Outcomes of ranger programs – social / cultural/ spiritual/ environmental	I
Language and its relationship to cultural burning	I
Economic development of cultural programs that reinforce cultural burning and IK	I
Mapping the right Aboriginal people for Institutions to contact	I
What would be the benefits of economic support for elders to go on a learning pathway and mentor others	I
Research to show the benefits of Aboriginal gatherings. Get people together more, of having youth programs and more positive pathways	I
Tools to assess capacity and needs for capacity building perhaps using a peer to peer approach	I
How to handle men’s and women’s business areas	I

### Economic research

Research topics suggested	Density Tally
How to enable accessible liability/insurance protection for cultural fire and land management / reduce risks and increase incentives	IIII
Developing planning and investment cases for wider view of private and public land holders to be part of planning for country including mapping and building	II



knowledge networks	
Can offsets (e.g. for road projects) and other types of funding instruments enable more cultural fire and land management and how to enable this / make the right connections	I
Economic incentives for people on Country healing the land – gaps and opportunities	I
Economic benefits of cultural fire management	I
What happens if cultural burning is not done and the escalating risk to property and lives	II
Mapping opportunities for engaging philanthropic funding for supporting cultural fire and land management	I

### Institutional research

Research topics suggested	Density Tally
How do we build recognition of Indigenous knowledge holders who are outside the academic framework?	II
There needs to be a new regulatory environment supportive of cultural burning and addressing appropriate hazard reduction frameworks.	I
Enabling cultural fire and land management among private land holders and cultural sites access	I
Mechanisms and lessons learned for landowners including Indigenous people in land planning and management	I
Design better evaluation and feedback mechanisms to improve practices after fire including indigenous perspectives back to institutions – getting the mob out on country after fire	I
How can cultural pathways of learning from elders and from country be revived and strengthened?	I

### Recognising and supporting Indigenous knowledge generation and transmission

*‘The knowledge of understanding cultural landscapes as Traditional Owners and valuing this knowledge is very important. How to support people to learn through Indigenous Knowledge systems and recognise that learning?’ -Minyumai workshop plenary discussion*

Discussions suggested that rather than just reinforcing western research models and academic frameworks of knowledge generation, research should recognise Indigenous knowledge and seek ways to enable and strengthen Aboriginal knowledge generation and learning systems.

Participants pointed to the challenge of having Indigenous knowledge and learning systems recognised within the academy, but without having to actually reveal all the knowledge itself.



*'We want academia to recognise this without having to unpick the traditional knowledge'*

Discussion highlighted the need to develop and nurture Aboriginal knowledge sharing and transmission processes, beyond formal academic, institutional pathways, to support young people to become knowledge holders- *"There should be ways for knowledge to be reinforced in traditional way."* Participants raised the concept of the 'Bush University', noting that, *"there are also cultural pathways of learning from elders and from Country."* In addition to keeping knowledge alive and supporting its transmission, there is also a need to support communities to rebuild their knowledge where there is a gap. Here, creating space for communities to get together on Country is especially important.

Some potential research areas to support this were reflected on:

- Documenting and supporting the skills of gentle, proactive cultural burning –which links to the wider discussion of supporting Aboriginal people to be on Country as much as possible.
- There is a need to help and enable people to tell stories about the work that is happening on country and share this with the wider community, to gain wider understanding, support and recognition of cultural land management practices.
- Can Indigenous fire knowledge be integrated into the education system?
- Appropriate monitoring processes for tracking changes and impacts in things like weeds / native animals/ endangered & totem species pre and post fire (cultural burns and hot burns) that can be carried out by Aboriginal people on Country.

### Capacity building

*'We don't want researchers to lead – we want this kind of work (cultural burning and getting back on Country) to happen and we want researchers to come in and back it up.'* – plenary discussion

Capacity building and using research to enable wider Indigenous goals related to caring for Country and community was a central theme across discussions. Participants identified a number of opportunities to help support this.

The discussion highlighted the need to provide resources and technical support to local knowledge holders to help enable communities to engage in their own research and knowledge development and retain data sovereignty. It was felt that there were lessons about capacity building that could be learned from Indigenous Health, however there remains a need for more resourcing for capacity building around Natural Resource Management.

- **Building Indigenous institutional capacity**

Participants emphasised a particular need to build capacity within Aboriginal institutions, and between institutions, to better support each other. They noted a need for succession planning, to identify and train future leaders. The concept of creating an Institute of Indigenous Land Management to help facilitate



capacity building, as well as collate data and help share it with researchers in the right way, was proposed.

In addition to the desire to build capacity around and through research, participants also noted that issues around resourcing require analysis themselves. There are opportunities, for example, for research exploring what IPAs actually need to achieve their fire management goals. It was suggested that capacity assessment and mapping and the development of capacity building plans would be helpful, to first help identify where the needs and opportunities actually are- *'assessing the needs first, this is the priority'*.

- **Training and research support for Indigenous Rangers**

There was also particular attention on pathways for developing capacity through Indigenous ranger programs. Participants noted that Aboriginal rangers are critical actors in relation to cultural fire and land management and will play important roles in any research on Country. Discussions focussed on how can research support career paths for Indigenous rangers – for example through mentoring, equipping and empowering rangers. It was suggested that ranger program needs to be expanded, with participants noting that many communities don't currently have ranger programs. Resourcing is needed to support this expansion. However, participants did reflect that there is a risk of ranger programs being co-opted into wider institutions and that programs need to ensure that cultural practice and connection to Country remains central:

*'We want them to be following cultural practices and not just be fire fighters for RFS'*

*'Support us to share and develop our knowledge first'*- Indigenous Ranger

Supporting ranger training and capacity building was seen as critical as a building block in allowing other types of research to occur. Particular areas where participant rangers identified the need for more training and support included:

- Identification of archaeological artefacts
- Biodiversity
- Mapping
- Data analysis

It was also suggested that it would be good to see an Indigenous Land Management Course or training program developed for rangers.

### Engaging youth

*'I have a couple of young ones looking up to me, which is amazing and good. I love being a Ranger'* - women's group

*'We want to have our old people and young people there – we should be able to make cultural burning a safe space'* – Plenary discussion

The importance of engaging and including youth was highlighted a number of times. Participants noted that there are many benefits of young people being on Country, including providing them with opportunities and responsibilities.



However knowledge and skills are being lost and there is a need for new pathways to get more young people on Country and involved in cultural land management, supporting learning and knowledge transmission. Possible pathways identified included:

- Getting children and youth involved in research
- Supporting junior Rangers programs – taking children and youth onto Country
- Youth targeted ranger pathways- employing and funding more rangers and more funding for trainees
- Engaging schools –particular opportunities were discussed (building on some examples) to get schools involved in learning about cultural fire and land management. This was also seen as an opportunity to engage local property owners.

## Women

*'My niece said, 'I want to be a bush ranger like my Aunty'...It is good to encourage young women to work on Country and be out on the land'*

*'Women communicate with fire and guide it'*

*'Women set their minds to it, get on the ground and get it done'*

*'Women take their time to get a good burn in – thinking about the landscape, the topography, the soil moisture, how it all works together'*

The women's group discussions raised a number of issues relevant to supporting women's cultural land management practice and research. Participants reflected on positive experiences of caring for Country through Aboriginal women's ranger programs, suggesting that these should be expanded, with programs needing more resourcing, equipment and training pathways.

Participants stressed the particular need to encourage more young women into the space, including through ranger programs. There is need for wider recognition that **'women can do fire'**.

It was noted that women need to lead and carry out burns at women's sacred sites. Many women's sacred sites currently need more care with fire and have often been left out because there are not enough women rangers to conduct burns in these spaces. This is a gap that needs to be addressed.

Participants reflected on how women can sometimes face barriers and discrimination within institutions/agencies, with some participants sharing examples of their experiences with institutional cultures that were not supportive of women being out on Country:

*'My workplace is stuck in the 50s - if you are a woman you don't work in the field'*

*'Gender problem is that men are in the field and women in the nursery'*

## Insurance, risk and regulation

*'Is there a research project that could look at how to best facilitate risk management?'*

The discussion highlighted how current procedures around risk management, liability and insurance are significant barriers to cultural land management, particularly cultural burning, being practiced and expanded. Participants noted that there are many sites that are long unburned and need cultural fire but in order to conduct cultural burns there is excessive red tape that has to be dealt with. They also noted that there are risk consequences of not supporting cultural burning that aren't given sufficient attention.

*'We have to jump through red tape – but it shouldn't be that way – if we know it needs burning then it should be burned'*

*'Cultural burning is still under their authority and under their law. Then it doesn't happen and there are consequences of fire not happening. We need to make decision makers and policy makers accountable too'*

*'How to deal with the risk issues and come at it with confidence instead of fear'*

*'If they want us to manage all these risks then we need the resources'*

Participants discussed the difficulties around TOs getting liability protection as a major impediment. Numerous recent examples were shared where insurance access issues had undermined/prevented opportunities for rangers and cultural fire practitioners to expand cultural into more areas, both in National Parks and on private lands.

*'One thing that is holding us up is insurance'*

It was also noted that important cultural aspects, such as the need for elders to be on Country and the desire children and youth to be able take part and join in cultural burns to support knowledge transmission can go against existing agency/regulatory risk frameworks. Participants felt that the primary focus should be on caring for Country, rather than navigating risk frameworks, but at the moment it feels like the reverse is true. It was also discussed how hazard reduction burns in line with fire agency risk mitigation approaches can result in the destruction of important cultural spaces/heritage when these are poorly done.

Participants reflected on an emerging trend towards tokenistic 'cultural fire zoning'. It was generally felt that this was problematic and was not the right approach to be adopting.

## Agencies and institutions

There was recognition of the need to create a more supportive environment for cultural land management in relevant agencies and institutions. Here the discussion focused of the importance of giving Indigenous people a voice and having them meaningfully included in planning and (bushfire) incident response-

*'We need our people to be sitting at the table'.*



*'We need to be informed and engaged on what state parks and forests are planning to do'*

*'Having an Aboriginal presence at the table with RFS and the emergency table so that they know what is going on in our Country. So that when they do come in they are not just smashing stuff... in the name of saving assets'*

A number of actions were suggested to help create a more enabling environment:

- Integrating Indigenous burn plans into five-year agency plans – what Aboriginal people see as important needs to be in those plans as well. Conversely any burn plans of agencies need TO, and IPAs involved from the start
- TOs and Custodians embedded in the Incident Management Teams (IMTs)
- Having Traditional Owners more involved in the planning stage
- Funded liaison position that acts as conduit for the Aboriginal community
- We need rangers to be sitting at those tables

Having a funded / resourced **Indigenous liaison position within IMTs** is seen as an urgent short-term goal. Each fire district and each fire control centre need a point of contact, with extensive knowledge of Country, who would join IMTs. It was felt there are some examples where this has worked in the past on an ad hoc basis that could be built on but there is a lack of any consistent approach and no resourcing.

*'Why wouldn't they have an indigenous liaison identified – it's a no brainer'*

The complication is that there are issues around cultural authority and who speaks for Country. Ideally you would have a paid position, filled by someone who knows who the right people to talk to are. It's about having someone who is a conduit for the community. The example was given where the Nature Conservation Council funds conservation reps on each council, with suggestions that perhaps a similar approach could fund an Indigenous Liaison position. RFS has regional bush fire committees that in theory have a position for Land Council representation but it is often not taken up and is not resourced.

It was felt that ideally this Liaison position would be a paid position with some level of independence to those structures but with the ability to give cultural guidance to them. There was discussion over where this might sit at state or local level.

There was also discussion of cultural land management hub and or an Institute of Indigenous land management. There was a feeling that Aboriginal people experienced in how government agencies work need to be inside these organisations to influence them.

Participants felt that among the agencies themselves there is a need for more consistency – *'fire service, national parks, RFS all start bickering among*



themselves'. There needs to be more collaboration, where agencies work together to do a certain burn.

Participants also emphasised the need for better agency recognition and respect for cultural heritage and significant areas. There were examples shared where hazard reduction fires / back burns put in place by institutions were poorly done or had gotten out of control and damaged Country and cultural assets.

- **Indigenous ranger pathways**

*'I used to just know when the right time to burn was. You need to know Country and be on Country. Just using the elements and common sense'*

Indigenous rangers play a key role in the interface between agencies and Country. But there are challenges with getting enough rangers on country and retaining them over time.

Recommendations were:

- Better salaries and career pathways – you should be able to make a good living from being a ranger
- Making sure that rangers don't get converted into being just RFS personnel – i.e. fire fighters. They need to have the approach of being on Country and burning Country the right way- *'We want to be empowered to do our own practices'*.
- Enable wider recognition that hazard reduction/back burning and cultural burning are not the same thing. Cultural burning goes beyond aiming to stop a fire. Hazard reduction is seen as often destroying important areas and cultural heritage.
- Elders need to be paid – could elders be supported on a learning pathway to mentor others. Need to resolve the tension where elders are no longer recognised in the space in some cases and this is taken over by institutionalised rangers. How do we keep it as a cultural practice that ensures the old people are being talked to and guiding the process according to culture?

## PROJECT STEERING AND ADVISORY GROUP MEETINGS

Three stakeholder meetings were held – see details below. Each meeting roughly following this agenda framed for each stakeholder group's perspective:

- Acknowledgement of Country
- Introductions
- Setting the scene and project overview and timelines
- Role of groups/circles and regional workshops
- Review and prioritise discussion themes from project plan
- Discussion on current cultural land management research and policy issues – what projects are people working on?
- Discussion on policy and research gaps – what is needed to provide evidence about / collect data to support cultural land management in southeast Australia?
- Discussion of research and engagement protocols
- What might success look like?
- Next Steps - Wrap up and next meeting

### CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT PROJECT STEERING GROUP (CLM-PSG)

**Date: April 19 2021**

**Location: Online**

Participants	
<b>Project team</b>	
Oliver Costello	Project Convenor, Jagun Alliance
Tony Jansen	One Point Five Degrees, sustainability, strategy and impact consulting
Kat Haynes	Research fellow, Centre for Environmental Risk Management of Bushfires (CERMB)- researching the social dynamics of cultural burning
Timothy Neale	DECRA Senior Research Fellow, Senior lecturer in Anthropology & Geography, Deakin University- research on challenges and opportunities building cultural fire initiatives
<b>Other participants</b>	
Shaun Hooper	Cultural burning researcher, Aboriginal Land and Sea Hub (University of New England)
Matthew Shanks	Taungurung Land & Waters Council, Cultural & Natural Resource Management Strategic Advisor





Lauren Tynan	PhD candidate at Macquarie University researching the reinvigoration of relationships to Country through cultural burning
Tim Hoogwerf	Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Program Manager Galkangu- Joint Management Plan Implementation Programme
Leanne Brooke	Local Land Services (LLS)
Noel (Nook) Webster	Firesticks Alliance cultural fire practitioner

A meeting was held in April 2021 with ten members of the project steering group. The project steering group was made up of cultural land management experts and advisors, with the meeting convened to discuss key issues around the empowerment and support of Indigenous-led and co-designed cultural fire and land management research. Participants were presented with a range of areas for consideration drawn from the project brief and the meeting was audio recorded and transcribed. The discussion content was then analysed to draw out the key insights and themes, which are reported below:

### 1) Research protocols

The meeting highlighted the importance not just of what is researched in relation to cultural land management, but how that research is conducted. Participants identified a need for any research organisation engaging in this space to develop cultural research protocols that protect Indigenous community interests and knowledge and ensure that researchers and organisations are held accountable:

*'From a community perspective, how do we ask questions to researchers or what are their protocols for engaging in research?'*

*'I think it's good within the new centre to have this really foregrounded as sort of a way of ensuring accountability... I just feel like it's important to put that in as a way of accountability in case research is happening, not led by Indigenous people'*

Identifying appropriate protocols to help guide researchers, including non-Indigenous researchers, and research collaborators, was seen as essential in helping open up pathways to support more research in the cultural land management space. Participants reflected that encouraging this research to develop a strong research base is important in helping ensure that policy and practice around cultural land management aligns with Indigenous agendas:

*'It doesn't mean you have to tell all your stories, you just need to, I guess, flag that there is a story to tell, and who's the storyteller and then create a pathway... if you want to do this work, then this is the pathway, you know, and, and see how many pathways we can create, because I think the more pathways you create, the more outcomes we'll see. And then the more influence that will have on making sure that, that policy setting shifts in a positive direction.'*

It was agreed that a framework of broadly applicable protocols could help support respectful engagement and collaboration with TOs, however it was also noted that local cultural protocols can vary across communities and researchers



still need to remain sensitive and responsive to local contexts; this need for attentiveness to local community approaches, practices and interests could itself be a protocol:

*'You can't just apply what you go into in one situation with, everywhere else. So you need to develop a framework to understand that everywhere you go, you're gonna have different protocols. So that becomes a protocol'*

Participants flagged the possibility of building an Indigenous-led research network, to help identify what is and isn't working in terms of research protocols.

Some other key issues around which research protocols might be developed were discussed:

- **Supporting Indigenous leadership**

Participants pointed to the need to ensure that TOs are meaningfully embedded in the research and that engagement is founded on recognition of their leadership role. It was suggested that a protocol should be developed around the need to ensure any research around cultural land management is co-led or co-designed:

*'researchers bring incredible value obviously, you know, without them research doesn't happen. But it doesn't happen without the Traditional Owners'*

*'I think we need to really look at how Traditional owners can own the outcomes of what's being done, and ensure that becomes one of those protocols going forward in terms of then there's that necessity to ensure Traditional Owners are co-leads, and are embedded in the research in more than just grabbing the information and running'*

- **Formal acknowledgement of respect for Indigenous knowledge and cultural values**

There was support for the inclusion of a formal acknowledgement of the value of and respect for Indigenous knowledge and cultural practice. Participants noted a particular need for recognition of Indigenous science's equality with Western science:

*'without that, it's not really clear, whatever the new CRC looks like, to the researchers in there that, you know, our knowledge and our processes are equal, unless the organisation is sort of saying, you know, we say it's equal. And I think that's really important.'*

- **Protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)**

The need for clear protocols around the collection and use of community knowledge relating to cultural land management was also identified, to ensure that communities remain custodians of their data, so that knowledge isn't misappropriated, and the research isn't extractive. This was seen as especially important in light of opportunities for developing more community-led citizen science research projects.



Establishing supportive principles/protocols is necessary to developing an effective research agenda, making it clear that TOs won't engage in cultural land management research without genuine efforts to build equality and community protection into the research process.

## 2) Supporting Indigenous voice, aspirations and research priorities

A key theme that emerged throughout the meeting was the need for meaningful recognition of Indigenous aspirations and support for community voice- ensuring research starts from a basis of recognition and respect for the cultural value of Indigenous land management knowledge and practices, and the importance of supporting the implementation of this:

*It's all good to have researchers come in and they're very, you know, they're very worthwhile and, and you need them, but if they're not pairing up with community and respecting and taking cultural values and I guess, aspirations for Country on board and kind of melding them together, then to me, that wouldn't be very successful.*

*We can put recommendations forward, but if they're not heard, that wouldn't be very successful. So, you know, we need those voices and those cultural values respected*

It was also seen as important that the research agenda reflects Indigenous research priorities and that there is capacity for community to “direct some of the research questions”. Participants emphasised the need for the new research institute to pursue research in key areas of interest identified by Indigenous communities and cultural fire practitioners.

Participants stressed that research focus needs to move beyond the utility of cultural burning, to provide support for Aboriginal communities to create and develop their own knowledge and further Aboriginal land management. There was some particular interest expressed in more research around fire thresholds, fire frequency and burning intervals.

It was also suggested that there was scope to identify other research areas regarding land management, where connections and synergies might exist with Indigenous interests, to help support a knowledge base to build policy around cultural land management. For example, research on smoke plume modelling may be useful in showing differences in impacts between cultural burns and wildfires or evidencing any lessened smoke impacts where cultural burning has occurred as part of hazard management programmes.

## 3) Recognition of cultural value and importance of being on Country

Tied to the need for support of Indigenous aspirations, participants highlighted a strong desire for greater recognition of the cultural value and significance of being on Country and appreciation of the fact that there are deep cultural benefits beyond the landscape management benefits. It was noted that agencies engaged in cultural land management sometimes fail to recognise that spending time walking on and connecting with Country is part of the work:



*'for some people, you know, the mentality has become that it's only real work, when you're like, spraying it, burning it, cutting it, there's not an understanding of just actually being immersed in your Country, and maybe hunting and gathering or just kind of, you know, like this, you know, spending that cultural connection time, how important that is for Rangers or for everybody really, and what the benefits of that might be...sure, you might not get x hectares of area of sprayed or burned, but maybe people's well-being and maybe the connection and maybe the level of communication that they bring to their stakeholder engagement or the community development, maybe that's the benefit. And I don't know what the metrics are, evaluate that, but I bet my life on it, that there are really, really powerful kind of values that coming out of that support for people.... how do we then strengthen that as a framework or cultural framework to support more people to be on country?'*

There is a need for a more holist understanding, that acknowledges how cultural land management practices are deeply embedded in broader Indigenous governance systems and ways of being.

#### **4) Indigenous capacity building and knowledge recognition**

There was emphasis placed on the need for research efforts to support capacity building for both Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities. Participants pointed to a range of areas where capacity building might occur, including opening pathways to support more individuals working in the cultural land management space:

*'thinking about more alternative ways of building capacity of indigenous people in this space would be really good, so through internships, and through diplomas, and, you know, whatever it is, but yeah, getting scholarships for that would be really good.'*

It was suggested that there are opportunities to identify where skills are needed for engagement and data collection, and to think through how capacity building could support this. For example, where language programmes may be needed to bring together Indigenous and scientific names to support communities to be able to do biodiversity or cultural assessments. Participants pointed to opportunities to enable communities to engage in their own research around issues that are important to them:

*'building the capacity within communities to undertake research on the on whatever it is that, you know, the community wants to have research done on and build that capacity. So, they're not having to contract in or bring in external contractors.'*

As well as supporting the development of new skills and learning pathways, it was noted that capacity building also entails recognition and resourcing of existing capabilities and knowledge of communities:

*'you know, the resourcing pretty much goes to the academics and the community don't really get resourced to participate, or the resourcing is kind of, not reflective of the knowledge or the capacity of the individual.'*



So, this kind of work that needs to be done there as well, I think, for that recognition stuff.'

## 5) Community led research and citizen science

The discussion also highlighted opportunities for citizen science and community led research. Participants pointed to the possibilities of expanding the scope of what is considered research and who are considered researchers and extending research opportunities beyond academic institutions and land-management agencies:

*'It's sort of encouraging the new Institute to be able to have funding that's not just tied to universities and traditional forms of research, but maybe funding pools and research projects that are actually just for community. And that sort of encourages a more self-determining model of community research or cultural burning outside of government outside of universities.'*

Building support for citizen science projects were seen as an opportunity for developing Indigenous research approaches and methodologies driven by community, rather than academics and institutions:

*'It also creates a sort of a great opportunity for, like grassroots, kind of, I guess, Aboriginal science kind of methodology to develop out of a community citizen science kind of approach. So, you know, instead of it being developed from, you know, high above, in academia, community can get out and start to do it and have a look at how they want to approach it.'*

Participants highlighted the role community led research can play in enabling community knowledge development and knowledge exchange, including engagement with non-Indigenous community members and better understanding and recognition of Indigenous knowledge and cultural practice.

However, in discussing these opportunities ICIP was identified as a key issue for consideration. Participants noted that it was important that communities retain ownership and oversight of their knowledge:

*'there's some citizen science projects, where communities gather lots of information, and that goes to a repository somewhere, and then suddenly, it's held by a chief scientist or an institution, and then community no longer have access...there's so many opportunities but I think, again, the protocols around it have to be really strong, to make sure that the people who collect the data remain the custodians of their data'*

Here again there was support for developing pathways for communities to collect the knowledge/data themselves and having a way that knowledge-holders can then have pathways for using and sharing that – rather than someone else just coming in and deriving benefits from that knowledge. The possibility of creating a digital space to support community access and management was raised.



## CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCY ADVISORY GROUP (CLM-AAG)

**Date: April 27 2021**

**Location: Online**

**Number of attendees: 15**

### Organisations represented:

NSW Dept of Planning Industry and Environment

- Cultural fire management unit
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Fire and Culture Science

NSW Rural Fire Service

ACT Parks and Conservation Service

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning Victoria

- Forest, Fire and Regions
- Parks Victoria

Country Fire Authority Victoria

Participants	
<b>Project team</b>	
Oliver Costello	Project Convenor, Jagun Alliance
Tony Jansen	One Point Five Degrees, sustainability, strategy and impact consulting
Kat Haynes	Research fellow, Centre for Environmental Risk Management of Bushfires (CERMB)- researching the social dynamics of cultural burning
Timothy Neale	DECRA Senior Research Fellow, Senior lecturer in Anthropology & Geography, Deakin University- research on challenges and opportunities building cultural fire initiatives
<b>Other participants</b>	
David Nugent	Director of Fire Emergency & Enforcement, Parks Victoria
Geoff Simpson	Cultural Science Team, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE)
Greg Summerell	Senior team leader for fire and culture science, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE)
Scott Falconer	Deputy Chief Fire officer, Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and planning (DELWP)
Hamish Webb	Director in the forest and fire policy planning area, Victorian





	Department of Environment, Land, Water and planning (DELWP)
Donald MacDonald	Bushfire Risk Evaluation Team, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
Jake Kinred	Program Co-Ordinator, Cultural Fire Management Unit, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE)
Adam Leavesley	ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS)
Mick Sherwen	VIC Country Fire Authority
Peter McKechnie	NSW Rural Fire service
Robert Boota	Githabul Rangers

A meeting was held in April 2021 with ten delegates from key Government fire and land agencies currently engaged in cultural fire management. The meeting sought to draw on the policy and operational experience of the delegates, to provide advice to the project steering group around possible opportunities to enable and support Indigenous-led and co-designed cultural fire and land management research. A number of agencies from across Southeast Australia were represented, including: Parks Victoria, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS), Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and planning (DELWP), NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE), VIC Country Fire Authority, NSW Rural Fire Service

Key discussion points, developed by the project team, were presented for reflection from the agency delegates. The discussion content was then analysed to draw out the key insights and themes, with the outcomes reported below:

### Meeting findings

The delegates reflected a clear desire for research and agency engagement around cultural land management, recognising it as an important pathway to improving how we care for Country and create healthy and resilient landscapes. As one Indigenous delegate reflected, *“why wouldn’t you want to learn from people that achieved living sustainably on this landscape?”*

- **Opportunities to learn from current agency practices**

In discussing current agency practices and processes, participants reflected on the potential for learning from what is currently being done in the agency context to support cultural land management practice and research and how this might be improved, with a number of key questions identified:

- ‘How are government agencies setting up an enabling environment to support cultural land management?’ (with cultural fire being a key part of this)
- What do agencies need to do better to support TOs in enabling a cultural land management approach?
- How is culturally appropriate decision-making being set up within organisations/agencies? How do we enable these conversations?



- How do agencies share approaches or policies and learning about how they've altered their business to enable cultural land management practices, with each other?

- **Empowering Traditional Owner voices and aspirations**

Agency participants strongly emphasised the importance of having Traditional Owners (TOs) identify their own research priorities in the space, and the desire to see pathways to feed TO voices into institutions, so that agency research agendas and processes around cultural land management appropriately reflect TO aspirations:

*'I'd actually like to see Aboriginal people design their research areas, and they lead the research rather than universities and agencies leading research areas.'*

*'I kind of find it hard as a, you know, in this space, in the work we're doing, for an agency, to be setting any directions or research priorities, without hearing that from our Traditional Owners first and saying this is what's important. And then going well, if we do this together, that'll be a really good outcome... what we're saying is, that TO voice back to us, and then for us in response its kind of like, well, how do we enable that? That's kind of the question for agencies.'*

It was agreed that it is important that TO perspectives and needs (recognising that there are different cultural fire frameworks) are being expressed and that research doesn't just apply a 'departmental lens'. Participants reflected that the way research in the land management space is often set up is still very much driven by Western frameworks and processes and that there is a need to think through how agencies enable and partner with TOs in a way that ensures that agency approaches, systems and structures are not just being imposed. There was particular emphasis on the need to ensure that the research approach isn't extractive and "*doesn't just become Western people wanting to better understand traditional knowledge and then incorporating it*".

Participants noted that the research has multiple end-users. There is a need to recognise TOs as one end-user group, with research priorities, processes and outcomes needing to reflect the aims of both agency end-users and Indigenous communities. It was recognised that there would need to be research arrangements to help ensure that benefits for community are reflected, particularly empowering traditional owners to practice culture on Country.

- **Building engagement pathways and collaborative relationships**

The discussion identified the need for more focus on building relationships and developing pathways for connection between agencies and Indigenous communities to help support further engagement and research in cultural land management:

*'I'd like to see more about agencies, building the relationship with people, and enabling the people to practice their culture...'*

Participants noted that there is a need for clearer frameworks to support agency engagement with Aboriginal communities and knowledge holders – setting out pathways and protocols to support this relationship building to help develop



research relationships and to enable more communities to engage in cultural burns on Country. Without clear supportive frameworks and pathways for building respectful connections, sometimes agencies don't know how to proceed or lack understanding of the significance and value of cultural land management practices:

*'a lot of land managers will say, you know, Aboriginal communities want to do cultural burning, but they'll often be like, but we don't know why, or where, or how'*

Comments were made about how sometimes consultation with Indigenous communities can be difficult for agencies to navigate because it isn't clear who they actually need to talk to – which community or who in the community has cultural authority- and what the appropriate protocols around engagement are.

There was also discussion of the importance of having clear principles around knowledge sharing and the protection of ICIP, to help provide confidence around building relationships. Participants raised the key question 'How do you create a culturally safe space to share knowledge?' It was noted that there is concern from Indigenous communities about being able to retain ownership of knowledge collected through research and have oversight how this is used:

*'a lot of community knowledge holders don't want to work with researchers, because they're concerned that their knowledge will be ripped off and misappropriated.'*

Thinking through these concerns, participants highlighted the value of Indigenous led, or co-design, collaborative research approaches in response. Although it was recognised that it can take time to build up community trust to support research engagement, it was noted that one clear way of building stronger engagement pathways would be ensuring that TOs are involved from the start of a research project.

Supporting Indigenous-led and collaborative co-designed research was identified as an important response to concerns about Indigenous IP and use of appropriate research protocols; where there is capacity for Indigenous researchers/co-researchers to manage methodologies and delivery and to make sure that the research is heading in the right direction. Indigenous led or co-led/designed research was viewed as *"the opportunity to create that relationship with local people on how they determine how it's applied"*

Participants noted that there was opportunity for agencies to share best practice to help inform the development of pathways and protocols to support relationship building and collaborative approaches:

*'How do agencies across the state/s come together to share their learning and understanding, how they are partnering with TOs and what that looks like for them?'*

In addition to the need for relationship building with agencies, the discussion also suggested the need for more collaborative engagements between Indigenous communities and the possibilities for building better regional governance. It was noted that there was opportunity to help revive what was there in the past in terms of strong cultural frameworks, which have been eroded by colonisation.



The question that emerged was: How do you get groups co-ordinating and working together – to build a bigger supportive network and enable collaborative work across larger landscape and community scales?

- **Indigenous capacity building and recognition of Indigenous knowledge**

There was strong support for the need to build capacity to help enable Aboriginal people to lead the process rather than it coming from government down. It was noted that much Commonwealth funding for cultural programs is directed to agencies, but building the business capability of Indigenous groups would allow them to be funded directly.

- **Recognising the knowledge and research capacity of community**

The discussion noted that there are opportunities for capacity building through research, but also pointed to opportunities to better recognise the knowledge and capabilities that already exists in communities:

*'I think there's sort of opportunities there to, you know, for Aboriginal community capacity building, in that space, but equally, you know, being able to sort of recognise the knowledge and capacity that communities have as well, which is often under-utilised and under recognised.'*

- **Recognising TOs as knowledge producers**

Indigenous led and co-designed research recognises that Indigenous community members are not just possible end-users of the research, but 'active agents' in the research and producers of that knowledge – whether as collaborative partners, principle investigators or co-authors.

*'it's also about empowering indigenous researchers and co-researchers, and the acknowledgement that you don't have to be of the Academy to be a knowledge-holder, and to be able to contribute to the science'*

- **Recognition of the role of culture and cultural significance**

A number of participants pointed to the need for a much more holistic understanding of the role of cultural practice in land management – and greater recognition and appreciation of what burning means for culture. As one participant shared in reflecting on the value and power of these practices for cultural connection:

*'you know, smell the smoke, feel the flame, you know, feel the connection with the land and the people around you as well. That's the power of the work.'*

Participants felt there was scope for some of the broader cultural values to come through research agendas much more strongly, with a suggestion that relational values around culture, kinship and connection with Country are not reflected enough in research priority areas. It was noted that the focus in land management research generally is still very much on 'managing' risk, with comparatively little attention on Indigenous ways of being and practicing and supporting custodianship:

*'I even feel uncomfortable using the word management...it's really about caring for Country practices that we're talking about.'*



There was suggestion that some deeper understanding and appreciation of what burning means for culture was needed before trying to set a research agenda:

*'I've talked to a lot of people who, who know about cultural burns, but have never participated in one. So I would actually think that, even before we look at research priorities, that we would actually walk and burn the country in a cultural context together and understand the why'*

One participant also identified a need for Caring for Country practices to be recognised in research and among those working in this space, as adding cultural value to sites, noting that places where caring for Country through cultural burning has occurred, become part of living culture:

*'This is the living of the culture. This is the breathing of the culture...we need to start showing these areas, and I hate to use this word, but they're assets that require equal protection...this is actually the living culture happening now.'*

These places then require recognition and protection in future land management practice. For example, areas where cultural burning has occurred should be protected against being subject to hazard reduction burns.

- **Barriers, knowledge gaps and research possibilities**

Discussions also identified some key areas where research could help address notable knowledge gaps and pointed to a range of barriers or challenges to agency engagement with cultural land management.


- **Better understanding cultural land management in the existing statutory/regulatory context**

It was identified that there is a need to better understand and articulate the relationship between cultural fire practices and the existing statutory land management context. Participants noted that agencies can have difficulty understanding how cultural burning fits within their existing hazard reduction frameworks and statutory requirements and a lack of clarity about this was noted as a key barrier for engagement by agencies.

However, participants also reflected that it is important to distinguish cultural fire and hazard reduction as two separate processes. There is a need to take care to ensure that cultural fire and cultural land management don't just get subsumed under 'hazard reduction'. Participants noted that some agencies are engaging Indigenous mitigation crews, but the focus has still been on traditional risk mitigation works and has not yet shifted further towards more of a focus on cultural fire and cultural land management. While risk reduction was recognised as one important benefit/outcome of cultural burning, participants noted that it is important for research to recognise that cultural fire practices go far beyond and are not synonymous with hazard reduction, and that cultural burning is just one component of cultural land management.

- **Legislative definitions and restrictions around fire frequencies**

Legislative definitions and restrictions around fire frequencies were identified as another key impediment for community getting back on Country for cultural



burning in New South Wales. Participants noted that there is a need to think about the narrative around fire frequencies and challenges with definitions around fire frequencies for cultural burning:

*'the fire frequencies are a 'key threatening process', because that's how the legislation defines that but arguably, you know, in some parts of the landscape a high higher frequency of a cool burning regime or a cultural burning regime may, in fact be better for the biodiversity than infrequent very high intensity fires that come through within the biological thresholds that have been defined for these communities. So, yeah, there's also a narrative around that the frequency or the relative return interval or whatever of cultural burning'*

- **Risk related burdens**

A number of challenges were also identified in relation to risk- related burdens that need to be addressed to support more engagement with Indigenous land management and research, particularly in relation to cultural burning. It can be very difficult for TOs to get insurance to enable cultural burns. It was also noted that with climate change the windows for appropriate burning weather are becoming smaller, and there is a huge amount of risk related work that needs to be done before practitioners can even get on Country. These burdens need to be addressed so that there is actually time to get on Country and develop relationships.

It is also the case that whoever is holding the land tenure is holding the risk and this can make land managers hesitant. One participant noted that the fact that fire is viewed largely as a threat is a key challenge:

*'The barrier is generally about perceived risk. And perceived risk comes from people at the moment in Australia see fire as a threat. No one's telling good stories of fire. No one's telling how fire is a management tool that has shaped this landscape.'*

- **Expanding narratives of protective, healing fire for adaptive management**

It was suggested that one way forward is for the research agenda to better reflect the possibilities of the protective, healing, adaptive role of the right kind of fire – and the value this has for both caring for Country and for culture. The discussions pointed to the need to explore and share narratives about fire that aren't just focused on risk and destruction from wildfires – but tell a richer and more nuanced story of the role of fire in the Australian landscape, and opportunities for cultural burning in adaptive management and resilience building:

*'how do we use that ability for Aboriginal knowledge and practice to heal these landscapes and not just the old knowledge, the new knowledge that we are co-creating, as our ancestors always did'*

The role of cultural burning in relation to adaptive learning and adaptive management was identified as a possible area of research that is important for agency responses, particularly in the context of climate change.

- **Expanding the temporal and spatial scales of research**





The discussion highlighted the different temporal and spatial scales of possible research- the micro, short-term scale looking at a single management event and possible impacts and benefits in the context of a small area, and the macro, longer term scale looking at the implications of a broader cultural fire regime and the landscape impacts.

At the micro scale, one participant pointed generally to the need for more monitoring and evaluation data to be able to report on the successes of various objectives of a cultural burn or land management program.

At a macro scale, participants raised the question: how is cultural burning is managed in light of the current landscape configuration (with post-settlement development that's happened) and how does it possibly fit with various fire risk management treatments?

- **Vulnerability of cultural sites to wildfire impacts**

A knowledge gap was also identified regarding the vulnerability of cultural sites to fire impacts. It was noted by some participants that agencies are working protect important sites from wildfires, but there are intangibles that they don't know about, values which non-Indigenous people can't define. Some groups are currently working to develop an assessment tool to identify those areas and landscapes most vulnerable, but agencies also need an understanding of what is really important to the Indigenous community in terms of what agencies need to protect in those spaces. There is a need for better understanding of cultural value and significance to help inform both prescribed burning practice and incident management response.

Possible research questions:

- How are government agencies setting up an enabling environment to support cultural land management? What do agencies need to do better to support TOs in enabling a cultural land management approach?
- What can be learned about where the opportunities are for government and for support from legislation/regulatory frameworks?
- How is cultural burning is managed in light of the current landscape configuration (with post-settlement development that's happened) and how does it possibly fit with various fire risk management treatments?
- How do you create a culturally safe space to share Indigenous knowledge?

Gaps and emerging areas for research:

- How cultural burning fits within existing agency hazard reduction frameworks and statutory requirements
- Legislative definitions and restrictions around fire frequencies
- Knowledge gap regarding the vulnerability of cultural sites to wildfire impacts- need a better understanding of what to protect



- Need for monitoring and evaluation data to be able to report on the successes of various objectives of cultural burn or land management program
- Research around the role of cultural burning in adaptive management
- Need for more stories about good fire – it's protective, healing, caring role.

## CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP (CLM-RAG)

**Date: April 30 2021**

**Location: Online**

**Number of attendees: 12**

Participants	
<b>Project team</b>	
Oliver Costello	Project Convenor, Jagun Alliance
Tony Jansen	One Point Five Degrees
Kat Haynes	Research fellow, Centre for Environmental Risk Management of Bushfires (CERMB)- researching the social dynamics of cultural burning
Timothy Neale	DECRA Senior Research Fellow, Senior lecturer in Anthropology & Geography, Deakin University- research on challenges and opportunities building cultural fire initiatives
<b>Research Advisory Group participants</b>	
Jason Sharples	Professor of Bushfire Dynamics in the School of Science, UNSW Canberra
Ross Bradstock	Emeritus Professor, University of Wollongong Founder of the Centre for Environmental Risk Management of Bushfires, founder of NSW Bushfire Risk Management Hub
Mal Ridges	Team Leader, Cultural Science, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE)
Michael-Shaun Fletcher	Director of Research, Indigenous Knowledge Institute Associate Dean (Indigenous), Faculty of Science, University of Melbourne
Laurent Tynan	PhD candidate at Macquarie University researching the reinvigoration of relationships to Country through cultural burning
Bhiamie Williamson	Research scholar, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU



	PhD candidate
Shaun Hooper	Cultural burning researcher, Aboriginal Land and Sea Hub (University of New England)
Robert Boota	Githabul Rangers, Jagun Alliance

A meeting was held in April 2021 with researchers with experience and expertise in a range of research areas tied to cultural land management and bushfires, including a number of Indigenous researchers. Participants represented a range of research institutions across Southeast Australia including the University of Wollongong, University of New England, University of Melbourne, Deakin University, University of New South Wales, Australian National University and Macquarie University.

Key discussion points, developed by the project team, were presented for reflection. These included:

- Identifying key existing research projects in the space
- Identifying research gaps or areas where greater research focus is needed; and
- Consideration of appropriate research protocols or approaches to guide future research efforts

The discussion content was then analysed to draw out the key insights and themes, with the outcomes reported below:

- **Research principles/protocols**

While it is clear that there is interest around cultural land management research, participants acknowledged that there are risks and sensitive issues associated with aspects of cultural land management research, so there is a need for some clear guidance on how researchers and research partners should approach research in this space.

It was suggested that any research agenda developed by organisations should include development of a research framework articulating broadly applicable principles or protocols to help guide culturally appropriate and culturally supportive research, ensuring that Indigenous community needs are met alongside the needs of other research partners and that those engaged in research are held properly accountable. However there was reflection that overly prescriptive or restrictive protocols can be problematic because communities and contexts will differ:

*'I worry about hard and fast protocols especially when different groups are at different stages. I liked the word 'principles'. I am less inclined for policy and protocols, just because there is such diversity and where different mobs are at and what people are trying to do, but fully recognise that there needs to be something there that sets out a key set of principles.'*

It was suggested that any research framework developed would need to be sensitive to differences in approaches and capacity among Indigenous groups. It would need to be responsive to diverse circumstances, inclusive of different



groups including women and youth and “flexible enough to engage with communities on their own terms, no matter what stage they are at”, so that inequalities are not reinforced. A research framework of broadly applicable principles would help provide guidance on both the type/motivations of research that should be pursued (perhaps in relation to key thematic areas/domains) and how this research should be approached.

Some key issues around which principles might be developed were discussed:

- Respect for Indigenous culture and caring for Country

There was a call for any research framework/agenda to include a strong acknowledgment that Indigenous knowledge, culture and practice is respected and viewed as equal to Western scientific knowledge and management practice.

- Indigenous leadership and early engagement of TOs

There was also support expressed for the principle that “all research around Indigenous knowledge and practice is Indigenous lead or co-designed in a way that has really strong kind of Indigenous leadership around the authority to do the research and protect the communities and Country's interests.”

A particular need was identified for more guidance around engaging with TOs, including support around identifying the appropriate knowledge holders with cultural authority. It was suggested that another key principle underpinning any research in this space is that TOs need to be meaningfully engaged from the start of the research process:

*‘too often engaging with Community is an afterthought for academics...we should be thinking of those things, academic should be thinking of those things and managers should be thinking of those things well before the research questions and ideas are formulated’*

Current guidelines such as Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders 2018 developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) are useful and could be better utilised. There may also be an opportunity for the new institute to develop their own set of guidelines that responds to the unique interests, values and risks in natural hazards research. Participants agreed that it would be useful to develop an appropriate research framework to collate and share examples of best practice around research and engagement with TOs in the cultural land, waters and natural hazards management context.

- **Indigenous voice and representation**

There was emphasis on the importance of ensuring Indigenous researchers and TOs are leading research projects. Regardless of this, Indigenous community aspirations must be appropriately reflected in research agendas broadly. There are growing numbers of Indigenous people in the academy, with an emerging cohort of Indigenous academics undertaking land and water-based research. Indigenous peoples are not simply external to research, but are themselves



researchers, blurring the lines but also adding depth to research processes. Any large research project that requires a team of researchers should have Indigenous students or academics or a process to engage and develop them. It is suggested that successful governance arrangements would need to support Indigenous researchers and TOs to have 'a structural voice' and an organised way to engage with the research institute.

*'It's not just western science researching what we're doing, but there's also you know, a need for a strong Aboriginal voice as well'*

The need to ensure that TOs are clearly positioned as potential end-users of the research was highlighted.

It was also identified as particularly important to have Indigenous representation on the skills-based board and senior Indigenous staff at the new research institute, to help oversee research collaboration and implementation. Representation in this space was viewed as valuable in helping to identify and support consultation and engagement with Indigenous leaders in the space and build strong partnerships and to ensure that appropriate principles/ protocols are being followed in the research to protect the interests of community.

- **Emphasising the 'culture' in cultural land management**

Participants commented that in relation to cultural burning, much of the emphasis was on burning, rather than on culture. Some expressed concern about isolating cultural burning from its broader cultural context and the risk of research being extractive. The discussion underscored the importance of 'culture' remaining central in cultural land management research and the cultural significance not being overlooked or sidelined. Research projects need to be founded on a more holistic understanding and recognition that Indigenous land management practices are expressions of culture and connection to Country:

*'You can't just talk about Aboriginal people and fire, and talk about fire without connection to Country, and connection to plants, and ants and eagles and health and well-being and all the things that come together.'*

*'The whole thing that makes cultural burning, cultural burning, is the culture, it's the first word. For cultural burning to be fully realised, that culture has to be there, strong and functioning and being performed. That is what makes cultural burning what it is.'*

*'[T]he cultural side of it is important, you know, the purpose of why we are burning'*

Reflecting on experiences with research currently being undertaken, participants discussed how opening up opportunities for getting on Country and engaging in burning are important in revitalising and supporting culture:

*'The cultural burning actually served the purpose of drawing the culture together and re-invigorating the culture. It became a nexus for community to build around.'*

*'A big driver and a whole part of my research is that fire and cultural burning is reinvigoration at the moment, it is what is bringing communities*



*together to share knowledge and that coming together is never just about the fire...cultural burning is never just about the fire...there are beautiful stories about the opportunities that cultural burning gives for many other types of knowledge sharing that don't happen just because of the fire but are enabled by it.'*

A key question that participants suggested should be kept in mind when discussing research about cultural fire is 'How do we support communities to solve their problems of realising their full expression of the cultural part of cultural burning?'

It was also noted that fire is just one component of cultural land management and that there is a need for greater recognition of it being "a way of living and revitalising culture":

*'doing fire does bring people together and starts that discussion about how does the 'culture' with cultural fire, be realised? But the conversation is really about how culture is supported and enabled, and fire is part of that, but there are a whole lot of other things that are part of that too.'*

- **Capacity building and knowledge recognition and development**

The need for cultural land management research to support capacity building for Aboriginal community members and organisations was also reinforced. Participants suggested that any research agenda should not just reflect "some menu of research choices, but that there's a need for capacity building as well, in the process." It was agreed that capacity building needs to occur in a range of spaces associated with the research, from encouraging early career Aboriginal academics to supporting the people on the ground doing the land management work. In addition to building capacity in academic, institutional frameworks to support Indigenous researchers, participants pointed to the need for incorporating broader pathways for community capacity building and knowledge recognition.

- Knowledge recognition

A significant aspect of capacity building discussed was better recognition of existing knowledge and capabilities within the community and the provision of supportive structures and resourcing to allow these to be engaged. One component of this is "expanding what counts and research and who counts as researchers." Participants noted that it was important that community members were recognised for the important knowledge that they hold, outside of academic qualifications, and that they were supported to be able to participate as co-researchers:

*'senior knowledge holders that have spent a lifetime on country, how do we support that recognition?... that capacity issue is that you know, we have knowledge in the community, we have people that have skills but they're not resourced and there's no structures for their employment'*

- Community knowledge development

Participants also emphasised the need to support the capacity of community to continue developing their own knowledge and practice. It was noted that Indigenous communities need space and research to explore how they might





draw on traditional knowledge and approaches to develop new ways of responding to current, contemporary issues that are emerging- *“how our cultural practices can be sort of, you know, utilised in modern day issues such as climate change”*. It is important to recognise that Indigenous science is living and communities need support to work through how Indigenous science and practice offers adaptive pathways to care for Country in light of contemporary landscape challenges.

- Skills development and capability building

A second key component of capacity building that was identified was providing pathways for learning skills and technical knowledge development within communities:

*‘...and the other one is that there are people who need to build that experience and skillset’*

*‘[Trainee rangers] they might know Country really well, but they might not know, you know, botanical names, and when they're going and doing, say biodiversity surveys or something, because there's some economic opportunities there, you know, building that capacity so that you can do that work, which might also lead to, you know, better monitoring outcomes and future research opportunities.’*

- **Possible research opportunities**

Framing the discussion of research opportunities was the reflection that cultural land management, cultural heritage protection, Indigenous peoples in disaster recovery and emergency management are currently hugely under-resourced in comparison to other areas of research around land, fire, disaster recovery and emergency management.

More resourcing directed into this space would open up a range of areas for investigation.

It was noted that much of the research that has occurred to date has been relatively short term, whereas aspects of cultural land management, such as ecological benefits, can take time and can be demonstrated over different scales. There is opportunity to think about cultural management practices across broader landscape and temporal scales.

Particular interest was expressed in exploring re-instating cultural burning practices on areas where it has not happened for a long time and investigating what sort of impacts that might have for risk mitigation of big wildfires (particularly ones that start in remote locations and grow)

However, participants did also reflect on the dangers around focusing on the need to ‘prove’ the ecological and risk mitigation benefits of cultural land management, commenting that examination of benefits always needs to be explored in parallel with how it builds capacity and supports getting more people on Country. Consideration of benefits needs to extend to the political benefits of governance building.

- Mapping and ARC-GIS





There was also discussion of potential research using mapping and GIS, including the possibility of collating information about where cultural burns are occurring. Participants reflected that there is currently not resource documenting in GIS where cultural burns have occurred or where they are planned, and that this could be a useful resource to support future research planning and development and a training/capacity building opportunity. It was also noted that improved understanding of where cultural burns are occurring is useful for validating technology being developed around micro-remote sensing.

However, some reservations were expressed, and it was suggested that any work around this would need to be appropriately scoped, with consideration of issues around Indigenous IP. Some participants felt that there were possible drawbacks and care would need to be taken to ensure that mapping work isn't misrepresented and doesn't become used in ways that problematic for furthering cultural land management aspirations. There was some concern that simply mapping burning locations, particularly considering the limited scale of current burning, doesn't tell a rich story about the cultural value and possibilities of Indigenous land management. There was weariness around the ability large-scale mapping to overlook the intimacy of being in Country – *'being able to stand on one dot on a map and realise that there are three totally different systems at work, with three totally different regimes ...How do we account for the layers of intimacy of Country and the intricacies of what happens on the ground?'*

There was some consideration of how GIS might be engaged in research to support greater implementation of cultural land management, in particular, how it might be used to reveal opportunities to implement cultural burning across a broader landscape. Participants discussed the possibility of mapping out areas where cultural burning might be engaged, for example identifying areas of appropriate estate that could be then be mapped against areas of catastrophic fire risk. However, it was suggested that greater focus should possibly be on building the qualitative narratives around the success of existing cultural land management work.

- Research about barriers and challenges to engaging in cultural land management

A key area where participants identified a need for further research was around barriers and challenges to engaging in cultural land management practices, particularly cultural burning. It includes often being subverted or excluded from policy, legislation, research, planning and operations. This occurs at different scales including national emergency coordination, state level emergency management, regional land and water management and local groups such as fire brigades or Landcare groups. Each of these represent barriers for groups to be involved with the business of looking after their Country and require research to identify specific actions focussed at addressing them.

*'There are a whole lot of reasons why enabling that culture within community faces a whole bunch of challenges and so in measuring efficacy and benefits of burning, part of that equation is how we also support the full expression of cultural burning...that storying and research about the barriers is really important.'*



## NEXT STEPS, UTILISATION AND IMPACT

The utilisation and impact of this project have the potential to be profound. This project was an opportunity for meaningful consultation with Traditional Owners as rights holders and other key Indigenous and industry groups as stakeholders into the defining and forming of an Indigenous-centred research approach for cultural land management. It has also been an opportunity to begin the process of capacity building to ensure communities are ready to engage with the research process.

The recommendations will require oversight and the Project Steering Group and project Team strongly recommends that implementation be guided by an Indigenous Research Committee (IRC) and the development of a Natural Hazards Research Australia Indigenous research strategy for longer term impact. Natural Hazards Research Australia needs to be mindful of the participant expectations to continue to support the conversations and relationships this project has begun, as well as demonstrate to Indigenous Researchers, Traditional Owners and end users that their views and recommendations are influencing the Natural Hazards Research Australia, research institutes and land and fire management agencies.

Accordingly, we propose a staged approach to be guided by the project team and an interim Indigenous Research Committee (IRC) consisting of Project Steering Group members to:

1. present the **key findings** and recommendations to the Natural Hazards Research Australia executive as the basis for developing an Indigenous research strategy.
2. establish Terms of Reference for the **Indigenous Research Committee (IRC)**
3. work with the Natural Hazards Research Australia to identify priority recommendations and research projects for **implementation** in the short, moderate, and longer terms.
4. work with the Natural Hazards Research Australia to identify the **resource requirements** to implement the recommendations and research projects.
5. **co-develop** with Indigenous partners and Natural Hazards Research Australia representatives, a cultural land and fire management research agenda and priorities.



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