



SOUTHEAST AUSTRALIA ABORIGINAL FIRE FORUM

An Independent Research Report

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Cover: Murumbung rangers burning at Gubur Dhaura ochre pit, Franklin, ACT. May 2018. Photo: ACT Parks and Conservation



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We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Ngunnawal people, Traditional Custodians of the lands on which the Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum was held in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory (ACT). We would like to thank the Ngunnawal people for supporting the forum and pay our respects to all Aboriginal peoples who contributed to this lively and important event.

We acknowledge and thank the Murumbung Rangers who invited us to write this report, and the many people who provided feedback on the original draft. We also acknowledge that the Forum was organised by the ACT Government and funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.

We acknowledge and thank Coolamon Advisors for the Forum Report that was finalised for the ACT Government following the Forum.

We acknowledge and thank Otis Williams (Deadly Photography) for most of the photographs used throughout this report, and permission from ACT Government to reproduce them here.

All errors and omissions in this report remain our responsibility.

SMOKING CEREMONY

Ngunnawal man Adrian Brown invited forum delegates to walk through the smoke, as part of being welcomed to Country.



Photos: forum delegates participate in the Smoking Ceremony, hosted by Adrian Brown, with Ambrose House (Otis Williams)



FOREWORD

Just kilometres from the doorstep of Parliament House we sat and we shared food, space, warmth, laughter, knowledge of Country, and connection to it and each other. We spoke of times gone past and hopeful times ahead when our old ways will prevail back on Country. For too long our old people sat without recognition on the fringes of their once rich and abundant Country as they saw country decline and fall sick.

The once common fires dotted across country, lit with intent and purpose slowly went cold and dull as the fires and spirit of the old people waned. Overtime, there was less and less fire until almost no more campfires were left – but now – we are going another way. Now, there are more campfires and the sticks to carry them further and faster than the old people would believe. Whether on foot, wheeled or flying we travel to share our stories. With our knowledge and practice we are reforging our fire pathways back on Country.

We must take up the firesticks in honour of the old people and lore for country. It is time to not only light campfires on the edges of change but to also walk the paths of our ancestors and create the change that country teaches. Country has taught us lore, it is our responsibility to walk the land and learn.

The same spark that taught our ancestors is here today. Fire starts and ends with the same elements – needing fuel, air and heat. Despite the diversity of fire, all fires have an intrinsic relationship with the elements of Country. Working with fire in the ways of the old people we create light, warmth, food and above all lore. Lore from Country.

During the gathering it was a real honour to sit and yarn with so many inspiring people, especially those young ones, our future elders. As you read this report think of the old people and their connection to Country and how you can share and play your part in honouring them and the ones to come.

Oliver Costello

Bundjalung man

Director of Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum was a landmark event, bringing together Aboriginal and non-indigenous peoples personally invested in expanding the use of cultural burning and supporting the authority of Aboriginal peoples in the management of bushfire in southeast Australia and across the Australian continent more generally.

As the diverse presentations demonstrated, Aboriginal fire management practitioners in southeast Australia face distinct challenges and opportunities moving forward.

This report identifies several key themes that emerged from across the forum: **creating knowledge, sharing knowledge, everyone together, and making it genuine.**

1. Creating knowledge

- I. There were repeated references to knowledge generation as occurring through and with Country, and as part of belonging with country.
- II. Forum presentations clearly identified that many Aboriginal people have a historically-grounded mistrust of academic research and researchers.
- III. 'Research' was also presented as a much broader term, encompassing diverse efforts by Aboriginal and/or non-indigenous peoples that can positively inform land management and a range of collaborations. At times this specifically included academic research.
- IV. While the forum demonstrated the importance of research in supporting different kinds of collaboration, it also highlighted the need for clearer dialogue between Traditional Owners/Traditional Custodians and other institutions regarding what research is important for their priorities and how it should be produced.

2. Sharing knowledge

- I. Strong interpersonal networks and institutions have been vital in the reintroduction of cultural burning throughout southern Australia. These have been important for sharing knowledge across Australia.
- II. Discussions emerging from the forum highlighted the increasing importance of links between Aboriginal people across southern Australia in the recognition and revitalization of cultural burning.
- III. The forum identified a need for Aboriginal leadership to develop and communicate appropriate cultural protocols for cultural burning and the sharing of fire knowledge. It is not appropriate for all such knowledge to



be made freely available, and if knowledge repositories are created then access must be controlled in culturally appropriate ways.

3. Everyone together

- I. The forum demonstrated the strengths and future potential of personal and institutional relationships between Aboriginal fire practitioners and government agencies involved in fire management. The case study presentations emphasised the mutually beneficial nature of such collaborations to date.
- II. Cultural burning was shown to be a focal point and interest for many different people, and this energy offers much for the potential for positive relationship-building between Aboriginal and non-indigenous Australians around a common concern for the health and safety of Country.
- III. There is a need to include a wider range of participants in discussions surrounding cultural burning. The forum demonstrated, in particular, the important knowledge and interests of women, elders and young people in relation to cultural burning.

4. Making it genuine

- I. There is also a strong recognition by Aboriginal people that their engagement in cultural burning and bushfire management more generally needs to move beyond tokenism. Collaboration has to be on meaningful terms to all parties.
- II. Identified barriers to future collaborations include: uneven distribution of funding between government and Aboriginal land managers, the unwillingness of bushfire agencies and others to engage in Aboriginal perspectives, overly bureaucratic risk management and regulations that do not account for cultural knowledge and practice, and a widespread reliance on narrow measurements of success (e.g. scientific biodiversity metrics) over other measures valued by Aboriginal peoples.
- III. As many presentations noted, some keys to successful and supportive collaborations include a shared emphasis on Aboriginal leadership, joint decision-making and a willingness amongst non-indigenous partners to give up some of their control and authority.



BACKGROUND

Purpose of the research report

This report was written as part of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre's 'Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities' research project (BNHCRC's HCIC). The HCIC research project focuses on collaborations between Aboriginal groups and natural hazards management agencies across southern Australia (see further Appendix 3). The BNHCRC is funded through a combination of Commonwealth research monies, as well as financial and in-kind contributions from government organisations, research institutions and non-government organisations.

We were invited to attend the Forum and write this report by the Murumbung Rangers, with whom we have one of our case study relationships; nevertheless, this is an independent research report written with respect to the HCIC project's research priorities. The Forum facilitators, Coolamon Advisors, prepared an official Forum Report which summarises key findings and provides recommendations emerging from the speakers and participants over the first two days of the forum (Coolamon Advisors 2018). This research report includes excerpts from the Forum Report in textboxes. These reports are valuable for the work of key actors involved in cultural burning, whether they attended the forum or not.

Background to the Forum

The Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum was organised in partnership between Murumbung Yurung Murra network, ACT Natural Resource Management, and ACT Parks and Conservation Services. The Murumbung Yurung Murra network (Ngunnawal for 'Good Strong Pathways') are Aboriginal staff working mainly in heritage, land and natural resource management in the ACT government. Murumbung Rangers are Aboriginal staff in the Parks and Conservation Service. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service protects and conserves the natural resources of the ACT through managing parks and reserves. ACT NRM (Australian Capital Territory Natural Resource Management) is one of 56 regional NRM bodies across Australia that delivers projects funded through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program. ACT NRM's Aboriginal NRM Facilitator, lead organiser of the Forum, is a member of the Murumbung Yurung Murra network.

The forum had several objectives (Coolamon 2018), to:

- Honour experiences and exchange knowledge about cultural burning across southeast Australia;
- Hear from First Nations people, fire agencies and researchers speaking about their work in fire, ecology, land management and caring for Country;



- Reflect on the future of Aboriginal burning in southeast Australia – how are we evolving with community and Country?; and,
- Develop and support First Nations fire networks.

The forum was held over three days (10-12 May 2018), with about 150 delegates attending. The first two-days comprised of the formal program of presentations and discussion (see Appendix 1). A cultural burning field trip was planned for the third day at the Gubur Dhaura ochre site. The forum also included stall holders showcasing their community, organisation or business, and a dinner (see Appendix 1). Funding for the forum was provided by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and the ACT Government.

The forum was particularly significant because it was a landmark gathering of Aboriginal fire practitioners, researchers and government agencies involved in fire management, that focuses explicitly on cultural burning across southeast Australia. The forum builds on the mobilisation of cultural burning activity elsewhere in Australia. This includes, for example, the Firesticks Initiative in New South Wales, which has taken up a coordination and leadership role through convening state-based meetings (e.g. UTS Sydney symposium in 2010 and Walgett Cultural Burning Forum in 2013) and other activities. The Firesticks Initiative is part of the diverse Aboriginal governance networks that are prioritising cultural burning knowledge and practice.



KEY THEMES FROM THE FORUM

In this section we present on what we saw as the key themes that emerged and were debated across the forum. These key themes are: **creating knowledge, sharing knowledge, everyone together, and making it genuine**. We illustrate these themes with examples from the presentations and discussions. This section provides neither a comprehensive documentation of the forum, nor an exhaustive discussion of the themes, but a brief overview of where we identified significant interest and debate converging. The themes reflect a central HCIC research priority of ours, to investigate how knowledge practices inform the opportunities and challenges of engagements between the natural hazards sector and Aboriginal people.

1) CREATING KNOWLEDGE

The need to create and share knowledge of cultural burning was a key theme throughout the forum.

Participants recognised the damaging impact of settler-colonial institutions and authorities in terms of the inter-generational transmission of knowledge and practice between Aboriginal people in southeast Australia, and the necessity of reconnecting with knowledge about Country.

There were repeated references to knowledge generation as occurring through and with Country, and as part of belonging with country.

- More than just place-based experiential learning, this is a recognition of Country as teacher and participant, across relationships held through time and into the future. It is also a positioning of human knowledge, belonging and existence as *within* Country, not external to it. As Ngambri elder Matilda House said, "I am not a TO [Traditional Owner]. The land owns me. And it has taught me many things through my life... No matter where you go on the lands of your ancestors, you will always see your footprints, and we must cherish that for the generations and the times before."



Photo: Aunty Matilda House welcomes delegates to the forum (Otis Williams)

- This co-located mutually supportive relationship provides for a healing and strength-based approach, that is also responsive to loss. The Ngunnawal people, for example, their country is now Australia's growing capital, and this has had immense consequences. As Ngunnawal elder Wally Bell said, "We've lost so many sites through residential development." Aileen Blackburn/Mongta (Aboriginal Women at Yam's Project) emphasised that bringing people and country together is needed, "to get back that laughter and that soul". She also emphasised the mutual beneficial relationships held between fire, water, country and people; especially the yam which, "transcends the landscape like a 'warm blanket'."
- Victor Steffensen (Mulong) presented on how knowledge, Country, and cultural burning co-emerge through the practice. As he said, "It's a formula where the country continues to teach us. ... Not just a knowledge system, but a formula of connecting with a system, and becoming more and more part of the landscape."



Photo: Victor Steffensen presenting on 'Sharing the Fire the Right Way' (Otis Williams)

Many presentations were also concerned with the role of academic research in either supporting or hindering cultural burning. There were several key concerns from presenters, namely:

- Relationships between Aboriginal peoples and non-indigenous researchers have historically been extractive and, sometimes, exploitative. In some cases, these practices of appropriation continue today. This involves researchers recording information in ways that result in communities losing control of knowledge. As a result, many participants in the forum held a justifiable scepticism of research in general.
- Many presentations identified a sense of expectations amongst various stakeholders, and particularly bushfire agencies, that cultural burning will need to be 'validated' or 'confirmed' through scientific research as part of becoming valued by government policy. While relationships with ecologists and fire scientists are often positive, some noted, practices of scientific 'validation' can be viewed as burdensome and condescending by Aboriginal peoples. For example, Sally Moylan (ACT Parks and Conservation Service) noted in relation to ongoing efforts to validate

cultural burning activities, “We all know this, it’s just a matter of putting it to paper”.

- Research is perceived as potentially damaging if it contradicts or misinterprets Aboriginal knowledge of burning and therefore Aboriginal peoples’ ability to speak about land management and their responsibilities to Country.



Photo: Adam Shipp, Yurbay Consultancies, with local bush tucker (Otis Williams)

These concerns suggest that academic research in the context of cultural burning and bushfire management is often equated with the biophysical sciences and as conducted by non-indigenous researchers. However, the presentations also demonstrated a much more diverse academic research agenda, including examples of Aboriginal people controlling and accessing academic research processes to positively inform land management and a range of collaborations.

- Aboriginal people are increasingly involved in the production of research that has the potential to explore questions that can support cultural burning projects. For example, Ray Lovett (Australian National University) presented on the relationship between culture and well-being in land

management programs, research that has the potential to provide further evidence to support ranger programs.

- While the need for scientific 'validation' was seen as a burdensome replication of what Aboriginal people already know, some participants were hopeful that biophysical research could help produce useful ecological knowledge either directly for community use or as a means to draw the support of government agencies towards cultural burning.
- To date, much of the academic research surrounding cultural burning is focused on exploring the social dimensions of Aboriginal land management rather than directly examining issues of ecological resilience or mitigating wildfire hazard outcomes. A better understanding of why collaborations are (or are not) successful in southern Australia may help support future cultural burning projects.
- There was a desire by some participants to access research related to historical and colonial accounts of burning by Aboriginal peoples that could help support localised revitalization projects.
- As such, participants highlighted the need for clearer dialogue between Traditional Owners/Traditional Custodians and other institutions regarding what research is important for their priorities and how it should be produced.



Photo: Ngunnawal elder Wally Bell (left) during a break (Otis Williams)



2) SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Discussions about the creation of knowledge were also linked to issues surrounding the sharing of knowledge.

- Strong interpersonal networks and institutional relationships between Aboriginal peoples have been vital to the reintroduction of cultural burning throughout southern Australia. This has been particularly true with regards to the sharing of knowledge about bushfire from northern to southern Australia, notably through participation in the National Indigenous Fire Workshops in Cape York and the Firesticks Initiative. As Victor Steffensen noted, fire knowledge is distributed across different community members and that “no one fella was a big know-it-all”.
- The focused and lively energy of the forum demonstrated the importance of bringing together Aboriginal peoples from different parts of southeast Australia to discuss the complexities of revitalising cultural burning. In particular, discussions around the case study presentations facilitated the sharing of different experiences of Aboriginal groups in realising cultural burning in southeast Australia. For example, how to access land for burning, collaborating with private and public land holders, and building on success.

However, while sharing knowledge was a priority, several participants raised the need to develop appropriate cultural protocols surrounding the sharing of knowledge within Aboriginal communities, across different Aboriginal peoples in Australia and with the broader Australian public.

- Dave Johnston (Australian Indigenous Archaeologists Association) presented on the importance of developing “our own protocols” to address “cultural safety issues” – for example, no go areas, and identifying who the knowledge holders are. Aileen Blackburn wanted to know, “how to do cultural burns without losing the integrity of our protocols, our intellectual property.”



Photo: Dave Johnson presenting on 'The Importance of Cultural Protocols' (Otis Williams)

- Thus, while cultural burning is seen to be a practice that is relevant to all members of Aboriginal communities, knowledge of burning is not necessarily seen as something that can or should be shared freely without the responsibilities to country that come with doing it.
- It is not necessarily appropriate for detailed knowledge about cultural burning to be made freely available to the broader Australian public. This can be a source of tension between Aboriginal and non-indigenous peoples and may lead to conflict surrounding ostensibly well-meaning projects. For example, efforts to establish national repositories of knowledge can be viewed by government agencies as a supportive step in facilitating cultural burning, but may actually be viewed by Aboriginal peoples as extensions of condescending governance approaches or extractive research agendas.

3) EVERYONE TOGETHER

In the broader context of Australian society, cultural burning was often seen as a source of tension between Aboriginal land managers and a range of government agencies concerned with fire management. However,



presentations from the forum also consistently highlighted the potential of bushfire management in bringing different groups of people together.

- Although fear of bushfire is often seen as a point of difference between Aboriginal and non-indigenous standpoints in Australia, concern over the optimal *management* of bushfire was identified by a range of actors as a uniting concern.
- In many of the case studies, successful supportive relationships were occurring where cultural burning was described as an activity that not only serves Aboriginal peoples' social and cultural interests, but can be a practical tool for government agencies. For example, in the presentation by Greg Packer and Raymond Woods (Riverina Local Land Services), Aboriginal participation in fire management on travelling stock routes in New South Wales was not only seen to be socially empowering but also an important means to conserve biodiversity and reduce fuel loads in remote and underserved areas.
- Further, overlapping goals were identified as having enormous potential more broadly for engagement and positive relationship-building between Aboriginal and non-indigenous peoples. Oliver Costello (Firesticks Initiative) noted, for example, that "Fire gives us an opportunity for reconciliation". Similarly, Neil Cooper (ACT Parks and Conservation Service) suggested that cultural burning offers the "power to change together".



Photo: Neil Cooper presenting on 'Fire Management in the ACT' (Otis Williams)



It is not just overlapping interests, but the activity of cultural burning itself that provides beneficial opportunities for engagement, collaboration and partnership.

- Getting on and doing cultural burns was seen as a key opportunity to develop relationships over time. As Heather Tomlinson (ACT Government), contributed from the floor, “We share knowledge and learn mainly through doing.” Collaborators Denis Rose (Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation) and Andy Governstone (independent ecologist) talked about “burning as learning”. In their engagements with their state government, Andy reported that, “It took a while for them to understand where we were coming from, and for us to understand where they were coming from.”

Discussions of knowledge sharing surrounding cultural burning also identified issues of inclusion and exclusion within Aboriginal communities.

- There was consistent acknowledgement of the authority of traditional owners vis a vis Aboriginal people more generally. As Dean Freeman (ACT Parks and Conservation Service) said, “We love our work and what we do, but we are mindful that we are not the Traditional Owners.”
- The intergenerational dimensions of cultural burning were a key consideration throughout different segments of the forum. During the participatory workshop, passing on knowledge to the next generation of Aboriginal peoples was consistently identified as central to the future of cultural burning. The case study presentation by Aileen Blackburn/Mongta (Aboriginal Women at Yams project) demonstrated the early age at which young people were previously introduced to their responsibilities for Country and the role of bushfire in managing landscapes.
- Women are underrepresented in both the bushfire management sector and the cultural burning activities of Aboriginal peoples in southeast Australia. The important historical and contemporary role of women, and “women’s Country”, was repeatedly raised by Ngambri elder Matilda House throughout the forum. The PhD research by Vanessa Cavanagh (University of Wollongong) has significant potential to inform this issue, as it is focused on better understanding the barriers to greater inclusion of Aboriginal women in cultural burning. At the same time, other presentations emphasised the significant interest of women in caring for Country and their cultural responsibilities in relation to bushfire. Aileen Blackburn/Mongta, for example, noted that she learned about burning from both her father and mother.



Photo: Vanessa Cavanah presenting on 'Scoping for PhD Research' (Otis Williams)



Textbox 1: Youth Yarning Circle

On the final afternoon a yarning circle was held with our rising generation of Aboriginal Youth, during which the following points were discussed:

- The importance of mentors, role models and of the support of family, friends and local community
- Passing on cultural knowledge to children is essential and gives you a sense of connection to Country. This learning should be happening in primary school, as waiting till high school may be too late
- Making the most of the opportunity to learn from you Elders, don't be burdened by shame, do it
- Giving young people the chance to speak helps us to be leaders
- The greatest risk is not protecting the environment, and when we have a wildfire through Country we lose something of our cultural heritage, cultural burning can limit this devastation
- Government legislation and cultural heritage act changes allow for cultural sites to be erased
- While we speak about fire with affection, the white experience of fire is one of destruction and trauma
- Bringing back pride in environment helps community wellbeing, but it is complex

This text is from the Southeast Aboriginal Fire Forum Report, by Coolamon Advisors, 2018.



Photo: Ngalan Gilbert speaking in the Youth Yarning Circle (Otis Williams)

4) MAKING IT GENUINE

While there were positive examples of supportive collaborations, there was also a strong recognition by a range of participants that Aboriginal peoples' engagement in bushfire management needs to move beyond tokenism. As Ngalan Gilbert (ACT Parks and Conservation Service) noted in the youth yarning circle, "Get Aboriginal staff and make it genuine". Discussions throughout the forum identified different aspects of non-tokenistic collaboration.

- Moving beyond tokenism requires the creation of knowledge. Bruce Pascoe suggested that he wrote the book *Dark Emu* (Magabala Books, 2014) because he felt lip service was being paid to Aboriginal culture in land management activities. He spoke about a group of academics from The Australian National University, who sought to warn him off his research, telling him "that Aboriginal people were just hunters and gatherers".
- Cultural burning should not be limited to the protection of cultural heritage, but incorporate wider social and ecological landscape values.



As Neil Cooper emphasized, cultural burning needs to be more than just “burning around rock art”.

- Control needs to be meaningfully invested in Aboriginal peoples. Dean Freeman defined cultural burning as instances “when Aboriginal people are undertaking each step of the burn”.



Photo: Krystal Hurst interviewing Bruce Pasco for a film about the Forum (Otis Williams)

In addition to tokenism, presenters also identified several other barriers to supportive and collaborative relationships with the government agencies engaged in bushfire management and the administration of public lands.

- Presenters identified the presence of tensions between scientific measurements of success and community values. Aileen Blackburn/Mongta noted that the reliance on quantitative metrics in land management is often alienating for Aboriginal peoples and instead emphasised emotional and other meaningful connections. As she summarized, “it is great to have the data ... [but] unless you can get back some feeling and some belonging, it doesn't work”. She also said, “I don't use words like ‘harvest’, ‘yield’, and ‘the value of the land’. All that is foreshadowed by the wellbeing of the land.”
- Tension was also evident in how non-Indigenous presentations were received by the majority Aboriginal audience, particularly around the issue of whose knowledge and thus whose authority matters. Brian Egloff



(University of Canberra) gave a presentation about the flawed observations of early European colonialists with respect to understanding Aboriginal burning practices, and the importance of reading country. A heated discussion followed on the privileging of colonial voices and written texts over Aboriginal people and their oral histories.

- Relationships between government agencies and Aboriginal staff are often perceived to be "one way". Aboriginal people are required to gain a range of certifications from fire agencies before undertaking cultural burning, but their knowledge is not valued in turn. As Aileen Blackburn/Mongta said, "I had to get my fire fighter ticket so I could do cultural burns... but, yes, we've got regulations too."

As many presentations noted, keys to successful and supportive collaborations are a shared emphasis on shared emphasis on Aboriginal leadership, and a willingness amongst non-indigenous partners to give up some of their control and authority.

- Neil Cooper identified the importance of examining non-Indigenous culture and attitudes about fire management and cultural burning. He said, "We think we have all the knowledge and the power, but that ... is at our own peril."
- Simon Curry (NSW Rural Fire Service), said that they "need to embed cultural burning as a thread through all our prescribed burning." Elaborating what is meant by this, and ensuring that such an engagement is not co-option but meaningful for Aboriginal peoples, is the complex work that forums such as this one help to navigate.



Photo: Auntie Violet Sheridan with dinner speaker Nicola Barker (Otis Williams)

Textbox 2: Recommendations from Coolamon Advisors

It was clear that the first three objectives of the forum were met. The connections required to commence the process of establishing First Nations Network were established. Given this and the other themes emerging from the forum, it is recommended that:

- Further work be completed on how to support the communication channels set up as a result of the forum, e.g. establishing regular meetings, or phone hook-ups where experience and lessons learnt can be shared
- Establish a register of contacts and projects
- Explore ways of increasing community involvement and engagement such as through social media
- Seek funding to establish the forum as an annual event where knowledge can be shared, and achievements celebrated

This text is from the Southeast Aboriginal Fire Forum Report, by Coolamon Advisors, 2018.



Photo: The Murumbung Rangers share a photo with some of the speakers at the end of day two (Otis Williams)

CULTURAL BURN AT GUBUR DHAURA

Given the importance placed on learning and sharing through being and doing, a cultural burn was planned for the third day of the forum. This would be the first time such a large group of people had been invited to a fire management activity in the Australian Capital Territory. A formal fire plan was developed, and a 'pre-burn' was included as a risk mitigation measure. This pre-burn conducted by the Parks and Conservation Service fire unit, created burnt ground to ensure a safe area for forum participants.

Gubur Dhaura is an ochre mining site, an area of European settler heritage, and a small park on top of a hill in the midst of suburban Canberra. Ngunnawal Elder Wally Bell noted that with the protection of this site, "we got lucky." The dual heritage helped ensure the area was protected from urban development. It also added an extra layer of administration for the cultural burn.



Photo: Dean Freeman, Euroka Gilbert and others at Gubur Dhaura (Jessica Weir)

Unfortunately, the rainy weather conditions did not support the cultural burn going ahead that day. Instead, the Murumbung rangers organised a visit to the site to learn about the planned burn from Dean Freeman, and hear about the heritage values from Wiradjuri man Euroka Gilbert. The Murumbung rangers also hosted a visit to the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia at the National Museum of Australia, and the Stromlo Depot of ACT Parks and Conservation Service.



CONCLUSION

The Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum was a landmark event, bringing together Aboriginal and non-indigenous peoples personally invested in expanding the use of cultural burning and supporting the authority of Aboriginal peoples in the management of bushfire in southeast Australia and across the Australian continent more generally. This report has sought to identify and analyse several key themes from the forum, foremost to support the efforts of Aboriginal practitioners and researchers to realise Aboriginal peoples' priorities for Country. Importantly, the opportunities and risks of the cultural burning activity itself clearly produces a more substantive commitment from non-Indigenous parties to understand and navigate the many governance contexts, priorities and concerns that Aboriginal people bring to this work. As this report documents, presentations and discussions at the forum revealed certain challenges and opportunities in these matters, many of which have to do with the establishment of beneficial collaborative relationships between Aboriginal peoples and between Aboriginal peoples and non-indigenous others.



APPENDIX 1: FORUM AGENDA

Day 1 - Thursday 10 May 2018

8.00am – 9.00am	Registration
9.00 am – 9.15 am	MC Introductions – Coolamon Advisors
9.15am – 9.30am	Welcome to Country
9.30am – 9.40am	Official Opening – ACT Government
9.40am – 10.00am	Fire Management in the ACT – Neil Cooper
10.00am – 10.30am	Dark Emu – Bruce Pascoe
10.30am – 11.00am	Morning Tea
THEME: CARING FOR COUNTRY	
11.00am – 11.25am	Acceptances and Challenges - Dean Freeman
	<i>5 min Questions</i>
11.25am – 11.45am	Djigan and Bubil (Fire and Water) – Aileen Blackburn/Mongta
	<i>5 min Questions</i>
11.45am – 12.15pm	Research and Aboriginal Fire Management – Bhiemie Williamson, Jessica Weir and Timothy Neale
	<i>5 min Questions</i>
12.15pm – 1.00pm	Lunch
1.05pm	SHORT FILM: 2016 National Indigenous Fire Workshop at Wujal Wujal
THEME: RETHINKING BURNING PRACTISES	
1.20pm – 1.50pm	The Local Land Service Cultural Burning: Finding the Balance Project – Greg Packer & Raymond Woods
	<i>5 min Questions</i>
1.50pm – 2.20pm	Cultural Burning and Natural Forces in South-western and South-eastern Temperate Forests - Brian Egloff
	<i>5 min Questions</i>
2.20pm – 2.50pm	A Centre of Excellence for Prescribed Burning – Deb Sparkes
	<i>5 min Questions</i>
2.50pm – 3.20pm	Afternoon Tea
3.20pm – 3.45pm	Sharing the Fire the Right Way – Victor Steffensen
PANEL DISCUSSION: COMING TOGETHER, WORKING TOGETHER	
3.45pm – 4.30pm	• Oliver Costello • Vanessa Cavanagh • Victor Steffensen • Aileen Blackburn/Mongta
4.45pm	MCs Wrap Up – Coolamon Advisors
	End



Day 1 - Thursday 10 May 2018

7.00pm	Dinner
7.00pm -10.00pm	Welcome to Country: Auntie Violet Sheridan Song/dance: Billy Tompkins Entertainment: Johnny B Bad and Good Seeds MC: Steven Oliver Special Guest Speakers: Elsie Seriat (Indigenous Marathon Foundation) Michelle Deshong (Australian Indigenous Governance)

Day 2 - Friday 11 May 2018

9.00am	Welcome THEME: HEALTHY COUNTRY, HEALTHY PEOPLE
9.15am – 9.45am	Importance of Cultural Protocols - Dave Johnston, Uncle Carl Brown, Auntie Matilda House and Uncle Wally Bell 5 min Questions
9.45am – 10.15am	Mayi Kuwayu National Research Project – Ray Lovett & Roxanne Jones 5 min Questions
10.15am – 10.45am	Morning Tea
	THEME: COMMUNITY DEVELOPED, COMMUNITY DRIVEN
10.45am – 11.10am	Scoping for PhD research - Vanessa Cavanagh
11.10am – 11.35am	Firesticks Initiative/Alliance – Oliver Costello
11.35am – 12.00pm	Koori Country Firesticks: Our Fire Story – Den Barber
12.00pm – 12.25pm	Burning the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape – Denis Rose
12.25pm – 12.45pm	Q&A
12.45pm – 1.30pm	Lunch
	THEME: HOW WE CAN SUPPORT COMMUNITY FIRE INITIATIVES
1.30pm – 2.30pm	Firesticks Community of Practice - Oliver Costello & Victor Steffensen
2.30pm – 3.00pm	Afternoon Tea
	YOUTH PANEL DISCUSSION: SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION
3.00pm – 3.40pm	- Justine Brown - Aaron Chatfield - Ngalan Gilbert - Sally Moylan
3.40pm – 4.00pm	CLOSING THOUGHTS – Robert Williams
4.00pm	Wrap Up – Coolamon Advisors
	End



APPENDIX 2: TERMINOLOGY

Below are some terms used in this report that some readers might be unfamiliar with, as well as terms that require clarification with how they are used in this report because they have contested or multiple interpretations. With respect to capitalisation, for this report we have followed the style used in the forum materials.

Country

A term many Aboriginal people use to generally describe their homelands, although it has a much broader meaning than just territory. Many Aboriginal people have affiliations to multiple countries through their kinship relations, and countries have multiple peoples. The meaning of country is multi-layered, place-based, and always being re-interpreted in the present. More than a simplistic match with people and language, Country might be known as a family area, a clan group, or a language area, it might be similar to a watershed, marked by plant species, major roads and/or towns; but is rarely clearly demarcated. In recent decades, the Federal government and other non-Indigenous parties have adopted the term 'Country', for example, to locate their environmental and natural resource management programs.

First Nations

This term acknowledges a specific political-legal group of people, as distinct to but also part of a larger pan-Aboriginal identity. First Nations have territorial and self-determination rights, whether formally recognised by the Australia government or not. The term connects with the experiences of First Nations people in North America. See also Traditional Owners, Traditional Custodians and Peoples.

Knowledge

Familiarity, awareness or understanding of something. In all societies, knowledge is made and re-made in the present, and is a composite of different sources.



Peoples	To signify status as a political-legal entity, for example as expressed through governance norms, territories and internal memberships. See also First Nations, Traditional Owners, and Traditional Custodians.
Research	A form of knowledge that is generated through systematic methods, such as observation and experimentation. Academic research is just one form of research, and biophysical research and social science research are categories within that.
Traditions	All societies have traditions, which are constituted in the present, with their defining feature being an expressed continuity with the past.
Traditional Custodians	A group of Aboriginal people who have responsibilities for a certain area of land, their Country. The term is often explicitly used as an alternative to the widely used 'Traditional Owners', which is critiqued for representing relationships with Country as ones of ownership. See also Traditional Owners, First Nations, and peoples.
Traditional owners	A particular group of Aboriginal people who have responsibilities for a certain area of land, their Country. The term was popularised by the <i>Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976</i> (Northern Territory), and is now commonly used throughout Australia, sometimes as the shorthand 'TO'.
Tokenism	To use superficial gestures in order to avoid or distract from meaningful material engagement.



APPENDIX 3: HCIC PROJECT TEAM

Commencing in July of 2017, the 'Hazard, Culture and Indigenous Communities' (HCIC) project is funded by the Bushfires and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre. The project is focused on existing and emerging engagements between the natural hazards sector and diverse Aboriginal peoples across southern Australia. Through collaborative research with Aboriginal peoples and sector practitioners, the HCIC project aims to understand how intercultural engagement can be better supported in practice and policy.

More information is available at:

<https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/hazard-resilience/3397>

PROJECT LEADERS

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Dr Jessica K. Weir has over 20 years' experience conducting research with Indigenous peoples on socio-ecological justice issues.

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Dr Timothy Neale has wide-ranging experience working with the natural hazards sector and Indigenous peoples on projects examining knowledge practices.

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Dr Will Smith has several years' experience working with Indigenous peoples on issues surrounding environment management internationally.

ADDITIONAL PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

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Professor Tara McGee (University of Alberta, Canada)
Adjunct Professor Jeremy Russell-Smith (Charles Darwin University)

END USERS

Dr Mark Eccleston (Aboriginal Victoria)
Dr Adam Leavesley (Australian Capital Territory Parks and Conservation Service)



Dean Freeman (Australian Capital Territory Parks and Conservation Service)
Owen Gooding (Country Fire Authority, Victoria)
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