



HAZARDS, CULTURE AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Annual Project Report 2017-2018

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Deakin University, Western Sydney University & Bushfire and Natural
Hazards CRC



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
END-USER STATEMENT	4
INTRODUCTION	5
PROJECT BACKGROUND	6
KEY MILESTONES	8
PUBLICATIONS LIST	13
TEAM MEMBERS	15



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, there has been an increasing amount of public attention focused on the contributions that Aboriginal people, and their knowledge and practices, make to resilience and sustainability agendas in Australia. Given the emerging commitment of natural hazards agencies in southern Australia to engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal people, the increasing level of legal recognition accorded to Aboriginal peoples' land rights, and Aboriginal peoples' own investment and interest in engaging in forms of natural hazard management, it is important that researchers support to this work, to understand and document how beneficial and respectful collaborations can be fostered.

The first year of the Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities (HCIC) project has focused around completing publications, initial fieldwork and the development of research priorities, and maintaining strong end user engagement. Key activities from this first year include:

- The completion of two reports: a comprehensive literature review of collaborations and engagements between indigenous peoples and government natural hazards agencies; and, a report on the landmark Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum held in Canberra.
- Presentations and poster displays by project members given for a range of industry and academic audiences.
- Scoping and selection of the two project case studies and the participants for the practitioner survey.
- Ongoing end-user engagement through regular meetings, newsletter circulation and the solicitation of feedback on key project outputs.
- The appointment of Dr Will Smith as the principal investigator for the project.



END-USER STATEMENT

John Schauble, *Emergency Management Victoria, VIC*

Despite what some may wish to think, emergency management does not occur within a socio-cultural vacuum. However, many of the structures and processes developed over the years to support the ways in which we prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies are rooted in a framework and a belief system that no longer applies.

The ways in which emergency managers engage with (or fail to engage with) Aboriginal peoples is a reflection of this.

Natural hazards, almost by definition, occur on country. The need for non-Aboriginal Australians to develop a meaningful and authentic understanding of the significance of country and how Aboriginal peoples perceive or regard hazards is so obvious it almost goes without saying. Those understandings vary widely around Australia, especially along the north-south divide.

This project is about examining and hopefully fostering those understandings through significant re-engagement and through closer understanding, in particular, of how fire has been and is still used by Aboriginal peoples on country in southern Australia.

To that end, it will have important implications for end users with policy and land management responsibilities.



INTRODUCTION

This Annual Report reports on year 1 (July 2017-June 2018) of the Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities (HCIC) project. The project began on 1 July 2017. The project is jointly led by Western Sydney University and Deakin University.



PROJECT BACKGROUND

Real and potential engagements between Aboriginal peoples, land management and natural hazard government agencies take place within a complex socio-cultural context. Considerations about whose values matter, and whose political-legal rights and entities are recognised and resourced, underscore the opportunities and challenges of these engagements.

Such engagements are increasingly being initiated and formalised in response to changing public policy and societal values. These values recognise the unique and ongoing status of Aboriginal peoples as first peoples, their relationships with Country, and their historical and contemporary exclusion from natural hazard and land management agencies. Governments at all levels are now working to match their social and environmental policies and programs in order to be more responsive to Aboriginal peoples' priorities.

As part of this, over the past decade, there has been an increasing amount of public attention focused on the contributions that Aboriginal people, and their knowledge and practices, make to the broader issues of resilience and sustainability. One key area of interest has been Aboriginal peoples' use and management of bushfire in contemporary Australia, and how that relates to their precolonial practices. In the debates and engagements around this issue, governments and Aboriginal people are articulating and learning about contested assumptions about knowledge and authority.

A considerable body of research has emerged parallel to these engagements, but much of it has focused on environmental and natural resource management, rather than natural hazard risk. Further, there is a bias amongst academics towards researching the northern Australia context, where Aboriginal people are by far the major land holders. Less research is conducted in southern Australia, despite this being where the majority of Aboriginal-identifying people live, and where natural hazard risk and research is generally concentrated.

Given the emerging commitment of natural hazards agencies in southern Australia to engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal people, the increasing level of legal recognition accorded to Aboriginal peoples' land rights, and Aboriginal peoples' own investment and interest in engaging in forms of natural hazard management, it is important that researchers support to this work, to understand and document how beneficial and respectful collaborations can be fostered. This is intercultural work. In these engagements, all values are important in understanding and navigating the context, and what is possible.

Thus, within the context of reducing natural hazard risk and increasing resilience in southern Australia, this research project has three objectives:

1. To investigate the hazard priorities of diverse Aboriginal peoples in southern Australia, and the sector's engagement with these peoples.



2. To conduct collaborative research with Aboriginal peoples and sector practitioners to explore how better engagement can be supported, with a focus on the interaction of scientific, Aboriginal and other knowledge sources.
3. To analyse and report on what this dynamic intercultural context can offer practice and policy, including with respect to the merging of risk and resilience agendas.

The project is supported by a qualitative research methodology focused on two case study sites, and a practitioner survey across southern Australia. The practitioner survey is intended to generate new insight into sector perceptions and assumptions regarding these challenges and opportunities. The case studies are designed to elicit insights into best practice, as well as established and emerging challenges, so as to uncover how engagement and collaboration are experienced and regulated.

Throughout, end user priorities centre and refine these research activities. The research also provides the grounds for the development of specific tools and products to assist end users. In particular, we are developing comprehensive and targeted socio-institutional diagrammatic, mapping and explanatory tools. Here, we use the term 'end user' to include both the natural hazard sector and Aboriginal people.



KEY MILESTONES

STAFFING

Dr Will Smith was appointed as Principal Investigator, starting at Deakin University in February 2018. His two main research activities will be the practitioner interviews and the socio-institutional mapping.

CASE STUDY PROGRESS

1. Dja Dja Wurrung / Murray Goldfields Case Study

Dr Timothy Neale has completed a first round of interviews and fieldwork with practitioners involved in collaborative bushfire management in the Murray Goldfields region. A journal article based on this initial dataset was drafted in collaboration with several case study partners and has been submitted to the journal *Cultural Geographies* for peer review and potential publication.

Dr Neale plans to continue to conduct interviews and fieldwork in the region for the remainder of the project in order to capture more comprehensive data over time and create further benefit to practitioners engaged in the case study.

2. Ngunnawal people and Murumbung rangers / ACT and NSW case study

Dr Jessica Weir is currently undertaking fieldwork and interviews with people involved in cultural burning on public lands in the ACT, and the proposed introduction of cultural burning immediately across the border on NSW Aboriginal lands. This offers comparative opportunities about the two regulatory regimes, as well as documenting the experiences of the Ngunnawal people in working with the two jurisdictions. A book chapter is currently in preparation.

Dr Smith, Dr Weir, and Dr Neale have also been involved in supporting the work of the ACT Murumbung rangers, by documenting the 2018 Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum.

PRACTITIONER SURVEY

Dr Smith has identified case study sites for the practitioner survey spanning Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, the ACT and Tasmania. Initial conversations with practitioners in both fire and flood management throughout these areas have yielded insights into challenges and opportunities for collaboration between Aboriginal people and the natural hazard sector. Recorded Interviews with practitioners are now underway.

SOCIO-INSTITUTIONAL MAPPING

The socio-institutional mapping will create a series of accessible, integrated information formats for end users. This includes State of Play reporting, the compilation of protocols, and, explanations of key concepts and terminology.

As part of the State of Play reporting, Dr Neale and Dr Smith have started gathering data on Aboriginal employment within the natural hazards sector.

PRESENTATIONS AND POSTERS

During the first year, project members have been active raising awareness of the project's aims and disseminating initial findings through both presentations and posters. This has taken place in both academic and industry venues across Australia, including:

Posters

- Smith, W, Neale, T, Weir, J.K., Leavesley, A., Carter, R, Blair, S, Cook, B, Costello, O, Curry, S, Eccleston, M, Foley, R, Freeman, D, Gooding, O, McGee, T.K, Nugent, D, Russell-Smith, J, Schauble, J, White, K, 2018, 'Intercultural collaboration on Aboriginal country', submitted to the BNHCRC for inclusion in the 2018 AFAC conference in Perth in 2018.
- Weir, J.K, Neale, T, Carter, R, Cook, B, Costello, O, Curry, S, Dore, J, Freeman, D, Gooding, O, Gunning, S, Leavesley, A, Mackintosh, L, McGee, T, Nugent, D, Russell-Smith, J, Schauble, J, and K White, 2017, 'Hazards, Culture, and Aboriginal peoples in Southern Australia', Poster, BNHCRC Showcase 2017 – Research Driving Change, Adelaide, 4-5 July, **and**, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, Sydney, NSW.
- Freeman, D and JK Weir, (2017) 'Cultural burning – join us for a fireside chat in chilly Canberra', Poster, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, 5-8 September, Sydney, NSW.

Presentations

- Neale, T (2018), 'Walking Together: Experiments in Collaborative Bushfire Management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country', Invited Seminar, Northern Institute, 31 May, CDU, Darwin, NT.
- Williamson, B, Neale, T and Weir, J (2018), 'Research and Aboriginal Fire Management', Presentation, Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum, 10-12 May, Canberra, ACT.



- Neale, T and Weir, J (2018), 'Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities', Presentation, BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum, 12-13 April, Sydney, NSW.
- Weir, J and Neale, T (2017), 'Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities', Presentation, BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum, 25-26 October, Melbourne.
- Neale, T (2017), 'Finding collaboration with hazards practitioners', The Participatory Environmental Humanities, workshop, UNSW, Queen's University and Arizona State University, Sydney, 18-19 July.
- Freeman, D (presenter) with Williamson, B and J Weir (panel), (2017) 'Summary Aboriginal Cultural Burns in the ACT 2015/2016', 'Bushfire Management - Balancing the risks', ACT Conservation Council symposium, Canberra, 21-22 July.
- Neale, T (2017), 'Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities', Seminar, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Alberta, 24 August.
- Freeman, D, Taylor-Grant, J, Leavesley, A, Weir, JK, Neale, T, Babington, K and N Cooper (2017), Bringing Aboriginal Knowledge into Agency Programs in Southern Australia, Presentation, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, 5-8 September, Sydney, NSW.
- Costello, O (2017). Engaging Aboriginal Communities in Cultural Burning on NPWS managed lands in NSW, Presentation, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, 5-8 September, Sydney, NSW.

PUBLICATIONS

The natural hazard sector's engagement with indigenous peoples: a critical review of CANZUS countries

Annick Thomassin, Dr Timothy Neale and Dr Jessica Weir have completed a comprehensive literature review of engagements between indigenous peoples and government natural hazards agencies in Canada, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the United States (or CANZUS countries). The review draws on existing academic and grey literature to explore recent and ongoing collaborations and provides insights to natural hazard management agencies' interactions with indigenous peoples. The review has been reworked into a journal article and has been submitted to *Geographical Research*.

Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum Report

Dr Will Smith, Dr Jessica Weir and Dr Timothy Neale have completed a workshop report identifying the key themes of the Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum held in Canberra in May of 2018. The forum was particularly significant because it represents the first gathering of Aboriginal fire practitioners, researchers and government agencies

involved in fire management that focuses explicitly on cultural burning in southeast Australia. The report provides key insights into the distinct challenges and opportunities that face cultural burning practitioners in southern Australia.

A draft of the report is currently being circulated to stakeholders for comments.

END USER ENGAGEMENT

The project has continued its strong end user engagement throughout its first year in the following areas.

Attendance at industry and community events and regular updates

The project team have maintained ongoing engagement with end users through attendance at key industry events and consistent communication through teleconferences and newsletter circulation. In addition to case study engagement, key examples include;

- During April 2018, Dr Timothy Neale, Dr Jessica Weir and Dr Will Smith attended the CRC Research Advisory Forum in Sydney, with end users Aidan Galpin (DEWNR) and Adam Leavesley (ACT PCS), and lead end user John Schauble (EMV).
- In May 2018, Dr Timothy Neale, Dr Jessica Weir and Dr Will Smith attended the South East Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum in Canberra, with end-users Dr Adam Leavesley (ACT Parks and Conservation Service) and Dean Freeman (ACT Parks and Conservation Service).
- During May and June, Dr Timothy Neale has met with representatives from the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations and other concerned organisations regarding a possible cultural burning research event in October 2018. Planning for this event continues in collaboration with Traditional Owners.
- During April, Dr Jessica Weir met with members of the Ngadjju community, southern WA, when they were in Canberra. She has continued to liaise with them, assisting with their work to: collaborate with local and state governments to improve support for cultural burning; and to network across southern WA on this issue.
- A quarterly newsletter has regularly been circulated to update end users on project progress and seek feedback project outputs and research directions. The newsletter is also published on the BNHCRC website (see Figure 1).
- Regular in-person and teleconference meetings between project team members and end users (see Figure 2).

Activity	Date
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Newsletter 3	21 st May 2018
Newsletter 2	2 nd March 2018
Newsletter 1	13 th November 2017

FIGURE 1 END USER NEWSLETTER

Activity	Date
Teleconference meeting between project team members and end users for end of year review.	28 th June 2018
Teleconference meeting between project team members and end users.	16 th February 2018
Teleconference meeting between project team members and end users.	2 nd August 2017
Teleconference meeting between project team members and end users.	20 th June 2017

FIGURE 2 HCIC PROJECT TEAM AND END USER MEETINGS

End user participation in project outputs and thematic analysis

A core aspect of engagement has been the participation of end users in the development of project outputs, including as co-authors. Key examples include:

- In March 2018, a draft of the literature review was circulated to end users. Detailed end user feedback was incorporated into the final draft of the report and informed the revision of the document into a submitted journal article.
- For both the 2017 and 2018 HCIC AFAC posters, end users were provided with a draft for comment, and supported the content as co-authors.
- In June 2018, an article based upon the Dja Dja Wurrung / Murray Goldfields case study was submitted to an academic journal for peer review and publication. End user Rodney Carter is a co-author on this paper with Dr Timothy Neale and two others.
- In May 2018, a brief on preliminary themes emerging from the project was circulated to end users and the project team for comment and consultation.



PUBLICATIONS LIST

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Neale, T, Carter, R, Nelson, T, and M Bourke, (2018) 'Walking Together: A Decolonial Experiment in Bushfire Management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country', currently under review with *Cultural Geographies*.

Thomassin, A, Neale, T and JK Weir (2018) 'The Natural Hazard Sector's Engagement with Indigenous Peoples: A Critical Review of CANZUS Countries', currently under review with *Geographical Research*.

REPORTS

Thomassin, A, Neale, T and JK Weir (2018) The natural hazard sector's engagement with indigenous peoples: a critical review of CANZUS countries. Melbourne, Vic: Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC.

Smith, W, Weir, JK and T Neale (2018) Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum Report. Melbourne, Vic: Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC.

POSTERS

Weir, J.K, Cook, B, Costello, O, Curry, S, Dore, J, Freeman, D, Gooding, O, Gunning, S, Leavesley, A, Mackintosh, L, McGee, T, Nugent, D, Russell-Smith, J, Schauble, J, and K White, 2017, 'Hazards, Culture, and Aboriginal peoples in Southern Australia', Poster, BNHCRC Showcase 2017 – Research Driving Change, Adelaide, 4-5 July, and, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, Sydney, NSW.

Freeman, D and JK Weir, (2017) 'Cultural burning – join us for a fireside chat in chilly Canberra', Poster, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, 5-8 September, Sydney, NSW.

PRESENTATIONS

Neale, T (2018), 'Walking Together: Experiments in Collaborative Bushfire Management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country', Invited Seminar, Northern Institute, 31 May, CDU, Darwin, NT.

Williamson, B, Neale, T and JK Weir (2018), 'Research and Aboriginal Fire Management', Presentation, Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum, 10-12 May, Canberra, ACT.

Neale, T and JK Weir (2018), 'Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities', Presentation, BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum, 12-13 April, Sydney, NSW.

Weir, JK and T Neale (2017), 'Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities', Presentation, BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum, 25-26



October, Melbourne.

Neale, T (2017), 'Finding collaboration with hazards practitioners', The Participatory Environmental Humanities, workshop, UNSW, Queen's University and Arizona State University, Sydney, 18-19 July.

Freeman, D (presenter) with Williamson, B and JK Weir (panel), (2017) 'Summary Aboriginal Cultural Burns in the ACT 2015/2016', Bushfire Management - Balancing the risks', ACT Conservation Council symposium, Canberra, 21-22 July.

Neale, T (2017), 'Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities', Seminar, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Alberta, 24 August.

Freeman, D, Taylor-Grant, J, Leavesley, A, Weir, JK, Neale, T, Babington, K and N Cooper (2017), Bringing Aboriginal knowledge into agency programs in southern Australia, Presentation, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, 5-8 September, Sydney, NSW.

Costello, O (2017). Engaging Aboriginal Communities in Cultural Burning on NPWS managed lands in NSW, Presentation, AFAC/BNHCRC conference, 5-8 September, Sydney, NSW.



TEAM MEMBERS

PROJECT LEADERS

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ADDITIONAL PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

Dr Brian Cook (University of Melbourne)
Oliver Costello (Firesticks Initiative)
Associate 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)
Aidan Galpin (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, South Australia)
Mike Wouters (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, South Australia)
Lyndal Mackintosh (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria)
Dr Simone Blair (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria)
Rodney Carter (Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation)
John Schauble (Emergency Management Victoria)
Simon Curry (New South Wales Rural Fire Service)
David Nugent (Parks Victoria)
Stuart Gunning (Office of Emergency Management, New South Wales)
Kate White (State Emergency Service, Victoria)