

University of Wollongong - Research Online

Thesis Collection

Title: Aboriginal Women Know: Cultural burning and Aboriginal women in New South Wales, Australia

Author: Vanessa Cavanagh

Year: 2025

Repository DOI: [10.71747/uow-r3gk326m.31549729.v1](https://doi.org/10.71747/uow-r3gk326m.31549729.v1)

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Research Online is the open access repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au



ABORIGINAL WOMEN KNOW: CULTURAL BURNING AND ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Vanessa Iris Cavanagh BSc. (Hons I)

Supervisors:

Leah Gibbs, Michael Adams, Laura Hammersley

This thesis is presented as part of the requirement for the conferral of the degree:

Doctor of Philosophy



Figure 1: Cover image Author, Vanessa Cavanagh participating in a cultural burn

This research has been conducted with the support of the Australian Government Research Training
Program Scholarship

University of Wollongong

Geography and Sustainability, School of Social Sciences

Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities

August 2025

ABSTRACT

This research examines Aboriginal women's experiences of cultural burning in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. It does this through the detailed perspectives of ten Aboriginal women, including myself, set in the context of focused conversations with hundreds of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and my strategic participation in the sector. Cultural burning involves Aboriginal people caring for Country with fire, an ancient practice of Indigenous science, that is Aboriginal-led and focussed on the health of Country. While colonisation restricted cultural burning in many places, Aboriginal people have long worked toward its revival. This momentum gained further traction following the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, which sparked significant public and government interest.

Participation in cultural burning mirrors the gender imbalance of Western fire management, where Aboriginal women remain underrepresented. This underrepresentation is also evident in the literature. In this research, Aboriginal women assert a rightful and active role in cultural burning, challenging their exclusion as inappropriate for several reasons. First, the disparity constitutes a basic gender equality issue. Second, the limited involvement of Aboriginal women indicates that cultural burning is not being fully recognised or enacted. Third, this absence compromises the maintenance and transmission of cultural protocols and knowledge across generations and threatens the safeguarding of Aboriginal women's values and knowledges. This research centres Aboriginal women's voices to advance understanding of their underrepresentation while highlighting pathways for greater inclusion. In doing so, it empowers, amplifies, and advocates for Aboriginal women's engagement and leadership.

Country is at the core of cultural burning and Indigenist Country-focussed research, thus the influence of Country in this research is significant. Country and fire have shaped this research through the impacts of the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires which dramatically increased public interest in cultural burning and amplified this research and my advocacy role. As such the influence of Country is addressed early, as are methodology and my positionality. This research uses Indigenous Research Methodologies to centre Indigenous people, priorities, experiences, and values. Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory is employed to further privilege the experiences and voices of Aboriginal women, explored through the lens of intersectionality. As an Aboriginal woman with decades of experience, including fire management, across practical and policy operations, my positionality is prominent in this research. Through Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography I share my unique, culturally embedded knowledge and experience. A mixed methods approach allows my research to address the cultural requirements of undertaking Indigenist research, where ethics, cultural safety, and cultural protocols are engaged in ways that support the political progress of Aboriginal people's cultural burning concerns.

This thesis examines, celebrates, and advocates for Aboriginal women's participation in cultural burning where culturally appropriate, and highlights the meaning, purpose, and personal outcomes for Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women must be included as they hold rights, roles, knowledge, and practices that are currently under-recognised. The thesis identifies strong aspirations for cultural burning and that Aboriginal women's involvement brings wide-ranging benefits for Aboriginal women, for Country, and for all others. These benefits include intergenerational participation and knowledge transfer; the strengthening and continuation of Aboriginal women's culture, sites, and knowledge; the empowerment of matriarchal leadership; and the preservation of cultural integrity through whole-of-community participation. This research also examines the barriers and challenges Aboriginal women face, drawing on their lived experiences and the solutions they propose. The research reveals policy implications and development opportunities contributing to the development of cultural burning and the broader fire management and caring for Country sector.

This research advocates for Aboriginal-led, Country-centred transformation of how Country is perceived and 'managed' – the engagement of Aboriginal women in cultural burning is one opportunity to activate this transformation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have the greatest gratitude to all the leaders and participants in this research, their contributions are invaluable. I acknowledge and respect Country for all that I have learnt during this research and beyond. I also thank the Aboriginal ancestors and spiritual entities who guide this work throughout the years.

I acknowledge the work of many Aboriginal people who have and continue to care for Country. I particularly thank the women who made direct contributions to this thesis and those who contributed to the Royal Commission feedback. I am indebted to the Aboriginal women and communities, who have repeatedly bolstered me through this research journey. This research has been overwhelming, challenging and positive for me, and I am absolutely privileged to have had this experience and responsibility. There is much work to be done and more to learn and celebrate.

Thank you Mum, Theresa Mena French, for counselling me through every cultural story in this thesis and reading it aloud with me. You have shared invaluable love, wisdom and guidance. One such instance was where you pulled together an impromptu support group of our family women around a kitchen table for me to do a live reading of some of the heavy stories - so that I did not carry that weight on my own. Throughout this research, as well as being my beautiful Mumma and Granny to my kids, you are an Elder, Matriarch, community leader and guide at every step. You have shown and taught me Aboriginal women's dignity and grace, power and leadership. I am who I am because of my Mum.

Dad I miss you and I am always grateful for you being my dad. Dennis Richard Cavanagh was always proud of everything I did. My Dad worked consistently and provided for his family. He taught me how to enjoy working with my hands and to be proud of my achievements. Dad took me camping and fishing and I loved being in the bush with him. My life is good because of my Dad and Mum. I miss you Dad.

Thank you, Emma and Tyson for undertaking this journey with me I am forever grateful to be your Mum. This PhD has been a consistent part of your childhood, we have had lots of fun times and many new experiences, I feel that it has benefitted our lives and relationships but I am also aware that at times it also took parts of me away from you, I am grateful for your grace with that and I'm excited for the fun times ahead without the PhD hanging around! Thank you Paul for the encouragement.

Deep appreciation to my research supervisors, official and otherwise, people to whom I can turn to form guidance, support and reassurance during the journey. Thank you Associate Professor Michael Adams, for your support through my entire university experience and as my primary PhD supervisor for your consistent feedback on chapters, confident encouragement on all things thesis and otherwise. Thanks to Dr Laura Hammersley for an easy friendship and encouraging supervisory relationship. I always felt motivated after spending time with you, be it night walks hunting for ghost mushrooms with my kids, dessert catch ups, or thesis work. Thanks also to Associate Professor Leah

Gibbs for stepping in to solve the problems brought about by COVID-19 and losing my primary supervisor. Thanks to what was the School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, UOW for consistently supporting me and the collegial encouragement especially assisting when COVID-19 added complexity. I acknowledge the support of the Bushfire Risk Management Research Hub and thank the support of its former team, particularly Dr Katharine Haynes.

I pay my respects to Mr John Garland and his family. John Garland was a field officer in the NPWS Upper Hunter District who died during a bushfire operation. I met and worked on a fire crew with John in 2001 and that occasion features in one of my stories.

Thank you to the guidance, support and engagement of the Aboriginal people within the cultural burning communities in NSW and the southeast of the continent for allowing me to walk with you on many journeys, it has been an honour and a joy.

Tremendous thanks to the people and organisations that assisted with this research throughout various stages of the journey, particularly: Delise Freeman, Pejar LALC, Ellie McNiece, Shona Coyne, Leanne Brook, Dr Jodi Edwards, Juanita McCarthy, Jilda Andrews, Sharon Hodgetts, Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance, Liz Dargin, Stella Crick, Chanelle Burman, Dr Lauren Tynan, Dr Michelle Bishop, and Koori Country Firesticks Aboriginal Corporation. I thank Indigenous scholars who have their content freely available online, I gained much from consuming your content, especially during the pandemic, lockdowns and the failed referendum. One particular video of Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith who was asked what advice she had for HDR students, her reply “Finish your qualifications, get it done.” I watched, re-watched and re-watched this clip for the motivation.

Thanks for ALL of the wonderful responses to my various questions and social media posts that assisted this work. Thanks to Rachael Cavanagh, Oliver Costello, Jessica Wegener, Firesticks Alliance, Aunty Kali (Marcia McBride), Koori Country Fire Sticks, Dr Lauren Tynan, Dr Michelle Bishop, Dr Sandy Sullivan, Dr Marlene Longbottom, Prof. Jason Sharples, Dr Crystal Arnold, Dr Katharine Haynes, Dr Josh Whittaker, Dr Jessica Weir, for guidance and advice.

Special thanks to Jane Yettica and Dr Lauren Tynan for your efforts in helping get over the final hurdle, I really, really appreciate it.

Thanks to Boe Spearim, Shaun Hooper, Dr Mark Dunn and Andy Macqueen for assisting me with information about Wonnarua peoples and their fire activities noted in European explorers’ journals.

Thanks to Leanne Brook for sharing details about your artworks that depict cultural fire. Thanks to Fleur Magick Dennis, Jayden Kitchener-Waters, Dwayne Bannon Harrison and Uncle Warren Foster senior for guiding me with discussions about songs and dances on fire. Thanks to Amanda-Jane Reynolds and Clive Freeman for sharing your experiences of fire and possum skin work. Thanks to Aunty Kali and Aleshia Lonsdale for assisting with non-scholarly literature and creative forms of knowledge. Thanks to Markeeta Freeman and Mel Williams from Wreck Bay for the photograph, and Dr Bhiamie Williamson for the map used in earlier presentations. Thank you to Ross Wallace, Bradford

Dale Welsh, Bob Sutherland and the late Aunty Carol Kendall for giving that ‘young field officer girl’ a go – a change in direct impacted my life – look what I did! Thanks to my various employers, bosses and NSW Departments where I was supported to complete this PhD, specifically, Senior Prof Gordon Waitt, prof Nick Gill, Senior Prof Pauline McGuirk, Tanya Koeneman and Laura Babian. Special thanks to the Cultural Fire Management Unit / Healthy Country Team, particularly Nook (Noel Webster) for reminding me that this PhD is worth the time that it takes, and Jake Kinred for ensuring that I had that extra time. To all my work colleagues and friends, thank you for the encouragement.

Thanks to Robert Kelly for protecting and encouraging me particularly in my most challenging times. You assisted every time I asked, as well as before I even realised that I needed help. Thank you for consistently and confidently reminding me not to rush, and that everything would happen at the right time. When I felt like I was faltering, you reminded me that I am my Mother’s daughter. This got me through what has been the hardest part of my life. Rob, Bugil-beh Bunaarm. I appreciate you, Leanne, Coby and Kurarli.

Thanks to Katie Hincks-Pope for all the fun, love and support throughout these years, it was great to break up the serious work with lots of adventures. I am excited to see what we get up to next with our kids.

Thanks to everyone that I stayed with for this research including, Shirley, Bernie and Graeme Walker, Katie, Damo and Xavier Pope-Hincks, Stacey Walsh, Laurel Waddell, Ava, Rosie, and Chad Gunther, Ethan and Jennifer Williams. I am grateful that you have opened your homes to me and my kids, nurturing and feeding us, so I could study, write and revive. Thanks to Yvonne Stewart for minding my kids whenever I needed. Thanks to the many others who also offered support and assistance. Thanks to Clive Freeman III for your unconditional love, fun and guidance. You have been my bestest Moodj throughout all of my university experiences and beyond. Thanks to UOW Woolyungah Indigenous Centre and Jaymee Demos Beveridge for the support and meeting space with extra whiteboards on-call. Thanks to everyone who listened, commented and guided my thinking and work throughout the PhD experience, before and beyond. Thanks also to my family, friends, the local school mums, my Tiddagang, peers and colleagues who helped and offered kind, hopeful or expectant words of encouragement. Very special thanks to Alisha Rose, Tara Hodge and Cass Strahorn. That you are reading this means that it’s done, YAAY!!!

IN MEMORIUM

During my PhD candidature many family members and friends passed away. Grief changes us and each departure is unique. I acknowledge the lives of those Loved Ones and the memories we shared. The influence of your life on mine, and the finality of your leaving, causes me to appreciate my life so much more. For all the things you did and did not get to do while you were here, I take this moment to remember you.

CERTIFICATION

I, Vanessa Iris Cavanagh, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Cavanagh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Vanessa Iris Cavanagh

21st August 2025

MY PUBLICATIONS

This is a list of my publications completed during my candidature. I also wrote and contributed to 14 other publications including op-eds, media articles, films and podcasts. Details of those publications are provided in Appendix 12.11.

Journal articles

Cavanagh, V & Standley, PM 2020, 'Walking in the landscapes of our ancestors – Indigenous perspectives critical in the teaching of Geography', *Interaction*, vol. 48, no. 1, p. 14-16.

Cavanagh, V, Hammersley, L & Adams, M 2022, 'Igniting a conversation: Indigenous intercultural doctoral supervision', *Geographical Research*, vol. 60, iss. 1, p. 46-58 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12481>

Nolan, RH, Bowman, DM, Clarke, H, Haynes, K, Ooi, MK, Price, OF, Williamson, GJ, Whittaker, J, Bedward, M, Boer, MM, **Cavanagh, VI**, Collins, L, Gibson, RK, Griebel, A, Jenkins, ME, Keith, DA, Mcilwee, AP, Penman, TD, Samson, SA, Tozer, WG & Bradstock, RA 2021, 'What Do the Australian Black Summer Fires signify for the global fire crisis?', *Fire*, vol. 4, iss. 4, p. 97 <https://doi.org/10.3390/fire4040097>.

Chapters in edited books and online publications

Cavanagh, VI 2020a, 'Grandmother trees, Aboriginal women and fire', in P Anderson, S Gardner, P James & P Komesaroff (eds.), *Continent Aflame: Responses to an Australian Catastrophe*, Palaver, Armadale.

Cavanagh, VI 2021a, 'This grandmother tree connects me to Country. I cried when I saw her burned', in C Day & M Ratliff (eds.), *Tree Story*, Monash University Museum of Art, Clayton VIC, p. 22.

Cavanagh, VI 2021b, 'Vanessa's story' in JK Weir, D Freeman & B Williamson (eds.), *Cultural burning in Southern Australia*, Report number 687.2021, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Cavanagh, VI 2022a, 'The (re)emergence of Aboriginal women and cultural burning in New South Wales, Australia', in J Weir & JD Scasta (eds.), *Global Application of Prescribed Fire*, CSIRO Publishing, Clayton VIC.

Ens E, Reyes-García, V, Asselin, H, Hsu, M, Reimerson, E, Reihana, K, Sithole, B, Shen, X, **Cavanagh, V** & Adams, M 2021, 'Recognition of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems in Conservation and Their Role to Narrow the Knowledge-Implementation Gap', in CC Ferreira & CFC Klütsch (eds.), *Closing the Knowledge-Implementation Gap in Conservation Science Interdisciplinary Evidence Transfer Across Sectors and Spatiotemporal Scales*, Springer, Cham, Netherlands.

Tynan, L & **Cavanagh, V** 2021, 'Fire', An A to Z of Shadow Places <<https://www.shadowplaces.net/concepts>>

Williamson, B, Weir, J & **Cavanagh, V** 2020a, 'Aboriginal people find strength despite perpetual grief', in P Anderson, S Gardner, P James & P Komesaroff (eds.) *Continent Aflame: Responses to an Australian Catastrophe*, Palaver, Armadale.

Cavanagh, V 2024, 'Case Study: Vanessa Cavanagh', in Women's Environmental Leadership Australia (ed), *Gender, Climate and Environmental Justice in Australia*, Women's Environmental Leadership Australia, <https://wela.org.au/gender-climate-report/>

CONDENSED TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: PROTOCOLS, PREFACE, POSITIONALITY

Chapter 2: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3: CONTEXT

Chapter 4: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 5: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 6: THE POWER IS IN COUNTRY: DESCRIBING CULTURAL BURNING

Chapter 7: OUTCOMES FOR AND FROM WOMEN

Chapter 8: OUTCOMES FOR MORE THAN WOMEN

Chapter 9: BARRIERS

Chapter 10: THESIS CONCLUSION

Chapter 11: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chapter 12: APPENDICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
IN MEMORIAM.....	6
CERTIFICATION	7
MY PUBLICATIONS.....	8
CONDENSED TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	9
TABLE OF CONTENTS	10
LIST OF FIGURES	18
LIST OF TABLES	20
ACRONYMS	21
CHAPTER 1 PROTOCOLS, PREFACE, POSITIONALITY.....	24
1.1 WHO'S YOUR MOB, WHERE YOU FROM?	24
1.1.1 Acknowledgement and cultural introduction.....	24
1.1.2 Centring Aboriginal cultural protocols and approaches	27
1.1.3 Voice and Thesis structure	28
STORY ONE: RETURN TO COUNTRY.....	33
1.2 PREFACE: THE INFLUENCE OF COUNTRY	38
1.2.1 The influence of Country in research.....	38
1.2.2 Alignment One: Revival and my research	39
1.2.3 Alignment Two: 2019-2020 Black Summer and my research.....	40
1.2.4 Alignment Three: The Cultural Fire Management Unit and my research	41
1.2.5 Alignment Four: Family and my research.....	43
1.2.6 Making sense of the alignments.....	45
1.3 POSITIONALITY	49
1.3.1 The significance of positionality to this research	49

1.3.2 Who am I and why am I talking about cultural burning?	50
1.4 CONCLUSION	54
STORY TWO: DESCENDANTS OF YENGO	57
CHAPTER 2 INTRODUCTION	62
2.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH INTRODUCTION	62
2.1.1 Outline.....	62
2.1.2 Fire and Aboriginal people	62
2.2 INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL BURNING IN NSW	63
2.2.1 Introductory clarifications	63
2.2.2 What is cultural burning?	64
2.2.3 Cultural burning: how and why	65
2.2.4 Revival of cultural burning	67
2.2.5 Where cultural burning occurs	68
2.3 PREMISE AND RATIONALE.....	70
2.3.1 Justification for this research	70
2.3.2 Significance and relevance of this research	71
2.4 UNDERREPRESENTATION	73
2.4.1 Defining ‘underrepresentation’ in cultural burning.....	73
2.4.2 A proxy: underrepresentation in Western fire management and environmental conservation agencies	73
2.4.3 Evidence of underrepresentation in cultural burning.....	79
2.5 RESEARCH APPROACH	81
2.5.1 Who, what and how?	81
2.5.2 Where is this research geographically focussed?	83
2.5.3 What is not being asked?	84
2.6 LITERATURE GAP.....	86
2.7 CONCLUSION	87
STORY THREE: N*GGER IN THE RFS.....	90

CHAPTER 3 CONTEXT	96
3.1 WESTERN FIRE MANAGEMENT AND CULTURAL BURNING	96
3.1.1 About Western fire management and its relevance to cultural burning	96
3.1.2 Key factors influencing cultural burning in Western fire management	97
3.1.3 Shortcomings and barriers of Western fire management	99
3.1.4 Western fire management and support for cultural burning	101
3.2 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CULTURAL BURNING AND WESTERN FIRE MANAGEMENT	103
3.2.1 Cultural burning differs from Western fire management	103
3.2.2 Different philosophies	104
3.2.3 Different relationships	106
3.3 COLONISATION, FIRE AND CULTURAL BURNING	108
3.3.1 Impacts of colonisation	108
3.4 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS	110
3.4.1 Impacts on fire and Country	110
3.4.2 Impacts on Aboriginal people	112
3.5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2019-2020 BLACK SUMMER BUSHFIRES ON CULTURAL BURNING IN NSW	114
3.5.1 Formal inquiries on the Black Summer Bushfires	114
3.5.2 Outcomes of the formal inquiries	115
3.6 CHANGE AND RESISTANCE	116
3.6.1 Resistance to cultural burning	116
3.7 CONCLUSION	121
STORY FOUR: THE POP-UP MATRIARCHAL METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP	123
CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY	127
4.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW	127
4.2 INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES	127
4.2.1 Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenist research and their place in research focussed on Country including Geography	127

4.2.2 Indigenous Research Methodologies in cultural burning research	129
4.2.3 Indigenous research and data sovereignty	130
4.2.4 Activating Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenous research and data sovereignty	132
4.2.5 Indigenous Women’s Standpoint Theory and Intersectionality	133
4.2.6 Indigenous participatory action research	134
4.3 ETHICS AND RESEARCH IN CROSS CULTURAL SPACES	137
4.4 DATA AND METHODS USED IN THIS RESEARCH	139
4.4.1 Overview of data and methods	139
4.4.2 The methods used	142
4.4.3 Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography	146
4.4.4 Participant Observation	147
4.4.5 Yarning	148
4.4.6 Interviews and focus groups.....	149
4.4.7 Indigenous digital technologies and digital engagement.....	150
4.5 DATA ANALYSIS.....	151
4.6 CONCLUSION	154
STORY FIVE: A LESSON ON LITERATURE – WHERE THERE’S SMOKE.....	156
CHAPTER 5 LITERATURE REVIEW	162
5.1 LITERATURE CONTEXT	162
5.1.1 Acknowledgement	162
5.1.2 Introduction	162
5.1.3 Geographical bias.....	163
5.1.4 Authoring with authority: the importance of Indigenous authorship in cultural burning literature, and Aboriginal women’s contributions	164
5.1.5 Aboriginal women’s contributions in non-scholarly texts.....	166
5.2 ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND CULTURAL BURNING IN NSW	171
5.2.1 About Aboriginal women’s burning	171

5.2.2 Support for Aboriginal women's burning.....	172
5.3 CULTURAL BURNING AND THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER.....	174
5.3.1 Gender and cultural burning core principles.....	175
5.3.2 Gender and cultural burning benefits and barriers	176
5.4 INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND CULTURAL FIRE.....	178
5.5 CONCLUSION	181
STORY SIX: COUNTRY HALTS CULTURAL BURN: LISTENING, LEARNING AND CONNECTING WITH WONNARUA COUNTRY.....	184
CHAPTER 6 THE POWER IS IN COUNTRY: DESCRIBING CULTURAL BURNING	190
6.1 ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S DESCRIPTIONS OF CULTURAL BURNING.....	190
6.2 THE AGENCY AND LEADERSHIP OF COUNTRY	191
6.3 CULTURE AND CULTURAL PROTOCOLS.....	195
6.4 INDICATORS.....	198
6.5 HEALING	201
6.6 INCLUSIVITY	203
6.7 ACCELERANTS.....	209
6.8 CONCLUSION	211
STORY SEVEN: ON HER GRANDFATHER'S COUNTRY	214
CHAPTER 7 OUTCOMES FOR AND FROM WOMEN	222
7.1 INTRODUCTION	222
7.2 INTERGENERATIONS	222
7.2.1 Babies' first teacher	222
7.2.2 Indigenous futures	226
7.3 MATRIARCHS.....	230
7.3.1 Women's engagement is important	230
7.3.2 Only women can go	234
7.3.3 Taking up space	237
7.4 CONCLUSION	244

STORY EIGHT: “TAKE YOUR CHILDREN WITH YOU.”	247
CHAPTER 8 OUTCOMES FOR MORE THAN WOMEN	250
8.1 INTRODUCTION	250
8.2 ACCESS AND CONNECTION TO COUNTRY	251
8.2.1 Access is valued across tenure	251
8.2.2 (re)Connection to Country for Aboriginal people.....	253
8.3 CULTURAL PRACTICES	255
8.3.1 Waking up our strengths	255
8.3.2 How knowledge is maintained and transmitted.....	258
8.4 RESPONSIBILITIES	261
8.4.1 Responsibilities to Country and community	261
8.5 EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES.....	264
8.5.1 Secure employment across NSW	264
8.6 RECONCILIATION, PARTNERSHIPS AND SUSTAINABILITY	267
8.6.1 Basic cross-cultural interaction.....	267
8.6.2 Improving Western fire management.....	269
8.6.3 Connecting all to Country for sustainability	270
8.7 CONCLUSION	272
STORY NINE: WREN’S STORY - FIRE AGENCY WOMEN EXTINGUISH CULTURAL BURN.....	275
CHAPTER 9 BARRIERS	278
9.1 BARRIERS INTRODUCTION	278
9.2 APPROPRIATION	279
9.2.1 Not free to be taken.....	279
9.2.2 Disingenuous	281
9.3 ERASURE.....	286
9.3.1 Overlooked, unseen	286
9.3.2 Safety: personal and cultural.....	289

9.4 COLONISATION AND SUPPRESSION.....	290
9.4.1 Tried to douse our fires	290
9.4.2 Will not die quietly.....	293
9.5 INCONGRUENT PARADIGMS: LIGHTING THE FIRE, NOT FIGHTING THE FIRE.....	297
9.5.1 Relationships with fire	297
9.5.2 It's not hazard reduction	299
9.6 CONCLUSION	301
CHAPTER 10 THESIS CONCLUSION	304
10.1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW.....	304
10.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	305
10.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE	307
10.4 PRACTICAL, POLICY, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH	309
10.5 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS	310
10.6 CLOSING STATEMENT	312
BIBLIOGRAPHY 11.....	314
APPENDICES 12	388
12:1 TERMINOLOGY / GLOSSARY	388
12.1.1 Key concepts.....	388
12.1.2 Types of fire	393
12.2 UOW HREC ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION.....	396
12.3 CONSENT FORM	399
12.4 DETAILS OF PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS	405
Table 13: This is a list of personal communications that are cited in this thesis.	405
12.5 INTERVIEW QUESTION SCHEDULE.....	407
12.6 DETAILS OF THE KEY DATA SOURCES.....	411
TABLE 4: Details of each data source.....	411
Table 5: Details of yarning circles that I participated in during PhD.	412

12.7: THE ABORIGINAL WOMEN INTERVIEWED	414
Table 6: Participants of semi-structured interviews and focus-groups.....	414
12.8 CULTURAL BURNING PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL	417
12.9 TABLES OF CULTURAL BURNING WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS.....	426
Table 7: Cultural burns attended in-person (where fires occurred).....	426
Table 8: In-person Cultural burning events attended (where fires did not occur while I was present).....	429
Table 9: DIGITAL Cultural burning specific events that I attended.....	432
Table 10: Royal Commission and Parliamentary Inquiry contributions	433
Table 12: Additional Social Media Posts I made relevant to my research – personal Facebook account	440
12.10 CULTURAL BURNING FOR THE HEALTH OF SPECIES	441
12.11 OTHER PUBLICATIONS.....	442

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Cover image Author, Vanessa Cavanagh participating in a cultural burn. Taken at Mawonga Indigenous Protected Area, Ngiyampaa Country, NSW. May 2023. Credit: Ethan Williams.

Figure 2: Smoking Ceremony

Figure 3: Author's childhood family

Figure 4: Firefighter Dad – Dennis R. Cavanagh; Figure 5

Figure 5: Activist Mum – Theresa M. French

Figure 6: Map Story locations

Figure 7: My first cultural burning workshop

Figure 8: Google Trends graph

Figure 9: Vanessa Cavanagh with jarjums (children) at Dhungala 2019.

Figure 10: Components of this research diagram

Figure 11: Research timeline

Figure 12: Black Summer Bushfires rip through my childhood home, Colo Heights

Figure 13: Sharing the platform with Aboriginal women (Mullumbimby, NSW. Feb. 2020)

Figure 14: Social Media post about Royal Commission

Figure 15: Firefighter Vanessa at Yengo during Black Christmas fires

Figure 16: Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate (2024).

Figure 17: RFS Superhero cartoon

Figure 18: RFS advertisement for Aboriginal roles. Advert features men only.

Figure 19: Being interviewed by NITV

Figure 20: Map locations of 11 cultural burns.

Figure 21: Black female firefighters meme

Figure 22: Threatened animal species statistics in State of the Environment (2021)

Figure 23: People with influence showing resistance about cultural burning

Figure 24: Around the kitchen tables – the pop-up matriarchal methodology workshop

Figure 25: The centrality of Country and Indigenous Self-Determination

Figure 26: Mind map of thesis

Figure 27: Vanessa's Poster

Figure 28: Data Sources and interactions

Figure 29: Locations of women's yarning circles and other relevant locations

Figure 30: Vanessa with daughter participating in women's yarning circle

Figure 31: Vanessa's children assisting with coding interview data, January 2021.

Figure 32: Ngaral ba djamaga ganji (Black cockatoo and good fire)

Figure 33: Coolamon being taken from a Kurrajong tree

Figure 34: Consent forms and weaving fibres – codesigning research with Aboriginal women

Figure 35: Supporting Aboriginal women to share their cultural burning messages

Figure 36: Ash deposits on Tathra Beach.

Figure 37: Rock formations of Wonnarua Country

Figure 38: Emma Cavanagh lights her first cultural burn.

Figure 39: Aboriginal man at Dhungala NIFW teaches Tyson

Figure 40: The National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2019 Dhungala promotional flyer cover.

Figure 41: NPWS Career paths for Aboriginal women poster

Figure 42: Emma's fire dance

Figure 43: Night burn.

Figure 44: Darug woman holds Darug artefact exposed during a cultural burn

Figure 45: Aboriginal woman Rachael Cavanagh social media post regarding appropriation of cultural

Figure 46: Government using Aboriginal knowledge methods without attribution

Figure 47: International Women's Day poster

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participation rates of Women and Aboriginal people in Western fire management in NSW

Table 2: Overview of the mixed methods used

Table 3: A summary of the strengths and limitations of each of the methods used in this project

Table 4: Details of each data source

Table 5: Details of yarning circles that I participated in during PhD.

Table 6: Participants of semi-structured interviews and focus-groups.

Table 7: Cultural burns attended in-person (where fires occurred)

Table 8: In-person Cultural burning events attended (where fires did not occur while I was present)

Table 9: Digital Cultural burning specific events that I attended

Table 10: Royal Commission and Parliamentary Inquiry contributions

Table 11: Other seminars, conferences, meetings I attended.

Table 12: Additional Social Media Posts I made relevant to my research – personal Facebook account.

Table 13: Details of personal communications

ACRONYMS

CFMU	Cultural Fire Management Unit
DPHI	NSW Department Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (formerly DPE)
DPIE	NSW Department Planning, Industry and Environment (formerly OEH)
DPE	NSW Department Planning and Environment (formally DPIE)
Firesticks Alliance	Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation
FRNSW	Fire and Rescue NSW
FCNSW	Forestry Corporation of NSW
IPA	Indigenous Protected Area
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KCFSAC	Koori Country Fire Sticks Aboriginal Corporation
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
LLS	Local Land Services
NPWS	NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
NSW	New South Wales, Australia
OEH	NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
RFS	Rural Fire Service NSW
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UOW	University of Wollongong



Figure 2: Start with a Smoking Ceremony. Bathing in the medicinal smoke that Welcomes me to Ngiyampaa Country. Photo taken in May 2023 at Mawonga Indigenous Protected Area, Ngiyampaa Country, NSW. Credit: Robert Pettit.

CHAPTER 1 PROTOCOLS, PREFACE, POSITIONALITY

1.1 WHO'S YOUR MOB, WHERE YOU FROM?

1.1.1 Acknowledgement and cultural introduction

Jingee Walla. Ngai ngethi Vanessa Cavanagh. Ngai mirrung Bungum Bundjalung, Bundjalung doobay and Wonnarua woman. I acknowledge that I live, work and raise my children as a visitor on somebody else's Country – Dharawal Saltwater Wollongong. I pay respects to the ancestors and spirits of this land, I acknowledge Elders past and present. I also acknowledge my own people, my ancestors and the spirits who are with me.

This qualitative research explores Aboriginal women's experiences of cultural burning in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, through the perspectives of ten Aboriginal women including myself. Cultural burning involves Aboriginal people caring for Country with fire, an ancient cultural practice of Indigenous science which is Aboriginal-led and focussed on the health of Country. To start this thesis and to empower my culturally-embedded approach, I begin by acknowledging Country and providing a cultural introduction of myself and my family (Fig. 3).

My mother, Theresa Mena French (Fig. 5), is a Bungum Bundjalung woman. She is the youngest child of Sarah 'Bubsie' French (nee Wilson), and John 'Jack' Felix French, both deceased and both Aboriginal people from Mallanganee and Tabulam in northern NSW, which is their traditional homelands. We describe ourselves as being Goori people and our primary traditional dialect is the Wehlabahl language. We belong to the French, Wilson, Hinnett and Mundine families. My great, great, great grandfather, Derry was a Bundjalung Elder who was dedicated as King for the Casino region of NSW in his coronation¹ in 1885 (Hoff 2006). Based on my family records, we believe Derry was born around the 1830-40s., the same time that the first Europeans were arriving in that part of Bundjalung Country and 50 years after the British invaded Kamay (Botany Bay) in 1788 (Lismore City Council 2024).

My Father, Dennis Richard Cavanagh (Fig. 4) was the youngest son of Iris Eileen Lester, who lived the greater part of her life between Sydney and Singleton. My Father and his family belong to the

¹ The concept of social hierarchy through the dedication of kings and queens is not a part of Aboriginal culture, rather it was an enforced artefact of European colonisation.

Wonnarua people from the Hunter region. We describe ourselves as being Koori people. Our Wonnarua family connections include the Lester and Waters families. Apical ancestors on my father's matriarchal line include Joey and Molly Mahdah, both born in the 1820s. Their daughter, Sarah Madoo Waters (nee Madoo Maduris Divine) was born in the 1840s in Wonnarua Country, at Eccleston on the Allyn River near Singleton. My paternal grandfather, Trevor Bryant Cavanagh, was an Indigenous man who was disassociated from our family. Although I carry his surname, I do not know much about my paternal grandfather, beyond what I have located through fraught government records. These records show Trevor Bryant Cavanagh was an Indigenous man born at Grafton (Bundjalung Country) around 1919. Trevor's parents were Ethel May Pearce and Thomas Cavanagh who married in 1914. Ethel May Pearce was born in Grafton, to Annie Smithers and Joseph Pearce. Thomas Cavanagh was born in Cowper NSW, to Susan Nolan and Thomas Cavanagh (senior).



Clockwise from top: Figure 3 Author's childhood family; Figure 4 Firefighter Dad – Dennis R. Cavanagh; Figure 5 Activist Mum – Theresa M. French. Figure 3: My brother Dennis 'DJ' and I with our parents Dennis R Cavanagh, and Theresa M French, in the front yard of my grandparent's property in the early 1980s, Bungum Bundjalung Country at Mallanganee, NSW. Credit: Cecil French. Figure 4 Dad – Dennis R Cavanagh during the time he was captain of Colo Heights RFS. Credit: courtesy of the National Museum of Australia; Figure 5 Mum – Theresa M French in the lead up to the national referendum, Wynyard Park, Sydney, May 1967. Credit: courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales and Courtesy SEARCH Foundation.

1.1.2 Centring Aboriginal cultural protocols and approaches

This research is Indigenist; that is research by, with and about Indigenous people, and which centres Indigenous priorities and perspectives. As a Bundjalung and Wonnarua woman I embody and empower Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing (Martin 2008). Throughout my life, work and this research I centre Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies to maintain my culturally-embedded standpoint and to decolonise the perception of what knowledge is, and how knowledge is produced and circulated (Smith 1999, Wilson 2008). The images of my parents (Fig 4 and 5) are metaphors for this research – Aboriginal leadership and self-determination at the intersection of speaking up about Country with a key focus on fire.

I start this thesis using Wehlabahl language words intentionally to centre, celebrate and maintain my Aboriginal culture². It is also an act of resistance to European invasion, which created numerous, compounding and negative outcomes for Aboriginal people, including the fracturing of Aboriginal languages and culture. My use of language is relevant because Aboriginal languages, cultural practices and knowledge underpin the research topic, cultural burning (Jacobsen & Pearce 2024, Steffensen 2020). Indigenous people, language and cultural practices such as cultural burning, pre-date the English language in this continent, and it is argued that Western approaches and languages falls short of articulating Indigenous understandings of the world and are incapable of fully comprehending and interpreting Indigenous knowledges, cultures and relationality (Arabena 2020, Jacobsen & Pearce 2024). Meriam woman, Professor Kerry Arabena (2020, p. 1) articulates this shortfall as: ‘Country can’t hear English’. This shortfall is symbolic of the inadequacies of Western research approaches in research that focus on Indigenous content. Of her use of Aboriginal language, Wiradyuri Wambuul woman, Dr Jessica Russ-Smith agrees by stating: ‘English and Western ways of knowing cannot convey the depth and meanings of the lessons and learnings’ (Russ-Smith 2023, p. 8).

² Disclaimer: Traditionally, Aboriginal peoples in what is now called Australia were oral cultures and did not use English language or Latin text as modes of communication. The spelling that I use in my introduction is my own phonetic interpretation. There is no disrespect intended in the way that I have presented my introduction here as text. My introduction is not based on any formal, accepted or endorsed documented version of Wehlabahl language or dialect, and it is not a credible source of how Wehlabahl languages or dialects are or should be documented or transcribed.

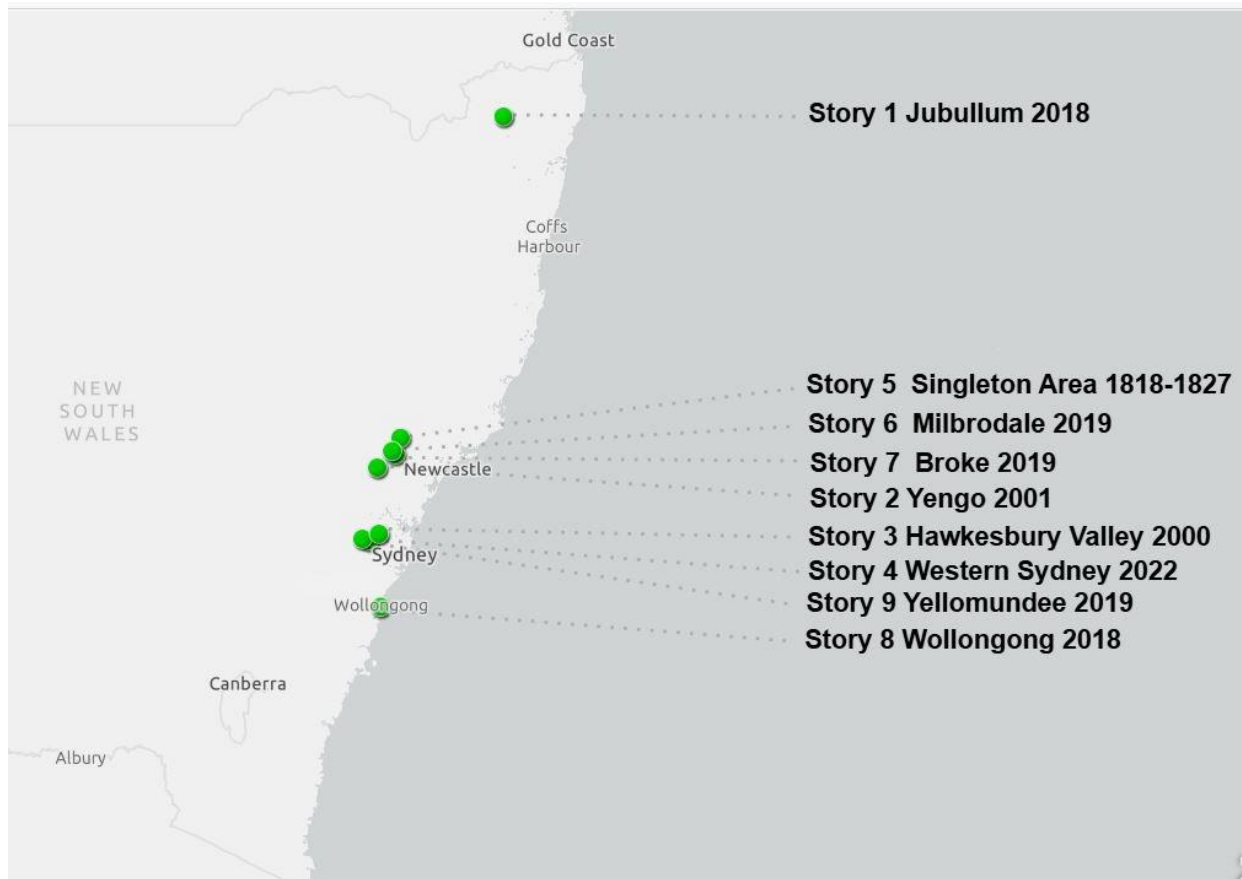


Figure 6: Map of Story Locations. This thesis presents nine personal stories which are additional to the main chapters. This map shows locations for the stories which are all located along the east coast of NSW.

1.1.3 Voice and Thesis structure

As Indigenist research, this thesis is intentionally configured outside Western conventions³, evident in the presence of my voice throughout and in its unique structure and order. My voice takes two forms in this thesis. One voice is academic and addresses the theoretical scholarly task through formal writing. The other voice is autoethnographic and appears as Indigenous Storywork. My stories emerge from my personal experiences and insights as an Aboriginal woman with decades of caring for Country experience across NSW, including with fire (see Fig. 6). Here, I contribute as one of the Aboriginal women participants in this research, with my stories weaving between each chapter and

³ Wiradyuri Wambuul woman Jessica Russ-Smith (2023, p. 7-8) identifies that associating an epistemologically sovereign thesis as being 'non-traditional' or unconventional 'privileges Western epistemologies and methodologies' and contradicts that Aboriginal knowledge systems belong to the first and true traditions of this Country. In contrast to being 'non-traditional', thesis structures which are based on Aboriginal epistemologies, particularly where Country is recognised as knowledge holder, is actually reinstating tradition, not contravening tradition.

introducing the concepts explored in those that follow. The formal text is presented in Times New Roman font, while the Storywork appears in Calibri.

The thesis is organised into ten chapters. Chapters 1–5 establish the approach and context of the research, Chapters 6–9 are thematic and present the empirical research findings. Chapter 10 offers the conclusion. Rather than starting this thesis with a topic introduction, research questions, and literature review, where my personal identity as the researcher is inconsequential, this thesis intentionally centres Aboriginal approaches. My identity and adherence to Aboriginal protocols are foregrounded in Chapter One, which introduces and establishes the Indigenist nature of this research. It achieves this by addressing Aboriginal cultural protocols, acknowledging Country, and providing my cultural introduction. Establishing this research as Indigenist is important not only because it reflects common practices within Aboriginal societies (Rigney 1999, 2003, Datta 2018a), but also because it supports my personal wellbeing. Furthermore, the personal details provided in this thesis, such as my genealogy, my stories, and photographs, are gifts to my children and future generations who will have access to this information beyond my lifetime. Next, I acknowledge and discuss the influence of Country in this research, highlighting the pertinent timing of this work in relation to the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires and my employment within the NSW Cultural Fire Management Unit. Chapter One concludes with my positionality, which illustrates how the unique and fortuitous nature of my identity and life experiences contributes to this research.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the research topic. I begin with an overview of Aboriginal people and fire, followed by an introduction to cultural burning. I define cultural burning as Aboriginal people caring for Country with fire, working within an Aboriginal cultural paradigm and context. The premise and rationale for this research are then outlined. Here, the lack of women's participation is introduced as the research problem and the justification for Aboriginal women's participation is discussed. I introduce key concepts including gender equality and equity, as well as Aboriginal cultural rights, practices, and responsibilities. Following this, the chapter outlines the research questions, research approach, location, scope, aims and theoretical framework. The chapter then examines the underrepresentation of Aboriginal women in the sector and how this has shaped their participation in cultural burning. The chapter concludes by highlighting gaps in the existing literature, particularly the absence of Aboriginal women's voices, values, and priorities.

Chapter Three provides the research context, starting with the relationship between cultural burning and Western fire management – the name used in this thesis for the formal government fire agencies, legislation, policies, and processes that govern in NSW. Western fire management is described in reference to how it interacts with cultural burning and Aboriginal culture through the four government fire authorities. Additionally, the chapter discusses the impact of the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires at the intersection of Western fire management and cultural burning, while also outlining the key differences between these two approaches. An outline of how colonisation has impacted Country, caring for Country practices and cultural burning is presented along with discussing

on the effects of climate change. With these discussions the similarities of experiences and concerns of Indigenous women worldwide are evident. Chapter Three does not specifically focus on Aboriginal women, rather, it outlines the complex and often challenging policy environments that cultural burning operates. In doing so, illustrating how Aboriginal women are marginalised within the sector. The chapter concludes by highlighting some resistance to cultural burning from within the sector.

Chapter Four outlines the research methodology, providing detailed discussion of the methodological approach that underpins this Indigenist research. It explains how and why Indigenous Research Methodologies are activated, including through Indigenous Woman Standpoint Theory and Intersectionality. It also explores the Indigenous participatory action research components (including participant observation), and how Indigenous research and data Sovereignty is addressed. The chapter also details my use of Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography, which operate as both method and methodology. The chapter describes the research methods undertaken including semi-structured interviews and small focus groups, and my observations and participation in the field, including in women's yarning circles and cultural burning events and activities. It also describes how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the research process and its reflection in the data. I highlight that my research makes notable contributions to Indigenous Research Methodologies.

As the literature review, Chapter Five takes a dual approach, serving as both a conventional literature review and a decolonising relational exercise. Specifically, the chapter highlights where Aboriginal women's voices on cultural burning can be found – primarily in non-scholarly literature and creative texts. I explore the cultural contexts of this repository. The literature review outlines the geographical bias of research on caring for Country and Indigenous fire management, primarily within central and northern Australia. The chapter also examines the importance of who is authoring cultural burning research, building on issues previously highlighted. Although there is a scarcity of Aboriginal women's voices in the scholarly literature, there is widespread support for Aboriginal women's participation in cultural burning and there is recognition that Aboriginal women bring a different approach which is beneficial.

Chapters Six through to Nine contain the thematic analytical discussion. These thematic chapters privilege the voices of the Aboriginal women who were formally engaged in this research through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, complemented by Aboriginal women's contributions in the literature, both academic and non-scholarly. Chapter Six synthesises Aboriginal women's perspectives of cultural burning and what they see as its key characteristics. Chapter Six also explores two features that are not thoroughly included in the literature, these are the socially inclusive nature of cultural burning where encouragement for wider community participation sets it apart from Western fire management. Chapter Six also examines the use of accelerants in cultural burning. Although this is not specifically a characteristic of cultural burning, the women raise some interesting and poignant points. Chapter Seven examines the outcomes of cultural burning as described by the Aboriginal women focusing on the impacts that are specifically linked to Aboriginal women. The two

themes are the intergenerational components of cultural burning through women's engagement; and the need to recognise and protect matriarchal knowledge, practices, and values, including Aboriginal women's sites in the landscape. The chapter illustrates that Aboriginal women's participation is fundamental to achieving this and outlines steps to increase women's engagement. Chapter Eight presents the wide-ranging outcomes of cultural burning as described by Aboriginal women that extend to all people, not only Aboriginal women. These outcomes include enhanced access to Country and the maintenance of Aboriginal cultural practices. The chapter also demonstrates how caring for Country, including cultural burning, activates broader cultural responsibilities to both Country and community. The women talk about their aspiration for cultural burning to create economic, social, environmental, and personal wellbeing outcomes. The discussion includes outcomes of cultural burning that affect Aboriginal people and others such as relationship building through cross-cultural partnerships and reconciliation. Additionally, the Aboriginal women share their concerns regarding society's lack of understanding or activation of caring for Country, which diminishes the ability to effectively address climate change. Chapter Nine outlines the barriers and challenges that Aboriginal women identify and experience themselves which impact on their ability to participate in cultural burning some of the barriers are specific to women, while others affect Aboriginal people and communities holistically. Some of the issues discussed include, appropriation of Aboriginal knowledge, which is a prominent and consistent concern across cultural burning forums. Other barriers include the ongoing influence of colonisation and cultural suppression, and the incongruent paradigms between Western fire management and cultural burning. A barrier that is specific to Aboriginal women is the conceptual erasure of women. Aboriginal women discuss being overlooked and not recognised as potential participants of cultural burning, this omission reinforcing male-dominated stereotypes. Another issue specific to women that the women discuss is personal safety.

Chapter Ten recaps the key findings of the research, highlighting the contributions to knowledge and the research implications. This chapter highlights development opportunities in cultural burning and across the broader sector. Its recommendations seek to improve diversity and representation including of Aboriginal women, but also Aboriginal youth. There is growing recognition of the important roles that Aboriginal women have and this chapter outlines some practical, policy, social and cultural developments involving women. The limitations of the research are identified, then the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and closing remarks.

STORY ONE: RETURN TO COUNTRY

Sunlight glints across the surface of the expansive Clarence River as we ascend on this cool winter morning. After stopping briefly in Grafton, I know it won't be long before we disembark at Lismore. I trace the Clarence as we head north. I see the Summerland Way, the road usually taken when we drive to my mother's traditional home in Bundjalung Country. I look out at the mountains to the west, remembering the time I fought bushfires in those forests decades ago. Back then, I was a young Field Officer – a park worker, in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), which is one of the state's four government fire authority departments. I worked my way up to being a remote area firefighter in the NPWS.

Remembering that bushfire event, I recall the ancient Aboriginal rock engravings that I had inadvertently come across as we worked on the fire line that night. I also recall the fresh scars across the rock surface made by a bulldozer blade that had carved across the rock as it created a firebreak in an effort to halt the incoming bushfire. These Aboriginal rock engravings are the enduring footprints made by my Bundjalung ancestors, hundreds, possibly thousands of years ago. This is my Country, and my connection is alive, so are my responsibilities. I take a moment to digest the engravings and the damage, thinking about my ancestors who knew and cared for all of this Country, including its sacred places, the networks that connect people, medicines, plant and animal kin, and how to live with fire. Like all Indigenous knowledge systems, Bundjalung knowledge was transmitted generation after generation through Bundjalung stories, and my Old People knew all the stories for this place. This one is my story.

I remember the sick feeling of shock in my body when I initially comprehended the engraving and bulldozer damage. I told myself "We have to get better at this" – a personal commitment that stays with me. When I returned to the same rock surface in the following days under sunny skies, I could no longer see the engravings, even though they had been so clear at night under torch and fire light. I was puzzled at the time, but in future years I would come to learn from Aboriginal rock art specialists that sometimes the different lighting does that, reveals and conceals the rock art. I think now, that if I had tried to show someone the rock engravings and the damage in the daylight, to complain, or raise an opportunity to improve our approaches, they most likely would not have been able to actually see the engravings for themselves. I believe that it was something intended for my eyes only, a painful lesson from Country designed to provoke me to commit to changing the current approaches to land management, protection and control.

Starting when I was 20 years old, I spent a few years employed as a Field Officer in the NPWS. All the practices that we were taught in that job, including fire management, were founded on Western scientific methods and approaches, except for Aboriginal heritage protection which was Aboriginal-led. By the time I was entering my mid-twenties I was transitioning into other roles to expand my skills and experiences. I spent time working in Aboriginal cultural heritage site protection, Aboriginal joint management of national parks, Aboriginal women's heritage protection, Ranger work and finally Aboriginal cultural heritage research. I consider all these roles as contributing to my Aboriginal identity, through the activation of cultural connections and responsibilities. However, they do not replace my responsibilities and connections outside of work – nor should they, Aboriginal identity is not something that starts and ends within a workplace.

Fast forward to my mid-thirties, I was a Mum to two sweet little babies, and I had no interest in leaving them to maintain a career. It had been a great 16 years of employment in the department. During that time, I had completed a science degree with First Class Honours, where I researched the section of the NSW Threatened Species legislation intended to incorporate Indigenous values into threatened species recovery. That Honours research was set in Bundjalung Country too. I spent many weeks there talking with my Elders, Aboriginal government staff and threatened species officers. One Elder I spent time with was at Jubullum, the same destination I am heading to today. I wonder if I will see that Old Fulla when I get there. I call him *Poppy* to show him respect as an Elder and grandfather figure. My Mum calls him *Uncle*, but he called my Mum's sister, *Sister*. We are all mob and related and those relational lines are not always linear, they circle back around. Those Elders and my family had a big influence on my Honours research. While I was there, they told me "put those university papers away and just listen, we are trying to teach you something, our way, our ethics". My Mum was with me on that day and she sternly reminded me that research was a big responsibility, that I must move forward respectfully and ethically; and to always come back to my Elders and back to Country, as she had done bringing my brother and I on many trips back to her Country throughout our lifetime. My Honours research was a time filled with cultural lessons and beautiful memories. Many of those Elders have since passed on.

Descending into Bundjalung Country I'm returning today for research fieldwork. This time for a different type of fire to the ones I used to see as a firefighter. It is 2018 and the first year of my PhD. I have been invited to attend my first official cultural burning workshop. These workshops are designed to empower and share knowledge across Aboriginal communities to support their caring for Country journeys where Aboriginal methods and knowledge systems are centred. The workshops specifically target Aboriginal people, yet often non-Aboriginal people are invited too. There are a whole range of people present: neighbours, government officers, people from NGOs, and local

community members who may want to learn about Aboriginal culture and caring for Country. It's highly possible that there are even some participants who just want to find ways to increase their opportunities to set fire to Country. It can be a tricky space.

Fortuitously, this cultural burning workshop was on my matriarchal Country at Jubullum. This wasn't just somewhere within the expansive Bundjalung Nation, it was along the actual river where my matriarchal Grandfather was born and raised, and where my Grandmother grew up too. Here as a child, my own mother played with her cousins and learnt to swim. The very Country my Mum would walk to visit her grandmother, Granny Liz who refused to speak English⁴. My first cultural burning workshop returned me to my matriarchal Country, where my mother, her mother, and every mother before them had lived and co-existed with Country for thousands of generations. The very ground that birthed my Bungum Bundjalung ancestry, it is literally my Mother Earth. This Country knows me and we share DNA. Later that day when I stood in the smoke of that cultural burn, I was inhaling the carbon of my own ancestors and all our relations (Fig. 7). This was a Smoking Ceremony, a Welcome to Country⁵ and a strong cultural grounding, marking the beginning of my PhD research⁶.

I discussed this story with my Mum and she expressed that this was a smoking ceremony of the highest level, a spiritual process beyond the realms of Western academia or human intelligence. It shows the inextricable link and spiritual connection between Country and myself – my ontological belonging. From an Aboriginal worldview, the alignments in this story are beyond coincidental. The serendipitous returning to my own traditional Country for my first cultural burning workshop is evidence of the influence of Country in my research and extremely appropriate from a cultural perspective. Tagalaka man, cultural burning practitioner and co-founder of Firesticks Alliance Victor Steffensen supports learning on one's own ancestral Country because it encourages cultural protocols and supports a range of positive outcomes including the spiritual nurturing of an individual's connection to Country.

⁴ Granny Liz was my mother's maternal grandmother. Granny Liz was multilingual, including several local Aboriginal dialects, however during her lifetime Aboriginal people were forbidden to speak our native languages. Granny Liz actively resisted this colonial imposition, she refused to speak English without duress and would only converse in Aboriginal 'lingo'. Granny Liz is depicted in 'Vanessa's poster' (Fig. 27: *Vanessa's Story*), she is the lady on the top left of the poster wearing the hat.

⁵ In some Aboriginal cultures in Australia the Aboriginal traditional custodians/owners or Elders of that Country (place) will perform a ceremonial welcome at the beginning of an event as part of the official ceremony. A Smoking Ceremony is where leaves from specific plants are burnt creating smoke that the event participants are bathed in (Fig 2). A Welcome to Country is another type of ceremonial welcome performed by an Aboriginal person who is a Traditional Owner from that Country, who welcomes others / participants to that Country. The Welcome is usually in the form of a short speech, it may also include singing, dancing, smoking ceremony or other cultural activity. An acknowledgement of Country can be made by any person to acknowledge the Indigenous lands on which they are located, and to acknowledge historical and current social contexts often with the aim of mitigating injustices and addressing disadvantage.

⁶ ABC News featured this particular cultural burning workshop in an online story which is available to view on the ABC New England North West Facebook page posted on June, 23 2018 (https://fb.watch/qKucQFIH_w/)



Figure 7: My first cultural burning workshop. Vanessa (front far left) and others at my first cultural burning workshop, Jubullum cultural burn. My family are Traditional Owners here and our ancestors have lived in this location for millennia. Photo taken in June 2018 near Tabulam, Bundjalung Country, NSW. Credit: Oliver Costello.

1.2 PREFACE: THE INFLUENCE OF COUNTRY

1.2.1 The influence of Country in research

Country is an influential leader in my research, similar to the way that Country leads cultural burning. This section outlines the influence of Country in this research, which I discuss as four alignments. The influence of Country is also visible in my stories and *Positionality* (Section 1.3), which highlight the strong relationality between my identity and this research.

The influence of Country in research is increasingly acknowledged (Bawaka et al. 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, McKnight 2017, Tynan 2021). Indigenous scholars express that Country is not passive in research, particularly where the research focusses on Country. Rather, Country is co-creator and dynamically active. Researchers express that Indigenous fire knowledge and language is sleeping in Country, waiting for Indigenous people to return and reawaken it (Garde 2009). trawlwulwuy⁷ woman Dr Lauren Tynan who is also an active cultural burning participant explains that Country maintains and shares knowledge: ‘I respect the agency of fire as a co-researcher who directs the scope and outcomes of the research project’ (Tynan 2021, p. 606). Other Indigenous scholars share this view and explain how the timing of Country-focussed Indigenous research is not indiscriminate or coincidental but rather it is responsive to the needs of Country at that time (Arnold, Atchison & McKnight 2023, Bishop 2023, McKnight 2017).

Gundungurra woman Dr Crystal Arnold and Awabakal, Gomaroi and Yuin man Dr Anthony McKnight, along with Atchison write that Country ‘contributes to research processes and enables non-human entities to communicate within and beyond their territory as sovereign subjects’ (Arnold, Atchison & McKnight 2023, p. 163). When people say “Country is speaking” it is not metaphorical: Country communicates and influences our understandings of the world (Arnold, Atchison & McKnight 2021, Tuck & Yang 2012). Tynan and Gamilaroi woman Dr Michelle Bishop (2023) who is also an active cultural burning participant, advocate for Indigenist and decolonising approaches in research relating to Country, so that attention is given to the relationality between Country, the researcher and the research. They also advocate that Indigenous methodological approaches are engaged because these are fit-for-purpose. The increase of Country being acknowledged as lead author and key contributor in scholarship is evidence of growing understanding that Country influences research (e.g. Bawaka et al. 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, Darug Ngurra et al. 2019, Murramarang Country et al. 2024).

The influence and leadership of Country is also well understood in cultural burning. Steffensen (2020) identifies that Country is an active knowledge holder and leader, pointing out that everything

⁷ Tynan (2020, p. 169) explains that words such as trawlwulwuy, tebrakunna country and mannalargenna are in lower case, as these are the print-based conventions of many Tasmanian ancestral languages.

we need to know can be learnt from Country, because Country is ‘the oldest living Elder for any Indigenous clan group and has been there all along’ (Steffensen 2020, p. 146). Beyond research and cultural burning, Aboriginal people and Aboriginal worldviews accept that Country is active and influential. Concepts like ‘Look after Country, and Country will look after you’ (ILSC 2022) show that Aboriginal people understand the existence of a reciprocal relationship between humans and Country, where Country is not passive. Aboriginal people also understand the alignments, such as those that occur in my research, as not being coincidental; rather it is characteristic of Aboriginal ways of being and doing, which in turn creates or informs the knowing (Martin 2008). Aboriginal people also understand that Traditional Owners have a specific role in facilitating knowledge that is located within Country, because of the ontological belonging with their Country, and the cultural protocols that are attached (Moreton-Robinson 2003). I identify the influence of Country in my research in numerous ways. For example, I entered the PhD process with a perception of being an autonomous individual, where I was in control of the decisions and direction my research would take. However, I acknowledge that Country is active and influential and that although this thesis is an original document, the knowledge underpinning it is bound with Country.

1.2.2 Alignment One: Revival and my research

When I enrolled in this PhD and was considering potential research topics, the University of Wollongong (UOW), where I am studying, along with other universities, won a grant from the NSW Government to establish the Bushfire Risk Management Research Hub. The Hub had several research priorities including *Work Package 5: Indigenous cultural burning: Exploring the links between cultural revitalisation and wellbeing*. I became aware that the Hub was seeking to support an Indigenous PhD student attached to this stream, which neatly aligned with my area of research, geography. I approached Professor Ross Bradstock, Director of the Hub, with a proposal to take on that PhD position with the research topic, ‘Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW’. My research proposal was accepted and categorised as *Milestone 4 of Work Package 5: Explore Aboriginal women’s engagement in cultural burning*.

At that time, I joined the Hub’s cultural burning working group and within two years I also joined the NSW Government interim cultural burning working group. My membership in both working groups was sought in recognition of my professional experience, and to ensure there was representation of Aboriginal women. Through these processes I influenced the development of NSW Government’s engagement in cultural burning. I see the influence of Country through the timing of these events at the beginning of my PhD.

At that time the NSW Government was in its initial stages of engagement in cultural burning at the policy level, yet Aboriginal communities had been active in reviving cultural burning activities

for many years, often alongside Aboriginal officers and allies in government. For example, the Orange LALC in central NSW had been caring for Country through cultural burning for many years (OLALC 2014). Similarly, the Dharug community in western Sydney have undertaken many cultural burns often alongside NPWS and the Rural Fire Service (RFS) such as the cultural burn at Burugal Aboriginal Place Yarramundi, NSW (NPWS 2024). The increased activity within government at the strategy and policy level is in response to the work that Aboriginal communities have been undertaking for years with building momentum across the state.

1.2.3 Alignment Two: 2019-2020 Black Summer and my research

As I completed the second year of my PhD, fire centred itself in the national consciousness with the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. Described as unprecedented and the worst bushfires on record, the fires lasted eight months – well beyond the seasonal period after which they are named, causing catastrophic damage and losses that were direct, indirect, tangible and intangible. These fires indicate that we are experiencing the climate crisis (Boer, Resco de Dios, & Bradstock 2020, DCJ 2024, Nolan et al. 2021). They burnt across millions of hectares and killed billions of animals. Seven percent of NSW was burnt making it ‘the largest recorded area of land burnt by bushfires in the State’s history’ (DCJ 2024, p. 13). Nationally, 33 people were killed directly by the fires, with the majority in NSW (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, DCJ 2024). Hospitalisations increased and hundreds of people died through respiratory illness and other health impacts (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020). Thousands of homes, buildings and infrastructure were destroyed, with significant loss in NSW (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, DCJ 2024).

The fires were ‘the most economically damaging on record’ for NSW (Wood, Beauman & Adams 2021, p. 11). Costs included those that are immediate, others prolonged, and some costs will never be comprehensively understood or are difficult to quantify, such as mental health impacts (Gibbs et al. 2013, Penman et al. 2023). The costs included increased cost of living, deteriorated infrastructure, and losses of ecosystem services (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, Productivity Commission 2014, Read & Denniss 2020, Wood, Beauman & Adams 2021). The direct financial impact of the fires are estimated at AU\$10 billion conservatively, with indirect costs over AU\$100 billion (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, Read & Denniss 2020). Tourism losses were estimated at AU\$1.1 billion (Reiner et al. 2024), and the total insurance damage was AU\$2.32 billion (Insurance Council of Australia 2024). The fires are known to have impacted on Aboriginal cultural heritage, however a systematic quantification of the impacts has not been undertaken. It is highly likely that a significant number of irreplaceable heritage sites were damaged or destroyed (Pickrell 2020, van Leeuwen & Miller-Sabbioni 2023).

The 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires generated significant public and government interest in cultural burning (Bowman & Lehman 2020, Butler 2023, McKemey et al. 2020a, Neale 2020). A Google Trends graph (Fig. 8) indicates public interest in ‘cultural burning’ over the 10-year period from 2014-2024, with a clear spike coinciding with the fires and ongoing interest following. Intense interest in cultural burning drew the work of myself and others into the spotlight and drastically intensified my research. During that time, my media engagements and my own publication outputs dramatically increased (see *My Publication* list, and Appendix 12.11). The 2019-2020 Black Summer also gave rise to a new phenomenon in fire, ‘megafires’, indicative of worsening fire conditions (Linley et al. 2022, Nimmo 2022). The biggest megafire, the Gospers Mountain Fire⁸, tore through my childhood home in Colo Heights. The local RFS and neighbours saved our house there, however, all the surrounding bush across thousands of hectares was decimated. Through the turmoil, I concentrated my efforts on amplifying cultural burning and Indigenous-led caring for Country, including advocacy for women’s engagement.

The fires, along with other disasters, prompted a Royal Commission and several state government inquiries. I participated in many through personal and joint submissions alongside other key cultural burning practitioners and advocates. Notably I was called as an Expert Witness in the Royal Commission into the National Natural Disaster Arrangements (discussed in *Positionality*), in recognition of my personal and professional experience, advocacy work and this PhD. I see the influence of Country in the alignment of my research with the Black Summer Bushfires. Although the event was catastrophic, the timeliness of my research is appropriate in response to the needs of Country (McKnight 2017).

1.2.4 Alignment Three: The Cultural Fire Management Unit and my research

Shortly after the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires and during my PhD candidature, I was appointed as the inaugural Principal Program Manager of the Cultural Fire Management Unit (CFMU) within NSW Government in DPE (August 2021). The CFMU was⁹ a small experiential hybrid policy, strategy and program team, established as part of the NSW Government response to the Bushfires. The CFMU was the first of its kind in NSW, possibly also nationally and beyond. Its primary remit was responding to Recommendations¹⁰ of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and supporting NSW

⁸ The Gospers Mountain Fire is the biggest single-ignition bushfire in Australian history and one of the many megafires that occurred during the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. In recognition of its magnitude Nguyen, K, McDonald and Taouk, M (2020) published a detailed report on the Gospers Mountain Fire.

⁹ In August 2024 the CFMU became the Healthy Country Team and was relocated into the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).

¹⁰ Specifically, Recommendations 25 and 26 of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry as detailed in Section 3.5.

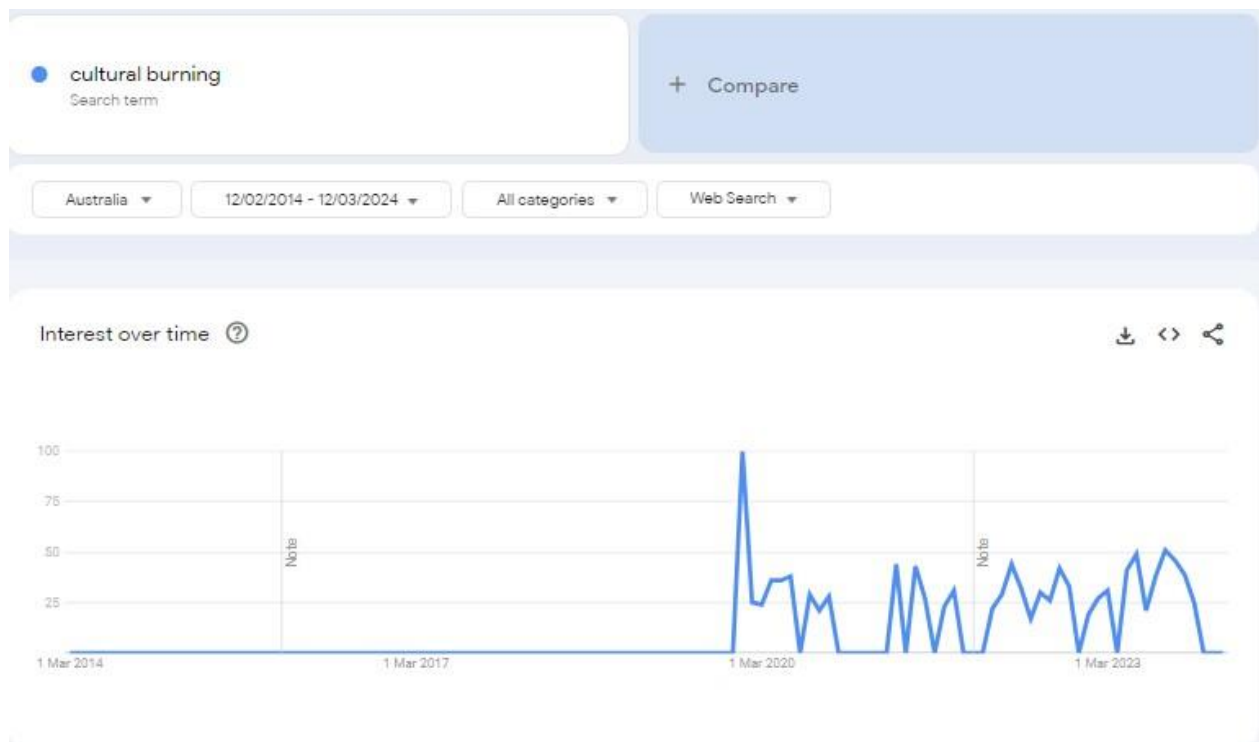


Figure 8: Google Trends graph. Showing the number of searches for “cultural burning” in Australia, 2014-2024. It shows a surge of searches at the same time as the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, with ongoing interest following the events.

Government to expand support and commitment to cultural burning. The programmatic arm of the CFMU had partnerships with several Aboriginal community-led cultural burning projects. Through these projects I was able to spend time on Country with Aboriginal people and witness, participate in and directly influence increased Aboriginal leadership and Aboriginal women’s participation in the sector. Beyond my personal activities, the CFMU projects kept me connected to ‘the field’ and nurtured me personally through what was an extremely intense work experience. As manager, I was deeply engaged in encouraging systems change across multiple government agencies, which came with a raft of challenges. I directly contributed to the development of a whole-of-Government, statewide cultural fire management strategy (forthcoming). Despite goodwill, creating change at this scale is a monumental task, complicated by entrenched institutional barriers, including Eurocentric worldviews of nature and of race (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024). As a new initiative, there were no formal structures or legislation to secure the objectives of the CFMU beyond the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, making its remit and ability to create change tenuous.

The CFMU manager role demanded that I understand the links between cultural burning, caring for Country, Aboriginal culture and wellbeing, colonisation and racism, and a range of other social and environmental indicators. It also demanded that with this understanding, I staunchly fight for recognition and engagement of Country-centred, Aboriginal-led relationships with fire. This PhD research has been an important strategic strength to my work in the CFMU. It is more-than coincidence

that I concurrently undertake this research and be employed in this role – again, I see this as the influence of Country. My PhD has been an apprenticeship, where Country has nurtured, challenged and prepared me for significant responsibilities and challenges. It has ensured that I gain the academic knowledge and qualifications required to be competent and strong in my role, and have authority and influence when working to enact systems change. By undertaking this research, I am current with the literature at the local, national and international level, and with practical developments in cultural burning. The PhD also contributes to my personal development, it builds on my skills and reinforces my confidence, so that I am culturally strong, with the necessary academic skills, cultural knowledge, lived experiences and networks. Throughout my employed role, I have frequently drawn on knowledge gained from my PhD to support my work and advocate for change.

1.2.5 Alignment Four: Family and my research

I recognise the influence of Country in my research through the involvement of my own family members, mainly my children and my mother, and several key interactions are shared in my stories. Beyond being my mother, Theresa Mena French holds an important role in this research as an Aboriginal Elder, respected matriarch and knowledge holder. She grew up on her own Country within an extensive family, embedded in Aboriginal community and culture. She moved to Sydney in the 1960s and joined her brother, Charles Patrick French in the Aboriginal social justice movement, including the 1967 Referendum which changed the national Constitution, so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be included in the national census; and to streamline the Commonwealth to make laws applicable to them. My mother and others, have lived experience of the active prohibition of Aboriginal culture, segregation and assimilation policies. Now, with her lived experience and with greater freedoms, she is a strong advocate for the retention and celebration of Aboriginal culture. Given this research focusses on Aboriginal women's experiences at the intersection of race and gender, my mother's contributions are invaluable. Through her lived experiences and understandings of colonial oppression, intersectionality, Aboriginal self-determination and Indigenous excellence¹¹, my mother's wisdom has been crucial in informing this research. She comprehends the implications of 'research' in Indigenous societies, as well as the influence of race, racism and oppression in Aboriginal women's experiences. My mother applies her knowledge to this thesis through our discussions and storying as well as her leadership (*Story Four: The Pop-Up Matriarchal Methodology Workshop*). Her nurturing, expertise and guidance, especially on cultural and racial issues, are not resources that are available

¹¹ Also known as 'Blak excellence', this term signifies empowerment and the centring of Indigenous joy and strength and wisdom, and counteracts the negative stereotypes that have been applied to Indigenous peoples. For more details on Indigenous excellence see Lavelle 2023, Schell et al. 2020, and Watego 2021.

through academia, and her involvement has been foundational in maintaining my health and wellbeing, and that of my children throughout the PhD journey.

Taking advice from my mother, I have involved my children in my research and work (*Story Eight: Take Your Children With You*). I take them to cultural burns, to meetings, speaking engagements, and they worked with me to code my research data. Having my children with me means we are spending time together. This opportunity strengthens and expands their experiences at the same time as contributing to my learning and wellbeing. It also minimises the potential for me to feel guilt and isolation from being an absent parent because of my PhD commitments. This connectedness is illustrated in a short film featuring my children and I at the Dhungala National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2019 (Firesticks Alliance and Cavanagh 2019). The involvement of my children has been an important research aid that has supported my research findings, such as encouraging me to consider other Aboriginal mothers' and carers' needs and experiences.

The presence and involvement of children and youth highlight certain challenges and barriers to cultural burning, whilst also influencing the behaviour of others, who become role models, teachers, Elders, Aunts and Uncles. It has caused me to be more attentive where I have witnessed that youth are encouraged as active participants in cultural burning, and they are valued as future leaders, not treated as ancillary or as a risk. Country has also revealed some negative aspects of the research topic, and I have witnessed the trauma of Country, and the impacts of trauma and grief on Aboriginal people, including myself, other Aboriginal women and men (Webster et al. 2023). Therefore, looking after my wellbeing is important. Country helps achieve this by keeping my family close to me, but I also need to protect the wellbeing of my children in their exposure to the bushfire damage (Cavanagh 2020d, Webster et al. 2023).

Like Country, my children and mother's contributions to this research are not formally recognised in my PhD supervisory team, however they are central to my research. Opaskwayak Cree Associate Professor Shawn Wilson (2008) explores the concept that Indigenous researchers gain lessons from research beyond the attainment of the knowledge that is to be anticipated from the research topic. The intergenerational features of research are not usually acknowledged in research, which is often framed as the work and intellectualising of the researcher as an individual. However, participation and contributions of my family members have been an incredible asset that has added richness and depth to this research and facilitated many personal lessons.

I see Country encouraging me to gain strong, grounded and personal understandings of the topic through the involvement of my family members. Wilson (2008) identifies that Indigenist research involves cultural processes and formalities where the research becomes an extension of cultural ways of being, knowing and doing, describing this as 'research is ceremony' (Wilson 2008). My experience of this research has been that multiple generations have shared a wide variety of learning, including about Aboriginal culture and leadership; respect and protocols; relationships, Country and cultural burning; gender, racism, and climate change. The nurturing aspect of Indigenous research has been

explored by Tynan (2020) who discusses research as a process of co-becoming, that positively influences researchers' wellbeing through strengthening identities. The involvement of my mother and children highlight that this research is not confined to theoretical realms, rather it is a culturally responsive practice that has, and will continue to affect Country, women and others. It therefore carries multifaceted opportunities and responsibilities (Wilson 2008). My research extends my personal journey, as an individual, as a mother and a daughter, it has contributed to my personal and cultural identity, growth and praxis. My research requires me to follow and respect cultural protocols, enact my responsibilities and be reciprocal (Wilson 2008). Similarly, Aboriginal people understand the important roles of Aboriginal women as matriarchs and leaders in our communities.

1.2.6 Making sense of the alignments

This section highlights the ways that Country leads and influences this research through four alignments. These are: the revival of cultural burning; the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires; the CFMU; and the involvement of my mother, children and family (Fig. 9). I understand these alignments in the context of Country having power and influence as co-creator of my research. All the alignments are interconnected and add richness and depth to this research, and produce outcomes that are unique, tangible and useful. This PhD has equipped me with the tools, expertise, support structures, and confidence required to undertake challenging tasks. The interconnections are illustrated conceptually in Fig. 10 Conceptual framework, and temporally in Fig. 11 Timeline.



Vanessa Cavanagh with Jarjum (her children), Tyson and Emma Cavanagh at the 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop, Dhungala hosted by Yorta Yorta. Photo courtesy of Craig Bender and Vera Hong.

Figure 9: Vanessa Cavanagh with jarjums (children) at Dhungala 2019. Credit: Firesticks Alliance website

This confluence allows me to take my culturally-embedded research and active engagement within and external to Government, to directly influence public, academic and government discussions, decisions and outcomes for cultural burning. My participation has contributed to the dynamically evolving space of cultural burning and changed the landscape in which I completed this research. My appointment in the CFMU role further influenced my research, and in turn the impact and influence of my research is already apparent in the sector. My work continues to positively influence cultural burning policy¹² development, management and practical operations. These alignments highlight that it is as much about demonstrating my research skills as it is about knowing, being, and doing. They also highlight the deep connection between praxis, identity and knowledge (Moreton-Robinson 2015, Wilson 2008). Through all these occurrences and outcomes, I feel the strength of Country and I see Country as active and powerful.

¹² This research has directly influenced the NSW Cultural Fire Management Strategy (forthcoming) that was developed in the CFMU where I was employed as Manager. This research also influences other Government policies and programs, and other national natural disasters programs that I provide expertise into. These include: the *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan March 2024*, *Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2024–33* (DPHI 2024); the NSW Crown Lands Cultural Burn Program (Crown Lands 2024); Natural Hazards Research Australia (NHRA) (Costello et al. 2021); NHRA 2022a; and the National Council for Fire and Emergency Services (Weir 2023b).

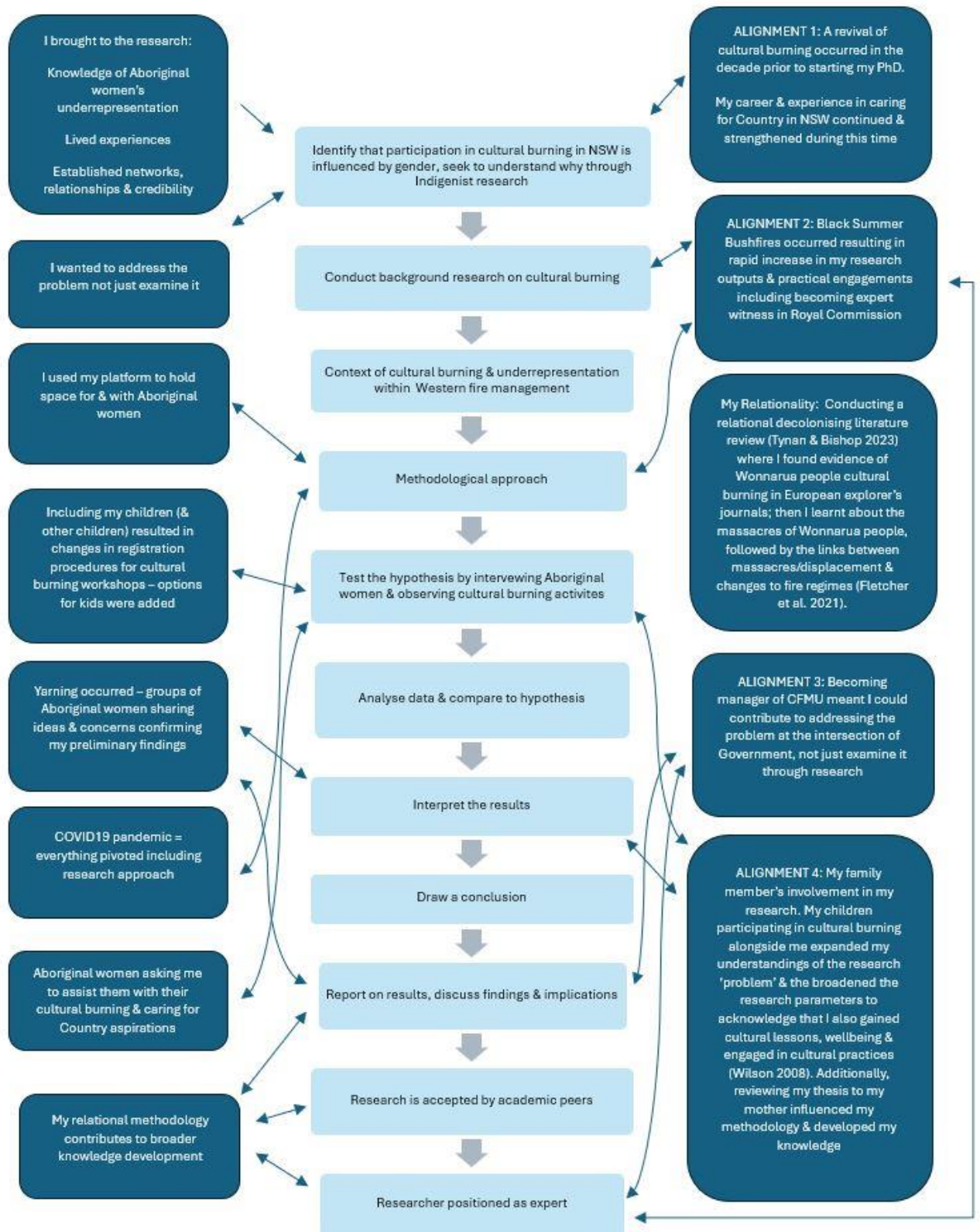


Figure 10: Components of this research. The centre column (light blue) shows how a 'standard' conceptual structure may look. However, my research progressed within a network of interrelated and relevant events and issues including four notable alignments and my positionality.

1.3 POSITIONALITY

1.3.1 The significance of positionality to this research

Positionality refers to the worldviews and political positioning of the researcher, and how it affects the research. Positionality is pertinent in settler-colonial societies, particularly in research involving Indigenous peoples where research has a legacy of disempowering and negatively affecting people (Smith 1999, Sultana 2007).

My positionality is a prominent feature and strength of this research; thus it is addressed early in the thesis, deviating from conventional Western thesis structure. In contrast, this practice is more commonplace in Indigenist research (Carter et al. 2014, Kwame 2017, Russ-Smith 2023, Smith 1999). My positionality is unique and relevant in multiple ways. First, as this is Indigenist research and as it focusses on Country, culture and Aboriginal people – specifically women - my identity as an Aboriginal woman, and the political intention of my work warrants clarification. This clarification addresses Aboriginal community expectations and demonstrates that appropriate research processes are undertaken. To address these expectations, I provide personal contextual details that legitimise me as an appropriate researcher for this topic. Also, this qualitative research is undertaken within Indigenous Research Methodologies where my identity, and the contributions I make to advancing Indigenous scholarship and community development are methodologically important (Altamirano-Jiménez et al. 2025, Foley 2018).

Although it is not customary in Aboriginal culture to talk about ourselves as experts or leaders (Ganter 2016), my positionality identifies multiple clear indicators that I am very well suited to undertaking this research. My pre-existing experience as an ‘insider’ in the field meant that I came to the research with established networks and a grounded understanding of the research topic, and its policy and operational landscape, where I could comprehend the jargon and non-verbal cues. Additionally, the roles I hold within the sector mean that I have influence that support me to advance the research outcomes beyond what might ordinarily be expected for a PhD student.

As detailed in Chapter One my experience of this research is unique in that I am concurrently completing this PhD whilst also being employed in Government as a leader and expert for the same topic area. This meant that I was constantly switching between progressing outcomes with my research and writing this thesis whilst concurrently progressing outcomes in the policy space and driving change in the sector. An example of this is where I discuss the NSW Government developing a Cultural Fire Management Strategy, I held the manager role of the team writing and developing that same strategy. This duality both heightened my understanding of the sector, and created complexity for my research progress, however both enmeshed me deeper in the research.

1.3.2 Who am I and why am I talking about cultural burning?

I am an Aboriginal woman, mother, cousin, community member, Auntie¹³ and native title rights holder through both my mother's and father's family lines. I was raised in an all-Aboriginal household which consisted of my brother and I with our parents, and we lived on a 26-acre property that my parents bought. Our home was located in the bush, about 25 kilometres away from the closest urban centre and our property is primarily covered in Sydney Sandstone Ridgetop Woodland and surrounded by kilometres of highly flammable native bushland. Fires were commonplace in my upbringing, from the slow combustion stove in our home, the controlled burns around our property, as well as the experience of destructive bushfires (Fig. 12). My parents were both active in the local community volunteer fire service (now RFS) at Colo Heights – both filling heteronormative roles, with Dad on the truck, and Mum in the kitchen. I was an RFS 'brat' along with my brother and our childhood friends. My father was RFS Captain for a time, and when he passed away, the RFS truck led his funeral procession and the RFS chaplain officiated his funeral alongside one of our Aboriginal Elders. My upbringing meant I did not develop a fear of fire and was not estranged from fire. Rather, fires were fun, constructive, and fire was used by my family and our (non-Indigenous) neighbours to maintain our properties. Burning our properties was undertaken with a perception that fire was a natural and good thing for the Australian bush, it helped control weeds and invasive plants whilst also minimising bushfire risk.

As an Aboriginal family, we participated in activities that were unique from our neighbours. We belong to a large extended Aboriginal family and community. Aboriginal culture is core to our identities. I remember a specific time when our extended family gathered to practice culture on our property; fire and smoke were a part of this gathering. At that time, Australian society was not as accepting of Aboriginal culture as is apparent today, where it is common for people to seek out Aboriginal cultural experiences. When I was young our cultural practices were not as overt, my family were maintaining what parts of our culture we could, whilst also navigating societal norms and experiences of racism. Regardless of how obscure or frequent our cultural practices appeared, I was raised in a strong Aboriginal family and belong within a strong Aboriginal community. This has shaped the person I am today. My childhood and culturally embedded upbringing fostered my love for the Australian bush and respect for fire, Aboriginal people and culture.

¹³ Aunties and Uncles are not just a parent's siblings or relations in Aboriginal society. Aunties and Uncles hold special roles for younger generations and being referred to as an Auntie or Uncle is a mark of respect (Lohoar, Butera & Kennedy 2014).



Figure 12: My childhood home, Colo Heights. Engulfed by the Gospers Mountain megafire. Taken at Wheelbarrow Ridge Road, Colo Heights during the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. Credit: Dean Sewell 2019, courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. File Number FL18563882.

I have been active in environmental conservation and caring for Country in NSW for almost three decades with much of this time focussed on Aboriginal-specific topics. In primary school my teacher asked me “What do you I want to be when you grow up?” I enthusiastically replied “a Treehugger!” My subsequent career in the environmental conservation sector is a fairly accurate representation of what I was trying to articulate. Over the decades I have worked in a range of roles. I started employment as a trainee in a local council bush regeneration team, then a park worker and firefighter in NPWS where I transitioned to working in Aboriginal heritage protection and joint management. I moved into a consulting firm as a project manager of the Georges River Aboriginal Riverkeeper project, which delivered successful traineeships with Aboriginal youth in southwestern Sydney (Cavanagh 2016, 2018, Wales & Cavanagh 2018). I spent several years as a lecturer in Geography at UOW before becoming the manager of the CFMU (see Section 1.2.4). I have a degree in Land and Heritage Management with First Class Honours. I am a cultural burning participant and industry change agent; however, I am not a cultural burning practitioner, nor do I hold cultural burning authority.

In all these roles I encourage the centring of Aboriginal cultural protocols and I brought this into my research where reciprocity and collaboration are key features of my approach. Here, there are times when I lead, times when I support, and times when I learn. I have mentored younger generations,

and I have been mentored. I have co-authored with Aboriginal women, and I have held leadership roles (Fig. 13).

Because of my life and career experiences Aboriginal women value and validate my research. In the early stages of my PhD, an Aboriginal woman and cultural fire practitioner expressed that she was pleased to learn of my research because I would be able to *hold space* for Aboriginal women. I prompted her to expand on what she meant, and she explained that my presence (and existing profile) would help raise awareness of Aboriginal women in cultural burning, making visible the need for gender representation and inclusion. Although my involvement in cultural burning at the time was new, my pre-existing experience and networks in the sector meant I was comfortable and proficient in holding space for Aboriginal women¹⁴. I am concurrently holding space for Aboriginal women in cultural burning, caring for Country, the broader sectors of Western fire management¹⁵ and environmental conservation, and I am one of the few Aboriginal women nationally¹⁶ to be completing a PhD. I maintain my political positioning and advocate for Aboriginal-led approaches, including involving women wherever opportunities arise.

Prior to joining the CFMU, I participated in two interdisciplinary UOW *Global Challenges* research projects to support those Aboriginal communities in their caring for Country aspirations and to advocate for Aboriginal women's involvement. I participated in cultural burning in both projects, and I gained a wealth of insight; however, benefiting my research was not the reason for my participation. I capitalised opportunities to raise the profile and advocate for Aboriginal women and I share my platform where possible to ensure that a variety of Aboriginal women's voices are heard. Reciprocity also means that I am fulfilling my responsibilities to Country and community through knowledge sharing, supporting and leadership (Graham & Maloney 2019). My contributions are demonstrations of me walking the talk, intentionally centring and promoting Aboriginal caring for Country and Aboriginal leadership. It forms part of my responsibility and reciprocation and ways in which I and my research have power and influence.

¹⁴ See Fig. 27: *Vanessa's Story* poster; and Fig. 19: *Being interviewed*

¹⁵ Western fire management is the term used in this thesis to describe the mainstream, formal fire agencies and their processes. Western fire management is explained in Section 3.1.1

¹⁶ I represent a minority community within academia as Indigenous people are underrepresented as higher degree researchers in Australia (Barney 2018). Only 8.3% of Indigenous people in NSW have attained a Bachelors degree or higher, compared to the total population which is 27.8% for NSW; and 26.3% for Australia (ABS Quick Stats 2021). 'In 2020, Indigenous PhD students made up only 1 percent of the total HDR cohort (586 students out of a total of 58,110) across all universities in Australia' (Ballangarry, J & Pugin, M 2024, p. 706).



Figure 13: MC of ‘Good Fire for Country’, Firesticks Alliance Mullumbimby, February 2020. I ensure that Aboriginal women’s voices were heard. Here I share the stage with Minyungbal Yugambah woman Rachael Cavanagh. Credit: unknown.

Through my roles, I have always advocated for and encouraged Aboriginal leadership in matters that concern Aboriginal people, including Country. I am aware of and support the alignments between the Indigenous Land Back movement which is grounded in unceded sovereignty (Altamirano-Jiménez et al. 2025, Morris n.d, Norman 2025), climate justice and Indigenous social justice – a stance that global expert environmental scientist and climate activist David Suzuki (2007) supports, not only for its political underpinning, but because as Suzuki acknowledges, it is what is needed for global human sustainability. This has been advocated by Indigenous peoples around the globe for many decades (Hernández 2022, Redvers 2022, Simpson, 2021, Whyte 2017). And there are growing calls for Indigenous women’s leadership in responding to the climate crisis (Altamirano-Jiménez et al. 2025, Nelson 2019, Thomas 2022). I understand and support that decolonisation across and within all departments and wider society is required and will enhance the opportunities for Indigenous approaches to reach optimal success, benefiting Country and all people (Sultana 2022, Thomas 2022).

My positionality illustrates the political underpinnings of my subjective self and my desires for this research. Positioning myself as one of the Aboriginal women contributing to this research, I bring forth my own understanding of the current policy landscape and the implications relevant now and for the future. In all the roles and opportunities I engage in, I am aware of the times that I am the only

Aboriginal woman present or holding a leadership role (for example, I was the only female listed as a presenter on the program of the 2019 Ngulla Firesticks Cultural Burning Forum, and I was specifically invited to attend and present at the Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum in Canberra, 2018). I am aware of the times when Aboriginal women's voices are underrepresented, and whose voices are being centred. I also understand that if I do not speak up and add my voice to discussions, especially where decisions are made, opportunities may be missed, Aboriginal women's issues will go unheard and Aboriginal culture, people and Country will be affected.

Because this is research by, with and about Aboriginal women, this PhD is appropriate, meaningful and useful. Aboriginal women know all of this, and they also understand the relevance of my positionality and the strength it brings to this research. I am aware that I am 'holding space' and my responsibility is to support other Aboriginal people – particularly women – to gain access to these spaces (Fig. 13 and Fig. 14). I know I have responsibility to Country and communities to create and foster positive changes. My research is strengthened by my relationship with Country, and my identity that was grounded and nurtured through my culturally embedded upbringing.

1.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter addresses cultural protocols, presents my cultural identity, acknowledges the influence of Country, and addresses my positionality. It has begun to reveal some of the legacies, histories and intersectional experiences of Aboriginal women and cultural burning. The upcoming story shares one of my experiences that explores firefighting, identity and privilege. The following chapter is what would conventionally appear as the first chapter in a thesis. It provides an outline of cultural burning in NSW, as well as explaining the thesis rationale, approach and literature.



Figure 14: Social Media post about Royal Commission. One of several posts I made on social media in the lead up to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020) seeking to engage Aboriginal women in my participatory action research. The image is of my children Emma and Tyson Cavanagh participating in cultural burning at Dhungala NIFW 2019, Barmah, Victoria.

STORY TWO: DESCENDANTS OF YENGO

“I wonder if the pilot knows exactly where we’re going?”

The thought crystallises in my mind and a sudden pang of alertness rises in my body. From where I’m seated, in the second-row centre of the throbbing helicopter, I watch the pilot routinely check his instruments, then review an A4 map that’s been taped to a clipboard, before casting it aside, and visually scanning around the helicopter’s encircling windows. We’re less than a few minutes into the morning flight, visibility is sketchy. As the helicopter continues to ascend, all I can see from my viewpoint are nearby ridgelines that prematurely fade into the smoky bushfire haze.

At 24 years old I’ve been a Field Officer in the NSW NPWS for four years. Firefighting is part of the job and in the summer months we’re often off somewhere around the state responding to bushfires. It’s December 2001 and dangerous fires have broken out in various places across NSW, in an event that will become known as the Black Christmas¹⁷ bushfires. Sitting in the helicopter with my helmet on my lap, dressed in heavy black boots and my fire-resistant yellows (Fig. 15), I smell strongly of smoke and sweat. Crammed either side of me are identically dressed crew members. Although we are all wearing the chopper’s audio headsets, we don’t talk, it’s too noisy, and any chatter could distract the pilot from their immediate task. I spend the trip looking out the windows trying to piece together the landscape through the haze.

I feel comfortable in this setting. I grew up in the bush where outdoors work was a daily responsibility and fires were a regular feature. My Dad and brother were members of the local RFS, and during my childhood I played around the fire shed with the other local kids. As a child, I noticed that not many women went out on the fire truck. Now it’s me, and I love the excitement of firefighting, but there are still not many women firefighters, and beyond my workmate Ross who is proudly Wiradjuri from Cowra, rarely do I meet other Aboriginal people on the fire line. However, this is not unusual; I am aware that I am often the minority¹⁸.

¹⁷ The Black Christmas bushfires occurred in December 2001 lasting for 23 days with over 100 separate fires in various parts of NSW (AIDR n.d.)

¹⁸ The status of women and Indigenous people in Western fire management and environmental conservation agencies is provided in Section 2.4: *Underrepresentation*.



Figure 15: Firefighter Vanessa at Yengo during Black Christmas fires. During the Black Christmas bushfires in the summer of 2001-2002. Taken at Big Yango Station, in Yengo National Park, Wonnarua / Darkinjung Country. Credit: Cavanagh family collection.

Prior to the flight we had a shift briefing in the incident control centre in the NPWS office in Bulga, a tiny village along the Putty Road south of Singleton. I grew up on this same road at a place called Colo Heights, about 125km to the south. The fact that this is Wonnarua Country wasn't part of that briefing and it is years before Acknowledgements and Welcomes to Country become commonplace. I know it's Wonnarua Country because it's my ancestral lands on my father's side, and our family has been involved in native title¹⁹ negotiations in the region for decades, interacting with the coal mining companies, and working to protect our important Aboriginal heritage sites across the region. Many of our Elders don't live long enough to see the outcomes of these negotiations. They did, however, get to see the expansive open cut coal mines that ripped through Wonnarua Country.

¹⁹ Native title is governed by the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)* which establishes, in Australian law, the recognised rights and interests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land and waters according to their traditional law and customs (Australian Government n.d., KLC 2024).

From the briefing I know we're headed for a prominent mountain, Mt Yengo, less than 30km to the south; it should be easy to spot. I continue to scan the windows hoping to catch a glimpse of Mt Yengo myself. I knew I would recognise it the instant I saw it – I have been revering that mountain my whole life. Of Mt Yengo, tourist information says it is:

very significant to the Wonnarua and other Aboriginal peoples of the region. As well as its ceremonial sites, special places and wild resources, the Yengo area provides economic, social and recreation opportunities for Wonnarua people²⁰.

Although broad statements like these are positive for what they do achieve in educating the public, they are written for tourist audiences, and don't adequately convey the spiritual or cultural attachments to Country for Aboriginal peoples. I agree that Mt Yengo is extremely significant for Wonnarua peoples and other Aboriginal nations. It is a centrepiece of our creation stories and part of the complex networks and songlines that connect peoples and Country across the landscape.

Mt Yengo has been important to me for as long as I can remember. As a child there was a place I would sit on our property at Colo Heights where I could see Mt Yengo far off in the distance. I would sit there and let my young mind wander while I stared out at the beautiful, flat-topped, indigo mountain. Back then I did not know the significance of Mt Yengo, but I remember that my parents would point it out as we travelled north along the Putty Road on our many road trips. As I came into my teenage years and early adulthood, I learned more of my relationship with Wonnarua Country, through my participation in native title processes and as my own interest and knowledge on Aboriginal culture grew.

Despite the restricted visibility, the helicopter pilot brings us safely to our destination, Big Yango homestead, within Yengo National Park. Our four-person firefighting crew has been assigned the task of putting in a rake-hoe line (firebreak) across a rocky ridge, which will assist firefighting efforts. The crew includes myself, my workmate Ross, and two male NPWS staff from the local region. One of these two is a younger man, who I'll call Mark; and the other, an older, quiet man, Mr Garland²¹, who I guess is around the same age as my dad (born 1944).

As we work through the day, Mark and I get talking. He tells me how Mr Garland has heritage that stretched back to the pioneering Europeans who came into the Hunter region. Mark speaks about the older man with obvious and genuine respect, describing that he feels honoured to work with someone whose surname is included in local maps in homage to their family's settler ancestors (the locale of Garland Valley is ~10km west of Big Yango). Mr Garland and his family have a rich history with over 100 years of connection in the place we are working in. The way Mark talks up about Mr

²⁰ Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation (WNAC) and the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) 2009, p. 4

²¹ My sincere respects to Mr Garland's family and friends, may he Rest in Peace.

Garland and his connection to that region makes me smile. Being the cheeky young person I am, I turn to the older man who had been listening to our conversation and say, “That’s cool Mr Garland, and do you know what? When your ancestors came here, they would have met my ancestors. We’ve been here for thousands of years before you fullas turned up!”

Mr Garland gives a wry smile.

The heat and smoke increase as we continue putting in the rake-hoe line. This task has us creating a ‘path’ approximately 1m wide through the hilly and rocky terrain. It is cleared of any flammable material, back to bare earth wherever possible. This rake-hoe line will likely be used as an ignition point from which a back-burn will be applied to reduce fuel loads in front of the approaching bushfire. It is physical, hard work, raking and digging; to this very day the calluses on my hands remain. The work is intensified by the summer sun and pervasive bushfire smoke that we cannot avoid breathing in. While we work, Mark and I discuss with interest that both Mr Garland and I have history in the region through our family heritage, and that now we are working together to fight fire and protect the landscape.

In the context of this research, I consider how Western discourses, and their artefacts (maps and the names of landmarks) maintain and privilege the power of particular peoples, in this case the Garland name, whilst ignoring and omitting others - such as acknowledging the Wonnarua history. I consider that if I had not spoken up that day, it is very unlikely anyone else would have known about my connection to that place, or if they would have thought about it as Aboriginal Country, rich with history and culture. For example, ‘yengo’ is an Aboriginal language word meaning mountain, and the mountain itself is important in Bhiemie creation stories (NPWS 2009). My idea that other NPWS employees should have basic knowledge of Aboriginal culture is not unreasonable. At the time as employees of the NPWS, we carried statutory responsibilities to protect Aboriginal heritage as NPWS held the primary legislation for the protection of Aboriginal heritage across all of NSW. From my perspective, there was generally a high level of ignorance regarding Aboriginal matters, and to a point this ignorance was maintained through business-as-usual processes.

CHAPTER 2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 Outline

This chapter introduces the research topic, key concepts and central arguments, focussing on New South Wales (NSW), Australia, unless otherwise stated. Located in the southeast of the continent with the coastal capital of Sydney, NSW is the most populated state in Australia, and it has the highest population of Indigenous people.

A brief description of fire and Aboriginal people is provided, then cultural burning explored. Following that, the research background, rationale, approach and theoretical framework, including the geographical and demographic focus of the research is presented. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature and an outline of the thesis chapters. This research is based on the premise that gender²² influences who participates in cultural burning and that Aboriginal women's roles, knowledges and aspirations regarding cultural burning are under-recognised.

The term Western fire management appears frequently in this thesis, and it is explained in detail in Section 3.1.1. In summary, Western fire management includes all government departments that engage with cultural burning, specifically the four government fire authorities of NSW, their staff, policies and processes.

2.1.2 Fire and Aboriginal people

Fire features strongly in Aboriginal cultures and each Aboriginal nation across the continent has and/or had its own localised definitions, uses and relationships with fire. This range includes fires for cooking, ceremony, landscape-scale fires applied by humans and fires ignited by lightning (Gammage 2011, Gott 2005, Pascoe 2014, Rose 1996, Steffensen 2020). In Aboriginal cultures fire is related to as a positive, agency-active entity (Cavanagh & Standley 2020, Steffensen 2020). Aboriginal

²² The focus of my research is Aboriginal women to reflect my identity as an Aboriginal woman. As such, this is the site where I feel most qualified to take up space. I acknowledge that Two-Spirit peoples and gender-diverse folx experience multiple oppressions in their participation in fire activities and these are often beyond those experienced by Aboriginal women (Sloan Morgan and Burr 2024). Further research and increased respectful engagement with Two-Spirit peoples and gender-diverse folx is supported.

people use fire and its products (smoke, ash and charcoal) in various ways, including smoking ceremonies (Fig. 2), as a resource, tool or medium, and for healing (Attenbrow 2010, Langton 2002).

The biodiversity in NSW has evolved with, and is attuned to cultural burning by Aboriginal people, at particular times and seasons, which are not tied to Western calendars, or Western fire management frameworks and priorities. However, the centrality and agency of Country in cultural burning is far deeper than any common-held view by the general public that fires are simply an inevitable feature of the Australian landscape, or that any type of fires is acceptable because Australian native species need fire as part of their lifecycle. Although many species do require fire or its by-products as part of their lifecycle, it is a specific type of fire that they require and not all fire is good for species (Nimmo et al. 2021).

Aboriginal use of fire to care for Country has its foundations grounded in scientific, cultural and spiritual relationships which have shaped Country and supported sustainable abundant societies for millennia (Flannery 1994, Gammage 2011, Langton 1998, Steffensen 2020). Knowing that Aboriginal people are the longest continuing culture on Earth (Clarkson et al. 2017, Malaspinas et al. 2016), and that Australia is the driest inhabited continent, with some of the most fire-prone forests in the world – including the eucalypt-dominated, temperate, broadleaf forests (Boer, de Dios & Bradstock 2020, NASA 2009, Penman et al. 2007, Zhang, Lim & Sharples 2017) – means that Aboriginal people must have significant fire expertise.

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL BURNING IN NSW

2.2.1 Introductory clarifications

This thesis discusses cultural burning in broad terms for several important reasons. First, a broad view is taken to avoid being definitive about cultural burning. Although all Aboriginal nations have caring for Country practices, Aboriginal knowledge of fire and its applications are not universal, they are as diverse and complex as the diversity of Aboriginal nations and landscape types (Firesticks Alliance 2016). Second, taking a broad view helps protect the knowledge and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) that Aboriginal communities hold regarding cultural burning (see Section 2.5.3). Lengths must be taken to protect Aboriginal knowledge, because all Aboriginal cultural knowledge and expertise must be sourced and used ethically and remunerated appropriately. This thesis consciously avoids providing information that must be appropriately sourced and activated by or within Aboriginal communities. The information in this thesis does not replace, displace, circumvent or substitute the authority of the cultural knowledge held by Aboriginal people, nor does it replace any requirement to follow cultural protocols or undertake meaningful and genuine partnerships or

agreements with Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal people must hold strong leadership roles in all research regarding cultural burning even where the focus is ecological (see Murramarang et al. 2024).

Similarly, a precise definition of cultural burning is not provided, as its meaning is shaped by Country, context and cultural perspectives, thus again, diversity exists. A definition for cultural burning must come from cultural burning knowledge holders and Aboriginal people who hold authority in cultural burning. Furthermore, there are Aboriginal communities who are re-establishing their cultural practices in the wake of the impacts of colonisation. These communities require the time and space to undertake this work without external influences that could interfere with their efforts. This PhD research could provide that interference which may be harmful in locations where cultural protocols restrict the involvement of Aboriginal women in cultural burning. The arguments made in this thesis may be misinterpreted as providing authoritative information, such as, *all Aboriginal* women are able to be involved in cultural burning in *all locations*, which is not the case. Similarly, there are locations that were not burnt by Aboriginal people for various reasons. Those relationships with Country need to be understood and respected. To avoid the potential negative impact, a precise definition is not provided.

Although all peoples and organisations including Western fire management (details of Western fire management are provided in Section 3.1.1) have their own culture and cultural practices, non-Indigenous cultural practices of fire are not included as cultural burning in this research. Cultural burning is practically and ontologically different from Western fire management and the participation of Aboriginal people in Western fire management does not indicate that cultural burning is taking place (see Section 3.2).

2.2.2 What is cultural burning?

Cultural burning is the term used in this research to describe the Aboriginal cultural practice of using fire to care for Country, it is just one way that Aboriginal people care for Country (Tynan 2021, Williamson 2021a). Because it is a way of caring for Country, cultural burning involves landscape-scale fires, predominantly occurring in non-urban areas, however, cultural burning has successfully occurred in urban places such as Adelaide CBD²³ and Sydney (Rey et al. 2025). Cultural burning is undertaken in response to the needs of Country and Country leads. In describing the leadership of Country Costello writes ‘Aboriginal lore and culture teaches that fire has spirit and authority and must be respected’ (Costello 2020, p. 66). Some cultural burning publications list Country as lead author to acknowledge the leadership of Country (Darug Ngurra et al. 2019, Murramarang Country et al. 2024). Cultural burning may also be known by various names such as: the good fire, right fire, traditional fire,

²³ A cultural burn was held in Adelaide SA, at Carriageway Park, Tuthangga on Friday 14 May 2021. See Kurna Kardla cultural burn <https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/blog/cultural-burn-park-lands/> Park Lands cultural burn, City of Adelaide, 2024.

firestick farming, Aboriginal cool burns, mosaic burns, traditional Aboriginal burning, patch burning or cultural fire management.

The benefits of cultural burning in NSW are being acknowledged as creating multiple interwoven wide-ranging positive ecological, social, spiritual and cultural outcomes. These benefits occur across genders and generations and affect individuals, communities, wider society and Country (McKemey et al. 2020a, Williamson 2021a). This builds on the popular widely understood discourse of *healthy Country means healthy people* (Burgess et al. 2009, Lovett et al. 2020, Lowitja Institute 2020, Taylor-Bragge, Whyman & Jobson 2021, Thorpe et al. 2023, Wright et al. 2021). Extending this narrative Indigenous scholars have explored the positive connection between healthy relationships with fire and the healthy of Aboriginal communities (Wardle, McMillan & McMillan 2021).

Every characteristic of cultural burning is embedded in Aboriginal culture and cultural knowledge. Therefore, practicing cultural burning also helps to maintain that knowledge and often activates various other cultural practices. Here, Aboriginal knowledge is maintained in cultural ways and Aboriginal cultural practices connect the knowledge with the ‘who, what, when, where and how’ of cultural burning. It is best when Aboriginal people learn on their own Country, because they are learning from their own Country and Elders and where the knowledge aligns with their own cultural identities (Cumpston 2020d, Daniels et al. 2022, Grant 2020, O’Leary & Walter 2018, Steffensen 2020, Tjuwanpa Women Rangers 2020). Although cultural burning is an Aboriginal cultural practice, the presence of fire typically means that cultural burning is subject to the formal processes of Western fire management (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024). These intersections of cultural burning and Western fire management are discussed in Chapter Three.

2.2.3 Cultural burning: how and why

Cultural burning is an embodied practice led by local Aboriginal people who have the cultural authority to care for that Country (Costello 2020, Steffensen 2020, Williamson 2022a, 2022b). Aboriginal cultural protocols stipulate that only specific people can speak for Country, and as a cultural practice located within an Aboriginal paradigm, cultural burning must uphold culture and cultural protocols regarding who speaks for Country (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, Yibarbuk & Ansell 2020). Ensuring cultural burning is led by the right people helps maintain culturally appropriate fire and culturally safe practices, which also supports healthy communities and healthy ecosystems (Steffensen 2020). The health of Country is centred in cultural burning and the right type of fire is applied to support the health of Country (Steffensen 2020). Specific knowledge about Country is required to ensure that cultural burning is undertaken in the right way. This includes knowledge about the condition of Country at that time; the species that are present and their needs; and the symbiotic relationships that those species have with fire (Costello 2020, Steffensen 2020, Williamson 2022b).

Cultural burning requires leaders to have a wealth of cultural knowledge and have access to the necessary ecological knowledge. Some of the prominent environmental indicators that inform cultural burning are local weather conditions and features (frost, temperature, dew, wind, storms); the behaviours and life cycles of animals (migration, nesting); and the life stages of plants (flowering, seeding, curing). Spiritual and cultural indicators are very locally specific and they are not easy to define. As a general example only, these indicators may become apparent through people's embodied connections with Country, they may be transmitted through feelings, dreams and messages, or cultural governance/protocol processes.

For these reasons it is important that cultural burning engages Traditional Owners, Elders and/or the right people to speak for Country who are capable in identifying and understanding these indicators (Tynan 2025). Understanding these multidimensional features requires specific knowledge; not all Aboriginal people have cultural burning knowledge inherently. This means cultural burning cannot, and should not, be led by just any Aboriginal person. However, all Aboriginal people do have the right to participate in caring for Country and connecting to Country.

Colonisation has restricted these rights, as this research discusses. Furthermore, the existence of formal rights and agreements such as native title, land rights and joint management, may contain legal implications requiring the involvement of specific people or groups (Langton 1998, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Williamson 2021a). These rights create additional layers of complexity, particularly that the current varied Aboriginal organisations and governance structures in Aboriginal communities allow for Indigenous people who do not have local authority to speak for Country to hold decision-making power. This is significant particularly where formal rights and agreements such as native title occur (Lehman 2001, Williamson 2021a). The involvement of the right people is also apparent in other countries, where Indigenous people articulate that cultural burning must be Indigenous-led and Indigenous-centred (Christianson 2015, Martinez et al. 2023a, Tom, Adams & Goode 2023).

Cultural burning involves Aboriginal people being actively located on Country. This can include walking through Country prior to the burn, walking with the burn, and walking Country after the burn. Being physically present and engaged is necessary so that people can be attentive to Country in-the-moment and respond to Country's indicators and articulations (Firesticks Alliance 2024a, Langton 2002, Steffensen 2020). Being physically present also allows for values in the landscape to be identified and cared for, such as protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and important resources such as bush foods and medicines (Steffensen 2020). Steffensen (2020) adds that taking leadership from Country requires flexibility, because it takes time to observe and comprehend the indicators, and that burning only proceeds when Country shows it is the right time.

The protection of the canopy during cultural burning exemplifies how this practice supports the health of Country from an Aboriginal perspective. Cultural burning positions the canopy as sacred, therefore, it avoids allowing flames to reach the canopy. There are cultural and ecological benefits from

this practice that Aboriginal people have learnt over millennia, including that animals evolved to instinctively climb trees to escape fire. Cultural burning complements this instinct, by keeping its fires close to the ground level. This illustrates the Aboriginal cultural knowledge of fire and Country in practice. Larger, old ‘grandparent’ trees, which are treated as respected Elders, provide refuge to animals who climb to escape the flames (Cavanagh 2020a, Cumpston 2020a, Steffensen 2020).

The intensity of fires in cultural burning is low, meaning that animals can return to the ground shortly after the fire has passed, and the unburnt areas provide food or habitat. In contrast, when destructive fires incinerate the canopy, animals have no means of escape and are more susceptible to perishing. Western science shows that the protection of the forest canopy has significant correlations with healthy carbon and water storage, confirming the importance of the canopy as is it practiced in cultural burning (Bell et al. 2020a, 2020b). Wiradjuri man and pyrogeographer Professor Michael-Shawn Fletcher has used Western science to ‘prove’ that Aboriginal knowledge here is valid. Fletcher identifies that cultural burning is the type of fire that increases biodiversity and protects fire sensitive ecosystems. It reduces fuel loads, protects the canopy by disrupting vertical fuel ladders, disconnects flammable connectivity through mosaic burning, and strengthens Aboriginal peoples’ connection to Country (Fletcher & SGM 2020).

2.2.4 Revival of cultural burning

Aboriginal people, culture and Country have experienced significant negative impacts due to colonisation, which creates ongoing barriers to undertaking cultural burning in NSW (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024). Despite this, caring for Country is a birthright and a cultural responsibility for Aboriginal people (Arabena 2020). Hence, Aboriginal people seek ways to return to caring for Country practices, and cultural burning offers that opportunity. In recent decades there has been a revival of cultural burning in NSW and Aboriginal communities are increasing their uptake as opportunities become more available (Steffensen 2020, McKemey & Patterson 2018). Several factors have contributed to this revival including the ongoing work of Aboriginal individuals, communities and organisations over decades, such as Local Aboriginal Lands Councils, ranger teams, Firesticks Alliance and numerous other Aboriginal-led groups²⁴. This uptake is apparent with the increase of Aboriginal people from NSW participating in the National Indigenous Fire Workshops in Cape York from around 2008 onwards. I attended the workshop held at Bundanon, near Nowra in NSW, with my children in 2018, where I participated in cultural burns and the women’s yarning circle, where I talked about my research and received valuable feedback (see Table 5 and Fig. 29). This was the first time that workshop was held outside Cape York in Queensland. I attended the following year again with my children when

²⁴ For example, Koori Country Cultural Fire Aboriginal Corporation (KCCFA n.d); Jagun Alliance (JAAC n.d); Walbunja Rangers; the Banbai Rangers (NIAA n.d)

the workshop was held in Barmah National Park, Victoria. The hosting of these workshops across Australia has contributed to broader awareness and knowledge of cultural burning, despite the challenges of having to navigate the complex and arduous terrain of Western fire. Additionally, the growth of two-way conservation where between Aboriginal people and conservationists is supporting increased collaboration and creating new opportunities to expand cultural burning. Catastrophic events like the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires have also stimulated responses within Government to assist the expansion of cultural burning (see Sections 1.2 and 3.5).

The revival of cultural burning is influencing a range of external supports, including the dedication of new funding in NSW for Aboriginal ranger teams who are distinct Aboriginal natural resource teams *within* the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, not Aboriginal people employed by government as ‘park rangers’. An expansion of cultural burning activities is anticipated with the increase in Aboriginal ranger teams in NSW. In recognition of the increase in cultural burning activities, government agencies are developing guidelines and policies to support cultural burning.

2.2.5 Where cultural burning occurs

Prior to the revival of cultural burning over the past decade, options for Aboriginal people to undertake cultural burning were limited. Access to land is a major barrier to cultural burning, with access being difficult for many Aboriginal people in NSW. As Freeman (2020, p. 241) highlights: ‘loss of traditional lands and colonisation’ are significant factors that limit cultural burning in the southeast. Altman and others (2011, p. 4) identified ‘very limited opportunities to develop [c]aring for Country initiatives’ in NSW and recommended expanding the Indigenous estate – that is, contemporary Indigenous community owned and managed lands – to encourage increased Indigenous participation in caring for Country, a view shared by others (Altman, Buchanan & Larsen 2007, Williamson 2021a). However, the Indigenous estate in NSW is very small compared to most other jurisdictions and this restricts lands accessible for cultural burning (Fig. 16: Indigenous estate in Australia) (Jacobsen, Howell & Read 2020, Williamson 2021a). Additionally, high biodiversity values are often present on Indigenous lands, which can create further restrictions (O’Byrne et al. 2020, Renwick et al. 2017). Cultural burning also occurs on Government estate and private freehold lands where those agreements have been made (Beukers & Costello 2017, Williamson 2021a).

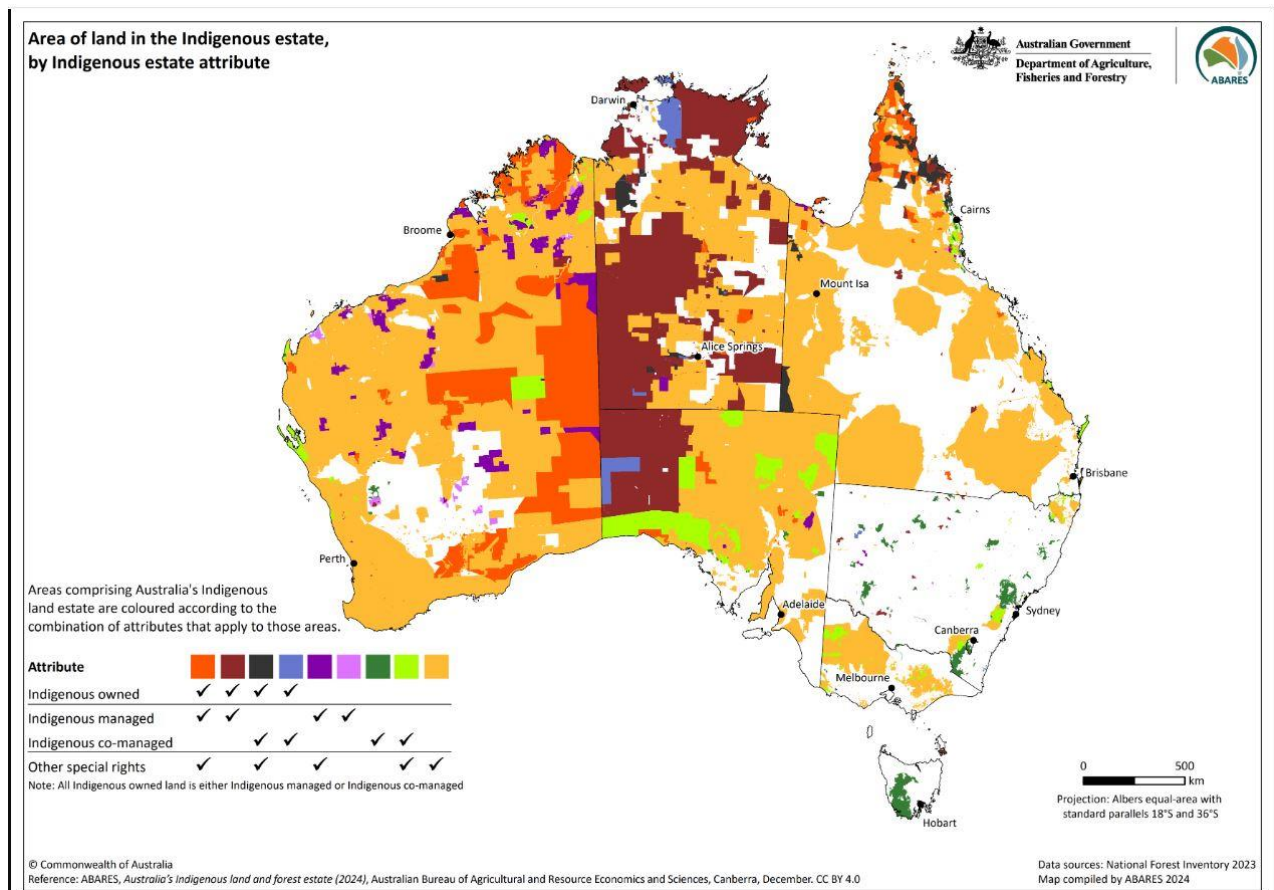


Figure 16: Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate (2024). Sourced from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (ABARES) (DAFF 2024).

Expansion of access to lands is an important development. It not only supports the growth of cultural burning, but also the revival of relationships and caring for Country practices, in places where Aboriginal people have been restricted (Archibald-Binge & Wyman, 2020; Vyas, 2019; Williamson 2021a). Principle Eight of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) report establishes that access is a fundamental issue: ‘Cultural burning requires ongoing access to Country – this is a must for Aboriginal people to live, know, read, enjoy and look after Country’ (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 30). Aboriginal communities in northern and central Australia have progressed their burning activities, is in part due to the levels of access that they have from ‘the return of large parcels of land to Aboriginal ownership and control’ (Williamson 2022a, p. 1). However, even where access is not restricted, there are many other challenges that cultural burning encounters which are explored in this thesis through the lens of Aboriginal women.

2.3 PREMISE AND RATIONALE

2.3.1 Justification for this research

Despite the revival of cultural burning in NSW, there is a noticeable lack of Aboriginal women's participation. Currently, there is no comprehensive documentation of Aboriginal women's fire practices in NSW or across Australia. Due to a lack of data, it is not possible to definitively measure Aboriginal women's level of participation in cultural burning. However, as examined in an upcoming section, Aboriginal women are underrepresented in the broader sectors of caring for Country, Western fire management and environmental conservation.

Whenever the question of Aboriginal women's involvement in cultural burning in NSW is raised, there is strong and widespread support for inclusion. At times though, caring for Country is incorrectly perceived as 'men's business' (Daniels et al. 2022, Fache 2014, NIAA 2024). As Fache noted in northern Australia 'A former woman ranger told me proudly that she had, as a ranger, experienced a 'men's job'' and '[be]cause we thought, you know, women weren't allowed to be rangers' (Fache 2014, p. 272). However, Indigenous women and others adamantly state that not only do Indigenous women have rights to maintain our relationships with Country, women also have vital roles in caring for Country, including custodial responsibilities with Country and communities (Daniels et al. 2022, HRC 2020, O'Leary & Walter 2018, Kwaymullina 2018a). To this point, the Australian Human Rights Commission dedicates an entire chapter of its 2020 landmark national report *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)* to the importance of caring for, and connection to Country for Indigenous women and girls. The chapter highlights Indigenous women's underrepresentation whilst recognising their relationality and rights. The Indigenous women's voices in that report echo that Indigenous women should be involved:

Country is a source of strength. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women feel confident and strong in their identity when they feel strong in their connection to country and culture. The power of this needs to be supported and protected. To deny Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women of the right to country would re-traumatise and further entrench many in severe disadvantage. More must be done to create an empowering environment for women to build and sustain their connection to country, and for women to have a seat at the table when it comes to decisions regarding their lands. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls have a right to be on their traditional country, to connect to their culture, and to enjoy all that exists across this continent (AHRC 2020, p. 364).

Research was undertaken to test the implicit bias of gendered labour division regarding Indigenous hunter/gather societies that position males as hunters and females as gatherers. That research found that Indigenous women are not only important and good hunters, Elder women were considered the best hunters, and that women hold important teaching roles with younger generations (Anderson et al. 2023).

In this research I concur and argue that prior to colonisation Aboriginal women were just as active and engaged in caring for Country as other members of Aboriginal communities. Therefore, Aboriginal women must be included in cultural burning where it is culturally appropriate. Women's knowledge and engagement forms part of the holistic reciprocal relationship that Aboriginal communities have with Country, and these holistic approaches have supported Aboriginal societies for millennia (MacLean, Robinson & Costello 2018, O'Leary & Walter 2018, Woodward et al. 2020). While Aboriginal cultural practices are not universal, there are numerous examples of Aboriginal women's burning practices in other states. As one example, Kiwirrkurra Ranger Nolia Yukultji Ward uses her expert knowledge on traditional burning techniques in the Central Desert to prevent damaging bushfires. She works alongside other rangers, traditional owners and scientists, to protect millions of hectares of desert Country using her fire expertise (O'Leary & Walter 2018). Further examples are provided in the literature review and thematic chapters.

This research argues that Aboriginal women must be included in cultural burning because Aboriginal women have rights, roles, knowledge and aspirations that are not being fully recognised. Women's involvement will also support a range of benefits, for Aboriginal women, Country and all others. This research supports, celebrates and advocates for Aboriginal women's participation in cultural burning, and highlights the meaning, purpose and personal outcomes for Aboriginal women. I centre and amplify the voices of Aboriginal women to encourage that their experiences and concerns are heard now and considered in the future. By integrating this knowledge into processes, I aim to enhance Aboriginal women's participation, where culturally appropriate. The current lack of women's participation is not only a gender equity concern but also results in incomplete and inadequate inputs and outcomes for cultural burning – practically, theoretically and in policy (discussed in Section 2.4). This shortfall, caused by the inadequate representation of Indigenous women, is also witnessed in natural disaster management in Australia (Spurway 2018) and in firefighting in NSW, nationally and internationally (discussed in Section 2.4).

2.3.2 Significance and relevance of this research

This research is an act of resistance to patriarchal Eurocentric norms and perceptions about Aboriginal women (Corr 2018). Aboriginal women's voices are centred as a political act in response to the lack of visibility and participation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning. However, resistance

and representation are not the extent of the rationale. Aboriginal women and our knowledges are brilliant in our own right and this research celebrates this. Aboriginal women are more than a mere reaction and counteraction to whiteness and the patriarchal. We are doing more than decolonising efforts towards inclusion or equality. Aboriginal women are reinstating Aboriginal systems and knowledges beyond the colonial project; we are rematriating²⁵ the Earth because this is what needs to happen. Leadership and resistance of Aboriginal women is necessary to support the emancipation of Country, its peoples and kin from imperial, colonial ecocide and the urgent need to respond to the climate crisis. There is a strong push to move away from ill-fitting and inefficient models, including Western fire management and environmental conservation, particularly in the context of climate change (Henry et al. 2023, Nolan et al. 2022, Samuel 2020).

Aboriginal women have an important role in this move (Graham & Maloney 2019, Russ-Smith 2021). This call is echoed globally by Indigenous peoples who recognise that fire suppression paradigms and Western fire management alone cannot solve the climate crisis nor worsening fire conditions, while Indigenous fire knowledge offers wide-ranging benefits (Martinez et al. 2023a, Nelson 2019, 2023b, Voggesser et al. 2013). There is also concern of an expectation being placed on cultural burning and Indigenous caring for Country knowledges to solve the climate crisis, without the significant and necessary systems change required at the planetary scale. These issues are explored throughout this thesis.

There are circumstances where cultural burning is not an immediate priority for Aboriginal communities and there are places where cultural burning is not a strong feature of caring for Country. Even when cultural burning is not an immediate priority, its significance remains unchanged. All Aboriginal people and communities experience significant, varying, competing and compounding priorities, and they often experience hardship. Often the demands on Aboriginal women outweigh their capacity. Métis woman and cultural fire steward Dr Amy Cardinal Christianson (2015) highlights that given the complex social concerns that communities often face, caring for Country is sometimes a priority that gets little attention. Anishnaabe, Cree, Métis and Norwegian woman, Melissa Nelson acknowledges these competing demands:

Indigenous women's struggles are deep and diverse. On an activist level, we are working to restore fire to the land, protect sacred waters from contamination, safeguard seeds from genetic modification, prepare for numerous "natural disasters" due to climate chaos, find justice for murdered and missing women, and continuously care for our families, communities, lands, and nations (Nelson 2019, p. 81).

²⁵ For descriptions of rematriation see <https://jackfrombkln.medium.com/rematriation-an-end-to-patriarchy-3cfc73e019ab> and <https://www.ou.edu/dreamcourse/past-courses/fall-2019/rematriation-of-indigenous-epistemologies-in-education>

Thus, this research is not exhaustive. There are Aboriginal women and others who undertake cultural burning autonomously, away from the gaze of others for a range of valid reasons. Where Aboriginal communities are burning autonomously, there may be minimal engagement with Government or researchers and there may be no formal records of the activities. I recognise that the absence of evidence does not equate to evidence of absence (Bowman 1998, Gott 2002).

2.4 UNDERREPRESENTATION

2.4.1 Defining ‘underrepresentation’ in cultural burning

This research highlights the underrepresentation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning. Underrepresentation refers to Aboriginal women either not participating in cultural burning at all, or not engaging to their full potential. This underrepresentation is often not by choice, but rather the result of various influential factors. Aboriginal women generally support the revival of cultural burning in NSW, but the lack of female participation is widely recognised as problematic. The underrepresentation of Aboriginal women is not limited to cultural burning, it also occurs in Western fire management, environmental conservation, caring for Country programs and the literature. As distinct groups, both Aboriginal people and women participate in these sectors, however, not at equitable levels. Both women and Aboriginal people experience systemic marginalisation and are vulnerable to discrimination. The disadvantage overlaps for Aboriginal women, creating intersectionality, whereby multi-dimensional oppressions are compounding (Crenshaw 1989, Clark et al. 2021).

2.4.2 A proxy: underrepresentation in Western fire management and environmental conservation agencies

Indigenous women account for around half the total Indigenous population of NSW (ABS 2025), thus statistically, the population of Aboriginal women in NSW can support equitable participation in cultural burning. To date, there is no quantitative data available regarding the participation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning in NSW. Given the lack of that data, a relevant proxy where data is available, is the key Western fire management agencies for NSW which are, the Rural Fire Service (RFS), National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) – a branch within the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW), and Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) – these agencies and their context to cultural burning are presented in Chapter Three.

Across these agencies data for the participation of women, and of Aboriginal people (as separate cohorts²⁶) is available. Table 1 shows that Indigenous peoples' participation is well above parity in the sector, and that women are mostly underrepresented. There is only one instance where women's parity is achieved – this is a recent achievement with previous departmental annual reports showing that women's participation was consistently low (OEH 2019). The inference drawn from these results is that although the participation of Indigenous people is very good, the lack of women's participation means that statistically, it is highly likely that the Indigenous participants are male.

The data in Table 1 aligns with field observations and confirms the argument of this research – that Aboriginal women are underrepresented, this is particularly evident in firefighting (DPIE 2019, FRNSW 2021a, Mackintosh 2018, RFS 2011). Although women have been engaged in firefighting throughout the colonial period (WIFF n.d.), firefighters in contemporary society embody a particular cohort of people (mainly masculine, white men) (Eriksen & Waitt 2016, Eriksen & Hankins 2015, Tyler, Carson & Reynolds 2019).

Fire agencies such as the RFS, acknowledge there is a persistent stereotypical firefighter image: When people think about firefighters, they often picture a big, burly bloke. When they think of brigades they imagine fire trucks, the station, and groups of men battling raging fires (NSW RFS 2011, p. 8).

This ideology of the Aussie firefighter is also revered in mainstream culture (Fig. 17). Firefighting agencies also acknowledge that change is needed across their organisations to address 'the unacceptably low levels of diversity' and improve women's engagement (FRNSW 2021a). The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council is a lead entity in the region and confirms that it is committed 'to increase attraction, recruitment and inclusion levels across gender, racial and cultural diversity' (FRNSW 2021a). Concerted efforts are occurring to improve female representation in firefighting. The *Girls on Fire* program uses affirmative action to target female youth in firefighting. The program's founder, Bronnie Mackintosh, understands that the persistent firefighter stereotype discourages women and diversity, noting: '95% of urban fighters in Australia are white men' (Mackintosh 2018).

²⁶ There is no data specifically on Aboriginal women's participation in the sector – the available data is Indigenous people *or* women, not a combination of both.

Table 1: Participation rates of Women and Aboriginal people in Western fire management in NSW.

Target group	Demographic	%	Year	Reference
Female	Total population of NSW	50.6	2021	Australian Bureau of Statistics Census
Indigenous people	Total population of NSW	3.4	2021	Australian Bureau of Statistics Census
Female	NSW DCCEEW	50.4	2024	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water 2025
Indigenous people	NSW DCCEEW	7.1	2024	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water 2025
Female	RFS employees	35.2	2024	Rural Fire Service 2024a
Female ²⁷	RFS volunteers ²⁸	34	2019	Rural Fire Service 2019
Indigenous people	RFS employees	5.7	2024	Rural Fire Service 2024a
Female	Forestry Corporation NSW	27	2024	Forestry Corporation of NSW 2024
Indigenous people	Forestry Corporation NSW	4.7	2024	Forestry Corporation of NSW 2024
Female	Fire and Rescue NSW	15.4	2024	Fire & Rescue NSW 2024a
Indigenous people	Fire and Rescue NSW	5.4	2024	Fire & Rescue NSW 2024a

Table 1: *Women's and Aboriginal people's*²⁹ participation (employment or volunteerism) across the major fire and conservation agencies in NSW. This data is used as a proxy to evidence this thesis' position on Aboriginal women's underrepresentation in cultural burning in NSW. Women's engagement is below parity except in DCCEEW – this achievement of parity is only recent with parity not being achieved in previous years (OEI 2019). Indigenous engagement is above parity.

²⁷ The statistics on Indigenous volunteer membership within RFS is not available.

²⁸ No available data could be located for the number of Indigenous volunteers in the RFS.

²⁹ There is no data available to show the employment figures that combine *Aboriginal* and *women* specifically; it is anticipated that data on this combination would illustrate further underrepresentation as a result of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989).



Figure 17: RFS Superhero cartoon. Dose of Dorin cartoon published at the start of the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. This illustration shows how highly firefighters are regarded in the Australian psyche, as well as revealing who firefighters (and heroes) are in terms of their social demographic – white and male. Paul Dorin, Cartoon Canberra City News, 11 November 2019.

However, overcoming the entrenched homogeneity that is prevalent within firefighting agencies is a very slow process. For example, female firefighters in Fire and Rescue NSW increased from 2% to just 10% over the five years to 2021 (FRNSW 2021b). In August 2019, the first all-female agency hazard reduction was undertaken in Scheyville National Park, NSW, involving only females, from crew members through to the incident controller³⁰ (DPIE 2019). In contrast, it is very common for fire activities to be attended only by males (OEH 2019). The entrenched representation of men in firefighting, such as those visible in recent recruitment advertising materials for Aboriginal people in firefighting, is counteractive and counter-intuitive to achieving the stated targets of Western fire management, regarding increasing the uptake of such roles by women (Fig. 18).

³⁰ NSW Government made a video of this burn, which provides great insight into the uniqueness of the burn with it being only attended by females. It also highlights that firefighting is male dominated and the issues associated with the lack of diversity. Video available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHuls3_SsAk

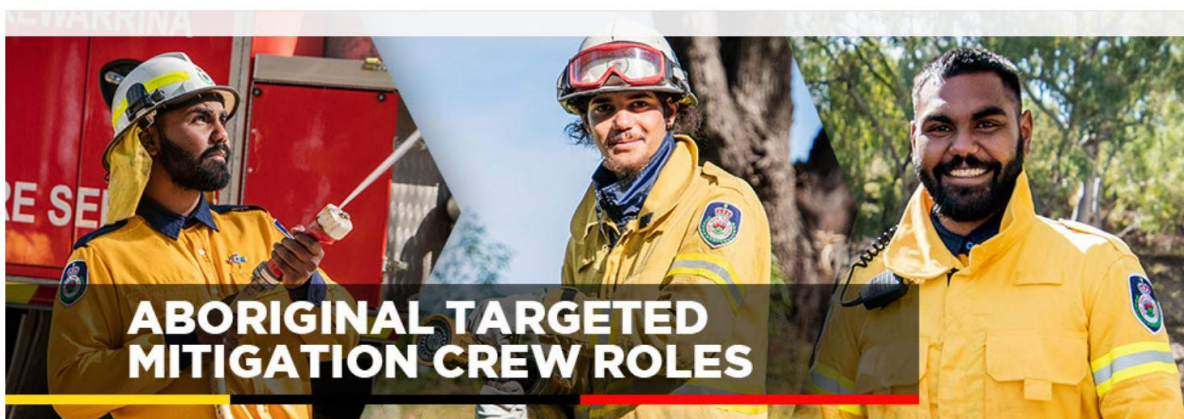


Figure 18: Advertisement for RFS Aboriginal roles featuring only men. RFS website, June 2025.

Addressing the underrepresentation of women's employment in the environmental conservation sector has not received the same level of scholarly or operational attention as has been applied to addressing women's underrepresentation in firefighting. However, it is known that women are underrepresented in the field operations, policy environment and the theoretical domains of the environmental conservation sector (Macinnis-Ng & Zhao 2022, Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). Globally, it is known that women's engagement in environmental issues is inadequate (Baladhikari & Baladhikari 2020, Hodges 2024, James et al. 2021, 2023, Sewell 2014, Singh et al. 2021). Under 11% of all wildlife rangers on Earth are women (WFRW 2024). Nationally, Indigenous women are also underrepresented in caring for Country (Northern Land Council 2018, Spurway 2018), accounting for only 20%³¹ of all fulltime and part-time Indigenous environmental conservation roles in 2014-15 (O'Leary & Walter 2018). There is growing recognition and action from national bodies like The Australian Human Rights Commission (HRC), and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) targeting Indigenous women in the sector. The HRC support increased engagement of Indigenous women stating: 'women and girls have a right to be on their traditional country, to connect to their culture' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2020, p. 364). NIAA concurs:

We must invest in women working on Country to ensure sacred women's sites, Law/Lore, knowledge and songs are maintained and protected. Currently, Indigenous women represent around a third of those employed as rangers. This is why the government want us to prioritise

³¹ Indigenous women's participation increases to 36% when casual work is included (O'Leary & Walter 2018).

applications from groups that plan to employ more women rangers or start new ‘women only’ ranger groups (NIAA 2024).

In 2024, NIAA announced funding to support over 1000 Indigenous ranger roles, with 770 of these being dedicated to women rangers (Brennan 2024). Although useful, the gendered labelling and targeted approaches regarding women’s participation highlights that women are not the gender norm. In caring for Country programs, female Indigenous ranger teams are often labelled by gender, highlighting their novelty – *Tjuwanpa Women Rangers* and the *Warburton Women Rangers* – they are not just rangers, they are *women* rangers (O’Leary & Walter 2018). No equivalent exists where men are specifically labelled by gender, because men are the norm.

The underrepresentation of women and the lack of cultural diversity across Western fire management is well known within Government and it is extensively critiqued in the literature (Batty & Burchielli 2011, Childs 2006, Eriksen 2019, Eriksen & Hankins 2015, Mackintosh 2018, Perrott 2016, Rasmussen & Maharaj 2020, Smith, Weir & Neale 2018, Young et al. 2018). Diversity inequality is inappropriate because it maintains barriers to employment, personal development, diminishes effectiveness of workplaces and fails to achieve community representation (Bargallie 2020, Eriksen, Gill & Head 2010, Mackintosh 2018). Both fire and environmental conservation agencies have similar backgrounds that influence the lack of diversity, as they ‘originate from civil defence organisations and have a deeply hierarchical, para-military structure’ (Young et al. 2018, p. 8). Not only are women underrepresented in the field, they are also underrepresented in the theoretical domains of fire science (Smith et al. 2018).

For minority groups and those from outside ‘the norm’, participation and ‘fitting in’ is difficult and discouragement occurs (Eriksen et al. 2010, Tyler, Carson & Reynolds 2019). Employment of women (and Indigenous people) did not occur in the early establishment of the sector (Kijas 2005, NPS 2021, Zephier 2019). Due to this structural and systemic exclusion, women and Indigenous people were ‘excluded from the political decision-making structures that shaped colonial fire management practices’ (Morgan & Burr 2024, p. 1). Even though the formal restrictions to employment are being dismantled, women and Indigenous people still face considerable challenges (NPS 2021, Zephier 2019). The lack of diversity in firefighting occurs in many Western countries including Canada (Braedley 2019, Gouliquer, Poulin, & McWilliams 2020); the USA (Bendersky 2018 Eriksen & Hankins 2014; Hulett et al. 2008a, 2008b, Jahnke et al. 2019, Khan, Davis, & Taylor 2017); Aotearoa/New Zealand (Long 2018); and the UK (Andrews & Ashworth 2018, Baigent 2005, 2016).

The persistent lack of diversity underpins what Goenpul Minjerribah Quandamooka woman Distinguished Professor Moreton-Robinson (2004) identifies as the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty. Moreton-Robinson (2004) explains that institutions such as Western fire management and environmental conservation agencies have been established by, for and around specific demographical groups – primarily white men. As a result, these institutions inherently operate in ways that maintain

this identity, creating barriers to diversity, as well as resistance to change. I agree and argue that the underrepresentation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning, and the prominence of men across the sector, reflects the influence of the patriarchy as it exists in society and in Western science. Western fire management and environmental conservation are founded in Western science³² which is positivist, reductionist, Eurocentric and patriarchal (James et al. 2021, 2023 Mackintosh 2018, Macinnis-Ng & Zhao 2022, Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). Thus, their structure, approaches and membership, such as firefighting and ranger teams, are both statistically and ideologically the domains of white men. These foundations and approaches do not adequately support, encourage or recognise Aboriginal women as leaders, participants or knowledge and rights holders. As a result, Aboriginal women encounter barriers and challenges to their full participation.

As Western institutions, Government priorities are often at odds with Aboriginal values. Government priorities, processes and approaches are ill-fitting and ineffective, as evidenced by Australia's poor biodiversity conservation records, as discussed by *trawlulwuy* woman Emma Lee, who found that Indigenous knowledges are often questioned, marginalised and devalued within mainstream environmental conservation processes (Lee & Tran 2016). Aboriginal people and others argue that under current approaches, Country is being mismanaged, and Country, Aboriginal peoples and culture are being disrespected (Steffensen 2020, Tynan 2021). This disdain is visible in *The Garma Declaration* (2008, p. 2): 'Nation-States have grossly mismanaged the lands and waters [causing] severe, widespread and on-going detrimental impacts to all aspects of the lives and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples.' Globally, Indigenous peoples are extremely vocal about the lack of care for planet Earth, exercised under imperial, colonial regimes (Hernández 2022, Sultana 2022, Suzuki 2007, Thomas 2022, Redvers 2022, Whyte 2017).

2.4.3 Evidence of underrepresentation in cultural burning

It is common that males outnumber females in cultural burning forums both as participants and as presenters. For example, only males were included in the cultural burning panel at the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) 2017 conference in Sydney (pers. com Weir 2021). Furthermore, it is commonplace for advertising material for cultural burning forums to favour men (see Appendix 12.8). In recognition of the need to promote Aboriginal women's voices, the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC centred Aboriginal women in its report on cultural burning in southern Australia (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021). This report was published to assist government and others to better understand cultural burning. Two of the coauthors are respected Aboriginal leaders

³² I acknowledge that *science* is a form of inquiry and does not belong to any one social group (Gorelick 2014). My use of the term *Western science* does not imply that science belongs to or originates from Western cultures. Rather, I use 'Western science' to demarcate between Indigenous sciences and non-Indigenous sciences which in the Australian experience, are colonial and Eurocentric.

with expertise in cultural burning, fire management, caring for Country and community development, who are experienced across operational and policy levels of Government. The report is coauthored by Wiradjuri man and Aboriginal fire leader, Dean Freeman; Euahlayi man, scholar, and cultural burning practitioner Dr Bhiamie Williamson; with non-Indigenous scholar Jessica Weir. The report features six personal stories, including my own, and presents 10 regionally relevant co-developed principles of cultural burning. Aboriginal women's contributions lead the report³³, and the report begins by stating the compelling importance of Aboriginal women:

Aboriginal women have long been marginalised from land management conversations with government and university. In recognition, women come first in this report ... cultural burning practices have intricate and interwoven roles for men and women. We look forward to hearing more such voices as cultural burning becomes better known (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 4).

The report's core principle three is also dedicated to Aboriginal women:

Contemporary Aboriginal women have fewer cultural burning opportunities than Aboriginal men, although historically this has not always been the case. Therefore, Aboriginal women must be supported in their cultural burning roles as they consider appropriate, including with their children, families and Elders (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 30).

There is growing recognition and support for Aboriginal women in cultural burning. Examples include the increase of gender-specific forums such as 'The Role of Women' webinar in the *djamanj djamaga ganj NSW cultural burning series* – where I participated as a panel member (broadcast on 29th October 2020) (Treading Lightly 2020). Another example is the *Ngangkirna Kardlatidli – National Indigenous Women's Fire Workshop* in May 2024 facilitated by Firesticks Alliance. This gathering brought together over 100 Indigenous women from across Australia to discuss and promote the important role of women, and to support more women to engage in cultural burning (Steffensen 2024). Events like these signify that the status of Aboriginal women in cultural burning is gaining momentum. My research continues this advocacy work regarding underrepresentation, which has been developing over decades. In 2004 the international Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network³⁴ published the *Manukan Declaration*, which states:

Indigenous women have a fundamental role in environmental conservation and preservation throughout the history of our Peoples. We are the guardians of Indigenous knowledge and it is

³³ The three stories from Aboriginal women in the BNHCRC report are from: Carol Pettersen in WA; Eileen Alberts in VIC; and myself in NSW. These three stories are intentionally presented first followed by contributions from Aboriginal men (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021).

³⁴ Australia was not represented as a signatory on the declaration and from the available information it is unclear if Australia was represented at this forum.

our main responsibility to protect and perpetuate this knowledge. Our weavings, music, songs, costumes, and our knowledge of agriculture, hunting or fishing are all examples of some of our contributions to the world. We are daughters of Mother Earth and to her we are obliged. Our ceremonies recognize her and we return to her the placentas of our children. She also safeguards the remains of our ancestors (Manukan Declaration 2004).

Several other international platforms make similar statements that Indigenous women's engagement is pivotal (IPCC 2023, UNDP 2009). The inadequate representation of Indigenous women is noted by the United Nations (UN) as being a global phenomenon requiring urgent action. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) advocates for Indigenous people to lead global responses to climate change, specifically identifying that Indigenous women and girls 'play a vital role as stewards of natural resources' (UNPFII 2008, p. 28). My research is also directly relevant to the UN Sustainable Development Goal Five: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*; and relevant to several other SDGs³⁵. My research aligns to Article 31.1 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 (UNDRIP) – applicable to Aboriginal women, which recognises Indigenous peoples' rights to 'maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions' (UNDRIP 2007). The current underrepresentation means Aboriginal women are excluded from decisions and activities that directly affect them, which may influence the effectiveness and longevity of practices (Arnstein 1969, Ross, Buchy & Proctor 2002).

2.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

2.5.1 Who, what and how?

This research is Indigenist. As such, the research intentionally and politically disrupts colonial hegemony and challenges multiple injustices (Kovach 2010, Hokowhitu et al. 2020, Nakata 2003, Rigney 1999, Smith 1999). Because cultural burning is an Aboriginal cultural practice, Indigenous research methods and methodologies are appropriate. While the research methodology will be detailed in Chapter Four, this research uses Indigenous Research Methodologies to ensure that Aboriginal

³⁵ My research aligns to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere; SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

priorities are central to the research question, and that cultural safety and Indigenous Data Sovereignty³⁶ are actively addressed. Indigenous Research Methodologies also facilitates my research to challenge the shortcomings of Western fire management and counter the Western, patriarchal discourse that dominates the operational field, the literature and policy. This qualitative research engages Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory to centre and amplify the voices of Aboriginal women as individuals and our collective experiences, whilst also challenging Western concepts of knowledge and knowledge production (Moreton-Robinson 2013). Through the lens of intersectionality, this qualitative research uses a mixed methods approach weaving discourse analysis, observation of in-person and digital forums, Indigenous participatory action research, Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography.

Care has been taken to ensure this research is undertaken in ways that are culturally safe, responsible and responsive. With free, prior and informed consent, nine Aboriginal women contributed in detailed and personal ways through semi-structured interviews and small focus groups, providing insights into the unheard lived experiences of Aboriginal women which were uncovered as we worked through the interview question schedule (see Appendix 12.5). Many more Aboriginal women, Aboriginal men and others contributed to this research through in-person and digital engagements. All formal participants in this research were over 18 years old and reside in NSW. Some motivations for participating in this research include advocating for gender equality and supporting an increase in Aboriginal-led Country-centred cultural burning and broader caring for Country. The women who participated in the interviews have either engaged in cultural burning or caring for Country, or they aspire to participate, or they have other relevant lived experiences. This research explores Aboriginal women's engagement in cultural burning in NSW based on three foundational themes:

1. What are the lived experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal women regarding their engagement in cultural burning in NSW?
2. What are the considerations or barriers to the full participation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning?
3. How do Aboriginal women want their knowledge and narratives of cultural burning to be presented and shared as an outcome of this research?

³⁶ Indigenous Data Sovereignty informs the data that this research uses, and how the data is treated. The Maianayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective (MnWIDSC) and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) (2018) provide these definitions relevant to Australia:

- 'Indigenous Data' refers to information or knowledge, in any format, that is about and that may affect Indigenous peoples both collectively and individually.
- 'Indigenous Data Sovereignty' refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to exercise ownership over Indigenous data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous data.
- 'Indigenous Data Governance' refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to decide what, how and why Indigenous data are collected. It ensures that data on or about Indigenous peoples reflects our priorities, values, cultures, worldviews and diversity.

Question Three acknowledges and responds to Aboriginal women's autonomy over how their knowledges are used and shared. Here, I not only sought Aboriginal women's engagement through ethical processes, I also encouraged their input regarding what data was, how their data could be used, and what forms of reciprocity were agreed upon, these decisions were captured in the *Research Consent Form* (Appendix 12.3). In this way, Aboriginal women are active autonomous agents in this research. Question Three also clarified for me, as the researcher, Aboriginal women's expectations regarding how I may or may not use the research findings. The general response to Question Three was that Aboriginal women supported sharing their experiences under the following conditions: first, that their identities remain protected, particularly for those working in the sector (all identifying features of the women have been removed); second, that their stories contribute to greater inclusion and consideration of Aboriginal women; third, that the research encourages better care of Country; and fourth, that I will continue to influence positive change into the future.

This research amplifies, advocates for and celebrates Aboriginal women's participation in cultural burning in NSW (Fig. 19). This research discusses the barriers and pressures faced by Aboriginal women, as well as their achievements and aspirations for the future. These insights not only explain their underrepresentation but also highlight solutions to address existing gaps, contributing to the ongoing development and improvement of cultural burning and the broader sector. This research, including my methodological approach and positionality, contribute to the development of Indigenous Research Methodologies, to Indigenist and decolonising research in the sector, and in the academic discipline of geography.

2.5.2 Where is this research geographically focussed?

This research is focussed on NSW, Australia, for several reasons. First, research on Aboriginal women's engagement in cultural burning in NSW is scarce and there is a need to support its development. Second, my positionality, cultural responsibilities and other relevant strengths are primarily located in NSW. Third, my research was attached to the UOW Bushfire Risk Management Research Hub, which was focussed on the southeast of the continent. Other relevant factors include that NSW has highly fire-prone landscapes and improvements of fire management will create multi-faceted benefits. NSW also has Australia's highest population of Indigenous people, and it is where the onset of colonisation severely disrupted Aboriginal people, communities and cultural practices. Advantageously, my employed role as the manager of the CFMU is also contained to NSW, and I have attended many cultural burning events and forums in NSW (Fig. 20). I acknowledge that Indigenous women are involved in cultural burning, caring for Country and other important practices all over the continent.



Figure 19: Being interviewed by NITV at a cultural burn near Murramarang in 2023. I attended a cultural burning workshop and conference near Murramarang on the NSW south coast. I presented at the conference in my capacity as manager of the CFMU. I also participated in the two-day cultural burning activities where this photo and interview took place. Location, Yuin Walbunja Country. July 2023. Credit: Australian Business Volunteers.

2.5.3 What is not being asked?

There are limitations to this research, some of which highlight opportunities for future research. This research does not collect or share information that is gender-restricted, gender sensitive or sacred. This research does not identify or evaluate specific ecological outcomes of cultural burning, nor does it seek to justify, qualify or compare cultural burning against mainstream practices, however clear arguments are made about the value of cultural burning in the context of Western fire management. The descriptions of cultural burning presented in Chapter Six emerged from the narratives of Aboriginal women, these descriptions do not claim to be a comprehensive or authoritative definition of cultural burning. This research does not engage with the carbon market – which is commonly associated with Indigenous fire practices in the continental north and not yet widely established in relation to cultural burning in NSW (Ansell & Evans 2020; McKemey et al. 2020b; Yibarbuk & Ansell 2020). Furthermore, carbon farming did not feature in the Aboriginal women’s discussions.



Figure 20: locations of 11 cultural burns. This map shows the locations of 11 cultural burning events that I attended where fires occurred while I was present. I attended many other cultural burning events where fires did not occur while I was present.

This research understands that Aboriginal women carry many and varied concerns about research in general, as well as concerns related to the research topic. The general concerns that Aboriginal women expressed regarding research are applicable to all Indigenous people, such as exploitation and appropriation, ICIP and copyright regarding Indigenous knowledge – these issues are addressed in the *Methodology* chapter. In relation to cultural burning, Aboriginal women expressed that they wanted to ensure that their contributions to this research helped rather than hindered cultural burning and Aboriginal women’s engagement, as well as supporting the health of Country at the macro-scale. Here the women show awareness for the potential of research findings to be used against Indigenous development – which is one of the reasons why Indigenous Research Methodologies were developed (Smith 1999). To reduce this potential all interview participants were able to review their contributions and I undertook iterative participant / research topic area validation by actively participating in the field, as well as triangulating my findings with the literature. In the wake of the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, the women were also concerned that cultural burning would be treated as a panacea to the broader mismanagement of Country or the climate crisis, which is an issue at the planetary scale. These issues are addressed throughout this thesis.

As previously explained this research does not provide any expertise on how to undertake cultural burning. This research is a snapshot of Aboriginal women’s experiences and perspectives at a point in time. The findings are based on the available data and are not exhaustive. Some outcomes that

are not featured in this research include the influence of cultural burning on: biodiversity; climate; asset protection; protection of heritage values; evidence of impact (ecological, heritage); and the influence of cultural burning on Indigenous specific formal land and resource agreements (e.g. native title). The information in this thesis is not universal and it is not beyond revision or contestation. Caution is taken to avoid essentialism, romanticised noble savage tropes or claims of the representation of Aboriginality as a universal truth about the ‘undifferentiated Other’ (Langton 1993, p. 27). In response to Langton’s provocation on the ability of Aboriginal people to make better representations, I argue that as Indigenist research, this thesis better understands and represents Aboriginal women, compared to research that is undertaken within a non-Indigenous lens; however, I acknowledge that Aboriginal people experience the world in multi-dimensional ways. In acknowledging this variety, I present my perspectives (as autoethnography) alongside other Aboriginal women’s voices, so that my perspectives are not the only voice or perceived as the authority.

2.6 LITERATURE GAP

Beyond my own work there is a dearth of literature exploring the contemporary confluence of gender and race in cultural burning or the broader sector of Western fire management and environmental conservation locally and abroad. There is no scholarly literature specifically on Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW – several Aboriginal women publish about cultural burning but not specifically focussing on gender. As a result, Aboriginal women’s voices, roles, experiences and priorities are largely absent in the scholarly literature, and this absence applies across the continent. A large proportion of the literature, including my own articles, were published after the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, which stimulated increased interest in cultural burning and led to a surge in publications (e.g. McKemey et al. 2020a, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021). Beyond academia, Aboriginal women are making important contributions to cultural burning, most notably in non-scholarly literature and creative text. Prior to the Black Summer, very few publications included Aboriginal women’s voices, and when they did, it was typically as contributors rather than lead authors or co-authors. In the literature that examines historical use of fire by Aboriginal people in NSW there are examples of where Aboriginal women were believed to be actively burning Country such as Karskens (2019) who describes that Aboriginal women used fire to optimise yam species maintenance and harvest in what is now the Hawkesbury region of NSW.

Without filtering for gender, the cultural burning literature in NSW is emerging and developing concurrently to the revival of cultural burning practice in the field (Maclean, Robinson & Costello 2018, McKemey et al. 2020a; Weir & Freeman 2019). Prior to the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires there was a clear geographical bias, with cultural burning literature focussing on remote parts of the continent

and areas other than NSW. Since the Black Summer, there have been numerous articles coming from the southeast with strong leadership from Indigenous male authors, many who are also well experienced in cultural burning, and many strong collaborations with non-Indigenous people (Freeman, Williamson & Weir 2021, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, McKemey et al. 2020a, Williamson 2021a, Williamson & Weir 2021).

Although there are few publications on Aboriginal women and cultural burning, there is growing literature on the importance of Indigenous women in caring for Country and these publications support the findings of my research. The importance of fire knowledge and practice features heavily in a national report by the NGO Country Needs People called *Strong women on Country: The success of women caring for country as Indigenous rangers and on Indigenous Protected Areas* (O’Leary & Walter 2018). Similarly, the Australian Human Rights Commission developed a national report Indigenous women and girls called *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women’s Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future*. A complete chapter is dedicated to the importance of Country to Indigenous women and girls, and women’s participation in fire practice is a resounding theme (AHRC 2020).

Eriksen along with Plains Miwok Indigenous man Don Hankins (2013, 2014, 2015, 2018) researched the gendered dimensions of fire management in various Australian locations and in California, USA. Their work finds that fire management is influenced by Aboriginal culture and gender where Indigenous women participate in fire in ways that are different to others and that Aboriginal women’s voices are often unheard or marginalised, including in the literature, due to the impacts of colonisation (Eriksen & Hankins 2015, 2018). In some areas colonisation has blurred the boundaries of knowledge custodianship, leading to the sharing of fire knowledge and practices across genders (Eriksen & Hankins 2015). The emerging literature demonstrates strong interest in and support for Aboriginal women’s involvement, with women being valued in cultural burning and caring for Country roles. For example, Yuin Bundjalung man Russell Brown explains that women are needed to uphold respect for cultural sensitivities such as women only places in the landscape: ‘We need specific women’s teams, as only women can go to certain sites; we support them’ (Lyngdoh et al. 2018, p. 46).

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of the relationship between fire and Aboriginal people in NSW. It introduced cultural burning, outlining its basic features, key concepts and the relevance of those to the arguments underpinning this research. The chapter explored the central premise of the research – that Aboriginal women have worthy contributions to make to cultural burning, which are not yet fully being activated as Aboriginal women are underrepresented. The chapter presents evidence that women and Aboriginal people are underrepresented in the broader sector. The chapter presents the

approach that this research takes, along with the geographical location of the research. A gap in the literature was outlined, namely that Aboriginal women's voices – hence potentially also, their values, knowledges, practices and priorities – are absent from the literature. This gap impacts on Aboriginal women, Aboriginal families, communities, the broader population, and Country, where cultural burning is not operating at its maximum potential and where Aboriginal women's values are not included. The intention of this research is to amplify, celebrate and advocate for increased participation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning (and the broader sector) where culturally appropriate. Focussing on the state of NSW, the next chapter provides further context by examining Western fire management in relation to cultural burning, the impacts of colonisation and climate change on cultural burning, the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, and examples of support for and opposition to cultural burning.

STORY THREE: N*GGER IN THE RFS

“Hey N*gger”

I know my hands are fumbling and my eyes have widened, but I try not to outwardly react at the male voice calling through the fire shed. I continue rolling the firefighting hose as neatly as possible, so that it'll fit into its cavity in the slip-on unit that's bolted to the trayback of the red and white Toyota. Suddenly I've got that strange taste in my mouth, and I can feel my heart hammering in my chest – fight, flight or freeze.

I'm in my early 20s and a full-time employee as a Field Officer in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Firefighting is part of this role, but tonight we are at the local Rural Fire Service (RFS) community fire shed, which is not a part of NPWS. A group of us 'Parkies' have joined the local RFS to expand our skills and experiences. We're also making a concerted effort to breakdown any division that exists between the NPWS and RFS teams and to build camaraderie. I think this division stems from NPWS employees being paid to attend fires and incidents, whereas the majority of RFS personnel participate as community volunteers. It's a tension that is palpable, and as emergency responders, any discord could potentially result in life threatening outcomes.

We turn up to the evening training sessions held at the RFS fire shed. We participate in the drills, becoming acquainted with the equipment on the fire trucks – the pumps, hoses, tools, communication radios and protocols. I also get to work alongside various experienced RFS crew, as well as my own NPWS team. I enjoy the social interaction that this initiative brings, and I learn lots from the RFS members.

The RFS has a very limited representation of the local community. The membership is mostly adult, white males with strong ties to the agricultural industry and blue-collar sector. In contrast, I'm young, visually Aboriginal, female and securely employed in a permanent state government job. I'm also a self-professed 'greenie'. Obviously, I don't really fit in at the fire shed, but that is commonly my lived experience in Australia.

Nationally, it's been a big few years for Indigenous issues. Pauline Hanson's One Nation³⁷ campaign, Mabo, native title³⁸ and the right-wing Prime Minister's fear mongering about Aboriginal land claims over taxpayers' backyards, have all stirred public debate. In my experience, this has exposed one underlying issue - racism. There are a few things in my favour though. I was born and raised in the region, so I'm considered 'a local'. My Dad has been an RFS member in a neighbouring brigade for several decades, and he is known within the RFS community. I completed all my schooling in this region, where, as an Aboriginal person, I was always the minority, so I'm used to the process of 'fitting in'. Yet, despite my efforts, there are moments when I am reminded that I don't belong.

"Hey N*gger!"

Being the target of racial taunts and insults is not foreign to my lived experience. In my life I have been called n*gger and many other derogatory terms directly to my face, and probably much more said behind my back. When I was younger the racism was more overt – name calling and exclusion. Now as an adult, I understand racism as also being more insidious, nuanced, multifaceted and consistently dehumanising. You never know when or where racism is going to happen. Sometimes it is the genuine yet exhausting questions about Aboriginal culture, the requests for my unpaid labour, the expectation that I educate and enlighten others, or demands for my attention from those seeking justification or validation of their own views. Other times it's yelled across a fire shed:

"HEY N*GGER!!"

He's getting louder, yet I don't *feel* like his call is directed at me. It lacks that essence of malevolence, so I don't look up from my task. I notice that another RFS man responds to the caller. It's then that I realise the responding RFS man has a nickname, 'N*gger'. From that moment onwards I took note of the ways the word 'n*gger' was used openly and confidently in front of me and others. Nobody appeared bothered by the liberal use of this derogatory term. I recall the RFS Captain giving instructions to someone while I was close-by and within his line of sight. The Captain's eyes did not flicker, and his kind yet authoritative voice did not waver as he directed: "Yeah get N*gger to do it."

³⁷ Pauline Hanson was the leader of the right wing One Nation Party that gave rise to White Populism in Australia with strong anti-Indigenous, anti-Asian discourses from the late 1990s onwards (Wikipedia, 2023, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pauline_Hanson%27s_One_Nation, Leach et al. 2000).

³⁸ Eddie Mabo was the leader of a group of Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people who won recognised ownership of their traditional lands Mer (Murray Island) through the High Court of Australia on 3 June 1992. This acknowledged the traditional rights of the Meriam people to their land, the court also held that native title existed for all Indigenous people (NMA 2022)

It was like I was invisible, or that 'N*gger' was not even remotely problematic.

I used to wonder if people were just ignorant and if they knew that 'N*gger' is a derogatory term, and that as a brown-skinned person I might feel uncomfortable with its use. The association between 'n*gger' and blackness was something that the broader community was aware of, but not necessarily something that would cause them to change their language, afterall, this is Australia at the turn of the millennium. I grew up with neighbours who had named their black dog N*gger and they didn't seem at all uncomfortable hailing their dog in public, or in front of my Aboriginal family. Of course, they know it's derogatory, they wouldn't weaponise it against us as a racist attack if they didn't know.

Back in the fire shed, I bank my thoughts and put away the fire hose. I know that there are little gains to be made if I do speak up and complain about the nickname here, and I'm on my own if I do. Like much of my working life in the environmental sector, I'm the only Aboriginal person present, and men far outnumber the women. I'm a minority within the minority and I'm on someone else's turf here in the fire shed. Even though I love the work, I'm reminded that I don't belong in this setting. I'm aware that as Parkies we are in the fire shed to try to build bridges, not burn them down and create problems – not that racism is my creation.

Whenever I saw this man and heard his nickname, I would be reminded of race and my place in this fire shed, in this community, in this nation. I remember younger me trying to figure it all out, trying to rationalise why he had been given that nickname? His hair was dark, but his skin was only mildly 'more olive' than most of the other RFS members. I remember thinking to myself, "I am much darker than him, I wonder why they call him n*gger, he's not that dark."

I didn't use the nickname, I didn't speak to him at all if I could avoid it. In hindsight, I must have been embarrassed for him. I was probably embarrassed for myself – for existing as racially different. I can't recall what his actual name was. Now, as an educated woman, an Aboriginal mother and Auntie, I wish I had called him by his name, to let him know that I saw him. I hope he is okay. Fuck, I hope that I'm okay! As I relive this story, writing it into this thesis and working through my thoughts, that familiar taste returns to my mouth, I my heart pumping in my chest. And then the realisation crystallises: "What nickname did they have for me?"

I didn't last long in the bridge building exercise.

Beyond issues of race, my experience as a young woman in the male-dominated fields of firefighting and environmental conservation has been shaped by gendered perceptions. Women were regarded as inherently fragile, warranting special 'protective' treatment, sexualised (Fig. 21) and fetishised, or considered to be lesbians. I use scare quotes in mentioning 'protective', because when I started my job as a NPWS Field Officer, the team supervisor warned my new colleagues that swearing

was no longer appropriate because there were “young ladies” joining the team. What wasn’t apparently problematic was the nude female calendars and messy piles of dog-eared porn magazines left strewn open in the shared depot toilet cubicles. The porn was present for many months after I started work in this government workplace. One day without mention, all the porn disappeared, and if those RFS people ever did have a nickname for me, it was all behind my back: my name was always used to my face.

Knowing that I exist as a minority and not always feeling welcome, my default coping mechanism is to counteract any perceived lack on my behalf with extra effort. Here I aim to prove that I should have a place, that I do belong and that Aboriginal women can, and should, be included in the sector. I am driven not only to keep up, but to exceed expectations, because I don’t want to be thought of as the token Aboriginal woman, filling a diversity quota. I want my place on the team to be validated through my performance, not by my heritage or gender, yet often it feels like those factors compound the exclusion of Aboriginal women. Ironically, it was both my heritage and my gender that created the opportunity for me to gain a foothold working in the environmental sector in the first place. As my initial employment in NPWS was in an affirmative action position that was both identified (Aboriginal applicants only) and targeted (to women).

The fact that I stayed in the sector and built my career is positive on numerous levels. It is great that I have made a secure and successful career, which is a credit to my own tenacity and the resilience that society’s systematically oppressed peoples are often credited for. But that doesn’t mean the types of opportunities I encounter are accessible to other Aboriginal women, nor does it mean that we should encourage maintaining a ‘business as usual’ approach with no serious effort to dismantle the oppressive systems. I have responsibilities here. Now that I have progressed in my career, made achievements and gained some power, I have a responsibility to make changes and hold the door open so that other Aboriginal women can have access too. Those changes won’t be made if I simply join the status quo. Additionally, I know that Aboriginal women are what is needed to care for Country, to support our families and communities, which will ultimately benefit everything and everyone.



Figure 21: Black female firefighters meme. This meme about Black female firefighters in the USA resonates with this research. The women look strong, yet also posed and glamorous / sexualised by wearing make-up, their hair out and firefighting coats removed, thus revealing more of their femininity and Blackness than would be visible in the actual field, wearing full firefighting attire. I consider if this 'posed' approach is an intentional recruitment strategy, or if it speaks to the sexist notion that women need to maintain the persona of being the 'fairer sex' even when holding traditionally masculine roles. Credit: Black News Facebook post March 27, 2021.

CHAPTER 3 CONTEXT

3.1 WESTERN FIRE MANAGEMENT AND CULTURAL BURNING

3.1.1 About Western fire management and its relevance to cultural burning

This section introduces Western fire management in NSW in relation to its influence on cultural burning. Western fire management is the term used in this thesis to describe all NSW government departments that engage with cultural burning, specifically through four formal government fire authorities. These departments each have legislation, policies and processes, staff and approaches that impact on cultural burning. There are numerous Indigenous and non-Indigenous non-government organisations that engage with cultural burning, such as Firesticks Alliance, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Country Needs People, and Bush Heritage Australia (Firesticks Alliance 2024b, Sacre 2023, WWF 2018). These NGOs are not included in the category of Western fire management but remain subject to the same formal fire management processes that apply to Aboriginal communities regarding cultural burning.

Western fire management is relevant to this research for two primary reasons. First, it formally governs landscape-scale fire activities (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024). Second, as a colonial construct, Western fire management has been established through Western positivist reductionist science, dominated by Eurocentric and human-centred relationships with nature. This foundation means that Aboriginal people, values or cultural practices, such as cultural burning, have not been considered in Western fire management (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024). Western fire management has been established within a para-military top-down approach, where fire is regarded through an adversarial lens underpinned by a fire suppression paradigm. Social diversity is uncommon in Western fire management – both in its practical operations and its philosophical underpinnings which are predominantly Western (Young et al. 2018, p. 8). Firefighting in Australia is deeply entrenched in white, patriarchal, social homogeneity, where women and Aboriginal people are underrepresented (Batty & Burchielli 2011, Eriksen 2019, Childs 2006, Perrott 2016, Young et al. 2018). I argue that the perception of ‘who participates’ not only influences Aboriginal women’s participation in Western fire management, but also filter across to cultural burning.

3.1.2 Key factors influencing cultural burning in Western fire management

Several components of NSW legislation impact on cultural burning, however I do not attempt to examine these laws in detail. Depending on the time of year, land tenure and land ownership, many pieces of legislation apply, often creating barriers rather than enablers. McCormack, McKemey and cultural burning facilitator, co-founder of Firesticks Alliance and Bundjalung man, Costello (2024) examined the legal barriers, challenges and exemptions to cultural burning in NSW in a 152-page report. They illustrate that at least 10 key State and Commonwealth Acts, rules or instruments impact on cultural burning, including:

- *Rural Fires Act 1997*
 - *Local Land Services Act 2013*
 - *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*
 - *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*
 - *Forestry Act 2012*
 - Land Management (Vegetation) Code 2018
 - Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code
 - Rural Boundary Clearing Code
 - State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021
 - *Environmental Planning and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*
- (McCormack, McKemey and Costello 2024, p. 65-66).

This legislation is operationalised across several government agencies where coordination, adequacy and efficiency fall short. Described as a ‘complex muddle of legal instruments and agency oversight’ McCormack, McKemey and Costello (2024, p. 36) state:

Overlaps and gaps in this regulatory system complicate cultural burning by allocating responsibility across many different agencies, with different statutory priorities. None of these agencies has a statutory mandate to protect or promote the health of cultural landscapes or communities or to reinvigorate or sustain healthy, culturally informed fire practices.

I describe this ‘complex muddle’ as Western fire management – a state government responsibility – and as an indicative snapshot I focus on the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, which is the primary legislation for landscape-scale fires in NSW. Here, fire management sits within a centralised management system that is governed by the state and activated through policy and legislation. By law, all permitted landscape-scale fire activities in NSW, including cultural burning, must be undertaken in accordance with the *Rural Fires Act 1997*. Western fire management, particularly in emergency situations, is prioritised in relation to the protection of human life and assets, such as property and

infrastructure (Woinarski, Zander & Garnett 2024). This prioritisation is stated in the *Rural Fires Act 1997* (NSW) where it identifies its purpose as: ‘the protection of persons from injury or death, and property from damage, arising from fires’ (*Rural Fires Act 1997* No.65, s3: Objects of Act).

There are four government fire authorities in NSW under the *Rural Fires Act 1997*: the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS); Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW); the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS); and Forestry Corporation NSW (Forestry). The RFS is the principal government fire authority for NSW, the largest fire agency in the state, and the biggest volunteer network in the world (RFS 2021a). The *Rural Fires Act 1997* sets out the structure and operations of the RFS under the direction of the RFS Commissioner, and the NSW Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee. The RFS works collaboratively with the three other fire authorities.

All four authorities have supported Aboriginal communities with varying degrees of autonomy to undertake cultural burning in varying ways. They support cultural burning either on the estate that they manage (this applies to NPWS and FCNSW who hold estate), or they support cultural burning on estate owned or managed by others (e.g. private freehold lands or Local Aboriginal Land Council lands), and their role is being the ‘sponsor’³⁹ and responsible Government fire authority (this applies to RFS and FRNSW who do not hold estate). Depending on tenure, the time of year and the specific local environmental factors, cultural burning may be undertaken with significant, through to minimal, engagement of fire authorities.

Other Government agencies, such as NSW Local Land Services (LLS), work with Aboriginal communities to support cultural burning. LLS activates cultural burning through the *Local Land Services Act 2013*. Both the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and the *Local Land Services Act 2013* define who can undertake landscape fires, when and how they can burn, and what types of burning can take place. The *Local Land Services Act 2013* Schedule 5A (Part 2 section 18), has provisions for traditional Aboriginal cultural activities as an allowable activity for ‘clearing native vegetation’, as long as it is not a commercial activity (*LLS Act 2013*). Using this provision, LLS has supported cultural burning activities, albeit carrying restrictions regarding remuneration, and that the objectives of the burn have been pre-determined as burning for the purpose of ‘clearing native vegetation’. Thus, using this mechanism, the cultural burn objectives are not being established by the Aboriginal people with the cultural authority to lead cultural burning.

In practice, NSW Government support for cultural burning is not yet universal, as there are some locations where Aboriginal communities are not undertaking cultural burning. There are also locations where departments are not adequately addressing cultural burning. However, all NSW departments are committed to support cultural burning through the recommendations of the NSW

³⁹ The sponsor of a burn holds liability for any damages caused by the burn. In Western law, the sponsor is the formally recognised manager/authority of the burn, which brings up its own tensions because often Aboriginal communities are not categorised or formally recognised as the authority, and the agency officers hold final decision-making power about the burn. Sponsors also may provide resource support and assistance as needed.

Bushfire Inquiry. Many departments have their own policies and initiatives to support cultural burning. McCormack, McKemey and Costello (2024) have examined the legal barriers to cultural burning and provide an in-depth analysis of these issues.

3.1.3 Shortcomings and barriers of Western fire management

Resourcing and coordination are both barriers and they are linked. There is investment into Indigenous burning programs in other jurisdictions, however caring for Country programs are geographically disproportionate, with notable concentrations in locations other than NSW. Secure or adequate funding for cultural burning in NSW has not been established, and there is a lack of coordination of both what funds and government policy and processes. Currently Governments invest billions of dollars into isolated portfolios across natural hazard and emergency management, Indigenous disadvantage, the environment and climate change. Typically, each portfolio focusses within its own boundaries and there is limited coordination and inter-agency collaboration. These ‘government silos’ are an inefficiency that hinders cultural burning, which often requires engagement across several portfolios (Costello 2021, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024, Williamson 2021a). As yet, there is no single Minister or department dedicated to supporting advancement of cultural burning in NSW. Nor is there legislation that discusses cultural burning or establishes, resources or monitors NSW Government’s commitments regarding cultural burning (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024).

The *Rural Fires Act 1997* was developed well before the recent revival of cultural burning in NSW. At that time the *Act* did not mention cultural burning, nor provide considerations to Aboriginal priorities, values or approaches. The closest consideration made regarding Aboriginal matters was a minor and generic reference to ‘cultural heritage’ as a possible inhibitor to the application of prescribed fire (*Rural Fires Act 1997* Part 3.4.54). This generic reference to cultural heritage is open to interpretation, inadequate and problematic when those implementing plans are likely to have limited understanding of Aboriginal values and appropriate responses. Consequently, the *Rural Fires Act 1997* has been critiqued as providing poor guidance on Aboriginal matters (Laidlaw, Spennemann & Allan 2007, 2008, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Salgo & Gillespie 2018).

This lack of consideration or inclusion of Aboriginal content is symbolic of broader Western fire management. For example, key mechanisms of Western fire management such as the Enhanced Bushfire Management Program (EBMP) (DPE 2023b), the State Bush Fire Plan (SBFP 2017), and the NSW State Emergency Management Plan do not address Aboriginal cultural burning. In fact, the State Bush Fire Plan (2017) does not include any mention of words Aborigin*, Indigenous, heritage, or culture. Similarly, the NSW State Emergency Management Plan does not contain the words ‘Aborigin*’ or ‘Indigenous’. However, matters pertaining to Aboriginal content were included in the Rural Fires

Regulation 1997, which stipulated Aboriginal positions within regional Bush Fire Management Committee membership. These positions are not compulsory quorum members to these committees, and anecdotally, many of these positions are regularly vacant (Djiringanj et al. 2025, pers. com J. Bertram 2019).

Even when Aboriginal matters and cultural burning appear in legislation, policies and key operational mechanisms, the Government officers whose job it is to respond must have the cultural competency to comprehend and provide appropriate support. Often there are deficiencies in staff cultural competency where mindsets and/or practices are not up-to-date with current developments regarding cultural burning (Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024). This variability accounts for inconsistent support provided to cultural burning across NSW. Where officers and processes are not conversant with developments regarding cultural burning, they risk maintaining or becoming an additional barrier to cultural burning. This means Aboriginal priorities regarding fire are often incomprehensible to government or deemed out-of-scope (Eriksen & Hankins 2014, Lake 2013, Thomassin et al. 2018). Inconveniently for Aboriginal people and cultural burning supporters, adequate Aboriginal cultural competency is not a baseline requirement of employment, which means that in cross-cultural interactions a lot of time is wasted educating (predominantly non-Indigenous) government staff instead of focussing on Aboriginal people's priorities and objectives (Hemmingsen & Marshall 2008).

Many, Western fire management agencies are aware of this shortcoming and undertakes initiatives, projects, programs and partnerships to progress cultural burning (Djiringanj et al. 2025). Increasing Aboriginal employment is often used as a pathway to enact improvement as increasing Aboriginal employment can build agency competency levels and influence government processes to be more inclusive and responsive of diverse communities. Programs that are targeted to Aboriginal employment and community engagement regarding cultural burning support and strengthen Aboriginal communities and their aspirations, however they often require Aboriginal people to 'fit' into mainstream approaches and processes (Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024).

There are Aboriginal specific fire-related initiatives in each of the four fire authorities. Some initiatives are locally specific, occurring through partnerships, while others are established through broader mechanisms such as national strategy development. For example, the 2021 Commonwealth State of the Environment report (Cresswell, Janke & Johnston 2021) was co-authored by Merriam woman and ICIP specialist, Terri Janke and contained strong support for Indigenous-led caring for Country, including several sections dedicated to cultural burning with six NSW case studies. Following this lead, Western fire management agencies in NSW have recently begun to engage more seriously with Aboriginal communities regarding cultural burning. However, these agencies maintain their own entrenched cultures, purposes and approaches, which marginalise Aboriginal people and women.

3.1.4 Western fire management and support for cultural burning

Prior to the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires there was slow but developing interest and support within NSW government for cultural burning activities in NSW. As the principal fire authority in NSW Government, it is pertinent that RFS is developing its support for cultural burning, with increased action since the Black Summer Bushfires. In its *Aboriginal Communities Engagement Strategy* (RFS 2018) the RFS acknowledges that Aboriginal communities hold important cultural fire knowledge and the constraints Western fire management creates for Aboriginal people to maintain knowledge and cultural practice. RFS commits to exploring cultural burning partnerships and has supported numerous cultural burning activities with Aboriginal communities across NSW. The RFS employs an Aboriginal Programs Coordinator to promote and improve RFS engagement with Aboriginal communities including through cultural burning. Aboriginal firefighters are employed through the Indigenous Mitigation programme, increasing the available support to Aboriginal communities for cultural burning (Davies 2020). The RFS had also acknowledged the need to improve and increase professional development of its staff and members to recognise and understand Aboriginal values and priorities (RFS 2018).

In 2016, the NPWS clarified its support for cultural burning on its estate with development of its *Cultural Fire Management policy*, DPE 2016a, and *Guidelines for Community (Low Risk) Cultural Burning on NPWS Managed Lands* (DPE 2016b). Recently this policy was updated to the *Cultural Fire Management Policy* (NSWEH 2025). Additionally, the *NPWS Fire Management Manual 2024-25 Policy and Procedures for Fire Management* (DCCEEW 2024) further details how NPWS will support cultural burning. An Aboriginal senior project officer in NPWS provides support to cultural burning activities across the NPWS estate.

FCNSW has supported cultural burns in State Forests including Niigi Niigi Cultural Burn in 2018, undertaken in Orara East State Forest (FCNSW n.d); Imlay Cultural Burn in East Boyd State Forest in 2018 (FCNSW 2018); and Cowarra State Forest cultural burn (Fairhurst 2020). In 2020 FCNSW supported Aboriginal people to complete basic fire training to build their experiences and confidence with fire with the aspiration that they will participate in cultural burning in FCNSW estate (FCNSW 2020a). FCNSW's *Forestry Corporation Fire Management Plan* (2019) which guides its fire management, states that Indigenous and other cultural values must be protected and enhanced through FCNSW operations, and this may require engagement of Indigenous heritage specialists (FCNSW 2019). FCNSW is 'committed to forming partnerships with traditional Aboriginal custodians to ensure the maintenance and protection of their culture and values' (FCNSW 2019, p. 10). The Aboriginal Partnerships Liaison Team within FCNSW works with Aboriginal communities and supports a range of Aboriginal partnerships, including cultural burning in State Forests (FCNSW n.d).

Although Fire and Rescue NSW is primarily focussed on urban areas, it is committed to encouraging fire safety for Aboriginal communities and understanding and celebrating Indigenous fire knowledge (FRNSW n.d.a). FRNSW has actively supported cultural burning by being the sponsor fire authority on hand (FRNSW 2024a, 2023a, 2023b). Resources such as fire trucks have been donated to Aboriginal communities to support cultural burning (FRNSW 2024b). FRNSW has an internal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council (ATSIAC), which advocates for Aboriginal cultural issues (FRNSW n.d.a). It has also developed a children's booklet that promotes Aboriginal cultural fire knowledge (FRNSW n.d.b). FRNSW supports six Aboriginal Community Fire Units across the state where residents are trained to provide localised responses to minor incidents and enhance community preparedness for bushfires (FRNSW 2021).

Beyond the four fire authorities, the NSW DCCEEW Healthy Country Team (preceded by the Cultural Fire Management Unit) are developing the first whole-of-government cultural fire strategy for NSW (see Section 1.2.4). There are many examples of successful cultural burning partnerships involving government and Aboriginal communities, as illustrated through three examples (McKemey & Patterson 2019, RFS 2017b). First, in 2024 Transport NSW announced a two-year \$4.5 million pilot project for Traditional Owners to use land management methods, including cultural burning, as asset protection along roads (Tugwell 2024). Second, Crown Lands has progressed its own Cultural Fire Program with dedicated staff to support cultural burning on Crown Lands (Crown Lands 2024). Finally, Aboriginal Affairs NSW partners with Aboriginal communities to attract funding to undertake cultural stewardship projects, involving cultural burning on Aboriginal lands such as Wattleridge near Guyra (NRC 2024).

Where funding is available, such as through caring for Country programs and ranger teams, there are noticeable limitations and challenges, including resource insecurity. Funding programs themselves carry multiple challenges, including that they are sporadic, short-term, have limited scope, and are often complicated further by government silos and the influence of election cycles (Kerins 2012, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024).

At this stage, all cultural burning progress involving NSW Government heavily relies on goodwill. NSW Government has made some important progress, such as including recommendations regarding cultural burning in the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, establishing the Cultural Fire Management Unit, and work to develop a state-wide whole-of-government cultural fire strategy (forthcoming) which will provide Aboriginal people, government, stakeholders and others clear and consistent direction regarding cultural burning from the perspective of government – it will not replace the leadership of Aboriginal communities. However, support for cultural burning in NSW is precarious until it gains some security through legislation or policy. Currently, cultural burning is not well understood or embedded across all stakeholders. The lack of understanding and accountability of Aboriginal peoples' rights, including by government and other stakeholders, mean those rights are not always enacted (Langton 1998, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024). To

address these issues Governments need competent staff and enforced accountability (Freeman, Williamson & Weir 2021; Langton 1998; Lehman 2001; Williamson 2021a).

These government initiatives and examples demonstrate that Western fire management supports cultural burning, with some departments further along than others. Stronger cross-departmental collaboration is needed to dismantle government silos, and enable a coordinated and consistent approach across government and NSW (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024). Although there is support, there are barriers that must be overcome (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024). The support for cultural burning must be responsive to reflect the diversity of Aboriginal communities across NSW where a range of capabilities and capacity exists. To date, much of the success that is occurring is reliant on goodwill and individual officer relationships within agencies rather than directed through widespread transformational change. This goodwill is encouraging but it is insecure and not universal. It is advantageous that there are already proactive government officers who work to support cultural burning outcomes because it is common that policy changes at the strategic level are stimulated first by on-the-ground activities, however this can take many years. Progress will continue to rely on individuals and piecemeal approaches until a secure statewide approach to cultural burning is embedded across NSW Government.

3.2 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CULTURAL BURNING AND WESTERN FIRE MANAGEMENT

3.2.1 Cultural burning differs from Western fire management

Cultural burning and Western fire management differ because they are underpinned by two differing worldviews which create different objectives, approaches and outcomes (Lindenmayer et al. 2025, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021). Cultural burning engages Aboriginal ontological knowledge, science and practices which are distinct to those of Western fire management. Cultural burning is Country-centred where the health of Country is central. The health of Country is understood within an Aboriginal cultural context (which is more than the ecological context of Western science). Cultural burning activities vary, and the objectives and outcomes include wide-ranging environmental, social, spiritual and cultural outcomes. These outcomes are important components of cultural burning. Cultural burning focusses on, and encourages respectful, reciprocal, good relations between people and

Country, where Country is respected as an Elder, and humans are a part of Country (Eriksen & Hankins 2013, Tynan 2021, Steffensen 2020, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021).

However, some similarities exist between cultural burning and Western fire management. Both understand fire as a powerful natural force and fire's potential to damage. Both understand that fire is an essential component for the health of Australian ecosystems. Both apply fire to the landscape to achieve their goals and objectives, which influences local ecosystem structure and composition. Finally, both can reduce or mitigate potential bushfire risk, evident in the cultural land management practiced in the continental centre and north (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020). However, hazard reduction is not the primary purpose or objective of cultural burning in NSW as it is for Western fire management (Hooper 2020, Langton 2002, Steffensen 2020). Cultural burning may be undertaken to reduce debris to foster Country for hunting, or it may be undertaken to protect important cultural values in the landscape or to protect Country.

3.2.2 Different philosophies

Aboriginal cultures relate to fire in positive ways and view fire as having agency. Cavanagh and Standley (2020, p. 14) articulate: 'within Indigenous knowledge systems, the biotic and abiotic features of the environment are sentient and as such, Country holds knowledge and fire is alive'. Indigenous people in other locations describe fire in similar ways (Brown 2021, Christianson 2015, Eriksen & Hankins 2013). This agency is not simply an Aboriginal way of describing cause and effect. For instance, it is not just a description of the interplay between the fire triangle of heat, oxygen and fuel as is understood within Western fire science. Being in good relationship with fire is a way to care for and be in relationship with Country, which also means looking after the health of everything within Country, including humans (Rose 1996, Steffensen 2020). Noongar Minung/Gnudju kayang woman, Carol Pettersen shows her nurturing regard for fire whilst also highlighting that many people are fearful of fire:

It's sad when I hear people talk about fire as an enemy, a demon. It's not. Fire is a beautiful, warm, comforting entity. It's got a spirit of its own and we see that and the energy within and we respect it (Pettersen, 2021, p. 9).

In mainstream society the relationship with fire is inherently negative and carries strong fear-based connotations linked to risk where landscape-scale fires are perceived as dangerous (Bishop & Tynan 2022, Johnston & Cavanagh 2020, Tynan 2021). In having this fundamental premise, Western fire management is couched within a mindset that is combative with fire. As the labels *firefighting* and *fire suppression* indicate, fire is regarded in opposition and as foe, rather than as a tool (Eriksen & Hankins 2013, Thomassin et al. 2018). Western fire management contrasts to cultural burning because

the Western approach is based on Eurocentric relationships with nature. These relationships are human-centric, where humans are considered the authority. Western fire management processes are bound to timeframes based on Gregorian calendars rather than the present condition of Country. The priorities and processes of Western fire management focus on assets and efficiency (life, property, assets/infrastructure) (Fletcher et al. 2021, Langton 1998, Tynan 2021). Western fire management is not primarily concerned with the health or needs of each specific Country at the specific time of the intended burn (Barber 2020, Steffensen 2020, Freeman 2020). The complex interrelationships of Country, people and fire that exist within Aboriginal worldviews are not a part of or considered in Western fire management (Baynes-Rock 2025, Costello 2020, Steffensen 2020, Williamson 2022b).

Western fire management does not seek to foster good relations between people and Country through activating fire. Rather, Western fire management is a product of positivist, reductionist, Eurocentric and patriarchal Western science, where humans are separate from, and have power and authority over the environment, and where nature is a resource that is available to be controlled, managed and extracted (Castree 2005, Plumwood 2012, Shiva & Mies 2014). This domination and separation of nature and humans is a false binary. It contrasts with Indigenous paradigms which position humans as being and belonging within nature, where Country is the centre and provider of all life. This contrast of worldviews and the problems that it presents to cultural burning have been examined by Baynes-Rock (2025), who argues that the false binary not only presents barriers to Aboriginal people trying to progress cultural burning, but that it will also inevitably compromise Western models. Arguably, we are already witnessing this compromise through the increasing scale and frequency of devastating fires (Abram et al. 2021, Bowman & Sharples 2023, Nolan et al. 2021).

The objectives of Western fire management are that humans fight, dominate, control and manage fire. The premise of controlling and managing fire encourages approaches that are reactive and oppressive rather than proactive, respectful and conducive (Langton 1998, Eriksen & Hankins 2015, Thomassin et al. 2018). Longstanding Firesticks Alliance member, Dr Peta-Marie Standley explains the fault in holding a combative relationship with fire: ‘Unfortunately, a lot of people’s experience with fire is that it’s dangerous, so they’re naturally afraid of it ... But you can’t fight fire. You have to work with it’ (Standley in Farra 2021).

There are also practical differences between cultural burning and Western fire management. Cultural burning is slow, calm and healing and embedded within cultural protocols and relationality with Country (Bishop & Tynan 2022, Johnston & Cavanagh 2020, Tynan 2021). In cultural burning the fires are cooler, slower, often creating mosaics and burning in ways that protect the seed banks, non-fire tolerant species and canopy (Firesticks 2024a, Murramarang Country et al. 2024, Steffensen 2020).

In Western fire management fires are faster, hotter and burn Country more comprehensively (Cavanagh 2022a, Steffensen 2020). Hotter fires create wide-ranging ecological damage, including to plants and animals, which can cause irreversible damage (Dickman 2021), depletion of ecological health and soil health (Murramarang Country et al. 2024), soil instability leading to erosion (Alexandra

& Finlayson 2020, Kemter et al. 2021, Shakesby et al. 2007), increased release of carbon into the atmosphere, and habitat loss and species change and decline (Dickman 2021).

3.2.3 Different relationships

The contrasts between Indigenous and Western relationships with fire reflect deeper issues of incompatibility and incommensurability between the two knowledge systems that inform each approach. Indigenous systems are relational (Watson 2017). They are complex adaptive systems where creativity and innovation are enabled, and where everything is connected, however this is not always clearly defined. In contrast, Western processes are generally categorical, ordered systems, which are top-down, Eurocentric, hierarchical structures that are motivated by defined measures and key performance indicators. The disconnect between the two approaches, along with the imbalance of power, hampers Indigenous caring for Country progress (Watson 2017). Western fire management favours Western science, and it does not adequately understand or include Aboriginal science and caring for Country knowledge. It also favours and maintains particular societal groups, while ignoring others (Morton-Robinson 2004).

This complexity has real policy implications for those who are working in cross-cultural spaces. Wilson (2018, p. 345) describes that Indigenous people ‘face unequal power-sharing relationships with competing stakeholders and land interests.’ Here, Indigenous engagement is reduced to a cultural add-on in a Eurocentric system. Currently, rather than being the primary approach, caring for Country predominantly operates on the periphery of the mainstream government models and authority structures. For cultural burning, this means it is currently positioned as secondary and supplementary to the pervasive dominance of Western models. Tacking cultural burning on to the current environmental conservation sector as a supplement to Western science is not appropriate, and it does little to address the broader systemic issues that exist, especially when mainstream environmental conservation is failing (Bennett et al. 2021, Henry et al. 2023, Samuel 2020). Maintaining the current models of Western fire management and environmental conservation will continue the ill health of Country and Aboriginal people (Fletcher 2021, Samuel 2020, Steffensen 2020, Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020).

Aboriginal people are highlighting that Country is being mismanaged and that we need to radically change human relationships with Country so that our behaviours become more aligned to healthy sustainable ecosystems and societies (Foth et al. 2021). Many people hold these views with an awareness of the worsening social and ecological conditions that colonisation has created; and an awareness of the links between healthy Country and healthy people (Burgess et al. 2009, Commonwealth 2024, Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020, Wright et al. 2021). Aboriginal people (and others) advocate for a return and reinstatement of Aboriginal systems and approaches as the primary

model, including the devolution of power, and a redirection of resources to Indigenous parties (Edwards et al. 2013, Ruane 2018, Watson 2017). Aboriginal approaches have proven to care for Country well in the past, as evidenced by the abundant healthy Country that Europeans encountered when they arrived on this continent in the 18th Century. Success indicators of the sector need to focus more on the health and wellbeing of Country and people, and they need to be decoupled from political and economic cycles and influences (Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024, Watson 2017). Both parties in two-way conservation must contribute in genuine partnership to encourage effectiveness and to decolonise the process (Howitt et al. 2013). However, more onus rests with non-Indigenous parties to meet and deliver on their commitments within caring for Country partnership agreements (Wilson et al. 2018).

Cultural burning does not mean having Aboriginal people undertake fire practices that are fundamentally Western. Where Aboriginal people undertake fire activities using Western fire management methods and methodologies, it fundamentally continues to be a Western practice, they are not doing cultural burning, they are Aboriginal people doing Western fire management (Williamson 2021a, Fletcher et al. 2021). Fire activities do not automatically become cultural burning because they include Aboriginal people or adopt some elements of cultural burning. This problem of (mis)labelling Western fires as cultural burning due to involvement of Aboriginal people is well discussed (Fletcher et al. 2021, McKemey et al. 2020a, Williamson 2021a). Eriksen and Hankins (2013, p. 24) argue: ‘many indigenous people working with fire today are trained within the Eurocentric and patriarchal notion of firefighting’, making fire for some Indigenous peoples ‘a complex affair’.

This is applicable to many Indigenous people like myself who have been formally trained in Western fire management, and then have influence in Aboriginal cultural practices like cultural burning. We have to acknowledge the multiple subjectivities of our training and cultural experiences and be able to hold distinctions between Aboriginal people enacting Western practices, and Aboriginal cultural practice. The misnomer of calling Western fire management that is undertaken by Aboriginal people *cultural* occurs when the delineation between the two differing ontologies (Aboriginal and Western) is unclear (Eriksen & Hankins 2013, Fache 2014, Fache & Moizo 2015). Cultural burning requires engaging with fire through an Aboriginal philosophical frame of reference and activation of Aboriginal methods and methodologies based on systems of traditional ecological knowledge and wisdom, if the burn does not uphold Aboriginal paradigms or fulfil cultural burning methodology it is not a cultural burn.

Like all cultures, Aboriginal cultures are dynamic. This is visible in re-establishing the cultural practice of cultural burning with accommodation of recent changes to the landscape, using modern tools and finding opportunities to operate in the periphery of Western fire management to gain broader acceptance. Additionally, if the Elders and cultural burning leaders want to encourage broader participation they can and do, and this creates a variety of outcomes, however, there will always be occasions where cultural burning includes selective participation for a range of reasons. The issues discussed here are explored further in the thematic chapters.

3.3 COLONISATION, FIRE AND CULTURAL BURNING

3.3.1 Impacts of colonisation

Colonisation has restricted cultural burning and a wide range of other caring for Country activities which, in addition to the changes in land use, has impacted on the structure and form of forests and other landscapes (Fletcher et al. 2021, Steffensen 2020). Sixty years after the arrival of the First Fleet, explorer Thomas Mitchell noted the changes in the landscape where Aboriginal fire practices had diminished due to colonisation. He made this important observation about European people's attitudes to fire:

...the omission of the annual periodical burning by natives of the grass and young saplings has already produced in the open forest lands nearest to Sydney thick forests of young trees...Kangaroos are no longer to be seen there, the grass is choked by underwood; neither are there natives to burn the grass, nor is fire longer desirable among the fences of the settlers (Mitchell, 1848).

Mitchell is describing that with the removal of Aboriginal people and practices from Country, Country changed and became what Aboriginal people often describe as being 'sick', choked up with vegetation, or unhealthy. This increase in flammable biota increases bushfire risk (Fletcher & SGM 2020). Mitchell also observes that fires were not desirable to settlers and their fences (which fire would damage). Here the beginnings of the Eurocentric fire suppression paradigm are visible and these paradigms prevail. These arguments are not new to Aboriginal people, including women. Ngarrindjeri mimini woman, Deb Swan who has broad cultural burning experience, is aware of the diversity of experiences Aboriginal people have through cultural burning, and she understands that colonisation has influenced Aboriginal peoples' ability to maintain cultural practices:

there's areas across Australia that never stopped burning. Some communities, the closer you get to Sydney, to the nerve of colonization, New South Wales, is where our culture gets disintegrated and where things have been stopped because we had to for survival (in Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020).

Fire scientists are confirming what Aboriginal people have been arguing for decades – that Aboriginal people have a long history of burning Country. Fletcher, along with others, analysed sediment layers to establish the long-term fire history in various locations of eastern Australia. They found that Aboriginal people have actively burned Country for millennia, and colonisation has negated that practice. They identify that changes to fire regimes and forest structure coincide with the timing of

colonial invasion (Fletcher et al. 2020, Fletcher, Hall & Alexandra 2020). Fletcher's research shows that when Aboriginal populations were depleted and forcibly moved, the ecosystems changed, and open grasslands became heavily forested, which increased the risk of destructive bushfires (Fletcher, Hall and Alexandra 2020, Laming et al. 2022). Similar arguments are made by fire scientists and social scientists (Bowman & Lehman 2020). Studies on charcoal records in NSW show that prior to colonisation, Aboriginal people were burning frequently and with low intensity fires (Constantine et al. 2023, Kelly et al. 2023).

Many Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people, including fire scientists and researchers advocate for the reinstatement of cultural burning (Bowman & Lehman 2020, Fletcher et al. 2020; Kelly et al. 2023, Price, Nolan & Samson 2022). Wider society is aiding this advocacy, with the hope that Aboriginal fire knowledge might help mitigate future destructive fire events (Maclean et al. 2023, Steffensen 2020). Aboriginal cultural burning practitioners explain that bushfires will always occur, and they are cautious about overstating what cultural burning can achieve in preventing bushfires. Fire manager and Wiradjuri man, Dean Freeman explains: 'You might still get a wildfire coming through, but you would lose a lot of the intensity so it would probably be a bit more manageable' (Freeman in King 2019). Aboriginal cultural burning practitioner Dan Morgan hopes to see cultural burning more widely adopted to make Country healthier and mitigate levels of extreme bushfire risk where possible, but he says it is likely that this will take several decades if not longer (Milton & Morgan 2022, Morgan & Keller 2020). However, there are several examples in NSW where cultural burning that was undertaken before the 2019-2020 Black Summer was credited for mitigating the impacts of those megafires (ABC Australia 2018, Archibald-Binge & Wyman 2020, Higgins 2020).

Not only were Aboriginal people and their burning practices removed from Country, but fire suppression paradigms were also established and became the dominant approach, restricting the application of fire and further compounding the changes to fire regimes (Fletcher, Hall & Alexandra 2020, Laming et al. 2022, Mariani et al. 2022, 2024). This forms what Aboriginal people argue is a perpetual negative cycle, where Country is not being cared for, which results in Country becoming unwell, which leads to more extreme hazardous events such as the 2019-2020 Black Summer. Aboriginal people argue that colonisation has caused the mismanagement of Country through the absence of Aboriginal-led caring for Country systems (Barber 2020, Costello 2020, Tynan 2021, Yibarbuk & Ansell 2020). Through a political lens, the removal of Aboriginal people from Country bolsters the doctrine of *terra nullius* and fictitious ideologies of wilderness (Langton 1996, 1998, Lehman 2001, Fletcher 2020, Fletcher et al. 2021, Lee 2016, Lee & Richardson 2017).

It is appealing that support for cultural burning is increasing including across Aboriginal and non-Indigenous communities. However, the range of skills, capability, capacity and confidence among Aboriginal communities varies. Some communities and ranger teams are already well established in their cultural burning activities, whilst others are yet to put fire to the ground and may require increased support. Some Aboriginal people are fearful, fearful of fire, or fearful of being perceived as arsonists,

others know that they need to build their skills and that this takes time and opportunities (Webster 2020). Where Aboriginal people are restricted from practicing culture, their cultural knowledge and practices continue to be depleted with multiple and significant impacts, such as diminished health, fractured communities and cultural loss. Aboriginal people know this, and fight for the protection of Country and rights to maintain cultural practices.

3.4 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

3.4.1 Impacts on fire and Country

Bushfire risks in Australia are increasing with the impacts of human-induced climate change (Abram et al. 2021, Clarke et al. 2020, Cresswell, Janke & Johnson 2021). The increased bushfire risks in Australia align with deteriorating conditions internationally (Cresswell, Janke & Johnson 2021, IPCC 2023, UNEP 2022). Impacts include an increased length to the fire season (Harris & Lucas 2019, Jolly et al. 2015), an increased frequency and intensity of bushfires (Abram et al. 2021, Bowman & Sharples 2023, Nolan et al. 2021), and an increased occurrence of extreme fire weather – characterised by strong winds, low humidity and high temperatures (Abram et al. 2021, Bowman & Sharples 2023, Nolan et al. 2021). This increasing risk presents a plethora of negative outcomes for humans and Country, including unhealthy fire regimes, megafires, and a wide spectrum of environmental, cultural and social losses (Abram et al. 2021, Nolan et al. 2021, Zylstra et al. 2023).

Aboriginal people agree that bushfire risks and impacts are increasing (Bowman & Sharples 2023, Bowman & Lehman 2020, Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020), and that the dangerous bushfires that occur now are not the fires that Aboriginal people want or value, as they are not good for Country or people. To paraphrase what I heard Yuin woman Aileen Blackburn-Mongta describe when I attended the Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum: ‘these fires are like atomic bombs! These aren’t good fires’ (Blackburn-Mongta 2018).

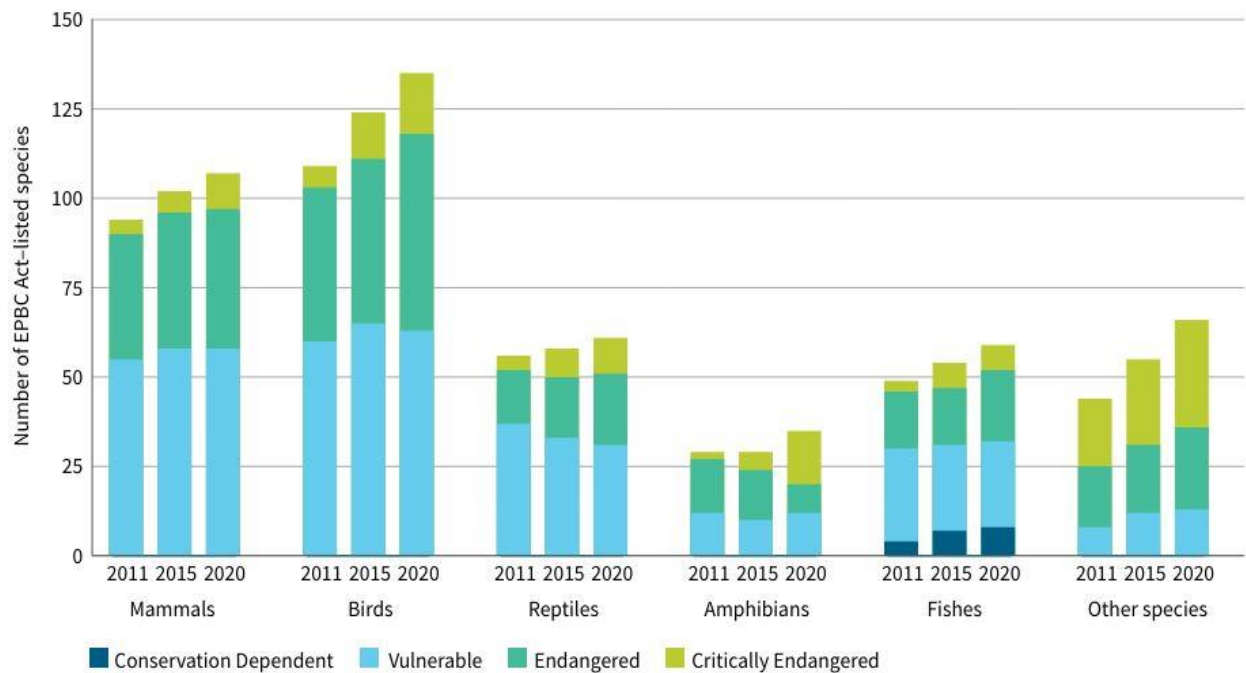
Disasters like the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires expose flaws in the current management paradigm and illustrate our dire situation regarding the extent of the climate crisis and its impacts, including on biota. Even though much of the biota in southeastern Australia is fire dependent or tolerant, species that have symbiotic relationships with fire may not adapt to the rapid pace of the changes in fire and climate. These changes will have profound negative consequences for species that are not currently understood, nor proactively managed (Jackson et al. 2017).

Species and biodiversity decline and loss in Australia is significant and ongoing. Inappropriate fire regimes and inappropriate management are significant factors affecting threatened species

(Dickman & MacDonald 2020, Woinarski, Burbidge & Harrison 2015; Woinarski & Recher 1997). An articulation of these deficiencies is found in an independent review of the nation's principal environmental conservation legislation, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act 1999), which heavily criticised the current national conservation system as being outdated, inadequate, ill-fitting and ineffective (Samuel 2020). The review made links between climate change impacts and bushfires, stating that future threats and risks, including altered fire regimes, will be compounding, substantial, unpredictable and set to worsen. Samuel (2020, p. 75) warns in terms of managing or understanding fire: 'the past will no longer be a useful guide to the future'. This warning is not the first of its kind from independent experts. In 2008, the *Garnaut Climate Change Review* warned of the high likelihood of catastrophic bushfires in 2020, yet this report was largely ignored by governments and policymakers (Khadem 2020).

Reports such as Samuel (2020) and Garnaut (2008) and the final reports of the Royal Commission (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020) and the NSW Bushfire Inquiry (Owens & O'Kane 2020) warrant our acute attention, and should stimulate strong responses, to avoid repeating mistakes and failures of the past. Furthermore, fire science experts critique current fire management approaches, particularly questioning the effectiveness of Western fire management's hazard reduction burning in mitigating dangerous bushfires (Lindenmayer & Zylstra 2023). Fire experts advocate for increased examination and application of cultural burning for its potential in holding solutions to improve relationships with fire (Bowman & Lehman 2020).

Through events like the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, Country is indicating the dire reality that we live in. As a holistic ecosystem, the planet is faltering with the pressures applied by our destructive human activity including catastrophic biodiversity loss (IPCC 2022). These events are often referred to as 'natural disasters', however it is clearly linked to human activity (IPCC 2022). Indeed, colonisation is an ongoing disaster for Indigenous peoples in multiple and compounding ways, including the degradation of Country and the ongoing disadvantage that Indigenous peoples' experience in trying to care for Country (Marshall & Twill 2022, Russ-Smith 2021 and 2023, Williamson 2022b). In Australia, this crisis is evident through significant and ongoing biodiversity loss (Fig. 22) and impacts on Indigenous heritage, as illustrated in the State of the Environment report (Cresswell, Janke & Johnston 2021, Murphy & van Leeuwen 2021). The timing of ecological deterioration corresponds with European colonisation of the continent (Ritchie 2022, Woinarski, Burbidge & Harrison 2015; Woinarski et al. 2019). Additionally, we know that bushfires exacerbate stress on species, and we know that fire and ecological risks are increasing with the impacts of climate change (Abram et al. 2021, Bowman & Sharples 2023, Nolan et al. 2021). Simultaneously, Indigenous people in Australia experience significant social disadvantage and are categorised as being the most at-risk group for human rights violations as a result of colonisation (HRMI 2023).



EPBC Act = *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

Number of terrestrial and marine animal species listed under each threat category in the EPBC Act, 2011, 2015 and 2020

Figure 22: Threatened animal species statistics in State of the Environment (2021). The threats to animals in Australia are increasing, particularly for those that are critically endangered. Graph cited in Murphy & van Leeuwen (2021).

3.4.2 Impacts on Aboriginal people

The climate crisis and disasters already disproportionately affect Indigenous people, and this will compound into the future (Menzies 2019, Standen et al. 2022, Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020, Williamson 2022b). Aboriginal people are significantly and disproportionately impacted by the ongoing destruction of Country through fire (Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020, Williamson, Weir & Cavanagh 2020a). Connections exist between the health of Country and the health of Aboriginal people (Burgess et al. 2009, Clapham et al. 2024, Jones et al. 2018, Murrup-Stewart et al. 2021).

Large scale disasters exacerbate poverty, and Indigenous people are affected in unique ways (UNSDG 2020, Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020). However, Aboriginal peoples' needs are largely ignored in government recovery responses, and although Indigenous people clearly advocate for Indigenous knowledges and expertise to proactively mitigate disasters, that expertise remains largely untapped (Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020). Of this dilemma, the State of the Environment report states:

The poor overall state of Country and connection to Country has a negative effect on Indigenous people's wellbeing. In turn, our environment is poorer because of the lack of Indigenous leadership, knowledge and management [in] Australia (Cresswell, Janke & Johnson 2021).

Some Indigenous groups are exploring their climate change resilience and adaptation capabilities through Indigenist research (Arbon & Rigney 2014). There is growing international interest in the potential for Indigenous knowledges to provide solutions to climate crisis (Wildcat 2010). Indigenous scholars agree that Indigenous knowledges are valid and underappreciated (Hernández 2022, Sultana 2022, Suzuki 2007, Whyte 2017).

There is international recognition that Indigenous peoples are disproportionately and negatively affected by climate vulnerability, including bushfire threats in Australia, the USA and Canada (IPCC 2023, Lake 2013, Lake & Christianson 2020, Williamson, Markham & Weir 2020), and that Indigenous women experience intersectional challenges that require specialist attention (IPCC 2023, Thomas 2022, UNDP 2009). Bushfire risks and other disasters will increase with climate change (Di Virgilio et al. 2019, IPCC 2023). This increase means that Indigenous peoples' risk increases and there will be escalating impacts including loss of heritage, changes to cultural practices, and depletion of resources, resulting in changing relationships with Country (Middleton et al. 2020, van Leeuwen & Miller-Sabbioni 2023, Williamson, Weir & Cavanagh 2020a).

One method of addressing Indigenous disadvantage is through Indigenous leadership and self-determination in caring for Country models (Smyth et al. 2004, Hunt, Altman & Kay 2009, NRMCC 2010, Weir, Stacey & Youngetob 2011, Urbis 2012). Another method is through research that is fit-for-purpose, such as Indigenist research – research by, with and about Indigenous peoples undertaken in ways that are appropriate and considerate to Indigenous people's experiences and priorities, with the aim that the research will be accurate and useful to Indigenous peoples (Rigney 1999, Walter 2018). My research is Indigenist, it is anchored in Indigenous leadership and self-determination to advocate for and create outcomes and benefits that Aboriginal women are calling for. Given the significant consequences of climate change for Indigenous people, we have multiple motivations stimulating the desire to activate more caring for Country activities including cultural burning.

3.5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2019-2020 BLACK SUMMER BUSHFIRES ON CULTURAL BURNING IN NSW

3.5.1 Formal inquiries on the Black Summer Bushfires

The 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, along with several other disasters around the same time, prompted a Commonwealth Royal Commission and several State inquiries with findings that influence cultural burning. The Royal Commission dedicated a chapter of its final report to Indigenous land and fire management (Chapter 18), accompanied by two recommendations directly addressing cultural burning:

Recommendation 18.1 *Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience: Australian, state, territory and local governments should engage further with Traditional Owners to explore the relationship between Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, p. 43).*

Recommendation 18.2 *Indigenous land and fire management and public land management: Australian, state, territory and local governments should explore further opportunities to leverage Indigenous land and fire management insights, in the development, planning and execution of public land management activities (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, p. 43).*

The NSW Government Bushfire Inquiry final report included a section on Traditional Aboriginal Land Management (Section 4.4.3 of the Inquiry Final Report p. 181-186), and two recommendations regarding cultural burning that outline the NSW Government commitment:

Recommendation 25: *That Government adopt the principle that cultural burning is one component of a broader practice of traditional Aboriginal land management and is an important cultural practice, not simply another technique of hazard reduction burning.*

Recommendation 26: *That, in order to increase the respectful, collaborative and effective use of Aboriginal land management practices in planning and preparing for bush fire, Government commit to pursuing greater application of Aboriginal land management, including cultural burning, through a program to be coordinated by Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Planning, Industry and Environment working in partnership with Aboriginal communities. This*

should be accompanied by a program of evaluation alongside the scaled-up application of these techniques. (Owens & O’Kane 2020, p. xi)

Although it is very common for governments to respond to significant bushfires by undertaking a formal inquiry, to date very little emphasis has been placed on Indigenous fire management (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024). The 2019-2020 Black Summer was the first time recommendations related to cultural burning were specifically included in the final reports of these inquiries.

3.5.2 Outcomes of the formal inquiries

As discussed in Section 1.2.4, I became the manager of the Cultural Fire Management Unit (CFMU), which was established within NSW Government in response to the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires to address Recommendations 25 and 26. To support this work two working groups were established, facilitated by the CFMU: the Aboriginal Working Group, with six members who hold expertise on cultural burning or Aboriginal caring for Country in NSW, and a Cross Government Working Group, with government membership from the fire authorities and other relevant departments in NSW. Another outcome of the NSW Inquiry included changes to the membership of the state-wide Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC)⁴⁰ to include three mandated Aboriginal positions. One of these three positions is dedicated to cultural burning (Fuller 2020).

It is anticipated that the representation of Aboriginal people on the BFCC will result in increased consideration of Aboriginal issues, values and priorities by the Committee, and this change will filter across Western fire management in NSW (Fuller 2020). These outcomes signify that governments are open to better understanding cultural burning, as well as supporting the expansion of cultural burning (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, Owens & O’Kane 2020). However, governments’ records for fully addressing the findings and implementing recommendations is poor (Tolhurst 2020). At the time of writing, five years on from the NSW bushfire inquiry, very little change has yet eventuated (Bradley 2024).

The recent public and government interest in cultural burning is replicated in much of the scientific community, where scientists and policymakers seek to better understand the potential of cultural burning, and other Indigenous caring for Country practices, as mitigating responses to natural

⁴⁰ The mandating of three Aboriginal positions on the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee was passed through Parliament in November 2020 (Fuller, 2020). The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee is a statutory body representing the Crown and is the highest bushfire planning mechanism in NSW (RFS 2024b). The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee consists of 20 members, including the NSW RFS Commissioner, who is the Chairperson (RFS 2024b). The purpose of the Committee is that the 20 members – including Fire and Rescue NSW and other specialists with a range of relevant expertise – provide advice to the RFS Commissioner and report to the Minister (RFS 2024b).

hazards (Neale 2020, Zylstra, Bradshaw & Lindenmayer 2022). As an example, prominent scientific authorities, such as the Bureau of Meteorology, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), and the national State of the Environment processes are increasingly engaging with Indigenous scientific content and Indigenous peoples in recognition of the important contributions that Indigenous science makes, including to fire management (BoM 2023, Cresswell, Janke & Johnston, 2021, CSIRO 2023, NEMA n.d.). This growing interest reflects the evidence that Indigenous knowledges, shaped by long-standing relationships with fire, offer valuable insights into sustainable fire management (Bowman 2016, Bowman & French 2019, Bowman & Lehman 2020).

Scientists and governments are increasingly interested in Indigenous caring for Country approaches for their potential to mitigate the significant impacts currently being experienced. Disasters such as the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires and over events currently cost the Australian economy AU\$38 billion per year, and it is estimated that disasters will cost Australia at least \$73 billion by 2060 (Deloitte Access Economics 2021, p. ii). These predictive figures are under a low emissions scenario, targets of which we are currently not meeting; therefore, the figure is likely to be higher and closer to AU\$94 billion per year (Deloitte Access Economics 2021, p. ii). NSW Treasury estimates that disasters will cost \$15.8 – 17.2 billion in NSW by 2060 (NSW Treasury 2021, p. 48). Insurance companies are increasingly conservative given the outlook of worsening environmental conditions (Insurance Council of Australia 2021).

3.6 CHANGE AND RESISTANCE

3.6.1 Resistance to cultural burning

While there is strong support for cultural burning, it also attracts criticism, caution and misunderstandings or misplaced advocacy. Some of the resistance relates to concerns for negative biodiversity impacts, some of it is attached to bigotry and a lack of understanding, and some of the resistance is linked to procedural, legal and policy barriers (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, McKemey 2020a, Nikolakis, Ross & Steffensen 2024, Williamson 2021a). In contrast to the growing literature that is supportive of cultural burning, very few publications relevant to NSW, or Australia as a whole, definitively challenge or oppose cultural burning. However, the debate over the extent to which Aboriginal burning practices have influenced Country has been occurring for many decades (Bowman 1998, Horton 1982, Mooney et al. 2011). Arguments in academia regarding the validity of Aboriginal burning practices influence how cultural burning is perceived and responded to in the policy sector, particularly where there is a lack of awareness and understanding of cultural burning practices. Here,

contributions by non-Indigenous actors, especially Western fire scientists, who publish on cultural burning can be misinterpreted or used as justification for resistance to cultural burning. Bowman and others (2021) provide an example:

It is important to acknowledge here that restoring Aboriginal fire management across the majority of the landscape is *unrealistic* given the profound social, economic and environmental changes that have occurred following British invasion in 1788 (Bowman et al. 2021, p. 351, emphasis added).

What Bowman and others (2021) state is not untrue. Indeed, Aboriginal people understand that colonisation has significantly impacted Country and cultural burning. However, such statements can hinder progress if they are used as justification for resistance. This further complicates the already difficult terrain that cultural burning activity must navigate. This is not uncommon, as forms of racism often minimise or disregard Indigenous knowledges and progress including in the environmental sphere (Cumpston 2020d).

Lindenmayer and Bowd (2022), two non-Indigenous academics who published on cultural burning, were challenged by Aboriginal academics and allies in (Pascoe et al. 2023) for undermining progress of cultural burning and Aboriginal self-determination, a view supported by others (Weir 2023a, Weir et al. 2024). Pascoe and others (2023) made use of the opportunity to provide clarification and call for the scientific community improve its support for cultural burning, instead of creating hurdles.

There is caution and concern for the potential of cultural burning to cause ecological damage and negatively impact on species through increased fire frequency. Although dated, an example of this argument is that the burning undertaken by Aboriginal people when they arrived in Australia altered the environment, leading to megafauna extinction (Flannery 2002). However, fire scientists contest that the ‘evidence does not support the hypotheses that Aboriginal burning was primarily responsible for the extinction of Pleistocene megafauna’ (Bowman 1998, p. 386). Other research highlights that there were multiple centuries of megafauna and human coexistence (Saltr   et al. 2016). More recently, fire scientists Lindenmayer and others (2024) identified that cultural burning was unlikely to have been occurring in some particular forests due to the local environmental factors, however, they identify that Aboriginal people were still very present and active in those areas. Resistance to Indigenous burning practices and the presence of conservation narratives that purport that Indigenous burning is damaging to ecosystems has been challenged in other countries such as Brazil (Welch et al. 2013).

Given the significant public interest in cultural burning in recent years, critics also warn of the potential for ‘immense public influence, to drive problematic and ecologically harmful policy’ (May 2023, p. 155). This caution and resistance to cultural burning occurs within the environmental conservation sector, presenting several issues. A dismissive deficit discourse regarding cultural burning in the sector fuels the disempowerment (intentional or otherwise) of progress towards healthy Country and the wide-ranging benefits from Aboriginal approaches to care for Country (Baynes-Rock 2025).

Resistance to cultural burning is also indicative of how officers of the state may inherently approach issues involving Aboriginal people, upholding, consciously or otherwise patriarchal white sovereignty (Moreton-Robinson 2004). Aboriginal people who are exposed to the caution and resistance experience forms of pathological violence and colonial load (Watego 2021). My personal experience includes witnessing caution and resistance to cultural burning within the sector and in online forums including from people who have influence and decision-making power that impacts on cultural burning. I have experienced this resistance in online forums where current and former environmental conservation employees critiqued and scrutinised cultural burning in ways that indicated that they are not well educated about, and dismissive of cultural burning (Fig. 23). With regard to the Aboriginal people within that group, one member empathetically confronted the issue saying:

I'm rather concerned and disappointed that right from the outset, this post and many of its replies, seek to discredit cultural burning rather than to understand it (Anon. 2020a).

Another staff member added: 'I think this post and the replies have offered Aboriginal people a great insight into the cultural competency of NPWS' (Anon. 2020b). As the discussion in the forum intensified many Aboriginal members reconvened in a separate group where we were able to debrief and validate the experience as compromising to cultural safety, particularly given our close working relationship with the critics who were current or prior work colleagues. This type of criticism is an indication of the resistance to cultural burning and Aboriginal caring for Country within the environmental and fire management sphere. Unfortunately, experiences like these occur in many facets of life for Aboriginal people.

Although support for two-way conservation has been established for several decades, Aboriginal models of caring for Country are often regarded as a secondary approach rather than being reinstated as the primary approach. Aboriginal models are rarely positioned as equal to Western science in Western fire management and environmental conservation sectors (Adams 2016, Muller 2012, Wilson et al. 2018). Additionally, changing policy and legislation is very slow. Weir (2023a, p. 1) investigated 'whether a cultural burning program embedded within a government bureaucracy can meaningfully support Indigenous peoples' landscape fires', finding that although cultural burning can be embedded in government bureaucracy, genuine equitable partnership or power-sharing was not an outcome. One of the problems that Aboriginal people experience is that the validity of Indigenous science and knowledge is commonly questioned (Smith, Neale & Weir 2021, Thomassin et al. 2018).



Figure 23: Resistance and concern about the rise of cultural burning in NSW.

Although ecological outcomes are not the primary aim of cultural burning, impacts on biodiversity are increasingly being explored, as are the different impacts between cultural burning and Western fire management (Bowd et al. 2025, Murramarang Country et al. 2024). Aboriginal people highlight the potential for cultural burning to replace or complement current hazard reduction activities (Hooper 2020). However, there is also careful consideration about the readiness, capacity and capability within Aboriginal communities to achieve this significant task, especially in a *modus operandi* approach with an inequitable distribution of resources and recognised authority (Neale 2020, Zylstra, Bradshaw & Lindenmayer 2022).

This social media post highlights that people are concerned about cultural burning and its application in NSW. This was a year after the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires and following the Royal Commission and state inquiries.

Although there is in-principle support for cultural burning from the general public, there is often a limited understanding of cultural burning and its objectives. Furthermore, cultural burning may not practically achieve the types of swift, selective, hazard reduction outcomes that the public is seeking. Additionally, public support is often of a transactional nature, and it does not deal with the necessary reparations or justice (Neale 2020). Neale (2020) highlights the misplaced enthusiasm for cultural burning from the general public. These misalignments can result in further marginalisation of Aboriginal knowledges and people if Aboriginal approaches are merely positioned as supplementary to Western science and practice or inappropriately co-opted by the mainstream. Appropriation misses important opportunities to meaningfully engage with cultural burning as an effective and necessary fire practice in its own right. It also misses the need to reinstate Aboriginal cultural systems to support sustainability with Country.

Regardless of the accuracy or intentions of peoples' interest, cultural burning provides opportunities to expand society's understanding and appreciation of Indigenous peoples' knowledge and caring for Country expertise, which may lead to securing ongoing investment in caring for Country in recognition of its multiple benefits across environmental, social, cultural, health and economic sectors (Maclean et al. 2023). The dominance and ongoing support of Western fire management and environmental conservation, despite their failure to address mounting fire risks and biodiversity loss, highlights persistent barriers to alternative approaches (Samuel 2020, Watson 2017, Zylstra 2022, Zylstra et al. 2023). Government departments themselves are aware of these obstructions and the need to address them. For example, the RFS acknowledges that Aboriginal people encounter restrictions regarding cultural burning that come from Western fire management policies and procedures (RFS 2018).

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the institutional context governing Western fire management and cultural burning. It highlights the sections of Western fire management that intersect with cultural burning, the differences between both approaches as well as the cultural norms that marginalise Aboriginal women. The impacts and influence of colonisation and climate change on cultural burning are discussed, as are the policy implications of the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. Here the increased bushfire risks are noted as outcomes of the changes to landscape use and management since colonial invasion and the removal of Aboriginal caring for Country practices. Cultural burning offers a valid response to these crises, and while the benefits have yet to be fully explored, ongoing investment and research continue to support its potential (Maclean et al. 2023).

The chapter also highlights that there is both strong support for, as well as some resistance to cultural burning in NSW. These issues do not impact Aboriginal women specifically, rather this chapter provides a broader context which influence the progress of cultural burning holistically.

STORY FOUR: THE POP-UP MATRIARCHAL METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP

“Ness, get your thesis and read that to me, I want to see where you’re up to...”

This is my mother asking me to read parts of my thesis to her. It is something that occurred many times during my candidature. I oblige, not because she is an academic seeking to provide a scholarly critique of my work, but as an Aboriginal woman and Elder, she knows that research carries responsibilities and risks. She also knows the intersectional work that I am doing can be personally taxing, and she provides cultural strength and support. I appreciate my Mum’s attention and see it as a gift of love and as part of her commitment to a better world. I read my stories and together we intellectualise and strategise to tease out what needs to be seen and understood. I go to one of the stories and read it through. This story included some racially and emotionally heavy content. Mum’s response was to rally an urgent response from women in our family (cousins, Aunts, nieces and families), to bring ‘the women’ together to support me in my work.

It was the middle of winter and the school week, and I’m deep in the swing of a thesis writing sabbatical. I thought to myself, “Arrrrgh Mum! The last thing I need is a pop-up PhD workshop with my cousins!” But of course, Aboriginal women know, and Mum knows exactly what she is doing. Just as I have witnessed throughout my life she auto piloted into her default leadership and coordination role.

On my Mum’s instruction the women promptly organised. A few short hours later she phoned back to inform me that the following evening I would drive two hours to Western Sydney, with my kids and my thesis, where I would recite these personal stories to a group of my maternal family members. One cousin was hosting this workshop, another cousin oversaw catering, the men ensured there was ample wood for the fireplace, and on the night, they kept an eye on the kids while the women talked up about my PhD and did our business.

One cousin drove three hours straight after her work shift to be there with three generations of her family. Squashed in around mis-matched tables pushed together in my cousin’s kitchen dining room I read aloud these stories to four generations of my maternal family who sat with their cups of tea or coffee. My Mum sat at the head of the table with me at the other, all around were Mum’s older sister, my cousins and nieces who listened while younger bubs were nursed on laps or ushered in and out of our women’s circle. On the tables were writing pads and marker pens where kids and adults could doodle or make notes while they listened. Before I began, I explained that I would be reading excerpts from my thesis, not as part of my formal research, but because my Mum had brought us

together to listen and care for me as I navigated the challenges of writing a PhD thesis including encounters with racism.

I recited three of my stories that night. When I got to the end of each story, we would all share our thoughts and feelings. One of my older cousins would speak up first expressing how the story made her feel or recalling a memory she had. Mum and her older sister spoke up too, followed by younger nieces and other cousins. That night we laughed and cried together as we unpacked experiences of racism, damage to Country, loss, strength, love and determination. There is always lots of love shared and I am forever grateful for the support, direction and encouragement I received for both my research and my ongoing work from the generations of Aboriginal women around that table. One niece with tears in her eyes said something like: “I want my kids to know this stuff too, my mum and dad never had a chance to have it, and we shouldn’t miss out. We all want that connection and we all should have it, Country too!”

When I packed my car to leave and had kissed everybody goodbye, Mum tapped me on the shoulder smiling contently and said: “That’s your methodology done!” I replied, “Yes Mum, you’re right.” While I thought to myself: “How the hell am I going to write that up academically?” On the drive home I reflected on what had happened and I knew I had been involved in a very special and powerful occasion. I felt that no matter how my academic examiners viewed this thesis, I had already undergone the most relevant examination possible – to share my stories from this research with Aboriginal women and for it be meaningful in their eyes.

Within seven months of the pop-up matriarchal methodology workshop, the cousin that had hosted us all that evening passed away suddenly and unexpectedly from a medical episode. Lesley was nearly 56 years old with adult children and young grandbabies. Death – far too young and far too often in Aboriginal societies. During the shock and awful days and weeks that followed, Mum, I and others reminisced about the pop-up methodologies workshop evening at Lesley’s house, knowing that the women who attended this pop-up workshop will cherish these memories (Fig. 24). Lesley’s passing also renewed my thesis writing motivation, as well as my commitment to making changes in Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal people understand the purpose of our research. We know that our research is important and the multiple layers that it affects in our families, communities and Country. We understand there is an urgency to create better outcomes for Country which is reflected in the increasingly dire Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports. There is an urgency for positive changes in Aboriginal communities too. All this knowledge, urgency and purpose is drawn together in the Indigenous Research Methodologies approach my research enacts.



Figure 24: Around the kitchen tables – the pop-up matriarchal methodology workshop. Four generations of females of Vanessa’s family gathered to discuss Vanessa’s research using Aboriginal women’s ways. Credit: V. Cavanagh

One insight from Mum, when she reviewed this story, is that funerals are significant features in Aboriginal culture. Funerals are very frequent in most Aboriginal communities, and they often maintain elements of Aboriginal ceremonial, cultural practices, to honour the person who has passed away. Funerals are occasions where Aboriginal people are returning to cultural practices, with smoking ceremony, dances, stories and sharing memories of who we are as cultural beings. It is important that we keep doing these practices as Aboriginal people.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Indigenous Research Methodologies are core to this Indigenist research. Indigenous Research Methodologies hold space for Indigenous practices within research and they facilitate scholarly critiques of Western knowledge production and research hegemony. The legitimacy of Indigenist research and Indigenous Research Methodologies has been established for decades, with a keystone contribution from Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999). The growing number of culturally embedded Indigenous researchers like myself make robust contributions to the ongoing development of Indigenous Research Methodologies by sharing our perspectives and experiences whilst exploring links between research, researchers, participant communities and methodological approaches. This chapter discusses the theoretical concepts and the mixed methods that this research uses, including Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenous Data Sovereignty (MnW et al. 2023), Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory, Participatory Action Research, Indigenous Storywork, Indigenous autoethnography, Intersectionality, ethics, cultural safety and recruitment.

4.2 INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

4.2.1 Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenist research and their place in research focussed on Country including Geography

Indigenous Research Methodologies and Indigenist research focus on Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2008, Smith 1999). They ensure that research is conducted in ways that are meaningful, useful, culturally responsible and appropriate to Indigenous people, and in this research, to Country (Rigney 2003, Smith 1999, Talbot, Hill & Babacan 2016).

Indigenous Research Methodologies align conceptually with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Both outline that Indigenous people have the right to equality, freedom from discrimination, self-determination, participation in decision-making, and protection and respect of culture. Indigenous Research Methodologies are fundamental to leading research institutions such as the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA 2017) – a global entity, national bodies such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

(AIATSIS) (2020), and the Lowitja Institute (Anderson et al. 2022), and where research involves Indigenous people they are core to university human research ethics committees' processes. In addition to Smith (1999) many Indigenous scholars have made significant contributions to Indigenous Research Methodologies in Australia (e.g. Moreton-Robinson 2016, Nakata 2016, Rigney 2006), and in other countries (e.g. Chilisa 2019, Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2016, Kovach 2015, Pihama 2001, Wilson 2001). Indigenous Research Methodologies counteract the legacy of damage that research has inflicted upon Indigenous peoples by intentionally disrupting and working to decolonise Western research processes and its political underpinnings (Chilisa 2019, Fredericks 2008, Smith 1999). The inappropriateness and issues attached to non-Indigenous research on Indigenous topics more broadly has been extensively discussed (Martin 2008, Moreton-Robinson 2016, Rigney 2001, Smith 1999).

Indigenous Research Methodologies also prioritise that research agendas, processes and data are appropriate and useful to Indigenous peoples. In doing so, Indigenous Research Methodologies transform knowledge production and highlight the limitations of Western knowledge production by privileging, celebrating and contributing to the survival and autonomy of Indigenous peoples and knowledges (Wilson 2001). Indigenous Research Methodologies also encourage cultural safety and support Indigenous self-determination and researcher-care by working within Aboriginal cultural paradigms, and by validating and prioritising Indigenous worldviews, priorities and practices (Talbot, Hill and Babacan 2016).

Indigenous Research Methodologies are appropriate for research involving Country and Indigenous people for practical, political and environmental reasons. Indigenous Research Methodologies encourage respect for Country and Indigenous cultural protocols, and they seek to empower Indigenous people's involvement in ways that enhance social justice (Arbon & Rigney 2014). Indigenous peoples have always practised science, and Indigenous science is grounded in embodied relationships with Country. Therefore, Indigenous science uses forms of Indigenous Research Methodologies, and its use supports the revival and continuation of Indigenous science, culture and knowledge (Ens & Turpin 2022, McCaul 2023, Moggridge, Thompson & Radoll 2022, Moreton-Robinson 2017, Woodward et al. 2020).

Indigenous Research Methodologies are gaining traction in research focussed on Indigenous people and Country, such as cultural burning, signifying a shift away from the domination by Western science. This shift is fuelled by a growing cohort of strong Indigenous researchers and building allyship from non-Indigenous researchers. The rise in Indigenous leadership and self-determination in research agendas indicates that Indigenous people are not going to be 'passive recipients of state policy' (McCaul 2023, p. 51). Indigenous scholars and others support the shift as it encourages wide ranging social and environmental benefits as well as being responsive to Indigenous community priorities and Indigenous self-determination (Adams, Cavanagh & Edmunds 2008, Arbon & Rigney 2014, Moggridge, Thompson & Radoll 2022).

Geography is implicated in the history of invasion dominated by Eurocentric doctrines, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous geographers challenge geography's colonial underpinnings and work to decolonise the sector locally and internationally (Coombes, Johnson & Howitt 2014, Howitt 2019, Radcliffe 2017, Sundberg 2014). Indigenous Research Methodologies hold a strong role in decolonising the discipline of geography (Coombes, Johnson & Howitt 2014, Richmond, Coombes & Louis 2022, Radcliffe 2017). Richmond, Coombes and Louis (2022, p. 90) argue that Indigenous peoples must lead geographical research and this 'decolonial praxis requires more than critique and must include regeneration of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, affirming the necessary role of Indigenous leaders.' Supporting the upholding of Indigenous knowledges and cultures requires sovereign Indigenous research, which includes methodological approaches that are distinct from Western research norms (Richmond, Coombes & Louis 2022).

4.2.2 Indigenous Research Methodologies in cultural burning research

Indigenous Research Methodologies suit cultural burning research because they acknowledge and support the links between Country, Indigenous peoples' self-determination and Indigenous scholarship. The emergence of Indigenous Research Methodologies and Indigenist research with cultural burning, particularly in the southeast, is a recent phenomenon with strong Indigenous leadership, including people who are cultural burning practitioners. Cultural burning adds to people's political resistance and sovereignty both in Australia (Baynes-Rock 2025, Freeman, Williamson & Weir 2021, Williamson 2021a) and in other countries (Adams 2021, Hoffman et al. 2021). In both locations, Indigenous scholars, cultural burning practitioners, Indigenous leaders and others are establishing the appropriate research protocols, parameters and expectations (McKemey et al. 2021b, 2022, Pascoe et al. 2023, Tynan 2021, Williamson 2021b, Williamson, Provost & Price 2023).

For example, Natural Hazards Research Australia recently adopted principles and protocols for its cultural land management governance and research. These are set within Indigenous research methodological frameworks and have been designed and endorsed by Indigenous people (Costello & Neale 2023). It has also been observed that Indigenous engagement in research involving Country including fire management positively influences research findings, outputs and outcomes (Ward-Fear et al. 2019, Ward-Fear and the Balangarra Rangers 2019b). The place of Indigenous Research Methodologies in Indigenous fire research in other countries is also developing (Adlam et al. 2022, Murveit et al. 2023). My research aligns to the principles of Indigenous Research Methodologies where Country and self-determination are central and underpin my methodology. Several conceptual theories are anchored to that central point as shown in Figure 25.



Figure 25: The centrality of Country and Indigenous Self-Determination. These underpin my Indigenous Research Methodology and provide anchorage to several conceptual theories.

Figure 25 presents a simplified view of the relationships between theory and practice, which is far more nuanced and complex. For example, when I initially attempted to draft Figure 25, I found it difficult to tease apart the components because of their interlinked nature and my draft turned into a more detailed mind map (**Fig. 26**) that illustrates how I see the chapters of this thesis being anchored to Country.

4.2.3 Indigenous research and data sovereignty

Indigenous research and data sovereignty apply the principles of Indigenist research specifically to data and research agendas (MnW et al. 2023, Walter & Suina 2023) (also see *Section 2.5.1*). Indigenous Data Sovereignty go beyond the basic principles of *free, prior and informed consent*; it applies to any research and data relating to or impacting on Indigenous peoples and it responds to the selection, collection and management of that data (GIDA 2020, MnW et al. 2023) This includes data in cultural burning and caring for Country research (Adams 2024, Murveit et al. 2023, Walter et al. 2021, Williamson, Provost, & Price 2023). It sets out Indigenous peoples' rights to determine, access, manage and have decision-making power regarding Indigenous research projects, programs and agendas (Hudson et al. 2023, Robinson et al. 2021a, Walter et al. 2021).

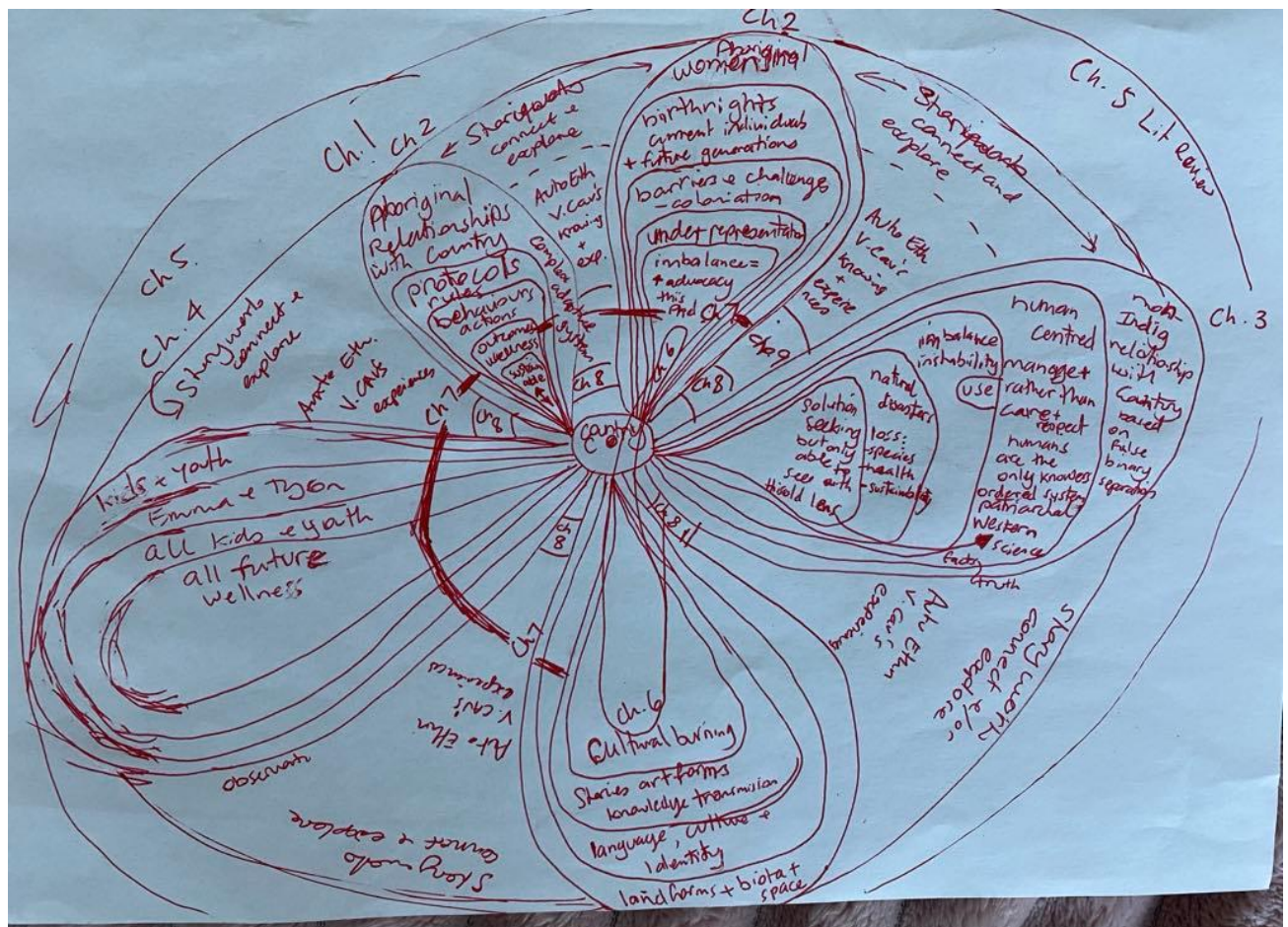


Figure 26: Mind map of thesis. My attempt of drawing a diagram of my methodological approach swiftly transitioned into a mind map of the chapters and research methodology. It shows the linkages between the research themes and Country, with my stories and autoethnography, and the literature encircling.

Indigenous research and the data it uses must be fit for purpose, useful to Indigenous aspirations and relevant to Indigenous worldviews and priorities (Walter & Suina 2023). Indigenous data aligns to the political underpinnings of Indigenist research and contributes to Indigenous nation rebuilding agendas (Rainie, Rodriguez Lonebear & Martinez 2017, Walter 2018, Walter & Suina 2023). Palawa scholar, Professor Maggie Walter with Suina (2023, p. 236) describe that Indigenous data ‘reflect the embodied social, political, historical, and cultural realities of Indigenous people’s lives’.

Indigenous research and data sovereignty highlight that Western research has been detrimental to Indigenous people both directly and indirectly. For example, restricted access to data reflects the disempowerment that Aboriginal people experience regarding access to Country. These restrictions are emblematic of the *modus operandi* of colonisation where one group is consistently privileged by virtue of the systems and institutions that they created with the purpose of retaining power and control. Indigenous research and data sovereignty movements have increased in recent years as Indigenous communities establish alliances to hold accountable processes of research, including to ensure that

research is appropriate and beneficial to Indigenous communities and that Indigenous peoples have leadership or control of research, including what constitutes as data and its use (Adams, 2024, GIDA 2020, Hudson et al. 2023, MnWIDSC 2018, Murveit et al. 2023, Williamson, Provost & Price 2023).

Indigenous research and data sovereignty features strongly in cultural burning research where Indigenous people have stated that research must align with and strengthen ‘Indigenous-led research projects, programs, and political action’ to overcome the numerous and wide-ranging challenges and barriers that Indigenous fire practitioners encounter (Murveit et al. 2023, p. 181). Researchers must be reciprocal and ‘give back’ or contribute to participant communities in useful and meaningful ways and the data must be accessible to Indigenous communities (Adams 2024, MnW et al. 2023, Murveit et al. 2023, Williamson, Provost & Price 2023). The underlying principles of Indigenous research and data sovereignty are evident in the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and the Royal Commission, which both outline that government engagement in cultural burning must be empowering and in genuine partnership with Indigenous people.

4.2.4 Activating Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenous research and data sovereignty

My research activates Indigenous Research Methodologies in numerous theoretical, practical and culturally appropriate ways. Primarily and most notably this is Indigenist research where the research is by, with and about Aboriginal women, where Aboriginal women are setting the terms in which the research occurs. Second, Indigenous Research Methodologies are centred by engaging Indigenous research modes such as Indigenous Storywork and autoethnography, and by operating within culturally informed standards, such as Indigenous research and data sovereignty. Furthermore, this research operates in ways that are respectful of culture and cultural safety, as well as centring Indigenous priorities and advocating for Indigenous outcomes, particularly for Aboriginal women in cultural burning.

A symbolic and functional representation of Indigenous Research Methodologies is including the cultural affiliations, if known, of Indigenous people – particularly those engaged in cultural burning – alongside their name, where it first appears. This simple act acknowledges and respects Indigenous diversity and sovereignty rather than using blanket terminology (such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations). It also highlights and celebrates the existence of Indigenous excellence within research where Indigenous people are not only engaging as research participants or informants, but also leading and co-authoring research. Acknowledging cultural affiliations promotes ‘Indigenous presence and visibility within the fire research discourse’ thus disrupting the homogeneity of research on fire and Country which has been dominated by non-Indigenous voices (Adams 2024, p. 3). Even though much of this research engages with issues connected to damage to Country and inequalities based on racial

and gendered oppressions, the use of Indigenous Research Methodologies contributes to my own wellbeing. I am nurtured through cultural networks of care and the strength of Indigenous excellence, and I experience the healing soliphilia of cultural burning alongside strong Aboriginal women and supportive Aboriginal men (Tom, Adams & Goode 2023).

My research addresses Indigenous research and data sovereignty in multiple ways. I have been careful to use data that is appropriate and treat it in culturally responsive and respectful ways, including ongoing participant community validation through my in-person and digital engagements. The Aboriginal women who participated in the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were provided their interview transcripts and they were the final decision-makers about what of their data I had access too, and how I could use it in this research. My research is strengthened because of my positionality with insider knowledge and established networks, where I have a grounded understanding of the research terrain and access to high quality data that meets Indigenous research and data sovereignty expectations. I understand and uphold my responsibilities of reciprocity and accountabilities, and my multiple hats mean that I am researching and actively contributing to the field concurrently.

4.2.5 Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory and Intersectionality

This research uses Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory, which extends the centrality of Aboriginal women in this research by intentionally privileging and amplifying Aboriginal women's voices, perspectives and experiences (Moreton-Robinson 2013). Similar to the intentional political nature of Indigenist research, Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory purposefully amplifies Indigenous women's perspectives with the objective of enabling positive outcomes for Indigenous women (Fredericks 2008). Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory is an appropriate framework to accommodate culture and gender in research as demonstrated by numerous Indigenous female scholars who articulate that this approach challenges dominant Eurocentric patriarchal positioning of research and disrupts the hegemony of Western science (Blair 2015, Fredericks 2008, Moreton-Robinson 2013, Ryan 2020, Walker et al. 2013). The Theory also understands and responds to the reality that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are not commensurate with non-Indigenous standpoints (Moreton-Robinson 2013, Smith 1999). It acknowledges the multiple and layered subjectivities that Indigenous women experience, including the relatedness of Indigenous women to Country; and our experiences of colonial Australia and gendered exclusion (Moreton-Robinson 2013).

Because Aboriginal women are underrepresented in cultural burning and in other relevant sectors (caring for Country, environmental conservation and Western fire management), which offer a gateway into cultural burning, Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory serves as a necessary counterpoint to the dominant patriarchal norms and voices. Indigenous women are specifically needed in caring for Country and healing from the ravages of devastating bushfires, which are the continuation

of colonial harms on Country and Indigenous people (Russ-Smith 2021). In relation to cultural fire in her Country, Nelson (2019, p. 70-71) argues ‘Indigenous women are rising and leading a new era of integrated activism based on Indigenous values and practices’. Alongside Aboriginal women this research continues Indigenous political activism and taking up space for the protection of Country (Nelson 2019, Russ-Smith 2023).

Section 2.4 established that Aboriginal women experience marginalisation in the environmental conservation sector and Western fire management. As distinct groups, both Aboriginal people and women exist in fire and environmental conservation agencies, and both are underrepresented, often experience systemic marginalisation and are vulnerable to discrimination. The underrepresentation occurs despite Aboriginal women’s participation in cultural burning being acknowledged as warranted and being encouraged by Aboriginal men and others. These vulnerabilities overlap for Aboriginal women, creating intersectionality, where multi-dimensional oppressions are compounding (Crenshaw 1989).

Aboriginal women experience oppressions that apply to Indigenous people (such as poor social, health and wellbeing indicators, and underrepresentation in governance structures), and they experience oppressions that apply to females (such as gender inequalities and gendered violence). My research acknowledges that this intersectionality consistently applies for Aboriginal women who seek to participate in cultural burning, and it centres Aboriginal women’s voices where Aboriginal women experience intersectional barriers. As an Aboriginal woman I have my own experiences of intersectionality, including as a PhD candidate, as Indigenous doctoral achievements are extremely underrepresented (Ballangarry & Pugin 2024).

4.2.6 Indigenous participatory action research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a transformative and decolonising research process that supports participation and action of peoples who are affected by the research, and is commonly used in research with communities who have experienced oppression (Denzin & Lincoln 2007, Dudgeon et al. 2020, Fine, Tuck & Zeller-Beckman 2008). Indigenous PAR recognises and responds to the impacts of colonisation and empowers Indigenous communities to have a greater say in research agendas, processes and outputs with the aim to promote positive social change, justice, wellbeing and self-determination (Datta et al. 2019, Dudgeon et al. 2020, Lenette 2022).

A global thematic synthesis literature review of cross-cultural fire research found that PAR featured strongly as a methodological framework (Vázquez-Varela, Martínez-Navarro & Abad-González 2022). In her study of Indigenous fire stewardship in Australia, Canada and the United States, Métis woman Amy Cardinal Christianson (2015) advocated for Indigenous PAR because it supported Indigenous community control of research, which she found was imperative where Western-trained fire

scientists did not have strong understandings of Indigenous fire science and methods. Non-Indigenous academic Michelle McKemey has undertaken extensive collaborative research on cultural burning with Indigenous peoples in various regions of Australia and uses PAR to ensure that Indigenous peoples are self-determining control of the research, and to encourage that the research produces relevant and valid outcomes (Banbai Rangers & McKemey 2021, McKemey et al. 2020b, 2021b, 2022).

My application of PAR presents as reciprocity and collaboration, as indicated in my positionality. I have practiced reciprocity in multiple ways, including participating in conferences, co-authoring, mentoring, podcasts, film, and sitting on working groups and committees. An example of my participation is a poster (Fig. 27) coupled with a chapter (Cavanagh 2021b) that I was invited to contribute to the publication *Cultural Burning in Southern Australia* by two Aboriginal men and fire practitioners Dean Freeman and Bhiamie Williamson along with non-Indigenous academic Jessica Weir (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021).

The poster and other publications I authored from this research demonstrate the participatory nature of my research and the theoretical framework underpinning this work – that Country and Aboriginal women are central and lead through an Indigenous research methodological approach. The poster (Cavanagh 2021b) shows images of my ancestors – human and in spirit form, with our Granny birds (yellow-tailed black cockatoos), my mother and her grandmother, myself, my children and other Aboriginal women. We are poised in various roles and activities linked to caring for Country, cultural burning, research and nurturing. The poster also contains quotes where I advocate for Aboriginal women's empowerment and greater involvement of Aboriginal women in cultural burning (Cavanagh 2021b). I call for greater recognition of Aboriginal knowledges in caring for Country activities through Aboriginal-led processes. I acknowledge and advocate for these changes in recognition of the range of social, emotional and environmental benefits that come from cultural burning and Aboriginal-led caring for Country. The poster demonstrates my beliefs, expertise and commitment to the field of Aboriginal caring for Country and cultural burning. In this PhD the focus is specifically the promotion of Aboriginal women's involvement and leadership (Cavanagh 2021b).



Figure 27: Vanessa's Poster. This poster and my story (Cavanagh 2021b) are one of six that feature in the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC illustrated report on cultural burning in the southern Australia. This report was published to increase understandings of cultural burning (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021).

4.3 ETHICS AND RESEARCH IN CROSS CULTURAL SPACES

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the UOW Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (HREC 2019/312). The ethical considerations of this research have been informed by several sources, including: the UOW HREC; key Indigenous research institutions such as AIATSIS (2012, 2020) and the NHMRC (2018a, 2018b); Indigenous research experts such as Janke (2021), Smith (1999), Moreton-Robinson (2013), Rigney (1999), and Nakata (2003); and a range of relevant material such as the CSIRO Indigenous fire management partnerships guidelines (Robinson et al. 2016), the research and engagement protocols outlined by Firesticks Alliance (Firesticks Alliance n.d.), and the cultural burning protocols listed in Weir, Freeman and Williamson (2021). Additionally, this research has been guided and informed by the cultural norms that I hold as an Aboriginal woman. Being an Aboriginal woman in research that focusses on Aboriginal women's issues does not circumvent complexities. Even as an insider I am very aware of the multifaceted privilege I hold as a researcher and the existence of power dynamics (Sultana 2007). From my insider perspective I have responsibilities regarding how I conduct the research and what findings I share.

Through the combination of sources, I address ethics, reciprocity, authorship and Indigenous cultural intellectual property. I used Indigenous institutions and scholars' works as a launchpad because they have unpacked the complex terrain of undertaking ethical research on Indigenous cultural content and with Indigenous communities. Their work provides appropriate templates for ethical research, and it incorporates the principals underpinning Indigenous Research Methodologies. For example, I used Janke's 2009 work on authorship, copyright and Indigenous knowledge systems as a model to develop an ethical research practice checklist that I workshopped with each interview and focus group participant to co-create our research modes (Appendix 12.3).

This collaborative process allowed for participants to stipulate how they wanted to engage in the research, it also identified opportunities and expectations for how I may enact reciprocity such as through participating in cultural burning myself and holding space for other Aboriginal women, through my advocacy, and through co-authoring and collaboration. This collaborative process encouraged us as Aboriginal women together, to consider how my research may be received in wider audiences, and discuss appropriate frames of reference, how my research findings may impact end-users and particularly how the information might be misused and appropriated – a legitimate concern explored in Chapter Nine: *Barriers*. These collaborative approaches are beyond the formal ethical requirements of academic institutions, however they serve an important purpose in ensuring my research is culturally appropriate, culturally safe, and aligns with Indigenous Research Methodologies. Under the pseudonym *Steph*, one of the women provided this feedback about this approach:

I've had a lot of time to be able to read through the consent and the protocol document and I think that it's amazing; this is beyond anything that I've ever seen before, and the process of being able to build this together has been exceptional. Steph.

Although I curated my own processes to address ethics in ways that are culturally appropriate, I still encountered the normative assumptions of Western research in demonstrating that my research was ethical. As the example provided here shows, the ethical research processes in the academy carry strong normative assumptions grounded in Western theory (Downing 2019). The prevalence of Western normativity in academic research illustrates that such institutions have still more work to do in deconstructing Western privilege my research contributes to decolonial movements within academia.

In completing the mandatory UOW HREC training module I was asked to imagine a scenario where I was the researcher preparing to undertake research with an Aboriginal community. The module required me to respond to several multiple-choice questions aimed at highlighting the complexities of research and Aboriginal communities. I was surprised when I got one of the questions wrong as I felt confident in this field given it is where my research is situated. On reflection I realised that I was answering the questions from my own Indigenous 'insider' perspective, whereas the question was positioned from a normative 'outsider' non-Indigenous perspective. My 'wrong' answer was formed from within my cultural positioning and based on my ethical conduct where I would not encounter the scenario in the exercise because my approach would have been different from the start as an Indigenous-led process.

When I adjusted my answer to the multiple choice question a pop-up displayed an explanation as to why a different response was 'correct'. I again found myself critiquing the points being made in this explanation. The module was stating that research with Aboriginal people should be 'consultative rather than directive'. I strongly disagree. My perspective is that all research that engages Indigenous content must be directed by the Indigenous people in focus. The age of consultative research has passed, all research involving Indigenous peoples, our knowledges, practices and Country must be Indigenous-led – it must be Indigenist (Rigney 1999).

Knowing that Indigenous research must be directed by Indigenous people, my position in relation to the scenario is that researchers should not be approaching Indigenous communities with research priorities that are not borne from that Indigenous community, otherwise it risks maintaining colonising, disruptive and extractive research processes. Further along in the training module explanation, a sentence states 'Research with Aboriginal people can be a complex and challenging area, where researchers often find they have to confront their own misperceptions and beliefs'. Again, here I see my position as an Aboriginal woman researcher being 'othered'; I am not confronting my own misperceptions, beliefs or biases, rather this ethics module is showing *its* bias as it was obviously designed for non-Indigenous people. My research is Indigenist and Indigenous-led to prevent or

minimise the type of scenario presented in the exercise. Indigenous research must be Indigenous-led and owned.

4.4 DATA AND METHODS USED IN THIS RESEARCH

4.4.1 Overview of data and methods

This research accesses a range of data from a range of sources (see Fig. 28). These include: my personal experiences; material from the semi-structured interviews and focus-groups; observations during cultural burning forums and events; and formal and informal conversations across digital platforms and in-person. This range of data was included in the original HREC application (as approved Section 12.2). The topics that were discussed by Aboriginal women in the intimate interview settings differed from the topics discussed in the bigger, more inclusive forums. For example, personal safety was only discussed in the one-to-one semi-structured interviews, whereas appropriation was discussed across the suite of methods. My personal experiences include cultural and career activities; these form the autoethnographic component of this research and are shared through Storywork. The material from the semi-structured interviews and focus-groups are centred in Chapters Six through Nine. In those chapters the Aboriginal women I interviewed confirm what I observed during my participation and this is backed up by the literature. All of my experiences throughout this research are empirical and contribute to my ability to understand and link all of the issues. I participated in around 100 events, interactions and forums directly relevant to cultural burning during this research, including at least 11 cultural burns (Fig. 20) and four dedicated women's yarning circle discussions (see Fig. 29 and Table 5).

My participation in these events ranged from observer to leader. Details of the events and the level of my engagement are provided in Appendix 12.9. Additionally, I had numerous conversations with Aboriginal women and others, many who make valid contributions, and these are included in this thesis as personal communications. These personal communications are listed in Appendix 12.4. As an Aboriginal person who is active and engaged in Aboriginal family and community, I regularly participate in a wide range of Aboriginal-focussed activities and forums (in-person and online), which are not focussed on cultural burning. My community, and family-based participation constantly informs my thinking and practice. I have not included details of this level of personal activity (see Appendix 12.9).

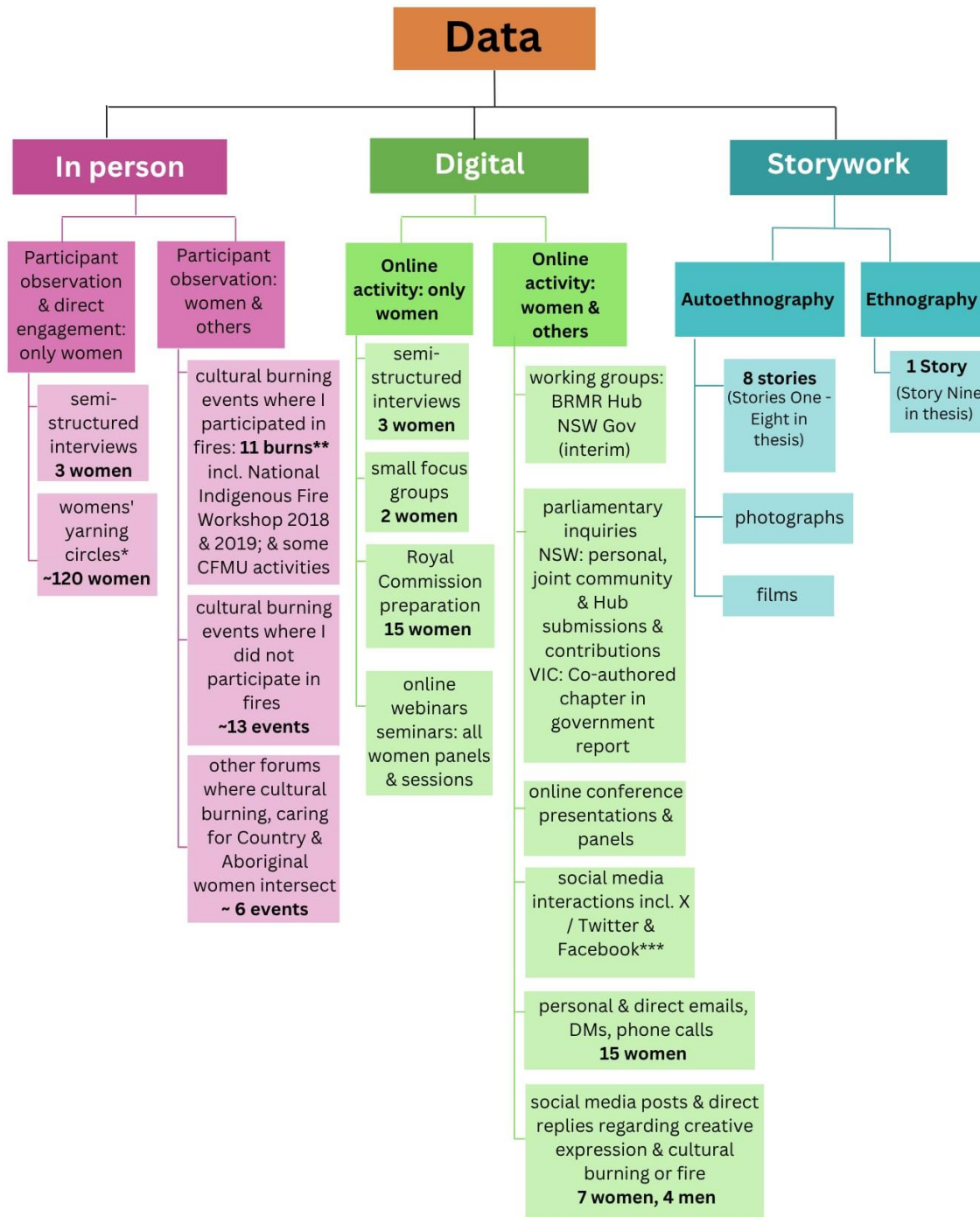


Figure 28: The range of methods and data sources used in this research and indicative numbers of Indigenous women involved.

~ shows approximate figure based on available data

- Some yarning circles included non-Indigenous women

** my attendance at the 11 cultural burning events only includes events where actual fires took place. Some events were intended to include fires which did not occur (due to circumstance); or if they did occur, I did not attend the fire component.

*** I posted about events on social media including X / Twitter and Facebook and received high levels of engagement and interest (e.g. Royal Commission posts received over 20,000 impressions). See Appendix 12.9 for details.

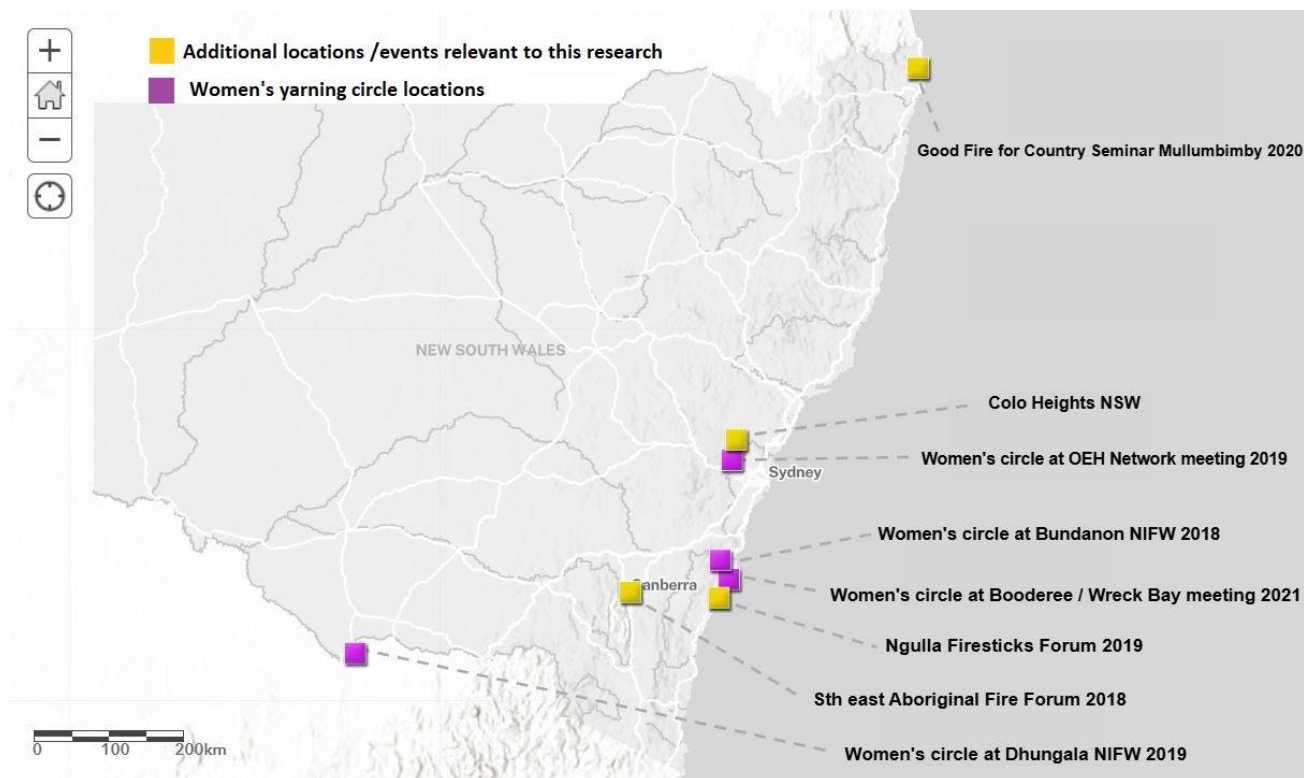


Figure 29: Yarning circles and other events. Locations of women's yarning circles and other relevant places not included in Fig. 20 Cultural Burn locations or Fig. 6 Story locations. Further details on the women's yarning circles, see Table 5.

Across these sources Aboriginal women's voices were sought out, particularly if women's voices were absent or the minority. This broad approach to data proved both fortuitous and necessary with the advent of the COVID19 pandemic from early 2020, which forced an uptake in digital communications and impacted Indigenous researchers in distinct ways (Locke, Trudgett & Page 2022). Indigenous people are avid users of digital technologies, and the pandemic shifted research activity to online formats (Carlson et al. 2021, Locke, Trudgett & Page 2022). The pandemic, combined with the intensity of discussion triggered by the 2019-2020 Black Summer, meant that many interactions that this research intended to be in person, transitioned to electronic forms. Even my participation in the Royal Commission occurred online, as did my networking with Indigenous women across the continent in preparation for the Royal Commission.

During my candidature I became the Manager of the Cultural Fire Management Unit (CFMU) within NSW Government (see Section 1.2.4). This Unit engaged in cultural fire operations and in Government strategy and policy development. Through this position I was involved in numerous cultural burning activities, including a range of community cultural burning workshops and planning meetings (see Section 12.9). I also transitioned from being a member of the NSW Government interim Aboriginal Working Group for cultural fire management, to holding the coordination role for this group. In this role I was a participant in discussions and responsible for activities beyond my role as a PhD

student, all which extended the influence of my research as well as informing it. I can bring gravitas to my arguments due to my PhD. Becoming the CFMU manager continued my personal lived experiences and created another layer to my positionality. While this activity operates within agency confidentiality, the knowledge continues to inform my research. However, I was careful in negotiating what information is appropriate to my employed role as well as what is appropriate for my research. This required me to be transparent about my research in my employed role, and transparent about my employed role in my research. I noted where information was specifically identified not to be included in my research – for example the Aboriginal Working Group discussed that I was not to use the work of that group in my research.

4.4.2 The methods used

This research used a mixed methods approach, including through formal discussions via semi-structured interviews and small focus group discussions. Data was also gathered through my active participation in multiple formal and informal activities where I observed and participated, including cultural burning workshops, conferences and seminars, relevant meetings and working groups informing government, and through digital engagement. Table 2 provides an overview of the mixed methods used. All methods have strengths and limitations, as outlined in Table 3. Engaging a combination of methods assists in mitigating the limitations which are balanced by the strengths of other methods.

Table 2: Overview of the mixed methods used.

METHOD	Purpose	Setting	Participants	Timeframe
Format				
Relevant studies				
STORYWORK	Storywork is used as:	Stories are based on the lived experiences of myself and others	I am the primary participant for all but one story. Other key participants include: my mother, Theresa French; my children, Emma and Tyson. Story NINE, <i>Agency women extinguish cultural burn</i> , does not involve me. That story recalls an incident that one of the Aboriginal woman interviewees described that highlights the challenges Aboriginal women encounter in cultural burning	Varied – some stories describe historical events (e.g. <i>Descendants of Yengo</i> story), other stories emerged during the research (e.g. Pop-up Matriarchal methodology workshop). All stories were written during PhD. See Fig. 11 Timeline
In-person	a conduit for autoethnography;			
Archibald, Morgan & De Santolo 2019; Steffensen 2019; Adams et al. 2024; Milroy & Milroy 2008; McKnight 2017	a descriptive tool to create intellectual interpretative pictures that convey information in culturally valid, responsive ways;			
	a method that is embedded in Indigenous culture meaning the process is culturally appropriate and the output is accessible to Indigenous people and others.			
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY	Drawing on my own experiences to complement the data gathered using other methods	My lived experiences before and during the research	As above, I am the primary participant with contributions from other people.	As above, prior to and throughout the research
In-person				
Whitinui 2014; Bishop 2021; Maihāroa & Woodhouse 2023; Poulos 2021; Kanuha 2000; Houston 2007				
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION	To observe the demographics of participation at cultural burning events and the responses, outputs and outcomes of Aboriginal women's participation and absence	Attending cultural burning events	Aboriginal people in cultural burning events & forums	Undertaken throughout research
In-person & digital				
Wilson 2008; Greene 2014; Taylor 2011				
YARNING METHOD	Undertaking conversational style discussions in ways that encourage that Aboriginal women are culturally safe to express themselves freely about cultural burning. Yarning style respects cultural protocols and cultural ways of sharing information such as storytelling	Varied settings based on opportunity. All four yarning circles occurred as subsidiary to bigger cultural burning forums	Aboriginal women in NSW including myself	Undertaken throughout research (see Table 5)
In-person				
Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Fredericks et al. 2011; Walker et al. 2014; Martin 2008				

METHOD	Purpose	Setting	Participants	Timeframe
Format				
Relevant studies				
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	To explore individual and personal experiences and aspirations regarding cultural burning	Settings chosen by participants or determined by COVID19 social distancing rules including in-person - indoors & outdoors, & remotely via telephone	Aboriginal women in NSW including myself	Undertaken throughout research
In-person & digital				
Clapham et al. 2021 Fredericks 2008 Fredericks et al. 2011				
FOCUS-GROUPS	Validate my findings within a group of Aboriginal women where a variety of experiences exist.	Determined by COVID19 social distancing rules, digital/remote via videoconference	Aboriginal women in NSW including myself	Undertaken throughout research
In-person & digital				
Clapham et al. 2021				
DIGITAL GROUP INTERACTIONS (GROUP & INDIVIDUAL)	<u>Group</u> : Used to advocate, share research updates, seek information, and hold discussions that are accessible to a large group of my networks. This approach often led to direct individual communication <u>Individual</u> : Used to explore concepts and obtain greater detail from individuals who are leaders, key persons, or who have important relevant personal, professional and/or cultural knowledge	Social media platforms including X / Twitter, Facebook. Formats included direct messaging; direct person emails; phone calls, online discussions and interactions on social media platforms	Contributions from Aboriginal people	Undertaken throughout research
Digital				
Adams 2024 Carlson & Frazer 2018a, 2018b Carlson et al. 2015 Clapham et al. 2021				

Table 3: A summary of the strengths and limitations of each of the methods used in this project.

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Storywork	Rich personal insights. Accessible for wide-ranging audiences including Aboriginal people. Contains cultural and personal information as well as scholarly content. Shares knowledge in a culturally responsive way.	Perceived as a limited perspective of one individual. However, by its nature Storywork is connected to community, Country, ancestral memory and ways of knowing which are collective and iterative, rather than individualistic. Perceived as a creative output that is often disregarded by dominant research methodologies as valid
Autoethnography	Uses the strengths of the researcher's own culturally embedded lived experiences to critique the cultural practice being explored.	Potential for unfounded generalisations. Can be interpreted as self-indulgent. Not a universal truth.
Participant Observation	Develop knowledge by being immersed in 'the field' gaining first-hand experiences.	Being an insider in research can attract limitations including: erroneous assumed knowledge, bias which limits the ability to be critically analytical; overlooking important elements in the data, being too close to the research; an inability to create space for the mental theoretical 'work' of research to take place or for new knowledge to emerge. The researcher's interpretations of what they observe may be incorrect or out of context.
Yarning method	A relaxed discussion where Aboriginal women are culturally safe, and where they can express what they want about cultural burning. Yarning style respects cultural protocols and cultural ways of sharing information such as storytelling. Engage with numerous people at the one time.	Can create messy glut of data that is not easy to decipher. Knowing when and how to end the yarn is a skill in itself. The quality of data relies on the relationship and rapport between researcher and participant.
Semi-Structured Interviews	Participant is empowered to tell their story of their experience using their words and expressions.	Participant may only discuss what they think the researcher wants to hear based on the questions, and the questions may be restrictive.
Focus Groups	Suitable method for participants who do not feel comfortable with a direct, 1:1 interview. A collective discussion which elucidates information and themes that may not emerge from more intimate conversations.	Individuals may dominate the discussion meaning that other's voices are not heard or other's experiences may be minimised.
Digital group interactions (group & individual)	Is easily accessible for participants and target communities. Can access a bigger pool of people through snowballing when contacts connect the researcher with their contacts. Engagement can be very swift.	Less opportunity to build rapport through in-person engagement. Opportunities for imposters to engage without validation of their identity or the information that they are providing.

4.4.3 Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography

Storytelling is important in Indigenous cultures around the world because Indigenous people have used stories to maintain and transmit knowledge for millennia (Atkinson 2022, Milroy & Milroy 2008). Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography are as much conceptual tools as they are research methods, however their use as *method* is a significant component of this research, hence the placement of this section.

Storywork is an Indigenous theoretical, methodological and pedagogical framework that acknowledges that stories maintain, connect and interpret Indigenous knowledges, including knowledge and relationships with Country (Archibald, Morgan & De Santolo 2019, Kwaymullina 2018a). McKnight (2017) describes Storywork as creating intellectual interpretative pictures that transcribe knowledge in culturally responsive ways. Stories capture and describe Indigenous relationality with Country as a knowledge production source (Milroy & Milroy 2008). Storywork suits Indigenous research, because it is ‘not just about the power of stories, but, about the power of working with stories, as a means to draw insights and possibilities to Indigenous experiences and knowledge’ (Smith in Archibald, Morgan & De Santolo 2019, p. xi). Storywork (and autoethnography) understand and empower Indigenous cultural knowledge systems in ways where Western research often falls short (Coombes, Johnson & Howitt 2014, Kwaymullina, Kwaymullina & Butterly 2013, Richmond, Coombes & Louis 2022).

Indigenous autoethnography uses the researcher’s personal lived experiences to draw out and make sense of broader concepts and communicates insights that are connected to the author’s identity, cultural customs, practices and larger political issues (Poulos 2021). However, Indigenous autoethnography is not simply an autoethnography undertaken by an Indigenous person. Indigenous autoethnography activates decolonisation because it centres ‘Indigenous axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies’ (Bishop 2021, p. 367). Te Maihāroa and Woodhouse (2023) agree and add that Indigenous autoethnography also encompasses the spiritual dimensions of Indigenous worldviews, which is lacking in non-Indigenous autoethnographic approaches. Both Storywork and autoethnography centre the voices of Indigenous researchers whilst honouring and celebrating Indigenous knowledge systems, methodologies, paradigms and relational worldviews (Whitinui 2013). This thesis weaves formal academic writing with Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography to bring forward my voice and enrich and validate the findings. As the majority of the stories in this thesis are my own individual experiences, they form the autoethnography component and I refer to them as *my stories* or *the stories*.

In research related to Country, both Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography are appropriate methodological tools that engage Indigenous peoples in culturally responsive and responsible ways (Moggridge, Thompson & Radoll 2022, Steffensen 2019). Both Indigenous

Storywork and Indigenous autoethnography can be mechanisms of Indigenous resistance where they contribute to decolonisation, disruption and transformation and allow unheard voices to be heard (Archibald, Morgan & De Santolo 2019, Bishop 2020, hooks 1989, Smith 1999, Te Maihāroa & Woodhouse 2023, Whitinui 2014). Both approaches facilitate Indigenous scholars to validate and reclaim our voices as experts of our own experiences (Te Maihāroa & Woodhouse 2023, Whitinui 2014). Both provide strong foundations for establishing the *Indigenous standpoint* within Indigenous standpoint theory (Bainbridge 2007). Moggridge, Thompson and Radoll (2022) found that Storywork facilitated greater inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in environmental research. Stories also empower and engage women (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson 2006).

As genres, Storywork and autoethnography are also highly accessible across multiple audiences, which is important as Indigenous research and data sovereignty identifies that research must be accessible. Storywork supports access to research in ways that suit Indigenous communities (Archibald, Morgan & De Santolo 2019, Datta 2018b, Kwaymullina, Kwaymullina and Butterly 2013). Indigenous people, including women, highlight the importance of stories in cultural burning research (Adams 2024, Murveit et al. 2023, Steffensen 2019, 2020). As knowledge repositories, stories are highly desired within Indigenous communities and useful because they often contain valuable information beyond fire and they contribute to building community strength and wellbeing (Adams 2024, Murveit et al. 2023). Facilitation of cultural burning research and outcomes has been made accessible to Indigenous communities through Storywork, as noted in the USA where the *Intentional Fire* podcast is ‘a platform to share stories from Karuk people about their relationship with fire and the importance of sovereignty over fire practices’ (Murveit et al. 2023, p. 194-5). N'dee San Carlos Apache scholar, Dr Melinda M. Adams advocates for Storywork in cultural burning research because it forms part of the healing aspect of cultural burning (Adams 2024).

Autoethnography declares the unavoidable and embedded subjective *self*, dropping ‘the facade of “objective research”’ (Houston 2007, p. 47). Indeed, my stories place me (and my family members – see Fig. 24) within the research illustrating the relationality between the research, Country and I / Indigenous people (Kwaymullina 2018a, Tynan & Bishop 2023). My stories reveal that I am an active participant and source of data in the research (Bainbridge 2007).

4.4.4 Participant Observation

Participant observation is a well-known research method used throughout qualitative and mixed methods approaches. I attended numerous cultural burning events and other relevant forums where I observed and participated. These events included: at least 11 cultural burning workshops where I interacted with fires (Fig. 20 and Table 7), and many more events where I did not interact with fire (Table 8); in-person and public events such as the National Indigenous Fire Workshops in 2018 and

2019, both with my children; digital events, such as the National Indigenous Fire Workshops 2020 conference; smaller-scale community workshops, both with my children (Micalong, Broke) and without (Narrawallee, Jubullum, Yelllowmundee); some private events (Milbrodale, Rick Farley Reserve, South Coast cultural burn); and a wide range of working groups, planning meetings, community and government meetings, webinars, seminars and conferences. Details of these events are provided in the timeline (Fig. 11), maps (Fig. 6, 20 and 29) and tables (Tables 5, 7 and 8).

Sometimes the influence of Country and the weather meant that fires were not a feature at these workshops. In the events that occurred close to the start of my PhD, I attended as a participant only. As my research developed, and as an outcome of the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires that escalated interest in cultural burning, my role shifted from participant-only, to being invited, sometimes impulsively, by Traditional Owners or leaders of cultural burning activities, to lead or contribute to components of the activity. This invitation reflects the growing relationships that were established throughout the research. I accepted all invitations to contribute and used the opportunity to raise awareness about my research and advocate for Aboriginal women's roles and participation (see Appendix 12.9).

4.4.5 Yarning

Yarning is a method used in Indigenous research because it accounts for cultural approaches to sharing knowledge (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, Fredericks et al. 2011, Walker et al. 2014). Yarning is a conversational style of engagement where all participants' voices and perspectives are encouraged. This is often achieved by each person in the circle taking a turn to speak. Each participant's experiences and perspectives are valid in yarning circles, which encourages cultural safety where Indigenous processes are the norm and those whose voices are marginalised in wider society are valued and included. Yarning respects cultural protocols and cultural ways of sharing information such as storytelling. All the yarning circles I participated in were in-person and targeted to women, however some circles included non-Indigenous women (Fig. 30). The themes that were noted from the yarning circles largely affirm the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and focus-groups, including weariness about appropriation, the need to include youth and children and the need to protect and maintain women's sites, knowledges and values. In addition to the bigger yarning circles, some informal yarns included men. Yarning took place in various locations and settings; all the women's yarning circles occurred as subsidiary to bigger events such as the National Indigenous Fire Workshops (Yarning circles details, see Table 5 and Fig. 29).



Figure 30: Vanessa with daughter talking about women's roles. Taken at Women's circle at 2018 NIFW. Credit: Lyngdoh Reye et al. 2018

4.4.6 Interviews and focus groups

Insider positionality means that researchers have existing networks and an understanding of the field, which supports valid and useful research (Kelly et al. 2012). This was true in my experience, and it supported me in securing research participants, which produced strong research outcomes. However, being an insider can also be problematic if inappropriate interpersonal power dynamics are not managed. For example, participants may feel obliged to participate due to an existing relationship (Sultana 2007, Taylor 2011). Participants were sourced through snowballing and referrals which also carried endorsement from other Aboriginal people who view me and my research as valid. Snowballing is effective within marginalised communities where research participants may not be readily accessible or where participants may be cautious about participating in formal research (Woodley & Lockard 2016). Being an insider to participant communities can also skew data if participants rely too heavily on the researcher to lead the discussion to the point that their input lacks authenticity (Sultana 2007, Taylor 2011). I mitigated these potential issues by being transparent, gaining free, prior and informed consent and working in ethical and culturally responsive ways. Using semi-structured approaches encouraged the women's agency and authentic participation. Respondent validation and triangulation with the literature and policy landscape encouraged further rigour.

Nine women were formally interviewed in this research. Seven of these were semi-structured interviews. Of the seven, four were in person, and the remaining three were by phone. I conducted one

focus-group discussion that involved myself and two Aboriginal women interviewees. This focus-group discussion occurred during the height of the lockdowns of the COVID19 pandemic and thus took place via video conference. The in-person interviews were undertaken in a range of settings, some in my home in the lounge-room while others were outside. In one interview the participant agreed to undertake an interview on a mountain that is extremely culturally significant in her cultural group - Djeera (Mt Keira), which is a female grandmother entity and cultural teaching place (see Appendix 12.7 for further detail). Each of the interviews ran for over an hour. Most of the interviews contained rich data which could have formed individual case studies and stand-alone components making significant contributions to the research and policy knowledge landscape. An interview schedule composed of 24 questions was used to guide the discussion (Appendix 12.5).

All these women identify as Aboriginal or Indigenous. The age range spread from young women of 24 years old, to grandmothers aged over 50 years. All interviewees were residing in NSW at the time of participating in this research, and some have traditional homelands in places other than NSW. The women had a range of cultural burning experience, some had not participated in cultural burning but had witnessed it, some had participated in at least one cultural burn, others had participated in many cultural burns over several years; however, none of the women positioned themselves as cultural burning leaders or experts. To protect the identity of the Aboriginal women pseudonyms are used (see Appendix 12.7 for further details).

All the semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions were recorded and professionally transcribed by the same transcribing service. I reviewed the transcripts for spelling and content accuracy. The transcripts were then sent to the participant for them to review for accuracy, appropriateness and validation. Some women removed content that was of a personal nature, or material they considered irrelevant to the research topic.

It is notable that most of the interviews were undertaken before the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. It is likely that had all the interviews taken place after the bushfires, the results and narrative would have reflected direct discussion and experiences from these catastrophic and unprecedented events. In fact, one woman who was interviewed before the Black Summer, reviewed her transcript after the bushfires, and decided to remove some of her sentences to avoid being “too critical of the RFS” given their recent experiences during that time.

4.4.7 Indigenous digital technologies and digital engagement

Indigenous people are noted as strong users of digital technologies and social media and their use can differ to mainstream populations use, including for organising and participating in political, wellbeing and cultural activities (Carlson & Frazer 2018a, 2018b). Online forums are accessible to many Aboriginal women and digital technologies supported numerous aspects of my research.

I used digital platforms to engage with a range of audiences throughout my research. I participated in many public online forums and used my personal social media to share updates and discuss my research and to seek information and advocate (see Appendix 12.9). Forums in which I participated include cultural burning workshops, working groups, conferences, relevant community events and social media. For example, in June 2020 I posted on social media seeking input in preparation for my participation in the Royal Commission into the National Natural Disaster Arrangements (Fig. 14). My post received 70 comments and 124 shares on my personal Facebook profile page and further additional comments where the post was shared on other profile pages; similarly, the post received 81 retweets and 21,300 impressions on Twitter. I followed up with multiple telephone calls with Indigenous women across Australia so I could maximise the benefit of my participation in the Royal Commission by advocating for the concerns of multiple Indigenous women during my hearing. This surveying within networks of Aboriginal women is one of the steps I have taken to ensure the research approach and data used was appropriate. These processes also encourage transparency, so others are aware of my capacity as a researcher, and so Aboriginal women have agency over how research about them is managed and portrayed (Adams 2024).

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

This research incorporates mixed-methods that include a range of data. My initial conceptualisation of the data of this research focussed primarily on the materials that came from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and these form an important component of the data. However, my entire experience of this research is data and hence part of the data analysis, and all interactions with the data must address Indigenous Data Sovereignty (GIDA 2020, MnW et al. 2023). Yunkaporta and Moodie's (2021) *Thought Ritual*, is an Indigenous data analysis method suited to this research. Thought Ritual (Yunkaporta & Moodie 2021) incorporates many features evident in my research including the influence of Country, spiritual dimensions, Indigenous Storying and Storywork, ancestral communications, cultural metaphors, meaningful coincidence or 'signs'. I see the application of Thought Ritual in the serendipitous nature of my research as described in the Preface of this thesis through the four alignments (Section 1.2 *The influence of Country*). Furthermore, Indigenous women have examined appropriate ways of engaging Aboriginal women in research and data analysis in ways that support women's autonomy and wellness whilst exploring community improvements (Walker et al. 2013).

Analysis of the interview and focus-group data occurred after all interviews and focus-groups had been finalised and approved transcripts had been edited and approved by participants. Analysis was iterative, and themes emerged during the inductive coding process (Hay 2002). Throughout this time, I

actively participated in the ongoing process of reflection and interpretation whilst simultaneously participating in cultural burning events and forums.

Open coding was used to conceptually interpret and make meaning from themes emerging, which were validated during my participation and observation in the field. Data was manually coded to organise it into broad themes, then recoded multiple times, which subsequently drew out more nuanced themes and subthemes as well as overlaps in themes, consistencies, inconsistencies and outliers. The interview and focus-group data was analysed for relationships, connections. My children were involved in this process also which supported their learnings (Fig. 31).

Because all the interviews and focus-groups were audio recorded (with permission) I was able to play them back. Re-hearing the women's stories and responses during the process of coding added contextual layers to my understanding of their contributions. All informal conversations and experiences that were not audio recorded were documented along with subsequent reflection in a field diary that also included videos and photographs (where participants are not identifiable) taken at relevant events.

My analysis sought to unpack, analyse and interpret Aboriginal women's contributions to the research topic and contextualise these narratives in the discursive landscape of cultural burning and broader caring for Country in NSW. The coding revealed a total of 39 sub-themes which were broadly categorised under six dominant themes:

1. What is cultural burning?;
2. What outcomes cultural burning produce - non gender specific;
3. What outcomes cultural burning produce - for Aboriginal women;
4. Barriers and concerns;
5. Trauma;
6. Policy directions and opportunities;

The first four themes are examined and presented in detail as standalone chapters (thesis Chapters Six to Nine respectively). The two remaining themes, Trauma and Policy Directions and Opportunities, are explored throughout the thesis in under various headings. For example, trauma is discussed throughout the thesis in relation to healing. Policy discussion is most prominently in relation to the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires as well as the progress being made within Western fire management to better support cultural burning.



Figure 31: Vanessa's children, Tyson and Emma, assisting with coding interview data, January 2021.
Credit: V. Cavanagh

Kanuha (2000) warns that an insider's perspective is still only one perspective and the researcher must work to minimise unfounded generalisations. Similarly, participants may not provide rich in-depth descriptions of the research topic because they assume I already know what they are talking about; that is often couched in statements such as "you know what I mean". Confidentiality is a significant challenge especially where specialist communities have small membership. This can be detrimental when engaging with employees who may risk breaching code of conduct rules if they are identifiable in the research and say negative things about their employer. To mitigate the negative impacts and capitalise on the benefits of being an insider in research Greene (2014) lists a range of tools and techniques to encourage research rigour, including: triangulation of processes, critical reflexivity, debriefing, maintaining a research diary, and regular meetings. I engaged all these processes to varying degrees.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This research is intentionally Indigenist, meaning it is undertaken within the motivation of being purposeful, political and necessary (Kovach 2015, Smith 1999, Talbot, Hill & Babacan 2016). This research is used as a vehicle to advocate for Indigenous approaches, specifically for Aboriginal women in cultural burning in NSW. It engages Indigenous Research Methodologies to centre Indigenous people, priorities, experiences and values. Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory is used to further centre and highlight the experiences and voices of Aboriginal women in cultural burning in NSW. These experiences are explored through the lens of intersectionality. I use a range of methods to collect data in this research.

Participant observation was undertaken during cultural burning events and forums to understand how Aboriginal women participate, the challenges and barriers they encounter and the outcomes they experience. I use Indigenous autoethnography and Indigenous Storywork to share personal experiences to bolster and provide illustrations of the concepts that Aboriginal women discuss. Through my positionality and active and engaged membership in the sector I was afforded opportunities to participate in yarning circles where Aboriginal women's voices were centred and Aboriginal women describe their experiences and perspectives. To ensure that Aboriginal women's perspectives other than my own are centred and amplified this research used semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In response to the COVID19 pandemic the methods expanded to include participation and observation across digital forms. The benefits of digital technologies as a tools for Indigenous political advocacy and advancement are understood and support my motivation and commitment to create positive changes in our communities.

I am committed to research that supports the priorities of Aboriginal communities, where an understanding of past injustices is necessary and useful. As clarified by Aboriginal woman, Professor Bronwyn Fredericks (2008, p. 117) in 'order to bring about the required changes within the knowledge bases, there must be a link between research and the political struggle of our communities'. My positionality and lived experience within my field of research and my scholarship with Country equips me with the knowledge, position, responsibility and networks to achieve this. By centring Indigenous Research Methodologies, I amplify and strengthen Indigenous research while also lending my voice to decolonial efforts across geography and fire.

STORY FIVE: A LESSON ON LITERATURE – WHERE THERE’S SMOKE...

My research for this literature review led me to read early European explorer’s journals, that describe interactions with Aboriginal people and fire in southeastern Australia. I was intrigued to learn that Aboriginal people’s fire and smoke were the first point of contact with Europeans, pre-dating any face-to-face interactions. For example, in his 1642 journey, Abel Tasman made observations about fires and smoke, from what is now known as Tasmania’s Aboriginal people. Similar observations were made by James Cook and Joseph Banks in 1770 (Cook & Wharton 1893), and Watkin Tench (1789). Although somewhat altered, Aboriginal people’s burning practices continued after European invasion, and early European explorer accounts, including colonial period artworks, reveal information about Aboriginal burning activities during the contact period (David et al. 2024, Giles 2004).

During this literature review, I read accounts from the European explorers who were the first non-Indigenous people to travel through my patriarchal homelands. I was excited when they noted Aboriginal people⁴¹ using fire to care for Country (Parr 1817, Dunn 2020, Macqueen 2004). It was November 1817, just shy of 30 years after the First Fleet arrived, when European explorer, Thomas William Parr took an expedition from Windsor in NSW, traveling north-west. The route Parr took roughly coincides with the current location of the Putty Road, Colo Heights, which is where I grew up, where my Mum still resides, and where my love of Country and respect for fire was founded. Just north of where Colo Heights is now located, on 10 November 1817, Parr commented on the grassy meadows that he encountered, and how they reminded him of England. Parr also noted:

... The Grass was on fire in several places, both on the flats, and the Hills through which we passed, which was *evidently done by natives but we could not see them* (Parr 1817).

A week later, as he travelled further north, closer to Wonnarua Country. Parr noted Aboriginal people tending to their fires: ‘We saw a number of Natives this Day generally about the skirts of the flames’ (Parr 1817). As I continued to read the explorers’ accounts, I repeatedly found descriptions of Aboriginal people using fire, particularly where Aboriginal women and children were included. One of the more well-known accounts is from Sir Thomas Mitchell (1848), who wrote:

‘Fire, grass, kangaroos, and human inhabitants, seem all dependent on each other for existence ... the native applies that fire to the grass at certain seasons, in order that a young

⁴¹ These were mostly likely Darkinjung people (neighbours to Wonnarua), or Wonnarua people (my ancestors).

green crop may subsequently spring up, and so attract and enable him to kill or take the kangaroo ... [it is] females and children, who chiefly burn the grass' (Thomas Mitchell, 1848).

Here, Mitchell witnesses fire being used by Aboriginal women and children as part of their hunting and resource gathering. Similar observations about Aboriginal women and children were made in other places. For example, in Victoria, Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson noted Aboriginal women using fire for harvesting. He wrote: 'the native women were spread over the plain as far as I could see them, collecting pannin, murrnong⁴² ... They burn the grass, the better to see these roots' (in Cahir et al. 2016, p. 234). Again, in Victoria, missionary, John Bulmer noted that young Aboriginal girls learnt about fire by imitating their mothers (in Campbell & Vanderwal 1999). Similarly, Karskens (2019) connects Aboriginal women's burning practices to yam harvest and maintenance in the Hawkesbury region of NSW.

Reading this history, especially the accounts from Colo Heights and Wonnarua Country, felt like a great gift to my research. While the historical information relating to Aboriginal people and fire is important, I am conscious that it was written by white men with limited understandings of what they were witnessing. Furthermore, it does not supersede the information that is carried by Aboriginal women, communities and knowledge holders, who are the authorities of their own experiences and stories.

My excitement upon reading about the fires undertaken in the Hunter region was short-lived. One moment I was reading about the burning practices of my ancestors, the next minute, I was reading about my people being massacred. I've known about the massacres of Indigenous peoples by invaders for as long as I can remember. The killing of Indigenous peoples wasn't something that I learnt about for the first time watching a movie, or in a school lesson. It was common knowledge in my Aboriginal family and communities. Like the Stolen Generations, horrific acts like torture, rapes and massacres were part of Indigenous people's experience of colonisation, and my experience, is that Aboriginal people knew about this history, and we talk about it. These horrors have been replicated across colonised nations around the globe. Therefore, it shouldn't have come as such a surprise to me that while looking into the historical literature of the colonial interface, I would come across records of massacres, including of Wonnarua peoples.

'By The Light Of Fires Which The Hostile Tribes Kindled'

The first land grants were given in Singleton in 1822 (Adams & Dunn 2020). In 1826, four years later, the Australian newspaper reported that the Bridgman Estate massacre that occurred in

⁴² murrnong (yam daisy, *Microseris scapigera*)

September that year was an act of reprisal. These were the early days of European invasion, where law and order was managed locally. The newspaper article stated that the massacre was payback on Wonnarua people, because they had killed two convict men at 'Richard Alcorn's hut near Singleton' in the NSW Hunter Valley (Ryan et al. 2025). In response to these murders, colonial officials, under the leadership of Magistrate Robert Scott, used Aboriginal trackers to locate the camp of the presumed murderers (the Wonnarua people), on the evening of 1 Sep 1826. The Aboriginal trackers used the fire and smoke from the Wonnarua people's camp to locate them. It was a family camp, where Wonnarua Elders, children, parents and teens were living as close to their traditional lifestyle as possible, amid the turmoil of the recent European invasion of their lands. Like other Aboriginal nations, fire had comforted and nurtured these Wonnarua people for millennia, but on this night, fire was used against them. The newspaper article states:

'Having continued the pursuit for some time, they at length discovered their tract...and by the light of fires which the hostile tribes kindled towards evening, the precise spot they occupied was soon ascertained' (The Australian 1826).

On that evening at the Bridgman Estate, at least 18 Wonnarua people were killed, more were wounded, and a Wonnarua woman and man were taken as prisoners (Ryan et al. 2025). As my research continued, I found details of another massacre of Wonnarua people. This one took place the following year in February 1827, on EG Cory's estate at Paterson River, north of Maitland. Reported again as an act of supposed reprisal to Aboriginal warfare. Newspapers at the time, reported that Wonnarua people were keeping and training dogs (dingoes) to destroy farmer's sheep flocks in the Hunter region (Ryan et al. 2025). A shepherd working at EG Cory's estate, killed one of the trained 'pet' dogs belonging to the Wonnarua people, who then retaliated. However, the exact action that the Wonnarua people took is unclear. Conflicting newspaper reports suggest that Wonnarua people either burnt the wheat crops at the estate or stole grain (Ryan et al. 2025).

The Europeans mounted a counter response, where an undisclosed number of shepherds and workmen set out to locate the Wonnarua people responsible for the affray (Ryan et al. 2025). Again, using smoke as the guide, the shepherds and workmen followed the smoke from the Wonnarua people's camp to locate them. This was another family camp, composed of elderly through to babies. Regardless, once located, the shepherds and workmen shot the Wonnarua people with their muskets indiscriminately (Ryan et al. 2025). At least 12 Wonnarua people were killed immediately. Others who fled were chased by the attackers, who followed them to a nearby waterway that 'gradually deepened, and some of the poor creatures were drowned' (Maitland Mercury 25 August 1877, p. 10). Fifty years later in 1877, a non-Indigenous man who claimed to have been present at this massacre

(i.e. participated), stated that none of the Wonnarua people from the family camp killed that evening were responsible for the dingoes, burnt crops or stolen grain that had instigated the massacre (Maitland Mercury 25 August 1877, p. 10).

Of course, these accounts are only what has been ‘officially’ recorded. It is highly likely that significantly more bloodshed occurred on Wonnarua Country, as it has across this continent. When I reviewed this literature – the contact history, the burning, and the massacres, I cross-referenced it to my own Wonnarua family tree. I can link my ancestors to this same timeline of contact history in Wonnarua Country, and identify how close my family lineage was to these events. Two sets of my four times great grandparents were living on Wonnarua Country when those massacres occurred. Their anglicised names are Joseph Hughes⁴³ and Mary Shoe⁴⁴, and Joey and Molly Mahdah/Matha (we have photographs of Joey and Molly’s daughter, Sarah Madoo Waters). Realistically, it was their Wonnarua relatives, living further along the river who were killed in these massacres.

With an ill feeling I recognise that my own Wonnarua family lineage survived these atrocities, when other Wonnarua families did not. I question, “Did my family survive because we were the Aboriginal trackers used in these attacks?” I do not know the answer to this. It is awful to think about the coercion, control and turmoil that Aboriginal trackers must have experienced. These horrendous, violent acts severed Wonnarua family lines. An intentional extermination of Aboriginal people spread across the continent. Murders of families who were collective keepers of intimate cultural knowledge of Country. This same cultural knowledge that supported Aboriginal people’s ability to thrive in abundance in extremely flammable forests on the driest inhabited continent on Earth, since the first sunrise.

Despite the ongoing disaster of colonisation, Indigenous peoples maintain efforts to sustain and reinvigorate our cultural land management practices, including fire. Particularly in NSW where invasion first impacted. I learnt from Wiradjuri man and pyrogeographer, Professor Michael-Shawn Fletcher, that there are correlations between the timing of the massacres and other events which removed Aboriginal people from caring for Country and noticeable changes in ecosystems and forests, which then changed the fire regimes, resulting in more dangerous bushfires (Fletcher et al. 2021a, Fletcher & Johnston 2020, Laming et al. 2022).

This introduction to my literature review was a challenge to write for several reasons. I struggled many times to understand what Country was trying to teach me through these emotional and spiritual stories. The explorer’s journals with their routes through my hometown, to see my Old People burning Country, and then the traitorous smoke that led to the massacre sites that robbed so

⁴³ Joseph Hughes was not Aboriginal and was born in Europe.

⁴⁴ It is noted that these ancestors would have had traditional Aboriginal names, but in official records they are listed under these Western names.

many Wonnarua people of their lives. These are not abstract coincidences or vague unfortunate histories occurring to some poor distant people. This is my Country and my people. The alignment of these intense personal references demand that I think deeper about 'the literature'. Russ-Smith's perspective, helped me to make sense,

If we want peace in the future, we need to think about past and present violences and their legacies and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledges as key to weaving a future of peace (Russ-Smith 2021, p. 16).

It does not surprise me that Russ-Smith (2021) wrote this in an essay about the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, and the importance of Aboriginal women's knowledge and leadership in the path through the catastrophe of colonisation. Aboriginal women know about the colonial Australian history and its direct relationship to bushfires and disasters that we now experience. Aboriginal people seek to return to Country, to heal from the atrocities, and nurture Country back towards wellbeing through cultural burning and caring for Country. In doing so, we navigate the colonial institutions built on the lie of terra nullius and the bloodshed of our people.

CHAPTER 5 LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 LITERATURE CONTEXT

5.1.1 Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the significant contributions to Indigenous fire by Yiman Bidjara woman, Distinguished Professor Marcia Langton (Langton 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2021), and Gurrgoni man, Dr Dean Yibarbuk (Burgess et al. 2009, Yibarbuk et al. 2001, Yibarbuk & Ansell 2020, Yibarbuk & Brann 2018, Yibarbuk & Cooke 2001). Although not NSW focussed, for decades their work has benefitted Country and they have established frameworks and foundations from which subsequent generations, like me, can scaffold. Langton and Yibarbuk are emblematic of the work of many other Indigenous individuals and communities, who have fought and continue to care for Country.

5.1.2 Introduction

This literature review identifies that Aboriginal women are underrepresented in the scholarly literature, as they are underrepresented in cultural burning practically. Literature by and about Aboriginal women's engagement in cultural burning in NSW is sparse, and only recently emerging. This lack is unsurprising given that regardless of gender, scholarly research on cultural burning in NSW is itself in early development. Most of the literature is written by men or non-Indigenous people. Where Aboriginal women do appear in publications, it is mainly as co-authors or informants/contributors. Aboriginal women as lead authors is a more recent achievement. Although Aboriginal women's voices and perspectives are largely absent in the literature, this lack does not reflect their cultural burning experiences, knowledge or aspirations. Nor is it a wide-spread gendered sensitivity under Aboriginal cultural lore. Rather, I argue it is because Aboriginal women are underrepresented in multiple relevant sectors, including cultural burning, Western fire management and academia – where Indigenous people account for less than two percent of Australia's total higher education student population, and one percent of the total PhD student cohort (Andrews 2023, Thunig 2022).

This chapter illuminates the geographical bias that occurs in the literature. It also discusses recent developments in southern Australia that impact Aboriginal women and identifies where women's voices are found. There is strong alignment between the literature and the views of Aboriginal women in this research, particularly regarding the fundamental principles of cultural burning and the broader support for Aboriginal women's engagement. However, much of the literature is positioned as taking a

whole-of-community perspective, and it does not focus on Aboriginal women specifically. Thus, Aboriginal women's priorities and experiences are largely absent.

The scholarly literature that does include Aboriginal women is reviewed in this chapter within these themes: that Aboriginal women's burning is distinct from men's and serves additional purposes; that there is widespread support for Aboriginal women's participation; that there are particular experiences that Aboriginal women share regarding cultural burning, including specific benefits, and that there is little discussion of the barriers to women's participation. Where possible, the voices of Aboriginal women engaging in cultural burning in NSW are privileged in this literature review. Their voices are complemented by literature from other Aboriginal people in the southeast of the continent, then further supported by publications from non-Indigenous people and those from other locations. Literature regarding Indigenous women from other countries is included. Centring Aboriginal women's voices in this way distils the issues and concentrates the Aboriginal experience so they are not buried by voices and priorities of others (Adams 2024, Thunig 2022).

The lack of Aboriginal women's voices was especially evident before the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, after which, the cultural burning literature rapidly expanded, including an increase in outputs from and about Aboriginal women, mostly in non-scholarly publications. Although catastrophic, the Bushfires created an opportunity to amplify messages, and garner support from audiences that otherwise may not be engaged (van Leeuwen & Miller-Sabbioni 2023). Along with others, I was involved in amplifying Aboriginal women's voices during and after the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, through publications, as well as working 'behind the scenes', directly connecting Aboriginal women with authors of prospective publications. For example, I connected Kaylene McLeod with *Bloomberg News* (see McLeod (2020)). Additionally, I invited Rachael Cavanagh and Deb Swan to join me in an interview with the program *For The Wild*, which became the podcast (Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020). In non-scholarly publications, Aboriginal women make important contributions that are highlighted in this chapter and discussed more thoroughly in the thematic chapters.

Occasionally teams of rangers are listed as co-authors, for example, the 'Banbai Rangers' co-author several papers with Michelle McKemey (see McKemey et al. 2019, McKemey & Rangers 2020, McKemey et al. 2021a, McKemey et al. 2022). Given the sector is male-dominated, I have allocated ranger teams into the category of male authors.

5.1.3 Geographical bias

In 1969, non-Indigenous archaeologist Rhys Jones coined the term 'fire stick farming' to describe Aboriginal peoples' purposeful application of fire in northern Australia (Jones 1969). Like Jones, research has mainly focussed on Indigenous burning practices in remote parts of Australia,

particularly the continental north, west and centre, where Aboriginal people's fire practices are more commonplace (Robinson et al. 2016). Research and literature in other parts of the continent are less common (Bardsley, Prowse & Siegfriedt 2019, Ens et al. 2015, Pert et al. 2015). The geographical bias to remote Australia reflects the implicit colonial assumptions of where authentic and valid caring for Country knowledges exists.

Paradoxically, most Indigenous people live in the southeast of the continent (ABS 2024). Although there are some similarities, making generalisations or drawing comparisons between Indigenous cultural groups across the continent can be problematic, as the cultures, histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples are diverse, as are their cultural burning aims, objectives and practices (de Rijke, Martin & Trigger 2016, Garnett & Sithole 2007). Some appropriate generalisations that are applicable to NSW are that colonisation has drastically changed Country, severely disrupted Aboriginal connections to Country, and the institutions of the nation-state, including Government departments, are dominated by Western models, mindsets and approaches, where barriers arise for Aboriginal people in cultural burning (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024).

Compared to other parts of the continent, NSW lags in its operational programs and research (Altman et al. 2011, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Williamson 2021a, 2022). Researchers are addressing the geographical bias by developing regionally appropriate resource materials such as the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC report (BNHCRC report) on cultural burning in southern Australia (see Chapter Two). The report's focus on the southern parts of the continent is an intentional divergence from the dominant and colonial gaze towards remote Australia.

Aboriginal communities are also exercising their self-determination by developing their own localised caring for Country plans, such as the Banbai Whole of Country Plan 2023–2033 (Banbai plan) (Patterson et al. 2024). The Banbai plan has been developed by the Banbai community for their specific Country and community, located in the NSW Northern Tablelands. Although the Banbai plan does not provide specific detail on Aboriginal women, the lead author, Lesley Patterson is a Banbai woman and long serving ranger. Through her leadership, Aboriginal women's engagement is implicit and encouraged. The plan centres the aspirations, development pathways and priorities of the Banbai community (Patterson et al. 2024). Similar examples exist internationally where Indigenous nations are leading their community approaches to caring for their lands, waters and communities, such as the *Good Fire II* report for the Karuk Tribe in California (see Clark et al. 2024).

5.1.4 Authoring with authority: the importance of Indigenous authorship in cultural burning literature, and Aboriginal women's contributions

The need for Indigenous people to hold leadership roles in Indigenous research is gaining traction, particularly where their input forms the foundation of the research (Barbour & Schlesinger

2012, Cumpston 2019, Langton 1998, Pascoe et al. 2023, Steffensen 2020). It is inappropriate for Indigenous people to be positioned as mere informants or contributors to research on Country and Indigenous issues. Similarly, it is important and appropriate that Aboriginal women take a lead in addressing the literature gap regarding their experiences with cultural burning, to ensure their experiences and concerns are not reliant on inappropriate generalisations and comparisons. Until recently, most scholarly literature on Indigenous fire practices at the national scale has been authored by non-Indigenous people who inherently understand the world from a non-Indigenous or Western perspective.

While trained within the formal Western academy, Aboriginal researchers, who have a strong grounding in Aboriginal identity and culture, conceptualise the ‘terrain’ of research within an Indigenous worldview. They couple their understandings of the dominant conventional research approaches, gained through their Western training, with their Indigenous perspectives, providing dimensions to research which are unobtainable by non-Indigenous peoples. As Aboriginal people, it also means they carry responsibilities to Country and community, in their lives as well as in their research and publications (West 2000). They are authoring with authority, as well as with considerable responsibility (Smith 2012, West 2000, Wilson 2008). The lack of Aboriginal peoples’ perspectives on Aboriginal fire practices has been highlighted for decades as inappropriate (Bowman 1998, Bowman & Lehman 2020). It is inappropriate because Aboriginal scholarship often holds an additional layer that is political, decolonising and resistance-based (Neale et al. 2019, Weir & Freeman 2019, Weir 2023a, Williamson 2021a, 2021b). Significantly, most of the Aboriginal authors in the cultural burning literature, including women, are also cultural burning practitioners, facilitators or experienced participants in cultural burning (women’s contributions include Bishop & Tynan 2022, Tynan 2021, Tynan & Cavanagh 2021).

The recent emergence of Aboriginal women’s voices in cultural burning has additional meaning when viewed through a socio-political and sovereign Indigenous resurgence perspective. Here, Indigenous women make direct links between Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence, Indigenous women and fire (Nelson 2019, Russ-Smith 2021, Whittaker 2020). In their publications, Nelson (2019) *Wrestling with Fire: Indigenous Women’s Resistance and Resurgence* (2019) and Wiradyuri woman Jessica Russ-Smith in *Giyira: Indigenous Women’s Knowing, Being and Doing as a Way to End War on Country* (2021) highlight the socio-political and ecological transformational nature of fire within decolonising frames of reference. Both Nelson (2019) and Russ-Smith (2021) highlight how Indigenous women’s leadership is essential to fully harness the opportunities within the transformation. In the introduction of *Fire Front*, a collection of Indigenous poetry that captures the trauma of the 2019-2020 Black Summer, Gomerioi woman, Alison Whittaker (2020, p. ix) also describes fire as colonial resistance:

It licks at the edges of the colonisers' language. It hems it into a workable, imperfect shape. It tears through the settlers' plantations, their arrangements of the trees and their form. It takes its restorative heat to the right flora.

In these publications Indigenous women are not bystanders, rather their voices are a timely reflection of the temporality of matriarchal and Indigenous activism in response to planetary ecocide and mass injustice; Indigenous women are responding powerfully to the call-to-action from Mother Earth.

Another factor regarding authorship, is that there is a noticeable rise in caution around publications about cultural burning with no leadership from Indigenous people (e.g. Lindenmayer & Bowd 2022, and response from Pascoe et al. 2023). Pascoe and others (2023) highlight that research that is not Aboriginal-led undermines the progress of cultural burning and Aboriginal self-determination, a view supported by others (Weir 2023a, Weir et al. 2024). As a minimum, it is positive that Aboriginal women's voices, perspectives and issues have appeared in publications to date. For example, Aboriginal women such as Banbai Ranger Lesley Patterson, feature in numerous academic papers with McKemey, where Patterson's contributions include important foundations (see McKemey & Patterson 2018, 2019, McKemey et al. 2019, McKemey et al. 2020b). Collaborations such as these strengthen over time and produce positive outcomes where Aboriginal women's self-determination and leadership becomes more prominent, as demonstrated in Patterson's lead authorship of the Banbai Plan (Patterson et al. 2024).

5.1.5 Aboriginal women's contributions in non-scholarly texts

Aboriginal women's contributions to cultural burning are prominent in non-scholarly publications. Acknowledging the literature across this broader field is a decolonising approach to literature reviews, as outlined by two Aboriginal female scholars and cultural burning participants, Tynan and Bishop (2023). Tynan and Bishop (2023) discuss the location of Indigenous knowledge repositories, highlighting that perceived gaps in knowledge often stem from Western academia's limited recognition of the location of valid knowledges. Western academics privilege scholarly literature as having authority, and position grey literature and other texts as secondary. However, Tynan and Bishop (2023, p. 502) highlight that valid knowledge 'primarily exists outside academia'; thus there is value in considering other forms of work, particularly including Country as knowledge holder. Non-scholarly texts are also more accessible than most academic publications, and accessibility is a principle of ethical research. Indigenous knowledge about Country is held in Country and can be transmitted through Country as well as through cultural practices such as songs, stories, and other art forms (Martin & Mirraaboo 2003, Arnold, Atchison & McKnight 2023, Tynan & Bishop 2023). Neale and Kelly (2020,

p. 153) articulate that ‘art is culture made visible’. Aboriginal people have contributed to this repository of knowledge through reports, podcasts, interviews, seminars, documentaries, short films, and in creative work such as artworks and installations, poetry, children’s literature, song, story and dance. Aboriginal women’s cultural burning contributions in these genres are briefly presented next and more thoroughly discussed in the thematic chapters. These texts continue the traditional practice of Aboriginal knowledge transmission through diverse and creative forms, which has communicated and maintained knowledge of Country for millennia (Cameron 2024a, 2024b, Griffiths 2017, Zurba & Berkes 2014). In addition to the location of knowledge, Tynan and Bishop (2023) encourage researchers to consider the relationships between people, place, knowledge and research. In my research, these connections are activated in my stories which reveal a range of knowledge and lessons, including for me personally. I also make obvious the connections between myself as researcher and my relationality with Country.

Poetry has facilitated Aboriginal women’s expressions of fire, particularly the grief and trauma caused by the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. Whittaker (2020, p. 177-78) explains the analogy of fire and poetry as colonial resistance:

This project was called Fire Front to describe the various power, restoration and dynamism of Indigenous verse. During 2019 and 2020, as it came together, this continent was beset by catastrophic and unprecedented fires escalated by climate change, colonisation, and depriving First Nations of their right to care for Country. We chose to keep the name, so we wouldn’t forget two things: what the words of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander poems are and can do, and what their poets stand to lose.

Wandi Wandian woman, Amethyst Downing-McLeod’s reflection of the aftermath of the Black Summer concurs: ‘As I walked through the cremated remains, Every step, I sunk deeper and deeper into the pain that is now’ (Amethyst Downing-McLeod, *Untitled* 2020). Many other Aboriginal women have poems about fire and trauma, including: Warrimay/Birribay woman Nicole Smede (2020) *Unprecedented*; Gunai woman Kirli Saunders (2023), *Aftermath*; Yuin woman, Lyndsay Urquhart (2023) *Mudjis and Yiliman (Friends and Spears)*; and Lyndsay Urquhart with Dharawal woman, Auntie Dr Jodi Edwards (2020) *Blood Moon*.

Many Aboriginal women in NSW express their fire stories through visual art, including Wiradjuri woman Leeanne Hunter, *Fire Series I – III* (Hunter 2022), and Murramarang, Yuin woman Leanne Brook, *Manawaradhanjin (in our hands)* (Brook 2022a). In their artworks, Hunter and Brook depict the impacts of the Black Summer Bushfires. In describing her artwork, in which an Aboriginal woman holds a small flame in her hands, Brook explains: ‘Fire has been used for tens of thousands of years as a way to renew Country, She graciously offers [fire] as a gift, hoping that now we will listen’ (Brook in NHRA 2022b, p. 3). Here, Brook voices Aboriginal women’s appeals for Aboriginal knowledge to be taken seriously, a call echoed by fire scientists and Indigenous scholars (Bowman &

Lehman 2020, Freeman, Williamson & Weir 2021). Brook was commissioned for another artwork *Ngaral ba djamaga ganji (Black cockatoo and good fire)* (2022b) as part of the *Healthy Country for the Glossy Black Cockatoo* project in NSW (Fig. 32). Of that artwork Brook writes:

A glossy black cockatoo watches on from the branch of a she-oak tree as community put fire on the ground to heal Country with good fire, guided by the spirit and knowledge of their ancestors. The circular design represents the hollows needed for breeding. The motif design which surrounds the hollows represents people working together on Country (Brook 2022b).

Brook's description of her artwork includes a variety of knowledge regarding the species, habitat requirements and food sources, communal practices to care for Country, and cultural burning approaches, objectives and philosophies. In northern NSW, Gullibul Elder Aunty Kali worked with youth, Aboriginal Elders and the wider community, to develop a sculptural installation. This artwork and project were undertaken to raise awareness and action for the conservation of Boodahbee/koalas following the devastation of the 2019-2020 Black Summer. This project included education and advocacy about how Aboriginal knowledge and practices, such as cultural burning, supports the Boodahbee (NRTT 2023).

In 2015-2016, two Wiradjuri women, Aleshia Lonsdale and Nyree Reynolds, and Worimi woman Irene Ridgeway joined others in an interstate cultural burning artistic exchange program. This exchange culminated in a group exhibition in Cowra NSW, called *Cool Burn*. Through various artistic mediums, the artists in *Cool Burn* shared their expressions of Aboriginal cultural burning practices and broader traditional ecological knowledges (pers com. Lonsdale, 28 March 2024).

Possum skin cloak making is one format of cultural expression that Guringai Yuin woman Amanda Jane Reynolds uses, which brings together several elements of interconnectedness between Country and people. After her home, business and local community was decimated by the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, Reynolds made a special possum skin cloak that told the stories of that event which was included in the *Truth in Fire* exhibition in Nowra. Of her work, Reynolds explains: 'through our art we can be a voice for Country' (Reynolds & NAVA 2024).

Songs and dances are powerful collective ways that Aboriginal women carry and share information about cultural burning, other forms of fire and knowledge of Country. Yuin woman Sharon Mason, with the Djaadjawan Dancers, maintain culture and practice through song and dance where all the elements, including their intricate dance regalia, are grounded in their cultural knowledge. In describing the importance of their participation at the 2018 Bundanon National Indigenous Fire Workshop (NIFW 2018), Mason advocates for increased Aboriginal women's participation, stating: 'we represent for all women, women everywhere, we've always had fire' (Mason 2018).



Figure 32: Ngaral ba djamaga ganji (Black cockatoo and good fire). Artwork by Murramarang / Yuin woman Leanne Brook (2022b) for the *Healthy Country for the Glossy Black Cockatoo* project. Included with permission of the artist.

Through song, dance and maintaining cultural knowledge, Mason and the Djaadjawan Dancers make several important political and cultural contributions, including advocating for Country and women, and acknowledging the strength of Country, Aboriginal people, women and culture. Mason explains:

Practising your culture empowers you, and that's what makes us strong women, we don't need this modern world to get through life, its [sic] our culture, and that what we need is our culture, so we need to maintain the land (Mason 2018).

Aboriginal men also carry fire knowledge through expressive forms. Yuin Djiringanj man Uncle Warren Foster explains the depth of the knowledge and meaning of fire songs and dances:

Why we dance is the same reason why we burn, to bring life back into Country, to bring our ancestors... we dance for the land, our ancestors, and ourselves, to build our spirit up (Uncle Warren Foster cited in Lyngdoh Reye et al. 2018, p. 43).

As will be explained further in Chapter Eight, these creative forms are not simply about developing beautiful artistic pieces. These expressions are and contain knowledge of Country, they support cultural strength, they are stories, wisdom, inspiration, political statements, demands for change and calls-to-action.

Children's literature is another format used to communicate Aboriginal fire relationships. Cultural fire practitioner Victor Steffensen teamed with Tagalaka woman Sandra Steffensen in the children's book *Looking After Country with Fire* (2022) to highlight the importance of encouraging children's involvement in cultural burning. They dedicate the book 'to the young ones who want to grow up being friends with the fire and looking after Country' (Steffensen & Steffensen, 2022, p.iii). Their book acknowledges that multiple levels of education occur when children are on Country, especially with Elders. Kirli Saunders wrote *Bindi* (2023) for primary school aged children to explore concepts of conservation and caring for Country including fire. Similarly, Ross and others (2022) published a children's book telling the creation story of fire from the Danggu people of the Fitzroy Valley. This publication engages children through stories where kin have positive reciprocal relationships with fire, rather than relationships of fire suppression (Ross et al. 2022). Engaging children in this way is an adaptive strategy to climate change outlined by Koger, Leslie and Hayes (2011), who identify that personal connection to place made during childhood creates emotional investment that motivates people to care for and protect those places into the future. Koger, Leslie and Hayes (2011, p. 230-31) describe: 'we care for what we love. Positive experiences in nature foster stronger personal investment in environmental issues.'

Following the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires several popular culture magazines published articles on Aboriginal women firefighters and cultural burning. *Vogue Australia* featured the women of Firesticks Alliance, which includes Indigenous women from across Australia (Farra 2021). In this article, former Firesticks Alliance co-chairperson Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan woman, Jessica Wegener acknowledges the increase in recognition and use of Indigenous caring for Country knowledge, and warns that it needs to be done in ways that maintain its integrity:

There's a shift in mind-set happening, and little bits of Indigenous knowledge are being embedded in Western practice. But it has to be applied holistically, not just in part (Wegener in Farra 2021, online).

Here Wegener highlights the argument for Aboriginal approaches to be reinstated holistically to care for Country, and importantly, that progressing this transformation must be undertaken with care and respect. *Atmos Earth* was another magazine published after the Bushfires to feature cultural burning. An article co-authored by Amanda Jane Reynolds discussing cultural fire in Yuin Country, included several strong stories from Aboriginal women, including Elders – described as keepers of fire knowledge and practice (Reynolds & Georgeson 2020). A third magazine, *The Australian Women's Weekly* promoted Aboriginal women's voices by featuring an all-Indigenous all-women Country Fire Association Team in Lake Tyers, Victoria (Smethurst 2020). In this article, the women described that they care for cultural heritage through their fire management work (Smethurst 2020). *Fashionista Magazine* lent their support for cultural burning and Aboriginal women by featuring Aboriginal women from cultural burning networks in one of their publications (Bauck 2020).

The non-scholarly body of work by and about Aboriginal women regarding cultural burning in NSW demonstrates a strong interest in Aboriginal women in cultural burning. The work acknowledges that there are Aboriginal women in NSW, and other places, doing important work in cultural burning and caring for Country, and that there is much more to be learnt from and with Aboriginal women.

5.2 ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND CULTURAL BURNING IN NSW

5.2.1 About Aboriginal women's burning

Gullibul Elder Aunty Kali⁴⁵ (Marcia McBride) is a strong supporter of the revival of cultural burning, and Aboriginal-led Country-centred approaches. Aunty Kali highlights the need for Aboriginal women's specific opportunities, because from her experience 'Aboriginal women burn Country different to men' (McBride & Dundler 2024). Wilinggin woman Patsy Nulgit agrees that women are needed to encourage biodiversity and balance in caring for Country and she says: 'women's fire knowledge is very different to men's fire knowledge ... it helps country and community in different ways' (CSIRO & NESP NAER, 2016, p. 7). Additionally, Aboriginal men acknowledge the gender distinctions in approaches to fire, and they support Aboriginal women's participation as an integral part of the broader approach, which is inclusive of generations, as illustrated by Ngarigo man Rod Mason:

⁴⁵ Aunty Kali wishes to be referred to as 'Aunty Kali' rather than her formal name, Marcia McBride.

Cultural fire is gender-based ... Man or woman, we had our own secrets. Woman looked after soft soil with herbs and grasses. Men cared for tall trees like stringybarks or ironbarks. Kids had a role' (Mason in Wettenhall 2020).

Examples of female specific cultural burning have occurred on Minjerribah / North Stradbroke Island in Queensland (DES 2020); South Australia (DEW 2023); lutruwita⁴⁶ / Tasmania (Kovacevic et al. 2021, p. 33); and in the Tanami region (Grant 2020, p. 65). In these examples Aboriginal women use fire to protect women's sites and plants and animals that are important to women. In these examples, cultural burning has supported women's leadership and skills development, and created positive outcomes for, and with the women. That Aboriginal women's fire is unique and that there is a difference between men's and women's priorities and approaches in caring for Country has been highlighted in other regions of the continent (Bird, Bliege Bird and Parker 2004, 2005, Bliege Bird et al. 2008, Eriksen & Hankins 2015, Davies et al. 2018). Eriksen and Hankins have researched the gendered dimensions of fire in various Aboriginal Australian locations and in California, USA (Eriksen & Hankins 2013, 2014, 2015) and describe women's burning as undertaken at a finer scale. Similarly, Mardu women burn in specific ways for women's hunting needs (Bird, Bliege Bird and Parker 2004, 2005).

Sage and Catt (2018) found that Martu people paid particular attention to burning in and around places that have gender sensitivities in their Country. This was acknowledged as an important consideration in planning burns with Martu people who are central in leading the planning and implementation process. Planning involves ensuring that gender sensitivities are managed so people know where they could and could not go on the fire ground. The opportunity for cultural burning to enhance the protection of Aboriginal women's sites and maintain women's knowledge in Tasmania was highlighted in Maclean, Robinson and Costello (2018). The need for women's engagement for the maintenance of women's values is also apparent in the developing literature and support continues to grow (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024).

5.2.2 Support for Aboriginal women's burning

Support for Aboriginal women's involvement is found in literature by Aboriginal women, Lesley Patterson and Lauren Tynan – both with extensive cultural burning experience – and is confirmed within an activist resistance lens by Russ-Smith, below. Banbai Ranger, Lesley Patterson was one of the first Aboriginal women publishing on cultural burning in NSW and has co-authored and made strong contributions to many scholarly papers regarding cultural burning in Banbai Country (see McKemey and Patterson 2019, McKemey et al. 2019, McKemey et al. 2021c). As previously noted,

⁴⁶ Tynan (2020) explains that often, print-based conventions of many lutruwita palawa kani / Tasmanian ancestral languages words are in lower case.

Patterson is the lead author of the *Banbai Whole of Country Plan 2023–2033*, which includes a comprehensive range of aspirations, issues and development pathways that have been developed by and for Banbai people and Country (Patterson et al. 2024). In other publications, Patterson highlights experiencing women's fire leadership: 'My Mother taught me how to put the winba [fire] out, and to have respect for it. She used to burn every year' (McKemey et al. 2021a, p. 1018). Patterson, along with the Banbai Rangers (2020), describe their leadership and relationships with Country as they detail the Banbai peoples' journey to re-establish their cultural fire practices, facilitated through access to Country with the establishment of Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) (McKemey et al. 2021a, O'Leary & Walter 2018). Banbai woman and Ranger Tanya Elone outlines that in their Banbai leadership model 'women occupy [the] important "driver's seat" [through] ranger and governance roles' (in O'Leary & Walter 2018, p. 92). The IPA led to an 'Aboriginal owned, controlled and staffed' enterprise to care for Country (O'Leary & Walter 2018, p. 92). Tynan and Bishop say Aboriginal women must be specifically included in cultural burning to maintain strong community participation and governance, and to ensure Aboriginal women have equitable access to opportunities (Bishop & Tynan 2022, Tynan 2021, Tynan & Cavanagh 2021). Russ-Smith describes that Aboriginal women hold special roles which are key to progress and that the wrong types of fire damage more than just Country:

Through the fire, settler futurity aims to erase evidence of Indigenous knowing, being and doing through violently destroying the being that is central to our survival, Country. Indigenous knowledges, and in particular Indigenous women, are key in shifting settler futurity logics and practice; our bodies symbolise Indigenous futurities through giyira [our wombs/our future]. ... Decolonisation is a solution to war; however, it cannot succeed unless Indigenous women, our sovereignty, voices, knowledges and bodies, are central to this transformation (Russ-Smith 2021, p. 22).

Indigenous women across the continent support Indigenous women's leadership and participation in cultural burning and other forms of caring for Country (Daniels et al. 2022, Kwaymullina 2018a, O'Leary & Walter 2018, Oscar 2021). National reports and programs advocate that Indigenous women are crucial in the fire and caring for Country sectors, highlighting that more needs to be done to support women's participation (HRC 2020, NIAA 2024, O'Leary & Walter 2018). Williamson (2021a, p. 6) discusses the challenges regarding Aboriginal women's engagement and highlights the inappropriateness of women's underrepresentation: 'cultural land management programs must include specific objectives to include Aboriginal women including through identified positions and targeted projects'. The concluding report on the NIFW 2018 which I attend with my children, provided clear support for women:

Women are the givers of life and the essence and also carry the fire. This is why the importance of women burning on Country is vital for the continuance of culture and cultural practices (Lyngdoh Reye et al. 2018, p. 52).

Aboriginal men in NSW agree that women have a role in cultural burning and must be supported (Costello et al. 2021, Freeman, Williamson & Weir 2021, Kovacevic et al. 2021, Lyngdoh et al. 2018, Robinson et al. 2021b, Smith, Weir & Neale 2018, Wettenhall 2020, Williamson 2022a, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021). The results of the advocacy for Aboriginal women are visible through an increase in events, workshops and participation targeted to women (Kovacevic et al. 2021, Steffensen 2024, truwana Rangers, ALCT & Firesticks Alliance 2021).

I located no evidence in the literature that indicates women should not participate in cultural burning. Rather, there is widespread support for women as a matter of equity, equality and efficiency (Maclean, Robinson & Costello 2018). Interestingly, like the way ranger teams are rarely labelled as ‘men’s ranger teams’, the literature by Aboriginal men and others, does not specifically discuss men’s roles in cultural burning, rather it discusses cultural burning holding a whole-of-community perspective. Given that Aboriginal men are well represented, the lack of inference to gender highlights the positioning of males as the *gender norm*. Spurway (2018) agrees that there is a significant gap nationally in understanding Indigenous women’s unique approaches to caring for Country and this must be addressed.

5.3 CULTURAL BURNING AND THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER

The cultural burning literature covers themes that are generic to cultural burning and/or applicable to all members of Aboriginal communities – not specifically Aboriginal women. The literature examines the core principles of cultural burning, as well as benefits and barriers. Beyond my publications, the scholarly literature does not explicitly explore Aboriginal women’s participation in cultural burning, how Aboriginal women describe cultural burning, or the benefits and barriers Aboriginal women experience. This research contributes to addressing this gap. The next section reviews the literature across several of the broader generic themes of cultural burning, where I highlight how they relate to Aboriginal women and what Aboriginal women have discussed in the literature.

5.3.1 Gender and cultural burning core principles

There are consistent messages across the literature about the core principles of cultural burning, which include: that cultural burning is led by Country who is boss and Elder; that cultural burning centres the health and needs of Country; that cultural burning is unlike Western fire management, which prioritises human needs (Barber 2020, Costello 2020, Freeman 2020, Steffensen 2020); and that cultural burning must be led by the right people – specifically Traditional Owners with authority for that Country. I explore these concepts below.

Fletcher’s research on deep time fire history identifies cultural burning as the type of fire that increases biodiversity (Fletcher & Johnston 2020). This view is tested and supported by others in various parts of the continent, where evidence demonstrates that low intensity burning – such as cultural burning – has lower impacts on native species (Bliege Bird et al. 2008, Bowd et al. 2025, Law et al. 2022, Steffensen 2020). Dean Freeman (2020, p. 240) identifies that ‘burning needs to match with the natural triggers that have allowed Aboriginal people to manage this country with fire, for at least 40,000 years’. Aboriginal women in NSW participate in cultural burning, where the objectives include burning for species health; however, gender is not a focus in these activities. Lesley Patterson with the Banbai Rangers, worked with cultural burning facilitator, co-founder of Firesticks Alliance and Bundjalung man, Oliver Costello, and ecologists to study the effects of cultural burning on the health of the Backwater grevillea (*Grevillea scortechinii subsp. Sarmentosa*) and the Short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) (McKemey et al. 2019, 2021c). Their research found positive results for both species and a range of additional social and cultural benefits; gender was not a primary feature of these burns (McKemey et al. 2019, 2021c). There are also examples of cultural burning for species health in which burning by Aboriginal women differs from men’s burning (see Section 5.2). In other parts of the continent Aboriginal women rangers teams burn for the health of species, including the KJ Women Rangers in Western Australia who burn in mosaics to enhance habitat of the Mankarr / greater bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*) (O’Leary & Walter 2018). Additionally, the Girringun Aboriginal women Rangers in far north Queensland use cool burning techniques to support and enhance the habitat of the endangered Mahogany glider (*Petaurus gracilis*) (Kim and Stephen 2020). Additional examples without a focus on gender are provided in Appendix 12.10. Aboriginal women from other jurisdictions confirm that cultural burning is undertaken to support the health of Country, and fire is not applied indiscriminately (Garde 2009). As an example of adhering to the principle of burning at specific times and in specific ways for the health of Country, the late Ngandi woman Mrs Cherry Wulumirr Daniels OAM remembers being young and wanting to burn Country in the Northern Territory, but her Elders stopped her:

If I picked up a fire stick to try and go and burn how I wanted to do it, they used to tell me, “Don’t do that my girl you can’t burn now, it’s not the right time” (Daniels et al. 2012, p. 176).

Cultural burning supports the health of Country holistically. A cultural burn I participated in on Murramarang Country at Narrawallee on the NSW south coast was part of a study on the impacts of different types of burns on soil health (Murramarang Country et al. 2024). This cultural burn features in the film *Burning for Resilience* (Mane Collective 2021) in which I promote women's participation. The study compared cultural burning with agency-led Western fire management burns, finding several positive additional outcomes from cultural burning (Murramarang Country et al. 2024). These studies support the idea that cultural burning creates positive outcomes for Country and species. More research is needed to establish wider applicability (Robinson et al. 2016). In other countries cultural burning supports healthy ecosystems and resources important to Indigenous people (Martinez et al. 2023a, Tom, Adams & Goode 2023), including women for basketry work (Marks-Block et al. 2021, Shebitz 2005).

The importance of involving the right people in cultural burning is well established. Cultural burning must be led by Aboriginal people. Cultural burning needs strong leadership from Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people with cultural burning authority. These are people who adhere to cultural protocols, have the ability to listen to and read Country, interpret its indicators, and protect Aboriginal culture (Barber 2020, Costello 2020, Darug Ngurra et al. 2019, Freeman 2020). Engaging the right people encourages cultural burning to be culturally suitable and safe (Costello 2020, Freeman 2020, Robinson et al. 2021b, Steffensen 2020, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, Williamson 2022b, Yibarbuk & Ansell 2020). The BNHCRC report concurs that cultural burning enacts 'unique authority and connections held between specific people and places...cultural burning involves matters of respect, obligation and responsibility with ancestral' Country (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 4). What is not frequently present in the literature is clarification that in some locations the 'right people' will be Aboriginal women. This may include locations where fire lore is Aboriginal women's business, or in matriarchal-led Aboriginal nations. Thus, not only must Aboriginal women be supported to participate because their burning is distinct (see Section 5.2), they must also be engaged because in some locations cultural protocols determine that they hold the authority. Weir and Freeman (2019, p. 12) highlight the need to address 'meeting the different responsibilities for men's country and women's country; and the role of women in fire management in contemporary and historical times.'

5.3.2 Gender and cultural burning benefits and barriers

In addition to the core principles of cultural burning, there are multiple benefits and barriers experienced by Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women contribute to the literature on the benefits of cultural burning, including access to Country, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and healing. However, there is a gap regarding Aboriginal women's discussion of barriers.

Gaining access to Country is a positive outcome of cultural burning that is well established in the literature by Aboriginal women (Bishop 2022, Bishop & Tynan 2022, McKemey et al. 2019, 2020a, Tynan 2021, Rey 2022, 2023). Access to Country – supported through the Indigenous estate – assisted the Banbai Rangers in reconnecting and re-establishing their cultural burning practices (McKemey et al. 2021a). Lack of accessible Country to undertake cultural burning is particularly apparent for Aboriginal people whose Country is now urbanised, as identified by Dharug woman Joanne Rey, who illustrates the positive outcomes she experiences from accessing and caring for Dharug Country in Sydney (Ngurra 2019, Rey 2022, 2023).

The literature makes a strong argument for women's participation in cultural burning, which is bound to involvement of children, youth, intergenerational participation and knowledge transfer. Williamson (2022a, p. 3) finds 'cultural burning by Aboriginal women frequently involves taking children and babies onto Country to be present and participate'; including children naturally increases both women's and children's participation. Focussing on southern Australia, the BNHCRC report makes this connection explicit: 'Aboriginal women must be supported in their cultural burning roles as they consider appropriate, including with their children, families and Elders' (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 30). Similarly, there is strong support for women and children for intergenerational knowledge transfer in other locations (VTOCFKG 2018). Aboriginal women confirm that positive intergenerational outcomes occur. Through cultural burning, youth learn from and about Country, they learn about working with fire, as well as environmental and heritage conservation such as Aboriginal site protection (McKemey and Patterson 2019, McKemey et al. 2019). These are important lessons, particularly for Aboriginal youth who will inherit these roles and responsibilities, and Aboriginal children are not learning about these topics through formal schooling (Bishop 2022). There is an urgency for intergenerational knowledge transfer to occur before Elders pass away (McKemey and Patterson 2019, McKemey et al. 2019). These experiences can support youth in their identities and can support resilience, health and wellbeing (Murrup-Stewart et al. 2021).

Healing of individuals, communities, relationships and Country is an outcome of cultural burning. The relationality between Aboriginal people and Country means that healing of Country with the care of cultural burning also makes positive impacts on peoples (Tynan 2021). Lauren Tynan identifies that relationality is nurtured and strengthened through cultural burning, accessing Country, and practicing culture:

Cultural burning is about connection between myself as a human, the fire on the ground and all entities present in this practice. As a relational practice, cultural burning enables peoples (or birds, lightning and other entities) to bring their relationship with fire together so that the two (or multiple) entities are more unified as one (Tynan 2021, p. 602).

Bishop and Tynan advocate for cultural burning as an appropriate way to care for Country following the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, saying we 'need to burn this Country again, but

with the right fire, a cultural burn. This will keep Country, Wallaby and humans healthy. We all rely on one another' (Bishop & Tynan 2022, p. 596). The concept of healing is a prominent theme in the BNHCRC report where it is repeated through the contributor's stories, as well as in the report's cultural burning principles. Principle Six reads: 'Cultural burning is healing for Aboriginal people because while Country is healing, they themselves are healing from being denied their cultural responsibilities and relationships with the land' (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 30). Principle Ten identifies that healing is applicable to wider society: 'This is work that we have to do together, sharing our knowledge to heal Country and working towards more appropriate fire regimes and therefore a safer and healthier environment' (published in Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 30).

The healing aspect of cultural burning is well discussed in the literature. Aboriginal women know the value of fostering this connection in all people, as described by Noognar, Minung/Gnudju kayang Carol Pettersen: 'Everyone has got to see their spiritual connection to the land' to help care for it (Pettersen 2021, p. 9). Cultural burning events that involve whole communities and wider society will support these connections, and human societies will become more invested and proactively engaged in the ecological health of the planet.

The barriers and challenges of cultural burning are common themes in the broader cultural burning literature which discusses appropriation, inadequate resourcing and coordination, differing worldviews, legal and policy barriers, bigotry and racism (Baynes-Rock 2025, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Williamson 2021a). To date, the literature considers barriers that impact all community members, regardless of gender. Some of this work highlights issues specific to women. But beyond my own publications, there is no scholarly literature that specifically explores barriers encountered by Aboriginal women.

5.4 INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND CULTURAL FIRE

The literature illustrates that Indigenous people across most continents are undertaking cultural burning or similar practices. Huffman (2013) completed a literature review on global Indigenous fire practices, and found evidence across six continents, including 27 countries, with activity concentrated in Canada and the US. Huffman (2013) noted strong correlations between the burning practices of Indigenous people across societies and noted discussion of gender and cultural burning in just two of the 35 articles in their study (5.7%). A similar study undertaken today would likely yield higher percentages with increased female participation, visibility and leadership. Gender was also present in

12 other articles – all which discussed fire but not always cultural burning. These articles were from five of the six continents (no gender content was noted in Asia).

Of these 12 articles, two were particularly relevant to this research – Karuk Yurok man Frank Lake's 2007 PhD thesis focussed in California, and Murray Garde's (2009) publication which details Indigenous women in Arnhem Land, Australia. The other ten papers discussing gender in Huffman (2013) were less relevant to this research. For example, research on Indigenous fire use in southern Mozambique specifically noted that women were not involved in burning (Schaffer 2010); and Mistry and others (2005) found that Indigenous women in Brazil use fire as a tool to keep landscape around their villages safe and clear, and that they burn the land as they travelled, harvesting fruit and honey.

The practicalities of cultural burning in other nations have strong similarities with NSW, including the benefits and barriers experienced by Indigenous people (Christianson 2015, Hoffman et al. 2022, Jolly et al. 2025). These include: Indigenous women's voices and concerns not being well established in the literature; underrepresentation of Indigenous women; presence of Indigenous women's voices in the grey literature; and that several Indigenous female authors are also cultural fire practitioners, thus, their rich insights are grounded in lived experiences. Furthermore, cultural burning is experiencing a revival in several countries, and the cultural burning literature is developing concurrently (Lake 2013). There have also been cultural exchange experiences between Australia and the USA with Indigenous women visiting and participating in cultural burning in both locations (Sexton-McGrath 2022). As in Australia, Indigenous women's voices and issues in literature from Canada and the USA is sparse, and there are a small number of Indigenous female authors.

Métis woman Amy Cardinal Christianson (2015) deliberates on the potential reasons for the lack of literature on cultural burning, which she considers may be attributed to a wide range of issues such as cultural barriers, ethical complexities, incommensurate worldviews, or time and resource constraints. The lack of literature on and by Indigenous women is also noted by Eriksen and Hankins with their research on the influence of gender in Indigenous communities in California and Australia (2015, 2018). Eriksen and Hankins (2015, 2018) acknowledge that Indigenous women's voices are often unheard or marginalised and that culture and gender influence fire practices where Indigenous women participate in fire in ways that are different to others. They discuss that Indigenous burning practices are dynamic, and have evolved to adapt to colonial impacts on Country and Indigenous societies, which blurs gender delineation. Like publications in NSW, the international literature primarily take a whole-of-Indigenous-community perspective, rather than focussing specifically Indigenous women.

Key Indigenous female scholars and fire practitioners are Métis woman Dr Amy Cardinal Christianson (mostly Canada and British Columbia focussed research), N'dee San Carlos Apache woman Dr Melinda M Adams (California based research), Tutunaku and Mexican woman and PhD candidate Deniss Martinez (2020), also focussed on California. These Indigenous women (and their doctorates) raise awareness for the consideration of Indigenous women in cultural burning in their

countries and abroad. Their publications are reflective of their cultural burning lived experiences, and there is strong Indigenous female representation in their work, including mentoring. Martinez and others (2024) discuss the benefits of Indigenous approaches, women's contributions and collaboration regarding fire in California. They argue for the importance of centring and supporting Indigenous women, because Indigenous 'women's leadership to rematriate ancestors and homelands', is needed to return communities and lands to good health (Martinez et al. 2024, p. 403).

This view is shared by others (Amezcuca & Almendariz 2023, Greenlar et al. 2024, Tom, Adams & Goode 2023, UC Davis 2023). Adams (2023) identifies that Indigenous women in California support other Indigenous women in developing their cultural burning skills through gender-specific fire training and other cultural activities, because building the capacity of Indigenous women is crucial to women's engagement (Adams 2023, Fisk et al. 2024). Adams co-authors with Fisk and others (2024) to highlight several examples of Indigenous women's leadership in cultural fire in California. They also advocate for wide and significant reforms to governance to ensure Indigenous people and systems are appropriately engaged through fire, and argue that forcing Indigenous knowledge and practice into the Western models will not work and is inappropriate (Fisk et al. 2024).

As in NSW, Indigenous women who are not academics in other countries also make important contributions to scholarly publications as co-authors including: Maidu-Wintun woman Diana Almendariz (Adlam et al. 2022); Karuk woman Analisa Tripp (Greenlar et al. 2024, Martinez et al. 2023b); Karuk, Yurok, Paiute woman Vikki Preston (Murveit et al. 2023); and Karuk woman Kathy McCovey (Greenlar et al. 2024). Many of these women's contributions also include visual media. In the short film *Cultures of Care*, Analisa Tripp, and Vikki Preston discuss their cultural burning experiences, including learning from Elders, connection to land, and the importance of youth engagement (Tripp & Preston 2021). In another film, *'Good fire' burn Yolo County landscape under the direction of Maidu-Wintun teacher*, fire keeper Diana Almendariz discusses her cultural burning activities in Yolo County, California highlighting that Indigenous women are pivotal to carrying cultural knowledge and bringing balance to cultural burning. Almendariz identifies that women hold multiple cultural responsibilities of care, which extend across many species, and multiple generations. Almendariz encourages knowledge to be shared with younger generations so it is retained and health and wellbeing is promoted (Amezcuca & Almendariz 2023).

Kathy McCovey describes how Indigenous women's fire practice is supporting healthy resources of medicinal plants and 'grasslands for basketry material' (Greenlar et al. 2024, p. 13). Basketry resources is a common theme in Californian cultural burning and is closely associated with Indigenous women (Fisk et al. 2024, Lake 2007, Marks-Block et al. 2021). Marks-Block and others (2021) describe how specific women hold the knowledge about resources for basketry, and those Indigenous women engage with fire managers to burn for the health of those resources. Lake (2007) noted that Karuk women were involved in burning to nurture basketry resources, and that Indigenous men would burn to assist with the women's needs. Lake (2007) also notes that as far back as the 1950s,

Karuk women were unhappy that government interventions had deteriorated cultural burning practices which affected their resources. Similarly, Christianson and others (2022) found that Dene Indigenous women in Alberta, Canada led the burning for the care of berry resources in the Meander River area.

Although not focussed on specifically on cultural burning, Anishnaabe, Cree, Métis and Norwegian woman, Melissa Nelson's (2019) essay about Indigenous women's resistance and resurgence in land justice has strong correlations with my research. Nelson uses fire's destructive and creative capabilities as metaphors for Indigenous women's contributions to land justice and socio-political transformations. Nelson writes about the power of Indigenous stories, the multiple responsibilities Indigenous women carry, and Indigenous women's rights to care for their lands and communities. She also talks about Indigenous trauma and burnout and how culture and Country are antidotes to these colonial loads. Similarly, Tom, Adams and Goode (2023) discuss that cultural burning facilitates healing for them and their communities.

Research that discusses Indigenous women and fire practice in other countries where the authors could not be identified as being Indigenous, include Shebitz (2005) who studied the Haudenosaunee Nation burning to maintain sweetgrass in New York State, and the Quinault and Skokomish Nations' burning to maintain beargrass in Washington State. Indigenous women's priorities and intergenerational knowledge transfer was a prominent theme in both case studies (Shebitz 2005).

5.5 CONCLUSION

The story that led this chapter shows that Aboriginal women have a long history of fire practice in NSW. It also shows that colonisation has changed and disrupted connections to Country, and impacts are evident in the fires we now experience. Prior to the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, Aboriginal women's voices were largely absent in the literature in Australia, and so their concerns and experiences were not well heard. This literature review demonstrates that, like the practice, cultural burning literature is a developing field, and Aboriginal women's voices are emerging; however, they are more frequently found in non-scholarly texts and creative practice. There is strong support for Aboriginal women's participation and Aboriginal women are keen to participate to fulfil various roles and responsibilities that impact themselves, their communities, wider society and Country. There is clear evidence that Aboriginal women in NSW and other places are doing important work and embedding their places across the sector. There are strong similarities between Aboriginal women's experiences and engagement in NSW and in other places, including internationally. These similarities include how and why Indigenous women are participating in the field, and how they are contributing to the literature.

Beyond gender, there is strong agreement on what cultural burning is and how it should be undertaken, and agreement that Aboriginal people are the authority on cultural burning. Many

Aboriginal authors on cultural burning in NSW are also practitioners, facilitators and supporters, meaning their contributions include rich insights from lived experience. Cultural burning supports a wide range of outcomes and benefits, yet there are also significant barriers to cultural burning.

The thesis now shifts to four thematic chapters which explore the data from the interviews and focus groups with Aboriginal women and draws in the non-scholarly contributions of Aboriginal women. The thematic chapters build on the literature by centring the voices and perspectives of the women. All my empirical research experiences along with my own knowledge and experience, inform my analysis. In the first thematic chapter, Aboriginal women discuss cultural burning. In the women's narratives, two descriptors of cultural burning emerged that are not well covered in the broader literature: Inclusivity and Accelerants. This chapter is followed by more detailed thematic chapters, each with analytical discussion, that complements and builds on the existing literature.

STORY SIX: COUNTRY HALTS CULTURAL BURN:

LISTENING, LEARNING AND CONNECTING

WITH WONNARUA COUNTRY

Three hours of driving and I am getting close to the location of today's cultural burn. It's on private property on Wonnarua Country, my patrilineal home. Along the way I passed the geographical features, that to my mind make plausible boundaries, here I introduce myself,

"Jingee Walla, I'm a Bundjalung and Wonnarua doobay, I'm a visitor respectfully passing through Dharawal Country, Darug Country, Darkinjung Country" ... and so on.

This is the type of introduction and acknowledgement I do aloud on car trips with my kids, so that they learn whose Country we are on, the cultural protocols, and how we relate to Country. It's my responsibility as their mum, to ensure that they know who they are, and where they come from. Today there is no one else in the car. Still I do the acknowledgements regardless. It's important that I maintain these customs, and I'm not actually alone, because I'm talking with Country and ancestors.

Arriving, I park inside the gate. Wren warmly greets me and guides me back to join the group of people in the bush - women, men, children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, preparing the site where the cultural burn will take place. Unlike other cultural burning workshops that are open to members of the public, this event involves just a small group of cultural fire practitioners, associates and the property owners. I was invited to attend by some of the Aboriginal women who are involved in my research. As part of the research methodology, the women and I have decided that we will walk together with the fire of an actual cultural burn, as we do, we will talk through how we will collaborate in this research. An embodied process of participant action research, with Aboriginal women, guided by Country and fire.

I join the others using garden rakes and rake-hoes, to pull back the dry organic debris from the base of the larger grandparent trees. This preparation is to prevent the flames from climbing these trunks, thus reducing the likelihood of fire reaching the canopy. The raking raises dust that smells of dry grass. Beyond being organic detritus, this is the dust of my Country, and my ancestors are present in every natural thing here (Freeman 2017). While I rake, I am encircled by dust that holds the DNA of every Wonnarua ancestor who came before me (Freeman 2017). In breathing, I am taking this in, we all are.

The clang of the metal tools that occasionally clip the sandstone rocks hidden in the grass, cuts across the murmur of people talking. There's also birds chirping and the wind through the trees. I feel good, and the birdsong seems happy. I lean in, listening to Country.

Gathered in the warm morning sun, the group assess the standing dead timber. We want to establish if these trees did happen to fall, would they land within, or outside the planned burn area – the latter, allowing for the fire to spread. This outcome is not desirable, as we look around at the surrounding beige parched paddocks, which are stark and tinder-box dry after years of drought. We clear around the base of those dead trees too, they are home to somebody.

All these senses and stimulants remind me of my years employed as field officer in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, where firefighting and tree-felling were part of my job. Mindlessly, I run my fingers over the palm of my left hand, picking at the calluses at the base of my fingers – another souvenir from those field officer years.

Closer to lunchtime, one of the women I was there to see, comes and apologises to me. The cultural burn would not go ahead as planned, because the person leading the burn had been watching the wind that had continued to increase over the course of the morning. They felt it wasn't right to proceed. We were both a bit disappointed that our 'walking and talking with fire' plan hadn't occurred. Instead of burning, as a group we go for a bushwalk towards the escarpment at the back of the property. I'm aware that we are only several kilometres from the Bhiemie Cave, a sacred Wonnarua rock-art site along the same escarpment. I scan for signs of Aboriginal heritage as we walk and I pay attention to the feelings in my body. Fondly, I think of my Old People living, walking and belonging here with Wonnarua Country since the beginning of time. Some trees with blazes on their trunks intrigue me. I put my callused hand to where the bark is missing, and I wonder if these are Aboriginal scar trees created by my ancestors.

I'm (re)connecting with Country.

Even though this is my Country, I have never walked this place before, because it is private property. This cultural burn, has allowed me to access places, I would not have accessed in ordinary circumstances. This cultural burn gave me access inside the gate. All over this continent, fences and gates demarcate private property and exclusion. They all cut across Aboriginal land.

Walking through the prepared burn site, a few of the men use a tomahawk to cut a coolamon (bark bowl) out of a Kurrajong tree (Fig. 33). The wind blows stronger. I imagine Country speaking, "there's no burning today"



Figure 33: Coolamon being taken from a Kurrajong tree. While we wait for Country to indicate that the cultural burn can proceed on Wonnarua Country. Credit Withheld.

After lunch, I sit in the shade, with the women involved in my research and we talk. I strip weaving fibres from the inner bark of the coolamon that the men had cut earlier, which had been gifted to me. The women weave using those fibres and some materials that they had brought with them. While we sit and do these cultural practices with our hands, we talk through the protocols and processes of my research. We are able to talk freely, identifying our approach and desired outcomes. We talk about what my responsibilities are, and they talk about their responsibilities too (Fig. 34).



Figure 34: Consent forms and weaving fibres – codesigning research with Aboriginal women. On Wonnarua Country I sit talking with the women about my research, and how they would like to participate. In front of me is some paperwork where I am noting the women’s preferences about their involvement, as well as the stripped weaving fibres from the inner bark of the Kurrajong tree coolamon that the men had cut earlier. Credit Withheld.

Looking out across the dry paddocks, I see rows of flat-topped hills. This is a landscape, man-made from the tailings of the gigantic nearby coal mines. These bleak hills and parched Country, cause a pang of hurt to my spirit, and I think to myself,
 “Stupid hills, after rippin’ the guts outta my Country!”

Sitting with those feelings, I grow more conscious of my responsibilities. My research needs to nurture and centre Country, and behave in respectful ways to create meaningful outcomes. I am mindful, so that my research won’t be extractive like the coal mines and the useless barren hills they

leave behind. Through the time we spent stripping bark and weaving, we decide to proceed to the next stage of research, and we set dates for interviews the following month. I spend the rest of the afternoon with the women, later I drive home.

“Ping!”

That evening I got a message on my phone from one of the women. Attached was a photo of her and the soft glow of a fire behind her in the night. Her message read: “the wind subsided at dusk, allowing us to go ahead with the burn, after all”.

I could have been upset that I had missed out on the fire, and that we didn’t get to walk and talk with fire like we wanted. But I see, and appreciate the many lessons that this day has given me, even without the flames. I learnt about cultural burning providing access inside the gate; being with Blackfullas and other people who want to love and care for Country the right way. There were lessons about being attentive, fake hills and extractive, useless research. But most of all, I loved walking Wonnarua Country, my patrilineal home, listening and reconnecting with callused hands on scarred trees, being attentive and learning what I needed to learn from Country.

I discussed this days later with my Mum. Like me, Mum is not a cultural burning practitioner, but she is a matriarch in her late-seventies, an Elder grounded in her culture, and strong community person. Mum explained that it was appropriate that I went back to my Dad’s Country and she told me it was “fitting that there were no flames. Country wants to see what you’re doing first, and see how you conduct yourself.” She’s right, and she continues, “You might do all this work and never see a fire, and that’s fine, you know, Country will decide [when it’s right].” Mum’s rationale identifies the importance of slowing down, reconnecting, paying attention to Country. Mum also highlights that the whole experience is valid and relevant, there are many layers to cultural burning and it all matters, not just what happens when the fire starts. Mum’s guidance reminds me to be confident in my research, the flames will come when the time is right.

CHAPTER 6 THE POWER IS IN COUNTRY:

DESCRIBING CULTURAL BURNING

6.1 ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S DESCRIPTIONS OF CULTURAL BURNING

The Aboriginal women who were interviewed for this research were asked to describe cultural burning (see Appendix 12.5). This chapter presents the Aboriginal women's descriptions across six categories, one: the agency and leadership of Country; two: the importance of culture and protocols; three: responding to Country and its indicators; four: healing; five: inclusivity; and six: accelerants. The first four categories are present in the literature for NSW, the final two categories are not prominent in that literature, thus they are examined in greater detail. The use of accelerants is not a defining characteristic of cultural burning however, the Aboriginal women present some interesting factors, and this section of the thesis is best placed to explore them. Because it involves fire, the Aboriginal women often describe cultural burning in reference to Western fire management. Their descriptions complement and build on the literature. It also confirms what I observed through my participation in the sector and reinforces my ongoing support for Aboriginal women (Fig. 35).

The voices of Aboriginal women are centred throughout the thematic chapters. The quotes from the Aboriginal women that I interviewed are italicised. Their contributions confirm and complement Aboriginal women's voices in the literature, which is provided across a variety of publications, including non-scholarly texts, where there are significant contributions from and about Aboriginal women. These contributions are provided to demonstrate that the issues raised by the Aboriginal women who were interviewed are valid and widely applicable. Input from Indigenous men and others are included where they add important contributions. The themes in the thematic chapters build on the developing literature and support the important work that is occurring in Aboriginal communities through the revival of cultural burning in NSW. Aboriginal women know they are underrepresented in both the field and the literature. For this reason, it is important that Aboriginal women's voices are privileged and leading work relating to Aboriginal women as the sector develops.

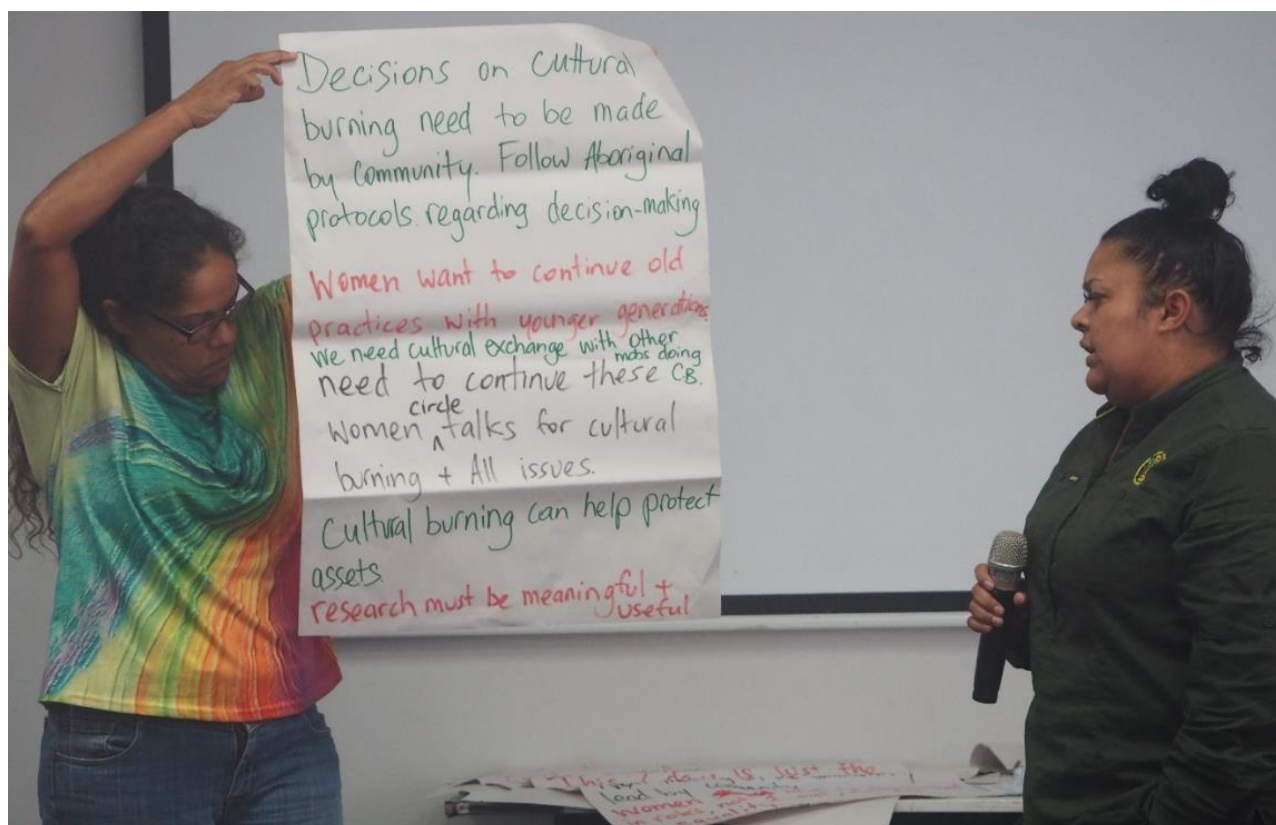


Figure 35: Vanessa supporting Mel Williams from Wreck Bay to share Aboriginal women's concerns and aspirations regarding fire and cultural burning. In March 2021, I was invited to attend and present at a meeting about cultural burning with Booderee National Park and Wreck Bay Community. At that meeting, I presented my research and facilitated a women's circle discussion. In the photo I am supporting a local Aboriginal woman, Mel Williams, who was reporting back from the women's circle. I interpret this photo as a metaphor for my research – where I am supporting and advocating alongside Aboriginal women, where local people are being heard. Credit: Brad Moggridge.

6.2 THE AGENCY AND LEADERSHIP OF COUNTRY

Country is pivotal to cultural burning and the agency and leadership of Country, is a consistent and prominent theme, in my stories, the literature, and in the commentary from Indigenous people across the continent (Steffensen 2020). As a category, the agency and leadership of Country is directly linked to other categories in this chapter. Listening to and taking guidance from Country is evident in the women's narratives. Their descriptions complement what is found in the literature and in other jurisdictions. The women identify that Country leads cultural burning in several ways and that it guides when, how and why to burn. They describe that cultural burning requires the right people who have the right relationship with Country. They identify that Country leads by providing indicators to inform humans of what its needs are regarding burning. The Aboriginal women describe that the Country-led approach of cultural burning heals Country by burning the right way, and this healing extends to people and kin. Furthermore, the women see the leadership of Country in bringing people together for the

purpose of caring for, and (re)connecting to Country via cultural burning. The women describe that this interaction and relationship building (with Country and between people) is needed to address the mismanagement of Country, as well as an array of social disadvantages, and to respond to the climate crisis. The women also describe that the leadership of Country sets cultural burning apart from Western fire management. Not only is the leadership of Country a strong theme underpinning cultural burning, it also is fundamental to this research (as detailed in Section 1.2).

The need to involve Aboriginal women in cultural burning, because women are the human female embodiment of Country, is not well discussed in the literature, or evident in discussions from Aboriginal women and others. Beyond Russ-Smith (2021, p. 26) who makes the connection that ‘Indigenous women’s bodies...are an extension of Country’, the links between the gender of Country as a feminine entity and Aboriginal women are not always made obvious. However, many people speak about Country as Mother and Mother Earth, and identify that the Earth is the ultimate provider and nurturer. The international Indigenous women in the biodiversity sector as in the Indigenous Women’s Biodiversity Network illustrated the link between Manukan Declaration (2004) ‘We are daughters of Mother Earth and to her we are obliged. Our ceremonies recognize her and we return to her the placentas of our children. She also safeguards the remains of our ancestors.’ However, in the women’s narratives the connection about Aboriginal women’s inherent roles, responsibilities or power in reference to the female relationality between Country and Aboriginal women did not emerge beyond needing to caring for women’s sites in the landscape.

Being led by Country means that cultural burning operates on schedules that do not necessarily align with Western frameworks or calendars. Rather, it requires flexibility regarding participation with minimal time constraints. The women show that they understand that cultural burning will happen at the right time, and if the circumstances are not right, delays occur. The flexibility with time accommodates opportunities for other important cultural activities to occur (see Section 8.3). Steph describes the importance of Country leading, being present and attentive, and being flexible regarding time,

You could just be there and listen to Country in a different way, and the conditions weren’t right to burn on that day and we wouldn’t have forced it even if there was a workshop or an education element attached, but to be able to just feel really comfortable in saying, “We’re not going to burn until Country tells us it’s right” and spend the rest of the day talking with people and building relationships and you were there – it was a beautiful day of just sharing and walking and connecting. And then at 9:00 o’clock that night after dinner, the wind just went down, and we got to put fire in the ground and the conditions were perfect and it was a beautiful burn. Steph.

Ashlee shows that she is aware of the leadership from Country as she looks for the guidance from species and spiritual entities,

next time I find myself lining up to be part of burning, I'm going to be looking for these other things, I'm going to be thinking about, "...Should we be burning today? What's the sky telling us? We need the presence of not only the emu, but Bhiamie, all of that stuff" Ashlee.

The agency of Country also occurs in cultural burning, where the fires are allowed to move independently, often leaving unburnt areas. This contrasts to Western fire management fires, where humans position themselves as having authority over the fires and often instruct the fires to burn in particular ways. In Western fire management the fires are forced by human intervention and accelerants that are used to burn landscapes more comprehensively, more quickly and more intensively, as well as burning landscapes that are not themselves ready to be burnt. Tracey describes,

I'd also think that when cultural burning is done, Country is given the natural chance to burn at the pace that it wants and where it goes, so the power is in Country, not in the drip torch and not your crew leader... it can travel where it wants, stop where it wants, and go as fast or slow as it needs. Tracey

In many scholarly and non-scholarly publications, Aboriginal women describe that Country informs where and how cultural burning is needed, and that cultural burning is undertaken to support the health of Country with the knowledge that particular species require specific fire as part of their lifecycle – here Country leads by stipulating when and how to burn (Johnston & Cavanagh 2020, McBride & Dundler 2024, McKemey et al. 2019, 2021c, Parsley 2023, Tynan 2021, Wegener 2024). Aboriginal women also discuss that in addition to species health, cultural burning is the right type of fire that helps keep all of Country healthy. The women describe that currently, Country is not healthy and that disasters such as the 2019-2020 Black Summer are indicative that Country has been mismanaged. Steph, who has years of cultural burning experience, describes the characteristics of cultural burning where nurturing and healthy processes are instilled,

It trickles like water and you light it in a way that allows the animals and the insects to be able to escape so that 360 degree... so it's not this wall of fire, this tsunami of fire that then obliterates everything. It's slow and it's cool and it just takes what it needs, it has its own agency and it's amazing to watch the floor come alive with the movement of insects that have time and space to be able to move away from that flame, climb up a tree, and then straight back down on a cool ash bed. It's beautiful to watch ... It's a cool burn that then clears through the undergrowth and it will never reach the canopy ... Well, like I was saying earlier, when you

look around now and you see how sick Country is and how most people take it for granted that that's what the Australian bush should look like – this untamed, impenetrable, dense bushland and we know that that's not the case and we know that Country was clean for a whole variety of reasons and to take care of all of the species there, fire was used. Steph

Here Steph identifies that Country tells us when to burn. She also links the lack of cultural burning and the lack of Aboriginal people caring for Country as creating unhealthy landscapes because they are not actively maintained. Rachael Cavanagh describes that the current fire regimes are inappropriate, and that catastrophic bushfires are signals that Country is in distress (Cavanagh R 2020c). Aboriginal women see the mismanagement of Country as a major flaw stemming from colonisation with ongoing negative impacts to Aboriginal people, culture and Country (Tynan 2021). Russ-Smith declares the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires as acts of war against Country, which is inherently a war on Aboriginal knowledges about how to care for Country in healthy ways:

These fires are a war on Country and an act of colonial violence based upon colonial relationships to land ... Australian politics and society have long ignored Indigenous knowledges and relationships to land. This active ignorance and exercise of white colonial power have led to more intense violations of Country, including catastrophic fires (Russ-Smith 2021, p. 15-16).

Damaging bushfires have wide ranging impacts both in the immediate vicinity of the fire and through interlinked ecosystems. These impacts affect Aboriginal people through diminished resources such as the foods and resources that are harvested from Country. Djirringanj woman Cathy Thomas (in Robinson et al. 2021b, p. 16) identifies: 'our food source is almost scarce from fires upstream, our beaches covered in debris from fires and affecting our fish and other species in the waters' (Fig. 36). Swan describes the hurt and trauma experienced from the mismanagement of Country and the ensuing disasters:

We have lost a lot of animals, as we have since colonization. But it'll be a very slow repair. We knew this was coming. We've been fearful of these times of wildfires coming because we're watching our environment slowly dry out...It's serious, and the government needs to do something now. This planet will not last. If we don't do something now this planet will not last our grandchildren' (in Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020).

Indigenous women in other settler colonial countries make the same arguments that lands are not properly cared for, resulting in bad bushfires (Tom, Adams & Goode 2023).



Figure 36: Ash deposits on Tathra Beach. I visited Tathra Beach in October 2020, almost a year after the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires and there were large swathes of bushfire singed leaves littering the beach demonstrating the physical impact of bushfires even at distances from the fires themselves. Credit: V. Cavanagh

6.3 CULTURE AND CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

The second category of the Aboriginal women's descriptions of cultural burning is that Aboriginal culture and cultural protocols are significant, active and important. The Aboriginal women identify that there is more to cultural burning than just the flames – it is a comprehensive and collective process that activates and facilitates a range of other cultural practices (see Chapter Eight). This means that Aboriginal culture influences the entire process and that culture and ceremony are core components of cultural burning,

the fundamental – and I think most importantly, is the cultural aspect of it and the ceremony that goes around it – that I think people need to understand. Lucinda.

Aboriginal women also identify that as a cultural practice that impacts on Country, it is important that cultural burning engages the right Aboriginal people. They identify the role of Traditional Owners who have the authority and custodianship, and those who are the right people to speak for Country. Wren describes that engaging the right people will mean that other aspects of the burn will be positive,

when you do things the right way, things work out well. And that's because things are negotiated between who holds knowledge about a certain place, and who's the right person to lead that, and is Country responding right now? Wren.

As identified in the literature review chapter, what is not prominent in the literature, or in the Aboriginal women's descriptions of cultural burning regarding 'the right people', is the recognition that in some locations, the right people will be Aboriginal women. Through this research I make the connection that in some locations, a defining feature of cultural burning and its adherence to local Aboriginal protocols, will position Aboriginal women as the right people. Although the Aboriginal women's descriptions did not make this explicit, it is evident in their discussions on why Aboriginal women must be included and explored (detailed in Section 7.3). The importance of culture and the need to engage the right people are further distinctions to Western fire management. In Western fire management and environmental conservation, the authority to lead and make decisions about Country, is not linked to custodianship based on Aboriginal birthright. Rather, through Western approaches any person can, and has the right to gain the knowledge and qualifications to hold leadership roles and make decisions about Country.

Because of this inconsistency, Western fire management can negatively impact on Aboriginal cultural protocols, because they can facilitate the wrong person to speak for Country. Furthermore, the training provided through the Western processes, centres Western science, where Aboriginal knowledge and culture are not necessarily considered. Unless the leader of those Western approaches holds competency in Aboriginal culture, all of their decisions and processes are set within Western systems and knowledges. These Western processes position humans as the authority, not Country. The Aboriginal women were clear about who from the Aboriginal community must lead cultural burning, emphasising the importance of engaging the right people. They also describe how others can participate,

we need all the people that we can who are passionate about this and who are doing this respectfully in the right way, and with the right people ... so it has to be Aboriginal-led, and it has to be Aboriginal people who aren't just responding to the latest policy update, but who have genuine decision-making power in this space. Steph.

I think it's something that's got to be led by Aboriginal people and that is every generation, you know, right across the board – the right way of doing it ... It is something that the whole of society should be involved with, but led by Aboriginal people. Lucinda.

Having the right people lead cultural burning ensures cultural protocols are respected by all participants, fostering cultural and spiritual safety, which is just as important as physical safety. The women's narratives reveal that when these processes are not followed, discomfort and insecurities occur. This is visible in these brief comments from Ashlee and Haley where the right people were not clearly identified at a burn they attended,

Hang on a sec. Who's the TOs⁴⁷ here? How come you're doing this? Ashlee.

I certainly wouldn't go burning on somebody else's [Country] unless I was specifically invited and the blessing from community was given for that to happen. Haley.

Ideally, the right people also provide participants with information about any gendered and culturally sensitive places, or local customs that are likely to be encountered. Maddie describes that participants need and want to know they are culturally safe,

that comes back to part of that cultural safety stuff ... and just knowing where those areas are so you don't go blundering in there and you know, because you want everyone to be safe on a fireground, from fire and trees, as well as spiritually... Maddie

The concept of engaging the right people is evident in the literature where Aboriginal women explicitly acknowledge that the 'right people' must lead cultural burning. Vikki Parsley (2023) confirms that Aboriginal lore, cultural protocols and Aboriginal knowledge of Country inform how cultural burning is undertaken, and that this will encourage that the fires are better for Country. Aboriginal women want Aboriginal people to be reinstated as the rightful custodians of their Country, and they want their participation to be culturally safe and appropriate.

In describing the participants in cultural burning, Aboriginal women also articulate the role of government. Rachael Cavanagh has engaged with cultural burning through community activities, Aboriginal organisations, and in government. Cavanagh's position is echoed by other Aboriginal women, as she states: 'working with the local First Nations community is essential. It is the local Mob who know their Country and their connection to fire and knowledge of the local forest' (Cavanagh R

⁴⁷ TOs is the acronym for Traditional Owner. The meaning of Traditional Owner varies. To refer to someone as a Traditional Owner of a place, generally means that they are an Aboriginal person with ancestral connections to that specific Country.

2020a). Cavanagh describes that as an Aboriginal cultural practice, it is paramount that Aboriginal communities lead cultural burning at all levels, practically and strategically. Cavanagh is adamant cultural burning is not for government to own or lead, rather government must only hold a support role – not a decision-making role. Aboriginal community leadership makes the process more robust and sustainable and encourages that Aboriginal community priorities are centred, thus diminishing the potential for government to be paternalistic in assuming the priorities (Johnston & Cavanagh 2020). However, there is awareness that shifting the power and authority away from government is a foreign concept for government and extremely challenging (Johnston & Cavanagh 2020, Rey 2022).

6.4 INDICATORS

The third category of Aboriginal women's descriptions is about the indicators from Country that inform cultural burning. Aboriginal women say cultural burning pays particular attention and responds to Country's needs, which are identifiable through indicators in the landscape. As detailed in Section 2.2 and Section 5.3, the indicators are spiritual and/or environmental, they are influenced by the time of year, local weather features and subsequent responses in nature such as changes in plants and animals. The indicators are read by the right people who know the Country. Being guided by indicators means that cultural burning is not applied to the landscape indiscriminately. It is burning in ways that supports the health of Country at the time that Country indicates.

Aboriginal women's discussions reflect what is found in the literature (Wegener 2024). What is not made explicit in the literature, or in women's descriptions, is that some indicators are specific to Aboriginal women. The connection that I make through my knowledge and this research is that Aboriginal women must be involved in cultural burning for their indicators to be incorporated. For example, environmental indicators aligning with various times of the year impact on plants and animals, some with very specific relevance to Aboriginal women's knowledge and cultural practices. Aboriginal women use species for food, medicines and resources at specific times of year and such knowledge is needed in cultural burning to support the sustainable management and Aboriginal women's use of these resources. Here I argue, that if women are not involved, their needs will not be considered and the resources could be burnt at the wrong time. Similarly, there are places in Country where women hold special knowledge, thus women must be involved to ensure these values are protected and maintained.

Beyond those observations, Aboriginal women articulate that people must be active and present with Country to be able to read and observe the indicators. Jessica Wegener has strong experience in cultural burning, and confirms that Country leads cultural burning, and that it requires Aboriginal people to be in close contact with Country so they can observe its needs (Wegener 2024, Wegener, Marchant & Cox 2021). People also need the ability to read what Country is communicating, along

with the knowledge to respond appropriately, including recognising when the most appropriate response is ‘no burning’, based on what Country is indicating.

The types of environmental indicators that the women spoke about were mainly plants and animals, and spiritual indicators they described as personal feelings. Other features that were mentioned included, wind, seasonal thunderstorms, dew, tidal patterns, stars and constellations. The women state that Aboriginal people have been applying fires with reference to indicators for millennia. The long-standing prevalence of Aboriginal people and their use of fire with Country has co-developed ecosystems that are fire-constructed, and sometimes, fire-dependant. Here, the co-development of Country with fire also forms part of the identity of that specific Country, and thus intuitively, also forms part of the relationality and identity of the Traditional Owners for each Country. Ashlee illustrates these concepts and argues that ecosystems need cultural burning specifically highlighting an interdependence,

[cultural burning's a] dialogue with Country that happens through burning, it's regenerative, and it actually has shaped the land that you see out the window. People have been present on this continent continuously for thousands upon thousands of years so what you see out the window has been touched by this process and it's sophisticated. ... it's a cultural practice and it's part of this land. Ashlee.

Part of the science of cultural burning is that Indigenous knowledges understand Country holistically, and that cultural burning must nurture the health of Country where the webs of relationships link humans, biota, fire and Country in cooperative and reciprocal ways.

[cultural burning is] a willingness to undertake a burn that will benefit the natural environment, so the flora and fauna, the species that are there, without having the need for huge fire. [its] listening to the nature and the earth telling you when it's time to burn and how far to go, it may just be you just do a two-hectare block, and then that's it for the day ... that's what the environment was used to was having those triggers, and having that known that that's the trigger to go, and not have raging bushfires go through ... and [mainstream fire management] base it on scientific methods now as opposed to the natural triggers that were already there. Maddie

it's a way of looking after Country, looking after the land, using fire that is calm and nurturing and responsive, it's dictated by seasons and by signs, and by looking at other things that impact upon Country and one of its main purposes is for the health and protection of land and Mother. Wren.

The timing of the environmental indicators are embedded in, and responsive to, annual weather cycles. These are not bound to the dates set through the Western Gregorian calendar, which is the structure that Western fire management operates under. This causes tensions which are identifiable in the women's narratives,

Well, first of all, I'd make it clear that it's not about chucking a match and just burning. It's a science, it's an earth-based science. Lucinda

not by a deadline – we talk about it being a slow burn, and it is, it's a slow burn to allow time for animals to retreat and so the flame is low, the soil and the seed bank isn't cooked, but it's much more than that to me. It's a lot deeper; it's like a single piece of grass changing colour can signal that it's now time to burn. If it's not the right time for that system to be burned, well they wait. We wait until it is time. We burn at the right time to improve the health of our trees. Kobi

The tone of these responses indicates that the women have had experiences where Indigenous knowledges have been discounted or diminished as invalid or irrelevant. To counteract this, Aboriginal women are participating in emerging research that confirms that cultural burning is good for Country. Leanne Brook with others participated in research on the effects of cultural burning on soil health (Murramarang Country et al. 2024). Lesley Patterson with others studied the effects of cultural burning on the health of the Backwater grevillea (*Grevillea scortechinii* subsp. *Sarmentosa*) and the Short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) (McKemey et al. 2019, 2021c). These examples are part of a growing field of research which shows positive results for species from cultural burning (presented in Section 5.3), as well as a range of other benefits. However, gender has not been a primary feature of these studies (McKemey et al. 2019, 2021c, Murramarang Country et al. 2024).

The approach to burning based on what Country needs differs from most Western fire management, which primarily focusses on reducing risks to humans and assets, with ecological burning being the exception. The Aboriginal women are not advocating for all Western fire management activities to cease, and they support the need to protect people and assets, however, they would prefer that Western fire management fires were undertaken in ways that are better for Country. They also suggest that there are outcomes of cultural burning which may align with Western fire management's risk reduction aims, but these aims do not always apply, and that there are problems with automatically associating cultural burning with Western fire management as presented throughout this thesis.

6.5 HEALING

The fourth category describes that cultural burning is healing for Country, kin and all peoples. For Aboriginal people, the links between Country and humans is deeply relational, thus damage to Country not only impacts on our health as human species, but it also impacts our cultural and spiritual health. Former director of Firesticks Alliance and Budawang Yuin woman, Sian Hromek, describes the importance of having a good relationship with Country: ‘this is our life force. This is where we’ve come from and where we’re going back to, so we treat it like a relationship’ (Hromek in Farra 2021).

The Aboriginal women discuss cultural burning across a range of healing outcomes which are all inextricably connected. It is healing to make Country healthy – it improves personal health and wellbeing, heals broader fractured social relationships, and provides spiritual healing and restoration.

I guess it’s a healing thing, you know, for our people as well...I think it’s a way to try and keep yourself grounded in this world ... that’s so important – it’s therapy, it’s medicine. Lucinda.

[cultural burning] empowers women to be there on the ground and I think it could heal women just as much as it heals men – that’s where we should be, we should be healing Country so that Country in return heals us. Kobi.

The women describe that participating in cultural burning makes them feel good.

... we were just a group of women and we had a particular area where we were burning, and not necessarily “we” – this was led by local custodians, local women from that place. We were on our own as women and the local custodial women were leading that so that had that feeling of women taking care of Country in the way that they needed to, in the way that Country was telling them to which included ceremony, which included healing – that was amazing. Wren.

Fire as healing sits in stark contrast to the mainstream perception of fire, where fire is destructive. Thus, healing is significant in describing what cultural burning is. Country, and Aboriginal people, need healing from the impacts of colonisation. However, healing is required for all peoples to repair social fractures and to restore human relationships with Mother Earth. The women in my research say that engaging all members of society to heal is important, so we can develop respectful relationships with Country, and each other, and move towards a sustainable human existence,

like our Old People talk about, to have people healing and connecting with Country in a way that is healing for Country, but healing for self, and we know that when Country is sick, Aboriginal people are sick and we’ve heard those messages again and again and again from Elders that if the Country is sick, people are sick, and so, for people to then take responsibility

in caring for Country and healing Country, well that heals us as well and that connects us not only to Country and to fire but to each other in those relationships of yarning as you're walking and lighting the fire, or listening to Country. Steph

...I think also strategically, it can transform the way that non-Indigenous Australians understand Blackfellas' relationship to Country by showing that there's a sophistication here; it's not just we're going out willy-nilly, and that there's this rationale that's really been refined over generations and generations... we can offer something to change the way that we experience this Country. Ashlee.

The wide-ranging healing benefits of cultural burning is well discussed in the literature by and with Aboriginal women and others (Cavanagh V 2020, McKemey et al. 2019, 2021c, Tynan 2021, Tynan & Cavanagh 2021, Williamson, Weir & Cavanagh 2020a, Steffensen 2020). It is healing that applies to both people and Country in recovery from colonisation, as well as the mismanagement of Country and destructive bushfires. Rachael Cavanagh exclaims 'How good fire is for everybody! It's medicine, and it's health, and it's wellbeing. It looks after Country' (Cavanagh R 2020b). Aileen Blackburn-Mongta (2021) identified that Country needs healing as much as humans do and that Country will only heal if the right people (Traditional Owners) are caring for it:

The land cannot heal if it doesn't have families out there on Country, our people out there, if it doesn't have laughter, the soul of the land, is just not gonna heal. It may look good, you might replant and [revegetate with] a 1000 plants, but the soul of that Country, it won't heal (Aileen Blackburn-Mongta 2021).

Healing also comes from working together to care for Country through Aboriginal-led approaches which are holistic, rather than limited to fire, built assets or ecological goals. When cultural burning is undertaken properly, it creates positive wide-ranging outcomes for both humans and the environment. Aboriginal women understand the importance of the symbiotic relationship between fire, Country, species, humans, and the deep relationality that Aboriginal people have with Country (Cumpston 2020c, Tynan 2021). Aunty Kali knows that destructive bushfires have damaged Country and instilled fear in people. She also knows that as collective action, cultural burning creates strong positive outcomes that heal Country and also helps heal the fear that people have for fire, and sometimes their fear of Country too. Cultural burning strengthens wellbeing and encourages better relationships with fire (McBride & Dundler 2024, McBride, Pipic Media & Wilarni 2022). Aboriginal woman from far north Queensland, Kylee Clubb, has worked with many Aboriginal communities to undertake cultural burning, and she identifies the wellbeing outcomes:

there's been massive damage to this area, and like I said, this affects the people spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally... When the land is healthy, the people are healthy and

mentally we feel a lot better because our Country is looking strong and that also affects our children and our women and our men. And we feel stronger inside because we know that we're doing the right thing by caring for our country (Richardson & Goll 2022 [online]).

Noongar woman Carol Pettersen says: 'Getting our cultural burning practices going again has been very healing, for the land and for us to care for Country' (Pettersen 2021, p. 9). What Clubb and Pettersen highlight is that cultural burning re-engages local Aboriginal people with their responsibilities to care for Country.

6.6 INCLUSIVITY

Aboriginal women describe cultural burning as an inclusive activity that welcomes participation from across society including, women, children, and non-Indigenous people where appropriate. The inclusive nature of cultural burning reflects that it is an Aboriginal cultural practice, where all community members are relevant. Inclusivity featured strongly in the Aboriginal women's descriptions of cultural burning, however, inclusivity is not a defining characteristic of cultural burning in the same way that the agency of Country, or adhering to cultural protocols is. This means that the absence of inclusivity does not mean that a cultural burn is no longer a cultural burn. For instance, a cultural burn that only involves one gender or only involves Aboriginal people is still cultural burning. Inclusivity is evident across a broad range of concepts that the Aboriginal women discuss and they value inclusivity.

I think the positive is that it's bringing people together and it's bringing people back on Country. Lucinda

I love the way that fire is part of... it's dance and song and story-telling, and of course, land management, which is absolutely critical but the best bit for me is how fire has this power to bring people together – people gravitate around it and there is something really special about fire and understanding it and being in it, and being in it and around with people. Haley.

Inclusivity is important from an equity, equality and diversity perspective, and involving Aboriginal women encourages better outcomes for Country, where women's values are included. They also discussed that the inclusion of Aboriginal women facilitates the maintenance of Aboriginal women's stories, knowledges, and practices as well as protecting women's sites and resources in the landscape (discussed in Section 7.3).

None of the women in my research held the view that women should not participate in cultural burning. All the women emphasised that where it is acceptable within local Aboriginal cultural protocols, women should be encouraged to participate. The women explained that some Aboriginal societies are matriarchal, and in certain places, Aboriginal women carry fire lore. In these contexts Aboriginal women's participation is paramount as their participation and knowledge ensures that cultural protocols are maintained and upheld. Even in societies that are not matriarchal, Aboriginal women should have clear leadership roles to ensure their knowledges are respected and maintained and to counteract the inherent male dominance of the sector. My research noted one single instance where an older Aboriginal man stated that cultural burning and caring for Country is solely men's business and the domain of Aboriginal men. This statement was made within a cross-cultural community forum regarding cultural burning, and was rejected by other Aboriginal people present, particularly in the women's circle⁴⁸ that occurred. On a separate occasion, I facilitated a women's circle to discuss cultural burning at an Aboriginal government staff network meeting in Yarramundi (2019). During this circle, it was highlighted that in some parts of NSW, local cultural protocols prohibit Aboriginal women from participating in burning Country. This underscores the diversity of Aboriginal cultural customs across NSW. Aboriginal women understand and support that Aboriginal culture is not homogenous, and therefore care must be taken to avoid promoting homogeneity through generalisations, universalism, or rigid policies and approaches.

Aboriginal women know that some women are discouraged or unsure about participating in cultural burning, and they offer explanations and solutions for this (explored in forthcoming chapters). They also see opportunities where they can encourage more women's involvement through their own advocacy. The interview with Ashlee occurred after the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires and her words demonstrate her awareness of Aboriginal women's underrepresentation, and the importance of inclusivity,

I think perhaps the biggest challenge might be in perception of others, of who should be involved in cultural burning, who should be directing it. I would say that [male dominance] that would almost be enough to discourage people who've never done it before to even join the conversation but I think from what I've seen, I think the big national conversations around cultural burning have been very careful to include women. I've seen that come from our side, you know, and to recognise the role of women in cultural burning but there's probably a role for women now to play in actually articulating what our role is and inhabiting that role really purposefully, and taking an ownership of that within that role, so that we can have part of... or a part to play in the governance of cultural burning. That's probably as much of a product of

⁴⁸ Aboriginal cultural modes of consultation often include break-away focus groups described as yarning circles. These 'circles' are conducted to encourage an equilateral standing for all participants in the circle, where everyone is seen and is encouraged to contribute (Aseron et al. 2013, Carlson & Frazer 2018b).

today's Australian society as it is a product of anything really so we're competing within this world to be heard and take the role that we know that we're feeling that we want to play. And that's why, again, it's important for children to be part of these processes because those young girls grow up, seeing the natural place for women and young boys grow up seeing the natural place for women as well, and also for them as children. Ashlee.

As an inclusive cultural practice, Aboriginal children are encouraged to participate in cultural burning and the importance of this cannot be overstated. Current Aboriginal generations have responsibilities to equip future generations with specific social, political, and cultural knowledge because Aboriginal children will inherit a variety of cultural roles and responsibilities. Having children involved in cultural burning now makes this responsibility visible and immediate. Bolstering this argument, research is being undertaken to better understand Aboriginal youth overrepresentation in the misuse of fire, where cultural burning and connection to culture are presented as mitigators to fire misuse by youth (Mate et al. 2025). At cultural burning events, children are learning multiple skills from Aboriginal Elders, educators, and Country. Aboriginal women know this and often include children in their discussion. Here, and in her previous quote, Ashlee describes the communal context of cultural burning with reference to children. She identifies that the presence of children means that the fires of cultural burning, and people's behaviours, are modified,

So, you know, the instinctive kind of male/female thing – we need to collapse that and think more about it as a community thing, because you could in fact pose the same question about children and I think if children are present, adults go into a completely different mode, a community mode of just, yes, lighting and following the fire, but also just having an eye and a line and just watching out but we become members of a community rather than a female lighting a fire, or a kid going crazy. They've got a different sense of ego; they're in this amazing wonderland of flames – they entrust us actually to keep them safe within that without even thinking about it. Ashlee.

The trust and safety that Ashlee talks about is relevant for both the immediate safety of the children (physically and spiritually), as well as ensuring that the children are being instilled with the skills and knowledge that they will need in the future. The involvement of children is in stark contrast to Western fire management, where children are not permitted to participate on the fire ground and the risk-adverse policies and practices of Western fire management that curtail children's participation, can create barriers for women (Steffensen 2020).

The involvement of children has forced the sectors of Western fire management that engaged with cultural burning, such as the NPWS and its guidelines for cultural burning on NPWS estate (DPE

2016b), to modify their rules and approaches so that children may be appropriately considered (Beukers & Costello 2017).

Involving children and youth in cultural burning means that they grow with an understanding of caring for Country and the difference between Indigenous and Western approaches. This is important for its potential future economic and employment impacts as well as the immediate cultural impacts for the youth as Banbai Ranger Tanya Elone explains:

I want our country to be a place where our children learn cultural values as well as have access to economic and social opportunities. Our country is a meeting place for family and community gatherings where knowledge is shared and what we see now, generations will see in the future. (Tanya Elone cited in O’Leary & Walter 2018, p. 92).

Inclusivity is a feature that sets cultural burning apart from Western fire management, yet it remains underexplored in the existing literature. However, there are signs of growing recognition of its importance. For example, there is an increase in literature that acknowledges women and children, which is recognition that their inclusion matters. To date however, few authors have addressed the problem of cultural burning activities being male dominated. My research bolsters the recognition of Aboriginal women in cultural burning and contributes to addressing this gap. As discussed in Underrepresentation (Section 2.4) Western fire management does not achieve inclusive participation in its personnel. Western fire management membership and participation is very homogenous and represents a very narrow demographic of mainstream society (predominantly white men).

Participation in burning activities in Western fire management is limited to firefighters aged in their mid-teens and above, who have been trained and accredited within Western fire methods and methodologies. The Aboriginal women in this research and others, feel that the demographic norms that occur in the field operations of Western fire management and the broader sector influence who participates cultural burning, particularly Aboriginal women’s participation, and that this is not appropriate. Therefore, active steps are being taken to ensure that cultural burning holds a holistic community approach. Tagalaka and Darnley Island descendant, Rachel Steffensen (2024), confirms that cultural burning is currently male dominated, which is unsatisfactory, and she identifies that Aboriginal women’s involvement is paramount and that they have cultural birthrights that support their engagement (Steffensen 2024).

One of the steps being taken to address underrepresentation is through the establishment of governance and leadership roles targeting women. This includes women holding key leadership roles in organisations such as Firesticks Alliance, and other conduits of cultural burning (Farra 2021, Firesticks Alliance 2024c, truwana Rangers, ALCT & Firesticks Alliance 2021). The Firesticks Alliance lead with further action by holding women’s cultural burning workshops including, Ngangkirma Kardlatidli in May 2024, truwana/Cape Barren Island in May 2022, and Wiyn Kalkkalk in April 2020. These targeted workshops include cultural fire activities, networking, capacity building,

knowledge sharing, cultural activities and skills development across a range of fields. The events create operating environments that support and encourage Aboriginal women (Steffensen 2024, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, Williamson 2021a).

The biggest of these women's workshops, Ngangkirna Kardlatidli, held by Firesticks Alliance, occurred in May 2024 on Kaurna Country (South Australia), brought together over 100 Indigenous women from across Australia to promote the role of women in cultural burning, and encourage more women to engage (Steffensen 2024). A participant at Ngangkirna Kardlatidli said: 'It was like we were rekindling the ancestral flame and reconnecting our women of all generations to fire' (Aunty Marilyn Nicholls in Firesticks Alliance 2023). The culmination of these factors is the increased awareness about the need to include Aboriginal women, and the benefits of inclusivity. As awareness increases, changes in practice occurs which results in further inclusion and the dismantling of gender (and generational) barriers.

In addition to the involvement of Aboriginal women and children, cultural burning sometimes includes non-Indigenous people. The Aboriginal women discuss the merits and challenges of non-Indigenous participation. They support non-Indigenous participation as long as the decision to be inclusive has come from the local Elders, and as long as Aboriginal culture is respected and protected. The Aboriginal women discuss that non-Indigenous participation facilitates important outcomes for awareness raising, education and partnerships. They consider that being inclusive has the potential to expand access to Country through new partnerships with landowners, so that more cultural burning and caring for Country practices may occur. The women describe that this will create benefits for and between Country, Aboriginal people, and wider society by encouraging social cohesion, as Ashlee illustrates

I think it helps us refine a particular Australian sense of custodianship. I think it can help us together understand or shape the way we want to be custodians of this land, if it is that we want to as a society care for it and work with it for a hundred generations to come. Ashlee.

The women believe that including wider society encourages more people to have embodied cultural experiences of Aboriginal-led caring for Country, which will stimulate people to more deeply consider the (in)effectiveness and (in)appropriateness of current mainstream approaches with the aim to influence change. Although not a focus area of cultural burning research, the cross-cultural social outcomes that occur through the involvement of non-Indigenous people in cultural burning is often highlighted as a positive outcome in cross-cultural research. Inclusivity involving wider society can be seen through the growth of cultural burning partnerships, which involve a variety of stakeholders including, Aboriginal communities, Government, and NGOs.

One example of inclusivity in the literature is the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC illustrated report on cultural burning in southern Australia. Aboriginal women account for 50 percent of the

contributors to this report which intentionally centres women's voices to amplify the need for inclusivity (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021). Inclusivity of women and others is outlined in Principle 10 of the BNHCRC report:

This is work that we have to do together, sharing our knowledge to heal Country and working towards more appropriate fire regimes and therefore a safer and healthier environment for all. Fire management is everyone's responsibility (Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, p. 30).

Not only is it a shared responsibility, cultural burning will be more robust and resilient by being inclusive. However, the invitation for wider society in cultural burning comes with trepidation and caution. This is warranted given the experiences of Indigenous people and knowledges being marginalised and appropriated. This appropriation can occur through a variety of processes including Western fire management, government, local land holders, researchers and educators. The issue of appropriation is a very strong theme in this research and broader cultural burning discussions (see Section 9.2). Edie takes a cautious but pragmatic view regarding the participation of others, particularly in relation to decision-making and maintaining the integrity of cultural practice,

Look, I think at the onset it needs to be our people leading it ... As far as non-Aboriginal people, I think it's remiss of us to think that our kids don't associate with the non-Aboriginal people. ... should [non-Indigenous people] lead it? Not on your life should they lead it. Can they be a part of it? They can be invited into the circle. When that happens [is] up to each individual group. And that might be not for five years, might be five months, might be five days, or five minutes after setting up a cultural burning team, you know. So, I think there's a place – but, the place is to be invited in. Edie.

Aboriginal women want non-Indigenous people to learn and participate in cultural burning, as long as Aboriginal people are culturally safe and not exposed to colonial load, that cultural protocols and Aboriginal leadership are upheld, and where the protection of ICIP is respected. Non-Indigenous participants need to understand and respect that cultural burning is an Aboriginal cultural practice that belongs within the care and control of Aboriginal people and communities. With the sudden interest in cultural burning and calls for its expansion – coinciding with a lack of a critical mass of cultural burning practitioners – Aboriginal women are concerned about the appropriation of cultural burning.

6.7 ACCELERANTS

The second issue that Aboriginal women raise that is not well covered in the literature for NSW, is the appropriate use of fire accelerants and retardants in cultural burning. Questions about methods of ignition, or the tools that should be used in cultural burning, were not included in the research question schedule, thus it was not a topic that featured in every woman's discussion. Although none of the women made explicit statements about the methods that should be employed to ignite cultural burns, several of the women made their preferences clear regarding what cultural burning should not entail, particularly the use of accelerants. The women discussed the use of accelerants and not the use of retardants, however my knowledge of the sector means that I understand the arguments that the women make here regarding accelerants are also relevant to retardants.

The Aboriginal women that discussed this topic showed concern for the introduction and use of petroleum-based accelerants and chemicals in the environment. Drip-torches, which involve using petroleum-based fuels to accelerate burning, feature very heavily in Western fire management, as do chemical foam retardants. The women who raised concerns argued that these foreign chemicals are not necessary or desired in cultural burning. Their concerns include the costs attached to the manufacture and supply of the chemicals – such as the financial and environmental costs of fossil fuel extraction and production, as well as the cost of the residual impacts of the chemicals on Country. They argue that accelerants and retardants are environmental pollutants, and that they are not required to undertake cultural burning successfully. The women question why it is permissible to use accelerants and retardants in Western fire management, when at any other time, applying these pollutants into the environment in a similar way is prohibited,

For me, it's like this infamous drip torch and I've seen it, I know that they do use it in some cultural burning and stuff in other places but in my mind, it's just this oxymoron that we don't need to use it but I also on that conversation of waste and everything too, not only in like the manufacturing of it and what it needs to work because I mean that happens with our cars and everything every day, but I also just worry and feel that when we're putting the fire in and we're looking after the land and Country that way, what happens when we're simultaneously dripping fuel into the soil, and into those same plants... that doesn't seem to be the best way, to be leaving fuel and petrol and oil, just purposefully putting that into the land and the soil. Wren.

The use of accelerants and retardants are not common at cultural burns in the southeast of the continent, however it does occur. The women argue that accelerants change the natural burn path and intensity of the fires, which then burn areas that otherwise may not have burnt under the leadership and agency of Country. The women argue that this interference is unnecessary and that it disrupts the

creation of natural mosaics and refuge areas. Accelerants also make it possible to burn Country at the ‘wrong’ time – when Country is not naturally ready to burn, thus they say changing the principle of cultural burning, which is burning for the health of Country as led by Country.

But, you know, fire itself, it makes you stop too. You know, this world is so fast and fire makes you stop and slow down because we don’t run along with our drip torches and stuff – we do a little bit and we sit back and we watch and see what happens. Lucinda

Broadening from accelerants and retardants, Aboriginal women also discuss the place of modern-day technologies in cultural burning. Being aware that fires are associated with danger and risk, they note that the presence of fire trucks, and protective equipment at cultural burns changes the mood of the event, heightening feelings of fear and safety risk.

this is something I’m just not familiar with – machinery and fire-fighting equipment – that sends a message in itself, is when you start that machinery so you can’t hear what the fire’s doing even, you can’t hear what birds are coming around, or the crackle or the wind. Wren.

The use of accelerants, retardants and modern technologies does appear in the literature for other regions. In the continental north and in arid areas, the use of accelerants, drip-torches and aerial incendiaries are common tools used for fire work including by Aboriginal women (Daniels et al. 2012, Straw & Grant 2018, Tjuwanpa Women Rangers 2020). In reference to the far north of the continent, Dean Yibarbuk regards using modern technology as working with the two-toolbox approach (Yibarbuk & Cooke 2001). Cabrogal Aboriginal woman, Mikaela Jade, supports the use of modern technologies in caring for Country because they can assist in access to information, and improving understandings of Country, she says:

I’m a huge advocate for combining technology with land and sea management in a way which enhances our understanding of country and culture. I love the way women involved with Indigenous Protected Areas and working as Indigenous rangers around Australia are at the cutting edge of using technology to care for country and keep culture strong. (Jade cited in O’Leary & Walter 2018, p. 18).

However, some prefer not to use foreign enhancers in cultural burning. Kylee Clubb describes her aversion to fire application approaches using aerial incendiaries: ‘When you do a lot of the air-dropping, you can’t tell what’s on there and what kind of trees and what animals are there. And it doesn’t give enough time for the animals as well to get away’ (in Richardson & Goll 2022). Similarly, Steffensen (2020) shies away from using accelerants and explains that preference using much of the same reasoning that the women have raised here. Long-standing member of Firesticks Alliance, Peta

Standley, has worked with Traditional Owners regarding cultural fire practices for over a decade and outlines her view that agency hazard reduction is routinely done ‘without the nuance around biodiversity’ where the health of Country is not centred and there is little concern for the current fire needs of local species. She highlights that agency fires are often applied in unfavourable ways which burn too hot and/or at the wrong time for what Country needs, and use chemical accelerants where fires are forced and ultimately, they do more harm than good (Standley in Farra 2021).

In Cavanagh (2022), I highlight the different approaches to igniting cultural burns, acknowledging that some practitioners prefer taking a more traditional, precolonial approach, while others welcome the use of modern technologies. There is diversity in the approaches and preferences that are used in cultural burning, and this will continue to develop as cultural burning practices evolve. There is also recognition that due to Country’s current state of ill health, some less favourable approaches may be necessary to support its recovery. For some communities, this may mean that cultural burning involves modern technologies such as fire trucks and personal protective equipment for the time being. Karajarri Indigenous Ranger Coordinator, Braeden Taylor, explains that using aircraft supports their work to protect Country because it increases access to Country and modern technologies assist them to dissect fuel loads, decreasing the likelihood of large and intense bushfires: ‘using the helicopter and plane, we can access country that’s hard to get to in a vehicle. It might not have been burnt in a long time and we can break it up’ (Taylor in Fisher and Elston 2023).

6.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, Aboriginal women share the defining characteristics of cultural burning. The women affirm the literature by identifying key characteristics of cultural burning, which is grouped into six categories. Their descriptions of cultural burning were often contrasted or compared to Western fire management. The women identify that cultural burning recognises and responds to the agency and leadership of Country, where Country is the authority and that cultural burning adheres to cultural protocols and respects Aboriginal culture. The women know that cultural burning is attentive to indicators which include burning to support the health of Country and that cultural burning heals Country, individuals, and wider society. The Aboriginal women also discuss cultural burning in two ways that are not well covered in the literature for NSW. First, that cultural burning as a cultural practice is an inclusive activity which encourages the maintenance of Aboriginal culture, important intergenerational experiences, and broader social cohesion. This inclusivity connects people and helps them to respect and protect Country. The second unique characteristic raised by the women is the use of chemical accelerants and retardants in cultural burning. The women have concerns that these foreign materials are unnecessary, unhealthy, and that they change the practice in ways that shift agency away

from Country. The thesis now moves to examine the outcomes of cultural burning that directly relate to Aboriginal women and their participation.

STORY SEVEN: ON HER GRANDFATHER'S COUNTRY

Eight year old Emma squeals with delight, as I blow my horn at the black and white cows that leisurely lumber off to the side of the road. They graze on the green grassy verge, more appealing than the mustard-coloured paddocks that are parched dry after years of drought. Driving on, I announce to Emma, "This morning we left Awabakal, Saltwater Country, and now we are in Wonnarua Country. This is your Grandfather Poppy's Country. See that escarpment there, that rocky mountain, that runs right through Wonnarua Country". I acknowledge Country and point out the Aboriginal Nations were are on aloud when we travel, so my kids learn it and understand that Country is an old and cultured landscape. It predates the more recent signposted colonial names. Emma hears, but doesn't reply.

The escarpment is dotted with prominent sandstone crags that rise dramatically from the alluvial plains (Fig. 37). My eyes keep returning to these beautiful sentinels watching out over Wonnarua Country. What would they tell me if we had a conversation? Would they bemoan the deep open wounds of their mine-scarred flesh, where their rich valuable coal has been extracted? Would they mourn their bleak desolate veins, that were once bountiful, lush rivers? Would they welcome us back, daughter and I, two Wonnarua women returning to Country? Hey! Would they even recognise us? After all it's been a while! Of course they would, Country knows.

Before deciding to attend this cultural burning workshop, I rang members of my Wonnarua family. I asked if they were attending, and who was organising the event. I made these checks because I wanted to understand if the event was occurring with the involvement of Wonnarua people, and also, so that I understood where I fit in to the socio-culture fabric of the community event. During these calls, once I had heard some of the names of the Wonnarua people who would be there, I felt content to attend.

I regularly talk with my kids about the importance of these types of cultural events, and encourage them to come along. I teach them of our connection to Wonnarua and Bundjalung Country, and how we all can care for Country too. Usually, I just pull 'mum-rank' and tell my kids "You're Coming", but this time I gave them the opportunity to decide for themselves. To my surprise, Emma volunteered to come. I was shocked because I thought surely she would have stayed home to attend her friend's 9th birthday party. She stated however, that her attendance came with one condition: it was to be just me and her, specifically excluding her younger brother, Tyson.

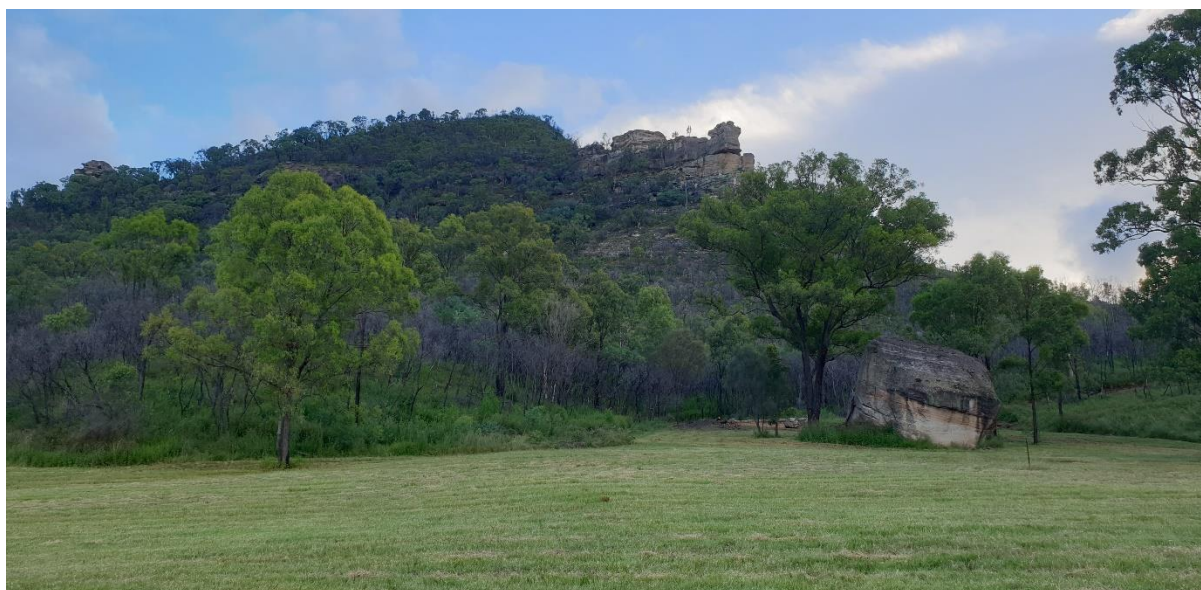


Figure 37: Rock formations of Wonnarua Country. The escarpment to the south of Wonnarua Country has many cags that watch over the plains like sentinels. Credit: Tracey Skene.

Arriving at the workshop, I grab a cup of tea, greeting those I know, and making introductions with others. I ensure that I introduce Emma to the Elders, teaching her that we are with other Wonnarua people. The energy of the group is good, and we acknowledge that it is good to be back on Country together, and coming together to care for Country in this specific way, with fire. There are plenty of non-Indigenous people here too, RFS members in their bright yellows, government staff with their name pins on their agency shirts, neighbours, and people who belong to various cultural burning groups.

To start the event everyone gets rallied into a large circle. Wonnarua Elders start with a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony. There is singing and storying of Country. I wonder if the non-Indigenous participants are engaging in these things for the first time, or is this becoming more commonplace in their non-Indigenous mainstream lives? I wonder if they're listening and participating with genuine support, or if they are feigning interest, being polite or participating just because their agency requested them to. It's hard to tell.

Glancing around the circle I note that there are roughly the same number of women as men. Similarly, there are Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people, and to my knowledge there are only a few Wonnarua people present. The age groups range from 60 plus years, through to a few preschool aged kids and there is a Mum carrying a baby in her arms. This age range means an opportunity for knowledge transfer across several generations. Surprisingly, there are slightly more RFS women than RFS men in attendance. This contrasts strongly to the statistical composition of the RFS firefighters, which is male dominated.

During the welcome event and the formal parts of the day, it's mainly men that hold the speaking and prominent leadership roles. Through my observations, I've noted that men's leadership at cultural burning workshops is commonplace. I attribute this prominence to a lack of critical mass of women who hold these roles, and not that it is necessarily a gendered cultural sensitivity that prevents or prohibits women from engaging. I see it more as a reflection of current society, the domination of patriarchy and hierarchy, particularly in the fire and environmental conservation sector. My observations are also informed through my own lived experience, where I am often sought out to 'speak up' on behalf of Aboriginal women in caring for Country forums, due again to the existing gender representation gap. I've noted that the call for Aboriginal women's voices to be heard, doesn't just come from Aboriginal women; it comes from Aboriginal men, and others who want Aboriginal women to be active in caring for Country and cultural burning too.

Knowing this, I'm prepared to give an impromptu presentation at this workshop, if I'm asked. If that occurs, I would introduce myself, stating my connection to Country as a Wonnarua and Bundjalung woman; then I would highlight my career and academic focus, leading to my PhD topic; and I would end with a call-out for potential participants. During these types of presentations, I make sure that my kids stand beside me, listening, participating and learning, so that they are building their skills and confidence. It's a good opportunity for them to practice speaking up, introducing themselves culturally, acknowledging Country and following cultural protocols. I'm also content with not being asked to do any presentation, and simply enjoy the day.

It is normal for me to be hyper-conscious of my various roles at events like this. With my positionality and multiple hat wearing, I am vigilant to be transparent, while also not imposing my researcher identity over my community member identity. Sometimes it's just easier to give an impromptu presentation, because it means I declare it all up-front. I also worry that in my heightened self-awareness, that I withdraw more than necessary.

Softly, I ask Emma "Do you wanna go up the front today and maybe help, light the burn or something?" She murmurs back, "No mum, I'll just stay here with you". This makes me even more anxious, knowing that my behaviours influence my kid's experiences. I don't want them to miss out, because I'm worried about being a researcher and imposter, as opposed to us being Aboriginal people, in this case Wonnarua people on Wonnarua Country, thus holding birthrights to participate in caring for this Country. I'm anxious because I know that these types of opportunities, to be burning our own Country and having that embodied education are rare, and far too important to pass up. Particularly, for young Aboriginal kids who will inherit all of these roles and responsibilities. I take a deep breath, but I don't speak up, to put myself or Emma forward.

After the welcome, we walk further into the reserve, where we are given a rundown of the day's schedule and a safety briefing. Following that, there's discussions on the types of forest we are in, bushfire history, plus more storying of Country and stories of cultural burning. After these discussions, one of the Aboriginal men leading calls to Emma, he asks her and another young Aboriginal boy to come forward. He wants them to be the ones to light the burn, and he talks about the importance of our kids learning this while they are young⁴⁹. My chest tightens with emotion. Country knows.

Emma went forward, calm and confident, surrounded by Wonnarua Elders, guided by the fire knowledge holders and the power of Country, she lit her first cultural burn, on her grandfather's Country, on her Country, on our Country (Fig. 38). I'm awestruck and fat, salty tears cloud my eyes. Country knows.

While I'm watching her, my body is stationary, but inside, my spirit is dancing and cheering and my mind is racing. This is SO Beautiful, SO important. I want to share the gravitas of this moment with everyone there. I want them all to know that we are Wonnarua people, and this is our Country. I want to tell them that in doing this burning, we are literally re-engaging our caring for Country practices, here on our own Country, for the first time since colonisation displaced us. This cultural burn is one step in our connection back to Country, in bridging the divide that colonisation creates. I want everyone there to understand just how important this is. It's not just a few Blackfullas, a smoking ceremony and patch-burning the weeds. This isn't a performance. This is culture, it is our lifeblood, and it's so powerful my chest could burst! I want to sing it from the top of my lungs, but I remain silent.

A sandstone crag once again catches my eye as if Country is tapping me on the shoulder. Paying attention to that crag, I internally acknowledge the spiritual power of Country, and give gratitude, "Thank you ancestors. Thank you Dad⁵⁰, I know you are all here watching this, and doing this with us".

Together the whole group watch Emma's fire grow for a few minutes. Once it is established, people are encouraged to follow suit, breaking into smaller groups and lighting other small fires. An Aboriginal woman comes over to me, she tells me that she will send me the photos she took of Emma lighting the burn with me watching close by. The fat, salty tears return, and we hug. Aboriginal women know. This was an amazing and humbling experience that had not been planned, or pushed for.

⁴⁹ This event was featured in the local newspaper, The Singleton Argus, including a photo of Emma and others lighting the burn. Singleton Argus, 28 May 2019, "We are fortunate to have Koori Country Firesticks Aboriginal Corporation lead our burns", Local News, <<https://www.singletonargus.com.au/story/6186206/aboriginal-cultural-burn-brings-people-together/>>.

⁵⁰ My father passed away in 2015.



Figure 38: Emma Cavanagh lights her first cultural burn. In 2019 Emma lit a cultural burn on Wonnarua Country. Two centuries prior on 12 Nov 1817 colonial explorer Thomas William Parr wrote of the same area of NSW,

All the whole surface of this place appears to have been burnt about two months ago so that the face of the Country is like Land covered with fine young wheat

An outcome of colonisation is that for centuries Aboriginal people have been prevented from caring for Country through traditional practices including cultural burning. The revival of cultural burning returns Aboriginal people to Country and is an opportunity to reinstate Aboriginal caring for Country. Credit: V. Cavanagh

Emma tends to her fire and I shadow a few steps behind her, letting her have her space. Like Emma, I am listening, participating and learning. Throughout the day, the young Aboriginal boy who was called up with Emma to light the burn hung-out with us. Chatting happily, he told me he was four (years old) and that he was “An-original” (Aboriginal). His accidental play on words made me smile, we are original indeed!

The rest of my day was paced at the speed of these two kids, eight and four, tending to fire and Country. Slow fire, slow research, slow down, pay attention. Country is leading me through. I can feel my cup refilling and I love this. My spirit is recharging. We move slowly with the fire, pointing out the things we notice; the little bugs and other small animals who are moving through the cool ash and away from the fire. Beetles, ants, butterfly, brown lizard, grasshoppers, prey mantis, jumping spiders, a big huntsman spider who we call 'Dave' to make them less scary. They are moving calmly and they don't seem scared or threatened at all by the flames. We also notice the birds who move in to sit in the tree branches above. The smoke send signals to Kookaburra and Magpie, "Come an' have a feed". Country talks to everyone, we are all connected. Cultural burning brings us in, and makes listen, participate and learn.

As the end of the day approaches, everyone gathers again in a circle to debrief. It's here that I finally voice the significance of Emma lighting the first fire, and what the day means to us as Wonnarua people. In the circle I share our story and cry as I feel the closeness of my Dad and ancestors return. I believe everyone genuinely felt touched by our story, and that they each feel 'good' about the day in special, unique ways. I believe these feelings aren't synonymous with just any type of prescribed burn, or because we are doing some outdoors communal working bee. This is a cultural burn, and we are cultural people working in cultural ways, Country is leading us all through.

As an educated Aboriginal woman I argue this day was good. Good for Country, good for me and Emma, good for the wider community to see and learn from, good for reconciliation, good for generations, good for my research and, in hindsight, good for my job now as the Manager of the Cultural Fire Management Unit. While there is much I still need to learn, I also have the ability to agitate and influence for the much needed changes. I add my voice to the work that people have been doing in this space for decades.

Country knows all of this.

That evening over dinner, I tell my mum and cousin Shirley about our day. I tell them about the sandstone crags, Emma lighting the burn in the presence of Wonnarua Elders and ancestors, the tiny beetles crawling through the cool ash, the anoriginals [sic], and the smoke signals to kookaburra and magpie. Together we laugh and cry, shedding tears because we comprehend the significance of the occasion. Aboriginal women know what it means, and how it feels in reference to our experiences of colonisation and displacement from Country. The feelings we feel deep in our bodies, in our chests and in our bellies that indicate to us the depth of importance. As mothers, aunties and grannies, we know just how good and important this is.

Through their tears, Mum and Shirley encourage me to keep going with all I do, to continue this PhD, and further. Because all Aboriginal women should be able to do this, to take their kids out

on Country, to have these beautiful strong cultural experiences, to reconnect and be strong together. Emma sat eating her dinner and listening to us. While we talked, laughed and cried, she hummed the tune of the fire song that the fire practitioner had sang that morning. She'd heard the song only once, and it had stayed with her all day. I hope these memories stay with her forever, I hope they stay with me as well, I know the lessons will.

CHAPTER 7 OUTCOMES FOR AND FROM WOMEN

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the opportunities and outcomes that occur through Aboriginal women's involvement in cultural burning. The chapter does this by examining two themes that are specific to Aboriginal women that emerged from interviews and focus group discussions. The first theme is a particularly robust topic that explores Aboriginal women's participation in cultural burning as a conduit for intergenerational participation and knowledge transfer with children and youth. The importance of engaging younger generations was briefly introduced in *Inclusivity* (Section 6.6); it emerges as a prominent theme throughout this research and is evident in many of my stories. It is also prominent across cultural burning forums and the literature. The second theme explores Aboriginal women's participation in cultural burning as it relates to Aboriginal women's values and priorities, including women's practices, roles, knowledges, and sites in the landscape. Reciprocity is evident across the chapter, as there are outcomes that Aboriginal women *gain* from their participation, and there are outcomes that Aboriginal women *give* through their participation. Although this chapter is more specific to Aboriginal women, the issues that are discussed here are still important to Aboriginal communities and wider populations. In Chapter Eight, the women discuss the broader benefits of cultural burning beyond those specific to Aboriginal women.

7.2 INTERGENERATIONS

7.2.1 Babies' first teacher

In June 2020, I was called upon as an expert witness to the Royal Commission into the National Natural Disaster Arrangements (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020). To prepare, I spoke with many Indigenous women across Australia to hear their concerns so that I could raise them in the Royal Commission hearing. One of the resounding messages I heard was the importance of women as our babies' first teachers. To paraphrase, Indigenous women and children must be involved in all aspects

of caring for Country, including cultural burning, so that our knowledges and practices are shared with our future generations. As mothers we are our babies' first teacher.

All the Aboriginal women I interviewed, including those without their own children, spoke strongly about the importance of encouraging young people in cultural burning. Aboriginal women know that being connected to Aboriginal culture and to Country are foundational to wellbeing and extremely important to young people for a variety of reasons that this chapter presents. Aboriginal women also know that cultural burning supports embodied learning with Country among Aboriginal peers, Elders, and community members. Young people's involvement in cultural burning was introduced in *Inclusivity* (Section 6.6), as part of the Aboriginal women's descriptions of cultural burning. That section highlighted the importance of involving young people to ensure cultural knowledge can be passed on. It also showed that the presence of children, particularly at cultural burning events, shaped the experience, and their inclusion is one way cultural burning differs from Western fire management. This section builds on those insights. During her interview, Edie illustrates the connection between women's and children's participation in cultural burning and its significance:

it's important for Aboriginal women to be involved in cultural burning because they're the ones who we're going to rely on to pass that down to their children and their grandchildren and that, to me, is more important – that's the most important part of having women involved because traditionally our women are teachers. Edie.

Understanding the importance of women and children's involvement in cultural burning and caring for Country is not new knowledge. For thousands of years Aboriginal people burned Country with multiple generations participating. It is embodied lifelong learning, from babies, who absorb through their mother's experiences, through to Elders including grandmother matriarchs who hold special roles in families and communities. Aboriginal women know that their participation directly impacts the participation of young people. Kobi has participated in cultural burning with her children and emphasises that children's involvement is paramount.

No, our kids would have been right. They're beside us from the beginning, learning. So they should be here. They have a role ... sometimes, they don't feel that they belong or don't fit. They fit on Country. It's where they should be. Kobi

Wren makes a similar connection to Edie and Kobi, but with an inverse perspective. She recognises that engaging children in cultural burning will create clearer entry points for women to engage and participate.

that's the genius part about children being involved in burning, because that also means that women who have caretaking responsibilities, aren't locked out of care of Country, and being with Country, because children equally have a role in doing that too. Wren.

Similarly, truwana Ranger team coordinator, Fiona Maher, highlights the benefits of involving children in cultural burning: 'the kids are going home and teaching mum and dad about it' (in Kovacevic et al. 2021, p. 34). Williamson (2022a) agrees that the involvement of children is important for their own learning, and it encourages parents to engage because the barriers regarding who can participate have been addressed. Reflecting on the National Women's Fire Workshop in 2024, Rachel Steffensen, makes the explicit connection between women's participation and the engagement of young people. Steffensen articulates that teaching younger generations is important to Aboriginal women, however, to achieve this through cultural burning, Aboriginal women must be active and engaged (Steffensen 2024). Knowing this, Aboriginal women often advocate for Aboriginal children when they describe why women's engagement is important, showing that Aboriginal women are considerate and inclusive of future generations.

In her quote above, Kobi outlines that Aboriginal children's place in modern day mainstream society can be tenuous, indicating that some children feel they do not belong or fit. Her observation is grounded in the understanding that a strong connection to culture is a positive social indicator for enhanced wellbeing (Murrup-Stewart et al. 2021, Wright et al. 2021). Aboriginal women know that keeping culture strong is important and acknowledge that colonisation has violently disrupted our knowledges and practices, undermining the ability to fully share cultural knowledge across generations. This is disruptive in multiple ways: directly, where children are unable to have their own embodied experiences on Country, and indirectly, where they miss out on cultural knowledge and experiences that were not passed down through previous generations. The Aboriginal women in this research understand that gaps in knowledge and practice exist. They express desires to halt and reverse the negative impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal culture and the damage to Country. There are noticeable elements of trauma and grief in the women's narratives, and they show they are taking hold of the current opportunities for themselves and future generations. Kobi describes her recognition of loss and responsibility during her early cultural burning experiences,

A lot of our cultural knowledge has been lost, and I feel kind of a responsibility, to gain as much of it as I can back. I guess I'm just at that age where I've got kids, and I'm feeling that loss ... After the first day of listening to the knowledge-holders ... speak about the burning for Country. I knew that it was really important work, and I tried to soak up as much of it as possible. ... I participate as much as I possibly can. ... With cultural burning, I get that sense, like, I know this is important information, and it's important work, and I feel really honoured to be a part of it. And I guess the responsibility comes in knowing that, and being at that age,

where I need to learn as much as I can. Because it wasn't passed down to me, so I can pass it on. Kobi

Maddie who does not have her own children, but who has worked in community engagement roles for over two decades, knows that it's important to engage children to maintain cultural knowledge,

I think women should be involved as well, and kids – I mean obviously that's how a lot of these things have been lost, is because no-one's been teaching them. Maddie

Aboriginal women in the literature agree that it is important for women to be involved so they can teach young people and keep culture strong. Vikki Parsley confirms that cultural burning supports Aboriginal communities to connect to Country so they can pass knowledge through generations in ways that maintain the holistic knowledge of Country (Parsley 2023).

As highlighted in *Inclusivity* (Section 6.6), Aboriginal women know that Aboriginal children will inherit caring for Country roles and responsibilities. Indigenous youth are 50% of the total Indigenous population, and they are 100% of the future Indigenous population (ABS 2021). Thus, it is paramount to include Indigenous youth to enable intergenerational knowledge transfer and to ensure they have influence over decisions affecting their future (seed Mob 2024). Aboriginal women know that communities must be diligent in preparing and teaching children, not only about Country and Aboriginal culture, but also about Aboriginal social and political arenas so that Aboriginal youth have the cultural foundations that will support them now and prepare them for the future. Cultural burning facilitates a wide range of learning experiences across a range of subject areas, including a spectrum of the physical and social sciences. There is also learning across numerous Aboriginal-specific topic areas including, relationships with Country, Aboriginal values in the landscape, local history and stories, Aboriginal languages, resources within Country, totemic relationships and many other topics. Aboriginal youth will also learn about themselves and their place within Aboriginal communities as they have their own lived experiences.

Cultural burning is set within an Aboriginal paradigm and knowledge system which means that participants get to witness and engage in Aboriginal-led activities, as well as Aboriginal cultural protocols, governance approaches and often cross-cultural engagement where the power dynamic between Black and White Australia is disrupted. During cultural burning, Indigenous peoples are the majority and hold the leadership roles, foregrounding Indigenous leadership, cultural protocols, knowledges and expertise. These are uncommon and inverse experiences to the contemporary mainstream lives of many people in NSW, where Indigenous people are a minority population. The visible representation of Aboriginal leadership that occurs during cultural burning is empowering. Bishop (2020, 2022) highlights that cultural burning facilitates Country-centred and Indigenous-led learning experiences, which young people are not commonly obtaining through the schooling system

or Western institutions. Knowing this gap exists, further bolsters the women's argument to involve youth in cultural burning. To counteract this gap, some communities are actively working with schools. In lutruwita / Tasmania, children are involved in cultural burning through collaborative school projects which are integrated into the children's formal learning (Kovacevic et al. 2021). This is creating multiple benefits, including making space for the participation of parents and mothers.

7.2.2 Indigenous futures

Young people understand the importance of their own engagement and actively advocate for themselves. I witnessed this in the Aboriginal youth panel at the 2018 Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum (Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). In this panel, young people identified a desire to learn from and beside their Elders while they are young, and while Elders are still living and able to go out on Country. They stated that engaging them while they are young is better than waiting until they are older when the Western education system has dominated their formal education and impacted (positively or negatively) on their development (Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). The concept of spending time with Elders before they pass on is a common theme that is visible locally and internationally. As this example from North America illustrates, Elders are concerned that they were 'the last generation with the knowledge of fire use and that they wished to pass it on to younger generations before this collective knowledge vanished' (Christianson et al. 2022, p. 270). The acknowledgement of cultural loss and the desire to ensure young people are learning from Elders is well discussed in the literature (Bishop 2022, McKemey et al. 2019, Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). Similar sentiments are evident in other Indigenous youth forums, such as the Indigenous climate justice collective, Seed Mob, who state:

young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have not been included in conversations about the climate crisis. Across the globe, young First Nations people are inheriting the consequences of your climate inaction ... We are one of the youngest generations of the oldest continuing cultures on Earth and we have cultural responsibilities and moral obligations to make sure that our cultures and humanity at large continues for generations ahead of us (seed Mob 2024).

Aboriginal women know this and the connection between Aboriginal women's participation and children's participation. They argue that the involvement of children in cultural burning will assist in re-establishing and normalising relationships with Country, which will help promote sustainable futures. Wren describes what her ideal future would entail,

It would be kids growing up where it's just a norm to be on Country. ... from a very young age. They're burning Country, and they know how to do that. Wren.

As an example of this normalisation, Lucinda participates in cultural burning with her children and grandchildren. Lucinda acknowledges that other Aboriginal women do not have these same opportunities to share intergenerational experiences and suggests this is unsatisfactory. Lucinda considers how other Aboriginal women could be supported to overcome any tensions or unease they have about participating in cultural burning.

We know that that's an unrealistic fear, because if you're raising your children – in my case now I've got grandchildren – and taking them out bush and taking them and having them part of all that process. There's nothing to be feared, but, you know, some women that may have not had that experience, are fearful about having their children involved. Lucinda

Kobi and Wren made similar observations – that women often hesitate to attend cultural burning events because they are unsure whether they are permitted, especially with their children (this is addressed later in this chapter and in Chapter Nine).

The presence of children means that cultural burning actively maintains communal cultural practices where children are valued and included. This practice reveals the collective social responsibility within Aboriginal communities to look out for all children, regardless of direct, individual relationships. This collective responsibility translates into sharing knowledge and skills with children other than one's own, as a social norm. This characteristic means that the presence of children positively changes the dynamic at cultural burning events, where communal experiences with shared roles and responsibilities are fostered. I have witnessed this with my own children at cultural burning events, where they were taught new skills by other Aboriginal people who were unknown to us (Fig. 39). Reciprocally, I also share my time and care with children other than my own. Aboriginal women discuss the learning experiences that adults and children share through cultural burning, not just of fire, but on a range of topics as previously described. Wren talks about this shared learning as being ongoing,

Well, I think, reflecting on the kids, and them being there, I think that an important lesson is, that we're all learning, when we're doing it too. And that the knowledge that I have of burning is tiny, and every time I keep burning different Country with different species, with different people, I learn more. Wren.



Figure 39: Aboriginal man at Dhungala NIFW teaches Tyson. An Aboriginal man unknown to us, shows my son Tyson how to use a kestrel tool during Dhungala National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2019 in Barmah National Park Victoria. Teaching and looking out for children who are not your own is common in Aboriginal societies. Credit: V. Cavanagh 2019.

Bishop and Tynan (2022) agree that children’s participation in cultural burning creates multi-generational, multi-directional culturally-embedded learning. This communal and intergenerational learning is visible with the Banbai Ranger teams and the young people in their community. Lesley Patterson describes the activation of intergenerational knowledge transfer through cultural burning and caring for Country activities, where children are learning about fire, species, and Country from their family, Elders, and community members (McKemey & Patterson 2019). Patterson is optimistic about the participation of young people: ‘even my youngest grandchildren are starting to pick up what I’m saying. They know about bush medicine’ (McKemey et al. 2021a, p. 1022). Aboriginal women across non-scholarly literature agree that involving youth is good for individuals, families, communities and good for Country. It encourages that future generations will be skilled in caring for Country through Aboriginal approaches (Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020, McBride & Dundler 2024, Wegener 2019). The Aboriginal women in this research also recognise the important roles of fathers, male role models,

and extended families, acknowledging that the responsibility to teach younger generations exists beyond women (addressed further in this chapter).

I have often had my children with me at cultural burning events with many positive outcomes. I have felt a deeper connection with my children and have noticed myself feeling happier, closer, and more engaged. I noticed this at the 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop – a multi-day event where we camped in the bush with a group of cultural burning friends. We were physically closer – sharing a tent, sitting around the campfire at night, participating in workshops during the day and walking Country together. The workshops included tool making, bush tucker talks, dancing, storytelling by the river, plant and wildlife identification, women’s circle, weaving, and possum-skin cloak making. All these experiences are culturally enriching but not commonplace in our everyday lives.

The importance of intergenerational participation is well established in the literature, and it confirms what was heard across the Aboriginal women’s interviews. In 1998, Yibarbuk explained: ‘fire that is the centre of each family... we need to encourage our children in the ways of the past. Fire must be managed and people must be on their country to manage that fire’ (Yibarbuk in Langton 1998, p. 1-6). The following year Langton (1999, p. 23) expressed concern about the breakdown in knowledge transfer: ‘Aboriginal leaders acknowledge that their vast knowledge systems are at risk of not being transmitted to younger generations.’ In literature from other regions, Indigenous women demonstrate the importance of intergenerational participation in cultural burning activities. Senior Indigenous women from remote Australia such as Kakadu traditional owner, Violet Lawson and Cherry Daniels from Arnhem Land, agree that engaging youth is important to maintain cultural obligations to care for Country and teach younger generations about fire, especially young women (Daniels 2012, 2022, Lawson cited in McGregor et al. 2010). Aboriginal woman, Kylee Clubb, in north Queensland notes the importance of involving younger generations in her cultural burning activities:

As we're all getting older, the next generation has to take on these roles, caring for our country and making sure it's maintained and healthy. It's very important that our younger ones get out on country with us, light that first match, smell that first burn, and see their country back to the way it is (cited in Richardson & Goll 2022).

People from other parts of the continent share similar aspirations (Bourke, Atkinson & Neale 2020, McKemey et al. 2020b, Steffensen 2020). Steffensen and Steffensen specifically target children’s participation in cultural burning through their children’s book *Looking After Country with Fire* (2022). The book highlights that multiple levels of knowledge sharing occur when children are on Country especially with Elders and they dedicate the book ‘to the young ones who want to grow up being friends with the fire’ (Steffensen & Steffensen, 2022, p.iii). Internationally, examples of multi-generational participation in Indigenous fire stewardship are frequent, and the connection between women and children’s participation is evident and encouraged for the same reasons found in NSW (Adlam et al. 2021, Hankins 2018a, Hoffman et al. 2022, Lake & Christianson 2020).

Broadening from fire, national caring for Country reports support intergenerational participation and identify the links between Indigenous women and Indigenous youth. The *Strong Women on Country* report by Country Needs People outlines that Indigenous women across the continent engage their communities and children in caring for Country activities including fire. The report includes several examples of youth focussed activities including junior ranger and school-based programs led by local Indigenous knowledge holders and Elders (O’Leary & Walter 2018). Young people are encouraged to gain skills, knowledge and to develop their own lived experiences. Similarly, the Human Rights Commission’s national report on Indigenous women and girls states: ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have a great desire to ensure their children are raised with a strong grounding in culture, informed by their relationship with country’ (AHRC 2020, p. 331).

7.3 MATRIARCHS

7.3.1 Women’s engagement is important

Aboriginal women’s engagement in cultural burning is often synonymous with Aboriginal children’s participation. However, as a matter of basic equality Aboriginal women have value, and women’s participation is valid on its own right. There are numerous reasons that support Aboriginal women’s engagement beyond those connected to youth. There are many Aboriginal women who do not have children, and responsibilities to engage children do not rest solely with women or mothers. All the Aboriginal women (and most others) that I interacted with in this research present a wide range of reasons for supporting Aboriginal women’s engagement. Reasons include, the protection and maintenance of Aboriginal women’s heritage sites in the landscape, as well as the maintenance of Aboriginal women’s values, knowledges, priorities, roles and practices (collectively, Aboriginal women’s values).

This section explores the interaction between cultural burning and Aboriginal women’s values across three streams. The first stream discusses matriarchal societies; the second examines cultural burning to care for women’s sites in the landscape; and the third demonstrates how Aboriginal women are claiming space and being encouraged in the sector. This section addresses a strong and consistent message that emerged throughout my research: women hold specific values, and at times, distinct burning approaches, that must be incorporated into cultural burning. The discussion highlights Aboriginal women’s leadership and acknowledges that women’s knowledge and contributions are generally under-utilised. This gap risks marginalising the efficiency and effectiveness of cultural burning by missing key links within Aboriginal communities.

Cultural burning forums are increasingly considerate of women, often in response to Aboriginal women's advocacy, such as with this research. All the women in this research agreed that where cultural protocols allow, Aboriginal women should be involved in cultural burning and caring for Country. There is an acknowledgement of the diversity of Aboriginal nations across NSW, and that there are places where it may not be appropriate for women to be involved. However, where it is appropriate, the women are keen to participate,

I definitely think that women should be able to participate in cultural burning, if that's what is right for us to do. We have to care for Country too. Tracey

it reinforces that our cultural rites of passage as Aboriginal women in a matriarchal society and it's a practice we would traditionally have done, and, you know, we all know through colonisation that patriarchal line has taken some of our rites of passage away. Edie.

Tracey and Edie's comments show an awareness of the need to adhere to cultural protocols, as well as their awareness of women's underrepresentation. Edie's comment highlights that some Aboriginal societies are matriarchal, thus for those communities women's leadership is necessary to uphold cultural protocols. Additionally, in some places Aboriginal women carry fire lore, again making their leadership fundamental. Regardless of whether an Aboriginal society is matriarchal, patriarchal or more neutral, the maintenance and protection of Aboriginal women's values remain valid. However, colonisation has severely disrupted Aboriginal cultural processes. Aboriginal women and others are keen to have the disruption rectified and to revive and strengthen cultural roles and approaches. The revival of cultural burning in NSW presents an opportunity to support the reclamation of matriarchal societies and celebrate Aboriginal women. In describing her experience at a cultural burn, Edie noted the replication of Western gender norms, illustrating that male leadership is not always appropriate,

In my head, I was like "Oh, how does this work", because we were traditionally a matriarchal society here, and we only became patriarchal because white man come along and said "We're going to only talk to the men, because that's what we do in our country, so that's what we're going to do in this country". Edie.

Edie acknowledges that Western patriarchy has been influential in centring men. In her narrative, where she questioned "how does this work", Edie highlights the dilemma that she faced with the inappropriateness of the male leadership at the cultural burn, which was occurring within her matriarchal Country. Edie went on to explain that the burn leaders were also aware of the dilemma and steps were taken to respectfully address it. These steps included an Aboriginal cultural ceremony to acknowledge the matriarchal foundations of that Country. The cultural burn was able to proceed through

the endorsement of the right people for that Country, who ensured that it was respectful of women and Country. They held this respect and were still able to provide the care that Country urgently needed through cultural burning. Crucially, these decisions can only be made by the right people (explained in Chapter Six and throughout thesis). Budawang Yuin woman, Rosie Goslett-King (2021), expresses that the inappropriateness that occurs due to a lack of gender representation is common across caring for Country work. She points out that addressing gender not only engages with matters of equality, but also the requirement to engage women who hold specific roles, knowledges and responsibilities with Country. Goslett-King describes:

While equality, in general, is certainly worth aiming for, in our conservation work it's especially important as Indigenous culture directs knowledge essential for proper care of key environmental and cultural assets/sites differently for men and women working on Country. In fact, some of the most important areas of biodiversity (women-only sites) and Indigenous land management techniques are women's business (Goslett-King 2021).

Firesticks Alliance agrees and explains that women's involvement is paramount:

Aboriginal women have played a significant role in care for Country through Cultural Burning for thousands of year[s]. Over the past 250 years, women's connection to this ancient practice has been impacted by colonisation and the displacement of people from their ancestral lands. We look forward to a future where Aboriginal women across Australia are provided opportunities that strengthen their connection to Country and allow for the continuance of culture, knowledge and storytelling ... Supporting Women to engage in Traditional Fire Practice leads to transgenerational participation which means more skilled Indigenous Communities with Knowledge to put healthy fire to country (Firesticks Alliance 2023).

Other Aboriginal women confirm that women's roles exist and must be incorporated. Yuin woman, Sharon Mason, describes Aboriginal women's involvement in cultural burning and exclaims: 'we've always had fire' (Mason 2018). Likewise, Ngambri Elder, Matilda House, repeatedly raised the important role of Aboriginal women with fire throughout the 2018 Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum in Canberra that I attended and heard firsthand from House who was adamant that women and women's Country needs to be considered in cultural burning (Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). It was here that I first presented my research and heard accounts of the important roles of women with fire from a variety of cultural burning practitioners and strong Aboriginal women's voices. Yuin, Wiradjuri woman and cultural burning supporter, Vikki Parsley, advocates for women and highlights the importance of women's roles:

I learnt from my aunties, my grandmothers ... having that female involvement is really important in our culture ... The majority of the knowledge from what I've been taught and told was always held by the women. We were the knowledge holders with the medicines and that

more specific plant use... in a lot of places too, we're matriarchal. The women are our leaders. The women are the backbone of our community... in the near future more women will get out there and be more actively involved on Country' (Parsley 2018).

Monero, Yuin, Ngarigo woman, Aileen Blackburn-Mongta, worked with Aboriginal women on a project that involved cultural burning and yam daisies on the NSW south coast. This project reconnected women with Country, centred Aboriginal women's knowledges and cultural practice, and created health, wellbeing and cultural benefits that were shared across generations (Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). In recognition and response to this momentum, cultural burning groups take steps to encourage and empower Aboriginal women, such as the increase in women's specific cultural burning forums (Treading Lightly 2020, Lyngdoh et al. 2018, Standley et al. 2020, Steffensen 2024). At the National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2018, Indigenous women arranged for a women's circle discussion which was strongly supported by Aboriginal men and others. The women's circle was well attended and the discussion included issues regarding women's empowerment, networking, gender disparities, gendered responsibilities, matriarchal fire lore, and protecting Aboriginal women's places, values and knowledges (Lyngdoh et al. 2018).

I participated in this women's circle with my daughter. We both also attended the women's circle the following year at NIFW Dhungala 2019, where the women raised concerns similar to those discussed in 2018. The 2020 NIFW online forum included a dedicated Aboriginal women's panel which I presented on. To further support women, Firesticks Alliance's governance structures include male and female representation to ensure 'that both women's and men's roles in Cultural Fire are centred' (Wegener in Kovacevic et al. 2021, p. 38). The connection between women and fire is not restricted to NSW. Evidence of Aboriginal women's strong association to fire in other locations can be ascertained in the book *Song Spirals* where 50 pages and multiple chapters are dedicated to Yolngu women's fire knowledge (Burarrwanga et al. 2019). Aboriginal women in other parts of the country also have strong associations to fire.

Broadening from fire, two relevant national reports that focus on Indigenous women, acknowledge the special roles women have with caring for Country. In *Strong Women on Country*, Kuku Yalanj woman, Antoinette Braybrook says: 'women...are leaders, repairing and strengthening not only our environment but the fabric of our families and communities as well... we all have a role in increasing the opportunities for [Indigenous] women to pursue leadership roles, including those focussed on caring for Country' (Braybrook cited O'Leary & Walter 2018, p. 69). This view is supported by the Australian Human Rights Commission who state: 'women and girls have a right to be on their traditional country, to connect to their culture' (HRC 2020, p. 364). In holding these positions, Indigenous women understand the links between the health of Country and the health of Indigenous peoples, as well as the importance of Indigenous women's leadership (HRC 2020, Moreton-Robinson 2000, Ryan 2018). Aboriginal women need to maintain, protect, and teach our stories and practices,

including matriarchal knowledge of Country (Cavanagh 2022a 2022b, Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020, Piccione 2022). Pitjantjatjarra and Pertame woman, Samantha Armstrong, from Mparntwe (Alice Springs) declares the importance of Aboriginal women: ‘Indigenous women throughout Australia are the caretakers of their Indigenous knowledge and they are the custodians of centuries of wisdom’ (Armstrong in Woodroffe et al. 2021, p. 9).

Daniels and others (2022), however, argue that Aboriginal women are marginalised in caring for their Country, and that this is a product of colonisation and Western societal gender norms. Aboriginal women acknowledge the prevailing, yet inaccurate assumptions and behaviours that reinforce the position of men across the sector. The assumption that cultural burning and caring for Country are specifically male cultural roles, as discussed in Chapter Two, has been challenged. However, the strength of male over-representation prevails.

Aboriginal women’s participation in cultural burning, where it is culturally appropriate, is necessary and important for maintaining Aboriginal culture and cultural practices holistically, as well as those specific to Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women want to be engaged in cultural burning as an equality issue, and to gain access to the opportunities that cultural burning supports. There is also growing recognition of Aboriginal women’s leadership and the critical need to engage women, which is particularly in matriarchal societies where gender specific cultural protocols exist in order to maintain Aboriginal women’s values and protect culturally significant sites.

7.3.2 Only women can go

The second stream that the women highlight is for the care and protection of Aboriginal women’s cultural heritage sites in the landscape. This is an obvious indicator for the need to involve Aboriginal women, as women’s sites can often be areas where men should not visit. Additionally, Aboriginal women have resources in the landscape relevant to women, as well as knowledges, stories and cultural practices. All these values are connected to resources, sites, and Country. Aboriginal women confirm that it is women who must care for Aboriginal women’s sites. They also emphasise the need for roles and programs specifically targeted to Aboriginal women, to ensure their presence in facilitating this responsibility.

I believe in our culture that there’s a shared responsibility, but there’s also something that men bring that women don’t have, and there’s something that women bring that men don’t have, if you start to think about lore ...it’s really important, because it’s part of our responsibility as Aboriginal people and there are spaces which are female spaces and our women need to be looking after those spaces. Lucinda

These issues are known within Aboriginal communities and cultural burning groups. With this knowledge, Aboriginal men advocate for Aboriginal women's participation too. Aboriginal women's involvement is required to ensure that cultural practices are effectively and appropriately operationalised, in ways that uphold cultural protocols, particularly regarding women's sites in the landscape – without Aboriginal women, it is unachievable (Robinson et al. 2021b, Lyngdoh et al. 2018, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021). A contributor in a community forum in Grafton said: 'there is strong interest in supporting women rangers to lead and implement cultural burns to ensure that women's cultural heritage sites can be appropriately assessed and managed' (Robinson et al. 2021b, p. 32). Another contributor in this forum also said: 'Let women represent their women's sites. Let them participate to look after their sites' (Robinson et al. 2021b, p. 32). In addition to sites, women are needed to maintain women's cultural knowledge (Maclean, Robinson & Costello 2018).

An example of burning for women's values and site protection occurred in 2015 in Gumbaynggirr Country. Aboriginal women worked in partnership with the Coffs Harbour LALC, Indigenous ranger teams, the RFS, and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, to undertake a cultural burn and protect Aboriginal women's heritage near Coffs Harbour airport (Bertram 2016). A hazard reduction prescribed burn was undertaken in conjunction to the cultural burn to achieve multiple objectives at the one time (Bertram 2016). It is important to note that the distinction between the cultural burn and the hazard reduction burn in this example were actively managed and kept separate. This intentionally avoids the blurring and confusion which can occur through the mislabelling of Western processes as being 'Aboriginal culture', just because there are Aboriginal people participating in the process.

These problematics were highlighted previously and are explored further in relation to ecological burns and the appropriation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge (see Section 9.2: and Fig. 45 and Fig. 46). Gumbaynggirr Elders were involved in planning and guiding the burn, to ensure that cultural protocols were upheld and that participants were culturally safe. Care was taken to address the gender-sensitivities, particularly the location near the women's site. This section of the burn involved only women where practically possible (Bertram 2016). Both the cultural burn and the hazard reduction were considered a success, and a variety of benefits were reported, including respect and promotion of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal women's values, building and strengthening collaborative partnerships, bushfire risk reduction, and ecological monitoring (Bertram 2016).

Similar examples exist in other jurisdictions. An all-Indigenous female 'cool burn' was undertaken with the Giringun Aboriginal Corporation, to support the mahogany glider species near Cardwell in north Queensland (Kim & Stephen 2020). However, it is unclear if this burn followed a Western fire management ethos, or if it was a cultural burn. Also in Queensland, an all-Aboriginal female cultural burn was undertaken in 2020, to protect a special women's area on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) (DES 2020). The Minjerribah burn was undertaken to support local plant species

and it was particularly respectful of the local cultural protocols, which do not allow for men to care for Country in that specific area (DES 2020).

A burn that was correctly labelled as a hazard reduction, but was culturally informed, occurred in 2021, in Dharawal National Park. In this example, NPWS conducted a gender-sensitive hazard reduction within a known Aboriginal women's place. This burn was undertaken in partnership with local Aboriginal women who hold the cultural authority for the area, and only females attended and participated in the burn (DPIE 2021). Here, government are respectfully engaging with gender and Aboriginal cultural issues. However, this burn was still conducted as a Western fire management operation through its fundamental processes and objectives. Hopefully, the implementation of cultural burning in examples such as these, and other fire operations, continue to increase so that cultural burning becomes the norm to protect heritage and support the health of Country.

There are other examples of strong Aboriginal women's leadership within Western fire management systems, such as the all-Indigenous all-female community fire team at Lake Tyers in Victoria (Smethurst 2020). The Lake Tyers team and other similar groups are doing important work as role models addressing the underrepresentation of Aboriginal women. Yuin woman, Kaylene McLeod, describes her participation in cultural burning and being a Western trained firefighter. McLeod says her Elders instilled in her a responsibility to care for Country, and to look after her community. She achieves this through her firefighting work where she is an important team member and community role model promoting Aboriginal women's representation and inspiring others (McLeod 2020). Even within Western fire management, Aboriginal firefighters carry their cultural identities and responsibilities with them, regardless of whether they are engaging in Western processes or other practices.

In addition to protecting sites, Aboriginal women have values and resources in the landscape such as weaving fibres and plant medicines, these must be considered in caring for Country activities. These women's values and resources may or may not overlap with values and resources known to other Aboriginal peoples who are involved in the process, thus Aboriginal women must be involved to provide adequate and appropriate care. Ashlee makes this point,

I think burning needs women. Also, I would guess that the women that have gone before me know the properties of particular plants because of the way that women use those particular plants... knowing the plants, means that we've got a different eye for what we're actually doing to cultivate growth or to bring on the seed... that we're particularly burning for that purpose ... the blokes that have their eye on different things as well. Ashlee.

The importance of women's engagement and the need to include women for the protection and maintenance of women's heritage and values, is a strong theme in the developing literature (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024). Weir and Freeman (2019) noted support for Aboriginal women in many of their community visits. They heard from Aboriginal people about the need to address

gender in caring for Country. Aboriginal people told them that it is important that they are ‘meeting the different responsibilities for men’s country and women’s country; and the role of women in fire management in contemporary and historical times’ must be considered (Weir & Freeman 2019, p. 12). In other regions of the continent there is recognition and advocacy for women to be included to improve Indigenous fire programs, Kowanyama man John Clark says ‘[we] Need more girls too, more female rangers, not only men have knowledge of fire, so have the ladies’ (quoted in Robinson et al. 2016). In the Tanami region of central Australia, Aboriginal woman, Josephine Grant, focusses on supporting Aboriginal women through ranger programs (Grant 2020). Grant describes how they teach young women and children to use fire to care for Country, women’s sites, food, medicine, and for ceremony and cultural business (Grant 2020).

International examples include research by Marks-Block and others (2021) on cultural burning in California to enhance basketry resources. Although their research did not focus on gender, 75% of the harvesters in their study were women (Marks-Block et al. 2021). It was identified that both the burning and the basketry were continuations of Indigenous cultural practice, invoking species knowledge, fire knowledge, basketry and fibrecraft knowledge. The baskets, which were the product of the resource gathering after fire, are used by Indigenous people for child-rearing, harvesting, clothing, ceremony, and as subsidiary income (Marks-Block et al. 2021). Shebitz (2005) found that Indigenous burning in the USA was important for supporting the Haudenosaunee Nation in maintaining sweetgrass species as a cultural resource in New York State. Also in this study, the Quinault and Skokomish Nations use Indigenous burning in maintaining beargrass in Washington State (Shebitz 2005). Indigenous women’s knowledge and practice featured strongly in both these case studies, as did the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer (Shebitz 2005). Mistry and others (2005) found that Indigenous women in Brazil use fire as a tool to keep landscape around their villages safe. They found that women would burn the land as they travelled, harvesting fruit and honey (Mistry et al. 2005). Indigenous women across many parts of the world hold fire knowledge and must be involved to protect women’s sites, maintain women’s resources, and sustain their knowledges.

7.3.3 Taking up space

The final stream emerging from the women’s discussions is Aboriginal women’s active claiming of space in the sector, along with the affirmative actions taken to encourage their participation. Women recognise their underrepresentation in cultural burning, in caring for Country, and the broader sectors. Aboriginal women recognise the connection between their underrepresentation and ongoing impacts of colonisation, as well as the importance of their participation for Aboriginal youth and future generations. They understand that this underrepresentation acts as a barrier, limiting their opportunities to fully participate (explored further in Section 9.3).

To resolve the issues attached to gender, the women encourage uplift in Aboriginal women's participation through specific and overt action. The women in this research identify that this PhD research is important, and that it contributes to this intentional action. It is Indigenist research that is by, with, and about Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women celebrate such acts of provocation and the political resistance to the erasure of Aboriginal women by colonisation (Corr 2018). Steph describes this research as 'really important work' and articulates its aptness,

...about cultural burning, by an Aboriginal woman, about Aboriginal women's involvement, I think is helping build this momentum, and helping it be Aboriginal-led. Steph

Aboriginal women add their voices to this research as acts of self-determination and as opportunities to champion, advocate, and make space for themselves, and other Aboriginal women. Wren shows her support and her reasoning for wanting to be involved,

And how exciting it's going to be to see women's experiences and stories, and voices, be out there ... You know, because the work, like when you publish it, other people will pick it up and they will use it and I always, often, underestimate those ripples that go out, and that's really powerful – that what you're doing means that women's stories and voices are going to start to ripple out and balance out lots of the early, like first colonial, recordings of burning and women, but then also even the current literature which is mainly male voices. That's very powerful, and I think that will help with conversations about women's role in burning when in some places, and in some conversations and movements, it is more of a gendered thing. Wren.

Wren points out that Aboriginal women's voices are often not considered in mainstream policies, and that this contributes to maintaining various intersectional oppressions.

Through this research and beyond, I have a role in claiming and taking up space as an Aboriginal woman. In doing so, I also hold space for other Aboriginal women. This research contributes to the representation of Aboriginal women. Previously, I described an incident at a community forum where an older Aboriginal man strongly asserted that cultural burning was men's business (see Section 6.6). My role at that forum included holding space for women's voices and ensuring Elder Aboriginal women present had the opportunity to guide and counsel us and articulate that Aboriginal women do have important roles in cultural burning and caring for Country. It was also important that I stood in solidarity with the women from that community as they presented their views back to the entire group, including that older man. Here my leadership is active. It is important that I do more than just research the topic, but also that I enact change. One way that I activate this is to bring other Aboriginal women along with me. Examples of similar actions include my preparation for the Royal Commission, sharing public speaking engagements with other Aboriginal women (see Section 4.2.6), co-contributing to

publications (Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020), and co-authoring (Tynan & Cavanagh 2021). I am conscious to share those opportunities with other Aboriginal women to actively promote the diversity of Aboriginal women's voices, as I achieved through my preparation for the Royal Commission and formal inquiry participation (Section 1.2 and Table 10).

Beyond this research, change is also enacted through affirmative action such as targeted programs, dedicated positions, tailored support, and advocacy for women. Cultural burning organisations and individuals are very supportive and encourage women's participation. As a result, women-specific workshops and activities are increasing. The literature confirms that affirmative action is needed (Cavanagh 2022a, Williamson 2021a). The annual National Indigenous Fire Workshop recognises the need to hold space for women, and they acknowledge the important work:

happening across communities to better support women to fulfil their important roles in cultural fire. It is incredibly important that we provide the space for women's discussions around intergenerational transfer of knowledge and supporting this in practice (Kovacevic et al. 2021, p. 11).

Aboriginal women also highlight the need to improve participation through the ways that cultural burning is promoted. They state that Aboriginal women need to be visible in cultural burning advertising materials and reports. Aboriginal women point out the male-centric nature of cultural burning promotional materials. This was the subject of an email I received in March 2019 from an Aboriginal woman after she heard about my research topic (see Appendix 12.4). The email contained two items: a screenshot of a promotional flyer for an upcoming cultural burning workshop (Fig. 40); and this single line of text:

‘Picture below tell a male story.....’

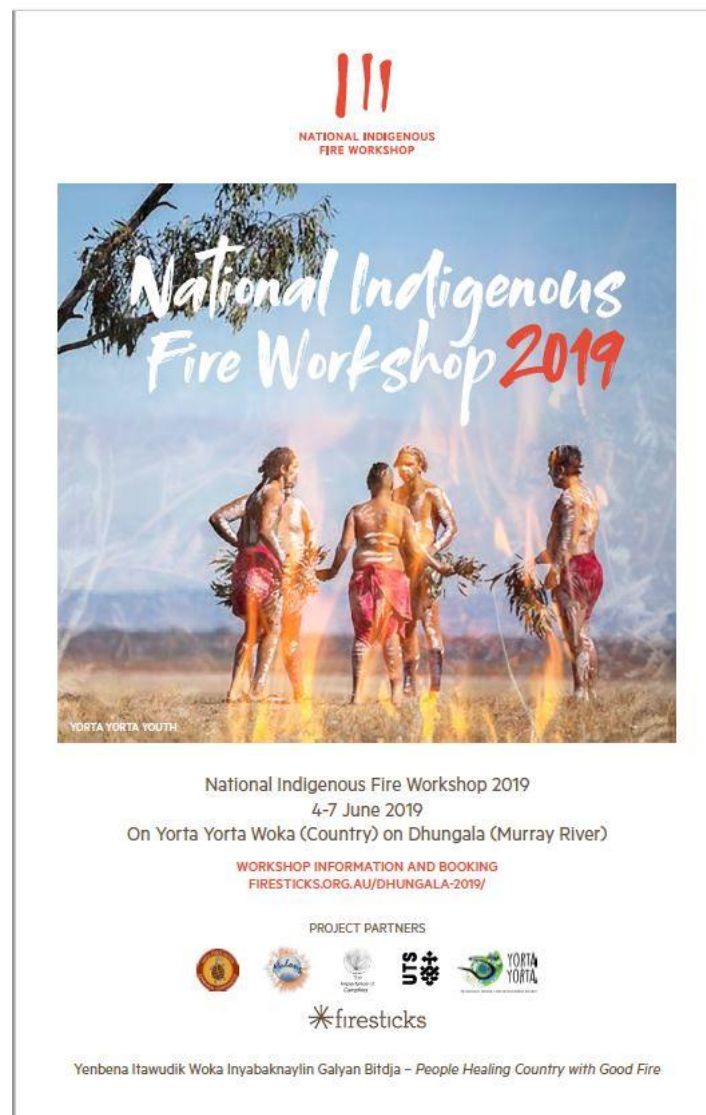


Figure 40: The National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2019 Dhungala promotional flyer cover. Many similar images appear on cultural burning advertising materials (see Appendix 12.8: *Cultural Burning Promotional Material*).

Here, the Aboriginal woman who emailed me, identifies that the image on the flyer featured only men, and that this lack of gender representation influences Aboriginal women’s feelings, and perhaps decisions, about who can and should attend. Other promotional materials for cultural burning were found to be similarly male-dominated with recent improvements (see Appendix 12.8). Making women visible and explicitly inviting them and children, is simple but necessary as Kobi shows,

the invitation that we got at the Land Council, I'm pretty sure it said "women included". It sounds like an easy thing but just, you think that that's a given these days, but sometimes you don't really know, especially with cultural things, whether it's appropriate to go or not. Kobi

In addition to the promotional material, the logistical and organisational structures of cultural burning events, also influence Aboriginal women's participation. I experienced this when registering for the Dhungala NIFW 2019, where I was intending to include my children. However, the initial registration process did not include any options for children. This made me pause and question whether children were allowed to attend, or if they were expected to register at the full adult rate. If children were not permitted, it would have influenced my decision to attend. If children were expected to register under the full adult registration cost, that would eliminate my ability to attend due to the total cost. I contacted the event organisers directly to enquire if children could attend, given they did not appear in the registration options. The organisers confirmed that children were very welcome, and they updated the event registration page to include options for children (including appropriate pricing ranges). Without this change, parents and carers of children who are unfamiliar with cultural burning events, may be deterred. My own experience here, and the examples above, indicate how representation and the mindful inclusion of women and children in cultural burning influences potential attendees. At the time, this barrier was easily rectified and may appear minor but it is influential as Kobi shows,

You know, if a mum was thinking, "I'd really like to be a part of this but I've got my kids" or trying to juggle school pick-ups or drop-off, all those kinds of things. I guess I'm lucky because I can attend as part of my role and I'm already working so when I think about it, I'm not really thinking about my children being a barrier to being able to attend but I can see community members that would be definitely a hurdle for sure. Kobi.

Here Kobi shares that she is able to attend cultural burning events because it fits within her employed role. This reveals another disparity that privilege certain Aboriginal people over others. Similarly, in my case, I could attend and involve my children. However, other Aboriginal women do not share this access, as illustrated by my niece in Story Four where she indicated that she wanted to have cultural burning opportunities for her and her children too. Like my niece, many Aboriginal women reach out to me, asking how they can attend cultural burning. Not only are they unsure about if and how to attend, they are also indicating that it is not a common practice for them. My self-reflective awareness identifies that it is not fair that I get to participate in cultural burning, because of my roles as a researcher and employee in a job aligned to cultural burning, whilst other Aboriginal women and their children miss out. I seek ways to make these opportunities accessible to all Aboriginal people, especially women. The lack of accessibility to cultural burning means that some Aboriginal women and children are alienated

from Country and culture. It also means that the cultural activity is weakened because it is not inclusive of all community members.

In other parts of the sector, accessibility, visibility, and representation is well understood. Western fire management agencies have initiatives targeted to women, such as the Girls on Fire program in NSW (Mackintosh 2018). There are also targeted and identified employment initiatives. For example, my initial employment in NPWS occurred during a dedicated initiative to increase women's employment. The Field Officer role that I secured was targeted to women, and it was an Aboriginal identified role (Fig. 41). I attribute much of my career and academic success to the foundation of having the security of a permanent job which I obtained when I was 20 years old. This stability and investment over decades has made a significant impact on my life. History shows that affirmative action is necessary and it works.

The Aboriginal women in this research want other women to have access to cultural burning opportunities and for Aboriginal women's involvement to be recognised and normalised. The women understand the importance of role models and working together to support each other. They believe increasing Aboriginal women's involvement in cultural burning will build momentum and support positive outcomes across a range of sectors and demographics. Through the promotion and support of Aboriginal women in cultural burning, Aboriginal women see multiple and wide-ranging benefits that will uplift societies and improve the health of Country. Aboriginal women's underrepresentation is reflective of colonisation and the patriarchy, which is inappropriate, inefficient and unsustainable. Haley believes her voice can help normalise women's inclusion.

it doesn't necessarily mean that I have to be the one lighting Country but I can contribute to the conversation and help to try and create opportunities for other women particularly. Haley.

Considering 'inclusion' as an equality issue, the role of government in encouraging women in cultural burning was discussed. The Aboriginal women gave mixed responses regarding if and how governments should influence women's inclusion. Some women were optimistic and supportive,

I want to know that I can see myself in the news, in academia, in cultural burning, in a range of programs. I need to be able to see myself, and I think the institutions and departments and government can play a role in doing that. Haley.

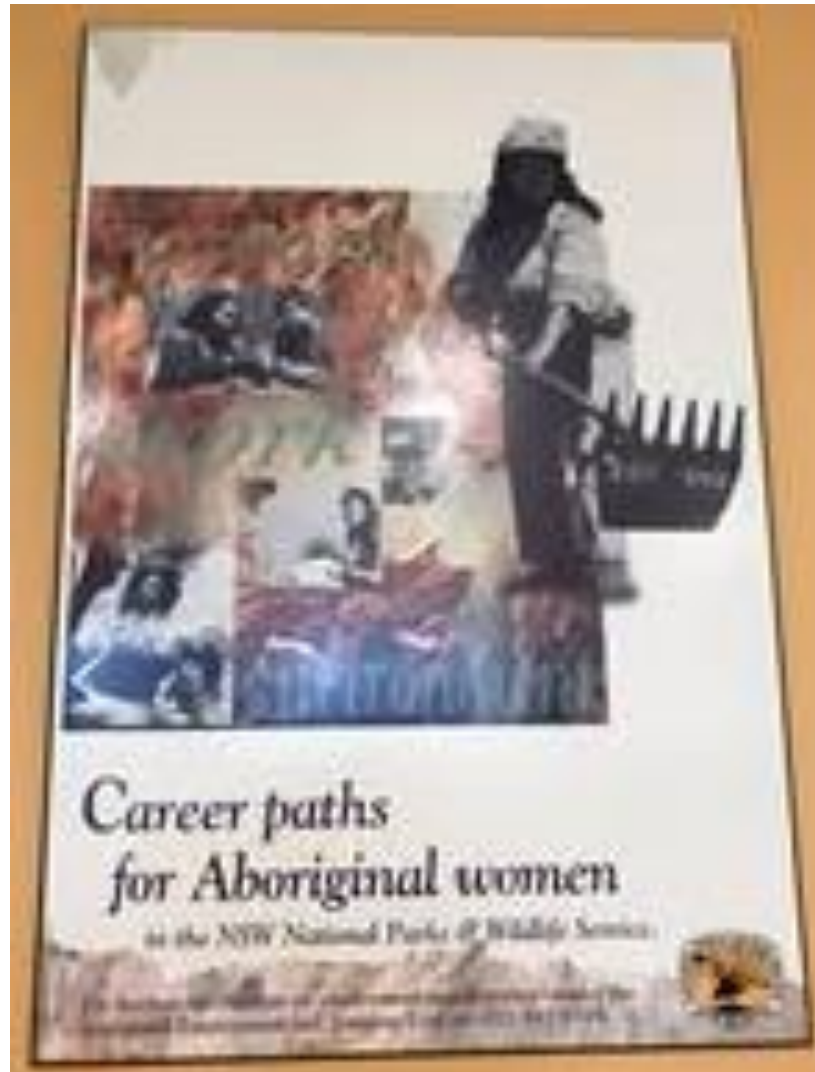


Figure 41: NPWS Career paths for Aboriginal women poster. This poster was a common feature of workplace office spaces when I started working in NPWS. It was part of the affirmative action to increase Aboriginal women’s employment in that Department and it illustrates Aboriginal women participating in a range of roles including firefighting roles with the woman using the rake-hoe tool which is used to make firebreaks (described in Story Two). Credit: Jessica Herder

While other women were cautious,

I think that Aboriginal women should be involved in cultural burning. That is something that should occur. But in terms of government doing something to make that happen, I don't know. I don't know about that, because I'm not sure how much we can trust or rely on the government to make changes to bring us in. Wren.

Ashlee, who works at a university, spoke at length about the need to raise the profile of Aboriginal women, and she illustrates many of the issues raised in this thesis – gender, balance, empowerment and timeliness,

I think right now more than ever, it's probably really important for us to think about how we demonstrate that importance of women being associated with cultural burning, you know, the nourishment factor alone but also, it is about community ... we, particularly women, have to work on to be more active in those spaces. Ashlee.

Williamson (2021a) confirms that targeted actions to include women are essential; without them, Aboriginal women will continue to be excluded. Beyond being an issue of inequality, this exclusion has direct consequences for Country, Aboriginal youth, and future generations (Williamson 2021a).

7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the many ways Aboriginal women contribute to and benefit from participating in cultural burning. The Aboriginal women in this research affirm what I observed during my own involvement – observations that are also supported by the literature. Aboriginal women assert that our place within cultural burning is valid and necessary, and that the visibility of Aboriginal women must be raised. We welcome these opportunities. The connection between Aboriginal women's participation and that of children and youth was also examined with participants emphasising that engaging women to support children's participation is both urgent and essential. The women describe cultural experiences shared as families and communities as nurturing. They see their roles as mothers and first teachers not only as important but as responsibilities carried for both the present and future.

Aboriginal women and children's participation in cultural burning encourages intergenerational knowledge transfer and strengthens their wellbeing and cultural identity. Aboriginal children need this strength as they are the future knowledge holders, Elders, and decision-makers who will have the responsibility of caring for Country along with other important roles. Aboriginal children need to have this knowledge as well as culture instilled in them now as these are not teachings that children attain in the Western mainstream schooling system. The women also illustrate that cultural burning engages and involves more topics than just fire, it also includes a wide range of education and skills. Children's participation will increase through women's participation, and this will encourage intergenerational knowledge transfer and build and strengthen entire Aboriginal communities. Finally, the women acknowledge that their learning is ongoing, and even though some knowledge has not been passed on to them, it is never too late to reengage with culture.

The women also shared that participating in cultural burning helps ensure that women's sites, knowledges, and values are better cared for. Aboriginal women deserve to participate as individuals in our own right, as this supports cultural identities, sustains women's knowledges and resources, and

honours matriarchal stories. These are not only aspirations, but responsibilities that need to be addressed now to ensure they are carried forward for future generations. Aboriginal women's involvement brings much needed balance to cultural burning and acknowledges that, in some cultural groups, Aboriginal women hold and carry fire lore.

Aboriginal women recognise that cultural burning, as well as broader sectors like firefighting and caring for Country, are currently male dominated, shaped by prevailing colonial mindsets that influence who participates. They advocate for equal access to employment and opportunities, and seek to challenge the patriarchal norms that centre and privilege men across these fields. The Aboriginal women call for meaningful change toward greater inclusivity, asserting that increased involvement of Aboriginal women leads to more representation and fosters positive social and environmental outcomes.

The women are optimistic and yet cautious of the influence of government in creating these changes. Aboriginal women also suggest that cultural burning promotional materials and registration processes need to explicitly address gender and children's participation as this will clarify some uncertainty and assist in encouraging participation. Aboriginal women want to be able to participate in cultural burning to learn and nurture themselves, Country and support others. Aboriginal women are active and engaged in working towards these goals. We know we have a role to fulfill, and we step confidentially into that role. Simultaneously we must support the empowerment of other Aboriginal people and marginalised members of our communities. Just as placing Aboriginal people within Western fire management does not resolve deeper issues in fire management, Aboriginal women are not simply seeking inclusion. What is needed is structural and systemic change and processes that genuinely accommodate Aboriginal women, their values, and ways of knowing. This shift is essential to re-establish healthy relationships with Country, foster sustainability, and move toward a more fair and just society.

STORY EIGHT: “TAKE YOUR CHILDREN WITH YOU.”

We had arrived at Dhungala, the 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop less than 24 hours ago. On day one there was a warm Welcome to Country by local Elders and lots of excitement setting up the tent, and meeting new people and catching up with old friends. We were participating in one of the formal workshops when my daughter, Emma, who was around nine years old asked me to use my phone to video her, because she has something she wanted to show me. When I started to film she performed what she later explained was her ‘Fire dance’ (Fig. 42). It was a traditional Aboriginal cultural dance, one that I had not ever seen her do before. We do not come from a family who typically participate in traditional dancing, so I knew that Emma had not been taught this dance before. I was perplexed, so when she finished, I asked her, “Where did you learn the Fire Dance from?” Pointing to her belly Emma replied, “I learnt it in my tummy, Mum”.

Her reply stirs a deep connection. Our bellies, my belly where I grew her and her brother, the place where our spirit resides and where we all have our umbilical connection to our own mothers. I realised I had witnessed a very special thing, Emma had shared with me knowledge that she carries in her DNA, our ancestral muscle memory that flourished into existence, stimulated by being surrounded by strong spiritual culture at the fire workshop. Emma wanted me to film it so she could enjoy watching herself on the screen, yet more importantly, having it on film meant that I could return to that memory and come to better understand it within the context of this research. While these experiences amaze me, they also bring me confidence, as acts of confirmation. Through these acts my children demonstrate their knowledge of, and connection to Country. What I take from these experiences, is that the methodology is in the doing, the practice, and I use these lessons as reminders that my research is grounded in cultural knowledge, intergenerational responsibilities and Aboriginal spirituality.



Figure 42: Emma’s fire dance. Daughter waves a eucalyptus branch and joyfully performs her Fire Dance at NIFW Dhungala 2019. Credit: V. Cavanagh

“Whatever you do, take your children with you.” Was an instruction from my Mum when I told her I was doing my PhD and was considering research topics. My stories show the richness and children bring to cultural burning and the important role they have alongside their families and within communities. The ability to have my children with me also reveals a barrier that other women may experience if they do not have support for their child’s absence from school. Unless activities are scheduled for weekends or holidays, the involvement of school-aged youth and/or their parent (stereotypically their mother) is restricted. Although cultural burning includes wide ranging educational benefits, it may not always be possible to accommodate children. Personally, I have not experienced this restriction, I have always had the privilege of being supported. I also arrange with the school that my children present what they learnt to their class on their return, to share their learning with their peers. This may not be possible for other parents and carers.

CHAPTER 8 OUTCOMES FOR MORE THAN WOMEN

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the outcomes of cultural burning specific to Aboriginal women, including intergenerational matters and the protection of matriarchal knowledges and places. In this chapter, the Aboriginal women's discussion broadens, exploring the wide-ranging benefits and outcomes of cultural burning, not just for Aboriginal women but across genders, generations, Aboriginal communities and wider society (McKemey et al. 2020a, Williamson 2021a). There is more to cultural burning than the fires. This scope is evident in the range of topics that Aboriginal women discuss, including ecological, social, spiritual and cultural outcomes. While the topics discussed by the women have received attention in the developing literature, Aboriginal women's perspectives are rarely included. This thesis contributes new knowledge by centring their voices. The themes identified in the literature are affirmed through the perspectives shared by the Aboriginal women in this research. Some themes examined in this chapter are specific to Aboriginal people, including access and (re)connection to Country, cultural practices, responsibilities to care for Country and community, and the economic and social development outcomes of cultural burning. Other themes speak more broadly to wider society, such as reconciliation and sustainability outcomes.

The women discuss these themes largely through a positive lens, building on the healing qualities of cultural burning presented in Chapter Six. The women describe cultural burning as a cultural practice that strengthens their identities and positively influences all aspects of their health and wellbeing. In contrast to this positivity, the women also repeatedly highlight that many of the topics are fundamentally negatively influenced by colonisation. For example, colonisation displaced Aboriginal people from Country, and established governance frameworks that systematically exclude Aboriginal people and women from caring for Country. This has significantly changed Country and affected fire regimes. It has also undermined the knowledge, practices, and responsibilities that Aboriginal people have with Country, impacting every aspect of their health and wellbeing. As colonisation is a strong and consistent theme throughout, its negative influence is not repeatedly explained but should be understood as a constant presence across the analysis. Similarly, the women did not speak to the topics in this chapter specifically in relation to Aboriginal women, but rather in reference to Aboriginal people and communities as a whole. Nevertheless, it is understood that gender remained a relevant factor, and

that the existing oppressions are intersectional and compounding for Aboriginal women (Crenshaw 1989).

8.2 ACCESS AND CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

8.2.1 Access is valued across tenure

Access to Country is a critical issue, with most Aboriginal people in NSW facing significant barriers, particularly when it comes to engaging in caring for Country activities such as cultural burning. Aboriginal people have strong aspirations to have greater access to Country, and cultural burning can enable this access. Access to Country itself is a positive outcome of cultural burning, and it supports other outcomes including (re)connecting with Country, exercising cultural responsibilities, and maintaining cultural practices. Aboriginal women explain how and why access is important, building on earlier discussion around cultural burning and the barriers to access (e.g. Story Six). Aboriginal women identify that as a land-based practice, cultural burning creates opportunities to access Country, and that in many cases, this is access that may not have otherwise eventuated. Access may have been restricted physically, with the presence of fences and gates, or people may not access Country because they are adhering to ownership boundaries (i.e. ‘do not enter private property’). Additionally, Aboriginal people may not have accessed the location because there were no planned activities that prompted them to go there, or alternatively, Aboriginal people may have accessed these parts of Country before, but not for the purpose of caring for Country and cultural burning. Access is an issue across many tenure types, including public lands and government estates (Beukers & Costello 2017, McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Williamson 2021a), and private freehold property (e.g. Story Six).

Aboriginal women identify that more access is needed to support the expansion of cultural burning, as Lucinda highlights,

I think that there would be more land available for us – that’s what it has to be, and there has to be more land for us to practice culture ... Aboriginal people have the right to practice culture, and to maintain the countryside, they have the right. Lucinda.

The types of rights that Lucinda is referring to could include Aboriginal cultural birthrights and our cultural responsibilities to care for Country, or it could be land rights, native title rights or UNDRIP. Fundamentally, Aboriginal people have many of these rights, but Aboriginal women know that the

ability to activate these rights is hampered by a lack of access to Country. Even where these rights exist, there are rules about what types of activities are allowed across the varying land tenures. Wren notes that cultural burning has enabled access to private properties that have remained inaccessible due to lasting impacts of colonisation. Wren describes what this access means and the excitement she feels,

their gates are locked So it actually locks out a lot of Aboriginal people, from accessing land and Country that they just haven't seen or been on for hundreds of years. I get so excited sometimes when we go on people's Country ... I think that's really special, and I think that's a power in burning, is getting Aboriginal people back on parts of Country that haven't been able to be accessed before. That's very special. Wren.

The women recognise that the access to Country gained through cultural burning is new and significant. They are also aware that if cultural burning is successful, it may lead to broader access, particularly in areas where neighbouring landholders are already participating, potentially expanding the lands available for cultural practice.

The positive connection between cultural burning and access to Country is well established. The women in my research complement the literature, identifying that the access gained through cultural burning is highly valued. Access is important given that Aboriginal people generally experience displacement from Country and restrictions to access and care for Country. Similar messages appear in the scholarly literature, featuring strongly in publications from Aboriginal women in NSW (Bishop 2022, Bishop & Tynan 2022, McKemey et al. 2019, 2020a, Parsley 2023, Swan in Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020, Tynan 2021). Aboriginal women in other jurisdictions demonstrate that cultural burning has facilitated access to Country with a variety of examples across the continent: in *Strong Women on Country* (O'Leary & Walter 2018); Queensland's Giringun Aboriginal Ranger team (Armbruster 2020); the truwana Rangers in lutruwita / Tasmania (Kovacevic et al. 2021); and in Kakadu and Arnhem Land (Daniels et al. 2022, and Violet Lawson cited in McGregor et al. 2010).

Aboriginal women in the literature describe the lack of access as a key limiting factor to cultural burning in NSW (Johnston & Cavanagh 2020). Rachael Cavanagh states that the lack of access is an outcome of colonisation, along with the restrictive government processes that continue to limit the freedoms of Aboriginal people (Johnston & Cavanagh 2020). The disruption of access to Country has negatively affected cultural burning practices, which has changed the structure and form of Australian forests and diminished the health of Country (see Section 6.2). Warlpiri Ranger, Christine Michaels Ellis says:

The desert has had people walking around and burning in it for a very long time, so the plants and animals have become adapted to fire... Because people are not living on Country anymore we need to go out and look after Country with fire. (Michaels Ellis in CoA & NIAA 2022).

As discussed in Chapter Two there is active discussion about the potential for the increase of the Indigenous estate in NSW to facilitate more access, more cultural land management, and more cultural burning (McCormack, McKemey & Costello 2024, Weir, Freeman & Williamson 2021, Williamson 2021a). The Aboriginal women in this research did not discuss access to Country in reference the Indigenous estate, however, they support the same issues raised in the literature. Lesley Patterson and the Banbai Rangers provide an example of how the Indigenous estate has supported access, which has led to multiple benefits. The Banbai community were able strengthen and develop their cultural burning journeys with the establishment of Wattle Ridge IPA (McKemey et al. 2021a). Over time they have developed their own businesses, and whole of Country management plan, involving multiple generations of Banbai people in their activities (Patterson et al. 2024).

8.2.2 (re)Connection to Country for Aboriginal people

The importance of connection to Country for Aboriginal people is well known and understood (Langton 2021, Moreton-Robinson 2013). Aboriginal women acknowledge that the access gained through cultural burning supports their (re)connection to Country. During cultural burning activities, this (re)connection includes being physically present with Country, and becoming refamiliarised with Country. It is also the process of engaging in a cultural activity to care for Country. In describing what this (re)connection means, the Aboriginal women use positive terminology, including love, healing, pride, and happiness. The women describe connection to Country as being fundamental to Aboriginal identity and that participating in cultural burning supports their wellbeing. Wren describes that cultural burning has made her connection to Country more recognisable and real in ways she had not experienced before,

I got hooked because it felt like all this stuff I'd heard about, about us as Aboriginal people and our connection to land and our connection to Country, and you hear this said so often – every textbook, every news article, every way that we often describe ourselves, “Oh we have this great connection with the land” – and of course it is, but that was probably one of the first times where I felt that in a really tangible way. I could touch and feel and understand what that connection was and the circumstances through which we were doing that burning also for me for the first time, just felt so right ... it's not just about theorising our connections to Country, but it's living it. Wren.

Ashlee uses fire / firing as verbs as she explains that cultural burning is a conduit to activate the (re)connections with Country, community, self, and culture. She shows there is a strong desire and need for connection to Country in Aboriginal people's lives because it is nourishing,

going back to Country is actually you making the connection between where you live and where you're from, then once you're there, you're firing off again in all these different directions – you're going fishing, you're seeing your aunts and uncles, you're actually reactivating those connections again that are really important to you. You know, if you see one of your totem family, you're just in tune with other things. And it fills you up, it gives you this sense of being supported and held by this network. You feel like you're part of something bigger, and so in engaging with cultural burning, for want of a better word, is about seeking these connections, looking to fire them up, be active within it, strike them and receive them, and just be alive in that kind of sense. Ashlee.

Aboriginal women emphasise that, alongside connecting to Country, connecting with other Aboriginal people is equally important. They see cultural burning as fostering human connectivity and community networking. Cultural burning provides opportunities to share knowledge and support each other, creating communities of belonging where Aboriginal processes lead. This stands in contrast to wider society, where Aboriginal peoples are a minority and our approaches are marginalised (Watego 2021). Aboriginal women discuss that belonging and networking are empowering, positive and healing activities for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal women in the Tanami region say access to Country for fire work has meant spending time with Elders and sharing knowledge. They learn about protecting and using plants, animals and medicines, which has improved their wellbeing (Grant 2018).

Many of the women warned about being disconnected and the problems that this can hold. The language they use communicates feelings of loss, hurt, trauma, and pain. When I asked Haley to describe an optimal future of Indigenous-led caring for Country, she became emotional, expressing sadness about the current mismanagement and damage to Country compared to a more hopeful vision of what could be. Haley says,

Wow ... It is a really confronting question isn't it? Actually, I think if I truly dove into that question, that it would actually be traumatic, if I'm really honest. Because there's actual, real sadness because... there is always this fight that's happening, let alone thinking about what would be ideal. Nobody's ever asked me that. Haley.

The interviewed paused briefly to allow Haley a moment to cry and gather herself before she continued,

Sorry, that's a really hard question. I'm so surprised that I just had that really quite emotional response to that. Because we all know Country has had trauma, and we have had trauma, by

being dissociated and fractured from it. And so when you asked me to put us all back together again, it's like "Oh, I'm not sure if I've got the glue, to know how that works." Haley.

Haley's response illustrates her strong feelings about Country, which are intertwined with her wellbeing. For Indigenous peoples, this emotion is not nostalgia for times long gone, but rather a genuine deep grief that manifests across a range of physical and social ills. These emotions are evident where Aboriginal people discuss destruction from bushfires (Williamson, Weir & Cavanagh 2020a). Cultural burning is understood to mitigate some of these ills by centring Country and leading within an Aboriginal cultural model where communities work together to care for Country. In this way, cultural burning is not only good and nurturing for Country, but also good and nurturing for people who gather with the intention to care for Country as our Mother (Tom, Adams & Goode 2023). The women talk about the importance of collaboration and networking to support each other in the process of healing and caring for Country (Fig. 43).

8.3 CULTURAL PRACTICES

8.3.1 Waking up our strengths

There is more to cultural burning than just fire and flames. Cultural burning is a cultural practice that supports a range of other cultural practices. As such, participating in cultural burning positively influences Aboriginal people's wellbeing, strengthens identities, and supports the maintenance of culture across generations. Some of the practices attached to cultural burning, include maintaining cultural customs and protocols like Welcome to Country, Aboriginal language revival, and cultural knowledge of Country, including stories heritage, and resources. These cultural practices are maintained in various ways, including physically caring for Country, as well as through performative forms of knowledge maintenance such as Aboriginal art, songs, dances, and resource use (fibrecraft, pelt-work, tool-making, food and medicine).



Figure 43: Night burn. Cultural burning brings people together to care for Country in cultural ways. Credit: V. Cavanagh July 2020.

Aboriginal women talk strongly about how cultural practices are enacted in cultural burning. They reflect on what it means to practice and celebrate culture in the context of colonialism in which such practices were historically prohibited. Ashlee reflects on this history and the significant disruption it caused, describing cultural burning as both a form of cultural revival and a practice that actively supports it,

From a historical perspective, lots of our cultural practices weren't allowed to be practiced. So, in one way, a visibility of cultural burning signalled a shift away from that time, or that we're in a different era now when these really visible cultural practices can be undertaken and where others are seeing it. Ashlee.

Lucinda agrees with Ashlee, noting that many Aboriginal people are seeking cultural experiences, something I have also observed, with many Aboriginal women asking me how they can participate in cultural burning. Lucinda explains,

think there's a real hunger for a lot of Aboriginal people to reconnect with their culture and cultural burning is one of those ways. It's a point of contact because from there, it's making all those connections and networking, but also the relationship-building that we as Aboriginal people practice as a part of our culture. It was all based around relationships, and relationships to each other but also to Mother Earth. Lucinda.

There is a shared awareness that without intentional effort, cultural practices can fade. Aboriginal women actively take up their responsibilities to maintain culture, and they emphasise the positive impact that participating in cultural burning has on their wellbeing. Kobi's reflections illustrate both these points,

to practice culture, to make sure that that knowledge is held and practised and not lost again... just to make sure that I'm doing my bit... Now, as an adult and being involved in community and realising how rich it is and hearing all these wonderful stories about caring for Country, burning for Country, language coming back – it's this sense of pride ... this is actually my history and I'm really proud of it. Kobi.

On the NSW south coast, Blackburn-Mongta describes a project that involves Aboriginal women caring for Country with a focus on native yams species. The women are reconnecting to Country and maintaining their cultural practices and encouraging intergenerational engagement. Using cultural burning and other methods, the women are experiencing outcomes such as positive wellbeing and confidence (Smith, Weir & Neale 2018). Reflecting on the project, Blackburn-Mongta says,

We are keen to continue the tradition, and to create more awareness around the significance and special cultural role the yam has ... I learnt some of the things about yams through my Nan - some of the traditions that have been handed down for our women ... To be able to do what my elders have done on that same bit of country which hasn't been cared for in a cultural manner for near on 200 years is unbelievable ... I can take my grandchildren and kids - and everyone will be able to go up to the bush and see that we have brought life back to that little bit of land (Aileen Blackburn-Mongta in Ferguson 2018).

Blackburn-Mongta highlights that the women desire to be involved and to care for Country. This project exemplifies that cultural practices are being strengthened through women's participation. These outcomes are experienced by the women who participate as well as multiple generations.

8.3.2 How knowledge is maintained and transmitted

Aboriginal performative forms, such as song, dance, poetry, and arts, are powerful ways that Aboriginal women carry and share information about fire, including cultural burning. These performative forms often contain numerous elements of culture and cultural practice, including being guided by Elders and knowledge holders, following cultural protocols, cultural knowledge of Country, knowledge transmission, Aboriginal languages, and singing, dancing, and physically gathering. The women discuss some of the cultural outcomes they have witnessed from participating in cultural burning:

We really had a sense of community about it ... it was a ceremonial gathering. It was one of those things you read about in books, you know, “Aboriginal people came and they gathered and this was really important and they did this seasonally and they did this around the Bunyan nut, or the Bogong moth” ... it fit into that category; what we did was an example actually of that. Ashlee.

During my research I sought information about women’s fire knowledge, and I received lots of feedback from Aboriginal women and some Aboriginal men (summarised below). This feedback included examples of performative forms of knowledge. One example is from Wiradjuri and Ngemba/Wayilwan woman, Fleur Magick Dennis, who told me of her experience where Ngiyaampaa cultural knowledge holders asked her to help develop a song and accompanying dance about cultural fire ceremony using the Ngiyaampaa language. Aboriginal women performed the song and dance at the Yaama festival in Bourke, and at other locations throughout NSW (pers. comm F. Magick Dennis 2024). Another example came from Gullibul Elder, Aunty Kali, who has conducted cultural burns to protect women’s places in northern NSW. She highlighted that through these activities she maintains her cultural protocols and practices and engages with community. Similarly, Kylie Clubb describes how cultural burning facilitates a wide range of cultural practices, including song, dance, storytelling, and art, as well as practical skills and knowledge about fire and Country (Clubb in Kovacevic et al. 2021). All are important parts of cultural burning and caring for Country (McBride, Pipic Media & Wilarni 2022).

In the literature, Aboriginal women discuss cultural practices in reference to cultural burning. Lesley Patterson identifies that Aboriginal communities experienced horrific punitive consequences, including imprisonment, violent punishment, and child removals, for maintaining their cultural practices throughout the colonial period. This forced restriction, along with the limited access to Country, caused significant disruption and destruction to many cultural practices, such as cultural burning and traditional languages (Patterson in McKemey et al. 2021a). As a result, Prior to 2014, the

Banbai people were not cultural burning. Although some communities have never stopped burning Country, the closer you get to Sydney, the epicentre of colonial impact, the greater the influence of colonisation, evident in the curtailing of cultural practice.

When I enquired about Aboriginal women's fire knowledge in performative forms, several Aboriginal men contacted me and made contributions to express the important links between culture and fire, and to share support for Aboriginal women's engagement as part of strengthening communities. One such example was Yuin Djiringanj man, Warren Foster Senior, and Yuin-Ngarrugu man, Dwayne Bannon Harrison, who described the Shoolaman Bapa song from their Country, which is an important part of their relationship with fire. The cultural details of this knowledge are deep and intricate. I have permission to share that the Shoolaman Bapa is more than a song, it is a specific cultural process that involves rubbing together the fire sticks and blowing on the embers to ignite the fire. This process and the song and dance connect the spirit of the person(s) lighting the fire with that fire. It activates the sharing of life force and spirit that brings fire to life. Shoolaman Bapa is not simply about the physical mechanism of starting a fire and happily singing about it, rather, it acknowledges and respects the spirit of fire and Country (information provided by Uncle Warren Foster senior and Dwayne Bannon Harrison, 22 March 2024 and 10 March 2025, this information and knowledge is not for reproduction, any reference must be done in accordance with cultural protocols and permissions from the knowledge holders; for details see Appendix 12.4).

Another interaction with Aboriginal men included a discussion about how knowledge is maintained and transmitted with Gomeroi, Ngiyampaa man, Jayden Kitchener-Waters and Yirandali, Ngati Maru man, Robert Kelly. This conversation highlighted that what is often perceived as Aboriginal creative or performative cultural expression are, far deeper and more meaningful forms of knowledge retention and transmission. These forms contain and communicate multiple layers of information, including knowledge, processes, and protocols. In the same way that cultural burning is a specific fire for specific Country at specific times, songs, stories, and dances, are geographically referenced. They also form part of the entire cultural practice of caring for, being in relationship with, and knowing Country. These performative forms are culturally appropriate ways to retain, maintain, and transmit knowledge across generations. Performing these forms brings people together, to share and maintain Aboriginal knowledge, culture, and practice, and are part of the cultural process that embodies and respects fire and Country (Kitchener-Waters, Kelly & Cavanagh 2024, pers. comm., 25 March, see Appendix 12.4).

Similar examples of performative forms are found in the literature. Cultural burning practitioner, former government firefighter, and Wiradjuri man, Den Barber, shares a song that he sings in Wiradjuri language about his understanding of the specific relationships between fire, species, and Country. Barber sings: 'Fire for that Country, Country for that fire' (Barber 2020, p. 61). Here Aboriginal men affirm what was heard from Aboriginal women – that cultural practices are an important aspect of cultural burning, and that there is more to cultural burning than just fire. Cultural burning is a

cultural practice, and it supports a range of other cultural practices, such as heritage protection, cultural re-invigoration, intergenerational knowledge sharing, storytelling, Aboriginal language revival, and broader cultural maintenance (McKemey et al. 2020a, Williamson 2021a).

The Aboriginal seasonal calendars are a common tool that support caring for Country knowledge maintenance and knowledge sharing (McKemey et al. 2021a). These seasonal calendars are developed locally to include biophysical and cultural knowledge linked to annual seasons as defined through local Aboriginal knowledge of Country. Visually, the structure of seasonal calendars is circular to reflect the circular relational systems of Indigenous worldviews. This contrasts to Western calendars, which are linear. The calendars demonstrate the intricacies of Indigenous knowledge of Country and can include environmental indicators that are useful to guide cultural burning (McKemey and Patterson 2018, McKemey et al. 2020b, Woodward 2023). These calendars are often enriched with Aboriginal language words, increasing their relevance to local Aboriginal people and Country (McKemey et al. 2021a). Ashlee suggests that Aboriginal languages have a role in cultural burning,

English language can't cut it here. We probably need to go back to all of our various languages and think through, "How do we translate these concepts? How do we use this common English language better to translate what these concepts are about?" language and messaging work but this are also part of it. Ashlee.

The role of language in communicating Indigenous concepts is explored by Arabena (2020) who highlights that, as an Indigenous entity, Country cannot hear English. The English language, therefore, falls short of comprehending and communicating Indigenous relationalities with Country. Here, Indigenous languages, especially the translation of fire knowledge specific to each place, comes to the fore. For example, through their fire activities, the Djabugay Rangers of north-east Queensland have reestablished vital connections between fire, Country, and their Aboriginal language. They have recognised 'new meaning in old songs and phrases when burning on Country. These songs and phrases talk to the intricate approach to fire application and burning certain Country certain ways in the right season' (Woodward, et al. 2020, p. 29). The importance and connection between fire and language is also highlighted in West Arnhem Land where the local Bininj Kunwok language contains knowledge that is locally specific to fire and Country and is used in their fire abatement project (Garde 2009).

Cultural burning can also physically connect people to Aboriginal heritage. At Yellomundee cultural burn, I was walking behind the fire-line where the ground was exposed after the dense grass layer had been burnt. I came across Aboriginal artefacts in-situ and undisturbed by the fire, which suggests the cultural burn was culturally appropriate and responsive (Fig. 44). I have had similar experiences of finding Aboriginal artefacts following other cultural burns. On this occasion, I was walking with a local Aboriginal woman from that Country, and together we inspected the artefact.

Holding it in her hand created a moment of deep connection to her ancestors, highlighting another cultural dimension of cultural burning.

8.4 RESPONSIBILITIES

8.4.1 Responsibilities to Country and community

In addition to practicing culture, the Aboriginal women emphasise that cultural burning helps them contribute to the cultural responsibilities they have for Country and community. The phrases they use to illustrate these responsibilities include: ‘it’s our job’, ‘our role’, ‘we have an obligation’ and ‘my responsibility’. The women embrace these responsibilities as they know it is beneficial for Country and for people. Even though Tracey does not live on her own Country, she still feels compelled to care for the Country she is on,

even though I haven’t grown up on Country, and I don’t live on Country, I still have deep respect for this Country down here and want to help care for it. Tracey.

Aboriginal women illustrate clear connections between cultural responsibilities and Aboriginal identity,

cultural burning is just fundamental to our practice as Aboriginal people ... a fundamental responsibility we have to Country. I feel that I’m not being ... following my cultural obligations if I don’t try to be involved with that in one capacity or another. Lucinda.

Steph describes cultural burning as a responsibility that engages her body physically, as well as her spirit. When asked why she participates in cultural burning, Steph explains,

love of being on Country, love of Country, love of fire as something that’s healing and regenerative. It feels purposeful...it’s this deep love and contentment that I feel in doing that, in being able to give back in that way, you know, as corny as that sounds, I think there’s always this conversation that people have or presume that Aboriginal people, you know, about connecting to Country and I think that sometimes that can just be this throw-away, token line of description of culture but to feel that in such a tangible way, I think people do it all the time in their everyday in different ways but I think to feel that really tangible connecting to Country and caring for Country, through the practice of cultural burning...



Figure 44: Walking behind the Darug fire-line of a cultural burn heritage is revealed. Against a background of black ash, a Darug woman holds a Darug artefact at Yellomundee. Credit V. Cavanagh

...is something I get a lot of fulfilment from ... to feel that energy and that love from putting fire in the ground, yeah, you want to do it all the time. You want to be out connecting with that fire and with Country in that way. Steph.

Where Aboriginal communities are engaging in cultural burning, Aboriginal people are happy to see these responsibilities are being enacted. Mother of two, Kobi, talks about the pride she sees in younger generations, as well as what she feels herself.

caring for Country, something that they've done for thousands of years, we've done for thousands of years. It's like a sense of belonging – you care for your Country, Country cares

for you. Just listening to some of the firestick boys talk and they've gone from these shy kids to now feeling a sense of pride, and "I've done this, I've looked after this" and they feel like they belong there. It's something that they're enjoying doing... I can see my [kids] wanting to be a part of that and feeling a great sense of pride in [themselves] for having [their] part, playing [their] part ...in terms of pride and ownership. I guess pride in the people, pride in my community ... I know this is important information and it's important work and I feel really honoured to be a part of it. Kobi.

Walbunja Elder, Vivian Mason, says her Elders used fire to keep Country healthy. Her description indicates a responsibility to burn Country and to look after it as she recalls: 'the Oldies would comment: "Wow, the bush is a mess. It needs a good burn" (V. Mason in Reynolds & Georgeson 2020).

In addition to responsibilities to care for Country, there are also responsibilities linked to our belonging within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal women demonstrate the concept of communal responsibilities in various ways, including making opportunities available to other Aboriginal people, such as, women and younger generations. Another example of communal responsibility is demonstrated by Maddie, who works in the environmental sector within government and holds statutory obligations through her role to create opportunities for Aboriginal people to care for Country. In addition to these professional duties, she also carries a personal cultural obligation to her Aboriginal community,

they're Native Title holders there. We need to involve them as much as we can in the management of their Country. Maddie.

Maddie's description reveals that currently there is a disconnect between this community and its ability to care for Country. This disconnect is a direct result of colonisation and Aboriginal people's dislocation from Country and cultural practice. Maddie recognises that she can help address this gap through her work by creating space to support and encourage cultural burning in ways that are not forced, performative, or occur in a dispossessing manner (Neale 2020). The interplay of power between Aboriginal people as rights holders and government as statutory authority is also evident in Maddie's language: 'We [government] need to involve them [native title holders] as much as we can in the management of their Country as well'. Here government is empowered as the active entity and native title holders are passive, however, the custodianship of Country is with the latter. This power imbalance illustrated in Maddie's narrative reveals the marginal spaces, even inside government, where Aboriginal people carve out opportunities with and on behalf of Aboriginal communities.

The concept of having responsibility to Country and community is a common thread through all caring for Country work. There have been demonstrations of the responsibilities in previous chapters, particularly Chapter Seven, discussing the responsibility to teach youth and the future

generations of leaders. In the previous chapter, Yuin woman and firefighter, Kaylene McLeod, explained she has a responsibility to care for Country and to look after her community (McLeod 2020). Aboriginal women in the literature also discuss these responsibilities. For example, Tynan discusses the responsibilities to Country and community as being inclusive of kin and inclusive of ourselves as relational cultural people (Tynan 2021).

8.5 EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

8.5.1 Secure employment across NSW

Aboriginal women are keen to see meaningful employment and economic outcomes from cultural burning. They talked about cultural burning as already contributing to the development of skills and training for individuals, and they shared aspirations for the potential of cultural burning to be established as a viable contracting option. The women identify that Aboriginal businesses are already contracted to provide a range of other land management services including (e.g. weed removal, bush regeneration), and they hope that in time, cultural burning could be added to this type of arrangement. Kobi lists a variety of ways that Aboriginal leadership should be enacted through the development of cultural burning initiatives,

in a wonderful world, I guess it would be community, or an Aboriginal community-led organisation that has the role of implementing the cultural burns across the nation... Aboriginal communities will be at the forefront of that ... every council area having their own firesticks program up and running. Kobi.

The women envision fee-for-service contracts for cultural burning and caring for Country activities as a meaningful form of employment for Aboriginal people, which could be applied across NSW. This approach has the potential to create secure, culturally grounded jobs on Country, allowing people to remain in their communities rather than relocate to for work, and to stay connected to Elders for guidance and leadership. The women emphasise that retaining local Aboriginal people within communities contributes to community strength and increases the potential for them to fulfill or support leadership roles. It also encourages investment back into their local economies. The potential for cultural burning to create positive employment and economic outcomes is described by Wren,

it would be great to see more people being able to do this as their full-time job... it's not then just their custodial role to care for Country and to burn Country, but there's something that is

their knowledge and their practice is honoured enough financially that they can look after their family and look after Country and not have to juggle it too much...if this does go bigger, and if governments are more keen to take it up, then they're going to need people doing that, and going to need people doing that more often than that does require an Aboriginal workforce to do that, which would be awesome. Wren.

Maddie recognises the potential for Aboriginal communities to establish commercial cultural burning businesses that could win contracted works programs. She sees this as a way to move away from the menial roles and positions in lower salary bands, which is a known issue of Aboriginal employment in the sector. Maddi says,

if you have community businesses ... where they've got trained firefighters, who can go out and treat fire trails, or prep the burns, and who can undertake burns as well – and that could be the areas, off [national] park's estate – you know, they could do it on forestry, or they could do it on farmers' lands, or council lands, or Crown lands, or whatever. So, you know, building up businesses, that I guess, empower Aboriginal people to undertake things like that, as well you know, it's not all about [employment for] cleaning toilets, and mowing lawns for day use areas... they get contracts to do things with councils and parks. You know, so why can't there be something similar for fire management? Maddie.

Maddie wants to see more Aboriginal community teams win meaningful contracts, and she knows that this is achievable through her employed role. Maddie believes this could contribute to fire management, as well as land management and broader operational maintenance. There are opportunities to develop these initiatives by learning from established ranger teams already engaged in this work. For example, the Walbunja Rangers in Batemans Bay, the Banbai Rangers near Guyra, Jugan Alliance, and the Parks and Conservation Services cultural burning program in the ACT (NIAA 2021, Patterson & Hunt 2012, REF for Jugan Alliance). Clients could include lands owned and managed by others (e.g. Government estate and privately owned land). Again, the women caution that economic development of cultural burning must be Aboriginal led, and that government's place is to support the community-led direction of cultural burning, but not to control cultural burning initiatives.

In addition to employment, the Aboriginal women highlight that cultural burning also supports skills development. Participating in cultural burning will contribute to increased knowledge, skills, and confidence. These outcomes support the development of individuals and increase their employment options whether that employment involves cultural burning or not. Aboriginal women in other locations show that cultural burning has contributed to their professional development as illustrated by Cindy-Lou Togo, who is a Crew leader of the Girringun Aboriginal Ranger team in far north Queensland. Togo explains that being a ranger is beneficial both for Country and for the rangers themselves. In

addition to employment, rangers gain accreditation, skills, and training that builds their capacity and capability. This not only supports them to do their jobs effectively but also strengthens their prospects for future job opportunities (Armbruster 2020).

The economic aspirations and skills development opportunities associated with cultural burning are well documented in the literature. Williamson (2021a) confirms that caring for Country and cultural burning creates meaningful work and professional pathways that are attractive to Indigenous peoples and that have been successful in other regions of Australia (Smith 2021, Steffensen 2020, Williamson 2021a). Firesticks Alliance (2023) affirms the perspectives shared by the women:

The large-scale adoption of Cultural Burning and traditional land management practices across Australia will deliver social and economic benefits that will help to close the gap and help change the perspectives of all Australians to embrace and respect Aboriginal culture proudly.

Swan believes that cultural burning and caring for Country has the potential to support secure economic outcomes through employment programs and commercial activities. This will be beneficial particularly where other employment options are sparse whilst also contributing to healthy ecosystem services that benefit all (Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020). Fiona Maher of the *truwana* Rangers in *lutruwita*/ Tasmania says: ‘We want to set up career pathways for kids who want to stay here and don’t want to move’ off Country (in Kovacevic et al. 2021, p. 34). Palawa man and cultural fire practitioner, Jason Smith, holds a similar view: ‘I want to see job opportunities created for us to train up our young mob, and other fellas in our community and women’ (Smith 2021, p. 21).

Rachael Cavanagh shared the same caution expressed by the Aboriginal women – that the integrity of cultural burning as a cultural practice must remain under the care and control of Aboriginal people, who must lead both the practical implementation and strategic direction of all cultural burning activities in NSW (Johnston & Cavanagh 2020). Smith agrees that for cultural burning to be successfully established as a business model, it must maintain its integrity as being Aboriginal-led and Country focussed, without appropriation from others. Steffensen (2020) strongly advocates for Aboriginal communities to self-manage any commercial activities related to cultural burning, and to not be restricted by development models imposed by government (Steffensen 2020). In Canada, Christianson (2014) acknowledges employment is an outcome, however, women also experience underrepresentation in Indigenous fire management organisations in Peavine Métis Settlement, Alberta.

8.6 RECONCILIATION, PARTNERSHIPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

8.6.1 Basic cross-cultural interaction

Much of this thesis has explored outcomes from cultural burning which relate to Aboriginal people. However, cultural burning is also beneficial for the wider population as it can foster cross-cultural education and reconciliation, as well as, encouraging environmental sustainability. For these reasons, Aboriginal women see the benefit of involving non-Indigenous people in cultural burning in appropriate ways, because it connects people with Country and with each other. Furthermore, there is an awareness that involving whole-of-society is advantageous and necessary to restore Country to being healthy, and to respond to the climate crisis. Although Aboriginal women are optimistic about broader participation, they are also cautious, warning that cultural burning must retain its core principles of being Aboriginal-led and Country-focussed, otherwise it risks losing its integrity. The women describe the inclusion of wider society as an opportunity to build support for cultural burning, potentially leading to greater access to Country, strengthened partnerships and collaboration, and, in turn, improvements in Western fire management, healthier Country, and a range of other shared benefits.

Aboriginal women talk about having non-Indigenous people at cultural burns as an opportunity for education and reconciliation. They describe that many of the non-Indigenous people who participate in cultural burning may not engage in Aboriginal activities at other times. Using ‘fire’ as a familiar entry point, cultural burning is a gateway for them to learn about Aboriginal people and culture within an Aboriginal leadership model. Former director of Firesticks Alliance and Budawang Yuin woman, Sian Hromek, identifies that cultural burning creates cross-cultural benefits that bring Aboriginal people, culture, and knowledge to the fore, saying: ‘the social implications are really important. We’re talking about the benefits for Indigenous people, but the social benefits for non-Indigenous people are just as huge’ (Hromek in Farra 2021). As an Aboriginal-led activity, attendees have the opportunity to engage with, and learn about various cultural processes and practices, such as Welcome to Country, Aboriginal knowledge about caring for Country, listening to Elders, and broader Indigenous issues. There are also opportunities for two-way knowledge sharing to occur when Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work together towards a shared goal. This engagement occurs at a basic social level where Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous people physically spend time together interacting on Country. Kobi shares her experience of cultural burning alongside others,

there's always a good conversation. The [cultural] burns that I've attended have always included [fire] agencies, so there's always that conversation about the differences, and what is working, and what's not working. Kobi.

The women understand that the humble beginnings of walking together with fire can lead to more significant outcomes. Tracey hopes that working together will have wide reaching benefits,

I'd hope to be able to learn and revive this part of our culture that is gaining momentum. I think more people need to be getting involved in it, to help care for Country, but also help care for us, and build up our identities and confidence and I think that'll have a lot of good flow-on effects for health for everyone. Tracey.

In sharing what she loves about cultural burning, Wren expresses a desire to foster healthier relationships between all people and Country, as well as a commitment to sustainability,

I love that it helps create relationships between people and Country – any person, whether they've grown up in Australia or not. Whether they're Aboriginal or not – that it creates a relationship between people and Country I think is a huge benefit to Country. Wren.

This approach of engaging the whole-of-society, especially children, in building strong relationships and emotional connections with the environment (Country) is recognised as an adaptive strategy for environmental conservation. Koger, Leslie and Hayes (2011) found that individuals who form personal attachments to places in nature, especially in early childhood, are more likely to protect those natural places later in life, and that such connections positively influence their sustainability practices.

Involving wider society can foster collaboration and partnerships with private landholders, government, researchers, and the general public. At the micro-level, such partnerships can increase access to Country, particularly if private landholders invite cultural burning on their properties, a growing trend observed by Williamson (2021a). At the macro-level, cross-cultural interaction encourages social cohesion and promotes collective healing by eroding social barriers and realising shared visions for the future. Olivia Mooka from the Girringun Aboriginal Ranger team explains that their cultural burning activities also serve as opportunities to educate the wider community about the local Aboriginal history (Armbruster 2020). This included private landowners who may begin to recognise the cultural significance of the land they occupy.

8.6.2 Improving Western fire management

The 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires sparked the national interest in Aboriginal approaches to fire, and the women acknowledge the growing support and interest in cultural burning. They view this interest as an opportunity to inform and transform Western fire management and reshape wider society's relationship with fire. The women emphasise the value of expanding cultural burning and embedding it as the primary fire management approach, provided its integrity is maintained (Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020). Through cultural burning, Aboriginal women witness the transformation in others, including officers from fire agencies. Tracey recognises moments as valuable learning opportunities, while also acknowledging the existing barriers and the solutions,

I'd like to see cultural burning incorporated into mainstream burning, and to do that, you have to educate non-Indigenous people who, unfortunately, are in the position of power to incorporate these values into their systems, and to do that, you need to show them first-hand how it's done and the benefits I think. Tracey.

Similarly, Steph wants to see Country being cared for with the right types of fire and shows generosity, thoughtfulness, and caution about involving wider society,

I think that there's this purposeful effort from knowledge-holders to increase people's awareness of cultural burning and the national forums are a really good place to do that. And I think then you've got government agencies and rural fire services and people from all different kind of conservation environment backgrounds coming in to learn a different way, whether they've volunteered for that or they've been kind of pushed into it from their organisation, and I think that's been transformative... There's such a realisation in that people don't know what they don't know and I think sometimes you see that revelation in people where they do this work because they love the environment, and they want to do good, and they think they're doing good, and they're out there, every day on the frontline, trying to do the best that they can to help save, protect the environment, or whatever their rationale and then, all of a sudden, they see that perhaps what they've been doing isn't the right way; they haven't been given all the information, they haven't been able to look more broadly at what else is being done here ... and that gives me goosebumps to think about how hard that realisation would be for some people who only want to do good. So, I feel like that combined, creates this energy of goodwill. Steph.

Aboriginal women are aware of the need to engage non-Indigenous people, yet they are also cautious, as cross-cultural interactions expose the vulnerabilities and the embedded power imbalance present in mainstream colonial Australia. Aboriginal women acknowledge that cultural burning is occurring within a social landscape that is laden with history and current power dynamics. The power dynamic is inverted in cultural burning events, as they operate within an Aboriginal leadership model, where the structure (how the event is run), and the content (what knowledge is being shared) is Aboriginal-led and Country-centred. In cultural burning, Aboriginal people are not merely being ‘consulted’, or providing advice to a colonial system, instead the leadership, approach, and purpose, sits within Country and with Aboriginal people. Here, non-Indigenous people attend by invitation to listen, learn, and participate. This leadership model and inversion of power is unfamiliar to much of wider society. Aboriginal women understand that although there is goodwill and benefit, when colonial load occurs, it is also taxing and burdensome for Aboriginal peoples (Rogers & Andrews 2020). Steph illustrates the decolonising work that Aboriginal people do in inclusive cultural burning workshops,

where it’s an open invitation for people to come and learn and so you see all ranges of people in that space. And I think that it changes a little bit, the interaction that you have. Because you’re trying to bring people along. You’re perhaps engaging in conversations of un-learning and re-learning with people. And trying to find the best approach to be able to help people see what this knowledge is, and not just what it has to offer, not just what it can benefit for them, in their role, or their industry, or whatever ... That’s a kind of tricky space, and I guess, trying to walk with the fire, and talk people along with that. So that they’re not just learning the easily-accessible points of cultural burning, and that fire knowledge in that sense. But you’re trying to give them a scope that this is something that’s much, much deeper. Steph.

Colonial load refers to the unfair expectation placed on Aboriginal people, who may themselves be participants, to teach, share and provide emotional, cultural and spiritual support and labour to others seeking to learn, engage in cultural experiences, or debate a wide range of topics, including the validity of cultural burning and Aboriginal knowledge. This heavy-lifting and decolonising work is predominantly shouldered by Indigenous people. These barriers are discussed further in the next chapter.

8.6.3 Connecting all to Country for sustainability

Knowing that bushfire threats will worsen (Morgan et al. 2020, Nolan et al. 2021, Nolan et al. 2022), Aboriginal women are concerned that Western fire management is not adequate to address the current or future threats to Country, and wider society. Aboriginal women see cultural burning as a

vehicle to improve the connection and relationships between Country and all people, which is needed to address global environmental sustainability issues and to respond to the climate crisis. Aboriginal women are concerned that generally most people are detached from Country, making Country more vulnerable to negative human behaviours that treat nature as an infinite resource available for human consumption rather than a finite and precious entity that has its own right to wholesomely exist. Lucinda articulates the need to live more sustainably and be more engaged with Country,

the big picture to this, is that we want to live sustainably on this earth ... I think too many of our population are living in cities, and cities are very detached from nature, and you can't live like that; can't live detached from nature – you have to be part of it, and love it, and look after it. ...Everything that you eat, use, wear, has come from Mother Earth in some capacity, and I think the problem is, that we've become takers, and we're not giving – or society have become takers and taking, taking, and over-taking – a bit like, you know, Tiddalick the Frog story, and not giving back ... if [cultural burning is] a way to get people to start really thinking about their future, and their sustainability on this Earth. It has to come from getting people, not just Aboriginal people, but people on Country, and having that connection, and that love. Lucinda.

In her rationale for why people should be involved in cultural burning, Lucinda refers to Tiddalick – an Aboriginal Creation Story from the southeast of the continent. Many creation stories contain lessons, and the Tiddalick story includes lessons about individual greed resulting in environmental damage that is resolved through whole-of-community teamwork. Here Lucinda uses the Aboriginal Story of Tiddalick, as a metaphor for the real-world problem of environmental destruction and solutions that can come from working together. Indigenous women in the literature understand and support the need for wider society to learn about and adopt sustainable behaviours grounded in Indigenous models. For example, Merriam woman, Professor Kerry Arabena (2008), argues that our sustainability requires us to acknowledge and behave in ways that centre Country, instead of centring humans. Beyond cultural burning, Aboriginal people see value in engaging wider society in Country-centred Indigenous-led relationships and connection to Country to encourage sustainability and healthy Country (Edwards et al. 2013).

There are opportunities to improve human relationships with Country including through fire if Indigenous models and approaches are genuinely engaged. As Tanganekald and Meintangk Boandik woman, Professor Irene Watson, articulates:

Our natural world is in crisis which makes the need for translation ever more urgent. The West has reached the end point of project progress and does not have the solutions to the crisis. It has no other lands to invade and colonise beyond leaving our Mother Earth and searching for other planets. Current regimes of recognition and protection do not work. We are on the brink of sacrificing our waters, our oceans and our lands which provide for an overpopulated planet.

Recognition laws in respect of First Nations come in the form of native title laws and Aboriginal heritage protection, and they are accompanied by named environmental laws, but none of them have the capacity to protect the environments which are vital to our survival. We are on a trajectory which it appears could sacrifice all life forms, but we still have the capacity for ongoing life. Cycles do return, to begin again. Aboriginal law is an ongoing cycle; it is the law (Watson 2017, p. 219-20).

Speaking more broadly about climate change responses, Cumpston argues that for over two centuries, Indigenous knowledge of Country has been largely ignored or treated tokenistically by mainstream land managers and conservationists, lamenting that: ‘The psychosis of denial impoverishes us all’ (Cumpston 2020d). Cumpston highlights the incongruent paradigms between Western and Indigenous approaches, and advocates for Indigenous knowledge of Country to be taken seriously. Aboriginal women see the opportunity that cultural burning creates for all peoples to engage or deepen their connectedness with Country. Scholars, Indigenous people and allies in other continents make similar arguments (Whyte 2018, Bacon 2018, Redvers et al. 2022, Sultana 2022).

8.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, Aboriginal women highlight how cultural burning creates outcomes that affect individuals, families, communities, and wider society. These outcomes are wide-ranging and are not gender-specific or limited to fire. The influence of colonisation is understood to have significantly changed Country and impacted on Aboriginal knowledge, cultural practices and relationships. What has endured within Aboriginal people is the strong desire to reunite and care for Country. The women’s descriptions identify beneficial outcomes across the themes: Access and (re)connection; Cultural practices; Responsibilities; Employment and economic outcomes; and Reconciliation, partnerships and sustainability. We learn from Aboriginal women that cultural burning provides opportunities to access and (re)connect to Country. With access, Aboriginal people can undertake a range of cultural activities including cultural burning and other practices.

These practices and responsibilities are vital for sustaining Aboriginal culture. They inform who we are as cultural peoples and are deeply significant to our health and sense of self. Cultural burning as a caring for Country practice is part of the inextricable links between Aboriginal people and Country, and participating contributes to our physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellbeing, as well as the health and wellbeing of Country and other people. It is also important that these experiences and knowledges are shared with future generations. Western fire management and environmental conservation have much to learn and gain from listening to Aboriginal people about cultural burning and caring for Country. Cultural burning also supports social cohesion and can create reconciliation

outcomes, such as community building and healing across wider society. These decolonising social outcomes are rarely achieved in the mainstream sector, where Aboriginal approaches and people, particularly women, remain underrepresented. Cultural burning can create economic, education and employment outcomes. Aboriginal women are keen to see this opportunity harnessed for the benefit of Aboriginal communities.

Aware of these benefits, Aboriginal women advocate for the expansion of cultural burning activities that include non-Indigenous people, provided it remains Aboriginal-led, Country-centred, and respectful of cultural protocols. They call for a broader uptake of cultural burning where these principles are upheld, with government and wider society playing a supportive role. The impact of colonial load must also be actively managed in cross-cultural interactions to ensure Aboriginal participants are culturally safe and not left to carry the burden of decolonising work alone.

Chapters Six through Eight have presented and explored the features and benefits of cultural burning. Throughout these chapters there is also a tension regarding the marginalisation that cultural burning experiences and negotiates as it operates on the periphery of Western fire management. The next chapter is the final thematic chapter that examines further the barriers and challenges of cultural burning through the perspectives of Aboriginal women.

STORY NINE: WREN'S STORY - FIRE AGENCY

WOMEN EXTINGUISH CULTURAL BURN

There's just been a couple of times where I've seen people in those positions, those government or RFS positions, default into their authority, that's given to them as being in that position, as being firefighter-trained, and they overstep the boundary.

I've been in situations where they really intervene and when it's not necessary, there isn't necessarily risk, no one's in danger – the Country itself, the bushes aren't in danger! But I've been in a few cases where it feels like they're exerting this power, and they're exerting this authority, and it's really intimidating.

And it really sets me off, because when so much else of the burn is so respectful, and people – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people – are coming together. Which in itself forming relationships that way, and coming together to care for Country, its monumental in terms of our relationships and coming together as this society we now live in.

So, all that good work and all that goodwill, and for things to be going so beautifully – and not rosy, but so... I think these monumental times and moments you know.

And then to have people just step away from that respect and default into their positions of authority, and therefore intervene, and overstay.

We know that the fire's going to go out, we know where the fire's going, we can see. We're reading the wind, we're reading everything, and we're reading and listening, and trusting our gut, to know if it's going to move in a way that we need to change what we're doing.

But when people aren't listening to their gut, or listening to Country, and they're just going off exactly what you were talking about before, a checklist, a to-do list of what is risk and what is not. And therefore when they see something that instils a tiny bit of this fear in them, and yeah, the [water-pump] starts up on the trucks, the hoses come out, and the fire gets doused!

We had a moment like that and again, it was women and this was a different burn again. It was women, we were looking after the burn and we had [fire agency] women with us looking after the burn, and they just totally took over and, yeah, as soon as the men left the site, the [fire agency] women just took over and yeah, the [water-pump] started up.

And even that for me again because, this is something I'm just not familiar with – machinery and fire-fighting equipment – that sends a message in itself, is when you start that machinery so – you

can't hear what the fire's doing even, you can't hear what birds are coming around, or the crackle, or the wind.

And they doused the fire!

And I was just so... it really pressed buttons for me because they didn't discuss it with the other 15, 10 women who were there. They just stepped into their position of expertise and as soon as men weren't there, they just went, "Oh well, we're in charge now"!!!

And I remember when some of the men came back from lunch, and they said, "What happened to the fire?" And we just looked at them and sort of went, "Yeah" and yeah, someone made the comment and went, "We went away for lunch and we've come back and someone's literally doused out the fire."

Our whole role when we change over like that is for one group to stay and caretake the fire and look after the fire and they came back and there was no fire to look after. There was no fire to look after because it had just been put out with water.

CHAPTER 9 BARRIERS

9.1 BARRIERS INTRODUCTION

Wren's story illustrates several barriers that Aboriginal women encounter when engaging in cultural burning. These may be rooted in gender, race, differing worldviews, or a combination of these factors. Some barriers are obvious, others are nuanced, and some only become visible when Aboriginal women attempt to participate. Additionally, some Aboriginal women do not participate in cultural burning because their cultural protocols do not allow it. However, most barriers to cultural burning are attached to colonisation and the patriarchy, where Aboriginal women experience intersectional oppressions. These experiences are not confined to cultural burning, Western fire management, or environmental conservation – they reflect a familiar pattern for Aboriginal women across many sectors (Longbottom & Fredericks 2016, McQuire 2018). As Wonnarua and Kunja woman, Shiralee Lawson, articulates, Aboriginal women 'have to fight tooth and nail to be listened to, even in spaces where we are beyond capable' (2021). As negotiating barriers are a familiar experience, Aboriginal women are well positioned to identify and articulate the challenges they face in relation to cultural burning. Better understanding of these barriers will assist in dismantling them and encouraging more Aboriginal women's participation.

This chapter examines the barriers raised by Aboriginal women, under these four categories, 1. appropriation; 2. erasure; 3. incongruent paradigms and; 4. colonisation and suppression. The category *erasure* is specific to Aboriginal women, whilst the other three categories are applicable to all members of Aboriginal communities. In this chapter, Aboriginal women with cultural burning and/or caring for Country knowledge and experience are prioritised. Input from Aboriginal men and others are included where they add important contributions. Except for the theme *personal safety*, all the barriers that the Aboriginal women raise, are present and affirmed in the literature.

In addition to those explored in this chapter, many barriers are implied in the themes discussed in previous chapters. For example, Chapter Eight discusses *access to Country* as a beneficial outcome of cultural burning. Inversely, the lack of access currently exists as a barrier. Similarly, in Section 6.6, cultural burning is described as an inclusive practice that encourages participation of all ages and genders. Inclusivity is discussed as a positive outcome of cultural burning, and the benefits that occur through inclusivity. Inversely, the current lack of inclusivity is a barrier. These interconnected benefits and barriers are not explored in depth in this chapter, however, the discussion occasionally revisits earlier material, as many of the issues are deeply intertwined.

9.2 APPROPRIATION

9.2.1 Not free to be taken

All the women raised concern about the appropriation of cultural burning and through this, the exploitation of Aboriginal communities. Cultural appropriation is a strong concern across cultural burning communities and initiatives, and it emerges as a consistent theme throughout this research. The Aboriginal women interviewed are wary about progressing the expansion of cultural burning without having protocols in place to protect ICIP, and to provide clear parameters on what cultural knowledge can be published, and how benefits are shared. Haley illustrates the women's concern,

Our cultural IP and knowledge has been monetised and people have profited from our culture and our history and literally our land. You know, black gold, one might say ... when you give out that knowledge and then other people go, "Oh, I'll take that. I'll appropriate that" and it becomes no longer something that we have the control over. It can be a really dangerous thing; we're talking about fire, we're talking about burning and death ... the risk around us not managing the knowledge well, has a really high impact if not done properly. Haley.

As previously quoted, Lucinda spoke about the importance of Aboriginal culture and ceremony in cultural burning. She went on to describe the risks that arise when the cultural elements are removed or ignored,

the fundamental – and I think most importantly, is the cultural aspect of it and the ceremony that goes around it – that I think people need to understand because ... whether non-Indigenous people start taking the cultural burning and utilising it, but then it's not cultural burning anymore; it's just hazard reduction. Lucinda.

Swan has been deeply engaged in cultural burning for many years, and she describes the appropriation she has witnessed. She talks about the inappropriateness of the appropriation and the damage it causes, including diminishing the integrity of knowledge, the unjust distribution of benefits, and the ongoing social marginalisation. Swan explains:

Over the years, there've been a lot of times where a lot of our knowledge has just been written into books, and then we have no knowledge of people delivering our knowledge, and it gets changed, or it's not exactly what our elders were telling in the first place. And then our elders are still sitting out on camps not being acknowledged for the knowledge they've shared. Not

getting paid, but we have people out there sharing their knowledge, flying all over the place, writing books, and getting accolades and money and economics and status from Indigenous people's knowledge (Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020).

This type of appropriation is not limited to cultural burning. Indigenous knowledge remains at risk due to the 'well established systems of exploitation' that Indigenous people have endured throughout the colonial period (DDWCAC 2020, p. 79). As a leader in the development of Indigenous cultural intellectual property (ICIP), Merriam and Wuthathi woman, and intellectual property lawyer, Terri Janke, has significantly contributed to protecting Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices. Janke (2021, p. 8) warns: 'Indigenous cultures are like Indigenous lands – they are not free to be taken'. International declarations such as Article 31 of UNDRIP (2007), identify that Indigenous people have the right to maintain and manage their cultural knowledge. However, these declarations are often ignored, trivialised, or reduced to symbolic gestures by the nation-state and its institutions. There is a lack of enforcement at the local level. Similar issues are noted in other countries. In Canada, Hoffman and others (2022) highlight how agency engagement can create issues:

Tokenism results when knowledge is extracted from an Indigenous employee, allowing non-Indigenous agencies to copy cultural burning techniques without involving Indigenous Peoples, or when knowledge appropriation is substituted for "meaningful engagement" with Indigenous fire practitioners (Hoffman et al. 2022, p. 470-471).

Appropriation can be intentional or inadvertent, and it can occur in multiple ways. For example, appropriation occurs where cultural burning methods are used without the consent, leadership, or involvement of the right Aboriginal people. Appropriation may also occur inadvertently through (mis)labelling fire activities as cultural burning. This includes situations where the participation of Aboriginal people in fire activities leads to the mistaken belief that cultural burning is occurring, when it is not (as described in Section 3.2). The concern about appropriation is very prominent in cultural burning forums and in the literature (Lyngdoh Reye et al. 2018, Kovacevic et al. 2021). Many Aboriginal people express concern about the expansion of cultural burning without protocols to protect ICIP, ensure benefit-sharing, and establish clear parameters for its application, particularly in contexts involving government and non-Indigenous participants (McKemey et al. 2020, Neale et al. 2019, Williamson 2021a). Aboriginal women want to ensure that the integrity of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practice is maintained.

9.2.2 Disingenuous

Appropriation can occur through the application of cultural burning methods by people who do not have the cultural authority to lead cultural burning. This can include Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people and government agencies. There are instances where Western fire management agencies copy and use cultural burning knowledge, approaches, and expertise, closely replicating its form and function, without acknowledging that they are appropriating Aboriginal knowledge and practice. Aboriginal women are aware of this occurring, and they are very concerned and annoyed, as illustrated by Steph,

I wonder though about the use of Aboriginal knowledge solely for the purposes of continuation of Western civilisation to just rework it a little bit to allow Western knowledges to continue to dominate and that co-option of knowledge – that’s something that worries me a lot. Steph.

Examples include Western fire management activities, often labelled as ecological prescribed burns or cool burns, that closely replicate cultural burning without acknowledging the use of Indigenous knowledge, or involving leadership and engagement of Traditional Owners, as Kobi highlights,

I guess there is a fear – and for good reason – that Indigenous knowledge surrounding cultural burning will be taken from the people. So, giving it a new title such as, “Ecological burning” and our mob will be removed from the process and pushed out of the conversation – essentially it’s intellectual property theft, and caring for Country lies deep in the soul of Aboriginal people and has the ability to heal us in ways like we cannot believe, so it’s important cultural burning is community-led. I guess that is the fear is that it’s taken from the people, our knowledge is taken from the people and we don’t have a role in it anymore. Kobi.

Appropriation is a strong theme across the interviews, the literature, and in cultural burning forums. Across a range of literature, many Aboriginal women warn against cultural burning being cherry-picked, co-opted, and absorbed into Western frameworks (Cavanagh, Cavanagh & Swan 2020, Cumpston 2019, Farra 2021, Johnston & Cavanagh 2020). Aileen Blackburn-Mongta has witnessed government and researchers infiltrating cultural burning, and she raised appropriation as a significant concern at the Southeast Aboriginal Fire forum I attended in 2018. She invited the audience to consider: ‘how to do cultural burns without losing the integrity of our protocols, our intellectual property’ (in Smith, Weir & Neale 2018, p. 15). She also highlighted that when appropriation occurs and the outcomes become overly Westernised, the relationality is lost, Aboriginal priorities are devalued, and the results are likely to be ineffective. Blackburn-Mongta says:

it is great to have the data ... [but] unless you can get back some feeling and some belonging, it doesn't work ... I don't use words like 'harvest', 'yield', and 'the value of the land'. All that is foreshadowed by the wellbeing of the land (Blackburn-Mongta in Smith, Weir & Neale 2018, p. 22-23).

Beyond fire, Cumpston challenges the continued exploitation of Indigenous people and knowledges:

Our knowledge, and our active custodianship should not be seen as inspiration, to be taken and adapted to produce an ultimately watered-down version that loses its meaning... It is time to stop seeing Indigenous ecological knowledge as something which can be separated from Indigenous peoples (Cumpston 2019).

Appropriation upsets Aboriginal people (Fig. 45 and 46 for examples). To Aboriginal people, cultural appropriation by government is extremely insulting. Shortly after Figure 46 was published on a government social media account, I was contacted by an angry Aboriginal community member about the post (they contacted me given my employed role as the manager of the Cultural Fire Management Unit within NSW Government). That community member highlighted that appropriation was occurring and described it as highly inappropriate, particularly given the government is a colonial entity. The community member expressed anger at the government for taking credit for and using Aboriginal knowledge and expertise without acknowledging the source of the knowledge or clarifying whether it had been used with the permission of the relevant Aboriginal community, and if fair remuneration had been exchanged. This community member was so angered, they were swearing in frustration. I understand their anger, and their need to vent. However, being on the receiving end of multiple similar responses, requires me to proactively protect myself. My experience is that government does little to prepare and protect its Aboriginal staff from the lateral violence and the valid frustrations from our own communities regarding the behaviours of government. All these experiences add to the colonial load experienced by Aboriginal people (Rogers & Andrews 2020, Whyman et al. 2023).



Figure 45: Aboriginal woman Rachael Cavanagh social media post regarding appropriation of cultural knowledge. Cavanagh expresses frustration at the lack of recognition for Aboriginal knowledge and expertise when the NSW Government uses cultural burning methods and promotes them on social media without proper acknowledgement. This post highlights Aboriginal people's concerns with how the Government is using cultural burning and Aboriginal knowledge. *Used with permission R. Cavanagh.

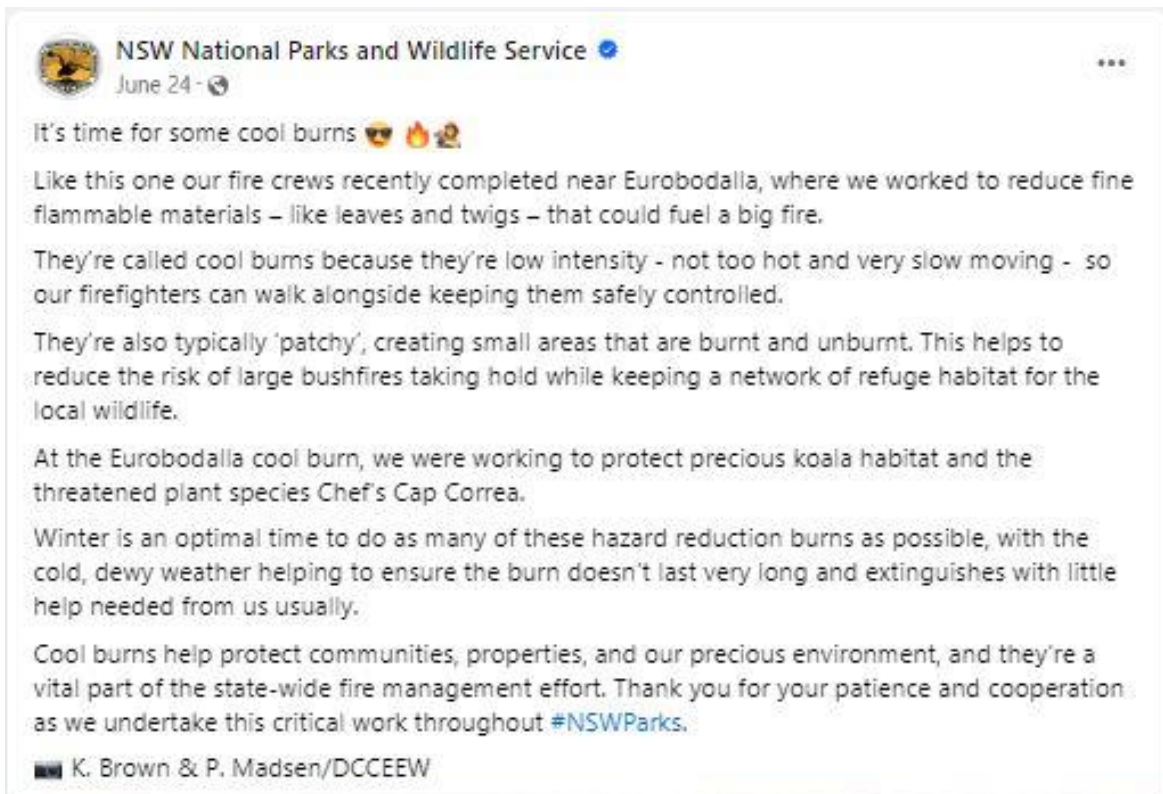


Figure 46: Government using Aboriginal knowledge methods without attribution. Screen capture of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, public Facebook post, 24 June 2024. The wording of this post indicates that this burn was undertaken in a very similar way to cultural burning, however, there is no mention of Aboriginal people's involvement, leadership, or the acknowledgement of the ICIP that is being used.

Tracey's narrative highlights the complexities that exist in the revival of cultural burning, particularly as an evolving initiative, where Aboriginal people are already marginalised. She also calls out the disrespect,

who has the right to teach it, or who has the right to start the burns? I don't know. And what constitutes as a "cultural burn" in this modern age ... involving new ways of lighting up and things. Of course cultures adapt and evolve over time, just like any culture around the world, but trying to figure out what exactly constitutes as a cultural burn, and then there could be challenge, like ... government agencies wanting to start doing these things. Are the 'powers that be' in these agencies going to be saying, "Oh yeah, this is a cultural burn!" But no, you're just doing your usual hazard reduction, and trying to tick off that you're doing cultural burn to make yourself look good. Tracey.

As explored in Section 7.3, there are mixed reactions regarding the role of government in increasing Aboriginal women's involvement in cultural burning. The same feelings of unease apply to the government's involvement in cultural burning more broadly. Some argue that governments should be doing more, while others are cautious about increased government involvement due to longstanding mistrust. Aboriginal women also question who within Western fire management seeks access to cultural burning knowledge, and who in government wants to hold decision-making powers over cultural burning. The women maintain that Aboriginal people, and no one else, should lead the strategic direction of cultural burning, independently of government, researchers, and others. These concerns are valid given Indigenous people's experiences of exploitation.

As discussed in Section 8.6, Aboriginal women are also aware that people are attending cultural burning workshops and having transformative personal experiences that lead to a range of positive outcomes (Steffensen 2020, Williamson 2021a). Most of these experiences are genuine and rooted in goodwill and good intentions. However, there is always the potential for exploitation to occur. Furthermore, Aboriginal women expressed concern when the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires suddenly thrust cultural burning into the spotlight as a potential solution to the increasing bushfire threat. They caution that this places an unrealistic burden on Aboriginal people and cultural burning to solve monumental problems without the required authority or resources. Wren sarcastically mocks this unrealistic expectation, while also recognising that such moments are opportunities for Indigenous approaches to enter the mainstream,

"Oh, you do have knowledge do you? Oh, sustainability. Yeah, yeah, 60,000 years. Oh, you're really sustainable. Can you help us be sustainable and mop up all of our problems?" So, I think there's also that shift that's happening where Indigenous knowledge is also being recognised and of value. Wren.

Wren's frustrations also reveal the lack of trust. Aboriginal women know that wider society's recent interest in cultural burning is a positive indication that people are keen to learn from Aboriginal people and knowledges. As awareness of the climate crisis, social justice, and Indigenous issues grows, people are responding in politically informed ways, including advocating for cultural burning. However, Aboriginal women are also aware that some people are only suddenly interested in cultural burning because it affects them personally and they want to protect their own interests. Here, genuine concern for Aboriginal paradigms and any real commitment to change is lacking. This self-interested engagement may be a result of peoples' proximity to destructive bushfires and where homes, holidays, or national icons (e.g. koalas) were compromised. Despite these frustrations, Wren demonstrates compassion and understanding, recognising that interest from broader society stems from good intentions, she says,

the increase in huge bushfires and wildfires coinciding with changes in the climate is making people quite worried – like the scientific policy-making community are starting to look for answers and solutions. Wren.

Aboriginal women are open to involve non-Indigenous people but emphasise the need for basic cultural awareness and sensitivity to protect Aboriginal people from harm and to ensure culturally safe engagement.

9.3 ERASURE

9.3.1 Overlooked, unseen

Aboriginal women highlight that their participation in cultural burning is often overlooked or excluded because of their gender. This occurs when people incorrectly assume that Aboriginal women have no role in cultural burning - an assumption rooted in implicit belief that cultural burning is exclusively 'men's business' due to perceived gendered cultural sensitivities. As a result, Aboriginal women are not included or invited to participate. Tracey shares her experience of this,

When I heard about [the cultural burn workshop] years ago, it was offered at work but only one person was encouraged to go, and that was an older male... I definitely would have liked to have gone, but there I guess, wasn't that support from managers to send other Aboriginal

staff, and females particularly... maybe there's a bit of a communication barrier, but also a different perspective from managers in terms of how important it is for other staff... there's probably a bit of lack of support in terms of what's important for [women] but then also there's, I guess, reinforced ideas that fire stuff should be for like, the big macho man, sort of thing, because in the Western world, you know, fire's about firefighting and you've got to be a real fit, brave man... I think it is important because we're starting to have that revival of knowledge and hearing that fire isn't just for the men – how it's for women and old people, young people – as long as it's culturally right, then I think yeah, of course we should be involved. Tracey.

The current lack of visibility of Aboriginal women in the field adds another layer of exclusion. If Aboriginal women are not visible as participants, this will deter other women from participating, as cultural burning already 'appears' to be a male practice, hence reinforcing the assumptions that women are not welcome (see Section 7.3). Maddie explains that Aboriginal women are not lacking in ability. She reflects on her reasoning, acknowledging that gender-based discrimination likely persists, despite being both unjust and unlawful. Maddie says,

I don't think that really there's... well, there shouldn't be – there probably still is, but you know, there shouldn't be any restrictions in terms of the work. I mean, women have proven that we can do it all ... we can do anything. We can run drip torch line, we can handle a hose, we can handle a chainsaw... You know, there shouldn't be any bias against anything else because we can do everything else. Maddie.

Underrepresentation remains persistent, with Aboriginal women overlooked and subject to intersectional oppressions across the sector (Section 2.4). This occurs in firefighting, Western fire management, environmental conservation, and caring for Country, where women's teams are labelled 'women ranger teams'. This could be indicative of affirmative action, however, it highlights the enduring inequality. The erasure also occurs where Aboriginal women are not considered relevant, let alone, important stakeholders or rights-holders in cultural burning and caring for Country. Tracey, for example, deliberates over why she was overlooked for the cultural burning workshop. She makes allowances and rationalises before circling back to present solutions to the problems she experienced. Tracey articulates that the explicit representation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning really matters,

Going back to what I was saying before about the big macho firefighter from that Western perspective, I think that we should be overturning that image... I think agencies and departments need to encourage Aboriginal people in general and women as well, particularly Aboriginal women ... it still doesn't feel like a very welcoming or safe place for us. I know I

definitely feel that myself but I put up with a lot of stuff because I know this is important, what I'm doing ... And then even with the cultural burning information and invites ...all the material is very male-dominated; I haven't seen any of the material have anything that welcomes women ... Yeah, even if there were women in the cultural burn, I don't see them in the photos that are put out, so it still feels like it's a man's thing... so they're tied with men's activities usually.... which is good for the men because they need that but what about for us too? Tracey.

Haley agrees and expresses that she feels that she is contributing to the necessary shift,

I think for me and some of the language and experience that I've seen, women haven't predominantly been encouraged as much as men to participate in cultural burning. I do think that is shifting and I'm a walking advertisement of that. I think there's a challenge that we all will face. Haley.

Aunty Kali has been around fires in the landscape for many decades. Learning from her Elders, she observed the lack of participation by Aboriginal women in cultural burning. She was once told, “Women can't burn Country” (McBride & Dundler 2024, McBride, Pipic Media & Wilarni 2022). To challenge this gender barrier, and to contribute to the increased momentum surrounding cultural burning, Aunty Kali activated Aboriginal women's leadership and developed a film titled, *Women Can't Burn*. This film follows her conducting her first solo burn (McBride, Pipic Media & Wilarni 2022). Aunty Kali knows that cultural burning is healing. She has witnessed the destructive bushfires that have damaged Country and instilled fear in people. As well as encouraging women, she encourages all community members to participate in cultural burning, where appropriate, to help them heal from their fears, and improve their relationships with fire and Country (McBride & Dundler 2024, McBride, Pipic Media & Wilarni 2022).

Russ-Smith (2021) unpacks erasure in relation to sovereignty and talks about erasure as being a product of ongoing colonial violence: ‘Colonial violence aims to erase Country, and therefore erase Indigenous women's bodies, as we are an extension of Country’ (Russ-Smith 2021, p. 26). Aboriginal women are familiar with needing to advocate for Aboriginal women's rights and equality, and Aboriginal women have been advocating for Aboriginal women for decades. This advocacy is occurring in cultural burning as well as in the broader environmental sectors.

I have observed that cultural burning is male dominated, both in terms of who attends and who holds leadership roles. However, Aboriginal men and others want to see improved representation as Williamson (2021, p. 6) demonstrates: ‘Cultural land management programs must include specific objectives to include Aboriginal women including through identified positions and targeted projects’. Since commencing this research, there has been a noticeable increase in the visibility of Aboriginal women and support for women's participation in cultural burning, including more women specific

forums (Section 1.2). This shift occurred after the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, with the uplift of Aboriginal women's voices and advocacy, including my own work. The impact of my research and role supporting Aboriginal women (in community as well as an employee in the sector) has been recognised (Neale & Costello 2024). Being overlooked is not an issue unique to cultural burning. Aboriginal women's participation is shaped by a range of factors, including patriarchal and colonial norms. These are systemic issues that Aboriginal women cannot, and should not, be expected to address alone (Lawson 2021).

9.3.2 Safety: personal and cultural

Personal safety was a significant issue raised by the women. Women's safety is always paramount, however, in Australian society, gender-based violence is prevalent and often has devastating consequences that disproportionately impact Indigenous women (AIHW 2018, PMC 2024). Given that cultural burning and the sector is male-dominated, and that Aboriginal women are significantly overrepresented regarding gender-based violence, it is not surprising that personal safety is considered a barrier. However, it is crucially important to acknowledge that violence against Indigenous women is 'perpetrated by men of all cultural backgrounds' (Longbottom, McGlade & Cripps 2024, Our Watch 2018). Tracey highlights that women need to be, and feel safe, noting that the male dominated nature of cultural burning may influence their decision to participate. Tracey explains that personal safety is a barrier, deterring women's participation,

other challenges could possibly be about not feeling safe going to a burn when you presume that it'll be a lot of males, so feeling out of it, or something could go wrong, so yeah, not feeling safe in that sphere. Tracey

The concept of gender-based violence as a barrier does not appear in current cultural burning discourse or literature. McKemey and others (2020a) listed 22 barriers regarding Aboriginal people's experiences of cultural burning in southeastern Australia. Included in that list is a *lack of trust, power and safety* (from bushfires). Nothing is noted in relation to Aboriginal women's personal safety (McKemey et al. 2020a). Safety concerns are reflected in the literature, but in relation to *physical safety* from destructive fires and *cultural safety* related to sector environments shaped by colonisation (Neale & Costello 2024, Robinson et al. 2021b). Although women's personal safety is not overtly addressed in discussions of cultural safety, they may be implied where discussions highlight specific requirements for women. For example, Robinson and others (2021), identify that the representation and participation rates of Indigenous women do need to increase 'to ensure that young Indigenous women are supported and feel culturally safe when engaging in training and cultural burning workshops' (Robinson et al.

2021b, p. 32). Although their discussion does not explicitly identify women's personal safety and gender-based violence, the need for specific care regarding women is visible. Gender-based violence and personal safety have also been highlighted as concerns in Indigenous women's caring for Country programs in other locations (Daniels et al. 2022).

Another identified cultural safety risk arises from potential challenges within cross-cultural interactions. For example, Indigenous rangers and fire practitioners described not feeling "culturally safe" to participate in mainstream fire crews or fire management activities with long-established fire management decision-making protocols and practices (Robinson et al. 2021b, p. 23). Men working around women's sites in landscape (as highlighted by Maddie earlier in this thesis) presents a cultural safety issue that can occur in any land-based activity, not just cultural burning.

9.4 COLONISATION AND SUPPRESSION

9.4.1 Tried to douse our fires

Aboriginal women recognise colonisation itself as a barrier to cultural burning, giving rise to numerous and wide-ranging challenges. The women highlight how colonisation has directly disconnected Aboriginal people from Country, from each other, and from cultural practices, making it unhealthy and unsafe. Colonisation establishes systems, structures, and mindsets that serve its own interests, while undermining Aboriginal people, knowledges, and practices (Moreton-Robinson 2004). These conditions prevented Aboriginal people from continuing cultural practices, leading to the widespread cessation of cultural burning across much of NSW. For Edie, caring for Country and cultural burning affirms 'cultural rites of passage as Aboriginal women in a matriarchal society'. She explains that colonisation has disrupted ancient, interdependent systems and societal structures, diminishing Aboriginal women's ability to engage in caring for Country and fire practices on her Country. This became evident to Edie during her travels, as she observed that Indigenous cultural burning was far more prevalent in other parts of the continent compared to NSW,

probably 20 years ago when I was working in Darwin and I had met [deleted text] his people still did cultural burning on Country and it intrigued me. I had come back [to NSW] and wondered why we didn't do it here anymore. Edie.

Banbai Elder Lesley Patterson makes observations about the influence of colonisation on culture in her community. She explains that through oppressive government policies, colonisation enforced punitive restrictions on Aboriginal cultural practices. Patterson says:

You passed on your culture, at your own risk ... Others were never taught because by then my grandmother was a Christian and the missionaries told my grandmother that speaking and teaching language was the devil's word (Patterson in McKemey et al. 2021a, p. 1015).

And:

we had to be careful because if you started teaching anything and other people heard you, they could report you to the police ... My mother would have been taken to jail and we would probably have been put in welfare (Patterson in McKemey et al. 2021a, p. 1017).

Colonisation enforced punitive controls around burning and accessing Country (McKemey et al. 2020a). The flow on effects include, diminished Aboriginal knowledge of Country, reduced capacity and capability within Aboriginal communities, erosion of autonomy, self-determination and confidence, and broader negative impacts on wellbeing (Costello et al. 2021, McKemey et al. 2020a, Weir & Freeman 2019, Williamson 2021a). Haley observes this in herself,

I'm living in a city now, I'm so far away from home, I feel quite disconnected at times but going to do [cultural burning] reminded me, you know, I am a cultural being. Haley.

Although Aboriginal knowledges are often described as being *lost* or *forgotten*, in reality, their decline has been driven by oppressive and coercive government policies and systems (Russ-Smith 2021). As a result, Aboriginal women experience and describe a deep sense of detachment and disempowerment.

there's so many Aboriginal people, especially in the eastern part of Australia ... well, we sort of were impacted first with colonisation and all the negative impacts that have come of that. Lucinda.

Even when the disconnection has not occurred directly, Aboriginal women continue to experience the consequences of disrupted knowledge transmission and cultural practice. They also carry the weight of intergenerational trauma, which manifests in a variety of personal and social dysfunctions. In these ways, colonisation has, and continues to, douse the fires of Aboriginal people, in a broader attempt to crush our spirit and erase cultural identities. Haley demonstrates how colonisation has affected her cultural burning experiences through a lack of opportunities to burn and learn. Haley also

highlights the fear and lack of understanding among non-Indigenous people about fire, alongside her own desire to respect cultural protocols,

there isn't a lot of opportunity that I know of, to participate in cultural burning in my own Country ... Also, we're talking about this history – I was just reading up about my own Country, and there was a law that came in, in I think 1886, I think it was – the line was “Aborigines will be flogged or imprisoned if they are caught lighting fires” and so from a very long time, we have literally been restricted from doing burning in the way that we would normally do them, with First Settlers et cetera being terrified, absolutely terrified of fire, and unable to manage it, and unable to understand its importance. So, there's also this other issue, which ties onto the back of that is, “Who can I learn burning from? Who in my community wants to take me under their wing, and show me these things, and has the time?” You know, even some of our oldies, they're looking after six great-grand kids ... there's social issues that stop us from having the time and capacity to do this really important work. Haley.

Haley recognises the legacy of past (and current) policies on contemporary Aboriginal lives. These laws suppressed fire, oppressed Aboriginal people, and created a plethora of wide-ranging problems, including sick Country and sick communities where disadvantage, poor health, and dysfunction are common. Despite these pressures, Aboriginal women know that continuing our cultural practices are part of our responsibilities to Country and community, and that Aboriginal culture is a strong foundation for our health and wellbeing. Cultural burning and its revival, reminds Aboriginal people and communities of our collective potential, and pathways to brighter futures. Steph links cultural burning to bigger issues of Aboriginal self-determination, and she acknowledges that it stimulates a heightened awareness of her own cultural autonomy,

that realisation of this bigger purpose, outside of what we're conditioned to think, is important. And the way that we now, have to sell our labour, to be able to eat and sleep and exist. When you're out there, and you're walking alongside the fire, and you're listening to stories from uncles and aunties, when you're re-engaging with carving and weaving and dance – so you're igniting all these other cultural practices, because you're out there, you get to see the world in a different way. You start to remember what's important, and what's not, and to get that bigger perspective. And I mean, I guess for Western civilisation, that's probably a pretty dangerous thing, for us to be engaging with, you know, despite all the discourse around Aboriginal people, wanting to close the gap, and everything else, but I think when we do engage with these practices, and with each other, we're strong, and we remember. You know, we've got living memory of not being an oppressed people, and where the momentum is also building towards our exodus out of subservience, which is exciting. Steph.

Steph is highlighting that cultural burning and cultural practice supports Aboriginal self-determination, which is an important political issue and a response to colonisation. What Steph witnesses through cultural burning is strong cultural peoples, who flourish with the weight of colonial conditioning being lifted, even if only briefly. She also indicates a distrust of the colonial project⁵¹ and its rhetoric regarding support for Aboriginal self-determination. Cultural burning assists by bringing people together, to care for Country and for each other, through Aboriginal leadership, which strengthens self-determination and governance.

Russ-Smith (2021) describes the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires as a continuation of the war of colonisation on Country and kin, where the flames themselves became the frontier of violence obliterating everything in its path. She emphasises that ‘fire is not a metaphor for colonial violence or war. It *is* colonial violence. It *is* war’ (Russ-Smith 2021, p. 19, emphasis in original). These fires, as outcomes of colonial violence, continue attempts to erase Indigenous peoples and our relational ties to Country. These relationships are obstacles to the ‘white possessive logics of Country are an action of war, as they aim to perpetuate and reinforce colonial and white superiority’ (Russ-Smith 2021, p. 19). Fighting to be seen is not a new challenge for Aboriginal women as demonstrated in this International Women’s Day poster from 1988 (Fig. 47).

9.4.2 Will not die quietly

Colonisation remains a fundamental barrier because it positions and maintains itself as the authority, what Moreton-Robinson (2004) labels the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty. In the context of cultural burning, colonisation exists as a barrier in multiple ways including privileging itself as an authority to being maintained in the mindset of people. By establishing and enforcing fire-related legislation, the colonial state determines what forms of burning are considered relevant or valid, who is authorised to carry them out, and under what conditions. The system overwhelmingly supports Western fire management, leaving little provisions for cultural burning, as Edie highlights,

Government policies didn’t allow for [cultural burning] to happen”. Edie.

⁵¹ Professor Irene Watson belongs to the Tanganekald and Meintangk First Nations Peoples. Watson (2016, p. 33) provides this definition: The colonial project is ultimately about justifying the occupation and exploitation of Indigenous land and the maintenance of unequal relationships between non-native and native; it is of paramount importance that the colonised remain contained as objects of the colonial state. And for the Indigenous, the only trajectory is to become totally absorbed and assimilated into the state.

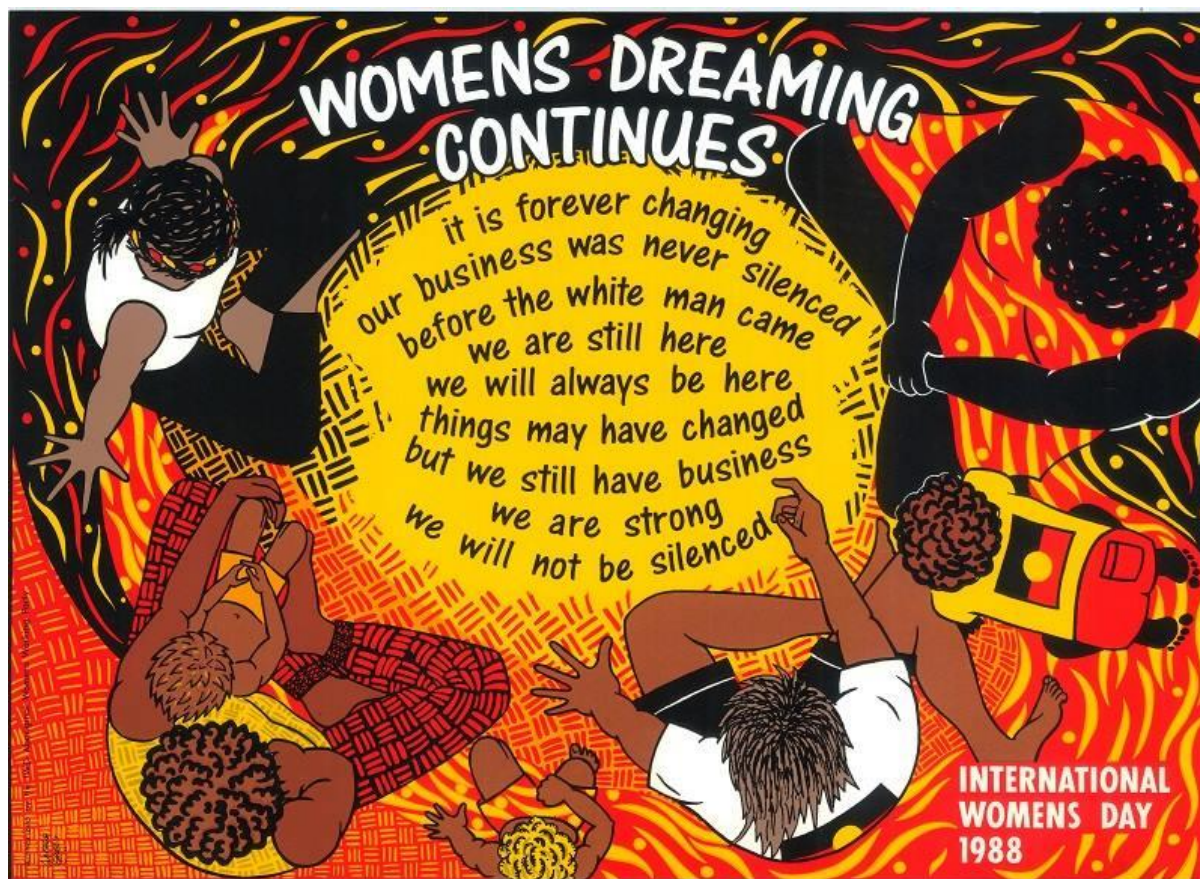


Figure 47: International Women's Day poster. This poster from 1988 outlines the erasure that Indigenous women have experienced, as well as the commitment to retain our places, roles and responsibilities. Credit: Image: "Women's Dreaming Continues" Karen Vance, Garage Graphix, 1988; sourced from: the Jessie Street National Women's Library Poster Collection.

Colonisation also reinforces its authority through institutional structures that appoint and empower individuals, predominantly non-Indigenous people, who maintain and benefit from the continued operation colonial norms. Western fire management institutions maintain the position that Western science is best practice, despite mounting contradictory evidence, including worsening ecological and social conditions. By privileging itself, the colonial system retains power to choose if, when, and how to engage with, or ignore Indigenous knowledges and practices (Costello et al. 2021). Aboriginal women recognise colonisation not just as a systemic barrier, but as a structure that facilitates bigotry, racism, and ecocide (Cumpston 2020c, Russ-Smith 2021, Watson 2017). Because of this, they understand that cultural burning encounters multiple challenges because colonisation rarely relinquishes power, as Ashlee acknowledges,

perhaps one of the challenges that we face is that we're already constrained with how we can practice it – when, where, with who? Ashlee.

Vivian Mason explains what those barriers mean for Aboriginal people today: ‘with all the laws and regulations these days, you can’t just put the fire where it needs to go’ (in Reynolds & Georgeson 2020). Blackburn-Mongta highlights that Aboriginal people are alienated because Western fire management approaches are privileged: ‘I had to get my firefighter ticket so I could do cultural burns’ (Blackburn-Mongta in Smith, Weir & Neale 2018, p. 22-23). Steph shares her experiences of trying to educate and engage with non-Indigenous people at cultural burning events to encourage them to learn about a better way to care for Country – which will ultimately create positive outcomes for all, whilst being met with unreceptive attitudes, colonial load, and racism,

And you get a few that you feel are quite hostile; they’re there, and so they want to learn, but the body language, with the arms crossed, and the standing back, or the frown on the face – often you’re trying to read people in the moment, to know how much to connect up with them during the fire, while you’re walking with it, how much energy to put into trying to change people’s minds. And I think that that really stems from this myth of primitivism, and that Aboriginal people were these kind of, nomadic hunter-gatherer savages, or, you know, whatever the rhetoric has been for 230 years, that we were no good. But we have knowledge, and you’re trying to change centuries of purposeful denigration, and that takes a bit of an emotional toll of how much do you give somebody, to try to perhaps change these ideas that they have, when there’s a risk that they can just dismiss that and, in doing so, they’re dismissing your sense of self, and your family, and your ancestors – everything. So, it’s sometimes a really tricky balance to find. Steph.

Steph highlights that even at inclusive cultural burning events, there can be strong resistance to the concept that Aboriginal people have knowledge that is valid, and this denial stems from the pathologising of Indigenous people. The Aboriginal women talked about how current models privilege Western science and approaches, often denying the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous science. Edie explains,

to have it justified by a non-Aboriginal person. I think that’s also too, a little bit of that distaste ... often we know things and we’ve learned things and it’s been handed down, and when you raise it, it still has to seek approval from a non-Aboriginal person to be accepted as being okay ... it’s another cultural practice that people believe didn’t exist, or doesn’t exist, or it’s not what it seems to be, and then here we are, saying, “Well, you know, it did exist, and it still exists, and it didn’t stop. Edie.

Additionally, the version of Australia experienced by the majority of society has been established by patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems that do not align with Aboriginal worldviews

or philosophies (Bishop & Tynan 2022, Russ-Smith 2021, Watson 2017). Aboriginal women describe the impacts of these differences. For example, Haley says,

There's actually, a really big fracture between what the Indigenous community thinks should happen, and the government policies and departments that are in place that said, "No, you can't burn there. You have to come through us" and we're really hamstrung in a lot of ways. Haley.

Steph agrees and adds,

Give us back Country to be able to take care of; we know what to do, and we know how to do, but I think there are these barriers and layers, and layers, and layers of dispossession, and purposeful kind of barriers to keep us out of Country. And we've seen that in lots of different examples of Aboriginal people wanting to just get on Country, to help heal ourselves and Country... the barriers to access are enormous, and if some of those... were removed or eliminated, I think that we'd have a really good shot at being able to do this well. Steph.

Not only do colonisation and non-Indigenous paradigms sit in contrast to Indigenous worldviews, they also pitch Aboriginal communities against each other, which undermines progress and depletes energy within Aboriginal communities, as Edie demonstrates,

the government robs Peter to pay Paul and when it comes to Indigenous cultural practices, they rob communities to pay communities to set that internal conflict ...and I wish cultural burning could just happen outside of that internal conflict so that it can just start to happen. Edie.

Aboriginal women describe that in many ways colonisation maintains its position and control of power. They understand that even where progress is made to advance Indigenous issues it is likely that colonisation will adapt by shifting the goalposts, redefining the terms of engagement, and re-asserting control to protect its own interest. Russ-Smith affirms Edie by stating: 'Colonialism continues to cause great wounding and violence across many spaces and Indigenous knowledges' (Russ-Smith 2021, p. 16). Colonisation is a pervasive barrier that takes many forms, through the behaviours of government officers who assert authority, as seen in Wren's Story; through legislation that defines who can and cannot burn; and through the disconnection of Aboriginal people from their full and confident cultural knowing. Aboriginal women see, understand, and experience these barriers, and actively resist the constraints that colonisation continue to maintain.

9.5 INCONGRUENT PARADIGMS: LIGHTING THE FIRE, NOT FIGHTING THE FIRE

9.5.1 Relationships with fire

We learn from Aboriginal women that fires in the context of cultural burning and Western fire management fires are fundamentally different, rooted in distinct worldviews, paradigms, and objectives. The women talked about these differences as both being and creating barriers in several ways. First, many people have a fear of fire and negative associations with it. Second, a barrier arises from the differing aims, approaches, and outcomes of cultural burning and Western fire management. However, these barriers can be addressed through education and by nurturing respectful and positive relationships with fire - something that cultural burning practices inherently support and make possible.

Fear can be a barrier that deters people from participating in cultural burning. This is understandable given the level of destruction caused by bad fires and the significant impacts on society (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020). Fear is a barrier because it causes people and institutions to respond to fire in risk-adverse ways and reinforces the ideology of working within a fire suppression paradigm where the objective is to extinguish fires, not encourage them. However, not all fires are damaging. Cultural burning is the type of fire that is healthy for Country, where fires are encouraged rather than extinguished. Edie describes that she held a fear of fire which has been diminished through her cultural burning participation,

I'm scared of fire, and always have been because we had a house fire when I was a little kid ... And I talk about, as a salt water woman, talk about the sea and "Never turn your back on the sea because it'll snatch you" and that's how I used to feel about fire in the land, but now I can see if you treat the land with respect and treat fire with respect to the land, that fire will just regress. Edie.

Aboriginal women perceive that barriers exist due to the predominant fire suppression paradigm and a lack of understanding that some fires are good and healthy. In addition to the fear and risk-adverse approaches, the current degraded condition of Country (discussed in Chapter Six) presents a barrier. Cultural burning needs to be incorporated very carefully to degraded Country because some safety issues do exist. Prior to the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires, Blackburn-Mongta (2018) emphasised that the destructive bushfires of recent decades are not the healthy fires that Country needs but are dangerous and unfamiliar to Country. Aboriginal women realise that although they are

catastrophic, events like the Black Summer Bushfires, generate momentum to create change and move towards better futures and sustainability (Section 8.6). Ashlee highlights how cultural burning can change relationships with Country.

we're in this climate catastrophe here where we're seeing really devastating fire and we have over the years, cultivated a particular relationship to fire that is all about destruction and damage and loss and grief and trauma and I think what cultural burning can do is offer really another way of relating not only to fire but to Country. Ashlee.

Steph talks about encouraging people safely through cultural burning so they can heal their relationship with fire,

people's relationship with fire is often one of fear and they've experienced bushfires or they've experienced being in really precarious situations where fire is not their friend, and so you want to make sure that they feel safe in that space, that they're not worried about it getting out of control or anything like that – these ideas or preconceptions that people have that fire is dangerous and you need to control it and fight it and manage it, and here we are, saying “Actually, this is something that we do with love and that generates life and we're not fighting the fire – we're lighting the fire” and that's a whole different frame of mind for people to get into. Steph.

The fear that people hold about fire causes them to distance themselves from Country and from people. What is needed, is for whole communities to lean-in to being (re)connected to Country and care for it properly. Fire is a way to care for and be with Country, which will encourage human sustainability (Steffensen 2021, Tynan 2022). Several of the Aboriginal women interviewed talk about how being trained in Western fire management as part of their job helped them to work through these fears.

In my traineeship I went through the [firefighting] modules. In my years with [agency], I've been involved with wildfires and hazard reduction burns. Tracey.

When I came to [agency] they trained us. It's an accredited firefighting course ...Yeah they put you all through the fire training. I was more than happy to do it. Lucinda.

Training in Western fire management can be valuable in building confidence and skills. However, without a strong grounding in Aboriginal culture and a clear understanding of the differences between Western and Indigenous approaches, there is a risk of appropriation and of undermining the integrity of cultural burning.

9.5.2 It's not hazard reduction

The Aboriginal women clearly distinguish between Western fire management and cultural burning, noting that each have different aims, objectives and approaches, and underlying worldviews, resulting in distinct outcomes for both Country and Aboriginal people (Section 3.2). While they acknowledge that aspects of Western fire management have merit, Aboriginal women reject the extraction, co-option, dilution, or selective integration of cultural burning and Aboriginal knowledges into Western fire management or environmental conservation systems that are often ineffective and not fit-for-purpose (Henry et al. 2023, Samuel 2020). Tracey reflects on her own experiences with Western fire management, raising concerns about its reliance on Western knowledge systems and the attitudes and behaviours she has witnessed, Tracey says,

No, there was no cultural aspects to the [fire] training, and I think that because there isn't those cultural components in the training, you see in the field, like especially if we're doing hazard reductions and we're introducing fire, you'll notice that the crew leaders in charge, you know, because they've got big egos and they'll want to get the burn started really fast and really hot. So, there's been instances where I'll be just starting to light up for the day and I'll be watching and sort of waiting to see how the fire's responding to that landscape and to the weather, and you get your crew leaders telling you "Hurry up. Come on" – there's budget time and those sorts of limitations... Yeah, to get this many hectares burned in these next few days or in today and tomorrow or "You need to get this burned ... before the weather change" or something, so you'll be getting instructed from people to make things really hot, really quick and then you'll often see spot-overs and damage to ... areas and stuff where the burn wasn't intended to go but because of these perspectives, things like that happen and that puts pressure on you too when you're burning ... instead of maybe just lighting up along a line, along a fire trail, you'll be getting asked to also go in and add additional rows parallel to that first row so that you get that vacuum effect of burning into the next section that's already hot and so really accelerating the speed and heat of the fire. Tracey.

Tracey understands that people are not fire trained in a way that recognises or supports Aboriginal culture or centres the health of Country. Tracey outlines that Western approaches focus on short-term reactive responses bound to time and money, rather than considering long-term embedded relationships and the health of Country. The criticism of Western fire management as reactive, rushed, and indiscriminate is a common theme in Aboriginal women's narratives as Lucinda exemplifies,

They just want to get it done as quick as possible and if it burns hot, it burns hot. It's not about considering the environment and you're considering the right time to burn and considering all the cultural considerations that go along with that. Lucinda.

In her interview Steph agrees that reactive approaches are inefficient and suggests that fire management would be improved by considering the long-term health of Country. She continues, describing that in this way cultural burning is different to Western fire management, and that there are spaces where humans are not to interfere, she says,

[Cultural burning is] not a hot, high fire – we don't touch the canopy. That's not our space ... with cultural burning, because it's slow, and it doesn't take down the canopy. Steph.

A key barrier in discussing the differences between cultural burning and Western fire management lies in the authority and dominance of the Western system, which imposes a specific way of thinking about and understanding Country, that does not align with cultural burning. When cultural burning is forced to operate on the margins of this incongruent system, the opportunity to practice it becomes constrained, limited by a system that believes it knows best. Kobi shares her frustration about this ongoing disempowerment,

At the moment, if we were to suggest a cultural burning on a piece of land here, we would get knocked back by council because, I guess they would not feel that we don't hold the knowledge, the burning knowledge, that's something RFS do, you know, not us. So to be able to have that ability to go, "This is our land and we're going to burn it our way", you know – give that power back to the people. Kobi.

When asked about the place of cultural burning in reducing fuel loads and bushfire risk, a common theme in the responses from the women is that although a reduction in hazard may be an outcome of cultural burning, it is not the primary objective, nor is it comparable to Western fire management.

Cultural burning isn't necessarily about mitigating risks or reducing hazards or protecting life and assets, although they are by-products of that ... all of those positive outcomes that agencies might be trying to get at in terms of asset protection and hazard reduction and protection of life and property, and all of that, I mean that can happen, that's undoubtable. Steph.

To highlight the potential for cultural burning as a bushfire risk mitigation, several women referred to the experiences of Tathra, in southern NSW, where the cultural burning that occurred prior

to destructive bushfires was heralded as being less prone to the impacts of those bushfires and reported in good news stories as enhancing safety. Kobi's description here echoes what other women also said,

I wasn't involved in the burn that they did at Tathra before the bushfires but I was able to go and have a look and evaluate after the bushfires came through and what was really significant about that is this little patch on the corner that they burned using cultural burn methods – it was still green, the canopy was intact, all these little grasses and lilies were shooting up from the ground, there was no bracken fern. You know, it was just coming through beautifully and when you step out and look and the rest of the landscape is brown because the fires have come through, the fire's come through and it's gone around this patch that they culturally burned the previous year. Kobi.

The women's perspectives reflect what is found in the literature. As an example, fire manager and Wiradjuri man, Dean Freeman, acknowledges that an increase in cultural burning would mitigate, but not eliminate big bushfires: 'You might still get a wildfire coming through, but you would lose a lot of the intensity so it would probably be a bit more manageable' (Freeman in King 2019).

9.6 CONCLUSION

Aboriginal women discuss the barriers to cultural burning. Some barriers they have experienced firsthand, others they are acutely aware of or deeply concerned about. They discussed the barriers across four categories: appropriation, erasure, incongruent paradigms, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Erasure is specific to women, whilst the other barriers apply to all Aboriginal people. Appropriation involves the exploitation of Aboriginal people and knowledges and significantly impacts the integrity of cultural burning. Appropriation can be by government, researchers, NGOs, and even other Aboriginal people who do not have the right knowledge or skills yet to be leading cultural burning. Erasure occurs where Aboriginal women are overlooked. Here, underrepresentation reinforces itself. By participating in this research, Aboriginal women are amplifying their voices and advocating for greater visibility. Colonisation, through its historical legacies and ongoing impacts, continues to create and maintain barriers.

The women reflect on how past policies disconnected them from Country, and how this disconnection continues to shape their lives today. They also describe how colonisation works in self-serving ways, further entrenching its authority and impeding cultural practices. Incongruent paradigms highlight the contrasting relationships with fire, where fear and risk aversion curtail progress. Furthermore, Aboriginal women highlight how the differences between cultural burning and Western fire management hamper development of cultural burning because of their differing aims, objectives,

and outcomes. These differences make it harder to progress cultural burning due to the entrenched dominance of Western fire management. The barriers described by Aboriginal women are largely reflected in the literature, with a notable exception of concerns about women's personal safety.

As seen in Wren's Story, even when cultural burning seeks to be inclusive through the goodwill of Elders and leaders and the involvement of non-Indigenous participants, offering valuable opportunities for education and reconciliation, domineering mindsets of superiority can still impede progress on multiple fronts. In this example, Western fire management, operating as a colonial authority, overstepped its place and asserted control without offering the basic courtesy of communication or negotiation with the Aboriginal people leading the cultural burn. Instead, they were ignored and left feeling frustrated, hurt, and undermined. These examples show that even where generosity and inclusivity are extended, Aboriginal people and their practices remain vulnerable to oppressive behaviours, whether driven by ignorance, habit, or intention. Addressing this requires more than transforming Western fire management and outdated conservation models. It demands a significant shift in colonial mindsets and the dismantling of the structures and policies that support them. Only then can Aboriginal leadership in fire practice be properly recognised, supported, and aligned with holistic Aboriginal caring for Country paradigms.

CHAPTER 10 THESIS CONCLUSION

10.1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This qualitative research has explored Aboriginal women's experiences of cultural burning in NSW. Through detailed perspectives of ten Aboriginal women, including myself, set in the context of focussed conversations with hundreds of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as well as my strategic participation in the sector, the leadership of Country and Aboriginal women's voices are prominent in this research. Additionally, my positionality is significant as an Aboriginal woman with over three decades of experience in the sector, where I have long been an advocate for Aboriginal women, cultural burning, and Aboriginal-led approaches to caring for Country. The structure of this thesis reflects the unique interplay between the leadership of Country, my culturally embedded approach, and my cultural, personal, and professional roles and experiences. Between chapters my lived experience is examined through Indigenous autoethnography and Indigenous Storywork, with stories that provide segues across the nine chapters. This final chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings, highlighting implications, contributions, and limitations of the research, suggesting directions for future research, and expressing my final reflections. The voices of Aboriginal women are included to highlight the core messages.

Cultural burning is distinct from Western fire management and is experiencing a revival in the southeast of the continent. Aboriginal women celebrate this revival for its environmental, cultural, and social outcomes, including to support the health of Country and to strengthen Aboriginal communities. However, Aboriginal women are underrepresented in cultural burning and across caring for Country programs, Western fire management, and environmental conservation. Due to the widespread nature of women's underrepresentation, Aboriginal women's voices, values, and priorities are not always evident in the literature, nor are they adequately considered or addressed in practice. Such underrepresentation is widely recognised as inappropriate and cannot be solely attributed to gender-sensitive cultural norms, though such norms do exist in some places. By exploring the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal women, and amplifying Aboriginal women's voices, this research contributes to redressing this gap. The aim is to encourage more equitable and culturally appropriate inclusion of women in cultural burning policy and practice.

Both Western fire management and environmental conservation sectors, as operationalised by NSW Government, remain male dominated and Western centric. These institutional structures present significant challenges to the development and application of cultural burning. Aboriginal women experience these barriers intersectionally, navigating both gendered and colonial constraints.

10.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

My research set out to explore Aboriginal women's engagement in cultural burning in NSW based on three foundational themes:

1. What are the lived experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal women regarding their engagement in cultural burning in NSW?
2. What are the considerations or barriers to the full participation of Aboriginal women in cultural burning?
3. How do Aboriginal women want their knowledge and narratives of cultural burning to be presented and shared as an outcome of this research?

The first two questions were addressed in two ways: first, through my own participation in cultural burning, where I reflected on my experiences; and second, through the discourse analysis of empirical data gathered from nine Aboriginal women via semi-structured interviews, small focus-groups and extensively with hundreds of Aboriginal women through focussed discussions in yarning circles and other forums. The third question informed my understanding of the women's expectations, both for how the research should be conducted and how its findings should be used to progress Aboriginal women's priorities and broader community values. This approach helped ensure the research was neither extractive nor exploitative. The Aboriginal women maintained authority and control over their participation, exercised decision-making power in the activation of the research process, and held me accountable for the integrity of the work. In addition to the expectations established by the Aboriginal women, the responsibilities and accountability I have to Country and community are apparent in my research and in my ongoing role in the sector. Country has been influential in aligning my research and my lived experiences in ways that maximise the impact of this research.

My research found that Aboriginal women wish to participate in cultural burning, some are already participating, and others are keen, but have not yet had the opportunity. The women consider their involvement in cultural burning as an important opportunity:

we're starting to have that revival of knowledge and hearing that fire isn't just for the men – how it's for women and old people, young people – as long as it's culturally right, then I think yeah, of course we should be involved. Tracey.

Aboriginal women expressed a desire to engage in cultural burning in culturally safe ways, guided by Aboriginal protocols and empowered by Aboriginal leadership. They describe cultural burning as an Aboriginal cultural practice that centres on, and responds to, Country, fostering healing for people and Country. There is strong support for Aboriginal women's involvement in cultural

burning, as uplifting women benefits not only them, but also their families, including future generations, their communities, wider society, and Country itself.

The women identified numerous benefits regarding Aboriginal women's participation, some specific to women, and others with broader impacts. Benefits directly related to women include influencing youth participation and maintaining matriarchal knowledges, values, and practices, including the appropriate care of women's sites. They advocate that youth participation is paramount for the continuation of culture, while also noting that young voices are often underrepresented.

it doesn't necessarily mean that I have to be the one lighting Country, but I can contribute to the conversation and help to try and create opportunities for other women particularly.
Haley.

As well as discussing impacts that affect them directly, the women discussed benefits and outcomes that impact on whole communities. Aboriginal women want all members of Aboriginal communities regardless of age, ability, or gender to experience the benefits of cultural burning, including increased access to Country, maintaining cultural practices, and the ability to enact cultural responsibilities to Country and community. The women also describe their aspiration for caring for Country programs (including cultural burning activities) as an opportunity for meaningful livelihoods, including economic outcomes. Caring for Country programs are perceived as viable, positive employment pathways, that contribute to self-determination and wellbeing away from widespread and systemic disadvantage. The women noted that cultural burning may involve the participation of non-Indigenous people, bringing both benefits and challenges. These include opportunities for cross-cultural partnerships and reconciliation, alongside the need to address colonial-load and guard against cultural appropriation.

Although catastrophic, the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires acted as a catalyst for increasing interest in cultural burning. Prior to the Black Summer Bushfires, literature on cultural burning in the region was scarce, but it expanded rapidly in its aftermath, coinciding with my doctoral candidature. I contributed to this growth both directly, through my own publications, and indirectly, by including and amplifying the voices of Aboriginal women in the sector. However, experience and research show that social and institutional responses to disasters often follow a familiar pattern: an initial surge of intense interest, action, activism, and in-principle commitment, often met with operational challenges and barriers (ranging from institutional though to personal barriers), and eventually followed by a kind of collective amnesia. This waning support undermines the ability to fully realise the goals such crises make so urgent.

Many of the barriers that Aboriginal women discuss are related to Aboriginal people and communities holistically, including the appropriation of Aboriginal knowledges. The women also describe their experiences of being overlooked as participants in cultural burning:

*we face all the challenges from male-dominated world, where women are regarded as someone that doesn't have certain knowledge. Also our role as carers of young children can be seen as an obstacle to get out there because of that fear around fire. **Lucinda.***

This concept of erasure includes being overlooked as knowledge- and rights-holders, reinforcing the false perception that caring for Country and cultural burning are solely men's business. The women discuss personal safety as a barrier shaped by their underrepresentation in the sector and the disproportionate rates at which women experience men's violence. Other barriers examined include the enduring influence of colonisation and the distinctions between cultural burning and Western fire management, including differences in worldviews, relationships to fire, and incongruent paradigms. Western fire management's privileged position as the state endorsed authority is itself a barrier, as it tends to serve its own interests. Its bureaucratic systems make minimal provision for cultural burning, forcing it to operate in marginal spaces.

The women emphasise how cultural burning strengthens Aboriginal connections to Country, with the potential to transform Western fire management and the environmental conservation sector while delivering environmental, social, and wellbeing outcomes. My research argues that increased participation of Aboriginal women will encourage more equitable distribution of benefits. Increased participation will benefit Aboriginal women now and will positively influence youth and future generations. Knowing that bushfire threats will intensify, Aboriginal women express concern that Western fire management is insufficient to address current or future threats. They offer solutions, calling for affirmative action that specifically targets and encourages Aboriginal women's participation. They also view their participation in this research as contributing to the transformation of the sector by centring and amplifying Aboriginal women.

10.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This thesis makes empirical and methodological contributions. The broad empirical contributions of this research are achieved by privileging Aboriginal women's voices and ensuring their presence in domains where they have been historically and systematically excluded. This exclusion has meant that Aboriginal women's priorities and values are often overlooked or omitted. While cultural burning practitioners are generally open to, and supportive of Aboriginal women's participation and leadership when prompted, significant barriers remain, including limited opportunities and the lack of clarity about the roles of women and children.

To address this problem, this research intentionally foregrounds Aboriginal women's engagement in cultural burning practices, amplifying their voices and rights in public arenas, and advocates for their inclusion in all policy, strategy, and literature relating to fire management. By focussing on Aboriginal women, the research challenges the persistent omission of women in cultural burning discourse, practices, and conceptual frameworks, and asserts their roles as essential participants in both cultural burning and the broader environmental sector.

This research extends our understanding of cultural burning from the perspectives of Aboriginal women. It also reveals aspects of cultural burning that are important to Aboriginal women, as well as aspects that rely on women's involvement or leadership. This reframing challenges the assumption that fire, and more broadly caring for Country, are predominantly male activities. In doing so, the research highlights the importance of Aboriginal and gendered knowledge systems in environmental governance.

Other empirical contributions of this thesis include Aboriginal women affirming and building on the epistemological and ontological development of cultural burning by adding their values, priorities and perspectives, and fulfilling the space that exists for women in the Aboriginal cultural practice of cultural burning. This research equips me with the knowledge and confidence required to be able to challenge the Western normativity of the government spaces that I work within and encounter. With these strengths, I challenge the dominant Western epistemologies and advocate for systems change across Western fire management and environmental conservation, as well as supporting Aboriginal women and their communities to achieve their goals and aspirations. Here, this research documents Aboriginal women's experiences and perspectives and asserts that Aboriginal women's cultural knowledge and lived experience are critical to cultural burning, practically and conceptually. It also reframes expertise in fire governance, and the broader sector.

Within this thesis and in other publications, particularly non-scholarly texts, Aboriginal women share emotional, cultural, ecological and intergenerational insights which enrich all aspects of cultural burning and contribute to its ongoing development.

My research has adopted Indigenous Research Methodologies to centre Indigenous people, priorities, experiences, and values, and to undertake research in culturally appropriate ways. Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory further privileges the voices of Aboriginal women and their experiences of cultural burning, explored through the lens of intersectionality. The thesis provides examples of Indigenist and Indigenous Research Methodologies in practice where relationality, cultural safety, ethical research, and ICIP-sensitive research designs are all addressed. My positionality provides a solid foundation that supports the unique strength of this research. Not only am I an Aboriginal woman researching Aboriginal women, I also have three decades of experience in the sector across practical and policy divisions with an ongoing influential role where I am able to implement and advance the findings of this research. This research has taught me the importance of applying the knowledge I am gaining. Another lesson has been the importance of Aboriginal women's guidance throughout the

research process, which for me has primarily been through my mother's engagement. I recommend that Indigenous researchers have Indigenous supervisors or mentors counsel them throughout their research to guide progress, brainstorm and soundboard ideas and concepts. Having contact with women Elders throughout my research journey has been a source of inspiration and strength.

The Aboriginal women who participated shared the view that this was an appropriate methodological approach for the research:

I think this is really important work and I'm really pleased to be involved in this ...the ripple effects of something like this about cultural burning by an Aboriginal woman, about Aboriginal women's involvement, I think is helping build this momentum and helping it be Aboriginal-led. Steph.

This research employed a mixed-methods approach that combined Indigenous Storywork, Indigenous autoethnography, discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews and focus-groups with Aboriginal women, and Indigenous participatory action research, including my personal engagement within the field and in women's circles. This approach allowed the research to address the cultural requirements of undertaking Indigenist research, where ethics, cultural safety, and cultural protocols are engaged in ways that support and contribute to the political progress of Aboriginal people's cultural burning concerns. As part of the shift away from treating Aboriginal people as objects of research, my methodology contributes meaningfully to the development of Indigenous Research Methodologies and Indigenist research, in which Aboriginal people lead and are central to all facets of the research.

As culturally embedded Indigenist research, this thesis makes several contributions to knowledge and scholarship. Given my professional role in the sector, along with the alignments that occurred through the research, I concurrently completed this project whilst applying my knowledge directly to the field. I completed the research in this manner as part of my Indigenous participatory action research approach, as well as fulfilling my responsibilities to Country and community. These approaches enriched the research, increased its impact and strengthened my own wellbeing.

10.4 PRACTICAL, POLICY, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

The research offers recommendations for developing cultural burning and caring for Country programs, with a focus on ensuring dedicated space is held for Aboriginal women's participation across all stages of the process. Achieving this may require the commitment of specific resources (including secure and ongoing funding for women's roles) and targeted, supportive approaches to encourage and

sustain women's involvement. One recommendation is to establish minimum representation targets for Aboriginal women across the broader sector with the aim to build a critical mass of women whose contributions will have both immediate impacts and long-term influence over generations. These targets would be aligned to other annually reported diversity and inclusion levels of organisations. A range of affirmative action measures could be applied, including: genuine and meaningful partnerships between agencies and Aboriginal women's groups; establishing Aboriginal women's sector mentoring relationships and support networks, and being attentive to the contributions that arise from these initiatives.

My own career provides an example of the effectiveness of this approach: three decades in the sector have led to this PhD, economic security, and leadership roles that I anticipate will continue to shape both the sector and Aboriginal communities into the future. There is a strong argument for transforming Western fire management and environmental conservation models to align more closely with Aboriginal caring for Country approaches. Aboriginal women must be central to these transformations to avoid replicating the gender inequities of the past, and ensure a diversity of perspectives are included. Indigenous people, especially women, must be meaningfully included in all processes related to caring for Country and responding to climate change.

Broader implications and significance of this research include revitalisation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices. This will positively influence Aboriginal people's wellbeing and, as Aboriginal people state, will generate positive outcomes for Country and wider communities through improved ecosystems services from the improved health of Country, and improved social cohesion through public education, awareness and reconciliation. Increased participation of Aboriginal women will lead to improvements across social, cultural and economic outcomes. A further implication is disruption of power and authority away from its present Western-centrism, and an opportunity to reset governance processes, and in doing so making them more inclusive (of gender and wider demographics), functional and effective. Greater inclusion of Aboriginal women (and other minorities) will increase cultural safety. Aboriginal women argue that all these changes are needed to address the disadvantage experienced within Aboriginal communities, and to adequately address the climate crisis and impending ecocide.

10.5 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The limitations of this study relate to sample size, methods, data sources, temporality and research settings. This research engaged intensively with a small sample size of nine Aboriginal women through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and extensively with hundreds of Aboriginal

women through yarning circles and other forums. Research findings may be enhanced by increasing the intensive sample size. A larger field may also establish if the research findings are widely applicable. As Indigenous people in Australia use social media in specific ways to support political and cultural wellbeing (Carlson and Frazer 2018a, 2018b), an online survey could be deployed to reach a bigger sample size and produce a larger dataset.

The Aboriginal women who participated in semi-structured interviews and focus groups possessed a range of cultural burning experience, however none of the women identified themselves as cultural burning leaders or practitioners. Targeting research to Aboriginal women who are cultural burning leaders or practitioners would produce another perspective, an additional layer of data and understanding, and perhaps different or more nuanced findings. This research is a snapshot of cultural burning that reflects a moment in time when it is experiencing a revival in NSW and coincided with the 2019-2020 Black Summer Bushfires. Repeating the study after cultural burning has been operating for a longer period of time would produce another valuable perspective on the issues raised by the women in this research. The in-person semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions for this research occurred in buildings or seated picnic areas. It would have also been appropriate to conduct the interviews and focus-group discussions during cultural burning events, which would have facilitated the women to describe their experiences 'in-the-moment'. Furthermore, during cultural burning events, Country may have revealed other lessons or data.

Opportunities and directions for future research and policy development include: first, a critical analysis of Aboriginal women's underrepresentation in a wider range of formal caring for Country programs, Western fire management, and environmental conservation. Such research should scrutinise barriers and propose solutions for each of those programs. Second, apply this research to other jurisdictions where Indigenous women are also underrepresented, to support development and progress Indigenous women's participation in those areas. Similarly, research is needed to better understand, listen to and accommodate Aboriginal youth perspectives to inform development of caring for Country and encourage succession pathways to continue Aboriginal leadership into the future. Third, include community-led monitoring and evaluations of the sector, including development of culturally relevant targets. Fourth, there is potential to access untapped knowledge through exploration of culturally aligned, Country-centred and creative research methodologies. Finally, develop a dataset that compiles historical descriptions of cultural burning for NSW to assist Aboriginal communities to understand the fire practices of the past for their Country so it may help inform their cultural burning planning.

10.6 CLOSING STATEMENT

This research is a marker in the rise of Aboriginal women's voices and leadership in the sector. The Aboriginal women who participated affirm and advocate the intent of this research:

because Aboriginal women know that cultural burning is part of our history, it's part of our cultural heritage. It belongs to us and we belong to it so I think absolutely there are particular challenges for Aboriginal women participating in this – different to Aboriginal men, different to non-Aboriginal women and men ... it's really necessary I think also to ensure the way that we continue to work in these spaces, in a way that is actually driven and determined by us. Ashlee.

Aboriginal women unapologetically call for their values and priorities to be more meaningfully recognised and included, serving as a guiding beacon so that we are seen, respected, and genuinely considered. This research amplifies Aboriginal women's voices, bringing them into spaces where they are rarely heard. Through their powerful and rich contributions, this thesis shares their stories, which will resonate widely and affect meaningful change – a process that is already underway.

BIBLIOGRAPHY 11

Abram, NJ, Henley, BJ, Sen Gupta, A, Lippmann, TJR, Clarke, H, Dowdy, AJ, Sharples, JJ, Nolan, RH, Zhang, T, Wooster, MJ, Wurtzel, JB, Meissner, KJ, Pitman, AJ, Ukkola, AM, Murphy, BP, Tapper, NJ & Boer, MM 2021, 'Connections of climate change and variability to large and extreme forest fires in southeast Australia', *Communications Earth and Environment*, vol. 2, iss. 8, <<https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-020-00065-8>>.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2021, 'Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables', viewed on 21 April 2021, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release>>.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2023, *New South Wales, 2021 Census All persons QuickStats*, viewed 21 April 2024, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/1>>.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2024, 2021 Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people QuickStats, viewed on 21 April 2024, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/IQSAUS>>.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2025, 2021 Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people QuickStats, viewed on 15 June 2025, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/1>>.

Adams, M 2016, 'Engaging with uncertainty: shared governance in Indigenous conservation landscapes', in L Elenius, C Allard & C Sandström (eds), *Indigenous rights in modern landscapes: Nordic conservation regimes in global context*, Routledge, p. 126.

Adams, M, Cavanagh, V & Edmunds, B 2008, 'Bush lemons and beach hauling: evolving traditions and new thinking for protected areas management and Aboriginal people in NSW', in D Smyth & GK Ward (eds), *Protecting Country: Indigenous governance and management of protected areas*, Research Program, AIATSIS, Canberra, p. 31-45.

Adams, MM 2021, 'Melinda M. Adams: Storytelling through fire', NSU Center for Tribal Studies, seminar, viewed on 28 July 2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8sCKzOEPW0>>.

Adams, MM 2023, *Storytelling through Fire: The Socio-Ecological and Cultural Reclamation of Indigenous Cultural Fire in Northern California*, Doctoral dissertation, UC Davis.

Adams, P & Dunn, M 2020, The convict valley - a history of Newcastle and the Hunter, radio interview, 21 December 2020, ABC Radio: Radio National, viewed on 21 April 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/latenightlive/convict-valley_mark-dunn/12878054>.

Adlam, C, Almendariz, D, Goode, RW, Martinez, DJ & Middleton, BR 2022, 'Keepers of the Flame: Supporting the Revitalization of Indigenous Cultural Burning', *Society & Natural Resources*, vol. 35, no. 5, p. 1-16.

AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) n.d., *Timber Creek compensation case*, viewed on 21 February 2024, <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/timber-creek-compensation-case>>.

AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) 2012, AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (GERAIS), AIATSIS, Canberra.

AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) 2020, AIATSIS code of ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research, AIATSIS, Canberra.

AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) 2022, *Welcome to Country: What is Country?* Australian Government, viewed on 21 February 2024, <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country#:~:text=Country%20is%20the%20term%20often,material%20sustenance%2C%20family%20and%20identity>>.

AIDR (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience) no date, Bushfire – Black Christmas, viewed on 21 February 2020, <<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/bushfire-black-christmas-2001/>>.

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2018, Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, 2018, viewed on 21 February 2020, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/summary>>.

Alexandra, J & Finlayson, CM 2020, 'Floods after bushfires: rapid responses for reducing impacts of sediment, ash, and nutrient slugs', *Australasian Journal of Water Resources*, vol. 24, iss. 1, p. 9-11.

Altamirano-Jiménez, I, Nickel, S, WC Sy & Aikau, HK 2025, *An Introduction to Indigenous Feminisms*. Routledge.

Altman, JC & Whitehead PJ 2003, 'Caring for country and sustainable Indigenous development: Opportunities, constraints and innovation', CAEPR Working Paper No. 20/2003. Australian National University.

Altman, JC, Buchanan, G & Larsen, L 2007, 'The Environmental Significance of the Indigenous Estate: Natural Resource Management as Economic Development in Remote Australia', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Altman, J, Kerins, S, Hunt, J, Ens, E, May, K, Russell, S & Fogarty, B 2011, 'Indigenous cultural and natural resource management futures', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Topical Issue 9.

Amezcu, H & Almendariz, D 2023, 'See 'good fire' burn Yolo County landscape under the direction of Maidu-Wintun teacher', 14 November 2023, The Sacramento Bee, viewed on 21 February 2025, <<https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/fires/article281817963.html>>.

Anderson, A, Chilczuk, S, Nelson, K, Ruther, R & Wall-Scheffler, C 2023, 'The Myth of Man the Hunter: Women's contribution to the hunt across ethnographic contexts', *PLoS one*, vol. 18, iss. 6, p. e0287101.

Anderson, P, Blue, L, Pham, T & Seward, M 2022, 'Capacity-Building Support for Indigenous HDR Students via the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network', in P Anderson, L Blue, T Pham & M Seward (eds), *Higher Degree by Research: Factors for Indigenous Student Success*, Springer Nature, Singapore, p. 27-37.

Andrew, S 2024, 'Colonial Load, Not Cultural Load: My Culture is Not the Problem', LinkedIn, 6 June 2024, viewed on 21 February 2025, <<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/colonial-load-cultural-my-culture-problem-shawn-andrews-azjje/>>.

Andrews, R & Ashworth, R 2018, 'Feeling the heat? Management reform and workforce diversity in the English fire service', in P Murphy & K Greenhalgh (eds), *Fire and rescue services*, Springer International Publishing, Nottingham.

Andrews, S 2023, 'Sisters are doing it for themselves', Pursuit, University of Melbourne, viewed on 7 March 2023, <<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/sisters-are-doing-it-for-themselves>>.

Anon. 2020a, Facebook post, 25 January 2020.

Anon. 2020b, Facebook post, 25 January 2020.

Ansell J & Evans J 2020, 'Contemporary Aboriginal savanna burning projects in Arnhem Land: a regional description and analysis of the fire management aspirations of Traditional Owners', *International Journal of Wildland Fire*, vol. 29, no. 5, p. 371-385.

Arabena, K 2008, 'Indigenous Epistemology and Wellbeing: Universe-referent Citizenship', AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper 22, AIATSIS, Canberra.

Arabena, K 2020, "'Country Can't Hear English': A guide supporting the implementation of cultural determinants of health and wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. Karabena Consulting, Riddell's Creek, Victoria.

Arbon, V & Rigney, L-I 2014, 'Indigenous at the heart: Indigenous research in a climate change project', *AlterNative*, vol. 10, no. 5, p. 478-492.

Archibald, JA 2008, *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, BC.

Archibald, JA, Morgan, JL & De Santolo, J eds 2019, *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*. Zed Books, London.

Archibald-Binge, E & Wyman, R 2020, January 6, 'It's miraculous': Owners say cultural burning saved their property. The Sydney Morning Herald, viewed on 27 February 2022, <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/it-s-miraculous-ownerssay-cultural-burning-saved-their-property-20200103-p53okc.html>>.

Armbruster, S 2020, *All-female Indigenous ranger crew lead the way in land management*, SBS news online, 12 November 2020, viewed on 31 March 2021, <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/audiotrack/all-female-indigenous-ranger-crew-lead-way-land-management>>.

Arnold, C, Atchison, J & McKnight, A 2021, 'Reciprocal relationships with trees: rekindling Indigenous wellbeing and identity through the Yuin ontology of oneness', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 52, no. 2, p. 131-147.

Arnold, C, Atchison, J & McKnight, A 2023, "'Often in between': Thinking through research methods and Indigenous sovereignty with Yuin Country', *Environment and Planning F*, vol. 2, iss. 1, p. 163-179.

Arnstein, SR 1969, 'A ladder of citizen participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, vol. 35, iss. 4, p. 216-224.

Aseron, J, Greymorning, SN, Miller, A & Wilde, S 2013, 'Cultural Safety Circles and Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives: Inclusive Practices for Participation in Higher Education', *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, vol. 6, no. 4, p. 409-416.

Atkinson, J, 2002, *Trauma trails, recreating song lines: The transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia*, Spinifex Press.

Atkinson, J 2022, 'Healing Ways From Trauma Webinar' - in partnership with the Iawa Collaboration and the Department of Rural Health, The University of Melbourne, viewed on 5 February 2024, <<https://youtu.be/otKTlZKf92A>>.

Attenbrow, V 2010, *Sydney's Aboriginal past: investigating the archaeological and historical records*. UNSW Press.

Australian Government, no date, *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*, viewed on 8 August 2024, <<https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A04665/asmade/text>>.

Australian Government, 2023, 'Cultural load, it's a real thing!', Australian Public Service Commission, viewed on 8 August 2024, <<https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-news/cultural-load-its-real-thing>>.

Australian, The, Saturday, 23 September 1826, p. 3, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/4248925>>.

Bacon, JM 2018, 'Settler Colonialism as Eco-Social Structure and the Production of Colonial Ecological Violence', *Environmental Sociology*, vol. 5, iss.1, p. 59-69.

Baigent, D 2005, 'Fitting in: the conflation of firefighting, male domination, and harassment', in J Gruber & P Morgan (eds), *In the company of men: male dominance and sexual harassment*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, p. 45-64.

Baigent, D 2016, 'Resisting and accommodating the masculinist gender regime in firefighting: An insider view from the United Kingdom', in B Pease & E Enarson (eds), *Men, masculinities and disaster*, Routledge, London, UK, p. 175-186, <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315678122-15>>.

Bainbridge, R 2007, 'Autoethnography in Indigenous research contexts: The value of inner knowing', *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 54-64.

Baird, A, McAtee, A, Salgado, V & Woodruff, F 2023, 'Prescribed Burn Program Best Practices for Southern Michigan: From Indigenous Partnerships to Communication & Burn Plans', University Of Michigan: SEAS.

Baker, RM, Davies, J & Young, EA 2001, *Working on country: contemporary Indigenous management of Australia's lands and coastal regions*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Baladhikari, S & Baladhikari, SK 2020, 'Women Indigenous Groups, Gender and Ecological Interface', in A Mitra, MMM Calma, SP Chakrabarty, S Zaman & P Pramanick (eds), *Natural resources and their ecosystem services*, HSRA Publication.

Ballangarry, J & Pugin, M 2024, 'Thrive not survive: the Indigenous PhD journey in conversation', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 26, no. 3, p. 706–720. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2024.2358853>>.

Banbai Rangers & McKemey, M 2021, 'Aboriginal cultural values and renewal assessment in NSW forests post-wildfires - Banbai case study report', Report prepared for the NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program, Natural Resources Commission, Sydney N.S.W.

Banks, J 1770, Endeavour journal, 15 August 1769 - 12 July 1771/ edited by J.C. Beaglehole, Sydney: The Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales in association with Angus and Robertson, 1962.

Barber, D 2020, 'Fire Song', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 61-62.

Barber, D, Tynan, L, Bishop, M & Walker, J 2018 'Right fire, wrong fire. Burning together with Country, evolving our culture with fire', *In Society for Social Studies of Science* (4S) Conference.

Barbour, W & Schlesinger, C 2012, 'Who's the boss? Post-colonialism, ecological research and conservation management on Australian Indigenous lands', *Ecological Management & Restoration*, vol. 13, iss. 1, p. 36-41.

Bardsley, DK, Prowse TAA & Siegfriedt C 2019, 'Seeking knowledge of traditional Indigenous burning practices to inform regional bushfire management', *Local Environment*, vol. 24, iss. 8, p. 727-745.

Bargallie, D 2020, *Unmasking the Racial Contract: Indigenous voices on racism in the Australian Public Service*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

Barney, K 2018, 'Community gets you through: Success factors contributing to the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students', *Student Success*, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 13-23.

Bauck, W 2020, PH5 Highlights Indigenous Fire Management Practices with its Spring 2021 Presentation: As fires ravage the American West, the brand looks to Firesticks Alliance, an Indigenous

Australian fire and land management group, for hope, *Fashionista*, 15 Sep 2020, <<https://fashionista.com/2020/09/ph5-spring-2021-collection-fires>>.

Bawaka, Country, Suchet-Pearson, S, Wright, S, Lloyd, K, Tofa, M, Sweeney, J, Burarrwanga, L, Ganambarr, R, Ganambarr-Stubbs, M, Ganambarr, B & Maymuru, D 2019, 'Gonj Gurtha: Enacting response-abilities as situated co-becoming', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 37, iss. 4, p. 682-702.

Bawaka, Country, Wright, S, Suchet-Pearson, S, Lloyd, K, Burarrwanga, L, Ganambarr, R, Ganambarr-Stubbs, M, Ganambarr, B & Maymuru, D 2015, 'Working with and learning from Country: decentring human author-ity', *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 22, no. 2, p. 269-283.

Bawaka Country, Wright, S, Suchet-Pearson, S, Lloyd, K, Burarrwanga, L, Ganambarr, R, Ganambarr-Stubbs, M, Ganambarr, B, Maymuru, D & Sweeney, J 2016, 'Co-becoming Bawaka: Towards a relational understanding of place/space', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 40, iss. 4, p. 455-475.

Bawaka Country including Wright, S, Suchet-Pearson, S, Lloyd, K, Burarrwanga, L, Ganambarr, R, Ganambarr-Stubbs, M, Ganambarr, B, Maymuru D & Graham, M 2018, 'Everything Is Love: Mobilising Knowledges, Identities, and Places as Bawaka', in N Gombay & M Palomino-Schalscha (eds), *Indigenous Places and Colonial Spaces: The Politics of Intertwined Relations*, Routledge, London, p. 51-71.

Baynes-Rock, M 2025, 'Cultural Burning as Resistance to Colonisation', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, p.1-19, <DOI: 10.1080/10455752.2025.2520305>.

Behrendt, L 2021, *Indigenous Australia for dummies*, John Wiley & Sons, Milton QLD.

Bell, T, Gharun, M, Possell, M & Adams, MA 2020a, 'Impacts of prescribed burning on forest carbon and water', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 117-123.

Bell, T, Parnell, D, Pepper, D & Possell, M 2020b, *Optimisation of fuel reduction burning regimes for fuel reduction, carbon, water and vegetation outcomes – final project report*, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Bennett, NJ, Katz, L, Yadao-Evans, W, Ahmadia, GN, Atkinson, S, Ban, NC, Dawson, NM, de Vos, A, Fitzpatrick, J, Gill, D & Imirizaldu, M 2021, 'Advancing social equity in and through marine conservation', *Frontiers in Marine Science*, vol. 8, p. 711538.

Bertram, J 2016, Taking Care of Country, Bushfire Bulletin: The Journal of the NSW Rural Fire Service, RFS August 2016, vol 38, no. 1, p. 23-25, viewed on 19 March 2025, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/39576/BFB_march_2016_low_res_single.pdf>.

Bertram J 2020, telephone conversation, 18 May 2020.

Bessarab, D & Ng'andu, B 2010, 'Yarning About yarning as a legitimate method in Indigenous research', *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 27-50.

Beukers, M & Costello, O 2017, Engaging Aboriginal communities in cultural burning on NPWS managed lands in NSW, AFAC17 CONFERENCE PAPER for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 7 September 2017, Darling Harbour Sydney.

Binskin, M, Bennett A & Macintosh, A 2020, Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements report. Commonwealth of Australia, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-11/Royal%20Commission%20into%20National%20Natural%20Disaster%20Arrangements%20-%20Report%20-%20%5Baccessible%5D.pdf>>.

Bird, DW, Bliege Bird, R & Parker, CH 2004, 'Women who hunt with fire: Aboriginal resource use and fire regimes in Australia's Western Desert', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 1, p. 90-96.

Bird, DW, Bliege Bird, R, & Parker, CH 2005, 'Aboriginal burning regimes and hunting strategies in Australia's Western Desert', *Human Ecology*, vol. 33, no. 4, p. 443-464.

Bishop, M 2020, 'Epistemological violence and Indigenous autoethnographies', in P Stanley (ed.), *Critical autoethnography and intercultural learning*, Routledge, p. 19-32.

Bishop, M 2021, "'Don't tell me what to do' encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 34, no. 5, p. 367-378.

Bishop, M 2022, 'Indigenous education sovereignty: another way of 'doing' education', *Critical Studies in Education*, vol. 63, no. 1, p. 131-146.

Blackburn-Mongta, A 2018, Djigan and Bubil (Fire and Water), presented at *Cultural Burning: Evolving with community and Country, the South-east Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum*, 10 to 11 May 2018, Ann Harding Centre, University of Canberra, Bruce, ACT.

Blackburn-Mongta, A 2021, Reconciliation takes action with Aunty Aileen Mongta-Blackburn Monero/Yuin Woman, Healing is Reconnecting, 5 Jul 2021, Bushfire Recovery Victoria, <<https://youtu.be/ufN68cd9IFE?si=Ys0MUOXyEMKUk0Cb>>.

Blair, N 2015, 'Researched to death: Indigenous peoples talkin' up our experiences of research', *International Review of Qualitative Research*, vol. 8 no. 4, p. 463-478.

Bliege Bird, R, Bird, DW, Coddington, BF, Parker, CH & Jones, JH 2008, 'The 'firestick farming' hypothesis: Australian Aboriginal foraging strategies, biodiversity, and anthropogenic fire mosaics', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 105, no. 39, p. 14796-14801.

Boer, MM, de Dios, VR & Bradstock, RA, 2020. Unprecedented burn area of Australian mega forest fires. *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 10, iss. 3, p. 171-172.

BoM (Bureau of Meteorology) 2020b, Twelve-monthly mean maximum temperature for New South Wales/ACT, viewed on 15 December 2021, <<http://www.bom.gov.au/jsp/awap/temp/index.jsp?colour=colour&time=latest&step=0&map=maxave&period=12month&area=ns>>.

BoM (Bureau of Meteorology) 2023, dedicated Indigenous Weather Knowledge, viewed on 19 March 2024, <<http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/?ref=ifr>>.

Bonta, M, Gosford, R, Eussen, D, Ferguson, N, Loveless, E & Witwer, M 2017, 'Intentional fire-spreading by "Firehawk" raptors in Northern Australia', *Journal of Ethnobiology*, vol. 37, no. 4, p. 700-718.

Bourke, M, Atkinson A & Neale, T 2020, 'Putting Country back together: a conversation about collaboration and Aboriginal fire management', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, p. 546-551.

Bowd, EJ, Cary, GJ, Freeman, D, Bell-Garner, B & Lindenmayer, D 2025, 'Plant Responses to a Re-emergence of Cultural Burning in Long-Unburnt, Threatened Temperate Woodlands', *Global Change Biology*, vol. 31, iss. 6, p.e70230.

Bowman DMJS 1998, 'The impact of Aboriginal landscape burning on the Australian biota', *The New Phytologist*, vol. 140, no. 3, p. 385-410.

Bowman, DM 2016, 'Aboriginal fire management – part of the solution to destructive bushfires', *The Conversation*, February 23, 2016,

Bowman, D & Lehman, G 2020, Australia, you have unfinished business. It's time to let our 'fire people' care for this land. *The Conversation*, 28.

Bowman, DM & French, BJ 2019, 'Our land is burning, and Western science does not have all the answers', *The Conversation*, November 19, 2019.

Bowman, DM & Sharples, JJ 2023, 'Taming the flame, from local to global extreme wildfires', *Science*, vol. 381, iss. 6658, p. 616-619.

Bowman, DM, Williamson, GJ, Johnston, FH, Bowman, CJ, Murphy, BP, Roos, CI, Trauernicht, C, Rostron, J & Prior, LD 2022, 'Population collapse of a Gondwanan conifer follows the loss of Indigenous fire regimes in a northern Australian savanna', *Scientific Reports*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 1-17.

Bowman, DM, Williamson, GJ, Price, OF, Ndalila, MN & Bradstock, RA 2021, 'Australian forests, megafires and the risk of dwindling carbon stocks', *Plant, Cell and Environment*, vol. 44, no. 2, p. 347-355.

Bradley, J 2024, 'Our sky turned red. In black summer, Australia stepped off 'some kind of precipice'', The Guardian, 31 December 2024, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/dec/31/our-sky-turned-red-in-black-summer-australia-stepped-off-some-kind-of-precipice>>.

Bradstock, RA, Gill, AM & Williams, RJ (eds), 2012, *Flammable Australia: Fire Regimes, Biodiversity and Ecosystems in a Changing World*, CSIRO, 2012.

Braedley, S, 2019, 'Equity shifts in firefighting: Challenging gendered and racialized work', Toronto: Women's Press.

Brennan, D 2024, 'More than 1000 new Indigenous Ranger positions - the majority for First Nations women - to be created', 30 October 2024, National Indigenous Times, viewed on 19 March 2025 <https://nit.com.au/30-10-2024/14582/embargoed-until-1201am-thursday-31-october-over-1000-new-indigenous-ranger-positions-the-majority-for-first-nations-women-to-be-created?fbclid=IwY2xjawGXkydleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHX_xM9QjbxCSrMislZuPbeWnh0Qgqu_ZBgmNom5xkCMQTuBrZTcOXiwmmQ_aem_2s4TicjAzx3V2pBlfotZvA>.

Brook, L in NHRA (Natural Hazards Research Australia) 2022, Manawaradhanjin 'in our hands', *Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan*, Natural Hazards Research Australia, <www.naturalhazards.com.au/reconciliation>.

Brook, L in NSW Environment and Heritage, *Healthy Country for Glossy Black-cockatoos*, 6 September 2022, <<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/news/healthy-country-for-glossy-black-cockatoos>>.

Brown, A 2021, 'Adrian Brown's story' in JK Weir, D Freeman & B Williamson (eds), *Cultural Burning in Southern Australia*, Report number: 687.2021, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Buchan, B 2017, 'Australia: what's in a name?', *Arena Magazine*, August 2017, no. 149, <<https://arena.org.au/australia-whats-in-a-name-by-bruce-buchan/>>.

Burarrwanga, L, Ganambarr, R, Ganambarr-Stubbs, M, Ganambarr, B, Maymuru, D, Wright, S, Suchet-Pearson, S & Lloyd, K 2019, *Songspirals: Sharing Women's Wisdom of Country through Songlines*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

Burgess, CP, Johnston, FH, Berry, HL, McDonnell, J, Yibarbuk, D, Gunabarra, C, Mileran, A & Bailie, R 2009, 'Healthy country, healthy people: the relationship between Indigenous health status and "caring for country"', *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 190, no. 10, p. 567-572.

Burnasheva, D 2022, 'Indigenous Women as Water Protectors, Men as Firefighters? Gender and Indigeneity in the Context of Climate Change in Sakha (Yakutia)', *Arctic Yearbook*, 2022, p. 1-18.

Butler G 2023, 'Hazard burns could be fuelling the fire danger. Indigenous practices offer another way', *SBS News*, 16 September 2023, <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/hazard-burns-could-be-fuelling-the-fire-danger-indigenous-practices-offer-another-way/pevprmc3f>>.

Butler, TL, Anderson, K, Garvey, G, Cunningham, J, Ratcliffe, J, Tong, A, Whop, LJ, Cass, A, Dickson, M & Howard, K 2019, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's domains of wellbeing: A comprehensive literature review', *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 233, p. 138-157.

Cahir, F, McMaster, S, Clark, I, Kerin, R & Wright, W 2016, 'Winda Lingo Parugoneit or Why Set the Bush [On] Fire? Fire and Victorian Aboriginal People on the Colonial Frontier', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, p. 225-240.

Cameron, L 2024a, 'Embodied Realisms in Australian Aboriginal Art', in K Bowers & M Vaysman (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Realisms* (online) Oxford Academic, 22 May 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197610640.013.27>, accessed 5 Dec. 2024.

Cameron, L 2024b, '"Reclaiming their stories": A study of the spiritual content of historical cultural objects through an Indigenous creative inquiry', *Australian Archaeology*, vol. 90, no. 2, p. 140-151, DOI: 10.1080/03122417.2024.2323244.

Campbell, A & Vanderwal, R 1999, 'John Bulmer's Recollections of Victorian Aboriginal Life 1855-1908', *Museums Victoria*, Melbourne.

Campbell, D 2015, 'Aboriginal Involvement in Caring-for Country: An economic case study in primary preventative health', *Australasian Psychiatry*, vol. 23, no. 6, p. 623–5. DOI: 10.1177/1039856215612985.

Carlson, B 2016, *Politics of Identity: Who counts as Aboriginal today?*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra ACT.

Carlson, B & Frazer, R 2018a, 'Social media mob: Being Indigenous online', Macquarie University, Sydney, viewed on 19 March 2025, <https://research-management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/85013179/MQU_SocialMediaMob_report_Carlson_Frazer.pdf>.

Carlson, B & Frazer, R 2018b, 'Yarning circles and social media activism', *Media International Australia*, vol. 169, no. 1, p. 43-53. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X18803762>>.

Carlson, B, Kennedy, T, Day, M & Bakic, T 2021, 'Introducing the COVID-19 Special Issue', *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, vol. 5, iss. 1.

Carter, C, Lapum, JL, Lavallée, LF & Martin, LS 2014, 'Explicating positionality: A journey of dialogical and reflexive storytelling', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 362-376.

Castree, N 2005, *Nature*, Routledge, Oxon.

Cavanagh, R 2020b 'From fighting to nurturing: the impacts and opportunities of fire', 20 August 2020 NITV, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/from-fighting-to-nurturing-the-impacts-and-opportunities-of-fire/kya6122qo?fbclid=IwAR2DojUds6RIXTQOVUqyyoZq9T0lcFDQzjY99k3Sy6U8PbnIGFdafKSgHR0>>.

Cavanagh, R 2020a, 'The differences between hazard reduction burning and Cultural Fire practices', viewed on 29 March 2021, <<https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/cultural-fire-practices/>>.

Cavanagh, R 2020c, *You Can't Ask That Series 5 Firefighters*, television program, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2020, Australia, viewed on 16 April 2022, <<https://iview.abc.net.au/video/LE1917H001S00>>.

Cavanagh, R 2023, Rachael Cavanagh, DoveTale, 24 July 2023, podcast, Episode 4, accessed on 16 April 2024, <<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-4-rachael-cavanagh/id1687156689?i=1000616835729>>.

Cavanagh, VI 2016, 'The Aboriginal Riverkeeper Team project - building Indigenous knowledge and skills to improve urban waterways in Sydney's Georges River Catchment', in GJ Vietz, AJ Flatley & ID Rutherford (eds), *Proceedings of the 8th Australian Stream Management Conference*, River Basin Management Society. p. 141-148.

Cavanagh, VI 2018, 'Lessons from the Aboriginal Riverkeeper Team project, Georges River, Sydney,' in R Smith (ed.), *Proceedings of Restore, Regenerate, Revegetate: A Conference on Restoring Ecological Processes, Ecosystems and Landscapes in a Changing World*, University of New England, Armidale, 5–9 February 2017, p. 19-20.

Cavanagh, VI 2020a, 'Grandmother trees, Aboriginal women and fire', in P Anderson, S Gardner, P James & P Komesaroff (eds), *Continent Aflame: Responses to an Australian Catastrophe*, Palaver, Armadale.

Cavanagh VI 2020b, 'Reigniting Connections: Aboriginal Women and Cultural Burning', there's no place like... Entanglements Lecture Podcast Series, 1 June 2020, Wollongong Art Gallery for Australian Center for Culture, Environment, Society & Space, University of Wollongong, accessed on 16 April 2024, <<https://shows.acast.com/theres-no-place-like/episodes/entanglements-vanessa-cavanagh>>.

Cavanagh V, 2020c, Grandmother tree, the fire and me: Dr Ann Jones interviews Vanessa Cavanagh, ABC Radio National Off-Track, Broadcast, accessed on 16 April 2024, <<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/grandmothertree/11937548>>.

Cavanagh, VI 2020d, 'Friday essay: this grandmother tree connects me to Country. I cried when I saw her burned', The Conversation, Volume 24 January 2020, <<https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-this-grandmother-tree-connects-me-to-country-i-cried-when-i-saw-her-burned-129782>>.

Cavanagh, VI 2021a, 'This grandmother tree connects me to Country. I cried when I saw her burned', in C Day & M Ratliff (eds), *Tree Story*, Monash University Museum of Art, Clayton Victoria, p. 22.

Cavanagh, VI 2021b, 'Vanessa's story', in JK Weir, D Freeman & B Williamson (eds), *Cultural Burning in Southern Australia*, Report number: 687.2021, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Cavanagh, VI 2022a, 'The (re)emergence of Aboriginal women and cultural burning in New South Wales, Australia', in J Weir & JD Scasta (eds), *Global Application of Prescribed Fire*, CSIRO Publishing, Clayton Victoria.

Cavanagh, V 2024, 'Case Study: Vanessa Cavanagh', in Women's Environmental Leadership Australia (ed.), *Gender, Climate and Environmental Justice in Australia*, Women's Environmental Leadership Australia, <<https://wela.org.au/gender-climate-report/>>.

Cavanagh, V, Cavanagh, R & Swan, D 2020, 'Vanessa Cavanagh, Rachael Cavanagh, & Deb Swan on ancestral fire regimes /205', For The Wild podcast, 26 October 2020, <<https://forthewild.world/listen/vanessa-cavanagh-rachael-cavanagh-deb-swan-on-ancestral-fire-regimes-205>>.

Cavanagh, V, Christianson, A & Kristoff, M 2019, 'Aboriginal women and caring for country in NSW, Australia with Vanessa Cavanagh', 4 November 2019, Your Forest Podcast <<https://yourforestpodcast.com/good-fire-podcast/2019/10/16/39x21icgmd101pd7tj2qqzsajy0jh6>>.

Cavanagh VI & Standley PM 2020, 'Walking in the landscapes of our ancestors – Indigenous perspectives critical in the teaching of Geography', *Interaction* vol. 48, no. 1, p. 14-16.

Cavanagh, V, Hammersley, L & Adams, M 2022, 'Igniting a conversation: Indigenous intercultural doctoral supervision', *Geographical Research*, vol. 60, iss. 1, p. 46-58, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12481>>.

CFMU (Cultural Fire Management Unit) 2024, Cultural Fire Management pilot projects, , accessed on 16 April 2024, <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/grants-and-funding/cultural-fire-management-pilot-projects>>.

Charlesworth, TE & Banaji, MR 2019, 'Gender in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics: Issues, causes, solutions', *Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 39, no. 37, p. 7228-7243.

Chester, L 2020, 'The 2019–2020 Australian bushfires: a potent mix of climate change, problematisation, indigenous disregard, a fractured federation, volunteerism, social media, and more', *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy*, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 245-264.

Chilisa, B 2019, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, SAGE Publications.

Christianson, A 2014, 'Social science research on Indigenous wildfire management in the 21st century and future research needs', *International Journal of Wildland Fire*, vol. 24, iss. 2, p. 190-200.

Christianson, AC, Sutherland, CR, Moola, F, Gonzalez Bautista, N, Young, D & MacDonald, H 2022, 'Centering Indigenous voices: The role of fire in the Boreal Forest of North America', *Current Forestry Reports*, vol. 8, iss. 3, p. 257-276.

City of Adelaide 2024, Park Lands cultural burn, viewed on 16 October 2024, <<https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/blog/cultural-burn-park-lands/>>.

Clapham, K, Senior, K, Longbottom, M, Bessarab, D, Fredericks, B, Harwood, V, Sheppard, F, Haynes, B, Wellington, K & Kelly, P, 2024, 'Shifting sands: Indigenous conceptions of health and place in fragile times', *Health & Place*, vol. 89, p. 103308.

Clark, SA, Tripp, B, Hankins, D, Rossier, CE, Varney, A & Nairn, I for the Karuk Tribe 2024, 'Good Fire II: Current Barriers To The Expansion Of Cultural Burning And Prescribed Fire In The United States And Recommended Solutions', Report, The Karuk Tribe.

Clark, T, Dodson, S, Guivarra, N & Widders Hunt, Y 2021, "'We're not treated equally as Indigenous people or as women": The perspectives and experiences of Indigenous women in Australian public relations', *Public Relations Inquiry*, vol. 10, iss. 2, p. 163-183.

Clarke H, Penman T, Boer M, Cary GJ, Fontaine JB, Price O, & Bradstock R 2020, 'The proximal drivers of large fires: a pyrogeographic study', *Frontiers in Earth Science* vol. 8, p. 90.

Clarkson C, Jacobs Z, Marwick B, Fullagar R, Wallis L, Smith M, Roberts RG, Hayes E, Lowe K, Carah X, Florin SA, McNeil J, Cox D, Arnold LJ, Hua Q, Huntley J, Brand HEA, Manne T, Fairbairn A, Shulmeister J, Lyle L, Salinas M, Page M, Connell K, Park G, Norman K, Murphy, T & Pardoe C 2017, 'Human occupation of northern Australia by 65,000 years ago', *Nature*, vol. 547, p. 306-10.

Clement, V 2019, 'Beyond the sham of the emancipatory Enlightenment: Rethinking the relationship of Indigenous epistemologies, knowledges, and geography through decolonizing paths', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 43, no. 2, p. 276-294.

CoA & NIAA (Commonwealth of Australia, National Indigenous Australians Authority) 2022, 'Stories from Country 2022: Stories and reports from Indigenous Rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas Programs', NIAA, viewed on 16 October 2024, <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/publications/stories-from-country-2022_0.pdf>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2022, Closing the Gap, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education, viewed on 16 October 2024, <<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/7-difference/b-targets/b7>>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2024, 'Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2023 Annual Report and Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Implementation Plan', viewed on 16 February 2025,

<<https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/ctg-annual-report-and-implementation-plan-hq.pdf>>.

CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) 2021, The 2019-20 bushfires: a CSIRO explainer, February 2021, CSIRO, viewed on 16 February 2025, <<https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Extreme-Events/Bushfire/preparing-for-climate-change/2019-20-bushfires-explainer>>.

CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) 2023, Indigenous Science, Australian Government, viewed on 16 February 2025, <<https://www.csiro.au/en/research/indigenous-science>>.

CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) & NESP NAER (National Environmental Science Programme's Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub) 2016, 'Report on the National Indigenous Fire Knowledge and Fire Management Forum: Building Protocols from Practical Experiences', 9th–10th February 2016, Darwin, Northern Territory: CSIRO.

Colchester, M 2003, *Salvaging Nature: Indigenous Peoples, Protected Areas and Biodiversity Conservation*, World Rainforest Movement, Uruguay.

Constantine IV, M, Williams, AN, Francke, A, Cadd, H, Forbes, M, Cohen, TJ, Zhu, X & Mooney, SD 2023, 'Exploration of the burning question: a long history of fire in eastern Australia with and without people', *Fire*, vol. 6, iss. 4, p. 152.

Coombes, B, Johnson, JT & Howitt, R 2014, 'Indigenous geographies III: Methodological innovation and the unsettling of participatory research', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 38, iss. 6, p. 845-854.

Cook, J & Wharton WJL 1893, Captain Cook's Journal during his first voyage round the world made in H.M. Bark "Endeavour" 1768-71 / with notes and introduction edited by Captain W. J. L. Wharton [1893] viewed 1 March 2019, <<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/cook/james/c77j/index.html>>.

Corr, EA 2018, 'Silence and resistance: Aboriginal women working within and against the archive', *Continuum*, vol. 32, iss. 4, p. 487-502.

Costello, O 2020, 'Fire has spirit', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 66-67.

Costello, O & Neale, T 2023, Principles and protocols for cultural land management governance and research. Natural Hazards Research Australia, viewed on 16 February 2025,

<<https://www.naturalhazards.com.au/news-and-events/news-and-views/new-guide-cultural-land-management-and-first-nations-research>>.

Costello, O, Dilworth, T, Haynes, K, Jansen, T & Neale, T 2021, 'Cultural land management in southeast Australia – Black Summer final report', Melbourne, Vic: Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

Country Needs People 2023, *25 Years of Indigenous Protected Areas: Keeping Country Strong*, Country Needs People, Canberra, viewed on 16 February 2025, <<https://assets.nationbuilder.com/thecountryneedsitspeople/pages/6212/attachments/original/1700004680/25-years-of-Indigenous-Protected-Areas-2023.pdf?1700004680>>.

Crenshaw, K 1989, 'Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1, no. 8, p. 139-167.

Cresswell, ID, Janke, T & Johnston, EL 2021, *Australia state of the environment 2021: overview*, independent report to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Australian Government, Canberra.

Crown Lands 2024, *Cultural Burn Program*, Crown Lands, viewed on 16 February 2025, <<https://www.crownland.nsw.gov.au/protection-and-management/environmental-management/cultural-burn-program>>.

Cumpston, Z 2019, 'First Nations knowledge is in vogue, but needs to be part of a deeper conversation', *The Adelaide Review*, 2 December 2019, <<https://www.adelaidereview.com.au/latest/opinion/2019/12/02/first-nations-knowledge-deeper-conversation/>>.

Cumpston, N 2020a, "'You can see something and it can look really beautiful, but what's the underlying story?'," 10 July 2020, SALIFE, <<https://salife.com.au/people-places/you-can-see-something-and-it-can-look-really-beautiful-but-whats-the-underlying-story/>>.

Cumpston, Z 2020b, *Illuminating Indigenous culture through plants*, Pursuit, 3 September 2020, University of Melbourne, <<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/illuminating-indigenous-culture-through-plants>>.

Cumpston, Z 2020c, 'Indigenous plant use: A booklet on the medicinal, nutritional and technological use of indigenous plants', Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Cumpston, Z 2020d, To address the ecological crisis, Aboriginal peoples must be restored as custodians of Country. The Conversation, viewed on 16 February 2025, <<https://theconversation.com/to-address-the-ecological-crisis-aboriginal-peoples-must-be-restored-as-custodians-of-country-108594>>.

DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry ABARES), 2024, Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate (2024), DAFF, viewed on 28 October 2024, <<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/forest-data-maps-and-tools/spatial-data/indigenous-land-and-forest>>.

Daniels, C, Nelson, E, Roy, J, Dixon, P, Ens, E & Towler, G 2012, 'Commitment to our country', in JC Altman & S Kerins (eds), *People on country, vital landscapes, indigenous futures*, Federation Press, Sydney, p. 174-189.

Daniels, CW, Ngukurr Yangbala rangers, Russell, S & Ens, EJ 2022, 'Empowering young Aboriginal women to care for Country: Case study of the Ngukurr Yangbala rangers, remote northern Australia', *Ecological Management & Restoration*, vol. 23, p. 53-63.

Datta, R 2018a, 'Decolonizing both researcher and research and its effectiveness in Indigenous research', *Research Ethics*, 14, vol. 2, p. 1-24.

Datta, R 2018b, 'Traditional storytelling: An effective Indigenous research methodology and its implications for environmental research', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 14, iss. 1, p. 35-44.

Datta, R 2023, 'Indigenous participatory action research (PAR)', in JM Okoko, S Tunison, & KD Walker (eds), *Varieties of qualitative research methods: Selected contextual perspectives*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, p. 237-242.

David, B, Fletcher, M-S, Connor, S, Pullin, VR, Birkett-Rees, J, Delannoy, JJ, Mariani, M, Romano, A & Maezumi, SY 2024, 'Cultural Burning'. Elements in Current Archaeological Tools and Techniques. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Davies, J 2020, 'First all-Indigenous NSW firefighting crews protecting sacred sites, remote communities', ABC Western Plains, 13 Jan 2020, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-13/nsw-launches-first-all-indigenous-firefighting-crews/11794392>>.

Davies, J, Walker, J & Maru YT 2018, 'Warlpiri experiences highlight challenges and opportunities for gender equity in Indigenous conservation management in arid Australia', *Journal of Arid Environments*, vol. 149, p. 40-52.

DCJ (Department of Communities and Justice) 2024, 'Inquests and Inquiries into the 2019/2020 NSW Bushfire Season: Findings and Recommendations Volume 1', Magistrate Teresa O'Sullivan for NSW State Coroner for NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice.

DCCEEW (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water) 2024, NPWS Fire Management Manual 2024-25 Policy and procedures for fire management, DEECCW, viewed on 28 October 2024, < <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/Fire/fire-management-manual-2024-25-240268.pdf>>.

DCCEEW (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water) 2025, Annual report 2023–24: volume 1 < <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/dcceew-annual-report-2023-24-volume1-240302.pdf>>.

DDWCAC (Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation), 2020. 'Submission to the Royal Commission into National Disaster Arrangements', Submission Number: NND.001.00160. Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.

DECC (Department of Environment and Climate Change) 2009, Yengo National Park, Parr State Conservation Area and Finchley Aboriginal Area Plan Of Management, Department of Environment and Climate Change, January 2009, viewed on 28 October 2021, <<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/Parks-plans-of-management/yengo-national-park-parr-sca-finchley-aboriginal-area-plan-of-management-090141.pdf>>.

Deloitte Access Economics 2021, 'Special report: Update to the economic costs of natural disasters in Australia', Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities, Deloitte Australia.

Denzin N & Lincoln Y (eds), 2007, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Denzin, NK, Lincoln YS & Smith, LT 2008, *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Sage, California.

de Rijke, K, Martin, R & Trigger, D 2016, 'Cultural domains and the theory of customary environmentalism in Indigenous Australia', in W Sanders (ed.), *Engaging Indigenous Economy: Debating Diverse Approaches*, Canberra: ANU Press, p. 43-53.

DES (Department of Environment and Science) 2020, Women gather for special cultural burn on Minjerribah, media release, 27 July 2020, <<<https://www.des.qld.gov.au/our-department/news-media/mediareleases/2020/women-gather-for-special-cultural-burn-on-minjerribah>>>.

DEW (Department for Environment and Water) 2023, First Nations Fire Management: Ninti Kungka (smart women), viewed on 28 October 2024, <<https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/about-us/first-nations-partnerships/fire-management>>.

Dickman, C & McDonald, T 2020, 'Some personal reflections on the present and future of Australia's fauna in an increasingly fire-prone continent', *Ecological Management & Restoration*, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 86-96.

Dickman, CR 2021, 'Ecological consequences of Australia's "Black Summer" bushfires: Managing for recovery', *Integrated Environmental Assessment and Management*, vol. 17, iss. 6, p. 1162-1167.

Di Virgilio, G, Evans, JP, Blake, SA, Armstrong, M, Dowdy, AJ, Sharples, J & McRae, R 2019, 'Climate change increases the potential for extreme wildfires', *Geophysical Research Letters*, vol. 46, no. 14, p. 8517-8526.

Djiringanj, C, Foster, R, Parsons, V, Parsons, R, Campbell, Z, Moore, G, Avery, K, Hoskins, C, Haynes, K & Summerell, G 2025, 'Working together to drive change: weaving caring for Country practices into fire risk management on Djiringanj Country', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol. 40, iss. 2.

Djouidi, H, Locatelli, B, Vaast, C, Asher, K, Brockhaus, M & Sijapati, BB 2016, 'Beyond dichotomies: Gender and intersecting inequalities in climate change studies', *Ambio*, vol. 45, no. 3, p. 248-262.

Dorin, P 2019, image, Cartoon / Dose of Dorin, Canberra City News, 11 November 2019, <<https://citynews.com.au/2019/cartoon-dose-of-dorin-221/>>.

Downing, M 2019, 'Institutional barriers that Aboriginal researchers face when conducting human research and why it needs to change (2019)', Paper presented at Australasian Research Management Society Conference, Adelaide, Australia, 16 – 20 September 2019, p. 47.

Downing-McLeod, A 2020, Untitled, poem, in A-J Reynolds and T Gregoreson 2020, After The Fire: A Journey Through Yuin Country, Atmos Earth, <<https://atmos.earth/australia-wildfire-indigenous-fire-practices-history/#:~:text=Clive%20Freeman%2C%20Amethyst%20Downing%2DMcLeod,to%20offer%20specialized%20support%20and>>.

DPE (Department of Planning and Environment) 2016b, *Guidelines for Community (Low Risk) Cultural Burning on NPWS Managed Lands*, DPE, 3 December 2023 (internal report).

DPE (Department of Planning and Environment) 2016a, *The NPWS Cultural Fire Management Policy*, DPE, viewed on 3 December 2023 <<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/park-policies/cultural-fire-management>>.

DPE (Department of Planning and Environment) 2023, *Cultural Fire Management Unit, Buungang Wambal project*, DPE, viewed on 28 October 2024, <<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/aboriginal-land-use-planning/cultural-fire-management-unit>>.

DPE (Department of Planning and Environment) 2023b, *Enhanced Bushfire Management Program*, DPE, viewed on 28 October 2024, <<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/fire/managing-fire/bushfire-management-program#:~:text=The%20Enhanced%20Bushfire%20Management%20Program,has%20been%20extended%20until%202022.>>>.

DPHI (Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure) 2024, *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan March 2024*, *Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2024–33*, DPHI.

DPIE (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) 2019, *Female firefighters blaze a trail*, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, viewed on 28 October 2024, <<https://www.miragenews.com/female-firefighters-blaze-a-trail/>>.

DPIE (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) 2020, *Our Place On Country*, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, viewed on 28 October 2024, <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/348980/Aboriginal-Outcomes-Strategy.pdf>.

DPIE (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) 2021, ‘Hazard reduction burn at Wedderburn, Dharawal National Park’, 28 April 2021, media release, <<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/news/hazard-reduction-burn-at-wedderburn>>.

Dudgeon, P, Bray, A, Darlaston-Jones, D & Walker, R 2020, *Aboriginal Participatory Action Research: An Indigenous Research Methodology Strengthening Decolonisation and Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, Discussion Paper, Lowitja Institute, Melbourne. DOI: 10.48455/smch-8z25.

Dunn, M 2020, *Convict Valley: The Bloody Struggle on Australia's Early Frontier*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest.

Edwards, M, Biloslavo, R, Kwaymullina, B & Kwaymullina A 2013, 'Big picture wisdom: Metatheorising ancient, scientific and indigenous wisdom perspectives for global environmental leadership', *Journal of Spirituality, Leadership and Management*, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 13-33.

Enright, NJ & Thomas, I 2008, 'Pre-European fire regimes in Australian ecosystems', *Geography Compass*, vol. 2, no. 4, p. 979-1011.

Ens, E 2012, 'Conducting two-way ecological research', in J Altman & S Kerins (eds), *People on Country: Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures*, The Federation Press, Annandale, NSW, p. 45-64.

Ens, EJ & Turpin, G 2022, 'Synthesis of Australian cross-cultural ecology featuring a decade of annual Indigenous ecological knowledge symposia at the Ecological Society of Australia conferences', *Ecological Management & Restoration*, vol. 23, p. 3-16.

Ens, EJ, Finlayson, M, Preuss, K, Jackson, S & Holcombe, S 2012, 'Australian approaches for managing 'Country' using Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge', *Ecological Management and Restoration*, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 100-107.

Ens, EJ, Pert, P, Clarke, PA, Budden, M, Clubb, L, Doran, B, Douras, C, Gaikwad, J, Gott, B, Leonard, S, Locke, J, Parcker, J, Turpin, G & Wason, S 2015, 'Indigenous Biocultural Knowledge in ecosystem science and management: review and insight from Australia', *Biological Conservation*, vol. 181, p. 133-149.

Ens E, Reyes-García, V, Asselin, H, Hsu, M, Reimerson, E, Reihana, K, Sithole, B, Shen, X, Cavanagh, V & Adams, M 2021, 'Recognition of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems in Conservation and Their Role to Narrow the Knowledge-Implementation Gap', in CC Ferreira & CFC Klütsch (eds), *Closing the Knowledge-Implementation Gap in Conservation Science Interdisciplinary Evidence Transfer Across Sectors and Spatiotemporal Scales*, Springer, Cham, Netherlands.

Ens, E, Scott, ML, Yugul Mangi Rangers, Moritz, C & Pirzl, R 2016, 'Putting Indigenous conservation policy into practice delivers biodiversity and cultural benefits', *Biodiversity Conservation*, vol. 25, no. 14, p. 2889-2906.

Eriksen, C & Hankins, DL 2013, 'Gendered dimensions of Aboriginal Australian and California Indian fire knowledge retention and revival', *Current Conservation*, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 22-26.

Eriksen, C & Hankins, DL 2014, 'The retention, revival, and subjugation of Indigenous fire knowledge through agency fire fighting in eastern Australia and California', *Society and Natural Resources*, vol. 27, no. 12, p. 1288-1303.

Eriksen, C & Hankins, DL 2015, 'Colonisation and fire: Gendered dimensions of indigenous fire knowledge retention and revival', in A Coles, L Gray & J Momsen (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Development*, Routledge, New York, United States, p. 129-137.

Eriksen, C & Waitt, G 2016, 'Men, masculinities and wildfire: Embodied resistance and rupture', in E Enarson & B Pease (eds), *Men, masculinities and disaster*, Routledge.

Eriksen, C, Gill, N & Head, L 2010, 'The gendered dimensions of bushfire in changing rural landscapes in Australia', *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 26, no.4, p. 332-342.

Fache, E 2014, 'Caring for country, a form of bureaucratic participation. Conservation, development and Neoliberalism in Indigenous Australia', *Anthropological Forum: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Comparative Sociology*, vol. 24, no. 3, p. 267-286.

Fache, E & Moizo, B 2015, 'Do burning practices contribute to caring for country? Contemporary uses of fire for conservation purposes in Indigenous Australia', *Journal of Ethnobiology*, vol. 35, no. 1, p. 163-182.

Fairhurst T 2020, 'Cultural burn paves a way forward in Port Macquarie-Hastings bushfire management', *Port Macquarie News*, 30 September, viewed 21 December 2020, <<https://www.portnews.com.au/story/6949007/cultural-burn-paves-a-way-forward-in-bushfire-management/>>.

Farra, E 2021, 'Earth To Us: "You Can't Fight Fire, You Have to Work With It"—In Australia, These Indigenous Women Are Harnessing Ancient Knowledge to Protect Their Land', *Vogue Australia*, 9 April 2021, <<https://www.vogue.com/article/firesticks-alliance-australia-cultural-burning-indigenous-knowledge>>.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) n.d. Aboriginal Partnerships, Forestry Corporation of NSW, viewed on 21 December 2020, <<https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/operations/aboriginal-partnerships>>.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) 2018, *Imlay Cultural Burn - East Boyd State Forest*, online video, 9 April, FCNSW, viewed on 21 December 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2s8Il8nFXVk>>.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) 2019, Fire Management Plan, FCNSW, Document ID: D00271354, effective, August 2019, viewed on 28 October 2024, <https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1241640/FCNSW-Fire-Management-Plan.PDF>.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) 2020b, Fire Management Policy, FCNSW, Policy No. P 2020/05, effective, viewed on 12 May 2020, <https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/459558/P202005-Fire-Management-Policy.PDF>.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) 2020a, *Media Release Fire training to facilitate increased traditional burning in State forests* 24 July, viewed on 21 December, <<https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/about/releases/2020/fire-training-to-facilitate-increased-traditional-burning-in-state-forests2>>.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) 2021b, Fire Management, FCNSW, viewed on 26 February 2022, <<https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/operations/fire-management>>.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) 2021a, Forestry Corporation Annual Report 2020–21, Forestry Corporation of NSW.

FCNSW (Forestry Corporation of NSW) 2024, ANNUAL REPORT 2023–24 <https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1591362/annual-report-2023-24.pdf>.

Ferguson, C 2018, ‘Women working together to “bring Aboriginal yams back to the bush”’, *Merimbula News Weekly*, 11 July 2018, Merimbula, N.S.W.

Fine, M, Tuck, E & Zeller-Berkman, S 2008, ‘Do you believe in Geneva: Methods and Ethics at the Global-Local Nexus’, in NK Denzin, YS Lincoln & LT Smith (eds), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies*, SAGE, Los Angeles, p. 157-180.

Finlay, SM, Canuto, K, Canuto, K, Neal, N & Lovett, RW 2021, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connection to culture: building stronger individual and collective wellbeing’, *MJA*, vol. 214, 8 Supplement, p. 12-16.

Firesticks Alliance n.d., Research + Engagement Protocols, viewed on 5 March 2019, <<https://www.firesticks.org.au/education/resources/research-engagement-protocols/>>.

Firesticks Alliance 2016, Winba = Fire, poster, Firesticks Alliance, viewed on 5 March 2019, <<https://www.firesticks.org.au/winba-fire-the-wattleridge-ipa-fire-and-seasons-calendar/>>.

Firesticks Alliance 2020, ‘Women’s Roles in Cultural Fire - FVC - Sat 5 Dec 2020’, Firesticks Virtual Conference was held online - 4 & 5 December 2020, viewed on 5 March 2021, <<https://vimeo.com/552178117>>.

Firesticks Alliance 2021, NIFW, viewed on 5 March 2022, <<https://www.firesticks.org.au/tag/nifw/>>.

Firesticks Alliance 2023, 'Empower Aboriginal Women through Cultural Burning', with Giving Global Project #57104, viewed on 25 March 2024, <<https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/aboriginal-women-in-cultural-burning/reports/#menu>>.

Firesticks Alliance 2024b, 'Communities', Firesticks Alliance, viewed on 01 July 2024, <<https://firesticks.org.au/communities/>>.

Firesticks Alliance 2024c, 'Firesticks', Firesticks Alliance, viewed on 01 July 2024, <<https://firesticks.org.au>>.

Firesticks Alliance 2024a, 'Our Approach', viewed on 28 October 2024, <<https://firesticks.org.au/our-approach/>>.

Firesticks Alliance & Cavanagh, V 2019, *Indigenous women have strong links with Country...*, motion film, producers Craig Bender & Vera Hong, Dhungala Burmah National Park, Victoria, published on Facebook on 10 November 2020, viewed on 28 October 2024, <<https://fb.watch/sp1gJi2jap/>>.

Fisher, KT 2015, 'Positionality, subjectivity, and race in transnational and transcultural geographical research', *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 22, no. 4, p. 456-473.

Fisher, R & Elston, B 2023, 'Indigenous rangers are burning the desert the right way – to stop the wrong kind of intense fires from raging', *The Conversation*, 28 August 2023, <<https://theconversation.com/indigenous-rangers-are-burning-the-desert-the-right-way-to-stop-the-wrong-kind-of-intense-fires-from-raging-211900>>.

Fisk, JJ, Leong, KM, Berl, RE, Long, JW, Landon, AC, Adams, MM, Hankins, DL, Williams, CK, Lake, FK & Salerno, J 2024, 'Evolving wildlife management cultures of governance through Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives', *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, p. e22584.

Fitzroy River Declaration 2016, Traditional Owners of the Fitzroy River 2016.

Flannery, T 2002, *The future eaters: an ecological history of the Australasian lands and people*, Grove Press.

Fletcher, M-S 2020, This rainforest was once a grassland savanna maintained by Aboriginal people – until colonisation, *The Conversation*, 11 May 2020.

Fletcher M-S, & Johnston, R 2020, 'Flames of Opportunity Event - The Hugh Williamson Lecture', Thursday, 29 October 2020, Science Gallery Melbourne and Indigenous Knowledge Institute, viewed 11 February 2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2km5avnYIo>>.

Fletcher, M-S, Hall, T & Alexandra, AN 2020, 'The loss of an Indigenous constructed landscape following British invasion of Australia: An insight into the deep human imprint on the Australian landscape', *Ambio*, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-020-01339-3>>.

Fletcher, M-S, Hamilton, R, Dressler, W & Palmer, L 2021, 'Indigenous knowledge and the shackles of wilderness', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 118, no. 40, p. e2022218118.

Fletcher, M-S, Romano, A, Connor, S, Mariani, M & Maezumi, SY 2021a, 'Catastrophic Bushfires, Indigenous Fire Knowledge and Reframing Science in Southeast Australia', *Fire*, vol. 4, no. 3, p. 61.

Flinders, M 1814, *A voyage to Terra Australis; undertaken for the purpose of completing the discovery of that vast country, and prosecuted in the years 1801, 1802, and 1803, in His Majesty's ship the Investigator, and subsequently in the armed vessel Porpoise and Cumberland schooner. With an account of the shipwreck of the Porpoise, arrival of the Cumberland at Mauritius and imprisonment of the commander during six years and a half in that island.* Pall-Mall: G. and W. Nicol, Facsimile edition, 1966. Project Gutenberg Australia Ebook. Viewed on 20 March 2021, <<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks/e00049.html#chapter1-7>>.

Foley, D 2003, 'Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous standpoint theory', *Social alternatives*, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 44-52.

Foley, D 2018, 'Indigenous methodology: Is it invented or is it legitimate?' *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, vol. 21, iss. 3, p. 20-38.

Foley, R 2016, 'It's time to invest in Indigenous carbon farming on Aboriginal lands' *The Guardian*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/nov/16/its-time-to-invest-in-indigenous-carbon-farming-on-aboriginal-lands>>.

Forest Fire Management Group 2014, 'National Bushfire Management Policy Statement for Forests and Rangelands', Council of Australian Governments, ACT.

Foth, M, Mann, M, Bedford, L, Fieuw, W & Walters, R 2021, 'A capitalocentric review of technology for sustainable development: The case for more-than-human design,' in A Finlay (ed.), *Global Information Society Watch 2020: Technology, the environment and a sustainable world: Responses from the global South*, Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Melville, South Africa, p. 78-82.

Fredericks, B 2003, 'Us Speaking about Women's Health: Aboriginal women's perceptions and experiences of health, well-being, identity, body and health services', PhD thesis, Central Queensland University.

Fredericks, B 2004, 'Urban Identity', *Eureka Street*, vol. 14, no. 10, p. 30-31.

Fredericks, B 2008, 'Researching with Aboriginal women as an Aboriginal woman researcher', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 23, no. 55, p. 113-129.

Fredericks, B 2013, 'We don't leave our identities at the city limits': Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban localities', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, vol. 1, p. 4.

Fredericks, BL, Adams, K, Finlay, SM, Fletcher, G, Andy, S, Briggs, L, Briggs, L & Hall, R 2011, 'Engaging the practice of yarning in Action Research', *Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 7-19.

Freeman, D 2020, 'Aboriginal burning in southern Australia', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 239-242.

Freeman, D, Williamson, B & Weir, J 2021, 'Cultural burning and public sector practice in the Australian Capital Territory', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 52, iss. 2, p. 111-129, DOI: 10.1080/00049182.2021.1917133.

Freeman, J 2017, Spot Fire 1 – Julie Freeman, Kaldor Public Art Project 32, viewed on 26 February 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfQ0OQmf8iM>>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) n.d.a, Diversity and Inclusion, FRNSW, viewed on 26 February 2022, <<https://careers.fire.nsw.gov.au/diversity-inclusion>>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) n.d.b, Traditional Fire Stories, booklet, Fire & Rescue NSW, viewed on 26 February 2022,

<<https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/gallery/files/pdf/publications/Traditional%20fire%20stories.pdf>>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) 2021a, *AFAC Statement on Workforce Diversity*, AFAC, viewed on 26 February 2024, <<https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/page.php?id=9128>>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) 2021b, *FRNSW About US: What we do*, viewed on 26 February 2021, <<https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/page.php?id=46>>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) 2021c, *FRNSW Annual report 2019-20*, viewed on 26 February 2021, <https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/gallery/files/pdf/annual_reports/annual_report_2019_20.pdf>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) 2023a, Cultural informed burns in bushfire-prone areas, FRNSW, YouTube, viewed on 9 August 2023, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V15wnrpCE>>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) 2023b, Fire and Rescue NSW conducts ‘cultural burns’ in bushfire-prone areas – Merimbula, FRNSW Media Release 9 August 2023, <<https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/incident.php?record=recqhCeIXAOTmYebC#:~:text=FRNSW%20Duty%20Commander%2C%20Inspector%20Phil,economic%20costs%20of%20natural%20disasters.%E2%80%9D>>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) 2024a, Annual Report <https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/gallery/files/pdf/annual_reports/annual_report_2023_24.pdf>.

FRNSW (Fire & Rescue NSW) 2024b, Fire and Rescue NSW donates decommissioned fire truck to Yurruungga Aboriginal Corporation – Urunga, FRNSW media release, Published: 23 Aug 2024 10:10am <<https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/incident.php?record=recDxNJzDSTn4HATs#:~:text=Published:%2023%20Aug%202024%2010,23%20Aug%202024%2010:13am>>.

Fuller, K 2020, Aboriginal leaders to be included in NSW's top bushfire planning committee, ABC Illawarra, 20 Nov 2020, accessed on 26 February 2025, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-20/aboriginal-voices-added-to-top-nsw-bushfire-committee/12904318&fbclid=IwAR1-U6r60fm00VG6wNO8MzhAJTvBgUg36pS4nuSe7CJpvvjWxe8s2mDBFJo?nw=0>>.

Gabriel, AG, De Vera, M & Antonio, MAB 2020, ‘Roles of indigenous women in forest conservation: A comparative analysis of two indigenous communities in the Philippines’, *Cogent social sciences*, vol. 6, iss. 1, p. 1720564.

Gammage, B 2011, ‘The biggest estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia’. Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW.

Ganter, E 2016, *Reluctant Representatives: Blackfella Bureaucrats Speak in Australia's North*, CAEPR Research Monograph No. 37. ANU Press, Canberra.

Garde, M 2009, ‘The language of fire: seasonality, resources and landscape burning on the Arnhem Land Plateau’, in J Russell-Smith, P Whitehead & P Cooke (eds), *Culture, ecology and economy of fire management in North Australian savannas: rekindling the Wurrk tradition*. CSIRO Publishing.

Garma Declaration (Garma International Indigenous Water Declaration) 2008, <<https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/env/garma-international.pdf>>.

Garnaut, R 2008, 'The Garnaut climate change review' (Vol. 13), Melbourne, Cambridge University Press.

Garnett, ST & Sithole, B 2007, Sustainable Northern Landscapes and the Nexus with Indigenous Health: Healthy Country, Healthy People. Land and Water Australia, Canberra.

Gibbs, L, Waters, E, Bryant, RA, Pattison, P, Lusher, D, Harms, L, Richardson, J, MacDougall, C, Block, K, Snowdon, E & Gallagher, HC 2013, 'Beyond Bushfires: Community, Resilience and Recovery-a longitudinal mixed method study of the medium to long term impacts of bushfires on mental health and social connectedness', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 1-10.

GIDA (Global Indigenous Data Alliance) 2020, CARE principles for Indigenous data governance. GIDA, accessed on 26 February 2025, <<https://www.gida-global.org/care>>.

Giles, E 2004, 'Australia twice traversed: the romance of exploration, being a narrative compiled from the journals of five exploring expeditions into and through Central South Australia, and Western Australia, from 1872 to 1876', access on 19 March 2025, <<https://archive.org/details/australiatwicetr02gile>>.

Girls on Fire 2021, About Girls on Fire, accessed on 26 February 2025, <<https://girlsonfire.com.au/about-girls-on-fire/>>.

Goodall, H 2001, 'Renewing country: Aboriginal people and their lands in rangeland environments', *The Rangeland Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, p. 99-115.

Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, N. 2016, Reproducing the Ropes of Resistance: Hawaiian Studies Methodologies, in K-ARKN Oliveira & EK Wright (eds), *Kanaka 'Ōiwi Methodologies: Mo'olelo and Metaphor*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu.

Gorelick, R 2014, 'Indigenous sciences are not pseudoscience', *Ideas in Ecology and Evolution*, no. 7, iss. 1.

Goslett-King, R 2021, Women on Fire, WWF Australia, 2 February 2021, accessed on 26 February 2025, <<https://wwf.org.au/blogs/women-on-fire/>>.

Gott, B 2002, 'Fire-Making in Tasmania: Absence of Evidence Is Not Evidence of Absence', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 650-656.

- Gott, B 2005, fire management in south-eastern Australia: aims and frequency', *Journal of Biogeography*, vol. 32, no. 7, p. 1203-1208.
- Gouliquer, L, Poulin, C & McWilliams, J 2020, 'Othering of full-time and volunteer women firefighters in the Canadian fire services', *Qualitative Sociology Review*, vol. 16, iss. 3, p. 48-69.
- Graham, M 2008, 'Some thoughts about the philosophical underpinnings of Aboriginal worldviews', *Australian Humanities Review*, iss. 45, p. 1-14.
- Graham, M & Maloney, M 2019, 'Caring for country and rights of nature in Australia: A conversation between earth jurisprudence and Aboriginal law and ethics', in C La Follette & C Maser (eds), *Sustainability and the Rights of Nature in Practise*, CRC Press, Boca Raton.
- Grant, J 2018, CLC Ranger - Josephine Grant, *Central Land Council*, Viewed 18 May 2021, <<https://ictv.com.au/video/item/6116>>.
- Grant, J 2020, 'Women rangers' fire management in the Tanami', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 65.
- Grant, K, 2021, 'Karla Grant Presents: We Need to Talk About Fire', motion picture, SBS, *Karla Grant Presents*, S1 Ep48, Bridget Ikin, Bundanon.
- Greene, MJ 2014, 'On the inside looking in: Methodological insights and challenges in conducting qualitative insider research', *The Qualitative Report*, 19, p. 1-13. <<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/greene15.pdf>>.
- Griffiths, B 2017, 'Friday essay: caring for country and telling its stories', *The Conversation*, 5 May 2017, <<https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-caring-for-country-and-telling-its-stories-75844>>.
- Griffiths, K & Reeve, A 2022, 'Explainer: How climate change affects the federal budget', *The Grattan Institute*, 29 March 2022, <<https://grattan.edu.au/news/explainer-how-climate-change-affects-budget/>>.
- Hania, P & Graben, S 2020, 'Stories and the participation of Indigenous women in natural resource governance', *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, vol. 32, no. 2, p. 310-340.
- Hankins, D 2018a, 'Ecocultural Equality in the Miwko? Waali?', *San Francisco Estuary and Watershed Science*, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 1.
- Hankins, D 2018b, 'Restoring Indigenous Prescribed Fires to California Oak Woodlands', *USDA Forest Service General Technical Reports*, vol. 251, p. 123-129.

Harris, S & Lucas, C 2019, 'Understanding the variability of Australian fire weather between 1973 and 2017', *PLoS one*, vol. 14, iss. 9, p. e0222328.

Hay, I 2000, *Qualitative research methods in human geography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

HEAL Network & CRE-STRIDE 2021, Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Discussion Paper, Lowitja Institute, Melbourne, DOI: <10.48455/bthg-aj15>.

HealthInfoNet n.d., Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology, Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet Edith Cowan University, accessed on 26 February 2025, <https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/healthinfonet/getContent.php?linkid=675466&title=The+Australian+Indigenous+HealthInfoNet+guidelines+for+Aboriginal+and+Torres+Strait+Islander+terminology&contentid=44676_1#:~:text='Mob'%20is%20a%20term%20identifying,and%20where%20they%20are%20from>.

Hemmingsen, S & Marshall, C 2008, 'Nambucca and Kaikōura: Indigenous community coastal resource management in Australia and New Zealand', in D Smyth & GK Ward (eds), *Protecting Country. Indigenous governance and management of protected areas*, AIATSIS, Canberra.

Henry, K, Keniry J, Leishman, M & Mrdak, M 2023, Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 Final Report, Department of Planning and Environment.

Hernández, J, 2022, *Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes through Indigenous Science*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley USA.

Higgins, I 2020a, Indigenous cultural burn a factor in helping save home from bushfire, as fire experts call for more investment, ABC News 18 January 2020, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-18/cultural-indigenous-burn-saves-home-in-bushfire-threat-area/11876972>>.

Hodges, K 2024, 'Exploring the dynamics of women's inclusion in the ranger workforce', Masters Thesis, University of Hawai'i.

Hoff, J 2006, *Bundjalung Jagun: Bundjalung Country*, Richmond River Historical Society, Lismore.

Hoffman, KM, Christianson, AC, Dickson-Hoyle, S, Copes-Gerbitz, K, Nikolakis, W, Diabo, DA, McLeod, R, Michell, HJ, Mamun, AA, Zahara, A & Mauro, N 2022, 'The right to burn: barriers and opportunities for Indigenous-led fire stewardship in Canada', *FACETS*, vol. 7, iss. 1, p. 464-481.

Hokowhitu, B, Moreton-Robinson, A, Tuhiwai-Smith, L, Andersen, C & Larkin, S (eds), 2020, *Routledge handbook of critical Indigenous studies*. Routledge.

hooks, b 1989, *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*, South End Press.

Hooper, S 2020, 'Cultural Burning is about more than just hazard reduction', *Indigenous X*, 7 January 2020, viewed 5 May 2021, <<https://indigenoux.com.au/cultural-burning-is-about-more-than-just-hazard-reduction/>>.

Horton, DR 1982, 'The burning question: Aborigines, fire and Australian ecosystems', *Mankind*, vol. 13, iss. 3, p. 237-252.

Houston, J 2007, 'Indigenous autoethnography: Formulating our knowledge, our way', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, vol. 36, iss. S1, p. 45-50.

Howarth, M 2024, 'South Coast Native Title holders file class action against NSW for cultural loss', NITV, 12 March 2024, <<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/south-coast-native-title-holders-have-filed-a-class-action-against-nsw-for-cultural-loss/5fg0ogy8g>>.

Howe, J, 1774-1852 1819, John Howe journal of expedition from Windsor to the Hunter River, 1819 and associated papers, 1819-1920.

Howitt, R 2019, 'Unsettling the taken (-for-granted)', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 44, no. 2, p. 1-23.

Howitt, R & Suchet-Pearson, S 2006, 'Changing country, telling stories: research ethics, methods and empowerment in working with Aboriginal women', in K Lahiri-Dutt (ed.), *Fluid bonds: views on gender and water*, Stree, Kolkata, India, p. 4863.

Howitt, R, Doohan, K, Suchet-Pearson, S, Cross, S, Lawrence, R, Lunkapis, GJ, Muller, S, Prout, S & Veland, S 2013, 'Intercultural capacity deficits: contested geographies of coexistence in natural resource management', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, vol. 54, no. 2, p. 126-40.

Howitt, R, Havnen, O & Veland, S 2012, 'Natural and unnatural disasters: responding with respect for Indigenous rights and knowledges', *Geographical Research*, vol. 50, no. 1, p. 47-59.

HRMI (Human Rights Measurement Initiative tracker) 2023, Australia: How well is Australia respecting people's human rights?, rightstracker.org, <<https://rightstracker.org/country/AUS?tab=atrisk>>.

Hudson, M, Carroll, SR, Anderson, J, Blackwater, D, Cordova-Marks, FM, Cummins, J, David-Chavez, D, Fernandez, A, Garba, I, Hiraldo, D, Jäger, MB, Jennings, LL, Martinez, A, Sterling, R, Walker, JD & Rowe, RK 2023, 'Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Data: a contribution toward Indigenous Research

Sovereignty’, *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*, vol. 8, p. 1173805, <doi:10.3389/frma.2023.1173805>.

Huffman, MR 2013, ‘The many elements of traditional fire knowledge: synthesis, classification, and aids to cross-cultural problem solving in fire-dependent systems around the world’, *Ecology and Society*, vol. 18, no. 4, p. 3.

Hulett, DM, Bendick, Jr, M, Thomas, SY & Moccio, F 2008a, ‘Enhancing women’s inclusion in firefighting in the USA’, *The International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations*, vol. 8, no. 2, p. 189-207.

Hulett, DM, Bendick, M, Thomas, SY & Moccio, F 2008b, ‘A national report card on women in firefighting. International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services’, International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services, April 2008, Madison, Wi.

Human Rights Commission 2020, *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women’s Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report*, Human Rights Commission, Canberra.

Hunter, L 2022, ‘Fire Series I – III’, Acrylic pour on canvas, This Is Us exhibition 05/05/2022 – 12/07/2022, Boomalli Artists Cooperative, Leichhardt.

ILSC (Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation) 2022, *Caring For Country Factsheet*, ILSC viewed on 21 October 2024, <<https://www.ilsc.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Caring-For-Country-Factsheet.pdf>>.

Institute of Foresters Australia 2019, Prescribed burning saves lives, property and biodiversity, Institute of Foresters Australia, viewed on 28 December 2023, <https://www.forestry.org.au/Forestry/About/Prescribed_burning/Forestry/About_the_Forestry/Prescribed_burning.aspx?hkey=64c04659-09b0-4c4e-92ac-7034e2442927#PageTop>.

Insurance Council of Australia 2024, Fire: Preparing for bushfire season, accessed on 26 February 2025, <<https://insurancecouncil.com.au/topic/fire/#:~:text=The%20total%20insurance%20damage%20from,close%20to%2039%2C000%20claims%20lodged.>>>.

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) 2022, IPCC WGII Sixth Assessment Report, Summary for Policy Makers.

IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) 2023, Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment*

Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee & J. Romero (eds)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, p. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001.

Jackson, S, Palmer, L, McDonald, F & Bumpus, A 2017, 'Cultures of carbon and the logic of care: the possibilities for carbon enrichment and its cultural signature', *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, vol. 107, no. 4, p. 867-882.

Jacobsen B & Pearce A 2024, Access to Country for Language Teaching and Learning, Research Report, Aboriginal Languages Trust, <<https://www.alt.nsw.gov.au/assets/Uploads/downloads/files/Access-to-Country-Report.pdf>>.

Jacobsen, R, Howell, C & Read, SM 2020, 'Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate: separate reporting of Indigenous ownership, management and other special rights', ABARES technical report, Canberra.

Jacobsson, A, Backteman-Erlanson, S & Egan Sjolander, A 2020, 'Diversity, preventive work and education—matters of health and well-being in firefighter discourse', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, vol. 15, iss. 1, p. 1817661.

Jahnke, SA, Haddock, CK, Jitnarin, N, Kaipust, CM, Hollerbach, BS & Poston, WS 2019, 'The prevalence and health impacts of frequent work discrimination and harassment among women firefighters in the US fire service', *BioMed research international*, 2019.

James, R, Fisher, JR, Carlos-Grotjahn, C, Boylan, MS, Dembereldash, B, Demissie, MZ, Diaz De Villegas, C, Gibbs, B, Konia, R, Lyons, K & Possingham, H 2023, 'Gender bias and inequity holds women back in their conservation careers', *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, vol. 10, p. 1056751.

James, R, Gibbs, B, Whitford, L, Leisher, C, Konia, R & Butt, N 2021, 'Conservation and natural resource management: where are all the women?', *Oryx*, vol. 5, iss. 6, p. 860-867.

Janke, T 2009, 'Writing up Indigenous Research: authorship, copyright and Indigenous knowledge systems', Terri Janke and Company.

Janke, T 2021, *True Tracks: Respecting Indigenous knowledge and culture*, UNSW Press, Sydney.

Janke T, Cumpston Z, Hill R, Woodward E, Harkness P, von Gavel S & Morrison J 2021a, 'Australia state of the environment 2021: Indigenous, Independent report to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Commonwealth of Australia.

Janke, T, Klemski, C & Melrose, L 2021, 'Bushfires, climate change and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge: healing country through holistic environmental management', *Australian environment review*, vol. 36, iss. 4, p. 93-98, <<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/agispt.20220118060448>>.

Jarvis, D, Stoekl, N, Addison, J, Larson, S, Hill, R, Pert, P & Lui, FW 2018, 'Are Indigenous land and sea management programs a pathway to Indigenous economic development?', *The Rangeland Journal*, vol. 40, p. 415-429, <<https://doi.org/10.1071/RJ18051>>.

Johnson, JT, Pualani Louis, R & Kliskey, A 2014, 'Weaving indigenous and sustainability sciences: diversifying our methods, WIS²DOM Workshop Report.' *National Science Foundation*: 1-116.

Johnston, R & Cavanagh, R 2020, From fighting to nurturing: the impacts and opportunities of fire, 20 August 2020, NITV News, <<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/from-fighting-to-nurturing-the-impacts-and-opportunities-of-fire/kya6122qo>>.

Johnston, RJ, Gregory, D, Pratt, G & Watts, M 2004, *The dictionary of Human Geography*, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton, Victoria.

Jolly, WM, Cochrane, MA, Freeborn, PH, Holden, ZA, Brown, TJ, Williamson, GJ & Bowman, DM 2015, 'Climate-induced variations in global wildfire danger from 1979 to 2013', *Nature communications*, vol. 6, iss. 1, p. 1-11.

Jolly, H, Kandlikar, M, Vishnudas, S & Satterfield, T 2025, "'Forest doesn't burn anymore": Indigenous ontologies of cultural burning and fire in Southern India', *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, p. 25148486251323153.

Jones, R 1969, 'Firestick farming', *Australian Natural History*, vol. 16, no. 7, p. 224-228.

Jones, R, Thurber, KA, Chapman, J, D'Este, C, Dunbar, T, Wenitong, M, Eades, SJ, Strelein, L, Davey, M, Du, W, Olsen, A, Smylie, JK, Banks, E & Lovett, R, on behalf of the Mayi Kuwayu Study Team 2018a, 'Study protocol: Our Cultures Count, the Mayi Kuwayu Study, a national longitudinal study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing', *BMJ Open*, 2018;8:e023861. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2018-023861.

Jones, R, Thurber, KA, Wright, A, Chapman, J, Donohoe, P, Davis, V, & Lovett, R 2018b, 'Associations between participation in a ranger program and health and wellbeing outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Central Australia: a proof of concept study', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 15, no. 7, p. 1478.

Kanuha, VK 2000, “‘Being’ Native versus ‘Going Native’: Conducting Social Work Research as an Insider’, *Social Work*, vol. 45, Iss. 5, p. 439-47.

Karskens, G 2019, ‘Fire in the forests? Exploring the human-ecological history of Australia's first frontier’, *Environment and History*, vol. 25, iss. 3, p. 391-419.

KCCFA (Koori Country Cultural Fire Aboriginal Corporation), n.d., accessed on 26 February 2022, <<https://www.facebook.com/Kooricountryculturalfire/>>.

Kelly, J, Saggars, S, Taylor, K, Pearce, G, Massey, P, Bull, J, Odo, T, Thomas, J, Billycan, R, Judd, J, Reilly, S & Ahboo, S 2012, “‘Makes you proud to be black eh?’: Reflections on meaningful Indigenous research participation’, *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 11:40 <<http://www.equityhealthj.com/content/11/1/40>>.

Kelly, LT, Fletcher, M-S, Menor, IO, Pellegrini, AF, Plumanns-Pouton, ES, Pons, P, Williamson, GJ & Bowman, DM 2023, ‘Understanding Fire Regimes for a Better Anthropocene’, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, p. 48.

Kemter, M, Fischer, M, Luna, LV, Schönfeldt, E, Vogel, J, Banerjee, A, Korup, O & Thonicke, K 2021, ‘Cascading hazards in the aftermath of Australia's 2019/2020 Black Summer wildfires’, *Earth's Future*, vol. 9, iss. 3, p. e2020EF001884.

Kerins, S 2012, ‘Caring for Country to Working on Country’, in J Altman & S Kerins (eds), *People on Country: Vital landscapes Indigenous futures*. The Federation Press <<https://www.federationpress.com.au/bookstore/book.asp?isbn=9781862878938>>.

Khadem, N 2020, ‘Ross Garnaut's climate change prediction is coming true and it's going to cost Australia billions, experts warn’, ABC News, 8 January 2020, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-08/economic-bushfires-billions-ross-garnaut-climate-change/11848388>>.

Khan, YA, Davis, AL & Taylor, JA 2017, ‘Ladders and lifting: How gender affects safety behaviors in the fire service’, *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, vol. 32, no. 3, p. 206-225.

Kijas, J 2005, *Revival, renewal & return: Ray Kelly & the NSW Sites of Significance Survey*, Department of Environment & Conservation (NSW), Hurstville, NSW, p. 126.

Kim, S & Stephen, A 2020, Girringun Aboriginal rangers conduct first women-only controlled burn to protect mahogany glider, ABC Far North, Wed 2 Sep 2020, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-02/girringun-aboriginal-ranger-women-cool-burn-help-mahogany->

[glider/12612930#:~:text=Five%20female%20rangers%20from%20the,conserve%20the%20endanger ed%20mahogany%20glider>.](#)

King, S 2019, 'Cultural burning boasts range of benefits for Indigenous Rangers, families and communities', National Indigenous Times, 20 December 2019, <<https://www.nit.com.au/cultural-burning-boasts-range-of-benefits-for-indigenous-rangers-families-and-communities/>>.

Kitchener- Waters, J, Kelly, R & Cavanagh, V 2024, conference call, 25 March 2024.

KLC (Kimberley Land Council), 2024, What is Native Title, viewed on 28 April 2025 <<https://www.klc.org.au/what-is-native-title>>.

Koger, SM, Leslie, KE & Hayes, ED 2011, 'Climate change: Psychological solutions and strategies for change', *Ecopsychology*, vol. 3, no. 4, p. 227-235.

Kovacevic, M, Standley, P, Gothe, J, Steffensen, V & Ryan, J 2021, 'Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020: Activating Aboriginal Fire Solutions and the Pathways Forward', Report, Firesticks Alliance, <<file:///C:/Users/vc73/Downloads/Firesticks%20Virtual%20Conference%20Report%20December%202021.pdf>>.

Kovach, M 2010, 'Conversational method in Indigenous research', *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 40-48.

Kovach, M 2015, 'Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies', in S Stegra and L Brown (eds), *Research as Resistance: Revisiting critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*. Canadian Scholars Press, Ontario.

Kwame, A 2017, 'Reflexivity and the insider/outsider discourse in indigenous research: My personal experiences', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 13, iss. 4, p. 218-225.

Kwaymullina, A 2018a, 'Literature, resistance, and first nations futures: Storytelling from an Australian indigenous women's standpoint in the twenty-first century and beyond', *Westerly*, vol. 63, iss. 2, p. 140-153.

Kwaymullina, A 2018b, 'You are on Indigenous land: Ecofeminism, Indigenous peoples and land justice', in L Stevens, P Tait, & D Varney (eds), *Feminist Ecologies Changing environments in the Anthropocene*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 193-208.

Kwaymullina, A, Kwaymullina, B & Butterly, L 2013, 'Living Texts: A Perspective on Published Sources, Indigenous Research Methodologies and Indigenous Worldviews', *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 1-13.

Laidlaw, P, Spennemann, DH & Allan, C 2007, 'No time to de(con)struct: the accessibility of bush fire risk management plans in New South Wales, Australia', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol. 22, iss. 1, p. 5-17.

Laidlaw, P, Spennemann, DH & Allan, C 2008, 'Protecting cultural assets from bushfires: a question of comprehensive planning', *Disasters*, vol. 32, iss. 1, p. 66-81.

Lake, FK 2007, 'Traditional ecological knowledge to develop and maintain fire regimes in northwestern California, Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion: management and restoration of culturally significant habitats', PhD Thesis, Oregon State University.

Lake, FK 2013, 'Historical and cultural fires, tribal management and research issue in Northern California: trails, fires and tribulations', *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, vol. 5, p. 1-22.

Lake, FK & Christianson, AC 2020, 'Indigenous fire stewardship', in SL Manzello (ed.), *Encyclopedia of wildfires and wildland-urban interface (WUI) fires*, Springer International Publishing, p. 714-722.

Lambert, S & Mark-Shadbolt, M 2021, 'Indigenous knowledges of forest and biodiversity management: How the watchfulness of Māori complements and contributes to disaster risk reduction', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 17, iss. 3, p. 368-377.

Laming, A, Fletcher, M-S, Romano, A, Mullett, R, Connor, S, Mariani, M, Maezumi, SY & Gadd, PS 2022, 'The curse of conservation: empirical evidence demonstrating that changes in land-use legislation drove catastrophic bushfires in southeast Australia', *Fire*, vol. 5, iss. 6, p. 175.

Langton, M 1993, '“Well I Heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television ...”: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things'. Australian Film Commission, Sydney.

Langton, M 1996, 'What do we mean by wilderness?: wilderness and terra nullius in Australian art', Address to The Sydney Institute on 12 October 1995, *The Sydney Papers*, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 10-31.

Langton, M 1998, 'Burning questions: emerging environmental issues for Indigenous peoples in northern Australia', Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University, Darwin.

Langton, M 1999, 'The Fire at the centre of each family: Aboriginal traditional fire regimes and the challenges for reproducing ancient fire management in the protected areas of northern Australia'. In:

Fire! The Australian Experience, Proceedings from the National Academies Forum, 30 September – 1 October, 1999. National Academies Forum, Canberra.

Langton, M 2002, 'The edge of the sacred, the edge of death', in B David & M Wilson (eds), *Inscribed Landscapes: Marking and Making Place*, University of Hawaii Press 2002, Honolulu.

Langton, M (eds), 2006 'Settling with Indigenous people: Modern treaty and agreement-making', The Federation Press, Sydney.

Langton, M 2021, *Welcome to Country: A Travel Guide to Indigenous Australia*, Hardie Grant Publishing, South Yarra, Victoria.

La Trobe University 2021, 'Cultural burning brings back threatened species', La Trobe University online news, 05/10/2021, accessed on 26 February 2025, <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/announcements/2021/cultural-burning-brings-back-threatened-species?fbclid=IwAR0m-7SKHSFQGh2q57zMTMA0LVmVhW4cQ460O_pq8wqgHo0tDvyvKBH52_Y>.

Lavelle, B 2023, 'Acknowledging Women Blakademics on International Women's Day', Indigenous X, 8 March 2023, accessed on 26 February 2025, <<https://indigenoux.com.au/acknowledging-women-blakademics-on-international-womens-day/>>.

Law, BS, Gonsalves, L, Burgar, J, Brassil, T, Kerr, I & O'Loughlin, C 2022, 'Fire severity and its local extent are key to assessing impacts of Australian mega-fires on koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) density', *Global Ecology and Biogeography*, vol. 31, iss. 4, p. 714-726.

Lawson, S 2021, 'We need to create diverse spaces that include Blak women. The time for invisibility is over', 25 March 2021, IndigenousX, <https://indigenoux.com.au/we-need-to-create-diverse-spaces-that-include-blak-women-the-time-for-invisibility-is-over/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign&utm_content=ap_u0ulkbdkzv>.

Leach, M, Stokes, G & Ward, I (eds), 2000, *The rise and fall of One Nation*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Lee, E 2016, 'Protected areas, country and value: The nature–culture tyranny of the IUCN's protected area guidelines for Indigenous Australians', *Antipode*, vol. 48, no. 2, p. 355-374.

Lee, E and Richardson, BJ 2017, 'From Museum To Living Cultural Landscape', *Australian Indigenous Law Review*, vol. 20, p. 78-107.

Lee, E & Tran, T 2016, 'From boardroom to kitchen table: shifting the power seat of Indigenous governance in protected area management', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, p. 81-93.

Lehman, G 2001, Turning back the clock: fire, biodiversity, and Indigenous community development in Tasmania, in RM Baker, J Davies & EA Young (eds), *Working on country: contemporary Indigenous management of Australia's lands and coastal regions*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 308-319.

Lenette, C 2022, *Participatory action research: Ethics and decolonization*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Lindenmayer, D & Bowd, E 2022, 'Cultural burning, cultural misappropriation, over-simplification of land management complexity, and ecological illiteracy', *Ecological Management & Restoration*, vol. 23, iss. 3, p. 205-208.

Lindenmayer, D, Taylor, C, Bowd, E & Zylstra, P 2024, 'What did it used to look like? A case study from tall, wet mainland Mountain Ash forests prior to British invasion', *Austral Ecology*, vol. 49, iss. 4, p.e13520.

Lindenmayer, D & Zylstra, P 2023, 'Identifying and managing disturbance-stimulated flammability in woody ecosystems', *Biological Reviews*, vol. 99, iss. 3, p. 699-714.

Lilleyman, A, Millar, G, Burn, S, Fatt, KHL, Talbot, A, Que-Noy, J, Dawson, S, Williams, B, Mummery, A, Rolland, S & Wilson, S 2022, 'Indigenous knowledge in conservation science and the process of a two-way research collaboration', *Conservation Science and Practice*, vol. 4, iss. 8, p. e12727.

Linley, GD, Jolly, CJ, Doherty, TS, Geary, WL, Armenteras, D, Belcher, CM, Bliege Bird, R, Duane, A, Fletcher, M-S, Giorgis, MA, Haslem, A, Jones, GM, Kelly, LT, Lee, CKF, Nolan, RH, Parr, CL, Pausas, JG, Price, JN, Regos, A, Ritchie, EG, Ruffault, J, Williamson, GJ, Wu, Q & Nimmo, DG 2022, 'What do you mean, 'megafire''? *Global Ecology and Biogeography*, vol. 31, p. 1906–1922.

Lismore City Council 2024, Early Settlers, Lismore City Council, accessed on 10 May 2024, <<https://www.lismore.nsw.gov.au/Community/Lismores-history/Early-settlers>>.

LLS (NSW Local Land Services) n.d., Supporting Aboriginal Land Management, LLS, accessed on 26 February 2025, <https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1286632/Supporting-Aboriginal-Land-Management-web-final-1.pdf>.

LLS (NSW Local Land Services) 2023, "Dundowra" Warragamba Cultural Burn, LLS, 22 September 2023, accessed on 26 February 2025, <<https://youtu.be/UdBzhi41brI?si=O9LQ0bF8bCJs54gY>>.

Locke, M, Trudgett, M & Page, S 2022, 'Indigenous early career researchers in the time of Covid-19', *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, vol. 25, no. 3-4, p. 11-27.

Lohoar, S, Butera, N & Kennedy, E 2014, 'Strengths of Australian Aboriginal cultural practices in family life and child rearing', Child Family Community Australia Information Exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Canberra, DOI 978-1-922038-69-2 (EPUB).

Long, JW, Lake, FK & Goode, RW 2021, 'The importance of Indigenous cultural burning in forested regions of the Pacific West, USA', *Forest Ecology and Management*, vol. 500, p. 119597.

Long, MA 2018, Leadership, Perceptions, and Turnover in Fire and Emergency New Zealand, Doctoral dissertation, Walden University.

Longbottom, M & Fredericks B 2016, "'Who is talking for us?' The silencing of the Aboriginal woman's voice about violence', Monday, October 17, 2016, Croakey Health Media, <<https://www.croakey.org/who-is-talking-for-us-the-silencing-of-the-aboriginal-womans-voice-about-violence/>>.

Longbottom, M, McGlade, H & Cripps, K 2024, 'Indigenous women are most affected by domestic violence but have struggled to be heard. It's time we listened', *The Conversation*, 11 May 2024, <<https://theconversation.com/indigenous-women-are-most-affected-by-domestic-violence-but-have-struggled-to-be-heard-its-time-we-listened-229720>>.

Lovett, R, Brinckley, MM, Phillips, B, Chapman, J, Thurber, KA, Jones, R, Banks, E, Dunbar, T, Olsen, A & Wenitong, M 2020, "'Marrathalpu mayingku ngiya kiyi. Minyawaa ngiyani yata punmalaka; wangaaypu kirrampili kara [Ngiyampaa title]; In the beginning it was our people's law. What makes us well; to never be sick. Cohort profile of Mayi Kuwayu: The National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing [English title]" *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, vol. 2, p. 8-30.

Lowitja Institute 2020, Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy – Final Report, Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.

Lowitja Institute, HEAL Network & CRE-STRIDE 2021, Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Discussion Paper, Lowitja Institute, Melbourne, DOI: 10.48455/bthg-aj15.

Lyngdoh Reye, R, Gilbert, R, Goddard, L, Gowers, J, Costello, O, Gothe, J, Webster, N, Standley, P, Steffensen, V & Gowers, J 2018, 'Healing People and Country with The Knowledge of Fire: National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2018 Bundanon', Firesticks Alliance, <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/131523/1/opt2018%20National%20Indigenous%20Fire%20Workshop_WEB%283%29.pdf>.

Macinnis-Ng, C & Zhao, X 2022, 'Addressing gender inequities in forest science and research', *Forests*, vol. 13, iss. 3, p. 400.

Mackintosh, B 2018, How diversity in Fire and Rescue will build a safer society, TEDxSydney, June 2018, accessed on 10 May 2024, <https://www.ted.com/talks/bronnies_mackintosh_how_diversity_in_fire_and_rescue_will_build_a_safer_society>.

Mackintosh, B 2022, Girls Fire and Resilience Program, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience.

Maclean, K, Hankins, DL, Christianson, AC, Oliveras, I, Bilbao, BA, Costello, O, Langer, ER & Robinson, CJ 2023, 'Revitalising Indigenous cultural fire practice: benefits and partnerships', *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 38, no. 10.

Maclean K, Robinson CJ, & Costello O 2018, 'A National Framework to Report on the Benefits of Indigenous Cultural Fire Management'. CSIRO, Canberra, Australia. <<https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=csiro:EP188803&dsid=DS1>>.

Maconachie, M, Gould, L & Hansen, B 2020, 'Burning for long-distance flyers', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 30-32.

Macqueen, A 2004, *Somewhat Perilous: the Journeys of Singleton, Parr, Howe, Myles and Blaxland in the Northern Blue Mountains*. A. Macqueen, Wentworth Falls.

Magick Dennis, F 2024, Messenger direct message, 22 March 2024.

Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, August 25, 1877, p.10. viewed on 12 January 2021, Debenham, 2020, p. 10-13, accessed on 10 May 2024, <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18831954>>.

Malaspinas, A-S, Westaway, MC, Muller, C, Sousa, VC, Lao, O, Alves, I, Bergström, A, Athanasiadis, G, Cheng, JY, Crawford, JE, Heupink, TH, Macholdt, E, Peischl, S, Rasmussen, S, Schiffels, S, Subramanian, S, Wright, JL, Albrechtsen, A, Barbieri, C, Dupanloup, I, Eriksson, A, Margaryan, A, Moltke, I, Pugach, I, Korneliussen, TS, Levkivskyi, IP, Moreno-Mayar, JV, Ni, S, Racimo, F, Sikora, M, Xue, Y, Aghakhanian, FA, Brucato, N, Brunak, S, Campos, PF, Clark, W, Ellingvåg, S, Fourmile, G, Gerbault, P, Injie, D, Koki, G, Leavesley, M, Logan, B, Lynch, A, Matisoo-Smith, EA, McAllister, PJ, Mentzer, AJ, Metspalu, M, Migliano, AB, Murgha, L, Phipps, ME, Pomat, W, Reynolds, D, Ricaut, F-X, Siba, P, Thomas, MG, Wales, T, Wall, CM, Oppenheimer, SJ, Tyler-Smith, C, Durbin, R, Dortch,

J, Manica, A, Schierup, MH, Foley, RA, Lahr, MM, Bowern, C, Wall, JD, Mailund, T, Stoneking, M, Nielsen, R, Sandhu, MS, Excoffier, L, Lambert, DM & Willerslev, E 2016, 'A genomic history of Aboriginal Australia', *Nature*, vol. 538, no. 7624, p. 207-214.

Mane Collective 2021, *Cultural Burning for Resilience: The Mini-Documentary*, motion picture, The Mane Collective, <<https://vimeo.com/603712505/d8549a8fdf>>.

Manukan Declaration, The 2004, Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network, in Manukan, Sabah, Malaysia, February 2004, accessed on 10 May 2024, accessed on 19 March 2025, <[manukandec.pdf](#)>.

Mariani, M, Connor, SE, Theuerkauf, M, Herbert, A, Kuneš, P, Bowman, D, Fletcher, M-S, Head, L, Kershaw, AP, Haberle, SG & Stevenson, J 2022, 'Disruption of cultural burning promotes shrub encroachment and unprecedented wildfires', *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, vol. 20, iss. 5, p. 292-300.

Mariani, M, Wills, A, Herbert, A, Adeleye, M, Florin, SA, Cadd, H, Connor, S, Kershaw, P, Theuerkauf, M, Stevenson, J & Fletcher, MS 2024, 'Shrub cover declined as Indigenous populations expanded across southeast Australia', *Science*, vol. 386, iss. 6721, p. 567-573.

Marks-Block, T, Lake, FK, Bird, RB & Curran, LM 2021, 'Revitalized Karuk and Yurok cultural burning to enhance California hazelnut for basketweaving in northwestern California, USA', *Fire Ecology*, vol. 17, iss. 1, p. 1-20.

Marshall, C & Twill, J 2022, 'Using Indigenous Knowledge in Climate Resistance Strategies for Future Urban Environments', in R Roggema (ed.), *Design for Regenerative Cities and Landscapes*, Springer, Cham, p. 49-63.

Martin, B 2017, 'Methodology is content: Indigenous approaches to research and knowledge', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 49, iss.14, p. 1392-1400,

Martin, KL 2008, *Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of outsiders and the implications for researchers*, Post Pressed, Teneriffe, p. 29.

Martin, K & Mirraboopa, B 2003, 'Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist re-search', *Journal of Australian studies*, vol. 27, iss. 76, p. 203-214.

Martinez, D 2020, 'Hands on the land, heart in community: Returning cultural fires Fire is a necessary part of California ecosystems; we should follow Indigenous cultural fire practices for healthier,

abundant forests and to reverse more than a century of damage.’ *Environmental Health News*, 17 June 2020, <<https://www.ehn.org/indigenous-wildfire-2646171110/particle-6>>.

Martinez, DJ, Cannon, CE, McInturff, A, Alagona, PS & Pellow, DN 2023a, ‘Back to the future: Indigenous relationality, kincentricity and the North American Model of wildlife management’, *Environmental Science & Policy*, vol. 140, p. 202-207.

Martinez, DJ, Meadow, AM, Manning, BRM & Maldonado, J 2024, ‘Climate Justice and Climate Adaptation in California: Indigenous Community Climate Adaptation Leadership and Opportunities for Scientific Collaboration’, *Weather, Climate, and Society*, vol. 16, p. 399-409.

Martinez, DJ, Seraphin, B, Marks-Block, T, Nelson, P & Vinyeta, K 2023b, ‘Indigenous fire futures: Anticolonial approaches to shifting fire relations in California’, *Environment and Society*, vol. 14, iss. 1, p. 142-161.

Mason, S 2018, Dharawal Yuin Country: Djaadjawan Dancers with Sharon Mason and Ashweeni, Firesticks Alliance, National Indigenous Fire Workshop, 2018 Bundanon, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://vimeo.com/412671312>>.

Mate, B, Griffin, J, Tighe, L, Pooley, K., Dadswell, K. & Sharples, J 2025, ‘Co-designing a youth fire intervention program with Indigenous communities in New South Wales, Australia’, *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol. 40, vol. 2, p. 66-78.

May, D 2023, ‘Rethinking The Biggest Estate on Earth: a critique of grand unified theories’, *History Australia*, vol. 20, iss. 1, p. 154-172.

McBride, AK & Dundler, J 2024, ‘Aunty Kali, Gulli-Bul Elder, Kyogle’, Firestory podcast, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://firestories.com.au/audio/>>.

McBride, AK, Pipic Media & Wilarni 2022, ‘Women can’t burn’, Pipic media 2022, accessed on 19 March 2025, <https://vimeo.com/708499644?share=copy&fbclid=IwAR0mAs-uF-y6uQhTjF6NaS0CXCN8ouEb-Ftn1eTx9OkTamrxsBDLco5l_Zc_aem_AX_MWxrR59JyAJHSmAr-Y6J7mPBzhFTIZeUP9BxOj2r8FF6wE_GMg5KPxHfuQOwQw2xa6d9xs4PRAajlZkA9PWsx>.

McCaul, J 2023, ‘Caring for Country as Deliberative Policymaking’, in N Moodie & S Maddison (eds), *Public Policy and Indigenous Futures*, Springer Nature, Singapore, p. 51-71.

McCormack, P, McKemey, M & Costello, O 2024, Identifying And Overcoming Legal Barriers To Cultural Burning, The North East NSW Forestry Hub, accessed on 19 March 2025,

https://nenswforestryhub.com.au/upload/documents/reports/articles/241008033240_IdentifyingandOvercomingLegalBarrierstoCulturalBurning_Final.pdf>.

McGregor, S, Lawson, V, Christophersen, P, Kennett, R, Boyden, J, Bayliss, P, Liedloff, A, McKaige, B & Andersen, AN 2010, 'Indigenous wetland burning: conserving natural and cultural resources in Australia's World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park', *Human Ecology*, vol. 38, no. 6, p. 721-729.

McKemey, M & Patterson, ML 2019, 'Aboriginal Cultural Revival through the Reintroduction of Cultural Burning and Development of a Fire & Seasons Calendar, in south-eastern Australia', in 6th International Fire Behaviour and Fuels Conference. Sydney, Australia, International Association of Wildland Fire. accessed on 19 March 2025, Available at <<http://albuquerque.firebehaviorandfuelsconference.com/wpcontent/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/Michelle-McKemey-Sydney.pdf>>.

McKemey, M, & Patterson, T 2018, 'Winba = Fire: developing a fire and seasons calendar for Wattleridge Indigenous Protected Area', in R Smith (ed.), *Proceedings of Restore, Regenerate, Revegetate: A Conference on Restoring Ecological Processes, Ecosystems and Landscapes in a Changing World*, University of New England, Armidale, 5–9 February 2017, p. 57-58.

McKemey, M & Rangers, B 2020, 'Winba = Fire: Banbai Fire and Seasons Calendar, Firesticks Alliance NSW, Released under Creative Commons: CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 DOI: 10.25952/5ee18a43bfd53.

McKemey, MB, Costello O, Ridges M, Ens EJ, Hunter JT & Reid NC 2020a, 'A review of contemporary Indigenous cultural fire management literature in southeast Australia', *EcoEvoRxiv*.

McKemey, MB, Ens E, Rangers YM, Costello O & Reid N 2020b, 'Indigenous knowledge and seasonal calendar inform adaptive savanna burning in northern Australia', *Sustainability*, vol. 12, iss. 3, p. 995.

McKemey, M, Patterson, ML, Hunter, J, Ridges, M, Ens, E, Miller, C, Costello, O & Reid, N 2021c, 'Indigenous cultural burning had less impact than wildfire on the threatened Backwater grevillea (*Grevillea scortechinii* subsp. *sarmentosa*) while effectively decreasing fuel loads', *International Journal of Wildland Fire*, vol. 30, iss. 10, p. 745-756.

McKemey, MB, Patterson ML, Rangers B, Ens EJ, Reid NC, Hunter JT, Costello O, Ridges M & Miller C 2019, 'Cross-cultural monitoring of a cultural keystone species informs revival of Indigenous burning of Country in south-eastern Australia', *Human Ecology*, vol. 47, iss. 6, p. 893-904.

McKemey, MB, Rangers, B, Ens, EJ, Hunter, JT, Ridges, M, Costello, O & Reid, NC 2021a, 'Co-producing a fire and seasons calendar to support renewed Indigenous cultural fire management', *Austral Ecology*, vol. 46, iss. 7, p. 1011-1029.

McKemey, MB, Rangers, B, Rangers, YM, Costello, O, Hunter, JT & Ens, EJ 2022, 'Right-way science: reflections on co-developing Indigenous and Western cross-cultural knowledge to support Indigenous cultural fire management', *Ecological Management & Restoration*, 23, p. 75-82.

McKemey, MB, Reid, N, Ens, E, Hunter, J & Ridges, M 2021b, *Developing cross-cultural knowledge ('right way' science) to support Indigenous cultural fire management*, Doctoral Thesis, UNE.

McLeod, K 2020, Bloomberg Quicktake, 9 March 2020, You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBwaalsCb3E>, <<https://x.com/bbgoriginals/status/1236954193648177152?s=20>>.

McNiven, IJ, Crouch J, Bowler JM, Sherwood JE, Dolby N, Dunn, JE & Stanisic, J 2018, 'The Moyjil site, south-west Victoria, Australia: excavation of a Last Interglacial charcoal and burnt stone feature: is it a hearth?', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, vol. 130, p. 94-116.

McQuire, A 2018, Mainstream feminism still blind to its racism, IndigenousX, 6 March 2018, <<https://indigenoux.com.au/amy-mcquire-mainstream-feminism-still-blind-to-its-racism/>>.

Mehl-Madrone, L 2007, 'The nature of narrative medicine', *The Permanente Journal*, vol. 11, iss. 3, p. 83.

Menzies, K 2019, 'Understanding the Australian Aboriginal experience of collective, historical and intergenerational trauma', *International Social Work*, vol. 62, iss. 6, p. 1522-1534.

Middleton, J, Cunsolo, A, Jones-Bitton, A, Wright, CJ & Harper, SL 2020, 'Indigenous mental health in a changing climate: a systematic scoping review of the global literature', *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 15, iss. 5, p. 053001.

Mikkelsen, C 2005, 'Indigenous peoples, gender, and natural resource management', Working paper No. 2005: 5, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen, Denmark.

Milroy, G & Milroy, J 2008, 'Different Ways of Knowing: Trees Are Our Families Too', in S Morgan, T Mia & B Kwaymullina (eds), *Heartsick for Country: Stories of Love, Spirit and Creation*, Fremantle Press, Fremantle, Western Australia, p. 22-42.

Milton, V & Morgan, D 2022, 'Traditional Indigenous burning protecting last-known koalas on NSW far south coast', ABC South East NSW, Sun 17 Apr 2022 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-17/koalas-saved-by-traditional-indigenous-burning/100988672>>.

Mistry, J, Berardi, A, Andrade, V, Krahô, T, Krahô, P & Leonardos, O 2005, 'Indigenous fire management in the cerrado of Brazil: the case of the Krahô of Tocantins', *Human ecology*, vol. 33, iss. 3, p. 365-386.

Mitchell, TL 1848, *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia: In Search of a Route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria*, published online by the University of Adelaide 2014.

MnWIDSC (Maiaam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective) 2018, 'Defining Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance', <<https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/>>.

MnW (Maiaam nayri Wingara), AIGI (Australian Indigenous Governance Institute) & Lowitja Institute 2023, 'Indigenous Data Governance Communique', National Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit, 13th June 2023, Cairns, QLD, <[Indigenous+Data+Governance+Communique+2023.pdf](#)>.

Moggridge, B, Pecl, G, Lansbury, N, Creamer, S & Mosby, V 2022, 'IPCC reports still exclude Indigenous voices. Come join us at our sacred fires to find answers to climate change', *The Conversation*, March 4, 2022, <<https://theconversation.com/ipcc-reports-still-exclude-indigenous-voices-come-join-us-at-our-sacred-fires-to-find-answers-to-climate-change-178045>>.

Moggridge, BJ, Thompson, RM & Radoll, P 2022, 'Indigenous Research Methodologies in water management: learning from Australia and New Zealand for application on Kamilaroi country', *Wetlands Ecology and Management*, vol. 30, iss. 4, p. 853-868.

Mooney, SD, Harrison, SP, Bartlein, PJ, Daniau, AL, Stevenson, J, Brownlie, KC, Buckman, S, Cupper, M, Luly, J, Black, M & Colhoun, E 2011, 'Late Quaternary fire regimes of Australasia', *Quaternary Science Reviews*, vol. 30, iss. 1-2, p. 28-46.

Moreton-Robinson, A 2000, *Talkin' up to the white woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, University of Queensland Press.

Moreton-Robinson, A 2003, 'I still call Australia home: Indigenous belonging and place in a white postcolonising society', in S Ahmed, C Castaneda, A Fortier & M Sheller (eds), *Uprootings, regroupings. Questions of home and migration*, Oxford, New York, p. 23-40.

Moreton-Robinson, A 2004 'The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty: the High Court and the Yorta Yorta decision', *Borderlands E-Journal*, vol. 3 iss. 2, p. 1-9.

Moreton-Robinson, A 2013, 'Towards an Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 28, no. 78, p. 331-347.

Moreton-Robinson, A 2016, *Critical Indigenous studies: Engagements in first world locations*, University of Arizona Press.

Morgan, D 2020, 'Caring for country', Australian Conservation Foundation, 3 June 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwEbiOH0h6A>>.

Morgan D & Dixon, P 2020, Bushfires lead to surge of interest in cultural burning, ABC 7:30 Report, 5 August 2020, accessed on 19 March 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/7.30/bushfires-lead-to-surge-of-interest-in-cultural/12528286>>.

Morgan D & Keller, C 2020, cultural burning at the south coast of NSW: an interview with Dan Morgan, Native Title Newsletter 2020, iss. 1, p. 9-11, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<http://kirra.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/NativeTitleNlr/2020/4.pdf>>.

Morgan, GW, Tolhurst, KG, Poynter, MW, Cooper, N, McGuffog, T, Ryan, R, Wouters, MA, Stephens, N, Black, P, Sheehan, D & Leeson, P 2020, 'Prescribed burning in south-eastern Australia: history and future directions', *Australian Forestry*, vol. 83, no. 1, p. 4-28.

Morgan, M, Strelein, L & Weir, J 2006, 'Authority, Knowledge and Values: Indigenous Nations Engagement in the Management of Natural Resources in the Murray-Darling Basins', in M Langton (eds), *Settling with Indigenous people: Modern treaty and agreement-making*, The Federation Press, p. 141.

Morris, K n.d., *Land Back and Language*, Common Ground, viewed on 19 March 2025, <https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/land-back-and-language?utm_campaign=later-linkinbio-commongroundfirstnations&utm_content=later-25223920&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkin.bio&fbclid=IwAR1ky3WqASgbX8OKdgT0ZCBTfVFW2vaL6ywFPSoWITWFi7VfONk3cRujsgs>.

Muller, S 2012, 'Two Ways': Bringing Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Knowledges Together', in JK Weir (ed.), *Country, native title and ecology*, ANU E Press, <<http://epress.anu.edu.au/>>.

Murphy, H & van Leeuwen, S 2021, *Australia state of the environment 2021: biodiversity*, independent report to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Commonwealth of Australia,

Canberra, accessed on 19 March 2025, DOI: 10.26194/ren9-3639
<<https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/soe2021-biodiversity.pdf>>.

Murramarang Country, M, Davis, J, Simmons, J, Snelson, S, Channell, V, Haynes, K, Deutscher, N, Brook, L & Dosseto, A 2024, 'Quantitative Assessment of the Effect of Agency-Led Prescribed Burns and Cultural Burns on Soil Properties in Southeastern Australia', *Fire*, vol. 7, iss. 3, p. 75.

Murrup-Stewart, C, Whyman, T, Jobson, L & Adams, K 2021, "“Connection to culture is like a massive lifeline”: Yarning with Aboriginal young people about culture and social and emotional wellbeing', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 31, iss. 10, p. 1833-1846.

Murveit, AM, Delphin, S, Domingues, C, Bourque, SD, Faulstich, SD, Garfin, GM, Huntly, N, Meadow, AM & Preston, V 2023, 'Stories as data: Indigenous research sovereignty and the “Intentional Fire” podcast', *Environment and Planning F*, p. 26349825221142293.

NAISA (Native American and Indigenous Studies Association) 2017, About NAISA, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://naisa.org/about/>>.

Nakata, M 2003, 'Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems', in A Hickling-Hudson, J Matthews & A Woods (eds), *Disrupting preconceptions: Postcolonialism and education*. Post Pressed, Flaxton, p. 19-38.

Nakata, M 2016, 'Indigenous response to global predicaments', *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, vol. 2, iss. 2.

Neale, M & Kelly, L 2020, *First Knowledges songlines: The power and promise*, Thames & Hudson, Australia.

Neale, T 2018, 'Digging for fire: finding control on the Australian continent', *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 79-90.

Neale, T 2020, 'What are whitefellas talking about when we talk about 'cultural burning'?', Inside Story, April 17 2020, <<https://insidestory.org.au/what-are-whitefellas-talking-about-when-we-talk-about-cultural-burning/>>.

Neale, T & Costello, O & Natural Hazards Research Australia 2024, 'Using cultural land management principles and protocols: a guide for collaborative principles, processes and protocols for governance and research', Natural Hazards Research Australia, Report Number: 29.2024, <<https://www.naturalhazards.com.au/resources/publications/report/using-cultural-land-management-principles-and-protocols>>.

Neale, T, Carter, R, Nelson, T & Bourke, M 2019, 'Walking together: A decolonising experiment in bushfire management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country', *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 26, iss. 3, p. 341-359 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474018821419>>.

Nelson, MK 2019, 'Wrestling with fire: Indigenous women's resistance and resurgence', *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, vol. 43, iss. 3, p. 69-84.

NEMA (National Emergency Management Agency) n.d., *Caring for Country with cultural burning*, NEMA, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://nema.gov.au/stories/cultural-burning>>.

Netana-Glover, L 2021, Complexities of Displaced Indigenous Identities: A Fifty Year Journey Home, to Two Homes, *Genealogy*, vol. 5, no. 62, <<https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030062>>.

Ngurra, D, Dadd, L, Glass, P, Scott, R, Graham, M, Judge, S, Hodge, P & Suchet-Pearson, S 2019, 'Yanama budyari gumada: Reframing the urban to care as Darug Country in western Sydney', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 50, iss. 3, p. 279-293.

Nguyen, K, Brunero, T, Thomas, S & Keane, D 2020, The truth about Australia's fires — arsonists aren't responsible for many this season, 11 Jan 2020, viewed on 28 December 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-11/australias-fires-reveal-arson-not-a-major-cause/11855022>>.

Nguyen, K, McDonald, P & Taouk, M 2020, Anatomy of a 'mega-blaze', ABC News, 27 Jul 2020, viewed on 28 December 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-27/gospers-mountain-mega-blaze-investigation/12472044>>.

NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) 2018a, *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) 2018b, *Keeping research on track II: A companion document to Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

NHRA (Natural Hazards Research Australia) 2022a, *First Natural Hazards Research Forum reflects sector shift towards solutions*, Natural Hazards Research Australia conference, Brisbane 26 October 2022, viewed on 28 December 2023, <www.naturalhazards.com.au/reconciliation>.

NHRA (Natural Hazards Research Australia) 2022b, *Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan*, Natural Hazards Research Australia, viewed on 28 December 2023, <www.naturalhazards.com.au/reconciliation>.

NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) n.d., *Wattleridge IPA and Rangers*, viewed on 28 December 2023, <<https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/environment/wattleridge-ipa-and-rangers>>.

NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) 2021, *Wattleridge IPA and Rangers*, viewed on 28 December 2023, <<https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/environment/wattleridge-ipa-and-rangers>>.

NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) 2022, *Land and Housing*, viewed on 28 December 2023, <<https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/land-and-housing>>.

NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) 2024, *Indigenous Rangers Program*, viewed on 28 December 2024, <<https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/environment/indigenous-rangers-program>>.

Nicholas, G 2018, 'It's taken thousands of years, but Western science is finally catching up to Traditional Knowledge', *The Conversation*, 15 February 2018 <<https://theconversation.com/its-taken-thousands-of-years-but-western-science-is-finally-catching-up-to-traditional-knowledge-90291>>.

Nikolakis, W, Ross, RM & Steffensen, V 2024, 'How bureaucracies interact with Indigenous Fire Stewardship (IFS): a conceptual framework', *Fire Ecology*, vol. 20, iss. 1, p. 1-13.

Nimmo, DG, Carthey, AJ, Jolly, CJ & Blumstein, DT 2021, 'Welcome to the Pyrocene: Animal survival in the age of megafire', *Global Change Biology*, vol. 27, iss. 22, p. 5684-5693.

NMA (National Museum of Australia) 2022, *Mabo decision*, National Museum of Australia, viewed on 18 May 2023, <<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/mabo-decision#:~:text=On%203%20June%201992%20the,existed%20for%20all%20Indigenous%20people>>.

Nolan, RH, Bowman, DMJS, Clarke, H, Haynes, K, Ooi, MKJ, Price, OF, Williamson, GJ, Whittaker, J, Bedward, M, Boer, MM, Cavanagh, VI, Collins, L, Gibson, RK, Griebel, A, Jenkins, ME, Keith, DA, Mcilwee, AP, Penman, TD, Samson, SA, Tozer, MG & Bradstock, RA 2021, 'What do the Australian Black Summer fires signify for the global fire crisis?' *Fire*, vol. 4, iss. 4, p. 97.

Nolan, RH, Williamson, G, Haynes, K & Ooi, M 2022, 'Fire management in Australia has reached a crossroads and 'business as usual' won't cut it', *National Emergency Response*, vol. 35, iss. 1, p. 22-23.

Northern Land Council 2018, *Re-connecting women with Country*, August 28, 2018, Northern Land Council Newsletter, p. 28–29.

NPS (National Parks Service) 2021, *By the Numbers*, National Parks Service US Department of the Interior, viewed on 18 May 2023, <<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/by-the-numbers.htm>>.

NRC (Natural Resources Commission) 2024, *Country-based management*, viewed on 1 July 2024, <https://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal-management?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR1y2hoFYV02JDrkkg3Y5B29HyfgfqfvR2Rm7OwPtz9pO125PDdy9t07qe8_aem_52eiDBfgyizaKXmwoAyipw>.

NRTT (Northern Rivers Talk Turkey) 2023, *Koala conservation with the Border Ranges Richmond Valley Landcare*, Border Ranges Richmond Valley Landcare, 14 December 2023, viewed on 18 May 2024, <<https://nrtt.com.au/archive/378/?fbclid=IwAR3wlrSplide8nIFPIYKhIX1D8gHiNBvjtk5j4zDgcl3CbEvUOnloA5-AkQ>>.

NSWEH (NSW Environment and Heritage) 2025, Cultural fire management policy, NSWEH, viewed on 18 March 2025, <<https://www2.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/park-policies/cultural-fire-management>>.

O'Bryan, CJ, Garnett, ST, Fa, JE, Leiper, I, Rehbein, J, Fernández-Llamazares, Á, Jackson, MV, Jonas, HD, Brondizio, ES, Burgess, ND & Robinson, CJ 2020, 'The importance of indigenous peoples' lands for the conservation of terrestrial mammals', *Conservation Biology*, vol. 35, iss. 5, p. 1002-1008.

O'Donnell, E, Kennedy, M, Garrick, D, Horne, A & Woods, R 2023, 'Cultural water and indigenous water science', *Science*, vol. 381, iss. 6658, p. 619-621.

Office of Emergency Management 2018, NSW State Emergency Management Plan, NSW Government, viewed on 18 March 2025, <<https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Documents/publications/20181207-NSW-state-emergency-management-plan.pdf>>.

OEH (Office of Environment and Heritage) 2018, *Annual Report 2017-18*, Office of Environment and Heritage, Sydney.

OEH (Office of Environment and Heritage) 2019, *Annual Report 2018-19*, Office of Environment and Heritage, Sydney.

OEH (Office of Environment and Heritage) 2019, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service first all female hazard reduction burn, National Parks and Wildlife Service, You Tube, 9 Oct 2019, viewed on 18 March 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHuls3_SsAk>.

O’Kane, M, Kojovic, N, Shanks, M & Nurse, M 2019, *Re-invigorating cultural burning practices in Victoria*, Anthropological Society of South Australia, p. 71-93.

O’Leary, P & Walter, S 2018, Strong women on Country: The success of women caring for country as Indigenous rangers and on Indigenous Protected Areas, Country Needs People, viewed on 18 May 2021, <https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/thecountryneedsitspeople/pages/3135/attachments/original/1526264838/Strong_Women_on_Country_report.pdf?1526264838>.

Oscar, J 2021, ‘The Important Role of Indigenous Women and Girls When Caring for Country’, Impact, viewed on 18 May 2023, <<https://www.impactx.tech/en/insights/insights/the-important-role-of-indigenous-women-and-girls-when-caring-for-country>>.

O’Sullivan, S 2019, ‘A lived experience of Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives: How cultural wisdom saved my life’, in H Higgs (ed.), *Practice Wisdom*, Brill Sense, Rotterdam, p. 107-112.

Owens, D & O’Kane, M 2020, *The Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry*, 25 August 2020, and the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW, viewed on 2 July 2024, <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2023-06/Final-Report-of-the-NSW-Bushfire-Inquiry.pdf>>.

Our Watch 2018, *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, Our Watch, Melbourne, viewed on 18 May 2021, <<https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/Changing-the-picture-AA.pdf>>.

Oxford Languages 2022, Oxford University Press, viewed on 18 May 2023, <<https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>>.

Parr, TW 1817, Journal and Station book (concerning an exploratory journey towards the Hunter from Windsor), unattributed field book, State Records NSW CS 2/3623, Fiche 3271, p. 1-51.

Parsley, V 2018, Dharawal Yuin Country: Women and Indigenous Knowledge with Vikki Parsley, Firesticks Alliance, National Indigenous Fire Workshop, 2018 Bundanon, viewed on 8 May 2023, <<https://vimeo.com/423899404>>.

Parsley, V 2023, The return of the right-way burn, Big Sky Country, Season 2, Episode 5, viewed on 18 May 2024, <<https://www.bushheritage.org.au/news/audio/big-sky-country>>.

Pascoe, B 2014, *Dark Emu: black seeds: agriculture or accident?*, Magabala Books, Broome, Western Australia.

Patterson, L, Patterson, K, Cutmore, D, Patterson, T, Ale, P, McKemey, M & Ridges, M 2024, 'Banbai Whole of Country Plan 2023 - 2033', Published by the Guyra Local Aboriginal Land Council, Guyra, NSW.

Patterson, T & Hunt, J 2012, 'Reconnecting with culture for future generations', in J Altman & S Kerins (eds), *People on Country: Vital landscapes Indigenous futures*, The Federation Press,

<<https://www.federationpress.com.au/bookstore/book.asp?isbn=9781862878938>>.

Pausas, JG & Parr, CL 2018, 'Towards an understanding of the evolutionary role of fire in animals', *Evolutionary Ecology*, vol. 32, iss. 2, p. 113-125.

Pearson, L 2021, 'Appropriate terminology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – it's complicated', IndigenousX, viewed on 6 April 2023, <<https://indigenoux.com.au/appropriate-terminology-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-its-complicated/>>.

Penman, TD, Clarke, H, Gibson, RK, Collins L & Nolan RH 2023, 'The 2019–20 Australian wildfires: precursors, characteristics and implications for the future', in L Rumpff, SM Legge, S van Leeuwen, BA Wintle, JCZ Woinarski (eds), *Australia's Megafires: Biodiversity Impacts and Lessons from 2019-2020*, CSIRO, p. 9-22.

Penman, TD, Kavanagh, RP, Binns, DL & Melick, DR 2007, 'Patchiness of prescribed burns in dry sclerophyll eucalypt forests in south-eastern Australia', *Forest Ecology and Management*, vol. 252, no. 1-3, p. 24-32.

Perrott, T, 2016, 'Beyond 'token' firefighters: exploring women's experiences of gender and identity at work', *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 21, iss. 1, p. 51-64.

Pert, PL, Ens, EJ, Locke, J, Clarke, PA, Packer, JM & Turpin G 2015, 'An online spatial database of Australian Indigenous Biocultural Knowledge for contemporary natural and cultural resource management', *Science of the Total Environment*, vol. 534, p. 110-121.

Pettersen, C 2021, 'Aunty Carol's story', in JK Weir, D Freeman, & B Williamson (eds), *Cultural Burning in Southern Australia*, Report number: 687.2021, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Piccione, T 2022, 'Australia's climate disasters could be helped by Indigenous knowledge, including benefits of fire', The Canberra Times, 3 November 2022, <<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7957463/aboriginal-land-bushfire-knowledge-ignored-at-australias-climate-peril-experts/>>.

Pickrell, J 2020, 'Thousands of ancient Aboriginal sites probably damaged in Australian fires', *Nature*, 23 January 2020, <<https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-00164-8>>.

Plumwood, V 2012, 'Decolonizing relationships with nature', in W Adams & M Mulligan (eds), *Decolonizing nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era*, Routledge, p. 51-78.

PMC (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) 2024, 'Women's Safety', Australian Government, viewed on 18 December 2024, <<https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/womens-safety>>.

Poulos, CN 2021, *Essentials of autoethnography*, American Psychological Association, Washington, US.

PRI (Public Radio International) 2020, 'Reviving traditional fire knowledge in Australia: 'Fire is something we live with', Anne Kusmer', The World online article and podcast, published 24 February 2020, accessed on 18 December 2024, <<https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-02-24/reviving-traditional-fire-knowledge-australia-fire-something-we-live>>.

Price, OH, Nolan, RH & Samson, SA 2022, 'Fuel consumption rates in resprouting eucalypt forest during hazard reduction burns, cultural burns and wildfires', *Forest Ecology and Management*, vol. 505, p. 119894.

Productivity Commission 2014, *Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements*, Inquiry Report no. 74, Canberra. JEL code: H77, H84, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/disaster-funding/report/disaster-funding-volume1.pdf>>.

Productivity Commission 2024, *Socio-economic outcome area 15*, Closing the Gap Information Repository, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area15>>.

Pryke, S & Leavesley, A 2020, 'Burning for Gouldian Finches', in A Leavesley, M Wouters and R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 158-159.

Pyne, SJ 1991, *Burning bush. A fire history of Australia*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.

Pyne, SJ 2006, *The still-burning bush*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne.

Radcliffe, SA 2017, 'Decolonising geographical knowledges', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 42, no. 3, p. 329-333.

Rasmussen, B & Maharaj, N 2020, 'The Economic Benefits of the Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy (IFARES) Program: Fire and Rescue New South Wales', BNHCRC, Melbourne.

Read, P & Denniss, R 2020, 'With costs approaching \$100 billion, the fires are Australia's costliest natural disaster', January 17, 2020, The Conversation, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://theconversation.com/with-costs-approaching-100-billion-the-fires-are-australias-costliest-natural-disaster-129433>>.

Read, N, Duff, TJ & Taylor, PG, 2018, 'A lightning-caused wildfire ignition forecasting model for operational use', *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology*, vol. 253, p. 233-246.

Reconciliation NSW, 2020, Aboriginal Nations/Languages in NSW & ACT map, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://reconciliationnsw.org.au/merchandise/>>.

Redvers, N, Celidwen, Y, Schultz, C, Horn, O, Githaiga, C, Vera, M, Perdrisat, M, Plume, LM, Kobei, D, Kain, MC & Poelina, A 2022, 'The determinants of planetary health: an Indigenous consensus perspective', *The Lancet Planetary Health*, vol. 6, iss. 2, p. e156-e163.

Reiner, V, Pathirana, NL, Sun, YY, Lenzen, M & Malik, A 2024, 'Wish You Were Here? The Economic Impact of the Tourism Shutdown from Australia's 2019-20 'Black Summer Bushfires'', *Economics of Disasters and Climate Change*, p. 1-21.

Renwick AR, Robinson CJ, Garnett ST, Leiper I, Possingham, HP, & Carwardine, J 2017, 'Mapping Indigenous land management for threatened species conservation: An Australian case-study', *PLoS ONE*, vol. 12, iss. 3.

Rey, JA 2022, 'Quiet activism through Dharug Ngurra: Reporting locally grown—not from the European South', *From the European South*, vol. 10, p. 25-40.

Rey, JA 2023, "'Who'd Have Thought?': Unravelling Ancestors' Hidden Histories and Their Impact on Dharug Ngurra Presences, Places and People', *Genealogy*, vol. 7, iss. 2, p. 41.

Rey, JA, Norman, CW, Brennan, G, Ens, E, & Norman-Hill, R 2025, 'Burning Love', Living Ngurra: Healing Country, Healing Hearts and Sharing Minds in Dharug Country, *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, vol. 9, iss. 1, <<https://doi.org/10.54760/001c.138509>>.

Reynolds, AJ & NAVA (National Association of the Visual Arts) 2024, *The Artist Files: Amanda Jane Reynolds, Guringai Yuin*, short film, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHjQ2k-1d8U>>.

Reynolds, AJ & Georgeson, T 2020, *After The Fire: A Journey Through Yuin Country*, Atmos Earth, <<https://atmos.earth/australia-wildfire-indigenous-fire-practices-history/>>.

RFS (NSW Rural Fire Service) n.d.a, RFS, Youth in the NSW RFS Membership Opportunities, accessed on 19 March 2025, <<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/volunteer/youth#:~:text=Many%20NSW%20RFS%20brigades%20offer,mentor%20and%20develop%20junior%20members>>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service NSW) n.d.b, RFS, Prevent bush fire arson, viewed on 29 December 2023, <<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/prevent-bush-fire-arson>>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service NSW) 2011, *Making a difference: women in the NSW rural fire service*, New South Wales Rural Fire Service, accessed on 19 March 2025, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/4267/Making-a-Difference-Women-in-the-NSW-Rural-Fire-Service.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2017b, Cultural burning program in the Riverina, NSW RFS, viewed on 23 March 2021, <<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-districts/orana/photovideo-gallery/2015-photo-and-video-gallery/cultural-burning-program-in-the-riverina>>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2018, NSW RFS Aboriginal Communities Engagement Strategy, accessed on 19 March 2025, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/185632/Segment-Report-Indigenous-Final-SINGLE.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2019, Annual Report 2018-19. New South Wales Rural Fire Service, accessed on 19 March 2025, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/129892/NSW-RFS-Annual-Report-2018-19-web.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2020, NSW Rural Fire Service Annual Report 2019/20, RFS, viewed on 26 February 2021, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/186236/NSW-RFS-Annual-Report-2019-20.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2021a, NSW RFS At a glance, NSW RFS, viewed on 26 February 2022, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/174545/NSW-Rural-fire-service-at-a-glance-2021.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2021b, NSW Rural Fire Service Annual Report 2020/21, NSW RFS, viewed on 26 February 2022, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/234365/NSW-RFS-Annual-Report-2020-21.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2022a, NSW Rural Fire Service Annual Report 2021-22, NSW RFS, viewed on 26 September 2023, <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/245191/NSW-RFS-Annual-Report-2021-22.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2024b, Bush Fire Coordinating Committee, RFS, viewed on 16 December 2024, <<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/managing-bush-fire-risk/bush-fire-coordinating-committee>>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2024a, NSW Rural Fire Service Annual Report 2023/24 <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/274645/RFS-Annual-Report-2023-24.pdf>.

RFS (Rural Fire Service) 2025, advertisement for NSW Rural Fire Service Aboriginal Targeted Mitigation Crew Roles, viewed 15 June 2025, <<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers/aboriginal-targeted-opportunities>>.

Richardson, C & Goll, H 2022, 'This thousand-year-old Aboriginal tradition of lighting fires could be a solution to fight Australia's devastating bushfires', Business Insider, 28 January 2020, viewed on 16 December 2024, <<https://www.businessinsider.com/australia-fires-aboriginal-indigenous-groups-2020-1>>.

Richmond, C, Coombes, B & Louis, RP 2022, 'Making space for Indigenous intelligence, sovereignty and relevance in geographic research', in SA Lovell, SE Coen & MW Rosenberg (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Methodologies in Human Geography*, Routledge, p. 83-93.

Rigney, L-I 1999, 'Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies', *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 99, no. 14, p. 109-122.

Rigney, L-I 2001 'A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science: Framing Indigenous research towards Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty', *Kaurna Higher Education Journal*, vol. 7, p. 1-13, <https://bpb-ap-se2.wpmucdn.com/thinkspace.csu.edu.au/dist/c/3891/files/2020/10/LI_Rigney_First_perspective.pdf>

Rigney, L-I 2003, 'Indigenous Australian views on knowledge production and Indigenist research,' *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 32-49.

Rigney, L-I 2006, 'Indigenous Australian views on knowledge production and Indigenist research', in J Kunnie, N & I Goduka (eds), *Indigenous peoples' wisdom and power: affirming our knowledge through narratives*, Hampshire and Burlington, Ashgate, p. 32-50.

Ritchie, E 2022, ''Gut-wrenching and infuriating': why Australia is the world leader in mammal extinctions, and what to do about it', *The Conversation*, 19 October 2022, <<https://theconversation.com/gut-wrenching-and-infuriating-why-australia-is-the-world-leader-in-mammal-extinctions-and-what-to-do-about-it-192173>>.

Roberts, Z, Carlson, B, O'Sullivan, S, Day, M, Rey, J, Kennedy, T, Bakic, T & Farrell, A 2021, 'A guide to writing and speaking about Indigenous People in Australia', factsheet, Macquarie University, viewed on 16 December 2024, <<https://doi.org/10.25949/5TFK-5113>>.

Robinson, CJ, Barber, M, Hill, R, Gerrard, E & James, G 2016a, *Protocols for Indigenous fire management partnerships*, CSIRO, Brisbane.

Robinson, CJ, Costello, O, Lockwood, M, Pert, PL & Garnett, ST 2021b, 'Empowering Indigenous leadership and participation in wildfire recovery, cultural burning and land management', in L Rumpff, SM Legge, S van Leeuwen, BA Wintle & JCZ Woinarski (eds), *Australia's Megafires: Biodiversity Impacts and Lessons from 2019-2020*, CSIRO Publishing, p. 430-441.

Robinson, CJ, Kong, T, Coates, R, Watson, I, Stokes, C, Pert, P, McConnell, A & Chen, C 2021a, 'Caring for indigenous data to evaluate the benefits of indigenous environmental programs', *Environmental Management*, vol. 68, iss. 2, p. 160-169.

Robinson, JM, Gellie, N, MacCarthy, D, Mills, JG, O'Donnell, K & Redvers, N 2021c, 'Traditional ecological knowledge in restoration ecology: a call to listen deeply, to engage with, and respect Indigenous voices', *Restoration Ecology*, vol. 29, iss. 4, p. e13381.

Rogers, C & Andrews, M 2020, 'It's not up to Indigenous people to educate everyone else about racism', September 30 2020, *The Canberra Times*, viewed on 16 December 2024, <<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6940177/its-not-up-to-indigenous-people-to-educate-everyone-else-about-racism/>>.

Rose, DB 1996, *Nourishing terrains: Australian Aboriginal views of landscape and wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.

Ross, H, Buchy, M & Proctor, W 2002, 'Laying down the ladder: a typology of public participation in Australian natural resource management', *Australian journal of environmental management*, vol. 9, iss. 4, p. 205-217.

- Ross, J, Bush, S, Ross, R & Ross, B 2022, *Winthali*, Pan Macmillan Australia.
- Ruane, S 2018, 'Using a worldview lens to examine complex policy issues: a historical review of bushfire management in the South West of Australia', *Local Environment*, vol. 23, no. 8, p. 777-795.
- Russ-Smith, J 2021, 'Giyira: Indigenous Women's Knowing, Being and Doing as a Way to End War on Country', in M MacKenzie & N Wegner (eds), *Feminist solutions for ending war*, Pluto Press. p. 15-28.
- Russ-Smith, J 2023, 'Balayanhi Wiradyuri Garingundhi. We are sovereign my granddaughter: Embodying Wiradyuri women's sovereignty through Wiradyuri knowing, being and doing', Thesis degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Charles Sturt University, July 2023.
- Ryan, L, Debenham, J, Pascoe, W, Smith, R, Owen, C, Richards, J, Gilbert, S, Anders, RJ, Usher, K, Price, D, Newley, J, Brown, M & Hugh, C 2025, *Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia 1788-1930*, University of Newcastle, 2017-2024, Newcastle viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres>>.
- Ryan, TM 2018, *Deadly Women: An Analysis of Indigenous Women's Leadership in Australia*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Canberra.
- Ryan, T 2020, 'The intersectional challenges of Indigenous women's leadership. ab-Original: Journal of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and First Peoples', *Cultures*, vol. 3, iss. 2, p. 149-171.
- Sacre, W 2023, 'The first of many flames', Bush Heritage Australia newsletter, *Bushtracks*, 13 Jun 2023, viewed on 16 December 2024, <<https://www.bushheritage.org.au/newsletters/2023/winter/the-first-of-many-flames#:~:text=For%20years%2C%20Bush%20Heritage%20has,truwana%20Rangers%20on%20pala wa%20Country>>.
- Salgo, M & Gillespie, J 2018, 'Cracking the Code: a legal geography and political ecological perspective on vegetation clearing regulations', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 49, iss. 4, p. 483-496.
- Salmon, M, Doery, K, Dance, P, Chapman, J, Gilbert, R, Williams, R & Lovett, R 2019, *Defining the Indefinable: Descriptors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Cultures and Their Links to Health and Wellbeing*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Team, Research School of Population Health, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Saltr , F, Rodr guez-Rey, M, Brook, BW, Johnson, CN, Turney, CS, Alroy, J, Cooper, A, Beeton, N, Bird, MI, Fordham, DA & Gillespie, R 2016, ‘Climate change not to blame for late Quaternary megafauna extinctions in Australia’, *Nature communications*, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 1-7.

Samarawickrama, A 2023, *The influence of cultural burns on the density and stress response of koalas on Minjerribah, North Stradbroke Island*, Doctoral dissertation, University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland.

Samuel, G 2020, *Independent Review of the EPBC Act—Interim Report*, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra.

Sangha, KK, Sithole, B, Hunter-Xenie, H, Daniels, C, Yibarbuk, D, James, G, Michael, C, Gould, J, Edwards, AC & Russell-Smith, J 2017, ‘Empowering Remote Indigenous Communities in Natural Disaster Prone Northern Australia’, *International Journal of Mass Emergencies & Disasters*, vol. 35, no. 3, p. 137-153.

Saunders, K 2023, *Aftermath*, poem, Red Room Poetry, viewed on 16 March 2024, <<https://redroompoetry.org/poets/kirli-saunders/aftermath/>>.

Schell, CJ, Guy, C, Shelton, DS, Campbell-Staton, SC, Sealey, BA, Lee, DN & Harris, NC 2020, ‘Recreating Wakanda by promoting Black excellence in ecology and evolution’, *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 4, no. 10, p. 1285-1287.

Schultz, PW 2002, ‘Inclusion with Nature: The Psychology Of Human-Nature Relations’, in P Schmuck & WP Schultz (eds), *Psychology of Sustainable Development*. Springer, Boston, MA.

Schultz, R & Cairney, S 2017, ‘Caring for country and the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians Investment in caring for country may help close the gaps in education, employment and health’, *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 207, no. 1, p. 8-10.

Seed Mob, 2024, *Heal Country Declaration*, Seed Mob, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://nt.seedmob.org.au/declaration>>.

Sewell, D 2019, ‘Item 12: Gospers Mountain fire, back of Wheelbarrow Ridge Road, Colo Heights, 19 November 2019’, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, File Number FL18563882, viewed on 16 March 2024, <<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/collection-items/item-12-gospers-mountain-fire-back-wheelbarrow-ridge-road-colo-heights>>.

Sewell, S 2014, ‘Women and the environment: an indicative study on Tamborine Mountain, Queensland’, Doctoral dissertation, James Cook University.

Sexton-McGrath, K 2022, 'Australian First Nations women travel to US to exchange knowledge on cultural burning practices', ABC Far North, 15 October 2022, viewed on 16 March 2024, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-15/indigenous-women-travel-united-states-cultural-burning-exchange/101533778>>.

Shakesby, RA, Wallbrink, PJ, Doerr, SH, English, PM, Chafer, CJ, Humphreys, GS, Blake, WH & Tomkins, KM 2007, 'Distinctiveness of wildfire effects on soil erosion in south-east Australian eucalypt forests assessed in a global context', *Forest Ecology and Management*, vol. 238, no. 1-3, p. 347-364.

Shebitz, D 2005, 'Weaving Traditional Ecological Knowledge into the Restoration of Basketry Plants', *Journal of Ecological Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 51-68.

Shiva, V & Mies, M 2014, *Ecofeminism*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London and New York.

Simpson, LB 2021, 'A short history of the blockade: Giant beavers, diplomacy, and regeneration in Nishnaabewin', University of Alberta Press, Edmonton, CA.

Singh, R, Galliers, C, Appleton, M, Hoffmann, M, Long, B, Cary-Elwes, J, Fritze, C, McCallum, J & Parry Jones, R 2021, 'The vital role of rangers in conservation', *In Parks Stewardship Forum*, vol. 37, no. 1.

Singleton Argus, 28 May 2019, "We are fortunate to have Koori Country Firesticks Aboriginal Corporation lead our burns", Local News, viewed on 16 March 2020, <<https://www.singletonargus.com.au/story/6186206/aboriginal-cultural-burn-brings-people-together/>>.

Sloan Morgan, O & Burr, J 2024, 'The political ecologies of fire: Recasting fire geographies in British Columbia, Canada', *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, p. 25148486241235836.

Smede, N 2020, Unprecedented, poem, February 2020, Baby Teeth Journal - Global Climate Crisis Edition, accessed on 16 March 2024, <<https://www.babyteethjournal.com/home/nicolesmede?rq=nicole%20smede>>.

Smethurst, S 2020, *Meet the all-female Indigenous fire crew protecting community, family and sacred land*, Now to Love, accessed on 16 March 2024, <<https://www.nowtolove.com.au/news/local-news/indigenous-all-female-fire-crew-australia-62022>>.

Smith, A, Kolden, CA, Prichard, SJ, Gray, RW, Hessburg, PF & Balch, JK 2018, 'Recognizing women leaders in fire science', *Fire*, vol 1, no.30, p. 1-25.

Smith, JA 2021, 'Jason's story', in JK Weir, D Freeman, & B Williamson (eds), *Cultural Burning in Southern Australia*, Report number: 687.2021, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Smith, LT 2012, *Decolonising Methodologies: Indigenous Peoples and Research*, Zed Books, London.

Smith, W, Neale, T & Weir, JK 2021, 'Persuasion without policies: The work of reviving Indigenous peoples' fire management in southern Australia', *Geoforum*, vol. 120, p. 82-92.

Smith W, Weir J & Neale T 2019, *Hazards, culture and Indigenous communities, project annual report 2017-2018*. Nillumbik Shire Council, Greensborough, Victoria.

Smith, W, Weir, JK & Neale, T 2018, *Southeast Australia Aboriginal fire forum*, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Spurway, K 2018, 'Critical reflections on Indigenous peoples' ecological knowledge and disaster risk management in Australia: A rapid evidence review', *Global Media Journal of Australia*, vol. 12.

Standen, JC, Spencer, J, Lee, GW, Van Buskirk, J, Matthews, V, Hanigan, I, Boylan, S, Jegasothy, E, Breth-Petersen, M & Morgan, GG 2022, 'Aboriginal population and climate change in Australia: Implications for health and adaptation planning', *International journal of environmental research and public health*, vol. 19, iss. 12, p. 7502.

State of Victoria 2020, *Inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian fire season: Phase 1 Community and sector preparedness for and response to the 2019–20 fire season*, Report for the Inspector-General for Emergency Management, State of Victoria.

Steffensen, R 2024, 'Firesticks: The Role of Women in Cultural Burning', Common Ground, 17 June 2024, accessed on 16 March 2025, <<https://www.commonground.org.au/article/firesticks-women-cultural-burning>>.

Steffensen, V 2020, *Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia*, Hardie Grant Publishing, Melbourne, Australia.

Steffensen, V & Steffensen, S 2022, *Looking After Country with Fire Aboriginal Burning Knowledge With Uncle Kuu*, Hardie Grant Explore.

Stoof, CR & Kettridge, N 2022, 'Living with fire and the need for diversity', *Earth's Future*, vol. 10, iss. 4, p. e2021EF002528.

Straw, N & Grant, J 2018, 2018 National Landcare Awards Nominee: Josephine Grant, NT, viewed on 18 May 2021, <https://www.nationallandcareconference.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NT_Indigenous-Land-Management_Josephine-Grant.pdf>.

Sultana, F 2007, 'Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research', *ACME: An international journal for critical geographies*, vol. 6, iss. 3, p. 374-385.

Sultana, F 2022, 'The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality', *Political Geography*, vol. 99, p. 102638.

Sundberg, J 2014, 'Decolonizing posthumanist geographies', *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 33-47.

Suzuki, D 2007, *The sacred balance: Rediscovering our place in nature*, Greystone Books Ltd. Canada.

Syphard, AD & Keeley, JE 2015, 'Location, timing and extent of wildfire vary by cause of ignition', *International Journal of Wildland Fire*, vol. 24, p. 37-47.

Talbot, L, Hill, R & Babacan, H 2016, 'Indigenous rights, country and people empowered by use of Indigenous Research Methodologies', Institute of Australian Geographers Conference, 29 - 1 July 2016, Adelaide.

Taylor, J 2011, 'The intimate insider: Negotiating the ethics of friendship when doing insider research,' *Qualitative Research*, vol. 11, iss. 1, p. 3-22.

Taylor-Bragge, RL, Whyman, T & Jobson, L 2021, 'People Needs Country: the symbiotic effects of landcare and wellbeing for Aboriginal peoples and their countries', *Australian Psychologist*, vol. 56, iss. 6, p. 458-471.

Te Maihāroa, K & Woodhouse, A (eds), 2023, *Indigenous Autoethnography: Illuminating Māori Voices*, Springer Nature, Singapore.

Tench, W 1789, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, edited by LF Fitzhardinge as Sydney's First Four Years, Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

Thomas, L 2022, *The Intersectional Environmentalist, How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People + Planet*, Voracious Books.

Thomassin, A, Neale, T & Weir, J 2018, 'The natural hazard sector's engagement with Indigenous peoples: a critical review of CANZUS countries', *Geographical Research*, vol. 56, p. 1-14.

Thorpe, A, Yashadhana, A, Biles, B, Munro-Harrison, E & Kingsley, J 2023, 'Indigenous health and connection to Country', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Global Public Health*, accessed on 16 March 2024, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190632366.013.436>>.

Thunig, A, 2022, 'First in family, first for family: Indigenous academic women's legacy motivation', *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education (Online)*, vol. 51, iss. 1, p. 1-19.

Tjuwanpa Women Rangers 2020, 'You can always add to a small fire', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 63-64.

Tolhurst, K 2020, 'We have already had countless bushfire inquiries. What good will it do to have another?', *The Conversation*. 16 January 2020, Australia, accessed on 16 March 2024, <<https://theconversation.com/we-have-already-had-countless-bushfire-inquiries-what-good-will-it-do-to-have-another-129896>>.

Tom, E, Adams, MM & Goode, RW 2023, 'Solastalgia to soliphilia: cultural fire, climate change, and indigenous healing', *Ecopsychology*, vol. 15, iss. 4, p. 322-330.

Treading Lightly 2020, The Role of Women, 'djamanj djamaga ganj we talk good fire' series, webinar, Treading Lightly Incorporated, accessed on 16 March 2022, <<https://treadinglightly.org.au/programs-projects/webcasts/>>.

Tripp, A & Preston, V 2021, *Cultures of Care*, Othering and Belonging Institute video, You Tube, accessed on 16 March 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djppUyOOoOQ&t=621s>>.

truwana Rangers, ALCT & Firesticks Alliance 2021, 'truwana luna patrulla nayri kaniplila', May 2022, truwana Rangers, Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania and Firesticks Alliance 2021 <https://vimeo.com/765449728/40989cb246?ref=fb-share&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR1uG-e_wHMiglsFmLwco7pUo5IT4GZSV3fljnnWHzddAwe_3KaREhI_jnY_aem_ZmFrZWR1bW15MTZieXRlcw>.

Tuck, E, & Yang, KW 2012, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, vol. 1, iss. 1, p. 1-40.

Tugwell, J 2024, 'NSW trials cultural burning program to keep roads open during emergencies like Black Summer', ABC South East NSW, accessed on 16 March 2025,

<<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-21/cultural-burning-pilot-program-highways-bushfire-emergencies-nsw/103488258>>.

Tyler, M, Carson, L & Reynolds, B 2019, 'Are fire services 'extremely gendered' organizations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia. Gender', *Work & Organization*, vol. 26, iss. 9, p. 1304-1323.

Tynan, L 2020, 'Thesis as kin: living relationality with research', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 163-170.

Tynan, L 2021, 'What is relationality? Indigenous knowledges, practices and responsibilities with kin', *Cultural geographies*, vol. 28, no. 4, p. 597-610.

Tynan, L 2025, Fire as design, Caring for Country as planning, Mold Online, <https://thisismold.com/series/relational-architectures/fire-as-design-caring-for-country-as-planning?fbclid=IwY2xjawIKy8hleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHxE7oS7YSgLh3ZPsSjjuR-6UmGHSe1iY1EFaup5Bxa1RLGmGsmq9uXxNPQ_aem_NHTGA88jjDfitPrABhkrig>.

Tynan, L & Bishop, M 2023, 'Decolonizing the literature review: A relational approach', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 29, iss. 3-4, p. 498-508.

Tynan, L & Cavanagh V 2021, 'Fire', an A-Z of Shadow Places Concepts, p. 1-4, accessed on 16 March 2022, <<https://www.shadowplaces.net/concepts>>.

UC Davis, 2023, Episode 21: Face to Face with Chancellor May and Deniss Martinez, UC Davis, 2023, viewed on 21 January 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-L7S30_VjX0&t=186s>.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) 2009, 'Resource guide on gender and climate change', UNDP, viewed on 21 January 2021, <<https://www.undp.org/publications/resource-guide-gender-and-climate-change-0>>.

UNPFII (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues) 2008, Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues Collated Paper on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change, UNPFII, E/C.19/2008/CRP.2, viewed on 21 January 2021, <<https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/tk/emccilc-01/other/emccilc-01-ipcc-en.pdf>>.

UNSDG (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) 2020, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, United Nations, viewed on 22 December 2020, <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>>.

UOW (University of Wollongong) n.d., UOW Harvard Guide, viewed on 21 January 2021, <<https://uow.libguides.com/uow-harvard-guide>>.

UOW (University of Wollongong) 2018, UOW NAIDOC Week shines a light on contribution of Indigenous women, viewed on 10 July 2018, <<https://www.uow.edu.au/media/2018/naidoc-week-shines-a-light-on-contribution-of-indigenous-women.php>>.

UOW (University of Wollongong) 2019, UOW PhD Stories: Vanessa Cavanagh, July 2019, accessed on 16 March 2022, <<https://magazine.uow.edu.au/research/newsletter/2019/UOW259531.html>>.

UOW (University of Wollongong) 2020, UOW Celebrating women researchers: Vanessa Cavanagh, 8 March 2020, accessed on 16 May 2022, <<https://www.uow.edu.au/global-challenges/news/celebrating-women-researchers-vanessa-cavanagh.php>>.

UOW (University of Wollongong) 2021, UOW Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, Research Highlights Report 2020, (Cavanagh features on pages: 7, 15, 26 and 29), viewed on 2 February 2021, <<https://documents.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@socs/documents/doc/uow268122.pdf#page=7>>.

Urquhart L 2023, Mudjis and Yiliman (Friends and Spears), poem, Red Room Poetry, viewed on 2 February 2021, <<https://redroompoetry.org/poets/lyndsay-urquhart/mudjis-and-yiliman/>>.

Urquhart, L with Edwards, J 2020, Blood Moon, poem, Red Room Poetry, viewed on 2 February 2021, <<https://redroompoetry.org/poets/lyndsay-urquhart/blood-moon/>>.

van Leeuwen, S & Miller-Sabbioni, C 2023, 'Impacts of wildfire on Indigenous cultural values', in L Rumpff, SM Legge, S van Leeuwen, BA Wintle & JCZ Woinarski (eds), *Australia's Megafires: Biodiversity Impacts and Lessons from 2019-2020*, CSIRO Publishing, p. 23-30.

Vázquez-Varela, C, Martínez-Navarro, JM & Abad-González, L 2022, 'Traditional fire knowledge: a thematic synthesis approach', *Fire*, vol. 5, iss. 2, p. 47.

Voggeser, G, Lynn, K, Daigle, J, Lake, FK & Ranco, D 2013, 'Cultural impacts to tribes from climate change influences on forests', *Climate Change*, vol. 120, p. 615-626.

VTOCFKG (The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Knowledge Group) 2018, The Victorian traditional owner cultural fire strategy, The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Knowledge Group, Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations, DELWP, Parks Victoria and the CFA, viewed on 19 March 2025, <[fireplusstrategyplusfinal.pdf](#)>.

Vyas, H 2019, July 4, Bringing back heritage: Farmer acknowledges private property as significant historic Aboriginal site, *The Wire*, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://www.thewire.org.au/story/bringing-back-heritage-farmeracknowledges-private-property-as-significant-historic-aboriginal-site/>>.

Wales, A & Cavanagh, VI 2018, 'Georges Riverkeeper Aboriginal Riverkeeper Team: a model for successful engagement of Aboriginal communities in natural resource management of urban areas', in GJ Vietz & ID Rutherford (eds), *Proceedings of the 9th Australian Stream Management Conference*, 12 – 15 August 2018, Hobart, Tasmania.

Walker, M, Fredericks, B, Mills, K & Anderson, D 2013, 'Perspectives on a decolonizing approach to research about Indigenous women's health: The Indigenous women's wellness study', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 9, iss. 3, p. 204-216.

Walter, M 2018, 'The voice of Indigenous data: beyond the markers of disadvantage', *Griffith Review*, no. 60, p. 256-263.

Walter, M & Suina, M 2023, 'Indigenous data, indigenous methodologies and indigenous data sovereignty', in S Swartz, N Singal & M Arnot (eds), *Educational Research Practice in Southern Contexts Recentring, Reframing and Reimagining Methodological Canons*, Routledge, p. 207-220.

Walter, M, Kukutai, T, Carroll, SR & Rodriguez-Lonebear, D 2021, *Indigenous data sovereignty and policy*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, Oxon UK, p. 244.

Wardle, D, McMillan, F & McMillan, M 2021, 'Fire, Stories and Health', in JC Spee, A McMurray & M McMillan (eds), *Clan and Tribal Perspectives on Social, Economic and Environmental Sustainability*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley UK, p. 159-168.

Watego, C 2021, *Another day in the colony*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Watson, I, 2016, 'First nations and the colonial project', *Inter Gentes The McGill Journal of International Law and Legal Pluralism*, vol. 1, iss. 1, p. 30-39.

Watson, I 2017, 'What is the Mainstream? The Laws of First Nations Peoples' in R Levy, M O'Brien, S Rice, P Ridge & M Thornton (eds), *New directions for law in Australia: essays in contemporary law reform*, ANU Press, Canberra.

Webster, N 2020, Fire Alliance Network series 'djamanj djamaga ganji, we talk good fire' series, webinar, Treading Lightly Incorporated, accessed on 2 February 2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXzwhYJVHrg&t=5s>>.

Webster, N, Bluff, L Moir, M, Marsh, J Teixeira, D Gray, J Rumpff, L Rogers, D Pascoe, B & Woinarski, J 2023, 'Of grief, spirit and hope: personal reflections of the 2019–20 wildfires', in L Rumpff, SM Legge, S van Leeuwen, BA Wintle & JCZ Woinarski (eds), *Australia's Megafires: Biodiversity Impacts and Lessons from 2019-2020*, CSIRO Publishing, p. 442-456.

Wegener, J 2019, 'Yorta Yorta Country: Build Traditional Practice In This Modern Day with Jess Wegener', 2019 NIFW, Dhungala, Firesticks Alliance, viewed on 2 February 2021, <<https://vimeo.com/356831984>>.

Wegener, J, Firesticks Alliance & Backbone Productions 2024, 'Jessica Wegener on the Firesticks Indigenous Fire and Land Management Mentoring Program', video, Firesticks and Backbone Productions, viewed on 2 November 2024, <<https://vimeo.com/951520916>>.

Wegener, J, Marchant, J & Cox, D 2021, 'Cultural burns connecting with the land', ABC Listen, Newcastle Breakfast, accessed on 25 May 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/newcastle-breakfast/cultural-burning/13358188>>.

Weir, JK 2023a, 'Expert knowledge, collaborative concepts, and universal nature: naming the place of Indigenous knowledge within a public-sector cultural burning program', *Ecology and Society*, vol. 28, iss. 1, no. 17, <<https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-13822-280117>>.

Weir, JK 2023b, 'Understanding cultural burns, ecological burns and hazard reduction burns', AFAC 2023 conference paper, <https://www.afac.com.au/docs/default-source/2023-Conference-proceedings/463-navigating-cultural-burns-ecological-burns-and-hazard-reduction-burns_jessica-weir.pdf>.

Weir, JK & Freeman, DH 2019, *Fire in the south: a cross-continental exchange*, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC Research Report, East Melbourne, Australia.

Weir, JK, Freeman, D & B Williamson (eds), 2021, *Cultural Burning in Southern Australia*, Report No. 687.2021, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.

Weir, JK, Morgain, R, Moon, K & Moggridge, BJ 2024, 'Centring Indigenous peoples in knowledge exchange research-practice by resetting assumptions, relationships and institutions', *Sustainability Science*, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 629-645.

Weir, J, Stacey, C, & Youngetob, K 2011, 'The benefits associated with caring for Country: literature review', AIATSIS, Canberra, p. 4.

Welch, JR, Brondizio, ES, Hetrick, SS & Coimbra Jr, CE 2013, 'Indigenous burning as conservation practice: Neotropical savanna recovery amid agribusiness deforestation in Central Brazil', *PloS one*, vol. 8, no. 12, p. e81226.

West, EG 2000, *An alternative to existing Australian research and teaching models—The Japanangka teaching and research paradigm—An Australian Aboriginal model*, Doctoral thesis, Southern Cross University.

Wettenhall, G 2020, 'Cultural burning as an agent of renewal', emPRESS Publishing, 4 March 2020, <<https://www.empresspublishing.com.au/cultural-burning.html>>.

WFRW (World Female Ranger Week) 2024, About Us, viewed on 2 February 2025, <<https://www.worldfemalerangerweek.org/about-wfrw/>>.

Whittaker, A 2020, (ed.), *Fire front: First Nations poetry and power today*, University of Queensland Press.

Whitinui, P 2014, 'Indigenous Autoethnography: Exploring, Engaging, and Experiencing "Self" as a Native Method of Inquiry', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 456-487.

Whyman, T, Murrup-Stewart, C, Young, M, Carter, A & Jobson, L 2023, '“Lateral violence stems from the colonial system”: settler-colonialism and lateral violence in Aboriginal Australians', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, p. 183-201.

Whyte, K 2017, 'Indigenous climate change studies: Indigenizing futures, decolonizing the Anthropocene', *English Language Notes*, vol. 55, iss. 1, p. 153-162.

Whyte, K, 2018, 'Settler colonialism, ecology, and environmental injustice', *Environment and Society*, vol. 9, iss. 1, p. 125-144.

Wikipedia 2023, *Pauline Hanson's One Nation* Wikipedia, viewed on 21 December 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pauline_Hanson%27s_One_Nation>.

Wildcat, DR 2010, *Red alert!: Saving the planet with indigenous knowledge*, Fulcrum Publishing. Arvada Colorado, p. 128.

Williamson, B 2021a, 'Cultural Burning in NSW: Challenges and Opportunities for Policy Makers and Aboriginal Peoples', Working Paper No. 139/2021, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, <<https://doi.org/10.25911/Q1PY-8E04>>.

Williamson, B, 2021b, 'Aboriginal community governance on the frontlines and faultlines in the Black Summer bushfires', Discussion Paper No. 300/2022, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, <<https://doi.org/10.25911/V482-AE70>>.

Williamson, B 2022a, 'Cultural burning and public forests: convergences and divergences between Aboriginal groups and forest management in south-eastern Australia', *Australian Forestry*, vol. 85, iss. 1, p. 1-5.

Williamson, B 2022b, 'Caring for Country means tackling the climate crisis with Indigenous leadership: 3 things the new government must do', *The Conversation*, June 1, 2022, viewed on 2 February 2025 <<https://theconversation.com/caring-for-country-means-tackling-the-climate-crisis-with-indigenous-leadership-3-things-the-new-government-must-do-183987>>.

Williamson, B, Markham, F & Weir, J 2020, 'Aboriginal peoples and the response to the 2019–2020 bushfires, Working Paper No. 134/2020', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra. <https://doi.org/10.25911/5e7882623186c>.

Williamson, B, Provost, S & Price, C 2023, 'Operationalising Indigenous data sovereignty in environmental research and governance', *EPF: Philosophy, Theory, Models, Methods and Practice*, vol. 2, iss. 1-2, p. 281-304.

Williamson, B, Weir, J & Cavanagh, V 2020a, 'Aboriginal people find strength despite perpetual grief', in P Anderson, S Gardner, P James & P Komesaroff (eds), *Continent Aflame: Responses to an Australian Catastrophe*, Palaver, Armadale.

Williamson B, Weir J, & Cavanagh, V 2020b, 'Strength from perpetual grief: how Aboriginal people experience the bushfire crisis'. *The Conversation*, volume 10 January 2020. <<https://theconversation.com/strength-from-perpetual-grief-how-aboriginalpeople-experience-the-bushfire-crisis-129448>>.

Wilson, RS, Pearce, T, Jones, K, Fleischfresser, S, Davis, B, Jones, G & Lieske, S 2018, 'Indigenous Land Management in Peri-Urban Landscapes: An Australian Example', *Society and Natural Resources*, vol. 31, no. 3, p. 335-350.

Wilson, S 2001, 'What is Indigenous research methodology?', *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 175-179.

Wilson, S 2008, 'Research is Ceremony – Indigenous Research Methods', Fernwood Press, Nova Scotia.

WNAC & DECC (Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Department of Environment and Climate Change), 2009, *Looking after Valley Arm: Management plan Valley Arm property, Paynes Crossing*, viewed on 2 Oct 2020, <<http://wonnarua.org.au/images/MANAGEMENT-PLAN-ValleyArm-WNAC.pdf>>.

Woinarski, JC & Recher, HF 1997, 'Impact and response: a review of the effects of fire on the Australian avifauna', *Pacific Conservation Biology*, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 183-205.

Woinarski, JC, Braby, MF, Burbidge, AA, Coates, D, Garnett, ST, Fensham, RJ, Legge, SM, McKenzie, NL, Silcock, JL & Murphy, BP 2019, 'Reading the black book: the number, timing, distribution and causes of listed extinctions in Australia', *Biological Conservation*, vol. 239, p. 108261.

Woinarski, JC, Burbidge, AA & Harrison, PL 2015, 'Ongoing unraveling of a continental fauna: decline and extinction of Australian mammals since European settlement', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 112, no. 15, p. 4531-4540.

Woinarski, JC, Zander, K & Garnett, S 2024, 'Fascinating and troubling': Australians would rather save a single human life than prevent an entire species from becoming extinct', *The Conversation*, 13 February 2024, viewed on 2 February 2025, <https://theconversation.com/fascinating-and-troubling-australians-would-rather-save-a-single-human-life-than-prevent-an-entire-species-from-becoming-extinct-222161?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR1sa1iyUWhaM4h5kq025iHHIA_MklfiKvnBD96ebWC_sxuxsx_kfeWL2HSY#Echobox=1707801571>.

Women in Fire Fighting Australia (WIFF) n.d, *The Amazons c1901–1903*, Women in Fire Fighting Australia – an archive, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<http://womeninfirefighting.blogspot.com/p/the-amazons-c1901-1903.html>>.

Wood, N, Beauman, M & Adams, P 2021, 'An indicative assessment of four key areas of climate risk for the 2021 NSW Intergenerational Report', TTRP21-05 Intergenerational Report Treasury Technical Research Paper Series, NSW Treasury April 2021.

Woodley, XM & Lockard, M 2016, 'Womanism and snowball sampling: Engaging marginalized populations in holistic research', *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 321-329.

Woodroffe, T, Wallace, R, Guthadjaka, K, Funk, J, Maypilama, EL, Ireland, S, Adair, R, Ober, R, Armstrong, S, Lowell, A & Pollard, K 2021, 'Indigenous women in science: A proposed framework for leadership, knowledge, innovation, and complexity', in WB James, C Cobanoglu & M Cavusoglu (eds), *Advances in global education and research*, vol. 4, p. 1-12.

Woodward, E 2023, 'Beauty beyond the Eye of the Beholder: The efficacy of Indigenous seasonal calendars in northern Australia', in P D'Arcy & DDDW Kuan (eds), *Islands of Hope: Indigenous Resource Management in a Changing Pacific*, ANU Press, p. 31.

Woodward, E, Hill, R, Harkness, P & R Archer (eds), 2020, *Our Knowledge Our Way in caring for Country: Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management. Best Practice Guidelines from Australian Experiences*, NAILSMA and CSIRO, Cairns, Australia.

Wright, A, Yap, M, Jones, R, Richardson, A, Davis, V & Lovett, R 2021, 'Examining the associations between Indigenous rangers, culture and wellbeing in Australia, 2018–2020', *International journal of environmental research and public health*, vol. 18, iss. 6, p. 3053.

WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) 2018, *Cultural Burning*, WWF, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://wwf.org.au/what-we-do/caring-on-country/cultural-burning/>>.

Yibarbuk D in Langton 1998, 'Burning questions: emerging environmental issues for Indigenous peoples in Northern Australia', *Chain Reaction*, Summer 1999/2000, vol. 81, p. 25-27.

Yibarbuk D & Ansell, J 2020, 'Fire management in Arnhem Land', in A Leavesley, M Wouters & R Thornton (eds), *Prescribed Burning in Australasia: The Science, Politics and Practice of Burning the Bush*, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, Melbourne, Victoria, p. 49-53.

Yibarbuk, D & Brann, M 2018, Indigenous ranger, Dean Yibarbuk recognised for contribution to conserving Arnhem Land, ABC: Northern Territory Country Hour, Tuesday 20 November 2018, viewed 14 May 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/nt-country-hour/dean-yibarbuk/10511788>>.

Yibarbuk, D & Cooke, P 2001, 'Bininj mak balanda kunwale manwurrk-ken', *Ngoonjook*, vol. 20, p. 33-37.

Yibarbuk, D, Whitehead, PJ, Russell-Smith, J, Jackson, D, Godjuwa, C, Fisher, A, Cooke, P, Choquenot, D & Bowman, DM 2001, 'Fire ecology and Aboriginal land management in central Arnhem Land, northern Australia: a tradition of ecosystem management', *Journal of Biogeography*, vol. 28, no. 3, p. 325-343.

Young, C, Pyke, J, Maharaj, N, Rasmussen, B & Jones, R 2018, *Diversity and inclusion: Building strength and capability literature review*, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

Yunkaporta, T & Moodie, D 2021, 'Thought ritual: An Indigenous data analysis method for research', in T McKenna, D Moodie & P Onesta (eds.), *Indigenous knowledges: Privileging our voices*, (Vol. 11), Brill, p. 87-96.

Zephier, S 2019, 'Women in The National Park Service: The Legacy of the Patriarchy', Honours Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Zhang, Y, Lim, S & Sharples, JJ 2017, 'Wildfire occurrence patterns in ecoregions of New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory, Australia', *Natural Hazards*, vol. 87, p. 415-435.

Zurba, M & Berkes, F 2014, 'Caring for country through participatory art: creating a boundary object for communicating Indigenous knowledge and values', *Local Environment*, vol. 19, iss. 8, p. 821-836.

Zylstra, P 2022, 'Bad fire science can kill our threatened species. It's time to cooperate with nature', *The Conversation*, December 14, 2022, viewed on 19 March 2025, <<https://theconversation.com/bad-fire-science-can-kill-our-threatened-species-its-time-to-cooperate-with-nature-196363>>.

Zylstra, PJ, Bradshaw, SD & Lindenmayer, DB 2022, 'Self-thinning forest understoreys reduce wildfire risk, even in a warming climate', *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 17, no. 4, p. 044022.

Zylstra, P, Wardell-Johnson, G, Falster, D, Howe, M, McQuoid, N & Neville, S 2023, 'Mechanisms by which growth and succession limit the impact of fire in a south-western Australian forested ecosystem', *Functional Ecology*, vol. 37, iss. 5, p. 1350-1365.

APPENDICES 12

12:1 TERMINOLOGY / GLOSSARY

12.1.1 Key concepts

Aboriginal / Indigenous / First Nations. This thesis uses Aboriginal to refer to the First Peoples of what is now known as NSW, Australia. Beyond NSW, the labels: *First Peoples*, *Indigenous* and *First Nations* are used interchangeably to identify the broader cultural groups of First Peoples from what is now known as Australia, as well as First Peoples from other countries. I use local Nation names where that information has been identified by an individual or community. I acknowledge that people may also use locally specific terminology, including regionally specific and words from local Indigenous languages to describe themselves. I acknowledge that terminology can be political and fraught with colonial complexity (HealthInfoNet n.d, Pearson 2021).

New South Wales (NSW). This research focusses on the place now known as *New South Wales* (NSW), Australia. The phrase ‘now known as’ acknowledges that names such as *Australia* and *New South Wales* are colonial products that are politically perverse. As a starting point, this thesis recognises that the use of such names (without this acknowledgement) lends power to maintaining colonial regimes and may be perceived as supporting ‘the validity of Australia’s alleged legitimacy as a sovereign nation’ without challenge, which is untrue. Much has been debated about the appropriateness of such names (Buchan 2017, Pearson 2021). Furthermore, the geographical expanse of some Aboriginal Nations exists across the borders of the nation-state, therefore although the focus of this research is NSW, some Aboriginal Nations extend into other adjacent jurisdictions. For example, Murawari Aboriginal Nation sits across both NSW and QLD.

Country. All of Australia, including what is now known as NSW, is Indigenous land, known within Aboriginal contexts as Country (AIATSIS 2022). Country is the lands, waters, skies and cosmic environments. Across the continent there are hundreds of diverse Indigenous nations which are geographically, linguistically and culturally distinct each holding relationality with Country based on Indigenous perspectives, laws and custom (Weir, Stacey & Youngetob 2011). This relational attachment includes inherited responsibilities to care for Country (Weir, Stacey & Youngetob 2011). At least 50 distinct Aboriginal nations exist across NSW. Each Country is recognised through its commonly understood boundaries, features, membership, relationships and responsibilities to

neighbouring Country. This requires governance, diplomacy, sustainable practices and scientific understandings of the ecosystems of each nation, as well as the complex webs of connections between and across species, peoples, time and places (Songlines). Country is foundational to Indigenous identity and Indigenous knowledge of Country including knowledge of fire, has been maintained and transmitted for millennia through Indigenous forms of storytelling (Reconciliation NSW 2020). Indigenous relationality as a way to be with and care for Country is becoming widely acknowledged, as shown by Johnson and others (2014, p. 13) who summarise ‘Indigenous peoples have been employing systematic methods for learning and teaching about the natural world for thousands of years.’ Country is the centre of all life, the primary provider, teacher and authority. Country is the primary boss and Elder (Steffensen 2020, p. 146). Country exists at all times and locations, despite the histories that have shaped and changed the form of Country, including through the establishment of ‘Australia’ as the nation-state. Beginning in NSW, European invasion of Australia resulted in the forced displacement and upheaval of Indigenous peoples from traditional landscapes. This disrupted knowledge systems that had successfully sustained Indigenous peoples for millennia. This disruption has been through physical displacement from lands, oppression, the denigration of culture as well as the decimation of human populations by disease, extermination and Stolen Generations (Atkinson 2002, Behrendt 2021, Watego 2021). European invasion has changed the landscape and impacted on fire regimes (Clarkson et al. 2017, Fletcher, Hall & Alexandra 2020, Laming et al. 2022, Mariani et al. 2022, 2024). Western science categorises the landscapes of NSW into 18 bioregions with biomes ranging across a variety of zones including temperate forests, arid, alpine, woodlands and rainforest (BOM 2020b, SoE 2021).

Connection to Country. Indigenous peoples’ bloodline connection to Country is a universal theme across Australia. Indigenous people hold long-standing, strong cultural understandings, relationality and deep respect for Country which is a process that has sustained cultural groups for millennia. Indigenous peoples of Australia are the longest continuing cultures on Earth and have been here since the first sunrise. Western science confirms Aboriginal occupation of Australia to at least 65,000 years (Clarkson et al. 2017, Malaspinas et al. 2016, McNiven et al. 2018). This longevity supports a deep, intimate and complex connection to Country (Arabena 2020, Langton 2021). Indigenous relationships with Country engage place-based knowledges of spirituality, science, education, medicine, technology, law, art, performance, diplomatic societies, cultural identity, health and wellbeing. Moreton-Robinson discusses that Indigenous people have deeply spiritual connections with Country that she describes as our ‘ontological belonging’ (Moreton-Robinson 2003). As an example of connection to Country, I am a Bundjalung and Wonnarua woman, I come from and belong to both Bundjalung and Wonnarua Country through my ancestry. The relatedness between me and Country exists within me and it is my ‘connection to Country’. Connection to Country is activated through Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing (Martin 2008, Moreton-Robinson 2013). Connection to Country can be activated, nurtured

and supported through caring for Country including with fire, which also supports positive wellbeing (Tynan 2021).

Care/Caring for Country. Caring for Country is defined as the activation of Indigenous knowledge systems to optimise and maintain healthy, sustainable landscapes and ecosystems through relationships of co-existence (Arabena 2020, Baker, Davies & Young 2001, Langton 1998). Cultural burning is one way to care for Country (Costello 2020, Steffensen 2020, Williamson 2022a). Torres Strait Islander and Merriam woman Professor Kerry Arabena defines caring for Country ‘as having knowledge, a sense of responsibility and an inherent right to be involved in the management of traditional lands...with the objective of promoting ecological and human health’ (Arabena 2020, p. 47). Similarly, cultural burning facilitator, co-founder of Firesticks Alliance and Bundjalung man, Oliver Costello says ‘Caring for Country can be understood as maintaining the interconnected relationships (kinships) between all elements and beings’ (Costello 2020, p. 66). Caring for Country nurtures relationships and connections between places, people and spirit, it involves not only caring for landscapes, but also the kin and people of that landscape (Arabena 2020; Tynan 2025, Weir et al. 2011). The process of caring for Country engages Indigenous knowledge systems which are cyclical, complex and comprehensive, thus it often involves features which are not present in Western land management, such as ceremonial practices and cultural protocols linked to Traditional Owner status. Indigenous philosophies inform that people and Country are intertwined, people are and are shaped by Country (Graham & Maloney 2019). Commonly this is translated in terms of health where the health of people is reflected by the health of Country (Burgess et al. 2009, Taylor-Bragge, Whyman & Jobson 2021). Where Country and people are unhealthy it is because this relationship has been disrupted such as the impacts of colonisation that have displaced people from Country and restricted caring for Country practice (Country Needs People, 2023, O’Leary & Walter 2018, Steffensen 2020). Prior to colonisation, Country and Aboriginal people coexisted in ways that maintained biologically rich, healthy and diverse ecosystems, including sustainable human societies for millennia. This research intentionally acknowledges several important distinctions between Indigenous caring for Country and Western approaches of land management. By acknowledging and defining the difference between Indigenous ‘care/caring for Country’ and Western ‘land management’, I am acknowledging and centring the philosophies and relationships that weave Indigenous people with Country (Steffensen 2020, Williamson 2020). Caring for Country is more than an ecological or biophysical exercise and it is more than viewing land management through an Indigenous lens (Altman & Whitehead 2003, Arabena 2020, Burgess et al. 2009, Weir, Stacey & Youngetob 2011, Woodward et al. 2020). Indigenous culture accurately positions humans as being and situated within Country. Caring for Country processes are not detrimentally extractive or exploitative, rather they are sustainable, holistic and reciprocal.

Land Management. To *manage* something establishes a hierarchy where one entity is in charge of or has power or control over another entity (Oxford Languages 2022). Western approaches regard humans as separate and superior to nature, where nature is a resource that humans have power and authority over (Castree 2005, Colchester, 2003; Johnston et al. 2004, Schultz 2002). Where Indigenous people carry-out Western land management, that activity remains Western, the insertion of Indigenous bodies into Western practice does not change the underlying paradigm, however those Indigenous people retain their sovereign relationality and connection with Country. The concept of managing Country is not an accurate or appropriate reflection of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Country, it does not suit the ethos of Indigenous caring for Country or cultural burning (Williamson 2022a). From an Indigenous perspective Country holds power, and our human roles are/should be as custodians with responsibilities to take care of Country. trawlwulwuy⁵² woman, scholar and cultural burning participant Dr Lauren Tynan (2021) writes that ‘Cultural burning is not about management, which implies a hierarchy of beings in which humans are seen to have sole authority over the land’ (Tynan 2021, p. 602). A view supported by Euahlayi man, scholar and cultural burning practitioner Dr Bhiemie Williamson who writes ‘When considering the gamut of considerations and activities that make up cultural burning, ‘management’ is an impoverished concept. How might the stewardship of public forests change if the agencies shifted conceptions of management to nurturing, listening and responding’ (Williamson 2022a p. 3). The authority bestowed to Western management of nature is problematic, first because Western theories, practices and beliefs contrast to Indigenous caring for Country worldviews and philosophies. Second, because they are failing to achieve broad environmental benefits, as evidenced by the progress reports of national programs like the State of the Environment and Closing the Gap, as well as international reports from the IPCC (Commonwealth of Australia 2024, Cresswell, Janke & Johnson 2021, IPCC 2023, Janke 2021a, Samuel 2020, Henry et al. 2023).

Two-way / Two-toolbox / cross-cultural / right-way conservation or science. Refers to collaboration between Western environmental conservation approaches and Indigenous caring for Country approaches. These bring together both Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge and skills, hence the two-toolboxes (Yibarbuk & Cooke 2001). Two-way conservation in broader environmental conservation programs (beyond fire management) has been developing over decades and have been found to enhance environmental outcomes, create positive personal cultural impacts for Aboriginal people as well as positive learning and development outcomes across all participants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous (Ens 2012, Ens et al. 2012, McKemey et al. 2019, Yibarbuk & Cooke 2001). As the mainstream environmental conservation sector has developed its understanding, support and application of Aboriginal caring for Country approaches, this supports increased opportunities for

⁵² Tynan (2020, p. 169) explains that words such as trawlwulwuy, tebrakunna country and mannalargenna are in lower case, as these are the print-based conventions of many Tasmanian ancestral languages.

cultural burning. Two-way models of Indigenous focussed research have been explored by Indigenous geographers who find that Indigenous approaches find more accurate outcomes and that further development is needed (Johnson, Pualani Louis and Kliskey 2014). A criticism of two-way conservation is that Government retains ultimate decision-making power and control, therefore the influence of the colonial political history means that significant power-imbalances exist. Often this means Indigenous knowledge is marginalised as complementary to Western knowledge rather than primary. Scholars argue that very little serious attention has been paid to rectifying the power imbalance beyond activities that supplement dominant Western conservation models (Fache 2014, Fache & Moizo 2015, Thomassin et al. 2018, Howitt et al. 2013, Langton 1998, Lilleyman et al. 2022). It also means that partnerships are hampered by funding and election cycles and priorities (Fache 2014, Fache & Moizo 2015, Weir 2023a, Williamson 2021a).

Colonial load / Cultural load. Aboriginal people often experience social expectations of undertaking additional work and carrying additional burdens due to their cultural identity. This is commonly referred to as ‘colonial load’ or ‘cultural load’. As the load comes from the colonising entity, not the cultural (Indigenous) entity, there is a strong and valid push to frame this concept as *colonial* load rather than *cultural* load to acknowledge where the burden occurs (Andrew 2024). Colonial load can include requests and expectations upon Indigenous people to: provide Indigenous knowledge, expertise and services; to educate others about Indigenous people, Indigenous matters and racism; to provide insights on behalf of all Indigenous people; to be available to listen to other’s opinions of Indigenous matters and racism; as well as additional cultural responsibilities that exist outside of the workplace that form and inform an Indigenous person’s capabilities (Australian Government 2023). The colonial load also refers to the influence of past government policies and structures that continue to (negatively) impact on Indigenous peoples in current society, the impacts of which are compounded by systemic racism and discrimination (Andrew 2024).

Mother. Aboriginal people often describe Country as ‘Mother’. The inscription of Country as ‘Mother’ places the Earth as female and Elder. This gendering of Earth occurs in wider society where the terms ‘Mother Earth’ and ‘Mother Nature’ are commonplace. This reference to gender is relevant to this research which also focusses on the role of women in caring for Country (Earth). Aboriginal people’s reference to Country as ‘Mother’ recognises that Country provides all that we need to maintain flourishing societies. It also reflects the level of respect that Aboriginal people hold for Country.

Old People. The phrase ‘Old People’ commonly refers to Aboriginal people who experienced a strong Aboriginal cultural upbringing, and whose experiences of ‘normal’ life were less impacted by colonisation and contemporary society. It can also be used to refer to Aboriginal Elders who have passed away.

Western fire management. Western fire management is used in this thesis to categorise the mainstream fire processes and institutions (predominantly NSW Government). These processes, institutions and approaches are Western constructs founded in Western science⁵³ which is positivist, reductionist, Eurocentric and patriarchal. Although the thesis discussion often focusses on Western fire management, the arguments are relevant also to environmental conservation agencies.

Fire is a natural feature of the Australian landscape. The forests of NSW have evolved with fire over millions of years (Bradstock, Gill & Williams 2012, CSIRO 2021). Fires are ignited by lightning or humans (Fletcher et al. 2021a, Gammage 2011, Morgan et al. 2020). Fire is vital for the health of Country because many species rely on fire for parts of their life cycle, some species have unique relationships with fire (Bonta et al. 2017, Nimmo et al. 2021, Pausas & Parr 2018). For example, in northern Australia, birds commonly referred to as *firehawks* understand and use fire by relocating burning branches to intentionally spread fire, to optimise their foraging (Bonta et al. 2017, Nicholas 2018). Fires will always occur and this must be supported. Humans must find ways to improve our relationships with fire as climate change impacts increase (Bowman & Lehman 2020, Williamson 2021a, Stoof & Kettridge 2022). Fires that are ignited by humans, are either authorised or unauthorised. Unauthorised fire activities are either arson or accidental. Arson is a criminal offense that carries significant penalty and not the focus of this research (RFS n.d. [b]). Accidental ignition can occur from escaped campfires or pile burns, discarded litter (cigarettes, glass), or they can originate from malfunctioning power lines, agricultural activity or industrial equipment.

12.1.2 Types of fire

Landscape-scale fires. This thesis focusses on landscape-scale fires ignited by humans, or through natural processes such as lightning. Landscape-scale fires are those which burn across a landscape, as opposed to fires that are contained (such as a campfire or pile burn). Landscape-scale fires include bushfires, prescribed burns and cultural burning. A naming convention for the types of fires that occur in NSW is not widely established, and there is diverse terminologies and objectives of fires. Often fire terminology is misused and/or misunderstood by the general public. The following terms are used in this thesis:

⁵³ I acknowledge that *science* is a form of inquiry and does not belong to any one social group (Gorelick 2014). My use of *Western science* does not imply that science belongs to, or originates from Western cultures. Rather I use Western science to demarcate between Indigenous sciences and non-Indigenous sciences which in the Australian experience, are colonial and Eurocentric.

Cultural Burning. Aboriginal peoples' engagement with landscape-scale fires is called cultural burning where it is undertaken within an Aboriginal paradigm as a caring for Country activity. Cultural burning is different to the fires applied through Western fire management processes. Although all peoples and organisations including Western fire management agencies have their own culture and cultural practices, non-Indigenous cultural practices of fire are not included as cultural burning in this research.

Bushfires. Uncontrolled landscape-scale fires are referred to as bushfires, this definition includes uncontrolled grassfires. Bushfires might be known as wildfires or forest fires in other jurisdictions, they may also be classified as 'out-of-control' fires. bushfire ignition is from lightning or humans (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, Read, Duff & Taylor 2018, Syphard & Keeley 2015). In extreme events, bushfires create their own weather systems, where pyrocumulonimbus thunderstorms produce dry lightning, this can ignite new fires (Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020, Nguyen et al. 2020). Bushfires cause damage to the environment, and they can impact humans and damage assets causing significant costs (increased morbidity, increased carbon released into atmosphere, negative impacts to health and wellbeing, increased financial burdens, negative impacts on ecosystem services, and loss of public amenity).

Prescribed Burns/ Prescribed Fire. Fires that are intentionally applied under official Western fire management processes are called prescribed burn / prescribed fire. Undertaken in accordance with the NSW legislation, prescribed burning includes fires undertaken by fire authorities or fires undertaken by landholders/managers under the patronage of a fire authority. Pyne (2006) describes that prescribed burns are undertaken intentionally and for specific purposes, thus they are fires that occur from human choice, as opposed to natural chance. Because cultural burning is a fire that is intentional, it could also be included in the definition of a prescribed burn, however for the purpose of this research cultural burning is separate from prescribed burning. Some prescribed burns are undertaken to reduce 'fuel' or biomass. Referred to as *hazard reduction* these may also be known as *burn-off*. Some prescribed burns are undertaken with the aim to encourage the health of a specific species, referred to as *ecological burn/fire* these may also be known as *habitat burn* or *regeneration burn* (Institute of Foresters Australia 2019, Morgan et al. 2020). During bushfire events, Western fire management may deploy a responsive strategy whereby a separate fire is ignited to undermine the approaching bushfire by reducing the available fuels. This is referred to as *back-burn* (Institute of Foresters Australia 2019, Morgan et al. 2020). Prescribed burns may be described as being 'under-control', they may also be called *controlled burn* or *planned burn* (Institute of Foresters Australia 2019, Morgan et al. 2020). Some prescribed fires become 'out-of-control', at which point they are then categorised as bushfire. There are other types of

landscape-scale fires which are not included in this research, such as the fires undertaken for farming, agricultural purposes, land clearing and silviculture.

Cool Burn or Ecological Burn. Where Western fire management undertakes a prescribed burn which aims to optimise the health of specific species, these are referred to as *ecological burns*. Often ecological burns are fires with a cool or low intensity and are described as cool burning. The term ‘cool burn’ however, is also used by some people to name what this thesis defines as cultural burning. The form of an ecological burn is generally similar to cultural burning however, ecological burning and cultural burning are philosophically and methodologically distinct and they do not necessarily hold similar objectives. Cultural burning is an Aboriginal practice set within Aboriginal paradigms and protocols, whereas ecological burns are a component of Western fire management which is set within Eurocentric and Western paradigms. The application of ecological burning by agencies is sometimes considered a ‘workaround’ that agencies employ to undertake a burn that is very similar to cultural burning but requires no input or engagement with local Aboriginal people. As discussed in Chapter Nine: *Barriers*, this workaround is a form of appropriation that angers people because it undermines Aboriginal people and culture, as well as curtailing potential cross-cultural progress and development. Additionally, some cultural burns have only gained the approvals required under Western fire management processes because they were categorised as an ecological burn and only then deemed appropriate (by Western authorities). Although in this scenario, this loophole has allowed for the cultural burn to proceed, the use of a loophole to achieve the approval, undermines Aboriginal people, authority, culture, knowledge and practice, and indicates that cultural burning is not valid in its own right. This is an example of cultural burning being forced to operate on the periphery of Western fire management, and it indicates the need to update how fire processes are understood and governed in NSW.

Landscape-Scale Fires. This research focusses on fires that burn across areas of the landscape, predominantly this occurs in non-urban areas. The types of fires discussed in this research burn across landscapes, even though cultural burning is not concerned with the measure of area burnt and cultural burning can be small in terms of area compared to Western fire management burning. There are other types of fires that occur in the landscape which are not the focus of this research including: pile burning, campfires, agricultural and silviculture fires. This research does not focus on structural fires (the burning of buildings or structures).

12.2 UOW HREC ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

HREC Approval of Application 2019/312

irma-support@uow.edu.au

To:Michael Adams

Cc:Vanessa Cavanagh;Laura Hammersley;Michael Adams;+1 other

Wed 18/09/2019 2:48 PM

Dear Associate Professor Adams,

I am pleased to advise that the application detailed below has been **approved**.

Ethics Number: 2019/312

Approval Date: 18/09/2019

Expiry Date: 17/09/2020

Project Title: Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW

Researcher/s: Cavanagh Vanessa; Hammersley Laura; Adams Michael

Documents	Initial	Ethics	Application	V1	-	31072019
Approved:	Response	to	Review	V1	-	13092019
	Draft	Protocol	V1	-		31072019
	Information	Sheet	V1	-		31072019
	Interview	Questions	V1	-		31072019
	Introduction	Letter	attachment	V1	-	31072019
	Letter	to	Senior Women	V1	-	31072019
	Letter	of	Support KCFSAC	V1	-	31072019
	Support	email	Firesticks Alliance	V1	-	31072019
	Support	Email	[Name Withheld]	V1	-	31072019
	Support	Email	Pejar LALC	V2	-	13092019

Sites:

Site	Principal Investigator for Site

University of Wollongong	Associate Professor Michael Adams and Ms Vanessa Cavanagh
Various indoor and outdoor public locations	Vanessa Cavanagh

The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document. Compliance is monitored through progress reports; the HREC may also undertake physical monitoring of research.

Approval is granted for a twelve month period; extension of this approval will be considered on receipt of a progress report **prior to the expiry date**. Extension of approval requires:

- The submission of an annual progress report and a final report on completion of your project.
- Approval by the HREC of any proposed changes to the protocol or investigators.
- Immediate report of serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants.
- Immediate report of unforeseen events that might affect the continued acceptability of the project.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process or your ongoing approval please contact the Ethics Unit on 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Barkus

Associate Professor Emma Barkus,

Chair, UOW & ISLHD Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee

The University of Wollongong and Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health District Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research

12.3 CONSENT FORM

This protocol⁵⁴ are the rules that Vanessa will follow in undertaking research with:
[PARTICIPANT]

1. These rules are to be followed
2. This page is just the main points, detailed information is available on pages 2-7
3. Aboriginal people own their knowledge
4. Aboriginal culture must be respected
5. This research is done in a respectful and ethical way
6. [PARTICIPANT] must feel like the research is beneficial
7. [PARTICIPANT] must feel like the research is useful to them &/or society
8. The research must not hurt or shame individual people, Aboriginal people or culture generally
9. [PARTICIPANT] can say NO or can withdraw from the research if they choose to
10. Everyone involved needs to understand what the research is about
11. Sometimes knowledge cannot be shared
12. Vanessa must check back with [PARTICIPANT], that the information that [PARTICIPANT] shares with Vanessa is OK to be used in the research before it gets used, this includes photographs, stories, quotes, or research notes
13. Regarding [PARTICIPANT]'s information, [PARTICIPANT] needs to say what is or isn't OK to be used
14. Vanessa must look after the information [PARTICIPANT] provides and keep it safe
15. Vanessa must acknowledge [PARTICIPANT] as a participant in the research whenever she formally writes or presents about the research
16. Vanessa cannot use [PARTICIPANT]'s information for her commercial gain
17. Vanessa must keep [PARTICIPANT] informed about the research progress
18. [PARTICIPANT] knows who they can contact if they are not happy with Vanessa or her research
19. [PARTICIPANT] and Vanessa will complete the checklist & sign these protocols

Project Title: Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW

Researcher: Vanessa Cavanagh, PhD student (supervisors: Associate Professor Michael Adams & Dr. Laura Hammersley)

Collaborating Entities: [PARTICIPANT] & University of Wollongong (UOW)

Purpose of this document. The key purpose of this research protocol is to outline how Vanessa and [PARTICIPANT] will engage in Vanessa's PhD research project ('the research'), in a way that recognises and respects 'Indigenous peoples' inherent rights 'to full and fair participation in any processes, projects and activities that impact on them, and the right to control and maintain their culture and heritage' (AIATSIS 2012:3). This may also be known as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property or ICIP (Kearney and Janke 2018).

What about Intellectual Property and Copyright? Intellectual property and copyright need special attention in research with Indigenous people. Intellectual property and copyright is very important, this is recognised by leading Indigenous research bodies like AIATSIS, and Indigenous legal people like Terri Janke and Company. Participants in research need to be aware that in knowledge research projects such as this one, the Australian law falls short of protecting traditional knowledge (oral history) effectively. In response to this shortfall, these research protocols have been written. These protocols provide a clear outline for how the research will be undertaken. Although copyright protects the written documents, such as Vanessa's PhD thesis, other people can read the thesis or other reports/publications that Vanessa writes, and use the content of the information for their ideas and future work (Janke 2009:6, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences 2016: 8). It is important that participants are aware of these issues, and that any information that they approve for Vanessa to use, will be accessible for others to read and use.

⁵⁴ The information on this page was adapted from AIATSIS website link: Orr M, Kenny P, Gorey IN, Dixon T, Mir A, Cox E, Wilson J. 2009. Aboriginal Knowledge and Intellectual Property Protocol: Community Guide. 2nd Edition. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs <http://www.nintione.com.au/resource/Aboriginal-Knowledge-and-IP-Protocol-Community-Guide-booklet-A5.pdf>

[PARTICIPANT] will have the opportunity to review the information they provide for the research, and decided if the information that Vanessa wants to include in her research is OK to be used. Additionally, in her thesis and any other reports/publications, Vanessa will attribute [PARTICIPANT] and the participants appropriately. Vanessa will provide [PARTICIPANT] with copies of the interview transcript, final thesis, any publications from the research. Vanessa and [PARTICIPANT] may decide to co-author a publication or conference presentation, where copyright will be shared. Vanessa and her supervisors are responsible for monitoring the research to keep it 'on-track'.

What is the research about? There has been a recent increase of Aboriginal people in NSW using cultural burning (fire) in caring for Country and environmental management activities. This research asks if Aboriginal women are, or want to be, involved in this process, and what are some of the complexities and challenges regarding their involvement.

Who is involved in the research? The research is being conducted by Vanessa Cavanagh. Vanessa is a PhD student at the University of Wollongong, for the period of 2018 to 2020. Vanessa's supervisors are Associate Professor Michael Adams, and Dr. Laura Hammersley. The research is linked to state government through the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH), and the research receives financial support from the Bushfire Risk Management Research Hub hosted within UOW. [PARTICIPANT] is participating as a research collaborator. [PARTICIPANT] will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Additionally, [PARTICIPANT] might suggest other Aboriginal women to participate.

Why has [PARTICIPANT] considered participating? [PARTICIPANT] is participating because...[PARTICIPANT]'s TO SELECT/ADD/DELETE PREFERENCE HERE *they want to maintain Aboriginal culture. [PARTICIPANT]'s wants to encourage more Aboriginal women to participate in cultural burning. [PARTICIPANT]'s wants to highlight the cultural roles that Aboriginal women have. [PARTICIPANT]'s is participating in this research to promote the centrality of Aboriginal women's voices. [PARTICIPANT] believes that this research topic is important, and additionally, that it is research being undertaken by Aboriginal women with Aboriginal women, meaning that integrity is maintained.* Engaging with the research may facilitate these goals.

What if [PARTICIPANT] changes her mind? [PARTICIPANT] is aware that she can withdraw from this collaboration, and it won't change the relationship with Vanessa or anyone else. If [PARTICIPANT] does decide to withdraw from the research ideally this will be done in writing (email or letter) however verbal notification from a [PARTICIPANT] will be accepted – if this occurs Vanessa or her supervisors will email [PARTICIPANT] to confirm that withdrawal is occurring. If [PARTICIPANT] does decide to withdraw from the research, it would be advantageous for this to occur by a set date agreed upon by [PARTICIPANT] and Vanessa. The suggested date is 3 months after the formal data collection phase; and no more than 4 weeks after Vanessa has provided a copy of [PARTICIPANT]'s contribution to Vanessa's PhD thesis.

What will Vanessa do? Vanessa will conduct a semi-structured interview with [PARTICIPANT]. Vanessa will seek permission for the semi-structured interview to be photographed and recorded, either by audiotape or handwritten notes (this may involve a research assistant to help Vanessa so she isn't trying to talk and write at the same time). Vanessa will send the complete transcript of the semi-structured interview back to [PARTICIPANT] for review and approval. Vanessa is responsible for maintaining communication with [PARTICIPANT] to check that the research involvement with them remains on track. Vanessa is responsible for providing [PARTICIPANT] a copy of [PARTICIPANT]' contribution to the final thesis and any other subsequent publications. Vanessa will participate in cultural burning activities to continue the maintenance and caring for Country, as well as undertaking participant observation, auto-ethnography. Vanessa will promote the principles of cultural burning in her research, presentations and publications. If Vanessa takes a leave of absence from the research, she must advise [PARTICIPANT] within 4 weeks of making that decision and discuss, if possible, her return date and plan.

What will [PARTICIPANT] do? [PARTICIPANT] will develop these research protocols with Vanessa as an important step in the research. [PARTICIPANT] will participate in a semi-structured interview. Within 4 weeks of receiving the semi-structured interview transcript, [PARTICIPANT] will review the transcript, and advise Vanessa if they have been accepted, or if other actions are required. If no response is received from [PARTICIPANT] regarding the transcripts, initial consent is upheld and the transcripts are to be considered 'reviewed and approved' by [PARTICIPANT] and acceptable for use by Vanessa. There might be further developments of these research protocols in the future if circumstances change. Any changes would need to be negotiated and agreed upon by [PARTICIPANT] and Vanessa.

When will this occur? The research will happen between March 2019 (when Vanessa presented at the OEH Aboriginal network meeting at Yarramundi, NSW) and will formally conclude by the time Vanessa submits her PhD thesis and it is accepted (December 2020).

How much time will the semi-structured interviews take? The semi-structured interviews may take up about 1-2 hours depending on the flow of conversation. Following the semi-structured interview, [PARTICIPANT] will be

sent the transcript for review, if further actions are required there may be follow up meetings which may take up to 1 hour.

Will [PARTICIPANT] get paid to participate in the research? [PARTICIPANT] will not be paid, however [PARTICIPANT] and Vanessa will decide on an appropriate reciprocity (giving-back) process.

Vanessa is already 'giving back' in these ways:

- By promoting Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW through the development of the PhD (including publications and presentations);
- Vanessa is formally mentoring an Aboriginal woman in the early stages of her career, this mentoring is facilitated through UOW.
- Vanessa sits on the OEH Cultural Burning working group and Work Package 5 working group; and
- By promoting Indigenous perspectives, engagement and success in her teaching, working and personal life.

The details of any other specific reciprocity are to be developed and determined during the research as agreed upon by [PARTICIPANT] and Vanessa. Some other actions [PARTICIPANT] might request that Vanessa do is:

- Co-authors a publication with [PARTICIPANT];
- [PARTICIPANT] might want to use these research protocols as a foundation for developing their own research protocols; Or
- [PARTICIPANT] might request that Vanessa give a free talk to local (school⁵⁵/Aboriginal) groups about her career, PhD, or other topics.

What will happen to the information? The information from the semi-structured interview may be used in Vanessa's PhD thesis, and may also be used in reports or publications that Vanessa develops. [PARTICIPANT] needs to be sure that the information provided to Vanessa, is OK to be shared with the wider public. If there is information shared with Vanessa, that is not suitable for sharing with the general public, needs to be brought to Vanessa's attention, so she can quarantine that information. [PARTICIPANT] will have the opportunity to review the information from the semi-structured interview when Vanessa reports back.

Will [PARTICIPANT]'s identity be confidential or publicised? You can choose to be identified or participate anonymously. To achieve this your name will be replaced with a pseudonym (fake name). People may be identifiable in photographs. Vanessa will ask if it is OK to take photos and abide by anyone who does not want to be photographed. Everyone needs to know that it's OK to say NO to photographs.

What are the potential risks? The topics in these discussions may make participants feel anxious or upset because it relates to Aboriginal culture and the impacts of colonisation. If you feel upset you should talk to someone about your feelings and get help if needed. You can ask for help from your GP, Aboriginal Medical Service, or contact services like Lifeline 131144.

What about data storage? During the project, the data will be stored on a password protected computer. Only Vanessa knows the password. Any hard copies of information will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university where Vanessa works, and only Vanessa will have the key. The information will be kept for a minimum of 5 years then it will be destroyed.

What about culturally restricted information? Although it is not the intention of this research to seek out culturally restricted or sensitive information, if such information is shared in the semi-structured interview, a discussion on whether it should be removed from the recordings and the research needs to occur. Additionally, permission must be sought from the right people before culturally sensitive information can be included in the research. [PARTICIPANT] will facilitate this process if the situation arises.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. The semi-structured interview will involve Aboriginal women over the age of 18 years who provide their free, prior and informed consent.

Contact. Questions about the research can be directed to Vanessa on

Complaints. Complaints about the research can be directed to:

Vanessa's supervisors: Michael Adams madams@uow.edu.au 0242214284 Laura Hammersley lauraham@uow.edu.au 0242218016	University of Wollongong Graduate Research School (02 4221 5452) University of Wollongong Research Services office (02 4221 3386)

Ethics Committee Clearance. In addition to these research protocols, the ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee **2019/312**.

⁵⁵ Vanessa has her Working With Children Check authorisation number WWC1188171E.

Checklist for Participants

Project Title: Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW

Researcher: Vanessa Cavanagh, PhD student at UOW (supervisors: Michael Adams & Laura Hammersley)

Collaborating Entities: [PARTICIPANT] & University of Wollongong (UOW).

1. I understand what this research is about	Yes ☐	No ☐
2. I voluntarily agree to my participation in this research	Yes ☐	No ☐
3. I understand that I can withdraw from the research	Yes ☐	No ☐
4. I understand what will happen to me during the research project as it has been explained to me	Yes ☐	No ☐
5. I agree that Vanessa Cavanagh can talk with me for the purpose of her research, including in a semi-structured interview, or other discussion	Yes ☐	No ☐
6. I consent to a semi-structured interview being audio taped or recorded for the purpose of Vanessa's research	Yes ☐	No ☐
7. I agree to photographs being taken of this a semi-structured interview for the purpose of Vanessa's research	Yes ☐	No ☐
8. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation as explained to me	Yes ☐	No ☐
9. I understand the potential risks & possible benefits of participating in this research as has been explained to me	Yes ☐	No ☐
10. I understand that the information developed from this research may be published in Vanessa's PhD thesis and other reports/publications.	Yes ☐	No ☐
11. I agree that Vanessa will provide [PARTICIPANT] with a copy of the semi-structured interview transcript and [PARTICIPANT]'s contributions to the thesis, so [PARTICIPANT] can review them and either approve them for Vanessa to use, or advise if further action or discussion is required.	Yes ☐	No ☐
12. I agree that my name, and other relevant information (e.g. [PARTICIPANT], position or Aboriginal Nation) may be included in the publications that come out of this research.	Yes ☐	No ☐ I want a fake name used
13. I understand that all information gathered in this research will be kept secure for a minimum 5 years at the University of Wollongong.	Yes ☐	No ☐
14. I understand Vanessa will give [PARTICIPANT] a copy of the publications that are produced as a result of this research.	Yes ☐	No ☐
15. I understand that under Australian law, Vanessa will own copyright of her thesis. Once the research is published it means that other people can read and use the words and ideas in the thesis without asking for permission from [PARTICIPANT] first. They will need to cite Vanessa as the author.	Yes ☐	No ☐
16. I understand that Vanessa will acknowledge the participants in her research, this will include attribution, for example: <i>The author acknowledges</i> [PARTICIPANT] in the thesis and any publications produced as a result of this research. This means that Vanessa cannot reproduce the information that is in the thesis in other places for other purposes without acknowledging [PARTICIPANT].	Yes ☐	No ☐

Signatures

Participant to complete:

- I have read these protocols, or someone has read it to me in language I understand, and I agree with it.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Please email me a copy of this form at this email: _____

Researcher to complete:

- I have described the nature of the research to the Participant and I believe that she understood and agreed to it.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Contact details

[PARTICIPANT] contact details	Vanessa Cavanagh (M) vanessa@uow.edu.au School of Geography & Sustainable Communities University of Wollongong NSW 2522
Vanessa's supervisors: Michael Adams madams@uow.edu.au (W) 0242214284 Laura Hammersley lauraham@uow.edu.au (W) 0242218016	University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Services Office research-services@uow.edu.au (W) 02 4221 3386 Building 20, Level 1 University of Wollongong, Northfields Ave Wollongong NSW 2522

References

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012, 'Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies, 2012', Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 'Participant Information Sheet & Informed Consent Form', *Version 1.0 – Last updated 15 September 2016*, Accessed online 30 July 2019: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>

Janke, T 2009, 'Writing up Indigenous Research: authorship, copyright and Indigenous knowledge systems', Terri Janke and Company Pty Ltd, Sydney.

Kearney, J and Janke, T 2018, 'Rights to Culture: Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), Copyright and Protocols 29 January 2018', Accessed 2/5/19 at: < <http://www.terrijanke.com.au/single-post/2018/01/29/Rights-to-Culture-Indigenous-Cultural-and-Intellectual-Property-ICIP-Copyright-and-Protocols>>.

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences 2016, 'Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol', Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

Orr M, Kenny P, Gorey IN, Dixon T, Mir A, Cox E, Wilson J. 2009. Aboriginal Knowledge and Intellectual Property Protocol: Community Guide. 2nd Edition. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs <http://www.nintione.com.au/resource/Aboriginal-Knowledge-and-IP-Protocol-Community-Guide-booklet-A5.pdf>

Other Guiding documents

This document is based on AIATSIS' Participant Information Sheet & Informed Consent Form, available online: Ethical Research - Forms research ethics, 'Participant Information Sheet & Informed Consent Form (Version 1.0 – Last updated 15 September 2016)', Accessed 2/5/19 at: <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>>.

National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018, 'Keeping research on track II: A companion document to Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders', Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

University of Wollongong, 'Consultation Paper Review of the University Intellectual Property Policy Suite February 2019,'
University of Wollongong 'Reconciliation Statement', Accessed 2/5/19 at:
<<https://www.uow.edu.au/about/ipar/reconciliation/index.html>>.

12.4 DETAILS OF PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Table 13: This is a list of personal communications that are cited in this thesis.

Date	Informants	Details Of Communication	Specific Information	Appears in thesis section; citation
March 2019	Cheryl Brown	Email to Vanessa Cavanagh	Following a recent presentation about my research that I gave to the OEH Aboriginal Network at Yarramundi NSW in March 2019, I received an email from an OEH staff member who is a respected Aboriginal woman. Attached to the email was the cover image of the upcoming Dhungala NIFW flyer. The email contained a single line of text 'Picture below tell a male story.....'	Section 7.3
18 May 2020.	Jamie Bertram	telephone conversation	Telephone conversation with Jamie Bertram in his capacity as Hotspots Fire Project's northern RFS Facilitator. We talked about Aboriginal women's representation in fire activities including cultural burning and RFS' engagement with Aboriginal communities more broadly to which Jamie advised that RFS had some opportunities that are not fully enabled – as described in section 3.1.	Section 3.1
2021	Dr Jessica Weir	Phone conversation with Vanessa Cavanagh	Jessica advised that she had attended the cultural burning panel at the AFAC 2017 conference in Sydney. The panel was all male.	Section 2.4 pers. com Weir 2021
2024	Fleur Magick Dennis	Messenger direct message, 22 March 2024.	Fleur Magick Dennis contacted me following a request that I made on social media regarding the sharing and maintenance of information about Aboriginal fire practices in creative forms. Fleur and I discussed the topic privately and then I drafted up an example paragraph and sent it to Fleur to review. She made some changes which I included. Fleur's example appears in section 8.3 Ngiyaampaa cultural knowledge holders asked Wiradjuri and Ngemba/Wayilwan woman Fleur Magick Dennis to write and perform a song in the Ngiyaampaa language about cultural fire ceremony and perform it with Aboriginal women at the Yaama festival in Bourke, and at other locations throughout NSW (pers. comm F. Magick Dennis 2024).	Section 8.3
2024	Uncle Warren Foster & Dwayne Bannon Harrison	Social Media discussion on Facebook.	Dwayne Bannon Harrison commented on a social media post that I made where I was seeking Aboriginal women's creative forms of knowledge about fire and cultural burning. In Dwayne's comment he highlighted that there is a song and dance that is undertaken on the South Coast that is	Section 8.3 pers. comm. Uncle Warren Foster and Dwayne

			connected with fire. Dwayne tagged Uncle Warren Foster in this comment and Uncle Warren Foster replied agreeing with what Dwayne had commented. I reached out to Dwayne privately to make sure that I understood the information about the song and dance that he has shared. We messaged back and forth briefly. Dwayne informed me that Uncle Warren Foster was the person that I needed to talk to as he could provide further details and validate the information. The information that Dwayne highlighted was not gender-specific, but rather it was about the relationship and connection between cultural burning, Aboriginal songs and dances and the maintenance of cultural knowledge. 10 March 2025 I contacted Uncle Warren Foster and we talked about the cultural information and if it was permissible for me to include mention of it in my thesis and could I send him the paragraph for him and Dwayne to review. I edited the paragraph to how it will appear in the thesis then sent it to WF and DBH in a group message. WF replied first saying that he was happy with it as long as DBH was happy with it. DBH replied shortly after saying he was happy with it and wished me good luck for the thesis.	Bannon Harrison, 22 March 2024
2024	Jayden Kitchener-Waters & Robert Kelly	Phone conference call with Vanessa Cavanagh	Robert Kelly reached out to me following one of my social media posts seeking Aboriginal women's creative forms of knowledge about fire and cultural burning. Robert wanted to share some insights with me and include Jayden in the conversation as Jayden had additional information. The information that they discussed was not gender-specific, but rather it was about different ways that knowledge can be maintained and transmitted. They want to share their understandings of experiences of knowledge being transmitted in formats which are not scholarly text and they were glad to hear that I was not restricting my views of 'the literature' to only academic material, particularly because the topic of my research is an Aboriginal cultural practice which means the literature will be richest and more comprehensive within Aboriginal cultural forms, as opposed to Western forms.	Section 8.3 Kitchener-Waters, Kelly & Cavanagh 2024, pers. comm., 25 March

12.5 INTERVIEW QUESTION SCHEDULE

Interview Questions Vanessa Cavanagh Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW research v2
30102019

1. To help with capturing everything we talk about today, is it ok if I turn on the voice-recorder now?
Vanessa's Script: This interview /focus group is for my PhD on Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW. To give you an outline of what we will do, I will introduce myself, then I'll get you to introduce yourself, and then we will talk through the list of interview questions. There are no wrong answers. You don't have to answer any questions if you don't want to, if that's the case just say "PASS, NEXT QUESTION". If you want to stop or pause the interview say "PAUSE or STOP INTERVIEW". Towards the end I'll read you some information about my PhD. Then there are some open-ended questions and time for you to ask me any questions. After today is finished, it gets typed-up and transcribed. I send that back to you for you to read and review, including photos of you. Then you need to then decide if you allow for some, or all of your contributions to be included in my research. Does that sound OK for how we run today?
2. First, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in my PhD, it's great to be hearing from Aboriginal women and the range of Aboriginal women's perspectives so I really do Thank you.
3. Can you please say your name, and can you confirm that you read and understand the information sheet and consent form, and that you are happy to proceed with this interview / focus group discussion?
4. Thank you so much. To introduce myself, my name is Vanessa Cavanagh, I acknowledge both my parents. My mum is a Bundjalung woman from the north coast, her families are the French and Wilson families; and my dad was a Wonnarua man, which is the Hunter region, Dad was from the Cavanagh and Lester families and lived his whole life in and around Sydney. A bit about me, since I left high school I've been working in nature conservation roles in NSW. I worked out in the field in the national parks, and in office-based roles, doing project management, and training trainees, but always with Aboriginal people. Now I'm doing this Phd at the University of Wollongong, I want that my research can help other Aboriginal women reach their goals, and I'm focussing that on Aboriginal women and cultural burning. So, to kick off can you tell me a little bit about yourself, who's your mob and where you are from?
5. And given my research topic, what got you interest in cultural burning?

6. In recent years there has been an increase in the visibility of cultural burning in NSW, it's becoming more popular. Why do you think that is happening?
7. Can you tell me about any examples that you know of?
8. Do you think it is important for Aboriginal women to participate in cultural burning, and why?
9. Do you think Aboriginal women face extra challenges to get involved in, or about cultural burning, and can you tell me about any examples of those challenges?
10. So do you participate in cultural burning or is it something you would like to do?
 - a. If YES,
 - i. For how long have you been doing cultural burning for?
 - ii. Why do you do cultural burning, what is the main reason?
 - iii. Are there any important lessons or outcomes you've experienced from cultural burning that you can share with me?
 - b. If NO,
 - i. Do you want to participate in cultural burning?
 - ii. What has prevented you from participating?
 - iii. What would you hope to achieve from doing cultural burning?
11. If you had to explain what cultural burning is to someone who didn't know, what would you say?
 - a. *Prompt* Is cultural burning different to the mainstream fire practices of like, the RFS?
12. What do you see or think are some of the positive outcomes that cultural burning can create?
 - a. *Prompt* For Country
 - b. *Prompt* For Aboriginal people
 - c. *Prompt* For everyone, the whole local of society
13. Are there positive outcomes that you have experienced yourself?
14. Do you think there are any possible concerns about, or problems that could be associated with cultural burning,
 - a. *Prompt* who can do it?
 - b. *Prompt* Is any type of fire activity involving Aboriginal people cultural burning?

15. From your perspective, who should be involved in cultural burning, men, women, Elders, kids, 'Indigenous people only', or anyone regardless of heritage?
16. How could government agencies or departments assist in encouraging Aboriginal women to participate in cultural burning, if that is something that you believe should occur?
17. If you could imagine the best future with Aboriginal people and caring for Country, what would that look like?
18. Ok we are getting towards the end of the interview now and like I said at the start, I'll read you this paragraph so you can reflect on what you've spoken about just now. Here it goes:
- a. *Script* Our talk today is for my, Vanessa Cavanagh's, PhD research. Before I can use any information you have provided, I need to get today's chat typed up and transcribed. Depending on how long we talked for this might take a couple of days to a couple of weeks, I'll then send it to you so that you can then review it, and think about it, before you give me permission to use it. Only once you give me permission to use your information, can I include it in my PhD which also means conference presentations, other publications. Whenever I use your information in that way I need to acknowledge you as the research participant. This is very important for 3 reasons:
 - b. because it is the way you are empowered to say how your information, your words and photographs of you, are used.
 - c. And because once I used it, it means that information is accessible to others.
 - d. When you are reviewing the information, you might decide that it is all OK to use. Or you might decide that some bits have to get removed, that is ok and good, you have to tell me which parts are OK to use, and which bits need to be removed.
- You can also decide to withdraw from the research altogether up to a certain time. Do you have any concerns or questions about this?
19. Ok now for some open-ended questions, were there things that you were expecting us to talk about that we didn't discuss?
- a. If yes, discuss.
20. Is there anything from today that made you feel uncomfortable or anything that you would like removed from the recording? If you change your mind, you have got my contact details so you can let me know.
21. That is the end of my questions, is there any final thoughts or comments you'd like to add.

22. OK The interview went for XX minutes. I'll get it transcribed & I'll send it to you for you to review.
so I'm going to switch off the recorder now.

12.6 DETAILS OF THE KEY DATA SOURCES

TABLE 4: Details of each data source

Format	type	participants	Number of Aboriginal women engaged
In-person	semi-structured interviews 1:1	3 women	3
In-person	women's' yarning circles x4	Bundanon 2018 ~50 women; OEH Network 2019 ~25 women; Dhungala 2019 ~60 women; Booderee 2021 ~15 women*	120* women (*includes some non-Indigenous women)
In-person	Cultural burning forums & events	unknown	unknown
Digital	semi-structured interviews 1:1	3 women	3
Digital	Small focus-groups 2:1	2 women	2
Digital	Social media post & direct replies where I was seeking information on Aboriginal women's creative expression & cultural burning or fire in NSW	Aliesha Lonsdale Amanda Jane Reynolds Leanne Brook Fleur Magick Deniss Aunty Kali Robert Kelly Jayden Kitchener-Waters Uncle Warren Foster (senior) Dwayne Bannon Harrison Lyndsay Urquart Rachael Cavanagh	7 Aboriginal women (and 4 Aboriginal men)
In-person	Storywork	Vanessa Cavanagh Emma Cavanagh Tyson Cavanagh Theresa French Wren* NPWS staff RFS members Various cultural burning workshop participants Various members of Vanessa's extended family	Approximately 50 Aboriginal women associated directly within the stories

*The yarning circles at Booderee, Bundanon and Dhungala all included non-Indigenous women as well as Aboriginal women. All of the participants at the OEH 2019 Network yarning circle were Indigenous women.

Table 5: Details of yarning circles that I participated in during PhD.

Name	Date	Number of participants & any demographics noted	Number of participants for the entire event	Was this yarning circle part of the official agenda. Provide contextual information	Details about the yarning circle
	Duration				
	Location				
	Links in thesis				
OEH Indigenous women's yarning circle	March 2019	25 Indigenous women. Age 20 – 60 yrs approx. Aboriginal employees of OEH NSW Gov. A range of vocations – field officers through to office staff. A range of salary classifications from managers through to temp tour guide staff.	150	No. this was an impromptu yarning circle that was called following my presentation to the entire OEH Network so that the women could talk freely and directly with me about their concerns and experiences of cultural burning	I kept field notes. I had several women reach out to me after the meeting to follow up on issues. I had women contact me to participate in semi-structured interviews for my research.
	1.5hrs				
	Yarramundi NSW, part of the NSW Government OEH Aboriginal staff Network Meeting				
	Chapter 4 Fig. 29 Fig. 28				
NIFW 2018 Bundanon women's yarning circle	July 2018	50 Indigenous women Age <5 – 70+ yrs. Aboriginal community members, cultural burning practitioners, government officers, fire fighters, academics	Over 380 ppl	No. To my knowledge this circle was called for by the Indigenous women who were attending the NIFW. I attended the two final days of the event and I had enquired with organisers about the opportunity to hold a women's circle which was supported. The circle occurred on the final day of NIFW 2018	I kept field notes and my contribution to this circle is captured in the final report of the NIFW. I spoke about my research and I received strong and stern yet positive feedback from Indigenous women about their expectations and hopes for what my research will be. My attendance at this event and my participation and contribution to this circle raised awareness about my research to key Indigenous women and it highlighted many of the themes that this
	1 hour on final day				
	Bundanon as part of the NIFW				
	Chapter 4 Fig. 29 Fig. 28				

					research explores
NIFW 2019 Dhungala women’s yarning circle	June 2019	60 Indigenous women.	Over 400 ppl	Yes.	My attendance at this event and my participation and contribution to this circle raised awareness about my research to key Indigenous women and it highlighted many of the themes that this research explores.
	1 hour	Age <5 – 70+ yrs.			
	Barmah NP as part of the NIFW	Aboriginal community members, cultural burning practitioners, government officers, fire fighters, academics			
	Chapter 4 Fig. 29 Fig. 28				
Booderee / Wreck Bay community cultural burning meeting	March 2021	15 women including Aboriginal and non-Indigenous women	~50	No	The Aboriginal Elders and leaders decided to include non-Indigenous women in this yarning circle. I was asked to facilitate the yarning circle and assist local community in presenting their key priorities.
	30min yarning circle on day two	Age 20s – 60+s.			
	Meeting rooms in Sanctuary Point.	Aboriginal community members, cultural burning practitioners, government officers, fire fighters, academics			
	Chapter 4 Fig. 29 Fig. 28 Figure 22				

12.7: THE ABORIGINAL WOMEN INTERVIEWED

Table 6: Participants of semi-structured interviews and focus-groups

	Name	Data collection method	Location	Date
1.	Tracey	In-person 1:1 semi-structured interview	Towradgi, NSW	28/10/2019
2.	Maddie	Phone call 1:1 semi-structured interview	Via telephone	16/03/2020
3.	Edie	In-person 1:1 semi-structured interview	Mt Keira, NSW	13/11/2019
4.	Lucinda	Phone call 1:1 semi-structured interview	Via telephone	19/03/2020
5.	Kobi	Phone call 1:1 semi-structured interview	Via telephone	07/11/2019
6.	Steph	In-person 1:1 semi-structured interview	Towradgi, NSW	14/10/2019
7.	Wren	In-person 1:1 semi-structured interview	Towradgi, NSW	22/10/2019
8.	Haley	Video conference, focus group interview	Video conference	19/07/2020
9.	Ashlee	Video conference, focus group interview	Video conference	19/07/2020

The profiles of each of the women are based on the information that they provided about themselves in their interview. These profiles do not include any identifiable characteristics that would expose their individual identity, including the commonplace cultural introductions that we do to culturally locate and introduce ourselves. This process of culturally locating and introducing ourselves is a normative cultural practice in Indigenous communities. It was important in the interviews to create a sense of shared understandings of cultural identity, build rapport and settle myself and the Aboriginal women into the interview process and get comfortable talking and being recorded. These details were shared at the beginning of each interview, however they are not included in this thesis to maintain anonymity. Here all identifiable features such as individuals names, the names of family members, the names of the women's traditional Country (e.g Bundjalung, Wonnarua), any distinguishing employment or membership are not included.

Steph has been involved in cultural burning for a few years and is a member of an Indigenous firesticks group. She does not have any children of her own, but has a bunch of nieces and nephews that she is close with. Steph works in the education sector, and has lived and worked in a several places in NSW and interstate. Steph is an energetic worker. She is aware of the challenges that Indigenous peoples face, while also being aware and prepared to take action to dismantle those challenges.

Wren has lived most of her life in NSW, away from her traditional Country. Wren has been involved in cultural burning for a few years and is working to encourage cultural burning with her own mob. Wren works in education and is studying. She does not have any children but has responsibilities to children through extended family. Wren did not have any prior experience in caring for Country before she became engaged in cultural burning a few years ago. Wren is a theorist, she loves to engage on a theoretical level although she also is pragmatic and physically engaged in cultural burning. Wren wants to keep Aboriginal protocols as the foundation of her engagement. Family and inclusivity is important to Wren, as are protecting cultural knowledges.

Tracey is in her 20s with no kids and she has not grown up on her own Country. Tracey works in a government environmental organisation and wants to be able to care for the local Country that she has grown up on, in an appropriate and respectful way. Tracey has not attended any cultural burns, and saw this research as an opportunity to learn more about cultural burning and to try to get involved. Through her work in a government environmental organisation Tracey has completed her bush fire-fighting modules and has participated in hazard reduction burns. Through her workplace Tracey wants to care for Country, but given it's a government environmental organisation the majority of her work is within a Western scientific framework. Tracey wants to contribute to influencing change for more inclusion of Indigenous peoples, knowledges and processes. Tracey is young, respectful and thoughtful often taking time to think through her answers before responding. She is very keen to engage, but only wants to do that in ways that upholds cultural protocols.

Lucinda is a grandmother who has lived and worked in many places, and has a grandmother's wisdom backed up by decades of experiences. Lucinda is active within her local Aboriginal community, and through her work in the environmental sector she has completed her bush fire-fighting modules. Prior to completing her bushfire modules Lucinda had fire experiences from growing up on a farm where fires (burn-offs, wildfires, pile burns and campfires) were a normal feature of her childhood. Lucinda has participated in some cultural burning events but has never led them. For Lucinda cultural burning is something she has been able to participate in through her employment, but she says it is something she would have participated in outside of her job regardless. She is keen to get more cultural burns occurring through her work capacity, and as a grandmother she talks about cultural burning in comprehensive ways that often involve multiple generations including her own family.

Eddie lives on her Country and has older children. Eddie works in education where most of her career has been focussed with decades of experience in cultural education and community engagement and practice. Eddie has participated in some cultural burning workshops, she is active in undertaking cultural burning on her own Country, and she has spent time in other, more remote places in Australia, where Indigenous communities burn their Country regularly. Eddie has been to university and is working on her PhD. Eddie is a quiet achiever. She does not draw attention to herself, but gets a lot done always working to improve Aboriginal community outcomes.

Kobi lives on her Country and has school-aged children. Kobi has been involved in cultural burning for a few years and through her work in the Aboriginal community sector is able to promote and support cultural burning events and opportunities. Kobi has had first-hand experience of bushfire, and is enthusiastic about all members of community having the opportunity to learn more about cultural burning and other Indigenous-led caring for Country activities. Kobi is the working mum with young kids, doing the juggle and making it all work for her, her family and community.

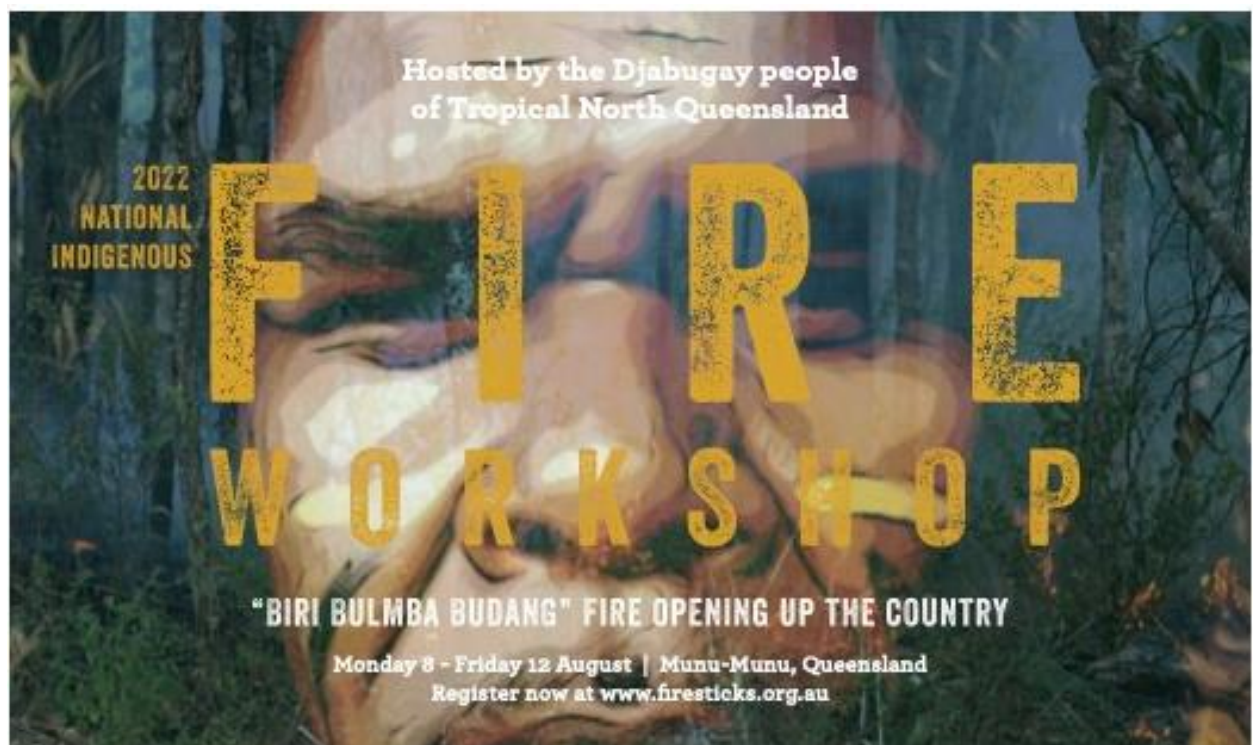
Maddie works in the environment sector and is an experienced firefighter and Incident Control Management team member with over two decades experience. Maddie does not have any children and does not live on her traditional Country. Maddie has not participated in any cultural burns but wants to

encourage cultural burning through her work and understands that she has statutory responsibilities to involve local Aboriginal communities in her work. Maddie sees her position as being the interface between government and community and she works well in that role to advocate for Aboriginal community engagement.

Ashlee is a mum of school-aged children, who lives away from her own Country. Ashlee works in heritage management and public education. Ashlee actively seeks out ways to maintain her cultural identity because she lives off Country and she notices that absence. Ashlee has only recently participated in cultural burning and wishes to engage further. Ashlee is a strategist. She sees opportunity in cultural burning for diverse and worthwhile outcomes for people and Country and she is excited about the future possibilities. Ashlee is a motivator and advocate with a strong confident grounding in her Aboriginal cultural identity. Ashlee was part of the small group discussion with Haley and myself.

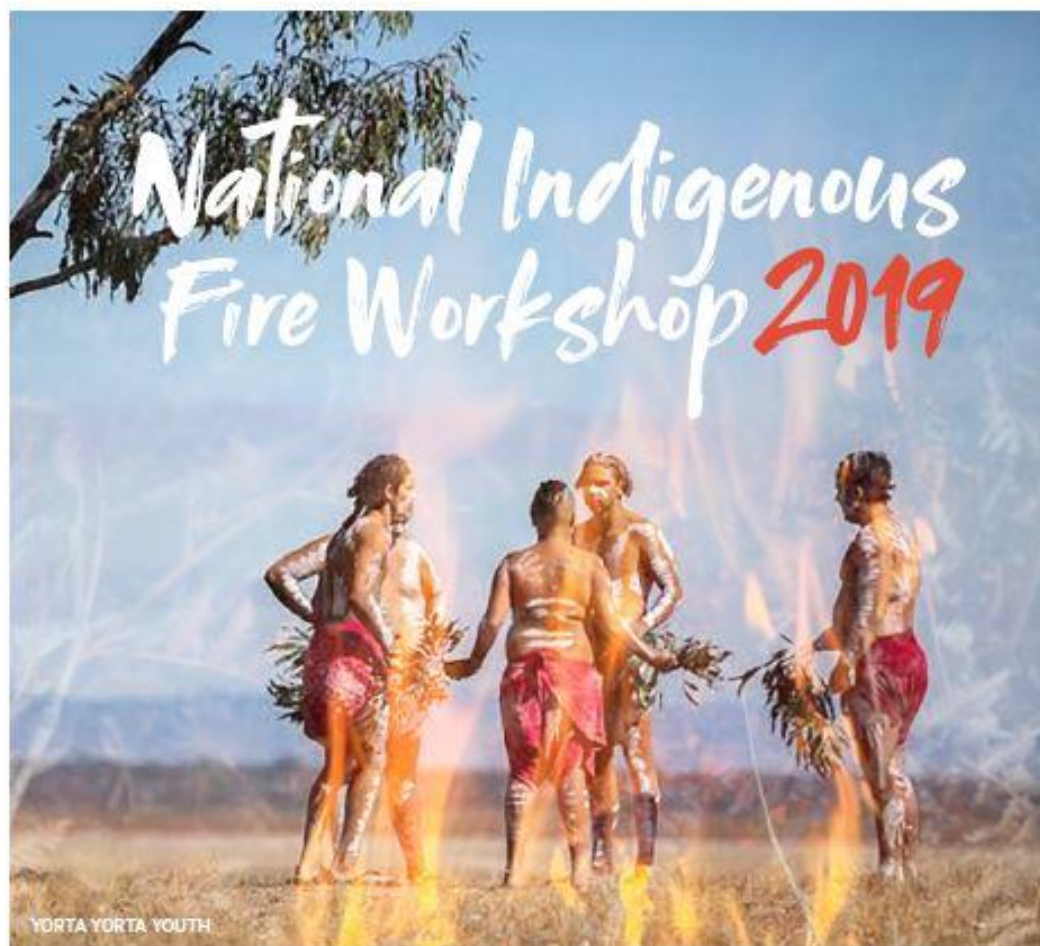
Haley grew up interstate on her home Country surrounded by extended family who were active in caring for Country. Haley moved to the east coast for work purposes. Haley thought that she had her first interaction in cultural burning very recently, however during the course of our interview she had the realisation that some activities that she had witnessed her family doing when she was young was potentially cultural burning. This realisation was a pleasant surprise to Haley and it gave her a renewed appreciation for her family history and knowledges. Haley works in public education institutions and she is a very good communicator. Haley wishes to engage further in cultural burning and speaks animatedly about her experiences and hopes for the future. Haley was part of the small group discussion.

12.8 CULTURAL BURNING PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL





NATIONAL INDIGENOUS
FIRE WORKSHOP



National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2019

4-7 June 2019

On Yorta Yorta Woka (Country) on Dhungala (Murray River)

WORKSHOP INFORMATION AND BOOKING
FIRESTICKS.ORG.AU/DHUNGALA-2019/

PROJECT PARTNERS



*firesticks

Yenbena Itawudik Woka Inyabaknaylin Galyan Bitdja – People Healing Country with Good Fire





**SOUTH EAST TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL CORPORATION and
KOORI COUNTRY CULTURAL FIRE ABORIGINAL
CORPORATION**

are seeking registrations from
INDIGENOUS YOUTH AGED 15-23 YEARS

who would like to learn
about

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL BURNING



WHEN: Tuesday 11 - Wednesday 12 October 2022 (staying overnight)

Youth under 18 must be accompanied by a parent/guardian for the duration

WHERE: River Run Lodge, Strathblane, Tasmania

COST: Free of charge (accommodation and lunches provided)

TO REGISTER: <https://form.jotform.com/211927426247862>

Contact firestickfuture@culturalfire.com.au for more information

This project received grant funding from the Australian Government.

**Come help us welcome
Koori Country Cultural Fire
Aboriginal Corporation
to the far south**

**Sunday, October 9
10am-2pm**

River Run Lodge
247 Narrows Road, Strathblane

- Welcome to Country
- Smoking Ceremony
- Hands on Activities
- Demonstrations for the whole family



Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council is proud to host

Ngulla Firesticks Cultural Burning Forum

14 June 2019

Ulladulla Civic Centre- Lower Level

9.30- 3pm

RSVP: Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council

:44555 883

Refreshments and lunch provided

Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony
A presentation of Ulladulla's Cultural History.

Guest Speakers

Vic Stefferson
Indigenous Fire Knowledge Systems

Dean Freeman
Building a Strong Foundation

Den Barber
Mangrove Mountain Cultural Burn

Michael Andrews
Partnering with Community

Chris Palmer
Emerging Cultural & Fire Science

Vanessa Cavanagh
The Role of Women with Cultural Fire

Dan Morgan
Burning to Protect Koala Habitat

Other presentations by Fire Practitioners and Researchers on the day.



Local Land
Services





 **firesticks** PRESENTS

GOOD FIRE for Country

Join leading fire practitioners and ecologists for
a night of short films and discussion on
Indigenous Cultural Fire and ecological
management

Opening Ceremony by Bunyarra Culture Collective

MULLUM CIVIC HALL

5TH FEBRUARY 5:30-9pm

\$10 TICKETS from trybooking.com

Tickets limited at door

All proceeds to support www.firesticks.org.au

Food available for purchase from 5:30 by  **Rider**
NORTHMANLYN CO-OP

12.9 TABLES OF CULTURAL BURNING WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS

The next five tables list the cultural burning and other relevant events that I participated in during my candidature. I have noted events where I participated as the Manager of the Cultural Fire Management Unit within NSW Government.

Table 7: Cultural burns attended in-person (where fires occurred)

I attended these events during my PhD candidature. Includes public cultural burning workshops, private cultural burning events, cultural burns attended as part of CFMU role with NSW Government as well as when I was not in that role.

Event Name	Event type	Attendance date	Location	Nature of my attendance	Link to resource	Number of Indigenous women directly interacted with (approx.)	Response to social media posts that I made about the event activity
Cultural burn workshop, Jubullum, NSW	Jubullum cultural burning workshop in Tabulam NSW	June 2018	Jubullum Village, Tabulam, NSW	Participant observer	https://fb.watch/xlbxiDGo2k/	5 (approx. 50 ppl attended event)	Facebook post on: 13/06/2018 Likes: 36 Comments: 1 Facebook post on: 27/6/2018 Likes: 15 Shares: 1
National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2018 Bundanon, NSW	National annual Firesticks Alliance conference	14-15 July 2018	Bundanon Trust, Bundanon NSW	Participant with my children; Participant in women's circle	Lyngdoh Reye et al. 2018	10 (over 380 ppl attended event)	Facebook post on 15/07/2018 about women's yarnning circle: Likes: 58 Comments: 6 Shares: 2
McNamara Cultural Burn, Broke NSW	Cultural burn workshop Organiser: KCF SAC	25-26 May 2019	Broke NSW	Participant with my daughter	https://www.singletonargus.com.au/story/6186206/aboriginal-cultural-burn-brings-people-together/	5 (approx. 30 ppl attended event)	Facebook post on 25/05/ 2019 Likes: 104 Comments: 7 Shares: 1

							Twitter/ X Likes: 33 Comments: 1 Retweets: 5 Impressions: 2,234
National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2019 Dhungala, Barmah VIC	National annual Firesticks Alliance conference	4-7 June 2019	Barmah National Park, Barmah Victoria	Participant with my children; Participant in women's circle; video was made about my participation	https://vimeo.com/356439077?&login=true#	20 (over 400 ppl attended event)	Facebook post on 7/6/2019 Likes: 79 Comments: 22 Shares: Facebook post on 5/6/2019 Likes: 87 Comments: 9 Shares:
Yellomundee	Cultural burn workshop Organiser: DPIE & KCFSAC cultural burn	July 2019	Yellomundee Yarramundi	Participant		5 (approx. 50 ppl attended event)	No social media post
Informal camp Rick Fairley Reserve	Informal camp	13 – 16 July 2020	Rick Fairley Nature Reserve	Participant with my children;		7 (approx. 20 ppl attended event)	No social media post
Informal test burn led by Traditional Owner Elder Micalong area, part of the Corroboree Frog project	Informal cultural burning test burn	October 2020 (single day)	Near Tumut NSW	Participant		3 (approx. 15 ppl attended event)	No social media post
Cultural burning for youth resilience, NSW	ULALC, UOW Global Challenges,	1-2 Jun. 2021	Narrawallee, NSW	Co-researcher	Film: https://vimeo.com/603712505/d8549a8fdf	15	Facebook post on 3/12/2021 Likes: 40 Comments: 4

south coast, 3-day camp.	Treading Lightly,				Project Outline: https://www.uow.edu.au/global-challenges/building-resilient-communities/cultural-revitalisation/	(approx. 25 ppl attended event)	Shares: 5
Sth coast cultural burn	Private cultural burn, invite from TOs	May 2024	NSW Sth Cst	guest		3 (approx. 10 ppl attended event)	No social media posts
Mawonga cultural burn camp	Traditional Owner camp, my attendance by invitation of TOs	29-31 May 2023	Mawonga IPA	CFMU Manager	Wiikalkaa - Little Fires Ngiyampaa Community Cultural Fire at Mawonga https://www.winangakirri.org.au/copy-of-malleefowls-hard-work-pays-off	4 (approx. 20 ppl attended event)	Facebook post on 31/5/2023 Likes: 75 Comments: 7 Shares: 0
Batemans Bay conference	Conference and cultural burn	25-26 Jul. 2023	Murramurra ng NSW	CFMU Manager, panel member, Media interview	https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-27/cultural-burning-conference-batemans-bay/102651322	10 (approx. 90 ppl attended event)	Facebook post on 26/7/2023 Likes: 73 Comments: 0 Shares: 0

Table 8: In-person Cultural burning events attended (where fires did not occur while I was present)

Attended during PhD candidature, including: public cultural burning workshops, private cultural burning events, cultural burning activities that I attended as part of CFMU role with NSW Government, as well as when I was not in that role.

Event Name	Event type	Attendance date	Location	Nature of my attendance	Link to resource	Number of Indigenous women directly interacted with (approx.)	Response to social media posts that I made about the event activity
Milbrodale cultural burn	cultural burn, Organiser: KCFSAC	24 Aug 2019	Milbrodale NSW	Participant observer		3 (approx. 10 ppl attended event)	
Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum 2018	Conference	10-12 May 2018	University of Canberra	Presenter	https://volunteerfirefighters.org.au/cultural-burning-evolving-community-country-canberra-may-2018	5 (approx. 100 ppl attended event)	
OEH cultural burning working Group workshop on Program Logic development	Government planning workshop	12 Dec. 2018	Seal Rocks NSW	Participant observer with PhD supervisor Laura Hammersley		2 (approx. 20 ppl attended event)	
Good Fire for Country	Seminar	5 Feb 2020	Mullumbimbry, NSW	MC and Presenter		5 (approx. 200 ppl attended event)	
Ngulla Firesticks Cultural	Seminar conference	13-14 June 2019	13/6/19 field trip	Presenter, and I was the only female	https://www.facebook.com/share/19uquWYc28/	0 (approx. 100 ppl attended event)	

Burning Forum Ulladulla LALC			14/6/19 Ulladulla Civic centre	presenter on agenda			
Browns Waterhole cultural burn conference	Cultural burning planning conference	26 May 2022	Lane Cove National Park	CFMU Manager	https://dharugcountrycity.com.au/locations/browns-waterhole/?fbclid=IwY2xjawlDCSFleHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHdsk1OU8CTONrmMIJq6D_96tGuIzC-tIqA0x1iZkl9RAeESxuR2YjS_9DQ_aem_jSyDzaw9qwS2Ndz9llpx7g	5 (approx. 30 ppl attended event)	
Mawonga cultural camp	Traditional Owner camp, my attendance by invitation of TOs	6-8 May 2022	Mawonga IPA	CFMU Manager	Wiikalkaa - Little Fires Ngiyampaa Community Cultural Fire workshop at Mawonga https://www.winangakirri.org.au/copy-of-malleefowls-hard-work-pays-off	5 (approx. 30 ppl attended event)	
Sandstone Country south coast site visit	Walking through severely bushfire affected bush to monitor Aboriginal rock art sites	4 Nov 2021	Near Ulladulla	CFMU Manager		0 (approx. 10 ppl attended event)	
NSW Gov. Multi-agency cultural fire strategy meeting	Progressing development of strategy	5-6 Sept. 2023	Batemans Bay	CFMU Manager		2 (approx. 20 ppl attended event)	
Narrawallee research review	UOW Honours student end of research review	Dec 2022	Narrawallee, NSW	CFMU Manager	Publication from this project: Murramarang Country et al. 2024	1 (approx. 10 ppl attended event)	
Booderee National Park and	Meeting to discuss cultural burning	3-4 March 2021	Sanctuary Point	Presenter and facilitator of Women's circle		10 (approx. 50 ppl attended event)	

Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community meeting							
South Coast Cultural Land Managemen t Workshop – Bawley Pt, NSW	BNHCRC	12 May 2021	Bawley Pt, NSW	participant	https://www.naturalhazards.com.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/cultural_land_management_in_southeast_australia_black_summer_final_report_0.pdf	3 (approx. 30 ppl attended event)	

Table 9: DIGITAL Cultural burning specific events that I attended

The events I attended during PhD candidature. includes public and private cultural burning forums and webinars. The Pyrolife webinar presentation in July 2020 has had 300 views on You Tube over 5 years.

Event Name	format	Event type	Attendance date	Location	Nature of my attendance	Link to resource	Number of Indigenous women interacted directly with (approx.)
Pyrolife webinar	Digital	webinar	8 July 2020	Online	Keynote Presenter	You Tube recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrdjaKd_nZE website: https://pyrolife.lessonsonfire.eu/reigniting-connections-aboriginal-women-and-cultural-burning-in-new-south-wales-nsw-australia-by-vanessa-cavanaugh/	–
djamanj djamaganj NSW cultural burning series - The Role of Women	Digital	webinar	29 Oct 2020	online	Presenter	https://treadinglightly.org.au/programs-projects/webcasts/	–
National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2020 Virtual Conference: Activating Aboriginal Fire Solutions and the Pathways Forward	Digital	National annual Firesticks Alliance conference	4-5 Dec 2020	Online	Participant and presenter in women's panel	Kovacevic et al. 2021 More than 170 ppl attended event	–

Table 10: Royal Commission and Parliamentary Inquiry contributions

Event Name	Event type	Attendance date	Location	Nature of my attendance	Link to resource	Number of Indigenous women directly interacted with (approx.)	
					Indications of impact, or outcomes from this		
Submission to the Royal Commission	Personal submission	April 2020	Written submission	Aboriginal community member,	Sub. Number: NND.001.00988. Vanessa Cavanagh.	3	Twitter / X on 8/4/2020 reminding followers to make submission to RC and State inquiries Likes: 37 Comments: 1 Retweets: 21 Impressions: 5,523 Twitter/X on 28/4/2020 reminder that RC submissions are closing Likes: 10 Comments: 0 Retweets: 12 Impressions: 3,488
					On 8 Apr 2020 I posted to social media a reminder for people to make submissions to current bushfire inquiries. I received a reply from an unknown person requesting information on how to lodge submission.		
					O		
Submission to NSW Bushfire Inquiry	Personal submission	8 April 2020	Online submission	PhD Student, Aboriginal community member,		3	Twitter / X on 8/4/2020 reminding followers to make submission to RC and State inquiries Likes: 37 Comments: 1 Retweets: 21 Impressions: 5,523

Firesticks Alliance submission to NSW Bushfire Inquiry	Collaboration	May 2020	Parliamentary Inquiry submission	Co-contributor	https://files.dcu.nsw.gov.au/dpc/migration/bushfire-inquiry-submissions/0906-Firesticks-Alliance-Indigenous-Corporation-20200522.pdf	0	
Royal Commission into the National Natural Disaster Arrangements	Witness hearings	18 June 2020	online	Expert witness	Binskin, Bennett & Macintosh 2020 On 12 Jun 2020 I posted to social media seeking input from Indigenous women in preparation for my participation in the Royal Commission hearing. From that social media activity I received numerous interactions including: direct replies to tweet, Direct Messages and referrals.	20 (see details in social media table)	Facebook post on 12/06/2020 seeking input from Indigenous women Likes: 145 Comments: 70 Shares: 125 Twitter / X 12/6/2020 seeking input from Indigenous women Likes: 138 Comments: 8 Retweets: 68 Impressions: 21,320
Engagement in NSW Bushfire Inquiry	Facilitated community and stakeholder meetings – Indigenous session	19 June 2020	Online stakeholder meeting	Community stakeholder (p. 413-414)	https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2023-06/Final-Report-of-the-NSW-Bushfire-Inquiry.pdf	5	
Hub contribution to NSW Bushfire Inquiry	Webinar	Sept 2020	online	First of four presenters discussing People and Country regarding bushfires.	https://vimeo.com/455379828 webinar recording	0	
Victorian Bushfire Inquiry	Co-authored chapter in	2020	Online government report	co-author pages 132-137	https://files.igem.vic.gov.au/2021-03/Inquiry%20into%20the%202019%2020%20Victorian%20Fire%20Season.pdf	0	

	government report				I co-authored with Oliver Costello, a section titled: <i>4.3.1 Cultural burning in the Victorian Government context</i> , in the 'Inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian fire season Phase 1 Community and sector preparedness for and response to the 2019–20 fire season' report.		

Table 11: Other seminars, conferences, meetings, projects that I attended and contributed to.

Not all events were focussed on cultural burning. I attended as PhD student and within my NSW Government role.

Event Name	Format	Event type & Location	Attendance date	Nature of my attendance	Link to resource, if any	Number of Indigenous women directly interacted with (approx.)	
OEH Aboriginal Network 2019	In-person	Network Meeting Yarramundi NSW	28-29 March 2019	Presenter and Women's circle facilitator		25 in women's yarnning circle 150 ppl in main presentation	Facebook post 28 March 2019 Likes: 92 Comments: 16 Shares: 3 Twitter/X Likes: 85 Comments: 4 Retweets: 13 Impressions: 7,094
NSW Bushfire Risk Management Risk Research Hub Annual Conference	In-person (Michael Adams attended on my behalf)	Hub Annual Conference 2019 Primus Hotel Sydney	4 June 2019	Presentation		0	
Corroboree Frog Global Challenges	In-person	Aboriginal community project Hosted by Brungle Tumut Local Aboriginal Land Council	14 Sept 2020 (meeting Tumut and Micalong) 19 Oct 2020 (meeting Tumut and Micalong)	Project co-researcher and community advocate	https://www.uow.edu.au/global-challenges/building-resilient-communities/cultural-revitalisation/	10 over 3 years	
Interim Aboriginal Working Group sponsored by NSW Government for cultural burning	Digital	Meetings online	Numerous meetings between Aug 2020 – Aug 2021		Committee member, Community member, PhD student, women's advocate	3 over 12 months	

cultural burning Aboriginal Working Group to the BRMR Hub	Digital	numerous Working Group sponsored by BRMR Hub online	numerous	Community member, PhD student, women's advocate		0	
SBS NAIDOC 2022 teacher resource booklet	Digital	NAIDOC resource	2022	Contributor p. 28	https://www.sbs.com.au/learn/wp-content/uploads/sites/sbs.com.au/home/files/sbs_learn_aidocweek2022_teacher_resource_digital.pdf	0	
Reigniting Connections: Aboriginal Women and Cultural Burning in NSW	In-person	NAISA conference 2019 University of Waikato, Hamilton, Aotearoa / New Zealand	26-29 June 2019	Presenter	http://naisa2019.waikato.ac.nz/media/1613/naisa-booklet-web-version.pdf	2 from Australia ~30 international Indigenous women attended presentation	
the Institute of Australian Geographers	In-person	conference Hobart, Tasmania	9 July 2019	Presenter	https://researchmgt.monash.edu/ws/portalfiles/portal/289359956/revised_iagc.pdf page 25	5	
International Women's Day Climate Change panel	In-person	ANU Panel discussion hosted by Professor Brian Schmidt ANU Canberra, ACT	6 March 2020	Presenter and Panel member	https://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/2020-international-womens-day-panel-climate-change	2	
Reigniting Connections: Aboriginal Women and Cultural Burning in NSW with Vanessa Cavanagh	In-person	Public Lecture at Wollongong Art Gallery	11 April 2020	Keynote Speaker Public Lecture, at my request and organisation I shared the event with a young Aboriginal woman "G" who performed several songs (with remuneration)	https://shows.acast.com/theres-no-place-like/episodes/entanglements-vanessa-cavanagh or https://podcasts.apple.com/gr/podcast/entanglements-vanessa-cavanagh/id1517363540?i=1000489595978	2	Facebook post 24 March promoting upcoming public lecture Likes: 39 Comments: 2 Shares: 5
Ecological Society of Australian annual conference Keynote	Digital	Ecological Society of Australian annual conference Online	30 Nov 2020	Keynote speaker	https://rockdocpress.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/best-of-esa2020/	–	

ACHAC presentation	Digital	By Invitation of ACHAC Online 10min session + Q&A with ACHAC members	17 Dec 2020	Invited to present my research to ACHAC	https://www2.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/heritage/aboriginal-cultural-heritage-advisory-committee#meetings	5	
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Fire Forum	In-person	Conference Sydney	26 May 2021	Poster presentation		0	
Decolonising the university from the Antipodes	Digital	Geographical research webinar online	March 2022	Presenter and lead author of Cavanagh, Hammersley & Adams 2022	http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12481	0	
Natural Hazards Research Australia conference Meanjin / Brisbane	In-person	Conference	13 October 2022	Presenter	https://apfmag.com/first-natural-hazards-research-forum-reflects-sector-shift-towards-solutions/	0	Facebook post on 13/10/2020 recapping my presentation Likes: 130 Comments: 17 Shares:1
Two-Point Co guest panel – Heal Country 2021	Digital	NAIDOC 2021 panel theme Heal Country for SBS Australia online	2021	Panel member online		–	
SBS NAIDOC 2021 teacher resource booklet	Digital	NAIDOC resource	2021	Recommended reading list p. 37	https://www.centresupport.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Curriculum%20-%20Guide%20NAIDOC%20Heal%20Country.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawlKoNZleHRuA2FlbQixMAABHUTYVCnrpbLJWw8t5VPAfaEqvEwK2sxvoKUpt1mEjLabYpdjC92wVWxVA aem PPzmQc7C3QvsYFn3n8OAlQ	–	
SBS NAIDOC 2022 teacher resource booklet	Digital	NAIDOC resource online	2022	Contributor p. 28	https://www.sbs.com.au/learn/wp-content/uploads/sites/sbs.com.au/home/files/sbs_learn	0	

					_naidocweek2022_teacher_resource_digital.pdf		
Plant a Promise	In-person	Sydney Festival performance by Henrietta Baird	18 Jan 2025	Contributor to development; panel member at Sydney Festival event	https://www.sydneystfestival.org.au/events/plant-a-promise	5	
Bundanon Siteworks	Digital	Recorded at Bundanon Trust, Bundanon, NSW Online symposium	31 oct 2020	Presenter	https://www.bundanon.com.au/projects/siteworks/2020-2/?srsltid=AfmBOorJd5ztIUgfCZaXU18b5wm9saTmzxD4m1JwYovu2n7gLABAFm2	–	Facebook post on 4/12/2020 recapping my contribution to Siteworks Likes: 106 Comments: 13 Shares: 7

Table 12: Additional Social Media Posts I made relevant to my research – personal Facebook account

Description of post	Date posted	Poignant feedback (if any)	Outcome from post	Likes, comments, shares
Excited to be joining @UOW #BushfireRiskManagementResearchHub to complete my #PhD with supervisors @LauraAH110 & @DrMichaelAdams. My topic area is Aboriginal women's involvement in #culturalBurns in NSW.	19 Apr. 2018	1 requests from Aboriginal women to link-up about PhD 1 invite to attend upcoming conference	I attended and presented at the conference	Likes: 66 Comments: 26 Shares: 1
Announcing my PhD topic Aboriginal women and cultural burning in NSW, inviting input and feedback	28 Oct. 2018	4 requests from Aboriginal women to link-up about PhD	Snowballing for recruitment Invite to NSW Gov cultural burning interim Aboriginal Working Group	Likes: 49 Comments: 14 Shares: 3
Shared that I spent the day at Triplarina post burn review with Nook (Noel Webster) and Peta Standley	2 Sept. 2019	Requests from Aboriginal women and men about how they can get involved in cultural burning	Sent information to those who asked	Likes: 72 Comments: 8 Shares: 2
Sharing that I had just completed my first PhD formal interview	14 Oct. 2019			Likes: 91 Comments: 5 Shares: 1
Promo post regarding my upcoming ABC radio interview with Lindsay McDougall	3 Feb. 2020			Likes: 167 Comments: 20 Shares: 0
UOW Woolyungah Indigenous Centre promo post about my research	6 Jul. 2020			Likes: 81 Comments: 17 Shares: 3
Promo post about podcast I featured on with Rach Cavanagh and Deb Swan	26 Oct. 2020	Requests for links to podcast		Likes: 14 Comments: 6 Shares: 0
I posted in FB group 'Writing While Black' asking for recommendations for publications about and by Aboriginal women and caring for Country	30 Mar. 2021	Comments disabled – no longer visible		Likes: 15 Comments: 9 Shares:
Sharing an article about the women in Firesticks Alliance being featured in Vogue Magazine Australia	10 Jul. 2021	Request from Aboriginal woman on NSW south coast for contact to be made with Firesticks Alliance, I connected them in the comments	Unknown if that connection that I made progressed further	Likes: 73 Comments: 8 Shares: 11
Launch of NRHA cultural burning booklet	1 Oct 2021	Celebrating Launch of booklet including my chapter and poster		Likes: 51 Comments: 4 Shares: 5
Acknowledging CSIRO for including my chapter on my PhD research in their book (Weir & Scasta 2022)	2 Apr. 2022	Comments were complementary		Likes: 196 Comments: 49 Shares: 0
Seeking Aboriginal creative forms about fire, cultural burning – especially from women	21 Mar. 2024	Lots of feedback directly from artists as well as referrals. This post led to four direct conversations with Aboriginal artists, creatives or performers who wanted to share their feedback. This is captured in the literature review chapter	Was directed to a swathe of grey materials and creative forms about women and cultural burning in NSW – all the material contributed to the literature review	Likes: 30 Comments: 25 Shares: 4

12.10 CULTURAL BURNING FOR THE HEALTH OF SPECIES

Cultural burning benefits Country, people and species. Here are examples of cultural burning which is focussed on supporting the health of specific species.

- Gouldian Finch (*Erythura gouldiae*) specifically rely on mosaic style batch burning to optimise their habitat (Pryke & Leavesley 2020).
- Matted Flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*) is critically endangered at Darebin Creek in Victoria, cultural burning supports its recovery (La Trobe 2021).
- Alwal / Golden-Shouldered Parrot (*Psephotus chrysopterygius*) is threatened and a culturally significant species to Olkola people in Cape York QLD, cultural burning supported its health (Samuels 2020).
- Latham's Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) is a migratory shorebird. Burning by the Murrumbung Aboriginal Rangers in Jerrabomberra Wetlands (in the ACT) supported its health through habitat creation and maintenance (Maconachie, Gould and Hansen 2020).
- Koala populations in Minjerribah / North Stradbroke Island benefit from cultural burning (Samarawickrama 2023).
- *Callitris intratropica* is a fire-sensitive conifer in the Arnhem Plateau in the Northern Territory benefit from cultural burning, however other factors can impede this success (Bowman et al. 2022).

The locations of these examples are outside NSW, and these examples are not limited to women's participation – examples within NSW and where women are leading are discussed in:

Section 5.3: Cultural burning and the influence of gender

Section 8.3: Aileen Blackburn-Mongta discussing cultural burning and yams project

12.11 OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Op-ed

Cavanagh, V 2020d, 'Friday essay: this grandmother tree connects me to Country. I cried when I saw her burned', *The Conversation*, Volume 24 January 2020.

Williamson, B, Weir, J & **Cavanagh, V** 2020b, 'Strength from perpetual grief: how Aboriginal people experience the bushfire crisis', *The Conversation*, Volume 10 January 2020.

UOW media features

UOW 2018, UOW NAIDOC Week shines a light on contribution of Indigenous women, 10 July 2018, <<https://www.uow.edu.au/media/2018/naidoc-week-shines-a-light-on-contribution-of-indigenous-women.php>>

UOW 2019, UOW PhD Stories: **Vanessa Cavanagh**, July 2019, <<https://magazine.uow.edu.au/research/newsletter/2019/UOW259531.html>>

UOW 2020, UOW Celebrating women researchers: **Vanessa Cavanagh**, 8 March 2020, <<https://www.uow.edu.au/global-challenges/news/celebrating-women-researchers-vanessa-cavanagh.php>>

UOW 2021, UOW Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, Research Highlights Report 2020, **VI Cavanagh** features on pages: 7, 15, 26 and 29, viewed on 2 February 2021, <<https://documents.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@socs/documents/doc/uow268122.pdf#page=7>>.

Podcasts

Cavanagh, V 2020, *There's no place like... Entanglements Lecture Podcast Series - Reigniting Connections: Aboriginal Women and Cultural Burning in NSW with Vanessa Cavanagh*, 1 June 2020 <https://shows.acast.com/theres-no-place-like/episodes/entanglements-vanessa-cavanagh>

Cavanagh V, 2020, *Grandmother tree, the fire and me: Dr Ann Jones interviews Vanessa Cavanagh*, ABC Radio National Off-Track, Duration: 25min 15sec, Broadcast: Sat 8 Feb 2020, 5:30am <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/grandmothertree/11937548>

Cavanagh, V, Cavanagh, R & Swan, D 2020, 'Vanessa Cavanagh, Rachael Cavanagh, & Deb Swan on ancestral fire regimes /205', *For The Wild* podcast, 26 October 2020, <https://forthewild.world/listen/vanessa-cavanagh-rachael-cavanagh-deb-swan-on-ancestral-fire-regimes-205>

Cavanagh, V, Christianson, A & Kristoff, M 2019, *Aboriginal women and caring for country in NSW, Australia with Vanessa Cavanagh*, 4 November 2019 Your Forest Podcast <https://yourforestpodcast.com/good-fire-podcast/2019/10/16/39x21icgmd101pd7tj2qqzsajy0jh6>

Public Radio International PRI The World, online article and podcast 'Reviving traditional fire knowledge in Australia: 'Fire is something we live with' Anne Kusmer, The World <https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-02-24/reviving-traditional-fire-knowledge-australia-fire-something-we-live> Published 24 February 2020

Films

Cultural Burning for Resilience: The Mini-Documentary, Mane Collective 2021, motion picture, The Mane Collective, <https://vimeo.com/603712505/d8549a8fdf>

My role in this film is researcher, participant and advocate. This film was a product of a UOW Global Challenges grant that was a researcher on. In the film and throughout the project I advocate for Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal women to continue to be engaged in caring for Country in ways that suit individuals – such as through academia or through employment in nature conservation projects.

Karla Grant Presents: We Need to Talk About Fire, 2021, motion picture, SBS, Karla Grant Presents S1 Ep48, Bridget Ikin, Bundanon.

I was invited to participate in Bundanon's Siteworks event as a guest speaker. Due to COVID-19 the format of Siteworks shifted online. I spent a weekend at Bundanon where I participated alongside other

participants to share knowledge on my area of expertise. I spoke about Aboriginal women's roles in caring for Country and cultural burning.

Indigenous women have strong links with Country..., 2019, motion picture, Firesticks Alliance and V. Cavanagh, Craig Bender and Vera Hong, Dhungala Burmah National Park, Victoria, <https://fb.watch/sp1gJi2jap/>

I attended Dhungala National Indigenous Fire Workshop 2019 with my children where I was invited to participate in a filmed interview to share my experiences and perspectives regarding the event and Aboriginal cultural burning. This short film features me talking about the underrepresentation of women in fire and environmental sector, my PhD research, the importance of women's participation, cultural protocols and the value of having children present.