



Hazards, culture and Indigenous communities

Research advisory forum / **2019**

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bushfire&natural
HAZARDSCRC



Australian Government
Department of Industry,
Innovation and Science

Business
Cooperative Research
Centres Programme

Project objectives

BOTH FOR AND WITH THE SECTOR AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES:

1. Investigate current priorities and engagement
2. Conduct collaborative research to improve engagement
3. Synthesise results for broader policy and practice utilization



Key deliverables

- Two case studies
- Southern Australia practitioner study
- 'State of play' reporting – insights and comparative analysis
- Social-institutional mapping
- Factors for success 'guidelines'





Results

What's the research telling us?



Literature review



Engagements

How they start:

- Rights to land and water
- Policy and regulation
- Local initiatives
- Natural hazard events

Why they occur:

- Imperative to engage 'local people'
- Specific socio-economic vulnerabilities
- Bridge cultural difference
- Facilitate cultural heritage protection
- Indigenous knowledge

SEE: Thommasin, Annick, Timothy Neale, and Jessica K. Weir. "The Natural Hazard Sector's Engagement with Indigenous Peoples: A Critical Review of CANZUS Countries." *Geographical Research* 57, no. 2 (2018): 164-77.

Ongoing fieldwork



Case studies

1. Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Loddon region, VIC
2. Ngunnawal, Ngunawal and Ngambri Country, Canberra, ACT

Practitioner study

Southern coastal Australia focus
>20 Indigenous and non-indigenous practitioners directly involved in engagements

Key points of inquiry:

- What has supported success?
- What has been difficult?
- Challenges and opportunities that lie ahead?

SEE: Neale, Timothy, Rodney Carter, Trent Nelson, and Mick Bourke. "Walking Together: A Decolonising Experiment in Bushfire Management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country." *cultural geographies* 26, no. 3 (2019): 341-59.

Summary points



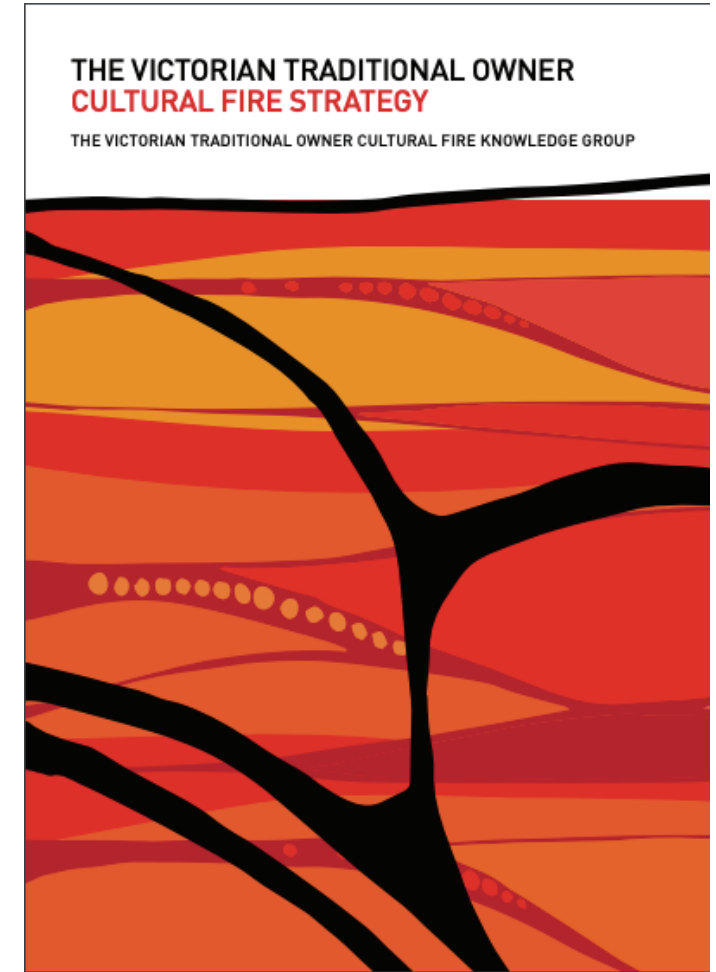
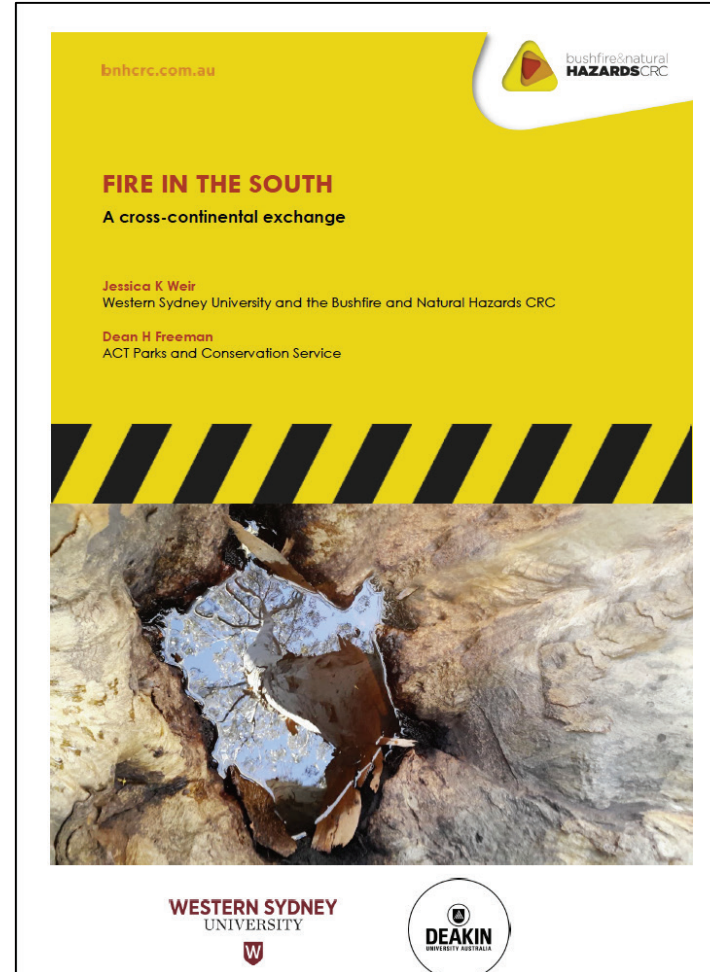
1. The sector is **well positioned** to provide leadership on public sector collaborations with Aboriginal peoples
2. Intercultural collaborations are **not well supported** by existing sector policy
3. Aboriginal people remain **underrepresented** in natural hazard management sector
4. Asking '**what is normal?**' is central to this work



Utilisation

How and where is it being used?





Key engagements:

- Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum
- Southern Western Australia knowledge exchange
- Firesticks Workshops (Nowra and Dhungala)
- Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Knowledge Holders Group
- Native American and Indigenous Studies Association conference



Some personal highlights...



Dr Timothy Neale (left), with Karen Patterson, Harley Douglas, Andrew Saunders, Anees Atkinson and Mick Bourke at djandak w/ healthy fire) burn on Djir Djir Worru Country.

Given that we cannot completely control fire and there are no absolute fixes, we need to create a better and more honest relationship of coexistence.

by DR TIMOTHY NEALE

DuSalle University and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

I first became interested in fire during my doctoral research in Far North Queensland. It's a landscape where fire and smoke are a reliable everyday experience through the dry season

never experience a significant bushfire, and therefore reasonably not think of it as a high risk area, but that landscape's rhythm is actually ticking away on a timescale of decades or centuries, preparing itself for a major fire. In addition to those mismatched timescales, anthropogenic climate

engaging much more extensively with Aboriginal peoples. A major aspect of my research is looking at the many benefits from engaging with Traditional Owners and Indigenous Australians about bushfire management. Many Indigenous Australians have immense skills in their



part to books such as Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu*, however, it is interesting to note that non-Indigenous scientists have been influenced by these ideas for some time. If we look at early ideas of fuel reduction burning, developed at CSIRO in the 1950s and 1970s, they were drawing on ethnographic and archaeological evidence about how, when and why Indigenous Australians used fire in the landscape. Regrettably, that influence was not matched with any real engagement with contemporary Aboriginal peoples.

That said, the mistake that many governments and other agencies can make, in Australia and overseas, is that they can be too focused on what Aboriginal peoples might have to tell non-Indigenous peoples. We have to understand that, in Australia and elsewhere, many Indigenous peoples' past and present experiences of sharing their knowledge have frequently been negative and exploitative. It's pretty galling, if you think about it, to follow up centuries of discussion by asking for more.

There are better alternatives, and one has to think in terms of respectful partnership. As Indigenous scholars and



activists have been saying for a long time, non-Indigenous peoples have to give up some of their power and control if they want to work together. We have to start from the premise of Aboriginal peoples' rights, as the First Peoples of this place, to speak authoritatively about Country. They must be supported to use their own knowledge and be treated as leaders in the management of their Country.

Dr Timothy Neale is a co-head on the CRC project Hazards, culture and Indigenous communities, which focuses on the risk and resilience priorities of Indigenous communities in southern Australia, the emergency management sector's priorities for these communities, and how these interests intersect. In 2015 he was awarded a Discovery Early Career Research Award from the Australian Research Council for his project 'Pyroecology: understanding and managing bushfires in a changing climate.'



- Thommasin, Annick, Timothy Neale, and Jessica K. Weir. "The Natural Hazard Sector's Engagement with Indigenous Peoples: A Critical Review of Canzus Countries." *Geographical Research* 57, no. 2 (2018): 164-77.
- Neale, Timothy, Rodney Carter, Trent Nelson, and Mick Bourke. "Walking Together: A Decolonising Experiment in Bushfire Management on Dja Dja Wurrung Country." *cultural geographies* 26, no. 3 (2019): 341-59.
- Neale, Timothy, Will Smith, and Adam Leavesley. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Southern Australia's Natural Hazards Management Sector: Examining Preliminary Employment Data." *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* (2019).
- Smith, Will, Jessica K. Weir, and Timothy Neale. *Southeast Australia Aboriginal Fire Forum: An Independent Research Report*. Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC (East Melbourne, Vic: 2018).

■ And some publications...



Future directions

How can it be useful to end users and others?





Workshops and materials

- Social-institutional mapping
- Factors for success 'guidelines'
- 2020 practitioner and end user workshops



Questions, feedback, more info?



Publications and reports available at:
<http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/hazard-resilience/3397>

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