

[bnhcrc.com.au](http://bnhcrc.com.au)

# BUILDING CAPACITY IN NORTH AUSTRALIAN REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Utilisation project report – November 2020

**Adj/Prof Jeremy Russell-Smith, Kamaljit Sangha and Dr Andrew Edwards**  
Darwin Centre for Bushfire Research and the Aboriginal Research Practitioners Network, Charles Darwin University, working with the North Australia Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance





Version	Release history	Date
1.0	Initial release of document	19/11/2020



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Industry, Science,**  
**Energy and Resources**

**AusIndustry**  
 Cooperative Research  
 Centres Program

© 2021 Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

All material in this document, except as identified below, is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International Licence.

Material not licensed under the Creative Commons licence:

- Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources logo
- Cooperative Research Centres Program logo
- Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC logo
- Any other logos
- All photographs, graphics and figures

All content not licenced under the Creative Commons licence is all rights reserved. Permission must be sought from the copyright owner to use this material.



**Disclaimer:**

Charles Darwin University and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC advise that the information contained in this publication comprises general statements based on scientific research. The reader is advised and needs to be aware that such information may be incomplete or unable to be used in any specific situation. No reliance or actions must therefore be made on that information without seeking prior expert professional, scientific and technical advice. To the extent permitted by law, Charles Darwin University and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC (including its employees and consultants) exclude all liability to any person for any consequences, including but not limited to all losses, damages, costs, expenses and any other compensation, arising directly or indirectly from using this publication (in part or in whole) and any information or material contained in it.

**Publisher:**

Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

May 2021

Cover: CDU Researchers and the Garawa & Waanyi Garawa Rangers, Borrooloola, at the Scenario Planning workshop. Source: NAILSMA



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>END-USER PROJECT IMPACT STATEMENT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>WORKSHOP SUMMARY</b>	<b>7</b>
Day 1 – Tuesday 11 November 2020 – 9am – 4:30pm	7
Day 2 – Wednesday 12 November 2020 – 9:15am – 11:30am	14
<b>RELATED ACHIEVEMENTS</b>	<b>16</b>
Report to WA National Disaster Resilience Program	16
Reports to Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC	17
<b>FUTURE PRIORITIES</b>	<b>19</b>



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is a collaboration of many parties, all of whom require thanks for their efforts in the commencement of this undertaking, down a path that is long, but is required for the greater good of emergency management in Australia and those Australians living in remote Indigenous communities.

Specifically, we would like to thank the involvement of colleagues in the Rural Fire and Emergency Management Agency in Western Australia (DFES District Officer Lee Vallance and Superintendent Grant Pipe), the Northern Territory (Bushfires NT Director Ken Baulch and Assistant Director Operations Joshua Fischer, and Miriam Nuttal from NTES) and Queensland (Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing, Assistant Commissioner Joanne Greenfield and Superintendent Tony Hazel).

We must also thank The North Australia Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance Ltd (NAILSMA - CEO Ricky Archer, Project Officers Dr Glenn James and Melina Pearse), the Aboriginal Research Practitioner's Network (ARPN) Leaders (Dr Bev Sithole and Hmalan Xenie-Hunter) and the Indigenous Land Managers from Arnhem Land (Otto Champion, Ted Gondarra) and Cape York (Bradley Creek, Dion Creek, Cliff Harrigan, Barry Hunter, Gavin Bassani, Brad Grogan and Rodayne Tanna) whose valuable conversations and information have added to the knowledge in this research.

Special thanks also to the Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC for support through the Utilization Contingency Fund, including Desiree Beekharry and Kelsey Tarabini for their attendance and assistance at the workshop in Darwin on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The utilisation workshop was built on preliminary discussions between the research team and agency end users, the Red Cross, community stakeholders and research partners regarding the development of better communication between remote Indigenous communities and fire and emergency services agencies, to reduce risk and build resilience by taking advantage of local knowledge and skills. The workshop addressed topics relating to volunteer models, and specifically the inapplicability, of the classical model, to people living in remote Indigenous communities.

Outputs of the workshop will shape the form of utilisation product/s that participants considered useful for addressing their specific and collective needs regarding volunteering.

This report is a summary of the workshop in Darwin, 11-12<sup>th</sup> November 2020, and provides summary documents addressing volunteer models adopting narrative formats (e.g. case studies, storytelling, etc); refers to videos addressing key issues for wider community distribution.

The CRC and CDU and our partners will work on the development and delivery of a second utilisation phase 2021. The in-kind support for this workshop, from supporting agencies and stakeholders, will ensure appropriate development of utilisation products during the second phase. This utilisation workshop was funded by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC in direction linkage to the *Building Remote Community Resilience to Natural Hazards* Core Research project.



## END-USER PROJECT IMPACT STATEMENT

**Ricky Archer**, *Chief Executive Officer, North Australia Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance, NT*

The workshop was a great initial gathering of Indigenous leaders from Cape York.

One of the best outcomes of the workshop was for agencies to hear concerns and challenges directly from people on the ground.

We hope that this will be the first of such gatherings.

NAILSMA is extremely interested in developing this method and delivering it across all of north Australia where required.

**Tony Hazel**, *Superintendent, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, QLD*

People working in emergency services become quite proficient at working across the four phases of emergency management; prevention, preparedness, response and recovery to facilitate safe communities. Because we think we know what's best for our communities we often go about our business in isolation. The challenge is that often we have failed to connect with community to ensure our involvement aligns with community expectations.

This workshop provided me with some valuable insights into the gaps we have in connecting with community, especially those remote communities in Northern Australia. Our challenges lie in developing capability to effectively connect with a wide range of community stakeholders and build effective partnerships so Government and the Community can work collectively to ensure safer communities.

I would especially like to thank Ted, Otto and the Rangers for their contribution and providing a community view of the current experiences of emergency management within their communities.

To the team from CDU and NAILSMA thanks for the invitation, I feel honoured to be asked to attend. We have just commenced an invaluable conversation that can lead to better emergency management in Northern Australia, thank you.





## WORKSHOP SUMMARY

### DAY 1 – TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2020 – 9AM – 4:30PM

#### Attendees

##### BNHCRC

Dr Desiree Beekharry – Core Research Program Manager

Kelsey Tarabini – Research Services Project Officer

##### NAILSMA

Ricky Archer – Chief Executive Officer

Dr Glenn James – Consultant

Melina Pearse – Admin/Exec Assistant

##### ARPNet

Otto Bulminya Champion

Hmalan Hunter-Xenie

Dr Bev Sithole (Zoom)

##### CDU

Dr Kamaljit Sangha – Ecological Economist

Dr Andrew Edwards – Research Fellow Bushfires

##### NT

Ted Gondarra – Galiwin'ku

Maratja Dhamarrandji – Galiwin'ku

##### WA

Lee Vallance – District Officer, Dept of Fire and Emergency Services (WA)

##### QLD

Bradley Creek – Mayor, Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council

Dion Creek – Kalan Enterprises – Co-Founder/Board Director/Operations Director

Cliff Harrigan – Normanby Station

Barry Hunter – Project Manager, Djabugay Aboriginal Corporation

Gavin Bassani – Yintjingga Aboriginal Corporation

Brad Grogan – Western Yalanji



Radayne Tanna – Western Yalanji

### Agencies

Josh Fischer – Assistant Director Operations, Bushfires NT

Miriam Nuttall – Planning and Preparedness, NTES

Joanne Greenfield – Assistant Commissioner, QFES

Tony Hazel – Queensland Rural Fire Services

Mike Wassing – Deputy Commissioner, QFES (Disaster Management)

Andy Kenyon – Director, Red Cross NT

Lee Vallance – Indigenous Projects Officer, DFES WA (Zoom)

### Apologies

Minister Selena Uibo

Prof. Jeremy Russell-Smith

Arnhem Land ARPNet Participants

### Welcome to Country

Bilawara Lee – Larrakia Elder

### Opening and Context

Ricky Archer NAILSMA & Ken Baulch Bushfires NT

- Acknowledgement of NAILSMA, APRNET, CDU, BNHCRC to the research.
- Purpose – to build capacity in remote communities to manage emergency events and best use local resources.
- Improve resilience and available capacity to deal with emergency events.
- Economic and social benefits in better using local resources.

### Introductions

General comments from introductions:

- Participants are looking forward to networking, information sharing, building relationships
- Interested in exploring from a volunteer perspective (youth programs, training and linking to community – staff and volunteers)
- Continuation of project and nurture relationships. Work towards being resilient.
- Required dialogue for things to happen in community
- Communities need to come together to go forward





- Confusion among community with so many service providers
- Empowerment back in the hand of community
- Looking forward to seeing what other groups are doing
- Encouraging to see recognition in community
- Important to be aware of ranger groups already being at capacity with duties
- Skillset barriers - blue card as an example
- How to protect country from prospectors?
- Effects on fire management from people moving away from community over time
- Need to increase knowledge of fire
- Ideas of engagement needs to change
- Aim to progress beyond the last few years work
- Issue of local authority/relationships within community being invisible and the need to make this visible
- Equal authority status required for agencies and community
- Investment strategy
- Capacity of community leaders
- Acknowledgement of the work done on country having benefits for urban communities
- Lack of long term plans such as communities being cut-off during wet season
- Communities given online access to emergency response tools
- Complexities of Government and Community structures.

### Lee Vallance – Q&A

#### What training is being delivered by the Agency to Rangers?

- Australian accredited training prior to going out to work on the ground
- Two-way learning

#### How do you know it is going well?

- Response capability
- Communication and reports back from the ground
- It has taken time to get here - still learning
- Required to work within landscape – not all communities are willing to participate. Difficult to push volunteerism into most disadvantage communities.



- Balance of responsibilities.

### What criteria identifies community as being involved; how do you know they're ready?

Access to communities, transient, stable, be prepared to face losses, changing perception, not all communities are willing. Strong people in community.

Note: Shortlisted for an award.

### How vulnerable are the groups to funding cuts?

Not really. Volunteer groups were previously under local government but now under fire and emergency.

## Break out group sessions by regions

### Notes from Agency Group

#### What's happening now?

- NT & QLD – clarity of \*\*aligning? Environment with policy
- All Hazards
  - o QLD – arrangements empower local decision making PPRR
  - o Both – have structures and plans in place
- Emergency events in remote communities
  - o NT – limited capacity, focus on response, agile limited engagement
  - o Strength and opportunity with industry and community
  - o Landowners responsible for fire management
  - o QLD – Examples of getting right people at table to collaborate – challenge to sustain in long term
  - o Have to leverage partnerships and invest e.g. ranger groups
- Mismatch between community and benchmarks and EM agency
- Our plans are templates
- NT – 46 local community plans, not specific to the community
- NT local / level / Controller / Representative
- QLD – EM Planning / Response is led by the local governments, no so in the NT
- But real community ownership of EM Plan is missing

#### Question 2

- NT – Local controller – Recovery and Planning
- NT – Recovery Plan – Controller. Exists only during an event



- NTES/NTPFES – Community preparedness, managing, recovery
- Plans
  - o QLD LDMG / DDMG Plan and Risk Assessment
  - o Remote councils need support
  - o ? Not based on local traditional construct, not consistent identification sites of cultural important
- Local Plans
  - o Do not cover everyone and not everyone has input
  - o Focused on response
  - o QLD – mitigation plans, risk assessment, local disaster plans – sectors lens vs community need
  - o We are not good at knowing what communities want/need
- Service Models
  - o We need to engage differently to partner and change our service delivery model
- How to partner? With community, other sectors, ranger groups

### Notes from BNHCRC, APRNet, NT group

- Situation Now
  - o Mala Leaders rebuilding capacity
    - Emerging leaders need to be approached by local community
  - o Recognition of community leadership and respective clan groups are authorities within themselves
    - Power of decision making already exists within the communities
    - This needs to be acknowledged
- Service Provider CLASH
  - o Service providers are not aware of Mala Group and use different reference groups as Guinea Pigs
  - o Too many pseudo leaders
  - o Mending discord created by SP and bring Mala groups back together
- What is the plan?
  - o Mala leaders appointed by clan groups
  - o Clan Groups - Decision makers/leadership
  - o Mala group informs/guides rangers



- Reduce red tape
- Reduce complexity
- Look at Otto's group as an example

### Notes from QLD group

#### What's happening now?

- Building relationships with rural fire/community QPWS (not so much SES) Djabugay
- Built up areas
- Challenges – landscape, resources
- No dialogue with CSC planning
- Conflict of interest within CSC
- Training building relationships with neighbours/warden/pastoralists.
- Limited resources \$\$\$
- Emergency services only supporting non-indigenous
- CSC Action are reactive instead of pro-active
- Disastrous

#### QLD group general comments during feedback

- No dialogue with Local Government, in and around town, outside of that is indigenous owned.
- Fire programs are privately funded
- Reduce risk of wildfire
- Opens land so people can visit
- Under resourced
- Permits – access issues
- Need for local input for Disaster Management
- On-ground issues with Agencies (e.g. lack of membership to SES, Water Police etc however those on the ground are first to be approached in emergency response)

At the end of the day, Miriam Nuttall from NTES and Otto Campion from the Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation (Arnhem Land, NT) presented the contrasting networks, outlining the government and community governance and planning arrangements related to EM.

#### Miriam Nuttall – Introduction to Emergency Management Arrangements

Presentation outlining the Northern Territory's comprehensive approach to emergency management:



Australia's comprehensive approach to emergency management recognises four types of activities that contribute to the reduction or elimination of hazards and to reducing the susceptibility, or increasing the resilience, to hazards of a community or environment.

These stages are often referred to as PPRR:

- Prevention/mitigation activities, which seek to eliminate or reduce the impact of hazards themselves and/or to reduce the susceptibility and increase the resilience of the community subject to the impact of those hazards.
- Preparedness activities, which establish arrangements and plans and provide education and information to prepare agencies and the community to deal effectively with such emergencies and disasters as may eventuate.
- Response activities, which activate preparedness arrangements and plans to put in place effective measures to deal with emergencies and disasters if and when they do occur.
- Recovery activities, which assist agencies and a community affected by an emergency or disaster in reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing.

### Northern Territory Legislative authority

The Northern Territory [Emergency Management Act 2013](#) reflects an all hazards approach to emergency and disaster events, natural or otherwise, and provides the legislative authority for all four phases of emergency management: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

The Act provides for the adoption of measures necessary for the protection and preservation of human life and property from the effects of emergency and disaster events. It forms the legislative authority for emergency management activities across all levels of government.

The Act defines the Northern Territory's emergency management structure and assigns roles and responsibilities. The Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services (PFES) is the responsible Minister for the Emergency Management Act.

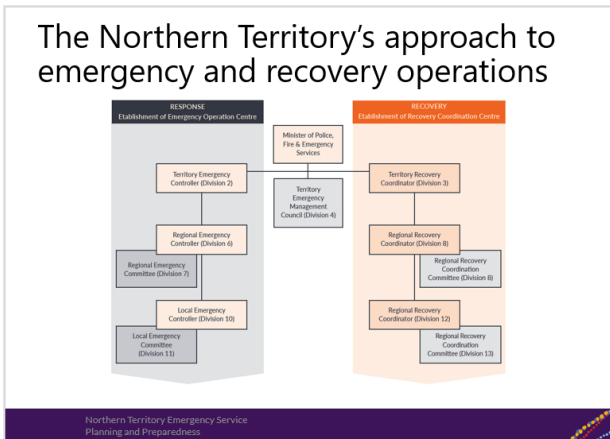
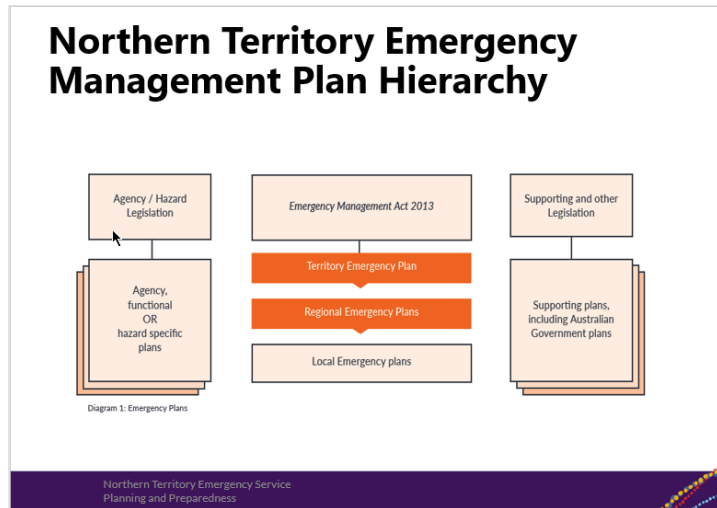
### Northern Territory Emergency Management Arrangements

The response to, and recovery from, an emergency or disaster event may require multi-agency support. This support is provided through the activation and co-ordination of government agencies and non-government organisations based on a Functional Group framework. The Northern Territory Emergency Management Arrangements lists 12 dedicated Functional Groups that are established through this plan. Functional Groups are integral to the effective management of emergency and disaster events across the Northern Territory. Activation of the Functional Group framework supports a coordinated approach to strategic and operational emergency management objectives. Functional Groups are designed to achieve specific emergency management outcomes and have designed roles and responsibilities.

## Controlling Authority

The Controlling Authority is the Northern Territory Government agency with delegated responsibility to respond to an emergency or disaster event. The Controlling Authority is jointly responsible with the Hazard Management Authority for ensuring that preparations to respond to an identified hazard are adequate. In the first instance, primary

responsibility for hazard-specific emergency response is managed by the designated Controlling Authority. This agency is responsible for managing the technical aspects of responding to and suppressing the immediate consequences of the emergency. The Controlling Authority establishes command, control and coordination of its own resources through an agency Incident Controller.



## Hazard Management Authority

The Hazard Management Authority is the Northern Territory Government agency responsible for coordinating and preparing plans and capabilities to respond to a specific hazard. If Northern Territory Emergency Management Arrangements are activated, the designated Hazard Management Authority will provide subject matter expert advice to the

Territory Controller and the Territory Recovery Coordinator and work with the Controlling Authority in response to, and recovery from, the emergency or disaster event.

## DAY 2 – WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2020 – 9:15AM – 11:30AM

### Opening

Ricky Archer

### Presentation – Otto Bulminya Campion

Kinship Systems

Fire in Community

Doing the right thing for country – give and take





## Q&A and Discussion

How to elevate on-ground to higher level?

- Cultural obligations happening re: fire management regardless of program ties
- Strongest starting point - cultural aspects

Common goal – what is this exactly?

**Action** - NT Platform - How can a platform be co-developed? (Ricky Archer)

**Action** - Circulate Booklet from Otto

**Action** - Circulate - Dion Creek – Paper developed with CDU

**Presentation – Ted Gondarra, Galiwin’ku**

Service providers in community

Community Reference Groups and DDA

**Next Steps:**

### **QLD Group**

1. Recognition of Indigenous Research
2. Cost to offer services as we are already busy – this should be recognised and adjusted in the budget (equitable payment for services)
3. To gain competency in white way
4. Joint Venture
5. An official chain of command in communities
6. Cultural induction for agency staff

**Agency and NT Group Notes to be included.**

Other Notes (Not sure if these were part of the Next Steps session)

Dalkarri & Djarka Structure

1. Governance
2. Leadership & Elders



## RELATED ACHIEVEMENTS

### REPORT TO WA NATIONAL DISASTER RESILIENCE PROGRAM

This report was a summary of the findings of surveys and interviews with key personnel in WA DFES, local council, the police and the Kimberley Land Council involved in the development of EM capacity in Indigenous Ranger groups in the Kimberley, namely Bidyadanga and Beagle Gulf:

DFES undertook an 8-year program to develop community-based “volunteer” bushfire brigades initially mandated for 8 remote Indigenous communities, 3 in the west-Kimberley region. Chosen because their English language skills and education levels were the highest, and they were the most socially stable. This task has been driven by the Broome-based District Fire Officer, Lee Vallance, with support from the Superintendent and other DFES personnel. The main lesson being that simply throwing money and equipment at a community has not worked.

To date, the two communities, Bidyadanga and Nyul Nyul, have reached a phase where the IRGs have working brigades and, at Bidyadanga, this includes local council employees. DFES have provided sheds containing functioning fire units on working vehicles, and associated fire management resources, including a communications room, used to undertake a strategic prescribed burning program, and have provided training to respond to wildfire.

DCBR staff, Drs Kamaljit Sangha and Andrew Edwards, travelled with Lee Vallance on one of his weekly visits, to undertake a series of interviews with key personnel at the two communities. The intention of the research was to document the approaches taken to develop the current fire management capacity in these communities to then communicate a model to implement in remote, predominantly Indigenous, communities in other parts of the country and perhaps elsewhere.

In summary, a model for engagement can be guided through the following salient points:

- Long-term agency support is required from trained personnel with the right understanding and consideration for the social, economic and cultural issues.
- Agencies need to be patient in their support, and provide regular, flexible and appropriate training and resourcing.
- Agency representatives need to seek the permission of traditional owners and other community elders, as it shows respect. Give the proper respect, and it will be returned.
- The classic model of volunteerism has limited applicability in remote Indigenous communities for various social, economic and cultural reasons.
- Fire management can be undertaken as part of the activities of broader landscape and community management. Some of these activities on some land should be fee-for-service.



## REPORTS TO BUSHFIRE & NATURAL HAZARDS CRC

### Final report to CRC regarding Scenario Planning for remote Community Engagement

The 'Scenario planning for remote community risk management in northern Australia' project was part of CDU's northern hub second round suite of projects, commencing in July 2017.

We developed a framework for the Fire & Emergency Services agencies to engage with remote Indigenous communities to potentially improve Emergency Services delivery. The agencies recognise the need to improve the services provided remotely, but also recognise that some jurisdictions (particularly the NT) are not adequately resourced to achieve this. The classic model of volunteering does not suit remote significantly disadvantaged Indigenous community members in remote communities. However, the expanding Indigenous Ranger program is a potential means to more appropriately engage with local Indigenous people to build local emergency management (EM) capacity, preparedness, resilience and disaster response.

We developed a suite of case studies. In each case, interviews and workshops were conducted with members of the, now, wide-spread Indigenous Ranger Groups (IRGs) to ascertain the aspirations, willingness and capacity of the Indigenous Rangers to engage in EM activities. We provided summaries of the activities undertaken and information gathered to date at Hermansberg and Yuendumu in Central Australia, Broome, Beagle Bay and Bidyadanga in the Kimberley, Galiwinku on Elcho Island off Arnhem Land, in Bulukhuduru, Ramingining and Ngukurr in Arnhem Land, and Borroloola on the Gulf of Carpentaria. Main identified issues across the selected remote communities include little engagement of locals, if any, in managing emergency situations around the community, inappropriate placement of EM plans in police stations, lack of resources and services in remote communities, broader recognition of IRGs capacity to deliver EM services, and willingness of IRGs to participate in EM services.

This research continued a service delivery program of land management, monitoring and evaluation tools to assist fire managers in remote north Australia. To develop "Improved Fire Management Regimes", we provide information with respect to the spatial distribution, and effects of fires on tropical savanna and rangeland habitats through the Savanna Monitoring & Evaluation Reporting Framework (SMERF). In particular, we include the development of a fire severity map to inform land management improve greenhouse gas emissions calculations.

Finally, we reported the ongoing priorities identified by partner agencies and community stakeholders requiring further action-based research and implementation, especially addressing:

- the full "costs and benefits" of engaging with IRGs in the delivery of effective EM in remote community settings;
- a full accounting of natural hazards and disasters in northern Australia and;



- the ongoing development of fire behavior models and improved map tools to assist savanna fire managers.



## FUTURE PRIORITIES

The progress of these undertakings quite clearly needs to be continued. It was clearly identified by the project partners from Queensland that there is a requirement to assess the broader benefits and costs associated with previously successful, and unsuccessful, Emergency Management arrangements involving communities and Indigenous Ranger Groups. A Queensland example is the Gangalidda-Garawa Indigenous Ranger Group based within the Carpentaria Land Council, who have been properly supported by the Queensland Government through employment packages, and who now deliver land and emergency management across a broad area.

The collaborative project between agencies and communities would entail a detailed assessment of the benefits, failures, opportunities, and would also involve detailed financial costings (such as the Darwin Centre for Bushfire Research have conducted in recent years through the Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC). This would provide an evidence-based case that could be used to inform the State/Territory Agencies, and national EM arrangements, to make a clear case for inclusion of Indigenous Ranger Groups in remote areas in the emergency management work force. This might well be funded through a revision of the Working On Country program, or most appropriately, through fee-for-service arrangements to deliver emergency management in remote communities.