

Vanessa's Story



"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN KEEN TO PROMOTE ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND ENGAGEMENT IN CARING FOR COUNTRY."

STATISTICALLY THERE ARE FEWER ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN PAID EMPLOYMENT IN CARING FOR COUNTRY ROLES THAN MEN, AND CURRENTLY THE MAJORITY OF VOICES GUIDING CULTURAL BURNING PROGRAMS ARE MALE.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO RAISE ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S VOICES SO THAT WE HEAR FROM WOMEN HERE TODAY, AS WELL AS THE VOICES OF OUR BARBINJS, OUR FEMALE ANCESTORS.

AT NATIONAL PARKS I COMPLETED FIREFIGHTING TRAINING AND ATTENDED MANY DIFFERENT FIRE EVENTS. THEN LATER THROUGH CULTURAL BURNING WORKSHOPS I LEARNED ABOUT APPLYING FIRE TO ENHANCE THE LANDSCAPE, RATHER THAN JUST REDUCING A HAZARD RISK FOR HUMANS. AFTER THE BLACK SUMMER FIRES, WIDER PUBLIC INTEREST IN CULTURAL BURNING REALLY TOOK OFF. BUT THIS IS NOT ABOUT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE GIVING KNOWLEDGE TO NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THAT'S THE END OF THE STORY. IT NEEDS TO BE A FAIR AND JUST PROCESS, WITH ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP.

THROUGH MY RESEARCH I UNDERSTAND SOME OF THE GENDERED SENSITIVITIES ABOUT PLACES IN THE LANDSCAPE, AND SHARED COMMUNITY ROLES. FOR SOME GROUPS AND NATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES, ABORIGINAL WOMEN DON'T OR DIDN'T PARTICIPATE IN CULTURAL BURNING TRADITIONALLY, WHEREAS FOR OTHERS THEY TALK ABOUT WOMEN BEING THE MATRIARCHS, THE FIRE-KEEPERS, THE HOLDERS OF THAT KNOWLEDGE.

SO IT'S NOT A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH.

WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN THE LEAD, WE CAN RESPOND TO COUNTRY, PASS ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES TO YOUNGER GENERATIONS, MAINTAIN INDIGENOUS PROTOCOLS, CREATE EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES WHILE ALSO REDUCING HAZARD RISK. IT'S JUST COMMON SENSE. WE NEED TO GO BACK TO THE WAYS THAT WORK. IT WILL LOOK DIFFERENT BECAUSE THE HUMAN POPULATION IS RADICALLY DIFFERENT TO WHAT IT WAS, BUT WE HAVE THE SCIENCE TO ADDRESS THAT.

RECENTLY I TOOK MY DAUGHTER TO A CULTURAL BURN ON WONNARUA COUNTRY. I WITNESSED MY DAUGHTER, A YOUNG WONNARUA PERSON, LIGHTING A CULTURAL BURN ON HER GRANDFATHER'S COUNTRY.

AND THAT'S WHAT CULTURAL BURNING AND ALL THOSE CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT PROCESSES AND CARING FOR COUNTRY ARE ABLE TO DO.

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT INDIGENOUS WELLBEING, TO ME, THAT IS IT."

VANESSA CAVANAGH

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IT'S CONNECTING BACK TO THOSE CULTURAL PROCESSES THAT HAVE MAINTAINED US FOR THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF GENERATIONS.

CULTURAL BURNING
in southern Australia