IS THIS REALLY WORKING?

Establishing a bushfire research

Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) process

bushfire&natural HAZARDS CRC

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Evaluating how research contributes to policy and practice is a highly topical subject with significant interest from government, research institutions and communities. For DELWP the question has been how to demonstrate their research program's **accountability**, **advocate** its benefits, **analyse** how and why the research contributes, **allocate** future funds, and **learn** what worked and what didn't within projects and the program. All of this aims to help **improve** the role of research in supporting FEMD in addressing its objectives.

> "World class science is developed that meets policy and operational needs for bushfire management public land"
> *Bushfire Science Strategy* (BSS) *2013-7* DELWP

The purpose of MERI framework and toolbox project was to explore how FEMD might best evaluate the extent to which its BSS research investments are contributing to policy and practice. The initial review of current national and international practice in assessing the impact of research on policy highlighted that 'measuring research impact' is a limited conception of the role of research in policy. Importantly, the project identified:

- it is more useful and realistic to *evaluate research contributions* across a continuum (see below) rather than 'impact' because links between original research and demonstrable impacts are rarely clear

- it is *crucial* that a project be co-designed and implemented by both the researcher/s and project lead/participants, and that there be ongoing dialogue throughout the project. It is particularly important that the definition of the 'problem' or issue at which the research is aimed is clear and shared among all participants

- current best practice is based on capturing the stories researchers and policy practitioners share about their experiences. We learned that a bespoke MERI Framework and Toolbox for DELWP was going to deliver the most robust and effective mechanism, with the toolbox including: workshops, case studies, interviews and surveys all informed by frameworks such as Most Significant Change, Appreciative Inquiry and the concept of Public Value Mapping

A continuum of research contribution to policy & practice (Adapted from Shaxson et al 2012)
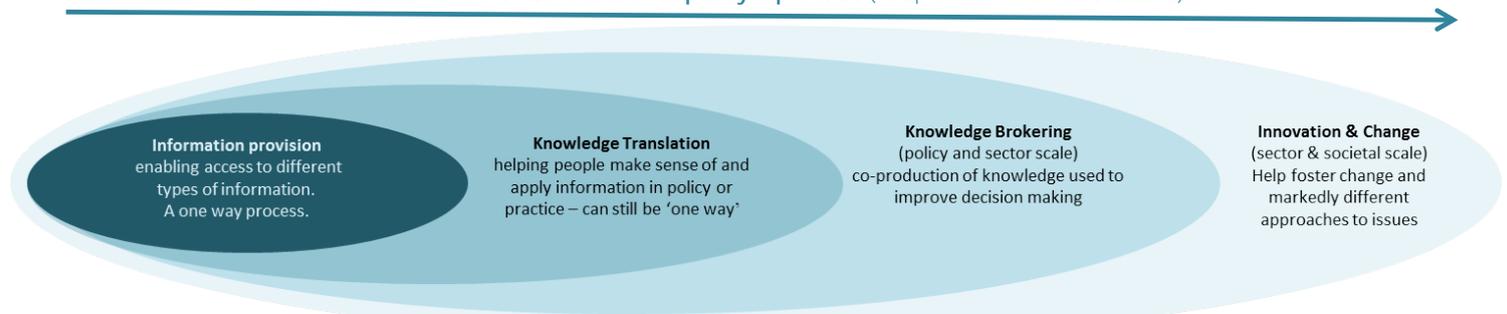
> ""The value of a MERI Framework for our Bushfire Science Strategy program goes far beyond the project outputs. The conscious evaluation, and adaptation of the project as it happened allowed us to explore the role relationships, systems, and institutional factors have in enabling or preventing us to use research to improve decision making. Importantly, it highlights the need to not only understand the value of the science, but strength of the relationships and exchanges between scientists and practitioners in helping prepare organisation being ready for change over longer periods of time as our knowledge grows and evolves. This project will help move from the ongoing conversation about the need to understand research value to a point where we can actively do this and improve not only how we manage science investment, but how we work with scientists to solve future problems" Liam Fogarty, Director, Knowledge and Engagement

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