

Conference

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Paper title

'All we see is miles and miles of burntout boring bushland': Graziers, tourism, and indigenous burning in Kakadu National Park

Abstract

Politics has been at the centre of Kakadu National Park's history even before its official inception in 1979. Glossy tourist brochures and triumphal declarations of effective 'joint management' conceal a history of disputes over uranium mining, biodiversity conservation, and conflict between Indigenous and Western environmental management. One of the most contentious yet under-explored aspects of Kakadu's environmental history is its fire history. Even before the Park was officially declared in 1979, the area was host to tension caused by competing management priorities and understandings of fire. This paper will examine the historical development of fire management within the Park, and explore the tensions and competing objectives of groups such as the Indigenous owners, graziers, conservationists, tourists, and Park management staff. Public feedback from the Park Plans of Management, consultation session records, and newspaper articles reveal tense debates surrounding both policy and practice. Disputes over fire in Kakadu reveal broader conflicts in historical Australian environmental politics, and expose deep fissures between competing and often contradictory Indigenous and Western environmental values and management philosophies.