

HAZARDS, CULTURE AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA



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NATURAL HAZARDS: THEIR RISK, AND MITIGATION, ARE INSEPARABLE FROM CULTURAL VALUES AND NORMS, *BUT...*

- Our cultural values and practices are often invisible to us
- Our perspectives are molded by the worlds within which we live
- We carry cultural assumptions, that we might not even be aware of, about what we think is normal

How then can we, as individuals and as a society, know and interrogate our cultural reality in order to reduce our natural hazard risk?

Australia has always had a very culturally diverse population, and today this is a super-diversity. Critically, experiences with cultural diversity are opportunities for insight into our own cultural background, whatever that may be. Through comparing our cultural values and norms with other people, we can better uncover the assumptions that lie behind our own perspectives, and have new knowledge for action.

In a new and innovative research project we explore cultural difference and similarity to gain insights into mainstream risk mitigation policy and practice, including how to reduce risk for specific cultural groups. Specifically, we are investigating the existing and emerging dynamic engagements between the natural hazards sector and diverse Aboriginal peoples across southern Australia. This is an intercultural project for an intercultural society, as these are not two separate groups that can be clearly culturally identified.

Throughout Australia, Aboriginal peoples have often been excluded from the management of natural hazards on public and private lands. However, this is now changing in southern Australia, where a majority of Aboriginal-identifying people live, as increasing numbers of Aboriginal people are formally employed within natural hazards agencies and the recognition of Aboriginal land rights increase.

Starting July 2017, our new action-research project will:

1. **Investigate the hazard priorities** of diverse Aboriginal communities in southern Australia, and the sector's engagement with these communities.
2. **Conduct collaborative research** with Aboriginal peoples and sector practitioners to explore how better engagement can be supported, with a focus on the interaction about scientific, Aboriginal and other knowledge sources
3. **Analyse and report** on what this dynamic intercultural context can offer practice and policy, including with respect to the merging of risk and resilience agendas.



Photos from Nowra cultural burn (Weir, 2017)



METHODOLOGY & METHODS

- **We're using:** action-research approach conducted in line with best-practice ethical guidelines, including the principle of informed consent
- **We'll be doing:** two case study partnerships, practitioner survey, literature collection and review, analysis and synthesis with policy and practice recommendations

KEY UTILISATION PRODUCTS

- 'State of play' reporting
- Socio-institutional governance mapping
- Identification of factors for best practice
- Support of national and sub-national networks
- Co-learning with case study partners and other end users
- Co-production of knowledge through co-authored presentations and publications

WHO ARE WE?

RESEARCH TEAM: Dr Jessica Weir has over twenty years experience working with Indigenous peoples on intercultural research projects about water, biodiversity, native title, climate change, and natural hazards. Dr Timothy Neale has several years experience working with the natural hazards sector and Indigenous peoples on project examining how knowledge practices are used in socio-ecological policy and practice. **Other research team members include:** Dr Brian Cook, University of Melbourne; Oliver Costello, Firesticks Initiative; Jeremy Dore, Aboriginal Carbon Fund; A-Prof Tara McGee, University of Alberta; A-Prof Jeremy Russell-Smith, Charles Darwin University; Research Associate to be appointed; and, Principal Researcher to be appointed

END USER COMMITTEE

- John Schauble, Emergency Management Vic
- Adam Leavesley, ACT Parks and Conservation
- Dean Freeman, ACT Parks and Conservation
- Rodney Carter, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans AC and Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
- David Nugent, Parks Victoria
- Owen Gooding, Country Fire Association
- Lyndal Mackintosh, Land, Water & Planning, Vic
- Simon Curry, Rural Fire Service, NSW
- Kate White, State Emergency Services, Vic
- Stuart Gunning, State Emergency Management Committee, WA

WARNING: IT SHOULD NOT BE ASSUMED THAT THIS PROJECT IS ONLY ABOUT ABORIGINAL PEOPLES' ISSUES AND INTERESTS. THIS PROJECT IS EQUALLY AND INEXTRICABLY ABOUT HOW THE NATURAL HAZARD SECTOR USES DIVERSE KNOWLEDGE SOURCES AND WORKS WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES.

