



FINDINGS

Cultural or traditional burning requires taking **the long view** about how to live with each other and Country

Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities

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Indigenous peoples' fire management captured national and international attention during the 2019-2020 bushfires. More than a burning technique, cultural or traditional burning is embedded in ways of knowing and doing attuned to the land and sustained relationships across generations with practical and purposeful understanding.

Introduction

Since 2016, we have worked collaboratively to understand how relationships between the natural hazard management sector and Aboriginal communities might be better supported in southern Australia. We have done so with qualitative methods that interpret the viewpoints of the different institutions and individuals involved.

Results

Aboriginal people bring to natural hazard management their own territories, their own governance processes and their own people. This is not just another cultural viewpoint; their self-determination and territorial rights are integral to the passage and generation of their knowledge, identity and ongoing existence as a people.

All Australian governments have a history of denying and disrupting these authorities – including through colonial policies of segregation and assimilation. Indigenous research collaborators have generously shared how such policies affect the governance of fire, Country and their own life stories today.

As partnerships with Aboriginal communities increase, the sector must identify and address where these histories remain evident in disparities in funding and authority, language and meaning, and how this informs what is considered 'normal' and appropriate.

Where collaborations are forming, this context means that: 1) Aboriginal communities are often reliant on agencies and their processes, and must develop relationships with non-indigenous practitioners, even if they do not wish to; and 2) Where collaborations are supported by the sector, these rely on the commitment of individuals, and are vulnerable to staff turnover, budgets, and the weight of meeting existing priorities.



Image: Dja Dja Wurrung and Yorta Yorta fire practitioner Mick Bourke

“Doesn't matter which way you think, we need to all start thinking in a way that respects each other and starts to learn from each other, and we can respond to these challenges ahead.”

Oliver Costello, Firesticks Alliance

The long view

Unsurprisingly, this is a complex topic and involves initiatives not just in the natural hazard sector, but across governments and society. This is why taking *the long view* is so important. It is work that requires change in core institutions. It requires a more equitable sharing of power and authority. It also requires understanding that there are multiple viewpoints, and that Indigenous people need to be addressed as partners in the management of all Country. The foregrounding of Indigenous voices and leadership, on meaningful terms, across a suite of natural hazard practices and policy, is fundamental. We suggest this may include:

- Resourcing and support for Indigenous communities to conduct their own natural hazard management, including through greater authority over land
- Social learning for non-indigenous policymakers and practitioners to evolve agency culture, and foster more culturally safe workplaces
- Supported knowledge exchange and networking for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners
- Support for policy groups and networks for Indigenous people to have access to sector decision-making forums
- Appropriate regulatory, training and qualification regimes that enable Indigenous peoples' access to cultural fire
- Indigenous-led research to support evidenced based policy and practice
- Clear policy support for the sector to take partnership approaches to Indigenous communities, with all parties supported to be involved, and with respect for intra-Indigenous governance priorities
- Clear public sector reporting of agency performance in these activities

“By and large, people working in government are there to do a job, and they're there to do it by the book. You've got to find those driven people who will work with you to move things around and adapt the policies and procedures.”

Amos Atkinson, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation

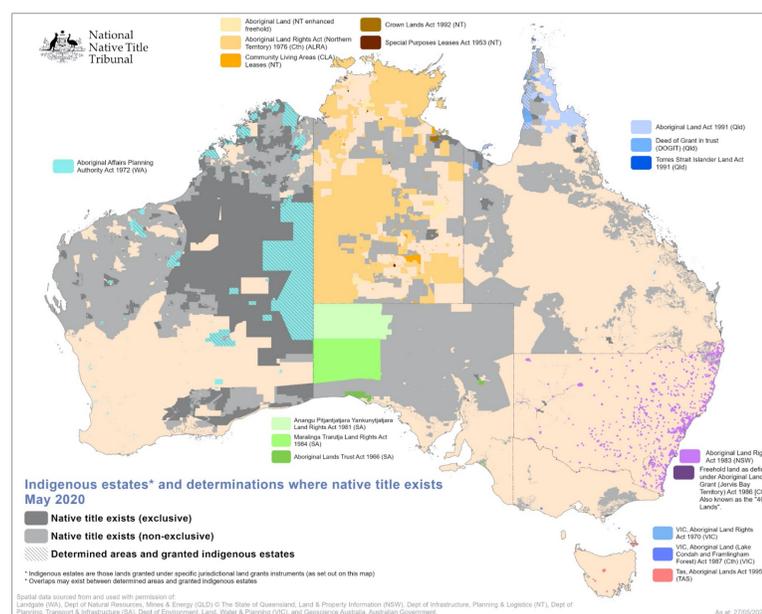


Image: Ngadju Elder Les Schultz, Ngadju Country

COUNTRY

Only traditional custodians can speak for Country, as handed down through law and custom, and practiced within networks of peoples and Countries. These intricate relational responsibilities have been abused by colonisation. Respect is needed to heal these intergenerational wounds.

The Indigenous Estate is only part of Country: all of Australia is Country



The Indigenous Estate reflects Australia's land tenure history. State, Territory and Federal governments are increasingly understanding Country means collaborating with First Nations across the entire continent and the sea. This is also in line with the principle of non-discrimination before the law, which was denied by *terra nullius*.