



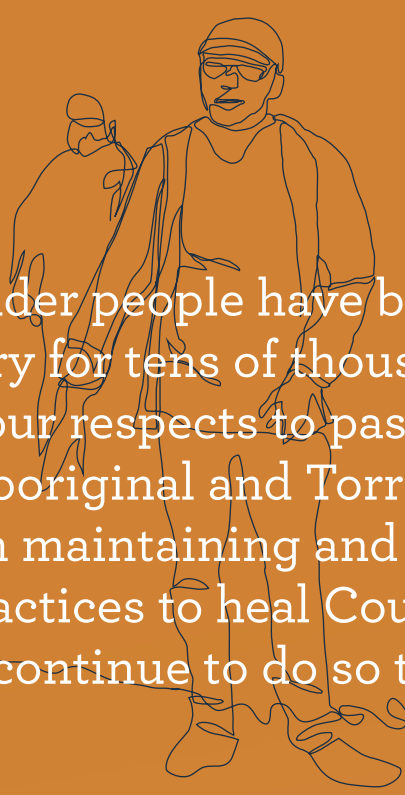
Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020  
**Activating Aboriginal Fire Solutions  
and the Pathways Forward**

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Victor Steffensen conducts a Cultural Burning training with private landholders who are increasingly seeing fire as an option for land management. Traced from a photo courtesy of Vanessa McDonald, SQ Landscapes.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been using fire to restore balance to Country for tens of thousands of years. We acknowledge and pay our respects to past, present and emerging Elders from all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations who have been maintaining and sharing Cultural Fire knowledge and practices to heal Country for thousands of years, and who continue to do so today.





# Welcomes and Connection to Country

Gathering together in ceremony to honour and connect to the Country on which we meet is a vital part of any Firesticks workshop or conference. Being online for the Firesticks Virtual Conference presented a unique opportunity to honour and connect to multiple places where communities are bringing back good fire.

Day 1 of the virtual conference opened with a Welcome to Country live streamed from Gimuy (Cairns) in Far North Queensland. On Day 2, participants travelled thousands of kilometres south for a Welcome to Country and dance performance live streamed from nipaluna/Hobart in lutruwita/Tasmania. These ceremonies set the tone for the conference.

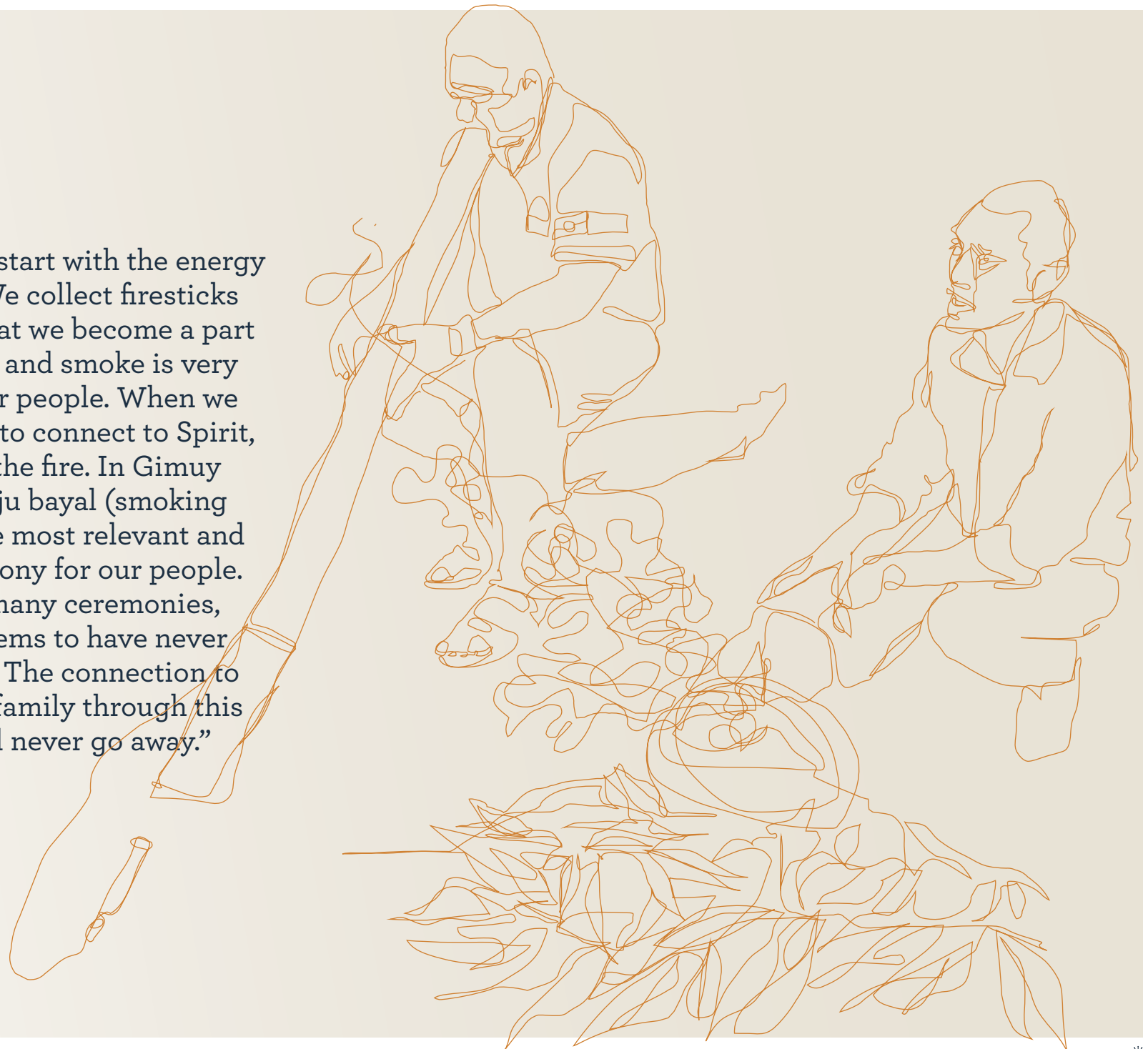




“To make fire, we start with the energy of our bodies. We collect firesticks off Country so that we become a part of Country. Fire and smoke is very important to our people. When we feel like we need to connect to Spirit, we sit around the fire. In Gimuy (Cairns), wunyju bayal (smoking ceremony) is the most relevant and practiced ceremony for our people.

We have lost many ceremonies, but this one seems to have never gone anywhere. The connection to fire, smoke and family through this ceremony will never go away.”

Carl Fourmile (right) and Lynton Schreiber (left) from Minjil in Gimuy (Cairns), Far North Queensland, conducting a wunyju bayal (smoking ceremony) during the opening of Day 1 of the Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020. Photo courtesy of Patti Preece.





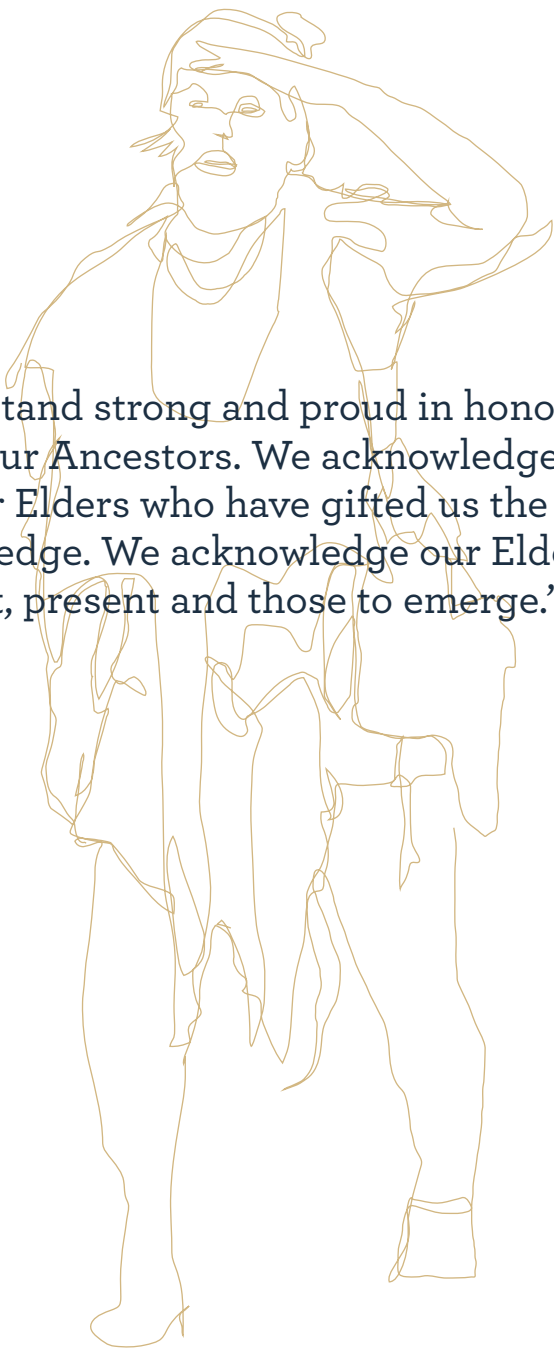
Carl Fourmile (right) and Lynton Schreiber (left) from Minjil in Gimuy (Cairns), Far North Queensland, conducting a wunyju bayal (smoking ceremony) during the opening of Day 1 of the Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020. Photo courtesy of Patti Preece. WATCH THE FILM <https://vimeo.com/555480195>





Sinsa Mansell, Trawoolaway women from Irapuna the Northern region of Lutruwita/Tasmania leads Pakana Kanaplila dance group's Welcome to Country in nipaluna/Hobart to open Day 2 of the Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020. Tracing and image from a film courtesy of Tom Melville.

“We stand strong and proud in honour of our Ancestors. We acknowledge our Elders who have gifted us the knowledge. We acknowledge our Elders past, present and those to emerge.”







Sinsa Mansell, Trawoolaway women from larapuna the Northern region of lutruwita/Tasmania leads pakana kanaplila dance group's Welcome to Country in nipaluna/Hobart to open Day 2 of the Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020. Image from a film courtesy of Tom Melville. WATCH THE FILM <https://vimeo.com/553158835>

# Introduction

Despite the challenges of the past year, this is an exciting time for us all over this country. Our communities are striving to put their fire back onto Country, to revive culture and knowledge, and to give their children a pathway forward into the future.

After the 2020 bushfires, Cultural Fire has been getting a voice on a national scale. We are seeing agencies starting to wake up and people starting to understand that we need to support each other, particularly First Nations peoples' leadership in managing Country into the future. I can't stress how important that is. This is not just important for Aboriginal people. This is important for the entire country of Australia.

The Firesticks Alliance exists to support communities to run their own businesses, to burn their own Country, to manage their own landscapes. Firesticks also exists to work with the government and to help the broader community connect with traditional fire knowledge.

The Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020 was about working together and putting our shoulders behind what is already working. Communities shared their stories and achievements with Cultural Fire and what support they need to take it to the next level.

There's a role for everyone to play. No matter where you are from or where you are living, there is a way that we all can contribute, respectfully and in unity.

We're calling on state and commonwealth agencies, universities, all communities, private landholders and their representative farming bodies, everyone across the sector to work together. We want to see more employment for all the Aboriginal people managing landscapes. We want to see traditional knowledge taught in schools. We want to see Aboriginal people monitoring, collecting data and doing their own research to deliver Cultural Fire to the world, proudly from Indigenous knowledge and proudly from the communities of Australia.

I'm really proud to say that the fire is here to stay. And that the people will, from this day forward, fight to get their lore and management back on country in a way that the entire nation is behind and celebrating.

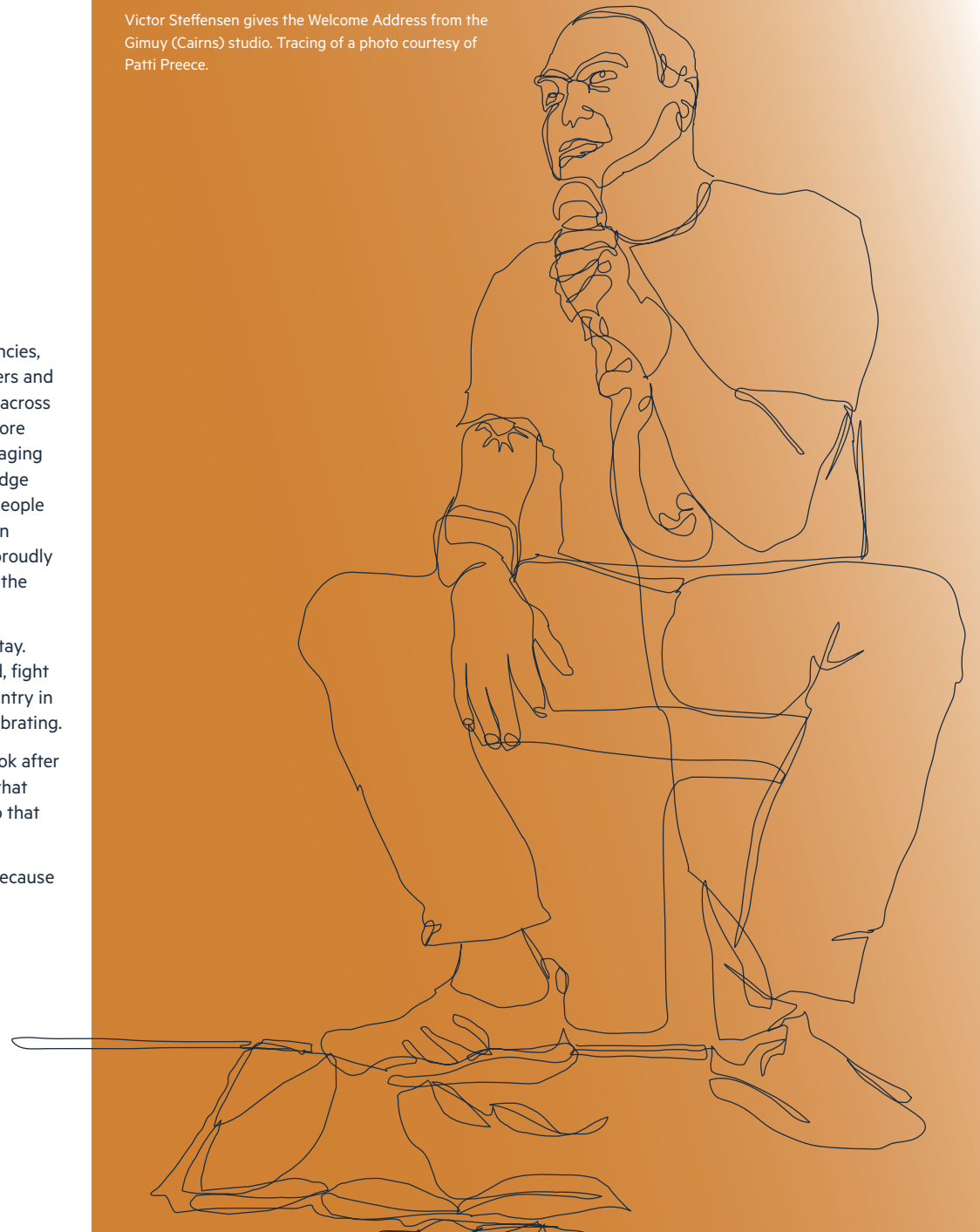
The land is crying for us all to come back to look after Country. To do that we must acknowledge all that belongs to that Country. And people belong to that Country.

There's a lot of work to do. I'm pressing play, because it's already begun for us all.

**VICTOR STEFFENSEN,**  
FIRESTICKS ALLIANCE

**The land is crying for us all to come back to look after Country. To do that we must acknowledge all that belongs to that Country. And people belong to that Country.**

Victor Steffensen gives the Welcome Address from the Gimuy (Cairns) studio. Tracing of a photo courtesy of Patti Preece.







Victor Steffensen gives the Welcome Address from the Gimuy (Cairns) studio. Photo courtesy of Patti Preece. WATCH THE FILM <https://vimeo.com/551373023>



# Executive Summary

This report covers the Firesticks Virtual Conference held from 4-5 December 2020. The purpose of the virtual conference was to keep connection and momentum across Cultural Fire practitioner groups during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While it was no replacement for gathering face to face and practicing Cultural Fire on Country, it still enabled communities to feel connected while sharing their stories of Cultural Fire practices, as well as providing important insights for communities and Firesticks' next steps.

Over 170 participants gathered online from Noongar Country in Western Australia to lutruwita/Tasmania. We were also joined by First Nations Cultural Fire leaders from the Plains Miwok community in Turtle Island (USA) and Métis community in Canada.

Over the two days of the conference, Aboriginal communities shared their achievements and challenges leading Cultural Fire projects and initiatives right across the country. We learnt many valuable lessons from these yarns - from taking the time to educate and build trust with partners, to the many different and creative ways that mobs have overcome the bureaucratic challenges to practicing Cultural Burning.

We also heard about the growing interest from partners to better understand Cultural Burning and many different ways they are supporting Firesticks and Traditional Owners to grow the practice of Cultural Burning, as well as the work happening across communities to better support women to fulfil their important roles in Cultural Fire. It is incredibly important that we provide the space for women's discussions around intergenerational transfer of knowledge and supporting this in practice. Afternoon Yarning Circles had participants discussing how to improve Firesticks' mentoring, training and certification program and providing feedback on the concept of Cultural Fire Credits to increase investment to communities to support the growing practice of Cultural Fire.

Ceremony and song were still a core part of the virtual conference, with beautiful Welcomes and Acknowledgements to Country from Gimuy (Cairns) and nipaluna/Hobart to open both mornings. At lunch time there were stunning musical performances by Naurita Briscoe, Kiara Gulliver and Merindi Schrieber on day one and pakana musical duo Kartanya and Dana day two.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of survey respondents reflecting that the event increased their knowledge of communities working in Cultural Fire management practice and of the work that Firesticks is doing to support those communities.

As the importance of Cultural Fire becomes increasingly recognised, Firesticks is focused on facilitating the development of a strong national network of professional Cultural Fire practitioners who are fully trained, accredited, certified and well-resourced to practice Cultural Fire across the nation.

We are well on our way to achieving this aim. This year, aspiring Cultural Fire practitioners from Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Traditional Owner organisations across the Hunter region will be able to participate in a first-of-its-kind Cultural Burn program while completing a Certificate 3 and Diploma in Conservation and Land Management at Tocal College. Working alongside Firesticks' certification framework that will deliver mentoring and training in Cultural Fire over four years, these courses will serve as a model for scaling up Cultural Fire training and accreditation to other communities in the years to come.

This year will also see Firesticks and the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation launch the Cultural Fire Credit, providing an avenue for the wider community and investors to channel sustainable, long-term and independent investment directly to Aboriginal communities to support Cultural Fire practices.

With so much shared energy and focus in the Firesticks Alliance network, 2021 promises to be a busy year. A special thanks to all who participated in the Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020 and to all the people behind the scenes who made the event happen.

**JESSICA WEGENER AND ANDRY SCULTHORPE,  
FIRESTICKS ALLIANCE BOARD CO-CHAIRS**

## Objectives

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE  
FIRESTICKS VIRTUAL CONFERENCE 2020



**Demonstrate the strength of the** Firesticks Alliance network of Cultural Fire practitioners, as well as opportunities for growth and learning



**Connect up** Aboriginal people practicing Cultural Burning to yarn with other mob across Australia; and



**Showcase** the long history and continuing practice of Cultural Burning.



A paper daisy undisturbed by a gentle Cultural Burn.  
Traced from a photo courtesy of Paul Dawson.

# History

## ABOUT CULTURAL FIRE

For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have managed Country with fire, using fire sticks to light carefully timed burns in the right places to enhance the health of the land and its people.

Cultural Fire can be used to improve the health of particular plants and animals, such as helping native grasses to seed. Cultural Fire can also be used for patch burning to create different fire intervals across the landscape, for fuel and hazard reduction, to gain better access to Country by cleaning up important pathways, and to maintain cultural responsibilities as part of culture heritage management. Cultural Fire is also a ceremony that welcomes people to Country, and it can simply be a campfire around which people gather to share, learn, and celebrate.

## THE PERSISTENCE OF CULTURAL FIRE KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

When Australia was invaded over 230 years ago, many Traditional Custodians were taken off Country and were unable to openly practice Cultural Burning. This has been devastating for plants, animals and people. Country has become sick with invasive species. Heavy fuel loads have led to increasingly catastrophic bushfires. Communities have been separated from the places where their ceremonies and culture come alive. And western burning practices, though well intentioned, have often contributed to further damage of Country - by lighting hazard reduction fires that are too hot, lit at the wrong time and in the wrong place.

Despite these immense challenges, Cultural Fire knowledge and practice has persisted. Awu-Alaya Elders, the late Dr Musgrave and Dr Tommy George from Cape York, have been at the forefront of Cultural Fire revival. Their Kuku Thaypan Fire Management Research Project inspired an initiative called the National Indigenous Fire Workshop, which brings people together to learn and practice Cultural Fire on Country.

## PRACTICING CULTURAL FIRE ON COUNTRY

Held annually since 2008, The National Indigenous Fire Workshop strengthens culture and shares the importance of getting traditional fire regimes back on Country. Workshop participants learn first-hand how to read Country, animals, trees, seasons, and understand the cultural responsibility of looking after Country. Each year the Workshop is hosted by a different Aboriginal community, and burns are conducted on different landscapes.

As momentum for Cultural Fire grew, in 2018 the Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation was established to consolidate and strengthen support for Aboriginal communities reviving their knowledge and practice of Cultural Burning. This has also involved coordinating the 2018 and 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshops.

## CONNECTING CULTURAL FIRE COMMUNITIES ONLINE IN 2020

A few months after the 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop at Dhungala, much of the south east coast of Australia was engulfed with devastating wildfires. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, affecting the Firesticks Alliance's ability to provide local support or workshops to communities. With heavy hearts, Firesticks and partners made the difficult decision to postpone the 2020 National Indigenous Fire Workshop, instead announcing that a virtual conference would be held.

While no replacement for gathering face to face and practicing Cultural Fire on Country, the 2020 Firesticks Virtual Conference still enabled communities to feel connected while sharing their stories of Cultural Fire practices, as well as providing important insights for Firesticks' next steps. It also enabled First Nations people from other countries to participate. The experience Firesticks gained from running a virtual conference will also enable the organisation to offer additional virtual training and workshops with communities and partners in future.

# Logistics

Once it became clear that a face to face Workshop would not be possible in 2020, Firesticks began exploring digital event designs with its partners and support from WWF-Australia through the Australian Wildlife & Nature Recovery Fund.

The team discussed the idea of running a series of short webinars in collaboration with partners. Dreamtime Productions and Virtual Events presented new technology for online networking and this was the beginning of the Firesticks Virtual Conference.



Firesticks Virtual Conference floorplan.

## AN INTERACTIVE ONLINE EXPERIENCE

Firesticks jumped at the opportunity to utilise this event interface because it promised a more interactive experience between conference attendees than a standard webinar. Digital events usually only have a chat box for attendees to type into, whereas Dreamtime Event Productions' interface would allow attendees to sit at 'tables' with each other, where they could have video conversations, document breakout discussions using digital 'whiteboards', as well as type questions to panellists and presenters through a standard chat box.

Even though there wasn't the catering and camping logistics that come with a face to face workshop, the Virtual Conference still required a lot of organisation. Once the digital interface had been chosen, Firesticks invested significant time and energy providing advice and support to ensure all speakers and attendees understood and felt comfortable using the technology.

## CONNECTING TO COUNTRY DIGITALLY

When it came to program development, the virtual conference differed from the face to face workshop in that it traversed many different landscapes with in-depth sharing of community led Cultural Fire projects happening in the network across Australia. Firesticks was careful to ensure that key stakeholders were invited to present and participate and that there was representation from many different communities. Firesticks was also mindful of creating space for the partners and the communities whom they support to interact and meet one another. There were over 30 speakers from a range of different communities and partner agencies. All speakers were offered an honorarium to acknowledge the generous contribution of their time and knowledge.

An important part of the face to face National Indigenous Fire Workshop program are the cultural performances that ground the event by providing connection to Country and people. Firesticks was careful to ensure that these elements were able to

be translated to a digital event format. The team set up satellite 'studios' in Gimuy (Cairns) and nipaluna/Hobart which broadcast opening ceremonies and cultural performances live to conference participants.

The virtual conference program was structured in two ways - the keynotes, morning and afternoon panel discussions, and cultural performances took place in the main room of the conference. After lunch, participants split up into breakout groups, or Yarning Circles, enabling them to discuss some of the topics in more detail and use virtual whiteboards to document takeaway messages from those discussions.

## CONSENT AND CULTURAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Another important aspect of the virtual conference was ensuring protection of Cultural Intellectual Property. A consent form was circulated to conference participants prior to the event requesting their consent for images, videos and quotes to be used in communications materials, as well as requesting that they refrain from recording sessions on their devices.

Firesticks is working with presenters to ensure that they are actively involved in the creation of communications materials (videos etc) and that they retain rights to the intellectual property of these products.

## OUR STORIES

Recognising that virtual conferences do not easily foster a sense of community, or programmatic cohesiveness, a series of daily email updates - titled "Our stories" - were produced to assist participants to feel a sense of cohesiveness and community over the two days of the conference; raise awareness of the key conference topics, themes and outcomes that delegates may otherwise have missed; and create a lasting repository of conference content that can be republished and repurposed for many years to come.



# Conference MC and Program Conveners

## Conference MC



**BARRY HUNTER** is a descendant from the Djabugay speaking people of Gimuy (Cairns) hinterland. He grew up beside the Barron River in the rainforest near Kuranda. Barry is currently the Chair of the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation and his significant experience includes employment in Government conservation agencies, mining and exploration industry, community and not-for-profit NGOs, and recently as a consultant working around Aboriginal Land Management, Carbon Industry and community economic development. With over 30 years experience in Aboriginal affairs, particularly in areas of land, natural and cultural resource management. Barry has a Bachelor of Applied Science from Charles Sturt University and has a keen interest in the work community rangers do in looking after land, fire management and cultural heritage. Barry also has a real passion for building community capacity and planning that delivers sustainable social, cultural and economic outcomes within our communities.

## Program Conveners



**DR PETA-MARIE STANDLEY** is the Training Services and Research Manager Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation. For over two decades Peta has worked alongside Indigenous people supporting them in the documentation, transfer, monitoring and communication of their Cultural Fire knowledge. As a Cultural Fire ecologist, her PhD research focused on transformational research practice in Indigenous knowledge domains, while undertaking in-depth documentation of two Senior Kuku Thaypan Elders traditional Cultural Fire knowledge. Her work also supported the co-development of the Firesticks National Indigenous Fire Workshops led by Dr. Tommy George and Victor Steffensen. Prior to and during her involvement in this work she engaged with Indigenous communities in Cape York, Wet Tropics, Northern Gulf bio-regions and more broadly across Australia in support of caring for Country and natural resource initiatives. She has a strong knowledge of protocol and ethics requirements when working with Indigenous Australians and broader community stakeholders. She has supported the development of the Firesticks Alliance since its inception.



**VICTOR STEFFENSEN** descendant from the Tagalaka clan of Northern Queensland. Victor's work began in 1991 when he realised the urgent need to record the invaluable wisdom of his Elders before it was lost. Over many years, through his love of the arts, film making, culture and the environment, Victor's life's work of re-engaging Traditional Knowledge Practices through creative community projects developed. Victor co-founded the Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation and has co-convened the National Indigenous Fire Workshop for the past decade. He has also founded the Living Knowledge Place, an educational platform based on community and Indigenous teaching methods. Victor released a book in February 2020 – 'Fire Country' How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia. Victor's story is unassuming and honest, while demonstrating the incredibly sophisticated and complex cultural knowledge that has been passed down to him, which he wants to share with others and there is much evidence that, if adopted, it could greatly benefit all Australians.



Friday 4th December 2020

TIME AEDT	DESCRIPTION	WHO   WHERE
10:00	Welcome and Acknowledgements to Country	Live Broadcast Cairns Studio
	Virtual Conference Introduction & Housekeeping	Barry Hunter MC
10:30	Keynote Address: Community Networks and Training Program Case Studies	Firesticks - Victor Steffensen, Firesticks Alliance Board Co-Chair - Jessica Wegener, Andry Sculthorpe
10:50	<b>Master Case Studies: Presentation of Community Cultural Fire Projects &amp; Initiatives</b>	Barry Hunter MC
11:00	South East Queensland: Presentations and Panel	Bunya People's Aboriginal Corporation - Paul Dawson, Mt Tamborine RFS & Future SE QLD Firesticks Alliance Regional Coordinator - Leeton Lee
11:30	Tasmania: Presentations and Panel	Andry Sculthorpe, Fiona Maher, Terry Maynard
12:00	Far North Queensland: Presentations and Panel	Djabugay - Barry Hunter, Gambir Yidinji - Jai Joseph, Kylee Clubb, Thomas Clubb, Rangi Clubb, Watsonville Aboriginal Corporation Barburrrum - Gerry Turpin
12:30	<b>The Importance of Partnerships</b>	Barry Hunter MC
	Partners and Agencies: Presentations and Panel	Southern Landscapes - Vanessa McDonald, WWF-Australia - Nat Burke, Yarra Ranges Shire Council - Gary Detez, QFES - Shane Brown
1:00	Big Yarn: Wrap up and key points from Presentations and Panels	Conference Attendees
1:30	Performance: Briscoe Sisters	Live Broadcast Cairns Studio
1:45	Lunch break - time for networking and visiting information and communications booths	Conference Attendees
2:30	<b>Firesticks Mentoring, Training and Certification Program Development</b>	Firesticks Alliance Panel presentation led by Victor Steffensen
3:00	<b>Yarning Circle</b> <b>Firesticks Mentoring, Training and Certification Program - 'communities of praction'</b>	Conference Attendees round table discussion - Each table choose a moderator and white board scribe
	How can the mentoring and training programs improve ?	Conference Attendees
	What does the certification framework need to consider?	Conference Attendees
4:00	Feedback from Yarning Circle	Barry Hunter MC
	Moderators present from each round table discussion	Conference Attendees
5:30	Wrap up for the Day	Barry Hunter MC

## Saturday 5th December 2020

TIME AEDT	DESCRIPTION	WHO   WHERE
10:00	Welcome and Acknowledgements to Country	Live Broadcast Tasmania Studio
10:30	<b>Keynote Address: Cultural Credits and Market Instruments</b>	Aboriginal Carbon Foundation - Rowan Foley
10:40	<b>Womens Roles in Cultural Fire: Presentations and Panel</b>	Kylee Clubb, Fiona Maher, Tammy Gilson, Deborah Swan, Jessica Wegener, Rachael Cavanagh, Rosie Goslett-King
11:25	<b>Master Case Studies: Presentation of Community Cultural Fire Projects &amp; Initiatives</b>	Barry Hunter MC
	Victoria and Western Australia: Presentations and Panel	Dave Wandin - Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung and Yorta Yorta - Mick Bourke, Amos Atkinson, Noongar - Oral McGuire
12:00	South Coast NSW and Hunter Valley: Presentations and Panel	Yuin - Leanne Brook, Dan Morgan, Adrian Webster, Local Land Services - Toby Whaleboat
12:30	<b>Activating Well Being for Education &amp; The Living Knowledge Place</b>	Torres Webb, Victor Steffensen
1:00	Performance:	Live Broadcast Tasmania Studio
1:45	Lunch break - time for networking and visiting information and communications booths	Conference Attendees
2:30	<b>Development of the Cultural Fire Credit and Investment Pathways Forward: Presentation and Panel</b>	Aboriginal Carbon Foundation - Rowan Foley, Barry Hunter, Lisa McMurray, Shilo Villafior, Firesticks Alliance - Peta Standley, Victor Steffensen
3:15	<b>Yarning Circle</b>	Barry Hunter MC
	<b>Cultural Fire Credit R&amp;D 'lets keep this moving' communities of praction</b>	
	What investment is needed to support groups to move forward on ground?	Conference Attendees
	How can what is being proposed for the cultural fire credit improve?	Conference Attendees
4:15	Feedback from Yarning Circle	Barry Hunter MC
4:45	Panel Wrap Up, Q&A, Mobs Yarn and Next Steps	Aboriginal Carbon Foundation - Rowan Foley, Barry Hunter, Lisa McMurray, Shilo Villafior, Firesticks Alliance - Peta Standley, Victor Steffensen
5:15	Closing Ceremony & 2021 National Indigenous Fire Workshop Launch	Live Broadcast Cairns Studio



Barry Hunter

Dave Wandin

Lisa McMurray

Peta-Marie Standley

Rowan Foley

Shilo Villaflor

Victor Steffensen

**Chat** 3 **Participants** **Q&A** 52

← General Chat

4:46 PM | Today

**Peta-Marie Standley**  
Her brother is visting and she has a baby nephew  
4:47 PM | Today

**Shane Brown**  
Thanks Julie Ryan.  
4:52 PM | Today

I will send you his details  
4:53 PM | Today

**Lisa McMurray**  
The pilots for this program have largely been driven by COVID restrictions, but as Victor says this work is to scale cultural burning everywhere within Australia  
4:53 PM | Today

**Don Hankins**  
Yes, it is definitely a global Indigenous issue.  
4:55 PM | Today

**Amy Cardinal Christianson**  
Yes! your program is a fantastic example for all of us - I talk about it all the time in my federal meetings as a great example of Indigenous leadership in fire!  
4:56 PM | Today

too true Rowan  
4:57 PM | Today

Type a message





## Session Summaries

### Community-led case studies



COMMUNITY-LED CASE STUDIES  
**Presentation of Community-led Cultural Fire Projects & Initiatives**

From Yidinji Country in Far North Queensland to truwana/Cape Barren Island in lutruwita/Tasmania, Aboriginal communities are leading Cultural Fire projects and initiatives right across the country.

Over the two days of the conference, they shared their achievements, challenges and needs for support to take Cultural Fire to the next level.

<b>CASE STUDY 1</b>	<b>FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND</b>
GERRY TURPIN, JAI JOSEPH, KYLEE CLUBB, BARRY HUNTER	
<b>CASE STUDY 2</b>	<b>SOUTHEAST QUEENSLAND</b>
PAUL DAWSON	
<b>CASE STUDY 3</b>	<b>SOUTHEAST QUEENSLAND</b>
LEETON LEE	
<b>CASE STUDY 4</b>	<b>HUNTER VALLEY</b>
TOBY WHALEBOAT	
<b>CASE STUDY 5</b>	<b>SOUTH COAST NSW</b>
LEANNE BROOK AND DAN MORGAN	
<b>CASE STUDY 6</b>	<b>VICTORIA</b>
DAVE WANDIN, MICK BOURKE AND AMOS ATKINSON	
<b>CASE STUDY 7</b>	<b>TASMANIA</b>
FIONA MAHER, TERRY MAYNARD AND ANDRY SCULTHORPE	
<b>CASE STUDY 8</b>	<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</b>
ORAL MCGUIRE	



## FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND Presenters

CASE STUDY 1

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

GERRY TURPIN, JAI JOSEPH, KYLEE CLUBB, BARRY HUNTER



**GERRY TURPIN** is a Mbabaram traditional custodian (Atherton Tablelands) with familial links to Wadjanburra Yidinji and Ngadjon-Jii on the Atherton Tablelands, and Kuku Thaypan on Cape York, north Queensland. Gerry is Chairperson of the Watsonville Aboriginal Corporation, a family clan of the Mbabaram (Bar Barrum) Nation. He currently manages the Tropical Indigenous Ethnobotany Centre at the Australian Tropical Herbarium, in partnership with James Cook University, Dept. of Science and CSIRO, and has worked with many Traditional Owner groups on Cape York and other parts of Queensland. As an Indigenous ethnobotanist Gerry has a strong cultural commitment to facilitating effective partnerships that support Indigenous communities to protect, manage and maintain their cultural knowledge on the use of plants.

**JAI JOSEPH** is a Wadjanbarra/Bundabarra Yidinji man from the Atherton Tablelands North Queensland. Yidinji Bumma are rainforest First Nation people. He is the current Director/Coordinator of Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage & Protection and representative of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) and World Heritage.

He also is an Advanced Fire Fighter for Tinaroo Falls Rural Fire and Army Combat First Aider and Patrolman for the 51st Far Nth Qld Regiment, Army Reserves. As a single father of three children he believes in leading by example and is a big believer of positive community engagement through volunteering and sharing of traditional cultural values through cross cultural tours in his homelands. Family, country and culture is core to traditional cultural continuance and closing the gap.

**KYLEE CLUBB** has been working with Indigenous communities on Country and community for over 15 years. She is a Director and Coordinator of Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage Protection Body in Far North QLD and is an advanced firefighter with Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade on Yidinji Country, Atherton Tablelands. Kylee is the Crew leader of Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage Women's team and upholds the Cultural Heritage Act along with her team. She participates in the strong continuance of Cultural Fire and cultural practices including song, dance, storytelling and art. Kylee participated in the Indigenous Leadership Centre's, Leadership Program, aimed at empowering Indigenous people to be leaders within their communities. She has worked within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care and Indigenous Mental Health community services and is deeply passionate about protecting cultural knowledge, IP and practice through community-led mentorship on Country and community.

**BARRY HUNTER** is a descendant from the Djabugay speaking people of Gimuy (Cairns) hinterland. He grew up beside the Barron River in the rainforest near Kuranda. Barry is currently the Chair of the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation and his significant experience includes employment in Government conservation agencies, mining and exploration industry, community and not-for-profit NGOs, and recently as a consultant working around Aboriginal Land Management, Carbon Industry and community economic development. With over 30 years experience in Aboriginal affairs, particularly in areas of land, natural and cultural resource management. Barry has a Bachelor of Applied Science from Charles Sturt University and has a keen interest in the work community rangers do in looking after land, fire management and cultural heritage. Barry also has a real passion for building community capacity and planning that delivers sustainable social, cultural and economic outcomes within our communities.



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## FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND Session Summary

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2021 Mbabaram Watsonville Aboriginal Corporation Workshop. Photo courtesy of Gerry Turpin.

**In this session, Gerry, Jai, Kylee and Barry shared how taking the time to build trust, overcome fears and educate partner agencies, communities and landholders about Cultural Fire has seen more Traditional Owner-led burning practices taking place on Country.**

From Savannah Country in the Atherton tablelands, Gerry spoke about how big wildfires had made communities fearful about using fire to manage Country. However, following a Cultural Fire assessment from the Firesticks Alliance, the community received funds to hold a local fire workshop and are beginning regular burning, bringing peace and calm to those who had witnessed the fires.

Drawing on his expertise as an ethnobotanist, Gerry also spoke about the work taking place to document and record traditional ecological knowledge on Country, which will help the community to grow bush medicine and other native plants to rehabilitate the land following extensive mining in the area. “We have a few rare and threatened species and we want to be able to manage fire to protect them,” Gerry said.

While still in the early stages of implementing Cultural Fire programs, Gerry said they intend to take a partnership approach, inviting the fire brigade, pastoralists, miners and other locals to attend workshops and learn about Cultural Burning, hopefully to allay any fears they may have too.

Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage Protection Body has also been applying Cultural Fire in the Atherton Tablelands, but with a slightly different approach, Jai said. Rather than rangers, they are a team of Cultural Heritage officers, and see Cultural Burning as a way to protect and continue Cultural Heritage practices. They faced many different challenges to burn on Country he said, but they faced them head-on.

“Every time we proposed to do a traditional burn, we had to make sure it was recognised by groups like Parks that we were trying to achieve cultural

continuance. Over six years, local parks and councils started to embrace the idea of bringing this cultural aspect over a lot of the projects happening on Country,” he said.

Because many Cultural Fire practices are unknown to agencies, Gambir have focused on educating and building trust. They realised that if proper risk mitigation was put in place, agencies would have no trouble with Traditional Owners embarking on traditional burns throughout the year and managing their own Country.

“[Rural Fire Service] was able to get us a Cultural Burn permit that allowed us to have two month [window to burn]...we had that freedom due to partnering with them in the risk management - they were around the borders and we burned the country inside,” Jai said.

These experiences galvanised the Gambir team to receive high levels of qualification - as advanced fire fighters, SES members and combat first aiders - to enable them to enter more mainstream organisations and ensure their ideas and concepts become part of these practices.

“We were able to prove, without any funding and with our own initiative and passion that we could get the qualifications. Ironically we have been helping accrediting the same rangers who told us five or six years ago we couldn't burn,” Jai said.

Gambir has grown to become one of the largest Indigenous rural fire groups in North Queensland, demonstrating that “Traditional Owners really want to take this control back,” Jai said.

On Djabugay Country, Barry also spoke about how building trusted relationships has led to Parks requesting that communities take on more responsibility for burning.

“[In 2018 and 2019] we had 12 [Cultural] burning days. In 2020 we've done 42 [Cultural] burning days... I can only see this increasing in future,” he said.



SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND **Presenter**

CASE STUDY 2

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND

PAUL DAWSON



**PAUL DAWSON** is the General Manager of the Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Corporation (BPAC), whose work is about the revival of Aboriginal custodianship and standing in the strength of 'Healing Country'. Fire practice for Country is vital to this. Paul is passionate about community responsibilities to the land and working at a regional scale to promote a truly collaborative movement. The Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Ranger program has been running since 2009, has won State and National Landcare awards in 2012, and a finalist in 2017. The Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Ranger program has been reviving fire practice across the Bunya landscape and sharing knowledge through education activities.

Paul Dawson Bunya Peoples Corporation, Wakka Wakka Country, SE QLD. Photo courtesy of Damon Anderson.



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## SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND Session Summary

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**In this session, Paul shared how the work of BPAC and its partners has contributed to building a community of practice founded in healing Country and strengthening Songlines around the highly significant Bonye Biar-Bunya Mountains. The landscapes have been significantly degraded due to intensive agricultural and cropping practices, and multiple tenures have made access to Country difficult.**

The journey of rebuilding the community's knowledge of fire and re-establishing Aboriginal leadership in the management of Country began in 2009. Navigating the bureaucracy required to obtain permission to burn often meant following fire practices that conflicted with traditional Cultural Burning knowledge.

Receiving Cultural Fire mentorship and training from Victor Steffensen "opened up the doors of understanding of reading Country and really gave our team a lot of confidence to put the foot down and demand more of a leadership role," Paul said.

BPAC are in the process of developing a Cultural Fire training program with the Firesticks Alliance, Cultural Fire practitioners and training organisations and it is imperative that this training is immersed in Country, Paul said. "[Spending time in Country] the only way to rebuild [fire] knowledge... Country comes first."



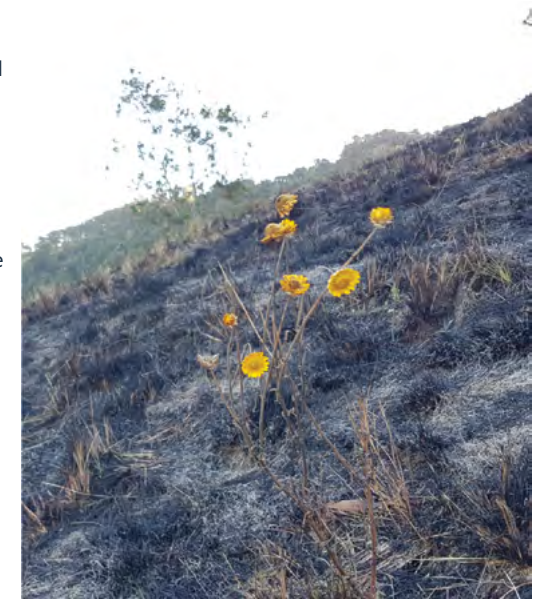
Fire response, straight after (top) and one year (below) following a Cultural Burn. The kangaroo grass has responded well and, through a partnership with Queensland University of Technology, the team has found that the kangaroo grass emits a hormone that seems to inhibit acacia infestations. Photo courtesy of Paul Dawson, Bunya People's Aboriginal Corporation.

Paul described the trickiness of conducting a first burn in a part of Sandridge and Rocky ironbark/Storm burn Country that was particularly degraded with weeds and a buildup of fuel. Being able to apply fire consecutively over a number of years to understand how different grasses - both native and invasive - respond to fire has been essential for creating healthy landscapes.

Agencies have been quite amazed when attending Cultural Burns, Paul said, not only at how gently the fire behaves, but also at how relaxed everyone is and how much knowledge sharing informally takes place during the application of fire.

Paul also stressed the importance of creating connectivity across the landscape by working with a variety of partners, from private landholders, neighbouring communities, researchers and government agencies. "It's really important that our neighbouring systems are all managed in conjunction for the practice to work," he said.

"Our hope is that agencies start listening, observing and immersing themselves in Country instead of ignoring Country in how they make decisions," Paul said.



A paper daisy undisturbed by a gentle Cultural Burn. Photo courtesy of Paul Dawson, Bunya People's Aboriginal Corporation.



Cultural Fire practitioners meeting in the Bunyas to share knowledge and apply fire as part of the Community of Practice. Photo courtesy of Paul Dawson, Bunya People's Aboriginal Corporation.





**LEETON LEE** is a descendent of Thungutti, Bundjalung and Mualgal peoples. He has a background in youth work/community services and cultural education over the past 9 years and is also a Volunteer Firefighter with Tamborine Mountain Rural Fire Service where he is responsible for burn planning and assessment of all landscape burns. Leeton is Firesticks Regional Coordinator for South East Queensland.

Leeton Lee 2021 Lockyer Valley SEQ Workshop on Yuggera Ugarapu Country. Photo courtesy of Lockyer Valley Regional Council.



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## SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND Session Summary

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**In this session, Leeton shared how momentum has been steadily building within fire brigades, local communities and agencies around Tamborine Mountain to move away from hot fires to burning the right country at the right time in partnership with Traditional Owners. With much of the Mountain Country being classified as 'high risk' by agencies, it has been important to overcome the concerns agencies have about burns getting out of control.**

Firefighters in the south east were invited to attend a Cultural Burning workshop, and this has encouraged the group to be open to the practice of Cultural Burning as well as experiment with different burn methods, Leeton said.

“One of the big conversations we’re having is managing landscapes for the diverse ecosystems that they are... not just seeing it as bush,” he said.

Leeton shared a video showing system diversity in action - a place where Sandridge Country and Storm burn Country meet however have different burning requirements. The burn conducted seven months prior left the Sandridge Country green with grassy regrowth while just over the creek the understory of Storm burn Country was bare - suffering from being burnt at the incorrect time.

Leeton shared recent work with Traditional Owners to start putting forward a training program that empowers the local community to pick up roles as Cultural Fire practitioners and start working with fire brigades and national parks. Training programs in other communities have served as good examples, he said.

“In the next five to ten years, I hope to see fires coming up all over at different times of the year,” he said.



Leeton Lee Tamorine MT presenting to RFS. Photo courtesy of Leeton Lee. WATCH THE FILM <https://vimeo.com/551790861>



## HUNTER VALLEY Presenter

CASE STUDY 4

HUNTER VALLEY

TOBY WHALEBOAT



**TOBY WHALEBOAT** is the Senior Land Services Officer (Aboriginal Communities) at Hunter Local Land Services. This role sees him undertake Aboriginal Engagement and Strategic Planning to assist Aboriginal communities to build and develop their capacity in natural resource management, emergency management, biosecurity and agricultural extension.

Toby Whaleboat, Wanaruah/Wonnarua Country, (Hunter Valley) NSW. Photo courtesy of Eva Twarkowski.



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## HUNTER VALLEY Session Summary

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**In this session, Toby shared about the evolution of Cultural Fire activities in the Hunter region, starting in 2016 when rangers from all the Aboriginal Land Councils and Traditional Owner organisations across the region joined the first Cultural Burning program held on Country hosted by Biraban Local Aboriginal Land Council.**

In the four years since, Cultural Burn programs have been held in all three Hunter Local Land Services districts. And 2020 was the first time that Cultural Burn programs were planned across all districts. Toby also shared that there have been a lot of requests from both public and private landholders for Aboriginal Land management teams to undertake Cultural Burns on their properties.

To provide Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Traditional Owner organisations across the Hunter region with capacities to increase their practice of Cultural Fire on Country, Toby shared an exciting collaboration between Hunter Local Land Services, Tocal College and the Firesticks Alliance to offer a Certificate 3 to Diploma in Conservation and Land Management that will commence in 2021. This will work alongside Firesticks' certification framework that will deliver mentoring and training in Cultural Fire over four years.

"This is a significant step in recognising the importance of traditional knowledge in the education system", Toby said.

He also hopes to see it enable more young Aboriginal people to pursue a career that places Cultural Fire and Traditional Knowledge at the centre.



Sedgefield TSR and Wonnarua Nation Property 2018 Workshop. Photo courtesy of Firesticks Alliance.

## SOUTH COAST NSW Presenters

CASE STUDY 5

SOUTH COAST NSW

LEANNE BROOK AND DAN MORGAN



**LEANNE BROOK** is a proud Murramarang Yuin woman from the Dhurga language group. She is currently an Aboriginal Community Support Officer with South East Local Land Services where she assists Aboriginal communities to deliver land management projects, based on their aspirations of healing Country. In addition to her interest in Aboriginal Cultural Landscaping methodologies, Leanne is also passionate about the revival of the Dhurga language. In her previous role at the Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council, she worked with Traditional Knowledge holders to write songs and teach Dhurga language to children and also coordinated the Giriwa Garawanga Aboriginal Art Gallery. Leanne is an accomplished artist, which is a way for her to express her connection to Country and Culture. Leanne holds a Bachelors degree in Communications and Media as well as a Diploma in Project Management.

**DAN MORGAN** is a southern Yuin Traditional Owner with two decades of experience in national park management. Previously Dan worked as an Aboriginal Field Officer for National Parks and Wildlife Services and as an Aboriginal Community Support Officer with South East Local Land Services (LLS). He has also served as a member of the Biamanga Board of Management. Dan is currently working as Firesticks Alliance Regional Coordinator Southern NSW.



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## SOUTH COAST NSW Session Summary

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Jacob Morris at the 2018 National Indigenous Fire Workshop Bundanon, hosted by Yuin. Photo courtesy of Craig Bender and Vera Hong.

**In this session, Leanne and Dan shared how communities and Country are recovering from the devastating impact of the 2020 bushfires, and how now, more than ever, good fire is needed to heal Country.**

Leanne shared her experience participating in a Cultural Burn conducted on her property in 2019. “I left that burn feeling really humbled and felt like I was doing something really good for Country...we were pumped and ready to get going”, she said.

A few months later, a bushfire started in Currowan and went on to burn 80% of the Shoalhaven. “We’re living in an upside down Country...Country is a worse state than ever here,” Leanne said.

One of the challenges of this time has been the lack of care for Cultural sites because of the perceived risk of getting communities to these sites, Leanne said. Working with agencies to assess sites will be critical, as well as getting good fire back on Country where it belongs.

Plans to work with Yuin Elder, Uncle ‘Nook’ Noel Webster and the community to build capacity for Cultural Burning through a series of burns and Cultural Fire Forum unfortunately had to be put on hold because of COVID-19. Instead, Ulladulla Local Aboriginal land Council and Treading Lightly inc, with funding support from South East Local Land Services produced a six week webinar series - djamanj djamaga ganj (we talk good fire) - to share knowledge and experience from local Cultural Fire projects.

“We need to build up our people to do the work that Country is calling out for us to do,” Leanne said.

Dan reflected on his experience advocating for Cultural Burning in both his field officer role and board director roles over the past 18 years, and the challenges still prevalent within agencies to receive approval for Cultural Burning.

“We had to jump through a lot of hoops to...introduce traditional land management practices. And yet it seems that they don’t have to go through that process for hazard reduction burns...As a Traditional Owner with cultural obligations to care for Country, doing hazard reduction burns would break my heart as I knew it was the wrong way to treat Country,” he said.

Despite taking an event as drastic as the 2020 bushfires to realise the importance of Cultural Fire, Dan shared how rewarding it has been to see the progression of Cultural Burning in such a short time. He shared his experience working with the Bega Land Council which, in 2020, was able to conduct a number of Sandridge Country burns.



djamanj djamaga ganj (we talk good fire) webinar series was developed to provide an introduction to Cultural Burning for those who couldn’t gather due to COVID-19. Artwork by Leanne Brook.

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## VICTORIA Presenters

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CASE STUDY 6

VICTORIA

DAVE WANDIN, MICK BOURKE AND AMOS ATKINSON

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**UNCLE DAVE** Wandin is a Wurundjeri Elder and land management expert who has been doing extensive conservation work at Coranderrk, a former mission station and place of enormous cultural and historical significance.



**MICK BOURKE** is a proud Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung man. He works as a District Planner at the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, with Forest Fire Management Victoria. Mick believes that bringing back the practice of traditional burning will not only heal the country but also heal the people



**AMOS ATKINSON** (Banjarra Warri) is a proud Bangarang, Djarra, Waveroo, Wiradjuri man living in Mooroopna, Victoria. He has spent most of his life in Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations and for the past ten years has worked in Natural and Cultural Heritage. Amos has been leading the revival of Cultural Fire on his Country. Amos believes in putting good fire back onto Country with the right Traditional Owners and the right traditional methods.



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## VICTORIA Session Summary

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Wurundjeri elder Uncle David Wandin and Brett Ellis accepted the 2021 Yarra Ranges Environmentalist of the Year Award on behalf of the Return to Firesticks Program. Photo courtesy of Brett Ellis.

**In this session, Uncle Dave, Mick and Amos spoke about recent political achievements as well as challenges that still need to be overcome to realise the vision that Traditional Owners have for Cultural Fire.**

Uncle Dave shared about the political advocacy being led by Victorian Traditional Owners that has resulted in a Cultural Fire Strategy becoming legislation in Victoria. It mandates government departments to consult with Victorian Indigenous people when undertaking burning on Country.

“This is a huge step that we’ve done in three years...I’m proud of what we have achieved,” Uncle Dave said.

The focus now is on ensuring the policy is implemented and that business as usual practices actually do change.

“Hopefully the government will read and use these strategies instead of it sitting on the shelf. I notice a lot of our Country plans seem to sit on the shelf. The people making big changes on our Country aren’t reading these documents,” Mick said.

Uncle Dave shared his concern that there is not enough burning is taking place, and that burns that do take place - one acre here, five acres there - are too small scale.

Making sure that more Aboriginal people have the power to re-write policies and procedures to include Cultural Burning will be crucial, said Mick.

“While we can do things in the existing system... we got to put our young fellas into these mainstream ivory towers to decolonise these offices... we have also got to stand on our own and have our own businesses to build our own economy;” he said.

They also discussed the importance of ensuring women’s representation in fire management, both in mainstream organisations and in Cultural Burning practices.

“Women [Elders] who want to run [burns] on Country but they have to run through male managers to get mapping done [which isn’t always appropriate],” Mick said.

Mick and Amos also shared Dja Dja Wurrung’s Country Fire plan - Djandak Wi - which provides a vision for expanding Cultural Burning across Central Victoria.



“We must train and build the capacity of our people. We must educate the government and the wider community how to manage Country our way. Most importantly, we need the resources to ensure we can employ our people to meet the obligations to manage our Country our way.” Image from a video courtesy of Mick Bourke. WATCH THE FILM <https://vimeo.com/478355911>





2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop, Dhungala hosted by Yorta Yorta. Photo courtesy of Craig Bender and Vera Hong.



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## TASMANIA Presenters

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CASE STUDY 7

TASMANIA

FIONA MAHER, TERRY MAYNARD AND ANDRY SCULTHORPE



**FIONA MAHER** lives on Country at truwana/Cape Barren Island in the Bass Strait, which was returned to the Aboriginal community in 2005. Fiona coordinates the truwana Rangers who were established in 2015 and work closely with the local community to ensure traditional cultural and environmental practices are used to heal Country. Fiona is passionate about her people, about surveying after fire to ensure that important Cultural sites are recovered and protected, as well as women's roles in Cultural Fire. Fiona has helped to establish the truwana/Cape Barren Island Cultural Fire Management plan that sits alongside the Island Mitigation Plan. She is currently contributing to efforts to develop a women's Cultural Burn team for lutruwita/Tasmania as well as a fee-for-service model to better support communities to lead Cultural Burning activities across lutruwita/Tasmania. Like all truwana Rangers, Fiona volunteers for the truwana/Cape Barren Island Fire Brigade, which supports the Tasmania Fire Service with remote area firefighting.

**TERRY MAYNARD** was born and lives on Country at truwana/Cape Barren Island in the Bass Strait. Terry is a Senior Ranger with the truwana Rangers who work closely with local community to ensure traditional cultural and environmental practices are used to heal Country. Terry is passionate about his homeland/country, culture and practices. Terry is passionate about putting the good fire back onto country. Terry loves the passion shown by rangers in following on from the old peoples legacies of land management and sees the importance of handing on knowledges to the younger generations. Like all truwana Rangers, Terry volunteers for the truwana/Cape Barren Island Fire Brigade, which supports the Tasmania Fire Service with remote area firefighting.

**ANDRY SCULTHORPE** is a proud pakana, Tralwulway man who has spent 20 years working in the area of Natural and Cultural Resource Management in Government and non-government organisations predominantly in the Aboriginal Community sector. Andry is currently working at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, undertaking community based, On-Country projects on Aboriginal Land around Tasmania and the Bass Strait Islands to promote healthy country and community development. Andry is interested in working within the principles of community leadership and self-determination for Aboriginal communities. Andry is also committed to the arts sector and he supports the development of art and cultural programs in the Aboriginal and wider community. Andry studied at the University of Tasmania and has a BSc in Ecology and Geography.

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## TASMANIA Session Summary

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truwana Rangers, Cape Barren Island. Photo courtesy Fiona Maher.

**In this session, Terry, Fiona and Andry talked about the many efforts taking place across lutruwita/Tasmania to get fire back into the hands of local people. With over 60,000 hectares of returned Aboriginal land in lutruwita/Tasmania and growing interest in fee-for-service Cultural Burns from private landholders, there is a critical need to build the lutruwita/Tasmania community's capacity to conduct Cultural Burning across the landscape.**

Fiona and Terry shared how the practice of Cultural Fire has brought the community on truwana/Cape Barren Island back together. After a long struggle for land rights, truwana/Cape Barren Island is now in Aboriginal community control. The island is home to many diverse types of Country - from the east coast's internationally significant lagoons to coastal sheoak forests.

The truwana Ranger group, which was established in 2015, has been rekindling the fires that the old people burned before colonisation. As a result, they've noticed more birds coming back to the island and nesting, and they have also found cultural sites that were obscured by thick vegetation. It's also brought the community back to the island to reconnect with Country again, says Terry. "We're keeping the stories going. To have that back again...[makes me] proud...it can only be a positive for this island," he said.

Terry and Fiona also shared how they have balanced their Cultural responsibilities with the firefighting role they play as members of the local fire brigade. "It has proven that cultural practices can co-exist with firefighting," Terry said.

The community has also started a junior ranger program that enables students to regularly head out on Country with rangers to learn about weed management, water sampling, identifying flora and fauna as well as other important practices to care for Country. Teachers on the island have linked these activities to the school curriculum so students get recognition for their learning on Country.

"Quite often the kids are going home and teaching mum and dad about it. We want to set up career pathways for kids who want to stay here and don't want to move to mainland Tasmania," said Fiona.

Across the Bass Strait, Andry shared about many Cultural Fire workshops that have taken place across lutruwita/Tasmania to deepen knowledge and connection with Country, as well as set up monitoring techniques that ranger teams can utilise to observe the outcomes of a burn.

However for Cultural Fire to work on a large scale, it requires transfer of power from the government to the community as well as serious investment. "We need policies that give Aboriginal people back ownership and institutions that resource community organisations that are leading this work so that we can get more people trained up and capable of applying the right kinds of fire in different areas," Andry said.



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## WESTERN AUSTRALIA **Presenter**

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CASE STUDY 8

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ORAL MCGUIRE



Oral McGuire, Noongar man on the Yaraguia property in Djiljeriny (Beverley), WA. Photo courtesy of Oral McGuire.

**ORAL MCGUIRE** is a Noongar leader and landholder who is strongly skilled at cross cultural mentoring and education. Oral has extensive experience in traditional land and fire management practices, as well as 20 years' experience running his consulting business. He has worked across government, private enterprise and the not-for-profit sector bridging the divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Oral is a prominent leader within the Noongar community and has held a number of current and past roles in Aboriginal organisations. His current roles include chairing Noongar Land Enterprises Incorporated, Yaraguia Enterprises Incorporated and as a member of the Curtin University Aboriginal Advisory Council.

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## WESTERN AUSTRALIA Session Summary

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**In this session, Oral shared about the incredible community persistence to push for the right to look after Country with Cultural Fire, in spite of massive struggles from government agencies.**

Karl-Ngarra is the Noongar word for Cultural Burning and its meaning encompasses so much more than the English term. Kaarl-Ngarra means to use fire to renew Country. This matters, Oral said, because all of our languages carry codes that teach us what is important.

“There’s a lot of rhetoric from whitefellas and government about who we are and where we fit around fire. The risk management elements, attitudes to what we bring as Traditional Owners and what people understand and interpret about who they believe we are, all leads to a low level of value in their world about what we bring,” Oral said.

Oral spoke about the racist attitudes of the government in how their practices delay, deny, defy, dismiss and die. “They pay [non-Indigenous] people to find solutions for us and then we get branded with the wastage of their incompetence,” he said.

A settlement was recently reached on the return of 300,000 hectares of predominantly forest land, nature reserves and crown lands to the Noongar community, with fire and land management to be carried out in a joint management initiative.

Finding cultural authority using cultural governance frameworks, rather than western corporate governance frameworks such as Native Title, will be critical.

“We need to re-establish and re-assert our cultural authority on our tribal lands...using the wisdom of our Elders and the knowledge of our systems and old cultures,” Oral said.

Oral McGuire, Noongar man on the Yaraguia property in Djiiljeriny (Beverley), WA. Photo courtesy of Oral McGuire.



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## COMMUNITY NETWORKS AND TRAINING PROGRAM

### Presenter

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**Jessica Wegener** King Mayi from Western NSW, Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan has a diploma in Indigenous land management, small business and project management and has undertaken an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science. Jessica is a Co-Chairperson of the Firesticks Alliance board, a Junior board member for the jointly managed Mount Grenfell Historic Site and a board member of an Aboriginal Women's Group. Jessica has been working in Land Rights for a number of years to progress economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities through balancing their social, cultural, environmental and economic growth capacity to deliver land management opportunities that are supportive of revitalising Traditional Knowledge in healing Country. She is currently developing a pilot in the Hunter region for a Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation Regional Indigenous Fire Training Course that is NSW accredited.



Jessica Wegener at the 2019 Dhungala National Indigenous Fire Workshop hosted by Yorta Yorta. Photo courtesy Craig Bender and Vera Hong.

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## COMMUNITY NETWORKS AND TRAINING PROGRAM

### Session Summary

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In her keynote, Jessica shared how Firesticks' has grown to incorporate many on-country mentoring and training programs for Cultural Fire application across different vegetation types. When the Firesticks Board of Directors convened for a strategic planning meeting in 2019, they recognised the need for Firesticks to create a Cultural Fire practitioner Training Certification Framework that would support the further growth and development of Indigenous-led Cultural Fire practice.

Jessica also shared briefly about the evolution of Firestick's governance model to one of shared leadership. Having a woman and man co-chair the Firesticks board ensures that both women's and men's roles in Cultural Fire are centred in Firesticks' activities.

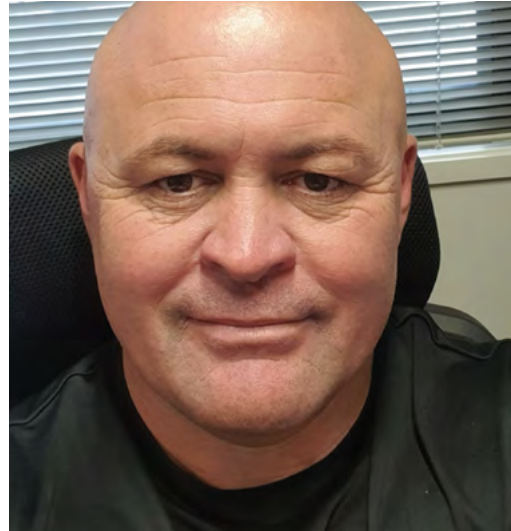


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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS

### Presenters

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**VANESSA MACDONALD** is one of the Principal Project Officers at SQ Landscapes, with experience in natural resource management since 2005. Vanessa is highly skilled in soil conservation, community engagement and grazing and land systems management. Her particular expertise and skill set means Vanessa is often undertaking field work alongside landholders to improve pastures and general landscape condition on-property.

**SHANE BROWN** is a Station Officer, iZone Officer (Bushfire Mitigation) and Traditional/Indigenous Land Management Practitioner at Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Prior to this he served as a Station Officer/Firefighter at the New Zealand Fire Service.

**GARRY DETEZ** has a sound knowledge of, and approximately 30 years' experience, living and working with Victorian Aboriginal communities. He has developed and implemented a range of capacity building projects, community cultural development initiatives, strategic planning and policy outcomes for the Aboriginal community. Garry has been connected to the Firesticks Alliance for the last 5 years in his role as Indigenous Development Coordinator at Yarra Ranges Council in Victoria.

**NAT BURKE** is Senior Manager, Social Development at WWF-Australia. Nat and his team manage WWF-Australia's community-led conservation and sustainable development projects in collaboration with Indigenous and local community organisations across Australia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Fiji. Prior to joining WWF-Australia, Nat held program management and policy advocacy roles at World Vision International, World Vision Australia and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS

### Session Summary

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**During this session, panellists spoke about the growing interest from partners to better understand Cultural Burning and many different ways they are supporting Firesticks and Traditional Owners to grow the practice of Cultural Burning.**

Vanessa from SQ Landscapes shared how, over the last 12 months, the landholders they work with in Southern Queensland have been increasingly seeking to understand how to use Cultural Burning as an option for land management. As a result, they organised a series of workshops run by Victor Steffensen first focused on understanding and reading Country to know how different landscapes worked, followed by burning workshops to provide participants with a visual understanding of how fires worked in the landscape.

The workshops were attended by over 100 local landholders, local rangers and local fire practitioners, a number of whom have started implementing Cultural Burning. The relationships that have started to develop between landholders and local Aboriginal groups will “assist with the on-ground implementation of these burns,” she said.

Shane from the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service shared how his approach to fire management has completely changed since being introduced to Cultural Fire. “I’ve not used a drip torch in the last three years after learning how to read the trees, soil and the time of year to burn. It’s been an amazing journey,” he said.

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**“I’ve not used a drip torch in the last three years after learning how to read the trees, soil and the time of year to burn. It’s been an amazing journey,”**

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However the fire services need to do more to enable traditional burning methods, Shane said. “For every door that we do we open, there’s two more behind it. It shouldn’t be this hard...we need to take the barriers [to Cultural Burning] away so our partners can move forward.”

Garry from the Yarra Ranges Council also spoke of the need to remove barriers to make it easier for Aboriginal people to conduct Cultural Burning. “Our role is to provide the platform and clear the pathway for Wurundjeri mob to do their thing,” he said.

Garry also spoke about how the Black Saturday bushfires that devastated the Yarra Ranges were actually a catalyst for the council to look more seriously into Cultural Burning and connect with the Firesticks Alliance. “The level of interest that Firesticks is generating amongst our government and private landowners provides that strong platform for reconciliation to grow and flourish. Allowing non-Aboriginal people to see Firesticks practitioners [practice Cultural Fire] gives them deep insights into the wisdom and depth of Aboriginal people and culture,” he said.

But as the enthusiasm grows, panellists also pointed out that it’s important that Cultural Burning be led by Aboriginal people.

“All of Australia can benefit from Cultural Fire but it won’t work if it is not Indigenous-led. [Partnerships have to be conducted] in a meaningful way. That requires us to spend more time, build relationships and be genuine. This is not work we can lead,” said Nat from WWF-Australia.

Nat also spoke of the importance of properly resourcing Cultural Fire practices and the important work being undertaken to find new ways to build financial sustainability of Cultural Fire as a practice. “We’re really hoping over the next few years we’ll be able to invest a lot more in supporting Cultural Fire,”



Victor Steffensen conducts a Cultural Burning training with private landholders who are increasingly seeing Cultural Fire as an option for land management. Photo courtesy of Vanessa McDonald, SQ Landscapes.



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## PANEL AND YARNING CIRCLE: FIRESTICKS MENTORING, TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

### Session Summary

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**In this session, Victor, Peta and Jess presented some preliminary elements of the Firesticks Cultural Fire Mentoring and Training Program and invited participants to share their inputs.**

“Stopping bushfires is a major challenge,” said Victor. “The healthier the land, the less likely it is to burn with wildfires. But we don’t have enough skilled practitioners to manage the country... a two day fire certificate [is not enough]. We’re talking about three years to get started with a simple training program that is tailored to each region.”

The proposed program would be hands-on in the field, giving local Aboriginal communities an opportunity to learn more about their local area - vegetation types, history, cultural sites - as well as cross cultural knowledge sharing with Aboriginal communities in other areas. The program would also build on the learnings from the many years of Cultural Fire training programs that Firesticks Alliance has conducted.

“The most vital part is that the teaching must be on Country. Learning the trees and soils requires that people are out on Country all the time,” Victor said.

Not only would the program enable more Aboriginal community members to have the skills, confidence and qualifications to practice Culture Fire, but the certificate framework embedded in the training would also assure agencies and investors that Cultural Fire practitioners are looking after Country the right way. This would then enable sustainable income streams to support Aboriginal communities on the ground.

Following the panel presentation, participants had lively discussion in smaller group Yarning Circles around the following questions:

- **How can mentoring and training programs improve?**
- **What does the certification framework need to consider?**

Collated feedback from participants was wide-ranging, with the proposed program needing to consider:

- Mob-to-mob cross-cultural sharing;
- Space for Elders to share their stories;
- Modules on both Western and Indigenous fire management to ensure that practitioners are well equipped and qualified to navigate both systems;
- Teaching on Country - learning what the landscape needs to be healthy, and doing demonstration fires to see how Country responds over a number of years;
- Modules in language;
- Focus on relationship building;
- Peer to peer assessment/verification;
- Pathways to ongoing careers;
- Accreditation and recognition that is accepted elsewhere;
- Special program for young people that suits their needs and inspires them;
- Consistent long term funding;
- Mentoring and workshops specifically for women;
- Support and advice to develop partnerships and allies with non-Indigenous people and organisations;
- Re-certification process which requires evidence of ongoing community engagement;
- Recognised prior learning.



Firesticks Director Jessica Wegener training in monitoring tools used by Firesticks Alliance with pakana mob at putalina 2019. Photo courtesy of Dr Peta Standley.





Dr Peta Standley, Fiona Maher putalina/Oyster Cove 2020 Firesticks Workshop. Photo courtesy of Firesticks Alliance.



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## CULTURAL FIRE CREDITS AND MARKET INSTRUMENTS

### Presenter

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**ROWAN FOLEY** comes from the Wondunna clan of the Badtjala people, Traditional Owners of K'gari (Fraser Island) in Queensland. Rowan is the founding CEO of the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation, a not-for-profit company with offices in Cairns, Sydney and Alice Springs. Rowan was invited to give a TEDx Talk in Brisbane in 2018, presented at the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany on Indigenous carbon farming and spoke at the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016. Rowan arrived in the Northern Territory in 1989 working as a ranger at Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park and returned in 2005 as the Park Manager living in Mutitjulu community for a total of six years. The Kimberley Land Council employed Rowan as their first Land Management Officer in 1995. He established their Land and Sea Management Unit and negotiated the first Indigenous Protected Area in Western Australia.

Rowan Foley. Photo courtesy of Aboriginal Carbon Foundation.

## CULTURAL FIRE CREDITS AND MARKET INSTRUMENTS

### Session Summary



**In this keynote, Rowan shared the latest research and development of Cultural Fire Credits - a way to better channel sustainable, long-term and independent investment directly to Aboriginal communities to support Cultural Fire practices.**

Cultural Fire Credits provide an avenue for willing members of the wider community to invest directly in looking after Country, he said.

“Lots of people want to invest but have no way of doing it...ordinary mums and dads who want to look after Country and are sick to death of having Country burned down could buy Cultural Fire Credits...corporations such as insurance companies are keen to invest [in preventative measures] because it is much cheaper to invest in Cultural Burning than it is to replace a house...landowners could buy credits to support a Cultural Fire Practitioner to conduct Cultural Burning on their property,” Rowan said.

Most of the income generated would go towards paying accredited Cultural Fire practitioners for the implementation of burns and equipment, while a percentage of funds would support the Firesticks Alliance to train and mentor the next generation of Cultural Fire Practitioners.

**Cultural Fire Credits provide an avenue for willing members of the wider community to invest directly in looking after Country.**

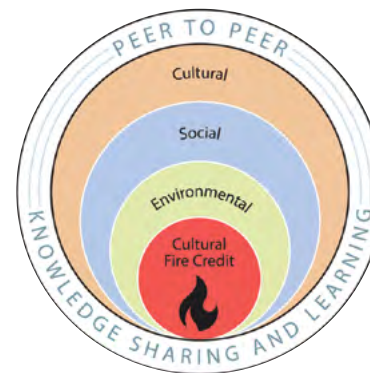


Lisa McMurray, Aboriginal Carbon Foundation, conducting core-benefits verification training. Photo courtesy of Aboriginal Carbon Foundation.

The Aboriginal Carbon Foundation would then implement a unique peer-to-peer strengths based verification approach that empowers Traditional Owners to determine the environmental, social and cultural values that are relevant and important to their Country and community, and bring in Traditional Owners from another community to verify that these outcomes have been achieved.

Environmental outcomes could look like increased biodiversity or protection of endangered flora and fauna, reduced greenhouse gases, while social outcomes could be increased employment of local Aboriginal people or partnerships with regional agencies. Cultural outcomes include protection of tangible and intangible sacred sites and cultural heritage, or Elders sharing traditional knowledge with young people.

The peer to peer verification approach has been embedded in the Queensland Government’s Land Restoration Fund as the only third party assurance for First Nation’s projects and all projects claiming social and economic outcomes. The fact the Kowanyama carbon project in Cape York underwent verification was a deciding factor in the Commonwealth Bank making a sizable purchase of carbon credits from this project.



Peer to peer verification model. Courtesy of the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation.



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## WOMEN'S ROLES IN CULTURAL FIRE

### Presenters

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**KYLEE CLUBB** has been working with Indigenous communities on Country and community for over 15 years. She is a Director and Coordinator of Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage Protection Body in Far North QLD and is an advanced firefighter with Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade on Yidinji Country, Atherton Tablelands. Kylee is the Crew leader of Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage Women's team and upholds the Cultural Heritage Act along with her team. She participates in the strong continuance of Cultural Fire and cultural practices including song, dance, storytelling and art. Kylee participated in the Indigenous Leadership Centre's, Leadership Program, aimed at empowering Indigenous people to be leaders within their communities. She has worked within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care and Indigenous Mental Health community services and is deeply passionate about protecting cultural knowledge, IP and practice through community-led mentorship on Country and community.

**FIONA MAHER** lives on Country at truwana/Cape Barren Island in the Bass Strait, which was returned to the Aboriginal community in 2005. Fiona coordinates the truwana Rangers who were established in 2015 and work closely with the local community to ensure traditional cultural and environmental practices are used to heal Country. Fiona is passionate about her people, about surveying after fire to ensure that important Cultural sites are recovered and protected, as well as women's roles in Cultural Fire. Fiona has helped to establish the truwana/Cape Barren Island Cultural Fire Management plan that sits alongside the Island Mitigation Plan. She is currently contributing to efforts to develop a women's Cultural Burn team for lutruwita/Tasmania as well as a fee-for-service model to better support communities to lead Cultural Burning activities across Lutruwita/Tasmania. Like all truwana Rangers, Fiona volunteers for the truwana/Cape Barren Island Fire Brigade, which supports the Tasmania Fire Service with remote area firefighting.

**TAMMY GILSON** is a Traditional Owner from Wadawurrung country, the land in which her great grandmother walked. Tammy's role of the past 9 years as a project officer at the Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation has embraced her culture and passion about caring for Country in all aspects of cultural heritage management, natural resource management and education. Tammy understands the importance of cultural values and that the continuation of cultural practice is vital to Wadawurrung people. Tammy along with her family perform ceremony and dance Tanderrum to revitalise the language and stories of dreaming, Tammy is also an award winning basket weaver. Tammy pays respect to her Ancestors and Elders and connects to Country through spirit.

**DEBORAH SWAN** is a Ngarrindjeri mimini (woman), with kinship affiliation to Darkinjung and Awaba Country where she grew up and still resides. Deborah has been a Culture and Heritage officer for over 30 years and was previously a certified Ranger with Forest NSW. Cultural mapping has been a large part of her life through previous studies and work. Deborah completed a diploma in Aboriginal Studies, Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Quality Auditing and has a Master's degree in Architecture Research. Her thesis was based around Indigenous epistemology and ideologies, highlighting the importance of reciprocal research methodologies when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While studying at the Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Deborah developed and co-authored the, "Guidelines and Principles for Pre-Ethical Approaches to Indigenous Australian Research" (Martin et al., 2016). Deborah is also a PhD candidate Doctor of Philosophy and Anthropology at the University of Newcastle.

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## WOMEN'S ROLES IN CULTURAL FIRE

### Presenters

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**JESSICA WEGENER** King Mayi from Western NSW, Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan has a diploma in Indigenous land management, small business and project management and has undertaken an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science. Jessica is a Junior board member for the jointly managed Mount Grenfell Historic Site and a board member of an Aboriginal Women's Group. Jessica has been working in Land Rights for a number of years to progress economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities through balancing their social, cultural, environmental and economic growth capacity to deliver land management opportunities that are supportive of revitalising Traditional Knowledge in healing Country. She is currently developing a pilot in the Hunter region for a Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation Regional Indigenous Fire Training Course that is NSW accredited.

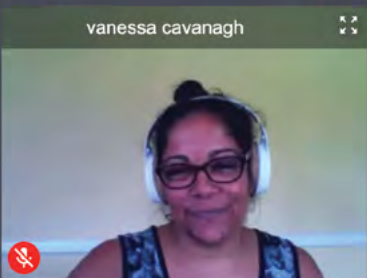
**VANESSA CAVANAGH** is a proud Bundjalung and Wonnarua Aboriginal woman. She is an associate lecturer in the Faculty of Social Science and is currently studying a PhD focused on Aboriginal women's engagement in cultural burning practices in NSW. She is passionate about empowering Aboriginal women to participate in caring for Country activities, and Indigenous leadership.

**RACHAEL CAVANAGH** is Minyungbal mibany, from Yugambeh Nation of northern NSW and south east QLD. She has a passion for Women's Rights and First Nations issues. The love for her Culture and Country has grounded her in the environmental sector specifically in caring for Country roles. She is currently a member on the National Indigenous Working Group for Forest Stewardship Council, Chair of the Clarence Valley Women's Refuge and on the Working group for Our Watch Australia. Rachel also leads Community Programs and Stakeholder Engagement for the Firesticks Alliance.

**ROSIE GOSLETT KING** is a Yuin Buddawang woman who is deeply passionate about promoting and re-establishing Cultural Burns/Conservation Burns/Firestick Farming and Women's Business as crucial elements of conservation work. She is currently the Women Rangers Environmental Network (WREN) coordinator at WWF-Australia. Previously she coordinated an Indigenous mix gender Ranger team in the Illawarra where she first had the privilege of connecting with Firesticks, attending the Barmah camp, and working with Uncle Nook who shared Fire knowledge with her and her team. Rosie has great pride in working with Community, caring for Country, and learning and sharing Culture and has great women role models in her family who inspire and motivate her to ensure the values of her Community and Culture are transferred between generations.



"How can you be something that you can't see?" said panellist Kylee Clubb. These women are leading the way for the next generation to care for Country.



**Chat** 5 Participants Q&A

← General Chat

your arrying and ho  
11:03 AM | Today

**Peta-Marie Standley**  
Strong beautiful women  
11:03 AM | Today

**April Crawford-Smith**  
Wow such an amazing concept  
11:03 AM | Today

**Lenka Vanderboom**  
True...Aunty Deb Swan...my Nan didn't name it a cool burn ...was just doing what was expected of everyone in looking after each other, Country and our other plant place and animal relatives.  
11:05 AM | Today

**Peta-Marie Standley**  
so important  
11:07 AM | Today

| type a message

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## WOMEN'S ROLES IN CULTURAL FIRE

### Session Summary

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Arceeya Clubb Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage Corporation and Djabugay woman Catherine Donnahue  
2021 Women's Gathering Djabugay FNQ. Photo courtesy of Julie Ryan.

**In this session, Kylee, Fiona, Tammy, Deborah, Jessica, Vanessa, Rachael and Rosie shared the work happening all across Australia to better support women to fulfil their important roles in Cultural Fire - from being caretakers of women's-only areas and plants, to teachers and role models to inspire the next generation to care for Country.**

Deborah illustrated this beautifully when talking about taking family groups out on Country, saying: "It's probably the first time [Elder women] put fire to the ground again but they remember walking with their grandparents and doing this. It ignites this DNA memory of the past...It's a beautiful thing to watch people ignite with the fire and bring spirit back into connection with Country."

Tammy shared her experience as a basket weaver, saying that exchanging stories and knowledge about fire is helping her to develop her own plan for Wadawurrung women. "My mum didn't have these opportunities," she said. "I have an obligation to those old people."

Many panellists shared the importance of intergenerational transfer of fire knowledge. According to Rachael: "[Cultural Fire] is more important than anyone gives it credit for. [Caring for Country] gives our kids something to aspire to." Fiona shared how Culture Fire provides a different way of teaching kids: "It's about bringing up our kids differently to the colonial ways that have been imposed on them." While Jessica shared that it's about "modelling the path for the next generation so they know what to do when they are a mother, grandmother."

Drawing on her own experience as a woman ranger, Rosie shared her passion for supporting and connecting women rangers to revitalise Cultural Fire, saying: "Some of the most important areas of biodiversity and Indigenous land management techniques are women's business, but women represent less than 26% of rangers."

Through the Women Rangers Environment Network at WWF-Australia, Rosie is helping to link women rangers across Australia who face similar and unique challenges, and provide opportunities for a nation-wide knowledge exchange. She shared plans for the first National Women Rangers forum in 2021 (COVID-19 permitting).

Vanessa shared preliminary outcomes of her PhD research, which aims to empower, promote, and amplify the work of Aboriginal women in Cultural Burning. Her research has shown that Aboriginal women in NSW have long-been participating in Cultural Burning, or are interested in it; the importance of recognising cultural diversity across NSW as, for some mobs, fire is women's business; their experiences of marginalisation - how participating in Cultural Burning gives women access to land that is normally restricted e.g. private property or national parks and how that can lead to improved partnerships; and that when Aboriginal women spend more time on Country there is increased monitoring of Aboriginal heritage sites and wider land management issues.

"We know that Country is healthier with people on it," she said.

Vanessa also shared a beautiful story about how her research has enabled her to bring fire back to her family's Country. "It was the first time in my direct family line that we had been able to go back and care for Country since colonisation," she said.







Deborah Swan, 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop, Dhungala hosted by YortaYorta. Photo courtesy of Vera Hong.





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## ACTIVATING WELL BEING FOR EDUCATION & THE LIVING KNOWLEDGE PLACE

### Presenter

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**TORRES WEBB** is a proud Far North Queenslander and Indigenous man from the Torres Strait. Torres is a passionate parent and community engagement advocate in improving the achievement, wellbeing and life chances of all children and youth by focusing on “what’s strong rather than what’s wrong”. He is recognised nationally and internationally for his community engagement and leadership skills. Having worked with Youth Challenge Australia in Vanuatu, Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network in Phillipines, Queensland Youth Parliament and with Oxfam International Youth Partnerships in India, Torres has also held a Deputy Chair position on the Erubam Traditional Land and Sea Owners Native Title Body, where he worked closely with the local rangers and Elders around caring for country and sustainability initiatives. Known for his work in promoting the power of positive relationships in educating future generations regardless of economic and social circumstance. Torres is passionate about securing equity, inclusion and social justice for Indigenous first Australians particularly the next generation (children & youth) through working with schools. Torres’s most recent work has been focused around developing active partnerships for learning across school and community, supporting and guiding educators to understand their purpose and role and new ways to best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Torres Webb Erub (Darnley Is) Zenadath Kas (Torres Strait). Photo courtesy of Jimmy Thaiday.

ACTIVATING WELL BEING FOR EDUCATION AND THE LIVING KNOWLEDGE PLACE  
Session Summary



In this session, Victor and Torres discussed the importance of integrating traditional knowledge into the mainstream education system.

“We can’t be in an education system that teaches us to think in straight lines and gives us content that is not relevant. It’s crucial that with climate change and [social and environmental] challenges that our kids are getting a roadmap and given the right education that...prepares them to contribute [to the wellbeing of community] when they leave school. That’s what the old people saw long ago,” Victor said.

To make it easier for teachers and schools to embed traditional knowledge in mainstream education, Torres has started developing curriculum content from community driven education site The Living Knowledge Place.

“It’s been amazing to see students get so deeply interested. They want to learn more. It builds connection and bridges reconciliation when they can see the depth of our knowledge - that isn’t just something in the past but is here in the present and into the future,” he said.

One of the challenges of working with the mainstream education system has been the way power and control is centralised in the government. “The government wants to control everything. We have to move to a way of shared leadership and shared expectations,” Torres said.

The Living Knowledge Place is designed to share and teach traditional knowledge values into contemporary culture to help address environmental and social challenges. It also provides teaching resources linked to community programs for educators. The Firesticks Alliance have developed an investment portfolio to increase the fire content in The Living Knowledge Place and connect education with community. VISIT [LIVINGKNOWLEDGEPLACE.COM.AU](http://LIVINGKNOWLEDGEPLACE.COM.AU)



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## PANEL AND YARNING CIRCLE: DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULTURAL FIRE CREDIT AND INVESTMENT PATHWAYS FORWARD

### Presenters

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**SHILO VILLAFLOR** is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Wagiman Clan in Darwin with historical ties to the Torres Strait Islands and Cape York. A proud Mum of 4 and even prouder grandmother of 1. For 20+ years she had worked in Native Title all over Cape York, in particular the Northern Peninsula Area and Weipa Area. She established close working relationships and formed treasured family bonds with many people whilst assisting in their legal fight to get their Native Title rights and interests recognised. She joined the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation in April 2019, to help create a real and sustained income stream for remote Aboriginal Communities and provide real and lasting empowerment and ownership over their own affairs and country. She is passionate about combining working with Traditional Owners and the important issue of climate change and the environment.

**LISA MCMURRAY** has over 20 years' experience redressing inequity within community development programs using strengths-based approaches across the Pacific and within Indigenous Australia. Lisa brings the right people and partnerships together to leverage their collective skills for cultural revitalisation, community building and climate change solutions. Lisa's current work with Aboriginal Carbon Foundation looks to Indigenous-led opportunities that lead to game-changing systemic dismantling and positive community outcomes. Lisa has led NGO collaborative community development initiatives in PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Timor Leste, India, Malawi, Cape York and the Northern Territory.

**ROWAN FOLEY** comes from the Wondunna clan of the Badtjala people, Traditional Owners of K'gari (Fraser Island) in Queensland. Rowan is the founding CEO of the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation, a not-for-profit company with offices in Cairns, Sydney and Alice Springs. Rowan was invited to give a TEDx Talk in Brisbane in 2018, presented at the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany on Indigenous carbon farming and spoke at the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016. Rowan arrived in the Northern Territory in 1989 working as a ranger at Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park and returned in 2005 as the Park Manager living in Mutitjulu community for a total of six years. The Kimberley Land Council employed Rowan as their first Land Management Officer in 1995. He established their Land and Sea Management Unit and negotiated the first Indigenous Protected Area in Western Australia.

# PANEL AND YARNING CIRCLE: DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULTURAL FIRE CREDIT AND INVESTMENT PATHWAYS FORWARD

## Session Summary

In this session, Shilo, Lisa, Peta, Rowan and Victor delved into the way in which Cultural Fire Credits could be implemented and invited participants to share their thoughts and ideas.

They shared how Cultural Fire Credits provide an opportunity to create an independent income around Cultural Burning that is not reliant on government grants, or beholden to government or donor-imposed monitoring and verification processes.

“For many years I have watched consultants from as far as Tasmania come to the Cape with us and tell communities there how to run their affairs. It was really disheartening to see Indigenous people have the wind knocked out of their sails because all of a sudden they are not the experts in the room,” Shilo said.

Instead, the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation set out to develop a peer to peer process that empowered Indigenous people. The peer to peer verification process reflects the indicators that communities are already looking for following a burn, Peta said, like scar height, knowledge transfer to young people etc.

“The idea is not to make this incredibly complex, but that it reflects the practice of mob on the ground and provides a framework for investors to feel confident that they have an outcome,” she said.

The Yarning Circle focused on hearing participants’ perspectives on Cultural Fire Credits, with participants discussing the best case scenario for Cultural Burns, the investment that would be needed to support this, possible concerns with the Cultural Fire Credit approach, and what some of the social, environmental and cultural benefits might look like.

Firesticks will be running a series of workshops over 2021 to continue these conversations and ensure that Cultural Fire Credits are designed to resource and finance communities to continue the Cultural Fire practices that they are already leading.

**First Table**

- What would the best case scenario look like for cultural burns (how many times a year, how many people are needed, what resources are required etc.)
- What investment is currently needed to support the best case scenarios?
- What aspects of the cultural fire credits that we have presented do you like?
- Is there anything that you are worried about or we should need to know to improve the Cultural Fire Credit?
- What are some of the cultural, social, environmental, economic benefits from cultural burning?

**Handwritten Notes:**

- What would be the best scenario?
  - \* % of land currently burnt using cultural fire burning is small
  - \* Some of the land is too sick
  - \* Best scenario would be to increase the %
  - \* Must bring the community along
  - \* Need to train non-Indigenous people as well to cover more land
  - \* Certification system could be ongoing to monitor
- Q1. cant put a number on the amount of burns but it has to fit in with our systems and timing. (depends on how many landscape types are in that system. there are variables like access and land size for numbers of people but in ideal circumstances it could be done with one or two people, however we must have other indigenous community members there to pass the knowledge on to. best case scenario is we dont need any resources as the country controls the fire. empowered communities and...
- In case you haven't come across it, there is a company that is part of a TNC biz incubator program that is creating a biz just around the tech platform for a similar system. MAYBE you can borrow some ideas for your platform? regen.network
- Q2. Investment in training, resources and partnerships. financial contributions (without expectation of dictating how we operate.

**Eleventh Table**

- Use investment in fighting fire for managing country
- Have government or philanthropist finance training of cultural burning
- apple effect reciprocity humility. Watching each community go through similar challenges
- more than fire its about healing people
- lost time on country over generations
- showing young people the way
- Require carbon offset projects to include cultural and environmental benefits
- we like everything about cultural fire credits verification model, locally controlled, local spending
- New income sources from tree products, biochar,
- What does healthy country look like?
- Set up investment vehicles for larger scale investment
- educating broader community
- mentoring knowledge sharing experiential building relationship
- Measurement as happy animals and ecosystems
- timin in natures time
- certification has to be on country
- Use investment in fighting fire for managing country

**Benefits:**

- water quality
- endangered species
- weed management
- encourage food and medicine plants and native grasses
- timber quality
- big trees live longer
- bring young folks back to culture
- fuel reduction

**Fire, water, cocultural systems**

Whiteboards from the Day 2 Yarning Circles.



A line art illustration in a light green color on a dark green background. It depicts two women from the waist up. The woman on the left has long, wavy hair and is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top. She is holding a stringed instrument, possibly a guitar or ukulele, and has her hands positioned as if playing. The woman on the right has shorter, curly hair and is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top. She is also holding a stringed instrument and appears to be singing or speaking into a microphone. The style is minimalist and artistic, using only outlines to define the figures and their instruments.

## SHARING SONG

Closing the first morning of the virtual conference was a beautiful musical performance by Naurita Briscoe, Kiara Gulliver, Merindi Schrieber and Lynton Schrieber who sang about the land, wind, water, and fires calling for unity. Over lunch on Day 2, pakana musical duo Kartanya and Dana performed lively covers of much loved songs, bringing smiles to participant's faces.



Lynton Schrieber, Naurita Briscoe, Kiara Gulliver and Merindi Schrieber. Photo courtesy of Patti Preece.





# Feedback

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of survey respondents reflecting that the event increased their knowledge of communities working in Cultural Fire management practice and of the work that Firesticks is doing to support those communities.

The program was also well received - all conference sessions were mostly rated as “excellent” by survey respondents. Respondents appreciated the ‘fun’ way that the online format was used, particularly through the inclusion of song and ceremony.

Over 170 participants gathered online from across Australia and internationally, including Cultural Fire leaders from First Nations around the world. For most respondents (60%), this was their first time attending a Firesticks Alliance event.

DAY	ATTENDED
FRIDAY	137
SATURDAY	93
TOTAL	179*

\*Note: We cannot determine exact attendance as some participants were sharing computers.

40% of survey respondents attended both days of the conference, with 50% attending either Day 1 or 2. This reflects organisers’ observations of attendance slightly dropping off on the afternoon of Day 2, which took place on a Saturday. 60% of survey respondents indicated that a two day virtual event, held on weekdays would be preferable.

Participants shared important feedback about the limitations of the virtual technology, particularly in reading body language while networking. Survey respondents encouraged Firesticks to explore using the online format throughout the year to support connection amongst the network at large.

The daily newsletter “Our stories” that shared highlights from each day of the conference was also well received by participants, with an average of 52% of participants opening the emails over the conference (industry average is 20%) and an average of 42% of participants clicking on links in the emails (industry average is 3%).

Yes! your program is a fantastic example for all of us - I talk about it all the time in my federal meetings as a great example of Indigenous leadership in fire!

Thanks to everyone who made this event happen and those who have attended. It has been such a pleasure to hear all the deadly voices, stories and work we are all doing. Well done, lots more to do. We’ve got this!!”

“Thank you for an amazing two days of sharing and community. What I have learnt over the two days will glow within and each time I see a fire or smoke it will bring here to this experience.”

“Mekmatyn. Wonderful to be part of the discussion. This has been good medicine. Keep up the good work on country. Cisysimeaj.”

“Great Conference, Loved hearing from all the mob and the positive work everyone is doing. Thanks again to Firesticks for bringing us all together again.”



Participant Amy Christianson is a Métis woman working on Indigenous wildfire stewardship with the Canadian Forest Service.

**Being on the panel with women was really deadly and made me think about how important our role with wiyn (fire) is.**

**TAMMY GILSON  
A WADAWURRUNG BA-GURRK (WOMAN)  
LIVING ON WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY**



## Reflections

### TAMMY GILSON

I'm a Wadawurrung ba-gurkk (woman) living on Wadawurrung Country. The Firesticks Virtual Conference was a great platform for all of us to come together and share our knowledge and experiences about wiyn (fire) on Country. I always feel encouraged and empowered listening to the Elders stories, especially Victor and Uncle Dave. Being on the panel with women was really deadly and made me think about how important our role with wiyn (fire) is. I'm going to keep having these yarns with my mob and wish to seek support from all agencies and private land owners to reintroduce our wiyn (fire) back onto Country.

### AMOS ATKINSON

I'm Amos Atkinson, proud Bangerang and Dja Dja Wurrung man. The Firesticks Virtual Conference was a deadly way to end the year with a celebration of culture. Thanks Firesticks for getting us involved. Seeing all the great work everyone is doing across Australia is so inspiring to see to keep the momentum going in 2021 for Victoria.

**The Firesticks Virtual Conference was a deadly way to end the year with a celebration of culture.**

**AMOS ATKINSON  
A PROUD BANGERANG AND  
DJA DJA WURRUNG MAN**



## ROSIE GOSLETT-KING

As a descendant of the Budawang Yin people growing up in the Blue Mountains, home to the Darug and Gandangara, my Country's Fire Knowledge wasn't passed down to me, nor are we allowed to continue this aspect of our culture here following colonisation.

The first time I heard about Firesticks was when I was a senior ranger of a mixed-gender all Indigenous Ranger team in the Illawarra. Uncle Nook from Firesticks Alliance took time to visit us and our site. He began to teach us about cultural burns and assess the benefits of applying fire to the Dharawal Country we were managing. Later, Firesticks Alliance helped support me and another senior member of the crew to attend the Dhungala Firesticks workshop.

Initially I was sad that we weren't going to be healing Country at the 2020 Firesticks workshop. Yet, even with an entirely online conference I still got those deadly goosebumps in my 35°C office in Wollongong as Carl Fourmile, a Yidinji man from the land of Gimuy in Far North Queensland welcomed us all to Country with a virtual smoking ceremony.

I was beyond excited during the forum to learn more about the continual advancements Firesticks have made in addressing the barriers stopping mob from conducting cultural burns, and their work to make it easier for teachers and schools to embed Traditional Knowledge in mainstream education through work on 'The Living Knowledge Place'.

As a relatively new employee to WWF-Australia as the Women Rangers Environmental Network (WREN) Coordinator, I was proud to be part of such a large, influential organisation supporting the forum. The Firesticks and WREN programs hold unifying values and both also seek to promote women's role in cultural burns and conservation work as crucial elements. This was highlighted through the 'Women in Fire' panel that I was honored to be invited on. Together we women spoke of the ways in which we influence and lead both within our communities, and across the broader Australian community, and the enablers and barriers affecting our ability to influence the strategic directions of ranger and burn programs in Australia.

Firesticks have been far from idle during COVID-19; they've formed many new partnerships (including with Aboriginal Carbon Foundation and WWF-Australia!), implemented leading comprehensive site management and evaluation techniques, they're developing a cultural burns carbon credit scheme, and I was especially stoked to hear about them developing accredited diplomas for fire practitioners, with a Women's Business unit!

Read more of Rosie's reflections on the Firesticks Virtual Conference at [wwf.org.au/news/blogs/women-on-fire](http://wwf.org.au/news/blogs/women-on-fire)

I was beyond excited during the forum to learn more about the continual advancements Firesticks have made in addressing the barriers stopping mob from conducting cultural burns, and their work to make it easier for teachers and schools to embed Traditional Knowledge in mainstream education.

ROSIE GOSLETT-KING  
DESCENDANT OF  
THE BUDAWANG YUIN PEOPLE

## MICK BOURKE

I'm Mick Bourke, a proud Yorta-Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung man. It was deadly to be able to come together online for the Firesticks Virtual Workshop, especially to yarn with mob who we haven't been able to see for a long time and hear about the great work they are doing on Country. During the lunch breaks it was deadly to be able to cruise around different tables and join people having in-depth yarns about many different topics. That's not always possible to do at in-person events because people are not necessarily all in the one space. We also got lots of good feedback from the Victorian mob who attended - we'd love to see more virtual catch ups during the year using this technology.

It was deadly to be able to come together online for the Firesticks Virtual Workshop, especially to yarn with mob who we haven't been able to see for a long time and hear about the great work they are doing on Country.

MICK BOURKE  
A PROUD YORTA-YORTA AND DJA DJA WURRUNG MAN



2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop, Dhungala hosted by Yorta Yorta. Traced from a photo courtesy of Craig Bender and Vera Hong.

## ABORIGINAL CARBON FOUNDATION

I really enjoyed the Firesticks Virtual Conference, especially the wide spread of Aboriginal people, rangers and the Traditional Owners actively involved. The variety of Aboriginal groups involved from throughout Australia is very encouraging and is obviously leading to better outcomes for local communities and their country. I felt so much pride and enjoyment expressed by a wide range of people involved. From Burnie, Tasmania to Far North Queensland, it was so great to hear directly from people just how important their cultural burning programs are to their local communities. It was very honest and heartfelt. The conference also enabled a wide variety of conversations and positive relationships to be developed with non-Aboriginal people, farmers and agencies. There appears to be a collective goodwill based on sound outcomes being achieved through cultural burning.

Following our presentation and Yarning Circle about the Cultural Fire Credit, we were pleased to see the level of interest people expressed in the concept and how well it was received. This support gives us the confidence to further develop the Cultural Fire Credit to benefit all involved and secure independent financial income streams.

It is wonderful to have a forum where all the different groups can come together to share experiences and talk with one another. I think this gives each group more support for the work they are doing locally - knowing they are part of a larger movement, which is working well

**ROWAN FOLEY**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
ABORIGINAL CARBON FOUNDATION

The Firesticks Virtual Conference was not only my first fire practitioner conference, but also my first major virtual conference and I really enjoyed it. I was worried I might find it a bit boring because it went all day over a few days, but the way it was designed and run meant it was easy to stay engaged. I most enjoyed meeting and hearing stories from Fire Practitioners all over Australia, in particular hearing about their projects and what was important to them. Getting to hear how important fire still is today in people's lives as well as the challenges faced, the milestones, the overall effects for the community and on the community - things I don't often hear first-hand as I don't work on the ground - has given me a greater understanding of the work I do and has really helped to drive my passion for my work. I am so grateful to the people who presented for their openness in sharing their experiences and their stories.

**SHILO VILLAFLO**  
REGIONAL MANAGER  
ABORIGINAL CARBON FOUNDATION

The Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020 was a great way to keep the momentum going with Cultural Fire in what was a very isolating year due to COVID-19. The virtual conference was unlike many others I have attended in that it encouraged people to share in a really organic and non prescriptive way and centered the knowledge and wisdom of Indigenous people. We at the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation were really interested in the community's input on Cultural Fire Credits and we received some great feedback that will be very important in further developing the concept.

**LISA MCMURRAY**  
LEARNING AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT MANAGER  
ABORIGINAL CARBON FOUNDATION

## WWF-AUSTRALIA

I was blown away by the Firesticks Virtual Conference. As a non-Indigenous person I was really struck by the common challenges and the common ambition around Cultural Fire revitalisation. I had no idea that there were so many different groups involved in Cultural Fire across the country, so to see everyone come together and share their diverse experiences was really impressive.

I'll be honest - at first I was pretty skeptical about the idea of an online conference. Other online conferences that I have attended have just been a series of extended zoom calls. Yet Firesticks found a way to curate a program that really felt like a bunch of people having a yarn. It felt like a genuine opportunity for groups, who are separated by thousands of kilometers and perhaps haven't engaged with each other that much, to share. And I think conferences generally don't create enough of that sort of space.

At WWF-Australia, we've been really encouraged by how much enthusiasm there's been for Indigenous land and sea management among a broader audience and, especially since last year's bushfires, Cultural Fire in particular. While this enthusiasm is usually well-intentioned, it can often be extractive - where non-Indigenous people and organisations talk about "taking" Cultural Fire practices and knowledge and applying it to their own management systems. The Firesticks Virtual conference really reinforced for me that non-Indigenous Australians need to better understand cultural fire as an integral and inseparable part of broader cultural and land management systems, and that Indigenous people are already leading the way when it comes to Cultural Fire and don't need non-Indigenous models to be brought in for branding or scaling.

The virtual conference also validated a belief that we already hold at WWF-Australia - that it is incredibly important for non-Indigenous people and organisations to support from the backseat. This means strategically investing in areas that have been identified by broad representative fora like those provided by Firesticks Alliance and Aboriginal Carbon Foundation. This ensures that we are truly supporting Indigenous self-determination and respecting Cultural Intellectual Property. We really couldn't have been happier to support such an excellent event.

**NAT BURKE**  
SENIOR MANAGER, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
WWF-AUSTRALIA

*The Firesticks Virtual Conference really reinforced for me that Indigenous people are already leading the way when it comes to Cultural Fire and don't need non-Indigenous models to be brought in for branding or scaling.*

**NAT BURKE**  
WWF-AUSTRALIA



Vanessa Cavenagh with Jarjūm (her children), Tyson and Emma Cavanagh at the 2019 National Indigenous Fire Workshop, Dhungala hosted by Yorta Yorta. Photo courtesy of Craig Bender and Vera Hong.



## Going forward

As the importance of Cultural Fire becomes increasingly recognised, Firesticks is focused on facilitating the development of a strong national network of professional Cultural Fire practitioners who are fully trained, accredited, certified and well-resourced to practice Cultural Fire across the nation.

Firesticks will continue to support and facilitate collaborations between Traditional Owner groups, agencies, private and public landholders to grow the practice of Cultural Fire across large areas of Country. The commencement of the Certificate 3 to Diploma in Conservation and Land Management in the Hunter region over the coming year will also provide valuable learning for Firesticks' Cultural Fire mentoring and training program and certification framework - a key stepping stone towards building community capacity to practice Cultural Fire.

The coming year will also see further development and launch of the Cultural Fire Credit, with a number of Indigenous community consultations planned to solicit further input and feedback on the concept, as well as a partners forum to launch the Credit and present other avenues for investors to support the growing practice of Cultural Fire in communities.

Taking the National Indigenous Fire Workshop online in 2020 was a real learning experience. Firesticks will be looking into opportunities to utilise virtual technologies more frequently to support training activities and knowledge sharing between communities that will further strengthen the network.

# Thank you

Firesticks Alliance would like to extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to the many people who contributed to the Firesticks Virtual Conference 2020.

We would like to acknowledge our partners and supporters who helped ensure that this year's conference was such a successful event. Thank you to our investment partner WWF-Australia through the Australian Wildlife & Nature Recovery Fund, supporting partners Aboriginal Carbon Foundation and University of Technology, Sydney, and supporter Aboriginal Affairs NSW. We would also like to thank event producers Dreamtime Event Productions and platform creators Virtual Events.

There are simply too many people, organisations and community groups to thank individually, but for all of those people or groups who played a role either large or small, we acknowledge your generous contributions and assistance.

We pay our respects to the Kuku Thaypan Elders, the late Dr George Musgrave and the late Dr Tommy George, with Victor Steffensen, Mulong for their fire knowledge.

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Oral McGuire Noongar man on Yaraguia property in DjiIjering (Beverly), WA. Traced from a photo courtesy of Oral McGuire.





Victor Steffensen on Djabugay country, FNQ 2021.  
Photo courtesy of Dr Peta Standley.



Malachi Wegener and Ralph Hume at the 2019 Dhungala  
National Indigenous Fire Workshop hosted by Yorta Yorta.  
Traced from a photo courtesy of Craig Bender and Vera Hong.

