

## Building community and landholder fire preparedness

Climate resilience and adaptation



Fire regimes are predicted to change across Australia under climate change. In many areas, bushfires are predicted to become both hotter and more frequent. The Black Summer fires of 2019-2020 burnt an unprecedented amount of land and resulted in devastating losses to both humans and ecosystems.

Fire plays an essential role in the functioning of Australia's ecosystems, and in the right context promotes biodiversity. However, the cessation of traditional burning practices since European settlement, combined with the effects of climate change, have caused fire regimes to shift.

Natural Resource Management organisations (NRMs) have helped create nature-based and community-led solutions to help mitigate the risks of fire, improve community resilience, and protect biodiversity.

### How does it work?

NRM organisations use field data, mapping, training, and workshops to work with communities to plan fire management and preparedness, tailored to specific areas at particular risk from future fires. NRM organisations work across tenures and sectors, using participatory planning approaches that empower communities and support integrated decision-making.

This work helps grow community resilience and allows for fire risk reduction across whole landscapes.

For countless millennia, First Nations people have nurtured Country through a profound bond that preserves its vitality through the ages. Their traditional practices have enhanced and preserved ecological balance and cultural heritage. This includes using low-intensity fire to maintain cultural responsibilities, care for country and cultural heritage, and breathe life back into the land.

NRM organisations frequently work with Traditional Custodians and First Nations organisations to support communities to reinvigorate cultural burning practices and bring healthy fire back into landscapes..

### Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium fire-preparedness

Healthy Land & Water is home to the Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium (QFBC) program which has been operating for almost 25 years. The QFBC works with local landholders,

First Nations people, all relevant stakeholders and land management agencies, as well as other local groups to build community resilience to fire.

After the Black Summer fires, QFBC embarked on projects in the Local Government Areas of Toowoomba, Southern Downs, Gladstone and Livingstone, aimed at building community resilience to fire. In addition, they teamed up with the Githabul Peoples, using local traditional knowledge to tailor a cutting-edge, First Nations led fire management strategy perfectly suited to the iconic landscapes of the Main Range area.

### What was done?

The QFBC rolled out a series of free Fire Information Sessions and Property Fire Management Planning Workshops for landholders in these fire-affected regions, to increase their awareness of and capacity to manage the role and benefits of appropriate fire in the Australian bush, fire management planning and the use of fire as a land management tool.





*Fire management plans are created working directly with local communities*

A practical map-based approach was used to design fire management for individual landholders. Because neighbouring landholders were able to attend workshops together, fire management could be planned across properties, allowing for larger-scale decisions to be made regarding future fire risk management and prevention. These cross-property plans were coupled with on-ground works to rebuild infrastructure damaged by the Black Summer Bushfires. Township fire planning workshops have also been held to bring together diverse stakeholders to develop area-wide Community Fire Management Plans that apply across tenures.

The QFBC is also undertaking a Township Fire Management Strategy planning process with the Githabul Peoples, which balances contemporary fire management practices with traditional knowledge. This model was developed by the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation. At the heart is a shared commitment to community

safety, protecting life and property, and upholding the fire management aspirations of First Nations.

Together, the QFBC and Githabul Peoples are developing map-based fire management strategies for townships. This is done by engaging key land use planning decision makers and managers within communities, exchanging knowledge and providing practical fire management actions.

An important component of this strategy is incorporating cultural burning practices into the landscape. To do this, the Githabul mob participated in the Wildland Fire Crew Member course, which enabled trainees to carry out planned burns effectively.

They also undertook a cultural burning workshop which allowed the Githabul Peoples across generations to connect with Country and fire.

### **What has this achieved?**

Private landholders came away from the workshops with increased skills, resources and the ability to plan and manage fires on their land and within their local area. This also ensured that local communities were invested in disaster risk reduction.

The project includes the ability to deliver identified on-ground works

at the property level as well as landscape scales using the planning frameworks and collaborative strategies that have been developed. This creates sustainable jobs and infrastructure tailored to each community's unique requirements.

By providing learning opportunities for communities, the project has enhanced community resilience and helped reduce bushfire risk. These communities now have long-term strategies toward bushfire management and have also had help in rebuilding infrastructure damaged by the Black Summer bushfires.

The project has strengthened alliances and networks within communities and between Federal, State and Local Government through engagement activities and cross tenure delivery of fire management actions.

Combining contemporary fire management practices with traditional knowledge has helped empower the Githabul Peoples to undertake cultural burning within their local communities and enhance their bushfire resilience. This First Nations-led approach has been recognised through the Resilient Australia Awards and by the Queensland Inspector-General of Emergency Management as an outstanding example of a cooperative, locally led approach to fire management. This has also been a significant step towards establishing the future Githabul Ranger team.



*The Githabul Peoples connecting with Country and fire*

### **MORE INFORMATION**

<https://hlw.org.au/portfolio/black-summer-bushfire-recovery>

