

# Principles and protocols for cultural land management governance and research

**Oliver Costello**  
Jagun Alliance

**Timothy Neale**  
Deakin University



# Acknowledgement of Country and First Nations People



# Acknowledge our old people



Image: Karrakanj (Brown Falcon), Billy Yalawanga, Dalabon

We would also like thank and acknowledge all our old people and ancestors as cultural knowledge holders.

We are grateful for their generous sharing of knowledge which has supported us to continue this journey to Care for Country.



**Ngalli-ngaa bilaan buuwiaan, gwang,  
buubaan, jan-gany webrrd muunaa gali  
maadj butherun**

*We learn from wind, rain, flood, lightning,  
hail, or fire – they teach us stories*

**Ngalii ngaa garima lee la jaguun, jaguun  
garima mebeerrd**

*We care for Country, as Country cares for us*

Statement and Language by Uncle Rick  
Cook, Marcus Ferguson and Oliver Costello  
from Bundjalung Jaguun.

Message Sticks Marcus Ferguson



# Oliver Costello



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Executive Director - Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation Board

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Director - Natural Hazards Research Australia Board (NHRA)

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Board Member - National Koala Recovery Plan

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Project Manager - Traditional Knowledge (Conservation Futures) Bush Heritage Australia

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Project Convenor - Cultural land management research and governance in Southeast Australia project (Deakin and NHRA)

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Indigenous Contributing Author - Extreme Events Chapter for 2021 State of Environment Report

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Vice President - Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium

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Member - National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) Indigenous Ranger Reference Group

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Co-founder - Firesticks initiative and Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation

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Independent consultant and Volunteer



# Project team

(who we are)

## **Research Team**

Timothy Neale, Oliver Costello, Bhiamie Eckford-Williamson, Andrea Rawluk, Michael-Shawn Fletcher, Shaun Hooper, Tasmin-Lara Dilworth, Lachlan Beggs and Gabrielle Miller

## **Project Steering Group**

Matthew Shanks, Vikki Parsley, Daniel Miller, Jack Pascoe, and Teagan Goolmeer

**Thanks to many others**, including Jagun Alliance, Taungurung Land & Waters Council, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, Djaara CAC, Burrendies Aboriginal Corporation, DEECA, DEW SA, CFS, CFA, ACT P&CS, DFES WA, and more!



# Timothy Neale

Associate Professor in Anthropology, Deakin University

- Non-indigenous, raised Aotearoa
- Undergraduate in Aotearoa, PhD at University of Melbourne studying land and water politics
- 2014: postdoctoral role with Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC
- 2016: joined Deakin University

Article

**Walking together: a decolonising experiment in bushfire management on Dja Dja Wurrung country**

*cultural geographies*  
1–19  
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insidestory.org.au

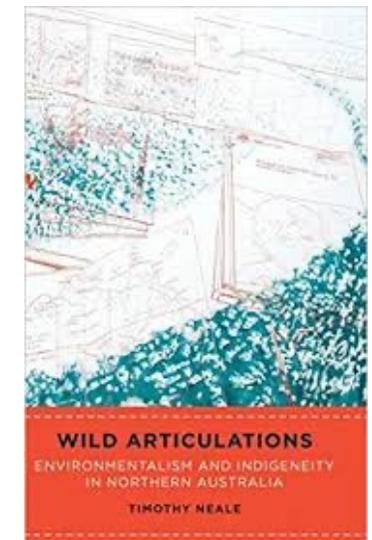
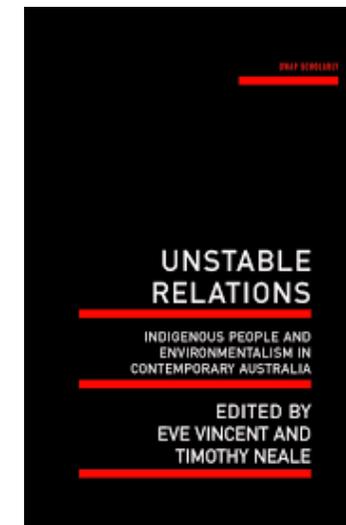
**INSIDE STORY** ABOUT SUPPORT SIGN UP Q

ESSAYS & REPORTAGE 1922 words

## What are whitefellas talking about when we talk about “cultural burning”?

TIMOTHY NEALE  
17 APRIL 2020

Having yet again rediscovered Aboriginal land management practices, let’s not let the opportunity slip away





# Key takeaways:

1. Creating safe spaces to learn and share
2. Understanding diversity across local, regional, state and national scales
3. Foregrounding pathways of empowerment and benefit



# Project background

(where we've been)



# Previous projects

- *Hazards, Culture and Indigenous Communities* project (2017-2021)
- *Principles for Enhanced Collaboration* project (2020)
- *Cultural land management in southeastern Australia* project (2021)



# Starting collaborations...

- “...it’s about **recognition** of the Traditional Owners and the organisation and individuals wanting them to become real partners... **They’re equals**... There is a mindset change there.” – Non-indigenous fire manager
- “It just dawned on me then and there [at a cultural burn], this is not even about putting a fire in [that site]... this is about the people. This is about bringing people back, and the power that has... **reconnecting people** with land is really, really important.” – Non-indigenous fire manager
- “[There is] a lot of deep-seated **angst and anger** that still comes through... We don’t forgive easily because if we’re being disrespected, you’ve got to earn that trust back. We’re dealing with angst from a couple of centuries of oppression and governmental control.” – Indigenous fire manager
- “I think just the **interest** that non-Aboriginal people have got now. Yeah, there’s such a massive interest, there’s a lot of talk now and that’s great for Aboriginal people and fire I suppose. With the current climate of fire here at the moment we’re getting **massive fires**, wildfires, and, um, everyone’s talking about [how] they’re only gonna get bigger. So, a lot of this talk now revolving around a lot more burns but on a smaller scale and people got that interest now in what it entails and how they can be involved.” – Indigenous fire manager



# Sustaining collaborations...

- “I cannot over-emphasize the need to have a **trusting relationship**. The more you open yourself to people, the more important it feels to you... the days where you think “oh, Christ, this is hard,” you can just go, “I know what this means to me”... you kind of have to be a bit vulnerable.” – Non-indigenous fire manager
- “I think whilst there is a desire for [Aboriginal peoples] to be getting back to “historic burning practices,” for want of a better term, there’s a significant hiatus in their experience... So, it’s about them **getting the opportunity** to start to re-learn some of that expertise.” – Indigenous fire manager
- “... if we don’t have the right staff, if we get some of these fellas that come along, particularly, don’t see the value in it and sort of really disagree with co-management that can sort of upset relationships pretty quickly and then, then you take a long time to end up, um, **repairing the damage.**” – Non-indigenous fire manager
- “Yeah, well, there wasn't much engaging before, but I think it's improving through **having conversations** with guys, but the best place for the conversation is **out on Country** when we're doing burns. So, when we burn, we invite some [rural fire service] members to come along and when we're in that space, we can really have a meaningful conversation and attitudes change.” – Indigenous fire manager





# Key enablers

1. **Interpersonal trust**
2. **Local cultural literacy**
3. Process self-determination
4. Specific funding
5. Open to change
6. **Making benefit “BAU”**



## PRINCIPLES FOR ENHANCED COLLABORATION BETWEEN LAND AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Green paper

Michelle McKemey<sup>1</sup>, Timothy Neale<sup>1,2</sup> and Oliver Costello<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Deakin University, <sup>2</sup>independent consultant & <sup>3</sup>Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC



# Working towards principles...

Problem: a need to work towards sector-wide structures, principles and networks to foster collaboration between land and emergency management agencies and Indigenous peoples and communities

= 3 workshops, 9 principles, 13 mechanisms of change



## CULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT SOUTHEAST AUSTRALIA

Developing the foundation for an Indigenous-led and co-designed research program for land management with Traditional Owners

Oliver Costello<sup>2,5</sup>, Tasmin Dilworth<sup>1</sup>, Katharine Haynes<sup>1,5</sup>, Tony Jansen<sup>4</sup> & Timothy Neale<sup>3,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Wollongong, <sup>2</sup>Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation, <sup>3</sup>Deakin University, <sup>4</sup>One Point Five Degrees & <sup>5</sup>Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC



# Bringing research into the frame...

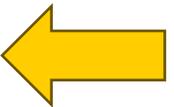
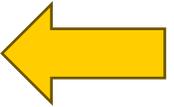
Problem: develop foundations for Indigenous-led and co-designed research programs to support cultural land management into the future

= 3 workshops, 10 recommendations



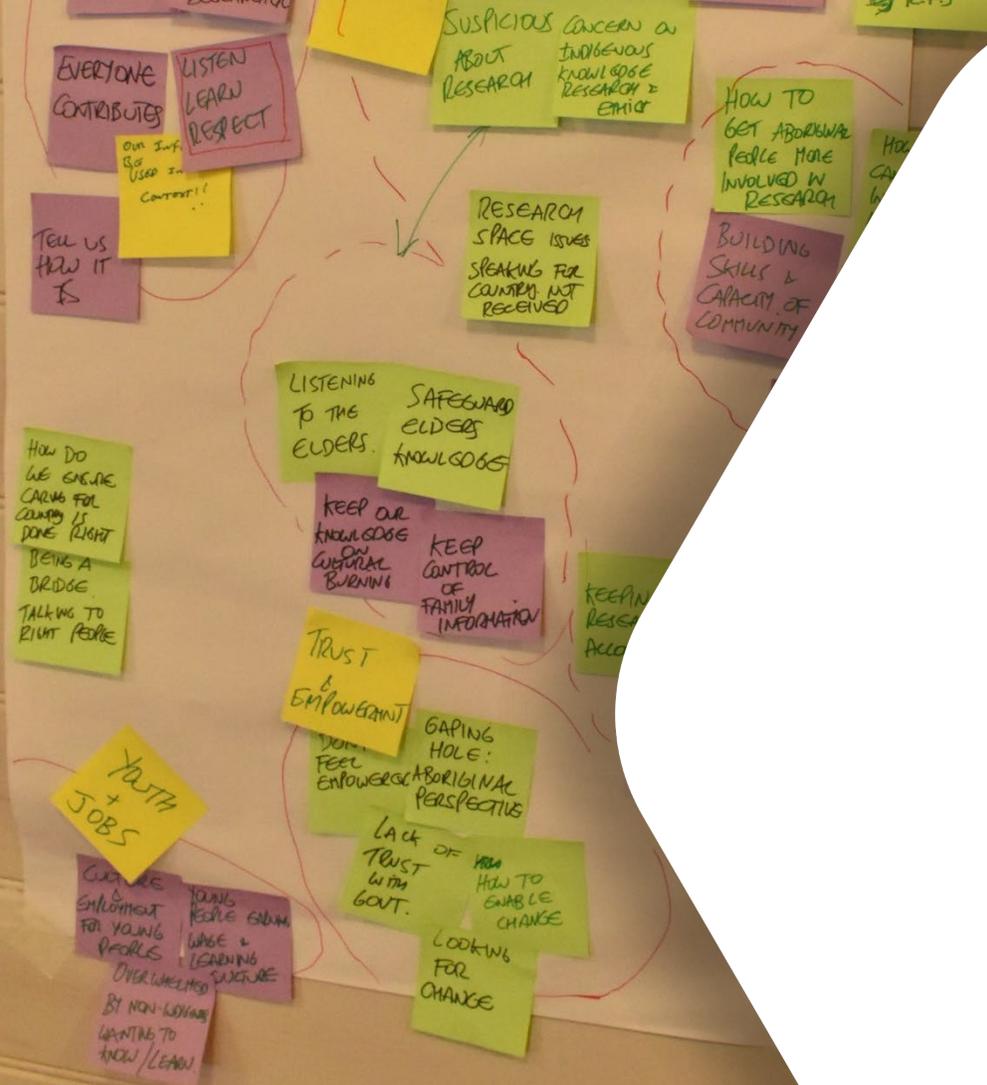
# Recommendations

1. Formal acknowledgement by research organisations of the equivalent value of Indigenous knowledge, practice, and science to Western understandings/knowledge systems. Respect and Recognition of knowledge-holders and cultural land management practice
2. Recognise the holistic and highly diverse context of Indigenous ways of being and Caring for Country
3. Make clear commitments to supporting Indigenous people to get on Country and engage in cultural stewardship practices to build the resilience of Country and people
4. Establish an Indigenous Research Strategy with dedicated research streams/project areas for cultural stewardship research within Natural Hazards Research Australia's research agenda that supports Indigenous-led research pathways.
5. Create avenues to recognise Traditional Owners as research partners/end-users of research funded by Natural Hazards Research Australia
6. Include Indigenous voice and representation in governance structures of institutions and land management agencies
7. Establish meaningful and ongoing pathways for Traditional Owner inclusion and consultation, to ensure research agendas and processes reflect Traditional Owner aspirations and priorities
8. Development of a framework of broad research principles/protocols and processes to guide more ethical and collaborative cultural land management research
9. Embed multiple aspects of capacity building into research frameworks and processes
10. Support opportunities for developing Indigenous governance, collaboration, and knowledge sharing

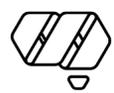


= *Cultural land management research and governance in south-east Australia* project (2022-2024)





# Principles and protocols across research and governance contexts



# Why principles, processes and protocols?

## → Principle

- A fundamental proposition
  - E.g. Indigenous peoples have the right to speak authoritatively about Country

## → Process

- Structure put in place that supports the principle
  - E.g. Resource and support Indigenous representative bodies to act as partners

## → Protocol

- Practice that constitutes or supports the process
  - E.g. Establish guidelines and requirements for co-design and co-delivery with Indigenous representative bodies



# Principles and protocols on a page

- Self-determination to practice culture on Country
- Reconciliation, equity and social justice
- Healthy Country, healthy spirit, healthy people
- Empowerment of Indigenous knowledge-holders
- Benefits with and for Indigenous communities
- Respect diversity of Indigenous peoples and cultures

Find it at: <https://www.naturalhazards.com.au/>

## Principles and protocols for cultural land management governance and research

Natural hazards managements agencies and research institutions all have legal and ethical obligations to engage with Indigenous peoples no matter where they work in Australia. **Everywhere is Country and Indigenous peoples speak for Country.** Nonetheless, starting or maintaining intercultural collaborations can present many obstacles, and there is a need for guidance on how to best work together for the benefit of Country. The following summarises a review of relevant collaborative principles, processes and protocols for agencies and research institutions. It is only a **starting point** for local and in-depth conversations.

	PRINCIPLE	EXAMPLE PROCESS	EXAMPLE PROTOCOL
1. SELF-DETERMINATION TO PRACTICE CULTURE ON COUNTRY	Cultural land management must be self-determined and rights based	Develop collaborative structures that respect Indigenous self-determination	Establish free, prior and informed consent mechanisms for collaborations
	Indigenous peoples have the right to speak authoritatively about Country	Resource and support representative bodies to act as partners	Require co-design and co-delivery with representative bodies
	Cultural leadership and resurgence through caring for Country 'our way'	Resource and support capacity-building according to self-determined pathways	Establish agreements that provide long-term and secure access to Country
2. RECONCILIATION, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	(Re)centre women and their unique role within Country	Resource and support Indigenous women's access to sacred and significant sites	Establish guidelines for identifying and protecting sacred and significant women's sites
	Support truth-telling and healing	Develop awareness of Historical and contemporary issues facing Indigenous peoples	Make place-based cultural sensitivity training compulsory for all staff
	Address racism and promote cultural safety	Develop training and policies to foster cultural safety and acceptance	Establish a cultural safety framework and embed it in all induction processes
3. HEALTHY COUNTRY, HEALTHY SPIRIT, HEALTHY PEOPLE	Healing Country and healthy people are interrelated	Resource and support Indigenous peoples' connection to Country and culture	Establish formal partnership arrangements to support on-Country practice
	Centre Country, culture and kin in contemporary land management	Develop policies that consider, measure, and monitor cultural and natural values	Establish bio-cultural monitoring including tangible and non-tangible Indigenous values
	Cultural land management is living knowledge and culture	Regulatory changes to dismantle barriers to full participation in cultural practices on Country	Establish exemptions for Elders and children to be involved in cultural fire activities
4. EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE-HOLDERS	Empower Indigenous knowledge and knowledge-holders	Recognise and support Indigenous knowledge and knowledge-holders	Renumerate all Indigenous participants in research activities
	Manage, protect, and share knowledge	Develop policies to protect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property	Develop local agreements that protect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
	Transfer and maintain the rekindling of knowledge	Recognise and support community learning pathways, processes and priorities	Develop project timeframes to reflect community processes and priorities
5. BENEFITS WITH AND FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES	Impact and value come through engagement and inclusion	Resource and support Indigenous peoples to define measures of success for policies and programs that affect them	Establish self-determined advisory groups to lead definition of measures of success
	Strong partnerships are based on shared understanding, respect and trust	Resource and support meaningful and trusting connections with community	Support role continuity and prioritise retention of staff working with Indigenous peoples
	Accountability through outcome monitoring and reporting	Resource and support transparency in monitoring and reporting	Establish procedures for public on partnership outcomes and benefits
6. RECOGNISE AND RESPECT DIVERSITY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND CULTURES	Indigenous peoples and cultures are diverse	Resource and support strengths-based approach to reflect local capacities	Develop localised agreements with Indigenous peoples
	Embed flexible and purpose-built policy and processes	Resource and support local processes for decision-making	Maintain awareness of Indigenous peoples' cultural calendar and significant periods
	Understand Indigenous cultural protocols and cultural authority	Develop staff understanding of local cultural authority	Identify full range of Indigenous representatives, including men and women

This document has been developed by the "Cultural land management research and governance in south-east Australia" project team as a reference guide for Natural Hazards Research Australia partners and researchers to learn about collaborative principles, processes and protocols. More information and references are available at [naturalhazards.com.au](https://www.naturalhazards.com.au)



For other key guidance, see: AIATSIS 2020. AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. Canberra, ACT: AIATSIS; Woodward, E. et al. 2020. *Our Knowledge Our Way in caring for Country: Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management*. Canberra, ACT: NAILSMA and CSIRO





## SELF-DETERMINATION TO PRACTICE CULTURE ON COUNTRY

Cultural land management must be self-determined and rights based

Indigenous peoples have the right to speak authoritatively about Country

Cultural leadership and resurgence through caring for Country 'our way'

## RECONCILIATION, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

(Re)centre women and their unique role within Country

Reconciliation through truth-telling and healing

Address racism, promote cultural safety and celebrate diversity through education and awareness

## HEALTHY COUNTRY, HEALTHY SPIRIT, HEALTHY PEOPLE

Healing Country and healthy people are interrelated

Centre Country, culture and kin in contemporary land management

Cultural land management is living knowledge and culture





## EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE-HOLDERS

Empower Indigenous knowledge and knowledge-holders

Manage, protect, and share knowledge

Transfer and maintain the rekindling of knowledge

## BENEFITS WITH AND FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Impact and value come through engagement and inclusion

Strong partnerships are based on shared understanding and mutual respect and trust

Accountability through outcome monitoring and reporting

## RECOGNISE AND RESPECT DIVERSITY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND CULTURES

Indigenous peoples and cultures are diverse

Embed flexible and purpose-built policy and processes

Understand Indigenous cultural protocols and cultural authority





# Key takeaways:

1. Creating safe spaces to learn and share
2. Understanding diversity across local, regional, state and national scales
3. Foregrounding pathways of empowerment and benefit





# CULTURAL BURNING

*in southern Australia*

WITH CONTRIBUTORS

GILGAR GUNDIJE ELDER

*Eileen Alberts*

GUNDIJMARA NATION

NGUNNAWAL MURRINGE (MAN)

*Adrian Brown*

BUNDJALUNG AND  
WONNARUA WOMAN

*Vanessa Cavanagh*

KAYTEJ ELDER

*Wayne ampetyane  
Davis*

MINUNG/GNIDJU KAYANG  
(WISE WOMAN)

*Carol Pettersen*

NOONGAR NATION

PALAWA MAN

*Jason ...*

## Some other resources:

- AIATSIS 2020. *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).
- BELLCHAMBERS, K. 2023. *Governing Country: A Literature Review of Indigenous Governance Principles in Indigenous Ranger Groups & Indigenous Protected Areas*. Canberra, ACT: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.
- NHMRC 2018. *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders*. Canberra, ACT: National Health and Medical Research Council.
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- WEIR, J., FREEMAN, D. & WILLIAMSON, B. 2021. *Cultural Burning in Southern Australia*. Melbourne, Vic.: Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.
- WOODWARD, E., HILL, R., HARKNESS, P. & ARCHER, R., , (eds.) 2020. *Our Knowledge Our Way in caring for Country: Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management*. Canberra, ACT: NAILSMA and CSIRO.

...and many more.

# Bugalbeh (thank you)!



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