

## **“Community level influence on individual behaviours with respect to bushfire readiness and decision making in the face of immediate threat”**

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Applications are invited from top-level potential PhD candidates to contribute to an exciting high calibre multi-level research project designed and conducted by the UWA Bushfire Research Team in partnership with the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre.

### **Project:**

Despite bushfires being a constant threat to communities in many parts of rural Australia, people are ill prepared to mitigate risk to life and property. While large differences in community preparedness and responses are observed, we appear to have no systematic account of how or why these differences exist. This project aims to identify how societal and community characteristics interact to influence how people and communities develop risk beliefs and enact upon them. In particular we shall examine the role of community leaders and leader organisations in shaping attitudes and subsequent behaviours. In particular, we intend to examine the role of the local culture, community leaders and community organisations in shaping attitudes and subsequent behaviours with reference to what we shall call community embeddedness. The objective of this study is to develop a community profiler which will enable communities and government to assess the preparedness status and needs of communities. To gain the desired qualitative insights, we will be using a longitudinal mixed methods research design in which qualitative and a quantitative components will be conducted in parallel and complement each other. We require PhD students for both components.

### **Quantitative Component**

In the quantitative component you will need to be flexible with your interests as you will be drawing on diverse literatures from disaster research, organisational community, and health psychology. The collection of data will be done longitudinally and so you will need to be prepared to learn and apply statistical techniques such as multi-level regression, structural equation and mixture modelling. The method of data collection will utilise survey techniques and so you will also become skilled in questionnaire and attitude measurement. As the data will be collected from at least three different states you will also have the opportunity to travel.

### **Supervisors:**

Your direct supervisor/s will be members of the UWA Bushfire Research Team:

- ❖ Dr Petra Buergelt
- ❖ Professor Carmen Lawrence
- ❖ Professor David Morrison

**Required Competencies:**

- ❖ Honours degree (2a or better) or Masters degree, or equivalent, preferably in psychology or other relevant fields
- ❖ knowledge of basic *quantitative* research techniques and tools (e.g., SPSS or similar)
- ❖ ability to work with a diverse interdisciplinary research team
- ❖ high level of organisation and management skills to organise the distribution of the survey and the collection of the data
- ❖ excellent communication skills to liaison with community leaders and members of key agencies
- ❖ time management skills that ensure the timely completion of study and required reports
- ❖ A desire to make a difference but above all a willingness to learn

### **Qualitative Component**

The data will be collected by conducting ethnographic case studies of high prepared and low prepared communities in bushfire prone areas. Data collection methods will include: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and diaries. The data will be analysed using grounded theory analysis strategies. To increase the efficiency of the data management, the qualitative software analysis program Atlas.ti will be used.

It is planned to conduct several case studies – and hence PhD projects - in four Australian states: Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, and New South Wales. The findings of these individual PhD projects will be pooled together and analysed by the UWA research team. Systematically comparing the various communities high and low in preparedness across different states will enable us to identify similarities, patterns and differences between the communities. The findings of this qualitative component will identify and clarify key variables for the development of a measure of a community profiler that will be developed parallel in the quantitative component. The community profiler will enable communities and government to assess the preparedness status and needs of communities.

To ensure comparability across the case studies, the theoretical frameworks and research design need to be the same for all projects. However, there is flexibility with regards to the particular focus of the study. This focus can be determined by you and will ensure the originality of your PhD. The originality also will come from the particular characteristics of the communities you select for your study and from specific additional data collection methods you see useful to gain the desired understanding.

**Where & Supervisors:**

You will be based in the state of your choice and your primary supervisor will be a disaster researcher from a University in the following states:

- ❖ TAS: Professor Douglas Paton - University of Tasmania
- ❖ QLD: Professor Kevin Ronan - CQ University
- ❖ VIC: TBA
- ❖ NSW: TBA

Your secondary supervisor/s will be members of the UWA Bushfire Research Team:

- ❖ Dr Petra Buergelt
- ❖ Professor Carmen Lawrence
- ❖ Professor David Morrison
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**Required Competencies:**

- ❖ Honours degree (2a or better) or Masters degree, or equivalent, preferably in psychology, sociology, anthropology or other relevant fields
- ❖ knowledge of and research experience with *qualitative* research methods
- ❖ ability to work with a diverse interdisciplinary research team with team members in different locations
- ❖ time management and organisation skills that ensure the timely completion of reports and the study
- ❖ excellent communication skills
- ❖ ability to work independently
- ❖ knowledge or expertise with Atlas.ti would be an advantage but is not essential

The role in both research components represents an exciting opportunity to be part of a research team of four senior academics and five postdoctoral researchers and so you will have a rich and stimulating environment to do your research and develop your career. This is also an opportunity to work in an area that is of increasing societal importance, and to contribute to the building of strong self-reliant and self-sustaining communities capable of co-existing with natural hazards.

**Further Information:**

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