

FIRE to FLOURISH



Strength through community-led action

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

IMPACT, EVIDENCE, LEGACY



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we work and live across Australia. This report was created by people living on Bidawal Maap, Boon Wurrung/Bunerong, Brinja-Yuin, Bundjalung, Cammeraygal, Djiringanj, Euahlayi, Gadigal, Gumbaynggirr, Gunaikurnai, Jubullum, Jukembal, Kamilaroi, Kurna, Ngarabal, Ngarigo Monero, Ngoorabul, Peramangk, Tabulam, Walbunja, Wathaurong, Wurundjeri, Yaegl, Yuin and Yukumbal Countries.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.

The term 'Aboriginal' is used throughout this report to describe and acknowledge the Aboriginal people, community members and nation groups of the program.

Where reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is made, the term 'Indigenous' is used. The term 'Indigenous' evolved through international law to acknowledge a particular relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the territory from which they originate.

Indigenous peoples are actively seeking recognition of their identities, culture and ways of life. As such, in some parts of the Country, it may be more appropriate in publications to use solely the term Aboriginal or First Nations people.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY STATEMENT

This document contains artwork of a deceased Aboriginal artist. In alignment with cultural protocols, policy and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property, Fire to Flourish has sought permissions and guidance on the continued use of the artwork, and an acknowledgement of the artist is given in written communication only. No audio or visual sharing or verbalisation of the artist will be promoted or endorsed out of cultural respect.

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FOREWORD

When disaster strikes, you see people who have lost everything. They're in shock. There's no quick fix. What matters is who shows up, how they show up, and whether they stay. Fire to Flourish has shown up and stayed – walking alongside 51 communities for five years, building trust at the pace of relationships, not timelines.

That's why I wanted to be part of the Strategic Advisory Council. The program reflects my own belief that communities are not problems to be fixed, but partners to invest in. It demonstrates what's possible when we put community at the centre of resilience – not as a slogan, but in structure, funding, leadership and decision making.

We've seen communities that were often overlooked leading their own projects, shaping their own futures, and influencing broader systems change. Reading this report, you'll see the scale and significance of what Fire to Flourish has enabled: communities growing stronger and more connected, new pathways for community-led governance, and a growing knowledge base to inform policy and practice.

Fire to Flourish offers a blueprint – one grounded in evidence and practice – for how we can collectively strengthen community resilience. The opportunity now is for governments, emergency services and community organisations to pick up that blueprint and embed it into how we prepare for and respond to disasters. This is not a side project; it's the foundation of effective, equitable resilience.

I want to thank my fellow Strategic Advisory Council members – Alison Worthington, Sharon Tierney, Kate Cowden, Lucy Stackpool-Moore, Claire Beattie, Jessica Bulger, Robert Glasser, Laura Cochrane and Ashley Keleher – for sharing their wisdom and commitment so generously.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible strength of the 51 communities that engaged with Fire to Flourish across the Clarence Valley, Eurobodalla, Tenterfield and East Gippsland - what you've achieved together is truly inspiring.

As the Council concludes its term and the program reaches its planned finish, I believe Fire to Flourish will remain a catalyst, helping to shape a new normal where community leadership is core to disaster resilience.



Professor Christine Nixon AO APM
Chair, Fire to Flourish Strategic Advisory Council





WELCOME

Welcome to the fifth and final Annual Report from Fire to Flourish.

This has been a landmark year defined by deep impact, shared leadership, and a strong legacy for community-led disaster resilience. Fire to Flourish was established as a five-year pilot innovation program. Over that time, we've shown that community-led resilience is not only possible – it's effective, powerful and transformative.

So it's with mixed emotions that I write this. I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved with our partners and friends – co-creating tailored resilience solutions with the communities of Clarence Valley, Eurobodalla, Tenterfield and East Gippsland. These achievements have been grounded in long-term relationships and built at the pace of trust.

Yet, having seen what's possible, it's bittersweet to know that many communities across Australia are still unable to access this kind of deep support. We now have the evidence, the tools and the model. The opportunity ahead is to scale what we know works so that all communities can lead their own resilience journeys with dignity and agency.

In 2025, our community teams worked at full speed to deliver results, while also celebrating the close of this remarkable chapter. The end-of-program community celebrations were deeply moving. Each was distinct, shaped by local voices and culture – but all shared a sense of pride, connection and collective achievement. It was clear that Fire to Flourish had helped communities not only recover but also reimagine and strengthen their futures.

One of the most memorable milestones this year was our National Showcase in November, where our team came together to celebrate with partners, supporters and friends. It marked a powerful moment of collective reflection, drawing together five years of co-creation, experimentation and learning into a compelling systems narrative. The Showcase crystallised the conditions, capabilities and collaborations needed to centre community leadership in disaster resilience, and highlighted what becomes possible when we act with shared vision and purpose.



Bundjalung Elders Ken Gordon, Avery Brown and Joe Walker with Fire to Flourish CEO Briony Rogers

A significant achievement for the program in 2025 was the design and delivery of six participatory grantmaking rounds led by community teams. This year, 107 locally identified projects were funded – each one addressing the unique resilience needs of its location. More than \$3 million was distributed in 2025 alone, while across the life of the program we've provided \$11.6 million in funding to support more than 258 projects, with local community members having decision-making power over how resources were allocated.

But the real impact goes far beyond the numbers. Communities have transformed how they collaborate, plan and prepare. We've seen strengthened local leadership, new skills in project delivery and governance, and a renewed sense of agency. In many places, Indigenous leadership and knowledge have been re-centred in community resilience strategies. Most powerfully, we've seen the emergence of new social and governance infrastructure – connectors, hubs and networks – that communities can rely on during future crises.

We've also laid strong foundations for legacy. In 2025, our teams have worked towards a practical toolkit for enabling community-led resilience, and shared insights in peer-reviewed journal articles, through research reports, and at major national and international conferences. I'm delighted that this year's Annual Report gives a spotlight to the evidence and insights generated through our program of research.

Initiatives seeded along Fire to Flourish's journey have become vital pieces of social infrastructure in their own right. The National Indigenous Disaster Resilience (NIDR) program, now housed as an ongoing research program in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University, has become the leading voice in elevating Indigenous leadership and knowledge systems within resilience policy and practice, advocating for approaches grounded in self-determination and cultural strength. The DisasterWISE Communities Network has grown into a vibrant and trusted space for community-led learning and collaboration, providing ongoing support for local leaders and practitioners working to embed community voice at the centre of disaster resilience efforts.

None of this would have been possible without our incredible partners. My deepest thanks to the communities of Clarence Valley, Eurobodalla, Tenterfield and East Gippsland for your courage, vision and trust. Thank you to our cornerstone partners—the Paul Ramsay Foundation, Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd, and Monash University—for believing in this vision and backing it with such generosity and resolve. Thank you to our delivery partners, Strategic Advisory Council, and wider network for your insight, support and collaboration.

And to the Fire to Flourish team—thank you. You've done something extraordinary. We asked you to co-create new solutions while navigating old systems, to hold space for others amidst trauma and complexity, and to keep learning, unlearning and pushing forward even when the path was uncertain. You embraced the unknown with courage and care, stayed grounded in community, and created the conditions for transformation. You are all inspiring, and my gratitude is deep.

As disasters grow in frequency and cost, the urgency for change is clear. The model developed through Fire to Flourish offers a compelling alternative—one that builds trust, invests in people, and generates lasting social, economic and environmental returns.

Let's make this the new normal for disaster resilience in Australia. Our work doesn't end here—we're committed to sharing what we've learned and creating pathways for others to adopt, adapt and extend this model. If you're ready to shift systems and invest in community-led resilience, we're ready to work with you.

Professor Briony Rogers
Chief Executive Officer, Fire to Flourish

OUR PARTNER COMMUNITIES



For five years, we have worked in deep partnership with four communities affected by the 2019/20 bushfires. These places are rich in natural beauty and Indigenous culture, and are populated with local people who are knowledgeable, passionate about their regions and have a strong sense of community.

Each partner community had a local Fire to Flourish staff team, comprising community members who worked together across the wider Local Government Area to engage the community in discussions about resilience priorities, facilitate decision making about grant funding allocation and support the implementation of community-led projects.

We supported each community to explore, analyse, co-design and create new community-led solutions that strengthen disaster resilience on their own terms.

As we conclude our place-based work in Clarence Valley, Eurobodalla, Tenterfield and East Gippsland, we do so knowing that the work we've done together, the relationships that have been built and nurtured, and the community projects that have been brought to life, have resulted in four communities that are more resilient, more connected and more prepared for any future disasters.

“After the Black Summer fires, the first thing to grow back was the black wattle. It comes quickly, thick and strong, restoring the soil and nurturing the land, so that deeper-rooted trees can return. That’s what Fire to Flourish has been for us. In our hardest time, they showed up, listened, supported and created space for healing.”

— Eurobodalla Community Member



CLARENCE VALLEY

Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl Land



EUROBODALLA

Walbunja, Brinja-Yuin and Djiringanj Land



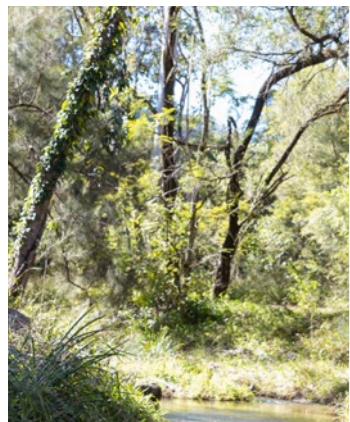
TENTERFIELD

Kamilaroi and Bundjalung Land



EAST GIPPSLAND

Gunaikurnai, Monero and Bidawel Land



OUR APPROACH

Fire to Flourish was a community impact program providing direct support to communities as the first and last responders to disasters. With communities and research as key enablers, our mission was to trial innovations in community-led resilience and influence system changes to support their scaling.

Conceived in the aftermath of the 2019/20 bushfires and led by Monash University, we partnered with fire-affected communities to co-create innovative approaches in community-led disaster recovery and long-term resilience.

Our six program principles were a guide for everything we did.

Together, these principles formed the foundation of Fire to Flourish. They reminded us that recovery is not only about bouncing back – it is about growing stronger, fairer, and more resilient, in ways that endure long after the program ends.

“Fire to Flourish didn’t just throw money at communities who were exhausted and traumatised – recovery is a full-time job, and while this program provided communities with money, they also offered enough support to make sure community members reached their goals successfully.”

— East Gippsland Community Planner



BE COMMUNITY-LED

Communities know what matters most. We create the conditions for local people to set priorities, design initiatives and lead decision making.

FOREGROUND ABORIGINAL WISDOM

We recognise Aboriginal peoples as Traditional Custodians and honour their knowledge systems, culture and resilience. Aboriginal wisdom is central to how we imagine and build thriving futures.

ADDRESS INEQUITIES AND ENHANCE INCLUSION

Disasters don’t affect everyone equally. We focus on inclusion and equity, making sure that diverse voices – especially those often excluded – are heard and respected.

BE STRENGTHS-BASED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED

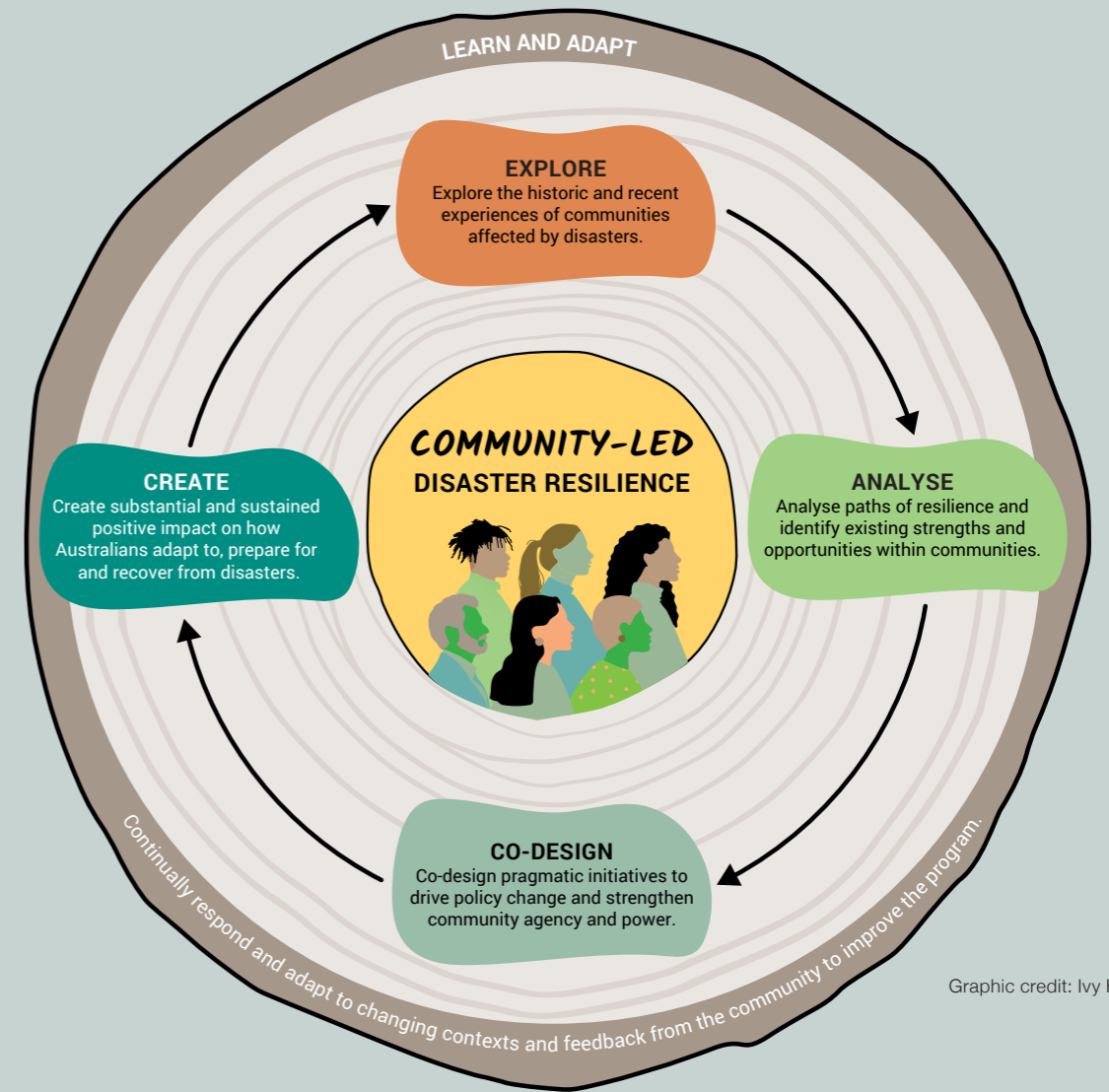
Every community has deep strengths to build on. At the same time, we understand that recovery is layered with trauma. Our approach supports healing and creates safe spaces where people can come together with trust.

BE HOLISTIC AND IMPACTFUL

Resilience is about more than one issue or project. We work across social, cultural, economic, environmental, and governance systems to make a difference that lasts.

LEARN, ADAPT, EVOLVE

Resilience and transformation is never linear. We learn alongside communities, adapting as needs and priorities shift, and sharing insights that can influence broader change.



Graphic credit: Ivy Hadjuk

The Fire to Flourish approach is represented above. Through our community partnerships, we explored, analysed, co-designed and created solutions for strengthening disaster resilience, self-determination and community cohesion. Practices of reflection, learning and adaptation were critical for the program’s transformative agenda.

The knowledge we have co-developed with our partner communities has created the evidence and insights needed to refine our model, demonstrate its benefits and develop practical guidance and resources to support its widespread implementation.



PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING



A cornerstone of the Fire to Flourish program has been the use of participatory grantmaking – an approach that seeks to shift decision-making power about funding directly into the hands of communities.

Rather than external organisations determining where resources should flow, communities themselves identify priorities and shape funding decisions. How this looks in practice has varied across places, reflecting local context, relationships and readiness. This flexibility has helped ensure that grants are locally relevant, inclusive and aligned with community aspirations.

The participatory processes are grounded in open conversations and outreach, creating multiple ways for people to share ideas and perspectives. Depending on the community, this has included workshops, informal gatherings and existing local networks. Support has been provided to help community members develop and refine proposals, strengthen budgets and clarify the impact they hope to achieve.

Funding decisions have been guided by community-led or community-informed decision-making structures. These have been designed to reflect a diversity of voices and experiences, with support provided to promote fairness, transparency and shared understanding of community priorities. Beyond allocating funding to projects that reflect what communities value most, these processes have also contributed to building confidence, skills and leadership within communities. Across rounds, peer accountability and trust-building have been central to the approach. Transparent deliberation, inclusive processes and shared governance structures have nurtured trust and ensured legitimacy. Reporting and acquittals are framed not as compliance exercises but as opportunities for reflection, focusing on what emerged, what changed and what was learned, rather than rigid performance indicators. Evaluation is similarly formative, supporting iteration,

strengthening capability and capturing the layered impacts of community-led action.

Participatory grantmaking is more than a funding mechanism. It is a capacity-building platform, strengthening local governance, deepening collaboration and reinforcing inclusion by creating space for diverse groups to influence how resources are used. This approach is trauma-informed and flexible, designed to be safe, empowering and responsive to evolving community needs. The results have been tangible: communities have funded projects that strengthen social connection, celebrate culture, enhance preparedness and support recovery in ways that matter most locally. Just as importantly, the process itself has left a legacy of trust, transparency and shared ownership.

By embedding participatory grantmaking in ways that adapt to context, Fire to Flourish has demonstrated how funding can be distributed in ways that directly resource communities, rebalance power and lay the foundations for lasting resilience.

“Our project mentors were part of our team, they extended our work so beautifully. They weren’t just involved in decision-making, they provided one-on-one support, giving real-time feedback to grant applicants. It meant that every project had capacity and support to avoid burnout, which is so important. This is what happens through intentional, meaningful community participation.”

— Barb Rix, Eurobodalla Community Project Specialist

PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING LIFECYCLE



OUR CONSORTIUM



Fire to Flourish has been an ambitious action-research pilot that set out to reimagine how recovery and resilience could be led by communities.

Over the past five years, it has been shaped by innovation in participatory practice and community grantmaking in Australia, showing that when communities are trusted and resourced, they can lead transformative change.

This achievement comes in the context of a future where disasters and shocks are no longer rare events but a recurring reality. Fire to Flourish has helped demonstrate that

by centring community leadership, foregrounding Aboriginal wisdom, addressing inequalities, and working in long-term partnerships, we can build resilience that is both equitable and enduring.

Such an ambitious initiative could only have been realised through the extraordinary vision, trust and commitment of our consortium of partners. As we celebrate the close of the program, the Fire to Flourish team extends our heartfelt thanks and deep gratitude to those partners who made this journey possible – and whose support has left a legacy of approaches and relationships that will live on.



Cornerstone and funding partners

Fire to Flourish is led by Monash University and supported by cornerstone philanthropic partners, the Paul Ramsay Foundation and Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd. Additional philanthropic support is provided by the Lowy Foundation.



Monash University

“Since its launch in 2021, Monash has been proud to lead the Fire to Flourish program. It is a powerful example of community expertise and lived experience coming alongside academic knowledge to drive real change, an extension of Monash’s deeply-held commitments to building sustainable futures, as outlined in its Impact 2030 Strategic Plan.”

— Prof Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University



Paul Ramsay Foundation

“Paul Ramsay Foundation believes that communities coming together, with strong local leadership, are best placed to know what their communities needed to thrive post the fires. With support from PRF when Fire to Flourish was still just an ambitious idea, we demonstrated what is possible when communities are enabled to make decisions about resources, and can strengthen their ability to face future challenges together.”

— Liz Yeo, Chief of Alliances, Paul Ramsay Foundation



Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd

The Lowy Foundation

The Lowy Foundation

Community foundation partners

Community foundations have played a critical role in the rollout of Fire to Flourish grant funding at a hyperlocal level. As implementation partners, these three community foundations were core partners, bringing trusted grantmaking capability, deep local experience, and strong governance to program delivery. Their experience and relationships within communities helped navigate local context and complexity, supporting an innovative, community-led approach while ensuring funding was administered with care, accountability and integrity.



Northern Rivers Community Foundation

“The partnership between Fire to Flourish and Northern Rivers Community Foundation, in Clarence Valley and Tenterfield, reflects NRCF’s values of community participation, local leadership and systems change facilitated through a place-based lens. It has provided a foundation for NRCF to deepen connection and extend its work to communities further afield.”

— Sam Henderson, CEO, Northern Rivers Community Foundation



Gippsland Community Foundation

Gippsland Community Foundation’s trusted local presence, paired with the community-led research approach of Fire to Flourish East Gippsland, created an environment for exploring and navigating opportunities to grow local capacity, support communities to lead their own decision-making, and strengthen GCF’s relationship with local communities that are now benefitting from this collective effort.

— Michelle Dowsett, CEO, Gippsland Community Foundation



Australian Communities Foundation

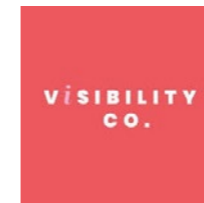
The partnership between Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla and the Australian Communities Foundation was built on a shared commitment to community-led recovery, empowerment, and resilience. ACF is proud to support participatory grant-making approaches that foreground local voices – supporting self-determination, Indigenous wisdom, and grassroots decision-making in disaster response.

— Andrew Binns, CEO, Australian Community Foundation



Strategic, delivery and research partners

Fire to Flourish enjoyed diverse partnerships to support program delivery for local community impact, research activities and strategic influencing for systems change.



Australian Business Volunteers

With both Australian Business Volunteers and Fire to Flourish grounded in grassroots community-led values, this collaboration was a natural mutual coalition. We collectively identified key gaps in current disaster and climate adaptation arrangements, particularly in funding and scaffolding to directly mobilise and resource community-led action for climate adaptation and disaster resilience, and sought to address these together.

— Liz Mackinlay, CEO, Australian Business Volunteers



Local Aboriginal organisations

Guided by our program principle of foregrounding Aboriginal wisdom, Fire to Flourish has prioritised working collaboratively with Traditional Owners, Land Councils and Aboriginal organisations.

Across Clarence Valley, Eurobodalla, Tenterfield and East Gippsland, we are proud to have worked closely with many local Aboriginal organisations, including seeking permission and input across the program.

Aboriginal Affairs South East Region

Aboriginal Enterprises Aboriginal Corporation

Baryulgil Local Aboriginal Land Council

Batemans Bay Local Aboriginal Land Council

Berimbah Aboriginal Corporation, CCY

Birrigan Gargle Local Aboriginal Land Council

Boomerang Meeting Place

Boonjaga Mungurra (Remember Home) Eurobodalla Aboriginal Reconnect Service

Budjaram Aboriginal Corporation

Bulgarr Ngaaru Medical Aboriginal Corporation

Cangai Aboriginal Corporation

Dorrigo Local Aboriginal Land Council

Eurobodalla Aboriginal Advisory Committee

Grafton Ngerrie Local Aboriginal Land Council

Gugiyn Balun Aboriginal Corporation

Gummyaney Aboriginal Corporation

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation

Gungyah Ngalingnee Aboriginal Corp

Gurehlgam Corporation

Healthy for Life

Indigenous Coordinator Centre - Batemans Bay

Jagun Alliance

Jubal Aboriginal Corporation

Jubullum Health Post

Jubullum Local Aboriginal Land Council

Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Regional Health and Community Services

Moogji Aboriginal Council

Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation

Murra Mia Southern Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service

Native Title Western Bundjalung

Ngullingah Jugun (Our Country) Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC

Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Corporation

Northern Elected Councillor

Northern Regional Office

Nungera Aboriginal Co-Operative Society

South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation

South Eastern Aboriginal Legal Service

South Eastern Aboriginal Regional Management Services (SEARMS)

Tabulam Aboriginal Corporation

Tabulam Turtle Divers R.L.F.C. Aboriginal Corporation

Wahlubal Elders Aboriginal Corporation

Yaegl Elders Corporation

Yaegl Local Aboriginal Land Council

Yaegl Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC

Local governments

Local government partnerships have been crucial to the success of Fire to Flourish, and we have worked closely with local councils in our four partner communities since 2021.

We are proud to have seen increased collaboration and cooperation between community groups and local

government in each partner community across the five years of our program, including support to establish specific projects in East Gippsland and Eurobodalla, a co-designed placemaking program in Clarence Valley to improve the disaster resilience of local spaces, and post-disaster learning processes in Tenterfield.



OUR EMERGING MODEL

Disaster recovery and resilience support for communities is often criticised as siloed, fragmented and misaligned with specific place-based needs. Existing systems are not designed to resource or enable communities to take their own actions to strengthen community resilience and reduce disaster impacts.

Fire to Flourish set out to create and resource the conditions that enable communities to design, establish and run resilience-strengthening activities at their own pace and in a way that suits them, supported by generous and flexible community grant funding from our cornerstone partners.

Out of this exploratory process, over many rounds of participatory grantmaking and co-design, we have honed a community resilience model that enables community-led, self-determined action for disaster resilience combined with appropriate safeguards, supports and resources needed to maintain safety, accountability and long-term impact.

In its essence, the Fire to Flourish model is a long-term, resourced enabling framework that invests in people and place by:

- **Developing capacity and knowhow** for leading resilience-strengthening activities and facilitating community grants through hands-on participatory experience.
- **Strengthening and expanding trusted networks,** community governance and place-based knowledge that can be called on in times of crisis.

- **Fostering inclusive community collaboration** and shared experience, including foregrounding of Aboriginal knowledge, cultural practices and appreciation of Country.
- **Funding resilience projects,** designed and selected through community-led participatory processes, that address resilience needs as a focus for collaborative action.

With these elements in place, communities have the freedom and autonomy to discuss, plan and implement their own disaster resilience journey. While every community is unique, there are four pillars that have emerged as foundational supports for communities seeking to lead self-determined action for disaster resilience: Leadership and Capabilities, Collective Action, Community Controlled Funding, and External Partnerships (see diagram). Bringing these pillars together in one integrated model not only delivers prevention, preparedness and recovery outcomes more effectively than traditional community grant schemes, it also strengthens social capital and long-term capability for wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

“We really built up the capacity of communities, especially remote areas – communities who have seen government departments come, offer help, tick their boxes and then don’t come back. We stayed, we sought permission from Elders, we kept coming back to listen. Now, other remote communities approach us to ask how a program like Fire to Flourish can help them too. It’s made a huge difference, thanks to our persistence and local knowledge.”

— Helen Duroux, Tenterfield Community Lead

LEADERSHIP AND CAPABILITIES:

Mobilise, resource and strengthen community leaders and networks

- Employing local community resilience facilitators
- Convening activities that bring people together
- Providing tailored training and development opportunities
- Facilitating community peer learning networks

COLLECTIVE ACTION:

Facilitate inclusive planning and participatory community governance

- Facilitating processes for shared understanding, envisioning, prioritisation and decision making
- Formalising community voice in disaster governance
- Supporting communities to collaborate with emergency services
- Enabling community-based data and knowledge management

FOUNDATIONS of SUPPORT

COMMUNITY CONTROLLED FUNDING:

Resource local priorities and projects with community controlled funding

- Establishing legal entities that can receive and distribute financial capital within communities
- Making non-competitive grant funding available for community-led allocation
- Streamlining grantmaking processes and embedding flexibility in grant conditions
- Providing rapid access to low-strings-attached disaster relief funding

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS:

Link with systems and partners that provide ready access to diverse forms of support

- Curating evidence-backed guidance, methods and tools
- Offering independent facilitation, technical advice and brokering support
- Making research, monitoring, evaluation and learning services accessible
- Connecting local experiences with systems change efforts

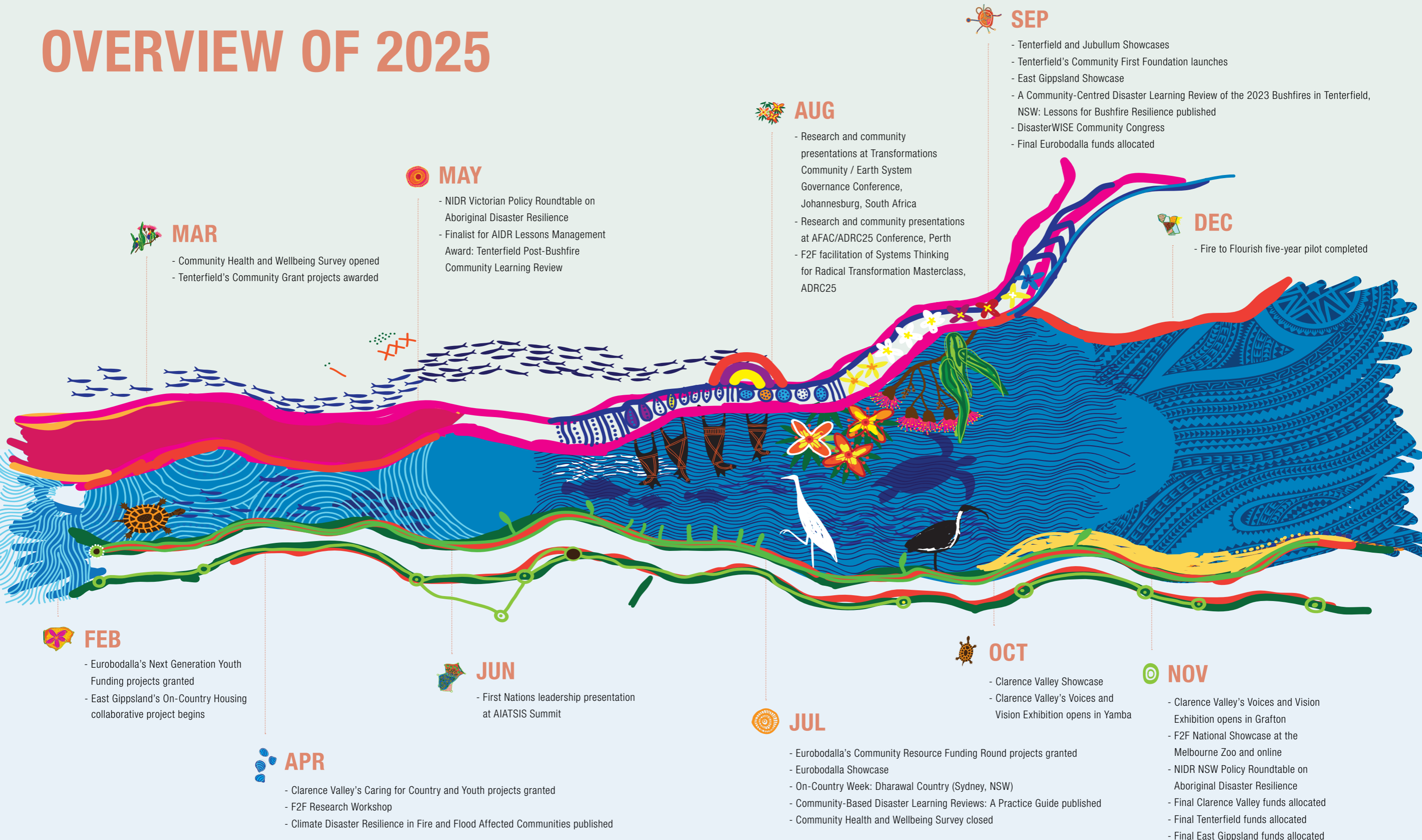
OUR YEAR OF IMPACT



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OVERVIEW OF 2025



MAR

- Community Health and Wellbeing Survey opened
- Tenterfield's Community Grant projects awarded

MAY

- NIDR Victorian Policy Roundtable on Aboriginal Disaster Resilience
- Finalist for AIDR Lessons Management Award: Tenterfield Post-Bushfire Community Learning Review

AUG

- Research and community presentations at Transformations Community / Earth System Governance Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa
- Research and community presentations at AFAC/ADRC25 Conference, Perth
- F2F facilitation of Systems Thinking for Radical Transformation Masterclass, ADRC25

SEP

- Tenterfield and Jubullum Showcases
- Tenterfield's Community First Foundation launches
- East Gippsland Showcase
- A Community-Centred Disaster Learning Review of the 2023 Bushfires in Tenterfield, NSW: Lessons for Bushfire Resilience published
- DisasterWISE Community Congress
- Final Eurobodalla funds allocated

DEC

- Fire to Flourish five-year pilot completed

FEB

- Eurobodalla's Next Generation Youth Funding projects granted
- East Gippsland's On-Country Housing collaborative project begins

JUN

- First Nations leadership presentation at AIATSIS Summit

OCT

- Clarence Valley Showcase
- Clarence Valley's Voices and Vision Exhibition opens in Yamba

JUL

- Eurobodalla's Community Resource Funding Round projects granted
- Eurobodalla Showcase
- On-Country Week: Dharawal Country (Sydney, NSW)
- Community-Based Disaster Learning Reviews: A Practice Guide published
- Community Health and Wellbeing Survey closed

NOV

- Clarence Valley's Voices and Vision Exhibition opens in Grafton
- F2F National Showcase at the Melbourne Zoo and online
- NIDR NSW Policy Roundtable on Aboriginal Disaster Resilience
- Final Clarence Valley funds allocated
- Final Tenterfield funds allocated
- Final East Gippsland funds allocated

APR

- Clarence Valley's Caring for Country and Youth projects granted
- F2F Research Workshop
- Climate Disaster Resilience in Fire and Flood Affected Communities published

2025 AT A GLANCE

COMMUNITY GRANTS

247
LOCAL ORGANISATIONS ENGAGED



107
COMMUNITY RESILIENCE PROJECTS FUNDED

43
COMMUNITY PROCESS PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED

474
COMMUNITY CAPABILITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES



6
FUNDING ROUNDS

63%
PROJECTS LED BY OR DEVELOPED WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OR GROUPS

\$3M+
FUNDS DISTRIBUTED

KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT

3
KNOWLEDGE OUTPUTS



45+
PUBLIC EVENTS AND PRESENTATIONS

20
RESEARCH PROJECTS

5
PHD STUDENTS





FIVE YEARS OF PROGRAM IMPACT

Our 2021–2025 Impact Report, independently prepared by Elevate Impact, assesses the impact of the program from beginning to end.

The analysis is based on data collected across the life of the program, including more than 6,000 data points provided by participants from all four communities. This comprehensive dataset delivers a robust, evidence-based assessment of Fire to Flourish’s impact.

The report focuses on indicators of overall resilience, as well as a subset of resilience domains that have been a focus of Fire to Flourish - social capital and Indigenous culture - as well as the natural environment. The results offer tangible evidence of a significant year-on-year increase in impact reported by community members who have engaged with the program.

The Impact Report unpacks the impact that Fire to Flourish had on community members in Clarence Valley, Eurobodalla, Tenterfield and East Gippsland between 2021–2025. It brings together data, insights and community perspectives to show what has changed, what’s been learned, and where this work can have the greatest impact into the future.

“One of the most meaningful impacts Fire to Flourish has had on our community is the way it has helped people reconnect, rebuild trust, and work together toward a more positive and sustainable future.”

— Community participant, Fire to Flourish



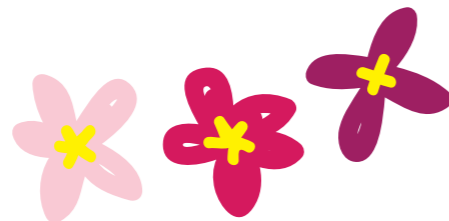
Make sure you’re signed up to our newsletter to receive a copy of our 2021–2025 Impact Report.

Impact Rating				
DOMAINS	2023 Co-designing Foundations	2024 Broadening Participation	2025 Spreading & Scaling	Shift
Overall Impact			8.6	
Social Capital	5.6	7.2	8.0	43% increase
Indigenous Culture	5.6	6.9	7.8	39% increase
Natural Environment	4.7	6.4	7.6	62% increase

Question	Impact Rating
The projects funded by Fire to Flourish have positively impacted my community	8.73
The funding made available by Fire to Flourish has been more easily accessible than other funding sources	8.66
New relationships have been formed through Fire to Flourish activities	8.85
Overall, Fire to Flourish has made a lasting positive difference in my community	8.73
The skills, relationships, and networks developed through Fire to Flourish will continue beyond the program	8.67
Fire to Flourish has influenced how local leaders, organisations, or governments think about community-led resilience	8.16
I now have a better understanding of what makes a community ‘disaster resilient’	8.27

Responses are classified into five categories:

- 8.00 – 9.99 = Very Positive Impact
- 6.00 - 7.99 = Positive Impact
- 4.00 – 5.99 = No Impact
- 2.00 – 3.99 = Negative Impact
- 1.00 – 1.99 = Very Negative Impact



ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

In 2025, Fire to Flourish researchers and community team members were invited to present their work at 15 events across Australia and internationally. This has been an important way for us to amplify our impact by sharing our experiences and insights and exchanging ideas with a wide and influential audience. The program also generated significant media attention in our partner communities, testament to our local impact and interest in this model of community-led disaster resilience.

EXHIBITION FLOURISHING WITH COMMUNITY STRENGTH AND SPIRIT

CLARENCE VALLEY INDEPENDENT

FIRE TO FLOURISH REFLECTS ON COMMUNITY-LED RECOVERY FIVE YEARS AFTER BLACK SUMMER BUSHFIRES

ABOUT REGIONAL

SURVEY TO EXAMINE BUSHFIRE-RELATED HEALTH IMPACTS

ABOUT REGIONAL

FIVE YEARS ON: HAVE YOUR SAY ON BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

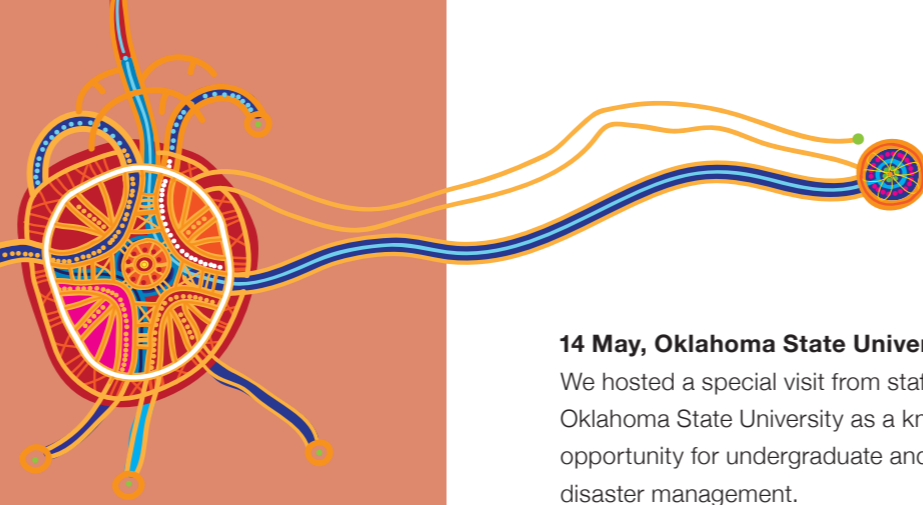
BAIRNESDALE ADVERTISER

CELEBRATING FIVE YEARS OF COMMUNITY-LED DISASTER RESILIENCE IN EUROBODALLA

MORUYA MAIL

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY FIVE YEARS ON: SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCE COULD HELP IMPROVE FUTURE SERVICES

BATEMANS BAY POST



14 May, Oklahoma State University visit, Sydney

We hosted a special visit from staff and students of Oklahoma State University as a knowledge exchange opportunity for undergraduate and postgraduate students in disaster management.

20–22 May, Lessons Management Forum, Wellington

Dr Adriana Keating and Dr Zoë D'Arcy presented an interactive workshop on how to engage communities to identify lessons from disasters, offering an immersive learning experience including key insights into the critical aspects of community-based disaster learning reviews.

21–22 May, Nature Conservation Council of NSW Bushfire Conference, Sydney

Matt Sing (Tenterfield) and Dr Jana-Axinja Paschen shared insights on community-led cultural burning, highlighting the story of a cultural burn in Tenterfield organised by Fire to Flourish Tenterfield with support from Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation.

2–6 June, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Summit, Darwin

Kamilaroi Elder Helen Duroux, Kizzy Nye and Barb Rix delivered a presentation on the power of First Nations leadership and wisdom as a critical ingredient to understanding what makes Community and Country resilient to disasters.

26 June, Climate Adaptation Roundtable, Virtual

Professor Briony Rogers presented Fire to Flourish's model and community experiences at an international roundtable on climate change adaptation hosted by the US National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and Monash Business School.

30 June – 4 July, The Australian Historical Society Conference, Townsville

Dr Gretel Evans addressed the notion of 'regenerative histories', considering whether the historical narratives of disaster-impacted communities are incorporated into future-facing community visions and strategies.

9–11 July, Drought Resilience Conference, Geelong

Dr Jana-Axinja Paschen reflected on how the Fire to Flourish initiative partnered with impacted communities to co-design a participatory model that prioritises agency, capability, and self-determination, sharing insights from co-design workshops and interviews.

5–7 August, Philanthropy Leadership Summit, Canberra

Sarah Smith joined a panel to share insights from Fire to Flourish as part of discussion exploring how Indigenous leadership and knowledge systems can guide us toward a more equitable and sustainable future, with decolonisation not just a reckoning with the past but a powerful blueprint for what comes next.

18–21 August, Transformations Community/Earth System Governance Project Conference, South Africa

Dr Gretel Evans introduced participants to Fire to Flourish's hands-on resilience capability framework for communities, while Sarah Smith, Barb Rix, Pamela Denise, Eva Grunden, Kathryn Kermode, Dr Zoë D'Arcy and Dr Gretel Evans led a workshop focused on embedding community-led decision-making in disaster resilience strategies.

26–29 August, AFAC25 and Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2025, Perth

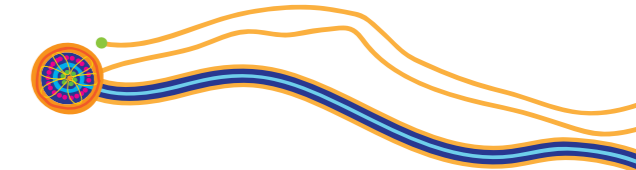
The Fire to Flourish team participated in AFAC25 and the ADRC in Perth, contributing to national dialogue on community-led disaster resilience and systemic transformation. Dr Adriana Keating and Dr Zoë D'Arcy facilitated a Masterclass on Systems Thinking for Transformation. The team also hosted a well-attended stall at Resilience Lane alongside DisasterWISE.

31 October, North American Association for Environmental Education, Virtual

PhD student Belinda Davis presented on schools as catalysts for sustainability transformation, exploring how schools in the UK, Australia, and the USA can drive systems change and bolster community resilience through transformative education.

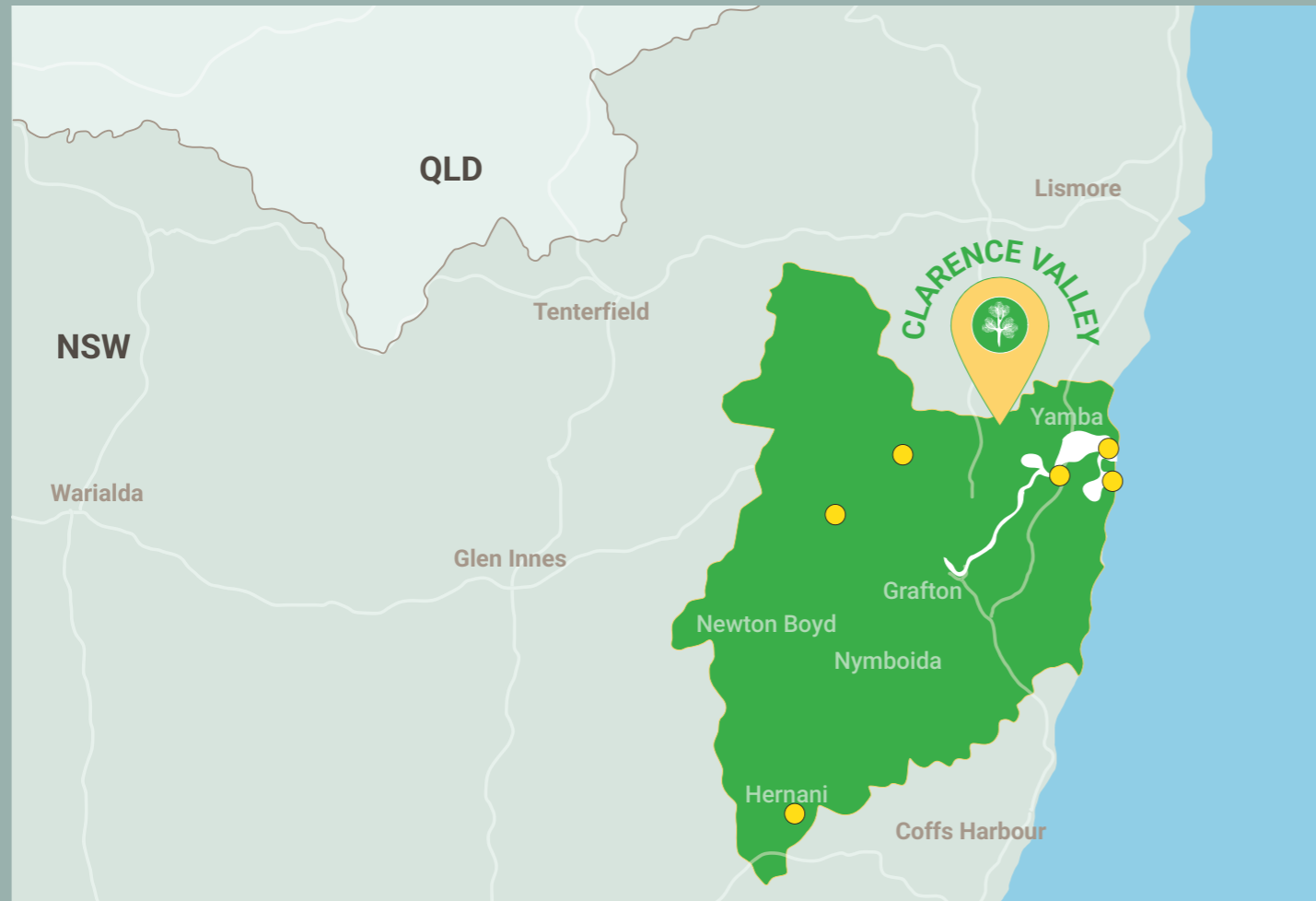
13 November, Brain Health Futures Summit, Melbourne

Professor Briony Rogers joined a panel discussion with other social and public sector leaders to explore how places and community infrastructure supports critical mental wellbeing.



CLARENCE VALLEY

Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl Land



In 2025:

15 projects led by or developed with Aboriginal people or groups

3 funding rounds

\$668K distributed in grants

19 community resilience projects funded

129 local organisations engaged

13 community co-designers engaged

36 community capability-building activities

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Circle of Friends: Sip, Share, Connect

Weekly workshops and activities have transformed the Iluka Community Hall into a vibrant hub of laughter, friendship and support. Growing from twelve to fifty members, the inclusive group builds confidence and joy. New NRCF funding will keep this welcoming space thriving, nurturing connection and community spirit throughout 2026.



Shannon Park Beautification

Shannon Park has been rejuvenated through a strong community effort, creating a beautiful, welcoming space for families, visitors and future generations. The restored skate park and gardens celebrate local pride, resilience, and connection. Growing from shared hope and determination, this revitalised space is a gift to Glenreagh, a place to come together, both in times of calm or crisis.



Fishing Line Off Line A Life Line

This project united young people from the Blicks community for a weekend of culture and connection. Along with plenty of fishing, Gumbaynggirr local Matt led them on Country to explore beach worming, bush foods, and ancient fish traps. At the Sikh Temple, mindfulness and migration stories deepened their ties to community and self.



Malabugilmah Concept Master Plan

Jana Ngalee Local Aboriginal Land Council developed strategic and master plans with the remote community of Malabugilmah, installed solar and UHF systems, and completed a Green Team feasibility study. They strengthened cultural preservation, sustainability, and resilience. These upgrades enhance disaster preparedness and community capacity.

"This project has transformed how our community prepares for and responds to disasters. The collaboration, planning, and infrastructure improvements have empowered our people and strengthened our resilience for generations to come."

— Brett Tibbett, CEO, Jana Ngalee Local Aboriginal Land Council





In Our Words

For our Clarence Valley team, the year kicked off with a dedicated Aboriginal co-design team – including Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl community members – being entrusted with disbursing \$420k across their lands as part of our Caring for Country and Youth funding round. Our team adapted the participatory grantmaking process to suit this round, providing more grant writing workshops and one-to-one support for applicants. Some community members were writing grants for the first time, others were building on previous projects, and many were forming new collaborations and partnerships.

A defining feature of this round was the deep cultural connection to Country, guidance from Elders, and the inclusion of youth priorities and representatives in the co-design group. As a result, nearly all projects benefited young people, through cultural experiences with Elders on Country, mentorship and leadership opportunities, and creative collaborations.

Throughout the year, we continued to learn, adapt and evolve as circumstances changed and additional funding became



available. We allocated a 'top-up' round of \$150,000 and reallocated unspent funds from previous rounds to support projects that had been partially funded or had previously missed out but were endorsed by their communities.

Forty-four projects from earlier rounds were still active in 2025, with another 25 projects receiving funding in April, culminating in a total of 69 projects realised over the past four years. It was a privilege to walk alongside inspiring project teams and witness firsthand the connections to Country, the transformation of public spaces, intergenerational learning, and successful collaborations across the region.

This year also brought new opportunities for skills development, along with several projects securing ongoing funding to support long-term sustainability.

In early October, the Clarence Valley community gathered at the Grafton Regional Gallery for a Community Celebration to honour the Fire to Flourish journey. The event, curated by Kath Kermode, featured live music, dance and art-making activities, as well as inspiring speakers – including NSW Minister for Recovery, the Hon. Janelle Saffin, local co-designers, project leads, researchers and strategic partners. It was a vibrant celebration of resilience, creativity and collaboration, showcasing how communities are revitalising shared spaces and strengthening connections for a more resilient future.

In October and November, we curated the Voices and Vision exhibition in Yamba and Grafton, which unpacked the incredible journey undertaken over five years of Fire to Flourish alongside more than 16 communities across Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl lands. It was an artistic



representation of the wide range of projects and activities that took place, from the pilot co-design round in 2021 to the final outcomes of Caring for Country and Youth initiatives funded in 2025. Artworks by Pamela Denise and Cara MacLeod brought these stories to life, while hands-on creative activities encouraged visitors to stay, yarn and share their own stories. A detailed full-wall timeline artwork and posters provided insights from diverse community participants and showcased key research findings.

We valued these opportunities to celebrate in person with our wide network of community members, organisations and supporters who made the program a wonderful success. We would like to acknowledge the funders, partner organisations and allies for their contributions, backed by their belief in the power of communities to take meaningful action and create lasting change.

Fire to Flourish Clarence Valley Team - Cara MacLeod, Pamela Denise and Kath Kermode

Community Co-designer Story: Avery Brown

My name is Avery Brown, I'm part of the Wehlubal clan group within the Bundjalung Nation.

My ancestors are from Baryulgil, which is a semi-remote community about 80 kilometers northwest of Grafton. I'm a proud Bundjalung man and I take a lot of interest in my communities.

When Fire to Flourish came along with funding, we were successful in securing some of that funding to run a program, which we called Connect Culture and Rekindle Bundjalung Mob. It's been good for myself and other Elders such as Ken Gordon and Joe Walker to be back on Bundjalung land, reconnecting and rejuvenating ourselves so that we can feel that we still belong to our land.

Our project is about taking school students out onto Bundjalung land, talking to them about culture and traditions, but also showing them how we lived in those days. It's essential that we pass on our knowledge, so that our traditions, customs and culture continues on. And every student that's been out there with us is wanting to go back.

It's our vision to continue on with what we're doing. This is not a one-off. I see it as an essential part of education, not only for the kids, but for grown-ups, too. We're all still learning.

When you're dealing with community, and you're dealing with educating your community and educating students in the school, it's got to be a combined collective effort. Because the three groups – us Bundjalung people, Gumbaynggirr mob and the Yaegl people – encompass the Clarence Valley.

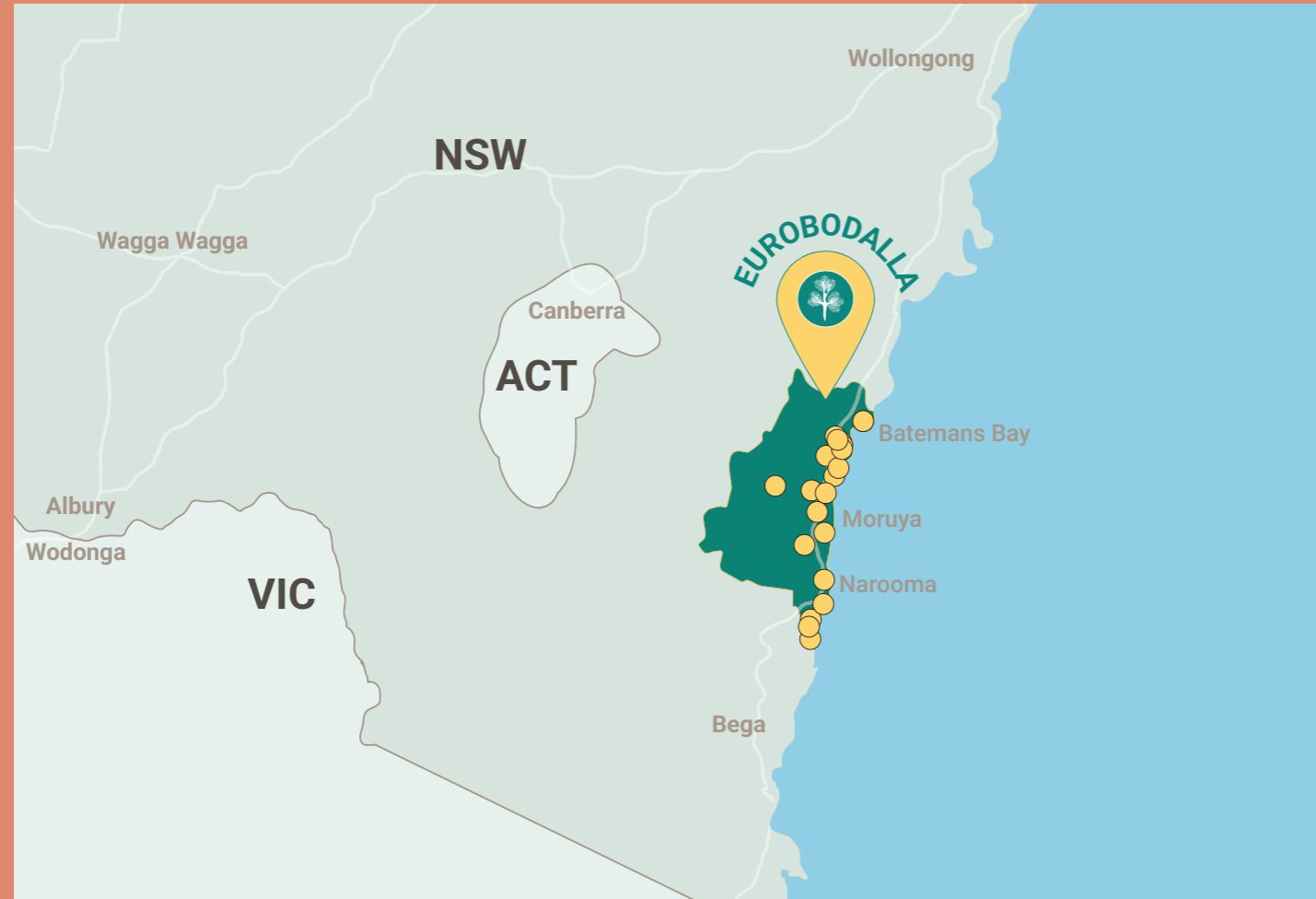


Avery Brown, Joe Walker, Ken Gordon. Credit: Leanne Kelly CVAS. Watch Bundjalung Elders speak about this project here:



EUROBODALLA

Walbanga and Djiringanj Land



In 2025:

41 projects led by or developed with Aboriginal people or groups

2 funding rounds

\$950K distributed in grants

64 community resilience projects funded

82 local organisations engaged

8 community project mentors engaged

240 community capability-building activities

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Yuwinj Ngura

Funded as part of the Next Generation Youth Funding Round, Yuwinj Ngura was a three-day school holiday program that created a Corroboree with young Aboriginal people. Youth were able to access a safe space to learn culture, connect to Country, learn traditional dance, create a dance ring, and participate in language, story, art and artefact creation.



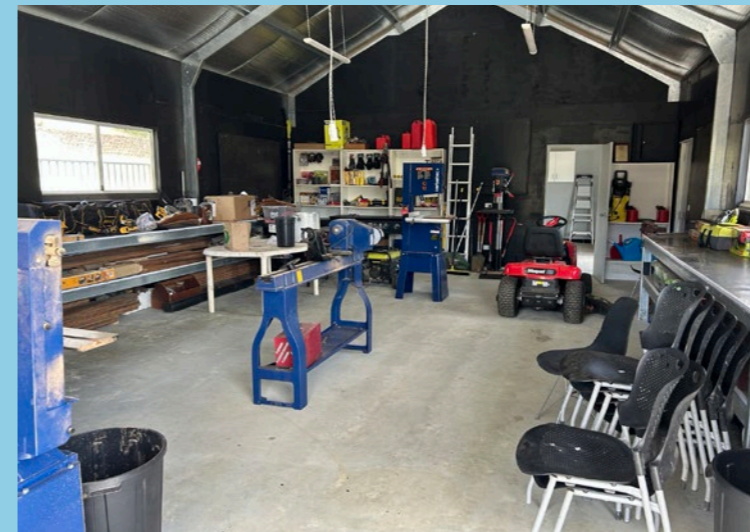
South Coast Marlins Elite Training

This funded training supported the all-girls NSW South Coast Marlins rugby teams to win all three of their grand final games in 2025 – a historic first for this small local league. Young female rugby players were provided with an elite training program, a wellbeing camp, and new branded equipment, which boosted social connection and capital, and provided a hopeful future for young women in sport on NSW South Coast.



Transition to Success

As part of the Next Generation Youth Funding Round, this multifaceted program of learning opportunities at Batemans Bay High School focused on building self esteem, self worth, mentoring support and connection to Indigenous culture. Students took part in a hospitality workshop, White Card course, Elders Gathering, First Nations Cultural Camp, resume development, and PPE training. This funding increased young peoples' sense of belonging, pride, education and employment opportunities.



Deadly Lads Cultural Healing Space

This project funded a safe, fit-for-purpose healing space and resources for Elders, vulnerable young men and people with severe mental health challenges and disabilities to come together and support each other, either through group or one-on-one support. The space now regularly provides local men with a deeper connection to Country, Culture and Community, improving social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

In Our Words

For Eurobodalla, 2025 was the first year of the Fire to Flourish program when our communities weren't busy recovering from a recent disaster, giving us space to properly concentrate on longer-term community development.

Funding decisions for our Next Generation Youth Round were made in December 2024, so we hit the ground blazing in January 2025, supporting each of the eight community project grantees with everything they needed to get started. Each project was significant, and we made sure that our support for each was tailored to their individual needs.

We also announced a new Community Resource Round of funding – a quick but essential value-add of capital purchases for local organisations and groups who are on the ground helping their communities every day. This round was established to meet a specific need: to relieve the burden of delivery for community initiatives. We wanted to provide financial support for small-to-medium initiatives that needed upgrades. This is a need often overlooked by funding bodies. If you're not on the ground in community then you likely don't understand the huge impact that something small, like a generator, actually has for locals.

By June, our group of incredible Community Project Mentors had decided which projects to fund, and we announced a list of 55 important projects. We funded a wide range of needs – arts supplies, shade sails and marquees, defibrillators, a barbecue trailer, STEM equipment for schools, new chairs, drones to map koala populations, and much more. These resources are now owned by the community, they are accessible and can be used by each community for the longer term.

Also in June, we were honoured to present our work at the AIATSIS Summit in Darwin. This was the widest platform we'd shared our work with and it was exciting to highlight the



importance of First Nations leadership within mainstream recovery funding programs.

Then in July, we hosted our Eurobodalla Showcase to celebrate the incredible community achievements of our program, and to show how social capital and connectedness actually works in communities. Across years of funding, our projects have a 97% success rate to completion, which is a significant result and proof that this type of support really works. The Showcase was such an important event for us, to celebrate this success and to bring people back together who had met through the program over the years. It was amazing to hear from community members who have experienced the whole journey, and to show everyone what is possible with a well-organised and community-led funding program.

We want to finish by thanking the community. While we've been here to support them with funding, we couldn't do what they've done. The communities we worked with supported us, they believed in us and trusted us, but ultimately they're also the ones who did the real work. The success of this program reflects the strengths of Eurobodalla and the selflessness of the people who live here.

Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla Team - Kizzy Nye, Barb Rix and Joe Brierley



Community Project Mentor Story: Michelle Preston

I'm Michelle Preston, I'm one of the Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla Community Project Mentors and have lived in Eurobodalla for thirty years.

It's a small community and I'm involved in a lot of our local grassroots initiatives, like OzHarvest, Red Cross and working with the homeless, so I really know the people who live here. I know what it takes for each person to have been recovering from the 2019/20 bushfires, floods and COVID, and what they've had to overcome just to engage with a program like Fire to Flourish.

Early in 2024, Barb asked me to come on board as a Community Project Mentor because she knew I was a well-respected member of the community with Indigenous kids, and that I'd have a good perspective of what's holding people back and how to help them.

For me, being a Fire to Flourish Mentor meant sitting down at the start of each funding round with people who had great ideas but weren't sure where to take them. We'd sit down, discuss their specific wants and needs, and workshop the viability of each project – similar to helping people set up small businesses with ABNs and business plans, they needed help to mould their idea into something achievable and viable. I was able to listen to what they wanted to do and help them, offering insights into how projects could get off the ground, and what might need changing to make each project work.

As a Mentor, I also offered a lot of guidance and support, and checked on their mental welfare throughout the project. A couple of years on from the fires, our people are still recovering, so they usually need direct mental support as part of their project from someone they know and trust in the community. This is the kind of hands-on, local support that is often missing from other funding structures. It's a real person-centred process and that's what really drew me into this program.

Before Fire to Flourish, I didn't have much experience in grant funding but I had plenty of knowledge of the communities, the people, and their needs. This program really kickstarted my own growth mindset and showed me that, even if I don't know something, I can just jump in and learn along the way. As I kept processing the grants, it became easier and easier. Don't fear something you don't know, just go for it!

A personal highlight was watching the young Indigenous

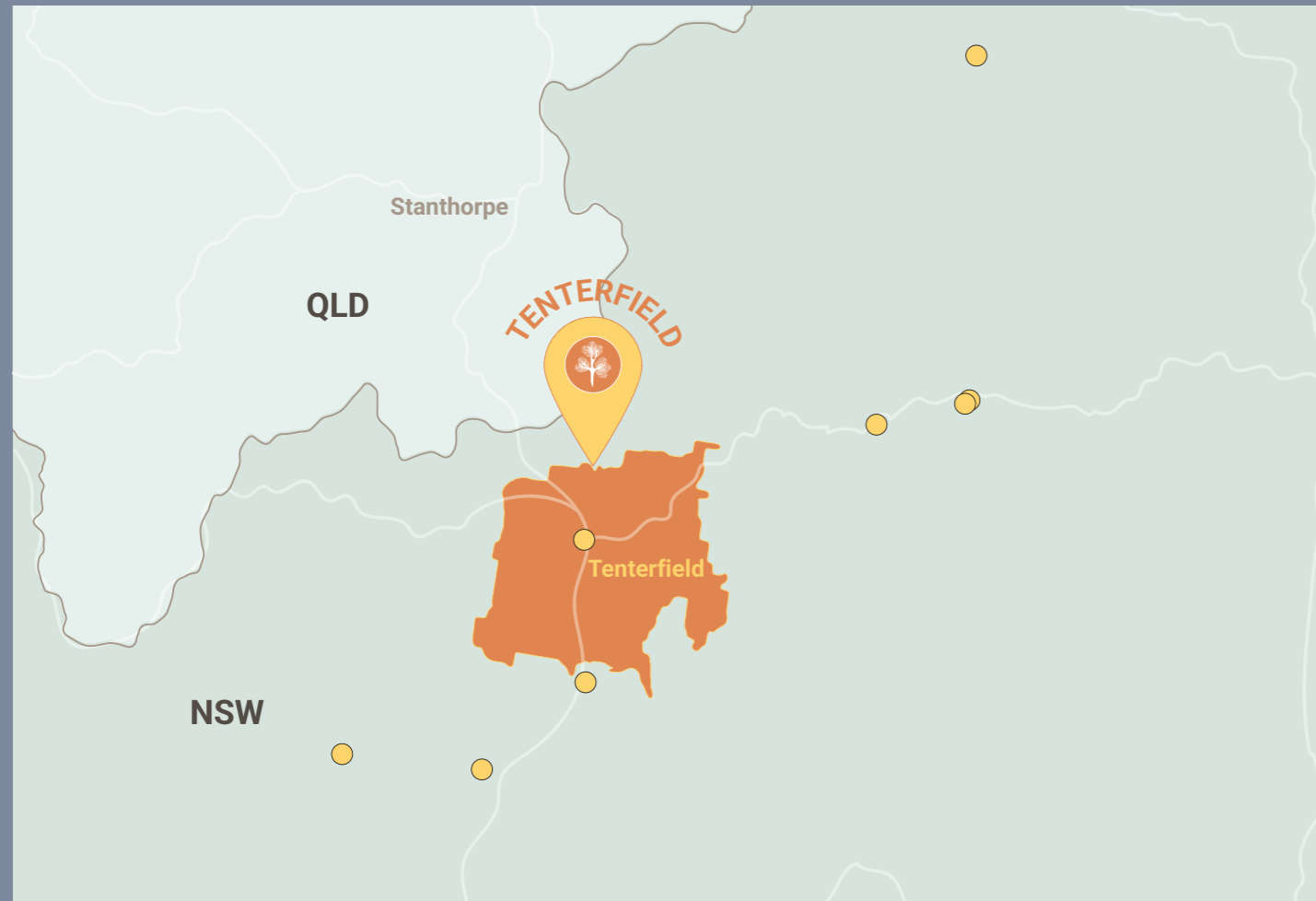
men and women – kids getting ready to leave school – who came to our meetings. Their input and willingness to step outside their comfort zone to make a difference to their community is so inspiring. They came in ready to roll and put themselves on the line to help create some magnificent projects and events. I'm so proud of them. The Yuin culture is in good hands with these kids, they're really embracing their knowledge and stepping into their power, it's amazing to watch.

That's one of the lasting impacts of this program – watching people turn their pain into the power of achievement and success. It's a huge win for community members.



TENTERFIELD

Kamilaroi and Bundjalung Land



In 2025:

12 projects led by or developed with Aboriginal people or groups

1 funding round

\$600K distributed in grants

24 community resilience projects funded

36 local organisations engaged

10 community co-designers engaged

198 community capability-building activities

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

CWA Kitchen and Ablution Block

In recent fires around the district, the newly installed CWA kitchen at our local aerodrome was utilised to prepare meals for the pilots that were doing water bombing to help stop the fires. The installation of this kitchen ensures emergency relief, where volunteers and pilots are able to freshen up and rest during their time servicing fires.



Spring Garden Expo

With Fire to Flourish funding and support, the Tenterfield Horticultural Society were enabled to step into the digital world, setting up an email account, an ABN and social media. They also launched the 2025 Spring Garden Expo, drawing visitors from across eastern Australia to a vibrant, greenery-filled Tenterfield memorial hall.



Jubullum Tuckerbox renovations

As part of the Next Generation Youth Funding Round, this multifaceted program of learning opportunities at Batemans Bay High School focused on building self esteem, self worth, mentoring support and connection to Indigenous culture. Students took part in a hospitality workshop, White Card course, Elders Gathering, First Nations Cultural Camp, resume development, and PPE training. This funding increased young peoples' sense of belonging, pride, education and employment opportunities.



Cultural fire burns at Leeches Gully and Jubullum

In partnership with Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation, these burns took place in Tenterfield and Jubullum. As a direct result of the cultural burns, Jubullum was declared safe from evacuation during a recent oncoming fire, and the community was kept safe. Although the Leeches Gully burn wasn't completed on the day, the team will be using the remaining funding to host workshops to train female Indigenous Rangers for next season's burns.

In Our Words

At the start of this year, Tenterfield communities were in recovery from fires in late 2024. The weather was still warm, so there was a lot of concern in the community, but also motivation to keep supporting community projects.

Having closed one round of funding in late 2024, our team immediately opened a Community Grant Round of extra funding in February 2025. This new round was in recognition of all priorities expressed to us by community members during previous rounds – a last chance for local organisations to receive funding using a system that we knew was meeting people’s exact needs, and was being rolled out using a fair, accessible system.

This was definitely the best-engaged round we’d facilitated in the years of Fire to Flourish. We received \$1.1 million worth of applications for only \$600k available in the funding pool.

The co-design group making the decisions for this round was made up of a third of previous co-designers and two-thirds new people, which was excellent. Having people in the room that already knew the process really helped guide newcomers, plus having new people coming on board was a sign that more communities and different groups had heard about the program. People wanted to get more involved. The dynamic worked really well and it was a great mix of demographics – young and old locals.

One significant highlight from this round was supporting much-needed upgrades to Friends of Tenterfield Aerodrome. Upgrades to the runway means that the site can now be used to load emergency management water-bombing planes and helicopters. This is a huge improvement for our communities and their disaster resilience. Before, it was a 50-minute round-trip between the airport and Tenterfield region, now it’s only a couple of minutes. The upgrades



directly resulted in people’s houses being saved when small bushfires affected the area throughout late 2025.

There also exists a legacy relationship between Monash Art, Design and Architecture’s Placemaking team and our Jubullum communities, who are collectively working on projects that will be completed early next year.

Launching our Community First Foundation was another huge focus for us this year. Because Tenterfield sits on the border of NSW and Queensland, it creates granting issues when community foundations can only disburse grants to one state at a time. Our new foundation will cover the towns that straddle the border, and will do the necessary work of facilitating funding to those communities based on their specific local needs. Coming to the end of the year, we are now at the stage of finalising deductible gift recipient status so that we can raise funds locally, and have already had quite a bit of interest.

In September, our Tenterfield and Jubullum Showcases were beautiful intimate events to celebrate our achievements with Fire to Flourish. Locals came, including people from the first co-design group right through to people who have just joined us, as well as other locals who didn’t know about the program yet. So, it created great opportunities to honour the amazing community effort of the past few years, while also making new connections right to the end.

We want to say thank you to the whole community for doing all the work that builds resilience. We can roll out a program like this, but ultimately it’s the community who do their work, and they’ve done an amazing job here in Tenterfield.

Fire to Flourish Tenterfield Team - Helen Duroux and Matt Sing



Community Co-designer Story: Mark Barnett



I’m Mark Barnett, I live on a farm just outside Tenterfield in Bolivia, in northern NSW.

I’ve been involved with Fire to Flourish Tenterfield from the beginning, having met Matt Sing and Aunty Helen when I first moved here and was new to the community. Once they became involved in Fire to Flourish in 2021, they asked me to help.

I was on a co-design group, where we were laying down the decision-making foundations before funding had become available. We were deciding how to make unbiased decisions, how to allocate funding to different groups fairly, what were our requirements and criteria for approving different projects, how to best respect peoples’ decisions, how to give everyone a voice and be impartial – really outlining the guiding ideology for later.

Once funding was ready to hand out, I was invited back. It was great to see the transition from developing those priorities right through to funding.

The timing of that first co-design round was important because we’d had more fires come through just outside of Tenterfield. Because we’d already been having these discussions, the communities rallied pretty quickly to assess

the fire damage and really put those networks and decision-making protocols into practice. Our communication had really improved and we organised quickly.

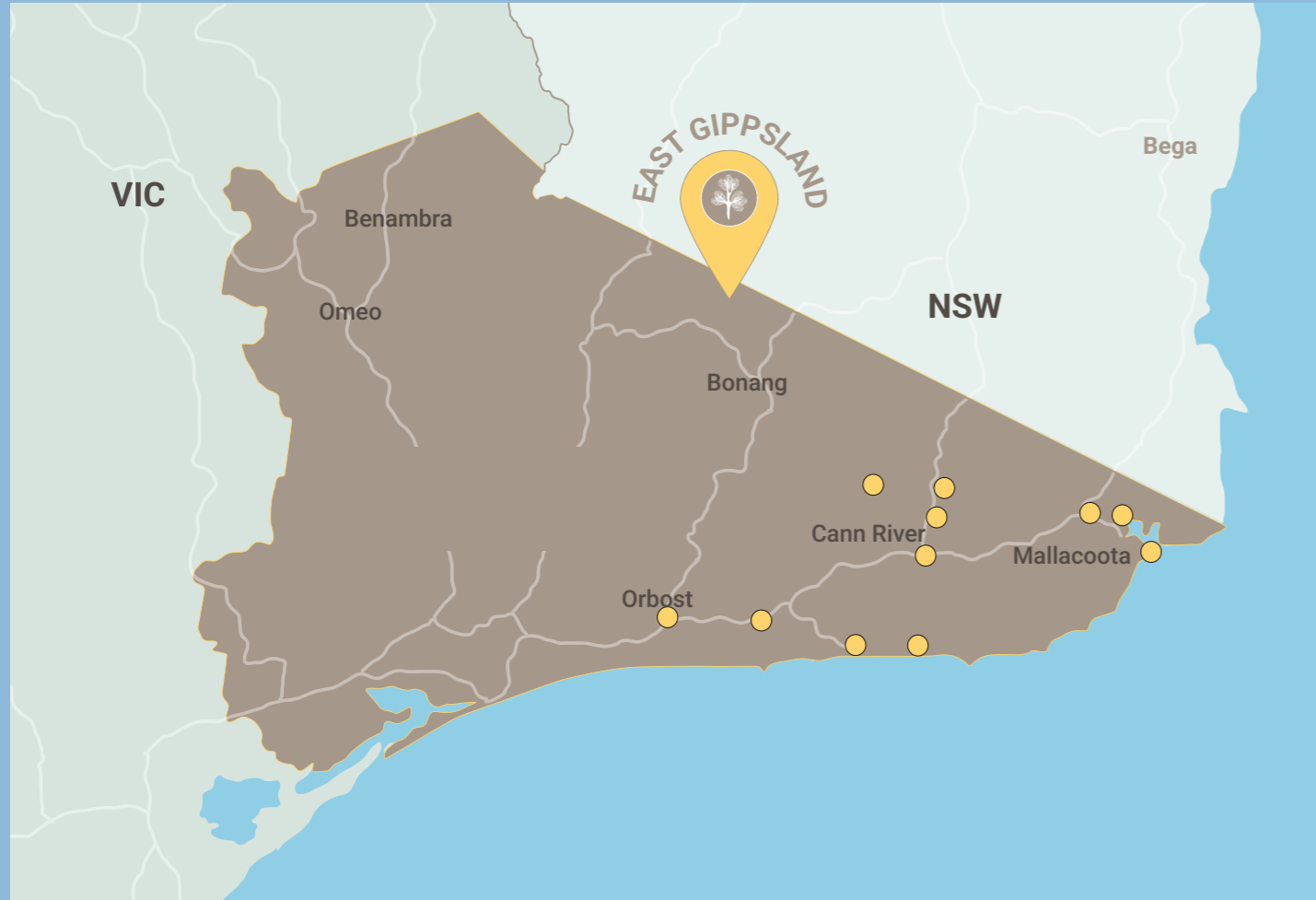
Now, you can see the impact of Fire to Flourish around the town because you can really see where the funding went. You can see it in the infrastructure but also in the people and connections – everyone that’s been involved with the program are still around, they’re part of local organisations like TAFE, Men’s Shed, Make It, CWA.

We’ve also helped educate locals about grant funding and you saw this impact through the co-design rounds, where people who didn’t get all their funding in the first round would come back in the second round with a new application showing what progress they’d made, so we could allocate new funding. I think this shows a strengthened ability to apply for grants in the future.

I’m grateful to this program because I was a new community member moving into town a few years ago and Fire to Flourish helped strengthen my ties to the community. I live in an isolated area but this program opened me up to different contacts. It was personally a really good networking journey for me.

EAST GIPPSLAND

Gunaikurnai, Monero and Bidawel Land



In 2025:

1 Project development and funding facilitator engaged

14 projects supported

3 projects linked with Australian Business Volunteers

8 future grants supported

7 projects linked with potential partners

1 social enterprise network facilitated

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Bemm River Men's Shed

Bemm River has one road in and out and is prone to bushfires, floods and power outages, where the community is cut off from access to supports, electricity, food supplies and fuel. The Bemm River Men's Shed was funded to install upgrades and to establish this space as a Disaster Relief Hub for the community – a safe, welcoming space to gather. They also upgraded their community slashing tractor and provided accredited training so the community can safely use it and be better prepared in the case of future bushfires.



Wilderness Coast KELPfarm Project

Jann Gilbert received funding to collect data and assess the potential for establishing a research facility on the Far East Gippsland coast. This facility would provide important research and data, and meaningful jobs and training for local young people. The final touches to a detailed prospectus for this venture are being made, to support partnership and funding for the facility.

Watch [this](#) video to learn more



Cann River Community-Owned Training Cafe

Funding established a community-owned training cafe at Cann River Community Centre, where funds are distributed back into the community. This community hub will support employment opportunities, training, and funding for other programs, such as the playgroup and youth group, as well as social gatherings.



Cann River Lyrebird Sculpture

The lyrebird is the emblem for Cann Valley and more recently a symbol of recovery, hope and resilience. With funding from a Fire to Flourish, the Tamboon Peachtree Association purchased the sculpture created by local artist Neil Findley, which is now a permanent attraction at the Cann River Community Centre.



In Our Words

East Gippsland’s main funding round was designed and allocated in 2024, so this year our focus has been on walking alongside project leads and community members as they implement and build on their ideas. We have supported volunteers to sustain their work, nurtured emerging leadership, and strengthened connections across communities.

A cornerstone of our support has been the implementation of Project Sharing Circles – relaxed, co-designed gatherings that offer networking, shared learning, peer problem-solving, gentle accountability, and a less onerous acquittal process. These circles have created space for collaboration and reflection, supported our research, and helped projects demonstrate early signs of strengthened disaster resilience.

As we moved into the final year of the Fire to Flourish program in East Gippsland, we worked strategically and sensitively to plan for exit and legacy. We know that relationship-based programs can leave a gap when they conclude, so we took time with communities to explore next steps, identify new ideas, strengthen partnerships, and prepare projects to be “grant ready” for future opportunities. We engaged Rachael Dooley, a Project Development and Funding Facilitator, to walk alongside project leaders and explore how else their aspirations can be supported, beyond Fire to Flourish.

Another major focus has been on enabling communities to recognise, reflect and celebrate their achievements. Several local celebrations were held across the footprint, which were joyful, well-attended, and sparked new relationships and collaborations right through to the end of the program. We also co-designed with our Community Planners an important Showcase held in Cann River on 18 September. Participants from government, non-government organisations and local communities experienced the program’s journey firsthand and celebrated the inspiring community-led resilience projects that have evolved.



We have also deepened partnerships across the broader ‘system’, helping strengthen relationships between communities and institutional partners that have not always aligned easily. This systems-level bridge-building is a significant legacy of the program.

We are grateful to the Gippsland Community Foundation for their partnership and stewardship of the Fire to Flourish East Gippsland funding. Their trusted integrity and transparent approach aligned strongly with the principles underpinning our participatory granting process.

Throughout the year, and indeed across the lifespan of the program, we have placed strong emphasis on community capability building – nurturing local leadership, strengthening confidence, and supporting communities to take sustained, self-determined action. This work is deeply aligned with Fire to Flourish principles of community agency, relational practice, and place-based resilience.

We were sad to farewell our Community Lead, Sara Matthews, whose contributions were invaluable and remain deeply felt. The program continued in her spirit, delivered with integrity and care.

The East Gippsland journey has been inspiring, rich and transformative. We are profoundly grateful to our Community Planners, project leads and the many community members who have contributed their courage, passion, vision and collaboration. Together, we have supported East Gippsland communities to strengthen their resilience, deepen their connections, and continue flourishing long into the future.

Fire to Flourish East Gippsland Team - Eva Grunden and Bonnie Nebauer



Community Planner Story: Christy Bryar

Being an architect who lost my home in the fires, Fire to Flourish was always going to be of interest to me. I became more involved after seeing how immediately healing the Fire to Flourish approach was, so gentle and inclusive. Personally, I found my Fire to Flourish experience also really helped with my recovery journey, which I shared with Eva and the team.

Going to community planning sessions and working with community has really strengthened our bonds, both as a town of Gipsy Point and across the wider region. We’re already a tight community here and we work well together – we meet regularly and are well-organised – but we’d never really sat down and thought about what we needed in the long-term.

This program gave us an opportunity to do that future-thinking, to stop and consider what we really need going forward. It gave us a chance to focus on the legacy of Gipsy Point. The value of place is really important to us. Our families will keep living here, so we were able to talk through what we want the legacy to be for future generations, and I don’t think we would have sat down for those conversations without Fire to Flourish.

Fire to Flourish also gave us the space to explore lots of different ideas and solutions that actually work for us. Some

grant funding requires a specific building at the end. So, being able to apply for a grant purely to do the exploration of what might be possible for a community, which isn’t restricted to a specific shed for example, was really special.

The community is now working in a new way, having learned different inclusive methods in Fire to Flourish community planning sessions that inspired us to change the way we work together. For example, the way we assess feasibility through community workshops now includes everyone’s voices and perspectives.

One important point for other granting bodies to note is that Fire to Flourish didn’t just throw money at communities who were exhausted and traumatised – recovery is a full-time job, and while this program provided communities with money, they also offered enough support to make sure they reached their goals successfully. It truly provided a safety net underneath community groups during times where they didn’t have capacity or needed more help. This meant that every single project was successful and didn’t burn anyone out. Also, these grants include payments for peoples’ time – this often gets overlooked in grants, but this program really values the time of the community members that are contributing.

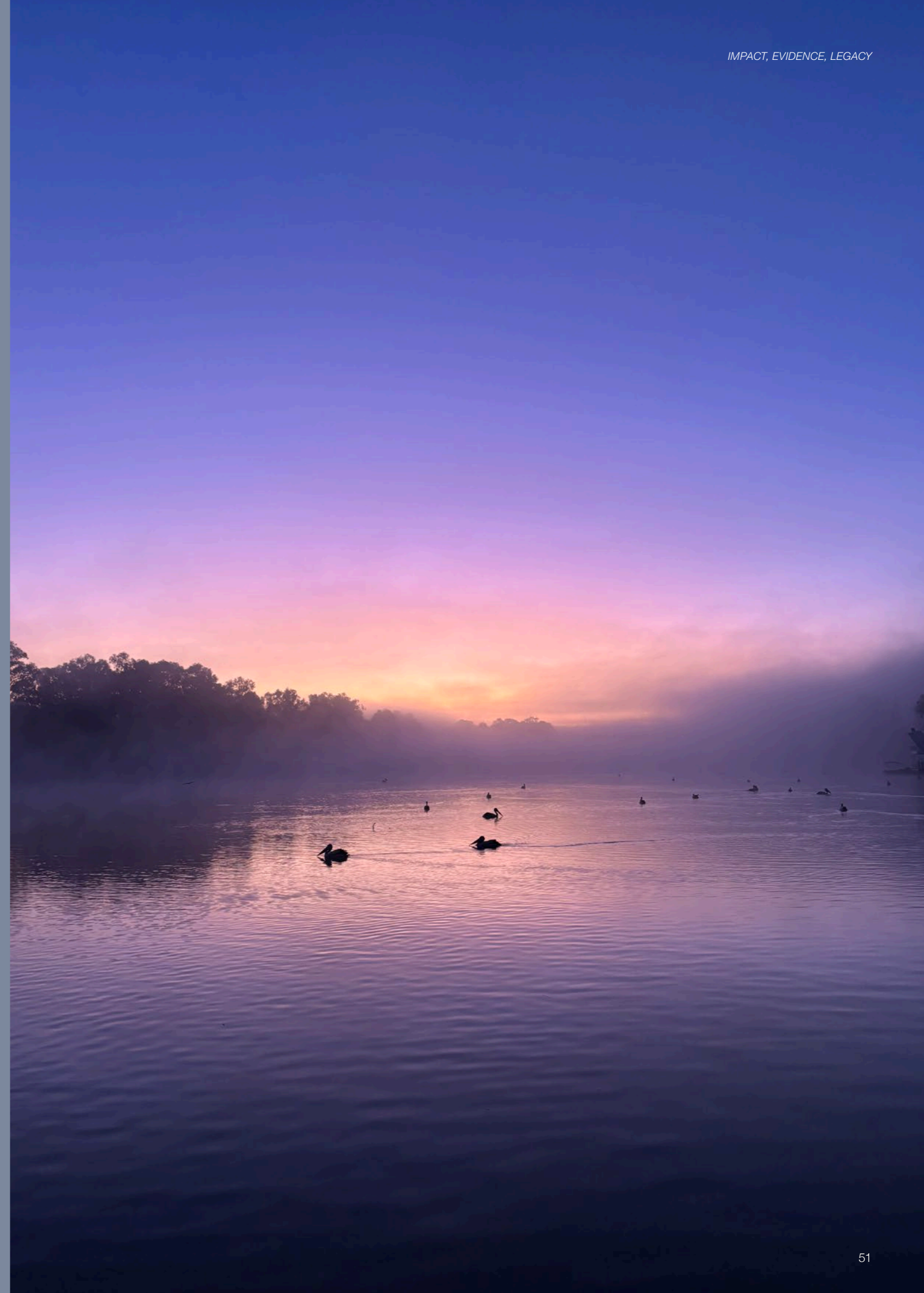


East Gippsland Community Planners, with Christy Bryar at front left.

OUR EVIDENCE AND RESOURCES



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WHAT OUR RESEARCH TELLS US

By connecting community lived experience with research expertise, Fire to Flourish has built an evidence base to directly support community-led action and influence change in disaster management systems to achieve better outcomes for local communities.

Our research brings together diverse disciplinary perspectives across community resilience, disaster risk reduction, social capital and cohesion, public and rural health, Indigenous knowledge, placemaking, economics and digital civics.

Projects are generating new evidence about community lived experiences and systemic issues, as well as supporting experimentation with new community-led practices. In addition, our PhD cohort has been developing new knowledge through their deep dives on topics that reinforce our research agenda.

We're using this research knowledge to develop practical guidance and tools for use by communities, policymakers and practitioners as they drive the sector's transition towards a disaster management model focused on community empowerment and self-determination.

In this section we shine a light on our research as projects near their conclusion in 2025. While research outputs are still in development and the scope presented is not exhaustive, we hope you find it a useful way to discover key findings and published research to date, with links for where to go for more information.

As the program concludes, we will continue to publish and share reports, findings and practical resources to support communities, community organisations, governments and emergency management organisations to enable communities to lead their own resilience efforts.

These will all be accessible via the Fire to Flourish Knowledge Centre:



DISASTERS AND INEQUITIES

Disasters deepen inequality – people-centred, community-led systems are essential for resilience

- Disasters amplify existing inequality – communities facing entrenched disadvantage experience greater damage, slower recovery and poorer long-term outcomes
- Recovery systems often overlook people, not just places. Mental health impacts can persist for years, vulnerable groups face greater harm, and internally displaced people remain largely invisible
- Strong social ties, community leadership and access to practical support are critical buffers for recovery and wellbeing.
- Equitable disaster resilience requires systems change: funding and recovery models that are community-led, trauma-informed, locally tailored and designed to target social vulnerability – not one-size-fits-all approaches



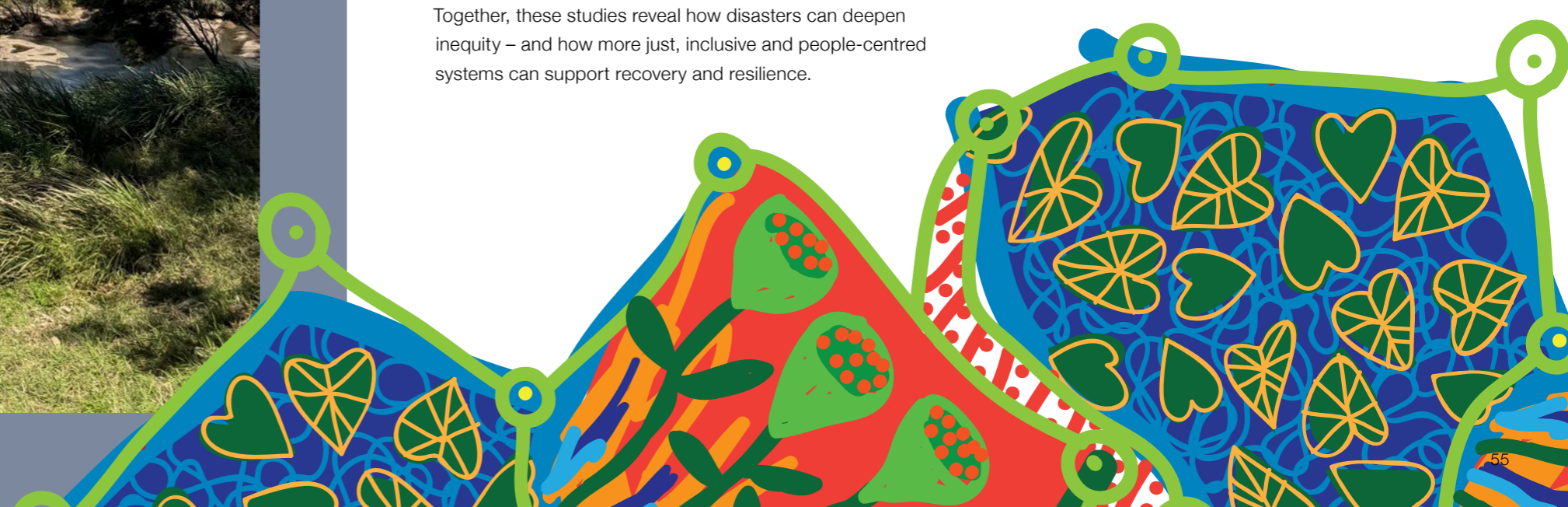
Research overview

This body of research examines how disasters intersect with social and economic disadvantage, health and wellbeing, and displacement – highlighting the deep inequities in how disaster impacts unfold and how recovery is experienced. It centres the lived realities of those most affected, revealing

how systemic issues and fragmented service systems can compound distress, delay recovery, and perpetuate exclusion. Across five streams of work, it identifies opportunities for reform and more equitable disaster resilience policy and practice.

<i>Stream</i>	<i>What it's about</i>
Socioeconomics of disaster resilience	Understanding how disadvantage shapes risk, damage and recovery – and what funding models communities prefer
Health and wellbeing after disaster	Measuring long-term mental health and wellbeing outcomes across diverse community groups
Internally displaced people	Making visible the hidden crisis of post-disaster displacement and the need for reform
Historical and lived experience inquiry	Exploring how storytelling, memory and identity shape community healing and futures
Systems change	Identifying what needs to shift in policy and governance to empower communities

Using participatory, trauma-informed and mixed-method approaches, the research combined large-scale surveys, interviews, narrative inquiry and administrative data to surface systemic barriers and community-informed solutions. Together, these studies reveal how disasters can deepen inequality – and how more just, inclusive and people-centred systems can support recovery and resilience.





Socioeconomics of disaster resilience

Disasters do not affect all people or places equally. Through Fire to Flourish’s socioeconomics research, we examined how social and economic conditions shape disaster risk, recovery, and long-term resilience.

Underlying disadvantage shapes exposure, damage, and recovery capacity, meaning that disasters deepen existing inequalities. Uniform approaches risk overlooking the communities most likely to experience severe and lasting harm.

The research brought together household surveys, administrative and spatial data, and community-based insights across multiple fire-affected regions to understand how different communities experience disaster and recovery. We explored not just immediate impacts, but the full social and economic pathways that unfold over time. This included how financial stress, housing insecurity, and diminished community networks influence longer-term wellbeing, economic stability, and resilience.

A particular focus was given to how recovery and resilience funding is allocated, governed, and experienced by different communities – highlighting the structural barriers facing areas already experiencing disadvantage, and the kinds of funding models communities themselves prefer.

What we found

- Lower-income households are more likely to live in disaster-prone areas and in housing that is more vulnerable to damage – making them disproportionately affected when disasters strike and deepening inequities.
- These households face significant recovery challenges, often relying on debt, personal networks, or emergency assistance to cope with rising costs and limited access to insurance or affordable credit.
- Disasters can erode bridging social capital – the relationships that cross socioeconomic divides and help communities share resources, information, and opportunities – slowing recovery and deepening vulnerability.
- Competitive disaster funding mechanisms tended to advantage better-resourced communities that could navigate complex application processes, leaving more vulnerable communities behind.

- Resilience measures often relied on top-down metrics that failed to reflect local priorities, lived realities or perceptions of preparedness and coping capacity – misdirecting resources away from those most in need.
- Community members strongly preferred funding models that gave them greater decision-making power, supported small-scale local projects, and recognised the value of community-led knowledge and action.

Why this matters

Resilience is not just about bouncing back – it’s about who gets to recover, who is left behind, and how systems can change to support everyone. This research shows that without targeted support and a shift in how resources are governed, disaster recovery can exacerbate inequality. The findings highlight the need for funding models that recognise and respond to social vulnerability, and for resilience planning to centre the lived experiences, priorities, and capacities of communities themselves.



How this research can be used

This research supports governments and funders seeking to design disaster recovery and resilience programs that explicitly account for social vulnerability and provide hands-on support for under-resourced communities.

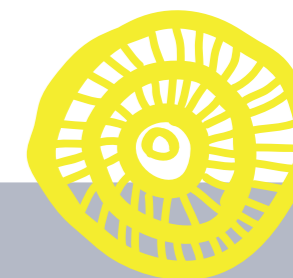
It provides policy-makers with evidence to justify revising resilience indices, funding allocation criteria and hands-on support mechanisms to better reflect lived experience, contextual disadvantage, and long-term needs – not just visible damage or infrastructure loss.

Community organisations can use these insights to advocate for more equitable and locally driven funding models that support long-term recovery and resilience-building.

Learn more

Outputs from this research are currently in development, including a synthesis report on **Community Preferences for Australian Disaster Recovery and Resilience Funding**.

A journal article on the **Alignment between top-down disaster indices and local views on disaster preparedness** is available for download.



PhD Spotlight: Lihini De Silva

Resilience and Recovery After Climate Disasters

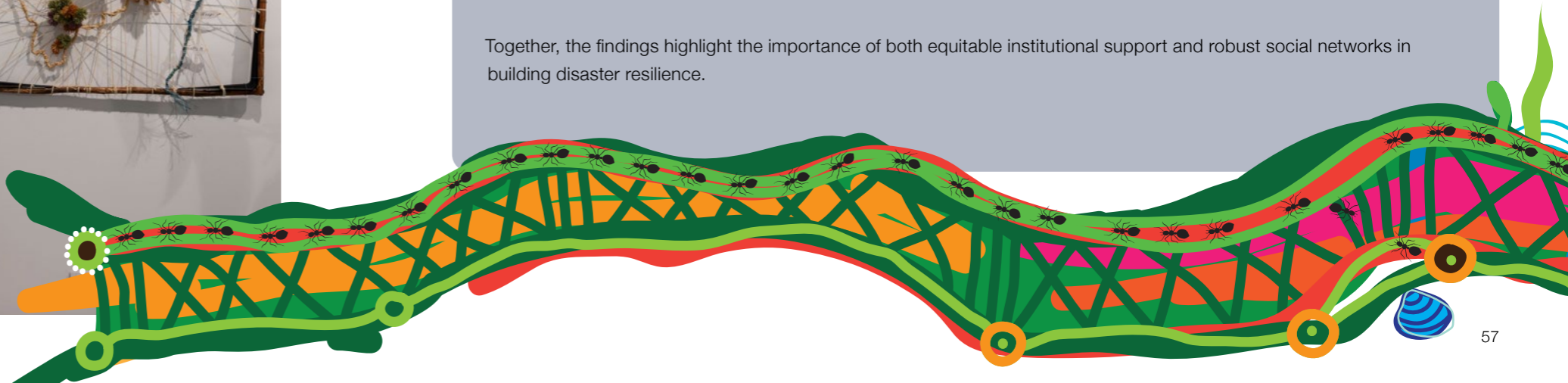
This research examines how formal and informal support systems shape community resilience and recovery in the wake of disasters.

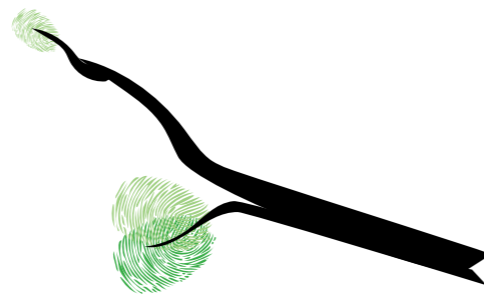
Focusing on the distribution of competitive community recovery grants following the 2019–2020 bushfire season, the study combined data from four major federal grant schemes to explore whether grant allocation accounted for socially vulnerable communities. Clear inequities were identified – communities with higher proportions of elderly people and young children often received less support, while those located far from commercial places and public services received more.

To understand how disasters affect informal support networks, the research also drew on social network data and natural experiments involving tornadoes and hurricanes in the US. Findings showed that disasters can weaken social capital by reducing cross-class connections, which are critical for sharing resources and facilitating recovery.

However, strong social capital – particularly bridging ties between socioeconomic groups – can play a key role in mitigating long-term economic impacts, including post-disaster unemployment.

Together, the findings highlight the importance of both equitable institutional support and robust social networks in building disaster resilience.





Health and wellbeing after disaster

We undertook the first population-wide cross-sectional survey to measure the ongoing health and other impacts of a major bushfire season in regional Australia.

A key finding reveals that the health and wellbeing of community members who have been affected by disaster is disproportionately low even after five years, with over 40% reporting continued high levels of psychological distress, well above the national average.

The study explored the cumulative health and wellbeing effects of disaster exposure across four bushfire-affected regions – Eurobodalla, Tenterfield, Clarence Valley and East Gippsland, where Fire to Flourish was active. Designed with input from local communities, the survey examined people’s bushfire experiences, recovery pathways, and broader life changes. It also captured direct impacts such as property loss, displacement, and bereavement, alongside access to healthcare, financial and practical support, and shifts in social and economic circumstances. In total, 2,207 people participated, including 18% who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and most (97%) had been living in the area during the bushfires.

To build a more inclusive understanding, the survey was complemented by targeted studies of specific groups, including frontline health and social care workers and children under five. These efforts revealed how intersecting factors – such as age, cultural identity, remoteness, and caring responsibilities – shape people’s disaster experiences and long-term health outcomes. A review of international evidence on early childhood further highlighted the importance of family and service supports in mitigating the developmental impacts of disasters.

What we found

- Five years after the fires, 41% of respondents reported high psychological distress – almost three times the national average of 14%.
- Rates of moderate to severe depression (22%) and PTSD symptoms (12%) remained two to three times higher than national benchmarks.
- People who experienced direct trauma and major losses – particularly older residents and those with fewer financial resources – faced the greatest long-term mental health challenges.

- Access to financial and practical assistance, alongside strong social connections, helped buffer distress and supported recovery and personal growth.
- Regional health and social care workers faced dual pressures of personal recovery and frontline responsibility, highlighting the need for tailored training, supervision and peer support to strengthen workforce wellbeing and service continuity.
- Disasters can disrupt early childhood development, with family and service supports playing a critical stabilising role.

Why this matters

The findings offer critical insight into the long tail of disaster recovery – showing that health and wellbeing challenges can persist long after public attention has shifted. Without targeted, sustained support, these challenges risk becoming entrenched. Importantly, this work highlights how structural factors – such as age, income, remoteness, and access to care – shape who is most affected and how recovery unfolds. Understanding these dynamics can help better design services, programs, and funding to reach those most at risk.

How this research can be used

Together, these studies provide evidence to inform policy and service design to better reach those most at risk and improve population health outcomes in regional and disaster-affected communities.

They offer evidence to guide the design of recovery support systems for vulnerable groups, especially older people, low-income households, and frontline workers, as well as shaping early childhood programs that mitigate developmental risks during and after disasters.

They can also inform funding and workforce strategies for regional health services, including preparedness and recovery.

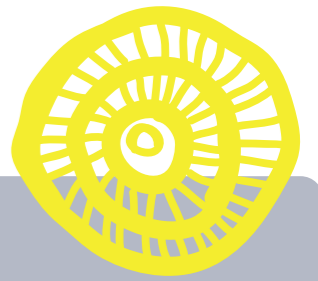
Learn more

A synthesis report presenting the findings of the **Health and Wellbeing After Disaster Survey** will be released shortly. We are also exploring ways to make survey data for each local government area accessible to communities and organisations, while complying with Fire to Flourish’s data governance policies and procedures.

A number of journal articles are also available for download and forthcoming:

- **Mental health and community resilience among vulnerable populations affected by natural hazards: Protocol for scoping reviews**
- **Mental health of vulnerable groups experiencing a drought or bushfire: A systematic review**
- Health and social care providers’ mental health after climate-related disasters in rural settings: A systematic review
- The need for and value of a population-based survey of health and wellbeing in bushfire-affected communities: Community members’ views (forthcoming)
- Beyond homogeneity: Factoring in intersectional experiences for equitable disaster risk reduction strategies (forthcoming)





Internally displaced people

There is currently no consolidated system that tracks internally displaced peoples (IDPs) beyond initial contact registrations, leaving them invisible in national disaster data.

We undertook the first ever examination of IDPs in Australia, to understand their experience and needs, and create a comprehensive evidence base for policy reform supporting unified approaches to IDP tracking and support.

With funding from the former National Resilience and Recovery Agency (NRRA), the project involved rapid reviews of national and international literature, consultations with government and service providers, and in-depth interviews and focus groups with IDPs and those supporting them. The research captured personal recovery stories and identified systemic gaps in recognition and support for displaced individuals.

What we found

- Australia lacks any unified system to track IDPs beyond initial emergency contact.
- Official displacement figures (8,000) severely understate actual numbers – estimates suggest up to 65,000.
- Seven recurring themes emerged: service fragmentation, re-traumatisation, complex housing challenges, limited system navigation knowledge, and the importance of trust and local connection.
- The absence of coherent data and service coordination perpetuates exclusion and delays recovery.
- Stakeholders consistently supported the need for consistent, cross-jurisdictional frameworks.

Why this matters

Despite frequent climate-related disasters, Australian disaster systems focus on asset loss (homes, land) rather than the people forced to leave. This oversight means thousands remain unsupported and undocumented, impeding recovery and increasing vulnerability in future crises. By elevating lived experience and identifying clear policy gaps, this research makes the invisible visible.

How this research can be used

This project provides the first comprehensive Australian evidence base for IDP-inclusive disaster recovery. It supports the development of national frameworks to systematically track displacement, design trauma-informed services, and embed inclusive practices in recovery planning.

Findings can be used by governments, local councils, and community organisations to build more just and effective recovery systems.

Learn more

A synthesis report, **Evidence, Voices and Reform for Australia's Internally Displaced People**, is in development for public release. Journal articles presenting the evidence generated through the research are also forthcoming:

- Internally displaced people as a consequence of natural hazards in high-income countries
- Storytelling: building the evidence-base of emergency management through lived experiences



PhD Spotlight: Shalini Matharage, visiting student supervised by Professor Daniel Aldrich

Voices of Strength: Lived Experiences of Climate-Induced Internal Displacement in Australia

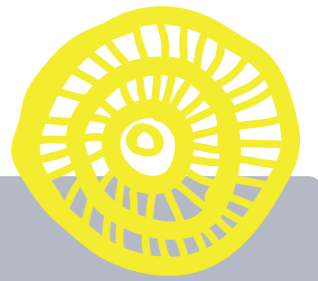
This research explores climate-induced internal displacement in Australia, focusing on communities affected by bushfires and floods in East Gippsland and the Clarence Valley. Its emphasis is on movement patterns and decisions about whether to rebuild, relocate, or remain.

Through over 30 semi-structured interviews with community leaders, residents, and fire authorities, the study uncovers the experiences of disaster-affected individuals who are still recovering or who fear future events. It also explores how social bonds, local institutions, and resource access shape recovery paths, informing when remaining is unfeasible, and migration becomes necessary, and emphasising community-centered, long-term recovery strategies.

Preliminary findings indicate that internal displacement often remains invisible in existing policies, which tend to view recovery as temporary and equate rebuilding with resolution. Many participants highlighted ongoing uncertainty, housing insecurity, financial stress, and emotional hardship.

A key theme is the importance of social capital: strong neighborly bonds, community networks, mutual aid, and informal information sharing often bridge institutional gaps. These elements help individuals recover quickly, stay in their homes, and reintegrate.





Historical and lived experience inquiry

Understanding the past and sharing stories of lived experiences helps communities navigate the future.

This research stream explored how histories of place and collective community experiences – particularly those shaped by bushfires – affect relationships, collective memory, and resilience. It examined how both historical and contemporary events are remembered, retold and reimagined, and how these evolving narratives influence community development, social cohesion, place-making, and recovery pathways.

We used trauma-informed and participatory approaches, drawing on oral history, narrative inquiry, in-depth interviews and archival research – including first-person accounts from bushfire-affected communities. This helped surface how past and present experiences shape people’s relationships with place and each other. It also revealed the power of storytelling in healing, future visioning, and identifying patterns that call for systemic change.

What we found

- Bushfire events can be deeply transformative, shaping people’s connection to place, memories of environment, and journeys of healing and reconnection.
- Bushfire experiences influence new meanings, identities and relationships with place – for both long-term residents and newer migrant communities.
- Local histories are being retold, as communities revise traditional narratives to reflect contemporary challenges, aspirations, and ways of living with Country.
- When applied in trauma-informed ways, storytelling remains a powerful tool for making sense of collective experience, strengthening community cohesion and surfacing shared priorities for change.

Why this matters

Historical and lived experience knowledge is not static – it actively shapes how communities recover, relate and plan for the future. When communities reflect on and retell their stories, they foster belonging, strengthen local identity and develop shared insights that guide more connected and

effective resilience strategies. This research demonstrates how communities are revisiting the past and making sense of their lived realities to create space for alternative futures.

How this research can be used

Community development and recovery practitioners can incorporate storytelling initiatives as part of place-based resilience and healing processes.

Emergency services and local governments can engage with lived experience and historical perspectives to better understand diverse community needs, assets and tensions – supporting more tailored and equitable recovery strategies.

Researchers and policymakers can view local histories as living resources that support adaptation, foster identity and inform decision-making over time.

Learn more

Insights from the experiences, capabilities and perceptions of 2,367 people were captured in our National Survey: **Disaster Preparedness and Resilience** report, published in Fire to Flourish’s first year.



Forthcoming Fire to Flourish publications include:

- Bushfire Experiences of Indigenous Communities in East Gippsland
- Community Cohesion and Fragmentation in East Gippsland Post-Disaster
- Local Histories and Disaster Recovery.

Also due for release shortly is a Practice Guide for Narrative Storytelling in Communities, offering practical guidance on how to safely and respectfully engage with local stories – and mobilise insights for community learning and systems influence.

PhD Spotlight: Belinda Lloyd

Bounded Rationality and the ‘Black Summer’ bushfires: temporal agency, bushfire affected people, and bushfire financial aid

This research explores how people affected by the 2019–2020 Black Summer bushfires in East Gippsland navigated financial aid systems – highlighting the gap between aid design and lived realities.

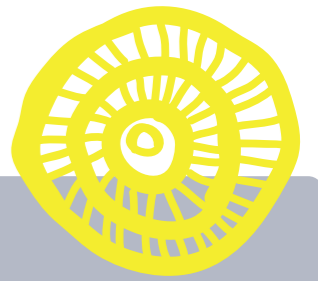
Through in-depth interviews, the study examined the perspectives of bushfire-affected individuals, asking how they understood, accessed, and made use of available financial support. These experiences were considered in the context of community dynamics, personal and collective trauma, and the evolving flow of information post-disaster.

Findings showed that experiences of financial aid were inconsistent and often inequitable. Key factors that shaped people’s access and use of aid included:

- Pre-existing social and financial capital
- The scale and nature of their bushfire-affectedness
- Individual capacity to process information and make decisions under distress

This research sheds light on the limitations of one-size-fits-all financial recovery mechanisms – and why designing systems that recognise people’s emotional, cognitive and contextual realities matters.





Systems change

Fire to Flourish research shows that enabling true community-led disaster resilience requires transforming the systems that shape local capacity, control, and investment.

This means shifting from exclusionary governance to shared decision-making, from fragmented planning to long-term, place-based investment, and from short-term fixes to transformative action that addresses root causes of vulnerability and disadvantage.

By bringing a cross-cutting systems perspective grounded in both community experience and theories of social-ecological transformation, Fire to Flourish identified critical leverage points for change. Through regular sensemaking with diverse actors at local, state and national levels, we iteratively refined a systems change agenda and developed actionable insights to inform future resilience investments and governance reform.

What we found

- Systemic change requires dismantling cycles of disadvantage and recognising the strengths and leadership already within communities.
- Communities need strong foundations – like services, infrastructure, and local systems – well before disaster strikes, not just emergency response.
- Communities need real power over decisions and resources, grounded in local knowledge and priorities.

Why this matters

Disasters often expose the deeper inequalities embedded in our systems. If recovery efforts reinforce top-down approaches, they can entrench disadvantage. But if communities are supported to lead, they can reshape local systems, build long-term resilience, and create more just and equitable outcomes for future generations.

How this research can be used

This work offers a framework for governments, funders and organisations to rethink how they support communities – by embedding community leadership in governance, ensuring

sustained investment, and shifting focus from short-term interventions to long-term systems transformation. It informs both local practice and broader policy reform.

Learn more



Read the foundational research report, An Agenda for Change: Community-led Disaster Resilience, which shaped the objectives and approach for Fire to Flourish in our early days.



Our Transformative Actions for Community-led Disaster Resilience report proposes six actionable steps for embedding community-led disaster resilience, identified through in-depth discussions with community, local government and agency representatives.



Systems change insights are embedded across Fire to Flourish's body of work. As our analysis continues next year, beyond the formal conclusion of the program, we will produce further outputs to guide shifts in culture, structure and practice for community-led disaster resilience.



PhD Spotlight: Elise Park

Moving Together: Towards More-than-Human Disaster Governance

This research examines how Australia's disaster governance system could better reflect the deep interconnections between people, landscapes and ecosystems. Current disaster approaches tend to centre human systems and control, often overlooking the relational ties between communities, Country and the more-than-human world – at times to the detriment of both people and environments.

Using a case study of bushfire governance in a NSW local government area affected by the 2019–20 Black Summer fires, the research analysed policy documents and interviews to characterise the dominant disaster governance paradigm. Early findings show this paradigm is shaped by underlying assumptions about risk, control and human–nature separation, which influence how decisions are made before, during and after disasters.

The research suggests that incorporating more-than-human perspectives – grounded in Indigenous and ecological philosophies – could support more equitable, sustainable disaster governance. Ongoing work is exploring what this shift would mean in practice, and how recognising Country as an active participant in resilience could reshape disaster prevention, response and recovery.



COMMUNITY-LED DISASTER RESILIENCE

Community-led resilience requires power, partnership and place-based practice

- Communities are already leading disaster resilience efforts. To succeed and endure, they need decision-making power, long-term investment, and systems that support – not hinder – them
- Inclusive, place-based collaboration – especially when grounded in First Nations knowledge, participatory practice and creative co-design – strengthens social cohesion, readiness and shared ownership
- Resilient systems are built when community leadership, participatory governance and deep local knowledge come together in sustained, culturally informed ways



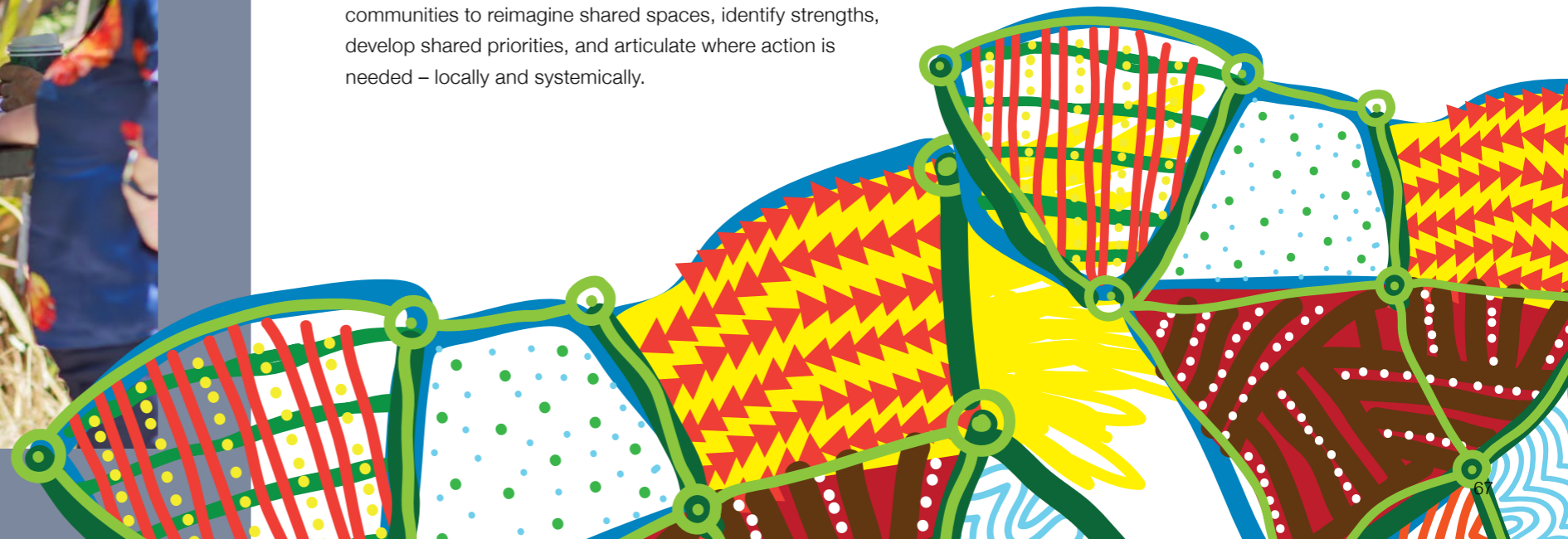
Research overview

We worked across five research streams to support and strengthen community-led disaster resilience. The research centred on mobilising and building on knowledge,

relationships, and capabilities within communities – alongside insights from past disaster experiences and place-based design approaches.

<i>Stream</i>	<i>What it's about</i>
Resilience planning to granting	Co-designing tools and processes for communities to drive planning and funding
Placemaking for disaster resilience	Testing how creative, co-designed approaches can build social and spatial resilience
Assessing community disaster resilience	Measuring disaster resilience across eight communities using a global framework
Community-based learning reviews	Trialling a methodology to support community-led reflection after disaster
Participatory grantmaking methods and tools	Trialling inclusive, community-led approaches to allocate disaster resilience funding

Using participatory, trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches, communities were supported to reflect on what has worked, what has not, and how resilience is constrained and enabled by broader social, economic, spatial, and governance systems. Creative, co-designed methods helped communities to reimagine shared spaces, identify strengths, develop shared priorities, and articulate where action is needed – locally and systemically.



Resilience planning to granting

Fire to Flourish developed a community-led ‘resilience planning to granting’ model in each of its locations and evidenced its benefits. The approach enabled communities to design flexible planning processes tailored to their needs, identify local priorities, direct resources and build social capital.

Through participatory action research and co-design across 20 funding rounds, the research tailored methodologies for engaging with communities. It demonstrated the outcomes of these types of approaches, including strengthened leadership, social capital, and systems understanding – equipping communities to drive their own long-term resilience.

We also conducted an independent review of the Cobargo Community Bushfire Recovery Fund – an exemplar community-led funding scheme established in 2020 following the devastating 2019/20 bushfires – to identify lessons for other communities and organisations.

What we found

- Genuine community leadership is essential for resilience planning that is locally relevant, effective and adaptable.
- Building shared understanding of local strengths and root causes of challenges deepens capability for long-term collective action.
- Sustained community leadership requires time, resourcing and appropriate structural support.
- The planning and decision-making process itself builds resilience by strengthening relationships, leadership confidence and collective problem-solving capacity.
- The transition from community planning to funding decisions is a critical design moment where values are translated into practice and trust must be actively maintained.
- Resilience outcomes are strongest when communities are supported to move from broad aspirations to clear, decision-ready priorities.
- Community governance is most effective when roles, boundaries and decision processes are explicit from the outset.

Why this matters

Too often, disaster recovery and resilience models sideline community voices. This work shows that when communities design and lead resilience-building efforts, the results are more equitable, sustainable and empowering. Participatory approaches build trust, shift power, and ensure that resources and strengths are fully mobilised for local impact.

How this research can be used

The model offers a scalable framework and practical methodologies for communities, governments and NGOs to support local resilience planning and participatory grantmaking. It can be adapted across contexts to guide community-led action and investment.

Lessons from other community experiences implementing these sorts of approaches can inform the design of initiatives to support successful outcomes.

Learn more

You will be able to read about **Community Voices, Visions and Priorities** and the **Benefits and Values of Community-led Processes for Strengthening Disaster Resilience** shortly, with new research reports almost ready for release.

A chapter for an international textbook on Planetary Health in Practice is forthcoming: **Caring for Country: Planetary Health in action through place-based community practices for holistic resilience**. It presents a case study of two Fire to Flourish ‘Caring for Country’ rounds through our resilience planning to granting processes.

A practice guide, **Community Power in Action: A Guide for Local Planning and Collaboration**, will also be available soon. It presents the resilience planning to granting methodology, as well as guidance for its tailoring and implementation in local contexts and tips grounded in Fire to Flourish’s experiences with communities.

You can read our **Review of the Cobargo Community Bushfire Recovery Fund** and associated journal article here.



Research article available for download:

- **Participatory Grantmaking builds community resilience: Lessons and insights from the Cobargo Community Bushfire Recovery Fund**



PhD Spotlight: Gabrielle Moir

Catalysing community-led disaster resilience: From assuming to enabling ‘community’

Disaster policies often call on “communities” to lead resilience efforts – but rarely ask how collective community action actually forms, or who gets to represent it. This research explores how policy framing can unintentionally limit the formation of effective collective actors by assuming their existence, rather than enabling their emergence.

By analysing how government frameworks define and engage “community”, this study is uncovering how these definitions shape what support is offered, what responsibilities are handed down, and whose voices are heard. Early findings show that common policy approaches may overlook the real-world processes required for collective action to take root and endure.

This research is now engaging with practitioners and communities to better understand how people navigate these assumptions in practice – and what’s needed to genuinely support community-led resilience.

Placemaking for disaster resilience

Fire to Flourish tested whether participatory placemaking and co-design could build long-term disaster resilience across diverse regional communities.

The project explored how physical improvements to shared spaces can simultaneously enhance social cohesion, local leadership, post-disaster recovery capacity, and preparedness for future disasters. Placemaking was found to create a 'third space', where institutional resources meet local knowledge, offering an adaptable approach to building durable social resilience.

Grounded in action research and Indigenous-led methodologies, we worked with Fire to Flourish communities in Clarence Valley, Tenterfield and East Gippsland. Across each site, we co-developed and tested a three-stage framework: recognising place through relationship-building and time on Country, imagining through creative mapping and modelling workshops, and enacting through participatory grantmaking and local planning processes.

What we found

- In Clarence Valley, over 400 residents participated in a \$600,000 participatory grantmaking round informed by Strategic Placemaking Frameworks and Locality Plans developed through co-design.
- In Tenterfield, four workshops led to a new community infrastructure masterplan led by Jubullum Aboriginal community members and local organisations.
- In East Gippsland, an Indigenous-led process foregrounded cultural practices and storytelling to co-design resilience activities.
- Communities consistently reported that creative design-based methods were more inclusive and effective than traditional consultation approaches.
- The grant-funded projects developed through placemaking processes generated both tangible infrastructure outcomes and enhanced social connection, trust, and local capability.
- First Nations-led design and relational approaches were found to be essential to genuine place-based work.

Why this matters

Placemaking offers a powerful pathway to translate abstract disaster resilience policies into concrete, community-owned action. It bridges everyday and emergency needs, supports healing and connection after disaster, and creates social infrastructure that outlasts individual projects. Critically, it redistributes power by creating a collaborative loop where government, researchers and community members co-create locally appropriate solutions grounded in place and culture.

How this research can be used

Local governments and agencies can use the codesign framework to guide participatory infrastructure planning.

Community organisations can adopt the creative methods developed to engage diverse groups in resilience-building efforts.

Policy makers can draw on the evidence to embed placemaking and social infrastructure investment in disaster preparedness and recovery programs.

Learn more

Explore examples, frameworks and insights from this work in the forthcoming synthesis report, **Placemaking for Disaster Resilience: Co-Designing Community Infrastructure for Connection, Recovery and Preparedness**. This publication synthesises fieldwork, methods and outcomes across all three sites, offering practical guidance for embedding placemaking in disaster recovery efforts.

In addition, three journal articles are available for download:

- [**A systematic review on co-design, place-making and social capital**](#)
- [**Placemaking as a catalyst for building resilience: co-designing social infrastructure with high-risk communities**](#)
- [**Placemaking living lab: creating resilient social and spatial infrastructures**](#)



Assessing community disaster resilience

We adapted a first-of-its-kind tool with the Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance to assess bushfire and flood resilience. The tool measured resilience across social, economic, health, environmental and built domains, helping identify local strengths and key gaps.

We applied the tool in eight regional communities across the four Local Government Areas Fire to Flourish worked with, collecting and analysing data through household surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. Evidence produced through this process can be used for prioritising and designing community-scale action.

What we found

- Communities were stronger at immediate disaster response than long-term planning, and scored higher on specific hazard response than on general resilience measures like energy, communications and transport systems.
- Hazard awareness was high, but this wasn't matched by action – especially where government investment in critical infrastructure was lacking.
- Disaster preparation was active, but efforts were mostly siloed, with limited coordination or awareness of others' planning activities.
- Taking part in the assessment process helped build capacity, prompting shared reflection on how resilience can grow across the community.

These findings highlight that while many communities are relatively well-placed for immediate disaster response, they need better coordination, long-term planning and sustained investment to strengthen disaster preparedness and resilience.

Why this matters

Understanding community disaster resilience at a local level is essential for smart, targeted action. This assessment approach provides a clear picture of community strengths and systemic gaps. By highlighting areas for investment and sparking shared reflection, the process not only measures resilience but actively builds it.

How this research can be used

This evidence can guide communities, local governments and agencies to focus their efforts where they'll have greatest impact – building on local strengths and targeting investment to fill resilience gaps.

The methodology also offers a practical tool to spark inclusive community conversations and guide targeted action for long-term resilience.

Learn more

Read about the methodology and community insights in our **Climate Disaster Resilience in Fire And Flood Affected Communities** research report.



Community-based learning reviews

Fire to Flourish's Tenterfield Bushfire Learning Review demonstrates the value of supporting communities to collectively reflect on disaster experiences and identify priorities for recovery and resilience.

Through the review, the Tenterfield community articulated practical, locally driven actions to strengthen preparedness, coordination and recovery, grounded in lived experience and local knowledge.

Following significant bushfires in October and November 2023, Fire to Flourish was invited by local residents to facilitate a post-event learning review. The process was designed to foreground community voices, support shared understanding, and enable the community to shape its own recovery and resilience priorities in a strengths-based, trauma-informed way.

What we found

- The Tenterfield community was ready and capable of reflecting on its disaster experience in a constructive, collaborative and trauma-informed way.
- Community members identified clear, practical actions to strengthen disaster resilience, drawing on local knowledge and experience.
- Prioritising community leadership and agency in the post-disaster period created momentum for collective action and learning.
- A no-blame, community-centred approach supported trust, healing and shared problem-solving.

These findings demonstrate that communities are not only willing to engage in post-disaster learning, but are highly capable of identifying and acting on resilience priorities when supported appropriately.

Why this matters

Post-disaster reviews typically focus on institutions, not the people most affected. This work shows that when communities lead their own learning, recovery is stronger and future risk is reduced. Community-based learning reviews build trust, surface practical solutions, and accelerate resilience by turning lived experience into collective action – when it matters most.

How this research can be used

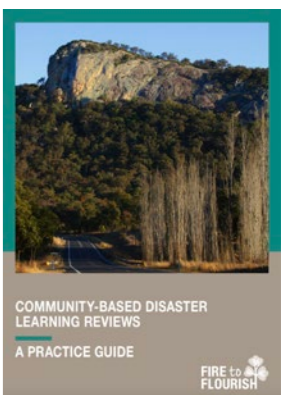
Community-Based Disaster Learning Reviews offer a practical and scalable alternative to traditional after-action reviews, extending learning beyond emergency operations to focus on community-led reflections for strengthening resilience.

The Fire to Flourish Community-Based Disaster Learning Review Practice Guide sets out a tested, trauma-informed and strengths-based methodology that can be used by communities, governments and recovery organisations to support community-owned learning and action.

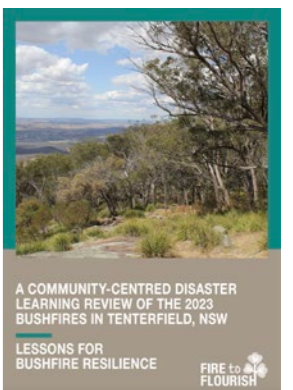
The Tenterfield Bushfire Learning Review provides a real-world case study showing how this approach can strengthen coordination, preparedness and local leadership following disaster.

Learn more

Read the **Community-Based Disaster Learning Reviews Practice Guide** here.



Read the **A Community-Centred Disaster Learning Review of the 2023 Bushfires in Tenterfield** report here.



Participatory grantmaking methods and tools

Fire to Flourish has demonstrated the transformative potential of participatory grantmaking for disaster resilience. For this approach to move beyond individual pilots and be adopted more widely, practitioners need clear, practical guidance on how to design and deliver participatory processes within real organisational contexts.

Drawing on lessons from working alongside communities, this research developed frameworks, governance guidance and practical tools to support participatory grantmaking across diverse settings. The work recognises that participatory processes are relational, context-specific and cannot be standardised. Instead, the tools support adaptation—acknowledging that participation sits on a spectrum and must align with different organisational capacities, governance requirements and risk settings.

The research examined how structured tools can support participatory practice without constraining it—capturing relational ways of working, informal coordination, shared judgement and locally grounded decision-making that are rarely reflected in formal systems.

Through co-design and reflective activities, interviews, field observations and process mapping, we developed a participatory grantmaking governance framework and implementation approach. This informed a digital playbook—a web-based tool to support practitioners and communities to design and deliver participatory funding processes. Rather than focusing only on procedures, the playbook captures the values, trade-offs and practical choices involved in participatory decision-making. The research also generated design insights for future tools supporting place-based, community-led practice.

What we found

- Funding models are most effective when they reflect how communities organise and make decisions, rather than imposing rigid institutional structures.
- Participatory grantmaking works best when treated as a spectrum aligned to organisational risk settings, governance requirements and community readiness.
- Community decision-making strengthens the credibility and legitimacy of grant outcomes when roles, boundaries and accountabilities are clearly defined.

- Participatory funding requires deliberate scaffolding, including facilitation, governance support and clear decision pathways.
- Effective practice relies on judgement, relationships and local context that cannot be fully captured in formal documentation.
- Process mapping can act as both a design and reflective method, helping practitioners articulate and refine their practices.
- Designing digital tools involves choices about language and structure that shape whose practices are visible and how tools are used.

Why this matters

Much of what makes community-led processes effective—trust, local knowledge and flexible, values-driven coordination—is invisible to traditional systems and difficult to transfer across teams or organisations. Without deliberate support, participatory approaches risk being treated as “set and forget” rather than practices requiring ongoing reflection and resourcing. By making these elements visible and actionable, this work supports more credible and responsible adoption of participatory approaches within existing governance environments.

How this research can be used

The participatory grantmaking approach developed through Fire to Flourish can be adapted by governments, philanthropic funders, NGOs and community organisations to support locally driven funding models in diverse contexts.

The web-based playbook provides practical guidance for designing and delivering participatory funding processes aligned with organisational capacity and risk settings.

The research methods also support organisations to reflect on their own practices, surface tacit knowledge and strengthen

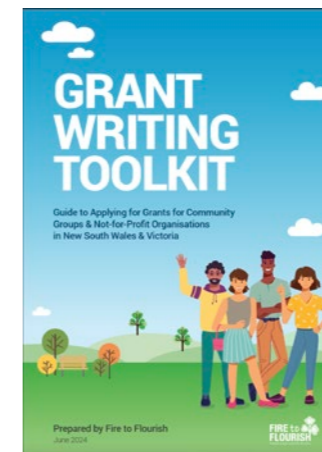
participatory processes over time. Tool developers and policymakers can use these insights to design systems that better reflect context, local practice and emergent decision-making.

Learn more

An overview of the **Fire to Flourish Participatory Grantmaking Framework and Methodology** is forthcoming.

The **Participatory Grantmaking Digital Playbook** is available online for free public use, accompanied by a **Guide to the Participatory Grantmaking Playbook**. It includes interactive process maps, contextual explanations, and practical guidance for communities and practitioners working in disaster resilience, equity and place-based funding.

You can also download our **Grant Writing Toolkit**, developed by Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla as an easy-to-use guide to help community groups and not-for-profit organisations apply for resilience grant funding.



CONNECTIONS AND LEARNING

Embed learning and reflection at every level to strengthen resilience

- Building community resilience isn't just about outcomes – it's about how we learn together along the way. Embedding reflection, learning and shared sensemaking across communities, programs and systems strengthens collaboration and supports lasting change
- Communities thrive when their knowledge and capabilities are recognised, and when experimentation and adaptation are supported through trust and resourcing



Research overview

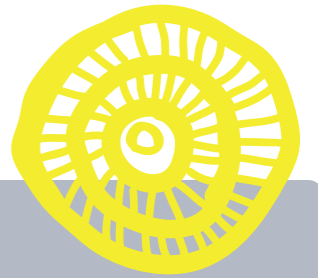
Our connections and learning research stream explored how continuous learning, reflection and capability building can support effective community-led disaster resilience. Spanning multiple disciplines – including social science,

evaluation, sustainability transitions and policy – this work captured practical insights from within the Fire to Flourish program to support innovation, transdisciplinary practice and deep collaboration.

<i>Stream</i>	<i>What it's about</i>
Community resilience capabilities	Understanding and building the networks and skills communities need to lead
Learning in practice	Embedding reflective practice and real-time evaluation to guide and adapt action
Enabling transdisciplinary practice	Exploring how research and practice can co-evolve for real-world impact

Using participatory, trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches, this body of work helped deepen shared understanding of how learning flows across people, communities and systems. It generated real-time insights to support Fire to Flourish's evolution and laid the groundwork for more adaptive, equitable and connected disaster resilience policy and practice.





Community resilience capabilities

Social capital, underpinned by strong collective capabilities, is essential for community resilience.

This research stream explored how communities can strengthen their knowledge, skills and networks over time to adapt to climate change and be prepared for disaster. We identified the capabilities that support locally-led resilience efforts, and the ways in which funded projects have activated and reinforced these capabilities through practice.

By embedding researchers within Fire to Flourish partner communities and working alongside local teams, we identified recurring themes in how capabilities were developed and leveraged in context. We drew on practice-based inquiry, participatory approaches and survey methodologies to explore the strengths, needs and aspirations of each community.

What we found

- Six capabilities were identified as foundational to collective community disaster resilience – cultural safety, integrity and inclusion; Indigenous knowledge, experience and practice; building and maintaining networks; disaster resilience knowledge; community-led action; and social innovation.
- Community-led projects funded by Fire to Flourish strengthened community capabilities in tangible ways, surfacing local priorities and enabling shared learning.
- Many grant funded projects focused on enhancing the built and social environments, underscoring the role of social infrastructure in strengthening relationships and networks.
- Projects also prioritised cultural and natural environments, reflecting deep connections between place, identity, Country, and resilience.

Why this matters

Community resilience cannot be imposed from the outside. It must be built from within – grounded in local knowledge, relationships and capacity. This research demonstrates that when communities are supported to define and grow their own capabilities, they are better able to lead their disaster preparedness and recovery efforts. Understanding

and investing in the full suite of community capabilities – technical, relational, cultural and place-based – is crucial for policy and programs seeking to enable sustainable resilience.

How this research can be used

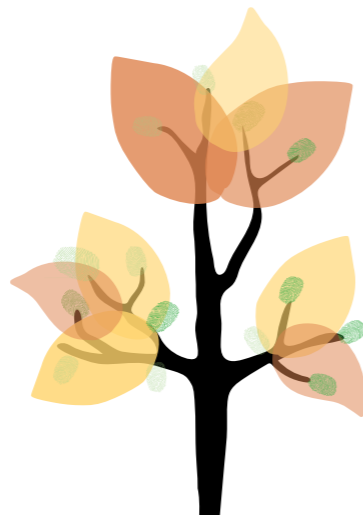
This research provides practical insights for communities, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to support community-driven disaster resilience.

It informed the development of a Capabilities Framework and Practice Guide, designed as a resource for communities, local organisations and governments. These offer a structure for reflection and planning, helping communities to recognise their strengths, identify gaps, and shape action to enhance disaster resilience in locally meaningful ways.

The research insights can also inform policy development by showing how community-led projects build long-term capacity and why they deserve greater investment.

Learn more

Download our **Key Capabilities for Community Disaster Resilience: Insights and Practice** report, which introduces the Capability Framework and includes tools and guidance to support community reflection and planning for capability growth. The associated journal article is also available for download.



PhD Spotlight: Belinda Davis

Socially transformative disaster resilience education

Most disaster education in schools focuses on safety messaging or the scientific aspects of natural hazards. This research reimagines disaster education through a socially transformative lens, grounded in a relational view of learning.

Drawing on a deliberative qualitative approach, her study examined how educational practices that emphasise relationships, values, and community engagement can better equip young people for navigating disaster impacts. The research included a critical review of 45 international disaster education programs, as well as focus group discussions across five countries.

Findings showed that socially oriented approaches support more meaningful learning, promote resilience well beyond the classroom, and can ripple outward to benefit communities – a process the research describes as a ‘Butterfly Effect’. The study contributes new models for disaster resilience education that bridge social and physical dimensions, and support transformative learning for students, educators and communities alike.



Learning in practice

Our research shows that community-led disaster resilience depends as much on *how* work is done as *what* is delivered. Across Fire to Flourish, learning in practice – at individual, community and program levels – was critical to building trust, adapting to change, and sustaining momentum over time.

The research highlights the foundations needed to activate community leadership and keep learning central in complex, long-term resilience work.

To capture these insights, we collected evaluative data across the life of the program, focusing on process learning, program learning and social learning. Using participatory and developmental evaluation approaches, the research examined how experimentation and innovation unfolded in communities, and how research could wrap around, support and integrate with community knowledge and leadership to generate real-world impact.

What we found

- Fire to Flourish’s six guiding principles provided a strong foundation for consistent delivery across diverse knowledge systems and changing community contexts.
- Trust-based relationships were central to success and required sustained effort throughout the life of the program.
- Multi-level scaffolding – across individuals, teams, communities and the program – helped navigate complexity, differing priorities and evolving ways of working.
- Practical, hands-on support from local staff strengthened community capability to design, fund and deliver community-led projects.
- Effective governance was essential for participatory grantmaking, integrating genuine community decision-making with accountability and safeguards for all involved.

Why this matters

Community-led resilience does not emerge automatically – it must be enabled through intentional design, care and learning. This research shows that without strong foundations, supportive systems and ongoing reflection, even well-intentioned programs risk reinforcing barriers rather than

building capability. Embedding learning in practice allows programs to adapt, respond to local context, and sustain trust and leadership over time.

How this research can be used

These insights provide practical guidance for governments, funders and organisations designing long-term community-led initiatives. They highlight the importance of investing in foundations – such as relationships, governance, workforce models and learning systems – alongside program delivery.

The findings can also inform evaluation approaches that prioritise learning and adaptation, rather than compliance alone, supporting more effective and responsive resilience practice.

Learn more

Two flagship reports capture our learning in action: **Lessons Learned in its Activation** and the forthcoming **Lessons Learned in its Implementation**. Together, they share practical insights on what it took to establish, activate, embed, and prepare community-led initiatives for scaling – offering guidance for others seeking to work in deep partnership with communities.



Enabling transdisciplinary practice

Transdisciplinary research lies at the heart of Fire to Flourish’s approach – blending knowledge systems, shifting institutional norms, and co-producing insights with communities.

This research explored how Fire to Flourish’s transdisciplinary methods supported innovation, experimentation and adaptation within communities, while also generating rigorous, policy-relevant evidence. It examined what it takes to sustain this approach in practice, and how it compares to similar efforts internationally.

Drawing on a global review of university-led transdisciplinary programs as well as in-depth interviews, including with Fire to Flourish researchers and staff, the research analysed both the structural and human dimensions of transdisciplinary practice. It explored tensions, enablers and the cultural and institutional shifts needed to sustain meaningful, community-embedded collaboration.

What we found

- Transdisciplinary research requires new ecosystems of relationships, underpinned by shared communication, trust-building and risk-sharing. This can reveal institutional constraints and requires significant relational and emotional labour.
- Bringing communities, universities and governments together exposes differing values and risk cultures that cannot be resolved away, but must be openly recognised and actively navigated.
- Effective transdisciplinary leadership focuses on creating enabling conditions – supporting psychological safety, adaptation and emergence – so diverse actors can contribute and lead with confidence.

Why this matters

Transdisciplinary approaches are often held up as essential for solving complex challenges – but they are difficult to implement within institutions not designed for them. This research underscores that success is less about technical frameworks and more about courage, leadership and the willingness to create new institutional ecosystems. Fire to Flourish offers an example of what’s possible when we prioritise relationships and reflection over rigid structures and predefined outputs.

How this research can be used

University leaders and funders can draw on these insights to design more adaptive, relationship-driven support for transdisciplinary programs – recognising the real labour and structural shifts required.

Research teams and programs can apply these lessons to create the enabling conditions for transdisciplinary work – focusing on leadership development, trust-building practices and adaptive governance.

Policy and practice partners can recognise the value (and discomfort) of productive tension in collaborations that aim to shift systems.

Learn more

Forthcoming publications on **Transdisciplinary Research Practice and Leadership** will share detailed insights, comparative international case studies and practical guidance for those looking to support, fund or lead transformative transdisciplinary work.



OUR LEGACY

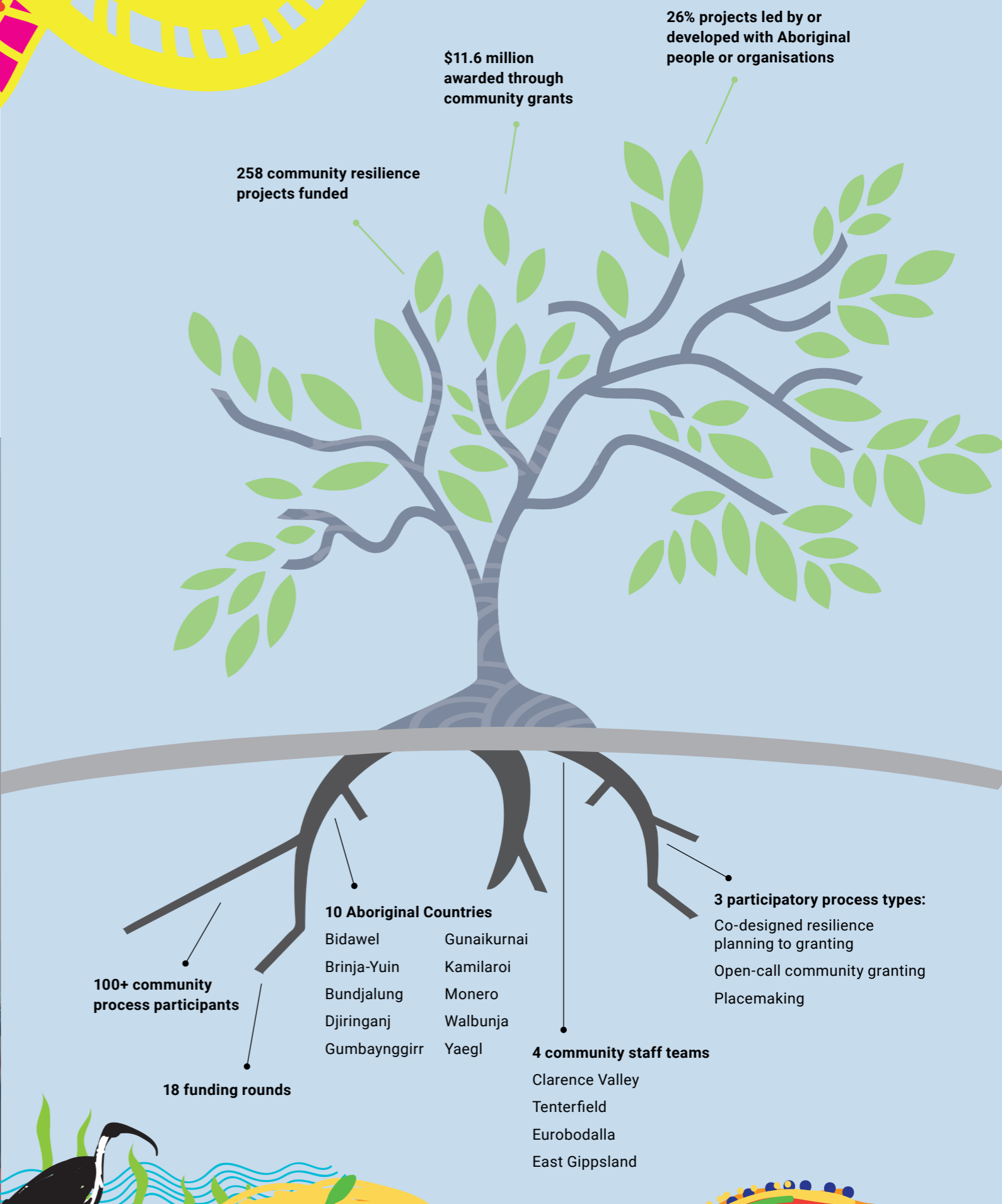
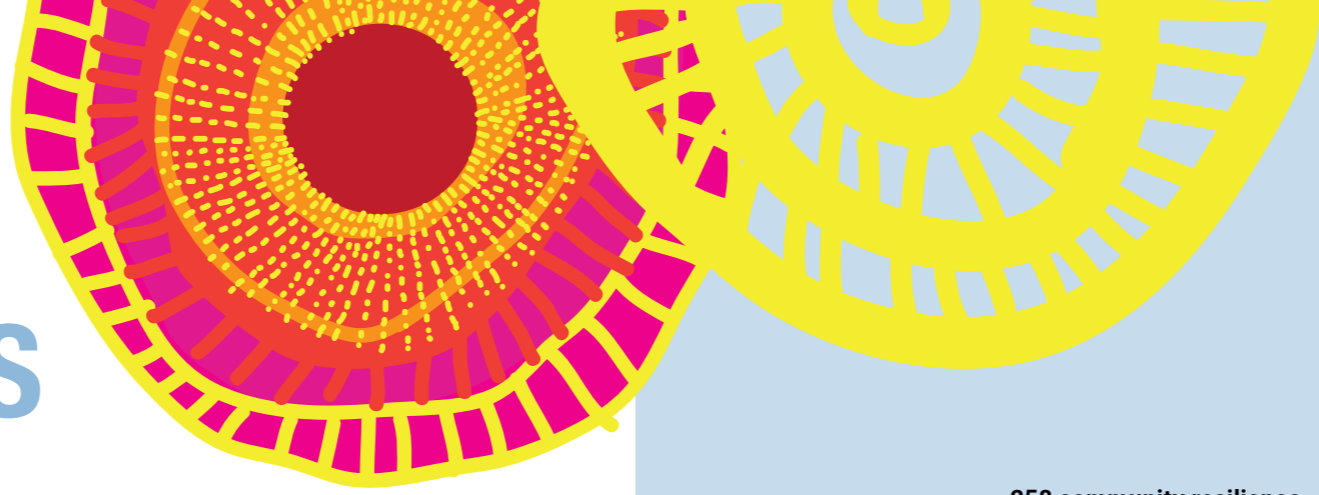


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PLANTING SEEDS OF RESILIENCE

Over its five years, the investment made by the Fire to Flourish program have helped communities strengthen their capacity and capabilities to collectively prepare for and rebound from disasters. By investing in people and connections alongside tangible resilience improvements, our aim has been to realise an enduring uplift in collective disaster resilience that persists long after the projects funded through grants themselves.



STORIES OF IMPACT AND RESILIENCE-BUILDING

Beyond the disbursed funding and the measured impact of Fire to Flourish, our community teams on the ground have observed a range of indicators of community resilience resulting from engagement with the program and its processes.

A project that has been delivering significant community impact for more than one year

Eurobodalla: Rock On For Climate Action by Sam Fletcher

This project was funded twice through separate rounds, and is now a successful youth-led annual music festival that unites locals around climate action.

Learn more about this project here.



A community organisation who has increased their agency in resilience efforts

Tenterfield: Gungyah Ngallingnee Aboriginal Corporation

The Gungyah Ngallingnee Aboriginal Corporation services the communities of Jubullum, Tabulam and surrounds in remote northern NSW. Established in 1984, Gungyah promotes community development, manages social housing and develops and operates social enterprises that promote education, health, housing, employment and culture.

Fire to Flourish Tenterfield have worked closely with Gungyah to strengthen existing relationships and co-create tailored community support through significant funding. “Over the past 18 months, our community has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis through the Fire to Flourish Project,” Gungyah said via Facebook in September 2025. “This pioneering initiative has secured significant funding, enabling us to revitalise infrastructure, develop innovative projects, and enhance essential services. We look forward to continued growth, positive transformation, and a brighter future.”

Increased social cohesion between diverse groups through the program

Clarence Valley: supporting stronger connections between three Aboriginal Nations

Fire to Flourish Clarence Valley worked closely with Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl Nations to bring communities together through initiatives such as the Aboriginal-led Caring for Country and Youth participatory grantmaking round. Guided by Elders and representatives from each Nation, we funded projects like Supporting Cultural Fire Management in Copmanhurst, which built relationships and connections, supported knowledge sharing between generations and mentored younger Aboriginal community members in Cultural Burning practices with Jagun Alliance.

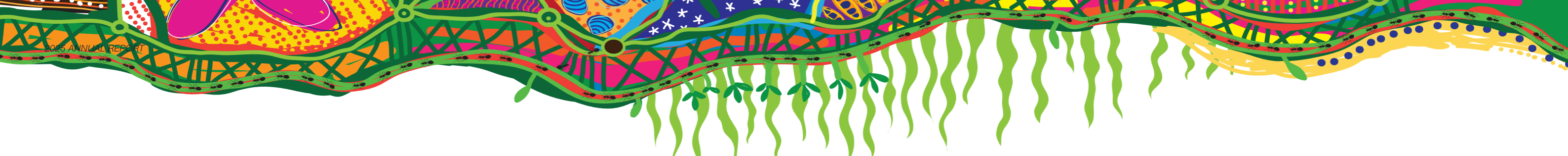


A community member who has gone on to secure a dream job through Fire to Flourish

East Gippsland: Wayne Hind from Bemm River

Wayne Hind, a member of the Bemm River Progress Association, consulted with his community and created the Foreshore Development project that has included the installation of raised garden beds with Australian native edible plants, descriptive signage and lighting for pedestrian safety. The signage describes both the First Nations and early settler information and history of the area. Wayne’s respectful and passionate advocacy helped connect with local government in ways that weren’t common beforehand. Not only did Wayne’s project get council approval, they also provided time and materials. “This was a real turnaround that changed the dynamic with local government,” Wayne said. “We have built new relationships into Council that will be really helpful moving forward.”





A community member who has stepped up to become a local leader

Eurobodalla: Sallyann Burtenshaw

“Sallyann is an enthusiastic and inspiring member of our community. She was just a local with an idea before applying for Fire to Flourish funding, and she has brought her idea to fruition with great success. Honoured with an award for Excellence in Supporting Disaster Resilience at our Eurobodalla Showcase, her projects Connect2Flourish and Create2Flourish were so inclusive of the community as a whole – all ages, young and old – and she has become an amazing project manager. Her art space is now a thriving community hub.”

Kizzy Nye, Community Lead, Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla



Increased recognition and confidence for Indigenous leaders

Clarence Valley: Creating space for Elders to feel supported

According to local Indigenous leaders, Fire to Flourish Clarence Valley created culturally safe, welcoming spaces where they felt respected and valued. Events and gatherings were shaped around comfort, inclusion, and cultural protocol, which Elders said enabled them to participate confidently. This approach strengthened Indigenous leadership, supported full participation, and increased recognition of Indigenous leaders across the Clarence Valley. Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla



A more connected community, where people and organisations are now coming together to increase social capital

East Gippsland: Community Planners

The East Gippsland Community Planners were a passionate and dynamic group of 12 wonderful leaders from Gipsy Point, Cann River, Noorinbee, Combiobar, Cabbage Tree Creek and Bemm River – four of whom were Indigenous. Each brought their unique perspective, lived experience and context, and stories of their community. The group quickly created respectful and trusting connections, and a powerful collective vision. One Community Planner reflected: “Knowing how our lives impact and support each other so deeply, personal interaction is so much more important as we recover.”



A newly developed community foundation supported by Fire to Flourish

Tenterfield: Community First Foundation

Fire to Flourish Tenterfield heard from locals that a new community foundation would be hugely beneficial to local granting and resilience-building infrastructure. With support from Fire to Flourish, Northern Rivers Community Foundation, and Community Foundations Australia, the Tenterfield team successfully launched the Community First Foundation in September 2025. Built and led by dedicated locals, it is now enabling community members and Indigenous leaders to utilise all existing resources and connections that build capacity and strengthen resilience before and after disasters.





NATIONAL INDIGENOUS DISASTER RESILIENCE PROGRAM

Fire to Flourish catalysed and incubated National Indigenous Disaster Resilience (NIDR), which is now a leading national research program that champions Indigenous excellence in disaster resilience. It is strengthening policies and practices with inclusion of Indigenous voices and priorities in emergency management and resilience sectors.

Policy Roundtables on Indigenous Disaster Resilience

Fire to Flourish proudly supports NIDR in delivering Policy Roundtables on Aboriginal Disaster Resilience, which NIDR is hosting in every state and territory between 2024 and 2026. Each roundtable brings state-based Indigenous organisations and community leaders together with emergency management and resilience agency representatives to share experiences of recent disasters and identify key gaps and priorities. This ensures that future state-specific disaster arrangements are based on inclusivity and recognition of Indigenous excellence in disaster recovery and prevention.

The Roundtables held this year have been followed by the publication of communiqués summarising the discussions

of the day and identifying priorities for reform for each jurisdiction. In NSW, the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) has committed to using the Communique to inform their Aboriginal Action Plan, which falls under the State Emergency Management Plan.

In 2025, NIDR hosted two Policy Roundtables:

Learn more about the Victorian Policy Roundtable (May 2025) [here](#).



Learn more about the NSW Policy Roundtable (November 2025) [here](#).



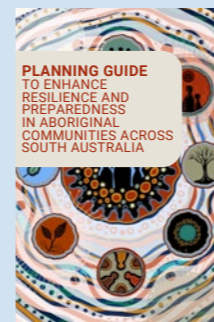
Foundations in Indigenous Disaster Resilience

Foundations in Indigenous Disaster Resilience is a keystone project for NIDR. The project is funded by Natural Hazards Research Australia and supported by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. The Foundations project seeks to understand the experiences of First Nations communities exposed to different hazard events across Australia, and to address the absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and priorities across the emergency management and disaster resilience sector. A key output of this project is the National Framework to Enhance the Resilience of Indigenous People and Communities, developed by NIDR in partnership with the National Emergency Management Agency.

In September, the NIDR team spent time with Traditional Owners and First Nations staff from Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA) in Halls Gaps and the broader Gariwerd Landscape. NIDR recorded the story of how, during the catastrophic fires across Gariwerd/Grampians and Little Desert National Parks in 2024/2025, these men established a Cultural Heritage Unit to protect the significant cultural heritage values across the landscape. Stories of Indigenous leadership like this one will inform the National Framework as they are critical to understand what is needed to strengthen the emergency management sector's capacity to support Indigenous resilience to disasters across Australia.

Research-backed resources

Throughout 2025, NIDR continued creating change by disseminating much-needed resources to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. Key resources include:



Planning Guide to Enhance Resilience and Preparedness in Aboriginal Communities Across South Australia: This Planning Guide was developed with Aboriginal peoples in South Australia to enhance disaster resilience and preparedness for Aboriginal communities.

It promotes good practice and safe engagement between emergency service personnel, policy makers and Aboriginal community leaders.



Disaster Preparedness Scorecard: Closing the Gap in Emergency Management: This Scorecard was launched in September 2025, evaluating how well government emergency management agencies have delivered on their commitments to engage

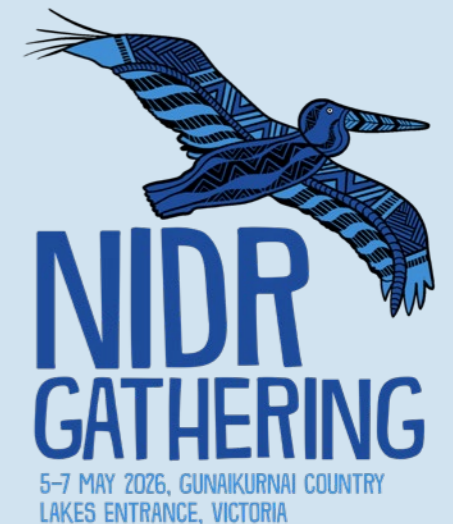
with Indigenous peoples before a disaster under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Beyond 2025

The legacy of Fire to Flourish's catalytic support for NIDR will be enduring, as the team's research continues to grow in scope and impact. Housed within Monash University's Faculty of Arts, the program is building a sustainable future beyond Fire to Flourish – one that remains grounded in research excellence.

Keep in touch with NIDR beyond 2025 via the [website](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

NIDR's flagship biennial event, the NIDR Gathering, will next take place on Gurnakurnai Country, Lakes Entrance, Victoria, on 5–7 May 2026.





DISASTERWISE COMMUNITIES NETWORK

In 2025, DisasterWISE strengthened and amplified a growing movement for community-led resilience. By engaging in cross-sectoral collaboration, hosting dynamic learning opportunities and building awareness through community engagement, the network has continued to deepen its impact.

As the network continued its transition to becoming independent beyond Fire to Flourish, focus has been on strengthening capacities to support lasting impact. This includes strategic foundations, an engaged membership base, events and other activities, and an independent company to steward the network's aspirations for enabling stronger, just and thriving communities going forward.

Vision – to grow a movement of people who are building disaster resilience through self-determination and community-led action

Monthly Get Togethers

DisasterWISE Get Togethers bring together members of the network, fostering connection, knowledge sharing and collaboration. These gatherings are essential touchpoints for members to share experiences about common challenges and solutions in disaster preparedness, response, recovery and climate adaptation initiatives.

In 2025, DisasterWISE hosted 10 online Get Togethers, bringing together over 350 participants. The conversations

brokered knowledge across varying ways of knowing to challenge each other's perspectives and provide insights into lived experiences and local ways of doing.

Some highlights include July's topic "A Matter of Trust: Building Connections, Building Bridges" and August's "Critical Care is the Practice: Holding Each Other When Systems Step Back", initiating robust discussions about power, agency and mutual aid. All Get Together recordings and summary documents can be found on the DisasterWISE website.

"The Get Togethers foster a warm, comfortable and inspiring environment that is so rare online. I now strive to foster a similar environment when facilitating online. DisasterWISE has influenced the ways that I connect with others"

— Get Together Participant

Conferences and Events

Throughout 2025 the DisasterWISE team and volunteers attended national events to share lessons and raise awareness. Some highlights include The Climate Adaptation Conference in Perth and presenting "Wisdom in Uncertainty; Reframing Resilience through a Community-Led Lens" at Changefest.



The Community Congress

In October, DisasterWISE hosted the online "Community Congress" in partnership with Resilient Lismore. Over 100 participants joined for a day of connection and solidarity. The "Our Stories Our Way" session showcased brilliant community-led practice and initiatives from across the Country, whilst the "Unconference" session in the afternoon raised awareness of community groups working to care for Country, community-led action and peaceful resistance.

Thank-you to the fantastic facilitators, Elly Bird, Melinda McInturff and Jodie Wilmer - and to the 24 community groups that shared their stories. A special thanks to Aunty Georgina Nicholson for an opening welcome and to the volunteer crew that kept everything running smoothly behind the scenes; Martti Sittenon, Sumarlina Wintoto and Andy George.

A collective contribution of resources and artefacts were shared and added to the DisasterWISE Knowledge Library on our Mighty Networks Platform. An overview document; "Community Congress Compendium" is also available on the DisasterWISE website.



"This congress has been the best source of info I have come across in my 4 years of volunteering for a community group. I needed info on our next stage of action - and got it!"

— Community Congress Participant

On the Road

The DisasterWISE team hit the road in April, visiting disaster-impacted communities between Canberra, NSW and East Gippsland. The Community Engagement Tour aimed to raise awareness of DisasterWISE, building connections with community leaders, groups and organisations that enable community-led practice. A highlight was attending the Eurobodella Community Support Network in Bateman's Bay, seeing the power of localised networks in action.



DisasterWISE Company Ltd.

To steward DisasterWISE beyond 2025, six board directors were appointed in May to govern the DisasterWISE Company Ltd. The directors bring a diverse skill set and extensive experience in community, social innovation, disaster research and management, climate adaptation and community finance. The board is looking to attract ongoing sustainable funding from interested partners who align with the DisasterWISE principles and values.

CONTACT US:
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THE FINAL WORD: IT'S TIME TO INVEST IN COMMUNITIES

Disasters are becoming more frequent, more severe and more costly – yet our approaches to resilience are not evolving at the same pace. Across Australia and globally, recent events have shown that disaster resilience requires more than rebuilding infrastructure. It requires sustained investment in the people, relationships and local capabilities that enable communities to adapt, prepare and recover.

Many Australian communities are no stranger to disaster. In recent years they have faced unprecedented flooding, wild storms, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the devastating 2019-20 bushfires. Through these experiences, communities have learned that disaster preparedness, response and recovery are not one-off events but an ongoing process of adaptation.

As disaster costs are projected to reach \$1.2 trillion over the next 40 years, strengthening long-term resilience has never been more urgent.

Research consistently shows that strong local networks, trusted relationships and community leadership are critical to reducing disaster impacts and supporting recovery. Yet current investment models have largely focused on emergency response and physical reconstruction – both essential – while comparatively less attention has been given to strengthening the social and governance foundations that enable communities to withstand future shocks.

When disaster strikes, local communities are the first to respond and the last to recover. Their knowledge, relationships and commitment are vital assets. Supporting this capability is one of the most effective ways to strengthen resilience.

Fire to Flourish has worked alongside communities recovering from the 2019-20 bushfires to co-design a research-informed model for community-led disaster resilience. This work demonstrates that when communities are supported with the right resources, structures and partnerships, they can lead meaningful preparedness and recovery efforts tailored to local needs.

Our experience suggests four priorities for strengthening disaster resilience.

First, communities need sustained investment in local capability.

Resilience depends on strong local networks, leadership and collaboration. Fire to Flourish has supported communities by employing local people to strengthen connections, facilitate participatory planning and build community capability. Without sustained investment, these efforts rely heavily on volunteer goodwill, which is difficult to maintain as disaster pressures increase.

Second, community governance should be developed before disasters occur.

Communities are better prepared when they have established processes for identifying local strengths, understanding diverse needs and making collective decisions. These foundations strengthen social cohesion and enable faster, more coordinated responses during crisis.

Third, funding models should enable community agency and power.

Traditional grant schemes often operate through centralised, competitive processes with fixed criteria and limited flexibility.

While effective for infrastructure delivery, these approaches can constrain local innovation and disadvantage communities with fewer resources to compete.

Fire to Flourish has demonstrated an alternative through participatory grantmaking, where communities collectively allocate funding based on local priorities. This model redistributes decision-making power, strengthens local capability, builds social cohesion and attracts significant co-investment – showing how community-controlled funding can deliver stronger and more sustainable resilience outcomes.

Fourth, invest in trusted partnerships that enable – not direct – community action.

Community-led resilience does not mean communities working alone. Communities value external support such as independent facilitation, technical expertise, relationship brokering, and access to tools and data. However, this support must be grounded in trust, reciprocity and long-term relationships – not top-down delivery. Effective partnerships recognise local leadership, respect community knowledge, and adapt to each community's unique context while supporting self-determination.

We have seen the impact of this approach in practice. In Tenterfield, Fire to Flourish supported a community-led governance model that brought together diverse local leaders to map strengths and priorities. When another bushfire occurred in October 2023, the community mobilised quickly, coordinated local support and initiated a community-led learning review. With clear processes and shared priorities in place, they strengthened both immediate recovery and long-term preparedness.

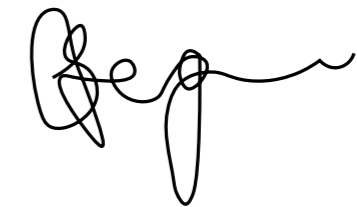
This is what disaster resilience can look like: communities leading collectively, supported by strong partnerships, flexible funding and trusted relationships.

As disaster risks grow, there is an opportunity to complement existing investments in emergency response and infrastructure with greater support for the social and governance systems that shape how communities experience and recover from disruption. Strengthening community capability will reduce long-term costs, enhance wellbeing and improve recovery outcomes.

The next disaster is not a question of if, but when. By investing in community-led resilience now, we can help ensure that communities are equipped to respond, adapt and recover.

Investing in people, relationships and local capacity is not only the right thing to do – it is essential to building a more resilient future.

Briony Rogers



Chief Executive Officer, Fire to Flourish

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STRATEGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL



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Chair



Robert Glasser
Independent



Claire Beattie
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Kate Cowden
East Gippsland



Lucy Stackpool-Moore
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Alison Worthington
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Laura Cochrane
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EXECUTIVE



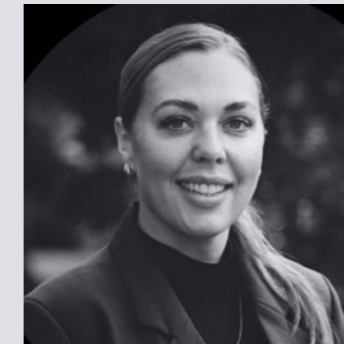
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COMMUNITY: CLARENCE VALLEY



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Pamela Denise
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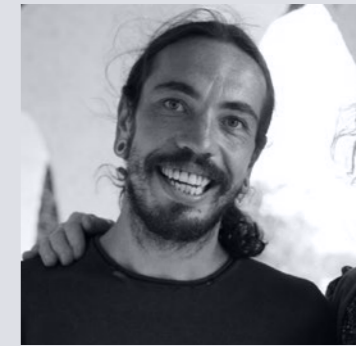


Kath Kermod
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COMMUNITY: TENTERFIELD



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Matthew Sing
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COMMUNITY: EUROBODALLA



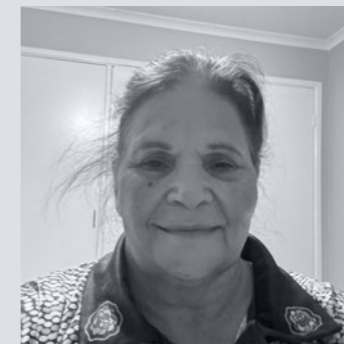
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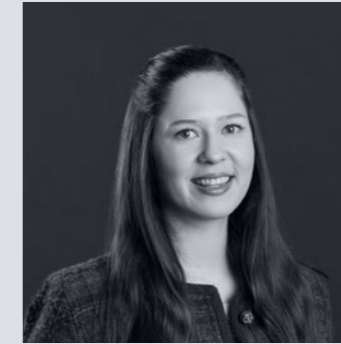


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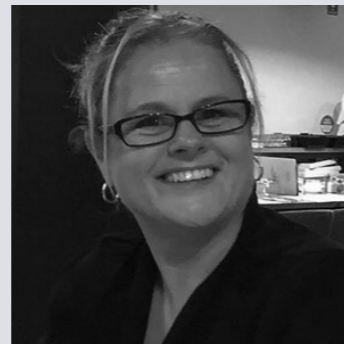
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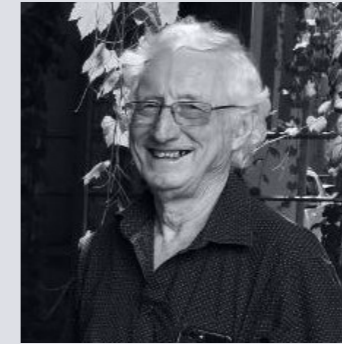


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RESEARCH: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE



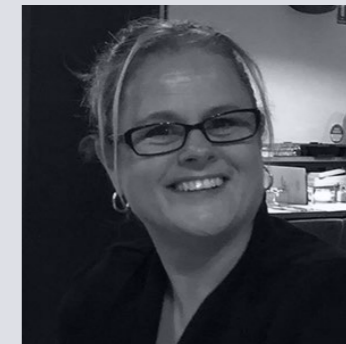
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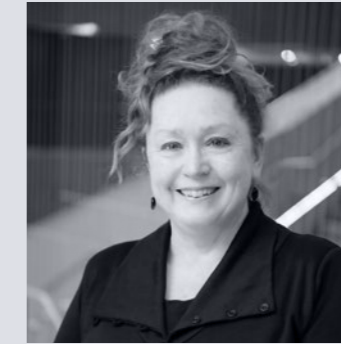


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RESEARCH: GRANTING TOOLS AND DATA MANAGEMENT



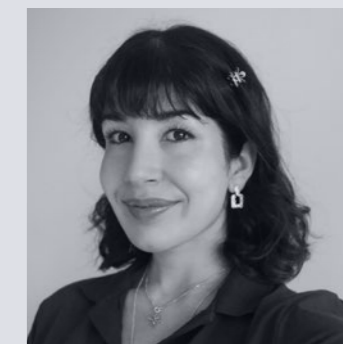
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Kadek Satriadi
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Ananya Alagh
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RESEARCH: PHD COHORT



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Home and Community



Belinda Davis
Transformative Bushfire
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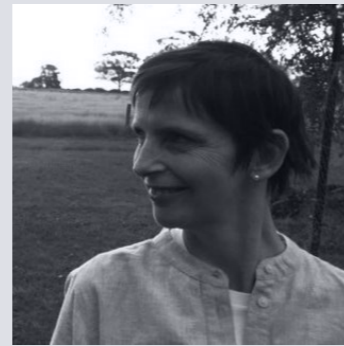
Gabrielle Moir
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Lihini de Silva
Disaster Economics



Elise Park
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Belinda Lloyd
Disasters and Social
Inequities



Euan Hind
Community Flood Resilience

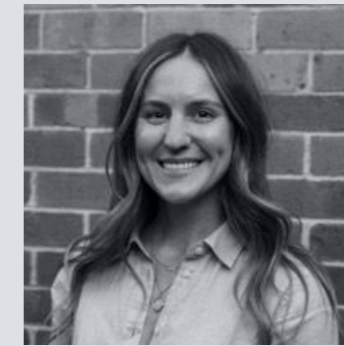


Ivana Gillard
Change Agents and
Transformation

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS DISASTER RESILIENCE



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Lucy Connole
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DISASTERWISE COMMUNITIES NETWORK



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Network Convenor



Steve Cameron
Network Convenor



Monika Correa
Project Officer

Featured Artists

We are thrilled to showcase the beautiful designs for each of the Fire to Flourish communities. We commissioned artists in each region to create a design that represented their community. These artworks have been woven throughout this Annual Report. We've included each artwork in full on the following pages.

WE ARE 27 CREATIVE

Most of the graphics that appear throughout this Annual Report are the work of We Are 27 Creative, an Indigenous art, design and communications agency. The full artwork is called Heart of Country, and the artwork story is below.

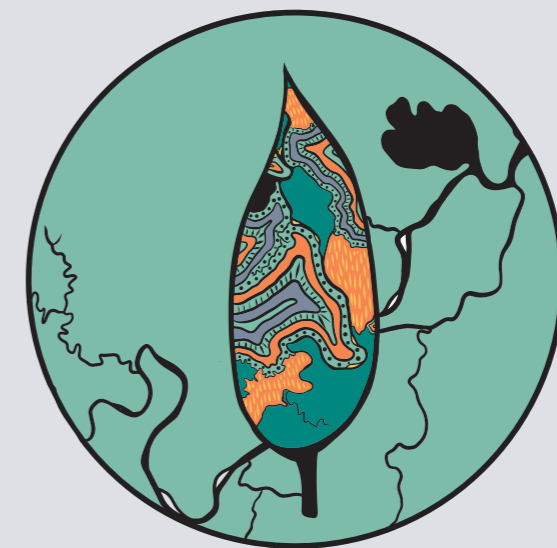
We are the heartbeat connected to this place. We belong to this Country. Shaping, shifting, changing, moving, flowing — Seasons guide our way. Meandering across the landscape words are nourishment. Seed cracks, flowers bloom, charcoal black. Knowledge is gained, we are healed, this land is alive in Celebration. Country is renewed.

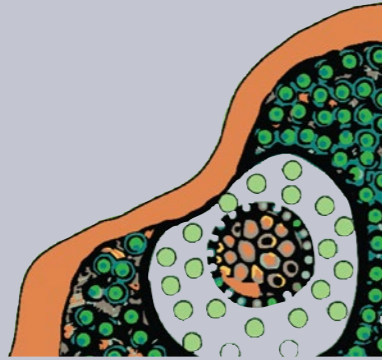


FRANCES BELLE PARKER

Frances Belle Parker is a proud Yaegl woman, painter, drawer, printmaker and installation artist from Maclean. An accomplished artist, Frances completed a BFA through UNSW, and a BVA (Honours) and Masters of Indigenous Studies (Wellbeing) both through Southern Cross University. Frances is deeply inspired by her Mother's land (Yaegl land) and the island in the Clarence River that her Mother grew up on, Ulgundahi Island.

"I have chosen a gum leaf shape, however when upright it can also represent a flame. Inside the leaf is an aerial mapping of the Clarence River; the river is one that connects all people of the Clarence Valley. The dots represent people and the stripes represent the resilience embedded into us as people. The yellow dashes represent the bushfires which have caused havoc in the region, the green represents the replenishing and the new growth of nature."





KIM HEALEY

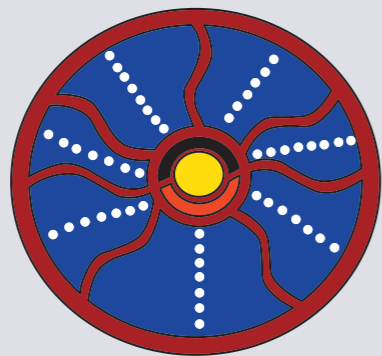
Deeply connected to her culture and country, Kim Healey has forged a reputation for her storytelling through a unique array of artistic mediums. Working and creating out of her small studio cottage on the coastlines of the Clarence Valley, Kim continues to attract and engage a diverse audience, using a contemporary palate, modern design, deeply embedded with her heritage through the Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung people.



BRONWEN SMITH

Bronwen Smith is the proud Walbunja owner and talented artist behind Gwiyaala Arts. From a young age, Bronwen had a passion for art and expressed herself through drawing. The name of Bronwen’s business, Gwiyaala meaning stingray, was influenced by the coastal inspiration for her paintings. Her art is not only an expression of the coastal landscape she loves, but is also used to share stories and connection. Bronwen’s saying is “let me paint your story”.

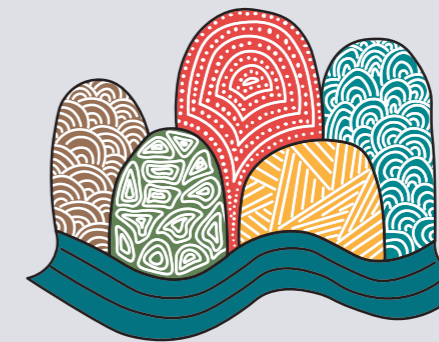
“This piece represents the South coast mountains and waters. The patterns in the mountains represent different plants, foods and dance. We celebrate coming together in culture.”



PAULA WANDIN

Wurundjeri artist Paula Wandin celebrated the bold colours of her region in this design connecting clan and Country.

“This piece is representative of the 5 clans of our region coming together under our flag and connecting to Mother Earth. The blue represents water, the giver of life. The five clans are Bratwoloong, Brayakooloong, Brabuwooloong, Tatumgooloong and Krowathunkooloong.”



KARLA MCGRADY

Karla McGrady is a Gamilaraay/Kamilaroi woman born in Tenterfield, now residing in Brisbane. She was encouraged to commence her profession as a self-taught artist with the influence of an artistic family and her cultural connections to art as a part of everyday life for Aboriginal people. Karla’s art is a mix of styles and ideas that have developed over the years.

“This piece depicts the landscape in the Tenterfield region, the granite mountains and boulders, freshwater creeks and significant places that hold stories and memories for Aboriginal people in the area.”

FIRE to FLOURISH

Strength through community-led action



Fire to Flourish was a long-term community impact program providing direct support to communities as the first and last responders to disasters.

We partnered with four communities recently affected by disasters to co-create innovative approaches in community-led disaster recovery and long-term resilience.

Fire to Flourish was led by Monash University and supported by cornerstone philanthropic partners, the Paul Ramsay Foundation and Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd. Additional philanthropic support was provided by the Lowy Foundation.

For more information, go to: firetoflourish.monash

