

# FIRE to FLOURISH



Strength through community-led action

# 2023

## ANNUAL REPORT





## 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 Bidawel Maap, Boonwurrung/Bunerong, Brinja-Yuin, Bundjalung, Cammeraygal, Djiringanj, Euahlayi, Gadigal, Gumbaynggirr, Gunaikurnai, Jukemba, Kamilaroi, Kurna, Ngarabal, Ngarigo Monero, Ngoorabul, Peramangk, Walbunja, Wathaurong, Wurundjeri, Yaegl, Yuin, Yuin-Monaro and Yukumbal Country.

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 use of 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/or Torres Strait Islander people is made, the term 'Indigenous' will be 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.

## CONTENTS

**04** SECTION 1  
INTRODUCTION

**16** SECTION 2  
OUR YEAR *of*  
EXPANSION

**30** SECTION 3  
PLACE-BASED  
ACTIVATIONS

**48** SECTION 4  
IMPROVING  
ACCESS *to*  
FUNDING

**62** SECTION 5  
INFLUENCING  
CHANGE

**70** SECTION 6  
WHO WE ARE

# INTRODUCTION



## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Welcome	06
Overview of 2023 events	08
1.2 Our way of working	10
1.3 Research that drives change	12
1.4 Demonstrating our impact	14



## 1.1 WELCOME

Welcome to the third annual report for Fire to Flourish. This year has seen an acceleration of action and impact as we continue experimenting with community-led innovations in disaster resilience.

With bushfires and floods once again striking our partner communities this year, I am reflecting on what it takes to build new models of practice in a climate-changed world. It can't happen in a shiny laboratory or ivory tower. It's gritty, learning-by-doing work that requires courage and collaboration.

Our mission at Fire to Flourish is to both trial innovations in community-led disaster resilience and influence the system changes needed for them to be scaled. As we look back over our third year, and our first full year of community-led action, it's clearer than ever that strong relationships with our communities, program partners and wider network are pivotal. We have reaped the benefits of having moved at the pace of trust.

A highlight of the year has been watching the blossoming confidence and skills of our local staff as they facilitate discussions with their communities on disaster resilience, future visions, shared priorities, funding allocation and systems change. It is not easy to be at the centre of experimentation committed to including diverse voices and perspectives - it is complex, nuanced and things don't always go to plan. Our team's commitment to learning and growth keeps us connected and inspired in the thick of innovation. This collective mindset is vital if we are to find new solutions and ways of working in an uncertain and unstable future.

This year saw our first major wave of community grant rounds. We have trialled new approaches to grantmaking - where community members are involved in the design and implementation of grant rounds according to their needs and desires. We're exploring

ways to maximise flexibility, accessibility and self-determination in disaster resilience funding - because we know that's what communities require.

We are excited that, to date, \$4.2 million has been disbursed to fund 49 diverse community-led projects, including cultural burning education, music festivals, mobile emergency infrastructure, tool libraries, community gardens, disaster communications, community governance and creative healing workshops. Funded projects point to clear patterns across our partner communities, despite their unique contexts. Communities are telling us they want to share ideas with others and be part of scaling the lessons.

We are learning from communities about the types of project implementation support they need, particularly when volunteers are thinly stretched, new to project management, or needing particular expertise that is not readily accessible. These are the realities of working on the ground with disaster-affected communities - and we are doing all we can to support them.

The program's first two years of laying foundations and building relationships took longer than originally anticipated, due to the disruptions of COVID and repeated disaster events. But progress and impact are accelerating, which we are delighted to share in our first Impact Report, available in early 2024.

I observe a growing recognition within the emergency management sector that Australia needs to transition away from a command-and-control model of disaster management towards a new model based on long-term resilience and principles of community development. To us, this means ensuring that community is valued, centred and resourced as a critical asset for coping, adapting and transforming with climate change and disaster. This is a key focus of our advocacy.

Fire to Flourish aims to influence this transition. We are systematically learning and generating research-based evidence about what works, and co-developing new toolkits and guidance for implementing new models in practice. For example, in an Australia-first we adapted a global tool for measuring community disaster resilience in ways that meaningfully inform local action. We are convening boundary-pushing dialogues with diverse stakeholders to influence narratives and strengthen relationships across the sector. This feels like systems change in action.

A highlight of our systems change work was launching the National Indigenous Disaster Resilience program and the outstanding success of the inaugural National Indigenous Disaster Resilience Summit. Our launch of the DisasterWISE Communities Network was another highlight that's bringing something new to the sector. DisasterWISE is already linking up community members across Australia and internationally to share stories, learn from each other and drive change.

In this moment, it feels crucial to acknowledge the difficult times Australia's Indigenous peoples endured with the Voice referendum. Fire to Flourish fully supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and is committed to prioritising Indigenous voices, knowledge and self-determination in all that we do.

Next year will be shaped by deeper and wider collaboration as we bring focus to implementing, spreading and scaling change. Together, we are planting the seeds of the future, watching them take root and begin to flourish.



**Briony Rogers**  
Chief Executive Officer



Image Credit: Stuart Murphy

# OVERVIEW OF 2023 EVENTS

## January

- Formative researcher workshop

## March

- On-Country gathering: Wurundjeri Country (VIC)
- Decolonising Research Workshop

## February

- Tenterfield resilience planning began

## April

- First in-person gathering of DisasterWISE Network Action Group

## May

- Prioritising Social Capital for Disaster Resilience public event
- National Indigenous Disaster Resilience program partner workshop

## June

- East Gippsland roadshow: Stories of community and Country
- Clarence Valley placemaking scoping trip
- Northern Rivers Community Foundation commenced as granting partner in Clarence Valley and Tenterfield

## July

- F2F Eurobodalla supported Mogodha NAIDOC Big Day Out
- F2F-led panel at 2023 International Transformations Conference
- F2F invited to meet with Productivity Commission on drought resilience funding for Indigenous communities

## August

- DisasterWISE launched at national AFAC/ADRC conference
- Inaugural National Indigenous Disaster Resilience Summit
- Australian Communities Foundation commenced as granting partner in Eurobodalla
- Tomorrow Party envisioning event in Meanjin/Brisbane

## September

- F2F Eurobodalla art exhibition and community grant round launch
- East Gippsland Communities Foundation commenced as granting partner in East Gippsland

## October

- Community engagement began for East Gippsland community grants
- On-Country gathering: Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl Countries (NSW)
- Clarence Valley resilience planning round 3 began

## December

- Clarence Valley placemaking findings and designs launched
- National Forum on Community Climate Resilience

## 1.2 OUR WAY OF WORKING

**Our mission is to trial innovations in community-led resilience and influence system changes to support their scaling.**

Fire to Flourish was conceived in the aftermath of the 2019/20 bushfires, which exposed the exacerbated impacts of disaster on communities experiencing entrenched disadvantage. Since those fires, we have been working deeply with four severely affected communities to support their recovery and longer-term resilience to climate change.



*“The Fire to Flourish approach helped me to see beyond the restraints of what we had been through, and to look at and dream about a more positive future.”*

— Community Co-Designer

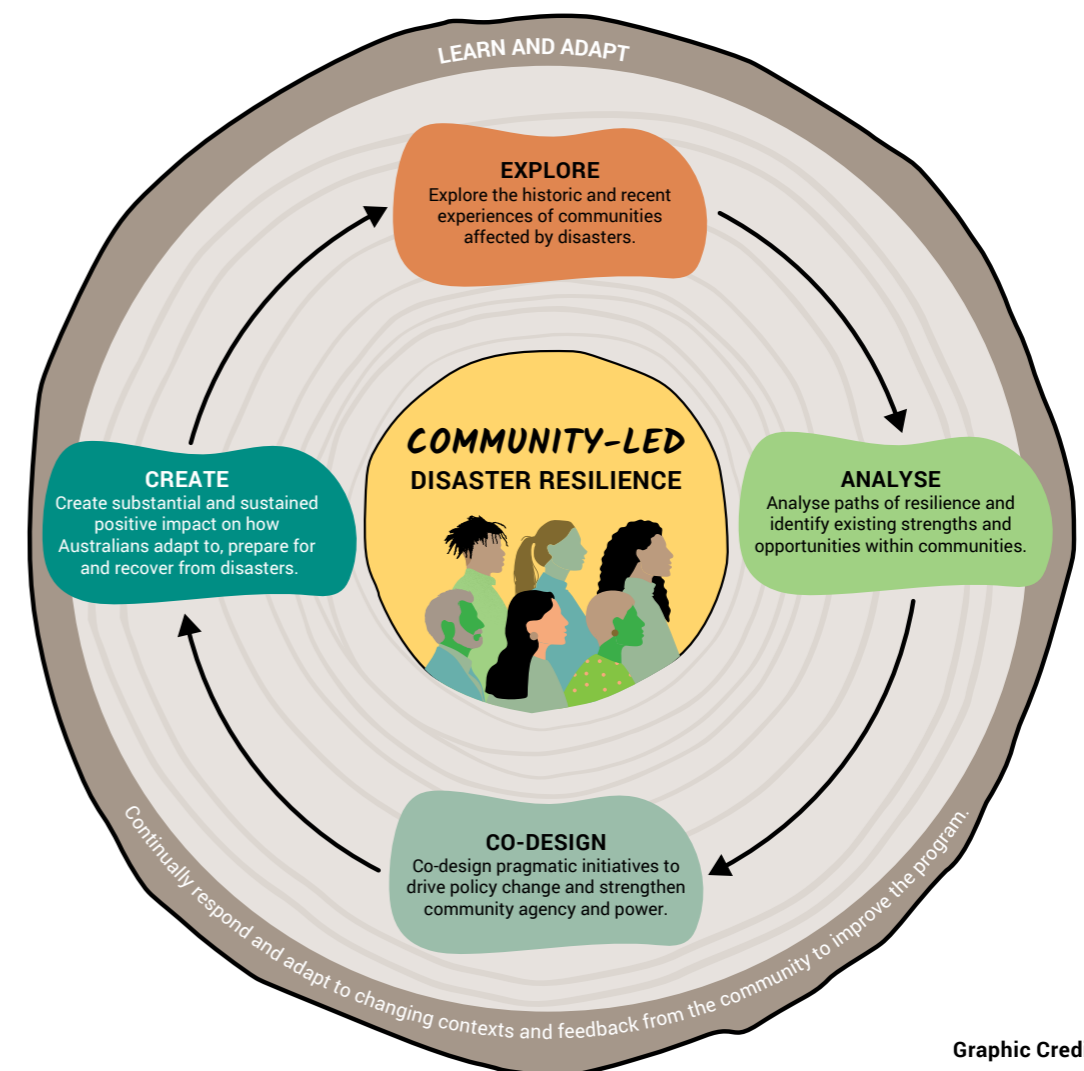


We are three years into our five-year program. In 2023, the program focused on activating broader participation through Phase 3, ready to expand implementation and innovations in subsequent years.



The knowledge we are gaining through co-designing and collaborating with our partner communities is providing us with evidence and insights to refine our approach and tailor our support according to each community’s voiced needs.

The Fire to Flourish approach is represented in the diagram below. We walk alongside communities: exploring, analysing, co-designing and creating new community-led solutions that strengthen disaster resilience on their own terms, while always learning and adapting as we go.



Graphic Credit: Ivy Hajduk





## 1.3 RESEARCH THAT DRIVES CHANGE

We are co-creating new knowledge that accelerates change towards a reimagined disaster resilience model.

Research is woven throughout Fire to Flourish to support communities as they take action to strengthen disaster resilience. This enhances community-led innovations using evidence and different research-backed ideas. It also means we are continuously learning and evaluating as we go so that we can understand what’s working, why and for whom – insights that are critical for replication and scaling of a community-led disaster resilience model. You’ll see evidence of this research lens throughout this Annual Report.

We connect community lived experience and local knowledge with research expertise from a range of fields, including community resilience, emergency management, disaster risk reduction, Indigenous geography, social cohesion, sustainability transitions and systems change, policy and governance, placemaking, digital civics, public health and economics.

Our research program includes numerous externally funded projects and a cohort of eight PhD students.

Our research projects span a variety of purposes:

- **analytical research**, such as economic studies that define problems with the current model of disaster management and identify priority issues to be addressed
- **participatory action research**, such as resilience planning and placemaking that co-creates new frameworks, models and toolkits in partnership with communities
- **evaluative research**, such as community resilience measurement that documents lived experiences and evidenced changes, as well as implementation challenges and opportunities
- **transitions research**, such as governance studies that identify pathways to strengthen policy and practice conditions for implementing new solutions at scale.

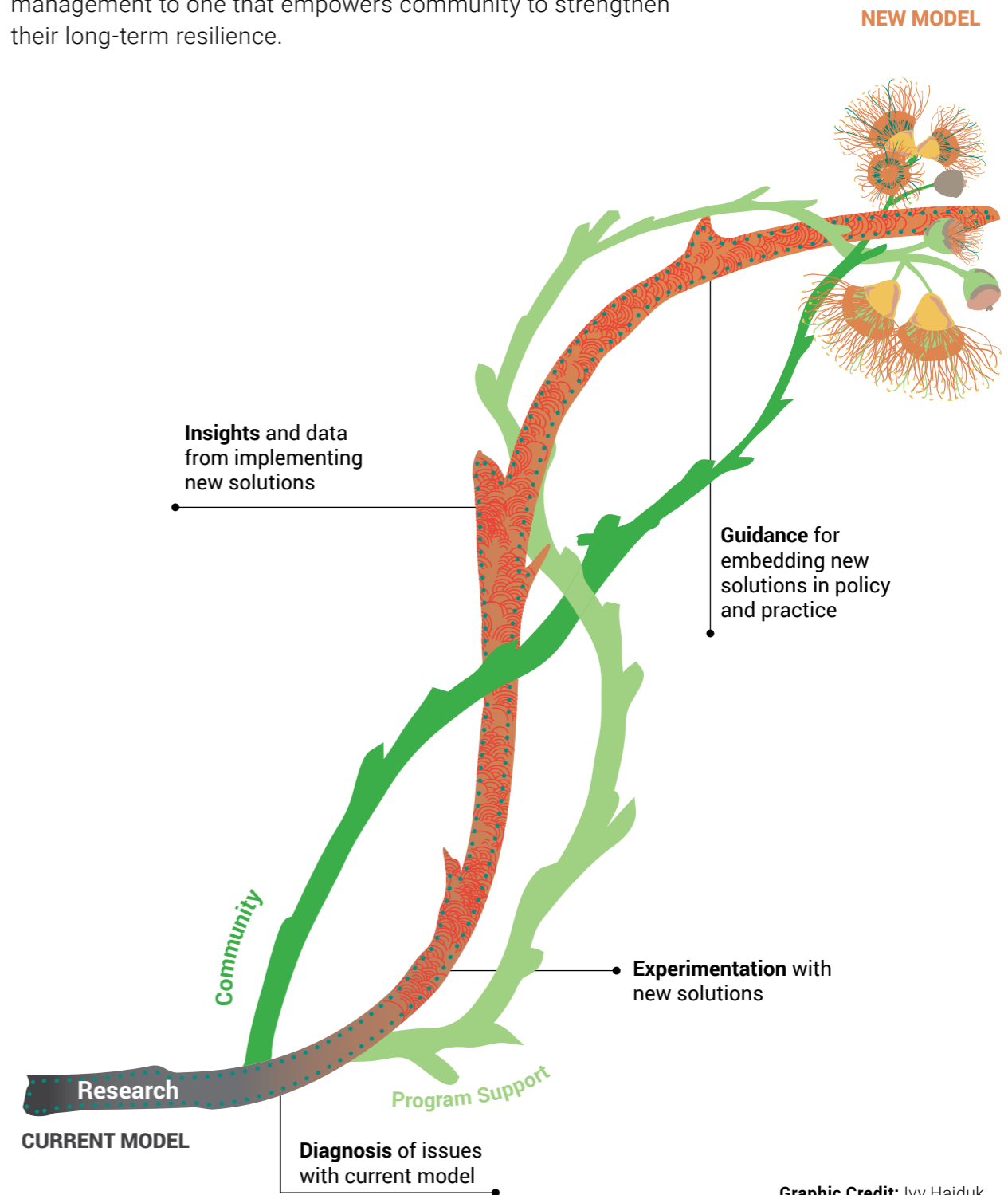
This year’s community granting projects, for example, have been informed by participatory action researchers who contribute data and expertise in disaster resilience and collaborative processes to support communities in systems thinking, network mapping, priority-setting, decision making and project development.

**Reciprocity is a fundamental principle for our research.** We conduct research in ways that build and honour respectful relationships, respond to community-defined priorities, involve community as co-researchers, make data and findings accessible and community-owned, and ultimately make meaningful contributions to engaged communities.



## TRANSITIONS IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Our research is scoped to inform and influence the transition away from the current model of ‘command-and-control’ disaster management to one that empowers community to strengthen their long-term resilience.



Graphic Credit: Ivy Hajduk

## 1.4 DEMONSTRATING OUR IMPACT

Fire to Flourish seeks to enhance community resilience in ways that are not only effective, but enduring – to ensure that ‘what success looks like’ is defined by the communities we walk alongside.

Insights from this year’s work in partnership with communities informed the design of our Impact Framework. Our first Impact Report shows that communities are reporting tangible benefits such as strengthened connections, new knowledge and skills, and better disaster preparedness.

*“The biggest strength [of Fire to Flourish] is funding outside of risk-averse government models and supporting novel ways of thinking through issues. Communities need to be supported to think outside the box and Fire to Flourish supports and facilitates this thinking.”*

2023 Impact Survey respondent, East Gippsland

Annual Impact Reports will guide ongoing program implementation and ensure we are independently monitoring our impacts and checking that our recovery and resilience strengthening activities are making a tangible difference in communities.

In formalising our Impact Framework, we drew upon the conversations, lessons and insights we have gathered with community and through research to date, informing our understanding of what genuine short- and long-term impact means. Critically, the communities we support will see themselves in our impact reporting because they have helped build its foundations.

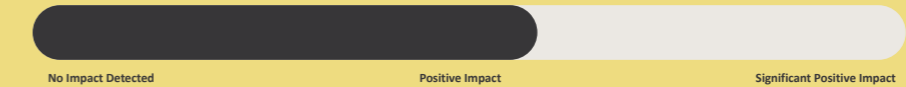
The Impact Report 2023 provides an overview of the impact we made in our partner communities this year, including recommendations that will be implemented throughout 2024.



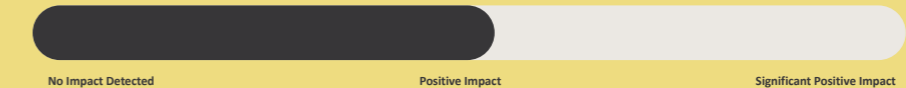
Impact Report 2023

## Overall Impact: Fire to Flourish 2023

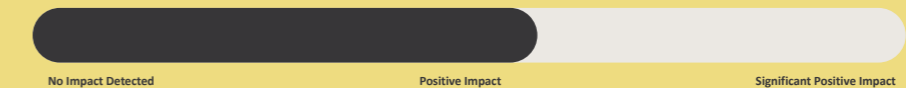
### Social Capital Impact



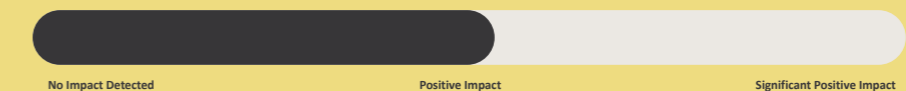
### Economic Wellbeing Impact



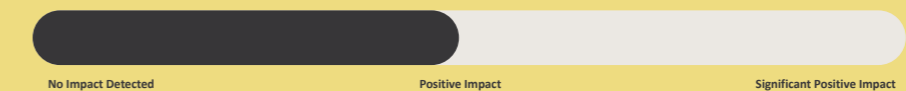
### Cultural Impact



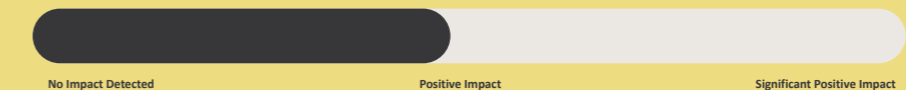
### Health and Wellbeing Impact



### Built Environment Impact



### Natural Environment Impact



**Numerical impact measurement calculated:** Social Capital = 5.59 (positive impact), Economic Wellbeing = 5.07 (positive impact), Cultural Impact = 5.55 (positive impact), Health and Wellbeing = 5.05 (positive impact), Built Environment = 4.75 (minor positive impact), and Natural Environment = 4.69 (minor positive impact).



# OUR YEAR *of* EXPANSION

## SECTION 2 OUR YEAR *of* EXPANSION

2.1 Broadening participation	18
2.2 Lessons learned	20
2.3 Partnerships that strengthen resilience	22
2.4 From resilience planning to granting	24
2.5 Aboriginal leadership	26
2.6 National Indigenous Disaster Resilience program	28



**Principle in Focus:**

**Address inequities and enhance inclusion**

In our pursuit of enhanced inclusion and equity, we've prioritised listening to and amplifying unheard voices. In 2023, we focused on expanding community networks, and gained deep insight into ways to incorporate diverse voices and experiences into all our program activities.

We have seen the value of growing community capabilities in boosting confidence and skills among community leaders - key levers for overcoming deeply embedded inequities and ultimately, enabling self-determination.



**2.1 BROADENING PARTICIPATION**

This year, we created diverse, inclusive opportunities for more people in each community to connect with and benefit from the program, building from the local anchor points previously established.

Following initial prototypes and co-design work of previous years, 2023 was a year of expansion. We trialled different ways to engage diverse parts of each community to strengthen community disaster resilience.

These experiences highlighted the importance of understanding the many 'communities' that live in a place, of ensuring all voices have opportunity to be heard, and of designing engagements to make it easy and fun for people to connect and contribute.

*"It's an honour to work so closely with community and know there's going to be tangible outcomes for them."*

Community Co-lead, East Gippsland



Image credit: Natural Hazards Research Australia

**2023 AT A GLANCE**

Graphic Credit: Ivy Hajduk



**4**

Communities with **ACTIVE RESILIENCE ACTIVITIES**

**22**

COMMUNITY STAFF

OUR TEAM



**35**

COMMUNITY CO-DESIGNERS

**9**

ABORIGINAL STAFF

**38**

RESEARCHERS

**11**

EXECUTIVE AND BACKBONE STAFF

GRANT FUNDING SKYROCKETED



**8**

FUNDING ROUNDS

**30**

Community organisations received funding

**49**

COMMUNITY PROJECTS SUPPORTED

**\$4.2M**

FUNDS DISTRIBUTED

HOSTED

**40**

EVENTS



**7**

NEW PARTNERS



## 2.2 LESSONS LEARNED

Transformative change requires fresh thinking, bold innovation and collective action. We must all learn together from successes and failures as we push boundaries and try new things.

As we partner with communities, trial community-led disaster resilience innovations and seek to influence system conditions, we are adopting a mindset of openness to understanding what works and what doesn't.

Fire to Flourish is committed to widely sharing what we learn along this journey. Our lessons this year reflect the program's focus on expansion.



### 'COMMUNITY-LED' IS BECOMING WIDELY ACCEPTED

There is growing recognition in the emergency management sector that communities must be empowered to lead their recovery and resilience-building efforts. The door for transformative thinking is open and there are many people and organisations eager to walk through it.

### COMMUNITIES ARE READY AND ABLE

Communities are demanding to be valued as capable, eager and central contributors to climate change and disaster resilience solutions. Our DisasterWISE Communities Network and many cross-boundary workshops and panel discussions have demonstrated the strengths and hunger in communities to work with others toward a better future.

### COMMUNITY-LED DOES NOT MEAN COMMUNITY ALONE

Communities often still need and value resources, governance and other forms of scaffolding, particularly when they are doing something new. By working with a strengths-based approach, this self-determined support can be tailored to the unique contexts and needs of individual people and groups.

### CONNECTING IN PERSON CANNOT BE UNDERVALUED

Engaging with people face-to-face is a sign of respect and makes a big difference to the strength of relationships and trust with communities and as a team. This highlights the importance of local people facilitating local initiatives, and of meeting on Country with Indigenous communities.

### LONG-TERM INVESTMENT IS CRUCIAL

Recovery funding and support initiated in response to the 2019/20 bushfires has largely dried up, even though some people in community are only now ready to seek assistance. Community disaster resilience is an ongoing endeavour, so it needs to be resourced over the long-term, including before a disaster strikes.

### TRUST GROWS WHEN COMMITMENT IS DEMONSTRATED

Communities are often wary of outsiders coming in with offers of support as they have had plenty of poor experiences. Finding early ways to demonstrate commitment, follow through and tangible value helps to grow the trust needed for more complex forms of support and collaboration that may come later.

### NETWORKS, NETWORKS, NETWORKS

Well-established, deep and broad networks within and across communities enable a faster and more tailored response in the face of disaster. We have seen firsthand the power of horizontal and vertical connections that link every individual into an ecosystem of support.

### COMMUNITIES WELCOME RESEARCH THAT GIVES BACK

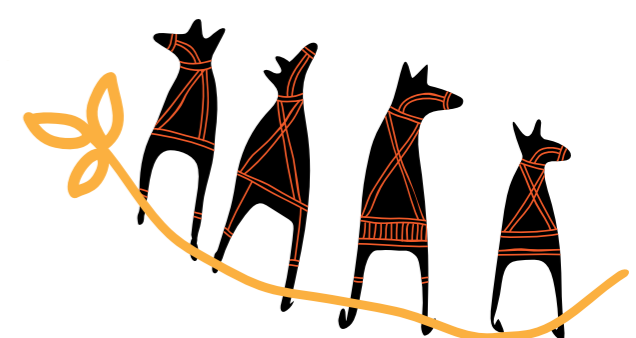
Disaster research has ballooned in Australia in recent years. While this is critical for growing the knowledge base, communities are fatigued by the demands of extractive engagements that don't give back. But if there is clear benefit to the community in terms of process, data, findings and outcomes, they welcome and value the opportunity to collaborate through research.

### UNIVERSITIES CAN BE REIMAGINED TO SERVE COMMUNITY

Traditional academic practice is not designed to directly serve community through education and research. But there is appetite and emerging experience in how universities can be reimagined as a service and capacity for community to draw on. Decolonising academic practice by emphasising relationships and reciprocity is a critical strategy for this.

### COMMUNITIES WANT TO BE PART OF SHIFTING PRACTICE

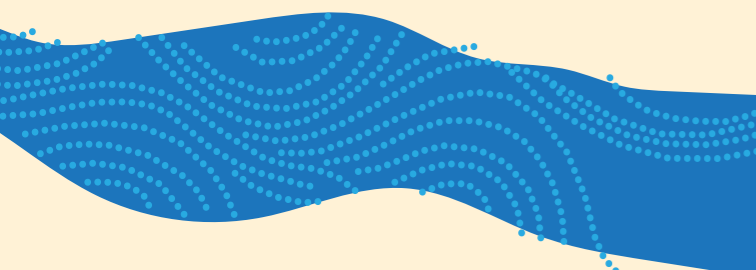
Communities are acutely aware of the climatic, environmental and socio-economic development challenges they face, and they want to be part of driving the systemic shifts needed to address them. They have relevant lived experience and expertise they want to share with governments and others. They want power and agency in innovating new solutions and taking action to drive change.



Principle in Focus:

Be holistic and impactful

At Fire to Flourish, our goal is to contribute collaboratively, and with evidence, to improve people’s lives and influence systems change. In 2023, we cultivated partnerships with values-aligned organisations advanced our research program in collaboration with our network of advisors, partners, local agencies and community members. This consortium approach is allowing us to fill gaps, scale our initiatives, and ultimately have a greater impact in our partner communities.



2.3 PARTNERSHIPS THAT STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE

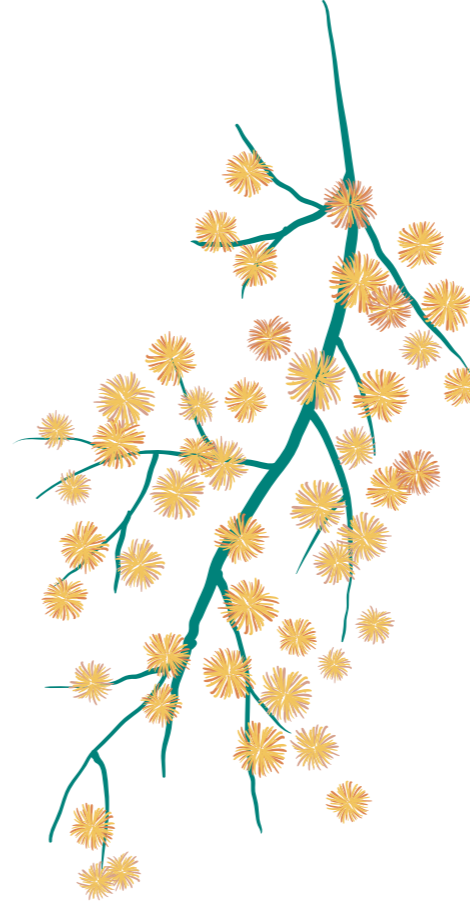
Partnerships are key to driving and supporting the local and national impact of Fire to Flourish.

We recognise that many resilience-building initiatives are already happening in communities. Partnering and collaborating ensures we are filling gaps and bolstering communities, rather than duplicating or replacing existing efforts.

Throughout 2023, we have focused on strengthening existing connections and forming new ones. The program is entering 2024 with a strong network of trusted advisors, delivery partners and local agency support. These partnerships are creating a tailored ecosystem for each partner community that complements their unique dynamics and amplifies their strengths.

We’ve actively cultivated partnerships with a deep-rooted understanding that true progress lies in collaborative efforts rather than operating in silos. These collaborations are yielding impactful results.

For example, our partnerships with Thirriwirri and Australian Business Volunteers have already proven to be instrumental in providing our partner communities with access to skills development, professional guidance, and support in grant applications and project implementation.

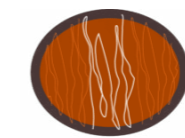


Our partnerships with the Northern Rivers Community Foundation, East Gippsland Community Foundation and Australian Communities Foundation have provided valuable insights into the potential for community foundations as a means to facilitate participatory granting on a larger scale across Australia.

By fostering these and other partnerships, we’re not just establishing connections but building bridges that enable communities to thrive and address their needs effectively within their unique local contexts.



Image Credit: Pamela Denise



## 2.4 FROM RESILIENCE PLANNING TO GRANTING

Each community is different and should have the agency and power to plan and design their own resilience using approaches that work for them. This year saw the extension of our resilience planning to granting workshop processes to ensure that our resilience strengthening activities are tailored to, and created by, communities.

Our resilience planning to granting process has been adapted from best-practice frameworks and is co-designed together by our action researchers and community staff. It draws on five domains of community disaster resilience to help the community map out their strengths, identify opportunities and develop project ideas that are built on a systemic understanding of their community and their vision for its thriving, resilient future.

Using these five domains, community discussions are designed to:

- help grow and support partnerships and networks within and beyond communities
- mobilise community strengths and relationships towards a future vision for resilience and transformative actions
- bring people together to develop shared trust and understanding of their collective needs and priorities, and to align their strategies
- grow partnerships and adaptive capabilities moving forward.

These insights can then inform community-led decision making about investment in projects through the program's grant funding.

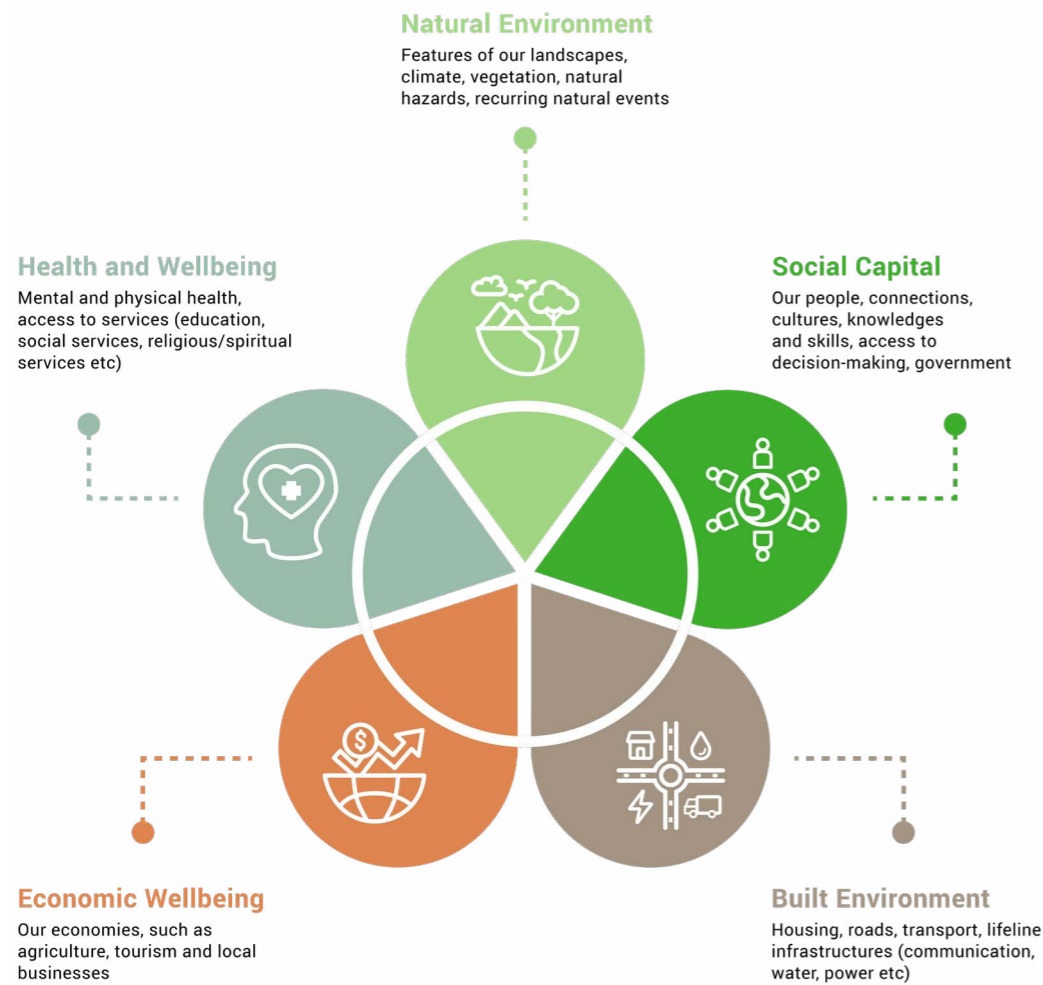
This year, we co-developed and facilitated reflection sessions in Eurobodalla, Clarence Valley and Tenterfield to identify lessons learned and opportunities for refining earlier iterations of the resilience planning to granting process.

We will continue adapting and improving the process in 2024. It is clear that well-facilitated community discussions guided by resilience thinking allows outcomes to be tailored to and by each community, and maximises benefits for community experiences, capabilities, networks and solutions.



*“We are travelling at the speed of trust. We are now travelling faster because that trust has developed.”*

Senior Program Manager - Community



Principle in Focus:

Foreground Aboriginal wisdom

Foregrounding Aboriginal wisdom is not an empty corporate value at Fire to Flourish. We recognise that community resilience has been expertly understood and implemented by Aboriginal people for tens of thousands of years, and so we are shaping our program to meaningfully incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and practices.

This means ensuring that Aboriginal people are leading across the program – as staff and community members – with a caring for Country, culture and community mindset.

2.5 ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP

Aboriginal peoples' wisdom, knowledge and resilience are invaluable strengths as we grapple with the impacts of climate change and disaster on community and Country.

Aboriginal leadership is embedded across Fire to Flourish's executive, operations, community, research, partner and advisory teams. We are proud to have developed strong relationships with, and deeply listening to, Aboriginal peoples, and working at the speed of trust.

Nine Aboriginal people occupy staff roles across Fire to Flourish. In 2023, we welcomed Sarah Smith (Narungga/Kaurna) to the executive team as our Director - Community. Our Indigenous Strategic Advisory Council members are Claire Beattie (Yorta Yorta) and Jessica Bulger (Wiradjuri). We have several Aboriginal leaders across the community teams, including Helen Duroux (Kamilaroi), Kizzy Nye (Walbunja), Matt Sing (Gomaroi) and Barb Rix (Walbunja). Roxanne Smith (Wiradjuri/Ngemba) is part of our backbone support team. Bhiemie Williamson (Euahlayi) spearheads our flagship National Indigenous Disaster Resilience program, providing Indigenous research leadership across the program. Thirriwirri, led by Jason Ardler (Yuin) and David Major (Yuin Maneroo), is an important strategic advisory program partner. The program is also supported institutionally by Monash University's Indigenous staff across various departments and by Pro-Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), Professor Tristan Kennedy.

Climate change disproportionately impacts Indigenous peoples and communities. We are recognising and learning from Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing, and celebrating and championing Aboriginal leadership and excellence in disaster resilience. As the original systems thinkers, the interconnectedness that Aboriginal practices embody is crucial to our program design – for example, weaving together resilience domains, people and networks across non-linear disaster cycles.

We are learning together how to implement our principle of foregrounding Aboriginal wisdom in practice, while recognising that it is not always easy to bring different knowledge systems together into a cohesive whole. Aboriginal community staff tell us they are feeling honoured and valued in their leadership roles, noting a renewed community spirit driven by our emphasis on inclusion and unity. This inclusivity drives local reconciliation, connection, optimism and learning.



FIRST NATIONS REPRESENTED, COVERING 52,941 KM² OF LAND



ABORIGINAL STAFF

“The appreciation of Aboriginal culture in [the program] is making a difference to the way people are treating us.”

Community Lead, Tenterfield



## 2.6 NATIONAL INDIGENOUS DISASTER RESILIENCE PROGRAM



By engaging with Indigenous peoples and communities across Australia who have had recent experiences of disaster, this fast-growing national program is championing Indigenous leadership in disaster resilience and embedding a caring for Country mindset across Australia's emergency and land management sectors.

Led by Euahlayi man Bhiemie Williamson, this program is creating lasting change and practical guidance to instil Indigenous knowledge within the structures, institutions and processes of emergency management and disaster resilience.

**So far, NIDR team have secured support for three discrete but interrelated projects:**

1. 'Foundations of Indigenous disaster resilience', in collaboration with Natural Hazards Research Australia
2. Review of the experiences of Far East Gippsland's Aboriginal communities in the 2019/20 bushfires
3. Enhancing relationships between Aboriginal communities and emergency services in South Australia, in collaboration with SAFECOM

This was a big year for NIDR. The team:

- secured in-principle partnership from peak Indigenous organisations, including Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, Lowitja Institute, National Native Title Council and the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance
- secured in-principle partnership from key disaster resilience organisations, including Red Cross Australia, the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR), Emergency Management Victoria, and the National Emergency Management Agency
- hosted a partner workshop in Naarm/Melbourne to introduce potential collaborators and co-develop the project's key outcomes, parameters, outputs and goals
- hosted Australia's first National Indigenous Disaster Resilience Summit in August, with sellout attendance by senior representatives from key organisations
- were invited to consult with the Productivity Commission on its review of how the Future Drought Fund can improve governance, engagement and inclusion of Indigenous people in its work
- were invited to present at the AFAC conference and the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference in Meanjin/Brisbane in August
- convened a session at the Higher Risk Weather Season National Preparedness Summit at Parliament House in September.



# PLACE-BASED ACTIVATIONS

## SECTION 3 PLACE-BASED ACTIVATIONS

3.1 Deepening our connections on Country	32
3.2 In their words: Fire to Flourish community teams	34
3.3 Placemaking	42
3.4 Resilience assessment	46



## 3.1 DEEPENING OUR CONNECTIONS ON COUNTRY

Coming together in person for reflection, learning, planning and self-care is a core element of the Fire to Flourish program. Our staff regularly travel to support community groups on Country, and our community teams met as a whole team with staff from other parts of the program twice this year.

### March: Naarm/Melbourne, Bunurong and Wurundjeri Country, VIC

This gathering was the program's first full-team on-Country gathering for the year. Over four days, community, executive, backbone and research teams met to prepare for a busy year of community-led action.

Held at Monash's Clayton campus, Collingwood Children's Farm and the Abbotsford Convent, this gathering kicked off with a Welcome to Country by Bunurong Elders. Highlights included a round of program team speed dating, cultural activities, and workshops on process design mapping, facilitation skills, strategic communications and granting.

Three years after the bushfires, community members who attended were deep in their long recovery journey. This gathering reiterated that vision, stamina, funding and scaffolding have been critical for community members doing the important work of connecting people, seeing possibilities and enabling collaborative action.



*“Getting together with community as equals.”*

Fire to Flourish participant, answering the question “What worked well?”

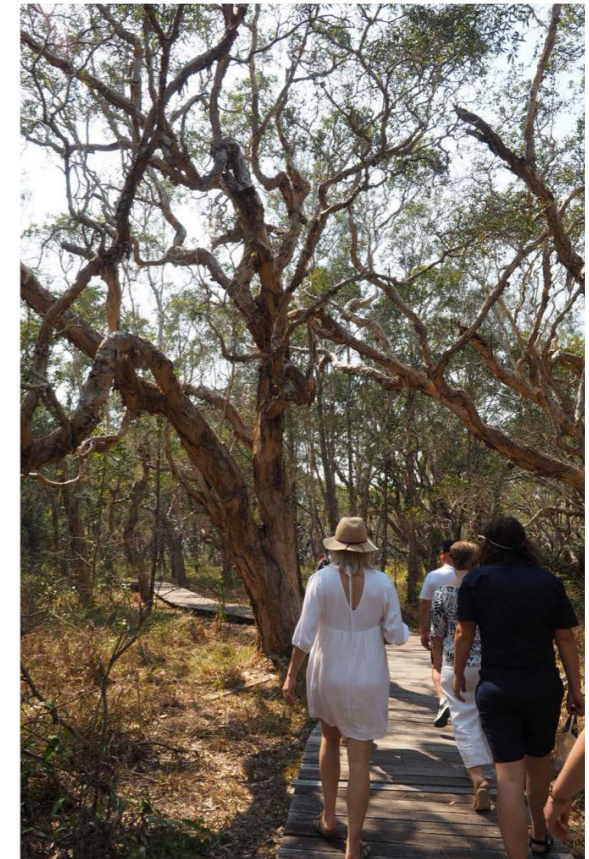


### October: Darlington Beach, Gumbaynggirr Country, NSW

This gathering brought together staff, program partners, advisors and members of our Strategic Advisory Council for a tour of the Clarence Valley region, to learn more about the initiatives and projects being planned and implemented by the Clarence Valley team.

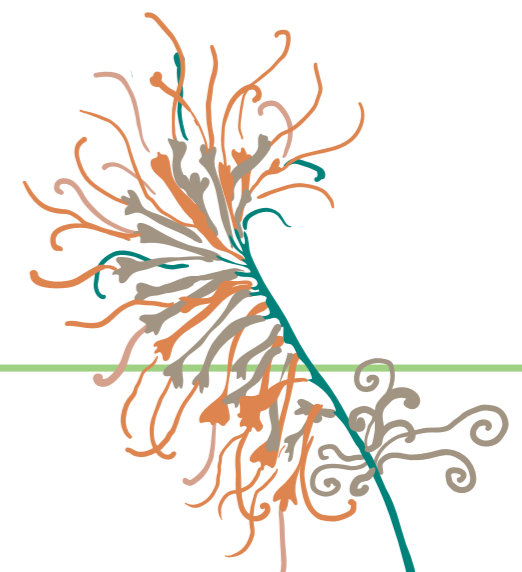
Activities included a Welcome to Country, an Aboriginal Gallery viewing, a bush tucker walk and clay making. With this second on-Country gathering, it was clear our community teams had grown in confidence and clarity about their vision for local implementation.

It was a great opportunity for the team to meet, connect and develop a deeper contextual understanding of the program and its impacts.



*“After working together for some time, having a chance to come together in person was really powerful and helped strengthen our relationships.”*

Fire to Flourish staff participant



## 3.2 IN THEIR WORDS: FIRE TO FLOURISH COMMUNITY TEAMS



# CLARENCE VALLEY

<b>\$322k distributed in grants</b>	<b>7 organisations received funding</b>
<b>73 stakeholder engagements</b>	<b>14 media engagements</b>
<b>16 community projects initiated</b>	<b>16 co-designers engaged</b>
<b>20 events hosted, 300+ people</b>	<b>9 professional development activities for 5 community staff</b>

Clarence Valley is a sprawling, beautiful area in the Northern Rivers of NSW, weaving through Gumbayngirr Country, surrounded by rainforest. The Fire to Flourish Clarence Valley team works with many communities in the area, including Nymboida, Blinks, Glenreagh/Orara Valley and Woombah.

This year, we gained great insights into local communities, places and spaces as we continued to branch out into new areas in the Clarence Valley, with extensive engagement at events and workshops to understand what our strengths are and what we need in order to flourish.

We have learned new skills and understanding in training sessions with Aboriginal Elders, mental health and wellbeing practitioners and media industry professionals. We have witnessed the power of conversation and deep listening in creative hands-on experiences in our co-design and placemaking activities, and learned through the practice of collaboration, deep diving into local places and using design studio processes (alongside the Monash University’s Faculty of Art Design and Architecture Masters students) with four local communities.

We have looked back on our experiences of floods and bushfires and created future visions of thinking about community resilience, both in day-to-day life and when disasters come.

A highlight was seeing genuine collaboration leading to innovative and creative outcomes, such as projects that build hope in the community or lead to regeneration, when community members have connected through our co-design process and developed project ideas together.

We have learned that big systems change can come from small things. Co-design Group Two funded Hernani residents to organise their own Festival of Small Halls event in August this year. From a magical night of music and delicious local cooking around fires, we saw the forming of a group of young families who now gather regularly for music nights. Opening up different uses of shared spaces is really exciting, and seeing networks built as a result of arts experiences and connections is a highlight for us.

We’ve had some team changes. Our former Community Lead Roxanne Smith took a role as the program’s Senior Program Manager – Community and is now supporting all four Fire to Flourish community teams. Cara MacLeod and Pamela Denise are now collaborating with an inspiring array of community members who are leading their own projects, developing placemaking and co-design project proposals with their communities, and collaborating with Fire to Flourish research teams at Monash University to improve the program’s design, delivery and impact.

We see our role as enabling people to lead change for building more resilient communities – we encourage anyone to get in touch. Our process is to connect with people in the community and to gather evidence to support them, so keep an eye out for co-design, placemaking and youth initiatives coming soon.

For 2024, we are hopeful that the visions our communities are building will be shared and grow momentum for greater systems change – that community strengths, Indigenous wisdom and the natural world are recognised and prioritised to address the pressing issues of our times.

### Clarence Valley team



**Image credits:** Fire to Flourish Clarence Valley team



# TENTERFIELD

\$250k distributed in grants	6 organisations received funding
9 events hosted, 1 event attended	2 professional development activities
10 community projects initiated	11 co-designers engaged
10 media engagements	50+ stakeholder engagements



Image credits: Fire to Flourish Tenterfield team

This year, the Fire to Flourish Tenterfield team focused on community support, co-designed resilience planning and granting, and rapid response funding after further bushfires.

Led by Kamilaroi Elder Aunty Helen Duroux and two Community Facilitators, Anthea Williams and Gomaroi man Matt Sing, the Fire to Flourish team primarily operates in Tenterfield, engaging nearby communities like Tabulam and Jubullum through support, community reconciliation and community grants. This year, a team of 11 co-designers organised regular meetings and workshops, emphasising community involvement. Indigenous representation within the co-design team, along with various local service providers, strengthened resilience efforts by aligning with local organisations’ disaster response priorities. People in town are reporting that the support they receive from Fire to Flourish is among the most meaningful.

Significant community input was included in our hosted activities, such as network mapping, vision statements, storytelling and resilience domain mapping. Events such as a group workshop and cultural day in June, with weaving workshops and bush foraging, furthered our community engagement.

Our team’s strong support during the late 2023 fires stemmed from our earlier groundwork, building on previous learning and networks. We convened urgent interagency meetings, aided by Fire to Flourish co-designers, facilitated collaboration among service providers and helped to avoid duplication of response efforts during these fires. Our innovative rapid response funding – facilitated by our partnership with the Northern Rivers Community Foundation – ensured that everyone in the community was financially supported to respond to the fires in ways that mattered most to them, such as boundary fencing that is essential for the area’s cattle-dependent economy, or income support so that people were free to clean up and help their neighbours. This hyper-local insight is essential when providing response funding so that communities’ needs are heard and respected.

Our Fire to Flourish team gave community the support they truly needed. We were better prepared to act more quickly than other organisations – our innovative rapid disaster response grant had already closed before other funding options had opened. It was a really positive action in a difficult time, and it reflects the strength of the Fire to Flourish network and program.

Our 2024 plans include ‘Tip Days’ in January, where Fire to Flourish staff and local services will be at the tip to help unload trailers while providing much-needed mental health support from Hunter New England Health counsellors and morning tea from the local Country Women’s Association. This is an example of genuine community resilience: building on what was developed before the fires, activating our networks and community governance structures to bring everyone together at a central community space to provide extra support recovering from the fires. Other plans include gifting, placemaking, Indigenous forums and further grant rounds. We are also collaborating with the local council to establish an independent Community Resilience Foundation to manage a community fund for Tenterfield and neighbouring areas, leveraging the existing co-designer group and service provider network.

**Tenterfield team**

# EUROBODALLA

\$480k distributed in grants	1 media engagement
10 events attended, 6100+ people	8 co-designers engaged
22 community projects initiated	50 stakeholder engagements
2 events hosted, 4500+ people	5 professional development activities for 9 community staff
22 recipients received funding	

The Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla team lives, works on and loves the beautiful Yuin Country on the South Coast of NSW. We pay our respects to the Walbunja, Brinja-Yuin and Djiringanj custodians of this land.

This year has been a testament to our resilience and collaboration, marked by profound gratitude and achievements. Through bushfires, floods and heatwaves, we have worked hard and had many successes. Our commitment to Indigenous knowledge was bolstered by the support of the Fire to Flourish program working with us to enhance our pursuit of a brighter future.

Our engagement at various community events, such as the 2000-attended Mogodha NAIDOC Big Day Out in July, showcased the richness of local culture. The Elders Tent was a particular highlight, fostering a sense of reverence and community amongst our Elders and the younger generation through traditional food, Elders' cake and collaborative art installations. Cultural workshops, featuring elements like possum skin cloaks and traditional fire practices, attracted enthusiastic participation.

Our attendance at the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference and National Indigenous Disaster Resilience Summit in August gave us opportunities to address the unique and specific ways that our Indigenous communities are affected by disasters. The success of initiatives like the art exhibition with River of Arts Eurobodalla in September highlighted the community's creativity and engagement. It's been a privilege to witness our projects making meaningful impacts and gaining recognition, such as the invitation to present at the Mogo Business Chamber dinner during Australian Business Week.

The team's commitment extended beyond community events. We engaged in Mental Health First Aid Training and cultural awareness sessions that equipped us to support the community during crises and honour local traditions respectfully. Community Connectors are now out in the community conducting baseline disaster resilience surveys.



**Image credits:** Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla team

The fruition of our first co-design granting projects marks a significant milestone. One of our funded projects, the Yiridbu Minga - Right Fire Education Program, brought cultural education to schools, with students demonstrating a genuine interest and desire to learn about local traditional practices and stories of Country. In September, we launched our second round of funding with an open-call grant round that is providing opportunities for community groups, networks and collectives to strengthen community resilience. The anticipation around this grant round reflects the community's engagement and commitment to fostering change.

Throughout these endeavours, we're grateful for the team's unwavering commitment and the genuine support from our community and partners. These moments of collaboration and growth reflect the spirit of unity and progress we strive for in our work.

**Eurobodalla team**



# EAST GIPPSLAND

\$200k distributed in grants	24 organisations engaged
8 community projects initiated	3 events hosted, 130+ people
8 organisations received funding	5 media engagements
10 events attended	2 community connectors engaged



Image credits: Fire to Flourish East Gippsland team

East Gippsland is a vast and diverse diaspora of small communities between the NSW border and the Victorian south-east coast. The area is home to a small community of Aboriginal peoples and Traditional Custodians living on Bidawel, Yuin, Gunaikurnai and Monero (Ngarigo) land.

The Fire to Flourish East Gippsland team is led by Community Co-Leads Sara Matthews and Scott Campbell-Smith. We are currently working with ten communities across East Gippsland: Bemm River, Cabbage Tree Creek, Club Terrace, Combiobar, Buldah, Noorinbee, Cann River, Tamboon, Gipsy Point and Genoa. No two communities across East Gippsland are the same; every community has different needs, availability, levels of energy and degrees of devastation from previous disasters. We want to allow each community to shape the program in their own way, especially the tiny communities who often miss out on funding opportunities. Fire to Flourish allows this kind of flexibility and support.

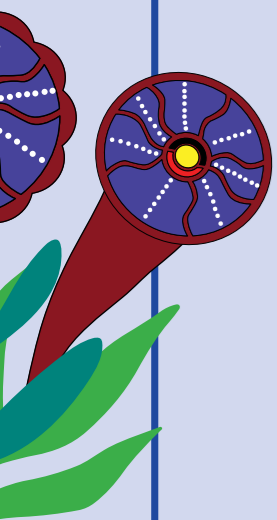
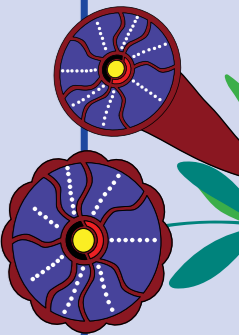
This year has been one of listening, learning and adapting to the diverse needs of communities as we rolled out the program. We launched early in the year, prioritising collaboration with existing community structures, such as local community groups and Hall and Recovery Committees. In early 2023, we held a Roadshow in Bemm River, Cann River and Genoa, which saw community come out to engage with the program and explore their experiences of resilience. Since then, we've had many meetings with organisations to ensure community ownership of the program. Our communities are already doing a great job of recovering and building resilience since the 2019/20 bushfires, so we have learned to work better with what's already established.

A highlight was the 'big aerial map' exercises we did with Genoa, the Cann Valley area and Bemm River/Cabbage Tree, facilitated by Disaster Relief Australia, which really helped shape residents' perspectives about their neighbours and surroundings.

From June to October, we focused our strategy on providing grants to the community quickly and appropriately, and worked closely with groups to implement our first community grant round. Our 'tell us what you need' approach brought lots of people forward with ideas. We've received 17 different community resilience grant applications, showcasing a broad spectrum of ideas – from large-scale and Indigenous art projects to cultural learning spaces, backup generators, emergency equipment sheds and sprinkler systems for public buildings. These ideas reflect the communities' priorities and a sense of urgency to prepare for the 2023/24 bushfire season. We're now working hard to process and roll out those grants.

We are excited for 2024, which will see lots of community planning; tailoring a resilience planning to participatory granting process; conducting a post-event review of Indigenous communities' experiences of the 2019/20 bushfires; completing resilience baseline surveys; and implementing our Staying on Country project with Aunty Aileen Blackburn-Mongta, the Cann River Indigenous community, Moogji Aboriginal Council and the National Indigenous Disaster Resilience project to ensure culturally safe evacuations and sustainable, resilient housing.

## East Gippsland team



**Principle in Focus:**

**Be strengths-based and trauma-informed**

Our participatory activities in community, like placemaking, invite people to collectively reimagine life in their community, bringing culture and lived experience to the table. Through these innovative processes, we are recognising and building on the existing strengths of each community, rather than telling them what their disaster resilience should look like. It also means recognising where there may be trauma, and ensuring activities are welcoming, safe and respectful for everyone.



**3.3 PLACEMAKING**

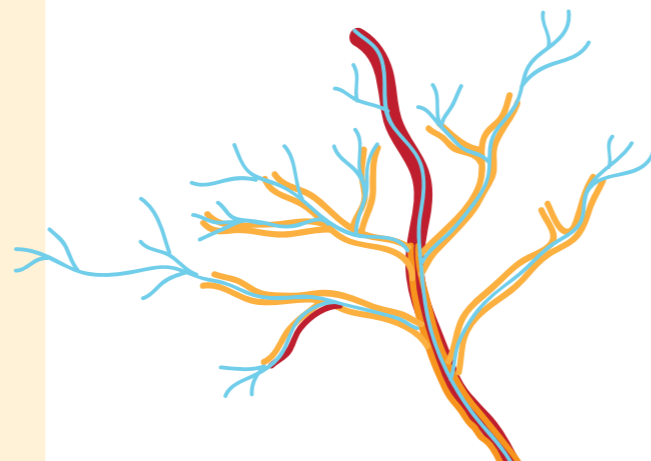
**What is placemaking?**

Placemaking is a collaborative co-design method to improve the environments of local spaces and places. We are tailoring this innovative practice to help shift traditional methods used in planning and architectural design, supporting communities to come together around a vision for disaster resilience.

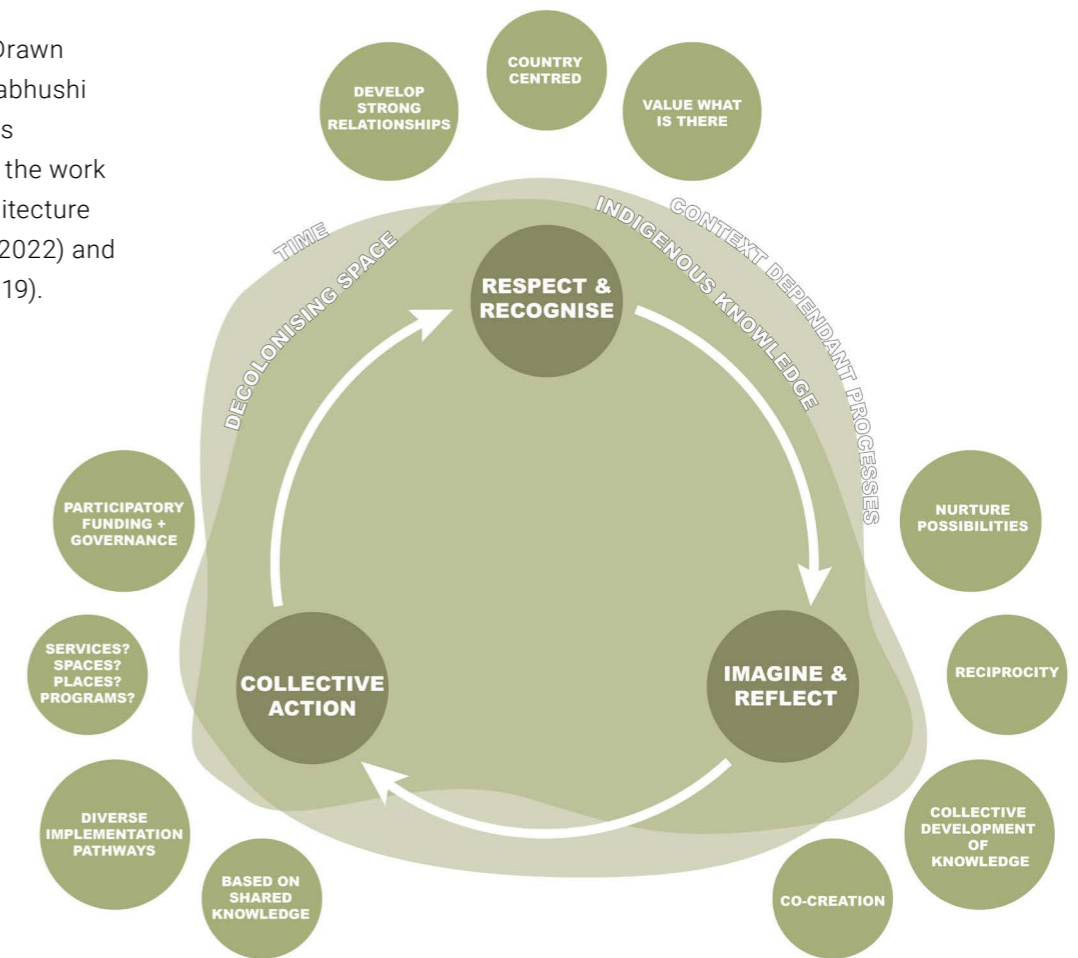
Our placemaking team convenes people (through activities like workshops and walking tours) to collectively reimagine and reinvent their local public areas based on their community priorities. Our approach also explores the relationship between people and Country – exploring the history, the stories and acknowledging Indigenous connections to these places.

These activities strengthen the connections between people and the places they share, and grow community networks, capabilities and long-term disaster resilience.

By facilitating placemaking as action or practice-based research, we are working with communities to co-develop tools and an implementation model that can support replication and scaling of the approach to other communities.



**Image credit:** Drawn by Nikhila Madabhushi and Robert Lees acknowledging the work of muf art/architecture (2009), TACSI (2022) and Yunkaporta (2019).



**Placemaking in Clarence Valley**

This year, our placemaking approach was trialled with communities in four locations in the Clarence Valley: Blicks, Orara Valley, Woombah and Nymboida.

We partnered with Monash University’s Faculty of Art Design and Architecture to create a dedicated placemaking unit for twenty urban planning and architecture students undertaking their Masters degree. This meant communities gained access to professional architecture and design services, while providing Master of Architecture and Master of Urban Planning and Design students with deep experience and insight into a participatory design process in a real-world setting.

Working closely with our community staff, the placemaking team facilitated a Clarence Valley ‘show and tell’ of ideas to change local spaces, and a scoping tour to deepen their understanding and connections with people and place. These informed participatory placemaking workshops with community members in each location to develop localised visions and project ideas. For example, Woombah envisioned a mobile shelter that provides an outdoor community gathering space that can be relocated when exposed to fire or flood risk.

Architecture students translated these visions and ideas into concept designs that were iterated with community to ensure their aspirations and objectives were reflected. Planning students developed supporting documentation to help these projects be implemented. For example, they created strategic planning frameworks, pitches for Council support and funding proposals.



Watch this video about placemaking



The visions, project ideas, concept designs and strategic planning frameworks were presented back to each community in public exhibitions, in late 2023. People were invited to provide feedback and vote on which projects they would like to see come to fruition. Each community will receive \$200,000 in seed funding to progress their chosen projects through to implementation in 2024.

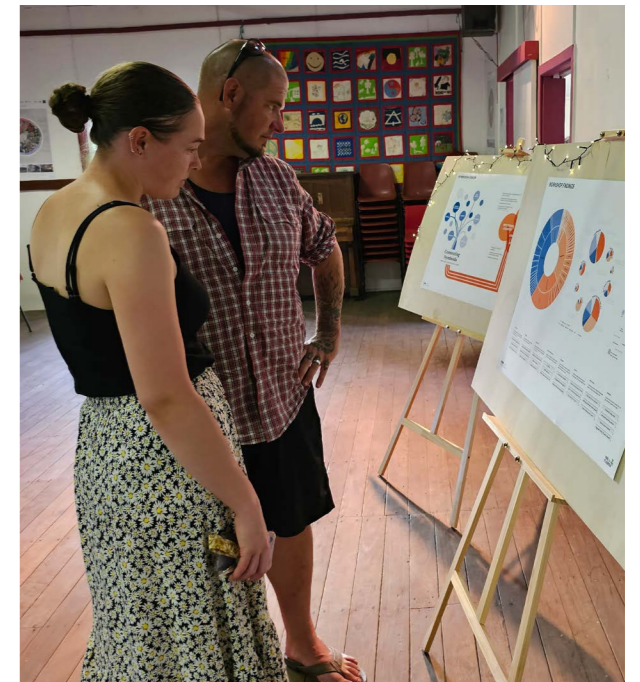


Image credits: Fire to Flourish Placemaking team

We have compiled each community's vision, priority placemaking projects and supporting documentation, as well as toolkits and other visual aids co-developed by the placemaking team and their students in partnership with the community. This will help extend and facilitate placemaking in other communities next year and beyond.



*"It was amazing to see the amount of people that not only turned up, but turned up and participated. And people actually felt like contributing and talking about their town or their region."*

Community team member



Image credits: Fire to Flourish Placemaking team

*"This experience has re-confirmed for me why I would choose to do architecture and these sorts of studios... I think architecture should be a more people-oriented industry. Obviously, the built environment has a rich interface with people, inherently, and just being able to spend the week there and have candid conversations about things that were not necessarily all about the built environment, helped contextualise a lot."*

Architecture student



### 3.4 RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT



In an Australia-first innovation, we adapted a global tool for measuring a community's disaster resilience in a way that informs priorities and actions they can take at the local scale.

Working with the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance, we adapted the multi-hazard Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities (CRMC) tool. The CRMC represents a new method of assessing community resilience in ways that have local meaning, and can generate data and insights that inform community-led action.



Our adaptation of the CRMC for bushfire is the first time that community bushfire resilience has been measured using a holistic, community-tailored, systems-based tool.

The tool delivers an analysis of each community's strengths and gaps, without prescribing any specific actions. Rather than assessing resilience at a Local Government Area-level, the CRMC assesses resilience using data from the community, collected and used by that specific community – an approach that is bespoke and tailorable to community needs. It takes into account the multiple dimensions of resilience, including:

- an assessment of 52 sources of resilience
- being based on the community's assets and complementary resources that sustain and improve community wellbeing
- serving as a proxy before a disaster to measure how a community might fare.

*“Some community members were passionate about the questions and wanted to talk.”*

Community members are central to the data collection, sensemaking and analysis for the CRMC – including conducting surveys, speaking to community members and using the dedicated Zurich CRMC app to ensure data is up-to-date and fine-grained. This leads to an empowering and insightful process that strengthens capabilities for action.

So far, we have worked with Eurobodalla and Clarence Valley community members as co-researchers, building their data collection and analytical skills. This ensures that community perspectives and voices are reflected in the assessment of their own resilience.

CRMC results can be used by a community to evidence their resilience strengths and gaps, prioritise programs of work, measure the resilience impacts of those programs more accurately, and support business cases for leveraging further investments into people and processes.



### CLIMATE RESILIENCE MEASUREMENT FOR COMMUNITIES

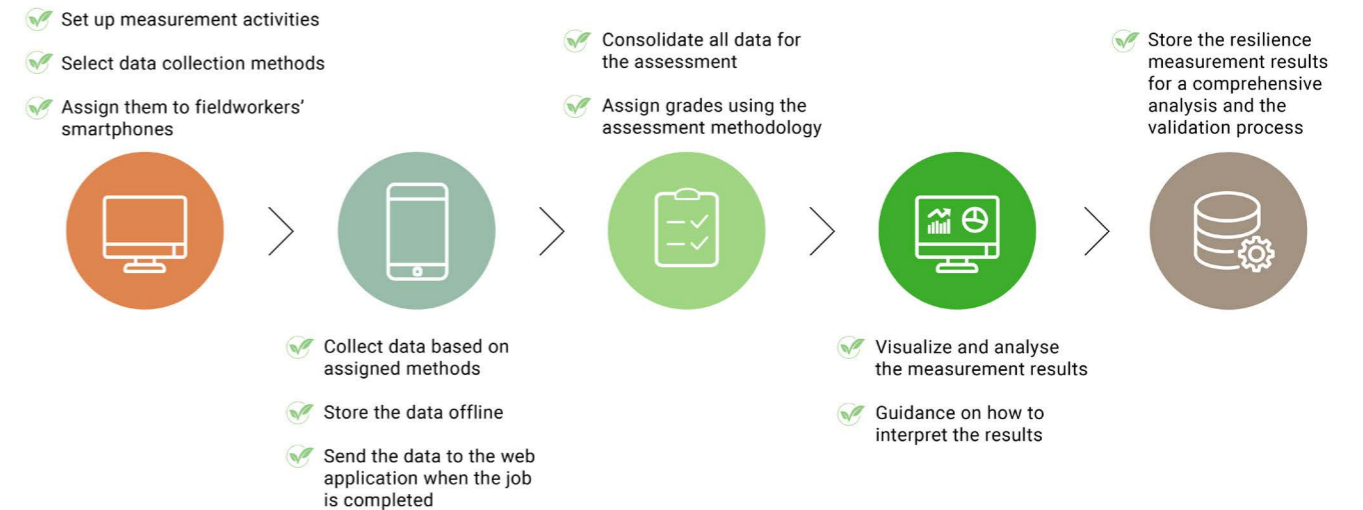


Image Credit: Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (2023), The Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities, [floodresilience.net](https://floodresilience.net)



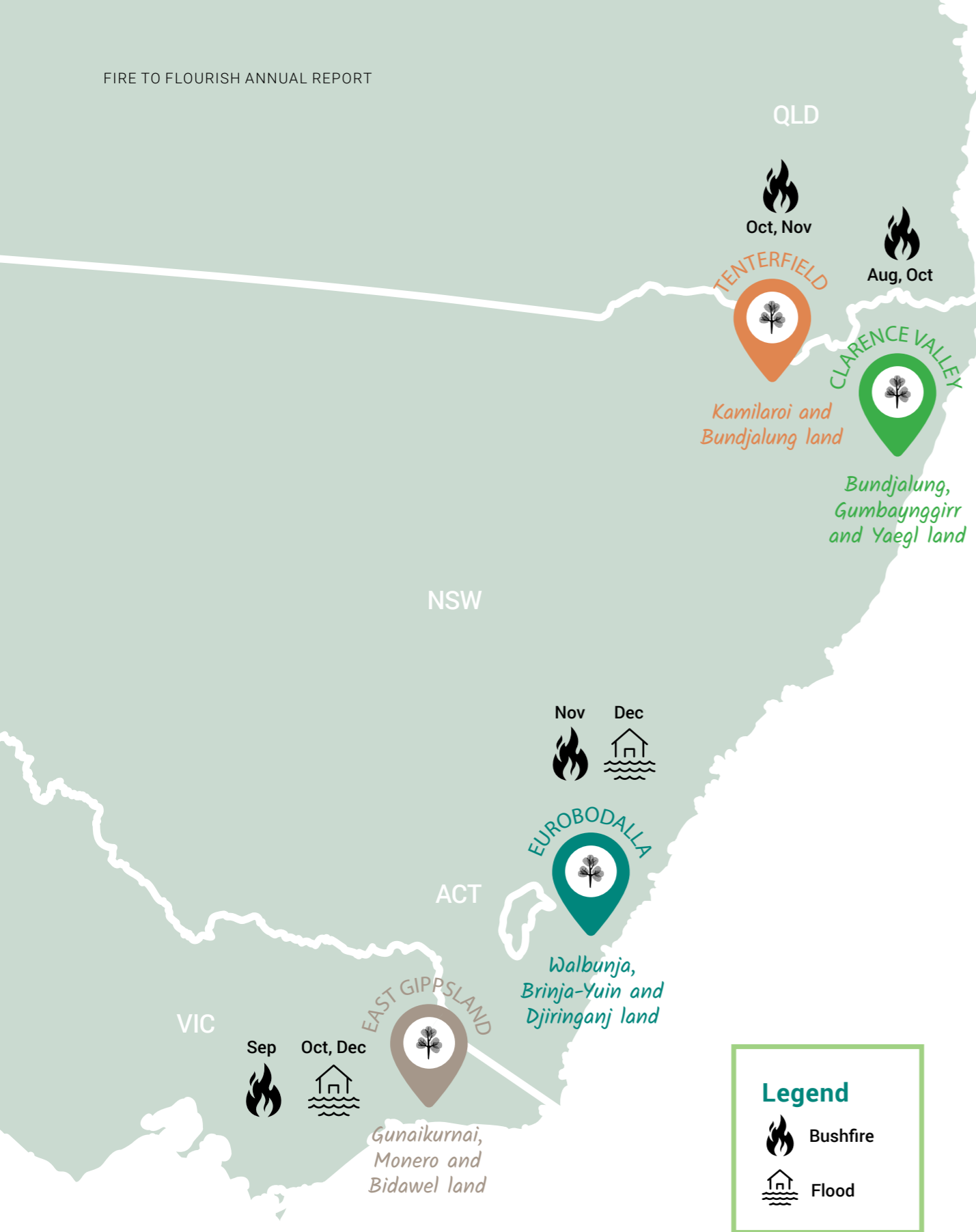
# IMPROVING ACCESS *to* FUNDING

Image Credit: Mihya Rose

## SECTION 4 IMPROVING ACCESS *to* FUNDING

4.1 Cascading disasters	50
4.2 Participatory granting	52
4.3 Reimagined disaster response granting	60





## 4.1 CASCADING DISASTERS

As the effects of climate change worsen, Australia is experiencing multiple and cascading disasters.

East Gippsland, Eurobodalla, Clarence Valley and Tenterfield have all experienced cascading disasters since the 2019-20 bushfires.

Each time a crisis unfolds and peoples' lives are disrupted, the task of recovery is made more difficult. Communities have little time to recover from one disaster before being struck by another, perpetuating a cycle of hardship. Beyond the physical challenges of recovery, there's a significant toll on peoples' emotional and psychological wellbeing

Following a disaster, traditional funding opportunities are often slow to materialise, come with rigid restrictions, and have criteria that often do not align with community-led priorities.

Fire to Flourish is exploring alternative models, aiming to reimagine disaster resilience funding. We're both trialling innovative models for decision-making on funding allocation, and exploring how to address current gaps in access to rapid funding immediately following a disaster.

In the context of ongoing and compounding disasters, a shift to community-led participatory grant funding approaches will empower and enable communities to take agency over their disaster risk reduction, preparedness and recovery actions, and disrupt the cycles of disadvantage that are typically exacerbated with disaster.



**Principle in Focus:**

**Be community-led**

Being community-led means self-determination - ensuring that local people shape the Fire to Flourish program and that their voices are foregrounded in its design and delivery.

Communities are central in all our local activities, influencing research priorities, guiding our granting rounds and contributing to the evaluation of our impact.

Our participatory granting trials have meant the program has been able to fund projects identified as real priorities by the community, many of which may have been deemed ineligible or overlooked in traditional funding rounds.

**4.2 PARTICIPATORY GRANTING**


Traditional grant processes typically have funder-developed, specific eligibility criteria that do not fully address community priorities or needs, or allow quick access to much-needed funds. At Fire to Flourish, we're taking a different, innovative approach.


Our program utilises **participatory granting** - an approach that seeks to shift power to communities, so that the people affected by decisions are the ones making the decisions.

Using a range of facilitated processes, the program team supports our four partner communities to identify priorities for action, co-design projects for funding and make decisions about which projects to fund. This means that each community determines its own priorities for grant funding and has a hand in deciding how and where funds will be distributed.

In our participatory granting model, participatory processes can be embedded at any or all stages of the grant lifecycle.

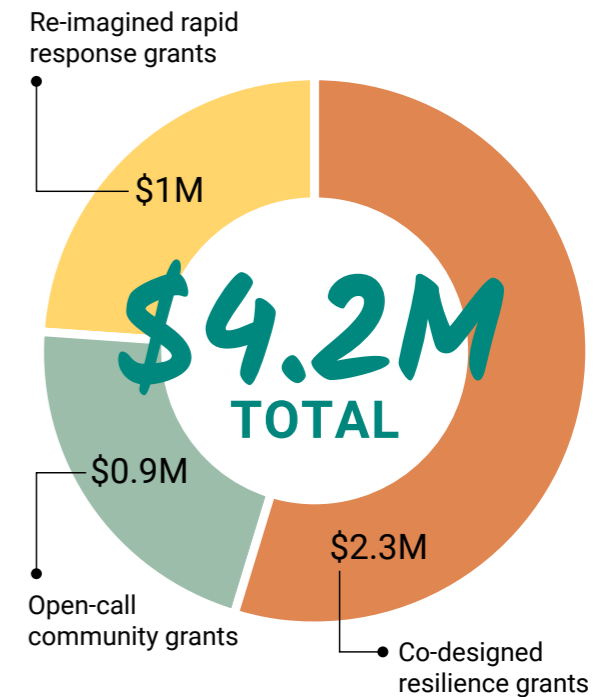
**To date, the program has trialed two types of these participatory processes:**

 **Co-designed resilience planning to granting** processes, where a group of diverse community representatives come together in a supported process to map out their strengths, identify opportunities, develop project ideas and allocate grant funding.

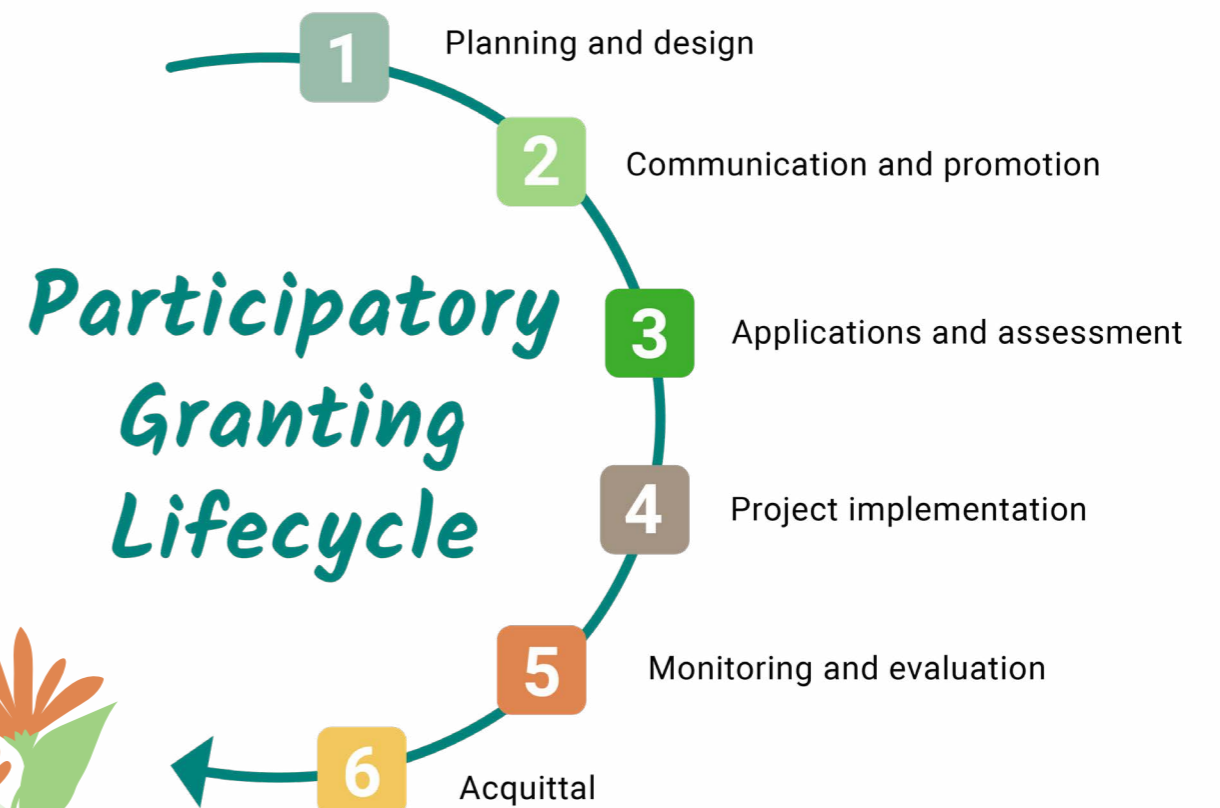
 **Broad-reaching open call community grant rounds**, where community groups are encouraged to apply for funding, considered by an assessment panel. The criteria and decision-making framework can incorporate different participatory elements.

Traditional grantmakers lean on rigid eligibility criteria and strict acquittal processes, on the assumption they are the most effective way to control funding allocation and avoid fraud. Our participatory grant trials refute this with the hypothesis that accountability to one's own community is a more effective risk mitigation strategy – and it's working. The evidence and insights we are gathering will be instrumental in influencing much-needed system changes in how funding is allocated to communities before, during and after a disaster.

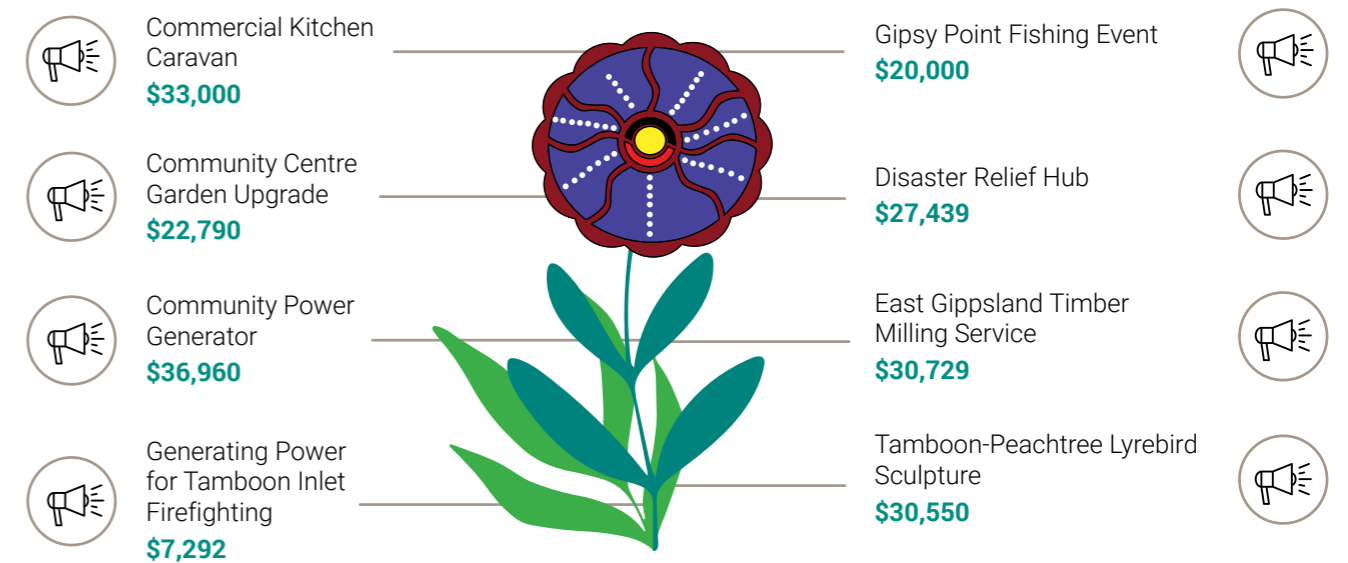
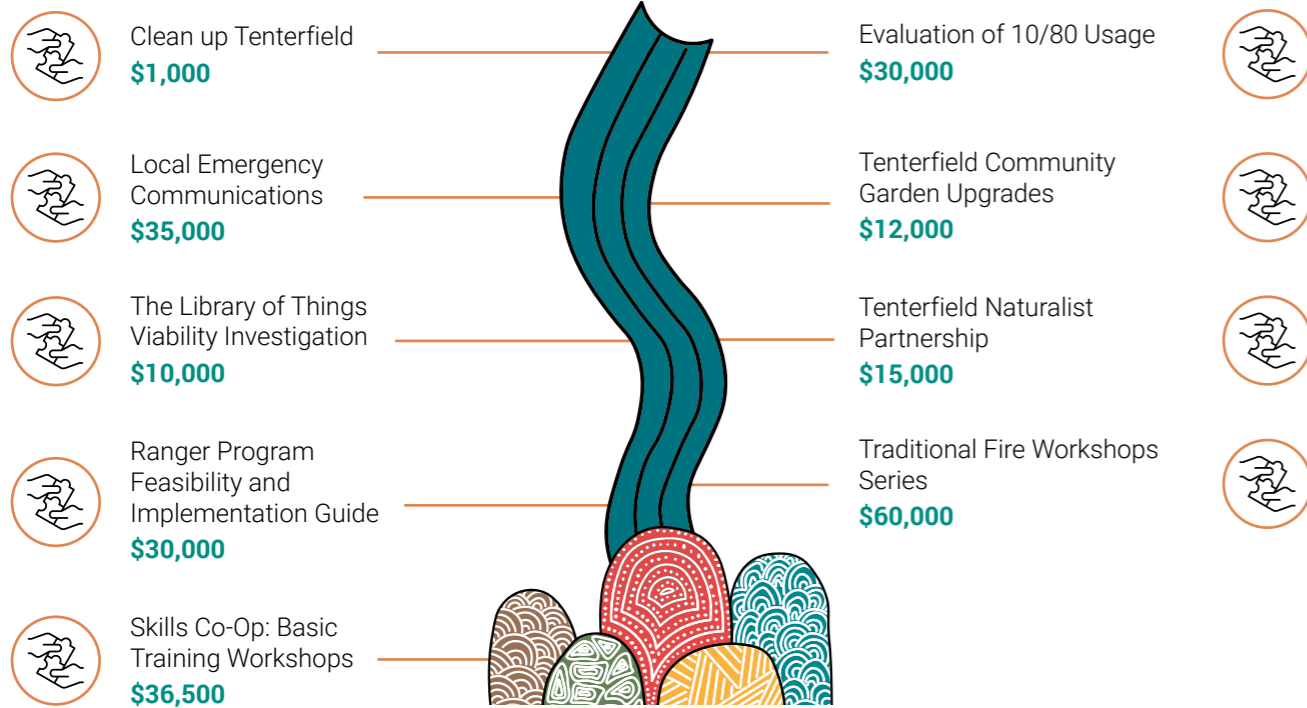
To date, a total of \$4.2 million in grant funding has been disbursed to community foundation partners for twelve distinct granting rounds, either completed or underway. A total of 49 community-led resilience projects have been approved to receive funding, with projects in various stages of implementation.



Graphic Credit: Ivy Hajduk



## 2023 PARTICIPATORY GRANT-FUNDED PROJECTS





PROJECT HIGHLIGHT IN THEIR WORDS

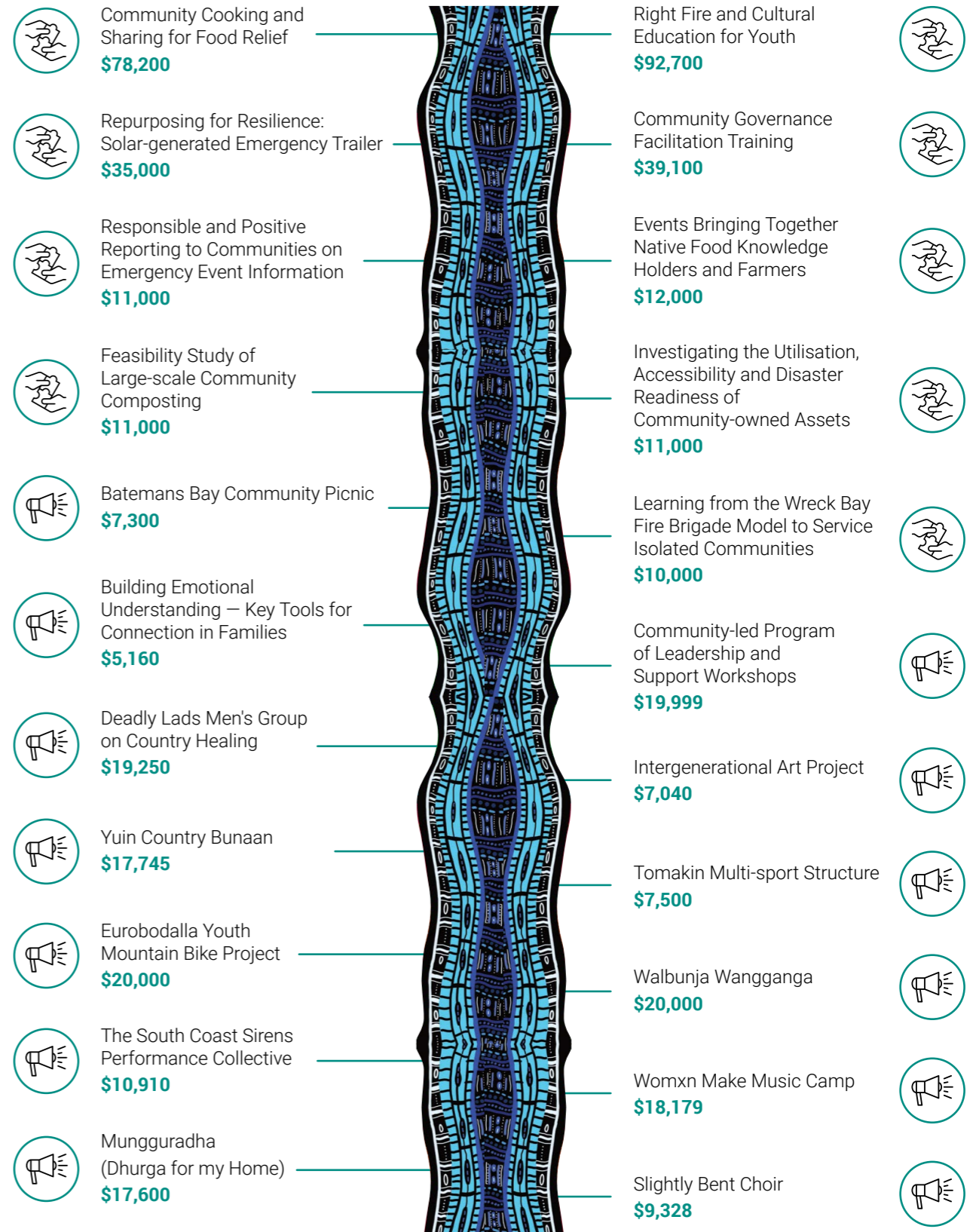
# Right Fire and Cultural Education for Youth

**FUNDING ALLOCATION**  
**\$92,700**

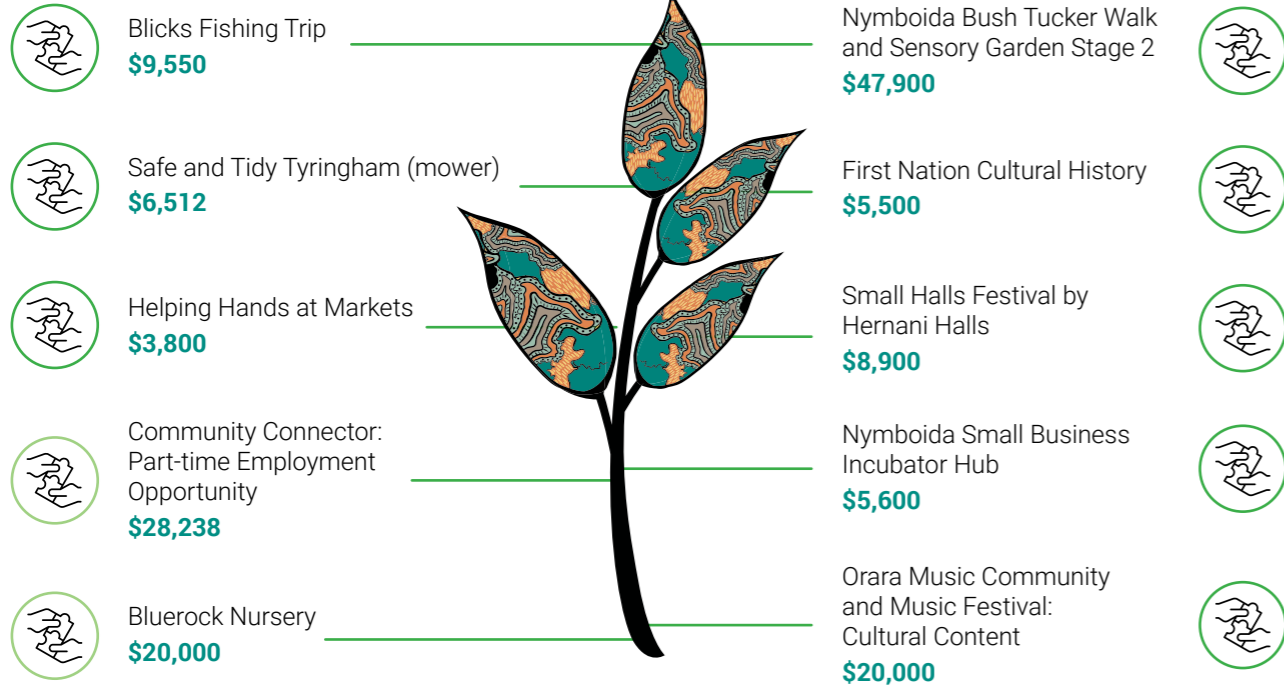
This project brought cultural education to schools, with students demonstrating a genuine interest and desire to learn about local traditional practices and stories of Country. This program was facilitated by Muladha Gamara, in partnership with Walbunja Rangers and Minga Cultural Services, and included three in-school learning sessions and three on-Country sessions for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. With delivery across three primary schools and two high schools in the Eurobodalla, Yiridbu Minga showcased traditional knowledge and connection to culture, Country and identity.

Students were given the opportunity to taste traditional bush foods, learn how to use a boomerang, create a dugan, participate in traditional painting practices, as well as traditional song and dance, and learn Dhurga language. The finale was a Family Day at Mogo Oval, bringing all the students together in celebration of their journey where they were presented with program gifts including the Dhurga Language Dictionary.

– Community Project Lead, Eurobodalla



CLARENCE VALLEY  
**FIRE to FLOURISH**  
 Strength through community-led action



Find out more about Fire to Flourish community projects

Image Credit: Minya Rose

**PROJECT HIGHLIGHT IN THEIR WORDS**

## Small Halls Festival by Hernani Halls

**FUNDING ALLOCATION**  
**\$8,900**

I was amazed how many people turned up for the Small Halls Festival in August. It was our first big event with more than 100 people from Dorrigo and Ebor, and even Cooté's Crossing and Bellingen. Community reconnected with people they hadn't seen in a long time and also made new connections.

Fire to Flourish's grant meant we were able to buy new equipment for Hernani Hall, as well as having enough money to run the Small Halls event. The event really helped our cash flow, too. When we started two years ago, Hernani Hall couldn't afford to keep the electricity on. Now, we can afford to keep running events for community, with a hall that is a lot more usable. Even just having hot

water is amazing. The event was really a catalyst - one big, well-organised event that helped us put on more events and also hire out the hall to community members and groups that want to use it. It boosted us and we learned a lot. We also now have a function space available if there was to be another fire. As a little community, we were very reliant on other surrounding communities to host firefighters. Now we have a space to provide them downtime, that has a working kitchen and can house people.

– Community Project Lead, Clarence Valley

## 4.3 REIMAGINED DISASTER RESPONSE GRANTING

Disasters create immediate need in the community. We must find ways to rapidly respond with funding to meet the pressing needs of community.

Nymboida (Clarence Valley) and Tenterfield unfortunately faced further bushfire devastation in the last months of 2023. Local staff felt their communities were better prepared for the fires following their involvement with Fire to Flourish in the last year.

Based on previously formed networks and strong partnerships with existing community governance structures, Fire to Flourish and the Northern Rivers Community Foundation worked quickly to support both communities to trial a new round of funding and immediate response options.



Having an existing institutional granting relationship with NRCF made a huge difference for these communities when the fires came – we had money available, ready to be spent on what was needed immediately. These funding opportunities were co-designed to facilitate rapid access to funding before disaster zones were declared, which, in some events, doesn't occur until weeks afterwards, if at all.

We listened to what the community were asking for and our hyperlocal networks in community meant we were well-placed to apply this new funding model. These trials address a critical systems gap in community being able to access small, flexible financial and logistical support during and immediately after a disaster.

They also place the onus on the granting provider to manage the grant residents experiencing trauma having to take on this burden at such a difficult time.

### Through these rapid response grants, we were able to:

- deliver 440,000 litres of drinking water to Nymboida, NSW, residents who had no other way of accessing fresh water for their homes or families, or to fight fires with
- provide temporary fencing to residents in Tenterfield, NSW, whose priority was to contain the cattle on their properties, for safety and to ensure no loss of income from lost cattle
- distribute \$280k to 90 individuals with immediate bushfire recovery needs.

*“There was money in people’s bank accounts in the first week after the fires.”*

Community Facilitator, Tenterfield



Image credit: Roxanne Smith

### Northern Rivers Community Foundation

We’ve seen, through our own experiences and those of other community foundations, that having the infrastructure for community funding embedded within the community is crucial during times of crisis, response and recovery. It’s not just about strong governance, systems and processes, it’s also about leveraging existing trust, local networks and social capital – something that NRCF possesses and that accelerates our support to the community.

There was a lot of talk about how the 2023/2024 fire season could be a particularly bad one. In Tenterfield and the Clarence Valley, Fire to Flourish asked the communities, “What’s going to make you feel better prepared?”. The communities asked for a small fund of money so that if something went wrong, there could be resources available immediately. The program backed it and we started setting that fund up – and both communities needed those resources pretty soon after.

There was money to families within two days of the fire coming through which allowed people to live at their own house with a bit of dignity, rather than having to go stay at a motel in town. It’s important to note that some of the individuals we assisted were still grappling with the impacts of the 2019/20 bushfires. Our learnings from past fires and recent floods were invaluable when it came to helping Tenterfield and Nymboida respond.

What we’ve heard from the feedback is that the community felt much better prepared for the upcoming season because they had this in place. The community said ‘this is what we want’ and someone actually listened and put it in place. It doesn’t need to be the gazillions of dollars that’s spent by Federal and State governments on disaster preparedness – small amounts that the community control, that we can get out quickly can go a long way in terms of long-term wellbeing.

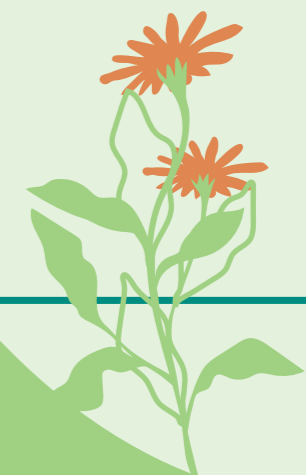
We often refer to this approach as deep and robust due diligence, where community foundations and their existing long-term relationships with community and grassroots organisations play a pivotal role in disaster response. NRCF recognises that, in the aftermath of a disaster, swiftly providing small amounts of resources to local community groups yields a better response than allocating larger sums to non-place-based organisations.

**Sam Henderson, CEO, Northern Rivers Community Foundation**

# INFLUENCING CHANGE

## SECTION 5 INFLUENCING CHANGE

5.1 Learning as we go	64
5.2 NIDR Summit	66
5.3 DisasterWISE Communities Network	67
5.4 Engaging for impact	68



## 5.1 LEARNING AS WE GO

With the generous support of our philanthropic funding partners, Fire to Flourish is able to take risks and try new things, which is often not possible with other sources of funding. As leaders in a movement advocating for community-led resilience, we have a duty to learn as we go, and to share those lessons widely.

One way we do this is a practice called **developmental evaluation** – a structured way to monitor, assess and provide feedback on a project or program while it is being designed or modified, creating a formal process for sharing back and forth across the multitude of program elements.

We keep a learning agenda at the heart of Fire to Flourish, while holding true to our program principles. We do so by mapping various aspects of the program journey and collecting evaluative data to support strategic learning.

Developmental evaluation informs ongoing program design and effectiveness to ensure we are learning by doing. We have dedicated staff across the program that are learning and capturing evidence, and sharing this with other teams to ensure strategies, research tools and methods, and communication techniques are being influenced for maximum change.

We use deep listening and observation, group reflections, surveys and interviews to capture feedback from participants in key activities, workshops and initiatives of the program. For example, in 2023, developmental evaluation researchers helped shape the placemaking process, co-design tools and community engagement to better suit the community’s needs and ensure that diverse groups felt comfortable to participate in the program.



### Principle in Focus:

### Learn, adapt, evolve

Learning-by-doing and doing-by-learning are central strategies for Fire to Flourish, which come with a commitment to continual improvement and sharing what we learn.

In our first full year of community activity, we refined our developmental evaluation approach to structure how we monitor, assess and provide feedback while the program is designed and delivered.

We have maintained open communication channels with our partner communities and invited independent impact evaluation to ensure the program makes a lasting impact in community and reaches its full ambition.

We are actively sharing our experiences and inviting learning discussions across the sector to collectively advance knowledge and influence practices in real time.

## 5.2 NIDR SUMMIT

In August 2023, our NIDR program hosted Australia's first National Indigenous Disaster Resilience Summit in Meanjin/Brisbane on the lands of the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples.

This sold-out event of 300 attendees was dedicated to showcasing Indigenous excellence and learning from Indigenous peoples with lived experiences of disasters, bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, emergency management practitioners, agency heads and government and non-government organisations to share knowledge and enshrine viable pathways for Indigenous inclusivity in disaster management arrangements moving forward.

*“The Summit came from a need to find Indigenous people working in disaster resilience and emergency management sectors, to try and bring these communities of people together, share and learn from Indigenous experiences in disasters and set an agenda for change.”*

NIDR Program Lead



Watch this highlights reel of the Summit



Image credit: Natural Hazards Research Australia

## 5.3 DISASTERWISE COMMUNITIES NETWORK



The DisasterWISE vision, developed by the network's co-designers, is to grow a movement of people who are building disaster resilience through community-led action.

It's been a phenomenal year for the DisasterWISE Communities Network, as it shifted from a co-design to prototyping phase. We launched DisasterWISE nationally in 2023 at Australasia's largest emergency management conference, AFAC23, as part of Resilience Lane, a dedicated exhibition space for community resilience initiatives.

The DisasterWISE Communities Network is beginning to scale both deep and out, focusing efforts on connection and relationships. It is building a community of change agents learning from one another and driving systemic changes. It now has 120 registered members across Australia and beyond, including China, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Brazil, Columbia, UK and Denmark.

The formation of a dynamic Network Action Group in early 2023 marked a pivotal moment and led to the prototyping of a community-led, self-sustaining governance model. This foundational step laid the groundwork for efficient and inclusive collaboration and decision-making within DisasterWISE.

As a learning network, DisasterWISE will provide infrastructure to support transformative learning-by-doing; enacting new knowledge to strengthen capabilities and connections for vibrant, equitable and thriving futures.



Learn more at [disasterwise.com.au](https://disasterwise.com.au)



## 5.4 ENGAGING FOR IMPACT

**MAY**

**FIRE to FLOURISH**  
MONASH University  
DISASTER RESILIENCE INITIATIVE

**PRIORITISING SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR DISASTER RESILIENCE: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?**

31 MAY, 2023  
3:30 – 5pm

*Prioritising Social Capital for Disaster Resilience Seminar*

This panel was co-hosted with Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative, bringing together more than 150 changemakers from community, industry and government.

### UNDERSTANDING THE RESILIENCE OF LIFELINES FOR REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

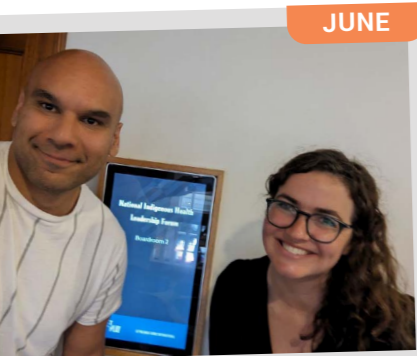


Through a partnership with RMIT University and Natural Hazards Research Australia, this research project engages with industry and community stakeholders and brings together physical and social scientists to develop a framework for understanding lifeline resilience.



**SEPTEMBER**  
*National Disaster Preparedness Summit*

At this inaugural summit at Parliament House in Canberra, Bhiemie Williamson and Emma McNicol led a discussion on engaging with Indigenous communities in emergency management at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.



**JUNE**  
*Lowitja Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference*

Bhiemie Williamson, Emma McNicol and Roxanne Smith attended this unique gathering of Indigenous delegates and presented the work of Fire to Flourish's NIDR project.



**JULY**  
*2023 International Transformations Conference*

Community and research staff attended this international conference in Sydney, and led a panel discussing community-research partnerships for disaster resilience and how we can drive system transformations needed.

### TOMORROW PARTY

**AUGUST**

We hosted a novel side event at the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference in Brisbane, that brought together approx 60 community and sectoral leaders, including from our partner communities, to envision a future in 2028 where community-led disaster resilience is the norm. Delivered in collaboration with Monash colleagues funded by the Wellcome Trust to explore new ways to engage policy and decision makers in the stories of people with lived experience.

### NOVEMBER

#### COP28 CLIMATE SUMMIT

As part of Monash Sustainable Development Institute's presence at COP28 in Dubai, CEO Briony Rogers presented (virtually) on the value and challenges of community-led approaches to wellbeing and disaster resilience.

### NOVEMBER

#### JUDITH NELSON UTZON LECTURE

CEO Briony Rogers delivered a keynote lecture at UNSW that reflected on key enablers of system transformation towards climate resilience, drawing on experiences across her career in sustainable water management and community disaster resilience.

### DECEMBER



*Watch the Forum recording*

#### National Community Forum on Climate Resilience

Co-hosted with Australian Business Volunteers, MUDRI, DisasterWISE and NIDR, this Forum explored community-led innovations to keep people safe during disaster and the system changes needed to better support communities.

#### SUBMISSIONS TO GOVERNMENT REVIEWS AND COMMISSIONS

Contributed evidence, insights and community voice into key federal and Productivity Commission reviews on Commonwealth disaster and drought relief funding, Commonwealth crisis response capabilities and new models of disaster resilience, through written submissions and invited engagements.



#### INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLES PROJECT

This two-year research project, through a NEMA grant, involves engagement with people who have been internally displaced and other stakeholders. It is working to understand and overcome the impact of colonised boundaries that exacerbate disaster impacts, especially in state-bordering or multi-Country communities.

# WHO WE ARE

## SECTION 6 WHO WE ARE

6.1 Strategic Advisory Council	72
6.2 Executive Team	73
6.3 Backbone Support	74
6.4 Featured Artists	84



## 6.1 STRATEGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

As we look to the future, Monash University and the Paul Ramsay Foundation reconfigured the program's strategic advisory body to predominantly comprise community and national leaders. We are delighted to welcome four community representatives to the Strategic Advisory

Council, as well as new independent and Monash representatives. We thank departing Strategic Advisory Board members for their critical program foundations: Jeni Whelan, Rebekah Brown, Galina Laurie, Dani Howden, Jason Ardler and Ben Gales.



**Christine Nixon (Chair)**



**Jessica Bulger**



**Robert Glasser**



**Claire Beattie**



**Laura Cochrane**



**Ashley Keleher**



**Alison Worthington**

**Sharon Tierney**  
Tenterfield

**Kate Cowden**  
Eurobodalla

## 6.2 EXECUTIVE TEAM



**Prof Briony Rogers**  
CEO and Director - Research



**Lara Werbeloff**  
Director - Program



**Lindsey Goodman**  
Director - Program (Acting)



**Sarah Smith**  
Director - Community



Image Credit: Ben Neely

## 6.3 BACKBONE SUPPORT



**Aayushi Shah**  
Project Officer



**Bethany Patch**  
Communications Officer



**Christine Mofardin**  
Communications Officer



**Roxanne Smith**  
Senior Program Manager - Community



**Claire Sauvage**  
Project Coordinator - Local Impact



**Dona Cayetana**  
Senior Program Manager -  
Delivery



**Gary Annat**  
Senior Research Coordinator



**Laelie Greenwood**  
Project Coordinator - National Impact



**Mae Wee**  
Executive Assistant



**Mellissa Kavenagh**  
Senior Program Manager -  
Research



Image Credit: Minya Rose

## COMMUNITY: CLARENCE VALLEY



**Cara MacLeod**  
Community Lead



**Pamela Denise**  
Community Facilitator



**Kaya Jongen**  
Community Connector

**Jess McPherson**  
Community Connector

**Tania Fox**  
Community Connector

**Tabatha O'Brien**  
Community Connector

## COMMUNITY: EAST GIPPSLAND



**Scott Campbell-Smith**  
Community Co-lead



**Sara Matthews**  
Community Co-lead

**Robyn Sturgess**  
Community Connector

**Bonnie Nebauer**  
Community Connector

## COMMUNITY: EUROBODALLA



**Alice Ansara**  
Community Facilitator



**Alison Worthington**  
Community Connector



**Barb Rix**  
Aboriginal Facilitator



**Kizzy Nye**  
Community Lead



**Steph Chiu**  
Community Facilitator

**Marlene Bolt**  
Community Connector

**Mary Randall**  
Community Connector

**Tayla Nye**  
Community Connector

**Wendy Wilson**  
Community Connector

## COMMUNITY: TENTERFIELD



**Anthea Williams**  
Community Facilitator



**Helen Duroux**  
Community Lead



**Matt Sing**  
Aboriginal Facilitator

## DISASTERWISE COMMUNITIES NETWORK



**Alison Stone**  
Network Convenor



**Kate Fawcett**  
Network Convener



**Sabrina Davis**  
Communications Specialist and  
Network Action Group member



**Steve Cameron**  
Network Convenor



Image Credit: Minya Rose

## RESEARCH AND INNOVATION



**Dr Adriana Keating**  
Research Fellow, Systems Change



**Assoc Prof Annette Bos**  
Research Lead, Developmental Evaluation  
and Transdisciplinary Learning



**Dr Ashley Humphrey**  
Research Fellow, Community  
Cohesion



**Belinda Davis**  
PhD Student, Transformative Bushfire  
Education



**Belinda Lloyd**  
PhD Student, Disaster and Social  
Inequities



**Bhiemie Williamson**  
Research Lead, National  
Indigenous Disaster Resilience



**Dr Caroline Spencer**  
Research Fellow, Internally Displaced  
People



**Prof David Johnston**  
Research Lead, Economics



**Delvin Varghese**  
Data Management Lead and  
Research Co-lead, Participatory  
Granting



**Dr Dharshani Chandrasekara**  
Research Fellow, Participatory Granting



**Dr Tasman Munro**  
Social Innovator



**Elise Park**  
PhD Student, Transformative Disaster Governance



**Dr Inara Walden**  
Research Fellow, Developmental Evaluation and Transdisciplinary Learning



**Ivana Gillard**  
PhD Student, Change Agents and Transformation



**Dr Jana-Axinja Paschen**  
Research Fellow, Community Resilience Planning



**Dr Emma McNicol**  
Research Fellow, National Indigenous Disaster Resilience



**Euan Hind**  
PhD Student, Community Flood Resilience



**Emeritus Prof Frank Archer**  
Research Lead, Internally Displaced People



**Prof Jane Fisher**  
Research Lead, Health and Wellbeing



**Jessica Trijsburg**  
PhD Student, Inclusive Decision Making



**Assoc Prof Jonathan Abrahams**  
Director, MUDRI



**Gabrielle Moir**  
PhD Student, Community Resilience Practice



**Dr Gretel Evans**  
Research Fellow, Social Capital



**Assoc Prof Helen Forbes-Mewett**  
Research Lead, CommunityCohesion



**Dr Julie Willems**  
Research Fellow, Health and Wellbeing



**Kerry Jones**  
Social Innovator



**lauren aneline**  
Social Innovator



**Aunty Vickey Charles**  
Social Innovator



**Dr Lucy Maynard**  
Social Innovator



**Dr Margherita Angelucci**  
Research Fellow, Participatory  
Granting



**Pranav Kulkami**  
Data Management Officer



**Prof Rebecca Wickes**  
Research Lead, Social Capital



**Dr Revathi Krishna**  
Research Fellow, Internally Displaced  
People



**Dr Mayeda Rashid**  
Research Fellow, Critical Lifelines



**Prof Mel Dodd**  
Research Lead, Placemaking



**Michael Johnson**  
PhD Student, Disaster Policy  
and Practice



**Robert Lees**  
Research Officer, Placemaking



**Zoë D'Arcy**  
Research Fellow, Resilience  
Measurement



**Dr Suzanne Cross**  
Research Fellow, Internally  
Displaced People



**Dr Nick de Weyenthal**  
Research Fellow Institutional  
Enablers and Barriers for Disaster  
Funding



**Nikhila Madabhushi**  
Research Fellow, Placemaking



**Prof Patrick Olivier**  
Research Lead, Participatory  
Granting

**Dr Sundar Ponnusamy**  
Research Fellow, Economics

**Tricia Hazeleger**  
Research Assistant, Cobargo  
Community Fund Review

**Dr Robyn Mansfield**  
Research Fellow, Resilience  
Measurement

**Dinislam Abdulgalimov**  
Data Management Officer

**Lihini de Silva**  
PhD Student, Disaster Economics

## 6.4 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.

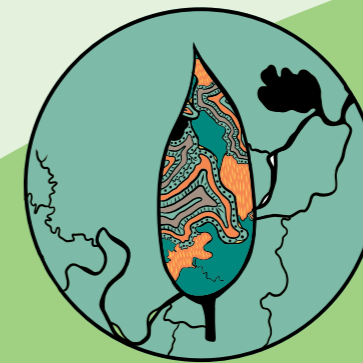


### We are 27 Creative

Many 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.

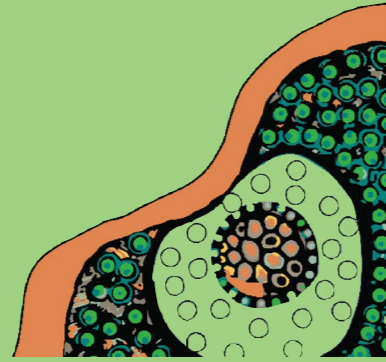
*We are the heart beat connected to this place. We belong to this Country.  
Shaping, shifting, changing, moving, flowing – Seasons guide our way.  
Meandering across the landscape words are nourishment.  
Seed cracks, flowers bloom, charcoal black.  
Knowledge is gained, we are healed, this land is 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**

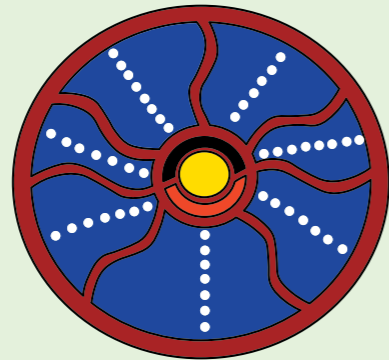
Deeply connected to her culture and country, Kim Healey has forged a reputation for her storytelling through a unique array of artistic mediums. Working and creating out of her small studio cottage on the coastlines of the Clarence Valley, Kim continues to attract and engage a diverse audience, using 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**

East Gippsland artist Paula Wandin celebrates 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, Tatungooloong 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 is a pioneering five year program, working in partnership with communities affected by the 2019/20 Australian bushfire season to trial innovations in community-led disaster resilience.

Pathways for scaling the insights, models and tools developed through the program are being created through partnerships with government, philanthropic, not-for-profit and private sector organisations.

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.

**For more information, go to:**

[firetoflourish.monash](http://firetoflourish.monash)



MONASH  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

**paulramsay**  
**FOUNDATION**  
PARTNERSHIPS FOR POTENTIAL



THE  
AUSTRALIAN  
CENTRE FOR  
SOCIAL  
INNOVATION