

# Impact Report 2023

## Summary Version






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**Conflict of interest declaration:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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We wish to specifically  
acknowledge the lands  
upon which Fire to  
Flourish operates:  
Bidwell, Brinja-Yuin,  
Bundjalung, Bunurong,  
Djiringanj, Gunaikurnai,  
Gumbaynggirr, Kamilaroi,  
Monero, Walbunja,  
Wurundjeri, Yaegl lands.

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## From the CEO

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I'm incredibly proud to present Fire to Flourish's first Impact Report. Our work is focused on supporting disaster-affected communities to lead their own recovery and resilience-building. As we undertake this journey, we are committed to measuring our impact and sharing our lessons. This report is the result of listening deeply to the experiences of the individuals who call our vibrant partner communities home.

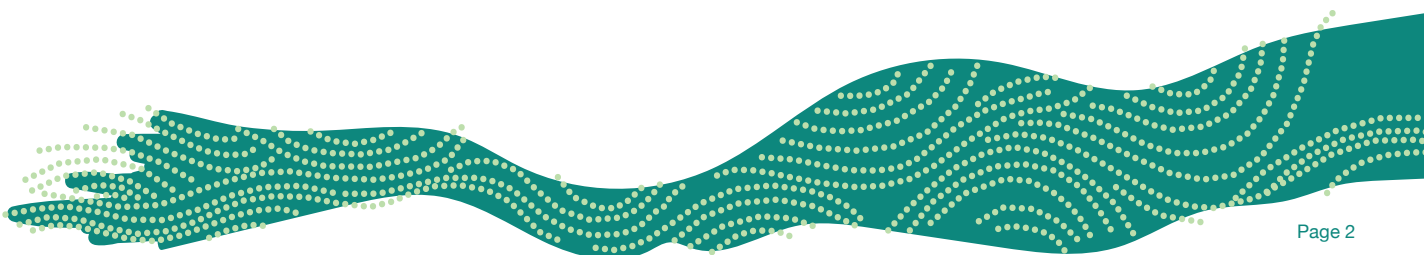
Four years ago, in the aftermath of the devastating 2019/20 bushfire season, there was a groundswell of recognition that the usual approach to disaster recovery did not serve the people and communities that were hit the hardest. Instead, something innovative and courageous was needed to experiment with ways to strengthen the agency and power of community in disaster resilience efforts.

Against this backdrop, Fire to Flourish was established to trial innovations in community-led disaster resilience and influence the system changes needed

for them to be scaled. Led by Monash University and supported through philanthropic funding, we are learning-by-doing and constantly responding and adapting to feedback from our partner communities. This is providing rich insights and an evidence base of what works and why.

I have had the privilege of spending time on the ground with Fire to Flourish's partner communities, witnessing the trust and blossoming collaboration that's happening every day. Hearing first-hand accounts of how the experience of working with Fire to Flourish feels so different to other recovery models, reinforces my belief that transformative change is needed now.

We don't have all the answers, but we do know that walking alongside communities to explore, analyse, co-design and create new solutions will strengthen disaster resilience and address their needs on their terms. And that feels essential.



Having moved with our communities at the pace of trust and listened deeply to learn and adapt as we go, we have entered the most impactful phase of the program. A momentum which I believe will continue to grow.

Our 2023 Impact Report tells the story of our first full year of activity in each of our four partner communities. While this year was our early 'test-and-learn' phase, the report demonstrates the positive social, economic, cultural, health, built and natural environment impacts that have already been felt in Tenterfield, Eurobodalla, Clarence Valley and East Gippsland.

The report uses qualitative and quantitative evidence from the local people that have engaged with Fire to Flourish. While our evidence base continues to grow, it clearly demonstrates that our delivery model works and is benefitting communities.

As I look beyond our partner communities and consider other Australian communities that may one day be exposed to disaster, I am in no doubt about whether recovery and resilience should be led by the communities themselves. Instead, I ask how we can ensure community-led action is enabled nationwide.

It's a privilege to be part of a program that is exploring this 'how' and increasingly bringing focus to implementing, spreading and scaling change. The positive impacts captured in this report are being felt by local people across our partner communities. This energises and inspires me to continue to be part of a growing momentum towards community-led recovery and resilience. Come with us, it is working.



**Briony Rogers**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Fire to Flourish



# Impact at a Glance

Fire to Flourish’s impact in its partner communities has spanned six domains of resilience.



## SOCIAL CAPITAL

**Strengthened community leadership and social cohesion** through community engagement, governance and capability building that brought diverse people together around a shared vision for disaster resilience and community flourishing.



## BUILT ENVIRONMENT

**Developed community-led masterplans and concept designs** for community infrastructure and public amenities that reflected community visions, priorities and ideas for rebuilding post-bushfire and strengthening disaster resilience.



## ECONOMIC WELLBEING

**Faster and more effective bushfire recovery** when communities were struck again, through better coordination of a community-wide response, and grants that provided rapid financial relief to individuals and that funded immediate unmet needs of the community, such as drinking water delivery and temporary cattle fencing provision.



## NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

**Regenerated land and reduced bushfire risk**, funding grant projects for seed banks, native tree replanting, vegetation management, waste management, Ranger programs and emergency communications.



## CULTURE

**Advanced reconciliation** through events, projects and participatory processes that strengthened community understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture, and promoted the coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.



## HEALTH & WELLBEING

**Improved community wellbeing** through engagement processes and funded projects that strengthened social connections, created safe space for story sharing, facilitated creative arts events for recovery and celebration, and increased people’s sense of power and agency in relation to disasters.

**\$4.2M**

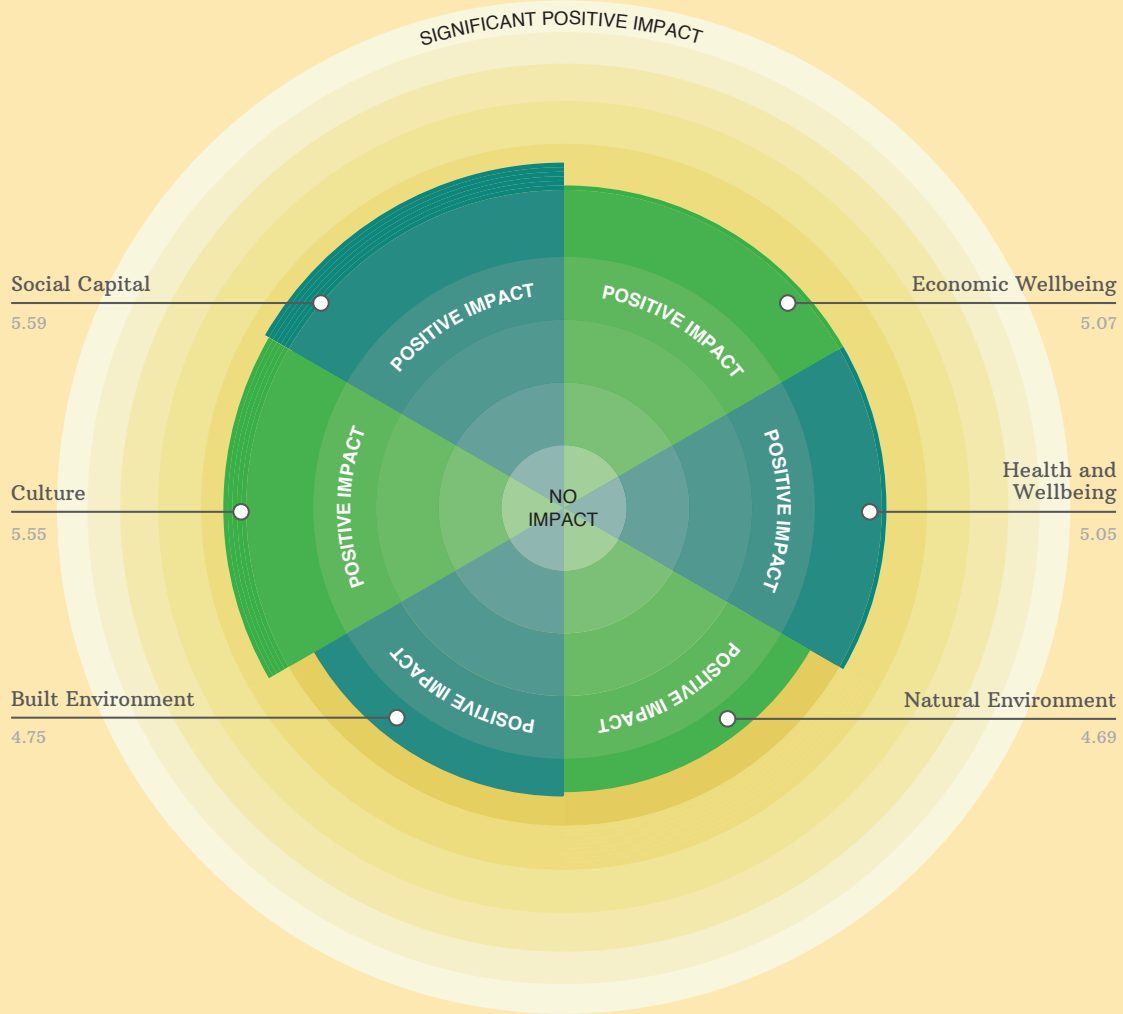
worth of community projects funded

**49**

community projects funded

“In a very short period of time, they were able to draw people into contributing and talking about their town or their region. People were surprised by the process – it was not what they were expecting, but in the end they enjoyed it. It was totally different to what they’ve been through before.”

Clarence Valley Community Team Member



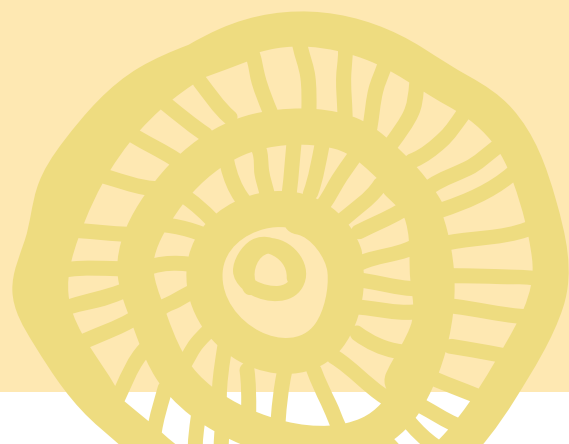
## National Impact

While this report focuses on the impact Fire to Flourish is having in its partner communities, the program has also had an impact nationally.

**Catalysed a national agenda to advance the disaster resilience of Indigenous communities,** including launching the National Indigenous Disaster Resilience (NIDR) program, initiating a Community of Practice with Indigenous and emergency management leaders, and securing over \$3M in additional funding to advance critical research priorities.

**Launched DisasterWISE Communities Network as a new social infrastructure** that enables community leaders to directly connect, learn from each other and collectively influence change to strengthen community-led disaster resilience, with more than 100 members joining since its launch in August 2023.

**Advanced the national conversation on community-led disaster resilience,** advocating that communities must be enabled in their local action through funding and other resources through leadership of national forums, contribution to others' events and submissions to public inquiries.



# Our Principles

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## Be Community Led

We ensure the community shapes, drives and owns the program and foreground their voices in its design and delivery.

## Foreground Aboriginal Wisdom

We respect the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, learn from their ways of knowing and being and foster strong collaborations and partnerships.

## Address Inequities and Enhance Inclusion

We strengthen the participation, capabilities and outcomes for people who are often underrepresented or marginalised.

## Be Strengths-Based and Trauma-Informed

We respect people's lived experiences and recognise and build on community strengths and support collective healing.

## Be Holistic and Impactful

We contribute collaboratively and with evidence, to improve people's lives and influence changes in system conditions that hold problems in place.

## Learn, Adapt and Evolve

We respond to changing contexts, continually improve the program's design and delivery and collectively advance knowledge and practices.


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# Our Delivery Pillars

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Strengthened  
Community Networks  
and Capabilities



Evidence and  
Knowledge Generation



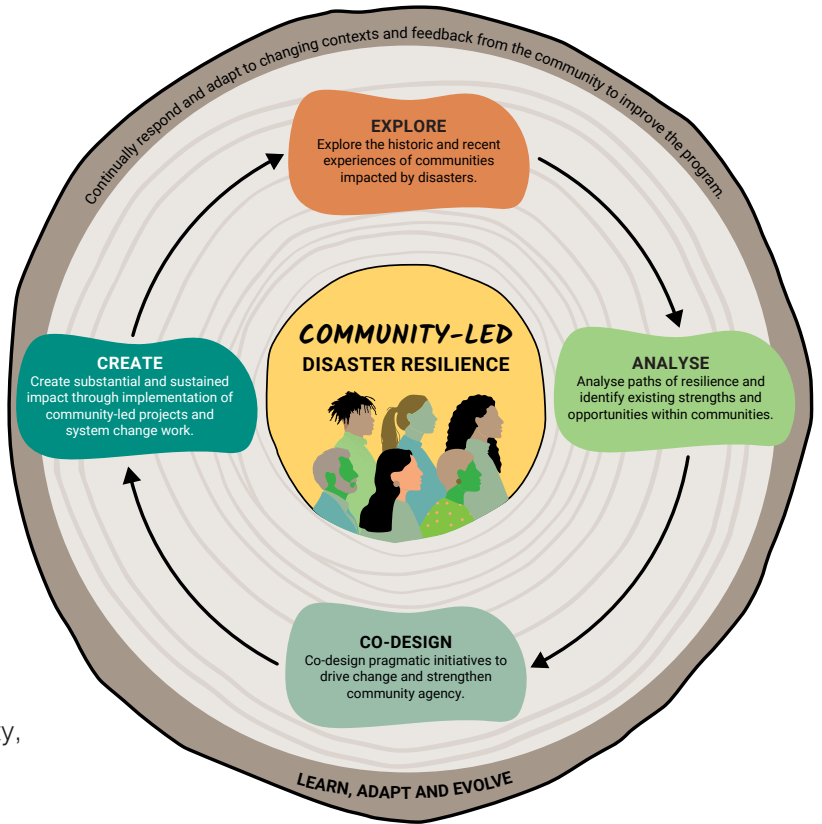
Influence and  
Advocacy



Scalable Models  
and Toolkits



# Our Approach



Fire to Flourish is focused on trialling innovations in community-led disaster resilience. A multi-stage process is implemented across each partner community, which involves facilitation and support for community to:

1. Listen to disaster and recovery experiences
2. Understand community strengths and dynamics
3. Create visions for the future
4. Identify their disaster resilience priorities
5. Develop project ideas and implementation plans that respond to community priorities
6. Tailor a participatory granting framework, including assessment criteria and process
7. Make decisions about which projects to fund
8. Support implementation of funded projects
9. Acquit grant funding, with emphasis on accountability to each other and collective learning
10. Reflect and capture the lessons learned throughout these activities

These ten core elements of the Fire to Flourish process are iterated by communities across multiple granting rounds, with each step co-designed and tailored to ensure implementation that reflects community interest, readiness and other contextual factors. Iterations also reflect process improvements as the program gains collective experience through its trials.

The program approach is also enhanced by activities designed to grow cultural understanding and connections, build community capabilities, strengthen social networks, enable action research, and provide other forms of support identified by the community as valuable as they work to achieve their disaster resilience aspirations.

These activities are guided by Fire to Flourish's broad program approach: walking alongside communities to explore, analyse, co-design and create new community-led solutions that strengthen disaster resilience on their own terms, while always learning and adapting as we go.



Disaster events  
2019–2023

-  Bushfire
-  Flood

# Our Work in Community

Against a backdrop of loss of lives, homes, environments, livelihoods and far-reaching community impacts following the devastating 2019-20 bushfires, Fire to Flourish initiated a disaster preparedness, recovery and resilience building program.

Fire to Flourish is deeply rooted in a community-led approach, focusing on understanding and addressing the specific needs of the community. This began with broad and deep engagement, identifying diverse community participants that brought different views and experiences, particularly seeking out unheard voices and often overlooked cohorts.


Fire to Flourish focused on both short-term recovery and fostering long-term community resilience. The program combined financial support, peer support and expert advice to enhance recovery, while also nurturing a culture of preparedness and resilience against future challenges.

**Fire to Flourish is proud to have worked alongside communities across Eurobodalla, Clarence Valley, Tenterfield and East Gippsland in their recovery and resilience building efforts.**

Funding was distributed directly to communities via a participatory granting approach, where communities have decision-making power over funding allocation. This was underpinned by a commitment to informed, transparent and ethical decision-making, aimed at addressing both immediate and long-term disaster resilience needs of the community. By providing grant funding and additional resources for services like insurance and training, the program facilitated community-led solutions that were not only effective but also aligned with the community's vision and disaster resilience aspirations.

Community-led decision making about grant funding was typically informed by participatory discussions that brought together diverse community co-designers to develop a shared understanding of the community's disaster experience and create a vision for the future.

This resilience planning process includes mapping local connections to grow a shared awareness of community organisations, services, assets, resources and capabilities. Emphasising Indigenous knowledge and practices also helped to create cultural safety for Indigenous people to participate and to elevate a commitment to caring for Country. Through these conversations, co-designers were supported to reflect on their resilience priorities and opportunities, creating a holistic view of resilience, grounded in the specifics of each local place.



“The mark of  
Fire to Flourish  
is going to be  
relationships and  
strengthening  
relationships.”

Community Team Leader

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# Measuring What Matters

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From its inception, Fire to Flourish has never shied away from the fact that its purpose, vision and goals are ambitious and built on a foundation of influencing changes to the world around us. As climate disasters continue to increase in terms of frequency, scale and impact, there is a greater need than ever before to support local communities and individuals be better equipped in preventing, preparing, responding and recovering from disaster.

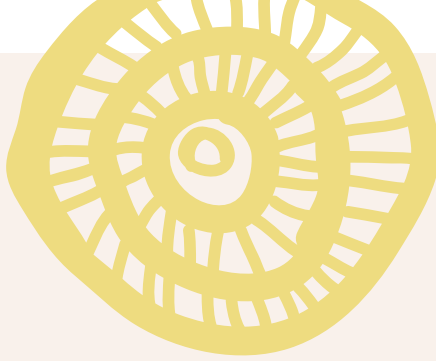
Measuring impact, as opposed to merely tracking outputs, is increasingly recognised as a vital practice for programs, organisations and governments with a social purpose. This shift towards impact measurement represents a deeper commitment to understanding and enhancing the long-term effects of various initiatives on communities and individuals.

Traditionally, organisations have focused on outputs and key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge their success. While these metrics are useful for assessing immediate output, they do not capture the broader, sustainable changes the organisation is helping to create in a broader social context.

Impact measurement, in contrast, delves into how policies, programs and services fundamentally affect people's lives, offering a more holistic view of their effectiveness.

One key benefit of focusing on impact measurement, is that it enhances informed future decision-making. By understanding the long-term effects of our actions, Fire to Flourish can refine strategies, allocate resources more effectively and scale up successful initiatives. This data-





driven approach is ultimately always informed by direct feedback from the communities and people we work alongside, ensuring a continuous improvement cycle, where learning from both successes and failures shapes future actions.

Core to Fire to Flourish's program design and implementation has been the development of an impact framework that follows the Productivity Commissioner's evaluation principles of being credible, useful, ethical, and transparent.

This framework was developed over a series of months with the Fire to Flourish team and impact specialists and ultimately aims to ensure the program is able to independently measure its impact across the following six key domains: *Social Capital, Economic Wellbeing, Culture, Health and Wellbeing, Built Environment and Natural Environment.*

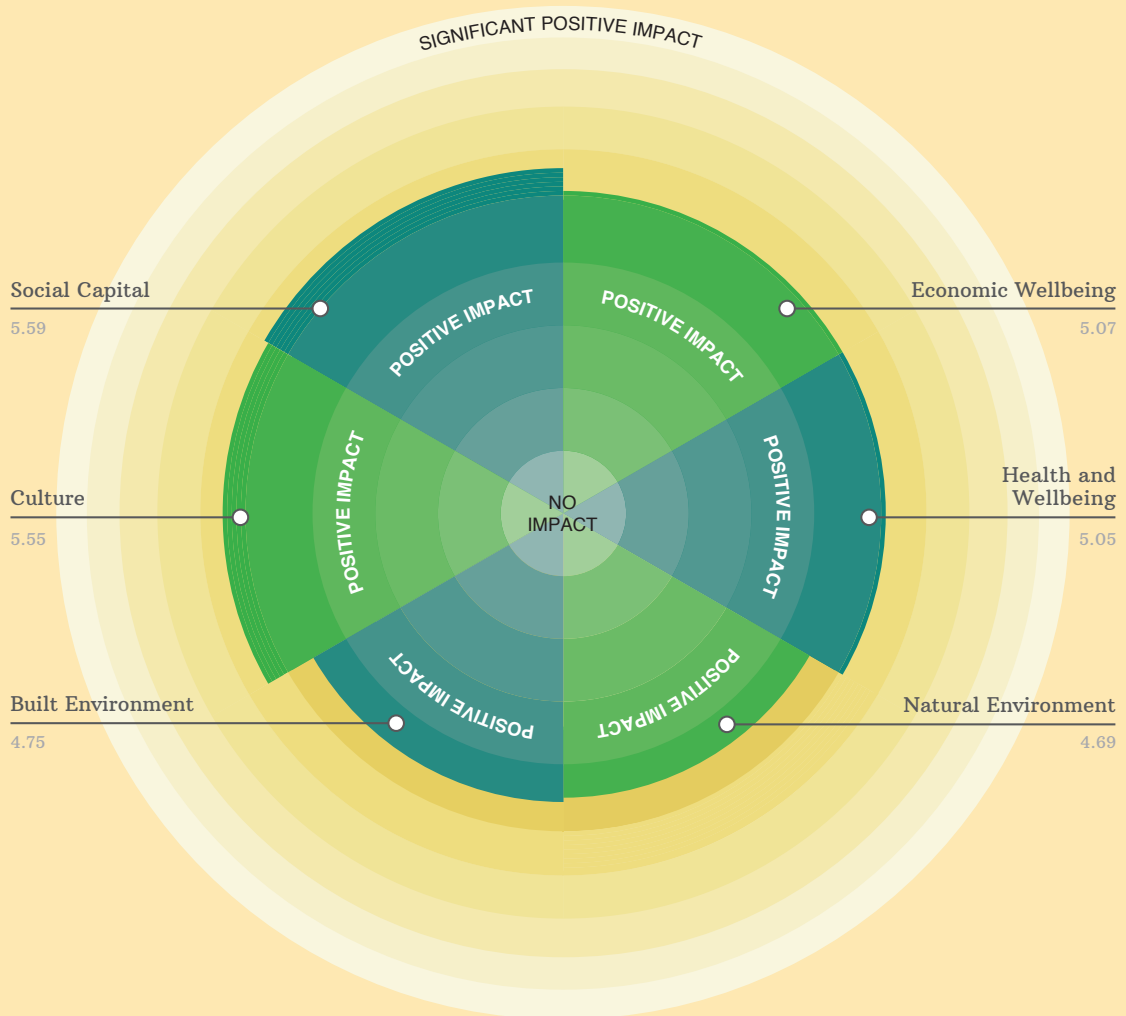


# Impact Framework

Domains	Social Capital	Economic Wellbeing	Culture	Health and Wellbeing	Built Environment	Natural Environment
Sub Domains	<p>Capability Development</p> <p>Network Building</p> <p>Engagement and Influence</p>	<p>Improved Access to Funding</p> <p>Quicker Economic Recovery</p> <p>Minimisation of Adverse Financial Impact</p>	<p>First Nations Knowledge</p> <p>Community Cultural Connections</p> <p>Cultural Capability</p>	<p>People Feel Supported</p> <p>People Have Agency</p> <p>Mental Health</p>	<p>Connection to Place</p> <p>Resilient Infrastructure and Systems</p> <p>Inclusive Access</p> <p>Meeting Places</p>	<p>Vegetation Regeneration</p> <p>Awareness of Natural Environment</p> <p>Cultural Land Management</p> <p>Community Stewardship</p>
Outputs	<p>Convened Community Groups, Co-designed Solutions, Funded Resilience Projects, Evidence and Insights, Network Building, Capability Development and more.</p>					
Impact	<p>Community reports increased confidence, knowledge and skills, stronger networks and greater engagement and influence with others</p>	<p>Community reports improved access to funding and improved skills to minimise adverse financial impact from disaster</p>	<p>Community reports improved understanding and connection to local Traditional Owners</p>	<p>Community reports feeling supported, mentally healthier and an increased sense of agency in relation to disaster</p>	<p>Community reports improved understanding, confidence in and connection with local infrastructure</p>	<p>Community reports improved understanding, respect and stewardship of local environment</p>
Who	<p>Communities preparing for, responding to, recovering from and reducing the risk of disaster.</p>					
Data	<p>Quantitative and qualitative data through surveys, interviews, program outputs and research outputs.</p>					
Impact	<p>No impact</p>		<p>Positive impact</p>		<p>Significant positive impact</p>	

# Overall Impact: Fire to Flourish 2023

Since the program's inception, Fire to Flourish has been deeply committed to ensuring the impact it creates is not only long-lasting and meaningful, but that any determination of impact is made by the community. The diagram below represents the overall level of impact the communities have determined Fire to Flourish has had across six key domains (social capital, economic wellbeing, cultural, health and wellbeing, built environment and natural environment).



### 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).

## Looking to the Future

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2023 was the first full year of community activity for Fire to Flourish. While it is early days, the evidence of positive impact already being experienced in its partner communities indicates the promise of this model of support for community-led recovery and resilience.

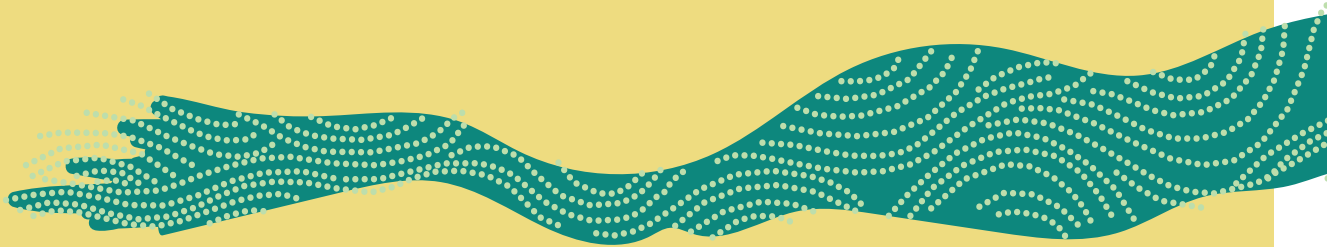
It is clear that impact is being generated in multiple ways across the program's four partner communities. Funding community-led projects through grants is of course important, but Fire to Flourish's impact goes much further. Resourcing community members as program staff has meant trusted local leaders can make the program more accessible to diverse groups and ensure initiatives are as effective as possible.

Convening visionary, strategic and catalytic conversations across different parts of the community has strengthened community cohesion, networks and capabilities as key resilience factors. The program's granting philosophy of being flexible,

responsive and participatory has enabled the community to express their priorities and have them directly addressed, whether that is realising a long-term vision or responding to an immediate disaster situation. Community-led decision making has invited local leadership, collaboration and the creation of shared value in ways that competitive or top-down granting never could.

This evidence emphasises the importance of designing and implementing holistic, long-term models of community support, with relationality and self-determination at the heart.

The Fire to Flourish Impact Framework will continue to evolve as the program hears from partner communities about the ways the program is making a difference to their wellbeing and resilience and as its research activity expands its evidence base for assessing and measuring impact over time.

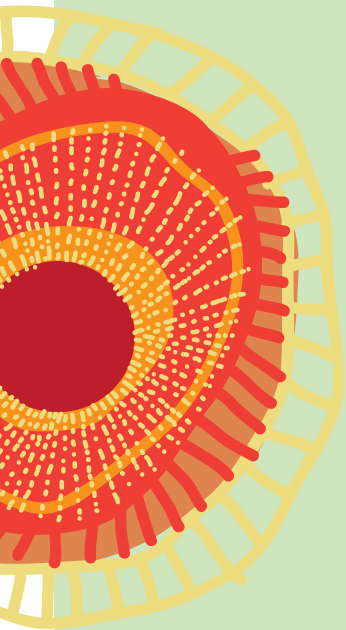


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**Report Prepared By:**

All content, data and analysis provided in this report was prepared independently by Elevate Impact ([elevateimpact.com.au](http://elevateimpact.com.au)).

Elevate Impact are a specialty strategic advisory agency dedicated to working with organisations committed to increasing their social impact. While working in partnership with Monash University and the Fire to Flourish team to understand the programs intentions and outputs, all quantitative and qualitative collected and analysed as part of this report was undertaken by the Elevate Impact team to ensure its independence and reliability.



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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)**