


Impact Report 2023





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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.

From the CEO



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

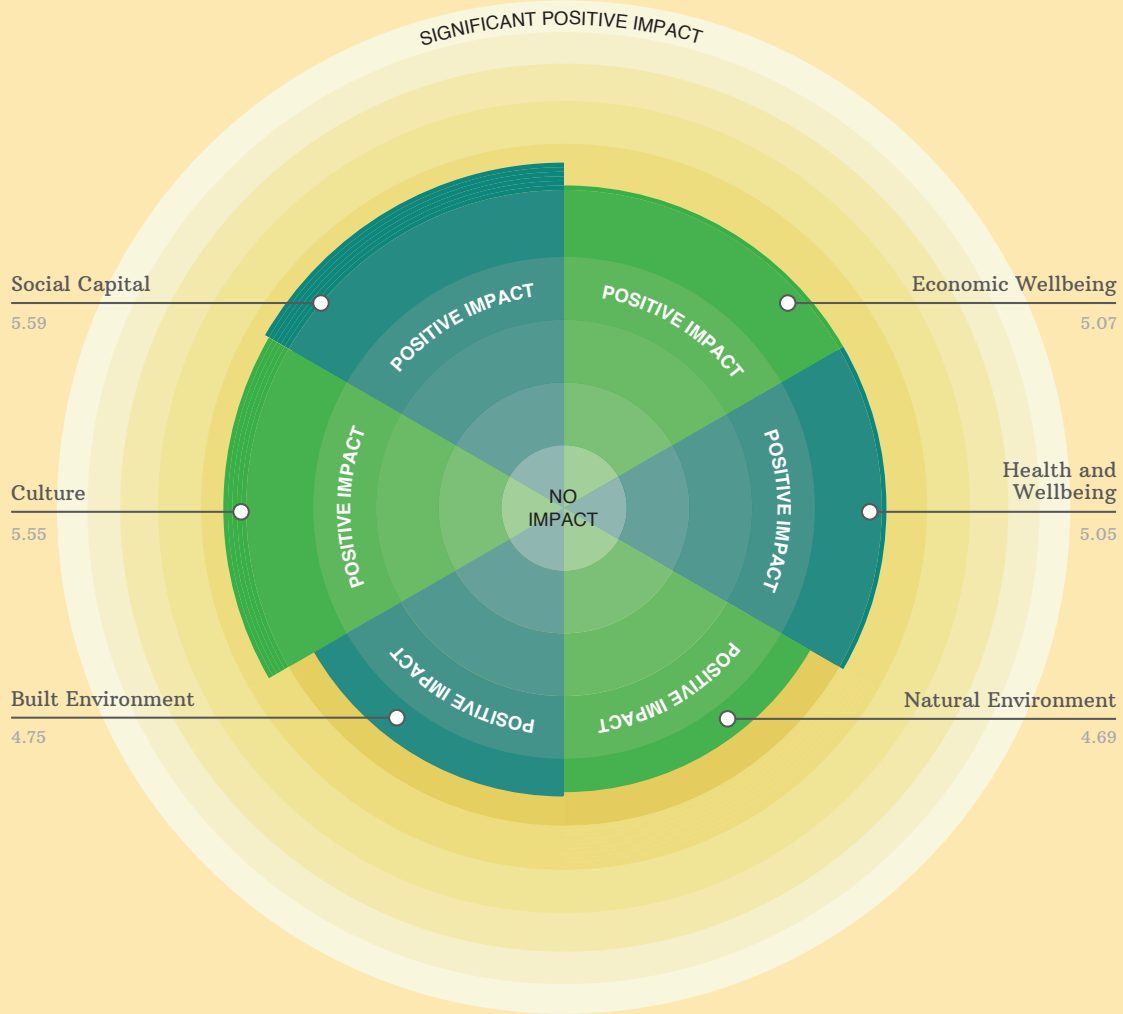
worth of community projects funded

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



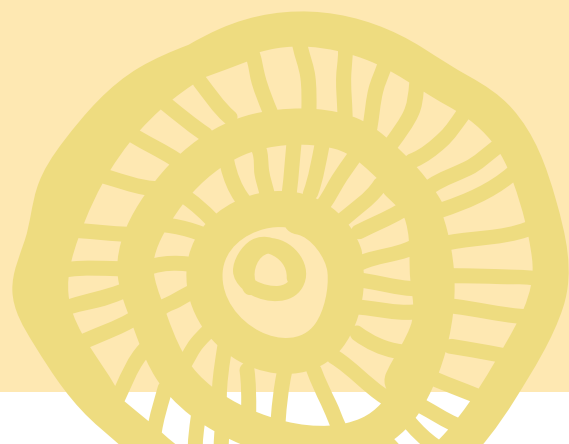
National Impact


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.





“When disaster hits it can make or break a community and I believe it’s the pre-existing bonds that determine this. I feel community connections are key to strengthening disaster resilience.”

Community Co-Designer

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PART 1. Our Story





The Impact of Disaster

A Land of Fire

Australia's geographical and climatic conditions expose the landscape to a variety of natural hazards, such as bushfires, floods, cyclones and droughts, each of which can have devastating impacts on both the environment and community. Disaster events disrupt lives, displace communities and leave behind long-lasting consequences which impact on those affected for years to come in a multitude of different ways.

The Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, on 7 February 2009, remain one of the most catastrophic disasters in Australia's history, with the loss of 173 lives. More than 2,000 homes were destroyed and entire communities were decimated. The fires scorched more than 450,000 hectares of land, laying waste to wildlife and livestock and causing profound environmental damage, recovery from which would take many years. The intensity and speed of the fires, fuelled by extreme weather conditions including prolonged drought, record-breaking temperatures and strong winds, caught many by surprise, leading to a rapid escalation in the scale and severity of the disaster.

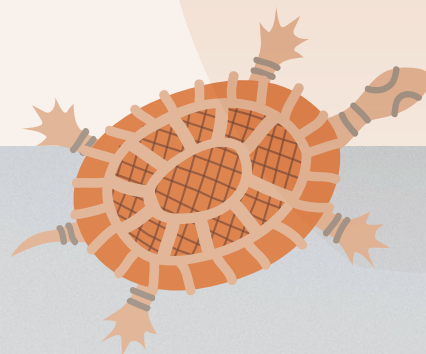
Black Saturday became a sombre reminder of the ferocity of nature and the importance of preparedness, community resilience and the ongoing challenges posed by climate variability and change. While at the time Black Saturday was considered a 'once-in-a-generation' event, subsequent disasters continue to grow in frequency and intensity.

Almost 10 years later, the 2019-20 bushfires brought the world to a standstill as Australia burned at a scale that had never before been seen. Fueled by extreme weather conditions linked to climate change, the fires destroyed more than 24 million hectares of land, resulting in the direct loss of 33 human lives and an estimated additional 450 deaths due to smoke inhalation.



“As an emergency physician, I know an emergency when I see one and climate change is the biggest global threat to emergency departments, health systems and public health.”

Dr Scott Mae,
former Chair of the ANZCA Environmental Sustainability Network



The Hidden Scars

Beyond the immediate physical toll of disasters, the psychological toll they inflict is immense. The trauma of experiencing a disaster can lead to long-term mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These conditions can remain well after property damage has been repaired, affecting individuals' ability to function in daily life and potentially altering the course of their futures. Children are especially vulnerable, with the emotional distress from disaster experiences capable of impacting on their development and mental health into adulthood. For those both directly and indirectly affected, instances of heightened anxiety, depression and PTSD can last for years beyond the event itself.

Economic Repercussions

From an economic standpoint, the aftermath of these events continues year on year, as rebuilding infrastructure and homes is coupled with the interruption of business activity, agricultural output and local tourism economies. The bushfires of 2019-2020 had an estimated economic impact exceeding \$100 billion. The aftermath sees a spike in insurance claims and the diversion of government resources to aid recovery, potentially leading to higher taxes and reduced funding for other public services. The economic disturbance extends to employment and can exacerbate poverty and inequality.

Social Upheaval

Socially, the havoc created by disasters can dismantle community networks and support systems that are crucial for recovery and resilience. The demand for social services surges, stretching the capacity of local and national agencies. While disasters often prompt an increase in community solidarity, the enduring stress on social connections over time can lead to increased isolation and fragmentation within communities.

Increasing Negative Impacts

The immediate effects of disasters often include loss of human and animal life and significant damage to natural environments, cultural heritage and infrastructure, such as homes, businesses and critical public facilities. Beyond the physical damage, there is a lasting psychological toll on those affected, with increases in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Economically the costs continue to increase year on year, compounding the difficulties of recovery and resilience for those affected.

\$100b

The estimated cost of the 2019-20 bushfires to the Australian economy.[#]

18m

The number of Australians estimated to be affected by a climate-related disaster in 2022.*

70%

The proportion of Australians living in a LGA impacted by a flooding event in 2022.*

\$38b

Estimated annual cost of disasters driven by natural hazards to the Australian economy.[#]

*Analysis from KPMG
#Analysis from Deloitte

Resilience, in this context, is not a one-size-fits-all solution handed down from authorities, but a tapestry of strategies woven by the communities themselves, reflecting their specific needs, skills, capabilities, and capacities.



Resilience Re-imagined

Ultimately, the impacts of disaster in Australia are complex, far-reaching and cannot be overstated. In response to these challenges, there has been a renewed focus on how communities can expand their levels of preparedness and resilience in the face of more frequent and ferocious disasters. The importance of a community-led resilience model is increasingly recognised, so that each community's unique strengths and needs are reflected and embraced. Resilience, in this context, is not a one-size-fits-all solution handed down from authorities, but a tapestry of strategies woven by the communities themselves, reflecting their specific needs, skills, capabilities and capacities.

Communities need to lead the way in defining what resilience means to them, whether it is through leveraging local knowledge to better anticipate the effects of extreme weather, being led by Traditional Owners on cultural caring for Country practices, or developing community support networks that activate during and after a disaster to provide psychological and material aid. This approach enables communities to take ownership of their adaptation, preparedness and recovery plans, ensuring that these strategies are culturally sensitive, sustainable and tailored to the local context.

For community resilience to be truly effective, it must be adaptable to the diverse landscapes and populations of Australia. In urban areas, this might involve community-driven urban planning that incorporates disaster risk reduction, while in rural or remote areas, resilience might focus on strengthening local economies and healthcare access to withstand and bounce back from adversities. First Nations communities might prioritise the protection and integration of cultural knowledge in land management practices, such as cultural burning, to enhance ecological resilience.

Fire to Flourish was founded in the belief that supporting communities to identify their unique assets and challenges, fostering local leadership and social cohesion, enhancing skills and growing capacity are the most effective ways to harness and grow true community resilience.



Community experiences of these catastrophic events highlighted critical gaps in how Australia is set up to support communities in disaster and recovery settings.



Understanding Fire to Flourish

Our Ambition

Fire to Flourish is a ground-breaking initiative aiming to bring transformative change to the way communities prepare for, recover from and reduce the risk of disasters. Since its inception in January 2021, the Fire to Flourish program has pioneered new ways of working in deep partnership with communities to promote and enable a holistic and transformative approach to disaster recovery and resilience, laying foundations for long-term community thriving.

Fire to Flourish recognises that innovations in practice, governance and systems are needed for communities to be enabled to lead their own journey in strengthening disaster resilience. It operates with a clear mission: to trial innovations in community-led resilience and influence system changes to support their scaling. In doing so,

Fire to Flourish seeks to support communities in leading their own journey to reduce disaster risk, prepare for natural hazard events and recover well when disaster strikes.

The journey of Fire to Flourish began in response to the devastating 2019-20 bushfires. Community experiences of these catastrophic events highlighted critical gaps in how Australia is set up to support communities in disaster and recovery settings. This underscored the need to transition away from a typically government-led reactive approach to a more sustainable, inclusive and effective community-led approach. In this vision, communities have agency, power and resources they can readily access to strengthen their climate resilience and address systemic inequities to be able to flourish over the long term.



Fire to Flourish's vision and mission are ambitious and the program has attracted a diverse group of stakeholders, including community leaders, policy makers, practitioners, academics, philanthropists and more – all united in the shared goal of supporting, fostering and strengthening community-led resilience.

Fire to Flourish is underpinned by a consortium led by Monash University and with cornerstone philanthropic investment from the Paul Ramsay Foundation and Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd and additional support from the

Lowy Foundation. These partnerships reflect a shared commitment to long-term support for community impact and systems change that enables community-led disaster resilience approaches to be adopted at scale around Australia. Fire to Flourish also involves a range of strategic and delivery partners at local and national scales, including community foundations, Local Governments and service providers that have critical roles to play in supporting community-led action to strengthen disaster resilience.





A Principles-Based Approach

At the heart of Fire to Flourish's work are its guiding principles, which shape its activities and initiatives. These principles guide our work in developing, testing and refining community-led resilience approaches, building an evidence base to support these models and connecting with a broad network of stakeholders for shared learning and coordinated action. This includes paying particular attention to the strengths, voices and needs of communities experiencing systemic inequities aiming to disrupt entrenched cycles of disadvantage and foster pathways towards thriving futures.

The program operates under the hypothesis that a community-level support model, involving collaborative learning processes and co-designed social and strategic planning initiatives, can create conditions for increased long-term community resilience to disasters. This goes hand in hand with transforming development trajectories to dismantle entrenched disadvantage.

Action research and evaluation are integral to Fire to Flourish's approach, with teams working to evidence the case for systems change, co-create and experiment with new methods and tools to strengthen community-led action, document lived experiences, assess changes and benefits that occur in community as a result of new models tested and identify and advocate for policy changes and other systemic shifts. This ensures that the innovations trialled are not just effective in the short term for the partner communities involved, but also sustainable and scalable for others in the long term.

Looking forward, Fire to Flourish aims to collaborate with other individuals and groups that have aligned values and purpose to develop pathways for scaling community-led resilience innovations and driving the systemic shifts necessary for proactive, holistic and sustained support to be available and accessible to all Australian communities.



Our Principles

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.

Our Delivery Pillars




Strengthened
Community Networks
and Capabilities



Evidence and
Knowledge Generation



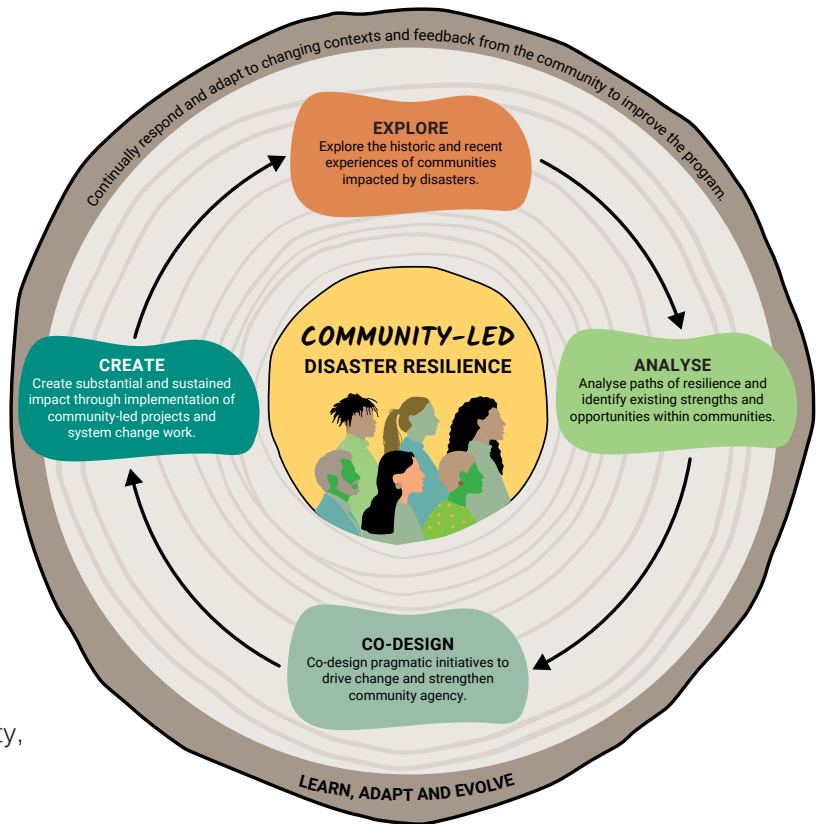
Influence and
Advocacy



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.



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



Measuring What Matters

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.

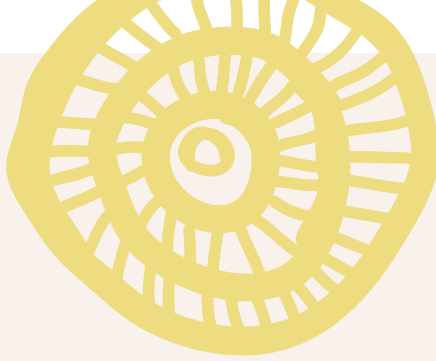
Measuring impact, as opposed to merely tracking outputs, is increasingly recognised as a vital practice for programs, organisations and governments with a social purpose. This shift towards impact measurement represents a deeper commitment to understanding and enhancing the long-term effects of various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

PART 2. Our Impact



Impact Survey Overview

Core to the Fire to Flourish program is developing a research and evidence base to assess and measure the program's impact over time. This includes data on areas including health and wellbeing, economics, community capability, resilience and social capital. This research is still underway, with insights and evidence emerging over the next phase of the program.

As a reflection of our commitment to impact evaluation throughout delivery of the program, Fire to Flourish sought self-reported information from community members about their experience with the program so far. We believe that a key measure of impact is to ask the community members in which the program directly operates.

In 2023, Fire to Flourish appointed Elevate Impact as its independent impact partner. Working in partnership with the Fire to Flourish team, Elevate Impact designed an impact measurement survey in line with the program's impact framework. As well as collecting vital qualitative feedback to guide the future design of the program, the survey was specifically designed to capture quantitative impact scores against the six impact domains identified by Fire to Flourish.

The survey was distributed to 340 community members across the four partner communities in December 2023. All survey responses were anonymous to ensure people felt comfortable responding freely.

The impact scoring for each domain is calculated based on the mean score given by each survey respondent (relative to each community) against each question impact domain and given a score between 1 and 10.

The scale of impact is determined as follows:

- 1.0 - 2.99 = no impact
- 3.0 - 4.99 = minor impact
- 5.0 - 6.99 = positive impact
- 7.0 - 8.99 = major positive impact
- 9.0 - 10 = significant impact



The 2023 Community Impact survey was sent to **340** individuals who have engaged with Fire to Flourish at the community scale.

Based on a confidence level of **90%**, the margin for error in the survey analysis is **3.8%**

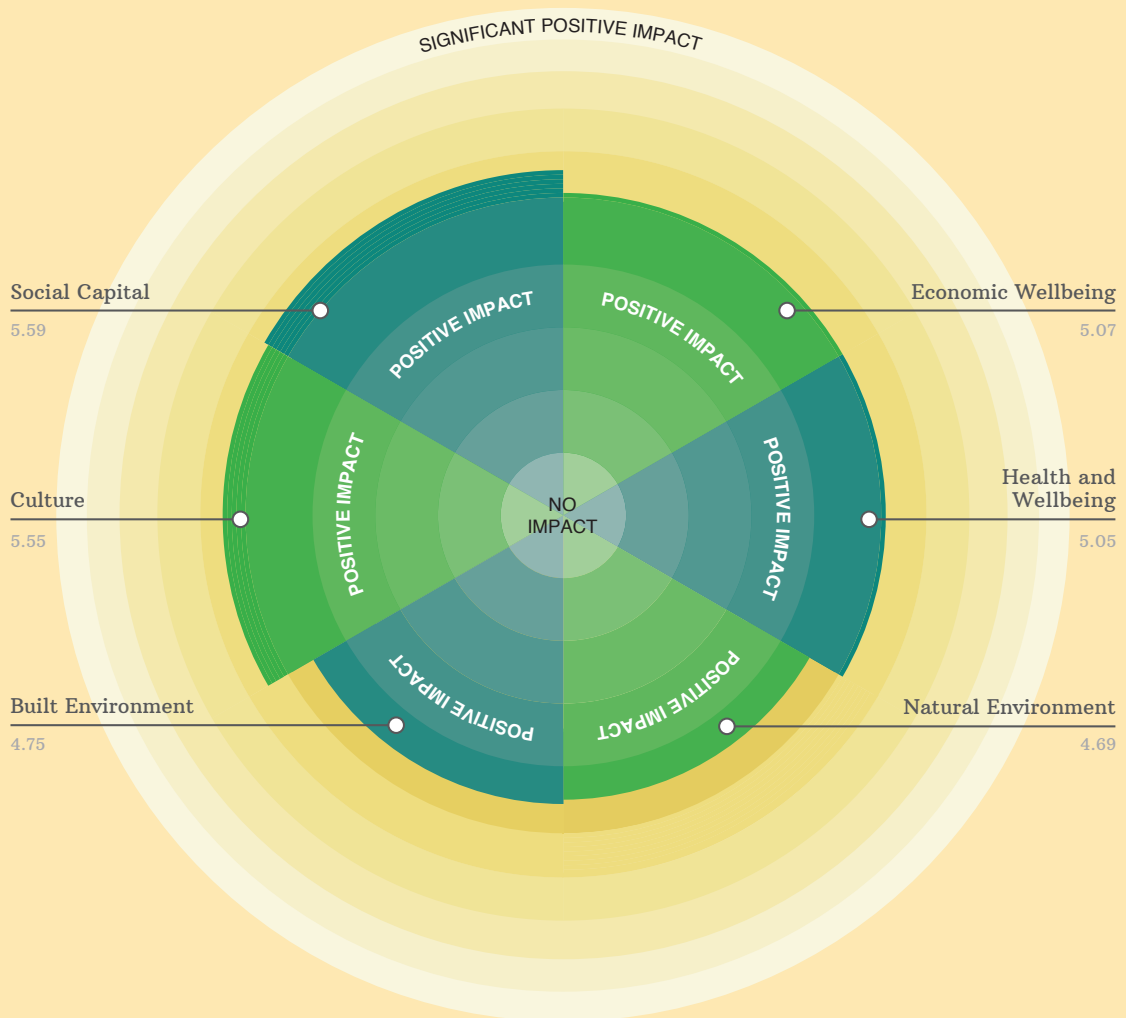
Based on the number of recipients, the survey received a **23.82%** completion rate

The survey included **49** questions designed to elicit community perception of Fire to Flourish's impact across six domains.



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).

PART 3.
Community
Impact

Clarence Valley

Clarence Valley, NSW

The journey of Fire to Flourish in Clarence Valley is an exemplar of the transformative impact of targeted support and engagement in disaster-affected communities. Clarence Valley was severely impacted by the bushfires of 2019-2020, which burned 59% of the region that is home to 54,000 residents, destroying hundreds of homes and farming structures and damaging community facilities.

The Fire to Flourish community team in Clarence Valley decided to focus efforts on particular towns and regions of the vast shire and the greatest impacts to date have been achieved in partnership with communities located in Glenreagh, Nymboida, Blinks and Woombah.

Several rounds of community co-design have been delivered by the local team, involving workshops designed to take participants through a resilience planning to participatory granting cycle.

This process supports and enables community-led decision-making about how grant funding will be distributed to achieve outcomes identified by the community as valued and desired.

In the first instance, the process involves recruiting diverse local residents to form a co-design group. These people embark on a process of gathering and analysing narratives of community disaster and post-disaster experience, to identify local strengths, capabilities and resources, as well as challenges, gaps and opportunities. Next, the focus shifts to envisioning a collective shared aspiration for a thriving and resilient community. Lastly, the group works to turn this vision to reality, bringing together a range of strategies and ideas from within their own circle and the broader community, to shape actionable steps and fund projects in support of the community vision.



As well as contributing to the physical rebuild of bushfire-affected communities, this initiative has also fostered a sense of ownership and pride among local residents.



Collaboration has played a crucial role in enhancing the impact of Fire to Flourish's initiatives in Clarence Valley. Partnership with the Northern Rivers Community Foundation (NRCF) expanded the reach and scope of grant distribution, while regular interactions with local entities ensured that the community remained engaged and invested in the resilience-strengthening process. Fire to Flourish further boosted community awareness and involvement through a series of events, workshops and sessions designed to collect and amplify local voices and visions for the future.

The diversity of projects and partnerships supported by Fire to Flourish in Clarence Valley reflects the unique needs and aspirations of the community. From cultural heritage initiatives and environmental restoration projects to youth engagement programs and business incubators, the initiatives span a wide spectrum of focus areas, each contributing to the collective resilience of the region.

One of the standout achievements of Fire to Flourish's work in Clarence Valley has been supporting community members to envisage and plan for the revitalisation of public spaces in bushfire affected areas. In partnership with Monash University Masters of Architecture, Planning and Design students, Fire to Flourish facilitated placemaking workshops, empowering the community to re-imagine and reshape their public spaces. As well as contributing to the physical rebuild of bushfire-affected communities, this initiative has also fostered a sense of ownership and pride among local residents.





Looking forward, Fire to Flourish's journey in the Clarence Valley continues to evolve. The lessons learned from the first two co-design rounds have informed planning for future rounds, with a heightened focus on engaging with other parts of the Clarence Valley, including the Yaegl and Bundjalung communities. Fire to Flourish is committed to ensuring that the resilience-strengthening efforts are grounded in the values, traditions and aspirations of the community.

Fire to Flourish's journey in the Clarence Valley is a story of transformation and resilience. In the face of profound local challenges, the program has successfully fostered a sense of community, provided targeted support and empowered local residents to take charge of their recovery and resilience-building efforts. The journey is ongoing, but the impact is already evident, with a community that is stronger, more connected and better equipped to face the challenges of the future.

Impact Story

Placemaking brings community aspirations to life

Placemaking is described as offering the 'engine' of skilled design and planning expertise to enable communities to realise their ideas and aspirations for local places and spaces.

Fire to Flourish implemented a placemaking initiative in Clarence Valley as an inclusive and creative approach that aims to capture local values and ideas, understand needs and perspectives and respond to these by providing strategic plans and creative designs back for each community to use as a resource.

Twenty architecture and urban planning Masters students from Monash University designed and delivered placemaking workshops across four regions of the Clarence Valley over a week in mid-August 2023. The locations were Woombah, Nymboida, the Orara Valley and Blicks region.

Each local workshop involved group work and staged hands-on activities to inspire creativity and conversations, gather relevant local data and insights and enable the co-creation of proposals to improve local spaces and places. Community members described the experience as unique and unlike any previous processes they have taken part in.

“When Council runs consultations there’s a panel on stage and everyone else on seats down below and we ask questions – question and answer. So yes, this was quite different and inclusive. It played to everyone’s individual ways of thinking – with the variety of activities they had for people to contribute their ideas – some people worked with the clay, and drawing and putting flags down on a map.”

Clarence Valley Fire to Flourish Community Team Member



Community participants were invited to consider how local facilities might be re-designed, improved or better equipped to support the community in good times and bad. Many people emphasised a desire for accessible and inviting spaces to gather, celebrate, exercise, get to know their neighbours and ultimately be in a better position to look out for one another in times of emergency.

An aspiration was for bike paths to be installed, connecting different parts of the community. One community member eloquently explained how this would help locals connect and thereby strengthen disaster resilience:

“As you travel by bike or walk you engage with others and get to know your neighbours and that helps to better connect the community so we can look out for each other when we face challenges in future.”

Another aspiration identified was the need for a new community hall “for evacuation and for yoga”. A consistent theme emerging through insights like these, is that spaces which facilitate strong forms of ‘everyday’ social

resilience are intrinsically linked to community disaster readiness.

The information gathered via the workshops was synthesised, analysed and used by the Masters students to develop useful strategic placemaking frameworks and design folios for each of the ‘action projects’ identified by community members in each location. These were iterated with community members and shared back via an exhibition mounted in each location in December 2023.

Fire to Flourish grant funding of \$200,000 per location is available to back each community’s aspirations and take selected designs forward toward realisation. A further participatory process is planned to enable community members to select which of the proposed projects they choose to fund.

Placemaking has provided communities with access to in-kind architecture and design services. In addition, Fire to Flourish is helping to train the next generation of architects and urban planners in community engagement and people-centred design.



Snapshot of Funded Projects: Clarence Valley

Below is a selection of the projects selected for participatory grant funding by the Clarence Valley community.

Blicks Fishing Trip

Objective: Connecting local children, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, through intergenerational camping experiences.

Activities: Participants learn essential skills and connect with Traditional Owner cultural heritage and history of the area.

Impact Aim: Fostering social cohesion through community bonding, intergenerational learning and cultural knowledge building.

Bush Tucker Walk and Sensory Garden

Objective: Restoration of land along Goolang Creek and building community networks through shared experiences of local areas.

Activities: Design and delivery of a Bush Tucker Walk and Sensory Garden through collaboration with local Indigenous and Landcare groups.

Impact Aim: To improve the local natural environment, enhance stewardship, promote the use of native plants and strengthen cultural ties and knowledge sharing.

Safe and Tidy Tyringham

Objective: Helping to build community connection, safety and accessibility by supporting local roadside safety projects.

Activities: The purchase of equipment to maintain essential fire breaks and create safer areas for the community to utilise.

Impact Aim: To improve health and wellbeing through the promotion of fire safety, community mobility and the importance of well-maintained public spaces.

First Nation Cultural History

Objective: Preserving and promoting local Indigenous storytelling and knowledge centred around the Golden Dog area.

Activities: The creation of informational materials to educate new residents and visitors about local Indigenous culture.

Impact Aim: To foster and enhance local connections with Indigenous people and promote cultural understanding and heritage preservation.

Helping Hands at Markets

Objective: To increase community connection and networking for young residents through supporting local youth work experiences.

Activities: Participants receive training in small business operations, events management and develop strong work ethics.

Impact Aim: To increase community skills and capabilities in young people by providing practical skills training.

Small Halls Festival

Objective: To increase the safety and functionality of Hernani Hall for community events and social gatherings.

Activities: Completion of critical safety repairs and purchase of equipment to facilitate events and social activities.

Impact Aim: The promotion of social connectivity and economic wellbeing by supporting the region's ability to showcase its cultural vibrancy.

Community Communications

Objective: To strengthening community connections, information distribution and networking through shared communications.

Activities: Supporting the development and distribution of a community newsletter.

Impact Aim: To build social cohesion and promote mental health and wellbeing through the sharing of knowledge, creating employment opportunities and connection.

Incubator Project

Objective: To transform unused community infrastructure into a hub for economic development and small business support.

Activities: Upgrading of facilities to offer reduced-cost spaces with amenities for small business owners, startups and entrepreneurs

Impact Aim: To support economic wellbeing through the promotion and support of local entrepreneurship and diversification of local economies.

Orara Community Festivals

Objective: Development of a cultural plan to strengthen community connection and promote economic opportunities for Indigenous people.

Activities: Link with local Aboriginal communities and develop cultural plans to support local community festivals

Impact Aim: To enhance community cohesion, promote cultural preservation and foster economic opportunities.

Bluerock Nursery

Objective: Supporting local forest regeneration efforts and knowledge sharing by the Gumbaynggirr community.

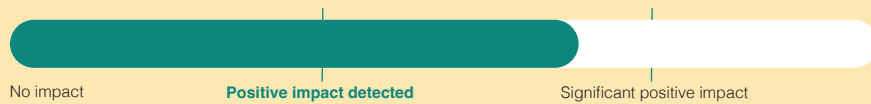
Activities: Purchase of capital equipment to increase the nursery's capacity to produce and promote native plant species.

Impact Aim: To promote and contribute towards natural environment restoration through the promotion of native species.

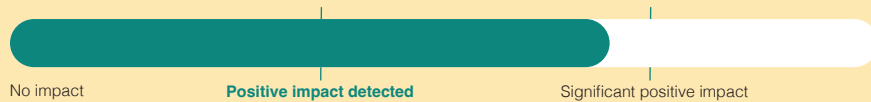
Impact Detected: Clarence Valley

Below is a selection of questions and quantitative data results from the impact survey distributed to the Clarence Valley community.

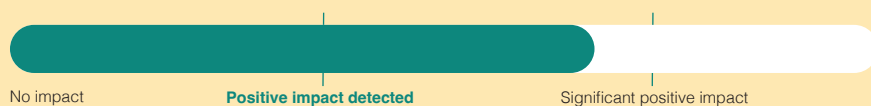
How would you rate the change in your confidence in bringing people in your community together to take action since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



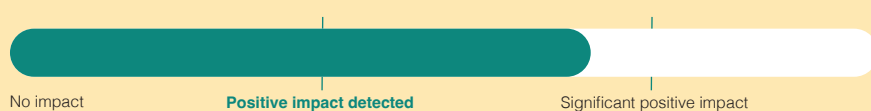
How would you rate the change in the level of connectedness you share with others from your community since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



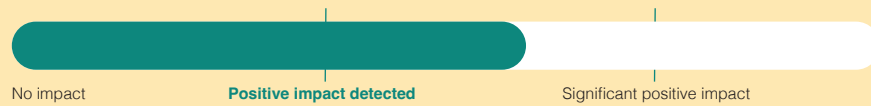
How would you rate the change in your level of knowledge of how your community could access funding for recovering from disaster since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



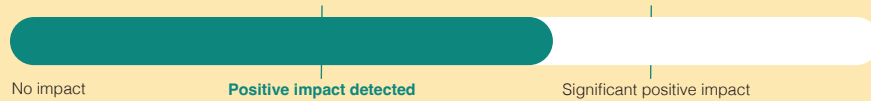
How would you rate the change in your understanding and appreciation of the connections the local Indigenous community, especially Traditional Owners, have with the natural environment since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



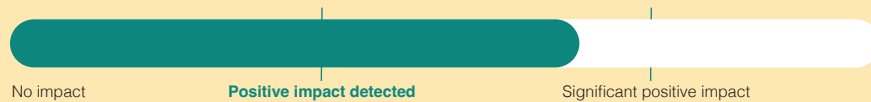
How would you rate the change in your connections with the local Indigenous community since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



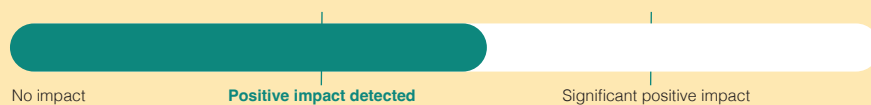
How would you rate the change in your understanding as to why maintaining the natural environment is important to the prevention and minimisation of disaster since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in the level of support you feel in relation to being able to recover from disasters since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your community's efforts to regenerate vegetation since Fire to Flourish became active in your local area?



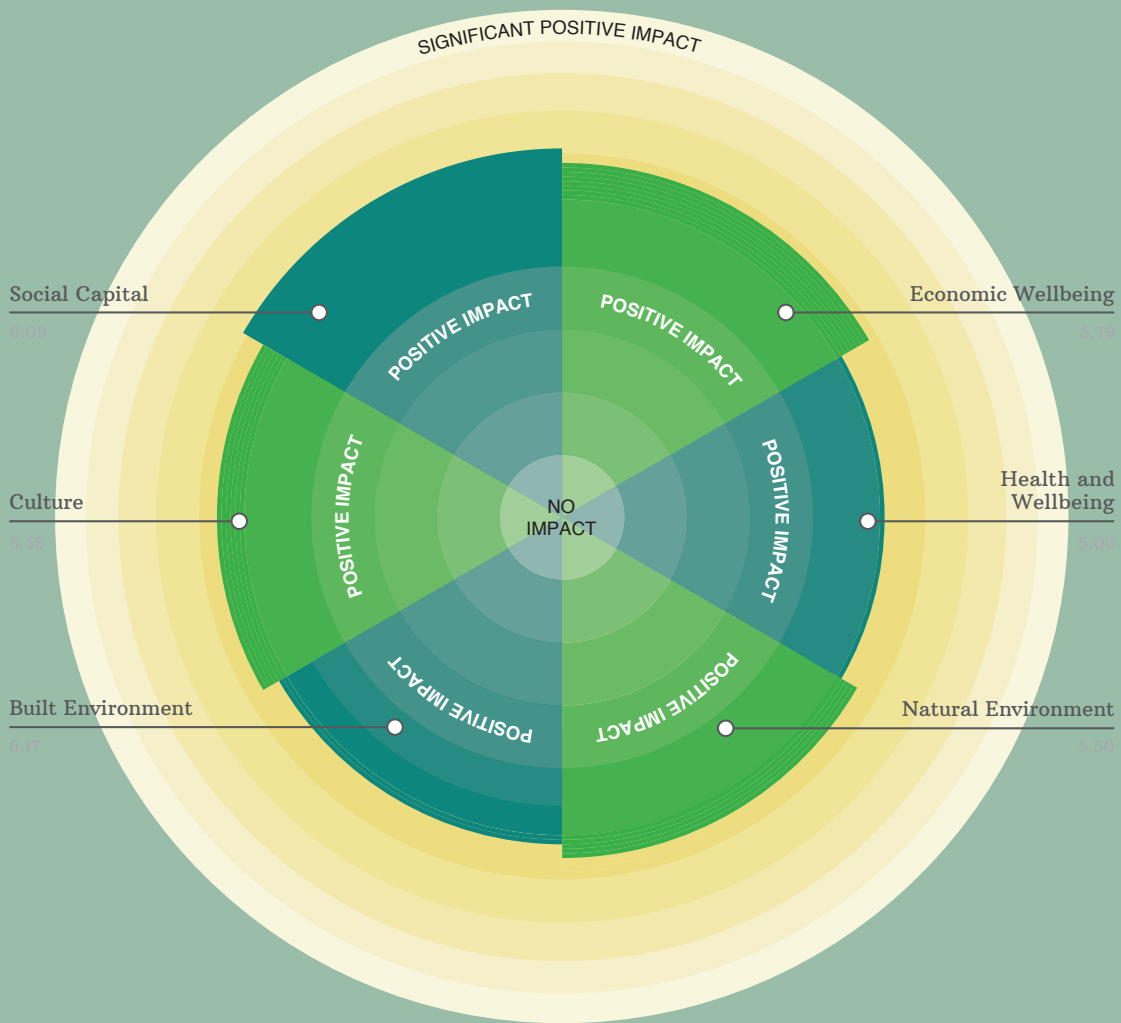
How would you rate the change in your community's shared understanding of the knowledge, skills, assets and strengths in your community?



How would you rate the change in your community's understanding of Indigenous land management practices since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



Overall Impact: Clarence Valley



Numerical impact measurement calculated:
Social Capital = 6.09 (positive impact), Economic Wellbeing = 5.79 (positive impact),
Cultural Impact = 5.80 (positive impact), Health and Wellbeing = 5.63 (positive impact),
Built Environment = 5.17 (positive impact) and Natural Environment = 5.50 (positive impact).



Eurobodalla



Eurobodalla, NSW

The Eurobodalla region of New South Wales was particularly affected by the catastrophic bushfires of 2019-20. Fires burned approximately 80% of the Shire, destroying homes, businesses and critical infrastructure. The region, known for its stunning natural beauty, including pristine beaches and national parks, saw its landscapes charred and wildlife habitats decimated.

The community faced immense challenges as it grappled with the immediate loss and began the long process of rebuilding. The psychological impact on residents was profound, with many facing the trauma of having fled their homes, lost possessions and livelihoods and the overarching grief for a devastated natural environment.

Following the bushfires, parts of the Eurobodalla have also had to contend with severe weather and flooding, further straining the region's recovery efforts and resilience. The drought preceding the fires had already weakened the agricultural sector and subsequent floods led to further economic and environmental setbacks. These events have underscored the vulnerability of the region to the multifaceted impacts of climate change and extreme weather events.

As a result of these events, the community has been strongly committed to building its resilience to disaster and has worked hand in hand with the Fire to Flourish team to co-design sustainable practices to promote response, preparedness and resilience against future disasters.

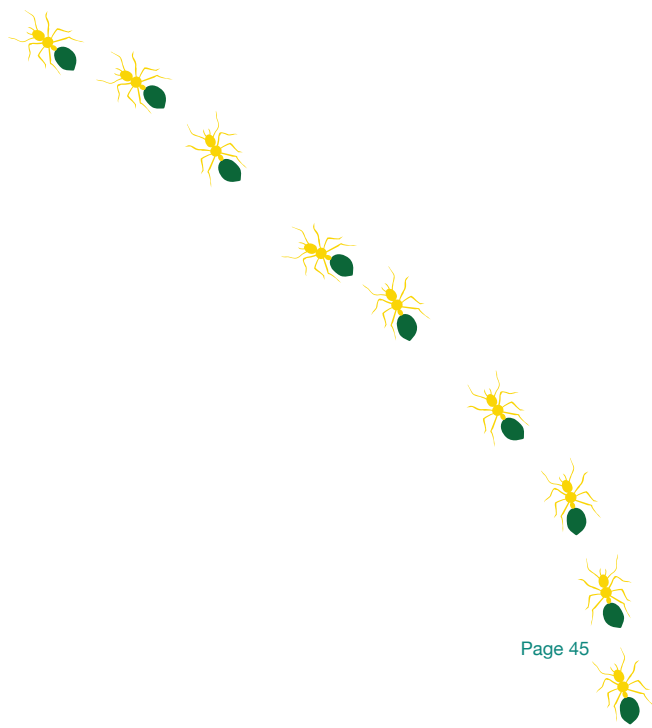


“In our local language we don’t have a word for ‘thank you’, it’s just something that’s innate in Aboriginal people, that we are going to help and have each other’s backs. There was just something burning within me to help my community in the bushfires.”

Kizzy Nye, Fire to Flourish Eurobodalla Community Lead

A united partnership, Fire to Flourish has worked with the Eurobodalla community to engage in deep listening and co-design, initially through a resilience planning process that brought diverse community leaders together to co-develop vision and priorities for a first round of granting. A second community granting round then provided an open opportunity for anyone in the community to put their ideas forward and receive feedback and support to refine their project concepts ready for funding.

More than \$300,000 has been disbursed in grants, supporting a wide array of projects from emergency solar power trailers to initiatives in cultural burning. The program leveraged crucial partnerships, notably with the Australian Communities Foundation (ACF), to optimise the grant disbursement process and ensure maximum impact.






Fire to Flourish led an extensive community engagement program as part of its work in Eurobodalla. Through a series of 50 meetings, community events and effective use of local media channels like ABC South East NSW, the initiative fostered strong local relationships, ensuring that the community was not just a passive beneficiary but an active participant in the program's recovery activities. The diversity of projects supported by Fire to Flourish speaks volumes about its holistic approach and commitment to creating a resilient Eurobodalla.

As Eurobodalla continues on its journey of strengthening resilience, Fire to Flourish is looking towards the next phase of its program. The lessons

learned from our first two rounds of community-led funding allocations will be invaluable as we prepare to facilitate further processes that will lead to community grant allocations. A key focus will also be placed on wellbeing and caring for Country initiatives, reflecting the community's resilience priorities expressed so far.

Fire to Flourish in Eurobodalla is a testament to the power of community, resilience and collective action. It represents a transformative journey from the ashes of the 2019-2020 bushfires to a future filled with hope, strength and resilience. The scars of the past remain, but they serve as a constant reminder and a driving force towards a brighter, more resilient future.



Case Study: The Key is Culture

The community of Mogo within the Eurobodalla Shire has been home to a wide range of different Aboriginal communities, each with their own distinct cultures and language groups. While the Monara and Yuin nations are recognised as the traditional owners of the land, many others from language groups, including the Dhurga, Bidawel, Thaua, Ngarigo and Djiiringanj, have called this place home.

Over the years, the community has experienced its share of disasters and hardship; little in recent times can compare to the devastation caused by the 2019-20 bushfires.

“When the fires came, I was living in Mogo at my grandfather’s house; we packed what we could and went to the airport because we thought that would be the safest place,” shared Jordan Nye, local resident and CEO of cultural guidance organisation, Muladha Gamara. As the fires got closer and closer to the town, the men realised it was their deep knowledge of the local landscape that could help them save their homes.

“For years, grandad and his brother would do cultural burns across from their homes to make it safe, but it had been a while since they’d been able to. So they decided to leave the airport and go back to the house to burn the country on the other side. The fire they lit met with the main fire and steered it away from the houses. It ended up saving many houses on the street. Not all, but many.”

In the aftermath of the fires, the economic and social impact on Mogo was immense and Jordan has since reflected that while there was help to be found, it was primarily from local community members and less from government or large institutions. “Four years on and some people are still waiting to have their homes rebuilt,” Jordan reflects.

But beyond the loss of physical infrastructure, the cultural impact on the community was significant. “As Indigenous people, we’ve got a really strong connection with fire and fire spirit and using fire to care for Country. Having our traditional practices ignored is painful. And after the fires, a fear was created within mob which we needed to overcome. Because as destructive as the fire was and as scary as it was, that was country and mother earth doing what she needs to do to protect herself and manage herself in a sense.”

In the aftermath of the 2019-20 bushfires, Jordan and others organised a healing day where cultural fire practices were done to help the community recover culturally and emotionally. “We needed to reignite this connection and relationship with fire and it was a really beautiful process watching community rebuild and re-bond with the spirit of fire.”

With a strong background and passion for community-led design, Jordan was keen to participate in the Fire to Flourish community co-design process and applied for funding to help address cultural capability and strength-building, with a strong focus on Mogo’s young people.

Through funding provided by Fire to Flourish, Jordan designed and ran a six-week cultural education program with four local schools. The program took students on a journey to deepen their understanding of local bush food, traditional dance and ceremony and the opportunity to engage with elders on leadership. Students also got the opportunity to work alongside the Batemans Bay Rangers where they learned about cultural burning, what it means to burn Country and why it is important.





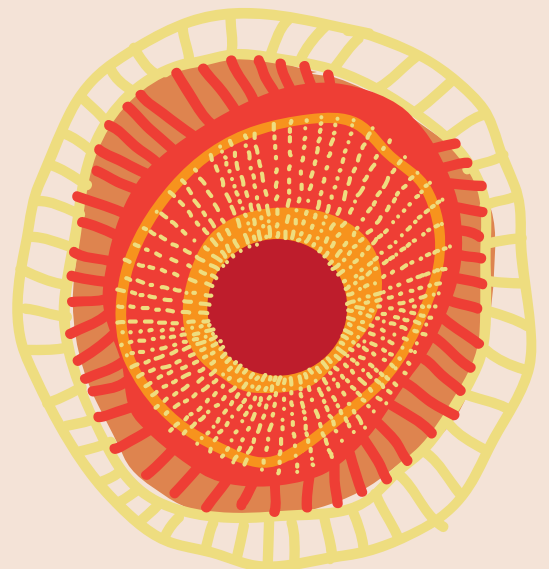
“Watching those young fellas grow through that process and feel comfortable to be in that cultural space was really powerful. Teachers told us afterwards that it had not only helped to introduce more culture into their schools, but also changed how the students behaved as leaders. They now had this drive to be leaders.”

While Jordan was proud of the cultural education program’s impact, he recognises there is much work to be done when working within communities to co-design solutions and increase resilience.

“We have to be careful about not trying to teach people to be leaders,” Jordan said. “Because many of us in these communities are already leaders, we know how to lead. We need to focus more on giving people the space and time to share their ideas and then develop things and learn from them. There’s a big project management side to getting these things off the ground and people need the right structure to bring these ideas to life.”

So where does Jordan think the biggest impact can be in the future?

“Focus on the people. If you have passionate and driven community members coming together to develop these beautiful ideas, help them make it happen and that’s where change will come.”



Snapshot of Funded Projects: Eurobodalla

Below is a selection of the projects selected for participatory grant funding by the Eurobodalla community.

Right Fire

Objective: To educate local residents and families about responsible fire practices, prevention, land management and cultural burning

Activities: Delivery of educational workshops, field demonstrations and community events.

Impact Aim: To foster cultural and social cohesion, support the preservation of natural environments and promote safety and wellbeing of local residents in relation to fire preparedness.

Community Cooking

Objective: To strengthen an existing volunteer-run food relief program aimed at supporting community building, networking and dismantling disadvantage around food security.

Activities: Provision of essential resources and coordination resources to support community cooking events and food distribution.

Impact Aim: To improve the health and wellbeing and community cohesion through the support of critical social services.

Community Governance

Objective: To enhance the skills and capabilities of individuals involved in community governance, improving decision-making processes and broader community engagement.

Activities: Delivery of a facilitated training program tailored for individuals in governance roles within local communities.

Impact Aim: To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of local community governance, leading to more resilient and empowered communities.

Resilience Solar Trailer

Objective: To enhance community safety and resilience by ensuring access to power during emergency events.

Activities: The provision of a solar-generated emergency trailer for use across various community events and in times of emergency.

Impact Aim: To increase the health and safety of the community residents during emergencies and enhanced sustainability of community events that promote social cohesion and economic activity.

Native Foods and Farmers

Objective: To connect native food knowledge holders and local farmers with the aim of fostering sustainable agricultural practices.

Activities: Support of community driven networking events, workshops and educational programs for indigenous knowledge holders and local farmers.

Impact Aim: To increase cultural impact, natural environment outcomes and economic activity for the community.

Emergency Communications

Objective: To improve the way emergency information is communicated to the community.

Activities: Working with local agencies to develop and implement communication strategies that provide clear, positive and responsible reporting during emergencies.

Impact Aim: To ensure a better informed and prepared community, leading to improved outcomes during disaster events.

Activating Community Assets

Objective: To optimise the utilisation of community-owned assets during disaster events, enhancing the community's resilience.

Activities: Investigating and communicating how assets such as community halls, rain tanks and dams can be accessed and used during emergencies.

Impact Aim: To increase health and wellbeing and social cohesion during disasters.

Community Composting

Objective: To explore opportunities for large-scale community composting, supporting local food production and self-sustainability.

Activities: Research and feasibility studies to support the successful implementation of future a large-scale initiative.

Impact Aim: To promote social cohesion, health and wellbeing and natural environment outcomes for the community.

Servicing Isolated Communities

Objective: To investigate how isolated communities in Eurobodalla can be effectively serviced and supported during disasters.

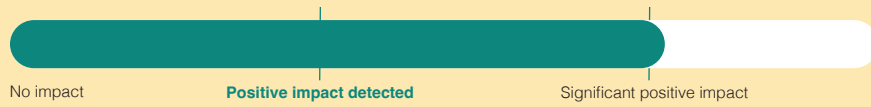
Activities: Researching successful models and developing a tailored plan for isolated communities in Eurobodalla.

Impact Aim: To promote social cohesion, community connection, resilience and health and wellbeing outcomes for the community.

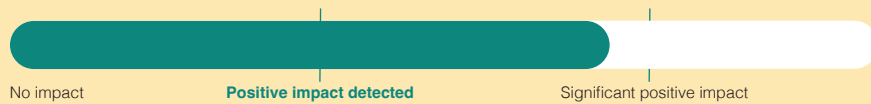
Impact Detected: Eurobodalla

Below is a selection of questions and quantitative data results from the impact survey distributed to the Eurobodalla community.

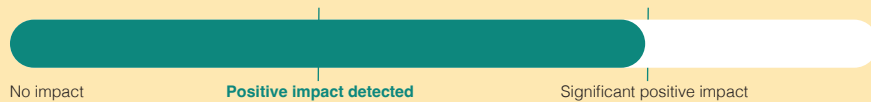
How would you rate the change in your confidence in engaging with different sorts of people and bringing them together in a safe and culturally inclusive way?



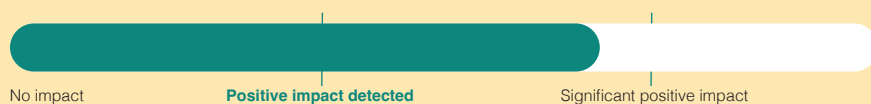
How would you rate the change in your confidence in building new connections and networks with relevant agencies and organisations in your community?



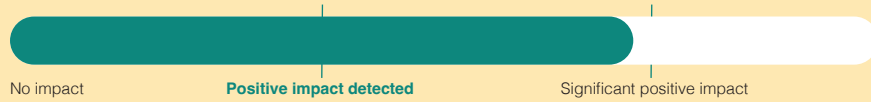
How would you rate the change in your level of awareness of the diversity of people, perspectives, skills and knowledge in your community?



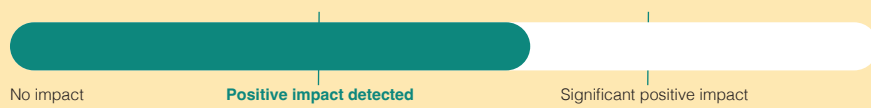
How would you rate the change in your understanding and appreciation of the connections the local Indigenous community, especially Traditional Owners, have with the natural environment since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



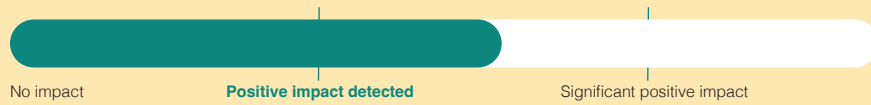
How would you rate the change in your connections with the local Indigenous community since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



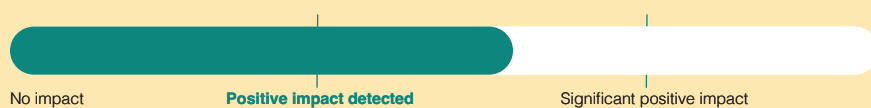
How would you rate the change in the level of support you feel in relation to being able to recover from disasters since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



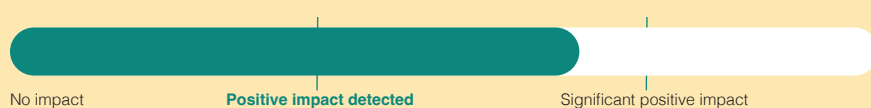
How would you rate the change in your connection to local community spaces (such as community halls, gardens and other places people value and use to gather) since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



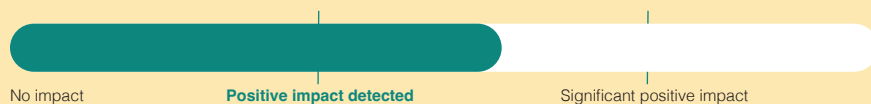
How would you rate the change in your knowledge of the local natural environment, including Indigenous flora and fauna, since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your level of opportunity to influence how your community would respond to disasters since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your connection to local community spaces (such as community halls, gardens and other places people value and use to gather) since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



Overall Impact: Eurobodalla



Numerical impact measurement calculated:

Social Capital = 5.84 (positive impact), Economic Wellbeing = 4.66 (minor positive impact),
Cultural Impact = 6.20 (positive impact), Health and Wellbeing = 4.89 (minor positive impact),
Built Environment = 4.78 (minor positive impact) and Natural Environment = 4.81 (minor positive impact).



Tenterfield

“I feel that the Fire to Flourish program is bringing opportunities to the community by connecting people back to their culture and releasing their inner strength.”

Helen Duroux, Fire to Flourish Tenterfield Community Lead

Tenterfield, NSW

Tenterfield has faced the full brunt of drought, bushfires and floods in recent years. The severe drought that gripped much of Australia in the years leading up to the 2019-20 bushfires, had a profound impact on Tenterfield, stressing water supplies to critical levels and severely affecting agriculture in the region. Then, the community was significantly affected by the 2019-20 bushfires, which destroyed properties and natural areas and left behind a landscape in urgent need of regeneration.

The challenges facing Tenterfield were compounded by the subsequent threat of flooding, which further tested the resilience of the community. These floods not only caused damage to infrastructure and homes but they also disrupted the recovery processes from previous disasters. In late 2023 Tenterfield was again threatened by bushfires.

This repeated cycle of drought, fire and flood has highlighted the region's exposure to extreme weather events and the pressing need for enhanced disaster preparedness and community resilience.

Fire to Flourish's partnership with Tenterfield has been multifaceted, with numerous projects underway. The team has successfully documented their journey, facilitating continuous improvement and learning.





In collaboration with the Northern Rivers Community Foundation (NRCF), Fire to Flourish enabled a collaborative granting process, ensuring that resources are efficiently allocated to where they are needed most. Engagement with local government has been a priority and the co-designers have aspirations to establish a sustainable community foundation of their own. Additionally, collaborations with the Jubullum Aboriginal community have been integral to lay foundations for a dedicated future granting process, ensuring that the path to recovery and resilience is inclusive and representative of diverse communities across the Tenterfield local government area.

Workshops and community events have played a significant role in Fire to Flourish's journey in Tenterfield. Sessions with groups such as the NSW Rural Fire Service have fostered innovation, while six community events have been crucial in spreading awareness and information. Through 20 meetings with local organisations, Fire to Flourish has strengthened its community ties, building a network of support and collaboration.

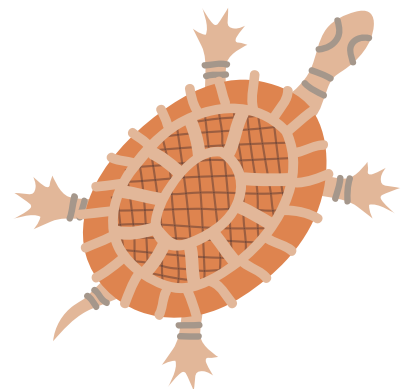
Reflecting on the journey, it is evident that while bushfires and other disasters have presented monumental challenges, the spirit of the Tenterfield community, in partnership with Fire to Flourish, is playing a central role in navigating the path to recovery.

The Tenterfield team strategically decided to include key community organisations in their co-design group, seeking individuals that could bring the context and networks of their organisations, along with a creativity and openness to new connections. This forged a strong, interlinked network of individuals, groups and organisations.

This co-design group mapped their community-wide connections, shared diverse stories and experiences of the bushfire disaster, imagined new possibilities for their community and developed transformative ideas for how their community's resilience could be strengthened. This collaborative work led to an initial suite of grant funded projects and laid foundations for further grant rounds to come.

Fire to Flourish is having a profound impact on the Tenterfield community through its support of a wide array of initiatives tailored to meet specific community needs.

Reflecting on the journey, it is evident that while bushfires and other disasters have presented monumental challenges, the community is leading their local recovery with strong collective spirit and, with the support of Fire to Flourish, is increasing their disaster resilience in many tangible ways. The diverse range of projects, the commitment to engagement and collaboration and the unwavering determination of the community highlight a story of hope, recovery and resilience.



Case Study: From little things, big things can grow.

For tens of thousands of years, the Gamillaroi people have cared for Country in northern NSW and southern Queensland and watched as the landscape was molded by the ravages of drought, storm and fire. And yet, rather than being immune to the heartbreak of these disasters, this deep and unbroken connection to Country can make the devastation even more difficult to bear. “Our connection to country means it affects us differently,” shared Helen Duroux, a proud Gamillaroi woman and Tenterfield resident.

Over the past five years, Tenterfield has been significantly tested by disaster, as drought and fires have continuously tested the resolve of the natural landscape and the people who call it home. While the impact of these events has been widespread and indiscriminate, Ms Duroux describes a different type of pain endured by Traditional Owners.

“In the weeks after the recent fires, my sister and I drove around and saw the devastation to the land. It was so hard for us to see Country the way it was. As Aboriginal people, when our country is devastated, so are we.” While the destruction of homes and property is often at the forefront of news reporting in the aftermath of a disaster, another story of the continuing impact on the natural environment is regularly left untold.

“After the fires, we had a lot of blackwater events. The rain came and washed the ash down into the creek and the fish couldn’t breathe. They come to the edges of the water to try to breathe because the ash from the fires is contaminating the water. But then the water recedes and they are all left to die,” said Ms Duroux. In the aftermath of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, she recalled visiting the river ways surrounding Tenterfield and seeing thousands of fish dead on the banks. “It was one of the saddest things I’ve ever seen.”

“But then, we went out again a few weeks later and we noticed there was regrowth. That’s how it happens here. There is drought, there is fire, there is rain and there is regrowth. That is Country.”

Following the devastation of the Black Summer fires, the Tenterfield community began working with Fire to Flourish in the hope of finding new ways to build resilience to how people could prevent, prepare and recover from disaster.

Ms Duroux took on the role of Community Lead for Tenterfield as part of Fire to Flourish's partnership with the community and, along with many others, began the process of bringing the community together to talk about what resilience looked like for them at a local level.

When the fires came back around in late 2023, these countless hours of coming together to collaborate, share, learn and plan proved invaluable. Community members described the emergency response in Tenterfield this time as far better coordinated than in 2019-20, highlighting Fire to Flourish as a key contributing factor.

"When the last fire came, we were ready. And because of what we had gone through together as a community, everything was

easier. We had preempted what would be needed and had everything in place to go," Ms Duroux said.

The co-design group acted as an information hub to help link community members with one another and with available services to support their preparation, response and recovery. Practical measures were efficiently coordinated by Fire to Flourish Tenterfield and the co-designers, enabling local farmers and property owners to support one another, for example, by reducing grass fuel load and providing feed for animals on burnt properties.

Co-designer efforts included sharing information, helping coordinate hands-on support and Fire to Flourish's rapid response grants and advocating on behalf of the community for local needs to be met by relevant agencies.

Community members also reported how the elevation of community voices within inter-agency meetings and other important



“As Aboriginal people, when our Country is devastated, so are we.”

Helen Duroux, Fire to Flourish Tenterfield Community Lead

forums, through the co-designers, helped transform local decision-making and enabled community members to feel an increased sense of agency and control in what was an uncertain and traumatising period.

The ‘thank you’ day organised by Fire to Flourish Tenterfield after the fires enabled the community to gather, share and reflect on recent experiences as an important healing step and helped people access further support from local organisations.

In partnership with Northern Rivers Community Foundation, the Fire to Flourish community team on the ground in Tenterfield was able to roll out a rapid grants process to help those most in need almost immediately. Grants were used to support individuals who required critical care, farmers who needed emergency fencing to save their livestock and even to deliver much-needed supplies to wildlife rescue workers who were caring for injured animals.

Through the work with Fire to Flourish, the community team was on the frontline of helping get these grants into the hands of those who needed it most, when they needed it most. “The set-up of this granting system was only effective because it was entrusted to local people with local knowledge to make the decisions. We are the ones on the ground who are connected with people and place and we know where the greatest needs are.”

While recovery grants are common practice in the aftermath of a disaster, they often come too late or with bureaucratic red tape that can prevent those who need it the most from getting

access. In the case of Tenterfield, Ms Duroux reflected that by the time government grants were even beginning to be made available, Fire to Flourish had already completed its rapid response.

While speed and local knowledge in the immediate aftermath of disaster are critical, one cannot underestimate the power a familiar connection can have when a trauma of this magnitude arises.

“Some people require the care of an existing relationship for them to be vulnerable enough to ask for help,” reflected Ms Duroux. “It can take a lot for people to share their stories right away. They don’t want to go and sit down with a Centrelink officer or someone when they are so vulnerable. But they still need some kind of immediate help and that’s what we could do.”

While Ms Duroux acknowledges the rapid response grants would not be able to help everyone recover all of their losses, she reflected that the speed and ease with which they were made available helped give people the strength they needed to face the road ahead.

“It gave people a sense of peace. To be able to help people with their immediate needs, put food in their cupboards, or help save their livestock relieves some of that immediate trauma. There’s a lot of pain while people try to work out ‘What on earth am I going to do now? How am I going to feed my family?’. You need the support of people around you in the immediate aftermath to keep you going so you can say, ‘Now I feel strong enough to start the recovery process.’”

Snapshot of Funded Projects: Tenterfield

Below is a selection of the projects selected for participatory grant funding by the Tenterfield community.

Alternatives to 1080 Bait

Objective: Local alternative solutions to the use of 1080 dog bait to address the issue of domestic pets and native wildlife being killed through accidental ingestion and secondary poisoning.

Activities: Undertaking research, delivery of community education programs and advocacy for policy change.

Impact Aim: To protect natural environments and promote health and wellbeing for wildlife.

Emergency Communications

Objective: To improve local communications during emergency events.

Activities: Development and implementation of a local emergency communication plan and training sessions for community.

Impact Aim: To enhance community health and wellbeing through preparedness and resilience, with faster response times and better-informed community members.

Waste Management

Objective: To advocate for free local waste disposal days to increase accessibility and reducing illegal dumping of flammable waste.

Activities: Provision of free access to waste disposal facilities and delivery of awareness campaigns on the importance of proper waste disposal.

Impact Aim: To reduce fire hazards, promote responsible waste disposal practices and create a cleaner, safer community environment.

Library of Things

Objective: To create a system for lending tools, equipment and other basic household items throughout the community for those in need.

Activities: Assisting the community in collecting and cataloguing items for lending, structuring a borrowing system and promoting the service to the community.

Impact Aim: To promote social cohesion, health and wellbeing and the maintenance of natural and built environments to ensure safety.

Community Mapping

Objective: To develop a community mapping tool to help residents find and support local services and resources.

Activities: Gathering data on local resources and services, developing the mapping tool and promoting its use within the community.

Impact Aim: To support economic activity, promote social cohesion and improve community networking and resource sharing.

Ranger Program

Objective: To support the future sustainability of the Local Indigenous Ranger Program designed to care for Country.

Activities: Conducting feasibility studies, developing program guidelines and assisting in future funding mapping.

Impact Aim: To promote cultural connection and understanding, social cohesion, environmental stewardship and better outcomes for natural environments.

Skills & Capacity Building

Objective: To create a cooperative of community members sharing a broad range of practical, business and community skills.

Activities: Establishment of the cooperative, recruiting mentors and trainers and organising skill-sharing sessions.

Impact Aim: To promote community networking, skills and capability building resulting in economic development, health and wellbeing and social cohesion.

Community Garden Upgrades

Objective: To expand the capacity of the existing community garden and improve accessibility and facilities.

Activities: Undertaking garden upgrades, organising community engagement activities and promoting the garden's use.

Impact Aim: To enhance social cohesion and health and wellbeing outcomes by improving local food security.

Naturalist Partnership

Objective: To reduce fire hazards and undertake infrastructure upgrades in Tenterfield Bird Park and Wildlife Refuge.

Activities: Conducting fire mitigation activities, implementing infrastructure improvements and engaging with local naturalist groups.

Impact Aim: To enhance the protection and safety of natural and built environments and improve health and wellbeing for wildlife.

Traditional Fire Workshops

Objective: To train local fire service officers and landholders in different land management techniques and cultural burning practices.

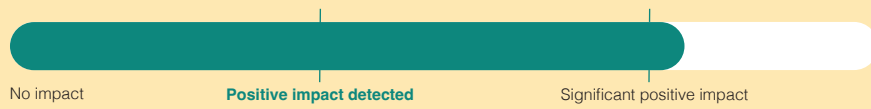
Activities: Organising and conducting a series of workshops and practical sessions on traditional fire management.

Impact Aim: To increased knowledge and adoption of cultural and sustainable land management practices.

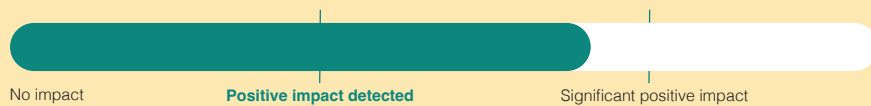
Impact Detected: Tenterfield

Below is a selection of questions and quantitative data results from the impact survey distributed to the Tenterfield community.

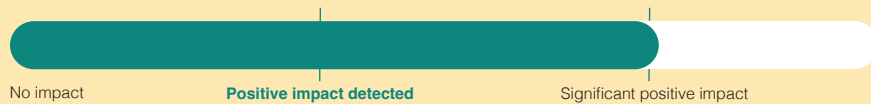
How would rate the change in your knowledge and skills with how you could recover from a future disaster (such as bushfire, flood, etc.) since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



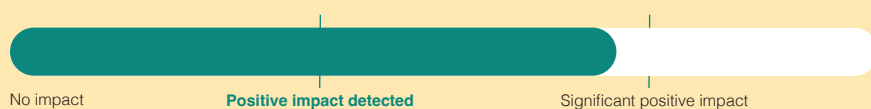
How would you rate the change in your confidence in bringing people in your community together to take action since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



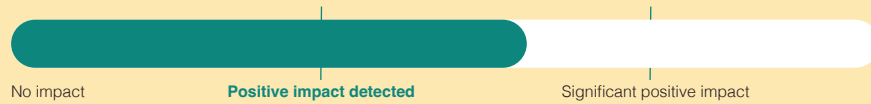
How would you rate the change in your confidence in building new connections and networks with relevant agencies and organisations in your community?



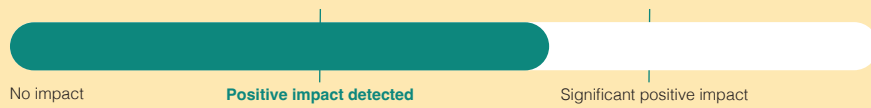
How would you rate the change in your level of knowledge of how your community could access funding for recovering from disaster since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



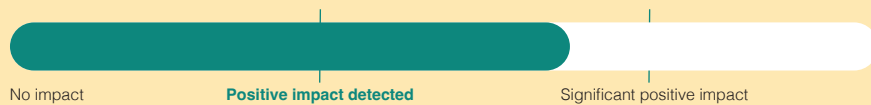
How would you rate the change in your understanding and respect of Indigenous knowledge and culture since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



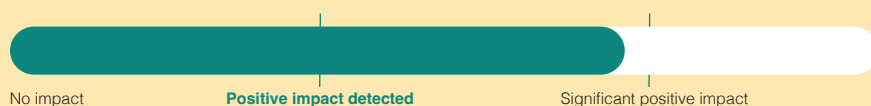
How would you rate the change in your understanding as to why maintaining the natural environment is important to the prevention and minimisation of disaster since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



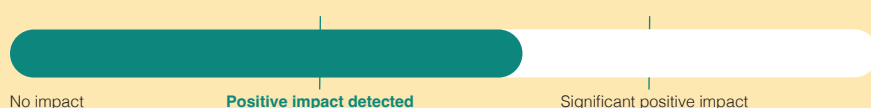
How would you rate the change in your understanding of local infrastructure systems (such as electricity, water and communications) since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



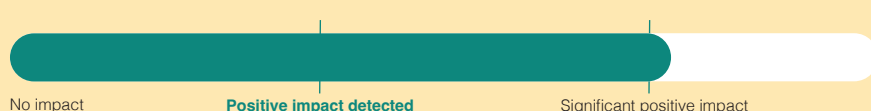
How would you rate the change in your community's level of action to minimise financial impact if a disaster occurred since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your community's understanding of Indigenous land management practices since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your level of awareness of the diversity of people, perspectives, skills and knowledge in your community?



Overall Impact: Tenterfield



Numerical impact measurement calculated:
Social Capital = 6.08 (positive impact), Economic Wellbeing = 5.70 (positive impact),
Cultural Impact = 5.50 (positive impact), Health and Wellbeing = 5.24 (positive impact),
Built Environment = 5.30 (positive impact) and Natural Environment = 4.63 (minor positive impact).



East Gippsland

East Gippsland, VIC

“Communities need to be supported to think outside the box and Fire to Flourish supports and facilitates this thinking.”

East Gippsland Community Member

As with Fire to Flourish’s other partner communities, East Gippsland has faced significant adversity due to disasters in recent years, with the 2019-2020 bushfire season marking one of the most challenging periods in the region’s history.

Bushfires ravaged large expanses of East Gippsland’s landscape, leading to the loss of homes, livelihoods and wildlife and significantly impacting on the region’s biodiversity. The scale of the disaster was immense, with the fires consuming hundreds of thousands of hectares, including much of the area’s national parks and forests.

The emotional toll was heavy, with residents facing the trauma of evacuation, the anxiety of an uncertain future and the sorrow for the natural environment that defines much of the character and economy of the region.

The aftermath of the 2019-2020 bushfires has been further complicated by other disasters, such as drought, storms and floods, which have tested the resilience of the East Gippsland community and ecosystems. These events have not only caused direct damage but have also disrupted the recovery from the bushfires, creating a complex web of challenges for residents and local authorities. The repeated impacts of these disasters have underscored the need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate risk and enhance resilience.





While the work of Fire to Flourish in the East Gippsland community is in its early stages, Fire to Flourish has made significant strides in establishing a robust program. Partnership with the East Gippsland Community Foundation has facilitated streamlined access to flexible grant funds for 8 community organisations in the Shire's far east. This has boosted energy and hope in the region, at a time when most bushfire recovery initiatives have been completed.

Collaborations with organisations such as Disaster Relief Australia and Moogji Aboriginal Corporation have also been instrumental in providing detailed mapping workshops and reviewing the bushfire experiences of Indigenous communities. These efforts are laying the groundwork for future action plans and fostering youth engagement.

The Fire to Flourish East Gippsland team has also mapped out a plan with the Ngarigo Monero community for placemaking workshops in 2024, focusing on enabling community to stay on their ancestral lands safely during emergencies.

Looking ahead, Fire to Flourish East Gippsland is adopting innovative engagement and resilience planning to granting methods across the region, readying for co-design and deeper analysis.



A project reviewing the experiences of Indigenous communities before, during and after the 2019/20 bushfires and conversations around a placemaking process in Cann River are also in progress, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to disaster resilience and community empowerment.

Looking ahead, Fire to Flourish East Gippsland is adopting innovative engagement and resilience planning to granting methods across the region, readying for co-design and deeper analysis. The East Gippsland program has identified and funded 18 community projects to commence implementing.



“Communities have really appreciated the grassroots approach we’ve taken. Asking what their priorities are and deep listening has been really important, so that people feel heard. It’s been an honour and a privilege to walk alongside my community and see them uplifted.”

Sara Matthews,
Fire to Flourish East Gippsland Community Lead

Impact Story

Meeting urgent disaster resilience needs across 10 small communities

A strategic approach to grant funding for small communities across the far East Gippsland region has been used to deliver targeted, timely and appropriate support for a range of important local needs. Between June to October 2023, the Fire to Flourish East Gippsland team were on a listening tour, sitting down with communities to hear about their priorities and inviting them to 'tell us what you need' for continued recovery, to be prepared for the upcoming bushfire season and strengthen community resilience to a range of other challenges.

Fire to Flourish is working to support ten communities in East Gippsland, across the region east of Orbost. Each small community has its own recovery needs and the levels of energy and degrees of devastation from previous disasters vary from town to town. A personalised approach to working with these communities has seen the greatest impact of Fire to Flourish in the region. Holding meetings one-on-one and in small group settings, to talk about what the program may be able to offer each community organisation or group, has been most successful.

Fire to Flourish encouraged local community groups and organisations to apply for funding grants of around \$30,000 to support identified needs and projects. The Fire to Flourish team collaborated with existing community organisations, including Hall and Recovery Committees, to get the word out about available funding and encourage applicants.

This approach has enabled the identification of key local infrastructure and disaster preparation needs for urgent funding, in addition to longer term projects that aim to support wellbeing and social connection for people living in communities that have been through so much over the past five years.

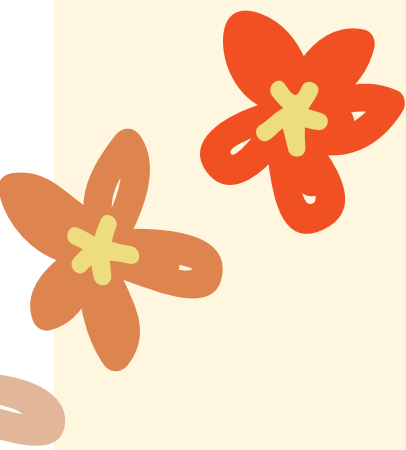
East Gippsland again faced bushfires, as well as storms and flooding over the summer months of 2023/24. The local Fire to Flourish team has been working hard to help community groups and organisations implement their projects, without overburdening community members who are already feeling exhausted from the experience of back to back disasters. To this end, many of the projects nominated for Fire to Flourish funding in East Gippsland are quite practical and tangible in nature.

A total of 8 projects were selected for funding in 2023. This includes upgrading facilities in a Men's Shed at Bemm River to establish a disaster relief hub, installing a community generator for use in times of power outage at Cann River and providing more reliable power for fire fighting pumps at Tamboon Inlet. Several projects aim to improve food security during disasters and make it possible to host social events, youth activities and cultural workshops at other times.

One project offers a creative post-disaster solution for use of resources to aid recovery. The East Gippsland timber milling project will provide free milling to landowners affected by bushfires to remove fallen trees and cut them to usable size to replace fencing and bridges.

Other projects aim to support wellbeing and connection within communities, such as reviving the popular Gypsy Point fishing competition and the permanent installation of a whimsical sculpture of a lyrebird made from burned farm equipment, as a memorial and thank you to Cann Valley residents, Aboriginal community and local agencies for their efforts and resilience during the fire emergency and ongoing recovery.

With such strong engagement in the community granting program in East Gippsland, Fire to Flourish is excited to work with communities there on a range of tailored community resilience planning and research projects in 2024.



Snapshot of Funded Projects: East Gippsland

Below is a selection of the projects selected for participatory grant funding by the East Gippsland community.

Rain Drops on the Roof Tops

Objective: To safeguard the Bemm River Community Centre and Activity Shed through the installation of a sprinkler system.

Activities: A lunch to bring community together to celebrate completion of the project.

Impact Aim: To deliver support and social connections for the Bemm River community whilst improving resilience to bushfire.

Cann Valley Youth Council (CVYC)

Objective: Sharing cultural and agricultural knowledge with Aboriginal organisations and academics.

Activities: Knowledge sharing will take place during two-day Cultural Immersion workshops.

Impact Aim: Improved land management, increased knowledge about Indigenous methods to care for Country and a healthier Country.

Aboriginal Art & Culture On Country

Objective: Provide local Aboriginal community with a Cann River outreach cultural space to share local First Nations lived experience.

Activities: Two art and culture group sessions and participation in community arts and culture events.

Impact Aim: The Aboriginal community of Far East Gippsland will benefit from the art, culture and holistic wellbeing exchange.

Genoa History Park Design & Permits

Objective: To secure planning and building approvals to create a local history park that houses community-owned fire trailers.

Activities: The park will serve as a meeting point for community members to connect.

Impact Aim: Improve community resilience to bushfire events by establishing community owned fire trailers, encouraging social connections and celebrating the history of the town.

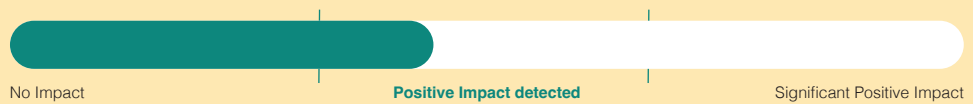
Impact Detected: East Gippsland

Below is a selection of questions and quantitative data results from the impact survey distributed to the East Gippsland community.

How would you rate the change in your level of awareness of the diversity of people, perspectives, skills and knowledge in your community?



How would you rate the change in your community's shared understanding of the knowledge, skills, assets and strengths in your community?



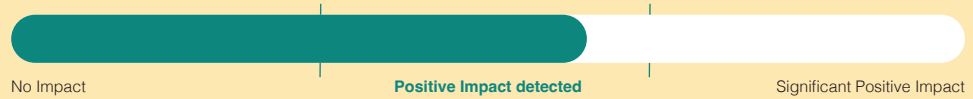
How would you rate the change in your confidence in building new connections and networks with relevant agencies and organisations in your community?



How would you rate the change in your knowledge of how your community could access funding for preventing and preparing for disaster since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your level of knowledge of how your community could access funding for recovering from disaster since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



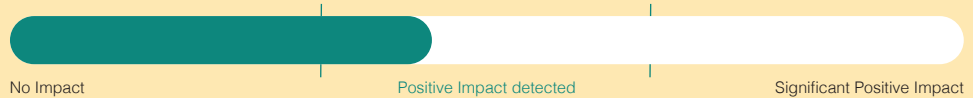
How would you rate the change in your connections with the local Indigenous community since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



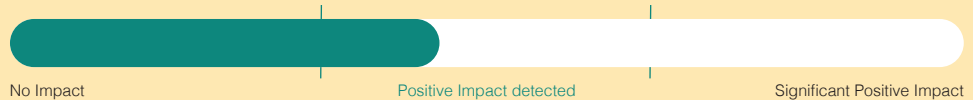
How would you rate the change in the level of support you feel in relation to being able to recover from disasters since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your connection to local community spaces (such as community halls, gardens and other places people value and use to gather) since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in your sense of care and responsibility over the local natural environment since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



How would you rate the change in the level of implementation of Indigenous land management practices in your community since engaging with Fire to Flourish?



Overall Impact: East Gippsland



Numerical impact measurement calculated:

Social Capital = 4.35 (minor positive impact), Economic Wellbeing = 4.93 (minor positive impact),
 Cultural Impact = 4.20 (minor positive impact), Health and Wellbeing = 4.67 (positive impact),
 Built Environment = 4.14 (minor positive impact) and Natural Environment = 3.55 (minor positive impact).

Looking to the Future

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.

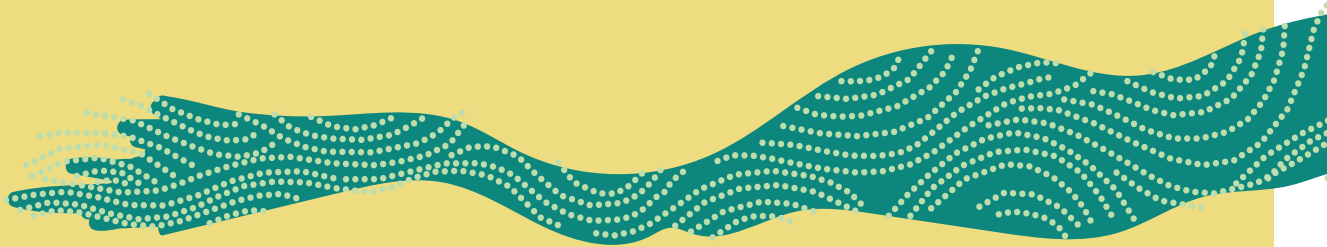
It is clear that impact is being generated in multiple ways across the program's four partner communities. Funding community-led projects through grants is of course important, but Fire to Flourish's impact goes much further. Resourcing community members as program staff has meant trusted local leaders 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.

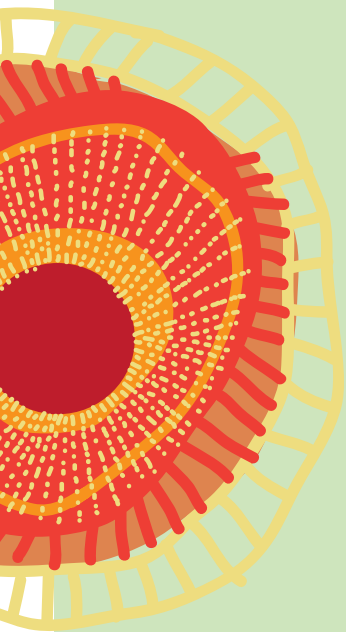
The Fire to Flourish Impact Framework will continue to evolve as the program hears from partner communities about the ways the program is making a difference to their wellbeing and resilience and as its research activity expands its evidence base for assessing and measuring impact over time.



Report Prepared By:

All content, data and analysis provided in this report was prepared independently by Elevate Impact (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.



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