

FIRE to FLOURISH

Strength through community-led action

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





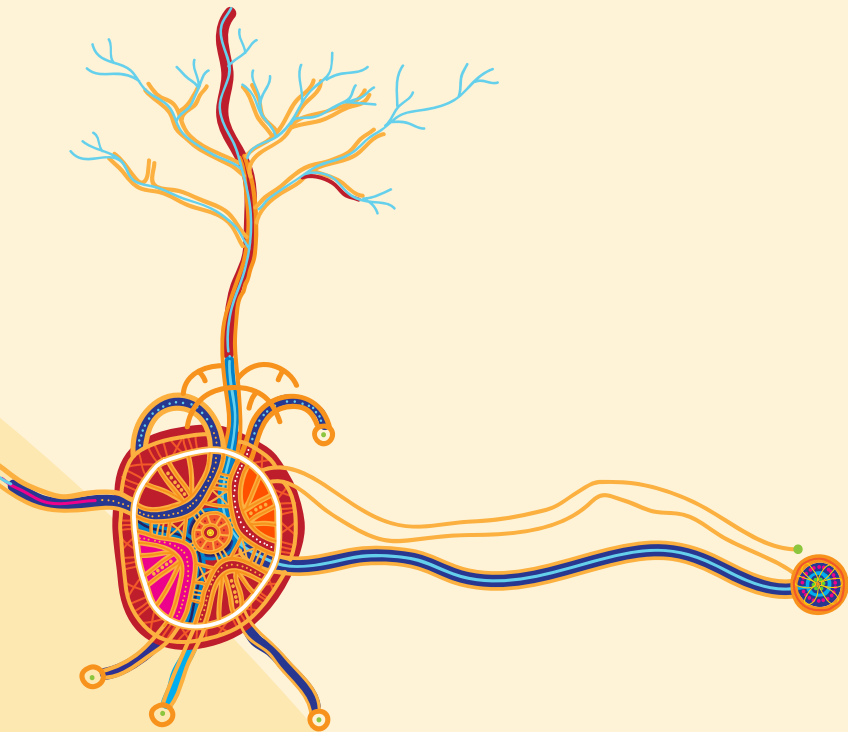
CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we work and live across Australia. This report was created by people living on Awabakal, Bundjalung, Boon Wurrung, Cammeraygal, Gadigal, Gumbaynggirr, Jukembal, Ngoorabul, Peramangk, Wathaurong, Wurundjeri, Yaegl, Yuin and Yuin-Monaro Country.

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

04	SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION	42	SECTION 4 BUILDING <i>an</i> EVIDENCE BASE
10	SECTION 2 SETTING <i>our</i> FOUNDATIONS	54	SECTION 5 WHO WE ARE
22	SECTION 3 CONNECTING BROADLY <i>and</i> DEEPLY		



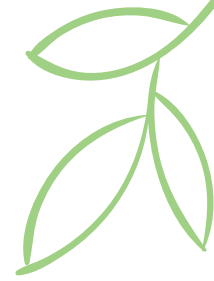
INTRODUCTION



 [CLICK TO SKIP TO SECTION](#)

SECTION 1

- [1.1 Welcome](#)
- [1.2 Overview of 2021 Events \(Timeline\)](#)



1.1 WELCOME

Welcome to the first Annual Report for the Fire to Flourish Program. It has been an extraordinary first year, as our newly formed team has begun to carry out complex and ambitious community place-based work, in the midst of the dynamic and challenging conditions of a global pandemic.

It has been critical to lay strong foundations in our first year. These foundations include relationships with our partner communities, stakeholders and internally within our team, as well as robust Program logic, design, research and evaluation frameworks that give us confidence in the work we'll be doing in the coming years. Our foundations have set us up well for coherent and impactful work with communities that will add value to the many other innovative things happening in disaster resilience across Australia.

Our partner communities' experience of disaster did not end with the 2019/20 bushfires. They have since faced floods, the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated isolation, wellbeing and economic impacts, more floods, and now the new phase of living with COVID-19. A holistic understanding of resilience is therefore vital: life won't be business as usual, communities continue to face uncertainty and challenge. And resilience building must be based on a collective sense of hope, vision, possibility, regeneration and imagination — led by communities, at their own pace.

As we learn alongside our partner communities, we are deepening our understanding of how Fire to Flourish can be of service and value to them. We will continue to grow their sense of ownership and leadership of the Program as it further unfolds.

We have already begun to see the value of a platform for communities to connect and have their voice heard. We held two public events in 2021 — a webinar on community-led resilience co-hosted with the Paul Ramsay Foundation and a disaster resilience forum co-hosted with the Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative (MUDRI), with over 400 and 120 attendees respectively. The feedback from both was strong and clear — people want to hear and learn more of the experiences, ideas and wisdom of community members.

We've welcomed the collective momentum of the network of diverse stakeholders we've engaged with across local, state and federal governments, the not-for-profit sector, philanthropists and community organisations. And we appreciate the generosity of everyone who has shared their experiences, insights and Programs with us. We're looking forward to strengthening these relationships as we continue the implementation of Fire to Flourish next year.

The value of the transdisciplinary approach underpinning Fire to Flourish has already been experienced. The ideas coming from our diverse team of community members, co-designers, researchers and practitioners have been outstanding. Our different lived experiences,

practical knowledge and disciplinary expertise are powerful when brought together in an environment of learning and innovation. I am grateful for the genuine collaboration of Fire to Flourish colleagues, and their commitment to navigating the complexities of our Program with goodwill, creativity and passion.

I deeply appreciate the leadership of Fire to Flourish's Indigenous Partnership Group, which has guided and supported the Program to foreground Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing as we design and implement its various components.

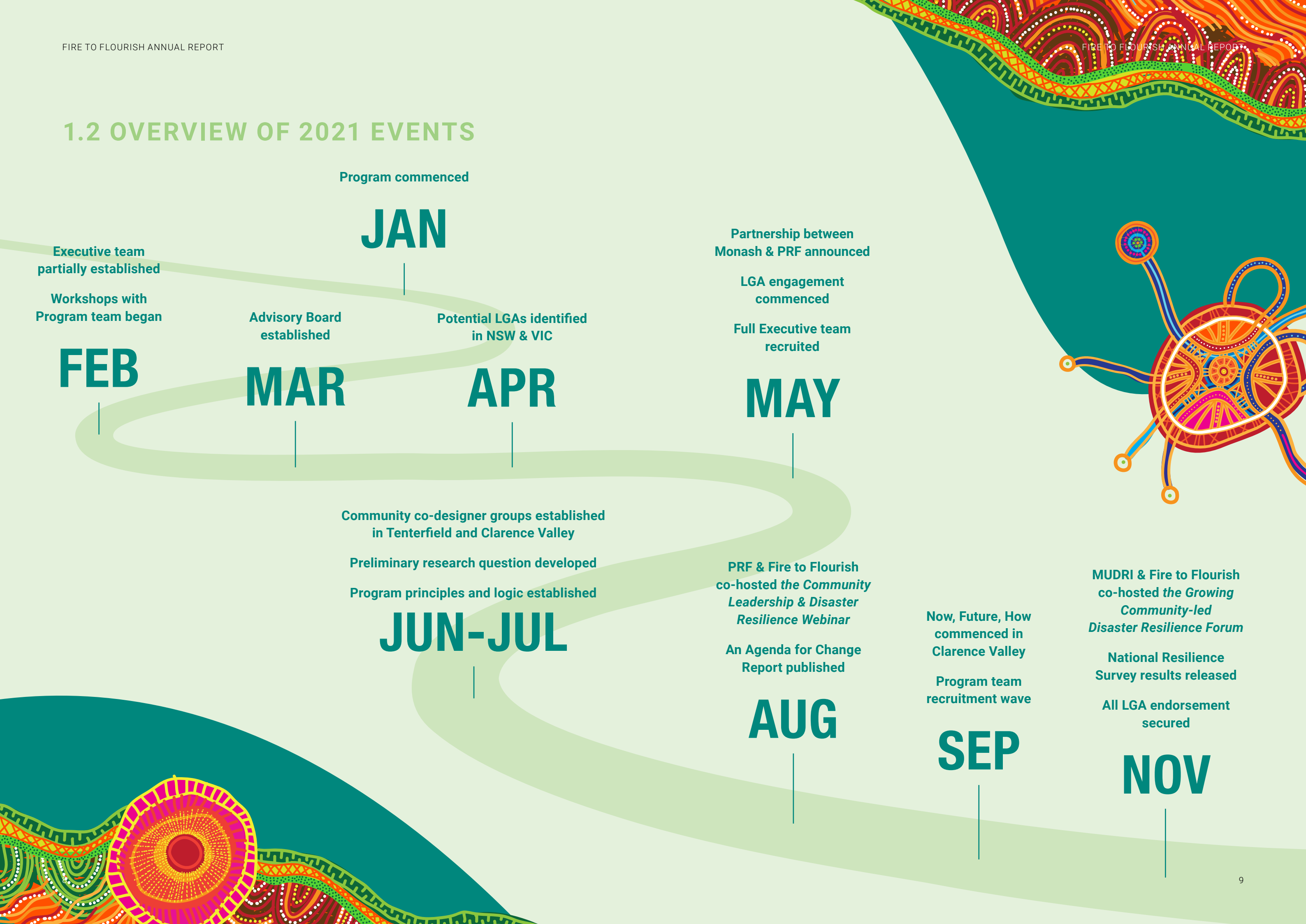
Finally, I thank our cornerstone partners — Paul Ramsay Foundation for their vision, support and commitment to learning together through the Program and Metal Manufactures Pty Ltd for their invaluable support.

The logo of Fire to Flourish is a tree, representing vitality, growth and regeneration. 2021 has been a year to grow our roots, which will hold us fast as we learn, adapt and evolve in response to community needs and priorities. With the support of our community co-designers, partners and stakeholders, we have built the foundations for a strong future.

Briony Rogers
Chief Executive Officer



1.2 OVERVIEW OF 2021 EVENTS



SETTING *our* FOUNDATIONS



Image Credit: Minya Rose.

 [CLICK TO SKIP TO SECTION](#)

SECTION 2

- [2.1 Program overview](#)
- [2.2 Program Logic and Ambition](#)
- [2.3 Program Principles](#)
- [2.4 Program Approach and Core Activities](#)
- [2.5 Transformative Resilience](#)
- [2.6 Indigenous Partnership Group Reflection](#)
- [2.7 Evaluation Framework](#)



2.1 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Fire to Flourish works at the intersection of bushfire recovery, disaster resilience and community development. In partnership with communities affected by the 2019/20 Australian bushfire season, we aim to support communities to lead their own recovery, co-create foundations for long-term resilience and wellbeing, and disrupt cycles of entrenched disadvantage. The Program will trial and scale innovations in community-led resilience, amplified through partnerships with government, philanthropic, not-for-profit and private sector organisations.

“I don’t like band-aid approaches. I want people to be really thinking about how you redefine systems and models and move forward”

— Clarence Valley Co-designer

“The gold is the people. People who already work in the community with a shared vision and have done for generations. People who can, and do, inspire others to work together collaboratively”

— Clarence Valley Co-designer



2.2 PROGRAM LOGIC AND AMBITION

The Program logic for Fire to Flourish was developed to help give an overview of and act as a guide for prioritising impact and research activities. The logic is a macro level representation of our intermediate and end-of-program outcomes and broader longer-term goals.

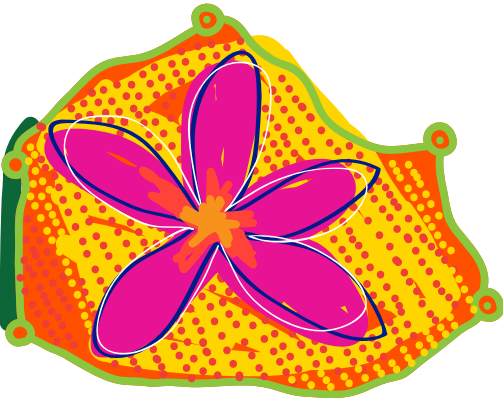


We have constantly referred back to it over the course of 2021 as a tool for Program planning, helping us see how our activities will lead to our broader goals, and making it easier to see what questions we need to ask at each stage.

2.3 PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

To guide our way of working together and with our community partners, the Program co-developed six Program principles. Together, these principles guide the Program’s design and delivery, and are an anchor point as we navigate and operationalise Fire to Flourish.

Each of them, in different ways, shape how our transdisciplinary team works together, within our delivery team, in communities and with stakeholders. We have welcomed the challenge of engaging deeply with these principles, and building a strong, principle-based approach to navigate both what we are doing and how we are doing it. As we look back on 2021, our reflections on the importance of each principle, and how we are bringing it to life, will be woven throughout this report. We anticipate our principles will continue to evolve as we collectively learn through our work.

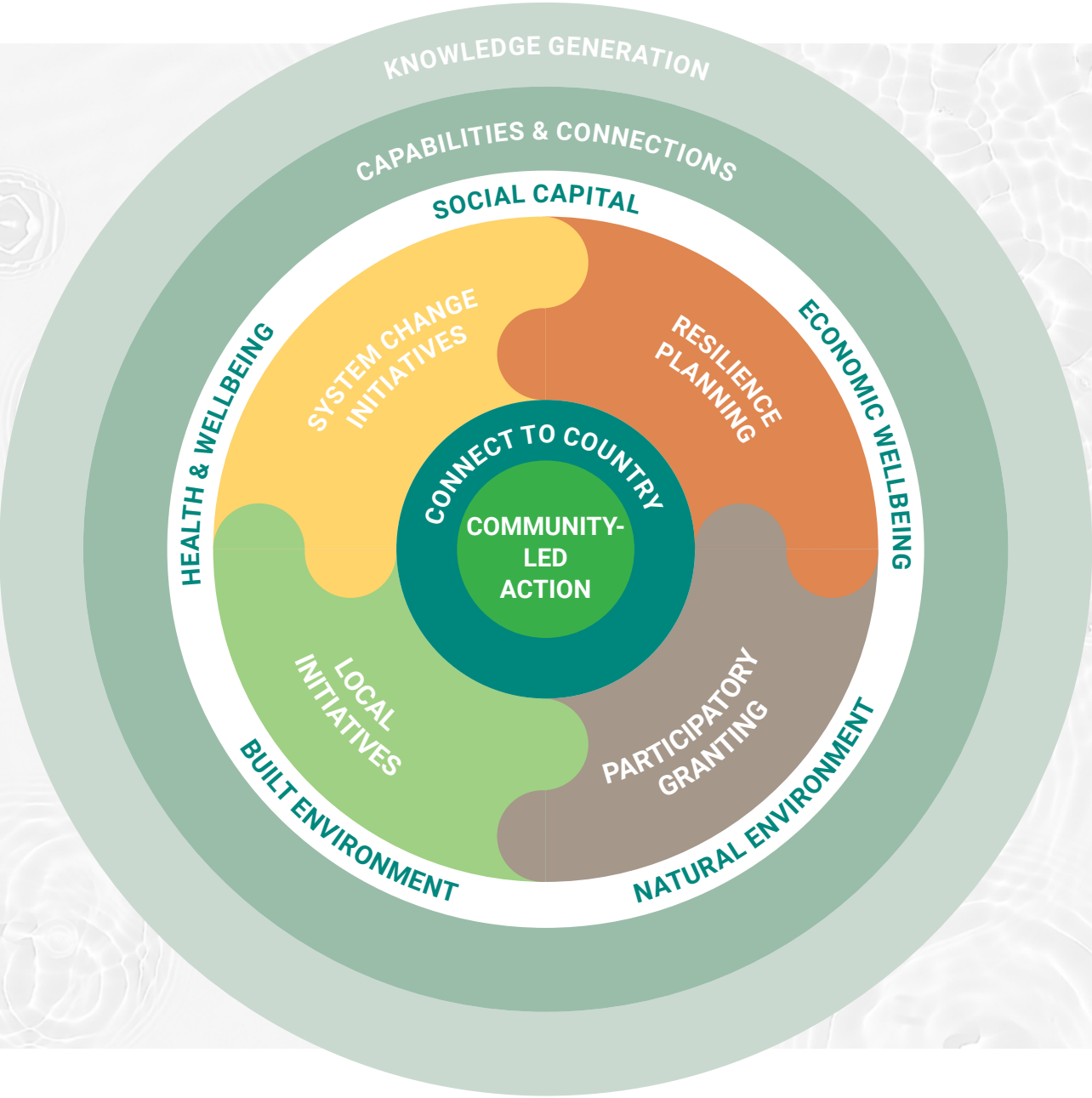


We will:

- BE COMMUNITY-LED** — to ensure the community shapes, drives and owns the Program and their voices are foregrounded in its design and delivery.
- FOREGROUND ABORIGINAL WISDOM** — to respect the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, learn from their ways of knowing and being, and foster strong collaborations and partnerships.
- ADDRESS INEQUITIES, ENHANCE INCLUSION AND SELF-DETERMINATION** — to strengthen the participation, capabilities and outcomes for people who are often underrepresented or marginalised.
- BE STRENGTHS-BASED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED** — to respect people’s lived experiences, recognise and build on community strengths, and support collective healing.
- BE HOLISTIC AND IMPACTFUL** — to contribute collaboratively and with evidence to improving people’s lives and influencing changes in system conditions that hold problems in place.
- LEARN, ADAPT AND EVOLVE** — to respond to changing contexts, continually improve the Program’s design and delivery, and collectively advance knowledge and practices.



2.4 PROGRAM APPROACH AND CORE ACTIVITIES



The design of the Fire to Flourish Program is reflected in this image, which we call the ‘Ripple Diagram’.

At its heart, anchoring the Program, are the principles of **Community-led Action** and **Connecting to Country**. These centre the right of each person to contribute to decisions that affect their lives, and incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into the fabric of the Program.

These create ripples outwards that influence all other Program elements. The next circle reflects what it is that the Program will do.

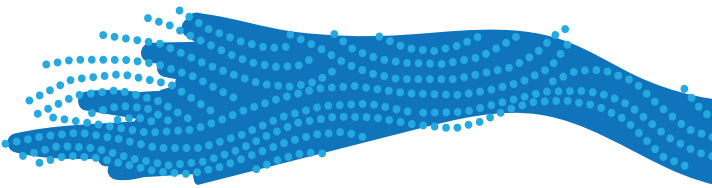
We will facilitate processes to support community **resilience planning**, helping communities to understand disaster risk and develop a shared vision. We will support them to set up a framework and process for **participatory granting**.

We will support **local community-led projects** focused on disaster recovery and resilience building as well as **system change initiatives** that seek to influence broader system change.

Wrapped around what we do is a circle describing *how* we’re going to do it. **Social Capital, Economic Wellbeing, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Health & Wellbeing** collectively represent a holistic approach to resilience. These themes will inform the development of local resilience planning and initiatives, and guide knowledge generation focus, including impact evaluation.

Embracing our holistic approach are cross-cutting processes that seeks to build **capabilities and connections** within and across communities at both local and national scales. This includes the National Resilient Communities Learning Network as a key platform and legacy for Fire to Flourish.

The outermost circle represents **knowledge generation**, an output of all we do: insights from all Program components will contribute to the development of a knowledge, evidence and tool base which in turn will spread and scale insights.



2.5 TRANSFORMATIVE RESILIENCE

A key philosophy underpinning Fire to Flourish is **transformative resilience**. This holistic approach brings a long-term focus to community resilience and considers how short-term incremental steps and strategies (that, for example, contribute to disaster recovery) can be coordinated in ways that support broader goals of community connection, development and wellbeing.



A transformative approach to resilience is taken when diverse stakeholders align towards a common vision and together build momentum towards changes that disrupt the root causes of inequities in communities. It means using the opportunity of disaster recovery to support broader community development. Community-led actions and small wins support fast and in-depth change, amplifying their impact and putting the community on a pathway toward their shared future vision.

This approach represents a shift away from a deficit model of disaster recovery and support that focuses on what individuals, groups or entire communities are lacking. Instead it focuses on growing the transformative capacities of communities so they can drive proactive, creative and systemic change to address their holistic resilience needs and aspirations.

“We’ve known this Country for a really, really long time. We’ve seen it change through ice ages and through lots of different natural, environmental changes. We’ve seen the landscape change dramatically and the removal of all growth in the last 200 years.”

— Community Co-designer



2.6 INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIP GROUP REFLECTION

The Indigenous Partnership Group holds the collective Indigenous leadership space for Fire to Flourish, shaping and providing Aboriginal leadership across the Program. It emerged from the need to set strong internal foundations of the Program, advising on the strategic direction of the Program to strengthen outcomes for Indigenous communities. The Aboriginal-led group will ensure F2F is delivered in a way that is culturally strong and consistently foregrounds Indigenous knowledges in all activities and decisions.

The Group has evolved over the course of the year. An underpinning principle of the group is that Indigenous governance is not just one voice. The reason for calling it a ‘partnership group’ and not an ‘advisory group’ was so that we can invite other people in, and invite community in. So that there can be a multiplicity of voices guiding the Program and strengthening the commitment to foregrounding Aboriginal knowledges. We see the membership of the Indigenous Partnership Group growing and changing over time in response to Program needs.

The Partnership Group will be in place for the life of the Program. It is an ongoing role. As Aboriginal people, we walk alongside and guide non-Aboriginal people, in the Program and out in the real world. Aboriginal peoples also need more allies (in non-Aboriginal people). The Indigenous Partnership Group is another way to develop these essential connections, and build an understanding and appreciation of Indigenous culture and ways of knowing.

The Group’s initial membership includes:

- Aunty Vickey Charles**
F2F Indigenous Advisor; Aboriginal Lead, TACSI
- Prof Jacinta Elston**
Pro Vice Chancellor (Indigenous), Monash University
- Prof Brian Martin**
Associate Dean (Indigenous), Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture, Monash University

Role of the Group includes:

- advise on strategic direction, implementation and growth of Program to strengthen outcomes for Indigenous communities;
- provide a culturally strong mechanism for members of Indigenous Communities to communicate their needs and raise issues with the Program Executive;
- advise on the development of positive links and networks between the Fire to Flourish Program and Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organisations and institutions.



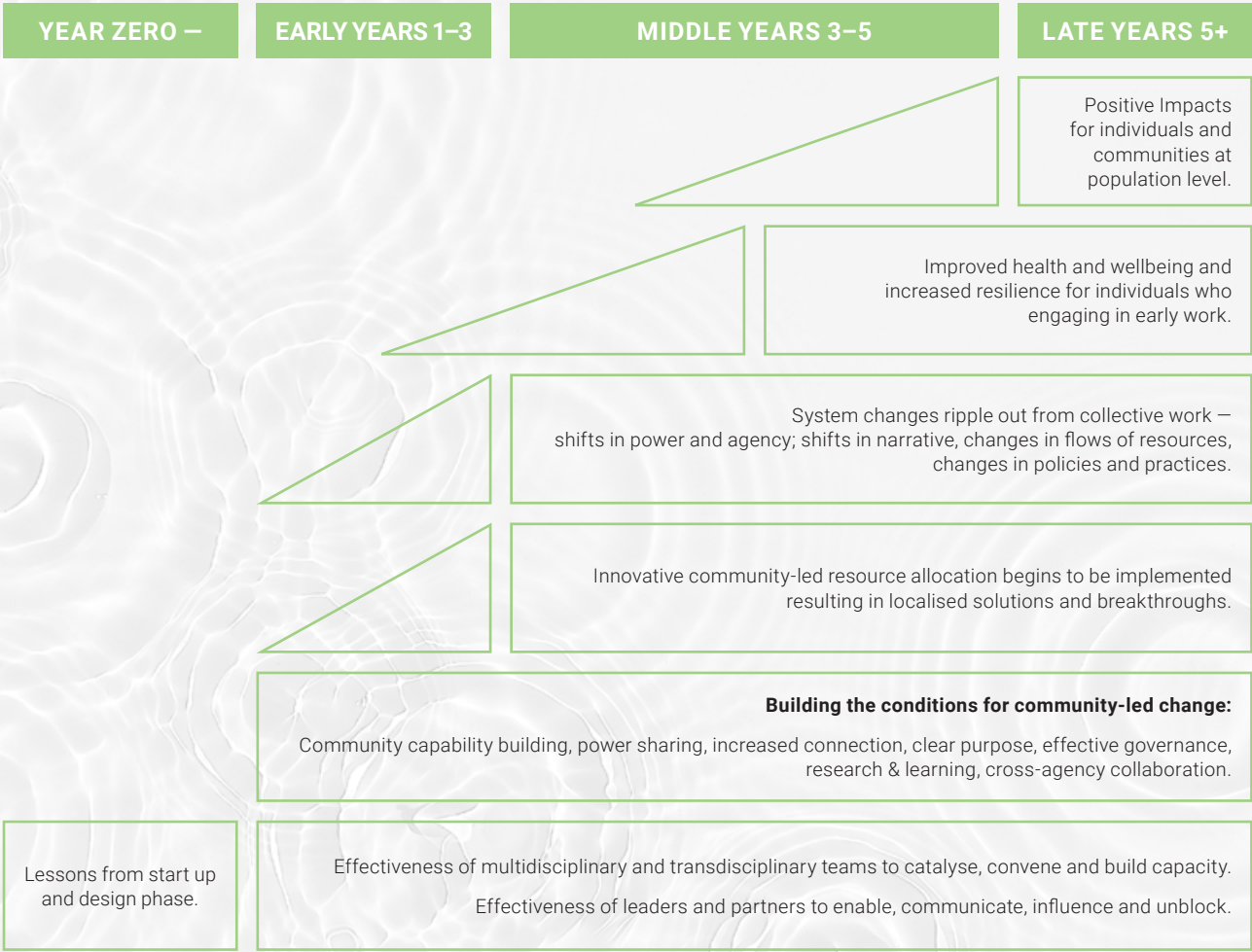
2.7 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

LEARN. ADAPT. EVOLVE.

Our 3 domains of evaluation and learning:

- 1. **Principles:** Across all our work, how are we aligned with our principles?
- 2. **Partnership:** How are we strengthening the partnerships that underpin the Program?
- 3. **Impact:** How are Program outcomes being achieved and what are we learning from this?

<p>Developmental evaluation [2021–2024]</p> <p>Evaluation of emerging initiatives to support their design and innovation</p> <p>Learning Loop 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">What are we learning about what we are doing? <p>Learning Loop 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">What are we learning about our assumptions, understanding and thinking? <p>Learning Loop 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">What are we learning about how we are working together and showing up to catalyse change in the communities we work with?	<p>Formative evaluation [2022–2025]</p> <p>Evaluation used to support continuous improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">measures intermediate outcome indicators in the Program logicdesigns and refines measurement approach for end of Program outcomes	<p>Summative evaluation [2024–2025]</p> <p>Evaluation used for outcome measurement and accountability once established</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">measures end of Program outcomes
---	--	--



Adapted from Clear Horizon.

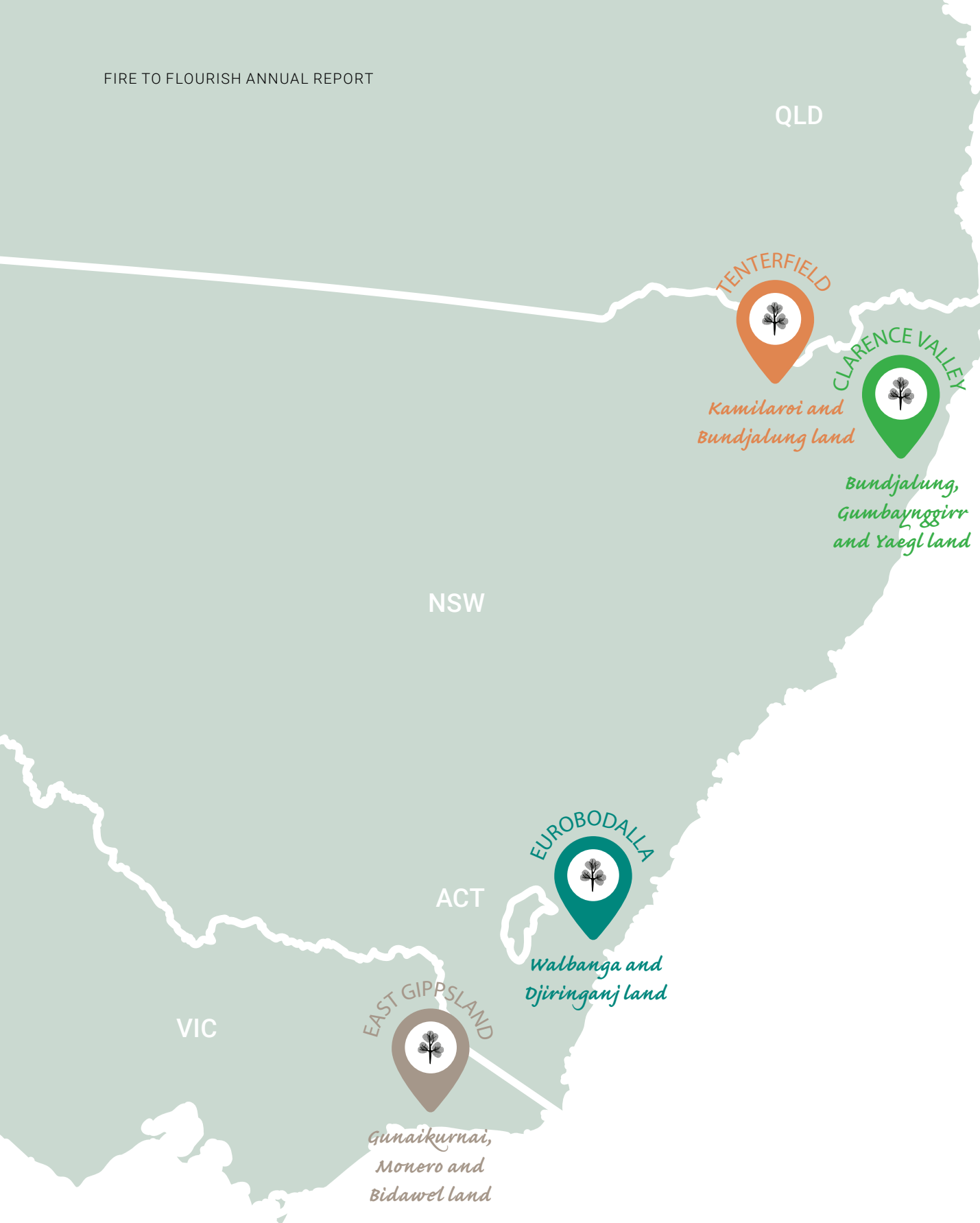
CONNECTING BROADLY *and* DEEPLY



 [CLICK TO SKIP TO SECTION](#)

SECTION 3

- [3.1 Introducing the Focus Communities](#)
- [3.2 What have we learned so far?](#)
 - [Team reflections](#)
- [3.3 In their words:](#)
 - [Community Co-designer Reflections](#)
- [3.4 Webinar and Community Forum](#)
- [3.5 Stakeholder Conversations and Partnership Building](#)



3.1 INTRODUCING THE FOCUS COMMUNITIES

The Program is working with Focus Communities from three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in New South Wales and one in Victoria:

1. Eurobodalla Shire Council (NSW)
2. Clarence Valley Shire Council (NSW)
3. Tenterfield Shire Council (NSW)
4. East Gippsland Shire Council (VIC)

The LGAs were selected across different regions to give a diversity of cultural nations, geographical regions and core economies.

All four LGAs were severely affected by the 2019–2020 bushfires and have communities in some of the most challenging socio-economic contexts. Eurobodalla, Clarence Valley and Tenterfield LGAs also have an Indigenous population higher than the national average (6.7%).

Communities within these LGAs were identified through engagement with local stakeholders (including Council, local Aboriginal Land Councils and other anchor institutions) to identify suitability in terms of alignment with Program objectives and community readiness to partner with the Program.

Principle in Focus:

Be community led

To be community-led, we are growing the F2F Focus Communities' influence on and ownership of the program. Community co-designers bring a diversity of perspectives and lived experiences to co-design activities facilitated by the Fire to Flourish team. Their knowledge, reflections and ideas are shaping key Program frameworks, including capability building, participatory granting and impact evaluation. They lead the pace and direction of F2F community activities, building on their strengths. As we activate the Program more broadly across the community, attention is being given to inclusive participatory processes so that people who may not be typically involved in community activities have the opportunity to contribute. Communities will decide where F2F funding will be directed and will lead the implementation of their funded initiatives, as well as the learning and sharing with other communities.

Principle in Focus:**Foreground Aboriginal wisdom**

Some early conversations of co-designers have been challenging as Indigenous and non-Indigenous members acknowledge their shared history and seek points of connection. Non-Indigenous co-designers are learning the ways of knowing and being of their Indigenous colleagues and are actively seeking ways to share this knowledge with the wider community, incorporating Indigenous practices and traditions in existing community events. F2F has also learned how thinly spread the Indigenous community is, as their presence is often required across multiple community processes and initiatives. We are guided and supported by our Indigenous Partnership Group as we seek to enact the principle to foreground Aboriginal wisdom with every decision the program makes.

Engaging with our Focus Communities

Clarence Valley was the first community to mobilise. F2F brought together 7 community co-designers, many of whom who didn't know each other previously, but shared common characteristics:

- devastated by fires;
- actively involved in grass roots recovery;
- play critical roles in their community;
- recognised by others as innovators; and
- represent diverse elements of the community.

The cohort got to know each other through storytelling. They mapped lived experience, cultural and community assets across social, natural, built and economic domains. They identified the strengths, capabilities, capacity and assets of the community, producing 'Stories of Now'.

The next phase saw Clarence Valley developing a collective vision of the future. They then created a virtual garden where they plant 'what ifs' and then decide which ones to water. Each of these plants are ideas for a specific project to build collective resilience in the local community and move towards the shared future vision. Aunty Vickey has challenged the co-designers to work on the soil first, ensuring it has everything needed to help their plants (ideas) grow. They are setting strong foundations to work together in new ways and are taking their 'what if' scenarios out to the wider community. This has created a world of ideas that will inform the 'how'.

The final phase of Now Future How is focused on prototyping a participatory granting approach, using the Program principles to inform criteria for the distribution of funds. They will be building a process for collective decision making and a non-competitive granting process that builds shared capability.

Tenterfield is building a culturally safe foundation, bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to build a shared and safe environment to enable difficult conversations. This work will continue in early 2022 when travel to communities for in-person engagement is possible as COVID-19 lockdowns lift.

East Gippsland's engagement has focused on understanding and developing the synergies and alignment of F2F with East Gippsland Shire Council, which is taking a place-based approach to recovery. Council has appointed place-based managers and have a vision for a resilience framework that is driven by community ideas and action. In 2022, the specific areas for focus across their vast and sparse region and communities will be determined, ready for mobilisation with community co-designers.

Eurobodalla has faced challenge after challenge since last year — fires, floods, COVID-19 then floods again. The communities have needed time to deal with each of these crises and are suffering from exhaustion and what they call "*consultation fatigue*". We are working with the community at a pace that is led by them, respecting these profound challenges and experiences.

Principle in Focus:**Address inequities, enhance inclusion and self-determination**

Working through a year in which field visits were not possible has emphasised the challenge of connecting with all parts of a community. Not everyone has the time, technology or confidence to participate. For this reason we are focused on inclusive community processes and are forging relationships with local councils and other community organisations to ensure marginalised people are represented. We are using events like the MUDRI Forum and the National Resilient Communities Learning Network to introduce new voices and forge new connections.



3.2 WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR? TEAM REFLECTIONS

Image Credit: Minya Rose.

“We can’t build resilient communities till we have better ways of working well with each other.”

— F2F team member

We need to have better conversations

and build capability in non-Indigenous Australians to work well with everyone in their communities. Hard conversations that require connection, trust and honesty. The Clarence Valley co-designers have been very ready to engage in our shared history. The group has started calling itself a “girrwa”, a Gumbaynggirr word meaning a collection of people — and of trees. They are now looking to incorporate Aboriginal wisdom into regular community events including the Timber Festival and Camp Oven Festival, in the form of a Welcome to Country and workshops. The inclusion and support of Indigenous community members has resulted in the Program receiving the endorsement of the broader Indigenous community.

Using a **healing and holistic lens** with trauma-informed work had an impact and outcome that was swift and significant.

The Program **principles have been critical** in the foundation-setting phase — people connect at a values level. All decisions are made against the principles, for both the Fire to Flourish team and the co-designers, including the recruitment of F2F project staff.

“I can’t believe the luck we’ve had in who chose to opt in. You couldn’t dream of a more enthusiastic, passionate, intelligent, creative, curious and open group of people.”

— F2F team member

Principle in Focus:

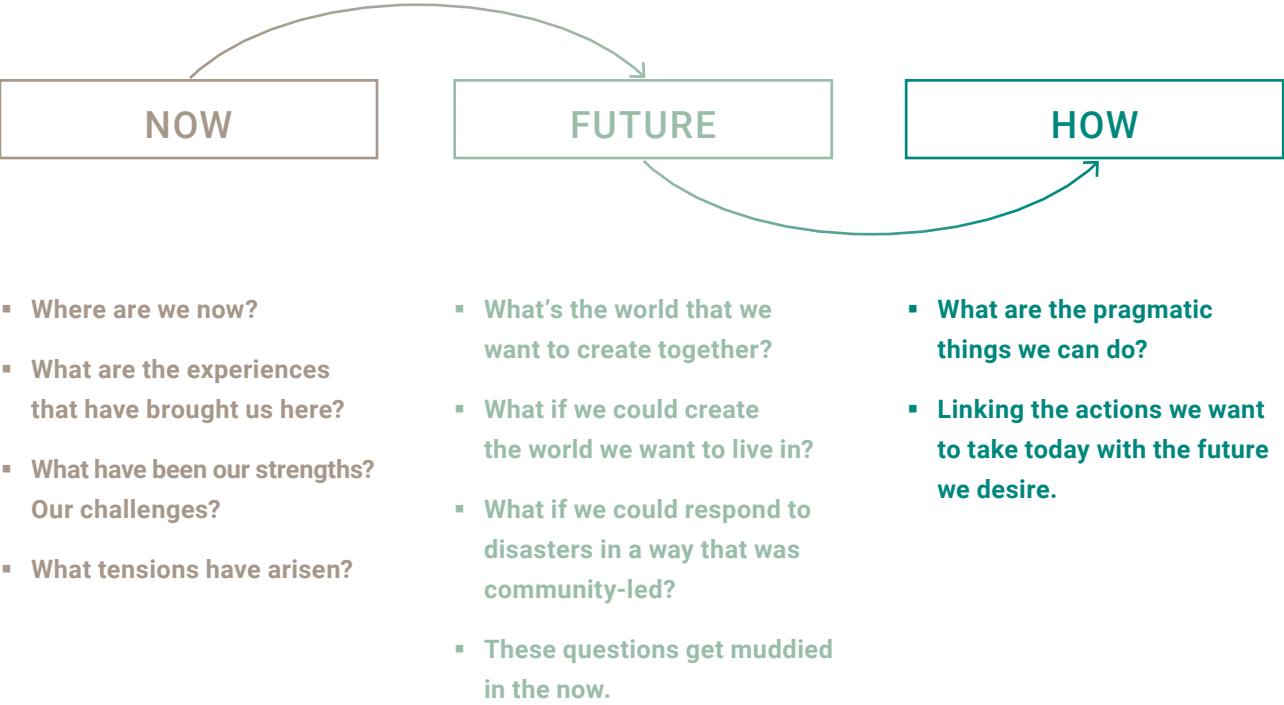
Be strengths-based and trauma-informed

Our Focus Communities have shared their experiences of disaster, feeling acknowledgement of what they have been through and reassured that they are not alone. They are also sharing their strengths, both personal and as a community, to support collective healing and create a space to move forward. We walk this path carefully to not retraumatise co-designers through the process, and to ensure they have the support and tools needed to work together towards their shared envisioned future. We have found using a healing lens has had a swift and positive impact on our community co-designers.

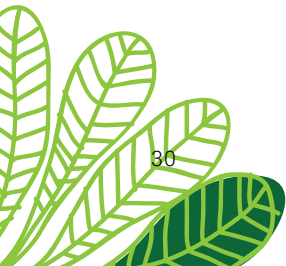


Image Credit: Minya Rose.

The Now Future How approach supports people to consider resilience from a holistic perspective while deepening capacities to adapt and transform. Co-designers can explore the history and experience of their community, build a shared vision for the future and develop pathways that can help move towards this desired future.



3.3 IN THEIR WORDS



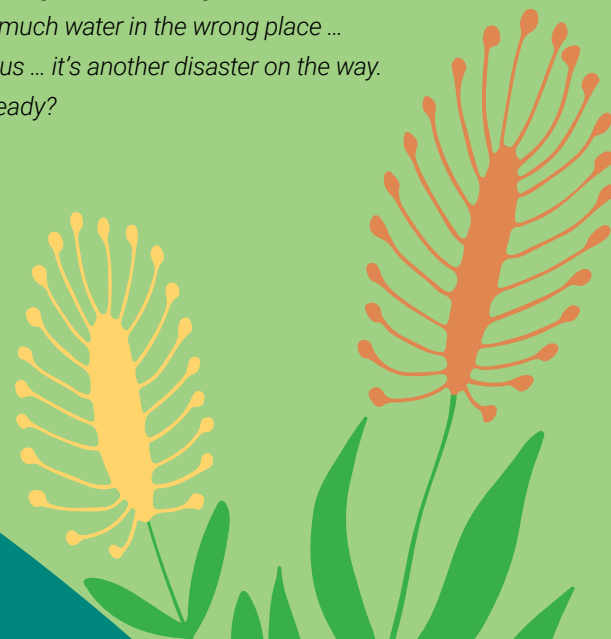


REFLECTIONS *of* CATE MCQUILLEN

Clarence Valley

Two years ago, we were mopping up.
We came 20 cm from losing it all, the wall of fire fearlessly held back by people
on the ground with hoses, and helicopters in the air with buckets.
In the aftermath, our world was still smoking and would do so for weeks.
The bush was silent and would be for months.
Others ... my dear friends, weren't so 'lucky'.

The story of the past doesn't seem that long ago.
Before the fire a drought and between then and now, a flood and a global pandemic.
As I write the loudest thunder we have ever had and another deluge.
It's bucketing down. A python and a family of antechinus are sheltering in
the pantry- not sure how that's going to work out.
The frogs are back. Their songs are deafening.
Rain is not my enemy here ... just too much water in the wrong place ...
moving through ... but downstream from us ... it's another disaster on the way.
Are they ready?



Fire to Flourish invites us to do the big thinking.

To ask that big question. Are we ready?

*Living in the past, the now and the future all at once-Recovering and preparing, practicing
resilience, and dealing with anxiety ... cascading disruptions ...
flood, cyclones, fires, pandemics ... climate change.
The impact of Nature. Our impact on Nature. The nature of us all.
This is the ecosystem, where the big thinking is happening.*

*As co designers, we sit together each week delving into those big issues ...
how they turn up in little things on the ground in community, how they traumatise
and change a community, how they drain and elevate, inspire and defeat.
And how the way we have always done things ... is no longer serving us.*

*The new way of doing things isn't tied down.
Aboriginal wisdom foregrounding, evolving guiding principles leading to strengths
and weakness ... to stories of change ... to a garden of ideas!
Onwards, backwards, forwards, and back again ...
we navigate this changed landscape ... in so many ways.*

*Guided, held, tooled up, supported, surrounded by wisdom, nurtured,
encouraged to explore, and talk and talk and talk ... yarn with purpose (and without)
... and deep listen.*

*The other co designers ... HONEST, RAW, INNOVATIVE, INSPIRATIONAL.
The F2F crew are REMARKABLE!*

*Once a week we gather!
In-between, the conversation threads its way into my days, my heart and mind extracting
the gold, letting others words and ideas marinate my thoughts ...
that's co designing.*

*That's what I'm learning.
That ... and a million other things.*

*I love these people and this process. I love being challenged.
I love the way we are honoured and cared for and respected.
I love how exciting it is ... being part of something big!
I love that we are many and one, at the same time. Looking for a new way.
It's unmissable stuff.*



REFLECTIONS *of* LAENA STEPHENSON

Clarence Valley

When Cate McQuillen initially invited me to join her as a co-designer in the Fire to Flourish Program, I had no idea what it was about and was a little reticent. I was in recovery mode, immersed in my lived experience of the bushfires that had devastated so much of the built and natural environment of my beloved Nymboida.

My beautiful 'labour of love' home built of rock, timber and earth, all from the property here where I had raised my four daughters, was gone. My eldest daughter's house was also gone along with the belongings of two other daughters and a son in law who were either living here or had all their possessions stored in containers and sheds. The grief of material loss, however, pales compared to the constant heartache and pain I feel at the loss of fauna and flora, the irrevocable changes to the natural world, where my mind, heart and spirit are deeply connected.

As Cate spoke to me more about the Program, I warmed and began to feel exited at the idea of joining her. When she read the guiding principles to me, I heard words that are at the heart of my personal work in community, what I aspire to achieve and reasons why I volunteer so much time and energy to my wonderful community in Nymboida.

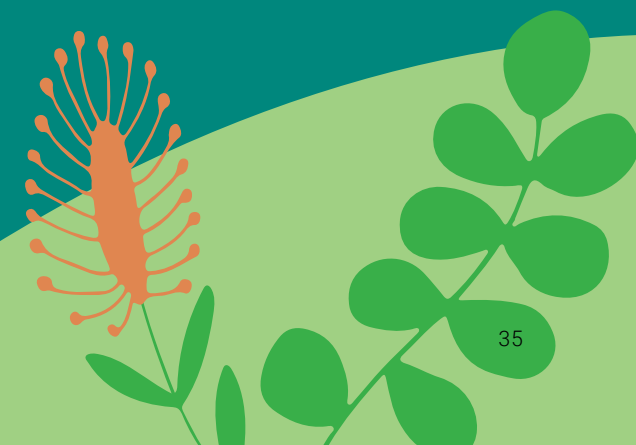


At first, I wasn't confident in my role. Recovery is a slow and very personal process, and I wasn't sure I was ready to take on the work as a co-designer. Covid meant inactivity in my major volunteer commitments, Nymboida Community Groups Incorporated and member owned and run, Nymboida Camping and Canoeing and I appreciated being locked down at home.

The greatest and most rewarding healing process for me is to plant fruit trees, vegetables, and flowers, reclaiming the beautiful gardens I had developed over 35 years, that were destroyed in the fire. The view from my hilltop is of low growing forest regrowth, weeds and wattle coming back with a vengeance, and tall dead black sticks that were once mature native forests. I focus on the gardens, especially beautiful flowers I plant, rather than look at the sticks.

From the outset, the Fire to Flourish team have been incredibly empathetic, considerate, caring and patient, gently encouraging and coaxing me during Zoom sessions and phone calls. I never felt any pressure to achieve as one often does in the workforce and I've been able to work at my own pace. While being guided within the framework of Fire to Flourish, a variety of approaches and methods were offered to the co-design team allowing each of us find the best process that works on an individual level.

I've been encouraged to reconnect with friends and neighbours in my community, to practise deep listening, and focus on our collective future. I was incredibly proud of the way Nymboida community came together following the fires and I'm feeling inspired about our potential to be a role model community in preparedness, resilience, and recovery. This is our now, future and how. We have a number of amazing community leaders here, working cooperatively, Now, for a very uncertain Future and we are working out How to move forward the best way we can.





REFLECTIONS *of* ROSS & FAYE NEIL

Clarence Valley

ROSS NEIL

I found the Fire to Flourish Program's approach to be a completely different experience in my life's learnings. The team applied a unique process of focusing my mind towards delivering results and outcomes without providing any personal opinions to change my direction of thought.

Like cognitive coaches, the team supplied templates to assist me in pulling together my thoughts which they did not challenge or offer up opinions on what I was ranting about. They applied deep listening and guided group discussion which was being generated in zoom meetings with the other co-designers.

As a result, some of the practices I picked up are being applied on other occasions outside of the Fire to Flourish Program such as greater deep listening and offering fewer options of my own into conversations with community, family and friends. I think the practice of not structuring or leading conversations is also a unique life experience.

Working along with the other co-designers is also an amazing experience. It was a remarkable process to arrive at the understanding of diversity of the people, backgrounds and cultures resulting in a greater level of "what if" thinking. The possibilities that flowed from the conversations of Now, Future, How resulted in much richer outcomes noticed by all involved. Fire to Flourish Program put together a carefully considered combination of Clarence Valley co-designers with wide-ranging backgrounds which further enhanced innovation and creative outcomes. The benefit to community will be obvious for years to come.



FAYE NEIL

When invited to participate in the Fire to Flourish Program I was hesitant because the project we had recently completed as Community Appointed Bushfire Recovery Officers had been very draining emotionally. Since being involved in the Fire to Flourish Program my outlook on possibilities for community has become immeasurable.

The journey through stories of now was both emotional and inspiring as co-designers' common threads began to emerge around struggles to respond to community's needs while caring for their own wellbeing during prolonged effects of bushfires, floods, Covid, etc. It made me realise that we are not alone in our struggles — the challenges our community faces are not that dissimilar to other communities.

Stories about what the future could be was, for me, the best part. With support from the Fire to Flourish team and encouragement from the co-designers, we began to breakdown the constraints of possibility pre-perceptions and started to dream.

Then, from the standpoint of our dreaming, a flurry of conversations emerged from co-designers about ways to achieve them (the backcasting canvas). The cohesion of the Clarence Valley co-designers was obvious as we looked forward with a combined focus. Like a great marriage of minds adding their many varied perspectives to achieve the desired collective outcomes.

The 'garden of ideas' that has resulted is evidence of the influence this process has had on all of us. Our approach to perceived community issues has permanently changed to a more holistic view incorporating the compass principles across the natural, social, built and economic environments.

None of this would have been achievable without the professional yet personable support provided by the Fire to Flourish Team who mentored us through slides and other material combined with zoom meetings where everyone's comments were valued.



REFLECTIONS *of* PAMELA DENISE

Clarence Valley



The fig tree (Tree of Life) that shielded and saved our plastic water tanks at the top of the hill from the tsunami of the firestorm, which ensured the water supply to successfully defend our small home. I thought this tree had died. But it is regenerating. I feel like this tree. I thought my professional practice and horticulture enterprise was wiped out, but incredibly it's coming back, changed but stronger.



I lost my studio (a lifetime professional collection, I will be 60 next year). This has meant that every project I quote for I had to abandon being cost competitive as I had no resources, absolutely none. To do a simple drawing outside I had to buy a pencil, paper and rubber, as well as procure a board to lean on. I was worried that I would be the most expensive freelance community arts worker on the eastern seaboard.

With the Fire to Flourish Program the reward to participate is immediate. (Financial remuneration aside, though not without first acknowledging how important that is). We get to discuss, with other enablers from other communities in our region, the types of projects or changes that would make a difference in our own patch.

By discovering the similarities and differences, I am understanding more clearly the overall direction we need to take to improve on the injustices and inequity and also to adapt to the challenges of climate change. I am encouraged to address what has previously been understood as too difficult, such as Aboriginal sovereignty. For instance, I personally, can start to give it back by using the proper place names, First People Nation and Elder acknowledgment and having a go at wrapping my tongue around the local languages.

It is a relief to look at the bigger picture. In my professional practice, the focus is on short term projects with tangible public outcomes. Increasing my awareness of the bigger picture is clarifying that focus of the short term projects.

All of this in 4 months! I thought the F2F process was slow and protracted, I see now that it is very fast and efficient.



Image Credit: Pamela Denise.



REFLECTIONS *of* HAYLEY KATZEN

Clarence Valley

The ideas from the conversations I had with my neighbours as part of the Fire To Flourish Program fill a large sheet of butcher's paper. Given the space to imagine what might help prepare our community for the next bushfire, without the usual constraints of the 'how', my neighbours readily made suggestions, many of which reflected the Program's principles.

How very lucky I feel to have had months of 'now, future, how' immersion through weekly zoom conversations with an awesome hive of co-designers under the guidance of the sensitive, skilled and resourced Fire to Flourish crew, and the wise and benevolent Aunty Vickey.

For the first 'now' months I so appreciated the opportunity to debrief about our Ewingar community's recovery and preparedness efforts, to meet skilled and

passionate community activists from the Clarence Valley and to hear their insights into their communities' characters and activities. What an alive way to contextualise our experiences. I was particularly grateful too for our [Indigenous co-designer]'s teachings which furthered my understanding about Aboriginal people's profound ancestral and familial connection to Country, and helped me begin to make sense of my own visceral relationship to the trees here, trees that have been my community and inspiration since the fires. And I was enlivened by the chance to witness these clever kind researchers use playful prompts and tools to facilitate, capture and organise so that the core principles and the stories are rich with the meaning of all our lived experiences.

But with a background in working in reaction to injustice, and embroiled in difficult grant applications and the challenges of this Covid19 era for community cohesion, I was tentative about the 'future' and the 'how' steps, determined to 'keep things real' and tangible.

To my surprise — and delight — it's in this often messy and befuddling 'future how' space that this holistic and healing research work has made its transformative mark. My thinking has shifted towards the 'what if' of a more hopeful future, and a sense that a process, even if not measurable, might be the only indication of constructive steps towards real change.

It's deeply heartening to know that whatever seeds we eventually decide to direct the funds towards, the 'gold' from the experiences of our bushfire-affected communities and our codesign conversations can contribute to something bigger than our individual communities — to possibility, to hope, to a future.



3.4 WEBINAR AND COMMUNITY FORUM

WEBINAR

August 2021

Community Leadership & Disaster Resilience: Research and Implications for Policy

“Disaster recovery needs to be used as an opportunity to aspire to something more”

— Jason Ardler, F2F Board member and Thirriwirri Co-Founder and Director

These words were shared by a panellist at Fire to Flourish’s first public event, *Community Leadership & Disaster Resilience: Research and Implications for Policy*, a virtual roundtable co-hosted with the Paul Ramsay Foundation. The webinar event was deliberately used as a community space for sharing and reflection, demonstrating two of our Program principles in practice: being ‘Community-led’ and ‘Foregrounding Aboriginal Wisdom’.

Jason Ardler, a Yuin man with extensive experience leading change in Aboriginal affairs and an independent member of the Program’s Advisory Board, was a key speaker at the event and his statement above encapsulates the goals of Fire to Flourish; using disaster as the catalyst for building a foundation for a thriving future.

Jason was joined by Zena Armstrong, President of the Cobargo Community Bushfire Recovery Fund, and Amber Kelleher, a youth representative from Save The Children, with all three answering questions about their community’s recovery journeys, and raising points for further discussion about how recovery can not only address the impacts of disaster, but also build foundations for long-term wellbeing.

More than 400 people across community, government, NGOs and practitioners joined online to listen to the speakers discuss their experiences of community connection as a foundation of resilience.





COMMUNITY FORUM

November 2021

MUDRI & Fire to Flourish Forum:
Growing Community-led Disaster Resilience Forum

*“We need to ensure government
success = community success”*

– Disaster Recovery Organisation

On Thursday 11 November, Fire to Flourish co-hosted a disaster resilience forum with the Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative (MUDRI). For the last ten years, MUDRI has hosted these multi-disciplinary forums highlighting community-based resilience building initiatives, and this year’s event marked an exciting new chapter, through collaboration with Fire to Flourish.

The Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative (MUDRI) was established to harness university-wide expertise with the goal of strengthening community-based disaster resilience. They foster information sharing in partnership with researchers, policy makers, providers and community members.

More than 120 people attended virtually from across the globe. Online were representatives from local, state and the federal governments, from 13 different universities, and from a mix of non-governmental, community and philanthropic organisations.

The forum was divided into four key sessions:

- a showcase of community-led resilience stories and current practices.
- the value of community networks
- evidenced-based community initiatives
- establishing community learning networks and sustainable partnerships

The collaboration between MUDRI and Fire to Flourish resulted in a thought-provoking Forum with a high level of interaction during the sessions and positive feedback afterwards. Responses to the speakers were warm and enthusiastic, particularly those from communities who shared their stories of community-led resilience and successful initiatives. There was great interest in sharing knowledge, experiences and strategies and in continuing to build relationships in the disaster resilience field.

This is the first in an ongoing series of forums co-hosted by MUDRI and Fire to Flourish that will help drive the Program’s agenda of building an evidence base and developing a long-lasting National Learning Network.



3.5 STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS AND PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

3.6 THE NATIONAL LEARNING NETWORK



Image Credit: Ben Neely.

Since the Fire to Flourish Program was publicly announced in May 2021, we have met with more than 60 organisations, agencies and individuals to introduce the Program and learn about previous and planned community-led and resilience building initiatives, to foster collaborative opportunities and potential partnerships. Relevant local and regional contacts identified through these meetings have strengthened the Program team with local engagement.

Ongoing engagement with stakeholders is delivered through scheduled regular meetings with key organisations on specific Program elements, partnership opportunities, regular updates and communication through the Flourish Flyer newsletter.

F2F has met with:

- Not-for-profits and community organisations
- Peak Bodies
- Research and knowledge institutions
- State and Federal Government agencies
- Local Governments
- Community members and key individuals

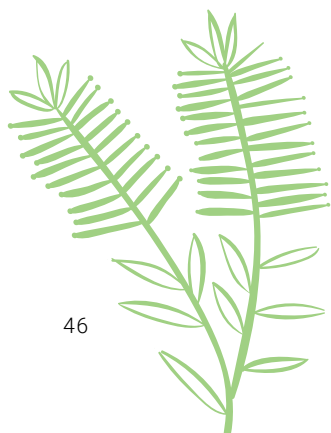
One of Fire to Flourish’s end of Program outcomes is to establish “self-sustaining national systems of community connection and learning that are strengthening resilience”. The aim is to collaborate with other organisations to develop a National Resilient Communities Learning Network. The Network will be developed and valued by and for communities and enables communities to connect with each other, facilitate sharing lived experiences, promote learning from each other and provide a model for peer support for communities working through the stages of preparation, recovery and resilience. We anticipate the Network will be both a vehicle for amplifying the community’s voice in resilience policy and practice, and a pathway to long term resilience and wellbeing for Australian communities.

The National Learning Network will be an important way for communities to share stories of strength and resilience, to celebrate achievements and to raise community voices. We would like to see communities inspiring others to reimagine a more resilient, connected and equitable community.

“I still come back to the fact that we probably need some sort of learning and development or some sort of support network.”

— **Community co-designer**

We’ve completed a desktop review of international best practice in learning networks. Planning for activity in 2022 is well underway and encompasses co-design and collaboration with community leaders, partner organisations, stakeholders and Focus Community co-designers.



BUILDING *an* EVIDENCE BASE



 [CLICK TO SKIP TO SECTION](#)

SECTION 4

- [4.1 Research Question, Agenda and Contributions](#)
- [4.2 An Agenda for change: Community-led disaster resilience](#)
- [4.3 National Survey: Disaster Preparedness and Resilience](#)
- [4.4 Snapshot for Year Two](#)

4.1 RESEARCH QUESTION, AGENDA AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Resilience in communities is dynamic:

it is about relationships and social capital, and how they interact with place and country. We have created a transdisciplinary research Program in order to build a robust evidence base to help make the case for community-led resilience.

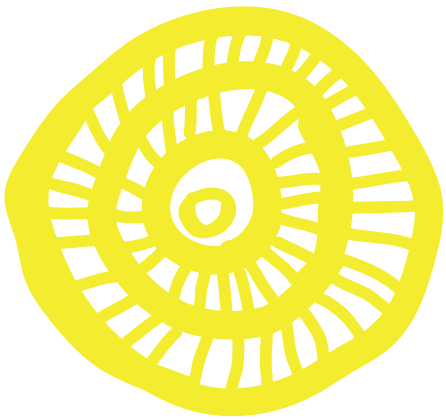
We recognise communities are experts in their own lives and bring expertise that needs to go alongside the expertise of researchers and innovation practitioners.

A transdisciplinary approach is one that brings together and seeks to integrate and generate new knowledge from diverse sources. Different areas of expertise and lived experiences result in insights and solutions to complex problems that are much better for the diversity of inputs that are brought to it.

We are bringing together experts across a range of fields including community resilience, mental health, Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, health economics, ecosystem resilience, architecture, social innovation and young people. We look at the evidence, identify the gaps are and bring together different types of expertise to address them – including lived experience, Indigenous perspectives, research and practice based knowledge.

Bringing people together around a common vision is a proven way to build social capital, clarity and alignment around priorities for the future, which will enable our communities to envisage different kinds of futures that they can then effectively head towards.

Transdisciplinary



Research Question:

How can community-led action strengthen disaster recovery efforts and resilience in ways that disrupt cycles of disadvantage and improve people’s lives?

This question provides a light on the hill for everyone working on the Program. It was developed through multiple workshops that explored each component part from every angle, to ensure we were all asking the same question.

Main areas of research:

- 1. Integrated evaluation
- 2. Practices of community-led resilience
- 3. System change

Image Credit: Minya Rose.

Principle in Focus:

Be holistic and impactful

The research that accompanies our community work will enable us to build an evidence base that will ensure we can respond to changing contexts and advance knowledge and practices. Our first survey has already provided important information about the resilience of disaster survivors. We have also brought together a broad range of experts to ensure we consider all facets that may impact on our Focus Communities and what they wish to achieve.

4.2 AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE: COMMUNITY-LED DISASTER RESILIENCE

This report, released in August 2021, articulates Fire to Flourish's way of thinking about the intersections between disaster, resilience, community and entrenched disadvantage.

By conducting systematic literature reviews, examining Australian disaster resilience policy and practices as well as reviewing independent and commissioned Commonwealth and State Government documents on the 2019/20 bushfires, it is clear that a shifting paradigm in disaster management is emerging. Our *Agenda for Change* is a contribution to this discussion,

exploring four key themes: disaster risk reduction; resilience; community-centred and community-led responses; and the need for greater attention to disadvantage and vulnerability.

We found that a community-led and strengths-based approach to disaster recovery offers a promising pathway for shifting individuals and groups from a state of vulnerability toward one of increased resilience, and potentially out of disadvantage. Our discussion of transformative resilience represents a holistic approach to community resilience and a shift towards a grassroots model of disaster recovery and support which focuses on individual, group and whole community capabilities and skills.

Our report highlights a range of opportunities for place-based, mission-driven and research-supported policy and practice to take the next steps in Australia's ongoing collaborative efforts to improve community resilience and steer positive community development trajectories in the aftermath of bushfire and other disasters.

Principle in Focus:

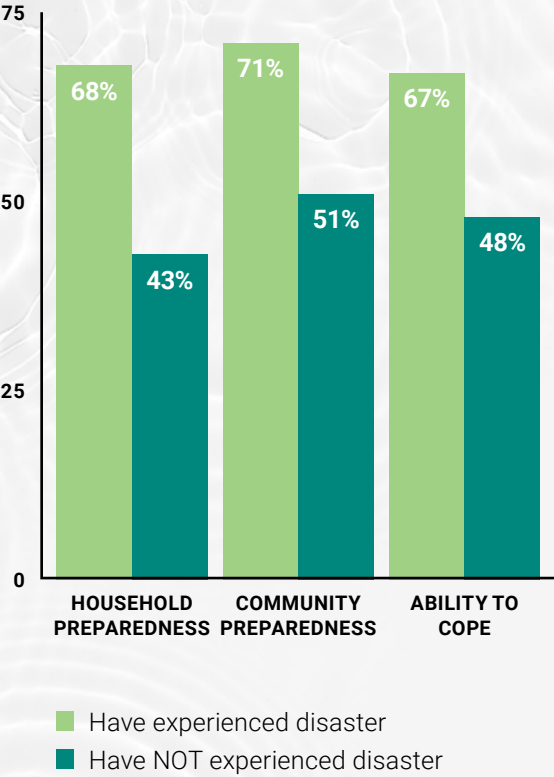
Learn, adapt and evolve

Our commitment to being community-led means responding and adapting as community needs and priorities evolve. Our program planning has already reflected this principle, with adaptations needed during the year to align with the readiness of Focus Communities to engage and their preferred starting points. The F2F evaluation framework and program learning systems are being refined to support quick cycles of learning and continual improvement.

4.3 NATIONAL SURVEY: DISASTER PREPAREDNESS & RESILIENCE

Biggest differentiator:

whether people had
previous experience of
a natural disaster event



In September 2021, 3,522 people across Australia were surveyed, answering questions measuring resilience, attitudes, and readiness relating to natural disasters.

The survey revealed that while disaster survivors are often depicted as victims with reduced capacities, this is not how they see themselves. In fact, people who have gone through a natural disaster report more confidence in their ability to cope with future disaster events.

Those who had experienced a natural disaster have more confidence:

- in their ability to cope with future disaster events
- that their household and their local community are prepared
- their community has access to the support services they would require in a crisis
- people will step up to lead when needed
- in community connection and information sharing, especially women

But we can't afford to wait for a disaster to strike before we start preparing. Of concern are the high numbers of people who:

- live in high disaster risk areas do not feel their household or community is prepared for future disaster events
- don't believe they have the agency to improve their community
- do not believe their community learns from past experiences

We urgently need to support communities to strengthen their resilience through community-led action.

Why do people feel they do not have influence in their community?

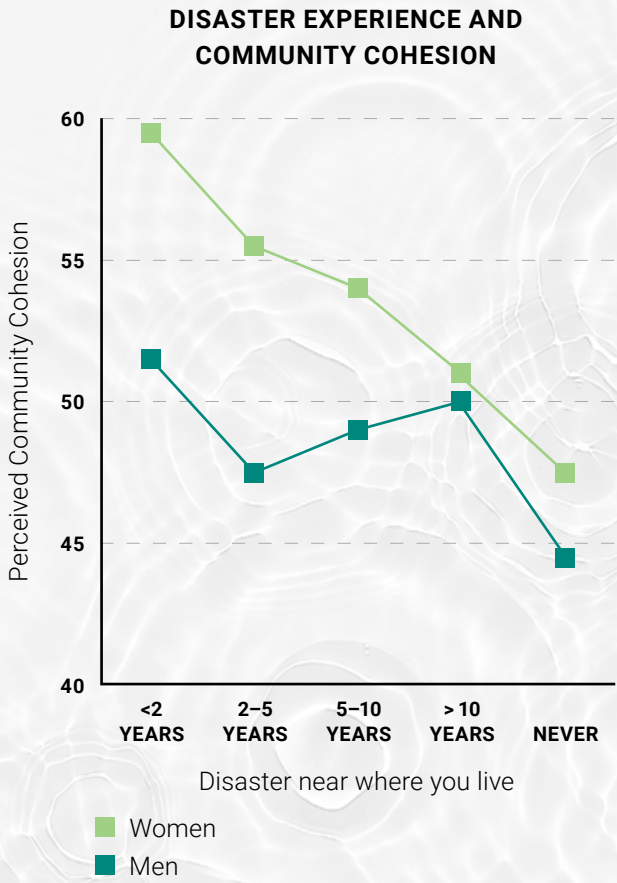
There is a disconnect between people's sense of connection and sense of agency. It is unclear why they feel they do not have influence – whether it's lack of opportunity or interest on the part of those in power – but those who feel disempowered may welcome community-led initiatives that give them a voice and build capability, especially as the majority of the population feel they have something to offer their community.

“I thought, no way will I live out there ... And then the bushfire came in 2002, and that kind of changed my relationship to this place. And I guess that's it, for me, fires kind of knit us to places or they tear us apart.”

— Community co-designer

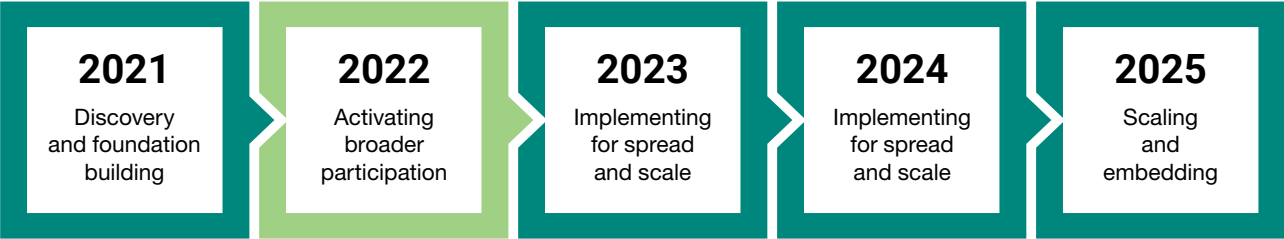
There is a greater sense of community connection and information sharing after a disaster event. All participants reported greater community cohesion in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, women more so than men. Women's perceived community cohesion significantly increases within the first two years and then steadily declines over the next 10+ years. However, 10 years post disaster, both genders still perceived higher levels of community cohesion than before the event.

A disaster brings a community together immediately and strongly – how do we harness this response and make it last?



4.4 SNAPSHOT FOR YEAR TWO

The Program’s emphasis in Year 2 now turns to co-designing foundations in each community and activating broader participation.



In 2022, we will be mobilising across all four Focus Communities. This includes convening community members to help co-design core Program components, as well as activate broader community participation in Program activities such as resilience planning and participatory granting to design and implement projects to support resilience priorities in each place. We also look forward to recruiting community-based staff in each place to support Program activities and community engagement.

We will continue to co-design a framework for the National Learning Network and begin to establish its early infrastructure, linking Focus Communities and others to share insights and experiences on disaster recovery and resilience.

Alongside community activation will be an expansion of the knowledge and research Program. This includes co-development of a research and evaluation framework with community and commencement of research projects to collect baseline data on indicators of holistic resilience. An International Research Advisory Group will also be established to advise on research design and delivery.



WHO WE ARE



 [CLICK TO SKIP TO SECTION](#)

SECTION 5

[5.1 Advisory Board](#)

[5.2 Program Team](#)

5.1 ADVISORY BOARD



Prof. Rebekah Brown (Board Co-Chair)

Rebekah Brown is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Senior Vice-President at Monash University. She is also the Director of Revitalising Informal Settlements and their Environments (RISE), an action research Program working in the Indo-Pacific to deliver solutions that benefit health, environment, and water and sanitation. Rebekah holds a Bachelor of Civil Engineering (Honours) from Monash University and a PhD in Environmental Studies from the University of New South Wales.



Dr. Jeni Whalan (Board Co-Chair)

Jeni Whalan is the Chief Strategy Officer at Paul Ramsay Foundation. She has worked with research institutes and think tanks around the world, including at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government, UNESCO, the International Peace Institute, the Sydney Policy Lab, and the Centre for Policy Development. A political scientist, Jeni holds a DPhil and MPhil in International Relations from the University of Oxford, where she was a Rhodes Scholar.



Jason Ardler

For more than 20 years, Yuin man Jason Ardler is has successfully led strategy and reform in complex public policy areas. He has a reputation as an authentic leader who inspires purpose and delivers results with a deep commitment to customer service. He is the co-founder of Thirriwirri. In 2018 Jason received the Public Service Medal (PSM) for outstanding public service to Indigenous people in NSW and in 2019 was made a Fellow of the Australian New Zealand School of Government.



Dr. Galina Laurie

Galina is a Partnerships Manager at the Paul Ramsay Foundation. She has over 15 years' experience in public policy. She has worked in leadership roles in state and local government in the areas of homelessness prevention, social and affordable housing, public housing renewal, community development and domestic and family violence. Galina has a PhD in American literature and is a past recipient of a Churchill Fellowship.



Ben Gales

Ben Gales is the founder of Impact Tracks, a social enterprise to help social impact organisations achieve and amplify their impact goals. He has a wealth of experience in government economic and social policy, venture capital, and impact investing. Ben has commercial investment experience from his time working in venture capital in the UK and the US, and has held a number of Non-Executive Board seats.



Marcus Ward

Marcus Ward is Chief Philanthropy Officer at Monash University. In 2018, he led the launch of the University's largest-ever fundraising campaign, "Change it. For good". Before joining Monash, Marcus was head of major gifts at Queen's University Belfast. Prior to that, Marcus led the Corporate and Trust Fundraising Team at The Prince's Trust in London, securing its largest ever philanthropic relationship.

5.2 PROGRAM TEAM



Assoc. Prof. Briony Rogers
Program CEO



Dr. Lara Werbeloff
Program Director



Kerry Jones
Executive Lead —
Community



Dr. Bronwyn Cumbo
Researcher —
Young People



Carla Clarence
Social Innovator



Prof. Carla Sgrò
Research Lead —
Ecological Health



Prof. Cathy Wilkinson
Executive Lead —
Research & System Change



Alison Stone
Executive Lead —
Learning Network



Prof. Andrea Reupert
Research Lead —
Education & Young People



Dr. Caroline Spencer
Research Lead —
Gender & Disaster Resilience



Chris Vanstone
Social Innovation Advisor



Dave Bushell
Data Manager



Auntie Vickey Charles
Social Innovator —
Cultural Connections



Bradley Webb
Researcher —
Indigenous perspectives



Prof. Brian Martin
Research Lead —
Indigenous



Prof. David Johnston
Research Lead —
Economics



Dr. Desiree Hdz. Ibinarriaga
Researcher —
Indigenous Perspectives



Prof. Diego Ramirez-Lovering
Research Lead —
Built Environment



Emeritus Prof. Frank Archer
Research Lead—
Disaster Resilience



Assoc. Prof. Helen Forbes-Mewett
Research Lead — Social Inclusion



Prof. Jane Fisher
Research Lead —
Health & Wellbeing



Pip Bergin
Project Officer



Prof. Rebecca Wickes
Research Lead —
Community Cohesion



Revathi Nugehalli Krishna
Research Fellow



Kate Fawcett
Learning Network Manager



Lauren Anseline
Social Innovator



Prof. Liam Smith
Research Lead —
Behaviour Change



Dr. Shelly Makleff
Researcher —
Public Health & Wellbeing



Dr. Shirin Malekpour
Research Lead —
Scenario Planning



Dr. Simone Mandl
Social Innovator



Prof. Mel Dodd
Research Lead —
Architecture



Prof. Neil Selwyn
Research Lead —
Education & Young People



Prof. Patrick Olivier
Research Lead —
Digital Civics



Suzanne Cross
Research Fellow



Tania Richter
Program Coordinator



Tasman Munro
Social Innovator



Dr. Thach Tran

Researcher —
Public Health & Wellbeing



Dr. Tom Bartindale

Researcher —
Digital Civics



Victoria Envy

Project Officer



*“We’ve got to be prepared to
plant a seed to grow a forest.
And that growth needs
the right conditions”*

— Community Co-designer



FIRE to FLOURISH



Strength through community-led action

Fire to Flourish is a five-year transdisciplinary Program working at the intersection of disaster resilience and community development. In partnership with communities affected by the 2019/20 Australian bushfire season, Fire to Flourish aims to support communities to lead their own recovery, co-create foundations for long-term resilience and wellbeing, and disrupt cycles of entrenched disadvantage. The Program will trial and scale innovations in community-led resilience, amplified through partnerships with government, philanthropic, not-for-profit and private sector organisations.

For more information, please contact:

Firetoflourish@monash.edu

A partnership between:



MONASH
University

MONASH
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

paulramsay
FOUNDATION
PARTNERSHIPS FOR POTENTIAL



ELECTRICAL
MERCHANDISING

**THE
AUSTRALIAN
CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL
INNOVATION**

**The Lowy
Foundation**


clarence
VALLEY COUNCIL

 **eurobodalla**
shire council




EAST GIPPSLAND
SHIRE COUNCIL