



Building a Better Understanding of Bushfire Risk

Submission

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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION TO GABA

Gariwerd Animal Biodiversity Alliance (GABA) Inc. was formed by a group of residents who live in the Gariwerd (Grampians) region on Djabwurrung, Jardwadjali and Guditjmara Countries. Our committee has expertise and experience in animal advocacy, anthropology, arts, environment, forests, health, horticulture, law, non-human animal behaviour and politics.

Established in March 2021, the purposes of GABA are to:

- ensure wildlife and their habitats are protected for forthcoming generations
- inform people about the importance of native wildlife to local ecology and biodiversity
- educate people about all species of non-human animals, including their needs, interests, rights, and relationships to land, sky, waters, and other species
- advocate for all animals and for biodiversity.

Fire is integral to protecting habitat for all species and acts as part of the restorative system of the natural world. As humans, we are part of nature, of Country, not separate to it. We also depend on the health of Country for our survival. Therefore, GABA has a strong interest in human knowledge and activities that supports the proclivity of nature to replenish Country for the sake of all species including our own. One of the most ancient knowledge bases in this regard is the use of fire. In balance, fire is restorative. Out of balance, fire is destructive. We are delighted to make our submission into understanding better how to reduce bushfire risk.

There is only one fire, and that is the right fire, for the right Country.

- Victor Steffensen, FireSticks Alliance

FIRE AND COUNTRY

There is a period of history that has been informally identified by geologists as being the Anthropocene.¹ It remains widely accepted by natural and social scientists that, along with the Great Acceleration² period after WWII, human activity has completely reshaped the ecology of the world. This didn't happen in isolation: There are social, political, theological, geographical, economic and colonial factors in our past that have created our current predicament. Human driven forces such as land-use change through farming sheep and other introduced animals, have helped change the nature of fire activity and its impacts. Such changes are transforming terrestrial ecosystems and threatening species with extinction.

There are three core components that coexist in our landscapes: sentient beings, living forms, and non-living structures. The health of all beings, including human beings, depends on the balance of all three. The sensitive interplay of sentient beings, living forms and non-living structures keeps the planet habitable and ecosystems functional which each life form, including ours, contributes to, shapes and benefits from.

We know from our First Nations³ People and their stories and Songlines that from the remote past through to before Europeans arrived at this continent, there was balance and harmony among all species. The Old People taught longstanding Law⁴ and Lore to the younger ones through Story and Ceremony. This deep respect for, and understanding of, all aspects of Country ensured continuing abundance allowing everyone on Country to flourish. This state we call Victoria was biodiverse and rich with wildlife and the landscapes and waterways were healthy. Much of this had to do with the sophisticated and multi-layered complex use of fire.

To undertake traditional fire burning, First Nations people read the local plants and trees, understand the soil, ebb and flow of the landscape, and seasonal weather conditions. They consider the lives, habitat and social movement of animals. They light the fire in such a way that animals can move freely around the fire, and easily survive any burn.

¹ Crutzen, Paul J. (2006). The 'Anthropocene' In *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene*, pp. 13-18. Springer: Berlin, Heidelberg.

² Steffen, W., Broadgate, W., Deutsch, L., Gaffney, O. and Ludwig, C. (2015). The trajectory of the Anthropocene: the great acceleration. *The Anthropocene Review*, 2(1), 81-98.

³ The terms First Nations, Indigenous and Traditional Owners are used interchangeably in this document.

⁴ Glenn, H. Patrick (2014). *Legal Traditions of the World: Sustainable Diversity in Law*. United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2014, 60-97.

Before Europeans arrived, fire was widely understood to be an ally. When First Nations people were removed from their land and prevented from performing their cultural traditions, the nature of the landscape changed drastically becoming much more fire prone. Many Victorians have experienced firsthand what happens when, in the absence of good fire, bad fire reigns, causing widespread devastation, harm and death.

Cultural fires burn slowly and remain cool, so the temperature of the flame does not overwhelm the landscape. Some areas are burnt, some are singed, and others are left to grow. This means burnt areas can regenerate with fresh green growth after burning, while other patches continue to provide strong ecosystems for local fauna and food production. Nothing is overwhelmed, and everyone remains safe. This method ensures that there are always living areas in the local ecosystem, with areas in different stages of regeneration.

Fire is beautiful. It's just like water; it trickles through the landscape and the right fire protects the trees and it brings food and encourages new life. It is a gentler technique, and it takes a lot more time to apply because the fire is slower.

- Victor Steffensen, FireSticks Alliance

This contrasts with our current relationship with fire, which is managed with tankers, accelerants, and burning huge swaths of Country (see Figure 1 below). This is counterproductive to a regenerative, reciprocal and sustainable relationship with fire which involves people walking together across Country, talking, being together, and lighting fires where appropriate. Fire management can be a part of everyday living. It doesn't have to be only an emergency service.

Conservation of Earth's biological diversity will be achieved only by recognizing and responding to the critical role of fire as friend, not foe.

SUBMISSION

We would like to acknowledge the work of the government and its agencies and partners in undertaking this review in an earnest attempt to prevent the catastrophic fires we have seen in recent years. Further, we wish to express our gratitude for the good will and experience of

volunteers who care for their communities through their local CFA fire sheds. We also appreciate and value the long-standing expertise of Traditional Owners. We have taken all this into consideration in writing this submission.

We have examined the recommended reading documents, including the summary document and reducing bushfire report⁵. On the basis of our work and expertise we offer a series of recommendations in line with those documents. Our recommendations prioritising First Nations fire-knowledge holders as leaders and authorities in fire management to which we urge immediate implementation. Traditional Owners have used fire for millennia as one of the many ways they care for Country, and government agencies have recognised them for doing so.⁶ However, governments have not yet sufficiently acknowledged, accept and integrated First People as authoritative fire practitioners into current fire management systems. Almost all our recommendations centralise First Nations people at the heart of bushfire risk reduction.

Until European settlers took fire out of the landscape, the country was well-managed and were a lot of grasslands and healthy landscapes.⁷

COMMENT ON LANGUAGE

Reading through government documents to prepare this submission, we felt that the language used with regard to fire and fuel management was quite combative. This tends to make readers see Country as danger, rather than as the myriad biodiverse complexity that it is. The term 'fuel reduction' can be inflammatory (no pun intended). Also, the focus on 'fuel management' is a narrow view on what is a highly complex landscape and engagement with Country where decisions involve physical, seasonal, spiritual, geographical, economic and cultural considerations. Similarly, diverse landscapes are seen as 'fuel' rather than a series of uniquely biodiverse ecosystems. The mountainous Country in Gariwerd⁸ presents some of the richest biodiversity in the state. Terms

⁵ Attorney General (2020) *VAGO Reducing Bushfire Report* <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/20201014-Reducing-Bushfire-report_0.pdf>

⁶ (2020). *First nations People and Fires Keep Traditions Alive Together*. National Emergency Response, 33(3), 15. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.578870536704951>

⁷ Chenery, Susan and Ben Cheshire (2020) *Fighting Fire with Fire* Australian Story <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-13/how-victor-steffensen-is-fighting-fire-with-fire/11866478?nw=0>

⁸ However, we are concerned that the mountainous areas of Gariwerd National Park is not covered by a RAP, see <https://www.safertogether.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/493533/DELWP_BushfireManagementStrategies_2020_Grampians_rr.pdf> 22. This forested area is particularly prone to bushfire and needs Traditional Owners to manage it.

like 'target', 'baseline', 'models' and 'inputs' don't inspire the relationship that we want community members to have with the Country that supports them and that they live on. We need science and heart to come together.

We are not suggested to completely get rid of those terms. However, we believe there needs to be a friendlier, holistic way of speaking about caring for Country and fire. Highlighting the reciprocity between people and Country can improve the relationship between the two. It is the changing of this relationship that will ultimately help reduce the overall risk of bushfire.

1. How the government can improve community understanding around bushfire risk and fuel management

The government can improve community understanding around bushfire risk and fuel management by helping the public better understand the nature of the landscapes they are living on. The separation of Country into private and public land, with different agencies and level of government responsible for different sections makes understanding Country and knowing what to do in response to that knowing, arduous and confusing.

We recognise there is already an alliance between some local governments, Traditional Owners and/or RAPs (Recognised Aboriginal Parties).⁹ Such alliances can become tools of community education in ways that are meaningful for people. In the absence of local Country-specific First Nations people, the Firesticks Alliance, a credible and respected authority on cultural burning, can conduct engaging workshops for the community that educate, inspire and give the community a sense of belonging and caring for something important.

The Firesticks Alliance have defined values and objectives underlying cultural burning that can inform on ground activities and improve community understanding by establishing common

⁹ Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (2021) *Caring for Country and Culture - Whole of Country Plan 2021-2030* <https://yynac.com.au/wp-content/uploads/wpforo/default_attachments/1622168442-Final-YYWOC-Plan_web-version-27-May-2021.pdf>

ground. These values are natural, spiritual, economic, educational and social. First Nations fire management values also align with government agencies areas of work including:

- Fuel Reduction - to reduce fuel levels in a specified area
- Ecological – to retain and improve biodiversity
- Regeneration Burn – to regenerate particular species of flora
- Catchment Protection – to restrict the spread of bushfires in forested water catchments

While cultural burning includes the above four areas, it is more integrated and complex than contemporary government fire management. Indigenous fire management is grounded in that understanding of reciprocity exists between people and Country. This requires patience and quiet observation. Healthy Country means healthy people. People who are healthy in mind and body care for Country. Country supports the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the people.

Cultural fire is careful, patient and based on close observation of local conditions by those who know the land well.⁸

In our experience, community members would be very supportive of a greater collaboration with Traditional Owners and would be prepared to learn and adopt traditional land management practices. Similarly, Traditional Owners would eagerly accept the opportunity to be active partners and leaders in such a venture. For government to actively support such collaboration would be a genuine investment in all people of Victoria. It would establish healthy communication pathways, provide a valuable education about Country for people of all ages, and create a resilient social and ecological landscape that with low bushfire risk. It would also benefit the entire community by helping them become confident in understanding ways to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire immediately¹⁰. This learning would improve community understanding of bushfire risk, and importantly, the confidence to manage it.

¹⁰ Steffensen, V. (2020). Fire Country: How indigenous fire management could help save Australia. Hardie Grant Travel, Melbourne.

2. In developing a whole of sector bushfire strategy, what are the areas of bushfire management that should be considered and prioritised?

In developing a holistic bushfire strategy, the following areas of management should be considered and prioritised.

1. Collaborate with qualified Country-specific Traditional Owners as authorities on fire across all areas of government
2. Include Traditional Owners and their knowledge-based fire practices in the entire sector of bushfire strategy and management.
3. Mainstream caring for Country through fire by providing avenues for Traditional Owners to educate the community about Indigenous fire practices
4. Consider non-human animals as active stakeholders in fire management systems – Traditional Owners to advise on this.

From a mainstream land and fire management perspective, there can be a misunderstanding that fire is always hot and always dangerous. However, according to First Nations' fire knowledge there are different kinds of fire recognised in their ancient knowledge structure. First Nations people explain that the reason we have intensive and destructive bushfires is because fires are too hot, lit at the wrong time, in the wrong place and burned in the wrong way. The nature of cultural fires is that they are cooler, smaller, take longer to burn, and are much lower in intensity. Fuel is not poured onto the land in the company of tankers, as with governmental fire systems. Rather, every fire is considered in relation to the specific needs, qualities and conditions of that particular Country.

Biodiversity in Australia¹¹ and Victoria¹² is the worst it has ever been, and there is no indication things will get better, unless we change what we do. Despite this, biodiversity and animal welfare are often overlooked in preference to human life and human property.

Indigenous fire management considers all aspects of Country as a whole, not as a hierarchy. In government fire management some areas such as human life and built property are priorities, and

¹¹ Samuel, G 2020, Independent Review of the EPBC Act—Final Report, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra, June. CC BY 4.0. <https://epbcactreview.environment.gov.au/resources/final-report>

¹² Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (2018) State of the Environment 2018 Report. Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria; Melbourne. https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/SoE2018_SummaryReport.pdf

others such as landscapes, forests and wildlife are seen as collateral damage. Since the catastrophic fires of 2019-2020, Victoria has thankfully started integrated the care of Wildlife through the Wildlife Welfare Bushfire Response 2020 Action Plan.¹³ However, little of it engages with First Nations people, who are the ones who hold the greatest knowledge about how to manage Country with fire in a way that protects, and that doesn't inflame.

Mainstreaming caring for country can be accomplished in small ways first. Small groups of people on small manageable sections of Country will be accompanied by people who keep close observation on the fire while reading the Country. This is slower but takes less resources than an emergency services style engagement with fire. Fuel-based burns often create walls of flame where escape can't escape and create unhealthy grey or black smoke and too much heat.

By contrast cultural burning tends to use spot ignitions using matches, creating a mosaic of cool fires leaving space for wildlife to escape and allowing native seeds to germinate whilst suppressing introduced plants. Cool cultural fires remove green litter from the forest floor, whilst reducing the risk of burning whole trees and forest canopies. Protecting the canopy is considered paramount in cultural burning because it holds many precious resources – insects, birds' nests, bats and shade. Altering the canopy or removing the canopy fundamentally alters the biodiversity of the surrounding ecosystem.

To develop a whole of sector bushfire strategy, we need to develop a community of people who are confident with, and unafraid of, fire. Knowledge transfer is critical, regardless of whether one identifies as Indigenous or Non-Indigenous. Any change in fire management practices has to be logical as well as meaningful for people, otherwise no-one will do it.

A whole of sector bushfire risk reduction strategy should consider the following:

RESPONSIBILITY

- Ensure the right people are involved in planning and implementing fire based cultural connections to the land
- Teach young people and pass on knowledge, to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people

¹³ DELWP (2020) Wildlife Welfare Bushfire Response 2020 Action Plan. Biodiversity Division, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/503891/Wildlife-Welfare-Action-Plan-2020-Final-signed-LD.pdf

RESPECT

- Accept the authority of First Nations people to teach about fire management
- Walk on Country with each other.
- Learn by observation and sharing

RECOGNITION

- Embed cultural connection within contemporary natural resource management practices
- Implement good training, strong partnerships, on ground practices and appropriate techniques
- Accept First Nations people as active partners and leaders in fire management and caring for Country.

You gotta burn country to feed the animals, to have green grass. Lots of animals come on country and it's healthy.

- Dr Tommy George, Awu Laya man.

3. How should fire agencies be responding to, mitigating and adapting to climate change?

Australia signed the Paris Agreement to combat climate change which includes our obligation to protect biodiversity and the integrity of ecosystems. Australia, and 174 other Member States signed and committed to: 'Ensure the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth.'¹⁴

In Australia, climate change has created a platform for hot fire to accelerate through our landscapes. First Nations people have commented that governmental fire practices burn the Country too hot, killing the wrong seed and drying out the land, making it more drought prone establishing a positive feedback loop where our land gets hotter and dryer.

¹⁴ https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf

Figure.1 Note the large area of forest and canopy burned (meaning no escape for wildlife) on the Billawin ranges, Gariwerd, July 2021.



With one million animal species at risk of extinction¹⁵ due to climate change caring for Country in the right way must be a priority. Lighting up huge tracts of land with petrol/ diesel, compromises wildlife and their habitats as well as the overall ecology of the forest.

We recommend implementing cultural burning, not just for the benefit of other species, but also for our own. We do not exist here in isolation. We are not separate from nature or from Country. Whatever our world view, all beings of all species depend on the balance of air, water, earth and fire to survive. Caring for Country should be the number one priority, to ensure all species – including our own - are protected long-term, as well as the biodiversity of our planet on which we collectively depend. We must think beyond solely human interests.

¹⁵ Leahy, Stephen (2019) *One million species at risk of extinction, UN report warns* National Geographic
<<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/ipbes-un-biodiversity-report-warns-one-million-species-at-risk>>

Another concern regarding climate change is agriculture, particularly animal agriculture:

- Animal agriculture is the greatest contributor to deforestation, habitat loss and species extinction¹⁶
- Animal agriculture accounts for 55% of Australian land use which equates to 427 million hectares, excluding timber production¹⁷
- Grazing crops like phalaris are highly flammable,
- Most of Victoria's open forests have been destroyed for grazing farmland or crop production for animal feed
- Most wildlife deaths have occurred on private agricultural land through the authority to control wildlife (ATCW) system.

Many farmers are becoming cognisant of the need to change how we farm.¹⁸ There need to be incentives to take up restorative methods of farming – whether permaculture, regenerative farming, indigenous land use, organic farming and other methods of low impact farming.¹⁹ Animal agriculture has destroyed the soft highly absorbent nature of Western Victorian soils. The compacted soil and decreased microbial activity have caused runoff, reducing the amount of water in the soil, creating a more fire prone landscape.

Considering the First Nations law of reciprocity, we suggest that where practices pose risks to landscapes (such as animal/ crop monocultures/ high chemical input farming) measures must be taken to balance those harms through restorative practices on that same land. If we take something from Country, we must give it back. However, this should happen with local government financial and social support to incentivise farmers, and knowledge should be shared farmer to farmer. In the Gariwerd area (Western Victoria), locally supported community education, workshops and engaging initiatives are preferable to being given government directives.

¹⁶ Bradshaw, Corey J. A. (2012) *Little left to lose: deforestation and forest degradation in Australia since European colonization* Journal of Plant Ecology 5:1, 109–120 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jpe/rtr038>>

¹⁷ Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (2021) *Snapshot of Australian Agriculture* <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/products/insights/snapshot-of-australian-agriculture-2021>

¹⁸ Farmers for Climate Action <<https://farmersforclimateaction.org.au>>

¹⁹ Millard, Esther (2020) *The Track to Transformation: How Regenerative Agriculture and Indigenous Land Management can improve the resilience of farms in Western Victoria*. Internship Report prepared for Andy Meddick MLC (Western Victoria), Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne

4. What do you consider to be a realistically achievable percentage for bushfire risk reduction through fuel management and your reasoning for it?

There are a complex range of elements involved in determining a percentage of bushfire risk reduction, so it is not a straightforward task to quantify. Even technical models of measurement by government agencies are distinct to the observation models used by First Nations people. Cultural burning is performed with highly attuned knowledge of particular Country. The practises can include burning Country for the health of particular plants and animals such as native grasses, rare marsupials, bush foods, threatened species or biodiversity in general. It may involve burning some sections and leaving others unburnt depending on flowering, animals, moisture and season. Fire can also involve patch burning to create different fire intervals across the landscape. It can be used to suppress introduced wades and encourage native grasses. It can also be used for 'fuel reduction' but slowly overtime, in a season specific way. All of this happens with experienced people conducting that care for Country with observation and refinement all the time. There is the possibility for that care, and companionship to fire because it happens so slowly. Cooler fire moves beneath the canopy and allows soft green growth to flourish underneath and gives animals an easy chance to move away. The authority of current government regulations, and the authority of First Nations encyclopaedic knowledge of Country and fire use different systems that, in the aspect of determining risk reduction, are at odds with each other.

The old men knew the country and when to burn to clean it out and make it healthy. Each ecosystem would become ready one by one. The next system would put the fire out because it was still green.

It could simplistically be said that if 10% of the Country is managed by First Nations people doing slow, cool, wise burns, we will see that amount of risk reduction. If they manage 10% of the land, we will see 10% risk reduction. When First Nations people are invited onto private properties on their Country as authoritative fire managers and are employed to advise when and how to burn according to traditional and cultural methods, this will have an immediate effect of reducing bushfire risk on private properties in regional areas.

SUMMARY

*It was "amazing" to watch the men skilfully burn the landscape.
"Flowering was protected... there was an increase in the diversity of the
understory, there was a decrease in scar height," Peta Standley (Cultural
Burning Researcher).*

Figure 2. Victor Steffensen from FireSticks Alliance conducting a cultural burn on Yorta Yorta Country, with First Nations fire and cultural experts, April 2021.



Australia's bushfires in 2019/2020 were unprecedented in scale and ferocity. We watched in horror as the flames burned people's homes, infrastructure and whole ecosystems. It is estimated that 18 million hectares were burnt, and 3 billion animals died. Plants and trees which provide food for wildlife were incinerated causing ongoing death by starvation.

Widespread positive education and engagement with Traditional Owners is one of the best ways to facilitate change. We understand though, that there are some Victorians, particularly those who may be living on the same land as their colonist and settler forebears, who may prefer not to engage with Traditional Owners or recognise their practices. It can be difficult to reconcile diverse

values where some regional Victorians support First Nations collaboration, and some don't. However, historical and ethnographic record demonstrates that First Nations people managed land wisely²⁰, allowing it to remain safe, to replenish and remain abundant *for* all species and *with* all species. When discussing fire risk and fire safety, the government must look at the evidentiary record and find ways to make these practices relevant and palatable to people who have different worldviews. Biodiversity, a healthy environment and reduced risk for current and future generations must be the guiding principle. If we are to avoid a repeat of the horrific bushfires of 2019/2020, we must take immediate action.

1. Firstly, we must acknowledge the impact of climate change on the prevalence and severity of bushfires and take steps to stop the heating of landscapes immediately.
2. Secondly, we need to improve fire management practices by recognising First Nations peoples as custodians of ecological knowledge and fire stewardship; Indigenous People should lead decision-making that affects Country.
3. Thirdly we need to improve our response to bushfire when it does occur in order to minimise loss of life for humans, wildlife and farmed animals by ensuring we have clear well documented procedures and by improving the capacity of DELWP, RAPS, Traditional Owners and other organisations and community groups to work collaboratively during bushfire emergencies.

The recommendations here can also offer meaningful employment to First People, allow Victorians to benefit from their knowledge, reduce the human, society and environmental cost of fire, provide protection to people and property²¹ in the event of bushfire, and restore the biodiversity of this land.

Please see our recommendation on pages 17 and 18. We believe this review is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to collaborate with Country-relevant First Nations People as leaders and decision makers for government, in ways that are sincere and transformative for the state. This is the perfect opportunity to bridge Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of viewing the world and move forward with proper conciliation and respect.

²⁰ Gammage, Bill (2012) *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* Allen and Unwin: Australia

²¹ Archibald-Binge, Ella and Rhett Wyman (2020) *'It's miraculous': Owners say cultural burning saved their property* Sydney Morning Herald, 6 January <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/it-s-miraculous-owners-say-cultural-burning-saved-their-property-20200103-p53okc.html>>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. First Nations Fire Knowledge
 - a. Listen to Traditional Owners
 - b. Recognise the authority of First Nations people and their longstanding knowledge of fire and landscapes
 - c. Accept First Nations culture and fire experts as active partners and leaders
 - d. Apply what they say
 - e. Ask to walk on Country with First Nations people and to learn about fire from them.
 - f. Give Traditional Owners the legal and social authority to manage and burn Country.
 - g. Bring Traditional Owners into the CFA to train firefighters
2. Community Relationship with Fire
 - a. Envisage a new generation of people who understand fire as an ally
 - b. Restore an ancient and healthy relationship with fire among contemporary generation of Australians
 - c. Active collaboration between landholders, Traditional Owners and all levels of government
3. Farming and Agriculture
 - a. Incentivise farmers to care for Country
 - b. Implement restorative practices on Country to redress harms caused by farming
 - c. Establish and strengthen farmer to farmer networks of knowledge exchange.
4. Climate Change
 - a. Act on the key drivers of climate change to mitigate catastrophic fire risk by working collaboratively with other agencies
 - b. Subsidise bushfire preparedness with First Nations as educators, with disaster recovery money. We won't need to recover if we are well prepared.
 - c. A. Ensure that laws support and don't hinder the genuine attempts by private landholders and farmers to work with First Nations people to reduce fire risk.
 - d. Reframe our relationship with fire, as one of a cooperative ally, rather than a fearful foe.

- e. Adopt recommendations from the 'National Indigenous Dialogue on Climate Change'²²
5. Safer Together Program
- a. Integrate First Nations people, culture and knowledge into every recommendation.
 - b. Invite local RAPs or Traditional Owners or FireSticks Alliance to be key managers
 - c. Holistically measure the impact of burn and non-burn risk treatments across public and private land.
6. Mainstreaming Caring for Country
- a. Establish 'Walk Together on Country' initiatives where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people walk together
 - b. Create fun opportunities for non-Indigenous Australians to learn about Country from Country-specific First Nations people.
 - c. Create education programs as an alliance between landholders, Country-specific First Nations people (or the local or closest RAP) and local government.
 - d. Fund engaging workshops on private land where First Nations people educate the community about caring for Country with fire.
 - e. Alliance between LGAs and RAPs to organize cultural burns on and around private properties in bushfire prone areas.
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On behalf of the GABA committee, thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to Building a Better Understanding of Bushfire Risk.

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²² See page 7 - Statement from Traditions Owners, In Morgan M, et al. 2019. *National Dialogue on Climate Change*. Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub Report No. 11, NESP Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub, Australia
<<https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=csiro:EP198062&dsid=DS>>