

# Protocols for Indigenous fire management partnerships

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# Overview

- This 8-month review sought to understand the scope and application of **Indigenous fire knowledge** in contemporary Northern Australian fire projects
- **Protocols for Indigenous fire management partners** were scoped out as part of this effort and can be used by partners to support Indigenous fire management and carbon abatement activities across Australia

# Indigenous fire knowledge & contemporary landscape burning activities & partnerships

- **Indigenous fire knowledge** is an integral part of Indigenous governance systems. It has been crucial to their successful management of Australian landscapes for millennia, and it enables diverse, ongoing management efforts across the continent
- This work confirmed that **contemporary landscapes are sustained by Indigenous landscape burning practices** that respect sacred sites, cultural protocols and the burning needs of different types of country.
- **Partnerships** that support Traditional Owners across all these aspects of Indigenous fire knowledge can produce **multiple additional benefits** (eg jobs) through a range of fire service agreements that are valued by local Indigenous communities

# Activities

- The research team conducted a literature review and a series of activities to investigate the perspectives of fire program practitioners, partners, stakeholders and resource providers
- These activities included individual and small-group interviews, focus groups, regional workshops and a national fire forum





# Outputs

- Key lessons identified regarding
  - knowledge sharing
  - legal and policy context
  - environmental fire management projects and partnerships
  - savanna carbon projects and partnerships
  - Indigenous jobs, training and the community
- Six protocols co-developed to guide non-Indigenous partner's on-ground efforts to effectively and appropriately support Indigenous fire management goals and landscape burning practices



# Diversity of fire management & partnerships

*"We need to build flexible country relevant carbon economies"*

*"Early burning stops fighting fires later in the year"*

*"Different country needs different fire – this needs to be negotiated on the ground, led by Aboriginal communities"*

*"Sure carbon is a great way for us to get jobs but it is also important way to care for country"*

*"I remember when I first saw a satellite map – amazing! We can work together to burn all Arnhem land the proper way"*

*"Our neighbours and us use the fence to talk about best way to burn these days – not to mark out boundaries"*

*"We have to make sure our homes, fences, power ... are all safe from wildlife by burning every year"*

# Protocols for non-Indigenous fire management partners need to be locally negotiated

## Recognising traditional and legal rights and interests

*Indigenous fire management projects and enterprise can be rekindled predominantly on the lands for which the project owners have some customary responsibility and often other legal rights.*

## Recognising Indigenous knowledge

*Fire management partnerships must recognise and support Indigenous fire knowledge and fire management as part of local Indigenous governance systems.*

## Learning and sharing knowledge

*Partners that wish to support Indigenous fire management activities and enterprises need to pursue the best methods for learning, sharing and passing on fire knowledge.*

## Fostering place-based partnerships

*Place-based partnership approaches are needed to design and deliver Indigenous fire management programs across Australia.*

## Working within governance arrangements

*Partnerships that are established to support Indigenous fire knowledge and management activities need to work within contemporary institutional and governance arrangements.*

## Ensuring benefits to local Indigenous communities

*Indigenous fire management programs and partnerships can and should deliver environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits for local Indigenous communities.*

# Building protocols from on-ground experiences

**Concern about building national protocols** – “protocols should be local and driven by local communities”; “each community is different, so is each fire strategy” and there is confusion about why national protocols are even needed

However, general consensus emerged that **generic protocols could be useful for**

- (1) highlighting why fire partners need to understand Indigenous fire management priorities, and
- (2) explaining how partners can ensure fire activities are appropriate, legal, safe and effectively communicated to the community

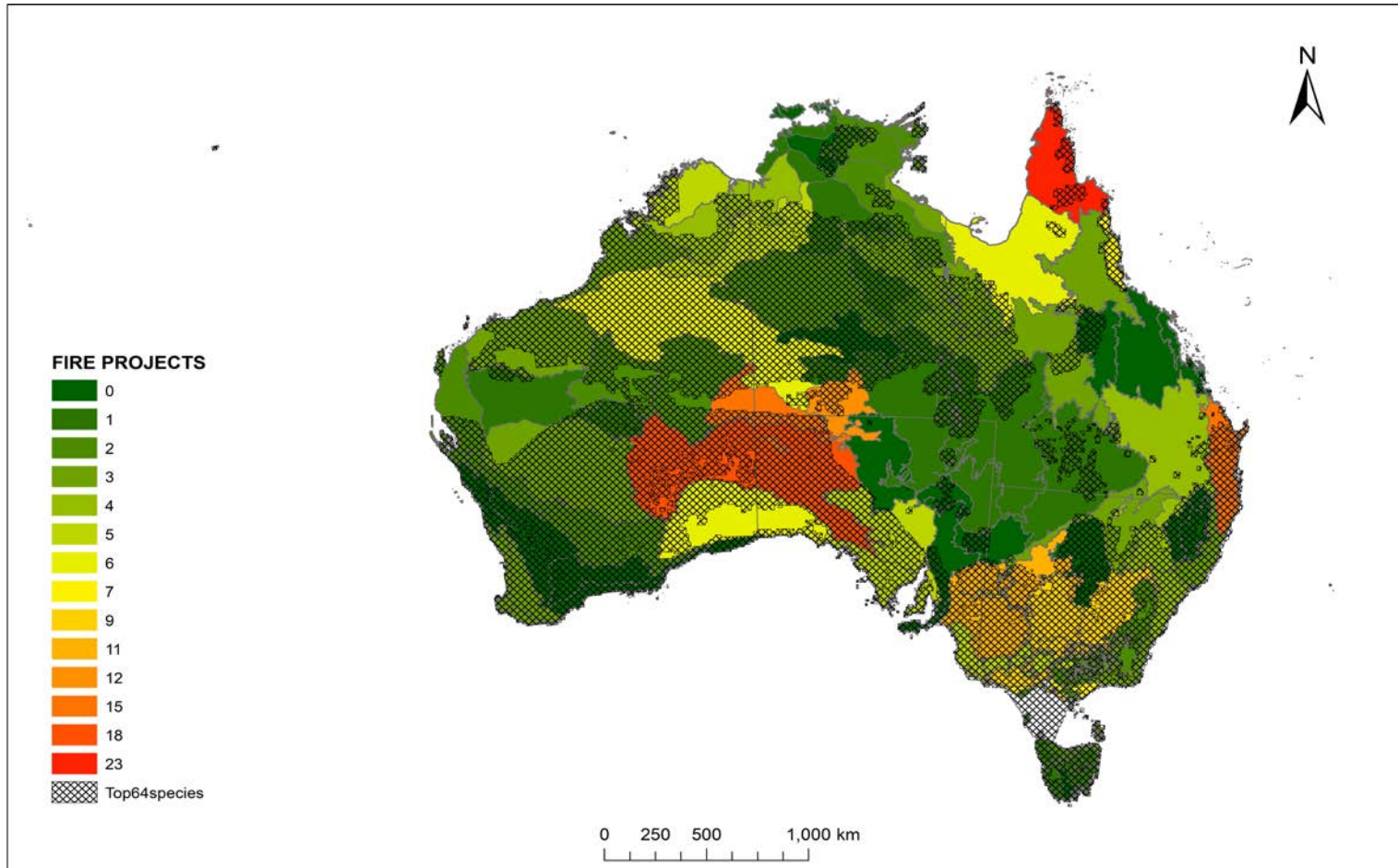


# Highlights

- Supporting Indigenous peer-based lesson sharing and protocol development for a unique and growing national industry
- Pathways identified to develop appropriate Indigenous fire partnerships for priority habitats and species



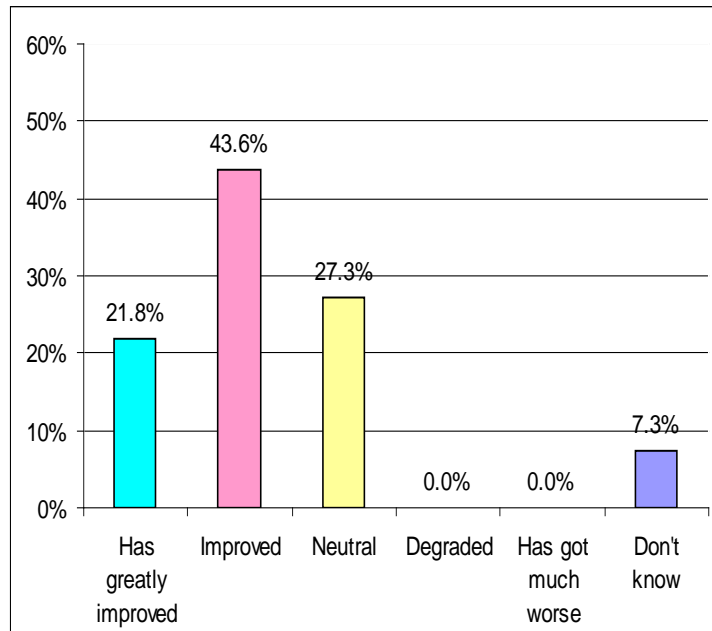
# Highlights – informing the development of appropriate fire regimes critical to saving our priority threatened species



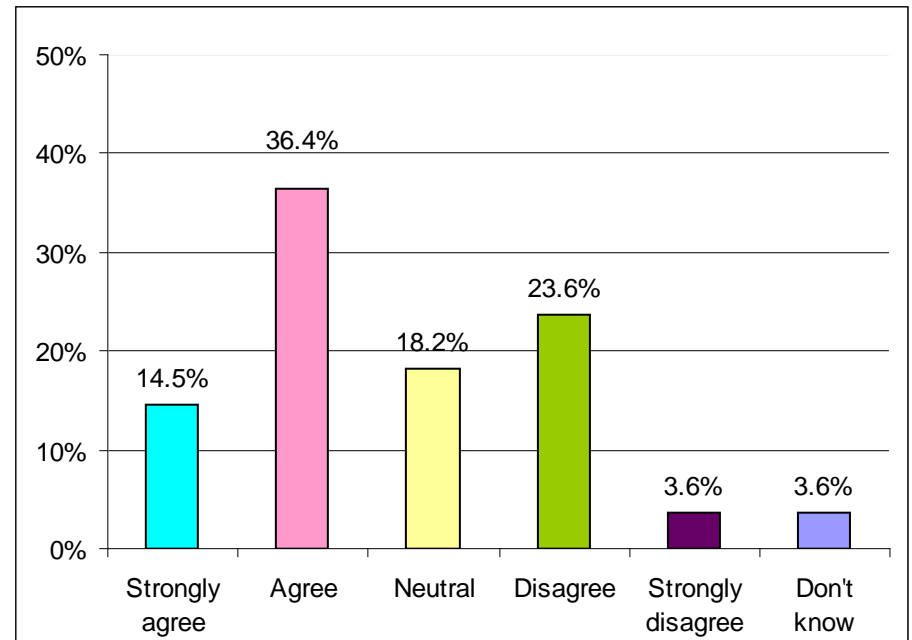
# Highlights

## Help non-Indigenous partners in their efforts to value and use Indigenous knowledge

***Qn: “Indigenous knowledge is highly valued and used when developing NRM projects in the region.”***



**Trend**



**Importance**

Tropical Savannas CRC Project evaluation of regional planning across Nthn Australia (2006-2008)

<http://savanna.cdu.edu.au/publications/index.html>

# Impacts

Multiple evidence base that can enable the unique features and (environmental, economic, cultural) benefits of Indigenous landscape burning regimes across Australia



# Evaluating and enabling multiple benefits

## Key reported motivations behind Indigenous fire projects

- Ecological benefits is a key motivation behind fire project activities (97%) as is livelihoods (83%) and cultural activities (82%). Carbon is less important (24%).

## Key reported environmental outcomes

- Local ecological benefits were the most reported environmental outcome of the Indigenous fire projects (51%).
- Indigenous led projects largely reported environmental outcomes at the local and landscape scales, with very few environmental outcomes for specific ecological benefits (i.e. including protection of individual species (e.g. small mammals or birds)).
- Projects that reported landscape scale benefits, i.e. across the broader region, were mostly located in Northern Australia.

## Key reported economic outcomes

- Livelihood / employment outcomes was the major economic outcome (60%) participants reported.
- Only 4% of the economic outcomes recorded by participants stated that carbon trading was one of the economic benefits of the project.
- Carbon trade as an economic outcome was only reported by Indigenous led projects.

## Key reported social outcomes

- Education and training is the major social outcome from Indigenous fire enterprises (64%), following closely by traditional knowledge sharing (56%).
- Indigenous led projects cited cultural (re)connection and on-country benefits more than other proponents. And this occurred largely in Northern Australia.



This work is supported through funding from the  
Australian Government's National Environmental Science Programme

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