Natural Hazards Research Australia

First Nations women, cultural fire knowledge, wellbeing and memory

Final report: An impact evaluation of the Australia Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX) program

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NIDR NATIONAL INDIGENOUS DISASTER RESILIENCE

MONASH University

Version	Release history	Date
1.0	Initial release of document	20/05/2026

Australian Government

Natural Hazards Research Australia receives grant funding from the Australian Government.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians across all the lands on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders both past, present and emerging. We recognise that these lands and waters have always been places of teaching, research and learning.

Publisher:
Natural Hazards Research Australia

ISBN: 978-1-923057-64-7

Report number: 82.2026

May 2026

Cover: Attendees and program support staff at Yaramulla ranger base on Ewamian Country (Undara Volcanic National Park). Image courtesy of Sarah Ebsworth (QFD).

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Acknowledgements

Our research team would like to thank all the Indigenous women who participated as both interviewees and participants in the Australia Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX). Thank you for generously sharing your time and trusting us with your personal experiences, feelings, stories and aspirations.

AUS WTREX was delivered through a partnership between the Queensland Fire Department (QFD) and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), with support from the National Council for Fire and Emergency Services in Australia and New Zealand (AFAC), WTREX and Fire Networks. The program was supported by Aboriginal Corporations and Indigenous Ranger networks across North Queensland, including: Ewamian People Aboriginal Corporation, Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage and Protection Aboriginal Corporation, Gambir Yidinji Fire Practitioners, and Gunggandji Mandingalbay Yidinji Peoples Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) Aboriginal Corporation.

Figure 1. 'The Circle of Flamekeepers' artwork for AUS WTREX, designed by Jedess Hudson, a descendent of the Ewamian and Western Yalanji people of North Queensland.

We would like to acknowledge that AUS WTREX was made possible because of the dedication of people working in QFD (Chloe Swiney, Kylee Clubb, Cherie Minniecon, Leah Hornibrook, Kate Eggar, Peta Miller-Rose, Nicole Nash, Kade Brindell), QPWS (Alex Lacey, Anthony Staniland, Eliza Wheeler, Timothy Yuen) and WTREX (Kelly Martin, Lenya Quinn-Davidson and Maria Estrada).

Thank you to our research end-users, QFD. Thank you to Natural Hazards Research Australia (the Centre), specifically Project Manager (Nicola Moore) and the Communications Team for their assistance in developing and promoting the research project and guiding the research process.

We would like to acknowledge that this report was written on Bunurong/Boonwurrung Country, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Wadawurrung Country and Ngunnawal and Ngambri Nganawul Country.

End-user statement

Commissioner Stephen Smith AFSM, Queensland Fire Department

Fire has a highly significant and uniquely complex presence and history within Australia. The challenges it poses are often frequent and extreme; the skills and resources that it demands are considerable; and fire events and associated activity are both well recorded and socialised.

Beyond that highly salient perspective however, exists the less overt places of fire in society, including its more personal meaning to individuals and communities. Fire is an intrinsic part of First Nations women's culture and plays a fundamental role in knowledge, wellbeing and connection with others, the environment and memory. In acknowledgment of this, the Australia Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX) is a contemporary training initiative designed to enhance fire practitioner skills; exchange knowledge; and facilitate a network of women in fire and land management.

AUS WTREX was delivered in North Queensland in May 2025 through a partnership between the Queensland Fire Department and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. When a program of such significance is delivered, it is vitally important to take the opportunity to document, evaluate and share what occurred. This was achieved via end-user partnership with Natural Hazards Research Australia, ultimately leading to the impact evaluation and profound experiences cited in this report.

Synthesising a report that balanced evaluation with participants' personal experience was a challenge that the research team met extremely well. Findings showcase a resoundingly successful and meaningful event, one that also informs future iterations of the program through both constructive and reflective lenses.

Refreshingly, findings are also infused with an array of powerful and poignant personal experiences, highlighting self-awareness, confidence, empowerment and personal growth. That inspiring success is reiterated by the project's supporting partners:

''Chloe Swiney, Kylee Clubb and I were inspired to bring WTREX to Australia after our own life changing experience at K-WTREX in California in 2022. To have worked with my sisters in fire to bring AUS WTREX to life, and then to see the powerful effect the program has had on other Indigenous women and firefighters from across the world, fills me with pride that we contributed to this growing international network of empowered Indigenous women in fire.'' – Alex Lacey, Undara Volcanic National Park Ranger QPWS, AUS WTREX coordinator and Ewamian woman.

''For a millennia, fire has been used by First Nations peoples to care for Country and connect with one another, and through AUS WTREX fire has been used to exchange cultural practices and support a diverse network of women in fire on a global scale. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is proud to have partnered with the Queensland Fire Department and supporting organisations to deliver Australia's first WTREX program, and will continue to build on the legacy of AUS WTREX by applying the many learnings and outcomes captured by this research report to support our diverse, inclusive workforce.'' – Troy Spinks, Fire Services Director, QPWS

''It has been a true privilege to work alongside Alex Lacey and Kylee Clubb in bringing AUS WTREX to life, and I am incredibly proud to have led the AUS WTREX Working Group. AUS WTREX created a space for connection, learning, and knowledge sharing, grounded in respect for culture and Country. I hope this research helps inform and inspire First Nations women in fire, recognising this is just the beginning of something much bigger.'' – Chloe Swiney, Manager Bushfire Mitigation Wide Bay Burnett, Rural Fire Service Queensland, AUS WTREX Project Manager

The Queensland Fire Department sincerely thanks the participants of AUS WTREX for their engagement in the program and openness to sharing their experience. The final report serves as a testament to their commitment and professionalism and stands as an invaluable resource for progressive community engagement and contemporary emergency service delivery.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AFAC	National Council for Fire and Emergency Services in Australia and New Zealand
AUS WTREX	Australia Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange
NHRA	Natural Hazards Research Australia
NIDR	National Indigenous Disaster Resilience
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporate
QFD	Queensland Fire Department
QPWS	Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
TREX	Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges
WTREX	Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges

Introduction

In May 2025, 37 women from across Australia and overseas came together in North Queensland for the inaugural 12-day Australia Women-in-Fire Prescribed Training Exchange (AUS WTREX) program. A key focus of AUS WTREX was the role of Indigenous[1] women in fire, and so the program prioritised supporting Indigenous women as participants. The focus of AUS WTREX was to enhance fire practitioner skills, exchange cultural burning and western burning knowledge and develop an international network of women in fire and land management.

AUS WTREX was delivered through a partnership between the Queensland Fire Department (QFD) and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), with support from the National Council for Fire and Emergency Services in Australia and New Zealand (AFAC), WTREX and Fire Networks. The 12-day program took place across Gimuy and Yirrganydji Country (Cairns), Ewamian Country (Undara Volcanic National Park), Bundarra and Wadjanbarra Country (Tinaroo and Rocky Creek) and Gunggandji Mandingalbay Yidinji Country (Yarrabah). A key focus of AUS WTREX was the role of Indigenous women in fire, and so the program prioritised supporting Indigenous women as participants.

QFD acknowledged that AUS WTREX was an important learning opportunity. Through its capacity as an end-user organisation with Natural Hazards Research Australia (the Centre), QFD expressed an interest for an impact evaluation to be done with participants of AUS WTREX. Key outcomes of this evaluation were to evaluate the delivery of the program and investigate the experiences of Indigenous women participating in the program. Central to this evaluation process was to identify what worked in delivering the program, the meaning of the program to participants and provide recommendations to enhance future training programs.

National Indigenous Disaster Resilience (NIDR) at Monash University was then appointed to conduct this evaluation and complement it with additional research skills and insights. The core objective of this research-led impact evaluation was to better understand how AUS WTREX impacted First Nations women who participated, given it was the first of its kind held in Australia. The research-led impact evaluation (hereafter research project) seeks to understand if and how participation in AUS WTREX impacts First Nations women's physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and their memory.

This report begins by providing contextual information about the Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX) and AUS WTREX, and by defining some key concepts at the centre of this project. The methodologies used for the applied research are then discussed, including oral interviews, personal reflective journals and participant observation and outline the strengths and limitations of each approach. Following this, the findings are detailed, which have been organised into six distinct, yet interconnected themes:

- **Safety and support**
- **Confidence and empowerment**
- **Reciprocal exchange**
- **Connection and healing**
- **Cultural, personal and professional growth**
- **Reincorporation**

These findings offer critical insights into the benefits of Indigenous-led spaces which enable First Nations women to gather and participate in caring for Country and professional development activities. The research reveals the importance of engaging women in the fire and emergency management sector, and tangential sectors such as caring for Country and land and water management on government-operated parks estates. Findings have implications for prescribed burning and other land management agencies to better engage,

[1] Throughout this paper, the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', 'First Nations' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably, reflecting the diverse identities of the women from Australia and overseas who participated in AUS WTREX. We also use the term 'Traditional Owners' to denote the specific relationship between people and Country where AUS WTREX took place.

recruit and support Indigenous women as fire practitioners, and explore the opportunities available to agencies by opening up pathways for employment, retention and promotion.

Background

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX)

Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX) are two-week, hands-on fire training programs developed by the North American-based organisation Fire Networks. The exchanges aim to restore relationships between people and fire so that responses to fire challenges are social, as well as scientific and environmental.

In 2016, several women firefighters who participated in a TREX event recognised shared challenges and experiences as women in fire management. In response, they adapted the original TREX model to create the WTREX, establishing a more supportive and welcoming training environment, particularly for women in the fire management sector.

Since 2016, there have been WTREX events across the United States, Canada, Portugal and South Africa.

In 2022, the first Indigenous women's TREX was hosted by the Karuk Tribe in the remote Klamath Mountains of northern California. This gathering marked the first training designed specifically for Indigenous women in fire, and it also represented the first time in over 200 years that the Karuk Tribe had been able to carry out cultural burning on their ancestral lands.

Four Indigenous Australian women from Queensland – Chloe Swiney, Kylee, Clubb, Evelyn Ivey and Alex Lacey – were supported by their workplaces to participate in the Karuk WTREX (Image 2). For Chloe, Kylee, Evelyn and Alex, this was their first experience in a program of this kind, and it inspired them to bring a WTREX event to Australia.

Image 2. (L–R) Chloe Swiney, Kylee Clubb, participant, Evelyn Ivey, and Alex Lacey at the Karuk WTREX.
Image courtesy of Chloe Swiney.

Australia Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX)

The Australia Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX) was a 12-day intensive training program that brought together 38 people, where 26 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women and four identified as Indigenous women to other parts of the world. An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander man also participated in the program.[2] A key focus of AUS WTREX was the role of Indigenous women in fire, and so the program prioritised supporting Indigenous women as participants. The program focused on enhancing fire practitioner skills, exchanging cultural and western burning knowledge, and developing an international network of women in fire and land management.

The program was delivered through a partnership between QFD, QPWS, with support from the National Council for Fire and Emergency Services in Australia and New Zealand (AFAC), WTREX and Fire Networks. The AUS WTREX program was planned, coordinated and implemented by the AUS WTREX Working Group (Working Group), made up of members from WTREX, QFD, QPWS and AFAC.

Some members of the Working Group were Traditional Owners themselves and held relationships with Traditional Owners on whose Country AUS WTREX took place. As such, Traditional Owners were engaged in the design and implementation of AUS WTREX. Men were also involved in the program as either Traditional Owners or as male program support staff, where some male program support staff were also a part of the Working Group.

AUS WTREX ran from 12–23 May 2025 in North Queensland across the locations shown in Image 3.

Image 3. Map of AUS WTREX locations across North Queensland, Australia.
Map courtesy of Alex Perlinski (NIDR).

[2] WTREX programs are open to people of all genders and backgrounds, yet Indigenous women were prioritised during the selection process.

Attendees engaged in burning activities across North Queensland, learned about the history of each Country from Traditional Owners, learned about incendiary burning and native plant species, took up roles in the incident command system, and practised weaving with raffia, lomandra and other materials.[3] The full 12-day program is included as Appendix A. It should be noted that some of the program sessions were either reduced or removed to make time for other activities.

[3] Raffia is typically made from the leaves of the raffia palm tree, native to tropical regions of Africa, and particularly Madagascar. Lomandra is a perennial grass native to Australia. Both are commonly used in weaving.

Research project

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements[4] highlighted significant public interest in cultural burning, particularly its potential to reduce fuel load in Australia's forests, thus reducing risk and its broader cultural and ecological benefits (Binskin et al., 2020). However, much less attention has been given to the broader wellbeing benefits of engaging in cultural burning and the exchange of cultural fire knowledge. AUS WTREX, the first program of its kind in Australia, provided a valuable opportunity to document and evaluate how such initiatives benefit First Nations women working or volunteering in Caring for Country and fire and land management roles. The need for this research project was formally identified by First Nations women during a Working Group meeting.

After being appointed to conduct this research project, NIDR discussed how this research project could complement and enhance the overall program by embedding research into its design and delivery. An approach to the research element of AUS WTREX was discussed in detail and agreed upon by all parties in the planning of the event. NIDR was not involved in the design or implementation of AUS WTREX, nor in engagement with Traditional Owners on whose Country the program took place. However, NIDR researchers attended Working Group meetings to understand the structure of the 12-day program and to provide advice on embedding research and evaluation into the program design. The research project focused specifically on the direct impacts of AUS WTREX participation on First Nations women. The views and experiences of cultural knowledge holders and the experiences of non-Indigenous or male participants were out of scope.

Given that AUS WTREX was coordinated and led by three Indigenous Australian women, this research deepens understanding of how First Nations women-led gatherings, and the exchange of cultural fire knowledge, strengthen wellbeing and memory, in addition to the environmental benefits of cultural burning. The findings will contribute to the growing evidence base on the wellbeing outcomes of caring for Country and cultural burning, particularly for First Nations women. Findings will also inform future iterations of the Indigenous women's TREX programs.

Defining key concepts

Wellbeing

In this project, the wellbeing of Indigenous participants includes physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing. For many Indigenous peoples, health and wellbeing is understood holistically (Biles et al., 2024; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Gee et al., 2014; Salmon et al., 2019). Together, this understanding of wellbeing differs from the narrow biomedical model of 'health' that focuses on disease and illness as the basis for treatment (Lansbury et al., 2022b & Weir et al., 2011). Wellbeing, then, means more than the absence of disease.

A holistic view of wellbeing recognises that connection, and disconnection, to one's family, community, culture and homelands or Country all influence wellbeing (Biles et al., 2024; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Gee et al., 2014; Lansbury et al., 2022a; Salmon et al., 2019). This means that a holistic approach to Indigenous wellbeing is required, one that recognises positive and negative factors (or determinants) outside the person. These determinants are referred to as historical, political, social and cultural determinants. Examples of these determinants are below:

- **Historical determinants:** impact of government laws, policies and practices negatively impacts Indigenous wellbeing, as these practices explicitly remove connections to family, community and culture (Gee et al., 2014 & Salmon et al., 2019).

[4] https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/natural-disasters

- **Political determinants:** Indigenous knowledges and values being excluded from emergency management decisions negatively impact Indigenous wellbeing, as this increases the risk of harm to communities, culture and Country (Williamson & Weir, 2021). Political determinants ultimately speak to the sense of control that individuals feel when exposed to powerful forces or state structures, with more control being directly proportional to increased wellbeing, and little or no control inducing a sense of negative wellbeing.
- **Social determinants:** experiences of racism negatively impact Indigenous wellbeing, as this contributes to chronic stress and may reduce access to health care (Leroy-Dyer, 2026).
- **Cultural determinants:** Indigenous peoples engaging in culture together positively impacts wellbeing (Brown 2014; Weir et al., 2011; Williamson, 2020).

In the context of this project, a holistic approach to wellbeing is essential to understanding the impacts of the program on participant wellbeing. This broad understanding of wellbeing also applies to Indigenous healing, where healing from trauma is a cultural and relational process, thus requiring culturally and socially safe spaces (Kingsley et al., 2018 & Quinn et al., 2022).

Memory

In this project, ancestral memory, sometimes referred to as blood memory, cellular memory or genetic memory, refers to the ability to hold and transmit emotions, experiences, events and knowledges over time (Bond et al., 2014; Weber-Pillwax, 2021). Blood memory, originally coined by Momaday in 1968, has been adopted by Indigenous scholars to theorise the continuity of Indigenous knowledges, despite forced dispossession and removal from ancestral lands and waters, and family and community structures. While the term has been adopted more widely by Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island (North America), similar terms have been used by Aboriginal scholars in Australia. For example, Jackie Huggins (2014, p. 2), a Bidjara and Birri Gubba Juru scholar, describes ‘Indigenous narrative memory’ as ‘an organic process that is in a constant state of being negotiated’, held in lived experiences and transmitted through humour, kinship and language.

Research approach

The research team is led by Associate Professor Bhiamie Williamson, a Euahlayi man and leading academic in Indigenous disaster resilience. He has published widely across interconnected fields, including cultural burning, cultural land management and Indigenous data sovereignty[5] and governance. The team also includes researchers Nell Reidy, Zoe Schultz and Jess Walters. In addition, the research project included Dr Amy Cardinal Christianson as an adviser. Dr Christianson is Métis and grew up in Treaty 8 territory in northern Alberta, Canada. She is an Indigenous Fire Specialist and the Senior Fire Adviser with Indigenous Leadership Initiative.

Zoe Schultz is a Gamilaroi and Malaysian Chinese woman and has studied a Master in Disaster Risk and Resilience in Aotearoa, where her dissertation research explored cultural burning and the western legal framework in New South Wales. Nell Reidy is a settler-descended researcher with a focus on trauma-informed and healing-centred community engagement. She is an experienced researcher and has worked with First Nations communities in remote Western Australia, recording knowledge about Country, including cultural burning practices with women, for the benefit and use of future generations. Jess Walters is a Palawa woman from the far north-west coast of Tasmania and was the Indigenous Ethics and Research Coordinator at Monash University at the time of this research. With deep family roots in agriculture, aquaculture and forestry, she has developed a strong passion in environmental security, focusing her work on engaging with rural, Indigenous and local communities to support Just Transition strategies.

Collectively, the research team brings together complementary and diverse academic skills: Williamson in geography and Indigenous governance, Reidy in history and anthropology, Schultz in urban planning and disaster risk and resilience, and Walters in earth sciences, environmental management and international relations. Despite coming from diverse academic backgrounds, all researchers are trained in trauma-informed approaches and committed to safe, sensitive and restorative research with Indigenous peoples. Williamson and Reidy are experienced in designing and conducting qualitative research, with oral interviewing being one of the two primary data collection methods in this project.

Ethics approval for the research was obtained from Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC: 46653). The research was conducted in alignment with the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, guided by its four core principles: Indigenous self-determination; Indigenous leadership; Impact and value; Sustainability and accountability[6].

Oral interviews

Oral interview is a data collection technique widely used across various fields, such as epidemiology, ethnography, human geography, sociology and so on. Oral interviews are a qualitative method and can range in format (such as one-on-one or focus groups) and style (formal, semi-structured and informal interviews). They can also be enhanced by including dimensions such as location (for instance, being in the place that is also being discussed so the participant can explain orally and visually) and time (interviewing people impacted by an event within a short period after the event, or years later). Person-centred oral interviews allow a participant to place themselves in the world around them and in relation to larger forces that exert pressure and exposures. Person-centred oral interviews build an awareness of a participant's engagements and perceptions about a certain topic and allow individuals to orient themselves within the context of historical and political forces.

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[5] Indigenous data sovereignty refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to exercise ownership over Indigenous data, which includes any data, in any format, that is 'about and may affect Indigenous peoples both collectively and individually' (Maiam nayri Wingara & Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, 2018).

[6] AIATSIS Code of Ethics.

In total, 19 Indigenous women participated in the pre- and post-program interviews; 16 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, and three identified as Indigenous women to other parts of the world. Pre-program interviews were conducted with 17 First Nations women, which also includes an in person interview with three participants in the first few days of AUS WTREX. The pre-program interviews provided a baseline understanding (i.e., reference point) of each participant, and explored influencing factors such as their upbringing, how they connect to Country (for instance, a cultural burn or going out bush), their understandings of wellbeing and their aspirations and anxieties about the program.

Post-program interviews were conducted with 11 First Nations women, three months after AUS WTREX. Of these, eight had engaged in both pre- and post-program interviews, while three participated in a post-program interview only. These interviews delved into their experiences during the program, such as challenging and pivotal moments, new friendships and how their lives have been since participating in AUS WTREX. Each interview was conducted via video call and went for between 20–60 minutes. All interviews were transcribed, de-identified and analysed thematically.

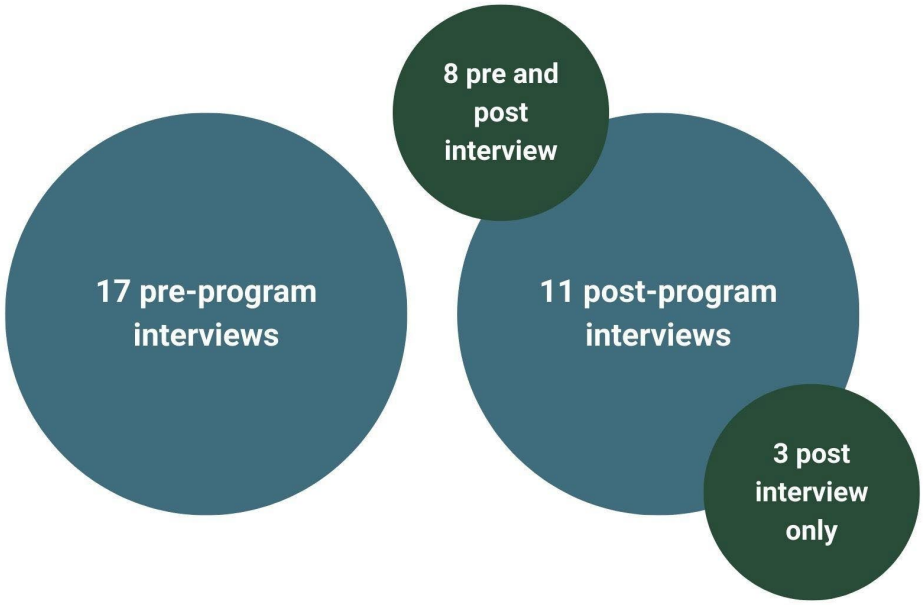

Image 4. Participant engagement in pre- and post-program interviews.

Participant observation, including daily check-ins

Participant observation is a widely used qualitative research method across disciplines including anthropology (Seim, 2021), ethnography (Shah, 2017), and tourism (Rossetti, 2024). It is commonly described as an immersive approach that seeks to minimise the distance between the observer and the observed (Cook, 2005; Holloway et al., 2010). Through participant observation, researchers actively engage in the activity under study, while also analysing its internal dynamics and reflecting on their own responses to the experience (Shah, 2017). In doing so, researchers inevitably influence the process of data collection through their embodied participation and presence (Cole, 2005).

Denscombe (2017) identifies perception as a key influence on participant observation, arguing that observations are inevitably influenced and shaped by the observer's own subjectivities, from their memory to their wellbeing. Sullivan (2020), a Wiradjuri scholar, emphasises that ongoing reflexivity is essential, particularly in relation to Indigenous researchers' assumptions, biases, intentions, responsibilities and values.

In the context of this project, two Indigenous female researchers (Schultz and Walters) were immersed as participant observers in the AUS WTREX program. Schultz participated in the program as a full participant, while also undertaking an embedded researcher role. Walters was primarily focused on observing but also

engaged in participation within the group. Both Schultz and Walters recorded research notes at the end of each day, away from other participants. All participants were aware of the researchers' presence, with a comprehensive informed consent process being delivered on the first day of the program in Cairns.

This dual-researcher approach provided practical and emotional support for Schultz as the fully embedded researcher, while enabling Walters to assume primary responsibility for the administrative and logistical tasks (for instance, attending program meetings, managing consent forms and data). The presence of two researchers also created opportunities for both to engage in critical self-reflection.

Daily check-ins

During AUS WTREX, Schultz and Walters attended breakfast (approx. 7–8am) and engaged with different participants to see how they were feeling as the program progressed. This approach enabled NIDR researchers to engage in informal conversations with participants and to build trust and rapport.

Dadirri

Dadirri is a Ngan'gikurunggkurr word from the region now known as Daly River in the Northern Territory. It is commonly translated in English to 'deep listening' (Atkinson 2002; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al. 2022). Atkinson (2002) utilises Dadirri as a method concerned with harnessing the mind-heart connection, where someone simultaneously hears and feels what is being shared (Atkinson, 2002, p. 19).

> *Dadirri at its deepest level is the search for understanding and meaning. It is listening and learning at its most profound level – more than just listening by the ear, but listening from the heart (Atkinson 2002, p. 19).*

Dadirri is an embodied experience, where a researcher receives communication in many forms. Applying Dadirri in professional settings emerged from healing and reform programs, but its utility as a research method was quickly identified. Atkinson (2002) utilises Dadirri as a foundation method in her investigations of transgenerational trauma[7] in Indigenous communities (Atkinson, 2002). It continues to be increasingly used as a research method.

> *The principles of Dadirri are based on what is learned from listening, providing a purposeful plan to act, informed by wisdom, and embraced by the responsibility that comes with that knowledge… This kind of listening contradicts aspects of communication in traditional styles of interviewing, where people focus on themselves, cognitively preparing their own responses rather than truly listening and understanding the speech, the feelings, and the commitments associated with the person with whom they are communicating (Ungunmerr-Bauman et al. 2022, p. 18).*

Although emerging from the Ngan'gikurunggkurr language, Dadirri has comparable precedents in other Indigenous groups. Ungunmerr-Bauman et al. (2022) acknowledges that:

> *The activity and practice of Dadirri has its equivalence in many of Indigenous groups in Australia and has been increasingly used as a research methodology with Aboriginal people in Australia (Ungunmerr-Bauman et al. 2022, p. 95).*

In the context of this project, Dadirri was an applied method within the oral interviews and participant observation. When interviewing participants, researchers were simultaneously listening to the key events, experiences and responses to interview questions, while paying attention to the way in which these responses are shared. An example of the operation of Dadirri and its importance as a research method is that while an interview transcript will record what a person says, it will generally not record a participant

[7] Atkinson (2002) defines trauma as 'an event or process which overwhelms the individual, family or community, and the ability to cope in mind, body, soul, and spirit' (p. 11).

expressing emotion, such as crying, in an interview. Embedding Dadirri as a research method strengthens inquiry through deeper consideration of interpersonal communication and connects thoughts and opinions with feelings and emotions. Applying Dadirri within the context of oral interviews allowed the research team to identify deeper truths of First Nations women within the context of fire, wellbeing and memory.

Participant journaling

Participant journaling was used as a qualitative data collection method to capture participants' experiences, feelings, and thoughts as they experienced them (Hayman et al., 2012). The process of journaling allows individuals to express emotions and thoughts and may support the interpretation of those experiences (Dimitroff et al., 2017). In the context of this project, participants were provided with journals at the start of AUS WTREX and were encouraged to record their daily experiences, feelings and reflections throughout the program. The purpose of the journaling was to provide deeper, more personal insights into participants' experiences across the program. As Schultz participated in the program as a full participant, she also engaged in participant journaling. This enabled her to document her feelings, observations, and reflections, including emerging themes that were revisited during the data analysis stage (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Importantly, this process also provided Schultz with an embodied understanding of the challenges associated with maintaining a journaling practice during an emotionally and physically demanding experience.

Participant groups

Participants who consented to take part in the research project were organised into two groups, including:

- **PG-1:** First Nations women participating in AUS WTREX – data collected through daily check-ins, participant observation and participant journaling
- **PG-2*:** First Nations women participating in pre- and post-program interviews – data collected through pre- and post-program interviews
- ***These participants are also in the PG-1 group.

Notes to support data interpretation

Study strengths

Key strengths of the project included the use of oral interviewing and participant observation as research methodologies. Oral interviewing enabled participants to integrate their upbringing, their connection to Country and sense of identity and wellbeing with their experiences during and after AUS WTREX. This approach supported participants to contextualise these events within their personal and professional lives, and to articulate what these events and processes meant for them, both individually and in relation to external factors. In this way, the interviews functioned as platforms through which participants could identify what aspects of their experiences were most significant to them, and why those experiences held meaning.

Likewise, participant observation was invaluable for the purposes of this research project. By engaging in the everyday rhythms and routines of AUS WTREX, Schultz and Walters developed a deeper understanding of both participants themselves and the impacts of the program, including the ways in which emotion impacts both participant experience and the research process itself (Cook, 2005; Witte et al., 2022). This meant that Schultz and Walters experienced emotions and insights that could only be accessed through direct participation in the program. While participant observation is sometimes critiqued for introducing personal bias and subjectivity, in this context, it enriched the contextual understanding of the data. It is a process of personal and professional discovery in which the researcher also becomes the researched, actively unsettling the researcher-researched dynamic (Smith, 2021).

Sullivan (2020) describes the complexities of being an insider/outsider when undertaking Indigenous research as an Indigenous person. In the context of this project, Schultz and Walters were outsiders in that they were not Indigenous women working in fire or land management. However, they were insiders by being Aboriginal women who share similar experiences and worldviews with other Indigenous women in the program. In this way, by deliberately showing up and being present as two Aboriginal women, this allowed Schultz and

Walters to understand the unique experiences and impacts for First Nations women in the program by experiencing the program themselves, while forming genuine relationships with other women in the program. The ability to connect with participants in an authentic and genuine way deepened relationships with participants of the program, building trust.

Trust was a foundational aspect of the research. By building trust through shared labour, specifically through physical labour alongside participants on the fire ground, and emotional labour off the fire ground, Schultz and Walters became insiders within the context of the program, accepted by other participants and forging a connection with them through shared experiences. In this context, physical labour included carrying equipment (e.g., drip torch, knapsack), dragging hoses, lifting heavy gear, and undertaking raking (rakehoe) work. Emotional labour involved not only the exhaustion and fatigue associated with physical labour, but also the ongoing processes of emotions (e.g., anxiety, pride), alongside providing support to other participants. Trust was also built through shared playfulness, for example, exploring new places together or learning how to weave.

Study limitations

One of the methods to maintain informed consent through the program was to provide wristbands of differing colours to participants. The purpose of the wristbands was to indicate their consent preferences regarding photography during the program (I.e. if someone wore a red wrist band, they did not want their photo taken. Whereas if they wore a green wrist band, photos were permitted). Three different wristband colours were used to indicate each participant's preference (red, orange and green), with participants able to change their wristband at any time should their preference change. Given the labour-intensive nature of the program, it became impractical to expect participants to wear wristbands for 12 days. On day 3 of the program, NIDR researchers informed participants that continued use of the wristbands was no longer required, and if anyone did not want their photograph taken, they could directly inform one of the NIDR researchers. Participants expressed their preference for this approach and as a result, the wristbands were no longer required, even though it formed part of the research ethics protocol.

While the most explicit example, there were other limitations and practicalities to the study that required the research team to adjust, communicate and balance the need to uphold the ethical protocol agreed by the ethics committee, with the naturally unfolding way of the program, and responding to the wishes of participants.

An additional example includes the journaling. AUS WTREX was both an emotionally and physically demanding experience, compressed into a short, but highly intensive timeframe. Although the NIDR researchers encouraged participants to journal throughout the program, there was limited time in the program for participants to engage in meaningful personal reflection, particularly alongside the need to stay connected with family and friends, or other work priorities. Participants described how there was very limited personal time in the program (which we discuss in later sections), which left some feeling emotionally exhausted. This insight may help to explain why only five participants were shared with NIDR at the conclusion of AUS WTREX. One participant described the importance of recovery, particularly before burning:

> **'Especially when you're burning, it's physically and emotionally draining, and you need that time to just reset and that for your next burn. And if you don't have that time to recover, you're putting yourself at risk.' – P8**

Both Schultz and Walters were present at breakfast, which served as a regular check-in session for participants. However, some participants chose not to attend breakfast due to exhaustion from the labour-intensive program, or due to personal preference. While Schultz and Walters engaged in informal conversations with participants at breakfast, this also happened at natural points throughout the program. For example, many participants identified the campfire as an important site for connection, laughter, and reflection (discussed in a later section).

Research findings

The original research question sought to understand if and how participation in AUS WTREX impacts First Nations women's wellbeing. Results across all data points demonstrate that AUS WTREX was an overwhelmingly impactful and positive experience. Participants described how it **'exceeded expectations',** how they **'made lifelong friends',** and how it was the **'best program they'd ever been to'.** This is illustrated in participant reflections below:

> **'It was [****] sick. The nervousness that I had beforehand, it shouldn't have even been nerves at all. It was amazing. It was definitely, a hundred per cent worth it.' – P1**
>
> **'I've been to other women's programs and that one there was just number one of mine, out of all the ones I've been to.' – P8**
>
> **'You work so hard all your life and then you get rewarded with this beautiful on Country experience with other women. You can't top that.' – P15**
>
> **'It's like the best program I think I've been to for Indigenous women. It's the first one I've been to for fire for Indigenous women.' – P16**
>
> **'It'll be the best thing that they ever do. I'm already looking to see when the next one in Australia is.' – P17**

Common themes appeared from oral interviews, participant observation and personal reflective journals. Analysis was done through deep listening to interviews, identifying common experiences or opinions, and organising these together into groups of recurring topics. An analysis workshop was carried out with Associate Professor Bhiamie Williamson, Nell Reidy, Zoe Schultz and Jess Walters. Prior to this workshop, researchers listened to a range of interviews and shared their observations. Zoe Schultz and Jess Walters complemented this process by reflecting on their own experiences and confirming these themes as being both accurate and according to their own experience. The content of journals added further depth to this analysis. Through this process, the six themes were identified and agreed as being both significant and representative across the cohort.

Across all interviews, there was a shared passion towards culture and fire, with some participants describing cultural burning as cleansing. Yet within these interviews, deeper messages emerged related to experiences of sexism, fear-based relationships with fire and the impacts of colonisation and government laws, policies and practices on individual and family wellbeing.

These themes are described and explored below with illustrative quotes.

- **Safety and support**
- **Confidence and empowerment**
- **Reciprocal exchange**
- **Connection and healing**
- **Cultural, personal and professional growth**
- **Reincorporation**

The original research question also sought to better understand the broader impacts of gathering and engaging in cultural exchange on memory activation. However, memory activation did not emerge as a key finding from the data. While participants described experiences of healing during and following AUS WTREX, these outcomes are better understood as relating to wellbeing, rather than memory activation. As such, we suggest that the impacts of gathering and engaging in cultural exchange are more appropriately framed through a wellbeing lens. Nonetheless, gathering and exchanging with other Indigenous women at sites of

significance[8] is likely to inscribe enduring 'sites of memory' (Stevenson, 2014) for participants, particularly if they revisit these places over time.

Safety and support

Participants consistently described AUS WTREX as providing a safe and supportive space to connect and learn alongside other women in fire. This was particularly significant for those who are often the only woman, or the only Indigenous person, in their workplace.

> **'…women in the fire service is less, but Indigenous women, even less.'— P5**

Participants spoke about the comfort of being surrounded by other women with similar life experiences, who also had a shared passion and respect for culture and fire. For participants, there was an awareness of the presence and influence of intergenerational trauma due to the legacies of government laws and policies, which also influenced the ways they supported each other. In this way, participants felt safe to speak about their challenges and experiences as Indigenous women working in male-dominated workplaces, but also as Indigenous women growing up and living in Australia and overseas.

> **'The whole [AUS WTREX] program was really a big discussion of what challenges as women we face.' – P3**

Despite differences in age, background and experience with fire, participants emphasised the strong sense of respect and trust that formed quickly. Many described how easily they worked together, despite not knowing each other beforehand.

> **'The women worked as a team as if we worked together before.' – P18**

> **'The women here really do listen and care, we are all here for our own self, but here for each other.' – P3**

Laughter was a frequent sound throughout the program, attributed to emotional and physical safety among participants. Although participants felt physically and emotionally exhausted at various points throughout the program, many noted that the humour and laughter among the group helped boost their energy.

> **'The laughs and support is something I'm not ready to let go of.' – P3**

> **'Everyone enjoyed it. Everyone had fun. I don't think I had that much fun with a bunch of ladies since I was a kid.' – P4**

Feeling safe in this environment meant participants also felt confident enough to step outside their comfort zones. Some shared that they put their hand up for opportunities they would not normally feel comfortable pursuing at work, as they feared criticism or retribution by their male colleagues. Besides being pushed outside their comfort zone, participants said the program helped them to acquire new skills in leadership, experience new roles on the fire ground, improve their emotional regulation in stressful situations, and develop friendships with other women in male-dominated workplaces. In the program, participants went through high-pressure situations (e.g., Division and Sector Commander roles) and came out feeling capable of achieving tasks that they knew they could do with the right mentorship, but had never been given the opportunity to do so.

> **'You're around other women and they always push you and they show you new things that you didn't know and they didn't degrade you if you didn't know or if you didn't know an answer, you could ask that question.' – P8**

> **'I just felt it was just amazing being in there because usually here at work, our ops are mainly males and stuff like that and I get a bit nervous to ask, can I help out or try to do this stuff? I feel**

[8] A 'site of significance' is generally defined as being an area of high cultural value. Common expressions of this include sacred sites, birthing sites, gathering places, and more. These sites of significance are both ancient and contemporary, with modern sites of significance often forming around significant moments, such as protests.

like I'm going to get criticised or judged or if I do something wrong, I'm going to get into big trouble.' – P16

AUS WTREX reversed this dynamic by providing a majority-women, and specifically a majority-Indigenous women, learning environment. Participants described how much they valued learning and working in an encouraging environment. Some described how the fire ground is usually stressful, but burning alongside other women in the program provided a sense of relief.

'The way that everyone would come together and share their knowledge and not bring each other down. We were all there to encourage each other and lift each other up.' – P8

'It was a very comfortable setting to be able to empower each other.' – P11

'She [another participant] didn't have to [teach] but genuinely wanted to.' – P17

Program support staff were also described as being genuinely committed to encouraging, supporting and teaching in a respectful way. While all program support staff were seen as highly supportive of and valued by participants, a few participants also noted how unusual it was to hear male staff openly express their discomfort about being in a women-dominated space.

'We had a few support guys, and then talking about how uncomfortable they felt like the males being in such a female dominated space, and finally feeling like a glimpse of what we deal with every single day.' – P1

However, there were various views about having men present in the program. One participant was surprised about the number of men present, and while many valued the male program support staff, some women described not feeling comfortable to be vulnerable or open up in front of a male participant or male support staff. Participants described how male presence inevitably changes the atmosphere of a place for women, for reasons such as cultural upbringing (e.g., women's business and men's business), or for those who work around unsafe men. Participants also recognised that this would have been uncomfortable for a male participant too, particularly around gender-specific discussions.

'But yeah, we don't open up around men.' – P14

'And so I felt like maybe there was always ears listening to women's conversations. I'm very strict on that, especially when they're talking about women's business and periods and things like that. I shut down in that. And I guess too of my upbringing too, that was brought up. We weren't open like that when we got men listening to those conversations. ' – P15

Confidence and empowerment

All Indigenous women who participated in this research project explained that their confidence and sense of empowerment had grown as a direct result of participating in AUS WTREX. While the program enabled participants to upskill, it also provided a space for their existing knowledge and leadership potential to be recognised, something several women noted had rarely occurred before attending the program. Several participants described how impactful it was to be around other strong, powerful Indigenous women.

'You give them the opportunity to, give them the platform, they'll step up on it and they will own it. You just got to give them that space.' – P3

'I did a really good job and it was just really cool that someone gave me that opportunity to have a go at that. Whereas here [at their work], you don't get them opportunities.' – P8

'I usually am not seen in groups of people because I am quiet, but I was seen!' – P17

Participants described how they felt proud after taking on new challenges, and many spoke about the significance of being able to achieve things they would not normally attempt in their everyday lives. In this way, the challenges and events during the program gave participants the frame of mind to have confidence in themselves.

'It does give you pride and confidence and a sense of accomplishment that something that you wouldn't do normally and you don't have to confront every day. Yeah. It is something that, it's an accomplishment.' – P4

As AUS WTREX progressed, participants – particularly younger women and those newer to fire – became increasingly confident in themselves and within the group. For some, this confidence emerged from being on the fire ground for the first time, or from working in a way where personal and workplace culture is aligned. Being surrounded by women who believed in and encouraged them was also described as deeply affirming and important.

'And I take a lot of pride in looking after Country, and especially for the Old People. So it is just a big drive. And especially being around women that see so much in you, it really uplifts you.' – P8

Participants also became more confident in themselves through the act of teaching others. In this way, individual strengths were affirmed to people by being in relation with others.

'When I was there, I think it made me realise I actually know a lot of the stuff, especially the fire stuff.' – P16

Most participants returned to their workplaces with strengthened confidence in their capabilities and decision making. Several expressed feeling more prepared to put themselves forward for new opportunities at work, including leadership and public speaking roles, or to step into male-dominated spaces where they had previously felt more uncertain.

'It built me with a lot of confidence in wanting to go and be more than just an operational ranger, which I've been for most of my working career, and wanting to go into those even more male-dominated spaces.' – P1

'I was able to be in charge and lead [a cultural burn]…but also showcase what I learned and what I was empowered with.' – P15

'I feel more confident now that I've come back. It sort of gave me a touch base with myself and it was really good to be around other strong women and recognise that I am that person, and it brought strength back out of me.' – P17

Since attending the program, many participants described feeling more confident advocating for themselves, for other First Nations women, and for cultural and environmental outcomes in their workplaces. Examples include leading burns with confidence, speaking up to protect cultural heritage, or pushing for better facilities (e.g., female toilets) for women at work. They feel more confident because they had the opportunity to learn from other Indigenous women who had navigated similar challenges and were actively achieving in their personal and professional roles.

'So a lot of our space is very still male-dominated, with our toilet facilities and our uniform and stuff like that. And just allowing myself to continue with having a voice in those sorts of spaces. If I don't say anything, then it's the next lot of women that will still have to deal with the exact same thing that I've dealt with in my own working career.' – P1

'I've gained more trust in what I believe in. And don't be afraid to speak up because if I don't speak up, then no one else is going to speak up for me.' – P15

'I've always been a little bit quiet or nervous at work I think because I've had a couple problems here with men and stuff particularly, but coming back from that [AUS WTREX] and listening to the stories and some words that have stuck with me that they have said has just made me stronger and I've called out some stuff or saying I don't feel comfortable with this, or this is what we should be doing at work, which has been really good. – P16

'I do think the conversations that I had with a lot of the women, I think I brought that back with me, that I can speak how I want to speak and be who I want to be and not to second guess myself because all the women were so strong.' – P17

Reciprocal exchange

AUS WTREX provided a rare space for Indigenous women in fire to connect with other women working across disparate parts of Australia and overseas. Women located in rural and remote areas of Australia had the opportunity to exchange with women located in urban and regional areas of Australia.

> **'...build their confidence as well because we are so remote and for them to meet other women who are in fire management. It's amazing.' – P14**

While AUS WTREX focused on the role of women in fire, its benefits were felt beyond this specific focus. In pre-program interviews, participants described a desire to see how other women lead, particularly in male-dominated workplaces. This shared context provided Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants the chance to discuss their experiences as women. A point of difference emerged from these discussions.

While all women navigate sexism in male-dominated workplaces, Indigenous women navigate sexism on top of racism, and community and cultural responsibilities. These conversations highlighted the challenges for Indigenous women working between agency and cultural responsibilities, and provided participants with different perspectives and understandings on what it means to lead (i.e., leadership beyond organisational walls). By being surrounded by other Indigenous women who are also leaders in their communities, some participants returned home with a broader understanding of leadership, and for some, began to see themselves as leaders.

> **'I think when you're in a male dominant industry, you don't really see a lot of females together or in general, especially in leadership.' – P2r**

> **'Everyone said that I'm the future leader. And that really shocked me because majority of the women in there said that. And I never thought that because I just see myself as immature.' – P8**

As such, participants described the program as a beneficial opportunity for anyone, regardless of their age or previous experience with fire.

> **'There's not one person that I didn't learn anything from, even the younger girls.' – P3**

> **'I think it was just because we're women and we're all in the same field, we all have the same interests. I don't think it was necessarily because of being Indigenous or non-Indigenous. I think it was just the power of having all these women together and being on the same page.' – P11**

> **'I was a bit worried the age gap would cause some awkwardness. I was shocked at how well we got along.' – P17**

Participants exchanged knowledge about different burning techniques, learning from women who practice cultural and western-style burning across varied landscapes throughout Australia and overseas. For example, participants were in awe of other Indigenous women who conduct aerial burns from helicopters.

> **'So they were incendiary burners and they're young women, young Aboriginal women that are doing this. And it's like, wow, look that they're out there in the choppers doing incendiary burnings.' – P4**

> **'I thought that was really, really awesome that they [interstate and international participants] come over and shared their knowledge and their way of burning to us as well.' – P4**

Many emphasised the importance of learning from Elders and Traditional Owners, with participants showing a deep yearning to learn more. For some, this was their first opportunity to learn about cultural burning, while for others, it was the first time they were able to apply their fire management skills to protect a culturally significant site:

> **'There's not a lot of women Aboriginal people at work, so we don't get to go to those special places and do those special things. A lot of it I work is on men's Country, men's business because I dunno, my team is full of men. That's why we do it and there's not a lot of women's stuff.' – P16**

While participants spoke about the benefits of exchanging western fire management skills in a professional sense, they also discussed the significance of participating in cultural burning. Some participants left feeling like they wanted more and lamented that the program did not provide more of these opportunities. Some people suggested that less time could be dedicated to presentations by government agencies:

> **'Yeah, I thought there would've been more of a cultural burn element. And then really understanding why we've got to do this prescription burning first. That was always safety first, policy first and then us, it could be good to change that mindset of government.' – P15**

> **'I think less PowerPoints and talking, if there's going to be a presentation, have it short, sharp and sweet and have a better mixture between practical and I guess class. There was moments that I was nearly falling asleep.' – P2**

One participant also described feeling uneasy around using a drip torch, as it can produce fires that burn too hot for Country. Following a personal conversation between the participant and the Traditional Owners, this concern was alleviated, demonstrating ongoing care and education within the program.

Connection and healing

Friendships were formed during AUS WTREX. Participants described the importance of connecting with one another as Indigenous women, as fire practitioners, as mothers and as women who share a passion and respect for culture and fire. For some, this also provided an opportunity to break down preconceived ideas of people by forming friendships. These friendships have continued well beyond the program, providing support through celebrations, challenges and significant life transitions.

> **'But the first day everyone got there, everyone was a bit standoffish, but after the first couple of hours it was like everyone acted like they knew everyone from years ago and it was like that instant spontaneous connection with all the ladies.' – P4**

One participant using the analogy of a fishing net to describe how these relationships have woven into their life:

> **'I have a fishing net with many large holes in it. I've caught fish, I've caught fish even though it has large holes. So I've learned stuff with this network. I've caught people inside my net and I got myself a small fortune of feeding fish. So I've got that stuff. And now I've met people, it's sewn the hole up, making the net able to catch more of a feed, which is capturing more people to support me in my community.' – P3**

These connections supported participants to work through personal challenges and fears during the program. Participants came with a range of prior experiences and comfort levels, including little or no experience using drip torches, fears associated with working around fire, and social anxiety. The supportive environment enabled participants to face these challenges with confidence.

> **'It helped me conquer something and I accomplished something I suppose in a way.' – P4**

> **'And I guess one of the toughest things I did, but now I think it's the best thing that I did was face my fears with fire, respect fire and just learn from fire as well.' – P3**

Despite travelling from different parts of Australia and overseas, participants shared similar experiences about how colonisation and government laws, policies and practices had impacted their families, and their connections to community and culture. Some had stronger connections to community and culture, while others yearned for this. Feelings of imposter syndrome were common, either relating to the workplace, or not feeling Indigenous enough. The program gave participants from across Australia and overseas the chance to laugh, to grieve, to yarn and to engage in cultural activities together. The opportunity to come together was described by participants as being pivotal for their emotional regulation and sense of belonging.

> **'I felt like sharing my story is done with people that understand, like the women from WTREX.' – P3**

> **'Without knowing it, I'm actually healing a lot being around so many strong women.' – P2**

‘And then being within that space with so many Indigenous females, we all kind of picked up on that. And then we all knew that we've come with baggage, dunno what, but we were also like, okay, we're more than happy to have a yarn, and if you're going to give us a time of day to speak, then it's going to become a friendship straight away.’ – P1

‘Really listening to all the women's stories about their personal journeys, reclaiming their heritage. So I've been going through an identity crisis my entire life.’ – P9

‘You’re allowed to rekindle those connections, even if you lost them, because it’s your right.’ – P17

Participants described that having time to connect with Country away from the fire ground was both important and restorative. Participants described feeling more grounded in place at particular points throughout the program, for instance when learning about Ewamian People’s history and culture in Undara, or learning about the cultural significance of Rocky Creek.

‘When we went to the women's site, that was just huge for me. I loved every single bit of it. That was just very significant for me.’ – P16

‘Not sure how but the [Welcome to Country] ceremony made me feel even more confident.’ – P17

These experiences highlight the importance of creating opportunities to pause, learn about place and understand its history and significance.

Cultural, personal and professional growth

Many participants described returning to their homes and workplaces feeling as though they had **‘changed’** or **‘unleashed something’** within themselves. For some, this occurred through challenging themselves, which gave them the frame of mind to have confidence in themselves, while for others it came from imparting personal experiences with the entire group. Many described a sense of anxiety, excitement or unknowing as they moved beyond their comfort zones, especially as most participants travelled to the 12-day program without knowing anyone else there. However, the prospect of such an experience was sufficient motivation to overcome these fears, as one participant describes:

‘As I was sitting in the airport [before AUS WTREX], I actually got scared and I was like, oh, I want to go home. I was just getting bad anxiety and things like that, but I'm so happy I came to do it, otherwise I wouldn't experience something like this.’ – P16

By embarking on an adventure, some participants surprised themselves through a willingness to step into unfamiliar situations. Many participants expressed a strong desire to maintain the momentum generated through the program towards the end. Being surrounded by a diversity of Indigenous women from Australia and overseas gave participants a broader understanding of how to embrace their Indigenous identity alongside other aspects of who they are. For example, participants described how they grew as mothers by connecting with and learning from other mothers.

‘I don't really have a lot of friends that are parents, so just being able to connect with a lot of women that have kids helped a lot.’ – P2

One participant shared her excitement about learning new cultural skills, such as weaving, in an environment where she did not feel judged. In her post-program interview, she described how much she valued this opportunity to strengthen skills viewed as important to her cultural identity:

‘And then what really, I guess topped it off was weaving, because I've always wanted to learn how to weave and just sitting down, having a laugh with the girls and learning a new skill. I've still got the basket half done at home, but that really just really, yeah, that was a really special moment for me and a great way to finish, I guess the fire aspect of things towards the end of it.’ – P2

For some, developing friendships with other strong women also became the catalyst needed to pursue personal aspirations and goals. This personal growth has also transformed into professional growth. Participants described gaining confidence to pivot or upskill in their careers, with some working towards roles such as incendiary burners, rangers in charge or sector commanders. Some participants have also joined or

are planning to join emergency services as a way to upskill and better protect their families, communities and Country.

> **'So being up there [AUS WTREX] has helped me fine tune on which way I want to go into the fire. That's why I've got into the planning a bit more on fire.' – P4**

> **'Seeing these girls that work with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service was like, that would be my ultimate dream. I would love that. That would be my ultimate dream job.' – P11**

Participants working within non-Indigenous organisations shared a desire to move beyond hazard reduction burning and develop a deeper understanding of cultural burning and its benefits for Country. Similarly, those already working in the cultural burning sector described strengthened aspirations to build cultural burning networks in their region.

The act of gathering and adventuring alongside other Indigenous women fulfilled a deep yearning for companionship and culture. While the fire ground was an important place for women to labour together, many participants described the campfire as an important site for connection, laughter and personal growth. For example, one participant reflected on the significance of being recognised by others around the campfire while playing a 'say 3 things about someone' game:

> **'And then I was shocked one night around the [camp]fire that I got about, they played that game around the fire and about four of the girls turned around and they said, oh yeah, [name redacted], I noticed [her] today. [She] did this or blah, blah blah. And I was like, oh, wow. Because I'm generally quiet, so I don't get noticed as much as other people generally in a group.' – P17**

While participants valued the knowledge shared by supporting government agencies during the program, many described fulfilling a deeper yearning, one that could only be met by the culture and knowledge shared by other Indigenous peoples. The act of adventuring, engaging in culture, and labouring together led to new friendships, and strengthened belonging, cultural confidence and identity. In this way, participants described how the most meaningful learnings emerged through relationships with other Indigenous women. Through this collective experience, participants underwent significant cultural, personal and professional growth, returning as changed women.

Reincorporation

AUS WTREX was described by many participants as a life changing experience, and several spoke enthusiastically about sharing what they learned with family, friends and colleagues upon returning home. Participants described how their non-Indigenous colleagues were genuinely eager and interested to hear about their experiences at AUS WTREX.

> **'When I got back, everyone was really quite excited for me.' – P11**

> **'So coming back to work, I was able to share a heap of stories and everybody's super interested and want to know more, more.' – P17**

Returning to supportive home and work environments has enabled participants to continue thriving from the benefits gained at AUS WTREX. Some participants with leadership and upskilling ambitions have returned to workplaces where their ambitions have been supported and valued.

> **'As well as having the boys that I work with and the blokes that I work with be so receptive to it and wanting that change to already be there like, well, it should be happening. I dunno why we don't.' – P1**

> **'Yeah, I have a lot of support in my role and I don't know if that's because everyone has seen, I've such a good attitude at work and I've done things like AUS WTREX. I put my hands up for these things and they have seen me.' – P16**

The friendships and support networks formed from the program also serve as an ongoing buffer against the broader structural changes still required to improve the wellbeing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in male-dominated workplaces.

The evidence indicates that all participants returned to their work and home contexts as changed people. However, reincorporating or returning as changed people to unchanged presented both opportunities and challenges. Participants described feelings of emotional comedown in the days following the program, particularly after spending an intensive period surrounded by supportive women.

> **'Yeah, it was a bit rough for the first couple of days. Coming down from that big high, you're having all these lovely ladies and you're used to greeting these ladies in the morning and you miss your family and you miss home. But at the same time you miss them [AUS WTREX participants] and they become your family as well.' – P4**

Participants have remained connected through messages, phone calls and in person catchups where possible. However, some expressed disappointment and surprise at the limited organisational support post-program, both from their own employer and from the program organisers.

> **'We all went back and a lot of people have disengaged from the whole AUS WTREX.' – P3**
>
> **'So yeah, it kind of felt like it was like, it's done now. Stop talking about it.' – P5**
>
> **'I think our work doesn't really understand how big of a deal it was.' – P15**

While all participants returned with valuable experiences and knowledge to share, some expressed that they felt ignored, punished or sidelined at work. In these cases, they have found it difficult to justify the value of the program to their male colleagues.

> **'I just feel like I have all this knowledge, but it's not being used.' – P8**
>
> **'There were a lot of things that we were put to the test, and emotionally and physically as well. So I felt like it wasn't just a holiday, but it's hard to justify that.' – P3**

Participants working in both non-Indigenous and Indigenous workplaces have described the abovementioned challenges. These reflections highlight how the post-event period is a particularly vulnerable time for participants, with implications for their wellbeing and sense of value within their organisations. In particular, it provides insight that reincorporation is a significant element to the program, and that the risks associated with changed people returning to unchanged environments.

Discussion

A workforce of Indigenous women in fire exists

This research shows that the AUS WTREX program had significant and overwhelmingly positive impacts for the First Nations women who participated. Confidence, cultural and personal growth, leadership and skills development and companionship was experienced by all participants. It is significant that an intensive program spanning 12 days could affect such profound changes in the lives of those who participated.

The AUS WTREX program received over 130 applications from Indigenous and non-Indigenous women from Australia and abroad. This demonstrates a widespread yearning among women in the sector for support and development opportunities. The final selection of participants included 30 Indigenous women, with 26 from across Australia. The women came from a range of professions and workplaces, including fire and land management roles within government agencies and Traditional Owner corporations, and ranged in age from 19 years old to women in their 60s.

This group of women revealed the existence of a small, yet highly capable and skilled Indigenous female workforce across the Caring for Country and fire and land management sectors. While few, and scattered across Australia, First Nations women are already actively working in emergency and fire services, national parks, native title groups and ranger programs. Caring for Country has always involved gendered responsibilities, where women hold distinct, equal roles alongside men (Cavanagh, 2022; Daniels et al., 2022; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Weir et al., 2011). First Nations women continue to work hard to protect their communities, culture and Country.

To date, sector-specific programs have focused on greater inclusion of women in emergency and fire management[9], however, there is little evidence that attention has been paid to encouraging and supporting *Indigenous* women across the fire and land management sector.[10] While the interests of Indigenous women may align with non-Indigenous women, there may also be important differences stemming from cultural backgrounds, historical considerations and experiences of racism. Despite the protective and resilient qualities of Indigenous cultures and kinship structures, Indigenous women face unique pressures, where discrimination may compound if different factors combine (Leroy-Dyer, 2026). For instance, where Indigenous identity intersects with sexual identity, or where an Indigenous woman carries community responsibilities that conflict with agency responsibilities. This means that while the experiences and needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women overlap, they are not identical. Parkinson (2019) found that women-led programs within the emergency and fire management sector create safe and encouraging environments for women to build self-confidence, create networks and find mentors. What distinguishes AUS WTREX from other women-led programs is that it provided a rare opportunity for Indigenous women in fire to come together in an environment of safety and belonging.

While we note the existence of this small, yet sophisticated workforce, both the caring for Country and fire and land management sectors remain dominated by men (Young et al., 2018; Daniels et al., 2022). Research remains limited on female involvement in these sectors, yet Parkinson (2019) found that women's career progression in emergency and fire management is constrained by gendered assumptions that they lack interest, confidence or availability for the demands of formal leadership roles. Programs like AUS WTREX shine a light on a workforce of Indigenous women that many may not have been aware existed. This is particularly important for Indigenous women and young people, as a lack of Indigenous firefighters has been identified as a barrier to Indigenous recruitment and retention (Mate et al., 2019; Rasmussen & Maharaj,

[9] The Australasian Women in Emergencies Network, Women and Firefighting Australasia and Girls on Fire are examples of networks and programs dedicated to advancing gender equity in the emergency and fire management sectors. However, they are not specifically designed to support First Nations women working across these sectors.

[10] The QLD Indigenous Women Rangers Network is one example of a network specific to Indigenous women rangers, however this is only available in Queensland.

2019). Pooley (2020) also found that programs designed for Indigenous peoples were more effective when culturally appropriate activities were incorporated. Kingsley (2018) also found that Aboriginal gathering places provide a sense of safety, as Aboriginal people from diverse backgrounds are able to gather, connect and be vulnerable with each other. Participants of AUS WTREX expressed a strong desire for more programs like it. With ongoing support and resources, this workforce has significant potential to continue to grow and strengthen.

While evidence on this workforce remains limited, this reflects a historic lack of attention and support, rather than the non-existence of the workforce. This investigation suggests that Indigenous women are already doing this work, but are yearning for sector-specific support to assist them in doing it, such as appropriate and tailored professional development opportunities. While programs like AUS WTREX go some way to providing this support, they are few. For some participants their expectations outstripped what could be offered by the program, suggesting that the workforce not only exists, but includes women with extensive experience and technical skills.

AUS WTREX facilitated connections across this small workforce, fostering a network of support for women across disparate parts of Australia. This program went beyond a networking opportunity. Instead, participants found a sense of companionship within a workforce that they described as, at times, challenging and isolating for Indigenous women. Findings also suggest that there is a shared yearning for cultural, personal and professional growth among First Nations women in this workforce. Despite participants coming from disparate parts of Australia and the world, they shared a common yearning to learn about culture and fire, and to meet other women in similar fields or with similar interests. However, through the act of gathering and adventuring together, participants ultimately discovered more about themselves than they had anticipated.

Program delivery – who is best placed to deliver this program?

AUS WTREX was delivered through a partnership between QFD, QPWS and an international non-government organisation, WTREX. QFD and QPWS deserve recognition for their leadership in supporting this program, a first in Australia. The involvement of these agencies enabled human and financial resources to be dedicated to the coordination and implementation of the program. As land management agencies with statutory obligations to manage landscapes in national parks and other public lands, they were also able to facilitate access to public land on which burning could occur.

There are also limitations for the implementation of a program like AUS WTREX being led by government agencies. Some participants felt that the time dedicated to presentations by government agencies was too much. Participants also expressed a desire for more opportunities to learn about and engage in cultural burning activities. There may be benefits in supporting non-government organisations, such as Native Title Prescribed Bodies Corporate with exclusive native title rights, or representative land councils with a larger administrative capacity, to host such a program. These organisations have the potential to offer a culturally grounded experience, many of which have resourced ranger programs and already engage in fire and land management activities. Further investigation would be required to understand the capacity, and legal responsibilities of different organisations given the varying rights and tenure held by groups across Australia. These considerations sit within the complex and diverse cultural and political landscapes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. Many Aboriginal communities are located on land that is held under Aboriginal land rights legislation or native title, recognised at either jurisdictional or federal levels. For example, some insurance policies held by Aboriginal corporations restrict cultural burning on private land (Milton, 2025).

This is not to say that such a program should be carried out completely independently from government agencies. In future iterations, the government agencies could adopt a more supportive role (for instance, resource supply), while Aboriginal groups or organisations lead program design and delivery. Delivering future iterations of the program through individuals or organisations with shared histories, language or place may help minimise cross-cultural misinterpretations.

Program design – what was missing from this program?

Our research found that structured time for recovery and reflection was a missing piece in this program. Participants described how there was very limited personal time in the program, which left some feeling emotionally drained on top of physical exhaustion. Concerns were raised about the health and wellbeing risks associated with such long days and minimal rest. While activities such as the campfire yarns and weaving provided relief during the intensive 12-day program, participants needed structured time and support to debrief. While the initial program included scheduled debrief and down time, some program sessions were either reduced or removed as other activities sessions ran over. These decisions were made in the moment by program organisers responsible for managing a full and ambitious program.

Participants came from diverse upbringings and life experiences, with differing forms of trauma, preconceived ideas about people and at varying stages of life. Participants indicated that wellbeing support was inadequate across the duration of the program, leading many to rely on themselves or other participants. A Peer Support Officer from QFD was assigned to the program and provided a presentation on peer support for the participants, yet they were not travelling with the group and were only available to provide support over the phone. Not having a peer support officer physically present meant that others (both staff and participants) needed to step into this role throughout the program. This also meant that some participants stepped away from scheduled activities in order to recover, limiting their participation in the program. While peer-to-peer support builds connection and trust between participants, the presence of a designated individual with overarching responsibility for participant wellbeing may have alleviated some of these pressures, giving participants more space to process their individual emotions and reflections.

Participants commented on the differences in burning across different types of Country throughout the program. Participants undertook burns in both savannah Country (Undara Volcanic National Park) and rainforest Country (Atherton Tablelands). Some commented about the differences between both these landscapes, and the Country they are used to burning at home. Given the diversity of cultures, languages and Country across Australia, establishing a shared understanding of what is meant by terms like ‘cultural burning’ and ‘traditional fire knowledge’ and a structured discussion about what constitutes a cultural burn, to whom, or the contemporary challenges involved in practising cultural burning today (for instance, public liability insurance costs) would have equipped everyone involved with a better understanding of the differences in intent and terminology between Indigenous and western fire practices.

Participants also experienced moments of conflict at different points throughout the program. For example, some participants were surprised about the presence of men, which caused discomfort in contexts where women-specific discussions were taking place. This highlights the importance of establishing clear expectations before women attend programs such as AUS WTREX. While participants welcomed the value in having men present as program support roles, the presence of a male participant was confusing and not considered beneficial nor important for participant wellbeing. Another source of cultural conflict emerged around the act of burning Country using a drip torch. Although participants knew in advance that drip torches would be used during the program, one participant described uneasiness around using a drip torch, as it can produce fires that burn too hot for Country. Following a personal conversation between the participant and the Traditional Owners, this concern was alleviated. However, this situation suggests that a more structured discussion around cultural burning and the use of equipment may be beneficial. While the program delivered extensive benefits for participants, incorporating structured recovery and reflection time in future program designs, including facilitated conversations around cultural burning and wellbeing, could reduce these risks to participant wellbeing.

Reincorporation – how to mitigate reincorporation risks?

Many participants described AUS WTREX as a life changing experience. While the 12-day program was not widely conceptualised as a formal leadership program, many described the significance of being recognised as leaders and having the opportunities to step into formal leadership roles. As such, women returned with a sense of excitement and possibility regarding their leadership potential, only to find themselves, in some cases, placed back into the same constraints they experienced prior to the program. Participants have returned to unchanged environments as significantly changed people. The opportunity to assume meaningful

responsibility is important to the development of individual self-esteem (Schwalbe, 1985). Participants of AUS WTREX were recognised at different points by their peers as possessing leadership qualities. This recognition has instilled confidence in many of the participants who returned to their workplaces with varying emotions. Some expressed feeling a sense of energy and inspiration to take new skills and confidence back to their workplace, while others felt isolation returning to colleagues and workplaces that didn't appreciate the value of the AUS WTREX program. In addition, all the participants interviewed discussed the sadness they felt leaving the new friends and the companionship established during the program. Feelings of isolation, loneliness and undervalue lead to many of the participants struggling when they returned home. While substantial resources were invested in program delivery, our research found that the risks associated with reincorporation were largely overlooked. Although programs such as AUS WTREX cannot address broader structural challenges in the short term, the friendships and support networks formed through the program can offer an important ongoing buffer for Indigenous women navigating male-dominated workplaces.

Additionally, employers who support their employees' participation in programs such as AUS WTREX have a responsibility to remain accountable for their wellbeing when they return to work. Greater employer accountability in middle and senior leadership can help to mitigate the risk of losing or suppressing the benefits gained through the program. The types of support services required will vary across workplace contexts, for example between Aboriginal corporations and government agencies.

Embedded evaluation as a monitoring and evaluation tool

In this research project, two Indigenous female researchers from Monash University (Schultz and Walters) participated in the program as both participants and embedded researchers. Schultz was involved in the oral interviews before and after the program, meaning she entered the program with a baseline understanding of each participant (such as where people grew up, where people were living and working, and what people were looking forward to in the program).

This combined approach enabled the researchers to build and deepen relationships in ways that would not have been possible through observation or oral interviews alone. By experiencing the program alongside other participants, Schultz and Walters were able to understand the impacts of the program on a deeply personal level. This evaluation approach required balancing professional responsibilities to the research question with accountability, integrity and transparency towards participants.

The research sought to understand the impacts of First Nations women-led gatherings and cultural fire knowledge exchange on wellbeing (physical, social, emotional and spiritual) and memory. Addressing this question required Schultz and Walters to reflect on their positionality in relation to the research question. This reflective process enabled them to move beyond a purely academic exercise and experience the program as Aboriginal women.

While this research was undertaken by two Aboriginal female researchers, this did not automatically position them as 'insiders' within the group, nor did it remove power imbalances in the researcher-researched dynamic. Like any relationship, Schultz and Walters invested time into building trust with participants. Smith (2021, p. 11) notes that Indigenous researchers working within insider/outsider dynamics require 'considerable sensitivity, skills, maturity, experience and knowledge to work these issues through.' Maintaining valued relationships while also undertaking data collection brought these complexities to the fore during this research. However, navigating these dynamics contributed to enriched data and significant self-discovery as Indigenous researchers and women.

This research approach offers insights into how decolonial methods that centre reflexivity and relationships can support monitoring and evaluation processes, leading to data that better reflects the impacts and outcomes of value to Indigenous peoples.

Implications

The findings of this research project provide a critical evidence base for agencies and organisations, policy makers and other researchers to design future programs such as AUS WTREX. While findings speak directly to the experiences of Indigenous women, there are wider lessons available in the design of programs for both non-Indigenous women, as well as Indigenous men and women.

Ensure employer accountability for participant wellbeing

Ensure there is accountability on the part of employers (at all levels of management) to provide structured reincorporation and wellbeing support for Indigenous participants returning to work, and integrate these commitments into participants' professional development plans.

Prioritise structured recovery and reflection time in future program design

Prioritise structured recovery and reflection time in future program designs to reduce the risk of emotional and physical fatigue, and ensure participants have adequate time, individually and with other people, to process emotions and experiences.

Recruit a First Nations mental health practitioner in the program

Recruit a skilled Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person with expertise in complex trauma and social and emotional wellbeing to provide support for participants throughout and after the program. The practitioner must be available to participants in person throughout the program and be capable of facilitating discussions on trauma and wellbeing in a culturally safe way that supports healing for participants. This person could also be available for online group discussions during the post-event period.

Monitor program impacts with an embedded evaluator

Incorporate an embedded evaluator to understand the program impacts and identify opportunities to strengthen future programs. For programs focused on Indigenous Australian women, this role should be held by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander woman to provide embodied understanding. Importantly, any embedded evaluator must be able to critically self-reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs, experiences and positionality.

Add a participant reunion to the structure of the program to foster participant companionship

Support a group reunion scheduled 6 months after the program to mitigate reincorporation risks, such as isolation and loneliness, reinforcing that the conclusion of the program does not represent a definitive endpoint. Such an approach would require careful consideration of longer-term implications, including what support follows the 6-month reunion. This would provide participants with an opportunity to reconnect and reflect on the post-event period and better support the goal of developing a network of women in fire.

Conclusion

This research project sought to understand the wellbeing impacts, for Indigenous women, of participating in the AUS WTREX program. The research team utilised a range of data collection methods in order to develop a thorough understanding of the identity, background and expectations of the women participating, to collect their experiences of the program as they happened, and to understand any changes and impacts for the women in the aftermath of the program. These methods included in-depth, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and journaling.

There were overwhelming positive impacts for Indigenous women who participated, as well as some ways in which future programs could be modified to further enhance the experiences of participants in this type of program. Bringing together 26 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, and four Indigenous women from abroad created a dynamic of implicit acceptance based on shared experiences as minorities within workplaces which have been known as hostile to women, and Indigenous peoples. Opportunities to share and learn in this environment fostered cultural and professional confidence and a deep sense of companionship.

In the months after the program finished, many participants spoke enthusiastically about the confidence and skills that they carried with them when they returned home and to work. For several women, this newfound confidence has had benefits in both personal and professional life. While the positive impacts of the program on wellbeing were reported by all research participants, the environments to which women return to after such a transformational experience is critical to whether or not these benefits can be sustained.

The AUS WTREX program was designed to connect First Nations women working and volunteering in fire, and to support the development of their knowledge and skills. However, this research demonstrates that the benefits extend well beyond the program's original intent. Bringing Indigenous women together in culturally supportive spaces not only strengthens participation in fire management but also positively contributes to the personal growth and wellbeing of First Nations women. Should agencies across these sectors take up these learnings, both First Nations women and the broader fire and land management sector stand to benefit as a whole.

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Appendix

Appendix A. AUS WTREX 12-day program 2025

Program			
Monday, 12 May 2025			
8:00am	**Registration**	Conference Room, Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns	
11:00am	**Welcome to Country and opening speeches** The 'Wunju Bayal' smoking ceremony is a sacred and ancient Aboriginal tradition. Fragrant smoke is created by burning native plants like eucalyptus and tea-tree leaves, and the smoke is then used to cleanse and purify people, objects, and spaces. The ceremony is a powerful and spiritual experience, with the sweet aroma of the smoke enveloping participants and creating a calming and peaceful atmosphere. The Wunju bayal smoking ceremony will be followed by speeches from supporters and partners of the program.	Terrace, Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns	MC: Chris Wegger Minjil Assistant Minister: Bree James Rural FIre Service Northern Region Deputy Chief Officer: Tyron McMahon Executive Director, Nothern Parks and Forests: James Newman Partner Agencies: Lenya Quinn-Davidson, WTREX Program Director Artist: Jedess Hudson
12:10pm Lunch			
1:00pm	**Wellbeing and Safety briefings** Coming together to gather and share fire knowledge can have an impact on our safety and wellbeing. In this session we will be covering safety briefings and support offered throughout the program along with sharing why capturing the impact of this program on our wellbeing is important and how we do it in culturally safe ways.	Conference Room, Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns	Lead and overview: Kylee Clubb Safety Officer Coordinator: Daryl Robinson. Peer Support program: Suzan Neary National Indigenous Disaster Resilience researchers: Zoe Shultz Nell Ready Jess Walters
2:45pm Afternoon tea			
3:00pm	**WTREX and the AUS-WTREX story** Learn about the history of WTREX and meet the three First Nation women who were inspired to host the first ever Australian WTREX program (AUS WTREX) and the journey to get here today. Maria Estrada will also lead the group in developing community agreements that will help facilitate our time together.	Conference Room, Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns	**Lead:** Lenya Quinn-Davidson, Kelly Martin, and Maria Estrada **Co Presenters:** **Kylee Clubb** **Alex Lacey** **Chloe Swiney**
4:00pm	**Yarning Circle** In this session, Kylee will utilise the cultural practice of yarning to enable us to get to know each as we begin the program journey together.	Conference Room, Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns	**Lead:** Kylee Clubb
6:15pm - 9:00pm	**Opening Dinner**	Conference Room, Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns	

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Tuesday, 13 May 2025			
7:00am	**Breakfast and briefing** *Any changes to the program or issues arising will be communicated and addressed over breakfast.	**Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns**	
8:00am	**Travel to Undara** You will need to check out of your room by 8:00am to ensure we are on our way to Undara by 8:30am. We will stop to stock up on any additional snacks or supplies you may need on the way.	Meet at the front of the Crystalbrook Bailey, Cairns.	
12:45pm	**Lunch**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	
1:45pm	**Travel to Yaramulla Ranger Base** The Yaramulla Ranger base is a short drive from the accommodation.	Meet behind the Leichardt room	
2:00pm	**Welcome to Country and Yarn about the history of Ewamian Country**	Yaramulla Ranger Base	**Ewamian Elder:** Uncle Dave Hudson
3:00pm	Preparation and overview for the next three days and then return to Discovery Resorts Undara	Yaramulla Ranger Base	**Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland**
6:00pm	**Dinner**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	

Wednesday, 14 May 2025			
7:00am	**Breakfast Briefing** *any changes to the program or issues arising will be communicated and addressed over breakfast.	Undara DIscovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	
8:00am	**Travel to Yaramulla Ranger Base** Please bring PPE with you for safety checks onsite.	Meet Behind Leichardt room	Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland
9:00am	**History of the Yaramulla base** In this presentation you will hear about the post contact history of the Yaramulla base. This will include the recent fire history of the area.	Yaramulla base Shed	Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland
0930am	**Women on Country - The Lacey Story** In this session you will hear the story of Ewamian woman and Park Ranger Alex Lacey and her role in caring for Country.	Yaramulla base Shed	Alex Lacey
10:00am	**Induction to use the fire units and PPE checks** You will be introduced to the different fire units and pumps that will be used during the live fire sessions. In this session there will be a mandatory check that everyone has the relevant PPE and to ensure that you know who you will be working with during the live fire sessions.	Yaramulla base	Alex Lacey, Anthony Staniland and Yaramulla Rangers

12:30pm	Lunch	Yaramulla base	
1:00pm	**Queensland Parks and Forests: Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation** In this session you will learn about the Departmental approaches and perspective including cultural heritage, fire strategies and cultural and natural values.	Yaramulla shed	Alex Lacey, Ebony Stallard and Anthony Staniland
2:00pm	**Flaura and Fauna identification** In this session you will have the opportunity to learn about the different flaura and fauna of the Savanna vegetation area and identify them.	Yaramulla base	Anthony Staniland and Ebony Stallard
2:45pm	**Women in leadership conversation** This session we will here from two women who hold senior positions in the fire and emergency space, and we will reflect on what leadership means to each of us. We will complete a leadership style assessment and discuss what this means on the fire ground.	Yaramulla shed	Susan Scott and Peta-Millier Rose
4:00pm	**Travel back to Discovery Resorts Undara and relax**		
6:00pm	**Dinner**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	

Thursday, 15 May 2025			
7:00am	**Breakfast Briefing** *Any changes to the program or issues arising will be communicated and addressed over breakfast.	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	
8:00am	**Travel to Yaramulla** *Must have all PPE		
8:30 am	**AIIMS overview** In this session there will be a short overview on the recognised system of managing incidents in the fire and emergency services sector.	Yaramulla base Shed	Chloe Swiney
9:00am	**Air Task Specialist** In this session you will be introduced to FireMapper and the Australian national symbology along with exploring the **Jet Ranger Heli chopper and incendiary machine display and having some general yarns about fire suppression techniques.**	Yaramulla base Shed	Bluey Harris, Michelle Brook and Nick Bloomfield
10:30am	**Break** During the break there will be a quick safety check prior to departing to the fire ground		Incident Controller and Yaramulla Rangers
11:00am	**Live fire Sessions** In this live fire session you will be lighting fires on up to 3-4 areas in your allocated team. The session will be reflective of how a prescribed burn would be conducted with an Incident Controller *(NB:This session does not include cultural burning). You will have packed lunch on this day.*	Yaramulla base	Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland.
4:00pm	**Fire debrief and travel back to lodge**		Alex Lacey and Anthony staniland
6:00pm	**Dinner**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	
7:00pm	**Reflection and check in** **It has been four days into a jam-packed program. This is an opportunity to check in and see how we are all doing and have a yarn about the experience so far. Bring your journals along to this session.**	**Undara Discovery Resort communal campfire area.**	Zoe Shultz and Jess Walters

Friday, 16 May 2025			
7:00am	**Breakfast/briefing** *Any changes to the program or issues arising will be communicated and addressed over breakfast.		
8:00am	**Travel to Yaramulla**	Meet behind the Leichardt room	
8:30am	**WTREX YARN: Power dynamics** In this workshop, participants learn what power is, how it is a facet of their own complex identities and how it is always in dynamic interaction vis-a-vis others. Maria Estrada, the workshop facilitator, will offer skills for people to learn to ground themselves in their power (Power Up) and even their lack of power (Power Down) to successfully navigate those dynamics and lead from a place of awareness.	Yaramulla base shed	Kelly Martin, Lenya Quinn Davidson and Maria Estrda Ramsay
10:00am	**Live fire session** Briefing and live fire burning. This will be a similar burn from the day before. You will have a packed lunch for this day.	Yaramulla Base Shed	Anthony Staniland and Alex Lacey
4:00pm	**Fire debrief, return to the lodge and free time**		Anthony Staniland and Alex Lacey
6:00pm	**Dinner**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	
7:00pm	**Participant yarning session** In this session you will hear from participants in the program share their fire knowledge, learning or information about their Country.		

Saturday, 17 May 2025			
7:00am	**Breakfast and briefing**		
7:30am	**Travel to Yaramulla**	Behind Leichardt room	
8:00am	**Fire briefing** This briefing will cover what is required for the live fire session for the day.	Yaramulla Base	Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland
8:30am	**Live fire Sessions** Working with your teams, you will light fire using different techniques including spot ignition and back burn over 10km including mop up processes.	Yaramulla	Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland
12:00pm	**Lunch** You will have a packed lunch this day.		
3:30pm	**Fire debrief**	Yaramulla Shed	Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland
4:00pm	**Kup Murri** Experience traditional cooking methods for afternoon tea.	Yaramulla	Alex Lacey and Anthony Staniland
5:00pm	**Return to Undara and receive a brief on the next day activities**		
6:00pm	**Dinner**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	

Sunday, 18 May 2025			
7:00am	**Breakfast**		
8:00am	**Rest/Explore** Today is all about rest and recovery. You can use this time to explore the local area.		
4:00pm	**Open yarning session** This session will be a combination of participant-led sharing, and a wellbeing check in with Zoe and Jess	**Undara Discovery Resort communal campfire area**	Zoe Shultz and Jess Walters
6:00pm	**Dinner**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	

Monday, 19 May 2025			
6:00am	**Breakfast**	Undara Discovery Resort Fettlers Iron Pot Bistro	
7:00am	**Check out**		
8:00am –11:00am	**Travel to Lake Tinaroo Resort**		
11:00am	**Lunch and travel to Rocky Creek (30 min)**	Lake Tinaroo Resort onsite restaurant	
12:00pm	**Welcome to Country story and onsite visit** In this session you will hear the stories of this Country from the Traditional Owners, explore the animals and plants and learn how the landscape is different to where we have been on the previous days. We will also yarn about the cultural heritage and the role of the cultural heritage team.		**Kylee Clubb and Gambir Yidinji Cultrual Heritage and Protection Team.** **Siohan Singleton,** **Ethnobotanist**
2:00pm	**Bushfire Hazard mapping** Rural Fire Services Queensland Bushfire Hazard Mapping Team will bring together three women with diverse and complimentary backgrounds and knowledge to refine the Vegetation Hazard Class mapping for the organisation's Bushfire Prone Area spatial map. The facilitators will be demonstrating how they complete vegetation field surveys across Queensland in an interactive session.		Lulu He, Tina Saren and Arianne Allen
3:00pm	**Travel back to Tinaroo Resort, check in and relax**		
6:00pm	**Dinner**		
7:00pm	**Open yarning session** This is a participant led session. Participants may share their stories from home, knowledge experiences and learning.		

Tuesday, 20 May 2025			
	Breakfast and briefing	Tinaroo Lake Resort onsite restaurant	
	Travel to Rocky Creek *(Bring PPE)*		
	Fire briefing This fire briefing will include operational safety protocols and you will also receive a briefing on cultural protocols as this live fire session will include cultural burning within women sacred areas.	Rocky Creek	Kylee Clubb and Gambir Yidinji Fire Practitioners
	Live fire Activity During this live fire session, there will be aspects of the burn where only women fire practitioners are allowed. You will all be guided accordingly. The live fire session will include mitigation burning and mop up.	**Rocky Creek**	Kylee Clubb and Gambir Yidinji Fire Practitioner Team
	Fire debrief before leaving site and return to Tinaroo Lake Resort	**Rocky Creek**	Kylee Clubb
	Dinner	Lake Tinaroo onsite restaurant Resort	

Wednesday, 21 May 2025			
6:00am	**Breakfast and Briefing**	Lake Tinaroo onsite restaurant Resort	
8:00am	**Travel to Rocky to check on the burn site** This will involve a review, check and cultural yarns about the post burn.	Rocky Creek	Kylee Clubb
10:00am	**Open yarning session** This is a participant-led session. Participants may share their stories from home, knowledge experiences and learning.	The lodge conference room	
11:00am	**Firecom** In this session you will hear about what happens when a Triple Zero (000) emergency call is made about a fire incident. The emergency call is rerouted to QFD Firecom centres. Firecom experiences more than 90,000 incidents per year. In this session you will learn about the role of fire communication officers and the link with Australian emergency response operations. You will also hear about the journey of women in fire communication roles.	The lodge conference room	**Chloe Swiney**
12:00pm	**Weaving** In this session, a collective of Traditional Owners and Elders will yarn and share their knowledge of basket weaving. Many hours are spent gathering, cutting and treating grasses to create both fine weave and open weave baskets. Make sure you are up for a cuppa tea and a yarn as the artists are looking forward to hearing stories from your home, too.	The Lodge conference room	**Jitta Arts:** **Aileen Rudken, Elfreda Mooka, Freda Masina and Nolear Walker**
4:00pm	**Travel to Cairns and check in to hotel**		
6:00pm	**Dinner**		

Thursday, 22 May 2025			
6:00am	**Breakfast/Briefing**		
7:30am	**Travel to Yarabah**		
8:30am	**Welcome to Country**		**Elder:** Vincient Schiber
9:00am	**Site visit** This site will have different vegetation than the previous sites as it is a coastal area. This is an opportunity to learn about the site and coastal vegetation through the lens of GMYBBC Rangers.		Helen Tait and GMYBBC Rangers
11:30am	**Lunch**		
12:00pm	**Live fire** This live fire session will be briefed and coordinated by the GMYPPBC Rangers.		Helen Tait and GMYBBC Rangers
3:00pm	**Return to Cairns**		
5:00pm	**Sunset Cruise** Dinner will be served on a river cruise from Cairns Marina to East Trinity. Mandingalbay Yidinji Traditional dancing and stories will be shared throughout the cruise.		

Friday, 23 May 2025			
6:00am	**Breakfast**		
8:15am	**Team Debrief session** During this session, you will have a chance to reflect on the experiences working with your specific team.		**Lenya Quinn-Davidson and Kelly Martin**
9:00am	**Whole group session**		Kylee Clubb, Chloe Swiney, Lenya Quinn-Davidson, Zoe Schultz and Jess Walters.
12:00pm	**Lunch**		
1:00pm	**Where to from here?** In this final session, we will explore ongoing networking opportunities, complete evaluations and officially close the program.		Lenya Quinn-Davidson, Chloe Swiney, Zoe Schultz and Jess Walters.
6:00pm	**Final Dinner** Please join the final dinner for networking with each other and some special guests.	**Crystalbrook Riley, Cairns on site restaurant**	Chloe Swiney

Saturday, 24 May 2025	
7:00am	**Breakfast**
8:00am	**Check out must be completed by 10:00am.**