

Connecting Indigenous people and the emergency management sector – Pathways to effective partnerships

Moungibi/Burketown Forum, 4 – 6 September 2023

Ricky Archer¹, Barry Hunter¹, Murrandoo Yanner Snr², Murrandoo Yanner Jnr², Rachel Amini-Yanner², Kevin Anderson², Glenn James³, Apryl Ford¹ and Melina Pearse¹

1. North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd. 2. Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation 3. Independent consultant





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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.

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We extend a special thanks and gratitude to senior Gangalidda leader Murrandoo Yanner for welcoming the forum participants to his country and for initiating the idea of a forum in Mougibi by way of invitation, following the successful forum held in Kuranda in 2021. The opportunity to showcase and explore the extraordinary working partnership forged by CLCAC, Traditional Owners (TOs) and the then Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES), now Queensland Fire Department (QFD), in the gulf is greatly appreciated, deepening a practical understanding of the ingredients and steps needed both here and further afield.

The co-hosts would like to acknowledge all who attended this third forum, recognising its importance as another step in an ongoing cross-cultural conversation. Your commitment to the conversation is very much appreciated. The room was brimming with high level and otherwise very busy people who nonetheless saw the value in contributing to this. We extend a special thanks to Joanne Greenfield, QFES Deputy Commissioner and Tony Hazell, Rural Fire Service (RFS) Regional Manager, for lending the forum the importance we think it deserves. Your trust good-will and contribution to the discussion has set the bar high for other agency leaders to follow.

We would also like to acknowledge those who were unable to attend. Your contributions were missed, but this is an ongoing conversation and future opportunities will emerge.

Finally, a heart (and stomach) felt thanks to all the super hard-working rangers, keeping everyone well-fed, looked after and happy - the evening out on the flat was unforgettable. Thank you so much!



Executive summary

This project has been about how we as a broad and diverse community deal with natural hazards more effectively. It's been about understanding and working with diversity and more specifically about recognising and respecting First Nations' indubitable connection to the country and its elements, and the depth of their experience, knowledge and capability. Within this lay the foundations of more effective hazard management and significant opportunities for Indigenous communities to self-empower and to prosper.

True collaboration in this cross-cultural environment has not been a common feature of our mainstream response to hazards, but the frequency and intensity of climate change-fueled disasters is forcing us to look outside of the box for more effective responses. Few in this country are blind to either the extraordinary and often devastating impacts of climate change or to the challenges we face to remodel our response. Indigenous voices speaking about what they have to offer in this space have been getting stronger, infused with centuries of accumulated experience and a working relationship to the land and elements based on familial connection, cultural law and responsibility – largely unrecognised in mainstream approaches to hazard and community management.

Indigenous groups in many parts of Australia are now kick-starting and leading conversations about cross-cultural collaborations and what they might look like. There are many questions and challenges about how collaboration can work but without a respectful and informed process amongst leaders and practitioners they will never be asked constructively or addressed effectively.

The forum that was invited to happen by Traditional Owners of Mougibi and enabled through a partnership between Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) and the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd (NAILSMA) was the focal event of this Natural Hazards Research Australia sponsored project. The forum hosts called on senior emergency management agency representatives, senior Indigenous leaders and land managers to refine and discuss questions and challenges about engagement of Indigenous communities in a better model for hazard management.

- What are the best models for engagement with Indigenous communities in natural hazard management?
- What are the moral imperatives to working in this cross-cultural space?
- What are the principles and tools we need to engage effectively and respectfully in EM?
- What might partnership development pathways look like?

There are fragmentary moments where some of these questions are being asked. This project had the privilege to consider such questions by bringing together the experience gained over the last 15+ years of a growing relationship between Traditional Owners of the Gulf Country through their land council (CLCAC) and QFES - a unique and important opportunity to explore how to do things (collaborations/partnerships/hazard management) better and to consider application at trans-north scale.



End-user statement

This project is a continuation of a long-term relationship and partnership building process focusing on Indigenous and emergency management agency collaborations. Both groups are primary beneficiaries of the ongoing process and end-users of the project outcomes.

“Working together, recognising and empowering community leadership is better for everyone . . . we need to do more in more communities.”

Joanne Greenfield – A/Deputy Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services

“Learning about opportunities and trying to understand the combined challenge across the remote parts of Australia. I think we all have similar issues and sharing them will help us all. People need to understand the relationship with Traditional Owners is vital and how we provide that continuity and connection with others. It’s always challenging, but others would have good ideas or processes that would assist us all. Projects and funding sources don’t really understand that side of the coin, which cannot be measured or reported on, as in KPIs and outcomes reached.”

Shane Klunder - District Officer, Emergency Management & Remote Aboriginal Communities. Department of Fire and Emergency services. Kimberley regional Office.

“Sharing and time to yarn is important. Face to face. [There should be] greater inclusion of emergency services officers.”

Tony Hazell- Rural Fire Service Regional Manager, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

“The incredible value of effective engagement and participatory processes in describing shared intent and community outcomes. [I’m] looking forward to the Joint Statement of Intent and briefing up in my organisation.”

Anonymous.

“Another successful forum, hosted by countrymen. This has been a really important opportunity to talk with CLCAC mob and QFES about what they’ve created between them and how. We have delegates from SW WA here who’ve been blown away by what they’ve seen. And now they have contacts they can just get on the phone to. A very important sharing experience.”

Barry Hunter, CEO, North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd.



Introduction

The landscape of emergency and natural hazard management across the north of Australia is diverse and dynamic at a number of levels. Diverse landscapes, weather patterns and climate change impacts present different challenges and approaches to hazard management, and manifest in different State, Territory and Federal agency responses. Indigenous cultures and local histories vary considerably across the north and even from place to place and are not as obviously accounted for in mainstream natural hazard management. The further one drills down into the characteristics of 'living landscapes' the more potentially important detail there is to understand in order to more effectively collaborate, support and build resilience in remote places: Consider the impact of language difference, land tenure and ownership, extant cultural authority and protocols, circumstances of disempowerment and local skill, ingenuity and capability. These and innumerable other variables will both challenge and be essential to developing effective emergency management partnerships.

While it may seem like too big a task to deal with all this complexity and uncertainty in any place let alone building good partnership models at scale, across jurisdictions, part of the solution is to unpack and let go of the ethnocentrism that dominates emergency management. Aboriginal leaders have long been offering local knowledge, skills and perspectives on natural hazard responses but have all too often been ignored or pushed aside by the all-powerful 'we know best' attitude. The people who know and live in the complexity of local life are the ones it is important to partner with. They're the ones who can and will help when you "just don't know where to start to engage"¹. They're the ones who will take responsibility for navigating local complexity through the process of developing cross-cultural collaborations and partnerships, and they are the ones who can offer and apply local knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and commitment to natural hazard management. The foundations for this sound simple but have not been practically understood in attempts to engage with remote Indigenous peoples. . . Recognition and Respect.

Yet there are broadly similar characteristics to draw on that can be understood at transregional scale but can only be effectively responded to at the local and regional scale.

Volunteer programs do much to capture what is needed to respond to local hazards but by itself are insufficient to draw on what's needed to more effectively address, not only the unique characteristics of hazards at different times and places, but to begin to address the cultural, economic and social challenges in these diverse human landscapes.

Partnerships at local level are now central to the national conversation about doing things better, but what exactly do they look like, how do they or might they work in practice and how do you start them?

These are not simply technical questions, and responses to them will differ. This current Natural Hazards Research Australia project builds on this key conversation about partnerships and digs deeper to understand the motivations, the building blocks, and the pathways to making effective emergency management partnerships.

¹ An exclamation made by a senior emergency management agency representative to an earlier forum held in Darwin in 2018.



Moungibi (Burketown) emergency management forum, 4 – 8 September 2023.



Background

A forum was held in Darwin in November 2020, hosted by NAILSMA and Charles Darwin University (Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods) to discuss emergency management and the prospects for better engagement between agencies and Indigenous communities. This was perhaps the first conversation involving senior Indigenous representatives and senior emergency management agency representatives from across the north. It was of course not the only conversation going on about what Indigenous communities have to offer the emergency management effort and what better relationships might look like.

Fragmented experience

There have been many constructive, failed, stalled and ongoing scenarios, but as is often the case they are fragmented across the various circumstances and jurisdictions of the wide north. Successful efforts include: key work on post cyclone stress, resilience and local governance done by Yolngu researchers and leaders in Galiwin'ku²; Bininj work on community-based rapid assessment and emergency management protocols in Ramingining³; facilitation amongst local police, fire and emergency service agencies and ranger groups in Borroloola, Ngukurr and Central Australia⁴; development of operational relationships with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services Western Australia and Bardi Jawi Indigenous ranger group in the Kimberley; Giringun coordinated Indigenous ranger group response to cyclone Yasi⁵; long standing partnership building between Indigenous ranger groups under the banner of Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and QFES.

Uniqueness and continuity

Other research by NAILSMA reiterated the unique qualities and circumstances of each and every place, arguing for local context specific approaches to relationship building and emergency management. It also recognised a number of broadly common features or circumstances across the Indigenous north. Federal and state emergency management agencies need to scale-up their engagement approaches from fragmented or disconnected experiences to regional, state or even trans northern scale, to achieve the kind of emergency management results needed. Pathways for effective partnerships must recognise, respect and support uniqueness within a scalable approach guided by equal recognition of commonalities.

It is worth referring here to previous Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC-supported work in Galiwin'ku and Ramingining (Arnhem Land, NT) on characteristics of uniqueness and continuity:

Indigenous communities in any given region such as Arnhem Land are connected by a range of characteristics and factors that make them quite similar. Their populations and cultures stem predominantly from pre-colonial society where shared experiences in landscape, customary economy, ceremony, and kinship prevail. Cultural and familial connectivity across vast landscapes engenders fairly common characteristics in contemporary communities and importantly carries numerous effective, seen and unseen skills and human assets into for example emergency management settings (e.g. nuanced communication, systems of

² Burrumalala Project (Maratja et. Al. 2017) – supported by NAILSMA and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

³ Sithole et.al. 2020.

⁴ Facilitated by Charles Darwin University, Research Institute for Environment and Livelihoods,

⁵ See James et.al Ch 6. In Russell-Smith et.al. (eds) 2019.



responsibility and care through kin, highly developed local and traditional knowledge, strong authority structures and unique capacity for collaborative action). There are many other senses in which communities are similar also, such as: the kind of infrastructure, plant and machinery they have; land management groups (rangers) that reinvest in cultural knowledge; increase familiarity of 'country' and its dynamics to new generations and pass-on / teach cultural protocols and invest in extensive training.

A further common thread of disempowerment, poverty and lack of effective engagement in broader political and economic society has positioned Indigenous community people as a welfare concern in the eyes and actions of governments in general. Forced and encouraged demographic shift into missions and ration depots etc. over the last century has grated against traditional systems and values and exacerbated perception of communities by (poorly engaged) governments as dysfunctional. These and other characteristics, variously perceived, encourage the one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery and community engagement as the most fitting and efficient.

Each community is, however, unique – not despite commonalities, but largely because overall cultural strength is a function of place-based stories of creation and group integrity. Ritual, language and authority are mainstays of this.

Additionally, historical processes have affected communities in different ways [. . .] the 'brand' of mission, State policy/legislative differences, land tenure, environment (e.g., island, coast or inland), resource availability (e.g., mines, tourism centres, communications infrastructure), key personalities etc.

The unique qualities of place cannot adequately be serviced by a blanket approach to service delivery. As this [2020] report indicates, the experiences of Galiwin'ku and Ramingining emergency management (EM) partnership projects, based on local perception of need and priority, are unique though none the less driven by concerns and characteristics common to both. This is a natural and mutually supportive conversation between the two community projects that Yolngu/Bininj gain confidence and strength from – these community people know they don't act or speak alone. They feel connected and so know what they have to offer is valuable and resonates with others further afield.⁶

Indigenous led conversation

This was foundational for the forums that followed, establishing opportunity for broad ranging discussion on the realities of emergency management agency responses to emergencies and natural hazards around remote Indigenous communities. Perhaps even more significant than the sharing of both common and at times challenging perspectives, was the strong feeling of gratitude, good-will and equity around the room. This arguably rare, respectful engagement across cultures planted the seed for positive outcomes and the sense that those who attended could make a difference and drive change for the better.

The ensuing forum held in Kuranda in 2021, developed the feeling of mutual respect, establishing this as an Indigenous led conversation, hosted *on country* by Traditional Owners proud to facilitate their part in a bigger picture future for better emergency management

⁶ ARPNet and NAILSMA 2020



partnerships across the north. The importance of an Indigenous agenda and hosting senior countrymen and agency invitees on traditional lands cannot be overstated and was not lost on all those who attended.

Pulling together the stories

Darwin was the introduction, Kuranda began to explore what we know and don't know; what research into knowledge gaps might look like; and to begin to frame better working relationships.⁷ This was done by sharing stories and perspectives across jurisdictions, from different language groups, through different histories and by accounting for experiences with state, territory and federal agencies in different times and places.

Policy and operational level perspectives from emergency management agencies significantly helped the forum understand how and why things are done as they are, and where new key ingredients may be needed to grow recognition and respect for the knowledge, skills and interests of Indigenous community groups, beyond the limitations of the volunteer model.

The value of pulling together an Indigenous conversation about emergency management across states and territories was well understood, leading to an invitation from Gangalidda Traditional Owner Murrandoo Yanner, to hold the next forum in Mougibi (Burketown, Gulf Queensland), hosted by Gangalidda and Garawa people through the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

⁷ Indigenous Fire and Land Management – Impact and Sustainability. 2021



Research approach

This partnership forum held in Mougibi, was the culmination of extensive consultations with Indigenous community leaders and emergency management agency representatives to determine the interest in such a forum and relevant themes to pursue. Mougibi was the third in what is hoped will be an ongoing series providing important and unique opportunities, not only to discuss emergency management but to establish an ongoing conversation to dig deeper into the practicalities of partnership building and better emergency management. These forums are already creating useful networks amongst emergency management agency people, Indigenous community practitioners, research and other organisations, through which advice and guidance can be sought, ideas and experience can be shared, and practical needs and solutions explored. As expressed by Shane Klunder, “agencies are looking elsewhere for models for better engagement with Indigenous people . . . and would get significant value from more regular contact through forums like this.”⁸

Setting the agenda

A participatory and inclusive approach was taken with this forum, as with earlier ones. This included support for preliminary discussions about themes of local importance at community level prior to the forum. This preliminary work was undertaken by local Indigenous researchers, who then brought the ideas and scenarios to Mougibi to share with others. The agenda at Mougibi was drafted through this process and with respect to specific questions and issues determined at the previous (Kuranda) forum⁹.

Indigenous only space

CLCAC and the Traditional Owner hosts made time in the forum agenda for Indigenous delegates to meet on day one. They were welcomed to Gangalidda country by senior Traditional Owner Murradoo Yanner. The day enabled everyone to get comfortable, talk through the Bush Ethics Agreement, review the agenda and the discussion at Kuranda two years prior, and consider the priorities they would like to see discussed with the emergency management agency and other representatives coming on days two and three. This ‘countrymen only’ time was important and much appreciated.

A live case study approach

An important outcome from Kuranda was the need to identify and explore existing case examples to dig deeper into understanding the ingredients for and challenges to successful partnership building. A subsequent invitation came from Gangalidda senior Traditional Owner Murradoo Yanner to hold this forum in Mougibi and take a close look at the partnership they have been growing with QFES over the last 15 years or so. The Mougibi hosts were well prepared to present this as a learning opportunity for all participants.

⁸ DFES District Officer. Kimberley Regional office.

⁹ See Future Research Priorities in JAMES G, Burton D, Campion O, Hunter B, Morrison J, Gondarra T & Bayung J (2021) Indigenous fire and land management - impact and sustainability, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne.



Focus on cross-cultural realities

The forum itself was co-hosted and run by the two instigating Indigenous organisations, CLCAC and NAILSMA, and so was framed with a strong cross-cultural perspective. Communication aids, such as interpreters, were discussed in the planning phase to ensure everyone would be clearly understood – formal Interpreters were not deemed necessary for this forum but the hosts and local facilitators were careful to ensure language was not a barrier to understanding.

Multiple agencies were engaged from the early planning stages to ensure that they, like the community delegates, would come informed and prepared.



Robbie Minter from Gnowangerup, sharing insights into the healing process he and others are slowly working through in his community in SW WA helping create greater resilience – a pre-cursor to any and all constructive relationship building with agencies like DFES and others – Mougibi, September 5 2023.

Bush ethics agreement

The hosts were keen to test and refine a local ethics agreement process to ensure the Traditional Owners are fully engaged and empowered to make decisions about research and other proponent activities proposed on their land and sea country. Agreement for an activity to occur is to be made on the basis of timely and accessible information about the proposed activity, and in respect of local criteria developed to help Traditional Owners and their representatives make judgements about positive and negative aspects of proposed activities.

Criteria includes, for example:

- Following local cultural protocols as directed
- Extent to which the activity contributes to the local economy
- Other ways in which the project will benefit the local community and the wider Indigenous community
- Clear follow-up after the activity is finished
- Final view from senior Traditional Owners and custodians about whether they're happy to host the activity



The process is undertaken directly between appropriate local leaders and proponents. Local leaders can then use the terms and conditions of the local agreement to keep track of the conduct and outcomes of the research or other activities. This 'bush ethics' agreement model and process seeks to address long-held concerns about poor engagement of Traditional Owners or their representatives in the research and other activities of external proponents on their country and with their kin. This local management tool and process was designed from community-based experience to assist traditional owners in managing research on their country, if and where they might need it – recognising that effectiveness of engagement, and the value of externally generated research to local communities varies significantly from proponent to proponent and from one circumstance to another.

A local tool and process to help assess and manage research should provide greater continuity of process and certainty for Traditional Owners.

The bush ethics framework was well received by the co-hosts and given some consideration for further development.

Outcomes focussed

The organisers and participants of the forum were determined to ensure the activity achieves practical ends. Sometimes useful outcomes are not planned but should nonetheless be recognised and nurtured (such as the confidence building and network of contacts gained by some participants for whom this kind of conversation and interaction with agencies would otherwise seem impossible in their own regions). Outcomes may be modest but useful, such as the long-sought admission of the CLCAC rangers to the Burketown State Emergency Services committee subsequent to the forum, and the opportunity for CLCAC and QFES to take stock of where they're at and consider future developments in their relationship.

The forum sought longer term outcomes in relation to: partnership development between QFES and CLCAC; developing understanding of the ingredients for and challenges to success that can provide recognizable pathways for Indigenous and government agents to develop their partnerships; (re)engaging Indigenous participants from across jurisdictions and empowering them with knowledge, skills and networks to take back home.

The forum participants are the end-users of this (research) activity and the forum was created and managed to ensure all parties could recognise, respect and understand each other – the delegates are important agents of change in this sector. The intention is to continue the forum model, expand it to include more participants that will give it practical application and offer other Traditional Owner groups opportunity to host their countrymen and emergency management agencies in this ongoing conversation on their country.



Research findings

It is valuable to try and identify and describe the issues and challenges facing Indigenous groups wanting to play bigger roles in emergency management in their region. It's similarly useful to do the same for emergency management agencies wanting to improve engagement with Indigenous groups and improve their own effectiveness. Previous forums have done this and suggested the value of proper¹⁰ partnerships as a vehicle for solutions. Participants at this forum were able to drill down further into the nature of these issues, and more clearly define solutions and pathways forward.

The benefits are and need to be both ways. Dealing with bureaucracy for example, is always complex (from inside or out), particularly when there are external initiatives and interests to champion. Working through genuine partnerships can make dealing with the bureaucracy easier by 'being on the inside' – such as accessing support through the RFS volunteer model. Reflecting on the 'two-way' value of the CLCAC partnership Joanne Greenfield (A/Deputy Commissioner, QFES) noted that;

“agencies need to be flexible and agile and having genuine, productive partnership improves the case for flexibility within [emergency management] bureaucracy. . . [we] need key people inside agencies who understand what communities need and can interpret agency rules and KPIs etc. to respect that understanding. . . [and there] needs to be internal champions to improve the culture and agency operation/policy/decision-making.”

Networking and being able to contact others to discuss issues/solutions is very important and there was a strong call for more regular contact amongst forum members, describing other benefits of this to agencies included:

- linking trainers with experience from elsewhere to inject new ideas, creativity etc.
 - access to explore good models for working with countrymen as a way to be more effective
 - Exploring different ways to incorporate volunteers (for example, within Indigenous ranger groups, allowing them to access tanker and fire fighter gear all year round)
 - Collaborating or connecting with useful research efforts
 - Problem solving
- Improving hazard response contributions across borders particularly from RFS and community partners

The focus on practical outcomes was enabled in part by the continuity of high caliber participants in this conversation since the first forum at CDU in 2019 – the expectation of future forums enabling deeper theme/research development, and not having to start from scratch each time. Having a case study approach to unpack the CLCAC/QFES partnership in the Gulf country was then central to exploring partnership development steps and ingredients for success. It also helped the forum understand what commonalities and differences for partnership development exist in other places that would a) benefit from the same approach and b) demand or suggest alternative approaches.

¹⁰ Whilst there are many partnership examples around, there are few displaying the characteristics required by Indigenous partners to make them work properly and effectively, for example, equity, respect, livelihoods focussed, 'two-way knowledge' function.



Challenges and gaps

Challenges are broken into several categories to clarify what specific type of response or solution is needed. Both Indigenous community and government agencies have related challenges to address.

Logistical/Operational Challenges	Description
Other stakeholders	<p>Multiple agencies and groups in community: Police, State Emergency Services, Rangers and funders etc. Lack of clarity as to roles, responsibilities and authority structure. Each has their own modus operandi and KPIs.</p> <p>Local and State Emergency Committees are dominated by non-Indigenous community members often with limited knowledge and experience in the region.</p>
Regional infrastructure	Communications infrastructure and technology is insufficient in the region. Too much country with no coverage.
Technology	Comms and other technologies need renewal/updating for functionality and to match agency equipment.
Ethnic diversity	Moungibi has multiple different language speakers apart from Indigenous whose communications needs must be met.
Resource continuity	Financial and other resources are usually one-off, short term or inconsistent, leading to gaps or breakdown in maintenance and functionality.
Funding	Often one off and rarely appropriate to local long-term vision/planning.
Population movement	Can be hard to keep track of where locals are at and who else (like visitors from other regions, tourists etc.) is around when hazards occur.
Who's in charge? Who's the back up?	Often disjuncture between agency authority structure, protocols etc. and local/ranger emergency response decisions or expectations – and between agencies.
Volunteerism	Has worked well for CLCAC rangers by being organised around the ranger group business/operational model. The volunteer model does not fit all circumstances – it may not be sustainable or stretches other resources.
Health and time commitment	Community ranger groups are success stories for the most part. They are skilled, have equipment and various forms of support. As a result, they are called on for their time and resources for so many things that do not return an income or grow their capability. Time, health and resource use are real issues.
Land tenure – responsibilities and access.	Most regions are a mix of different tenures (parks, pastoral, private, Indigenous held etc.). Roles and responsibilities, access and relationships for these need to be understood ahead of time.



Food and supplies storage	Recent floods have shown again how food and supplies storage is limited and problematic.
Continuity across (emergency management) commands	Continuity of decision-making, process etc. across commands is challenging.
Different models for operation and engagement in different jurisdictions	Each state and territory works according to different command and engagement models. This can make networking and solution finding at trans-agency level difficult.
Staff continuity	Problems with losing skills and knowledge when staff come and go too quickly.
KPIs	Key performance indicators and measures vary across agencies.
Cross-Cultural Challenges	
Stereotyping	Engagement with Indigenous groups, collaboration, divestment of responsibility to, respect and trust all suffer from stereotyping – mostly as a symptom of ethnocentrism in Govt Agencies.
Local governance ¹¹	Organisation and decision making at the local level, including amongst other community stakeholders, is essential for effective collaboration and emergency management response.
Partnership governance	Indigenous partners are usually treated inequitably, sometimes because of financial dependence and often because of inherent ethnocentrism in agency modus operandi
Language	Not just about clear communication between first languages but also about learning and interpreting technical/bureaucratic lingo.
Culturally safe places/relationships	It's critical for people to be able to work in spaces where there is some understanding and respect and not feel threatened or subservient.
Understanding and sensitivity	
Community, family, cultural obligations	These obligations and responsibilities are not barriers to professional partnerships, they are strengths. External relationships should respect these so as not to work against them.
Developmental Challenges	
Training and capability	Indigenous land managers and rangers work in a 'two-way' knowledge system (IK, local and western style). Training and capability building needs to harness both. Dependence on others presents unnecessary risks. CLCAC rangers are able to access RFS training so don't need to use ranger funding for that.

¹¹ See the 'The Chaos of Engagement' represented diagrammatically by ted Gondarra in NAILSMA, ARPNet 2020.



	Updating skills to match new equipment and changing needs is essential.
Professionalism	Part of the initial challenge was to create a strong sense of commitment, purpose, skill and reliability in the local workforce to be able to attract and succeed in partnership with QFES.
Goal setting	Development and relationship building goals must be achievable.
Decision making equity	Authority usually rests with financial partner but also relates to policy and protocols etc. At times response to hazards may be more effectively driven by local Indigenous knowledge, timing of response at local level and experience. This can be at odds with agency policy/protocols and needs to be planned out as formal partnerships develop.
Bureaucratic conservatism	Policy, rules and procedures developed for government agency operation are resistant to change to meet novel partnerships with Indigenous groups operating semi-independently and with different rules. Effective work in collaboration can help massage change in bureaucratic systems.
Research Gaps	
Cost Benefit analysis ¹²	Comparison of current scenarios for natural hazard preparation, response and recovery with (better) projected partnership scenarios is a critical basis for making change/improvement
Communication	Creating a reliable and flexible communications network throughout a region needs expert research and planning, with both technical and local experts.
Local governance	Governing and business models for the community partner should be investigated to clarify the structural legal options for local organisation and suggest developmental pathways that will suit the emergency management, social, cultural and economic goals and objectives of the partnership. This research will require local expertise.
Climate change	The impacts vary over time and from place to place but the impacts should have ongoing research and analysis to inform local emergency management planning and implementation

The list of challenges above is not exhaustive but much of it relates specifically to the things the parties have been trying to address through the CLCAC/QFES partnership.

Development Storyline / Strategic Initiatives

CLCAC and QFES have been building their partnership over the last 15-18 years. The long genesis and mutual trust are testament to these challenges not being 'deal-breakers'. This list also tells us that there is always more work to do to improve the partnership and its major goal of more effective hazard management in the region. So how did this relationship develop and

¹² Work on cost benefit analysis was undertaken by Russell-Smith et al (2020), estimating monetary and non-monetary costs incurred through natural disasters in the NT, informing their argument for developing a new equitable partnership scenario in EM. More research is needed in other jurisdictions and other circumstances to refine the new cost benefit scenario and inform policy.



what were/are the steps? This is something we all want to have a clear map for but, actually, much of it is organic and not easily described or not always described by different players in the same way. Here was our attempt to lay it out from the conversations with CLCAC and QFES. This is in a sense a storyline for how the partners-to-be got on with the job:

Leadership, Motives and Vision

“To reverse dependence [that Gangalidda and Garawa traditional owners suffer under government and other agencies]”

To manage hazards and emergencies in the region much better.

Grass roots

Two-way learning starting with kids at school.

Include community and family support for cultural learning.

Local Structure and Organisation

Connect the CLCAC, the PBCs and the ranger groups in the story.

Training and preparation - professionalism
Collective goal making

Opportunity

With the benefit of good communication between key QFES staff and CLCAC leadership an opportunity was seen and grasped to source money for the project.

It's worth noting that acting on such opportunity is often a matter of personal initiative, vision and perseverance.

Cultural Burning Becomes Key Activity

Traditional owners and their rangers made cultural burning central to EM planning and effort, becoming contract trainers for emergency services personnel.



Growing Mutual Respect

Over time the knowledge, capability and effectiveness of rangers earned respect from ES staff. This was used to good effect by QFES to enhance support where possible, earning mutual respect.

Linking Projects

CLCAC were able to link other useful projects into their EM effort, such as the Savanna Burning project supported by NAILSMA



Discussion

The challenges and gaps summarised above were generated mostly in consideration of the experiences of the CLCAC/QFES partnership but clearly resonate at some level with other locales. There may be a myriad of possible solutions with as many formal and informal processes that might apply in the unique circumstances of different communities. This participatory process does not deliver a definitive, stepwise plan for developing effective emergency management partnerships. It outlines the experience in the Gulf and suggests that other, deeper ingredients for partnership building are needed to deal with the various challenges thrown up by circumstance and experience. Looking back, the coloured storyline above begins to paint a picture of how solutions to specific challenges might be found in these strategic steps.

As the forum discussion developed it became more obvious that solutions can be found for most of the challenges and gaps (some more easily than others) in that 'organic' storyline of how they got to where they are now. An effective development pathway is however dependent on a deeper set of qualities, such as those grown over time in the QFES/CLCAC partnership, helping to explain how solutions to problems can be found and how strategic initiatives might be supported to advance the collective regional emergency management project.



① Recognition

Partnership Q&ES (Q&ES) can work well

Good Leadership demonstrates good intent - Returns

VALUE OF LOCAL Knowledge + RELATIONSHIPS

Value of research in this space can provide evidence for further treatment + support

Love/Love Culture & Customs

Recognise all communities are different

Recognise the dichotomies & have the moral fortitude to challenge or bring about change for the better

Recognise the Past!!

Recognise need for cross-cultural skills

Recognise local history

Recognise boundaries - use to back off

Local/Community Inquiries

Need for next gen. succession plan

Land tenure

Recognise what works + how to foster it

② Principles (Underpinning Partnerships)

- Accountability → honesty
- Inclusive
- Balance → equity → sharing (knowledge) → effort
- Respect & communication → understanding
- Trust
- Persistence (Time & Dialogue)
- Safe Collaboration
- Participatory Environment
- Continue to develop & evolve partnerships
- Productive relationships

Positive relationships

rights based approach

Truth Telling process

Integrity ← Culture

Commitment - process

Set goals

Culturally appropriate M&E process

Do No Harm

FPIC Free Prior informed Consent

ICIP Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property

Realistic

Community horizontalisation of training

How do we achieve continuity

③ Pathways start, grow, adapt.

Localised Structures

Understanding

Good Planning Down from grassroots -> up the pathway

Local Indigenous activities + leadership

Prior Consultation (as defined by community)

Communication - ongoing, relevant, appropriate

Develop Professionalism - training

Governance

Priorities

Appropriate training

Agency Policy + guidelines to support/guide stakeholder engagement.

Appropriate + Respectful Community engagement.

School leaders - Work development, teamwork, apprenticeship, work experience



Discussion about the CLCAC/QFES partnership teased out some abiding qualities or ingredients of good partnership-making and then sought to codify them in a kind of memorandum of understanding, serving to outline the foundations of this successful partnership and secondly, spelling out for others the core ingredients for successful relationship building elsewhere. Without these ingredients local initiatives (such as the healing process in Gnowangerup¹³ and the reinvention of traditional authority and decision making in Galiwin'ku¹⁴) will fall on deaf ears. Everyday challenges and plausible solutions may remain unrecognised - seemingly unimportant to an otherwise business-as-usual (top-down) emergency management approach.

The resulting Statement of Mutual Understanding and Intent¹⁵ is a composite of well-known home truths, moral and practical imperatives, but it was arrived at through a deliberate and participatory process keenly focused on emergency management partnerships. The Statement has an important context for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners in the EM space and is a step back to fundamentals, emphasising that unless these fundamental elements of our (future relationship) are agreed to and worked on, it will not work. This is the platform for more effective emergency management in remote areas.

All participants at the forum contributed to the Statement of Mutual Understanding and Intent. Whether their perspectives on what's needed centered on the principle of "reversing dependence"¹⁶, the need for greater equity and livelihood opportunity, the drive to decentralise services and responsibility to regions¹⁷, creating meaningful jobs, and just doing better emergency management, the Statement seemed to capture the basic and fundamental ingredients for any and all of these.

The cross-cultural conversation had gone full circle and come to the nub of the challenge. The next step is to review it and sign it as a statement that "encapsulates the mutual respect and agreement Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and their organisations have arrived at to deliver better emergency services and hazards management."¹⁸

Many of the elements in the Statement were expressed in one way or another in the case study. A good outcome for the QFES/CLCAC partnership is to have this reference that makes explicit some of the values they've harnessed together, and to have a fuller, overt agreement as to important ingredients for success that the partnership still has to work on.

It remains to be seen whether the Statement of Mutual Understanding and Intent will serve as a practical reminder and guide for processes of effective partnership building in emergency management. Its anticipated eventual signing makes it something of an informal contract, which may be a challenge to business as usual, but does not in itself represent a financial liability to government agencies wanting and needing to do better in remote areas.

Community Governance and Ted's diagram

Tony Hazell (QFES) asked how we kick start similar success elsewhere and reflected on Ted's governance diagram – how do we recognise the different models and bring them together.

Ted Gondarra has been working to re-institute traditional style decision making in the town of Galiwin'ku since he was involved in post cyclone research after cyclones Nathan and Lam in

¹³ See image in 'cross Cultural Realities' above.

¹⁴ Dhamarrandji et al. 2017, Sithole et al 2020

¹⁵ See draft version of the Statement in Utilisation Outputs below.

¹⁶ As stated purposefully by Murradoo Yanner.

¹⁷ As reiterated by Joanne Greenfield (Dept Dir. QFES)

¹⁸ See Statement opening paragraph at Utilisation Outputs below.



2015. He and other clan leaders sought to understand and help others understand the issues with and solutions for community decision making at Galiwin'ku¹⁹.



This picture represents the pressure that having so many Service Providers, puts on Galiwin'ku

The Chaos of Engagement²⁰

Ted discussed the diagram above at Mougibi, as he had at Kuranda and previously with others. The efforts to revitalise traditional owner and custodian authority in Galiwin'ku (represented by the circles of authority on the left) are important here. They represent Galiwin'ku custodians' attempt to do what Mougibi people and their Land Council have in part achieved: Getting their side of partnership equity and capability sorted out, albeit by having to push back colonial and historical forces still prescient. It is the same elements of recognition, principle and collective planning articulated in the Mougibi Statement. For Galiwin'ku leaders the quid pro quo expectation that NTES will be agile enough to relate to such a Yolngu structure and process won't be realised if this important ingredient for partnership building is not recognized – allowing for its form and function to be adapted (fit for purpose) by collective good-faith process.

Tony's question is important because virtually every community will have culturally and socially specific work to do to prepare for 'professional'²¹ partnership engagement, and they will need that to be understood, respected and at times supported. So, how do we kick start similar success elsewhere? We start, as the Statement reminds us, by recognising in efforts to (re) build local governance, key ingredient to our partnership; equity, leadership, culture, livelihood, independence, integrity (see Statement below).

¹⁹ Auspiced by Yalu Marnggithinyaraw Indigenous Corporation. Dhamarrandji et. al. 2017.

²⁰ 'The Chaos of Engagement' represented diagrammatically by ted Gondarra in NAILSMA, ARPNet 2020

²¹ A term used by Murradoo Yanner describing the equivalent level of capability, reliability and conduct needed (and achieved) for traditional owners and rangers to equitably engage in effective partnership with QFES (and others).



Participant feedback

At the end of the forum in Mougibi participants were asked to jot down what their main ‘takeaways’ from the forum were and what they would like to see next. The forum was lauded for its cross-cultural open and frank participatory style, allowing an open exploration of challenges, mistakes and strengths from all those represented. There was a strong sense of trust and relationship potential in the room. What developed was also a practical sense that emergency management is not just about the technologies and mechanics of the getting the job done. It is very much about people and diversity – recognition and respect at the heart of effective collaboration.

Main take-home messages from the Forum

- *“The incredible value of effective engagement and participatory processes in describing shared intent and community outcomes.”*
- *“Sharing and time to yarn is important – Face to face, seeing, hearing, touching is important.”*
- *“(Some) agency people think they have ticked all the boxes but are oblivious of the fact that the boxes are irrelevant, dysfunctional and disengaging.”*
- *“We (emergency management agencies) need to do better working together and recognising (each other’s qualities, challenges etc.). Empowering community leadership is better for everyone.”*
- *“Forging productive relationships in pursuit of a common agreed objective.”*
- *“Working properly together is essential for the long term.”*
- *“Aboriginal Liaison Officers²² are powerless (to effect change from community perspectives).”*
- *“Emergency management plans (as they are currently conceived) are inappropriate for engaging communities”*
- *“In the field of disaster management, we need to reflect ‘country’.”*
- *“Need better understanding by (government) agencies of community level capability and qualification.”*
- *“Still operating on a whitefella agenda and level in remote communities, coming from an entirely white fella world view.”*
- *“Won’t get community volunteers unless engagement improves significantly. ”*
- *“Leadership in agencies need to create the space and resources to build meaningful partnerships with communities.”*
- *“Research can help remove the excuses we keep hearing and showcase Indigenous leadership in emergency management.”*
- *“This is rare and incredibly useful. . . We learn so much from each other when strong leaders sit together on country respectfully.”*

²² ALOs are employed by EM agencies (NTES for example) as key element of Indigenous community engagement.



What would you like to see happen next – Participant thoughts

- *“Would like to see bigger forums (with) more agencies coming to learn, and research evidence presented at these forums to hold noses to!”*
- *“Would like to see committed ongoing engagement from all relevant stakeholders.”*
- *“Would like to see a greater inclusion of emergency services officers (in future events like this).”*
- *“Looking forward to the Statement of Mutual Understanding and Intent and (using it) to brief my organisation.”*
- *“We need to do more together in more communities.”*
- *“Continued growth (in partnership building) being driven by local need.”*
- *“To see more resources to help lift the level of certification and up-skilling of all ranger groups around Australia so local TOs can move into active emergency roles within their communities and be more engaged in any land management on their country.”*
- *“There’s a need for more numeracy and literacy for better engagement in accredited training.”*
- *“Building ranger capability to the extent that reliance on hopeless govt. agencies becomes almost irrelevant.”*
- *“I’d like to see these forums continue and be hosted by Indigenous communities in other places.”*



Moungibi Emergency Services rescue vehicle L-R Murrandoo Yanner, Ricky Archer, Dion Creek.



Statement of mutual understanding and intent

Statement of Mutual Understanding and Intent

Partnering with Traditional Owners in Emergency Management, Mougibi (Burketown, Queensland) September 2023.

This Statement encapsulates the mutual respect and agreement Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and their organisations have arrived at to deliver better emergency services and hazard management.

The Statement is drawn from ideas put forward in a focused group session at the forum, many of which reflect years of hard work in relationship building and growing collective goodwill. It comes at a time when natural hazards and emergencies threaten people and Country, perhaps more than ever before, stretching conventional emergency management beyond capacity. Partnerships in the cross-cultural environments of remote Australia are not a last resort, but rather offer long-sought best practice methodologies and real solutions.

The elements in this Statement do not capture all that is needed to go forward but reflect the important foundations and interests expressed in the Indigenous Emergency Management Forum held at Mougibi (Burketown), 4–8 September 2023.

RECOGNISE and RESPECT

We participants (individuals and represented agencies) of the Mougibi Forum understand the need to **RECOGNISE**:

- equitable partnerships are necessary for effective emergency prevention and management
- and respect Aboriginal law, custom, knowledge, language and history
- local leadership, initiative and intent
- all communities are different
- what's already working and how to foster it
- Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
- shortfalls in Indigenous community member volunteerism and the importance of livelihood opportunities
- the challenges and have the moral fortitude to bring about change for the better

PRINCIPLES

Further, as essential to building our partnership and operations, we commit to these rights-based approach **PRINCIPLES**:

- independence is a foundation for long term partnerships
- mutual respect, inclusiveness, fairness and trust
- effective communication, participatory practice, free, prior and informed consent/decision-making
- 'do no harm' and safe collaboration
- flexibility and adaptability
- integrity and truth-telling
- two-way knowledge and skill
- continuity and timeliness

PATHWAYS

We understand there is no one **PATHWAY** to effective partnerships. Together we will seek to create and make the most of our opportunities. We acknowledge that much of what happens will be organic and require 'learning on the go'. We also acknowledge the following ingredients are essential to advance Traditional Owner aspirations and fulfil our common obligations:

- a solid commitment to long-term support to create strong foundations for the partnership and its work
- cross-cultural training for all staff relevant to the partnership to maximise partnership cohesion and effectiveness
- training for Indigenous partners to understand non-Indigenous emergency management agency structures and operational logic
- to maximise partnership cohesion and effectiveness
- formally supported intergenerational learning, leadership and succession without which resilience will be lost
- good participatory planning from the grassroots to reveal the PATHWAYS forward
- building on local initiatives to minimise operational costs and overheads
- develop and support livelihood opportunities to ensure long term success
- employ proper consultation as defined by the community to engender mutual trust and understanding
- develop professionalism and generate trust for the partnerships we build in the broader community
- set realistic goals and accommodate local timeframes to ensure expectations are met
- develop and employ monitoring, evaluation and adaptation process relevant to both partners to deliver accountability
- ensure that technology and training needs are met

This Statement of Mutual Understanding and Intent represents a foundation and important step for mutually beneficial partnership building. We see it as a practical reference to cross-cultural and cross-organisational intelligence and good will, a measure of what happens from now on:

- working together under the umbrella of our mutual understanding, collective goodwill and intent
- creating best practice, cross-cultural partnerships
- excelling at meeting the needs of natural hazard and emergency management in remote northern Australia





Team members

Ricky Archer. Chief Executive Officer. NAILSMA. Outgoing

Barry Hunter. North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd.
Acting CEO NAILSMA

Murrandoo Yanner Snr, **Gangalidda senior Traditional Owner**

Murrandoo Yaner Jnr. Senior Ranger Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Rachel Amini-Yanner. Chief Executive Officer, Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Kevin Anderson. Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Glenn James. Consultant to NAILSMA

Apryl Ford. Project Support. Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Melina Pearse. Project Support. NAILSMA.



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