GUNAIKURNAI LAND and WATERS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION CULTURAL FIRE STRATEGY

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Managing Country Using Fire



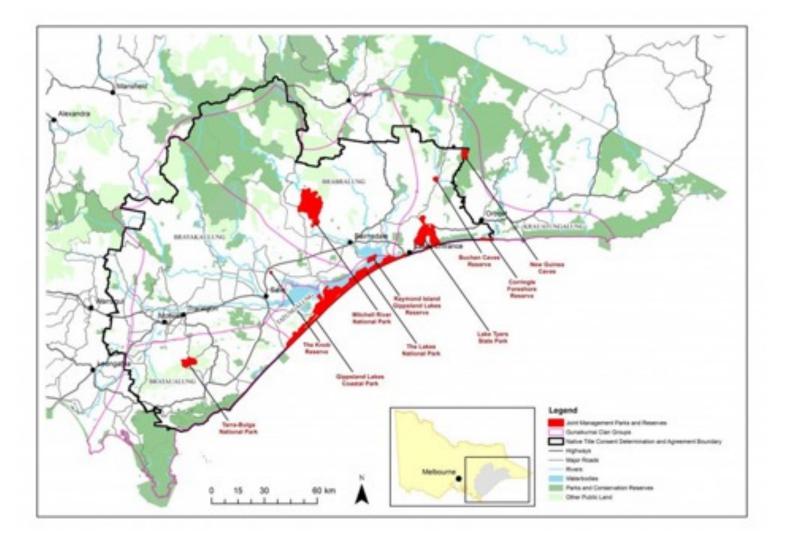


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Gunaikurnai Voices



WHAT IS CULTURAL FIRE?

Traditionally, there was no such thing as 'Cultural Fire' as fire was an intrinsic and symbolic part of the connection to each other, the land and the spiritual world. Cultural Fire could therefore be seen as a pathway to restoring traditional meanings and the reclamation of traditional customs. Fire was and is still used as a meeting place at both the family level for cooking, storytelling and family gatherings as well as for inter-family and inter-tribal reasons such as communication and ceremony.



"If we are going to use the term Cultural Fire then it needs to be accurate. For a long time, this term has been used for something it is not."

"Where does 'Cultural Fire' begin and end. If this term is going to be used, then it needs to be well defined and understood. Agencies or Government do not determine what Cultural fire is."

"We have to understand when and where is the right time to burn on our land."

"Fire can be scary because it can get away."

"Fire was a normal practice for families. To create walking trails from East Gippsland up into the High Plains or to keep the bush clean and tidy for food when they returned."

"I remember mobs Fire in the early 80's at the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust before summer started."

"Dad told me stories of how they use to burn all the time in the bush around Nowa Nowa."

"What is the impact of Fire on animals? We need to make sure they are taken care of."

HOW FIRE WAS USED?

- to look after the family;
- to make places safe, so you do not get burnt out, and to provide more generally for the safety of children;
- for warmth and cooking;
- to provide light at night (imagine sitting in the bush without fire to sit around and give light);
- caring for the land, a tool to tend nature's garden and to promote the growth of food sources;
- for ceremonial reasons to bring new life, helps the kids grow, keep the land healthy, and look after plants and animals;
- to regenerate the land after occupying a certain area and harvesting foods and other resources, fire was used when leaving so that when they returned in the future, it was 'renewed' again;
- for the production of tools, weapons, vessels, infrastructure, instruments and art;

- for hunting and food gathering;
- to keep travel routes open and Country safe to travel through;
- to dry foods, possum skins and other goods;
- to communicate presence in an area or signal transit through an area to others;
- to protect waterways which were extremely important food sources for Aboriginal people (upon which highintensity fires could cause severe, widespread and long term health impacts);
- as continued connection to healthy land as part of Aboriginal wellbeing, 'we suffer if the Country suffers' (when we see big fires it's like a death in the Country – similarly for clearing too many trees from the land); and
- for spiritual reasons communicating with spirits (e.g., letting certain spirits know they were coming into an area of Country; and cleansing bad spirits from people or areas and keeping family safe).

Purposes

The purpose of the GLaWAC Cultural Fire Strategy is to provide the direction for On Country burning to occur in a way that is culturally appropriate and effectively managed which reflects Gunaikurnai values across landscapes.

Our Vision

On Country Fire occurs with the right fire, in the right time and in the right way, and in the right place. We use fire to make the land healthy, for ceremony and as a means for communication with each other and the spirits.

Our children grow up understanding these Cultural practices and teach their children. We help others to understand the benefits of the use of the right fire to manage and protect Country.

Strategie Objectives

- 1. To be able to manage and protect Country with fire culturally and professionally.
- 2. To be able to conduct Cultural fires and share stories amongst the Gunaikurnai community in a culturally safe and supportive environment.
- 3. To protect tangible and intangible Cultural heritage, including in agency-led burns and operations.
- 4. To continue our research work and partner with others, including our GKTOLMB, to understand the benefits of the use of right fire on Country.



Strategies

 To have a culturally and operationally capable fire crew that enhances Gunaikurnai caring for Country objectives, the following must be achieved: 	"If we are going to undertake Cultural burns it needs a consistent and ongoing commitment from staff and funding."
	"We understand we need guidance and training but don't necessarily have to undertake the formal General Fire Fighter training to undertake burns. Some will want to be able to do it less formally."
	"Firestick training is good, but we need to be able to do it on our lands."
	"We need to create a brand and a team. A team that will challenge each other, build confidence and meet standards."
	"We don't want to do burns in agency PPE"
	"We need the time and space to build a dedicated fire crew that includes other roles such as planning, logistics and assessments."
	"We can use Elders and community to read the land and guide us in the right direction, and then we can build that knowledge ourselves. We need to find the right people to do this."
	"We need a dedicated team that will be there from start to finish. From the initial planning and assessments right through to the post-burn monitoring. Some of the team may be able to work with the agencies to be a part of the bigger picture and share knowledge."
	"We support effective partnerships with other land management and fire agencies."

2. To be able to plan, register and put fire back into Country when and where it is needed for healthy Country, the following must be considered:	"We should prioritise fires that can protect Cultural assets." "For a long time, Aboriginal voices have not been heard and we have been told how things are going to happen. That needs to change, and we need effective consultation with fire agencies."
	"Maps are one thing, but effective co-design should occur on Country as decisions should be made when you are part of the land" "We really enjoyed the burn at the Knob once we took matters into our
	own hands. Until then we were just watching from the side." "We need to have a say on where to burn. It will be a good way for us to learn and to be able to look at it and ask ourselves 'why do we want to burn it?"
	"We need to do the follow-up work as well. To monitor what happens after the burn. We can do a before and after assessment."

3. To have the capability to provide approvals for Cultural fire that are consistent with legal requirement, the following must be achieved:	"Cultural Fire needs to fit in within existing legislation, and risk management should not be seen as a limitation."
	"We need to have staff that understand and can navigate through the processes required to get burns planned and approved."
	"We need a process to approve who can participate in our burns, including members from the community. This process needs to retain control and manage risks."
	"Agencies don't burn enough and leave it until it is too late, and then the big fires come through and burns it all. All of the permits and regulations make it too hard. We need to burn there and then not wait until next week or next month when it is too late."
	"We need to make sure Cultural Fire is planned so that we do not damage Cultural sites."
	"We need to make sure we always do a walk through before we burn."

4. To have resources to support our community and agency partnerships to undertake private property burns, where applicable, the following must be achieved:	"We need to have discussions with private landowners."
	"GLaWAC will access ongoing funding that is being provided through the Governments budget allocation for Cultural fire."
	"We will partner with neighbours to assist capability building and joint burns should they request it."
	"This strategy is reliant on the successful implementation of strategies 1 to 3."
5. To support and build the Fire Knowledge Holders Advisory Group.	"We need additional resources to support community involvement and to make sure that our cultural safety is not impacted by external forces."
	"Community wants to participate on our land in our way, and we will work to provide necessary training for safety and participation that won't put people off or be fully aligned to all General Fire Fighting training requirements."
	"We will always encourage Elders and community to participate."
	"We need ongoing discussions with the state to yarn about the risk management process."

Actions

IMMEDIATE: 0 – 3 MONTHS

- 1. Develop the strategy.
- 2. Identify, secure and allocate funding.
- 3. Define the processes for planning and conducting burns
 - a. Nomination based on the Cultural use of fire;
 - b. Planning, including risk management, Cultural heritage assessments and approval;
 - c. Tactical planning;
 - d. Objectives, maps and briefing;
 - e. Approval to ignite;
 - f. CFA/FFMVic input;
 - g. Conducting the burn;
 - h. Requirements, expectations, standards, OH&S;
 - i. Completing the burn;
 - j. Sign off as 'Safe';
 - k. Monitoring and reporting;
 - l. System for data storage, including photos, lessons learnt.
- 4. Commence more detailed implementation planning.
- 5. Identify potential sites for Cultural fire.
- 6. Develop fire plans.
- 7. GLaWAC staff undertake BWA training.
- 8. Commence increased fire/Country related employment.

SHORT TERM: 3 - 6 MONTHS

- 9. Define minimum skills and training requirements.
- 10. Seek and involve wider community participation in managing and caring for Country through fire.
- 11. Train and accredit staff to minimum skills standards.
- 12. Conduct lower risk burns.
- 13. Deliver increased media and communications of outcomes and activity actions.
- 14. Develop the capability and resources required to manage the use of fire.
- 15. Develop a capability and training pathway.
- 16. Develop a training calendar.
- 17. Develop a system for data collection, monitoring and reporting.
- 18. Structurally review our employment options, opportunities and pathways.

LONG TERM: 6+ MONTHS

- 19. Evaluate lessons learnt and identify opportunities for improvement.
- 20. Review the strategy.
- 21. Develop a 3 5 year Fire program.
- 22. Develop a 3 year training program.
- 23. Develop the systems and processes required for learning, development, and knowledge sharing.

Links, Partnerships and ongoing Collaboration

The Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy provides the foundation for how Cultural fire will be invigorated through Traditional Owner led practices across all types and tenures of Country. It sets out the following four objectives:

- Develop operational pathways that enable Traditional Owners to lead the planning and to undertake Cultural burns across all land tenures and Country types according to their Cultural obligations.
- Build Traditional Owner governance and capacity in Cultural fire knowledge and practice.
- Improved management of state forest reserves and private land through the application of collaborative management to heal Country and build resilience in people and landscapes.
- 4. Facilitate the development and strengthening of institutional frameworks that support Cultural fire practice.

The Gunaikurnai Cultural Fire Strategy complements these by identifying specific strategic objectives and actions relevant to the Gunaikurnai people within the context of the settlement area and will provide the pathway for Gunaikurnai people to realise their vision of:

> Right fire at the right time and in the right way.



CONSULTATION

GLaWAC acknowledges that this document and the feedback that should occur is iterative and ongoing.

The return of management responsibility for caring for Country is a pillar of our settlement agreement and Native Title rights.

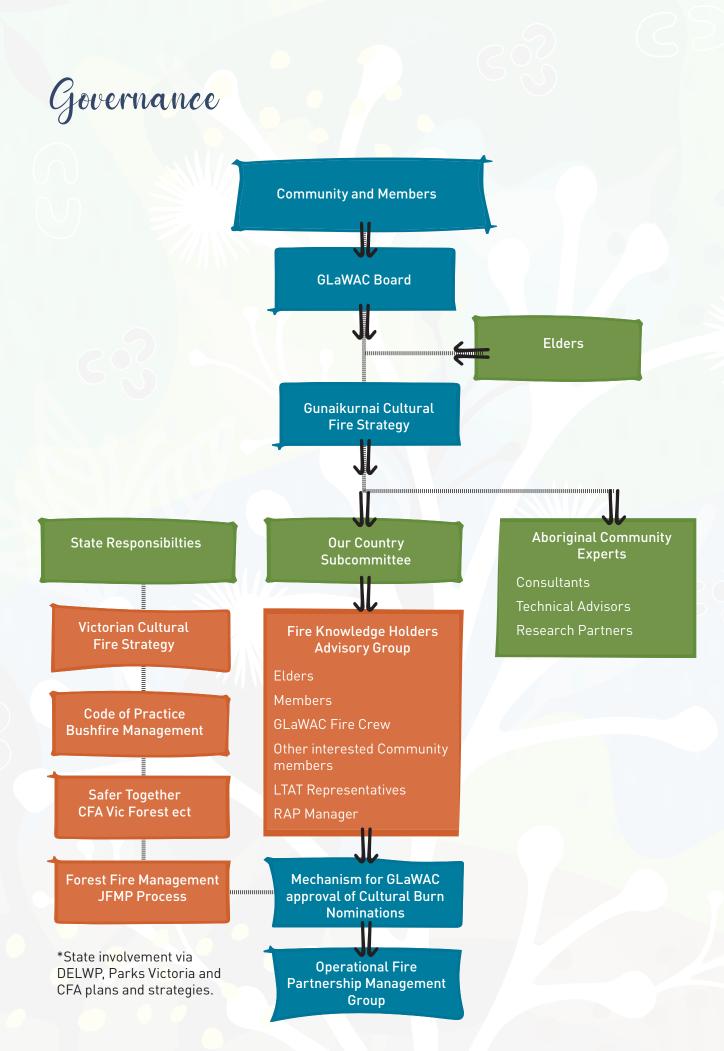
This document contains quotes and feedback from: several Gunaikurnai Elders both past and present, GKTOLMB, Lake Tyers Trust staff, GLaWAC Staff, Elders and Directors, and the On Country Sub-committee, Community input received via one-on-one yarns, social media feedback and NAIDOC week gatherings.

Our website supports feedback should anyone wish - www.gunaikurnai.org.

EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

We will know we are successful when:

- 1. Gunaikurnai people apply the right fire at the right time in the right way.
- 2. Gunaikurnai people use fire as a means to teach the next generations and others within the community.
- 3. Gunaikurnai people work together with, and help inform, land and fire agencies on how to incorporate Cultural fire into their land and fire management activities.



GLaWAC recognises the importance of relationships with individuals, organisations, and agencies to successfully implement On Country Cultural Fire.

Listed here are the key owners, practitioners and partners and the role they will play:

1. GLaWAC staff	a. GLaWAC staff will be a part of the goals and objectives by contributing to the development of the strategy through discussions about what is important to them, how they think Cultural Fire should and should not occur and what the key risks and issues are. Staff will also make up the dedicated fire crew as well as non-fire roles such as planning, assessments, and support.
2. Elders	a. Elders will be a part of the goals and objectives by helping to build and explain knowledge about how to read the land to ensure right fire, right time, right way.
3. Community	a. Community members will be part of the use of fire by participating in the nomination, planning, and conducting of Cultural Burns.
4. Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust	 a. LTAT staff will be a part of the goals and objectives by: i. Working with GLaWAC to identify suitable areas to undertake burns within the Trust. ii. Assist in planning and undertaking burns within the Trust.
5. Forest Fire Management Victoria	 a. Forest Fire Management Vic will support these goals and objectives by: i. Working with GLaWAC to define the support that will be provided to GKTOLMB as per actions 7, 17 and 32 in the Joint Management Plan and the key aspects of the Aboriginal Self Determination Reform Strategy 2020 – 2025. This includes how DELWP will "work in genuine partnership by transferring power back and becoming more accountable to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorian." Examples of how this could occur include: 1. Work with GLaWAC to define the process for planning and conducting burns on public land within the settlement area. 2. Providing approval to undertake burns on public land within the settlement area.
6. Country Fire Authority	 a. CFA will support these goals and objectives by: i. Working with GLaWAC to define the process for planning and conducting burns on private land within the settlement area; ii. Providing approval to undertake burns on private land within the settlement area.
7. Catchment Management Authorities	 a. CMAs will support these goals and objectives by: i. Working with GLaWAC to understand how fire can be integrated into water and catchment management.
8. Fire Risk Consultants	 a. FRC will support these goals and objectives by: i. Assisting with the development of the strategy; ii. Assisting the development of a capability, resource and training plan; and iii. Assisting to identify, plan and undertake burns.





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