

# TOWARDS CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FIRE MANAGEMENT IN THE WAANYI AND GARAWA LANDS

Part of the broader BNHCRC Savanna fire management project



Katherine van Wezel<sup>1,4</sup>, under supervision of Jeremy Russell-Smith<sup>1,4</sup>, Seán Kerins<sup>2,4</sup>, and Sue Jackson<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Darwin Centre for Bushfires Research, Charles Darwin University, NT, <sup>2</sup> Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, ACT, <sup>3</sup> Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith University, QLD, <sup>4</sup> Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

## CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FRAMEWORKS FOR BUSHFIRE AND NATURAL HAZARDS MANAGEMENT ARE CRITICAL TO ESTABLISHING RESILIENCE IN REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES<sup>1</sup>. A COLLABORATION WITH THE WAANYI AND GARAWA PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH-WEST GULF OF CARPENTARIA IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A REGIONAL CASE STUDY.

Waanyi and Garawa have drastically reduced the occurrence and extent of wildfires on their traditional lands over the last decade<sup>1</sup>. Maintaining this achievement is increasingly difficult due to a lack of self-determination and financial independence<sup>2</sup>. The aim of this project is to enable wider groups of Waanyi and Garawa landholders to collaboratively develop an economically sustainable fire management plan that responds to their own cultural objectives. Here a participatory action research (PAR) approach will be employed to explore the primary research question: **what are the impediments, opportunities and key challenges for fire to be managed over the long term in a culturally appropriate way within the Waanyi and Garawa lands?**

### DEVELOPING A CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Waanyi and Garawa aim for wider landowner participation in land management, where traditional knowledge is documented and applied to achieve goals that are relevant to them today<sup>3</sup>. This research will therefore:

- ▶ Document customary knowledge held by older Waanyi and Garawa people through qualitative interviews on country
- ▶ Address contemporary objectives through PAR methods such as focus group discussions and participation in fire management activities
- ▶ Involve Waanyi and Garawa groups that are currently underrepresented in fire management, such as women and traditional owners living in Queensland

### ENGAGING WITH A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

A recent BNHCRC review discusses how payment for ecosystem services (PES) is the only sustainable economic framework currently available to Indigenous land management activities<sup>4</sup>. Fire management can provide

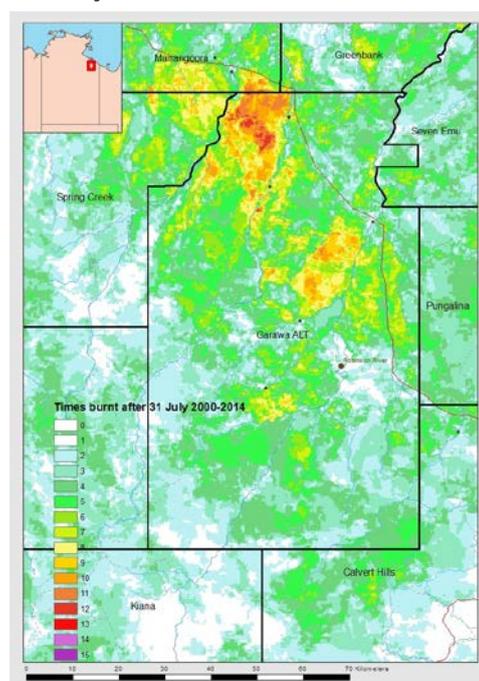
ecosystem services such as savanna emissions abatement, enhanced carbon sequestration, improved soil quality and biodiversity<sup>5</sup>. This research strives to:

- ▶ Analyse the economic potential of as many different ecosystem services as possible so as to diversify the funding sources available to land managers
- ▶ Assess their compatibility with community objectives
- ▶ Identify and engage with prospective beneficiaries such as neighbouring property holders, local businesses, and NGOs
- ▶ Inform adaptive management by supplementing freely available fire scar data<sup>6</sup> with participants' own ignition records

### A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

A preliminary analysis of the Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust indicates a high potential for savanna emissions abatement. The area is mostly covered by eligible vegetation classes<sup>7</sup>; falls entirely within a rainfall zone (600 – 1000 mm) included in available accounting

methodologies<sup>8</sup>; and has frequently experienced late dry season fires over the last 15 years:



### END USER STATEMENT

*"The proposed project has the potential to deliver significant benefits for Waanyi and Garawa Traditional Owners and contribute towards improved community based fire management outcomes. The project will enable Traditional Owners to improve their fire management by identifying key challenges and developing appropriate community driven solutions. The project will therefore provide foundational information to underpin successful future fire management programs."*

- Mark Ashley, Executive Director at Bushfires NT

### REFERENCES

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