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Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation
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Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

Email: NationalResilience.Consultation@homeaffairs.gov.au

Subject: Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper

Please find enclosed a submission by Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation in response to the questions raised in the discussion paper.

Jingela (Hi), my name is Oliver Costello. I'm from Bundjalung Jagun in the Northern Rivers of NSW. For over a decade I have been actively engaged in Cultural Land Stewardship knowledge and practice. I believe strongly in the role of Aboriginal culture as a keystone to maintaining livelihoods, supporting identity, connecting to Country and enabling healthy and regenerative communities to care for Country.

I co-founded the Firesticks Initiative and was a founding Director of both the Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation and Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Adult Education and Community Management from the University of Technology, Sydney. I currently hold the following roles (note that the views shared in this submission are from the Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation and our supporting authors):

- Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation Board (Director)
- Natural Hazards Research Australia Board (Director)
- Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium (Vice President)
- Project Manager - Traditional Knowledge (Conservation Futures) at Bush Heritage Australia
- Project Convenor - Cultural land management research and governance in Southeast Australia
- National Koala Recovery Plan Board (Member)
- NSW Bushfire & Natural Hazards Research Centre (Cultural Advisor and Researcher)

In recent years I have led and supported a range of projects relating to First Nations empowerment in relation to Cultural land stewardship, Threatened Species Recovery, Bushfire and Natural Hazards such as:

- Indigenous Contributing Author - Extreme Events Chapter for 2021 State of Environment Report
- Cultural burning Advisor - Project 8.2.1 Indigenous aspirations and capacity for bushfire response, Charles Darwin University - NESP Threatened Species Recovery Hub
- Research advisor - Hazards, Culture, and Indigenous Communities: Principles for Enhanced Collaboration (PEC) Deakin University - Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC
- Project Convenor - Cultural Land Management in Southeast Australia - Developing the foundation for an Indigenous-led and co-designed research program for land management with Traditional Owners
- Advisor to National Indigenous Australians Agency on the Indigenous Rangers Independent Reference Group
- Deputy Chair - Indigenous Reference Group, Threatened Species Recovery Hub, National Environmental Science Programme.
- Co-Author of the Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework (2015-2022)
- Authored “buubaan butherun (Flood Stories)” which was commissioned by the NSW flood Inquiry (2022) and informed their key recommendations for the Environment.

I have a broad range of experience in Natural Hazards, Cultural Resource management, Cultural fire practices, Aboriginal Joint Management partnerships, culturally significant species and threatened species management. I work to support a range of research, policy, advocacy, and on-ground projects. I am passionate about Aboriginal leadership, empowerment, partnerships and recognition of cultural knowledge and practice. Being involved personally and professionally in major bushfire and flood events that have occurred over the past few years has proved to be exceptionally challenging. I gratefully acknowledge the contributions Teagan Goolmeer, Dr Tim Neale, Michele Lockwood and David Hinchley made to prepare this submission.

If you have any questions or to further discuss, please get in touch.

With regards,



Oliver Costello

Executive Director,
Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation



Jingela blaganmirr

(Hello Everyone)

Ngalii – ngaa naa jaguun gunuu djanda mandii nguthung garra guuriaabun, beehing, nguubuu-gan

(We acknowledge Country – our elders past present and future)

Ngalli-ngaa bilaan buuwiiiaan, gwang, buubaan, jan-gany webrrd muunaa gali maadj butherun

(We learn from wind, rain, flood, lightning, hail, or fire – they teach us stories)

Ngalii-ngaa wala-wala guuriilaa wuuyun-girr

(We share old ways into the new)

Ngalii-ngaa nyaagii gaany ba-aarn nguubuugan

(We need these ways now and for our future)

Ngalii ngaa garima lee la jaguun, jaguun garima mebeerrd

(We care for Country, as Country cares for us)

Ngalli ngaa naa gannga la

(We hope you understand)

Bugle bee wala-wala

(We thank you for the opportunity to share)

Statement and Language by Uncle Rick Cook, Marcus Ferguson and Oliver Costello.

To: Whom it may concern

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper.

Acknowledgement

This submission was shaped by several experts, submissions and consultation discussions on behalf of the Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (Jagun Alliance). We acknowledge Country, our Ancestors and Elders past, present and future. We give gratitude to the plants, animals, lands, waters and sky for all their teaching and everything they provide in growth and abundance. Our old people were Culturally connected across this whole landscape through Lore, language and kinship. They gathered to share resources and maintain abundance through caring for Country. Our vision is to continue our Lores and cultural practices to keep people connected, healthy and empowered within what is known as Bundjalung Jagun (Country). Due to growing demands on our very constrained resources, Jagun Alliance is only able to provide a limited response at this stage, but we welcome any opportunities to be engaged in co-design or in future consultation.

Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation

The Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (Jagun Alliance) is an Aboriginal owned not-for-profit organisation and registered charity founded in 2016. Jagun Alliance aims to foster innovation and develop partnerships with Aboriginal enterprises and the public and private sector in cultural land management. Jagun Alliance provides Aboriginal employment, capacity development and knowledge sharing through coordinating and implementing multidisciplinary projects and programs, including cultural heritage projects and natural resource management.

Connecting to Jagun Project

Jagun Alliance has received funding under the Federal Government's Black Summer Bushfire Recovery grant to deliver the "Connecting to Jagun" project. The project includes a series of community workshops on bushfire recovery, cultural fire and caring for Country across seven Local Government areas in the Northern Rivers. This includes Clarence Valley, Richmond Valley, Lismore, Kyogle, Ballina, Byron and Tweed Shires.

A comprehensive series of workshops across the Northern Rivers region will help inform and educate mob and landholders, enhancing Community resilience and Country to help mitigate future natural hazards including bushfires. These workshops allow Jagun Alliance to support landholders by developing a work program for our Ranger team to do cultural burning, bush regeneration and other caring for Country activities.

Jagun Alliance has formed partnerships with First Nations organisations across the region including Native Title Corps, Aboriginal Land Councils and Ranger Groups to work together on planning and delivering the community workshops and work program which incorporates cultural burning.

Goong Butherun / water stories: Flood Recovery in the Northern Rivers Project

This project has been developed in partnership with the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to provide a cultural assessment of how waterways within the Richmond River Catchment are recovering from the 2022 floods. Jagun Alliance is co-designing and delivering the project as part of the broader Flood Recovery Program for Water Quality Monitoring by NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE). The project also recognises that the terms water quality monitoring can be more appropriately understood through cultural indicators of river health, on Country knowledge practices and place-based experiences.

Heal the Rivers – Flood Recovery & Landscape Restoration Project

Jagun Alliances project aims to deliver Aboriginal directed and culturally informed catchment management & restoration projects within the catchments of the Tweed, Brunswick, Richmond, Evans and Clarence Rivers. The project will develop a First Nations-led strategy for Bundjalung Country in the Northern Rivers to deliver cultural landscape restoration and nature-based flood mitigation & adaptation. The key activities in the program will include:

- Establish a River Custodians team with at least 5 full-time Indigenous staff
- Develop the Conservation Futures integrated knowledge system (Data and mapping) to empower decision making for restoration, flood mitigation and adaptation
- Link with partners across the region to connect existing works, knowledge and data
- Work with universities and training facilities to support First Nations students
- Undertake community resilience and engagement activities
- Deliver cross-sector workshops to share knowledge and identify/prioritise actions with a particular focus on culturally significant places and species within catchments

Community-based workshops will occur in all seven local government areas (LGAs) in the Northern Rivers and will prioritise cultural land management and restoration. Jagun Alliance will aim to bring together local mob, private landholders, and representatives from both government and non-government organisations to share knowledge while also gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects involved in riparian restoration from a First Nations perspective.

As a result of these workshops, On-Country work will be identified and delivered across at least 7 priority areas with the aim of expanding work areas over time. Consultation with Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Native Title representatives will be a key aspect of the Heal the Rivers project. Only through strong partnerships can we achieve the desired outcomes. Heal the Rivers is a four-year program funded by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) under the Northern Rivers Recovery and Resilience Program (NRRRP). This project is supported by Conservation Futures, Bush Heritage Australia and the University of Melbourne.

Our Response to the Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper

For First Nations people, a separation between people and Country does not exist. Country is a part of us, it is our kin, our family. It encompasses our totemic and spiritual relationships and has traditionally provided us with what we have needed to sustain us. Caring for country is a core responsibility and right.

Collaborative management between Indigenous cultural authorities (i.e., Indigenous landholders, Indigenous land and sea ranger groups, etc.) and emergency service agencies has the potential to foster mutually supportive and knowledge-sharing relationships while delivering positive outcomes for biodiversity and communities into the future.

This is, in part, because Indigenous land and sea rangers are situated across the country and work in some of the most remote and hard-to-resource locations, they are also increasing in more regional and urban areas. These are locations with significant natural hazards risks and therefore significant potential impacts from natural hazard events. Indigenous land and sea rangers hold a diverse set of

skills and expertise locally relevant to hazard management, including environmental monitoring, local environmental knowledge, nature-based solutions, and hazard mitigation techniques such as cultural burning and water catchment restoration. Increasing rangers' numbers and capability to include emergency management will not only provide the Commonwealth with an economically viable option for emergency management, and build capacity within Indigenous groups, but it will also support Indigenous endeavours to care for Country.

Other benefits of supporting Indigenous land and sea rangers to engage in emergency response include:

- Improved response times: rangers live and work in remote and regional landscapes, as well as in peri-urban areas, and will often therefore be first responders in emergency response situations. This will lead to shorter response times and therefore improved outcomes.
- Local knowledge: rangers have an incredible wealth of knowledge regarding their Country they live and work in, as well as unique interpersonal networks within Indigenous communities. These are both highly beneficial during emergency response situations.
- Building the ranger sector: engagement in emergency response will provide opportunities for ranger groups to build their capacity in several ways. This includes through individuals gaining skills and training, as well as ranger groups gaining new potential revenue streams.
- Activation of assets: ranger groups already own and maintain a number of assets (e.g., vehicles, equipment, facilities) that can be utilised in emergency response. Engaging rangers in emergency response could provide significant efficiencies through the use of these assets.
- increased jobs and increasing recognition of role of cultural burning and other cultural practice that can help restoration of resilient landscapes.
- Mutual benefits across the community

Creating alternative Commonwealth capabilities for crisis response by engaging with Indigenous land and sea rangers has the potential to empower Traditional Custodians in their relationships with others and management of Country. This includes not only relationships with emergency management agencies but also conservation groups, the forestry sector, the agricultural sector, enabling a wider range of partnerships to support community resilience and emergency response.

Existing ranger programs around Australia are already involved in disaster response and have resources, skills and partnership for effective response, and are often the groups on-Country that is able to react most quickly and effectively (e.g. ranger groups in north Queensland provided rapid and broad community support after Cyclone Yasi, large scale fire management capacity across northern Australia, contributions to bushfire and flood response in Eastern Australia).

Opportunities for the Commonwealth to build on its investment in Indigenous ranger programs nationally include:

- Increased resources and a stronger focus on fire planning, preparation and building community capacity & partnerships will develop a much more informed community, better on-ground preparation and ensure that the right partnerships and capacity is in place in the right locations when needed.
- Continuing to build and support ranger groups around the region at the scale necessary for response to increasing and multiple disaster threats), including infrastructure and equipment for strengthening a quick response role (place-based rangers with the right skills, equipment, and intimate local knowledge of fire history, threats, people and partnerships provide a strong basis for effective action and coordination)

Jagun Alliance is currently implementing project work across seven LGA's in the Northern Rivers region targeting communities and properties that were directly impacted or threatened by the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20. This work aims to heal community members impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires and improve their cultural and social connections to each other as well as the country in order to build resilience to future natural hazards including bushfires. It is working with partners and communities to develop an Indigenous led framework for resilience building based around cultural and social connections to country and the broader community, and is expanding these efforts to also focus on health and wellbeing impacts and responses to floods and climate change threat through a range of other projects.

The experience shows that, even in regions with complex land ownership (and limited Indigenous land ownership or Native Title) there is a strong role for Indigenous ranger groups and facilitating organisations such as Jagun Alliance. There has been an enthusiastic response to the fire workshops from landowners, and an appetite for investment by landholders in cultural/ecological burning with potential for significantly increasing the scale and quality of fire readiness (with cooperative with multiple landholders and agencies). Jagun Alliance's broad and partnership-based approach enables a "backbone" role and quick response that adds to existing efforts of RFS and other agencies.

Furthermore, by incorporating Cultural awareness training and education into the governance structures of institutions and volunteer groups, cross-cultural community relationships and communication barriers will improve into the future. (For further info see: The Green Paper: Principles for enhanced Collaboration between Land and Emergency Management Agencies and Indigenous Peoples was developed by Deakin University through funding from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC in 2021. The research was led by Michelle Mc Kemey, Timothy Neale and myself, Oliver Costello.

https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/managed/downloads/principles_for_enhanced_collaboration_between_em_agencies_and_indigenous_peoples_0.pdf