



**GREAT SOUTHERN (INLAND)  
REGIONAL DROUGHT  
RESILIENCE PLAN**

*report on*

**ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY  
CONSULTATIONS**



## 02 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

South Coast NRM, Keogh Bay and The Gillamii Centre respectfully acknowledge and pay respect to the Noongar Traditional Owners of the Great Southern on whose lands this report was developed. We collectively pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future, as well as their continued connection to culture, land, and waterways. We thank them for their patient contribution to this work.

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Cover image: Pincushion Hakea (*Hakea laurina*), Kingsley Bartlett.



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# 05 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Future Drought Fund Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP) program, jointly funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and WA's Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, aims to support regional organisations, local government, communities and industry to partner together to develop regional drought resilience plans.

Respondents' comments focussed, with great consistency, on the following major themes:

1. The connection between Noongar culture and the pre-contact ecology;
2. The substantial changes to the ecology since settlement, particularly:
  - a) Land clearing
  - b) Salination
  - c) Damage to sites
  - d) Damage to rivers and creeks
  - e) Changing climate and ecological responses
3. Underlying causes of these changes;
4. The impact of these changes on noongar people and culture;
5. What can be done to mitigate, or reverse these changes. The primary recommendations were:
  - a) Restoration of native landscapes
  - b) The participation of Noongar people in restorative projects and related work
  - c) Restoration of Noongar land management practices, especially burning
  - d) Education

This report will expand on each of these major themes, as far as possible in the respondents own words.



While this project focussed on drought and drying, the Noongar people consulted saw drought and drying in the context of a welter of changes to the natural environment in the Great Southern. It is not possible to represent their views on drought and drying without also discussing the wider issues they perceive.

In each section of this report, findings and recommendations are presented. These are listed below. Some findings and recommendations connect with findings in the broader Community Consultation Report for the inland Great Southern. Where there is a correspondence to this report, the relevant Strategic Priority and theme is identified.

*finding one* **EXISTENTIAL THREAT**

Drought Resilience planning should recognise that for Noongar people, drought is one of several linked factors that have damaged the foundation of Noongar identity and well-being. That foundation being a healthy natural environment.

Drought planning needs to recognise that for Noongar people there is already a crisis that goes beyond questions of resilience, productivity and adaptation to identity and cultural survival.

*finding two* **NOONGAR LANGUAGE**

Noongar people have a detailed knowledge of, and passion for the nature of the Great Southern. As a result, they should lead, be consulted and be involved in any restoration-related projects.

*finding three* **NOONGAR PRIMARY INTEREST IS NATIVE ECOLOGY**

Most Noongar people consulted are not farmers or owners of agricultural land. Their primary interests lie not in the management of farming businesses, but in the restoration of a natural ecology. Therefore, their environmental concerns extend beyond drought and drying to the overall decline of the native ecology in the Great Southern.

## *finding four* **RESTORATION WORK IS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

Many Noongar people manage the mental health impacts of trauma, poverty, racism and other disadvantages by spending time on Country. Most Noongar people view caring for Country as a strong cultural and personal obligation. Noongar control over, and participation in, restorative projects is a well-being measure that supports Noongar mental health.

## *finding five* **RESTORATION WORK IS CULTURAL MAINTENANCE**

Participation in restoration projects gets Noongar people out on Country. Spending time on Country helps Noongar people connect with the landscape and share cultural knowledge. These projects, in addition to their restorative benefits and mental health effects, are also mechanisms for the maintenance and transmission of Noongar culture. The maintenance and survival of Noongar culture has value for all Australians - not just Noongar people.

## *finding six* **A NOONGAR-FRIENDLY LANDOWNER NETWORK**

An innovative project to support Noongar cultural maintenance and relationships in the Great Southern might be to establish a “Noongar-friendly landowner network” willing to allow Noongar people to do some, or all, of the following on their land:

- Access remnant bushland
- Gather bush foods and medicines
- Run revegetation projects on parts of their land
- Take kangaroos and emus and other game
- Control feral animals
- Visit important sites and locations that may have previously been inaccessible
- Camp
- Conduct traditional burning in remnant native vegetation

A network like this has the potential to expand the Country accessible to Noongar people for traditional activities, build relationships with farmers, other landowners and land managers, to improve the overall cohesiveness and resilience of the Great Southern Community, and provide for advanced natural resource management.

*(Community Consultation Report for the inland Great Southern link: Strategic Priority 3, Theme 1)*

## *finding seven* **EXPANDED RESTORATION PROJECTS**

Drought resilience planning should include expanded and on-going support for native landscape restoration projects, led, managed, or involving Noongar people. A number of positive existing models are available, such as Ballogup, Gondwanalink, Nowanup, Badgebup and Mindaribin Reserve.

*(Community Consultation Report for the inland Great Southern link: Strategic Priority 2, Theme 2, 3)*

## *finding eight* **EDUCATION AND INFORMATION SHARING**

Many Noongar people consulted in this project valued the information gained from researchers and academics. Any restoration projects that form part of drought resilience planning should incorporate information sharing and on-going engagement between Noongar people and researchers.

## *finding nine* **YOUTH EDUCATION**

Drought resilience planning should include support for Noongar youth to undertake school-based traineeships in environmental management that involve participation or employment in projects that manage natural resources.

*finding ten*

## **EXPANDED TRADITIONAL BURNING**

Drought resilience planning should include support for the expansion of traditional Noongar burning to restore landscapes, reduce fuel loads and wildfire risk and support Noongar cultural maintenance.

*finding eleven*

## **BUILDING COLLABORATION**

Drought resilience planning should include support to increase collaboration between Noongar organisations, native title holders, farmers and natural resource management or Landcare groups, especially in the planning and conduct of land restoration projects.

*finding twelve*

## **OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESSES**

Drought resilience planning should consider options for expanding and supporting Noongar land ownership and businesses in consultation with organisations such as the South West Land and Sea Centre (SWALSC) and Noongar Land Enterprises.

*finding thirteen*

## **RANGERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

Drought resilience planning should aim to further support and expand existing Noongar organisations including Ranger programs, nurseries, seed collection and rehabilitation businesses, among others, to increase their capacity to offer environmental services and employ Noongar people.

*finding fourteen*

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Drought resilience planning should include provision for the on-going monitoring and evaluation of projects by Noongar people and researchers, especially projects such as traditional burning and restoration to improve methods and evaluate outcomes.

(Community Consultation Report for the inland Great Southern link: Strategic Priority 2, Theme 1)



# 11 INTRODUCTION

The Future Drought Fund Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP) program, jointly funded by the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and WA's Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, aims to support regional organisations, local government, communities and industry to partner together to develop regional drought resilience plans.

The Regional Drought Resilience Plan for the inland Great Southern will identify and guide actions to build the region's resilience to future droughts, with a focus on agriculture and allied industries. Regional drought resilience plans are community led plans, being developed in regions around Australia, that present the historical and expected future impacts of drought in the focal regions, based on the best available evidence. The plans will also contain an assessment of drought risk and adaptation pathways, based on expert input and extensive stakeholder consultation.

Finally, plans will include a pipeline of investible drought resilience projects that address the specific needs and priorities of agriculture and allied industries and inform future investments in drought resilience and agricultural adaptation in the regions. This report supports the development of the drought resilience plan for the inland Great Southern through provision of community consultation and stakeholder engagement which will contribute to the plan's development.

This report collates information from stakeholders in the Noongar Community of the Great Southern. Consultations addressed the following themes:

- preparing for, and being more resilient to, future droughts;
- building environmental, economic, and social resilience to droughts;
- identifying innovative and transformative drought projects to guide future investments;
- improving natural resource management.

While the focus of this project is on drought, the Noongar community has a more holistic perspective on the challenges faced by the environment of the Great Southern and the Noongar people who are connected with it.

Drought is seen as just one undesirable outcome arising from a small set of common underlying causes, each of which needs to be addressed if resilience is to be improved.

# 12 METHODOLOGY

## WHO WAS CONSULTED?

This consultation project aimed to meet a selection of Aboriginal community members and representatives from across the Great Southern, specifically:

- Senior Elders in the Noongar community able to provide a decades long perspective on climate and the impacts of changing climate on Noongar people, culture and Country;
- Noongar people whose livelihood depends on the land and reliable rainfall;
- Noongar people whose work gives them a special insight into the potential impacts of drought;
- The Tambellup Strong and Proud 2022 participants; a program which engages with Noongar Youth aged 11 - 17.

South Coast Natural Resource Management (South Coast NRM) provided an initial list of community members based on previous consultation and project work. Whenever Keogh Bay made contact with a person on the list, they were asked if they felt there were others that the consultation team should meet with. As a result, the list expanded and adapted, once consultations were underway.

Contact was made by phone, email and Facebook. Some consultations were done via video conference or phone, but the majority were conducted through face-to-face discussions during the week that the consultation team spent travelling in the Great Southern.

The consultation approach resulted in 18 senior Noongar people engaging in conversations between 20 May 2022 and 1 June 2022. The discussions typically lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours. These conversations were recorded and transcribed, producing more than 60 pages of text and commentary.



## **HOW WERE PEOPLE CONSULTED?**

The consultations were led by Kingsley Bartlett, a Noongar man from the Yued and Baladong regions near Perth. Kingsley has extensive experience in consultation projects around Australia and is skilled at making connections with community members and setting people at their ease. Kingsley asked most of the questions and led the discussion.

Kingsley was supported by Ashely Marjoram of The Gillamii Centre, Cranbrook. The Gillamii Centre was established to lead, inspire & support, productive agriculture, rural communities and healthy natural ecosystems. Ash has a detailed knowledge of the ecology and geography of the region and assisted in recording discussions in notes or on audio.

Consultations broadly followed the format shown in the Discussion Guide at Appendix A. Each discussion broadly followed these steps:

1. **SOCIAL CONTEXT:** Understanding where a community member fits in the community and in relation to the Country;
2. **CHANGES:** What, if any, changes has the community member noticed due to drought or drying climate;
3. **IMPACTS:** What have been the impacts or effects of these changes on the land, ecology, people and culture;
4. **WHAT CAN WE DO:** What options does the community member see to reduce the severity of these impacts?

## **TRADITIONAL CONNECTIONS OF INTERVIEWEES**

All of the Noongar people consulted in this project traced their traditional and contemporary connections to areas within the region bounded by the southern coastline between the towns of Denmark and Esperance and inland to the Stirling ranges and the towns of Cranbrook, Tambellup, Katanning, Kojonup, Gnowangerup, Jerramungup and Ravensthorpe.

Everyone consulted continues to live in the region, in or near one of the towns mentioned above.

## **RECORDING AND QUOTES**

Everyone interviewed for this project agreed to have their interview recorded on audio. As a result, this report has been able to make direct use of quotes to capture the concerns and opinions of Noongar stakeholders.

Where people have given explicit permission to use their name as the source of a specific quote we have done so. Where we do not have this explicit permission, quotes are used, but not credited to a specific person.

## 14 NOONGAR CULTURE AND PRE CLEARING ECOLOGY

Most of the Noongar people consulted for this project are in their 60s, 70s and 80s. This means that most people remember aspects of life that defined the Noongar experience in the 1940s, 50s and 60s.

These experiences include:

- Growing up on mission settlements such as the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) at Gnowangerup;
- Family survival through itinerant work on farms, grubbing roots, rock-picking, shearing and labouring;
- Poverty and continuing reliance on traditional food sources as well as introduced wild sources such as rabbits;
- Traumatic family separations and institutions

While some people touch on the traumatic nature of these times, most remember fondly their close contact with the land, the learning of traditional skills and the sense of a strong Noongar community and family life. Carol Peterson's early life captures some of these themes:

*“ I'm 81 years old, from the Knapp family, our apical home is here in Albany, and our traditional run is from Walpole to Esperance, however like a lot of them, we were forced into Gnowangerup mission.*

*That was only while my dad, who is a whiteman, went off to war and the Welfare came and got us. So I spent 3 years in the Gnowangerup mission and suffered all the stuff you read about with children in institutions.*

*But when dad came home from the war, he worked with other people and got the school going, so I grew up in Jerramungup, really traditional lifestyle living off the land. And that was all about survival we didn't dare come out into society because when mum and dad got married at that time it was against the law to co-habit black and white...*

*Mum and Dad had seventeen kids, but a wonderful childhood. We were part of the Jerramungup war settlement and we worked with the early settlers and their sheep.*

*We had an intimate connection with the plants and learnt how to track, learnt when not to touch things, they would never kill a doe in the spring because she would be carrying babies, we knew when to get the mallee eggs all that stuff all the cultural living out in the bush. I have great delight now in taking my great grandchildren out. But for me it was survival.*

These early experiences created a strong connection with a substantially more intact ecology than exists today. During those decades though, large areas of the Great Southern were being cleared for farming but many people remember large areas of intact woodland and mallee. The clearing often used Noongar labour – something that some project participants regret:

“ So we need to put back into the ground what the people have taken out, people say it is all the wayilbalas<sup>[1]</sup> fault - but our ancestors we actually helped with that, we were picking mallee roots as well, so we had something to do with that - we were involved, but we didn't know no better, but now we know, and we can plant these trees (Noongar Stakeholder 1).

Eugene Eades recalled a story of a relative who started a journey to Narrogin, after helping with clearing near Borden:

“ He went near the foot of the Stirlings and was camped having supper when, like a bucket of Sandalwood seeds fell over the fire, and then another. That was the start of the falling stones. He ran to his tent, but stones kept falling through the tent without leaving a hole. The next day, when he kept going the stones kept on falling from the sky. That was the spirits of the Old People coming to display a message, “They can clear the land, but don't clear it on sites of sacred significance.” But the Wayilbalas went for broke with farming, they just kept on clearing.

Respondents often contrast their memories of this intact ecology with the present situation:

“ It's gone from being able to search our creeks...for marron and things because now they are non-existent, but 45 years ago they were there. We used to go to Moodirup Lake catching marron. We used to go half way between Kojonup and Katanning and people were catching Marron. Tambellup Hall on the road to Collie...which is about 35 kms out - I used to catch Marron there.

Now the creeks just stink from rotten debris and top soil that has been flushed down through flood events when we do get them. Our people used to eat the turtle out of those rivers but wouldn't eat them today because that water just stinks, its rotten (Noongar Stakeholder 2).

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[1] A common Noongar terms for Anglo-Australians

Most people consulted as part of this project considered that it was their experiences of this time that gave them their understanding of the land, its animals and plants, and a direct connection with traditional Noongar culture:



*In my time I have seen huge changes...*

*See all the koonaks all gone where we used to go as kids in Tambellup, and turtles, gone, they can't cope with the salty water, they just die out. The last water rat I saw around here was around 1990 in the Carolup River. There is a beautiful pool there and I saw one swimming, that is the last time I saw one.*

*When I grew up in the 60s we were all one big group on the reserve, and those there at that time who were Elders, they were in their 60s. So that puts them back to the early 1900s when they were born - they have a connection with the 1880s. It's going to be unfortunate that these kids will grow up with McDonalds, phones, Facebook, that is going to be their culture you know. Sad for the next generation. (Noongar Stakeholder 3)*

*Those changes probably happened before our time from the stories that our parents told us, where they used to catch the marron. They used to do this and do that. It probably started to change halfway through their lifetime. Probably just before we were born, 60 years ago it started happening and if you look back through farming methods and techniques, that when the machinery got a lot more bigger and the clearing happened a lot quicker and undoubtedly connected to the drought season and the lack of rainfall we are starting to have (Noongar Stakeholder 2).*

The changes that people have observed over these decades are contrasted with these early experiences of Noongar life and a more intact ecology. The core problem for Noongar people is concisely stated by Ezzard Flowers:



*Through my upbringing I was connected to everything that is now endangered.*

This observation suggests that the degradation of the natural environment, through land clearing, and salination, worsened by global warming, higher temperatures and more frequent droughts and drying is an existential issue for Noongar people and culture.

Noongar cultural values connect substantially with a natural landscape - the disappearance of which is being hastened by drought and drying.

*finding one*

## EXISTENTIAL THREAT

Drought Resilience planning should recognise that for Noongar people, drought is one of several linked factors that have damaged the foundation of Noongar identity and well-being. That foundation being a healthy natural environment.

Drought planning needs to recognise that for Noongar people there is already a crisis that goes beyond questions of resilience, productivity and adaptation to identity and cultural survival.





# 19 THE CHANGES

The people consulted for this project made dozens of observations about change to the ecology of the Great Southern since their childhood. Drought, drying and warming are among the significant changes mentioned. Most of these changes were regarded negatively.

Everyone consulted in this project considered that, from their own observations, there had been considerable rainfall decline and warming in the last 50-60 years. Noongar Stakeholder 3 recalls their childhood:



*I have definitely noticed changes, as a kid growing up on the Noongar reserve in Tambellup in the 60s when the creek started to run – the Gordon River - it would go from the first rains right through to October you know. And I remember it was raining all the time you know. Sitting in a little tin humpy, looking out and think when will it stop raining you know? Or coming home from school you would get wet coming home, raining all the time.*

Most people connected the most negative changes with farming and land clearing:



*Definitely noticed the effects of clearing on drought. Clearing increases drought, they are all connected. I did a painting many years ago of mother earth. And I actually drew tears on it...and if you take your tears even when we cry, they are salty, and mother earth is very much the same.*

*We have gone from scarifier seeding to broadacre, so all the trees that used to be in the paddock have just been knocked away. It's just opened vast space. It's just crops, crops, crops. You don't get rain, you get wind and the top soil is gone, blown away into the creeks (Noongar Stakeholder 2).*

*Land clearing really affects the environment and its ability to retain water. Water runs off the land very fast and poisons creeks with the fertilizer or chemicals and silt. And it brings up the salt. You see algal blooms in a lot of creeks because of this. All the land clearing creates heat. It becomes too hot for condensation to happen and the soil dries out. These days I see a lot of trees dying because it is too dry (Ken Kelly).*

We have sought to plot in a mind map the ways in which people saw these changes. This mind map is attached to this report on an A3 sheet.

The red circles on the mind map are the underlying causes of change from the perspective of people interviewed. Broadacre farming and land clearing related to broadacre farming were perhaps the most consequential of these through habitat loss, wide-spread salination, siltation of streams and the regional destruction of native freshwater aquatic life.

On the face of it, these changes are not connected with the current purpose of examining the impacts of drought and drying. However, most people interviewed for this project strongly connected the loss of natural forest and woodland to reduced rainfall, erosion during times of drought due to exposed soils and loss of soil moisture, among other effects.

It is worth noting that it has been demonstrated scientifically that the loss of natural forests does affect the local water cycles exacerbating the broader reduction in rainfall due to climate change.

Noongar Stakeholder 3 made this point succinctly:



*Wherever you have more bush, you have more rainfall. Katanning is pretty fortunate to have a lot of bush, but you go to Kellerberrin you have hardly any bush round there. So more planting to bring back some rain.*

Global warming was cited by most people as a key underlying cause of the heating and drying they had witnessed, although most people considered that if there had been less land clearing its impacts would be less severe. The emphasis placed on land clearing suggests that most participants consider clearing a more significant factor as both a cause of drought and drying; and impact on ecology, than global warming.

Other significant underlying causes include the lack of traditional burning and introduced plants and animals.



Green ovals in the mind map indicate the specific observations that people mentioned that result from these underlying changes. Not all of the specific observations made in this project are shown on the mind map due to their sheer numbers. There were many others such as:



*But we have also seen, sometimes our little birds, our Chida, they have two or three lots of babies in one season, like our Jirrijirri [Willy wagtail] and our mudlark, even the kulbardis [magpie] have two lots of babies in the one season. They have been making the most of the hot summer and having their babies way later in the year than they should be. I don't know if it is a good thing if they go from hot weather to cold weather and these little babies aren't quite ready (Noongar Stakeholder 4).*

*You go looking around for payin, the little pigface, and the kurok and they are all changing because the seasons are getting warmer (Robbie Minter).*

The combined effects of these underlying causes add up to a regional collapse of the ecology that Noongar people and culture traditionally depended upon. They add up to the major observations repeated throughout this study (and shown in large ovals on the mind map) of:

1. The disappearance over a large region of the Great Southern of freshwater species;
2. The loss of key tree and plant species, and a range of bush foods and medicines;
3. The loss of estuarine species such as mullet and the changed behaviour of some ocean species such as salmon;
4. The loss of key fauna species;
5. Changing flowering, fruiting and breeding patterns.

It is noted in general that the broad observations people made about change, as well as the specific instances of change, mirror scientific observations on warming, rainfall decline, drought and species loss in the Great Southern over this time period.

Although most interviewee agreed with mainstream scientific observations of change, there were many comments that suggested a uniquely Noongar view of the natural world and the Noongar role in it. For example, Eugene Eades noted that:



*The moment Noongars got put out of the bush, things started to change...*

These observations suggest that Noongar spiritual presence and their practical management of the landscape are critical to the health and preservation of the Country.

Another interviewee speculated that some ceremonies and Cultural practices, including the playing of didgeridoo, had the effect of suppressing salt and now that these practices had ceased, salt had risen to the surface.

Many people expressed uncertainty and confusion about the causes of environmental change and the nature and extent of changes. For example:



*That is when I noticed that too, the salmon they don't move up as fast, they move up to Bremer Bay and then they stop there and when you catch them they are this long? So is that global warming, or is that the magnetic...I don't know. Or is it a natural phenomenon?  
(Carol Petersen)*

*Again I am not a scientist, but the world has been warming up since the ice-age, realistically, are we speeding it up as people, I don't know, maybe we are. I found when I boiled water that it gets to sort of a point, and then it boils quicker. Maybe we have reached that point where there is a number of people and the emissions maybe it's at that point where it is starting to accelerate. But I am not a scientist, just have traditional knowledge through to what I know (Noongar Stakeholder 2 and 5).*

*finding two*

## **NOONGAR KNOWLEDGE**

Noongar people have a detailed knowledge of, and passion for the nature of the Great Southern. As a result, they should lead, be consulted and be involved in any restoration-related projects.

*finding three*

## **NOONGAR PRIMARY INTEREST IS NATIVE ECOLOGY**

Most Noongar people consulted are not farmers or owners of agricultural land. Their primary interests lie not in the management of farming businesses, but in the restoration of a natural ecology. Therefore, their environmental concerns extend beyond drought and drying to the overall decline of the native ecology in the Great Southern.

## 23 IMPACTS ON NOONGAR PEOPLE AND CULTURE

All respondents had clear and consistent views on the impact of environmental changes, including drought and drying on Noongar people and Noongar culture. These views are founded in the deep conviction that a healthy native ecology is essential for Noongar health and wellbeing; the recreation and communication of Noongar culture and healing.

It is worth quoting from a number of interviewees to demonstrate the consistent perspective on personal and cultural impacts.

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*That is when I noticed that too, the salmon they don't move up as fast, they move up to Bremer Bay and then they stop there and when you catch them they are this long? So is that global warming, or is that the magnetic...I don't know. Or is it a natural phenomenon? (Carol Petersen).*

*Again I am not a scientist, but the world has been warming up since the ice-age, realistically, are we speeding it up as people, I don't know, maybe we are. I found when I boiled water that it gets to sort of a point, and then it boils quicker. Maybe we have reached that point where there is a number of people and the emissions maybe it's at that point where it is starting to accelerate. But I am not a scientist, just have traditional knowledge through to what I know (Noongar Stakeholder 2 and 5).*

^^

*Through my upbringing I was connected to everything that is now endangered (Ezzard Flowers).*

^^

Noongars now can only forage on the sides of the road and little parks and reserves, you can't access on farms, because they have cleared too much land. Only little pockets left. And the plants on the side of the road are not really good, just half a tree.

Before family used to go to that spot and have a big cook-up, we don't do that anymore. There is a disconnection between being on Country and our people, not necessarily to do with drought...We just know we got to go there, we just know we need to feel better...Now people keep it to themselves because there is not enough Noongar people going out to feel better, we don't do it as a group anymore. Everyone is protective of their spots. We never used to think anything of it. Which is sad (Cheryl James-Wallace).

^^

^^

*But for the Noongars used to be we could take the little kids bush but now you have to go miles to get a decent feed... A lot of the native foods that we used to have, a lot of the shrubs, goannas you hardly see them on the road, or a snake. Bobtails you hardly see them poor little slow fellas and the few you see on the side they are squashed. Yeah, the change of season puts everything out of whack (Noongar Stakeholders 6 and 7).*

^^

*Our cultural environment is being eroded because we can't find the products to teach our children. You can't find the fruits. I think the bandicoot and Nyingarn [echidna] are the only things around anymore (Carol Petersen).*

^^

When mum reckoned the rivers started to go salty that was about 1945. First taste of salt. And the Marron started to come out of the Gordon River, they used to have fish, marron, gilgies, turtles, and where they used to swim, there used to be a little canopy of trees and when we used to walk under there you would see the big holes where the koonaks used to be. But the Noongar way of life they used to move around and when they come back everything is nice and clean. Just carry the things they got, maybe a little horse and car there...but now all the food is gone, people could never go back to live the way they used to (Noongar Stakeholder 8 and John Farmer).

^^

Country is pretty important to us. I see the overload of community when it becomes part of someone it takes their wellbeing...I see young fellas who don't get out into the bush enough and it takes away their identity and they start to lose it (Robbie Miniter).

^^

These changes are definitely having an impact on families who don't have the capacity to go out, people who don't have licenses or forced removal of our children. A lot of families are drowning in grief and loss and sorrow. One of my Aunties, when she was alive her full family thrived, they went out bush, they had food in the back yard every Friday, Saturday and Sunday and all these different things and they was teaching us our culture. But when she passed...(Robbie Miniter).

^^

You go out and try to tell them [young people] about some bush lilies that would normally be there, but they are not there yet and you say, "Well this is a result of what is going on". Hopefully it is part of a cycle, maybe a 10-year cycle, but maybe it's a bigger problem. You don't want to stress out too much...young people generally don't...but when they become young adults, we might not have enough to show them (Larry Blight).

^^

^^

*You wonder about the future, I have grannies. What is it going to be like for them? Because soon you won't be able to go out on Country. We used to be able to go out on Country and light a fire and catch a fish and eat it. We still do it, but we do it less. We want to teach our kids how to survive out in the bush like our old people used to do, build a humpy, get your fire going, your fire in the right place. They are going to miss out, I am not getting any younger (Vernice Gillies).*

^^

*And it all goes back to when settlement happened, and they cleared this area and said that is my paddock. That area that was cleared was a significant Aboriginal site, our people jumped the fence to practice their customs and the minute they jumped the fence they got shot or got put in prison.*

*Unfortunately, our people have been forced to break the law to practice their customs and traditions. That is still happening today. We still shoot from the side of the road, but legally we can't. But what happens if we are in Kojonup and no farmer says we can shoot on his land. Well we got to shoot from the side of the road to get our meat. And next thing we know, we are in jail for shooting illegally.*

*And then you get the effect on what you do culturally. Personally, I don't bother getting marron no more. It is just too hard, the restrictions are too difficult, we can't access places where we can do it without the mob, so personally I just don't do it.*

*But if you are unable to connect in with Country because the food sources are not there, you can't show your kids...(Noongar Stakeholder 2).*

^^

*"It's just sadness I reckon. We want to take our kids out to show them what was important and now you take them and they're wondering why you're taking them because we can't find anything".*

*"You can't do it because you can't show your children, you have to go ask a farmer to go onto his property, to show them a Malleefowl nest".*

*"You should still be able to go show your kids" (Noongar Stakeholders 11 and 12).*

^^

The picture painted by these, and many other comments is the increasing difficulty of being Noongar, due to radical ecological decline and the disappearance or scarcity of key species that formed the foundation of Noongar cultural and family life. The effects of drought and drying amplify these pre-existing problems.

*finding four*

## **RESTORATION WORK IS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

Many Noongar people manage the mental health impacts of trauma, poverty, racism and other disadvantages by spending time on Country. Most Noongar people view caring for Country as a strong cultural and personal obligation. Noongar control over, and participation in, restorative projects is a well-being measure that supports Noongar mental health.

*finding five*

## **RESTORATION WORK IS CULTURAL MAINTENANCE**

Participation in restoration projects gets Noongar people out on Country. Spending time on Country helps Noongar people connect with the landscape and share cultural knowledge. These projects, in addition to their restorative benefits and mental health effects, are also mechanisms for the maintenance and transmission of Noongar culture. The maintenance and survival of Noongar culture has value for all Australians - not just Noongar people.

*finding six*

## **A NOONGAR-FRIENDLY LANDOWNER NETWORK**

An innovative project to support Noongar cultural maintenance and relationships in the Great Southern might be to establish a “Noongar-friendly landowner network” willing to allow Noongar people to do some, or all, of the following on their land:

- Access remnant bushland
- Gather bush foods and medicines
- Run revegetation projects on parts of their land
- Take kangaroos and emus and other game
- Control feral animals
- Visit important sites and locations that may have previously been inaccessible
- Camp
- Conduct traditional burning in remnant native vegetation

A network like this has the potential to expand the Country accessible to Noongar people for traditional activities, build relationships with farmers, other landowners and land managers to, improve the overall cohesiveness and resilience of the Great Southern Community, and provide for advanced natural resource management.

(Community Consultation Report for the inland Great Southern link: Strategic Priority 3, Theme 1)

# 27 BUILDING RESILIENCE

Just as the participants in this project had consistent views about the kinds of changes they have seen, and the impacts of these changes on Noongar people, they likewise have similar views on the best ways to build resilience.

The logic of these recommendations is straightforward. If the primary cause of these ecological changes, including drought and drying, is land clearing then:

- This process should be reversed by restoring the landscape with original species; and
- Noongar land management should be re-established where-ever possible, especially traditional burning; and
- Noongar people must be central participants or owners of this restoration process, because they believe it is their responsibility to care for and heal the land[2]. In doing so, it will help provide for personal healing, cultural maintenance, and employment. This participation should occur through expanded Ranger programs, projects like Gondwana Link (long term and landscape scale restoration projects) and Noongar land ownership.

Additionally, respondents felt it was important to:

- Address the causes of climate change through reduction in emissions; and
- Educate both the Noongar community and the wider community about the changes and potential solutions.

The following quotations provide a flavour of the comments offered by project participants concerning ways to build resilience:

## REVEGETATION

^^

*Hopefully with the planting of a huge number of plants creates more rainfall for us. I think that is the only way to stop it. If we do it that way it will save some of our significant areas. It won't do much in our lifetime, but in 3-4 generations to come they might get some benefit from it (Noongar Stakeholder 2).*

^^

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[2] Note that while Noongar respondents felt that caring for Country was a core value of Noongar culture, some respondents also made clear that the wider Australian society should take on this responsibility as well. Noongar Stakeholder 4 explained how, when talking to school children, he would say “You are all Minang now” in the hope that they would take up some of the land care responsibilities of Minang Noongar people.

^^

*I'd like to see us survey catchment areas and figure out how far to revegetate to make a kind of buffer to get streams and areas of land back to being healthy. I think the logging ban will help in some areas. We just need a lot more vegetation to cool the ground and allow for condensation, not evaporation. On the east side of the Stirlings there is a farm there that Gondwana Link has brought back and revegetated and now wedgetail eagles are breeding out there. So the number 1 thing for me is revegetation (Ken Kelly).*

^^

*I would love to see us working together to put things more back into the ground. Trees mainly because trees generate their own water, that way we will at least have half a chance, but if we keep taking away we will have a desert out here, but it won't be a sandy desert, it will be a salty desert. And you can't do anything with a salty desert, you can't make no Vegas out here, you can't even build on it (Noongar Stakeholder 1).*

^^

We don't do enough regeneration. Once you open up that land and you have x number of sheep per hectare, they eat everything don't they, its wide open to the elements and it gets dry and a wind comes through it blows away. And not blue gums, they just suck up the water. We have forests [of blue gums] here. They just suck up the water - they are a foreign plant.

We have to get the right plants back into the right areas. We need a lot of our natives back. We know our bush needs to have a burn. Dad was one of these fellas who use to go out and he used to chuck a match here and there. You know burn a little bit of the bush, next weekend he would go out and burn a little bit more and a little bit more. That was the normal practice. He learned that from his father and his grandfather. Keep that down, keep that fuel down (Noongar Stakeholder 9).

^^

But there are good things going on, there is a lot of seed collection and replanting and reveg especially at the Stirlings and you are starting to see where there are more trees planted you start to see more rainfall, so it is not all doom and gloom, the more you plant...That is one thing we have been saying for years because farmers are the ones that really notice it. The old school farmers couldn't give a damn at the time, but the young ones talk to us and we say, well those paddocks that you are not using, start replanting them (Noongar Stakeholder 4).

^^

When they cleared the land and all that stuff it just put everything right out brother, its sad but.... So if Gillamii and the other guys continue keep on regrowing and bringing back in the native animals and things that was here before, that will be our salvation you know. Then the water will hopefully be trapped from the rains you know, now it just runs off (Olivia Roberts and Glenda Williams).

^^

^^

*If we can start to look at preserving and better our natural water ways, buffers and taking the weeds, bridal weed that takes over and strangles everything, all those things that creep into disadvantaging the river system, making sure we have some control over testing the river system, we rely on those systems to provide for us, if we can manage better and working in a more collaborative approach between Gillamii and NRM [South Coast NRM] and NSP, we all working together to make that change otherwise we are going to see these things get worse. With the tree planting, who knows we might not be able to push the salt back down, but we might be able to push it more towards the positive (Robbie Minitier).*

^^

*I know there is one flat down here, where they planted the trees and I walked through there and the ground looks a bit healthier, down the back, other side of the garden, that looks real healthy, its Riverview. Noongar people got Johnny Lee, Mystic Park and Riverview [farms]. They planted a lot of the trees, and it is looking good. You can see all the yate and white gums that all died out, but they are starting to grow back (Noongar Stakeholder 8).*

^^



## NOONGAR LAND MANAGEMENT

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*Once, the first rain would be in May, and that's when we do fire burning, that is my family practice, as opposed to the fire authorities who do it in the spring when all the birds are nesting and bulbs are coming up, Oh it drives us mad... The fires are there because of the drought and clearing of the land is too much, the fires are a result of that, but are not the cause. We should not be afraid of fire (Carol Petersen).*

^^

*They need to do it right, a lot of them burning when they shouldn't. You know the mist is going to drop at sundown so that is when they should be doing it and not all at once, just spot burn here and there. It would be a blessing if old people have any passion to look after our land they should work together and they can go forward together knowing they will be doing it right. The Earth is our mother, we all need that, it's the source of life too (Noongar Stakeholders 6 and 7).*

^^

I think the Ranger program is a great program and it should be more offered and I go back to the Community Development and Employment Program, with a mutual obligation is far better than sitting around on NewStart, go and plant some trees during winter. Would be far more beneficial (Noongar Stakeholder 3).

^^

We live in a farming community so straight away I think of farming. If we had the opportunity to purchase 3-4000 acres of property, we can turn that into a profitable business and for the kids that don't want to go anywhere, they have a place to work, cropping animal husbandry, aquaculture and horticulture and become self sufficient. If you had one in here in Kojonup, Katanning, Gnowangerup, one in Tambellup, you could start a cooperative (Noongar Stakeholder 2).

^^

## EDUCATION

^^

*Educating our youth, more Rangers on the job to look after Country, when to burn and because they are there all the time they will know more effects. Oh! There was orchids here last year, but nothing this year? Taking a lot of photos and monitoring to see if things are changing. The Rangers at Badgebup are trained people and they can do a lot more... monitoring. Even working in nurseries and learning about plants (Noongar Stakeholder 10).*

^^

*We need this government to be the leaders in change. I think we need to get that into education and into schools to teach young people about the right way to farm and plant (Noongar Stakeholder 9).*

^^

*The biggest one is that it has to be brought into school curriculum, forget about sex education and religion and things like that, teach them about the Country. Living with the land as an everyday practice, things like, when we went from camp to camp, so we would break the leaves off the tree to make a bed, first job you have to do, and then you come back 12 months later and those trees were beautiful foliage, we used to prune them naturally. You look now they are tall and skinny. It was just part of our lifestyle, working with nature (Carol Petersen).*

^^

*I suppose education is the big one to help people cope. We need to know how things could change, the ice caps have been melting for some time now. Not to just put your head in the sand (Noongar Stakeholder 10).*

^^

## *finding seven* **EXPANDED RESTORATION PROJECTS**

Drought resilience planning should include expanded and on-going support for native landscape restoration projects, led, managed, or involving Noongar people. A number of positive existing models are available, such as Ballogup, Gondwanalink, Nowanup, Badgebup and Mindaribin Reserve.

(Community Consultation Report for the inland Great Southern link: Strategic Priority 2, Theme 2, 3)

*finding eight*

## **EDUCATION AND INFORMATION SHARING**

Many Noongar people consulted in this project valued the information gained from researchers and academics. Any restoration projects that form part of drought resilience planning should incorporate information sharing and on-going engagement between Noongar people and researchers.

*finding nine*

## **YOUTH EDUCATION**

Drought resilience planning should include support for Noongar youth to undertake school-based traineeships in environmental management that involve participation or employment in projects that manage natural resources.

*finding ten*

## **EXPANDED TRADITIONAL BURNING**

Drought resilience planning should include support for the expansion of traditional Noongar burning to restore landscapes, reduce fuel loads and wildfire risk and support Noongar cultural maintenance.

*finding eleven*

## **BUILDING COLLABORATION**

Drought resilience planning should include support to increase collaboration between Noongar organisations, native title holders, farmers and natural resource management or Landcare groups, especially in the planning and conduct of land restoration projects.

*finding twelve*

## **OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESSES**

Drought resilience planning should consider options for expanding and supporting Noongar land ownership and businesses in consultation with organisations such as the South West Land and Sea Centre (SWALSC) and Noongar Land Enterprises.

*finding thirteen*

## **RANGERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

Drought resilience planning should aim to further support and expand existing Noongar organisations including Ranger programs, nurseries, seed collection and rehabilitation businesses, among others, to increase their capacity to offer environmental services and employ Noongar people.

*finding fourteen*

## **EXPANDED TRADITIONAL BURNING**

Drought resilience planning should include provision for the on-going monitoring and evaluation of projects by Noongar people and researchers, especially projects such as traditional burning and restoration to improve methods and evaluate outcomes.

(Community Consultation Report for the inland Great Southern link: Strategic Priority 2, Theme 1)

# 34 APPENDIX A

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Consultants should aim to ask all of the following questions during the course of a conversation with the community member. Please do not treat as a check list.

### INTRODUCTORY – GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER QUESTIONS.

- Kingsley to introduce himself, along with Freya and Ashley.
- Whose your family? Do they belong to this area?
- Did you grow up around here?
- Do you spend a lot of time on Country?
- What kinds of things do you and your family do when they go bush?

### Changes from Drought and Drying

- Have you noticed changes from droughts or drier seasons? [Share information about recent drought, if the person seems interested]
- What sorts of changes in the Country have you seen?
  - o Have you seen changes to plants and the way they grow?
  - o Have you seen changes to rivers, creeks and swamps?
  - o Have you seen changes for the animals?
  - o Have you seen changes to bush foods and medicines?
  - o Have these changes affected important sites and places?
- When did you start noticing these changes?
- [If on Country] Can you show me some of these changes? [Take photos]

### Effects of these Changes

- How do you feel about these changes?
- Are these changes affecting you, your family or Noongar culture?
- Are these changes affecting your organisation, business or your farm [if representing one of these]

### Main Concerns

- What are the main things that really worry you about drought and drying climate?

## What can we do?

- Do you have any ideas for what we can do?
- You mentioned about [previous examples given] – what kind of help do you think is needed there?
- You also mentioned about [previous example] – how could the government help with that?

## Windup

- Thankyou for talking with us today.
- Is there anything else you want us to put in our report about drought, from an Aboriginal perspective?
- Do you mind if we take a photo with you to prove we didn't just sit around in the hotel?



# Appendix B - Map of causes, relationships and observations

- Arrows can be read as "contributes to"
- Red ovals are underlying or first causes
- Green ovals are specific observations
- Blue and grey ovals are intermediate causes

