

Kaurna burns return at Wirraparinga

The practice of managing Country with fire has returned to Wirraparinga (Brownhill Creek).

In April, the Firesticks team including Clem Newchurch, Paul Dixon Jr and Quahli Newchurch carried out a cultural burn in an area of Kangaroo Grass at Wirraparinga (Brownhill Creek) for the first time in hundreds of years.

Among those who attended these significant burns were involved Kaurna people, community members, students, politicians, and the Governor of South Australia, Her Excellency the Honorable Frances Adamson AC.

A throughline of continued respect and the need for increasing cultural practices on Country was delivered during speeches given by Ms Adamson, Clem Newchurch and Quahli Newchurch (Firesticks Alliance), Aunty Lynette Crocker and Ron Bellchambers (Brownhill Creek Association).

Kaurna Elder, Uncle Jeffrey Newchurch, has been involved with the area for several years, having first been engaged in efforts to stop a dam that had been proposed for the area.

He said engaging with several projects at Wirraparinga had allowed involved Kaurna members to build experience working with different community groups, organisations and government entities.

A previous celebration was held back in November 2023 for the ongoing restoration of an important Kaurna tree, named the Willawilla Karra Ku, which was acknowledged during the ceremony for the cultural burns.

"It's about when we have an influx of community groups supporting Kaurna and walking together on this journey of saving our environment and putting a position forward," Uncle Jeffrey said.

"It's allowed us to build our character and gain our confidence canvassing for Kaurna because it's always been a hard journey doing it alone.

"We had Aboriginal students here taking ownership for their backyard – it's a powerful and engrossing thing where they do feel ownership and feel important in it."

Cultural burns are often referred to as "cool fires" – low temperature burns usually lit at knee-height, which help germinate seeds in the soil.

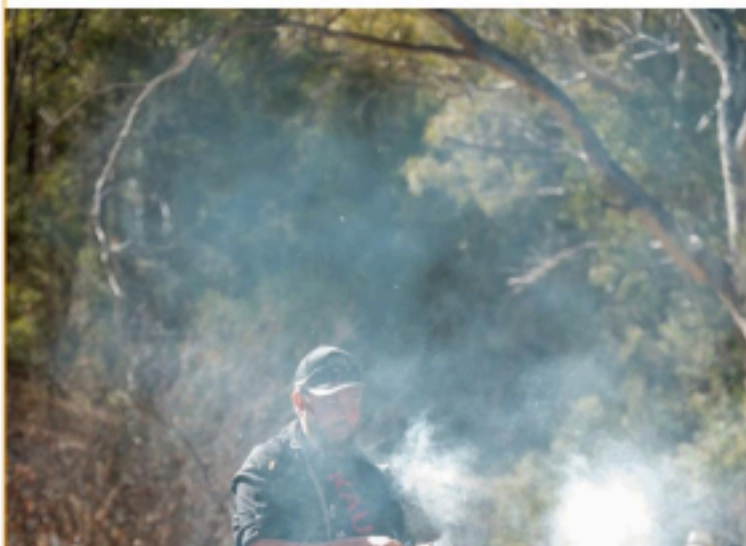
Ngarrindjeri and Kaurna man, Paul Dixon Jr, was part of the Firesticks Alliance team at Brownhill Creek and hopes continued burns can change the perceptions people have of fire and fire management in general.

"We've been down here on-and-off for the past year, finding spots to put fire onto the Country, which is something that hasn't been here for hundreds of years," Mr Dixon Jr said.

"These are native plants that evolved with fire, so it'll also kill off the invasive species that aren't used to it.

Cultural burns are referred to as "cool fires", low temperature burns usually lit below the knees that can also germinate seeds in the soil.

L-R Clem Newchurch, Dr Peta-Marie Standley, Merle Simpson, Governor of South Australia, Ron Bellchambers, Rebecca Simpson, Paul Dixon Jr, Quahli Newchurch.



A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF FIRE, BUT I THINK EVENTS LIKE TODAY CAN CHANGE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION ON WHAT FIRE IS AND HOW IT CAN BE USED TO LOOK AFTER COUNTRY."

It's all about Country telling us when it's the right time for fire."

Mr Dixon emphasised how careful consideration is given to all weather conditions before cultural burns to maximise the effectiveness of fire management and adherence of safety protocols.

"Today the conditions were a bit too dry; we were hoping for a bit of rain in the lead up but there was too much sunshine over the weekend, so we take this on board and leave it," he said.

Uncle Jeffrey Newchurch and Brownhill Creek Association Community Engagement Officer, Ron Bellchambers.

Kaurna Fire practitioner Paul Dixon Jr.

Brownhill Creek Association Community Engagement Officer and Project Manager, Ron Bellchambers, has been instrumental in leading the conservation and management of Brownhill Creek.

"Back in 2018, Willa Willa Karra Ku, the shelter tree was dying and came under development threat. We had an arborist report and consulted with other Kaurna Elders to find funding for the project," Mr Bellchambers said.

"It's more than seeing it as just one localised project, it's a matter of bringing all government agencies together. Agencies like Green Adelaide, National Parks and Wildlife Services SA, while also looking at the cultural assets around it."