

Global climate action in local Byron Shire

Dr Anne Stuart

Do you remember the ‘think global act local’ campaign? When this thinking spills over to a group of passionate volunteers who pit their actions toward making changes, supported by a local philanthropic group like the Northern Rivers Community Foundation (NRCF), you can really feel you are effecting critical change beyond your own neighbourhood.

The Northern Rivers Community Foundation saw the potential of harnessing local knowledge and building resilience through a collaboration between Zero Emissions Byron, Jagun Aboriginal Alliance Corporation, Madhima Gulgun, and Byron Shire Council to build capacity among key land management stakeholders to support and implement ecocultural fire across the Northern Rivers. The Ecocultural Fire Training for Biodiverse and Bushfire Resilient Communities was awarded \$25,000 from NRCF which will see 2025 as the year to deliver this exciting project.

The removal of Aboriginal fire from the Northern Rivers since colonisation has increased destructive wildfires that severely threaten the region’s unique biodiversity and undermine rural community resilience. Cultural fire management is an ancient, safe, and sustainable land management activity. Good fire is implemented by Aboriginal people primarily for maintaining and improving the health of Country, culture, its people, and kin. It follows protocols involving Elders and knowledge holders who lead and conduct burns in a way that recognises cultural lore and the health of Country.

Cool fire

Good fire, under the right conditions and with expert oversight, is cool, controlled and staged in mosaic patterns over several years. A guiding principle of the practice is right fire – right time – right country.

While there is growing community awareness of the need to restore cool, controlled burning for biodiversity, cultural revival, and bushfire resilience, it is hindered by a limited



Top: Jagun’s, Oliver Costell and Marcus Ferguson setting up a cool burn. Photo supplied

Above: Jagun and ZEB workshop with Dr Andy Baker. Photo Julie Ryan

Bottom: Woodlands cool fire October 2024. Photo supplied

understanding among land managers and landowners of how to implement such fire management programs.

Bushfire safety

Zero Emissions Byron has previously collaborated with Jagun Alliance Aboriginal Corporation and Byron Shire Council under grants from Ingrained and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, to improve community bushfire safety and continue connection to Country.

The document Good Fire – Healthy Country (<https://zero Byron.org/2023/07/13/good-fire-healthy-country-2023>) and the Good Fire Restoration Plan template, were prepared to support landowners implement fire restoration.

Zero Emissions Byron is excited to provide a far-sighted vision, combining Indigenous ways of caring for Country by befriending fire with emerging approaches for restoring open ecosystems degraded by

the absence of fire. This new collaborative professional development training package provides the basis for ongoing capacity building beyond this project and throughout the Northern Rivers region.

We applaud The Northern Rivers Community Foundation for their unwavering support and engagement with local issues, which translate to global outcomes.

Landholders interested in developing a Good Fire Plan can register an expression of interest to reinstate good fire for Country on the Byron Shire Council website and/or contact landuse@zero Byron.org for more information.

■ Dr Anne Stuart is Chair of Zero Emissions Byron.

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