

Project Description

Manjimup Shire, Western Australia

Exploring community-engaged processes for local fire management in a warming world for the Shire of Manjimup, WA.

Community partner: Warren Catchments Council

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See more: <https://www.futureearth.org.au/initiatives/community-science-sustainability>

The Challenge

Manjimup Shire is located in the south of Western Australia and has a population of around 9500 people across 4 towns. The Shire spans over 7000km² and encompasses forest, parts of Mount Lindsay National Park, and southern coastline. The region's economy was largely based in forestry (and still is to a degree), but is now known as Western Australia's Southern Food Bowl and also depends on tourism.

Warren Catchments Council (WCC) is a natural resource and landscape management group which has worked in the region for 30 years. WCC has worked over decades on programs pertaining to weed and pest control, public education, healthy waterways, and biosecurity. Climate change is impacting the community and the natural environment in the Shire and will touch on all aspects of WCC's work and as part of the community.

There is concern in the community about climate change, both in terms of taking action to mitigate emissions along with preparing for and managing the impacts on the region. There is growing concern particularly around water scarcity as the climate warms, coastal erosion, and a changing bushfire regime. While the local Council has taken actions such as investing in photovoltaic panels, there is a fear that their community may not be adequately prepared to manage the impacts of warming conditions.

The Manjimup Shire Council has committed (including financing) to developing a climate change action plan and community members would like to see the development and implementation of this plan involve collaboration with citizens, and inclusion of local values, priorities and strengths offered by the community.

The Warren Catchments Council would like to contribute to positive dialogue with the Shire Council as it prepares its climate change action plan. WCC seeks to demonstrate the strengths that come from drawing on community values, priorities, knowledge, and skills.

As we come into another fire season in 2020-21, WCC would like the project to focus on the way that community input can, in a warming world, assist local fire planning and management to better meet its multiple objectives of:

- Being effective in mitigating fire and managing the aftermath,
- Ensuring the conservation of biodiversity, and
- Being cost-effective

The Project

The WCC, on behalf of the Manjimup Shire community, would like help understanding how their local Council can engage with community values and strengths in local fire management, so they can engage in a constructive dialogue with Council about the role of community in developing and implementing its climate change action plan.

This will give Councillors and community suggestions on how they might work together on pathways for action, to contribute to a productive ongoing dialogue about how the community will protect its wellbeing in a warming climate.

This project will detail the approaches and/or mechanisms that local governments (ideally in Australia) have adopted to include the local community in planning, managing and adapting to bushfires in a warming world. This would be in pursuit of meeting multiple shared objectives of effective fire mitigation and management post-fires, ensuring the conservation of biodiversity and cost-effectiveness.

The project will be based in a rigorous methodology, but it is important that it be written for a lay audience so community members, Councillors and Council staff can all have a dialogue on how this may influence their activities.

Community Lead

Julian Sharp, Chairperson of WCC, is the project manager and will be supported by John Bailey, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Science at Murdoch University. Julian and John will co-design the project, facilitate community engagement, outreach for data and local knowledge to incorporate into the project. Julian and WCC also have long standing relationships with other organisations and members of the community, and local Councillors and Council staff, with whom the project can be shared.

WCC has been granted funds to undertake a series of community workshops across the Shire to map 'community wellbeing and resilience in a changing climate', which they will undertake with a local specialist. These workshops will elicit information on community preferences, values and priorities as they pertain to climate action planning. Data from these workshops may be useful in tailoring the content of the project outputs.

Scientist/Specialist Partner

The role of the scientist/specialist for this project will be to provide an overview of the approaches and mechanisms that Councillors and community members may consider to include community input into local fire planning and management in a warming climate. This will be one set of suggestions made in the context of the Manjimup Shire Council developing their climate change action plan.

Desired roles, skills and competencies:

- A governance expert (could be based in research or practice) who is well-acquainted with the opportunities and limitations to effective local government leadership in fire management and climate change action
- Understanding of the jurisdictional obligations for fire management in Australia, ideally also with knowledge of this in a West Australian context

- Ability to design and use comparative policy methodologies which can provide useful suggestions or ideas on how other Councils have successfully engaged the community to make their local fire management planning and practice effective
- Additional expertise in community engagement in governance, or bushfire management, is desirable
- A willingness to co-design the workplan and outputs with Warren Catchment Council and Future Earth Australia to best meet community objectives
- Ability to work online and communicate via videolink with Future Earth Australia and community partner
- Willingness to answer questions for non-scientific audiences and community members over a videocall when required
- Able to translate technical information to a lay audience
- Open to including students and early career people

Future Earth Australia asks all scientific/specialist partners to work with the community to help define a project with concrete local impact that they can contribute to as pro-bono volunteers and collaborators.

Timeline

This project will be undertaken over the course of 6 months, and the timeline and project plan is designed to be negotiated between all parties.