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## **Mentoring and certifying the next generation of Indigenous Fire Practitioners**

Indigenous communities are leading the healing of the country after the devastating bushfires of 2019/2020, supported by a new Cultural Fire Certification and assessment framework launched today.

Since the bushfires, Cultural Fire has been getting a voice on a national scale. Increasing demand for Cultural Fire services from Indigenous communities, councils, private landowners and agencies across Australia has highlighted the urgency to increase the professional workforce of Indigenous Fire Practitioners.

**“The Firesticks training and certification program is crucial to support our resilience as a nation. It’s about getting people out onto Country and using Good Fire to heal the land. Because we know when we improve the health of the landscapes, we improve its resilience against wildfires.”** said Victor Steffensen, who is leading the mentoring and training of Indigenous Fire Practitioners across the continent.

The Firesticks Alliance Indigenous Corporation provides on-going mentoring, knowledge exchanges and training certification programs for Indigenous communities. It is leading the development of the certification and assessment framework that will recognise and enhance Indigenous Fire Practices in Cultural Fire across 14 different country types.

**“This will then enable Indigenous Fire Practitioners across the continent to confidently conduct Cultural Burns on their Country, as part of their cultural obligations, as well as fee for service work with private and public landholders, bringing much-needed employment opportunities to Indigenous communities in regional and rural areas”** said Peta Standley, Training Services and Research Manager at Firesticks Alliance.

Suncorp is backing the new program and investing in the Firesticks Alliance at a critical time. Last year's Royal Commission into natural disasters showed there is a growing and broader recognition of the value of Indigenous land and fire management practices.

**“Australia has a long and devastating history with bushfires. We may not be able to prevent them, but we need to do more to protect communities and reduce the impacts. Cultural Burning practices have an important role in this which is why it’s critical the deep knowledge and land management techniques of the First Nations people of this continent are better utilised and preserved. Suncorp’s partnership with Firesticks will support these practices to continue and be expanded, with the Cultural**



**Fire Certification program also helping to create jobs, drive cultural connection and protect our environment and communities,” said Steve Johnston, Suncorp Group CEO.**

In April 2021, a pilot program launched in the Hunter Region of NSW with 43 Associate Indigenous Fire Practitioners enrolled to undertake the Firesticks certification program along with complementary Certificate III to Diploma qualifications.

**“Over the next three years we will see the Associate Indigenous Fire Practitioners spend over 150 days on Country, learning about different Country types, cultural site assessments, producing burn plans and reading maps for land management purposes, among other topics,”** Jessica Wegener said, Firesticks Alliance’s Learning and Certification Coordinator

**“We are finally getting the recognition that the old ways are the right way. This is how we used to do it for thousands of years, and we know it works.”** - Mick Smith, Awabakal, Biripi and Worimi man Associate Indigenous Fire Practitioner, Hunter Region

The partnership between Firesticks Alliance and Suncorp will formalise the Firesticks certification and assessment framework required to ensure the safety of people and country and leave a legacy of recognised and culturally certified Indigenous fire practitioners supporting increasing cultural fire mentoring and training in their communities.

With the support of Suncorp, the Firesticks Alliance aims to mentor and certify 100 Indigenous Fire Practitioners by 2023.

**ENDS**

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#### **About Firesticks Alliance**

For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have managed Country with fire, using fire sticks to light carefully timed burns in the right places to enhance the health of the land and its people.



The Firesticks Alliance is an Indigenous not for profit organisation that provides leadership, advocacy and action to protect, conserve and enhance cultural and natural values of people and Country through cultural fire and land management practices. Firesticks values and respects country, local knowledge, protocols of Elders and ancestors and are committed to providing a supportive Indigenous led network that fosters a community of practice to maintain and share Cultural fire knowledge and practice on Country.

The Firesticks Alliance partners with diverse communities, landholders, agencies and institutions across the continent. Together Firesticks is identifying pathways to apply cultural fire to landscape, to help heal and care for Country and empowering communities through mentorship and shared understandings that are improving fire management in Australia.

Firesticks Alliance pays our respects to the Kuku Thaypan Elders, the late Dr George Musgrave and the late Dr Tommy George, with Victor Steffensen, Mulong for their fire knowledge.

### **About Suncorp**

Suncorp Group offers insurance and banking products and services through some of Australia's and New Zealand's most recognisable brands. With a heritage dating back to 1902, we have grown to become an ASX-listed company with more than 13,000 people and \$97 billion in assets. Suncorp Group comprises three core businesses: Insurance (Australia), Suncorp Bank and Suncorp New Zealand.