Environmental Biosecurity Webinar of Butchulla Land and Sea Rangers (BLSR) with support from Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and Department of Environment and Science (DES) Transcript

The Butchulla Land and Sea Rangers (BLSR)

The Indigenous Forest Health and Environmental Biosecurity Project

Presented in 2023

**Presented by:**

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[*Opening visual of slide with text saying, ‘The Indigenous Forest Health and Environmental Biosecurity Project with photo,’* ‘*The Butchulla Land and Sea Rangers (BLSR)*,’ *‘Webinar 3 – Overview’, ‘2023*]

**Tilly:**

Nara that's ‘hello’ in Butchulla language.

I just want to acknowledge Butchulla country and the elders and custodians of this beautiful country that I live on and work from a lot the time. And same for AJ's country and his ancestors and his people. I'm really quite blessed to be working down on that beautiful country as well in this new role in the biosecurity space.

That was my acknowledgment slide. So that's just a photo of AJ, myself, Christie, and Mel our boss. And about who we are and our roles in this project. So, I want to start off this presentation by giving a bit of background and talk about the importance of this project that we're delivering.

So, if you didn't know, 50% of the National Reserve System is managed by Indigenous groups under the federally funded Indigenous Protected Areas Program, and that's not including the other lands captured under joint management with Parks and other stakeholders. Country is the centre of culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which is ingrained through connection, story, language, and law.

So, it's really, really imperative to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and custodians on the ground. And when it comes to exotic pests and diseases, things like myrtle rust, it has the potential to significantly impact country and culture and already is, already has and already is. We're aiming to have a greater understanding of these impacts and broaden that, raise awareness of that.

With this understanding of practicing culture and cultural custodianship when it comes to land management, it's important to start to build the capacity in the biosecurity space and provide the opportunity for input from First Nations people capturing information on the ground. There are very limited communication pathways from industries and government to Indigenous groups managing the majority of our continent's biodiversity. And we're working together on building this program and are aiming to build and establish this.

As you know, we're starting, but there's a long way to go. So, our program is aiming to build the capacity and awareness within our own communities and broader about the threats to country and culture and therefore community. On-country First Nations Ranger teams are managing these pests and diseases as one of their main focuses and Myrtle Rust is a good example of that. Exploring ways that we can combine Indigenous knowledges and sciences with Western and also capturing like the work that we see with the Bunya Peoples Aboriginal Corporation (BPAC).

We see the Indigenous rangers there are doing work with non-native Phytophthora dieback in the most sacred Bunya Pines, and that is really significant to not just the Wakka Wakka people but people, neighbouring nations, including Butchella and far beyond even into AJ's country. We just delivered a Forest Health and Environmental Biosecurity Training Workshop with the Bunya Peoples Aboriginal Corporation, which was really exciting and we're about to host another here on Butchella Country with a broad range of groups, Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, even on neighbouring country and communities.

So, we're doing this to better inform because, you know, we know our rangers, everyone knows about the weeds, everyone knows about the pest animals, but these pest insects and diseases that we're seeing in trees that's not so widely known about. So, increasing that awareness and capacity to report and respond. Another thing that's really important with this is giving that space to discuss and understand and even document where appropriate the cultural significance of specific species that are threatened and how those threats then impact our ability to practice culture, which I'll talk about a little more later, and also to help develop tool kits for groups on the ground to monitor and report and then explore management options and helping to develop awareness material.

That's another one that we're working on. We're working on fliers at the moment. Also, how to understand the current shape and model of teams and what environmental programs projects they are delivering and look at how to integrate and better support around biosecurity threats.

And we are hoping to get a better understanding within this project and build an Indigenous network within this continent and also through to Aotearoa in New Zealand with the Māori tribe. This is just a bit about what we've done. We've worked with Dr. Geoff Pegg. He's helping us with this project and he's a wonderful partner in this project with that, we have recorded the ‘Myrtle Rust The Silent Killer’ documentary, and here we've got Uncle Shannon here, who's from Bunya Peoples Aboriginal Corp, and we're recording a part two in a way which will be very exciting.

So, what we're doing is understanding what existing tools and information groups have co-designed. And we've also got a fire map here on the bottom right to mimic the purpose of pests and disease and distribution and things like that. It's important to have these conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to really get that deeper understanding because, you know, culture for us provides guidance and management of country through, law, language, story, totemic systems, and kinship.

And this land has been managed by First Nations people for over 60,000 years and it has only really taken since colonization for that's for know what we see today. The amount of damage that we see on country today in just a couple of hundred years is pretty devastating really. So, it is really wonderful, everything that's happening, you know, in a science community and in the environmental protection community, it's wonderful.

But what we're asking, we are seeing the beginnings of involving and engaging and highlighting First nations peoples and knowledges. But we want to see that centred because really, even though, you know, all these biosecurity threats that we're seeing now are introduced and only been here recently, traditional land management strategies can be adapted and it's an adapting culture.

Our culture is adapting, and we can adapt our traditional land management methods to better protect country from pests and diseases too. So, we need to move on from this disproportionate set up and create an inclusive, holistic approach. And only recently has the science community really started to grasp and understand the importance of this role and the importance of traditional ecological knowledge.

So, I'm going to talk a bit about impacts on country, culture, and community. Talking about Myrtle Rust specifically. Some of you may have heard me talk about this in previous presentations. So, on the left here, you can see this elder lily pilly, at death's door due to Myrtle Rust infection and in the in the picture across that's this site at Tallebudgera on Yugambeh, Kombumerri country and you can just see that it's absolutely devastating the whole understory of this site is dead or dying, mostly dead.

And it's really tragic walking there. You're just walking over these trees that are just piled up. And really eerie too, because especially in the springtime, where you should be smelling nectar, you should be hearing birds and insects. You know orchestras of bird and insects pollinating away and having their feeds. It's just not happening. And there's so many flow on effects to this.

So, you know, the Myrtaceae here in this forest is a key species and there's so many with this loss, you know, there's the risk of fire, and especially with the dead trees that are still standing, creating a ladder to the canopy above that is living. Yes, absolutely huge risk for wildfire as well as there's a beautiful creek downhill from this site and the erosion that, you know, without the roots systems holding these together.

So, one thing I want to highlight to you is that country, culture, and community, they're all connected. We're not separate, and myrtle rust impacts the health of country, impacting our ability to practice culture and the overall health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities. And I want to go into some examples of that. So, these are just a few. We've got blackbutt up here, this first one, the resource one.

Well, all of these are very overlapping, but you see here we've got resources, resources, tangible and intangible cultural values, resources for ceremony, shelter, tools, weapons, everything. We've got seasonal indicators, which is country communicating to custodians about the times, when it's time to fish, when it's time, all these different things. And that that sacred practice of communicating with country through seasonal indicators is being disrupted not only by climate change, but by threats like Myrtle Rust.

Our food is being impacted. And that's not just our food, that's our animal kins food, medicine, the spiritual significance, and stories associated with these species. Again, that intangible value and cultural heritage, there like, arrow tree on K’gari. And then all of that overlaps into totemic significance. You know, not only are these plant species totems, but the totem animals that depend on these species, it just, yeah, it impacts absolutely everything.

There's no way to dissect and label, box, and separate this. When it comes to country and culture, it's all interconnected. There's no separating it. Through this project, as I said before, combining Indigenous knowledge systems and sciences with western science and centring cultural custodianship, I believe hold solutions in the future. So, it's a shared responsibility. You know, like the first Butchulla law, caring for country, what's good for country comes first.

It's all our responsibility. I think that one speaks for itself. You can just have a read of that one, but I just want to acknowledge that yes, our program is supported through CEBO and we're hoping to continue this partnership and the growing collaborations, especially with the Māori in Aotearoa. Yeah, Thank you. Thank you for listening.

[End of Transcript]