LIVING WITH WILDFIRE AT THE WUI
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
CALIFORNIA AND NEW SOUTH WALES

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bushfire CRC

'GENDER AND WILDFIRE AT THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE'
BY CHRISTINE ERIKSEN (FORTHCOMING), NEW YORK : ROUTLEDGE

FIRE DANGER TODAY
LOW MODERATE HIGH VERY HIGH EXTREME
NO FIRES WITHOUT A PERMIT

NSW Southern Tablelands

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"Black Saturday" VIC

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No Smoking or Fires
Violators may be fined $541

Angeles National Forest / Los Angeles) CA

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THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE:
AMENITY RICH BUT BUSHFIRE PRONE LANDSCAPES

California

New South Wales

THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF BUSHFIRE

"The mythical building up of the bushfire volunteer …it's very important that we always have that mythical icon. It has to be male. We cannot have, I mean, women bake the scones and sell them to raise money but we must have that icon. Bushfire always gives us that."

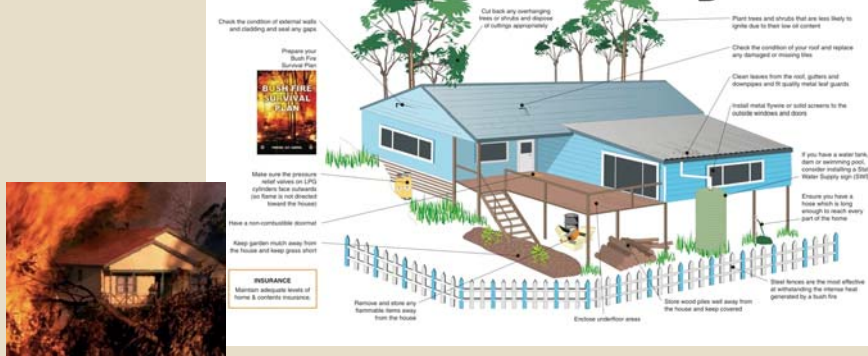('Nicola', NSW, Feb 2009)

(RE)NEGOTIATING GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF BUSHFIRE

- Gender roles and gendered norms structure women's and men's level of risk tolerance, risk engagement and risk resilience
- Bushfire awareness and actions as 'explicitly gendered social experiences' (Enarson 2012)
- Gender awareness has rarely informed bushfire management policy, practice and outreach programs

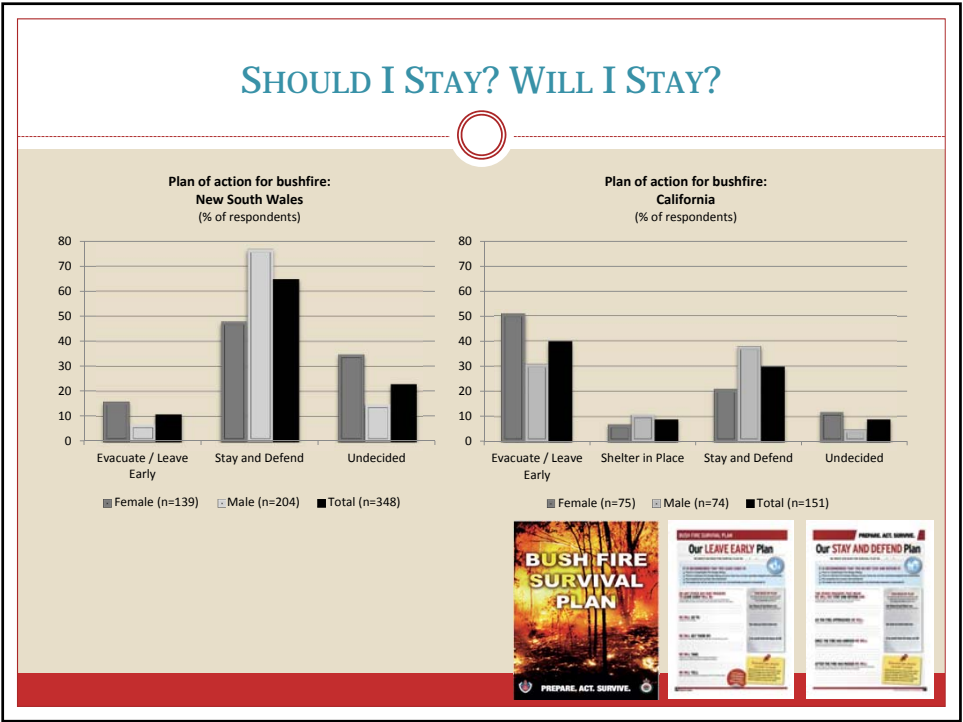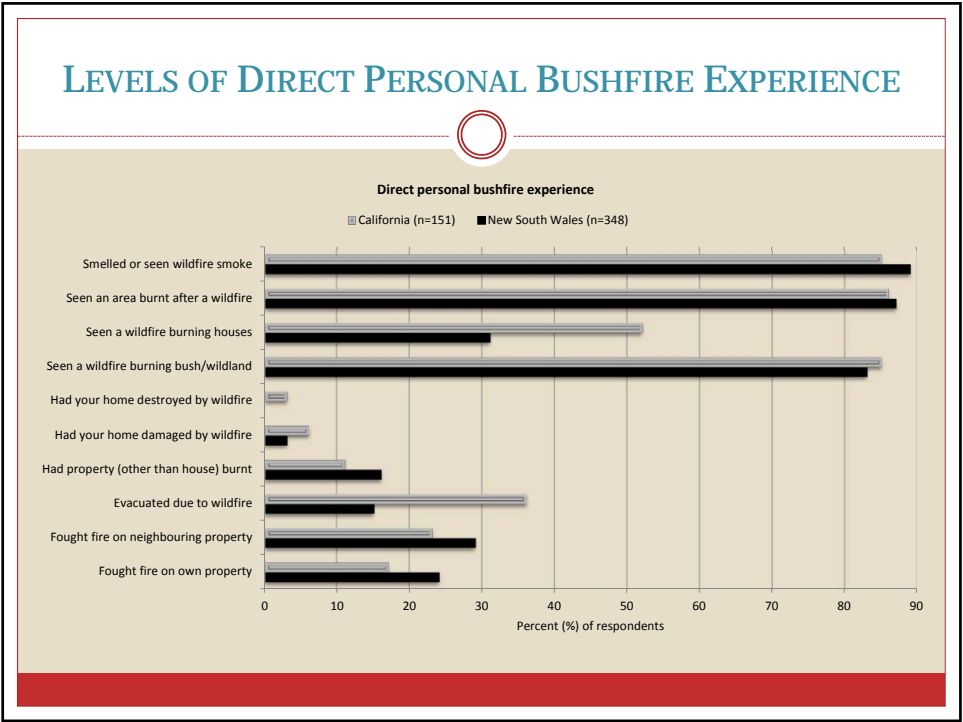## HOME: A GENDERED DOMAIN. A PLACE OF SAFETY?

PERCEIVED LEVELS OF BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

NSW n = 348 CA n = 151	Satisfactory - Very (Percent of gender)				Not at all – A little (Percent of gender)				Don't know (Percent of gender)			
	NSW		CA		NSW		CA		NSW		CA	
F = female M = male	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Perceived level of personal wildfire preparedness	67	77	92	84	22	29	8	16	4	1	0	0
Perceived level of local community's wildfire preparedness	50	42	38	22	26	44	62	78	24	14	0	0

PERCEIVED LEVELS OF BUSHFIRE THREAT

New South Wales n = 348 California n = 151	High – Extreme (%)		Low – Moderate (%)		No threat (%)		No response (%)	
	NSW	CA	NSW	CA	NSW	CA	NSW	CA
Perceived level of wildfire threat to private property	39	56	58	32	2	1	1	11
Perceived level of wildfire threat to local area	66	79	33	11	0.5	0	0.5	10

LEVELS OF DIRECT PERSONAL BUSHFIRE EXPERIENCE

Direct personal bushfire experience

California (n=151)   New South Wales (n=348)

SHOULD I STAY? WILL I STAY?

GENDERED SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

"The biggest fear is that he's out somewhere. There is no mobile range here. Once I phoned up to say there is a lot of smoke and I can smell burning, where's it from? I was obviously by myself, I think I had one of the kids with me. Like, you've got to be able to talk to somebody. Like, what do I do? I can't even turn on the pumps. I have to have him telling me what to do!"

(Female, NSW, Feb 2009)

BUSHFIRE FATALITIES IN AUSTRALIA HISTORICALLY

- Men accounted for the majority of bushfire related deaths between 1900 – 2008 - Haynes et al. (2010)
  - Most died outside while attempting to protect assets
- Male fatalities have decreased since 1955
- Female fatalities have increased since 1955
  - Most died while sheltering passively or evacuating
- Despite changing social circumstances the gender distribution of "Black Saturday" fatalities in 2009 were 'generally similar' - Handmer et al. (2010)
- Clear correlation between women's and men's intended actions today and the gender split in actual activities at time of death historically

"IT'S NOT FIREWOMEN, IT'S FIREMEN"

[Wife] "Talking to people in town, women seem much less concerned about bushfire or thinking about it than men in general. I know it's a generalisation but..."

[Husband] "Well fire fighters, it's not firewomen, it's firemen."

[Wife] "I'll make them as many sandwiches as they like but I'm not going out into a bushfire and fighting it."

[Husband] "I can move that fallen log a lot easier and chainsaw it up and get rid of it than [my wife] could. That's just a physical reality you have to understand."

[Wife] "Maybe women are more willing to just let things go".

[Husband] "But I don't' consider what's for dinner tonight, ever! So you know, like, it's a gender phenomena and maybe it's conditioning, maybe it's cultural, I don't know."

[Wife] "We certainly know that we embrace the stereotypes of male and female roles on the land out here: you do outside stuff, I do inside stuff. Like, we're very stereotypical in our roles in that sense."

(Couple in their early 40s, NSW, January 2009)

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS AND EVERYDAY TRADEOFFS

• To increase resilience to bushfire at the rural-urban interface a more explicit link is needed between:

  o Everyday choices and bushfire management

  o Gender roles, gendered norms and bushfire vulnerability

  o Learning processes and the way people make decisions about preparing for bushfire

PUBLICATIONS ON RESEARCH RESULTS

C. Eriksen (forthcoming)
Gender and Wildfire at the Wildland-Urban Interface
New York: Routledge

C. Eriksen, N. Gill & L. Head (2010)
The Gendered Dimensions of Bushfire in Changing Rural Landscapes in Australia
Journal of Rural Studies, 26(4), pp. 332-342

C. Eriksen & N. Gill (2010)
Bushfire and Everyday Life: Examining the Awareness-Action 'Gap' in Changing Rural Landscapes
Geoforum, 41(5), pp. 814-825

C. Eriksen & T. Prior (2011)
The Art of Learning: Wildfire, Amenity Migration and Local Environmental Knowledge
International Journal of Wildland Fire, 20(4), pp. 612-624

C. Eriksen, N. Gill & R. Bradstock (2011)
Trial by Fire: Natural Hazards, Mixed Methods and Cultural Research
Australian Geographer, 42(1), pp. 19-40