

# Prescribed burning in temperate peri-urban Australia: how and why is the decision to burn made?

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# Why peri-urban?

- Complex decision making arena
  - Fragmented land use
  - Multiple values
  - Socially and environmentally dynamic
- Often fire prone regions which juxtapose human lives and assets with high or extreme bushfire risk
- Prescribed burning, especially on public lands, a contentious issue

# A peri-urban landscape



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# Research questions

- How and why are prescribed burning decisions made in temperate Australian peri-urban environments?
- What values, ideas and attitudes inform these decisions?
- How can the social legitimacy of decision-making be improved?

# What is 'social legitimacy' and what of it?

*'...the capacity of those affected by a collective decision to deliberate in the production of that decision'* (Dryzek & List 2003)

Desirable because:

- Accords with democratic ethic
- More efficient policy and decision-making
- Helps us deal with the uncertainty inherent in all decision making; including prescribed burning

# Uncertainty in decision-making: policy responses

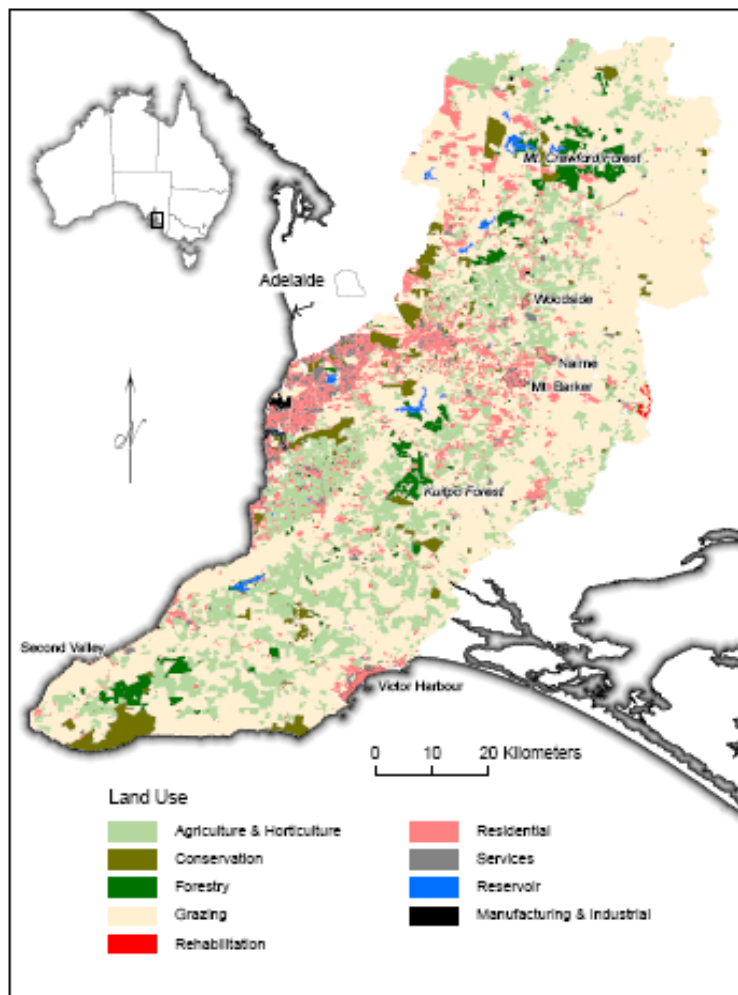
- Emphasis on public participation
- Regionalism, subsidiarity and decentralisation of governance
  - e.g. Natural Resource Management Boards
- Adaptive management

# Research methods

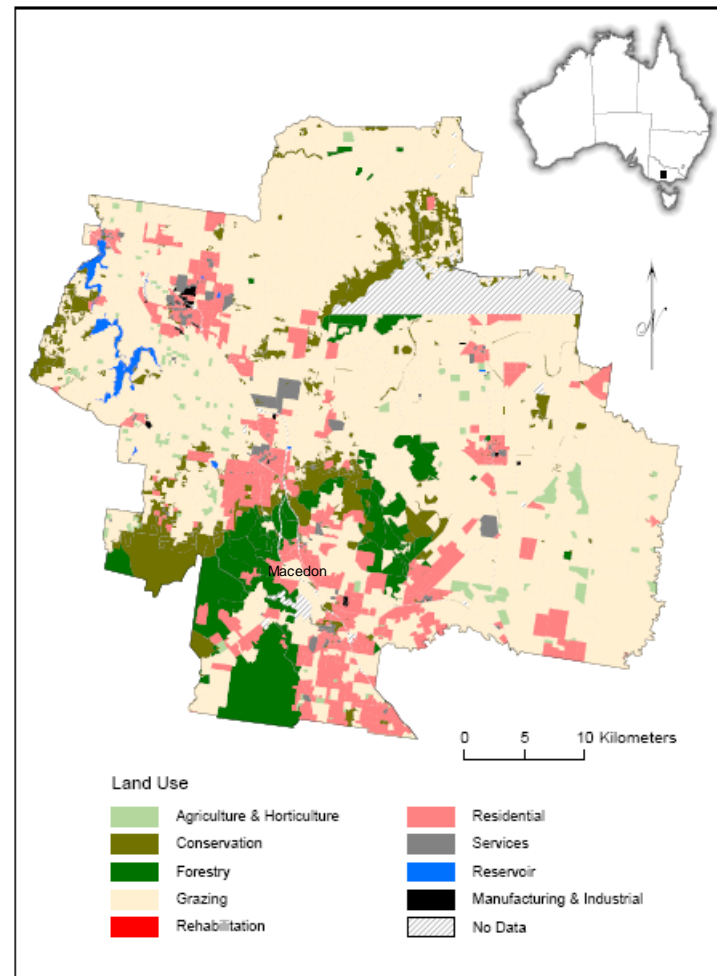
- Case study strategy
  - Mt. Lofty Ranges, South Australia
  - Macedon Ranges, Victoria
- Qualitative methods
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - Participant observation
  - Grey literature

# Case study locations

## Mt. Lofty Ranges

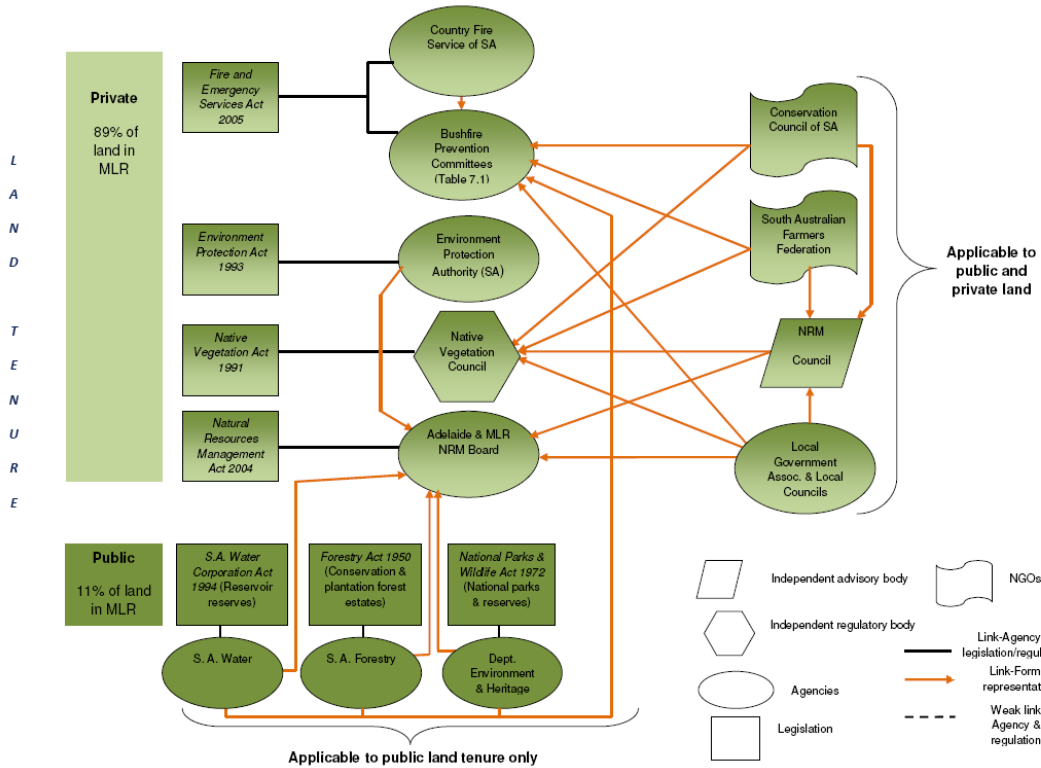


## Macedon Ranges

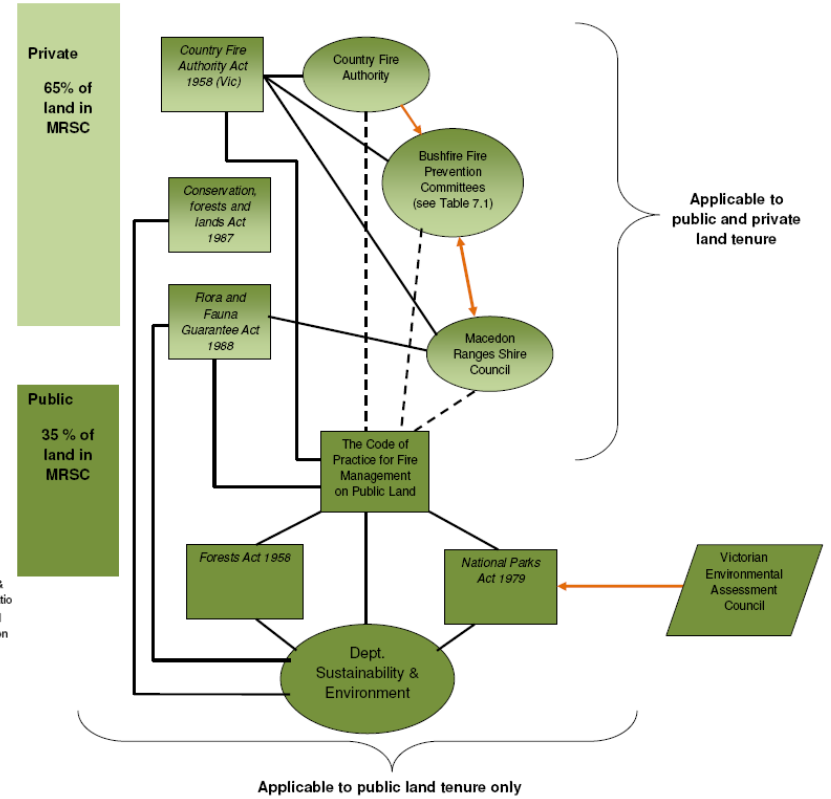


# How: governance compared

## Mount Lofty Ranges



## Macedon Ranges



# How: public land

## **Mt. Lofty Ranges (SA)**

- Three main public land agencies Dept. Environment & Heritage, Forestry SA, SA Water (+ CFS)
- Native vegetation laws
  - Inclusion of NGOs (S A Farmers Federation & Conservation Council S A)
- Limited public consultation
- Use of Fuel Management Zones

## **Macedon Ranges (Vic)**

- Only one agency, Dept. Sustainability and Environment (+ CFA)
- Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Land
  - Formal consultation process
- Use of Fuel Management Zones

# Why: public land

- In both regions bushfire hazard reduction is driving prescribed burning
  - Influence of major bushfires
    - for example ACT/Victorian Alpine fires 2003 & Wangary (S A) fires 2005
  - Results from bushfire inquiries
  - Role of science-especially regarding fire behaviour
    - McCarthy and Tolhurst (2004) , Gould *et al.* (2007)
  - Increasing extent of peri-urban environments and urban expansion

# Values, ideas and attitudes

- Continuing environmental concerns
- Pre-European ideals persist in some quarters
- Expectations of increased bushfire frequency and intensity associated with climate change
- Evidence to support bushfire suppression benefits of fuel reduction burning growing (Gould *et al* 2007)

# Reforms and issues

- Prescribed burning as a core natural resource management issue
- Participatory opportunities at the planning stage, when objectives are set
- A need for *tenure blind* planning
- Reform to native vegetation laws in South Australia?

# Acknowledgements

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# Questions?

