

Climate change: impact on country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture

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Key points

- The chapter aims to provide better mechanisms for incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into climate change discussions and dialogue.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of country are explored as an important contribution to the climate change debate.
- Strength-based approaches to effectively tackle climate change will require humans overcoming disconnections from our ecosystems and moving to approaches that embrace cultural and ecosystem diversity.
- Key strategies mentioned for ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives are incorporated revolve around respect, collaboration, reciprocity (two-way learning), resilience, community control, better understanding of Indigenous models of health and the environment.
- Clear recommendations have been provided for social/cultural, economic and spiritual action to assist services and individuals to better integrate diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems.

Introduction

Prior to colonisation in 1788 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population had the primary responsibility for managing 100% of Australian ecosystems. Now that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people totals less than 4% of the entire Australian population, traditional methods of ecosystem management have been severely disrupted and are excluded from current climate change debates. Throughout this chapter Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the preferred terminology to represent the diverse and distinct populations across the Australian continent that are collectively known as the First Peoples of Australia. The term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' recognises the two different Indigenous populations of Australia: Aboriginal people on mainland Australia and in the island state of Tasmania, and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have occupied islands between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea for thousands of years. The term 'indigenous' is an international term and refers