



Charles Sturt  
University

# Social worker capability in disaster practice

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# Presentation overview

- EcoSocial Work (ESW) framework
- Building social worker capability in disaster practice
  - Multi-pronged methods
  - Strategies and approaches
- Field education exemplar
  - Decolonising disaster practice
  - Transformative change in disaster practice
- Challenges and concluding thoughts





# Ecosocial Work (ESW) framework

Proactive approach to disaster practice by adopting an ESW framework

- Creating and maintaining a healthy, sustainable and biodiverse ecosystem
- Understanding the interdependence between human and environmental wellbeing
- Concerned with injustice caused by the unfair distribution of environmental risks

# Program of disaster practice

- Building social worker capability in disaster practice
- Multi-pronged approach to building social work capability in disaster resilience
- Nexus between research, education and community engagement



# Specific program activities

## Practitioners

- Online, free, short course on disaster preparedness
- Action research with human service organisations
- Action research with social work practitioners
- Contributed to professional CPD course with national professional body
- Various speaking events with practice groups, podcasts, media etc.

## Students

- Compulsory Eco-Social Work (ESW) course
- Suite of elective courses focusing on environmental sustainability and disaster practice
- Embedded ESW throughout courses
- International study abroad programs
- Voluntary online course (Boetto & Bell, 2015)
- Field education opportunities\*

# Disaster practice: Field education placement

- Established relationship with Peta
- Established relationship with agency
  - State government department responsible for disaster resilience (Resilience NSW)
- Requirements:
  - 500 hours Research focus
  - Weekly supervision
  - Assessment items

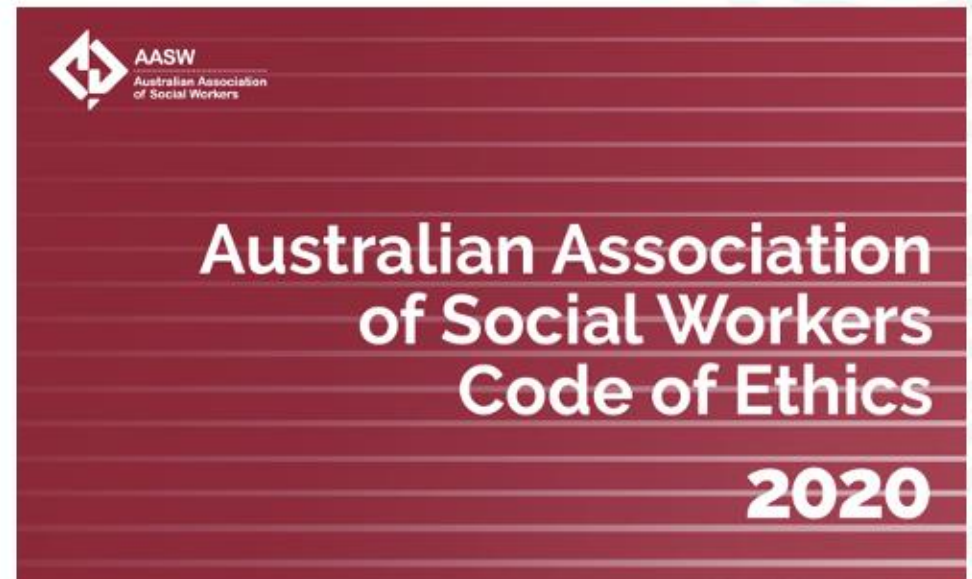


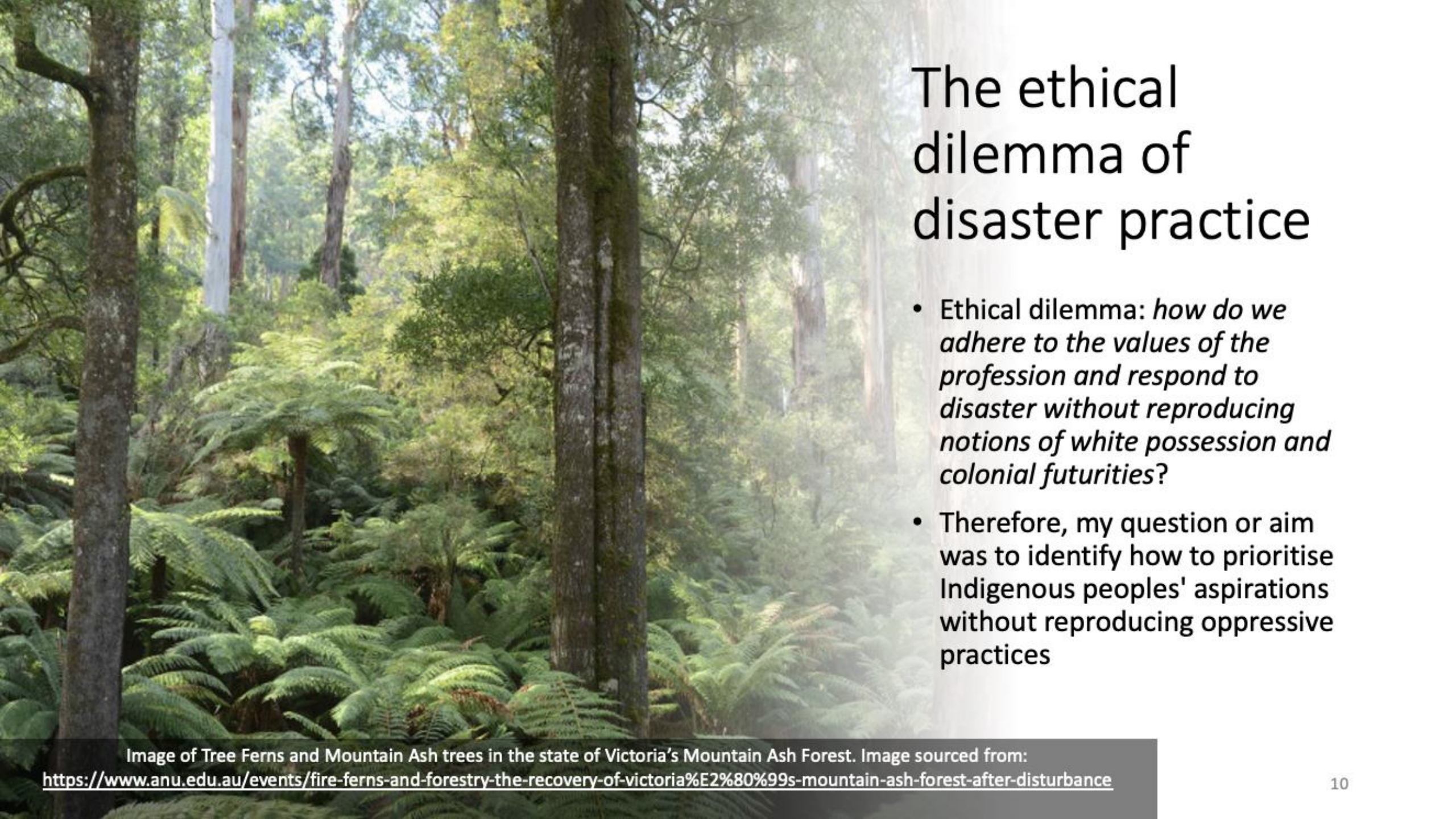
# Activities undertaken on placement

- Co-developed learning activities and learning plan
- At the request of the Director of Resilience NSW
  - what might recovery look like?
  - what can we learn from past experiences of disaster?
- AASW Code of Ethics (2020), and review of Practice Standards (2021)
  - Learning activity examples included: Identify and ethical dilemma and reflect on professional identity



*Practice Standards*





# The ethical dilemma of disaster practice

- Ethical dilemma: *how do we adhere to the values of the profession and respond to disaster without reproducing notions of white possession and colonial futurities?*
- Therefore, my question or aim was to identify how to prioritise Indigenous peoples' aspirations without reproducing oppressive practices



# Examples of colonialism in disaster practices

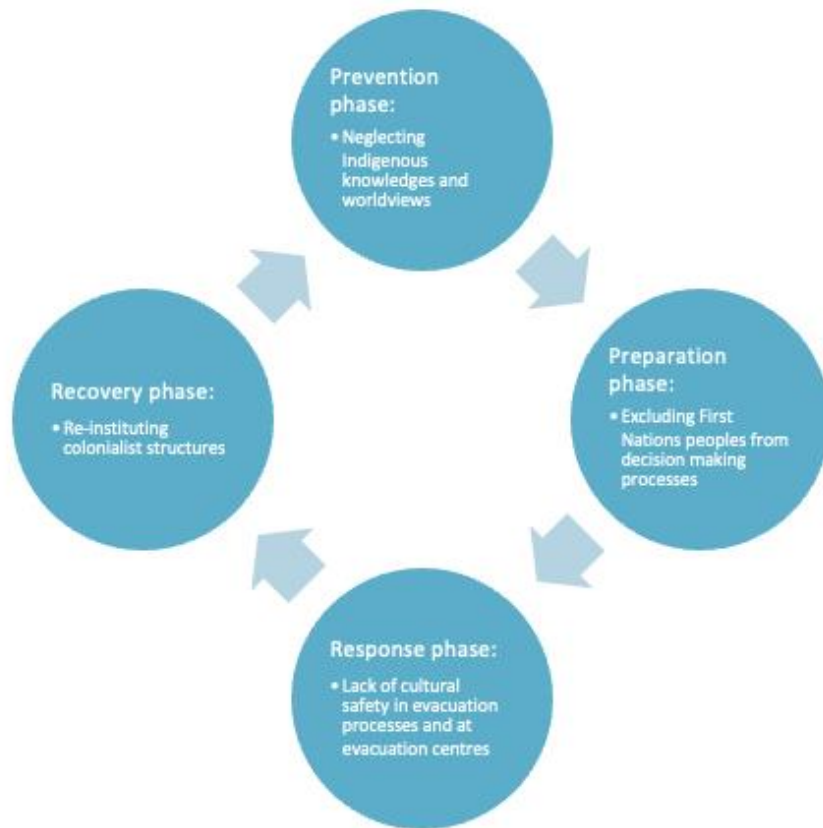


Diagram of examples of colonialism at various phases of the disaster processes and practices



Image of the critical endangered Leadbeater's Possum. Image credited to Zoos Australia sourced from <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/conserving-threatened-species/threatened-species/lowland-leadbeaters-possum>



Furmsion tree – Photograph of humans standing around a large old growth tree located in a Victorian Mountain Ash forest. Image sourced from the paper by Professor David Linder-mayer (2016). Photograph located in the State Library of Victoria

Image of Tree Ferns and Mountain Ash trees in the state of Victoria's Mountain Ash Forest. Image sourced from: <https://www.anu.edu.au/events/fire-ferns-and-forestry-the-recovery-of-victoria%E2%80%99s-mountain-ash-forest-after-disturbance>

# White possession

Image of firestorm destroying habitat that was once successfully managed by First Nations peoples. Image sourced <https://theconversation.com/colonialism-why-leading-climate-scientists-have-finally-acknowledged-its-link-with-climate-change-181642>

# Cabbage Tree Island's Indigenous community displaced by NSW floods 'left out' of government's response

By [Rani Hayman](#) and Indigenous communities reporter [Nakari Thorpe](#)

Posted Sun 13 Mar 2022 at 7:29am, updated Sun 13 Mar 2022 at 12:44pm

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-13/nsw-floods-displace-cabbage-tree-island-indigenous-community/100903252>

"The ideal solution for me right now is for government to step up and ... have conversations with our community about what's going to be the infrastructure needs for this community to be maintained," Mr Binge said.

Decolonising / decontaminating / transforming disaster practice: what is the role of the social worker?

- First Nations scholars are asking for social workers to address systemic Whiteness and racism within the profession (Walters, et al)
- Adopting Indigenist Standpoint Pedagogy (ISP) to decontaminate/decolonise (2011, 2019, 2020)
- Ecosocial /environmental social work (Boetto, \*\*\*\*)
- Feminist intersectionality (Fraser, Taylor, and Riggs, 2021)
- Multidimensional social work (Harms, \*\*\*\*)
- Decolonial social work disaster practice (Jeffries and Boetto, \*\*\*\*)

# EcoSocial Work framework and my contributions to the Charles Sturt program of disaster practice



# Challenges

**Cascading disaster events impacted staff availability**

**Social work role not clearly defined within organisation**

# References

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Thank you