



MEDIA RELEASE

Bushfire Expert Highlights NT Fire Research in Portugal

Bushfires NT Spatial Scientist Andrew Edwards recently attended the Fifth International Forest Fire Research Conference in Coimbra, Portugal to present the results of his research on NT savanna fires.

Mr Edwards said his attendance at the conference highlights the importance of northern Australia in relation to bushfire issues on a global scale.

“Bushfires NT staff were selected to present three papers from thousands of applicants that shows how important the work being done in northern Australia is globally, enabling us to compare our work with the leaders in the field,” Mr Edwards said.

“The tropical savannas of northern Australia represent a significant proportion of the world’s grasslands and are also the most frequently affected by fire.

“In the future world of carbon accounting, northern Australia has a head start in how it might be best to use fire: for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; for the best forms of all types of land management while maintaining the highest possible level of biodiversity.”

Mr Edwards presented the results of a ten year study of the effects of various fire regimes across habitats in three big NT parks to the world's leading fire researchers.

“By mapping the effects of recent fire regimes using data from satellite imagery over the past 20 years we are beginning to understand the effect these regimes have had on vegetation,” he said.

“The research most specifically pertains to the fire sensitive Arnhem Plateau covering eastern Kakadu National Park, west Arnhem Land and Nitmiluk National Park and also in Litchfield National Park, where more than 200 permanent plots have been assessed annually for more than ten years.

“The results illustrate the negative effect of frequent hot fires (being more than one in 10 years) on all habitats, particularly in the sandstone where all the beautiful waterfalls, heath and rainforest jungles are found.

“The research also highlights that fires can increase diversity.

“A high frequency of only ever very low severity/intensity fires can help to create a high diversity of plant species and ages.”

Mr Edwards said the Forestry department of the University of Coimbra in Portugal has hosted the International Forest Fire Research conference every four years since 1986, and gathers together the world's leading researchers in the field.

“Coimbra contains the oldest continuous University in the world dating back to the 10th century,” Mr Edwards said.

“It was a fantastic opportunity to network with Australian, European and North American colleagues and help provide NT scientists with the opportunity to insert their research into international projects and to attract interest, and funding, from overseas.”

The research is undertaken by Bushfires NT and collaborators such as Parks and Wildlife NT, Kakadu National Park, the Northern Land Council, Charles Darwin University, plus many others including fire and land management agencies across the Gulf, Cape York and the Kimberley.

The research results are then shared with all the partners to benefit land management across northern Australia.

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Media Note – For more information contact Andrew Edwards on 0889 448447 or 0427 270835.

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