

Cultural burns by indigenous Australians

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In news— New research by the University of the Sunshine Coast has found that traditional fire burning practices or ‘cultural burns’ by indigenous Australians can help protect the iconic koala.

About cultural burns-

- The ‘cultural burns’ were found to be cooler, lower and slower than ‘hot fires.
- Such fire activity encouraged the regeneration of suitable native plants. On the other hand, they controlled species like banksias and wattle to reduce the risk of fire reaching the canopy where koalas lived.
- The research results showed that there were no negative impacts on the densities or stress levels of the animals during or after the traditional burning method .
- The United Nations had taken note of burning practices and techniques of indigenous peoples around the world as a method to control wildfire incidents in a report of 2022 on increasing incidences of fires globally.
- The report noted that indigenous and traditional knowledge of land management in many regions – particularly the use of fire to manage fuel, including for wildfire mitigation – can be an effective way of reducing hazard.
- The document had cited the example of Australian Aborigines’ use of fire to create mosaic landscapes for hunting and gathering purposes.
- This practice broke up the continuity of fuels and inhibited the extensive spread of wildfires.

About koala-

- A koala or koala bear is an **arboreal herbivorous marsupial native to Australia.**
- It is the **only extant representative of the family Phascolarctidae and its closest living relatives are the wombats.**
- It is easily recognisable by its **stout, tailless body and large head with round, fluffy ears** and large, spoon-shaped nose.
- It has a body length of 60–85 cm and weighs 4–15 kg.
- Its fur colour ranges from silver grey to chocolate brown.
- According to fossil records, Koala species have inhabited parts of Australia for at least 25 million years. But today, only one species remains i.e., the *Phascolarctos cinereus*.
- They were classified as “**vulnerable**” only in 2012.
- They are found in the wild in the southeast and eastern sides of Australia in coastal Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.
- **They inhabit open Eucalyptus woodland**, the leaves of these trees make up most of their diet
- **They are asocial animals**, and bonding exists only between mothers and dependent offspring.
- Because of its **small brain, the koala has a limited ability to perform complex, unfamiliar behaviours.**
- **Its vision is not well developed**, and its relatively small eyes are unusual among marsupials in that the pupils have vertical slits.