



# Arts tell of nature's force

## Stories explain bushfire concerns

By MICK ROBERTS

A BANKSTOWN academic says while bushfires can be traumatic for young people, they can also be beneficial as a teaching tool to develop better knowledge of the natural environment.

While visiting early childhood centres as part of her PhD research into creative arts and music for early childhood teaching, Dr Kumara Ward noticed genuine concern amongst children shortly after the 2009 Black Saturday Victorian Bushfires.

As a result the lecturer from the School of Education at the Bankstown campus of the University of Western Sydney developed

creative stories to help address children's concerns and curiosities over the fate of animals during a bushfire.

Dr Ward developed a story about a green tree frog, Croaka Loka who finds a body of water to shelter from a blaze, to sensitively demonstrate how animals manage during bushfires and how they manage in a burnt-out habitat.

Through surveys with early childhood educators and observations of children's behaviours during preschool visits, Dr Ward found that the arts can successfully contribute to developing connections with local natural environments.

"The arts are an effective

vehicle through which children can be provided with opportunities to understand and identify with the lifecycles, habitats, inter-relationships, form, colour, patterns and wisdom of the natural world," Dr Ward said.

"The January 2013 bushfires are a force of nature that is happening now and they will be part of the children's consciousness," Dr Ward said.

"While they represent hardship and tragedy for some, they also represent opportunities to engage in discussions, stories and creative experiences about the natural world that highlight its power, diversity and capacity for renewal."



*Dr Kumara Ward wanders through burnt-out bushland at Deepwater Reserve, Milperra*