California and Australia are 8000 miles apart, but it turns out they have similar wildfire problems. And in both cases, the electric grid and climate change are part of the equation. The problems in California and the rest of the West are familiar to many readers. Though they don't necessarily get much attention in the U.S., Australia has had some horrendous fires, with blackouts as one consequences. The Black Summer fires burned over 30 million acres of land, causing 34 deaths directly and another 400 from the effects of smoke. There were blackouts and parts of the national grid had to be disconnected.

Rosemary Lyster, an Australian environmental scholar, and I explore the approaches of the two jurisdiction in a forthcoming article. A comparison of the two cases is illuminating because California and Australia have very different regulatory philosophies. Until very recently, Australia's government was never able to get its act together in terms of climate change. It takes a Texas-like approach to electricity regulation, with the free market as the icon.

In some ways, Australia has done better than California, with much less of a problem in terms of grid-originated fires. But it has focused on grid resilience narrowly, whereas California has embedded the wildfire risk to the grid within its overall climate adaptation strategy. Australia has also done more to incorporate wildfire risks into land use planning. California has imposed adaptation planning requirements as a requirement when utilities seek rate increases, which guarantees that utilities take it seriously. That wouldn't work in Australia, since the government doesn't supervise utility rates.

There's definitely room for both jurisdictions to learn from each other. This case study also points up an important gap in energy law scholarship in the US, which tends to overlook the value of learning from regulatory systems outside our borders. Climate change is a global issue, and we all have things to learn from each other as we seek to respond.