

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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**Key Points:**

- The two largest earthquakes ( $M_w$  4.9 and 4.3) in the seismic sequence indicate thrust faulting in southeast Australia
- Higher than average stress drop (57 and 28 MPa) suggests the rupture of strong faults with longer recurrence intervals
- Adjacent fault planes ruptured, implying fault interaction through interplay between stress conditions and fluid diffusion

**Supporting Information:**

- Supporting Information S1

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## Interacting Intraplate Fault Systems in Australia: The 2012 Thorpdale, Victoria, Seismic Sequences

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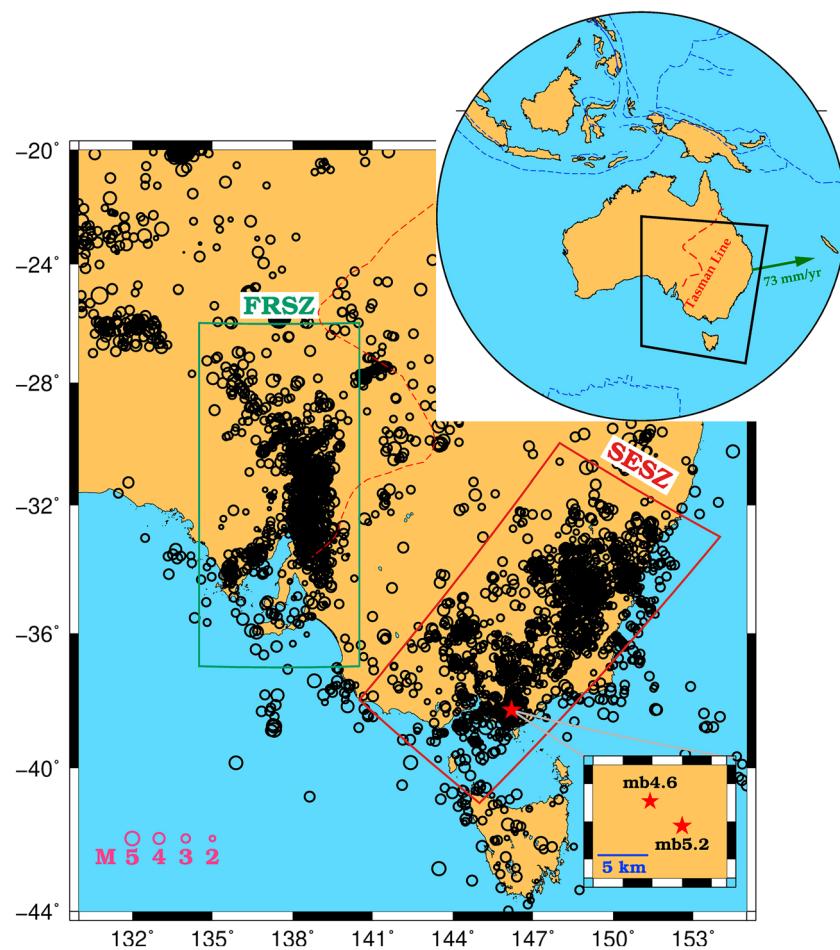
**Abstract** Using a new seismic waveform data set, we locate 234 earthquakes and estimate source parameters (focal mechanisms, magnitude, and stress drop) of the two largest earthquakes (E1 and E2) in the 2012 seismic sequence in Thorpdale, Victoria. The focal mechanisms suggest thrust faulting, consistent with previous observations in southeast Australia. The estimated magnitudes are  $M_w$   $4.9 \pm 0.14$  (E1) and  $4.3 \pm 0.1$  (E2). The estimates of stress drop  $57 \pm 7.4$  MPa (E1) and  $28 \pm 2.4$  MPa (E2) reflect strength of faults in an intraplate environment. By analyzing spatiotemporal distribution of aftershocks, we show that E1 and E2 reflect two separate seismic sequences about a month apart. E1 and E2 ruptured two adjacent faults with orientations  $218^\circ/78^\circ/78^\circ$  (Fault 1) and  $134^\circ/27^\circ/171^\circ$  (Fault 2), respectively, where angles indicate strike/dip/slip rake. To test causal mechanism of fault interaction, we performed Coulomb stress modeling, which shows very weak unloading of E2 by E1. Thus, we infer that fault interaction might instead reflect remotely triggered fluid diffusion. Also, a local rotation of the stress field proceeding E1 might have favorably reoriented Fault 2 for failure. Finally, we identify an apparent correlation between high heat flow and seismicity in southeastern Australia, suggesting a combination of mechanisms including transient stress perturbations and lithospheric thermal weakening associated with high heat flow as the principal factors localizing intraplate seismicity.

**Plain Language Summary** The 2012 earthquake sequence in Thorpdale is the most recent and significant seismic activity in southeast Australia, during which two moderate-sized earthquakes were felt in the region with the second earthquake thought to be an aftershock of the first. Using a newly assembled data set, we estimate source parameters of these earthquakes and locate 232 smaller earthquakes associated with this seismic sequence. In this study, we show that faults ruptured with thrust motion, the moment magnitude of the two largest earthquakes are 4.9 and 4.3, and the stress release per fault length (57 and 28 MPa) is larger than the global average. By locating aftershocks, we also show that the two largest earthquakes ruptured two separate faults rather than one. The absence of any plausible Coulomb stress loading suggests that these different faults interacted with each other through other mechanisms such as a fluid diffusion.

### 1. Introduction

A rare intraplate earthquake shook the residents of Thorpdale in Southeast Australia on 19 June 2012 at 10:53:29 UTC (henceforth E1). A month later, on 20 July 2012, another significant earthquake struck approximately the same region at 09:11:31 UTC (henceforth E2), which was initially thought to be an aftershock of E1. The preliminary magnitude and hypocentral depth assigned in the U.S. Geological Survey catalog to these two earthquakes, respectively, are  $m_b$  5.2 and 10 km and  $m_b$  4.6 and 13 km with a hypocentral separation of  $\sim$ 5 km (Figure 1). Being a sparsely populated small town, Thorpdale suffered only modest losses from these shocks (AUD  $\sim$ 20 M; Calligeros, 2014). However, the 1989  $M_w$  5.4 earthquake in Newcastle, NSW, that claimed 13 lives, injured 160 people, and incurred  $\sim$ AUD 4B of economic losses (2008 Year Book Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics) exemplifies the impact that an earthquake similar in size to E1 can cause if it were to hit a major population center. Note that the Central Business District of Melbourne is located just  $\sim$ 120 km northwest of the Thorpdale earthquakes. Table 1 documents source parameters of the largest earthquakes to strike this region in the last 53 years.

In Southeastern Australia, deformation is slow with strain rates estimated to be less than  $10^{-9}$  year $^{-1}$  (Sandiford et al., 2004). The maximum horizontal compressive stress ( $S_{H\max}$ ) in this region is NW-SE



**Figure 1.** Seismicity of south and southeastern Australia since 1967 from IRIS Wilber 3 ([https://ds.iris.edu/wilber3/find\\_earthquake](https://ds.iris.edu/wilber3/find_earthquake)). Seismicity in this region is localized in two regions: Southeastern Seismic Zone (SE SZ) and Flinders Range Seismic Zone (FRSZ). Open circles show the location of earthquakes with their radii scaled to magnitude. The 2012 Thorpdale earthquake sequence (red star) is located within SE SZ, and the inset shows the U.S. Geological Survey locations of the two largest earthquakes along with their preliminary magnitudes. The Tasman line generally divides Precambrian cratons to the west from younger Paleozoic rocks to the east. The Australian continent is moving toward the northeast at ~70 mm/year with respect to the Pacific plate.

oriented (Nelson et al., 2006; Rajabi et al., 2017), which is mainly controlled by far-field tectonic forces generated at the Indo-Australian-Eurasian-Pacific plate collision zones with local sources introducing secondary heterogeneity (Coblentz et al., 1995, 1998; Heidbach et al., 2007; Zhao & Müller, 2001). The accumulated stress due to this slow deformation is released primarily in the Southeastern Seismic Zone and the Flinders Range Seismic Zone (Figure 1), where tentative predictions of shortening can be up to 250 m/Ma (Célérier et al., 2005; Sandiford, 2003; Sandiford & Quigley, 2009). In this study, we focus on

**Table 1**  
Source Parameters of Earthquakes Recorded in the Region Since 1967

Date	Location	Magnitude	Latitude	Longitude	Depth (km)	Reference
03/05/1966	Mount Hotham	$M_L$ 5.5	-37.042	147.158	15	1
22/06/1969	Boolarra	$M_L$ 5.0	-38.540	146.340	0	2
21/11/1982	Wonnangatta	$M_L$ 5.4	-37.205	146.956	17	1
25/09/1996	Thomson Dam	$M_L$ 5.0	-37.880	146.430	11	1
29/08/2000	Boolarra	$M_L$ 5.0	-38.420	146.290	18	1
19/06/2012	Thorpdale	$m_b$ 5.2	-38.304	146.200	10	3

Note. References: 1 = Leonard et al. (2002); 2 = Geoscience Australia catalog; 3 = U.S. Geological Survey catalog. Dates are formatted as DD/MM/YYYY.)

the 2012 seismic sequence in Thorpdale—the most recent and significant seismic activity in the Southeastern Seismic Zone.

A critical step in mitigating hazard from earthquakes similar to the Thorpdale earthquakes is understanding the origin of fault rupture in intraplate settings. The physics that governs the origin of such earthquakes, however, is still not well understood (Calais et al., 2005). Recent evidence points to a process where intraplate fault systems located tens to hundreds of kilometers apart interact with each other over many hundreds of years to produce large earthquakes (Liu et al., 2011, 2014), of which precise knowledge is still missing. The episodic activation and long quiescence (>10,000 years) of individual faults as observed in Australia from paleoseismic studies further confounds analyzing intraplate earthquakes (Clark & McCue, 2003; Crone et al., 2003). This latter fact is used for justifying space-for-time substitution adopted in the study of stable continental earthquakes (Johnston & Kanter, 1990). The inevitable catastrophic nature of these earthquakes (England & Jackson, 2011), albeit low probability, together with the utility of space-for-time substitution and yet to be validated self-similarity hypothesis (Prieto et al., 2004; Shearer, 2012), rationalizes studying the physics of intraplate earthquakes regardless of their magnitude.

In this study, we relocate and estimate source parameters of E1 and E2 using a newly assembled seismic data set. The use of seismic stations close to the fault ruptures (<850 km) from a temporary open network and a private network that records waves in a wide frequency band allows us to improve the precision of parameters estimated, which is important for analyzing seismic hazard accurately and understanding the physics of rupture. In addition to E1 and E2, we locate 232 aftershocks with  $M_L \leq 3.4$  in the area, combine our results with available geologic information to identify the fault planes, and discuss their geodynamic implications to the region. We explore whether E2 resulted from migration of seismicity to an adjacent fault due to static stress transfer following E1. The magnitude difference (0.6 units) between E1 and E2 is less than the 1.2 magnitude units generally required to be classified as an aftershock (Båth, 1965; Shcherbakov & Turcotte, 2004), which also suggests that E2 is a separate earthquake possibly triggered by E1.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Hypocenters of Earthquakes

We locate earthquakes using eqFocus program (es&s, 2010), proprietary software used for locating earthquakes by the Seismology Research Centre. This program solves the location problem using a nonlinear least squares procedure (Levenberg, 1944; Marquardt, 1963). Prior to becoming proprietary, it has been used to locate earthquakes in Australia (Gibson et al., 1981). We also located earthquakes with the program HYP (Lienert & Havskov, 1995) as implemented in SEISAN (Havskov & Ottemoller, 1999) and confirmed that the locations obtained by the two methods differ by only <2 km on average, which is also the average location uncertainty estimated with either method for any given earthquake. Exploiting additional data recorded from 13 temporary stations of which a majority were deployed 2 days after the seismic sequence commenced, we also computed precise relative locations of E2 and its aftershocks using the HypoDD software (Waldhauser & Ellsworth, 2000). GIP3A 1-D seismic velocity model (es&s, 2010; Sandiford, 2013)—a legacy model built into eqFocus program for locating earthquakes in the Gippsland Basin—is used in all our location inversions.

### 2.2. Focal Mechanisms

We employed the probabilistic approach of Hardebeck and Shearer (2002) to determine focal mechanisms of E1 and E2. This method uses a grid search to determine strike, dip, and slip rake from first motion polarities. The solution space is averaged iteratively. At each iteration, solutions farthest from the average solution are removed until the final cluster of solutions is within a desired range of angles. The misfit of solutions is estimated taking uncertainty in earthquake location, Earth structure model, and polarity picks into account. Computing the intersection point of the ray and the focal sphere accurately for all station-source combinations is important to obtain the best fitting focal mechanism. The intersection point is determined by the take-off angle of a ray, which is a function of earthquake depth and velocity model. In Hardebeck and Shearer's (2002) method, uncertainties in take-off angles, and therefore, uncertainties in focal mechanism solutions, are computed by shooting rays in a range of 1-D velocity models

relevant for the region of interest. The depth from which rays are shot are determined by the earthquake depth and its uncertainty. We used three velocity models for this purpose: VIC5A (Collins, 1988; Wesson, 1988), GIP3A, and ak135-f (Montagner & Kennett, 1996). We provide VIC5A and GIP3A models in Tables S2 and S3 in the supporting information. The solutions are searched for by sampling the focal sphere with a 2° increment.

### 2.3. Spectral Analysis

We perform spectral analysis of seismograms to compute moment magnitude and stress drop of E1 and E2, where we fit a theoretical spectral function to the average moment rate spectral density function (e.g., Attanayake & Fonseca, 2016).

#### 2.3.1. Moment Rate Spectral Density Functions

Following Houston and Kanamori (1986), we compute moment rate spectral density functions (MRSDFs; equation (1)) from displacement seismograms recorded by short-period stations. In equation (1),  $\varphi(f)$  is the  $P$  wave MRSDF;  $\rho$  and  $V_p$  are density and  $P$  velocity, respectively, at the hypocenter obtained from GIP3A model;  $E_R$  is the radius of the Earth;  $g$  is the geometric spreading correction that depends on the source-receiver distance ( $\Delta$ );  $R$  is the radiation pattern correction that depends on the strike ( $\phi$ ), dip ( $\lambda$ ), and slip rake ( $\delta$ ) of the fault, source-to-station azimuth ( $\gamma$ ), and the take-off angle of the ray ( $\zeta$ );  $C$  is the free surface correction that depends on the angle of incidence ( $\xi$ );  $s$  is the spectrum of the displacement seismogram;  $t^*$  is the path averaged attenuation; and  $f$  is frequency.

$$\varphi(f) = \frac{4\pi\rho V_p^3 E_R}{g(\Delta)R(\phi, \lambda, \delta, \gamma, \zeta)} s(f) \exp[\pi f t^*] \quad (1)$$

We first automatically mark theoretical traveltimes of the direct  $P$  wave based on VIC5A model and then handpick a more accurate arrival time ( $T_0$ ) using the automatic pick as a guide. The seismogram is then cut within the time window [ $T_0 - 0.25$  s,  $T_0 + T_x$ ], where  $T_0$  is handpicked  $P$  wave arrival time and  $T_x$  is 2.0 s and 1.0 s for E1 and E2, respectively. Based on Stork et al. (2014),  $T_x$  was chosen to entirely bracket the direct  $P$  waveform and the scattered energy (Figure S1). We compute the spectrum of this windowed seismogram and apply the four corrections given in equation (1) to form the MRSDF of each seismogram. These corrections are described in the next section. The individual MRSDFs are then averaged in  $\log_{10}$  space to obtain the average MRSDF of the earthquake, which minimizes the unmodeled residual effects of site, path, and radiation.

#### 2.3.2. Corrections to MRSDFs

##### 2.3.2.1. Geometric Spreading

We use the trilinear geometric spreading model (equation (2)) of Allen et al. (2007) to correct our MRSDFs. This model is developed for southeast Australia using a dense data set covering an epicentral distance up to about 1,000 km.

$$\log_{10}g(\Delta) = \begin{cases} 1.3 \log_{10}\Delta & \Delta \leq 90 \text{ km} \\ 1.3 \log_{10}90 - 0.1 \log_{10}\frac{\Delta}{90} & 90 \text{ km} \leq \Delta \leq 160 \text{ km} \\ 1.3 \log_{10}90 - 0.1 \log_{10}\frac{160}{90} + 1.6 \log_{10}\frac{\Delta}{160} & \Delta > 160 \text{ km} \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

##### 2.3.2.2. Free-Surface Receiver Correction

We correct for the free-surface receiver effect using equation (3) (Bullen & Bolt, 1985). The calculations require the ray emergence angle ( $e = 90^\circ$ —incidence angle) at a station, which we computed using the VIC5A model. The range of estimated values is  $1.06 \leq C \leq 1.61$  ( $\sim 35^\circ < e < \sim 85^\circ$ ), and we find it to be  $\sim 1.5$  on average. This is consistent with the standard analytical value of 2 used in other studies assuming vertical incidence (Dost et al., 2018).

$$\text{free surface correction} = \frac{6 \sin(e) \sec^2(e) [1 + 3 \tan^2(e)]}{4 \tan(e) \tan(p) + [1 + 3 \tan^2(e)]^2} \quad (3)$$

where  $p$  is defined as follows:

$$\cos^2(p) = \frac{\cos^2(e)}{3}$$

### 2.3.2.3. Radiation Pattern

The standard practice in studies similar to ours is to use a radiation pattern coefficient averaged over the focal sphere (Abercrombie, 1995). Not accounting for effects of radiation at individual stations accurately, however, can lead to errors of up to 0.8 magnitude units (Stork et al., 2014). For this reason, we opted to correct each MRSDF for radiation pattern following Aki and Richards (2009) using focal mechanism solutions determined in a previous step.

### 2.3.2.4. Frequency-Dependent Attenuation

Allen et al. (2007) provide a trilinear frequency-dependent attenuation model (equation (4)) for shear waves in Southeast Australia.

$$\log_{10}Q_s(f) = \begin{cases} 3.66 - 1.05 \log_{10}f & f \leq 3.92 \text{ Hz} \\ 3.01 + 0.03 \log_{10}f & 3.92 \text{ Hz} \leq f \leq 9.83 \text{ Hz} \\ 2.56 + 0.48 \log_{10}f & f \geq 9.83 \text{ Hz} \end{cases} \quad (4)$$

In equation (3),  $Q_s(f)$  is the frequency-dependent quality factor for shear waves and  $f$  is frequency. Because there is no  $P$  wave attenuation model for our region of study, we scale Allen et al.'s  $Q_s$  to  $P$  wave attenuation ( $Q_p$ ) using equation (5) under the standard assumption that bulk dissipation is negligible compared to shear, that is,  $Q_\kappa^{-1}/Q_\mu^{-1} \approx 0$  (Shearer, 1999).

$$Q_p = \left(\frac{3}{4}\right) \left(\frac{V_p}{V_s}\right)^2 Q_s \quad (5)$$

In our scaling, we used  $V_p = 6.052$  km/s and  $V_s = 3.573$  km/s, consistent with source region velocities given in GIP3A model. This scaled  $P$  wave attenuation model is used to correct  $P$  wave spectra.

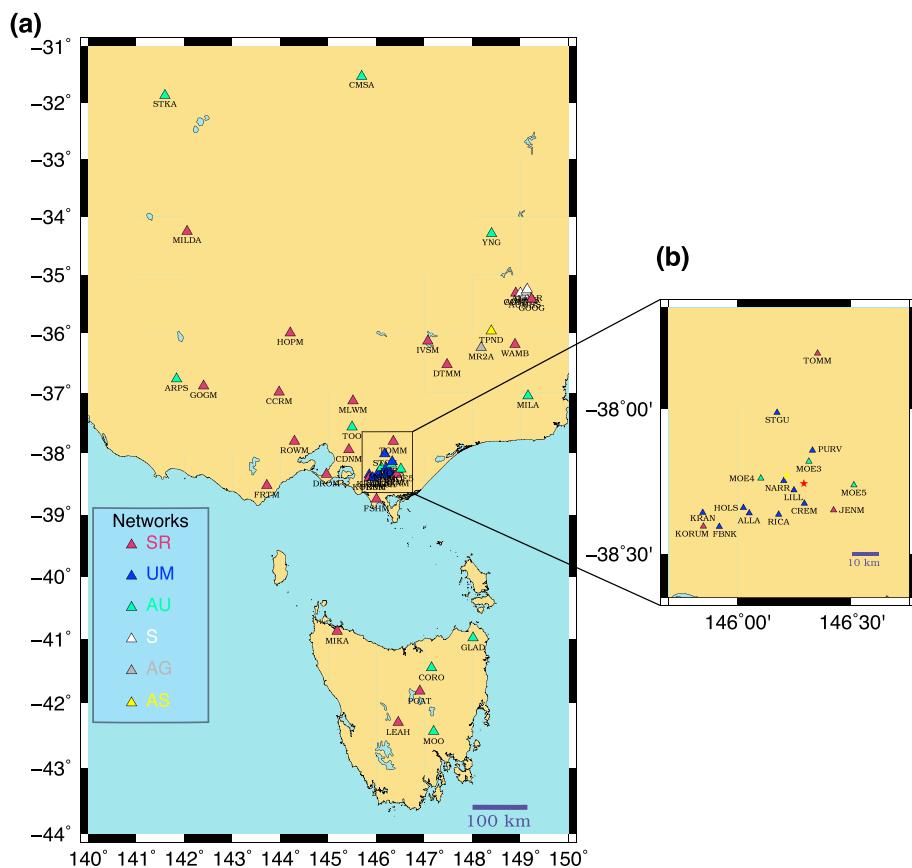
### 2.3.3. Spectral Fitting and Stress Drop

We fit the spectral function of Boatwright (1978, 1980) given in equation (6) to the average MRSDF of each earthquake and obtain the best fitting moment magnitude and corner frequency. The advantage of using Boatwright's model over Brune's (1970) is that it fits the observed spectral falloff better (Kaneko & Shearer, 2014).

$$\Omega(f) = \frac{M_0}{\left[1 + \left(\frac{f}{f_c}\right)^{2\eta}\right]^{\frac{1}{2}}} \quad (6)$$

Here,  $\Omega(f)$  is the source spectrum,  $M_0$  is the seismic scalar moment measured at long periods (scales with moment magnitude  $M_w$ ), and  $f_c$  is the corner frequency, above which the MRSDF falls off at a rate of  $\eta$ . We fit these parameters using a grid search. The search increments are 0.01, 0.1, and 0.1 for  $M_w$ ,  $f_c$ , and  $\eta$ , respectively. The fitting is done for  $f_x \text{ Hz} \leq f \leq 50 \text{ Hz}$ , where  $f_x$  is 0.5 and 1 Hz for E1 and E2, respectively, where the lower cutoff is determined by the length of the time window. Also, the higher-frequency content might be slightly lower for the larger earthquake relative to the smaller earthquake. This, however, does not affect the estimation of magnitude and corner frequency because the frequency band in which these parameters are estimated contains stable source spectra. The best fitting parameters are obtained from minimizing an  $L_2$ -norm weighted by inverse frequency so that the contribution of each frequency to the misfit is nearly the same. The uncertainties are estimated from fitting parameters to the upper and lower envelopes of the average MRSDF.

We use Eshelby's (1957) radially expanding singular crack model to relate  $f_c$  to fault radius ( $r$ ) and shear velocity at the source ( $V_s$ ), which can then be used to estimate fault-averaged static stress drop ( $\Delta\sigma$ ; equations (7) and (8)).



**Figure 2.** Seismic networks used in this study. (a) Seven networks operated regionally, from which data were acquired. (b) Permanent and temporary seismic stations located within the boxed area in (a). All stations except for SR stations are temporary deployments in (b). The two main shocks relocated in this study are also shown (E1 = red star; E2 = yellow star). AG and AU = Geoscience Australia; AS = Australian Seismological Center; S = Australian Seismometers in Schools; SR = Seismological Research Center network; UM = University of Melbourne.

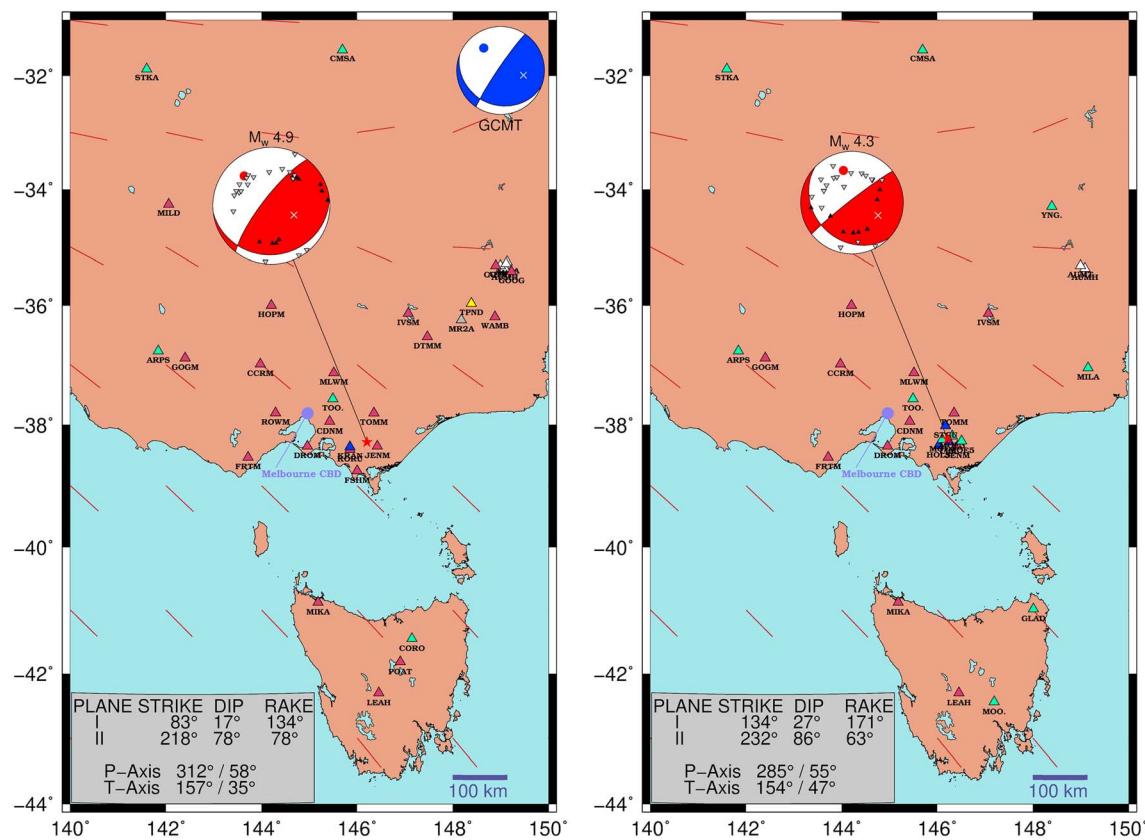
$$r = k \frac{V_s}{f_c} \quad (7)$$

$$\Delta\sigma = \left(\frac{7}{16}\right) \left(\frac{M_0}{r^3}\right) \quad (8)$$

In equation (6), the proportionality constant  $k$  is assumed from a theoretical dynamic rupture model and it depends on the rupture velocity. We used  $k = 0.38$  applicable to the cohesive zone circular fault model assuming a rupture velocity of  $0.9V_s$  (Kaneko & Shearer, 2014). In section 4 we provide parameters needed to estimate stress drop at different rupture velocities and/or with dynamic rupture models.

### 3. Data

To analyze the source parameters of the two largest earthquakes in detail, we obtained vertical component waveform data from seven seismic networks for epicentral distances less than 850 km (Figure 2). Forty-three percent (i.e., 23/53) of selected stations from which data were acquired are in the Seismological Research Center network (SR), having a wide flat frequency response spectrum (0.5–50 Hz). We supplemented this data set with data from broadband (0.02–5 Hz) stations in other complementary networks: Geoscience Australia (AU and AG); Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology (IRIS)/International Deployment of Accelerometers (IDA) (II); privately maintained Australian Seismological Center (AS); and the Australian Seismometers in Schools (S). In addition, we also added stations from temporary networks deployed by the University of Melbourne (UM) and Geoscience Australia to our data set. As mentioned



**Figure 3.** Focal mechanism solutions of 2012.06.19 (left, red star) and 2012.07.20 (right, red star) earthquakes. Also, shown are stations from which data were used. The station color code is the same as in Figure 2. In the focal mechanism, first motion up is illustrated by black triangles, gray inverted triangles show first motion down, and the compressional quadrant is shaded red. Also, shown are *P* (red solid circle) and *T* (white cross) axes. The Global Centroid Moment Tensor solution is also shown for the 2012.06.19 earthquake in the upper right corner of the left panel. The dashed brown lines indicate  $S_{H\max}$  azimuth from Rajabi et al. (2017).

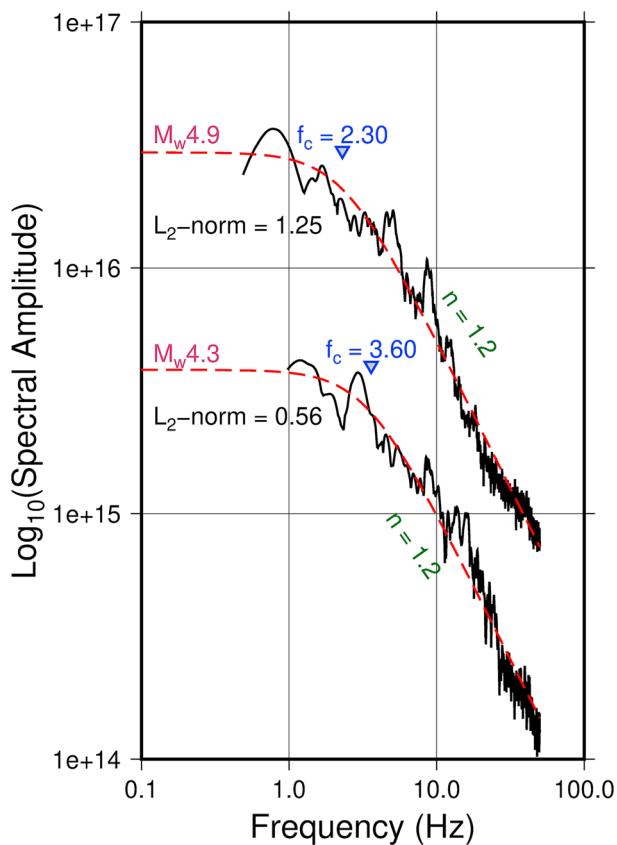
earlier, these included 13 temporary stations progressively deployed in the Thorpdale region 2 days after E1. Given the timeline, this temporary network failed to capture E1 and a majority of its aftershocks, preventing us from performing precise relative locations as was done for E2 and its aftershocks.

We apply standard processing steps to the waveform data, where we remove instrument response and convert counts to displacement. The broadband stations are filtered between 0.02 and 5 Hz, and the short-period instruments are filtered between 0.5 and 50 Hz. Two stations, CCRM and GOGM, had their polarities reversed (Elodie Borleis, Seismological Research Center, personal communication, June 28, 2018), which we correct before finalizing the data set. We retain stations that exhibit excellent signal-to-noise ratio and those whose first motion polarity can clearly be picked. The finalized broadband and short-period data set for these earthquakes (Figure S1) is used to constrain focal mechanisms. Given the wider frequency band of recording and higher sampling period (0.01 s) relative to broadband stations, we use data from short-period stations in our spectral analysis. Hiramatsu et al. (2002) have demonstrated the importance of both these data characteristics for accurate spectral estimates. To locate earthquakes, we precisely pick onset of *P* and *S* waves manually with a picking uncertainty less than 0.03 s. On average, we make 19 combined *P* and *S* traveltimes measurements from 11 stations per earthquake.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Focal Mechanisms

Our focal plane solutions and orientations of *PT* axes inverted from first motion polarities (Figure 3) suggest that both E1 and E2 are reverse-faulting earthquakes with some strike-slip component, which is consistent with the compressive stress field predicted for southeastern Australia from numerical modeling (Coblenz



**Figure 4.** Observed (black lines) and fitted (dashed red lines) source spectra. Parameters obtained from spectral fitting are also given.

2017), we hypothesize that heterogeneous fault strength at least in part contributed to the difference in stress drop estimates of  $57 \pm 7.4$  (E1) and  $28 \pm 2.4$  MPa (E2). Recall that these estimates are based on Kaneko and Shearer's (2014) Cohesive Zone dynamic rupture model, in which stress drop is a factor of 1.7 smaller than that estimated from Madariaga's (1976) dynamic rupture model. This difference results from different  $k$  values: Kaneko and Shearer's  $k = 0.38$  versus Madariaga's  $k = 0.32$  for a rupture velocity of  $0.9V_s$ . We prefer Kaneko and Shearer's  $k$  value because they take 3-D wave propagation effects into account better than, for example, Madariaga's (1976). Also, Kaneko and Shearer's dynamic model incorporates a cohesive zone that prevents a stress singularity in the rupture front. These models describe cohesive forces active in a crack better. If the assumption of a rupture velocity of  $0.9V_s$  is relaxed to a lower value, the estimated stress drop increases. We note that our estimates of stress drop with a rupture velocity of  $0.9V_s$  are comparable with predicted lithospheric averaged, differential stress magnitudes of  $\sim 20\text{--}50$  MPa in southeastern Australia (Coblenz et al., 1995). We provide necessary parameters in Table 2 for computation of stress drop for other rupture models and velocities.

Taken together,  $f_c$ , reduced  $\eta$ , and  $\Delta\sigma$  indicate the possible rupture of strong, relatively small asperities as observed in earlier investigations (Kanamori & Allen, 1986). In fact, our analysis suggests that the estimated source area ( $1.1 \text{ km}^2$ ) of E1 is only  $\sim 25\%$  of that expected for an average rupture of similar magnitude ( $4.4 \text{ km}^2$ ) from scaling relationships applicable to intraplate regions (Leonard, 2010). However, the distribution of aftershocks following E1 and E2 in the first 24 hr suggests that the fault area expanded following the main shocks. We discuss this further in the next section.

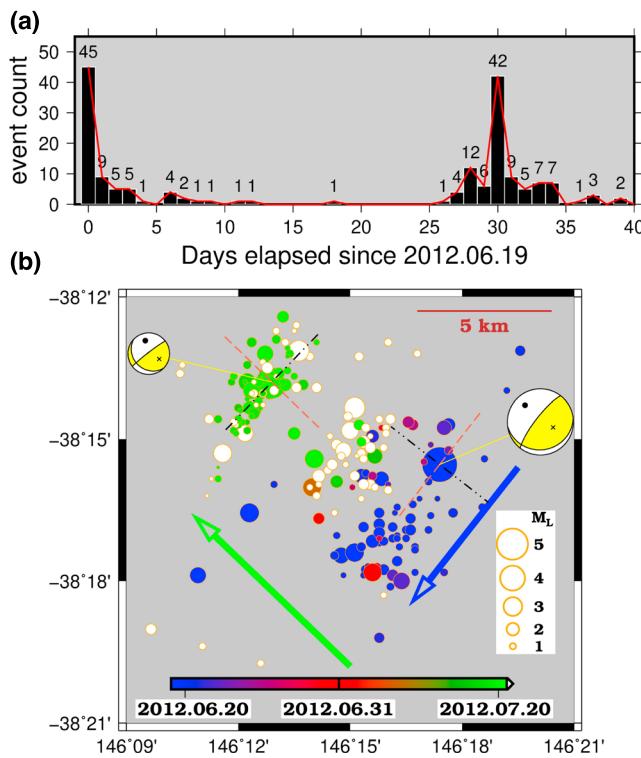
Dawson et al. (2008) estimated source parameters of a rare  $M_w 4.7$  earthquake located in the southwestern seismic zone in Western Australia

**Table 2**

*Estimated Source Parameters of E1 Located at a Depth of 18.1 km (Line 1) and E2 (Line 2) Located at a Depth of 12.4 km*

Event date	$M_w$	$f_c$	$r$ (km)	$\eta$	$\Delta\sigma$ (MPa)
2012.06.19	$4.9 \pm 0.2$	$2.3 \pm 0.1$	0.59	1.2	$57 \pm 7.4$
2012.07.20	$4.3 \pm 0.1$	$3.6 \pm 0.1$	0.40	1.2	$28 \pm 2.4$

Note.  $M_w$  = moment magnitude;  $f_c$  = corner frequency of average source spectrum;  $r$  = radius of the equivalent circular rupture;  $\Delta\sigma$  = stress drop.



**Figure 5.** Spatiotemporal evolution of earthquakes. (a) Temporal distribution of frequency of earthquakes in the first 40 days following E1. Two peaks associated with E1 and E2 are clearly observed. Numbers on top of each column indicate the number of earthquakes on that particular day. The red line connects the columns to illustrate earthquake rate. (b) The epicenters color coded by elapsed time. The color scale is for the time period 19 June 2012 to 20 July 2012, and earthquakes falling outside this time range are colored white. Focal mechanism solutions are also mapped on to epicenters of E1 and E2. The arrows indicate the general direction of seismicity migration immediately following E1 (blue) and before E2 (green). Pink dashed lines are the strike directions of preferred fault planes of E1 and E2, whereas the dash-dotted black lines are orthogonal to the preferred strike directions. These directions are used in the projections given in Figures 6 and 7.

the U.S. Geological Survey preliminary estimate of  $\sim 5$  km, which is well beyond the fault dimensions determined from our spectral analysis. This hypocentral separation is also significantly larger than the average area (proportional to length of a fault) expected for a single earthquake in an intraplate setting of similar size (Leonard, 2010) even after accounting for lateral and vertical location uncertainty of  $\sim 2$  km. This naturally raises the question whether E2 ruptured the same fault plane as E1. Analysis of spatiotemporal characteristics of the seismic sequence provides evidence to resolve this problem.

#### 4.3.1. Spatiotemporal Evolution of the Seismic Sequence

Two clear peaks are visible in Figure 5a where we show earthquake rate following E1. We were able to record smaller earthquakes ( $M_L < 1$ ) as a result of deploying temporary stations several days after E1 occurred. In fact, all earthquakes (29 in total) with  $0 \leq M_L < 1$  are associated with E2 in this study. The peak associated with E1 is one sided, meaning no precursory activity was recorded with at least  $M_L 1$ . There is a rapid decrease in aftershock activity after the first 24 hr, which is also observed in other large intraplate earthquakes (e.g., Copley et al., 2012). On the other hand, a two-sided peak is associated with E2. We observe that seismic activity picked up 4 days before E2 and dropped markedly in as many days after E2 with a majority of these earthquakes having a magnitude  $M_L > 1$ . This suggests that the seismic sequence commenced with E1, and some precursory activity preceded E2.

using interferometric synthetic aperture radar modeling. They estimated stress drop and fault rupture area to be 53 MPa for a distributed slip model and  $\sim 1$  km $^2$ , respectively, which is remarkably consistent with the  $M_w 4.9$  earthquake investigated in this study despite using different methods. We find that the rupture area estimated by Dawson et al. (2008) is also only 16% of that expected from global scaling relationships for an earthquake of similar magnitude. Note that the magnitude of the compressive stress field in Western Australia is similar to that in southeastern Australia (Coblenz et al., 1995; Denham et al., 1987). These observations raise the question whether moderate-sized seismic sources modulated by a high compressive stress magnitude in the Australian continent are self-similar. Testing this hypothesis requires more data.

#### 4.3. Earthquake Location

In total, we located 236 earthquakes between 1 January 2012 and 11 April 2018 with  $M_L \geq 0$ . Prior to 19 June 2012, only two small earthquakes ( $M_L = 1.2$  and 1.8) had occurred in January and April of 2012 in Thorpdale. This suggests that the seismic sequence in Thorpdale commenced with E1. In Figure 5, we show earthquake rate and a map of epicenters whose source parameters are given in Table S1 in the supporting information. The distance to the nearest station from E1 (JENM,  $\sim 15$  km) and E2 (NARR,  $\sim 2$  km) is less than their respective hypocentral depths (E1 = 18.06 km and E2 = 12.41 km), providing high confidence in the source locations. The addition of temporary stations reduced the distance to the nearest station from any given aftershock to less than 5 km from about 15 km prior to installing the temporary stations, which is generally less than source depths estimated in this study. Numerical experiments demonstrate that when both  $P$  and  $S$  waves are used in source location inversion, accurate source depths can be obtained when the distance to the nearest station is  $\sim 1.4$  times the source depth (Gomberg et al., 1990). Given that the distance to the nearest station in the first 2 days of the seismic sequence was  $\sim 15$  km, this suggests that source depth of aftershocks located at depths greater than  $\sim 11$  km are well constrained. In our catalog, about 69% of aftershocks in the first 2 days were located at depths greater than 11 km. These favorable geometric conditions reflect the average uncertainty of  $\pm \sim 2$  km in our source locations.

The hypocentral separation between E1 and E2 increases to  $\sim 9.2$  km from the U.S. Geological Survey preliminary estimate of  $\sim 5$  km, which is well beyond the fault dimensions determined from our spectral analysis. This hypocentral separation is also significantly larger than the average area (proportional to length of a fault) expected for a single earthquake in an intraplate setting of similar size (Leonard, 2010) even after accounting for lateral and vertical location uncertainty of  $\sim 2$  km. This naturally raises the question whether E2 ruptured the same fault plane as E1. Analysis of spatiotemporal characteristics of the seismic sequence provides evidence to resolve this problem.

In Figure 5b, the evolution of the seismic sequence is illustrated for the time period 19 June 2012 to 20 July 2012. We observe that a majority of the aftershocks in the first 24 hr following E1 (blue solid circles) are clustered in a southwest direction from E1, implying that fault plane expanded in that direction. Within the aftershocks cluster, however, we do not observe a systematic migration of seismicity. We elaborate this later in section 5.2. The general alignment of these aftershocks relative to E1 is consistent with the strike of the steeper focal plane of E1, that is, 218° (strike), 78° (dip), and 78° (slip rake). Although the aftershock activity diminished considerably after 24 hr, it appears that the migration of seismicity changed from an initial SW direction to a NW direction in the days following E1 (dark-to-bright red to brown circles) and culminated in E2 and associated aftershocks. Unlike aftershocks of E1, a significant number of aftershocks of E2 are collocated. These observations suggest the activation of a fault plane striking SE-NW.

The depth of aftershocks associated with E1 and E2 are also characteristically different (Figure S2 in the supporting information). The aftershocks of E1 are distributed in the 10- to 18-km-depth range, whereas those that are associated with E2 are contained within 5- to 15-km depth. In fact, E1 appears to be located at the bottom of the seismogenic layer, which we estimate to be 18–20 km thick based on our results. Leonard's (2008) estimates of the thickness of the seismogenic layer in Australia based on a 100-year seismic catalog is similar to what we predict here.

#### 4.3.2. Did E1 and E2 Rupture Different Faults?

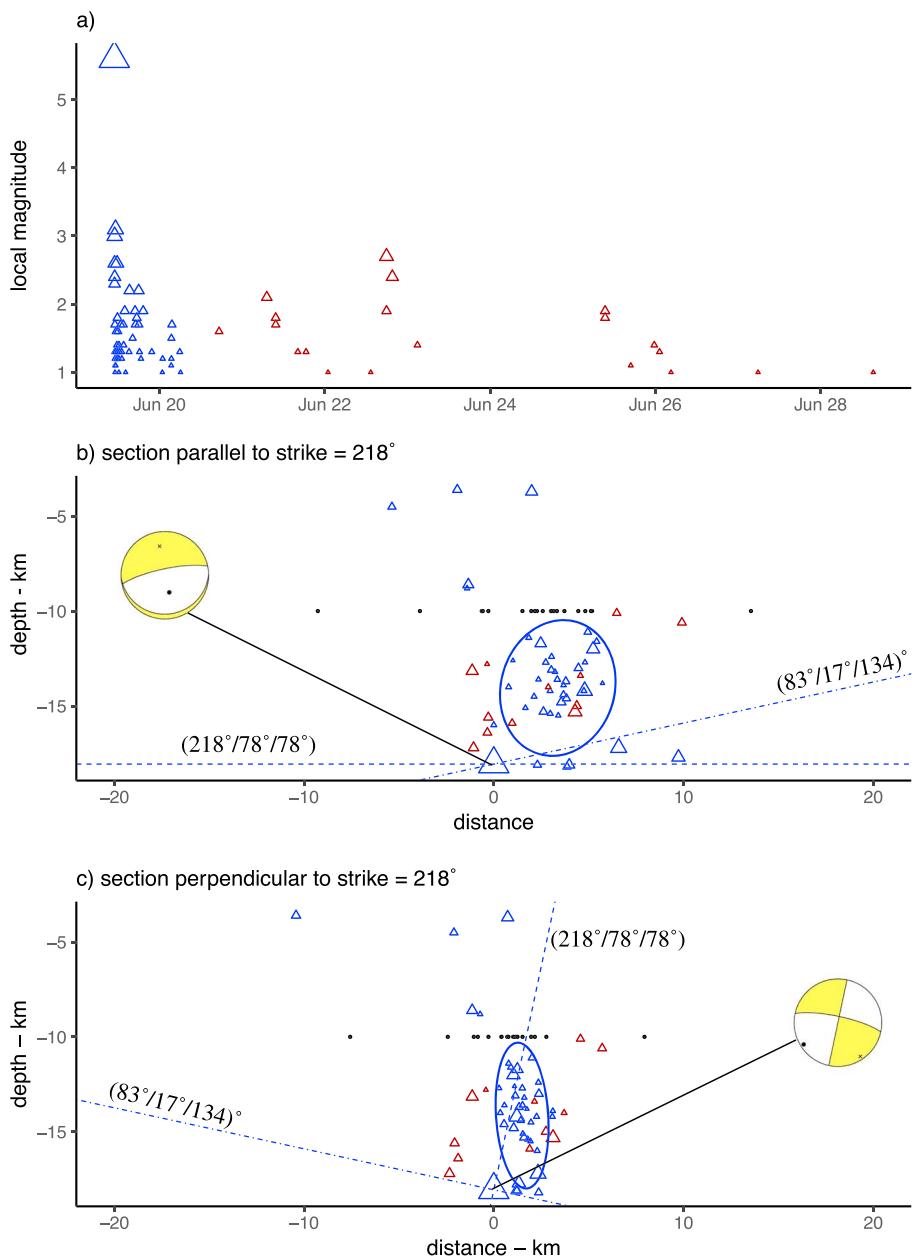
To resolve the orientation of the faults that were activated, we project seismicity on to cross sections parallel and perpendicular to strike directions given by focal mechanism solutions (Figures 6 and 7). We divided the earthquake data set into two subsets: (a) from 19 June 2012 to 30 June 2012 that captures seismicity associated with E1 (Figure 6) and (b) from 15 July 2012 to 30 July 2012 that captures the sequence associated with E2 (Figure 7). Figure 6c is the cross section perpendicular to the fault plane solution 218°/78°/78° of E1 on to which E1 and its aftershocks are projected, and we find that earthquakes are clearly aligned with the steeper plane (218°/78°/78°) as opposed to the shallow-dipping one (83°/17°/134°). Thus, we conclude that E1 activated the steeper plane. Similarly, in Figure 7c, we project E2 along with its aftershocks perpendicular to the fault plane solution 134°/27°/171°. There, the earthquakes are aligned with the shallow-dipping plane (134°/27°/171°) rather than the steeper plane (232°/86°/63°) of E2. Therefore, we suggest that E2 activated the 134°/27°/171° plane. Based on these projections, it seems that E1 activated a different plane than E2. Henceforth, we use Fault 1 (E1) and Fault 2 (E2) to describe 218°/78°/78° and 134°/27°/171° planes, respectively.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Links to History of Deformation

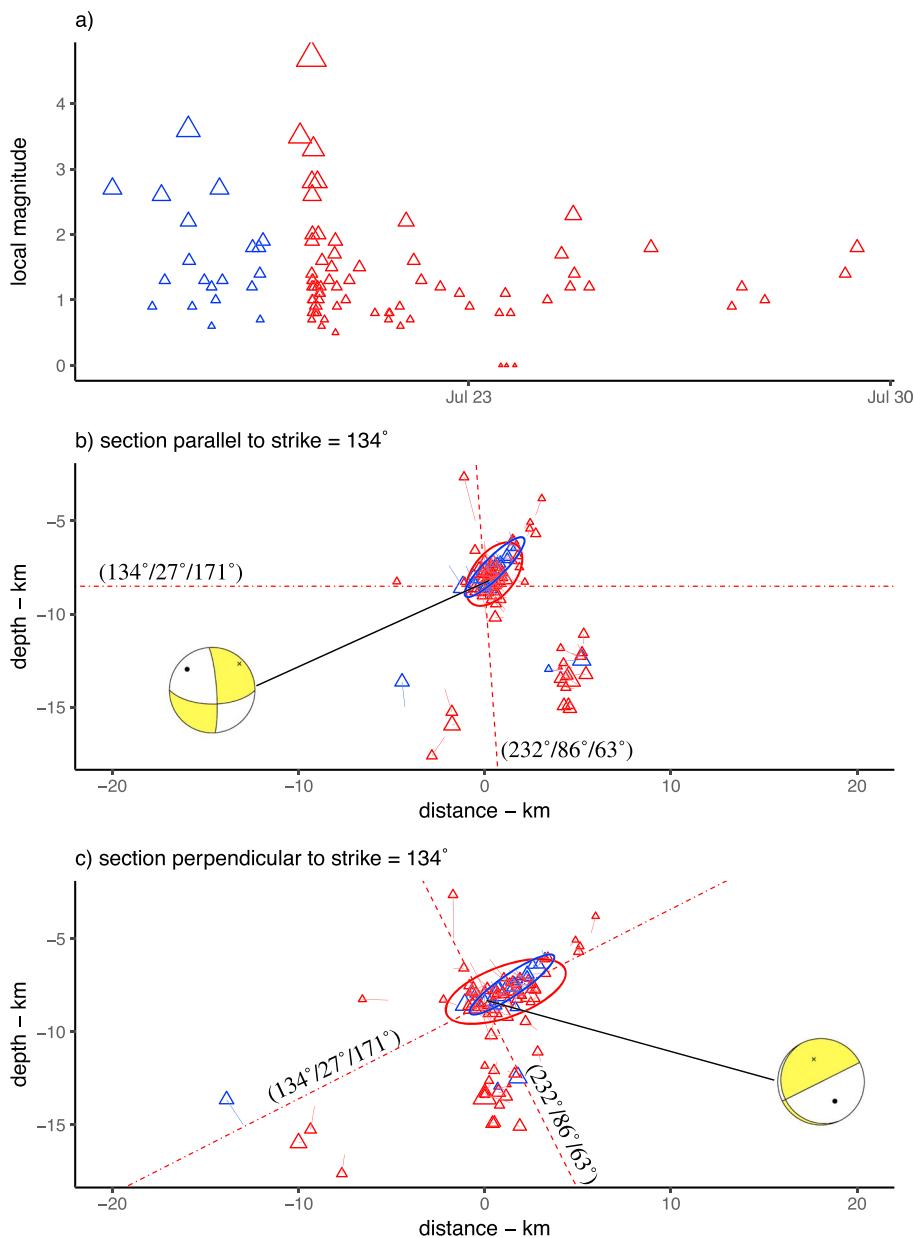
Within the framework of Coulomb failure criteria, bimodal conjugate systems of faults are predicted with a maximum interplane angle of 60° (Anderson, 1905). The interplane angle for Fault 1 and Fault 2, however, is nearly orthogonal, suggesting that these faults originated from different deformation episodes. Fault 1 is optimally oriented relative to the inferred present-day maximum horizontal stress ( $S_{H\max}$ ; Figure 3) to be reactivated with reverse motion as demonstrated in slip tendency analysis (Müller et al., 2012). In southeast Australia, the origin of faults having a similar orientation to Fault 1 are traced back at least to the early Pliocene (Sandiford, 2003). Thus, if Fault 1 and Fault 2 do not belong to the same conjugate system, it might be that Fault 2 dates to an early stage in Fault 1. This is consistent with the inference from modeling presented by Sandiford et al. (2004), for a progressive Paleogene-Neogene counterclockwise rotation in  $S_{H\max}$ .

Etheridge et al. (1987, 1991) reported the observation of a shallow-dipping normal fault system with a 295–300° strike in the offshore Gippsland Basin. This fault system formed as Australia rifted from Antarctica in the early-to-late Cretaceous, and it was reactivated with a reverse sense (inversion) in the middle Eocene. A conjugate set of this particular fault system could then explain the orientation of Fault 2. Considering mechanics of faulting, the present-day fault configuration requires a history of regional-scale polyphase deformation including block and stress rotation (Dembo et al., 2015; Ron & Beroza, 2001; Sibson & Xie, 1998; Zoback, 1992). Evidence supporting these processes is present in the geologic record of southeast and east Australia (Dickinson et al., 2002; Fielding et al., 2016; Quigley et al., 2010; Sandiford & Quigley, 2009; Vandenberg, 2010). Numerical experiments also suggest that the stress field in southeast Australia has undergone significant rotation since circa 55 Ma (Müller et al., 2012; Sandiford et al., 2004).



**Figure 6.** The projection of earthquake hypocenters on to cross sections. (a) Earthquake distribution from the 19 June 2012 to 30 June 2012 period. The blue and red open triangles are E1 and its aftershocks color coded by time, where the size of triangles scale with their local magnitudes. (b) The projection of fault plane solutions and earthquakes in (a) on to a cross section parallel to the strike 218°. The horizontal distance is relative to the location of E1. The ellipse arbitrarily envelopes the region where the aftershock density is highest. The focal mechanism of E1 is also projected to this cross section. (c) Same as (b) but the projection is on a cross section perpendicular to the strike 218°. The earthquakes are clearly aligned with the 218°/78°/78° plane. Also, see Figure 5 for the map view of projection orientations.

Alternatively, the origin of these faults might be a polymodal process, in which case they are coeval structures responding to the 3-D stress field (Healy et al., 2015; Oertel, 1965). To the South of the Thorpdale seismic sequence, numerous faults with a general NE-SW strike and an irregular interval cut through the Strzelecki group and intrusive granites of lower Cretaceous and upper Devonian origin, respectively (Figure S3 and S4 in the supporting information). Embedded in this fault network is a sparsely distributed secondary fault network with a WNW-ESE strike (e.g., Franklin fault, Vagg Creek fault, and Balook fault). Fault 2 aligns with this secondary network of faults well. If a more recent date than middle Eocene (e.g.,

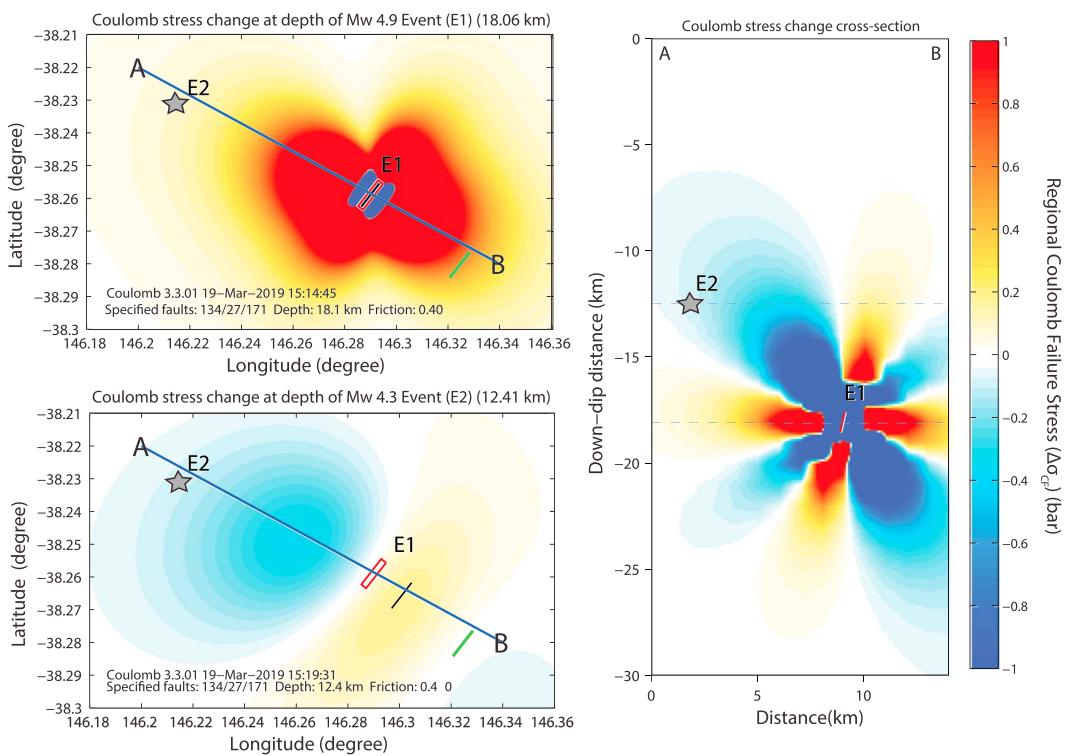


**Figure 7.** This is the same as Figure 6, but seismicity is for the time period from 15 July 2012 to 30 July 2012, capturing E2 and its aftershocks located with double-differencing method. Also, the cross sections are (b) parallel and (c) perpendicular to a strike of 134°. Stronger clustering of earthquakes is observed, and a majority of earthquakes align with the shallow-dipping plane as seen in (c). Also, see Figure 5 for the map view of projection orientations.

Etheridge et al., 1987) can be established for these faults, a polymodal mechanism cannot be ruled out given that observations of polymodal faults have been made in NE Australia (Carvell et al., 2014).

## 5.2. Stress Buildup and Release

Coulomb stress transfer modeling offers a useful way to evaluate if E1 triggered E2 (Lin & Stein, 2004; Stein, 1999; Stein et al., 1997; Toda et al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2015). We used the U.S. Geological Survey software Coulomb (available at <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/research/modeling/coulomb/>; Lin & Stein, 2004; Toda et al., 2005) to quantify changes in the regional Coulomb failure stress ( $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$ ) imparted by E1 to determine if E2 was triggered due to static stress transfer. The expectation for such a relationship is an increase in  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$



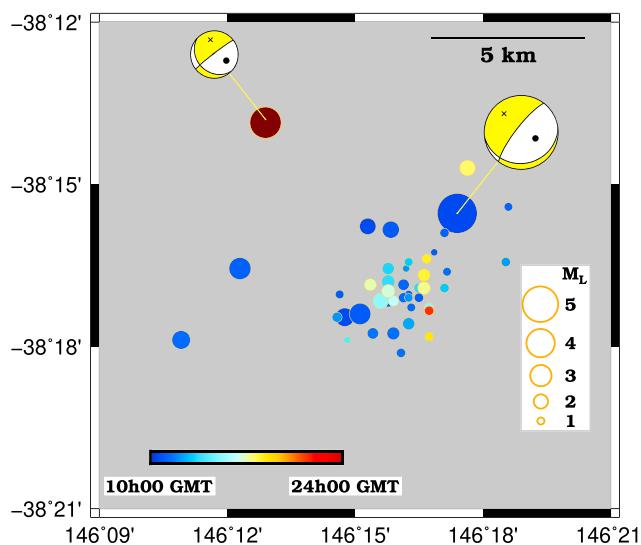
**Figure 8.** Regional Coulomb failure stress change ( $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$ ) imparted by E1 to receiver faults parallel to the rupture plane of E2. The focal mechanism primary rupture plane with an orientation of  $218^\circ$  (strike),  $78^\circ$  (dip), and  $78^\circ$  (slip rake) was used for the source fault orientation. The  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$  field was resolved on receiver fault planes parallel to E1 with an orientation of  $134^\circ$  (strike),  $27^\circ$  (dip), and  $171^\circ$  (slip rake). The red box shows the rupture plane of E1 ( $1.1 \text{ km} \times 1 \text{ km}$ ) at its hypocenter, and E2 is shown by the gray star. The upper left panel shows  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$  at the hypocentral depth of E1 (18.1 km), whereas the lower left panel shows that at the hypocentral depth of E2 (12.41 km). The right panel illustrates  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$  on a cross section between A and B.

on E2 as a result of E1. The magnitudes of  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$  need not be large and typically is greater than  $+0.01 \text{ MPa}$  where the relationship is held to be causal (King & Cocco, 2001).

In this analysis, we used a coefficient of apparent friction of  $\mu' = 0.4$ , a shear modulus of  $32 \text{ GPa}$ , and a Poisson's ratio of  $0.25$ , which are similar to other stress transfer calculations covering a variety of rock types (King et al., 1994; Toda et al., 2005). We also set the along-strike fault length to  $1.1 \text{ km}$  and down-dip width to  $1 \text{ km}$  so that the fault area estimated from spectral analysis ( $\sim 1.1 \text{ km}^2$ ) remains fixed. We used the primary plane from the focal mechanism solution ( $218^\circ/78^\circ/78^\circ$ ) of E1 and predict the  $\sigma_{CF}$  imparted to the primary focal mechanism plane ( $134^\circ/27^\circ/171^\circ$ ) of E2 (Figure 8).

Figure 8 shows that  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$  on E2 decreased slightly by  $\sim 0.008 \text{ MPa}$  and, on face value, negates expectation for stress coupling as the causal mechanism for E2. Therefore, we infer that accumulation of stresses over time from tectonic forces and prior events may have generated a baseline stress field conducive for nucleating E1 and E2 in a rapid succession and that the slight reduction in  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$  would have been too small to change those initial conditions. Notwithstanding an apparent lack of static stress coupling, it is intriguing that E1 and E2 are clustered in time and space. In the next subsections, we explore some other possible scenarios.

Seismic sequences exhibiting coupled fault behavior are found elsewhere in Australia. For instance, the four largest earthquakes ( $M_s$  6.3, 6.4, 6.7, and 5.3) in Tennant Creek occurred within a 20-hr period on 22 January 1988 with a hypocenter separation of less than  $15 \text{ km}$  (Bowman, 1992; Jones et al., 1991). Focal mechanism solutions indicate that the interstrike angles of these earthquakes were  $118\text{--}133^\circ$ , suggesting the activation of a complex fault system. In addition, McCue (1990) documents other large earthquakes ( $6 \leq M_L \leq 6.6$ ) that are clustered in time and space. Thus, it appears that Australia is a candidate intraplate region for producing



**Figure 9.** Spatiotemporal evolution of seismicity on 19 June 2012 between 1000 and 2400 hr. Aftershocks of E1 are clustered to the southwest of E1. Within the aftershock cluster, however, seismicity do not show a discernible spatial pattern. These aftershocks occur in a region where  $\Delta\sigma_{CF} = \sim +0.1$  MPa (see Figure 8). The  $M_w$  4.3 earthquake is shown in maroon color.

recognized as important for triggering earthquakes on low-angle fault planes in numerical experiments (Wills & Buck, 1997).

#### 5.4. Fluid Diffusion-Assisted Seismicity

An alternative hypothesis for causal linking of sequential rupture on nearby but distinct faults is fluid diffusion-assisted seismicity migration (Chen et al., 2012; Talwani et al., 2007). Previous observations and modeling suggest that this process is likely to span a short time window (hours to days) within which the earthquakes are clustered (Hummel & Müller, 2009; Yukutake et al., 2011). Also, fluid-induced seismicity is characterized by smaller stress drop values because introducing fluids lubricates faults, reducing effective shear resistance (Hough, 2014; Yamada et al., 2015). Analyzing tectonic and induced earthquakes in the central United States, Huang et al. (2017), however, claim that fluid-induced and natural earthquakes are indistinguishable in terms of stress drop. Nonetheless, when taken together, time window of occurrence, temporal evolution, and stress drop should allow for identifying fluid-assisted seismicity migration.

Our catalog indicates that 44 aftershocks occurred following E1 on the same day and that seismicity was active at least up until April 2018 with a diminishing rate, suggesting a period of prolonged stress release. Aftershocks within the first 24 hr do not show a discernible spatial pattern (Figure 9) as would be expected for rapid fluid diffusion-driven seismicity (Yoshida & Hasegawa, 2018). Instead, we observe that these aftershocks were triggered in a random pattern, consistent with the rupture of smaller asperities on the fault as those locations were loaded to failure from static stress transfer (Goebel et al., 2012; Kazemian et al., 2015). This is consistent with our predictions of  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$ , where these aftershocks are located within a region to the southwest of E1 with  $\Delta\sigma_{CF}$  up to  $+0.1$  MPa. Thus, it is unlikely that a fluid-assisted process activated E1 and its immediate aftershocks.

With an apparent lack of stress coupling between E1 and E2, however, we cannot rule out fluid diffusion activating E2. The stress drop of E2 being nearly one half that of E1 might suggest lubrication of Fault 2, by which shear resistance at the fault interface is reduced. Another feature that supports this hypothesis is precursory activity that began 2 days prior to the occurrence of E2 nearly at the same location as E2 (Figures 5 and S2). Delayed sluggish release of previously locked pore fluid in the vicinity of E2 from shaking effects of E1 might have triggered these smaller precursory earthquakes, which in turn enhanced permeability in the rock rather rapidly. A resulting diffusion of fluid could have reduced clamping stress on an extended fault interface, producing a larger event (E2). Global data sets provide evidence for such a

clustered complex fault ruptures. To what extent a high compressive stress magnitude (Coblentz et al., 1995, 1998; Nelson et al., 2006) in the crust contributes to this behavior of faults needs further investigation. Future work to map the changes in stress over time in the region including the effect of prior seismicity may provide additional information regarding the state of stress and mechanism for triggering E2.

#### 5.3. Rotation of the Local Stress Field

A stress drop of E1 on the order of differential stress (i.e.,  $\sigma_1 - \sigma_3$ ) in the crust can produce a localized, transient rotation of the stress field (Hardebeck & Okada, 2018 and references therein), which can preferentially orient the local stress field temporarily to promote rupture on faults suboptimally oriented. Using Yin and Rogers' (1995) equations and principal stress magnitudes estimated by Nelson et al. (2006) for the Gippsland Basin, we estimated that E1 rotated the local stress field by about  $10^\circ$  toward the normal to Fault 1.  $P$  axis orientation determined from focal mechanism solutions also suggests that the direction of principal compression rotated by  $27^\circ$  counterclockwise, consistent with inferred left lateral motion of E1. Whether this stress field rotation reoriented Fault 2 favorably for failure needs further investigation given that there is a nonlinear relationship between Coulomb stress and the orientation of principal stress axes (King et al., 1994). While such rotations are not captured in our Coulomb tests, they have been previously

remote and delayed triggering mechanism (King & Cocco, 2001; Parsons et al., 2017). Detailed knowledge of fluid diffusion in this region is required to test this hypothesis, which would be important future research work.

### 5.5. Implications to Seismic Hazard

It is difficult to ascertain if E1 is a characteristic earthquake for this region without paleoseismic evidence. Nonetheless, it is important to constrain parameters useful for seismic hazard analysis of similar earthquakes. Stress drop estimate is a key input parameter in strong ground motion simulations as they determine the high frequency acceleration (Baltay et al., 2013). Also, the variability of stress drop between the two earthquakes studied here contributes to the variability of strong ground motion models, which is an important consideration in seismic hazard analysis (Cotton et al., 2013; Oth et al., 2017). It would be interesting to test if the peak ground acceleration of  $0.8 \text{ m/s}^2$  calculated for southeastern Australia (Gaull et al., 1990) should be revised based on our estimates of stress drop.

Taking a physics-based approach, recurrence interval is another important parameter that we can constrain. The strain drop ( $\Delta\varepsilon$ ) associated with earthquakes can be estimated from  $\Delta\sigma/\mu$  (Kanamori & Brodsky, 2004), where  $\mu$  is the dynamic shear modulus estimated from (shear velocity) $^2 \times$  density. We obtained these values for the hypocenter from the GIP3A model and find that E1 and E2 have  $\Delta\varepsilon$  of  $1.809 \times 10^{-3}$  and  $8.61 \times 10^{-4}$ , respectively. The recurrence interval can then be calculated as  $\Delta\varepsilon/\dot{\varepsilon}$ , where  $\dot{\varepsilon}$  is the average strain rate for the region (Ward, 1998). If we use Sandiford et al.'s (2004) upper bound of  $3.153 \times 10^{-9} \text{ year}^{-1}$  for  $\dot{\varepsilon}$ , we obtain 573 and 273 ka, respectively, for E1 and E2. Regardless of appreciable uncertainty, these physics-based estimates agree to a first order with those obtained from field investigations in the region (Gardner et al., 2009).

The high stress drop-long recurrence relationship is explained by the phenomenon called “stiction,” where static friction increases with stationary contact time of fault interfaces (Dieterich, 1972; Gitis & Volpe, 1992). The increase in static friction coupled with other processes such as chemical healing increases shear resistance (fault strength), requiring larger stresses to initiate rupture. The observation of higher stress drop in intraplate environments than in interplate ones (Allmann & Shearer, 2009; Romanowicz & Ruff, 2002; Scholz et al., 1986) can thus be explained by the time dependence of shear resistance.

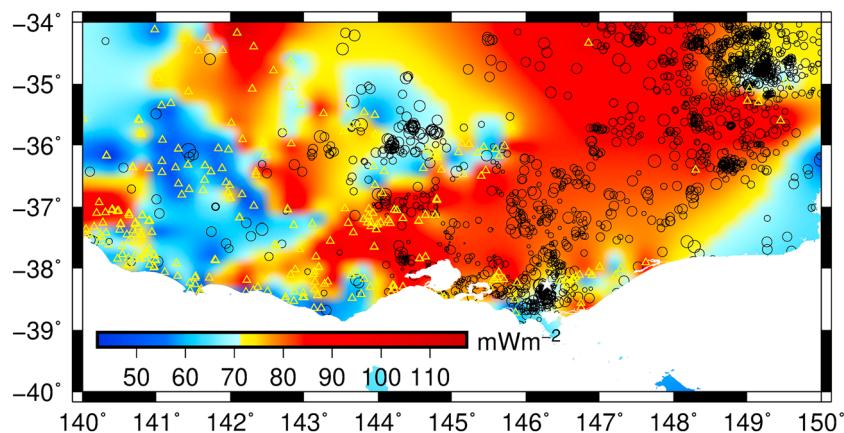
### 5.6. Global Implications

Although intraplate seismicity accounts for less than 5% of global moment release (Talwani, 2014), both historical and contemporary examples indicate a disproportionate damage to life and property from it (Bilham, 2014; Bodin & Horton, 2004; Ming et al., 1995). Despite this, forecasting hazard from intraplate earthquakes is difficult primarily because faults remain undetected prior to rupturing, it is difficult to detect active segments of mapped faults due to long quiescence periods, or earthquake characteristics are not well constrained due to the short temporal record of seismicity (Wolin et al., 2012). Thus, comparing information across analogous intraplate environments is useful for understanding geologic conditions under which these earthquakes occur, and their characteristics.

#### 5.6.1. Influence of Heat Flow

Global observations of intraplate seismicity (e.g., central and eastern North America, China, western India, Australia, and Africa) are generally attributed to either reactivation of preexisting zones of mechanical weakness such as rifted crust (Schulte & Mooney, 2005; Stein et al., 2014; Talwani & Rajendran, 1991), local geologic structures and dynamics favorable for stress concentration (Attanayake & Fonseca, 2016; Dentith & Featherstone, 2003; Forte et al., 2007; Levandowski et al., 2018; Stephansson et al., 1991; Talwani, 2014), or thermomechanical weakening of the lower crust and the upper mantle (Célérier et al., 2005; Kenner & Segall, 2000; Liu & Zoback, 1997).

Based on previous studies, seismicity in Gippsland Basin, (Thorpdale is located within the Gippsland Basin) can be linked to at least two of the above mechanisms, namely, reactivation of faults generated by rifting of Australia from Antarctica in the Lower Cretaceous (Etheridge et al., 1987, 1991) and thermomechanical weakening of the lower crust and the upper mantle (Holford et al., 2011; Sandiford & Egholm, 2008). Clark et al. (2014), however, argue against the control of thermomechanical weakening on the basis of relatively low levels of seismicity and neotectonics features in the Cooper/Eromanga Basin in east central Australia, where some of the largest heat flow anomalies in Australia are observed.



**Figure 10.** Interpolated heat flow field and seismicity from Figure 1. The locations of heat flow measurements and earthquakes are shown with triangles and circles, respectively. The radii of circles scale with earthquake magnitude. The location of Thorpdale seismic sequences is shown by the white star. An apparent correlation between high heat flow and seismicity emerges in this map.

To test this hypothesis, we combined new heat flow measurements of Mather et al. (2018) with those of Holford et al. (2011) to produce a map of heat flow field of southeast Australia using a minimum curvature interpolation approach (Smith & Wessel, 1990) and overlay 51 years of seismicity (Figure 10). Notwithstanding limitations in heat flow data coverage, an apparent correlation between heat flow field and seismicity emerges, where regions that are seismically most active have an apparent heat flow  $> \sim 70 \text{ mW/m}^2$ . A similar apparent correlation has been observed by Holford et al. (2011) primarily in the Flinders Range Seismic Zone in south Australia. Anomalous low seismic velocities are observed in the upper mantle beneath this region of high surface heat flow (Davies et al., 2015; Rawlinson et al., 2016), consistent with somewhat elevated Moho temperature and a mechanism involving weakening of the lower crust and upper mantle as Liu and Zoback (1997) proposed for the New Madrid Seismic Zone (NMSZ).

Liu and Stein (2016) argue that weakening from rifting is neither necessary nor sufficient for intraplate deformation based on observed seismicity in the NMSZ and north China. Recent quantitative analysis suggests, however, that structural inheritance from past tectonic cycles observed in the Saint Lawrence Valley in eastern Canada is an important factor in driving present-day intraplate deformation, where the strain rate can be 2 to 11 times higher than the surrounding region (Tarayoun et al., 2018). This latter study assumes that no other process contributes to observed high deformation rates. On the other hand, our analysis suggests that, even if high heat flow is not solely responsible for localizing deformation, it is likely a contributing factor.

#### 5.6.2. Fault Behavior

A common feature observed in several major intraplate environments including Australia, North China, and the NMSZ is the spatiotemporal clustering of earthquakes followed by prolonged quiescent periods ranging from hundred- to million-year timescales (Calais & Stein, 2009; Clark et al., 2012, 2014; Crone et al., 2003; Liu & Stein, 2011). In southeast Australia, sparse data suggest quiescent periods of the order of  $\sim 100 \text{ ka}$  (Gardner et al., 2009), consistent with our prediction in this study.

Liu et al. (2011) explain the behavior of intraplate faults using the concept of complex dynamic systems, in which slow tectonic loading is accommodated in a distributed network of interacting faults, and nontectonic variable transient stress perturbations (e.g., static stress transfer, isostatic adjustment to erosion, and local stress field rotation) controlling the triggering of earthquakes. For instance, we hypothesize that interplay between transient stress conditions and fluid diffusion may have coupled E1 to E2 in this study. On the other hand, static stress transfer has been identified to increase seismic potential in other intraplate environments. For example, Walsh et al. (2015) estimated that neighboring faults within about 10 km were loaded by as much as 0.05–0.5 MPa following the  $M_w 5.8$  earthquake in Mineral, Virginia, in 2011. This level of static stress change is capable of producing secondary main shocks (Stein, 1999).

Within Liu et al.'s (2011) framework, the opposite effect is also feasible. That is, if an earthquake produces a stress shadow, earthquakes on receiving faults will be suppressed or delayed. For example, Liu et al. (2018)

suggest that the magnitude of the 2008  $M_w$  7.9 Wenchuan intraplate earthquake in China was suppressed by a long-term stress shadow produced by 283 years of seismicity in and around the Longmen Shan Fault preceding the Wenchuan earthquake. Also, Li et al. (2005) predict a similar stress shadow scenario for the present-day NMSZ, where three  $M_w$  7.0–7.5 earthquakes occurred in 1811–1812. In our case, however, we find that the negative static stress coupling is too weak to hinder the failure of Fault 2. Therefore, if Liu et al.'s (2011) model accurately describes intraplate fault behavior, it becomes a challenge to understand the utility of commonly used concepts such as recurrence interval,  $M_{max}$ , and fault slip rate in seismic hazard analysis because these estimates become highly dependent on transient stress perturbations (Calais et al., 2016). As Stein and Liu (2009) pointed out, it may be that hazard in regions where faults have been recently active is overestimated, whereas that in other regions that lack recent seismicity is underestimated. Innovative seismic hazard analysis methods are needed to capture the effects of intraplate seismicity driven by transient processes.

## 6. Conclusions

We located 234 earthquakes of the 2012 Thorpdale seismic sequence and estimated source parameters of the two largest earthquakes (E1 and E2) to understand the rupture process. Our focal mechanism solutions suggest reactivation of faults in a reverse sense, consistent with the regional compressive stress field. From our source spectral analysis, we estimate earthquake magnitudes to be  $M_w$   $4.9 \pm 0.14$  (E1) and  $4.3 \pm 0.1$  (E2), and the rest of the aftershock magnitudes ( $M_L$ ) do not exceed 3.4. The stress drop estimated for E1 and E2 are  $57 \pm 7.4$  and  $28 \pm 2.4$  MPa, respectively, suggesting that the ruptures were associated with strong faults. These are capable of hosting earthquakes with long recurrence intervals, and our physics-based estimates of recurrence interval are 573 (E1) and 273 ka (E2). By analyzing the spatiotemporal distribution of earthquakes, we identify that the seismic sequence originated along a steep fault with a  $218^\circ$  strike, which then reactivated another sequence including E2 on a shallow-dipping fault with a  $134^\circ$  strike within 30 days of E1. Our Coulomb stress modeling indicate weak negative coupling between E1 and E2, precluding an explanation based on Coulomb stress transfer for fault interaction. Instead, we hypothesize that fault interaction was facilitated by fluid diffusion, local rotation of the stress field proceeding E1, or some combination of these processes. Interacting intraplate faults, with or without a prolonged time lag, have been observed previously in Australia (Jones et al., 1991; McCue, 1990), Asia (Liu et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2018), central and eastern United States (Li et al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2015), and in the Wharton basin beneath the Indian Ocean (Hill et al., 2015) following large earthquakes. Here we suggest that such fault interactions can take place even with moderate-sized earthquakes located several fault lengths apart. Also, an apparent correlation between heat flow and seismicity in southeast Australia suggests that intraplate seismicity is driven by a combination of mechanisms (e.g., transient stress perturbations, mechanical weakening from rifting and high heat flow). This understanding has important implications to the physics governing earthquakes and seismic hazard analysis.

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