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Mythbusting the Savanna Burning Methods



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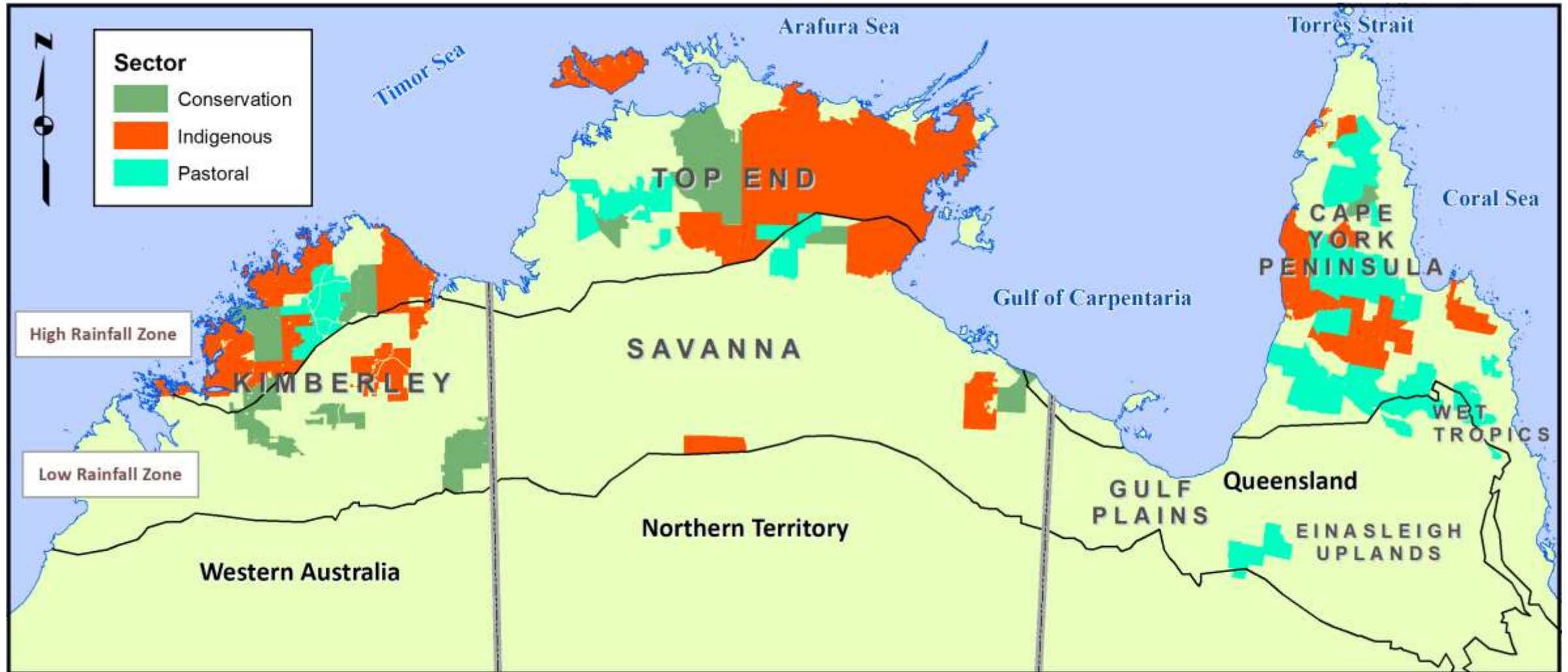
Introduction

- The number of savanna burning projects has grown significantly over the last 10 years
- Projects cover over 350,000 km²
- Projects cover broad range of land tenures across WA, NT and QLD
- These projects generate Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) through the management of fire
- Diverse and complex industry – projects owned by Indigenous groups, pastoralists, state governments, private conservation estates etc
- Widespread misunderstanding and even scepticism of the industry

The Top Ten Myths

1. All savanna burning projects are the same
2. Carbon accounting methods are perfect
3. The savanna burning method prescribes how to burn
4. Savanna burning must stop on the 1st August
5. Projects get paid to burn, so more area is burnt
6. Savanna burning projects harm biodiversity
7. Savanna burning projects are not traditional burning
8. Savanna burning projects need to prevent fire to engage with sequestration
9. All fire within a fire project is a result of savanna burning project operations
10. Fire scars tell the complete fire story

What is a savanna burning project?



Savanna Burning Methodology Determination

- A methodology determination prescribes procedures for estimating abatement from eligible projects and rules for monitoring, record-keeping and reporting
- Fires emit greenhouse gases, including methane and nitrous oxide
- The objective is to avoid the emission of methane and nitrous oxide from the burning of savannas, compared to the emissions during the baseline period

The savanna burning method tells you how to calculate the amount of methane and nitrous oxide

- **from a defined area**
- **for a particular year**
- **for defined eligible vegetation types**
- **for fires in the EDS and LDS**
- **accounting for fire history (years since last burnt)**



Myth 1: All savanna burning projects are the same

“One project can be used to draw conclusions that apply across the industry!”

“People with carbon projects burn to maximise carbon, not for country!”

- Projects differ in all of their characteristics
- Projects are registered and decisions about fire management are made by individual projects for a variety of reasons
- Method enables flexibility of operation
- Results from any one project cannot be extrapolated across the industry
- Not all fire management is the result of a savanna burning project

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Myth 2: Carbon accounting methods are perfect

- Offsets Integrity Standards – estimates that underpin any method should be conservative
- Savanna burning projects cover much of tropical northern Australia
- Scientific data that underpin the savanna burning method collected from specific sites across northern Australia
- Data is used in models to predict variables across northern Australia
- Balance - *Where should limited research resources be directed to enable a more accurate result without unnecessarily complicating the method?*

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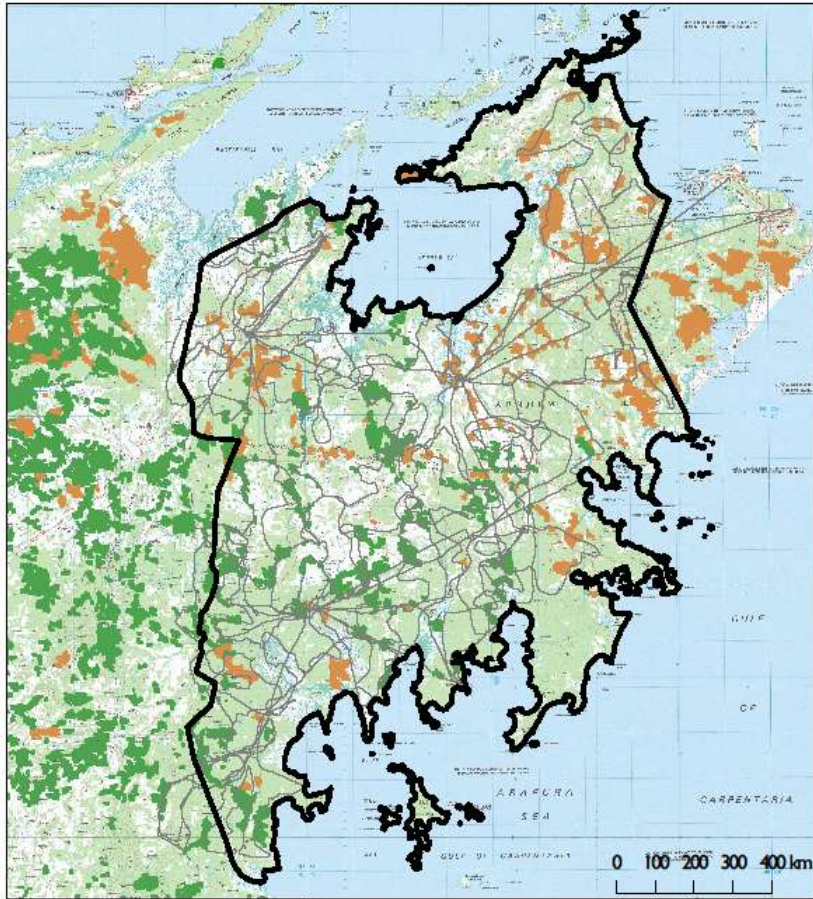
Myth 3: Savanna burning method prescribes how to burn

Project activity (2018 Method)

- The project proponent must undertake savanna fire management by undertaking **planned burning** in each project area each calendar year
- To demonstrate a pattern of burning that meets the **objective of avoiding the emission of methane and nitrous oxide** from the burning of savannas, compared to the emissions during the baseline period
- The method does not prescribe when you can and cannot burn country
- Method enables flexibility of operation

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Myth 4: Savanna burning must stop on the 1st August



Prescribed Burn Tracks
2016
NEALFA Project Area

Legend

- Prescribed burn tracks
- ▭ NEALFA Project Area
- Burnt area mapping
- early
- late

- Flexibility to undertake appropriate fire management for your project area
- This includes undertaking fire management after 1st August
- Early versions of the method (2015) stipulated this explicitly

(16 1b) fire management may also be carried out in each project area in the late dry season

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Myth 5: Projects get paid to burn so more area is burnt

“These groups earn carbon credits from burning, so they just burn everything!”

- Projects can generate an Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) if they are successful in avoiding emissions compared to their baseline period
- 1 ACCU = 1 tonne CO₂-e
- Yes, ACCUs are a financial product which can be sold
- Yes, many projects use the revenue from carbon credits to fund their fire management
- Decisions about area burnt made by individual projects and include a range of factors
- Often guided by physical realities
- Importantly, more fire does not equal more money

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Project emissions = EDS + LDS emissions



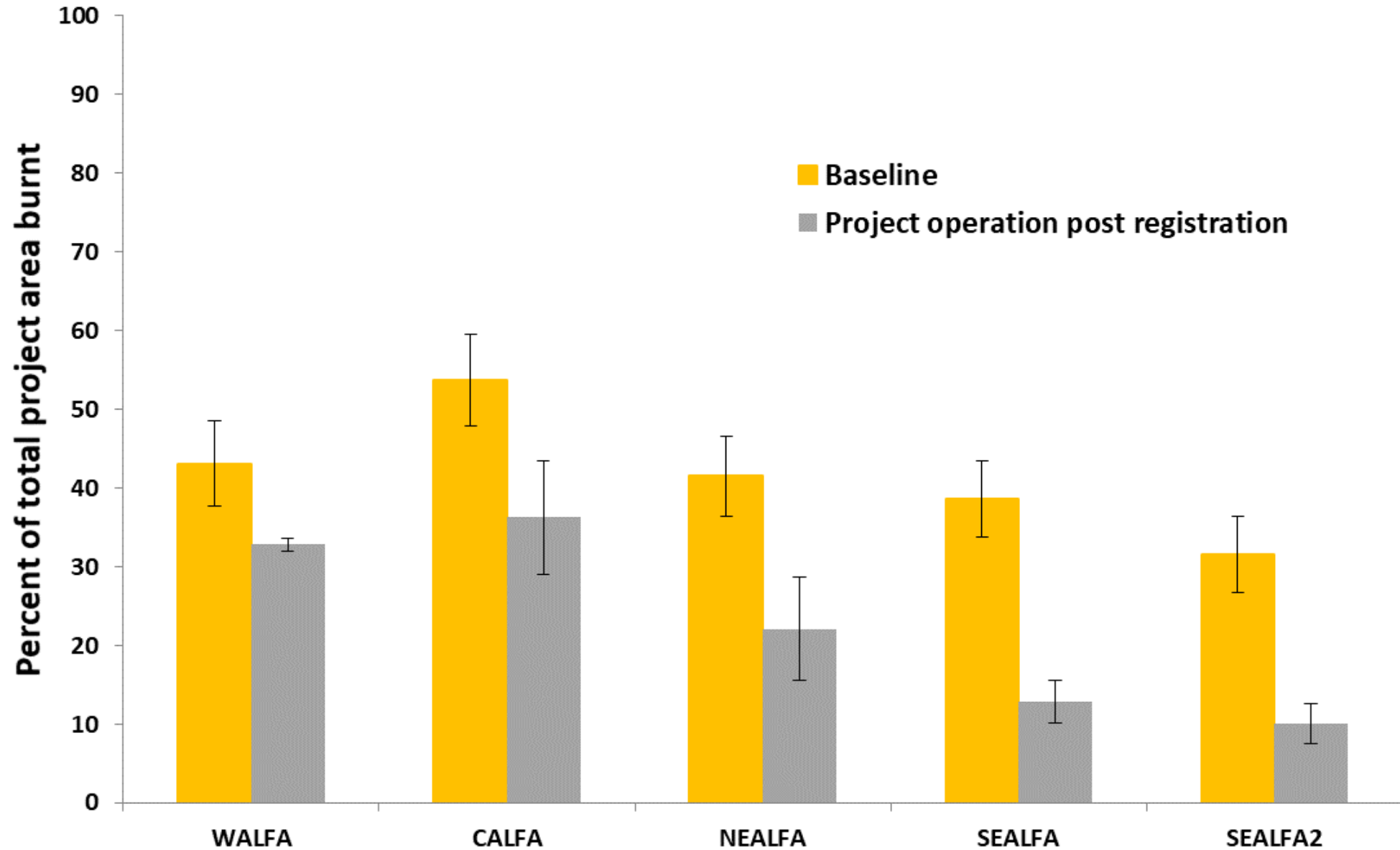
**Late dry season fire
(LDS)**



**Early dry season
fire (EDS)**



Average area burnt (total)



Myth 6: Savanna burning projects harm biodiversity

“They just burn as much as they can for as little cost as possible, no matter the impact on biodiversity!”

- Method does not prescribe particular fire management
- Carbon methods may not consider biodiversity but planning and operations generally do
- Method is, and needs to remain, a simple way to account for carbon
- Method allows projects to undertake fire management in a way that provides other benefits
- More research and monitoring is required to understand the impacts of fire management on biodiversity

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Myth 7: Savanna burning projects are not traditional burning

“These guys are flying around in helicopters – what’s traditional about that?!”

- It varies!
- Some projects apply best practise fire management without traditional practises (e.g. non indigenous fire projects)
- Aboriginal ranger groups and Traditional Landowners are strongly grounded in custodial responsibilities and use modern tools to deliver customary burning
- Aboriginal people have every right to incorporate whatever tools they need to address the damage that colonisation has wrought on fire regimes



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Myth 8: Projects need to prevent fire to engage in the savanna burning sequestration method

- The recent savanna sequestration method is the first to account for Emissions Avoidance and Sequestration
- The activity is the same as for emissions avoidance - undertaking planned burning
- Sequestration component adds a new carbon pool accounting for carbon stored in dead organic matter
- Sequestration is already happening, we now have the science to account for it in a method

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Myth 9: All fire within a project is part of savanna burning project operations

- Projects operate in complex landscapes
- There may be multiple stakeholders with different objectives
- Yes, all fire within a project area is included in the carbon accounting under the method
- BUT not all fire in a project is part of savanna burning operations
 - Fires are lit by people, deliberately or accidentally, both during the early and late season
 - Lightning strikes ignite fires

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Myth 10: Fire scars tell the complete fire story

- Remotely sensed fire scars are truly amazing but it is always important to note that they may not tell the whole story
- Fire scars do not demonstrate what fire management is undertaken as part of savanna burning operations
- Fire scars do not show wildfire fighting efforts
- Dig deeper than NAFI to explore complexities of fire management

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Thoughts for moving forward ...

- This is a complex industry – Aboriginal land managers, scientists, Governments, pastoralists, conservationists / NGOs, carbon business etc.
- Communication is vitally important

*It is important to get the story out there – but make sure it is the **right story!***

***Talk to your colleagues** involved in other aspects of the industry!*

*Build upon the **collaborative and innovative environment** in which the Savanna Burning Industry was created!*