

International Savanna Fire Management Initiative

Sam Johnston ^{1*} and Nolan Hunter¹

ABSTRACT – Due to colonisation, traditional ways of fire management have been suppressed across landscapes and as a result vast areas of country are poorly managed and degraded. Conventional methods of firefighting have largely failed. Climate change will make the situation worse. Indigenous people in the savannas of northern Australia have developed a solution to this threat and have been leading the way in community based integrated fire management practices. Combining their traditional knowledge with modern science and technology, Indigenous communities burn early, keep fuel loads down and reduce destructive wildfires. This leads to a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions, which in turn provides carbon market opportunities. Today, traditional fire management is practised across northern Australia's savannas on range of tenures including Indigenous lands, conservation parks and pastoral leases. Currently, there are 74 registered savanna carbon projects covering 25% of northern Australia that have reduced wildfire by 50% and generated an industry worth more than \$100 million. The 25 Indigenous-led carbon projects create more than 400 seasonal jobs in remote communities, while at the same time reinvigorating traditional culture and improving biodiversity. In 2013 the International Savanna Fire Management Initiative (ISFMI) explored the feasibility of adapting Australia's ground breaking savanna burning technology for the savannas of Africa, Asia and Latin America. With the support of the Australian Government, the ISFMI Botswana Pilot Project, is adapting the technology for southern Africa. Wildfires are a dominant feature of southern African landscapes, they emit significant GHG emissions, threaten wildlife tourism, reduce agricultural productivity and damage ecosystems. Building on the success of the northern Australian Indigenous carbon industry, the ISFMI is working with the Government of Botswana and Indigenous communities to reignite traditional fire management practices at a number of pilot sites. Our presentation will highlight a) how Indigenous communities in northern Australia are reigniting traditional practice of fighting fire with fire b) how this approach combined with the latest science and technology is reducing wildfires and building locally owned carbon businesses and c) how this technology is being adapted for the southern African landscape in partnership with Government of Botswana and local Indigenous communities.

Keywords: Traditional knowledge; community based fire management; carbon markets; socio-Australia; Botswana; southern Africa; knowledge exchange

¹International Savanna Fire Management Initiative, Kimberley Land Council (KLC), 11 Gregory St Broome, 6725, Western Australia,*Corresponding author: samj@unimelb.edu.au