



The new normal : Communities learning to live with fire

Val Charlton November 2024

A true story....

I had to evacuate twice last summer!



First time, ever!

Another true story..

Moved to a new house and sorted out what to keep and what to throw out - notes, comms resources and reviewing 25 years of working with people in landscapes about conservation and Community-based Fire Management – CBFiM





Some thoughts about:

- *Integrated Fire Management, landscapes and communities at risk, from a practitioner's perspective

- *What it might take to “turn the ship” and make genuine changes – attitude and commitment – to include community decision making into IFM

- *Insights and learnings

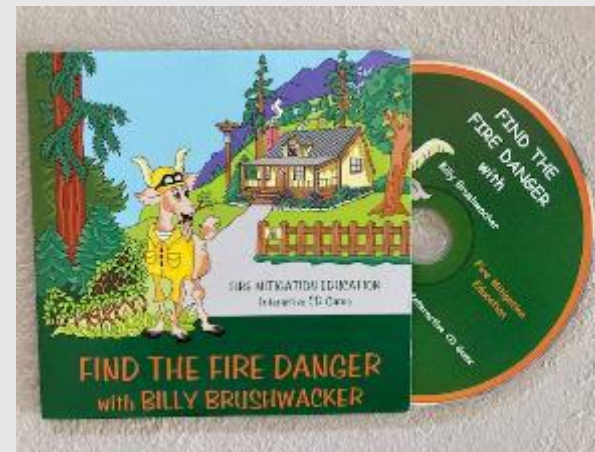
- *Resilience- is it possible?

Integrated Fire Management – we are not walking the talk!

Addressing the causes of ignitions

We know that most fires are caused by people – different reasons require different strategies
YET....

We carry on making leaflets and distributing them with little real public engagement
WHILE KNOWING THAT ... any reduction of unwanted ignitions will reduce suppression efforts, costs and damage

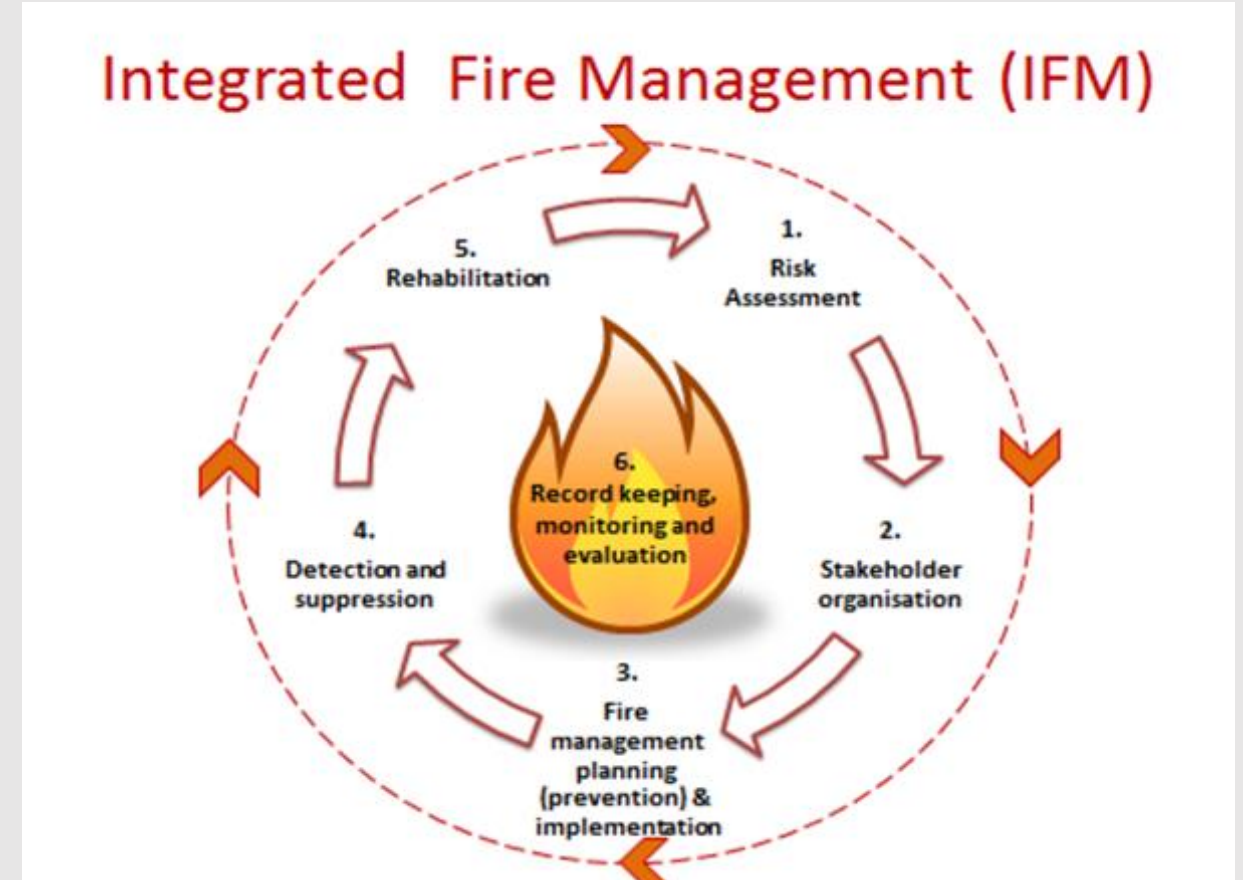


Integrated Fire Management – we are not walking the talk!

The distribution of effort and budget still hugely favours SUPPRESSION.

Why is it so hard to secure EQUAL support for prevention, good risk planning, fuel management, community-based decision making, etc?

- Fire suppression is a massive industry
- Fire and Emergency Services oriented = mandates and duties, personnel types (A1), the need to command and control
- Politicians



Integrated Fire Management – we are not walking the talk!

**Public perceptions (victim mentality)
and sensational media coverage
favours continuing the suppression
track**

- Non – catastrophes don't sell newspapers or attract funding support
- Public expectations....our own fault!
- Inability or unwillingness to have the hard conversations and engage in long term landscape planning - very messy and a scarce skillset



2023



Weekend Argus

SATURDAY EDITION R11 incl vat



FEBRUARY 7, 2009

MILLION DOLLAR MAN

A fortune awaits JP Duminy in India - PAGE 32

Cape Argus
AMAZING ARGUS
AUCTION

YOUR HEART'S DESIRE

How low are you prepared to bid for a luxury Valentine's break for two? - PAGE 4

90 fires in one day

By CRAIG McKUNE
and LYNNETTE JOHNS

An uncontrolled fire in Algeria in the Cederberg engulfed a church, a school, and a house yesterday and the municipality was battling to source helicopters to waterbomb the flames.

However, the chance of them getting air support was nil as all the helicopters were busy in other areas.

Zoo, in the Strand, near Monwabisi and a veid fire close to Bliskiesdorp in Delft last night.

Provincial disaster and fire brigade manager Schalk Carsten said they had called in the South African Defence Force for help when the fire situation appeared out of control. Carsten said they called on the military when faced with a wall of flames that was spreading across the Moutonshoek Valley near Pletberg.



WALL OF FLAMES: Farmworkers tend a backburn to prevent a veid fire from spreading across the Moutonshoek Valley near Pletberg

IMAGE: JEFFREY ABRAHAMS

SMS the Argus
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absorption jumping back into their vehicles, the group faced up to four and six days of burning hot weather.

and onto the Louisaford Wine Estate. The fire started on Thursday

When you need a little extra...

2009....

What enables lasting behavior change?

Catastrophic / Extreme Wildfire Events?

*Portugal and Chile are recent examples of taking advantage of a crisis to change policy and implement prevention actions

*Carrot and stick approaches

??Will efforts be sustained??



What enables lasting behavior change?

Stakeholder Partnerships

- *Sharing responsibility and liability
- *Respecting ecosystem patterns, processes, cultural and economic values across landscapes
- *Compromise! Having the hard conversations, building trust among stakeholders, being involved and present for the long haul

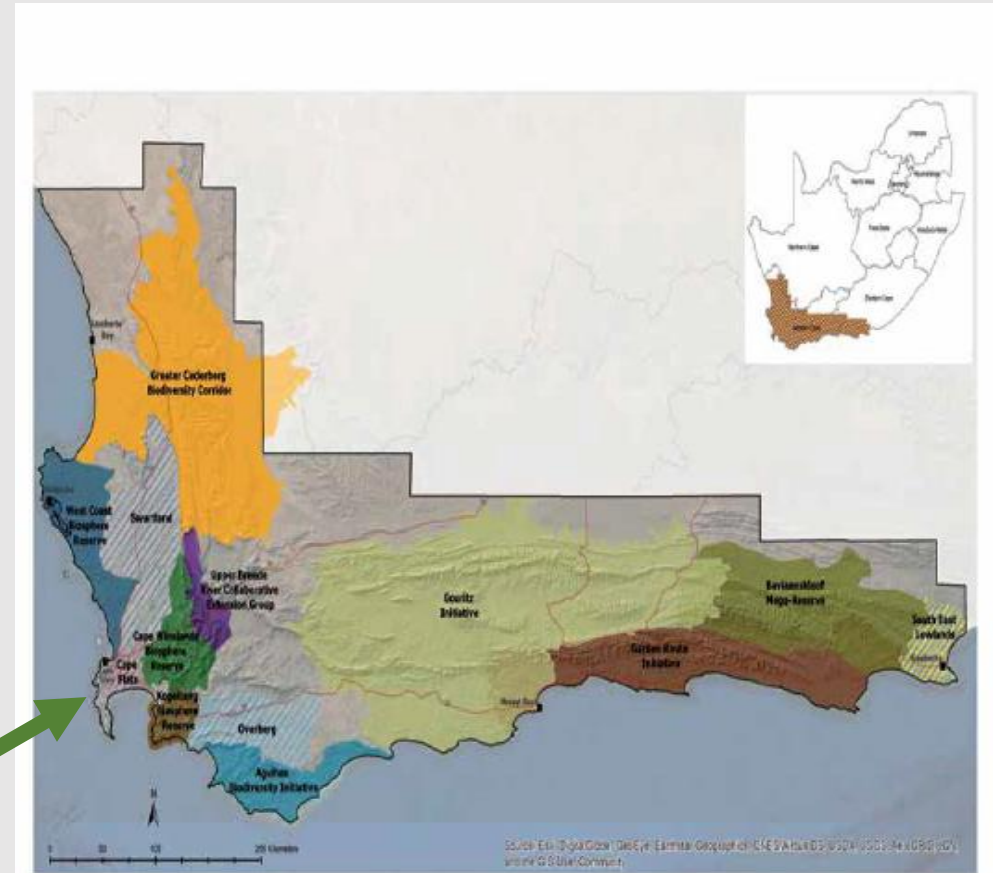


Ownership of the problem!

What enables lasting behavior change?

Place - based initiatives inculcate an attitude of sharing and partnership, and create positive energy on the ground

- * Conservation landscape initiatives
- * Forest owner associations
- * Biosphere programmes
- * Agricultural co-operatives
- * Fire Protection Associations
- * Stewardship schemes
- * OECEM's



CAPE 2000 – 2020 Landscape Initiatives
Cape project for People and the Environment

What is Community-based Fire Management?

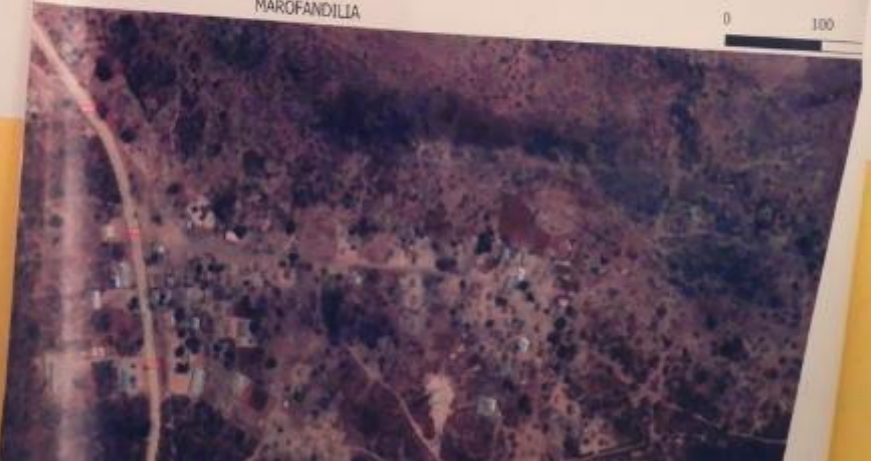
“CBFiM

is a type of land and forest management in which a locally resident community (with or without the collaboration of other stakeholders) has substantial involvement in deciding the objectives and practices involved in preventing, controlling or utilizing fires.”



5th IWFC 2011, NFPA 2012, UN FAO 2013

Oviana	Olona Lomou ny Asa	Torona Lomou ny Asa	Mambona	Mpivonaha wika	Fivako Lomou Harala ny ASA
Agositra	Fokomelona ny Komitry France	Manjambilo	Angady, Paha Bavilla Reteve	FAIVYAMA SARANALA DREDA	Tiamonana Tivonana Balahy ny Pahy ny ampony chief Tahony ny Komity Firenise
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Tolay	Tsakiny Tokitrano Ecole			Mila mamont rondy ny Komitry ny chif	
agitra	Fokomelona ny Komity France				



Collectively
producing a
community
fire
management
plan.

Combining
simplicity
with
technology!

Good reasons why CBFiM should be supported

Fire fuel loads in the landscape are greater than authorities alone can manage



Over 90 % of unwanted fires are caused by people.

The solution has to involve people

Suppression costs are increasing to an unaffordable level



People use fire as a land management tool every day

Fire adapted ecosystems are threatened
by
too few and
too many
fires



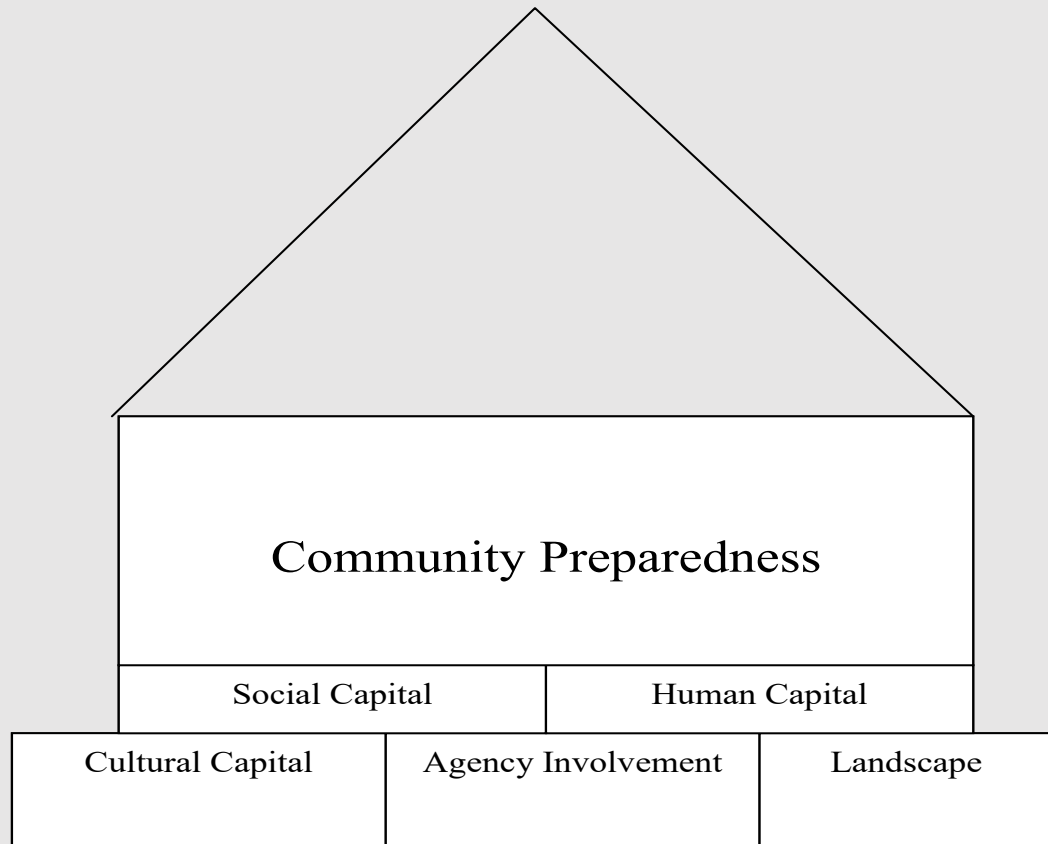
There are more **people** living
in fire – prone interface zones
than ever before

What is the Wildland Urban Interface/Intermix?

- *A set of conditions that affect resources and how they can be managed, rather than a geographic place
- * Natural Resource definition: where increased human influence and land-use conversion are changing natural resource goods, services, and management techniques (University of Florida)



What is “The Community” ?



Social Capital community characteristics that contribute to collective social action- Leadership, networks , the ability to mobilise resources

Human Capital Training and education

Cultural Capital knowledge and skills people possess because of their heritage, experience and place attachment

Agency Involvement gives the local community access to public programmes, funding and resources as well as skills and expert knowledge

Landscape Vegetation and topography, but also social aspects such as land ownership

Use communities' social and cultural capital

goodwill, leadership, assets, strengths.



Share technical knowledge and expertise with the people living in the landscape

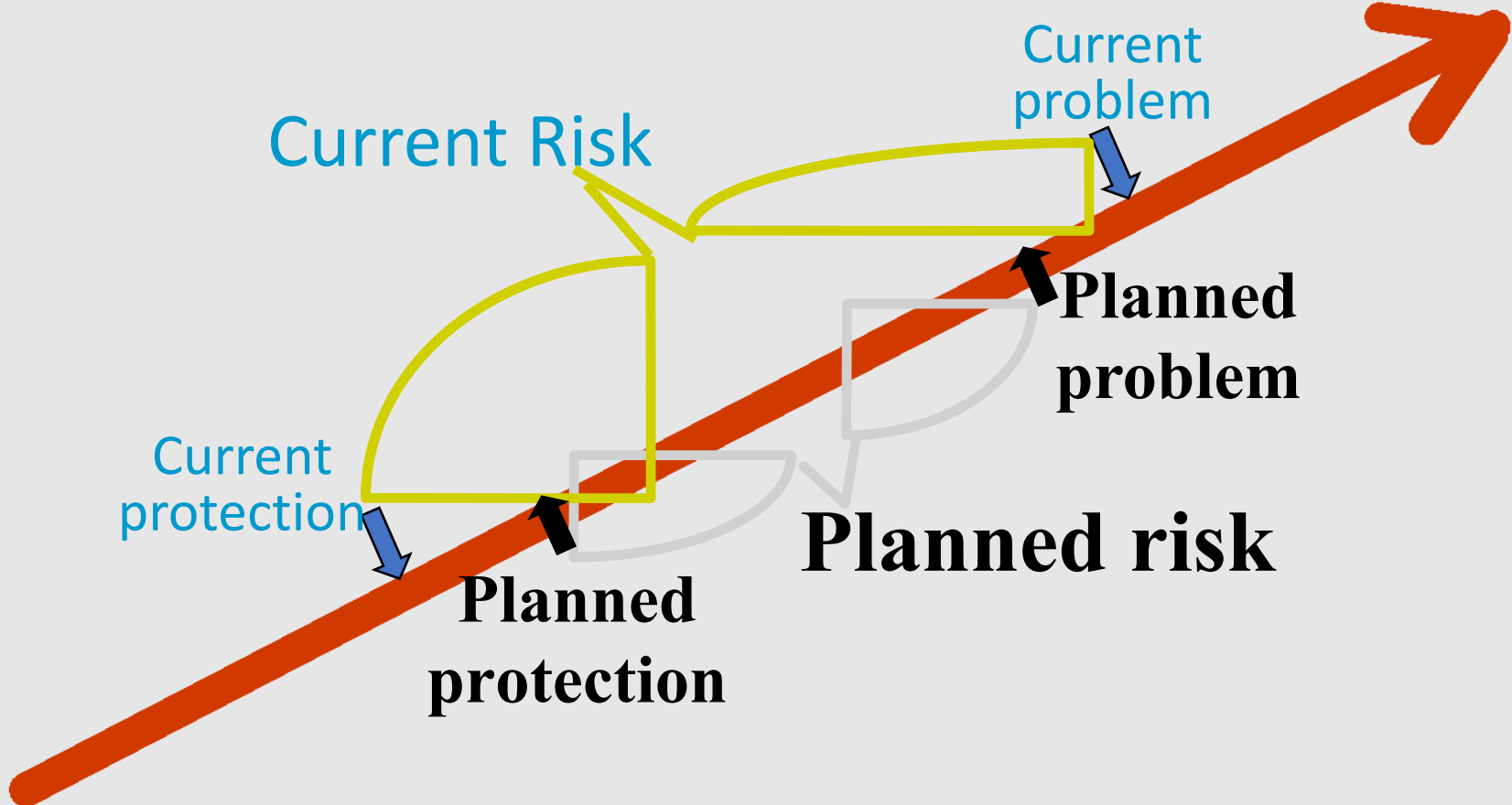


Chile

Crisis created opportunity - Commercial forestry recognised the hazard and liability they have created and the critical role they have to play

Long term. Real commitment.

Risk = Current Problem - Current Protection



Assumed (Acceptable) Risk

The acknowledged assumption by a community of a given degree of risk.

(Example – every year when crops are planted, the farmer knows and accepts that there is a chance that the crop will fail.)

The Value of Round Table Discussions

Having those hard conversations with stakeholders!

*Do all stakeholders understand the risk associated with the WUI and land and forest fires?

*Are there any public policy issues that need to be addressed as a result of the WUI and associated risks?

*Resource gaps?

*Research opportunities?

*The risk and liability implication of commercial forestry activities or other “fire exclusion” landscapes?

Many more...



CBFiM can provide the opportunity to



do DIFFERENT things



Strategically
– placed
open-ended
firebreaks
using aerial
ignition



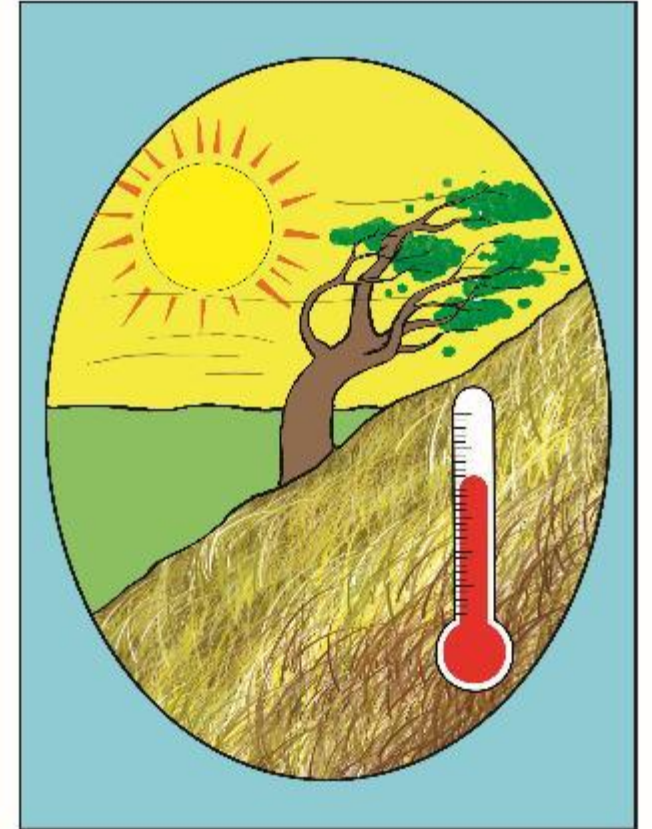
Technical
knowledge ...+
Community
permission... +
Excellent
communication

Self-
extinguishing!

A word about Skilled Communicators.....

The right people can...

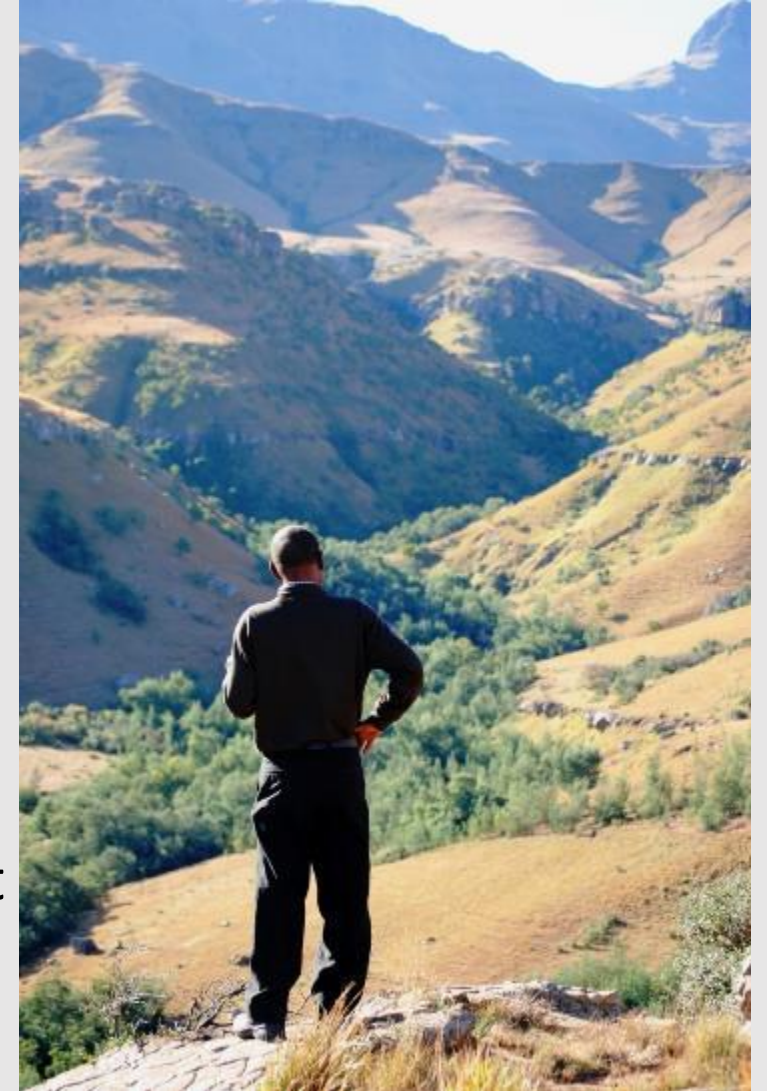
- Build awareness about risk and fire weather
- Increase public acceptance
- Encourage positive behavior
- Focus on the similar
- Communicate with a purpose
- Undertake pre-fire (fuel reduction) communication
- Provide accurate and factual communication during fire events



And lastly:

Some lessons learned..towards resilient landscapes and communities

- **People are not the problem, but the solution. Shared responsibility is the goal.**
- Social ecology capacity–building is absolutely critical. Train-the-trainer, community facilitation, **genuine commitment** to community work – **it's messy!**
- **Recognition of community effort is essential**
- Stipends and incentives encourage community commitment

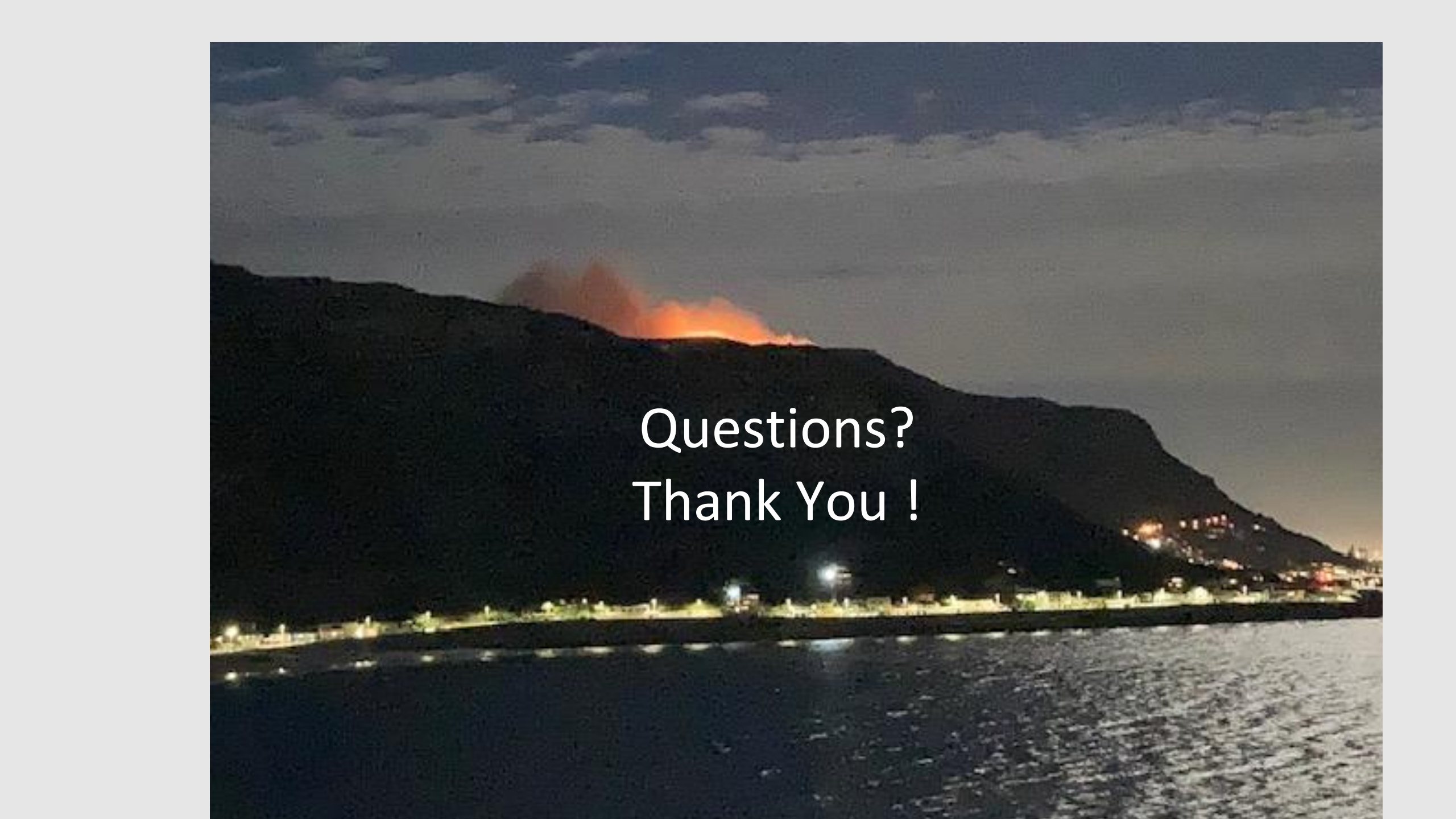


And lastly:

Some lessons learned..towards resilient landscapes and communities

- There must be a **tangible benefit to a community** for behaviour shifts to be sustained.
Eg – improved grazing as well as reduced fire risk.
Biodiversity protection, insurance incentives,
tax rebates.
- **Tap into community values - bottom up and top down**
- **LISTEN!**
- **This is a journey... and a marathon, not a sprint.**



A night photograph of a coastal town with a volcano in the background. The volcano is illuminated from within, showing a bright orange and red glow. The town is lit up with yellow and white lights, and the water in the foreground is dark with some reflections. The sky is dark with some clouds.

Questions?
Thank You !