Volume 4 | Issue 10

October 2023

# Southern African Institute of Forestry



Delivering a professional service to forestry

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SAIF Calendar : October 2023 : Gum Tree Harvesting White River , Mpumalanga , RSA Photographer, Gerrit Marais , Mpumalanga Branch

### From the President's Desk Fire and Water

Not for the first time, South Africa experienced some severe weather over the past month or two. Droughts and floods are common in South Africa. Most of these events which took place over the past  $\pm$  200 years have been recorded and documented, some of which we read about in books or carried over from one generation to another we hear this from the people who lived before us.

Headlines like "Runaway fire claims lives of six South African National Defence Force soldiers" and South African Air Force assists Overberg communities following Cape floods", "South African coastline battered by storm surges, two deaths reported" as well as "Fire destroys 17 living spaces at commune for the destitute in Krugersdorp" dominated some of the news apart from the conflict in Isarel and Gaza. You will read more about the devastating fire at Richards Bay which directly affected the Forestry and forest products industry recently, elsewhere in this Newsletter.

The question arises whether these so-called "unprecedented" events are becoming more frequent and more severe or are they just cyclical by nature and should be expected? Are these events connected to Climate Change or Global warming? Are we perhaps simply better informed than before about these extreme events thanks to the media coverage particularly in the social media? We agree that there













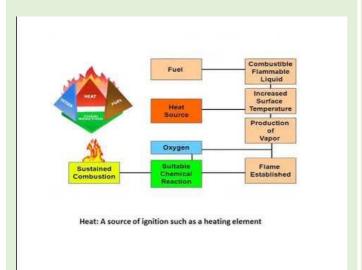


are more questions than answers at this stage. Many experts and professionals offer their opinion and advice, but we often feel overawed by the situation to the point of asking "so what?".

According to the meteorologists and other experts, we can expect an increase in these extreme events e.g., devastating floods and mega fires. Should we therefore accept our fate that we are victims and that these severe weather events have become the new norm/ standard and that we can do nothing about it?

One recent article state that during the next 30 years, it's predicted that 96 million children will be displaced by river floods alone.

On one hand, the alarmists warn us that it will just get worse and on the other side, the realists say that there is something that we can do namely to address the high fire fuel loads and to prepare and maintain fire breaks/ belts. If we refer to the well-known fire triangle of which an image with some explanation is shown below, we have no control over two of the elements namely Heat and Oxygen. These 2 elements can at best be mitigated during a fire event.



There is however one element which can and should be addressed pro-actively namely fuels. After some of the devastating fires which ravaged large parts and many farms in the Free State and Northwest Province recently, the Umbrella Fire Protection Associations indicated that the preceding good rainy seasons contributed directly to the very high fuel loads in both Provinces. As these fire fuel loads were not appropriately addressed and reduced prior to the fire season, the fires which occurred during the extreme

weather, soon got out of hand, and spread rapidly.

This also brings us to another major area of concern namely the ignition element and allegations and suspicions that many of these fires were arson / incendiarism related. All of us who have worked in commercial forestry and even conservation, know that the key to stopping a veld – and forest fire, is to detect and report fires early and then to respond rapidly.

It was also alarming to hear about the level of compliance or perhaps non-compliance of state institutions with the Veld and Forest Fire Act (NVFFA, Act no. 101 of 1998). It is alleged that no fire belts have been prepared and or maintained on some state land in the Northwest Province which directly contributed to the spread of the fires. It further appears that not even the National Department (DFFE) which should oversee and enforce the veldfire legislation, consistently comply with various Sections of the Act. This is a rather shocking state of affairs if the Department which is supposed to set the example does not comply with its own legislation.

What should and could landowners do then to protect their assets? Apart from managers and owners of state land who are obliged to join the local Fire Protection Association (FPA), private landowners are strongly advised to join the local FPA and be actively involved and see to it that they themselves do comply with the NVFFA e.g., preparation of external and internal fire belts/ breaks, investing in fire management training of their staff. Landowners should also invest in buying suitable equipment for fire suppression. Farmers and forestry estates alike, should also organize themselves into Farm Watches or Fire Management Units (FMU's) to be able to detect fires more effectively and to be able to respond quickly to fires.

Last but certainly not the least, should be to do regular fire risk assessments to identify key areas which require prescribed burning or other forms of fuel load reduction like mulching.

On behalf of the SAIF, I would like to express our condolences to those who lost loved ones and suffered major damage to their property and assets during the past few months.



#### The Rob Thompson Column

#### **Three key elements**

Any forestry practitioner worth his or her salt, will know the three elements that contribute towards the voracity of a fire and when combined are sometimes referred to as the fire triangle.

Heat, Oxygen and Fuel.

Take any one or more of those elements away, or reduce such significantly, and the fire subsides and or dies. Spray water on the fire and it cools and withers. Create a fire break, or skoffel-line, and you rob the fire of fuel. Cover the flames with a retardant or suppressant or physical barrier such as a beater or blanket, and you effectively smother it of oxygen.

Well, the organization I work for suffered a massive fire within our chip mill complex late September 2023 which raged for almost two weeks before coming under control. All three critical elements were present in abundance, which made control all that more challenging.

Extremely hot and dry weather conditions, high winds and thousands upon thousands of tonnes of wood chips to consume. Yes...even wood chips burn! The energy and heat generated prevented, for some time, any close combat of the fire, with the only real recourse left, to allow it to consume all the fuel and quite literally burn itself out. Whilst we know all about the fire triangle, we could not nail any one of the critical elements effectively and quickly due to torrid conditions.

Through my career I have been involved with several large plantation fires. One that comes to mind was a particular fire in the latter 1990's in Zululand which would turn out to be the then biggest plantation fire in South Africa. This record has subsequently been overturned on several occasions throughout the industry, with the latest to set the record, being the series of tragic Knysna fires of 2017. Whilst not being a stranger to fire, and I'm sure that many of my colleagues share similar experience parameters, it still fascinates me how we all still react to fire.

We know that it is going to happen. We are ready for it. We are trained for it. We've seen it before and yet three key emotions always emerge, without fail,

at the time it strikes!

Thinking back on past experiences, and the latest trauma at the chip mill, I posit that there are three key human elements or emotions that emanate at time of an uncontrolled fire.

I am going to refer to this emergence as the SAD triangle. I have experienced this triangle at varying levels at all the fires I have attended, and no doubt industry colleagues can attest to the same. Just as with the fire triangle, the more we understand of each SAD element the more we will be able to draw on and direct our best efforts.

The first element is **Surprise**.

No matter how prepared we are, how much equipment we have on hand and how well trained we are, there is always the element of surprise at the moment the fire report comes in. Just as a well-trained soldier expects opposing gun fire, there is always an element of surprise as the first shot rings out. What is critical is to expect surprise and to be able to draw energy therefrom and react appropriately to that emotion positively and concisely. Surprise that is not curtailed can cause action paralysis which is risky at time of a fire ... let alone a gun fight.

The second element is **Anxiety.** 

No matter how hard or experienced a forester you are, the first sight of the flames and smoke and wind is enough to push anxiety levels to extreme heights. Heights at which rational thoughts do not exist and non-optimal actions are most likely to occur. Anxiety, if not controlled, can lead to irrationality, thoughtless action, and failure. Back to the analogy of our soldier. That first shot could lead to panic and angst and the instinct to flee unless she draws from her anxiety and reacts positively and decisively. Rather than flee and risk exposure, a directed confrontation and response would in fact be the most appropriate reaction. Whilst not easy, the trick would be to recognize anxiety and allow it to caution, rather than direct.

The third and last element is **Disturbance**.

In the hullabaloo of the fire, initial confusion often reigns and operators are found wanting

given that their natural equilibrium and sense of self or focus is thrown out of balance.

Routines are disturbed and there is scarcely room to think, let alone to plan carefully and assess all of the incoming fire related stimuli. Similarly, our soldier, in the heat of battle, is going to feel disturbed unless she reverts to an ingrained and oft repeated emergency drill, that requires no thinking, but rather immediate placement of her full confidence in an instinctive and predetermined reaction to a specific situation.

Looking back at the wood chip fire, I cannot fault the reactions and decisions of the firefighters. As professionals in what they do, they have most likely unconsciously understood and adopted the three elements. It is however perhaps appropriate that we articulate, every now and again, what we can realistically expect at a fire of this nature and the emotions that we are likely to encounter. It is better in my view to be introduced to them under controlled circumstances, rather than having them announce their presence as you literally stare down a flaming gauntlet.

It is important to analyse every fire and to learn from the experience. There are always positives in every disaster and it is up to us to take the time to discover these and equip ourselves further for the next event.

OK, so I have offered a solution for fire related angst. Now we need someone to step up to the plate and offer a solution to quarter and semi final rugby test match spectator nerves. Just what are the Bokke asking of us and what's with these one-point differences? My nerves! I think I'd rather face a fire!

#### FSA Media Statement Richards Bay Fire

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03 October 2023

The fire at Richards Bay Wood Chips, in KwaZulu-Natal, is burning into its fourth day, despite the gargantuan efforts being made by firefighting personnel and staff from NCT Forestry Agricultural Co-operative Limited, the Municipality and other organisations to extinguish the blaze. Their efforts have been hampered by the unrelenting gale force winds and hot weather conditions in the region over the weekend,

which meant the fire spread quickly and air support has been unavailable until the early hours of Monday morning (2 October 2023).

While there have been reports of the fire spreading to other parts of Richards Bay, NCT remain grateful that there have not been any other major losses or injury and that those battling the blaze have remained strong and unscathed. Only once the fire has been extinguished, and it is safe for investigators to access the area, can the intricate job of uncovering the initial cause of the fire begin. For the time being, the top priority is to shield the surrounding community from the blaze by efforts on focussing all controlling extinguishing the fire. Forestry South Africa would like to commend the efforts of all the personnel and organisations who have fought the blaze tirelessly. This includes the staff of NCT, TWK, MONDI, South 32, NTE, Bell, RBCT, RBM, Transnet, the Municipal firefighters and many others and we to thank the City and Provincial administrations for their leadership during this challenging time. It is thanks to the immense efforts, coordinated approach and established disaster response protocols from all these people and organisations, that this fire has not spread further.

Our thoughts are with all those affected by this devastating incident, and we wish all involved every strength for the ongoing containment and suppression of the fire.

Michael Peter - Executive Director FSA





Images from the Fire at NCT Richards Bay

# Sponsor of the Month : September 2023 MTO Forestry (Pty) Ltd Who we are

The origin and essence of MTO's core business is forestry and manufacturing with additional business interests in Agriculture, Biomass-Energy and Ecotourism. These business interests depend on that core while also contributing to MTO's success by enabling a totally integrated approach to sustainable land use.

MTO produces timber from its internationally accredited pine plantations in the Eastern and Western cape, and Eucalyptus plantations in Mpumalanga. Through its plantations and manufacturing processes the company produces a basket of high-quality products which include: Sawlogs; Structural Lumber (treated and untreated); Transmission Poles; CCA treated poles; Shelving; Cross laminated Timber panels for Alternative Building Technology and Bio-Mass Energy from sawmilling and forestry residue.

Expanding beyond its core operations, MTO's ecotourism business presents a captivating range of recreational opportunities within its plantations which include: Mountain Biking; Accommodation; Hiking; Running; Walking; birdwatching; Horse riding and Fishing.



MTO's manufacturing locations in George, Longmore, Retreat and White River process the timber from the company's internationally accredited plantations into a basket of high-quality products which include: Structural Lumber (treated and untreated); Transmission Poles and CCA treated poles; Shelving; Cross Laminated Timber panels for Alternative Building Technology and Biomass Energy from sawmilling and forestry residue.



FSA MEMBER'S STORY

#### MTO Group and Ezigro Seedlings: Coming together to nurture care, community and growth

the MTO Group believes
that Arbor Week serves
as a valuable platform for
promoting environmental
awareness, sustainable
land management, and
community engagement. To this
awareness, sustainable
land management. To this
end our region in the Lowveld, in
partnership with Enigro seedlings
donated much needed fruit trees
and vegetables to the Choco
Village at the Game Community
in White River. We donated 20
fruit trees to 10 vemen who stay
in different villages around the
community. We then present
2000 red onions, 2000 opiniers, 2000
tomatices, 2000 opinier perpers and
four office household from our groundnuts
Enterprise Development project
in the context of Arbor Day, which
signifies the importance of trees
and their role in creating shaded
and green environments, the













he MTO Group's transformational w focus areas of socio-economic h fewelopment. It will certainly play fo

with food security, promoting healthy eating habits, and fostering relationships with ke



Article taken from Forestry South Africa's

"Forestry in Focus"

FSA Magazine Issue Twelve

<a href="https://www.forestrysouthafrica.co.za/fsa-magazine/">https://www.forestrysouthafrica.co.za/fsa-magazine/</a>















#### **Upcoming Events**



The theme of the conference is: The Value of Forestry in a Greening Economy

#### 07 to 09 November

**Karkloof Country Club** 

(Near Howick in the KZN Midlands, South Africa)

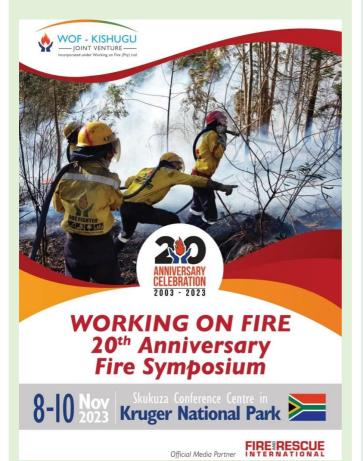
#### Keynote speaker: **Dr Ole Sand**

For inquiries about the conference contact: focus@cmogroup.io



NELSON MANDELA





#### **Winner of the Continuous Excellence** Award to the Forestry Industry



THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN **INSTITUTE OF FORESTRY** 

#### **CONTINUOUS SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARD**

-1080 Awarded to

#### Karen Kirkman

in recognition of continuous and outstanding service to the forestry industry

President: M Date: 31 August 2023







Braam du Preez handing over the Certificate to Karen Kirkman for her excellent service to the Industry over the past 28 years

# News from the Forest and Forest Products Industry



#### **Media Release**

#### Sappi concludes consultation process at Stockstadt Mill and commences consultation process on future of Lanaken Mill

The persistent global economic downturn is proving to be much tougher than anticipated with depressed markets, geopolitical instability and weak economic growth combining to put significant pressure on Sappi, particularly in Europe.

In response we announced on 6 July 2023 the start of a consultation process on the possible closure of Stockstadt Mill. We have completed this process and agreed on the social plan for the employees. In addition, an agreement has been signed for the sale of the site. The closure of the site should be completed during the first calendar quarter of 2024. Once all closure elements are taken into account, the impact is expected to be cash neutral.

We continue to be faced with significant overcapacity in graphic paper forcing us to take extended periods of costly commercial downtime. As the recent overstocking by customers reduces it has become very clear that demand will not return to previous levels. Combined with input cost pressure, we do not see this situation, caused by factors beyond our control improving in the foreseeable future.

Steve Binnie, CEO of Sappi Limited commented: "Sappi continues to position itself for growth and increased profitability in line with our group Thrive25 strategic focus. This includes reducing exposure to the graphic paper segment while expanding Sappi's presence in packaging, speciality papers, pulp and biomaterials. Recent investments across our South African, American and European operating businesses demonstrate this priority. We will therefore continue to review the viability of all our operations and make changes when necessary."

Marco Eikelenboom, CEO of Sappi Europe stated: "These are globally challenging times and Sappi

Europe is faced with overcapacity in graphic paper forcing us to take extended periods of costly commercial downtime. As the recent over-stocking by customers reduces it has become very clear that demand will not return to previous levels. Combined with input cost pressure, we do not see this situation, caused by factors beyond our control improving in the foreseeable future.

"We have therefore decided to inform both the Mill Management and the Works Council that we are today starting the consultation process on the potential closure of the Lanaken Mill. In parallel we are reviewing how best to reduce overall fixed and other overhead costs."

Sappi Europe is focused on building a sustainably resilient company. This requires evaluating the future of all facets of the business based on market dynamics and the market segments Sappi believe will be strongest in the future.

While continuing to serve the graphic paper market through its competitive assets, the overall priority of the European business will be to grow the packaging and specialities segment specifically within flexible packaging, functional papers, self-adhesives including glassine, labels as well as dye-sublimation categories. Restructuring measures result in a better utilisation of Sappi's remaining assets to the benefit of customers.

**Sappi Lanaken Mill** is an integrated pulp and paper mill located in Belgium, currently employing a total 644 workers with a production capacity of 165,000 tpa of pulp which is used to produce 530,000 tpa of coated woodfree paper mainly sold into the European print market.

**Sappi Stockstadt Mill** is an integrated pulp and paper mill located in Germany, with a production capacity of 145,000 tpa of pulp (for internal use) and 220,000 tpa of coated and uncoated woodfree paper mainly sold into the European print market.

This Press Release was issued on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October by Sappi Limited & Sappi Europe

www.sappi.com















#### **Forestry Industry News**

#### **Top Crop Nursery**



#### **Mondi Appointment**



# Papering over the cracks: why negative forestry perceptions are doing our planet a disservice

By Jane Molony, Executive Director at Paper Manufacturers Association of South Africa (PAMSA)

I would be sipping piña coladas on a luxury island resort if I had a rand (or maybe a US dollar) for every time I've seen the words 'please consider the environment before you print'. Variations of this phrase can be found at the bottom of emails and in countless pieces of pro-digital and paper recycling messaging.

In the quest for a higher state of environmental consciousness, there is an increase in misinformation around paper and its impact on our planet. The misinformation seems to ignore how sustainably grown trees act as carbon sinks (thanks to photosynthesis), or that farmed wood is a renewable resource. Instead, the myths about the forestry and paper sector have grown ignorant tendrils across the internet, into literature, school curricula and textbooks, and have taken root deep within our minds.

We have been taught to protect trees. We have been made to believe that the production of timber and paper causes deforestation, and that using digital forms of communication, advertising and reading will save our planet.

Climate scientists have recently indicated that this year could become the hottest year on record as the warming El Niño effect continues. While there are a number of human-influenced impacts at play, we rarely consider the impact of our digital footprint on the planet.

TechTarget cites statistics from International Energy Association that the world's data transmission networks and centres are responsible for nearly 1% of energy-related global greenhouse gas emissions annually and accounted for approximately 300 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2020.

A study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) also found that cloud computing and data services now have a greater carbon footprint than the entire airline industry and a single data centre can consume the equivalent electricity of 50,000 homes. It's something we rarely think about as we click send a hundred times a day or save something to 'the cloud'.

We have been led to understand that everything digital is better for the environment by greenwashed statements.

I am not saying "unplug the Internet and print everything". I am saying that we need to get our facts straight. There are always two sides to an issue like this. The digital world is very much part of how we live and thrive, but we are doing our economy and society a disservice to see the forest and paper industry as an environmental villain.

'Greenwashing' is when an organisation or sector spends more time and money on marketing itself as being environmentally conscious than it does on minimising its environmental impact. Unfortunately, paper has been an easy target of this kind of misdirection.

A number of banks in South Africa are guilty of greenwashing and we have taken them to task. One particularly green bank has pushed its paperless transition by urging consumers to join a 'movement towards a cleaner, greener, paperless world'. Another bank had a message on its blue ATM screens: "If everyone said no to a receipt just for one month, we would save 45 trees."

It's necessary to unpack *why* businesses and consumers think paper is bad before we can change perceptions.

### Timber harvesting has been equated to deforestation

The production of timber, pulp and paper does not cause deforestation. In South Africa, like wheat or maize, trees are farmed — except with longer rotations. There are always trees of different stages of maturity growing, and forestry companies use the same land over and over again, with thousands of hectares audited, certified and sustainably managed. Deforestation is the removal of trees without replanting, and a change in land use, such as cattle farming, urban development or human settlements.

That said, deforestation is a very real concern in developing countries and some African countries, where illegal logging of tropical forests is happening at an alarming rate. It's why forest certification is so important, and where consumers can wield their power by only purchasing paper packaging, books or

or other wood-based goods with either a FSC® or PEFC® label. These certification symbols indicate that the wood or paper is sourced from sustainable sources.

#### The perceived impact of forestry is visible

If you see an image of a forest plantation that has been felled, you might assume that those trees are lost forever. I am willing to bet that the same area will be showing 50 shades of green within 12 months as the trees begin to coppice (regrow) or are replaced with saplings.

On the flip side, we do not see the impact of storing terabytes of data in the cloud, posting our holiday snaps on Instagram or sending emails to all and sundry. We do not see the tonnes of metals, cables, fans, switches, the electricity needed to power the servers all or keep them cool. We do perhaps see the mounting volumes of e-waste.

In all things, we need to consider the sources and flow of materials that we use.

#### Forestry is a monoculture

Yes, at compartment level, forestry plantations are a monoculture, not unlike fields of sugar cane or other forms of agriculture. Zoom out to a landscape level and you will find that our members' forest management practices support biodiversity conservation with incredible success and often in collaboration with environmental organisations.

A third of forestry-owned land is not planted with commercial trees but managed for the conservation of the natural habitats and the biodiversity they contain. This in turn balances the ecosystem and ensures healthy, productive plantations.

#### Trees use water

All life on earth requires water. Much like us, plantations will take up the water they need and transpire the excess. If a eucalyptus or pine tree is planted near a water course, it will take up more water. The amount of water they need and use depends on an array of factors from abiotic (soil, climate) to biotic such as the size, age and health of the plant.

Our country's 1.2 million plantations are not irrigated, and the average annual water requirement (water used) for forestry plantations has been calculated to be 428 million cubic metres per year, approximately 3% of South Africa's total water usage. By comparison, crop irrigation is 7,920 million cubic metres (62%) with urban domestic use just less than three million cubic metres (23%).

#### The impossibility of paperlessness

While digital media has undoubtedly increased our access to information, delivered convenience and opened up new economies, the idea that it will render print and paper obsolete is, well, ridiculous.

Tim Harford writes in 'Fifty Things that Made the Modern Economy': "Old technologies have a habit of enduring. We still use pencils and candles. The world still produces more bicycles than cars."

Many people forget that paper is more than the stuff we stick into our laser jets and copiers. The same stuff that makes pristine A4 sheets makes cardboard boxes, gift bags, toilet paper, facial tissue, magazine paper, book paper, labels, and countless cellulose-based products such as sponges, textiles and cellulose acetate (or cellophane). They all started as wood fibre. These everyday products are all renewable, many of them recyclable.

Other components of wood are finding their place in a variety of applications: sugars can be used to make xylitol; lignin is processed into lignosulphonate for dust suppression, water treatment and improving the flow of concrete.

#### What you can do

If you want to use wood and paper products in an environmentally sound way:

- Put down the greenwashing paintbrush, because digital media does not grow on trees.
- Change or remove that email signature footer.
   Please
- Make sure the paper you use is sustainably sourced by looking for certification symbols such as FSC or PEFC.
- If you print, recycle the paper along with paperbased packaging and other recyclable paper products.

By understanding the facts, dispelling misconceptions, and embracing emerging trends, farmed trees, print and paper do not need to compete with digital or vice versa. The two worlds can complement one another and fulfil functions that the other cannot.

Forest, pulp, and paper companies are among the most fervent adherents of sustainability. Not only is our sector committed to being environmentally conscious and resource efficient, but we also invest incredible amounts of time and resources to make sure we make the most of our trees, supporting not only society, but a future that is founded on a circular economy.

#### Received from:

Paper Manufacturers Association of South Africa distributions@m.mediaportal.co.za

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# Farewell to the SAIF KNZ Branch Chair Dr. Mmoledi Mphahlele



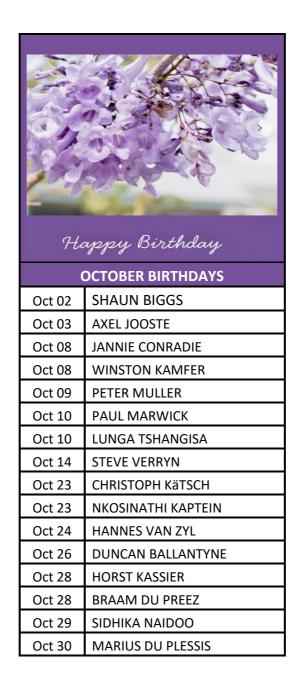
Mmoledi resigned from Mondi effective from the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2023 and he will be taking a position with APRIL in Indonesia. He therefore resigned as SAIF: KZN Branch Chair.

Mmoledi became a stalwart and It has been a great pleasure working with him. He will be sorely missed both by the KZN team as well as the Council. We would like to wish Mmoledi all the best for the future and furthering his career in Indonesia.

SAIF Newsletter October 2023

#### **SAIF Contact Details**

Position	Name	Email
President	Braam du Preez	president@saif.org.za
Vice-president	Vacant	
Past-president	Wayne Jones	past-president@saif.org,za
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Mpumalanga	Vacant	admin@saif.org.za
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Western Cape	Prof. Bruce Talbot	western-cape@saif.org.za
DFFE representative	Vacant	



Happy Birthday to all our members who celebrate(d) their birthdays in October