ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue looks at the 2026 fires in Papua and sets them beside the other regions of Indonesia.

It uses three kinds of satellite evidence. Hotspots are thermal detections from SiPongi, the fire system of the Ministry of Forestry, in its NASA and LAPAN feeds. Footprint is the area of 375 m VIIRS cells with at least one detection. Burn scar is mapped burned area from MapBiomas Fire Indonesia, run by Auriga Nusantara.

Each one measures a different thing, so their totals differ. Burn scar is the closest to hectares burned. Footprint is an upper bound. Hotspots count repeat detections of the same fire. Kalimantan holds 51 percent of NASA detections this year, 43 percent of the footprint and 23 percent of the burn scar. Papua holds 16, 20 and 28 percent. Peat in Kalimantan smoulders for weeks and is detected again and again. Savanna and swamp grassland in Papua burn wide and fast and leave fewer detections per hectare.

Burned area here comes from MapBiomas because the official SiPongi series still ends in July. SiPongi lists 25,839 ha for Papua Selatan to July, against 64,386 ha in MapBiomas for the same months. It now lists 12,227 ha nationally for 2025, well below the 359,619 ha it listed for that year in August 2026, so Figure 2a leaves 2025 out. BNPB reported 161.5 ha still burning in Papua Selatan on October 29, a count of active fire rather than of total area.

RESPONSE

BNPB began cloud seeding over Merauke, Boven Digoel and Mappi on October 22 and had flown 13 sorties with 13,000 kg of salt by October 31. Its hotspot count for Papua Selatan fell from 1,169 to 65 between October 25 and 28 as rain arrived. Emergency status for the province is being extended. Merauke police were investigating fires in Sota, Tanah Miring, Jagebob and Elikobel in September and had named no suspects.

313,777 ha

PAPUA BURN SCAR, JAN TO SEP 2026

28 percent of the national total and the largest of any region. Merauke holds 192,479 ha.

The Landscape Group

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OCCASIONAL FACT SHEET

Papua Holds Indonesia's Largest Burn Scar of 2026

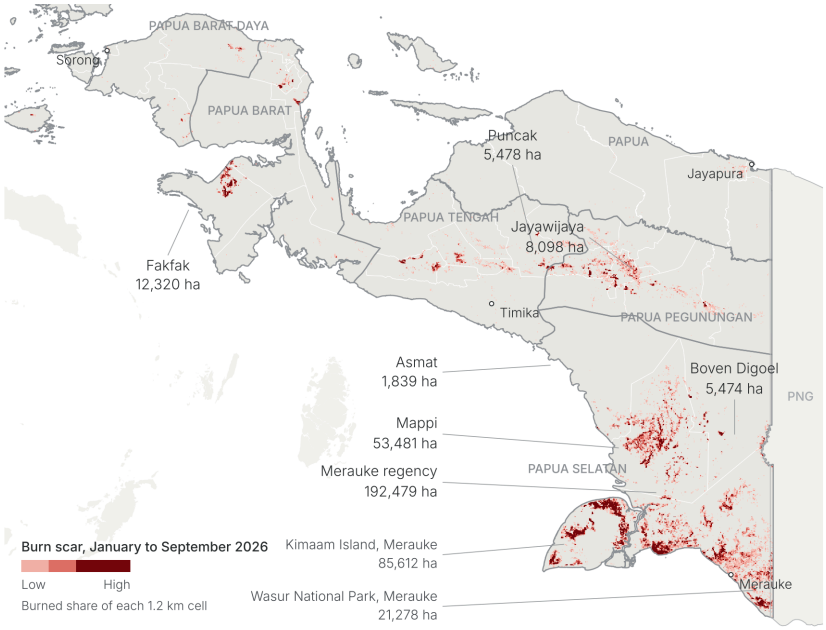


Figure 1. Burn scar in Papua by regency, January to September 2026. Shading is the MapBiomas Fire Indonesia raster, shown as the burned share of each 1.2 km cell. Province lines follow the six provinces in place since 2022.

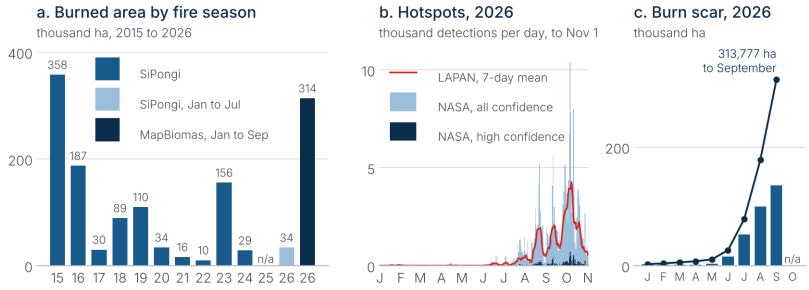


Figure 2. Papua fires. a, burned area by fire season from SiPongi, with 2026 also from MapBiomas. b, daily SiPongi hotspots to November 1, 2026. c, MapBiomas burn scar by month and in total.

Location and scale

MapBiomas Fire mapped 313,777 ha burned in the six Papua provinces from January to September, 28 percent of the national 1,103,132 ha. Bali, Nusa Tenggara and Maluku follow with 297,732 ha, then Kalimantan with 258,149 ha. Papua Selatan alone holds 253,274 ha, the most of any province, ahead of Nusa Tenggara Timur at 185,495 ha.

Merauke regency carries most of it. Its 192,479 ha are 61 percent of the Papua burn scar and 17 percent of the national total. Kimaam Island, off the Merauke coast, holds 85,612 ha of that. Mappi follows with 53,481 ha, then Fakfak in Papua Barat with 12,320 ha. Wasur National Park, on the border with Papua New Guinea, has 21,278 ha burned.

The fires came late and kept growing. The monthly burn scar in Papua Selatan rose from 11,419 ha in June to 105,405 ha in September. SiPongi NASA detections in Papua Selatan rose from 50,541 in September to 73,792 in October. Papua reached 20 percent of national detections in October, its highest share of the peak season.

Papua Has Burned at This Scale Before

Burn scar ranks Papua first in 2026, while hotspot counts still rank Kalimantan first.

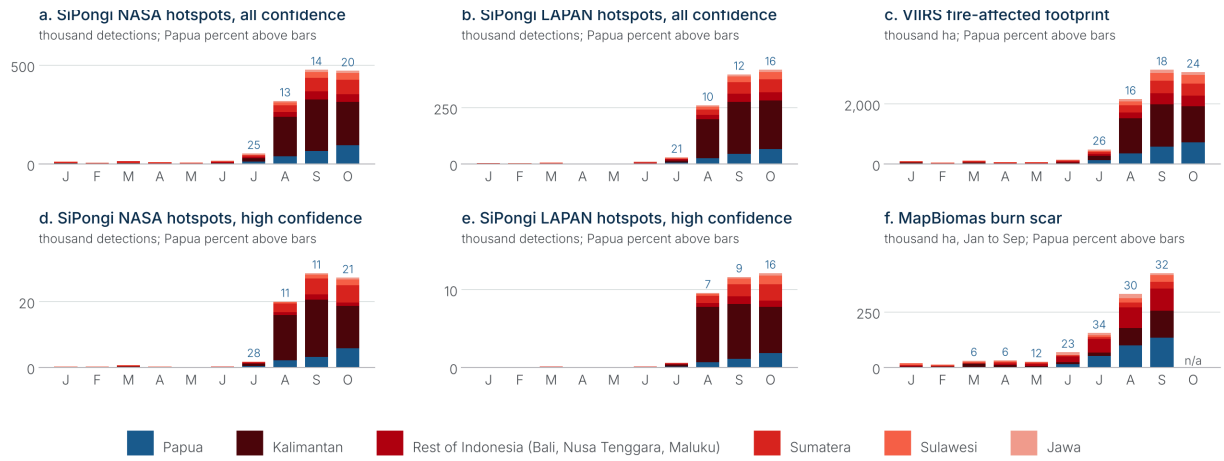


Figure 3. Hotspots, footprint and burn scar by region and month, 2026. The NASA feed is MODIS, SNPP and NOAA-20, the LAPAN feed is SNPP and NOAA-20, and footprint counts unique 375 m VIIRS cells per month. The number above each bar is the Papua percent of that month.

Past fire seasons

Papua has burned at this scale before. SiPongi records 357,970 ha burned in Papua in 2015, 187,114 ha in 2016 and 155,562 ha in 2023, when Papua Selatan alone had 150,813 ha. In 2016 Papua held 43 percent of the national burned area. Quiet years such as 2021 and 2022 stayed between 10,000 and 16,000 ha. In 2015 Greenpeace counted 11,590 hotspots in Papua between August 1 and October 26, and haze cancelled flights in Jayapura, Manokwari and Timika. Greenpeace linked them to the Merauke food estate of that time. A 2020 study by Greenpeace and Forensic Architecture found signs of deliberate burning in a Korindo oil palm concession in Merauke between 2012 and 2015. Korindo denied it, and the Forest Stewardship Council found large-scale clearing but could not establish intent. The 2026 MapBiomas total to September is close to the 2015 official total, though the methods differ.

Human costs

Smoke closed schools in Boven Digoel, Asmat and Mappi in mid October. Mimika has no large fires of its own, yet it suspended preschool and primary classes and saw a flight diverted from Timika. Flights into Merauke were delayed or cancelled on several days between October 1 and 9. Residents of Merauke told the BBC that people were coughing, that water was hard to find, and that visibility fell to 200 meters. The haze reached Maluku and Sulawesi. We found no published count of respiratory cases for Papua Selatan.

Causes

Drought set the conditions. The 2026 El Niño reached an ONI of +2.16 in July to September. Fuel explains the scale. MapBiomas classes 97 percent of the Merauke burn scar as non-forest natural cover, mostly savanna and swamp grassland. These grasslands burn in most dry seasons, and people use fire to hunt and to clear gardens. The Merauke regent, Yoseph Gebze, said in late October that there are strong indications of deliberate burning to clear land.

Clearing for national food projects adds to the fire. Auriga Nusantara found 57,809 ha of burn scar in Merauke inside food estates, forest reserved for food and the rice field program from January to August. That is about half the Merauke burn scar for those months. Yayasan Pusaka says most fire points lie in oil palm concessions and national strategic project sites. BNPB reported that one Merauke oil palm concession held the densest hotspots in late October. MapBiomas maps 1,244 ha burned inside the permit of PT Merauke Sawit Jaya. A burn inside a permit does not show who lit it. In Mappi the Sungai Buru peat unit had 15,741 ha burned to August, the largest of any peat unit.

Sources and method

Hotspots. SIPONGI KEMENHUT, sebaran titik panas by regency, satellite and confidence, daily from January 1 to October 31, 2026, NASA and LAPAN feeds, accessed on November 2, 2026. One feed returned no data on eight days (January 22 to 24, May 22 and 23, June 2 and 3, July 26). **Footprint.** NASA SNPP and NOAA-20 points from the same system, gridded to 375 m in an equal-area projection and counted once per month. It overstates burned area. **Burn scar.** MapBiomas Fire Indonesia, monthly 2026 statistics and raster, Auriga Nusantara and Geodatin, accessed on November 2, 2026. Official SiPongi burned area (Indikasi Luas Kebakaran) still reports January to July. ONI from the NOAA Climate Prediction Center.

Reporting. Cendrawasih Pos, October 14, 2026. Punca, October 13, 2026, citing Antara. Pemerintah Kabupaten Merauke, Rayendi Purba, October 9, 2026. Suara.com, Pebriansyah Ariefana, October 15, 2026, relaying BBC Indonesia. CNN Indonesia, October 29, 2026. IDN Times, Umi Jari Widayah, October 31, 2026. Republika, Bayu Adji Prihammanda, October 31, 2026. GoodStats, Shahibah A, October 20, 2026, from Auriga Nusantara. Betahita, Raden Ariyo Wicaksono, September 30, 2026. Jubi, Emanuel Riberu, September 7, 2026. **History.** SIPONGI KEMENHUT annual burned area by province, 2015 to 2026. The Jakarta Post, Hans Nicholas Jong, October 30, 2015. Mongabay, Hans Nicholas Jong, November 12, 2020.