

Measuring landscape evolution from inception to senescence

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3 **Measuring landscape evolution from inception to senescence**

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22 **Key words:** Curvature, hillslope thresholds, soil diffusion, soil transport, erosion, dunes,
23 natural laboratory

24
25 **Abstract**

26 **The concept of the geomorphic cycle is a foundational principle in geology and**
27 **geomorphology, but the topographic evolution of a single landscape from inception to**
28 **senescence has not been demonstrated in nature. The Cooloola Sand Mass (CSM) in**
29 **eastern Australia preserves dune landforms from initial formation to the achievement**
30 **of maturity (a morphologic steady-state) and its topographic evolution parallels that of**
31 **physical based models of dry unconsolidated sand. Our field based measurements and**
32 **forward numerical models demonstrate that this evolution is caused by nonlinear**
33 **sediment transport governed by hillslope thresholds. Our findings confirm that**
34 **physical models of landscape evolution are applicable at the landscape scale. We also**
35 **propose that the distribution of curvature (C) of a landform, and its associated standard**
36 **deviation (σ_C) represents a landscape's potential for change. Once σ_C is normalised, it**
37 **can be used to measure and define the evolution of topography and is an essential**
38 **morphometric tool for understanding landscapes.**

39
40 **Introduction**

41 The concept that the Earth's surface evolves through time from newly constructed landforms
42 to denuded landscapes in topographic equilibrium is a foundational idea in geology and
43 geomorphology¹⁻³. The underpinning concept is that gravitationally driven transport processes
44 act in tandem with erosion and deposition to relax landscapes towards their base-levels while
45 reducing mean local relief^{3,4}. It has not been possible to demonstrate the complete process in
46 a natural setting. This is because the evolutionary pathway of a landscape incorporates
47 multiple phases of relaxation and rejuvenation (stages in the geomorphic cycle) to produce
48 the landscapes we observe today. Moreover, landscape evolution typically develops on
49 geological time scales⁵ and few systems have adequate dating control over the full duration
50 to investigate the entire process; nor are intermediate stages usually preserved.
51 Consequently, most studies utilise space for time substitutions for their experimental design
52 (e.g. Stolar et al.⁶ and Hilley & Arrowsmith⁷); however, for timescales on multiple millennia,
53 tectonic and climate forcings are rarely uniform and assumptions cannot be verified. In this
54 paper, we highlight that the Cooloola Sand Mass (CSM) dune field in Australia is an ideal
55 natural laboratory to evaluate landscape evolution because of its lithologic homogeneity,

56 tectonic and climatic stability, and chronologic constraints on dune emplacement. Utilizing field
 57 observations and digital terrain analysis, we explain the evolution of 15 dated parabolic dunes
 58 spanning their entire geomorphic development (0.23 ± 0.05 to 9.82 ± 0.98 ka) and validate our
 59 results by simulating dune evolution, under varying soil transport conditions, as it approaches
 60 a morphologic steady-state. We consider only gravitational processes as Holocene sections
 61 of the CSM are not subject to fluvial processes.

62

63 ***Curvature and landscape evolution***

64 Hillslope curvature (\mathbf{C}), the spatial rate of change of gradient from a fixed position in all
 65 directions⁸, influences water flow paths⁹, nutrient redistribution^{10,11}, and soil characteristics¹².
 66 These consequently affect landscape evolution. Particularly, \mathbf{C} has been used as a surrogate
 67 for mobile soil (regolith) thickness¹³⁻¹⁵ and in the derivation of soil production functions and
 68 erosion rates¹⁶⁻²⁰.

69

70 In soil-mantled landscapes \mathbf{C} is inversely related to mobile soil thickness. Ridges and spurs
 71 ($\mathbf{C} < 0$) have the thinnest soils whereas the hollows and valleys ($\mathbf{C} > 0$) have the thickest
 72 soils^{13,15}. According to commonly prescribed soil production functions (exponential or
 73 humped), production rates are the highest in thin soils and rates decrease as soil thickens²¹.
 74 Therefore, soil is primarily produced on ridges and displaced downslope to the hollows through
 75 diffusive sediment transport, whereby soil flux is solely gradient dependent (linear slope-
 76 dependent transport). Sediment flux \widetilde{q}_s is equal to the product of hillslope gradient $\mathbf{S}^{1,2}$

77

$$78 \quad \widetilde{q}_s = -KS, \quad \text{Eq. 1)}$$

79

80 where \mathbf{K} is the soil transport coefficient. Past studies have focus on the convex sections of
 81 hillslopes where a balance between erosion and soil production can be established and a soil
 82 thickness steady-state can be demonstrated. It has been shown that increases in convexity
 83 (decrease in \mathbf{C}) corresponds with an increase in soil production and divergence of sediment
 84 flux, and erosion^{17,18}. Less attention has been given to concave segments of hillslopes where
 85 sediment tends to accumulate^{13,22}. Patton et al.¹⁵ observed that landscapes have equal
 86 proportions of convex and concave land area and the distribution of \mathbf{C} is centred on planar
 87 surfaces ($\mathbf{C} = 0$). When evaluating landscapes from narrow to broad \mathbf{C} distributions they noted
 88 an overall increase in erosion rates and variability in sediment transport styles (i.e. soil creep
 89 to landslides), which likely coincided with increasing local relief and hillslope gradients. Though
 90 not originally stated in their work, this implies that in landscapes with broad \mathbf{C} distributions
 91 have a greater potential for change than landscapes with narrow \mathbf{C} distributions. Here we
 92 suggest utilizing the standard deviation of \mathbf{C} distribution (σ_c), as a metric to capture the
 93 variability in landscape drivers (i.e. soil production, transport, erosion, and deposition), which
 94 quantifies the potential of a landscape to change with time (stage of geomorphic cycle). We
 95 note that if soil transport is linearly related to hillslope gradient (i.e. Eq. 1 holds), then the
 96 erosion rate \mathbf{E} is given by¹⁸

97

$$98 \quad \mathbf{E} = \nabla \widetilde{q}_s = -\mathbf{K}\mathbf{C}. \quad \text{Eq. 2)}$$

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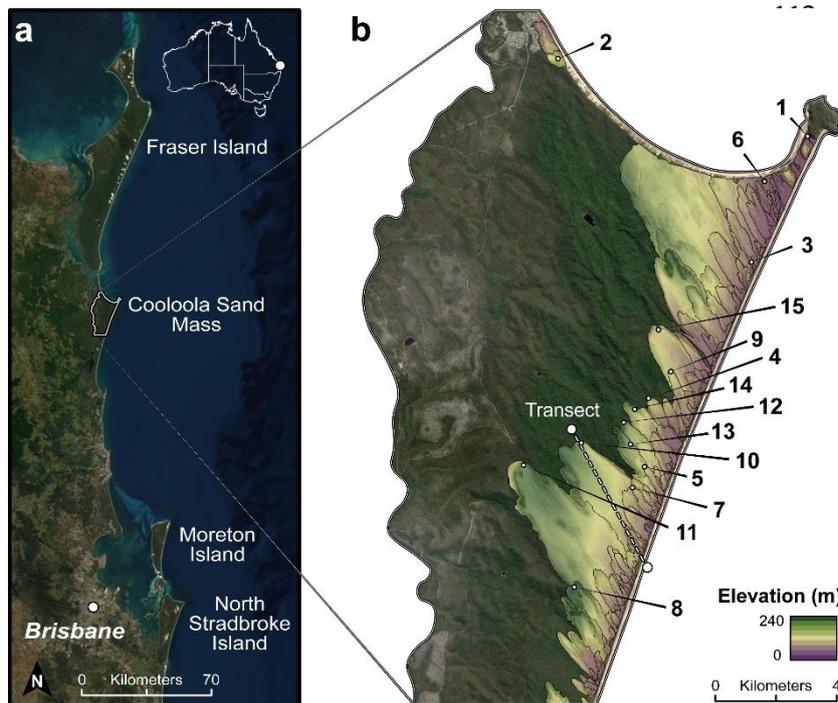
100 Therefore \mathbf{E} is directly proportional to \mathbf{C} hence σ_c captures the spatial variability of erosion
 101 rates and the potential for a landscape to smooth itself. We expect the time dependence of σ_c
 102 to embody fundamental hillslope parameters and to demonstrate threshold crossing
 103 behaviour.

104

105 ***Field area***

106 The Cooloola Sand Mass (CSM) in south eastern Queensland contains a series of coastal
 107 dune formations that extend back in age nearly 800 ka. The dune field comprises of >150
 108 large parabolic dunes, many of which have been dated (i.e., Walker et al.²³ and Ellerton et
 109 al.²⁴) (Fig. 1). The on-lapping parabolic dunes provide a chronosequence through the

110 Holocene. The outcome is a landscape increasing in age and soil development while
 111 decreasing in topographic variability moving inland from the coast (Fig. 1c). During the



During the Holocene, large volumes of (180-250 μm) quartz sand have been provided by the longshore drift system²⁵, and the CSM is tectonically inactive with only minor eustatic/hydro-isostatic changes in local elevation (sea-level) of between +2 to -0.5 m²⁶. Proxy records indicate stable climate and vegetation during this period in coastal SE Queensland²⁷.

Figure 1: Regional and site location. *a)* Satellite imagery of the South East Queensland Dune fields in Australia, emphasizing the location of the Cooloola Sand Mass. *b)* Delineated Holocene dunes and their associated elevation at a 5 m resolution and location of the 15 dated dunes used in this study (dots) (obtained from Walker et al.²³ and Ellerton et al.²⁴, see Extended Table 1). *c)* A transect aligned parallel to the dominant wind direction, (southeast to northwest), seen in Panel b, highlights the transition from juvenile dunes (i) to more mature dunes (ii to vi). When dunes are emplaced, they have highly variable surface topography but as time continues, their slope relaxes towards a morphologic steady-state and this evolution can best be described by a dune's curvature (C), specifically a dune's standard deviation of curvature (σ_c).

155 The dunes are smooth and undissected, which is indicative of a dominance of diffuse grain-
 156 by-grain processes²⁸ and a lack of hillslope-scale water-driven transport. The absence of
 157 channels and fluvial processes is consistent with the characteristically high infiltration rates
 158 (>600 mm hr⁻¹)²⁹, and few steep slopes, except on the lee faces of the dunes. Sediment
 159 removal from internal basins is negligible due to the absence of fluvial transport and dune
 160 onlapping, effectively making the CSM a closed system. Since the soil parent material
 161 (unconsolidated dune sands) and the soils they generate are virtually identical, soil thickness
 162 is unlimited, creating a truly transport limited system. The evolution of the landscape is not
 163 restricted by production of readily available material. All sediment eroded from the convex
 164 positions of the landscape is deposited in the concave positions. Hence there is a closed mass
 165 balance and lowering of the convex ridges (loss of elevation) can be accounted for in the
 166 concave hollows (gain of elevation), see Extended Fig.1. Consequently, the CSM is a natural
 167 laboratory that closely mimics idealized physical models of unconsolidated sediment (e.g.
 168 Roering et al.³⁰, Roering³¹, Sweeney et al.³², Furbish et al.³³, and Deshpande et al.³⁴), provides
 169

170 a legitimate space for time substitution of landscape evolution, and retains the depositional
 171 legacy of hillslope erosion.

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Landscape evolution and hillslope thresholds

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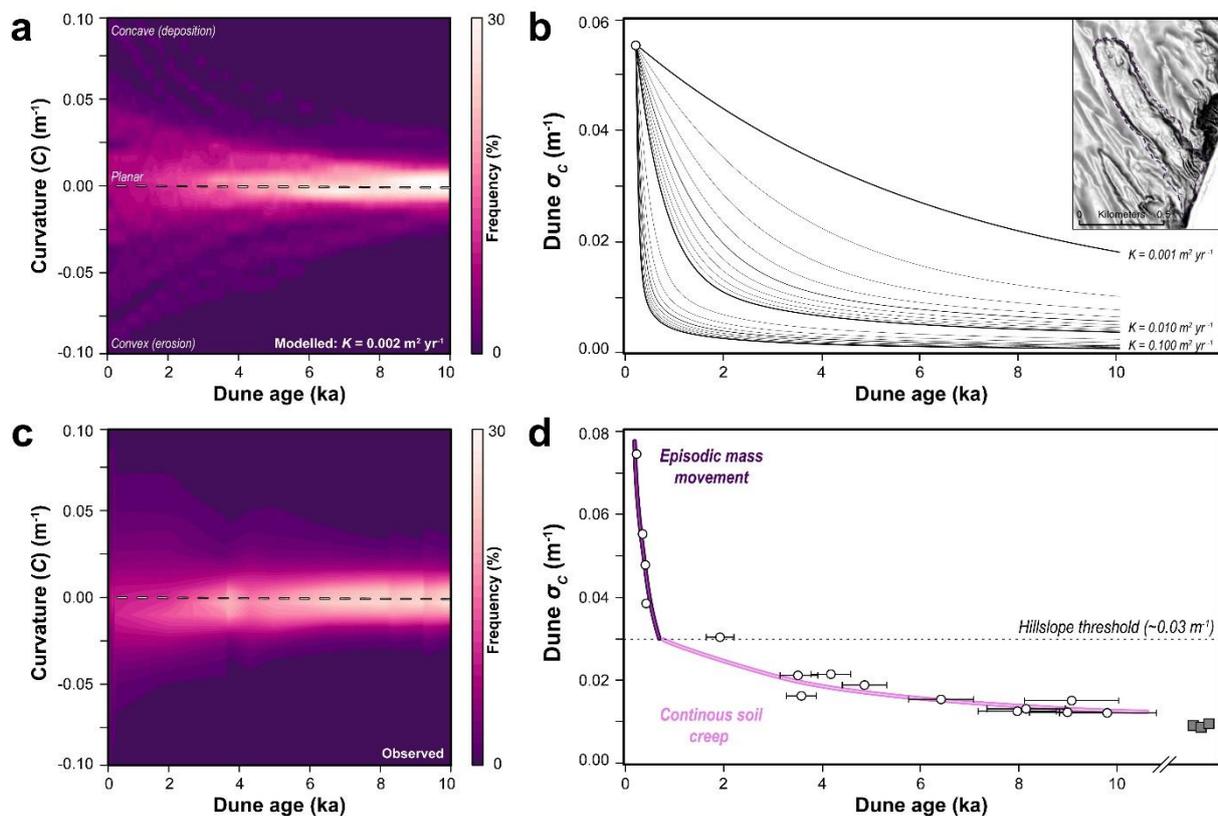
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In simulated dune evolution for 10 ka on a young dune (~0.3 ka), we observe that the C distribution is symmetrically distributed with its mean centred on $\sim 0 \text{ m}^{-1}$, and narrows with time (Fig. 2a and Extended Fig. 2). Simulations produced smooth decays of σ_C , the rate of decay increasing with higher K (Fig. 2b). Like the simulations all CSM dunes exhibit normal distributions of C of mean $\sim 0 \text{ m}^{-1}$ (Fig. 2c) and whose σ_C decline by a factor of about 6 (from 0.074 to 0.012 m^{-1}) as dunes increase in age. By contrast, the decline of σ_C from the dunes followed a “hockey stick” form, showing a steep initial decay transitioning abruptly to a more gradual decline at a σ_C of 0.03 m^{-1} (Fig 2d and Extended Fig. 3). We observe a rapid relaxation of the highly convex dune crests within $\sim 1 \text{ ka}$ of emplacement which is best described with a K value of $0.06 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$. This is abruptly followed by a phase of slower topographic adjustment reflecting a K value of $0.002 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ which ultimately reaches a morphologic steady-state ($d\sigma_C/dt \rightarrow 0$) by the late Holocene, a phenomenon that continues for all the Pleistocene dunes (grey squares in Fig. 2d).

This kind of threshold soil transport behaviour has been demonstrated in sandbox experiments and modelled as non-linear slope dependent transport³⁵. The associated transport equation includes a soil transport coefficient that increases as a function of gradient S . Our simulations do not incorporate non-linear transport equations, but the steep “handle of the hockey stick” parallels our simulations of the decay of σ_C at high K , which act as a proxy for this behaviour. That the “blade of the hockey stick” does not follow the high K simulations is evidence of the transport regime shift at $\sigma_C > 0.03 \text{ m}^{-1}$. We propose this pattern derives from a threshold behaviour triggered by hillslope gradient during periods when dunes are devegetated by fires. Burning switches the dunes from essentially slow linear slope-dependent soil transport to non-linear transport, but where the non-linear enhancement of transport is only manifested on the younger, steeper dunes of high σ_C (Extended Fig. 5)



200

201 **Figure 2: Simulated versus observed landscape evolution. a)** Distributions of curvatures for simulated evolution
 202 of a juvenile dune (insert in panel b) with a constant soil transport coefficient (K) value of $0.002 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$, see Extended
 203 Fig. 2 and 3. Note the normal distribution of curvature (C) centred on planar topography (0 m^{-1}) and the gradual
 204 narrowing of distributions with time (dark to light frequency). **b)** Simulated evolution of dune standard deviation of
 205 curvature (σ_c) for 10 ka, under varying K values. **c)** Observed C distributions for the 15 dated CSM dunes which
 206 mirror simulated outcomes in **Panel a. d)** Plotted dune σ_c with time (with error bars, $\pm 1\sigma$), white dots and visual
 207 trend line. CSM evolution is best described by two K values. When dunes σ_c are greater than the hillslope threshold
 208 ($\sim 0.03 \text{ m}^{-1}$, dashed line), K is $0.06 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ (purple line) which reflects the dominance of episodic mass movement
 209 (dry ravel and sheet-wash ($n=4$)). After dunes are lowered below the hillslope threshold, K is $0.002 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ (pink
 210 line) where slow and continuous soil transport occurs (soil creep ($n=11$)), see Extended Fig. 3. This behaviour
 211 continues as a morphologic steady-state approximated by Pleistocene age dunes (grey squares, not included in
 212 this analysis) is approached.

213

214 Field observations at the CSM support our claims. Across the CSM, the freely drained soils
 215 with high infiltration rates should limit dune evolution to slow continuous sediment transport;
 216 however, wildfires are a common disturbance³⁶ which remove vegetation and produce
 217 hydrophobic surface soils^{37,38}. As a result, local soil transport efficiency (K) increases as
 218 hillslopes near their angle of repose (angle of 33° or slope of $0.65 \text{ m}^* \text{ m}^{-1}$) experience episodic
 219 mass movements in the form of dry raveling and sheet-washing³⁹. The sharp convex slope
 220 elements are rounded and steep-sided swales infill, corresponding to a rapid decline in σ_c .
 221 These punctuated disturbances reduce soil residence time in both erosional and depositional
 222 sites and limit soil development. Although fires occur with constant frequency and across
 223 dunes of all ages, higher erosion rates caused by episodic mass movement is limited to the
 224 first 1 ka of dune development. In this phase, hillslope gradients are near their angle of repose,
 225 ridge crests are narrow, and as a consequence σ_c is greater than $\sim 0.03 \text{ m}^{-1}$ (Fig. 2, Extended
 226 Table 2, and Extended Fig. 4), thus indicating a potential hillslope mechanism threshold⁴⁰.
 227 After dunes reduce to less than $\sim 0.03 \text{ m}^{-1}$, gradual transport regimes controlled by soil creep
 228 processes dominate (i.e. granular relaxation, bioturbation, and rain splash^{33,34,41,42}), soil
 229 residence times increase, and podsolization is well expressed in the world's thickest soils,
 230 Giant Podzols⁴³.

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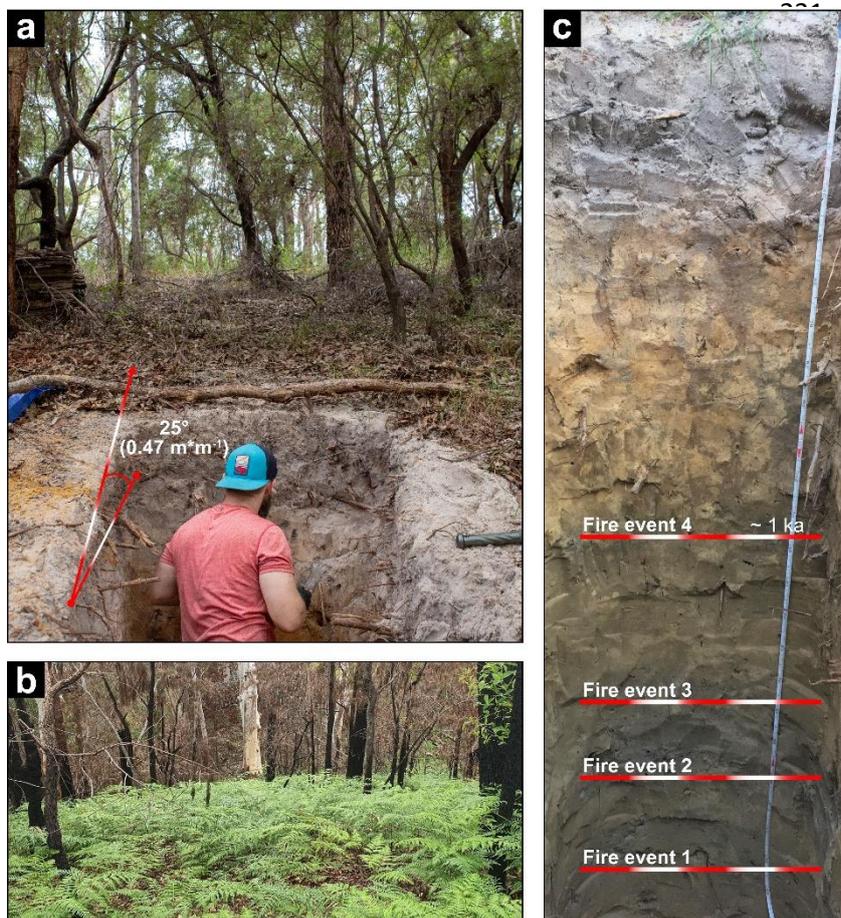


Figure 3: Surface images of dune slopes and soil profiles.

a) Typical hillslope at the Cooloola Sand Mass looking up to dune crest. **b)** Same dune as **Panel a** looking down slope after being severely burnt in the “Freshwater Road Fire” on December 15th, 2019. Note, within three months the rapid reestablishment of vegetation covers and stabilizes the landscape. **c)** Depositional foot-slope of a $\sim 2 \text{ ka}$ dune and stratified layers of charcoal associated with fire induced mass movement (dry raveling and sheet-washing) oldest (fire event #1) to youngest (fire event #4). Distinct layers can be observed within the first 1 ka (unpublished charcoal radiocarbon age) of dune deposition. As time progresses, charcoal layers become more diffuse and eventually become disseminated even throughout the profile, highlighting the transition between episodic to continuous sediment transport on dune evolution.

263 In fact, a major fire event in 2019 showed evidence of mass movement only on younger dunes
264 (inception through adolescence), initiating on steep, lee hillslopes near sharp, convex dune
265 crests. Though short-lived, the landscape was efficiently smoothed by lowering local highs
266 and filling local lows⁴⁴. Within three months, the disturbed portions of the landscape were
267 stabilized by new vegetation growth (Fig. 3b). Past disturbance events are recorded as
268 stratified charcoal layers in depositional footslopes. Within the early stages of dune evolution,
269 the depositional portions of the landscape have abundant and distinct stratified layers of
270 charcoal. As time progresses, these layers become more diffuse and eventually charcoal is
271 evenly disseminated through the profile due to the influence of slow continuous transport and
272 mixing (Fig. 3c). These records are found at all excavated footslope positions and demonstrate
273 the regularity of wildfire and the consistency in the transition from episodic to continuous soil
274 transport processes is across the landscape.

275 **Conclusion**

276
277 Hillslope curvature's (C) connection with key processes in landscape evolution has prompted
278 a closer examination to how its distribution evolves with time. We propose that the standard
279 deviation of this distribution (σ_C) is a proxy for a landscape's potential to change. The
280 significance of this parameter stems from C 's inherent coupling with slope which governs
281 gravitational driven erosion, deposition and transport processes that reduce local relief. When
282 C distributions are broad (larger σ_C values) erosion and deposition rates are higher with a
283 wider variety of transport styles compared to narrow distributions (smaller σ_C values). If given
284 adequate time eroding $d\sigma_C/dt \rightarrow 0$ indicating a lack of local relief and landform senescence,
285 see Extended Fig. 6

286
287 The application of σ_C has been tested on a singular idealized chronosequence, and this
288 system provides an end member example of a transport limited system where no valley
289 processes are present. Changes in σ_C value correspond with a shift in dominant transport
290 mechanisms observed for soil-mantled landscapes¹⁵ which may indicate that σ_C is a
291 generalizable topographic metric. As highlighted by reviews across the geosciences (e.g.
292 Jerolmack & Daniels⁴⁵, Tucker & Hancock⁴⁶, Minasny et al.⁴⁷, Pawlik & Samonil⁴⁸, and Richter
293 et al.²¹) identifying landscapes that can facilitate the integrated merger of interdisciplinary
294 methods is vital for the understanding of earth systems processes. The Cooloola Sand Mass
295 (CSM) provides such a system. The CSM records and preserves the evolution of dune
296 landforms from inception to topographic senescence and demonstrates how transport
297 processes, erosion and deposition act in tandem with topography to relax landscapes.
298 Moreover, diffusional processes dominate at CSM and the assumption of equality of mass
299 fluxes from erosional into depositional positions is valid, whereas this is not generally true, or
300 at least demonstrable, in most landscapes. The conditions at the CSM parallel many physical
301 based models of idealized systems. It validates landscape evolution inferences from physical
302 modelling³¹ and supports the coupling between granular material physics and landscape
303 change⁴⁵.

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317 **Methods**

318 **Dune selection and OSL dating overview.** We focus on the Holocene sections of the
 319 Cooloola Sand Mass (CSM) as dated by Walker et al.²³ and Ellerton et al.²⁴ and mapped by
 320 Ward⁴⁸ and Patton et al.⁴⁹. Small aliquot²⁴ and single grain²³ Optically Stimulated
 321 Luminescence (OSL) ages for dunes were acquired from previously published sources. Dates
 322 represent the time of dune emplacement (inception) and consequently the initiation of dune
 323 relaxation. We choose to select ages from either dune apices or along the crest of the trailing
 324 ridges to ensure primary aeolian deposition. Additionally, samples collected at depths of less
 325 than 1.5 m were disregarded to avoid post-depositional mixing (i.e. bioturbation) and to reduce
 326 the risk of complex cosmic dose rate histories. In total, 15 dunes met our criteria, see Extended
 327 Table 1. Any dunes with multiple ages, were averaged and the resultant ages were utilized to
 328 produce the σ_c -age relationship. Additionally, three Pleistocene aged dunes, as defined by
 329 previous published work^{23,24,48,49}, were delineated to provide a topographic end member for
 330 our analyses (not incorporated within the σ_c -age relationship).

331
 332 **Dune delineation.** We use high resolution elevation data, satellite imagery and a series of
 333 field campaigns to identify and validate our mapping efforts. Principally, we used publicly
 334 available 2 m resolution digital elevation model (DEM) derived from Light Detection and
 335 Ranging (LiDAR) (2011 Queensland LiDAR data) and Orthophoto imagery (1:5000) acquired
 336 through Queensland Globe. Dated dunes are individually defined as polygons in ArcMAP and
 337 delineated at the base of crests and trailing arms. A more detailed explanation of our mapping
 338 procedures can be found in Patton et al.⁴⁹. Each dune was allocated into a geomorphic stage
 339 according to definitions given in Extended Table 2.

340
 341 **Selection of topographic indices.** In this study we have evaluated the application of common
 342 morphometric variables such as elevation, slope, curvature for all delineated dunes. We
 343 elected to resample the original DEM using bilinear interpolation to a 5 m resolution to dampen
 344 topographic noise, removing DEM artefacts, and decrease roughness associated with dense
 345 vegetation^{49,50}. Each layer was produced in ArcGIS (version 10.6) spatial analysis tools and
 346 calculated to the same extent.

347
 348 Ultimately curvature (C), and more specifically the standard deviation of curvature (σ_c) was
 349 chosen for our study for four main reasons: 1) C and σ_c normalise for antecedent topography
 350 on which dunes were emplaced, and allow us to compare dunes of varying ages across the
 351 whole dune field. Curvature is the first derivative of gradient (i.e. the spatial rate of change of
 352 gradient) and hence is insensitive to gradient biases introduced by broad-scale topography.
 353 Despite initial similarity in most respects, antecedent topography plays a role in controlling
 354 initial slope conditions. Dunes that have advanced over a flat plain have internal basins with
 355 different (lower) slopes than those that have advanced through previously emplaced dunes
 356 sequences (Fig. 1c). A desirable feature of C is that all landforms' curvature distributions are
 357 centred at zero, which makes it possible to make straight forward comparisons between
 358 dunes' σ_c values. 2) C is a proxy for soil production¹³, soil thickness¹⁵, and governs the
 359 convergence and divergence of sediment transport. Thus making C a logical candidate to
 360 describe landscape evolution. 3) σ_c provides unique values, which follows Hani et al.'s⁵¹
 361 recommendations for ideal morphometric variables. 4) More complex methods have been
 362 used to describe topographic variability (e.g. root mean squared-based models, two
 363 dimensional variograms, and wavelet lifting schemes); however, the difference between each
 364 method's outcome is likely insignificant and largely site specific (see Berti et al.⁵⁰ for more
 365 detail).

366
 367 The values of C is a commonly utilized parameter in ArcGIS and the calculation of its standard
 368 deviation is an easily applied procedure. Curvature was calculated using the equation derived
 369 from Zevenberger and Thorne⁵² and Moore et al.⁷, which is ArcGIS's primary curvature output.
 370 However, this curvature function differentiates the slope in percent rather than the actual

371 gradient, and reverses the sign, so to compute curvature values in units 1 m^{-1} , we divide the
 372 ArcGIS output by -100. This makes positive values represent concavity (hollows) and negative
 373 values represent convexity (ridges/spurs). Zonal statistics provided all topographic values
 374 used in this study and can be found in Extended Table 1. Any areas that are presently active
 375 (e.g. local reactivation), recently disturbed (e.g. streets, mines, and buildings), and/or currently
 376 water affected (e.g. lakes, and swamps) were removed and not included within our statistical
 377 analysis. Note, C and σ_c are extremely sensitive to the quality of the original elevation model
 378 or changes to boundary conditions (i.e., extent of the DEM and/or shape and size which zonal
 379 statistics were calculated), methodology, and/or processes. Special care was taken to
 380 eliminate these potential errors. Minor variability in absolute values may occur; however,
 381 overall trends remain the same.

382
 383 **Modelled dune evolution.** We utilize topography from the CSM and run a one-dimensional
 384 landscape evolution model for a model time of 10 ka. A 1.13 km transect from a young dune
 385 ($\sim 0.3 \text{ ka}$)⁴⁹ with elevation extracted every 5 m is used, see Extended Fig. 2. The simulated
 386 land surface evolves by solving Eq. 2 using a forward finite difference scheme with yearly time
 387 steps. At each time step curvature is calculated from the second derivative of a quadratic
 388 function fitted over a 3-point moving window. The calculated erosion rate is then multiplied by
 389 the time step to compute land surface lowering (erosion) or rise (deposition). The standard
 390 deviation of the curvature distribution σ_c is calculated every 50 years. We performed 30
 391 simulations for K values in the range $0.001\text{-}0.01 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$, to produce general $\sigma_c\text{-age}$
 392 relationships. These are then normalized to allow comparison with natural data. Due to the
 393 observed hillslope threshold ($\sigma_c = 0.03 \text{ m}^{-1}$), we ran additional models using two different K
 394 values for before and after the hillslope threshold has been met. Note, $\sigma_c\text{-age}$ relationships
 395 could not be explained well with simple functions (e.g., two or three parameter exponentials);
 396 therefore, we selected K values based on observed goodness of fit when σ_c is normalized.
 397 We focus on the relative changes in dune evolution when K changes. The absolute values of
 398 K are beyond the scope of the project but will be addressed in future studies.

399
 400 **Data availability.** All datasets necessary to generate our results during the current study are
 401 available at (Address here). All soil samples at the CSM are located at The University of
 402 Queensland School of Earth and Environmental Science.

403
 404 **Code availability.** All code necessary to generate our results during the current study are
 405 available at (Address here).

406 ***Declaration of competing interest***

407
 408 The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal
 409 relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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 418 and emerging.

419 ***Author Contributions***

420
 421 N.R.P. formulated the idea of the manuscript. N.R.P., D.E. and J.S. carried out field work and
 422 the analyses. N.R.P. and J.S. drafted the manuscript with inputs from D.E., G.S. and P.C.A.
 423 P.C.A., G.S. and N.R.P. modelled landscape evolution. All authors assisted with writing and
 424 editing the manuscript.

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624 **Extended Data**

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627 *Nicholas R. Patton^{1,2}, James Shulmeister^{1,2}, Peter C. Almond³,
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636 **Extended Table 1:** Age data and supporting information used in Fig. 1, Fig. 2., and Extended Fig. 3 * Indicates the
637 area of the dune at the surface. Indicates the distance dune travel, parallel to trailing arm, from the current coastline
638 position to its furthest inland extent.

Map code	Age (ka)	Average age (ka)	Age error (ka)	*Dune area (km ²)	[†] Dune length from coast (km)	Mean slope (m ² m ⁻¹)	Standard deviation of slope (m ² m ⁻¹)	Hillslope σ_c (m ⁻¹)	Profile σ_c (m ⁻¹)	Evolutionary stage	Dating method	Lab ID	References
1	0.23	0.23	0.05	0.065	0.43	0.268	0.187	0.0744	0.050	Inception /Juvenile	Single-aliquot	USU-2011	Ellerton et al., 2020
2	0.36	0.36	0.11	0.249	0.61	0.423	0.205	0.0551	0.027	Juvenile	Single-aliquot	USU_2002	Ellerton et al., 2018
3	0.43	0.43	0.06	0.101	0.57	0.272	0.147	0.0476	0.030	Juvenile	Single-aliquot	USU-2010	Ellerton et al., 2020
4	0.44	0.44	0.10	0.421	2.14	0.316	0.200	0.0383	0.025	Juvenile	Single-aliquot	USU-2283	Ellerton et al., 2020
5	1.94	1.94	0.28	0.155	1.00	0.276	0.121	0.0302	0.017	Adolescence	Single-aliquot	USU-2267	Ellerton et al., 2020
6	3.53	3.53	0.38	0.143	1.61	0.299	0.110	0.0210	0.013	Mature	Single-aliquot	USU-2012	Ellerton et al., 2020
7	3.60	3.60	0.30	0.270	1.75	0.228	0.091	0.0162	0.011	Mature	Single grain	Sample Number 2	Walker et al., 2018
8	4.20	4.20	0.40	1.02	2.45	0.240	0.136	0.0214	0.013	Mature	Single grain	Sample Number 3	Walker et al., 2018
9	4.89	4.89	0.45	0.469	1.96	0.195	0.127	0.0187	0.013	Mature	Single-aliquot	USU-2284	Ellerton et al., 2020
10	6.96 5.91	6.44	0.66	0.761	2.89	0.236	0.143	0.0154	0.009	Mature	Single-aliquot Single-aliquot	USU-2269 USU-2268	Ellerton et al., 2020 Ellerton et al., 2020
11	9.80 6.20	8.00	0.80	8.19	6.31	0.131	0.109	0.0125	0.008	Mature	Single grain Single grain	Sample Number 5 Sample Number 4	Walker et al., 2018 Walker et al., 2018
12	8.17	8.17	0.82	0.792	2.69	0.167	0.110	0.0131	0.008	Mature	Single-aliquot	USU-2282	Ellerton et al., 2020
13	9.74 8.30	9.02	0.80	4.30	4.55	0.137	0.122	0.0121	0.007	Mature	Single-aliquot Single grain	USU-2748 Sample Number 6	Ellerton et al., 2020 Walker et al., 2018
14	9.10	9.10	0.96	0.727	2.76	0.214	0.129	0.0150	0.009	Mature	Single-aliquot	USU-2270	Ellerton et al., 2020
15	9.82	9.82	0.98	1.81	3.26	0.160	0.116	0.0121	0.008	Mature	Single-aliquot	USU-2285	Ellerton et al., 2020

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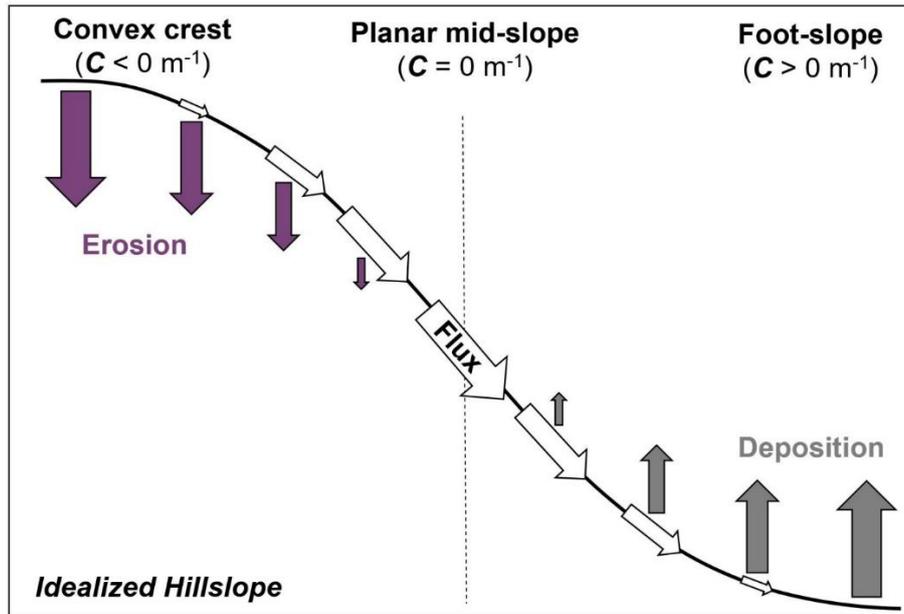
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641 **Extended Table 2:** Defining landscapes evolutionary stages of development for the Cooloola Sand Mass,
642 Australia^{24,49}.

Dune development	Description	Dominant transport processes	Secondary transport processes	Soil development
Inception	Dune creation. Active landform constructed with little to no vegetation.	Wind advection, granular flows, and deflation.	Dry ravelling, granular relaxation, and rain-splash	No podzolization
Juvenile	Newly stabilized dune with vegetation. Some sections may contain active (inception) features. Gradients are steep, with lee facing slopes near 0.65 m ⁻¹ (33 degrees). Sharp crest and trailing arms. Episodic mass movement is the dominant transport process.	Granular flows, sheet-washing, and dry ravelling	Dry ravelling, granular relaxation, and rain-splash	Incipient Podzol (weak B-horizon)
Adolescence	Stabilized dune with vegetation. Gradients remain steep with sharp crest and trailing arms. Transitional phase of a dunes development with little episodic mass movement.	Granular flows, sheet-washing, dry ravelling, soil creep, rain-splash and granular relaxation	NA	Podzol (well defined B- and E-horizons)
Mature	Stabilized dune with vegetation. Diffuse hillslopes with rounded crests. Gradients are less than 0.65 m ⁻¹ (33 degrees) and no episodic mass movement is present. Continuous soil creep controls the development of the dunes evolution.	Soil creep, rain-splash and granular relaxation	NA	Podzol (well defined B- and E-horizons)
Old age	Lack many of the dune original structures. Diffuse hillslope with no episodic mass movement. Continuous soil creep controls the development of the dunes evolution.	Soil creep, rain-splash and granular relaxation	NA	Giant Podzol (E-horizon > 5 m)

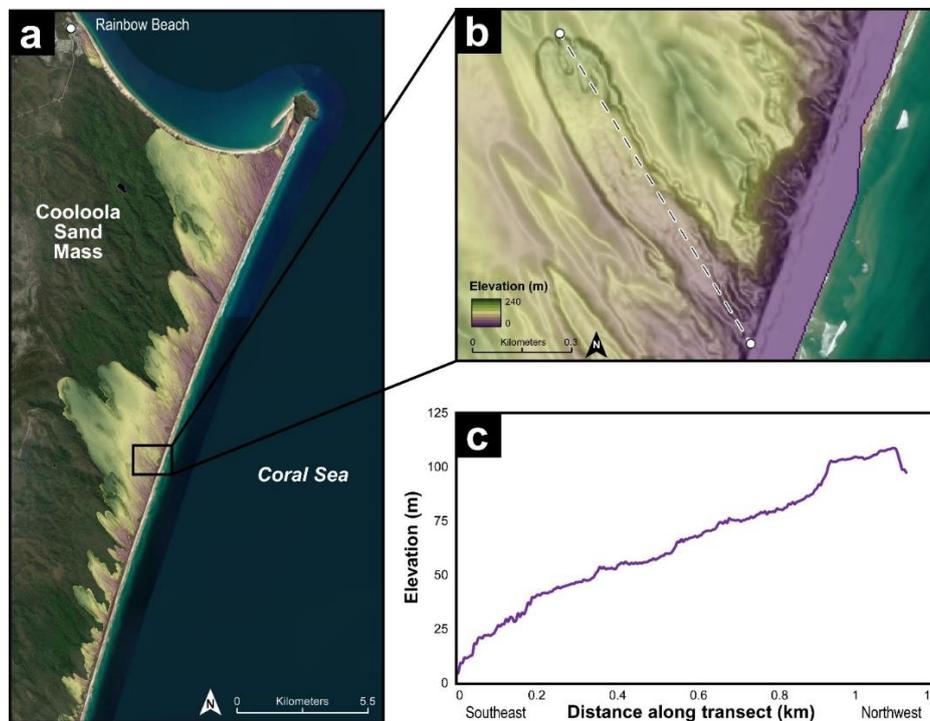
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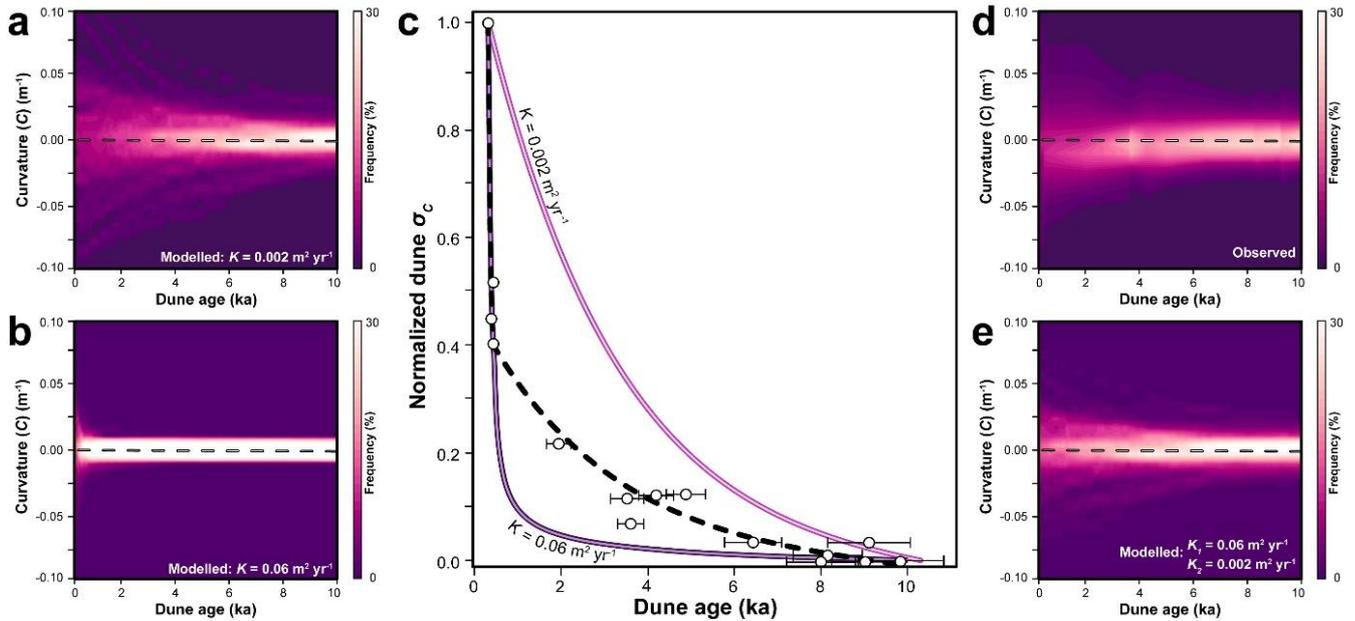
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Extended Figure 1: Conceptual diagram of hillslope positions and the contribution of erosion, deposition and flux (size of arrow) at Cooloola Sand Mass (CSM), Australia. At the CSM, diffusive hillslope processes dominate and all sediment removed from crest and ridges can be accounted for in the hollows and valleys (a conservation of mass). Here we show that sediment flux is proportional to hillslope gradient (slope-dependent linear transport). At the crest, hillslope gradients and curvatures are low and erosion rates are the highest. Moving further downslope, away from the crest, hillslope gradients and curvatures increase causing more sediment flux and less erosion. A maximum sediment flux (equivalent to maximum erosion rate at the crest and a maximum deposition rate at the foot-slope) is reached at the mid-slope position when gradients are the highest and curvature is equal to 0 m^{-1} . After the mid-slope position, only sediment flux and deposition occurs as hillslope gradients and curvatures decrease. At the foot-slope, hillslope gradients are low and curvature is at a minimum therefore deposition is at a maximum. As time progresses ridges lower and hollows fill, reducing hillslope gradients and the maximum and minimum curvature values. Combined we see a systematic decrease in erosion, deposition and flux rates with time.

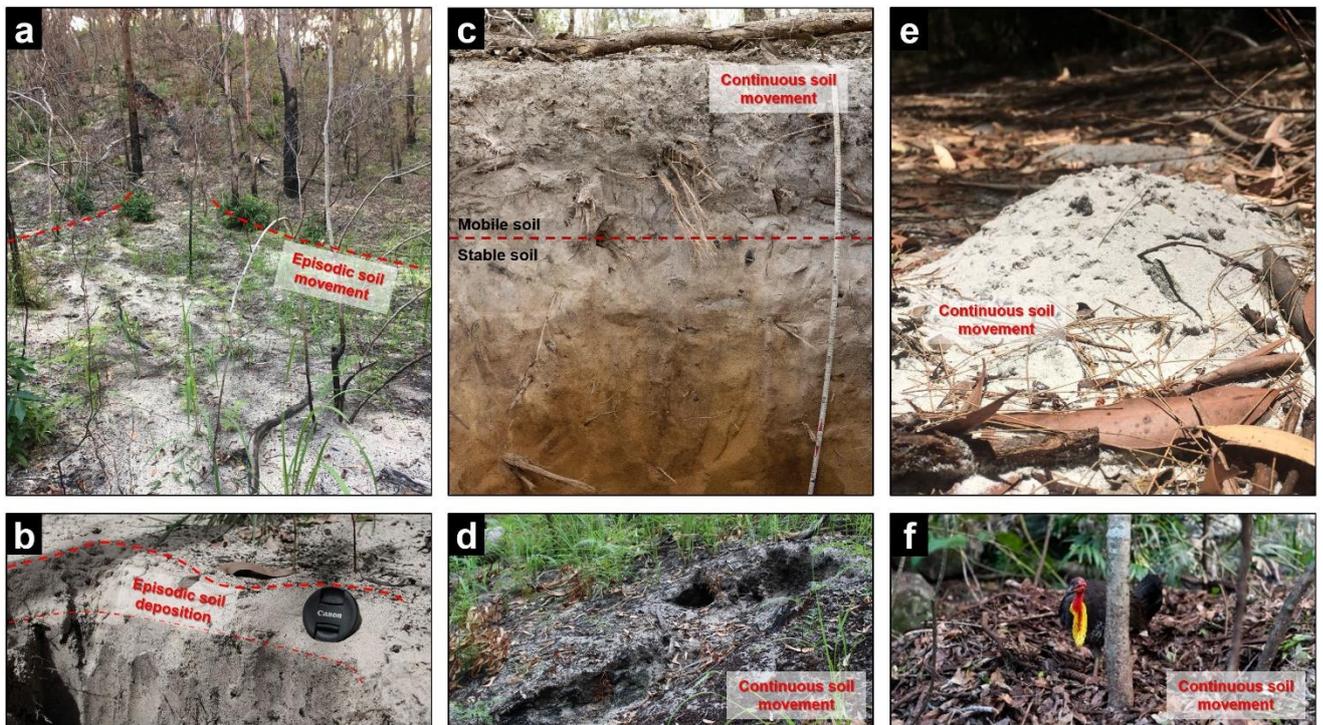


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Extended Figure 2: Location of dune used in modelled simulations. a) Location of the 0.3 ka^{49} dune and the 1.13 km transect used to run our 1-D landscape evolution model. b) Dune elevation profile from Southeast to Northwest.

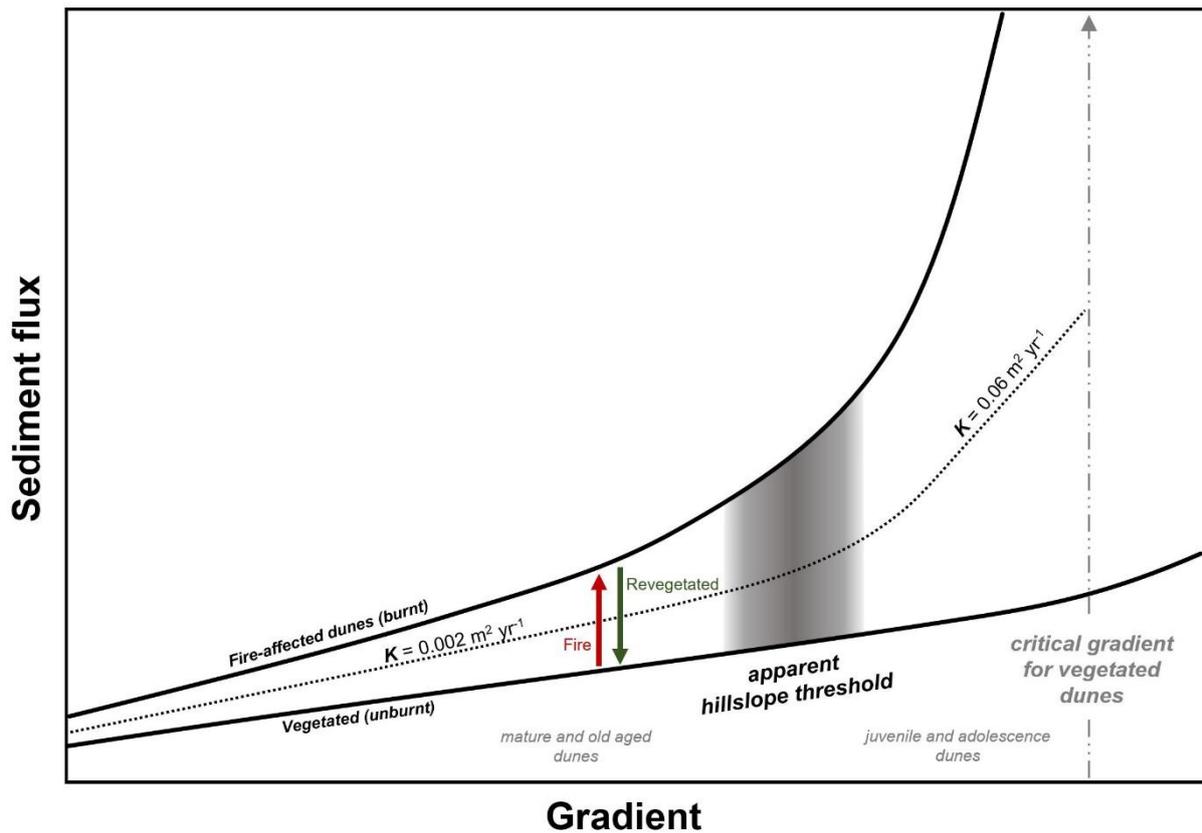


665 **Extended Figure 3: Simulated versus observed landscape evolution results.** Distributions of curvatures for
 666 simulated dune evolution for 10 ka on a juvenile dune with a constant soil transport coefficient (K) values of **a)**
 667 $0.002 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ and **b)** $0.06 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$. Normalized modelled dune evolution from panels **a** (pink line) and **b** (purple line),
 668 compared to the observed CSM dune's σ_C (white dots). Not one K value alone can explain the evolution of the
 669 CSM dunes. Dunes are best described with a K value $0.06 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ before the hillslope threshold ($\sim 0.03 \text{ m}^{-1}$) has
 670 been reached, after which a K value of $0.0012 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ can be prescribed, as depicted by the dashed line. Observed
 671 **C** distributions for the CSM dunes **d)** parallel that of the two K value simulation **e)** utilized in panel **c**. Note, to
 672 compare our 1-D modelled simulation, we used profile curvature. Both hillslope curvature and profile curvature
 673 response similarly with time, see Extended Table 1.



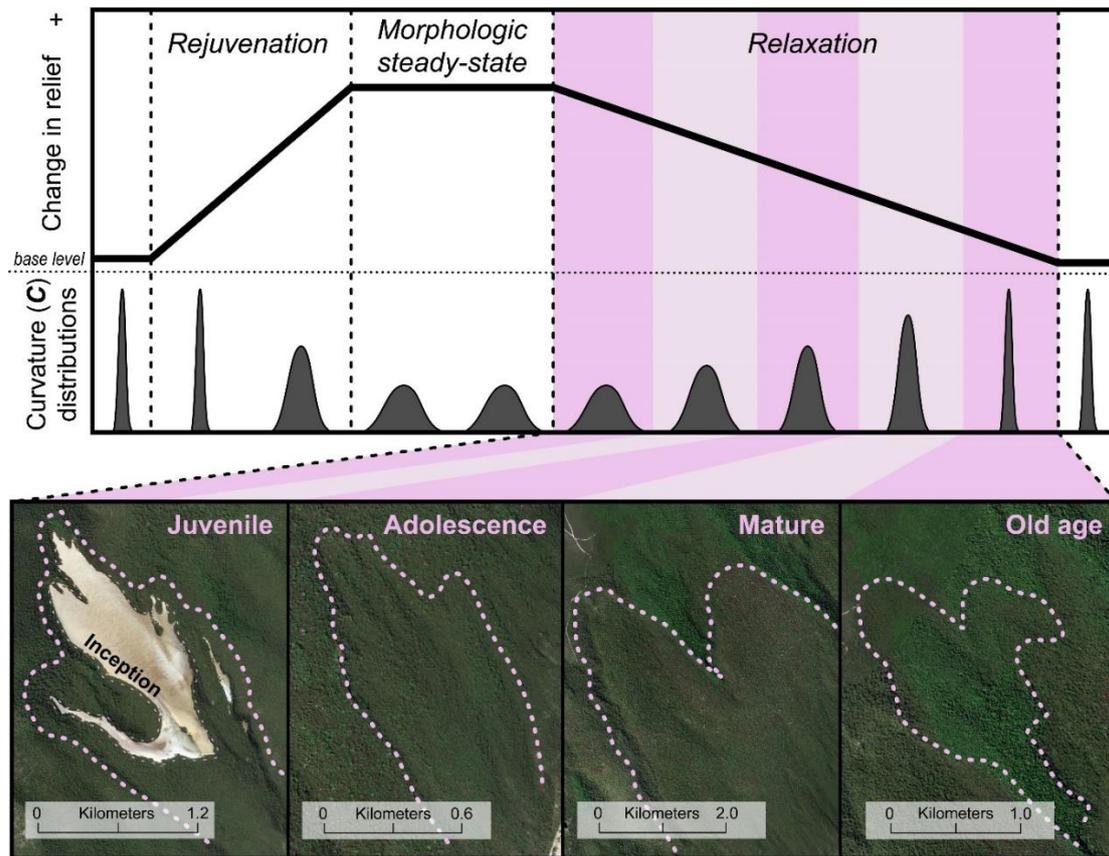
674 **Extended Figure 4: Field images of typical soil movement.** Commonly observed episodic (Panels **a** and **b**) and
 675 continuous (Panels **c**, **d**, **e** and **f**) soil transport mechanisms at the Cooloola Sand Mass. **a)** Fire induced sand ravel
 676 and sheet-wash movement on the steep lee facing hillslope of a 0.44 ka dune shortly after fire event and its
 677 associated **b)** deposition. **c)** Common mid-slope soil profile on a Holocene age dune highlighting the abundance of
 678 biogenic disturbed soil near the surface in the A-horizon where it becomes increasingly stable moving down profile
 679 as shown by the intact E- and B-horizons. Typical perturbation include **c)** root growth and decay, **d)** tree throw, **e)**
 680 burrowing invertebrates, and **f)** nest construction (photo credit: Patrick Adams and Kegham Hovsepian).

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Extended Figure 5: Conceptual diagram of sediment flux and gradient modified from Roering et al.³⁵. When dunes are vegetated soil transport is muted and soil flux is linearly related to hillslope gradient. After fires, when sand is exposed and surfaces are hydrophobic, soil flux increases non-linearly with gradient, but the non-linearity of transport is only important for young dunes where slopes approach the critical hillslope gradient. The net effect of vegetated and burnt phases is a soil flux-gradient relationship that can be approximated by two straight line segments separated by an apparent threshold. Comparing our model simulations of σ_c time decay with empirical data suggest K values of 0.002 and $0.06 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$ approximate the behaviour, respectively, of older dunes with few steep slopes and low σ_c ; and younger dunes of steeper slopes and higher σ_c .



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

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 694 **Extended Figure 6:** Conceptual diagram (summarizes the main findings) modified from Montgomery³. The
 695 relationship between change in elevation from base level and dunes curvature (C) distributions (σ_C) for a landscape
 696 with time. Positive change from base level represents a phase of landscape rejuvenation. This will result in a
 697 broadening in the C distribution (greater σ_C) thus providing a higher potential for landscape change. No change in
 698 elevation with time (constant elevation) results in a morphologic steady-state. While negative change from base
 699 level represents a relaxation phase. This will result in a narrowing in the C distribution (lower σ_C) thus providing a
 700 lower potential for landscape change. Given ample time in a relaxation phase, the landscape will evolve towards
 701 senescence ($\sigma_C \rightarrow 0 \text{ m}^{-1}$) where no local relief remains. The evolution of the dunes found at Cooloola Sand Mass
 702 (CSM) are constrained by hillslope thresholds which relate to physical properties of the original parent material (the
 703 angle of repose of the dry, unconsolidated sediment). Therefore, the σ_C for dune inception is uniform and once
 704 emplaced will only decrease with time, unless reactivation occurs (rejuvenation). Aerial image of the delineated
 705 dunes and the stage of their evolutionary development highlight these changes. Further description of dune stages
 706 can be found in Extended Table 1 and 2.
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Figures

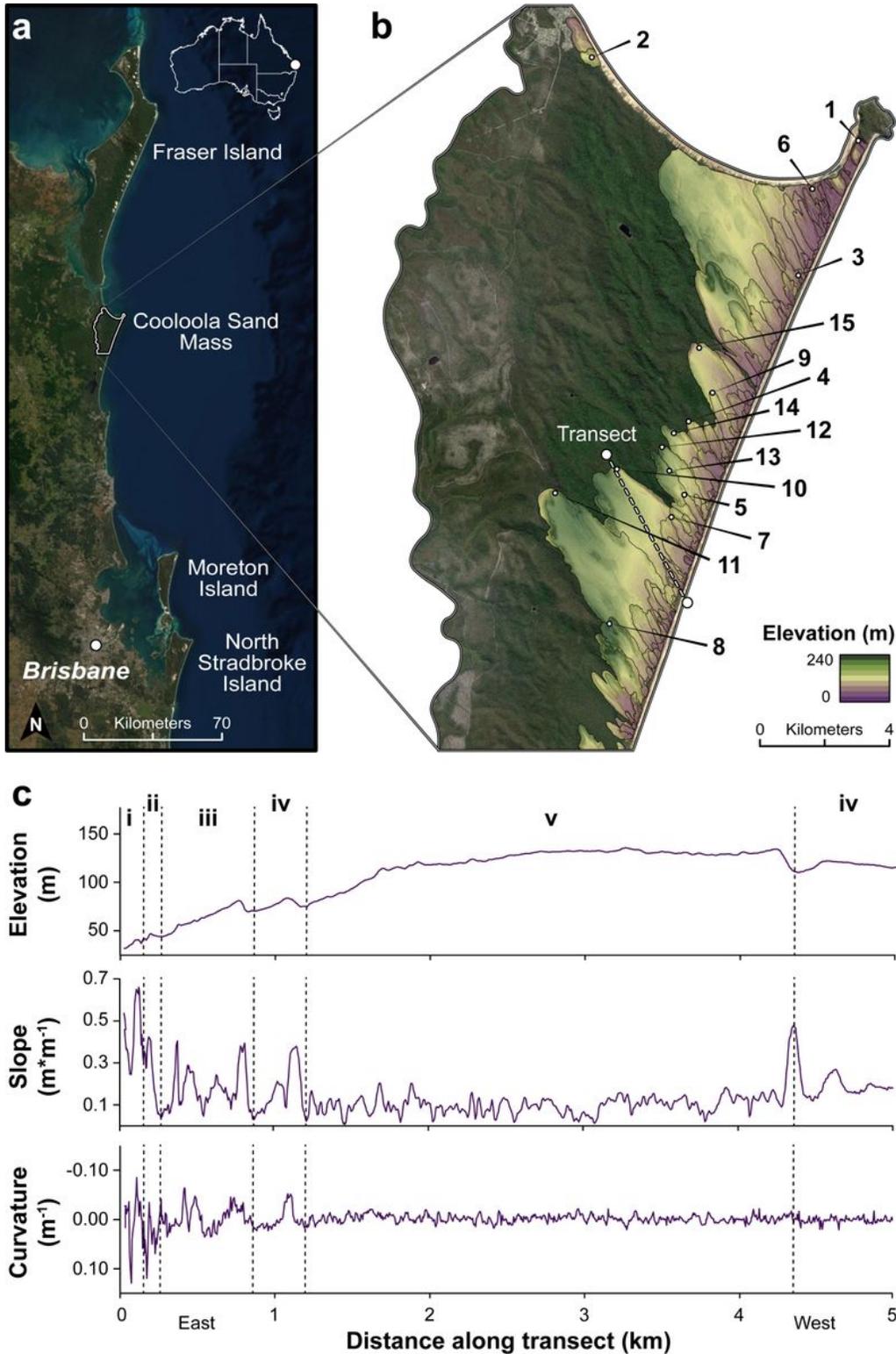


Figure 1

Regional and site location. a) Satellite imagery of the South East Queensland Dune fields in Australia, emphasizing the location of the Cooloola Sand Mass. b) Delineated Holocene dunes and their associated elevation at a 5 m resolution and location of the 15 dated dunes used in this study (dots) (obtained from

Walker et al.23 and Ellerton et al.24, see Extended Table 1). c) A transect aligned parallel to the dominant wind direction, (southeast to northwest), seen in Panel b, highlights the transition from juvenile dunes (i) to more mature dunes (ii to vi). When dunes are emplaced, they have highly variable surface topography but as time continues, their slope relaxes towards a morphologic steady-state and this evolution can best be described by a dune's curvature (C), specifically a dune's standard deviation of curvature (σ_C).

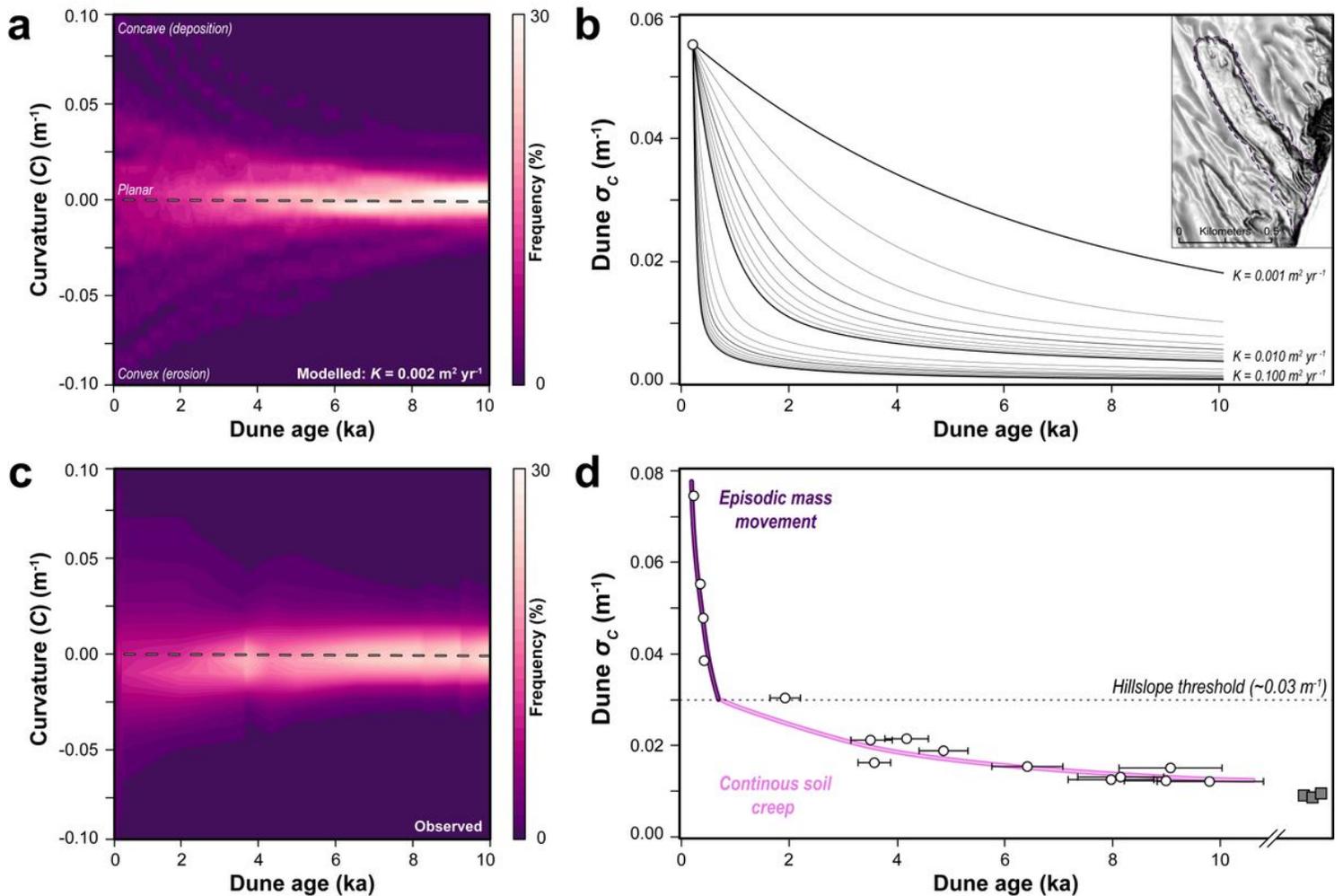


Figure 2

Simulated versus observed landscape evolution. a) Distributions of curvatures for simulated evolution of a juvenile dune (insert in panel b) with a constant soil transport coefficient (K) value of $0.002 m^2 yr^{-1}$, see Extended Fig. 2 and 3. Note the normal distribution of curvature (C) centred on planar topography ($0 m^{-1}$) and the gradual narrowing of distributions with time (dark to light frequency). b) Simulated evolution of dune standard deviation of curvature (σ_C) for 10 ka, under varying K values. c) Observed C distributions for the 15 dated CSM dunes which mirror simulated outcomes in Panel a. d) Plotted dune σ_C with time (with error bars, $\pm 1\sigma$), white dots and visual trend line. CSM evolution is best described by two K values. When dunes σ_C are greater than the hillslope threshold ($\sim 0.03 m^{-1}$, dashed line), K is $0.06 m^2 yr^{-1}$ (purple line) which reflects the dominance of episodic mass movement (dry ravel and sheet-wash ($n=4$)). After dunes are lowered below the hillslope threshold, K is $0.002 m^2 yr^{-1}$ (pink line) where slow and continuous soil transport occurs (soil creep ($n=11$)), see Extended Fig. 3. This behaviour continues as a morphologic

steady-state approximated by Pleistocene age dunes (grey squares, not included in this analysis) is approached.

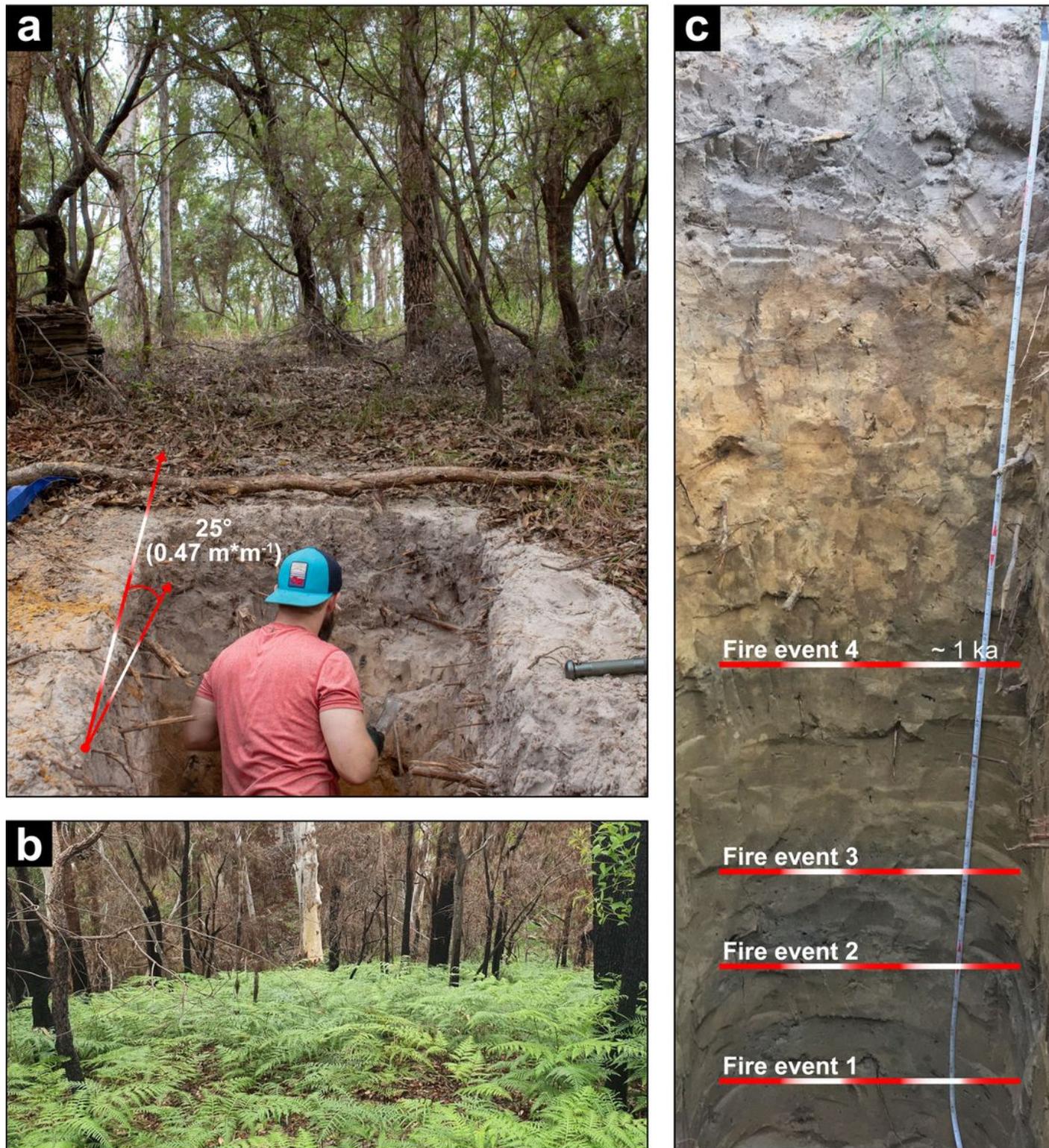


Figure 3

Surface images of dune slopes and soil profiles. a) Typical hillslope at the Cooloola Sand Mass looking up to dune crest. b) Same dune as Panel a looking down slope after being severely burnt in the “Freshwater Road Fire” on December 15th, 2019. Note, within three months the rapid reestablishment of

vegetation covers and stabilizes the landscape. c) Depositional foot-slope of a ~2 ka dune and stratified layers of charcoal associated with fire induced mass movement (dry raveling and sheet-washing) oldest (fire event #1) to youngest (fire event #4). Distinct layers can be observed within the first 1 ka (unpublished charcoal radiocarbon age) of dune deposition. As time progresses, charcoal layers become more diffuse and eventually become disseminated evenly throughout the profile, highlighting the transition between episodic to continuous sediment transport on dune evolution.

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

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