



Australia Unprepared for Worsening Extreme Weather

We, the undersigned, who are former senior Australian fire and emergency service leaders, have observed how Australia is experiencing increasingly catastrophic extreme weather events that are putting lives, properties and livelihoods at greater risk and overwhelming our emergency services.

Climate change, driven mainly by the burning of coal, oil and gas, is worsening these extreme weather events, including hot days, heatwaves, heavy rainfall, coastal flooding and catastrophic bushfire weather. Australia has just experienced a summer of record-breaking heat, prolonged heatwaves, and devastating fires and floods - there should be no doubt in anyone's mind: climate change is dangerous and it is affecting all of us now.

Facts You Need To Know

- › Bushfire seasons are lasting longer and longer.
- › The number of days of Very High to Catastrophic bushfire danger each year are increasing across much of Australia, and are projected to get even worse.
- › Opportunities to carry out hazard reduction burns are decreasing because warmer, drier winters mean prescribed fires can often be too hard to control – so fuel loads will increase.
- › Higher temperatures mean that forests and grasslands are drier, ignite more easily and burn more readily, meaning fires are harder to control.
- › 'Dry' lightning storms are increasing in frequency, sparking many remote bushfires that are difficult to reach and control.
- › Fire seasons across Australia and in the northern hemisphere used to be staggered – allowing exchange of vital equipment such as aerial water bombers, trucks and firefighters. The increasing overlap of fire seasons between states and territories and with the USA and Canada will limit our ability to help each other during major emergencies.
- › A warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, increasing the risk of heavier downpours and flooding events - like that which recently affected Townsville.
- › Current Federal Government climate policy has resulted in greenhouse gas pollution increasing over the last four years, putting Australian lives at risk. Communities, emergency services and health services across Australia need to be adequately resourced to cope with increasing natural disaster risk.

Tackling climate change effectively requires rapidly and deeply reducing greenhouse gas pollution here in Australia and around the world. We have the solutions at our disposal, we just need the political will to get on with the job.

We call on the Prime Minister to:

- › Meet with a delegation of former emergency services leaders who will outline, unconstrained by their former employers, how climate change risks are rapidly escalating.
- › Commit to a parliamentary inquiry into whether Australian emergency services are adequately resourced and equipped to cope with increasing natural disaster risks due to climate change.
- › Recognise that strategic national firefighting assets like large firefighting aircraft are prohibitively expensive for states and territories, are currently leased from the northern hemisphere, and that increased overlap of fire seasons is restricting access to this equipment during times of need. A cost-benefit analysis of current arrangements and their effectiveness, and how Australia's strategic aerial firefighting needs can be best met and funded, needs to be initiated in consultation with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre.
- › Ensure continued funding for stakeholder-driven research into how we can respond to, mitigate, and increase resilience to bushfires, natural hazards and escalating climate change risks.

We call on all State and Territory Governments to:

- › Provide increased resources to enable forestry, national parks, urban and rural fire services to increase environmentally sensitive fuel reduction and fire mitigation programs.
- › Focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation programs while taking strong action to significantly reduce state / territory emissions.
- › Cease cutting the budgets and resources of forestry, national parks, urban and rural fire services, both directly and through instruments such as "efficiency dividends", so that the services can increase operational capacity to deal with our "new normal" of catastrophic weather risks.

This joint statement is signed by:

Mary Barry

Former CEO, Victorian State Emergency Service

Neil Bibby AFSM

Former Chief Executive Officer, Country Fire Authority Victoria, and former Deputy Chief Officer, Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade

Tony Blanks AFSM

Former Fire Unit Manager, Tasmania National Parks, and former Fire Manager, Forestry Tasmania

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Former Chief Fire Officer, Tasmania Fire Service

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