

# 2020 | National Bushfire & Climate Summit

## FACTSHEET

[Climate change fuelled Australia's devastating Black Summer.](#) The ongoing drought coupled with increasing periods of extreme heat, both aggravated by climate change, set the scene for the catastrophic fires in the summer of 2019-20.

- This season's bushfires were the worst on record for **New South Wales** in terms of its intensity, the area burned, and the number of properties lost.
- The season was also the worst season on record for properties lost in **Queensland**.
- Nearly **80% of Australians** were affected either directly or indirectly by the bushfires.
- Nationally, an estimated **one billion animals** were killed by the bushfires, 800 million in NSW.
- At least **450 people died as a result of the bushfires**, including deaths from smoke impacts.
- At a national level, the 2019-20 bushfire season is expected to break new records for economic costs from bushfires. The tourism sector alone is set to lose **at least \$4.5 billion** over the season.
- More than 23,000 bushfire-related insurance claims were lodged across New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria between November and February **totalling an estimated value of \$1.9 billion**.
- The catastrophic bushfires spewed around **830 million tonnes of carbon dioxide** into the atmosphere, which is more than Australia emits annually.
- It is estimated that over **17 million hectares had been burned** across NSW, Victoria, Queensland, ACT, Western Australia and South Australia.
- Catastrophic fire danger ratings were experienced at locations and times of the year **never before recorded**.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE & BUSHFIRES IN AUSTRALIA**

### **Hot, dry conditions exacerbated by climate change primed conditions for dangerous bushfires.**

Australia's temperature has risen by around 1°C since 1910 due to climate change. Every year since 2013 has been amongst the ten hottest years on record for Australia, with only one of the ten hottest years (1998) occurring before 2005. Australia has also experienced a drop-off in cool season rainfall across mainland southern Australia in recent decades, and this is linked to climate change. These trends have contributed to an increase in dangerous bushfire weather over recent decades (as measured by the McArthur Forest Fire Danger Index). In other words, climate change has made the bushfire conditions we are seeing now worse.

### **Climate change is driving longer fire seasons.**

As the bushfire seasons lengthen, and with a reduction in cool season rainfall in southern Australia, [the window for prescribed burning has shrunk](#), making it more difficult to conduct controlled burning, and increasing the risks of fires escaping. Additionally, as bushfire weather worsens, the effectiveness of hazard reduction will diminish – no amount of hazard reduction will protect human lives, animals and properties from catastrophic fires. We need to look at the root cause, worsening climate change.

### **Bushfire conditions are now more dangerous.**

The risk to people, property, the natural environment and economy has increased significantly and will continue to do so. The length of the bushfire season has increased substantially, making it harder to prepare for dangerous conditions. The risks and costs of fighting fires have also increased substantially, as have the costs of their impacts.

### **Scientists expect fire weather will continue to become more frequent and severe without substantial and rapid action on climate change.**

If we fail to take strong action to rapidly phase out coal, oil and gas as part of a global effort, the impacts of climate change, including worsening bushfires, will continue to escalate.

## **WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING**

**Dr Karl Braganza, Head of Climate Monitoring at the Bureau of Meteorology on day one of the Royal Commission hearings (25/05/20):**

*“Climate change means that the past is no longer a guide to future climate related impacts and risks.”*

*“Climate change is adding to Australia's natural climate variability, driving changes and extreme weather, and increasing climate impacts on our water resources, ecosystems, health, infrastructure and economy, both now and continuing into the future.”*

**Dr Helen Cleugh, Senior Principal Research Scientist at CSIRO on day one of the Royal Commission hearings (25/05/20):**

*“These dangerous weather conditions for bushfires are likely to occur at least in part due to increasing greenhouse gas emissions.”*

*“The risk of fire danger is both due to the long-term drying and warming, which is conditioning the landscape, but also the extreme fire weather that is observed partly due to climate change.”*

**ALL QUOTES SOURCED FROM: [‘TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS’](#)**