

Greta Thunberg and Scott Morrison have expressed their views on the Australian bushfires. Photos / AP, Getty news.com.au
By: Natalie Wolfe and wires

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has responded after Swedish teenage ecowarrior Greta Thunberg made scathing comments about Australia's bushfire crisis.

Retweeting a video from 9 News, Greta said politicians had failed to connect the world's climate crisis with extreme weather events.

The tweet has already garnered thousands of likes and retweets.

Greta Thunberg



@GretaThunberg

Not even catastrophes like these seem to bring any political action. How is this possible?

Because we still fail to make the connection between the climate crisis and increased extreme weather events and nature disasters like the [#AustraliaFires](#)

That's what has to change.

Now.

[https://
twitter.com/9NewsSyd/status/1208283137228165120](https://twitter.com/9NewsSyd/status/1208283137228165120)

...

Nine News Sydney



@9NewsSyd

The ring of fire around Sydney is as angry and as frightening as we've seen. 20,000 people are tonight in the path of the mega fire rolling down the Blue Mountains into the town of Lithgow. #9News I

[http://
9News.com.au](http://9News.com.au)



185K

10:37 PM - Dec 22, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

60.8K people are talking about this

The PM dismissed Greta's criticism in a press conference this afternoon, saying he was focused on Australia's interests.

"Australia and the Australian Government will set our policies based on Australia's national interests, on what Australia needs to do," Mr Morrison told reporters in Mudgee.

"That's where I keep my focus. It's not for me to make commentaries on what those outside of Australia think that Australia should do.

"We'll do in Australia what we think is right for Australia. And that has always been my guiding principle.

"I'm not here to try to impress people overseas.

"I'm here to do the right job for Australians and put them first, and that means putting the environment in which we live at the top of the agenda, along with the economy in which people live at the top of the agenda.

"And making sure that we have responsible plans to balance the issues to ensure that people have what they need going into the future and they can be confident about their future.

"And I believe that they can. I think that they can be very confident.

"I mean, right now, particularly here in Mudgee where you have the double blow of drought and fires, you talk to people and what they talk to you about is their hope and they talk to you about their future."

The Prime Minister did not use Greta's name during his answer.



Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison speaks to firefighters in Mudgee, New South Wales today. Photo / AP

Greta, 16, also retweeted pictures overnight of cockatoos that had dropped dead from trees in western Victoria because of the extreme heat.

After months of crisscrossing the Atlantic to attend first the United Nations climate summit in New York and then COP25 talks in Madrid, Greta was back in Sweden on Friday, taking part in a rally outside the parliament where her protests first began over a year ago.

Dressed in her trademark yellow rain coat and woollen hat and trailed by a pack of bodyguards, Greta met with a group of young climate activists just outside the parliamentary building.

Named 2019 Person of the Year by Time magazine, Greta said she hoped the distinction would help put her cause in the spotlight.

"I really hope that it raises awareness and motivates others to get involved in the campaign," she told Swedish news agency TT.

Just over a year ago, at the start of the school year, the then-ninth grade student left her books at home and began sitting outside the Swedish parliament to raise awareness about the climate emergency.

Her "school strike" made the rounds of social media before gaining momentum in the international press — and the "Fridays for Future" movement was born.

The Greta phenomenon went viral. Her Twitter and Instagram accounts now have more than six million followers.

As the unofficial spokesperson for her generation, Greta wants to sound the alarm about global warming among the world's politicians, as witnessed in her rousing "how dare you" speech at the UN climate summit.

Her struggle has inspired more than just fellow teenagers to take up the cause and at the Stockholm rally banners for "pensioners for the climate" could be seen.

Hjalmar Nowak, a 55-year-old psychiatrist carrying a sign with the words "Doctor strike for the climate", said Greta's

achievements had been inspiring, even if the young climate activist herself was disappointed.



Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg attends a climate march,

in Turin, Italy on December 13. Photo / AP

"Well, Greta says they have achieved nothing since the emissions are still rising. That's true, of course, but they have achieved a lot by raising awareness," he told AFP.

Nevertheless, the last round of climate negotiations at the COP25 in Madrid earlier in December did not yield the results many had hoped for, with UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres dubbing it a "lost opportunity".

Greta has not said what her plans are for the next few months. But her many Swedish fans and supporters seemed happy to have her back on her home turf.

"Valkommen hem!" ("Welcome home") one of them wrote on her Instagram account.

Scott Morrison's Hawaii horror show: how a PR disaster unfolded

The PM went on holiday for a few days. It didn't need to look like a political crime scene. But as usual, the cover-up made everything 10 times worse

Amy Remeikis

@amyremeikis

Fri 20 Dec 2019 21:55 GMT

Last modified on Sat 21 Dec 2019 01:07 GMT



Climate campaigners at Kirribilli House protest against Scott Morrison's Hawaii holiday while bushfires rage across large parts of Australia. Photograph: Jenny Evans/Getty Images

Throughout history, the world's greatest minds have attempted to simplify Ockham's razor.

William of Ockham's principle was a fairly simple thing – “entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily”. Isaac Newton used it to apply to competing scientific theories. Robert Hanlon riffed off it to sum up political blunders: “never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity”. Which brings us to modern politics, where the simplest interpretation – “cock up over conspiracy” – reigns supreme.

Nixon wasn't done in by the crime but the cover-up. And yet, decades on from Watergate, political leaders and those paid small fortunes to advise them continue to insist the simplest route is the one furthest from the actual answers or truth.

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Scott Morrison taking a holiday is not remotely Watergate. But just five days on from his leave being made public, the prime minister, who prides himself on his marketing prowess and spin, was forced into the extraordinary position of releasing a statement expressing deep “regret” for “any offence caused to any of

the many Australians affected by the terrible bushfires by my taking leave with family at this time”.

So how did a politician who rarely acknowledges a wrong step, even if faced with the debris, end up sort-of-almost apologising for taking a holiday to **Hawaii** with his family in a public statement?

Let’s look back.

Monday

Michael McCormack, the deputy prime minister, is appointed acting prime minister.

The Greens NSW MP David Shoebridge sets off a social media firestorm with this one tweet:



David Shoebridge



@ShoebridgeMLC

Where's the Prime Minister? We just confirmed with the Deputy PM's office that he's acting PM until at least Thursday. Have they noticed the country is on fire? We have heard rumours @ScottMorrisonMP is in Hawaii #ClimateEmergency

1,639

1:17 PM - Dec 16, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[814 people are talking about this](#)

#Hawaii and #howgoodishawaii began trending on Twitter.

The Australian Financial Review publishes a small story, reporting the PM is on holiday with his family.

“The trip was not announced and Mr McCormack’s office referred questions to a spokesman for the Prime Minister.

“It is Mr Morrison’s first holiday since taking his family to Fiji after his May federal election win.”

Samantha Maiden from the New Daily reports the PMO will not confirm where the prime minister is, when he will return, and insists the matter is “not a story”.

But Mr Morrison’s office insists that claims he is holidaying in Hawaii are ‘wrong’ while refusing to disclose his location or for how long he is on leave.

The prime minister’s office will not confirm whether or not Morrison is in Hawaii. The lack of information or confirmation starts a story hunt.

Tuesday

#Wherethebloodyhellareyou and #wheresScotty trends on Twitter in relation to Morrison, including missing posters, as the PMO and McCormack, who holds a press conference, refuses to say where the prime minister is, or even if he is in the country.

McCormack says he will be acting prime minister, from his electorate of Riverina, until Thursday.

Wagga Wagga of course back in the early 1900s had its hand up to be the nation’s capital, well it’s taken a bit over a hundred years and it is finally the nation’s capital.

But look, it’s great to be actually acting prime minister from my home town. I love Wagga Wagga, I was born here and only two federal members have ever served Wagga Wagga in the federal parliament from our city, born in our city.

The prime minister’s office said that Morrison was continuing to receive briefings on the NSW bushfires and the recovery efforts from White Island in New Zealand. It is understood he will resume normal duties on Thursday.

Network Ten reports Morrison criticised then Victorian police chief Christine Nixon for going to dinner during the midst of the Black Saturday bushfire crisis

while appearing on Q&A in April 2010. Maiden published the story early the next day, quoting him as saying at the time:

She's clearly made a bad judgment call. That happens to people from time to time, but this was a very serious issue.

I think there are very serious concerns in the community about exercising judgment, and it's incumbent on all of us in public life to make decisions following that in the best interests of the ongoing nature of the program.

The PMO continues to refuse to answer questions, telling reporters they are “wrong” that Morrison is on holiday in Hawaii.



10 News First Sydney



@10NewsFirstSyd

PM Scott Morrison is being criticised for quietly going on holiday while parts of the nation are experiencing extensive bushfires. | [@vanOnselenP](#) [#auspol](#)



1,446

7:19 PM - Dec 17, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

881 people are talking about this

Wednesday

Australia experiences a new heat record, with temperatures reaching an average of 40.9C

Hawaiian shirts featuring Morrison's face are created, with profits going to volunteer fire organisations.



samantha maiden



@samanthamaiden

Good morning. @ScottMorrisonMP Alleged Hawaiian holiday has now been immortalised in a limited range of shirts featuring a smirking Prime Minister nestled in a Hibiscus flower. Link to purchase shirt here 100 per cent proceeds to volunteer firefighters

<https://>

thenewdaily.com.au/news/politics/2019/12/18/scott-morrison-hawaii-tshirt/

...



1,308

9:23 AM - Dec 19, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[582 people are talking about this](#)

Anthony Albanese addresses the controversy, by saying he will not address it:

I'm not going to be critical of Mr Morrison personally in terms of his circumstances of taking leave with his family. I'm not going to do that. That

would be cheap politics and I'm not into that. I'm into the issues. And the issues that count are a national response. Doesn't matter whether it's Mr Morrison or Michael McCormack, we're not seeing a proper response from this Government.

The prime minister's office remains mum.

Maiden confirms from Sydney airport sources that Morrison and his family were seen checking into a Jetstar business class flight to Honolulu. She again reports his office as saying it was “wrong”.



Helen Davidson



@heldavidson

· Dec 18, 2019

Scott Morrison escaped Sydney's bushfires on a business class flight to Hawaii I from @samanthamaiden who I hope has the text messages from PMO

<https://>

thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/

[2019/12/18/scott-morrison-business-class-hawaii/](https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2019/12/18/scott-morrison-business-class-hawaii/)

...



PM escaped Sydney's bushfires on a business class flight to

Hawaii

Scott Morrison escaped Sydney's bushfire crisis on a business class flight to Honolulu, according to witnesses who claim to have seen him check in.

thenewdaily.com.au



samantha maiden



@samanthamaiden

Where did this crazed rumour Scott Morrison is in Hawaii emerge from?

7:21 pm ✓✓

Is he?

7:21 pm ✓✓

How long is McCormack acting
amp

7:21 pm ✓✓

PM

7:21 pm ✓✓

Like I don't want to write a story
saying he's on holidays if....for
example...he's visiting the troops
and it's embargoed for safety

8:04 pm ✓✓

Don't believe everything you read
on Twitter.

8:24 pm

I got it confirmed he's taken a few
days off back Thursday family
holiday and as in Hawaii

8:24 pm ✓✓

What part is wrong ?

8:24 pm

Wrong.

8:25 pm

237

2:13 PM - Dec 18, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

87 people are talking about this

Lara Worthington, who as a teenager was the face of the “Where the bloody hell are you” tourism campaign Morrison greenlit while part of Tourism Australia, weighs in.



Lara Worthington



@MsLWorthington

Scott Morrison : WHERE THE BLOODY HELL ARE YOU???
[#AustraliaBurns](#) [#AustraliaFires](#)

4,746

5:32 PM - Dec 18, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

1,432 people are talking about this

The PMO continues to not say, confirm or reveal anything, meaning the story kicks on for another day. The story morphs from #whereisScottMorrison to a comment on his leadership.

From Katharine Murphy:

*People are angry about Morrison’s mini-break because it symbolises the **lack of leadership he has shown on the bushfires; the lack of principled***

leadership Australia showed last week in Madrid on climate change and the Coalition's *indefensible record on climate at home*; the lack of velocity in the government's response to Australia's stuttering economy, which was underscored by the latest midyear economic forecast, *which had downgrades as far as the eye could see*.

The Morrison holiday has accumulated public outrage because it symbolises absence: a prime minister missing in action on important things. A prime minister too regularly substituting rhetoric for action. A prime minister apparently too pleased with himself to understand that people need more from government than they are getting.

Thursday

Almost every media outlet in the country is talking about Morrison's absence.

Australia experiences its hottest day, with average temps of 41.9C, a full degree warmer than the heat record set the day before.

Thousands of people protest outside Kirribilli House. Further headlines are made when NSW police threaten to arrest a young girl, who was protesting with her father.



River McCrossen

@RivOMac

As police went about their move-on order at Kirribilly House, one girl was visibly frightened during police direction.

She and her father complied with the move-on order. [#ClimateProtest](#)



5,341

4:29 PM - Dec 19, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

3,136 people are talking about this

McCormack wanders back into screen to tell the protesters they are wasting their time.

You are wasting your time.

Go and do something productive. Go and donate your time to meals on wheels and something like that. The fact is, the PM is not there. He is having a well deserved holiday.

Those people who are shouting and screaming ... go and help someone out in need. Do a good turn rather than shouting and screaming and holding up placards that not always the words are spelt correctly on

He's entitled to a holiday. The PM takes a week off, he is entitled to that.

McCormack says there is no need for Morrison to return early.

The prime minister is very across this issue. He is getting daily briefings, if not hourly briefings, and he is very across it.

We are in constant contact. I am the acting prime minister, I am here at the state control centre, I am here with RFS Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

Morrison is confirmed to be in Hawaii, after some excited Australian tourists post about having a “few bevvies” with the “bit of a legend” PM. They include a photo.



samantha maiden



@samanthamaiden

Aussie tourist claims ‘enjoyed bevvies’ with [@ScottMorrisonMP](#) in Hawaii in photo on left with PM making Hawaiian ‘shaka’



hand signal for ‘hang loose’. Same board shorts & glasses PM seen wearing in photograph on right just weeks ago in Australia

<https://>

thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2019/12/19/pm-hawaii-10-year-old-tears/

...



196

8:24 AM - Dec 20, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

209 people are talking about this

The PMO responds by saying the “wrong” statement they had issued to a journalist was not about the prime minister being in Hawaii, or overseas, but that he was due back on Thursday .



Michael Pascoe

@MichaelPascoe01

· Dec 20, 2019

Replying to @JohnQuiggin and 6 others

[@TheNewDailyAu](#) 's [@samanthamaiden](#) filed Monday -

<https://>

thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/

[2019/12/16/pm-scott-morrison-hawaii-holiday/amp/?](https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2019/12/16/pm-scott-morrison-hawaii-holiday/amp/)

__twitter_impression=true

...



Secrecy surrounds missing-in-action PM as he takes a holiday

Scott Morrison has staged a great escape from Sydney's bushfire-related air pollution for a family holiday, but his office is tight-lipped on where he is.

thenewdaily.com.au



samantha maiden



@samanthamaiden

First story saying he was on leave was 6pm AFR. Later that night, I believe, we were first to report he claims he was in Hawaii and PMO said story was 'wrong' (they now suggest what was wrong was not that he was overseas, or on holiday, or in Hawaii, but was returning Thursday

8

1:39 AM - Dec 20, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[See samantha maiden's other Tweets](#)

Up to 40 homes are believed to be lost as fire continues to rage through Buxton, Balmoral, Bargo and surrounds, as the Green Wattle Creek blaze tore through the Wollondilly Shire on Thursday.

Late on Thursday, the worst news emerges – two volunteer firefighters have been killed, and another three injured, in a truck roll over near Buxton.

Friday

The nation wakes to the news of the volunteer fire fighter deaths. Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer were both in their 30s and both had young children.



NSW RFS



@NSWRFS

The 2 firefighters killed in a vehicle accident last night are Deputy Captain Geoffrey Keaton 32yrs & Firefighter Andrew O'Dwyer 36yrs, both from Horsley Park Brigade. Our thoughts are with their family, friends & fellow brigade members. [#nswrfs](#)



8,210

11:07 AM - Dec 20, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

3,535 people are talking about this

Morrison announces he is “coming home early” but confusion continues over how early that is, given reports he was scheduled to return to work on Monday.



Amber Robinson

@missrobinson

· Dec 20, 2019

Replying to @samanthamaiden @ScottMorrisonMP

Wasn't he due back today anyway?



samantha maiden



@samanthamaiden

No, his office said yesterday Monday Dec 23

8

11:44 AM - Dec 20, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[See samantha maiden's other Tweets](#)

He releases a statement expressing regret but not apologising.



Amy Remeikis



@AmyRemeikis

Scott Morrison's statement on his holiday [#auspol](#)

STATEMENT ON PM LEAVE

Over the course of the past week I have been taking leave with my family. Our leave was brought forward due to the need to cancel our scheduled leave in January because of our official government visit to India and Japan at the invitation of PMs Modi and Abe.

I deeply regret any offence caused to any of the many Australians affected by the terrible bushfires by my taking leave with family at this time. I have been receiving regular updates on the bushfires disaster as well as the status of the search for and treatment of the victims of the White Island tragedy. The Commonwealth's responsibilities have been well managed by the Acting Prime Minister, Minister Littleproud and Minister Payne.

As noted, given the most recent tragic events, I will be returning to Sydney as soon as can be arranged.

12

10:14 AM - Dec 20, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

57 people are talking about this

Morrison phones into to Sydney radio 2GB to explain the holiday, confirm he was in Hawaii and why he, and his office, would not confirm any details:

Well, we don't normally, John. I mean, I took leave in June as well and we did follow exactly the same practice. So I mean, we don't always say where we're going.

My privacy with my family when we're having leave, I'm sure people understand, that's something that I know Australians would respect.

But I think on this occasion, John, because there have been such horrendous events that have understandably caused a lot of anxiety, I deeply regret that and so does Jenny and to all those who were affected by the fires especially, we deeply regret it.

And I'll be getting back there as soon as I can.

The girls and Jen will stay on and stay out the rest of the time we had booked here. But I know Australians understand this and they'll be pleased I'm coming back I'm sure.

They know that, you know, I don't hold a hose, mate, and I don't sit in a control room. That's the brave people who do that are doing that job. But I know that Australians would want me back at this time out of these fatalities. So I'll happily come back and do that."

Morrison was still working on a flight home when he called to do the interview. Given his office told Maiden he would be returning to work on Monday, he'll be back on deck about 48 hours earlier than scheduled.



Frances Mao



@francesmao

So the PM confirms he was in Hawaii. Earlier this week his

office told me reports of Scott Morrison holidaying in Hawaii were "incorrect".

[https://
twitter.com/2GB873/status/
1207782319152488449](https://twitter.com/2GB873/status/1207782319152488449)

...

722

11:06 AM - Dec 20, 2019

I'm the 13-year-old police threatened to arrest at the Kirribilli House protest.

This is why I did it

My name is Izzy Raj-Seppings, and I dragged my dad on a one-hour bus trip on the hottest day of the summer to demand Scott Morrison act on climate change because I'm tired of watching my future burn before my eyes

Isolde (Izzy) Raj-Seppings

Fri 20 Dec 2019 22.37 GMT

Last modified on Sat 21 Dec 2019 00.59 GMT



Izzy Raj-Seppings being threatened with arrest by NSW police at the Kirribilli House protest against Australian prime minister Scott Morrison's inaction over climate change. Photograph: Steven Saphore/EPA

The image of 13-year-old Izzy crying as she was told she could be arrested outside Australian prime minister Scott Morrison's Sydney residence has become one of the defining images of the country's bushfire crisis.

Guardian Australia asked her to write about why she was there and what she felt.

As Australia burned from tragic bushfires, on Thursday I joined hundreds of others to demand action from our prime minister outside his Kirribilli residence.



It was a whirlwind of emotions and action. The drastic change from motivational speeches, to a peaceful sea of tents awaiting the PM's climate action, to a squad of riot police moving through the crowd arresting people, was unsettling.

Many people have asked me what motivated me to drag my dad on a one-hour bus trip to Kirribilli House on one of the hottest days of summer. My answer? Our politicians' denial, and the inaction of our government and our prime minister. Their denial has gone on for far too long. I'm tired, tired of the lies and misdirection. I'm tired of watching my future, my friends' and family's futures, all of our futures, burn before our very eyes.

How dare Scott Morrison race off to Hawaii during Australia's time of crisis? What we need is a prime minister who acknowledges that this isn't another normal fire season, that the cause of this is climate change! Lives and homes have been taken while Morrison lies on a tropical beach with his head in the sand.

Can Morrison's 'she'll be right' strategy on climate work forever?

Katharine Murphy

The government has an opportunity to pivot in 2020 – to actually do something rather than pretending to

@murpharoo

Fri 20 Dec 2019 19.00 GMT

Last modified on Fri 20 Dec 2019 19.02 GMT



'What I don't know is whether the current community concern will be transient, vanishing once glorious Sydney harbour reverts to sparkling.' Photograph: Jenny Evans/Getty Images

I

t's hot as I write this final column for 2019, the day is creeping towards 40C. It's dry. The ground is like concrete, and dust is obscuring yellowed grass on my parched suburban block. Bushfire smoke has rolled in and out of Canberra. Smoke is the last thing I smell before going to sleep and the first thing I smell as I wake up.

With the summer stretching out in front of us and **no significant rain** forecast before April, according to the Bureau of Meteorology, December and January promises extreme weather, burning bushland, eerie blood-red sunsets. **Towns are on the brink of running out of water.** Instead of resting and recharging with their loved ones, emergency services workers are spending their days toiling in a hellscape.

Long dries are dangerous times for Coalition governments, politically. The

public furore over Scott Morrison's ill judged mini-break in Hawaii while parts of the country were battling a national disaster – and **Morrison's attempt on Friday to clean up the damage** – points to the political difficulties the government faces.

Long dries create negative feedback loops for centre-right parties in Australia. The Nationals find themselves besieged by furious constituents. Rural independents position themselves to challenge major party incumbents. Far-right populists preen and circle – Pauline Hanson, the Shooters party. As a consequence of the unwelcome competition, Nationals want to flex their muscle within the government and be seen to be delivering, which can create difficulties for the Liberals in urban areas.

Water politics (as my wise colleague Gabrielle Chan **put this, predictively, in August**) is in hyperdrive in regional Australia. The irrigators engaged in an existential fight to preserve their livelihoods (like the group that came to Canberra during the final sitting weeks of the parliament and camped outside the main entrance and outside the National Farmers Federation HQ, a protest convoy demanding an audience) – want more of the scarce water. They feel wedged between the ecology, the speculators and a basin plan they evidently associate with misery.

But in cities, progressive Liberal voters fret about **persistent government inaction on climate change**. Restiveness about a lack of climate action puts pressure on the other arm of the government, the arm inclined to worry the Coalition has lost control of the climate change narrative.

A prelude to this summer nocturne played out during the last federal election, when **Nationals found themselves under significant challenge in seats** with direct exposure to the Murray-Darling. It gets forgotten, because the government has been entirely successful in projecting the sweetest victory of all post-election narrative, but Sussan Ley, the Liberal member for Farrer, suffered a negative swing on primaries of 7%. A high profile independent contesting the seat got almost 20,000 votes in the seat. National Mark Coultan had a similar experience in Parkes – a negative swing on primaries, and a bump for an independent.

In the cities, climate-related anxiety swung votes too. **Tony Abbott lost his seat**, Josh Frydenberg suffered a negative swing of over 8% and Tim Wilson a negative swing of 3.66%. In Trent Zimmerman's seat of North Sydney, the Labor candidate got a positive swing of over 8%, while in Brisbane, Trevor

Evans had a negative swing of 2% and the Greens a positive swing of nearly 3%.

While the May election was fought on a range of issues, certainly not climate and environment alone, the election result tells us the Coalition did a better job than Labor of straddling its split constituency, neutralising and weaponising where required; and was more effective in channeling the inevitable protest votes back to the Coalition.

So it is possible – Christmas holiday SNAFU and abject prime ministerial apologies notwithstanding – that Team Morrison will end the year resolved to maintaining the status quo with its actions and messaging. It's possible the Coalition will try and wait out the backlash. After all, what problem needs to be fixed here? The negative swings in May happened in seats the government holds by a large margin, so what's the case for a course correction? On this benign view Morrison can go on managing the different aspirations among the Coalition's supporters by walking every side of every street.

To recap quickly, the Coalition's formula for neutralising the climate backlash in May was **campaign calm down in the cities**. Morrison told voters he was not Abbott, and the Coalition would meet its international commitments with sensible practical policies that wouldn't crash the economy. In the regions, Morrison was also for the coal industry, for the farmers, for everyone immediately in front of him.

The government lost bark, but speaking out all sides of its mouth worked earlier this year. Everyone apart from the unmourned apex wrecker Abbott hung on, and while Labor and the Greens picked up votes on climate change in some parts of the country, **a majority of voters either rejected Bill Shorten's plans to take corrective action**, or didn't particularly but prioritised another set of issues when casting their votes.

So the Morrison et al political strategy prevailed. It absolutely did.

But will it work forever? And by work, I mean continue to command a national majority of 50% plus one.

Will Australians continue to either vote against climate action, or prioritise other things, when they are experiencing the practical consequences of policy failure in their daily lives? To frame this thought another way, if sanguine, or she'll be right mate (our natural default in Australia), is a piece of string, just how long is that piece of string?

I'm not asking this question rhetorically. I'm asking it because I don't know the answer.

I do know this. Australia's climate is changing, there are practical consequences associated with warming and these consequences are now too present to be ignored.

A new authoritative study published this week found that climate change has reduced the average annual profitability of farms by 22% over the past two decades (and yes, I know effective climate action is a global imperative, not just a local one). Cropping farms have been the worst hit, with revenue down 8% or around \$82,000 a farm, and profits down 35%, or \$70,900 for a typical cropping farm. Regional Australia is well aware it is now engaged in an adaptation exercise, because agribusinesses deal with that reality every day.

One of the small fascinations of the year, certainly for me, and I suspect for a number of us that live outside Sydney, has been watching the perils of climate inaction becoming a major national story largely because Australia's largest city was inconvenienced by noxious bushfire smoke. All of a sudden, the issue gained traction and surround-sound coverage – television, radio, digital, print – at least in outlets that still perform journalism.

I know the government has just endured a pretty spiky and uncomfortable month. You can only imagine how rotable Morrison would have been when it became obvious he would have to eat humble pie on Friday. You can actually picture that scene, or at least I can, quite vividly.

What I don't know is whether the current community concern about the lack of leadership will be transient, vanishing once glorious Sydney harbour reverts to sparkling, and people resume bushwalking in the Blue Mountains without masks and asthma inhalers, or whether the summer of 2019 and 2020 will be remembered in the future as an awakening of sorts.

Obviously, I hope it's the latter. In the spirit of good cheer, generosity and hope, I also hope that Morrison and the government he leads will take the opportunity of shifting on climate policy in 2020, and by shifting I mean actually doing something rather than pretending to be doing something.

The government has an entirely viable opportunity to pivot in 2020, to end the domestic war of political convenience in the new year, because the world will be contemplating what fresh emissions reduction commitments to offer between

now and 2050. Opportunity beckons.

I am **often tough on this prime minister**, because he furnishes plenty of reasons to be. But I've said before, and will now say again, I think Morrison is capable of finding a 50% plus one on climate change that is about more than winning a single election at a particular point in time, but about actually trying to fix a problem that requires fixing.

But first he has to make some decisions. Morrison has got to decide whether he covets power for its own sake or whether he wants to use the power Australian voters have given him to do good.

He's got to decide whether he's a chess grand master or a prime minister. These are two different callings.

Morrison can be feckless and shallow, possibly without serious negative consequences. It is the political age for feckless and shallow. Populists and charlatans litter the landscape.

So he can do that, and he won't lack company when he struts and frets on the world stage. Or he can find the courage and the moral purpose to do some good in the world, and leave a legacy that benefits future generations.

Katharine Murphy is Guardian Australia's political editor

Australian bushfires: death toll rises as fires sweep across NSW and South Australia

Two people confirmed dead in South Australia as fires burn at emergency level across three different states

- **NSW fires live: roads closed and second person dead in South Australia bushfires**
- **Bushfire survival supersedes Christmas plans as firefighters battle infernos**

Naaman Zhou

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Sat 21 Dec 2019 08.38 GMT

First published on Sat 21 Dec 2019 03.20 GMT



Two bushfires in NSW, Gospers Mountain and Green Wattle Creek, two areas in Victoria, and one in South Australia on Kangaroo Island were all burning at emergency level as of Saturday afternoon. Photograph: Dean Lewins/EPA

Emergency-level fires have swept across parts of New South Wales and South Australia, and the death toll and number of injured firefighters has risen, as the country's severe heatwave and bushfire crisis continued on Saturday.

Two people were confirmed dead in South Australia, and homes were destroyed and communities evacuated in what authorities described as "an awful day" in which fires raged across three states, even creating their own thunderstorms in some parts of NSW.

At Lithgow, about two hours' drive west of Sydney, residents were forced to flee as fires threatened the community of more than 10,000 people and destroyed several homes on the outskirts of the town. At 7pm, a person was reported unaccounted for in the Dargen area, near Lithgow, the ABC reported.

Four firefighters in NSW were treated for heat exhaustion on Saturday, the ambulance service said, while another firefighter was reportedly injured after being struck by a truck in Richmond.

On Saturday night, the Blue Mountains communities of Bilpin and Blackheath remained under threat, while southerly winds pushed a blaze away from Yanderra on Saturday afternoon. Fire fighters were expected to remain on the ground into the night.

“We have seen property impacted and lost,” the NSW RFS commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, told a press conference on Saturday afternoon. “We have 3,000 firefighters and emergency services personnel out there dealing with the fires, a bad weather day.”

Ahead of Saturday, authorities had been preparing for what they knew would be rarely-seen conditions. Catastrophic fire conditions were declared in the state, with high winds, above 40C temperatures, low humidity and long-term dryness in the bush combined to fan flames across the country.

Catastrophic **is the highest fire danger rating** and is the equivalent of the conditions before the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria. Saturday was only the second time that greater Sydney had catastrophic conditions declared.

As conditions worsened, major roads, including sections of the Princes Highway, Hume Highway and Greater Highway were closed during the day, with police warning people to stay off the roads despite the Christmas holiday rush. Train services on rail lines west of Sydney were also delayed and cancelled.

By 4.30pm, seven fires in NSW were burning at emergency, including the more than 400,000-hectare Gospers Mountain mega-fire, and the Green Wattle Creek fire, where two firefighters died on Thursday when their truck overturned.

A southerly change swept through at 5pm, making the fire even more erratic and changing the fire direction. Around this time, NSW authorities began warning of a bushfire-generated thunderstorm that had formed over Currowan and Tianjara fires in the Shoalhaven area, on the NSW south coast.

The fire service said this would lead to increasingly dangerous fire conditions. Such storms, known as pyroCB, can produce embers hot enough to spark new fires 30km from the main fire.

NSW RFS



@NSWRFS

A strong southerly change is moving up the coast. Some fires

have generated thunderstorms ahead of the change. The change will increase winds and see erratic fire behaviour. These are dangerous fire conditions. Stay informed of the changing situation.[#nswrfs](#) [#nswfires](#)

123

8:19 PM - Dec 21, 2019

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Fires also continued to burn in Victoria and South Australia. The South Australian premier, Steven Marshall, confirmed that two people had died in the state on Friday. One, a 24-year-old from Queensland, died in a car crash at Lameroo. Another person died in a fire in the Adelaide Hills that also seriously injured another.

The Cudlee Creek fire in the Adelaide Hills, and a fire on Kangaroo Island, were both at emergency but were downgraded to watch and act.

Twenty-three firefighters were also injured in South Australia, one seriously, and three trucks were destroyed. Five homes, 28 buildings and 16 vehicles had been destroyed.

In Victoria, the Marthavale fire in East Gippsland quadrupled in size overnight, growing so large it created its own weather. Throughout Saturday, two emergency warnings were in place, for Ensay, Reedy Flat, Stirling, Holstons; and Tambo Crossing, Wattle Circle, Stirling.

The acting prime minister, Michael McCormack, said the prime minister, Scott Morrison, would return to Australia on Saturday night, after he cut short a family holiday to Hawaii.

The prime minister had apologised on Friday for “any offence caused” by the holiday, which began on Monday, and said he would return “as soon as can be

arranged”.

Morrison had originally planned to return to the prime minister’s role on Monday night, but he boarded a plane back to Australia on Saturday and is expected to land in Australia later in the evening.

Marshall, the SA premier, cancelled his own Christmas holiday as the fires swept South Australia. He was scheduled to leave for New Zealand this week but said he would remain in Adelaide.

With Morrison away, McCormack conceded at a press conference that he agreed Australia needed to do more to combat the climate crisis, though he did not outline what that might be. But McCormack also hit out at what he called climate change “hysteria” and linked the fires to other causes, including dry lightning strikes and self-combusting manure.

Facing pressure over the federal government’s role handling the crisis, the emergency management minister, David Littleproud, announced about 30 Canadian firefighters would join the local effort from Sunday.

On Saturday morning, the federal opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, criticised Morrison for a lack of transparency around the trip.

Albanese said “media inquiries were met with misinformation, at best” after Morrison’s office initially told reporters he was not in Hawaii.

The NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, and police told residents to please delay travel and obey directions from authorities. “Today is not the day to start your holiday,” a police spokeswoman said.

On Saturday, protesters gathered outside Kirribilli House, accusing Morrison of a lack of leadership on the fires and on combating climate change.

The NSW RFS has **set up a dedicated donations fund** for the families of two firefighters who died on Thursday after their truck overturned near the Green Wattle Creek fireground.

Fitzsimmons said that conditions were expected to improve after Saturday, but noted the fires would continue to burn unless the state received a much-needed downpour.

“We will not get on top of these fires until we get some decent rain, we have said



Australia climate change: Thousands rally in Sydney amid bushfires

45 minutes ago



EPA Organisers say some 20,000 people took part in the "climate emergency rally"

Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets of Sydney to demand urgent action on climate change amid an extreme bushfire season that has brought hazardous smoke to the city.

It came a day after a thick haze caused chaos in the harbour city, setting off smoke alarms and marring visibility.

Protesters, many wearing face masks, accused the government of inaction.

But Australia's government has defended its policies and argued that climate change is not solely to blame.

"Certainly climate change is a factor, there is no question, but also it is important to note that most of these fires have been caused by 'Little Lucifers'," Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack told ABC, referring to arsonists.

What happened at the protest?

Organisers estimated that some 20,000 people joined Wednesday's protest march. They accused successive governments of failing to address the "approaching climate emergency".

"Now the result is here: unprecedented drought, bushfires, and now a massive health crisis, with millions choking, with no escape, and severe consequences for people's immediate and long term health," they wrote on a Facebook page for the event.

Protesters held up signs and chanted as they gathered outside Sydney's Town Hall.

"They [the government] are to blame for our largest city being poisoned and rather than taking meaningful action, they are fast-tracking new coal mines," Chloe Rafferty, an organiser for the Uni Students for Climate Change group holding the march, told Reuters news agency.



AFP



GETTY IMAGES

"We are here because we care about the future of our children and their children's children. We are going to send a message to our leaders in our country: that we are now going to stand up to say we are here and we have had enough," another protester said.

What is the background?

Bushfires have been raging for weeks in Australia, killing six people, destroying more than 700 homes and burning millions of acres of land.



Sydney bushfire smog "like being a heavy smoker"

The blazes have brought "hazardous" air quality levels to Sydney. **The haze on Tuesday** was described by many people as the thickest to blanket the city amid this year's fire crisis.

Some residents reported breathing problems and said they were "choking" on the smoke.

Sydney residents are also facing **the city's toughest water restrictions in more than a decade** amid a severe drought.

What is Australia doing about climate change?

Australia has one of the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions rates in the world **due largely to its reliance on coal-fired power plants**.

In June, the government gave **final approval for construction to begin on a controversial coal mine** in the state of Queensland. Environmental campaigners said they feared it could pave the way for six other mines to be approved in the area.

Under the Paris climate agreement, Australia has pledged to cut emissions by 26% to 28% on 2005 levels by 2030.

But while Prime Minister Scott Morrison has reiterated the government's commitment to meeting this target, the United Nations last year warned that it was not on track to do so.

Climate of chaos: the suffocating firestorm engulfing Australia

The death toll from the unprecedented crisis has reached eight and sparked an apology from the prime minister

Adam Morton

@adamtmorton

Fri 20 Dec 2019 14:00 GMT

Last modified on Fri 20 Dec 2019 16:20 GMT



Firefighters were battling more than 200 fires as a heatwave engulfing Australia pushed temperatures in the south into the mid-40s. Photograph: David Gray/Getty Images

E

ven by the standards of 2019, with an Australian public increasingly conditioned to the threat of unprecedented bushfires and warnings of record-breaking heat, this has been a week unlike those before it.

On Friday, firefighters were battling more than 200 fires across five states as a heatwave engulfing the country pushed temperatures in the south into the mid-40s, and Sydney and other centres were enveloped in a smoke that health professionals warned had been at hazardous levels for nearly a month. Strong winds pushed the smoke 900km south, where it also blanketing Melbourne.

The human cost was emphasised with the death of two firefighting volunteers, **both young fathers**, who were killed when their truck rolled as they helped defend villages south-west of Sydney. It brought the confirmed fire season death toll to eight. More than 800 homes and buildings have been destroyed in New South Wales alone.

The escalating crisis moved the prime minister, Scott Morrison, to apologise and promise to return early from a Hawaiian family holiday as he faced rising criticism for being absent during a disaster without informing the public he was taking leave. Morrison's office had earlier **denied to journalists** that he was in Hawaii.

Until Tuesday, Australia's hottest day on record had been in January 2013, when the average maximum temperature across the continent was 40.3C. By Thursday, that mark had been beaten three days straight. The **new record of 41.9C (107.4F)**, set on Wednesday, was a full 1.6C hotter than the old benchmark.

Conditions were expected to worsen on Saturday in New South Wales, the site of the majority of the fires, as it was hit by the centre of a mass of hot air rolling across the continent. Authorities warned, with several areas including suburban Sydney facing catastrophic fire conditions of expected temperatures up to 47C, the hottest all year, and gusting inland winds approaching 40kmh, people should not assume firefighters could save them.

The extraordinary heatwave has been partly driven by natural factors – the strongest Indian Ocean dipole event on record that has dragged moisture away from the continent, and atmospheric warming above Antarctica, which heated up the areas worst affected by fire along the east coast – but scientists say it cannot not be divorced from the more than 1C rise in average temperatures due to increased atmospheric greenhouse gases.

According to Sarah Perkins-Kirkpatrick, from the University of New South Wales' climate change research centre, "everything about this is unprecedented". She says it is hard, after years researching and speaking to the media about the link between emissions and extreme heat, to find the right words to describe what the country is now experiencing.

"Climate scientists have been banging on about it longer than I've been alive," Perkins-Kirkpatrick says. "We all knew at some point that everything would come together in a perfect storm to make people fully realise climate change is here and now it is. We aren't surprised, but we are equally shocked and saddened."



The helmets of volunteer firefighters Andrew O'Dwyer and Geoffrey Keaton at a memorial at the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade. They were in a truck convoy near the town of Buxton when a tree fell into their path, prompting the vehicle to roll off the road, with both men dying at the scene. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

The worsening conditions have come as the Morrison government is feeling heightening pressure at home and abroad for failing to acknowledge and address the climate crisis.

Morrison's reputation on climate change was forged in early 2017, when he brandished a piece of coal in parliament at the opposition Labor party, telling them, and the public, it was not something that should invoke fear.

As the bushfire crisis worsened over the past month, the prime minister dismissed suggestions that anything Australia did could limit the impact of global heating on the fire threat and **refused to meet with former emergency services chiefs** who wanted to discuss the climate crisis. It prompted accusations he was failing to show leadership on a national disaster.

The issue came to a head before Morrison headed overseas when, with Sydney shrouded in smoke and **its famous harbour near invisible**, he called a press conference to discuss legislation to enshrine religious institutions' right to discriminate against staff, with the bushfires only belatedly raised in the questions that followed.

The ensuing criticism led to a **statement two days later** in which Morrison acknowledged the bushfires were an emergency and said he accepted the link between climate change and an extended fire season. He rejected **criticism of his climate stance at the UN summit in Madrid**, where Australia was repeatedly named as one of a handful of countries blocking more ambitious action, as baseless. Then he went overseas.

Australia bushfires factcheck: are this year's fires unprecedented?

[Read more](#)

What was **not considered a significant news story**, on the basis a prime minister is entitled to a holiday and the issue is the government's policies, gained momentum as anger over his absence grew on social media. It culminated in a protest outside his Sydney residence, Kirribilli House, on Thursday.

The abrupt cancellation of Morrison's holiday on Friday came after a picture was **posted to Instagram** showing the prime minister posing in Hawaii with other Australian tourists, who claimed to have shared a "few bevies" with him.

In a **written statement**, he said he had brought forward his leave with his family as he would be travelling overseas on official business next month, but would now come home before his wife and

daughters. In a subsequent interview on 2GB radio in Sydney, Morrison said he accepted his absence had “understandably caused a lot of anxiety”. He deeply regretted it.

David Littleproud, the emergency management minister, later said Morrison might have “retrospectively” not gone had he known how bad the bushfire crisis would be.

Critics said the crisis was already well known. In a [special climate statement](#) released amid this week’s heatwave, the Bureau of Meteorology said that as early as September most of the east of the continent was “primed for high fire danger ratings”. The three months of spring were the driest and second warmest on record.

At last count, the bushfires had [destroyed at least 3.1m hectares in NSW and Queensland alone](#), an area larger than Belgium. In the process they had razed areas that do not usually burn, [including rainforests, wet eucalypt forests and dried-out swamps](#), and are believed to [have coupled with the atmosphere to create giant thunderstorm clouds](#).

The weather bureau says warmer and drier conditions are expected to continue into the new year. With the onset of the usual northern monsoon delayed, tropical rains [are not expected until late January or into February](#).

DECEMBER 20, 2019 / 10:39 AM / UPDATED 2 HOURS AGO

Two Australian firefighters die as flames circle Sydney; prime minister cuts short holiday

Colin Packham
4 MIN READ

SYDNEY (Reuters) - Two volunteer Australian firefighters died while battling blazes around Sydney, authorities said on Friday, forcing Prime Minister Scott Morrison to cut short a vacation in Hawaii as temperatures were again set to soar.



Police block the Old Hume Highway as a blaze jumps the road near the town of Tahmoor as the Green Wattle Creek Fire threatens a number of communities in the south west of Sydney, Australia, December 19, 2019. AAP Image/Dean Lewins/via REUTERS

Australia has been fighting wildfires across much of its east coast for weeks, leaving 8 people dead, more than 700 homes destroyed and nearly 3 million acres (1.2 million hectares) of bushland burnt.

As fires ringed Sydney, Australia’s most populous city, a fire truck hit a tree and rolled over just to the south of the city, killing the driver and a front passenger, police said. Three other passengers survived with injuries.

“There is no finer person available in my view than someone who is willing to put themselves on the line for the want of nothing in return, no remuneration, nothing other than to make a positive difference in their local community,” New South Wales (NSW) Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons told reporters.

“There is a definition of hero and these two line up to it.”

Fitzsimmons named the dead firefighters as Andrew O’Dwyer, 36, and Geoffrey Keaton, 32. Both men were fathers to 19-month old children, Fitzsimmons said.

Earlier three other firefighters were engulfed by flames as fierce winds fueled bushfires across the same state. Two men were airlifted to hospital with burns to their faces, arms and legs, while a female colleague was taken by ambulance to hospital.

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the injured firefighters are now in stable condition.

Bushfires are common in Australia’s hot, dry summers, but the ferocity and early arrival of the fires last month in the

southern hemisphere spring is unprecedented.

The crisis has stoked widespread public anger, with protests around Australia, irritation fueled this week by Morrison going on leave. He has weathered a storm of criticism on social media, adding to criticism that his government is failing to deliver adequate climate change policies.

Morrison's office initially declined to comment on the reports, though eventually Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack confirmed he was acting leader.

Just hours after confirmation of the deaths of the firefighters, Morrison said he would be returning and issued an apology.

"I deeply regret any offense caused to any of the many Australians affected by the terrible bushfires by my taking leave with family at this time," Morrison said.

Morrison's arrival back in Australia is likely to coincide with temperatures again soaring.

On Thursday, Australia recorded its hottest day on record as national temperatures topped more than 42 degree Celsius (107.6 degree Fahrenheit).

While the mercury will cool on Friday, temperatures are expected to hit 40 degrees Celsius on the weekend, stoking fears of a fresh wave of fires across NSW.



A helicopter is seen during a bushfire near Bilpin, 90 km north west of Sydney, Australia, December 19, 2019. AAP Image/Mick Tsikas/via REUTERS

The fires have resulted in days of heavy pollution in the city usually known for its sparkling harbor and blue skies.

Many commuters have donned breathing masks in recent weeks as air quality has plunged to hazardous levels not previously seen in Sydney.

(GRAPHIC: Forests in flames: Images from space show Australia's bushfires in different light - here)

Reporting by Colin Packham; additional reporting by W

WORLD NEWS DECEMBER 18, 2019 / 12:30 PM / UPDATED 43 MINUTES AGO

In Australia's outback town of Oodnadatta, it's just another very hot day

Jonathan Barrett
4 MIN READ

SYDNEY (Reuters) - An outback town near Australia's red-hot center barely paused on Wednesday for a heat wave that is gripping the country, fuelling fires and prompting widespread health warnings as heat records tumble.

Oodnadatta, a South Australian town of about 200 people on an old Aboriginal trading route, is forecast to record peak temperatures of 47 Celsius (116.6 Fahrenheit) on Wednesday, according to the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM), making it

one of the hottest places on Earth.

“It’s just another very hot day,” said resident Hayley Nunn, who is the manager of the town’s distinct pink roadhouse where tourists stop on their way to and from the Simpson Desert.

“People say to me they love summer. If you love summer, come out and experience this because you will not love it,” Nunn said in a phone interview.

Nunn said Oodnadatta falls into a rhythm in the summer with people doing jobs early in the morning and late in the afternoon, while sheltering from the heat in the middle of the day.

“I grew up here, I’m used to the heat. You cope but it’s not fun.”

The unrelenting heat in Oodnadatta, forecast to repeat every day for at least the next week, is expected to fall just shy of the 50.7C (123.26F) temperature recorded there in 1960, a long-standing national record.

But other heat records are tumbling in the first month of the Southern Hemisphere summer.

Australia recorded its warmest day on record on Tuesday, according to BOM’s preliminary results, with an average maximum temperature across the country of 40.9C (105.62F), just above the previous record set in January 2013.

But the mark could be exceeded again on Wednesday and possibly on Thursday and Friday, according to BOM data.

The hot weather is stretching across the continent and fuelling fires that have been ravaging Australia’s east for weeks, since late in the southern spring.

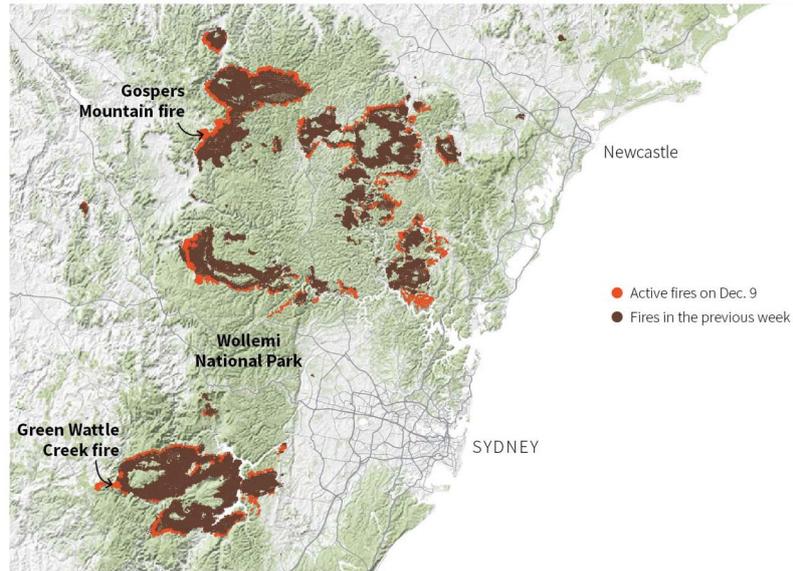
Fire authorities in the state of New South Wales (NSW) said on Wednesday there were 100 fires, half of them not contained.

Fires have killed six people, destroyed more than 680 homes and burned nearly 3 million acres (1.2 million hectares) of bushland.

Graphic: Mega fire surrounding Sydney spurred by winds ([here](#))

Mega fire surrounding Sydney spurred by winds

A number of bushfires combined into a single giant blaze north of Sydney late on Dec. 10, blanketing Australia's biggest city in hazardous smoke. Firefighters believe it will take weeks to control the blaze.



Source: NASA, Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS); Bureau of Meteorology, Australia; Reuters.

S. Scarr, 10/12/2019

REUTERS

BATTLE ON TWO FRONTS

Australia is being hit with two separate climate-driving events off its west and southern coasts - a positive Indian Ocean Dipole and negative Southern Annular Mode - that are reducing rainfall and increasing temperatures.

“They have combined together to create this situation of a particularly nasty heat wave event,” said BOM meteorologist Sarah Scully.

The extreme conditions have been exacerbated by a warming climate, which is triggering large-scale protests in a country that is committed to exploiting its vast coal reserves.

A dog cools off under a shower at St Kilda beach as a heat wave sweeps across Victoria, Australia, December 18, 2019. AAP Image/David Crosling/via REUTERS

The combination of thick smoke settling over populated areas and intense heat has triggered numerous health warnings, especially for the young and the old, and those with respiratory conditions.

“People should take those conditions seriously and do what they can to keep out of the heat as much as possible,” said Richard Broome, the director of environmental health in New South Wales state.

In Oodnadatta, where the temperature is only expected to drop to around 30C (86F) overnight, residents are warning travelers to take plenty of water on their car trips in case they break down on isolated roads.

“Between most towns, it’s 200 kilometers (124 miles),” said Nunn.

Australia fires: A visual guide to the bushfires and extreme heat

6 hours ago

Australia is grappling with massive bushfires fuelled by record-breaking temperatures and months of severe drought.

Fires in New South Wales (NSW) have burned at least 2.7m hectares (7.4m acres) this season, destroying more than 700 houses. Eight people - including two volunteer firefighters whose vehicle was hit by a tree - have died.

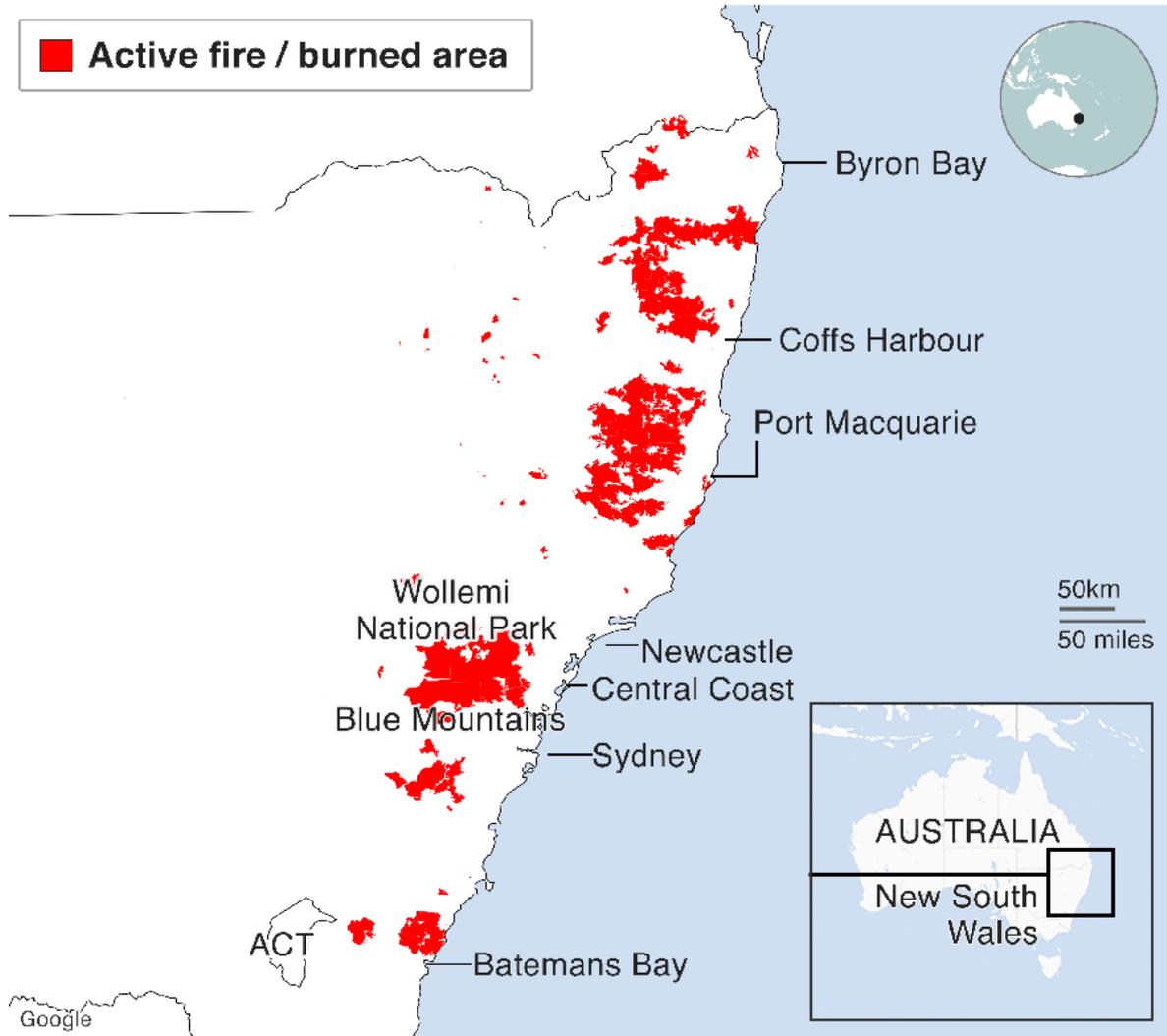


GETTY IMAGES

What's the situation in New South Wales?

Hot, dry weather combined with prolonged drought and strong winds have created perfect conditions for fire to spread rapidly.

Bushfires in New South Wales



Source: New South Wales Rural Fire Service (19 December 2019)

BBC

Nearly 100 fires are burning across the state, with many uncontained and continuing to threaten lives.

The fires have been exacerbated by 40C temperatures and strong winds in recent days, creating difficult conditions for the 2,500 firefighters deployed in the field. Large fires are burning in the north region between Port Macquarie and Byron Bay.

Further south there are fears that the vast Gosper's Mountain fire, which originated in the Wollemi National Park, may merge with the Green Wattle Creek blaze in the lower Blue Mountains.

Smoke from these fires has periodically blown south-eastwards to reach Sydney, causing severe air pollution in Australia's largest city.

How big are the fires?



70 metre
high flames have
been reported

Sydney Opera House is
65m height

Source: NSW rural fire service, CalFire / NIFC

BBC

To put the fire damage in New South Wales in perspective, 1.8 million hectares burned in the 2018 California wildfires and some 900,000 hectares were lost in the 2019 Amazon fires.

Flames up to 70m (230ft) in height have been reported.

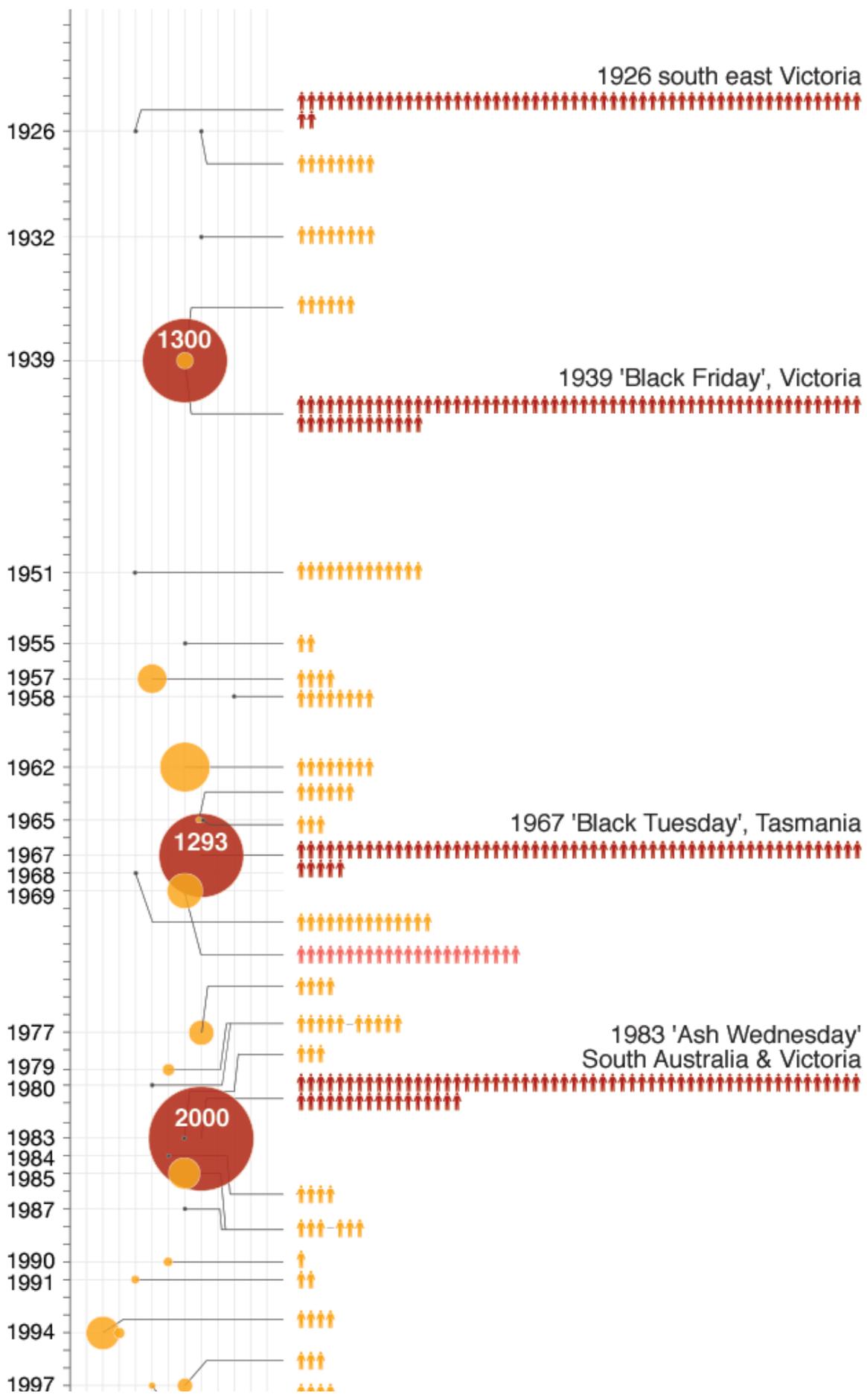
So are bushfires getting worse?

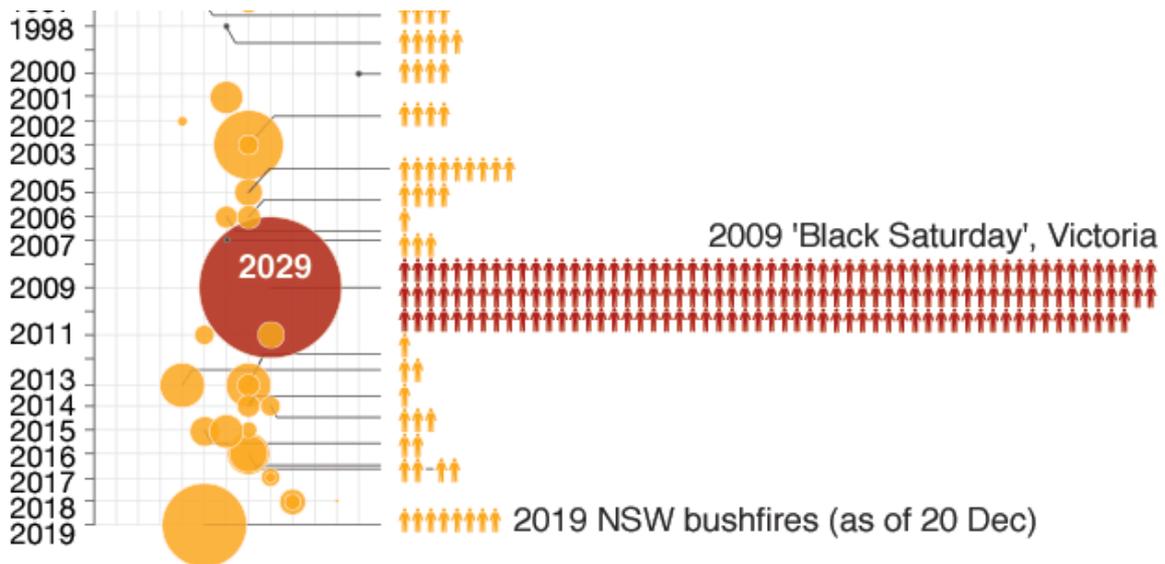
Many Australians are asking that very question and whether these fires are linked to climate change - but the science is complicated.

Scientists have long warned that a hotter, drier climate will contribute to fires becoming more frequent and more intense.

Deadliest fires in Australia







Source: Risk Frontiers

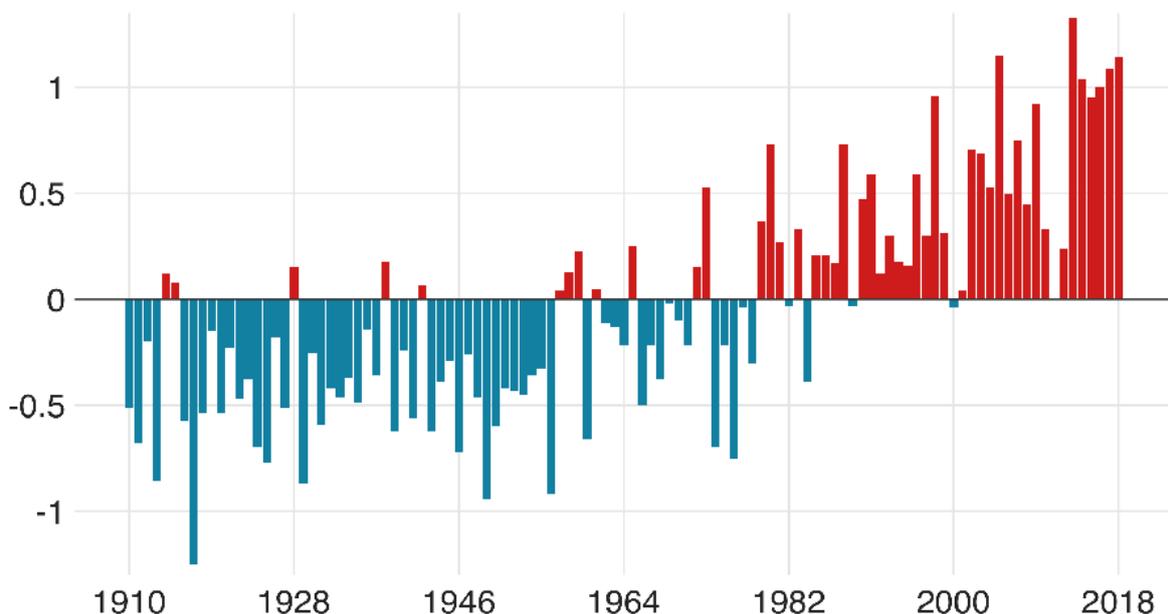


Australia's deadliest bushfire disaster was "Black Saturday" in February 2009, when some 180 people died in Victoria.

Data shows that Australia has warmed overall by slightly more than 1C since 1910, with most of the heating occurring since 1950, the Bureau of Meteorology says.

Australia has been getting warmer

Annual mean temperature above or below average (°C)



Note: Average is calculated from 1961-1990 data

Source: Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology

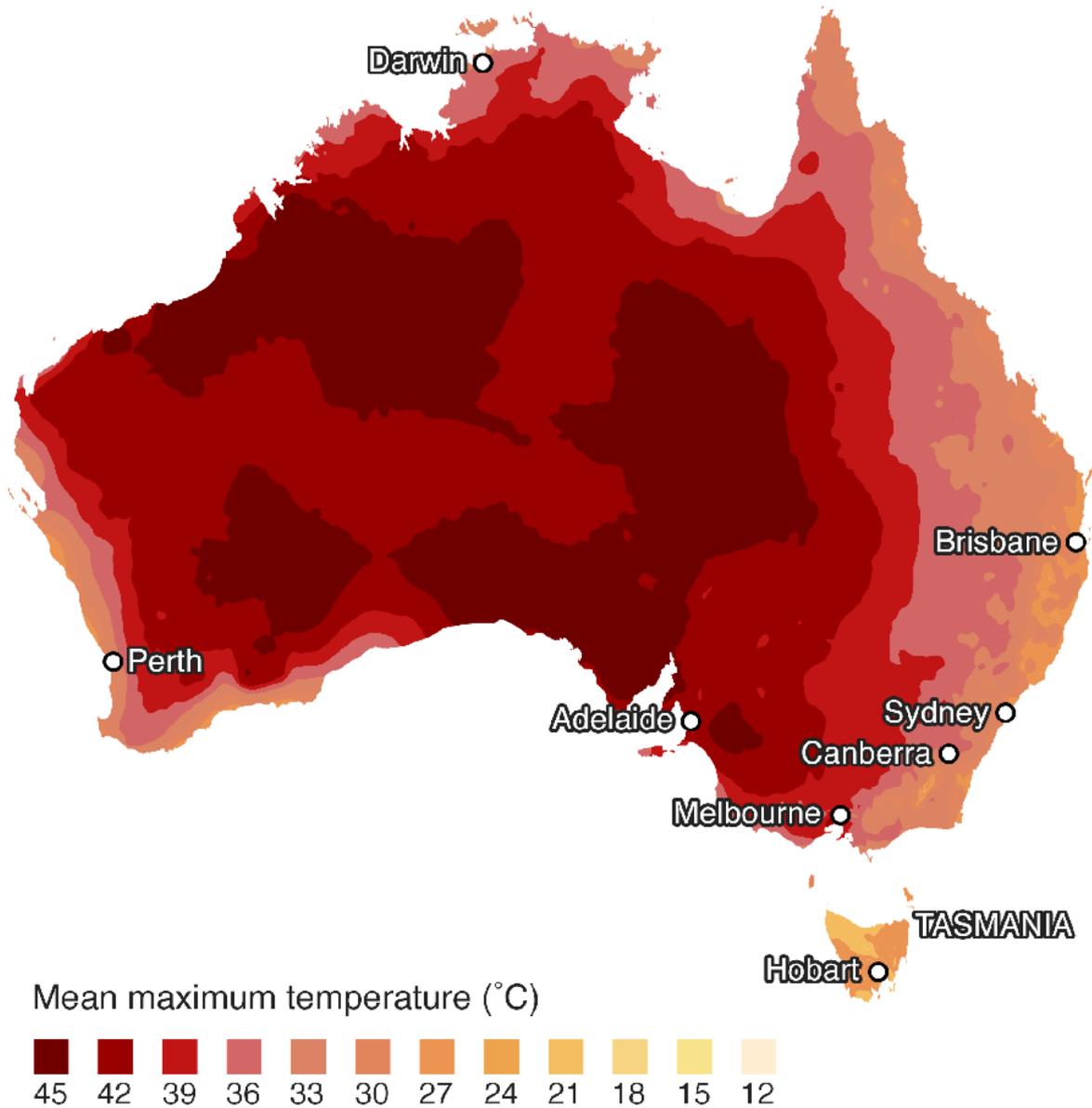


Hottest day on record

Australia broke its all-time temperature record twice this week. Tuesday's average

maximum of 40.9C was broken a day later by Wednesday's 41.9C, both beating a 2013 record of 40.3C.

Mean maximum temperature, 19 Dec



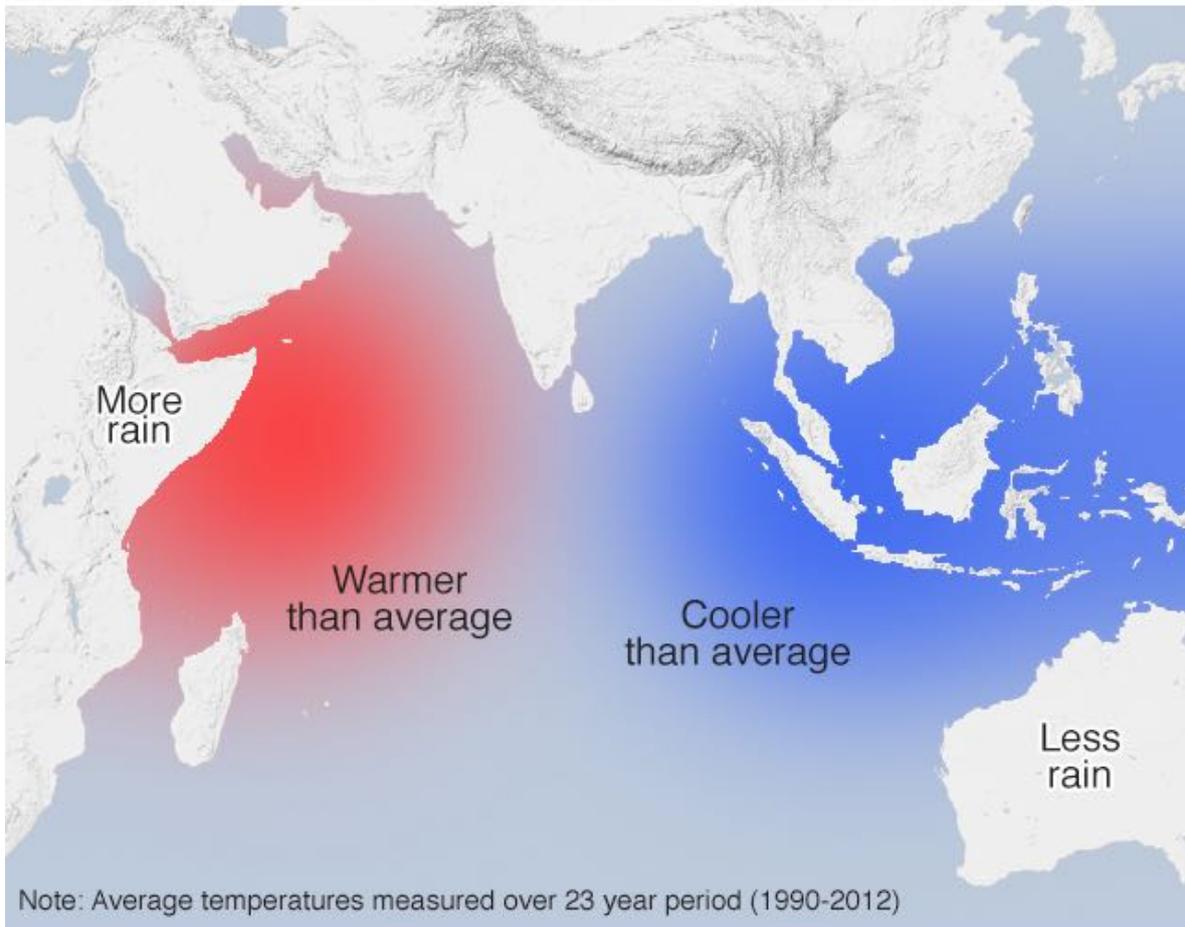
Source: BOM Australia

BBC

The main climate driver behind the heat has been a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) - an event where sea surface temperatures are warmer in the western half of the ocean, cooler in the east.

The difference between the two temperatures is currently the strongest in 60 years.

A positive Indian Ocean Dipole means a wetter west and drier east



Source: Australian Bureau of Meteorology

BBC

Australia experiences hottest day on record and its worst ever spring bushfire danger

Tuesday's average maximum of 40.9C was Australia's hottest ever and follows the driest and second warmest spring on record

Graham Readfearn

@readfearn

Wed 18 Dec 2019 05.44 GMT



Fire crews battle a blaze in the Blue Mountains on Tuesday, which the Bureau of Meteorology said was Australia's hottest day ever. Photograph: Dean Lewins/EPA

Australia has just experienced its hottest day on record and its worst spring on record for dangerous bushfire weather, according to data released by the Bureau of Meteorology.

Preliminary analysis suggested that Tuesday was the hottest day on record for Australia, with an average maximum across the country of 40.9C. The temperature beat the previous 40.3C set on 7 January 2013, in a record going back to 1910.

Confirming the unprecedented nature of the current devastating fire season, the bureau has also found that 95% of Australia experienced fire danger weather

that was well above average.

Above average temperatures, high winds, severe drought and the driest spring on record combined to bring dangerous conditions to many parts of the country.

In a **special climate statement**, the bureau said that by September most of the east of the continent was “primed for high fire danger ratings”, leading to hundreds of homes being lost in New South Wales.

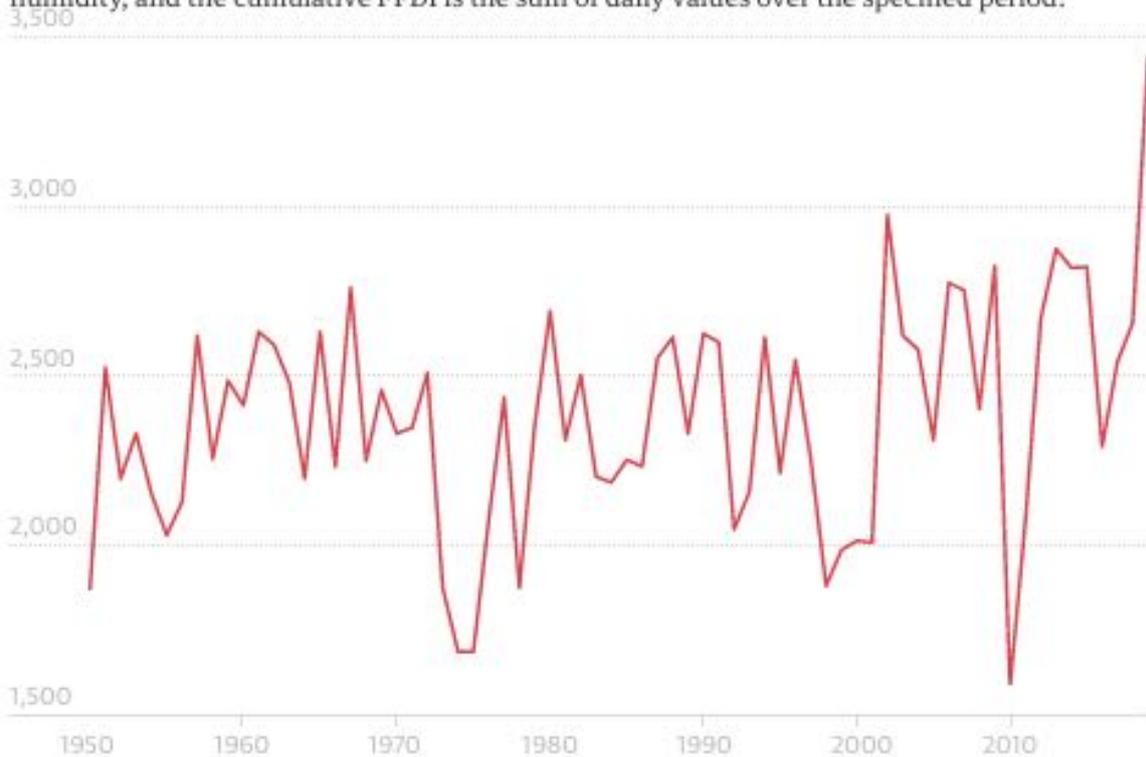
September to November had been the driest, and second warmest, spring on record.

Fire danger

The bureau uses a tool known as the forest fire danger index (FFDI) to assess the risk of bushfire, combining temperature, wind, humidity, fuel and an assessment of drought to deliver an overall rating. The FFDI record goes back to 1950.

Fire weather in spring

Showing the cumulative forest fire danger index (FFDI) for spring in each year since 1950. The FFDI combines measurement of rainfall, evaporation, wind speed, temperature and humidity, and the cumulative FFDI is the sum of daily values over the specified period.



Guardian graphic | Source: Bureau of Meteorology, Special Climate Statement 72

Cumulative forest fire danger index (FFDI) values for spring in each year since 1950.

The bureau's analysis found that in October and November, every state and territory had experienced dangerous fire weather.

When the bureau added all the fire ratings together, they found this "accumulated FFDI" was the highest on record across the continent.

Daily high fire danger ratings had also reached record levels in regions in every state and territory.

North-east NSW had an average score of 25 or above – in the "very high" FFDI category – for 21 days, beating the previous highest spring count of 11 days in 2002. The average number of spring days with very high fire risk in the region is just two.

Australia bushfires factcheck: are this year's fires unprecedented?

[Read more](#)

Firefighters, many of them exhausted, have been fighting to save homes and buildings up and down the east coast since the fire season started earlier than normal.

NSW RFS confirmed on Wednesday that 768 homes had been lost and almost 65000 saved during the current fire season, which still has many weeks to run.



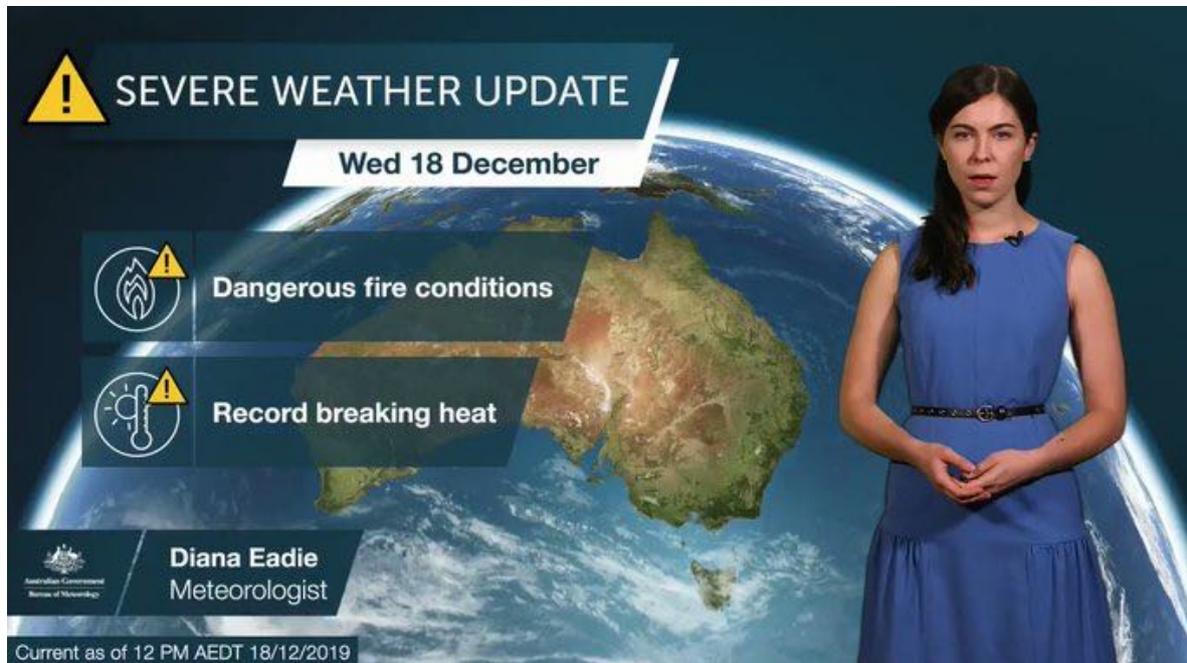
Bureau of Meteorology, Australia



@BOM_au

Preliminary results suggest that the 17th December was Australia's hottest day on record at 40.9 °C, with the average maximum across the country as a whole, exceeding the previous record of 40.3 °C on the 7th January 2013.

[http://
ow.ly/cEwS50xCLFh](http://ow.ly/cEwS50xCLFh)



642

3:40 PM - Dec 18, 2019

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A December heatwave starting Wednesday could also break temperature records across South Australia, Victoria and NSW, the bureau has said.

Former **fire chiefs and emergency services leaders** said on **Tuesday** they would convene their own national bushfire summit, saying climate change was forcing a rethink on how Australia should prepare for and fight bushfires.

On Monday, 22 health and medical groups called on the federal and NSW governments to respond to the “**public health emergency**” caused by the smoke haze from the NSW fires.

Guardian Australia has revealed that since August 2019, the **fires in NSW and**

Queensland have emitted 250 million tonnes of carbon dioxide – almost half the country's entire annual carbon footprint.

Australia weather: records forecast to be broken as heatwave temperatures surge past 40C

Oodnadatta and Port Augusta forecast to reach 48C and Sydney's western suburbs to hit 45C

Calla Wahlquist

@callapilla

Tue 17 Dec 2019 12.19 GMT

First published on Tue 17 Dec 2019 08.13 GMT



Australia weather forecast: NSW has been placed under a total fire ban from midnight Tuesday to midnight Saturday as Australia is hit by a heatwave that will see temperatures nudge 50C in some areas and 45C in western Sydney. Photograph: Dave Hunt/AAP

December heat records are expected to tumble in Australia from Wednesday as a heatwave moves across South Australia to Victoria and New South Wales.

Temperatures are forecast to peak in Victoria and South Australia on Friday,

with Oodnadatta and Port Augusta to reach 48C (118F), and peak in NSW on Saturday.

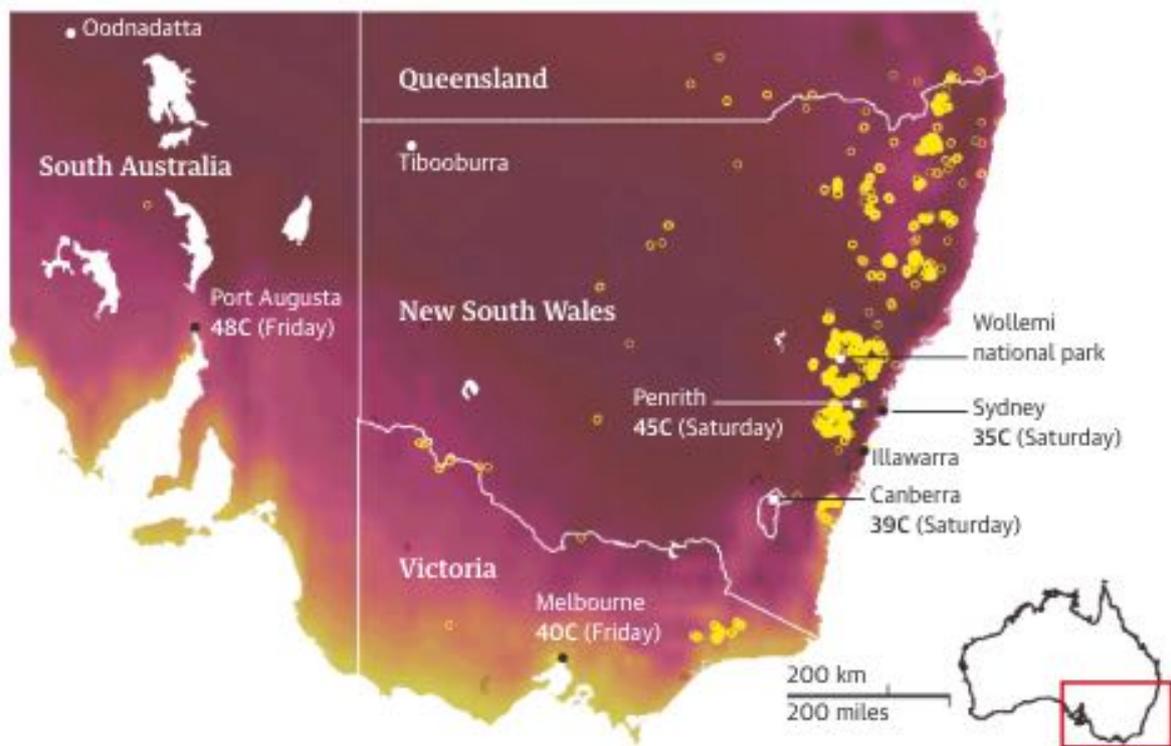
NSW has been placed under a total fire ban from midnight on Tuesday to midnight on Saturday as firefighters battle to contain more than 100 fires burning around the state, including the 400,000-hectare (990,000-acre) Gospers Mountain megafire in Wollemi national park in the Blue Mountains.

Smoke from this fire is forecast to lay thick over Sydney on Wednesday morning, but will shoot up to 3km up into the atmosphere on Thursday when the heatwave reaches western Sydney. Penrith is forecast to reach 44C on Thursday and 45C on Saturday, while the eastern suburbs of Sydney will reach 39C on Thursday and 35C on Saturday.

Temperatures are forecast to peak in Victoria and South Australia on Friday and in NSW on Saturday

Temperature forecast map for Saturday

■ 40C ■ 30C ■ 25C ■ 20C ■ Active fires over past 48 hours



Guardian graphic. Sources: [Ventusky.com](https://www.ventusky.com), AccuWeather, Nasa Earthdata

Extreme fire danger is forecast for greater Sydney, the Illawarra and the southern ranges on Thursday.

Tibooburra, a small town in the far north-west of NSW, has been above 40C

since Monday and is expected to remain above that temperature until Christmas Day.

“This is blowing [December records] out of the water,” said Rob Taggart, senior forecaster with the Bureau of Meteorology in Sydney.

Some of the official weather stations in NSW, such as the Bathurst agricultural station, have records dating back 108 years. The hottest ever December day on record at that station is 38.9C on 27 December 1938, during a historic heatwave that wrought the deadly Black Friday bushfires on 13 January 1939.

The hottest temperature ever recorded at that station was 41.5C on 11 February 2017, a day of catastrophic fire danger on which the St Ivan fire burned 55,000 hectares of bush and farmland and **destroyed 35 homes around Uarbry in the upper Hunter Valley.**

“The forecast predicts that Bathurst is going to exceed that December record by a pretty big margin, with a forecast top of 41C,” Taggart said. “To be having these levels of temperatures at this time of year, not in the peak of summer but in mid-December, is pretty big.”

This year was **on course to be Australia’s second hottest on record**, behind 2013, based on average monthly temperature data from January to November. It would have sailed into second place had December temperatures been average.

“It is going to provide pretty tough competition for Australia’s warmest year on record,” Taggart said.

Three of the four hottest years on record in Australia have occurred in the past six years, and all have occurred in the past 15.

“Australia has warmed by about 1.4C since pre-industrial times and that warming trend is increasing,” Taggart said. “So as climate scientists have been saying for 20 years, we can expect more frequent heatwaves, and more severe heatwaves, and this is certainly an example of that.”

Koalas in Blue Mountains rescued as blazes approach – as it happened

[Read more](#)

The southern parts of SA, from Port Lincoln to Mount Gambier, will also be under a total fire ban tomorrow, with extreme fire danger in the Yorke

Peninsula, areas outside Adelaide, and the lower south-east.

A total fire ban will also be enforced in the Wimmera region of Victoria on Wednesday, where the danger rating has been set at severe. The rest of the state, including the Mallee region, which will see the top temperatures tomorrow with Mildura to reach 43C, has a fire-danger rating of very high.

Melbourne is forecast to reach 39C on Wednesday and 41C on Friday, when Mildura is forecast to experience its hottest ever December day of 47C.

“It’s going to be hot all the way through,” said Christie Johnson, duty forecaster with the Bureau of Meteorology in Victoria.

'Hugely disappointed' emergency chiefs to hold bushfire summit with or without PM

Frustrated by government 'denial', Emergency Leaders for Climate Action ready to go it alone on bushfire crisis summit

NSW fires: extreme heatwave across Australia elevates bushfire risk as temperatures hit more than 40C – live

Lisa Cox

Mon 16 Dec 2019 17.00 GMT

Last modified on Tue 17 Dec 2019 00.59 GMT



Former fire chiefs have expressed 'huge disappointment' with a lack of leadership during the bushfire crisis.
Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP via Getty Images

Former emergency leaders who have been pushing the Morrison government to take action on the climate say they will “go it alone” and convene their own summit on the bushfire crisis.

The Emergency Leaders for Climate Action say they will hold the summit after the current bushfire season because of their “huge disappointment in the lack of national leadership during a bushfire crisis”.

It comes as fires raged across New South Wales and Western Australia on Monday and as Australia was named as one of a handful of countries responsible for **thwarting a global deal** on the rulebook of the Paris climate agreement.

Australia took a match to UN climate talks while back home the country burned

Julie-Anne Richards

[Read more](#)

A week ago, former fire chiefs Greg Mullins, from NSW, and Lee Johnson, from Queensland, called for a **national summit** on how the country should prepare for and resource bushfire emergencies in a changed climate.

Both men are part of Emergency Leaders for Climate Action, a group of former fire and emergency chiefs who had warned the government that Australia faced

a disastrous fire season.

The group's ranks have expanded from 23 to 29 members since it **first warned** the government earlier this year that Australia was unprepared for the escalating climate threat.

Late last week the prime minister, Scott Morrison, **moved to reassure voters** he understood the fires were a national emergency and said climate change was one of many contributing factors to the current fire season.

But Mullins said those "many factors are all related to climate change".

"What we feel is that there's just still this denial of the problem and where we have denial of the problem, there's not going to be any action," he said.

"So we'll go it alone. We'll arrange a national summit that will look at building standards, fuel management practices, response capability and national coordination arrangements.

"We'll invite the prime minister and we hope that he comes too."

The Emergency Leaders for Climate Action said Australia had "embarrassed" itself through its performance at the United Nations climate conference in Madrid at a time when people around the world were watching reports about the country burning.

Mike Brown, a former chief officer for the Tasmanian Fire Service, said the outlook for the next three months was for drier and hotter than average conditions for much of the country.

"That doesn't stand well for how things develop into the summer," he said.

Brown said the eastern half of Tasmania, including all of the east coast and the Derwent Valley, was particularly dry. It follows the summer of 2018-19, when huge fires hit world heritage forest.

"I'm a big fan of fuel reduction but the weather window in which to do fuel reduction is becoming narrower due to hotter and windier weather due to climate change," Brown said.

"You also can't do fuel reduction in wet forest types. We think that due to the changing climate there needs to be a fresh approach to manage fires and just how people in communities are going to be managed into the future when we're

facing increased fire weather.”

The proposed summit would include fire service workers, Indigenous landowners, the military, the insurance industry and local governments. Mullins said it would occur in late March, but the timing was subject to change if the bushfire season ran for longer than usual.

Australia bushfires north of Sydney 'too big to put out'

2 hours ago



Sydney's mega fire is getting out of control

A "mega blaze" raging across a 60km (37 mile) front north-west of Sydney cannot currently be put out, Australian fire officials have warned.

The fire across almost 300,000 hectares (1,150 sq m) is just an hour's drive from the nation's most-populous city.

People who cannot defend their property from approaching fires have been told they should leave immediately.

Since October, bushfires have killed six people and destroyed more than 700 homes across Australia.

The severity of the blazes so early in the fire season has caused alarm, and prompted calls for greater action to tackle climate change.

Fires have also raged across Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania.

What's the latest on the ground?

Several fires have combined to form the Gospers Mountain mega blaze, which is more than 283,000 ha in size.

At 12:00 local time Saturday (01:00 GMT) 95 fires were burning, with half yet to be contained, **the New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) tweeted.**

It said that more than 2,200 firefighters "were out in the field".

Skip Twitter post by @NSWRFS

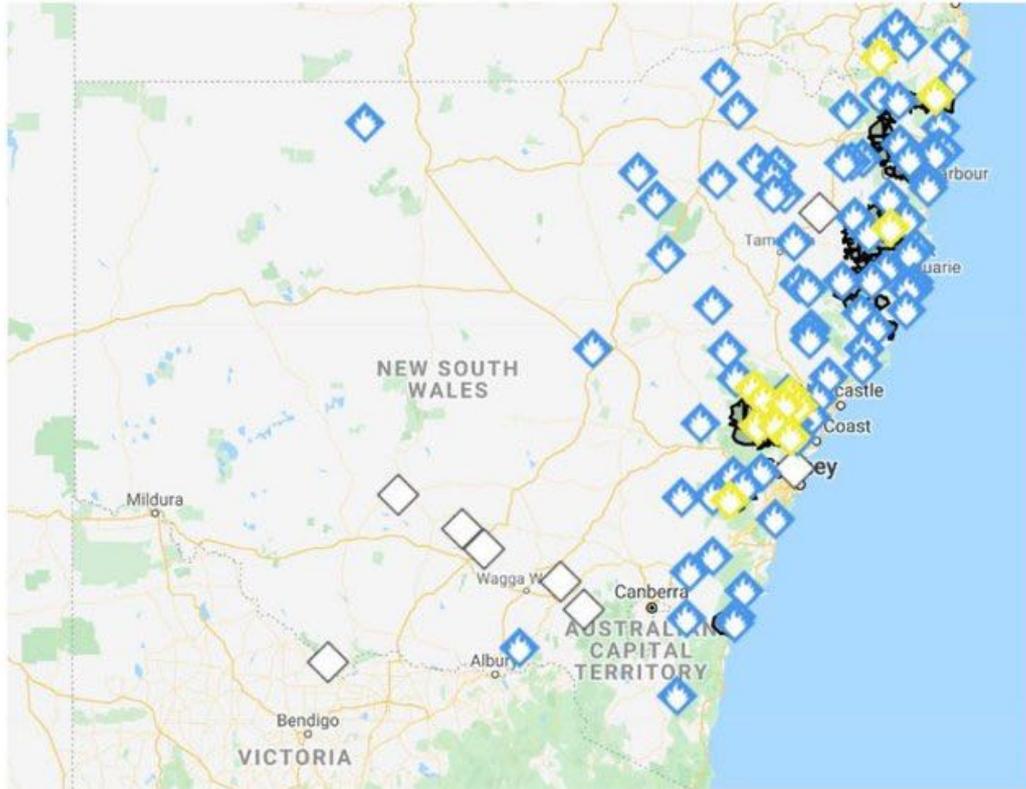


NSW RFS



@NSWRFS

At 12pm there are 95 bush fires, with half yet to be contained. There are currently 12 fires at Watch & Act level, and more than 2,200 firefighters out in the field. While fire activity has reduced this morning, there's still 8 areas of Total Fire Ban today. [#nswrfs](#) [#nswfires](#)



BUSH FIRE INFORMATION LINE
1800 NSW RFS
 1800 679 737
 www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

64

2:06 PM - Dec 7, 2019

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Report

End of Twitter post by @NSWRFS

At one point on Friday, nine fires had been raised to emergency level warnings, although these decreased markedly amid a brief respite in conditions later in the day.

The blazes north of Sydney were sending black fumes across the city, causing a rise in medical problems.

NSW RFS deputy commissioner, Rob Rogers told national broadcaster ABC: "We cannot stop these fires, they will just keep burning until conditions ease, and then we'll try to do what we can to contain them."

He said the 60km stretch from Hawkesbury to Singleton was "just fire that whole way".

Video footage from the Orangeville area showed firefighters running from a wall of fire and the Walkabout Wildlife Park has evacuated hundreds of animals.

Fire officials in Ingleburn warned: "If your property is not prepared for the bushfire season and you're not sure you are able or capable of defending your property if a fire approaches you need to leave straight away."

Firefighters from Canada were briefed in Sydney on Friday and will be deployed across New South Wales over the weekend, to be joined by teams from the US.

What's the outlook?

There was some respite overnight but another dry and windy day is predicted.

"They were able to strengthen a number of containment lines [overnight]... in preparation of some of those challenging conditions we are expecting this afternoon," RFS Chief Superintendent Ben Millington told the ABC.

But he added: "We're not out of the woods yet."



EPA
A smoky haze has enveloped much of Sydney

Tuesday is the next big concern, with temperatures inland of Sydney likely to reach above 40C (104F). Some firefighters have expressed concern that volunteer numbers might not be enough and that there are inadequate water supplies. The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) said that "some fires were too big to put out" while the NSW RFS said late Friday the blazes would only be extinguished "when we get good rain".



Firefighters flee intense flames in Sydney, in a video shared by them to show the dangers of bushfires

Sydney may be blanketed in smoke for weeks, if not months.

Is this fire season particularly bad?

It hasn't come close to the fatalities of 2009, when nearly 200 people died, but the scale of the damage has been huge.

How bad is bushfire smoke for health?

Toxic smoke affects golfers at Australian Open

More than 1.6 million hectares of land have burned in New South Wales alone.

The season has hit earlier than normal and has been exacerbated by drought conditions.

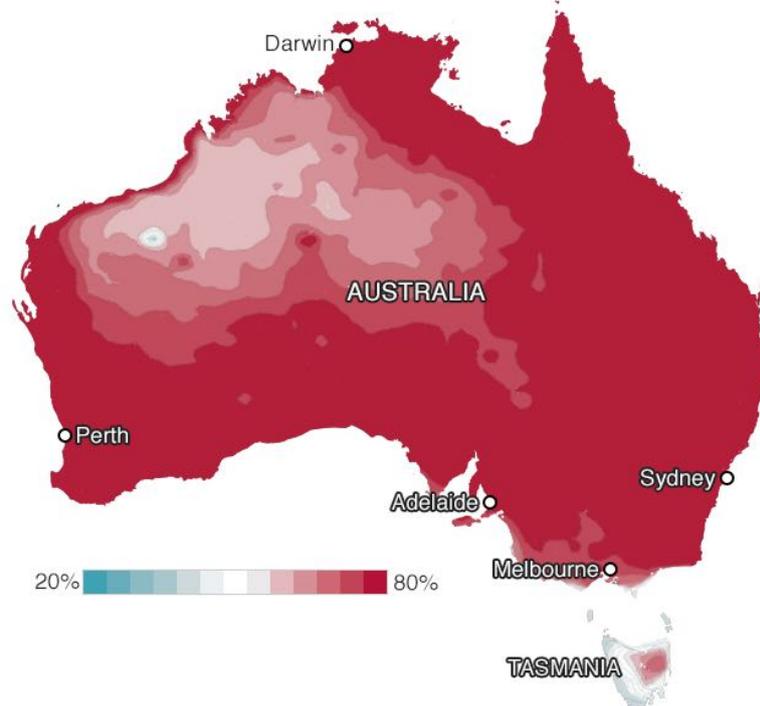
RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said: "There is an absolute lack of moisture in the soil, a lack of moisture in the vegetation... you are seeing fires started very easily and they are spreading extremely quickly, and they are burning ridiculously intensely."

Is climate change to blame?

The BOM says that **climate change has led to an increase in extreme heat events** and raised the severity of other natural disasters, such as drought.

Forecast for Summer 2019

Chance of exceeding the median maximum temperature for Dec - Feb period



Source: BOM Australia

BBC

Last week, the bureau noted that NSW had endured its driest spring season on record. It also warned that Australia's coming summer was predicted to bring similar conditions to last year's - the nation's hottest summer on record.

Australia may see 50C days 'in decades'

Climate emergency 'clear and unequivocal'

The government has been criticised over its efforts to address climate change. PM Scott Morrison has dismissed accusations linking the crisis to his government's policies.

Final call to halt 'climate catastrophe'

What could be wiped out by temperature rise

Hundreds of bushfire survivors and farmers converged on the nation's capital, Canberra, this week in protest. **One woman displayed the charred remains of her home outside Parliament** - on which she had written: "Morrison, your climate crisis destroyed my home."



DEAN SEWELL / GREENPEACE

Melinda Plesman called for the government to take action on climate change

Australia fires: five blazes merge north of Sydney as conditions forecast to worsen

More than 100 bushfires were burning in New South Wales on Friday, more than half of them out of control

Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson



NSW Rural Fire Service crews protect properties as the fire approaches Mangrove Mountain north of Sydney. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

Five fires burning to the north of Sydney joined up into one huge conflagration on Friday, with out-of-control blazes threatening homes and lives.

On a day that brought choking smog to Sydney, the premier of [New South Wales](#) said the entire coastline of the state was on fire.

NSW fires: five bushfires merge north of Sydney – as it happened

[Read more](#)

Six people have died, and more than 680 homes have already been lost to bushfires in NSW this fire season, and on Friday more than 100 fires were burning, more than half of them out of control. Eight fires have emergency warnings, which means they pose an immediate risk to lives and property.

The largest fire – a conglomeration of five blazes which have joined up north of Sydney – has burned over 335,000 hectares.



Fire front at Kulnara, near Mangrove mountain, NSW. 6 December 2019. Photograph: Matthew Abbott/The Guardian

The forecast for coming days is for more hot, dry conditions. Strong winds are likely to continue to fan blazes towards towns and properties.

The NSW premier, Gladys Berejikilian, said while fires had been burning across the state for weeks, the sheer scale of the current fire threat was stretching crews' ability to fight the blazes.

“Previously [the fires] were pretty much confined to the northern part of New South Wales but what we have seen this week is our resources stretched across the entire coastline.



Bushfire conditions are expected to worsen with further hot and dry weather forecast. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/EPA

“We have also seen the fires coming in very close proximity to major population centres, whether it is on the south coast, central coast, or even greater western Sydney.”

Berejikilian said homes had been lost, but the full extent of the damage across the state would not be known until after the fires were extinguished, and people were able to return to evacuated areas.

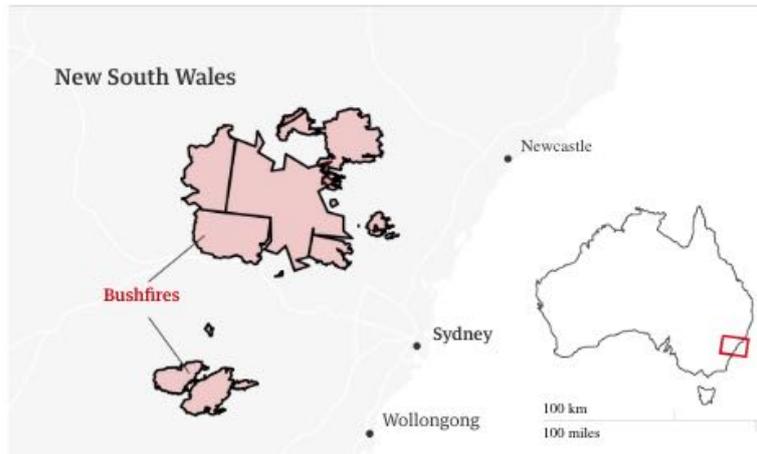
Those forced from their homes might not be able to return for days or weeks.



Fire on the central coast, north of Sydney, destroyed farm structures. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

“We are anticipating conditions worsening next week, especially around Tuesday, and that is why it is important for the community to remain vigilant,” Berejikilian said.

At Kulnara, 85km north of Sydney, dozens of firefighters and trucks stood ready on Friday afternoon ahead of a predicted wind change. But unpredictability was hindering firefighters’ efforts to tackle blazes.



Earlier in the day wind changes had pushed a fire past some properties, only to swing the blaze back towards homes another way.

Shane Hilson's property is situated north of the town. "It came in over the back, then it went right up along the ridge, and then it came back all the way down the back and around," he said, pointing to a line of trees on the edge of one of his paddocks".



"There's nothing left to burn," he said.

Hilson's wife and children went to her mother's place two days ago, while his father-in-law came to help him fight the blaze.

Both men were bleary eyed and exhausted, but had nothing but praise for the Rural Fire Service.



Trevor Colliss fights the fire at Kulnara, near Mangrove mountain, NSW. 6 December 2019 Photograph: Matthew Abbott/The Guardian

"These fellas have been marvellous, hey," Hilson said.

Hilson's neighbour, Rob Meggs, described how the fire destroyed his shed, office and one of the fire vehicles.

The shed was "a hoarder's heaven", he said.

"It was full of stuff [and] that might be a release in one way. But my office, that might be a bit more painful. It had some records in there that I won't be able to replace."



Helen Davidson



@heldavidson

The house at this Kulnura property was saved from the Wrights Creek fire but they lost their shed and office space.



1

7:20 PM - Dec 6, 2019

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[See Helen Davidson's other Tweets](#)

Meggs's house survived, thanks to the efforts of the RFS and metropolitan firefighters.

He was cautious not to get too close to the still-burning ruins; he thought all the petrol cans had exploded but there were still paint cans under the collapsed structure.

He stayed to defend the house: "We were advised earlier in the week at a meeting that the conditions weren't catastrophic and if you were physically able and prepared [you could stay]."

He's been in his house 22 years, and hasn't seen anything so big.

The NSW Rural Fire Service commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, said a long-term forecast of low rainfall and above-average

temperatures meant some fires could burn for weeks, even months.

“We’ve still got months ahead of challenge and the only forecast for rain is late January to early February of any meaningful substance.”



Smoke haze from bushfires in New South Wales blankets Sydney. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

Sydney has been choked by thick smoke for almost a week.

Hospital emergency departments have seen a 25% increase in people presenting with asthma and breathing problems, and ambulance crews are responding to between 70 and 100 call-outs a day for respiratory conditions, including to school children as young as six.

Some schools across the state have been closed because of the fire risk, while others have kept children inside because of the worsening air quality.



Ciarán Gearoid

@CiaranGearoid

The moon from Sydney airport has taken a red appearance from the smoke off the QLD fires. [#spooky](#)



3

7:29 PM - Dec 6, 2019

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[See Ciarán Gearoid's other Tweets](#)

Surf Life Saving NSW has told all club life saving captains to close beaches if the air quality is too poor.

Twenty-one firefighters from Canada have flown in to assist crews across NSW. A contingent from the US is due to join the frontline on Sunday.

Topics

- [Australia news](#)
- [Natural disasters and extreme weather](#)
 - [New South Wales](#)
 - [Bushfires](#)
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Australia bushfires: 'Mega blaze' destroys homes ahead of heatwave

2 hours ago



NINA LIPSCOMBE The huge bushfire is burning near Sydney

Authorities in Australia have issued fresh warnings about a "mega blaze" after it spread beyond containment lines and razed 20 houses near Sydney.

The fire, burning over about 400,000 hectares, has moved further into the Blue Mountains - a popular tourist area which lies west of the city.

It is a blow to crews who are already battling over 100 fires and bracing for extreme temperatures this week.

The heatwave could bring the nation's hottest day on record, forecasters say.

Temperatures could exceed the 50.7C (123.26F) record set in Oodnadatta, South Australia, in 1960, according to the Bureau of Meteorology.



NINA LIPSCOMBE The blaze as seen from a popular tourist spot in the Blue Mountains

Since September, six people have died in a bushfire crisis that has engulfed the eastern states of New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland. The blazes have destroyed more than 700 homes and blanketed towns and cities in smoke.

The bushfires and extreme weather has Australia's landscape, sparking public debate about the need for stronger climate action.



NINA LIPSCOMBE The blaze is now burning over about 400,000 hectares

Last week, parts of Sydney suffered air quality 22 times worse than the clean air

standard. Australia's largest city has about five million residents.

The smoke prompted an increase in hospital admissions and calls for a public health emergency to be declared.

What is the fire threat to Sydney?

Blazes are burning to the city's north-west and south-west. The mega blaze, also known as the Gospers Mountain fire, has encroached further in recent days. Firefighters had tried to use cooler temperatures for "back-burning" - a tactic of deliberately starting small fires to remove vegetation before dangerous conditions arrive.

But in this instance the tactic backfired and crews lost control of the back-burn, said NSW Rural Fire Service deputy commissioner Rob Rogers.

About 20 homes were destroyed as a result amid 70m-high (229 ft) flames, he added.



Video released by the fire service shows a section of the blaze "crowning" across treetops

"In these drought conditions, whatever we try doesn't seem to be working," Mr Rogers told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on Monday.

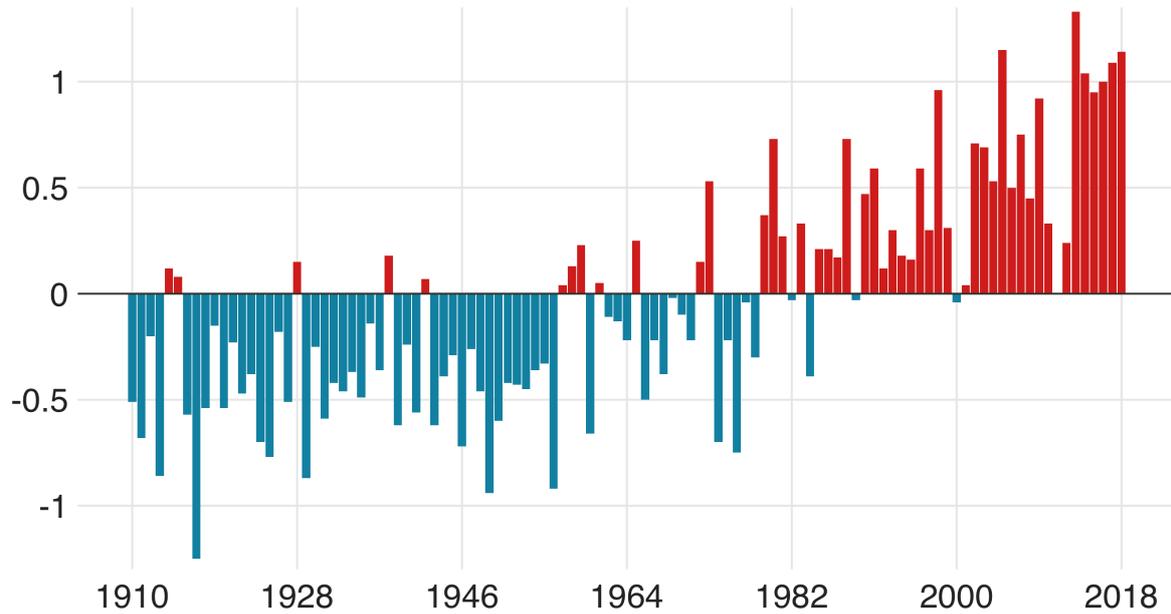
Why Australia is expecting a long and dangerous summer

The heatwave forecast for later this week will exacerbate those conditions. Across the nation, temperatures are set to exceed 40C in many areas.

Parts of Sydney could reach 46C by the end of the week, meteorologists say.

Australia has been getting warmer

Annual mean temperature above or below average (°C)



Note: Average is calculated from 1961-1990 data

Source: Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology

