The hottest summer on record: Experts react

March 1 2013, by Charis Palmer

Australia just experienced the hottest summer on record. Credit: Leonard Matthews

Data analysis from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology has confirmed last summer was the hottest on record, with January the hottest month recorded since 1910, when records began.

Average temperatures across the country came in at 28.6°C, more than one degree above normal, according to the Bureau, exceeding the previous record set in the summer of 1997-98 by more than 0.1°C.

The heatwave seen in the first three weeks of January was widespread, with 14 of the 112 locations used in long-term climate monitoring experiencing their hottest day on record during the summer– the largest number in any single summer.

Record temperatures were also set in two capital cities; Sydney with 45.8°C and Hobart with 41.8°C.

Summer rainfall was at its lowest since 2004-05 and Victoria had its driest summer since 1984-85 and South Australia since 1985-86.

"This summer follows a pattern of extremely hot summers in various parts of the world over the past few years," the Bureau said in a statement.

"While the final numbers for the Southern Hemisphere summer will not be confirmed until mid- March, it was the hottest December on record for land areas of the Southern Hemisphere, followed by the hottest January."

"The Bureau of Meteorology is the premier organisation in Australia for collecting and analysing observations around weather and climate," said Professor Andy Pitman, co-director of the Climate Change Research Centre at University of New South Wales.

"And their systematic analysis of those data demonstrate a remarkable set of records around temperature extremes which the climate science community recognises is entirely consistent with global warming," Professor Pitman said.

"The question I would ask is how much proof do you need? Because the evidence is definitive that extremes are changing over Australia as a consequence of global warming."

The data is likely to have an impact on people's perceptions of climate change, said John Cook, climate communication fellow at University of Queensland.

"Peoples' attitude towards climate change is quite malleable, it's influenced even by how hot it is on the day you ask them about climate change.

"Weather is how people experience climate change."

Mr Cook said people often asked scientists to "prove climate change", but this was really the wrong question.

"We already have many lines of evidence for it. This is not proof of it but it's what we expect to see. What we're experiencing is something scientists have been predicting for years."

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