

A third of Western Australia at higher risk this bushfire season

November 23 2015, by Narelle Towie, Sciencenetwork Wa



Globally, 2015 is expected to smash heat records again, with October setting the eighth heat record for the year. Credit: Toni Fish

As Western Australia reels from devastating fires that tore through farmland near Esperance this week, the Climate Council warns the state

is facing an above-average bushfire risk this season.

Record-breaking temperatures, mounting fuel loads and drying climate and soils has put a third of WA at a higher fire risk than normal, according to the group's Climate Change and the Australian Bushfire Threat report issued recently.

A team led by Climate Council researcher and Macquarie University Environment and Geography honorary associate Dr Martin Rice spent months analysing peer-reviewed climate and technical data.

"Climate change is exacerbating fire conditions in south-east WA and this is because we are experiencing a warmer climate and a drying trend and one of the main drivers for [bushfire](#) is change in weather conditions," Dr Rice says.

"We looked at fuel loads, temperature and seasonal outlooks, soil and vegetation moisture content and emergency services resource capacity."

"These are predictions for large areas of southern Australia and that includes a large area of Western Australia."

Globally, 2015 is expected to smash heat records again, with October setting the eighth heat record for the year.

In WA, the maximum mean temperature last month was 3.7⁰C above normal and it was the tenth driest October on record across the South West Land Division, according to the Bureau of Meteorology.

Fire seasons 19 per cent longer globally

The Climate Council, an independent, publically funded group, warn fire seasons have increased in length by 19 per cent globally since 1978, and

that [climate change](#) will progressively cause an overlap between the North America and Australian seasons.

Key firefighting aircraft are leased from overseas and contracted to North American during its summer, while both countries share firefighting personnel, Dr Rice says.

"When you have overlapping seasons, you're going to have less and less resources available," he says.

The number of professional firefighters will need to double by 2030 to meet demand as the Australian fire season extends into October and March, the Climate Council says.

Meanwhile, the WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services is warning that three quarters of West Australians living in the state's south believe they are not risk of a bushfire.

Of 695 people surveyed in WA's south, more than half claimed they didn't know exactly what to do during a bushfire, and more than two thirds admitted they hadn't done enough to prepare, according to DFES.

[Click here](#) for more information on being prepared this bushfire season.

DFES recommends that if you live or travel in Western Australia you:

- Develop a bushfire survival plan, write it down and practice it with your family. This plan should include your triggers to evacuate.
- Prepare and maintain your property throughout summer. This includes pruning back trees, cutting long grass, clearing your roof gutters and removing rubbish from around your house.
- Have an emergency kit ready to go including essential supplies

such as a battery operated radio, torch, first aid kit, woollen blanket, water and non-perishable food. On the day don't forget to add in your purse or wallet, car and house keys, mobile phone and charger and important documents.

- Monitor the weather and Fire Danger Ratings during the summer.
- During a bushfire close all doors and windows, and turn off evaporative air conditioners, but keep water running through the system if possible.
- Know the different levels of bushfire warnings issued by the fire services and keep up-to-date during an emergency by seeking information from a variety of sources.

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

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