

Inquiry: Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events

Submission by Yasir Assam 18-01-13

Apologies that this is short – I only found out about this one day before the deadline.

This is a submission from an ordinary citizen very concerned about climate change.

First, to state the obvious: the best way to prepare for the most extreme weather events is to reduce their frequency by preventing global temperatures from rising above 2C (or even 1.5C) above pre-industrial levels.

According to some estimates, to have a good chance of doing that, the world needs to burn no more than around 550 Gt of CO₂ by 2050, yet global proven fossil fuel reserves are around 5 times that amount. Unfortunately Australia has a big chunk of those, and rather than ensuring our share is kept in the ground, we are increasing both our domestic and exported emissions through an ever increasing rate of fossil fuel mining. The best thing we can do is to halt the boom in fossil fuel extraction, and enact a plan to phase out all fossil fuel extraction within 10 years, switching to 100% renewable energy in the meantime. Of course many in government and the opposition would balk at such a suggestion, but I fear we will be forced to take even more drastic action in the next decade or two, so this is actually the least radical (conservative even) course of action we can take.

I am really concerned about temperature projections of 4-6C rise by 2100. I'm worried that for much of Australia (including the area where I live – the Northern Rivers, NSW), it will be difficult to have any kind of outdoor life for much of the year, because of the heat.

Also hard to imagine what will grow around where I live – perhaps we'll have to rely on GM crops that can withstand the heat. It wouldn't surprise me if many in mainland Australia attempted to migrate to Tasmania or somewhere else that is cooler. Life will get hard to nearly impossible for many people living in mainland Australia.

Though very hard to predict, I don't think it's unreasonable to suppose that our civilisation itself could crumble under such conditions. I'm not suggesting that humans will become extinct, just that the societies of 22nd century planet earth might be a pale imitation of today's global civilisation.

Naturally I'm very concerned about extreme weather events of various sorts, in particular intense storms, floods, heat waves and bush fires.

I'm concerned about the combination of rising sea level with storms, and the effect that will have on coastal flooding.

I'm concerned about the erosion resulting from increasingly intense rain

I'm concerned about an aging population living with heat stress, and the death and illness that will cause.

I'm concerned about the destructive effect increasingly wild weather will have on our flora and fauna, particularly as we continue to diminish their habitat through development and mining. I've read that an extinction rate of around 50% could take place globally as a result of climate change.

I'm concerned about the effects increasing wild weather will have on our economy, that we will be spending more and more of our money as a nation rebuilding after disasters, and less on things like education and health, leading to a steady decline to our health and well-being.

I'm concerned about the psychological effects of living with the knowledge that the weather will keep getting worse over the decades to come. What impact it have on the mental health of the next generation, knowing that their future will be filled with increasingly destructive weather?

On a local government level, I'm concerned that not enough is being done to protect wildlife habitat (which is needed more than ever to protect species endangered by extreme weather) and it seems in NSW, councils do not need to plan for a sea level rise greater than 90cm by 2100. This already seems like a conservative figure given some of the sea-level rise predictions I've seen recently.

We are clearly not doing enough to prevent catastrophic global warming, and it's hard to understand how politicians in governments of all the major parties can be so myopic – do they think their children will live in some kind of bubble immune from the effects the rest of us will live under?