

Australian Climate Risk Assessment issues dire warnings

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Australia's first National Climate Risk Assessment (NCRA), published last month, warned of the accelerating danger of continued climate change. Drawing on research and analysis by the country's leading official scientific bodies, the report predicted extreme heat and heatwaves, significant sea level rise and increased coastal hazards affecting millions of people.

Issued by the Bureau of Meteorology, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Geoscience Australia, the assessment's warnings included that over half a million homes would be at risk as a result of sea level rise by 2030.

Citing a "very high confidence" level—indicating high agreement and robust evidence—the NCRA said 7.5 percent of all residential buildings were already in "high-risk areas" for extreme weather events.

By 2050, sea level rise could put 1.5 million more people in high-risk coastal areas, and as many as 3 million by 2090.

By 2050, the report said that 18 of the top 20 most at-risk regions nationally would be in Queensland, particularly the state's southeast and its capital city Brisbane. At 1.5 degrees above current temperatures, Brisbane would experience coastal floods for 86 days a year—almost three months of flooding. At +3°C, Brisbane would have floods 314 days a year.

With a "high confidence" level, there was an increased risk of vector-borne diseases, such as malaria and dengue fever, as temperatures, rainfall and floods increased, all causing further strain on the healthcare system.

Such conditions were expected to disproportionately affect infants and the elderly, as well as those with pre-existing medical conditions or heightened susceptibility

to abnormal environmental conditions.

The report said annual heat-related deaths would go up by 190 percent in Sydney and 126 percent in Melbourne compared with today's levels. If global heating were allowed to reach +3°C, heat-related mortality would rise by 444 percent in Sydney and 259 percent in Melbourne.

Ecosystems are also under threat. By 2050, up to 70 percent of native plant species could face conditions outside their current climate range, risking widespread species loss and ecosystem collapse. At +1.5°C, the oceans would become more acidic, preventing corals, phytoplankton and zooplankton from forming hard skeletons, so that coral reefs would cease to exist.

Many of these negative outcomes have already begun: coral bleaching events, wildfires, droughts, floods and epidemics are being exacerbated by climate change.

Critical infrastructure is at risk, with telecommunication services among the most vulnerable to damage. The annual cost of climate-driven disasters could be \$40 billion by 2050, even under modest levels of global heating.

The worsening outlook had already led insurance companies internationally to draw back coverage, primarily affecting already disadvantaged communities.

Overall, according to the report, "individuals and households already disadvantaged are the most vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate." In other words, as with all social maladies, the working class is the hardest hit.

However, the NCRA's assessment of impacts to "the Defence and National Security system" ranked second only to the "Natural Environment system" in the evaluation of immediate vulnerabilities. That

underscores the prominence of military and intelligence implications in government concerns. They are of more immediate official anxiety than those threatening the broader community, primary industry, food production and the health system, among others.

As part of the Defence system, the NCRA included state and local disaster response bodies like the emergency and fire services. However, chief among the report's concerns with this system was the overreliance on military personnel in assisting in disaster relief, a situation projected to worsen as the already declining volunteer workforces face increased demands.

The NCRA cited the Defence Strategic Review 2023, which stated that such reliance would "detract from Defence's primary objective of defending Australia." Thus, the problem was presented primarily from the standpoint of military capacity.

In evaluating risks to the "Economy, Trade and Finance system," the report notably cited increased health and social costs, higher insurance premiums and a reduction in productivity and real wages.

The NCRA alluded to the potential for "Black Swan events"—significant unpredictable events, typically financial—and the risk of "maladaptation" as caused by flawed government and private business decisions.

Despite these projections, the Albanese Labor government has continued to set emissions targets in line with the Business Council of Australia—which represents the largest corporations operating in the country—in contravention even of the limited goals of the Paris 2015 agreement.

Last month, the Australian Labor government released its totally inadequate 2035 target of a 62-70 percent reduction in domestic greenhouse gas emissions relative to 2005 levels. In 2021, the Climate Council estimated that Australia would need to commit to a 75 percent reduction in emissions by 2030.

Labor's previous 2022 climate target of a 43 percent reduction by 2030, adopted with the backing of the Greens and "Teal" independent members of parliament, also disregarded the scientific evidence.

Moreover, Labor previously claimed that the government was "on track" to meet the insufficient 43 percent target, despite mounting evidence to the contrary published by independent climate scientists.

Labor has ensured fossil fuel corporation profits with a "Future Gas Strategy" and new coal mine and gas

project approvals, directly contributing to the dangerous outcomes. In fact, far from representing an alternative to the previous Liberal-National government, Labor has doubled down in its support for fossil fuels.

Since taking office in 2022, the Albanese government has approved at least 31 new coal, oil and gas developments, which add up to a cumulative emissions total of 6.5 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent over their lifetimes.

Most recently, Labor approved an extension until 2070 of the giant North West Shelf (NWS) gas project, operated by Woodside Energy Group Ltd.

Nevertheless, the NCRA endorsed the government's National Adaptation Plan, which aims at adjusting to current and future worsening of climate conditions. Those most at risk of climate disaster—the working class and young people—must reject this criminal refusal to take the necessary measures to halt the climate disaster.

The issue of climate change, as with those of war, genocide, austerity and pandemic prevention, cannot be solved by nationally-based capitalist governments. Only through the overturn of the capitalist profit system and its replacement with socialism, led by the international working class, can the climate catastrophe be averted.



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