

2019–20 Australian bushfire season

Introduction

The 2019–20 Australian bushfire season was one of the most catastrophic wildfire events in the country's history. Spanning from late 2019 into early 2020, the fires ravaged vast areas across Australia, causing unprecedented destruction and loss.

In a season marked by severe and protracted drought, the natural environment was particularly devastated; scientists have estimated that, in the forests and woodlands that were burned during the 2019–20 bushfire season, there would have been almost 3 billion native vertebrates

The record-breaking Australian bushfire season charred more than 20 percent of the country's forests. The fires claimed the lives of 479 people, millions of animals, and 9,352 buildings. Between the fires and the smoke, over 80 percent of the country's population was affected. The country's 2019-20 bushfire season came to be known as **Black Summer**.



Where did it happen?

The bushfires impacted various regions across Australia, with some of the hardest-hit areas including:

1. New South Wales (NSW): Particularly affected were areas such as the South Coast, the Snowy Valleys, and the Southern Highlands.
2. Victoria: Devastating fires swept through East Gippsland and the Alpine regions.
3. South Australia: Kangaroo Island was severely impacted, along with parts of the Adelaide Hills.
4. Queensland: While not as extensively affected as other states, Queensland still experienced significant bushfire activity, notably in the southeast.



State / territory	Fatalities	Homes lost	Area (estimated)		Notes
			ha	acres	
Northern Territory	0	5	6,800,000	16,800,000	Area, includes mainly scrub fires, which are within the normal range of area burnt by bushfires each year; ^[62] homes ^[92]
New South Wales	26	2,448	5,500,000	13,600,000	Area; ^[67] fatalities; ^[67] homes ^[67]
Queensland	0	48	2,500,000	6,180,000	Area, includes scrub fires; ^[62] homes ^{[92][e]}
Western Australia	0	1	2,200,000	5,440,000	Area, includes scrub fires; ^[62] homes ^[92]
Victoria	5	396	1,500,000	3,710,000	Area; ^[62] fatalities; ^[21] homes ^[97]
South Australia	3	151	490,000	1,210,000	Area; ^[62] fatalities; ^[98] homes (KI:65) ^[99] (AH:86) ^[100]
Australian Capital Territory	0	0	86,464	213,660	Area ^[101]
Tasmania	0	2	36,000	89,000	Area; ^[62] homes ^[92]
Total	34	3,500+	18,736,070	46,300,000	^{[f][d][105][106]} Total area estimate from 13 February 2020

Causes

1. **Drought:** Australia experienced prolonged periods of drought leading up to the bushfire season. This dryness created highly flammable conditions in many forested areas.
2. **Record-breaking Temperatures:** The bushfire season coincided with record-breaking heatwaves across Australia. High temperatures exacerbated fire conditions, making it easier for fires to ignite and spread rapidly.
3. **Strong Winds:** Strong and erratic winds further fueled the spread of the fires, making them difficult to contain and control.
4. **Ignition:** Lightning was the major cause of ignition of fires during the 2019–20 fire crisis in NSW and Victoria
5. **Climate Change:** While not the sole cause, climate change is believed to have worsened the conditions conducive to wildfires, including hotter and drier weather patterns.



Consequences

The consequences of the 2019–20 bushfire season were profound and far-reaching:

1. **Loss of Life:** Tragically, the fires resulted in the loss of numerous lives, including firefighters and civilians.
2. **Ecological Damage:** Millions of hectares of land were burned, leading to significant ecological damage and loss of habitat for numerous species. Some estimates suggest that over one billion animals perished in the fires.
3. **Property Destruction:** Thousands of homes and structures were destroyed or damaged, leaving many communities devastated and displacing thousands of residents.
4. **Health Impacts:** Smoke from the fires blanketed cities and towns, leading to poor air quality and respiratory issues for many people, particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions.
5. **Economic Losses:** The economic toll of the bushfires was substantial, with billions of dollars in damage to infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, and other sectors.

