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Hot, parched and sinking – apocalypse Sydney

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SYDNEY faces a temperature rise of up to 4.3 degrees by 2070, and a tripling of the number of days a year when the thermometer soars above 35 degrees, if global greenhouse gas emissions are not cut deeply, a report warns.

But it is already too late for the city to avoid a warming of about 1 degree by 2030 as well as a 3 per cent reduction in annual rainfall because of polluting gases present in the atmosphere.

The report, *Climate Change in Australia*, provides the most comprehensive assessment of the country's climate to date, and is based on the work of more than 50 scientists from the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology.

Its grim projections of more droughts, heatwaves, bushfires, and severe "weather events" were released in Sydney yesterday at the Greenhouse 2007 conference.

Addressing the 700 assembled scientists, Dr Tim Flannery said: "We need urgent action." Science would drive the agenda on how to address climate change from now on, and this had to be done via the United Nations and the Kyoto framework during the upcoming climate talks in Bali, he said.

"I respectfully and publicly ask our Prime Minister to ratify the Kyoto Protocol so we have a seat at the table in those negotiations.

And furthermore to use his great influence with his friends in the United States in the Bush Administration to urge on them a similar course of action."

Britain's chief scientist, Sir David King, said there was no choice but to adopt globally binding greenhouse gas emissions targets. "I do not understand how we can manage a global problem with an aspirational set of targets. It is all very well to say 'Well, we did our best and we didn't manage it', but we are all going to suffer," Sir David told the *Herald*.

It also made no sense for any individual, business or country to claim its contribution to climate change was so small it would not have to take any action, he said.

An author of the report, the CSIRO's Dr Penny Whetton, said: "Some climate change for Australia is certainly inevitable, so we're going to need to adapt to its impacts."

By 2030, up to 20 per cent more months of drought over most of Australia are expected, the report says. By 2070 this could rise to 40 per cent in eastern Australia and 80 per cent in the south-west, if fossil fuels continue to be burnt unabated.

Human activity has already had a widespread effect on Australia's climate, the report shows.

A warming of 0.9 degrees since 1950 has been mostly due to greenhouse gas emissions and has exacerbated the drought, it says, and reduced spring snow depths in the Snowy Mountains by 40 per cent since 1962.

The three oceans surrounding the continent have warmed, with waters near Tasmania heating at a rate three times the global average.

GRIM FORECAST

- ▶ Sydney will be up to five degrees warmer by 2070 if greenhouse gas emissions remain high.
- ▶ Up to 30% less rainfall.
- ▶ Double the bushfire risk by 2050.
- ▶ Sea level rise to exceed the average global rise.
- ▶ Snow to decrease in alpine regions.

'We need urgent action. I respectfully and publicly ask our Prime Minister to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.'

TIM FLANNERY



Surf's up... on a fine spring day, high tide waves crash over the running path at Mrs Macquaries Chair yesterday. The temperature peaked at 32 degrees in Sydney's west, with a forecast maximum tomorrow of 34. Photo: Robert Pearce