


Craig Reucassel Presents

BIG WEATHER

(AND HOW TO SURVIVE IT)

[PRESS KIT](#)

With unique access to Australia's emergency services, first responders and local communities, **Big Weather (and how to survive it)** is an emotionally-gripping series filmed over one violent summer.

 tv + iVIEW

Starts Tuesday 13 October 2020, 8.30pm



From the frontlines of Australia's Black Summer of 2019-20, three-part series **BIG WEATHER (AND HOW TO SURVIVE IT)** delivers an urgent and entertaining message of how our weather is changing and what we can do to survive it.

Presenter **CRAIG REUCASSEL** charts the season as oppressive heatwaves set temperature records that lead to Australia's worst fire season on record. Over 20 million hectares of forest go up in flames: a fifth of the continent's forest and an area twice the size of Belgium. Then in a violent contradiction, catastrophic fire is followed by severe storms and flash floods.

Sharing stories from frontline disaster crews, experts and communities dealing with the effects of our escalating climate emergency, *Big Weather (and how to survive it)* seeks to answer some big questions: **Why are these events becoming less predictable and more intense? And what can we do to prepare, survive and adapt into the future?**

Big Weather (and how to survive it) is a dynamic and emotional series showcasing nature at its most destructive and spectacular. Fusing tales of tragedy and triumph with practical tips and survival scenarios, *Big Weather* brings the lived experience of an historic summer into every living room, to help communities adapt, survive and thrive in the new era of climate extremes.

EPISODE 1

Tuesday 13 October | 8.30pm on ABC + iview

SUMMER IS COMING

With a record-breaking start to the season, Craig joins fire chiefs and emergency commissioners in Tasmania as they plan for the ominous summer ahead. With the prospect of months ahead without rain, fires breaking out in the rainforests of South East Queensland are a sign of things to come.

Craig checks the readiness of communities by putting their bushfire plans to the test. Just how prepared are we?

Temperatures in Sydney's west reach 47°C and sweltering students decide to put citizen science into action to cool their school and plot a strategy to see a nationwide rollout for their devised solutions.

EPISODE 2

Tuesday 20 October | 8.30pm on ABC + iview

INTO THE FIRESTORM

As fire explodes across the country, towns are cut off and highways close. Australia experiences the largest peacetime evacuation in its history.

Craig learns what's required to become a volunteer firefighter as he undertakes training before heading to the firefront in Gippsland, Victoria. Although some people lose everything, Craig meets others who have been miraculously spared. He also learns that that whilst these extraordinary events were unprecedented in nature, they weren't unpredicted.

When a military helicopter accidentally sparks a wildfire known as "The Monster" in the ACT, Craig heads to the small town of Michelago as residents prepare to either leave, or stay and defend. What happens next will result in the ACT's worst environmental disaster.

Retired Fire & Rescue NSW Commissioner Greg Mullins provides sobering insights into the changes we're experiencing as records continue to tumble.

EPISODE 3

Tuesday 27 October | 8.30pm on ABC + iview

READY TOGETHER

After three years of brutal drought, the hottest summer on record and a devastating fire season, Australia's east coast is hit by a severe low trough. In this final episode, Craig finds himself facing floodwaters as two months of rain falls in just two days in Sydney, the heaviest rainfall experienced in 20 years.

Craig is put to the test as he learns how to escape from a sinking car and through virtual reality, watches Parramatta disappear under rising waters.

From every extreme weather disaster comes tales of resilience. As the violent summer draws to a close, Craig finds consolation in the positive actions of others. He visits inspiring communities who have not only survived disaster but found innovative ways to mitigate against future catastrophe.

Finally, Craig invites viewers to explore the ways all Australians can unite to be **#ReadyTogether**, in order to survive and thrive in a new extreme weather reality.



SHANE FITZSIMMONS

As Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, Shane became a household name appearing in the media frequently over the summer of 2019/20. He joined the RFS as a 16-year-old volunteer and remained in the organisation for 35 years. In April 2020 Shane departed the RFS to become Head of Resilience NSW, a new government agency focused on disaster preparedness and recovery.



KARL BRAGANZA

Karl Braganza is currently the Head of Climate Monitoring at the Bureau of Meteorology's National Climate Centre. Karl's department is responsible for the preparation and analysis of Australia's instrumental climate record. It is also responsible for the official reporting of observed climate variability and change in Australia.



DIANA EADIE

Diana Eadie is a weather forecaster at the Bureau of Meteorology where she has worked for the past six years. Currently, she works on the Extreme Weather Desk, analysing how extreme weather will impact Australian communities.



CLAIRE YEO

As a senior weather forecaster at the Bureau of Meteorology, Claire Yeo specialises in severe weather forecasting for Emergency Services and produces warnings for critical fire weather days or severe thunderstorms.



DON FAZIO

Don Fazio is a District Fire Officer and manages the Applied Training grounds at the Western Australian Fire & Emergency Services Academy. He's highly skilled in Vehicle Extrication, Vertical Rescue, Confined Space Rescue, Structural Firefighting, and Emergency Planning. Don was a volunteer firefighter for more than a decade. He's responsible for training Craig and the new recruits in the *Big Weather* series.



PETER SUTTON

Peter Sutton is a superintendent with the WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services. He is a veteran of fire and rescue operations with over 25 years of service. As an incident controller Peter is often called upon to make critical decisions for emergency services and communities during Big Weather events. Peter oversaw the car experiment in the *Big Weather* series.



GREG MULLINS

Greg Mullins AO AFSM (Australian Fire Service Medal) has 49 years volunteer rural and professional firefighting experience. For 13 years he was the Commissioner for NSW Fire and Rescue. He retired in 2017 and still volunteers with the RFS. During the Black Summer, Greg battled many firefronts, including Blackheath, Bateman’s Bay, Mogo and Cobargo. In November 2019, Greg was one of the former fire commissioners who tried to warn the government of the fires to come.



NICK MOIR

As the Chief Photographer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Nick Moir is renowned for his award-winning photographs of dramatic Australian weather phenomena. He was winner of the South Australian Museum’s ANZANG Nature Photography competition for his evocative image of a bushfire bearing down on a town in south-east NSW and captured numerous front-page images that appeared across the summer of 2019/20.



SARAH U'BRIEN

Sarah U'Brien is the manager of the Dungog Shire Community Centre. When, in April 2015, Dungog was unexpectedly struck with a “once in a thousand year weather event”, she found herself coordinating the community-led recovery efforts. That experience led her to evolve her community work to focus on disaster preparedness and the vital role that community plays in building resilience.



WAYNE WALTISBUHL

Wayne Waltisbuhl is a 40-year firefighter veteran and Regional Manager of Rural Operations for the Queensland Rural Fire Service. He is responsible for overseeing community preparedness operations in the outlining suburbs and areas surrounding Brisbane.



KYLEE CLUBB

As a Cultural Fire Practitioner who follows in the footsteps of her ancestors, Kylee also works as a senior firefighter with the Tinaroo QLD RFS. Kylee is a Queensland director of the Firesticks Alliance and works with Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage protection.



VICTOR STEFFENSEN

Victor is a descendant of the Tagalaka people through his mother's connections from the Gulf Country of north Queensland. Much of Victor's work over the past 27 years has been based on the arts and reviving traditional knowledge values - particularly cultural burning - through mentoring and leadership with many Indigenous communities. Victor is co-founder of the National Indigenous Fire Workshops, which have been hosted in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.



DR SEBASTIAN PFAUSTCH

A Senior Research Fellow at Western Sydney University, Dr Pfaustch develops applied science projects that allow government and industry to optimize strategies and practices to mitigate urban heat. He uses his detailed understanding of trees, microclimates, eco-hydrology and natural resources management to deliver evidence-based concepts for cooling in parks, playgrounds, schools, car parks and many more components of the urban fabric to 'future-proof' our cities.



STUDENTS LAILA AND IAN

Laila and Ian are high school students in Western Sydney. Concerned with the effect of rising temperatures in their classrooms and the effect it was having on students' learning capabilities, they conducted their own science study. With a group of likeminded students and the support of their school and P&C, they installed temperature sensors throughout their campus to record data and compile a body of evidence to help shift school heat policy. Their aim is to enable sustainable cooling solutions for all schools across the country.



THE YEATES

Lyndon and Sheryl Yeates, together with their boys Owen and Lewis, have lived in the suburb of Karana Downs QLD for eight years. Properties in their neighbourhood tend to be an acre or more in size and are nestled in native bushland on the outskirts of Brisbane.



THE HUXHAMS

Terry and Nerolee Huxham and their four children Matthew, Luke, Josie and Jewel live in the adjacent suburb of Mount Crosby. Like many Australians, both families are aware of the risks of living near bushland, but have never seriously considered a bushfire plan until now.



Photo credit: Nick Moir



Photo credit: Nick Moir



Photo credit: Nicholas Searle



Photo credit: Nick Moir

THE FIRE

Across Australia in 2019/2020 the worst bushfires in the nation's recorded history burned 20 million hectares – the equivalent of over half of Germany. This is almost three times the size of the apocalyptic fires that burned the Amazon in 2019 – and more than 27 times the size of California's catastrophic wildfires of 2018.

Australia's losses included 21% of its temperate forests, well over a billion wild animals, thousands of homes and 33 lives.

THE HEAT

2019 was the hottest year ever recorded in Australia. In December, heat records were broken for the hottest month, week, and day. The hottest day record was broken two days in a row.¹

On 4 January 2020, Australia was the hottest location on the planet.²

THE DRY

Just 277.6mm of rain fell on average in 2019 – 40% below normal – and the driest year ever recorded in Australia.

THE RAIN

Over just four days, between 6-10 February 2020, 392mm of rain fell on Sydney – the city's biggest four-day total in 30 years.

THE STORM

In Canberra on 20 January 2020, just one ten-minute hailstorm caused damage that approached \$1 billion.

¹ Graham Readfearn, 'Australia records its hottest day ever – one day after previous record', *The Guardian*, 19 December 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/19/419c-australia-records-hottest-ever-day-one-day-after-previous-record>>.

² 'Sydney's Penrith the hottest place on Earth amid devastating bushfires', *SBS News*, 4 January 2020. <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/sydney-s-penrith-the-hottest-place-on-earth-amid-devastating-bushfires>>

big facts of black summer

BUSHFIRE RECORDS

The worst bushfires on record belong to the season of 2019/2020.

20 million hectares of Australia (200,000km²) were burned. This is an area over half the size of Germany (357,386km²).



20% of mainland Australia's forests were burned in the 2019/20 bushfires - for most other continents and forest types the proportion has been at most 4-5%.

An exception is tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests in Asia and Africa, for which the analysis found medians of 8-9% had been recorded in that 20-year period.

Lead author of a paper on Nature Climate Change, Matthias Boer, said, "There is just nothing like it out there and we felt confident to call it unprecedented."

Australia's wealthiest and most populous state, NSW, experienced its worst ever bushfires – in terms of the homes lost, the area burned, and the sheer scale of the disaster including the wildlife killed (est. 800 million of one billion nationwide).¹

NSW spent 21 days under State of Emergency orders.

6.82% of the state burned in 11,141 bush and grass fires.

81% of the Blue Mountains World Heritage area burned.²

The Gospers Mountain Fire was started from a single lightning strike and became the largest single-ignition forest fire ever recorded in Australia at 500,000ha (5,000km²).

¹ Climate Council of Australia, 'Summer of Crisis' Report, March 2020. <<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Crisis-Summer-Report-2003f1.pdf>>.

² Ibid.

That's more than twice the size of the ACT, nearly half the size of Sydney, and almost the size of the Indonesian island of Bali (5,780km²)

Flames 70 metres high were recorded.³

CATASTROPHIC FIRE DANGER

One way to measure the scale of bushfire danger is to record the fire danger ratings issued. The highest ratings are 'Catastrophic' and 'Code Red'.



Source: bom.gov.au

Never before had a catastrophic fire danger rating been issued in Sydney. The first was issued in November 2019 – before the summer even began. At that time 99 fires were burning out of control in the state, 17 were life threatening emergencies.⁴

These fire danger ratings were also issued in other locations and at times of year for the first time ever.

HOMES LOST

3,500+

BUILDINGS DESTROYED

2,000+

HUMAN LOSS OF LIFE

33 people died in the Black Summer fires (including six firefighters from ground and air responders).

The effects of the bushfire smoke led to the deaths of nearly 450 people.⁵

³ Greg Mullins, 'Come with me to the mega-blaze, Scott Morrison, and see what we're up against', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December 2019. <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/come-with-me-to-the-mega-blaze-scott-morrison-and-see-what-we-re-up-against-20191216-p53kcp.html>>.

⁴ Ben Doherty, 'Australia fires: nation braces for 'most dangerous bushfire week ever seen'', *The Guardian*, 11 November 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/11/australia-fires-nation-braces-for-most-dangerous-bushfire-week-ever-seen>>.

⁵ Georgia Hitch, 'Bushfire royal commission hears that Black Summer smoke killed nearly 450 people', *ABC News*, 26 May 2020. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-26/bushfire-royal-commission-hearings-smoke-killed-445-people/12286094>>

Despite the vast areas burned, the greatest loss of life from a bushfire in Australia was in 2009 when 173 people perished in Victoria's 'Black Saturday' bushfires. 450,000 hectares were burnt.

LOSS OF WILDLIFE

Recognised mammal ecologist Professor Chris Dickman of Sydney University suggests that 800 million animals were killed in NSW alone, and well over a billion across the country (some estimates include 200,000 koalas). Yet these estimates are limited and do not include bats, frogs and invertebrates.⁶

BUSHFIRE EXTINCTION



113 species, including Australia's iconic koalas, have been pushed towards extinction because millions of hectares of unique habitat have been destroyed by bushfires.⁷

Image: [Australian Geographic Magazine](#), Issue 155. Feb 2020.

AUSTRALIA'S VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS: THE 'FIRIES'

Australia's volunteer firefighting services have 195,000 volunteer members – almost 1% of the population.⁸

Australia has the fourth highest proportion of volunteer firefighters per capita in the world. However, in Australia's rural areas the proportion is much higher – closer to 4.5% are volunteers. That's almost twice the proportion of any other nation.

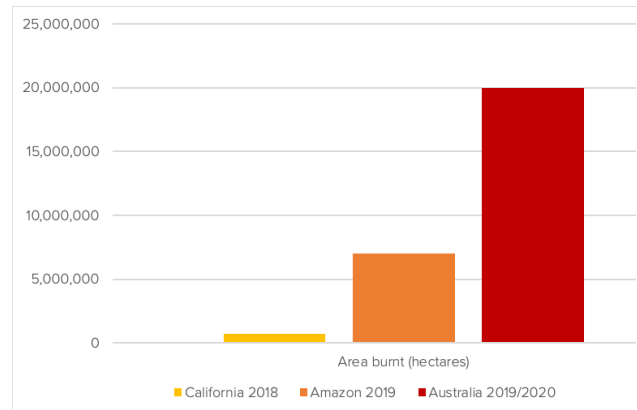
It's been estimated that the economic value of the hours volunteered is \$1.3 billion.⁹

By the end of 2019, many volunteer firefighters had been deployed for 100 days.¹⁰

HOW DOES BLACK SUMMER COMPARE TO THE CALIFORNIA FIRES OF 2018 AND THE AMAZON FIRES OF 2019?

Area burnt in the fires:

- California (2018): 737,803 hectares.¹¹
- Amazon (2019): 7 million hectares.¹²
- Australia (2019/2020): 20 million hectares.



Australia's Black Summer burnt 27 times more area than the California fires, and almost three times more than the Amazon fires. The area lost in Black Summer fires was almost five times greater than the area lost across all of the US in wildfires in 2018 (3,548,078ha).¹³

Deaths:

- California 2018 – 97 civilians and six firefighters.¹⁴
- Amazon 2019 – 2 people.
- Australia 2019/2020 – 33 people.

BUSHFIRE SMOKE

Australian air quality becomes officially 'hazardous' when the Air Quality Index reaches 200. At 1am on the first day of 2020, readings peaked at 7,700 at one Canberra site.¹⁵

In 2019, Sydney alone experienced 81 days of poor or hazardous air quality – that's more than the combined total of the previous ten years.¹⁶

⁶ University of Sydney, 'More than one billion animals killed in Australian bushfires', *USYD News*, 8 January 2020. <<https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2020/01/08/australian-bushfires-more-than-one-billion-animals-impacted.html>>.

⁷ 'The 113 animal species that may die out because of bushfires', AAP, 28 February 2020. <<https://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/conservation/the-113-animal-species-that-may-die-out-because-of-bushfires/news-story/2a7bc9657ac2abbbb092d8a3878fb34d>>.

⁸ Michelle Cull, 'Value beyond money: Australia's special dependence on volunteer firefighters', *The Conversation*, 23 January 2020. <<https://theconversation.com/value-beyond-money-australias-special-dependence-on-volunteer-firefighters-129881>>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Michael Condon, 'Volunteer firefighters approaching 100 days away from jobs ask for more financial help', *ABC News*, Online. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2019-12-27/volunteer-firefighters-approaching-100-days-ask-for-help/11829100>>.

¹¹ 'Wildfires by State, 2019', National Interagency Fire Center, cited in Insurance Information Institute. <<https://www.iii.org/table-archive/23284>>.

¹² Jacqueline Mattos, 'Australian Bushfires vs Amazon Rain Forest Fires', *Science Connected Magazine*, 28 January 2020. <<https://magazine.scienceconnected.org/2020/01/australian-bushfires-vs-amazon-rain-forest-fires/>>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 'Statistics: Deaths', *2018 California Wildfires*, Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_California_wildfires>, accessed 19 June 2002.

¹⁵ Amy Remeikis, 'Canberra chokes on world's worst air quality as city all but shut down', *The Guardian*, 3 January 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/03/canberra-chokes-on-worlds-worst-air-quality-as-city-all-but-shut-down>>.

¹⁶ John Pickrell, 'Smoke from Australia's bushfires killed far more people than the fires did, study says', *The Guardian*, 21 March 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/mar/21/smoke-from-australias-bushfires-killed-far-more-people-than-the-fires-did-study-says>>.

big facts of black summer

Around the world, huge numbers of deaths are attributed to hazardous air quality, and the number of premature deaths due to air pollution is projected to increase from three million people globally to between six and nine million in 2060.¹⁷

Some Australian cities and towns had the worst air quality of anywhere in the world in late 2019.

On 19 November 2019, Sydney's air quality was officially the worst in the world.¹⁸

Sydney and large parts of New South Wales continued to struggle with the longest and the most widespread period on record of poor air quality and hazardous levels of pollution.¹⁹

It didn't stop there. On 2 January 2020 Canberra had the worst air in the world - worse than Lahore, worse than New Delhi, worse than Shanghai.

By 13 January it was Melbourne's turn to share the inevitable title of worst air quality in the world.²⁰

CO2 EMISSIONS

The bushfires released between 650 million and 1.2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere²¹, the equivalent of emissions from all commercial air travel in a year.

Australia emits 531 million tonnes in an 'average' year.

Researchers at Finnish Meteorological Institute estimated that by 4 January 2020, smoke from Australia's bushfires covered 20 million kms².²²

The bushfire smoke is estimated to have cost Sydney alone \$12-50 million per day²³ for reasons including

loss in worker productivity from sick days, shopping and outdoor dining, and tourism.

HEATWAVES

From the beginning of December 2019, Canberra experienced four heatwaves and 41 days of 30°C or more; for the fourth consecutive year the territory recorded more than 40 days above 30°C.

It also broke records: the hottest day on record, 44°C; the hottest February day on record, 42.7°C; and the hottest minimum temperature, 26.7°C.²⁴

RECORD AUSTRALIAN DISASTER INSURANCE

23,000 bushfire-related insurance claims were lodged across New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria between November 2019 and February 2020 totalling an estimated value of \$1.9 billion.

According to insurance firm Aon, "The most expensive bushfire seasons in Australia in terms of insured loss were \$1.76 billion in 1983 and \$2.16 billion in 1967. But they all will be potentially challenged by the eventual total insured loss from the 2019-20 bushfire season as losses from the bushfires continue to rise as access to fire damaged regions opens and damage assessments continue."²⁵

A 2017 report by Deloitte found that, "the total economic cost of natural disasters, and not just bushfires, is growing and will reach \$39 billion per year by 2050."²⁶

ANTHROPOGENIC INFLUENCE

In 2018 Australia's carbon emissions were the highest recorded.

The record temperatures experienced in Australia in the last few years will become the norm in a scenario where emissions continue to grow – becoming average by 2040 and exceptionally cool by 2060.²⁷

¹⁷ Jessica Irvine, 'The economic cost of bushfires on Sydney revealed: up to \$50 million a day and rising', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 December 2019. <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-economic-cost-of-bushfires-on-sydney-revealed-up-to-50-million-a-day-and-rising-20191212-p53jba.html>>.

¹⁸ Georgia Clark, 'Sydney's air quality worst in the world due to bushfires', *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 November 2019. <<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/sydneys-air-quality-among-worst-in-the-world-due-to-bushfires/news-story/0c016c0575860fc371605542435832ad>>.

¹⁹ AAP, 'NSW endures longest spell of air pollution on record as bushfires flare near Sydney', *The Guardian*, 5 December 2019. <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/05/nsw-endures-longest-spell-air-pollution-record-bushfires-threaten-queensland>>.

²⁰ AAP, 'Melbourne's air quality 'worst in the world' as bushfires continue to burn across Victoria', *The Guardian*, 14 January 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/14/melbourne-choked-by-hazardous-smoke-as-bushfires-continue-to-burn-across-victoria>>.

²¹ Climate Council of Australia, 'Summer of Crisis' Report, March 2020.

²² @anttilip (Antti Lipponen), 'The smoke from #Australia has now (4 Jan 2020) spreaded over a huge area larger than 20 000 000 km² (≈7 700 000 sq. miles)', *Twitter*, 5 January 2020. <<https://twitter.com/anttilip/status/1213463962085404673?s=20>>.

²³ Irvine, 'The economic cost of bushfires on Sydney revealed', *SMH*.

²⁴ Georgia Hitch, 'Bushfires, heat, smoke and hail storms: A breakdown of Canberra's extreme summer', *ABC News Online*, 1 March 2020. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-01/canberras-summer-of-fire-heat-rain-and-hail/12011124>>.

²⁵ Alexi Demetriadi, 'Can the insurance industry sustain bushfire losses?', *Insurance Business Australia*, 29 January 2020. <<https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com.au/news/breaking-news/can-the-insurance-industry-sustain-bushfire-losses-211716.aspx>>.

²⁶ Deloitte Access Economics, *Building Australia's resilience to natural disasters 2017*, <<https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/building-australias-natural-disaster-resilience.html>>

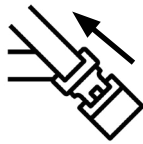
²⁷ Lisa Cox, "'Unprecedented' globally: more than 20% of Australia's forests burnt in bushfires", *The Guardian*, 25 February 2020. <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/feb/25/unprecedented-globally-more-than-20-of-australias-forests-burnt-in-bushfires>>.

CAUGHT IN A FLOOD?

A one-tonne car will actually begin to float away

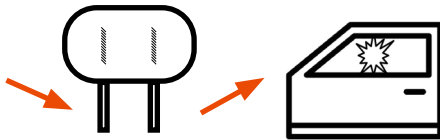


If you do find yourself submerged in a car, **exit as quickly and safely as possible**



Take **off** your **seatbelt**

Wind down the window



If your electric windows won't open, **use the headrest** from your seat to smash the glass



Climb out **onto the roof**



Call 000

AVOID ENTERING FLOOD WATERS IN CARS AT ALL COSTS

CAUGHT IN A FIRE?

Pull off the road, away from trees and shrubs



Face the car **into the fire**



Turn on **hazard lights**

Shut all windows and air vents



Keep air conditioner on **recirculate**

Get down low in the footwell and cover yourself with woollen blanket



Always **carry water** in a car



Avoid driving through fire at all costs

LEAVE EARLY

EXCERPT FROM 'EXECUTIVE SUMMARY' OF THE NSW BUSHFIRE ENQUIRY 2020

The 2019-20 bush fire season was extreme, and extremely unusual. It showed us bush fires through forested regions on a scale that we have not seen in Australia in recorded history, and fire behaviour that took even experienced firefighters by surprise. The total tally of fire-generated thunderstorms in south-eastern Australia since the early 1980s increased from 60 at the end of 2018-19 to almost 90 at the end of the 2019-20 bush fire season – an increase of almost 50% in one bush fire season. Fire-generated thunderstorms are extremely dangerous phenomena that produce extreme winds, lightning, tornadoes and black hail.

The season showed us what damage megafires can do, and how dangerous they can be for communities and firefighters. And it is clear that we should expect fire seasons like 2019-20, or potentially worse, to happen again. A number of factors combined to make this season so extraordinary. Climate change as a result of increased greenhouse gas emissions clearly played a role in the conditions that led up to the fires and in the unrelenting conditions that supported the fires to spread, but climate change does not explain everything that happened.

The 2019-20 bush fire season challenged conventional assumptions. For example, it appears that the extreme dryness of forested regions over large continuous areas was the determining factor in the size of the fires. When taken together with the weather conditions experienced, the fires became extreme, burning through forests and across bare earth.

Previous prescribed burning and hazard reduction activity appears to have reduced fire severity in some instances, but in others it appears to have had no effect on the severity and spread of the fires.

This season also challenged assumptions about how we fight fires. The scale of the fires stretched the capacity of fire authorities and the underpinning systems to respond, even with interstate and international support. We couldn't get to all new fires early enough, many of which were started by lightning in remote or rugged terrain and quickly got to the point where suppression was extremely difficult.

Read the [Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Enquiry 2020](#) (released 31 July 2020).

BIG WEATHER (and how to survive it) was conceived to both inspire and empower audiences to help prepare, respond and recover from extreme weather events.

When we first began developing the *Big Weather* series, we were frustrated by the crippling and polarising effect of the so called “debates” when it came to climate change and the lack of political will and action that followed. In our own communities, it was a subject people didn’t want to talk about or engage with and often the mere mention of the words “climate change” had a disengaging effect. And broadcaster audience figures confirmed this too.

So, we were faced with this dilemma; “How do we investigate a subject that is potentially threatening the existence of our species when no one wants to talk or listen?”

What we did know though, was that whilst people seemed uninterested in “climate change”, they were very interested in weather.

The idea behind *Big Weather* was to focus on the effects of extreme weather events and what we can do about them. As more people are becoming affected by these weather events every summer and the repair costs reaching into the billions every year, the idea was simple; focus on the symptoms and work back to the cause. We looked at fire, heatwave, cyclone, storm surge and flood and focused on the practical ways to best mitigate against them.

How do we best prepare, respond and recover when faced with those events?

We turned to experts in the field with lived experience of such disasters as our trusted voices and asked them, how do we best prepare to recover? And how do we best avoid repeating this in the future?

The series itself is a combination of observational footage and newsfeeds of events across the summer of 2019/20, combined with practical and informative stunts lead by Craig Reucassel, experts and community participants. We worked closely with almost all of the state agencies who were incredibly supportive in such difficult times. We met many families and communities who were facing enormous challenges, and despite their circumstances, welcomed us into their lives with warmth and generosity for which we’re extraordinarily grateful. We wanted the series to be practical and have meaningful take away steps and tips. We wanted to illuminate those informal networks that provide the very foundation for resilience and recovery within those communities and build the stories around them and for them.

The challenge we found ourselves faced with was to create an engaging and watchable series for a TV audience without diminishing or disrespecting the very real experience and trauma that so many people across the country now face as a result of the events of last summer. We were also determined to provide a sense of hope by showcasing practical strategies for communities to build upon and at the same time provoke, challenge and hopefully inspire and encourage others to do the same.

– MICK ANGUS

SCREEN AUSTRALIA
and
AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING
CORPORATION

present in association with
SCREEN QUEENSLAND

a DMA CREATIVE production
in association with
NORTHERN PICTURES

presenter
CRAIG REUCASSEL

series director
DANIEL MARSDEN

series producer
MICK ANGUS

story producers
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JULIA HOLMES

cinematography
MARK BROADBENT
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research
INGRID ARNOTT
EVELYN SAUNDERS
REBECCA BERGH
MARISA BARTOLINI

editors

ALEX PAUL MITCHELL
LEANNE COLE

assistant editors

MORGAN POLL
PHILIPPE SCHMULIAN

writers

POLLY MARSDEN
CRAIG REUCASSEL
CHRIS THORBURN

production supervisor
GINA TWYBLE

production managers
SIMONE FAETS
HEATHER MACFARLANE

composer

ACK KINMOTH

production coordinators
JESSICA MAGRO
AIMEE LINDORFF

production assistants/archive researchers
BRYONY PARKER
CHASE HASLINGDEN

executive producers

MICK ANGUS
KARINA HOLDEN
CHRIS THORBURN



MEDIA CONTACT

BRIDGET STENHOUSE

ABC TV publicity

m. 0466 541 642

e. stenhouse.bridget@abc.net.au

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