

## **The Current Australian Fires - A Response to a Query from our Friends at Mid-Kent A.S. England.**

J.Bailey - Manager Ballarat Municipal Observatory and Museum 12<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

Our thoughts are with those who have lost family and friends, with the firefighters and those helping in any way the people, animals and property affected by the fires. So many people are helping from every corner of the Earth and it is greatly appreciated.

The recent and current fires across Australia have started International debate.

Some people have questioned the use of the word precedent with regard to the current fires in Australia. If you think about the equipment that the fire fighters had to use in the 1851 or 1939 fires in Australia and the resulting loss of life, animals and property, and try to compare it to what our firefighters have now, you will quickly realise that the current fires would have been far more apocalyptic if there were no modern trucks, helicopters or aeroplanes to help. It is a simple but terrifying thought to ask the question, what if we didn't have them?

There would be few people that fire hasn't touched in some way over their lifetime in Australia. Losing a cousin in a 1967 Tasmanian fire, my parents nearly losing their home in a 1975 NSW fire and personally experiencing first-hand a bush fire with a terrifying north wind behind it in Victoria in 2015, a smaller fire in comparison to this seasons' fires.

The point is the fires are occurring earlier resulting in a longer fire season, temperatures are hotter resulting in a drier landscape, drought is a constant in the climate cycle in Australia. But now we are hotter than ever before. Experiencing six days of 36.3, 40.0, 41.4, 41.1, 39.2, 34.7 degrees Celsius in January 2009 beginning on 27<sup>th</sup> I witnessed hundreds of insects seeking moisture inside our house in the shower cubicle on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>th</sup> days, birds of all shapes and sizes coming to drink at containers of water left out for them, an unprecedented heatwave. Five days followed recording from 27.5-36.7 degrees Celsius and then the Black Saturday Fires came the following day on the 7th February 2009 with a temperature of 44.1 recorded in Ballarat on that day, still the record high for February in Ballarat as I write. The leaves on the ground from trees on our property disintegrated under my footsteps, they were totally lacking moisture. The wind was blowing horizontal to the ground with debris caught up in it. Wind gusts up to 115km/hr were recorded at Mt William in Western Victoria.

In 2019 we had more trucks, helicopters and aeroplanes as well as the emergency warning systems via the internet and our mobile phones which came into being after the Black Saturday Fires in 2009.

When winter 2020 comes we will have the statistics of the current fires. Already the Ballarat highest temperature for December has been broken on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019 with a record 43.5 degrees Celsius.

With all the equipment that has been available for the current fire season and the obvious inadequacy of that level of support, we need our best minds up front to plan for the future.

The experiences and qualities we need for leadership in countries across Earth must address the issues that will lead to a SUSTAINABLE Earth. The word growth should be removed from the Earth's economic language and replaced with sustainable. Australia and every country on Earth needs a sustainable economy and environment, it is up to all of us, as citizens of the Earth. We need to heed one of the oldest cultures on the planet, the Indigenous Australians, who have sustainably lived on this ancient land for tens of thousands of years, and have a deep and intimate connection to the land and nature. There is no Planet B as yet, and although we may find earth-like planets, there is still the challenge of getting to them! So at this stage, we need to preserve this life giving haven in the outskirts of our vast galaxy, in a truly fascinating Universe.

*Link to a comprehensive list for donations*

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/21/how-you-can-donate-and-help-the-volunteer-firefighters-in-australias-bushfire-crisis>

*NB. Generally all the funds raised through visits go towards keeping the Observatory maintained and updated and we rely on visitors and groups to for this. However the need in the wider community after the fires is also great and the Observatory Team have decided to give 35% of the revenue over 2 years from our Saturday Viewing Program to help with the recovery effort in selected areas of need in Victoria, suggested by our members, some whom have been through fires in the past and some who work as CFA Volunteers and some who are members of environmental groups. The recovery effort in some areas will take years and we would like to support this recovery. Valuing greatly the support that some of our members have been on the receiving end of help in the past.*