

OPENING STATEMENT

As the Committee will know, we are facing a hot, dry season ahead with El Nino and a positive Indian Ocean Dipole both officially declared.

Above average fire and heatwave risks have been forecast and are being experienced across large parts of the country.

Over the past four weeks, we have seen significant fire activity NT, Qld, NSW and Victoria, and today we've seen Extreme Fire Danger in SA and WA, with multiple fires burning at Emergency Warning and Watch and Act levels across New South Wales and Queensland. To everyone in those communities can I urge you to monitor the conditions and heed the advice of local authorities.

The communities of Tiwi, Daley and Arnhem Districts in the Northern Territory are currently experiencing heatwave conditions, with these conditions set to extend into Northern WA and Qld through the week.

There is also an increased likelihood of severe storms and cyclones, and we extend our thoughts to our neighbours in the Pacific area, who are currently experiencing TC Lola.

For many in our Emergency Management Sector, there's been no reprieve since well before Black Summer.

We have gone from those fires, through the COVID response, La Nina and floods, into this El Niño and Indian Ocean Dipole events.

Thank you to all officials and personnel from Federal, State and Territory agencies, along with ADF and volunteers, who have all gone above and beyond to help Australians in need.

The Commonwealth Government has a key role in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters.

And while disaster management is primarily a State and Territory responsibility, the Albanese Government has stepped up to support them.

We've made it a real priority to work with all partners to ensure that Australia is much better prepared for disasters and responds much more quickly.

We know that we can't eliminate disaster risk, and we will face difficult conditions this summer.

That is why NEMA this year expanded their High Risk Weather Season Preparedness Program to include the first National Disaster Preparedness Summit, held in Parliament last month. The Summit brought together leaders from Federal, State and Territory emergency services, and also from the logistics, food and groceries, insurance, energy and utilities, telecommunications, community and not-for-profit sectors.

Aside from the summit, we've made major changes at the Federal level to ensure we're much better prepared, connected and coordinated than we were for Black Summer:

- We're tackling the root cause of increasing extreme weather – climate change – by legislating much more ambitious emission reduction targets;

- We've created one unified National Emergency Management Agency, under the leadership of Coordinator-General Brendan Moon;
- We've established the Disaster Ready Fund, which will invest up to \$1 billion in disaster mitigation over the next five years, with matching funding from other levels of government;
- We've delivered a new Australian Fire Danger Rating System, to simplify fire threat messages to the public;
- We've opened an upgraded National Situation Room and developed the National Joint Common Operating Picture, which enables better collaboration between organisations during a crisis;
- We're building the first ever National Emergency Stockpile, to supplement jurisdictions' own resources of emergency housing, water purification equipment and other necessities, for when disasters strike;
- We're funding Disaster Relief Australia, a veteran-run volunteer organisation, to relieve some of the pressure on our magnificent Australian Defence Forces, when it comes to clean up and recovery;
- We've established the Hazards Insurance Partnership, to work with the industry on initiatives to put downward pressure on insurance premiums;
- We're undertaking the biggest ever upgrade of our national flood gauge warning system, to ensure authorities have better and faster information on rising flood levels;
- We're developing a new cell broadcast National Messaging System to significantly enhance how we deliver emergency messages to the public.

- We've now formed a taskforce to take forward something that's been talked a lot about in disaster circles - a new Public Safety Mobile Broadband system.
- And this morning, in a world-first, we launched a free app to better prepare their home from bushfire risk and help put downward pressure on insurance premiums.

All of this, while continuing to support communities in recovery from record breaking floods across WA, SA, NT, Qld and NSW.

We continue to work closely with all Australian States and Territories as we move through the preparedness, response and recovery from natural hazards and disasters across Australia.

As we move further into this High Risk Weather Season, I encourage all Australians to ensure they are prepared for what may be a difficult season- As they say in the emergency services, we will continue to prepare for the worst, and hope for the best.