

and heavy forest fuels, along with higher abundance of dead fuel components and higher flammability of live vegetation.

Across the rest of Victoria, mostly normal bushfire activity is expected, however there is likely to be increased growth rates in pasture and croplands in the west due to winter rain. There is uncertainty around the effect of the Indian Ocean Dipole and warm/dry outlook, with some risk that ash forests in the central highlands and Otways may dry out at faster rates and become more flammable than normal during summer.

TASMANIA

For the early part of Tasmania's fire season, most of the state has normal fire potential. The western half of the state is wet, but the east is drier than normal, especially between the Forestier Peninsula and Scamander. This eastern dry area has above normal fire potential. Without significant rain in the coming months, this area will expand. As in recent years, increased fire activity is likely in this dry strip before December and will require considerable response efforts. Eastern peat soils will be susceptible to fire and will burn to depth, with traditionally wet or damp gullies already dry.

The fire season in the remainder of the state will commence more normally, in late spring or early summer, and provide good conditions for planned burning.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Average to below average rainfall has occurred across South Australia, with some areas experiencing persistent dry conditions since the start of 2018. In areas of ongoing dry conditions, grass fuel growth is either average, to well below average, which creates the likelihood of normal fire potential in these areas. This level of fire potential also continues in central and southern parts of South Australia, where average rainfall has occurred.

The Bureau of Meteorology's El Niño watch is currently neutral and the Indian Ocean Dipole is forecast to be positive.

Similar forecasts have resulted in drier and warmer than average conditions in the lead up to, and throughout, South Australia's fire season. The dry spring forecast may result in an earlier start to the fire season in parts of South Australia.

The Mount Lofty Ranges have recorded almost average rainfall, which has reset the Soil Dryness Index to zero. However, late winter rainfall may promote increased vegetation growth before summer, and could increase the available bushfire fuels during the fire season. Forecast conditions maintain the potential for bushfire across the populated areas of the Mount Lofty Ranges.

Parts of the Lower Eyre Peninsula have received good rainfall, resulting in a bumper cropping season and higher than normal grass fuel growth. Due to the increased fuel load, these areas have above normal fire potential. Kangaroo Island also has above normal fire potential, with a combination of drier than average, and wetter than average conditions (depending on the vegetation type) across the island. These conditions may result in above average fuel loads in parts, and drier than average vegetation in others, especially in areas of forested and scrub vegetation.

The prolonged dry conditions across much of South Australia is also likely to create increased occurrences of raised dust during the windy conditions that often accompany high fire risk days. The dust may affect the operational capabilities of aerial firefighting assets and limit their effectiveness. Fire managers will carefully monitor this issue during the fire season, noting that without rainfall, dust suppression is impossible on the scale required.

There are currently no forecasts indicating any potential for above average rainfall during spring and summer, which may prolong the fire season across parts of South Australia. Significant bushfires have occurred in similar conditions, and even areas of normal fire potential can expect to experience dangerous bushfires as per a normal South Australian fire season.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Rainfall deficiencies have persisted across most of the south west of Western Australia, with this area experiencing its driest start to the year, followed by the seventh-driest autumn on record. In addition, drier and warmer than average conditions are forecast through to October, which will increase soil moisture deficits and stress in woody vegetation. These conditions have resulted in above normal fire potential for parts of the Swan Coastal Plain, Avon Wheatbelt, Jarrah Forest, Warren, Esperance Plains and Mallee regions. In parts of the Nullarbor, higher than normal fuel loads will contribute to above normal potential.

Above normal fire potential is also expected for coastal areas of the Pilbara which experienced heavy rainfall in association with Severe Tropical Cyclone *Veronica* in March 2019. This rainfall promoted good growth of soft grass and spinifex, as well as delaying curing compared to the rest of the region. As conditions dry out, greater continuity and loading of grassy fuels will increase the fire potential in parts of the Pilbara affected by *Veronica*.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

The late and weak monsoon activity for the 2018/19 wet season has led to dry conditions, with the Top End experiencing the driest wet season since 1992. Similarly, large areas of central Australia have received below average rainfall over the last 12 months.

This has led to reduced growth of vegetation, but despite this, the Northern Territory is expecting normal bushfire potential to continue for the remainder of the fire season, due to a shift in the timing of fire management activities. In the Top End, both mitigation activities and bushfires occurred two months earlier than normal, with large, long duration, early season fires that would normally be pulled up by temporary watercourses taking place. With a late onset to the 2019/20 wet season expected, dry conditions are likely to be extended.

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