



MEDIA RELEASE
Embargoed, 12.10am
Thursday, 19 November 2009

ACTU

Early and extreme fire danger here to stay; firefighters call on Senators to pass CPRS

For the first time Australia has issued a "catastrophic" or "code red" fire danger warning with extreme temperatures forecast for South Australia, Victoria, ACT and New South Wales today.

"Those senators who don't believe in global warming need only step outside Parliament House today to experience the reality of 37 degree heat weeks before summer has even begun," said Peter Marshall, National Secretary of the United Firefighters Union.

Mr Marshall, who represents 13,500 professional firefighters, said politicians still threatening to block or weaken crucial climate change laws were putting lives and properties at risk.

"Firefighters are extremely concerned about the effect of climate change on their work. Even under a low warming scenario, Australia can expect a major increase in catastrophic fire events. We are the people on the front line who will have to deal with the consequences."

Mr Marshall said the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre recently warned of "above normal" fire frequency this summer, with Monash University scientists early this year confirming the link between drought and rising carbon emissions (see attached report).

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said: "We need to tackle climate change as quickly as possible if we are to have any hope of mitigating or reversing the extreme weather patterns that are becoming commonplace in Australia."

Ms Burrow said fires, storms and floods not only cost lives, but will also cost the nation dearly in social dislocation, as well as the economic cost of rebuilding, rising insurance premiums and compensation claims.

"Most Australians understand this and they want action," Mr Marshall said.

"It's time for the Australia's politicians to get real and pass these laws without any further watering down.

"Let's get on with the job of protecting the community and ensuring fire fighter safety."