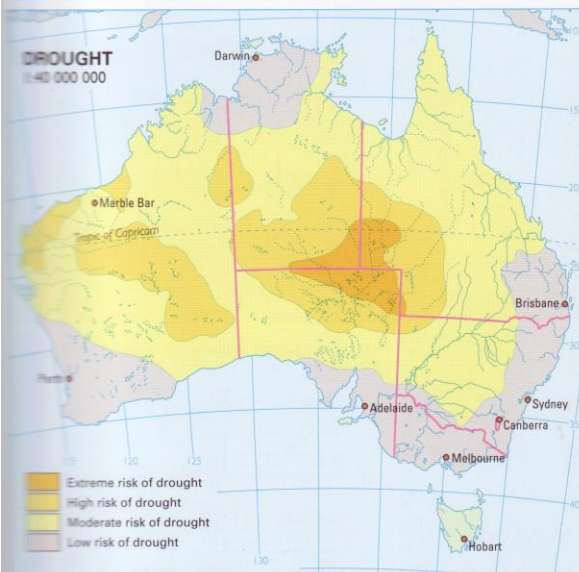


▲ A Department of Sustainability crew tries to control bushfires south of Jamieson, Victoria. In 2006 Victoria's firefighters faced searing temperatures and strong winds as they battled huge blazes sweeping across the state's north east and Gippsland regions.



▲ The Mayor of Goulburn, NSW, surveys the water levels at Pejar Dam in April 2006. For the past few years the people of Goulburn, one of Australia's most drought-affected cities, have been watching the water levels in their city dam drop lower and lower.



MAJOR DROUGHTS IN AUSTRALIA:

- 1901-3 Sheep and cattle numbers halved, wheat crop all but lost – Darling River nearly ran dry at Bourke, NSW.
- 1911-16 19 million sheep and 2 million cattle lost.
- 1916-20 Virtually the whole continent affected.
- 1933-45 30 million sheep lost.
- 1958-60 40% drop in wheat harvest and A\$300-500 million lost in farm income. Drought contributed to the 1967 Tasmanian bushfires.
- 1992-3 Total losses A\$3 billion over eastern Australia.
- 1997-5 Losses of over A\$5 billion, influenced by a strong El Niño weather pattern.
- 2002-7 South Australia, Victoria and the Murray-Darling Basin experience the driest period since 1900.

HEATWAVES

In Australia during the last century heatwaves caused more deaths than any other natural hazard. In 1939 a heatwave in southern Australia caused 438 deaths.

Marble Bar, WA, holds the world record for the longest heatwave. For 160 days from 31 October 1923 to 7 April 1924 temperatures averaged more than 38°C (100°F).

What is a heatwave?

- A prolonged period of excessive heat and humidity, during which temperatures average more than 38°C.

What causes heatwaves?

- Slow-moving warm fronts during the hottest months of the year.

What are the effects of heatwaves?

- Humans – people suffer from heat stress when the body absorbs more heat than it can dispel. Heat stroke (hyperthermia) can be fatal.
- Agriculture – animals suffer heat stress in a similar way to humans, and crops and vegetables are also at risk.
- Vegetation – plants and trees often perish under excessive heat. Heatwaves are also a major contributor to severe bushfires.
- Infrastructure – heatwaves can cause damage to roads, railways and bridges.
- Utilities – water and electricity consumption increases during heatwaves, often causing shortages. Computers can also overheat and break down.

NATURAL DISASTERS IN AUSTRALIA 1967-99

	Average annual cost (A\$ million)	Number of deaths	Number of injuries
Floods	314	99	1,019
Severe storms	284.4	58	942
Cyclones	266.2	154	958
Earthquakes	144.5	13	191
Bushfires	77.2	223	4,185
Landslides	1.2	18	1
Total	1,087.5	565	7,296