

## Economic and demographic impacts of climate change

Climate science has predicted that northern Australia will be wetter with more frequent and more intense storms, bringing more extreme rainfall activity and floods. The pattern and intensity of these are likely to well exceed past experiences. In contrast, a drying pattern is forecast for southern Australia associated with warming, and specifically more frequent and more extreme heatwaves. Bushfire threats are real and also likely to intensify. Fires kill and injure people of all ages and both sexes relatively indiscriminately. Their devastating effect upon the living environment and livelihoods carry profound impacts not only upon financial security, but also the local, regional and national psyche. These changes are already upon us.

Economic, social and mental health stresses are already apparent. Evidence of declines in wellbeing and ways of living was already emerging in regions not affected by the recent climate. Flood events and storms damage crops. The combination of protracted droughts, coupled with increased evaporation, and diminished stream/river flows mean that soil moisture and crop irrigation will decline, inevitably impairing agricultural yields. Historically, Australia's weather patterns have been characterised by extreme variability, yet climate change forecasts that local weather patterns are likely to become more variable, with more extreme events. The economies of Australian rural regions are therefore under threat.

Livelihoods of the agricultural sector drive the economies of rural communities. This workshop examines the health impacts arising from these socio-economic changes, and the impact upon communities over time. Policies to support rural communities through times of transition need to be based on an understanding of what the impacts are, and how they differ in contrasting communities. Many questions need answering. In addition to advancing basic and integrated research, the time now is for identifying and trialling adaptive strategies. Latest research in this area will be presented, followed by a panel discussion and opportunities for delegates to raise issues relevant to their region.

Panellists:

Liz Hanna NCEPH – ANU

Andrew Phillips – NRHA