

# Climate Risk Management

## A Guide for Local Government Public Health Professionals in South Australia

Climate risks result from extreme weather and incremental changes in our climate. As the frequency of extreme events increases, so does the magnitude of risk.

We can't control the weather, but if we factor climate risks into decision making, our regions, cities, towns and communities will be able to adapt and prosper as the climate changes.

### What is the purpose of this document?

This Climate Risk Management Guidance Note describes the potential impacts of climate risks including extreme weather and climate-related events.

Addressing climate risks requires a whole-of-council approach to embed climate considerations into council decision-making. This means the future climate is considered in all decisions of all functions of council, from business continuity and asset management to the provision of community services.

This document focuses on the types of decisions that local government public health professionals influence, and provides information on how to incorporate climate risk issues into public health planning and decision making processes.

### Why do public health professionals need to consider climate risk?

Extreme weather and climate events including heatwaves, bushfire, flood and drought, have the potential to impact physical and mental health and community wellbeing. As the frequency of extreme weather events increases and incremental changes in the weather are felt, the risks to health and wellbeing will increase.

Councils provide a range of public and environmental health services to promote community wellbeing. If these services are to remain effective, it is crucial that councils adapt to future weather conditions and community needs. This can be achieved through considering climate risks when planning and delivering public health actions.

**Weather** describes the conditions of the atmosphere including temperature, rainfall, humidity and wind over a short time period, and can be highly variable.

**Climate** is the longer term pattern of weather in a particular area and influences how we plan and design our communities. Climate change refers to significant changes in climate patterns over many years.

## How is the climate changing in South Australia?

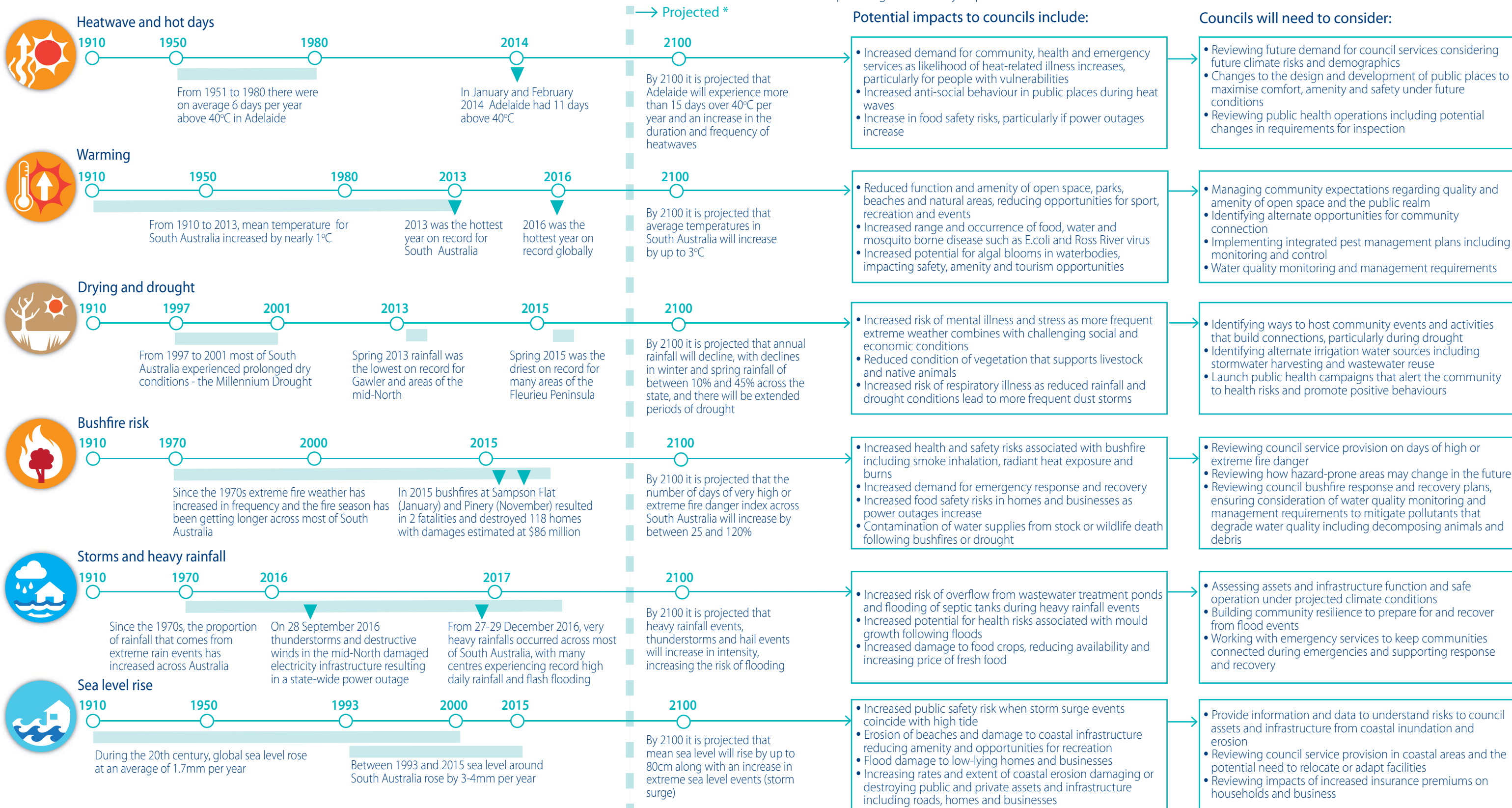
South Australia's climate varies greatly between seasons and from year to year. As the climate changes, this variability is increasing and temperatures and rainfall are varying more from the long term average. In recent years, heat and rainfall records have been broken and there has been an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. These events have had significant impacts and are projected to worsen in coming years.

The diagram below illustrates historic and projected changes in the weather and what this means for councils.

## What does this mean for councils?

As well as direct physical injury and increased risk of illness and disease, extreme weather and climate related events have the potential to impact community wellbeing in a variety of ways. Functioning community assets and infrastructure including parks, trails, sporting facilities and natural areas promote exercise and wellbeing. Roads, footpaths, stormwater assets and public realm facilitate community connectivity and influence liveability. Libraries and community and recreational facilities promote social and community interactions. Councils' ability to provide and maintain these services and facilities will be impacted by climate risk.

Some of the potential impacts to communities and councils and considerations to be taken into account through the planning and delivery of public health action are described below.



\* Source CSIRO 2015 Climate Change in Australia Cluster Reports

## What are council's responsibilities for public health and climate risk management?

Councils provide a range of public and environmental health services which contribute to community wellbeing. As the public health authority for their area, councils have responsibilities under the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* to take action to preserve, protect and promote public health within their area. The Act states that councils must:

<b>Councils must</b>	Prepare a regional public health plan consistent with the State Public Health Plan that identifies existing and potential public health risks (Section 51)	<b>This means</b>	Considering future risks to public health including climate risk and identifying strategies to prepare for those risks to be consistent with the priority area of the South Australian Public Health Plan - Preparing for Climate Change.
<b>Councils must</b>	Provide information to communities about risks to public health and provide or support activities to protect or promote public health (Section 37)	<b>This means</b>	Councils need to understand climate risks to public health to inform their communities and develop and deliver strategies and actions that will build community resilience.

“ **Preparing for climate change is a priority of the South Australian Public Health Plan.** ”

As a service provider and asset manager, councils have responsibilities to consider risks and take appropriate risk mitigation action. Council responsibilities are identified in the *Local Government Act 1999*. The Act states that councils must:

<b>Councils must</b>	Make informed decisions (Section 6)	<b>This means</b>	Taking account of readily available information (such as climate risk data and climate projections) when making decisions.
<b>Councils must</b>	Take measures to protect their area from natural hazards (Section 7)	<b>This means</b>	Recognising climate risks to councils, communities and businesses and providing support to prepare, respond and recover.
<b>Councils must</b>	Give due weight in all plans, policies and activities to state and national objectives and strategies (Section 8)	<b>This means</b>	Considering how policies and actions align with and contribute to state and national strategies including climate change and public health strategies.

✓ **Framework for a National Strategy on Climate, Health and Wellbeing for Australia (March, 2017)**  
The National Strategy identifies action to protect population health from climate risks including policies to anticipate climate risk and reduce impacts on health and wellbeing.

✓ **South Australia's Climate Change Strategy**  
The Strategy identifies that successful adaptation requires integrating climate risks into risk management and highlights the need to build resilience and raise awareness. Priority adaptation options to increase community wellbeing are included in many of the Regional Climate Change Adaptation Plans.

Councils are also responsible for protecting individuals and communities from local nuisance including the adverse effects of smoke or dust. Increased frequency of bushfire and reduced rainfall may increase the likelihood of smoke and dust issues. Council responsibilities are identified in the *Local Nuisance and Litter Control Act 2016*. The Act states that councils must:

<b>Councils must</b>	Take action to manage local nuisance (Section 7)	<b>This means</b>	Councils may issue Nuisance Abatement Notices or apply fines to persons responsible for creating a local nuisance.
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**Liability Considerations**  
Legal liability may arise from a council's significant failure to fulfil their function or responsibilities described in the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011*, the *Local Government Act 1999* or the *Local Nuisance and Litter Control Act 2016*. A council may be liable if they are found to have acted negligently, for example by failing to reflect known risks (such as flood risk) in their development plan or failed to exercise its powers and functions to appropriately manage flood risk. A council may also be liable if they provide inaccurate information relating to flood risk, or if they understate or overstate those risks.  
Liability may also arise from councils' responsibilities as a landowner if they fail to manage their land in accordance with common law principles that apply to all landowners including nuisance and negligence.

“ **Climate risk management means considering the current and future climate in all decision making.** ”

## What do we need to do as council public health professionals?

Council plans and strategies guide council action and are the starting point for taking action against climate risk. Along with core public health responsibilities such as community health services, food safety, noise and air emissions and environmental protection, public health matters intersect numerous council functions and are a key consideration in council policies including emergency management, open space and recreation, stormwater management, age-friendly neighbourhoods and animal management. Public health (or public health related) council plans, strategies and services are shown in the diagram below, along with suggested actions on how to incorporate climate risk elements into existing processes:



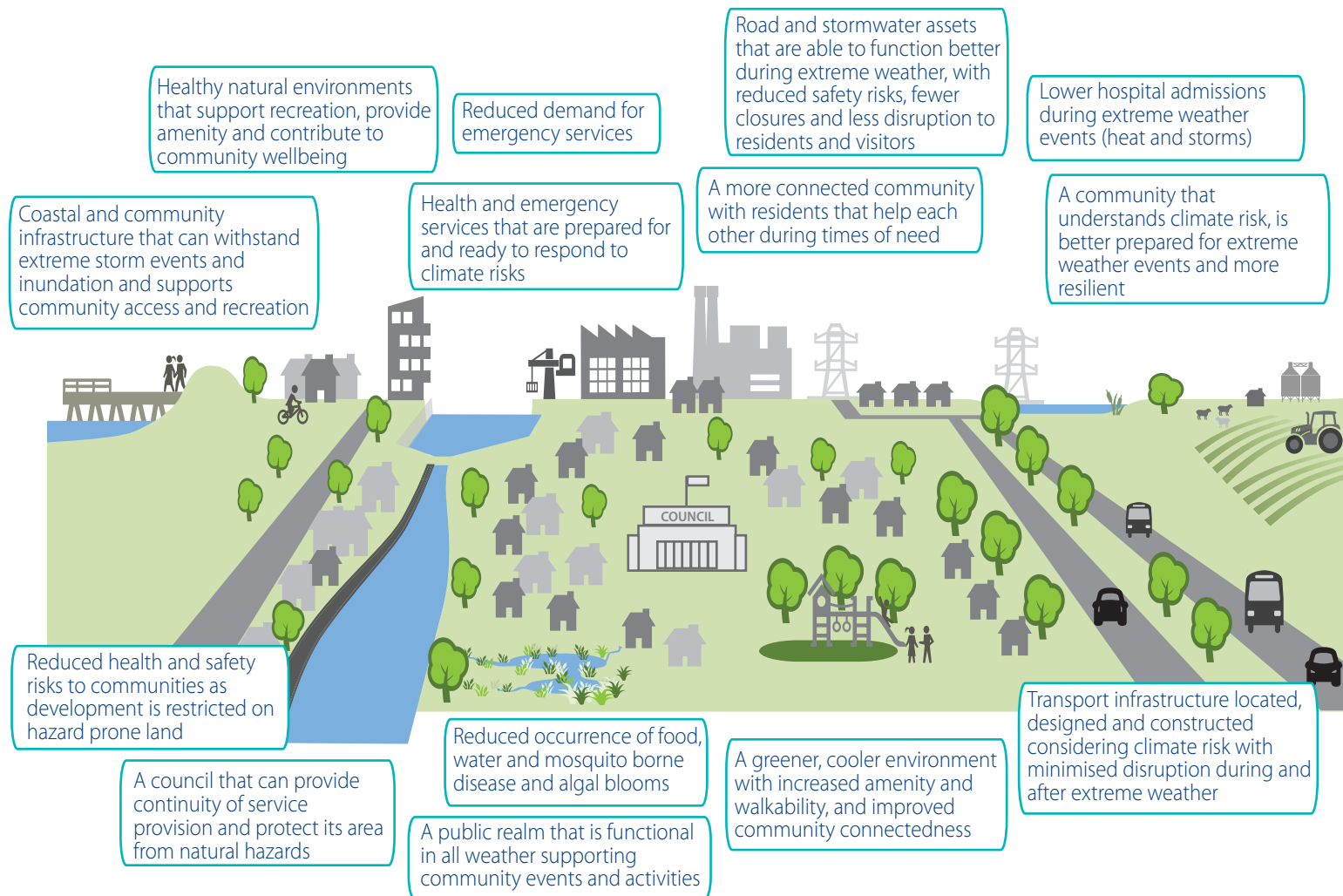
Communities including residents, business and industry rely on their councils for information about their local area. They expect councils to inform them about things that are changing and how the council is planning and budgeting for the future. Councils must be prepared to provide accurate information about the climate risks in their area so when asked they can provide a current and informed response.



## What are the benefits of managing climate risks?

Managing climate risks means changing the way that a council provides its functions and services, so that they are delivered in a way that is more appropriate for the future climate. By taking a risk based approach, and through early action, your council has the opportunity to meet the challenges associated with extreme weather events and incremental change to the climate. Considering climate risk in public health planning processes allows councils to demonstrate their commitment to building resilient healthy communities, to invest in facilities and services that will meet future public health needs.

The diagram below outlines some of the ways councils and their communities will benefit from building resilience into the delivery of their public health planning, functions and services.



## Where can I get more information?

The LGA website contains a variety of information and references, including links to useful websites.

For information on climate risks and projected climate changes refer to [www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au](http://www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au)

For downscaled climate projections for South Australia, go to SA Climate Ready.

This document has been prepared for the Local Government Association of South Australia as part of the climate risk management series of guidance notes and documents. This document has been prepared with funding support from the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.

The series includes guides for:

- > Local government planners
- > Local government engineers and asset managers
- > Local government economic development activities
- > Local government financial managers