

Planning for an Uncertain Future: the effects of weather events on business

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Australia's climate seemed to flip into overdrive this summer, with historical weather records being broken. This has many people asking whether these events are related to a change in climate? And if so, can we then expect a greater frequency of wild weather in the future? The consequences of these events have been severe. Floods and cyclones damaged infrastructure, disrupted gas supplies and affected national logistics grids such as rail and road networks. More recently, Sydney's sweltering seven-day heat wave fuelled energy demands, affecting the reliability of electricity suppliers and causing power outages across the city.

These events have cost Australian business billions in property damage and lost productivity.

Given the economic cost, we all should be asking ourselves how long-term weather patterns and erratic weather are likely to affect our businesses. How can we plan to deal with the challenges of changing conditions, and capitalise on opportunities (such as customer preference for 'green' products)? Can we cope with future requirements to increase energy efficiency and use fewer resources? What about the uncertainty that a changing climate may affect the risks associated with investment (and the flow on effects to insurance premiums)? While planners, architects and engineers are clearly focused on responding to the social and infrastructure impacts of floods and cyclones, are sufficient resources being made available to address the environmental impacts?

As we recognise (again...) the importance of planning for disaster, with respect to our families, homes and prized possessions, we should also recognise the value of planning to protect the environment. Environmental protection is now a pre-requisite for a profitable business. Urban developers need to plan to manage 'unplanned for' site runoff, miners need to plan to manage flooded pits, rail operators need to plan to manage washed-out crossings, and port operators need to plan to manage navigation channels filled by cyclone-borne sedimentation.

Pro-active, disaster-focused, environmental planning is the logical 'next step' for businesses seeking resilience and often defines the market leader.

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