

NRM GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Adaptation	<p>The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. Adaptation can be autonomous or planned.</p> <p><i>Incremental adaptation</i></p> <p>Adaptation actions where the central aim is to maintain the essence and integrity of a system or process at a given scale.</p> <p><i>Transformational adaptation</i></p> <p>Adaptation that changes the fundamental attributes of a system in response to climate and its effects.</p>
Aerosol	A suspension of very small solid or liquid particles in the air, residing in the atmosphere for at least several hours.
Aragonite saturation state	The saturation state of seawater with respect to aragonite (Ω) is the product of the concentrations of dissolved calcium and carbonate ions in seawater divided by their product at equilibrium: $([\text{Ca}^{2+}] \times [\text{CO}_3^{2-}]) / [\text{CaCO}_3] = \Omega$
Atmosphere	The gaseous envelope surrounding the Earth. The dry atmosphere consists almost entirely of nitrogen and oxygen, together with a number of trace gases (e.g. argon, helium) and greenhouse gases (e.g. carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide). The atmosphere also contains aerosols and clouds.
Carbon dioxide	A naturally occurring gas, also a by-product of burning fossil fuels from fossil carbon deposits, such as oil, gas and coal, of burning biomass, of land use changes and of industrial processes (e.g. cement production). It is the principle anthropogenic greenhouse gas that affects the Earth's radiative balance.
Climate	The average weather experienced at a site or region over a period of many years, ranging from months to many thousands of years. The relevant measured quantities are most often surface variables such as temperature, rainfall and wind.
Climate change	A change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g. by statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period of time, typically decades or longer.
Climate feedback	An interaction in which a perturbation in one climate quantity causes a change in a second, and that change ultimately leads to an additional (positive or negative) change in the first.
Climate projection	A climate projection is the simulated response of the climate system to a scenario of future emission or concentration of greenhouse gases and aerosols, generally derived using climate models. Climate projections are distinguished from climate predictions by their dependence on the emission/concentration/radiative forcing scenario used, which in turn is based on assumptions concerning, for example, future socioeconomic and technological developments that may or may not be realised.
Climate scenario	A plausible and often simplified representation of the future climate, based on an internally consistent set of climatological relationships that has been constructed for explicit use in investigating the potential consequences of anthropogenic climate change, often serving as input to impact models.
Climate sensitivity	The effective climate sensitivity (units; °C) is an estimate of the global mean surface temperature response to doubled carbon dioxide concentration that is evaluated from model output or observations for evolving non-equilibrium conditions.
Climate variability	Climate variability refers to variations in the mean state and other statistics (such as standard deviations, the occurrence of extremes, etc.) of the climate on all spatial and temporal scales beyond that of individual weather events. Variability may be due to natural internal processes within the climate system (internal variability), or to variations in natural or anthropogenic external forcing (external variability).
Cloud condensation nuclei	Airborne particles that serve as an initial site for the condensation of liquid water, which can lead to the formation of cloud droplets. A subset of aerosols that are of a particular size.



CMIP3 and CMIP5	Phases three and five of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP3 and CMIP5), which coordinated and archived climate model simulations based on shared model inputs by modelling groups from around the world. The CMIP3 multi-model dataset includes projections using SRES emission scenarios. The CMIP5 dataset includes projections using the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs).
Confidence	The validity of a finding based on the type, amount, quality, and consistency of evidence (e.g. mechanistic understanding, theory, data, models, expert judgment) and on the degree of agreement
Decadal variability	Fluctuations, or ups-and-downs of a climate feature or variable at the scale of approximately a decade (typically taken as longer than a few years such as ENSO, but shorter than the 20–30 years of the IPO)
Detection and attribution	Detection of change is defined as the process of demonstrating that climate or a system affected by climate has changed in some defined statistical sense, without providing a reason for that change. An identified change is detected in observations if its likelihood of occurrence by chance due to internal variability alone is determined to be small, for example, less than 10 per cent. Attribution is defined as the process of evaluating the relative contributions of multiple causal factors to a change or event with an assignment of statistical confidence.
Downscaling	Downscaling is a method that derives local to regional-scale information from larger-scale models or data analyses. Different methods exist: e.g. dynamical, statistical and empirical downscaling.
El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)	A fluctuation in global scale tropical and subtropical surface pressure, wind, sea surface temperature, and rainfall, and an exchange of air between the south-east Pacific subtropical high and the Indonesian equatorial low. Often measured by the surface pressure anomaly difference between Tahiti and Darwin or the sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific. There are three phases: neutral, El Niño and La Niña. During an El Niño event the prevailing trade winds weaken, reducing upwelling and altering ocean currents such that the eastern tropical surface temperatures warm, further weakening the trade winds. The opposite occurs during a La Niña event.
Emissions scenario	A plausible representation of the future development of emissions of substances that are potentially radiatively active (e.g. greenhouse gases, aerosols) based on a coherent and internally consistent set of assumptions about driving forces (such as demographic and socioeconomic development, technological change) and their key relationships.
Extreme weather	An extreme weather event is an event that is rare at a particular place and time of year. Definitions of rare vary, but an extreme weather event would normally be as rare as or rarer than the 10th or 90th percentile of a probability density function estimated from observations.
Fire weather	Weather conditions conducive to triggering and sustaining wild fires, usually based on a set of indicators and combinations of indicators including temperature, soil moisture, humidity, and wind. Fire weather does not include the presence or absence of fuel load.
Global Climate Model or General Circulation Model (GCM)	A numerical representation of the climate system that is based on the physical, chemical and biological properties of its components, their interactions and feedback processes. The climate system can be represented by models of varying complexity and differ in such aspects as the spatial resolution (size of grid-cells), the extent to which physical, chemical, or biological processes are explicitly represented, or the level at which empirical parameterisations are involved.
Greenhouse gas	Greenhouse gases are those gaseous constituents of the atmosphere, both natural and anthropogenic, that absorb and emit radiation at specific wavelengths within the spectrum of terrestrial radiation emitted by the Earth's surface, the atmosphere itself, and by clouds. Water vapour (H ₂ O), carbon dioxide (CO ₂), nitrous oxide (N ₂ O), methane (CH ₄) and ozone (O ₃) are the primary greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere.
Hadley cell/circulation	A direct, thermally driven circulation in the atmosphere consisting of poleward flow in the upper troposphere, descending air into the subtropical high-pressure cells, return flow as part of the trade winds near the surface, and with rising air near the equator in the so-called Inter-Tropical Convergence zone.

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Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)	Large-scale mode of interannual variability of sea surface temperature in the Indian Ocean. This pattern manifests through a zonal gradient of tropical sea surface temperature, which in its positive phase in September to November shows cooling off Sumatra and warming off Somalia in the west, combined with anomalous easterlies along the equator.
Inter-decadal Pacific oscillation	A fluctuation in the sea surface temperature (SST) and mean sea level pressure (MSLP) of both the north and south Pacific Ocean with a cycle of 15–30 years. Unlike ENSO, the IPO may not be a single physical ‘mode’ of variability, but be the result of a few processes with different origins. The IPO interacts with the ENSO to affect the climate variability over Australia. A related phenomena, the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO), is also an oscillation of SST that primarily affects the northern Pacific
Jet stream	A narrow and fast-moving westerly air current that circles the globe near the top of the troposphere. The jet streams are related to the global Hadley circulation. In the southern hemisphere the two main jet streams are the polar jet that circles Antarctica at around 60 °S and 7–12 km above sea level, and the subtropical jet that passes through the mid-latitudes at around 30 °S and 10–16 km above sea level.
Madden Julian Oscillation (MJO)	The largest single component of tropical atmospheric intra-seasonal variability (periods from 30 to 90 days). The MJO propagates eastwards at around 5 m s ⁻¹ in the form of a large-scale coupling between atmospheric circulation and deep convection. As it progresses, it is associated with large regions of both enhanced and suppressed rainfall, mainly over the Indian and western Pacific Oceans.
Monsoon	A monsoon is a tropical and subtropical seasonal reversal in both the surface winds and associated rainfall, caused by differential heating between a continental-scale land mass and the adjacent ocean. Monsoon rains occur mainly over land in summer.
Percentile	A percentile is a value on a scale of one hundred that indicates the percentage of the data set values that is equal to, or below it. The percentile is often used to estimate the extremes of a distribution. For example, the 90th (or 10th) percentile may be used to refer to the threshold for the upper (or lower) extremes.
Radiative forcing	Radiative forcing is the change in the net, downward minus upward, radiative flux (expressed in W m ⁻²) at the tropopause or top of atmosphere due to a change in an external driver of climate change, such as a change in the concentration of carbon dioxide or the output of the Sun.
Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs)	Scenarios that include time series of emissions and concentrations of the full suite of greenhouse gases and aerosols and chemically active gases, as well as land use/ cover. The word representative signifies that each RCP provides only one of many possible scenarios that would lead to the specific radiative forcing characteristics.
Return period	An estimate of the average time interval between occurrences of an event (e.g. flood or extreme rainfall) of a defined size or intensity.
Risk	The potential for consequences where something of value is at stake and where the outcome is uncertain. Risk is often represented as a probability of occurrence of hazardous events or trends multiplied by the consequences if these events occur.
Risk assessment	The qualitative and/or quantitative scientific estimation of risks.
Risk management	The plans, actions, or policies implemented to reduce the likelihood and/or consequences of risks or to respond to consequences.
Subtropical ridge (STR)	The subtropical ridge runs across a belt of high pressure that encircles the globe in the middle latitudes. It is part of the global circulation of the atmosphere. The position of the subtropical ridge plays an important part in the way the weather in Australia varies from season to season.
Southern Annular Mode (SAM)	The leading mode of variability of Southern Hemisphere geopotential height, which is associated with shifts in the latitude of the mid-latitude jet.



SAM index	The SAM Index, otherwise known as the Antarctic Oscillation Index (AOI) is a measure of the strength of SAM. The index is based on mean sea level pressure (MSLP) around the whole hemisphere at 40 °S compared to 65 °S. A positive index means a positive or high phase of the SAM, while a negative index means a negative or low SAM. This index shows a relationship to rainfall variability in some parts of Australia in some seasons.
SRES scenarios	SRES scenarios are emissions scenarios developed by Nakićenović and Swart (2000) and used, among others, as a basis for some of the climate projections shown in Chapters 9 to 11 of IPCC (2001) and Chapters 10 and 11 of IPCC (2007).
Uncertainty	A state of incomplete knowledge that can result from a lack of information or from disagreement about what is known or even knowable. It may have many types of sources, from imprecision in the data to ambiguously defined concepts or terminology, or uncertain projections of human behaviour. Uncertainty can therefore be represented by quantitative measures (e.g. a probability density function) or by qualitative statements (e.g. reflecting the judgment of a team of experts).
Walker circulation	An east-west circulation of the atmosphere above the tropical Pacific, with air rising above warmer ocean regions (normally in the west), and descending over the cooler ocean areas (normally in the east). Its strength fluctuates with that of the Southern Oscillation.

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MACDONNELL RANGES, NORTHERN TERRITORY, ISTOCK

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