

CLIMATE PROFILE

UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

Introduction

The Upper Hunter Shire Council Local Government Area (LGA) covers an area of 10,022 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 13,500 people. A predominantly rural area, the Upper Hunter LGA is synonymous with horse studs, grazing, dairy farming and general farming. It also has a large proportion of National Parks and nature reserves.

The Upper Hunter Shire and broader region is well known for its historic climate variability and extremes. Major floods, droughts and bushfire events in recent years have had an impact on the Upper Hunter LGA. Events of this nature have significantly raised community awareness of climate variability and the potential impacts of climate change.

This climate profile aims to further increase understanding in these areas. The information included in this profile has been sourced from research completed by the University of Newcastle and Macquarie University on behalf of the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy (HCCREMS).

The profile provides an overview of the key results that have been produced by this research and the process by which they were generated. In particular, it provides the results of analysis of both historical climate variability and projected climate change as it relates specifically to the Upper Hunter Shire.



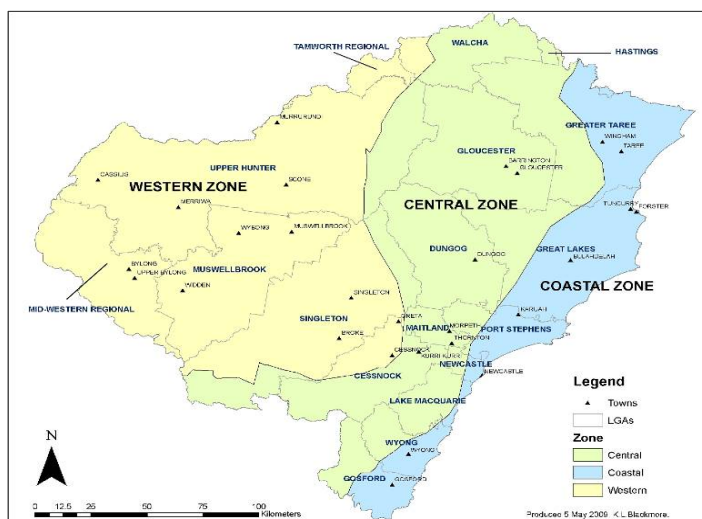
Climate Zones

A key element of the research was the identification of three climate zones for the Hunter, Central and Lower North Coast region. This was achieved through a process known as climate zonation; a statistical process which divides a region into distinct sub-regions or zones where climatic similarity is maximised within zones and minimised between zones.

Twelve synoptic patterns that “drive” climate variability in the region were also identified and a comprehensive review of climate history and an analysis of this variability was completed. This confirmed a relationship between historic climate patterns and these synoptic ‘weather drivers’ in each climate zone.

The CSIRO Global Climate Model (Mk3.5) was then used to identify projected changes in the 12 synoptic types for time periods of 2020-2040, 2040-2060 and 2060-2080. Projections were based on the A2F1 emissions scenario. Because of the strong historical relationship that exists between these synoptic types and weather patterns in the region, these changes could then be used to project changes in climate for each of the three climate zones. Full details of the methodology used are available at www.hccrems.com.au.

The climate zones that have been identified for the region are shown below. The results generated for both the central and western zones underpin this climate profile for the Upper Hunter Shire.



Climate zones within the Region



Upper Hunter Shire Council LGA

The Upper Hunter Shire spans both the western and central climate zones. Projected changes in climate for both of these zones are therefore relevant to the area. Because the LGA lies predominantly within the western climate zone, historic and projected climate changes for the Shire as a whole are most accurately represented by the changes within this zone.

In this regard, it is also important to note that while each climate zone is represented by a defined boundary, climate is actually a gradual and continuous process between the two. For the purposes of this climate profile, information is provided for each of the zones.



Climate zones - Upper Hunter Shire Council LGA

Results

The following results provide both an historical analysis and future projections for a range of climate variables in the western and central climate zones. These include rainfall, temperature (minimum, maximum and average annual), humidity, pan evaporation, water balance, wind and extreme events.

Historic trends are analysed for significance using regression analysis. An asterisk (*) is used to identify trends that are found to be statistically significant. The length of historic data used to analyse trends varies according to data available for each variable.

Projections are provided for the period 2020-2040, 2040-2060 and 2060-2080. Where minimal change between these periods is identified, projections are provided for the entire 2020-2080 period. Projected values are relative to the average historic recorded values for each climate parameter. The length of the relative historic period is determined by the availability and quality of historic data.

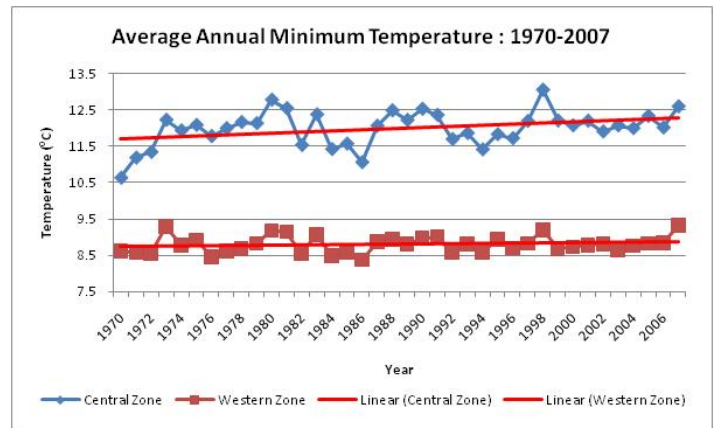
MINIMUM TEMPERATURE

Historical analysis: minimum temperature

Historically, the Upper Hunter Shire has experienced a statistically significant annual increase in average minimum temperatures of $\sim 0.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ in the central zone however little change is evident in the western zone ($\sim 0.1^{\circ}\text{C}$). More detailed seasonal and zonal changes are summarised below.

Minimum temperature (1970-2007)				
Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	Warmer: $\sim 0.4^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Warmer: $\sim 0.2^{\circ}\text{C}^*$ increase	Cooler: $\sim 0.1^{\circ}\text{C}^*$ decrease	Warmer: $\sim 0.2^{\circ}\text{C}^*$ increase
Central	Warmer: $\sim 0.3^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Warmer: $\sim 0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Warmer: $\sim 0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Warmer: $\sim 0.9^{\circ}\text{C}^*$ increase

* Statistically significant



Trend in average minimum temperature

Projected changes: minimum temperature

Generally, it is projected that the Upper Hunter Shire is likely to experience warmer average minimum temperatures during autumn and winter, with summer minimums expected to decrease along with a slight decrease during spring. Projected increases during autumn and winter are greater than the projected decreases for summer and spring and thus an overall increase in annual average minimum temperatures is projected.

Minimum temperature (2020-2080)				
<i>Projected changes are relative to the 1970-2007 period</i>				
Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	Warmer: $\sim 4.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Warmer: $\sim 4.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Cooler: $\sim 0.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ decrease	Cooler: $\sim 1.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ decrease
Central	Cooler: $\sim 0.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ decrease	Warmer: $\sim 1.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Warmer: $\sim 1.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ increase	Cooler: $\sim 0.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ decrease

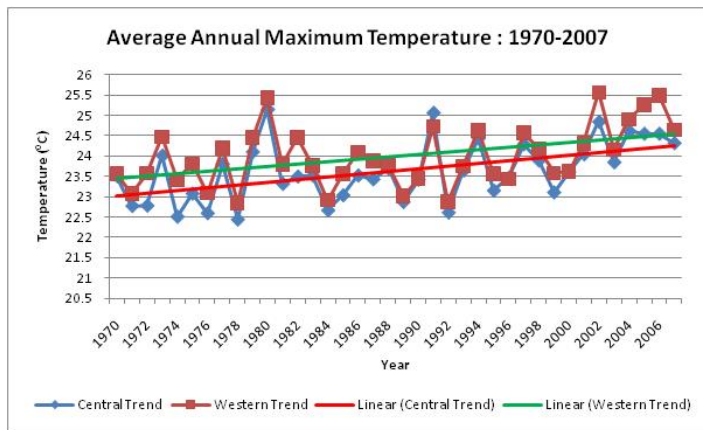
MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE

Historical analysis: maximum temperature

Historically, the Upper Hunter Shire has experienced a statistically significant annual increase in average maximum temperatures of ~1.1°C in the western zone and ~1.2°C in the central zone. More detailed seasonal and zonal changes are summarised below.

Maximum temperature (1970-2007)				
Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	Warmer: ~1.6°C* increase	Warmer: ~0.7°C increase	Warmer: ~0.8°C increase	Warmer: ~1.4°C* increase
Central	Warmer: ~1.6°C increase	Warmer: ~0.8°C increase	Warmer: ~1.0°C* increase	Warmer: ~1.7°C* increase

* Statistically significant



Trend in annual average maximum temperature

Projected changes: maximum temperature

Generally, it is projected that average maximum temperatures in the Upper Hunter Shire will continue to increase during autumn and winter. Similar or slightly cooler average maximum temperatures are projected to occur during summer and spring. More detailed zonal and seasonal projections are summarised below.

Maximum temperature (2020-2080)				
<i>Projected changes are relative to the 1970-2007 period</i>				
Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	Cooler: ~0.2°C decrease	Warmer: ~2.0°C increase	Warmer: ~1.8°C increase	Cooler: ~1.3°C decrease
Central	No significant change	Warmer: ~1.8°C increase	Warmer: ~1.6°C increase	Cooler: ~1.3°C decrease

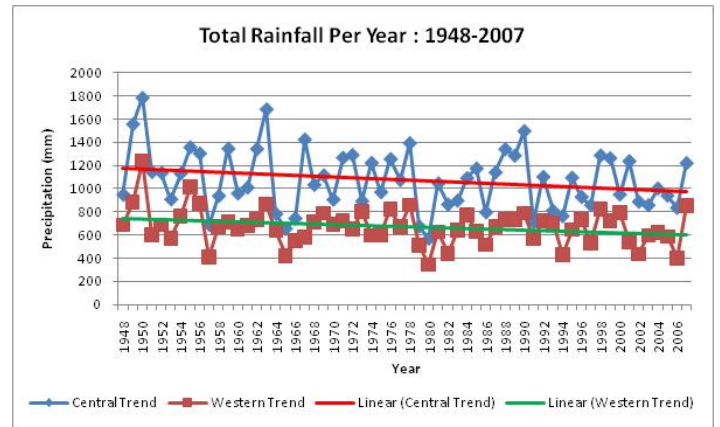
RAINFALL

Historical analysis: rainfall

Historically, the Upper Hunter Shire has experienced a statistically significant decrease in annual rainfall of ~142mm (in the western zone only) over the period from 1948-2007. More detailed seasonal and zonal changes are summarised below.

Rainfall (1948-2007)				
Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	Drier: ~32mm* decrease	Drier: ~5mm decrease	Drier: ~10mm decrease	Wetter: ~2mm increase
Central	Drier: ~43mm* decrease	Wetter: ~9mm increase	Drier: ~43mm* decrease	Wetter: ~10mm increase

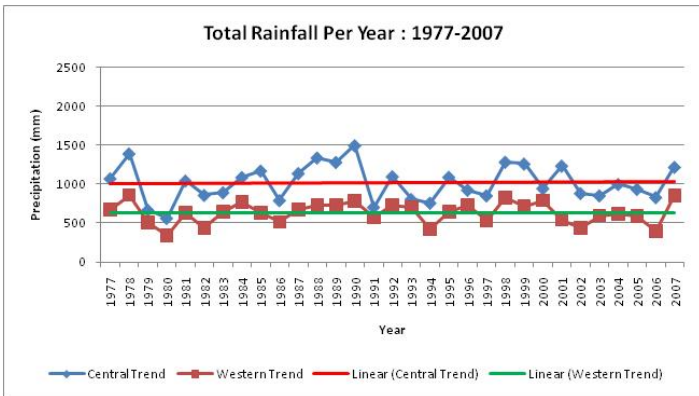
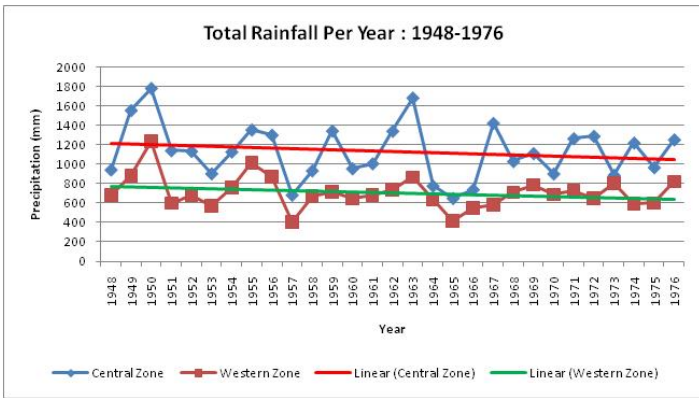
* Statistically significant



Historic climate records are marked by both annual and interdecadal variability. Interdecadal variability within the Australasian and South West Pacific regions is associated with the Interdecadal Pacific Oscillation (IPO).

During the time period from 1948 to 2007 there have been two phases of this oscillation: IPO -ve phase (La Nina-like) from 1948 to 1976; and, IPO +ve phase (El Nino-like) from 1977 to 2007. Rainfall patterns within the region vary according to the IPO.

Although an overall decrease is evident from 1948-2007, a stepwise change occurs between IPO periods and there occurred no change in rainfall during the drier 1977-2007 period. The following graphs show annual rainfall patterns for the central and western zones during each IPO period.



Trend in annual rainfall for IPO periods

Projected changes: rainfall

Average annual rainfall patterns for the Upper Hunter Shire are projected to stay within the boundaries of existing known natural variability. However, it is projected that rainfall patterns during 2020-2080 will return to the generally wetter, more variable conditions experienced during the 1948-1977 period, which are associated with the negative 'La Nina'-like phase of the Interdecadal Pacific Oscillation. Projected seasonal and zonal changes in rainfall are summarised in the following table.

Rainfall (2020 – 2080)				
Projected changes are relative to the 1948-1977 period (ie La Nina –ve phase)				
Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	No significant change	Sig. wetter: ~33% increase	No significant change	No significant change
Central	No significant change	No significant change	Drier: ~12% decrease	Wetter: ~11% increase

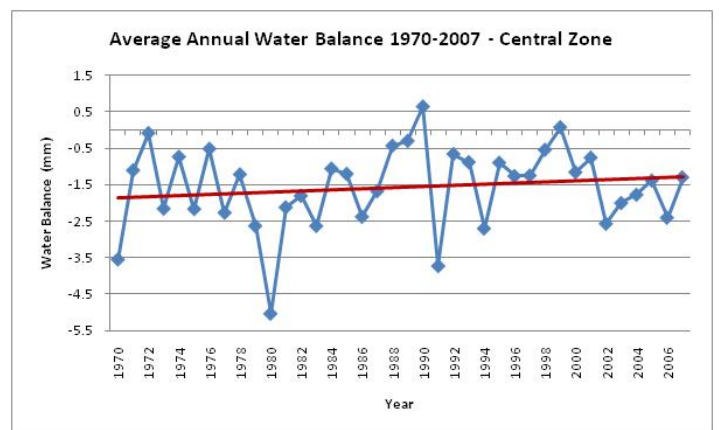
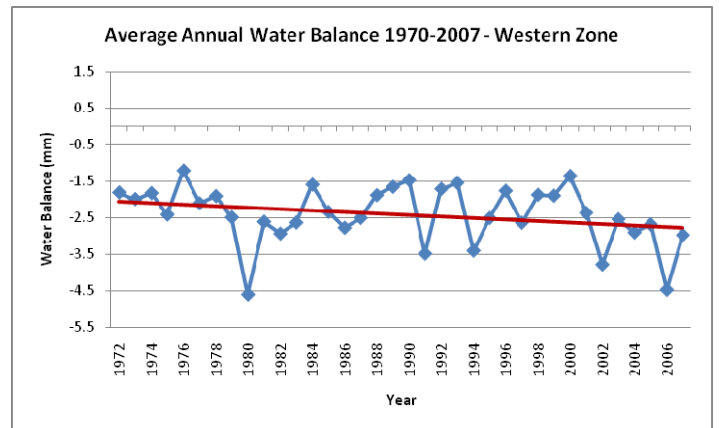
WATER BALANCE

Historical analysis: water balance

Water balance refers to the excess of precipitation over evaporation. It is affected by both the level of precipitation and prevailing temperature conditions.

Historically, the Upper Hunter Shire has experienced a total decrease in average annual water balance of 0.7mm per day in the western zone between 1973-2007 and an increase of 0.3mm per day in the central zone. More detailed seasonal changes are summarised below.

Water balance (1970-2007)				
Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	Drier: ~1.4mm/d decrease	Drier: ~0.9mm/d decrease	Wetter: ~0.5mm/d increase	Drier: ~0.8mm/d decrease
Central	Wetter: ~0.6mm/d increase	Wetter: ~0.3mm/d increase	Wetter: ~1.1mm/d increase	Wetter: ~0.9mm/d increase



Western and central zone trend in annual water balance

Projected changes: water balance

Seasonal shifts in the western and central zones balance out to produce no projected overall annual change. Projected seasonal shifts in water balance are summarised below.

Water Balance (2020-2080)

Changes are reported in average mm per day relative to 1970-2007.

Season	Decrease	Increase
Summer		~1.3 mm Central Zone ~0.5 mm Western Zone
Autumn	~1.9 mm Central Zone ~0.3 mm Western Zone	
Winter	~0.5 mm Central Zone	~0.2 mm Western Zone
Spring		~1.4 mm Western Zone ~1.3 mm Central Zone

WIND SPEED

Historical analysis: wind speed

Historically, the Upper Hunter Shire has experienced a decrease in annual average wind speed in the western zone of ~1.2km/hr and a statistically significant decrease in annual average wind speed of ~6.5km/hr in the central zone. More detailed seasonal and zonal changes are summarised below.

Wind speed (1970-2007)

Zone	Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Western	Calmer: ~1.0km/hr decrease	Calmer: ~1.7km/ hr* in- crease	Calmer: ~1.5km/ hr de- crease	Calmer: ~0.5km/hr decrease
Central	Calmer: ~5.2km/ hr* de- crease	Calmer: ~5.8km/ hr* de- crease	Calmer: ~7.8km/ hr* de- crease	Calmer: ~7.2km/hr* decrease

* Statistically significant

Projected changes: wind speed

Seasonal shifts in the western and central zones balance out to produce no projected change on an annual basis. Projected seasonal shifts in water balance during the period 2020-2080 are summarised below.

Wind Speed (2020-2080)

Changes are reported in average km/hr relative to 1970-2007.

Season	Decrease	Increase
Summer	~0.1km/hr Central Zone	
Autumn		~1.0km/hr Western Zone ~1.2km/hr Central Zone
Winter	~0.2km/hr Central Zone	~0.3km/hr Western Zone
Spring	~1.3km/hr Western Zone ~0.8km/hr Central Zone	

EXTREME EVENTS

Projected changes: extreme events

Extreme weather events such as major storms, flooding rains or extreme temperature days, are a key concern for the community. Their occurrence is a significant source of risk, whether in terms of personal injury, loss of life, economic damage, social disruption or environmental damage. Accordingly, extreme events in the 95th percentile (that is, events in the top 5%) at individual Bureau of Meteorology recording stations have been analysed to project likely changes in their future occurrence.

This analysis has found that the projected frequency of weather patterns responsible for extreme storm events along the NSW coast are likely to increase, suggesting a higher probability of east coast low formation during autumn/winter.

There are also projected changes in the frequency of occurrence of synoptic patterns associated with high rainfall events. An increase in the frequency of occurrence of high rainfall events in summer and autumn are projected in the central and western climate zones. A decrease in extreme rainfall events during winter is projected with no changes anticipated for spring.

Projected increases in the synoptic pattern linked to high maximum temperatures during summer and autumn is likely to result in an increased frequency of extreme heat days in both the central and western zones during the period from 2020-2080. This has a variety of implications including human health and bush fire risk.

A summary of projected changes in the nature and occurrence of extreme events relevant to the Upper Hunter Shire for the period 2020 – 2080 are shown below.

Extreme Event	Projected Change
Extreme storms	Increased frequency during autumn & winter storms
High rainfall events	Increased frequency during summer and autumn. A decrease is projected during winter with no changes anticipated for spring
Extreme Heat Days	Increased frequency during summer and autumn
Frost	No change in winter frost events, however increases in autumn and spring are projected.

How can the results be used?

The climate change projections included in this LGA Climate Profile provide the next order of detail and insight over previous CSIRO (2007) projections available for the Hunter, Central and Lower North Coast region. These projections now make it possible for the Upper Hunter Shire Council, government agencies, industry and the community to more accurately assess and prepare for the potential risks posed by climate change in the Upper Hunter Local Government Area.

More information

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References & Further Reading

- ◆ Blackmore, K.L. & Goodwin, I.D (2008). Report 2: Climate Variability of the Hunter, Lower North Coast and Central Coast Region of NSW. A report prepared for the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, NSW.
- ◆ Blackmore, K.L. & Goodwin, I.D (2009). Report 3: Climatic Change Impact for the Hunter, Lower North Coast and Central Coast Region of NSW. A report prepared for the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, NSW.
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- ◆ Verdon, D & Goodwin, I.D. (2007). Progress Report 1 to HCCREMS on Stage 1 of the Regional Climate Change Study. A report prepared for the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy, NSW.

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