

New Zealand records its warmest ever winter with average temperature of 9.8C

The figure for the three months to September was 1.3C above the long-term average and higher than the previous record set in 2020



Snowfall in New Zealand was well below average in 2021, meteorologists said. Photograph: Lee Brown/University of Leeds/PA

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New Zealand has recorded its warmest ever winter, and scientists say that climate change is driving temperatures ever higher.

For the three months through to the end of August 2021, the average temperature was 9.8C, according to New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research.

The figure was 1.3C above the long-term average and 0.2C higher than the previous record posted in 2020. Scientists have been keeping records since 1909, but most of the warmest winters have been recent.

Nava Fedaeff, a meteorologist at the institute, said that on top of a background of global warming, this year there were more warm winds than usual from the north and warmer sea temperatures.



Ardern says climate crisis is 'life or death' as New Zealand landmark report calls for sweeping changes

She said the underlying warming trend could be tracked through carbon dioxide concentration, which had increased in New Zealand from 320 parts per million 50 years ago to about 412 parts per million today.

Fedaeff said snowfall at lower elevations was well below average this winter as it was often replaced with rain, which could make for lower river levels later in the year because there would be less snowmelt. That could impact irrigation for farms, she said.

There were also more extreme weather events, Fedaeff said, including severe flooding in some places and dry spells in others.

Prof James Renwick, a climate scientist at the Victoria University of Wellington, said that in the short term at least, some New Zealand farmers with cow or sheep herds might benefit from a longer grass-growing season.

But he said the changes were also putting pressure on natural ecosystems and that over time more species would face extinction. It was imperative for humans to slow the rate of greenhouse gas emissions, he said.

“If we don’t get on top of warming soon, there is going to be grief for large sections of the world.”

Renwick said New Zealand had talked a lot about climate change but had so far **done little to curb its emissions**. But he said there were now good government policies in place, including a pledge to become carbon-neutral by 2050.

He said there were plenty of natural resources like wind, sun and water that could provide renewable power for the nation’s energy needs.

“New Zealand could become world-leading in green energy and a green economy.”