



## THE INDEPENDENT

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### Aborigines 'to bear brunt of climate change'

Aborigines in the harsh Outback will be among the Australians hardest hit by climate change, with higher rates of disease likely and spiritual suffering too when forced to see their ancestral lands ravaged, according to an expert report.

The report published in the most recent Medical Journal of Australia urges federal and state governments to act immediately to "mitigate some of the worst impacts of climate change in these communities".

"Elevated temperatures and increases in hot spells are expected to be a major problem for indigenous health in remote areas, where cardiovascular and respiratory disease are more prevalent and there are many elderly people with inadequate facilities to cope with the increased heat stress," the authors wrote.

Higher rates of dengue fever, a mosquito-spread virus, and communicable diseases such as bacterial diarrhea, which are common in hot and dry conditions, may increase with climate change unless new preventative action is taken, said the report.

It also said that because of Aborigines' close connection to tribal land, land degradation due to climate change will make indigenous inhabitants "feel this 'sickness' themselves."

Co-author Donna Green said today she had found indigenous populations in the United States, Canada and New Zealand had similar connections to tribal lands which impact upon their health.

"The psychological well-being of indigenous people is frequently connected to the well-being of the land, the spiritual connection and the whole cohesion of the community itself," said Ms Green, a New South Wales University climate change researcher.

Australian National University indigenous health expert Amanda Barnard said she agrees with many of the report's conclusions, including that indigenous medical services have inadequate resources.

"It's true indigenous people in remote and rural areas - there's just not access to services yet," said Ms Barnard, who did not contribute to the report.

As one of the world's hottest and driest continents, most experts agree Australia is particularly vulnerable to the effects of global warming, such as drier and more extreme weather patterns.

Aborigines are an impoverished minority in Australia's population of 21 million and die on average 17 years younger than their fellow Australians, often as a result of preventable or treatable diseases such as diabetes.

The report was written by Ms Green, Australian National University researcher and rural medical doctor Ursula King and indigenous land manager Joe Morrison.



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