



Title: The Face of Climate Change

Description: The sun setting through the plume of smoke from the Pigeon Valley fire that burned in Tasman District, Te Waipounamu, the South Island.

Photographer: Ann Wheatley @ann.wheatley.photography

Where and when: As seen from Brightwater, Tasman District, 7 Feb 2019

The Story: The Waimea Plains, cradled between two mountain ranges, is well placed to escape weather extremes, but our sheltered position didn't protect us in 2018 and 2019. 2018 brought Fehi and Gita, two large ex-tropical cyclones that damaged roads and tore through homes and crops. Then in 2019 Nelson-Tasman faced its worst drought since 2001. The Waimea River flow dropped to its lowest level in decades. With the land dry as a bone and no immediate relief in sight, sparks from farming equipment started a fire that became the biggest civil defence emergency in Nelson-Tasman's history. It began the night before Waitangi Day, and quickly escalated into a major incident. The region experienced three fires, a huge one in Pigeon Valley, and two smaller ones on Rabbit Island and in Nelson.

According to a Fire Investigation Report released under the Official Information Act, the Pigeon Valley fire "destroyed or damaged around 2,000 hectares of pine forest, destroyed one home, multiple outbuildings, fences, shelter belts, pastures, and caused the evacuation of around 2,500 people. As New Zealand's largest wildfire in several decades, this fire precipitated a local state of emergency and disrupted the lives of thousands of people.

Hundreds of firefighters fought the fire at its peak, supported by heavy machinery and up to 24 aircraft. Crews worked on for a month to completely extinguish the fire."

From now on we can expect summer months to be high risk times in the Nelson-Tasman region. Our part of Aotearoa is predicted to have more summer droughts, fires and heat waves. Unfortunately, tropical cyclones also come south in summer and king tides occur. When these happen together the result is extra high sea levels, stormy winds and heavy rain leading to coastal flooding. Our challenge making our communities more resilient, while acknowledging that other regions will be having similar problems.

We've all seen images of tragic wildfires in distant places, but for me, experiencing a plume from a fire burning only a few kms away was a wake-up call, a confirmation that climate change is already affecting us. It's time to act and to join with others pushing for changes to the way we live, treat each other, and other forms of life. We have a precious opportunity for a better way of life to emerge.

- Camera:** Olympus OM-D E-M1
- Lens:** M.Zuiko 12-50mm F3.5-6.3
- Exposure:** 45 mm F/6.3 1/250s ISO 200
- Digital specs:** 4088 x 2598 pixels
- Key words:** New Zealand, Aotearoa, fire, sunset, smoke, drought, tragic Pigeon Valley Fire, Wakefield fire, forest fire, climate change, climate change impact, wildfire, silhouette, documentary photography, photojournalism, visual storytelling, Ann Wheatley, Ecosystems Photography
- Price:** \$250 (incl. GST) for use of the digital image. Visit www.ecosystemsphotography/sales for details & to order, or to get a quote if you would like a high-quality print.
- Donation:** The price is made up entirely by a \$250 donation to the Nelson Tasman Climate Forum or to a sustainability organisation or project of your choice.
- Image ref:** AW#003 (please use this reference in all orders and correspondence).

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5 Feb 2022