

Hope for hazard burns as La Nina fades

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RURAL Fire Service crews are hopeful of catching up on hazard reduction burns with La Nina predicted to fade in the next few months.

After years of drought, La Nina caused significant rain across the country this past summer. But according to Associate Professor at UNSW Science's Climate Change Research Centre, Dr Andrea Taschetto, that weather pattern is expected to fade with normal conditions to return by April/May this year.

"Without La Nina we expect to receive normal average rainfall in winter, not

exaggerated as we've seen during the summer and autumn," Dr Taschetto said.

Lower Hunter RFS acting district manager Inspector Dave Millsteed said the rain and drought meant the service hadn't been able to conduct as many hazard reduction burns as it would have liked in the past few years.

"We're at the behest of the weather with hazard reduction burns," he said. "The biggest issue up until this season was it was too hot or too dry, now it's gone to the other extreme. Mother Nature has not played too nice.



"We're hoping La Nina will continue to break down and we'll be ready to go out as soon as we have the right weather."

Inspector Millsteed was thankful the rain had created a more benign season for local crews, who are yet to respond to a major bushfire

event this danger period, which ends this month.

He said crews had been responding to "run of the mill" incidents, such as car accidents, small pile burns and assisting the SES with storm events, but had importantly been given a chance to rest after the deadly black summer bushfires of 2019/20.

"Black Summer had a huge effect on the RFS and other agencies," he said. "Our people in the Hunter were instrumental in helping other areas. Some of them saw some horrendous things.

"I cannot think of a time in

history where we were under so much pressure.

"This time has allowed them to take stock of their experiences and engage in assessment programs to help them consolidate their feelings and thoughts. I'm confident our troops are in a good place and are ready to go and support the community."

He said the quieter season had also allowed members to catch up on training, which was impacted by the COVID-19 lockdowns, as well as conduct maintenance on equipment and appliances.

— SAGE SWINTON