

Media panic on climate, bushfires and a vacation

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Remember when journalism was about facts? We ask this not as the silly season descends and news outlets scratch around for angles in the dog days of summer but amid an outbreak of hyperventilation and all manner of fakery and febrile emoting posing as legitimate reporting. Has journalism gone mad? How else to make sense of the hysteria around Scott Morrison's vacation, loony claims his government has abandoned national leadership during the bushfire crisis and that "Australia is burning", climate change is causing it and we can fix it by slashing our emissions now. There is a crazy degree of crisis and panic in the air, as well as smoke haze. Our public debate is dominated by emotionalism while reporters chase non-stories sparked into the world by memes and tweets.

We have journalists, morphing into Extinction Rebellion activists, writing open letters to the Prime Minister. "The country is not parched but desiccated, and it is burning like a tinderbox, and people are frightened," Guardian Australia's Katharine Murphy scorched last week, before over-boiling on Wednesday. "We have a government, led by (Morrison), which is, in many different ways, failing to rise to the challenges of our time. They. Are. Failing. I get very impatient about that. I get very worried about that." We are worried about colleagues at the zero-subscription renewable website. It's understandable in the ceaseless hunt for clicks, with a begging bowl out for donations, climate alarmism is a brand optimiser. That's fine up to a point. But a reader wandering into the Guardian's pious yarn garden may think its journalists are reporting news.

They. Are. Not.

Let's deal with the Prime Minister's pre-Christmas family vacation. Have we really come to this? Where bored and biased journalists, egged on by a nudge and a wink from Labor, blithely turn social media drips and brattish bystanders into a reflection of non-existent national outrage over the Prime Minister daring to take a few days away with his wife and two young children? How dare he.

We'll see plenty of him over Christmas and New Year's, and then he'll be off to India and elsewhere next month selling our wares. Any claim that he is indifferent to the bushfires is a low charge. Already the Prime Minister has been on the ground, visiting those affected by the fires and those fighting them. He'll be out again.

The incendiary slur Mr Morrison or his government is responsible for the climate right now or his policies have caused the bushfires could use a bucket of water. Let's get real, folks, especially those in the crystal sewer of Twitter. Kevin Rudd's wife, Therese Rein, of all people, took to social media to lay blame for the fires at Mr Morrison's feet. "We have reached an absurdity when people blame governments for deliberately lit fires and the smoke they produce," Chris Kenny wrote last Saturday. "Grown adults blame governments for weather."

What to make of former NSW Fire and Rescue commissioner Greg Mullins? He leads Emergency Leaders for Climate Action, funded by Tim Flannery's Climate Council, and demands a meeting with Mr Morrison on fighting bushfires and to consider the impact of climate change. The group's request was referred to Natural Disaster and Emergency

Management Minister David Littleproud. In a stunt on Tuesday, Mr Mullins blasted Canberra for a “leadership vacuum” on bushfires, while claiming the Coalition had offered “no moral leadership” by opposing tougher carbon emissions standards at the Madrid climate summit. “The facts are that Australia is burning while we turn a blind eye to the driving force, which is climate change and a warming planet,” he said, adding a summit will be held in March or April.

Others who should know better include NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean, who also has directly blamed the fires on climate change. It’s likely he is playing another game, such are the wheels within Liberal politics. But his intervention misleads the public as it diverts attention from what he and officials should be doing to limit the severity of conflagrations in our fire-prone land. Kenny put it best when he observed “rational arguments, hard facts and intelligent debate have been cast aside in favour of woke whingeing”. It’s not even Christmas but in a post-fact age, amid End Times gloom and attention-clamour disorder, our faux climate emergency is just beginning.