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MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW THINKING AND TECH TO JOIN BUSHFIRE FIGHT

Artificial intelligence paired with space-derived data could soon join the battle against bushfires in NSW and nationally, speeding up detection and response times to prevent a repeat of Australia's recent catastrophic season.

Deputy Premier and Minister responsible for Disaster Recovery John Barilaro said the NSW Government is working with the best minds in science from across the globe as part of the 2020 Bushfire Data Quest which will help predict future bushfire activity.

"There is no doubt the recent fires have left both a physical mark on our state's landscape, and emotional one on its people," Mr Barilaro said.

"Predicting the behaviour of bushfires is a hugely difficult problem, made more complicated by a myriad of factors such as fuel load, atmospheric conditions, soil moisture, and availability of water.

"Using data from satellites is a great advancement on the tools we have traditionally used with much of the task of planning on-the-ground bushfire response relying on the experience and instincts of fire-fighters - who are often volunteers.

"We are investigating further how we use the data from multiple satellites and local sensor networks to create algorithms that will help detect fires earlier, predict fire behaviour, and help emergency services respond more effectively to protect homes, people and nature.

Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney Stuart Ayres said NSW was supporting Australia's high-tech research, including in the fight against bushfires.

"The 2020 Bushfire Data Quest brings together a range of players in the innovation ecosystem, including universities, research institutes, philanthropy and technology companies.

"It will tackle problems in new ways that can be difficult to replicate in traditional academic or industrial research settings," Mr Ayres said.

"Teams of machine-learning specialists are working with bushfire researchers and leading data scientists, primed with information from multiple satellites and local sensor networks.

Data Quest Lead Dr Cormac Purcell welcomed support from the NSW Government for The Bushfire Data Quest.

“The Bushfire Data Quest, made possible by our challenge partner Minderoo Foundation, aims to do great science by connecting brilliant minds to big questions,” Dr Purcell said.

“By drawing on a wide range of experience, skills and viewpoints, the teams will naturally create better outcomes. We harness the best practices from the private, academic and non-profit sector to accelerate research for the benefit of all humanity.”

Support for the 2020 Bushfire Data Quest builds on the NSW Government’s \$5 million Space Industry Development Strategy, maximising opportunities for NSW businesses to tap global demand for space technologies, currently estimated at \$420 billion.

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