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# Calls for an industry-standard heat policy to be implemented on worksites as summers get hotter

By Arianna Levy

Heatwaves

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Jenny Newport's son, Glenn, died 13 years ago from working in extreme heat. She believes a heat policy could have saved him. (ABC News: Crystalyn Brown)

## In short:

Jenny Newport's son, Glenn, died while working on a coal seam gas pipeline construction project.

Temperatures at the construction site where he was working had exceeded 40 degrees Celsius that day.

## What's next?

Ms Newport is calling for state and federal governments to implement heat policies to help protect workers.

It has been 13 years since Jenny Newport's son died from extreme heat while on a worksite in Queensland, and she believes not much has changed.

Ms Newport had hoped there would be an effective heat policy for every worksite across the state after her son's death.

"It's unbelievable," she said.

**"The government still hasn't done anything or taken the coroner's recommendations and enacted a policy from that."**

Her son, Glenn Newport, had flown to his worksite in Queensland's Western Downs from Brisbane amid a three-day heatwave in 2013.

According to the coroner's report into Mr Newport's death, the temperature on the day "exceeded 40 degrees Celsius".

Mr Newport had been contracted to work on a coal seam gas pipeline construction project near Roma and had been taking regular breaks with his crew throughout the day.



Construction worker Glenn Newport died at a worksite near Roma in Queensland's southern inland. *(Supplied: Newport family)*

The 38-year-old became gradually incapacitated by the heat and was taken to the worksite clinic for treatment around lunchtime.

"He was seen staggering as he walked back to his donga, and it was left up to his mates to check on him," Ms Newport told the ABC.

By the evening, Mr Newport had collapsed in his room and was taken to hospital, but he died from hyponatraemia — as a consequence of working in excessive heat — while in the ambulance.

Hyponatraemia is a condition from drinking too much water which then causes sodium levels in your blood to drop below normal range.

That can lead to the swelling of cells, with symptoms including nausea, fatigue and in severe cases seizures and coma.

**"If there had been an overall heat policy for all of the state at the time, that would have applied to where Glenn was working," his mother said.**

"If he'd been allowed to stop work, or if there had been that duty of care, he would still be here.

"State governments and federal governments are doing so much to safeguard our country from climate change, isn't it about time we actually safeguarded or future-proofed our workforce?"

### 'It's not about stopping work'



Experts believe a "fit-for-purpose" heat policy can reduce heat stress and increase productivity on worksites. (ABC News: Steve Keen)

In Queensland there is no set maximum temperature for workers, but employers need to manage heat risks according to the Health and Safety Act.

Under the Best Practice Industry Conditions (BPICs) standards, which were negotiated between the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) and the former Queensland Labor government, workers could stop work at 35C or 29C with 75 per cent humidity.

In 2024, [the newly-elected LNP government sensationally suspended BPIC](#) for new major government projects.

CFMEU Queensland executive Jared Abbott said an industry standard heat policy would ensure workers would be protected and would not reduce productivity.

**"The policy is not the be all or end all. It's not about stopping work – it's not about giving people another excuse," he said.**

"[A heat policy] would drive companies to have better productivity and certainly drives better behaviour on site."



Jared Abbott says heat policies drive good behaviour. (ABC News)

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland provides guidance — including an online heat stress calculator to help businesses undertake a heat stress risk assessment — and other educational resources on its website.

**A 'graded approach' recommended**

With extreme heat becoming increasingly more prominent, experts have also warned a heat policy that is "fit for purpose" needs to be adopted across worksites.

Professor Ollie Jay, the director of the Heat and Health Research Centre at the University of Sydney, said he believed a graded approach should be used.



Ollie Jay co-developed the Australian Open's heat policy. *(Supplied)*

"We need to shift from thinking about just hot weather to focusing on hot people in hot environments," Professor Jay said.

A year after Mr Newport died, the Australian Open was in the grip of a four-day heatwave that saw a record number of players pull out.

Professor Jay worked on developing a heat policy, which the grand slam adopted, with a focus on cooling down the athletes while they performed in extreme temperatures.

The policy measures air temperature, humidity, black globe temperature and wind speed as a collective and uses graded measures — such as

applying ice towels and increasing water intake — to reduce heat stress while also maintaining productivity.



The Australian Open made headlines in 2014 after a string of hot days. (AAP: Joe Castro)

Professor Jay said a common problem is that the standard meteorological measure of air temperature is taken in the shade, meaning the radiant heat on worksites in direct sun is often much hotter.

He suggested that a heat policy similar to the Australian Open's could be adopted nationally for workers.

"It's such a pressing need. We know it's getting hotter and these are things that need to be put in place to protect workers," Professor Jay said.

"It can be directly applied for worksites but it will need to be repurposed from catering to athletes to catering to worksites.

**"There's already been so much research done. We need to focus on using the research that's already been done [as] I haven't really seen that."**

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