

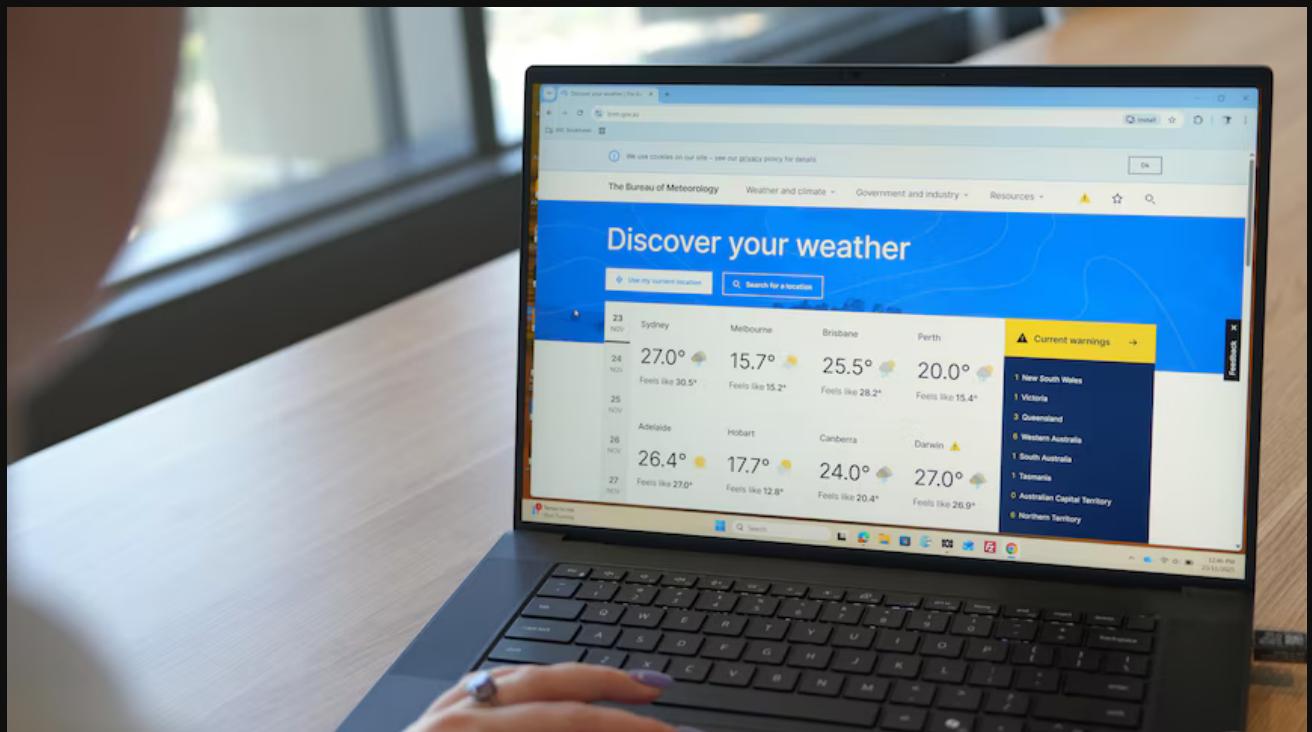


Bureau of Meteorology boss reveals website rebuild 'approved and funded' by Turnbull government

By national affairs correspondent **Jane Norman**

Federal Government

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The Bureau of Meteorology has revealed the total cost of its new website was about \$96.5 million. (ABC News: *Greg Bigelow*)

In short:

The Bureau of Meteorology's new chief executive has revealed the agency's controversial website redesign was approved by the Turnbull government.

It follows the revelation that the site cost taxpayers \$96.5 million, about 20 times the previously stated \$4.1 million price tag.

What's next?

Environment Minister Murray Watt, who is responsible for the BOM, says he has asked the chief executive to get "on top of what occurred".

The Bureau of the Meteorology's new boss has blamed a "miscommunication" for the furore that has erupted over a costly and controversial website redesign, revealing it was approved by the Turnbull government as part of a broader overhaul of the agency's computer systems.

Politicians have been lining up to slam the bureau after it was revealed the new website cost taxpayers \$96.5 million, about 20 times the previously stated \$4.1-million price tag.

But the bureau's chief executive Stuart Minchin, who has been in the role for two weeks, said the redesign was just one part of a larger end-to-end rebuild of the technology underpinning the website, which was prompted by a cyber attack in 2015 that threatened to "take down the whole system".

"I totally understand the miscommunication that led to this perception in the public, but I want to make it clear that it was always going to cost a lot more than \$4 million," he told the ABC.

"It was originally scoped back in 2017 and funded and approved by Cabinet at that time.

"Overall, the program was always intended to be in the order of \$80 million."

Blaming COVID for the delay, as well as a "15 per cent cost blow-out", Dr

Minchin firmly defended the need for the upgrade.

"The \$96.5 million that we're talking about was not just the front end of the website, the tip of the iceberg that the public sees, but the back end, which sees data flowing from tens of thousands of pieces of equipment in the field, to the supercomputer that does all the modelling, right through to systems that actually forecast the weather and put it through to the website," he said.



Dr Stuart Minchin has defended the need for the website upgrade. (ABC News: Matthew Holmes)

"So every bit of that chain had to be hardened and made secure to stop a future attack taking down the whole website."

Earlier, Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce, who served in the Turnbull government, described the apparent cost blow-out as a "fiasco", while his leader David Littleproud likened it to an episode of the satirical ABC program *Utopia*.

BOM flooded with complaints

Costs aside, the website revamp has proved deeply unpopular since its

launch a month ago.

The agency has been flooded with complaints about how difficult it is to navigate and there have been criticisms of the changes to the radar map, which has made place names hard to read.

"We are acting on this feedback," Dr Minchin said.

"I totally accept the Australian public did not all get what they wanted from the initial release of the website."

Environment Minister Murray Watt, who is responsible for the BOM, has held two meetings with Dr Minchin in the past fortnight to express his concerns about the process.

"What the BOM had said to me was that there were other elements of the website design that did increase the costs," Senator Watt said on Monday.

"I don't think that I was aware of that total cost of \$96 million, but I understand that people are very concerned about that amount of money and that's why I've asked the new CEO to get on top of what occurred."

Senator Watt said he looked forward to a "a change in the culture and the approach of the BOM" under Dr Minchin.

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