

# Almost 2 million lightning strikes recorded as storms batter eastern Australia

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The New South Wales State Emergency Services (NSW SES) has responded to more than 7,000 storm-related incidents across the state since Wednesday morning, as fierce storms battered large swathes of Australia's east.

Wild weather is expected to continue through the weekend, with ongoing thunderstorms on the east coast and a tropical cyclone developing just off the coast of Western Australia (WA), threatening gale force winds from Port Hedland to Exmouth in the state's northwest. Meanwhile, large areas of Queensland and WA are experiencing a severe heatwave.

With heavy rainfall expected for much of the NSW coast, numerous flood warnings have been issued. North of Newcastle, Ferndale Caravan Park residents were told to evacuate this morning due to the risk of flooding.

Wednesday's severe weather was the result of a cold front "that triggered a massive line of storms... At one stage we basically had a line of storms extending from almost the Queensland border down to Tasmania," meteorologist Christie Johnson told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). That represents a staggering storm front spanning more than 1,500 kilometres.

An 80-year-old man was killed on Wednesday when a tree fell on his car in Cowra, 240 kilometres (km) inland in Central West NSW. The same day, four people were injured in Wagga Wagga in southern NSW, when a demountable hut upturned in the strong winds.

Weatherzone detected an incredible 1.819 million lightning strikes from Queensland to Tasmania in the 24 hours to 8 a.m. Thursday. Between midday and midnight on Wednesday, 73,700 strikes were detected within a 100 km radius of the Sydney CBD.

Fallen trees and downed powerlines impacted electricity supply to around 200,000 homes in the Illawarra, Sydney and Hunter regions on Wednesday evening. While most connections have since been restored, further severe weather yesterday resulted in another 68,000 outages. As of this morning, around 28,000 homes are without power in Sydney and a further 15,000 in Newcastle and the Hunter.

In Sydney, where social media showed astonishing footage of numerous and sustained lightning bolts across the city skyline, Crown Casino at Barangaroo was hit by lightning which punctured the roof, allowing heavy rain to enter the building.

The wild weather ripped the roof off a house in Carlingford, in Sydney's northwest, which then smashed into the house next door. Fourteen people in that suburb were forced to find temporary accommodation because their homes were damaged by the storm.

Fires erupted in Mudgee, Central West NSW, when a house was hit by a power line and completely destroyed, and in Dubbo, where lightning struck a tree and ignited a leaking gas pipe.

Wind gusts of over 100 km/h were recorded across the storm front, including at Sydney Airport, with the highest reaching 120 km/h in Williamstown, near Newcastle and Trangie, in the Central West.

The storms dumped massive amounts of rain in some regions, with the highest fall recorded at Eurobadalla on the South Coast, 127 millimetres (mm) in 24 hours. The rain dumps have caused flash flooding and leaking roofs, putting more strain on underfunded emergency services.

At lunchtime on Thursday, the NSW SES issued a warning to residents between Tweed Heads and Nimbin, in the state's Northern Rivers region, to stay

indoors, due to expected damaging winds and “large to giant” hailstones.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has issued flood warnings from Coffs Coast to Newcastle, an area spanning 400 km, warning school holiday campers not to camp next to rivers.

Prior to the development of the cold front responsible for the storms, the BOM website was warning of a heatwave in NSW from January 13 to 16, but this was cancelled on January 15 due to the shift in weather patterns, indicating how quickly conditions changed.

In November, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) issued a summary of Australia’s weather extremes titled “State of the Climate 2024: Australia is enduring harsher fire seasons, more ocean heatwaves and sea-level rise.”

The report, which started by stating Australia was already 1.5 degrees hotter on land since 1910, said that Northern wet season rainfalls were 20 percent higher than 30 years ago. The report went on to say, “In southwestern Australia, rainfall in the cooler, growing-season months has declined 16 percent, and in the southeast by 9 percent in recent decades” adding that “more rain in these regions now falls in heavy, short-lived rainfall events.”

In a grim conclusion, the CSIRO wrote that climate change impacts on Australia will lead to more frequent, more intense rainfall events, causing increased flooding combined with extreme heat events and longer droughts. These predictions can be replicated worldwide.

Decades of underfunding mean that Australia’s emergency services are totally unprepared for the growing threat from “natural” disasters. The SES is staffed mainly by 10,000 volunteers, with just 500 full-time employees.

Similar statistics are mirrored in Australia’s firefighting force. There are only 30,000 full-time firefighters in the world’s driest inhabited continent. By contrast, volunteer firefighters number up to 200,000.

The Labor government, which represents the interests of finance capital, does not differ from any other capitalist government in its refusal to reduce emissions and its lack of preparedness for the increasing disasters climate change will inevitably bring.

Since May 2022, the current Labor government has

approved seven new coal mines and the expansion of three others, directly contradicting climate science which has established the burning of fossil fuels as one of the main drivers of climate change.

Halting the mounting perils of climate change and extreme weather events is a task that can only be carried out by the international working class, through the overthrow of the capitalist system, the root cause of environmental destruction. What is required is a fight for the socialist transformation of society, under which the continuation of human civilisation is prioritised over the profit interests of the corporate and financial elite.



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