

# Australia climate change: Thousands rally in Sydney amid bushfires

45 minutes ago



EPA Organisers say some 20,000 people took part in the "climate emergency rally"

Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets of Sydney to demand urgent action on climate change amid an extreme bushfire season that has brought hazardous smoke to the city.

It came a day after a thick haze caused chaos in the harbour city, setting off smoke alarms and marring visibility.

Protesters, many wearing face masks, accused the government of inaction.

But Australia's government has defended its policies and argued that climate change is not solely to blame.

"Certainly climate change is a factor, there is no question, but also it is important to note that most of these fires have been caused by 'Little Lucifers'," Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack told ABC, referring to arsonists.

## What happened at the protest?

Organisers estimated that some 20,000 people joined Wednesday's protest march. They accused successive governments of failing to address the "approaching climate emergency".

"Now the result is here: unprecedented drought, bushfires, and now a massive health crisis, with millions choking, with no escape, and severe consequences for people's immediate and long term health," they wrote on a Facebook page for the event.

Protesters held up signs and chanted as they gathered outside Sydney's Town Hall.

"They [the government] are to blame for our largest city being poisoned and rather than taking meaningful action, they are fast-tracking new coal mines," Chloe Rafferty, an organiser for the Uni Students for Climate Change group holding the march, told Reuters news agency.



AFP



GETTY IMAGES

"We are here because we care about the future of our children and their children's children. We are going to send a message to our leaders in our country: that we are now going to stand up to say we are here and we have had enough," another protester said.

### What is the background?

Bushfires have been raging for weeks in Australia, killing six people, destroying more than 700 homes and burning millions of acres of land.



Sydney bushfire smog "like being a heavy smoker"

The blazes have brought "hazardous" air quality levels to Sydney. **The haze on Tuesday** was described by many people as the thickest to blanket the city amid this year's fire crisis.

Some residents reported breathing problems and said they were "choking" on the smoke.

Sydney residents are also facing **the city's toughest water restrictions in more than a decade** amid a severe drought.

### What is Australia doing about climate change?

Australia has one of the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions rates in the world **due largely to its reliance on coal-fired power plants**.

In June, the government gave **final approval for construction to begin on a controversial coal mine** in the state of Queensland. Environmental campaigners said they feared it could pave the way for six other mines to be approved in the area.

Under the Paris climate agreement, Australia has pledged to cut emissions by 26% to 28% on 2005 levels by 2030.

But while Prime Minister Scott Morrison has reiterated the government's commitment to meeting this target, the United Nations last year warned that it was not on track to do so.

# Australia bushfires north of Sydney 'too big to put out'

2 hours ago



Sydney's mega fire is getting out of control

A "mega blaze" raging across a 60km (37 mile) front north-west of Sydney cannot currently be put out, Australian fire officials have warned.

The fire across almost 300,000 hectares (1,150 sq m) is just an hour's drive from the nation's most-populous city.

People who cannot defend their property from approaching fires have been told they should leave immediately.

Since October, bushfires have killed six people and destroyed more than 700 homes across Australia.

The severity of the blazes so early in the fire season has caused alarm, and prompted calls for greater action to tackle climate change.

Fires have also raged across Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania.

## What's the latest on the ground?

Several fires have combined to form the Gospers Mountain mega blaze, which is more than 283,000 ha in size.

At 12:00 local time Saturday (01:00 GMT) 95 fires were burning, with half yet to be contained, **the New South Wales Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) tweeted.**

It said that more than 2,200 firefighters "were out in the field".

Skip Twitter post by @NSWRFS



**NSW RFS**



@NSWRFS

At 12pm there are 95 bush fires, with half yet to be contained. There are currently 12 fires at Watch & Act level, and more than 2,200 firefighters out in the field. While fire activity has reduced this morning, there's still 8 areas of Total Fire Ban today. [#nswrfs](#) [#nswfires](#)







EPA  
A smoky haze has enveloped much of Sydney

Tuesday is the next big concern, with temperatures inland of Sydney likely to reach above 40C (104F). Some firefighters have expressed concern that volunteer numbers might not be enough and that there are inadequate water supplies. The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) said that "some fires were too big to put out" while the NSW RFS said late Friday the blazes would only be extinguished "when we get good rain".



Firefighters flee intense flames in Sydney, in a video shared by them to show the dangers of bushfires

Sydney may be blanketed in smoke for weeks, if not months.

### Is this fire season particularly bad?

It hasn't come close to the fatalities of 2009, when nearly 200 people died, but the scale of the damage has been huge.

#### How bad is bushfire smoke for health?

#### Toxic smoke affects golfers at Australian Open

More than 1.6 million hectares of land have burned in New South Wales alone.

The season has hit earlier than normal and has been exacerbated by drought conditions.

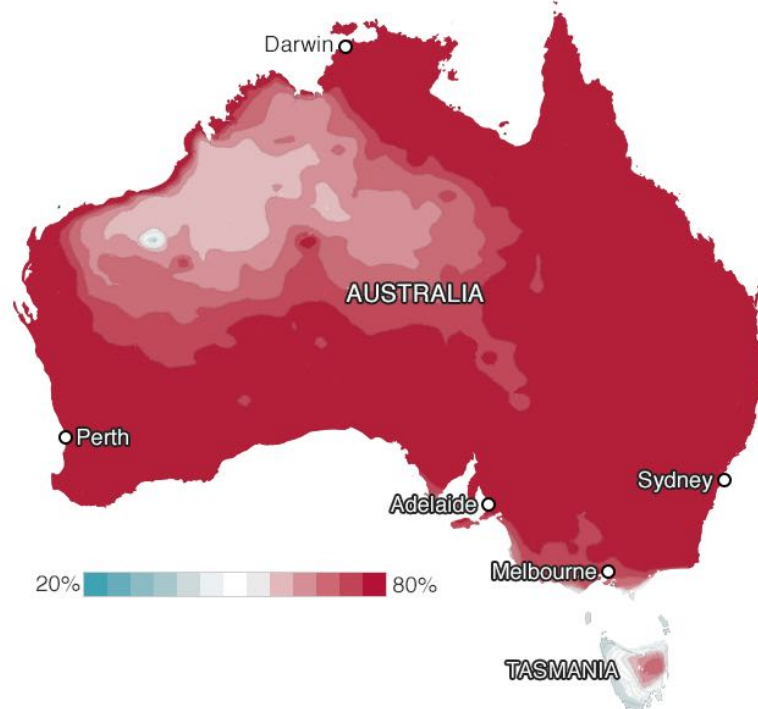
RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said: "There is an absolute lack of moisture in the soil, a lack of moisture in the vegetation... you are seeing fires started very easily and they are spreading extremely quickly, and they are burning ridiculously intensely."

### Is climate change to blame?

The BOM says that **climate change has led to an increase in extreme heat events** and raised the severity of other natural disasters, such as drought.

## Forecast for Summer 2019

Chance of exceeding the median maximum temperature for Dec - Feb period



Source: BOM Australia

BBC

Last week, the bureau noted that NSW had endured its driest spring season on record. It also warned that Australia's coming summer was predicted to bring similar conditions to last year's - the nation's hottest summer on record.

### **Australia may see 50C days 'in decades'**

### **Climate emergency 'clear and unequivocal'**

The government has been criticised over its efforts to address climate change. PM Scott Morrison has dismissed accusations linking the crisis to his government's policies.

### **Final call to halt 'climate catastrophe'**

### **What could be wiped out by temperature rise**

Hundreds of bushfire survivors and farmers converged on the nation's capital, Canberra, this week in protest. **One woman displayed the charred remains of her home outside Parliament** - on which she had written: "Morrison, your climate crisis destroyed my home."



DEAN SEWELL / GREENPEACE

Melinda Plesman called for the government to take action on climate change

## Australia fires: five blazes merge north of Sydney as conditions forecast to worsen

More than 100 bushfires were burning in New South Wales on Friday, more than half of them out of control

**Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson**



NSW Rural Fire Service crews protect properties as the fire approaches Mangrove Mountain north of Sydney. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

Five fires burning to the north of Sydney joined up into one huge conflagration on Friday, with out-of-control blazes threatening homes and lives.

On a day that brought choking smog to Sydney, the premier of [New South Wales](#) said the entire coastline of the state was on fire.

NSW fires: five bushfires merge north of Sydney – as it happened

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Six people have died, and more than 680 homes have already been lost to bushfires in NSW this fire season, and on Friday more than 100 fires were burning, more than half of them out of control. Eight fires have emergency warnings, which means they pose an immediate risk to lives and property.

The largest fire – a conglomeration of five blazes which have joined up north of Sydney – has burned over 335,000 hectares.



Fire front at Kulnara, near Mangrove mountain, NSW. 6 December 2019. Photograph: Matthew Abbott/The Guardian

The forecast for coming days is for more hot, dry conditions. Strong winds are likely to continue to fan blazes towards towns and properties.

The NSW premier, Gladys Berejikilian, said while fires had been burning across the state for weeks, the sheer scale of the current fire threat was stretching crews' ability to fight the blazes.

“Previously [the fires] were pretty much confined to the northern part of New South Wales but what we have seen this week is our resources stretched across the entire coastline.



Bushfire conditions are expected to worsen with further hot and dry weather forecast. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/EPA

“We have also seen the fires coming in very close proximity to major population centres, whether it is on the south coast, central coast, or even greater western Sydney.”

Berejikilian said homes had been lost, but the full extent of the damage across the state would not be known until after the fires were extinguished, and people were able to return to evacuated areas.

Those forced from their homes might not be able to return for days or weeks.

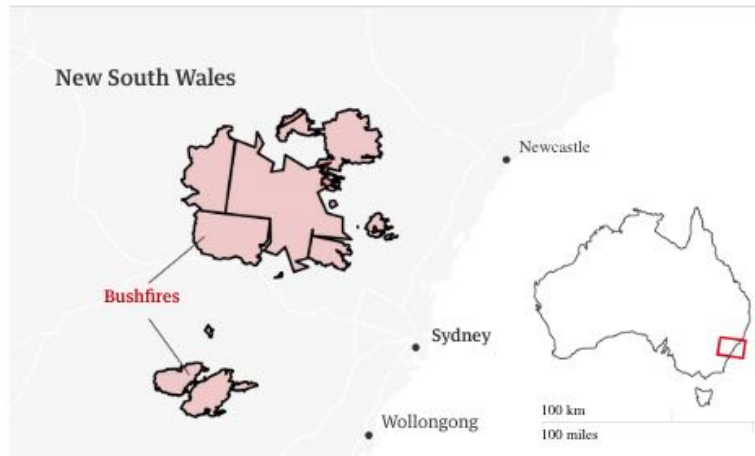


Fire on the central coast, north of Sydney, destroyed farm structures. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

“We are anticipating conditions worsening next week, especially around Tuesday, and that is why it is important for the community to remain vigilant,” Berejikilian said.

At Kulnara, 85km north of Sydney, dozens of firefighters and trucks stood ready on Friday afternoon ahead of a predicted wind change. But unpredictability was hindering firefighters’ efforts to tackle blazes.





Earlier in the day wind changes had pushed a fire past some properties, only to swing the blaze back towards homes another way.

Shane Hilson's property is situated north of the town. "It came in over the back, then it went right up along the ridge, and then it came back all the way down the back and around," he said, pointing to a line of trees on the edge of one of his paddocks".



"There's nothing left to burn," he said.

Hilson's wife and children went to her mother's place two days ago, while his father-in-law came to help him fight the blaze.

Both men were bleary eyed and exhausted, but had nothing but praise for the Rural Fire Service.



Trevor Colliss fights the fire at Kulnara, near Mangrove mountain, NSW. 6 December 2019 Photograph: Matthew Abbott/The Guardian

"These fellas have been marvellous, hey," Hilson said.

Hilson's neighbour, Rob Meggs, described how the fire destroyed his shed, office and one of the fire vehicles.

The shed was "a hoarder's heaven", he said.

"It was full of stuff [and] that might be a release in one way. But my office, that might be a bit more painful. It had some records in there that I won't be able to replace."



**Helen Davidson**



@heldavidson

The house at this Kulnura property was saved from the Wrights Creek fire but they lost their shed and office space.



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7:20 PM - Dec 6, 2019

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Meggs's house survived, thanks to the efforts of the RFS and metropolitan firefighters.

He was cautious not to get too close to the still-burning ruins; he thought all the petrol cans had exploded but there were still paint cans under the collapsed structure.

He stayed to defend the house: "We were advised earlier in the week at a meeting that the conditions weren't catastrophic and if you were physically able and prepared [you could stay]."

He's been in his house 22 years, and hasn't seen anything so big.

The NSW Rural Fire Service commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, said a long-term forecast of low rainfall and above-average

temperatures meant some fires could burn for weeks, even months.

“We’ve still got months ahead of challenge and the only forecast for rain is late January to early February of any meaningful substance.”



Smoke haze from bushfires in New South Wales blankets Sydney. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

Sydney has been choked by thick smoke for almost a week.

Hospital emergency departments have seen a 25% increase in people presenting with asthma and breathing problems, and ambulance crews are responding to between 70 and 100 call-outs a day for respiratory conditions, including to school children as young as six.

Some schools across the state have been closed because of the fire risk, while others have kept children inside because of the worsening air quality.



**Ciarán Gearoid**

@CiaranGearoid

The moon from Sydney airport has taken a red appearance from the smoke off the QLD fires. [#spooky](#)



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[See Ciarán Gearoid's other Tweets](#)

Surf Life Saving NSW has told all club life saving captains to close beaches if the air quality is too poor.

Twenty-one firefighters from Canada have flown in to assist crews across NSW. A contingent from the US is due to join the frontline on Sunday.

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