

Australia fires: Troops called to tackle fires

2 hours ago



Temperatures have surpassed 40C (104F) in parts of south-east Australia

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has announced 3,000 reserve troops will be deployed to help tackle raging bushfires across the country.

Defence Minister Linda Reynolds said this is the first time this has happened in Australia's history.

Temperatures have surpassed 40C (104F) in parts of south-east Australia. Officials had warned that Saturday was set to be a "dangerous day".

Since September, fires in Australia have killed at least 23 people.

Speaking at a press conference on Saturday, Mr Morrison told reporters: "We have seen this disaster escalate to an entirely new level."

An emergency warning was issued for areas of eastern Victoria that told remaining residents it was now too late to leave.

"The safest option is to plan how you will safely take shelter indoors as conditions worsen," the warning said, adding: "Leaving now would be deadly."

Residents were instructed to attempt to take shelter indoors or in a large clearing or body of water.

Dozens of people are missing and some 1,500 homes have already been lost this fire season.

Australia bushfires: PM's climate stance criticised as thousands flee blazes

Scott Morrison's government under pressure as fires feared to have killed 17 people

Ben Smee, **Calla Wahlquist** *Helen Davidson in Sydney and Jon Henley*

Wed 1 Jan 2020 19:04 GMT

First published on Wed 1 Jan 2020 18:48 GMT



A firefighter hosing down trees and flying embers in an effort to secure nearby houses from bushfires near the town of Nowra, New South Wales, on 31 December. Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP via Getty Images

Navy ships and army aircraft have been dispatched to help fight devastating bushfires on Australia's south-east coast that are now feared to have killed at least 17 people, amid a spiralling debate over the government's stance on the climate emergency.

Thousands of people have fled apocalyptic scenes, abandoning their homes and huddling on beaches to escape raging columns of flame and smoke that have plunged whole towns into darkness and destroyed more than 4m hectares of land.

Thousands of firefighters were still battling more than 100 blazes in New South Wales state (NSW) and nearly 40 in Victoria on Wednesday, with new fires being sparked daily by hot and windy conditions and, more recently, dry lightning strikes created by the fires themselves.

At the end of Australia's hottest-ever decade, Canberra, the capital, was blanketed in a cloud of dense smoke that left its air quality more than 21 times the hazardous rating and could be seen more than 2,000 km away, on the South Island of New Zealand, where it turned the daytime sky orange.

Fanned by soaring temperatures, strong winds and a terrible three-year drought, huge blazes have ravaged a tinder-dry landscape, causing immense destruction: since November, more than 900 homes have been lost in NSW alone.

With three months of the summer still to go, the early and devastating start to the country's fire season has led authorities to rate it the worst on record and prompted urgent questions about whether the conservative government of the prime minister, Scott Morrison, has taken enough action on global heating.

The bushfires have claimed the lives of nine people since Christmas Day



Polls show a large majority of Australians see the climate emergency as an urgent threat and want tougher government action, but Morrison has focused instead on the nation's response to the bushfire crisis and defending Australian business, while other government officials have publicly disparaged climate activists.

In his New Year's Eve address to the nation, **Morrison failed to make any connection between the bushfires and global heating**, suggesting that while they were a terrible ordeal, Australians had faced similar trials throughout history.

Past generations had "also faced natural disasters, floods, fires, global conflicts, disease and drought" and overcome them, the prime minister said in a video message. "That is the spirit of Australians, that is the spirit that is on display, that is a spirit that we can celebrate as Australians."

On Wednesday, he acknowledged at a reception that the fires were "a time of great challenge for Australia", but deflected debate about the underlying cause of the fires, concentrating again on the nation's resilience.

Fire experts and scientists have described the scale and impact of this year's fires as unprecedented and said that greenhouse gas emissions, while they do not cause fires, play a proven role in raising temperatures and creating the exceptionally dry conditions that make the risk of fire extreme or catastrophic.

Although slightly cooler conditions on New Year's Day gave the country a moment to take stock of the devastation, conditions were set to deteriorate again over the weekend, the NSW state premier, Gladys Berejiklian, said.

Dangerous fire conditions were forecast to return to eastern Victoria and NSW on Saturday, with **temperatures again likely to reach the mid-40s**. "We are assuming that weather conditions will be at least as bad as what they were yesterday," Berejiklian said. "All of us have to brace ourselves."

While most of the destruction occurred on Tuesday, the ferocity of the fires meant many people were unable to find out basic information until New Year's Day. Electricity and communications lines were cut for extended periods in many areas. Roads in and out of towns remain closed.

Officials in NSW and Victoria said on Wednesday another five people were confirmed dead, and another man was presumed to have been killed. Scores more were missing and the death toll was likely to continue to rise, they said.

Three bodies were found on Wednesday at Lake Conjola on the south coast of NSW, bringing the death toll in the state to 15.

About 4,000 people in the coastal **Victoria** town of Mallacoota fled to the shore as winds pushed a fire toward their homes under a sky turned dark by smoke and turned red by flames. Dozens of homes burned before winds changed direction late on Tuesday, sparing the rest of the town.

Mark Tregellas, a resident who spent the night on a boat ramp, said only a late shift in the wind direction spared lives. "The fire just continued to grow and then the black started to descend," he said. "I couldn't see the hand in front in my face, and then it started to glow red and we knew the fire was coming."

"Ash started to fall from the air and then the embers started to come down. At that point, people started to bring their kids and families into the water. Thankfully, the wind changed and the fire moved away."

The Victoria state premier, Daniel Andrews, said four people remained missing after a massive blaze ripped through Gippsland, a rural region about 500km (310 miles) east of Melbourne.

Mick Roberts from East Gippsland had been unaccounted for since Monday and was found dead in his home on Wednesday. "He's not missing any more ... sorry but his body has been found in his house," his niece, Leah Parsons, said on social media.

At Malua Bay, on the NSW south coast, survivors spoke of how 1,000 people spent the night on the beach. "Everyone was on the beach, just covered in ash and smoke," Al Baxter, a retired rugby union international, told Guardian Australia.

"There was a strange calmness. People were as close to the water's edge as they could be. People were literally just lying on the beach trying to keep out of the smoke and ash."

Criticism of the Morrison government's climate stance has intensified as the fires have raged. Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal and liquefied natural gas, but the prime minister, who won a surprise third term in May, last month rejected calls to downsize Australia's lucrative coal industry.



Scott Morrison says no evidence links Australia's carbon emissions to bushfires

His government has pledged to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28% by 2030, a modest figure compared with the centre-left opposition Labor party's pledge of 45%. The leader of the minor Australian Greens party, Richard Di Natale, demanded a royal commission, the nation's highest form of inquiry, on the crisis.

"If he (Morrison) refuses to do so, we will be moving for a parliamentary commission of inquiry with royal commission-like powers as soon as parliament returns," Di Natale said in a statement.

Australia's armed forces, including helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and naval vessels, were being deployed to help fight the fires, bring water, food and fuel to towns where supplies were depleted and roads cut off, as well as evacuate residents.

Victoria's emergency management commissioner, Andrew Crisp, said the 176-metre HMAS Choules, due to arrive by Friday, may be used to evacuate many of those stranded in Mallacoota, although its capacity of 1,000 people would not be enough on its own to handle everyone who needed to get out.

"It doesn't have the current capacity for everyone at Mallacoota," Crisp said. "We are exploring all our options ... and certainly to look at evacuating some people from Mallacoota by sea is an option we're seriously considering."

Besides the deployment of HMAS Choules, Australia's defence force said it had been providing support to bushfire efforts in all states except Tasmania since 8 November. and was dispatching Taipan, Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters plus two Spartan aircraft to Victoria, where they would help with firefighting efforts and provide humanitarian assistance to isolated communities.

Australia fires worsen as every state hits 40C

6 hours ago



The remains of a car that was destroyed by bushfires in Balmoral, New South Wales

Scores of fires are burning out of control across Australia amid a heatwave that has seen temperatures exceed 40C (104F) in every state.

The most dangerous fires on Monday were in the state of Victoria.

About 30,000 residents and tourists were urged to flee East Gippsland - a popular holiday region - but evacuations were later deemed too risky as fires encroached on major roads.

A volunteer firefighter died battling a blaze in the state of New South Wales.

The sacrifices of Australia's unpaid firefighters

A visual guide to Australia's bushfire crisis

Sydney NYE fireworks to go ahead despite protests

Are you affected by the fires? Let us know by emailing haveyoursay@bbc.co.uk

In total, 10 people have died in the nation's bushfire crisis since September.

Meteorologists say a climate system in the Indian Ocean, known as the dipole, is the main driver behind the extreme heat in Australia.



What happened to the firefighter?

Authorities said the volunteer firefighter was killed and two others suffered burns after their truck rolled over in extreme winds while they were battling a blaze east of the city of Albury.

New South Wales (NSW) Premier Gladys Berejiklian described the death as "heartbreaking".

"Words fail at times like this," she wrote on Twitter.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said another firefighter was injured in a separate vehicle.

"This is awful news for the families and our sympathies are with them. These are testing times. We are so grateful for the courage and dedication of our firefighters," he tweeted.

The volunteer firefighter is the third to be killed so far this fire season. **Two volunteer firefighters, both fathers to young children, died on 19 December** battling a blaze near Sydney.

Prime Minister Morrison was widely criticised for being abroad on holiday at the time, and returned home early.

How bad are the blazes in Victoria?

Scorching temperatures, strong winds and thunderstorms created dangerous conditions in Victoria on Monday.

In East Gippsland, three fires burning near the towns of Bruthen, Buchan and Bonang rapidly expanded as temperatures soared to the mid-40Cs.

Officials said the wind-driven blazes were "racing" towards the coast, and had moved faster than predicted.



Volunteer firefighters talk about compensation payments controversy

Residents in northern Melbourne were told to "act immediately to survive" as firefighters struggled to battle an out-of-control fire.

Officials said the fire in Bundoora, some 16km (10 miles) north of Melbourne city centre, was "threatening homes and lives".

"The safest option is to take shelter indoors immediately. It is too late to leave," Victoria Emergency said.

The fire, which reportedly damaged homes in the area, was later downgraded from the emergency level.

Other emergency warnings remained in place for several fires in the state, with some urged to evacuate.

"We have had a challenging day in Victoria," said Andrew Crisp, the state's emergency management commissioner.

He said the huge blazes had produced their own weather systems from smoke columns "punching into the atmosphere 14km high".

"There's lightning coming out of these columns. It is unpredictable [and] it's dangerous out there," he said.

Similar fire-generated thunderstorms - or pyrocumulonimbus - were also recorded in NSW.

Skip Twitter post by @NSWRFS



NSW RFS



@NSWRFS

A fire-generated thunderstorm has formed over the Badja Forest Road and Tuross Falls Road fires, north-west of Cobargo. This is a very dangerous situation. Monitor the conditions around you and take appropriate action. [#nswfires](#) [#nswrfs](#)



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

BUSH FIRE INFORMATION LINE
1800 NSW RFS
1800 673 737
www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

183

5:17 PM - Dec 30, 2019

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

223 people are talking about this

End of Twitter post by @NSWRFS

Report

Lightning strikes in dry, drought-affected forests have the potential to quickly become fires that threaten lives and homes.

Dry lightning sparked at least 70 new fires in the region in the past 24 hours, officials said.

A 250km (155-mile) stretch of the Princes Highway, east of Bairnsdale, was closed on Monday.

On Sunday, Mr Crisp urged people in the region - about 280km (175 miles) east of Melbourne - to "get out", but confirmed on Monday that many people had remained in the region.

Elsewhere in the state, a major New Year's Eve music festival has been cancelled after organisers said the bushfire threat was too dangerous.

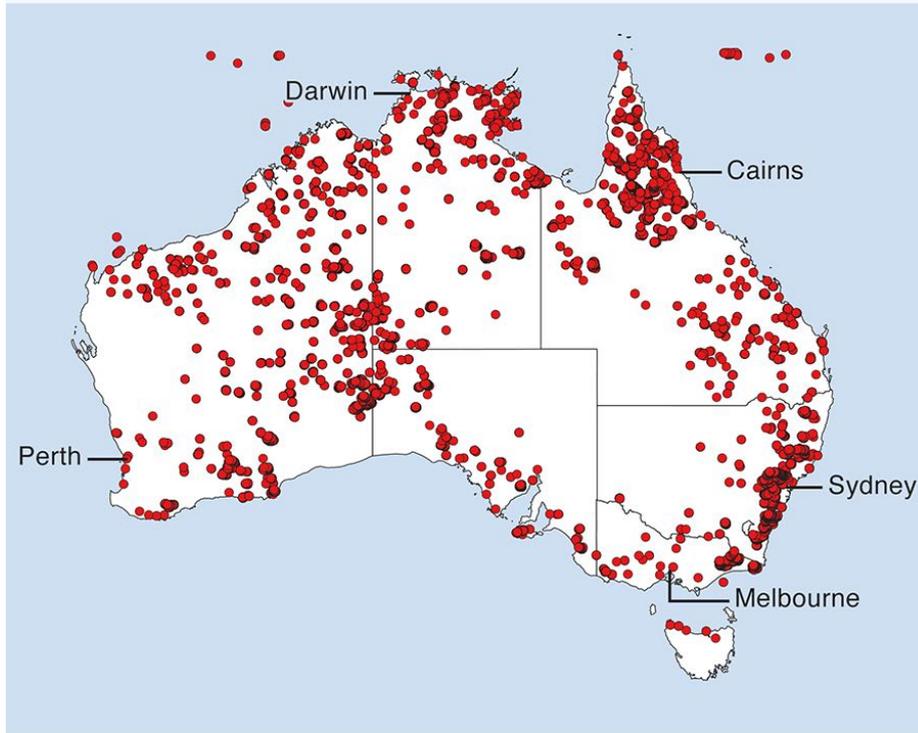


Some 9,000 people had already been camping at the Falls Festival in Lorne. Access is by a single track, meaning it would not be possible for festival-goers to evacuate quickly. "We are gutted to make this call but the safety of our patrons, artists and staff is our main priority," said organiser Jessica Ducrow.

What about the other states?

In South Australia, crews battled "catastrophic" fire conditions in a wine region north-east of Adelaide.

● Fires recorded in the seven days to 30 December



Source: NASA/FIRMS

BBC

The island state of Tasmania also struggled to contain bushfires amid a sweltering heatwave. Hobart, the state's capital, experienced its hottest December day on record when temperatures hit 40.8C on Monday. More than 100 blazes continue to burn in NSW, the state worst-affected by the fires so far this year. Temperatures exceeded 41C in parts of the state, including in Sydney, Australia's largest city.



The shocking aftermath of the bushfires in Balmoral - the town almost razed to the ground

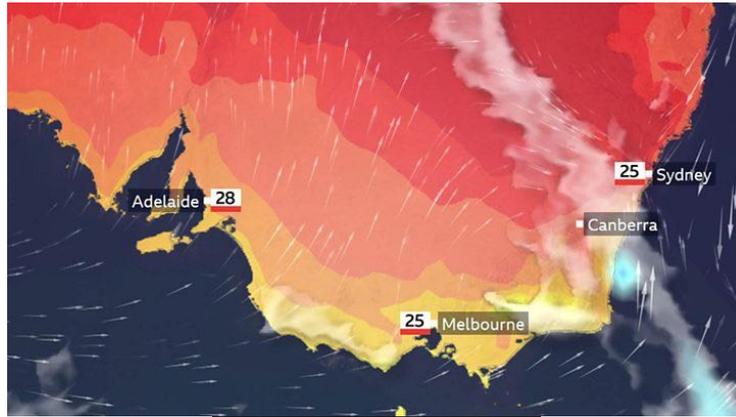
Officials have warned that "deteriorating weather conditions" could worsen bushfires in the state on Tuesday. The town of Balmoral, south-west of Sydney, was largely destroyed on 22 December amid similar conditions.

What will happen to New Year's Eve fireworks?

With total fire ban restrictions in place, several regions have cancelled their New Year's Eve fireworks, including the Australian Capital Territory, where the nation's capital city Canberra is located.

However in Sydney, authorities say the city's harbour fireworks display - watched by millions around the world - will go ahead despite criticism.

More than a quarter of a million people have signed a petition calling for the fireworks to be cancelled and the money spent on fighting fires.



Darren Bett assesses the forecast conditions in Australia

The city's authorities say the cancellation would have little practical effect on affected communities. Details of a bushfire relief fund will be projected on the Sydney Harbour Bridge during the night. Across Australia, the fires have destroyed at least four million hectares (9.9m acres) in five states since September.

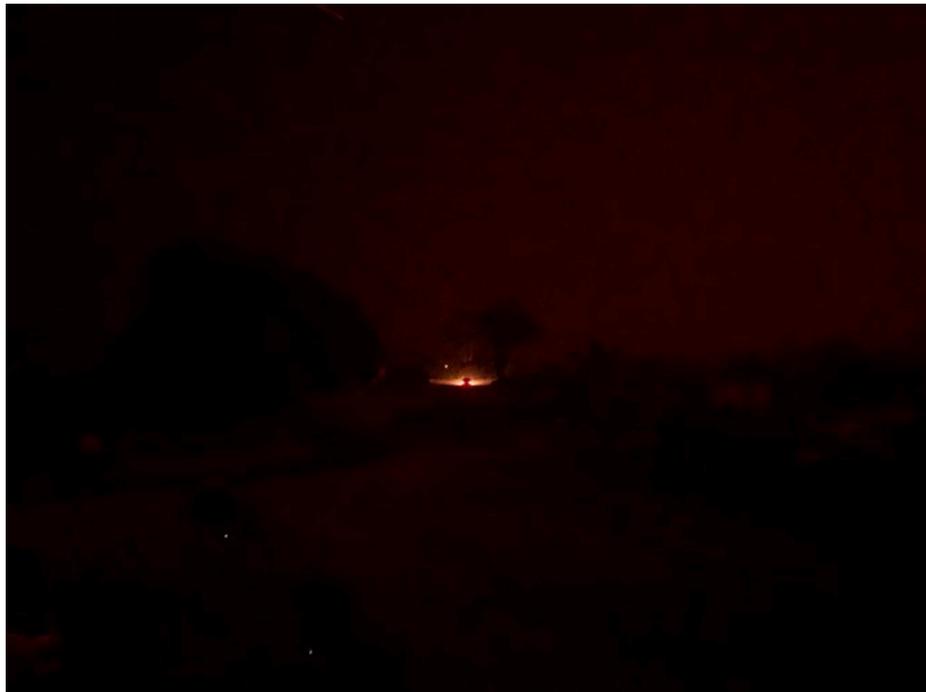
'It's like midnight': Thousands trapped on beach in Victoria

31 Dec, 2019 11:13am
4 minutes to read

Towns in Victoria's East Gippsland have been hit by out-of-control bushfires and homes are expected to be lost, while 4000 people are sheltering on a beach.

Thousands of people, including tourists and locals, are trapped on a beach in East Gippsland as fires rage around them.

The darkness in [#Mallacoota](#) is utterly surreal. Not far off pitch black when this should be a beautiful sunny morning.



228 people are talking about this

A massive fire is set to hit the beach in Mallacoota and locals say the sky has turned black.

The fire has cut power to the town.

"It's not pleasant, it's pitch dark here and the emergency vehicles have disappeared from sight," resident and local community radio presenter Francesca Winterson told ABC Gippsland.

"The power's been out here a long time and we've run out of solar.

"My home's in the fire path, I won't have a home, that's just the way it's going to be, we have to try and be calm."

AusNet Services says 5700 properties in East Gippsland without electricity due to the fires, and another 1800 in northeast Victoria also down.

Mobile and landline phone lines are also down in parts.

People in Mallacoota have tweeted saying they have got life jackets on and they're about to jump in the water.

Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp said firefighters are protecting 4000 people on the town's foreshore this morning.

They have been there throughout the night.

It's understood the plan was if the fire got too close, they'd be surrounded by CFA volunteers and they would create a wall of water to protect them as a last defence.

Some residents in Mallacoota are telling local ABC radio and tweeting that the fire has now hit the town.

They say sirens are ringing out and that fireys are instructing people to jump in the water.

A resident in Mallacoota has posted an eerie video from the town's foreshore.

Jann Gilbert, who took the video at 9.22am, said the current situation is "really scary".

"Absolutely unbelievable," she can be heard saying in the clip. "It's pitch black, embers are falling from the sky and you can't really see anything."

Nationals MP Darren Chester, who represents Gippsland, told ABC, "I was talking to a mate in Mallacoota, he says it's like midnight there, it's pitch black. They have a lot of smoke. They have embers falling."

"We have three strike teams in Mallacoota that will be looking after 4000 people on the beach as the fire goes into that particular town," Mr Crisp said.

Day has just turned into night in [#mallacoota](#)



"We are naturally very concerned about communities that have become isolated and to get an appreciation about other losses there could be we'll be putting helicopters up doing reconnaissance flights."

Mallacoota local Don Ashby told the ABC he expected damage to homes. "I've been in bushfires before, but not like this," he said.

Authorities say a fire will hit the town's foreshore within the next 30 minutes.

Earlier this morning, residents were posting pictures of a "horrific" red sky over the coastal town.

Properties have been lost in the region as out-of-control bushfires rage, but it's too early to confirm just how many, authorities say.

Fires rapidly grew overnight due to winds and lightning strikes and have ripped through more than 200,000 hectares in Victoria's East Gippsland, it was estimated early this morning.

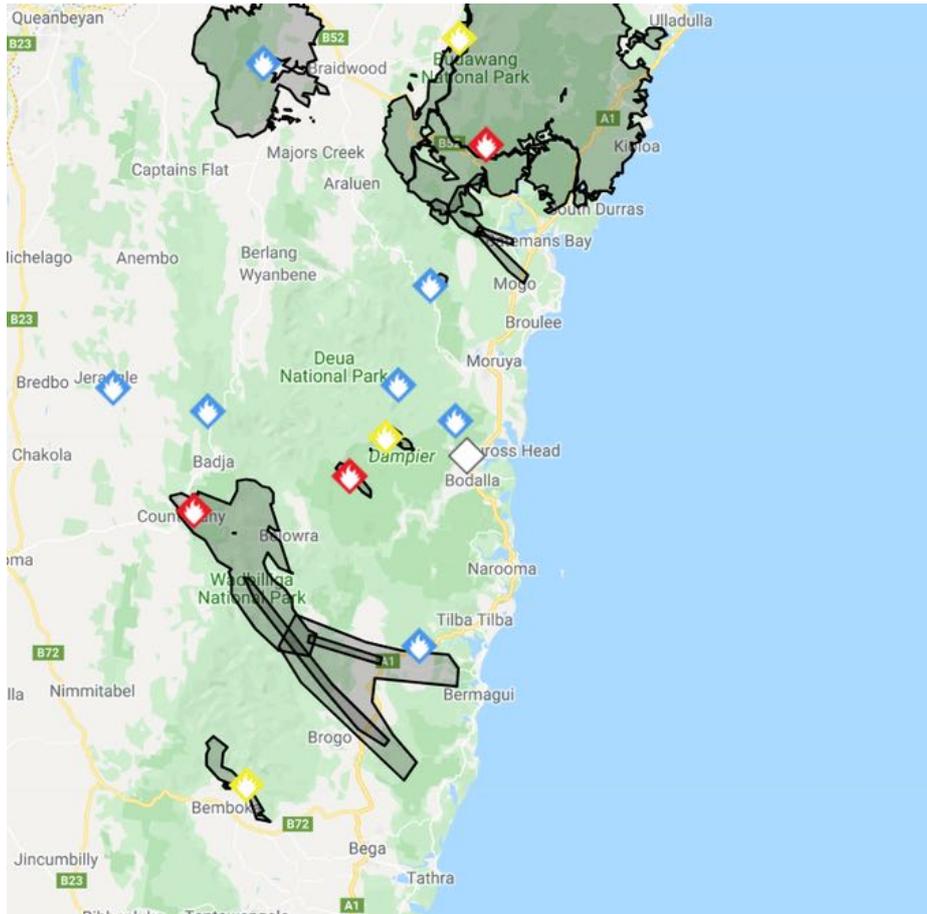


NSW RFS



@NSWRFS

Fires on the south coast of NSW are currently moving rapidly to the east. A strong and gusty southerly change is expected to move up the coast this morning. This will push fires in a northerly direction. [#NSWRFS](#)



102

9:29 AM - Dec 31, 2019

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148 people are talking about this

Rapidly moving fires in NSW have suddenly flared up this morning and they're headed east, towards the coast.

Meanwhile, a firefighter has been killed in a truck rollover near Albury in New South Wales, as out-of-control infernos threatens homes and lives in three states, with conditions set to worsen in some regions.

Severe fire danger is also forecast for Exmouth Gulf Coast and Gascoyne Coast in Western Australia today.



TraceyCorbinMatchett

@traceycm74

My fam n I just ran for our lives through bush. Huge bushfire trapping the 5 of us in the holiday house we're staying at. We



don't know what's left but so grateful for the @NSWRFS heading home to Sydney in shock. #tarbuckbay #NSWfires The #RFS are heroes!!



2,148

12:39 AM - Dec 31, 2019 · Turramurra, Sydney

Australia bushfires: towns devastated and lives lost as blazes turn the sky red Thousands shelter on beaches as fires rip through Victoria and New South Wales

Luke Henriques-Gomes

@lukehgomes

Tue 31 Dec 2019 07:49 GMT

Last modified on Tue 31 Dec 2019 09:48 GMT



Bushfires bring destruction to NSW south coast - video

Australia's bushfire crisis has claimed at least two more lives, authorities confirmed on Tuesday, as dozens of fires tore through several towns on the east coast and forced thousands of people to take shelter on beaches.

Two people – a father and son – died when **fire hit the New South Wales town of Cobargo** on Tuesday, while emergency services officials held grave fears for a third person, near Narooma, on the state's south coast.

In **Victoria**, where more than 200,000ha has burned in the state's east, at least four people were unaccounted for. The armed forces stand ready to evacuate those sheltering on the state's beaches if needed.

Eleven people have been confirmed dead across all states in this year's bushfire season so far.



Relief, anxiety, despair: bushfire evacuees endure day of emotional torment

The NSW Rural Fire Service commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, said it was “absolutely” the state’s worst bushfire season on record as he warned the reality of the damage would become clear only once the fires were under control.

“We need to brace ourselves for a considerable number of properties, a considerable number of homes that are likely to have been damaged and or destroyed right across these eight emergency warning fire areas, given the extraordinary nature of the fire behaviour and fire spread today,” he said.

In his New Year’s message, the prime minister, Scott Morrison, said the fires were having a “devastating impact” and warned that the weeks and months ahead would “continue to be difficult”.



Burning embers cover the ground as firefighters battle against bushfires around the town of Nowra in New South Wales. Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP via Getty Images



Flames rage near properties on the Sussex inlet road, south of Nowra. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

“I wish we had better news on New Year’s Eve but, one news we can always take comfort in is the amazing spirit of Australians,” he said. “We have faced these disasters before and we have come through.”



Firefighters battle to save NSW and Victorian coastal towns – in pictures

The fire crisis swept up the coast during the day, beginning with **dramatic scenes in Mallacoota**, in the far south-eastern corner of Victoria, where about 4,000 people fled their homes and took refuge on the beach and in boats as multiple fires surrounded the town, turning the sky black by 9am, and then a hazy red.

As the day progressed, similar scenes unfolded all the way up the NSW south coast, including large towns such as Batemans Bay and popular holiday destinations such as Bermagui in the south, all the way up to Jervis Bay, 250km further north.

Cobargo, a village a few kilometres inland from Bermagui, **lost much of its main street as the fires swept through**. Further north the town of Mogo **suffered similar devastation**, although dozens of animals in its popular wildlife park were saved by staff.



Cobargo, New South Wales, before and after bushfires destroyed a number of businesses on New Year’s Eve. Composite: Google Maps/Twitter

Late on Tuesday evening, NSW police announced that all telecommunications would be lost for a 150km stretch of the coast between Nowra and Moruya.

More than 120 bushfires were still ablaze on Tuesday evening, including eight at emergency level, and crews were concerned some blazes in Victoria could jump the border into NSW fuelled by a southerly wind.

The defence minister, Linda Reynolds, announced that the Australian Defence Force would deploy helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and naval vessels to assist in supplying and potentially evacuating people trapped by the Victorian fires, after a request from the state premier, Daniel Andrews.



A resident tries to hose down her home in the hope of saving it from nearby bushfires around the town of Nowra in New South Wales. Photograph: Saeed Khan/AFP via Getty Images

Victorian authorities are yet to quantify the damage across East Gippsland, but said a “significant” number of homes had been lost and at least one primary school destroyed, while many livestock are also expected to have died.

Of the four people missing across East Gippsland, Andrews said: “We do have very real fears for their safety. They have been in active fire environments.”

On Tuesday afternoon, police in NSW confirmed that a father and son had been killed in fires at Cobargo. The two men were protecting their homes in the Bega Valley.



Mallacoota fire: images of 'mayhem' and 'armageddon' as bushfires rage

Another man was unaccounted for west of Narooma, on the NSW south coast. “Unfortunately we think the news in that house will not be good either,” the NSW police deputy commissioner, Gary Worboys, said.

Pictures posted to social media from countless small communities up and down the coast and inland suggested a huge number of properties had been destroyed, adding to the 900 confirmed lost in [New South Wales](#) in this year’s fire season until last week.

On Tuesday evening, large fires were still burning out of control including the 31,000ha Clyde Mountain fire near Batemans Bay, the 26,000ha Green Valley fire east of Albury and the 64,000-ha Countegany fire east of Cooma .



A family board a boat in Mallacoota to seek shelter from fires on Tuesday morning. Photograph: @BradleyWDeacon

The opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, called for a meeting of federal, state and territory governments, noting fires were burning across multiple states. “I again say to the prime minister that it isn’t acceptable, in my view, to say [the council of state and federal governments] doesn’t need to meet until March,” he said.

Fire chiefs in NSW have said they expect the fires to continue to burn until the state receives sustained rainfall. Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia have also faced bushfires in recent days.

Albanese also described the City of Sydney’s decision to go ahead with the New Year’s Eve fireworks as “problematic”.



People on a boat taking shelter from the bushfires hitting the area around Mallacoota. Photograph: HANDOUT/Courtesy of Ida Dempsey/AFP via Getty Images

Amid **considerable debate in Sydney over the \$6m fireworks display**, traditionally one of the largest in the world, authorities said the show could go ahead despite potentially dangerous conditions.

Some have said holding the display would be insensitive, but the NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, backed the move.

“I understand the decision to proceed and on balance I support that decision,” she said. “It’s not without acknowledging how there are mixed feelings in the community about it.”

On Tuesday the NSW firefighter who died the previous day was named as Samuel McPaul, 28. McPaul was killed while fighting fires 70km east of Albury, near the Victorian border, when the 10-tonne truck he was in **was overturned by a freak “fire tornado”**. McPaul’s wife Megan is expecting the couple’s first child in May.

Australia fires: nine dead and hundreds of properties destroyed, with worse to come

Residents in Victoria and New South Wales count terrible cost during brief reprieve from disaster that has sent smoke as far as New Zealand

Ben Smee, Calla Wahlquist and Helen Davidson

Wed 1 Jan 2020 08:05 GMT

Last modified on Wed 1 Jan 2020 08:17 GMT



The remains of burnt-out buildings are seen along main street in the New South Wales town of Cobargo after bushfires ravaged the town. Photograph: Sean Davey/AFP via Getty Images

Nine people are confirmed dead, with four still missing, and more than 200 properties have been lost since Christmas Day in Australia's catastrophic bushfires.

Smoke still hung thick over the south-east of the country on Wednesday evening, even as weather conditions offered a reprieve to take stock of the destruction.

On Wednesday afternoon, authorities in **New South Wales** and Victoria said another five people were confirmed dead, and another man presumed dead. They warned the death toll was likely to continue to rise.



Malua Bay fire: survivors tell how 1,000 people lived through a night of flames on NSW beach

At Malua Bay, on the NSW south coast, survivors spoke of how **1,000 people spent the night on the beach** in a bid to seek shelter from the flames. "Everyone was on the beach, just covered in ash and smoke," Al Baxter, the former Wallaby, told Guardian Australia. "There was a strange calmness. People were as close to the water's edge as they could [be]. People were literally just lying on the beach trying to keep out of the smoke and ash.

In **Victoria**, Mick Roberts from Buchan in the East Gippsland region had been unaccounted for since Monday. He was found dead in his home on Wednesday.

"He's not missing any more ... sorry but his body has been found in his house," Roberts's niece Leah Parsons said on social media. "Very sad day for us to (start) the year but we're a bloody tight family and we will never forget our mate and my beautiful Uncle Mick," she wrote.



Burnt homes Batemans Bay, on the New South Wales south coast. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

In NSW, police have now confirmed deaths at Lake Conjola, Yatte Yattah, Sussex Inlet and Coolagolite. Authorities been unable to reach a property at Belowra in NSW where a 72-year-old man is presumed dead.

As relatively calm conditions set in on Wednesday, the sheer scale of the fire emergency was laid bare. People returned to find their homes damaged or destroyed. Thick **smoke was visible more than 2,000km away, on the south island of New Zealand.**



Annie Pappalardo
@Annieb25

In Christchurch... the smoke from NSW and Victoria has made its way here. I just wish it would rain across the whole of Australia and put them all out! That was the sun at 3pm!! [#AustraliaFires](#) [#bushfirecrisis](#)



44

6:52 PM - Jan 1, 2020

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[29 people are talking about this](#)

Authorities confirmed 176 homes have been lost on the NSW south coast; 89 in Conjola Park, 40 at Malua Bay and 15 in Rosedale. Another 50 properties have been destroyed in Victoria since Sunday. It is expected the final figures may be much higher.



James Findlay
@james_findlay
· Dec 31, 2019

Replying to @james_findlay

After last night, my Uncles and Aunts were protecting their farms in Victoria.



James Findlay
@james_findlay

Here it is. Our family home. Burnt to the ground. Photos taken by our neighbour. We are devastated. Just one of the many, many homes lost in Batemans Bay and Mogo. [#NSWfires](#)



276

1:13 PM - Jan 1, 2020 · Melbourne, Victoria

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[192 people are talking about this](#)

The small inland communities of Cobargo, Quaama and Mogo in NSW were severely affected by the fires.



Tegan George



@tegangeorge

Absolute devastation in Cobargo. Many thought their homes would be ok. [@10NewsFirstSyd](#)



36

6:22 PM - Jan 1, 2020

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

37 people are talking about this

While most of the destruction occurred on Tuesday, the ferocity of the fires meant many people were unable to find out basic information until New Year's Day. Electricity and communications lines were cut for extended periods in many areas. Roads in and out of towns remain closed.

The disaster has brought out stories of community and **efforts to battle on in the face of unprecedented adversity** in Victoria and NSW. In Bairnsdale, donations flooded in for those who had lost everything, who even then were reluctant to accept help.

"We had a couple with three kids here, and he [the father] started crying," said helper Wendy McPhan. "I said, 'here's a \$300 voucher for Woolies,' and he said 'no, I can't take that, there's people worse off.'

"I said: 'Mate, you have lost everything. You have lost your house. There is no one worse off.'"

Australia is becoming a nation of dread – and the world looks on with pity and scorn

David Marr

Many people are now concerned they might not be able to escape affected areas for days; a fear compounded by forecasts that the calm weather on Wednesday is but a brief reprieve.

Forecasters predict very hot and windy conditions for South Australia on Friday and dangerous bushfire conditions for eastern Victoria and New South Wales on Saturday, with **temperatures again set to reach into the mid-40s**.



The smoking ruin of a building in Cobargo, New South Wales. Photograph: Sean Davey/EPA

“We are assuming that on Saturday weather conditions will be at least as bad as what they were yesterday,” the NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, said. “That is something all of us have to brace ourselves for.”

The likelihood of extreme conditions returning has added to the urgency to assist people who remain hemmed in by closed roads and uncontrolled firegrounds.

The **Australian Defence Force has been deployed** to attempt to evacuate residents from isolated communities by air or sea, and drop off supplies. A ship with supplies for two weeks – 1.6 tonnes of water, food, and 30,000 litres of fuel – has already left Melbourne.

Victorian premier Daniel Andrews, on a visit to Bairnsdale on Wednesday, said: “I don’t know that we’ve ever done this before ... we’ve got choppers taking 90 firefighters out of the Mallacoota area, they can’t be removed any other way – we’re essentially doing a shift change by the air.”

The three major fires in Victoria’s East Gippsland region now cover about 500,000 hectares and have “essentially combined into one”, state emergency services commissioner Andrew Crisp said. A 100,000ha fire at Corryong, on the northern side of the Great Dividing Range, and another fire of a similar size in NSW, are also at risk of combining.



A burnt-out truck on the Princes Highway south of Nowra, New South Wales, on Wednesday. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

Crisp said it would not be possible to put out those fires before the weather worsened. “It was nature which started the fires and it will be nature that stops these fires,” he said.

On Wednesday afternoon two fires burning on Kangaroo Island in South Australia merged, and firefighters have warned it could burn for weeks. Forecast northerly winds could push the fire towards the Flinders Chase national park.

Since the start of July, 15 people have been killed by the bushfires and more than 1,000 homes lost.

Firefighter **Sam McPaul, 28, died when his fire truck was overturned by extreme winds east of Albury** on Monday.

Father and son, Robert and Patrick Salway, were found dead inside their house in Cobargo on Tuesday.

The nature and scale of this bushfire season in Australia is **unprecedented**. Scientists have cited the lack of moisture in the landscape – following years of drought – as a key reason the fires have been so severe. Intense heat, dry conditions and strong winds have created conditions where the fire risk is considered extreme or catastrophic.

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, at a reception for the Australian and New Zealand cricket sides at Kirribilli House, acknowledged the fires were “a time of great challenge for Australia”. Morrison reiterated comments from a **New Year comment piece** that focused on the resilience of communities and deflected debate about the underlying cause of the fires.

“Whether they’re started by lightning storms or whatever the cause may be, our firefighters and all of those who have come behind them to support them, whether they’re volunteering in the front line or behind the scenes in a great volunteer effort, it is something that will happen against the backdrop of this Test match.

“But at the same time, Australians will be gathering, whether it’s at the SCG [Sydney cricket ground] or around television sets all around the country, and they’ll be inspired by the great feats of our cricketers from both sides of the Tasman and I think they’ll be encouraged by the spirit shown by Australians and the way that people have gone about remembering the terrible things that other Australians are dealing with at the moment.”





Australia bushfires: tens of thousands stranded while attempting to flee

Visitors who were told to evacuate a vast area along the NSW south coast before even worse fire conditions return stuck for hours in gridlocked traffic

Ben Smees and Luke Henriques-Gomes

Thu 2 Jan 2020 08:41 GMT

Last modified on Thu 2 Jan 2020 08:58 GMT



Police direct traffic evacuating the NSW south coast on the Monaro Highway via Cooma. Thousands of people were caught in huge traffic snarls as they fled bushfire-affected zones on Thursday. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

Tens of thousands of people remained stranded on Thursday evening while attempting to flee bushfire-ravaged areas of the south-east Australian coast – having earlier been urged to leave before the return of extreme and dangerous weather conditions.

The mass evacuation of communities in **New South Wales** and Victoria is among the largest ever emergency movements of people in Australia. The numbers fleeing the bushfire crisis remain unclear, but are expected to compare to the 60,000 people who were flown out of Darwin after Cyclone Tracy in 1974.

Visitors told to flee a vast evacuation area along the NSW south coast reported sitting in gridlock for up to 10 hours after responding to the order to evacuate, as further outbreaks of fire and sheer weight of traffic blocked escape routes north of Ulladulla and near Cooma in the Snowy Mountains.

Some political leaders find their natural authority in a crisis – not Scott Morrison
Katharine Murphy, political editor

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, urged people to be patient, as he **again deflected criticism about his government's policies to address the causes of**

climate change.

"I know you can have kids in the car and there is anxiety and there is stress and the traffic is not moving quickly but the best thing to do – the best thing that helps those out there volunteering, out there trying to restore some order to these situations, is for everyone to be patient," Morrison said.

On Thursday afternoon an angry protester told Morrison he should be "ashamed of himself" and that he had "left the country to burn" during a tour of the burnt out town of Cobargo.

Authorities in **Victoria** hold grave fears for 17 people missing across the state, and advised anyone who could do so to leave fire-affected places in the East Gippsland region.

At the Victorian coastal inlet of Mallacoota, which is among 20 towns that have been isolated by the fires since Tuesday, between 3,000 and 4,000 people were facing an impending food and water shortage as they waited to be evacuated by sea.

On Thursday afternoon, Australian defence force officials said they expected to relocate 800 people using the naval ship HMAS Choules, while others will be airlifted out.



Linda Reynolds



@lindareynoldswa

Evacuation plans for [#Mallacoota](#) are underway, as [#YourADF](#) works with emergency services to prepare transferring people to HMAS Choules tomorrow AM.

Commanding Officer of Choules, CMDR Houlihan, led the ADF team onshore today to provide timely and relevant support.



153

5:03 PM - Jan 2, 2020

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[53 people are talking about this](#)

New South Wales has **declared a seven-day state of emergency** before extreme conditions, including temperatures exceeding 40C, return to the south coast, Snowy Mountains and the outskirts of Sydney on Friday and Saturday.

Evacuation orders were issued to holidaymakers from Batemans Bay to the Victorian border and people were advised that two highway escape routes were opened – north to Sydney along the Princes Highway, and south, via the Monaro Highway, hooking back to Canberra through Cooma. But on Thursday evening both routes were at a standstill as the fire threat lingered, with tailbacks of up to 25km reported.

The northern route was blocked from about midday by a bushfire that closed the Princes Highway. Motorists heading north were advised to delay their trip or take shelter at Ulladulla. The road remained closed about 6pm. Motorists were reported abandoning their cars or heading to the south.



Gavin Coote



@GavinCoote

Gridlock all the way through Ulladulla, similar scenes in Milton, Nowra and Batemans Bay. Just met a woman who's arrived in Ulladulla after leaving Depot Beach - 30km south - at 7am. I'll have more on [@abcnews](#) The World Today @ 12.10pm on Local Radio, 1pm on [@RadioNational](#)



74
1:48 PM - Jan 2, 2020 · Ulladulla, New South Wales
[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

53 people are talking about this

The southern route was also hampered by a bushfire that came close to the Monaro Highway and caused delays north of Cooma. Witnesses said the lines of stationary traffic near Cooma were more than 30km long.



Prof Jodie Bradby
[@JodieBradby](#)

Monaro Hwy from Cooma to Canberra. Drive carefully folks.



345

6:29 PM - Jan 1, 2020

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

188 people are talking about this

Residents in the town of Batlow, famous for its apples, were advised to leave by Friday morning because of forecast fire danger in the Kosciuszko national park and surrounding areas. The entire park has been evacuated and authorities warned conditions were likely to be so severe that surrounding towns could not be defended.



Gillian Bradford



@bradders2

One account from a friend trying to evacuate from Malua Bay today:

Headed north at 6am. Took 6.5 hours to do 80kms.... then highway closed at Benalong and we were turned back. so we headed south. now at a standstill coming into Bega 10 hours in the car and counting.

57

8:21 PM - Jan 2, 2020

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

35 people are talking about this

NSW Rural Fire Service commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said conditions on Saturday were forecast to be worse than those on New Year's Eve.

"Those fires have spread at the absolute worst-case scenario, which typically is not what happens when it plays out on the ground," Fitzsimmons said.

"The conditions on Saturday are likely to be worse than New Year's Eve and a lot of those areas in the south-east quadrant of the state have the potential to be impacted and impacted very heavily."

The New South Wales premier, Gladys Berejiklian, said the state of emergency from Friday would give emergency services the authority to undertake forced evacuations and road closures at short notice.



'We were surrounded': how the bushfires forced Rosedale families to flee to the beach

"We don't take these decisions lightly but we also want to make sure we're taking every single precaution to be prepared for what could be a horrible day on Saturday," she said.

Since Christmas Day, nine people have been killed in bushfires across New South Wales and Victoria, while **17 people have died** since the season began.

About 150 fires continued to burn in Victoria and NSW on Thursday afternoon and officials warned they would be unable to control the blazes before conditions worsen.

"We have no capacity to contain these fires ... the fires are going to do what they are going to do, and people have to get out of that area," NSW Rural Fire Service deputy commissioner Rob Rogers said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Morrison attended the funeral of Geoffrey Keaton, a volunteer firefighter who died on 19 December when his truck rolled at Green Wattle Creek, south of Sydney.

At a press conference afterwards, Morrison was repeatedly asked about his government's climate policy.

"I understand the anxiety and I understand the fear that is there for many and I understand the frustration, but this is a natural disaster," he said. "What we are saying is we cannot control the natural disaster but what we can do is control our response.

"The drought has created a tinder box around the country and that has, through various forms of ignition, has seen these fires run for long periods of time."

New Zealand glaciers turn brown and 'could melt faster because of Australia's bushfires'

By Gianluca Mezzofiore, CNN

Updated 1433 GMT (2233 HKT) January 2, 2020



A photo taken on January 1 shows the Fox and Franz Josef glaciers in New Zealand, which have turned brown as a result of Australian bushfire smoke and ash.

(CNN)Smoke and ash drifting from the [Australian bushfires](#) have caused New Zealand's glaciers to turn caramel brown, with one expert fearing this could increase the risk of them melting faster this year.

A jet stream transporting large amounts of smoke and ash this week from the blazes in Victoria and New South Wales deposited them along the way in New Zealand's South Island as they traveled east, according to CNN meteorologist Michael Guy.

Pictures and videos taken on New Year's Day show that the yellow haze had discolored the snowy mountain peaks and glaciers in the Southern Alps.



A photo taken on January 1 shows the Fox and Franz Josef glaciers in New Zealand, which have turned brown as a result of Australian bushfire smoke and ash.

Rey, an Australian woman living in Wellington, snapped some of these photos on Fox and Franz Josef glaciers.

"We took a flight up over Fox and Franz Josef glaciers (from Franz Josef township) and landed on a flat surface not too far from the glaciers, not on a glacier per se. The pilot said he had been up the day before and the snow was white," Rey, who didn't want to give her full name, told CNN.



A photo taken on January 1 shows the Fox and Franz Josef glaciers in New Zealand, which have turned brown as a result of Australian bushfire smoke and ash.

"I'm an Aussie living in Wellington NZ on a South Island road trip with my sister who is from rural NSW, so we've been following the news closely and feeling pretty devastated."



Fabulousmonster

@Rachelhatesit

· Jan 1, 2020

Near Franz Josef glacier. The "caramelised" snow is caused by dust from the bushfires. It was white yesterday



Fabulousmonster
@Rachelhatesit

[#AUSTRALIANBUSHFIRES](#)



97

12:20 PM · Jan 1, 2020 · Westland District, New Zealand

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

52 people are talking about this

Satellite pictures on Thursday showed smoke from the fires in New South Wales and Victoria crossing the Tasman Sea and the North Island of New Zealand. New South Wales and Franz Josef glaciers are more than 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) apart.

New Zealand's former prime minister Helen Clark tweeted that the impact of Australian ash on glaciers "is likely to accelerate melting."



Helen Clark



@HelenClarkNZ

How one country's tragedy has spillover effects: Australian bushfires have created haze in New Zealand with particular impact on the south of the South Island yesterday & now spreading more widely. Impact of ash on glaciers is likely to accelerate melting:

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/world/the-times/bushfires-ash-from-australia-threatens-nz-glaciers/news-story/cc78bf59db528b33865a7eea740a3541>

...
<https://twitter.com/WeatherWatchNZ/status/1212491582504460289>



Bushfire ash threatens NZ glaciers

New Zealand's retreating southern glaciers are facing a new threat: clouds of orange soot from bushfires in Australia.

[theaustralian.com.au](https://www.theaustralian.com.au)

WeatherWatch.co.nz

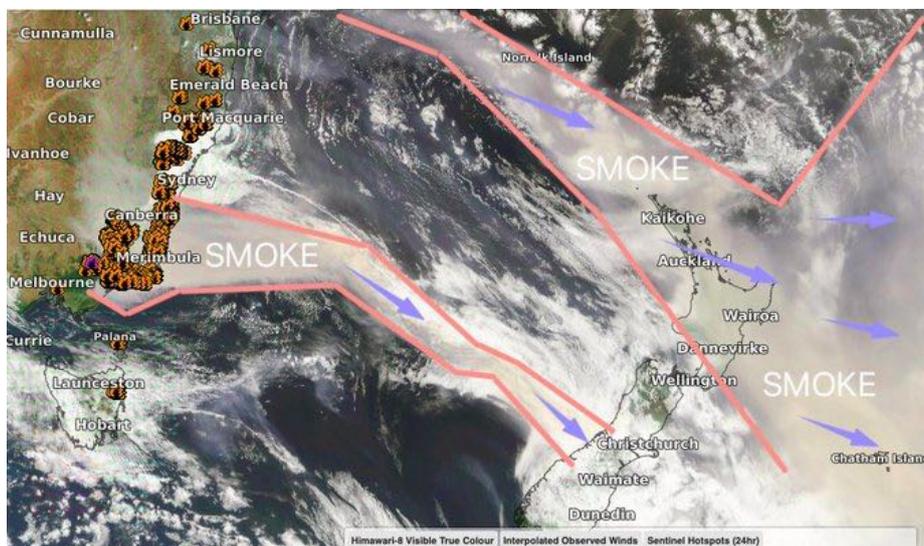


@WeatherWatchNZ

#Smoke from #Australia is thinning out further today as it now moves over the North Island of #NewZealand (combined with cloud too).

The main plume lies over the North Island for Thursday. A secondary weaker plume is covering a few parts of the South Island.

10:50am NZDT Jan 2:



406

11:56 AM - Jan 2, 2020

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

420 people are talking about this

That's because of the so-called Albedo effect, Guy explains.

"This is when the whiteness of an object reflects radiation away impacting its temperature," he continues.

"Thus, areas on the planet that are covered in ice and snow do not absorb the radiation as fast because it reflects it, causing lower temperatures than areas with a lower whiteness value which are quick to absorb the radiation and increase and hold on to the temperatures." Guy added that this year, glacier melt may quicken "since the color will be a little darker than true white."



Miss Roho
@MissRoho

This the view from the top of the Tasman Glacier NZ today - whole South island experiencing bushfire clouds. We can



actually smell the burning here in Christchurch. Thinking of you guys. [#nswbushfire](#) [#AustralianFires](#)
[#AustraliaBurning](#)



6,043

12:04 AM - Jan 2, 2020

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[3,950 people are talking about this](#)

People in other parts of New Zealand's South Island woke up on New Year's Day to skies turning an eerie yellow, orange and gray from the bushfires.



Megan Bilcock
@meganbilcock

South Island, New Year's Day. Heartbreaking reality of the Australian fires still burning. Skies lit yellow, orange and grey here in NZ this morning, air smelling of burning. [#australiafires](#) [#australiaburns](#) [#savethekoalas](#) [#nofilter](#)



6

4:41 PM - Jan 1, 2020 · Bushy Beach
[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

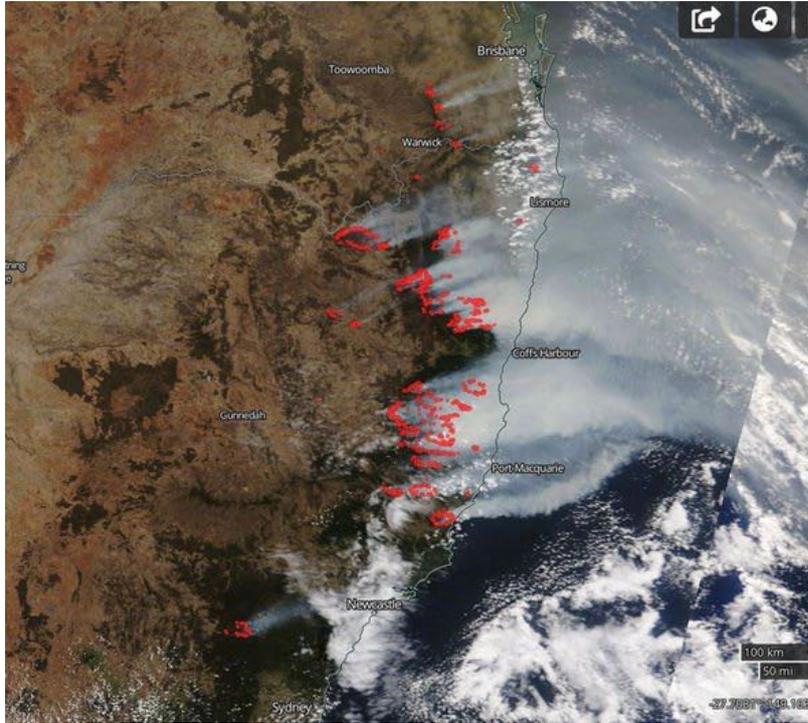
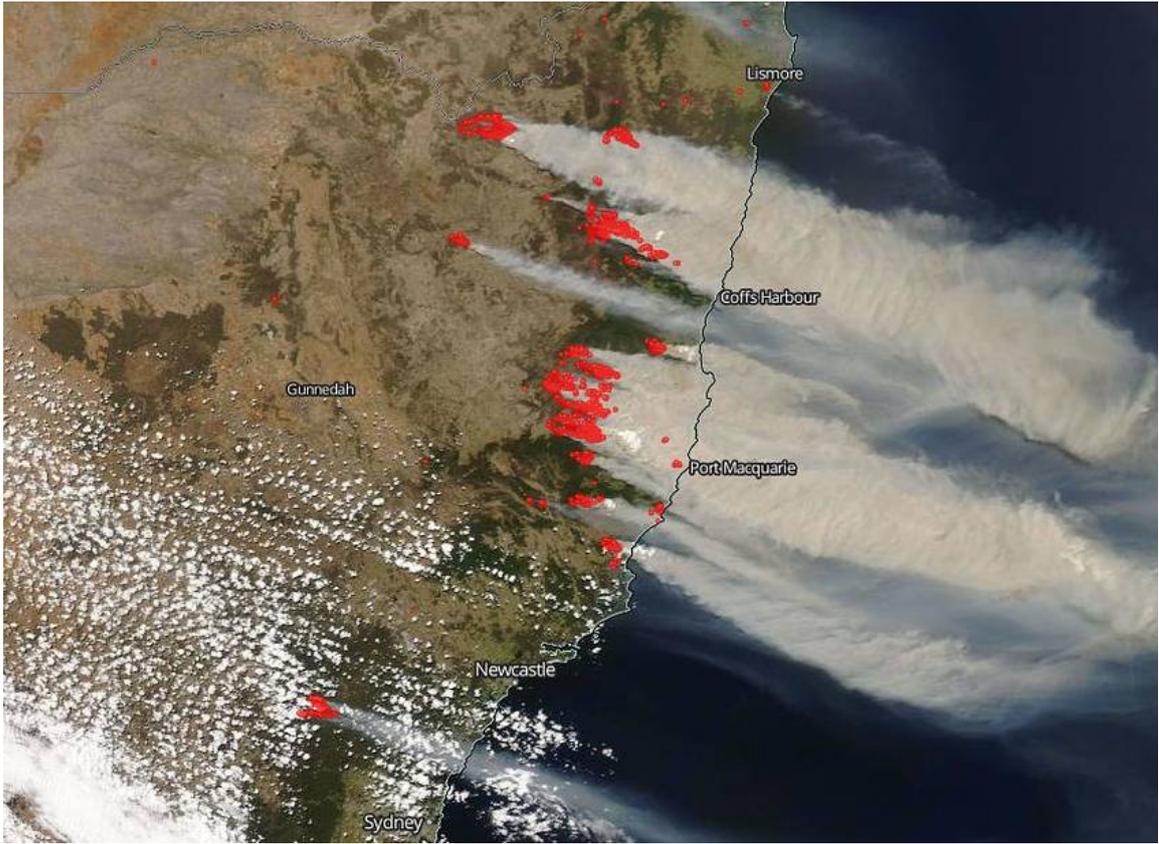
[See Megan Bilcock's other Tweets](#)

In November, travel photographer and blogger Liz Carlson [took photos of the glaciers](#) in Mount Aspiring National Park on New Zealand's South Island turning pinkish-red from dust and particles blown over from Australia's bushfires.

"Often at the end of summer the glaciers can appear dirty, even gray with all of the snowmelt and bits of black rock on them, but this was the height of spring so it was really bizarre," she told CNN last month.

While it's too early to say exactly how the particles will affect the glaciers in New Zealand, scientists have found that forest fires in the Amazon [have caused glaciers in the Andes](#) mountains to melt faster, with pollutants such as black carbon and dust lodged in the ice, reducing the glacier's ability to reflect sunlight.

CNN's Michael Guy contributed to this report.





5m ago
05:15

There are not a lot of flights coming in or out of Canberra at the moment.

Here is one of the reasons why



Annika Smethurst



@annikasmethurst

Passengers describe flying through fire-generated cloud on Melbourne-to-Canberra flight

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-05/nsw-vic-fire-generated-thunderstorm-plane-qantas/11842038?pfmredir=sm>

[abc.net.au/news/2020-01-05/nsw-vic-fire-generated-thunderstorm-plane-qantas/11842038?pfmredir=sm](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-05/nsw-vic-fire-generated-thunderstorm-plane-qantas/11842038?pfmredir=sm)

[5/nsw-vic-fire-generated-thunderstorm-plane-qantas/11842038?pfmredir=sm](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-05/nsw-vic-fire-generated-thunderstorm-plane-qantas/11842038?pfmredir=sm)

... via [@abcnews](#)



Bright orange, then pitch black as Qantas flight hits turbulence in fire's cloud

Passengers describe the terrifying moment their flight from Melbourne to Canberra entered a fire-generated weather system.

[abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-05/nsw-vic-fire-generated-thunderstorm-plane-qantas/11842038?pfmredir=sm)

4

6:12 PM - Jan 5, 2020

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[See Annika Smethurst's other Tweets](#)

Facebook
Twitter
9m ago
05:12

Scott Morrison is asked what his message is, to the world at large, which is watching, and told that the social media hashtag is 'Australia is on fire'.

His response is brief.

Thank you for your support.

Facebook
Twitter
10m ago
05:11

He is again asked about his leadership during this crisis:

The response you are seeing rolled out here in Australia at a state and commonwealth level is unprecedented. This is the largest single call out ever of defence force reservists, working together with our full time defence forces to provide support which this country has never seen before.

On top of that, the financial support that will be provided, I made more announcements about that yesterday, but already some 25 million working in close partnership with the states and territories.

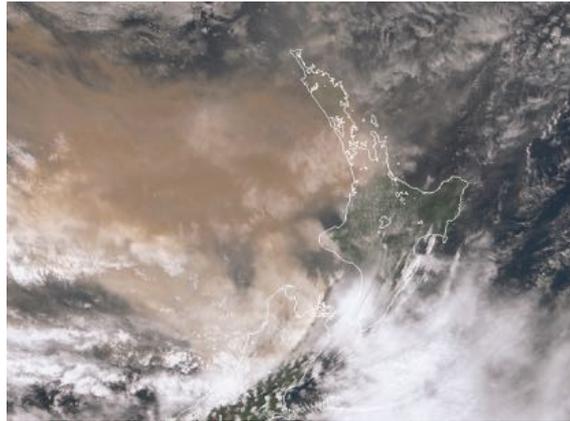
What matters is the resources are made available on the ground, the delivery of services necessary in the building and recovery effort that we will see in the future, the focus on the work that needs to be done, by the Commissioner, the Premier and the Major General.

Facebook
Twitter
11m ago
05:10

Scott Morrison is asked if he has apologised to **Shane Fitzsimmons** for not telling him in advance about the ADF deployment - he says he has already done that.

Global Apocalypse Now: Auckland NZ goes brown at midday





Australia bushfires might burn for months, Morrison warns

7 hours ago



The BBC's Phil Mercer says Kangaroo Valley has "a horrible, ghostly feel"

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has warned that the devastating bushfires raging in the country might go on for months. At least 24 people have died since the fires began in September. Air quality in the capital Canberra was this weekend rated the worst in the world. Mr Morrison announced the creation of a recovery agency to help those who have lost homes and businesses in the fires. He has faced fierce criticism over the speed of his response to the crisis.

The weekend saw some of the worst days of the crisis so far, with hundreds more properties destroyed. Rural towns and major cities saw red skies, falling ash and smoke that clogged the air.

Conditions eased in Victoria and New South Wales on Sunday after temperatures and wind speeds dropped and some light rain fell. But authorities warned that the danger was far from over.

"We're in uncharted territory," said the New South Wales premier, Gladys Berejiklian. "We can't pretend that this is something that we have experienced before. It's not."

John Steele, 73, who was evacuated with his wife from their rural property north of Eden late on Saturday, told the AFP news agency: "Visibility was down to about 50 metres, if that, and we had lots of debris falling out of the sky and a lot of white ash."

"The sky is still red. We're not out of the woods yet."



The BBC's Phil Mercer witnessed a dust storm "coming towards us like a monster"

Prime Minister Morrison on Saturday announced the largest military call-up in the country's recent history, mobilising up to 3,000 reservists to assist exhausted volunteer firefighters.

Mr Morrison, who cancelled a planned visit to India because of the crisis, faced further condemnation on Sunday, after the head of the NSW Rural Fire Service revealed the service had only learned of the plan to call up reserve troops through the media.

In an indication of the long road ahead, Mr Morrison warned that the fires might burn for many months, and said that the newly-created recovery agency would run for at least two years. The body will help bushfire-hit communities recover, media reports said, through work ranging from rebuilding infrastructure to providing mental health support.

Queen Elizabeth on Sunday said she was "deeply saddened" by the fires, and thanked the emergency services "who put their own lives in danger" to help communities.

Fundraiser nets A\$20m in 48 hours

A fundraiser for fire services launched by the Australian comedian Celeste Barber on Friday raised more than A\$20 million (£10.6m; \$13m) in just 48 hours

"Please help any way you can. This is terrifying," Ms Celeste wrote in a Facebook appeal.

She called the rush of donations "incredible", and said the proceeds would go to NSW Rural Fire Service - a government-funded agency staffed by volunteers - and the Brigades Donations Fund, which channels charitable donations directly to fire brigades.

Members of the comedian's family were evacuated from the town of Eden in New South Wales, where officials told residents to leave immediately and head north if they did not have a bushfire response plan.



Many New South Wales residents have turned to evacuation centres after fleeing their homes

A number of celebrities have also donated money to support the firefighting effort in recent days - among them the US singer Pink and Oscar-winner Nicole Kidman, who pledged \$500,000. "Our family's support, thoughts and prayers are with everyone affected by the fires all over Australia," she wrote on Instagram.

News of the donations was praised by Australians on social media, but some lamented that private citizens were raising funds they said should have been put in place by the government.

Nearly 200 fires are still burning across the country, with every state and territory affected. More than 1,200 homes have been destroyed and millions of hectares of land scorched.

Tens of thousands of homes in NSW were left without power and thousands of people have been evacuated from coastal towns over the past week. The town of Cooma suffered a further blow on Saturday night when a large tower carrying millions of litres of water exploded, flooding homes and sweeping away vehicles. NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro told ABC News the incident was a "massive disaster".

Paradise lost: residents flee Eden as Australia fires race towards them



Shelley Caban and her daughter Pearl on the bus where the family has been living since fleeing their home in Nethercote on New Year's Eve. Photograph: Andrew Quilty/The Guardian

Days of limbo wear down NSW-Victoria communities displaced by blazes ripping through swaths of east coast by **Michael McGowan** in Eden

Sun 5 Jan 2020 13.27 GMT

First published on Sun 5 Jan 2020 12.42 GMT

Shelley Caban just wants it to be over.

"Sometimes I think, 'Fuck it, just burn it all, the house and everything,'" she says. "It's the waiting and the limbo, you just feel like anything has to be better."

When the Guardian spoke to Caban on Sunday, the 33-year-old was sheltered inside the safety of an unregistered bus-turned-refuge on the wharf in the coastal **New South Wales** town of Eden with her husband, Oliver Tratham-Webb, her three daughters Pearl, Aster and Aria, three dogs, a cat and several ducklings.

They have not seen home – a historic 150-year-old timber house in the picturesque Nethercote Valley just south of Eden in the state's far-south – since New Year's Eve, when they woke to chokingly-thick smoke outside their home, packed the bus and left.

"I just knew we had to get out of there," she said.

Now they find themselves among the thousands of Australians displaced indefinitely by the bushfire emergency gripping this country, a rolling crisis that has torn through great swaths of the east coast since November. In its wake, the fires have left whole towns decimated and forced new **pressure on the Australian government** to act more aggressively to address the impact of climate change.



Aster Tratham-Webb sleeps by Comet the dog on the bus owned by the Tratham-Webb family on Sunday. Photograph: Andrew Quilty/The Guardian

"It has to change something, doesn't it?" Caban said on Sunday. "I really, really hope it does. The spiral can't keep going like this."

After communities across the state's south coast were struck by fierce blazes on New Year's Eve, authorities had warned that blistering temperatures and strong gusting winds on Saturday could make for even worse conditions.



They were right.

At least 60 homes have been confirmed destroyed by fires that ripped through NSW on Saturday, though that total is expected to rise once Rural Fire Service crews are able to properly inspect the fire grounds.

It brings the total number of properties destroyed in this state since bushfires gripped more than a month ago to 1,400.

The worst-affected areas on Saturday included Batlow, a small village in the foothills of the state's Snowy Mountains, where homes were destroyed and a man died of a heart attack while attempting to protect a friend's property.

In the Southern Highlands, south-west of Sydney, homes were destroyed in Kangaroo Valley and Wingello after embers from the Currowan fire crossed the Shoalhaven River and sparked fires in the dense bushland on the river's northern banks.



The aftermath of bushfires on properties south of Cobargo on the New South Wales south coast on Sunday. Photograph: Andrew Quilty

In Victoria, where dozens of blazes continue to burn, 18 communities remain cut off, including **Mallacoota**, where residents had previously had to be evacuated by the navy after a previous round of fires tore through.

The prime minister, **Scott Morrison**, has promised an aid package for areas ravaged by the crisis and said on Sunday he would consider a royal commission into the deadly blazes, which have burned vast areas on the east coast.

Morrison, who has been heavily criticised for **taking a holiday in Hawaii during the crisis** and was heckled by locals in Cobargo after **forcing a handshake on an unwilling woman**, also again **defended his leadership during the emergency**.

In the small fishing and logging town of Eden, near the NSW and Victoria border, hundreds of people huddled at the wharf on Saturday night as a large and uncontained fire driven by gusting southerly winds raced towards the town.

By Sunday morning, conditions remained dire, and police began pleading with people to flee north to the town of Merimbula or west to Bega.



Eden residents prepare to take shelter onboard a tugboat at the town's wharf, rather than evacuating north by road, as the so-called border fire threatened the town on Sunday. Photograph: Andrew Quilty/The

In Merimbula, about 27km north, an evacuation centre has reached capacity and shanty towns have emerged along the water. Among them was Rodney Sargent with his girlfriend, Jaymi Herman.

The couple had driven almost 2,500km south from Townsville in Queensland with their dog Rex to meet Sargent's father, Alan, who had come 4,000km across the country from Western Australia to meet for a holiday in Eden.

Now they're stuck.

"It wasn't the holiday we were expecting," Sargent told the Guardian. "We can't get any phone service and we're pretty much out of fuel. We're just waiting here. You feel pretty lost. I just want to get out of this entire state as quickly as possible."

Despite the urging of police to leave Eden though, many decided they were safer in the town near water.

On Saturday night, as the fire approached, Matt Proctor, a fisherman, took his partner and two children on to his dinghy and took shelter in a harbour near the town. In pitch black and surrounded by acrid smoke, they tried to wait it out as relentless gusting winds buffeted them and ash rained from the sky.



The wharf at the New South Wales south coast town of Eden, where residents who decided not to evacuate boarded boats to see out the threat of the border fire burning to the south of Eden. Photograph: Andrew Quilty

"It was apocalyptic," Proctor told the Guardian. "Like end of the world stuff." Eventually they took shelter in one of two tugboats at the town's wharf along with dozens of other people who had fled to the water.

"It was tense, it was eerie, you know it's the safest place to be but we didn't sleep much. It's been chaos here not just today but for days and days. We thought New Year's Eve was the worst we'd ever see. Little did we know. It plays with your mind a bit. Eden is such a beautiful place to live and now we've lost so much."

Easing conditions later on Sunday enabled RFS crews to bring the fire under control, and the town itself remains intact. But authorities say places to the south including the Nethercote Valley where Caban and her family live remain under threat.

Not long before she spoke to the Guardian on Sunday, she received a call from neighbours who told her the house was under threat from embers.

"It's heartbreaking," she said. "It was our dream to own a beautiful home like this. I know I will cry a lot if we lose it."