

Major Incidents Report 2025–26

An overview of major incidents that have involved the fire and emergency services sector from July 2025 to June 2026.



Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency

Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience



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Cover: At the height of the algal bloom, huge amounts of foam washed up on beaches, including at Glenelg, South Australia. Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Marco Catalano
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The report was compiled and edited on the lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people of the Noongar Nation. The views, information and advice expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Government.

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*The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience
acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country
throughout Australia and recognises their continuing
connection to land, waters, and culture.
We pay our respects to Elders past and present.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that
this report may contain images of people who may have since
passed away.



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Foreword



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The Major Incidents Report 2025–26 marks the tenth edition of this important publication, providing a comprehensive overview of incidents considered significant by Australia’s emergency management sector over the past year.

Commissioned by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and published by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR), this year’s report examines 10 significant incidents from across Australia, supported by detailed case studies, key lessons, and emerging themes.

Reflecting on a decade of shared insight, continuous improvement, and strengthened national capability, this year’s report notably incorporates a 10-year analysis of trends, providing a valuable perspective on the evolving risk landscape, changes in reporting over time, and a stabilising perspective as an approach to future challenges.

Across this period, coordination and information sharing have remained central to the sector’s ability to deliver stability in complex and uncertain environments.

In the face of increasingly dynamic and multi-hazard events, our collective capacity to make informed decisions depends on strong collaboration across jurisdictions, private sector agencies, communities, and the Australian Government. The consistent support of our partners reinforces the resilience and cohesion of the national system.

In response to growing operational demands, NEMA continues to strengthen coordination mechanisms and enable more agile, resilient systems. This year marked the convening of the 700th National Coordination Mechanism (NCM), including periods of sustained high tempo, with multiple meetings convened daily over consecutive days.

This reflects the scale and diversity of events and the sector’s commitment to maintaining situational awareness through a unified approach.

Importantly, I want to recognise the professionalism, resilience and dedication of personnel across all organisations within our sector. Beyond formal coordination structures, it is the ongoing efforts of our personnel – maintaining connections, sharing critical information, and supporting sustained operations in rapidly changing environments – that underpin the effectiveness of our national emergency management system.

I also acknowledge the contributions of AIDR and Executive Director John Richardson, jurisdictional representatives from emergency service organisations and the Australian Government in the development of this report.

Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation to all volunteer and career emergency management personnel. Your commitment, often at personal sacrifice, ensures the protection of communities and supports their recovery from natural hazards.

Introduction

Major incidents across Australia continue to demonstrate the complex, interconnected nature of disaster risk. Hazards rarely occur in isolation, and their impacts can overlap, compound and cascade across communities, economies, infrastructure, essential services, and the environment. Understanding these connections is central to reducing disaster risk and strengthening resilience.

This risk is shaped by systemic drivers including climate change, demographic change, economic conditions, social vulnerability, infrastructure exposure, supply chain dependencies, technological disruption, and geopolitical pressures. Disruption in one system, such as energy, transport, telecommunications, health, housing, or food supply, can quickly affect others.

Recent national incidents demonstrate this complexity. Shifting weather patterns disrupted seasonal outlooks, while storms, floods, fires and a harmful algal bloom affected southern Australia. In northern Australia, significant flooding and severe weather were associated with Tropical Cyclones Fina, Koji, and Narelle.

Impacts also extend beyond administrative borders. Weather systems, flood catchments, fire weather, smoke, biosecurity risks, marine impacts, transport disruption, and supply chain failures can cross local, state, territory, and international boundaries. Cross-border impacts can affect warnings, evacuations, logistics, energy and telecommunications restoration, essential goods, and specialist capability, reinforcing the need for shared situational awareness, consistent public information, interoperable systems, and pre-arranged mutual aid.

Since 2017, the Major Incidents Report has captured significant incidents affecting Australia, turning operational experience into shared insight for the sector. In this edition, a Steering Committee comprising state and territory emergency services organisations and NEMA identified the content, with emergency services representatives contributing 10 concise summaries. For the first time, the report expands beyond traditional single-incident case studies to include higher-risk weather season periods in Victoria, Queensland, and the Northern Territory, with a focus on 2025-26. It also continues to examine major single incidents across South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania, and Western Australia. The Optus Triple Zero (000) outage on 18 September and the Bondi beach attack on 14 December were also identified as major incidents this year. However, they are not included in this report as proceedings and investigations relating to these incidents remain ongoing.

Recurring and emerging themes include:

- increasing exposure to severe weather, extreme temperatures, and intense rainfall
- exposure of essential infrastructure, including energy, transport, and communications assets
- cascading and cross-border impacts across infrastructure, services, supply chains, community supports, and local economies
- the value of interoperable capability, mutual aid, and national coordination
- pressure on workforce capacity, logistics, equipment, funding, and recovery services during concurrent emergencies
- additional operational and recovery complexity in remote, regional, and dispersed communities.

Taken together, these incidents show that disaster impacts are shaped not only by hazards, but also by the condition, connectivity, and capacity of exposed systems. Ongoing investment in disaster risk reduction, resilience, preparedness, and shared learning therefore remains essential.

By identifying recurring and emerging insights, this report supports the Second National Action Plan¹ to implement the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework². It also contributes to Priority 1 of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: Understanding Disaster Risk, and reinforces Priority 4, Enhancing Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response³.

It is acknowledged that some incidents described in this report may be stressful or upsetting. Readers are encouraged to seek support if needed, including through Australian Red Cross resources⁴.

AIDR thanks the agencies and individuals who contributed to and reviewed the written and visual content of the Major Incidents Report 2025–26 .

1. National Emergency Management Agency. (2022). Second National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction.
2. National Emergency Management Agency. (2018). National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.
3. United Nations. (2015). Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.
4. <http://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies>



*Grass trees burning on the Deep Creek fireground, SA.
Source: Willunga Country Fire Service.*

1. Climate and significant weather overview

1.1. Climate

1.1.1. Temperature

For Australia, the mean temperature for July 2025 to June 2026 was 1.02 °C above the 1961–1990 average, the ninth warmest on record since 1910–11.

Mean temperatures were above average to very much above average (in the warmest 10% of all July to June periods since 1910–11) across most of Australia (Figure 1), with temperatures the warmest on record for parts of north-eastern New South Wales and southern Queensland. Exceptions of this pattern were observed across inland Queensland and the Northern Territory, parts of the Kimberley, and south-west of Western Australia, where temperatures were closer to average.

Nationally, each month over the 12-month period was warmer than the 1961–1990 average, with October, January, and June in their respective top 5 warmest on record.

The warmth over the 12-month period reflects the warmer global climate. Australia's climate has warmed on average by $1.59 \pm 0.23^\circ\text{C}$ between 1910, and 2025, with most of the warming having occurred since 1950. Globally, 2025 was the third-warmest year on record, with the World Meteorological Organization reporting an average global temperature of $1.44 \pm 0.13^\circ\text{C}$ above the pre-industrial (1850–1900) baseline average.

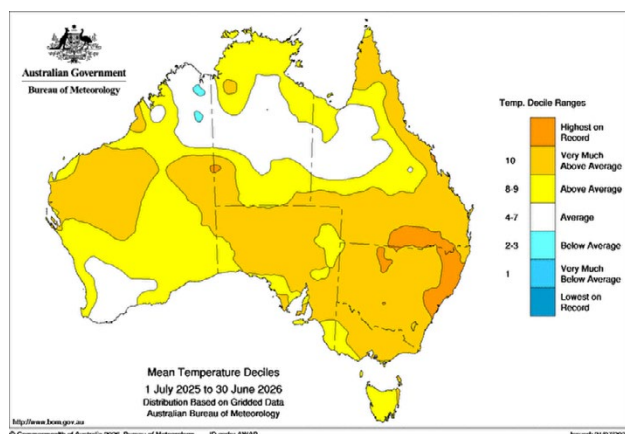


Figure 1. Mean temperature deciles for July 2025 to June 2026 relative to all years since 1910.

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

1.1.2. Rainfall

For Australia overall the total rainfall for the July 2025 to June 2026 period was 26% above the 1961–1990 average at 592.2 mm.

Northern Australia

Rainfall was above to very much above average (in the wettest 10% of all July to June periods since 1900–01) for much northern Australia (Figure 2), including:

- the Northern Territory
- most of northern and western Queensland
- Western Australia's Kimberley region and coastal areas of the Pilbara.

Rainfall was the highest on record for small pockets of:

- the Northern Territory's Katherine and Daly River catchments
- northern Cape York Peninsula in Queensland
- part of the Lake Eyre Basin⁵ (in South Australia).

These regions were impacted by significant flooding in 2025–26.

Rainfall was below to very much below average (in the driest 10% of all July to June periods since 1900–01) for large parts of the inland Pilbara and Gascoyne regions in Western Australia.

5. Lake Eyre Basin is the official name of the drainage division for the river catchments that flow inland towards Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre.

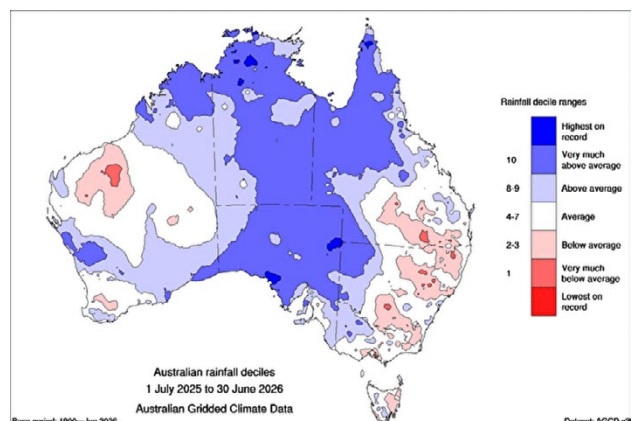


Figure 2. Rainfall deciles for the July 2025 to June 2026 period, relative to all years since 1900.

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

Rainfall over northern Australia is dominated by the wet season period, from October to April. The northern Australia (north of 26° S, the Northern Territory-South Australia border) area-average total rainfall for the 2025-26 wet season was 685.1mm, 44% above the 1961–1990 average of 476.4mm. This was the seventh highest on record, comparable to the 2022–23 wet season.

State of the Climate 2024 reported that wet season rainfall for northern Australia has increased in recent decades. Rainfall for the last 30 wet seasons, since 1996, has been 23% above the 1900-1995 average. In addition, the intensity of heavy rainfall events in Australia is increasing as the climate warms. Warmer air can hold more water vapour than cooler air, and moisture in the atmosphere can increase by 7% per 1 °C of warming, all other things being equal. This can cause an increased likelihood of heavy rainfall events across Australia.

Southern Australia

Rainfall was below to very much below average for large parts of southern Australia, including:

- much of eastern Tasmania
- central and eastern parts of Victoria
- inland and eastern areas of New South Wales and southern Queensland
- south-western parts of Western Australia.

Rainfall was above to very much above average for:

- much of South Australia
- western New South Wales and north-western Victoria
- south-eastern and central western areas of Western Australia.

State of the Climate 2024 reported that there has been a decline in cool season (April to October) rainfall over the south-west and south-east of Australia in recent decades. This is the key period for rainfall and water flows in those regions. Cool season rainfall for the last 30 years, since 1996, across southern Australia has been 8% below the 1900–1995 average.

1.1.3. Oceans

Australian region

Averaged across the 2025–26 financial year, sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the Australian region (4° S to 46° S and 94° E to 174° E) were 0.75 °C above the 1961-1990 average, ranking second-highest since 1900–01. SSTs were above average to very much above average across most of the Australian region and warmest on record for parts of the Coral Sea (Figure 3).

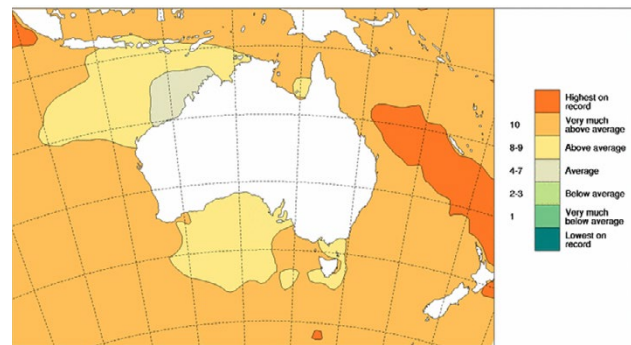


Figure 3. July 2025 to May 2026 sea surface temperature deciles compared to all years since 1900 in the NOAA Extended Reconstruction Sea Surface Temperature (ERSSTv5) dataset.

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

Monthly mean SSTs from July to December 2025 ranked among the 3 warmest on record for their respective months since 1900. From January 2026, SSTs shifted closer to the average over recent decades (1991-2020), particularly across the northern half of the region. Relatively warmer SSTs returned from May, with SSTs off southern New South Wales and eastern Tasmania up to 2 to 3 °C above average.

Annual average SSTs in the Australian region have warmed by 1.16 ± 0.11 °C between 1900 and 2025, around 0.1 °C higher than the global average, while 9 of the top 10 warmest calendar years on record have occurred since 2010. Globally, SSTs during the past 11 calendar years, between 2015 and 2025, have been the 11 warmest on record.

Pacific Ocean

In the Pacific Ocean, SSTs progressively cooled across equatorial regions from July 2025, transitioning to La Niña in late spring. The event peaked in late 2025 before returning to neutral conditions in early March. Rapid warming followed in the central and eastern tropical Pacific from March and by early June the weekly relative Niño 3.4 index surpassed the El Niño threshold (+0.80 °C). Atmospheric indicators over the tropical Pacific such as trade winds, cloudiness, and mean sea level pressure responded to the warming ocean temperatures, indicating ocean-atmosphere coupling in mid-June, consistent with the onset of El Niño.

Indian Ocean

In the tropical Indian Ocean, a negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) emerged in late July, and persisted until mid-December, characterised by warmer-than-average waters in the eastern tropical Indian Ocean, and cooler than average in the west. SSTs were indicative of a neutral IOD pattern during the first half of 2026. Although the IOD index briefly exceeded the positive threshold (+0.40 °C) from late January to early March, this was largely driven by tropical activity in the eastern basin. This was not a positive IOD event, and the pattern had limited influence on Australian weather.

1.1.4. Atmosphere

Australian region

Monthly-averaged mean sea level pressure (MSLP) anomalies varied month to month across the Australian region during July 2025 to June 2026. Variations in MSLP during the period resulted in variable rainfall patterns, including low cool-season rainfall across southern Australia and both wet and dry periods along the east coast.

November 2025 was characterised by monthly-mean MSLP anomalies more than 7hPa below average across Tasmania and broadly below average across the south-east of Australia. Conversely, positive MSLP anomalies dominated the country during April and May 2026. This period saw settled and dry conditions over south-eastern Australia (e.g. Figure 4), including New South Wales having its second-driest April on record.

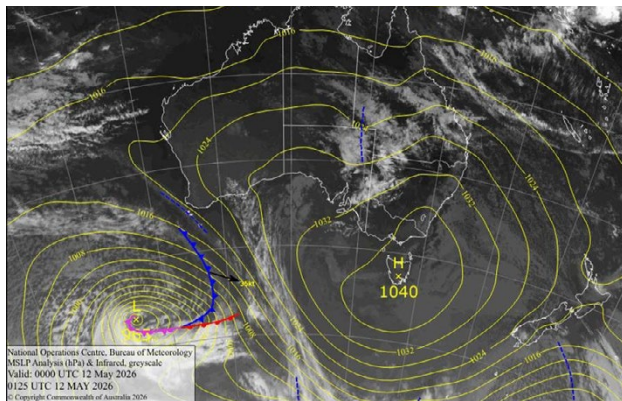


Figure 4. Mean Sea Level Pressure (MSLP) and satellite infrared at 0000 UTC 12 May 2026. A strong high-pressure system was centred over Tasmania, with several MSLP site records set that day.

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

A shift of high-pressure systems further polewards is consistent with the broad atmospheric response to a globally warmer climate. State of the Climate 2024 reported that there has been a trend towards higher surface atmospheric pressure over southern Australia. With that, there have been more highs, fewer lows, and a reduction in the number of rain producing lows and cold fronts. This is particularly important during the cool season (April to October), which has seen a decline in southern Australian rainfall in recent decades.

Southern Annular Mode

The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) was positive at times during early July, August, January to early February, and throughout most of June. While positive SAM in winter typically favours drier conditions across parts of the far south of Australia, this signal was relatively weak during June.

SAM was negative at times during October and from late November to mid-December. Negative SAM during spring

and summer tends to bring drier conditions to parts of eastern Australia and likely reinforced the below-average rainfall in New South Wales from October to December by reducing onshore flow.

Madden–Julian Oscillation

During the northern Australian wet season, the Madden–Julian Oscillation (MJO) was active in the Australian region several times, contributing to enhanced tropical activity over much of northern Australia. This included the most active start to the tropical cyclone season since 1998–99, with 8 forming by the end of January.

A moderate to strong pulse from late October to early December brought heavy falls to parts of tropical northern Australia, associated with inland troughs over northern Queensland

In mid-to-late January, another moderate to strong pulse in the Western Pacific coincided with enhanced monsoonal conditions, and widespread heavy rain and flooding, particularly through Queensland and in the Katherine River region of the Northern Territory.

Weaker MJO pulses in late February to early March and again in early April coincided with monsoonal conditions and tropical lows, although the April pulse was associated with relatively limited tropical activity,

1.2. Significant weather

Australia is affected by different natural hazards throughout the year. Significant weather events across Australia for July 2025 to June 2026 are summarised in Figure 5.

1.2.1. Cold fronts, damaging winds, and rough seas

Strong cold fronts, with damaging to destructive winds, can impact southern Australia from autumn through to spring. Such systems can also bring rough seas and high swells, with the risk of coastal inundation and erosion. Off the east coast of Australia, coastal low-pressure systems have a similar set of hazard risks.

July to September saw several strong fronts and coastal lows impact south-eastern Australia. This included a coastal low in early August, with hazardous surf off the New South Wales coast and major flooding along the Namoi River, and a strong cold front in late August with tornadoes reported near Adelaide.

The south-west of Western Australia was impacted by strong cold fronts in July, with reports of a tornado near Perth, and in May. The latter was the strongest cold front

to cross the region since 2020 and brought widespread damaging to destructive winds. In early June a strong frontal system brought damaging winds and high seas, with coastal erosion along south coasts of Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria.

1.2.2. Severe thunderstorms

The risk of severe thunderstorms peaks for eastern Australia during spring and into summer. These can produce damaging to destructive winds, large to giant hail, and flash flooding.

Central and eastern Queensland and northern New South Wales saw several significant storm periods during October and November. Giant hail (over 5 cm in size) was reported on several occasions, including:

- near Caboolture (Queensland) on 18 October
- near Kingaroy (Queensland) on 2 November
- near Moree (New South Wales) on 15 November.

In Victoria, the Melbourne area was affected by severe storms on 26 October, with a likely tornado in the western suburbs and flash flooding. On 15 January, a severe storm impacted the Surf Coast region, including significant flash flooding at Wye River.

1.2.3. Heatwaves and fire weather

Severe to extreme heatwave conditions affected most of Australia at times between October and January. The hot and dry conditions also increase the risk of bushfires,

particularly when strong winds elevated Fire Danger ratings to Extreme or Catastrophic.

Mid-October saw very hot conditions across northern Australia, including Queensland and New South Wales which both saw record October temperatures set on the 21st.

Early December saw warm conditions across the south-east of the country. Strong to damaging winds ahead of a cold front fanned bushfires in eastern Tasmania and coastal New South Wales.

Early January saw severe to extreme heatwave conditions across much of Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales. Extreme to Catastrophic Fire Danger ratings were forecast for 9 January for much of Victoria and adjoining regions, with many bushfires burning in the west of the state by the end of the day.

The most significant heatwave event occurred at the end of January, when an extremely hot mass of air became trapped over south-eastern Australia by high pressure systems to the south and in the Tasman Sea. Over 60 sites recorded their hottest ever day, and several set records for consecutive days above 45 °C or 48 °C. A maximum of 50.0 °C was reached at Andamooka on 29 January and Port Augusta on 30 January, respectively the eighth and ninth time this has been observed in Australia. The extreme conditions allowed existing bushfires to continue, and new bushfires to start in western and northern Victoria and in South Australia.

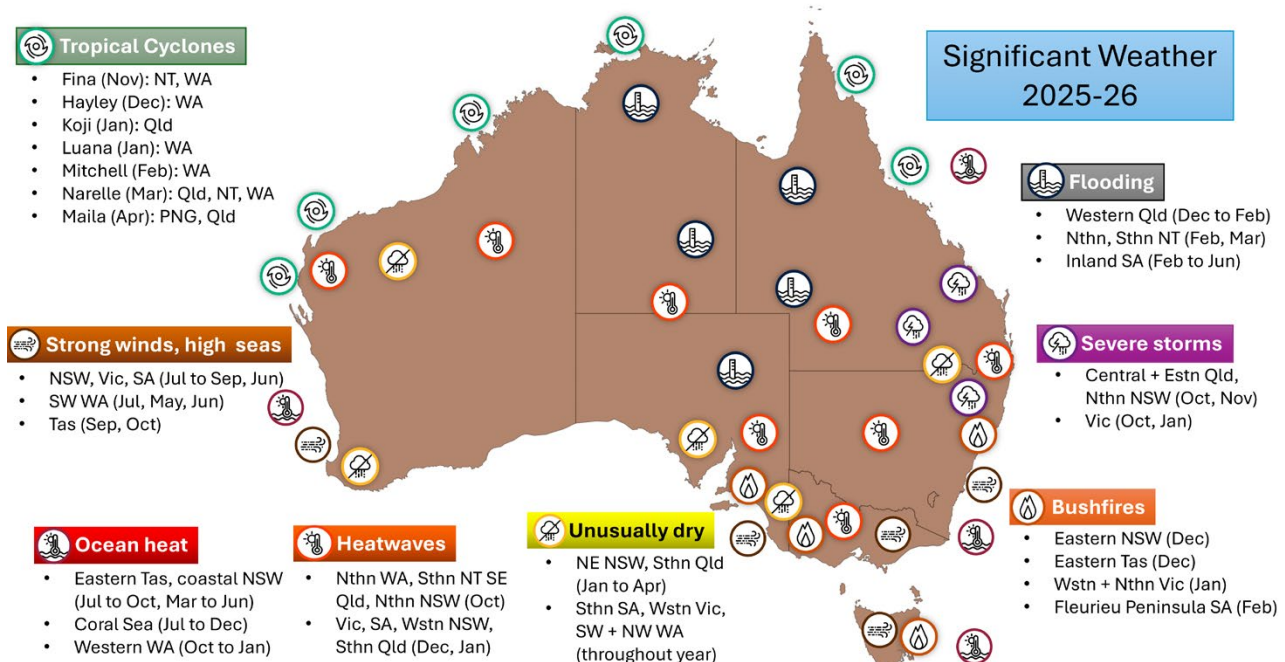


Figure 5. Significant weather events across Australia between July 2025 and June 2026.

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

1.2.4. Tropical cyclones

There were 11 tropical cyclones in the Australian region during the 2025–26 season (Figure 6), above the average of 10 for all seasons since 1980–81, or 8 to 9 since 2000–01. Seven of the 11 tropical cyclones reached severe intensity (Category 3 or stronger), a higher proportion than the long-term average but comparable to recent years.

Nine of the 11 tropical cyclones impacted the Australian mainland or offshore islands:

- Four systems (Fina, Luana, Hayley, and Narelle) made landfall on the Australian mainland at tropical cyclone strength (Category 1 or higher).
- Two systems (Mitchell and Koji) made landfall as tropical lows.
- The remnants of ex-Tropical Cyclone Maila brought rainfall and flooding to northern Queensland after causing significant damage in Papua New Guinea.
- Two systems (Grant and Jenna) caused gale force winds and minor damage at Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

In addition to impacts at landfall, including destructive winds and storm surges, tropical cyclones can bring large amounts of rain to inland areas, e.g. ex-Tropical Cyclone Koji caused renewed river level rises in western Queensland in January.

Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle was relatively long-lived in March, and saw the longest continuous period on record for the Bureau of Meteorology issuing Tropical Cyclone Advises for a single system.

Severe Tropical Cyclone Fina in November was the strongest system (as a Category 2) to impact the Darwin area since 2019. Fina made the equal earliest Australian mainland landfall on record when it crossed the Cobourgh Peninsula on the evening of 21 November and was the most intense system on record for November in the Australian region.

1.2.5. Monsoon activity and widespread flooding

The monsoon onset at Darwin for the 2025–26 wet season was observed on 23 December, close to the average over all seasons since 1957–58 onset date of 29 December.

Monsoonal conditions began developing from around 20 December across the southern Indian Ocean and Australian longitudes. Very heavy rain across western Queensland in late December resulted in major to minor flooding across many river systems, some of which persisted into February as waters moved downstream.

Monsoon conditions continued across northern Australia for long periods until March. This was enhanced at times by active phases of the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO, see Section 6.1) and by tropical systems. Record rainfall across the Lake Eyre Basin in February saw flooding in much of the interior, which continued into June in South Australia as waters moved slowly towards Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre. Record rainfall in early March in the Katherine and Daly Rivers in the Northern Territory resulted in extended periods of major flooding.

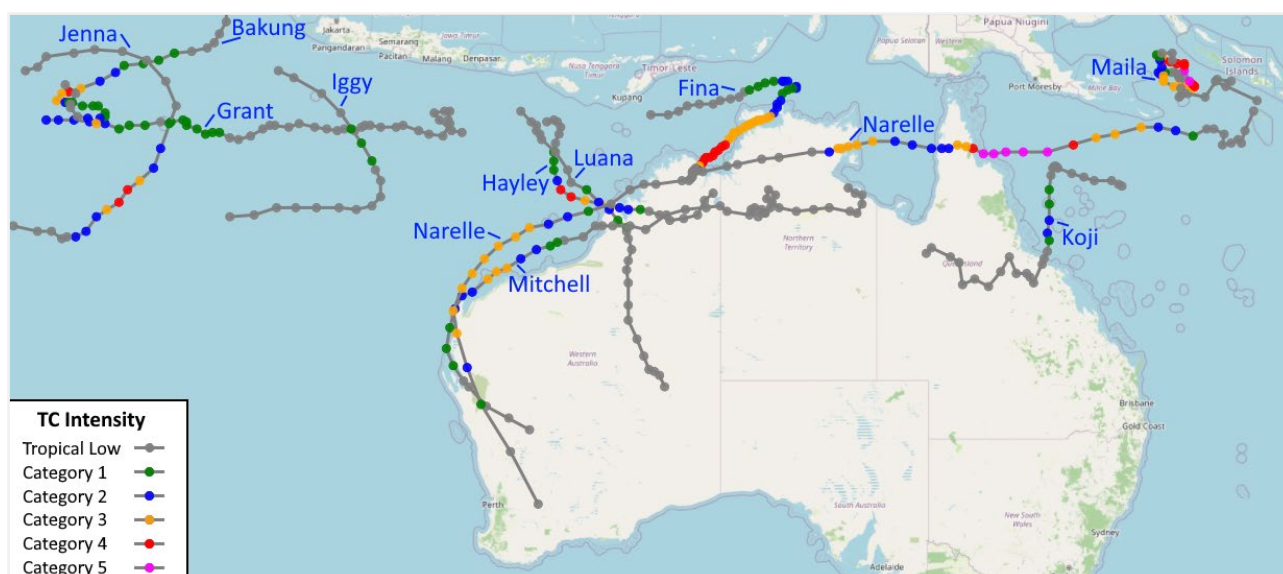


Figure 6. Tropical cyclone tracks in the Australia region for the 2025–26 tropical cyclone season. (NB: Cyclone tracks have not yet been finalised and are subject to change.)

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.



Scientist from the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) conducting offshore water sampling to support the detection and classification of harmful phytoplankton species. Source: Government of South Australia (Department for Environment and Water).

2. National overview

2.1. National plan activations

Australia has a range of national plans that cover specific situations where Australian Government coordination or assistance is required. The following plans were activated in 2025-26:

- Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN)
- Australian Government Overseas Assistance Plan (AUSASSISTPLAN)
- Australian Government Plan for the Reception of Australian Citizens and Approved Foreign Nationals Evacuated from Overseas (AUSRECEPLAN)
- Emergency Response Plan for Communicable Disease Incidents of National Significance (CDINS)

The Australian Government Crisis Coordination Team (CCT) responded to concurrent incidents, activating 6 times across 199 calendar days for domestic and international incidents.

2.1.1. Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN)

COMDISPLAN is the plan for the provision of Australian Government non-financial assistance to Australian states and territories in an emergency or disaster.

COMDISPLAN was activated 3 times in 2025-26 for the following events:

- Tropical Cyclone Fina in the Northern Territory – 19 November 2025 to 27 November 2025.
- Nationally significant natural hazards (Victorian Bushfires, Northern Territory, and Queensland flooding) – 8 January 2026 to 15 April 2026.
- National response to Diphtheria – 26 May 2026 (ongoing).

A total of 13 requests for non-financial assistance were received by NEMA and tasked to various Australian government agencies and contracted capabilities, including:

- Australian Defence Force (ADF)

- National Emergency Management Stockpile
- Australian Government Deployed Planning Teams
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA) (for provision of the Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT)).

2.1.2. Australian Government Overseas Assistance Plan (AUSASSISTPLAN)

AUSASSISTPLAN details the process for the provision of emergency Australian Government-led physical assistance to overseas countries. This plan was activated once in 2025-26 for the following event:

- Samoa – 22 August 2025, in response to a Request for Assistance from the Government of Samoa, the Australian Government deployed a 4-person specialist AUSMAT to provide clinical and technical support in response to a severe Dengue Fever outbreak.

2.1.3. Australian Government Plan for the Reception of Australian Citizens and Approved Foreign Nationals Evacuated from Overseas (AUSRECEPLAN)

AUSRECEPLAN details the process for the safe repatriation of Australians, permanent residents, and other approved foreign nationals following an Australian Government assisted evacuation in response to an overseas disaster or adverse security situation.

AUSRECEPLAN was activated once in 2025-26 for repatriation and reception of 6 passengers (4 Australian citizens, one Australian permanent resident, and one New Zealand citizen) evacuated from the MV Hondius following a Hantavirus outbreak.

2.1.4. Emergency Response Plan for Communicable Disease Incidents of National Significance (CDINS)

The Emergency Response Plan for Communicable Disease Incidents of National Significance (CD Plan) provides the

national framework for how the DHDA, with state and territory health departments, prepare for, coordinate, and manage communicable disease emergencies.

The CD Plan was triggered twice during 2025-26.
The CDINS were:

- Syphilis (declared 7 August 2025 – active during current reporting period).
- Diphtheria (declared 22 May 2026 – active during current reporting period).

2.2. National Coordination Mechanism

The National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) was convened on 51 occasions during 2025–26, to support shared situational awareness and consequence management across nationally significant issues. These NCMs brought together Australian Government, state, territory, and local government, industry, not-for-profit, and other key representatives to coordinate responses to emerging and complex events. NCMs during 2025–26 were co-chaired by NEMA, Australian Government Coordinating Agencies, and Sector Lead Agencies for crises including the domestic implications of conflict in the Middle East, national fuel supply issues, fuel supply impacts on supermarkets, and the repatriation response for passengers from the MV Hondius.

The following case studies illustrate how the NCM was used to support coordination, information sharing and consequence management across government, industry and not-for-profit sectors.

2.2.1. Domestic implications of conflict in the Middle East

From 2 March 2026, the NCM was convened 7 times to provide situational awareness on the domestic implications of conflict in the Middle East. These meetings provided situational awareness of the evolving conflict and considered emerging security issues, travel impacts, and implications for Australians overseas. The meetings were co-chaired by the Department of Home Affairs and NEMA.



Residents at Toolakea Beach (Qld) prepared sandbags on the weekend.
Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
Baz Ruddick © 2026 ABC.

2.2.2. National fuel supply

From 12 March 2026, the NCM was convened 3 times and NCM-AUSGOV (Australian Government-only) was convened 11 times to provide situational awareness, facilitate national coordination of response activities, coordinate public messaging, and support decision-making in relation to national fuel supply issues. Australian Government agencies considered emerging issues, shared updates and supported consequence management. The NCMs, initially co-chaired by the Department of the Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, were transitioned to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and NEMA.

2.2.3. Fuel supply impacts on supermarkets

Alongside the broader national fuel supply series, from March 2026 the NCM was convened 8 times to consider fuel supply impacts on supermarkets. These meetings focused on potential impacts to supermarket supply chains, with participants sharing information, identifying emerging risks, and supporting planning for potential crisis escalation. The meetings were co-chaired by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources and NEMA.

2.2.4. MV Hondius repatriation

Between May and June 2026, 8 NCMs were convened to support the repatriation of 4 Australian citizens, one Australian permanent resident, and one New Zealand citizen from the MV Hondius in Tenerife, Spain. The response involved complex international coordination, quarantine arrangements, and travel logistics.

The NCMs were initially co-chaired by NEMA and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), before transitioning to the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, as co-chair, once the travellers returned to Australia. The NCMs enabled rapid national coordination, problem solving and the management of international relationships, quarantine requirements, and travel arrangements during a fast-moving situation.

The NCMs were delivered as part of NEMA's CCT activation with participation by Australian Government agencies, relevant state government agencies, and airport operators.

2.3. Defence

During the 2025-26 higher-risk weather season, Defence responded to 7 requests for Australian Government assistance under COMDISPLAN. Defence assistance included contributions to Commonwealth-led response with evacuations, relief, and early recovery efforts across the country.

There were several major higher-risk weather season Defence contributions.

In January 2026, Defence assisted in the response to Victorian bushfires through the provision of accommodation and messing for emergency services personnel and ration packs for emergency service personnel.

In February 2026, during the South Australian bushfires, Defence assisted response efforts through the provision of accommodation and messing for emergency service personnel.

In March 2026, Defence assisted in the Northern Territory flooding events and Tropical Cyclone Narelle with provision of:

- logistics planning officer support
- aerial evacuation support to the Numbulwar community
- personnel to support immediate relief tasks in Katherine.

Defence assisted in the Western Australia response to ex-Tropical Cyclone Narelle in April 2026 with the provision of support to aviation operations, including:

- aircraft ground handling capability
- aviation fuel supply
- accommodation for emergency service personnel.

2.4. National resource sharing arrangements

Early indications suggested the 2025-26 higher-risk weather season would present significant challenges for Australian communities and emergency service agencies. Through ongoing collaboration, agencies identified areas of risk, and their initial planning was shared with NRSC. Heatwave conditions exacerbated fuel moisture deficits in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, and Tasmania and created difficult conditions for field operations.

Western Australia experienced successive fire events that put pressure on resources around Perth and into the southern regions. Interstate resources were requested in December and again in January to support fatigue management as communities were repeatedly impacted.

As a precaution ahead of elevated fire weather, South Australia called in additional incident management capacity. In the same period, Victoria experienced significant and extensive fire activity requiring significant cross-border support that extended to interstate and international deployments over 7 weeks.

South Australia was then impacted by a fire in a sensitive ecological area generating requests to support efforts to protect endangered flora and fauna.

Seasonal monsoon activity put pressure across northern Australia with deployments to the Northern Territory and Western Australia in response to Tropical Cyclone Narelle.

New Zealand experienced protracted rain events that generated flooding and landslides resulting in near record numbers of Emergency Declarations.⁶ While the season presented significant challenges, there was no requirement for support from Australia.

In total, NRSC was operational for 111 days, supporting 8 separate events and coordinating the deployment of 1,792 personnel and 110 vehicles.

2.5. Relief and recovery

Joint state/territory and Australian Government funded Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) recovery assistance was activated in response to 72 events across Australia in 2025-26.

DRFA assistance is being used to support recovery from disaster events with multiple storms and flooding, bushfires, and cyclones affecting all states and territories throughout 2025-26.

Of the 72 events, 6 were activated for extraordinary assistance (Categories C and D) under the DRFA. A total of \$527.5 million has been committed in extraordinary assistance for these events, in addition to significant support provided under Categories A and B of the DRFA.

Assistance was made available to 219 of Australia's 539 local government areas (LGAs) for a range of recovery measures, including emergency assistance for impacted individuals and families, support for councils for clean-up activities, and to restore or replace damaged essential public assets. Extraordinary assistance was also made available in the most severely impacted LGAs in the form of additional community and mental health support, environmental recovery, support to restore damaged sport and recreational facilities, and recovery grants for primary producers, small businesses, and non-profit organisations.

There is also continued DRFA assistance provided for recovery following significant events in 2024-25 such as Tropical Cyclone Alfred, the North Queensland tropical low, and severe weather events in western New South Wales and Queensland.

The Australian Government also provided over \$73 million directly to disaster affected individuals and families through

the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP) and Disaster Recovery Allowance (DRA):

- The AGDRP is a non-means tested payment of \$1,000 for eligible adults and \$400 for eligible children which is available to people whose homes or major assets have been lost or directly damaged, people who have been seriously injured or are an immediate family member of someone who has lost their life. The AGDRP was made available for 4 events in 31 unique LGAs.
- The DRA is a short-term income support payment to assist individuals who have experienced a loss of income as a direct result of the flood. The DRA was made available for 5 events across 80 unique LGAs and 3 unincorporated areas.

2.6. Provision of international support

In December 2026, the Australian Government announced funding for partner government responses to cyclones and flooding across Southeast Asia, bringing total assistance to over \$14 million between October and December. Support was delivered through Australian NGOs and UN agencies, in Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam, providing urgent lifesaving aid to impacted communities. The ADF also delivered emergency relief items, including kitchen, hygiene, and shelter kits, to Vietnam.

Following the escalation of conflict involving Israel, the United States, and Iran in February 2026, DFAT coordinated a whole-of-government response to support Australians affected by the crisis in the Middle East region. DFAT activated crisis response mechanisms to manage crisis operations, provide consular assistance, and coordinate engagement across the Australian government and with international partners.

DFAT's Crisis Response Team (CRT) was deployed to various Middle East locations to support the evacuation of Australians, a total of 23 CRT members were deployed.

In April 2026, the Australian Government committed \$2.5 million in humanitarian assistance to support the Governments of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands respond to Tropical Cyclone Maila. Funding was delivered through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, alongside humanitarian relief supplies for affected communities. Partners included CAN DO, Plan, Save the Children, and World Vision. ADF flights assisted delivery from Australia of relief supplies to Solomon Islands and supported in-country logistics in both countries.

6. NEMA NZ, 2026 www.civildefence.govt.nz/emergency-events/previous-emergencies/declared-states-of-emergency

3. Key national insights and trends

This section reflects on the past 10 years of the Major Incidents Report to highlight emerging trends and opportunities. These insights are a thematic analysis, drawn from all Major Incidents Reports dating back to the inaugural 2016-17 report. This analysis focused on strategic trends, which can be used to inform future practice.

3.1. Insights and trends

Trend 1: increasing complexity of natural hazards

Driven by climate change, natural hazards are becoming increasingly complex, characterised by more frequent and concurrent events, greater severity, and reduced predictability.^{7,8} Over the past decade, compounding natural hazard events have occurred across the country, with consequences reaching beyond the geographic areas immediately impacted. Between September 2019 to February 2020, multiple jurisdictions experienced a severe and protracted bushfire season, commonly referred to as the Black Summer bushfires.⁹ Catastrophic bushfires occurred throughout New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and Tasmania which resulted in loss of life, largescale damage to infrastructure, and significant environmental damage.¹⁰ Concurrently during January 2020, severe weather events and hailstorms occurred along the east coast, causing substantial damage to infrastructure and vehicles, power outages, and flash flooding.¹¹ These concurrent and intersecting events have strained response resources and resulted in emergency management and community fatigue.

The continued effects of climate change will result in increased unpredictability of the weather and subsequent natural hazard events.¹² Concurrent, large- scale, long- duration events across multiple jurisdictions will demand increased national coordination and collaboration between all levels of government and the private sector. Ongoing challenges and fatigue will compound within communities that are repeatedly impacted by natural hazards, with little time for recovery

between events. Investment in disaster risk reduction, interoperability across emergency management, effective coordination, and resilient infrastructure will be essential when planning to mitigate future impacts of complex and concurrent natural hazard events.

Trend 2: increased technology-related incidents

The emergency management landscape over the last decade has also evolved following an increase of technology-related incidents.¹³ Technology-related incidents require complex coordination across all sectors and levels of government.

Since 2023, there has been an increase in technology-related incidents due to reliance on cyber infrastructure. The Optus outage in November 2023 and CrowdStrike outage in July 2024 demonstrate the widespread impacts of technology disruption and the complexity required for response.^{14,15} These events emerged unexpectedly and impacted a wide range of sectors, including telecommunications, banking, and transport.¹⁶ Technology-related incidents are additionally complex when infrastructure relies on systems without available alternatives during outages. Following the CrowdStrike event, an Australian Government after-action review noted the invaluable contributions of the NCM to provide efficient coordination and response.¹⁷ Going forward, emergency management agencies will need to continue to leverage existing coordination mechanisms and further develop crisis appreciation and preparedness processes to consider the impacts of technology-related incidents.

Trend 3: increased need for collaboration and coordination

Over the past decade, collaboration and coordination between governments and across the private sector has increased, with the creation of NCMs and appointment of a Commonwealth Recovery Liaison Officer (CRLO).^{18,19} The NCM, established in 2020, was created to enable shared situational awareness, rapid problem definition and effective consequence management between all stakeholders for a range of events.²⁰ Over 700 NCMs

have been held since its creation, enabling nationally coordinated responses to complex crises to achieve effective consequence management.²¹ The creation of the CRLO role in 2024 has enabled effective coordination of recovery activities across all levels of government, industry, and community for 4 events to date.²²

Improvements in public communications have increased consistency and accessibility of emergency messaging across the country. The introduction of the Australian Warning System in 2022 has created a consistent language to inform communities of what actions they need to take during emergencies such as bushfires, floods, and storms.²³ The launch of AusAlert, the new cell-broadcast based national warning system, this year will further enhance consistent communications across the country and allow for international best practice emergency warnings to be sent to compatible mobile devices during local and national emergencies.²⁴

Collaboration has further improved with the enhancement of capturing and sharing information. In November 2022, NEMA launched the National Joint Common Operating Picture (NJCOP), a web-based platform which collates data from a variety of Australian Government agencies, including the Bureau of Meteorology.²⁵ The NJCOP provides visibility of hazards across Australia and delivers situational awareness to inform a nationally coordinated response.²⁶ Additionally, state-led operation centres provide the opportunity for stakeholders to exchange information and collaborate in a shared-space.²⁷ Effective collaboration is fundamental to remove inefficiencies, develop shared situational awareness, and share information. Maintaining coordination tools, such as NCMs and the NJCOP, will ensure shared situational awareness and continue to underpin effective consequence management.

3.2. Observations

Across all trends, there is a constant theme highlighting the importance of effective coordination and information sharing to respond to increasingly complex hazards. Increased complexity has been a characteristic observed across all hazards in the past decade, including in natural, and technology-related incidents.

More than ever, coordination across all levels of government, industry and community is required for an effective national response. Consistency and accessibility of information and communication is important for effective coordination throughout all trends. Emergency management continues to evolve to respond to the rise of technology-related incidents. Conversely, the

use of technology to enhance information sharing and consistency has evolved to improve coordination between all levels of government.

3.3. Implications for future practice

Effective coordination across governments, industry, and community will continue to be essential to respond to increasingly complex and compounding hazards.

Significant efforts have been made to ensure a coordinated approach, including NCMs, the NJCOP and jurisdiction-based operation centres. Agencies can further enhance collaboration through joint exercises, maintaining crisis appreciation planning, and continuing to leverage coordination mechanisms to enhance information sharing. Effective collaboration across all sectors will continue to strengthen consistent and adaptable national emergency response.

7. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2023-24

8. Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment: An Overview 2025

9. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2019-2020

10. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2019-2020

11. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2019-2020

12. Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment 2025

13. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

14. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2023-24

15. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

16. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

17. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

18. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2020-21

19. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

20. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

21. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2020-21; AIDR Major Incidents Report 2021-22; AIDR Major Incidents Report 2022-23; AIDR Major Incidents Report 2023-24; AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

22. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2024-25

23. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2022-23

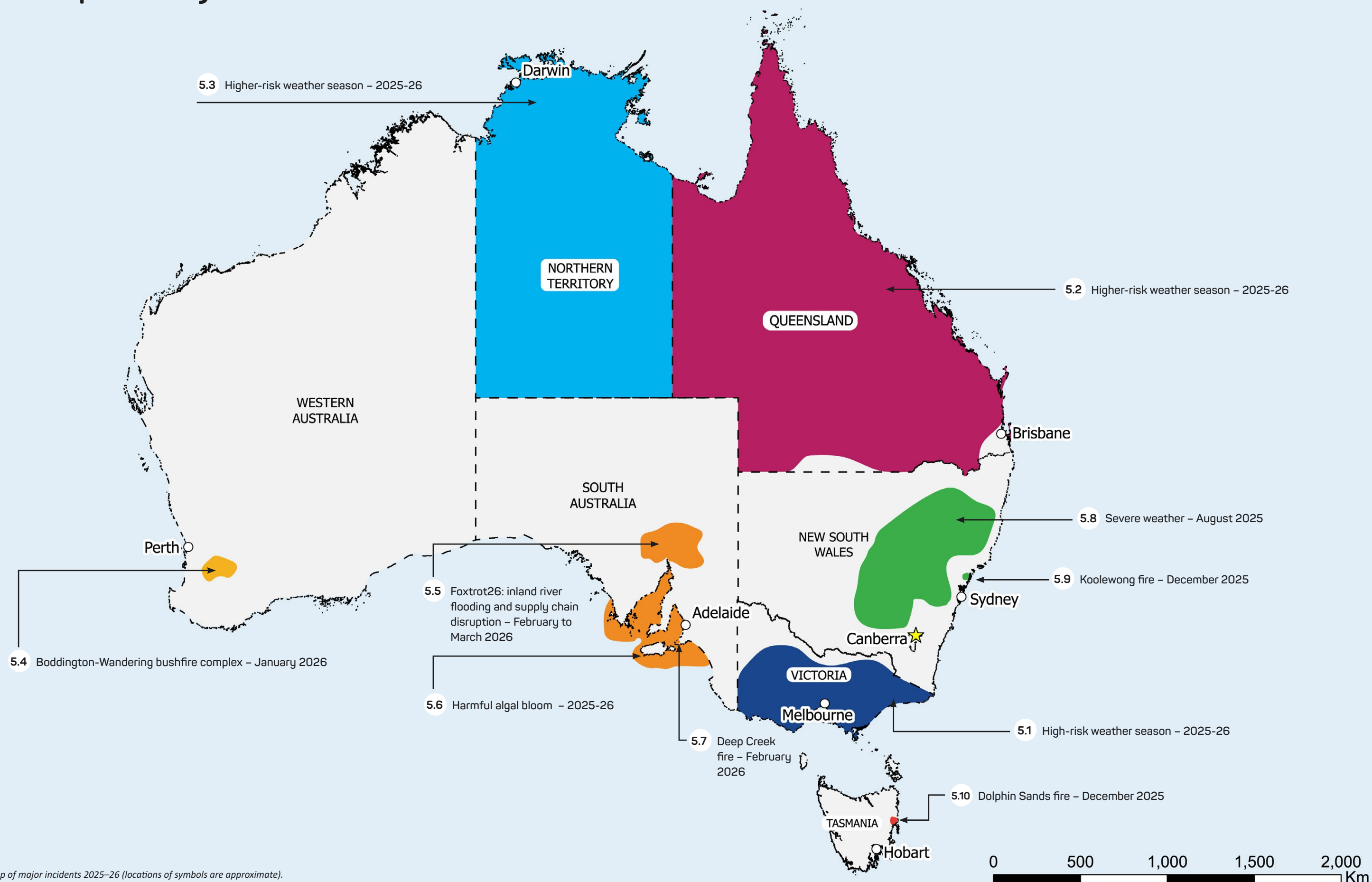
24. Australian Government AusAlert

25. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2021-22

26. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2021-22

27. AIDR Major Incidents Report 2022-23

4. Map of major incidents 2025-26



Map of major incidents 2025-26 (locations of symbols are approximate).

5. Incident summaries

5.1. High-risk weather season (Victoria) – 2025-26²⁸

5.1.1. Overview of high-risk weather season

Victoria's 2025–26 season demonstrated how hazards can compound over time, with climate, changing weather patterns, and highly populated regions increasing exposure across communities, infrastructure, the environment, and emergency services. The season did not unfold as a series of discrete events; rather, prolonged dry conditions, extreme heat, bushfires, storms, and flash flooding overlapped or followed in quick succession, increasing the scale, complexity, and duration of impacts.

The risk built gradually before the most severe conditions emerged. After almost 2 years of dry conditions and above-average temperatures, agencies and departments worked closely with communities to prepare for a severe fire season. These antecedent conditions increased fuel dryness and landscape vulnerability, setting the foundation for fires that first escalated in October 2025 and intensified significantly during January 2026.

The most dangerous fire conditions occurred from 7–9 January 2026. On 9 January, Extreme to Catastrophic fire dangers were observed, with more than 200 bush and grass fires starting in a single day. Although many fires were contained through rapid suppression, several became campaign fires, generating cascading impacts across communities, infrastructure, agriculture, and emergency services.

As these fires continued through January and February, homes, sheds, infrastructure, livestock, and crops were destroyed across the state, and tragically, one life was lost. Further consequences were avoided through the collective response effort of Victorian agencies, supported by interstate and international resources. By the end of February 2026, approximately 440,000 hectares had burnt across private and public land.

Relief and recovery efforts were prioritised during and immediately after the fires so that affected communities could access financial assistance, relief centres, and support services, as agencies continued to manage

emerging weather-related risks.

Driven by humid atmospheric conditions on 15 January, intense thunderstorms over following days brought intense rainfall and flash flooding across south-western Victoria, including at Lorne, the Wye River, Kennett River, Cumberland River, and the Separation Creek. Roads, campsites, and coastal communities along the Surf Coast were inundated, with cars, caravans, tents, and camping gear swept into the ocean or washed onto beaches, and hundreds of residents and holidaymakers to these areas evacuated. Occurring while nearby fire response and recovery were still underway, these storms added further compounding pressure to communities, systems, and responders already managing those consequences.

5.1.2. Weather and climate factors

The season's risk profile was underpinned by cumulative climatic stress. More than 24 months of warm and dry conditions had reduced soil moisture, increased fuel availability, and left many landscapes more susceptible to hot, windy, and unstable weather, meaning later hazards were occurring on top of already stressed environmental conditions.

Some parts of Victoria had record-low rainfall. Severe rainfall shortages affected the south-west, central, northern, north-eastern, and western parts of the state (see Figure 7).

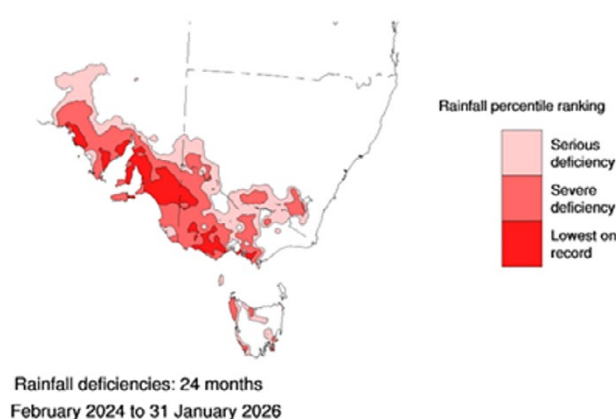


Figure 7. Rainfall deficits ahead of the 2025 – 26 high-risk weather season.

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

28. In Victoria, the term 'high-risk weather season' is used in place of 'higher-risk weather season' and is used here for consistency with Victorian terminology.

Rainfall in December 2025 was 23% below the 1961–1990 average, and January 2026 rainfall was 73% below average. Localised storm rainfall occurred in parts of the Otways and far eastern Gippsland in mid-January, but it did not ease the broader dry conditions across inland areas. As soil moisture continued to fall from November 2025 to January 2026, fuel availability increased, the potential for rapid fire spread grew, and the state entered the peak risk period.

Temperatures before the season were also high. In 2025, Victoria's average maximum temperatures were much higher than usual. The state's average temperature was 15.0°C, which was 0.94°C above average and the eighth warmest on record.

Against this backdrop, the AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook identified increased fire risk for south-west, western, central and north-central Victoria, and south-west Gippsland, during January and February 2026. Spring rainfall supported grass growth in some areas, but long-term drying meant these fuels could cure rapidly and become highly flammable under hot and windy conditions. This increased the likelihood of fast-moving fires with broader consequences.

5.1.3. Preparedness

These climatic conditions and forecasts (see Figure 8) informed significant preparedness activity before the season. Agencies and departments prepared for a risk environment in which hazards could occur concurrently or in rapid succession, delivering the annual coordinated fuel management program, the Country Fire Authority's (CFA) Get Fire Ready program, the Are You Fire Ready media campaign, regional pre-season briefings, evacuation and shelter-in-place exercises, critical infrastructure resilience audits, and updates to joint standard operating procedures.

The Victorian Government also invested in additional seasonal firefighters for Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic), earlier commencement and expansion of the aviation fleet, strategic bulk water cartage, and fuel distribution.

Victoria's aviation fleet preparedness arrangements were implemented, and aircraft were pre-positioned based on risk. Aircraft provide firebombing, aerial intelligence gathering, and aerial supervision, helping ground crews to complete suppression and containment operations.

Ground fire suppression involves CFA volunteer firefighters, FFMVic firefighters, Fire Rescue Victoria firefighters, CFA Forest Industry Brigades, and heavy plant and equipment such as bulldozers, graders, excavators, harvesters, and tractors operated by FFMVic and contractors.

Preparedness arrangements included CFA's bulk water carrier program and local farmers with firefighting equipment for protection of their own and neighbouring properties. For the 2025-26 high-risk weather season, aircraft commenced operations in early October 2025, one month earlier than in most seasons, as part of the preparedness investment. By January 2026, the core fleet of 54 aircraft was strategically positioned across the state to respond to outbreaks before they developed into larger incidents. A whole-of-sector preparedness program also focused on targeted statewide priorities and risks.

Victorian departments and agencies also prepared for forecast heatwaves, recognising that extreme heat could increase fire danger, heighten health risks, affect electricity supply, and place additional pressure on health, transport, and community support systems at the same time.

Friday 9 January 2026 was forecast to be one of the most severe fire weather days recorded in Victoria.

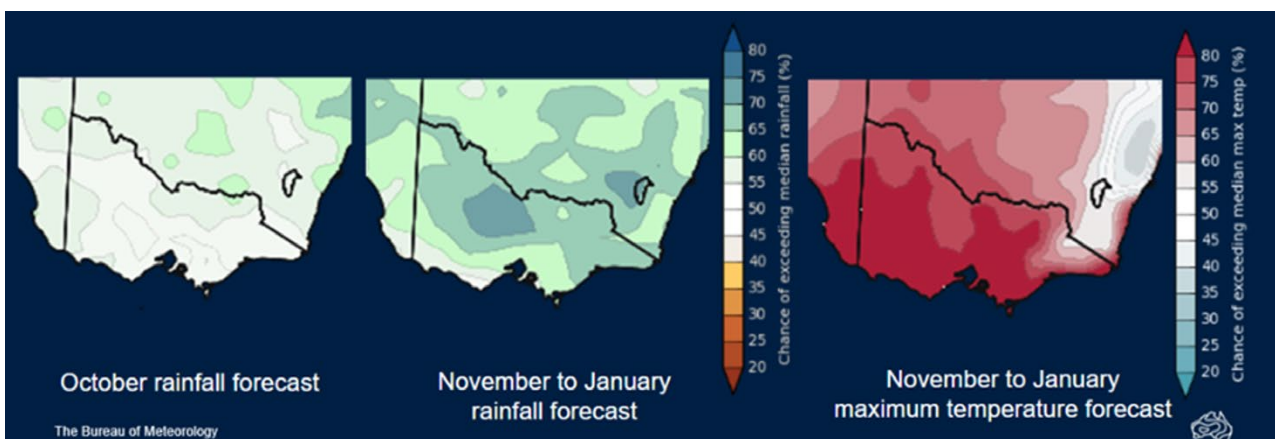


Figure 8. Rainfall and maximum temperature forecast for the 2025–26 higher-risk weather season.

Source: Bureau of Meteorology.

A Catastrophic fire danger rating is the highest rating and means fires may be highly unpredictable, uncontrollable, and dangerously intense. Four weather districts were forecast to reach Catastrophic fire danger. The remaining 5 districts were mostly at the upper end of an Extreme fire danger rating.

As the season moved from preparedness into response, Victoria's State Control Centre (SCC) was activated to Tier 3 for readiness and response, the highest level, from 9 January to 5 February 2026. This enabled whole-of-sector coordination as hazards escalated, aligning preparedness, response, relief, and early recovery functions during major and evolving emergencies.

5.1.4. Response

Fires

The response phase began in earnest on 9 January 2026, when Victoria's fire environment escalated rapidly on a scale not seen in a single day since Ash Wednesday in 1983. More than 200 bush and grass fires started that day, creating simultaneous demands for suppression, warnings, evacuations, logistics, and relief before several communities had time to absorb the first impacts.

Two of the most significant fires were Walwa and Longwood, which began on 5 and 7 January 2026 (see Boxes 1 and 2). Both intensified under extreme to catastrophic fire conditions on 9 January. The Longwood fire became one of the largest fires to affect private land in Victoria, with grassland fire behaviour similar to, and at times worse than, the 2009 Black Saturday fires.

The Horsham Automatic Weather Station at the Horsham Aerodrome, near the Grass Flat fire, recorded a maximum Fire Behaviour Index value of 121. This was the third highest recorded in Victoria. In forest areas across central Gippsland, fire behaviour was similar to the 2009 fires and the 2019–20 Black Summer fires.

By the end of February 2026, about 440,000 hectares had burned. This exceeded the 430,000 hectares burned during the 2009 Black Saturday fires and shows how sustained fire activity accumulated into a statewide impact over time.

Preparedness programs, public information and warnings, media updates, SCC coordination, the state of emergency declaration, and firefighting operations all supported life safety outcomes as conditions escalated. Tragically, one person died in the 2026 summer fires.

During the first week of the response from 7 January 2026, a significant number of emergency management volunteers and staff helped with response and relief operations.

As these priorities evolved, first responders worked in affected communities and across other parts of the state for many days. Because severe conditions were forecast for early January, additional aircraft were added to the core fleet. On 9 January 2026, 75 aircraft were positioned across Victoria based on risk. Aircraft also provided intelligence to support situational awareness and community warnings as conditions changed rapidly.

Strong winds limited aircraft operations at times, with night waterbombing used when conditions allowed and when safety could be maintained.

Agencies reported that public information became a central part of the response as the emergency expanded. At the peak of the bushfires, the VicEmergency app recorded 1.6 billion hits in the 24 hours on 9 January 2026, reflecting strong community demand for real-time information during a rapidly escalating and geographically widespread emergency.

The public generally followed emergency information and warnings, including advice to evacuate early.

Between 1 December 2025 and 1 February 2026, 1,798 bushfire and grassfire warnings were issued through VicEmergency channels. Friday 9 January 2026 was the busiest day on record for VicEmergency community warnings, with 291 warnings issued.

Emergency services focused on clear and timely public information to help communities act before risks worsened. Community meetings, live-streaming, media conferences, social media, field footage, and video updates were used to explain the situation, describe response activity and provide safety advice as fire, smoke, road access, and relief needs changed.

Bushfire – Walwa – River Road**Start: 5 January 2026****Under Control: 13 February 2026****Size: 120,914 ha****Situation:**

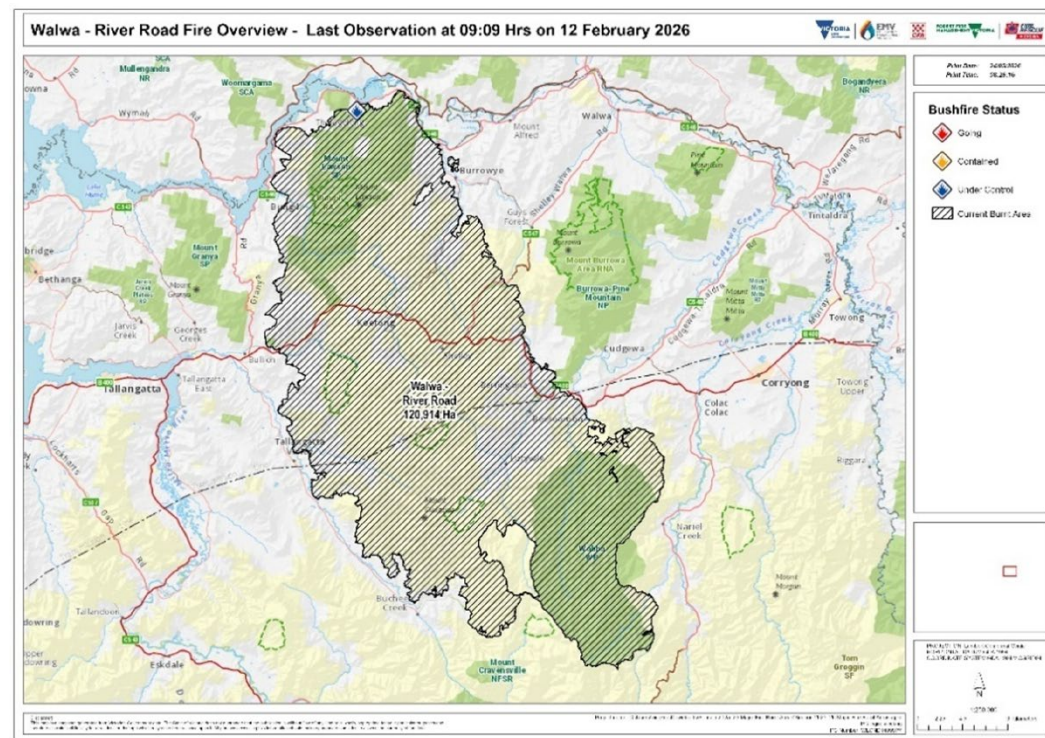
Ignited from lightning in Mount Lawson National Park near Walwa, close to the New South Wales border, the fire spread rapidly through steep forested terrain and dry grass fuels, moving north and north-east toward Murray River Road and adjoining rural properties. At 1800hrs, control was transferred to Tallangatta ICC. The initial response included multiple resources from CFA and FFMVic and interstate strike teams through cross border arrangement to undertake asset protection and establish containment lines. Community engagement and meetings were held.

The fire expanded significantly between 8 and 11 January 2026 with spot overs into plantation areas. Firefighters were heavily supported by aircraft and international and interstate crews also provided significant assistance. Backburning and planned ignition works were undertaken, including more than 12 kilometres of containment line construction in the early phase. The projected incident footprint was expected to reach approximately 150,000 ha, with suppression efforts focused on holding the fire within defined control lines and preventing further spread toward communities and critical infrastructure. A 40 km backburning operation was conducted, leading to the fire's containment. By mid to late January 2026, containment lines were strengthened and fire activity moderated as conditions eased. Recovery planning commenced alongside suppression activities, with agencies supporting fencing replacement, agricultural recovery and community wellbeing.

There were multiple community evacuations, prolonged road closures affecting cross-border travel and freight movements and disruptions to telecommunications, transport and agricultural operations. Energy and communications infrastructure were threatened, requiring contingency planning to maintain essential connectivity. Water infrastructure resilience was monitored, including risk considerations to treatment and supply systems servicing nearby communities. Relief and recovery arrangements were activated with Emergency Relief Centres. There were 402 community warnings were issued along with eight Emergency Alert campaigns and two Potential Impact Zone (Red) maps.

Impacts:

- Grazing pasture, fodder, plantation and fencing losses.
- Initial Impact Assessments: 14 residences destroyed, two residences damaged and 93 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.



Box 1. Overview of the Walwa – River Road bushfire.

Source: Emergency Management Victoria.

Bushfire: Longwood – Berrys Lane**Start: 7 January 2026****Under Control: 5 February 2026****Size: 132,427 ha****Situation:**

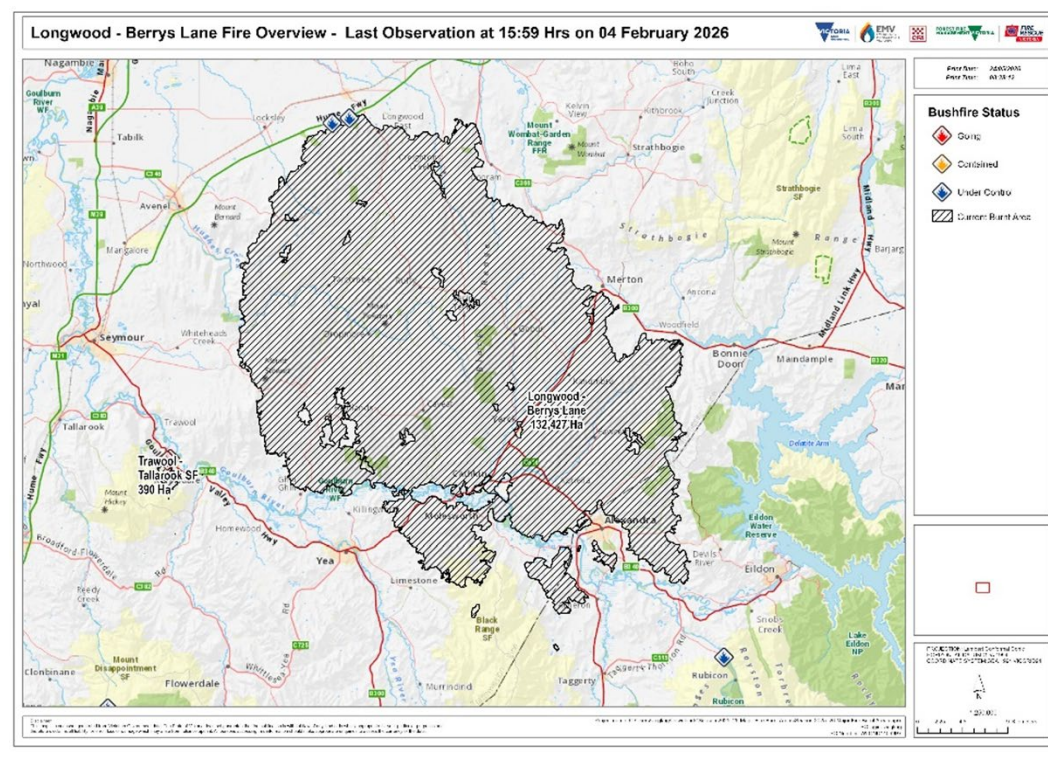
The Longwood – Berrys Lane fire ignited near the Hume Freeway in the Hume region. Two fires were reported in close proximity to major transport corridors, prompting an immediate escalation of resources. The fire spread rapidly through dry grass and scrub fuels under elevated fire danger conditions, threatening properties, critical transport infrastructure and rail assets. As the fire was close to the Hume Freeway and the Melbourne-Sydney rail corridor, traffic management and transport disruption became early priorities.

On 7 January 2026, control was transferred to Alexandra ICC and significant aviation resources were actively engaged, including night-capable aviation support. Suppression operations continued with direct attack and containment line construction for preventing further spread towards Longwood township and adjoining farming land. Additional strike teams were deployed to strengthen containment lines and undertake black-out operations as fire behaviour intensified. Due to potential spread into Melbourne's water catchment area, FFMVic commenced planning works on 10 January 2026, establishing of a division focusing on strengthening contingency and strategic breaks to protect Melbourne's water supply. Control in Alexandra ICC was transferred to Seymour ICC on 10 January as Alexandra ICC was within the potential impact area.

Relief arrangements were activated locally, with Emergency Relief Centres available. Containment was achieved on 21 January 2026, with patrol and monitoring operations continuing into February 2026. The fire was deemed Under Control 1 on 5 February 2026, and control of the incident was returned to agency control on 13 February 2026. There were 216 community warnings issued along with 22 Emergency Alert campaigns and three Potential Impact Zone (Red) maps.

Impacts

- The fire impacted structures and transport corridors, water and energy services, communication infrastructure, and resulted in significant livestock loss, as well as impacts to fodder and agriculture.
- Initial Impact Assessments: FRV completed 1,198 structure-damage assessments, reporting 320 residences destroyed, 19 residences damaged and 859 properties had destroyed or damaged outer buildings.



Box 2. Overview of the Longwood - Berrys Lane bushfire.

Source: Emergency Management Victoria.

International and interstate assistance

The AFAC National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC) coordinates support from other states, territories, and countries. The Arrangements for Interstate Assistance 2019 agreement enables Australian states and New Zealand emergency management agencies to share personnel and equipment during large-scale emergencies.

Australia and Canada also have an agreement to share wildfire management resources. This supports mutual assistance and cooperation during major fire events.

As the scale of the fire threat became clearer, Victoria requested additional support through AFAC on 7 January 2026 under these arrangements. The request included liaison personnel, incident management teams (IMTs), firefighters, aviation personnel, and equipment to help manage escalating demand across multiple incident areas.

Victoria received support from 1,469 staff and volunteers from New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, New Zealand, and Canada.

Table 1. Overview of international and interstate assistance inbound

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	WA	NZ	Canada	TOTAL
Crew	128	686	44		120	58	34	42	40	1,152
IMT	4	63	11	56	45	21	32		30	262
Liaison Officer and admin	3	6	2	3	6	4	2	2	4	32
NRSC Deployment Manager and admin	4		2	7					13	
Aviation support				2						2
Specialist / other	4			4					8	
	135	763	57	63	182	83	68	44	74	1,469

Victoria also provided support to other Australian jurisdictions and Canadian emergency services during the season and in previous years, deploying personnel when requested.

Table 2. Overview of interstate and international assistance outbound

Deployment	Dates	Personnel deployed from VIC	Personnel deployed by agency	Agency
2025 Canada fires June/July/August – deployment started 07/06/2025	01/07- 18/08/2025	24	1	FRV
			1	CFA
			22	FFMVIC
2025 WA fires – December	17/12- 22/12/2025	2	2	FRV
2026 WA fires – January	01/01- 07/01/2026	2	2	EMV
2026 SA fires – February	04/02- 11/02/2026	91	91	CFA
2026 NT floods – March	08/03- 24/03/2026	15	3	FRV
			5	CFA
			7	VicSES
2026 WA – TC Narelle	29/03- 04/04/2026	2	2	FRV

Floods

While fire response remained the dominant operational focus, the season also highlighted the importance of maintaining flood and storm readiness. The flood and storm impacts arrived during a high tempo operational fire period with the SCC at Tier 3 activation, adding evacuation, access, welfare, and public information demands to a system that was already stretched.

Very humid conditions led to thunderstorms from 15 to 17 January 2026. These storms produced rainfall across most of Victoria and demonstrated how rapidly the season could shift from fire-driven risk to flood-driven impacts.

On 15 January 2026, a severe storm caused flash flooding across south-western Victoria, producing more than 180 mm of rainfall in about 6 hours at Mount Cowley, west of Lorne. This caused flash flooding in Wye River, Kennett River, Cumberland River, and Lorne. Roads, campsites, and coastal communities along the Surf Coast were affected, creating a second significant emergency environment while fire response and relief operations were continuing elsewhere.

Floodwater swept cars, caravans, tents, and camping equipment into the ocean or onto beaches. Parts of the Great Ocean Road were closed because of dangerous

conditions, debris, and landslide risk. Hundreds of residents and visitors moved to higher ground or emergency shelters, compounding evacuation, access, and welfare demands during an already active emergency period.

The incident was managed by the nearby Colac Incident Control Centre which was already established for fire response gaining efficiencies with the agency IMTs managing multiple incidents within the footprint.

Heatwave

Soon after the storm and flood impacts, a severe to extreme heatwave began on 24 January 2026, adding another layer of risk to an already pressured season. Northern inland areas recorded 6 to 8 consecutive days above 40°C. A heatwave of this duration had not occurred since January 2014, and some locations had never recorded a heatwave lasting more than five days.

The heatwave conditions peaked on 26-28 January 2026, coinciding with statewide Total Fire Bans and elevated fire danger across northern and central Victoria. Walpeup and Hopetoun recorded 48.9°C on 27 January, setting a new Victorian maximum temperature record and exceeding the previous record of 48.8°C at Hopetoun on 7 February 2009 (Black Saturday).



Floodwater swept cars, caravans, tents, and camping equipment into the ocean or onto beaches.

Source: Jeff Wilson, supplied by Emergency Management Victoria.

The severe heatwave conditions placed renewed stress on electricity distribution networks statewide. On 27 January 2026, over 103,000 customers were without power, including around 2,500 life support customers. Power was restored progressively and all heatwave-related outages were resolved by 29 January 2026. The outages showed how extreme heat can compound emergency impacts by affecting energy supply, health risk, communications, household resilience, and recovery capacity at the same time.

5.1.5. Impacts

The combined effect of these hazards was reflected in the scale and breadth of impacts across Victoria. The January 2026 bushfires affected 23 LGAs and one alpine resort, with consequences for homes, farms, roads, services, natural environments, and local economies. These impacts were not confined to burnt areas; they were amplified by road closures, smoke, heat, power disruption, storm damage, and the need to maintain relief and recovery services across multiple locations.

Initial impact assessments identified 451 homes destroyed. By comparison, more than 2,000 homes were destroyed in the 2009 fires, and more than 350 homes were destroyed in the 2019–20 fires. Secondary impact assessments were still being finalised at the time of reporting, so the full extent of cumulative damage to properties, infrastructure, and community assets was still emerging.

The impacts of the bushfires on farming communities and agricultural enterprises surpassed both the 2009 Black Saturday fires and the 2019 Black Summer fires. Over 45,000 head of livestock were lost, predominantly sheep and cattle, as well as almost 10,000 km of fencing and over 150,000 hectares of agricultural land, including established horticultural crops such as vineyards and orchards.

Of the major fires recorded during the season, the majority were the result of lightning strikes, with others due to mechanical ignition, reignition of previous fires, electrical fault, or unknown or undetermined causes. This mix of causes reinforced the challenge of managing multiple ignition pathways when weather, fuels, and response capacity were already under pressure.

Over the season, Department of Transport and Planning data showed that multiple arterial roads were closed predominantly due to fire emergencies. Closures of local council roads as well as jointly managed roads were also recorded, adding to response, relief, supply chain, and community access challenges.

For roads predominately in State Forests and National Parks managed by the Department of Energy,

Environment and Climate Action, contractors supported hazardous tree removal and other make-safe works. These activities helped restore safe access and reduce the risk of further disruption during response and recovery.

5.1.6. Relief and recovery

As the scale and complexity of impacts became clearer, the Victorian Government activated relief and recovery support. Assistance included hardship payments, emergency accommodation, the 1800 Recovery Hotline, recovery support, psychological first aid, financial counselling, emergency animal feed, and waste disposal assistance, recognising that communities were dealing with overlapping losses, service disruptions, and practical recovery barriers.

Relief payments were made available soon after the fires began through the Personal Hardship Assistance Program. These payments helped meet immediate needs such as food, clothing and medication. Further recovery funding was announced as impacts and community needs became clearer. Councils opened 32 Emergency Relief Centres and 15 Recovery Information Hubs to provide food, water, psychosocial support, financial support, accommodation support, and recovery information as demand increased across affected areas.

This support continued as communities moved from immediate relief into recovery. Relief centres supported communities advised to leave and people directly affected by fire. After the fires, affected people were contacted and connected with recovery services. By 26 February 2026, all affected LGAs had moved into recovery. By 6 March 2026, secondary impact assessments had been completed for most councils, providing a clearer picture of cumulative recovery needs.

Total recovery assistance provided for the January 2026 bushfires was more than \$420 million including cost-sharing under the Commonwealth and Victorian government jointly funded DRFA. This reflected the scale of escalating impacts and the need for sustained support beyond the immediate response period, particularly where fire damage, access constraints, agricultural losses, psychosocial impacts, and infrastructure disruption intersected.

5.1.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

The scale and complexity of the season reinforced the importance of capturing learnings across the emergency management system. Emergency Management Victoria's State Lessons and Evaluation team works with agencies

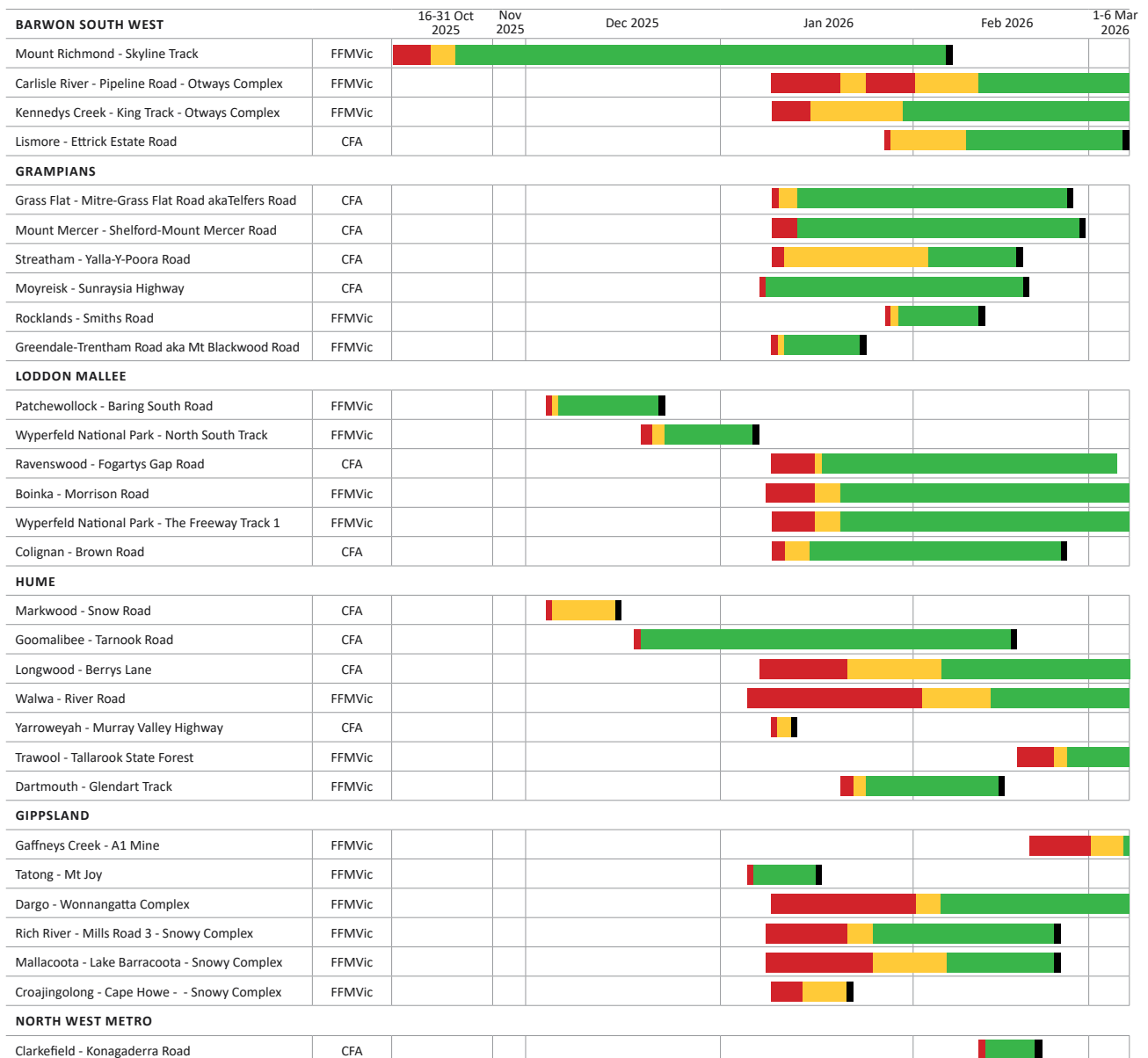
and departments to identify lessons, insights, and improvement opportunities across preparedness, response, relief, and recovery, including how compounding hazards, cascading infrastructure impacts and sustained community disruption affect decision-making and outcomes.

For the 2025-26 high-risk weather season, the team collected and analysed observations from the SCC

and held end-of-season debriefs with sector partners, regional, and IMTs.

As reviews continue, findings and recommendations will support continuous improvement and help strengthen future emergency management arrangements. This will be particularly important for anticipating, coordinating, and recovering from hazards that occur concurrently or in rapid succession.

4.1.8. Timeline of fire events



Legend

■ Going ■ Contained ■ Under control ■ Safe

Figure 9. Timeline of fire events

5.2. Higher-risk weather season (Queensland) – 2025-26

4.2.1. Overview of higher-risk weather season

The 2025–26 higher-risk weather season in Queensland included severe storms, tropical lows, monsoon rain, and tropical cyclones. These events happened one after another and caused repeated impacts across the state. The Madden-Julian Oscillation was active several times during the wet season. This helped monsoon troughs and tropical lows bring heavy rain, storms, and flooding to much of northern Queensland. Six tropical cyclones crossed the Australian coast between October 2025 and April 2026, with 2 crossing the Queensland coast. Coral Sea temperatures were the warmest on record, which helped fuel intense weather. The summer of 2026 was Queensland's wettest since 2010–11, with rainfall well above average across most of the state except the south-east corner.

The season began with severe storms in south-east Queensland in October and November 2025. These storms caused short-term damage. From mid-December, the situation changed to longer and wider flooding. Tropical Low 07U and the start of the Australian Summer

Monsoon caused major flooding across northern and north-west Queensland. More impacts followed from Tropical Cyclone Koji, Tropical Low 29U, and Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle. Together, these systems affected far northern, inland, central, and south-east Queensland over several months.

The season had serious effects on communities, infrastructure, and primary producers. Over the 6 months, almost all of Queensland's LGAs were disaster-declared. Impacts included loss of life, major river and flash flooding, isolated communities, supply shortages, evacuations, road and rail closures, power and telecommunications outages, damage to public assets, and major agricultural losses. Queensland's disaster management arrangements were used throughout the season. Local, district, and state disaster management groups worked together on preparedness, response, relief, and recovery. The State Disaster Coordination Centre was activated for 3 major events. Agencies and partners also supported warnings, Emergency Alerts, resupply operations, infrastructure repair, welfare checks, damage assessments, and financial assistance.



Several boats broke free of their anchorages off Airlie Beach during Tropical Cyclone Koji.
Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Jasmine Hines © 2026 ABC.

Together, the events showed how complex Queensland's disaster risks can be. Some communities were still recovering from one event when another event arrived. The season showed the need for strong readiness, good logistics and resupply systems, stronger infrastructure, flexible financial support, clear community warnings, and close coordination between agencies. It also showed the importance of improving preparedness, lessons management, and recovery planning for long-lasting disasters that affect many regions.

5.2.2. Weather and climate factors

From October to November 2025, severe storms affected south-east Queensland, including Brisbane, Redland, the Scenic Rim, and the Sunshine Coast LGAs. The storms did not last long, but they brought damaging wind gusts, flash flooding, and hail. They damaged homes, roads and council assets, and left some residents without power. They also led to early financial assistance before the larger summer floods began.

From mid-December 2025, the impacts changed from short storm damage to a large and long-running flood situation. In late December, the Australian Summer Monsoon moved into parts of northern Queensland. Many places in north-west Queensland recorded their highest daily rainfall totals for December, with some receiving more than 100 mm in one day. This heavy rain caused both flash flooding and riverine flooding.

Tropical Low 07U started a difficult period of weather, with response, relief, and recovery continuing through the season and beyond. The system was active from 14 December to 2 January. It brought heavy rain and flooding to north-west Queensland and eastern parts of the Northern Territory. The slow-moving low was part of a monsoon trough and brought more than 500 mm of rain to some areas, including Normanton, Cloncurry, and Julia Creek. Several river systems flooded, including major flooding in the Flinders, Western, Georgina, and Leichhardt catchments.

A man died on 30 December when his vehicle was caught in floodwater near Normanton. Flooding also caused major stock losses, with more than 90,000 cattle estimated to have died. Emergency fodder drops were needed to support surviving livestock. Road closures cut access to many communities, including Normanton, Karumba, Burketown, Doomadgee, Julia Creek, and Winton. The Flinders Highway and Great Northern Railway were also closed for long periods and damaged.

As the situation grew, government support was expanded several times from 30 December 2025. This support

included help for councils, emergency fodder, loans, freight subsidies, hardship assistance, reconstruction of essential public assets, and targeted flood recovery funding. More LGAs were added over time, showing that this was not a short event. It was a rolling disaster across the north and north-west, with floodwaters gradually moving south.

Tropical Cyclone Koji then added to the flood situation when it crossed the coast between Ayr and Bowen on 11 January 2026. Koji weakened to a tropical low before crossing the coast, but it still brought strong winds, including gusts up to 117 km/h. These winds caused some building damage, power outages, and damage to boats that broke free from their moorings, mainly in the Mackay and Whitsunday regions. As the system moved inland and eventually crossed the Queensland–Northern Territory border, it brought further heavy rain, storms, and strong winds. Weekly rainfall from 10 to 16 January ranged from 50 to 300 mm, with higher totals in some places. Significant flooding occurred in coastal and adjacent inland catchments including the Fitzroy River catchment.

In mid-February 2026, heavy rain and thunderstorms affected southern Queensland. A surface trough and moist air moved from New South Wales into southern Queensland. The system then deepened as it moved inland and north. It caused major flooding in the Flinders, Cape, and Bulloo rivers, as well as flash flooding. Flooding and road closures isolated communities in western and central Queensland.

In early March 2026, Tropical Low 29U caused another major flood event after crossing the coast south of Cairns. It first affected far northern Queensland, but its impacts later spread across inland, central, and south-east Queensland, including the Fitzroy River and the Burnett River at Bundaberg, and the Mary River. Inland catchments also had new or renewed flooding, including major flooding in the Thompson River at Longreach. Impacts included major river flooding, isolated communities, supply shortages, evacuations, and many road closures. Two tourists died when their vehicle was swept off the road in the Gympie area. This event highlighted the increasingly complex nature of Queensland's disaster risk, with impacts unfolding across multiple regions.

The final major event of the season was Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle, which occurred from 15 to 28 March 2026. Tropical Cyclone Narelle approached far northern Queensland as a Category 5 severe tropical cyclone. It crossed the coast as a Category 4 system between Coen and Lockhart River on the morning of 20 March 2026. It then moved across Cape York Peninsula and entered

the Gulf of Carpentaria south of Weipa as a Category 2 system later that day. Tropical Cyclone Narelle then moved west into the Northern Territory and Western Australia. It generated the longest continuous period of Bureau of Meteorology weather advice for any Australian tropical cyclone.

Tropical Cyclone Narelle brought strong winds, with gusts above 100 km/h, and caused some building damage. Fallen trees and branches damaged powerlines and mobile communication sites. Heavy rain of more than 200 mm flooded roads and properties. In some places, helicopters were the only way to reach communities during the wet season. They were used mainly for welfare checks and damage assessments.

5.2.3. Preparedness

Preparing for disasters is a shared responsibility in Queensland. Before each higher-risk weather season, households, businesses, communities and government agencies take steps to get ready. The Get Ready Queensland program helps people understand risks and prepare for disasters. Get Ready Week is held each October, with community events across the state to encourage people to prepare before the wet season begins.

Queensland's disaster management arrangements are coordinated at local, district, and state levels. These levels work together to keep communities safe. Local governments are mainly responsible for managing disasters in their own areas. Across the system, agencies build their capability through plan reviews, training, exercises, and pre-season briefings. Working across agencies and borders also helps improve coordination. Government agencies review their readiness and plan for potential disruptions to supply chains, telecommunications, critical infrastructure, and business continuity, as well as the mobilisation and support of volunteers.

Targeted preparedness activities also included the Culturally Inclusive Disaster Planning and Exercising Project. This project works with First Nations peoples on Country, aiming to include traditional, cultural and local knowledge, practices, and languages in Local Disaster Management Plans and disaster management practices.

5.2.4. Response

Queensland's disaster management arrangements were activated across the 2025–26 higher-risk weather season. Local governments managed impacts in their areas, while disaster districts provided support when needed. At the



Storm surge ahead of Cyclone Koji.

Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Michael Lloyd © 2026 ABC.

state level, the State Disaster Coordination Group met 15 times to coordinate the response across agencies. Global unrest and disruption to international fuel supply routes also created concern during the season. The Group worked with industry to monitor supply risks and coordinate emergency fuel supplies when needed.

The State Disaster Coordination Centre, a whole-of-government centre, was activated for 3 major events over 24 days. These activations supported local and district groups. They occurred in January 2026 for Tropical Cyclone Koji and the North Queensland Monsoon Trough, in early March 2026 for Tropical Low 29U, and in late March 2026 for Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle. Up to 19 Queensland Government agencies provided staff to the Centre. Between January and April 2026, 4 disaster declarations covered the Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, and Cairns disaster districts for these 3 major events.

To support fast response and relief, especially for cyclone events, agencies moved staff and resources closer to areas that could be affected. For example, as Tropical Cyclone Koji developed in the Coral Sea, State Emergency Service (SES), Queensland Police Service, and Queensland Ambulance Service officers were placed in the Whitsunday Islands before possible impacts. Agencies also sent swiftwater rescue crews, emergency crews to assess and reconnect critical infrastructure, and supplies such as fodder, aviation fuel, and generators.

During the season, agencies encouraged communities to follow Bureau of Meteorology advice and warnings and to check local disaster dashboards. Thirty-eight LGAs issued 215 warnings under the Australian Warning System. The State Disaster Coordination Centre authorised 68 Emergency Alerts across 25 LGAs. When telecommunications outages occurred, response agencies went door to door to share warnings and check on people's welfare.

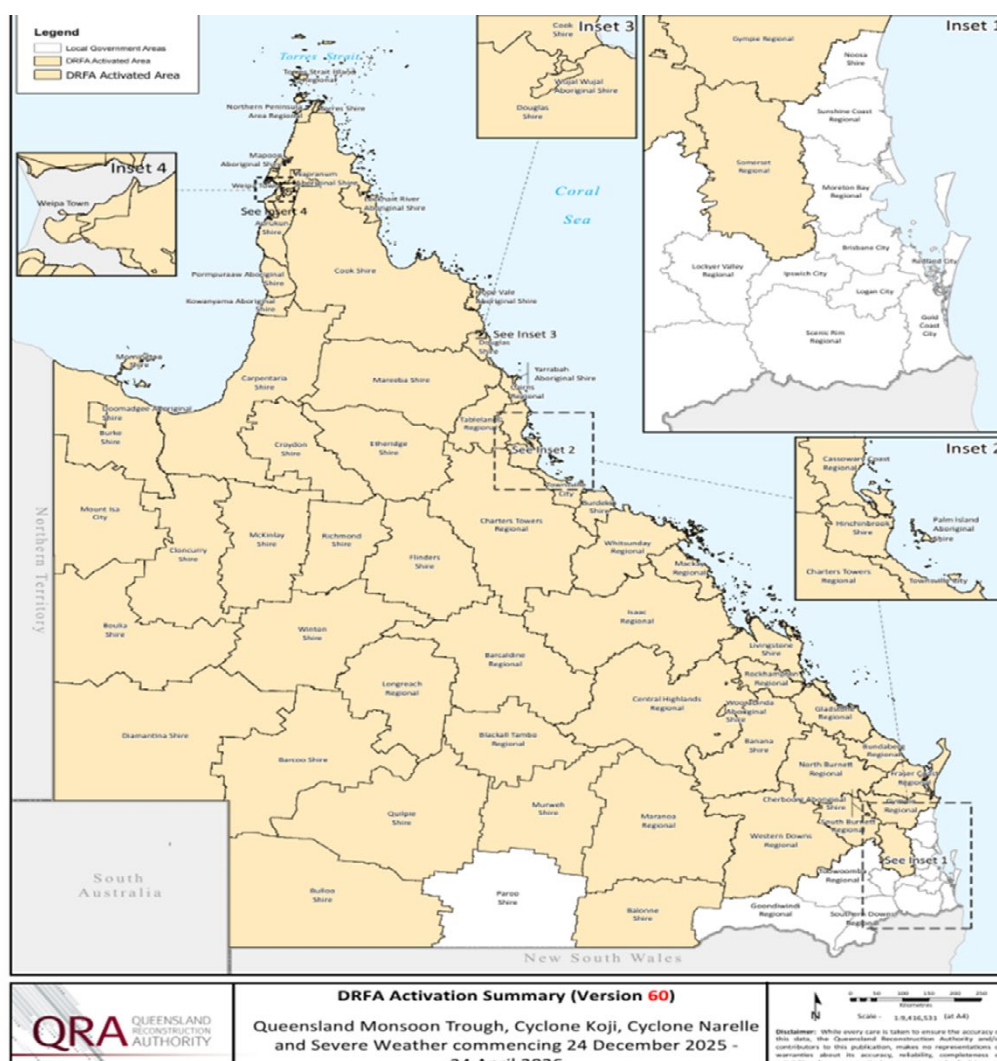


Figure 10. DRFA Activation Summary following the North Queensland Monsoon Trough, Tropical Cyclone Koji and Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle.

Source: Queensland Reconstruction Authority

5.2.5. Relief, recovery, and impacts

Across the 2025-26 higher-risk weather season, of Queensland's 77 LGAs and one town authority, all but one became eligible for disaster recovery funding by the end of the season. Tropical Low 07U, the North Queensland Monsoon Trough, Tropical Cyclone Koji and Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle created repeated hazards on landscapes that were already flooded. Communities across the state faced common impacts, including damage to homes, critical infrastructure, and transport routes. Some communities were isolated for long periods, first by rising floodwaters and then by damaged roads.

In early March 2026, Tropical Low 29U caused flooding across far northern, inland, central, and south-east Queensland. The impacts were broad and varied. They included major riverine flooding, isolated communities, supply shortages, and evacuations. In far northern Queensland, the Daintree River received more than half a metre of rain and rose above major flood levels within hours at Bairds, upstream of Daintree Village. The Daintree ferry, an important transport link for local communities and tourism, was damaged when floodwater dislodged a concrete public pontoon and pushed it into the ferry. The ferry was out of operation for 3 weeks. Because the ferry is the most direct route between Cairns and Cape Tribulation, the alternative 4-wheel-drive route added about 4 hours to the trip. Several tourism boats moored to the pontoon were also swept downriver and damaged.

At the time of writing, emergency repairs to essential services and transport routes were either underway or complete. Some major projects were still being assessed. Damage assessments were continuing across the state to understand the full impact and support recovery planning. Farmers and primary producers experienced major pasture damage and livestock losses. Reports suggested livestock losses may have exceeded 100,000 head. This damage required a major response from all levels of government. The loss of breeding stock, including cows and calves, is also expected to make it harder for producers to restock and recover.

The North Queensland Monsoon Trough, Tropical Cyclone Koji and Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle affected much of the state. Seventy-six of Queensland's 77 LGAs and Weipa Town Authority were activated under DRFA (see

Figure 10). This included support for counter disaster operations, reconstruction of public assets, disaster assistance loans for small businesses, primary producers and not-for-profit organisations, and the Personal Hardship Assistance Scheme.

More than \$222 million in exceptional circumstance recovery assistance packages were jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments under the DRFA. These packages provided support for relief, recovery and, where applicable, resilience-building. They included support for clean-up, environmental recovery, economic recovery, mental health, community recovery, repair of sport and community recreation assets, and stronger rebuilding of damaged critical infrastructure.

5.2.6. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

Australia's first Climate Risk Assessment, released in 2025, found that more intense and extreme climate hazards are likely in the future. The 2025–26 higher-risk weather season showed that compounding and cascading hazards may become more common. These are hazards that happen close together or cause further impacts. During the season, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority worked with NEMA to combine some disaster funding activations across events. This recognised that some communities were affected by more than one disaster. The approach reduced the burden on communities by avoiding the need to separate every item of damage by event. The Queensland Reconstruction Authority is reviewing the approach to see if it should be used again in the future.

Researchers from Queensland's Cyclone Testing Station are helping improve future knowledge by collecting information on how Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle affected buildings and infrastructure. This work will help inform building codes and resilience strategies for cyclone-prone communities.

Disaster management groups and coordination centres also reviewed lessons during operations. This helped agencies adapt while events were still happening. Agencies will consider these lessons and take action before the next higher-risk weather season.

5.2.7. Timeline of events

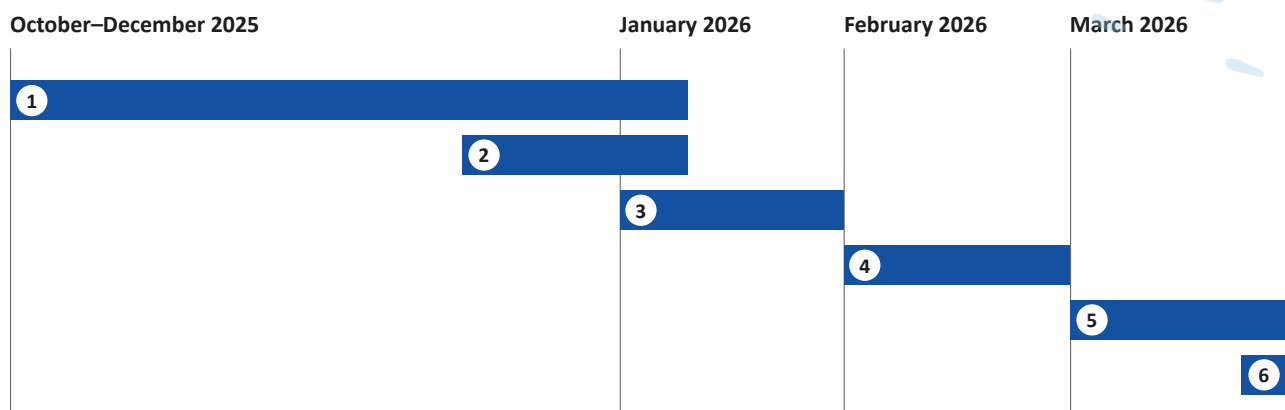


Figure 11. Queensland higher-risk weather season – 2025-26 timeline of events.

- 1 October–December 2025: Severe storms** and hail in south-east Queensland caused infrastructure damage, power outages, and road impacts.
- 2 December 2025–early January 2026: Tropical Low 07U and monsoon rain** caused large-scale flooding in north and north-west Queensland. Communities were isolated and major agricultural losses occurred. Above-average rainfall also increased soil moisture across large parts of northern Queensland.
- 3 January 2026: Tropical Cyclone Koji** added to existing flooding and increased impacts in already wet catchments. Led to new flooding in coastal catchments including the Pioneer and Fitzroy River catchments. More low-pressure troughs brought extra rain, leading to very high soil moisture in northern Queensland. Many river level sites recorded very high flows, and many dams were more than 90% full.
- 4 February 2026: Heavy rain** caused major river and flash flooding across western and central Queensland, with heavy and intense rainfall in southeast Queensland and in the Burnett also extending inland to the Southern Highlands and Coalfields. More LGAs were activated for funding support as the response moved into recovery.
- 5 March 2026: Tropical Low 29U** caused new and renewed and widespread flooding across northern, inland, central, and south-east Queensland.
- 6 Late March 2026: Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle** brought more rain and major river flooding across parts of inland Queensland. Into April, most river flows were above average, and most water storages were full.



SES volunteers and NT Police in Katherine working to support victims of flooding.
Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Oliviana Lathouris © 2025 ABC.

5.3. Higher-risk weather season (Northern Territory) – 2025-26

5.3.1. Overview of higher-risk weather season

Between November 2025 and March 2026, the Northern Territory faced a long period of severe weather and flooding. The season included Severe Tropical Cyclone Fina, widespread flooding in the Barkly and Central Australia regions, major river flooding in the Big Rivers region, and Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle. These events happened one after another. Each event made the next one harder to manage and increased the overall impact.

The season caused widespread flooding, long periods of community isolation, major transport disruptions, damage and pressure on important services, and heavy demand on emergency management resources. The large size of the Northern Territory made the response more complex, because teams had to work across remote, regional, and urban areas at the same time.

Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services (NTFES), through the Northern Territory Emergency Service (NTES) as the Hazard Management Authority, supported all stages of emergency management. This work required close cooperation with Northern Territory Police as the Controlling Authority, Territory Government departments, local government, Aboriginal community organisations, Commonwealth agencies, and critical infrastructure providers.

Several features elevated the season to a major incident of state significance, including:

- multiple severe weather events occurred over a 5-month period
- significant impacts were experienced across multiple emergency management regions
- extended road closures disrupted logistics and supply chains
- numerous remote communities became isolated for prolonged periods
- commonwealth support arrangements were required
- interstate emergency management resources were deployed
- recovery activities commenced while response operations remained ongoing
- public, political, and media interest remained high throughout the season.

The 2025–26 season showed how several disasters in a row can build on each other. This can create larger impacts than a single event and can challenge emergency management systems that are designed mainly for one emergency at a time.

5.3.2. Weather and climate related factors

The Northern Territory wet season often brings tropical lows, monsoon weather, cyclones and flooding. In 2025–26, these hazards combined and created a long-running emergency.

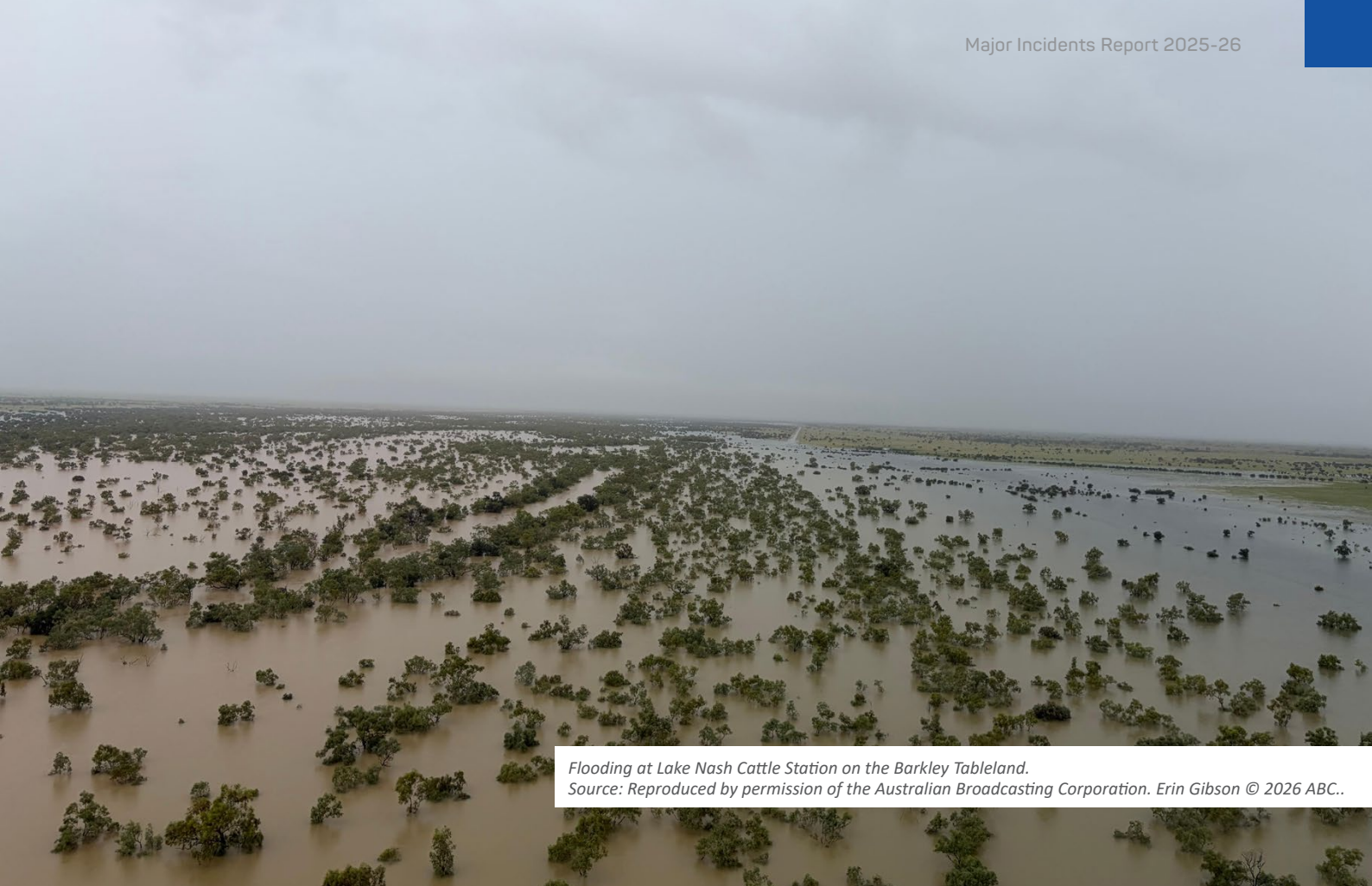
Severe Tropical Cyclone Fina developed in November 2025 and threatened the Top End, including Darwin, the Tiwi Islands, and nearby coastal areas. The cyclone brought very destructive winds, intense rainfall, and impacts to power, communications, and transport.

After the cyclone, steady rain across inland catchments led to flooding in the Barkly and Central Australia regions. Large rivers and floodplains received heavy inflows. This caused many road closures and isolated communities for long periods. Freight movements and key resupply routes were also disrupted.

As floodwaters moved through river systems, impacts spread north into the Big Rivers region. High river levels and multiple rain events caused long-lasting flood conditions and increased the need for community support and resupply. Flooding in South Australia also affected the Territory when key routes south of Alice Springs were cut. With the Stuart Highway and rail line closed, agencies had to plan carefully for the delivery of critical goods across the Territory. This was made harder by another road closure within the Northern Territory at the same time.

During March 2026, Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle developed while catchments were still saturated, and river levels elevated from earlier rain. Existing flood impacts made communities and infrastructure more vulnerable. This meant the cyclone was not only a new hazard; it also increased the impacts already being felt.

The season showed why it is important to understand compound and cascading risks. These risks happen when one weather event makes later events more damaging or harder to manage.



*Flooding at Lake Nash Cattle Station on the Barkley Tableland.
Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Erin Gibson © 2026 ABC..*

5.3.3. Preparedness

Preparedness work began before the main impacts occurred and continued throughout the season. As is normal in the Top End, higher-risk weather season community engagement occurred in the months prior to the season start on 1 November. This messaging and engagement include recommended preparations for households, information about shelters, and what to do statements supporting Local and Regional Plans.

Northern Territory Emergency Management Arrangements were activated in response to Bureau of Meteorology forecasts and warnings. Incident Action Planning helped agencies build a shared understanding of the situation, plan for likely impacts, and prepare operations.

Across government, agencies reviewed business continuity plans, identified risks to important infrastructure and assessed communities and transport routes that could be affected. Emergency management partners worked together to identify resources and focus on high-risk locations.

Local Emergency Committees and regional coordination groups supported preparedness in communities. Extra attention was given to remote communities that often become isolated during major floods. Planning included emergency supplies, community welfare needs, and backup transport options.

As flooding spread beyond the first cyclone impacts, preparedness changed from planning for one event to planning for a long emergency. Agencies had to consider staff fatigue, resupply needs, aircraft support, and how to keep resources available over several months.

The season also showed the value of staying ready between major incidents. Lessons from the response to Severe Tropical Cyclone Fina helped shape planning before Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle.

5.3.4. Response

NTFES and partner agencies delivered a coordinated response across the higher-risk weather season.

Early operations focused on Severe Tropical Cyclone Fina. This included public information, operational readiness, infrastructure monitoring and managing expected impacts. Emergency management arrangements helped agencies work from a shared picture and make coordinated decisions.

As flooding moved inland, the main priorities became protecting life, supporting isolated communities and keeping essential services running. A major effort was needed to understand conditions in remote areas where access was limited, and information was hard to gather.

A key part of the response was strong cooperation between agencies. Government agencies, local councils,

emergency services, infrastructure operators, and community organisations worked together to identify problems and coordinate solutions. This helped teams use limited resources where they were needed most.

Commonwealth support became more important as operations grew. NEMA, ADF liaison staff, and other Commonwealth partners helped with coordination, planning, and support. This showed the value of having strong arrangements between governments before emergencies occur.

During Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle, NTFES coordinated the arrival and use of interstate emergency service personnel. These teams provided extra support and helped the Territory sustain operations during a busy and demanding period.

Providing the NRSC with an early indication that support would be needed proved invaluable. This allowed for multiple deployments so interstate teams were prepared, deployed, and redeployed during the later months of the season.

Aircraft played a critical role throughout the season. They were used to move people, check flood conditions, support logistics, and help resupply communities. Because many roads were closed and distances are large in the Northern Territory, aviation was essential.

The response showed that existing incident management systems worked well. It also showed how difficult it can be to manage emergencies that last a long time and affect many areas at once.

In summary, between 1 November 2025 and 30 April 2026, 1,506 Request For Assistance were completed, totalling 5,346 volunteer hours with 524 Australian Warning Systems messages issued across NTFES for cyclones, storms, and flooding.

5.3.5. Impacts

The 2025–26 higher-risk weather season affected communities, infrastructure, government services, and the economy.

Remote and regional communities were isolated for long periods because of road closures and flooding. This affected access to food, fuel, medical services and everyday goods. Further impacts related to dislocation of numerous communities increased demand for emergency resourcing and support required in safely managing these vulnerable communities.

Transport networks were heavily disrupted. This affected emergency operations and everyday economic activity. Road damage and floodplain access issues made logistics difficult.



Homes along Gwendolyn Drive, Katherine (NT) saw some of the town's worst damage.
Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. James Elton © 2026 ABC.

Critical infrastructure was affected by both cyclone impacts and flooding. Power, communications, and transport systems were interrupted, which made emergency response and recovery more difficult.

Over the course of the season several communities required evacuation. The Daly River Community was evacuated on 2 separate occasions, the second time as a result of the recording breaking floods that peaked in mid-March at Daly River. The communities of Pulumpa, Jilkmingan, Numbulwar, Murray Downs, Beswick, and parts of Katherine all required evacuations operations to be conducted.

These evacuation operations highlighted the complications of widespread events requiring community members to be relocated hundreds of kilometres from their communities. Due to cultural and capacity requirements, establishment of extended relocations facilities were required and had to be delivered while still undertaking primary response and recovery activities.

The season also placed strong pressure on emergency management staff and agencies. Running operations across several regions for months required endurance, planning, and careful resource management.

The impacts built up over time. Earlier events made later events more serious and harder to manage. This showed how disasters can create cascading effects. Operational capacity and community resilience were tested and stretched during the extended period of response.

5.3.6. Relief and recovery

Relief and recovery work happened at the same time as response operations because the season lasted for several months.

Communities affected by severe weather and flooding needed ongoing access to essential supplies, welfare support, public information, and government assistance. Relief work focused on keeping communities safe and supported while emergency operations continued.

Many flood-affected communities were isolated for long periods. Government agencies worked together to coordinate food, medical support, emergency accommodation when needed, and other critical services. This was especially important in remote areas where normal supply routes were disrupted.

Recovery planning began early because repairing infrastructure and supporting communities would take time and resources. Damaged roads, flood-affected infrastructure, and disrupted economic activity created long-term recovery needs.

The season showed that recovery planning should be part of response operations from the beginning. As the months continued, response, relief, and recovery work often overlapped.

5.3.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

The 2025–26 higher-risk weather season provides several important lessons for emergency management.

Emergency management systems often focus on one hazard at a time. This season showed the need to plan for compounding incidents from the start, because several events can build on each other and create long-term impacts.

Strong whole-of-government coordination was a key strength. Existing relationships and governance arrangements helped agencies work together despite the scale and length of the emergency.

Commonwealth and interstate support helped strengthen the response. Feedback from interstate teams showed the value of clear briefings before deployment, on arrival, and during operations. Continued work on shared procedures, deployment processes, and joint planning would further improve future responses.

Aviation and logistics remain essential for emergency management in the Northern Territory. Future planning should continue to focus on flexible logistics models that can support remote communities during long periods of isolation.

Long emergency operations need strong support for workforce resilience, fatigue management, and maintaining capability. Long incidents create different challenges from short emergencies.

Recovery planning should also be built into response structures from the earliest stages. This can help make the shift from response to recovery smoother.

Cross-border issues should be considered early and included in seasonal preparedness. Impacts in the Northern Territory and neighbouring states did not stop at borders. Agencies worked with interstate partners, sometimes at local and regional levels, to support affected communities. These arrangements were often informal and relied on strong national networks of emergency management professionals.

Overall, the season showed the strengths of Northern Territory emergency management arrangements. It also showed the need to keep adapting to disasters that are becoming more complex and more connected.

5.3.8. Timeline of events

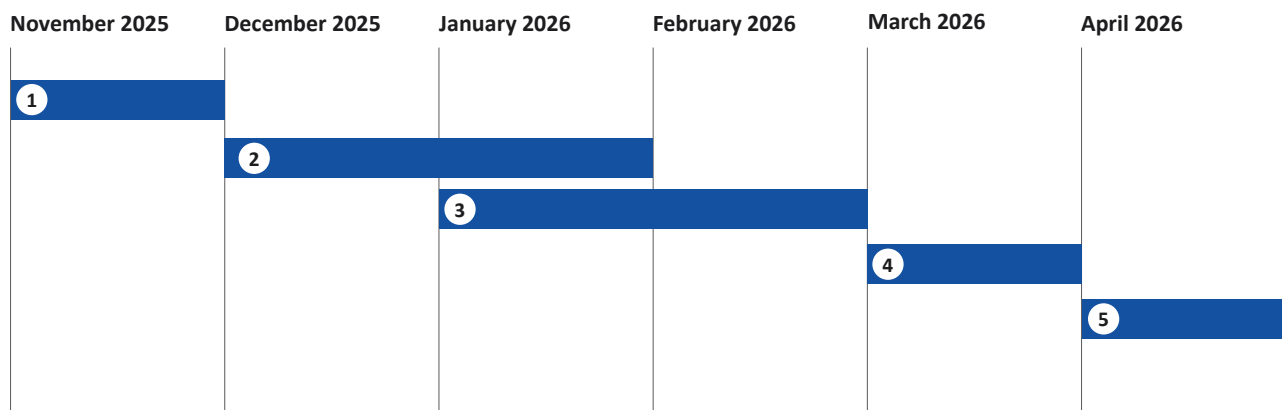


Figure 12. Northern Territory higher-risk weather season – 2025-26 timeline of events.

1 November 2025

- Severe Tropical Cyclone Fina threatens the Top End, including the Tiwi Islands and Greater Darwin region.
- Northern Territory Emergency Management Arrangements activated.
- Whole-of-government preparedness and response planning undertaken.
- Cyclone impacts include destructive winds, heavy rainfall, flooding, and infrastructure disruption.
- Recovery begins after Severe Tropical Cyclone Fina.

2 December 2025-January 2026

- Flooding develops across Barkly and Central Australia regions.
- Extensive road closures occur.
- Remote communities and pastoral properties become isolated.
- Multi-agency flood response operations commence.
- Recovery begins in the Big Rivers and Central Australia regions.

3 January-February 2026

- Recovery in the Big Rivers region is affected by new weather impacts.
- Flooding expands across the Big Rivers and Top End region.
- Community resupply operations increase.
- Commonwealth support coordination intensifies.
- Recovery operations continue across areas of the Northern Territory that are not directly affected.

4 March 2026

- Significant flooding occurred in early to mid-March across the Top End.
- Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle develops.
- Saturated catchments and elevated river levels from previous flooding increased flood risk, with renewed flooding occurring due to Severe Tropical Cyclone Narelle.
- Interstate emergency service task force deployed and integrated into Northern Territory operations.
- Commonwealth liaison activities continue throughout response operations.

5 Post-March 2026

- The Northern Territory moves toward recovery and restoration activities.
- Ongoing support to affected communities.
- Consolidation of lessons identified and operational insights for future emergency management planning.

5.4. Boddington-Wandering bushfire complex (Western Australia) – January 2026

5.4.1. Overview of incident

The Boddington-Wandering complex fires started during a wider bushfire outbreak across the South West and Great Southern regions of Western Australia, following a major dry lightning event on 22 January 2026. More than 2,500 lightning strikes were recorded within 400 km of Perth. These strikes ignited several fires at the same time near Boddington, Wandering, and Bannister (see Figure 13). On 22 January, extreme fire weather conditions, with high temperatures and strong winds driving rapid fire spread and making suppression difficult.

The Boddington-Wandering complex became one of the main bushfire priorities in the state. More than 150 firefighters, supported by aircraft, worked across the firegrounds. By the morning of 23 January, fires near Boddington had already burnt about 3,000 hectares and were not fully contained. Emergency warnings were issued and some nearby communities were evacuated. The fires also affected key transport routes, including the closure of Albany Highway, which disrupted travel, access, and freight movement.

Initial reporting did not confirm widespread loss of buildings or critical infrastructure. However, the fires grew to more than 6,000 hectares and moved onto properties with homes, creating a serious risk to life, property,

and rural livelihoods. The area had also experienced earlier fires in December and January, which increased pressure on firefighters, local governments, and affected communities.

5.4.2. Weather and climate-factors

In the days before the fires, the Great Southern and South West regions experienced very hot and dry weather. This followed several weeks of summer heat with little rainfall. The dry conditions reduced moisture in soil, grass, and vegetation, leaving fuels more likely to ignite and burn quickly. Forecasts for early 2026 also indicated below-average rainfall and above-average temperatures, increasing the seasonal bushfire risk.

Conditions worsened immediately before the fires started. Perth weather observations, used as a general indicator for the wider region, showed very hot and dry conditions on 20 and 21 January. Maximum temperatures reached 39 to 41°C. Afternoon humidity was very low, at about 12 to 16%, and easterly winds blew ahead of a west coast trough – conditions associated with extreme fire danger. On 22 January, dry lightning moved through the area with gusty winds and little or no rainfall reaching the ground. This lightning ignited several fires near Boddington and Wandering.



Fires burning as part of the Boddington-Wandering bushfire complex.

Source: Paul Gibson – Community Emergency Services Manager for the Shires of Narrogin, Cuballing and West Arthur (Supplied by DFES).

Overall, the fires followed a high-risk bushfire pattern: dry fuels, extreme heat, low humidity, gusty winds, and dry lightning. These factors increased the chance of ignition and supported fast-moving fire behaviour across the Boddington-Wandering area. The level of risk highlights the importance of planning, training, readiness, and early public information before severe fire weather arrives.

5.4.3. Preparedness

Preparedness in the Boddington area involved several agencies and local partners working together to reduce bushfire risk. This included learning from recent fires, training emergency personnel and completing fuel reduction work. The December 2025 Newmont/Boddington bushfire was a significant event, involving more than 200 emergency responders and showing strong cooperation between the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), local bushfire brigades, mining emergency services, and interstate support. Newmont Goldmine also demonstrated preparedness by using bushfire safety plans to protect key infrastructure and safely evacuate workers, even though some support systems, such as water supply, were damaged.

Across the wider Great Southern region, agencies prepared through regular training and exercises. These included bushfire exercises, logistics workshops, and capability programs involving DFES, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), local government, and volunteer brigades. The training focused on incident management, resource movement, and interagency coordination during busy fire periods. Preparedness also included fuel reduction work, such as mulching, spraying, planned burning, clearing vegetation, and improving emergency access routes. These actions helped reduce risk, support community safety, and improve access for firefighters when the fires started.

5.4.4. Response

The response to the Boddington-Wandering complex fires on 22 and 23 January 2026 was escalated quickly because several fires were burning at the same time. The fires were managed together under one incident structure, allowing incident leaders to set priorities, coordinate resources and maintain a shared view of risk across the firegrounds. The fires had already burnt several thousand hectares and were threatening communities. Due to the scale and complexity of the incident, additional crews, aircraft, and incident management personnel were deployed from across Western Australia, with support also provided by the South Australian Country Fire Service.

Many organisations supported the overall response. These included DFES, DBCA, local government bushfire brigades, and the SES. The Salvation Army and Department of Communities assisted with welfare and evacuation centres. Local mine operators, including Newmont and South32, also played an important role by providing emergency services personnel, heavy machinery, and water resources to support firefighting and protect key assets.

Firefighters used a range of strategies to control the fires, with crews attacking the fire directly where it was safe to do so, and with heavy machinery, including dozers and graders, used to build control lines and firebreaks in areas where direct firefighting was not possible. Public safety actions included closing Albany Highway and other roads. DFES also issued bushfire warnings as conditions changed. Overall, the response showed strong coordination between emergency services, local communities, interstate support, and industry partners.

5.4.5. Impacts

Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams completed damage assessments across affected areas. These assessments helped authorities confirm the scale, location, and type of damage. The information supported operational decision-making and helped recovery teams identify the services and support required by affected residents and landholders.

Most reported damage was to sheds, vehicles, and other property infrastructure. A smaller number of homes were affected, and some properties were assessed as destroyed or unsafe to occupy. This indicates that some areas experienced serious losses, while widespread loss of primary residences was limited. These impacts shaped the relief and recovery priorities that followed.

5.4.6. Relief and recovery

Relief and early recovery focused on keeping people safe and supporting those affected by the fires. Evacuation centres were established in nearby towns, including Williams – with nil attendees – and Narrogin. Although there were minimal attendees – with only 4 people registering at Narrogin – these centres were a hub for provision of shelter, registration, food, and emotional support. Agencies such as the Salvation Army and the Department of Communities helped deliver these services. Support was also arranged for animals, including pets and livestock. This included relocating animals, providing water and feed, and arranging veterinary assistance where needed. Community meetings and public updates helped residents understand fire conditions, road access, and recovery arrangements.

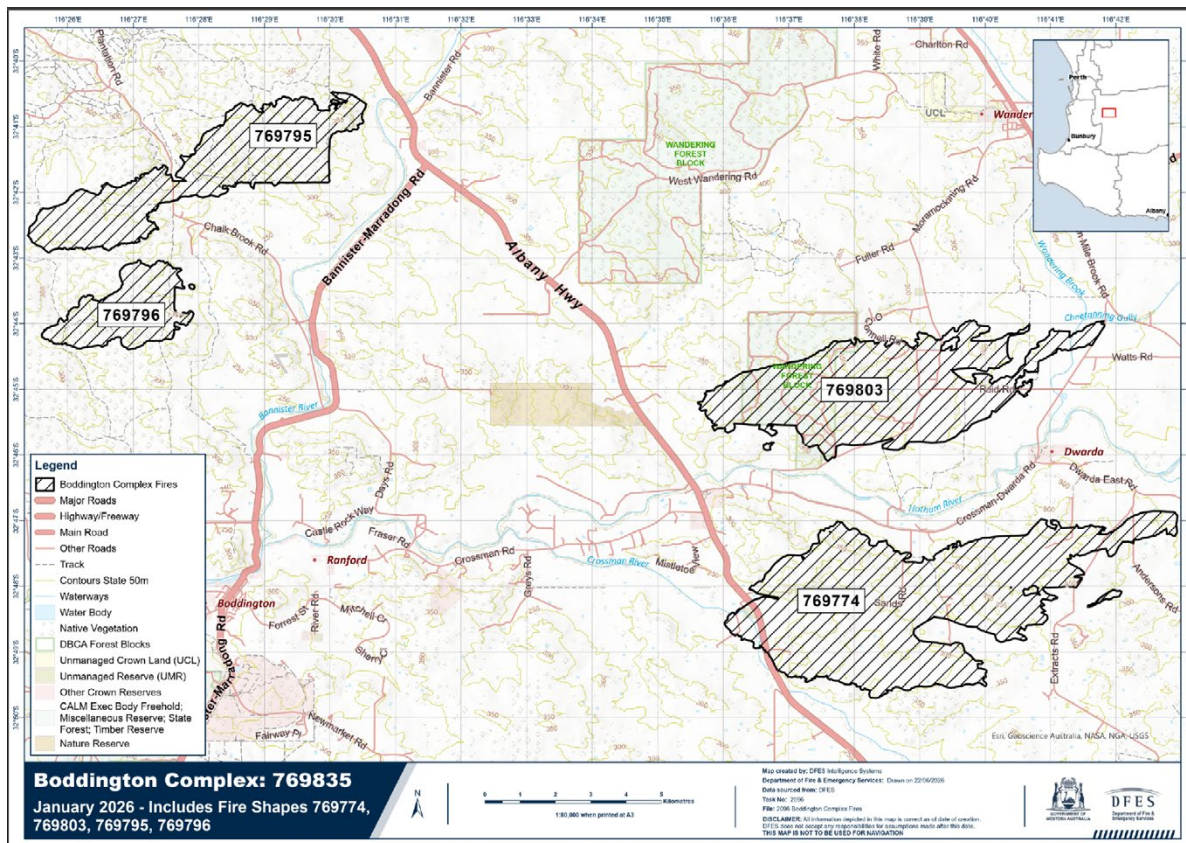


Figure 13. Map showing Boddington complex of fires, Western Australia.

Source: DFES.

As the fires became more stable, recovery support shifted towards farms and rural businesses. Farmers needed help with emergency feed, injured or displaced livestock, damaged fencing, and supply issues. Local government, industry groups, and state agencies helped coordinate this support. The recovery approach focused on practical assistance so residents and producers could return safely, restore essential services and continue farming activities.

5.4.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

The main observations from the incident follow, with these highlighting strengths that supported the response and opportunities to improve future bushfire preparedness, response, and recovery.

Strong multi agency and industry support

The incident demonstrated strong cooperation between emergency services, government, industry, and community partners. DFES, DBCA, interstate crews, SES, local government, mine operators, and local businesses all provided important support, including personnel, equipment, accommodation, and welfare services.

Insight: Industry and community support are major strengths during large incidents. These partnerships should be planned before the fire season so additional support can be requested, coordinated and used quickly when needed.

Effective local response and community engagement

Local brigades, farmers, and community members played an important role. They responded quickly, helped protect properties and supported containment work.

Insight: Local response is critical during fast-moving bushfires. It should be clearly connected to formal incident structures so local capability can be used safely and effectively.

Incident management and IMT capability challenges

The IMT worked under significant pressure. Challenges included delays in establishing the team, staffing gaps, unclear handovers, and limited availability of trained Level 2 personnel.

Insight: A complete and stable IMT should be established early during complex fires. This supports situation awareness, clear decision-making, and consistent coordination across the incident.

Communications and information flow

Communication systems performed unevenly. Starlink and informal tools were useful, but some traditional systems experienced outages, delays, or inconsistent information. This affected public warnings and coordination between agencies.

Insight: Communication plans should include more than one reliable option. Backup systems are essential when normal systems fail or become overloaded.

Use of local knowledge

Local knowledge was valuable but was not always built into planning and decision-making in a consistent way.

Insight: Local knowledge should be formally included in command and planning arrangements, not only used through informal advice. This can improve decisions and outcomes for affected communities.

Machinery and heavy asset management

Heavy machinery and contractors were important for controlling the fires. However, issues were identified with tasking, confirming equipment availability, tracking machinery, and coordinating use across agencies.

Insight: Large fires need a clear system for requesting, assigning, and tracking heavy machinery. This helps equipment be used safely, effectively, and in line with incident priorities.

Training and capability gaps

Several training gaps were identified. These included incident management systems, bushfire operations in forest and plantation areas, and support staff capability.

Insight: Regular, practical training is needed to reduce operational risk and help teams work in a consistent way during complex incidents.

Fatigue and workforce sustainability

Fatigue was a repeated issue. Long shifts, limited staffing, and uneven crew rotation affected personnel working on the incident.

Insight: Fatigue should be managed as a serious safety risk. Crews need planned rest, enough relief staff and clear rotation arrangements during long-running incidents.

Community information, warnings, and public interface

Public information improved during the incident, but delays occurred in issuing and updating warnings while multiple fires were active.

Insight: Large incidents need simple, timely warning processes so communities receive clear and current information when it matters most.

Logistics and welfare support

Logistics support was generally strong, including food, accommodation, welfare, and supplies. Mine sites and local community networks provided important assistance. However, some coordination gaps remained on the firegrounds.

Insight: Strong logistics are essential for long-duration fire operations. Community and industry support should be included in formal logistics planning before the fire season.

Recovery and transition

Recovery planning began early and was well supported through damage assessments, community engagement, and recovery coordination. However, roles and processes were not always clear.

Insight: Recovery should be planned early, with clear roles and simple processes. This helps communities move from response to recovery with less confusion and better support.

5.5. Foxtrot26: inland river flooding and supply chain disruption (South Australia) – February to March 2026

5.5.1. Overview of incident

Foxtrot26 was a significant inland river flood that affected South Australia during February and March 2026. The event followed sustained heavy rainfall associated with a slow-moving weather system. Rain fell across already wet catchments, causing rapid runoff into rivers and low-lying areas across inland and outback regions. Rivers rose in response to the initial local rainfall and then rose again as floodwaters from Queensland and the Northern Territory moved through connected river systems into South Australia, extending impacts well beyond the areas where rain first fell, affecting regional towns and key freight routes.

The event caused significant disruption to communities, infrastructure, transport networks, and regional services. While flood heights were lower than some previous events, the affected area was broader. Low-lying and flood-prone properties were inundated, roads were closed, infrastructure was damaged, and access became difficult across large areas. Some communities, pastoral properties, and travellers became isolated when floodwaters cut key access routes. Emergency service access was also constrained where road and air access was limited.

A defining feature of Foxtrot26 was the prolonged disruption to freight movement and supply chains, particularly for remote communities that rely heavily on road transport. Extended closures across road and rail networks affected the movement of essential goods, including food, fuel, and medical supplies. Ongoing resupply operations were required, using road transport and aircraft where conditions allowed.

Foxtrot26 is considered a major event because of its geographic scale, duration, and cross-sector impacts. Flooding continued for months as river systems carried water downstream, creating sustained disruption to transport networks, regional economies, and community access.

Foxtrot26 also occurred during a complex governance period. South Australian State Emergency Service (SASES) was operating in the lead-up to a South Australian state election and under caretaker conventions. This added complexity to decision-making, public communication, ministerial engagement, and whole-of-government coordination. SASES was required to remain independent, impartial, and focused on public safety while maintaining emergency management operations.

The event demonstrated how inland flooding can develop from a weather hazard into a prolonged, complex emergency. Over time, the operational focus shifted from immediate flood response to maintaining community access, supply, communications, and support.

5.5.2. Weather and hydrological factors

Foxtrot26 was driven by a slow-moving low-pressure system over the southern Northern Territory. This system interacted with warm, moist tropical air and another weather system moving in from the west. Together, these systems produced moderate to heavy rainfall across large inland areas, with thunderstorms causing short periods of heavier rain in some locations.

Forecasts indicated that rainfall was likely to continue rather than pass quickly, increasing the flood risk. Catchments were already wet from earlier rainfall which reduced the amount of water that could soak into the ground. As a result, more water flowed into rivers and creeks.

The combination of sustained rainfall, wet catchments, and connected river systems produced different flood behaviours. Some areas experienced rapid flooding, while others saw flood levels rise later as water moved downstream. This meant some communities faced elevated flood levels and access issues for an extended period.

Foxtrot26 followed several earlier flood events in regional and remote South Australia. Many communities had experienced significant flooding in 2022 and again in 2025, resulting in isolation, disrupted freight routes, impacts to livelihoods, and extended recovery periods. By 2026, some communities were already under pressure, increasing stress and expectations for response, resupply, and recovery support.

The 2026 event highlights the complexity of inland flooding in Australia. Impacts are shaped not only by where rain falls, but also by catchment conditions, upstream flows, and the movement of water through river systems. In Foxtrot26, these factors turned a rainfall event into a prolonged flood emergency.

5.5.3. Preparedness

Preparedness for Foxtrot26 commenced before the most severe impacts occurred, based on increasing confidence in forecasts for sustained rainfall and possible flooding

across South Australia. Planning was informed by Bureau of Meteorology advice indicating widespread moderate to heavy rainfall, with the potential for localised heavy falls and flooding across several regions.

Preparedness was coordinated at state and regional levels. State Coordination Centre (SCC) arrangements were activated early and scaled as required, allowing command, control, and coordination arrangements to be established ahead of peak impacts. Agencies also engaged through established forums, including State Emergency Committee briefings and regional coordination arrangements. This supported a shared understanding of risk, likely consequences, and operational priorities.

Public information and warnings were issued through multiple channels, including websites, social media, traditional media, and direct community engagement. Messaging focused on helping people understand the risk, prepare early, avoid unnecessary travel, and make contingency plans.

Operational planning included positioning resources for likely impact areas. Specialist teams, including swiftwater rescue and storm response crews, were identified and mobilised. Equipment, supplies, and personnel were moved closer to areas expected to be affected. Early engagement with partner agencies and Functional Support Groups supported planning for logistics, intelligence, and consequence management.

These preparedness activities strengthened readiness and ensured key response arrangements were in place before the most significant impacts occurred.

5.5.4. Response

The response phase commenced as flood warnings increased across inland catchments, marking the transition from planning to active operations. Early response activity focused on life safety, public information, and readiness for access disruption. Warnings and targeted messaging encouraged people to prepare, avoid travel, and retain essential supplies in case deliveries were delayed.

As impacts increased, SASES prioritised people at greatest risk, particularly those likely to become isolated. Flood rescues were undertaken for people stranded in vehicles or cut off by rising water. Roads and rail lines were closed where needed to protect public safety, and alternative transport routes were identified where possible.

As conditions deteriorated, emergency resupply became a major operational priority. Essential goods, including food, fuel, and medical supplies, were delivered to isolated communities through coordinated multi-agency arrangements. Aircraft were used where road access was unavailable. Reliable communications were critical to support coordination between agencies and maintain contact with affected communities.

Public information was adjusted as the situation evolved. Warnings and advice were issued for affected regions, a dedicated Infoline was established, and Community Liaison Officers were included in incident management arrangements. These measures helped communities access information, request assistance, and provide local intelligence to responders.



Aerial imagery captured by SASES RPA pilot of the Willochra Creek flooding impacts and attempts to clear the silt over road.

Source: SASES.

Overall, the response required emergency services to manage immediate life-safety risks while also coordinating resupply, communications, logistics, and community support across a large and changing operational area.

5.5.5. Impacts

Foxtrot26 caused wide-ranging impacts across communities, infrastructure, and regional systems. Impacts were not limited to direct flood damage (see Figure 14). They were also strongly linked to loss of access and disruption to transport and supply networks.

Flooding inundated homes, businesses, and agricultural properties. It also damaged critical infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and rail lines. This damage created secondary impacts by limiting travel and reducing the ability of communities and emergency services to access affected areas.

Foxtrot26 affected rail corridors where floodwater covered tracks and saturated the ground beneath them. This reduced track stability and increased the risk of washouts and ballast movement. As a result, some train services required speed restrictions, temporary closures, and inspections before services could restart. Rail impacts temporarily reduced east-west freight movement and added to broader transport disruption.

Combined damage to rail lines and major roads elevated the event from a state logistics issue to a national supply chain concern. Road closures, damaged rail infrastructure, and reduced freight movement affected the movement of essential goods within South Australia and across interstate freight routes. These impacts led to the establishment of an National Coordination Mechanism (NCM), bringing together governments, agencies, and industry to share information, identify risks, and coordinate priorities.

Social impacts were significant, especially for isolated communities. Residents experienced displacement, stress, and concern about access to food, fuel, and medical supplies. Reduced access to health services, education, and community support increased these impacts. Tragically, 2 lives were lost in the floodwaters.

Economic impacts were also substantial. Businesses, freight operators, and primary producers experienced losses due to supply chain disruption, delays, and interrupted operations. Environmental impacts, including erosion, water contamination, and debris, added further complexity to recovery.

Overall, Foxtrot26 demonstrated that inland flooding can create long-lasting and connected impacts. Loss of access and logistics disruption can become major drivers of social and economic harm.

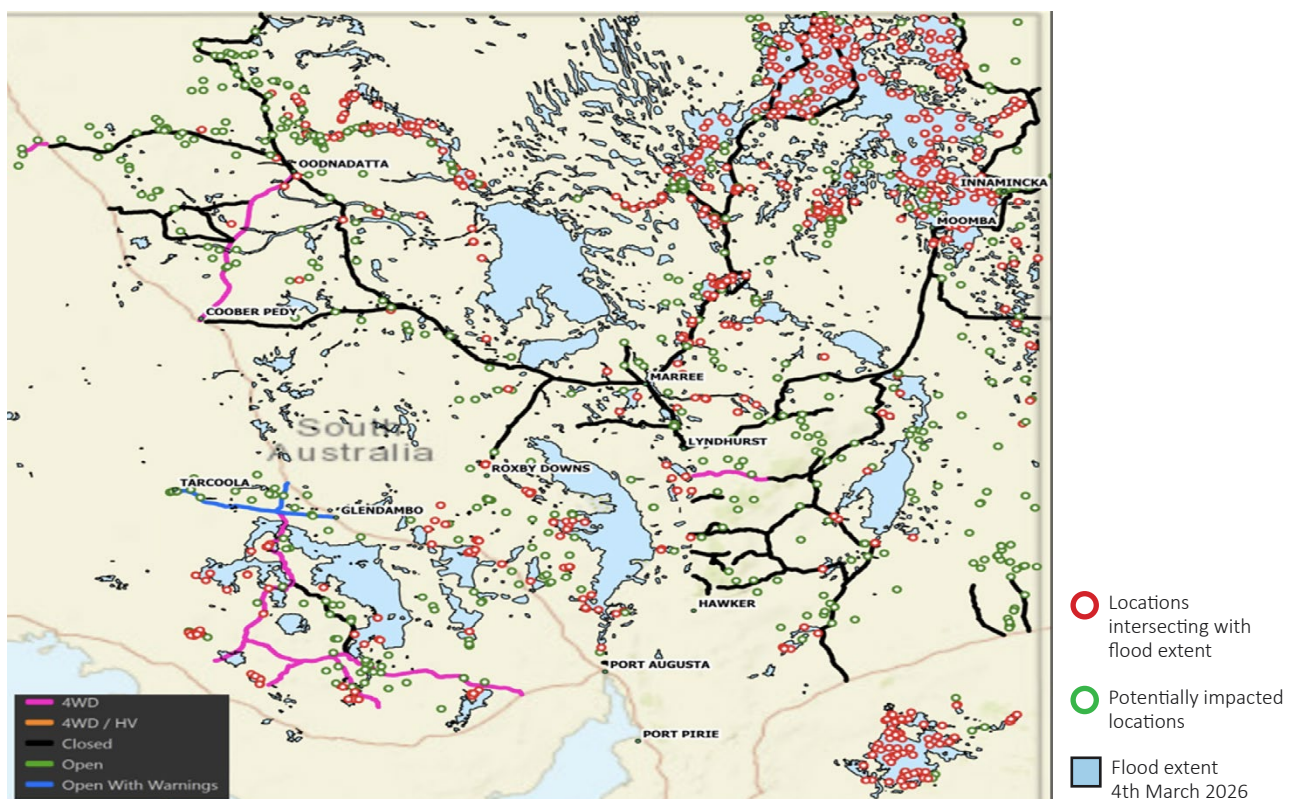


Figure 14. Impact locations in flood extent 4 March 2026.

Source: SASES.

5.5.6. Relief and recovery

Relief and recovery activities for Foxtrot26 began during the response phase and continued beyond the initial emergency period. This was required because the event was prolonged and caused widespread impacts across communities, infrastructure, and supply networks.

Relief efforts focused on supporting affected communities, particularly those that were isolated or had reduced access to essential services. Support included emergency welfare, access to medical care, and continued delivery of essential supplies. Aircraft played an important role by transporting supplies and supporting vulnerable people to access services or reconnect with family.

Community reunification flights were also used as part of the broader resupply operation. With many roads closed, approved flights moved both supplies and people. This included returning residents home, supporting children travelling from boarding school during school holidays, and reuniting family members separated by flooding. These flights also supported access to medical appointments and assisted vulnerable people during the extended disruption and were coordinated through the Resupply IMT.

As floodwaters receded and access improved, activity shifted towards restoring connections and supporting communities to return to normal daily routines. Essential supply chains were progressively restored, reducing the need for emergency deliveries and supporting the recovery of local economies.

Recovery activity occurred alongside relief efforts and focused on restoring infrastructure, supporting communities, and enabling economic recovery. Damage assessments were completed for properties, transport networks, and critical utilities. These assessments helped prioritise debris removal and repairs to roads, bridges, rail lines, and freight access routes.

Other recovery support included financial assistance for affected households and businesses, support to reopen community facilities such as schools, and actions to strengthen regional resilience. The event reinforced the need for stronger supply chain planning, so communities are better prepared for future disruption.

Together, relief and recovery activities shifted the focus from immediate life support to the longer-term restoration of access, community wellbeing, and economic activity.

5.5.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

Foxtrot26 provided important observations and opportunities for improvement in managing inland flooding and supply chain disruption:

- Early identification of supply chain risk is essential. Transport disruption emerged early in the event, showing the need to move quickly from flood response to logistics and community support planning. This includes identifying communities that may become isolated and understanding their priority needs.
- A dedicated resupply capability is critical during prolonged access disruption. Clear coordination structures helped prioritise essential goods, manage requests, and integrate aviation support where required.
- Inland flooding can occur in phases and continue well after rainfall has ended. Impacts continued as water moved slowly downstream, requiring longer planning horizons, careful resource management, and sustained support arrangements.
- Freight corridors should be treated as critical infrastructure in emergency planning. When major road and rail routes are disrupted, communities can lose access to essential goods and businesses can be significantly affected. Planning and response arrangements should clearly prioritise these routes.
- Flexible transport options are important in remote and isolated areas. When road access was unavailable, aircraft and other delivery methods became essential to maintaining supply and supporting community needs.
- Flexible communication approaches supported community engagement and situational awareness. Because the affected area was large and dispersed, online community meetings helped keep people informed and provided agencies with local information to support operational decision-making.
- Workforce fatigue and surge staffing need to be planned for during long-duration incidents. Public information also needs to evolve with the event, shifting from flood warnings to information about access, resupply, services, and recovery as community needs change.

5.6. Harmful algal bloom (South Australia) – 2025-26

5.6.1. Overview of incident

South Australia has experienced Australia's most significant recorded harmful algal bloom, a large-scale marine emergency that was novel in its extent, duration, toxin profile, ecological impact, and cross-sector consequences.

First detected in mid-March 2025 near Victor Harbor at Waitpinga on the Fleurieu Peninsula, the bloom later spread across Gulf St Vincent, Adelaide's metropolitan beaches, Spencer Gulf, Yorke Peninsula, and Kangaroo Island.

When the bloom was first detected, the main type of microalgae present was a dinoflagellate called *Karenia mikimotoi*. Some *Karenia* species can produce toxins and other substances that harm fish and other marine life. Dense blooms can also reduce oxygen in the water and irritate or block fish gills.

In May 2025, brevetoxin was detected in South Australian shellfish for the first time in Australia. Brevetoxin can accumulate in shellfish and, above safe limits (set by Food Standards Australia New Zealand), can cause Neurotoxic Shellfish Poisoning. Later testing showed *Karenia cristata* was producing the brevetoxin and became the dominant species for much of the bloom.

Multiple *Karenia* species, including *K. cristata*, have been present at low levels in South Australian waters for at least the past decade.

Although algal blooms are not new, this event was unprecedented for South Australia because several unusual features occurred together: national-first confirmed brevetoxin detection, extraordinary spatial extent, sustained duration, very high algal cell densities, mass marine mortalities, and impacts across environment, health, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, coastal businesses, and community life.

The bloom affected more than 20,000 km², or about 30% of South Australia's coastline – more than 8 times the size of the Australian Capital Territory. It lasted for more than 12 months, and, at its peak, *Karenia* levels exceeded 23 million cells per litre, compared with normal background levels below 1,000 cells per litre. It became one of the most serious marine wildlife mortality events recorded in Australian waters, with millions of marine animals dying across more than 770 types of marine life.

Harmful algal blooms can disrupt food chains and affect the availability of prey for marine predators such as

dolphins, seals, and seabirds. Assessments are continuing to better understand the scale and severity of these impacts.

Its novelty also lay in the way impacts cascaded beyond the marine environment. Fisheries and aquaculture were disrupted, government introduced management measures to protect public resources and public health, and flow-on effects were felt by marine and coastal tourism, seafood processing, coastal accommodation, marine supply chains, and fishing retailers.

There are 3 common visual indicators of a harmful algal bloom, all of which have been observed across South Australian waters and beaches during the algal bloom:

1. Abnormal foam on the water's surface or washed up along the shoreline.
2. Abnormally discoloured water.
3. Marine mortalities, including dead fish, in the water or on the coastline.

Community concerns about beach amenity and health impacts significantly reduced beach visitation and use.

5.6.2. Weather and environmental factors

Drivers of the harmful algal bloom

Early investigations suggest that several environmental conditions contributed to the bloom's development off the lower Fleurieu Peninsula. They included:

- River Murray floods, which brought large amounts of nutrients and organic material into coastal waters after record-high river flows in 2022–23, supporting increased algal growth in the region.
- The longest and strongest coastal upwelling ever recorded along the Bonney Coast in 2023–24, where nutrient-rich deep ocean water moved toward the surface, supporting further algal growth in coastal waters.
- Unusually long marine heatwave conditions from September 2024, along with calm conditions that reduced water mixing and created stable layers in the ocean that can favour harmful algal bloom species such as *Karenia*.

It remains difficult to identify which factors had the greatest influence. Harmful algal blooms are complex events, and it is not yet clear whether all these factors were necessary for the bloom to develop and persist. Collectively, however, these factors are likely to have

increased nutrient and organic matter availability off the lower Fleurieu Peninsula. This is consistent with satellite observations showing above average levels of algal growth in surface waters over several years before the harmful algal bloom. Together, these conditions may have preconditioned the marine environment, allowing *Karenia* populations to remain elevated and enabling the bloom to develop and intensify rapidly once favourable physical oceanographic conditions occurred.

Climate-driven changes in ocean conditions are recognised as a factor that can increase harmful algal bloom risk. However, evidence about whether blooms are becoming more frequent or severe varies by region.

5.6.3. Preparedness

Because this bloom was unlike previous events in Australia, there was no established response plan for managing impacts at this scale and duration.

South Australia had existing measures in place for early harmful algal bloom detection and monitoring of state waters, including:

- South Australian Seafood Quality Assurance Program (SASQAP) which monitors water quality in approved shellfish harvesting areas of the state and provides

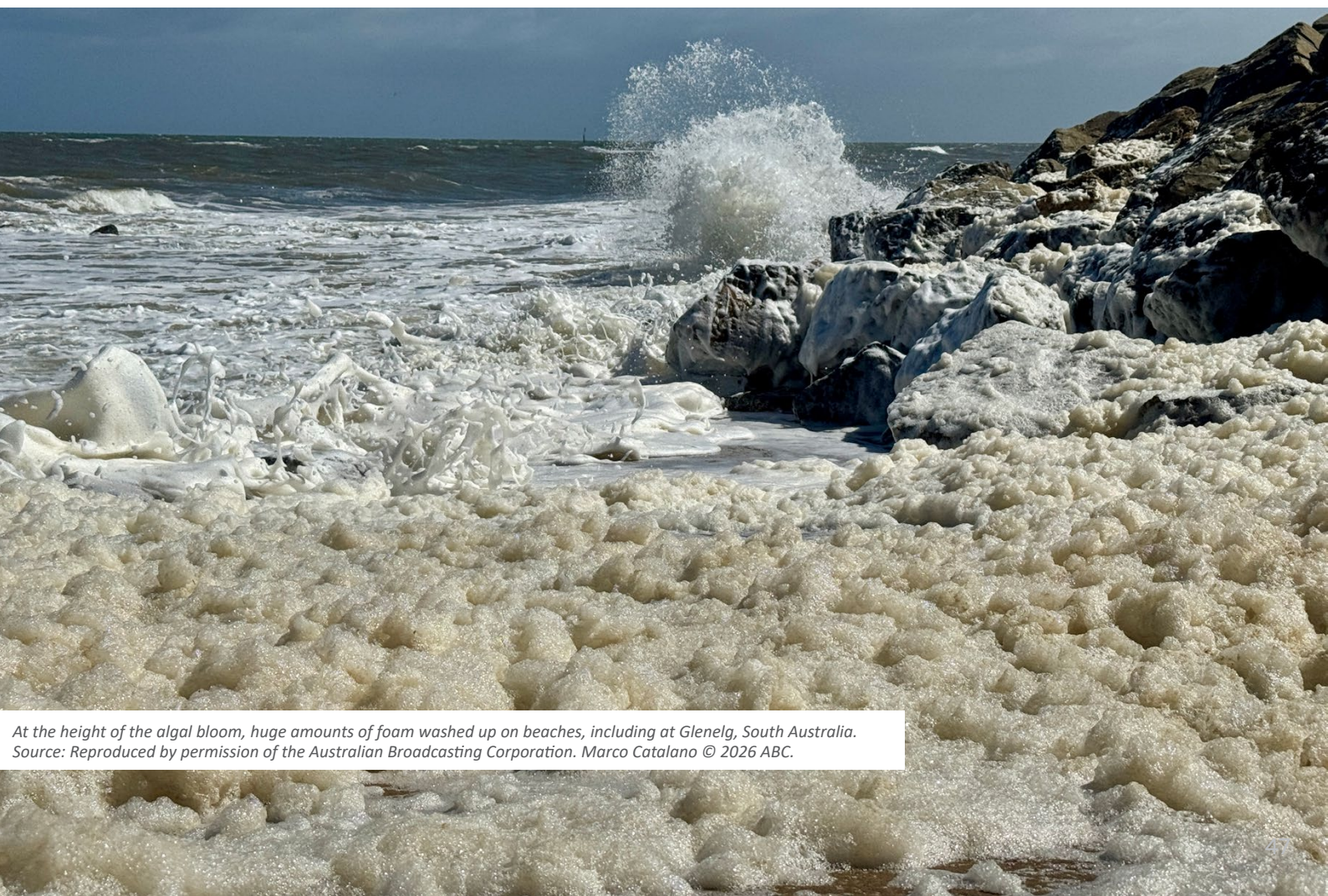
food safety protection for the safe consumption of South Australian shellfish

- water quality testing including a harmful algal bloom buoy at Port Lincoln
- State Biotoxin Management Plan
- South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) scientific expertise, including its oceanography team which is a unique capability within the South Australian government.

These arrangements supported preparedness and early detection. However, they were not designed for an event of this scale, duration, and cross-sector impact.

5.6.4. Response

Harmful algal blooms develop slowly compared with rapid-onset emergencies such as storms, fires, or floods. This event did not create an immediate threat to human life or property, but it caused serious and sustained environmental, economic, and community impacts. There was also uncertainty about whether or when the bloom would decline, persist, or return. As there is no proven treatment for a bloom of this size, the event did not fit neatly within South Australia's usual emergency management arrangements.



*At the height of the algal bloom, huge amounts of foam washed up on beaches, including at Glenelg, South Australia.
Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Marco Catalano © 2026 ABC.*

A coordinated response was established across government to bring together scientific advice, environmental management, public health, primary industries, communications, and community support. Key agencies included the Department for Environment and Water, the Department of Primary Industries and Regions, the Environment Protection Authority and SA Health.

Whole-of-government coordination

By mid-2025, it became clear that existing coordination mechanisms were not sufficient for an event of this scale, duration, and complexity. In August 2025, formal whole-of-government governance arrangements were established to provide sustained strategic oversight, operational coordination and clear escalation pathways. The governance framework comprised:

- **Algal Bloom Coordination Unit (ABCU)** – established within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the ABCU provided central coordination for the response. It supported governance groups, coordinated response initiatives, oversaw coastal condition reporting and beach clean-up activities, managed stakeholder engagement and correspondence, and supported reporting and accountability. Staff were mobilised through an across-government expression-of-interest process to quickly build the unit's capability.
- **Algal Bloom Cabinet Taskforce (ABCT)** – established as a sub-committee of Cabinet and led by the Premier, the ABCT provided strategic leadership, approved major response and recovery measures, and ensured alignment across portfolios. The ABCT met weekly in 2025 and fortnightly in 2026, with Secretariat support from the ABCU.
- **Chief Executive Response Group (CERG)** – the CERG brought together Chief Executives from relevant agencies to provide coordinated executive level oversight, resolve cross agency issues, and escalate matters to the Taskforce as required.

Initial whole-of-government response actions included:

- satellite imagery analysis of the harmful algal bloom
- enhanced water sampling and environmental monitoring
- risk assessment for fisheries, aquaculture, and public health
- daily beach clean-ups of marine mortality washups
- weekly situational updates to affected industries
- convening of a national science forum to support shared scientific understanding.

The Algal Bloom Summer Plan became a key response mechanism. It provided a \$102.5 million package to

support public safety, environmental monitoring, coastal access, affected industries, and community activity. It also provided a foundation for longer-term recovery work.

Coastal Remediation Program

A major beach clean-up program was set up after thousands of dead fish began washing onto metropolitan and regional beaches. At the busiest point, clean-up crews collected more than 9,500 kg of dead marine life each week.

Beach clean-up and reporting were among the most visible and resource-intensive parts of the response. Operations required sustained deployment across metropolitan, regional, and remote coastlines over many months. Activities were established quickly to manage public safety, biosecurity, and coastal amenity risks, then adjusted as mortality patterns and community expectations changed.

Disaster Resilience Australia volunteers were initially deployed for 8 weeks to support contracted crews. They were later replaced by field officers employed by the State Government on term contracts. At its peak, the program involved more than 260 volunteers, staff, and contractors undertaking inspections, beach clean-ups and condition reporting across 64 sites.

Communication of beach conditions was delivered by the Surf Life Saving (SLS) 'BeachSafe' website and app (through a partnership with SLS South Australia), with expanded patrols and flag operations over the summer period.

Federal Government support

The Federal Government also provided targeted funding to support South Australia's recovery. Because the event did not fit under the usual DRFA, support was provided through specific funding packages designed for the unique impacts of the bloom.

5.6.5. Impacts

Harmful algal blooms can create broad environmental, social, and economic impacts. They can kill fish, seabirds, marine mammals, and other marine life; contaminate seafood with toxins; affect human health; and lead to closures of fisheries and aquaculture areas. These impacts can also affect tourism, coastal businesses, and community confidence.

Environmental impacts

This event is considered one of the most serious marine ecological disasters in Australian history. Early surveys have found major impacts on nearshore biodiversity, including the loss of some species from affected areas.



A globe fish on the beach at Waitpinga, south of Victor Harbor in South Australia after the initial outbreak in March. Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Caroline Horne © 2026 ABC.

Blooms of *Karenia* species can harm many forms of marine life, including small drifting animals, shellfish, fish, birds, and marine mammals. During this event, deaths may have been caused by irritated or blocked gills, low oxygen levels, exposure to algal toxins, and reduced food supply. Some marine mammal deaths, including endangered Australian sea lions, have been linked to starvation caused by fewer prey animals and wider disruption to the ecosystem.

The full environmental impact is still not known and will take time to understand. Current evidence shows severe and widespread harm to marine life recovery will be long-term with a return to pre-event conditions uncertain.

Economic and social impacts

The bloom caused wide disruption across South Australia’s coastal regions:

- Coastal businesses: reduced visitor confidence and concern about the bloom contributed to lower trade for hospitality and tourism operators, leading to stimulus and promotional measures as part of the response.
- Fisheries and aquaculture: fishing and aquaculture businesses experienced operational disruption, market impacts and financial pressure, leading to emergency grants and fee relief.
- Community life: beach visits declined, aquatic sporting events were cancelled, and participation in programs such as VacSwim and Nippers was affected.

Public health and safety

Foamy or unusually coloured water can irritate the skin and eyes. Wind and waves can also break up algal cells and carry small particles into the air. Exposure may cause short-term symptoms such as skin or eye irritation, coughing, and shortness of breath. People with asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, or other long-term lung conditions may be more sensitive.

5.6.6. Relief and recovery

Because the bloom could not be directly stopped or contained, conventional emergency response actions were limited. The response focused on managing consequences, including beach clean-up, public information, health advice, industry support, and environmental monitoring.

The government adopted a relief and recovery approach focused on community wellbeing, environmental recovery, and economic support. More than \$160 million in funding was announced to reduce ongoing impacts, build long-term resilience, and support ecological and industry recovery. Key programs included:

- providing dining and travel vouchers to boost coastal tourism and support businesses
- enhancing the coastal monitoring program, satellite capacity, and algal bloom early detection network.
- strengthening environmental resilience including the development of oyster reefs, with the reefs functioning as natural filters and helping prevent algal blooms.

Together, these measures reflect a recovery-led approach tailored to the long-duration and cross-sector nature of the incident.

Future recovery planning

Work has started on an Algal Bloom Recovery and Resilience Plan. The plan will guide long-term recovery and strengthen preparedness for future harmful algal blooms. Unlike many recovery plans, it will need to consider several future scenarios, including the possibility that the bloom may return. It will bring together work across government, including:

- environmental impact assessments involving underwater surveys to assess the scale and severity of algal bloom impacts on marine biodiversity and habitats, including marine park sanctuary zones
- threatened and vulnerable species risk assessments
- a comprehensive assessment of fisheries affected by the algal bloom to provide independent advice on options to restructure the fisheries for ecological and economical sustainability
- a review of emergency management governance arrangements and plans for future harmful algal bloom events.

5.6.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

The algal bloom highlighted that existing emergency management legislation, plans, and governance arrangements were not well suited to a slow-moving environmental emergency of this scale. These arrangements are better aligned to rapid-onset hazards such as fires or floods. Future arrangements will need to be more flexible, scalable, and capable of supporting sustained coordination across agencies and sectors.

Clear, timely, and consistent public information was essential throughout the response. As understanding of the bloom developed, public messages were updated to explain what was known, what remained uncertain, and what action people should take. Because the bloom affected health, the environment, businesses, and community life across a large area, information was shared through several channels, including:

- public forums held in algal bloom affected suburbs and towns
- algalbloom.sa.gov.au website with up-to-date information
- beach signage with information on algal blooms for beach visitors
- seafood campaign to promote safe to eat seafood across South Australia
- regular press conferences with the Premier
- algal bloom information booklets delivered to beachside suburbs
- proactive engagement with media outlets.

As this was the first event of its kind in South Australia, the response drew on lessons from overseas, including the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Chile. These examples helped inform health advice, modelling, and response planning. Key opportunities to strengthen future capability include:

- establishment of the Office for Algal Bloom Research in South Australia
- development of a Recovery and Resilience Plan that outlines restoration and recovery support for this algal bloom and arrangements and considerations for future harmful algal bloom events
- trialling algal bloom mitigation and detection techniques
- extending real-time ecosystem monitoring to enhance algal bloom detection capability.



A sign at Somerton along Adelaide's coast advising beachgoers in August.
Source: Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Isabel Dayman © 2026 ABC.

5.7. Deep Creek fire (South Australia) – February 2026

5.7.1. Overview of incident

The Deep Creek fire in February 2026 was a significant Level 3 bushfire on the Fleurieu Peninsula. The fire escalated quickly due to very dry fuels, steep and difficult terrain, and changing coastal winds. It burned about 4,592 hectares across national park, conservation land, forestry, and private property (see Figure 15). The fire threatened several Southern Fleurieu communities and developed a fire edge of about 60 km. Although there were early concerns that much of Deep Creek National Park could be lost, about 60% of the park remained unburnt. There were no deaths and no occupied homes were lost. Damage was mainly limited to sheds, vehicles, farm infrastructure, and environmental areas. Roads, utilities, and normal community activity were also disrupted.

The response involved multiple agencies and interstate support over more than 10 days. The fire was contained after one week, but patrols, hazard reduction, repair, and recovery work continued for several weeks. The incident placed pressure on command, control, coordination,

logistics, information systems, and public information. It also required operational decisions to balance life safety, property protection and important environmental values. This was the first time the South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) required support from several interstate fire agencies at the same time.

A notable outcome was the protection of important habitat for endangered bird species, including the Mount Lofty Ranges southern emu-wren and the Western beautiful firetail. Broader environmental and cultural values in Deep Creek National Park were also considered as part of incident strategy and operational planning.

The fire became a major emergency because it spread quickly through steep, heavily vegetated land with limited access. These conditions made direct attack difficult and created ongoing safety risks for firefighters. The response required aircraft, heavy machinery, specialist personnel, and a large number of interstate crews. Strike teams from Victoria and New South Wales, along with IMT and support personnel from other jurisdictions, helped sustain operations.

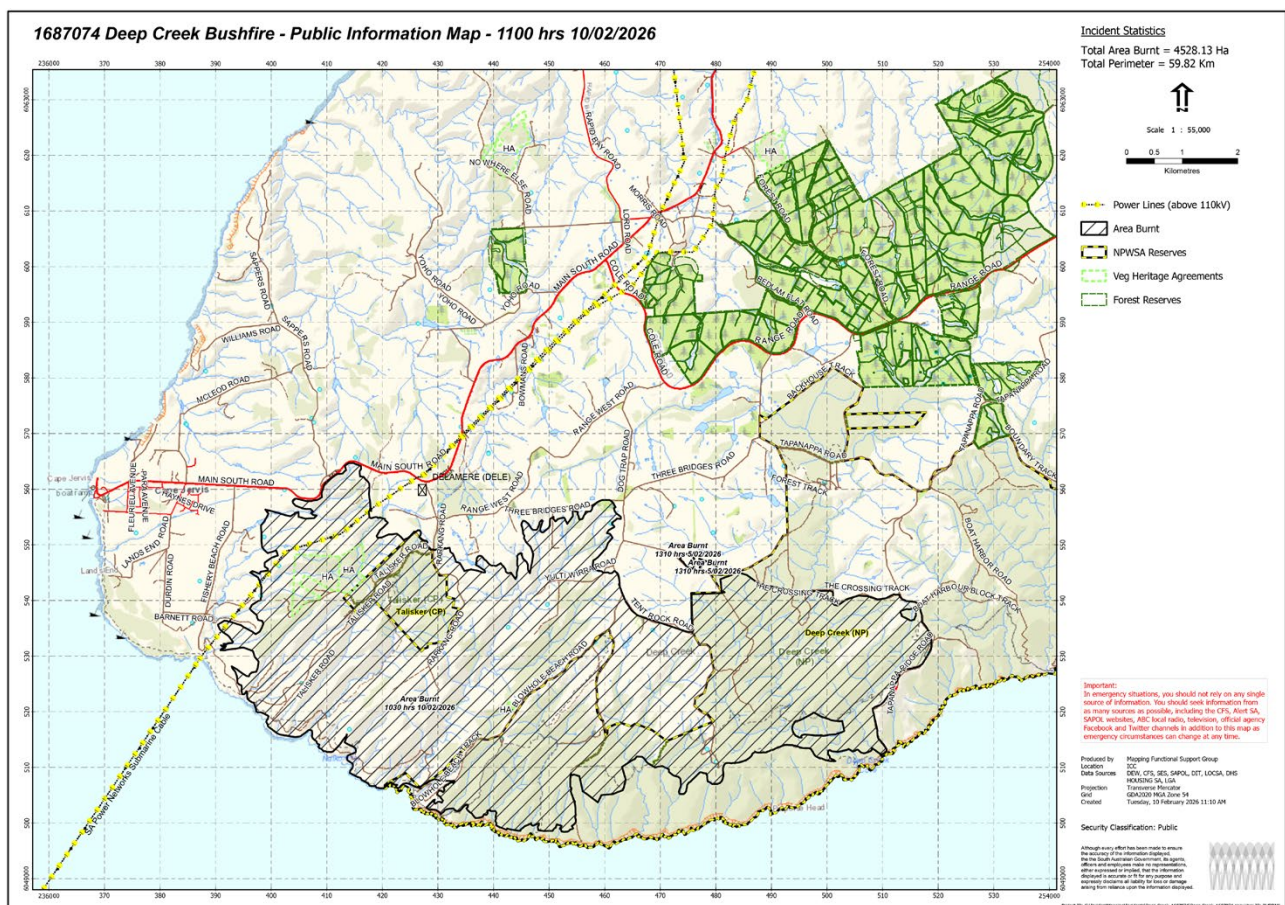


Figure 15. Deep Creek fire public information map.

Source: CFS.



Deep Creek fire. Source: SASES.

The incident developed over an extended period. The main fire growth occurred between 1 and 5 February, the fire was declared contained on 8 February, and further patrol, repair and recovery work continued after containment. Public interest remained high because the fire threatened lives, communities, natural areas, and critical infrastructure. Clear warnings, active community engagement, and strong coordination were required throughout the incident.

Overall, the Deep Creek fire provided important lessons for future fire seasons. CFS, under its Emergency Management Merge Project will be looking to strengthen escalation, IMT readiness, logistics, communications, interagency coordination, transition to recovery, and lessons management. The incident also highlighted the success of national arrangements with support quickly provided by most states and territories either in Ground, IMT, SCC, or NRSC roles.

5.7.2. Weather and climate factors

The Deep Creek fire started under a high bushfire rating for the district but was intensified by very dry fuels, locally strong and changing coastal winds, and steep terrain. Limited access and rapid fire spread reduced the effectiveness of ground-based firefighting beyond property protection. These conditions moved the incident beyond initial attack and into a sustained campaign fire. Early fire behaviour outpaced early information flow, communication and coordination arrangements. This reinforces the need for early worst-case planning, timely escalation, and scalable support systems during severe fire weather.

5.7.3. Preparedness

Pre-incident preparedness arrangements were generally sound. Regional bushfire planning had already identified Deep Creek and the Fleurieu Peninsula as high-risk areas due to difficult terrain, dispersed communities, and important transport routes. Previous fuel management, access planning, and community preparedness helped reduce risk and supported safer outcomes for communities and responders. Readiness for aviation, public warnings, and early escalation also helped protect life and property. Existing procedures and governance arrangements gave the response a useful foundation.

Community engagement and warning arrangements strengthened as the incident progressed. This included incident webpages, community meetings and visible leadership. CFS, as a result of the Deep Creek After Action Review, will focus on ensuring that preparedness arrangements are scalable to better support campaign incidents and their scale and complexity.

5.7.4. Response

The response began when ground crews and aircraft were dispatched after the fire started on 1 February 2026. As conditions worsened, the incident was escalated early to Level 3. This provided access to enhanced planning, aviation, interstate assistance, and state-level coordination. The response shifted from initial attack to sustained campaign operations involving CFS, Department of Environment and Water (DEW), Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS), SES, South Australia Police (SAPOL),

councils, interstate agencies, and a full IMT. A defining feature of the response was the scale of interstate support, including strike teams from Victoria and New South Wales, and additional IMT and support personnel.

Key response actions

- Issued timely public warnings, incident updates, and emergency messages through Alert SA, incident webpages, media channels, and community meetings.
- Protected communities and assets where heavy fuels were close to homes, with no occupied homes lost.
- Used ground crews, aircraft, and heavy machinery for initial attack, containment, backburning, and sustained suppression operations.
- Included environmental values in incident strategy and coordinated with partner agencies, interstate strike teams, and interstate support personnel.
- Managed road closures and access control while establishing logistics, base camps, accommodation, and staging arrangements.
- Scaled up the IMT and strengthened planning, intelligence, logistics, and public information as the incident continued.

5.7.5. Impacts

The Deep Creek fire was a fast-escalating, complex and cascading bushfire that tested response, coordination, logistics, public information, environmental protection, and recovery arrangements. It burned about 4,592 hectares, threatened communities and critical access routes, disrupted normal activity, and required decisions that balanced life safety, property protection, and significant environmental values.

The incident required significant and sustained resources, including ground crews, aircraft, heavy machinery, specialist personnel, a full IMT, multiple agencies, councils, and interstate support. It extended beyond the main fire growth period, with containment declared on 8 February and patrol, repair, recovery, and hazard reduction work continuing afterwards.

The fire also attracted strong public, media, and political interest because it occurred in a high-profile national park and tourism region and threatened lives, communities, infrastructure, and environmental assets. It provides learnings for the sector – particularly in early escalation – scalable incident management, interoperable systems, logistics, public information, recovery integration, local knowledge, and interstate support.

5.7.6. Relief and recovery

Relief and recovery activity began during the later stages of the response. Early progress was limited by gaps in information about losses and clear flow pathways. Recovery was recognised as an important part of incident management, not a separate activity to be considered after response ended. Once Zone Emergency Support Team (ZEST) arrangements were in place, they helped connect response agencies, councils, and recovery partners. Support for affected communities included public information, community meetings, council and interagency coordination, welfare support, and transition forums. Responders were also supported through accommodation and fatigue management during the extended campaign.

As the incident moved from response to recovery, work focused on repair planning, environmental recovery, engagement with councils and recovery partners, patrols, hazard reduction, and the staged release of response resources. This fire has highlighted opportunities to ensure recovery arrangements scale as quickly as response arrangements. Delayed or incomplete damage information made early recovery planning harder. The review identified the need for earlier recovery activation, clearer ownership, and faster damage assessment.

5.7.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

The review and related incident material indicate that the response achieved a strong operational outcome. The fire was contained effectively, aircraft and heavy machinery were used well, and cooperation between agencies and interstate crews was positive. Public warnings and community engagement strengthened during the response. Interstate support was a critical enabler, with strike teams from Victoria and New South Wales and additional IMT and support personnel from other jurisdictions. The outcome was significant: despite heavy fuels, difficult terrain, and homes close to the fire edge, no occupied homes were lost. The review also identified opportunities to improve consistency, clarity, and resilience, especially during the early stages of rapid escalation.

A key insight is that the final level of damage should not understate the seriousness of the incident. The fire had the potential to cause much greater loss, including homes, infrastructure, tourism access, transport routes, and public and private land. These outcomes were

avoided through local knowledge, early escalation, strong resourcing, interstate support, adaptive leadership, and sustained effort across the campaign.

Key observations and opportunities for improvement:

- establish IMT governance, facilities and role clarity earlier in fast-growing incidents
- improve the way strategic intent, briefings, Incident Action Plans, maps, and updates are shared with field leaders
- activate intelligence, safety, logistics, and support functions earlier and at the scale needed for complex incidents
- improve system compatibility, resource tracking, and information flow across the IMT, field operations, partner agencies, and national support arrangements
- strengthen early logistics planning, base camp planning, fatigue management, and accommodation arrangements for extended incidents
- embed lessons through clear recommendations, improved training and exercises, stronger recovery planning, and more reliable communication and decision-support systems.



Grass trees burning on the fireground. Source: Willunga Country Fire Service.

5.8. Severe weather (New South Wales) – August 2025

5.8.1. Overview of incident

On Saturday 2 August and Sunday 3 August 2025, a strong low-pressure weather system brought heavy rain, damaging winds, and riverine flooding to northern New South Wales.

NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) worked with other emergency services, government agencies and local councils to coordinate a large, multi-agency response.

Flooding developed quickly. Minor flood warnings were issued for the Gwydir, Severn, Myall, Nepean, Manning, Gloucester, and MacIntyre rivers. Moderate to major flood warnings were issued for the Peel River at Tamworth and the Namoi River at Gunnedah, Narrabri and Wee Waa, and the Hunter, Patterson, Williams, and Macleay Rivers.

At the same time, a major snow event affected the Northern Tablelands. It was the heaviest snowfall recorded in the region in more than 40 years. From 2 to 4 August, up to 50 cm of snow fell in areas including Armidale, Uralla, Guyra, Walcha, and Bendemeer. The snow caused major travel disruption, power and phone outages, stranded motorists, and isolated residents.

The flood and snow created a complex multi-hazard emergency. Agencies had to manage flood damage, storm damage, flood rescues, evacuations, road closures, service outages, and community support at the same time. The scale and duration of the event meant local resources needed support across several LGAs.

5.8.2. Weather and climate factors

In late July and early August 2025, a strong cold front and upper trough moved across New South Wales, resulting in heavy rain and deep snow in higher areas.

Snow depths of around 10 cm were estimated over the Northern Tablelands, but some areas receiving between 50 to 90 cm. This required agencies to adjust plans quickly as the conditions changed.

The low-pressure system also brought widespread rain across inland and coastal New South Wales. Rivers rose quickly, causing flooding across several catchments.

Cold air and moisture over higher ground also caused heavy snow and ice across the Northern Tablelands.

Several factors increased the impact of the event. These included intense rainfall, already wet catchments, very cold conditions, and weather systems affecting nearby regions at the same time.

Because flooding and snow occurred together, emergency agencies had to manage multiple hazards and risks at once and needed additional people, equipment, and coordination.

5.8.3. Preparedness

Early preparation helped agencies understand the situation and respond more effectively.

NSW SES already had updated flood intelligence for the north-west of the state following earlier flooding in 2025.

The Bureau of Meteorology and NSW SES issued warnings to communities about heavy rain and damaging winds in the Northern Tablelands and nearby areas.

Using these forecasts and warnings, NSW SES and partner agencies began planning before the weather reached communities. NSW SES also ran a warnings campaign to help people prepare for severe weather and possible isolation.

5.8.4. Response

On 2 August, an IMT was established in Tamworth, with Emergency Operations Centres also opened in affected areas.

A Flood Rescue Area of Operations was established to coordinate flood rescue teams across affected areas.

In total, 694 incidents were recorded during the event, with 290 linked to heavy snowfall. Response activities included:

- storm and snow-related damage
- flood preparations (e.g. sandbagging)
- flood rescues (22 activations)
- coordinating evacuations
- resupplying isolated communities
- assisting stranded motorists
- managing road closures
- operating in areas with prolonged power and communication outages.

NSW SES used a Public Information Plan to share media releases, warnings, and interviews. Its social media campaign reached more than 2 million views across affected areas. NSW SES issued 153 Australian Warning System alerts, being 49 Advice warnings, 61 Watch and Act warnings and 43 Emergency Warnings.



Flooding near Wee Waa and traffic in snow near Armidale, New South Wales, August 2026.

Source: NSW SES.

Most warnings related to flooding in the Narrabri and Gunnedah LGAs. Five warnings were issued for the snow event. Emergency Alert was used 4 times to share evacuation information in Narrabri and Gunnedah when river levels rose faster than expected.

Aircraft supported rescues, transport, supply deliveries, and aerial checks of affected areas.

The NSW SES Commissioner issued an Employment Protection Order for 4 to 13 August. This legal order protected volunteers' jobs when they were away from work during an emergency, assisting NSW SES to keep volunteers available throughout the response.

5.8.5. Impacts

Flooding led to evacuations in parts of Narrabri and Gunnedah. Evacuation centres opened in both towns. Several rural properties were isolated for varying periods, and Wee Waa was isolated for 4 days. NSW SES helped deliver supplies to isolated communities using boats and high-clearance vehicles.

The Oxley and Kamilaroi highways were closed in several places because of flooding. Many local roads were also affected.

The snow event caused serious disruption to power, communications, and transport across the Northern Tablelands. The New England Highway, Oxley Highway, and Waterfall Way were closed, leaving about 120 motorists stranded, some overnight. Snow and fallen trees blocked local roads, delaying welfare checks, medical access and supply deliveries. Public transport was cancelled and freight movements stopped.

More than 27,000 homes and businesses lost power after snow-covered trees brought down power lines. In rural areas, repairs took several days because crews could not reach damaged equipment. The outages affected water and sewer systems, closed service stations, and disrupted heating and refrigeration. Some people used private generators and outdoor gas heaters, creating safety risks and fuel shortages. Hospitals and aged-care facilities used generators to keep heating and medical equipment working.

Internet and NBN outages made it harder for residents to get information, use banking services, and keep businesses operating. When online channels were unavailable, people relied on local radio and word-of-mouth for updates.

The snow also affected the local economy. Businesses closed because power and communications failed and staff could not travel. Essential goods sold out within 24 hours, and fuel and gas supplies ran low. Tourism stopped, small businesses lost income, and farmers faced crop damage, livestock issues, and freight delays.

Communities affected by snow showed strong resilience and cooperation. Neighbours checked on vulnerable residents, shared supplies and cleared local roads before emergency services arrived. Community groups and local councils worked together to support welfare needs, manage spontaneous volunteers, and share information through local networks. This helped reduce harm and maintain community confidence during the emergency.

The event showed how closely power, communications, transport and welfare systems are connected. When one



Thousands of homes are experiencing power outages.

Source: Essential Energy.

system failed, others were affected quickly. This made the response more difficult and meant some communities had to rely on themselves for longer than usual.

5.8.6. Relief and recovery

Relief work started while the emergency response was still underway. It focused on helping people who had been displaced or cut off by floodwater or snow.

Key relief actions included opening evacuation centres, providing welfare support, and delivering essential supplies.

Recovery work included assessing damage, restoring essential services, repairing infrastructure, and moving from emergency response to recovery arrangements.

Snow made recovery slower because some areas were hard to reach, and some power outages lasted for several days.

A total of 417 damage assessments were completed in flood-affected communities. 52 properties were found to be damaged, including 5 that were not safe to live in.

Gunnedah LGA was declared a natural disaster area. This made financial and practical support available for people, businesses, community groups, farmers, and local councils.

A formal handover to recovery was completed for the Gunnedah and Narrabri LGAs on 12 August 2025.

5.8.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

The Incident Controller identified the event as a significant learning opportunity because it was complex and unusual for the region. Reflection after the event has supported the professional development of personnel involved in response and relief operations. These insights are also informing future multi-agency exercises.

After action reviews identified several strengths and opportunities for improvement:

- Embedding appropriately skilled Liaison Officers in emergency operations centres and incident control centres was observed to increase situational awareness, enhance cross-agency coordination, and improve communication flows.
- Early preparedness and planning activities, together with the daily sharing of information and intelligence by NSW SES enabled other agencies, functional areas, and local governments to prepare their own resources and make effective decisions as the weather impacted.
- The use of the Australian Warning System during the flooding and snow event improved the provision of public information and warnings to impacted communities. The nationally consistent language and icons used in the system helped ensure messages were consistent and more readily understood.
- The snow event revealed some uncertainty in decision-making authority between local and regional coordination levels, particularly for road closures and resource deployment. While coordination remained strong, differing interpretations of combat agency roles caused some delays and inconsistent inter-agency communication. Strengthening pre-event role clarification and escalation pathways will improve consistency and timeliness, supported by the development of a Snow Emergency Sub Plan to guide future events.
- Major arterial roads were closed early; however, some secondary and local roads remained open, allowing continued travel into affected areas. As conditions deteriorated, these routes became hazardous, leading to more stranded motorists and increased demand on response agencies. Clearer, shared processes for coordinating road management across agencies will support more consistent and timely decisions in future snow events.

5.9. Koolewong fire (New South Wales) – December 2025

5.9.1. Overview of incident

At about 12:45 pm on Saturday 6 December 2025, several Triple Zero (000) calls reported a fast-moving bushfire in Nimbin Street, Koolewong, on the New South Wales Central Coast. Early reports indicated rapid fire growth under dangerous weather conditions. This prompted an immediate multi-agency response, including the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), NSW Police Force (NSWPF), Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW), and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

More than 50 fire appliances, 250 firefighters, and 9 aircraft, including 2 Large Air Tankers, and the RFS Chinook helicopter were deployed. On arrival, crews found several houses already on fire and immediately began property protection. The fire spread quickly through bushland and produced embers that affected nearby areas, including Koolewong, Woy Woy Bay, and Phegans Bay (see Figure 16). This created a serious risk to life and property.

During the initial response, a spot fire started in Woy Woy Bay, more than 1 km from the main fire. This increased the complexity of the incident. Access was difficult because of steep terrain, narrow roads, waterways, and limited movement options across the area. While the spot fire did not reach homes in Woy Woy Bay, it had the potential to cause serious damage.

As the fire escalated and reached the edge of residential areas, it destroyed 16 houses and damaged another 9. Emergency service crews also helped protect 118 nearby houses.

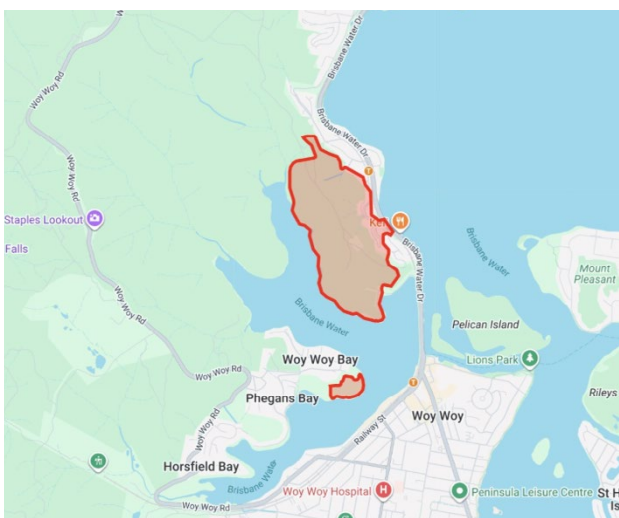


Figure 16. Koolewong bushfire footprint.

Source: NSW RFS.

The fire also affected critical infrastructure, including communications towers. This reduced the ability of emergency services to provide timely warnings and alerts to the community.

5.9.2. Weather/climate related

From September to November 2025, parts of New South Wales received below average rainfall. By 5 December 2025, parts of coastal and inland New South Wales were very dry. Some areas had a Drought Factor of 10, the highest possible level, and Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) readings above 100. In some places, the KBDI was more than 75 points higher than normal for that time of year. At the Gosford weather station on 6 December 2025, the KBDI was 156 and the Drought Factor was 10. These values were similar or exceeded those recorded in the same period during the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires.

On 6 December 2025, the forecast included moderate to fresh winds, hot temperatures, and very dry air. Together, these conditions led to Extreme Fire Danger Ratings and Total Fire Bans across many parts of New South Wales, including the Greater Sydney and Hunter regions.

Changing northerly winds and steep terrain made the fire difficult to control. The risk was increased by the proximity of homes to bushland, resulting in several houses being affected by the fire.

5.9.3. Preparedness

The Bush Fire Risk Management Plan for the Central Coast LGA was endorsed in June 2025. It was developed through consultation with firefighting agencies, local communities, and key stakeholders. The plan identified Koolewong and Woy Woy Bay as areas where residential and coastal communities are close to steep bushland escarpments and have diverse community demographics.

To support community preparedness, the RFS partnered with FRNSW, NPWS, NSWPF, and Central Coast Council to hold a community street meeting in May 2025. The meeting allowed agencies to speak directly with residents about bush fire risk, property preparation, Bush Fire Survival Plans and emergency response arrangements.

5.9.4. Response

The Koolewong bushfire required a significant multi-agency operational response from ground crews, support crews, IMTs, and aircraft. Agencies involved included the RFS, FRNSW, NPWS, NSWPF, and NSW Ambulance.



Koolewong Fire.

Source: Peter Marshall, NSW RFS.

The response escalated quickly during the afternoon of 6 December and continued over the following days as crews worked to contain the fire, mop up hot spots, and support recovery operations.

Specialist aviation resources were used for both intelligence gathering and fire suppression operations (including Large Air Tankers) conducting water and retardant drops aimed at slowing fire spread and reducing fire intensity.

A multi-agency IMT was established at the Central Coast RFS Fire Control Centre. A declaration was made under Section 44 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* (New South Wales). This declaration enabled coordinated management of firefighting operations across agencies under the direction of an appointed Incident Controller by the RFS Commissioner.

The IMT and firefighting crews were supported by the RFS State Operations Centre at Sydney Olympic Park. The RFS State Operations Centre coordinated public information, community warnings, alerts, and strategic resources such as aircraft. This supported a coordinated whole-of-government response for the local community and firefighting operations.

From early in the incident, the warning level reflected the fire's behaviour, weather conditions, and proximity to homes and infrastructure. Just after 1:00 pm, the warning level was set to Watch and Act. As the fire spread and more properties were affected, it was raised to Emergency Warning at 2:20 pm. The Emergency Alert system was used to advise people to leave if the path was clear. A second Emergency Alert was sent just after 4:00 pm to residents in Phegans Bay and Woy Woy Bay, advising them to shelter from the fire.

5.9.5. Impacts

The bushfire had a significant impact on the Koolewong community, including damage to homes, disruption to key services, and impacts on local transport.

The fire destroyed 16 houses and damaged another 9. Damage also occurred to electricity transmission infrastructure, communications systems, and a water reservoir located on elevated terrain above the township.

During the afternoon of 6 December, local communications were interrupted and approximately 33 residents lost electricity because of damage to infrastructure.

The incident also resulted in direct impacts on the community, with 3 residents sustaining injuries attributed to the bushfire and requiring hospital treatment. Beyond the physical impacts, the event caused considerable disruption and distress for affected residents, particularly those who were displaced from their homes or experienced prolonged service interruptions.

The fire closed several local roads and affected the northern rail line, which was closed for several hours.

5.9.6. Relief and recovery

The Koolewong bushfire caused major damage to local properties. In the early stages of recovery, many community members could not return home because of hazards such as asbestos from damaged buildings and unsafe fire-affected trees. An evacuation centre opened at Gosford RSL on the afternoon of 6 December and closed on the evening of 10 December.

Recovery activities were coordinated under established New South Wales recovery arrangements by the NSW Reconstruction Authority involving:

- emergency services agencies
- Central Coast Council
- New South Wales Government functional areas
- utility providers
- non-government organisation and community partners.

A damage assessment was completed on 7 December to identify damaged or destroyed buildings and impacts to important services such as electricity and water. Utility providers restored services as soon as it was safe. This included checking that the water supply was clean and free from contaminants. Electricity was also restored where possible, with some residents using a supplied generator while the broader network was repaired.

5.9.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

AFDRS performance during the Nimbin Road, Koolewong fire

The AFDRS describes Extreme Fire Danger as conditions where the Fire Behaviour Index is between 50 and 99. At this level, fires are expected to present a high threat to life and property, create elevated firefighter safety risks, require a predominantly defensive suppression approach, move rapidly into tree crowns, and produce embers capable of starting new fires a short to medium distance ahead of the main fire.

The observed behaviour and impacts of the Nimbin Road, Koolewong fire were broadly consistent with those AFDRS expectations. Although the fire was relatively small

in overall area, it resulted in significant property loss, destroying 16 houses and 2 other buildings. Suppression activity was initially focused on defensive operations, reflecting the difficulty of safely and effectively controlling the fire while assets were under immediate threat.

Observation

The fire also produced outcomes consistent with the AFDRS description of increased safety risk and spotting potential. Several firefighters and community members were injured, and spot fires occurred about 1 km from the main fire, despite relatively light winds. This indicates that ember production and short- to medium-distance spotting were material factors in the fire's spread and impact.

On balance, the AFDRS appears to have performed appropriately for this incident. On Saturday 6 December, the forecast Fire Danger Rating for the Greater Sydney Fire Weather District was Extreme, with a forecast Fire Behaviour Index of 69. When the fire was affecting homes and other assets, the nearby Gosford weather station recorded an observed Extreme Fire Danger rating at 3:10 pm, with a Fire Behaviour Index of 64 (METAR observations which use a longer averaging period also observed Fire Behaviour Indices of 52 and 54 at 12:00 am and 2:30 pm respectively). The observed fire behaviour and consequences aligned with the operational implications associated with an Extreme rating. By comparison, the older McArthur-based Forest Fire Danger Index, calculated from the same weather information, would have been a Fire Behaviour Index value of 49, falling within the Fire Danger Rating category of High. In this case, the AFDRS was observed to more accurately reflect the increased level of threat, suppression difficulty, spotting behaviour and consequences experienced during the fire.

5.10. Dolphin Sands fire (Tasmania) – December 2025

5.10.1. Overview of incident

The Dolphin Sands bushfire started on 4 December 2025 and significantly affected a coastal community on Tasmania's east coast (see Figure 17). Strong winds, low humidity and dry, flammable vegetation supported rapid fire spread through scrubland.



Figure 17. Mapped fire perimeter of the Dolphin Sands bushfire, illustrating the extent of fire spread along the peninsula and its proximity to the Swansea township.

Source: Tasmania Fire Service.

Although the total area burnt was relatively small, the incident escalated quickly and caused substantial damage in a short period. It should be viewed as a significant emergency management event.

The fire burnt about 700 hectares. It destroyed 19 homes and caused moderate to severe damage to another 14 homes. Other losses included sheds, vehicles, water systems, and electrical assets. More than 40 power poles were damaged, cutting power to about 270 customers. Dolphin Sands Road, the only road in and out of the community, was affected early in the incident. This isolated residents and made access, movement, and emergency response more difficult.

The incident was complex to manage. Strong winds with localised severe gusts and flammable scrub caused fast fire spread, short-distance spotting, and changing fire behaviour. These conditions increased risk to people, homes, and critical infrastructure.

The response required resources beyond normal local capacity. More than 80 Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) appliances were deployed, supported by incident management staff, aircraft when conditions allowed, and partner agencies including Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS), SES, and Tasmania Police (TASPOL). Emergency

communications were also under heavy pressure, with high call volumes and record peak activity on the Tasmanian Government Radio Network (TasGRN).

The incident continued after the first major fire run. Fire crews kept working over the following days and weeks on containment, patrols, and recovery. Recovery work included damage checks, hazardous materials management, infrastructure repairs, and community support services.

The Dolphin Sands bushfire provides useful lessons for emergency management across Australia. It shows that local extreme conditions can develop even when broader forecasts appear more moderate. It also highlights the risks for communities with one access road, the limits of fuel treatment in scrub areas, and the need to coordinate response and recovery during fast-moving incidents.

5.10.2. Weather and climate factors

The Dolphin Sands bushfire started and spread in conditions that did not trigger a Total Fire Ban. However, local conditions were still strong enough to support serious fire behaviour in highly flammable fuels.

On 4 December 2025, the East Coast Fire Weather District had a forecast Fire Behaviour Index of 42, rated High (see Table 3). The Incident Weather Forecast for Dolphin Sands identified winds of 50km/h, gusting to 85 km/h.

Key weather drivers

Strong, gusty winds were the main driver of fire behaviour. They increased spread, intensity, and short-range spotting. Local wind speeds were stronger than forecast and had a major influence on the incident.

Low humidity, dry air, and responsive vegetation made it easier for the fire to start and keep burning. Although the area was not in long-term drought, fuels were dry enough to support fast, sustained fire spread through scrub and dry eucalypt forest.

Fuel characteristics and fire behaviour

The vegetation at Dolphin Sands has a clear fire risk profile. Common fuels, including boobialla scrub, marram grass and wattle (*Acacia longifolia*), may not burn readily in mild conditions. When humidity falls and winds increase, they can become highly flammable. This means fire activity can shift quickly from low intensity to fast, intense behaviour.

Table 3. Forecast Tasmania Fire Danger Ratings (Fire Behaviour Index) for the period 4–7 December 2025.

District	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
King Island	No Rating 10	No Rating 4	No Rating 10	Moderate 12
Furneaux Islands	Moderate 18	Moderate 13	Moderate 18	Moderate 21
North West Coast	Moderate 12	No Rating 11	Moderate 12	Moderate 13
Central North	Moderate 20	Moderate 16	Moderate 16	Moderate 19
North East	High 25	Moderate 16	Moderate 21	Moderate 20
East Coast	High 42	Moderate 18	Moderate 22	Moderate 23
Midlands	High 35	Moderate 19	Moderate 20	Moderate 22
Upper Derwent Valley	High 25	Moderate 16	Moderate 16	Moderate 20
South East	Moderate 22	Moderate 16	Moderate 18	Moderate 21
Central Plateau	Moderate 23	Moderate 15	Moderate 15	Moderate 18
Western	High 31	Moderate 21	Moderate 17	Moderate 15

Code

Fire Danger Ratings (Fire Behaviour Index – FBI):	No Rating: (< 12)	Moderate: (12–23)	High: (24–49)	Extreme: (50–99)	Catastrophic: (≥100)
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Source: Bureau of Meteorology, Tasmania Fire Danger Ratings, issued 3 December 2025.

Dry eucalypt forest to the northwest had been treated with planned burns in 2017, 2019, and 2020. A TFS assessment in July 2025 found these fuels had not regrown enough to require further treatment. This suggests some hazard reduction benefit remained. However, much of the wider scrub area was untreated and could still burn under suitable weather conditions.

Climate context

The East Coast Bushfire Risk Management Plan (BRMP) identifies Dolphin Sands as a bushfire-prone area (see Figure 18). Its fuel types are sensitive to local weather changes and can support severe fire behaviour, even when the broader fire danger rating is not at the highest level.



Figure 18. Historical bushfire extent and burn history across the Dolphin Sands area, Tasmania.

Source: Tasmania Fire Service.

More broadly, changing fire weather patterns may increase bushfire risk in similar areas. Longer dry periods, higher temperatures and more frequent high or extreme fire danger days can increase both the likelihood and severity of fires.

5.10.3. Preparedness

Preparedness measures were in place before the fire at strategic, operational and community levels. However, the conditions on the day reduced their effectiveness and serious impacts still occurred.

At the strategic level, Dolphin Sands is identified as bushfire-prone in the East Coast BRMP. The area has highly flammable scrub, many privately owned properties and only one access road. These are recognised risk factors for emergency planning.

Fuel management had been undertaken in nearby forested areas. However, the main scrub fuels are generally not well suited to broad planned burning because of safety and effectiveness issues. In these areas, risk reduction relies more on mechanical treatment and property-level preparation.

Local government also supported risk reduction through roadside fuel management, fuel breaks and grant programs. These programs helped property owners

improve firefighting capability, including through static water supplies. However, uptake was not consistent across the community.

Land-use planning requirements under the Tasmanian Bushfire-Prone Areas Code and Australian Standard AS 3959 include measures such as defensible space, vegetation management, water supply, and access. In the affected area, 21 of 88 homes, or 24%, were subject to these requirements when approved. Post-fire observations showed that these measures were applied unevenly and were not always maintained. Many properties were not kept to a defensible standard.

Before the fire, the TFS activated hot day preparedness arrangements. This included setting up a Regional Operations Centre (ROC), placing strike teams in advance, and forming an IMT.

Public warning systems were operating and were used during the incident. However, the fire changed quickly and access was affected early, which limited the detail available in the first stages.

Overall, preparedness provided an important base for response. However, the fuel type, limited access and fast fire spread reduced its effectiveness.

5.10.4. Response

The response to the Dolphin Sands bushfire began on 4 December 2025 as fire weather conditions worsened and a fast-moving vegetation fire spread through flammable scrub.

The first appliances were dispatched at 1:44 pm and arrived at 2:04 pm. Extra resources were called in early from both the Southern and Northern Regions.

The response occurred while other fires were also active. A major fire at Glenlusk, on the edge of Hobart, threatened important electricity transmission infrastructure and required resources. One strike team was assigned there. This created competing priorities and required crews and equipment to be moved as risks changed.

The situation became more complex when some responding resources were redirected to new incidents involving immediate risk to life. Command teams had to continually reassess priorities and allocate resources in a changing environment.

As the Dolphin Sands fire grew, a multi-agency response was coordinated. This involved TFS, TASPOL, SES, and PWS. Fire behaviour worsened quickly because winds were stronger than forecast and humidity was low.



Ground-based firefighting operations during the Dolphin Sands bushfire, Tasmania.

Source: Thomas Rose, Triabunna Fire Brigade.

Dolphin Sands Road was affected early in the incident. This cut off the community and made access, situational awareness, and operational decision-making much harder during the most critical early stage.

Ground crews were the primary firefighting resource. Heavy machinery was also used to build containment lines. Aircraft could not be used effectively during the first operational period because of strong winds. They became more useful the next day when conditions eased.

The main priorities were protecting lives, defending assets, and containing the fire. TASPOL closed roads and supported community safety. Residents were told to follow their bushfire survival plans. Re-entry was not possible for several days because of safety risks.

Emergency communication systems were under heavy demand. FireComm handled 676 calls during the incident, including 212 calls during a 2-hour peak period. There were also 175 Triple Zero (000) calls. The Tasmanian Government Radio Network (TasGRN) recorded peak activity of 1,439 affiliations.

Operations continued after initial containment work and included patrols, asset protection, and transition into recovery.

5.10.5. Impacts

The fire caused significant impacts to property, infrastructure, and the community.

About 115 properties were affected, including:

- 19 residences destroyed
- 14 residences with moderate to severe damage
- approximately 100 additional structures damaged.

Thirty-one properties contained asbestos-containing material. This required specialist handling and created ongoing public health and safety risks.

Electricity infrastructure was significantly damaged, including more than 40 power poles. Power was disrupted to about 270 properties. Some properties experienced longer outages because both network and private infrastructure repairs were required.

The impacts were not only physical. Loss of access, damaged infrastructure, and service disruption affected the community, property use, and local economic activity, including tourism.

As of June 2026, recovery costs are estimated at about \$4.5 million. These costs are jointly funded by the Australian and Tasmanian Governments under the DRFA.

5.10.6. Relief and recovery

DRFA was activated for the Dolphin Sands, Glenlusk, and Levensdale bushfires.

A Regional Emergency Coordination Centre (RECC) was established at 70 Collins Street, Hobart. It operated from 5 December to 15 December 2025. The centre included liaison officers from the Department of State Growth (DSG), Environment Protection Authority, TASPOL, SES, and Department of Premier and Cabinet – Resilience and Recovery Tasmania (DPAC RRT). It operated under the Southern Regional Emergency Management Controller.

Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council opened an evacuation centre at Swansea Town Hall on 4 December 2025. TASPOL completed early welfare checks. Formal property impact notifications were then coordinated by DPAC RRT.

Dolphin Sands Road was closed between 4 and 9 December. Decisions about reopening the road were coordinated across agencies.

Recovery work first focused on identifying, managing, and removing hazardous materials. These included asbestos-containing material, damaged septic systems, lithium-ion batteries, solar power systems, and chemical residues.

Most debris removal and clean-up work was completed within a short time after the fire. More complex and specialised clean-up continued for longer.

5.10.7. Observations, insights, and opportunities for improvement

The Dolphin Sands bushfire demonstrated strong interagency coordination and response. It also identified several opportunities to strengthen future preparedness, response, and recovery.

Warning clarity and community movement planning

Standard bushfire messages did not fully explain the constraints faced by communities with only one access road. Warnings should provide clearer advice about timing, movement options, and the point at which leaving may no longer be safe.

Community preparedness and shared responsibility

Property preparedness had a strong influence on outcomes. Some properties did not maintain defensible space or safe access to a suitable standard. More consistent checks, education and compliance would help improve preparedness.

Early command and surge capacity

Concurrent fires placed pressure on command teams and resources. Earlier strengthening of incident management arrangements and surge capacity would support response during fast-growing events.

Situational awareness and intelligence

Limited early information affected decision-making. Improvements are needed in forward command, intelligence gathering, and timely information sharing.

Infrastructure resilience and recovery integration

Loss of access and infrastructure damage strongly affected both response and recovery. Greater focus is needed on resilience in land-use planning, infrastructure design, and early recovery planning during response.

6. Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABCT	Algal Bloom Cabinet Taskforce
ABCU	Algal Bloom Coordination Unit
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFAC	Australian and New Zealand Council for fire and emergency services
AFDRS	Australian Fire Danger Rating System
AGDRP	Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment
AIDR	Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience
AUSASSISTPLAN	Australian Government Overseas Assistance Plan
AUSMAT	Australian Medical Assistance Team
AUSRECEPLAN	Australian Government Plan for the Reception of Australian Citizens and Approved Foreign Nationals Evacuated from Overseas
CCT	Crisis Coordination Team
CERG	Chief Executive Response Group
CFA	Country Fire Authority (VIC)
CFS	South Australian Country Fire Service
CDINS	Communicable Disease Incidents of National Significance Plan
COMDISPLAN	Australian Government Disaster Response Plan
CRLO	Commonwealth Recovery Liaison Officer
CRT	Crisis Response Team
DFAT	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFES	Department of Fire and Emergency Services (WA)
DBCA	Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (WA)
DHDA	Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
DPAC RRT	Department of Premier and Cabinet – Resilience and Recovery Tasmania
DRA	Disaster Recovery Allowance
DRFA	Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
FFMVic	Forest Fire Management Victoria
FRNSW	Fire and Rescue NSW
FRV	Fire Rescue Victoria
ICC	Incident Control Centre
IMT	Incident Management Team

IOD	Indian Ocean Dipole
KBDI	Keetch–Byram Drought Index
LGA	Local Government Area
MIR	Major Incidents Report
MSLP	Mean Sea Level Pressure
MJO	Madden-Julian Oscillation
NCM	National Coordination Mechanism
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NJCOP	National Joint Common Operating Picture
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW)
NSWPF	NSW Police Force
NRSC	National Resource Sharing Centre
PWS	Parks and Wildlife Service (Tasmania)
RFS	NSW Rural Fire Service
SAM	Southern Annular Mode
SASES	South Australian State Emergency Service
SCC	State Control/Coordination Centre
SST	Sea Surface Temperatures
SES	State Emergency Service
SLS	Surf Life Saving
TASPOL	Tasmania Police
TC	Tropical Cyclone
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue
UTC	Coordinated Universal Time

7. Acknowledgments

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Military Strategic Commitments	Department of Defence
Humanitarian Division and Consular and Crisis Management Divisions	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
National Resource Sharing Centre	AFAC



Smoke plume from the Dolphin Sands bushfire, Tasmania, 4 December 2025.
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Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency



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