

Dust storms and giant hail batter bushfire-weary Australia

January 20 2020



Australia has since October been overwhelmed by an unprecedented bushfire season made worse by climate change

Thunderstorms and giant hail battered parts of Australia's east coast on Monday after "apocalyptic" dust storms swept across drought-stricken areas, as extreme weather patterns collided in the bushfire-fatigued country.

Australia has since October been overwhelmed by an unprecedented bushfire season made worse by climate change.

Swathes of the country have burned, hundreds of millions of animals have died, more than 2,000 homes have been destroyed and at least 29 lives have been lost.

Violent hail storms pelted the capital Canberra on Monday, with footage showing the storm ripping branches off trees.

Emergency services were warning people there to "move cars undercover and away from trees and [power lines](#)".

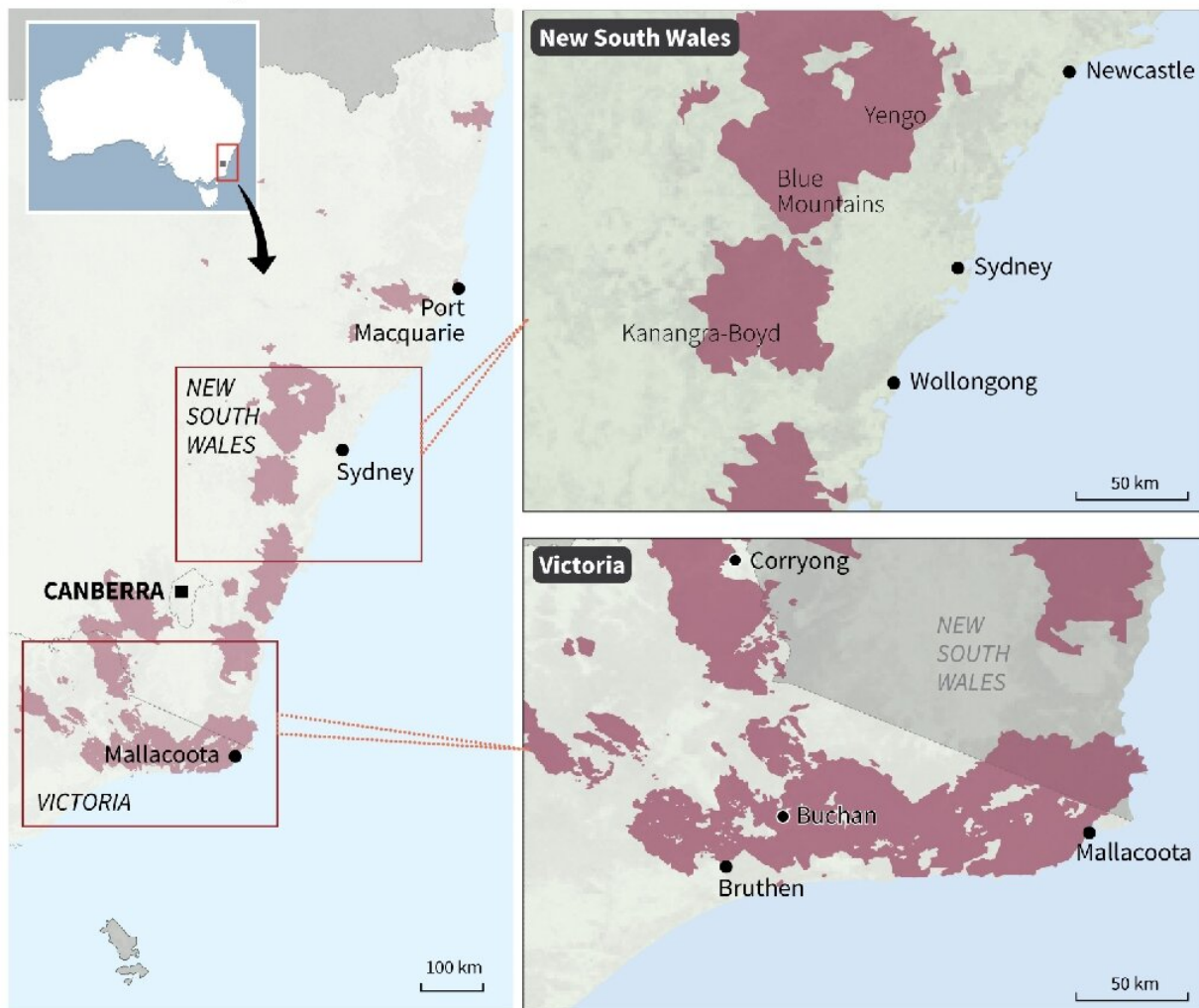
The bureau of meteorology told people in the southeast of New South Wales, including Sydney, to brace for the approaching storm.

"Severe thunderstorms are likely to produce damaging, locally destructive winds, large, possibly giant hailstones and [heavy rainfall](#) that may lead to flash flooding in the warning area over the next several hours," the bureau said.

Two people visiting the popular tourist destination the Blue Mountains were taken to hospital when a 16-year-old boy was hit by lightning and a 24-year-old man suffered injuries while leaning on a nearby metal railing.

Australia bushfires

■ Extent on January 20



Maps showing the extent of bushfires in Australia's Victoria and New South Wales states on January 20.

"These people are extremely lucky to be alive," Ambulance New South Wales duty manager Greg Marshall said in a statement.

"One centimetre either way and they would have faced a direct hit which

could've been fatal."

They both remain in hospital in a stable condition.

'Like an apocalyptic movie'

Dramatic images captured over the weekend from western New South Wales show a massive wall of dust rolling through outback towns. Locals reported being cast into darkness in the middle of the day.

"We are used to the ritual and rush of bringing in washing, turning air cons off, closing windows and doors, before a big dust storm hits," Ashleigh Hull from the rural town of Dubbo told AFP.

This one was "more spectacular" than the typical dust storm, she added.

"It was honestly like an apocalyptic movie, a huge wave coming towards us, really quite impressive, but I just wish it actually brought a good amount of rain, not dust."



The bushfires have left large areas of Australia burnt through

The southern city of Melbourne was also lashed by huge hailstones late Sunday.

In Victoria, where bushfires continue to smoulder, heavy rainfall overnight was welcomed in fire grounds in the north, but authorities said it also brought with it new dangers.

State Premier Daniel Andrews said the rain meant "much more dangerous conditions" for those operating heavy machinery to get into areas damaged by bushfires, while landslides complicated efforts to open up closed roads.

The wet weather has brought a reprieve for many fire grounds along the east coast, but authorities remain on high alert, warning that the bushfire season still has weeks to run.

Experts expect Australia to lose billions of dollars in tourism revenue as a result of the fires.

The government over the weekend announced a Aus\$76 million (US\$52 million) recovery package to aid in the tourism recovery.

The number of travellers booking visits to Australia has fallen 10-20 percent since the fires began in September.



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Tourism Australia was forced to suspend an upbeat advertising campaign launched in the middle of the crisis featuring pop star Kylie Minogue after the ad was met with incredulity about what many saw as poor timing.

"This is one of the biggest, if not the biggest—I would say the biggest—challenge the [tourism industry](#) has had in living memory," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Monday.

Australia's conservative government has come under intense criticism for its response to the fires and [climate change](#), which scientists say is a major contributing factor to the crisis.

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