

# Storm lashes Australian coast threatening homes

July 28 2020, by Andrew Leeson

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Dozens of seafront homes in Wamberal are at risk of falling into the sea after storms eroded the beach

Homes perched on Australia's stunning eastern coast were at risk of being swept away Tuesday, after days of driving rain, high winds and

monster swells smashed the coastline.

The last 48 hours have brought fresh warnings of gale-force winds, rain and powerful surf to an area north of Sydney, where around 40 seafront properties have been damaged by successive storms in the last month.

"I've been living on this beach for 18 years," said resident Gordon Cahill "we've had various [storm](#) events come and go. This time we've been nailed."

Erosion has long posed a threat in the seaside town of Wamberal, destroying homes in the 1970s and again washing away huge swathes of the beachfront from properties in 2016.

But as climate change drives rising sea levels and increases the frequency and severity of storms, the beach will be unlikely to recover as well between storms as it has done in the past.

The government estimates 39,000 buildings are located close to "soft" shorelines around Australia and are at risk of erosion.

Before the winter storms, residents of Wamberal had been campaigning for coastal protections to be built.

Cahill, whose deck collapsed in the storm after the surf ripped away chunks from his neighbours' properties, has been living on the beach for 18 years and said sandstone blocks put in place by the original owners of the property had saved his home.



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He blamed [local authorities](#) for not allowing other residents to build similar protections.

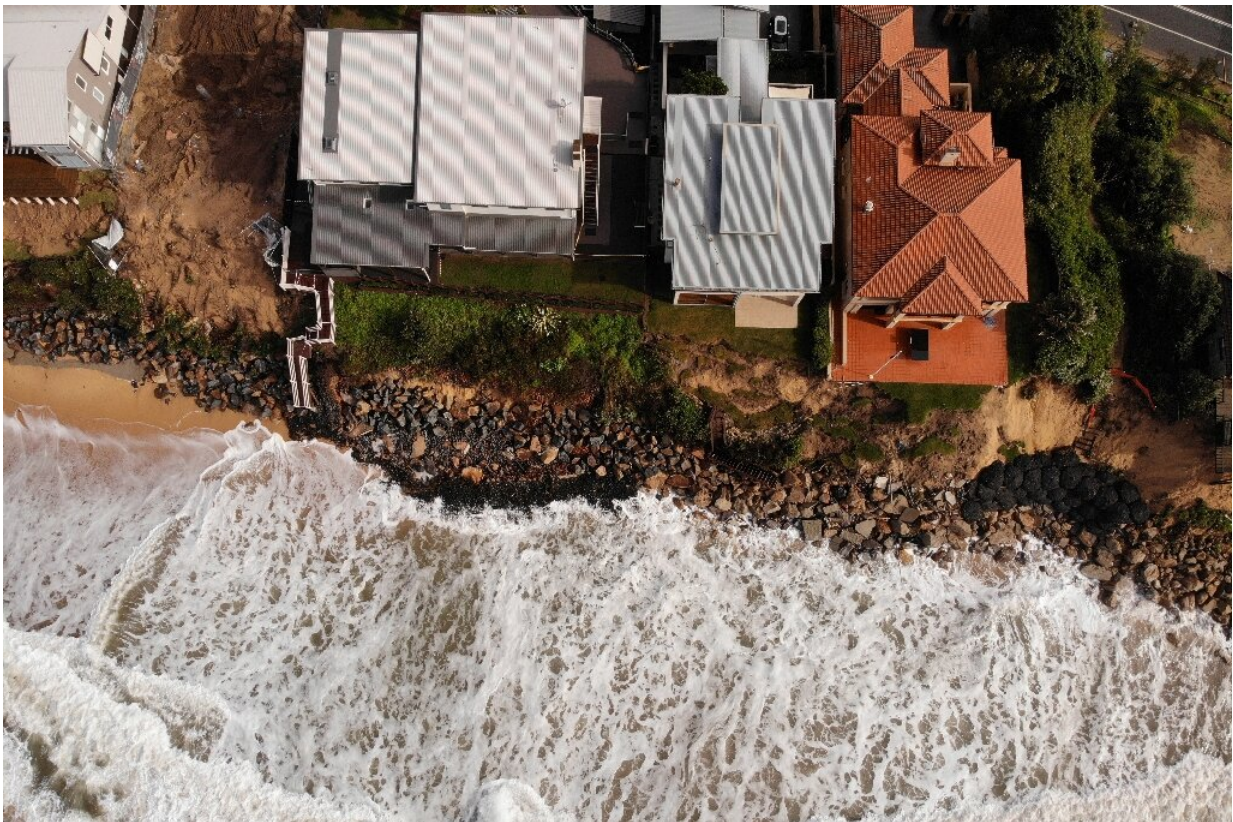
"We have been bringing this matter up with council for the best part of 30 years, through various organisations, through various people, after every storm, and it's always the same deafening silence," he said.

But since a devastating storm hit more than two weeks ago the response had been different, with emergency crews working to the very last minute to help prevent further damage to properties, dumping sandbags and tonnes of rocks.

## 'It's tragic'

Margaret Brice—one of the few people to have remained to brave the latest weather—said the episode was "devastating" and "nerve-racking."

"You can feel the vibrations through the house, you go and look out every day and a little bit more has slipped away," she said as set after set of frothing foam chipped away at the already crumbling cliff face below.



The Australian government estimates 39,000 buildings are located close to 'soft' shorelines around the country and are at risk of erosion

Unlike some houses in the area, now directly endangered by erosion, her home had foundations driven into the bedrock but as the coast fell away, she wondered what would be left if nothing was done.

"The garden is somewhere where we can't go," she said. "People are out of their homes."

When she built her [home](#) in 2001, she was told the local government was planning a revetment wall to protect the area but planning was still underway almost two decades later.

The Central Coast Council said in a statement on its website that a Sydney-based company had been appointed in May to prepare concept plans for a protection structure at Wamberal while further planning of the coastal management was ongoing.

Brice called on the authorities to act. "We don't want a situation where living rooms are the front line of defence."

Both Brice and Cahill partially blamed inaction on the perception of the homes as luxurious beachfront mansions owned by the wealthy who did not need help.



Wamberal resident Margaret Brice says every day a bit more of her property has slipped into the sea

"It's just easier to say that these are McMansions on the coast, worth millions of dollars and some of them are, some of them aren't ... there are people who've used life insurance policies to buy an investment property so they can have their future and then watching that fall away," Cahill said.

"And it's tragic, it's really sad and it's unnecessary."

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