

Storms help Australia contain UNESCO heritage island fire

December 14 2020



Bushfires that have burned more than half of UNESCO world heritage-listed Fraser Island are suspected to have been started by an illegal campfire

Australian firefighters have managed to control a bushfire that burned more than half of the UNESCO world heritage-listed Fraser Island,

around two months after a suspected illegal campfire sparked the blaze.

The [fire](#) on the world's largest sand island, off Australia's east coast, destroyed large swathes of the isle's forests before heavy downpours arrived over the weekend.

"With the help of welcome rainfall and a massive response from crews, the fire is now contained," Queensland Fire and Emergency Services tweeted on Sunday.

Attention has now turned to the large weather system that brought the much-needed rain—and with it, [strong winds](#) and the possibility of flooding to roughly 500 kilometres (300 miles) of the east coast.

"Many of the impacts from this weather event will be similar to a category one cyclone event," Queensland Emergency Services Minister Mark Ryan told public broadcaster ABC.

Strong winds and rain are hitting tourist hotspot the Gold Coast, as well as Byron Bay, where the town's famed beach is at risk of severe erosion.

The storms come just over a week after a heatwave swept through much of the region, sending temperatures soaring to 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) in some areas.

Scientists say climate change is fuelling more extreme weather in Australia—including droughts, bushfires and cyclones—which will only worsen as global temperatures rise.

Fraser Island

50 percent of island ravaged by two months of bushfires, as of Dec 14



Map locating Fraser Island off Australia's east coast which has been ravaged by two months of bushfires.

The country is one of the world's leading fossil fuel exporters and the conservative government has dragged its heels on reducing [carbon emissions](#), despite recent polling showing Australians are increasingly concerned about [climate change](#).

The Fraser Island fire was the first major blaze of the Australian summer, coming as the country recovered from the devastating 2019-20 fires, which burned an area roughly the size of the UK and left 33 people dead.



Known for its large population of dingoes, or native wild dogs, Fraser Island was listed as a world heritage site for its rainforests, freshwater dune lakes and complex system of sand dunes that are still evolving

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service said the fire burned through more than 50 percent of the 166,000-hectare island, raising fears of widespread environmental damage.

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Also known as K'gari, meaning paradise in the local Butchulla people's language, it attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists annually.

The island will reopen from Tuesday after a two-week closure, though visitors will largely be restricted to undamaged areas.

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