

Australia begins 'long haul' to recovery as floodwaters recede

March 25 2021, by Andrew Leeson



A man piles up damaged possessions outside his house in Londonderry, a suburb outside Sydney, as flood-stricken residents along Australia's east coast began a massive clean up effort following days of floods

Thousands of flood-stricken residents along Australia's east coast began a massive clean up effort Thursday, as waters receded revealing

damaged homes, piles of debris and mud-caked roads.

The region has been devastated by widespread flooding brought on by a torrential downpour, inundating towns, destroying farmland and leaving two people dead.

On Thursday, David Williams stepped back inside his home in flood-hit Londonderry, to find waters lapping just below his knees and "gut-wrenching" destruction.

"That was pretty heartbreaking," he told AFP. "But we're fortunate that we're able to save a lot of stuff."

Williams said he was now on the "long haul" to recovery from the [devastating floods](#), clearing out over eight trailer loads of once-prized possessions—now a sodden, twisted mess dumped on the side of the road.

In [coastal areas](#) north of Sydney, hundreds of troops and volunteer firefighters bolstered efforts in stretched communities by digging mud from roads and clearing debris from properties.

Ben Shepherd, an inspector from the Rural Fire Service, said the teams wanted "to try and return communities to some sense of normality as soon as possible".

"This is going to be a prolonged event that is potentially going to take weeks—if not months—in some areas," he told AFP.



Residents clear out belongings from a home after floodwaters receded in Londonderry

Farmers were also pitching in, donating hay as emergency feed for livestock and trucking it hundreds of miles across the country to help others who have "lost everything".

Across the vast flood zone, many communities remain cut off by swollen rivers and it was still unsafe for about 20,000 people to return home.

Authorities pleaded with residents to remain vigilant around floodwaters.

"We believe that most river systems have peaked but complacency is a concern for us," state Premier Gladys Berejikian said.

"Unpredictable flows will continue to occur in communities which haven't seen this amount of rainfall for up to 50 or 100 years."

Homes, businesses damaged

Emergency services have responded to over 12,000 calls for help since the disaster struck late last week, rescuing more than 1,000 people from floodwaters.



Cars sit in floodwaters in Londonderry, a suburb outside Sydney

On Wednesday, officers said they had discovered the remains of a

25-year-old Pakistani man trapped in his car in six metres (20 feet) of floodwater in Sydney's northwest.

Just hours later, Queensland police said divers had found a second man dead in a vehicle that was upturned in a river on the Gold Coast.

Flooding has extended to parts of the outback, including Moree where television images showed the inland town split into two by a bursting river Thursday.

Meteorologists have forecast sunshine for most affected areas until the end of the week.

But close to Sydney near the still-overflowing Hawkesbury River, the focus remains on ferrying food, [medical supplies](#) and other essentials to isolated areas.

Bianca Tolhurst was able to rescue all her horses and cattle when her 150-acre farm in Richmond went under water but said the prospect of starting to clean up when fields were still inundated was "exhausting".



A flooded residential area in the Windsor suburb of northwestern Sydney on March 24, 2021.

We don't even know what the recovery is until the water subsides. We have no idea what we're dealing with," she told AFP.

"I don't even know where to start."

Thousands of homes and businesses have been damaged in the flooding, with insurers receiving more than 22,000 claims so far.

Some coastal regions received a metre (three feet) of water in a week, the equivalent of two-thirds of normal annual rainfall.

Scientists have warned Australia can expect more frequent and more [extreme weather events](#) as a result of climate change.



Members of the State Emergency Service transport relief goods during rescue operations at a flooded residential suburb of Sydney

When the floods hit, many were still reeling from a prolonged drought and unprecedented bushfires just over a year ago.

In Londonderry, Williams said he was lucky compared to an elderly couple who lives next door, after their home was filled to waist height with thick muddy water and debris.

"They've lost everything. They've got nothing left. Got a couple of memories, and that's it."

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