

'Catastrophic' Australia floods prompt helicopter rescues

March 23 2021, by Andrew Leeson, With Holly Robertson In Brisbane



A rescue worker stands at the entrance to Windsor Bridge after the area was inundated with floods in the Windsor area in northwestern Sydney on March 23, 2021, after torrential downpours have lashed Australia's southeast for days.

Military helicopters, jet skis and rubber boats were deployed to rescue

people stranded by "catastrophic" floods along Australia's populous east coast Tuesday, with thousands of homes damaged.

A relentless week-long downpour has soaked most of New South Wales, causing surging rivers to burst their banks; swallowing homes, roads, bridges and farmland.

Strained [emergency services](#)—which just one year ago were battling drought and unprecedented bushfires—used military aircraft and lightweight rubber dinghies to access cut-off communities.

So far, around 850 people have been winched or ferried to safety, but tens of thousands have been told to flee their homes and wild [weather](#) has spread to more inland areas.

In hard-hit Windsor, near Sydney, residents traversed the murky debris-strewn torrent on jet skis and other vessels normally seen off the city's golden beaches.

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

"We've never seen anything like this ever," said 50-year-old Jodie Sallustio, who has been stranded by floodwaters surrounding her partner's Port Macquarie home since Friday.

About 18,000 people have already been evacuated across New South Wales, with state Premier Gladys Berejiklian saying the wild weather was now "impacting a huge area of the state".



Torrential downpours have been lashing Australia's southeast for days, causing rivers in Australia's most populous state to reach peaks not seen in decades

"It is catastrophic in its dimensions and the impact will be severe, and the fact that 15,000 people may need to be evacuated within the next 24 to 48 hours is a huge concern," she said.

In parts of the state, residents have begun looking to clean-up efforts but meteorologists have warned that flooding will persist for days even though rainfall is forecast to ease Wednesday.

Thousands remain without power and energy providers warned electricity will not be restored in some areas until later in the week.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the Warragamba Dam, Sydney's main drinking water source, was expected to continue spilling over into already swollen rivers for another week.

"This is a complex weather event and becoming more complex," he told reporters in Canberra.

WaterNSW, which manages the dam, said the daily overflow had now dropped to half of its peak of 500 gigalitres on Sunday—roughly equivalent to the total volume of Sydney Harbour.



The Bureau of Meteorology tweeted that "unfortunately this situation is far from over", with half of New South Wales now under weather warnings

More extreme weather expected

Emergency services have responded to more than 10,000 calls for help.

So far, no fatalities or serious injuries have been reported, but thousands of homes and businesses are believed to have been damaged.

Insurance Council of Australia CEO Andrew Hall said 11,700 claims had already been lodged and "a large number" were expected in the coming days.

Organic farmer Rod Bailey said his property near Port Macquarie had suffered "complete devastation" with at least 95 percent of its crops destroyed by [heavy rains](#).

"We won't see any income short of three months," he told AFP. "It's a difficult situation we're in but many of our neighbours have had it far worse."

The Bureau of Meteorology warned Tuesday that "we are not out of the woods yet", with half of New South Wales still under emergency weather warnings.



Rescue boats—including Surf Lifesaving vessels usually reserved for beaches—are also being used to extract stranded residents from floodwaters

State Emergency Service assistant commissioner Nicole Hogan told public broadcaster ABC another 1,750 volunteers had arrived from interstate to support the efforts in what would be a "critical 24 hours".

Flood and severe weather warnings have been extended to areas not previously affected, including the south coast of Sydney and outback areas to the northwest recently crippled by a prolonged drought.



Emergency services in New South Wales have responded to more than 10,000 calls for help during the floods so far and carried out about 850 flood rescues

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

Just north of New South Wales, parts of Queensland state's populated southeast have also been hit by flooding after days of heavy rain.

Eight million residents in Sydney and across the state have been told to work from home if possible and avoid unnecessary travel.

Health officials have said the rain and floods will delay the already halting roll-out of coronavirus vaccines in Sydney and surrounding areas.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: 'Catastrophic' Australia floods prompt helicopter rescues (2021, March 23) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-03-catastrophic-australia-prompt-helicopter.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.