

Losses mount from west Australian bushfire

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Firefighters battle a fire near Yarloop in Western Australia, where the out-of-control blaze more than doubled in size in 24 hours

The number of homes lost in a bushfire in Western Australia rose on Saturday to 121, as officials admitted the emergency was not yet over with three people still unaccounted for.

Fire tore through Yarloop, some 110 kilometres (70 miles) south of Perth, early on Friday, destroying scores of homes in the old mill town.

That number rose to 121 on Saturday after a fuller assessment, as hundreds of firefighters continued to battle the huge blaze which is still threatening nearby areas.

"It is still a cause for concern," Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Wayne Gregson told reporters of the blaze.

"It has been a very challenging [fire](#) for us—it's still a challenge, (we're) not out of the woods yet."

Gregson said three people who were unaccounted for on Friday had not yet been located.

"We're holding our hopes out that they got out early and heeded the warnings," he said.

"It's just the fact that we are not able to account for them. In the fullness of time, hopefully, we will account for them."

Western Australia's Premier Colin Barnett said the event had been declared a natural disaster, a measure which gives residents access to greater financial support.

But he admitted that the damage bill was going to be a "large one".

Bushfires are common in Australia's hotter months, with four deaths in Western Australia last November.

Australia's worst firestorm in recent years devastated parts of the southern state of Victoria in 2009, razing thousands of homes and killing 173 people.

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