

Further devastation expected as severe weather, floods hammer Australia's east coast

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Three people are confirmed dead in Lismore, with more bodies likely to be discovered as floodwaters recede and recovery crews continue rescue operations.

At least nine people have died in Queensland amid warnings the state's flood emergency is far from over, with more thunderstorms and rain predicted later in the week.

The CBD of Lismore, in northern New South Wales (NSW), was completely flooded on Monday after the Wilson River broke the city's 10 metre levee around 3 a.m.. Floodwaters peaked around 12 hours later at 14.4 metres, far exceeding the 12.15 metre height of the 1974 floods and the greatest recorded level of 12.46 metres in 1890.

Some residents were forced to cut holes in the roofs of their houses to escape after the floodwaters rose above the level of doors and windows. Many waited on their rooftops for hours, with emergency services completely overwhelmed.

The rescue effort in Lismore has been almost entirely carried out by individual volunteers, as a city with a population of 44,000 has been all but abandoned by the state and federal governments. To the extent that there has not been a mass casualty event in Lismore, it is solely the result of the selfless actions of ordinary people coming to the rescue of one another.

On Monday, at least 50 boat owners turned up in response to a social media call from the desperately under-resourced State Emergency Service (SES), which has just seven boats in Lismore. At one point during the crisis, the SES received up to 374 emergency calls in half an hour.

Around 45 Fijian abattoir workers rescued 60 residents from an aged care facility that was almost

completely submerged. One of the workers, Apenisa Marau, said on 2GB Radio, "It was really hard, and quite terrifying trying to get those elderly people out of their homes."

"Most of them were bedridden, in wheelchairs; some of them were just trying to stay afloat," Marau continued. "We just tried to do what we can, since we're going to be here for the next three years, we wanted to be a part of the community."

The Fijian workers arrived in the region last year as part of the Pacific Labour Scheme, which provides business with cheap labour sourced from impoverished countries. The workers are denied the basic rights of citizenship or permanent residency and their temporary visas are tied to the companies that employ them.

The heroic actions of these highly exploited workers, along with many other ordinary people, stands in complete contrast with the woefully inadequate preparation and response of the NSW, Queensland and federal governments.

Twitter user Eddie Lloyd, a Lismore resident, posted today: "Food has run out in the shops and water is due to run out this afternoon. Where is the PM? ... HELP."

Also on Twitter, Ellena wrote yesterday: "Major flood warnings were texted to Brisbane residents a day AFTER rivers were rising, and power was lost Sunday night with the next outage update due this Friday 9pm! We appreciate freak events can't be helped but we've been here before and expect better."

Another Brisbane resident told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "The government has not done anything to avoid this happening again. It rained exactly the same as it did last flood. Communication has been just as dismal as last flood."

“Everyone knows Brisbane floods. They changed the zoning so that places could be built on flood plains so developers could make money. The government relies on the people to pick up the bill for everything, the suffering, the loss of wages and houses. ”

People whose homes have been severely damaged or destroyed have been offered a woefully inadequate \$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child one-off disaster recovery payment.

NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet described the storm as a “one-in-a-thousand-year event” yesterday. While this claim was particularly outlandish, similar statements are made by governments in response to virtually every disaster in an attempt to excuse the inadequate official response and lack of preparation or timely warnings. Last year, NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian claimed severe flooding in the state was a “one in 100-year” event.

While Monday’s rain and flooding was on a scale not previously recorded in Lismore, major flood events are not unusual. Despite this, the city was not included as a priority area for flood mitigation funding in a recent grant round administered by the National Resilience and Recovery Agency.

Floodwaters are now rising in Ballina, around 40 kilometres east of Lismore, after the Richmond river burst its banks. Overnight, the town’s hospital was evacuated and 55 patients moved to a nearby school, where a makeshift emergency department has been established.

The intense low-pressure system responsible for record rainfall and flooding in Queensland and Northern NSW in recent days is now moving south, threatening further death and devastation of homes, businesses and infrastructure.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has issued severe weather warnings for “damaging winds and heavy rainfall,” as well as “abnormally high tides” covering most of the NSW coastline, from Newcastle to Eden. Major flood warnings are in place from Greater Sydney to the South Coast.

Across the state, more than 40,000 people have been ordered to evacuate, while at least another 300,000 are on high alert.

Already today, a landslide at Kiama Heights on the South Coast has closed one lane of the Princes Highway, and hundreds of residents have been ordered

to evacuate in parts of the southwest Sydney suburbs of Milperra, Chipping Norton and Liverpool.

Warragamba Dam, in Sydney’s southwest, reached capacity at about 3 a.m. today, and is expected to remain full for at least two weeks. As much as 250 gigalitres of water is expected to spill over today, after the dam began overflowing around 6 a.m..

This has evoked fears of a repeat of major flooding in Sydney’s northwest just under a year ago when the dam filled and was discharging water into the Nepean river at a rate of 500 gigalitres per day. A young migrant worker from Pakistan was killed when he was trapped in his car in floodwaters in the city’s northwest, and thousands of homes were severely damaged.

The Nepean River is expected to pass the “moderate flood level” of 7.9 metres late this evening, while the Hawkesbury River may exceed the “major flood level” of 10.5 metres tonight and reach as high as 14 metres tomorrow.



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