

# Australia: Flood affected Sydney residents speak out

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At least 85,000 people in New South Wales (NSW) were impacted by catastrophic floods over the past five days, with more than 100 evacuation orders issued across the state. For many, this was the fourth such disaster they have faced in 18 months.

As in all the recent floods, warnings came late or not at all, and with the volunteer-based State Emergency Service (SES) sorely under resourced, people were again left to rely on family, friends and neighbours to deal with the crisis.

The woeful official response was lauded in a joint press conference yesterday by Labor Prime Minister and extreme-right Liberal-National NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet, who declared, “the soul of our country is based on volunteers.”

The worst affected areas were in the northwest outskirts and working-class southwest suburbs of Sydney, where rivers reached higher levels than during previous floods in March 2022 or March 2021.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to residents in southwest Sydney about their experiences during the floods.

**Linda**, who has lived in Lansvale for almost four decades, spoke to WSWS reporters as she was clearing flood-damaged items from her home for the fourth time this year.

She said: “We didn’t get any warning. By the time we heard from the SES, we only had 15 minutes to get the cars and motorbikes out.

“On the night it actually flooded, we didn’t get much rain that day. Usually it takes a week or more of constant rain. But this time, 10 o’clock that morning it was all good, the river wasn’t up. By 10:30 p.m., we’re up, we’re going.

“We had it twice in two days. We cleaned Sunday-Monday, then it came back in again with vengeance [on

Tuesday]. Now we’re up to the second clean. We’ve all had it, we’ve had enough.

Linda was critical of the management of Warragamba Dam, Sydney’s main water supply reservoir. In all of the recent flood events, the dam has been left to reach capacity and overflow, at times dumping more than 500 gegalitres of water per day into already swelling river systems.

“They know when the rain bombs are on the way. Why don’t they let the dams go, let the water out slowly? They should have done what people have been saying for years—build a secondary dam so a lot of the water could be diverted to another dam and not into people’s homes.”

Linda was joined by her daughter **Sam**, who said: I think a lot of people are on the brink of ‘We’ve had enough, let’s pack up and sell.’”

Linda replied: “It’s easy to say that, but people won’t want to buy the homes that have been in the floods. You’ve got so many people in so many areas who want to sell, get out, but where do you go? How can you buy, or how can you sell? People don’t want to buy here.”

At the press conference yesterday, Albanese and Perrottet announced that flood-affected residents will receive a federally funded disaster recovery payment of just \$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child. This is the same miserly figure afforded to those affected by the March floods, under the Liberal-National government of Scott Morrison, underscoring that there is not a shred of difference between the major parties.

Of this payment, Sam said: “It’s a joke. \$1,000 is not going to fix all our electronics that went under. It’s not going to pay for medical bills when people are injured in the cleanup.”

Linda agreed: “That \$1,000 is a pittance. It wouldn’t

even buy somebody a washing machine or a bed.”

Linda said the severity of floods in the area could have been mitigated by rational planning, “if they had put drainage in properly and realised that they’re building so much upstream without considering the people downstream. We know a lot of the construction has made it worse. All that concrete, where it used to be just paddocks and farms.”

Linda also criticised the construction of new housing developments in flood-prone areas. She said: “We can’t understand why they let them build there, when they know that in ’85 and ’86 that whole area went under. Why would they then let people go ahead and build there? You’ve got to hold someone at fault for that. It’s all about money.”

**Paul**, a truck driver, has owned his house in Lansvale for five years. In that time, his family have been through three floods, although as he said, “it was like five times,” because on both occasions this year there had been two floods in quick succession.

“Last time we had two floods in two weeks, this time it was two in two days. In March, the water was 2.5 metres above the floor of my garage. The second time was about knee-high. This time it was about 1.5 metres.

“It was only half a day of rain. We didn’t get any warning. They said it was supposed to come on Sunday night, but it was already rising on Saturday night and the SES hadn’t even come here yet.

“We were kind of experienced this time, so we brought a lot of things upstairs. The main damage is to the wall, the Gyprock.

“They’re going to give us \$1,000. What does that do? Nothing. Expenses are going up every day. You go and buy groceries, just veggies, it’s a hundred bucks already. It’s killing us and the government’s not doing anything. Whoever runs the country, they’re gonna do the same.”

The complete disregard by the ruling class for the safety and living conditions of residents affected by floods is just one expression of a broader offensive on the working class. This includes the bipartisan “let it rip” strategy of managing covid, which has already killed more than 7,900 Australians this year alone, as well as cuts to real wages and social spending amid soaring inflation, all of which are being accelerated by the newly elected Albanese Labor government.



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