

Floods once again devastate Australia's most populous state

Elle Chapman, Cheryl Crisp
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Devastating floods have hit southwest and northeast New South Wales (NSW) this week, the fourth major flooding event for these areas this year. There have been two confirmed deaths, with one man missing since Monday, and wide-scale damage to homes and businesses. Hundreds of stranded residents have been rescued by helicopters and boats.

The worst-hit towns include Forbes, Borenore, Canobolas, Molong, Canowindra, Walli, Tuena and Eugowra in the Central West region of NSW. Emergency services described it as the state's "biggest flood operation in its history." One thousand people were evacuated from Forbes, whose population is experiencing the second flood evacuation in two weeks. There are 112 flood warnings still current across the state.

In Eugowra, where 90 percent of homes and businesses have been affected by the flooding, 60-year-old Diane Smith, the town's newsagent, was swept away by floodwaters and tragically lost her life. A short time earlier, emergency services workers had rescued her from her flooded home on Monday morning. She was dropped off at a bridge which was deemed safe at the time. But as the floodwaters rose, she attempted to drive to safety to the nearby showground and was swept off the road, where she was last seen clinging to a tree.

The body of a young man was also found in the floodwaters. He has not yet been identified. An 85-year-old man, Ljubisa 'Les' Vugec, is still missing, last seen at his home in Evelyn Street, Eugowra on Monday morning.

In Molong, the Molong Creek swelled to 4.7 metres at the Wellington Bridge, carrying two shipping containers, as well as cars, down the main street. The waters knocked down the wall of the local supermarket and destroyed numerous local businesses.

In Forbes, the Lachlan River appears to have peaked at 10.68 metres, just below the record of 10.8 metres

recorded in 1952. Major flooding is occurring at Condobolin, Nanami, Euabalong, Warren, Hay, Barham, Boundary Bend, Bourke, Brewarrina, Hillston, Jemalong, Mungindi, Walgett and Wee Waa.

NSW Liberal-National Premier Dominic Perrottet was confronted by angry residents in Eugowra demanding to know why emergency response numbers went unanswered at the height of the flood and why there was a lack of food, water and assistance in the flood ravaged town of 700.

The flooding followed record rainfall, more than has been seen in some areas since 1875. Australia is experiencing its third La Niña year in a row, which has resulted in whole swathes of the country being flooded over and over again.

The Bureau of Meteorology's monthly statement said, "Rainfall was highest on record for October for large parts of the Murray–Darling Basin in NSW and Victoria," and noted the national rainfall total was two-and-a-half times the average level.

The flooding was in part caused by overflows and releases of 230,000 megalitres of water per day from nearby Wyangala Dam, equivalent to half the volume of Sydney Harbour. Residents reported that it caused a wall of water to inundate towns such as Eugowra. Such releases had never happened before.

The response of governments, however, remain the same as that experienced in the 2019–2020 bushfires and flood events earlier this year. Residents are left to fend for, and rescue, themselves and their neighbours.

Such is the dire situation of the State Emergency Services (SES) in the largest and most-populous state in the country that the state government has issued calls for New Zealand, Singapore and United States emergency workers to assist in the operations. Eighteen members of the Singapore Civil Defence Force landed at Sydney Airport today, to join 12 flood-rescue personnel from NZ.

As the direct outcome of government policy, both state and federal, virtually all flood, fire and disaster services are manned by volunteers, many themselves impacted by the very same crises they are assisting.

About 280 Australian Defence Force personnel are also involved. The government has exploited the lack of adequate civil disaster services as a pretext to involve the military, as part of its efforts to condition the population to its widespread use in domestic disasters and later use to suppress social and political unrest.

Many residents in the town of Eugowra and far beyond are not insured against floods. The mostly residential eastern part of the town is designated a floodplain, with insurance premiums sitting at \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year. Many have lost their homes and all their belongings, with houses lifted and carried along by the floodwaters.

After an outcry from broad sections of residents and ordinary people following the NSW Northern Rivers flood disaster earlier this year, the Liberal-National government announced an \$800 million voluntary buy-back scheme last month which would be financed jointly by the federal Labor government and the state government.

The scheme, which is woefully inadequate to meet the devastation wreaked on the population of northern NSW, will buy back 2,000 homes and provide some funding for damaged houses. There are however 4,500 houses which are deemed uninhabitable and 14,000 houses which were inundated during the floods this year and last. Other areas of flooded NSW have been excluded from the scheme, including the flood-ravaged Central West.

NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet said, “Particularly at this time, when the catchments are full, the rivers are full, the ground is wet ... it doesn’t take much rainfall for flash flooding to occur. So we can’t protect against that in every single occasion. What we can do is focus on projects in those areas that reduce flooding, and reduce danger to people’s lives.”

Like its response to COVID-19, the attitude of the government is that workers must learn to “live with the floods” and take individual responsibility.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported in March this year, the floods have further demonstrated the “indifference of governments—Coalition and Labor—for the health, lives and livelihoods of ordinary working people.”

At that time, people whose homes were damaged or destroyed were offered a meagre \$1,000 per adult and \$400 per child in one-off disaster payments, plus possible

13-week income replacement payments. Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Perrottet at the same time announced grants of up to \$75,000 for primary producers and up to \$50,000 for small businesses.

For decades, Liberal-National and Labor governments have zoned flood-prone areas for housing development. In doing so they have condemned hundreds of thousands of the poorest sections of the population, relocating to regional areas to escape impossibly high metropolitan housing prices, to the prospect of continual flooding and inundation of their homes. When such devastating and deadly events occur, these same governments leave residents to fend for themselves.

The predictions from meteorologists are that this is a prospect which will continue and increase through La Niña and global warming—itself the outcome of the degradation of the planet in the interests of profit and production.

The frequency of extreme weather events such as floods and fires in Australia and other countries is already increasing as a result of climate change. As the planet gets warmer, the atmosphere is able to store far more moisture in extreme scenarios. With more moisture in the air, this means that downpours are more significant.

The priority of the Australia government is not the lives of ordinary people, but the defence of their own imperialist interests. Whilst a pittance is spent on flood preparation and support, funding has been increased to the military, in preparation for a US-led war against China.

The ongoing flood disaster crisis has once again revealed the brutal indifference of the ruling class and its representatives towards the lives of the working class. It also demonstrates the burning need to reorganise society along socialist lines. Rational, democratic planning is required to protect the working class and meet social needs. This is incompatible with capitalism.



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