

# Australia: In wake of Cyclone Alfred, local councils evict homeless

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While residents of southeast Queensland and northern New South Wales are still reeling from the damage, floods, power cutoffs and other impacts of Cyclone Alfred, municipal councils in heavily-affected Brisbane are banning homeless people from their parks.

Led by Liberal National Party (LNP) Mayor Adrian Schrinner, the Brisbane City Council (BCC) closed homeless encampments in various parks, giving hundreds of homeless people living in tents just 24 hours to leave, under threat of fines and criminal convictions.

These actions followed those of the neighbouring Moreton Bay Council, 20 km north of Brisbane city. As of March 12, the council banned homeless people from camping on public land, with fines as high as \$8,000 directed against those remaining.

The evictions are the latest attack on homeless people. Last October, the BCC cut power to two public parks in South Brisbane, shutting streetlights and preventing the use of public barbeques to cook food. In December, Moreton Bay Council banned homeless persons keeping pets or sleeping in vans in public parks, and cut access to public water and sewerage.

Nearly 400 people sleeping in public parks between the two city councils are now being subjected to further dislocation, with many forced to stay in even more dangerous locations. The evictions and steep fines, which are unpayable by virtually anyone who is homeless, are a callous attack on some of the most vulnerable members of the working class, under conditions of a severe housing and cost-of-living crisis.

Aware of public outrage, Schrinner claimed that the “vast majority” of homeless persons had refused an offer of temporary accommodation when Cyclone Alfred hit. “I don’t believe we should ever accept that tents in public parks are an acceptable substitute for secure and safe accommodation,” he said.

At the same time, Schrinner vilified homeless people as

a threat to public safety, accusing them of making “parks and public spaces becoming dangerous no-go zones because of violent, aggressive and anti-social behaviour.”

Schrinner also exploited the neighbouring council’s evictions, declaring there were “reports that homeless encampments in Moreton Bay were closing down and moving to Brisbane, and we won’t allow that to happen.” Comparing homeless people searching for a safe place to sleep to invaders, he warned of them “pouring into the city.”

Moreton Bay Council claimed there was an “escalating health risk,” due to homeless people discarding waste products. Deputy Mayor Jodie Shipway insisted that this had nothing to do with “the very complex issue of homelessness.”

The council’s own statistics show that Moreton Bay has Queensland’s longest social housing waiting list of 4,421, with homelessness increasing about 90 percent in the past decade.

According to the anti-homelessness organisation Brisbane Zero Collective, anywhere from 250 to 300 people were sleeping on Brisbane streets on a given night last year, a threefold increase compared to 2021. Overall, at least 10,000 people are homeless in southeast Queensland, with the number of homeless throughout the state increasing by 22 percent since 2020.

Both councils falsely claimed that the people being evicted had refused offers of accommodation and were “homeless by choice.”

Karyn Walsh, CEO of Micah Housing, a non-profit organisation offering housing for homeless people, said many were deemed ineligible for assistance because they had no identification documents, while others were never offered any help at all. Walsh reported that only 71 of 261 identified homeless people in Brisbane were offered any accommodation.

Moreover, only temporary shelter was offered, which

included motel rooms, hostels and boarding houses, meaning that in a matter of days a homeless person can find themselves back on the street.

Much of this accommodation is unsuitable and unsafe. Aiden Thomson, 24, evicted from both Moreton Bay and now Brisbane, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that he “chose” to stay in parks because of the danger of assault in temporary accommodation.

Despite having been homeless and eligible for assistance since he was 15, Aiden told the ABC he had never been offered long-term public housing, and that he declined offers to live in a temporary boarding house because it was far worse than living in a tent. “I’ve been assaulted, I’ve been sexually assaulted, I’ve been taken financial advantage of, I’ve had harassment, I’ve been bullied in these houses.”

Similar comments were made by Moreton Bay resident Jaki Rose, 59. Despite working full-time in hospitality, she is homeless due to the exorbitant costs of renting. She reported that because of her employment she was deemed ineligible for any support or social housing. She had been offered accommodation by the council without any indication of how long she would be able to stay.

At a press conference in Brisbane on Wednesday, barely three days after the evictions, Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese did not even mention the housing crisis or homelessness, instead spruiking \$2.5 billion in handouts for the Brisbane Olympics to be held in 2032.

Labor’s deputy state opposition leader Lucy Collier referred to the evictions as “cruel and heartless” but offered no further response.

Likewise, the Greens called on Schrinner to become “actually serious about ending homelessness... and increase funding to front line services” but organised no opposition to the evictions.

The Greens’ statement also did not point out that the current LNP state government was not the first to preside over worsening homelessness. The preceding Palaszczuk-Miles state Labor government of 2015–2024 did so as well.

An acute housing crisis has developed in Australia. Both Liberal-National and Labor governments at all levels have slashed public housing for decades and encouraged real estate speculation and profiteering.

In Brisbane alone, house prices have increased more than 50 percent in the past five years, such that the median home price for a family of four is \$977,000 and median rent is \$675 per week. The median annual family

income is just \$98,200, or \$1,885 per week before taxes.

For those in homes, the unprecedented increase in interest rates since 2022 has meant that 44 percent of Queensland homeowners report being in mortgage stress (defined as spending 30 percent or more of income on mortgage or rent expenses).

Public housing has been reduced to just 4 percent of houses in Queensland. The waitlist for social housing was 47,820 as of January 2025, an 11 percent increase on last year. Among those on the list, 12,749 were classified as either homeless or at high risk of it. The median wait time for social housing is two and half years, with many waiting longer.

Such is the severity of the crisis that community organisations and charities were providing tents for people to stay in the parks from which they are now being evicted.

Similar attacks on the homeless are taking place throughout the country. In neighbouring New South Wales (NSW), the state Labor government is evicting homeless people living in flood-wrecked homes in the northern regional city of Lismore.

Also in NSW, where 64,280 people are waiting for social housing, the state Labor government has issued eviction orders to 147 residents of a public housing estate in Sydney, as part of plans to remove 3,000 people to develop a private residential complex.

In Victoria, the state Labor government plans to demolish and effectively privatise 44 public housing towers in Melbourne, displacing about 10,000 residents from their homes.

The housing crisis is one of the starkest expressions of the reality of capitalism: a society organised entirely in the interests of the billionaires, at the expense of working people, who produce all the wealth.

The hundreds of billions used to pay for the military and tax cuts for the rich could pay for sufficient affordable and public housing many times over. Instead, determined to satisfy the real estate companies, banks and big business, capitalist governments are driving growing numbers of working-class people into poverty and homelessness.



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