

Australia: While massive fires continue, Victoria experiences flash floods

Eric Ludlow**16 January 2026**

Flash floods struck Victoria's world-renowned Great Ocean Road tourist region on Thursday, transforming idyllic coastal holiday spots into scenes of chaos during Australia's peak summer vacation period.

The disaster erupted in the early afternoon when a "rain bomb"—an extreme short-duration downpour—unleashed a record-breaking 180 millimetres (7 inches, nearly 10 percent of the region's average annual rainfall) of rain across narrow, steep catchments in under five hours.

The Mt Cowley gauge west of Lorne—a popular beachside town 120km southwest of state capital Melbourne—recorded 115mm in one hour alone. Rivers like the Wye, Kennett and Cumberland, normally gentle streams beside caravan parks, exploded into raging torrents, bursting concrete bridges, sweeping dozens of cars out to sea or smashing them against pylons and inundating low-lying holiday parks with half a metre of mud, logs and debris.

At Wye River Caravan Park, floodwaters trapped families in their vans as waters rose rapidly; at Cumberland River, a man clung to his rooftop awaiting police helicopter rescue. The Great Ocean Road highway closed between Skenes Creek and Lorne, stranding motorists amid ongoing storms.

The State Emergency Service (SES) issued emergency "take shelter now" warnings, evacuating hundreds to relief centres at Lorne Surf Life Saving Club and Apollo Bay. Around 400 people lost accommodation with 60 sheltering overnight.?

The Great Ocean Road, a 240-kilometre scenic coastal drive hugging the cliffs and beaches between Melbourne and the South Australian border, draws hundreds of thousands of visitors annually—especially working-class families seeking affordable escapes.

Thursday's sudden deluge caught visitors and locals unprepared. Thankfully, no lives were lost and no serious injuries reported, but the episode reveals the razor-thin

margin between tragedy and survival in areas abandoned to the elements by successive state governments.?

The flooding compounds an already catastrophic summer crisis across Victoria, Australia's second-most populous state.

On 10 January, Premier Jacinta Allan declared a State of Disaster for 18 local government areas and Lake Mountain Alpine Resort amid bushfires that have now scorched over 410,000 hectares—an area larger than the Australian Capital Territory. These infernos have razed 259 homes and claimed at least one life, leaving hundreds displaced and entire communities sheltering in relief centres.

Emergency services, already stretched beyond capacity, shifted within hours. SES Chief Officer Operations Alistair Drayton, said in an interview with *New Daily*: "I've come from a fire to a flood zone in one day."

Like the bushfires, Victoria's Great Ocean Road floods expose the criminal indifference of the state Labor government, headed by premier Jacinta Allan, to the mounting toll of climate catastrophe on the working class.

This is not a crisis out of the blue.

In October 2022, Victoria endured statewide floods that killed four people, destroyed 1,700 homes and damaged thousands more—including repeat inundations along the Great Ocean Road and Otways rivers. Those disasters prompted parliamentary inquiries, Auditor-General reports and grand promises from Allan's administration of "significant investment" in flood mitigation.

Victorian Water Minister Harriet Shing boasted in 2025 of \$37.5 million to 2028 to review and implement a Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy (VMFS), alongside flood studies and priority flood mitigation projects.

Planning Minister Sonya Kilkenny heralded "better information and more clarity to councils" through updated mapping to 2100 projections. The government's formal

response to the 2022 Flood Inquiry accepted 16 recommendations, pledging accelerated planning overlays, a full VFMS review by 2025 and assessments of levees, floodwalls and culverts. The government has boasted that it has committed more than \$2.5 billion in support recovery funds cost-shared with the federal government under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Four years on, these pledges amount to hollow rhetoric.

Concrete achievements are meagre: 59 flood studies completed (many pre-dating 2022), planning overlays updated in inland towns like Birregurra (near the flood zone) and a handful of levee upgrades in the northern Murray region—none in the steep coastal catchments that birthed Thursday's flash catastrophe.

The Allan government's mapping exercises and \$47.7 million spent on maintaining outdated strategies have failed to shield ordinary people from new deluges. No retention basins, upgraded bridges or enhanced drainage have been developed in Wye River or Lorne.

The Auditor-General in October 2025 slammed the government's 2022 recovery rollout as "slow" and fragmented, while municipal councils repeatedly begged for climate-proofed planning and stormwater capacity.?

In Victoria's southwest, where flash flooding has now struck twice in four years, the Colac Otway Shire has seen zero dedicated infrastructure projects to mitigate major flooding since 2022 despite known vulnerabilities in the Otways' narrow, steep river systems.

Nationally, the Albanese federal Labor government's inaction compounds this state-level failure.

Despite the 2022 east coast floods that killed 13 across New South Wales and Queensland, no unified national flood mitigation infrastructure program has materialised beyond fragmented state grants. The \$1 billion Disaster Ready Fund, promised post-Black Summer, has prioritised scattered levee and drainage works without addressing flash flood vulnerabilities or cross-state coordination. Four years after pledging national disaster resilience, incompatible mapping systems and funding silos persist, leaving working-class communities nationwide exposed as climate extremes intensify.

What unfolded on the Great Ocean Road was a textbook case of class-based neglect.

Working-class residents and holidaymakers in caravans—denied access to flash-flood-resilient infrastructure—were left to fend for themselves as rivers surged without warning.

These floods and other extreme weather events are

becoming more prevalent due to government inaction on climate change, both in Australia and internationally. Victoria's "rain bomb" follows the catastrophic 2022 floods in northern New South Wales and Queensland, which displaced 20,000 and caused \$5 billion in damage—events scientists directly link to a warming atmosphere that intensifies rainfall by 7 percent per degree Celsius.

Similar devastation struck Spain with the 2024 Valencia floods (230 dead), Germany's 2021 Ahr Valley deluge (180 dead), Pakistan's 2022 super-monsoon that submerged one-third of the country, killing 1,700, and Sri Lanka's 2025 floods from Cyclone Ditwah that killed over 20 people, displaced 75,000 and destroyed thousands of homes in the island's worst cyclone since 2007.

Each catastrophe bears the fingerprint of fossil fuel-driven warming: hotter air holds more moisture, supercharging deluges while baked soils repel infiltration. Yet, as working-class families and regional communities bear the brunt, the Albanese federal Labor government funnels billions into the military and corporate tax cuts.?

This reveals the incompatibility of the capitalist profit system with the defence of human life and the environment. Proper flood mitigation, national disaster coordination and reversal of climate change demand socialist planning—an economy reorganised to prioritise social need and protection of the natural world upon which we depend, not private wealth accumulation under capitalism.



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