

Almost 7 million people threatened by deadly Australian bushfires, according to new climate report

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18 January 2026

A new report has been published by the Climate Council and Emergency Leaders for Climate Action (ELCA) in Australia titled “When Cities Burn: Could the Los Angeles Fires Happen Here?” Its primary findings are a sharp warning on the impacts of the climate crisis on exacerbating bushfires in Australia, a continent that already has a history of devastating fires in recent years.

Overall, the report estimates that there are 6.9 million people who live in regions that are the most exposed to deadly fires: the borders between the suburbs and the rural bushlands. At particular risk are those living on the outskirts of major and capital cities, including Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart. The populations of such areas have increased by an average of 65 percent since 2001.

The title of the report references the devastating January 2025 Los Angeles fires which killed 31 people and destroyed 16,000 buildings. Numerous climate experts warned in the aftermath of the LA inferno that a similarly extreme event could occur in Australia, which shatters any conception that large-scale fires are a purely rural concern.

The report highlights “climate pollution from the burning of coal, oil and gas” as the driver of the LA fires. The greenhouse gas emissions caused by the burning of these fossil fuels is responsible for the increased warming of the earth, creating conditions of record dryness levels and high speed winds that exacerbated the LA wildfires. Adding to these conditions in LA were bushlands in close proximity to suburbs and homes and a prior history of destructive fires.

All of these traits are shared by essentially every

Australian capital city, raising alarm bells for a potentially catastrophic fire event on par with that of the LA fires occurring in a major Australian centre. The founder of ELCA, former New South Wales Fire Commissioner Greg Mullins, stated on the findings of the report: “Australian cities increasingly face the potential for catastrophic fires like the ones in LA.”

It is not only climate factors that the report highlights, but social ones. It points out that contributing to the death toll in LA last year was the fact that many homes in the city had been built before fire-resilient building standards were introduced in 2008, and most had not been updated to modern standards since then.

A similar situation exists in Australia, where in the high-risk fire zones populated by almost 7 million people, 90 percent of homes were built before modern bushfire standards existed, with no subsequent safety upgrades being conducted for the vast majority. This increases the risk of ignition due to embers and also increases the likelihood of fires spreading from house to house in densely packed suburbs.

The impact of such disasters has historically been borne most by the working class, and the poorest sections of those in rural areas. Compounding the immediate effects of the fires themselves is the economic impact which is even more dire due to the growing cost of living crisis. In the last 5 years, insurance premiums for those homes in the most high-risk bushfire areas have increased between 78 percent and 138 percent in Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth.

The report also includes modelling for a scenario of global warming by 3°C since pre-industrial levels, which is what the world is currently on track for given inaction by governments internationally. In such a

scenario, the areas exposed to catastrophic levels of bushfire danger would be three times as large as that which affected the 2009 Black Saturday fires. High-risk areas in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia could face temperatures as high as 48°C.

The recommendations of the report include deep cuts to fossil fuel use, heavy investment in disaster preparation and increasing emergency services capacity in high-risk areas.

The warnings contained in the latest report follow on from those published last November in the first National Climate Risk Assessment (NCRA). The joint Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) report gave a broader picture of the consequences of climate change in Australia beyond extreme disasters like bushfires. This includes a 250 to 450 percent increase in annual heat related mortality in capital cities like Melbourne and Sydney, given a 3°C global warming scenario.

Despite these objective, science based warnings, federal and state policies remain shaped by the imperative of private profit. The Albanese Labor government's 2035 targets announced just days after the NCRA report was released—a 62–70 percent reduction in domestic greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 levels—does not come close to matching the cuts scientists say are necessary. The federal government under Labor has approved dozens of new coal, oil and gas developments since taking office in 2022, while diverting hundreds of billions to military spending and corporate incentives rather than a rapid, planned transition away from fossil fuels.

The fires that have burnt across Victoria over the past week demonstrate the consequences. Temperatures have reached almost 50°C in some areas, and hundreds of homes have been destroyed by infernos. Regions in the south have experienced heatwave conditions not seen since the 2019-20 Black Summer fires.

Workers and young people in Australia, whether currently impacted by the ongoing bushfires or not, must understand that the capitalist system is primarily responsible for the danger they have been placed in by such catastrophes. The ruling class, concerned not with the lives of millions but with its own profit interests, has endangered the entire world with increasing temperatures, heightened bushfire risk, and all manner

of disasters.

The descent into further ecological collapse can still be prevented with a global effort to systematically replace fossil fuel use with alternative, renewable energy sources.

But these demands cannot be won under capitalism. The pro-corporate Labor government, like the Coalition before it, will subordinate these necessities to profit. Only the international working class, independent of capitalist parties and mobilised for political power, can implement the comprehensive, rational measures required to safeguard lives, livelihoods and the natural environment.



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