

Australians rescued from rooftops as floods sweep New South Wales

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??Flooding in New South Wales, Australia?

Sydney, November 16 (RHC)-- Emergency workers in Australia have rescued hundreds of people – some from rooftops and trees – as rapidly rising floodwaters in the state of New South Wales (NSW) cut off towns and inundate homes, farms, highways and bridges.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, citing the southeastern state's emergency services, reported on Tuesday that at least 200 people had been rescued from floodwaters over a 24-hour period in the worst-hit towns in central NSW. An estimated 900 calls seeking help were received.

The NSW Rural Fire Service said its helicopters saved nearly 70 people, some of them found clinging to the branches of trees and trapped on rooftops. Authorities also issued an evacuation order for the town of Forbes, which was hit by flooding two weeks ago. "They can't believe this could happen twice in such a short period of time," the town's Mayor Phyllis Miller told ABC television. "I'm an optimist in my life but this is really heartbreaking."

Officials said about 600 properties in Forbes will likely be flooded with the Lachlan River set to match levels hit during a severe flooding event in 1952. It is the fourth major flood to hit eastern Australia this year.

The crises have been caused by a rare multi-year La Nina weather phenomenon, which brings above-average rainfall to eastern Australia. Data showed that the town of Cowra, about 300km (186 miles) west of Sydney, received 121mm (4.8 inches) over the 24 hours to Monday morning, the highest daily rainfall in 118 years.

Rains have eased and blue skies have returned to many areas, but emergency crews warned the danger had not yet passed. "Although it is sunny out there at the moment, the waters are still flowing into catchment areas and creating severe risk to communities," said Carlene York, NSW's emergency services commissioner.

Rescue efforts are focused on Forbes and the nearby town of Eugowra, officials said. "We know for many of our communities in the central west, there is a lot of pain and a lot of hurt, but we've got through these challenges in the past and we'll get through these challenges again," NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet said. "We do expect a difficult period of time over the next couple of days."

The federal government will deploy an additional 100 defence personnel for relief efforts, volunteers from New Zealand have arrived, and NSW has also sought help from the United States and Singapore, he said.

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