

# Thousands of Tourists Flee Australian Bushfires as Military Begins Evacuations



In this photo provided by the Australian Defence Force, H.M.A.S. *Choules* appears as a ghostly figure through smoke haze off the coast of Mallacoota, Australia, Thursday, Jan. 2, 2020. The Australian Defence Force is moving naval assets to Mallacoota on a supply mission that would last two weeks and helicopters would also fly in more firefighters since roads were inaccessible due to wildfires. -Australian Defence Force/AP

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(PERTH, Australia) — Thousands of tourists fled Australia's wildfire-ravaged

eastern coast Thursday ahead of worsening conditions as the military started to evacuate people trapped on the shore further south.

Cooler weather since Tuesday has aided firefighting and allowed people to replenish supplies. Vehicles formed long lines at gas stations and supermarkets, and traffic was gridlocked as highways reopened. But fire conditions were expected to deteriorate Saturday as high temperatures and strong winds return.

“There is every potential that the conditions on Saturday will be as bad or worse than we saw (on Tuesday),” New South Wales Rural Fire Service Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers said.

Authorities said 381 homes had been destroyed on the New South Wales southern coast this week and at least eight people have died this week in the state and neighboring Victoria, Australia’s two most-populous states, where more than 200 fires are currently burning.

New South Wales authorities in the morning ordered tourists to leave a 250-kilometer (155-mile) zone along the picturesque south coast. State Transport Minister Andrew Constance said it is the “largest mass relocation of people out of the region that we’ve ever seen.”

In Victoria, where 68 homes have burned this week, the military was helping thousands of people who fled to the shore as a wildfire threatened their homes Tuesday in the coastal town of Mallacoota. Food, water, fuel and medical expertise were being delivered and about 500 people were going to be evacuated from the town by a naval ship.

“We think around 3,000 tourists and 1,000 locals are there. Not all of those will want to leave, not all can get on the vessel at one time,” Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The early and devastating start to Australia’s summer wildfires has led authorities to rate this season the worst on record. About 5 million hectares (12.35 million acres) of land have burned, with at least 17 people dead and more than 1,300 homes destroyed.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the crisis was likely to last for months. “It (fires) will continue to go on until we can get some decent rain that can deal with

some of the fires that have been burning for many, many months," Morrison told reporters on Thursday.

Smoke from the wildfires caused the air quality in the national capital, Canberra, to be the world's worst and was blowing into New Zealand.

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Source: <https://time.com/5757634/australia-bushfires-tourists-flee/>

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