

## Role of climate change in LA fires

**Nick Grimm:** As the winds abate in California, the scale of the destruction is becoming clearer, but there are still fears new fires could start. In Australia, fire experts warn there are lessons to be learnt from this disaster. Alison Xiao has more.

**Alison Xiao:** The wildfires have been described as the most destructive in LA's history.

**Juan Perez:** Not just me, the whole neighbourhood is gone.

**Alison Xiao:** Juan Perez lost everything in the Eaton Fire, one of the largest blazes that's still uncontained.

**Juan Perez:** I don't know how we're going to get back from this. I don't even know where to start.

**Alison Xiao:** He's one of the thousands whose homes have been engulfed by flames in recent days. CNN is reporting that arson investigators are looking into the cause of the other uncontained wildfire, Palisades, which stretches from Malibu to Santa Monica, as questions swirl around how the six separate fires across the city started. LA County Sheriff Robert Luna says nearly 200,000 people are currently under evacuation orders, and the death toll is expected to rise.

**Robert Luna:** At one point, we'll be able to do a more thorough search of these impacted areas. Some of them look like a bomb was dropped in them, where we will be able to bring in canines and other things to help us hopefully not discover too many fatalities. That's our prayer.

**Alison Xiao:** US meteorologist Matthew Cappucci says the hurricane-force gusts that fueled the fires were record-breaking, burning on a very dry and parched landscape from prolonged drought.

**Matthew Cappucci:** We did have historic winds with this episode, the worst winds we've seen in the region since 2011. At one point, Burbank, California, part of the LA Metro, saw gusts to 130 kilometers per hour, which for them is an all-time record. And even if the winds wind down a little bit, we're still going to see wildfires continue to grow and expand and potentially ignite new ones too.

**Alison Xiao:** Former Fire and Rescue New South Wales Commissioner Greg Mullins says climate change is also changing the nature of fires and how we fight them.

**Greg Mullins:** The impacts of climate change have lengthened the fire seasons in California and across the world. We're seeing the same here as the Bush Fires Royal Commission found.

**Alison Xiao:** He says during the traditional fire season in Australia, authorities have in the past requested additional firefighting aircraft from the northern hemisphere.

**Greg Mullins:** Access to those assets is going to get harder and harder. And the Royal Commission, following Black Summer, said that Australia needed to have a sovereign aerial firefighting capability.

**Alison Xiao:** Greg Mullins is also the founder of Emergency Leaders for Climate Action and says Australians have to be prepared for the idea of more fires in urban areas here.

**Greg Mullins:** We are vulnerable. Urban bushland interface areas across Australia, you look at the Perth Hills, the Adelaide Hills, the Dandenongs, the Blue Mountains, Sydney suburbs. We need to learn the lessons. We could see similar fires. There's different conditions there. The vegetation is quite different. The hills are steeper and some of the construction is lightweight because of the earthquake risk. So the homes do burn more readily. But we need to look at what's happened there and not rest on our laurels.

**Alison Xiao:** Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden has pledged that his government will cover 100 per cent of California's firefighting and recovery costs for 180 days.

**Nick Grimm:** Alison Xiao reporting there.

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