

= Cyclone Ilona =

Severe Tropical Cyclone Ilona caused moderate damage across the Pilbara region of Western Australia in mid @-@ December 1988 . The system originated from a monsoon trough that coalesced into a tropical low over the Timor Sea on 12 December . The system initially moved southwest , before moving on a more westerly course . Steady intensification occurred and Ilona reached its peak strength on 17 December as a low @-@ end severe tropical cyclone . A southward turn directed the cyclone toward Western Australia , and it made landfall near Mardie Station . The system subsequently degraded over land and dissipated on 19 December .

The cyclone 's effects were relatively limited , though locally significant damage was reported in areas such as Dampier and Karratha . Several homes lost their roof and downed power lines left towns without power for several days . No casualties were reported , damage amounted to A \$ 1 million (US \$ 725 @,@ 000) , and the name Ilona was retired after the season .

= = Meteorological history = =

A monsoon trough was noted along the coast of Australia 's Northern Territory in late November into early December 1988 . This system led to sporadic heavy rain in the region . On 12 December , a tropical low consolidated from the monsoon trough over the Timor Sea , west of Darwin , Northern Territory . Moving southwest , the system skirted the Kimberley coast before turning west . Acquiring gale @-@ force winds by 00 : 00 UTC on 13 December , the low was classified as a Category 1 tropical cyclone and assigned the name Ilona by the Tropical Cyclone Warning Centre (TCWC) in Perth , Western Australia . At this time it was situated near Adele Island . Twelve hours later , the Joint Typhoon Warning Center (JTWC) also began issuing advisories , dubbing it Tropical Cyclone 03S . Decelerating somewhat , Ilona steadily intensified over the following days and achieved severe tropical cyclone status ? having ten @-@ minute sustained winds of at least 118 km / h (73 mph) ? around 12 : 00 UTC on 15 December . Similarly , the JTWC assessed the system to have reached the equivalent of a Category 1 hurricane on the Saffir ? Simpson hurricane scale (SSHS) by 18 : 00 UTC .

Ilona turned south , and later south @-@ southeast , on 15 December and began a steady approach to Western Australia . Slight intensification took place , with the cyclone achieving its peak strength around 00 : 00 UTC on 17 December with ten @-@ minute sustained winds of 130 km / h (80 mph) and a barometric pressure of 960 hPa (mbar ; 28 @.@ 35 inHg) . The JTWC estimated Ilona to be slightly stronger , with maximum one @-@ minute sustained winds of 155 km / h (100 mph) ? a Category 2 @-@ equivalent on the SSHS . That day , Ilona passed near the North Rankin gas platform . Around 16 : 00 UTC , the eye of Ilona made landfall near Mardie Station . Around 16 : 30 UTC , the center of Ilona passed over the town , with a five minute period of calm observed . An eye passage was also reported in Fortescue Roadhouse . The cyclone rapidly decayed as it accelerated inland , falling below tropical cyclone strength by 00 : 00 UTC on 19 December , at which time it was situated northeast of Meekatharra . Thereafter , the decaying low turned east and ultimately dissipated later that day just west of the Western Australia ? South Australia border .

= = Preparations and impact = =

On 15 December , areas across Pilbara were placed on alert for the storm 's arrival ; however , as the storm continued west , the alert was dropped . The warning was quickly reinstated when forecasts showed Ilona moving south . Officials indicated that residents had roughly 12 hours to fully prepare .

Striking Pilbara as a severe tropical cyclone , Ilona caused significant damage in the region ; however , the sparsely populated nature of the region limited the extent of severe damage . Mardie Station was buffeted by hurricane @-@ force winds with gusts up to 174 km / h (108 mph) . An unconfirmed report indicated gusts as high as 220 km / h (140 mph) . These winds uprooted trees , downed power lines , and tore roofs from homes in multiple locales ; extensive damage occurred in

Roebourne , Wickham , Dampier , Karratha , Pannawonica , and Tom Price . Homes and caravans sustained damage in Karratha , reportedly the hardest @-@ hit area according to State Emergency Services . Affected areas were without power for several days , and crews from Port Hedland were called in to assist . Heavy rains also accompanied the system , with accumulations exceeding 100 mm (3 @.@ 9 in) across much of Pilbara , breaking December records at the time ; two @-@ day accumulations exceeded 200 mm (7 @.@ 9 in) in some locations . The rainfall was mostly beneficial to the region . Offshore , the combined effects of Cyclones Ilona and Orson in March 1989 caused tremendous damage to coral reefs ? mainly populated by Acropora ? in eastern areas of Mermaid Sound . Turbulent waters killed or broke apart 50 ? 100 % of the living coral across all sites in the sound . In coastal Dampier , 12 boats sank , capsized , or were washed ashore . Damage amounted to A \$ 1 million (US \$ 725 @,@ 000) .

Though no casualties were reported , the effects of Ilona were deemed severe enough for its name to be retired after the season .