

= Cyclone Peter =

Cyclone Peter was the rainiest tropical cyclone on record in Australia . The third system and first severe tropical cyclone of the 1978 ? 79 season , Peter developed on 29 December from a weak low pressure area over the Gulf of Carpentaria . Peter moved southeastward and deepened while brushing Arnhem Land . Initially a tropical low , it strengthened into a Category 1 cyclone by 12 : 00 UTC on 29 December . Peter intensified further on 30 December and became a Category 2 cyclone . On the following day , the cyclone peaked with maximum sustained winds of 110 km / h ( 70 mph ) . Peter weakened to a Category 1 cyclone before making landfall near the mouth of the Edward River in Queensland . While crossing the Cape York Peninsula , the storm weakened slowly . After reaching Pacific Ocean near Cooktown , the storm decelerated and meandered offshore , but dissipated just offshore on 4 January .

While trekking slowly offshore the east coast of Queensland , the storm dropped very heavy rainfall , peaking at 1 @, @ 947 millimetres ( 76 @. @ 7 in ) at Mount Bellenden Ker , making it the wettest tropical cyclone on record in Australia . Severe flooding occurred , especially in the Cairns area . The most severe damage was dealt to sugar cane , which suffered 70 to 90 percent destruction . Some flights were canceled at the Cairns Airport due to standing water . Floodwaters forced at least 50 people to flee their homes in Cairns . A number of roads , including major highways , were flooded throughout coastal areas of Far North Queensland . Rainfall and winds also resulted in many power and telephone service outages through the region . There were two fatalities and damage reached approximately \$ 10 million ( 1979 AUD ; \$ 11 @. @ 4 million 1979 USD ) .

= = Meteorological history = =

During the final week of December 1978 , an area of atmospheric convection developed over northern Australia and surrounding areas . During 28 December , an area of low pressure developed over the eastern Arnhem Land within this area of atmospheric convection . Over the next day the system moved northwestward toward the Gulf of Carpentaria and developed further , with the first gale force wind associated with the system reported from an automatic weather station on 29 December . The system was subsequently named Peter by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology ( BoM ) after it moved into the Gulf and developed into a Category 1 tropical cyclone on the Australian tropical cyclone intensity scale . After being named , Peter continued to intensify further as it tracked southeastward toward the Cape York Peninsula .

The system was subsequently considered to have peaked as a Category 2 tropical cyclone on 31 December , with 10 @- @ minute sustained winds estimated at 110 km / h ( 70 mph ) by the BoM . Several hours later , the system made landfall between Aurukun and the Edward River mission , Queensland , at around 20 : 00 ( Australian Eastern Standard Time , 11 : 00 UTC ) . As Peter made landfall during 31 December winds of 120 km / h ( 75 mph ) , were reported from both Fitzroy Island and the Edward River mission weather stations . Over the next couple of days the system gradually weakened over land , before it emerged into the Coral Sea near Cooktown , Queensland , on 1 January . The system subsequently weakened below tropical cyclone intensity and became a tropical low during 2 January . The system was last noted on the following day as it degenerated into a complex low pressure system and moved back over the Cape York Peninsula . The complex low subsequently moved westwards over the Peninsula and into the Gulf , where it developed into Tropical Cyclone Greta .

= = Impact = =

The Darwin Tropical Cyclone Warning Centre ( TCWC ) in Northern Territory issued a cyclone warning on 30 December for the coast of Arnhem Land from the Wessel Islands to Port Roper , located near the mouth of the Roper River . Although a cyclone warning indicates expectation of landfall , Peter would never strike Northern Territory . The strongest observed winds in the territory was 74 km / h ( 46 mph ) on Northeast Island , while the highest precipitation total was 140

millimetres ( 5 @. @ 5 in ) in Nhulunbuy , 107 mm ( 4 @. @ 2 in ) of which fell in 24 hours . Very rough seas were reported along the coast of some areas , beaching a 12 m ( 39 ft ) fishing vessel onto the rocks at Gove harbour .

In Queensland , the Brisbane TCWC issued cyclone watches and flood warnings as the storm passed over the Cape York Peninsula . Some areas experienced strong winds , with gusts up to 110 km / h ( 68 mph ) at Edward River Aboriginal Mission and Fitzroy Island . The storm dropped very heavy rainfall while drifting offshore Queensland , with Mount Bellenden Ker recording 1 @, @ 947 mm ( 76 @. @ 7 in ) over a period of approximately three days , making Peter the wettest tropical cyclone in Australia . About 1 @, @ 140 mm ( 45 in ) of that fell in a 24 @- @ hour period , which was the country 's highest daily rainfall total . Other significant precipitation amounts included 433 mm ( 17 @. @ 0 in ) in Millaa Millaa and 402 mm ( 15 @. @ 8 in ) in Cooktown .

Due to the heavy rainfall , severe flooding occurred , mostly between Tully and Cooktown , with the worst impact in the Cairns area . Many creeks and rivers , such as the Herbert , the north and south branches of the Johnstone , and McLeod rivers overflowed or reached dangerous levels . Much of the damage in North Queensland occurred to newly planted sugar cane , with approximately 70 to 90 percent of area 's crop destroyed . Twenty growers in Goondi each lost between \$ 20 @, @ 000 to \$ 30 @, @ 000 in sugar cane . Damage to this crop was comparable to the floods in 1977 . In total , the storm destroyed 270 @, @ 000 to 315 @, @ 000 tonnes of sugar cane .

Standing water at Cairns Airport led Ansett Australia to cancel some flights . Portions of many roads , including major highways such as the Bruce , Captain Cook , Gillies , and Kennedy highways were reported by the Royal Automobile Club as closed due to inundation and washouts . Many motorists were left stranded by floodwaters on Bruce Highway . Emergency personnel crews were put on standby in Innisfail as water up to 60 cm ( 24 in ) threatened dozens of homes in the eastern part of town . In Cairns , over 50 people fled their homes . On 5 January , the Coast Guard of Australia began evacuating some 160 stranded campers in areas about 140 km ( 85 mi ) north of Mossman . Foods shortages occurred in some areas of Far North Queensland , forcing several emergency food drops , including to about 250 people on 4 January and 70 people on 5 January . Additionally , a policeman was winched by helicopter to deliver food supplies to 10 isolated people on 7 January in Goldsborough , which is located in the Gillies Range to the west of Gordonvale . Overall , Peter left two fatalities and about \$ 10 million ( 1979 AUD ) in damage , at least \$ 4 @. @ 5 million of which was done to sugar cane in Babinda , Innisfail , and Tully .

After the storm , the Government of Queensland declared the Cairns area as a natural disaster area . About week later , the Cabinet supported a measure by Minister for Primary Industries , Vic Sullivan , to offer low @- @ interest loans to farmer who lost significant amounts of crops and livestock . Later , Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke @- @ Petersen requested aid from the national government . Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser approved low @- @ interest loans up to \$ 25 @, @ 000 ( 1979 AUD ) for small businesses and the implementation of other measures for recovery .