

## How Many More ‘Unprecedented’ Disasters Before We Admit This Is The New ‘Normal’?

Cyclone Alfred will be soon forgotten, but the climate warnings shouldn't

[Ricky Lanusse](#)



### At What Point Does “Unprecedented” Just Become “Normal”? (created by author)

Every morning during the first week of March 2025, I checked on [Tropical Cyclone Alfred](#), a beast swirling in the Coral Sea, Australia, that appeared on radar in late February.

Why was an Argentinian so fixated on a cyclone brewing on the other side of the world? It wasn't out of curiosity — I was watching a storm rewrite the rules. And I had a bad feeling about it.

First, it moved the *wrong way*. Most storms in the [Coral Sea](#) track east, then drift harmlessly into the Pacific. Alfred did the opposite —

it turned back west toward Australia, barreling toward the Brisbane area, home to many of my Argentinian friends.



**Tropical Cyclone Alfred moved down the eastern coast of Australia, before turning west towards south-east Queensland.** (Source: [ABC News](#))

My friends, along with millions of Australians, braced for the impact of the [anomalous wrath](#) 650km (404 miles) south of the Tropic of Capricorn — the last cyclone to get that close to Brisbane was [Tropical Cyclone Wanda](#), which hit just north of the Sunshine Coast in 1974. Their messages painted a picture of anxious preparation — tying down outdoor furniture, securing windows, stripping supermarket shelves bare. In some places, the panic had shades of the COVID lockdown era. *Maybe people thought stockpiling toilet paper would help soak up the flooding?*

New South Wales premier Chris Minns didn't sugarcoat it: if rivers rose like they did in the [catastrophic floods of 2022](#), there simply weren't enough resources to save everyone. *"We cannot guarantee a boat for every house in the flood evacuation zone,"* he [said](#).

On March 4, Alfred slowed to a crawl, like a funeral march of destruction, battering the coastline with relentless waves that chewed away beaches and sent seawater surging inland. Torrential

rains and brutal winds slammed into the Queensland coast, home to nearly 4 million people.

And just as suddenly, it *weakened*. Downgraded to a tropical storm by March 7–8, Alfred dissipated into a tropical storm without making the expected devastation. My friends, now well-versed in Aussie slang, called it a “fizzer.”

But let’s be clear — this wasn’t a non-event. At its peak, more than 330,000 homes lost power. Evacuation orders were issued along 11 rivers. Entire towns saw a year’s worth of rain in just two days.

Yet in a world of escalating storms — supercharged typhoons, record-breaking hurricanes — Alfred will soon fade from the worldwide headlines because it wasn’t a horrifically captivating Category 5 monster — Alfred was just a *“boring”* near-miss.

But that doesn’t mean Premier Minns didn’t have it right: we are nowhere near ready for what’s coming. Because storms like Alfred are the real warning shots — the ones we dismiss, the ones that lull us into thinking we’re still safe, and the ones that give us yet another glimpse into an increasingly erratic future where cyclones refuse to follow the old rules.

And sooner or later, one of them won’t be a *fizzer*.

## **Climate Change is Embedded in Every Cyclone**

You don’t need a scientist to tell you what’s happening. Look at the satellite images, the flood maps, and the wreckage out of the window. And attribution studies already confirm Alfred was supercharged by human-driven warming.

But Alfred isn’t an outlier. Every cyclone now carries a human signature.

Scientists have long been warning that while climate change doesn’t create tropical storms out of thin air, it makes them stronger, intensifies rainfall, worsens storm surge damage through sea level rise, and increases the likelihood of rapid intensification.

So, if you think cyclones are someone else’s problem, think again. And it all starts with heat.

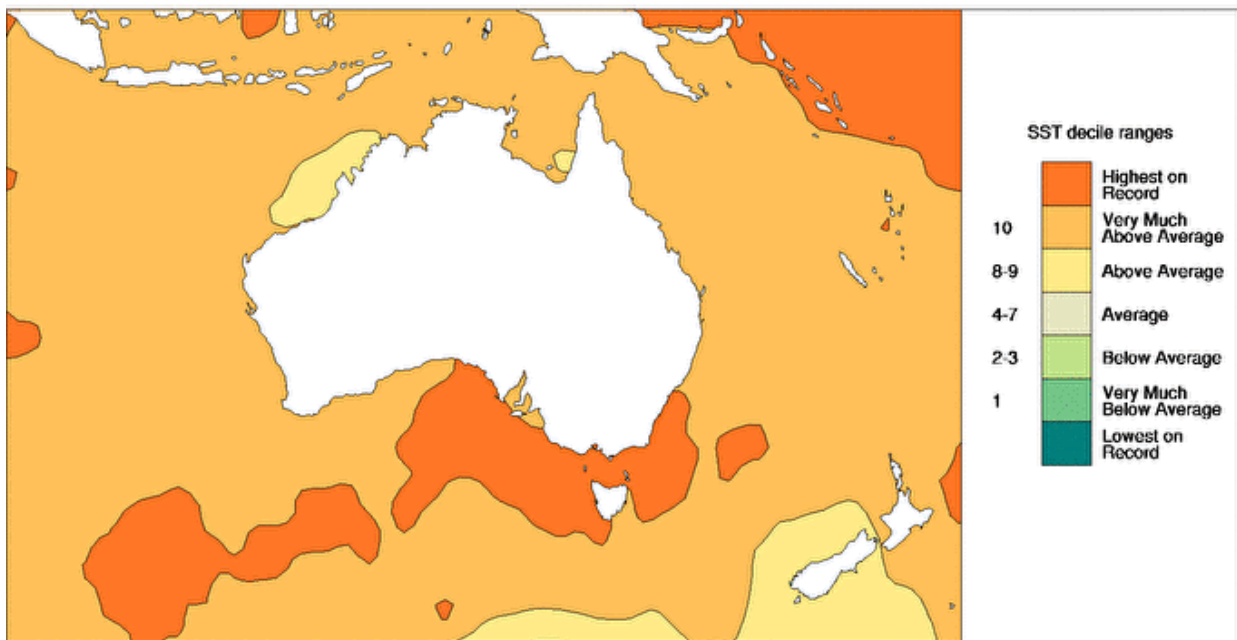
Tropical cyclones feed off seawater hotter than 26°C (79°F). Think of them as massive heat engines, converting ocean energy into wind and rain. The problem? The world’s oceans have been absorbing a catastrophic amount of heat — between 1971 and 2018, they soaked up 396 zettajoules, the equivalent of detonating 25 billion Hiroshima bombs. Where does that energy go? Into storms like Alfred. Into record-breaking heatwaves. Into the slow, irreversible unraveling of the climate we once knew.

2024 was the hottest year in recorded history and the hottest for Australia’s oceans. And a hotter world means the air can “hold” more moisture before unleashing it — about 7% more per degree of warming.

The mechanism is brutally simple:

***warmer oceans = more moisture = more fuel= stronger storms.***

Australian region sea surface temperature deciles: annual 2024  
Distribution Based on Gridded Data



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## Australian region 2024 Sea Surface Temperatures (Source: [Climate Council](#))

And where’s all this energy coming from?

Mainly from the fossil fuel industry, the same juggernaut responsible for 76% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Decades of ignored scientific warnings, political inertia, and corporate greed have turned our oceans into boiling hot tubs, birthing storms that no longer play by the old rules.

Because, as warming continues, the zone where cyclones can form is expanding — some studies suggest by 60 kilometers per decade. Over 40 years, that's an extra 240km of previously untouched coastline — more homes, cities, and infrastructure suddenly in the crosshairs. Australia is already on the frontline. Soon, places that never worried about cyclones will find themselves bracing for impact.

And if this trajectory holds, the humanitarian and economic fallout will be staggering.

## **The Era of “Unprecedented” is Over**

In a world where climate change isn't a distant, abstract threat but a here-and-now reality, these events are no longer outliers but part of the new rhythm we're forced to live with. What's harder to swallow, though, is how this predatory system continues to act like it's business as usual.

Just three years ago, this same coast collapsed under the worst floods in Australia's history, causing \$ 7 billion in damage. Before that, the worst fire season on record burned 19 million hectares, leaving nearly 3 billion animals in their wake. In 2023, Cyclone Gabrielle flattened parts of New Zealand, costing \$14 billion — the same year the U.S. alone counted 28 climate-related disasters, each costing over \$1bn, the highest number of billion-dollar catastrophes in a single year. And in 2024, across the Pacific, Typhoon Yagi shredded the Philippines, barely breaking a sweat.

Alfred wasn't supposed to hit like this. It wasn't supposed to shift south, wasn't supposed to dump this much rain, wasn't supposed to become yet another catastrophe stacking onto a world already gasping for relief. But here we are, knowing that every storm, flood,

and fire is a direct consequence of the fossil fuel industry's greed, [backed by governments](#) that would rather manage the damage than stop it at the source.

Within a few days, the headlines move on. Because this is how the system works, drowning us in figures and disasters that aren't just staggering but numbing. And worst of all, they're becoming routine. It is a sign of the new normal where the ["climate haven" illusion is dead](#), and we are all too blinded by endless news feeds to see it.

Unprecedented becoming the normal

But even Australia, a wealthy nation with resources to rebuild, is already seeing the cracks — [insurance is disappearing](#), [economies are faltering](#), and communities are still drowning in losses from disasters years ago.

**So, if this is what collapse looks like in a country with financial safety nets, what's in store for the world's most vulnerable left to fend for themselves?**

Pakistan's [2022 floods](#), which displaced 33 million people and cost \$30bn in damages (10% of their GDP), wasn't just a natural disaster — it was economic devastation that will ripple for generations. Meanwhile, Mozambique has been battered by five cyclones in four years, pushing thousands into poverty, Argentina just suffered the [most devastating flood](#) in a decade when a year's worth of rain suffocated the coastal city of Bahia Blanca, and women and girls continue to bear disproportionate impacts of [heatwaves in South Sudan](#) that have become a constant threat.

While long-made promises of aid and solidarity vanish in today's climate agenda, these nations face political and economic instability, rising migration, and deepening inequalities as [climate-induced conflicts](#) ripple outwards.

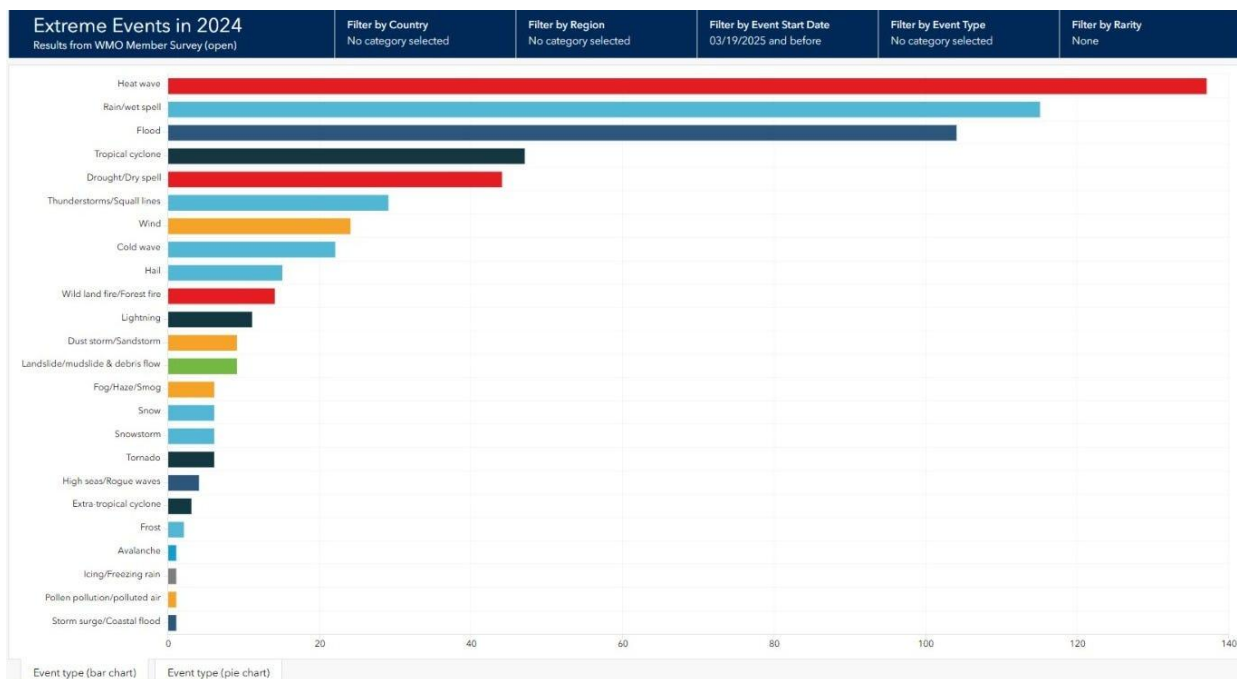
[The fossil fuel industry knew](#) this would happen, and today, we are living in their calculated disaster, paying the price for every barrel burned. And [our leaders let them](#) burn with no remorse, pretending

carbon budgets and climate agreements would be enough while emissions keep rising and the planet keeps boiling.

Every degree of warming locked in today shapes what the next Alfred will look like. How many homes it will take. How many lives it will upend.

The [WMO's report on 2024](#), the hottest year on record, documents a [devastating trail of extreme weather](#) that claimed lives, destroyed buildings, and ruined vital crops, [displacing](#) more than 800,000 people — the highest yearly number since record-keeping began in 2008.

The report identified [151 unprecedented extreme weather events](#) in 2024 — each worse than any previously recorded in its region — including heatwaves above 48.5°C (120 °F), flash floods, landslides, [supercharged storms](#), and widespread power outages. Countless other extreme events likely went undocumented.



151 unprecedented extreme weather events registered in 2024, while countless other extreme events likely went undocumented — Isn't this the new “normal,” then? (Source: [WMO](#))

**So, if we are having one “unprecedented” event every 2.4 days (or 58 hours, to be precise): at what point does “unprecedented” just become the new “normal”? When will this**

fuelled system stop pretending we've dodged the bullet and start realizing it's still loading the gun?

Because Alfred was unprecedented — until it wasn't.

So be loud.