

Knowing the signs

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS FOR A FLOOD IN THE HAWKESBURY-NEPEAN VALLEY?

What causes significant floods here?

Significant floods in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley are caused by intense low-pressure weather systems, most of which are East Coast Lows.

These weather systems can happen at any time and can occur several times a year. They tend to be more common in Autumn and Winter and often intensify rapidly overnight. This makes them one of the most dangerous weather systems to affect the region.

The unique geography of the valley also affects the extent and depth of flooding in the region. Most river valleys tend to widen as they approach the sea. The opposite is the case in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley. Narrow downstream sandstone gorges between Sackville and Brooklyn create natural choke points that cause the 'bathtub effect'.

Floodwaters back up and rise rapidly, causing deep and widespread flooding across the floodplain. Much like a bathtub with five taps (the major tributaries) turned on, but only one plug hole to let the water out.

There is a pattern of flood-dominated and drought-dominated cycles in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley. These cycles typically last from 30 to 50 years.

It's important to remember that floods can take place at any time, including in droughts. This happened in February 2020. It flooded across Greater Sydney while level 2 water restrictions were in place and bushfires were burning across the catchments.

It's not a matter of if another major flood will happen, it's a matter of when.

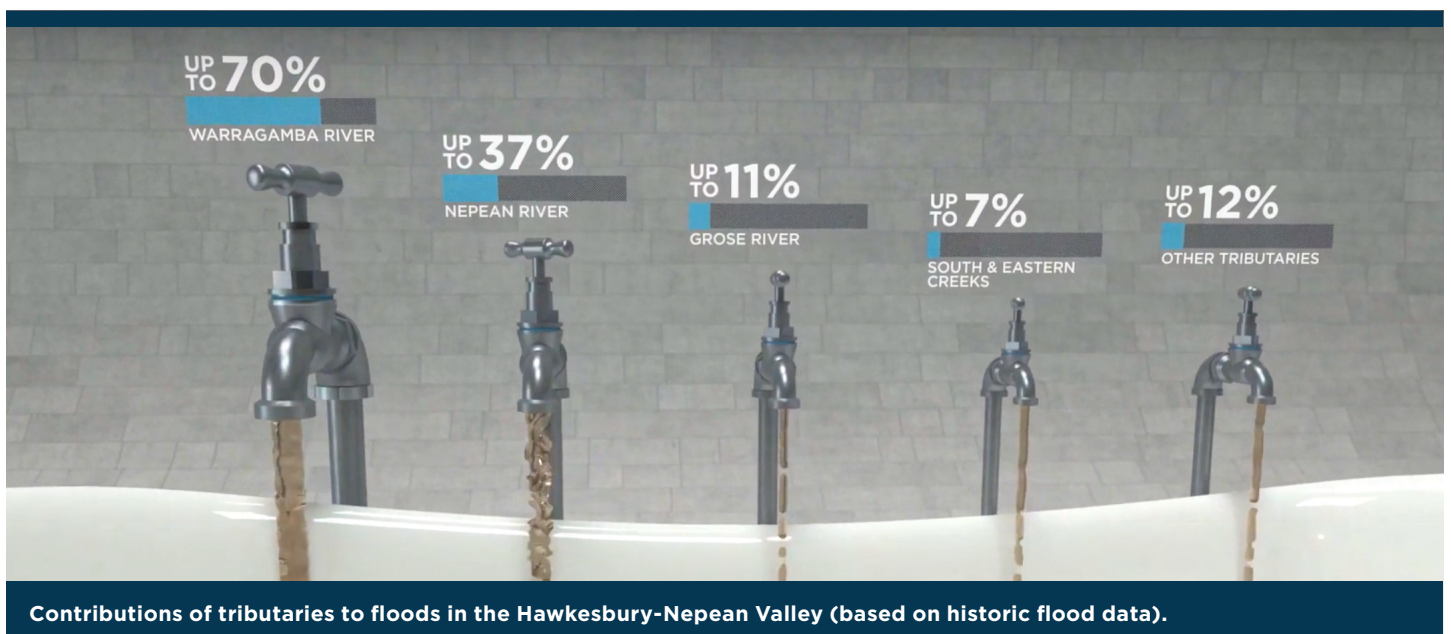
What are the natural warning signs?

Every flood is different, so you can't rely on what you might have experienced or heard about in the past.

It's important to pay attention to weather reports and be aware of some of the early warning signs such as:

- predictions of heavy and/or prolonged rainfall
- East Coast Lows affecting the region
- heavy, sustained rainfall is occurring in upstream catchments such as the Blue Mountains, the Southern Highlands, Goulburn and Wollondilly regions.

In most cases you won't see flooding in your neighbourhood before being told to evacuate. This means your best source of information is official warnings.





Looking north-east across Windsor during March 2021 floods. Source: Infrastructure NSW. Image: Adam Hollingworth

Official warnings and advice

Official warnings and flood advice are provided by The Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau) and the NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) on a range of channels including radio stations and social media.

The Bureau uses rainfall and flood gauges to predict the arrival time and depth of floodwater. Working in cooperation with NSW SES, the Bureau issues three types of related forecasts and warnings:

- **A Flood Watch** provides early advice that flood-producing rain is expected to happen in the near future. Note: a flood watch is updated daily but it is *not a warning of imminent flooding*.
- **A Flood Warning** is issued when the Bureau is more certain that flooding is expected in a specific area and is typically issued when rainfall has started to fall.
- **A Severe Weather Warning** is issued for very heavy rain that may cause flash flooding or abnormally high tides that can affect flooding. Localised flash flooding occurs after intense rainfall and is also referred to as overland flooding.

Leading up to, during and after a flood, NSW SES will issue information and warnings to communities through its website, social media channels and Hazards Near Me app.

There are three levels of flood warnings:



Advice

There is a heightened level of threat but no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes.

 ACTION STATEMENTS	Stay informed Monitor conditions	Reduced threat: return with caution
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Watch and Act

Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.

 ACTION STATEMENTS	Do not enter floodwater Prepare to evacuate	Prepare to isolate Avoid the area
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Emergency Warning

You may be in danger and need to take action immediately.

 ACTION STATEMENTS	Evacuate now / Evacuate before [time]	Shelter now Move to higher ground
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It is vital that you leave if you receive an Emergency Warning directing to you **EVACUATE**.



IMPROVING flood forecasting in the valley

The Bureau of Meteorology is working to enhance flood forecasting for the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley to support improved emergency planning and response.

This includes improved forecasts, new flood modelling and better understanding of timing, behaviour and heights of floods.

