



Millions living on city fringes at higher risk of climate disasters as federal government warned of 'national crisis'

By Margaret Paul and Phoebe Hosier

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Queyea Tuazama changed her practices after floods ravaged her outer metropolitan farm. (ABC News: Danielle Bonica)

When flood waters destroyed hundreds of Queyea Tuazama's carefully planted crops in one of Australia's booming outer metropolitan areas, she knew that wouldn't be the last of it.

Counting the costs, the west African woman decided to come up with a contingency plan against future disasters amid a changing climate.

"Everything was flooded, it was covered... we couldn't get in and we lost everything," she said of the community farm in Melbourne's outer south-east.

"Now we are using mostly wicking beds. We can move those beds and have it in a safe place, instead

Key points:

- Millions of Australians living on the city fringes are at higher risk of climate disasters, a report has found
- The population of Australia's outer metropolitan areas is set to soar to 7.5 million in 15 years
- The NGAA has urged the federal government to invest in climate-

of losing all our crops and starting from nothing."

proofing vulnerable growth regions

It comes as the peak body for local governments in Australia's outer metropolitan areas urged the federal government to invest in climate resilience across the nation's rapidly-growing outer suburbs.

Releasing its pre-budget pitch to the government, the National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) found 5.3 million Australians living in major growth corridors will be harder hit by climate change than inner-city dwellers.

The submission report warned residents in outer metropolitan areas will likely see a "significant increase" in emergencies if we keep building suburbs on land that is at high risk of fire or flood.

Building on flood and fire prone land



The number of homes being built on grasslands prone to floods and bushfires has sparked safety concerns. *(ABC News: Billy Draper)*

Across the nation, Australia's sprawling outer suburbs are booming.

Twenty per cent of Australia's population live in a fast-growing growth area around the nation's major cities.

These areas are growing nearly three times as fast as the rest of the country, with outer suburban growth areas increasing by 34 per cent in the past decade, while Australia's overall population grew by just 15 per cent.

Population estimates forecast outer metropolitan areas will be home to 7.5 million people in the next 15 years.



NGAA's Bronwen Clark says soaring population growth in outer suburban areas comes with major risks. *(ABC News: Danielle Bonica)*

NGAA executive officer Bronwyn Clark said the dizzying pace of growth requires careful thinking and urgent action.

"We're building new developments and thousands and thousands of houses every year in a really unsustainable way," she said.

"We're building right on the outskirts of the city in places more vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters and yet we're putting thousands and thousands of families into new houses there every year.

"So we're putting people into places at risk of fire and flood and we're not investing in the infrastructure to get people out of those areas when there is an emergency."

A looming 'national crisis'



Congestion and hot, dark-roofed homes are typical of outer metropolitan regions. (ABC News: Peter Drought)

Australia's growth suburbs are typically hotter due to a lack of established vegetation and an excess of hard, concrete surfaces.

In many areas, infrastructure is underfunded and communities are under-serviced, fuelling a reliance on private vehicles as transportation.

The report found long term federal funding was needed for roads, train lines, footpaths and bikeways in growth areas, to combat growing congestion and ensure liveable communities.

"Trees take time to grow," Ms Clark said.

"We've seen in western Sydney in Penrith for example, they've had summer days over 50 degrees.

"When you look at the number of [houses with] black roofs... we're really just building up the temperature so it's definitely hotter in these new suburbs."



Max Godber says green spaces are vital amid the concrete of the outer suburbs. (ABC News: Danielle Bonica)

Community garden coordinator Max Godber said shared green spaces have never been more important in outer suburban areas.

"What was once a diverse abundant farmland is now turning into this barren landscape of houses, tarmac, asphalt and concrete," he said, describing Melbourne's outer suburbs.

"Living in these areas can be quite lonely and people can feel quite isolated.

"A community garden brings people together... and recognises there is community. That's what neighbourhoods are all about."

Andrew Butt from RMIT's Centre for Urban Research said planning for climate change was a vital issue, especially in growth areas.

"These are highly transport dependent, energy-intensive sorts of neighbourhoods, where we're looking to make shifts like walking more, looking at passive transport," he said.

"We need to make sure communities in those areas are less exposed to risks and shocks particularly around things like extreme weather."

He said a national approach to sustainable design, tree planting and increasing public transport would help.

The report identified priority infrastructure projects for major freeways and road links in six locations across Victoria, two in NSW, two in South Australia and four in Western Australia.

The NGAA said a dedicated federal minister was also needed to consider the multitude of issues facing millions of residents in Australia's outer metropolitan areas.

"Strong leadership is required at federal level to address this national crisis," it said.

The Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Catherine King has been contacted for comment.