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Neo-Nazis and trans rights protesters clash in Melbourne; bushfire alert for parts of Great Ocean Road - as it happened

Melbourne forecast to reach 37C while northern regions of the state could exceed 40C. This blog is now closed

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Jordyn Beazley and Graham Readfearn (earlier)

Sat 18 Mar 2023 16.40 AEDT



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18 Mar 2023 16.25 AEDT

What we learned today, Saturday 18 March

That's where we'll leave the blog for now. We may bring you more news later, but here's a wrap of today's major news so far:

Transgender rights [protesters clashed with neo-Nazis in Melbourne](#) after the controversial [UK figure Kellie-Jay Keen](#) held an event in the city. Following the clash, the federal Labor MP **Josh Burns** called for "tougher laws" after black-clad marchers made Nazi salutes in front of the Victorian parliament.

Residents of Kennett River and Eastern View, located along Victoria's Great Ocean Road, were urged to evacuate as the state confronted the most [dangerous fire conditions](#) since the black summer bushfires.

The **Australian passport office** has recovered from the pandemic shock with 96% of routine [passports issued](#) within the standard 10 business days in February, compared to just 46% a year ago, new data from the **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade** shows.

[Australia's cannabis industry](#) could be earning the black market \$25bn a year and, rather than policing it, we could be gaining revenue from it by legalising it, the Greens senator David Shoebridge has said.

The amount of dead fish blanketing the river near Menindee in the latest mass kill appears to eclipse the large-scale fish deaths experienced in 2018 and 2019. Experts said the [rotting fish and hot weather](#) would probably further deplete the water of oxygen in the coming days.

Thank you to everyone who has been following along.

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Updated at 17.02 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 16.23 AEDT

Labor MP criticises 'ugly alliance between anti-trans bullies and neo-Nazis'

The clash between transgender rights protesters and neo-Nazis in Melbourne occurred in response to the Let Women Speak event held in the city today.

The event was hosted by the controversial British anti-trans rights figure **Kellie-Jay Keen** who is currently touring Australia.

The federal Labor MP **Josh Burns** called for "tougher laws" to be considered after black-clad marchers made Nazi salutes in front of Parliament House.

■ ■ *The ugly alliance between anti-trans bullies and neo-Nazis on display in the city today was extremely confronting.*

Both groups seek to bully and blame minority groups in their dark ideology. Scapegoating minorities is their business model, and it has no place in Australia.

The brazen marching with neo-Nazi salutes in front of the Victorian Parliament is unacceptable. This is a time for us to consider whether tougher laws are needed.

The protest in Melbourne came after Keen's events in Sydney and Adelaide this week were met with clashes between anti- and pro-trans rights activists. Keen is due to travel to Hobart on Tuesday and Canberra on Thursday before heading to New Zealand.

In January, the Greens MP **Stephen Bates** wrote to Australia's immigration minister asking him to revoke Keen's visa. Bates wrote on Twitter at the time:

■ ■ *Today, I wrote to the Immigration Minister and called on him to revoke the visa of a prominent transphobe who poses a significant risk to members of the trans and gender diverse community of Australia.*

*There's no place for hate speech in this country. I won't be sharing their name because I don't want to amplify their hate speech. **The Immigration Minister has the power to revoke his Government's decision to allow this individual to spread hateful views within our community.***

[Share](#)

Updated at 17.04 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 15.58 AEDT

Man's body retrieved from water at Manly beach

A man's body has been retrieved from the water at Manly beach, NSW police say.

Emergency services were called to the beach just before 12.30pm on Saturday, the police reported.

The man is yet to be formally identified, but an investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death is under way.

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Updated at 16.13 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 14.18 AEDT

Melbourne neo-Nazi clashes - pictures

Here are some images made available by news agency AAP taken by photographer James Ross during clashes between opposing anti-transphobia protesters and neo-Nazis in Melbourne today.



📷 Police grapple with a protester during a transgender rights rally, involving opposing neo-Nazis, outside Parliament House in Melbourne. Photograph: James Ross/AAP



📷 Neo-Nazi protesters outside Parliament House. Photograph: James Ross/AAP



📷 Transgender rights supporters are held back by police. Photograph: James Ross/AAP

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Updated at 14.21 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 14.06 AEDT

More on those clashes in Melbourne.

Some people on Spring Street have been sharing scenes on social media showing black-clad marchers walking in front of Parliament House making Nazi salutes and holding Australian flags.

Nazis in Melbourne pic.twitter.com/S2OKED39Ow

– Christopher Burgess (@Chafule) [March 18, 2023](#)

Other footage shows police on foot and on horseback trying to keep groups apart.

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18 Mar 2023 13.56 AEDT

Transgender rights protesters clash with neo-Nazis in Melbourne

Transgender rights protesters have clashed with neo-Nazis in Melbourne's city centre, with a major road blocked to traffic, according to a report by AAP.

About 30 people from the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement marched along Spring Street near the Victorian parliament on Saturday afternoon, holding signs calling transgender people offensive names and performing Nazi salutes.

The group clashed with hundreds of others who were rallying for transgender rights.

The pro-trans group held signs that included messages such as "women aren't defined by their bodies".

Police, including mounted officers, worked to keep the two groups separated. Spring Street remained blocked to traffic in both directions early on Saturday afternoon.



📷 Police release OC spray on protesters gathered for a transgender rights rally, involving opposing neo-Nazi protesters, outside Parliament House in Melbourne. Photograph: James Ross/AAP

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Updated at 14.11 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 13.16 AEDT

Magnitude 4.7 earthquake hits New Zealand

Thousands of Kiwis from Auckland to Queenstown have reported feeling a magnitude 4.7 earthquake that hit near Christchurch on New Zealand's South Island.

GeoNet reduced the earthquake classification to "light" after originally classifying it as "moderate".

Bit of a shake there, geo-net confirming it as a magnitude 4.6 south-east of Lyttelton Harbour centred under Port Levy at a depth of 5km. [#eqnz pic.twitter.com/hJY8xXYzsD](#)

– Sam Hoeflich (@Samm467) [March 18, 2023](#)

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Updated at 13.23 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 13.07 AEDT

Community urged to look after one another as NSW heats up

As an [unusually long heatwave for autumn grips](#) New South Wales, the state's police have urged the community to look after each other.

Temperatures are expected to max out in central Sydney at 31C, but parts of western Sydney will hit 40C.

Here's the deputy commissioner for emergency management, **Peter Thurtell**:

While warmer weather may not concern some people, the heat can be especially dangerous for more vulnerable members of the community, including babies and children, older people, or those living with an illness.

If you know someone who may need assistance - particularly if they live alone or are socially-isolated - check-in on them this weekend and make sure they are doing okay and have what they need.

The RSPCA has also urged pet owners make sure their animals have access to plenty of fresh, cool water as well as shade.

While Surf Life Saving Australia is asking people heading to waterways to take care, after a record number of deaths on or around the water this summer.

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Updated at 13.22 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 12.58 AEDT

Residents in Kennett River urged to evacuate as extreme fire rating declared

Residents in **Kennett River**, located along Victoria's Great Ocean Road, are being urged to evacuate as an extreme fire rating is declared.

The bushfire, burning 0.3km north of Kennett River is under control, but the **Bureau of Meteorology** has warned wind gusts in the area will reach between 60 and 70km/h.

Vic Emergency predicts the bushfire could impact the area between now and 3pm.

The Age reports the state is today seeing the [most dangerous fire conditions since the black summer](#) bushfires three years ago.

Bushfire - Watch and Act for Kennett River. You should Prepare to Evacuate. For more info:

<https://t.co/QZYEoNGhdh> #vicfires

– VicEmergency (@vicemergency) [March 18, 2023](#)

The warning for Kennett River comes after residents in the Great Ocean Road's **Eastern View** and **Memorial Arch** areas were recommended to evacuate earlier due to bushfire risk.

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Updated at 13.08 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 12.45 AEDT

NSW premier says PM 'out of touch' on Kids Future Fund

A week out from the NSW state election, the premier, **Dominic Perrottet**, has slammed **Anthony Albanese's** criticisms of the Liberals' signature Kids Future Fund as "out of touch", **AAP** reports.

The prime minister, who has been campaigning heavily alongside the NSW Labor leader, **Chris Minns**, said the superannuation-style fund for children would create a greater divide between rich and poor.

Perrottet, who has previously been complimentary about working with Albanese on national cabinet issues, lashed out on Saturday saying "[Albanese] is absolutely wrong and that is the Labor way".

Perrottet told reporters in the marginal western Sydney seat of Penrith:

▲▲ *There is no greater investment that we can make than in our children's future.*

For the prime minister to come out yesterday and say that he's against, like NSW Labor, setting up a future fund account for our children shows how out of touch he is with the challenges that families are facing today.

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Updated at 12.56 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 12.33 AEDT

Parts of Victoria's Great Ocean Road urged to evacuate

People located in the Great Ocean Road's Eastern View and Memorial Arch areas in **Victoria** are being urged to evacuate after an extreme fire rating was declared.

Vic Emergency reported a bushfire 0.3km north of Eastern View that is under control, however, the **Bureau of Meteorology** has issued a weather warning for wind gusts between 60 and 70km/h in the area.

The wind increase was expected from 10am and Vic Emergency warned it may increase the fire behaviour.

Fire Danger Ratings (FDR) tell you how dangerous a fire could be if one started, and the actions you need to take. Many parts of Victoria tomorrow will have an Extreme FDR.

To find out your local FDR, visit <https://t.co/ImyKJkhnMw>.

Stay informed: <https://t.co/FeB4eqPDFJ>. pic.twitter.com/OfWeXy33Bs

– VicEmergency (@vicemergency) [March 17, 2023](#)

Vic Emergency also issued a severe weather warning for damaging winds in Victoria’s central, north central, and south west districts.

SEVERE WEATHER WARNING for DAMAGING WINDS. For people in parts of Central, North Central and South West Forecast Districts.

Damaging winds over elevated terrain until the early afternoon.

Stay informed: <https://t.co/T05ONtwAm3> pic.twitter.com/gRZug5EKYT

– VicEmergency (@vicemergency) [March 18, 2023](#)

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Updated at 12.58 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 12.20 AEDT



Josh Nicholas

Passport wait times improve

The **Australian passport office** has recovered from the pandemic shock with 96% of routine passports issued within the standard 10 business days in February, compared to just 46% a year ago, new data from the **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade** shows.

Passport applications surged after Australia’s international border reopened in early 2022. Processing delays became so pronounced that some applicants waited months or **queued outside passport offices** for hours. The number of applicants paying an extra \$225 for priority service in 2021 was **double pre-pandemic levels**.

The department is **encouraging Australians to continue applying for passports well before they need to travel**, with the passport office estimating around 2 million Australians did not renew their passports during the early years of the pandemic, and “most” have yet to reapply.

Passport applications are still around 25% higher than pre-pandemic levels, and March and April are generally peak periods for passport renewals.

A department spokesperson said:

“Customers should continue to plan ahead and allow at least six weeks to apply for or renew their passport, and longer if they are applying for a child passport.”

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Updated at 12.29 AEDT

18 Mar 2023 12.02 AEDT

Truck crashes into Sydney home

Two people who were in a truck that crashed through part of a house in Sydney’s south this morning have had a **“fortunate escape”**, the Sydney Morning Herald reports.

The cabin of the truck, owned by a tree-logging contractor, was hanging over a 10-metre cliff after the truck crashed through the unoccupied home.

Fire and Rescue NSW Superintendent **Adam Dewberry** said the truck, which had a chipper trailer on the back, appeared to have lost control after it went down a steep hill at Weerona Place, Caringbah South.

Firefighters rescued the man and woman who were trapped in the front of the truck. Both appeared to have sustained no injuries, however were taken to hospital as a precaution.

CARINGBAR SOUTH | [#FRNSW](#) have rescued two occupants of a truck that crashed into a house at the bottom of the hill on Weerona Place. Firefighters have stabilised the truck. [@SuthShireCncl](#) pic.twitter.com/MW6WYC9vnZ

– Fire and Rescue NSW (@FRNSW) [March 17, 2023](#)

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Updated at 12.22 AEDT

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