
Changes to building codes urged as extreme weather hits more often

Nila Sweeney *Reporter*



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Property owners and home builders are urging governments to update building codes and construction standards to protect homes from extreme weather events such as cyclones, which are expected to become more frequent.

Sunshine Coast home owner Matt Bell, chief economist at residential property fund Oliver Hume, said most properties in south-east Queensland were built to withstand severe storms and flooding, but were less robust against cyclones.



Matt Bell, Sunshine Coast resident and chief economist at Oliver Hume, outside his home in Buderim in south-east Queensland.

“When I built my house in Buderim, I was concerned about bushfires and floods and I didn’t think about cyclone provisions at all because it hadn’t occurred since the 1970s, so it’s not something many home owners think about.

“I think in light of this [extreme cyclone hitting this far south](https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/tens-of-thousands-without-power-as-force-of-alfred-hits-20250307-p51hp6)

[\[https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/tens-of-thousands-without-power-as-force-of-alfred-hits-20250307-p51hp6\]](https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/tens-of-thousands-without-power-as-force-of-alfred-hits-20250307-p51hp6) for the first time in a long time, the construction code probably has to be reassessed in SEQ to reflect the higher building standards in the cyclone-prone areas such as those in Far North Queensland.

“At the very least, we need to reconsider and extend the geographical coverage of those stronger building standards for cyclones.”

Davina Rooney, chief executive of the Green Building Council of Australia, said Australia had strong building codes, but they must continue to evolve to meet the reality of extreme weather events such as [Cyclone Alfred](https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/everything-you-need-to-know-about-cyclone-alfred-20250306-p51hb4)

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“It’s been 50 years since an event like this has struck Brisbane, but science shows that a changing climate will push cyclones further south and into highly populated areas like south-east Queensland and NSW – more homes than ever are in their path and at risk.



Cyclone Alfred has already caused severe beach erosion. **Nick Moir**

“Regular updates to the National Construction Code are essential to ensure homes are more resilient, reducing disaster recovery costs and better protecting communities.”

The total cost of tropical cyclones in Australia has blown out to \$23 billion between 1967 and 2021, according to a report by the Insurance Council of Australia.

It found that modern houses were not resilient against cyclones and those built before the 1980s may need to be retrofitted.

“As a home owner in a coastal location, I think it’s important to acknowledge the risk of changing weather patterns,” said Tim Lawless, CoreLogic’s research director and a Sunshine Coast resident.

“Minimising the risk or severity of property damage is challenging if you are in a pre-existing home in a hazard prone area, but for new homes, there is an opportunity to minimise the risk through design and building materials.

“Logically, building codes and standards need to keep up to date with changing weather patterns. Given the impact of global warming and an expectation for more frequent and severe weather events, ensuring building codes are kept up to date seems critical.”

“Building design in FNQ must withstand category 5 cyclones, requiring extreme structural reinforcement, whereas SEQ homes focus on moderate wind resilience and flood prevention,” said Lea.

“While both regions adhere to stringent building codes, FNQ demands additional cyclone-resistant features to mitigate the risk of more frequent and intense storms.”

Lea said any change in building codes would need to be justifiable due to the extra costs.

“We’ve already got serious issues with the delivery of houses due to the cost of construction, which has gone through the roof in the last few years, so adding more legislation would make things more difficult.

“I think legislating it and changing the building code, I think would be a difficult task.”

Bell agreed that the cost of retrofitting or adopting new standards for new builds will be prohibitive, but the issue still needs to be addressed.

“Undoubtedly, we’re going to get more of these events in the future,” he said. “When I built my house less than 10 years ago, it was outside the one in the 100-year flood zone. I suspect that now it is probably within that zone, just because of how the flood modelling has changed over the last five to 10 years.

“So it seems very likely that there’ll have to be some ongoing improvement in codes and standards to make sure that newer builds can stand more frequent extreme events like this hitting south-east Queensland.”

Tony Mitchell, Master Builders Queensland general manager of building services and licensing, said for the most part, homes in SEQ were structurally ready for Cyclone Alfred.

“I’m not too concerned about their structure because we made some changes five years ago that new houses around Brisbane and past Toowoomba should withstand 200km/h winds, so costs had increased because of extra tie down and bracing requirements.

“What I’m worried about is the lack of maintenance on existing structures, that can cause debris impact and inappropriate vegetation that could break a house if uprooted during a high-wind event.”

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