



Danger: a road 5km from Bairnsdale's racecourse subsides because of the rain.

Rain brings tide



Fears: Peter Bryant looks at the torrent flowing through his Eagle Point neighbour's property. Picture: JON HARGEST

Row gently down the street

IT'S not often you back a boat out of the garage and row it down your street.

But that's exactly what happened in Bairnsdale yesterday after knee-deep floodwater inundated roads, farms and houses in East Gippsland.

Greg Brooks and his dog Kelly opted for the unorthodox transport after water flooded their driveway in Arco Court, Bairnsdale.

"We couldn't get a car down the street so I thought I'd row the boat," Mr Brooks said.

"It's funny — it's the first time the boat's been taken out in 10 years and instead of being in the river it's on the road."

Not far away, Inge Gaediske worked with SES crews to barricade her home with sandbags as rising water began lapping at her doorstep.

"I couldn't sleep last night because I was so worried the house would flood," Ms Gaediske said.

"This is worse than last

Matt Doran

week, when the water was so high garbage bins were literally floating down the street.

"My whole back yard is under water. I have towels at the doors and I'm afraid water is going to start pouring in through a leak in the roof."

"It's very scary. I just pray to God the sandbags can keep the water out."

Eagle Point residents were also battling to save their homes when a creek overflowed in Bay Drive.

Peter Bryant battled the driving rain all morning, filling up sandbags and baling buckets of water out of his shed.

"There's a real fear that things could get a lot worse with the run-off from the mountains," he said.

"There is a holiday house next door and the water is up just below their windows."

Regional SES manager

Kevin Perry said Bairnsdale locals were bracing for a major flood of the Mitchell River.

"At this stage it's a case of wait and see, because if this rain continues overnight we will see the Mitchell rise very quickly," he said.

"Residents at the caravan park are on standby and it's possible there will be an evacuation tomorrow."

Lindenow vegetable farmer Bill Bulmer said his home would almost certainly be flooded if the river kept rising.

"We've got the sandbags ready because when we had the floods in 1998 there was water right through our house, from the front door to the back door," he said.

"It's a funny thing, not so long ago we were in the middle of bushfires and I was dealing with the fact that 1000 of my lettuces were covered in ash."

"Now we're literally seeing all the debris from the fires

being washed down an overflowing river."

SES crews from Bairnsdale and surrounding areas worked tirelessly from 6am yesterday, responding to more than 70 calls for help.

Crews were kept busy when a 15m tree collapsed on a home in Lucknow, causing thousands of dollars damage. Owner Pat Sommerville said it was lucky the family wasn't home at the time.

"It's come down right above the kitchen, smashing the gutters and the wall," she said.

SES volunteers were also forced to close Forge Creek Rd, Bairnsdale, when part of the road gave way in a landslide, leaving a 15m hole in one lane.

Down at the Wy Yung Football Club, kids watched in awe as the ground was covered in murky water.

Darcy Murray and his mates made the most of the conditions, taking speccies in waist-deep water in the goal square.

VICTORIA'S worst floods in almost a decade have battered Gippsland, but delivered a welcome top-up to desperately low water catchments.

And the best and worst are yet to come, with more torrential rain expected to break river banks today.

The conditions prompted VicRoads to warn motorists to cancel all unnecessary trips to Gippsland, and urge those who have to travel to the region to take extra care.

Yesterday, the wild weather brought down trees and powerlines, blocking highways and trains, with emergency services responding to hundreds of call-outs.

By 6pm, the onslaught had delivered 100mm in 24 hours to the Thomson Dam, Melbourne's biggest reservoir.

As water rose yesterday, the weather bureau issued major flood warnings for the Mitchell and Avon rivers, threatening residents in Bairnsdale, Stratford, and Briagolong.

At Lakes Entrance, 84mm of rain fell in the 24 hours to 3pm today, while Bairnsdale received 93mm of rain to 8pm.

The rising Traralgon Creek is also a major worry to low-lying homes in Traralgon.

Almost 500 residents had been put on alert last night, with Latrobe City Council crews patrolling the Traralgon Creek to monitor the rising water overnight.

Floodwaters in Traralgon

Mary Bolling, Mike Edmonds, Matt Doran and Annalise Walliker

are expected to peak at 5m this morning, cutting off the Princes Highway and reaching levels set by floods in 1993.

Yesterday, the Princes Highway was blocked at Nicholson, and between Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance.

Many other roads were also blocked, and power supplies through large areas of East Gippsland were cut as the storms ripped through with winds up to 110km/h.

The closed roads trapped many people in their homes.

Last night, regional SES manager Kevin Perry said the worst was yet to come, as locals were braced for a major flood of the Mitchell River.

"It's a matter of just wait and see, because overnight we will see the Mitchell rise very quickly," Mr Perry said.

At Swifts Creek, Vallerie McCann said the water rose much faster than in 1998, when she was stranded for days.

"My neighbour had a look at it for me and he rang me and said: 'The only way I'd bring the four-wheel drive in there is if you have a heart attack'," Ms McCann told ABC Radio.

Stringers Creek was also rising, threatening to cut off the tiny town of Walhalla.

The former head of the Lake Wellington Rivers Authority, Ross Scott, is predicting flooding at least equal to 1998.



Ute better stop: one of many flooded roads near Bairnsdale. Picture: JON HARGEST