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Australia was already grappling with extreme heat and one of the worst droughts on record when devastating bushfires tore through the bone dry land. For months, the infernos have raged through Australia's southeast, leaving parts of the country choking under some of the worst air pollution in the world. Since September, more than 18 million hectares (44 million acres) of bush, land and forest have been burned. At least 28 people have died, around 3,000 homes have been destroyed and about one billion animals could have been affected. Heavy rain down the east coast this week has temporarily eased the crisis, but authorities warn the fire risk is not over -- bushfire season typically ends in March. Only last week, Australia's capital city of Canberra declared a state of emergency as bushfires moved rapidly in the area.

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