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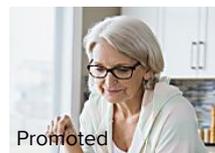
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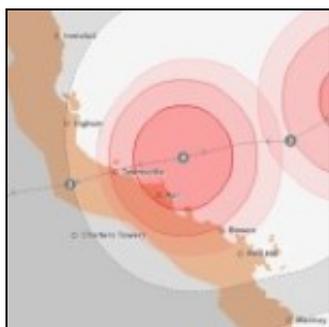
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Weather News

Cyclone Debbie could hit north Queensland as category four, Bureau of Meteorology warns

Saturday March 25, 2017 - 22:03 EDT



Empty shelves at a Coles in Townsville on March 25, 2017, as residents stock up on essentials such as bread in preparation for Cyclone Debbie. - ABC

A cyclone off northern Queensland could intensify to category four by the time it crosses the coast somewhere between Cardwell and Bowen, near Townsville, the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has warned.

The tropical low was declared as Cyclone Debbie, a category one system, at 11:00am and is currently expected to cross the north Queensland coast on Tuesday morning, although it could be sooner or later.

BOM Queensland regional director Bruce Gunn said a degree of uncertainty remained in how the system would behave.

At 7:00pm AEST on Saturday the system was 660 kilometres east of Cairns and 560 kilometres east-north-east of Townsville, moving west-south-west.

On Saturday afternoon, the bureau said the warning zone was between Ayr to St Lawrence, including Bowen, Mackay and the Whitsunday Islands.

A cyclone watch extended as far as Cairns, including Cardwell and Townsville.

"At the moment our timing is thinking the crossing of the coast would be some time around Monday night or into Tuesday, but it's still a very uncertain situation," Mr Gunn said.

"If the cyclone were to speed up we could feel impacts on the coast as early as Sunday night.

"Alternatively it could slow down, but the problem with that is the longer time over the warm waters of the Coral Sea could see it intensify to a category five, I can't rule that out.

"But at the moment, our estimate is for a category four system to impact the coast with the centre crossing somewhere between Cardwell and Bowen.

"Category four systems have winds in excess of 200 kilometres per hour and you can expect some major structural damage with that sort of system.

"Caravans are a big risk and could easily be destroyed, dangerous airborne debris, widespread power outages, boats breaking their moorings, all of that sort of thing."

Townsville bracing for Cyclone Debbie

Townsville is right in the middle of the coastal crossing zone and Mayor Jenny Hill said the city would probably move to full alert today.

Cr Hill said people south of Townsville or on beachfront properties were most at risk and they may have to evacuate before the storm hits.

"We have to assume the tracking maps are reasonably correct. And we can't afford to wait until the last minute before asking people to consider leaving their properties and moving to somewhere safer," she said.

"What we'll ask people to do though initially is to move in with family and friends in areas of the city that are considered safer.

"We'll have a better indication today when the next report comes in from the weather bureau and we'll reassess from there."

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk said disaster management committees had been activated in Cairns, Innisfail, Townsville and Mackay.

"I understand today that up north the weather conditions are fine, everything is calm and there are blue skies," she said.

"This is the time you should now be preparing ... make sure you have your emergency kits ready.

"We've also had some extensive discussions today about island communities â?? Palm Island, the Whitsunday communities including Hamilton Island.

"We've been in constant contact with the mayors there and we've been assured everyone is getting ready."

- ABC

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