

Power cuts have hit SA in a big way — here's how they compare to the 2016 statewide blackout

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A transmission tower just outside Tailem Bend was toppled during Saturday's storm.

(Twitter: ElectraNet)

Tens of thousands of South Australians are still without power after intense storms swept across the state over the weekend.

[Trees have been felled, powerlines downed, homes damaged, streets closed, and business stock spoiled](#) — but the full economic impact is unlikely to become known for days, although the total cost has already been estimated in the millions of dollars.

"[Power outages] were stretching from the middle of Eyre Peninsula, right through Yorke Peninsula, the Mid North, metro area, through the Riverland and Murraylands and down to the south-east — it was a really massive impact," SA Power Networks spokesperson Paul Roberts said.



A crumpled Stobie pole caused by the latest storms in South Australia. (*Facebook: SA Power Networks*)

For some, the widespread power outages have been reminiscent of [South Australia's infamous statewide blackout](#).

Here's how the two events measure up, based on what we know so far.

Weekend storms leaves thousands in the dark

At its peak, Saturday's weather resulted in the loss of power to more than 160,000 homes and businesses — easily the largest number since the 2016 blackout.

"We had 163,000 customers without power due to this storm event, terrible winds and lightning and trees falling on Saturday," Mr Roberts said on Monday morning.



Time-lapse video shows Saturday's storm approaching Henley Beach.

On September 28, 2016, [more than 850,000 properties were impacted by power cuts](#) that lasted for hours, with some going without power for days.

But Mr Roberts said that the current situation was, despite the lower number of impacted properties, "worse in terms of our ability to recover from it" because of a fundamental dissimilarity between the events — the extent of localised damage.

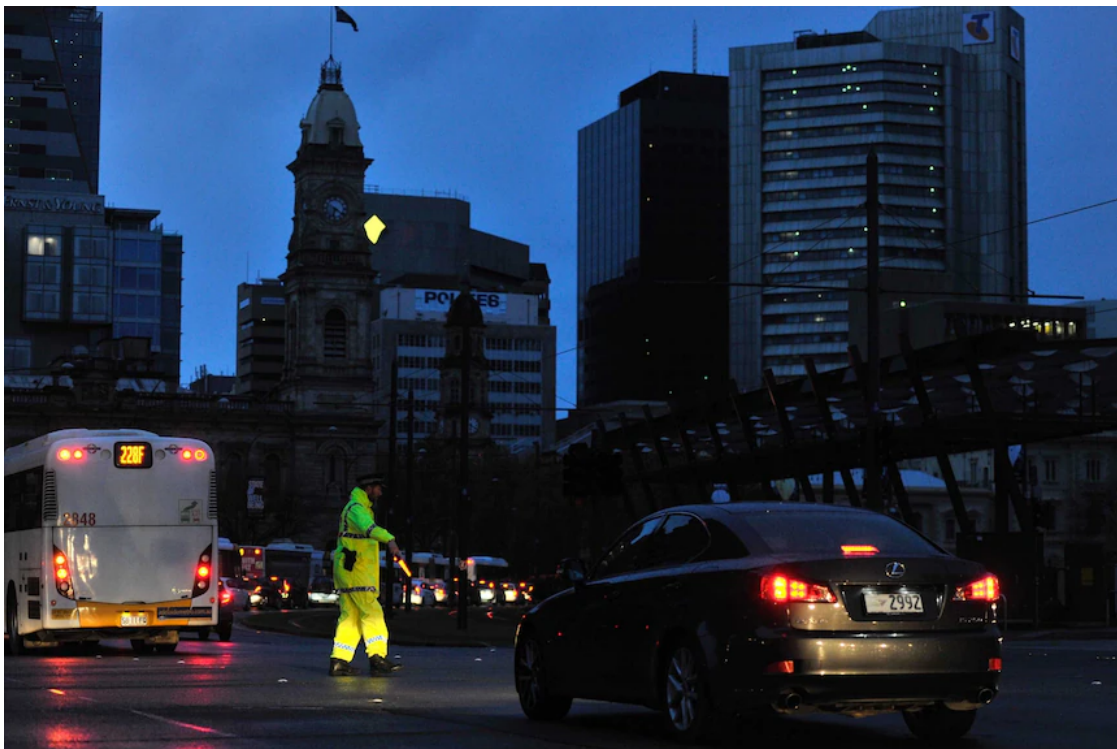
"It's going to take much longer for us to recover from this one than it did the statewide blackout, [when] most people were back on in the evening and overnight that day," he explained.



A caravan was spotted floating down the flooded Currency Creek in South Australia.

"We're really having to rebuild many parts of the network which have been damaged by big trees that have fallen on lines, all sorts of damage, which requires rebuilding — not just reconnecting supply.

"The statewide blackout was essentially reorganising supply ... whereas this is actually about rebuilding the network."



In 2016, police had to direct traffic around Adelaide's CBD after power to streetlights was cut. (AAP: David Mariuz)

Intense weather triggers cuts

Both the statewide blackout and the latest power cuts were precipitated by intense weather.

A staggering 423,000 lightning strikes occurred in 18 hours on Saturday, while the State Emergency Service has received about 2,000 calls for assistance in the past couple of days.

"The sheer amount of calls that we receive in such a short period of time [means] it will take time for our crews to get around and attend those tasks," state duty officer Brenton Clarke said.



Time-lapse video shows dark clouds building over coastal Adelaide.

Wind gusts in excess of 100 kilometres per hour were recorded at several locations, the Bureau of Meteorology said.

"We've had to go and check 500 reports of wires down — that's a massive number, I don't recall that number before in a storm," Mr Roberts added.

Six years ago, [twin tornados ripped through SA's Mid North, damaging critical infrastructure](#).

More than 20 giant pylons were knocked down, crumpling over in the fields in which they stood.

One of several collapsed electricity pylons near Melrose in 2016. (*ABC News: Tom Fedorowytch*)

In a striking similarity to that event, a giant pylon at Tailem Bend that is part of the interconnector between SA and Victoria was knocked over during Saturday's storm.

But SA Power Networks said that was a "quite separate" issue to the ongoing blackouts.

"What we're dealing with is ... the damage that has been caused, to the electricity distribution network that runs down streets, runs through suburbs, the Stobie poles and wires," Mr Roberts said.

"The interconnector is the transmission network operated by ElectraNet, not SA Power Networks, and that situation there is that they have lost a tower on the interconnector at Tailem Bend which means there is no supply coming from interstate."

Energy Minister Tom Koutsantonis said South Australia was currently now isolated from the rest of the national grid.

"We are now islanded for the fifth time since the statewide blackout," he said.

A flooded street in Victor Harbour on Saturday, after wild storms hit the state. (ABC News: Caroline Horn)

ElectraNet said its crews were inspecting transmission lines in the "path of the storms" but confirmed that customer supply "as a result of the damaged tower at Taillem Bend has not been impacted".

"We are developing a plan to safely make the required repairs," it said.

"Until the damaged tower is repaired, power flows to and from [Victoria] are constrained to zero."

Economic hit to be determined

An early estimate of the economic impact of the 2016 blackout concluded that the [blackout cost businesses more than \\$360 million](#).

While it is much too early to count the full cost of Saturday's storms, the damage bill is expected to go well into the millions.



Heavy rainfall caused extensive damage to homes and businesses.

"The most important cost is going to be to businesses and homes who have lost food and stock," Mr Koutsantonis said.

"Then of course there's the rebuilding costs of all the damage — now that's still being tallied, [but] that will be in the millions.

"A lot of these businesses will have insurance so we'll wait and see what happens once all the insurance claims are lodged, and make sure that they're paid out."

But Mr Roberts added that, in addition to lodging insurance claims, some people might receive automatic compensation payments.

"There's also a scheme in place in South Australia called the guaranteed service level scheme and, with that scheme, people are paid for the inconvenience of long duration outages and the payments sort of stretched depending on the length of the outages," he said.

A large tree on a road at Somerton Park. (*ABC News: Emma Sleath*)

"People don't need to apply for them, they're automatically credited to people's retailer to their account, later in the year, that will happen automatically.

"My guess is that many people, in fact, most people will be getting at least \$200 to \$300 in payment for that inconvenience."