

## Cyclones and the Northern Territory

### Cyclones in Northern Australia

Although many people will recall the destruction wrought by Cyclone Tracy in December 1974, this was not the first time that Darwin had felt the full force of a cyclone.

Cyclones (also known as 'hurricanes' or 'typhoons' in the northern hemisphere) are areas of low atmospheric pressure surrounded by high wind systems which rotate in a clockwise direction. They are graded, according to their severity and wind velocity, on a scale of one to five (the latter being the most severe). Cyclone Tracy was a category four cyclone.

The cyclone season in Northern Australia begins on 1 November and extends until April. During this time many cyclones will form, though few will cause much destruction. Darwin and the north of Australia have felt the force of a cyclone on a number of occasions – the worst being in 1897, 1937 and 1974.

The practice of naming cyclones began in 1964. The original custom was that only female names were used; the use of male names did not begin until 1975.

The Bureau of Meteorology monitors the development and movement of cyclones across the north of Australia and issues warnings accordingly. The Bureau has cyclone warning centres in Darwin, Brisbane and Perth.

### Records relating to cyclones

Most offices of the National Archives hold records relating to cyclones. With few exceptions records become available for public use once they enter the open access period.

### Records held in Darwin

The tables below include details of the major records held relating to cyclones. These records are held in our Darwin Office.

## Cyclones generally

Series E490, listed below, includes photographs, tracking maps, synoptic reports, written summaries, watch and warning messages, post-cyclone reports, damage reports and press clippings relating to cyclones. The series began in 1956, but the Bureau of Meteorology has collected material relating to earlier cyclones extending as far back as 1839. Samples of records from this series are included in the table.

### Bureau of Meteorology, Regional Office, Northern Territory (CA 2351)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Case history material for tropical cyclones</u>	1956	E490
<u>Tropical cyclone case history – cyclone tracks 1923–62, Northern Territory and Western Australia</u>	1923–62	E490, cyclone tracks 1923–1962
<u>Tracks of cyclones in the Northern Territory and Kimberley areas for 1962/63 to 1970/71 seasons</u>	1962–71	E490, cyclone tracks 1963–1971
<u>Tropical cyclone Flora, 1–5 December 1964</u>	1964	E490, flora 1964

## Cyclones specifically

The records listed below refer to particular cyclones that have caused damage to Darwin.

### Correspondence files

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Cyclone at Darwin – report of damage done</u>	1915	A3, NT1915/1942
<u>Cyclone at Darwin, March 1937 – repairs to government properties</u>	1937	A1, 1937/4701
<u>Cyclone, March 1937 – assistance</u>	1937	F1, 1937/296

## Cyclone Tracy, 1974

Commonwealth records become publicly available when they enter the [open access period](#). Therefore, most records held by the National Archives about Cyclone Tracy (including records of agencies such as the Natural Disasters Organisation and the Darwin Reconstruction Commission) can be accessed. Please see *Fact sheet 176 – Cyclone Tracy Darwin* for more information.

Other available records include weather-related information of the Bureau of Meteorology, news reports and program material of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the official reports of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission.