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Deluge cuts off Exmouth

Unexpected and sudden flood waters took the northwest town of Exmouth by surprise during the ANZAC Day long weekend, with two people needing rescue from their vehicles by local State Emergency Service (SES).

On Saturday 26 April the main route into Exmouth, Minilya-Exmouth Road, was transformed into a river, with over 200 millimetres of rain falling on the town and nearby Cape Range National Park. At several floodways the water was reportedly up to two metres deep.

West Pilbara District Officer Paul Leiper said after little rain in the last eight months, a string of thunderstorms hit the town and by 4pm the main road into Exmouth was cut off, leaving some residents and tourists stranded.

“Unfortunately many drivers take their lives into their hands and try and cross the flooded waters, which in most cases is not safe,” Paul said.

“They are unpredictable and it is very hard to tell what the currents and the depths are like.

“Fortunately the SES were quick to respond to the incident and were able to rescue those in need of help.”

Russell Levine of Exmouth SES who was involved in rescuing a driver, said with the heavy rainfall people couldn’t get from one side of the town to the other.

“The water accumulates in the ranges on the west and travels down the gullies into Exmouth town. The flood water then rushes through town and floods everything,” Russell said.

“We had to firstly get to the rescue site some hundred metres downstream, secure ourselves, gain access to the vehicle, get the driver off the truck and bring him back safely to the bank.

Aside from the drivers stranded in their vehicles in the floodwaters, emergency services received several other calls including one from a nursing home where help was required with sandbagging.

While no one was hurt, the deluge resulted in some damage to homes and businesses, and caused part of the main road to collapse.

Exmouth is also a very popular tourist destination and tourists camping in nearby Cape Range National Park were evacuated and housed temporarily in Exmouth, as the park was affected by the flood and caravans were washed away. The park had to be closed and assessed for damage after the incident.

Minilya-Exmouth Road from the Burkett Road turnoff remained closed until Monday 28 April due to extremely high levels of water and debris.

DFES staff and SES also worked together with the Shire of Exmouth, WA Police, Australian Federal Police, Horizon Power, Department of Parks and Wildlife, Main Roads and the community themselves to quickly recover from the flooding event.

This was especially important as subsequent significant rainfall was forecast for the area only five days after the original event. Thankfully this did not occur to the full extent of the forecast and the town was able to resume some normality in the following days.