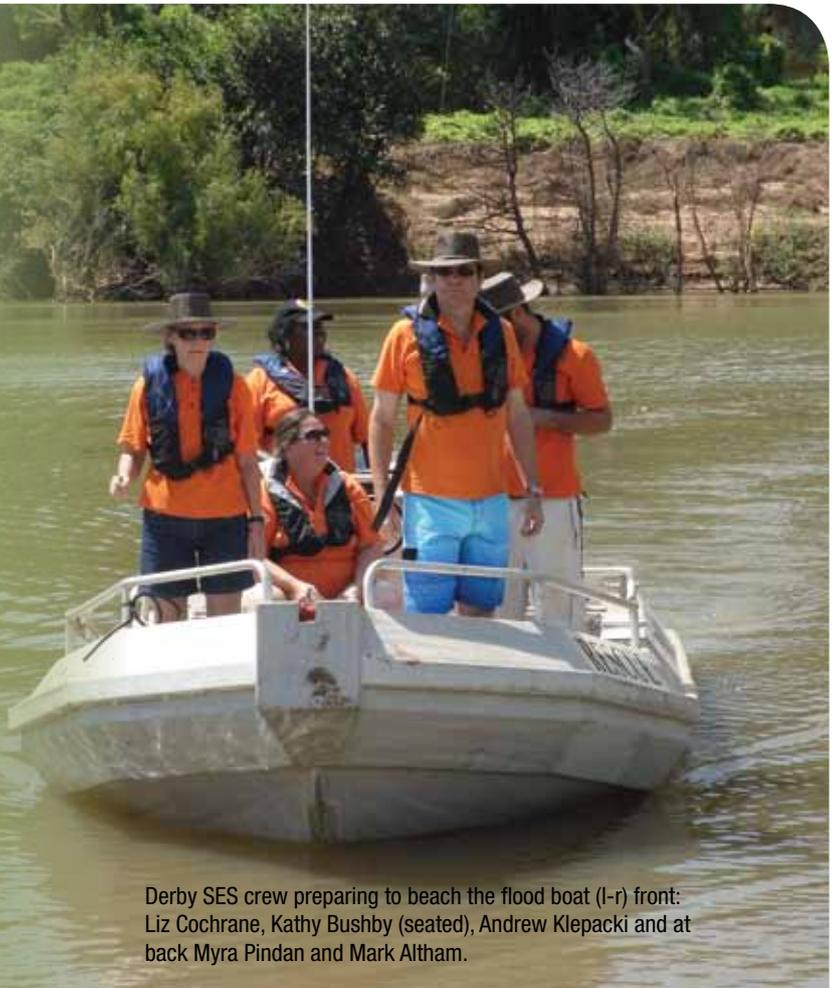


Training to have flow on effects

The Fitzroy River in the Kimberley provides Derby's State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers with a challenging location for their flood boat training.



Derby SES crew preparing to beach the flood boat (l-r) front: Liz Cochrane, Kathy Bushby (seated), Andrew Klepacki and at back Myra Pindan and Mark Altham.

Unit members recently tested their skills on the river to ensure they continue to be prepared for natural disasters and emergencies that could impact local communities.

The training location was the picturesque Geikie Gorge about 20 kilometres outside of Fitzroy Crossing.

Central Kimberley District Manager Matt Reimer travelled with five Derby SES volunteers and their flood boat in April to further develop their skills.

"It's a beautiful place, especially during the wet season when the Fitzroy River rushes through the 30 metre deep gorge with its ancient limestone cliffs," Matt said.

"The river is unpredictable and in the drier months can be reduced to a slow moving stream, whereas in the wet season, heavy rains can see it rise over 16 metres and become fast flowing.

"These extremes provide valuable opportunities for the Derby volunteers to conduct important flood boat operator training for incidents like people slipping off the banks or coming to grief when boating on the water."

All five volunteers are already qualified as flood boat operators, having completed the course last year, but this provided the chance for them to put their training into practice.

"With recent rains in the Fitzroy Catchment it was a good opportunity to gain some valuable practice in an area where the volunteers may be called on in a real emergency situation," Matt said.

"Crews conducted people overboard drills, and manoeuvring into rocks and trees to simulate picking up stranded people.

"This built on their training where they learnt how to handle the boat in flood conditions, how to guide the driver through hazards, and how to help people caught in flood waters."

Matt said it was not just the water that needed to be monitored by the volunteers during flood events, but also debris or other hazards littering the river.

"In this part of the State our volunteers have to deal with the obvious weather hazards of storms, cyclones, flooding and wind that impact the region," he said.

"There are also many living hazards such as crocodiles and snakes that can be encountered during a rescue and must be planned for."

With the fit for purpose Scorpion flood boat, Derby volunteers have a vessel that is well suited to the task at hand with its 100 litre fuel capacity and two outboard motors.

"This configuration allows for extended operational periods and gives the volunteers the comfort of having an extra motor in case one fails or is damaged," Matt said.

"This built on their training where they learnt how to handle the boat in flood conditions, how to guide the driver through hazards and how to help people caught in flood waters."