



Fire and Emergency
Services Commissioner
Darren Klemm AFSM

Commissioner's Foreword

This past year we have faced some of the most destructive emergency events seen in Western Australia. We responded to over 26,000 incidents with bushfires, cyclones and floods impacting communities across the State. The Wooroloo bushfire in February and the crossing of Tropical Cyclone Seroja in April, both significantly complex emergency management events, presented additional challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. I am proud of our preparation and response that showed our capability in protecting and supporting our community before, during and after an emergency.

In February, as parts of the State entered a week-long lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 a large fast-moving bushfire started near Wooroloo, quickly endangering lives and homes. Hundreds of our firefighting personnel were joined by volunteers from other services and external agencies to provide logistical, transport, catering and other support to us and the affected community. Everyone worked together to battle the blaze with the added challenges of working under COVID-19 restrictions. We shared the community's devastation as the loss of 86 properties was confirmed in the aftermath.

The scale of the Wooroloo bushfire and the potential for broad impact to properties and infrastructure meant increased aerial support was required. We used a Large Air Tanker (LAT) that was based in WA for the bushfire season, as well as two additional LATs that we requested from the eastern states. Extensive retardant lines laid by the LATs

succeeded in halting the fire, saving hundreds of homes and lives.

In April, we monitored the tracks of multiple tropical lows off the WA coast and began preparing for the unusual weather event that would test the resilience of multiple communities in our Midwest Gascoyne region. Tropical Cyclone Seroja crossed the midwest coast as a category 3 cyclone and bore down on multiple townsites, bringing destructive winds and heavy rains. The trail of destruction spanned over 130,000 square kilometres with more than 1,000 properties damaged.

In what was an outstanding collaborative effort, our State Emergency Service were supported by emergency services personnel from across the state and the country. The Australian Defence Force provided crucial logistical support, while DFES Urban Search and Rescue Task Force (USAR) personnel completed over 3,200 damage assessments as external agencies worked to restore communications, power and water to the region. Once again COVID-19 presented additional challenges as we ensured that personnel responding from interstate and areas that were in lockdown could provide the necessary emergency response while still adhering to the COVID directives in place.

Through the pandemic, our people worked tirelessly alongside other emergency services responders, health providers and others in the WA Public Sector to support the response efforts. Multiple staff have been seconded to support operations in the State

Health Incident Control Centre and USAR officers have been deployed to provide logistical support across the State, nationally and internationally through the Western Australian Medical Assistance Teams and Australian Medical Assistance Teams.

Through the Emergency Services Levy and support of the State Government we are delivering the resources, facilities and assets needed to protect the community where they are needed most. This year the operational fleet has been boosted with 55 new emergency services vehicles delivered to stations, in pre-delivery preparation or going through the First of Type process. New facilities have been built across the state from the Broome Bush Fire Brigade in the north to the Australind SES facility and Esperance Emergency Support Unit in the south, with many more in between including Kensington and Cockburn career fire stations. Additional refurbishment and restoration projects are complete or underway.

The new Bushfire Centre of Excellence facility, the first of its kind in Australia was officially opened in January. Located in Nambeelup, the education hub is the primary vehicle for DFES to share information about bushfire management in Western Australia. More than 50 bushfire training courses are delivered every year to better equip our people with the bushfire skills they need to protect the community.

The Bushfire Risk Management program continues to show great success with 77 Local Governments having commenced or completed their plan. This year over \$8.9 million has been allocated through the Mitigation Activity Fund grants for Local Governments to undertake 1,271 bushfire mitigation treatments to help reduce the State's bushfire risk. An additional \$4.5 million has contributed to mitigation works on Unallocated Crown Land and Unmanaged Reserves.

The health and wellbeing of all DFES staff and volunteers is at the forefront of everything we do. Following a period of extensive consultation with volunteers and staff, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan has been developed and launched to provide additional programs for our people to access the support they need to ensure they are thriving in the workplace.

We launched My Bushfire Plan in December 2020 to empower the community with a simple way to create a personalised and robust bushfire plan and update it any time online. People can download the app and have their bushfire plan in the palm of their hand or complete their plan through the



Commissioner Darren Klemm at a Seroja press conference in Kalbarri

website. My Bushfire Plan also includes factsheets and checklists to understand the risks of bushfire so they can make informed decisions to protect themselves and their property.

In closing out another year, I would like to thank all emergency services volunteers and staff for your outstanding commitment to serving the Western Australian community.

Darren Klemm AFSM
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