

State Recovery Controller Communique # 13

It's been heartening to hear about the initiatives both big and small that local governments are working on as part of their Local Operational Recovery Plans. There is a focus on strengthening resilience locally and building on the sense of community, as well as implementing practical solutions that will make a real difference in the event of a future natural disaster.

Recently, recovery specialists from 11 government and partner agencies visited Kalbarri, Geraldton and Northampton as part of the touring Recovery Support Sessions. These sessions provided community members the opportunity to chat about the specifics of their recovery needs face-to-face with experts. While some people attended to follow up on recovery matters already underway, quite a few people, especially of those who attended the Geraldton session, were reaching out about their circumstances for the first time. I've heard that many people were walking in feeling overwhelmed and burdened with their situation, and after talking to the experts and receiving helpful advice and information, they were walking out feeling like a weight had lifted off their shoulders.

The Cyclone Seroja State Recovery Coordination Group convened meeting number 21 on the 9 June 2022. Here is a snapshot of the recovery issues and programs discussed.

- ❖ **Community Welfare and Outreach Program*** – In addition to the current service providers engaged as part of the welfare program, there is a focus on increasing mental health support in the Mid West region to meet demand. This is being done in collaboration with the peak bodies for Mental Health. Youth services in Morawa and Mullewa are also a key area of focus. Targeted outreach is being undertaken by the Department of Communities and Red Cross in Northampton and Kalbarri to check on vulnerable community members who were affected by the cyclone and are requiring ongoing support.
- ❖ **Insurance** – The Insurance Council of Australia reported that up to May this year \$357.94 million worth of claims have been incurred, sitting at 81 per cent closure rate. There are currently 1781 claims that remain open. The labour and building supply shortages are chronic issues across all of Australia and continue to impact the progress of insurance repairs and rebuilds.
- ❖ **Heritage and Cultural Asset Assistance*** – The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage continue to support owners of cyclone impacted heritage and cultural assets. The agency is providing a service to owners where architects and/or engineers assess the scope of works required and provide heritage advice, as well as administering the Heritage and Cultural Asset Recovery Grants.
- ❖ **Primary Producer Assistance*** – To date, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development have disbursed over \$1.16 million in financial support to cyclone impacted primary producers. The two programs, Measures to Assist Primary Producers, and the Primary Producer Grant, remain open until March 2023 to provide recovery support to primary producers.

- ❖ **Small Business Assistance*** – Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) have extended the closing date of the Small Business Recovery Grant to 31 March 2023. Applicants who have started an application were contacted to advise of the extension and offered assistance with finalising their submission. Additionally, many Kalbarri based small business operators recently took the opportunity to meet with a SBDC's Business Local advisor for one-to-one advice and information.
- ❖ **Insured Residents Assistance*** – The Recovery and Resilience Grants Program has received 362 applications from insured residents. Most applicants are still working with their insurers and waiting for either repair works to be undertaken, or the installation of cyclone rated building upgrades. These activities need to be underway or completed for the applicant to submit the evidence required and receive a reimbursement grant. The slow rebuild progress is due to the national labour and supply shortage.
- ❖ **Uninsured Residents Assistance*** – There are over 20 eligible uninsured residents who have sought help with removing hazardous debris and make-safe works on their damaged property. The majority of properties are in Kalbarri and Northampton and State Recovery staff have met with the owners onsite to go through the scope of works. A panel of contractors has been appointed and it is estimated works will commence soon.
- ❖ **Evaluation and Monitoring** – A number of interviews, workshops and surveys will be undertaken in the next few months to gather information about the recovery programs implemented to support local governments and their communities. Participants will include grant recipients, local government representatives and State agency staff. The purpose is to capture data from the perspective of each key stakeholder to inform State Recovery on what is working well and what could be done better. Evaluation is an important element of recovery work and provides invaluable information for the improvement of existing and future recovery programs.
- ❖ **Public Information** – There has been a focus on direct mail channels to target residents who are not actively seeking recovery information. Two pieces will soon be distributed to residents within the 16 affected local government areas. One is a letter from the State Recovery Controller advising the type of help available and the other is a flyer inserted in the rates notices. The objective of both pieces is to make people aware of the help available and encourage them to make contact to find out more in relation to their situation.

For all the latest State Recovery information please visit emergency.wa.gov.au/recovery or join the **DFES Cyclone Seroja Recovery Facebook Group**.

Deputy Commissioner Melissa Pexton – Cyclone Seroja State Recovery Controller

**Funded through the Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements*