

WOOROLOO BUSHFIRE RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

JULY 2021

THE STATE RECOVERY COORDINATION GROUP HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED TO COORDINATE EFFORTS TO HELP ALL RESIDENTS AFFECTED BY THE WOOROLOO BUSHFIRE OF FEBRUARY 2021.

Led by State Recovery Controller Dr Ron Edwards and supported by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the group includes representatives from State Government departments, the City of Swan, the Shire of Mundaring, and not-for-profit groups. The intent of the group is to work together to support fire-affected residents through the recovery process.

Eighty-six homes in the City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring were destroyed in the fire and many more properties were damaged, while essential services were disrupted and social networks affected, leaving many people in need of support.

The recovery effort includes the physical clean-up of fire-impacted properties and the removal of rubble, the provision of emergency and ongoing accommodation to residents who have lost their homes and possessions, and the directing of financial relief. It also involves connecting people with other services to help with their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing in the months ahead.

All levels of government, not-for-profit groups and the Western Australian community have committed considerable resources to the clean-up and rebuilding effort. The State Recovery Coordination Group will ensure these resources are well-utilised and affected residents get what they need to start the long recovery process.

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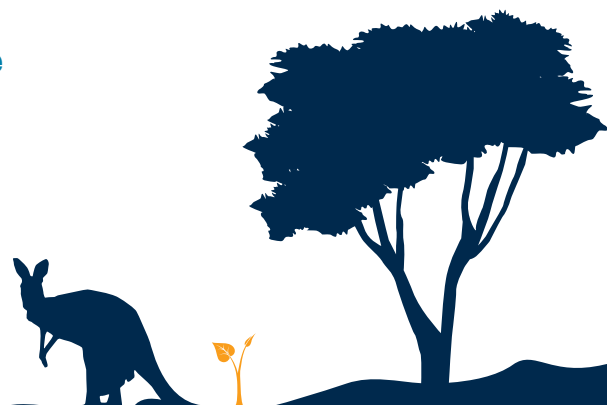


To find out how you can access support services, please visit the City of Swan, the Shire of Mundaring, or call the Disaster Response Hotline on 1800 032 965.

If you have any feedback or content ideas please contact wooroloo@dfes.wa.gov.au



FOR A SAFER STATE





MESSAGE FROM THE STATE RECOVERY CONTROLLER, DR RON EDWARDS

Right across the Western Australian community, the response to the Wooroloo bushfire disaster has been rapid, whole-hearted and inspiring.

We have seen government agencies at all levels, not-for-profit groups and local volunteers come together to deal with losses in the immediate aftermath of the fire, and to collaborate effectively in the important recovery efforts. We have also seen people from across the community digging deep and donating generously.

Rebuilding lives and assets will be a long, tough journey for those affected. I know Western Australians are resilient, but people who have lost so much will need all the support they can get.

My message to people in the Wooroloo and Gidgegannup communities is that you are not alone. The people of Western Australia will be with you all the way.

The City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring have already put in a lot of hard work to help these communities get back on their feet and this process will continue for as long as there is a need.

As State Recovery Controller, I am committed to ensuring a cooperative, whole-of-government response, working with State and local agencies to ease the burden on those impacted by the bushfire.

I want to reinforce that the recovery is community-led. We are here to help any way we can, but we will be guided by what people need at each step of the process.

I would like to thank Western Australians for their generosity towards those affected by the Wooroloo bushfire and commend everyone involved in the recovery for their efforts so far.

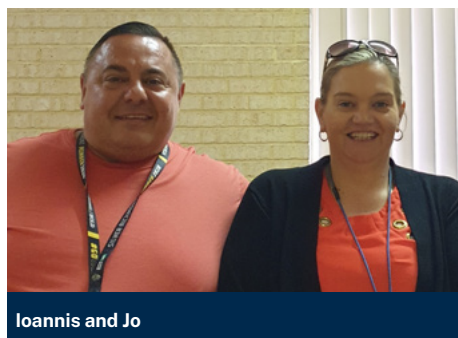


ON THE GROUND SUPPORT

The Department of Communities (DoC) Bushfire Recovery team have been on the ground in Gidgegannup from the early days of the Wooroloo bushfire's aftermath.

Immediately following the fire, many affected people found themselves with limited options and were either living rough on their properties or staying with friends or family while waiting for emergency accommodation and relief money to become available.

The small team of DoC Liaison Officers were stationed at the Bushfire Recovery Centre at Percy Cullen Oval in Gidgegannup to provide a point of contact for people seeking to access services or simply in need of a chat and some moral support.



DoC Community Resilience Liaison Officer Ioannis Dimopoulos said their team worked with people right from the start to get them back on their feet. His fellow Liaison Officer Jo Reimers spent the early part of the recovery process visiting each affected property with Department of Water and Environmental Regulation staff and representatives from GHD, the company contracted to manage the residential clean-up program.

Jo said this was a critical part of the process of meeting those affected by the fire and building relationships. "I was able to let people know about the services available to them, including financial support and temporary on-site accommodation options," Jo said.

The third member of the DoC team, Bushfire Recovery Coordinator Steph Williams, spent time in the recovery centre working directly with bushfire-impacted people, as well as representing the department at a planning level to manage the recovery effort.

The team have been working closely with the City of Swan, the Shire of Mundaring, not-for-profit organisations, charities and volunteers to link people to the goods and services they need, including for their psychological wellbeing. "We aim to get the message out that we are here to help people who need different types of welfare services," Ioannis said. "Our work has been all about establishing a rapport with people and building relationships so people are comfortable with us if they need to talk about delicate issues."

The team are still on site five days a week at the City of Swan's Gidgegannup office on Toodyay Road and one day a week at the Wooroloo Hall to maintain contact with the affected communities and make it convenient for people to contact them. They are also available to answer any queries via recovery@communities.wa.gov.au



A COMPLEX CLEAN-UP

The complex work of clearing rubble and debris from the sites of bushfire damaged and destroyed homes is continuing, providing the safe removal of waste to enable community members to rebuild on residential blocks.

There are 137 properties registered for the Wooroloo Bushfire Coordinated Residential Clean-up Program, which is overseen by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER), in collaboration with the City of Swan, the Shire of Mundaring and Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES).

Three contracts have been awarded to carry out the works. Environmental contractor GHD is managing the site planning meetings and environmental testing processes, while McMahon Services have been engaged for the demolition and debris removal, and asbestos removal specialists Thuroona Services will focus on removing asbestos-containing materials.

DWER's Director Operations, Compliance and Enforcement Shaun Hodges said each property poses unique logistical clean-up challenges. "Properties with asbestos, those waiting for temporary on-site accommodation and those in low-lying areas have been given priority for clean-up," Shaun said. "The road to recovery is a long process and the clean-up program partners appreciate

the ongoing patience and support of affected residents."

Residents whose homes have been destroyed or damaged are eligible for this program whether or not they are insured.

Experience from previous significant bushfires has shown a State-led residential clean-up program delivers better outcomes for affected residents, including reduced risk of cross-site hazardous waste contamination and residential blocks being restored in a coordinated and effective way.

The clean-up program is jointly funded through the Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, and forms part of a broader \$18.1 million community recovery package.

Registered residents seeking information about site planning meetings or the works schedule for their properties can contact 1800 328 997.

[Weekly progress updates, facts sheets and FAQs are published at: wa.gov.au/woorloobushfirecleanup](https://www.wa.gov.au/woorloobushfirecleanup)

OPERATION WOODS

Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) unites the skills and experience of military veterans with emergency service specialists to rapidly deploy disaster relief teams in Australia and around the world the wake of natural disasters. DRA conducted bushfire recovery operations, named Operation Woods, in the Perth Hills around the City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring. Commencing on the 24 February 2021 and continuing over eight weeks until the 24 April 2021, Operation Woods was DRA's first major operation in Western Australia and DRA's largest operation to date with 219 volunteers deployed from every State and Territory across Australia. They contributed a total of 11,064 volunteer hours, completing 103 work orders and achieving cost savings of \$545,497 to the community.

DRA collaborated closely with the State Recovery team and attended meetings of the State Recovery Coordination Group Partnership Forum. State Recovery Controller

Ron Edwards said the contribution provided by DRA was invaluable. "The DRA volunteers generously gave up their own time to help community members in need," Dr Edwards said. "In the aftermath of this devastating bushfire, they were there on the ground to help people take their first steps towards recovery."

Bec Talbot, who grew up in the Perth Hills, was a dedicated first-time volunteer with DRA for the Wooroloo bushfire recovery. She spent a week on the ground with the DRA Strike Teams and enjoyed the sense of accomplishment and camaraderie from their work.

"Throughout the week we helped dozens of homeowners," Bec said. "For some we were felling burnt and dangerous trees to help them regain access to their property, for others we were rolling up damaged fences. We cleared house and shed debris, and we sifted ashes to search for jewellery, war medals and treasures. "Regardless of the job we did, the same feeling was felt by the Strike Teams: to be able to help these residents through their time of crisis and devastation was such a privilege."

**Content sourced from an original article by DRA's Wayne O'Brien.*



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Western Australian Government responded quickly in the wake of the Wooroloo bushfire, announcing an immediate allocation of \$2 million to the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund – Wooroloo Appeal. Overall the fund raised more than \$16.7 million, with people affected by the bushfire able to apply directly for assistance.

The WA Government also made available emergency Bushfire Relief Payments of \$4,000 to residents who lost their home and \$2,000 to people whose home was damaged, with this money distributed through the City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring.

The Wooroloo Bushfire was proclaimed an eligible disaster under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Western Australia (DRFAWA) in February 2021. The DRFAWA is a joint Commonwealth and State Government arrangement that provides financial assistance to residents and the two local governments who have been directly impacted by the bushfire.

The emergency assistance available to individuals and families is managed

by the Department of Communities and local governments. It includes financial assistance for things such as emergency food, clothing or temporary accommodation. Other personal hardship assistance is also available for replacement of essential household contents and housing repairs, subject to certain eligibility criteria including means testing.

Significantly, under the DRFAWA a Community Recovery Package worth \$18.1 million was announced on 25 February 2021 to support impacted individuals and communities. The package covers:

- the coordinated residential clean-up program, providing safe removal of bushfire damaged waste to enable rebuilding
- a community recovery and outreach program, including services and initiatives such as the Bushfire Recovery Centre, emotional support services, and community-driven recovery projects
- a community recreational asset restoration program, assisting with the clean-up and repair of community and recreational assets (for example, walking trails, footpaths, picnic furniture and toilets).

In addition, the WA Government authorised extra power outage payments for those affected by the Wooroloo bushfire and many State Government agencies and the affected local governments have also waived fees and charges associated with some reconnections and approvals.

To determine if you are eligible and how to apply for the financial assistance provided by the State please visit:

USEFUL LINKS

City of Swan

swan.wa.gov.au/Your-Services/Emergency-management/Fire/Wooroloo-Bushfire-Recovery-dashboard/Financial-support

Shire of Mundaring

mundaring.wa.gov.au/Wooroloo-Fire/Pages/Financial-Assistance.aspx

Department of Fire and Emergency Services

emergency.wa.gov.au/recovery

dfes.wa.gov.au/recovery/Pages/Individuals-and-Families.aspx



A LESSON IN RECOVERY

The Wooroloo bushfire caused major disruption across the region, but thanks to the coordinated efforts of multiple agencies the impact on schools and on the education of students was minimal.

At the height of the emergency on 2 February, there were as many as 15 schools impacted. However, the strong relationship between the Department of Education and DFES enabled a swift flow of information between agencies. This allowed the Department of Education to make

decisions that would assist the wellbeing of staff, students and their families at the schools in the bushfire emergency area.

The Deputy Director General Student Achievement Jim Bell said the Department of Education mapped the location of staff and students living in the bushfire zone whose homes may have been affected and put supports in place to assist those families should they need it. Twelve students in the affected area were identified as possibly requiring significant support.

“We committed that every student who was impacted by the bushfire would be provided with anything they needed to attend school the following week. This included clothing, shoes, backpacks, stationery, lunch boxes and water bottles,” Mr Bell said.

The Department worked closely across sectors to ensure affected students and staff at private and independent schools were also looked after.

With the Department of Communities opening evacuation centres in the area, school psychologists provided support in the centres after hours and throughout the weekend from Thursday 4 to Sunday 7 February, and pastoral critical incident response chaplains were also available.

A bushfire recovery kit was developed for school psychologists to use within the schools to assist students, and short and long term supports for the recovery of impacted school communities were established.

As the bushfire coincided with the COVID-19 lockdown in the Perth and Peel regions, schools were fortunately closed during the emergency period. As soon as the warning for the bushfire was downgraded to an Advice, the Department of Education team worked with the Department of Finance staff to inspect and clean each of the schools where necessary to make them ready for students and teachers when schools reopened the following week.