

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND STATE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

### **Recommendation 1:**

*I recommend the DFES immediately take steps to create and fill the additional positions of a District Officer, Area Officer (Rural Competencies) and Bushfire Risk Management Officer to supplement the current Area Officer in Esperance. If these changes require additional funding, I recommend that the Honourable Minister for Emergency Services give priority to considering how funding can be allocated for these additional positions and then arranging for that funding to be made available.*

### **Supported In Principle**

The State Government accepts that emergency management staffing needs are continually evolving in regional WA. The State Government accepts that additional emergency management staffing may be required including in the Esperance region.

DFES has employed a Community Emergency Services Manager for the Shire of Esperance, and as an interim measure, seconded a Natural Hazards District Officer from the Kalgoorlie office to the Esperance office.

DFES is developing a risk to capability model which, when applied across the State will assist in prioritising resources to optimise operational service delivery. If required, DFES may then seek to secure additional permanent regional staff to support emergency management in the Esperance region.

### **Recommendation 2:**

*I recommend that DFES commence planning and fund allocation for a Career Fire and Rescue Service Station to service the Esperance – Ravensthorpe Community all year round, and to respond quickly to provide support to the local volunteer Bush Fire Brigades in the event of a bushfire. If that change requires additional funding, I recommend that the Honourable Minister for Emergency Services give priority to considering how funding can be allocated for the creation and staffing of such a station and then arranging for that funding to be made available.*

### **Not Supported**

The State Government does not support a Career Fire and Rescue Service Station to service the Esperance-Ravensthorpe community.

The State Government has instead prioritised bushfire prevention and allocated significant funding to bushfire risk mitigation in the region, to help mitigate against the threat of catastrophic bushfire.

DFES' Resource to Risk modelling does not support the establishment of a Career Fire and Rescue Station in the Esperance region. New Career Fire and Rescue Stations are recommended according to comprehensive risk modelling and finite resources available. The Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner has the statutory authority and appropriate operational expertise to recommend new fires stations based on need. Any departure from current practice will compromise the operational needs of the Department and deliver suboptimal outcomes to the wider community by redirecting funding from higher operational priorities.

**Recommendation 3:**

*DFES adopt a policy by which: (i) any authorisation under s13 which is initiated verbally be made in writing (as required by the Act) as soon as practicable; (ii) a copy of the written authorisation be given to the local government or DPaW as soon as practicable; and (iii) the fact of any authorisation, once completed, be (where possible) communicated to those in the ICV and on the fireground as soon as practicable.*

**Supported**

DFES has updated Incident Controller procedures to ensure local governments are notified in writing of Section 13 authorisations and/or handovers between DFES, DBCA (previously DPaW) and the respective local governments.

DFES has developed training materials to improve understanding of legislative authorisations and handover processes. Updated resources, such as guides, checklists and templates are currently being rolled out to in preparation for the 2020/2021 southern fire season.

An Incident Control Vehicle Reference Group is being established to define and improve standards of incident communications, resource management and information management during operations.

**Recommendation 4:**

*The State Government give consideration to giving a higher drafting priority to the Consolidated Emergency Services Act.*

**Supported**

Cabinet has approved the drafting of an Exposure Draft Bill. Parliamentary Counsel's Office will draft the legislation in accordance with Government priorities.

The proposed legislation will amalgamate and modernise current emergency services legislation, and clarify responsibilities for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

The McGowan State Government, if re-elected, will review a higher drafting priority to the new amalgamated emergency services legislation.

**Recommendation 5:**

*DFES fund an additional two light tanker appliances and one heavy duty appliance to be used by the Esperance Volunteer Bushfire Brigades, at their discretion. The appliances should be provided on a permanent basis, as the Brigades need to be able to learn how to use the appliances and train on them, and the fire seasons are becoming extended and unpredictable.*

**Supported in Principle**

The State Government supports the availability of additional firefighting resources in regional WA, including the Esperance region.

DFES is committed to undertaking a review and potential expansion of the summer season firefighting fleet allocation across the south west land division (SWLD) based on a risk to capability assessment.

**Recommendation 6:**

*The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions allocate funding to the Esperance District Regional Office to purchase an item of earth moving equipment suitable for fire mitigation works, as well as for use during a fire, together with 1.0 FTE position for an operator of the machinery, on a permanent basis. If there is insufficient funding within the Department, I recommend the Honourable Minister for Environment support an increase of funding for the Department to allow this recommendation to be fulfilled.*

**Not Supported**

DBCA has adequate access to heavy plant machinery and operators available from within its existing resource base across the south west and from local contractors. These resources assist DBCA to meet its obligations for bushfire mitigation and response on lands for which it has legislated management responsibility, and to meet its bushfire mitigation responsibilities on unallocated Crown land (UCL) and unmanaged reserves (UMR) outside town sites as required by a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage (DPLH).

Local government and DFES are responsible for developing and implementing rapid, effective, and complementary fire response arrangements for UCL and UMR. DBCA's existing arrangements to utilise contract machinery for bushfire response on lands for which it has legislated management responsibility provides a more flexible response capacity than acquiring one additional item of earthmoving equipment.

**Recommendation 7:**

*The South-East Fire Working Group's final plan for a long-term fire mitigation strategy be fully supported and funded by DFES and the State Government. I suggest that at a minimum, the funding should cover a period of ten years to allow for the creation of firebreaks and strategic fire exit tracks on the vast area of UCL in the Esperance region, with a view to then formalising ongoing funding for maintenance after that time on a long-term basis.*

**Supported**

The State Government supports long-term bushfire risk mitigation planning.

The State Government supports the South-East Fire Working Group to facilitate the sharing of resources amongst stakeholders.

More than \$1 million in grants and funding allocation for bushfire risk mitigation has been invested in Esperance in the last three years, with a further \$355,000 allocated for 2020/2021.

DFES manages Emergency Service Levy funding for bushfire risk assessments, prescribed burning, firebreaks and other works in cooperation with local governments, DPLH and DBCA.

**Recommendation 8:**

*Consideration be given to reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding between DPaw and the Shire and, as part of that process, the MOU should include a more streamlined procedure to ensure that the best balance can be met between ensuring that cognisance is taken of rare flora and fauna and areas of cultural significance on*

*the interface with farms and UCL, but which permits farmers to undertake mitigation works expeditiously to ensure fire risk is reduced on the borders.*

### **Supported**

The State Government supports the development of an appropriate agreement between DPLH and managers of land next to UCL to facilitate and expedite bushfire risk mitigation works. DFES manages mitigation funding for government land, including on UCL.

DBCA is developing administrative processes that reflect the State's responsibility to adequately protect rare flora and fauna and areas of cultural significance as outlined in the relevant legislation. The intent is for these provisions to align with agency processes and ensure a balanced solution for bushfire risk mitigation on UCL and for the protection of biodiversity conservation values.

### **Recommendation 9:**

*The WA Government, via DFES or whatever is the relevant agency, undertake an assessment of established airstrips in the north-western quadrant of the Esperance Shire, with a view to identifying airstrips that can be enhanced to permit operation by water bombers. Once a suitable site has been identified, priority should then be given to funding the necessary upgrades to make the airstrip(s) suitable for that purpose.*

### **Supported in Principle**

The State Government supports an assessment of airstrips in the Shire of Esperance.

DBCA has the operational capacity to assist DFES and local government with the identification and assessment of existing airstrips to determine suitability for aerial suppression operations.

DBCA manages the fixed wing fire-bombing operations and, as such is the relevant agency to conduct an assessment of airstrips for their suitability for water bombing operations. DFES will provide assistance to DBCA as required.

### **Recommendation 10:**

*The Honourable Minister for Emergency Services and/or the Honourable Minister for Environment, depending upon whose portfolio water bombers actually falls, give priority to funding (at an estimated cost of approximately \$800,000) a Wheatbelt based aerial fire suppression response for the full fire season commencing in the Wheatbelt and concluding in Esperance.*

### **Supported in Principle**

The State Government supports in principle availability of additional fire suppression aircraft for the Wheatbelt to Esperance area.

Fixed wing aerial suppression assets are managed by DBCA with funding provided by DFES for maintenance support. These assets are routinely deployed to stand by at regional Forward Operating Bases on assessed risk.

DBCA and DFES support undertaking a risk to capability assessment that would assist in identifying the appropriate level of aerial suppression resource allocation to address the predicted bushfire risk on any given day.

**Recommendation 11:**

*DFES consider updating the official bushfire season in the Esperance region to reflect the reality of the impact of climate change and other factors that have altered the start and duration of the fire season.*

**Supported**

The State Government recognises the lengthening of ‘bushfire seasons’ across the State.

The State Government will seek to undertake a review of the impacts of seasonal changes, including the drying climate focusing on fire regimes within the SWLD. DFES Operations will liaise with the Shire of Esperance to extend the Restricted and Prohibited burning times based on risk and forecast weather conditions.

In the interim, Fire Service procedures allow for the high threat period to be altered (as required) based on weekly risk assessments.

**Recommendation 12:**

*The State Government fund the installation of at least one new repeater tower in the north-western sector of the Esperance region to enhance communications during an emergency.*

**Supported**

The State Government has supported the expansion of radio communications capability in the Esperance region through the installation of new radio repeaters at Peak Charles.

The new tower and repeaters are located approximately 130 kilometres north-north west of Esperance and services an area of approximately 15,000 square kilometres. This facility was partly funded through DPLH’s Mitigation Activity Fund. An additional (linked) repeater location with an adjoining footprint is being investigated to further improve radio communications in the north-west sector of Esperance.

The State Government recognises that current technology is limited in its capacity to service growing demand and will seek to undertake a review of communications capabilities in the Esperance region and investigate flexible and mobile solutions that provide digital radio communications and enhanced Wi-Fi and phone coverage.