

State Recovery Controller Communique # 2

Over the past two weeks I have spent time in the Mid-West attending community organised events and meeting with local governments and volunteer groups to discuss recovery initiatives and priorities. One of the joys of this role is the opportunity to speak with the locals to hear their stories and see first-hand the community supporting each other during this very challenging time. I am buoyed by what I am seeing with local community groups forming to drive recovery in their regions.

It is now nearly twelve weeks post impact and the State Government recognises the provision of mental health services in the affected regions remains a priority. I encourage anyone who is experiencing distress or hardship to reach out via 1800 032 965. There is welfare support available through the three Recovery Centres located in Northampton, Kalbarri and Morawa, and mobile outreach services provided by the Department of Communities and Red Cross.

The District Recovery Coordination Group (DRCG) and State Recovery Coordination Group (SRCG) meetings were held on Thursday 1 July. Discussions centred around current and emerging recovery matters, coordination of recovery efforts and progress updates.

Below is a snapshot of the discussions:

- **Financial Assistance** – The Premier’s Grants of \$4,000 for Small Business and Residents closed on 30 June 2021. Processing of the applications will continue for the next few weeks.
The Lord Mayor’s Distress Relief Fund processed the first batch of disbursements on 30 June. Owner/occupiers of destroyed residential properties received \$25,000 and damaged, uninhabitable property owners received \$10,000. Eligible applications will continue to be processed, with further disbursements planned.
The Australian Government Disaster Recovery payments remain open until October 2021. The Department of Communities Disaster Relief Assistance is also available for eligible applicants. A reminder that information about all available Financial Assistance is available at www.emergency.wa.gov.au/recovery
- **Insurance matters** – As the clean-up of residences continue there has been some concern by local governments that building debris is being placed on verge and roadsides for the local governments to remove. It is the responsibility of owners, and/or the insurance builders, to dispose of debris in a responsible manner. The Insurance Council of Australia confirmed that costs associated with debris disposal is included in insurance policies and they are speaking with insurance companies to ensure they are disposing debris responsibly.
- **Accommodation** – The Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner and I hosted a roundtable in Geraldton with local government CEOs to fully understand the accommodation needs of displaced community members. The conversation focussed on the varying accommodation needs and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not suitable. As an outcome of this meeting DFES is scoping the purchase of caravans. This option provides flexibility for families to choose to locate their temporary accommodation on their property or at a local caravan park or other identified location. We know that providing choice to

affected residents of how and where they would like to live is crucial in their recovery and resilience journey.

- **Community Recovery Officers** – The advertising process for the four Community Recovery Officer positions closes on Friday 2 July, with the shortlisting and interview taking place soon after. These important roles will be responsible for designated hub areas in Kalbarri, Northampton, Morawa and Geraldton. They will be a valuable resource to inform and help the local communities navigate options available to them. Additionally, they will also identify on the ground insights to community sentiment as the recovery activity progresses.
- **Welfare Support** – The Department of Communities and Red Cross will be expanding their outreach services to provide psychosocial support outside of business hours. This important change will deliver greater support to community members, particularly farmers, who are committed to their farming activities during daylight hours.
- **Local Governments** – Key recovery issues local government CEOs raised included the development of a coordinated regional tourism campaign. This idea is opportune as a State Government Tourism Officer dedicated to the recovery is commencing in Geraldton next week. A focus group is being planned to discuss the tourism campaign opportunities available.
- **Roads** – Main Roads have made headway to ensure the State and local roads of the impacted area are repatriated to pre-cyclone condition. In total, 569 signs were blown over and now only 27 signs remain to be reinstated. 93 of those replacement signs were made to order directional signs. In addition to making the roads safe, five mulching teams are working continuously to remove a significant number of enormous trees that fell and were pushed to the verges to enable the roads to be opened quickly.
- **Heritage Listed Buildings** – A significant on-the-ground assessment of cyclone damaged heritage listed buildings has been completed and will be shared with the relevant stakeholders.
- **Public Information** – Accurate and timely recovery information for the affected communities is being regularly published on www.emergency.wa.gov.au/recovery, the DFES Cyclone Seroja Facebook group, and hardcopy flyers are being provided on the ground. We encourage agencies, local governments and community groups to post recovery information in the DFES Cyclone Seroja Facebook group.

For State Recovery information, including financial assistance available, please visit emergency.wa.gov.au/recovery or join the **DFES Cyclone Seroja Recovery Facebook Group**.

Community members experiencing personal hardship or distress as a direct result of the cyclone can phone the Department of Communities' Disaster Response Hotline on **1800 032 965**.

Melissa Pexton – DFES Cyclone Seroja State Recovery Controller