

THE FACTS

Four confirmed dead, several missing.

300 people evacuated, with **60** people fleeing to Norseman.

165 customers in the Salmon Gums, Grass Patch and Scaddan areas without power last night.

More than **150,000ha** burned (**117,000ha** for Scaddan/Salmon Gums/Grass Patch, **15,000ha** for Merivale, **23,000ha** for Norseman).

15,000 head of livestock killed.

Three homes destroyed.

Evacuation centres established at the Esperance Civic Centre and Norseman Town Hall.

A number of roads closed including:

- Coolgardie-Esperance Highway, both directions between Norseman and Gibson townsite.
- Merivale Road, east of Fisheries Road.

The following schools are closed:

- Cascade Primary School
- Grass Patch Primary School
- Salmon Gums Primary School
- Scaddan Primary School

Donations can be made directly in person at the Shire of Esperance Administration Building. An Esperance Fires Appeal will be set up at Bankwest in due course.

If you are unable to contact a loved one who may have been affected by the fires, you can enquire in person at the evacuation centre, visit the Red Cross website www.register.redcross.org.au or call the State Inquiry Centre on **1800 015 337**.

Bankwest, Commonwealth Bank and ANZ have activated emergency assistance and disaster response packages for customers affected by the bushfires in the Esperance region.

Locals stay strong

■ Katherine Fleming, Gabrielle Knowles and Kelly Bell

It was their day from hell — devastating hours of chaos, fear and loss as a fire believed to be the deadliest in WA's history roared through their close-knit rural communities.

With black smoke looming large in the distance, the people of Esperance and surrounding farming areas spent yesterday pulling together, to mourn the four people killed, to comfort the hundreds evacuated and brace for more catastrophic days ahead.

Scaddan farmer Kym Curnow was among those who perished, found in his car when the fire had passed.

He was described as a hero after going to warn his neighbours to evacuate and likely saving lives by redirecting cars heading the wrong way.

It is believed one of the cars he turned around was carrying a man and two women, believed to be European backpackers working as farmhands, who were also later found dead.

There were fears the death toll could rise further, amid grave fears for those still unaccounted for last night.

Phone towers were destroyed, which exacerbated communication difficulties and led desperate friends and relatives to flood social media pleading for information about their missing loved ones.

"Catastrophic and unstoppable" fires, sparked by lightning on Sunday, tore through more than 150,000ha and numerous farms around Salmon Gums, Scaddan, Grass Patch, Merivale and Norseman.

On Monday, the area had a fire danger index rating of 250 — worse than the day of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria and more than double what is considered to indicate catastrophic conditions.

Fanned by strong winds, the fires swept through at up to 25km/h, destroying an unconfirmed three homes and 15,000 head of livestock and blackening countless paddocks with crops ready for harvesting after a bumper season.

Nationals party WA president Colin De Grussa was among those farmers forced to flee their properties, describing the "sick feeling" of leaving but conceding the "monster" fire left him no choice.



Devastation: Vehicles destroyed in the Esperance bushfire.



Lost to fire: A burnt-out home.



KILLER Firestorm

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About 300 people were evacuated in total, including 60 who fled to Norseman and more than 120 others who sought shelter at a relocation point at the Esperance Civic Centre.

The close-knit Esperance community immediately began to rally with offers of every kind of help imaginable: money, food, clothing, furniture, rooms, hot showers and care for pets and animals.

At a community meeting last night, shire president Victoria Brown asked people to contribute to a disaster relief fund rather than providing goods, as they were not yet sure what was needed.

She also asked that people did not try to return to the fire zone until it was declared safe.

"I know you're desperate, some of you, to go home and check your stock but please don't do that," she said.

Applause rang out after Mrs Brown said that despite early reports that Scaddan Primary School had been destroyed, an aerial search found it was undamaged.

Firefighters were deployed from Perth, Kalgoorlie and South West towns to help exhausted local brigades and police, some of whom had been working for 16 hours.

Last night, the fire had a 250km perimeter and more than 200 firefighters, volunteers and pastoralists were working to protect homes and strengthen containment lines.

They were expected to be re-

inforced this morning by 25 appliances which were due to arrive in Ravensthorpe last night.

They hoped to bring the fires under control by 6pm. While fire conditions eased yesterday, with consistent winds and lower temperatures, more unfavourable weather was expected at the weekend and on Monday.

Department of Fire and Emergency Services Acting Supt



19 November 2015

Official Esperance Fires Appeal Launched

The Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund (LMDRF) has been activated to raise and coordinate donations to support the victims of the fires currently burning in the State's south.

The LMDRF is the recognised state emergency fund and provides relief for personal hardship and distress arising from natural disasters occurring within Western Australia.

Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi said the tragic loss of four lives and damage caused by the wildfires in the Esperance region is devastating.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the affected communities and the loved ones of those who have died," Ms Scaffidi said.

"Through the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund, members of the community can help those who are affected by this unprecedented disaster to rebuild their lives.

"The fund is operated by an independent Board and donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

"The costs of administering the fund are absorbed by the City of Perth, so all money raised will go directly to those who need it most."

Donations to the Esperance Fires Appeal can be made:

- via EFT: BSB: 306-035, Account: 201445-8
- over the counter at any BankWest branch or agency to the dedicated appeal account BSB: 306-035, Account: 201445-8
- in person at the Customer Service counter at Council House, 27 St Georges Terrace, Perth
- on the phone via credit card on 9461 3886 during normal business hours
- by mail to LMDRF, Esperance Fires Appeal, City of Perth, GPO Box C120, Perth WA 6839

The process for distributing funds will be announced at a later date and will be managed in conjunction with the Shire of Esperance.

For more information go to:

Website www.appealswa.org.au

Facebook www.facebook.com/Distress.Relief.Fund

Issued by: Michael Holland, Senior Communications and Public Relations Officer, 0409 378 926, michael.holland@cityofperth.wa.gov.au