



LORD MAYOR'S DISTRESS RELIEF FUND

MEDIA RELEASE

08 January 2016

LMDRF Waroona and District Fires Appeal

Destruction and property damage caused by fires burning in the State's South-West, has led to the activation of the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund (LMDRF).

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

The Board Chair, Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi, said the catastrophic fires have razed much of the township of Yarloop, and damaged parts of Waroona.

"Initial media reports suggest a significant number of houses have been lost, as well as buildings and infrastructure," Ms Scaffidi said.

"I hope and pray people remain safe until the fire threat passes."

The Fund has been activated to raise and coordinate donations to support the victims of the fires.

"Just as people supported the community of Esperance recently, we need to pull together to assist residents of Yarloop and Waroona," Ms Scaffidi said.

"This blaze has caused as much damage, if not more, than recent fires in Esperance, Parkerville and Roleystone combined."

Through the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund, the community can help those who are affected by this 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 Waroona and District Fires Appeal can be made:

- via EFT: BSB: 306-035, Account: 2014474
- over the counter at any BankWest branch or agency to the dedicated appeal account BSB: 306-035, Account: 2014474
- in person at the Customer Service counter at Council House, 27 St Georges Terrace, Perth

19 January 2016 - Attachment 8.5.2

- on the phone via credit card on 9461 3886 during normal business hours
- by mail to LMDRF, Waroona and District 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 affected Shires.

For more information go to:

Website www.appealswa.org.au

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

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

The West Australian

Monday, January 11, 2016

SPECIAL EDITION

\$1.50

Gascoyne, Shark Bay \$1.60, Pilbara, Kimberley \$2.35. GST INC.

HELL ON EARTH

Ian Gray and Tracey Newman survived the Yarloop inferno by plunging into a creek and holding wet towels over their heads. 'It was like hell. We thought we were dead,' Ms Newman said.

■ **FULL REPORT** P4-5

■ **RESIDENTS DEMAND ANSWERS** P2-3

■ **TRIBUTES TO VICTIMS** P6-7



Survivors: Ian Gray and Tracey Newman with their pet dog Rain. Picture: Nic Ellis

PERTH 17-27 Partly cloudy. Tomorrow: Possible morning shower, 18-26. Yesterday: 18.9-26.4.

Weather details P34

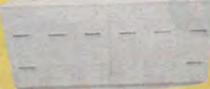
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ANATOMY
OF A FIRE

■ **Late on Wednesday night via text:** "Bushfire EMERGENCY WARNING from DFES for waroona. If the way is clear, leave now."

■ **Thursday morning:** Volunteer firefighters from Yarloop, joined by brigades from Harvey, Bunbury, Cookernup begin an all day battle against the blaze.

■ **Between 8am and 9am:** Electricity goes off in Yarloop, but then returns.

■ **Around 12 noon:** Electricity goes down again, and does not return.

■ **2.15pm:** At a community meeting in Pinjarra, incident controller Greg Mair, from DPaW said the fire was "in and around" the township of Yarloop. "The structural taskforce, people who are used to fighting fires around buildings and other fire fighters are protecting Yarloop."

■ **3pm - 6pm:** Bushfire brigades continue to battle the approaching fire. Resident report receiving no text messages or phone calls informing them of the impending danger.

■ **6.35pm:** No mention of Yarloop in DFES Emergency Warning.

■ **7.30pm:** Residents told there is nothing more that can be done by volunteer firefighters on the ground. One is told to get in a BVB ute and was taken to Australind.



DPaW incident controller Greg Mair

**INSIDE COVER HAS
MOVED TO PAGE 10**

Anger over 'slow'

The Aftermath

Major questions were raised yesterday about the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' response to the deadly Yarloop bushfire, with residents adamant they did not receive adequate warnings.

Volunteer bushfire brigade firefighters also criticised the assistance they received from career colleagues.

As the calamitous toll of the bushfire that all but wiped the historic town off the map on Thursday night continued to rise, *The West Australian* has been told DFES fire resources did not arrive in the town until much of it was already alight.

Two calls for emergency assistance from bushfire firefighters were not responded to until dozens of homes were already ablaze, according to those who battled on the front line of the fires for most of the day. And Yarloop residents said they did not receive direct warnings via text or phone as the flames approached and that a text message sent the previous evening referred to the Waroona fire.

Two men — Malcolm Taylor, 73, and Leslie Taylor, 77 — are believed to be the two victims of the fire, after remains were found in the blackened ruins of two houses.

Yarloop locals were told it would be days before they could return to the ruined township and shock turned to anger among many as to how the blaze could wreak so much damage.

Phil Penny, fire control officer of the Yarloop bushfire brigade, said he was the proudest bushfire leader in the country at what his men had tried to do to save the town.

"I am not going to put the blame on anyone — I don't know if we had 10 times the resources we could have saved the town," Mr Penny said. "But when DFES got there it was too late. To lose 143 structures in a couple of hours is a bit ridiculous."

A DFES spokesperson said last night an inquiry into its response to the fires would be done but noted its emergency alerts referring to the surround-

ing areas in the Harvey Shire — which includes Yarloop — began at 12.10pm on Thursday.

DFES also said a five-unit "strike team" had driven into the head of the Yarloop fire in response to triple-0 calls on Thursday evening, carrying with them their own water supply.

But the time of their arrival could not be confirmed.

Emergency Services Minister Joe Francis said he was "exceptionally proud" of the efforts of firefighters, both career and volunteer, and said as much as humanly possible was done to save the town. "They put themselves through significant danger to get through some exceptionally difficult fires to save people's lives," he said.

"I'm very comfortable and the (DFES Commissioner) is very comfortable that, within the limitations of human beings being human beings, everything possible was done. Everything has its limitations — human beings, equipment, technology."

Mr Francis said early investigations suggested while the water supplies in Yarloop were there on the morning of the fire, the combination of high demand and a lack of electricity meant "the water stopped coming out of the taps".

But WAFarmers president Dale Park claimed incompetence within DFES was partly to blame for the extent of the fires.

Mr Park said DFES lacked the expertise to fight fires effectively and was too focused on being an "incident controller".

"Out of everybody I talk to, and most of them have years of experience in fighting fires, not one of them has a good word to say about DFES," he said. "I am sick and tired of it."

"I have put out more fires with fires than I have with water and most of us are the same."

"And I have been a fire control officer for probably 30 years."

And WA Liberal senator Chris Back blasted the lack of a national strategy to tackle bushfires, warning State and Federal authorities are too focused on responding to blazes rather than preventing them.

Milder temperatures and



Catastrophic: Yarloop in ruins. Picture: Nic Ellis



Discontent: Update meeting. Picture: Nic Ellis



Harvey: Firefighters get some sleep.

Keep up-to-date with all the latest fire news at thewest.com.au



more moderate winds yesterday enabled firefighters to make good progress in battling the blaze. DFES incident controller Ricky Curtis said the firefighting progress had allowed authorities to reopen roads from the south to Harvey as well as

Binningup and Myalup. For those who remain in Yarloop, the Water Corporation said it would install a standpipe to resume drinking supplies.

Tim Clarke, Daniel Mercer, Gareth Parker, Gabrielle Knowles and Brad Thompson

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One-man firefight: Alex Jovanovich managed to save his house and those of neighbours. Picture: Nic Ellis

Satellite image supplied by Landgate

ANATOMY OF A FIRE CONTINUED

- **Around 7.30pm:** DFES asked for urgent assistance for multiple structure fires.
- **7.35pm:** DFES Emergency Warning specifically mentions Yarloop: "You are in danger and need to act immediately to survive. There is a threat to lives and homes. Homes are under threat by fire." In fact, residents report that dozens of properties are already on fire.
- **8.15pm:** Locals begin huddling on the Yarloop oval.
- **8.41pm:** DFES Emergency Warning informs "The fire has crossed now South Western Highway near Yarloop Homes are under threat by fire at Preston Beach, Lake Clifton, Waroona and Yarloop. It is not safe to leave."
- **9.15pm:** Yarloop locals informed DFES are on their way.
- **9.25pm:** FESA units arrive, but are unable to immediately access local water supplies. Locals continue to huddle on oval and in cars as houses and historic structures catch alight. Some gather in front of the Yarloop hotel, until that burns down in minutes. In all 143 properties including 128 houses, sheds, caravans and community buildings are confirmed lost.

Emotions mixed as local recounts fire fight

Alex Jovanovich

When the firestorm swept through Yarloop as night closed in on Thursday, Alex Jovanovich was armed with nothing more than a few buckets and some old ice-cream containers full of water.

The former carpenter and experienced firefighter had stashed water wherever he could keep it before supplies cut off hours earlier.

"The whole eastern sky was just red — it was like

broad daylight," Mr Jovanovich said. "And you could just hear the roar, the wind was absolutely howling.

"I've seen fires before but nothing like this.

"Then the fireballs started happening — you could see them flying up in the air.

"And before it hit the back of the shed, it hit the roof and I thought 'the house is gone' straight away.

"But luckily it didn't get in under the eaves.

"I was throwing as much water as I could because I had to get the water from

over the road. I was absolutely zapped — I didn't think I was going to make it.

"I didn't want to give up, though, so I just kept going."

In the end, Mr Jovanovich saved his home as well as the homes of five neighbours.

But as the adrenaline of the experience wore off, the 64-year-old spoke with a mix of sadness and anger about the efforts of fire authorities as his beloved town was reduced to ashes.

He said apart from the failure of the State Government to ensure there were

back-up water supplies for firefighting, the "inaction" of firefighters stationed at the town on the night contributed to its destruction.

"I did it all on my own — I never saw anyone," he said.

"They did nothing to save Yarloop — they just watched it burn."

After spending most of his life in Yarloop, Mr Jovanovich feared the town would not recover from the blaze.

"There's nothing left," he said.

"Yarloop will die."

Daniel Mercer

Locals praise firefighters for saved town

Harvey

The people of Harvey will for ever be indebted to the firefighters who helped save the town on Saturday, according to Shire of Harvey president Tania Jackson.

Relieved Harvey residents were allowed to return to their homes yesterday, after the brutal bushfire which had raged across the South

West for days came within 1.6km of the town.

On Saturday, as the massive fire bore down on the township, the 2500 residents were told to leave amid fears yet more damage to homes following the devastation at Yarloop.

But with hundreds of firefighters battling on several fronts, friendlier weather helped stave off another potential disaster, and by yesterday afternoon DFES

warnings had been downgraded to a watch and act.

Those who had left the town were beginning to return through roadblocks if they could prove their identity.

"The people of Harvey will be indebted to those who fought the fires for ever," Ms Jackson said. "It was a truly amazing effort."

Harvey Fresh general manager Paul Lorimer said yesterday that he was work-

ing with fire authorities to arrange access to its site so tankers could remove products and collect milk still being produced by local farmers.

"Once access has been granted to the town and the site it will be our intention to get the plant cleaned and prepared for the processing of milk as soon as possible," a Harvey Fresh spokesman said.

Tim Clarke

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Couple huddle in creek

Ian Gray and Tracey Newman

As they lay huddled under wet towels with their dog in a creek, Ian Gray and Tracey Newman resigned themselves to the worst.

"I've never been to hell but it was like hell," Ms Newman said. "It was unbelievable.

"We thought we were dead.

"And most of the people in town just thought that they were finished."

Only hours earlier, the couple had been sitting down to dinner in their Yarloop home, aware but not alarmed about reports of a fire burning in the hills to the historic town's east.

Like many residents of the small South West community, Mr Gray and Ms Newman recounted at the weekend an amazing tale of survival as they rode out a blaze that shocked the State with its ferocity.

She said they hoped to battle the fire if it threatened their Johnston Road house but it quickly became apparent they did not stand a chance.

"There was just a wall of



Ian Gray and Tracey Newman

fire across the paddock," Ms Newman said.

"It was just coming like a train — the wind was unbelievable.

"And we just got to a point and I said, 'Come on, we've got to go'."

In mortal danger, Mr Gray said they grabbed wet towels as well as their dog and headed for their dam before dashing for a creek at the edge of the property when they saw the dam circled in flames.

"As it turned out the creek

was a better option because the creek is quite deep," Mr Gray said.

"We got right down there and we put wet towels over our heads with the dog.

"The smoke was horrendous — it was like a wall just constantly flowing."

When the immediate danger finally passed, Mr Gray said he and his wife rose to a scene of horror.

"We came up out of the creek and 360 degrees, wherever you looked, it was fire," he said.

"All the trees around the paddocks were on fire and the town was ablaze from one end to the other.

"Tracey and I both looked at each other and said, 'That's it, Yarloop is gone'. While we were in the creek we could just hear 'bang, bang, bang' as gas bottles went up. And there was one almighty explosion over here somewhere and groaning noises. And you could actually hear houses collapsing.

"So the sounds were awful, awful."

Despite the ordeal, the couple's house "somehow" survived. "I can't believe it — it's amazing," Mr Gray said.

Daniel Mercer



Tough times: Tracey Ferguson and her partner Tim Vass.
Picture: Nic Ellis

Firefighter watches his

Tracey Ferguson and Tim Vass

With soot and smoke coating his face, Tim Vass fought weariness and despair as he tried to explain his unimaginable predicament.

The captain of the volunteer bushfire brigade from the farming hamlet of Uduc, Mr Vass had just helped save a neighbour's property from one of the many breakouts in the Waroona fire on Saturday.

As he did it, he and his partner Tracey Ferguson watched their own home burn to the ground.

"I look after an old neighbour who's got a property," he said.

"Her husband was a firefighter

everyone here knew and respected for a lot of years.

"He died nearly two years ago.

"We had to save our house and let hers go or save her house and let ours go. Out of ultimate love and respect for the family we saved hers."

The terrible blow, though an act of selflessness, caps a miserable few years for the couple, who lost their home and business in another fire barely 12 months ago.

"We went bankrupt on the economy slide," Mr Vass said.

In the face of such hardship, Mr Vass took whatever solace he could from the efforts of friends and neighbours as well as other firefighters, some of whom had also lost their houses in the inferno.

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- appealswa.org.au
- facebook.com/Distress.Relief.Fund

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- Authorities request no goods be donated

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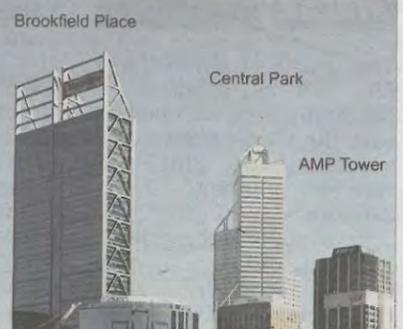
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to survive 'hell'



house burn after saving neighbour's

"I look around here and I'm not the only one who's copped it," he said.

"At Yarloop the other night a whole town was rubbed off the map.

"There are other firefighters out there who do the same thing and

we do what we do regardless. I'm not going to stop."

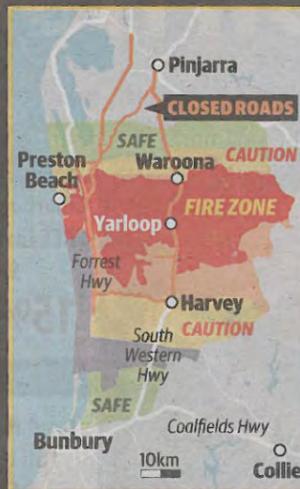
An experienced bushfire fighter, Mr Vass said the Waroona blaze was different from others that he had tackled and was very difficult to control. "This fire is a bloody monster," he said.

"It's unprecedented. Every time we get on top of it the wind swings, conditions change.

"All of us have Margaret River, Dwellingup, the bigger ones, flown interstate or whatever — this is a different animal."

Daniel Mercer

HORROR FIRE WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



- **AREA:** More than 72,657ha
- **PERIMETER:** 226km
- **CAUSE:** Lightning strike, reported 7.25am Wednesday
- **BUILDING LOSSES:** 143 properties including 128 houses.

EVACUATION CENTRES

- Murray Leisure Centre, Pinjarra. Leschenault Leisure Centre, Australind.

EMERGENCY WARNING AREAS LAST NIGHT

- East of Waroona, Hamel and Yarloop and surrounding areas in the Shires of Harvey, Waroona.

TRAFFIC

- All non-essential travel should be deferred. If you are heading to or from Perth, use Albany Hwy and Coalfields Hwy. If you must travel, please ensure your petrol tank is full before you depart.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Fire updates:** dfes.wa.gov.au, 13 DFES (13 3337), @dfes_wa, ABC local radio
- **Health Direct:** 1800 022 222
- **Main Roads:** 138 138 or mainroads.wa.gov.au

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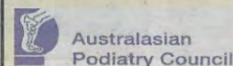


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Mates fear that



Stayed put: Malcolm Taylor

Flag rises amid the ashes of despair

Tony Toop

It was an incongruous scene.

Amid the wholesale ruins of an entire town that up until Thursday had been the home of more than 500 people, Tony Toop stood on the roof of his perfectly intact home on Yarloop's Eastcott Street and flew the Australian flag from an aerial.

But while it might have been interpreted as an act of defiance against nature, Mr Toop put it in more sombre terms.

The former fly-in, fly-out worker said it was as much a tribute to the neighbours who had lost homes and, more pointedly, the friends who had lost their lives when Thursday's fire all but destroyed the town.

He paid particular tribute to Leslie "Squizzy" Taylor, an elderly man who is believed to be one of the two victims whose bodies were found in the remains of their homes.

"It's not high up on the aerial because in a way it symbolises we're at half-mast," he said.

"We've lost not just a town but we've lost friends. This was an iconic Australian town.

"The history we lost here — it's just unbearable to think of what's gone down here."

On a day when some Yarloop residents defied roadblocks in a desperate bid to find out whether they still had homes, Mr Toop echoed the sentiment of many who felt the town was "left to burn".

"My house survived but I don't know how," he said.

"All the reports were about everywhere else but Yarloop. We never even got a mention."

Daniel Mercer

The Victims

Malcolm Taylor told friends he was having a beer as he watched his neighbours pack and leave Yarloop on Thursday as flames raced towards the town.

The 73-year-old told them he could not be a king without his castle, Diane Pike said.

But friends now fear that his decision to stay in his house led to his death after police found human remains in two proper-

ties destroyed when the inferno ripped through the historic South West timber town.

War veteran Leslie Owen Taylor, 77, is also missing, feared dead, with his Yarloop house and car among those destroyed.

Both missing men were known as "Squizzy" and devastated friends and relatives yesterday paid tribute to them, describing them as true gentlemen.

Leslie Taylor's brother Bruce said that as a young man, his



Half-mast: Tony Toop raises the flag at his Yarloop home. Picture: Nic Ellis

castle cost 'king' his life

brother had served in several conflicts including Vietnam and was proud of his service with the Australian Army. "He will be sadly missed," Bruce Taylor told Seven News.

Tony Toop, a friend of Leslie Taylor, said he was a lovely, jovial man who used to go everywhere with his dog.

"I do remember sitting at the bar having quite a story with him," he said.

"He was quite fond of the local girls and everyone used to

have a bit of fun with Squizzy." Mr Toop said he had taken firefighters to Mr Taylor's home the morning after the fires and found it destroyed and his car still there.

Tony Elson, who became good friends with Malcolm Taylor after they moved to Yarloop at the same time several years ago, said he was "one of the nicest men you would ever meet".

"You could never just pop in to Malcolm's house for 15 minutes — you would always be there for

a couple of hours, and he would insist that you have a couple of cans of VB," Mr Elson said.

But he feared his friend's hearing problems might have contributed to him not fleeing when it became obvious just how ferocious the fire was.

"When he took his hearing aid out, you could be bashing on the window and he would not have a clue you were there," Mr Elson said. "When I was leaving in the flames I could still see his car there. If I had known he was still

there I would have kicked the door down myself."

In the hours after the blaze ripped through Yarloop, worried friends and family turned to social media appealing for news about the men's whereabouts.

They are now waiting on confirmation from police that the pair are dead.

Forensic officers spent yesterday at the Yarloop properties and hope DNA samples will confirm the identities of the remains. A third Yarloop resi-

dent also feared missing was yesterday confirmed to be safe and well.

WA Police said they had no reports of anyone else being unaccounted for but that it was possible they could receive more reports in the days ahead.

They urged anyone living in the fire zone to register with the Australian Red Cross so loved ones could confirm they were safe.

Daniel Mercer, Tim Clarke and Gabrielle Knowles



Heartbreaking: Anita Peck with the charred bicycle among the ruins of her house. Picture: Nic Ellis

Burnt bike tests resolve

Anita Peck

For Anita Peck it was the heartbreaking reminder that most threatened to tear down her emotional defences.

The burnt small bike lay forlornly on its side on what used to be the front veranda of her Eastcott Street house in Yarloop.

It was a Christmas present for Ms Peck's youngest daughter, who — because of the hustle and bustle of the festive season — never got a chance to ride it.

"The kids don't know it's this bad," Ms Peck said as she saw the ruins of her home for the first time

yesterday. "My little girl said, 'When can we go back to the house and when am I going to see my toys?'"

"Obviously we've just had Christmas so all their toys were in there."

Unlike those who did not leave, Ms Peck said she bundled her three children — a 17-year-old son and two daughters, aged 15 and seven — into the car to stay with her parents in Rockingham.

"We moved here for a change about five years ago," she said.

"We were just starting to get used to it. I liked the quiet. Now I'm not sure what we're going to do. I didn't expect anything like this."

Daniel Mercer

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