

# Bayview Rise Bushfire Report

February 2022





# Acknowledgements

**The Shire of Denmark acknowledges the Minang and Bibulmun people of the Noongar nation, who are the traditional owners of the land on which the Bayview Rise Bushfire occurred in February 2022 and who have cared for this land for thousands of years.**

**We pay our respects to Noongar Elders past, present and emerging and welcome their guidance and counsel.**

The Shire of Denmark also acknowledges the support, hard work and dedication of the countless organisations, volunteers and community members who contributed their time, money and energy to the emergency and recovery response.

The Bayview Rise bushfire emergency caused significant damage to property and livelihoods. The Shire acknowledges the traumatic experience many members of our community experienced that weekend, and the on-going challenges resulting from the emergency.

Specifically, the Shire acknowledges the four families who lost their homes, and the many other residents who suffered fire damage on their properties.





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Electronic copies of this document are available for download online via the Shire of Denmark website.

Copies of all Shire documents are available in alternative formats upon request.

# Executive Summary

This report summarizes the Bayview Rise bushfire incident that occurred in the Shire of Denmark in February 2022. It provides an outline of the emergency response, details of community feedback and Emergency Services debriefs which form the basis from which key learnings and priorities have been identified.

The Shire of Denmark is in the process of reviewing its Local Emergency Management Arrangements. Key priorities identified throughout the feedback and debrief process are listed below in no particular order:

- A comprehensive review of the Shire's Recovery Plan should form part of the review of the Shire's LEMA, including a management plan for donations.
- Fatigue Management Guidelines for Shire staff must be developed and appropriate training should be provided.
- Advocacy for continued review and improvement of communication protocols at the State level, including additional methods for communication with the community during an incident – particularly those without phone reception, are isolated, and vulnerable – should be investigated.
- The Shire should continue to provide educational resources to assist in improving the local community and stakeholder resilience.
- The Shire should continue to support local organisations in improving our community's emergency preparedness.
- The Shire should continue to facilitate and support community development – word of mouth is an important way of notifying community members of emergency events.

## Next Steps

Much of the actionable feedback from community, Shire of Denmark staff responders and Emergency Services volunteers is within the remit of State Government departments, particularly the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

The recently released *DFES 2022 Adverse Fire Weather Event Community Report\** addresses many of the concerns raised locally.

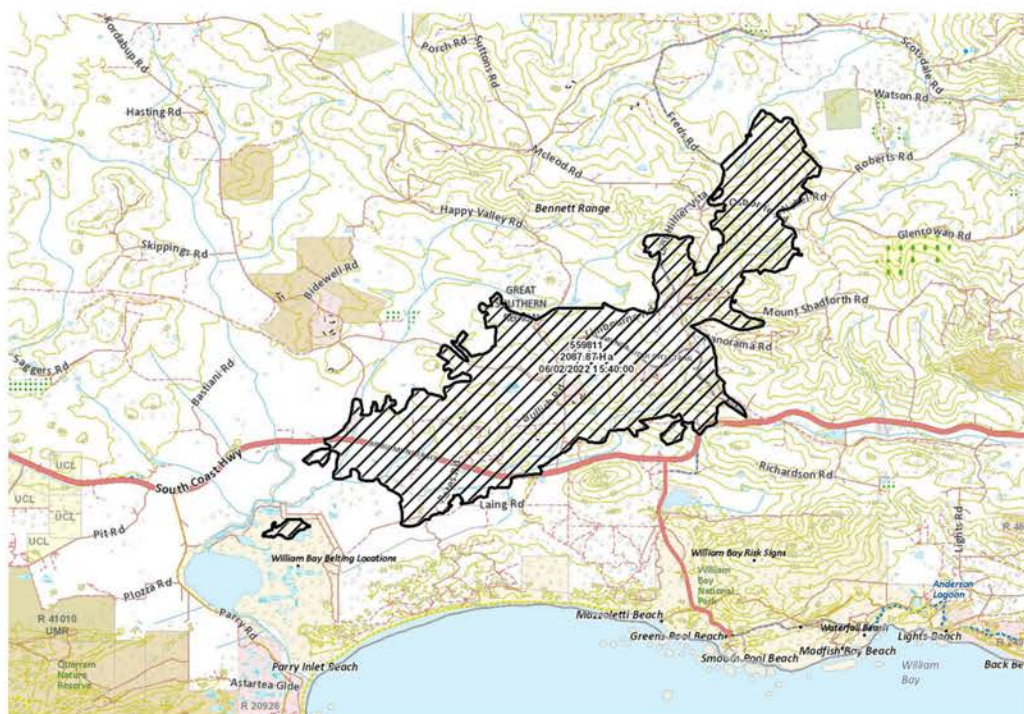
The Shire of Denmark will continue to advocate to the relevant State authorities in efforts to follow up on the concerns and opportunities outlined within this – and the above mentioned – report.

The Shire will address the areas within its own jurisdiction through its review of its Local Emergency Management Arrangements.

\*Available publicly at [www.wa.gov.au](http://www.wa.gov.au)

# Introduction

Denmark experienced a bushfire emergency in early February 2022. The blaze, which started on Friday 4 February 2022 at Bayview Rise near Shadforth, resulted in wide-scale threat, impact and damage to homes and businesses.



The bushfire raged over a weekend and was downgraded from an Emergency Level incident on Monday 7 February 2022, by which time the blaze was considered to be contained and under control. Volunteers and property owners responded to flare ups in the following weeks, with the incident formally declared closed on Thursday 24 February 2022.

In the months following the incident, a post-event evaluation of the Bayview Rise Bushfire has assisted to improve the Shire of Denmark's capability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from future disaster events.

Several post-incident debrief sessions were held in the wake of the incident, including debriefs for the Fire Control Officers, Shire staff and the Incident Management Team, including the Chief and Deputy Bushfire Control Officers. A community debrief was also held for impacted residents.

A number of post-incident evaluation reports were also produced, including the Incident Support Group Lessons Management Report, the Impacted Residents Meeting Report (included in appendix), the Severe Weather Event After Action Review Survey and community survey feedback was collated.


The key areas for improvement that emerged has been compiled in this report and will be considered in the Shire's review of its Local Emergency Management Arrangement (LEMA)\*.

\*The WA Government is also working across the sector to review and improve Western Australia's Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA).

# Bushfire Response Timeline

Due to the elevated fire danger rating on Friday 4 February 2022, all brigades were put on standby following the daily morning radio 'sched' (daily radio check in). Shire machinery and operators were also on standby including two graders, two loaders and a water tanker. Contractors with additional machinery were contacted and available if needed. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) was also consulted and the availability of water bombers was confirmed.

Smoke was spotted and reported at Bayview Rise near Shadforth in the morning of Friday 4 February 2022, kicking off the emergency response.



<b>FRI 4 FEB</b>	<i>Daily Fire Danger Rating - VERY HIGH</i>
<b>9.20am</b>	000 call, available crews contacted via radio
<b>9.22am</b>	Brigades begin to respond
<b>9.34am</b>	Brigades request air support, SES tasked for refilling at Denmark Airport
<b>9.49am</b>	Water bombers activated
<b>9.50am</b>	Shire machinery requested
<b>10.15am</b>	Water bombers depart Albany
<b>10.39am</b>	First emergency level warning issued on Emergency WA website
<b>12.07pm</b>	15 appliances and four water bombers active, DFES assistance requested
<b>12.08pm</b>	Request for William Bay National Park to be evacuated
<b>2.15pm</b>	DFES District Officer took charge of the incident response
<b>2.20pm</b>	<b>Incident declared LEVEL 2</b>
<b>2.30pm</b>	By now, 17 brigade and VFRS appliances, 14 DBCA appliances, one DBCA dozer, one DFES Incident Control Vehicle, four water bombers and Level 2 Incident Management Team are active.
<b>2.44pm</b>	Large Aerial Tanker (737) called in DFES State Pre-Formed Team activated to Denmark Evacuation centres activated Parry Beach and Lights Beach closed
<b>11.00pm</b>	<b>Incident declared LEVEL 3</b> Additional State level support requested and deployed to Denmark

**Sat 5 FEB** *Daily Fire Danger Rating - SEVERE*

**12.00pm** Pre-Formed Team 'Charlie' arrived (including Community Liaison Unit, Urban Search and Rescue and Rapid Damage Assessment teams)

**2.00pm** Community meeting held at Civic Centre and via Facebook livestream

**Sun 6 FEB** *Daily Fire Danger Rating - EXTREME*

**2.00pm** Community meeting held at Civic Centre and via Facebook livestream

**6.25pm** **Incident downgraded to Watch and Act**

**Mon 7 FEB**

**11.27am** **Incident downgraded to Advice**

**1.00pm** Community meeting held at Civic Centre and via livestream  
*DFES Commissioner and Minister for Emergency Services in attendance*

**THU 24 FEB**

**6.00pm** **Incident closed**

Crews continue to respond to call-outs and flare-ups well into March

# Incident Response

Countless volunteers and residents worked together on the bushfire emergency response alongside local bushfire brigades worked with team members from Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), WA Police, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), Shire of Denmark, WA Country Health Service, Department of Education, Main Roads WA, St Johns Ambulance, National Broadband Network (NBN), Telstra, Department of Communities, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), Western Power and Water Corporation.

## Response Statistics

- 46** brigades, groups, units from across the State
- 816** personnel worked on the emergency response
- 10** aircraft dropped 1.9million litres of water
- 3** community meetings held during incident
- 3** evacuation centres (Denmark, Walpole, Albany)
- 200+** evacuees registered

## Damage Statistics

- 2087** hectares burnt
- 4** homes lost
- 56** homes saved
- 30** livestock deaths
- 100km** fencing damaged or destroyed (estimate)





# Impacted Residents and Community Debrief Feedback

An invite-only impacted residents community meeting was held at the Somerset Hill Fire Shed on Thursday 24 February 2023, attended by approximately 110 people.

Those invited were given the opportunity to submit questions before the meeting via phone or email. The meeting was facilitated by an independent facilitator, Sue Middleton from AgDots. Agencies in attendance were Shire of Denmark, DFES, Regional Men's Health, Denmark Police and volunteer brigades. The Shire of Denmark organised the meeting and several staff were in attendance to support the management of the meeting.

Meeting format:

- What happened, information about the event and the investigation into the fire origins
- Q&A on the event and community feedback
- Identifying what are the community issues now?
- What did we learn (for future events)?

The speakers for the meeting were:

- Sue Middleton, AgDots (facilitator)
- Wayne Green, DFES Great Southern
- Matt Hartfield, Denmark Police
- Ceinwen Gearon, Denmark Shire President
- David Schober, Shire of Denmark CEO
- David King, Shire of Denmark Deputy CEO
- Lez Baines, Chief Bushfire Control Officer

The meeting focussed on the questions the community raised in relation to the event itself, the response to the event, and their concerns about the response.

A feedback form was distributed which residents could fill out on the night or return after the meeting. A copy of this form was made available at the Shire or online at [yourdenmark.wa.gov.au](http://yourdenmark.wa.gov.au). **After impacted residents had the chance to respond first, the survey was opened to the wider community.**

**A total of 129 responses were received.**



# What the Community said...

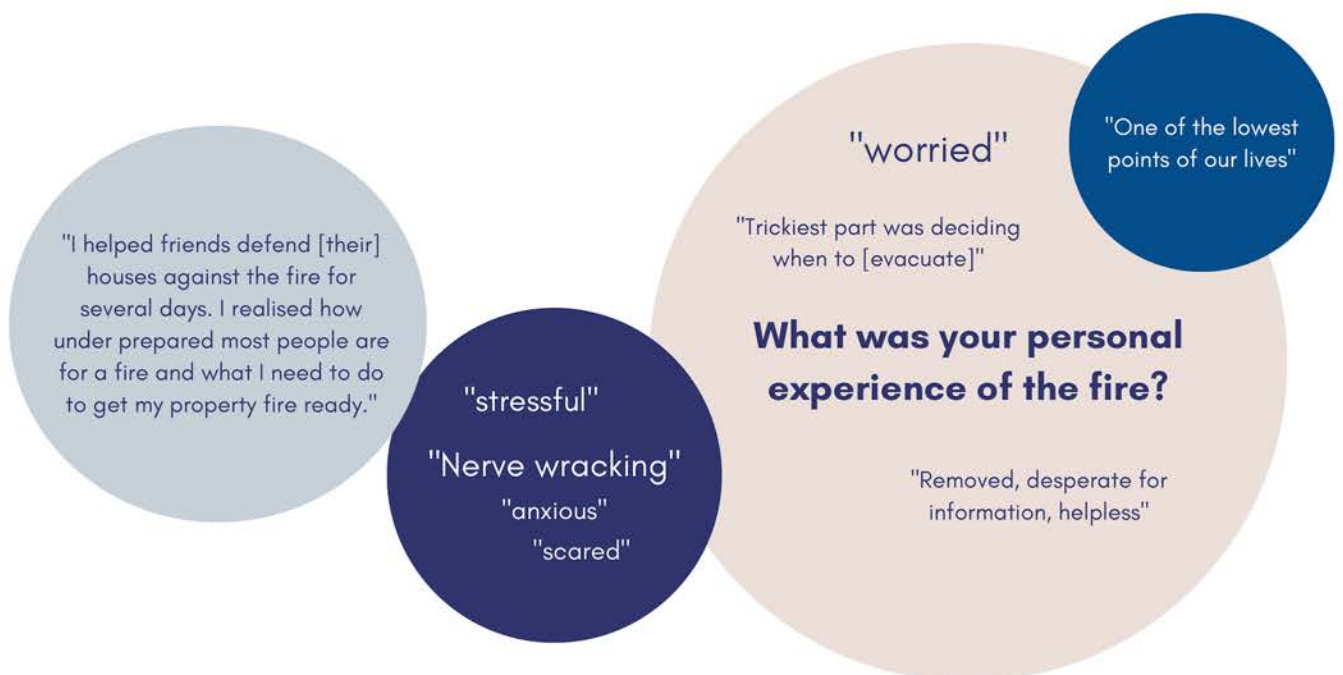
During the **Impacted Residents Meeting**, community members expressed a range of concerns in relation to the fire event and response. There was an expression of appreciation and gratitude to the volunteers and DFES staff who helped to save their homes and ensure their well-being. The event was overwhelming for many residents but the common feeling was that the level of volunteer and professional firefighting support was exceptional.

Some residents also expressed their anger about the fire and how it started, and their anxiety and distress at how decisions were made during the fire event. For many residents, the event has caused damage and a loss of a sense of safety.

A range of concerns and questions were raised during the meeting, which have been captured in this report. The questions that were posed and the answers that were given have been summarized in the appendix to this report.

Common themes rising from the **community feedback** captured include:

- Communication with residents needs improvement – particularly those without phone service, isolated, elderly and vulnerable people
- More information on where to take pets and livestock when evacuating is required
- Clearer information and process required on what happens when you leave the fire ground, if you need to return
- A register of people staying to defend their properties should be investigated
- Residents require more information about Bushfire Ready Groups and how they work



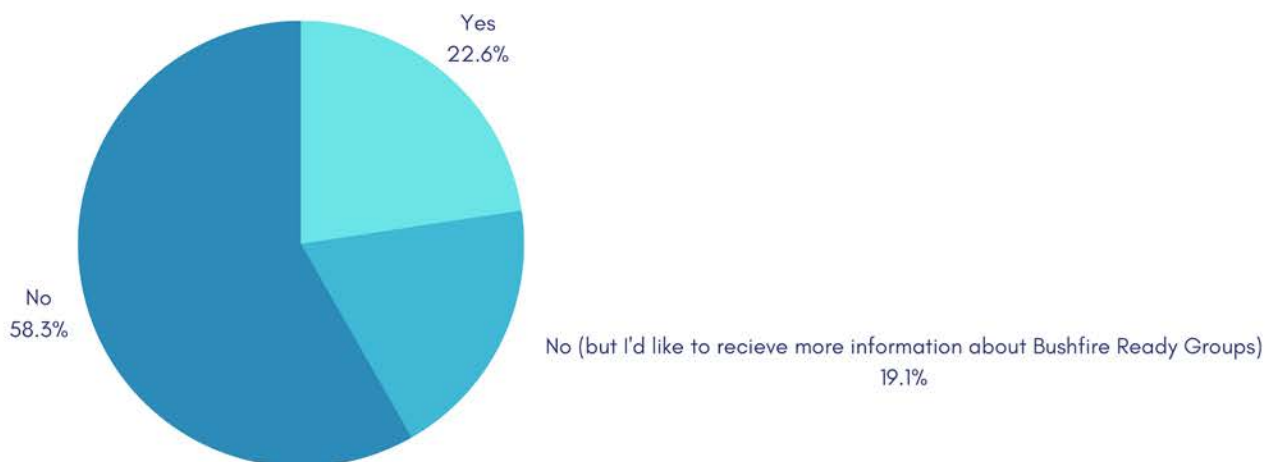
In the feedback forms, a lot of impacted residents also spoke about defending their properties alone or without support from brigades and worrying about family members and livestock. Many addressed the importance of checking in on neighbours. While many people said they wouldn't respond differently next time, there was also feedback to suggest that of those who stayed to defend some are thinking about tweaking or improving their preparedness and equipment for next time.


After the Impacted Residents Meeting, the survey was opened to the wider community for input.

**Community survey results** continued to roll in as the Shire called out for feedback on the bushfire experience in the days and weeks after the incident. The data shows:

- Most people first heard about the fire either via word of mouth or because they simply saw the smoke.
- The most common ways to stay updated during the event were:
  - Emergency WA (70%)
  - ABC local radio (38%)
  - Word of Mouth
  - Denmark Shire SMS alert system
- Most people felt 'generally' or 'well' informed during the fire.
- Most people (60%) had a Bushfire Plan in their head, while 35% had a Bushfire Plan written down.
- A lot of people who had a plan in their head said they'd put their plan to paper for next time.
- The most common estimates of fencing damage on impacted properties were within the 1-5km and 6-10km ranges.
- Many people evacuated and many who stayed to defend are thinking about tweaking or improving their preparedness and equipment for next time.
- Several community members said they'd like to learn more about Bushfire Ready Groups.

**Survey question:** *Are you a member of a Bushfire Ready Group?*





"I commend the emergency services. I am so grateful our home was saved."

"Followed our fire plan, talked [to] friends that might be concerned or unsure or unprepared."

"Stressful. Lack of information and conflicting info lead to utter confusion."

# Post Event Evaluation

## Preparedness

The following issues were raised during the debrief process with the goal to improve preparedness.

Topic	Issue	Action	Agency
Community Education	Lack of understanding of what to do with pets and livestock	Improve public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
	Confusion on rules and restrictions on movement in and out of fireground	Improve public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
	Bushfire Ready up-take	Improve public awareness for program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
Staff Education	Understanding of how an incident runs, staff responsibilities clearly defined	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
	Understanding of incident management levels	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
	Integration of Bushfire Brigades and Incident Management Team worked well	Maintain standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
	Bushfire Ready awareness among staff	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
Internal Shire Operations	Inadequate building and asset user guide information	Develop user guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> </ul>
Resources and Infrastructure	Standpipe refilling backlogs	Dividing branches required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> </ul>
	Availability of heavy earth moving equipment and operators	Continue annual update of LEMA for list of current earth moving contractors and operators. Advocate for additional funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shire of Denmark</li> </ul>

Topic	Issue	Action	Agency
<b>Resources and Infrastructure</b>	Vehicle management	Internal protocols to guide Shire equipment use in an emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Traffic management by Police in initial response was effective	Maintain standard. Ensure traffic management for entry into Denmark townsite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA Police</li> </ul>
	Managing air resources was overwhelming	Review number of qualified Brigade Volunteer Ground Controllers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Availability of AV and IT resources	Gap analysis of equipment and communication user guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Public information about Evacuation Centres	Improve public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
	Water tank fittings	Ensure public facilities have compatible fittings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Protection of critical infrastructure	Consider in Bushfire Risk Management Plan review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>

## Response Planning

The following summarises feedback received in relation to the response phase.

Topic	Issue	Action	Agency
<b>Fatigue Management</b>	DFES Fatigue Management Guidelines do not extend to Shire staff.	Examine DFES guidelines to local relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	State support	Response planning should incorporate State teams earlier in an incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> <li>• DFES</li> </ul>
	Staffing back ups	Ensure each role has a replacement/back up person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>

Topic	Issue	Action	Agency
<b>Communication</b>	Community meeting format with Facebook livestream worked well	Implement learnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFES</li> </ul>
	Communication to residents who have limited phone service, are isolated and are vulnerable	Improve community messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFES</li> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Early and timely release of information	Improve community messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFES</li> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Radio congestion	Review radio communications plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bushfire Advisory Committee</li> </ul>
	Confusion about evacuation centres and other relevant information	Improve communication between departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFES</li> <li>Dept of Communities</li> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
<b>Overlooked Resources</b>	Community organisations and groups	Consider local groups as a resource in LEMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Recovery needs to commence on day one of emergency event	LEMA to include recovery plan (staff designations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
<b>Mapping</b>	Out of date mapping	Maps should be kept up to date and standardised. Create a user guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFES</li> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
<b>Documentation</b>	LEMA under-utilised	Copies of LEMA available and accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Contacts out of date	Yearly update to LEMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Acronyms	List of acronyms in a visible location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFES</li> <li><b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>

# Recovery Planning

A review of the Shire's Recovery Plan via the LEMA is required in 2023 in accordance with the Emergency Management Act.

The following summarises feedback received in relation to the recovery phase:

Topic	Issue	Action	Agency
<b>Staffing</b>	Resources to support Local Government	More resources allocated to recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	Lack of understanding around available funding for disaster recovery	Advocate for review of eligibility criteria for State Government disaster recovery funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
<b>Community Support</b>	Focus on water quality and safety post fire	Improve public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA Health</li> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Contact information for community	Ensure relevant agencies contact details in LEMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
	Managing community enquiries	Develop reference sheet for Customer Service (which agency to contact for what, contact numbers included)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>
<b>Donations</b>	Managing influx of donations	Include in Recovery Plan/LEMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shire of Denmark</b></li> </ul>





# Appendix:

## Impacted Residents Questions & Responses

Agency	Question	Response
DFES	Was it a Total Fire Ban on Friday?	No. Very High fire danger conditions don't determine a Total Fire Ban. Although a pre-emptive Total Fire Ban can be put on if resources are stretched.
WAPol	Did the fire start on private property and was the resident home?	Yes, it was on private property.
WAPol	How many welfare checks were conducted and when were they done? NB The resident went to the police station Friday evening and the station was locked (the call was transferred to Perth and then Albany).	58 separate checks in and out of the fire zone, with another 50 able to be confirmed without visiting. Checks between Friday 11 pm (approx.) and Tuesday.  By then the Police were operating out of the Shire.
DFES	If SMS messages can't be relied upon, what should we do in the future?	DFES relies heavily on ABC radio to communicate. Have a radio with batteries in your kits. Emergency WA website is good when everything is working well (power and internet) but there can be a delay in reported fire shape while the incident team confirms the information.
DFES	Was the response delayed as the fire went from Level 1 to Level 2? NB The resident observed trucks stopped and occupants talking.	Lez (Chief Bushfire Control Officer) was making decisions, and if people are talking it will be regarding the fire. Decisions are made strategically i.e. all brigade appliances were protecting the assets (properties) and all DBCA were on the eastern flank in anticipation of the wind change (all official response vehicles are tracked and mapped so the location of resources is always known).
SoD	Why was fire handed back to the landholders?	The incident went from a Level 1 to 2 and then 3 and then goes back down as the fire is brought under control. When it goes back to Level 1 it's back under the management of the local Shire through the volunteer brigades. The fire is still burning and in the landscape - if it is beyond the capacity of landowners call 000 or use your network. Sleepers can ignite after several months. DFES has flown the fire and mapped hotspots. Scenarios have been run as to how breakouts/flare-ups would be managed. Smoke will remain. The Chief Bushfire Control Officer reminded residents that local firefighters are all volunteers and need to get back to work so a level of responsibility falls to landowners. It was suggested that farmers leave water units on site close to hand.

Agency	Question	Response
DFES	What is the protocol when the fire comes back to a property once it's gone past? NB - residents' situation was okay after the fire went past but hen became grave. Also left the property to get supplies and then the police wouldn't let him back in.	Firefighters will follow the moving fire front. Without communication, it's difficult but they will go back to check. Patrolling of fire lines is common practice when conditions and resources permit. It is the police's job to not let people through the roadblocks until restricted permits are in place. It's for the safety of the firefighters on the ground. If a resident is self-sufficient they can stay on site for as long as it is safe to do so.
DFES	The roadblock protocol needs to change as they had resources to fight the fire.	<b>This will not change. The safety of the community is the priority. KEY LEARNING</b>
WAPol	Is there criminal proceedings if they do go through a roadblock?	If you breach a roadblock there are charges i.e. disobeying lawful rules. Farm response units can be registered against an incident and will be allowed back in the fire ground, past roadblocks.
DFES	How is it safe to leave people in the zone, why not have someone escort them to the property?	People who remain must be resourced. Sometimes fires are 300km around and there are not the resources to take residents into the fire ground. <b>If you are staying to defend then you have to be prepared. Education will help ensure you are self-sufficient. KEY LEARNING</b>
DFES	What does it take to get aerial assets (737)?	Assets are available but can take up to 1.5 hours to get to the site depending on location, other fires etc, even if called in early. It always seems like aerial assets take longer than they actually do to arrive during incidents.
SoD	Given the fire ratings on Friday and Saturday what fire is okay to light?	The Firebreak and Fuel Management Notice is the reference to use when determining what you can and cannot do.
WAPol	To be a criminal offense do you have to intend to burn the **** out of everything?	It depends on intentionality. Police and the Shire are working together on whether the fire was lit at a time it shouldn't.
SoD	Why were no trucks sent before the inferno went through - approx. 5 pm? NB Husband and neighbours fighting fire on Happy Valley Rd	An assessment would have been made that it was too dangerous for trucks as there had been a near burn over incident.

Agency	Question	Response
WAPol	There was no one to tell there was a concern for a resident in the fire zone.	Use 000. 000 calls guide what the police do. If deemed too dangerous the incident controller will not let the crew go in. This is where a Bushfire Ready Group works. 55 groups already set up in Denmark and should be encouraged across all networks.
SoD	If the Shire knows our numbers can we use that to get back to properties?	Resources for this type of activity are limited at the height of any incident. Shire staff will not enter into a fireground during the peak of the fire but may be available to assist after the incident should landowners need to return to check on animals.
DFES	Can anyone register their vehicle and then get back in to their property?	No, you have to have a response vehicle like a farm fire-fighting appliance.
DFES	Who registers who is staying to defend?	Bushfire Ready Groups can keep their own records of who is leaving and who is defending.
DFES	Does the 737 have to go back to Busselton to refill or can Albany airport be registered?	Question taken on notice. Response: It is possible for the Light Air Tankers to use Albany Airport, however this requires mobile refilling and foam support. Due to Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATS) operating out of Albany and requirement for retardant it was more efficient to return to Busselton.
SoD	Does the Shire have the ability to require farmers to have their own fire fighting assets so they can be responsible for their own mopping up? Can building codes require properties to have sprinkler systems and independent water and power?	If building in a bushfire area then planning legislation requires certain conditions are met.
SoD	Landowners need to manage standing bush (road verges) but can't do that now. What's changed?	There have always been regulations around the management of road verges which are crown land. Clearing permits are managed by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulations.
SoD	What is the Shire doing about its land?	To manage fire risk on Shire land, the Shire applies for State Government funding. Denmark will receive over \$500,000 funding next year and will continue the work it has been doing for three years under the Mitigation Activity Fund.

Agency	Question	Response
DFES	Will there be compensation available from the Emergency Services Levy for rehabilitation work from damage caused by fire appliances on properties?	No compensation. Emergency Services will make decisions regarding where operations are best placed to contain bushfires, sometimes this will be on private property. The priority is to ensure the safety of the community. Residents need to investigate private insurance. Some insurance companies may cover water usage and damage to pasture.
SoD	Is there some way undergrowth can be controlled around a house on Limbourne Road in the tree preservation area?	Undergrowth can be managed. The Shire has staff who can assist with site assessments and the Shire has in the past run workshops to demonstrate to landowners how asset protection can be carried out.