

Ed's learning curve not entirely one sided

NINE hundred metres isn't far in the overall scheme of things—but it is a distance that will long remain in Ed Bartosiak's mind.

Ed has just finished a six months stint with CALM's Mundaring District on secondment from the WA Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) as part of a partnering charter to strengthen relationships between the two fire organisations.

The 900 metres was the length of a hose run the Mundaring crew carried out during a wildfire in the Avon Valley National Park earlier this year.

"The way the crews worked that night was incredible," Ed said. "The country was so steep, you couldn't walk it. You literally had to climb it."

But teaming up with CALM crews while they put the 'wet stuff on the red stuff' was only a small part of Ed's induction into CALM's fire management.

The aim of the secondment was to enhance teamwork between CALM and Fire and Rescue crews so that each had a better understanding of the other's role.

This understanding—part of a mutual aid agreement—is particularly crucial in the Mundaring area and other parts of the 'urban-rural interface' along the Darling Scarp.

The scarp and its suburbs—some set in picturesque leafy settings—have long been regarded as a fire disaster just waiting to happen. It's not a matter of if, but when.

Recently, CALM, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Bush Fires Board and local councils agreed on a 'three agency response zone' along the scarp. This means that in the event of a wildfire, there is an automatic turnout by units from the three agencies.

Consequently, CALM and the Fire and Rescue Service will be working much closer together than in the past.

Ed's experiences in Mundaring are now being passed back through the Fire and Rescue Services and in his new role as a training officer at Belmont.

One big aspect of CALM's fire operations he has taken on board is the use of the Incident Command System at wildfires.

The FRS only recently adopted the system which has been part of CALM's and the volunteer bush fire brigades' fire suppression operations for several years.

At a recent 'round the table' debrief with CALM Mundaring staff including district manager Peter Keppel, fire co-ordinators Ross Mead and Bruce Telfer

and overseer Tom Nevin, Ed said his time with CALM was a very positive experience that would have benefits for both organisations.

"One of the things that I noticed on reviewing the previous six months was that I picked up a lot more about CALM's operations than I expected," Ed said.

"For example, aspects such as water capacities, vehicle weight distribution, and even tyre sizes and pressures, may not appear important, but when it comes down to your effectiveness at the fireface, they can mean the difference between getting the job done or getting bogged.

"The knowledge gained on fuel hazard reduction burns and prescriptions is invaluable in terms of understanding fire behaviour and how fires react in different conditions.

"From a personal point of view, I'm even looking at the ecology of our plants in a different light."

Ed's experience wasn't all 'one-way' and CALM picked up tips which helped the crews in several fires.

Peter, Ross, Bruce and Tom said they now had a much better understanding of the way the FRS worked, and foresaw several changes they would be implementing in Mundaring district.

"We are going to have to become more aggressive in



CALM Mundaring staff recently farewelled Ed Bartosiak after a six-months secondment to the district from the Fire and Rescue Service. Ed presented the district with a memento in appreciation of his time with the department. CALM staff pictured are, standing, Bruce Telfer, Ed, David Atkins, seated, Les Doust, Nibs Morganti and James Gallagher.

our response to fires in the Hills urban areas," Peter said.

"Also, the volunteer brigades, which are such a big help to us, are now on a centralised callout system through kocal Aboriginal radio station 6AR. This means they could be called

to a fire on CALM land even before we are notified.

"So we have to look at our arrangements and systems for call outs."

Bruce said a visit to 6AR had given him a much greater understanding of the FRS operations system.

"As well, Ed passed on some valuable information on tackling structural fires.

"This increased the competence and confidence of our crews, particularly when they were called to the fire in Chidlow in February, when the crews managed to save several houses."

Peter commended Ed for his commitment—particularly for his willingness to make himself available to fit into a different organisation.

"There's no doubt we now have a much better appreciation of each other's activities," Peter said.

