



DEC ready for early bushfire season

A LACK of winter rainfall this year has resulted in the bushfire season beginning four to six weeks earlier than normal. Opportunities for prescribed burning have been limited and karri and tingle forests have become flammable much earlier in the season.

The Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC's) five pre-formed incident management teams, established to ensure that it can respond effectively to large fires and other emergencies, will again be central to the department's fire season response.

DEC Senior Fire Planner Roger Armstrong said that this fire season is likely to be one of the most challenging in many years.

"The department is ready to handle fire emergencies and mount an effective emergency response," Roger said.

"The pre-formed incident management teams have been briefed and have prepared themselves for mobilisation.

"Duty rosters, detection systems and other preparedness measures have been activated early. Water bombers are in position and have been already been used at many fires this season.

"Fire detection aircraft are also flying detection circuits on bad fire days."

The incident management teams depend

on the involvement of people from all parts of the department to support the fire fighting effort. Many of the support roles in the teams don't require experience in fire management but require people who are interested in challenging assignments, are concerned with doing a worthwhile job and being part of something that is valued highly by the department, the government and the community.

Roger said the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into the 2009 fires have had significant impacts on the way that the department and its sister agencies undertake fire management.

"We have always focussed on keeping our fire fighters safe and on putting the fire out and we will continue to do so. However, this year will also see us focussing on putting the information out," Roger said.

"Keeping the community informed about bushfires and how they might be affected is one of the major lessons of the Victorian fires. An informed community can make better decisions and some of those decisions may have life and death consequences."

Community bushfire information updates and information on DEC fire management can be found on the DEC website www.dec.wa.gov.au and follow the links News > Media statements > Fire updates.



The DEC pre-season briefing for the gold and green incident management teams.

Explaining the conditions

RAINFALL has been below average during winter across most of southern Western Australia.

Rainfall has been the lowest on record for the Swan, South West and Warren regions which include forests of jarrah, karri, tingle and wandoo. Substantial areas of the eastern and northern Wheatbelt have also experienced the lowest rainfall on record.

Very low winter rainfall has led to poor moisture recharge of soil, woody fuels, deep litter profiles and organic soils which are now very dry. Stream flow in major streams and rivers has also been negligible.

These conditions indicate that this fire season will have increased bushfire potential.

Bushfire emergency warning system

THIS season you will hear messages on ABC radio and TV relating to the status of bushfires.

These messages will be graduated from an 'ALERT' informing you that there is a fire in your vicinity, a 'WATCH and ACT' message informing you that things are becoming more serious and you need to take steps to leave the area or prepare for the passage of a bushfire.

The highest level message is an 'EMERGENCY WARNING' informing you that the passage of a bushfire in your area is imminent and it is best shelter in a safe place.

When the threat has abated an 'ALL CLEAR' message will be broadcast.

You can find more information on these messages on the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) website www.fesa.wa.gov.au.





Senior Project Officer Tammie Reid and Cultural and Community Coordinator Koodah Cornwall at the forum opening.

Reflecting on DEC's Foresight Forum

THE new Western Australian Conservation Science Centre recently hosted the third annual gathering of DEC's senior managers and leaders. This year's aptly named Foresight Forum aligned its focus with future global trends as identified by CSIRO, and how these trends may impact on the department's business areas.

Director General Keiran McNamara's opening address looked at the department's priority areas, including the Kimberley Science Conservation Strategy, the Great Western Woodlands Strategy, amendments to the Environmental Protection Act and upcoming proposed amendments to the Conservation and Land Management Act and Wildlife Conservation Act.

Dr Tom Hatton from CSIRO made a fascinating presentation based on the concepts outlined in the CSIRO 2010 discussion paper—'Our Future World: an analysis of global trends, shocks and scenarios'. The paper had input from more than 50 CSIRO scientific and business development staff, and identified five global megatrends:

- more from less—a world of limited resources
- a personal touch—personalisation of services

- on the move—urbanisation and increased mobility
- divergent demographics—older, hungry and more demanding
- iWorld—digital and natural convergence.

Dr Hatton praised DEC for its ability to think about and engage in the 'long-term game' of conservation and environmental protection, and for the leadership it's had over the years.

Director Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs and forum MC Ron Kawalilak said one of the key themes that emerged during the forum was the need for the department to continue to find better ways to engage with and respond to the needs of our stakeholders and community, including using more innovative communication methods such as social media.

"This is to ensure that the department's business objectives, values and achievements are better understood by the community and our many stakeholders," he said.

"This is important if we are to have a consistent and authentic reputation and continued relevance into the future."

Health over the holidays

AS the holiday season beckons, it's easy to lose sight of your health goals. Rich food, drink and a lack of exercise can contribute to a sluggish system.

DEC's Risk Management Section recommends trying the following tips to minimise the impact of holiday feasts and increased down-time.

Stay off the snacks

Weight gain during the holidays is usually a result of snacks that we have lying around the house. Go easy on the chocolate and nuts—instead opt to have bowls of fruit on the ready.

Plan a walk

Just because it's Christmas doesn't mean normal life has to stop completely! Find 30 minutes for a swim, walk along the beach or a game of cricket.

Bulk up on vegetables

Whatever your meal of choice, max out on vegetables and cut back on meat. Salads are an ideal alternative as long as your veggies aren't covered in butter or rich dressing.

Choose your drinks carefully

If you're watching your weight, some drinks will kill your diet. Keep an eye on your intake of premixed drinks and drink responsibly.

Sleep

To ensure that you get enough sleep during the festive season, try to get a couple of extra hours on the days where you have some free time. This is the best way to compensate for the busy days where your sleep is sacrificed.

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Ningaloo a key fish nursery



DEC has been part of studies undertaken by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and the Western Australian Marine Science Institution (WAMSI) which have highlighted the importance of ensuring greater protection for key areas of Ningaloo.

The study, which looked at abundance of juvenile fish and corals along the Ningaloo coast, identified areas in the northern and central part of Ningaloo as significant fish nurseries.

AIMS scientist Martial Depczynski said one big surprise was the discovery that the vast algal fields (Sargassum) in the park's lagoons act as important nursery grounds for various species of reef fish, including recreationally fished species such as the emperors and functionally important groups such as the goatfishes.

"These findings indicate that calmer

lagoonal and back-reef areas are vitally important to the ongoing health of Ningaloo's adult coral and fish populations, as this is where nursery grounds seem to be concentrated," Martial said.

"Over the past two years, researchers have been studying the reef to create a cost-effective and safe way to conduct a long-term monitoring program of reef health in the marine park based on the growth and recruitment of coral and fish.

"We will also be collecting further data next year to gain an understanding of how recruitment strength varies between years."

Two scientists from DEC's Marine Science Program—Shaun Wilson and Tom Holmes—worked on the research project with Martial.

Shaun said the project was designed to provide management agencies with a template of how best to monitor annual recruitment processes within the marine park.

"The development of a long-term monitoring program that focuses on larval input is critical because it provides a benchmark of the future health of the Ningaloo reef system," he said.

Shaun said the current research at Ningaloo Marine Park would add to DEC's scientific knowledge and would be used in the development of the department's broader marine monitoring program along the entire WA coast.

Shaun and Tom will be continuing their fish recruitment research into the future, focusing on other issues such as the impacts of climate change on coral reef communities.

WAMSI's Ningaloo research projects are being led by DEC with work being undertaken by The University of Western Australia, CSIRO, AIMS, Curtin University, WA Museum, Edith Cowan University and the WA Department of Fisheries.

Tree Top Walk gift shop takes out top tourism award

THE Tree Top Walk gift shop was recently recognised for its contribution to the tourism industry during the 2010 WA Tourism Council Awards gala evening at Burswood Entertainment Complex.

Tree Top Walk Business Manager Julie Ross said that winning the bronze Specialised Tourism Services award was a great thrill.

"It's an honour to represent the department and its commitment to supporting tourism across the regions through several infrastructure projects," she said.

The category was open to retailers or facilities that enhance the visitor experience and integrate with other tourism products.

"While the Tree Top Walk is no stranger to winning tourism awards nationally and internationally, it was good to be recognised

at the highest level for our commitment to the visitor experience through the gift shop," Julie said.

"The gift shop has become such an integral part of the success of the site as it provides an eclectic range of local and specially designed products that financially benefit local artists and suppliers and generate funds for the operation of visitor services across the Warren Region.

"The development of the gift shop demonstrates that DEC is receptive to the changing needs of tourists and keen to maintain the Tree Top Walk as one of the state's top tourist attractions.

"It was a great evening for our staff to attend as it gave a glimpse of the very best product in the industry as well as the experience of being publicly applauded for their hard work and effort."



The Tree Top Walk team shows off their bronze award with Peter Sharp and Tracey Shea and Regional PVS Leader Tim Foley.





Happy holidays from the ECN team

The ECN team would like to remind readers that this is the last edition of Environment and Conservation News for 2010.

The next edition will come out on 18 January 2011.

The ECN team would like to thank all of our readers for your support and contributions during 2010. We look forward to bringing you the news from around the department in 2011.

