

# **COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE 2021 WOOROLOO BUSHFIRE**

## **A REPORT ON FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS WITH RESIDENTS**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

The Wooroloo Bushfire (Western Australia) burned uncontained between 1 and 6 February 2021 from Wooroloo to Brigadoon. It burnt approximately 11,000 hectares, destroyed 86 homes and damaged or disrupted power, water and communications infrastructure. The lives of hundreds or residents of the affected area were dislocated for months, and some are still experiencing the impacts of the bushfire.

### **Research scope and methods**

Face-to-face interviews with forty residents impacted by the 2021 Wooroloo bushfire were conducted in November 2021. Residents of Bailup, Brigadoon, Gidgegannup, Noble Falls, Tilden Park and Wooroloo were asked about their experiences during and after the bushfire using a semi-structured interview format.

### **Key findings**

#### **Awareness**

Residents became aware of the Wooroloo bushfire through their sources, primarily through contact from family, neighbours or friends, by telephone or social media. Some were aware through environmental cues, including seeing or smelling smoke and flames.

#### **Official warnings**

Most interviewees did not receive an official warning of the bushfire, and those who did receive it well after they had become aware of the fire through other sources.

Many who received a text message said it was unhelpful because it did not relate to their location or circumstances, was late, inaccurate, or unclear. The official warnings instructed some people to leave at a time when the proximity of the bushfire made evacuation extremely dangerous or impossible.

Many people continued with normal activities on their property, aware of the bushfire's presence but believing that it was not an immediate threat and would probably be easily controlled so that they could monitor it.

#### **Sources of information during the bushfire**

People sought information about the bushfire primarily from personal contacts with emergency services personnel; Internet sites, including the DFES website, Facebook and Bushfire IO; ABC radio; monitoring the fireground; neighbours, and through other forms of media.

#### **Threat from the bushfire**

Many people who remained at their property throughout or for some period during the bushfire experienced its threat mainly through ember attacks. Some had the fire front sweep through or flank their property, often accompanied by ember attack—many extinguished spot fires and embers for many hours and some for days. Most experienced the fire's size, speed, proximity,

intensity, and heat as extremely frightening. People also heard explosions, had ash fall on them, and the large plumes of black, orange and sepia-coloured smoke heightened the feeling of threat.

Threats changed from smoke inhalation to ember attack, to radiant heat and flame contact and a combination of them and then back again.

### **Evacuation during the bushfire**

Approximately 40% of interviewees evacuated primarily because of the fire's proximity, responsibility for dependents, their capacity to remain, the influence of family and neighbours, and the perceived threat posed by the bushfire. No evacuee cited the receipt of official warnings as a reason for leaving.

#### ***Problems before leaving***

Many evacuees were impeded or slowed while still at their property primarily by organizing clothes, medicines and valuables, including relocating firearms; rounding up and loading animals and pets; dealing with confusion and anxiety and negotiating with other family members.

#### ***Problems on the escape route***

A few evacuees experienced problems escaping to a safer location, including driving through smoke and near flames; dealing with the anxiety of dependents; heavy traffic; and being unable to access their preferred escape route.

#### ***Things that assisted leaving***

Family members, neighbours and friends helped some evacuees to leave. The recent extension of Lillie Road to Reserve Road created a crucial new escape route.

#### ***Evacuation destination***

Most evacuees escaped to a safe location well out of the bushfire zone staying with friends or family. Some tried to remain close to their property to return once the fire front had passed. For some, the destination choice depended on whether their pets and horses could be accommodated.

#### ***Feel about the decision to leave***

Few evacuees regretted leaving even though some had homes and property destroyed by the bushfire. Some said the threat posed by the fire to their lives and dependents as removing any doubt about leaving.

#### ***Property preparation before leaving***

Some evacuees were equipped and acted to protect their property in their absence. Preparations were typically clearing the area of vegetation and fine fuels, cleaning gutters, and watering down structures. A few used trailers and utes carrying water and pumps to extinguish embers before they evacuated.

## **Remaining to defend against the bushfire**

Approximately 60% of interviewees remained to defend their property, many wanting to protect their homes.

### ***Factors supporting remaining***

Eight main factors sustained the decision to remain: preparation of their property, including gutter cleaning and wetting down; access to a reliable water supply and delivery capability, including roof and wall sprinklers; firefighting equipment, including hoses, pumps and mobile water units and power generators; an evacuation plan to protect family members and in case defence failed; a basic firefighting plan; previous experience with fires or risk management in rural settings, at work or as a volunteer fire fighter; having personal protective clothing; and receiving assistance from family, friends and neighbours.

### ***Things that made staying safer***

A combination of four key factors made their efforts to defend safer: reliable water supply; equipment to deliver that water; a team of people to help defend; and a defensible space around the house.

### ***Experiences of sheltering***

Few defenders sought shelter in their homes, behind protective structures, around water such as pools and dams and in burnt or cleared areas such as paddocks.

### ***Controls on movement***

Most defenders directly or indirectly experienced some restrictions by the emergency services on their movement out of and into the fireground during the period the bushfire was burning. Many circumvented these controls using tracks and back roads that were not blocked at the time, access across private property, and in some cases, using their personal contacts with the various arms of the emergency services to negotiate their way through.

### ***Reflections on the decision to stay and defend***

Most of those who remained would not hesitate to do the same thing again, convinced that their house and property would have certainly been destroyed either by the fire front or by spot fires ignited by embers.

### ***Experiences helping neighbours***

Many defenders assisted neighbours in fighting the fire or, in some cases, defended properties for neighbours who had evacuated. This sometimes involved considerable effort and personal risk and included helping with animals. In many cases, they helped to save their neighbour's property.

## **Recovery from the Wooroloo bushfire**

### ***Experiences immediately following the bushfire***

The days following the passing of the firefront were experienced by those who were still within the fireground as extremely busy, noisy, hectic and disrupted. The fire services continuously patrolled to extinguish flare-ups, contractors worked to restore electricity and

communications, and property owners were clearing and rebuilding. Electricity remained disconnected for weeks, and people had to find ways of coping, including purchasing and wiring in generators. A lack of institutional support, including emotional and psychological support, was noted, but some practical, neighbourhood-based support offered soon after the event was provided.

### ***Problems in recovery***

People experienced the bushfire's emotional and psychological impacts, including PTSD, anxiety, and stress. The burnt landscape had a depressing effect on their lives. People whose houses were destroyed had to cope with living in rental accommodation, rooming with friends or neighbours, and living in caravans or temporary dwellings on site. They had lost memorabilia, personally meaningful items and valuables.

Recovery involved an overwhelming amount of repairing and rebuilding work, especially to fences. For some, it felt that they had to 'start all over again'. Shortage of labour and materials and the loss of personal equipment and tools made the repair and rebuilding task more difficult.

### ***Roadblocks***

Access to food, water, fuel, and vital supplies such as medications and animal feed was imperative following the fire. However, roadblocks made this extremely difficult and frustrating, isolated people and, in some cases, undermined their morale. Friends or family brought supplies to the roadblocks requiring the defender to travel through the fireground. In many instances, roadblocks were ineffective because, through necessity, people found ways around them or used personal contacts to circumvent them.

### ***Role of local government***

There was dissatisfaction with Councils' support for people in the fireground early in the recovery when people needed water, fuel and supplies. But Councils' community support networks as part of refuge services and recovery support were appreciated by many who were aware and could use them.

However, planning and building processes were experienced as bureaucratic, complex and time-consuming, failing to recognise the constraints faced by applicants.

The financial support provided by the State and Federal governments and the City of Perth's Lord Mayor's Fund was critical to recovery, especially providing emergency finance for necessities without significant bureaucratic delays.

### ***Experience with insurance***

The response of insurance companies and agents was seen as overwhelmingly helpful, supportive, and timely. Small preliminary payments were made to enable priority and emergency purchases, including tools for cleaning, clearing and rebuilding and to provide generators.

However, delays and frustrations with insurance were extensive while the fire area was 'locked down'. Some insurance companies refused to provide support without an assessor

visiting their property, while others approved some payments based on telephone discussions. Slow processing of claims meant some people who self-financed repairs ran out of money.

Some insurance companies consistently cut claims by applying inappropriate cost standards, most commonly for fencing, undermining peoples' recovery efforts and extending the time needed to build back.

### ***Things that assisted recovery***

Community social events, working bees and support from local groups and charities assisted people in their recovery, including the CWA and BlazeAid.

### **Future**

#### ***What would you do differently to stay and defend***

Most people whose homes were destroyed intended to rebuild, some planning extremely fire-safe structures beyond the requirements of the current bushfire regulations.

Many people would better plan and prepare for bushfires or respond differently if they were threatened by a bushfire again. Many defenders would be better prepared and equipped with pumps, hoses and water supply, including firefighting units. Installation or improvement of roof, wall and lawn sprinklers was planned, including establishing water recycling systems. Generators allowing independent operation when the power utilities were closed down were envisaged.

The extent of vegetation close to homes was reconsidered, including planting more fire-safe vegetation, such as succulents close to structures. Options for more extensive planned burning of vegetation on their property were also being examined. People planned to create a more extensive defensible area.

Mutual protective action with neighbours during a future bushfire was proposed, including improving access between neighbours' properties to allow them to help each other and provide ready escape routes if needed and improving their firefighting skills through training or joining the local bushfire brigade.

#### ***What others should do differently to help take protective action***

Improved warnings and communication from the emergency services preceding and during bushfire was seen as a priority for the future. DFES' firefighting performance management and ineffectiveness are seen as needing significant improvement. In the future, people want emergency services to provide effective support for their protective actions, reliable information about the fire and expert management of bushfires in cooperation with residents.

## Background

In the spring of 2020 Perth experienced above-average rainfall, with the Perth Hills recording record falls, including Gidgegannup (137.8 m).[2] Considerable vegetation growth followed, which dried out in December and January when summer rainfall was less than 5 mm.[3]

The Wooroloo Bushfire ignited at approximately midday on Monday, February 1, 2021, in the vicinity of Werribee Road Wooroloo. The daytime temperature reached 38 °C (100 °F) and strong winds were experienced.[4]

The fire spread rapidly to the west and north-west, driven by easterly winds toward Gidgegannup. By 1 pm, an emergency warning had been issued to residents of Wooroloo, Bailup and Gidgegannup, who were urged to evacuate.[4]. An east-south-east wind change pushed the fire through Noble Falls Reserve, across Toodyay Road, into Tilden Park and other parts of Gidgegannup before spreading into the Walyunga National Park. By late afternoon, 230 ha was reported burnt as the fire moved in a north-westerly direction.[5]. At the height of the fire, 500 firefighters were involved, supported by aerial assets, including two large fire bombers.

Evacuation centres were established in Gidgegannup Midvale and Beechboro.[7]

Over the following five days, persistent strong east winds (including south and north easterly at different times) drove the fire to Brigadoon and threatened the Shady Hills subdivision in Bullsbrook, travelling 26 kilometres from its source. By 6 February, the fire was contained, and the Emergency Warning was downgraded to Advice level. Light rains assisted in continuing efforts to extinguish the fire before expected worsening conditions.

The bushfire burnt approximately 11,000 hectares. The fire perimeter exceeded 140 kilometres (c.f. Figure 1). The impacts of the fire included 86 residential dwellings destroyed, power infrastructure disrupted, power poles extensively burnt and extensive non-human animal deaths. The loss of power supplies resulted in the disruption of water supplies and telecommunication networks. Western Power reported 2,700 properties without electricity[6]. Repairs and restoration of the power network took weeks [8]. Hundreds of horses were evacuated from the fire zone and stabled at the Magic Millions complex and other private locations away from the fire.

In July 2021, WA Police charged a man with a breach of duty and carrying out an activity that could cause a fire, alleging that he used an angle grinder that caused sparks.[1]

In mid-August 2021, the Western Australian government announced an enquiry into the Wooroloo Bushfire to be conducted by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council. The brief to AFAC was to "examine the circumstances surrounding the Wooroloo Bushfire and the response to it" [9][10]

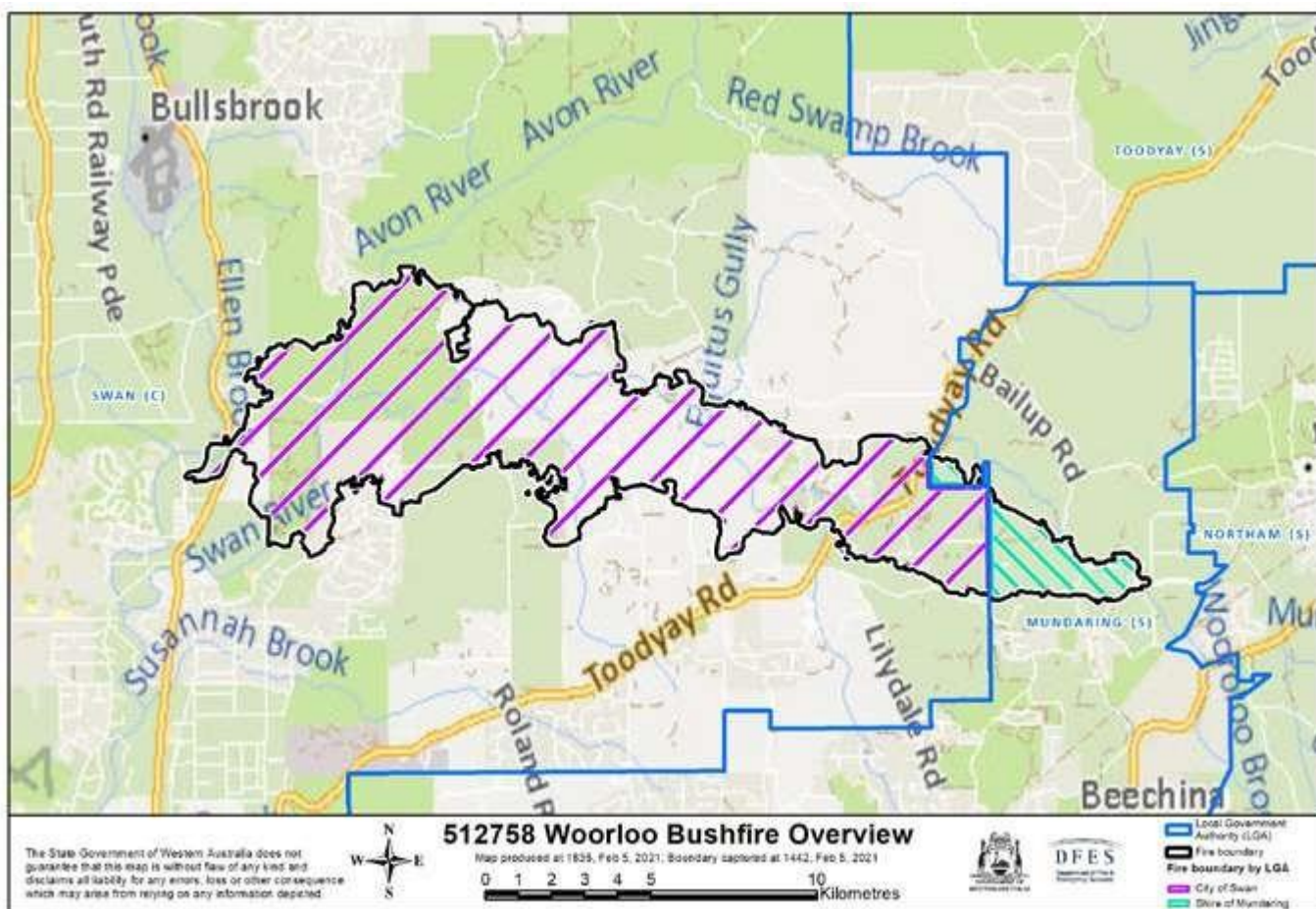


Figure 1: Woorloo bushfire boundary

The Western Australian and Commonwealth governments provided disaster relief and support payments to people who had lost their homes or were displaced by the bushfire. Non-government organizations also played an essential role in supporting affected people.

The fire partially coincided with a five-day lockdown of the Perth metropolitan region that started at 6 pm on 31 January. DFES COVID-19 Safe Operations Guidelines were applied during fire-fighting operations

## Purpose and Scope of the Report

This report presents findings from face-to-face interviews with residents impacted by the 2021 Wooroloo bushfire. The following themes were investigated and detailed in the semi-structured interview appended to this report.

- Awareness of the bushfire
- Receipt and response to official warnings
- The usefulness of official warnings
- Use of media and other sources of information
- Perception of threat from bushfire
- Intentions to leave, stay and defend or wait and see
- Protective action (leave or stay) during the bushfire
  - Reasons for taking protective action
  - Problems/issues in taking action
  - Factors contributing to the success of action
  - Assistance provided
  - Reflections on decision
- Preparation and planning
- Household dynamics
- Impact of the bushfire on property and household members
- Recovery
- Plans for the future

Findings are presented as a service to the community affected by the Wooroloo bushfire and to the broader Western Australian community in the hope that the insights provided through this independent analysis will supplement the research undertaken by the State government and contribute to real, practical and long-term improvement to bushfire preparation and response in Western Australia.

## Research Methods

Residents affected or threatened by the 2021 Wooroloo bushfire were invited to participate in semi-structured face-to-face interviews about their experiences of the bushfire.

The researchers posted an invitation to participate in the interview on community notice boards in the localities impacted by the bushfire and on social media, including local Facebook pages. This recruitment strategy resulted in a sample that was self-selected.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, overwhelmingly at the interviewee's residence and, in a small number of cases, at some other location if that was requested.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed comprising open-ended questions as described in the previous section outlining the scope of the research and is attached as an appendix to this report. We asked the interviewee to tell us their story about the bushfire so they were free to focus on the main issues as they saw it, describe their personal experiences, and express their unique perspectives.

Potential interviewees received a preliminary introduction to the research, and if they remained interested, a more detailed *Participant Information sheet* was sent. Before the interview was commenced, participants signed a Consent form to provide informed consent. Each interview was audio-recorded with the consent of the participant.

Recordings were transcribed and analysed thematically using *NVivo 12*, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

### Interviewee sample

Forty interviews were conducted with 18 women and 22 men who were residents of the localities impacted by the Wooroloo bushfire and were personally threatened by and affected by it. Interviewees were or had been resident during the fire of the following:

- Bailup
- Brigadoon
- Gidgegannup
- Noble Falls
- Tilden Park
- Wooroloo

### Research Ethics

Interviews were conducted following responsible conduct of research principles, as outlined in the Australia Code for Responsible Conduct of Research 2018, which includes guidelines for informed consent of interviewees and research data management. Measures were taken to ensure the rights of interviewees and to ensure their anonymity in this report and in any papers, presentations or other publications arising from the research.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

## **Awareness of the Wooroloo bushfire**

Many interviewees first became aware of the bushfire primarily through contact from family, neighbours or friends, by phone or face to face, because they had seen information of the bushfire in social media. Some were aware through environmental cues including seeing or smelling smoke. Those who were proximate to the ignition point became aware through smoke and flames. A few interviewees, who were volunteer firefighters, were contacted by the fire services by pager or app.

### **Environmental cues**

*It was probably early in the afternoon when I saw the smoke*

*We were taking our lunch outside and we could smell the smoke. And we sort of looked up over the hill there and there it was*

*We could see a fire plume in a very light, brownish, cool fire plume off in the distance. there's a huge plume of smoke ... the wind was coming directly in our faces. We were obviously in line of the fire.*

*I noticed smoke and could smell it.*

*over that hill there and you could just see a little bit of smoke*

*...just saw smoke ...over there. I said there shouldn't be smoke in February so something's up.*

*I was in my... old garage, doing mosaics and had the roller door up and I could smell smoke.*

*...about 150 meters from where the fire actually started ... I could see the flames*

*I thought next door's horses have been stirred up and there was a big cloud of dust and so I stopped momentarily ... but the horses were calm and I realized it was smoke*

### **Family, neighbours and friends**

*...my wife rang me and said... friends had rung her... there's a fire starting in Wooroloo*

*I was in Midland. I got a call from my youngest daughter who lived with me ...and she said, "Dad, you better get home. We have smoke and it looks like there might be fire in Wooroloo.*

*...friends, acquaintances in the area... and out of the fire zone ... we were all constantly contacting one another to say are you okay*

*My wife was in touch with her sister and my father-in-law, and it was more based on their information that we became aware of how significant this fire was going to be and that we may be impacted.*

*I was lucky because I know [Name]. He was the captain ... and he texted me that there was a big fire in Wooroloo with lots of appliances, that was the first tip off*

*At 3:40 I got a text message from this controller, who's a friend of mine, saying that it wasn't going to be contained anytime soon. He knew where my place was and it was just directly in line of it.*

*...partly because friends over in Wooroloo sent a message saying ... could we come and help them evacuate horses.*

*We were working down in the city. About... four o'clock, one of our colleagues came up and said, I've just heard there's a bushfire at Gidgegannup.*

*Facebook, initially, my wife mentioned there was something on Facebook,*

*[Name] was the one who I think initiated the idea of it being a fire because there was panic on Facebook and so I'm not a Facebook person you see, so that's how I got to initially find out about it.*

*I had a message from my nephew-in-law who is at Gingin. He's a previously professional fire, now volunteer fire and he sent [Name] the message, "Did you know that fire's coming directly in your direction?"*

### **Fire Services' app**

*I was in a brigade then. I actually had their app in my phone*

*I was on the BART system and that sort of thing, so I got messages.*

*[Name] got the BART and I think I got the fire brigade text message, the text because he's active and I'm just on reserve*

*There was a BART message that came out around mid-day at about a structure fire, which had obviously an immediate response in all units fully manned. Shortly after that, there was another alert that came out that there was a scrub fire in the vicinity.*

Most interviewees were at home when they became aware of the bushfire although a few were in the Perth CBD, Midland and other suburbs, working, shopping and for other reasons. The COVID lockdown meant that many interviewees were at home at a time when they would normally be elsewhere.

## Receipt and usefulness of official warnings

Most interviewees did not receive an official warning of the bushfire and those who did received it well after they had become aware of the fire through other sources. Some received a warning of a bushfire in Wooroloo but not in the area of their residence including Gidgegannup and Tilden Park.

Brigade members were warned of the bushfire by receiving a Brigade callout.

*...part of the Gidge fire brigade so we get the call outs, the BART callouts, so you are kind of monitoring what was going on then*

A few interviewees received an SMS warning on their mobile telephone.

*A text message did come through at some point in the afternoon, before the fire came, that if you are going to leave, leave. If you are going to stay and defend, then make preparations. I think I got two of those texts.*

*[Name] was getting texts saying leave*

Many of those who received a text message commented on its unhelpfulness because it did not relate to their location or circumstances, was late or unclear. The failings of the official warnings meant that some interviewees were instructed to leave at a time when the proximity of the bushfire made evacuation extremely dangerous or impossible. The lack of accurate information meant some interviewees did not prepare their property to survive in their absence and had inadequate time to organise their belonging and properly manage their evacuation, so they left at the last minute, under direct threat of the fire.

*...if we'd known about it, we would have had probably a good hour or more to load up and get organized and get out plus I could have had the water systems running a lot longer and drench everything*

*...information that comes to people has to be accurate, and it has to be on the spot. You can't give information when fire has already gone past or is here. If you're going to give any information out, it's got to be now because people are ready to leave as their exit plan.*

## Timing

*My neighbours in Wooroloo got their Watch and Act notice after we had been turned away from trying to get their horses, so their place had probably already caught fire by the time they got their Watch and Act.*

*We actually didn't get a 'Watch and Act' notice until after we had evacuated.*

*...we didn't get a notice on the phone until about 4:30.*

*These are the messages that started after four and were all the same. And the fire was here at our doorstep probably by five.*

*I am never going to trust it again. It was way too late, way too late.*

*I've literally had about a dozen people afterwards say ... 'I was waiting and waiting and couldn't really know what was going on' and they got out within 10, 15 minutes before the fire had gone through and some of those people lost their places*

### **Accuracy**

*..the very generic DFES warnings were coming through on the mobile phone ... I took with a pinch of salt (because) some of the instructions were incorrect.*

*...got warnings but come on... All it can say is get out. Get out. Get out. Get out. This is going on. I got a fire here. I got a fire here. I got a fire here and you're telling to get out? You are kidding me.*

*... the instructions were incorrect. One of the instructions was to leave via Toodyay Road, which would have put us into the head of the fire.*

*...they had all these experts telling how long it was going to take to get to Toodyay Road and they... estimated an hour and 10 minutes or something and it was there in 20 minutes. So, they were that far behind the fire,*

*...when they gave the roads, they just kept talking about Bailup Road, across Toodyay Road and Bailup Road. It didn't say and it's heading in a westerly direction, north-westerly direction towards... Lillie Road, the park in there and reserve through the centre there.*

*Those things are quite generic. They're not individual-specific.*

### **Location**

*There were warnings coming through for Wooroloo on the mobile phones, but we never had a warning for Gidgegannup. And there was no indication of roads. It was just a warning for Wooroloo. We were not Wooroloo. So, you know, I thought "Oh, well, it's not coming here."*

*It was always Wooroloo, Wooroloo, Wooroloo and I kept looking at them and say well, it doesn't concern us because it's, you know, it's way back over miles away.*

*...some warnings came later after I had gone but none of them mentioned Gidgegannup. They were all saying Wooroloo and Mundaring and there's not one of those messages mentioned Gidgegannup and it was heading straight for it. So even that system failed because people were getting the warnings but said it doesn't mention Gidge so I think it's going around.*

*They said Toodyay Road, Bailup Road, that's all they mentioned. If they'd said Reserve Road, Raine Road, we would have been out a lot quicker.*

*It just snuck up on us. It was ... lack of information, if we'd known just roughly where the fire actually was... that would have been an enormous help.*

*...any warnings that we did get were just confirming the fire was still in Wooroloo. Don't worry about it. If they'd said Gidgegannup in the messages, then ...hang on a minute that's Toodyay Road. What's going on? And then maybe our thinking would have been a little bit different*

Many interviewees commented on the lack of official warning through mobile SMS. Some felt the implications of not getting a warning were disastrous.

*So, we grabbed some cash that we had and our passports out of the safe and left and that was it. Everything else was completely destroyed. So that's one of the most annoying and frustrating things that makes me angry ... that we had no warning. None whatsoever*

*Anyway, the fire was happening, I had faith in the emergency services system but I didn't hear anything from them.*

## **SMS**

*We didn't get an SMS warning or anything like that on our mobile phones.*

*There was absolutely nothing for this area.*

*I don't recall anything coming through, any warning or anything like that, no.*

*I've never registered with anyone but this is my house. I live here. I don't have a Telstra landline. I depend on my mobile.*

*Nothing on the phone to say evacuate or go to this area. Nothing.*

A few interviewees commented on problems with mobile telephone reception that impacted on the receipt of warnings and their ability to call for assistance.

*That area there's really poor phone reception ...Mayo, Dinsdale, or Toodyay Road there, and so, it wasn't until I was getting back in Tilden Park really where I started getting all the emergency messages.*

*One of the (furies) called around and said if you have any problems call triple zero. I said we can't. We have no communication. We had no mobile internet, no mobile phone, obviously no power in the house so, no computer access. We couldn't even dial the emergency number on our mobile phones. There was nothing.*

*We always doubted the telecommunication. We've been on that for ages trying to get things sorted out here but between NBN, Sky Master, Telstra, all of them are such an... they render you into tears trying to get stuff done. This has been our dilemma for 35 years.*

*My biggest gripe with the whole thing is communication. The biggest issue we've got around here is the intermittent coverage. The intermittent power supply to phone towers. They regard Gidgegannup as a top three fires area for the state so they need*

*to invest to ensure that there is phone coverage so people can communicate. That is where a lot of people were exposed.*

## **Actions in response to awareness of bushfire**

Interviewees responded to the knowledge there was a bushfire in Wooroloo, in a diversity of ways.

Brigade members responded to call outs, contacted officers or colleagues for information or to offer their services or simply prepared to be called out..

*I told him I could come because I've got an HR license. Sometimes they struggled to drive the twelve two, ... and he said "Oh, can you get to the station and go?"*

*I got my gear ready in case I was needed. But really, given I guess the location, I assumed that it would be dealt with and that I might be needed at some stage over the next few hours.*

In cases where interviewees were aware of the close proximity of the bushfire, they took immediate protective action for both their property and their neighbour's property.

*So, part of our thing was to prepare the house to remove fuel sources that can go up. I finished getting the washing, went inside, made sure all the windows and doors were locked and closed and locked the house up*

*[Name] grabbed a pair of pliers to go and rescue next door's horses because we knew with the way the wind was going that they'd lose their bottom fences. We'd grabbed their dogs too and brought them up here because we didn't think anybody was home.*

*I came back to get our fire truck and went into [Name]'s place. I was putting out the fire then and there was burning up there. I was putting spot fires out. And because you put one out here and all of a sudden there's another one started just over here. It was dry.*

*I rang ... our neighbour who I've been dealing with him for years and years. I said, "... this bloody thing is going to cross Toodyay Road in the next hour or two. It's out of control and we need to stop it. If we get some of our private units, do you think we'd be able to help?" And [Name] said, "Oh, there's bloody units coming from everywhere.*

When they became aware of the bushfire some interviewees contacted neighbours and friends to inform them of the fire and advise them of their plans.

*I phoned [Name] and I said, "Look, I don't think you should bring your mum up today." And she said, "Why not?" I said, "There's a fire." She said, "Where?" I said, "At Wooroloo." And she said, "Well, that's miles away."*

*We started communicating with the neighbours ... about where it started, what started it, and is it going to come down over the hill or not?*

*So, a neighbour... lives on a 100-acre block to the east of us, he had a bit of line of sight of Wooroloo. So, between he and I, we're swapping information via phone.*

*...my wife informed her friend who lived in Dinsdale Road that there was a significant fire heading their way and that they needed to get sorted out.*

Some prepared for property defence or evacuation when they became aware of the fire.

*[Name] and I immediately started getting our cars packed for escape because we had an escape route across our neighbour's property to [Name] Road.*

*[Name] said to me get stuff out of the house and I didn't know what to take. I say 'what do I take?' I didn't know what to put in the car*

*So, I've got my fire equipment ready. I got my jacket and goggles and mask.*

*I ... started preparing, just getting any burnable stuff away from the house, getting the fire pumps ready, getting sprinklers ready, battening down the hatches so to speak.*

*...at the time we had the trailer with a IBC 500 standard and I went out there to hook that up*

Many interviewees continued with normal activities on their property, aware of the bushfire's presence but believing that it was not an immediate threat and would probably be easily controlled, so they could simply monitor it.

*So, I think, okay, well, I'm aware of it and so, ... I was just outside doing what I normally do. Work around the property and sort of just keep an eye on it.*

*I thought it was a fair way off. I really didn't do much at the beginning*

*Well, when their call didn't come through, I thought it must be all under control. I knew we've got a system of getting called immediately. So, I said to [Name], "Let's finish lunch and we'll probably get going soon." We just kept an eye on it.*

*...from about 12:30, through till about 2 p.m. I was working in my home office, I'd pop outside, once or twice to check on progress*

*I thought it's quite away from us, so I didn't think it was going to be too much of a problem. I just went about my business.*

*Anyway, we weren't concerned because we looked at the location of the fire with IO, did a quick calculation of the fire and paddocks even with the wind. Thought they'll be on top of that. There's good open space to push fire breaks, all sorts of good stuff.*

## Sources of information

Interviewees sought information about the bushfire primarily from the personal contacts with emergency services personnel; Internet sites including the DFES website, Facebook and Bushfire IO; ABC radio; monitoring the fireground; neighbours, and through other forms of media.

### Emergency services

Interviewees communicated with emergency service personnel to access information about the fire, the status of their property and sometimes gave advice about protective response. Access to fire personnel was primarily through personal relationships with them or because fire services visited the property during the bushfire.

*...in contact with the [Function] ... and he said that my house hadn't yet been reported as lost ... He said, so, if you can get back safely have a look at it. You might want to get back there and keep from burning down.*

*... he gave us information of where the fire was and what it was doing to his knowledge and he also unfortunately told us that there was a high rate of homes lost*

*. ... he gave us up to date information. He ... told us to keep an eye on the ember attacks,*

*...called a couple of colleagues in the brigade and I managed to actually get hold of the captain. And just wanted to get some idea of where the fire was tracking.*

*I had a friend that was in the volunteer fire brigade and she started sending things through to us.*

A few interviewees took their cues from the presence of the emergency services including fire appliances and aerial water bombers.

*...you can see all the helicopters. So, as soon as you start seeing all them a little bit more regularly, it was like right, okay. Well, let's put the sprinkler on*

*...the brigade boys had been going through the Vibe in Gidgegannup and refuelling. Obviously, there had been some fairly direct intel there, and okay, I took note of that.*

### Internet sources

Interviewees used Internet based sources including fire service web pages, the IO web site and government and community Facebook pages to access information about the bushfire. While most interviewees reflected positively both on the DFES site and Facebook a few felt that they were unhelpful.

### *DFES site*

*...the website with the map was probably the most important thing. And when I saw that we were right in the zone ... we had about 10 minutes to get out. But really, that that was a bit too late for my mind, to make a sensible decision.*

*We went into the FESA site, just to give us an idea ... confirming that it crossed Toodyay Road. So that FESA site was quite good. It confirmed what we already knew through Facebook, and so we knew where we were at, there weren't going to be any more surprises,*

*I just kept watching the DFES website throughout the afternoon as the fire developed from that tip off.*

*I was watching a fire map that I pulled up,*

*I looked up the DFES online thing, that's pretty useless. They put a lot of money into it after the last big fires and it's still pretty useless. It's different but it doesn't tell you anything. We could do a lot better than that.*

*...then we kept monitoring the DFES site online.*

### **Facebook**

*the other part of information was Facebook because we have a local Tilden Park Facebook page. ... they confirmed 'bloody hell it's in our backyard' because it crossed Toodyay Road.*

*people were so busy looking after things....as far as I remember there wasn't very much at all on Facebook.*

*...and we're on Facebook as well*

*...they were saying we should leave, on the community Facebook page.*

### **Bushfire IO**

*...the bushfire IO... was probably the most helpful because you can kind of see the path and you could see how many choppers there were.*

*We'd only recently started to utilize bushfire IO which we found to be very useful, because it gives you the range of burn offs versus events, incidents.*

*We were also using the bush fire IO site... that's quite a bit more useful than the DFES site. It is a satellite map with the fire zone imprinted over it and it has hot spots like areas in different coloured circles and it also has lots of arrows with the wind does.*

## Monitoring the fire ground

Many interviewees went to a position on their property or drove to a location where they could better monitor and assess signs of the fire. In some cases interviewees reported being close to or even in the fire.

*The first thing I did was go outside and face that direction. We did see distant smoke, so we thought, okay, that is coming our way for a start, because I monitor the wind all the time.*

*I was out here looking for wind direction and smoke,*

*...was still doing jobs around the workshop and keeping an eye to the east to see what the smoke was doing.*

*I was outside monitoring every second...because it was westerlies, so I knew if it stayed westerly, considering where it was at the time, we'd be okay.*

*...into the fray and we might only have minutes because the winds going this way. That's why we screamed up there in our cars, we got to see ourselves.*

*I'd be going out and having a look and maybe getting in the car up the hill having a look ...So [Name] and I spent the day going out onto the escarpment*

*...did actually go for a recce at about 9 o'clock I think it was and you could see the fire. I drove through the fire, but ... it wasn't being driven by the wind. It had its own sort of momentum.*

*I drove... The fire was coming. I wanted to see how close it really was and ...to have a little look ... It was burning up to my (property). I just wanted to have a look ... see the fire behaviour ... so I had a bit of an idea of what I was in for.*

*So [Name] and I... we went to check what's happening to see whether it's heading towards us or not. So, we went around Clenton Road and came down Reserve Road and we could see the bloody fire.*

*We... went down Dinsdale and stopped. We could see the bottom of the road an inferno. And he said, "Let's just wait here." We'll just wait here and see what's happening. This fire was like looking into hell and then it started getting closer.*

*We came back through the corner and ... it had bypassed us on the left and was approaching Toodyay Road and that's extremely fast, it was obvious. And then it jumped Toodyay Road and it was heading straight here and I said "I got to get back home"*

*... we've come to a friend's place on Mayo Road. He's on a hill. So, we sat there, and we watched it creep and hit. We've seen the smoke and we can see flames on the top of the ridge. We thought now, it's really on.*

## ABC Radio

Many interviewees tuned into ABC local radio to get information about the fire. It was widely known that ABC radio would regularly report on a major fire.

*I listened to the ABC all the time ... there would have been bushfire warnings on 720.*

*So, as always we turned on the radio and listened to the ABC reports*

*...the ABC emergency thing ... it was pretty much all about the fire.*

*...had a battery radio but you hear nothing on the radio. Even on the ABC channel they give you updates but they're generic yet the fire is still going.*

*...720, the radio station, and hear their reports on the quarter hour.*

## Neighbours

Some interviewees contacted their neighbours for information about the fire including the status of the bushfire and their property. Neighbours provided information they gleaned from observation, access to fire service communication channels and prior experience of fire in the area. Interviewees also coordinated their protective responses with their neighbours sometimes using communications systems they had created themselves.

*I rang my neighbour [Name] and said mate, how you going... let me know if my house is still standing... he was on the phone ... saying it's still here. There's still water going.*

*I did get an SMS from my neighbour, [Name]. He said, you ready, [Name]? Because we both decided to stay and defend.*

*I went down to our neighbour, [Name] who's a volunteer fire person, and I thought he might have some more information.*

*...we were talking on the CB radio that we'd ... set up for the valley. It worked out that that was the only communication we had when everything went down.*

*[Name] was fantastic cause he was higher up; we were in the valley. He could see ... where it was coming, and he predicted where the fire would come*

*...my neighbour was listening in on the command channel and he spoke to me and some of the other neighbours and said this thing is really serious.*

*I was in contact with our immediate neighbours and finding out what they were doing*

*[Name] said it was near his place and he said, "I think you'll have to think about evacuating,"*

*...her friend was actually texting her saying she can see it. And she said, "Get out. Get away. It's big.*

## **Volunteer communication**

A few interviewees used equipment to access fire services, including volunteer radio communication

*...on the volunteer fire radio, so we could hear the communication between DFES and the vollies ..., so we kind of knew where the fire was and what they were concerned about and that sort of things. That was actually quite handy.*

*...we also jumped onto the volley station..., we knew with our little handsets, we wouldn't interfere with their broad comms but we'd hear them coming.*

*I could smell a bit of smoke, and I.. cranked out (communications feed) on the computer to hear what the local CFS boys are doing. That's sort of the direct line in.*

*I have an app on my phone called Broadcastify, which picks up ...like a scanner... so I can hear what appliances brigades are turning out and hear the overall radio chatter about what's going*

## Threat from the bushfire

### Type of threat

Many of the interviewees experienced the threat of the fire mainly through ember attack. Some had the fire front sweep through or flank their property, often accompanied by ember attack.

Embers were blown by strong winds and fell in waves, creating spot fires, lighting vegetation around properties and creating ignition points on structures including homes and sheds. Many interviewees extinguished spot fires and embers for many hours and for some, for days. Embers were continuously generated not only as the fire front passed through but from the burning, sometimes over many days, of large trees and bushes in the surrounding landscape.

### *Ember attack*

*...all the embers and the fire wasn't on the ground. It was shooting like fire balls, shooting everywhere.*

*The front itself didn't come through here. This was embers inside a flank fire.*

*...just fires everywhere around and a lot of the trees were starting to chimney by that stage with a lot of ember points on the house. So, I just had to spend that night putting out spot fires around the house and keeping the water onto the house.*

*...it was really the embers (that were the main threat) because once the fire front had gone through, that was probably 10 minutes...we managed to keep the flames off the house in those 10 minutes. And really, it was just having the willpower, I suppose, to keep fighting the embers all night.*

*I realized embers are the biggest threat. You know they really are*

*All the fires that were starting in the paddock were all from embers*

*I was standing here and an ember in the darkness came, "YeEEEE", flying across ... at eye level. I thought, that's incredible. That would have come from the top of the hill somewhere,*

*...on the Tuesday night... we had an ember attack. [Name] and I were standing outside on the veranda and it was raining red. I've never seen it before, and it was everywhere. It was all around.*

*The next night, 30 hours after the fire... I spent the night sitting in the fire truck in the middle of my paddocks because the embers were blowing across from the road and the branches were starting to fall because it was pretty windy.*

*...the trees were dropping big branches, and as they dropped there was just an explosion of sparks and then we had all these spot fires because of the sparks.*

*...trees in here, some dead, right at the top of the block and these fucking embers would continually all night just pour out of this bloody tree trunk and branches*

*At night all of a sudden, another branch has crashed down in a big flare of embers that blow across at us.*

*...embers started coming over, we started getting chunks of black stuff landing in the gardens.*

*I probably made one critical error and underestimated the ember attack – the level of the ember attack... it just about knocked me over.*

### ***Fire front***

*It was a wall of flame twenty metres tall.*

*When I was up at the barn ... the fire came this way and started crowning and it was moving just as one big flame front...and just went through like a jet engine and I felt the heat at that stage.*

*This is about half an hour into the fire...the property behind us...the fire front ... went through the bottom of their paddock just running with the fuel load.*

*...the fire hadn't got here yet but we knew it was on that side and we can see all of the smoke. We could see flames through ... the bush here.*

*And it was just really terrifying, it was just sort of this big huge fire that you thought, well, this is it.*

*...the fire was raging. It was coming down this way...cutting across the scarp. It burned everything right through. It's been burned. Just completely black. Next door neighbour and upwards. All the fire was just raging up the hill and on both sides of us.*

*It was probably about two o'clock ... in the morning and I ... saw this huge bloody, massive, red glow and the fire had hit the bottom of the hill. The wind had got behind it and it was roaring up and had all those wattles . It just went up like candles.*

### ***Both fire front and embers***

*We turned everything on because I could see embers were already arriving ... and then probably within about 40 minutes ... the fire started impacting the bottom corner of the property*

*...the flames, the fire slowly sort of– spot fires – became bigger and bigger until they all joined up and I suppose that was the front of the fire then and that swept around on both sides of us.*

*...the fire impacting some of the older trees. I'm talking about basically chimneys. Just old marries that have lost all their limbs and the fire took hold of those incredibly quickly and basically, they became ember providers.*

### **Smoke**

*The impact of smoke is significant. The fire and the heat, the flame, but the smoke is up there. ... you can't get away from it. You can get away from the heat and the fire, but the smoke it was just something else...*

*I'd have to come inside just to get some fresh air, to get some new air because the smoke was still outside even though the fire front had gone through.*

*And the smoke was pretty bad too.*

*...the smoke was really bad. I had my breathing bushfire full face on.*

### **Perception of the threat**

Most interviewees, whether they remained and defended their property or evacuated, said that they perceived extreme threat from the bushfire at some stage, and for many, a number of times during the event. They explained their perception of the threat in ways that reflected their experience of the bushfire.

*Basically, it would wipe out everything that didn't have water on it.*

*It was once in a blue moon thing. It was worse than the ones in the East Coast, you know, and it was so huge.*

*That building actually exploded and showered debris. I was actually down here in the yard with the horse and the horse and I got hit.*

*I'm thinking, yeah and like, we're really in trouble here*

### **Factors influencing perception of the threat**

Interviewees perceptions of the threat were influenced by a range of factors including the size, speed, proximity, intensity and heat of the fire. Interviewees also heard explosions, had ash fall on them and saw the black and orange colours in the smoke as indicating growing threat.

When neighbours began responding by evacuating, interviewees recognised a growing threat.

*...it was a huge fireball... travelling about 250 metres through the air in a space of seconds and it just kind of went over and boof, a whole firewall went straight up.*

*By the time it took me to drive 600 metres the whole side of the hill was gone.*

*The fire came through the olive grove, impacted the side and then it basically crowned the whole way along the side of my property. So, it took out a lot of big trees.*

*The fire started coming up through the undergrowth here and getting up into the trees.*

### ***Direction and proximity***

*...once it started to cross Toodyay Road that's when I knew that it was coming straight for us.*

*So, it was in front of me. Had gone across Toodyay Road but it was also behind me still.*

*All of a sudden there's a sort of a thing on the map that came in like an alleyway to show that the fire jumped Toodyay Road and we were right in the line of fire*

*...if you look through the valley, you can see the hill about a kilometre and beyond and I was watching the flames going up the hillside, it was at night now. And it reached the rim or the ridge and the flames kept grabbing the sky.*

*...watching that house and the smoke was right behind the house and all of a sudden flame started to come up behind it and then saw the house light up ...and then I couldn't see anything. I thought it looked like the house was caught on fire.*

*Everything around us was on fire. And the trees opposite the house and opposite the shed*

*And I think seeing the planes go over, more than anything else. Because it was just above that tree and you thought, "It's pretty bloody close, isn't it?"*

*The wind was so strong that the fire was leapfrogging itself, and so I suppose the front was probably a kilometre away but we were getting spot fires appearing everywhere.*

*...helitac started operating directly in front of our place. Not good. Told me that it had jumped Toodyay Road and they will be making plans for the next anchor point downwind from that to try and defend*

### ***Speed of movement***

*...you can hear the crackling of the fire. You can hear the intensity of it and ...within one minute it was over there but the next minute it just came right towards us.*

*We've had fires at that distance before, it was never a concern, but things dramatically grew from there very quickly and no one estimated the speed and the direction of the fire*

*So, then it started rolling down the hill, which I thought was going to take a long time, but it didn't take that long at all, really. It was like it was moving fast.*

*But until you see those flames... you think maybe still a long way off. And then all of a sudden on the top of the hills, flames reaching up. That's when the game changes. And then the speed it ran down the hill. That's something that's sort of surprised me.*

*Just the velocity of the wind and once it just started coming down over that ridge and the wind just grabbed it. It just went.*

*...we've worked it out, the fire was at least five kilometres away. At that point, 15 minutes later, it was in our paddocks.*

*...it came through so quickly when that wind got behind it and pushed it, it was this thing coming over the hill that was just daunting. Absolutely daunting.*

### ***Intensity***

*...jumped over Dinsdale Road onto our side. Knowing what's in between there and us, we knew it was going to be pretty brutal*

*...the fire hit that reserve and I think partly due to the terrain ,with the direction of the wind and ... partly because there's been no hazard reduction burning done in the last 20 years of any value. ... When the fire hit the reserve there, it just went ballistic. It really was quite scary*

*I got down there, it was like roaring, you know, I thought, This is ridiculous. If I try to even go anywhere near that.*

*...what a shock it was when I've seen the size of it. When it hit Noble Falls and it just went like a mushroom cloud.*

### ***Explosions***

*...and then all of a sudden, the explosions started. it was hitting homes and gas bottles were exploding and cars were exploding and that was a concern. It was like a bombardment in war.*

*...we saw the smoke colour change and the noise and number of those explosions increased quite a bit... so then we knew people's homes or cars, or both were being done*

*...we could hear trees crashing, a number of gas pots or whatever but it's pretty eerie. Everything was glowing all around us like fairy land.*

*Just a big plume of smoke, just a massive plume went up because his house is wood. So, once I saw that, I said, "I think it's [Name]'s house just went up in smoke."*

*...we heard fuel explosions over at [Names'] place.*

*...one of the buildings actually exploded while we were still moving horses and the debris from that hit me, hit one of the horses.*

### ***Embers and ash***

*I was standing there I was actually had a hose in my hand just dampening a few things down and when it just... when the ash and everything started to pour out of the sky*

*I'm talking chunks of burning embers. Small fist-size, a child's fist. ... And at that point, I realised that we could be in trouble.*

*...about two o'clock, you know, we had ash falling on us.*

*They went from fireflies to wood chips on fire, to almost it seemed like tracer (bullets), the wind was so fast,*

*The embers, if they weren't coming down on a trajectory and bouncing off the house, they were like tracers blown horizontal by the wind*

*And you get ash so, I put the retic on. That's just standard. But when the big chunk started landing around me, I thought no. And I was hearing them on the roof.*

### ***Smoke and colour of the sky***

*It was really quite weird. There weren't flames but ... there were different colours in the huge smoke plume. The top of the cloud was a sort of a grey, white, but then it sort of got down and was black, almost, and then sort of orangey black ... it was a frightening bloody thing*

*...the sky was red. You couldn't see any flames, but it was, you could tell that it was really serious fire, heat and ...the whole sky was pretty much a smoky, orange, haze.*

*When I saw the ... colour of the smoke, I knew it was hot like the fire was hot. There's a lot of fuel being burnt in there*

*...the sky was turning. Instead of the light, white smoke it was going orange and red. So you knew that it was coming closer*

*It was that eclipse effect... went from day to night within a 10 second period*

*It's not just the fire, it was the smoke, made it difficult to breathe and fight the fire. It was actually starting to fill this end of the house full of smoke.*

### ***Actions of family/ neighbours/ community members***

*...within 15 minutes or less, streams of cars were screaming down the road, so that gave you another impact of pending danger because you could feel the fear in the air because a lot of these were towing horse floats and they don't normally speed with a horse float, but these guys were.*

*...he stared down and he said, "Mum, it's really bad. You could see just from his face." He said, "It's on us," which he couldn't quite see from there. It's upon us and you could see that he was terrified and so was I actually,*

### **Changing threat**

The changing dynamics of the bushfire influenced by ambient temperature, wind strength and direction, time or day, vegetation type and topography influenced the types of threat that interviewees faced. Threats changed from smoke inhalation to ember attack, to radiant heat and flame contact and a combination of all of them and then back again.

*But with us, it was five days. We were fighting. It came from down that way on the Monday night. It came from at the back there on a Tuesday. On the Wednesday, it sort of moved along the back and was heading in there. And then it came around this way and it jumped over so it was coming from there. So for five days, solid we were fighting fires.*

*...the next thing we knew, it took off up on the hill and the wind changed fractionally and we had the front of the fire come through our front fence and across the property and with that came embers that ended up in the gutters of the house and set the gutters on fire.*

*...the wind was blowing directly from the bridle trail towards our house and there were lots and lots of trees on fire on the bridle trail and that created them all into Roman candles and we got continual waves of embers rolling across our front paddock and heading straight towards the house.*

*This flame was just huge and it was just all along the ridge. It went from a narrow column to ridge on the ridge.*

*...it was all hands-on deck when it changed direction because then it went up [Name]'s boundary ... and hit one of his big trees, monster tree, and it went up like a Roman candle...and big branches started falling. And then it was away again, the flames were coming now this way*

*Then through two to three, four in the morning. It was just monitoring after that, and then you'd hear the big crashes of limbs coming down, and I remember hearing more explosions, but further distance away. I knew there were cars or sheds or garages going up in the distance by that stage, it was moving that Northwest and everything was black smoke.*

*...all afternoon, the fire was coming down that hill and up my paddock. ... six o'clock, this whole veranda was full of smoke. My house was full of smoke. The fire came right up to the edge of the house, and I couldn't see a thing. We couldn't breathe. We couldn't do anything, but we had the hose. So, I'm just blindly putting water on everything.*

*...for 36 hours it was blowing embers on the house. So, the house was constantly covered in embers.*

*When the fire passed us the first time, I had a massive bit of relief, because it's gone, you put it out of your brain, which was dumb because no, it's nowhere near over. But that's what I did and that was my mistake. I shouldn't have let it go so comfortably because within a couple of hours, it was in my face again and that created more shock and anguish and the fear factor went up again. So it's re-entering my body all over again and I realized that when [Name] said 'don't let your guard down at all, because of the embers it's not over till it's over', then I understood what he meant.*

*The fire front part had gone even though everything around you is still burning. Because for days, at night-time, this whole hill was beautiful. ... everything was glowing,*

*So, over the next few hours it came at us from a new direction. It came from the east first and the paddocks lit up from Tilden Drive, and then it came up from Higgins and burnt right up to our fences*

*...and flaring up again ...a tree that had dried out would flare up and embers would fly and you think, oh God, not again.*

*And just ... lo and behold then another arm came through and again, it went tearing through our escarpment that goes right around us... it was really flying. It just kept coming. Just kept coming.*

*...the fire front didn't actually come down to where the property buildings were. It circled around both sides and went slowly down the hill. I defended what I believed was the main threat, which were trees close to the house. And unfortunately, embers ... had lodged in the evaporative air conditioner and by the time I had seen the flame and got on the roof with a hose I spent probably two or three minutes but the fire had already spread into the house, into the roof.*

## Self-evacuation during the bushfire

### Reasons and triggers for leaving

Approximately four in ten interviewees decided to evacuate their property during the bushfire. A range of reasons were cited for deciding to leave including proximity of the fire, responsibility for dependents, their capacity to remain, influence of family and neighbours, and the perceived threat posed by the bushfire. A few were motivated by fear and some took a cue to leave from their neighbours

A few said that they planned in advance to leave if there was a bushfire in their area.

It is noteworthy that no one who evacuated the Wooroloo bushfire cited the receipt of official warnings as a reason for doing so.

### *Proximity of the fire*

*...as soon as that fire crosses over Toodyay Road, we'll pack the car up with whatever we can grab, and we'll get out of here*

*...because of ... where it was and how it was coming and how it was approaching, there's no way I'm staying*

*The fire was that close that, you know, we had to do something either stand and defend or get out.*

*And I think seeing the planes go over, more than anything else. Because I was just above that tree and you thought, "It's pretty bloody close, isn't it?"*

*...that was when I saw [Name]'s house go and just a big plume of black smoke. That was it. That's when I said ... it's too close now. And then that's when I said we should actually go.*

*...they started talking about Lillie Road and we thought, right, well, if it gets between Mayo and Lillie, even if it's on the other side of Toodyay Road, we're out of here.*

*...probably moved ... when it jumped Toodyay road and was coming this way, and we left*

### *Responsibility for dependents and pets*

*I had my partner here and... she's got lung problems anyway. She doesn't need smoke and everything else. So, we just said, look let's get out of here.*

*And I had the responsibility to get my horse out.*

*Well, I think if we didn't have [Name]'s mum with us, we may not have gone as soon.*

*I said to her, "We are going. We can't be selfish and stay here. And, you know, I'm here. Your mom's here. You're here. And we love each other. And we're going."*

*...our main concern was making sure that she was safe—she can't do anything. I mean, she can walk five paces and that's it.*

*...when I saw it down the road and knowing that [Name] can't move quick... and the smoke probably would've made it worse for her.*

### **Capacity to remain**

*...we had always said that we would stay and defend but that was when we were a lot younger and then when the fire was sort of imminent and everything and [Name] said, ... we're going to go.*

*...and knowing that we could not, physically at our age, we could not defend the property.*

*I just thought we should get out of here because there is nothing I can do.*

*...we've had all sorts of very health dramas. At the time, I had a sore shoulder, and I had a crook knee... it was a sign... we thought we can't defend this.*

### **Influence of family and neighbours**

*...and [Name] saying, "We got to, come on. We got to go. We got to go. We got to go."*

*[Name] came and he sort of bullied us to get our act together and get out of here.*

*I think I would have stayed longer if it wasn't for ...[Name] persistence that we should leave now. She was very emotional and demanding that we leave.*

*[Name], he's making us know, making a phone call to us to say hey, you have to go.*

*I think because of the messages that [Name] was sending us or sending to [Name] and you just couldn't risk it.*

### **Perceived threat**

*I literally felt it was on me already... it was just there even though the flames were not on the property. That the smoke and things were so thick, and the ash was like snow. It just blanketed everything. I think that was what really set me off. You think bloody hell. It's time to get out now*

*it was the most confronting and frightening things you'd probably ever see... even though there wasn't any flame in it. There was just this monstrous black, dark, huge, different coloured cloud coming over towards you ... it was pretty, pretty horrific.*

*It was a very, very strong hot wind, and very dry, no humidity, perfect fire conditions and it was headed our way. You could see from the wind and from where the smoke was, this could be serious. We get little minor scares here and there, but this one you could tell was potentially a serious fire for us.*

*I know the intensity of all those fires over east that there's no way I'm going to cook in this fire. I'd rather just go.*

*He had a feeling about it that because we can see how much smoke there was and how close it appeared to be.*

*...with a fierce wind, we could expect to see even fireballs dropping ahead of it, ...with a wind like that, so we got out.*

*Well, I knew it was hopeless. The place was not... it was no longer defensible.*

### **Fear and anxiety**

*It was one of those fight or flight things, you know, I think where your brain just says get out. You're concerned about getting out and whether you're going to get out.*

*So, it was really fear, I suppose, on my part or a sense of foreboding in as much as, we can't outrun this. We can't. We haven't got the equipment to save the property*

### **Actions of others**

*I could see people were going. I could see people driving with horse floats, people taking their horses out. Maybe they'd already got messages that we didn't get. I don't know. Someone, people you know, in Facebook. I'm not on my phone looking when there's a disaster around.*

### **Planned in advance to leave**

*I think it was that we realized it was a significant fire. As soon as it's a significant fire, the family leaves.*

*It's pretty straightforward ... just a sequence of things that I had to do. I followed that to the t when I realized that it was getting that close.*

*...we planned to grab whatever we can and go ... if you thought that a big fire was coming*

*We've always said that. If it got really bad, we'd leave,*

*we always had a plan in place for fire... So clothes and passports, valuables, that sort of thing that was all loaded in the cars and my wife and my daughter would leave at a predetermined time*

*that was the plan. If we got a catastrophic forecast, we would hook up the van and we would grab our stuff and go.*

*So, if it was one of these catastrophic fires that we've had, the plan was always to leave regardless, and I suppose we didn't have as much time.*

## **Plan B**

Only four interviewees who intended to evacuate their property had a 'Plan B' in case the unexpected happened. Their 'Plan B' involved staying to defend, sheltering, or escaping through neighbouring properties.

*So, if we hadn't been able to evacuate, I think ... we would have just defended as best as we could.*

*Well, the only thing would be as I know there's a dam at the back on the other side of the road. That was the only thing that I would be thinking of.*

*...the back fence because there's a woman out the back here. I would've cut the fence if we got stuck and her place is in a cul-de-sac so I could have gone straight through there and then down the road.*

*drive through any of these places but you'd have to cut fences and that's a last resort but if it's lives on the line, there is something that you could do, but I could always get out no matter which way the fire came*

### **Problems before leaving**

Many interviewees reported issues that impeded or slowed their evacuation while they were still at their property. These included primarily organizing clothes, medicines and valuables including relocating firearms; rounding up and loading animals and pets; dealing with confusion and anxiety and negotiating with other family members.

#### ***Pets and horses***

*I had to try and load the horse. The horse got on, but I couldn't get the foal on. So, we're stuffing around trying to get the foal on because it was only a new foal. It was only like six weeks old but a big foal. ...the smoke was really starting to come in really choking. I couldn't get the foal on. That was the worst feeling having to ...run them back to the paddock because the fire was so close that we would have had our own lives in danger.*

*I went down and grabbed the ponies first, brought them up, tied them up. Then I brought the roping horse up, tied him up to the hitching rail ... Then we tried to load the ponies and the ponies wouldn't load... We spent 10 minutes chasing around the place trying to catch him... the fall-back position, I took the two ponies down to the team roping arena down the bottom of the property.*

*..we had a quick look for the other cat and we couldn't find it and you know I was just like, I just like I don't really want to waste time because it was already at the top of Tilden Park.*

#### ***Organizing belongings***

*...we grabbed a few paintings off the wall. [Name] got some clothes together. And we've made sure we had our passports and our wallets and credit cards, etc. and we left.*

*I just grabbed a basket and I think I grabbed a handful of undies, a couple of T-shirts, a pair of jeans, a jumper just threw it in everything was just like reachable with where my hands were*

*We went and grabbed some of the...like the laptop and a few other things that were in the shed. Really, we weren't as prepared as we should have been with what we wanted to take with us*

*...grabbed everything that we could find, and just got my son to grab his favourite toy and my handbag just in case*

*...it took about 20 minutes to get her out of the house. And she said, just go and get this paperwork, go get that paperwork. I grabbed whatever I could. So, she took her car and had one dog in her car and I had two dogs in my car then we left.*

*[Name] kept saying to me get stuff out of the house and I didn't know what to take. I say what do I take? I didn't know what to put in the car.*

*What we had to think about was grab all the computers, get all the hard drives, throw the fishing gear and grabbing gear back in the house and get ready.*

*[Name] had his firearms in a safe in the shed and decided to shift it over into a different shed... one that he thought was more fireproof because we were in a difficult position. We couldn't take them with us.*

*I raced into the ... house, grabbed the keys to the gun safe because I'm going to try and pull some rifles out. And when I got back in there, there was too much smoke and heat and stuff. I just couldn't, couldn't do anything.*

### **Negotiation**

*It was one of those things where you're not panicking, you're not running around madly or anything but you're just not thinking straight*

*We had a discussion about whether they should take the dog or not.*

### **Problems on escape route**

A few interviewees experienced problems evacuating to a safer location including having to drive through smoke and near flames, dealing with anxiety of dependents, heavy traffic and not being able to access their preferred escape route.

*I remember seeing a lot of flame as we were going down the driveway. It was the front of the fire, but it was as long as the whole road, it was just orange. All I could see was orange and I was just driving like freaking out. Just drive, drive, drive.*

*So, I'm driving out the driveway, I can barely see for smoke and ...it's surreal and the light is black, it's like sepia, you're looking through sepia, it's all sepia.*

*I didn't want to fork a tree. There were trees coming down around me. Fire passing all around me.... both sides of the road alight ...So, I'm driving through the belly of the beast.*

*...we had a guy come from further down come up the road and said you need to turn around now, it's moving quickly.*

*Well, we were heading for Gidge but we couldn't get through, that's why we went to Chidlow.*

*(She was) begging me to try and get to Gidgegannup. Well, I tried. I went round on the east side, tried to get through, couldn't.*

*...just after we'd gone, there was a traffic jam moving down the road because people were going out with horse floats and things*

*...when I drove down, the helicopter dropped its load. Just hit my car, you know, "boom".*

*...as it went on, he was a little bit hysterical. When we actually got stuck in the fire in Wooroloo where it was like he couldn't see through the smoke and ashes raining downing on us and he said "that was cool"*

### **Things that assisted leaving**

Some interviewees said that that family members, neighbours and friends helped them to leave.

*...a friend of ours who lives on Stoneville Road, [Name] he said, "I'm on Reserve Road. I'm three minutes away. I'm coming to make sure you get out."*

*I brought one of my friends with me just because (my horse) can be really bad and I had a pretty stressed son at that point in time as well.*

*My daughters came, one who lives here and one who lives close by. [Name] did all the organizing and the other the moving. So, I've always felt safe*

Three interviewees who evacuated specifically noted that the recent extension of Lillie Road to Reserve Road had created an important escape route for non-four-wheel drive vehicles that was previously unavailable.

*...the saviour for a lot of people has been that they've extended Lillie Road through to Reserve Road and so a lot of people exited that way.*

*Lillie Road, this one down here, only opened up to Reserve Road a year or two ago and if that road hadn't been opened, we all would have got cooked along with all the horses and animals and things. It would have been a traffic jam down the bottom here because Lillie only literally went about 200 meters past my property and ended. So, there was just good luck, not good management, that's for sure.*

*Up until about a couple of years ago, we only had one way of getting out of here and that was to go out Tilden Drive then they did the subdivision out Lillie Road and so we were able to go out that way.*

A few interviewees reflected on the fortuitous organisation of their escape kits and caravans.

*...it was the first day back for school but it was COVID lockdown ... Both my kids were supposed to be going on camp. So, the camp bags were all packed ready. And so for them to pack a bag for being away for a few days was easy.*

*...we had the caravan all set up, because we were going on holidays, we should have been going on Monday but the lockdown kept us here for a week so we kept it all set up.*

*...we'd already hooked the caravan up, loaded some stuff in the caravan that you keep in there. So we thought well, we got the beds in there. And we've got your crockery and cutlery in there, mostly a few things left in the pantry in the caravan. So we would be right... from that perspective. And that was always, hook the caravan up and go, ... which is what we did.*

*We'd already hooked the caravan and that Hilux up so that we were ready to take the caravan and the ute*

### **Evacuation destination**

Most interviewees escaped to a safe location well out of the bushfire zone staying with friends or family. Some tried to remain in close proximity to their property so they could readily return once the fire front had passed. For some, the choice of destination was dependent on whether their pets and horses could be accommodated.

#### ***Family, neighbours and friends***

*That night, we went down to friend's house in Perth.*

*We went down to [Name]'s mum's place in Perth.*

*...we stayed at a friend's place just basically over that hill there ... thinking that we might have to evacuate her place too and she's evacuating her horses ... and we're there not knowing what to do and what you see is just black smoke.*

*...we had a phone call from a neighbour up the road on the corner. So he just said, well, do you want to come back here and stay with us. So we end up going back to their place*

*So, I went to some friends in Gidgegannup and waited to see what happened.*

*I went to my daughter's place in Stoneville?*

#### ***Animal accommodation***

*I finished up going to some old friends of mine with (room for) my horses.*

*...we moved two of our horses to the show grounds.*

*Then, went to the Gidge Showgrounds. There's an enclosure there that we let the dogs loose for a while.*

#### ***Caravan Park***

Some interviewees stayed in caravan parks or motels.

*...we hit it off down to a caravan park in Benara Road and booked in there.*

### **Nowhere to go**

Some interviewees had nowhere to go and wandered around looking for safe accommodation.

*We didn't know what to do. So, we went over to Chidlow. There's was nothing over there, no one over there. So, we ended up going to Gidgegannup to Vibe service station. And because of COVID they wouldn't let us have any food or water or order anything.*

### **Feel about decision to leave**

Few interviewees regretted their decision to leave even though some had homes and property destroyed by the bushfire. Some mentioned the direct threat posed by the fire to their lives and dependents as removing any doubt about leaving

*When you're faced down with what was coming over the hill there, it is no second doubts whatsoever.*

*...just had to say goodbye to everything and then just go because by then, I was thinking of our lives, you know, I don't want to lose him. He doesn't want to lose me. Whatever else gets left behind, ... we've got each other.*

*...(staying) is not the stress that I would want to go through with an eight-year-old child.*

Some reflected on what they had lost after they evacuated.

*We weren't as prepared as we should have been. We just did not think that the house would be wiped out. ... there's a lot of stuff that's gone. A lot of magnificent paintings and my entire mosaic workshop and everything which are replaceable ...but some paintings aren't replaceable.*

### **Property preparation before leaving**

Some interviewees reported equipping and undertaking actions to protect their property from bushfire in their absence. These preparations included clearing the area of vegetation and fine fuels around the property, clearing gutters and watering down structures. A few interviewees took their preparatory actions a step further by using trailers and utes carrying water and pumps to extinguish embers. While extinguishing spot fires clearly constituted property defence, these interviewees evacuated.

### **Watering down**

*I had all the sprinklers. I had a sprinkler system right around, under the eaves.*

*We just had a generator going and we had our water sprinkler system going.*

*... putting sprinklers on roofs*

*...so we were watering all the decking, trying to soak all the decking because it's all decking around his house. Just watering as much as we could*

*we spent all afternoon wetting all the decking*

### ***Extinguishing spot fires***

*I'll take the firefighter on the trailer behind you and go around the block and see what I can see whether any of your ember's coming through or anything like that.*

*...we've got water on each of the corners of the house. We did have a small tank... a 5000-gallon, I think... off the shed ... and we could access that with the fire pump*

*I'd also fired up my fire cart on the back of the tractor, made sure all that was full, the pump was ready to go, charged, everything ready to go.*

*... a little water tank fire unit... for burning off ... just to get things safe and ... don't get out of control*

*[Name] started to go around the boundary with her old ute and a water tank on the back of the trailer... good for a spot fire*

*So, I drove the tractor round to the front of the hardstand of the workshop, parked it up, put a couple of fires out that were around the blacksmith's shop. Gave a squirt and saw, that's right, another ember attack blasting sparks while inside the workshop and the big machinery shed. I gave that a good spray of water with what I had left, closed the doors up and then pushed the trailer out of the long grass.*

### ***Clearing vegetation***

*...it's a natural bush property but two years before the fire, I had the firies in to burn off and clear all the fuel underneath the trees to reduce fuel loads.*

*[Name] and [Name] religiously each year burn off a section of the block. So, the heavy leaf litter and undergrowth and stuff was removed. You do a portion of it and then next year, do another section and gradually work way around again.*

*...we burn off every year, a substantial part of the block. There wasn't any fuel load on the ground to speak of and I think that's what saved us.*

*...keeping as much flammable material away from the place as possible.*

*I've made sure grass always mowed down at the time of the year anyway. Nothing left. So what was left on the ground was just the small weeds? So, when we left the whole house was clear. There's nothing to burn up to the house*

*We always... mow, everything is always really clean.*

*So, that was always when you got horses in the paddocks, there's never really much and in February, January, February you got not much left except dirt.*

***Cleaning gutters***

*...it is a fire risk to have gutters that accumulate stuff. So, I'd say my gutters are pretty, not pristine, but pretty good,*

*...we cleaned up around the place as much as possible. You know, we cleaned a lot of – gutters were cleaned.*

*...my gutters never had leaf litter in them.*

*We do a fair bit of cleaning up around the place. [Name] consistently does the gutters and all of those sorts of things.*

## Remaining to defend during the bushfire

### Accessing their property

Some of the interviewees who were committed to defending their property were not at home when the bushfire started and made their way through fire or bypassed emergency services roadblocks to get there. A few used their contacts with or knowledge of emergency services to negotiate their way through. Some interviewees recognised that they had risked their lives returning to their home

*We knew a way through the back, across paddocks and private property. ... got back and ... was putting out little spot fires all around the deck...*

*Came in the back way, there was a police roadblock there. Pulled me up. I said 'I've got horses to attend to, I said you're not going to stop me, I'm going through.' One of the blokes, we had a bit more of a conversation, I said, "Well I'm ex (emergency services) so I have half an idea about what you blokes are about." ... he said, "Right, well f\*\*\* off, go and do it."*

*...the front was crossing Lillie Road at that time and so, I couldn't see anywhere... I couldn't see... the end of the bonnet through the smoke. I'm sitting up holding the steering wheel... f\*\*\*, f\*\*\*, f\*\*\* because at that point, I couldn't stop and turn around ...so, I just gunned it, ... I was doing like 40-50 Ks an hour through there.*

*Twice I've hit the gravel and that drops away real significant and so I swerved and ... kept a lot of blind faith that there's nothing coming the other way. There's nothing really on the road. It was pretty stupid thing to do but the adrenaline ...to get home to save my house.*

### Reasons for remaining

Approximately six in ten interviewees remained to defend their property. They expressed a diversity of reasons for their decision to remain, but many said they wanted to protect their home.

*I decided on the moment when I saw the fire going across to the house. I just couldn't walk away and leave it.*

*... if we weren't here, If we'd left, we would have lost our house.*

*I wouldn't have wanted to come home and see my place just all flat, black thing ...like those poor people... who had lost everything and have to start rebuilding again.*

### Factors influencing decision to remain

Interviewees cited eight general factors that supported their decision to stay and defend their property against the bushfire.

#### *Property preparation*

Interviewees described how they prepared their property so they could more readily defend it.

They reporting cutting grass and vegetation around buildings, clearing gutters

Cut back grass and vegetation

*I keep everything really, really short and the plants away ... from the house*

*We keep the fuel load down and keep everything clean.*

*...always keep it very clear around the house. ... clear some bush in the back of the house because it was a bit close to the house.*

*...rake up all the fuel especially along the fence lines.*

*...had mown the grass. We cleared everything up, you know, kind of raked all leaves and cleared everything*

*If you've got ... shrubs all around your house, which a lot of people do, it looks lovely but it's just asking for trouble.*

*...no big trees or stuff around the house... it gives us a bit of space*

*We keep the grass well done and the paddocks always bare*

Some interviewees burned vegetation to clear around buildings.

*We do a lot of burning off and so the flames never actually got more than about 30 metres from the house. A lot of cleared land around it*

*... we burn it off all the time. Yeah, [Name] burns off all the black boys every spring.*

*...always keep it very clear around the house. ... cleared some bush in a burn at the back of the house because it was a bit close to the house.*

*...we burn off on the escarpment to reduce the load.*

Clear gutters

*...we keep the gutters clean. ... one of our strongest theories is that houses burn down because of leaves in gutters.*

*If you've got gutters full of gum leaves, it's like having gutters full of kerosene*

*...like it's keeping the gutters clear...*

*Clean out all the gutters. That was imperative,*

Wetting down

Some interviewees described mitigation actions during the bushfire including wetting down ground and clearing vegetation around their homes.

*...made it a bit damp and it did quite obviously slow it down and I did that all the way along.*

*I managed to get the reticulation running... So, I had all the gardens wet before the power went off. I just wet everything I could think of, all the house, all the gardens*

*that were reticulated ... through the back of our patio, I wet the ... shed, round the tanks, the wood piles, poured water on the wood piles, the fire shed as much as I could...*

*... we had all the sprinklers going ...a lot of sprinklers...which worked out to be miraculous*

*...we were on the end of the house there wetting down all the... wetting down everything there and wetting down ...the door*

*... wetting everything down and filling my gutters with water, doing the normal thing and wetting around the house the best I could. I was just constantly wetting things there all afternoon because things were drying. So, it's wetting it again, drying, wetting again.*

*I was cutting all the grevillea, right? About 10, 15 metres from side of the house. So, if the grevillea went up, it would have been right up to the house. We suddenly realized we weren't as well prepared as we thought we were ... and it wasn't until the fire was coming. It really focused the attention on what needed to be done.*

### **Water supply**

Many interviewees indicated that ready access to a reliable supply of water was central to their decision to remain and defend their property.

*...the main thing was having plenty of water supply*

*...you've got to have water; gravity water.*

*...we had the tanks up there, down here, we've got much more than we need. We've got two 20,000 litres then two 12,000 litres to the house.*

*We hold 10,000 litres of water in storage just for firefighting ... which doesn't get touched except for firefighting ...*

*...at the west end of the house ... basically with a suction hose that went into a 5000-litre tank and also the 1000-litre spa...*

Water was delivered to fire in a range of ways.

*...we just used watering cans with a rose on them and we just kept walking under the house and round the deck to put spot fires out. They're so easy. Just dunk it to in a pool, water on the deck and you put a little .... better than any hose*

*[Name] was full on with her buckets of water doing the spot fire thing because they would flare up in some of the posts you couldn't put out...*

*...(the firies) said that we can't get you any water. You know, they kept telling me we can't get a tanker in, read my lips. We can't get a tanker in. And I'm saying, "We don't need a tanker." I'm pointing to a full tank with 100,000 litres of water connected to the fire hose.*

A few interviewees reported that large volumes of water were used in defending their

property.

*...used 70,000 litres of water .... 23,000 litres in a poly tank up there at the barn and I had a 50,000-litre concrete tank ... on the house which is now empty.*

*...we're very fortunate because we have probably 100-102,000 litres more than most people by design.*

### ***Equipment***

Many interviewees identified items of equipment that were integral to their property defence, most of which enabled the delivery of water including water pumps, hoses, and mobile water units. The mobile water units included trailers, utes and quad bikes.

*So, I'd filled up. I had two fire trailers.*

*I've got two units. I've got a bigger one with a 1000 litre bulky, which I usually put on the trailer.*

*...we have a ute with a water tank on the back filling that up, getting that ready.*

*So continually through the seasons. That's why we set up this neighbourly, North Gidge group and we've all got our private units, because it's too far away for SKG to respond to*

*[Name] had our little four wheel motorbike with buckets of water*

Some interviewees also delivered water to the roofs and walls of buildings using sprinkler systems. A few had established roof water recycling systems to reuse limited tank water used by roof sprinklers.

*Sprinklers were on the roof*

*I've got sprinklers on the roof around the eaves. Impact sprinklers on my sheds and garages*

*...the high-pressure pump with the roof sprinklers.*

*I got the sprinklers on the shed roof.*

*I'd had the gutters diverting so water was going back into the tank*

Water pumps were integral to water delivery directly from water tanks and swimming pools and on vehicles.

*I've got pump set up on two tanks.*

*We got the firefighting two stage high pressure pump, hoses and everything that I set up for suction into the swimming pool.*

*I ... started the fire pump. We have quite a good infrastructure for fire. Never thinking we'd have to use it.*

*... we had pumps and lines and things like that ready to defend.*

Many interviewees used generators to back up their residential power supply which most expected to fail or be turned off as a safety measure during the bushfire.

*I had a generator so I knew that I could supply power because power was already out*

*I've got a backup diesel generator, two pack of fire pumps*

*I set up the generator and my fuel pump and I've got a hose in it.*

*... he's worked on being fire ready for years and years. And one of the big, big, things was the generator. We've got this big 24 kV generator that just keeps the whole house and everything running... if it wasn't for the generator, we'd had no lights, would have no pumping facilities, we'd have no water,*

*we've got two small Honda generators at this stage and put in a diesel generator at the power box here now*

Some reported establishing reserves of fuel to run generators and vehicles.

*... during summer we always have all the jerrycans full of fuel. So, we've got plenty of reserves.*

Many interviewees used firefighting hoses and fittings, while some used domestic or garden quality hoses.

*I've got proper fire hoses and reels and stuff.*

*I had a fire hose ... like you have in the back of the light tankers ...to defend the house. So, I had a lot of water and quite a good defence*

*...we've got a lot of hoses, reject hoses from the fire brigade ... if they leak they throw them out so they threw some of them in our direction. I had to buy fittings for them which made them quite expensive. But they were good hoses...We had the pump, we had the standpipes and hoses*

*About a month before the fire, I bought a hose reel...the big red hose reels that you see in factories. ... and put it by the pump ... and that was extremely useful ... it worked a treat.*

*... garden hoses just did the job. I went all night standing there (chuckle) which wasn't so.... Ooh when you think of it now. Oh my God, but we did it*

*We have hoses all round verandas during summer.*

*...with that pump and that nozzle, I can shoot the water straight over the top of the house and into any of the trees around the house.*

### **Evacuation plan**

Notwithstanding their intention to remain and defend their property a few interviewees had made an evacuation plan if circumstances changed. Evacuation plans involved dependents leaving in advance of the threat, routes to use and evacuation triggers.

*My plan was to get the kid and wife out early, and then I will deal with what's left.*

*As soon as I feel uncomfortable. As soon as I see ash or embers or anything coming.*

*...if it gets to the point where it was "very intensive"... heat and flames close by... it was affecting me so I'm unable to do anything... Come on, we got to go," we would.*

*...there was an escape plan, but it wasn't my main idea and there wasn't an exact trigger. It was just going to be a yeah, okay, this is it, I can't do anymore.*

*...we've always had an escape plan, although we have always as well wanted to stay and defend, having that escape plan in place.*

*...we had an escape route from the top paddock, which was an easy exit if we needed because we've got a secondary gate up there, across our neighbour's property to Berry Road. So, we knew within 30 seconds we could be out.*

*If you couldn't get out on the road there are gates you can get out on the fire breaks with the neighbouring properties.*

*Depending which direction, the fire is coming from, of course because there's only really Toodyay Road in and out or backway through Wooroloo.*

*...part of the plan was I had my car parked out the front pointing down the drive. I knew that if the fire was to come through there it will be hot but not ridiculously hot and there will be small chance of any trees falling across.*

### **Planning**

The fire plans of a few interviewees were based on a single strategic premiss or addressed only single issues. while a few plans were more comprehensive.

*...in my fire plan, and I said to my wife I will stay and defend during the day because there's a pretty good chance the water bombers especially up here, will get here.*

*...my wife and my daughter would have left at predetermined time and my son and I intended to stay and defend.*

*...since we have three kids, and sometimes when we work we had to leave them here, and because there was no (escape) road... we've always had a plan, [Name] has written a plan, if there's something happen, you do that, you know, we've always think about fire. He has always thought 'what do we do?' So, it's always for us, we live with it.*

For some the plan was a visualisation of the steps or responses they might take given the emerging circumstances of the bushfire. Some felt that a strength of their plan was its flexibility and ability to respond to different circumstances.

*...you have a plan. It doesn't mean the plan works. Gives you a starting point...you adapt as required. So, having a plan and even to the point of visualizing and knowing*

*what you're going to do and working out where things are and stuff like that is a big part of it .*

*...over the years, we've talked about what we would do, in general terms like move the animals, giving them the shed, park vehicles away from the house, things like that. And if it's really bad, meet at a certain place. But it was all loose because on the day, different things happen. Different people are there. It'll come from a direction you didn't expect. We go through scenarios, but vague scenarios.*

*I have a plan, but plans last till first contact with the enemy. But you've got to have a plan to start with. You've got to be a bit flexible. You're going to be able to sort of think on your feet.*

For some their plan was simply to stay and defend having equipped and prepared to an extent that they believed was adequate. In these cases there were no specific steps planned

*Well, I was going to stay actually like, I thought it can't be that bad, you know.*

*That decision was made years ago, we've always decided to (stay) ... it wasn't on the spot.*

*...our plan is to stay with this house, we've only just built this place and so we started to make all the preparations in terms of clearing things way out*

*We're always going to stay and defend. We have our own fire truck. We hold 10,000 litres of water in storage just for firefighting. We keep the fuel load down and keep everything clean. So we had never had any intention of leaving.*

More comprehensive plans were often discussed with household members or neighbours, and practiced with them.

*we'd read all the information from DFES. If you were staying this is what you do. And we'd discussed that with the kids that ...we will stay and defend. When the fire front's coming through we will be in the laundry. And they know the things we need to have, you know, wool blankets, water bottles and everything in there. The kids ... and we were well briefed in what we were going to do should the fire come through.*

*every year, [Name] and I catch up. He takes me through sprinklers, sprays, taps and all sorts of bits and pieces, because he's got a little bit more infrastructure than us. We ...share a fire plan, and we re-commit to what we're going to do and what we're not going to do and where we're going to go if things go wrong...*

### ***Firefighting experience***

A few interviewees felt that their experience with bushfire or in managing risk as a volunteer bushfire fighter, in previous disasters or in their work, influenced their decision to remain and defend.

*Training, ... having been involved in the fire brigade for so many years, ... I have turned out to a few house fires over the years and seen enough to know that preparation and being present ...if you're not there, you can't defend it.*

*I'm not a vollie or fire fighter but I have been in the military ... around weapons and explosions and stuff. I've got a pretty, high appetite for managing risk,. I wasn't uncomfortable in my decisions to stay.*

*I've been in bushfires before. I grew up on the land. I grew up on a farm and preparation was a big thing.*

*...had a farm up in [Name] past Gingin and we did a lot of burning off ... clearing land and that sort of thing, so I had a bit of experience that way.*

*We lived in ... timber country in the southwest. And we knew what fire was. Dad lived through the ... big Dwellingup fire in the 60s. ... so fire was a big issue.*

### ***Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)***

A few interviewees had PPE available that could be used during a bushfire. PPE was mostly acquired through involvement in volunteer bushfire brigades.

*I got what was my dad's firefighting gear because he used to be the Chief in the brigade. ... put his fire gear on which I have in the shed.*

*I was still in the fire brigade in those days. So, I had my fire brigade equipment.*

*We were in the volunteer bushfire brigade. So, we had our outfit. We had the face mask and helmet and we also had masks of our own that we had for breathing and... our boots and stuff like that.*

*...all of us were dressed in fire brigade gear*

*...the boys and I all had the complete outfit with helmets and goggles and gloves*

### ***Help from others***

Assistance from family, friends and neighbours was influential for the decision of a few interviewees to remain and defend.

*... got a mate with a bobcat who went around cutting fire breaks ... he was amazing ... you should have seen his face like it was black*

*They said they'd come across and help me if I needed it.*

*...he came across with one of his nephews. ... with the Hilux with the water trailer and a pump on the back. They checked on me. I was up at the top of the barn. They came down said we'll go in your paddocks to the front of the house and try and stop the stuff getting up here into the trees.*

*...he's got a small firefighting unit...and the corner back gate joining our properties, so we could access both properties, so we were all sorted. So I was ready, he was ready.*

### **Things that made staying safer**

Interviewees identified a combination of four key factors that made remaining to defend safer, water; equipment to deliver that water; a team of people to help defend; and a defensible space around their house

*I had water going out ten meters around the house. I had a wall of water coming down around the house. So, I could stay wet and moist. I had firefighting hose, firefighting equipment ... this side of the house ... not a lot there.*

*I think having the wife and the neighbours in a team effort. I couldn't do it as a sole person. It was too overwhelming, ... I'd have been so exhausted physically and psychologically you'd be buggered.*

*...it's just preventative burning.... in patches throughout our property because we have a bit of bushland the other side of the creek there. The fire came through there, but it was relatively low intensity*

Interviewees felt that the presence of informed, capable others, and that vulnerable people were not present, improved the safety (and success) of their efforts at defence. A team of defenders was able to cover multiple separate events occurring at one time, assist each other with physically demanding tasks, provide advice and knowledge, and allow team members to rest or sleep.

*...there were four of us here for a time and that was really good but if it had just been [Name] and ... me, it could have been a different outcome. You think it's okay to have the gear and the plan but if something...you know, you're down here with the hose and you see flames up here that's a case of turning that off and go running up and you think 'Dear I forgot to turn that up' and you got to run somewhere else to turn it up and it could be all too late. Having extra bodies around is really useful.*

*...had to brief the kids and let them know what their roles were to be and what we were to do, and you know all of that.*

*...we were just dealing with individual crises, like each person had their own little issue.*

*[Name] had the main fire hose for the house that runs all the time pumping... and there's enough to ... do both sides of the house if you drag it around, and her job was to keep that valley and the leeward valley not on fire.*

*And our youngest bloke, we had him on... an extended garden hose. Just wetting all that area ... out there just putting out spot fires... He actually stopped a ton...*

*We kept working and at about midnight, one o'clock or something, I was just physically exhausted. I was knackered. So I said to [Name], you keep patrolling around, putting out the embers and such, I had about an hour's kip on the sofa*

*...if I'd had the responsibility of other people with me, then I'd have got out of there.*

A few interviewees recognised that the direction of the wind had driven the fire front away from or tangential to their property and that fortunate circumstance had made their property defence safer.

*...only due to the fact the wind didn't change, that was the only thing that confirmed our decision to stay was wind direction, nothing else... I'm just lucky we didn't have any huge flames to contend with.*

### **Experiences of sheltering**

Only a few interviewees needed to seek shelter. They used a range of strategies to shelter from the fire front or as the fire burnt around them, sometimes for many hours or days. They sheltered in their home, behind protective structures, around water such as pools and dams and in burnt or cleared areas such as paddocks

*We sheltered in the laundry while the fire front passed and that probably took about half an hour, and I must say that that was the most terrifying experience I have ever been through. It was the orange glow and the heat, and the wind were incredible...*

*I got on this side of the house to wait for (the fire) to pass over the top and then go back out.*

*...we stayed in the paddocks where it was burnt already, and it was clear of anything. It was safe.*

*We set up a camp in the pool area and we had a couple beds where I was able to sleep on. Camp cooking gear and a couple of chairs and now, you know, so we stayed in there for three nights.*

### **Controls on movement**

Most interviewees who remained and defended their property directly or indirectly experienced some restrictions by the emergency services on movement out of and into the fireground during the period the bushfire was burning. Many circumvented these controls in different ways, using tracks and back roads that were not blocked at the time, access across private property and in some cases using their personal contacts with the various arms of the emergency services to negotiate their way through.

*I just drove out via the backway of (road name) ...and just a little backroad down the back off Mayo, (street name) I think it is back to Toodyay Road...*

*...he managed to come back because he knows quite a few people locally, and he knew a way in from the back... he had to go through private property. And the guy said "Yeah, come up through here you can get in." So, he got back to his house,*

*We know the local (emergency services officer) who is in (location). He rang the others and ...and talked to guys on the back route ...*

*...before the fire got here, I had a call from a neighbour not far from the fire ...so I took my fire unit down there and I got past the shops. I got to a police blockade, and I told him that my friend was just around the corner and he went and spoke to the firies and they went, "Okay. You can go through.*

*...and then when we're coming back, they wouldn't let us through. And I just said, "I ain't moving until I get through." They said, "Can you move off the road through." I'm going, "No I'm not going nowhere." So, in the end they just said, "If you move two cones, we haven't touched them." So, we shifted the cones and drove through and then everyone else started coming through.*

*...we could leave but they were stopping us from coming back in and to be perfectly honest, dealing with the bushfire to me was just doing a job. The only thing that was frustrating and stressful for me was the roadblocks stopping us getting back in, because there was still work to be done.*

In a small number of cases interviewees who intended to defend their property, who were not at home when the bushfire ignited were prevented from getting to their property by roadblocks and the directions of the emergency authorities not to enter the fire ground. The story of one interviewee is indicative.

*When we got up to Gidgegannup at five o'clock (on Monday) the road was blocked. ... (from friends) we knew our place was still clear. So, I asked to get back in through the roadblocks. Waited all Tuesday basically...*

*I just accepted the authority and the knowledge and respect for people in uniforms. A big mistake. We got reassurances from five people saying that the main fire was ... further to the West.*

*They still had units that were doing the rounds, checking on the spot fires breaking out and clearing up in this area. I trusted that reassurance. Anyway, during the night, the wind changed, and the next day our place was just debris*

### **Reflections on the decision to stay and defend**

Most of those who remained said that they would not hesitate to do the same thing again because they were convinced that their house and property would have certainly been destroyed either by the fire front or by spot fires ignited by embers.

*I'd do it again. Would never leave. We would have potentially lost all the sheds, lost vehicles... and who knows, we could have lost the house.*

*We both say this time and time again that if we had left, we'd lost the house because even if the fire front had gone through, there'd be nobody here to defend it from the ember attack...*

*...that secondary fire that came back on us, we figured would have gone into ... our property. If we hadn't have stayed, we probably would have lost our home... so we both agreed that [name]'s burnt foot was worth it.*

*I felt that I would be better staying and defending the house and the property because I was well-prepared and I don't have any regrets about doing that.*

### **Experiences of helping neighbours**

Many of those who remained assisted neighbours fighting the fire or in some cases defended properties for neighbours who had evacuated and left them. Assistance sometimes involved considerable effort and personal risk and included helping with animals. Interviewees reported in many cases that their assistance helped to save their neighbour's property.

*...the bushes on the side of his house were on fire and it started to get up into the eaves and... we were putting water in there with my fire trailer...*

*...we sent a couple of our fire trucks to the neighbours opposite ... because I knew he was there by himself. His wife had left, and his English isn't very good. [Name] sort of took control on his property...*

*We hopped into our unit. [Name] and [Name], hopped into their unit and we went up to [neighbour]'s. When we got there... we saw the fire was right up on his house and we were really surprised to see that he was there on his own. We stopped the fire sort of at [neighbour]'s doorstep.*

*[Neighbour] said, it's come up to his property line, so ...we went down there and sure enough, his fence line was ablaze...So, we started putting out the fires ...as best we could because we had to keep our distance from the trees that were dropping, big branches...*

*I fired up the tractor and fire pump and ...went to the neighbours' places with the tractor. There were trees down across the roads everywhere. There were power poles down across the roads. So, I started pushing trees off roads and power poles off roads, cutting wires- There was a few neighbours places where there was nobody there, they'd obviously bailed out. The house was still standing but we walked around the house making sure there was nothing still threatening the house, which there was in a couple of places, so we put them out.*

*...the three of them, the men, ... ended up going over to [Name]'s over here because it was going that way and they thought it might come down.*

*..down in this corner, the fire was ... trying to get into her property... we spent nearly an hour digging a firebreak between her property and [Name]'s property with shovels and rakes. So, we did that, and that was good,*

*[Name] was ... getting horses out and I said we'd go up there near the light pole and cut the fence and put them in that yard over there. So, we shifted the horses up here because that paddock was on fire and then it burned right out, right up to the trees .*

In some cases fighting fire on the neighbour's property also protected their own.

*[Name]'s place over there. That's where a lot of my embers were coming from because of wind direction. And so, eventually we just went across there and put out what we could...*

## Recovery from the Wooroloo bushfire

### Experience immediately following the bushfire

The days following the passing of the fire front was experienced by those who were still within the fireground, as extremely busy, noisy, hectic and disrupted. There were continuous patrolling by the fire services to extinguish flare-ups, work by contractors to restore electricity and communications, and work by property owners to begin clearing and rebuilding. For many, electricity was not restored for weeks and interviewees had to find ways of coping including purchasing and wiring in generators.

*...was more about chain sawing and clearing roads and putting out bits and pieces of fires or flare ups*

*...it's pretty dangerous in here. The trees were down and all the powerlines and there were still fires even two weeks after. The fires kept driving around all the time and we had a couple of flare ups.*

*What was immediately noticeable was the red and blue lights everywhere constantly. So pretty much for the next two weeks nonstop people, vollies, full timers just nonstop, day, afternoon, night shift at work. Out there - you get used to the crews coming through. And they were just nonstop driving around putting stuff out*

*I'll tell you what, after the fire, every afternoon, it would just rain dead leaf. For a fortnight. Any one day was worse than a year's accumulation of leaves. I bought a blower, and I was using it every single night and unbelievable how many leaves just keep coming off the trees.*

*We had no electricity for four weeks so that's why we had the generator.*

A few interviewees commented on the lack of institutional support including emotional and psychological support for those who had to remain at their property, one person comparing their treatment to that of their animals

*During the five days we were on evacuation order so we were locked in here. We had vets come in looking to check on animals. No one ever came and checked on us.*

*there was never any provision to check for people who stayed and defended. So... if you stay and defend, you're on your own. Really on your own and normally, you sort of a lockdown evacuation situation would last for one or two days but we were five days.*

There was however some practical, neighbourhood based support offered early after the event including community gatherings.

*...the little shop just around the corner ... Gidge one stop. They put on a breakfast the next morning for everybody, free. You know the usuals, sausages and whatever.*

*...that first weekend afterwards we organized a chat at the pub, and we had a few hundred people there. That's been really good for people to come together and ...talk about their shit and what's going on*

### **Problems in recovery**

Interviewees highlighted the emotional and psychological impacts of the bushfire that they and other members of their community were attempting to come to grips with

*There's been a lot of people... with PTSD ... that have sunk into the realities of not having a home and all the stuff that's gone with that.*

*Mainly stress after the fire. My heart rate was 140 to 150 and then I spent two days in the hospital.*

*But [Name] for about ... six weeks, I reckon he had post traumatic distress order. He was just so hyper ... just absolutely anxious the whole time. So, it really, really affected him, I think...a lot.*

*[Name] was very emotional. She found it very difficult to come here and see the devastation ...a brick house that's got internal bricks exposed and nothing that's identifiable inside and you take several looks to work out what room's where.*

*I think before the fire most things wouldn't probably bother you anywhere near as much as they do now but when something does go wrong, it's a lot harder to deal with. I think I'm trying to put myself together a bit.*

*Your life is obviously turned upside down and, you know, trying to live like this is not easy...literally every day there's something to remind you that, you know, what you had is gone.*

*After the whole aftermath... I had trouble sleeping ... it took a long time for us to get back into our comfort zone. I think it took more than out of us than we realized. That we dodged a bullet*

Many interviewees mentioned the impact of the burnt landscape and ash having a depressing, deadening, and scouring effect on their lives

*When I looked out there, I thought well, this is my definition of hell, that's it. It was just shocking and it's still not good, if you got just at the end of our block and look up there, it's really dead, dead, dead.*

*I'm still getting ash. I can wipe something down ...and I'm still getting ash blowing in different times. We've had so many windy days. I can wipe something down and I'm still getting ash and stuff.*

*...you come in the house, it just stunk of smoke all the time. It really stunk and it was like snowing outside because it was just ash blowing around all over.*

Some interviewees lost their homes in the bushfire and had been forced to live in rental accommodation elsewhere, with friends or neighbours, in caravans or temporary dwellings on site during the drawn-out process in which their houses are planned, approved and, in a small number of cases, rebuilding was commenced

*...we put (insurance money) into buying the van. We had this pad put down for the pod and for the van. So, that's how we've got at least some accommodation and been living in it ever since. Yes, not much fun. Nine months or whatever it's been.*

Loss of memorabilia, personally meaningful items and valuables was particularly difficult for interviewees following the bushfire.

*It's just all that personal stuff that you've collected over the years and family heirlooms and things like that that really hit hard and at the time you don't really realize it, you know, it's not until you lose it that you realize just how valuable it is to you*

Many interviewees said that much of their recovery efforts were directed at rebuilding their property including fences. Many said that the amount of work that had to be done was overwhelming. For some it felt that they had to 'start all over again'. Shortage of labour and materials and the loss of personal equipment and tools made the repair and rebuilding task even more difficult

*Time, just redoing everything that needs redoing, everything that, you know you've done ... fencing, irrigation, you know, just clean up fire breaks trees everywhere just mess everywhere just cleaning up all the burnt stuff.*

*It's just that constant ongoing battle and the work that's needed to try and get to start to bring back some sort of normality but that is a long way off. We'll be in this situation for at least another 16 months.*

*...we're rebuilding or trying to rebuild at the moment. It's been a nightmare*

*...then it starts all over again. All the things that you've done 20 years ago, you have to redo.*

*with a shortage of materials everywhere, I can't get the damn shed up and I can't do a lot of things*

*...trying to get electrician. I thought he was coming this week. He hasn't shown. I rang up to try and get a quote for the concrete and one of the concreters said, I can see you in the new year. ... and I got to wait for the electrician. ...to put all the cables down first and then the concrete goes on top. So, I can't do anything until he turns up.*

*So, there's not a day goes by where you're not doing something to do with fire recovery.*

*... just the thousands of different things that you've got to deal with in terms of starting from scratch...you think you've got that, but you realize you turn around to do a job then you realize oh, I haven't got those tools.*

*We lost [Name]'s workshop and ... three storage containers that had things and spare truck and car parts*

*It's not the emotional help as much as physical help because this sort of situation builds up, mounts up... there's a lot of us out there that are still trying to break through the work that's needed*

*...this entire property has all brand-new fencing, but I did it for three months, four months. Working horses in the morning...fencing in the afternoon.*

## **Roadblocks**

Many who stayed to continue to defend and maintain their property and the properties of their neighbours over the coming weeks, initially when the fire was still active and following, when the area had to be made safe, needed to access food and water, fuel and vital supplies such as medications and animal feed. Roadblocks made this process extremely difficult and frustrating. In some cases, friends or family were forced to bring supplies to the roadblock and hand it over to the interviewee who stayed on the inside of the roadblock. The failure of the authorities to properly deal with this issue defeated a major aim of the roadblock in allowing travel through the fireground.

*...for a whole week, we were locked in here since we stayed, on lockdown but people had left and some of the neighbours had animals that needed looking after...*

*I'm running out of gas. I need to go. They won't let me out. Oh, you're kidding. I'm just going to (location) to get gas for my ute so I can go back and continue doing what I'm doing. They won't let me out. They say 'you go you can't come back in again.' ... really quite nasty about the whole thing. The security people and the police didn't want to know.*

*...became difficult ... to get fuel for the Gensets and small engines because we're still running firefighters but thankfully, we know all the paddocks and everybody and we would just go through people's paddocks to get fuel.*

*There's no argument, no discussion... I remember sitting in my ute trying to talk him into it. There are other people coming from the other side trying to get in and they were arguing and in tears and all sorts of stuff*

*I'd just pull over and say look, "I've got things that I've got to do, I'm going through. I don't give a f\*\*\*" I was polite, but I went through. I was never rude to anybody, but the roadblocks were a complete hindrance to those of us that had stuff to do.*

*I just drove into Gidgegannup and drove around the fire block and told the young fellows that I'm going back through, and you can take my number if you want, but I'm not stopping.*

*We needed a few supplies and ...[Name] rang her mother and she was going to bring up some food for us but she couldn't get through. So, we had to meet her down at the checkpoint in Gidge town site. And we ...met across the border and took the box of food...*

*I needed my script, ... and the guy at the checkpoint said the chemists was only another 50 metres down the road....but if you go past the checkpoint, I can't let you back in. So I waited for his head to turn because there was a multitude of people and families there. I snuck through, went to the chemist, got my script, and I went back through. He didn't see me ... there was probably 20 other people there so I got back through.*

*Smoke, coming out of my ears. We couldn't get, they wouldn't let us through the roadblock to get diesel at the Shell garage, a hundred metres maybe down the road. We couldn't go out to get heart meds for my husband and I've heard of others that weren't allowed out ... they wouldn't let us back in. And if we had gone and not come back in, I reckon even late in the week we'd have still lost our place because we were still putting out stuff. We were really angry,*

*... a contractor of some sort... and I just said, I got to get some medication for my wife and I'm coming back. She said, "You can't come back, sir." Yeah. And I'm just saying to her, "Well lady, here's the script. I'm going through." And she said, "I'll have to ring." So she rang someone and then they said, "Yeah, he can come back."*

*You know, for days afterwards there was a lot of mopping up to be done. And we, even though the front had passed, there was fire everywhere and we still had to protect our place and our neighbours' places. And we needed to be here to do that but life goes on, you know, we still had a business to run down in the city. I needed more fuel and other things and I had meetings to go to and be back here again, and to be impeded in access back to our place was extremely frustrating.*

*The roadblock was in the village and that was a big issue. You could get out but they wouldn't let you back in unless smart people around here, knowing back tracks they could do ... just back tracks.*

Some interviewees experienced the isolating effect of roadblocks as fundamentally undermining their morale.

*...that was a very, very isolating time when you needed people but nobody could help.*

*...that was the biggest interruption to our lives, it was not the fire, the biggest interruption to our life was access for the week immediately after the fire and that was a nightmare.*

A few who remained believed that people should have adequate supplies of their own to

make it unnecessary to leave while the roadblocks are in place.

*I can understand (the emergency services') point of view in that they don't want lots of people, especially on the night of the fire...if you're going to stay, you should be prepared with everything. You should have fuel, food. Everything that you need to stay.*

For those who had evacuated and were shut off from their properties, the negative experience was reinforced by what seemed to be the unfair and inconsistent application of the roadblock rules.

*It took, what seemed like months, but it was probably at least two weeks before they even let us back in. One of the most annoying things that really upset me was watching the news one night during that period when we couldn't get back in and Channel Nine had somehow snuck in with a camera and were driving around my bloody property showing it on the news.*

### **Role of local government**

Some interviewees were dissatisfied with Councils' efforts to support people in the fireground, especially early in the recovery when they needed water, fuel and supplies. Some felt the resources applied to the task on the fireground by the Councils was inadequate

*...during the actual five days ... if someone had come around and said are you right for drinking water, or are you right for bread and milk? Are you right? Is there anything we can bring in? They could have bought fuel in. Just check on the people that are protecting their own homes because there would have been a lot more houses lost had people not stayed and defended.*

*... Shire (should have) mobilized the water trucks... people dropping off jerry cans of fuel. Because everyone's living off generators for somewhere between four and eight weeks. ... and help people to put out all the spot fires with fuel and water they need for the job*

*They had a small bunch of volunteers that will come and help you on the ground that you have to throw yourself on the ground with tears and yelling before you get shit.*

On the other hand, some interviewees expressed appreciation for Councils' community support networks that were provided as part of refuge services and as ongoing recovery support over a more extended period.

*Then we went to the Recovery Centre in Brown Park. And that was incredible. Wow, what a service. 10 hours after the fire and everything's set up like a bloody city out there. And it was a bit confusing to know what to do, where to go. But you got to give it to the volunteers and that rapid response.*

*...from our perspective what was really well done after the fire was the initial Rapid Response Centre at Brown Park. That was so valuable. Even though we're all walking around in a daze,*

*I think the support. It's just been amazing because we've had government support and agency support and groups that you didn't even know about. We all know about Red Cross but Disaster Relief Australia and the rapid response team like that was something to behold. Volunteers galore providing support, food, accommodation, if you needed it, and information.*

*Red Cross, some of those religious groups, Salvation Army, they were very helpful. There's a list of half a dozen different people set up organizations set up tables over at Gidgegannup. So, we did the rounds there and got a lot of help from there and a positive kind of feedback from everyone.*

*...you could walk in and there was like The Salvation Army. There was Bendigo Bank. There was the City of Swan that, there was everything there that you, that was there to try and help you and register.*

*...we have a morning tea and there's one, two, three, four probably people who are associated with the City of Swan that are part of this recovery group,*

*There's a recovery centre in Gidgegannup. It is a huge help. Nearly all ... the state government departments are still coming on Friday. So, they do sandwiches and coffee, every Friday morning*

*...they set up a good recovery centre with the Salvos and the Red Cross*

*...community services have helped us out immensely. They gave us food. We've had vouchers. They have a community soup or a food night every second week and up at the rec hall every other week on a Thursday you can go and get dinner free. It's still going on. So, the Mundaring Shire, I couldn't thank them enough.*

But some were not informed of the existence of the recovery centre assistance early on because they were isolated in the fireground with no power or communications.

*They had everybody, the Shire was there, Red Cross was there. All the insurance companies were there, some of the banks were there, anybody that could do something was there and we didn't know because how do you find out? It's on Facebook, we have no power,*

Many interviewees who needed planning and building permission from their local council complained that the process was bureaucratic, complex and time consuming. Some felt Council failed to recognise their practical difficulties completing long forms.

*I don't know how long council will be with new building plans ... but there's probably still a month, two or three that we've got to wait for our plans to get through.*

*...they said they'd fast track building approvals. My house is 4 years old. It is nearly exactly the same house and on exactly the same spot of land with exactly the same energy rating, power rating and everything. Took them 6 weeks*

*...the communication was very lax.... there were forms to get the clearing happening. There was 6 pages that we had to fill in and don't have printers like you know when you've lost your house,*

A few interviewees reflected on the benefit of being resident in a smaller, more rural based Council where they felt there was more time for their needs.

*... they are huge Councils that have way too many suburbs of a different demographic and geographic area .... Mundaring is much smaller. I think a lot of stuff happened a little bit quicker just because they are much smaller and ...understand the hills a bit better.*

*Council eventually caught up. The best thing they've done is the skips and then the roads. That's been super helpful. Being able to just drive out the front, ... dump all the melted car bodies or tires or all the things that have burnt. That's been helpful*

Many interviewees said that the financial support provided by government and the City of Perth's Lord Mayor's Fund was extremely important to their recovery, especially by providing, without major bureaucratic delays, emergency finance for necessities

*you got a little, you know 400 bucks here, \$200 voucher there which all helped because even though we still had our house we lost all our stuff... and water because we had no water because all the tanks got affected.*

*...the Lord Mayor's appeal was an absolute godsend in terms of money*

*the benefits, the generosity, the Lord Mayor's funding, the government funding... well, we're building because of all that generosity.*

*...certainly, those handouts from the government and things like that helped us*

*I was really amazed at the support that we were given by the Shire and government bodies. We're given a lot of help for the house. It is uninsured, so have lost a lot. But we had a lot of donations through Lord Mayor's fund and that came through very quickly. The federal government gave thousands of dollars.*

## **Experience with insurance**

Many interviewees reported a positive experience with their insurance providers. The response of insurance companies and agents were overwhelmingly helpful, supportive, and timely. In many cases small preliminary payments were made to enable priority and emergency purchases.

*I think we've done pretty well personally. We had good insurance, so we haven't had any trouble with that. Our insurers have been great.*

*...they were wonderful. Can't complain at all. They came out probably five days or maybe a week after the fire and had a young woman ... assessor ... she said, "... if we are able to give you some money up front, would that help you?" Within a couple of days, we had that money in our account.*

*We had a really good experience with insurance. We have a broker and he was excellent but also the case manager that we got was very experienced fantastic fellow.*

*They were on the ground within days, and they were brilliant in handling our case. Peace of mind is what you're wanting with a lot of unknowns following an event like this... they paid out their entire contents policy within 36 hours of when we met with them.*

*I've got nothing but wonderful things to say about them. Right from the word go they were just concerned about [Name] and me, "How are you feeling? How's it affecting you? Can we help in any way?"*

Provision of equipment such as generators and pumps were important for interviewees to be able to live more comfortably on their property. Basic tools for cleaning, clearing and rebuilding were also financed early in the recovery process.

*...they organized a generator for us and then within a week, there was a guy here hooked it all up and we had a generator running full time for two months.*

*...we had nothing. We didn't have even a broom. We didn't have a shovel, nothing. So, you had to suddenly so, our insurance straightaway gave us a bit of money up front to settle what do you need right now? So, with just a few implements to just get it started*

However, many interviewees experienced delays and frustrations. Some interviewees reported that insurance assessors couldn't visit their property 'because the fire area was locked down' and they 'had to wait for assessors before they could start recovery work. But some said that they made progress by telephoning their insurance company and were able to get some payments approved without an assessor visiting first.

*...frustration of just things that you want to clean up but you can't because you weren't allowed to touch anything. So, you had to wait for assessors*

*I had a huge problem of insurance initially because we lodged a claim and all we got was, it turned out this guy was in an ivory tower in Sydney... and all he did was read the rules to you*

*...I'd phone again, maybe a week or so later and oh, he's not available again. So, this went on for months. He's never available... I'm always getting these young people and they don't know anything about my claim. So, you could explain the whole thing again and they go in the database, there's always a question. Oh, so can you answer that question. It's just an absolute shamble.*

Some managed insurance approval delays by organising contractors and works in advance of approvals and financing the work themselves or negotiating payment terms. The slowness of some insurance companies meant that quite a few interviewees reached a point where their private finances were exhausted.

*I organized the recovery myself and with my neighbours. ... we hired the excavators. Because insurance can't get in for three or four weeks at best... we just did it ourselves with contacts and friends and people we knew.*

*...we used our savings to do work in the farm... to get us going... I wasn't too worried that it's going to take four or six months to get the money, but it got to the point where I was running out.*

Some felt that their insurance company consistently cut claims by applying inappropriate cost standards to their circumstances, most commonly in relation to the cost of fencing. A few interviewees felt strongly that their insurance company's cost cutting undermined their recovery efforts and extended their recovery time.

*...you got a farmer putting in 50 kilometres (of fence). They can do it for \$12 a metre. So, insurance have got this norm which is \$12 a metre. So, what do they pay? \$8 a metre. That barely covers material. So, I got \$8 a metre for doing the fencing,*

*If they paid the full cost of replacement, I could have got contractors, and that could have been done. Because they only paid half, I'm going to do a lot of it myself or with some part time help. That means instead of taking a year to recover it takes two years.*

*... the insurance company wouldn't cover a lot of it because they covered what's in a normal garden shed even though I got a farm policy. So, my horse floats, all my trailer gear, my welding machine, the whole lot ... wasn't in a normal garden shed.*

### **Things that assisted recovery**

Interviewees reported a range of factors that had helped in their recovery after the bushfire including community social events, working bees and support from local groups and charities.

#### ***Community social events***

Some mentioned community social events including mixed and gender-based gatherings to help people discuss issues and address problems and differences.

*...the dinners we've been to...have been excellent and it's funny because we've lived in the Gidge community since '89. ... and we know some people but we ... are meeting more people going to these get togethers.*

*...we do a monthly men's gathering where ...we have drinks and dinner or barbecue ...at someone's place ...and that's given guys an opportunity ... to kind of work people out and talk about things*

*We keep on getting emails or texts ... to say that they're having a dinner or doing this. So, there's still this community thing that's still helping or trying to get people together to discuss things.*

*...to see the community really come together very effectively—we're at the dinner the other night and that's become part of our lives at the moment.*

### **Community working bees**

Interviewees who participated in working bees assisting neighbours or clearing community areas, saw these as an important component of recovery both in providing and getting support to one another.

*..there's a bunch of lads ... we'd get together and get chainsaws and just go and chop down precarious trees that shouldn't be left standing... pulling fences and helping people. Being able to give back to the community and help people ... I haven't felt overburdened or overwhelmed by the whole thing.*

*...helping people out cutting things down and whatnot. To me, that kept me busy. So, I didn't have to really dwell on what's lost, you know, this is what happened and I'm not that kind of person. I'm not a victim.*

*I guess we've concentrated on more trying to help other people. We're quite actively involved in the recovery programs. We do quite a lot of volunteering with the recovery programs.*

*...when you've got a community and you all help each other in a little busy bee at someone's house one time and just go and pick up all of the rubbish around the place and if you've got 10 people doing it, it's so much easier than one or two.*

Many interviewees highlighted the importance of support they received from neighbours, friends, and community members.

*We know the local vet. She came through the roadblock, administered some painkillers to animals and gave us an assessment.*

*The little shop around the corner. Word got around that the next morning he put on a free barbecue breakfast for anyone in the fire ground and he did that for days... because he knew we didn't have power. We didn't have any food*

*Probably just friends. Friends and community. That's it. We had busy bees, and twenty families pitch in and pull down all the old fencing*

*...it's friends and family and I'm lucky I've got a pretty good network of people to call on, who can help.*

*...we have really good friends that came and helped set it all up for us*

*Family and friends – inside of a week I had a saddle, bridle, gear – I was back on horseback. About a month or six weeks later I had a new horse given to me. More saddles, more gear... even strangers have been wonderful. It's been pretty amazing.*

### ***Support from local groups and charities***

Interviewees praised the recovery support provided by local social, sporting groups and community organisations including the Country Women's Association. BlazeAid was mentioned by many interviewees grateful for their help with fencing and overwhelmed by their organisation and efficiency.

*...the lovely CWA ladies gave us some lunch and ... donations had just flooded in. The hall was just already chock a block full of all sorts of things, clothing and that sort of stuff.*

*BlazeAid are the number one external help ... when you've got property and livestock. What they do as a charity is amazing.*

*...particularly getting precooked meals from the CWA because I can assure you, the last thing you feel like doing for months afterwards is cooking.*

*...having [BlazeAid] as groups roll up hundreds of metres of barbed wire fencing and black star pickets and what's also dusty and hot and ashy and all that stuff was a huge, huge help and then getting a boundary fence up. So, the animals are secure again. That was the number one help. That was brilliant.*

*...there's been some wonderful volunteer groups offering all sorts of different things. ... the community and not just the Gidge community... the outside as well. Just the outpouring of kindness has been a real blessing*

*I can't remember all the names, but the people that came out and help chop some trees down and move things*

*...both of us were staggered at the community generosity and how it kicked in. I couldn't believe it. People that let you know you are not on your own. The amount of money the community raised for all sorts of people*

## Future

### What would you do differently to stay and defend

Most of the interviewees whose homes had been destroyed said they intended to rebuild. Some intended to rebuild extremely fire safe structures beyond the requirements of the current bushfire regulations. Others considered more bushfire safe options.

*...this is just such a wonderful block and a wonderful location that despite our family's' ...protestations about it. ...." It was like after about three weeks, we were sitting out here, ... and we both looked at each other and said, "We've got to rebuild, don't we?"*

*...the house that we're building is as good as a bunker by all accounts. It is just going to be so fire resistant or tolerant or whatever, so you know, it ain't going to burn.*

*We're doing a mitigation plan with a new building being built, even though it was BAL 29 it is being made to BAL 40.*

*...my house was wood framed...M board. So, obviously that's something that you think about whether...I build that again or do I build a brick house or do I build a steel framed house*

Many interviewees said that they would better plan and prepare for bushfire or respond differently if they were threatened by a bushfire again. Many of those who were committed to remain and defend their property wanted to be better prepared and to be able to better fight the fire with pumps, hoses and water supply including firefighting units. Installation or improvement of roof, wall and lawn sprinklers was planned by some interviewees including establishing water recycling systems. Some planned on installing professional grade large size fire hoses and nozzles.

*I've run and dug in 32 ml ring (sprinklers) around the house paddock and ...I've got risers. ... with impact sprinklers on them and they will send out 10 meters away from the house*

*...burying a few more of the feeder lines to some of my sprinkler systems a bit deeper because a couple of them did get a few pinholes in them from things catching on fire*

*...we've got sprinklers all along there and all up this fence and they throw 50 metres. So, now if anything happens in the east, I just put those on straightaway whether it's a threat or not. And then that area is wet.*

*...poly reticulation around the yard and the risers that comes out of the ground...got burnt and so, we lost water pressure ... So, we're in the process of changing everything above ground to steel.*

*We're looking at sprinklers for the roof of the house ...The problem is we want a system that turns itself on.*

*...when we rebuild, I think roof sprinklers are a worthwhile addition. But I'll have some sprinklers further out on the edges of the house too. Try to water further away.*

*I wanted to put a big concentric ring of interlocking sprinklers around the house yard and make it ... properly defensible.*

*I will have all steel risers and there'll be no pulley valve above the ground*

*I would have liked my own firefighting unit, so I could fight the fire myself. I've now getting one made.*

*...we've updated the fire truck ... with the pump*

*we were thinking we'd buy a fire unit for the ute. ... we didn't have anything to go and help the neighbours. When we saw the flare ups next door, all you could do was take two watering cans each*

*it'd be really good if we could have a couple of brackets. So, I could just put out the big hoses, hang the hose up with something that'll hold it, and just let it spray on the fire side, you know, wherever the fire is coming from.*

*...be absolutely fireproof, you know, like there's a lot of things you could do. Sprinkler systems on the roof, concrete tanks.*

*I want to put the tank down there with a simple ... petrol pump... Honda motors because they are absolutely reliable. It can pump up to the sprinklers. Some of it will transfer on the ground. But a lot of it will go back down the drain and divert ... so that it can recycle.*

A few wanted breathing units

*...we'll make sure that we improve our respiratory protection. Because you can't stay in place with that level of intensity and smoke.*

*... the mask for my eyes and ... for breathing. ... covers all your eyes to get a really good view ... And you've got a breathing thing for fumes and chemicals.*

Some also wanted to be better able to cope after a bushfire by having generators that would allow them to live independently when the power utilities were closed down. Some houses would be specifically wired for a generator.

*...a generator system so even if we get months without power, I just bang the generator on, a big generator that powers the whole house.*

*And our house is wired to the generator ... when ... the generator's on, you got full power.*

Many had also reconsidered the extent of vegetation close to their homes and planned to create a more extensive defensible area around them. This included planting more firesafe vegetation such as succulents close to structures. Some interviewees said that they were examining options for more extensive planned burning of vegetation on their property.

*I think we have to do some serious thinking about what's here and what is going to happen with this vegetation*

*...we'd always been concerned about the fuel load surrounding us*

*... maintaining the bushfire zone ... up to 60 metres. We've chosen not to take every tree out, but those trees now would be manageable in a fire event.*

*...a lot of fire planning in permaculture design of gardens. So, we planted for that down there and succulents and things like that.*

*...now I'll never put bushes near the house. it's going to be something which is ... a bit of a resistance to fire and the succulents may be the answer.*

*We're in the process of clearing further back now. We felt we had a good clearance area but we've ... had some trees cut down.*

*A big part of the fire in general was the fuel build-up on the ground. So, I'll pay a lot more attention to that.*

*I wouldn't be planting new Eucalyptus; I'd be planting kind of evergreen kind of deciduous trees.*

Some interviewees felt they needed to better organise mutual protective action with their neighbours.

*...next time let's not try talk each other into going. Let's regroup to bounce off, work together. But if one of us wants to stay then, stay cool.*

*...we've all got fire units, sorted out, self-help. So, these self-help things I think, are really good.*

*I just didn't believe that with the fire, the way it was, that there would be any possibility of getting help. I've always felt that with the location of our property, ...it's off the road. It's a little difficult to get to. I'd certainly be looking at a neighbourhood team ... it's possibly one of those things that rather than being left to your own devices that we could have a localized response.*

Some interviewees wanted to improve access between neighbours' properties to allow them to help each other and provide ready escape routes if needed.

*Every single corner of my property has got a gate out now. Every one of my neighbours has got a gate.*

*...part of the fence that burnt down was the gate into the neighbour's, we're getting rebuilt, and we're not going to lock it permanently, just a bit of wire, so that we both have access with our fire units. So, it's a future safety thing.*

Some interviewees intended to improve their fire fighting skills through training or joining the local bushfire brigade. A few believe that there needs to be greater community awareness and education about planning, preparation, and capability for defending property.

*...having training courses available to people, you know, pump maintenance, you know, actual putting fire out, all those kinds of things.*

*...the other thing we need to do that we haven't done is join the local fire brigade.*

*I think we'll tap into the fire brigade a bit more. Get them to guide us and look after us and then do a bit more.*

*...there is not strong enough community awareness about how to protect your own property from bushfire. Maybe that needs to be looked at.*

A few interviewees wanted to be better prepared and have a clear evacuation plan in case they decided to leave their property.

*...next time it ever happens again probably pack some water, have clothes ready or something like that. So, I had more stuff ready. So, if there was a fire that was coming close, instead of waiting for a few hours before you say, well, I better go.*

### **What others should do differently to help take protective action**

Interviewees wanted better warnings and communication from the emergency services preceding and during bushfire.

*I'd very much hope the fire department and emergency services ... can get organized and get those warnings out ... even if it had been somebody with a megaphone driving by saying fires... two minutes down the road ... pack up or defend...that would have saved a lot of personal possessions and things that a lot of us have lost.*

Many interviewees expressed support for the local brigade volunteers who took early responsibility but concluded, from many different angles, that DFES' fire fighting effort and performance had been inadequate, badly managed and ineffective. There was a sense that it was left to residents to look after themselves; to gather information about the fire; to organise their own resources; work with neighbours and defend their properties themselves. This feeling was captured in the following:

*I probably have less regard and trust in the system...the DFES. When you have a major disaster, you need someone to take on an overall plan. I heard it said that there's not a major disaster until the DFES get involved. So, there's that part of it. So, all this we know better than you, bullshit. And they just pull this authoritarian card out and you are not allowed to do anything yourself. You are not allowed to think of yourself? Don't worry.*

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## **APPENDICES:**

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

### Background

Thank you for agreeing to share your experiences and responses to the recent bushfire.

I'd like you to talk about the things that were of greatest importance to you before and during the bushfire.

Some of what you say may be part of a report to the government, may appear in publications, or be presented at a conference. But everything you say will be anonymous and not identifiable to anybody except me.

Everything you say will be available to you if you want.

### Run-up

- When and how did you **first** become aware of the fire? (timing, warnings, sources)
- How did you first become aware?
- Where were you when you first became aware? (Home, work, shopping etc)
  - What were the first things you did once you became aware of the bushfire?
- Were you aware of the likely weather outlook? Of the FDR?
- Did you get a warning?
  - What type -SMS, door knock ES, neighbour/ friend/ family?
- Was the warning – timely, useful, accurate, provide local information?
- How did you respond to the warning?
  - What role did the warning in your decision to stay or leave?
  - How influential was it in your decision and when you took action?
  - Why did it have this influence?
- How long did you have between first warning and actual impact? (immediate impact, hours, days)]
- What information did you get?
- Where did you get information from radio, TV or any other source?
  - How important were they in providing you with information and advice that you acted on? What was the most important source?

**During the fire**

- How much of a threat did you think the bushfire was to you and your family and your property? (What did you think early on? As time went by?)
- What influenced your view about the danger the bushfire posed to you and your family?
- What were you thinking you would do when the bushfire first started?
- Why were you thinking that you would (stay and defend/leave/ wait and see)?
- What did you end up doing?
- Did you leave or stay?
  - Leave
    - ◆ What prompted you to go (warning, smoke/ flames/ embers)
    - ◆ When did you leave? (did you feel you left late?)
    - ◆ Where did you go?
    - ◆ Did you have to deal with any problems/issues
      - Before you left
      - Getting to your destination?
    - ◆ What were the most important things that helped you to successfully leave?
    - ◆ Did you get any help?
      - Were fire agencies present at any time?If so, did they help you to:
      - make decisions, identify safe areas, leave, or shelter?
    - ◆ How do you feel now about your decision to leave?
  - Remain
    - ◆ Why did you decide to stay rather than leave when you became aware of the fire? How much did the following influence you:
      - Property preparation
      - Fire-fighting equipment and water?
      - Fire-fighting experience

- Planning
- Evacuation / escape plan
- ◆ What was the biggest threat to the property? (embers, radiant heat, flame contact)
- ◆ Who else was present?
  - What did they do?
  - ◆ Did you have dependents present? Were there pets or livestock to care for?
- ◆ Were you able to actively defend at all times or did you seek shelter?
  - Where?
- ◆ Did you get any help?
  - Did you continue to get information during the fire? (who from?)
  - Were warnings updated/details provided on what evacuation roads to take?
  - Were fire agencies present at any time?
    - If so, did they actively defend your property? (before, during, after the fire front)
- ◆ Were your neighbours involved helping or advising you during the bushfire. How important were they in assisting and providing information and advice that you acted on?
- ◆ What were the most important things that helped you to successfully stay?
- ◆ How do you feel now about your decision to stay?

### **Preparation and planning**

- What had you done to prepare in advance for bushfire?
- Did you have firefighting equipment (hoses, pumps, water source), equipment to put out embers and spot fires and personal protective clothing, goggles, masks etc?
- Had you planned what you were going to do if there was a bushfire?
- What was your plan?
  - (discussed with household members, practiced, Plan B)
- Is there anything you could have done to make you safer or improve the outcome?

### **Household dynamics**

- Was their agreement or disagreement within your household about the best things to do during the bushfire.

- How did you resolve the differences/ decide what to do?

### **Experience**

- Have you had any previous experience with bushfire?
  - Have you been a member of a local volunteer brigade or community Bushfire Ready Group
  - had experience fighting a bushfire
  - been instructed/trained/ helped out by someone with firefighting experience?

### **Impact**

- How much damage did the bushfire cause to your property? (casualties, buildings, livestock, fences)
- What have been the main issues for you in trying to recover from the fire?
- In hindsight, what has been most important in helping you cope with the fire's impact?
- What do you know now that you wish you had known before the bushfire?

### **Future**

- Is there anything you would do differently in future bushfires?
- If there were bushfires you had to deal with in the next fire season do you think you would do the same as this time or would you change what you do? Why?

### **Other**

- Are there any other things you would like to tell us about?
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

### **Thank participant**

## RESEARCH RECRUITMENT FLYER

### Your experiences of the 'Wooroloo' Bushfire

We want you to tell us about your experiences prior to, and during, the Wooroloo' bushfire, affecting Wooroloo, Gidgegannup and Brigadoon. We are interested in everyone's experience whether you evacuated or stayed to defend; whether your home was destroyed or not; and whether you were in the path of the fire or close by.

A group of local interviewers will conduct the research in October and November 2021, led by Dr Ken Strahan with Dr Karen Brown and Rohan Carboon. Ken Strahan has been doing bushfire research for 27 years and completed his PhD about peoples' decision-making partly based on the Parkerville/ Stoneville/Mt Helena fire in 2014. This year he was awarded the EMPA Award for Excellence in Emergency Communication Research for work he did with the Victorian Country Fire Authority.

We would like to conduct around 80 interviews with households affected by bushfire, conducted in person at their property or somewhere that is convenient for them.

Your participation would be voluntary, and the researchers will apply human research ethical standards to ensure your informed consent and your anonymity.

A report will be emailed to you and publicly released by the end of 2021. It will also be available to recovery agencies to support recovery processes. The findings may also be disseminated through journal articles and presentations to the emergency management sector and research community.

- **Interested in participating?**

Please contact Ken Strahan using the details below if you would like if you would like more information, to arrange an interview, or if you have any further questions.

- **Dr Ken Strahan**

Strahan Research

Mob: 0418 532 472 / email: [ken@strahan-research.com](mailto:ken@strahan-research.com)

## INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

### *Resident experience of the bushfires affecting Gidgegannup, Tilden Park, Avon Ridge ('Wooroloo') bushfires*

This is an invitation to participate in an interview conducted by Dr Ken Strahan (Strahan Research) with Dr Karen Brown and Rohan Carboon. The interview is a key part of research that explores peoples' views about bushfire and their responses to the bushfire event. You are invited to participate in an interview because of your knowledge, as a resident during the 'Wooroloo' bushfires. Your input is vital for us to better understand the effects of the bushfire on individuals, families and communities.

### *Methods and Demands on Participants*

If you choose to participate in a semi-structured interview (more like a focused conversation), an interview will be scheduled for November 2021 at a time, day and location that is convenient to you. The interview will take approximately one hour and, with your permission, will be audio recorded. Handwritten notes can be taken if you would prefer not to be audio recorded. We would prefer to record for the purpose of ensuring we do not miss key points and to capture key quotes for the report but no quotes will be personally attributed. The interview will focus on your experiences of the bushfire. Examples of possible interview questions include: 'How did you first find out about the fire?', 'What did you do during the fire?' and 'How did the fire affect you and your family or household?' With your approval and involvement we will take some pictures of locations or sites around your property which were significant during the bushfire.

### *Possible Risks, Inconveniences and Discomforts*

Approximately one hour of your time will be required for the interview. Re-living a bushfire experience can be emotionally distressing. You will not be pressured for details you feel uncomfortable talking about. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any information you have provided to that point. Withdrawal from the research or refusal to participate will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.

The privacy of interview participants is ensured (personal details such as names and addresses will never be disclosed in any published material). While discussion of sensitive topics is not anticipated, recollecting aspects of an emergency can be emotionally distressing. Should you require support, contact DFES <https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/emergencywa/recovery.html> . Lifeline Australia provides 24 hours a day telephone crisis support during and after natural disaster. <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/information-and-support/natural-disaster/> .

### *Funding and Benefits of the Research*

This study is funded by Strahan Research. Findings will be made available to residents to assist them to improve their preparedness, responses to, and safety in bushfires. Findings from the study will be written in a report and may be published in scholarly publications (eg: journals, conference proceedings). The confidentiality of interview participants is ensured (personal details, such as names and addresses, will not be disclosed).

### *Ethics Review and Complaints*

Interviews will be conducted following responsible conduct of research principles, as outlined in the Australia Code for Responsible Conduct of Research 2018, which includes guidelines for informed consent of interviewees and research data management. The interviews will be recorded (audio) for confidential internal use within the research team; the recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

Ongoing monitoring of the research is the responsibility of the researchers listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research is or has been conducted, you may contact Ken Strahan on 0418 532 472 or via e-mail: [ken@strahan-research.com](mailto:ken@strahan-research.com)

Thank you for your interest in this study. Please contact Dr Ken Strahan using the details below if you would like to arrange an interview, or if you have any further questions.

Dr Ken Strahan

Strahan Research

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## CONSENT FORM

### CONSENT FOR WOOROLOO BUSHFIRE RESEARCH

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet
2. I agree to participate in the research project as described.
3. I agree:

(a) to be interviewed (b) that my voice will be audio recorded.

4. I acknowledge that:

- (a) I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
- (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.

The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to Strahan Research. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant's Consent

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

