

## Esperance Fires and Engaging the Community

Early in February 2019 severe bushfires swept through areas around Esperance. Like a lot of WA, this area has many culturally significant and sacred sites for the region's Aboriginal communities.

Our Aboriginal Advancement Unit travelled to Esperance with the Incident Management Team to meet with local Aboriginal Elders. By being 'on the ground', we were able to facilitate communication between the Elders and response teams so all parties were represented in planning meetings.

"Including our Aboriginal Advancement Unit in the Incident Management Team was an excellent strategy and ensured everyone was on the same page," Richard Burnell, Executive Director Corporate Services said.

### Consultation with Elders

Well before the Esperance bushfires, the Aboriginal Advancement Unit had formed a close relationship with the Tjaltjraak Aboriginal Rangers through emergency management planning and 'Ready on Country' training.

Mr Burnell said this close relationship with the Rangers helped ensure culturally significant and sacred sites were protected when firefighting machinery was deployed.

"Our discussions with the Elders, Traditional Owner Mr Doc Reynolds, family group representatives and the Tjaltjraak Native Title Corporation gave us vital information, which helped us identify ways to care for country and avoid sites the Traditional Owners wanted left undisturbed," Mr Burnell said.

### Impact

Once the culturally significant sites were identified, plans were developed for their protection. Maps with the sites clearly marked were made available to operational staff working in those areas so machinery and fire appliances could be coordinated to avoid damage. Because of the cultural sensitivity of the maps, they were only available to responders working in the identified areas.

Tjaltjraak Rangers were sent to the Mickel Farm frontline and used the maps to guide the machinery creating fire tracks ensuring the culturally significant sites were protected.



Commissioner Darren Klemm, Doc Reynolds, the Hon. Francis Logan and Gail Reynolds-Adamson discuss the identification of culturally significant and sacred sites.