



## FROM THE COAST

### The Marathon of Recovery

Our thoughts go out to those in the South West affected by bushfires which have devastated the historic mill town of Yarloop and surrounding areas. The unfolding tragedy is a sobering reminder of what we experienced ourselves in November last year, and from which we are continuing to recover.

Recovery extends far beyond what photos and media footage can show. We've seen images of burnt farmland and reserves, volunteers fighting dramatic blazes and evacuation centres, but what we can't see in photos is the ongoing emotional toll on members of a community. You may have noticed since November a heightened sense of alarm in Esperance whenever a bushfire advice is issued, even in people not considered directly affected by the fires. The Shire recently supported a Psychological First Aid Training course run by the Australian Red Cross to provide volunteers with additional training to help members of our community to feel safer, to connect to others, to access physical, emotional and social support, and be in a better position to help themselves. It also aimed to remind volunteers how important it is for them to take care of themselves. While many agencies and community groups are continuing work to restore some normality to Esperance, it's important to remember that everyone is in a position to help our community to recover.

Another way we can all help is by keeping away from bush fire affected areas to allow vegetation to rejuvenate. We have had many visitors to Esperance over Christmas and New Year and the region still has tourists and travellers keen to experience our beautiful landscape. It is important to remember how fragile that landscape still is and that it is the responsibility of all of us to care for our natural resources. The Shire's Environmental Recovery Sub Committee is asking residents and visitors to be vigilant over the next 12-18 months and to stick to the beach or bitumen and respect restrictions in place by environmental agencies. Four wheel drive motorbikes and cars are asked to stay on established roads and tracks and not make new tracks on the bare dunes opened up by the fires in Merivale. This will allow the fragile sand dunes to recover quickly and reduce wind erosion issues.

Recovering from fires is a marathon in which we are all still running. Some are a bit puffed, some are teary at times, and we're a bit slower than during the initial sprint, but the important thing is, we are still going.

We extend our compassion and empathy to everyone in the South West and hope everyone stays safe.