



FROM THE COAST

Fire Recovery Stories

This time last year many in the Esperance community were just beginning to harvest bumper crops that were set to break records. Crops that would set farms up to weather the potential hardships that sometimes occur when your business is largely dependent on Mother Nature. Farmers are always aware of potential threats and the dangers associated with fire season, but no-one could have foreseen the tragedy we would experience just a few weeks later.

We are a pretty resilient lot so you could be forgiven for thinking that it's all done and dusted and that apart from those who lost loved ones, friends or family, we've moved on. The fact is that recovery doesn't quite work that way. It hits people differently and there is no such thing as a timeline for when grieving or trauma ends. As a result the anticipation about harvest this year is a little more subdued. We're all a little more vigilant. A year on from the fires, reflection will bring some sensitivities and hopefully also some healing so it is vitally important that we acknowledge and remember the fires, their impact on our community and how we continue to recover.

Following the November fires, a Recovery Plan was prepared by the Shire, a Local Recovery Committee and the fire affected communities of Cascade, Scaddan and Merivale. One of the initiatives to come out of the plan was the creation of a book, funded by Lotterywest, of stories, pictures, poems and acknowledgements. This was identified as a way people could tell their own experiences during the fires and their aftermath, and at the same time allowing an insight into what others were and potentially still are going through. This book is part of a number of Recovery projects that are being implemented to help our community in moving forward.

Submissions are being sought from now through to the end of January. The book will then be produced with a launch planned for April and we would love to see as many people as possible get involved in this project. We are looking for stories, photos, poems, anything from anyone involved, whether as a volunteer, property owner or even to hear how the event unfolded for people in relative safety. We would particularly love to hear from people directly affected by the fires such as the brave firefighters who battled the blaze and the people who prepared meals.

If you don't have a story to contribute but would like to acknowledge for example the work of the firefighters, we would include these and testimonials in the book as well. The book will be gifted in appreciation, to the firefighters, visiting brigades, community and organisation volunteers, and most importantly those directly affected by the fires. The publication will also be made available to the community. If you would like to contribute to Our Bushfire Recovery Story – a memoir of community strength and resilience, please contact Recovery Project Officer, Amelia Rolton on 9071 0675.