

Emergency re-supply as Pilbara flood waters rise

When communities in the Pilbara were cut off from the rest of civilisation for eight days by flood waters earlier this year, DFES personnel and multiple volunteer units pulled together to provide much needed support and essential supplies.



Marble Bar and Newman received considerable rainfall into the catchment areas surrounding their towns in the early months of 2014, causing river levels to rise significantly.

The Shaw and Coongan Rivers experienced high levels, immersing the Marble Bar to Port Hedland road. This isolated the town of Marble Bar, while the Waralong community which sits north of the road and between the two rivers, was cut off from both Marble Bar and Port Hedland.

West Pilbara District Officer Paul Leiper said Port Hedland DFES personnel co-ordinated an airlifted resupply to the remote Waralong community from Port Hedland.

“The re-supply was undertaken using fixed wing planes and helicopters and was supported by the Port Hedland State Emergency Service (SES), who collected supplies from local providers in Port and South Hedland,” Paul said.

“DFES and SES crews also accompanied the aircraft to assist with loading and unloading of supplies, and conducting welfare checks.”

Marble Bar Volunteer Emergency Service and police met the aircraft at the airport for supply transfers to the town of Marble Bar.

The Jigalong community located east of Newman was also isolated due to high river levels and inaccessible roads, and two resupplies were conducted to the community using fixed wing aircraft.

The DFES Karratha regional office co-ordinated the first resupply, which originated from Meekatharra due to Great Northern Highway being closed between Meekatharra and the Capricorn Roadhouse south of Newman.

“The second Jigalong resupply was co-ordinated in Newman by the local SES Manager Connie Reed, who organised the loading and dispatching of the aircraft. She was ably supported by Newman SES volunteers,” Paul said.

Once the Great Northern Highway reopened further supplies for Jigalong were able to get through to Newman by road. Eight fixed wing airlifts, co-ordinated by the Regional Operations Centre at Port Hedland, were then

needed over two days to fly essential supplies from Newman to Jigalong.

Newman SES provided invaluable logistical support by managing the transfer of food and essentials from a semi-trailer onto the waiting aircraft at Newman airport. Newman Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service also provided manpower until they were called out to an incident.

East Pilbara District Officer Peter Cameron said although the remote desert communities take measures to try and ensure their preparedness for the wet season, it is not always possible.

“They generally stock up their stores in October and this lasts them through to January, then giving them a window of opportunity to restock again before the season starts.

“In this instance there was cultural business which brought more people into the Jigalong community location than is usual and the supplies were not sufficient when they were surprised by bad weather.”

Pilbara Superintendent John Newman said the resupply of the affected communities and towns provided challenges to all involved, however the endeavour was successful.

“It would not have been possible without the co-operation and dedication of our volunteers who willingly provided assistance throughout this demanding time.

“It is a credit to everyone involved that the resupplies to these isolated communities were achieved in such a timely and efficient manner.”