

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

All must play their part to prevent more fire disasters

The wonderful weather which makes West Australians the envy of the world is not without a downside.

The scorching days of high summer can be too much for even the toughest of us.

And the baking heat makes the landscape vulnerable to devastating bushfires.

Already there have been warnings from authorities about the need to prepare for the looming fire season.

This is a good move. WA had one of its worst bushfire seasons last year when infernos near Esperance and at Yarloop left six people dead and destroyed hundreds of homes.

There are fears conditions will be just as dangerous this season. Last weekend, the State Government launched a new Emergency WA website, which will provide up-to-date information on bushfires and other emergency situations across WA.

Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Wayne Gregson acknowledged maps outlining the extent of bushfires and areas most at risk could change very rapidly.

But the site is a welcome initiative as part of what needs to be a multi-pronged approach to fire safety.

With this in mind, it was disturbing that research commissioned by DFES revealed many West Australians continue to ignore calls to prepare early for bushfires.

The July survey of 1000 people found almost 60 per cent of regional and 80 per cent of metropolitan respondents had not taken any action to prepare.

This must change.

As emphasised by Emergency Services Minister Joe Francis, householders in bushfire-prone areas should take precautions such as cleaning out their gutters, clearing vegetation and securing back-up water supplies.

Another part of fire prevention is the program of controlled burning. The Department of Parks and Wildlife aims to burn 200,000ha in the South West every year to keep fuel loads below six years old across 45 per cent of the landmass.

DPAW has hit the target in only two of the past 20 years. It burnt 154,000ha in the 12 months to June 30. After a slow start this financial year, the agency has managed to burn more than 50,000ha.

Every effort must be made to ensure the program is delivered.

Another concern is the fractured relationships in the volunteer firefighting sector, as well as between the volunteers and DFES.

It is time they put the bad blood behind them and agreed to work together.

They are all too vital to the community to be anything less than fully effective.



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Yilgarn job prospects hinge on green light

David Utting

The future of iron mining in the Yilgarn is in the balance with three new mines proposed for construction as soon as practicable.

Cliffs Natural Resources plans to mine its F Deposit near Koolyanobbing and Mineral Resources has proposed to mine J5 and Bungalbin East 100km north-east of Southern Cross.

The mines will provide some ongoing ore for Cliffs which currently exports almost 12 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) through Esperance Port and will provide all of the ore beyond 2017 for MinRes, which exports 5.4 Mtpa through Kwinana Bulk Terminal.

An economic-impact study by independent engineering consultants AECOM in September forecast that MinRes' proposed mines will support substantial employment beyond 2030. The total number of direct and indirect full-time equivalent positions is almost 1500, which includes 585 direct jobs on site and in the supply chain.

Cliffs currently supports about 1660 direct and indirect FTEs, including about 650 directly.

Total jobs supported by iron ore mining in the Yilgarn by these two companies is 3160 (Industry standard ABS multipliers are used to calculate indirect job numbers).

Thankfully, Cliffs' F Deposit was recommended for approval in September by the Environmental Protection Authority (albeit with conditions) but the situation is not as clear with MinRes' proposed mines.

These are currently being assessed by the EPA which will make a recommendation to the Minister for



Environment, who will decide if mining can take place or not.

Banded iron formation ranges such as the Helena-Aurora Range where MinRes intends to mine are recognised as landscapes having important environmental values and MinRes' proposed mining disturbance represents a very small fraction (1.6 per cent) of the banded iron in the relevant area.

The Helena-Aurora Range is often incorrectly described as "unique" and "unspoiled". It is more than 99 per cent intact but so are six nearby ranges each also being greater than 99 per cent intact: Die Hardy, Dryandra, Hunt, Johnston, Lake Giles and Mt Manning Range.

Most of the disturbance is sensitively planned and occurs away from the ranges and there is no evidence that any species of flora or fauna will be lost.

The proposed mining will occur to the highest environmental standards and is consistent with WA Government policy.

The area has long been recognised as

a mining zone, with exploration stretching back 150 years and BHP drilling for iron ore at Bungalbin East in the 1960s and 70s.

The State Government re-affirmed in 2010 that the area surrounding J5 (a granted mining lease) and Bungalbin East (a pending mining lease) would be retained as a lower level, dual-use mining and conservation area, rather than declaring the area an A-class reserve.

MinRes has made a strong case that the economic benefits, quality environmental management and specialist mine site rehabilitation skills can balance mining with conservation.

MinRes alone pays over \$40 million annually in port fees and both companies pump over \$60 million a year combined into State coffers through royalties.

And then of course there are 3160 families with a breadwinner.

David Utting is chief executive of the Yilgarn Iron Producers Association