



**South East Premium Wheat Growers Association**

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## **Esperance fires book “Settling the Dust” to help others**

A book comprising nine case studies on farms damaged by fires near Esperance in 2015 provides helpful lessons for others who may be affected in the future.

Published by South East Premium Wheat Growers’ Association (SEPWA), “Settling the Dust” was partly funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC).

SEPWA President, Greg Curnow said it became clear soon after the fires that there was limited information available to support farmers in their decision making.

Managers who suddenly found they had to regenerate their burnt paddocks during the middle of harvest in November 2015 were lucky to have good soil moisture and so sowing cover was one option.

“Because of the scale of the fires which burnt more than 130,000ha of farm land, all forms of soil types were burnt from higher rainfall, sandier soils on the coast and around Scaddan, through to heavier Mallee clays at Cascade,” Mr Curnow said.

“So there was a lot of different work done in the region – depending on each person’s situation.

“One thing I can say in hindsight though is that so long as you are well insured, it is almost certainly not as bad as it looks and it’s amazing how fast farming land will recover,” he said.

Mr Curnow had 800ha of his farm at Grass Patch burnt, but it was the loss of his uncle, Kym (Freddy) Curnow who was one of four people who died during the blaze at Scaddan, that was the real tragedy for him and many others.

Mr Curnow said the 12 months following that day had been the hardest in his life.

“Probably the best piece of advice I can give is to make sure you spend plenty of time with family and friends after suffering such an ordeal. And if you have to work hard to sort things out, make sure you still take time to do the things you love.”

The book shows that some people did a lot to re-generate their soils, through cultivation and planting cover crops. Others chose to go on a holiday and not look at the paddocks until the weeds

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grew back to provide stability from wind erosion. The thing that was clear was that there were plenty of options and not one solution could fit all.

The book also provides information and tools to help people recover emotionally from such an event. Possibly the biggest lesson learnt in this regard was to accept help and look out for each other. Seeking professional advice was also worthwhile.

To download the book, you can go to [www.sepwa.org.au](http://www.sepwa.org.au).

### *Photo captions*

- Cover of the book “Settling the Dust”
- SEPWA President, Greg Curnow

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