

# CAMPFIRE

Winter Edition, August 2020

'The Department of Health WA's  
Official Aboriginal  
Environmental Health Newsletter'

## In This Issue

- Food for the Mob
- Community waste management
- Exotic ticks and dog health
- Mosquito-born illnesses
- Dog Health Training
- #endingtrachoma update
- Other EH news
- Upcoming Events



**WA ABORIGINAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
HEALTH**

## A Quick Message from the EHD

The emergence of COVID-19 in Western Australia these past months has seen a major shift to action for the Aboriginal Environmental Health (AEH) program. Despite the various barriers to regular service delivery throughout the region, AEH Service Providers have adapted and responded to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 climate with confidence, keeping communities well informed and equipped. We wish to thank everyone for the efforts in making their workplaces and communities cleaner and safer. We also want to acknowledge the enthusiasm of our workforce in responding to requests for help in distributing food/supplies and COVID-19 information packs. We look forward to hearing any of your experiences as you progress through the world of COVID-19. If you have any stories to add to the next Campfire newsletter please send them to [Onike.Williams@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:Onike.Williams@health.wa.gov.au).



PHAIWA's Scott Mackenzie and Bega Garnbirringu's Troy Hill, their new work friend attempted to eat a Safe Bathroom Assessment during a recent visit in Bondini.

The Aboriginal Environmental Health Program can be contacted on  
(08) 9222 2000 or at [AboriginalEnvironmentalHealthWA@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:AboriginalEnvironmentalHealthWA@health.wa.gov.au).

[Click here to visit the Aboriginal Environmental Health landing page.](#)

## Food for the Mob

Wayne McDonald and Sue Chiera, Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation

Bundiyarra's Environmental Health Services Team in Geraldton recently joined other Aboriginal organisations to distribute around 800 food and hygiene packages to regional and remote Aboriginal communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic raised many issues for Aboriginal people - most importantly access to food - so the EH team along with MEEDAC and the Aboriginal Biodiversity & Conservation Foundation (ABC Foundation) banded together to deliver 'Food for the Mob' to communities in the Midwest and Gascoyne.

Bundiyarra's Manager Operations, Wayne McDonald, said Bundiyarra and the EH team is an essential service and continued to operate during the crisis.

"Bundiyarra, along with MEEDAC and ABC had calls from people in critical need, people in lockdown where there are no shops, they are not allowed to leave their communities, and they are running low on cleaning products, hygiene needs and food," he said.



Pictured above: Members from Bundiyarra's EH team, MEEDAC and the ABC Foundation, with some relief packages being assembled for distribution.

"Bundiyarra provided the logistics, assembling the packages, and delivering to some communities like Pia Wajarri, Kardaloo and Barrel Well, while ABC made the 700 km round trip to Yulella near Meekatharra and Mungullah near Carnarvon."

It is expected supply and delivery of 'Food for the Mob' will run for another six months. The ABC Foundation is providing funds to assist in the coordination and delivery of the meals, through Bundiyarra.

Preparing for the unfortunate possibility of a second wave of the virus, Bundiyarra is considering an application for a funding agent for capacity building in other support areas.



Some of Bundiyarra's Environmental Health team ready for a second 'Food for the Mob' delivery: Steven Kelly; Alan McDonald Jnr; Bundiyarra Manager Operations Wayne McDonald; and Les Dann.

## Bettering Community Waste Management

Peter Wilden, Environmental health Coordinator. Pilbara Meta Maya Regional Aboriginal Corporation

Pilbara Meta Maya Regional Aboriginal Corporation's EH Team have contributed to the supply of Wheelie Bin Stands/ Holders (pictured below), in an initiative to control wind-blown litter and eliminate hungry community dogs scavenging for food. These wheelie bin holders were welded together by a local WA company and installed within the Punmu Aboriginal Community using Quickset cement. The bin holders have been working well and there has been a significant decrease in community litter.

An additional 55 bin holders are currently being made for installation in other Pilbara remote Aboriginal communities including Warralong, Mata Mata, Punju Njamal, Jinparinya and Yandeyarra communities.



The EH team from Pilbara Meta Maya have also provided and installed around 30 new 240L wheelie bins/bin holders to Parngurr community for all housing and council buildings. The bin holders (pictured below) were installed in December 2019 as a community initiative to prevent bins falling over and rubbish being scattered around. At the same time, the community replaced all broken bins with new ones.



## Exotic Brown dog ticks in WA

Kimberly Evasco, Scientific Officer, Environmental Health Directorate

### What is Ehrlichiosis?

Ehrlichiosis (er-lickee-oh-sis) is a disease caused by infection with a bacteria known as *Ehrlichia canis*. The bacteria is transmitted to dogs through the bite of an infected common brown dog tick. Ehrlichiosis has recently been discovered for the first time in local dogs in the Kimberley region in May and in Northern Territory in June. Report to be found as far as Carnarvon.

### What impact does it have?

The bacteria invade the dog's blood, causing a fever. An infected dog will appear tired, weak, lose weight or go off its food. It is important to take any dog appearing unwell to a local vet to determine whether they are suffering from Ehrlichiosis.

Transmission of the bacteria can only occur through ticks. Direct transmission from dog to dog does not occur.

Whilst rare, it is possible for people to be infected through the bite of an infected tick (infection does not occur from dog to person). A few people overseas have become sick with Ehrlichiosis following brown dog tick bites.

### What can you do?

The only way to prevent infection and keep your dog healthy is to prevent tick bites. The simplest way to do this is by:

- Regularly treating dogs for ticks with an effective product (e.g. cydectin pour-ons or tick collars)
- Spraying the house for ticks. Ticks like to lay their eggs in the cracks of walls and floors. Make sure your tick spray is safe to use around the kids and dogs.
- Take your dog to the vet or tell the local AEH team if you see any dogs around town that look sick.
- Check your dogs for ticks and remove them appropriately.
- Avoid tick prone areas where possible. Always check yourself and your children for ticks, especially after being in tick prone areas. Emergency Animal Disease Hotline - 1800 675 888.

Visit the Department of Health's (DoH) website for more information on ticks and how they can be safely removed.

### What is being done about it?

The DoH and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) are working together to determine how far the bacteria is distributed throughout WA. DPIRD is conducting a dog survey, collecting blood samples from dogs across the region and developing resources to raise awareness in remote communities. DoH is conducting a tick study and would like to ask anyone willing to collect ticks from dogs across the Kimberley/Pilbara regions to contact [medical.entomology@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:medical.entomology@health.wa.gov.au).

It will also be important for dog health programs in affected regions to review their tick prevention strategies. If the chosen product has resistance issues or is not applied appropriately, it is unlikely to prevent tick infestation and Ehrlichiosis in local dogs. Keeping dogs healthy in communities and limiting individual's exposure to ticks, will in turn assist in reducing any potential public health risk.



Image above: Brown dog tick infested dog ear, Courtesy of The Ark Animal Hospital.

## MVE and Mosquito Management

Craig Brockway, Senior Scientific Officer, Environmental Health Directorate

The DoH is warning Pilbara and Kimberley residents to take additional precautions to avoid mosquito bites following continued evidence of Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) activity across the region.

While no human cases of MVE have been reported this year, activity has been detected in sentinel chicken flocks across the whole Kimberley, and in parts of the Pilbara.

MVE is a rare but potentially fatal disease. Initial symptoms include fever, drowsiness, headache, stiff neck, nausea and dizziness. In severe cases, people may experience fits, lapse into a coma, be left with permanent brain damage or die.

The virus responsible for the disease is transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. The only way to prevent infection is to avoid being bitten.

Given there is no vaccine or specific treatment for MVE, it is important that individuals take additional measures to avoid mosquito bites while the virus is active:

- avoid outdoor exposure, particularly at dawn and early evening;
- wear protective (long, loose-fitting, light-coloured) clothing when outdoors;
- apply an effective personal repellent containing diethyltoluamide (DEET) or picaridin evenly to all areas of exposed skin and always follow the label instructions;
- ensure infants and children are adequately protected against mosquito bites, preferably with suitable clothing, bed nets or other forms of insect screening;
- remove water holding containers from around the home and garden to ensure mosquitoes do not breed in your own backyard;
- use mosquito coils and mosquito lanterns and apply barrier sprays containing bifenthrin in patio and outdoor areas around houses; and
- ensure insect screens are installed and in good condition on houses and caravans;
- use mosquito nets and mosquito-proof tents if sleeping outside.

For further general information on mosquito prevention, visit the **Department's** website.



Image left & above: Sentinel chicken flocks in Exmouth, a well established surveillance mechanism for monitoring MVE virus activity in vectors in WA.



The Department can provide you with **Fight the Bite** resources (on request) to assist health promotion efforts in reducing mosquito exposure in communities.

## Dog Health Training in Roebourne

John Perrett, Senior Program Officer, Environmental Health Directorate

The implementation of good dog health remains an important component of the Aboriginal Environmental Health Program, ran in Aboriginal communities around the state. It allows people other than veterinary surgeons to gain access to scheduled medicines to treat community dogs, such as Cydectin for parasites. We are seeing changes in the ability to control dog reproduction with the recent withdrawal of Covinan in the market. 2020 has been impacted by COVID-19, but we are pleased that Professor Ian Robertson is available to present a number of Dog Health Training courses in the second half of the year. We have just concluded one in Roeburn, another one in Kalgoorlie in August and in Derby in September.

Here is a quick shot of the Roebourne class and Kalgoorlie class of 2020 with their certificates.



Image above: Kurtley Moncrief, Julius Barker, Cassie Blackwell, Rex Boothe, Robert Jehu, Thomas Smith-Corrigan, Masen Corrigan, Albert Fraser, Jerry Penie, Prof. Ian Robertson, Gina Turangi, Toni Morrison and Tristan Flanagan.



Image above: Gary Tucker Snr, Gary Tucker Jnr, Troy Hill, Stanley Ashwin, Colin Jones, Prof. Ian Robertson, Robert Bonney, Jamarl Sambo, Les Dann, Onike Williams, Derek Councillor, Joel Bone and Kevin Schnitzer.

## #EndingTrachoma Project Update

### Ngaanyatjarra Lands

Robert Mullane, Manager Aboriginal Environmental Health Program, Environmental Health Directorate

The #endingtrachoma project aims to have the incidence of trachoma and skin infections in 'trachoma at risk' Aboriginal communities throughout WA by December 2020. The project has been successfully trialled in multiple communities across WA and recently visited remote communities within the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (NG Lands) - Wingellina and Jameson. The purpose of this trip was to ensure each home had functioning 'health hardware' such as bathrooms, laundry and plumbing and in response to COVID-19, to ensure people have safe and functioning houses to self-isolate within, if the need arises.

In the NG Lands, the project team conducted house by house interventions to address health hardware. They spent a week assisting the local Aboriginal Environmental Health Team to complete safety assessments in each house. There was also support by an onsite licensed plumber from Lakes Contracting who completed any identified plumbing works. The team consisted of members from the EHD, PHAIWA, Goldfields Population Health Unit, Ngaanyatjarra Council and Health Services and the WA Housing Authority.

During the trip, a total of 51 out of 54 houses were audited, and received a Safe Bathroom Assessment. 106 plumbing issues were identified, with 55% directly affecting the ability to wash yourself. 39 six step hygiene stickers were placed in bathrooms, 29 towel hooks installed, 153 bars of soap given out, 45 acrylic mirrors installed at child height and 25% of houses received a short conversation around hygiene.

The outcomes of the housing project were positive, local partnerships were strengthened to work towards local solutions, health hardware issues were addressed immediately in houses and the overall project was well received by both communities.

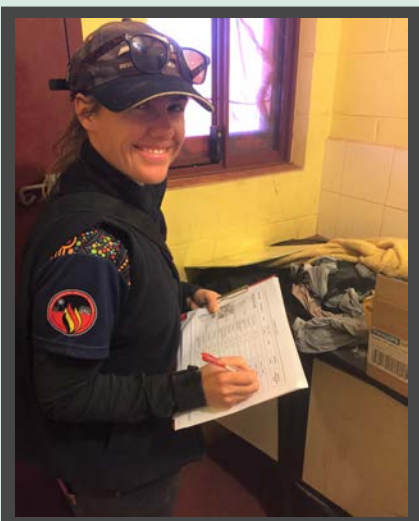


Image above: Robert Mullane (EHD), Kevin Schnitzer (Ng Health), Scott Mackenzie (PHAIWA), Claire Woollacott (Goldfields Population Health) and Malisa Waters (Ng Council).

## #EndingTrachoma Project Update

### Meekatharra and Wiluna

John Perrett, Senior Program Officer, Environmental Health Directorate

In July we visited Meekatharra and Wiluna to undertake Safe Bathroom Assessments in relation to the condition of the plumbing and health hardware in domestic dwellings. A total of 95 houses were eligible across the two towns and 70 houses were accessible over 4 days. Due to cultural events we were unable to undertake assessments in the Bondini community.

Thanks to Scott Mackenzie (PHAIWA) for arranging the field trips and coordinating with the various organisations that contributed to the success of the week.

The first two days were spent visiting in Meekatharra where Colin Jones (Yulella Aboriginal Corporation) liaised with tenants and a total of 45 out of 60 houses were assessed. In Wiluna, Eric, Tianni, Teddy and Stuart (Ngangganawili Aboriginal Health Service), guided us to the various residences where we able to access 26 out of 34 homes. During this trip a total of 319 issues were reported, 254 plumbing fixes, 33 electrical fixes, 89 globes replaced and 350 bars of soap were given out. Residents were thankful for the soap bars provided and the towel hooks, mirrors and light globes which we installed.

Special thanks to Robert Bonney (Bega Garnbirringu Health Service), the local Housing Officers (Jade and Janine), Mark Smith (Plumber) and Scott Mackenzie (PHAIWA) for assisting and leading the teams around the communities. Undertaking a community wide inspection of eligible housing stock bathrooms and toilet facilities proves to be an effective method of identifying repairs for immediate follow up by the contracted plumbers. A significant benefit is that a concentrated repair program can be rolled out in the community. Another benefit is the potential savings to the Department of Communities. Hopefully this translates into the capacity for other maintenance and repairs.

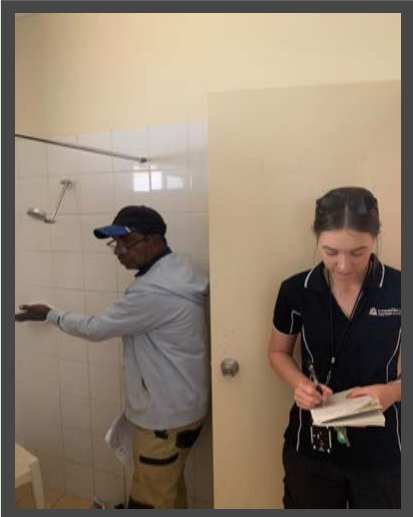


Image above: Jayde Dowling (Dept. Communities), Scott Mackenzie (PHAIWA), Colin Jones (Yulella Aboriginal Corporation) and John Perrett (EHD).





## Other EH News

- The Decision paper on the '**Review of the remote Aboriginal Communities plumbing scheme**' has now been published. The scheme which has been operating since December 2016, allows AEHWs who have completed a Certificate II in Indigenous Environmental Health (or Certificate II in Population Health) to carry out a limited range of plumbing repair work in emergency situations, in eligible remote communities. The aim of the scheme is to reduce the risks to health that may arise in remote Aboriginal communities and prevent significant water waste, where a licensed plumber cannot attend. The decision paper can be found [here](#).
- We would like to applaud the Kimberley's very own Caitlin Fuller and Isaac Buckle for enrolling to study a Diploma of Environmental Health at Edith Cowan University (ECU). The year long tertiary course prepares students for a future in EH, developing an understanding of the prevention and control of communicable and environmental caused disease, including the planning and coordination of environmental health projects. Both Isaac and Caitlin have been working with the Shire of Derby/West Kimberley's AEH Team at and excelling in their roles. We appreciate the support of the Shire for these two wanting to undertake higher education. We acknowledge the significance of this decision and are excited that two Aboriginal EH workers from remote WA are commencing this journey. All the best for your studies!

## Upcoming Events

- The next **Dog Health Training** events will be held in Derby on the **24th - 25th** September 2020
- The next **Kimberley Forum** will be held on the **22nd & 23rd** September 2020 in Broome.



Image left: Pilbara Meta Maya Regional Aboriginal Corporation's Environmental Health Team - Toni Morrison, Jerry Penie and Peter Wilden.

If you have feedback about the Campfire Newsletter, please send your queries to [Onike.Williams@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:Onike.Williams@health.wa.gov.au)