

THE DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (DFES)

Case Study

whispir.

Overview

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) performs a critical role in coordinating emergency response to a large range of natural disasters and emergency incidents that pose a risk to people and property throughout Western Australia (WA).

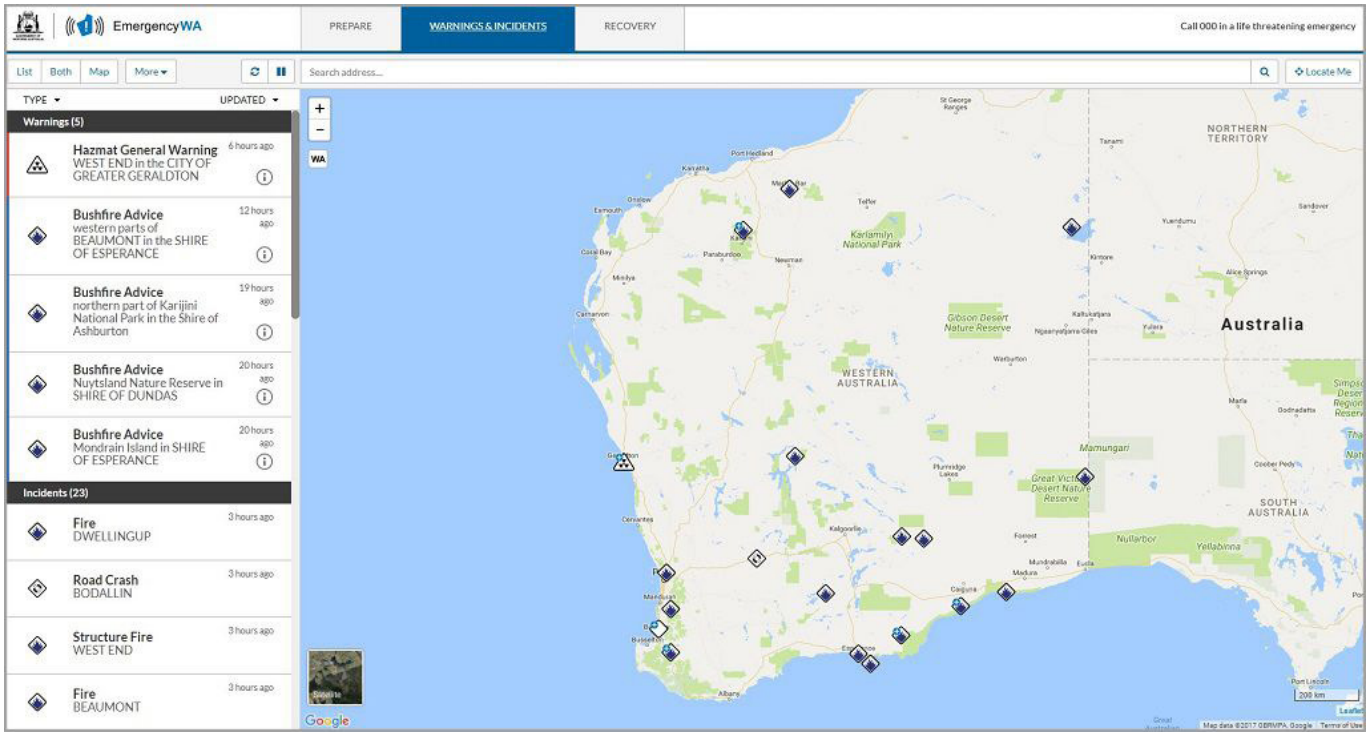
OVERVIEW

The single, centralised media and communications team are responsible for issuing all advices regarding incidents across the State, and are the source of current incident information then used by other organisations, government departments and members of the public.

The focus of the 'DFES Critical Messaging System' project is to facilitate communications functions of the DFES media team by providing a one-source, one-message hub for issuing hazard related communications across multiple channels.

The primary mechanism for delivering this information is the custom built emergency.wa.gov.au website, which presents updated status alerts throughout the State for ready viewing by the public. These are supported by multi-channel messages capabilities to reach the media, and other stakeholders, including SMS, email and social media to maximise reach.

Future phases of implementation will include on-boarding of other WA Government Departments, to facilitate further emergency communications workflows.



CHALLENGE

Bushfire season in Western Australia is a high-pressure, high-risk time for both residents and for DFES staff and volunteers.

In 2013, DFES was tasked to develop a centralised single source of emergency communications following a review into the 2011 Perth Hills Bushfires. After a thorough scoping and procurement process, Whispir was selected to deliver the system.

In October 2016, DFES launched the Critical Messaging System and Emergency WA website. The Whispir messaging platform was customised to streamline the process of disseminating alerts and warnings and simultaneously publish them across multiple channels including social media, stakeholder emails, RSS feeds and the new website.

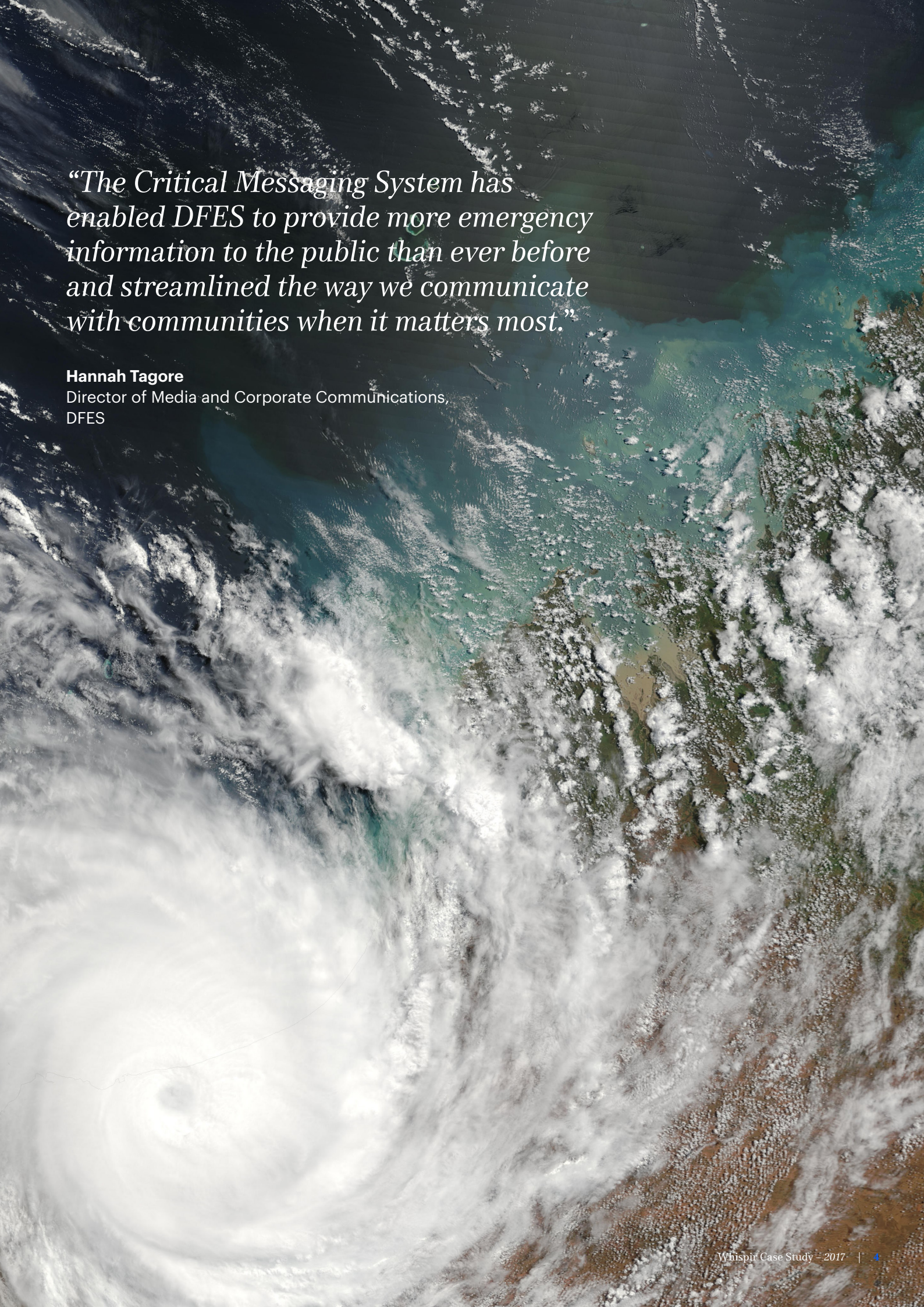
The map based website was designed for optimum usability and also hosts live feeds of active incidents and prescribed burns. This means the community can now find out about an incident as soon as authorities do.

While Western Australia's emergency warning system resembles the 'One Source One Message' solution that Whispir built several years ago for the Victorian Government, the solution created for DFES is specifically primed to WA conditions. DFES worked closely with Whispir to select the most relevant components of the communications platform, which Whispir then optimised to provide the high-level of automation required by the WA government.

Before Whispir's solution, DFES' alerts and warnings system relied heavily on manual processes. Now, incident based data feeds automatically to the website and it is quicker and easier to issue high level warnings when required.

The Whispir-powered website represents a single, trustworthy source of truth for WA residents, and a more streamlined process for the WA government. With real-time information easily accessible, more people than ever can take the actions they need to stay safe.





"The Critical Messaging System has enabled DFES to provide more emergency information to the public than ever before and streamlined the way we communicate with communities when it matters most."

Hannah Tagore
Director of Media and Corporate Communications,
DFES

OUTCOME

Increased efficiency of incident and warning notifications to the media and public within WA. The website has provided an easier to use interface for the public who can view incidents and warnings as they are happening, allowing them to make more informed decisions on how to react to an event in their surrounding area.

The system has demonstrated the ability to serve up to 16 million site visits per day under extreme load testing, and since launch there have been more than 3.4 million visits to the website, generating more than 7.6 million page views.

Detailed technical specifications:

a. Included:

- Provide a single, authoritative source for the issuing of emergency information.
- Provide a more efficient method of creating, distributing, and updating alerts and warnings.
- Distribution of alerts and warning information to various groups including media and stakeholders, and via the public website and data feeds.
- Provide the ability for WA media and emergency contacts to access/subscribe to emergency information through easy to use interfaces.
- Provide a solution which is capable of utilising multiple data feeds from different sources and provisioning for the ability to collate these feeds into a centralised location prior to distribution to required recipients. Initial requirement is to provision for BoM and FCAD feeds but with the view to bring in different feed types under the development of the Data Feed Management Hub.
- Provide a highly available, highly redundant hosted solution that can meet the predicted peak user loads during emergencies.
- Provide a feature rich public facing website to display alerts and warnings and automatically publish other emergency information.

b. The Whispir platform leveraged the following core features:

- infoCentre Module – New Whispir module built for the DFES project, which can also be adopted by other emergency management authorities. This module allows for the consumption of different data sources into a customer account which can then be used to populate outbound communications.
- Events & RMS Modules – Events templates (types of emergency) that pivot into the related Rich Message Templates (All clear, Advice, Watch & Act, Emergency).
- Social Media Module – warnings posted to Twitter and Facebook.
- Custom built Website – consumes data on emergency notifications and presents them to the public in a WCAG AA complaint format (best in the state of WA and to be used as a benchmark) at: www.emergency.wa.gov.au
- RSS & CAP Output feeds.
- Fire Danger Ratings and Total Fire Ban warning outputs on the website map view.

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