

MR JIM REGAN - STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE VOLUNTEER

Statement by Minister for Police and Emergency Services

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland - Minister for Police and Emergency Services) [2.12 pm]: I rise to acknowledge a very sad event in this State's history. Last Friday at 4.00 am, the unthinkable happened: one of our State Emergency Service volunteers was killed. Jim Regan was the first member of the Western Australian State Emergency Service to lose his life while on operational duty. Jim, who was 36 years of age, joined the SES four and half years ago, and, from all accounts, his work with the SES became a passion.

On 1 and 2 April, Jim was part of a team of SES volunteers from Newman and Tom Price who were working with police officers and Department of Conservation and Land Management national park rangers to rescue two British tourists in the remote Karijini National Park. Once the injured man from the first incident was hauled to safety at about midnight, news came through that a second tourist, this time a young woman, was at the bottom of a gorge after a separate fall. The team set off again in the middle of the night. As rescuers were about to attach ropes to the stretcher holding the 25-year-old tourist, they were hit by a two-metre wall of water. Eyewitness accounts are that Jim Regan was hit by the full force of the flash flood, and he was swept away. Response efforts included the immediate deployment of additional ground-based personnel, an expansion of the operation control team, fresh vertical rescue teams, and aerial reconnaissance in the form of helicopter support. Jim's body was recovered by police divers from a pool at the base of the gorge late on Saturday afternoon.

On Friday morning, immediately after the incident, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority sent two senior managers to Tom Price and Newman to support Jim's family and SES colleagues, and to provide whatever assistance was required. The peer support network also swung into action, with counsellors and chaplains dispatched to Newman and Geraldton, where Jim's parents live. Today, FESA's board chairman, Mike Barnett, acting chief executive officer, Bill Forbes, the President of the SES Volunteer Association, Phillip Petersen and a senior FESA volunteer manager will travel to Newman to meet Jim's family as well as his SES unit colleagues. All of those close to Jim must be acutely feeling his loss at this time, and our thoughts and prayers go out to them.

Mr Speaker, our State has 29 000 FESA volunteers, including 2 300 SES volunteers. They provide emergency services to the community of Western Australia 24 hours a day, seven days a week every week of the year. These selfless individuals also put in hours of training and prevention work. They deserve our highest praise.

I extend the deepest condolences of this House to Jim's family, friends and colleagues. Words cannot express the gratitude that we feel for Jim. He will be remembered as a hero.

Members: Hear, hear!