

Mr Peter Rundle; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Emily Hamilton; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mr Zak Kirkup; Mr Donald Punch; Chair; Mr Kyran O'Donnell

Division 27: Fire and Emergency Services, \$68 812 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr F.M. Logan, Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr D. Klemm, Commissioner.

Mr L. Bailey, Deputy Commissioner, Operations.

Mr M. Cronstedt, Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Emergency Management.

Mr J. Tillman, Acting Executive Director, Rural Fire Division.

Mr R. Burnell, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Ms G. Camarda, Director, Business Services; Chief Finance Officer.

Ms M. Onorato-Sartari, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Emergency Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer the minister to page 365 and the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. I want to ask about the perceived improvements that the division structure will bring about. How will the department and, more specifically, the division mitigate the issue of head command posts being removed from on-the-ground emergency response, as we saw in the Esperance fires in 2015?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I take it that the member is talking about the creation of the rural fire division out of the machinery-of-government restructure of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Is he talking about how the divisional structure will impact on incident control units?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is right. How will the communication levels improve so we do not see a breakdown of communication, as we did on that particular occasion?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will hand the Esperance issue over to the commissioner and whoever else from operations to add some comments about that in a second. As I have already explained to the member and to the other National Party members who were at the briefing in the National Party room, the rural fire division is made up of a number of components, some of which already exist in the department—for example, the office of bushfire risk management—and some new parts of that division, being the bushfire centre of excellence and other parts. They basically relate to management and policy on how we keep our rural and regional communities safe, how we can use bushfire risk management planning and the office of bushfire risk management in planning to keep our community safe, and how we address the issue of mitigation money that flows from that division in order to undertake mitigation to keep our community safe. As I explained over and over again to a handful of people who do not seem to want to learn—the member is not one of them and nor are the Nationals—operations do not come under the rural fire division. We already have operations in place. In the majority of cases, operations in level 1 and level 2 rural and regional fires are undertaken in the first instance, as the member knows himself, by bush fire brigades, and that is coordinated by the shires themselves. When it gets to level 3 bushfires and there are major incidents, the responsibility then flows on to the commissioner as the HMA and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services takes charge. That has no relationship to the divisional structure itself because the operations part and division of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is not changing. The relationship between local government and the department remains exactly as it is at the moment but we want it to become closer and we want to have a far more integrated approach between the department and local government. As I have indicated, the rural fire division would have no immediate direct impact on the operations of the application of resources, which is the crux of the member’s question; that is, in Esperance, why was the application of resources not applied in a timely manner and why was there a communication breakdown, as claimed in one of the reports that was undertaken on the Esperance fire? I will hand over to my colleagues to comment on the Esperance fire itself and the application of resources and communications.

Mr D. Klemm: I will talk just briefly about what I think the member is referring to, which is the management of the incident continuing through its levels—level 1, level 2, and level 3 being the worst—with local volunteers being in charge. The minister referred to the rural fire division not necessarily impacting that immediately. The benefit of the centre of excellence, once it is up and running, is about developing that capability within volunteers in a place in which they feel they are valued. That could be volunteers teaching volunteers in a centre of excellence. It does not necessarily need to be in the physical building of the centre of excellence. That decentralised training model can exist anywhere throughout the state. It is very much about the high-level training that develops the

capability in volunteers across the state, whether they are volunteer bush fire brigade volunteers or whoever they happen to be. When an incident is declared level 3, it becomes the responsibility of the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner to appoint an incident controller. That incident controller does not have to be from DFES. Certainly during the Waroona and Yarloop fires, an officer from the Department of Parks and Wildlife at the time was appointed as the incident controller for significant periods, as were some DFES staff. I see a time in the future, through the development of capability in the centre of excellence with volunteers and others, when we will be in a place to be able to appoint a local volunteer to do that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As you know, Mr Tillman will be taking over as head of the —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am happy enough with that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Just dealing with that issue that the member raised, and using Esperance as an example, as the member knows, that fire started in the middle of unallocated crown land. For the first time ever as a government we have made available \$35 million to undertake mitigation, particularly improvements on unallocated crown land. The problem with Esperance, as the member knows, is that within that unallocated crown land the access roads and the firebreaks had not been looked after for 10 years or more. Hopefully with this money that we are talking about, which will come through the rural fire division—to go to the very point of how it is going to help—those breaks and those access roads will be cleared, so something like the Esperance fire will not happen again, or it can be dealt with in a timely manner. Communications at that point do not come into it, even though in the Esperance report, the issue of communications was highlighted. If we look at every report going back years and years, communication has always been a point of contention.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question. Will the government be making any legislative change when it drafts the new emergency services act to quarantine the division's budget to dealing with —

The CHAIR: With respect, member, that is not a further question on that subject; it is a different question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is about the rural fire division.

The CHAIR: You may complete the question. I am sorry I interrupted you but the first three-quarters of the question had nothing to do with the previous question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the government be making any legislative change when it drafts the new emergency services act to quarantine the division's budget to dealing with rural and regional fire issues?

[7.30 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not see why that would need to be part of the emergency services act. We did not have time to do it this time around, but in next year's budget papers we will have a clear line item highlighting the rural fire division with its component parts under it. That goes to the very point that the member is looking for—it does not need to be done via an act; it can be done via the budget papers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the bushfire centre of excellence be located in a regional area?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Is the member trying to get a head start on ABC radio? For the bushfire centre of excellence, a number of options will be put to me as the minister. I have asked the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner and the team at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to go away and look at the options. Remember, if the member looks at the budget papers here now, we have only \$500 000 to undertake the planning for the bushfire centre of excellence in the forthcoming financial year. Hang in there, member—you will get to know where it is when it is finally decided. We have not even got the first dollar out of Treasury yet to start the planning. When that flows from 1 July, that will allow the commissioner and his team—particularly John, because it is John's role—to start work on developing an options paper about how big it should be, what it should contain in terms of its physical size and the structures of the bushfire centre of excellence in how that relates to the regions. I have spoken to the member about that before. Murray Carter, who is the executive officer of the rural fire division, explained to the member the other day that he expects—I am sure John would repeat this—a significant amount of work for the bushfire centre of excellence will be done in the regions as it is. People are jumping at shadows expecting an \$18 million building to rise out of the ground somewhere. That will not be the case. It will not happen like that. It is a set amount of money to build capacity across all of the regions of Western Australia including ultimately a centre for both training and research and development. I am expecting that options paper to be brought back to me once the \$500 000 starts flowing from 1 July. The full amount will not be flowing until next financial year. I am sure the member will be able to ask the same question when we do the budget estimates next year. Mr Tillman, would you like to add your views about the bushfire centre of excellence?

Mr J. Tillman: Yes, sure. Regarding the centre of excellence, the minister talked about the fact we have a very good model now of decentralised training right across the state. That delivers hundreds of courses across the various services, particularly bushfire and prescribed fire. It works very well. The role of the centre of excellence will be to support the development of the training resource packages and to support the regions in delivery. Some

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very specialised training will be delivered at the centre of excellence. We need to scope that out and think about how that will operate. In all reality, we will not be able to achieve the volume of training that needs to be delivered unless we continue to support that decentralised model of training delivery out in the regions. As an example, if we are teaching about prescribed fire, or planned fire, we need to be doing that out in the regions so we are training practitioners in the fuels that are relevant to the area they work in. There is no point taking people from Bremer Bay to teach them how to burn karri fuels in Margaret River when their primary fuels are coastal mallee heath, for example. Obviously we need to think about how that will work, but I think the model we have now of decentralised delivery of training, using volunteers and staff supporting local governments, working with the Parks and Wildlife Service, is very good. We need to build on that in this ultimate goal of building rural fire capability.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I look forward to it.

Ms E. HAMILTON: The Whitfords Volunteer Sea Rescue Group provides vital services in my electorate. I refer the minister to “Spending Changes” on page 364 in volume 2 of budget paper No 2. I refer to the line item “Equalisation of Volunteer Marine Rescue Services”. I ask the minister to explain what additional benefits this will bring to our community.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member for her question. Ocean Reef volunteer marine rescue service is in the member’s electorate. I believe the member for Bunbury also has a very active VMRS in his electorate. There is one in Mandurah for sure. The member for Roe has a very active VMRS in Esperance, one in Bremer Bay and one in —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Katanning.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is along the south coast there; I cannot remember. He has another one in his electorate. It is not Ravensthorpe.

We announced \$19.5 million worth of funding to the VMRS over and above what it receives currently for its whole replacement program. The member for Roe needs to talk to his VMRSs. They are so happy that they are nearly doing cartwheels! As the member for Joondalup knows, they were ignored over the last eight years, particularly the Ocean Reef VMRS. What was Whitfords VMRS is now Ocean Reef. Cockburn and Fremantle were out on their own, separate from the other volunteer marine rescues for a long time. They were very “feisty”—I think that is probably the best word to describe them—in their relationship with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and, before that, with WA police. I think they eventually agreed to come under the banner of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, like all the other VMRS units had done across Western Australia. When they came under the banner of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, they thought their access to equipment would improve. Unfortunately, it did not, and I cannot explain why. I am certainly not going to put my departmental people who are sitting around me on the spot by asking them to explain why. I certainly cannot understand why, under the eight years of the Liberal–National administration, this issue was not addressed. It was relatively straightforward. If the emergency services levy were put up to raise cash flow to give to these VMRS units, then the problem would have been resolved. It literally had been ignored, as the member for Joondalup knows. She lobbied me, as did the member for Bunbury, to increase the level of funding to those units so they could do things such as replace their radios and some transportation equipment for the boats they pull around on their trailers. At one point it even came down to battery replacements, flares and things like that, which is all fairly standard stuff for volunteer marine rescue organisations. To be able to make that change, increase the emergency services levy and then push that cash through to people who do such a great job on behalf of all of us, is a pleasure for me as a minister and something that I found relatively straightforward to address.

If we think about what the volunteer marine rescue services do, I have heard that some people have asked, “Why are we paying VMRS out of emergency services levy funding because I have not got a boat?” “No—but you do go fishing, you do swim, and some people surf, dive, kitesurf and windsurf. Quite often, they get into trouble and they do not even own a boat.” As we have seen with that very, very unfortunate incident recently, it could be as simple as someone falling off The Gap in Albany. It was a terrible incident. A poor young man fell off The Gap just by taking a photograph. He did not own a boat. The VMRS was there. It had to undertake the gruesome task of recovering a dead body out of the ocean, and do it on behalf of all of us. They had to recover the body of a very young person and deal with it. They had to deal with all the trauma that comes with it, for nothing, as volunteers on behalf of the community. I am very, very pleased to be able to provide that funding through the department to the volunteer marine rescue people. They do a great job on behalf of all of us.

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[7.40 pm]

Mr M. HUGHES: The minister is familiar with the electorate of Kalamunda and the hills environment and is very knowledgeable about the bushfire-prone nature of the topography up there. I refer the minister to page 365 of

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budget paper No 2 and the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” with regard to the mitigation of bushfire risk. Would the minister please explain the progress made to date with mitigation and what this will mean for Western Australian communities, including mine?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member. The member for Kalamunda occupies a seat that has seen some significant bushfires and significant property losses. A significant number of houses were lost in the Pickering Brook fires.

Mr M. HUGHES: Stoneville and Parkerville.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Stoneville and Parkerville; the list goes on. People talk about bushfires in rural and regional Western Australia, but forget that the hills in the outer suburbs of Perth have suffered probably as much as, or more than, anybody else, particularly property losses—thank goodness not so much with loss of life, but definitely with loss of property, and probably more than most other regions. My experience of talking to people in Esperance, particularly Mr Sanderson, the Scaddan bushfire brigade and the Shire of Esperance, really brought home to me, along with the Ferguson report, the reasons why we needed to put more money into bushfire mitigation. It was an obvious decision, but not one that has always been welcomed. As the member knows, various parts of the community have not welcomed bushfire mitigation and there also has been pushback from various quarters about whether we should use emergency services levy funding for bushfire mitigation. Residents in the hills are paying level 1 as opposed to some of the regions that pay anywhere up to level 4 and level 5 as their outlay for emergency services. That is why mitigation is critically important.

Through the bushfire risk mitigation planning action fund we have made \$50 million available to shire councils. The City of Kalamunda is working on a bushfire risk management plan at the moment. If the member has not seen that plan and how it works, I urge him to go along to the council to talk about it and see how it actually works. It is a spatial mapping tool that identifies the highest possible bushfire risks in the member’s local shire area—which is probably most of it!—and comes up with a strategy for using mitigation action funding to minimise the risks and undertake mitigation, whether by prescribed burning, mechanical clearing or whatever other form of mitigation they choose. That is underway at the moment and I certainly urge the member to go and have a look at it and possibly even do a story on that area.

As I pointed out to the member for Roe, the other \$34.6 million that we have made available is the first of its kind. Various shires and regional members have been calling for a long time for some coordination of bushfire mitigation across government agencies and on crown land—Esperance is a classic example of unallocated crown land—to be undertaken and for somebody to take the lead on it, because everyone has been buck-passing. As the member for Roe knows, farmers in his area ring the shire about unallocated crown land and are told that it is not its responsibility; it is the responsibility of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage says, “I think that area belongs to the shire or the Department of Fire and Emergency Services or the Department of Parks and Wildlife.” Everyone is pointing their finger at each other; now we have a coordinated body that will take responsibility for that through the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the rural fire division, and money is allocated—record funding of \$50 million—for mitigation. It is a great and historic step forward and hopefully it will help Kalamunda and the areas surrounding it, which have suffered greatly from bushfires over the years. I hope it undertakes mitigation that will keep properties in and around those areas safe.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I refer to page 365, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, and the third dot point under “Machinery of Government” about the Office of Emergency Management being moved into the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. I am keen to understand what that integration now looks like in DFES’s overall responsibility. I have a couple of questions, noting the issues about recovery, but I would like to gain a bit of an understanding—it could be a bit of a dixer—and a bit of an overview of what that integration looks like. I am keen to understand the FTEs and the like dedicated to that role.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will deal with the inclusion of the Office of Emergency Management in the department. The Office of Emergency Management, as the member knows, was set up to take on a couple of responsibilities. One was to do risk management planning for and on behalf of the state and also various levels of government, both state and local. Secondly, it was to assist in the area of recovery, particularly for WANDRRA funding, which is obviously supplemented in a significant way by the NDRRA funding —

The CHAIR: Minister, for the purposes of Hansard, could you expand those, please?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes. NDRRA funding is the national recovery funding available, and WANDRRA is the Western Australian equivalent of disaster recovery funding. It is their responsibility to be the coordinator between the commonwealth, the state and Treasury, on behalf of the department, to allow that funding to flow. Of course, there have been issues with that, and I am sure the member will probably come to those in a second.

The Office of Emergency Management, although separate from the department, has always been funded and supported by the department as an administrative arm. The changes to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services under the machinery of government are significant—more significant than simply the establishment of the rural fire division. We have gone from a fire response agency, whereby people ring 000 and a fire unit will turn out, whether it is a red or a white truck or whoever turns out, depending on where people live in Western Australia, to an agency that has holistic responsibility for all emergency services across Western Australia. That covers everything from a response to a terrorist attack through to bushfires, and everything in between, including fires, floods, earthquakes, building collapses, HAZMAT incidents and road crashes—all the incidents for which we as a community would expect a body to be prepared to come to and carry out rescues, and put recovery plans into place afterwards. That is what we are expecting from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services now, similar to what is happening in the UK. We have moved significantly. I do not think people have really appreciated the changes we have made, because we have been quiet in the way we have gone about them. That means a reduction in the structure of the department from six divisions to four and a reduction in the number of senior management positions as part of the normal government commitment to reducing our overall executive numbers. There is also the voluntary targeted separation scheme, the total number of which is 37 for fire and emergency services. Those are the changes that have taken place. Given the fact that recovery is now a responsibility of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Office of Emergency Management, and Mr Cronstedt, who is here and who headed OEM, is now the executive director of the division of strategy and emergency management. The role Mr Cronstedt plays is no different from what he played in OEM; that is, he continues to undertake disaster management and risk planning, at a state government level; an international level, in which we have responsibilities as well in East Asia; and a local government level.

[7.50 pm]

Mr M. Cronstedt: The work of the Office of Emergency Management being subsumed into the Department of Fire and Emergency Services means that the department, as the minister has said, gets a much broader remit across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, and it takes a whole-of-government risk management approach to minimising the impact on communities. It continues to serve the State Emergency Management Committee, which is the peak body that looks after all emergency management, administers the Emergency Management Act and approves the policies and plans that underpin all the hazards that the minister described. That work will continue and the chair of the State Emergency Management Committee is obviously well respected and has links to the commissioner, such that there is now a service level agreement that underpins the services that DFES will provide to the State Emergency Management Committee through my office and others, and that work will continue apace, as it has. That is also supported, of course, through commonwealth funding through the national partnership agreement, which allows us to fund projects that the SEMC wishes to pursue across risk management, planning and helping local government, and specific grants to local governments and many others to pursue community protection initiatives.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: As part of the answer, some reductions were touched on not only through VTSS, but as a result of incorporation of OEM. Are the reductions outside of VTSS a result of this incorporation?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, the VTSS applies across the whole of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and I correct the record, the number for VTSS is 39 in total, not 37, which includes OEM.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Just to clarify, as a result of OEM being subsumed into DFES, no-one has been lost from OEM unless it has been through VTSS?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, there was a proportion that applied to OEM.

Mr M. Cronstedt: There are a couple of positions that comprise part of the 39, but the services continue.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Just to clarify an operational matter, I know there is probably a new name for it now, but on the same point, does that mean that Westplan is now entirely generated through DFES for all matters as a result?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, Westplan involves a number of agencies, not just the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Out of interest, does that mean that DFES leads in generating that? As the minister quite rightly points out, a lot of hazard management authorities are involved in that. I think OEM was the previous author and holder of custody.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is right; OEM is still the lead author of Westplan, but it involves a number of agencies, as the member knows.

Mr M. Cronstedt: DFES is now essentially the administrative arm that supports and drives the agenda, but the SEMC is a body of its own that can decide the parameters and what it approves and does not. They are the

custodians of plans and they give agencies such as DFES, police and others responsibility for plans. When things need doing, plans need writing or policies need writing, there is a bunch of public servants within DFES who will do that work.

Mr D. Klemm: Can I just add to that, if I can? There is a range of prescribed hazards in the state of Western Australia and, fortunately, DFES is not responsible for all of them. For the ones we are responsible for, the Westplans that the member is talking about occur through the State Emergency Management Committee; however, it is our responsibility to drive the review, the updating and the changes that are required to Westplans on a regular basis. It is our responsibility to do that, just the same as it is and will continue to be for police for those hazards that they are responsible for, albeit that it all leads to the State Emergency Management Committee.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I was getting confused; my apologies. I was trying to understand how, say, a Westplan for a terrorist act would feed into this structure, but WAPOL would still have the responsibility fed up through SEMC.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Correct, yes.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: In estimates yesterday, I think the Premier spoke about the new subcommittee of cabinet devoted to emergency management. I appreciate that it may not be the minister's remit to talk about, but if it is, how does that integrate into the SEMC structure? The minister mentioned the United Kingdom before; is it sort of like an executive government oversight? Is it operational in that respect?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I think the Premier told the member yesterday that the first meeting had not been held yet.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: No, I did not know that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is yet to happen, so given it is basically a subcommittee of cabinet, we will discuss that and the information on how it operates will come out later after the first meeting.

The CHAIR: Minister, can I counsel you that if we could keep the answers a bit shorter, we will get through more questions.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In my electorate of Bunbury, bushfire mitigation is an important issue and recent fires have highlighted the need to work together to protect our communities. I refer the minister to the first dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 365 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the minister explain how the rural fire division will work? How will it better support our communities? Particularly, how much will the rural fire division cost? What are the benefits to the community? Could the minister also outline what volunteer management support officers and volunteer liaison officers are?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member for Bunbury. I know he shares a very strong interest in this. In fact, he was on to me only today about mitigation in an area that I have to take up with the commissioner later on regarding a tricky issue near Bunbury Regional Prison. Not only that, I know that the member for Bunbury has questioned the City of Bunbury about its bushfire risk mitigation planning.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: And had two extensive community meetings.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: And he has had two extensive community meetings on the issue. This is something that is very real to the member for Bunbury and something for which he has been pushing for a long time, as it affects the residents of Bunbury. Everywhere from Dalyellup through to Australind is surrounded by various areas of bush. Just by Australind, by Eaton, recently, this year, there was a significant fire that frightened the residents of Eaton senseless in the belief that the houses were going to go up. It certainly looked like they were going to go off at one stage, looking at the TV footage.

As I indicated to the member for Roe, the rural fire division is now a completely new division of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. It is funded to the tune of \$80 million a year, which is a record in terms of the amount of money that has gone into rural and regional fire management for Western Australia. It is really built around a number of things that the department does now, but there will be further improvements, and significant improvements, when we have the bushfire centre of excellence in operation. As I indicated earlier, the critical thing is the bushfire risk mitigation planning, which is one of the reasons that the member asked the City of Bunbury what it had done in this area. I will not repeat what the member told me about what it has done in the area. It is doing its own planning, but hopefully it has got a little bit further down the track. At the end of the day, the mitigation action fund, which is \$15 million worth of emergency services levy money, effectively, is available to the City of Bunbury once it undertakes that planning and it has been endorsed by the Office of Bushfire Risk Management.

[8.00 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I hope they do it sooner rather than later.

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Mr F.M. LOGAN: Exactly. There has been a fire pretty close to Bunbury and it was very close to Eaton. Had that area been identified as a high-risk bushfire planning area and had the planning been completed and endorsed by the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, they would have been able to access the funding, reduce the fuel load and keep the people in Eaton safer than they are now. It is real for the member, and that is how it is supposed to work. That is how those components of the rural fire division are expected to work. The volunteers who turned out on that day came from all over Bunbury. I think the first responders were the Eaton–Australind Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service, which is not very far from the fire. They were immediately followed by the career fire service from Bunbury, and various other VFRS and bush fire brigades from in and around Bunbury followed.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: All of who did an excellent job, I might add.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: They did, yes. They got a significant fire, which the member knows, eventually under control and saved all those houses in and around Eaton. As part of the restructuring of the department and under the machinery-of-government changes with the introduction of the rural fire division, we will also ensure that there is better communication between the department and the volunteers regardless of where they come from. A ministerial advisory body has been established—we have not had the first meeting yet, but we will—so representatives of all the associations, whether they be BFB, VFRS, SES or whoever, can come along and meet with myself and the commissioner once or twice a year to deal with some of the issues they see as critically important to the overall future of their associations and their bodies. Below that, things called volunteer advisory committees have been in place, but one of them, for example, has never met. They were established in a fairly dysfunctional way. We want to reorganise them, either as voluntary advisory committees or as a different form of consultative group. Again, that will be organised by both the RFD and the two new volunteer liaison officers who will be employed by the commissioner, through his office. At the ground level, there will be an additional regional-based volunteer support officer for each of the regions for the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to provide assistance to the brigades, particularly regarding administration. Their administration levels have been going up over the years as they take on more responsibilities. Those support officers will be there to help them with administration and provide face-to-face contact and feedback to the commissioner.

The CHAIR: That was six minutes, minister. I give the call to the member for Kalgoorlie.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: My question should be quick. I refer to page 364 and the table “Spending Changes”, in particular the “Are You Bushfire Ready?” campaign under “Other”. I see that nothing has been budgeted for the upcoming year and beyond. Was the campaign a failure; and is the department looking at a different style of campaign for the future?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member for the question. That \$100 000 is simply an amount of income that we received from, in this case, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to support that campaign. There was a view about how the “Are You Bushfire Ready?” campaign was funded under the previous government. As the member for Dawesville knows—he was probably involved in it —

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It was a good campaign.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: — the previous government was advised that the “Are You Bushfire Ready?” campaign could not be funded out of Emergency Services. I am pretty sure that is the advice the previous government received. As a result, the previous minister in your administration, member for Dawesville, had to go around with a hat and collect money from various organisations to run its campaign. I think Western Power was the biggest contributor with \$1 million. There was also funding from other sources. That was the situation we initially found ourselves in, with the same advice. Hence, after I went around with a hat, the only money I got was \$100 000! We added more to that; it was not just \$100 000. We managed to top it up and run the campaign that members saw in the last bushfire period. It was slightly different. We did not have the money that the previous government did to be able to run a very slick TV advertising campaign with various cricketers on it. Also, the feedback we got was that it was not coming through well. So we approached it in a completely different way. We used a lot of social media to push the campaign, and as members drive around they will see big signs on the side of the road, whether they are going down south or towards Esperance or Kalgoorlie. That is to try to approach it in a different way, keep the costs as low as we can, and reach out to people in a slightly different way. We did radio ads and social media ads but no TV ads. However, the feedback we have had so far is that it has been just as good as the previous campaign. After taking further legal advice about what we can spend our money on, we found that the advice that the former government received was wrong and the advice we received in government was right—the money can be expended out of the emergency services levy. It is about keeping people safe and giving people advice on what to do should they be faced with a bushfire that is likely to injure them or wipe out their property. That money is part of the overall budget for the department and we will be planning a new strategy very soon.

Mr D. Klemm: We concentrated on “fire chat” as an approach last year and we launched that at the Argyle Irishtown Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade with a gentleman there whose house had survived a fire that went straight

over the top of his house. That was based on the work he had done around his house. We found that the fire chat approach, with a strategy of home owners having a chat with their neighbours and family about making a plan, was very effective. We will be looking to expand on that for the coming bushfire season.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 364 and the table “Spending Changes”, in particular the line item “Comprehensive Crew Cab Protection”. Can the minister give me a bit of detail on what that line item will go towards? The minister may recall the context in which I asked the same question last year regarding my electorate and the member for Collie–Preston’s electorate. We have two very good quality fire appliance companies, and I wonder how that is shaping up. Is there an opportunity under the government’s Local Projects, Local Jobs —

The CHAIR: Member, there are about three questions there. You will have the opportunity to ask further questions so maybe you can restrict it to one and then ask further questions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay; not a problem.

[8.10 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: In dealing with all of those, the crew cab protection, as the member knows, came out of the Black Cat Creek fire inquiry’s recommendations on what we should do to vehicles to keep the crew as safe as we possibly can when there is a burnover. As the member knows, crew cab protection has been completed on 93 per cent of all appliances that are used in rural and regional Western Australia to attack bushfires, which is a fantastic outcome. A further \$8.7 million has been allocated for the next financial year for crew cab protection in the remaining 261 bush fire appliances; the remaining ones are located in the north of Western Australia. They had not been planned to be converted; we will now ensure that they get crew cab protection. As the member knows, crew cab protection involves burnover blankets, radiant heat shields, underbody and external water deluge spray systems, critical component heat lagging and shielding, an in-cab breathing system, and of course the automatic vehicle location system to identify where those vehicles are. Work has been completed on all vehicles and they have been fitted with the AVL tracking system.

The member’s sub-question related to future fire appliances and the role of the two companies that tendered for work from the department in the next range of contracts. Obviously, I cannot speak about those contracts. I am not allowed to. I do not know much about them as such, apart from updates I get from the commissioner. Can the commissioner carefully answer that question?

Mr D. Klemm: I will. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services is currently in the final stages of negotiating with the preferred providers. We expect that to be finalised in the next two to three weeks. A light fleet tender will go out shortly, and I cannot discuss that one. In terms of the interim heavy fleet, some component parts of that will have to be retendered. That will occur after the negotiations have finished with the preferred providers from the first tender.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate the answer.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I think that is about as much as we can say on the tendering process.

Mr M. HUGHES: I refer the minister to the dot point about the computer-aided dispatch system on page 371, under the heading “Asset Investment Program”. Can the minister explain the key components of the replacement program, and when can the Western Australian community expect to benefit from it?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member, who is on top of and very interested in all these things. The government has committed \$18.025 million to replace the current computer-aided dispatch system and \$4.78 million to replace the current mobile data terminals, both of which have reached the end of their lives. The department has been pushing for the upgrade of this technology for a significant period. I believe Mr Burnell is a specialist in this area, so here is his chance to shine.

Mr R. Burnell: I joined the agency a little over two years ago, and it became absolutely evident to me that that was the most critical system the agency has to support its response capability. We were having significant issues maintaining the operability of it, and also the mobile data terminals were old technology that was no longer supported by vendors. We conducted a worldwide search to see whether we could get some replacement parts and equipment, and they were no longer available. We were certainly well and truly exposed from a risk perspective. We saw an opportunity to leverage off some work being undertaken by the Western Australian police service. It was going through an upgrade of its computer-aided dispatch system, and we saw that as a primary opportunity. Rather than having to go off on our own accord and spend money to replace a dispatch system being used by another government department, we were able to collaborate with it. That resulted in a significant overall cost reduction for the state because we have been able to leverage off the expertise and experience of the existing police CAD team. We incorporated some police people into the project; they were out-posted to the DFES project. We

have been working in cohorts with them for 18 months now. We have a planned launch date of 8 August, when the project team is on track to have that system go live.

The process has allowed us to re-evaluate the way we operate within the communications centre. Our existing system, which is now almost 20 years old, forces people to work in a particular way that takes a certain amount of time before we can dispatch an appliance to a 000 emergency response call. The new technology enables us to split the tasking of the work so that we can send off an appliance in response to an issue while the call taker is still taking further details. That means we will be able to offer a better service to the community.

We are also working on the replacement of the mobile data terminals. The old service was almost just a little paging service—very simplified. When we think about a response mechanism when travelling to, say, a property that might be a multistorey building, there are so many questions around the local hazards, the site plan and where chemicals are stored on the site—all sorts of issues. At the moment, fire response teams have to rely on their local knowledge, and if we start calling in response vehicles from outside that area, they may well not have that local knowledge. They also rely on a lot of paper-based material sitting in the vehicles. The new mobile data terminals will be focused on giving all responders as much information as we can get. That will help them prepare as they are travelling to the location, and that means they should be able to operate far more effectively than they are currently able to.

Mr M. HUGHES: So, it is a significant improvement in terms of community safety?

Mr R. Burnell: Absolutely.

Mr M. HUGHES: Efficiency and reliability.

Mr R. Burnell: Yes; absolutely.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As the member for Kalamunda has seen, within 18 months —

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Well done.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: — we have improved the out-of-date communications systems, addressed the issue of a rural fire division and mitigation and that of marine services. That is all within 18 months, member for Dawesville. I just do not know what the former government was doing over those last eight years; I think it must have been asleep.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I have a further question on that item that was so brilliantly raised by the member for Kalamunda. With the current paging system, most on-call volunteers get those pagers. I could be wrong. Is that right? Do critical volunteers get pagers under the existing system or the old system?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Certainly they all operate pagers that —

Mr D. Klemm: A pager that they hook on their belt?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Yes.

Mr D. Klemm: No.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It has all changed now. Mr Burnell will answer.

Mr R. Burnell: During the mobilisation process, the response agency and individuals rely on all sorts of communication mechanisms; pagers are one. For example, if the mobile service network was not operating in a way that allows people to get access over the internet, paging is delivered over a different infrastructure. It forms part of our mobilisation mechanism that we still have to rely on when we cannot get access over, for example, a network service.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I could be wrong, but I think pagers might exist in Mandurah or the southern districts. They still operate on a pager basis for some —

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member is right; I think pagers are still around. Volunteers are still using pagers, as the member pointed out.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: That is right.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: But I think the majority now use mobile phones.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: As part of this change that has happened so well in the past 18 months, are there any concerns from volunteers? I suppose it is no longer an issue as most people maintain their own mobile phones so they have network connectivity, whereas with the old system, pagers were given regardless of whether people maintained

a mobile telephone. Have any issues like that been encountered during the changeover rollover, whereby people have been reluctant to give up their pagers or anything like that because they do not have mobile phones?

[8.20 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Now that the member has mentioned it, one volunteer fire brigade asked me whether pagers were going to be replaced completely. Mr Burnell, some volunteers still use pagers, but they have their mobile phones as well.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: So they operate in parallel.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes. I cannot remember which brigade it was, but its members liked pagers. They work and people carry them on their overalls or wherever.

Ms E. HAMILTON: Many local residents in the Joondalup electorate are volunteers with the emergency services. I refer the minister to frontline services on page 369 of budget paper No 2. Can the minister provide an update on presumptive rights legislation and volunteer insurance consolidation?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will refer the matter of presumptive legislation to the commissioner. It has been rolled out and a number of claims have been lodged. Some have been accepted and some are pending. As the member would know, the hardest working person on presumptive legislation is none other than the Chair of our committee.

The CHAIR: I have a question to ask the minister about that shortly.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: She actually introduced the first presumptive legislation bill into the house only to have it not dealt with. An identical bill was brought in one year later by the then government.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It varied slightly, I think.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is unfortunate that happened because the legislation could have been in place a year earlier had the wisdom and direction of the current Chair of this committee been acknowledged. As Madam Chair would know, a lot of fear and innuendo about presumptive legislation was talked about, which I am very pleased to indicate to this committee did not come to pass. Commissioner, would you enlighten us on how that legislation has been rolled out?

Mr D. Klemm: Since the time presumptive legislation was introduced for career firefighters in 2013, 17 claims have been lodged, of which 14 have been accepted, one has been declined and two are pending. Those claims were from eight retired personnel and nine serving personnel. As members would know, presumptive legislation deals with 12 prescribed cancers. Of the most common types of cancers that made up those 17 claims, 63 per cent were prostate cancer, 25 per cent was cancer in multiple sites and 12 per cent was bladder cancer. Since the presumptive legislation was extended to volunteers in September 2017, three claims have been lodged and accepted. Two were from retired volunteers, one of whom has passed away, and one from an active volunteer. The estimated cost of those claims from volunteers is \$1.29 million, with an average estimated cost per claim of \$430 000. Clearly, there have been some benefits for career and volunteer firefighters when they have needed it most.

The CHAIR: I have a further question on that, if I may. Has the minister received any representations about extending the presumptive legislation to post-traumatic stress disorder; and, if so, where is that heading, if at all?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, I have. Obviously, I have received representations, particularly from the United Firefighters Union of Australia, which has raised with me on a number of occasions the impact that PTSD is having on its members as a result of the work they do and whether presumptive legislation could be extended to cover PTSD as, I think, it does in one jurisdiction elsewhere in the world. I have raised that matter with my colleague the member for Cannington, the Minister for Commerce, who is responsible for this matter, particularly for not only WorkSafe but also RiskCover, and the likely costs to RiskCover that would result from the legislation being amended. That is where it sits at the moment, awaiting a response from the minister.

There are some issues relating to extending the legislation to cover PTSD. Would the commissioner be willing to express his views on that?

Mr D. Klemm: From DFES's point of view, I do not necessarily feel that we are sitting on a vast number of claims for PTSD that have not been recognised or approved. In terms of the need to have presumptive legislation for PTSD, I am not saying one way or another, but there is not a massive number of claims that are saying, "You do not have PTSD so we are not going to recognise it." Also I think it is important to acknowledge a range of other occupations in the emergency services space could have rightful claims on the requirement for presumptive legislation for PTSD. Although I certainly support it, I think nurses, police officers and ambulance officers would have rightful claims to it as well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 373, and the income from state government line item, "Royalties for Regions Fund". What projects are being funded from royalties for regions?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Off the top of my head, I can advise the member for Roe that the mitigation action funding, as we talked about, is still a royalties for regions payment. The regional workers incentive allowance payments are funded from royalties for regions. The volunteer fuel card is still funded from royalties for regions. Up until 2017–18, but not in the forward estimates, \$4.3 million from royalties for regions was contributed to fire crew protection. The south west helicopter is funded out of royalties for regions in the forthcoming budget, 2018–19, by \$4.6 million. I told the member about the vehicles in the north of the state that need fire crew protection. They will be funded out of royalties for regions. The estimated actual is \$4.2 million and it was budgeted at just over \$5 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What work has been done or is being done to identify other projects that could be funded by royalties for regions?

Mr D. Klemm: We should take some tips?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, does the member for Roe have any suggestions about what we could be funding out of royalties for regions? He is getting a fair bit at the moment. Nothing has really sprung to mind. We have actually reduced our take on royalties for regions funding only for the purposes of ensuring that that pool of money gets identified for the regions. Where funding could be sought for from the emergency services levy, it should come out of that. It is a different pool of money. It is being spent, for example, on the mitigation action fund.

[8.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the minister been specifically asked to identify projects or programs in his department that could be funded by RforR?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, not unless the member has any ideas on how we should supplement the budget of the department. I am sure the commissioner would be more than willing to talk to him about that later. We are trying to ensure that the money that is spent on keeping communities safe, regardless of where, but let us say in the regions from the member's perspective, comes from the right pool of income. For example, of the mitigation funding we talked about for the crown estate, most is probably going to be spent in the regions, though not all of it; I am sure the peri-urban fringe will receive its fair share as well. That funding is from the emergency services levy. Why is that? Because it is the government's land. We should take responsibility for it, as we are required to do under bushfire risk mitigation planning. The tenure lies with the Crown, so therefore the Crown should spend its money on it. In the past, under a previous administration, it would have gone straight to royalties for regions. Is that the appropriate source of funding for the Crown? Possibly not. I am sure the former member for Pilbara would have probably said no. We have extracted that money as part of the increase in the emergency services levy. The member can see how we are trying to approach it. We are not relying on royalties for regions for everything simply because it happens to be in the regions. It depends on the issue and the subject and whether it should be paid for out of the emergency services levy, which is more appropriate.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The RAC south west emergency rescue helicopter is providing a vital service for communities in the south west and is a matter of great community interest. I refer to the line item "Continuation of South West Emergency Rescue Helicopter" under the spending changes on page 364. I ask the minister to explain the funding source changes that have taken place.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is a good follow-on from the member for Roe's question. The Liberal Party and the National Party said quite a number of things about the future funding of the south west helicopter and whipped themselves into a state of hysteria over the future of the south west helicopter, as the member knows.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: He was a part of it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member was doing a grand job lobbying for his own airport and for his own service. He did so in a very sensible way as opposed to perhaps someone else who might be in the upper house who got himself into all sorts of trouble talking about the south west helicopter and what would happen to it. In significant competition, the National Party bought into the argument as well to show how relevant it was to the regions in this fight over the funding of the south west helicopter. As I kept on saying, "Don't panic; it's okay." Obviously, I could not say too much prior to the budget but I did try to indicate to people that the south west helicopter service is going to continue and to stop panicking. Consequently, it will. It is a critical piece of infrastructure for the south west. The last time I was down there with the member for Bunbury, they literally had to go as we were talking to them. They had a callout and within a few minutes, they were up in the air on their way to Caves Road, Margaret River, where unfortunately a young man had come off his motorbike and was whisked away to hospital.

In terms of total funding, it goes to the point that the member for Roe was making. We have approved \$27.9 million for the ongoing funding of the helicopter to continue with the service. In the future, it will be funded. It has been funded in the past out of royalties for regions and the road trauma trust fund and for good reason—because

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 23 May 2018]

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Mr Peter Rundle; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Emily Hamilton; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mr Zak Kirkup; Mr Donald Punch; Chair; Mr Kyran O'Donnell

a significant proportion of its work is done for people involved in road crashes—and now the emergency services levy. In the past it was on a 50–50 basis, including in this financial year coming. It will still be funded out of royalties for regions and the road trauma trust fund on a 50–50 basis. In the following financial year, it will be funded out of the emergency services levy and the road trauma trust fund as well. This goes to the point I was making earlier to the member for Roe. Is it appropriate that the helicopter, given that it does emergency services work, be funded out of royalties for regions? When the member's colleagues were in government last time, they believed it was. I am not 100 per cent sure what they were told about how that funding should have been undertaken but having gone back and taken further legal advice on how we can spend the emergency services levy, we were very clear on the point that because of the work it does, the helicopter can be funded out of the emergency services levy, as it should be, because of the nature of its work. Simply because it is in the regions and it works mostly in regional Western Australia, outside Bunbury, but all outside Bunbury, does that necessarily mean it has to be funded out of royalties for regions or should it be funded out of its proper source, which is the emergency services levy and the road trauma trust account? That is what we have done.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the voluntary targeted separation scheme, three lines from the top of page 365. How many of these redundancies in DFES were for positions based in regional Western Australia?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will pass that on to the commissioner.

Mr D. Klemm: It would be difficult for me to give the member an accurate answer. It was done by expression of interest.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a couple of questions. I am happy to take it as supplementary information.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Just put it on notice and we will answer it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The next one is a further question. What process is in place to ensure that the function of each redundant staff member is undertaken?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Again, that is an operational matter. As a person under the voluntary targeted separation scheme picks up their redundancy and leaves, obviously the commissioner takes on their responsibility. That workload continues.

Mr D. Klemm: Before the end of the calendar year, DFES is proposing to do a functional review of the various tasks and duties that we undertake across our whole organisation. Clearly, with the Office of Emergency Management coming in and the establishment of the rural fire division, and the VTSS, we want to make sure that everything that we are doing is something that we need to be doing and will continue doing. Through that process, we will seek to make sure that we have the right people in the right places and the right positions.

[8.40 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the minister provide by way of supplementary information —

The CHAIR: Member, it is supplementary if you have asked the question, so maybe ask the question first and see whether that information is provided.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will ask the question. Will the minister provide the position, the location and the level of each position made redundant?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: We will provide that to the member by way of supplementary information.

The CHAIR: Can the minister repeat what he will be providing?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: We will provide to the member for Roe by way of supplementary information—just regions?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The position, the location and the level of each position made redundant.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will provide the position, the location and the pay level under the voluntary targeted separation scheme.

The CHAIR: The member just said “level” rather than “pay level”. Does he want the classification?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I do not think he means physical building level.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No.

The CHAIR: No—classification; not pay.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Classification, yes.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, that is probably better.

[*Supplementary Information No B20.*]

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 23 May 2018]

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Mr Peter Rundle; Hon Fran Logan; Ms Emily Hamilton; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mr Zak Kirkup; Mr Donald Punch; Chair; Mr Kyran O'Donnell

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for Kalamunda.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Government members have gone way beyond the 80–20.

Mr M. HUGHES: I know that the member for Dawesville is very interested in my contributions to Parliament. I have a broad interest in government policy across the state. I am interested in emergency management delivery across the state. I refer the minister to the heading “Works in Progress” on page 371 and the item “CFRS Vincent Fire Station”. Can the minister provide an update regarding this station and the benefits it will provide to the community?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: That fire station is very close to Kalamunda!

Mr M. HUGHES: It is in this state.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Well done, member for Kalamunda.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is a good question, actually. It goes to the point of emergency services for the city of Perth and ultimately for Western Australia. Perth is the capital city of Western Australia. It has the most critical infrastructure, probably more so for the purpose of prevention of loss of life than any other place in Western Australia, and up until now it has been serviced by only one fire station, which is Perth fire station. The member for Dawesville’s committee has been looking at the area of terrorism and its aftermaths, and it would be well advised to take on board why that new station has been opened. It goes to some of the issues that I believe the member’s committee has raised publicly when it asked questions of both the State Emergency Management Committee and the department itself. The number of people who live in Perth is approaching two million, and the CBD is now serviced by rail, roads, tunnels, the airport and various other pieces of infrastructure. Being serviced by one fire station, should there be a significant event such as a terrorist attack in one form or another, we would be drawing services from as far away as Kalamunda.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Really—will we be drawing services from Kalamunda?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes. We will be drawing services away from Midland; that is for sure. That would service Kalamunda. We would be drawing services away from Armadale, which would be serving Kalamunda and probably, depending on the scale of the event, we would draw in volunteer services from those areas as well, particularly the volunteer fire and rescue service people who have the skills and capacity to respond to those events. The answer is yes, as far away as Kalamunda and probably further. The very fact that we have two fire stations in place now of the scale that they are, which is significantly larger than normal fire stations, I think is a good thing. It is an \$18.95 million investment by the state. It was warmly supported on Twitter by my predecessor, apparently.

The CHAIR: Minister, we are descending from the question asked. I do not think there are any further questions on this division, so I will put the question. Then I will vacate the chair for five minutes. We will return at 8.50 pm.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 8.45 to 8.50 pm