

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Grievance

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [9.56 am]: An increasingly dangerous situation is developing in my electorate of Southern River. Over the past 10 years there has been very significant growth in the population. The suburb of Canning Vale did not really exist as a suburb in the early 1990s, yet it is now a fully developed suburb. Adjoining it is the suburb of Southern River, which did not really exist as a suburb five years ago but now there are thousands of houses. Adjoining that suburb is Harrisdale, a newly developing area, and Huntingdale, which has perhaps doubled in size. The Mayor of Gosnells has informed me that in the next 10 years another 20 000 blocks of land will be developed in the general area down towards Champion Lakes. Despite the massive growth in population, this area does not have an ambulance station. With a growing population and increasing traffic density, my constituents have expressed concern that it will be only a matter of time before an ambulance will not be able to get to an incident in time. Indeed, during peak-hour traffic, emergency vehicles have major difficulties getting to an incident because the area is clogged up with traffic. Some of those issues are being addressed, and in the next 18 months some of the problem should be alleviated by some planned roadworks.

We have been informed that in 2013 the Fiona Stanley Hospital development will include a new ambulance station. However, even under good traffic conditions it is still a 15-minute drive to Southern River. I would hate to think how long it would take in peak-hour traffic. At times it can take half an hour to get to the freeway from Southern River, which is next to the Fiona Stanley Hospital development. Obviously, an ambulance on a priority 1 call would be able to travel significantly faster than I can in peak-hour traffic. Nonetheless, this stresses the importance of something being done before there is a tragedy.

My electorate has a lot of young families, and nine schools, not to mention the ones that are in Harrisdale, which are in the electorate of the member for Darling Range where huge developments are going on. Any ambulance required in my electorate must come from Riverton, Gosnells, Armadale or Jandakot, and that is simply unsatisfactory. To highlight the difficulty, I draw attention to an incident that happened to parents who are constituents of mine. In September of last year their little daughter Zoe was in the bath when she unexpectedly suffered convulsions and almost drowned. Mr Mustafa Cokcetin did cardiopulmonary resuscitation on his little daughter. His wife phoned for an ambulance. According to them, it took 14 minutes for the ambulance to arrive. I am sure that any parent would recognise that 14 minutes would probably seem like an eternity. Although this story has had a happy outcome in that Zoe has made a full recovery and is a bright, bouncy little girl, it could have had a different ending. Parents and residents are deeply concerned at the fact that it took an ambulance so long to get there. It is only a matter of time before we have a tragedy in my electorate—a needless tragedy, I might say—if an ambulance station is not established in this growing area. I draw that to the attention of the house in the hope that some action will take place.

I have spoken to the St John Ambulance service, which makes a wonderful contribution to our community—this is not in any way a criticism of the service. St John Ambulance is very much appreciated, but it can obviously operate only from stations that have been established. I do not want this grievance in any way to be taken as a criticism of the excellent service that St John Ambulance provides.

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [10.04 am]: I thank the member for Southern River for bringing this issue to my attention. I start by apologising to him for not being here at the very start of his grievance. I did not miss much but the preceding grievances must have been very short because I was not expecting his grievance to start so soon.

It is a scary situation for anyone when an emergency occurs at their premises. The desperate waiting time for an ambulance to arrive can be very traumatic. On election day, when I was at a polling booth in Mandurah, a lady collapsed near a road. I had to put my medical hat back on and look after her and assess her. We called for an ambulance. It seemed like forever that it took to arrive. We checked the time later, and it was nowhere near as long as we thought. Even in this case, which happily had a good outcome, the parents have said that the ambulance took 14 minutes to get there. Because people have the impression that it seems to take forever when they are waiting for an ambulance to arrive, St John Ambulance has a system of logging when the call occurs and the ambulance arrival time. The time in this case was 11 minutes, not 14 minutes. Those 11 minutes still seem an enormous time. People might think that in the case of an emergency it is too long. However, it takes time for vehicles, wherever they are stationed, to arrive at the scene of an emergency.

The member said that his electorate of Southern River is serviced by four ambulance stations in Jandakot, Gosnells, Armadale and Riverton. The Riverton and Gosnells stations have recently had additional ambulance crews assigned to them, so there are now 13 crews altogether. Those ambulance crews do not sit in the station where they are based, but they are out, virtually the whole day, working. What inevitably happens when there is an emergency call for an ambulance is that an ambulance is already responding to another situation. When there

is a priority, the nearest ambulance is diverted to where it is required urgently. The key performance indicators state that a priority-one call-out must be responded to in 15 minutes.

People must accept that, in a country as vast as Australia and with the spread of the metropolitan area, it is not financially possible to have an ambulance based in every suburb and every locality. For example, it takes half an hour to drive from one end of my electorate to the other. Of course, country electorates are far bigger than that. The member for Eyre is not present, but it would seem to take forever to drive the length of his electorate. The Mandurah area has one ambulance station in Mandurah and one ambulance station in Pinjarra; in fact, the ambulance that responded to the call we made in Mandurah was from Pinjarra because the ambulances from Mandurah were all on priority-one calls. One was taking an emergency patient to Perth. It is therefore not practicable to have ambulance stations everywhere. The advertisements to encourage people to learn resuscitation and management skills are extremely important. A response time of five minutes would be too long if someone was dying as a result of a heart attack or being almost drowned. Families and parents need to have the skills to save someone if that is required, because no ambulance taking 10 or 15 minutes, or even five minutes, will arrive in time to save that person's life.

Having said that, I understand the member's concern. He has a very large electorate with a rapidly growing population. It is very important for his constituents that he does everything he can to make sure that the government is aware of, first, the growing population and, second, the concerns of his constituents about the time that it takes ambulances to get to those areas. Of course, St John Ambulance has responsibility for those bases, but it operates under a contract arrangement with the Department of Health for total funding. Together they make an assessment of where bases are required. They carry out a five-year forward plan with a five-year contract. The process of the next five-year plan will begin soon. I will make sure that when they are doing that plan, they are aware of the grievance of the member for Southern River and that they are looking very carefully at the issues he has raised to make sure that there are no little pockets that are not being properly serviced in his metropolitan electorate. If an ambulance base is required to meet the needs of this electorate, this is the perfect time to raise that matter to have it considered in the five-year forward estimates review.