

WHITFORDS, FREMANTLE AND COCKBURN SEA RESCUE GROUPS — FUNDING REDUCTION

**385. Mr A.P. O’GORMAN to the Minister for Emergency Services:**

I refer to the minister’s advice to Whitfords Volunteer Sea Rescue Group officer Roger Howell late last month that the minister was halving the allocation to Whitfords, Fremantle and Cockburn sea rescue groups from \$400 000 to \$200 000.

- (1) Is the minister aware that the Liberal Party’s 2000 election commitment was to double the amount of funding, not halve it?
- (2) What is the rationale for this cut?
- (3) Did the minister advise the Premier of his intentions?
- (4) Is the minister aware that the service was responsible for assisting 3 300 people last year alone?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL** replied:

Thank you very much, member for Joondalup —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Ocean Reef, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Member for Joondalup, it does not help by responding. I formally call you to order for the first time today. I have given you the call, Minister for Emergency Services.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I appreciate the question but I am disappointed that the member asked it today. I hoped that the member for Ocean Reef could have asked it of me tomorrow. Perhaps the member for Joondalup could come and sit over here with us for a while!

- (1)–(4) Let us go back and examine the historic context. The previous government provided \$200 000 to these three metropolitan sea rescue groups, which members opposite have suddenly discovered have an important role to play in keeping people safe at sea.

Several members interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I would like to know what has happened to members opposite in the last four years to make them suddenly interested in maritime safety!

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** We doubled the funding from \$1 million to \$2.2 million.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** The funding for who?

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** That’s what happened.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Really?

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** We doubled the money from \$1 million a year in the year 2000 to \$2.2 million —

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Sure, let me put it this way —

**Mrs M.H. Roberts** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Midland!

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Let me put it to you this way before I throw a chip to calm you down! Under the former government, \$200 000 a year was provided. That was stepped up to \$400 000 a year. But it did not stop there—did it, member for Joondalup?—because the member forgot the \$150 000 of additional funding secured by the member for Ocean Reef, supported by the now Premier, to put a new boat in at Whitfords. The member forgot that little bit.

Getting back to the member’s conversation with Mr Howell, who I met a couple of weeks ago, I should point out that I also met with the Fremantle volunteer sea rescue group —

**Mrs L.M. Harvey:** A great organisation!

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** It is a great organisation. I nearly had a heart attack when I turned up and I was met at the door by Mr James McGinty! However, he assured me he had seen the light and that he was now a dedicated marine rescue person. I am sure that the member for Belmont’s invite to join will be in the mail soon.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** I’m a landlubber!

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I —

Several members interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** And you gave the mooring at Rotto!

It was a very good question, member for Joondalup. The funding for the metropolitan rescue groups this year will remain at at least \$400 000. Let me put that on the record very clearly: the funding for the metropolitan sea rescue groups will remain at at least \$400 000 this year. The issue that I was principally discussing with Mr Howell was in follow-up to a meeting I had at Fremantle which, by its account, makes over half of the rescues in WA, although I suspect that if I knew Mr McGinty was coming I would suddenly get the motor going! However, he does a great job and the group does a very, very good job down there. The Fremantle group has made informal approaches to the government to separate from the other two groups. It has made an approach verbally and I have now asked the group to write to me to express its desires. If that is what it wants to do, it is an independent group, at arm’s length from government, and we will look at what we can do. I am doing some work now that I suspect will lead to more than \$400 000 in funding. I think there are some issues in relation to those metropolitan groups around access to capital so that they can replace their motors and their boats. There are also some significant operational pressures on them, because the level of activity they have to service is going up. The costs of delivering that service, whether it is fuel or looking after the boats and the like, are also going up. Therefore, I am aware of the funding challenges that they have. But I can give an absolute assurance that, notwithstanding some confusion in the initial stages of this financial year—let us not forget we are only a month in—funding will not go below \$400 000. There is a probability that that funding will be increased as we look at innovative ways to deliver money to those three groups to assist them to access funding to address capital-related issues, principally the replacement of engines and boats.

The point to note is this: we understand the important role that marine rescue plays right across the state. We are a state of people who interact with our coastline and ocean. We understand the role that marine rescue volunteers play. Metropolitan volunteers, because of the level of activity, play a very important role in that. We will maintain that funding, we will look to improve it and I think members will find that the groups will be very, very happy with the outcomes —

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** That’s a backflip by you because you told Mr Howell something different, didn’t you?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Was the member for Midland in the meeting? Let us not forget, before I sit, that the member for Midland is the one who, because she could not understand the complexity of the issues she was dealing with, personally created a lot of the problems that we are dealing with today.