

EMERGENCY SERVICES — SOUTH WEST COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

1200. Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM to the minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services:

I ask this question on behalf of Hon Adele Farina, who is away on urgent parliamentary business. I refer to the recent police training exercise that was held together with emergency services officers in Bunbury and was plagued by communication problems due to insufficient capacity on the mobile phone network.

- (1) What action has the Barnett government taken to immediately address these communications problems?
- (2) Will the communications in Bunbury and the south west be improved in time for this year's bushfire season, which commences on 1 December?
- (3) How can communities in the south west have any confidence that the state's new State Alert system will be effective in boosting public safety during emergencies such as bushfires if the mobile phone coverage in the south west is so poor or nonexistent?

Hon PETER COLLIER replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The provision of mobile telecommunications is not a state government responsibility and is subject to commercial arrangements; however, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority supported Telstra in gaining council approval on 2 June 2009 to build a mobile phone base station and tower at Balingup in order to provide improved mobile phone communications.
- (2) In addition to the answer above, FESA's statewide radio communications project—the Western Australian emergency radio network project—is being deployed in the south west at present. The project will provide improved operational communications during this year's bushfire season.
- (3) State Alert does not rely solely on mobile phone communications. State Alert uses a number of mediums, including fixed phone line and web technologies, to communicate emergency information. State Alert is only one of a suite of systems that FESA has at its disposal to distribute public warning information during a bushfire. Other mediums include ABC radio, media alerts, a public recorded information line, a community call-taking service, and television broadcasts.