

**Division 23: Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia, \$31 843 000 -**

Dr S.C. Thomas, Chairman.

Mr J.C. Kobelke, Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Ms J.C. Harrison-Ward, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr C.A. Hynes, Chief Operations Officer.

Mr F. Pasquale, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Ms K.J. Roberts, Executive Director.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I welcome the CEO and staff of FESA. I refer to the major initiatives for 2007-08 on page 429. The second dot point from the bottom refers to progressing agreed outcomes of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee's inquiry into emergency services legislation. What are the agreed outcomes and what are the minister's intentions for progressing them?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** FESA has engaged in wide community consultation, as the member will be well aware. The strength of our volunteers and their base in local government are incredibly important. With all the best intentions, people are trying to ensure a thorough consultation process. I have asked FESA to speed it up because the thoroughness of the process has delayed the feedback for longer than I would like. Local governments are telling us they want until August. Given that they are such key players and we want them totally committed, I will move quickly once I get that feedback on the views of local government.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Can the minister say what are the agreed outcomes?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** When the outcomes are agreed, I will make a decision. Then we will proceed.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** The minister mentioned volunteers. What is he doing to try to retain our 30 000 volunteers, given the demands of contemporary living on their time, particularly in rural areas? What is he doing to try to keep them motivated to continue to volunteer?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** The member has touched on a very real issue. These volunteers are invaluable. They make a fantastic contribution and they are genuine community-minded people who give a huge amount of help with a whole range of voluntary service brigades. We have put out a media pack and a CD to try to encourage more people to come in. We have been able to provide the brigades with more up-to-date equipment as a result of the money made available through the emergency services levy. We are doing a whole range of things, and we need to do that because, as the member said, these people are very important. He quite rightly referred to the pressure of modern living and getting people to be generous with their time and commitment. We are up against it in terms of maintaining the number of volunteers we have and encouraging more people to join a whole range of voluntary brigades.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I think one of the key issues is recognising the work they do. Has the minister explored the possibility of some sort of tax benefit or relief to offset their generosity in giving up their time?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Absolutely. That is a very genuine point and one that my predecessor, the member for Midland, Michelle Roberts, took up and led around Australia. Based on that initiative here -

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I gave you the idea, minister. Come on, give me a break!

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I am not sure whether the member was in Parliament when Minister Roberts kicked it off; it may have been before the member came into Parliament. Any form of tax relief is clearly a commonwealth matter. We prepared a tax rebate package in Western Australia, which had the advantage that it would be available to people who were volunteers but who had no taxable income. If it was a rebate of \$300 a year, it would not be such a huge financial commitment on the commonwealth that would simply be laughed at. My predecessor and I sought support from other ministers, and I was very pleased at the last meeting of emergency services ministers when Hon Philip Ruddock, the federal Attorney-General, who has responsibility for this area, gave an undertaking to report back this year on that matter. I have not seen that report yet. The whole issue of payment for volunteers was also raised by Senator Barnett, from Tasmania. He said that there was a task force that the Prime Minister had agreed to, so we asked it to consider our proposal as being the most viable. That was what federal Attorney-General Ruddock was to report back to us about. Clearly, there is an interest at the federal level. We believe our model is a doable one; it is very practical. As the member said in his question, it is simply recognition of the incredible role played and the commitment given by our volunteers. It would in absolutely no way compensate them for what they do, but it would give them formal recognition and a small amount to cover their out-of-pocket expenses.

**Mr T.K. WALDRON:** I refer to the capital works program on page 430. The last item refers to the vehicle replacement program of fire appliances in the metropolitan, regional and rural districts. It refers to heavy

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pumpers, light pumpers, country pumpers and other vehicles. There was an issue with some of our country brigades that thought some vehicles were not appropriate. I understand that has been turned around. Would the minister like to comment on the turnaround in relation to the vehicles being sent out under the ESL and their appropriateness for the terrain?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** This is a very real issue. I do not have expertise with regard to heavy pumpers, light pumpers, light tankers and other appliances. I am very impressed with the quality of appliances now going out and the thought that is going into developing them. They have to serve a whole range of needs in different areas. There are also clear advantages in getting a level of standardisation so that they can be shipped around the state. We can produce them to a standard that we know is going to work. There were misgivings or complaints from some units that would have preferred a slightly different configuration, but I will ask Mr Craig Hynes, the acting chief operations officer, to comment on that.

[8.50 pm]

**Mr C.A. Hynes:** The criticisms of some of the new-age appliances - what we call live drive technology - were well accepted by predominantly most brigades in the state. However, we did get some feedback, particularly from the south coast and some of the broadacre areas, that the areas were interested in returning to a more basic design, even though the performance of the trucks was adequate and served the purpose. We did a number of consultations in the Shires of Esperance, Cranbrook and Dowerin and in the metropolitan area, and we came up with a new design, which has recently been signed off. It is becoming a standard rural appliance. It has simple technology with a Hatz Gaam pump and this has been well received. We tested one of the appliances at the track the other day with a number of groups. The feedback is that it is now hitting the mark.

**Mr T.K. WALDRON:** Will other country volunteer bush fire brigades be made aware of this new vehicle type?

**Mr C.A. Hynes:** Yes. We have a very good consultative and advisory arrangement with our volunteers. All volunteer representatives go through a volunteer vehicle and equipment and appliance advisory committee. Each region is represented and it usually reports to its district operational advisory committee. They are well informed about matters and have a lot of input into the developments. That network is used to spread information.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I draw the minister's attention to "Major Initiatives For 2007-08" on page 429. The fifth dot point refers to developing a suite of standard facility footprints for emergency services buildings. Can the minister explain what that means?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I will ask the executive director to answer that question.

**Ms K.J. Roberts:** This is an initiative to help streamline the process for development and delivery of new facilities. In the past, we had fairly lengthy consultation processes that resulted in a great degree of variation, which made the whole delivery of buildings quite a protracted and rather expensive outcome for both the volunteers and FESA. In consultation with the volunteer associations in the regional offices, we have been working to have a suite of what we are calling facility footprints. Volunteer units will be able to use those designs to determine what selections they choose - almost a menu of designs - for a replacement facility, which will be pre-costed.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Is there some danger of perhaps designing out the flexibility to deal with the demands of such a vast state, considering the requirements of each unit; that is, the spectrum of fire brigade, bush fire brigades, SES units and marine rescue units. Much of the contributions to their buildings are often sourced from local labour or local input. They may be fairly restricted in meeting the requirements of the communities.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** When it comes to all this, whether it is an appliance or a building, we make compromises according to what we can afford. The suggestion here is about compromises for not only cost, but also timeliness. The key issue is that it is done in consultation with the volunteer units. I will ask Ms Roberts how it is going. In many cases, the local units want it delivered quicker. Many are dragged out, particularly given the escalation in costs. Some buildings should have been built by now but they have been delayed and FESA cannot cover the cost, so the unit must go back and replan. It is a compromise issue, but the key ingredient is to ensure that the volunteer units are fully engaged so that they get what they want within the constraints.

**Ms K.J. Roberts:** I can assure the member that we will not have a vanilla type of facility footprint. Each facility will be service specific. For example, the facility footprints for the SES will take into consideration the unit profiles, such as whether it is a regional, district or local unit. It will be the same for the other services, so there will be enough variation to meet the specific needs of each unit according to its function.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I have some understanding of what FESA is trying to achieve. I want to draw the minister's attention to the fact that we have inherent problems with our buildings. I can name a few that I have seen as I have travelled around the state. The Donnybrook SES unit does not have toilets; my own unit, the Murray SES unit, does not have a home; the Dwellingup Fire Station, which is arguably one of the highest

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priority facilities in Western Australia given the propensity for serious fire there, has been overlooked. I am interested in the concept of it, but I am a bit curious about how it may streamline things and achieve its objectives.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** We can have a discussion but we have many other things to cover. The main point has been answered.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I am concerned that we are trying to set up a standard facility and will paint ourselves into a corner.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** That is not the intention. I take on board the member's concerns, but we have indicated what we are trying to achieve in undertaking consultation with the volunteers.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I refer to the capital works program on page 430 of the budget papers, and the third point about the construction of new buildings and the upgrading of existing facilities, similar to what the member for Murray just spoke about. What progress has been made on the Butler Fire Station?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** The member clearly has been an advocate for making sure our career Fire and Rescue Service is available in the northern suburbs. He is well aware that the Butler facility has been temporary. I am pleased to say that, although it was on an 8.00 am to 6.00 pm shift, it has moved this week to being a full-time service. The delay was because the permanent positioning is to be slightly further north. The urban development has not provided the required streets and access, therefore, we cannot move to the final location. Unfortunately, it has been a temporary arrangement, but despite that, it is now operating a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week service out of Butler.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Are they career firefighters?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Swan Hills.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** Can someone go before me?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yawning does not count as a question! If the member would like to ask a question she has the call, otherwise I will pass it on.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** I will take the call. I refer to page 430 and ask a general question on the capital works program. For some years, there has been a plan to build a fire station at Ellenbrook. At what stage is the planning for that facility?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I am advised that the land has been purchased. There is no money in the forward estimates but it is not carried in here. It will be available in 2010-11.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I refer to "Works in Progress" on page 430. A line item refers to \$46 million for FESA House relocation. Where will FESA House be relocated?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** It will be relocated at Cockburn Central, the new area being developed along the freeway.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I take it FESA will move administration and all associated parts of FESA to Cockburn Central on a greenfields site.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** It will be a greenfields site for FESA administration.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Will it include the training facility?

**Ms J.C. Harrison-Ward:** No; the training facility is at Forrestfield.

[9.00 pm]

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Has a feasibility study been conducted into a suitable site to relocate, given that it involves \$46 million?

**Mr F. Pasquale:** FESA House has been through extensive studies in terms of costing, including the cost of refurbishing the existing site. When FESA House was assessed in terms of those costs a question was raised that if a significant amount of money was to be spent, should it be spent on that premises. Another question was whether the building was in the right location. A number of studies were done to decide where FESA should be located in view of security issues, given that the Perth fire station has its administration, "000" communications centre and coordination centre in one location and given the substantial costs involved in refurbishing the existing site. While the refurbishing was taking place, occupants of the whole building, including the fire station, would have to be relocated, and that was also taken into consideration. All the financial assessments

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were provided to the Department of Treasury and Finance, which was very supportive of the financial analysis that supported the decision to move.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Can the minister make that document available to me so that I can examine its contents?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** A range of detailed investigations have taken place. Some of the information might involve matters of costs that are commercially confidential. If the member is more specific in terms of justification, I will provide him with the information.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I suggest that a proposal - report or recommendation - was put forward on which this decision was based. Am I able to access that information?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I cannot give that undertaking because it may be in cabinet documents, documents that have been to cabinet, and cannot be released now under the 30-year rule. It was an enormous decision made by the government. It was made prior to my becoming minister. I asked for further confirmation on the process and was assured that a considerable amount of work was required to be done.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** The reason for having this estimates committee is to allow the opposition, on behalf of the people of Western Australia, to hold the government accountable. How can I go to the community and say honestly that it is the best decision? It may well be the best decision, but how can I, on behalf of the people of Western Australia, gauge that?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** If the member asks a specific question, I will provide a specific answer.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** My question is: can I have access to the report that was the premise on which the decision to move FESA to Cockburn Central was made?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** It is possible that there may be more than one report.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** If that is the case, I ask for the reports.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** Some of them might be cabinet documents.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Can I have the documents that are not cabinet documents - something that I can hang my hat on?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** The estimates committee is about providing advice on the reason that government is allocating expenditure; it is not about uncovering a process or other means to obtain these documents.

[Mrs D.J. Guise took the chair.]

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** There is a line item in the *Budget Estimates* for \$46.57 million, which is by far the largest portion of the budget document, and, quite frankly, it appears to me to have slipped under the radar. I am curious, on behalf of the people of Western Australia, to see that \$46.5 million will be spent on moving to Cockburn Central. I have no gripes about Cockburn Central. Why was not Joondalup, the Butler Fire Station, or Kalamunda not considered?

**The CHAIRMAN:** I do not hear a question. I think the member has vented some spleen - I actually heard that. Does the minister have a response to that? I do not know that it was a question.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I think it was a statement.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I am trying to make it clear to the minister: can I, by way of supplementary information, have access to a report or reports, that are not subject to cabinet confidentiality, detailing the decision to move to Cockburn Central?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I cannot provide the report by way of supplementary information because it is a cabinet report. However, I give an undertaking that I will provide a report to the member outlining the case that was made for the establishment of a new headquarters at Cockburn Central.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Will that be by way of supplementary information?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** It will be a report. I am not sure what the status of it is. It is not information that can be incorporated into *Hansard*. I give an undertaking to the member, one that he can hold me to, that I will provide him with a report.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am sure the member will take the minister up on that offer.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Has the decision to move to Cockburn Central been made public?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I thought it had been made public, but I am told it has not, but it is in the budget papers. There has been so much internal discussion that I thought it was public knowledge.

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**Mr M.J. COWPER:** My next question goes to the heart of the matter. We are talking about open and accountable government. I thought a line item of \$46 million would involve a major announcement. I also thought the Labor Party would have been out in the community banging on the drum to announce this project. When is the minister planning to advise the people of Western Australia about this move.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** We are tonight, and I will bang the drum for the member.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I thank the minister. I refer now to the decision to move the Perth Central Fire Station -

**The CHAIRMAN:** What is the line item? Is it under works in progress? I will help the member out because I am feeling generous and it is getting late. It is page 430.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Indeed, it is. It is an indictment of my eyesight. By way of supplementary information, is it possible to have access to a report or reports that are not subject to cabinet confidentiality on the reason to relocate the Perth fire station to a new site on Wellington Street.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I am not suggesting that I will provide it by way of supplementary information. However, I give the member an undertaking, and he can hold me to it, that I will provide him with a copy of the report.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** The problem is that the topic of my next question does not appear in the *Budget Statements*. My question refers to the State Emergency Service unit in the Shire of Murray and where it will be located. I refer to page 431.

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I am advised that the Shire of Murray has applied via the emergency services levy capital grants for an additional \$500 000 to rebuild the facility. The application was not supported by any detailed plan or drawing. Therefore, FESA is not in a position to commit to it. More work needs to be done to ascertain what action can be taken to look after the needs of the volunteers in that area.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I come back to my first question: what is the government doing to retain volunteers, particularly in regional Western Australia?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I have already answered that question. There is clearly an issue here because this matter needs to be worked through, and having a home for the SES in the Shire of Murray is an important issue.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[9.10 pm]