

FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY - BUSH FIRE BRIGADE PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

196. Mr B.J. GRYLLS to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services:

The minister told us yesterday that he would investigate why the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia has not funded level 2 protective clothing for Western Australia's 250 bush fire brigade volunteers capable of attending structural or building fires.

- (1) Will the minister please provide the number and cost of level 2 full uniforms supplied directly by FESA to volunteer brigades since the introduction of the emergency services levy, and at what cost?
- (2) What would be the cost of providing full level 2 protective outfits to all volunteer brigades in WA?
- (3) Is the minister aware that a country brigade captain called ABC talkback radio today claiming -

Ms J.A. Radisich: After receiving a call from the member for Merredin!

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: It is not a laughing matter if a person has to fight a fire without the proper protective equipment.

- (3) Is the minister aware that a country brigade captain called ABC talkback radio today claiming that he had just three sets of lower level protective clothing for 20 volunteers to attend grassfires?
- (4) What does the minister intend to do to redress this disastrous situation in which many of the state's 25 000 volunteer firefighters are forced to attend potentially life-threatening fires without proper protective clothing?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question. I gave a commitment that I would follow up the question he asked me yesterday. The Fire and Emergency Services Authority advises that, in conjunction with local government, the levy funds equipment for 250 volunteer brigades. The equipment and requirements depend on the role the particular the brigade has. In the case of level 2 equipment, which the member asked about yesterday, safety equipment is made available to fire brigades and units that are trained to combat structural fires. The tunics and boots are given, along with other equipment, only when the unit is properly trained in the skills to carry out the duties of a level 2 firefighter because breathing apparatus is involved and the equipment is heavy. The firefighters need to be specifically trained.

Assessments are carried out by FESA to determine the level of equipment that should be made available to the local service. Also, local brigades can apply for particular equipment and be assessed through the application process. In assessing the application I am advised that factors such as the availability of other units and regular fire services are considered. Currently, Greenough - which the member asked about yesterday - is eligible to receive \$64 500 for an upgrade through the capital grants committee. The committee represents local government and other stakeholders in the region. A review can be lodged through the appeals process with the committee. Approximately \$12 million was provided to local government in 2005-06: \$6 million was provided in operating grants and \$6 million in capital. Although I want all firefighters and emergency personnel to have their equipment to do their jobs, I do not want anyone being placed in danger by not being trained adequately to fight a fire. That is why assessments are carried out to determine what is required. Given the member's concerns raised yesterday, I have now directed FESA to review the assessments and report back to me within two weeks on whether level 2 equipment is required or justified for the areas mentioned by the member yesterday.

I will now give the answers to questions asked today.

- (1) Bush fire brigades respond to bushfires and undertake defensive structural firefighting only. Based on risk and capability, only four bush fire brigades have been equipped and trained to undertake structural firefighting. Hence, they have been provided with the appropriate level 2 equipment. Volunteer fire and rescue services, volunteer emergency services brigades and four bush fire brigades provide an offensive firefighting response in over 100 locations around the state outside the metropolitan area.
- (2) The cost would be \$24 000 for each brigade. However, other costs would be involved in upgrading a brigade, including training. The total cost for each brigade would be in excess of \$89 000. The total for all brigades would be in excess of \$40 million.

Mr B.J. Grylls: I am not asking about the breathing apparatus; I am asking about the tunics.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: It is not just the tunics; it is the breathing apparatus and training. The member should check what level 2 means.

- (3) Yes. However, local governments are responsible for the provision of level 1 personal protective equipment from the operational grant allocations.
- (4) FESA's advice to local government is that the bush fire brigades should provide only defensive structure firefighting for which they are equipped and trained.