

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2001-02

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [10.06 am]: It is my pleasure to present for tabling the first report of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee entitled "Annual Report 2001-2002".

[See paper No 281.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The committee, like other standing committees, was established in May 2001. This report is for the period May 2001 to June 2002. The committee has been engaged and is continuing to be engaged in a major inquiry. It is currently finalising the final report, which I hope to present to this Parliament before the end of the year and, I hope, before the end of October. I will make a number of comments regarding the activities of the committee and highlight some of the important aspects of its work.

During the period May 2001 to June 2002 the committee was involved in initiating an inquiry into emergency services issues. The committee's work is to look at and make recommendations on emergency management in Western Australia, as benchmarked against other Australian States. It refers to five key points, which are -

1. the means by which legislation puts in place effective measures to respond to emergencies and disasters;
2. the effectiveness or otherwise of command structures in emergency services;
3. the effectiveness or otherwise of the information flow in times of emergency;
4. the effectiveness or otherwise of the system of reporting of emergency management; and
5. the effectiveness or otherwise of the existing Western Australian legislation.

One of the important initial findings of the committee is that Western Australia remains the only State that does not have any formal legislation underpinning emergency management arrangements. The State has relied on a series of policy statements and cabinet minutes that basically put in place arrangements for emergency management in this State. Of particular interest in the work of the committee has been benchmarking this State against other States in Australia - given that these arrangements are not legislative in nature - and looking at world practice. The committee undertook a comprehensive review of current legislation in other States. That was done by the committee's research officers and through a series of parliamentary visits.

The committee resolved to visit Port Hedland and Karratha in the Pilbara region to meet with a range of representatives of the emergency services, local government and those agencies that are involved in planning for responding to and recovering from an emergency or major incident, such as a cyclone. Although members of Parliament are criticised from time to time for visiting various places, these sorts of visits, such as those to Port Hedland and Karratha, were crucial. The information that the committee was able to glean would not have been gleaned by any other means. It was important for the committee to visit and experience through a series of meetings and inspections of facilities there exactly what happens during the cyclone season, what demands are placed upon the local community and agencies during a cyclone threat, and the sorts of sacrifices that many people in local communities make to ensure that their communities are safe.

The visit to Port Hedland highlighted to the committee just how crucial the role of volunteers is in communities throughout Western Australia. An example is the State Emergency Service in Port Hedland. It is very ably managed by Mrs Kerry Angel and her husband, who acts as her deputy. They have 30-plus volunteers on call. Their role becomes crucial during cyclones. The work of people like Kerry Angel and many others throughout Western Australia cannot be undervalued. Kerry works 50 hours a week without payment. Her husband, who is employed in the mining industry, also commits 30 hours a week of his time. They work to ensure that arrangements are in place to deal with emergencies so that the communities of Port Hedland and South Hedland are protected as much as possible. The examples of Kerry and her husband in Hedland are mirrored by many others throughout Western Australia. In all our communities, no matter where they are, a huge number of volunteers continually give their time and effort to make sure that their local communities are well prepared and as safe as they can be in emergencies. When the committee met with the local emergency management committee in Port Hedland, which is chaired very ably by the Mayor of Port Hedland, committee members gained a crucial insight into the events leading up to the cyclone season and what happens when it prevails. The volunteers and services in that community endeavour to ensure that all that can possibly be done to prepare for such an event is done. They also ensure that all the other agencies that need to work together as part of the LEMC and the response teams can respond to an emergency and then allow the community to recover.

Importantly, over the past year, the local communities have been telling the committee that they want to be involved in the preparation for, and recovery from, emergency situations. In a recent committee hearing Mr Michael Bates, the President of the Shire of Moora, outlined the importance of local knowledge and the

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experience of local government and members of the community, who have called Moora home for a long time. Their knowledge and experience was crucial in responding to the emergency they faced with the Moora floods a few years ago.

The committee also undertook a parliamentary visit to Canada. I will not speak in depth on that because I did not attend; it was led by the deputy chairman, the member for Pilbara. I am sure that members who undertook that visit will comment on it. One of the important aspects of that visit was the opportunity for the committee to meet a number of local province representatives in Canada. Canada's emergency management procedures are considered to be among the best in the world. Members not only met with emergency management people and examined management arrangements in that country, but also they attended an important disaster management conference there. Given the way in which the events of September 2001 provided information and experience for emergency management authorities throughout the world, it was important that Western Australia was represented at that conference. The information gleaned will assist the committee in preparing its report, which will be presented to Parliament later this year.

The committee also visited Queensland, a State that faces difficulties, particularly in the north, such as cyclones and floods, similar to those that occur in Western Australia. The committee met with a number of emergency service representatives and volunteers in Queensland's emergency services organisation, which is equivalent to that in this State. It was important to see Queensland's arrangements and the important elements of its legislation that we may want to include in legislation in this State. We were also able to visit the Emergency Management Australia complex in Melbourne. It gave the committee an opportunity to become aware of the arrangements used to respond to national disasters. That visit was crucial, given that communities throughout this country are concerned about ensuring that emergency services are prepared as well as possible for any emergency.

The committee has conducted a series of deliberative meetings and heard formal evidence. Some of the witnesses included the Commissioner of Police, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, the senior executive from the Fire and Emergency Services Association and the chief executive officer and policy executives from the Western Australian Local Government Association. As I indicated, a series of local government people appeared before the committee, particularly those from the local emergency management committee in Port Hedland, and the President of the Shire of Moora, Mr Michael Bates.

The committee's work is in progress. As I said initially, the committee hopes to present to Parliament a final report before the end of the year, although it is not certain that it can meet the target date. Nonetheless, we aim to ensure the report is before Parliament at the end of this year.

As I said at the outset, the fact that Western Australia does not have legislation that underpins emergency arrangements has attracted considerable debate and the drafting of such legislation has certainly been strongly recommended by a number of agencies and individuals that we have met. Although I will not pre-empt the findings of the report, at this stage it seems that some form of legislation is required to underpin our emergency services. However, the committee will determine the nature of the recommendation it makes on that issue. Based on early indications, that type of legislation is supported by the majority of the committee. If the committee decides to recommend to the Parliament that legislation is important in emergency services management, it must include a number of key elements. The committee will formalise those key elements in potential drafting instructions and recommendations and findings in the report.

As a new member of Parliament I can clearly see the value of our committee structure. The standing committees have a critical role to play in highlighting issues that need to be addressed by government. This committee and other committees should continue to play a crucial role in Parliament's business. It certainly allows us to get to know better our colleagues from all sides of the House, to understand their motives and to appreciate their points of view. As Chairman of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly, I thank my colleagues, the member for Pilbara, who is the deputy chairman, and the members for Perth, Joondalup, and Nedlands. I also acknowledge the earlier work of the member for Hillarys, who was discharged - that is the term, I believe, or perhaps evacuated - from the committee on 26 March. I thank him for his contribution. I give particular thanks to the committee staff. I have a great deal of respect for the principal research officer, Mr Michael Baker, and for our research officer, Nici Burgess. Both are very able staff members, who have been very precise in their research to prepare the committee for its work, and I congratulate them. I am looking forward to tabling in this place the final report of the committee's inquiry into emergency services and related matters, hopefully before the end of this year. I hope the Government and the Parliament will note seriously the recommendations and findings of that report. They can and should play a very important role in the future management of emergency services in Western Australia.

MR A.P. O'GORMAN (Joondalup) [10.22 am]: I commend the report to the House, and acknowledge the officers who assisted the committee in its tasks. Mr Michael Baker, the principal research officer, has been a

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mine of information for me, and has kept the committee on the straight and narrow path towards an understanding of the workings of the committee structure in this place, and how that structure can be used to bring a good resolution to this inquiry into emergency management. Nici Burgess also keeps us moving along smoothly, making sure that we are all well aware of the agenda, the minutes, and all the relevant items that may arise in the committee. I commend both those people to the House for their excellent work. I also mention Helen Lunsmann, the receptionist, and Glen Whitting, the parliamentary assistant. All those people perform great tasks, and often they are behind the scenes and are not recognised properly.

As the chairman of the committee has already mentioned, the committee is presently undertaking an inquiry into emergency management in Western Australia. I commend the deputy chair of the committee, the member for Pilbara, for bringing this matter to its notice. He has particular reasons for doing that, since his electorate is very prone to cyclones, and he would like some legislation in place to cover how they are dealt with.

Mr R.F. Johnson: What about past members?

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: I am coming to you. The member for Hillarys has prompted me to comment on his time on the committee. My purpose for joining this committee was twofold: to advance the work of this Parliament and to learn how this Parliament works. When I first walked into the committee, I noticed that it was all grey suits sitting around the table. I was a bit disappointed at that, because any committee needs a reasonable gender balance, and I was quite happy -

Mr R.F. Johnson: - to see me go!

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: - to see the member for Hillarys go!

Mr R.F. Johnson: The truth comes out! He wanted a female instead of me!

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: Notwithstanding that I thought the member for Hillarys could do a perfectly good job -

Mr R.F. Johnson: I am very disappointed with you!

Mr A.P. O'GORMAN: I knew the member for Hillarys would be!

The member for Nedlands has come onto the committee and given it that female perspective, and I thank her for that. It is a good way to go.

As the member for Mandurah said, the committee received a number of briefings from the departments that we have the responsibility for looking at, and I thank all the people who provided those briefings. I found them very informative. Those people obviously know their job very well. The committee also undertook a number of hearings, and all the witnesses who presented evidence at those hearings did so in a very professional manner, which helped the committee reach the conclusions in its report.

One of the major activities of the committee was the trip to Canada. The entire committee did not undertake this travel. The committee has five members and two staff members. The delegation to Canada consisted of three members and one staff member. This put a bit of pressure on that staff member, particularly when he was not feeling well at times. He still had to show up and take all the notes, making sure that the three members were aware of what was going. Once again, that was Michael Baker, the principal research officer, and I thank him for that. The journey to Canada was undertaken by the members for Pilbara and Nedlands and me. One of the main reasons for going was to attend the twelfth World Conference on Disaster Management. It was the first time the conference had been held in Toronto; prior to that, it had been held in Hamilton, Ontario. Canada is at the forefront of emergency management, because it has been hosting this conference for the past 12 years. Eight hundred delegates attended from 20 countries, so the committee obtained the benefit of a wide spectrum of experience from all around the world, which sped up the process of gathering knowledge. Following the conference, the committee travelled across three provinces. In Ontario, we spoke with emergency managers from three levels of government - federal, provincial and local. All levels showed a very professional way of dealing with disasters. The committee then travelled to Winnipeg in Manitoba, again speaking to the three levels of government. They did things slightly differently, which gave us another perspective. Finally, the committee wound up in Vancouver, British Columbia, which also had a slightly different way of doing things. All the people in Canada who looked after us showed exceptional skill in emergency management. At the conference, there was much talk about the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. The committee had the privilege of hearing a talk from one of the people at the forefront of handling the emergency of the twin towers. With 800 people in the room with a carpeted floor, we could still have heard a pin drop, because people were in awe of the way that situation was handled. The gentleman received a standing ovation.

The committee also travelled to Port Hedland and Karratha. The member for Pilbara, since we were in his electorate, was very proud to take us around and show us the area, and to explain some of the problems that may arise in the event of a cyclone. That trip made the problem very clear, and brought very close to home the difficulties that can be faced in the event of a cyclone, a flood, or any disaster. This also brought home to me in

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my electorate the disasters and emergencies that can happen there. The city of Joondalup is a fairly densely populated area of the State, with about 150 000 inhabitants. Thinking about it in an offhand way, it seems that not a lot can happen, but when the matter is delved into, it becomes serious. Aeroplanes flying overhead could crash. There is also risk of flood, which actually happened in July of 2000, as a result of a heavy downpour. The State Emergency Service turned out to assist people in that emergency. Many disasters could happen in our neighbourhoods, but we do not usually think about them.

In Karratha, we spoke with representatives of the local emergency management committee, the State Emergency Service and the volunteer fire service. All these people contribute way beyond the call of duty to make sure that their community is looked after in an emergency. We should congratulate those volunteers. Members should note that Western Australia has an ethos of volunteering that is unrivalled in the world. I am not worried about saying that, because our ethos of volunteering is unrivalled. People put in 20, 30, 50 or whatever hours every week to make sure that their communities are looked after. When we have spoken to people in other countries, the ethos of volunteers is that people put up their hands and then get paid for the amount of time they attend emergencies. Our volunteers are to be commended.

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to go with the committee to Queensland. I feel disadvantaged by not having done that, because I have listened to some of the stories and information that other committee members gathered while in Queensland. I have realised that it is important to travel with committees so that members can make sure that they are up to speed with what is happening in not only Western Australia but also other countries and the eastern States. One can learn so much on even a short trip.

I commend the report to the House. I thank my fellow committee members - the member for Pilbara, the member for Mandurah, who has done a great job as chairman, and the members for Perth and Nedlands. I also thank the member for Hillarys for his efforts at the start of this committee.

MR J.N. HYDE (Perth) [10.31 am]: Parliamentary committees have an important role to play in the oversight of the Government and its agencies. Part of my impetus for becoming involved with this committee arose from the aftermath of September 11. It is important that, as a Parliament in Western Australia, we move on from September 11, and that instead of glorifying a defeat and creating heroes, we learn from the mistakes. It is inescapable that more than 340 fire officers were killed on September 11 as they tried to do their job. A small number of police were killed and injured. There is a tremendous lesson to be learned. What our committee and others involved in that day have discovered is that different emergency services undertook different operations. There was no cooperation or understanding between the emergency services, and there was a great degree of difference in the level of leadership of those emergency services. It is important that we concentrate on how nearly 350 fire officers were lost as they supposedly went about doing their job. We have to ensure that our frontline emergency workers are not put in that sort of precarious situation in any emergencies that occur in Western Australia. It is the important job of an oversight committee to look at what is in place in Western Australia today and to consider what should be in place and how the Government can expedite the operations of its emergency services so that emergencies can be ameliorated at the absolute minimum danger to emergency service workers. I will talk about this issue in greater length when the committee hands down its report.

I thank the communities of Port Hedland, Karratha, Moora and the little Aboriginal community of Yandeyarra, which the committee visited. Until one gets involved in a committee such as this, it is difficult to appreciate the depth to which communities, particularly in the north west, live with emergency management every day of their lives, and the effect that a cyclone, flood or tidal surge can have on a community within our State. If this committee can put in place some procedures or tighten up in any way what is happening in this State to improve the quality and enjoyment of life in those communities, it will have done its job. That is a benchmark that the committee should consider.

I also thank my local LEMC in the Town of Vincent, which for many years has been at the fore of local emergency management in the metropolitan area. Some issues have come out of that. The Town of Vincent has two evacuation centres, but very few people know about them. In this State there is an attitude that emergency management is being looked after; the plans are somewhere and we know what we are going to do in an emergency. However, we have not engaged the community. That issue of engagement is something that this committee will have to consider in its final report.

We already have a model for this in this State through Safer WA. I am fortunate to have chaired the Safer WA community security fund. Government was involved in ensuring that local councils undertook local security audits. I believe that Safer WA provides a model and a relationship between State and local government that could perhaps be mirrored in emergency management. That is also something that the committee should consider.

I thank our helpers - Michael Baker and Nici Burgess - my fellow members of the committee and, above all, our chairman, David Templeman.

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MS S.E. WALKER (Nedlands) [10.36 am]: I share the sentiments of the chairman and the member for Joondalup in commending the work of the committee's principal research officer, Michael Baker, and research officer Nicole Burgess. They both have great personalities. Principal research officer Michael Baker has a good sense of humour, which came to the fore quite a few times when we were in Canada together. Nici Burgess has a wonderful, sunny disposition. Without being condescending in any way, I thank them both very much for the support they have given me and the information they have collected.

I became a member of the committee in late March. The report being tabled today relates only to the committee's work between 30 May 2001 and 30 June 2002. Therefore, although I have been a member of the committee for six months, I was not involved in some of the issues that were dealt with between May 2001 and March 2002. The member for Joondalup said that he felt slightly disadvantaged by not having gone to Queensland. I did not participate in the trips to Port Hedland or Queensland. However, it is fair to say that both the member for Joondalup and I can still contribute to the committee. I have been a bit disadvantaged by not having become a member of the committee until a late stage.

The first point I make concerns the disaster arrangements in place in this State, and the lack of legislation. I refer to the Nedlands electorate. It has been said that nothing much happens in the way of disasters in the Nedlands electorate. However, the trip to Canada and my work on the committee has caused me and other members to think about whether there is the potential for disasters to occur in our own electorates. It is amazing how easily we forget incidents that have occurred. When we have spoken about them as a group, we have remembered incidents and disasters that have occurred in this State and elsewhere and which have tended to be forgotten.

I wish to raise four incidents that have occurred within the electorate of Nedlands. While we were in Canada it was obvious to all members that the concerns for the safety of the community from terrorist activities were still very real and relevant for the people there, because Canada shares borders with the United States. Of course, Parliament House is in the Nedlands electorate, and there have been two bomb scares in the electorate since September 11; the first was the day after. What I have learned about disaster management is the ripple effect that occurs. If there really were a bomb in Parliament House, how would we cope? I am sure plans are in place for moving the Parliament, but I do not know about them. The West Perth business community would come to a standstill if the disaster was big enough. Do those businesses have plans in place for themselves and the community; and how would they get back on track? Kings Park is also in the Nedlands electorate. Members may remember a few years ago a fire was lit in Kings Park and it turned into a natural disaster. We can still see the effects of that today as we drive past Kings Park. At the beginning of this year a fire was allegedly lit in bushland off Underwood Avenue and it got out of control. Houses are located across the road and the fire could easily have jumped the road, had it not been for the quick action by our emergency services personnel. The Underwood Avenue bushland is in the electorate of the member for Cottesloe but it borders on my electorate, so the fire could have potential impact on the Nedlands electorate.

During the course of the committee's work last year members heard a lot about volunteers. I recall attending the volunteer awards at Kings Park with other parliamentary members. When we came back and listened to the news program, we heard a lead story about an electrician who had been badly injured at the Hollywood Retirement Village, which is also in my electorate. The potential for disaster was stymied only because of the 72 volunteers from the Salvation Army who turned up within half an hour of the incident occurring. Seven hundred elderly people are in residence at the Hollywood Retirement Village, and it also has a dementia ward. When I turned up a generator was operating, and people with smiles on their faces, and carrying torches, were helping the elderly and the infirm. These events have caused me to think about the potential for disaster in not only my electorate but also the State. I feel very confident that even though we do not have the appropriate legislation in this State - I am sure we will be getting some, without pre-empting the committee's report - the emergency services do work well.

At this stage I do not wish to say a great deal about my visit to Canada, but I will after presentation of the report. While I was there I had the benefit of visiting several areas, particularly the world conference. As Australians in the audience at the world conference, we were recognised and acknowledged as having travelled a long way. We heard from Richard Shierer, the right-hand man to Mayor Giuliani in New York, who gave a very moving speech, and I would eventually like to tell the Assembly about some of the highlights of that speech. I also heard a speech by a veterinarian who tried to recover people following the Twin Towers disaster, and then looked after the animals. I also heard what he had to say about the community programs that had been set up. I do not want to go into detail about those matters at this stage.

I thank my committee members, particularly David Templeman, who seems to have the right demeanour as committee chairman - as do the committee staff - to put up with the idiosyncrasies of members.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.D. McRae): Order, member for Nedlands! The chairperson of the committee is the member for Mandurah.

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Ms S.E. WALKER: Who did I say, Mr Acting Speaker?

The ACTING SPEAKER: You mentioned him by his personal name.

Ms S.E. WALKER: I beg your pardon, Mr Acting Speaker. He is a very good chairman. I thank you for pointing that out.

I also thank the members for Joondalup and Pilbara, with whom I travelled. Members of the committee are all very busy people and there are always times when they cannot get to committee meetings. However, it is important that members not compromise the work of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee by attending other committees when they are supposed to be attending this committee. If that occurs it may have a detrimental effect on the work of the committee. Members should make a choice about which committee they will participate in, even though they can often not participate fully. I commend the work of the committee, and I thank the committee chairman and commend him for his comments when presenting the report today.

MR L. GRAHAM (Pilbara) [10.45 am]: I do not need to repeat the comments of previous speakers. I express my appreciation to the committee staff. Committee work in Parliament is not something that members do as an add-on to their roles as members of Parliament; it is one of the fundamental reasons for being in this place. Committee work is not a secondary duty, although it may look that way when members first come into Parliament. I was lucky when I entered Parliament because I was quickly put on committees under the tutorage of some very experienced and competent members. I had the benefit of working with people such as Ian Thompson when he was a committee chair, and also Monty House and Hendy Cowan who were then in Opposition. I learned from them the extraordinary benefits members can gain from committee work. Members of Parliament should not treat parliamentary committees as they sometimes do - as somewhere to go to make up the numbers on behalf of their political party. Committees are one of the few places in this Parliament in which members can take off their political hats and make a serious difference about how this State operates.

I was extraordinarily pleased to hear the comments by my colleagues who travelled through the north west recently, because I am constantly berating members of Parliament and ministers about their complete lack of understanding of the effect of their decisions in different places in this State. Although a decision made in St Georges Terrace might be a competent decision, the further one moves from St Georges Terrace the less relevance it has to reality and the more effect it has on people's lives. I was extremely pleased that the committee members travelled and met with people from my electorate. I endorse the comments by my colleagues about the contribution made by people in emergency services areas in the north west. It is no accident that an inquiry is being conducted into emergency services, and I am a member of a committee that finds itself in the north west. Emergency services are largely irrelevant to people until something goes wrong, and they are most relevant to people who use those services regularly or are regularly threatened by emergencies. Most of the emergencies that this State confronts are not in the city. When they do occur in the city - such as the Bellevue fire - they attract enormous attention. Most country people live with those sorts of emergency events as a regular part of their lives, and they need support and assistance to manage them.

Some committee members - I was one of them - travelled to Canada. I am sure there are many reasons that the budget for travel by the committee was curtailed. I am not sure that any of them make sense. I believe that those members of the committee who did not travel to Canada suffer a great disadvantage. An enormous amount of information was put in front of the members of this committee in Canada by an extraordinary number of people of goodwill. When I say goodwill, I mean that with a capital "G". It was quite humbling to see the extent of the effort that those people made to cut out of their very busy schedules days at a time to escort us around. An enormous amount of effort was made to ensure that our slightest request for information was followed up. That was done to such an extent that while sitting in my office this morning, listening to the chairman's speech on the television, a return e-mail popped up on my computer from one of the people from the Justice Institute of British Columbia. The question I had asked was particularly difficult, but this person said that she would try to find the information. It has been some months since we left Canada, yet she bothered to get off her bottom to find that information and make sure I got it within my time line, not hers. She knew the committee's time line for writing the report.

The members of the committee who did not travel are at a severe disadvantage in understanding where the world is at in emergency management. I am not new or naive. I understand the criticism of politicians travelling overseas, and I cop it from time to time. I am sure some of it is justified. However, when a committee of the Parliament travels on a learning exercise on a fundamental issue, it should not be a point of criticism; in fact, it should be a point of congratulations that people are prepared to do it. I do not mean that in a self-effacing, "Gee, aren't we noble travelling overseas" way. It takes a lot of time, effort and energy to travel and to learn things to help us get things right so that this State's procedures and legislation match the world's best, if we can ever do that and I do not know that we can.

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We attended the World Conference on Disaster Management in Toronto. Other speakers have spoken about that conference, so I will not go through it. Our report will spell out in detail what we did and saw there. Western Australia is significantly behind the rest of the world in these matters. It is significantly behind the rest of Australia, and Australia is behind the rest of the world. If anyone doubts that, they simply need to take note of what the Americans are saying about our preparedness for matters of emergency. They are warning us that we are not ready. I am not one of the lunatics who can be found in the emergency field, and neither is the committee. Other commentators have said that Australia is off the pace. I spoke to the head of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA, Mr Bob Mitchell, some time ago and put him in touch with some people. It seems to me that if Western Australia is to be serious about emergency management, it should get in touch with the Canadians and the world organisation for emergency management. We should consider holding a conference in the next 10 or 12 years, and ensure that the best people in the world - there are between 800 and 1 000 of them - are invited to Perth so that they can have a look at Western Australia, go through our system and comment on it.