

VOLUNTARY EMERGENCY SERVICES

Statement

HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural) [9.45 pm]: I rise tonight to draw the house's attention to the endeavours of some of the voluntary emergency services organisations in the Agricultural Region. I received a letter today—I think other members of Parliament have also received it—drawing attention to the fact that it is National SES Week. I thought it was timely given that I had had some experience with some of the voluntary groups in my electorate in recent times. All members will appreciate the importance of volunteers in their communities. The benefits of volunteering are well documented and fall into the realms of meeting new people, learning new skills, bringing a sense of belonging and being able to support the community. The role of an emergency services volunteer is particularly important. In regional Western Australia for the most part, we are heavily reliant on volunteers for all our emergency services, including the Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia, the State Emergency Service, St John Ambulance and the Volunteer Marine Rescue Services. The services that these organisations provide in the community exist because people are willing to donate their time to train people, to be trained, to fundraise and to organise and support those who are involved.

Some time back, I visited the town of Kalbarri. Mr Mac Holt from the Kalbarri SES took the time to introduce me to the emergency services volunteers in the town. Kalbarri has a strong history in volunteering, and that is probably understandable given the hazards that are in close proximity to the community. Kalbarri has the ocean on its doorstep, and when I looked at how people get out into the ocean through the inlet, it was enough to make me feel queasy just thinking about it, let alone standing and watching it all day. Kalbarri also has cliffs and gorges, which are a fantastic asset to the state, and long stretches of road, which the volunteers need to cover if there are vehicle accidents. There are also many other hazards, including Mother Nature's floods, fires and storms. One of the Kalbarri SES unit's specialties is rope and cliff rescue, which is understandable as it is in close proximity to the cliffs and gorges. Quite significant training and practice is required to maintain the high level of skill that the volunteers need to perform the rescues.

The Kalbarri SES has recently been recognised as a finalist in the state team of the year awards run by the SES. The nominees have been judged on their dedication to duty, involvement in the development or implementation of programs, contribution to the service, and excellence in preparedness, response and safety at an incident. The SES state awards are coming up this Saturday and I would like to wish all the finalists the best of luck. Kalbarri has been recognised for providing teams for 18 operations in a 14-week period between last December and March. This included situations involving floods, storm damage, land searches, and search and rescue, and they stretched from Broome to Kalbarri. The Kalbarri team is part of the response teams that come right down into the bottom part of my electorate and go right up into the Mining and Pastoral Region. The team has a specialty in rope and cliff rescue, but it is very well trained. Mac Holt certainly took the time to explain to me just how the team performs all that training. The team is outstanding and I was privileged to meet a number of the volunteers while in Kalbarri. They even convinced me to try out their new rope rescue training tower, which was funded partly by royalties for regions. It meant that I had to get kitted up in the orange outfit with the helmet and the abseiling gear. For someone who is absolutely petrified of heights, I went over the edge with a 17-year-old named Brandon Bickford and abseiled down the tower, much to the mirth of my staff and everybody else at the bottom of the tower!

Mac explained to me that for many years they had been travelling out to the gorges to do their training, and that that took quite a considerable amount of time because they had to go out and set up. It is in the terrain that they are actually doing rescues in, but it did require time. This new training tower allows them to make better use of their valuable training time, and it also provides a resource for other SES units.

Royalties for regions has also funded a new volunteer marine rescue boat and boat-lifter for the community, and contributed towards the building of a new St John Ambulance sub-centre. It was clear to me that the Kalbarri community has a strong commitment to volunteering, and it was wonderful to see that they are among the finalists in the upcoming SES awards.

More recently, over the last week—last Friday—I visited the year 7s at Kellerberrin District High School. During my visit, I was made aware of the fact that many of those year 7s were about to compete in the Junior Fire Brigade Championships this weekend in Kellerberrin. Kellerberrin has a strong volunteer fire brigade team. Back in 2008, some of the senior members of the brigade decided to engage with some of the younger people in town, and they have had a junior brigade since that time. There are 46 students in Kellerberrin, from the ages of 11 to 16 years, in that junior brigade, and it is the largest junior fire brigade in the state, if not in Australia. It is absolutely outstanding for a town that size to have so many volunteers at that age involved in such a fantastic endeavour. While I was at the school, some of the students said that before they joined the brigade, they had never participated in organised activity or even played sport. They were very forthcoming about how much they enjoyed the benefits that they got from working not only with the seniors but with the other kids in the brigade. It

is a real testament to the senior brigade members that they not only saw an opportunity to engage with the young people in their town and give them a really good outlet for some of their youthful activities, but also put in additional hours to coordinate and train the juniors. I put on record my congratulations to Mr Greg Hunt, the president of the Kellerberrin Junior Fire Brigade, and Mr Dave Fox, the vice-president, and all the members of the committee, who take the time to coordinate and work with the young people involved. I will be in Kellerberrin on Sunday and I will be cheering along the crew from Kellerberrin, as well as teams from Bassendean, Guildford, Merredin, Northam and Armadale; and sometimes they also have teams from interstate. That will be a fantastic day. I am sure they would like to see a few of our other representatives there as well.

The events that they compete in replicate what firefighters have to do in the nineteenth century. They involve both “dry” and “wet” events. The dry events require the runners to connect the hoses, the hydrants, the branches and other equipment without the use of water. The wet events are the same as the dry events, but they use water to strike targets. The advent of new technology has added new disciplines to their training. The training gets them together and gives them a sense of camaraderie, and gets them ready to do what they will need to do when they become part of the senior brigade.

For me it is very heartening to know that despite the criticism that some of our youth get from time to time and that they attract, there is an organisation that is engaged in providing a fantastic opportunity for our youth to learn new skills and to be part of a team and to learn the value of volunteering at a young age. My experience of young people throughout my electorate is that given the opportunity, they will take every chance to give back.

I would like to record my congratulations to those involved, and also my appreciation for the hard work and dedication of all those involved in the SES, given that this is National SES Week, and I will certainly be wearing the orange ribbon that we have been provided with to support the nearly 2 000 SES volunteers in Western Australia.