

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**AGENCY REVIEW HEARING —  
DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2016**

**SESSION ONE**

**Members**

**Ms M.M. Quirk (Chair)  
Dr A.D. Buti (Deputy Chair)  
Mr C.D. Hatton  
Ms L. Mettam  
Mr M.P. Murray**

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**Hearing commenced at 9.50 am**

**Mr WAYNE GREGSON**

**Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, examined:**

**Mr LLOYD BAILEY**

**Deputy Commissioner, Operations, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, examined:**

**Mr STEPHEN FEWSTER**

**Deputy Commissioner, Capability Command, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, examined:**

**Mr MURRAY CARTER**

**Director, Office of Bushfire Risk Management, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and your appearance before us today. One of the functions of the committee is to review the departments within its portfolio responsibilities and from time to time the committee will conduct agency review hearings. The purpose of today's hearing is to discuss preparations for the 2016–17 bushfire season. At this stage I would like to introduce myself. I am the chair, Margaret Quirk, member for Girrawheen. On my right is Dr Tony Buti, member for Armadale; on my left is Ms Libby Mettam, member for Vasse; and on her left is Chris Hatton, member for Balcatta. We are expecting Mr Mick Murray, member for Collie–Preston. The committee is one of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking you to give evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any document during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record.

Before we proceed I need to ask you the following questions. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

**The Witnesses:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Before we proceed with questions, do you wish to make an opening statement to the hearing?

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**Mr Gregson:** Yes, Madam Chair, I would. Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to address the committee again this year. It has been a number of years since this department has appeared before the committee. Since taking the role originally as the CEO of FESA in September 2011, I have overseen an organisation on a journey of significant organisational change. With the establishment of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services on 1 November 2012 and my appointment as the FES commissioner, we have all been working hard to build capacity, capability and cooperation with the agency across Fire and Emergency Services and with members of the public. This includes a raft of new measures to enhance capacity to respond to bushfires and to build more resilient communities as well as initiatives to better support volunteers who are essential to the delivery of emergency services in Western Australia. A survey conducted in 2015 showed that 67 per cent of community members thought DFES performance had improved since 2011. Some 2016 survey findings reiterated that 85 per cent of community members believe that DFES is extremely important in the delivery of emergency services. These results highlight the high standing DFES has in the community as a leading emergency services organisation. I acknowledge that there will always be work to do, and that can be done, but the commitment is that we will continue to focus on building a safer and more resilient Western Australia.

I would like to spend some time in looking at some of the major achievements since 2012. Significant enhancements were made during 2012 to increase the capacity to respond to bushfires and build resilient communities, which included the establishment of a joint DFES and Parks and Wildlife state air desk to streamline the deployment of the aerial firefighting fleet; the establishment of a community liaison office as part of a revised AIIMS structure to liaise with affected communities during and post major incidents; a number of additional fire districts being created, particularly in the south west capes region, to better protect high-risk communities; and the establishment of the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, which operates independently from DFES to assess the state's bushfire risks and prescribed burnings. DFES developed community bushfire risk management plans in partnership with local government to provide an agreed approach to bushfire risk mitigation and to work with stakeholders in the Kimberley, goldfields, Nullarbor area and Indigenous communities to reduce significant fuel loads and protect key infrastructure on highways, station pasture and the environment through aerial and ground prescribed burning.

The year 2013 saw the establishment of the "Are You Bushfire Ready?" campaign, which was launched that year, reinforcing that preparing for bushfires is a joint effort between the government, communities and individuals and that everyone needs to play their part. That is now in its fourth year and it widely recognises the campaign calls for action to prepare for bushfire season. Again in 2013 we introduced the primary school bushfires program, which was aligned to the national science curriculum, to help children learn about bushfires and the danger of fire. We enacted legislation to facilitate access to compensation entitlements by providing a legal presumption in favour of firefighters who have contracted one of 12 specified cancers and served qualifying periods of service. We moved to the national telephone warning system, Emergency Alert. Mental health first aid training was increased to increase understanding and awareness of mental health issues among DFES personnel and volunteers. We launched the professional pathways program to assist DFES personnel and volunteers to identify the skills and knowledge requirements they need to fulfil operational roles and we delivered the portal-to-progress platform as part of an innovative program to draw ideas from troops on the ground as an avenue for them to voice ideas and contribute to continuous improvement to emergency services management in Western Australia.

In 2014, the aerial suppression activity was enhanced through the addition, for the first time, of the Erickson skycrane to our cadre of appliances. The Fire and Emergency Services Simulation Centre was opened in Belmont as a key asset to providing fire and emergency service responders with crucial training and to gain experience in real incidents. Improved capability of the state and regional operation centres was delivered.

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In 2015, phase 2 of the crew protection program was rolled out, which saw the initiation of contracts for the installation of burnover blankets, radiant heat shields, auto-deluge systems, in-cab breathing systems, lagging and panels to protect vital equipment. There was a contribution from the state government for the establishment of a volunteer hardship assistance scheme. A peer support program was extended to include bush fire brigades, ensuring that peer support officers were trained to assist them, and the emergency services volunteer sustainability strategy was released to ensure that expertise is captured to address volunteer feedback and recommendations from the Auditor General's report on volunteers.

In 2016, we are better supporting fire and emergency service volunteers through the introduction of legislation to enable volunteer firefighters who develop certain cancers. The volunteer fuel card scheme was introduced. The volunteer ID cards are being rolled out to aid smoother facilitation of volunteers through vehicle checkpoints. DFES is embracing new technology in terms of our Emergency WA website, the installation of automatic vehicle location systems to allow tracking and communications of firefighting vehicles on the fire ground, and the enhancement of communications through digital social media. Additionally, we have launched the eAcademy, which is helping to enhance the capability of DFES personnel and volunteers, particularly in remote areas, to access online training. The Department of Parks and Wildlife and ourselves have performed an integrated incident management team with volunteers and support from local government personnel. This bushfire season, an access permit will also be introduced that allows community members who stayed in the fire zone to defend their properties to leave and re-enter if it is deemed safe.

The Ferguson inquiry recognised that the strategies and decisions made in managing the Waroona fire were reasonable and appropriate. Those on the ground made difficult decisions under extremely challenging circumstances. It also acknowledged the contribution of the volunteer emergency service workers during this complex and challenging incident, which validated their crucial role in the response to bushfires and emergencies across the state. We have a number of initiatives ongoing and the review will drive even further initiatives that will contribute to a large program of works in 2017.

[10.00 am]

**The CHAIR:** Thanks very much. I do not know if you have had a chance to look at the State Emergency Management Committee report, which was tabled only yesterday. I note that *The West Australian* seem to have had access to it before it was tabled. Have you been able to see a copy of that?

**Mr Gregson:** I have seen a draft copy during its formulation.

**The CHAIR:** I will just read out a section on page 9 of the report —

EM—

That is emergency management —

is an element of unfunded core business. There is a need for the development of a sustainable funding model for EM that will allow for an emphasis to be placed upon prevention and mitigation.

... resourcing limitations in some areas have been identified as adversely impacting the ability to provide: proactive mitigation, asset betterment, recruitment of appropriately skilled staff and response and recovery services. This issue is particularly acute among some local governments.

Is that a statement with which you concur?

**Mr Gregson:** It is a statement for the minister to consider. That report, as I understand it, is formulated as a statutory obligation on the State Emergency Management Committee to advise the

minister of gaps in the state's preparedness to respond to emergencies. I have not seen the final report. Clearly, the report is alluding to gaps, and they are no doubt for consideration of the minister and Parliament in the fullness of time.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Maybe I will put it this way: the proposition is that emergency management is core business and there is an element of it that is unfunded. Would you agree with that?

**Mr Gregson:** I would say that every commissioner or CEO of all emergency management agencies could certainly do more with more.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Resourcing limitations have adversely impacted on some occasions on your capacity to deliver services?

**Mr Gregson:** Again, the perennial challenge of management is that resources are finite and expectations on businesses, or government agencies in this case, are often beyond what those finite resources can deliver, and that is a common challenge for everybody. We do our best to deliver the best we can with the resources that we are allocated.

**The CHAIR:** Under Minister Buswell there was the bushfire risk mitigation programs to do prescribed burning around townships in order to minimise the risk. That was a pilot program.

**Mr Gregson:** That is correct.

**The CHAIR:** It was hoped to extend that to a program that operated every year.

**Mr Gregson:** That is correct.

**The CHAIR:** As I understand it, your application to turn that program into a fully operational program was unsuccessful in terms of asking for additional resources.

**Mr Gregson:** We were not allocated the resources in the time frame that was originally intended; that is correct.

**The CHAIR:** So that program operated at limited levels after —

**Mr Gregson:** The program was operated at its maximum capacity given the resources allocated to that program. It is true to say that it has not been rolled out as rapidly and as fully as it could have been because of resources constraints. However, there was a degree of analysis that was later delivered in the trial that was originally also intended. The combination of those factors is that we are still not where we could be with that program.

**The CHAIR:** The bottom line is that you had a pilot, you went to cabinet, you asked for more money to establish it as a regular event and cabinet knocked you back. Is that the case?

**Mr Gregson:** I think that is putting me in a position to betray cabinet confidentiality. At the end of the day —

**The CHAIR:** Well, you can tell us that subsequent to making a submission, the program was not fully implemented.

**Mr Gregson:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. You have mentioned the Ferguson report. I really do not want to go into the issue of the administration of country fire services or whatever because that is not necessarily going to happen this season. There were two other issues that came up in that context and one was traffic management. This has been a recurring theme throughout a number of reports. What is the problem with getting it right?

**Mr Gregson:** There are two issues really. Firstly, there is the issue of getting the policy right and, secondly, there is the issue of indoctrinating, training and getting the personnel familiar with the policy and confident to operate within the policy. The challenge with the policy is that subsequent to Boorabbin there is probably a legitimate and genuine risk aversion to allowing people into potentially dangerous areas. It is an obligation and a decision placed, quite rightly, on the incident

controller. Many incident controllers will, with my support, err on the side of caution. I think there was some significant criticism of agencies post-Boorabbin, so there is a reluctance to relax the policy. Having said that, the current policy, which has been reviewed three or four times by ourselves in conjunction with other government agencies through the auspices of the SEMP, has, we believe, provided sufficient latitude and scope for incident controllers to be able to operate reasonably. We still have a way to go getting incident controllers confident that they are not unduly exposing people to risk. This year we are intending to put people in the IMT—incident management teams—that are specifically trained around traffic management policy and can give more informed advice and familiarity of the policy to the incident controllers. But at the end of the day a decision is a risk-based decision for the incident controller. I understand that there are competing objectives, particularly from primary producers and members of the community, but the level of risk is taken into account by the incident controller and I think that that is not unreasonable in the context of Boorabbin.

**The CHAIR:** You mentioned an access permit. For example, when it is deemed safe, a farmer can get an access permit and go in and check his stock or feed the stock or do whatever needs doing. Is that the idea?

**Mr Gregson:** The idea is to make a more rapid transition from response to recovery, and as part of recovery it is to allow members of the community who are potentially affected by the fires to get back into their properties to assess the damage and check on stock as soon as practicable.

**The CHAIR:** What is the procedure going to be for obtaining such a permit?

**Mr Gregson:** Can I defer that to the deputy commissioner who is an instrumental author in some of these processes?

**The CHAIR:** Sure. He looks worried!

**Mr Bailey:** We have some SES volunteers who will be trained up in the next week or two to man the access permit issuing area. They will be overseen by an operational officer who will be able to work with the management team to ensure that it is safe to issue them. There is either a paper-based permit or a vehicle sticker to go on the windscreen, and that will allow access to the identified person or approved personnel into that area. Part of the team, too, is engaging someone from the local area who can assist with the identification of people if need be and their legitimacy to be in that area. We do not want it to be overly complex but, as the commissioner rightly says, it is a risk management issue and it is obviously a challenging time in the first couple of days, but we do acknowledge that primary producers, poultry producers and so forth need to get back in for genuine reasons, and that is what we are trying to address.

**The CHAIR:** One of the issues that has come up before is that you might early on in an incident have a police officer who has had some online training as to how to operate a vehicle control point, but I understand that after some time they hand over to maybe a Main Roads person who is a contractor who will not necessarily have this training. Has that been identified as a problem?

**Mr Bailey:** Yes. We are looking at limited access areas, if you like. Take, for instance, the Waroona fire; there might be a north entry and south entry into the area for the permits. The other ones will be road closures where they are just closed and nobody gets through unless they are obviously fire appliances and so forth. It is limiting the access routes for those who are allowed to get back in so that we can manage it as well.

[10.10 am]

**The CHAIR:** I gather that the other issue that came up in the traffic management context was the ID cards for fire volunteers. How is that progressing?

**Mr Gregson:** The rollout has commenced of ID cards, but it is an interesting conundrum because just because you have an ID card does not necessarily mean you can go into a restricted area.

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You still have to have a legitimate reason. We do not want to create the impression that just because you are a volunteer or even a career firefighter and just because you have an ID card means that you can go into an area. But the rollout of ID cards is progressing well. I do not know how many we have rolled out at the moment, but we will certainly have a significant number rolled out prior to the fire season.

**The CHAIR:** Is it the problem that local governments cannot identify who is in the brigades and give you the information or take the photograph? What is the problem in this age of technology?

**Mr Gregson:** The problem is we have written to all local governments to ask, firstly, whether or not they even want their volunteers to have ID cards. We deal with 132 local governments and not all of them are receptive or want to have ID cards. Those that are inclined to want to have ID cards cannot necessarily provide the details or photographs of their volunteers. It is somewhat easier for DFES volunteers. It is more problematic for bushfire volunteers. Nevertheless, we are working —

**The CHAIR:** Sorry; I am just a bit gobsmacked by that. What reasons would local governments have for saying that they do not want their volunteers to carry ID cards?

**Mr Gregson:** They have given a variety of reasons.

**The CHAIR:** Like what?

**Mr Gregson:** “We don’t want our volunteers to have ID cards. We’re too busy. We’re not going to collect photos of our volunteers. We don’t know who our” —

**The CHAIR:** So they see it as an administrative impost on them.

**Mr Gregson:** Well, it might be. There also may be disinclination to want their volunteers to have ID cards. Many of their farming brigades, groups and units do not think it is necessary.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Can I look at the great southern region, Esperance and so forth. I want to refer to the great southern region operations plan, 21 September 2015, that was prepared by Nick Best, senior planning officer. In that plan there are a number of actions—10 actions —

**Mr Gregson:** Sorry; I have not seen the report, I do not think, to which you are referring. Is it a DFES report or a local government report?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** It is a report—it is signed off by Deputy Commissioner Lloyd Bailey. I am sure that Deputy Commissioner Lloyd Bailey is aware of it. That plan recommended 10 actions. Many are to take place in the future, up to even 2023, but there are a couple of actions that one would hope are occurring now or will occur quite soon. One was to build a replacement CFRS station with capacity for future increases in manning from 2016. I am just wondering where that might be at.

**Mr Gregson:** A career fire and rescue station in Esperance? Other than looking around for potential suitable blocks of land, there has been no progress in that space.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** You know, of course, that Esperance is a major concern, I believe, in your department because of the fires that we have had down at Esperance and the issues that have resulted from Esperance, so I presume that is an area where you are concerned about trying to improve the capacity to fight fires.

**Mr Gregson:** I am concerned about improving capacity to fight fires across the state.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Right. But in regard to Esperance, which has been one of the areas that you have had recent concerns with, in regard to staffing issues, that was action number 10. I just want to go to the section of the plan. Page 21 of the plan states that a review of the staffing levels has highlighted that the staff to brigades, groups and units—BGU—ratio is the greatest workload in the state. In other words, each staff member in the GSR is expected to be responsible for more BGUs than is the case for staff in other DFES regions. In response, a restructure staffing proposal has been developed. The proposal recognised that there is a need to increase the staff in all three GSR

regional and district offices. In total, eight staffing positions have been identified to enhance service delivery in key areas and to bring the GSR staffing levels up to those of the other regions. These staffing positions are in the appendix to the plan. This staffing proposal has been subsumed into the greater country staffing plan being developed by the country operations.

Eight staffing positions were identified but the action then states: establish four new positions rather than eight. What is then interesting is that the actual plan had action 10, establish eight new positions, and it is crossed out and handwritten it has got four. I have two questions. This action was from 2015. Has that been implemented and why was it reduced from the identifiable eight down to four?

**Mr Gregson:** I think I can answer that. We have not implemented that. We have not had the capability to put in additional staff, whether it is eight, four or one.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** And why have you not had the capacity? Is it financial reasons?

**Mr Gregson:** As I say, you can always do more if you have got more resources. We do not have the resources to put additional —

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** In other words, it is a financial issue.

**Mr Gregson:** It is a resourcing issue.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** It is a financial issue. Are you alarmed at that? We had a major fire down in Esperance. As is stated here, this region has a greater ratio than others to deal with—and this plan identified eight. You have reduced it to four and you have not even been able to increase it by one.

**Mr Gregson:** Let me just go back a step. I have not seen the report; I do not believe I have seen the report. I understand what you are referring to. If I am correctly informed, it is a draft document. But let us presume that it is a mature draft document. There are still matters for deliberation for the corporate leadership team, and where we place resources is, again, how we distribute to get what we consider is the best return on investment, the best bang for our buck, of our people. I accept the fact that supervision of brigades, groups and units might be greater in Esperance, but that is just one factor. Other areas may have less brigades, groups and units but have a greater geographical area or have more complex challenges in their specific region or district. That is just one element for consideration, but the reality is that we have not been able to place additional resources into Esperance region.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Do you see that as a major concern?

**Mr Gregson:** It is a concern, absolutely, if you cannot put optimum resources into an area, or if you are constrained by putting optimum resources into an area, you are likely going to elevate your level of risk.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** But in the document, in the introduction and in the executive summary, it states that the great southern region operations plan—this plan here—has been prepared in order to identify emerging risk and gaps in service delivery required to mitigate community exposure to such risk.

**Mr Gregson:** That is correct. It is a constant exercise to identify risk, look for gaps and endeavour to acquire resources to plug gaps. That is the nature of the business.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** What would you say, then, to the community down there? There is a plan which identified the need for a substantial increase in staffing and you do not have the resources to even slightly increase the staffing down there.

**Mr Gregson:** I think the community is aware that we optimise the people and the resources that we have.

**The CHAIR:** That submission was put up prior to the actual fires in Esperance. At that point you had identified there was a risk, that there needed to be between four and eight personnel, and they

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were not forthcoming for reasons related to resources. When that incident occurred, was it generally known that there were just not enough bodies on the ground to oversight or to control the incident?

**Mr Gregson:** I do not know what you mean by “generally known”, but we are aware of resource challenges before and after Esperance.

**The CHAIR:** So that must have been a source of some concern or frustration that you identify a risk, you try to act on it, and the resources are not forthcoming.

[10.20 am]

**Mr Gregson:** At the end of the day, every commissioner or chief executive officer can always do more with more. We validate exercises. We do post-operative assessments. We form a view where there are gaps in risks and we endeavour to plug those gaps with the resources that we have or we get additional resources as part of the usual and ordinary process.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** In regard to this plan, it was endorsed by the director of capability planning, the superintendent of the great southern region, the assistant chief superintendent country south, assistant commissioner country and Lloyd Bailey, deputy commissioner operations.

**Mr Gregson:** Again, you have the benefit of having the document in front of you. If it is the document to which I think you are referring, it is a conceptual document, which would have ostensibly reconfigured—created another district—and made the service delivery of the agency significantly improved in the lower south west area, yes.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** In regard to the Esperance fires, after you had done your analysis of those fires, did you come to a conclusion that would be consistent with this plan of what actions needed to be implemented?

**Mr Gregson:** I think, in principle, yes.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Including the staffing?

**Mr Gregson:** I would not necessarily confirm either of the numbers that you proposed, but I think —

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I am not proposing them.

**Mr Gregson:** Okay. I am not prepared to sign off on eight or four or six, but the paper speaks for itself.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** It has been identified in the draft document—fair enough—but how do you make the decision about where you put your resources? This example seemed to be very high, but it did not get a guernsey?

**Mr Gregson:** That conceptual paper has its genesis in the operational personnel in the field, and, understandably, that is one of many. There are a number that come up. The process is —

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I understand that. The question is: how is it —

**Mr Gregson:** How is it then decided? It usually goes to operations command, which is the senior operational officers, and they make a preliminary assessment as to resource allocation. If there are more resources required, it goes to the corporate leadership team. The corporate leadership team determine the best spread of resources of the agency across the state—are we optimising our people? Any gaps are then fed into the usual and ordinary processes of government.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** How far up the ladder did this report get?

**Mr Gregson:** Every year, as part of the usual and ordinary processes of government, I make a submission as part of the budget process.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Bailey, is your recollection of this plan maybe more complete than the commissioner’s?

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**Mr Bailey:** No, as said, it is a conceptual plan. There are other plans for the south west as well, looking at the ratio of personnel to brigades. Certainly, some areas have been addressed in terms of the community emergency services management program. I think 33 are in place now across more than that number of local governments.

**The CHAIR:** All right, but we want to specifically focus on this plan. Do you know what happened to it after everyone signed off on it?

**Mr Bailey:** It was endorsed in principle, but not enacted.

**The CHAIR:** Did it stay with DFES or did it go up the line or did it form part of the cabinet submission? Do you know what actually happened to that assessment?

**Mr Bailey:** The figures in there would have been taken into account, as the submission says, in the submissions to government for resources.

**The CHAIR:** Are you aware of what happened in relation to that submission?

**Mr Gregson:** The resources that we get —

**The CHAIR:** I am actually asking the deputy commissioner.

**Mr Gregson:** With respect, Madam Chair, I think that we can only go so far in propriety as to what forms submissions to cabinet and what cabinet decides.

**The CHAIR:** So it went to cabinet, did it?

**Mr Gregson:** Ultimately, we make a submission to government every year as part of the budgetary process. We then optimise the resources that we get.

**The CHAIR:** I am just interested in the process. You say that a cabinet submission goes every year for your particular allocation for that budget in that financial year, commissioner. Are you saying that this stuff just hangs around for 11 months and is then included in your once-a-year bid or does this kind of assessment—I am just speaking generically, not about the specific incidents now—go up from time to time to government to say that there is a risk and we need to augment our resources in this particular region?

**Mr Gregson:** Both can happen. We make a determination as to whether or not there is a need to put in an urgent cabinet submission or we could make a determination to include it as part of the usual budgetary round process.

**The CHAIR:** Can I infer from your reticence about wanting to comment more on this particular paper that it did form some part of the cabinet process?

**Mr Gregson:** Again, I am not sure how far I can go in discussing with you what does —

**The CHAIR:** Just a yes or no; you do not have to say —

**Mr Gregson:** I understand —

**The CHAIR:** You cannot refuse to answer if it is not related to cabinet. That is why we need the confirmation.

**Mr Gregson:** But the contents of the cabinet submission, surely —

**The CHAIR:** I am not asking you to talk about the contents; I am asking you to say whether your refusal to expand on this is on the basis that it went to cabinet. If it is that, we will leave it.

**Mr Gregson:** Ultimately, my refusal, or my disinclination to put more meat on the bones, is that I think I am constrained by what I put up to the minister and to cabinet as part of their deliberations. What is included in that is really a matter, with respect, that should be addressed to the minister.

**The CHAIR:** That is fine. We are trying to ask you whether that is a document that falls into that category. You have confirmed that it has, and we will not press it any further.

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**Mr Gregson:** I can also confirm to you that when there are gap analyses, sometimes we make separate and distinct submissions to cabinet and sometimes we wait for the usual and ordinary course of business—to answer Mr Murray’s question.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I am not going to ask whether it went cabinet at all, but about the plan itself. There are 10 actions. I am not asking about whether you decided to take it to cabinet or not, but I assume that you would have agreed at that time that those 10 actions were necessary. This report states that the planners identified that in order to continue to meet the organisational standards and community expectations, a number of changes to service delivery models in the GRS were required, including an enhanced voluntary fire and rescue presence, an enhanced career and voluntary capability through improved facilities and additional appliances and increased DFES staff positions to support the service delivery model—then those 10 actions. You would have agreed at the time that that was what was necessary?

**Mr Gregson:** We would have agreed in principle. I am not sure whether that went to the corporate leadership team for final endorsement or whether resources were available to allocate to that or not.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** You said that you are not sure whether it went to the corporate leadership team. Why would something like this, which is also signed off by the deputy commissioner of operations and the other people I referred to, not go to the corporate leadership team?

**Mr Gregson:** If it is within the existing resources, then the deputy commissioner would not even need to do that. If it needs to be compared with other submissions, other like submissions for other regions and other competing priorities, then the corporate leadership team would consider that.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Are you able to come back to us to confirm whether it did go to the corporate leadership team?

**Mr Gregson:** Yes.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Commissioner, I understand that DFES and DPaW have been working on a new incident resource management system to coordinate emergency management personnel and equipment. How is this progressing?

**Mr Gregson:** We have managed to further the endeavour of a combined view of resources. Our first tranche, or our first activities in that space, is around automatic vehicle locations so that we will both be able to see each other’s resources whilst in the response phase. There is a considerable amount of work to be done. A good end state would be to have a common database of all assets, not just ours and DPaW’s, but other government agency assets and local government agency assets, and have visibility of that in the same way that we have been endeavouring to do with the aerial fleet. We are also working on a joint intelligence desk, or a way of having a common operating picture, with the Department of Parks and Wildlife, so that we will have a much better understanding of what is occurring and what joint consolidated resources are available to address that.

[10.30 am]

**Ms L. METTAM:** What sort of impact do you think that will have on your responses on the ground?

**Mr Gregson:** I think it will enable the incident management teams, the regional operation centres and the state operation centre to have a great deal more visibility of what is available. We sometimes see that resources are double counted or people believe different resources are available and this would give greater clarity to what is at their disposal.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Can I just jump back a bit, Madam Chair, to the ID card. Could we have on notice a list of the shires that have and have not accepted the ID card?

**Mr Gregson:** Yes.

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**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Okay —

**Mr Gregson:** Sorry, Mr Hatton, there is just one other aspect to answer Ms Mettam's question. We are also working on WebEOC. Since last time I presented to the committee four years ago, there has been a significant amount of development in our incident management software and that is increasingly looking at resources as well. It is starting to have a fusion effect across government agencies.

**Ms L. METTAM:** And that feeds in to what you were talking about before with the tracking of vehicles —

**Mr Gregson:** In the fullness of time, automatic vehicle location and new computer-aided dispatch and new resource management software and the incident management software are all coming together, hopefully not just with respect to DFES. Ultimately, particularly with the new product called Webfusion, we will have visibility and we will be able to do interagency tasking across other agencies that have WebEOC, such as the police and the health department; it will be linked in to hospitals and things like that.

**The CHAIR:** Crew protection, and vehicle location is part of that, that was promised in about, I think, October 2012 and then in May the next year, 2013, there was some money allocated in the then budget for crew protection, which included curtains, deluge systems, blankets and, I think, the vehicle location. That is not yet complete, as I understand it. Why not? For example, I talked to a Yallingup crew the other day that has not yet had the curtains installed in their appliances.

**Mr Gregson:** I can answer that broadly and then, perhaps, I will defer to the deputy commissioner of operations. We have commenced a journey of crew protection. There are a number of phases to that project. It is somewhat more problematic than having a small fleet. We have a very large fleet of a very large number of different types of appliances, some presenting with engineering challenges, some presenting with overweight challenges because you are adding more weight with crew protection. But, certainly, some of the early aspects, such as the blankets, are fully completed. Then we are moving right through the deluge systems, the in-cab breathing, the lagging, the panelling and then, ultimately, it is the automatic vehicle location, which is well underway. Various parts of the fleet are at various stages, but the initial stages are well and truly on board. We have challenges aligning it to the availability of vehicles. We have challenges aligning it to when vehicles are going to be replaced. For example, there is no point spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on vehicles if they are going to be replaced the month after. We have made significant progress in the delivery of the various components of crew protection over the various vehicles in the fleet since we commenced this.

**The CHAIR:** When the announcement was made in May 2013, that was fully funded and fully costed, as I understand it. Now, additional money has to be brought in from royalties for regions to complete the task. I am a bit curious why that is needed.

**Mr Gregson:** As I understand it, the original project scope was for a limited number of vehicles, those in the high fire danger areas.

**The CHAIR:** I did not read that in any press releases or in the budget.

**Mr Gregson:** I can only account for departmental press releases. I would have to go back and have a look. My understanding is that the original scope quite clearly identified that they were for the high fire danger-risk areas. If there has subsequently been a decision made to do it to the entire fleet, then there would be additional resources required. I will defer that. I am happy to stand corrected on that, Madam Chair, but that is my understanding of it.

**The CHAIR:** If it is, it is a sin of omission, because all the publicity, all the press releases, all the discussion at estimates was that the full fleet was going to be covered. This is absolute news to me.

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**Mr Fewster:** Madam Chair, perhaps if I can add that the original allocation was a forecast of the requirement, notwithstanding that the number of vehicles that were to be fitted increased. The actual cost of fitting, particularly the deluge system, had not been determined at the time the allocation was made. The work is proceeding as quickly as it can, but it is complex, as the commissioner has indicated. The vehicles that are in stage 2, which is everything but the AVL, for want of a better description, are about halfway through. There are a number of vehicles that are yet to be fitted and they are in the areas that are less high risk.

**The CHAIR:** How many are yet to be fitted?

**Mr Fewster:** Today, I would have to give you a rough figure, chair.

**The CHAIR:** That will be fine—better than nothing.

**Mr Fewster:** As of today, it will be roughly 96 that are complete, with 189 the target.

**The CHAIR:** How many have not got the vehicle location on? Is it 96 or more than that?

**Mr Fewster:** Is that AVL?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Fewster:** Sorry, chair, AVL is only commencing its rollout at the moment. There are a number of vehicles without AVL.

**The CHAIR:** How many?

**Mr Fewster:** Again, I would have to come back.

**Mr Gregson:** The target for AVL before this bushfire season is 600 vehicles, I think.

**The CHAIR:** Out of a total of how many vehicles?

**Mr Fewster:** In the order of 1 100 will eventually be fitted out.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ideally, it seems to me that the funding for that sort of activity should come out of the ESL. Can you explain to me why it is necessary to dip into royalties for regions for this money?

**Mr Gregson:** With respect, I just ask for the money. Where it comes from is not determined by me.

**The CHAIR:** Is that because there is not enough money in the ESL?

**Mr Gregson:** There is always enough money in the ESL if the government decides it wants to put the ESL up. I mean, the ESL works. With respect, I ask for more money to run the department, I ask for money for volunteers and whatever else, but how I am given that money, the source of that funding, is not an issue that I have any control over at all. If the government decides they wish to make a contribution from the consolidated revenue, so be it. If they wish to make a contribution to my budget from royalties for regions, so be it. And if they wish for the project, whatever it is, to be funded from the emergency services levy, that is a matter for government.

**The CHAIR:** Joe Bloggs householder who pays their ESL is a bit concerned that it has gone up 80 per cent in eight years or something, but they willingly do so knowing that it is going to frontline equipment and services. If it is coming from somewhere else, does that mean that there is not enough money to supply that basic equipment?

**Mr Gregson:** With respect, I think we are getting a little circular. I put up for the money that I believe is required to run the department and then I run the department to the best of my ability on the money that I am given.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Sorry, Madam Chair, have you finished?

**The CHAIR:** No, I have not finished, but do butt in.

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**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Since 2011, from my reading, there have been 12 reports, two of those being from this committee, and there have been 192 recommendations over that period of time, with six reports containing 92 recommendations. In the most recent report, the Ferguson report, I believe there was a fair bit about mitigation and fair bit about local knowledge. You did not say that councils are impediments, but I think they may be. Do you regard councils to be an impediment to working forward with some of those recommendations? I would like to put to Mr Carter that after the Yarloop restoration takes place that a bushfire attack level contour mapping process will take place. Is contour mapping of each town or locality something that is applied across the whole of Western Australia? It is a double question.

[10.40 am]

**Mr Gregson:** Before I hand over to Mr Carter, Madam Chair, firstly, I have never said local governments are an impediment.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** No, I said that, and I think I corrected it.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** It is a typical government ploy—it is only a joke!

**Mr Gregson:** The arrangements are what the arrangements are. I mean, certainly local government departments would probably have some competing challenges around resourcing and around expertise. There is bushfire risk or bushfire-prone mapping done across the entire state of Western Australia. There are bushfire attack levels and considerations done during parts of planning processes. Contours, as I understand it, relate to elevation, so I am not too sure where that fits in, but I am happy to hand over to Mr Carter.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Thank you. Just going back, commissioner, are you saying that in moving forward with the recommendations and having local knowledge and local volunteers being a part of DFES strategy, including bringing the two together, because there is conflict between the volunteers and DFES, the councils are largely coming on board or they are possibly stopping you from moving forward?

**Mr Gregson:** Firstly, I do not accept that there is too much conflict between volunteers and DFES. I think there is certainly some conflict around different points of view about how we move forward, particularly with respect to the rural fire service. By and large, everybody in the game—state government, local government and volunteers—share a vision that we all want the best for the community of Western Australia. With respect to how the structure is moving forward, there is a divergence of views. Some local governments would like to hand over responsibility to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and that would be supported by their volunteers; some local governments perhaps would not wish to hand over their responsibilities to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, with or without the support of their volunteers. So there is a very mixed view. When we did some considerable surveying of local governments when we were putting together the legislative package to amalgamate the three acts, about a third of local governments were inclined to be fused with DFES, about a third were against it and about a third were open-minded and wanting more detail.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** So do you think it would be better that they would all come on board—in the big picture?

**Mr Gregson:** Look, I would rather keep my personal views to myself. This is a matter at the moment, currently, with the government to make a determination on as to how they move forward with the structure of particularly rural fire and the hazard of bushfire more broadly. There are a number of complex and competing public policy considerations, and they are best left with government.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Thank you. Mr Carter, in this particular “Report of the State Recovery Controller”—I do not know if you have seen it; you may not have—it says, under the heading,

“Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) Contour Map”, that the lead agency is the Shire of Harvey, and it then says, under the heading “Status” —

The State Government has commissioned a consultant to prepare a BAL Contour Map for the residential areas within the Yarloop gazetted town site boundary. This will assist those residents wishing to rebuild meet new assessment requirements introduced in December 2015.

How significant are BALs in the total preparedness for the bushfire season?

**The CHAIR:** They are a planning issue. They are not necessarily a —

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** They are a planning issue but I would have thought that DFES would have contour maps everywhere.

**The CHAIR:** They assess risk for other situations. BAL is for the purposes of planning.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Well, I am asking Mr Carter.

**Mr Carter:** I can place a bit of context around that. With the bushfire-prone areas map, the legislative reforms were put in place December last year that allow the commissioner to designate bushfire-prone areas, which we have done for the whole of Western Australia. That is a binary yes or no; it does not grade high risk to low risk. It is one category—yes, you are; or no, you are not. What that does, most importantly, and this is a significant step forward for Western Australia that has been debated for a long period of time and we are now there, is that it triggers the requirement for assessment of bushfire risk—which is the BAL assessment; it is one of those tools—by a proponent of a particular development. Generally, a BAL assessment is done on a particular site for a particular single development. The work that you are referring to—I have not seen that report, but I am aware of the work—is that given the specific circumstances around Yarloop and the government’s involvement in recovery, the Department of Planning proposed, with the agreement of others, that they would as part of that process conduct a BAL contour assessment, which is basically that instead of looking at a house or a shed or something on a specific site, it does an overall BAL assessment for a broader area that then guides a number of developments as to what their BAL rating would be. So, it is a useful tool for a specific area. But, no, it has not been done for the whole of the state because it is particularly resource intensive. It has been led by the Department of Planning, with the assistance of others, for the Yarloop town site, which is a relatively small area, and it is a very useful tool to do it; rather than over many—over almost 100—specific sites, you do one overall assessment.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Thanks. You have answered my question, but you have actually raised another question. If it is a particularly useful tool and it will save lives and property—I am suggesting that you are saying it is very useful to save lives and property, as one of many strategies—could it feasibly be more broadly expanded across Western Australia?

**Mr Carter:** Certainly, I would like to see it more broadly expanded. But I think it needs to be focused in the areas that have a higher focus on development, generally development and proponent-driven, because the BAL works on vegetation. The bushfire attack level is heavily reliant on vegetation type and location and slope of land, with some other factors, but they are the main ones, and of course vegetation comes and goes annually. So in our bushfire-prone area map at a much coarser level we still need to update that annually to give effect to where vegetation has been legally cleared, and equally important is where vegetation has been added and additional bushfire risk has been created. So the answer is yes, but with a contour map it would need to be reviewed, and to review the whole of Western Australia annually would be not feasible.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** So linking that to training at the local level—because it was mentioned about local level recommendations for mitigation and local level resourcing and knowledge and training—could the BALs be more useful to local levels so that they study these BALs and know more about their local levels of mitigation and risk?

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**Mr Carter:** Absolutely. They are useful at the local level where there are sites that are likely to be focused on development. Some of the south west shires, for argument's sake, would benefit from that type of approach rather than individual case-by-case BAL assessments, if that makes sense.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** It is the wrong agency to ask those questions of.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** All right. It might be the wrong agency, but there is some very good information coming back. With the Esperance fire again, the local level is very important. In one of the reports, it was mentioned that there were not enough key management personnel at the Esperance fire. Are you aware of that?

**Mr Gregson:** I am aware of that.

**Mr C.D. HATTON:** Could more local management be more effective so far as resourcing, with BAL knowledge and all that?

**Mr Gregson:** Again, I get back to my original proposition. You are likely to do better if you have more resources, no matter at which level. Providing they are being appropriately harnessed and properly trained and supervised and instructed and leveraged off, you are going to get a good return. A good manager gets a good return on the investment that he is able to make.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** We have talked about the contour mapping for the bush and whatever is around that, whether it be farmland or whatever. What about water bodies themselves? I use Yarloop, because that was my area at one stage. There was an issue that happened down there when the shire would not take responsibility for insurance for what we called the Yarloop swimming hole, and nor would Harvey Water, so that was removed. That was also a fire truck pick-up area for water, with a water stand there as well. It concerns me that some people who had not been there for some time might have thought there was still a water body there, and there was not. It is on the creek, on the irrigation channel, and Harvey Water saw it as a dollar being lost. What I am saying is have we under these contour maps identified the number and size of dams, river bodies and those sorts of things so that people know exactly where to go to pick up water?

[10.50 am]

**Mr Gregson:** Certainly the local managers, local superintendents and the local emergency management committees are aware of what local resources are available to them during response modes. Everything from hydrants, water tanks, rivers, dams—those types of things—local area commanders, local bushfire control officers, local CESMs and local government would have an awareness of what is available to them.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Your statement is local, local and local. I understand that, but at times those people wear out and have to go for a rest, right? I do know that at one stage, one of the local managers was removed from his position because he had been there too long. That is fine to have a rest. Then what happens? Because we are talking about local; I am about the broader picture.

**Mr Gregson:** Yes. There are a number of positions within the incident management teams that are occupied by either local government or local volunteers, so you would never see—one would think; one would hope—a disconnect with information flow from the local community or the local government.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Just quickly about local government, I want to refer to mitigation. My understanding is that DFES's position is that you are a response-only agency, although the Ferguson inquiry suggested that the FES commissioner should have an overarching responsibility of fire prevention and mitigation. Page 99 of the Ferguson review talks about that. In your annual report, you say that —



... finite resources will impact our ongoing capacity to support local governments to develop their bushfire risk management plans from June 2017 onwards.

What kind of support that you were providing local governments that you will not be able to now provide?

**Mr Gregson:** That alludes to the ongoing bushfire planners that are placed in local governments to assist local governments to formulate their bushfire risk management plans.

**The CHAIR:** They are currently paid by DFES, but in the local governments?

**Mr Gregson:** Correct.

**The CHAIR:** Are you saying post-June 2017, there is unlikely to be the funding for them?

**Mr Gregson:** Their ongoing funding —

**The CHAIR:** They are 12-monthly contracts, as I understand it.

**Mr Gregson:** Their ongoing funding will be subject to budgetary allocation.

**The CHAIR:** All right. In relation to those local fire control officers, they operate—this might be a question for Mr Carter—I understand they use, some IT system which is a bushfire risk management system; is that what it is called?

**Mr Carter:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I have heard some complaints that the information in that system is not readily available to be shared between agencies. Do you accept that or not?

**Mr Carter:** I accept that there have been issues with the consolidation of existing—particularly with Parks and Wildlife. They have had a lot of information around protection of assets for a long time so that the BRMS system is basically an asset-out system; it works on cataloguing assets of all types and then, obviously through the bushfire risk management planning process, identifies mitigation or risk reduction activities including burning, fire breaks and a whole range of other things that may threaten those assets. It is an asset-out system which the BRMP process is based on. The integration of the Parks and Wildlife system, which has been a landscape-scale fuel reduction program over a long time, into it—from a landscape in to an asset out—has caused some teething problems, which are being worked through.

**The CHAIR:** So they are not integrated, in other words?

**Mr Carter:** No. It has filled a gap because there has been no asset-based system in Western Australia prior to this system, so it is a custom-design system designed by DFES for use in the bushfire risk management planning program.

**Mr Gregson:** Just to add some context to that, this is a result of the agency developing a tenure-blind risk management approach that came out of Keelty. The risks are identified in a tenure-blind sense and then it is given to the owner-manager-occupier of that land to treat the risk, and that is what is facilitated by the local placement of these people in the local governments.

**The CHAIR:** I think that is eminently sensible, but I am told that after a particular asset has been identified as being a high risk and then some mitigation treatment is put on it, that is not necessarily accurately reflected in the system, subsequently, and there are complaints that the risk assessment on that land might not be consistent with the current status of the land.

**Mr Carter:** That is not my understanding, Madam Chair. My understanding is exactly what the system is designed to do is to do what you —

**The CHAIR:** You have had no complaints from local government fire control officers about this?

**Mr Carter:** No, I have not.

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**The CHAIR:** Are you aware that many of them use the QGIS system, which they find a bit more fit for purpose?

**Mr Carter:** I am not familiar with that specific one, but I am aware of local governments that use other private systems which they pay significant money for. One of the intents of the BRM system was to allow equitable access across all local governments for a locally driven up bushfire risk management system. It was not then suitable, through the pilot program, for the local governments that could not afford to have an alternative private system to be expected to go and acquire one, so it is a system design that all can access.

**The CHAIR:** All right. I will get off that and just quickly, Mark Webb was over with OBRM for a while. He is a former director of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority and he is now acting DG at Agriculture. He prepared a document while he was at OBRM relating to strategic risk assessment, I think, for the state. Are you familiar with that document?

**Mr Carter:** No.

**Ms L. METTAM:** There were some questions regarding crew protection earlier. What sort of threats did we see with the volunteer fire crews during the Waroona bushfire and how was that seen as being managed?

**Mr Gregson:** In what sense?

**Ms L. METTAM:** What was the level of threat to the volunteer crews?

**Mr Gregson:** I would rate it as high. All, both volunteers and career firefighters, across the board, whether they work for DFES or local government, put themselves in elevated risk and elevated risky circumstances. They actually go where angels fear to tread. It is risky business, as evidenced by the fact that we lost a pump. I think there were some, very fortuitously, very minor injuries. Things can change very, very rapidly in a major bushfire, so the level of risk is an operational factor. A major element of our operations is making sure that our crews are safe and our people are well equipped and well trained.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** This relates to that question. The Ferguson review called for more effective consultation with your volunteer firefighters and an Auditor General report found that DFES was having issues with managing various aspects of the volunteer workforce, including managing fatigue. Have we any confidence it will be different this season?

**Mr Gregson:** Yes and no. Potentially, we will have a fatigue management policy in place. But let me say this to you. Despite our best endeavours, volunteers will not always wish to abide by a fatigue management policy when their community is at risk. We see evidence of it all the time. They are so conscientious that they will work until they drop. Similarly with career firefighters—they are not inclined to go down there and just want to do their eight hours then clock off. It is a significant issue for us, particularly when we have campaign fires that are going to require a heavy human resource commitment over an extended period of time. Fatigue management can be problematic because, to a great extent, it is also about that individual's personal responsibility and level of awareness. We provide guidelines and try to roster breaks but, again, it is a very dynamic set of circumstances. It is not something that is just going to be resolved by edict. It requires good IMT, good rostering practices and good facilities for crews to take breaks. Will it be different this season? To the extent that we have got more awareness of fatigue and extant policies, it will be different; to the extent that those policies are given effect by the volunteers, particularly on the ground, is more problematic.

[11.00 am]

**The CHAIR:** I would like to direct a question to Mr Bailey. I understand that you were down in Albany for the Bearfoot inquest last week. You gave evidence and I gather you would have sat in on the evidence as well; is that correct?

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**Mr Bailey:** That is correct, yes.

**The CHAIR:** I know that we are still waiting on the coronial findings, but were any lessons learnt or is there anything that you have concluded from investigating and having to give evidence for that case?

**Mr Bailey:** I think that the coroner will be some time in coming out with a determination, but the initial indication is that it was a tragic accident in relation to Mrs Bearfoot. I think there are some key issues there in the effectiveness of briefings. It appeared to me that although the briefings were undertaken, they were not absorbed. Also, maps and spot weather forecasts were handed to crews but little attention was paid, necessarily, to the content, particularly of the weather forecast. The tabular information there was read but not the written information below the table. Since 12 October 2012—before the end of October 2012, in conjunction with the Bureau of Meteorology, we have reconfigured the spot weather forecast and put the written information above the tabular information so it is more visible. We have also undertaken a lot of training to ensure people are more aware of it. When there are significant wind changes or whatever, they are required to be conveyed to crews, if they are relevant to that shift period, through a red flag warning. People confirm that they have received it, confirm that it has gone down, and confirm that it has gone back up. We believe that we are in a better place in terms of making people more aware of the significance of the written text, if you like, on the spot weather forecast. It was the same as the Boorabbin outcome. I think the key thing there is that because it was not picked up in the first instance of being relayed by the local government to the incident controller, it just snowballed from there. It just got overlooked by everybody, essentially.

**The CHAIR:** All right. That is a good segue. I just want to quickly ask about the Aurora system, which is an IT system which assists to predict fire behaviour. I understand that it is operated out of Cockburn with Landgate operators; is that correct?

**Mr Gregson:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** All right. I am curious about the process. Let us say that on the day of the Yarloop–Waroona fires, from time to time readings would be factored in and then some forecast would be given as to fire behaviour; is that correct?

**Mr Gregson:** Yes, it is correct. There are a number of variables that are fed into the model—fuel load, topography, weather forecasts, fuel type—and they give a prediction of where the fire will be over a certain timeframe. If left unmitigated, your fire shape will look like this in an hour's time, in two hours, in four hours, or in however many hours. Having said that, fire behaviour is becoming increasingly less predictable across Australia.

**The CHAIR:** All right. What I am asking is: are you aware of whether the system was in operation on the day of the Waroona–Yarloop fires?

**Mr Gregson:** Yes, it was.

**The CHAIR:** All right. You might need to provide this to the committee on notice. I understand it is quite a prompt response from the computer—a couple of minutes. But the forecast at eight o'clock in the morning from Aurora predicted that Yarloop would be hit at about 6.30 that night. I think it was hit at seven o'clock. If that was showing up at eight o'clock in the morning, what process is followed subsequent to that prediction coming up on the system?

**Mr Gregson:** I am happy to provide that process to the committee.

**The CHAIR:** In general terms, can you tell me, after the Landgate person uses the system down at Cockburn, what do they do with the bit of paper or the printout?

**Mr Gregson:** It is a little bit more sophisticated than that, but in principle, they are liaising in real time with people in the IMT and the people in the regional operation centres. The product that comes from Aurora is what we call an intelligence product. That gives you an operational picture of

what you are dealing with and that forms part of a shared operational picture with the people in the IMT and the people in the regional operations centre.

**The CHAIR:** All right. What I am interested in is how does it go up the line, and how long does that process take?

**Mr Gregson:** Well, it is being distributed as soon as —

**The CHAIR:** So is there an email or something to everyone who needs to know?

**Mr Gregson:** I think it goes through as an attachment through WebEOC.

**The CHAIR:** All right. As a consequence of that, is someone supposed to act on it?

**Mr Gregson:** Well, it goes into the planning cell, usually, of the IMT and in the regional operations centres or state operation centres. The planners have a look at what is happening. They liaise with the logistics cell to work out what is the best way to apply mitigation or firefighting activities. That is liaised between the IMTs and the state operations centre and they form a view based on not just that but aerial intelligence and fire map intelligence as to rates of spread and intelligence from the field. They are building a composite picture of what is occurring.

**The CHAIR:** Of which that is one —

**Mr Gregson:** Of which that is one component.

**The CHAIR:** What I am trying to work out is who has access to the information, getting the confirmation effectively from the ground, that those readings are reasonably accurate? At what stage does someone ring up someone and say, “It’s going to hit the town at 6.30 or 7.00”?

**Mr Gregson:** It is happening in real time, so it is not, “We’ve got information; we’ll share it with you.” It is happening constantly. The planners, the cartographers and the mappers are talking to each other in real time.

**The CHAIR:** Is it going through too many hands? Does it need to be streamlined? If you have got more than 10 hours’ warning, how is it that the town is not evacuated?

**Mr Gregson:** Well —

**The CHAIR:** Sorry for being a little simpleminded, but I do not understand it.

**Mr Gregson:** Again, if you had a situation where you knew that a fire was going to impact on a town site over a certain period of time—that is, if you do nothing about it—you are then obviously doing the firefighting activities to counter the actions of the fire, and at the appropriate time you would make an assessment and put out appropriate warnings to that town. That will be your advice or your emergency warnings letting the community know what is happening.

**Mr Bailey:** It is fair to say that the first map produced is one that shows no intervention—if there is no aerial bombing and no crews on the ground doing anything—it shows the fire running uninhibited, if you like. So it gives you the worst-case scenario—if all else fails on the ground, this is what is likely to occur. There is a lot more work that needs to be pumped into the computer to come up with the intervention-happening type product—so, if you are doing this, the likely result could be something different. The commissioner is right. It goes to the planning cell and the IMT to ensure that where the troops are sent should be in response to what the prediction is, and you take into account the actual fire shape as well, as opposed to the predicted, if they do vary.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Fewster, do you have anything to add to that? You were writing some notes for the commissioner, I see.

**Mr Fewster:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I was going to say what the commissioner has already said and the deputy commissioner obviously said.

**The CHAIR:** That is a good save!

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**Mr Fewster:** It is a very, very dynamic process. In the case of the Waroona fire, there was a prediction group in the IMT who were working on fire shapes. It has been indicated already that there will be a process of ground truthing—the fire is actually doing this, rather than predicted; the speeds are actually this across the ground, rather than what was predicted—and that information feeds into their planning processes.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Further to that, when does that finally get brought together and then sent out to the general public through SMS, if they are lucky enough to get one?

[11.10 am]

**Mr Gregson:** It is happening constantly. The intelligence is assessed in real time and if there is a need to change the community warning, the social media feeds, the ABC community warnings—if there is a need to change intelligence or information going to the community—that happens on a needs basis.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I am a bit lost because I was at Preston Beach when that fire was on and people were saying they were getting text messages, so how does that work? I do not understand the system; I am not being critical, I do not understand.

**Mr Gregson:** No, text messages are notoriously unreliable and it is just one of many, many ways we diffuse information to members of the public. I have said this a number of times: one ought not, as a member of the community, rely on an SMS before taking action. It is one way that, in certain circumstances, we can inform the community. Sometimes it happens so quickly we do not have time to get an SMS out; sometimes you have already lost your towers and your infrastructure to get a message out or you have lost power to those base stations or there are no base stations there. It is just one possible avenue of getting information, but there are many others, and individual situational awareness has primacy.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** In hindsight I see some confusion where one neighbour could be saying, “I’ve got a text message”, and another one saying, “I haven’t”, and “I am listening to the ABC” or whatever. It was very confusing for people on the ground. Maybe at some time the text message issue should be looked at very strongly—whether it is reliable enough to be utilised without causing confusion. I would like your comments on that.

**Mr Gregson:** I think we will try every possible channel to get information out to members of the community, whether it be SMS, Twitter, Facebook, ABC warnings, media briefings—every conceivable channel—in the hope that one of those channels gets the message out there. We do try to adopt a principle of single-source messaging so that you do not get confusion about what is being said from one media outlet as opposed to what you are getting through another media channel. We also try to be collegiate with other government agencies, so what you are hearing from the police and from DPaW and from ourselves is consistent. There is a fair bit of integration around messaging, but I would be reticent to cancel an available channel because there are times when SMSing is most appropriate and has the most leverage and the most benefit and the greatest penetration in communities. But you are right; how many times have you turned your mobile phone on and got four or five SMS messages from the day before or voicemail messages from the day before? There is no better evaluation than individual, personal, situational awareness, and people need to take greater responsibility for themselves and their own families and not be overly reliant on a text message, a Twitter feed or a radio broadcast.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I think it is unfortunate in today’s world there is an extension on your arm called a mobile phone, and people live and breathe by it. I think we have to be very careful, as you are saying, about how we get that message out through there and not to cause confusion between different households.

**The CHAIR:** There is also the issue that the two gentlemen who died in Waroona—the coroner will look at this—were both elderly and I understand that one of them was deaf, so there were some

issues there around people who are not high consumers of IT, whether or not they are consumers of warnings or whether they —

**Mr Gregson:** Look, I would rather not comment about that whilst it is before the coroner.

**The CHAIR:** No, I am just saying that one size does not fit all.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** In the hills, not far out of my electorate, there are some black spots where the mobile phone does not have any reception. I am just wondering if it is possible—this is a bit simplistic—to have large sirens that are stationed in the hills, for instance?

**Mr Gregson:** Yes, it is possible. I know we have had deliberations about whether that is viable and whether it is a good option. It is probably interesting. It might be more effective in smaller communities than the hills, for example. It is an interesting proposition. The challenge there, of course, is that people will say, “I didn’t hear the siren. I got an SMS but I was waiting for the siren.” It would be another channel; it has some merit. It has just been pointed out to me that it was an opportunity that was referred to in the Ferguson report for local government to consider.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks very much, commissioner, and your colleagues. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for the correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days of the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide any additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee’s consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence.

I understand that we will have a list of the local governments that do not want to participate in the ID arrangements.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** And whether this plan went up to the corporate leadership.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, and the status of the great southern region operations plan of 2015. Thank you.

**Mr Gregson:** Can I perhaps close by extending an invitation to you and any members of your committee who would like, before this fire season, to come and see the state operation centre and some of the processes we have referred to today—WebEOC, Aurora mapping and automatic vehicle location. If you were of a mind to do that, we would happily accommodate you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Hearing concluded at 11.16 am**

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