

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO 2011 KIMBERLEY ULTRAMARATHON EVENT

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT KUNUNURRA
TUESDAY, 24 APRIL 2012**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Dr M.D. Nahan (Chairman)
Mr W.J. Johnston (Deputy Chairman)
Mr M.P. Murray
Ms A.R. Mitchell
Mr I.C. Blayney
Mrs M.H. Roberts (Co-opted Member)**

Hearing commenced at 9.06 am**STOREY, MR JOHN****Farmer, examined:****STOREY, MRS ANN-MARIE****Farmer, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Before we commence today, could I ask those in the public gallery to refrain from using audio recording devices as it might interfere with Hansard. Also, please switch mobile phones to silent.

Thank you for your appearance before the committee today. This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament.

Before we commence, there are a number of procedural questions I need you to answer. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions relating to your appearance before the committee today?

Mr Storey: No, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much for your submission. It was a large one and a good contribution. Do you propose any amendments to your submission at this time?

Mr Storey: No, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we ask any questions, do you wish to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Storey: Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Note that my first question was: can you tell us your involvement with RacingThePlanet from 2010 through to now; your interaction with the two races and whatnot? I know you have done it in your submission to a large extent but if you could get a chronology and description of that.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I am the member for Geraldton and Mick is the member for Collie–Preston. Both of us have to be at Anzac services first thing tomorrow morning so we will actually have to leave at about 10 to 10 to catch flights back to Perth to our own electorates. We are not leaving for any other reason; we would actually prefer to be here for the day, but unfortunately Anzac Day takes priority in our electorates. I am just apologising if I may leave before that.

Mr Storey: Thank you, sir. I understand.

My opening statement might cover some of that. I have lived in Kununurra for 32 years and over that time have walked this country extensively and guided many wilderness treks. For the past 17 years I have worked for a company, Outback Initiatives, training Ghurkha police in these ranges. This includes the logistics of planning these exercises. My involvement with RacingThePlanet in 2010 was on a voluntary basis. My wife was competing in the event and many runners were raising money for charity. I was happy to assist with my time and knowledge. I found RacingThePlanet to be meticulous in the setting of the course, with course director Carlos Garcia traversing every inch of the 250 kilometres on the ground to ensure safe passage for the participants. I also carried out the area briefings each morning. I was not involved with the planning or running of the 2011 event, as originally we were not going to be in Kununurra at this time. Medical issues found us here and I merely took Carlos up in the gyro on two occasions for him to have a look at the two off-road sections. Our flight to Emma Gorge on the morning of the second was purely us joining in the spirit of the event with friends. We only became involved with the day's events because of our values and sense of care, when we saw the danger in the morning and again in the afternoon, helping the ambulance into the accident site.

Prior to the race I had advised the shire president, Fred Mills, by email and by word of mouth of the fires. Mr Jack Trust, elder and leader of the Wuggubun community, also told me that they had rung FESA for help when the fires threatened the community on 29 August, and help was refused. I have maps and photos to show you where these fires started, what we saw on that day, and how, without my full message being conveyed, local volunteer Scott Connell, when he advised RacingThePlanet, could not possibly have known where the fire was. The photos will also show that any fire could easily be seen by runners before entering the valley. Statements show that the fire was seen by a group but they continued on towards the fire, upwind of them. No-one could have predicted the wind changes that occurred that day and what would happen. These winds also surprised us as we always check weather predictions before flying.

The CHAIRMAN: In 2010, what was your involvement with the RacingThePlanet race at that time?

Mr Storey: In finding and helping Carlos set a course. They did not know the area at all. WA Tourism had contacted me and put us in touch, and asked if we could help them find a course. My first reaction was no, it cannot be done. They had been up here taking photos of the gorges and ranges, and the country, knowing they were going to cover 40 kilometres a day through those ranges, we cannot get more than three or four kilometres a day. Anyway, it was a challenge. I learnt more about the company and what was going on, so I took it on. We used a lot of the open country to get the 40 kilometres in. Carlos Garcia, the racing director, came over, and so did Mary and Alistair. They actually ran through the gorge in Cockburn Range where part of the course was and started to realise what we had been telling them about the area. From there, I helped Carlos set the course. My other involvement was on the day, or the day before, Mary asked me to also do a briefing to the runners after the doctors had done their briefing, and each morning before each section I would brief them again on what to expect on that section of the course.

The CHAIRMAN: At any time in 2010—because they are new to the area and you were not—did they ask you what the risks were; fire, snakes, falls, all those sorts of things?

Mr Storey: Yes, we covered all that. In 2010 there was no fire. Again, at the briefing before the start of the race, we covered all that as well. Of course there were the constant questions about snakes and crocodiles. But I stressed on everybody over and over again, “Forget about them; your biggest enemy is dehydration” and went through what to look for and what to do. Warned them about the rocks and twisting an ankle and that sort of thing. There was plenty of water out there. Told them to drink in the creeks, get in the creeks, cool off. They were well informed.

The CHAIRMAN: They did have some dehydration issues in that race. We saw the reports. Why was that? Was it just the nature of the place and race?

Mr Storey: Could my wife answer that; she saw firsthand?

The CHAIRMAN: You experienced it firsthand?

Mrs Storey: I was a competitor in that race, and I walked the whole lot. I came on that first day, which was the worst day. I came through from the back. Really what I saw out there was basically human error and mismanagement on the part of the competitors. The competitors out there simply did not drink enough. They did not drink early enough. They did not use the creeks to refill their bottles. They did not cool themselves in it. They basically poorly managed themselves. It was not that there was not sufficient water; there was plenty of water out there at every checkpoint. There was water between checkpoints 1, 2 and 3. It is simply that people did not avail themselves of it. When you jump off a plane the day before a race like this from a cooler climate, no time to acclimatise, and you couple that with stupid decisions, the rate of dehydration I expect that. It was competitor choice really.

The CHAIRMAN: RacingThePlanet has held races around the world in different environments, including the Gobi Desert. I have never been there but I imagine it is a challenge—both heat and cold. They are used to at least advising their participants on very tough conditions. Did RacingThePlanet in your view adequately advise or nag their persistence on what to do?

Mrs Storey: Yes, they did. We received copious amounts of written material months leading up to that race.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any of that material?

Mrs Storey: Yes, I probably do, if I dug through the stuff I have at home.

The CHAIRMAN: Could you, because we have not come across any.

Mrs Storey: Quite possibly I would still have it, if I have still got those emails. There was a lot of that. In the pre-race briefing the day before the race, it was emphasised so much, and every day before the race competitors were told that there were creeks out there; the water is completely safe to drink. Throw it over your head, throw it over your shirt; get in it. It took two to three days and they finally learnt. They were wallowing in the water at that point because they knew they had to do because of what happened. I am a firm believer—I said it from the day I walked out of that—that is poor choices and poor mismanagement on the part of the competitors, not the management.

The CHAIRMAN: That was a 40 to 50-kilometre run every day for five days?

Mrs Storey: The first day was about 43 kilometres. We had a 20-kilometre day on day four and then a 100-kilometre day on day five.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you do the whole thing?

Mrs Storey: Yes.

Mr Storey: She did the 100 kilometres in 19 hours non-stop. We were very proud.

The CHAIRMAN: A bit humid at that time of year, too.

Mrs Storey: The first day was a little humid, the second day; but after that the weather switched to what would be normal—much dryer.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you have discussions with RacingThePlanet between the race of 2010 and the preparation for the race of 2011? Were you in constant dialogue with them at all?

Mr Storey: Not about the race, on a friendship basis, because we became close friends; and yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Then they came back and started planning for 2011. When were you introduced to them again about the 2011 race?

Mr Storey: We knew about the 2011 race before they left here because that had been teed up with El Questro. El Questro advised them to hold it in September on that date. To us, it is a hot time of

the year, but that was between them and El Questro. We knew it was on. Of course it had been talked about during friendship get-togethers and that. Other than that, nothing until Carlos arrived to do the course. He arrived on the twenty-sixth to set the course.

The CHAIRMAN: You were not involved in an advisory or otherwise capacity in the risk management strategy?

Mr Storey: None whatsoever.

The CHAIRMAN: They provided a risk management strategy to Tourism WA?

Mr Storey: Sorry, sir?

The CHAIRMAN: RacingThePlanet prepared a risk management strategy for Tourism WA. You were not involved in the preparation of that?

Mr Storey: Nothing whatsoever.

The CHAIRMAN: You did not see it?

Mr Storey: No.

The CHAIRMAN: So the first you actually had discussions with RacingThePlanet for the preparation of the 2011 race was 27 August?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you think they solved the problems they ran into in the first race; that is in 2010?

[9.20 am]

Mr Storey: As Ann said, those problems with dehydration and that were competitor caused. On the second and third day I had been asked to drive many competitors back to town who were pulling out of the race. So many of them said to me, "John, we wish we had listened to you, you were right." That was a competitor problem. The issues with the IV drips were a separate issue. I know they had come with plenty of those this time. The biggest problem in the 2010 race was communications. Of course at that stage, in 2010, I did not know what equipment they had. They did not know what this area was like. This area is incredibly difficult for communications. The Army, in their exercises in 1992, had trouble with communications. The Chinese satellite phones that they had in 2010 let them down. Everywhere else in the world, right across the Gobi, right across the Atacama, they have mobile coverage, whereas they did not here. All your UHF, VHF, HF are line of sight and do not work in those ranges. They learnt that. I know this time they came back better prepared. I do not know what they had, but they did have a lot of satellite phones, and this time good Iridium ones and the Thuraya ones.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I want to ask whether Mrs Storey paid to be a competitor in the 2010 event and whether that was part of some other arrangement?

Mrs Storey: No, I did not pay. I was sponsored.

The CHAIRMAN: Who were you sponsored by?

Mrs Storey: RacingThePlanet.

The CHAIRMAN: On the twenty-seventh you went out with Carlos in your gyro and mapped out the new course for 2011?

Mr Storey: No; not mapped out the new course because they already knew the course. They were using the same course as they did in 2010. Ninety per cent of that is on roads, so there were only two short bush sections. We looked at the first run over here on the Dunham, on that first day, on the twenty-seventh. Then he went and marked the road places and that on the twenty-eighth with

Sam. It was the morning of the twenty-ninth that he asked again if we could fly over the Tier Gorge range to check that out.

The CHAIRMAN: Tier Gorge is very rugged stuff.

Mr Storey: Very.

The CHAIRMAN: When you were flying around on the twenty-ninth, did you see any fires in the area?

Mr Storey: You have moved to Tier Gorge. Could you come back along what they call Dillon Springs Road —

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, we drove Dillon Springs Road.

Mr Storey: You saw that white vehicle there on the side of the road?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes. It has been there for a while, they said.

Mr Storey: Yes. That was not there on the twenty-eighth, on the weekend. When we flew over on the morning of the twenty-ninth, that had suddenly appeared there. There had been some burnt areas to the west of that. Both Carlos and I expressed surprise, “Where did that vehicle come from?” But no fires to be seen, really.

The CHAIRMAN: Then on the day before the race you were out with your gyro again, were you not, kind of looking around—is that what happened?

Mr Storey: On the day?

The CHAIRMAN: The first —

Mr Storey: No, not on the first. It was on the second when we flew out in the morning.

The CHAIRMAN: Were they adequately informed about the risk and nature of fire in the area; that is, RacingThePlanet and their contestants?

Mr Storey: I do not know by whom. We were not privy to who they spoke to or anything like that. The fires on the Dunham side that we saw on the twenty-seventh, which I sent Fred Mills an email on, that was clearly seen from the air. They are not fast-moving fires. They are just grass fires. They trickle along. Carlos could see that. On the twenty-ninth we had flown back over that area and everything had been burnt out. The fire had passed; there was no more danger. Carlos has pictures from Dillon Springs Road looking over at the range—I have it here—on the thirtieth. There is no fire on Dillon Springs Road. It is way back in against the range. It was nowhere near the course when he took that photo on the thirtieth. They did pass small fires on the road on the bus on the way in. I know they queried that with the bus driver, who is a shire councillor, and also queried it with the El Questro rangers. It was just brushed off—nothing to worry about; we live with them every year. But more than that, I do not know, sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Were you at the pre-race briefing?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mrs Storey: No; not the pre-race briefing.

Mr Storey: Sorry, not the pre-race briefing, no.

The CHAIRMAN: The one the day before?

Mr Storey: No.

The CHAIRMAN: You were at a briefing right at the start of the race?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: On the day of the race, we have your evidence that you detected first, some time in the early morning, that there was an increase in fire at the Tier Range area, a larger fire?

Mr Storey: When Mary knew that we were going to fly out, she asked if I would start the race. Because of our involvement the year before, we were glad to do that. Carlos also said, “Could you just have a look on the Dillon Springs Road to see that everything is all right?” We flew that. There was no sign of fire, nothing. The fire was in between those two ranges, well to the west and the south. That was the only smoke we could see. We flew from the Barrels straight across and you could see where the fire had burnt up to the north east edge of the ridge. There was nothing—no sign of smoke, no sign of anything. It had gone out; it had finished. We turned south along Tier Gorge and immediately saw small wisps of smoke in the centre. We flew there. About a kilometre to the south of where they had to come through, there were some spot fires—just small ones on the ground. They were burning on the south side, moving south. Very broken country, gullies and everything. The gullies were green, obviously wet. I did not consider them any danger at all. But as we flew out over checkpoint 2, we saw Carlos coming in. With the radios, all I had said to Sam on the day before was, “What channel are you operating on?” She said, “Channel 1.” Not knowing what radios they would be using, we presumed that it was UHF, just like we use here, so I was on channel 1 on UHF. We saw Carlos drive up—could not get hold of him. We saw him with a handheld trying to get hold of us. Then we saw him run to the car and get the car radio, and of course having flown with me, he knew that we had UHF. When he could not get us on the handheld, he ran to the car and put the car radio on and managed to get us on channel 1. We told him what we had seen and said we did not think there was any danger but just keep an eye on it anyway. He knew where those fires were. We then flew in a direct line from checkpoint 2 to Emma Gorge. While there was some burnt-out country below us, there was no sign of smoke at all. The only smoke that could be seen was well to the south coming out between the two ranges.

The CHAIRMAN: Then you went to Emma Gorge and had coffee?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mrs Storey: Chocolate muffin and coffee.

The CHAIRMAN: You were not running this time!

Mrs Storey: No.

The CHAIRMAN: You two were together, were you not?

Mrs Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: A good idea. I would have been with you on a coffee that day!

Then you took off again. You went over the area.

Mr Storey: We flew back along the road following the runners, just to wave to them and that sort of thing. When we got halfway from Emma back to checkpoint 2, we were blown away. Our actual words to each other were, “Shit! Who has lit up?” That whole country was now alight.

The CHAIRMAN: On the gorge

Mr Storey: Not on the gorge—this side of the gorge.

The CHAIRMAN: Oh really!

Mrs Storey: Well this side of the gorge, about halfway along Gibb River Road, off the road. But we had seen nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a smoulder, flame; nothing. We fly low enough to pick up those pink ribbons on the ground. We have quite good visual. We came back and all of a sudden, “Where the hell has this come from?” There is the fire, a pile of rocks, quite a distinct landmark.

[9.30 am]

Mr Storey: But it was all on this west side. There was no danger to the runners from that.

Mrs Storey: That is quite a few kilometres; lots of kilometres from there.

Mr Storey: As well, we could see well to the south and west, and the fire was quite extensive down that side.

The CHAIRMAN: I get my north–south–west wrong! You were coming back from Emma Gorge and you started seeing the fires between checkpoint 1 and checkpoint 2?

Mrs Storey: No. Between Emma and checkpoint 1 was the first lot.

Mr Storey: That rock that Carlos took the photo from was after checkpoint 1. You see where that red dot is, “fire observed”, in that area and going right south. See where the big gorge is between the two ranges?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr Storey: And well to the south of that. So that whole country was now alight.

The CHAIRMAN: They had gone through that area?

Mr Storey: No.

The CHAIRMAN: They were still going to checkpoint 1?

Mrs Storey: Yes. When we got there, they were just rounding checkpoint 1. The fastest runner was on his way to checkpoint 2.

Mr Storey: You see where the track goes from Gibb River Road to checkpoint 2?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr Storey: All that fire was on the west side. It had been fine. That was not any danger.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you contact Carlos and say, “Listen, the fire has picked up”?

Mrs Storey: We flew virtually to checkpoint 1 and headed straight into where we saw those spot fires, because we wanted to know what had happened to them. We had flown straight to those spot fires and they had extinguished.

Mr Storey: Just like we had suspected, they had gone out. There were no worries. There was no danger there at all.

Mrs Storey: At that time we had also spoken to the media chopper that was in the area. He had made us aware of his presence there so that we knew.

Mr Storey: If you look at checkpoint 2 where the course takes a right-angle turn to the north, we were a kilometre south of that. We then turned to the north. As soon as we turned to the north, we saw the fire coming around the north east end of that range. We are looking at about five kilometres away. The helicopter was in the air in front of us as well. We immediately flew north around the end of that range. The fire had flared up on the north east side. It was then that we tried to get hold of checkpoint 2. Again, not knowing the different radios, we could not raise them on channel 1. That was when I radioed the helicopter and said, “We can’t get them; please land and tell them that the fire has flared up. He is coming over the range and it will be on them in two hours.”

[9.33 am]

The CHAIRMAN: That was a severe warning; in your view, that was a danger to the runners.

Mr Storey: I repeated it twice, and the pilot acknowledged it.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the problems was that the pilot was working for the photographer, not RacingThePlanet.

Mr Storey: It had been arranged with Heliwork that that chopper would be the emergency chopper. Apparently, from what I understand, Heliwork had advised Mary that it was pointless having a chopper costing \$1 300 an hour for 40 hours just sitting in town. That chopper was going to be on

site out there and could be swung into action as an emergency chopper immediately. That had been arranged with Heliwork.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you not think as an experienced person around here that the lack of communication between you and others with RacingThePlanet was a bit of a worry? You had a bit of a problem in 2010 so they had a trial run, if you like. They had com problems then and they had com problems here. It was not just you. A whole range of people had communication problems and could not communicate what was going on on the course, either to the emergency services or to each other. In your case, you saw a danger coming up in the path of the runners and you could not get it to them directly. You could not get it. You had to transfer it through a second party, which you do not know; as often in communications they get filtered.

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Was that not a severe problem with the organisation of RacingThePlanet?

Mr Storey: That I cannot speak for because —

The CHAIRMAN: Not on their behalf. As an expert in this area—it is a difficult issue—you stated right from the front that communications are difficult here.

Mr Storey: Yes. We always have difficulty. We have had difficulty a number of times with our groups getting satellite contact with Iridium phones; it is not just Thuraya. The Ghurkhas are out there at the moment and Colin has had problems twice in the last few days getting contact. It is a problem in this area. What I would have done and when in 2010 they went through the gorge in the Cockburns, I organised the communications on that day, and I put three of the LQ Rangers at strategic points on high points so we had line of sight with the radios. That worked well but we still had a few problems. Had it been me, I would have put people with radios on high points where you had line of sight for the radios.

The CHAIRMAN: For the UHF?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have hand-held UHFs?

Mr Storey: No, just UHF in the gyro.

The CHAIRMAN: No; I mean, did they have hand-held UHFs?

Mr Storey: No, they had VHF's.

Mrs Storey: No. We learnt later that they are actually VHF's.

Mr Storey: That is why we could not get them on channel 1. We did not know that at the time though.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: So these VHF radios, they had brought in with them presumably?

Mrs Storey: No, they were VHF and they used them in all their other races, yes, and they did bring them in.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: So that they brought them into Australia. Do you know if they conformed with the Australian licensing requirements?

Mr Storey: I do not, Sir, no.

The CHAIRMAN: Some do, some do not. I use them on a boat. Some do, some do not.

Mr Storey: As I say, if we had anything to do with the actual organising of everything, I would have inquired and checked on all that. But as we did not, my only question to Sam on the day before, because we were flying out there, was just: what channel are you on?

Mrs Storey: There was no reason, not being involved in the organisation, for us to know the channel for their communication. The only reason we got into contact with Carlos that morning was he was cluey enough to work out that the car radio might get us.

The CHAIRMAN: But you were involved with the Ghurkhas and others organising events. Is it not one of the necessary things you do if you are going to go out in that country, especially if you are going out in groups and dispersing—you work on your coms; you figure out how you are going to communicate with each other? Is that not a necessary part of the organisation of the race?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And so just from outside observing, it was a fault of the organisation.

Mr Storey: Yes. We train with the radios with the Ghurkhas before we go out. In the early days we used big bulky HF radios and I had the base at home. That could let us down sometimes. Then we went to the satellite phones. It is the Iridium satellite phones, and even though we train with them, we can still be let down. Overhangs, cliffs, trees, smoke and weather, which will all affect it and you often have to get up onto a high point. We have been out in our groups and had trouble sometimes. There has never been an emergency but we have needed to call Heliwork to tell them where to pick us up and that, and we have had trouble getting through and have had to wait until the next day or a part of the night. So they are not infallible.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you try to call them on the Iridium phone?

[9.40 am]

Mr Storey: We did not have their numbers. After we then saw the chopper start to go down, we flew to the checkpoint. We knew Sam had gone to checkpoint 4, so we then flew there trying to get hold of her.

Mrs Storey: We flew there because we thought we might pick Carlos up somewhere on the way. We got to checkpoint 4. Sam saw us and went to the radio. We could not talk to her, so breaking up things.

Mr Storey: So between checkpoint 4 and home we had quite a bit of discussion because we were worried like hell about what might happen. And we were saying to each other, “Look, I saw the chopper start to go down. Surely he would have given them the message.” And we said to each other as well, “You know, we knew the chopper was going to be there in the air.” Ann knew that he had to go at eleven to refuel so that meant he was going to be in the air another hour. And we even said to each other, “Surely he will go down and, you know, warn them if anything is going to happen.” We considered driving out there when we got home, but that would have been another hour, so it would have been one o’clock before we got there. We could not ring because we did not have their sat phone numbers. So, yes, we were concerned about it.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Did you consider FESA or the police or anyone else?

Mr Storey: No, because we saw the chopper start to go down. We trusted that that message had been given correctly.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think FESA knew the race was going on that day?

Mr Storey: Oh, they knew.

The CHAIRMAN: How do you think they knew?

Mr Storey: Because Nadia told them.

The CHAIRMAN: Nadia who?

Mr Storey: Donnelly, from the tourist bureau.

The CHAIRMAN: So she told them. Do you think they should have been involved, been aware of and attuned to and participated in the warning or response to that fire? It did creep up very quickly.

Mr Storey: Our training and the way we work, it does not matter what forms have been filled out or who has been told, there is a duty of care. And just like we saw something unfolding, we tried to do something about it. If anybody, especially a government department, perceived any danger, surely they would do something about it.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes. So you are confident that FESA knew there was a race going on.

Mr Storey: I had an email from Nadia on it.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you remember the day that that went out? Could you provide us a copy of that email?

Mr Storey: No, but I have it here, Sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Could you on your gyro communicate with St John's or FESA or the police?

Mr Storey: No. If we were on the right channels and that on UHF, we could, yes. But when we got back there in the afternoon and saw the ambulance and the two four-wheel drives at the Barrels, we tried calling them, still on channel 1.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you do a roam on your UHF? Sometimes on mine it roams and finds them.

Mr Storey: Scans, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Scans, yes.

Mr Storey: We can, but it was not set up for that, and I am flying and trying to adjust radios.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, you had other things to think about.

Mr Storey: Yes. We did try a few other channels on the way out.

Mrs Storey: We did try 10 because when we were flying at the point we were trying to show them the way in, because on the ground you cannot see the track with all those rivulets. And we could see it clearly from the air, so we overflew them and I was waving my arms this way, this way. During that process, John said, "Flick it to 10" and see what. So we did flick to 10 and we tried to call them but we got no response. We tried a couple of times again. We tried several times while we were flying around there on 1 and on 10 to get hold of these people.

The CHAIRMAN: Do they have a common emergency channel? On VHF in Perth it is 16.

Mrs Storey: Yes, 16, it is the same. I have not heard of one on UHF as such.

Mr Storey: It is channel 9.

Mrs Storey: At one point I did hear Brandee's voice come across the radio.

The CHAIRMAN: Whose?

Mrs Storey: Brandee's.

Mr Storey: Dr Waite.

Mrs Storey: Dr Waite, yes.

Mr Storey: But that was before we got to checkpoint 3.

Mrs Storey: No, no. That was when I was flying around in circles waving at them.

Mr Storey: Was it?

Mrs Storey: That is when I heard them anyway. I tried to call; again, absolutely no response. I mean they are not 100 foot under us or something. So, no, we could never raise them. We believe afterwards they actually were using UHF channel 10 but we could not raise them.

The CHAIRMAN: In the pre-race organisation, would it have been appropriate to say what com they have and have a schedule: "We use UHF, here is our gear out there. You go out and test it"? For instance, they had the satellite phones and they had, we understand, international numbers on it,

which meant you had to put in a bloody lot of numbers, unless you had the memory in it, and that is hard to do by itself. So we understand that they were using Iridium phones, some from overseas, some and others; and a lot of the other services did not know the numbers and had a hard time. They did not get the prefixes—that is it—so someone had to randomly guess at the prefixes—Hong Kong or otherwise. So there appears to be a lack of preparation for the communications on the track on the day.

Mrs Storey: Can I just before John answers? Just inadvertently because I happened to be standing around at the start of the race just waiting for things to happen, I saw Sam give a sat phone to one of the tail-end Charlies, the volunteers that follow-up the last runners, the safety-sweeper type thing. I saw her give her the phone. There was also a card with all the numbers on it that related to all the other checkpoints and whatever. And I also saw her actually ring and check that the number was good at that point in time, so that everything was. In regard to that bit about the length of numbers and things, that is very much an Iridium thing—the older Iridium phones. I do not think it is so much these days. You always had to ring the international code right through. If I was 10 kilometres down the road, I would still have to ring that international number. It did not matter that they had come from overseas; it is the same thing.

The CHAIRMAN: It is like 12 digits.

Mrs Storey: Yes, it is a shocker. Most of them are not like that now but it does still exist.

The CHAIRMAN: So it does not matter very much whether the phones are overseas or otherwise, they would still go up into the existing —

Mrs Storey: All our Australian phones when I was first studying using satellite had 618, da, da, da, da. It did not matter.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Just to follow on, there are two questions I would like to ask. One is about in the earlier part when you first saw the fires and there may have been some, in your view, human element where those fires were lit. Did they follow a particular track or something like that that you could identify from the air saying they were the fires that burnt off, if someone has driven along this route or sparked something up?

Mr Storey: No, not like that. The CSIRO sentinel hot sites will show only the fires showing up on the twenty-ninth. But they do not pick up everything; they will only pick up a large area or a very hot fire. I have got the printouts here, Sir, but Carlos has a photo on the thirtieth of it going up that range and the sentinel site does not show it at all.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It was not as if someone drove along a particular track and lit the track as they were going along?

Mr Storey: No. Well, on the east side, no. On the other side, on the west side where we saw it all start up that morning, yes, that is possible to do. Yes, there are tracks in there.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: And the other one is about communication. We have heard from other witnesses that there were some problems with language, about some people not being greatly versed in the English language. Do you think that contributed at all or may be some of the problem?

Mr Storey: Well, I do not know who they are talking about but everybody spoke perfect English—RacingThePlanet.

Mrs Storey: But the few people we came into contact with which were the senior management, none of them had problems with the English language.

The CHAIRMAN: On the day after you went in, you flew over checkpoint 4 and tried to flag Sam and you could not get to her. You then went home for a while, right?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: But then you came back and you flew over the area and saw there was something wrong, saw emergency assets on the ground, right?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay, and then you flew up. How long did you stick around there?

[9.50 am]

Mr Storey: We probably got there—yes, we did, we got there at four.

Mrs Storey: I think after that.

Mr Storey: No, I have got it in my notes. We got there at four and immediately saw the country had been burnt through at the end of the gorge. We saw the ambulance, two ambulances, and the four-wheel drive on the ground and realised that something had happened. So we flew immediately to the end of the gorge, could not see anything, could not see anybody, flew around to the other side of checkpoint 2, saw that it had burnt out, flew back to the Gibb River Road looking for people—nothing. We wondered what was going on because we should have seen people; flew back to the Barrels, so that was 15 minutes, and then we saw the vehicles starting to make their way across country, realised that something was wrong. We then flew back to the end of the gorge, flew up the gorge and found the four-wheel drive that Andrea had taken in—her own—there below the hill and the helicopter had landed to the west well away in the creek.

The CHAIRMAN: Was that the filming helicopter?

Mr Storey: Yes. Looking at the area and the time, because we were now about 20 past four, we realised that they would be battling. We did not know what had happened at this stage, but we realised that there was an ambulance trying to get in; they probably would not get there before dark because of the terrain and that and they cannot see from the ground, so we made a decision we would help and we flew down and—

The CHAIRMAN: You landed there?

Mr Storey: No, no, we could not land. We were just coming down in front of them and had to guide them up the hill, guide them around, guide them through gullies. So it took quite a while. We were starting to worry at this stage because we were low on light, and got them in there and then really had to beat it for home, but then found the police vehicle coming in. So we did some quick calculations on light and fuel and got him in enough that he could get there and then went for home. And, yes, it was touch and go. We did not get back until dark and we do not have landing lights or anything. But that was our choice; we took that risk to help people get in.

Mrs Storey: It was at that point that we were guiding the police in that the other helicopter came in and saw it come down.

The CHAIRMAN: The rescue helicopter?

Mrs Storey: The rescue helicopter, and he spoke to us and asked us to stand clear because he knew we were in the area, which we did, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: He did a remarkable job then.

Mrs Storey: Yes—very lucky.

Mr Storey: Yes. Paul Cripps has flown for us before and he is a good pilot.

Mrs Storey: He is a good pilot, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: They had a young guy, Bryn, who actually was a paramedic.

Mrs Storey: Paramedic with him, yes, and very fortunate on the day that he was available.

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And then you flew away; you had to go home.

Mrs Storey: Yes, we had to go home.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you follow-up with the issue on that day any further?

Mrs Storey: We went into town because we knew where the finish was. By the time we sort of got to Celebrity Tree Park where it finished, they were just coming in; like a couple of volunteers were coming in with the gear to set up. And of course really the message had certainly not come out that end of the course. I think the first we started to get some detail of how serious the injury was was when the media guys came in. There were some there with a camera, and they were able to, I guess, enlighten us a bit about the fact that someone was seriously burnt and that sort of thing. But to that point, we had no idea.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you surprised at what happened?

Mr Storey: Yes, very.

The CHAIRMAN: I mean, you know things can happen out there in terms of fire and you know the risk better than I do, but do you think there were errors involved, not errors in that you can avoid errors, in your view?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: By whom?

Mr Storey: The runners. Of course the message in the first place. And advice from the media person that went over to receive the message was a local girl, Vicky Biorac. The chopper pilot was on the other side of the creek. He shouted it over. And the message that Vicky says she got was that there is a fire coming and it may be here in a couple of hours, or in two hours. So that is the message that she gave and was given to Carlos when he arrived.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Who did Vicky get that message from? From the pilot of the other —

Mrs Storey: The pilot of the chopper; the media chopper pilot.

Mr Storey: Yes, the first chopper.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The media chopper. So you spoke to the media chopper pilot?

Mrs Storey: He has landed.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: He has landed.

Mrs Storey: He shouted across the creek with the chopper in the background to Vicky, and then Vicky has conveyed the message to us.

The CHAIRMAN: But you cannot rely on that, especially with choppers —

Mr Storey: No. When Carlos and Scotty got there, the message was given to them. And Carlos is just paranoid about safety and he was very worried at the time. But they looked around and all to the west of them and to the south is burnt, and where the chopper landed and that side where I had told Carlos the fires were, there was no smoke; it was all burnt. And where they were at checkpoint 2, you cannot not see the smoke to the north east; there was no chance.

The CHAIRMAN: So you could not see the smoke from the Barrels.

Mr Storey: No, we are not at the Barrels; we are at checkpoint 2.

The CHAIRMAN: At checkpoint 2, okay.

Mrs Storey: Yes. They were obstructed by a range on that side and the other side was completely burnt out.

Mr Storey: So Carlos said, "Where's the fire. Where's the fire?" And Scotty, the local fellow, was party to the advice to them, "Well, it can't be here. That's burnt out. That's burnt out. You know, it

can't be here." And it was only when they later went around to the north end and saw it that they realised what was happening.

The CHAIRMAN: When was that? When did Carlos go around?

Mr Storey: I can only go by their statements and their time lines.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Why is it, do you think, that the media chopper did not go and check it out straight away?

Mr Storey: I do not know. You know, that question could probably be answered with what happened when Carlos got hold of the media chopper on the ground and told him that there was an emergency, people were trapped in there and somebody might have been burnt, and the chopper pilot turned around to him and said, "Who's going to pay?" And Carlos lost it. He screamed at him, "I'll pay. Get that chopper in the air now!"

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: And then, I mean based on bits of reports I have seen, it seems that the media chopper went elsewhere and filmed other things rather than checked out the fire at that stage.

Mr Storey: Well, yes.

Mrs Storey: All I knew, because I spoke to them, I walked over to the gyro—this is all before the start of the race—because the wind had whipped up to put a cover over the head of it. And the pilot was over there with his helicopter—landed in the same area—and I was speaking to him. I was talking to him to find out where he would be, so he told me that they would be out there and they had to refuel at 11 o'clock. From the time we left, which was about 10.40ish —

Mr Storey: No, it was about quarter past 10.

Mrs Storey: About quarter past 10, until 11 he would be in that area because that is where the runners would be.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: So then how long would it take him to refuel and get back to the course?

Mrs Storey: I do not believe they were coming back until about one o'clock, if I remember rightly. They were lifting off again at one o'clock.

Mr Storey: Scheduled.

Mrs Storey: A scheduled lift-off, yes; in time for him to rest and that sort of thing.

The CHAIRMAN: Carlos got around the north east corner about 12.30, right, according to our records? He then would have seen the smoke trapped in the valley.

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Could he not have contacted the chopper and said, "Go up there and see what is up there"?

Mr Storey: I do not know. I suppose he could have, yes. I do not know what decisions were made except from what he told us that his immediate concern was, because of what has happened in other races with runners getting lost, even though the trail is well marked, that the markers had been burnt, just like they had been in Dillon Springs Road earlier on, and people could get lost in there. That is why he sent Lon Croot in immediately with the GPS.

The CHAIRMAN: Carlos would have left checkpoint 2, gone around to the north east corner, had heard about the fires in the vicinity and could see the smoke, and he could have contacted one of them and said, "Listen!". Do they not have decision points as to from one checkpoint to another: do we proceed and under what conditions? That is what those checkpoints are there for—to stop, refuel, water, cool down and make a decision to go ahead to the next stage, knowing that that is a tricky stage because there are a lot of rocks and tough terrain.

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: We are just trying to put this scenario together. But he would come around there. No, you warned him about fire two hours and an hour plus had elapsed during that period of time between when you talked to him and 12.30; that is a good hour and a half. And then he could see the smoke up the valley and he could have controlled people leaving at checkpoint 2.

[10.00 am]

Mr Storey: I do not know that you could say you could see smoke up the valley. There was smoke across the end of the valley. But yes, you know, I suppose any of that is quite —

The CHAIRMAN: Could he have communicated with checkpoint 2 if he was going towards the Barrels?

Mr Storey: He should have been able to, but I do not know. I know he had the hand-held and I presume he had —

Mrs Storey: The hand-helds did not work, so certainly not the radio.

Mr Storey: But, Sir, you have what could have been done and what the thought pattern was—unknown to us, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Let us go back to the start of this thing. Do you think RacingThePlanet should have gone through the local emergency management committee? You know that exists, right? They have the shire convenes with the police and all other emergency services.

Mr Storey: LEMC?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, LEMC. Should they have gone through or been forced in some way to go through if they did not know about it?

Mr Storey: I do not know.

The CHAIRMAN: I mean you as an expert. I am not saying that —

Mr Storey: Yes, but things have changed with regulations and requirements and committees. I have been out of that side. I do not know what is in existence at the moment and what forms you are supposed to fill in and what you are supposed to do. I do not even know that people are supposed to go through there. I know with the annual dam-to-dam race, they have to fill out a form for the shire and advise the shire what was done. But I do not think LEMC; I do not know.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: It is not a requirement.

Mr Storey: No.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: It depends on the land tenure of where you are going through.

Mrs Storey: In 2010 they had a contact here, and they employed someone, I guess, to do all of that sort of stuff.

Mr Storey: And advise them.

Mrs Storey: And advise them. She actually withdrew sometime prior to the race, so they lost that contact. So, I have no idea what they were advised. But I do not believe—well, to my knowledge they did not have to go through LEMC.

The CHAIRMAN: They did not have to, no.

Mrs Storey: Yes, or advise anybody else for that race.

The CHAIRMAN: But then my point is: requirement no, but should they?

Mrs Storey: I do not know.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: You are really asking would it be desirable for them to rather than —

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: So it is a further question rather than past.

Mr Storey: I think, you know, that everything has been so fragmented, there should be a central coordination with these sorts of things, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: The person you referred to, was that Ms Clifford?

Mrs Storey: I do not —

The CHAIRMAN: Jaye Clifford.

Mrs Storey: Yes, Jaye.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Mr Storey, you indicated in your report that RacingThePlanet had sent all the details of the race to a lady at the shire. I think it was Christine.

Mr Storey: Yes.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: How do you know that?

Mr Storey: Because I asked Sam whether had she done that.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: So you do not know the details of what was actually submitted to the shire?

Mr Storey: No, we do not, but it was one of the questions I asked her.

The CHAIRMAN: Just to get some details, you have said on page 2 of your police statement that you sent an email to Mr Fred Mills on 27 August advising him of fires in Dunham Valley. Do you have a copy of this email?

Mr Storey: I do, Sir.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have a copy of that? We could get it later, if you wish.

Mr Storey: Okay; that is okay.

The CHAIRMAN: What specifically did you tell Mr Mills and did you request him to do anything about the fires?

Mr Storey: No, I did not request him to do anything about the fires. You will see from my email to him it is rather sarcastic and to the point. We have dealt so many times with the shire and that over the years about fires being allowed to continue to burn and not being suppressed. And Fred himself, too, has tried so much as shire president to get funding because the shire wanted to suppress them but FESA will not give them the funding, and it is just an ongoing battle. I cannot tell Fred what to do; I can only, you know, let him know. And, again, over coffee on the Wednesday, I let him know of the elements on the other side, and he knows what the requirements are and what needs to be done. About four years ago, before Peter Stubbs resigned as CEO, he wrote to FESA and tried to get \$350 000 for aerial suppression and was refused. So the shire has made every effort to get funding from FESA for fire suppression. But I know Mr Mills is appearing here; you would need to ask him more about that.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes; next.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Mr Storey, can I go back to the information that RacingThePlanet provided to Christine at the shire? I know you said that you do not know what the detail of that was. When you asked RacingThePlanet if they had informed the shire, did you speak with her before or after the event?

Mr Storey: No, that was only after the event.

Mrs Storey: It was only about a week or two ago.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: A week or two ago?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Ms A.R. MITCHELL: Why would you ask them that then?

Mr Storey: Because I wanted to be clear in my mind about things before coming before you, Ma'am.

The CHAIRMAN: When you had a discussion with Mr Mills, did you refer to the fire and its proximity to the prospective course?

Mr Storey: Oh, yes, I told him. This is when we had coffee?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr Storey: Yes, I told him that Carlos had told me that the fire had burnt out the flags on part of the Dillon Springs Road, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay, two things: he is the shire president at the time?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: He would have known, one, that there had been a fire out there and that there was a race coming through that area in the vicinity of the fire.

Mr Storey: Oh, yes.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I just want to clarify some earlier matters. I think you said you were engaged by RacingThePlanet in 2010 to advise them and so forth. I was just going to enquire as to whether that involved financial consideration. Then you further said that you were not going to be here in 2011 so that you were not engaged by them in 2011 in the lead-up to that race because you originally were not going to be here.

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: And then it turned out you were here. I think you have said that you took Carlos up on two occasions to assist with him being able to mark the course. So, I am wondering whether you were engaged financially to do that and whether that was the extent of your engagement by RacingThePlanet, or if you were engaged by them to do anything else during the lead-up to 2011 or post 2011.

Mr Storey: No, not at all. Carlos loves flying and it makes it a lot easier for him to see the course below. I love flying and I got on well with Carlos because he is meticulous about details, like I am, and Carlos helped with the cost of the fuel. He gave me money for the fuel, but that is all. With the Gyro, you are not allowed to use it commercially or charge for anything. So, friends that we take up and that, they just contribute to the fuel.

The CHAIRMAN: In 2010, what was your role again?

Mr Storey: Originally, they had offered me money for it and I said no, and I guess that was why they then turned around and sponsored Ann and allowed her —

The CHAIRMAN: Allowed her to run 250 kilometres!

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mrs Storey: I volunteered actually.

Mr Storey: But my original role was to find a course and advise on that. It was not until they got here for that race that she then asked me to do the briefing and give the competitors first-hand information and knowledge of the country.

[10.10 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Were you paid for that service?

Mr Storey: No.

The CHAIRMAN: The department of Tourism WA for the 2010 race gave RacingThePlanet your name and some other person.

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And they contacted you because of that; that is how they got in touch with you, right?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And that was to get a local to advise them on a range of local acclimatisation of the issues, but they did not hire you or give you a brief or otherwise to be an integral part of the planning process for the race and the safety aspects of it?

Mr Storey: No, not at all.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think they should have, or did you think they were competent enough to learn and adjust to the local conditions in terms of their safety procedures?

Mr Storey: All right. First, I will not work with anybody that is blasé about anything, and I had no trouble with working with Carlos and them right from the word go because of their attention to detail. They have had great experience doing this all over the world, and the logistics of doing that sort of thing is huge. At the beginning I would not say they did not listen but they did not believe when we said about the rocks and the conditions and that sort of thing. It was on their second visit up here, and flying over Mary had logged that gorge in the centre of the Cockburns, and it is only seven kilometres through there and they want to do 40 kilometres a day, and I said, “You’ve got no hope.” Carlos, his wife and Alistair decided to run it this day, and we dropped them off at six in the morning and we were to meet them on the other side —

The CHAIRMAN: They were doing a practice run.

Mrs Storey: Yes, to see if it is possible.

Mr Storey: And we were to meet them on the other side in the afternoon. Well, they did not get out until seven o’clock that night, and they were so exhausted. And he said, “John, now I know what you mean.” So that is when it was changed that it would only be a 15 kilometre day or something and they would camp in the middle of the gorge that night, Because it was such beautiful country, they wanted to go through it.

The CHAIRMAN: What month of 2010 was that?

Mrs Storey: What month was the race?

The CHAIRMAN: Of that practice run?

Mrs Storey: August the year before.

Mr Storey: August 2009.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. So they came out and scoped out the area?

Mr Storey: Oh, yes.

Mrs Storey: Yes, we spent a bit of time with them then.

The CHAIRMAN: What is “a bit of time”?

Mrs Storey: John had already sent out a pre-map and they wanted to see these areas and things. They learnt from that trip about water, much more so about water and the terrain, and we said to them, “You can’t run this stuff at night; it’s too dangerous”, and they learnt that as well first hand.

Mr Storey: That 100 kilometre section goes through the night, so there are a lot of logistics with it. These are things we told them: it is way too dangerous to have anybody out in that country at night.

Mrs Storey: The rock country even.

Mr Storey: So that is why we had to change the whole route and use the road that runs around the Cockburn range so that that was safe.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: When the 2011 event was advertised, indeed some of the runners have said when they showed up for the 2011 event they still believed that the race was going to be from Kununurra to Emma Gorge but at some stage there was a decision taken to reverse the course. So I am wondering if you know anything about that; and at some point it would appear from some evidence we got yesterday that the decision was made before mid-August to reverse what was originally advertised.

My other question is, because you have said that you helped Carlos view the potential course for 2011 and that he was going to be marking it out with pink ribbon and so forth, there are also reports of sections of the pink ribbon being burnt out or burnt the day before the race. So the day before the race there were sections where pink ribbon was being replaced or put to another location. I would ask if you anything about that because potentially the course had changed in part.

Mr Storey: All right, the first part of your question, I do know what was advertised. We were not going on the site or anything, but I do know, speaking to Carlos in January—we were together on a friendship basis then and talked about the course—and it was talked about from going from Emma to Kununurra. Because a lot of these runners, just like in 2010, were flying the day before and they were on the plane the next day out—no hanging around. And it was the same with that, so it was to —

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I just asked the question because Kate Sanderson, who was one of the girls who was injured, and two other men, one who I think was a volunteer and one who was a competitor, had booked accommodation at El Questro on the basis that they were going to stay post race and they were going to stay at El Questro and so forth.

Mrs Storey: RacingThePlanet prior to the 2010 race, and I presume also earlier, had posted a map of the course on their site. So I would have thought if they posted a map of the course out there, they would have seen it ran from —

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The start and finish.

Mrs Storey: Yes.

Mr Storey: With your other question about the pink ribbons, the only ones that I knew had got burnt were the ones on the Dillon Springs Road back on the twenty-ninth. Others I do not know about, but because parts of that site had burnt out before, there is every possibility that could have happened, yes, but Carlos —

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: So do you know when the course was first laid when the pink ribbon was first put out for the 2011 race?

Mr Storey: He did the Dillon Springs section on the Sunday afternoon of the twenty-eighth. When he did the rest, I do not know. But this is a common occurrence in all countries. Kids pinch ribbons. In the 2010 race he had to re-mark huge sections up to three times because the cattle were eating the ribbons! I mean, these flags have a piece of wire on them!

The CHAIRMAN: In 2010, did you advise them that they needed to get the emergency services people teed up to at least there was a race on or that you had to learn the local emergency services; because every place you go—these guys are used to going, as you said, around the world—you have to look at the local services and what are there to provide? Did they know who is who in the zoo and how to contact them?

[10.17 am]

Mr Storey: I did not give any direct advice or anything like that, except that Heliwork had the chopper and I was with them at Heliwork when the arrangements were being discussed with the chopper about getting into the gorge and the airlift and that sort of thing, but no.

The CHAIRMAN: Did Tourism WA contact you in respect of RacingThePlanet in 2010 or subsequently?

Mrs Storey: WA Tourism rang John originally to see would it be okay for RTP to bring him. That is the only contact that we had with him.

Mr Storey: That was the only contact.

The CHAIRMAN: There were no expectations of the types of services that you would be providing RacingThePlanet?

Mr Storey: No. They merely contacted us and asked us if we were prepared to help. I said yeah.

The CHAIRMAN: Anything else you want to say?

Mr Storey: Talking about if danger could have been seen, there were a whole set of circumstances that went on that day—if this had happened, that would have been different, that sort of thing. You went into the accident site but not actually through the whole gorge?

The CHAIRMAN: We flew through the gorge.

Mr Storey: You flew through the gorge?

The CHAIRMAN: In the helicopter; yes, we did.

Mr Storey: Down on the ground it is different.

The CHAIRMAN: We went to checkpoint 2 by road. We then drove around to the Barrels and then to Dillon. We flew up from the Barrels through the gorge to checkpoint 2, back to where the accident took place. We whirled around there for a while, so we saw it, but we were not at the accident site on land.

Mr Storey: They are the pictures I sent you a week and a half after the burn. We have some here from last weekend when we went in. As you go through that valley, you get to the high point. You are 80 metres above that valley where the accident occurred. For 250 metres of that track, you have got an uninterrupted view down that valley. The smoke could easily have been seen.

The CHAIRMAN: Coming up the valley, you should have been able to see the smoke coming over the ridge into the valley.

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mrs Storey: Once it had come around that ridge, they would have been able to see it.

The CHAIRMAN: This is coming from checkpoint 2.

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: That is at the apex of the valley and you start going into it. On the right-hand side below the ridge is where the accident happened.

Mrs Storey: Yes.

Mr Storey: No, not below this ridge—it was well further out. It was a kilometre and a quarter out from here.

The CHAIRMAN: Eastward?

Mr Storey: North.

The CHAIRMAN: North east.

Mr Storey: No. Due north, virtually. The valley is a kilometre wide at the point it happened.

The CHAIRMAN: That is good terrain. It was much worse further up the valley.

Mrs Storey: Yes, it is a bit tighter and harder towards it. It is much more open. Everything around here has rock on it—smaller rocks there. As you come straight from the descent to the valley floor, the terrain there is not rocky. It is grass. It is quite smooth for a few hundred metres.

Mr Storey: And the track actually ran—I have got Carlos's coordinates—virtually through the middle of that valley, but they were well over to the right. We are not sure why.

The CHAIRMAN: They ran from the fire. They went down. Some of them walked through, danced through or whatever. The people who were injured got towards the flame wall and then ran back and up the valley, up the hill, up that side.

Mr Storey: That is a photo from the bottom looking up at the ledge where they were caught.

Mrs Storey: Where we believe they were caught. That is where the helicopter landed.

Mr Storey: Where we saw the helicopter.

The CHAIRMAN: Right up there?

Mr Storey: No. To your right, behind that tree in the middle. It is only 39 metres up. You can just see the rocks behind it. That is standing on top of that ledge looking out. You can see the broken tree that they broke to clear for the chopper's rotors.

The CHAIRMAN: Of course when people are confronted with a growing wall of flame coming towards them in that condition, panic is not unexpected.

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: There were some geologists involved in this too. They were Australian geologists working for Telfer. They are used to the bush, and they ran up the hill.

Mr Storey: This photo here, when we were out there a week ago, we actually found—one of the reasons we went back out was to take accurate measurements on our estimates of heights. We were still wondering where this crevice was that was talked about. That is five metres below the ledge where the chopper picked them up. We found a head torch, —

Mrs Storey: Plastic bags —

Mr Storey: — food packages and things like that.

The CHAIRMAN: And shoes?

Mrs Storey: Not shoes, no. It is a torch.

The CHAIRMAN: It is tough country, is it not?

Mr Storey: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: With that, the smoke might have been hotter than usual.

Mrs Storey: Yes. It was a fairly warm day, if I remember rightly.

Mr Storey: From our other pictures you can see where it has gone through the grasslands, ribbons have not even been burnt. But where they were, it is like sitting on top of a burner on the stove. You are on top of the fire.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: People from FESA made some similar comments yesterday. They also commented that it is easy to panic and to get disoriented with smoke and other things.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much for your evidence before the committee, and your submission and the material you provided. It has been a great help. If any questions come up, Tim can get in touch with you. There was one question on notice. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Please make these corrections and return the transcript within 10 working days from the date of the covering letter. If the transcript is not

returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be introduced via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide any additional information or elaborate on a particular point, we encourage you to do so. Please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript. Thanks very much for your evidence.

For those in the public seats, we will adjourn until 10.30 am.

Hearing adjourned at 10.25 am