

BUSH FIRES AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second Reading

Resumed from 9 August.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [12.58 pm]: I rise to make a very brief contribution to the debate in support of the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022. The bill amends sections of the Bush Fires Act 1954 to instate what is recognised as the nationally agreed Australian Fire Danger Rating System—AFDRS—and the corresponding fire behaviour index and thresholds. The feedback that I have had at a local level and from some key stakeholders is that this bill is welcome. We hope that it will be in place in good time and that the communications around these changes will be properly resourced so that it can be properly communicated to the public. From the shadow’s consultation and briefings and the information that we have received as an opposition, I understand that how this bill has been communicated was probably one of the only issues raised by stakeholders, including the Western Australian Local Government Association.

I have had feedback on what the bill does, which is to simplify and update the former McArthur rating system for fire risk categories. It means that going forward we will have in place a system that better informs the community and the state about the risks associated with fire. It is particularly important in this state because the old McArthur model picked up only two different types of fuel types to calculate the fire danger index here in Western Australia: forest and grass. We know that with the varied landscape of Western Australia, it is important that we also consider other fuel loads that feed into the fire danger index. The new model recognises eight different fuel levels.

A good example of how the former system worked and how such issues were missed is the Margaret River fire of 2011. Under the fire danger index, the fuel load was recognised simply as grass as opposed to coastal heath, which has varying challenges; the fire index rating for that fire was just 2 when the challenge was significantly greater. The new system recognises, for example, spinifex in the north of the state, which poses a real risk to property and is a unique challenge. They are important measures. I understand that the challenge will be to ensure that this legislation is adopted and implemented in good time going forward, given that Western Australia is the only state that requires a legislative instrument for making such changes to the fire ratings.

I want to touch on a concern that has been raised at a local level in the City of Busselton. The City of Busselton oversees 16 brigades and 550 volunteers. The area is in a high fire risk zone and the efforts in relation to bushfire mitigation are quite significant. Until last financial year, the cost of the role of the bushfire risk mitigation officer was split 50–50 split between local government and the state government. I appreciate a lot of planning work goes into bushfire mitigation. The mitigation activity fund funds activity, and grants can be applied for under that fund, but there is not state funding for the significant planning activity. Recently, the City of Busselton and the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River worked together with the allocation of a bushfire mitigation officer and have invested in this role to see a reduction in the fuel load across the region. Local governments already invest significantly in roadside burns. They invest in the bushfire risk mitigation officer role, the community and emergency services as well. There is some concern that going forward, local governments will have to take on fully investing in the bushfire mitigation officer role without state government funding support.

That challenge has been raised not only at a local level by the City of Busselton. It has also been recognised by the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River as it tries to tackle the important task of reducing fuel loads. They have shared this responsibility together, but I certainly urge the government and the minister in particular to reconsider cutting funding for that important role of bushfire mitigation officer, appreciating that more costs will be borne by ratepayers given the importance of the role going forward as well. We know that the important consideration here is that the city has more volunteer brigades and volunteers than many other local governments. It also has a significant fuel load that it is challenged with trying to contain, and it has more assets at risk and more hazards that require management than is the case in other local government areas, such as the management of Meelup Regional Park.

We saw recently and earlier this year just what the risk is at Meelup Regional Park. In January this year, there was a significant fire; the Eagle Bay bushfire threatened the Eagle Bay town site, Meelup and Cape Naturaliste. That underlines the significance of the City of Busselton’s investment and the challenges that it faces in the fire mitigation efforts. That fire illustrated and highlighted the great role of our volunteers and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. I think that fire and how that fire was contained illustrated a few things. The fire broke out in early January this year. I understand that over 220 hectares was burnt in that town site area. Residents of the Eagle Bay area and surrounds were awakened in the early hours of the morning by a DFES alert. We saw an incredible effort by volunteers and City of Busselton and DFES officers all working together to contain what was a very significant blaze. I think it was a really good example of how far we have come as a community in these efforts. Quite clearly, our volunteer teams work, and we have seen how well they work on the ground with the DFES officers. That fire was ultimately contained.

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There was so much support from neighbouring businesses, such as Eagle Bay Brewing, Wise Wine and Meelup Farmhouse. An extraordinary effort was undertaken to contain that fire, which was really out of control and was a significant threat. It took an enormous effort, but the outcome in that case was very positive. The great role of the prescribed burning that had been undertaken the season before, as I understand it, was also highlighted—as well as some of the work that had been undertaken in terms of bushfire mitigation and prescribed burns in the Dunsborough area. Effectively, in the words of many fire officers on the ground, this had averted something that could have been much more significant. I think it illustrated a few things such as the great effort of our volunteers, the outstanding effort of our DFES officers, how they worked well together locally in the Capes region and also the importance of ensuring that there is a continued and concerted effort to reduce fuel loads in high fire-risk zones such as in the Capes region. This is exactly why I urge the government to reconsider the cuts to bushfire mitigation funding. I also underline the support for prescribed burning going forward, and the important role that it has in mitigating more serious impacts when fire inevitably strikes a region.

Just in terms of my thanks in relation to that fire, I should also mention FAWNA Inc and Emergency Animal Support Evacuation WA, which also played an important role in supporting the welfare of animals in response to a significant threat to their landscape. I will leave my comments there, and as a member of the opposition I will illustrate that we will also be supportive of this bill going forward.

MS E.J. KELSBIE (Warren–Blackwood) [1.13 pm]: I rise today to contribute to the second reading debate on the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022. The bill forms part of the government’s response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. The royal commission was established in February 2020 in response to the extreme bushfire season of 2019–20 which resulted in loss of life, property, wildlife and environmental destruction. The commission examined coordination, preparedness for, response to and recovery from disasters as well as improving resilience; adapting to changing climatic conditions and mitigating the impact of natural disasters. The inquiry considered the legal framework for commonwealth involvement in responding to national emergencies. The commission’s final report outlined a series of recommendations, and the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022 will ensure WA is able to instate the nationally agreed and consistent Australian Fire Danger Rating System and corresponding fire behaviour index thresholds recommended by the report.

In my electorate of Warren–Blackwood, we unfortunately know the impacts of bushfire all too well. I have never had to pack up my house before, or think about where I am going to take my animals—my cat and my dog—but recently that is exactly what I had to do. I have never been so pleased to hear helicopters and planes flying over Denmark—something I thought I would never say. The community came together—volunteers, staff and local police—to make sure that the town was safe and actually saved. Looking at the photographs now, it brings a bit of a tear to my eye and goosebumps. We came really close. Whilst the fire kicked off in Denmark, it kicked off in Bridgetown as well. Meeting the locals and the volunteer fireys was really emotional. I have actually joined a bush fire brigade as a volunteer ancillary. I have joined the Ocean Beach Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade. I have roped my partner in as well. I would encourage everybody to play their part in our local bush fire brigades. They are always needing more volunteers.

Recent bushfires in Margaret River, Manjimup, Denmark and Bridgetown, as well as others across the great southern and south west, tore through our forests, farms and bushland, putting homes, buildings and lives at risk. We had multiple incidents across Warren–Blackwood and other parts of the state occurring at once. Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner Darren Klemm highlighted that the state had never seen this many emergency warnings at one time. Our emergency services responders were working long days and nights to keep our communities safe. This included volunteers from volunteer bushfire services in the Shires of Denmark, Plantagenet, Bridgetown–Greenbushes, Nannup, Manjimup, Donnybrook–Balingup, Augusta–Margaret River and Boyup Brook. That is pretty much the whole of my electorate. State emergency service volunteers from Bridgetown SES, Denmark SES, Gnowangerup SES, Manjimup SES, Mt Barker SES and Walpole SES also played a part. Local government councillors and staff, police, St John Ambulance, community resource centres and animal welfare organisations all pulled together—as they do across the state when fire hits.

We were lucky enough in Denmark to have a really proactive Country Women’s Association, which made sure everybody was fed and watered. In small towns, locals wear many different hats. The state was on fire, and everybody pitched in to do what they could. I am really proud to share that Edwin Bland, from the Bridgetown Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, is a finalist for this year’s Murray Lang Bush Fire Service Award. This award is the highest individual honour one can receive as a bushfire service volunteer. It is presented to a volunteer who has gone above and beyond what is expected of them and made an exceptional contribution in the last 12 months. I give massive congratulations to Edwin on being selected as a WA Fire and Emergency Services Awards finalist. I wish him the best of luck, and the winners will be announced at the WA FES Awards gala dinner in September.

Just last month I joined Minister Dawson and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services WA Commissioner, Darren Klemm, in Greenbushes to present Talison Lithium with a certificate of distinction. Talison runs its own bush fire brigade to support volunteer emergency services groups in the region. Its staff were among the volunteer

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firefighters who helped bring February's Bridgetown blaze under control. It was amazing to meet the volunteers and hear their stories, and receive some tips on how to make my cottage even further prepared for fires. Talison offered accommodation to emergency response personnel so that they could stay close to the fireground. It provided use of its water cart so fire crews could reload supplies in the field. The Bridgetown blaze was just one of three big bushfires supported by Talison during the recent high threat period.

I am really proud to be part of the McGowan Labor government in continuing to improve the state's ability to respond. We committed \$11 million in this year's budget to secure WA's first large air tanker to be based in WA during bushfire season. From December to March each year, there has never been a large air tanker exclusively for WA, with our state previously relying on available aircraft through the national aerial firefighting centre. I know firsthand that people who were on the ground when these fires were blazing were so thankful that the LAT was available to us and that it came swiftly.

Our government has also committed \$15.9 million to upgrade the Emergency WA website to ensure that critical information is more easily accessible in emergency situations, and \$3.1 million for the bushfire framework review. On the ground, we have made a number of local investments, including in a new Isuzu 4.4 broadacre tanker for the Forest Hill Bush Fire Brigade. I had the absolute pleasure to be on site to hand over that vehicle. To see the pride of the volunteers when they got that new equipment and drove it out of the car park was outstanding. This is a world-class firefighting vehicle that forms part of the McGowan Labor government's \$140 million investment in frontline appliances. It is a primary firefighting appliance for regional firefighting brigades, with the latest safety features to protect our crews. It has a number of new and improved safety features, greater off-road handling and more efficient firefighting capabilities. The state government is not only supplying brigades with new appliances, but also has worked hard to redesign the operational fleet, with input from volunteers who use them. This will ensure that each appliance better meets brigade operational needs and is suited to local conditions and terrain. It is important to our government that the appliances suit the needs of Western Australian firefighters. Additionally, much of the manufacturing can be done in this state.

Earlier this month, we announced the recipients of the mitigation activity fund grants program, or MAF. The program supports local governments through endorsed bushfire risk management plans to treat bushfire risks in their communities. Across Warren-Blackwood, we are supporting the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River through a \$499 000 contribution to undertake 33 treatments, the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes with \$160 850 for 19 treatments, and the Shire of Manjimup with \$289 320 to complete 36 treatments. In the 2021-22 round 2 allocation announced in November last year, we committed \$202 450 to enable the Shire of Nannup to undertake 14 treatments. This is a great program. All local governments are eligible to apply for a grant once they have a bushfire risk mitigation plan endorsed by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' Office of Bushfire Risk Management. The activities undertaken by local governments through the MAF include building firebreaks, reducing fuel loads and carrying out hazard reduction burns, making our communities safer from, and more resilient to, bushfire. The latest MAF funding announcements are on top of the water tank funding that was provided last year. The Warren-Blackwood bush fire brigades in Porongurup, Kendenup, Smith Brook, Alexander, Kudardup and Wallcliffe all received funding to install water tanks. Every little bit helps.

The McGowan Labor government understands that this is something we need to attack from all angles—better prevention, fit-for-purpose equipment and whole-of-state solutions like the light air tanker. The Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022 is another part of the response by looking at the systems and processes our state uses and improve them. We all understand that climate change is having a major impact on our state, our country and our planet. Climate change is influencing the frequency and severity of dangerous bushfire conditions through changes to temperature, environmental moisture, weather patterns and fuel conditions. Significant changes have been observed in recent decades to more dangerous bushfire weather conditions. It makes sense for WA to move towards a more modern system that will bring us in line with the rest of Australia. The new model utilises modern scientific models to more accurately predict the way in which a fire is likely to behave, and will be easier to understand for government agencies, businesses, industry and, most importantly, the community.

The new model draws upon over 60 years of scientific advances in the field. By endorsing the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022 and coming on board with the Australian Fire Danger Rating System, we will ensure that, for the first time, all state and territory governments will use a single, unified Australian fire danger rating system. This is incredibly important for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, it will ensure consistent, straightforward messaging across Australia on the next level of fire risk and action required. Simple, easy to understand and consistent messages help keep people safe. Fires do not recognise where one state ends and a territory border begins. Our messaging will now be consistent with the rest of Australia.

To close, I would like to reiterate four important points that Minister Whitby raised when speaking on the bill. He talked about how public safety will be improved by adopting the Australian Fire Danger Rating System and corresponding fire behaviour index thresholds. Firstly, it will improve the scientific accuracy behind danger

predictions. This will provide benefits such as more accurate fire danger information, increased confidence in predictions, improved management outcomes and reduced economic losses. Secondly, it will improve the way in which fire danger is communicated. This will provide benefits such as having a more informed public, which will result in fewer lives lost, less property damage and reduced community recovery costs. Thirdly, it will provide government and industry with better decision-making tools. This will provide benefits such as better proactive fire management, better firefighting outcomes, improved community safety and reduced over-warning costs. Finally, it will be a truly national system. This will provide benefits such as reduced development costs, better resource sharing, less chance of public confusion and improved national outcomes. I encourage all members of the chamber to support the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022 and to seriously consider joining one of their local bush fire brigades and to support them in any way that they can.

MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills — Parliamentary Secretary) [1.27 pm]: I rise to make a contribution on the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022, and I am very pleased to do so. I like to make a contribution whenever there is an opportunity to address the issue of bushfire, because this issue is incredibly pertinent to my electorate. As I am sure members appreciate, the Wooroloo bushfires basically burnt from one end of my electorate to the other on 1 February. My community is on the front line of the impacts of climate change. We live the impacts of climate change every day, so I think it is always important to make a contribution. Every time I do, I try to take a different angle. I will try to do that again today and hopefully have something a little fresh and interesting to say.

The bill forms parts of the Western Australian government's response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. Two recommendations focused on expediting the development and implementation of a new Australian fire danger rating system, and another recommendation focused very much on the delivery of education to make sure that the public understands what the fire danger rating system will mean for them. That was very important for us in Swan Hills during the Wooroloo fires. This bill will instate a nationally agreed fire danger rating system and some corresponding fire behaviour index thresholds, reflecting the fact that climate change is undoubtedly impacting both the frequency and severity of bushfire conditions both here and in other regions of the world. It is undoubtedly influencing temperature, environmental moisture, weather patterns and fuel conditions. There have been significant changes in recent decades and things are much more dangerous than they were, but the system we have at the moment is based on science that is over 60 years old, so it really is in need of a refresh. The new rating system will use modern scientific models to provide greater accuracy in predicting how fires are likely to behave and will make it easier for everyone to understand what it means for them. This system is a key component in addressing the lessons we have learnt in recent years. In particular, we know that consistent and straightforward messaging is key for the safety of our communities, and that was brought home to me very poignantly during the Wooroloo fire.

The process of recovery from the Wooroloo fire is a long and enduring one, and I think it will continue for many years to come. One key thing that has continued through our recovery process is our community recovery dinners. They are held monthly and everyone comes together. They are fabulous events. They are sponsored by some incredible local organisations. At each dinner, there is a different theme, if you like. There are guest presentations on how we can help our native flora and fauna to recover and how to prepare property in a mitigation sense. Commissioner Klemm and I have attended several now and provided an update from the state government's perspective on our recovery initiatives.

Just before the winter recess, I attended a community recovery dinner with Assistant Commissioner Craig Waters and Deputy Commissioner Melissa Pexton, and Superintendent Peter Sutton from the metropolitan south east region. We were invited to the dinner to provide an overview of the recently released *AFAC independent operational review: A review of the management of the Wooroloo fire of February 2021*. The independent review was initiated so that we could learn lessons from the Wooroloo fire. It was quite a unique fire in its severity and the speed with which it tore through my electorate. There were some really significant lessons to be learnt about how prepared the community was, the immediate response and, as the event endured, how agencies and community organisations continued to work together. Indeed, some lessons were learnt about recovery, too. It is very important that we take the time to learn those lessons.

As I say, I would like to acknowledge the significant work done by the independent review team that was appointed. It was a panel of three: Mr David Nugent from Parks Victoria, Assistant Commissioner Steve Yorke from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service and Susan Davies, who was the local community representative. I know Sue through her incredible involvement in the Bullsbrook Residents and Ratepayers Association and the Bullsbrook Community Garden. She is truly community minded. She has an extensive professional background, as she was a nurse, so she has dealt with some crises in her time. She had a very measured, thoughtful and thorough approach. Having spoken to her about her experiences through this process, I know that she did a wonderful job, so I really want to acknowledge her. It would be intimidating, as a constituent, to engage in such a formal process that involves so much emotion and complexity and is so important to so many people. I just wanted to acknowledge the work of the independent review team.

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The report is a very interesting read. It is long, but it underscores the important role of first responders and the many organisations that both contribute to the immediate incident and assist with the aftermath. Many organisations in my community are still working to provide support, and I just want to thank them.

The report also underscores the severity of the impacts of this event on my community. There is quite a lot of trauma in Swan Hills. It is funny how it is coming out more now—now that we have had a bit of time and space away from the immediate event. I have been advised that there has been a bit of an uptick in the number of community members seeking access to mental health supports, so there is quite a bit of trauma. When we were invited to this dinner—the event preceding it commemorated the one-year anniversary of the fire—we decided not to present this information because it may have been quite emotionally difficult for some people who nonetheless wanted to come together. We thought that we would give plenty of notice that we were going to talk about the independent report so that those who wanted to hear about the fire could come, but those who wanted to stay away because they were still traumatised by the event and it was still too fresh for them would have the opportunity to sit that particular dinner out. There were also some people who were not able to make it, so for that reason I thought I would take the opportunity today to discuss the report, the feedback I had from my community about the report and some of the perspectives that were offered into the conduct of the report. For those who do not have the time to read what is quite a lengthy tome, this will give them a little bit of a *Brodie's Notes*, if you like, on the report.

I want to thank all the constituents and organisations that provided submissions to the process. The lived experience is really important to share, so I want to thank all those constituents who provided submissions. I know that a lot of people have subsequently chosen to publish their submissions, and I think it is great that they were willing to do that and have done so. Thank you to everybody who provided feedback.

The report begins with an overview of the incident and runs through its commencement on 1 February and how it ran through the hills. It started in Wooroloo. It is called the Wooroloo fire, but relatively little damage was done in Wooroloo. The vast majority of the 86 homes that were lost were in Gidgegannup. The fire proceeded through Brigadoon and then jumped Great Northern Highway into Upper Swan and threatened the community of Ellenbrook. That was very scary. It was scary for everybody. The fire got to the boundary of my neighbour's place. I had to evacuate. In a suburb of 40 000 people, the fire threat was very real for all those people. It was a huge suburban area to think about evacuating and making sure that everyone was fire responsive. It was an incredibly stressful time. The report goes through the progress, I suppose, of the bushfire. It then refers to pre-incident actions, what has been done about community preparedness and how operationally ready the various agencies that responded are. It also discusses the response itself and the management of the fire.

I debriefed with every single one of my fire brigades in the aftermath and all of them said that it was a challenging fire to respond to. No sooner had they made a plan than they found that the fire front had moved on so much further. It really did progress incredibly quickly.

[Quorum formed.]

Ms J.J. SHAW: As I was saying, the first section of the report runs through incident response. Our firemen and women and the various other first responders who turned out did an absolutely amazing job. It was quite emotional for me. As soon as we were allowed back onto the fireground, the former captain of the West Gidgegannup Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, Beau Algeri, who is a great guy, took me on a tour through the fireground. The place was still smouldering; it was absolutely crazy. I was talking to him about what had happened and how close the fire came to my house. He said to me, "That was my brigade. We were there on Campersic Road; we held the fire at bay there." It was quite emotional to know that it was my local brigade and friends of mine who had stood there and defended my home. As I said, incident response was absolutely fabulous. The first recommendation in the report is interesting. It is —

That DFES lead the development of a dedicated purpose-built, appropriately equipped Multi-Agency Incident Control Centre to be built in or around the Perth Hills to deal with fires and other emergency incidents in that area.

I think it is a very valid recommendation, and the government has noted that recommendation, but it is not so simple. People should be aware of the terrain of the Perth hills, the geography of the place. It is 100 kilometres from Bullsbrook up my way, down to Serpentine–Jarrahdale. The whole area is an incredibly long, thin populated strip. There are lots of inland communities that spur off the north–south axis into Bedforddale, Roleystone, Kalamunda, Darlington, Mundaring, Gidgegannup and Bullsbrook. If there is just one centre, where do we put it in the hills? Are we sure that it is going to be the best possible facility? It is probably worth thinking about what we can do with existing facilities to make sure that their capability to respond to incidents is deployable right the way across the scarp. The state government made the single largest investment for a standalone volunteer bush fire brigade facility at the West Gidgegannup brigade. It was \$1.3 million for a state-of-the-art facility that has fabulous incident control capability and radio rooms. I do not know whether one facility is the right idea. We probably have to

look at how we leverage the assets we currently have at those various spots along the scarp to make sure we have a fabulous incident response capability in the hills.

I appreciate that I am a little short on time today. There is just one other point I would like to talk to on recommendations 7 and 8, which are about reviewing vehicle control points and the use of restricted access permits. Those recommendations were accepted by government. It includes the establishment of a road-clearing capability. One of the things that came up the most during the Wooroloo bushfire from my constituents was that people were very frustrated about not being able to go back into their properties once they had left. There seemed to be a bit of inconsistency about vehicle control points. A lot of people who had stayed were then not able to leave to get fuel and water. They did not have access to power or food and, if they left to acquire those things, they were not permitted to go back. I want to say a couple of things about that. People really need to understand what it takes to prepare to stay. You cannot just say you are going to stay for a day or two. If someone is prepared to stay and defend, these incidents may endure for many days and people need to understand what that means in preparation of their properties. That has really been brought home for us as a community. I think it is very appropriate that a review be undertaken. Page 20 of the report talks about the experiences of residents who remained. I would very much encourage people to review that and consider their own fire preparation plans and ability to leave in light of the findings and recommendations of this report.

Finally, I want to speak to one other aspect for which there were no findings or recommendations made but there is a fairly extensive amount of discussion given in the report. It is on the animal welfare aspects of this incident. Thankfully, there was no loss of human life or serious injury, and the vast majority of domestic pets, horses and farm animals were evacuated to safe areas. Of those animals that remained, many survived with minor injuries. Unfortunately, a number of animals had to be euthanized and, obviously, there was a devastating impact on native flora and fauna. This was the first incident during which the *Animal welfare in emergencies: State support plan* was enacted. It provides for the care of animals at evacuation centres and facilitated the establishment of a response team located at a dedicated emergency hospital that was set up. It also allowed for the deployment of vets and Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development personnel into the incident area to check on animal welfare—to make sure that animals that had remained had been fed and, unfortunately, to deal with any animals that might be in difficulty as soon as possible. There were dozens of local volunteer veterinarians, veterinary nurses and wildlife carers who managed to get fast and safe access to the fire zone to attend to animal welfare. Over 150 veterinary days were spent assisting affected animals and over 750 veterinary assessments of animals were completed prior to landowners being given clearance to return.

When people are fearful about returning because they are worried about what is going to happen to their animals when they reach an evacuation centre, this plan meant that there were mechanisms available for evacuees and their animals to be taken care of. For those who evacuated and were worried about the animals that were left behind, this plan ensured that those animals received urgent veterinary care and were fed and watered. That all encourages people to make better quality decisions in response to fire incidents. No doubt there are lessons to be learnt but the mere existence of this plan made a real difference.

I want to congratulate Australian Veterinary Association WA president, Dr Garnett Hall, who coordinated, led and represented the veterinarians who were involved. He and I released an owl together that had been injured in the fires. Again, it was very emotional. It cannot have been easy for those personnel. They had to make hard decisions about animals. I want to thank them for their contributions. I want to congratulate the state government on implementing the animal welfare in emergencies response plan. It is vital. On that note, I draw my remarks to a close.

Visitors — Warwick Senior High School

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Members, before I put the question, I would like to acknowledge in the Speaker's gallery the student leaders from Warwick Senior High School, which is dear to my own heart but is now ably represented by the member for Kingsley.

Debate Resumed

DR J. KRISHNAN (Riverton) [1.48 pm]: I rise today in support of the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022. This bill forms part of the Western Australian government's response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. Recommendation 13.1 is about expediting the development and implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System. Recommendation 13.2 is about the government delivering education about fire danger and the rating system, understanding the danger involved with the fires and the appropriate actions to be taken depending on the rating system. The frequency of bushfires and the magnitude and intensity of bushfires is getting worse, and the current legislation is based on evidence from 60 years back. Things have changed. We have had the opportunity to review various bushfires, see what could have been done and learn from science to implement new systems. For instance, the current system takes into consideration only temperature and rainfall and comes to a conclusion on the rating when, in reality, there are many more considerations such as wind, wind

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speed, moisture in the area and various other aspects that could allow us to more accurately determine the risk and the rating, and particularly the actions to be taken.

This bill will do four things. It will improve the accuracy of the determination of the fire danger; improve the communication standards so that there is consistency to keep people well informed to take actions; have a better decision-making tool to help people, businesses, agencies and government to take appropriate action; and be a truly national system. I take this opportunity to thank the volunteers across the state. The member for Kalamunda mentioned that there are 19 000 volunteers in this particular sector across 566 fire brigades. Being a general practitioner for more than half my life I have always been proud of saving lives, but these volunteers save lives and livelihoods. I take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for their contribution.

I heard from the Minister for Police about the investment the government is making in its latest recruitment to fight bushfires. He mentioned that the latest trucks are worth \$250 000, which is nothing when it comes to saving somebody's life or livelihood. The government is making that investment. More importantly, this government is acknowledging science, climate change and the changes that need to be made to prevent bushfires happening in the future. I recently visited Willetton Senior High School and interacted with six different classrooms in that high school. Without doubt, the biggest topic that the young students brought up with me was climate change and renewable energy. We need to do more than that. I support this bill and thank you for the opportunity, Madam Acting Speaker.

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldvis — Minister for Environment) [1.52 pm] — in reply: I will respond and conclude the contribution of members to this debate on the Bush Fires Amendment Bill 2022. I begin by thanking all members from all parties who had something to say on this important legislation over the last couple of days. There is a lot of commentary about the standard and quality of debate and the tenor of proceedings in this chamber, but I think we can all agree that the debate has been conducted in a very worthwhile way. The contributions of all members have been significant, worthwhile and well thought out. Everyone who stood and made their contribution did so with something meaningful to say, with the intent, as we all have, to make Western Australia safer. It was great to see bipartisan support. A number of opposition members also spoke. Opposition members, at times, raised certain issues that were of interest and concern to them, but every opposition member also indicated that they intended to support this legislation. I welcome the support, commentary and quality of debate from around the chamber on this very important issue.

We need to know simply what this bill is about. Most importantly, this bill is about saving lives from the risk of bushfires that are ever present in our community. As some members indicated, bushfires are becoming more extreme as time goes on. The contribution of climate change has been remarked upon in terms of having a longer bushfire season, more intensity in the fires, an increase in the fuel load and drier conditions generally, which increases the likelihood of more intense fires. When we have intense fires and extreme weather conditions with heat and wind, we know that that can end up in a catastrophic situation. We know that it can result in loss of life and loss of property. We have been all too familiar with those losses and tragedies in Australia and Western Australia in recent years.

The bill is very simple. It is three pages long. It consists of seven clauses, and as the member for Riverton pointed out, it is a response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, the response at the national level to disasters that have occurred in Australia in recent years, specifically the fires on the east coast in 2020 that were, in their breadth and intensity, incredibly devastating. They were a wake-up call to us all. The Western Australian government, like all states and territories, has responded positively to a royal commission finding that a consistent Australian fire danger rating system be implemented, one that is nationally consistent, universal, modern and based on a firm scientific knowledge; is easy and clear to understand; and, importantly, describes not the likelihood of fire occurring on a particular day, but the way a fire is likely to behave if there is a fire on that certain day. There will be a reduction in the number of warnings from six to four. It is in very simple language and the levels are moderate, high, extreme and catastrophic. Along with those is a series of graphics with certain messaging that is consistent. They escalate according to the level of warning. It is meant to be a very clear message to all members of the community and, most importantly, to members of the public and the agricultural community, business community and local government. A lot of consultation and work has been conducted at the national level and also here in Western Australia. I am happy to get into some of the detail of that consultation a little later.

It is important that this messaging is easy to understand, based on modern scientific knowledge and consistent across all state and territory boundaries. These days there are many interstate travellers who may come from another state or territory, or Western Australians travelling around the rest of Australia who would be confronted by different warnings, systems and categories. It could lend itself and no doubt does lend itself to some lesser understanding of the apparent danger, and possibly confusion. It is important to get this right. Our current rating system is based on science that is 60 years old. It is high time and necessary that we make these changes.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 10 August 2022]

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Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Elizabeth Kelsbie; Ms Jessica Shaw; Acting Speaker; Dr Jags Krishnan; Mr Reece Whitby

I refer to climate change. That is another reason why it is particularly important that these changes go ahead and that the new nationally consistent fire danger rating system is implemented. We know that climate change is leading to more intense fires. We know that the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, Darren Klemm, has in the past couple of years mentioned that his experience on the ground, leading the defence of Western Australian towns and property, has instructed him that the intensity has increased to a dramatic degree. I can draw from my experience in a former life as a journalist for many years. Covering bushfires every summer is a regular part of a journalist's job in Western Australia. I can remember going back 20 or even 30 years ago, when the loss of a house or a property was a very rare event. We seemed to have bushfires often, but the times when multiple houses and properties were lost were very rare. However, increasingly as the years went on, climate change obviously had an impact, as did the building of more urban interface with the edge of Perth and the increasing population in regional areas.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 3364.]