

**Division 30: Fire and Emergency Services, \$228 661 000 —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr D. Klemm, Commissioner.

Mr M. Cronstedt, Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Emergency Management.

Mr B. Delavale, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Operations.

Mrs G. Camarda, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr R. Burnell, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr M. Carter, Executive Director, Rural Fire Division.

Ms M. Pexton, State Recovery Controller.

Miss M. Onorato-Sartari, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is my intention to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Before I ask a question, as the local member who represents most of the country affected by tropical cyclone Seroja, I put on record my appreciation of the work by emergency services volunteers and staff. I thank them for their efforts.

To start, I want to ask a question, but it is not about cyclone Seroja; I will come back to that in a little while. I also apologise that we may have to mix and match with other committees so I may have to leave at some point. The point I want to raise concerns the relationship to government goals and desired outcomes on page 458 of budget paper No 2. One outcome on that page states —

A diverse team of volunteers and staff with a wide range of skills ...

In order to have a diverse team of volunteers, we need volunteers. There have been some disturbing reports of late about the position of volunteers who operate as fire control officers, and that under the new Work Health and Safety Act, people could potentially be held liable for an injury or, even worse, a death on a fireground. The minister knows that the penalties for that include up to five years' jail and a very serious financial penalty in some circumstances. I refer to an ABC report on 22 September—yesterday—which quotes the CEO of the Shire of Chapman Valley, one shire affected by Seroja, and Mr Brown, the chief bush fire control officer of the Shire of Dandaragan, who said that they do not want to expose themselves to ongoing risks under this legislation. Will the minister outline, either now or in some other way, his understanding of how this legislation will affect volunteers, especially volunteers in a position of coordination on a fireground; their employers, who might be farmers and who send them there; and local governments, which in some cases control bush fire brigades?

**The CHAIR:** Let us stop there; you can always ask further questions.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** There was a lot of commentary there. Could the member be more precise in his question?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am asking whether the minister understands, and whether the department has drawn up any understanding of, the risks that volunteers face when acting in a supervisory capacity, especially when an accident occurs on a fireground or on the way to a fireground, or anything related to a volunteer's efforts on a fireground, under the new Work Health and Safety Act, which captures volunteers? There are reports from my electorate —

**The CHAIR:** I think you have encapsulated the question. We will leave it to the minister to respond and then you can ask further questions.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** This legislation is not my legislation, but I know it applies to emergency responders. Perhaps it would have been better for the member to ask another minister about the impact of this legislation on volunteers. However, in terms of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and volunteers throughout the state, I understand that there has always been a requirement to provide protection for emergency responders. There has always been an obligation on people who fight fires and who respond to emergencies to have certain levels of training. That obligation extends to someone having the reasonable capacity to provide that direction and control of volunteers.

This legislation applies throughout most Australian states. It applies in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. It has done so for more than a decade and it works well. The overall observation I will make is that it is good that our volunteers are treated in the same way as career personnel. I often make the observation that career responders and volunteers put their lives on the line to the same degree whenever they are required to provide protection, whether that is physical protection in protective clothing or when using modern appliances and equipment, or when providing protection in occupational situations. That is the first issue I will raise. That is a good thing. I also make the observation that, as I said, there was always an obligation under previous occupational health laws to provide the right training and expertise to people who are being sent into harm's way.

[7.10 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am aware that those obligations may have existed in the past. However, there is a great deal of concern in rural communities about the implications of this act. If the government wishes to have a diverse team of volunteers on the ground, I would suggest that the department, the minister or someone will need to act to clarify and educate people about what the changes will mean and assure them about the limits of the new legislation. There are people who are seeking to profit from causing concern in the community around this issue. They are offering to provide services at a greatly inflated cost to farmers et cetera. Putting in place protocols may help protect them. This is causing a lot of concern. I suspect that that might be at the bottom of some of this, but it has blown up, and not just in this newspaper; I have received text messages from people who are concerned about their liabilities. I fear that there will be a withdrawal of service of some very senior volunteers if something is not done. I ask the minister, the commissioner or someone to take this matter in hand and understand and address the concern.

**The CHAIR:** I do not know whether that requires much of a response other than to acknowledge it.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Nevertheless, chair, I am happy to respond. The member is right. It does require engagement with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to educate people and provide that service. Indeed, that is exactly what is happening. I will refer to someone in a moment who can provide more detail about that. The team at DFES is engaging with the Western Australian Local Government Association and other agencies and authorities to pinpoint the issues that are in this legislation and to better educate people. This legislation has been around for a while. In fact, the former Attorney General Hon Michael Mischin, MLC, introduced the green bill, so this will not surprise anyone. I refer to Mr Richard Burnell to explain some of the detail.

**Mr R. Burnell:** I am happy to provide some information to the house. The Local Government Insurance Scheme convened a webinar on 31 August to which all local governments were invited to attend. My understanding is that 160 people attended the webinar. At that webinar was some legal representation, and the Local Government Insurance Scheme provided a clear understanding of the implications of the act. DFES was also invited to talk about the training that is available through the DFES Rural Fire Division and about all the documented procedures and work practices that we have. That was made available to all the local governments. The Local Government Insurance Scheme, as I understand it, has committed to provide detailed answers to the questions that were raised by all those who participated in the webinar. Those answers will be provided within a fortnight. We were involved in that process and we are providing whatever support we can.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** For the benefit of Hansard, I mispronounced Mr Burnell's name; I said Burrell. Apologies for that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a further question to that. It is more of a question/comment.

**The CHAIR:** Just stick to the questions, member for Roe. You can write the minister a letter if you want to comment.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Pursuant to that, my understanding is that when a farmer or a farm worker arrives first on the scene, it creates a problem. If the local government turns up first on the scene, that is covered by insurance, as was just pointed out. However, my understanding is that if a farmer or a farm worker turns up first on the scene, the farmer is not covered and is liable under the Work Health and Safety Act. That is why I agree with the member for Moore.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 23 September 2021]

p474b-490a

Mr Shane Love; Mr Reece Whitby; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mr Paul Lilburne; Mr Vincent Catania; Chair

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We are getting examples like Dandaragan farmer Richard Brown who says that he will step down as the shire's chief fire control officer due to the new workplace safety legislation. This is turning into a public relations disaster.

**The CHAIR:** I am waiting for the question, member. Is there a question? You were seeking a legal opinion, I think.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** If the farmer turns up before the local government authority, does he have to accept liability under the new work health and safety laws?

**The CHAIR:** I am mindful that the minister is being asked for legal opinion, which might be contrary to the standing orders, but he can attempt to answer it.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will not go into legal opinions, member. I think that with new legislation people are often uncertain, and that is why DFES is making concerted efforts to educate and inform people, which is a good thing. Going back 10 years ago, when almost identical legislation was introduced in the other states, there were similar claims that volunteers would walk away. That simply did not occur in those other jurisdictions. I might refer to the commissioner for some more commentary.

**Mr D. Klemm:** Good evening to everyone and thank you, minister. I will cover a couple of points. Going to the member's question, I fancy that the answer to that question will be in the some 160-odd questions that the Local Government Insurance Scheme will respond to as a result of the webinar that Mr Burnell referred to. DFES also has volunteers that it has been responsible for in various forms over the course of the last 90 to 100 years. We have a really well established training system and program. We also have modern and robust standard operating procedures, or doctrine.

To answer the member for Moore's comment about people seeking to profit from this, all those procedures, the training and the doctrine is available at no cost to local governments to use for their bush fire brigades and/or farmers. Under Murray Carter's leadership, the Rural Fire Division has developed training for farm workers on responding and attending to bushfires. That training goes for only six hours. So DFES has done a lot of work to provide assistance to local governments and their volunteers through bush fire brigades to prepare them for not only this summer but previous summers as well.

[7.20 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am saying that we are trying to help and do not underestimate the situation.

**The CHAIR:** I gather that is not a further question, member. Any further questions? Member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 457 and the line item "Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja Enhanced State Recovery Structure" under "New Initiatives" in the "Spending Changes" table. I wonder whether the minister could outline what that funding represents. There are two payments over the forward estimates with a combined total of just over \$9.6 million. If the minister could explain the commitment that that represents to the communities, I would be grateful. Could the minister also explain what the commonwealth's contribution is towards these?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I do not have a page 457 tab. Can I get some more information about the item the member is talking about?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am talking about the line item under "New Initiatives" in the "Spending Changes" table on page 457, which is "Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja Enhanced State Recovery Structure". There are two payments of \$4.404 million and \$5.237 million.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am just trying to find the right page. What is the member's question again?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I wonder whether the minister can outline what that commitment of \$9.6 million represents.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Member, the same support is expressed in different ways in the budget. Hence it will take a little to get on top of it, but this funding is just part of the funding. As the member would be aware, a historically large amount of money has been committed to the recovery for cyclone Seroja. This \$9.641 million is to facilitate financial assistance and allow the state to help deliver that assistance across a range of agencies.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is that part of the category C and E arrangements or is it something additional?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I might get the Seroja State Recovery Controller to respond.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I think Georgina Camarda might be able to provide a bit of advice on the \$9.6 million and then I am happy to talk to the question regarding commonwealth funding.

**The CHAIR:** Could the chief finance officer respond, please.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** The \$9.641 million is allocated to DFES over two years and to provide enhanced resourcing to DFES, in particular the State Recovery Controller, to help administer a number of disaster recovery funding

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arrangement packages throughout the state. The \$9.6 million is funded by the consolidated account and also through reimbursement through the DRF arrangements.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are we saying that is all for administration?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will let Ms Camarda continue.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just say that it assists Hansard if any acronyms, such as DRF, could be said in full. That would help them a lot.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** I might refer that one to State Recovery Controller Mel Pexton to explain resourcing.

**Ms M. Pexton:** That package refers to a number of resources and not all those are administrative by any means. For example, our community recovery officers have now gone out into the region. They are working across a number of local governments areas. We have a range of resources in there to support the delivery of the packages. So, across that \$104 million record package for the disaster recovery funding arrangements, as the member may be aware, we have a number of grants and community welfare and outreach support services. Sorry, I do not have the exact number in front of me, but the approximately \$9 million contributes as part of the delivery of that program.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have a further question, member?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I think that is perhaps as much information as I am going to get now. I might put a question on notice and seek some more detail around the funding arrangements.

**Mr M. HUGHES:** Evening, minister.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Evening.

**Mr M. HUGHES:** I refer the minister to page 458 and the heading “Capacity to maintain Frontline Operations” under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. I am referring specifically to point 3.2 and the new career Fire and Rescue Service facility in the south east metropolitan region. Could the minister provide an update regarding this station and the benefits it will provide to the community?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Certainly. I thank the member for the question. Given that he represents an electorate that is very bushfire prone, the member would be aware of the importance of having both volunteer and career fire services on hand. The growth of the Perth metropolitan area is such that DFES is required to look at whether the growing demand can be serviced by volunteer brigades or whether a new career fire station is required. Certainly we have identified a need for a new career fire service station in the growing south east metropolitan region. DFES is looking at the best location for that station, but we have committed \$14.5 million in the forward estimates to provide funding for that station, including \$2 million in the current year to acquire the necessary land and also for the additional fire appliances that will operate there. This is a significant investment in the south east metropolitan region. It will be very welcomed and will supplement existing career and volunteer fire services in the south-eastern corridor of Perth.

We have excellent career fire stations in the area but Perth is growing. It is growing southward, and the member would be aware of very strong growth in the south-east part of Perth. There always comes a point at which we look at the volunteer service and, as very good as that is, we want to expand our career fire service as well. We have made a commitment in this budget to provide for extra career fire stations. This will be the twenty-fifth career fire station in the metro area.

That is an important milestone. I am sure it will be welcomed by those communities in the south-eastern suburbs of Perth.

[7.30 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I want to turn to page 463, the emergency services levy, and the changes in the budget around that. Funding into the department from the emergency services levy in 2020–21 was estimated at \$29 million; it is a comparatively small amount of \$4 million this year; \$12 million next year; and \$23 million and \$26 million the following years. The emergency services levy goes into an account. Is this the drawdown from that account or is it the actual money that the department has raised? What does this reflect, or is this just the amount that is being used in a particular manner within the department’s budget?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I might throw that question to Georgina Camarda.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** Just to confirm: is the member referring to the asset investment program on page 463?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** That is for the 2021–22 financial year, and \$4 million of the emergency services levy is being used to fund the asset investment program for that particular year. The emergency services levy is raised every year to the amount that is approved by government. This year, the emergency services levy is \$391 million, from

memory. That is used to fund our operations, some of which goes towards the asset investment program, which is the number the member just highlighted. The amount allocated towards the asset investment program varies each year. Have I answered the member's question?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Minister, I am trying to find out how much flexibility the department has in the use of the emergency services levy. Presumably, a fair bit of money can be used for capital purchases in a given year, or not. There is flexibility in how it is used—it does not have to be used within a particular time or for a particular purpose.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I make the point that all dollars raised through the emergency services levy are spent, and have to be spent, on emergency services. That is the first point I make. In terms of how the funding arrangement is worked out, there is an agreed budget each year of the needs of the agency in terms of all its operating costs and its desire for capital expenditure, including new appliances. Everything is worked out as an annual budget. It is from that that the ESL is calculated. A return from the ESL will cover whatever the agreed budget is for that year. I can hand the member over to the commissioner, who might like to elaborate on the source of revenue.

**Mr D. Klemm:** What the member sees there is some of the challenges we have had with delivering our asset investment program, particularly in relation to COVID and fire appliances, and some of the delays in building caused by COVID. In some cases, we carry funds over from one year to the next because of the challenges we have with this construction, and that is what is seen there. The important point is that the emergency services levy can be used only for the purposes of the emergency services act, which I am responsible for. Every dollar raised through the ESL is spent on emergency services.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Within the fact that it is all to be used for emergency services, there is a fair degree of flexibility in any given year, which would mean that there is an agreement that the department will hold the money in trust until such time as it is used in the appropriate way. Is there any pressure on the commissioner to spend all the money in a year and get it out the door, as such?

**Mr D. Klemm:** Yes, there is. We strike our budget each year. We must go through quite a lengthy process to get the ability to carry funds over from one year to another. Importantly in the asset investment program, as an example, is fire trucks, which are on a replacement program. Anything we do not build this year still has to be funded next year because the trucks have to be replaced. The funds the member is looking at demonstrate some of the delays we have had due to COVID, and of course it compounds itself because when we get into the next financial year another whole series of trucks have to be replaced because they have met their replacement date.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The department has a fairly mature capital replacement program in which it has laid out all the replacements for its fleet.

**Mr D. Klemm:** Yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** And presumably some level of growth into the future in innovation or different machines that may come forward. Who determines how much will go to local government grants within that program? Local government bush fire brigades et cetera look for assistance. Is it the commissioner or the government? Who determines the level of grants that are available?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The commissioner can elaborate. There is a local government grants committee, consisting of representatives from DFES, local government and the volunteer association. The actual decision on the success of grants is determined by that committee. It is an independent committee, inasmuch as there is a DFES representative, but there is also a local government representative and a volunteer association representative.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** My understanding is that is how it is divvied up but not how the size of the pie is decided.

**Mr D. Klemm:** About \$35 million a year is applied to both the capital and operating grant process for local government. In the first instance, it is for the management of trucks. The trucks that are provided to local government bush fire brigades are on a replacement program; exactly the same as the trucks that DFES has responsibility for. That is for both bush fire brigades and the State Emergency Service. An operating grant is also available through the LGGS, or the local government grants scheme. The committee is not necessarily dealing with the operating grant because that is just an average of the last couple of years' expenditure. Capital grants are managed and decisions made by the local government grants committee, albeit there is quite a mature process around the replacement of trucks that the local government grants committee does not need to make a decision on. Some \$35 million to \$36 million is provided each year.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to the local government grants scheme: are we talking about the section that is on page 467, "Emergency Services Grants", with footnote (a)? Is that the local government grants scheme that we are talking about? It sits in the budget this year at a bit over \$38 million.

[7.40 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The member is correct; the current estimate is \$38.6 million.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is the point that I am trying to make about how the department determines the size of the pie. The emergency services levy, a source of revenue for the department, is growing across the forward estimates. Last year, it raised \$349 000 000 and across the forward estimates that increases to \$428 000 000 but there does not seem to be any growth in the very static amount that is granted to local governments under that scheme. Rather than being a percentage, is it an amount that is somewhat arbitrarily decided?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I might refer that question to Georgina Camarda.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** Just for clarity, the emergency services levy is one of our funding sources; it is our primary funding source. If the levy looks like it is going up in the out years—the forward estimates indicate that it is—that means that another funding source is coming down. We only raise what we need to raise to meet our total cost of services and asset investment program. In terms of who determines the local government grant scheme budget, it has been set historically. We have sought increases in that budget in the past and have been successful. I suppose it is on a needs basis of local governments, the bushfire brigades and the State Emergency Service. If there is a need, certainly the department will put forward a case to Treasury and seek additional funding. A departmental submission would need to be made to determine a greater budget of the LGGs if required. As I said, the emergency services levy is our primary funding source and just because it is going up in the out years, that does not necessarily mean that our total expense is going up in the out years as well.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On the emergency services levy again, the primary interface between the department and ratepayers and property owners is when they get their rate bills. Can the minister explain why the levy in 2019–20 stood at \$381 million and then declined over the next few years?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I refer to the chief financial officer.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** There was a fall in the emergency services levy revenue in 2021. That was associated with the government policy decision to freeze ESL charges, which resulted in households or property owners paying the same or less in their ESL charge and, hence, we recovered less revenue that year. The government provided a \$40 million injection in 2020–21 to provide for the shortfall in the emergency services levy revenue. We are collecting a little more in the emergency services levy this financial year. There was a policy decision to increase the levy rate by 4.3 per cent. The government subsidy to provide for the shortfall in the ESL revenue is \$14.9 million this year. That is the reason the levy has gone down in the last two years compared with 2019–20.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I gather from what was just said that a government freeze was imposed 18 months or so ago. Does that mean that the underlying property value, the underlying rate or something else has not recovered since then because I would have thought that immediately upon lifting the freeze, it would shoot straight back up to the higher levels of 2019–20? Was it a freeze or a reduction or is it a reduction in the underlying valuations?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The intention of the government during COVID was to freeze household charges. There was a reduction in the ESL for that particular year and the disparity in funding was topped up by consolidated revenue. Coming out of that, we have had a slight increase in this budget, but we have also moderated that with an additional top-up from consolidated revenue of some \$15 million. The increase that the member is seeing in this budget is the increase as opposed to the year before when there was a reduction. But if the member compares the current amount with the amount before that freeze or reduction, householders are still paying less ESL than they did before COVID because of the moderation of the increase this year due to the extra \$15 million from consolidated revenue.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is actually the amount that is making up the shortfall, not causing the shortfall. I will move on from that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 462 and item 4.3, which refers to \$2.9 million for plant and equipment, including \$400 000 for a fixed repeater tower in Esperance. Can the minister indicate when that fixed repeater tower will be built? I note that it was recommendation 12 in the coroner's report into the Esperance fires. I am sure the people of Esperance are keen to know.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The sum of \$355 000 is for the construction of a fixed repeater tower in Esperance, which will obviously contribute to much enhanced bushfire management and volunteer capability in that part of the world. In terms of the timing of its installation, I might refer to Richard Burnell to clarify that.

**Mr R. Burnell:** We are putting in a number of telecommunication improvements around the Esperance region, given that the question relates to just the Esperance region. The tower has been planned for this coming budget year. It took a length of time to determine the specific location, which was agreed with the local government. We are now working through the land acquisition process and we will then purchase the equipment and install the tower. In the interim, we have provided some portable repeaters so that the area has radio communications. Those portable repeaters were used at the Norseman complex fires. We have also been working with the federal government on satellite wi-fi services so that if there are communication failures with the standard cellular network, at least the

local government communities, with the evacuation centres, will have the ability to communicate through satellite services. Those will be rolled out before December. Telstra has been putting through applications for round 2 of the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters funding package, which is a commonwealth package. My understanding is that all the applications from Western Australia have been accepted and we are waiting for final approval. That will also improve telecommunications in the Esperance area.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I assume that the tower will not be available this summer but that other temporary arrangements are in place.

**Mr R. Burnell:** That is correct; that is my understanding.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can the minister, or perhaps the commissioner, provide any information about the implementation of any of the other recommendations in the coroner's report into the Esperance fires that will occur over the next year or so?

[7.50 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Is the member able to point to the budget item for that?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is really just under the total cost of service on page 461. I just want to get an indication of the 12 recommendations. Obviously, not all of them came under DFES, but a substantial number did. Are there any others, besides the repeater tower?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is difficult because the member is referring to another document that is not the budget. If he is able to point out a particular part of the budget that we can respond to, we are happy to do that.

**The CHAIR:** The member did refer to the repeater tower under new works on page 463. As I understand it, the member wants to know what other works are being done in conjunction with those recommendations. You may have to put a question on notice, member.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** What the member is asking is a broader request outside the budget. Indeed, the state has responded already to every one of those recommendations and has tabled that paper as its response. It is public information that the member can draw on, or he can ask a question on notice. That might be the better way of handling it.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 467 and the volunteer marine rescue service under "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies". I note the ongoing commitment of around \$8 million a year to the volunteer marine rescue service. Is that a matter simply of various grants for equipment or are fixed costs picked up in running some of those organisations in terms of buildings and volunteers et cetera? I am trying to get an understanding of the difference between the subsidy component and the grant component of that money.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Yes, the information I have is that that funding relates to both equipment and any other operating costs that may have been incurred—so all costs that are incurred.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How much is a regular ongoing cost and how much is grant funding, as in capital, boats and one-off equipment that might go to different centres?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will defer to the executive director, Richard Burnell.

**Mr R. Burnell:** The majority of the dollars are associated with the volunteer marine rescue service, because the extent of the funding is only a fairly recent issue. There are over 70 vessels in the volunteer marine rescue service fleet. A lot of the vehicle replacement program has been planned. There are 36 volunteer marine rescue associations, many of which own their own buildings. They have not had audits undertaken on the standard of the buildings and the work that needs to be undertaken on them, so we are providing assistance to the volunteer marine rescue associations themselves to undertake those audits. They are also going through and replacing a lot of old vehicles, trailers, plant and equipment. There is a capital grants committee, similar to the volunteer State Emergency Service or bush fire service, that operates in a similar manner. Each year the associations put forward funding applications for the replacement of whatever their capital is. That is the majority of the spend that is seen in the budget.

**Mr P. LILBURNE:** Good evening, minister. Thank you for your candour this evening; it has been very good and pleasing. I thank also the advisers here this evening for their time and ongoing service to our community. I appreciate it greatly. I am interested in the expansion of the state's emergency services fleet. I refer to the spending changes on page 457 and the line item "State Operational Support Fleet". What is the significance of this and what will it mean for emergency services in the community moving into the future?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I thank the member for the question. I appreciate his interest in this area. Obviously, the government is keen to invest in emergency services to keep the community safer. A key part of this is our emergency responders having greater access to the best available —

**Mr P. LILBURNE:** Excuse me, I cannot quite hear, minister. There is some noise over there.

**The CHAIR:** Let us start again, minister.

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**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Obviously, the government is keen to provide the very best level of service and equipment to our responders so they have the best equipment. This could include fire appliances, flood boats, better communications equipment et cetera. The budget includes \$11.2 million over the forward estimates for the state operational support fleet. This gives DFES greater resources and communications capabilities at strategic locations across Western Australia. The funding includes \$1.2 million over the budget and forward estimates periods for operating costs, and \$10 million to boost funding for the replacement of ageing high fire season fleet appliances—new fire trucks. This will expand and modernise the emergency services fleet across all hazards. It is an extra \$5 million per annum over 2023–24 and 2024–25 that will strengthen our capability to mitigate and manage seasonal remote and peak period hazards and risks across Western Australia. Having that backup high season fleet gives the ability for DFES to move resources around. Western Australia is a very big state. The fire seasons are at different times in Western Australia, so it makes sense to have that backup fleet that can be moved around so that when the fire season is at its peak in the north, the vehicles are there, and then as the season moves on and the risk changes to the midwest or the southern parts of Western Australia, that high season fleet can be repositioned to respond. We will always need our fleets to be in situ and to be there for all eventualities. But having that secondary line, if you like, of well-equipped and modern vehicles and not relying simply on second-hand or lesser vehicles means that the high season fleet is equal in terms of its age and capability to other appliances and can be moved around as required as the fire season and other needs arise to reposition it.

[8.00 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I thank the minister for his copious answer. Can I move on to the line item for “Mapping of Bushfire Prone Areas” under ongoing initiatives on page 457? What areas are covered and why has that funding now cut out in the forward estimates?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is a responsibility to update a fire map, essentially, of Western Australia. It is not something that we are required to do every year but it is required to be updated from time to time. The member can understand there is a set expense in the budget to provide for that and it is currently underway. We want to see a much more useful, more granular map so that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is better able to respond to fire. It will examine not just the existence of vegetation but also what type of vegetation it is. If fire is moving through an area, it is good to know whether it is grassland, shrubs or big timber. At the moment, we can do better. We can have a better resource to help inform our firefighters and give a greater picture of the state and where the risks and potential areas for fire are. As I said, it is not something we do every single year. The department is required to update it from time to time, which is the process we are now in.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How is it funded? Will it come out of the emergency services levy?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will refer to Murray Carter for the detail on that.

**Mr M. Carter:** The answer to the question is “partly”. The contribution is split across the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and will be seen in its budget papers. That part of the contribution is a part-time staff person from DFES to provide the oversight to that reform project, which is around a review of the map of bushfire-prone areas, as the minister mentioned, and some work being done on that by the CSIRO currently. Of course, the impact of the map itself will then play out in the amendments made to *State planning policy 3.7*, which is around planning and development in bushfire-prone areas. The modest amount in the budget reflected in our budget papers is part of a policy position that is to deal directly and collaboratively with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage on that reform work before we then normalise the map of bushfire-prone areas back into our normal routine operation within the agency. That is why the funding comes to an end, to answer part of the member’s earlier question.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The last questions I have on this are: How will the program be rolled out? What impact does the department anticipate it will have? Will it be rolled out through local governments? How will the map be distributed?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am happy for the commissioner to respond.

**Mr D. Klemm:** The map of bushfire-prone areas is available on the DFES website. It works in reverse, member. We receive information from local governments from a land point of view about land that has been cleared this year as opposed to land that was not cleared last year. That is when the map of bushfire-prone areas is updated. As Mr Carter mentioned, the map is then reflected in planning decisions. The map is always available on the DFES website for anybody to look at. It clearly identifies, for the whole state of Western Australia, bushfire-prone areas.

**The CHAIR:** I am going to indulge myself and ask the minister a question about that. The minister mentioned —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Page number!

**The CHAIR:** It would be on page 457, “Mapping of Bushfire Prone Areas”. It is a further question. The minister mentioned that the ongoing process will drill down to a more granular level so that the map is a bit more accurate, especially on the fringes. The CSIRO has been enlisted to assist in this process. When do you anticipate that it will be finished, and when do you anticipate that better outcomes will occur due to more accurate mapping?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Thank you, chair, for the toughest question of the evening.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** We are relying on input from the CSIRO and, as the chair may be aware, the eastern states are battling with lockdowns and the impact of COVID.

**The CHAIR:** It has been going for four years, minister.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Yes, that is right. We are very keen to get it back. We have been told, on many occasions, that it will be with us shortly. There was some issue with the people working on the map in Melbourne, I understand, who were working from home, could not go to the office and did not have the bandwidth capacity. I am as annoyed by these continual excuses —

**The CHAIR:** You cannot be more annoyed than I am, minister!

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Maybe I am the second-most annoyed, because it is something we have been waiting on. It is beyond the control or the ambit of the state government to deliver this. We are relying on our friends at the CSIRO. Once they come through, we will be onto it.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will let someone else get back with a wet lettuce leaf. I give the call to the member for North West Central.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Thanks for asking that on behalf of what we asked you to do! I have a new question. It is on page 457, under ongoing initiatives. I refer to the large aerial tanker and lead aircraft. In 2021, there is \$2 443 000 and no funding in the forward estimates. Given the fact we have had probably our wettest season on record since 1975, and I would imagine we are very fire prone all over the state, why has funding not been allowed for a large aerial tanker? One was used in the last lot of bushfires and we will probably have to use it again into the future. Is there an agreement in place? Why is it not in the budget?

**The CHAIR:** There are three questions there, but—minister.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I can assure the member we are not stepping away from the provision of a large aerial tanker capacity in Western Australia. It is something we have had for a number of years now and will continue to have. Because we simply do not know what sort of season lies ahead and what sort of requirement there will be for a large aerial tanker, it is funded after the fact. The arrangements are that a draw is made from consolidated revenue to finance that after the provision of the service.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** On the large aerial tanker and the smaller tanker, from helicopters to the C-130s and whatever that big plane is called that throws down the red stuff—the fire suppressant—are they locked in for our fire season now? As I said, our rainfall can be compared with 1975 when there was large rainfall and, obviously, there has been large growth everywhere right across the state. Even in the Gascoyne, where people think there are not many trees, growth is very high. We experienced this after the 2010–11 floods when we had one of the largest fires. I think it burnt 750 000 square kilometres of land. Will the minister have those aerial tankers and helicopters booked in and ready to go in the event of a pretty disastrous fire season?

[8.10 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Absolutely, member. We always have to be prepared, and I think the indications are that this season, because of the large amount of rainfall we had over winter, the fuel load will be quite high. The potential is that, in our long, hot summer, that fuel load will dry out. The member is absolutely right: there needs to be a significant aerial tanker capacity coming into this summer. There will be announcements down the track, but I can assure the member that this will be the most impressive season ever in terms of aerial capacity, including large tankers and some other aerial assets. They will be provided for. I will refer to the commissioner to elaborate, but we saw the effectiveness of those large aerial tankers in the Wooroloo–Gidgegannup fires, where there were inaccessible areas and valleys that are very difficult to get to. That support was very important and critical. Increasingly, those large aerial tankers are part of the resources that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services can draw on. I will refer to the commissioner to elaborate, but certainly there will be a big commitment this coming summer to aerial suppression.

**Mr D. Klemm:** The aerial fleet that DFES and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions are responsible for each summer is a mixed and varied fleet, for very good reasons. We have a number of different risks that require different ways of delivering water and/or retardant to fires. DBCA largely manages the single-engine air tankers, referred to as SEATs, which spend most of winter and a bit of spring spreading fertiliser and pesticides onto crops, and are then repurposed as water bombers during the bushfire season. We also have helicopters that are incredibly efficient in and around homes, and really effective at protecting properties; they come in a couple of different sizes. Then there are large air tankers, which was the focus of the member's question. We are currently in negotiations with both the National Aerial Firefighting Centre and the federal government around having a large air tanker to be placed here in Western Australia, as there was last year. One of the challenges for the aerial fleet

is that we often do not know how often they are going to fly. Costs are different for sitting on the ground as opposed to flying, so we have a retrospective model, if you like, in terms of recouping the costs of flights once we get to the end of the bushfire season, every season. That is called supplementary funding, as the minister referred to, and it is funded out of the consolidated account to cover off something that is extremely difficult for us to budget for in terms of what it is going to cost.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** In terms of being able to have these larger aerial tankers, I know the minister mentioned that they use fire retardant. There are a few sceptics out there on the effect that has on the environment, as opposed to putting out fires. How is the minister dealing with the environmental fallout of having that retardant once it hits forests? Secondly, in terms of filling up the tankers with water, do we have the right infrastructure at, say, Perth Airport, to be able to fill up these larger aerial tankers in a timely fashion by having the proper fittings or proper piping infrastructure to get the water to the aircraft?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The member is absolutely right: there needs to be infrastructure when the plane is on the ground, and certainly DFES has that capacity also. Maybe the commissioner can explain more.

**Mr D. Klemm:** In relation to the first part of the member's question, to do with the environmental impacts of the retardant, the retardant has to be approved through US government standards. There are a number of reasons for that, but it is the same retardant that is used everywhere in the world, essentially, so from that point of view, it has the environmental clearances to be able to be used. In relation to the infrastructure to be able to fill up large air tankers, last year we established a large air tanker refilling capability, including retardant, at Busselton Airport. That was done to an extremely high standard by the local State Emergency Service volunteers in Busselton. Over the course of what was a pretty busy year for the large air tanker flying out of Busselton, they implemented a number of improvements to, at one stage, be able to keep three large air tankers running during the height of the Wooroloo fire, and their efforts are to be commended for not only delivering that service but also improving it while keeping those three planes flying, one at a time, out of Busselton to go over the top of Wooroloo. In preparation for this year and coming years, DFES is almost at the end of development of a transportable refilling facility, so that should the need arise and we need to operate a large air tanker out of Esperance, Kalgoorlie or Geraldton, we can deploy that refilling capability into those areas. It may sound reasonably simple and that it is just a matter of connecting a hose to a plane and refilling it, but the retardant has to be continually mixed or it settles in the tank. That is a really key component and requires some tanks and infrastructure to be able to do that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 467 and the line item "Bushfire Mitigation Activity Fund—ESL", under "Rural Fire Division". The estimated actual for 2020–21 is \$1.8 million, and then there is a 2021–22 estimate of \$13.4 million. Note (b) states that the estimated actual represents an underspend of \$7.4 million from the 2020–21 budget because of weather conditions and the eligibility of local governments to participate in the program. That tells me that our fire mitigation program is well behind the eight ball. As the member for North West Central said, we have just experienced the wettest winter since 1975. Does that concern the minister? What are the plans to bring things back up to speed?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** As the member said, there was an impact on mitigation activity from both weather and COVID; that was also an aspect. The extent of the funding arrangements has been incredibly impressive. Since we have been in office, more than \$30 million has been spent on mitigation support to local governments, and there is a lot of money in the forward estimates, too. Maybe Mr Carter can elaborate on how we can catch up, in essence.

[8.20 pm]

**Mr M. Carter:** The heart of the member's question is around that scale-up. We have moved, over a three-year period, to a \$30 million-plus investment; that is just for on-ground work. The investment in planning, resources and support for local government is above that again. Prior to this program being put in place, we had around 16 local governments; we now have 87 local governments engaged in the program and, notably, 54 of those now have an endorsed final bushfire risk management plan, and that is the key to eligibility, as mentioned in the budget papers.

Once the plan is endorsed, they become eligible for the mitigation activity fund. There has been some underspend in previous years on top of the specific factors mentioned, climatic conditions and COVID, but it is also about the ramping up. I expect that in the coming year and following years that will even itself right out so that the spend for on-ground mitigation work will reach a maximum amount in the current year or the following year. Another factor is that it is emergency services levy and royalties for regions funding. Of course, not all the royalties for regions funding is made available to us; it is held by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. As we work through the grant programs—twice a year they are run across both programs—eligibility by individual job lot across local governments is established, but it moves around. In terms of the midyear review and the budget processes with Treasury, those figures move around depending on which local governments are successful in getting their grants and whether they are non-metro or regional local governments that are eligible for royalties for regions.

I think the heart of the answer is that we will catch up and we will catch up quickly. The number of local governments now engaged in the scheme and the support we are giving those local governments to put in place work on the ground has risen significantly over the past three years. I am very confident that the amount for on-ground mitigation of over \$30 million, as mentioned, will have \$8 million to \$10 million a year on top of that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** With the government's latest forestry announcement, I wonder whether the likes of Mr Carter would be very concerned about the fire mitigation issues that will now arise from having all our state forests locked up and being unable to mitigate?

**The CHAIR:** That does not sound like a further question; the member has branched off to a tangential matter that —

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I think it is a pretty relevant matter in relation to fire mitigation.

**The CHAIR:** It is not relevant in the sense that it is not in the minister's portfolio.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Okay. I have a further question. Mr Carter indicated that it should be okay to catch up. Will it take the whole financial year to get back up to speed, I guess? It is a question about the timing.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Thanks, member. I will refer that to Mr Carter. But I think, as has already been explained, we are often dealing with things that are unpredictable. The ability for local governments to get their mitigation plans in place to be able to qualify is affected by issues like the weather and, dare I say, COVID, but I will let Mr Carter elaborate.

**Mr M. Carter:** That largely is the answer, given there is seasonal dependence for particular aspects of the program, particularly within the planned burning space. The mitigation activity funding funds a range of activities, and planned burning is a key one, but not the only one. It is also for chemical use for firebreaks, access track enhancements and maintenance, and things like mechanical fuel removal and modifications such as flashing and shredding of vegetation, and scrub rolling as well. Some of those activities are not as prone to seasonal variations in weather—planned burning clearly is. What gives me confidence is the quantum of local governments now involved. We are getting such a large number of local governments that variations across the state can be catered for by shifting the investment into regional areas. As the opportunities arise, with enough agility and flexibility in that program, we can make sure that money actually hits the ground; whereas, in previous years, we have been slightly restricted because of a lighter number of eligible local governments. Now there is a different scenario and that gives me confidence that we will be able to catch up and hit the areas when they become available and move that money across the regions, basically.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I refer to page 457 of budget paper No 2 and the items under the heading "Recovery". We have heard a lot about severe tropical cyclone Seroja, which hit in April this year. Can the minister provide a list of where the state and commonwealth funding of \$104.5 million has gone or is going?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Sure, member.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am happy to take it as supplementary information if the minister does not have it.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am happy to respond. It is a big question because there is a lot of money and a lot of support. We have the Seroja State Recovery Controller with us here this evening who can also elaborate on it. The funding is significant. In May, funding of \$104.5 million was announced. It is a record amount in terms of Western Australian disaster recovery funding.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** There was major damage.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That is right.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The minister says it is a record amount, but it was a major event.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That is right, and it is good to know that we were able to respond in concert with the federal government accordingly.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Appropriately.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Appropriately, accordingly, there is a record amount that will go to recovery in terms of community support—the psychological support that is needed on the ground through Communities and the Red Cross —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Minister, I understand all of that; I would just like a list of where the \$104.5 million is going. I want to know what has been spent so far and where it has been spent, where future money will be spent and the time frames. I am sure the minister has that list. Can the minister provide it as supplementary information so that we can continue and ask further questions rather than taking up everyone's time?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am happy to give the member an indication of that this evening, because I think it is important to talk about it. I know that the recovery controller can do that also. It involves community welfare and outreach programs, recovery and resilience grants for insured residents of up to \$20 000, clean-up and recovery support for primary producers and small businesses of up to \$25 000, and support for the clean-up and restoration of community

recreational heritage assets of up to \$25 000. Also, very importantly, member, there is support from the federal government under this program to provide worker accommodation. There is a range of support there.

In terms of who is accessing the support at the moment, a lot of the support is provided as reimbursement. Once someone has paid for repairs on their property, there is a process to seek the money as reimbursement.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Does that include local government? Is that part of that reimbursement program?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I believe so, but I might refer that to the state recovery controller.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I still want that list, minister.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The member is entitled to put a question on notice.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Come on; the minister celebrates the fact that it is \$104.5 million and says, “This is a great announcement; how good are we?”, but it was one of the biggest cyclones to hit Western Australia. Anyway, putting that aside, why does the minister not want to provide that list as supplementary information? The minister can hand over the document right now. I would have thought that it is a cause for celebration.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am happy to provide it as a response to a question from the member—no problem.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** To me?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** No. If the member puts the question on notice, I am happy to provide it.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The minister wants to celebrate that it is \$104.5 million; well, let us celebrate it and the minister can provide a list of where that money is going. I think that is pretty fair.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Member, I am happy to —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** That then causes concern that that money is not being spent in the right manner. Should I be concerned?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The member should be aware that this program of support—a record amount—has come from the grassroots. It involved consultation with communities —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** It was a record disaster.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It involved consultation with 16 local governments and cooperation with the federal government. I would say that this is a long-term program and there is a long time for people to apply—from memory, until 2023. Perhaps I will get the state recovery controller to elaborate on how extensive this program is.

[8.30 pm]

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am looking forward to it.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The member has only to desire to put a question on notice and he will have that.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you, minister; and thank you, member, for your question.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am sorry you have to answer it.

**Ms M. Pexton:** As the minister indicated, the \$104 million announcement was based on a commonwealth–state funding package. As the minister outlined, that includes particular grants that will be available to different parts of the community identified as needing further support, given, as the member indicated, the impact that occurred.

We have a recovery and resilience grant for individual residents who are insured to apply for funding of up to \$25 000. That allows them to build further resilience measures into their properties, which, given the location and the fact that there was a category 3 cyclone, is a really important measure. Primary producers can also seek assistance of up to \$25 000 to clean up around their properties and fix any damage. There is a similar grant of \$25 000 for small businesses. There is a cultural heritage grant of up to \$20 000 for areas where we know heritage assets are the primary focus. Further to those grants, as the minister indicated, a very extensive community welfare and outreach package will supplement resources on the ground to support communities that have been considerably impacted. Another component of the package is the delivery of community recovery officers to work alongside regional local governments—16 in total—that are underdone in terms of capacity and capability to manage a recovery of this scale.

Further to the minister’s comments, the actual eligible measures of the disaster recovery funding arrangement will go for two years. As the minister indicated, they will go through to the end of the 2023 financial year. All the grants I have outlined are open for a full 18 months, allowing for that closure at the end of the 2023 financial year so people will have time to get work done and apply to have that money reimbursed.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The minister mentioned the \$104.5 million—the largest ever—and workers’ accommodation. How much of that \$104.5 million will be dedicated to workers’ accommodation? Where is the workers’ accommodation

going to be put in a place like, say, Kalbarri? How many beds will there be? What is the time frame for building the workers' accommodation?

**The CHAIR:** That is four questions, minister, but I know that you can answer them.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I think he is a very capable minister; he can answer all those questions. I have asked them before, I think.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The workers' accommodation is a key part of the recovery. At the moment we have an in-principle agreement with the commonwealth to provide workers' accommodation specifically for rebuilding after the damage caused by Seroja. I think it is the first time that Western Australia has secured an agreement under the disaster recovery funding arrangements, so that is significant in itself.

Land has been secured in Kalbarri and we are in the process—the state recovery controller can elaborate on this—of deciding on a provider for the work camp. The intention is to ascertain the numbers that are required initially, but it will be important to remember that under the recovery arrangements we can provide accommodation only for workers involved in rebuilding after cyclone Seroja. It is important to remember that.

Other parts of the midwest were impacted by the cyclone. The member knows very well that not only was Kalbarri impacted, but Northampton was impacted dramatically. Workers' accommodation will be required in Northampton and, I believe possibly in a small number in other places, including Morawa, Mingenew and Perenjori. The in-principle agreement and our negotiations with the commonwealth will enable us to access funding for that accommodation. We are working as hard as we can to get it done as soon as we can. I know that there is still a lot of the work, for instance, in agricultural areas and farming communities, and farmers have not had time to scratch themselves. They were seeding when this thing happened and now they are about to start harvesting. The time will come after the harvest when they will turn around and realise that they have significant damage on their property and that will be the time to address those issues. That is why a long-term period has been allocated for the recovery program. I think a lot of the people who would qualify for support probably have not yet had time to put in an application. That is why it is difficult to take a snapshot of what the final picture will look like and to appreciate the full significance of the package, how many people have taken part and what allocations there have been to individuals. I am mindful, of course, that some people can apply for multiple grants because they qualify as residents, business owners and primary producers.

We want to get the workers' cottages there as quickly as possible. Once we agree on an arrangement with the commonwealth government, we will get what we can in place as quickly as we can. We have already had a lot of early success with emergency accommodation. No-one who asked for accommodation has gone without a roof over their head. Indeed, we secured a number of caravans, which the member is aware of.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Have they been licensed?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Those caravans are providing people somewhere to live. I was just speaking to the CEO of the Shire of Northampton yesterday, in fact. He was very appreciative of those caravans and they were supplied as required by those individuals. It has been a very successful program.

The other thing we need to remember is that the Western Australia economy has been doing particularly well and the mining industry is booming, which means that there is competition for resources and labour. That probably predates Seroja, but, of course, it adds an extra burden when trying to secure tradespeople, resources and building materials. There is a lot going on. The state recovery controller could talk all day—or all night—about the issues involved, suffice to say—the member pointed this out earlier—that it was a significant disaster and it has had a significant impact. The response, reaction and recovery will take a long time. I think we have an excellent structure—one of the most comprehensive recovery structures of any disaster in Western Australian history. I think we can be pretty confident saying that. I will say it again because I know the member likes hearing it: it is a record amount of money. We need to thank our friends in local government—16 councils—who are dealing with really immense pressures.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Huge pressures.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Exactly. They are small shires, as the member knows, with small numbers of staff, and we are supporting them. They are doing it tough. But our response has been built from the ground up in terms of what their needs are. I also have to say that the commonwealth government has been very good. There has been cooperation between the state and federal government. My opposite number in Canberra is a National Party MP, Senator McKenzie, and I have her phone number. We get on very well and she is very responsive. It is a good news story.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** She is a very good friend of Western Australia.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Indeed, and it is good to see that state and federal governments can cooperate when they really need to.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** There is \$104.5 million available and it has been seven months since the cyclone but there is still no workers' accommodation. That is having an impact on accommodation in Kalbarri and Northampton. Geraldton, where a lot of tradies and builders are staying, is full as well. It is very difficult to get accommodation in Geraldton at the moment because everything is full. When people drive up and down the highway, as I do, they see the historical buildings in Northampton that probably will not be rebuilt because they were underinsured or there was no insurance. There was an earthquake in Boulder some years ago and I am pretty sure that the government came up with a fund of \$5 million to \$10 million to keep the heritage buildings in Burt Street, Boulder. There was money to keep the facades and to fix buildings because there was no insurance to fill the gap to rebuild those historic buildings.

Would the Minister for Emergency Services and the government consider looking at a fund to protect that heritage and rebuild some of those buildings along the highway in Northampton to ensure that the heritage is kept? One example is the pub, which probably will not get rebuilt because of the insurance complications. It is a significant, iconic building. Is there a heritage fund like there was when there was an earthquake in Kalgoorlie-Boulder?

[8.40 pm]

**The CHAIR:** I will stop the member there, mainly because I suspect that maybe the question should have been put to the Minister for Heritage, but if the minister is able to answer it, he can.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I think the member raises a good point. Part of the recovery arrangements talk about heritage and community assets. It is certainly something that would depend on the building itself, I imagine, and whether it is part of the community asset. Certainly there is a provision to look at the protection of heritage assets in the community. It is an issue. Quite often, the insurance for historic buildings and the ability to get tradespeople with the skills to work on the architecture who have knowledge of the past practices makes it expensive. I refer to the state recovery controller. Maybe she can elaborate on the heritage aspect of the recovery arrangements.

**Ms M. Pexton:** As the minister indicated, we currently have a grant, which we have outlined to the member. However, it is important to understand that the state-commonwealth arrangements are not one stop and we are done. As we work through the nuanced issues such as heritage, we have the opportunity to go back and further consider additional grants and levels of support and so on and so forth. As the minister and the chair have indicated, that would be done in partnership with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage because it maintains the Register of Heritage Places and there are certain protocols around that. Similarly, local governments have a part to play. We will watch that closely and, as needed, we will consider what other measures may be required.

**The CHAIR:** I have the members for Roe and Carine on the list. I do not know whether the minister needs a comfort break.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** We can end this division and have a break at nine o'clock, if that is okay.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the line item "Primary Fire and Emergency Fleet" on page 463. The budget for 2021-22 is \$22 906 000. How is the Collie emergency services vehicle manufacturing group going? I assume that is part of this budget to build primary fire and emergency fleet vehicles.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That is a really important government initiative and is a boost for Collie, obviously, to provide a new range of appliances for the emergency vehicle fleet. As the member points out, there is an underspend in 2021-22. I think the member was pointing that out. As I understand it, the issue is with the delivery of the cab chassis that underpin the appliances. All fire vehicles come in as a cab and a chassis, and the superstructure is built on top. We have a very good company engaged by DFES to supply the parts that go on top of those chassis. The member might be aware that there is a real issue with buying a new car anywhere in the world because of the shortage of computer chips.

That is also impacting on the provision of trucks to be imported to become fire appliances. That is a real issue. I know that the commissioner has been frustrated about that, but we simply cannot get access to those vehicles. That is why there has been an underspend of some \$12 million. We are trying to procure a supply of those chassis so that improvement work can be done in Collie. The company is turning out excellent fire trucks. They are amazing. I handed one over the other day to the Karnup Volunteer Fire and Emergency Service. The volunteers were amazed by what is being turned out in Western Australia and which will be turned out in Collie as well.

**Mr D. Klemm:** The minister is quite correct about some of the delays we have had involving the cab chassis. That goes across all the fire appliance fleet in particular, including the Toyota LandCruisers, which are the cab chassis of choice for the light tankers. We are just starting to run those out, but we are on somewhat of a drip-feed from Toyota for the number of cab chassis that we can get. The problem goes all the way up to Isuzu trucks. The delivery time for those cab chassis has almost doubled. Getting the Scania cab chassis from Europe has been pushed out to 10 or 11 months. There are challenges with the build program, but the good news is that we now have all of our build

contracts in place with all the builders for all the different types of fire appliances. Once we get a steady flow of cab chassis, we will be able to catch up reasonably quickly. The company that does the bulk of our building is establishing itself in Collie. It is not long until the first trucks will roll out of that facility.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I thank the commissioner. Did the minister's department have any input into the tender decision that awarded the total allocation to a business based in Malaga instead of engaging with a regional business such as one in my electorate in Narrogin, the Narrogin fire service, which had a fantastic business but has now basically been totally wiped out? It was prepared to deliver the same service. Did the minister's department have any input into the tender decision to award the business to build those vehicles to a business based in Malaga?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Certainly, the government leaves those operational decisions about which equipment to acquire and sorting out tenders to DFES. DFES will always make a judgement on the best value and best return for the taxpayer dollar when meeting the needs of DFES and delivering a quality product. The commissioner can elaborate.

**Mr D. Klemm:** As we went through the new build contracts, tenders were put out for the various vehicle types. The successful tenderers were chosen, as the minister said, partly for value for money and also for whether the quality of the product the company provides is fit for purpose, to ensure that we are providing the safest possible trucks in this instance to the volunteer and career personnel out there.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Would the minister be as disappointed as the local member—as I am—when I have seen a local business wiped out in Narrogin that had an excellent tender to build those vehicles, and then, at the same time, we now have a Malaga-based company with a shed in Collie, which from what I gather —

**The CHAIR:** You have got an answer on this. This sounds like rhetoric to me.

[8.50 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** From what I gather, that —

**The CHAIR:** Sounds like a question for private members' business.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The question is whether the minister is as disappointed as I am to see a local business wiped out when there is a shed in Collie with a few pieces of metal and no building or any trucks whatsoever?

**The CHAIR:** I am ruling that question out of order, member.

**Mr P. LILBURNE:** In light of the scheduled break, would it be appropriate through the chair to put the question to the minister on notice at some point in the future or at a later time?

**The CHAIR:** No, we will go to the break at 9. Fire away. I am sure the member for Roe will be returning with a question that complies with standing orders. Member for Carine.

**Mr P. LILBURNE:** Thank you, chair. Minister, I am interested in bushfire risk management and I refer to page 471 and the bushfire awareness campaign. Can the minister explain the significance of that campaign and what it will mean for emergency services in the community?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I thank the member, and it is a good question. It is a timely question because as we move into the high fire season it is important that members of the community become engaged with the issue, consider their own circumstances, and plan, especially if they live in fire-prone or susceptible areas, to have a response if they are faced with a catastrophic fire. As in previous years, and certainly last year, My Bushfire Plan WA, as it is called, will be part of our response. The idea is that there will be certainly public education through advertising. "How fireproof is your plan?" is a question we ask, and that will be across all media forms. We urge people to think about their personal risk and plan what they will do if a bushfire strikes. It is really important that people think about their personal situation at their home and work out a plan for if they are faced with the catastrophic situation. We urge people to download the app on their phone. I can tell the member that when there is a major fire event, the number of downloads of that application on people's phones skyrockets. Over the last fire season, there was a big increase in the number of people downloading that app. We want to see that continue. Part of the education campaign is urging people to download the app. It has basic information on what people should do, how to decide whether to stay and defend or leave and critical issues about how people handle the situation.

I can tell the member, and I have told members this before, that the suburbs where most people have downloaded the app and made their plan is Ellenbrook with 102, closely followed by Baldivis with 97. I was very disappointed that my electorate got pipped at the post by Ellenbrook, but it demonstrates that people at the urban fringe are very aware of the fire risk and they are keen to get involved with planning and thinking about the risk of fire. The country town with the most plans created was Margaret River with 78. That again tells us the important story that people in the regions are also very aware of this issue. The more public education we can have the better.

It is very interesting to talk to people who went through the Wooroloo fire recently. Even people who have been aware of the fire risk and have some experience with fire, when faced with an absolutely catastrophic, massive

blaze, a very fearsome and rapid blaze, as we had at Wooroloo, would tell us they would never stay and defend again. I think the commissioner spoke of people with that story. It is very important people appreciate the risk and the danger and the fierceness of bushfires that they can face. It is a story we heard many times; people say that they thought they could deal with it and that if they had their time over again, they would have got out. At the end of the day, we know that property loss is devastating. We saw 86 homes destroyed at Wooroloo, but those homes can be rebuilt and, thankfully, we did not have one loss of life in Wooroloo, which is really astounding given the nature and rapidity of the fire.

I do not know whether the commissioner wants to share some of his thoughts.

**Mr D. Klemm:** I thank the minister. The minister is quite correct. A number of community members in Wooroloo spoke to me of the belief that they had prior to the fire that they were prepared and ready to stay and defend their property. They felt like they were prepared both mentally and physically to do that, and then with the passage of that fire, they took the opportunity afterwards to reflect on their preparedness and discuss with me that it was not a place that they were going to stay and defend again. The preparedness level they were at was not what was required once a bushfire of that significance and intensity hit their location. The bushfire awareness campaign is really, really critical for this.

One of the major reasons that Ellenbrook has downloaded the app the most is the potential impact of the Wooroloo fire on Ellenbrook late on that Monday evening and into Tuesday morning. We would argue it is fantastic to see people engaging with the app, but preferably they would have done that prior to the bushfire season. Rather than accessing the app the moment the fire is at the front door, we would prefer that members of the community undertake that preparedness well before that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 464, halfway down the page, and income. Point 3 refers to the \$12.2 million budget estimate and the increase in the emergency services levy revenue. Can the minister tell me how many or what percentage of householders now pay the maximum ESL rate?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is an interesting question. I might refer to the chief financial officer who might be able to answer that.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** I will take a moment to see whether I have those facts and figures for the member. The 4.7 per cent is the proportion of properties that are paying the maximum and the levy applies to 1 311 452 properties.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Many householders who contacted me are concerned about the increase in ESL rates by 4.3 per cent, as identified in this line item. That is well above CPI, as the minister will know, and it seems to be that we are building momentum. It used to be just a small \$35 charge when it started. Now it has become a massive impingement on all ratepayers in WA. Can the minister tell me why it has increased well and truly above the rate of CPI?

[9.00 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I think I explained this earlier in the evening. The increase logged for this financial year is actually lower compared with the previous year. In the previous year, we had a freeze on household charges to help people out with COVID. The emergency services levy take was much lower and it was supplemented by \$40 million from the consolidated account. The actual increase compared with before COVID, in the budget year before that freeze, means that people are paying less than they were. The increase is based on a cut. I do not have in front of me the actual increase in real dollars, but it is only a few dollars. We have done a great service to people by accepting that COVID presented difficulties. We wanted to freeze the cost of the household basket. We reduced the ESL take from residents and ratepayers, and we supplemented that loss from the consolidated account of government. Now, in this budget year, we are still supplementing that ESL money with just under \$15 million from the consolidated account. Ratepayers are actually paying slightly less than they were before COVID.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I will take that on board. I think the member for Moore brought up earlier the spending of the ESL on non-fire-related activities such as marine rescue, which did not use to come out of the ESL. When did this pattern develop?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Member, the emergency services levy is not a fire services levy; it provides for all emergency requirements. DFES is not just a fire agency or department; it is an emergency services agency. I would hate to think that we were not going to fund marine rescue or the State Emergency Service, which provide excellent service to the Western Australian community. Those volunteers might be quite upset if the member were to suggest that they should not be funded.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What I am really concerned about is that a pattern appears to be developing. I agree that marine rescue do a great job as well. Government expenditure is reducing and the levy seems to be replacing it. To me, that pattern seems to be developing, including the 4.3 per cent increase this year. It is a concern that I would like to put out there.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I think that is an odd thing to say, especially given that, as I have pointed out, in this budget and in the previous one the ESL has been supplemented from the consolidated account. I also point out that most other jurisdictions across Australia use a levy-based system on rates to fund their emergency services. It is not unique and I think people want to know that their emergency services are well funded. I do not think it is a case of the taxpayer, or at least the government, getting out of its responsibilities. This is a government initiative. The emergency services levy is part of the way the government raises revenue. The beauty about the ESL is that it is defined and, according to the budget and the requirements of emergency services, it is worked out what the rate needs to be. Ratepayers enjoy the protection of emergency services if their house catches fire or there is the risk of a bushfire, or if they go to sea and they need rescuing; they get this service.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Plenty of our ratepayers have to pay the levy and put the fire out as well!

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I cannot understand the member's logic.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** What percentage of ratepayers now pay the maximum \$750 ESL levy, and is the increase in the number of ratepayers paying the maximum level because gross rental values have gone up?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will refer to the chief financial officer.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** Can the member please repeat the question?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** What percentage of ratepayers pay the ESL maximum of \$750, and is that because the gross rental value of properties has gone up? Has that led to an increase in the maximum one can pay, and what percentage of people pay the maximum ESL? Of those ratepayers paying ESL, what is the maximum amount that households pay?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Before Mrs Camarda responds, as I described before, the movement in gross rental values does not determine the funding of DFES through the ESL. DFES requires a certain budget. That budget is approved and then a calculation is made to fund what is required through the levy system. It is not simply that we become windfall beneficiaries because of the movement in house prices. That is not the case. That is the reverse. The budget is worked out first and then a calculation is made in terms of how we find enough revenue to fund that approved budget.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I think the question related to the percentage of people who have hit the maximum.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** But I think also the indication was somehow that the number was increasing because of a movement in —

**The CHAIR:** No; I think it was just a straight-up question.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The first question was: what percentage of those paying ESL have hit the maximum amount of money paid?

**Mrs G. Camarda:** It is 4.7 per cent of properties that pay the maximum amount.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 9.07 to 9.16 pm*