

EMERGENCY SERVICES — TRAINING REVIEW

Motion

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [10.16 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house calls on the state government to immediately review emergency services training with a view to —

- (a) provide nationally accredited and recognised training to emergency service volunteers and recognise prior learning of volunteers;
- (b) ensure localised and regular delivery of this training to regional volunteers; and
- (c) ensure training packages are developed in consultation with each of the volunteer emergency service associations.

This motion is reasonably self-explanatory. Obviously when we talk about emergency services, it is important that our services are adequately trained and that training is adequately available to people no matter where they are based or live, no matter what service they are in. From my perspective, I bring this motion to the house for consideration to reflect on some of the meetings I have had around the state with various emergency service organisations and to look at some of the issues that they have raised with me about training, to try to see if we can find a way to improve things for them and to see what is happening in that space within government. Every year as we head into the bushfire, cyclone or storm season, we are constantly told, rightly, that we as a community need to be ready for those events. We need to prepare our homes, have our bushfire plans, tie down trampolines when the big winds come and that sort of thing. I think that the community is well aware of those needs. In addition, our emergency services have to be adequately prepared—that is, in terms of equipment and people. Given that most of our emergency services members are volunteers, it is important that we have enough volunteers in the services, and part of that is having adequate training. Adequate training not only ensures that those volunteers have the right skillset to do the job, but also is a good way to attract people in the first place to join volunteer organisations, which are desperately crying out for new volunteers.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services 2016–17 annual report shows that in that year emergency services attended 306 searches, a total of 9 546 fires—4 805 of which were bushfires—1 400 structure fires, 2 852 road crash rescues, 2 041 rescues that were not road-crash related, and 1 130 marine rescues. Our services are busy. Those volunteers are working hard. Are they getting adequate training to do that job?

I now want to reflect on a couple of reports over recent years that have identified training as an area for improvement within the department. I will firstly talk a little bit about the January 2016 Waroona bushfire special inquiry and a couple of opportunities outlined in the report. In keeping with the reason for bringing forward this motion, it is about opportunity. I see it as an opportunity for us to make sure that our emergency services continually improve. Opportunity 14 identified in this report states —

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services training for Fire and Rescue career staff ... to include enhanced training in natural hazard incident management; hazard reduction burning; rural and forest fire behaviour and the Department of Parks and Wildlife use of fire as a management tool.

These identified opportunities for improvements in training are for some of the career firefighters, as well as for volunteers of course. One of the views expressed by the department was that younger volunteers are more interested in joining the brigades because of the higher level of training and support available. One of the constant—not criticisms—things raised with me by members of volunteer organisations around the place when I meet with them is that it is hard to attract new volunteers to those organisations. Yes, people are busy and they do not necessarily have the time they used to have, but I believe one of the main areas of attraction to work on is in promoting not only the organisation, but also the skills that people can gain from being a part of that organisation. There is an opportunity to increase the level of promotion of the training that is available and also, as we will discuss later, to make that training more available.

There are a couple of important opportunities in the report of the special inquiry into the Waroona fire. Obviously, it is focused on fire, but one of the comments states —

In addition to there being a perceived lack of experienced persons in rural fire management in DFES, there was also the suggestion put to the Special Inquiry that the agency does not provide adequate training to their staff in bushfire management, and emphasises theory rather than practical experience.

The State Emergency Services Volunteers Association expressed the view that this issue is not confined to bushfire skills:

I think this is important —

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... what is becoming increasingly apparent to SES volunteers throughout the State is that DFES staff have no training in the (natural hazard) roles they take over and the events are not managed efficiently with many problems occurring.

When we talk about training, we are talking about training not only at the level of the volunteers or the frontline members, but also at the top level to ensure that those people in control of major incidents have adequate knowledge of the different hazards they will face and do not look just at the fire perspective of things. The report goes on to state —

DFES provides training to paid staff and volunteers through the Professional Pathways Project, which includes leadership, technical and operational training.

We will talk about this pathways project, and hopefully we will hear from the government about what is happening with that process, because there has been some criticism of it from some of the people I have met. Concern is identified in this report that modules required to be undertaken are lengthy and are delivered during business hours—of course that makes it hard for volunteers to attend—and the prerequisite subjects also fail to recognise pre-existing knowledge and training, some of which was undertaken prior to the pathways project being adopted. There is a need to ensure that there is a good way to recognise the training that people have already done.

In a report from the Office of the Auditor General, there was a conclusion about how making a sustainable volunteer workforce is becoming an issue. It asked the question about whether DFES actively trained and equipped fire and emergency service volunteers. Most of the participants in the survey said that they had the right equipment, but the issue that was most prevalent for them was the training. They did not feel that they had adequate training or access to adequate training. Those things are interesting of course.

In travelling around the state, I have had the opportunity to meet with a number of emergency service members from Carnarvon down to Kalbarri and Esperance, and my colleagues have met with service members from the south west, as well as with people from the volunteer representative organisations in Perth. The perception of the State Emergency Service is that the training is no longer competency based; it is now WA-based workplace training and is not necessarily aligned with other states, which potentially affects the ability to deploy some of our volunteers or service members to other states. There does not appear to be a facility for recognition of prior learning to be obtained in a timely manner. Indeed, in some of the conversations I have had with those members, I have been told that they have been unable to complete certain levels of training; in fact, it would take a volunteer eight years to reach the competency level because of the number of modules they have to do and the fact that they have to travel to a major centre to do it. That is really holding back our emergency services volunteers. It is holding back those organisations from having accredited, trained people to then pass on that knowledge and train volunteers at a local level. These concerns need to be addressed, and hopefully they will be.

From the point of view of the SES, some of the training courses are not always delivered using the equipment that the SES uses. That obviously presents issues. We have to make sure that the training is relevant and available and that they are using the right equipment. There is no point in training someone to use something that they are not going to use in the primary role they take on.

In a meeting in Albany, it was pointed out that level 3 incident controllers are required to come down from Perth because there was not the capacity locally, but the understanding of the volunteers there and in other places is that volunteers cannot achieve those level 3 qualifications; that is reserved for the hierarchy of the department. Perhaps we can ascertain whether that is correct, but, whether or not it is correct, the perception is that it is holding people back from undertaking that level 3 qualification. It is important for people in the local area to have that qualification because the local knowledge that that person has is also very valuable in times of major incidents, rather than having people come from outside who do not have the local knowledge and who then have to rely on other people to provide that knowledge, which could potentially confuse the operation. Out of that, there is a belief that far more level 3 fire incident controllers need to be based in the regions.

We have talked to people in Denham. The pathway for volunteer marine rescue members is difficult and they find it hard to access. Yes, it is an isolated place and these guys are prepared to travel, but some of the travel they have been asked to do is extremely onerous and at their own expense. Perhaps there is a way that we can bring the training to them or to take some sort of rolling training model out to these people to ensure that they all have access to it. Some of the guys in Esperance have also said that the training seems to be more focused on getting numbers through and they are not really interested in recognising the prior learning of people. This is a consistent theme that came through, no matter which service we spoke to. Of course, some of the training was a little disjointed. People were asked to do an on-road driving training course before they could do the off-road one, but most of the members of the emergency service never drove on the road so they did not see that they needed to do that course, and there was no recognition of their own knowledge or experience anyway.

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These things, again, which are combined in the view of most of these people, put people off joining the volunteer services. That is not what we need. We need more people to join the volunteer services. It is not just about putting out nice advertisements asking people to join their local fire brigade or marine rescue service; it is also about telling people the opportunities that are offered. When I have met with these people, they have said the opportunities would be good if they were available, accessible and achievable in a realistic time frame. Therefore, some thought needs to be put into how that might occur.

I now want to refer to a Department of Fire and Emergency Services report titled “Together We Can: Western Australian Emergency Services Volunteer Sustainability Strategy 2016–2024”. The report identifies different outcomes and actions. I hope we will hear from the government today where DFES is up to with those particular strategies. Page 31 of the report lists strategies to increase the recruitment of volunteers. They include the need for volunteers to be engaged in a relevant pathway; developing e-learning resources for volunteers, where appropriate, to reduce training time; tracking the timeliness of new volunteers’ training pathways; and implementing the volunteer identity card. The report refers also to the need to promote additional qualification and training opportunities for targeted volunteers via the pathways program.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services “2016–2028 Strategic Plan” outlines the department’s strategic planning framework for the 12-year period to 2028. I refer in particular to strategic direction 4, “Valued and Capable People”, which is about the need to have the right people in the right places with the right skills and knowledge. The time line for implementation lists the outcomes that are aimed to be achieved for 2020. One of those outcomes is that DFES volunteers are accessing a range of opportunities to build their technical and experiential skills. Another outcome is that the structure of the volunteer services meets the needs of emergency services across the state. That is an interesting outcome. Many of the smaller emergency services organisations argue the case that they tend to get left behind. The people in these organisations are all part of the same community. In my meetings with them, they said the fire guys get whatever they want—if they need new equipment, they get it—but it is very difficult for the marine rescue guys, the SES and other organisations to upgrade equipment or get new equipment. There is a disconnect in that area. There is now a dedicated bushfire commissioner within DFES. The State Emergency Service and the volunteer marine guys should also have a dedicated commissioner so that they will have a point of connection to improve the training available to them.

One idea that was put to us about how to attract volunteers and provide training to volunteers in regional and remote areas was “voluntourism”. That is quite a neat name. We could identify people with the necessary skills who are willing to volunteer to be trainers, and offer them accommodation or another form of incentive to stay in rural and remote areas in exchange for providing training and relief to the staff of the local volunteer organisations. That opportunity needs to be explored. It again comes back to access to training, and the length of time it takes to get through the training courses, and also the fact that the training seems to be very fire orientated, so the SES and VMR groups seem to be missing out.

To get back to the motion, in summary, we need to find out what areas we can improve. We need to ensure that prior learning is nationally recognised, and that there is a consistent training program across the nation so that people from other states can be interchanged with people from this state. We also need localised training that is locally delivered. That is very important. The different organisations face unique issues in the jobs they do. The organisations in Shark Bay and Denham engage in different types of rescue operations than might be the case in the south west of the state, where people might need to be rescued from forests or bush, or from cliffs. There needs to be an understanding of the local area. That can be improved only by having more highly trained people from the local area involved in the training.

The most important point in all this is the need for consultation. All the organisations I met with made it very clear that they did not feel they were adequately consulted about their training needs. They also felt that it was essentially left to them to try to attract volunteers. There was no higher level process or procedure to enable that to happen. It is important to address that. We are coming into the fire season, and towards the end of the year we will be coming into the cyclone and storm season. This is the time to think about our emergency services and look for ways to ensure that our fire and emergency organisations are provided with the people and training required to protect all of us when we need it.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [10.36 am]: I wish to make some comments on behalf of the McGowan government on this motion. I thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this motion before the house. I indicate that the government will not be supporting the motion, and I will go through the reasons why. At the outset, I acknowledge the amazing work done by the emergency services right around Western Australia, particularly in regional Western Australia. I want to acknowledge the volunteers in particular—the many men and women who help protect our communities on a daily basis—and place my thanks on the record.

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I have to say, not knowing the intricacies of the issue, that in relation to training, I have obviously sought advice from the Minister for Emergency Services, who has responsibility for this area, so I place these comments on the record as the views of the minister. I am told that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services currently has in place an incredibly sophisticated training and professional development program. The department, as a registered training organisation, provides professional development services for volunteers and employees to enhance both their operational and organisational skills so that they can best serve their local communities right around the state.

The McGowan government is committed to providing high-quality, interactive and realistic learning environments, including specialist training, to equip volunteers to operate in the often dangerous situations they find themselves in. DFES has two primary training grounds—the WA Fire and Emergency Services Academy at Forrestfield and the simulation centre at Belmont. These facilities have the capacity to train volunteers from all the fire and emergency services and career firefighters from around Western Australia. Members may be interested to learn that the academy is equipped with applied training grounds, simulation programs and a variety of innovative learning options. Students have access to a range of learning resources through the DFES eAcademy. Students also have access to subject-matter experts across all the courses on offer. The current DFES training model delivers nationally recognised or accredited training, mostly delivered at, or coordinated through, the WA Fire and Emergency Services Academy. This training is provided to career firefighters as part of their vocational training qualifications. All volunteer programs are coordinated and delivered by DFES regions; that is, our volunteers are trained in the regions by people in the regions.

In 2014, DFES introduced professional pathways for volunteers and staff. This pathways framework complements the existing experience and knowledge of both career and volunteer personnel through harmonisation of the skills training and development for all personnel. Pathways training helps to ensure that there is a career path for volunteers to train as career firefighters. It is aligned with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services catalogue, which includes three main streams of competency—namely, incident management, leadership and management, and technical skills. I am told that a number of key requirements underpinned the development of the volunteer pathways, including the provision of flexibility for different levels of volunteer commitment and time. DFES recognises that some volunteers may be time-poor but are still dedicated to serving their community. This dedication should be encouraged and DFES should work to ensure that such volunteers can contribute in a flexible way that suits their lives. Another requirement was the utilisation of existing training products, some of which are best practice training and, as such, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The third of the key requirements was to develop the pathways at a base level that will change and develop over time.

In 2016, DFES introduced a new web-based learning management system, known as eAcademy, to assist volunteers and staff to manage training. The e-Academy is the single source for all DFES pathways training information, approvals and record management, automating pathways training registrations and approvals and information management processes. Although there were some issues with eAcademy, DFES is working with volunteers to understand those issues and has made progress in rectifying them. There are tight controls over registered training organisation activities, which have strict compliance requirements, particularly around trainer–assessor qualifications. This strict compliance regime caused a significant impost on volunteer trainer–assessors and, based on feedback, accredited training was discontinued for volunteers. In addition, volunteers also expressed concern about the mandated volume of learning and training time commitments for accredited training, which were considered onerous by a vast majority of volunteers. It is also important for honourable members to understand that we should be making it easier for those who wish to volunteer and serve their communities to do so. This should obviously be tempered by the need for volunteers to do this safely. As a result, DFES now delivers role-specific training to all volunteers to a DFES competency framework. DFES is committed to training all volunteers, as well as career firefighters, to the best standard for their role. Certainly, regional communities and communities throughout the state would want that. We want to know that the volunteers who are serving us in our communities have access to training so that they can serve to the highest standards. All trainer–assessors hold training and assessment qualifications, along with industry knowledge, skills and experience. I am told that all trainer–assessors complete the DFES workplace training and assessment course to develop the required skills and knowledge to facilitate effectively. Different levels of certification can be achieved as a result of participating in training and assessment activities within DFES. I am told that these include the record of attendance, the record of completion, the statement of attainment or qualification and pathway certificates.

DFES has volunteers and employees from all walks of life. It is worth noting that DFES provides a range of services to ensure that all students, regardless of age, gender, cultural or ethnic background, disability, sexuality, language skills, literacy or numeracy level, remote location and other personal circumstances are able to access, participate in and achieve suitable outcomes through vocational education and training. Available services include pre-enrolment materials; access to mentors within the workplace; referrals to language, literacy and numeracy programs when appropriate; flexible delivery models and methods; alternative format learning materials, including

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e-learning; flexible scheduling and delivery of training and assessment; counselling services through the Employee Assistance Program; and learning and assessment programs customised to the workplace.

I am told that DFES is currently reviewing the training offered to volunteers. All volunteer courses will be mapped to a competency framework in 2019. DFES has already commenced this with bushfire training programs. Volunteers have been heavily engaged throughout this process. Volunteers can apply to external providers for recognition of prior learning should they wish to pursue nationally recognised units of competency. DFES offers volunteers recognition of current competency, enabling volunteers to complete an assessment-only pathway if that is what they choose.

As part of the collaborative and consultative approach by DFES, volunteer training interests are represented through service-specific volunteer training advisory groups that also have association representation. When designing or reviewing training courses, DFES relies on numerous subject matter experts to ensure the best and most relevant training for our unique conditions in Western Australia.

Honourable members would be aware that I have previously spoken about the Minister for Emergency Services' announcement on the Rural Fire Division. In fact, we have had some debate in this chamber about this important initiative. It is worthwhile noting the impact that the Rural Fire Division will have on the delivery of training for all volunteers and career firefighters. For the first time ever, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services will have a division dedicated to rural and bushfire management, which will enhance our capability at state, regional and local levels. The new division includes the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, a bushfire risk management program and related activities, land-use planning and bushfire technical services, and, of particular significance to this motion, a new first-of-its-kind \$18 million Bushfire Centre of Excellence, which will facilitate high-level training and bushfire science.

This is a major step forward for Western Australia. I think all members agree that it is a positive initiative. We are embarking on one of the most ambitious reforms to the bushfire sector in WA, one that includes significant investment in training that harnesses the skills that we have and looks to what we will need in the future. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence will improve rural fire management through leadership, collaboration and innovation across the sector. Its primary focus will be to enhance the coordination and delivery of bushfire management training across the entire sector in WA. Importantly, this includes volunteers from all services. It will lead to improvements in interoperability through shared training programs and peer-to-peer learning. I am told that work on this is well underway. The government will consult with volunteers and other key stakeholders to further develop concepts for the Bushfire Centre of Excellence in the very near future. I am told that a request for proposal to host and construct the centre will be released shortly. I know that members who represent regional WA in particular will have a keen interest in where the centre will go. I know Hon Dr Steve Thomas has previously made comments in this place about where he thinks it will go. Certainly, we will put out the request for proposal to host and construct the centre very shortly.

Hon Colin Holt: Give us a hint!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I wish I knew. Honourable member, I have previously said that as a regional member, I have an interest in where it will go. I would love to see it in my electorate, just as members of this and the other place would undoubtedly love to see it in their electorates.

Hon Colin Holt: Let's put it in Broome.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not sure that Broome is the most central place for it. However, if it was offered to us in Broome, we would take it. I will go back to putting my case on the record, otherwise I will run out time.

The operational planning and design of the centre of excellence is progressing, with capital funding to support the construction of the facility available from 2019–20. The location of the Rural Fire Division will be considered in parallel with the functional design of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, paying particular attention to training and capability building within all the volunteer groups engaged in bushfire management throughout the state. The centre will not just be for volunteer and career firefighters; it will deliver training for all emergency services personnel. It is about collaboration, supporting our volunteers and harnessing their expertise, whether they are from a bush fire brigade, the State Emergency Service, a volunteer fire and rescue service or a volunteer fire and emergency service.

Two other important improvements are worth mentioning. Volunteer liaison officers will be based within the commissioner's office to provide a direct link between volunteers and the commissioner, an issue that was raised previously as something that has been missing around the state. We all know that bushfire risk management is a shared opportunity and a shared responsibility. Getting these essential on-ground works done is very much part of that. Enhanced training of personnel within the sector, irrespective of whether they are paid, within government or industry or volunteers, is essential to achieving that. This government is absolutely committed to the enhanced

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training of all volunteer groups operating within the bushfire sector as they form a critical, irreplaceable component of the Western Australian capability in this regard.

In closing, DFES recognises that emergency services volunteers are incredibly important in defending and preparing our state in a variety of situations. The training is incredibly important and DFES takes it very seriously. Training of volunteers is nationally recognised, training is delivered regionally and all training is developed in consultation with the volunteers and their volunteer associations.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [10.50 am]: Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to make a few opening comments on the motion moved by Hon Colin de Grussa. This is an excellent motion and I thank the honourable member for moving it today. In honour of his motion, I have worn my volunteer emergency services tie with its bright orange emergency services colours. I know that Hon Colin de Grussa is a passionate advocate for emergency services. I think this is a very worthy debate.

Hon Colin de Grussa raised a lot of very important points. It was very hard to find anything to disagree with in his address. I propose to move on to a few other issues, referring to a couple that the Minister for Environment presented to the house. I wish to make the point that training for emergency services will always be a fairly tricky exercise for a number of reasons. One of the first ones, particularly in rural areas, is that a group of people who have historically fought bushfires have developed a degree of competence and expertise and are not always willing to undergo additional training to be ticked off by a bureaucratic process and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. I understand that. I also understand the reverse argument that says a DFES manager of a fire—the fire control officer on a fire field—needs to have a degree of confidence in the people who are volunteering and who have turned up to assist to fight that fire that they are capable of doing the jobs that they might be sent to. The fire control officer needs to have some confidence that the people that they have are adequately trained because the last thing they want to do is send someone out on a fire field who gets injured because they were inadequately trained or did not know the detail or the best method to use in a particular situation. I understand that.

There has always been some reticence within DFES to make full use of volunteer firefighters unless they have a good working knowledge of their capacity. That capacity varies very much over the state. When I look at the area that I cover in the south west—in the Capes region, Margaret River and Busselton—the volunteer firefighters, DFES employees and Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions employees all work together remarkably well. There is a huge amount of cooperation and respect for each other. At an emergency event in that area, we see that come together reasonably seamlessly. There is respect across all three of those groups. That does not happen universally across the south west electorate and it certainly does not happen universally around the state. We do need to ensure—I have raised this before—that that mutual respect is developed. In my view, that can only happen through joint experience on a fire field or through joint training. That joint training is absolutely critical. I agree with Hon Colin de Grussa that it is important that that become nationally recognised. We should be able to take a volunteer firefighter from the south west of Western Australia, plonk them in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, for example, and expect them to have a fairly similar standard of training and some indication of their capacity. I think that is a good thing. I think that the government has taken some steps in the right direction with training. The interaction between the department and the volunteers has increased to such a level—I commend the department for that; I think it has put much greater effort into being inclusive—that mutual respect can occur. The last thing we want is volunteers turning up to a DFES-controlled fire when the DFES fire controller does not know or understand the capacity of the volunteers or they do not have the capacity required. It is absolutely essential that training is enhanced.

Along with the minister, I guess we all have some expectation of enhanced training based on the development of this \$18 million centre of excellence, which I still think should be somewhere between Pinjarra and Manjimup in the south west land division where most of the forests meet most of the people. That is where the greatest risk lies, and I still think that is the best location. I will obviously be a little disappointed if the government announces that it will go into Darlington where the United Firefighters Union of WA announced it was going some months ago. I will be very interested to see who is running government in Western Australia. That will be a very interesting announcement. I am hoping that commonsense will reign in that process. I attended the opening of the revamped Yarloop Fire Station. For six weeks, the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services had been saying that he did not want to take it too far out of Perth. For some reason, he changed his approach significantly and said that it is an open tender process and he will look at every location.

Hon Stephen Dawson: There you go—open mind.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The proof of the pudding will be in the eating. I look forward to that announcement with some degree of enthusiasm to see whether the minister has managed to find a good regional compromise. I think Broome might be a long way to go but there is plenty of room in the —

Hon Stephen Dawson: I'm not sure too many of them would complain.

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Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I have a few places that I might recommend but I am happy with an open process. Hopefully, if it is a genuinely open process, logic will dictate that it will go somewhere in the region that I mentioned.

I note that the minister said that the centre of excellence will lead to improvements. We hope that is the case. We hope that additional training will occur, and to a higher standard. We are dealing with about 27 000 or 28 000 volunteers around the state in emergency services, the vast majority of them—about 22 000—bushfire volunteers and fire volunteers. That is a lot of training to be provided. We always have to try to make sure that the training is as convenient as possible because there is an issue of requiring a reasonably full-time two to three-day course, for example, to get a basic fire ground ticket. It is not a small and simple thing. It is not a quick online course. Significant things need to be taught because people's lives are at risk. There is a significant and sometimes onerous process to go through. Hon Colin de Grussa raised very good points about making that training as regional as possible—providing it as close to home as possible. It would be nice to see it streamlined as much as possible but having opened this debate with the comment that DFES has to be able to send people out to a fire ground whom it knows are adequately trained to deliver that service, it will never be a simple argument. Either side of politics—or all six or seven parties represented in this chamber—could probably find examples of where that was not done perfectly and raise issues about the conflicts between the recipients of that training, in particular in regional areas, many of whom have looked after the fire zones and risk zones in their patches not just for years but for generations, and bring that historical local corporate knowledge to the people. That group of people do not necessarily appreciate being told in a basic fire-training service how to do their job, but we have to find a way for them to work together. I admit that DFES has become far more aware of making sure that it delivers that training in a way that is respectful to the corporate and regional history that those people are aware of.

I see improvements in the process. It is difficult to maintain a volunteer workforce that does not feel like it is respected and valued. I appreciate that DFES has made this better over the past few years, and I commend it for that. I still think there is a way to go to make sure that we continue to do that. I see no alternative in the long term other than to provide that high level of training to people who are there that gives faith to those managing particularly larger fires, and to provide training to a level that means that they can be adequately used. There were examples in our major fires in Yarloop, in particular, and in Esperance, where volunteer firefighter units were stacked up somewhere out of the way while the Department of Fire and Emergency Services crews got on with the job. That only changes with mutual consideration. I appreciate also the comments of the mover of the motion about the State Emergency Service, Volunteer Marine Rescue Western Australia and the other groups. It is absolutely critical that their training becomes a little more integrated, even though it will be specialised for the most part, and that they are equally respected. I think that to be equally respected, they need to be given a seat at the table and directorships at DFES.

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [11.01 am]: I would first like to thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this very important motion to the house. It is very timely considering the start of the bushfire season is just around the corner; I think it will be only a matter of weeks. The forecast for next week is for temperatures in the mid-20s with no rain, so it will not be too long before there are bushfire issues.

A lot has been said about bushfires today and that the new Rural Fire Division will create a centre of excellence for training. It is a little disappointing that it is not up and running yet, considering that the bushfire season is very close. If my memory serves me right, the briefing I had on the new Rural Fire Division was that the training would be sent out to the regions and to brigades to provide the training onsite, rather than creating a centralised centre of excellence where people had to come in. I hope that will be the case. I remember some years ago attending the very well maintained Rocky Gully town hall where we had some bushfire training with the local brigade and a member from DFES had come down as a trainer. It was a very informative and very valuable day. These training programs are very, very important. I think the government should keep them under constant review. Minister Dawson said they were not reviewing it this time but went into some lengthy detail about how training is provided throughout the state. It is not just bushfire training. There is a lot of focus on bushfires but there is, of course, the State Emergency Service, marine rescue, volunteer ambulance brigades and volunteer fire and rescue. All those involved in emergency brigades need adequate training and to be valued as they are.

During a lot of the debate on a Rural Fire Division, the Economic Regulation Authority put together some models on how much it would cost to implement a rural fire service. One of those models was a fully paid service that contained only about 3 000 full-time employees. That was estimated to cost more than \$500 million. That gives us some idea of the value of volunteers within the state. That was only for bushfires. When we start adding on SES, fire and emergency services and all the other volunteers, it could easily be worth double that. A lot of the expertise of these people will be in the local community on the ground, knowing the terrain and knowing the people, which is absolutely invaluable.

There is also a lot of responsibility on these people. A fire incident manager or controller has an enormous amount of responsibility managing a fire incident to make sure that volunteers are kept safe and that the emergency is dealt

Extract from Hansard

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Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Tim Clifford; Hon Darren West

with. Just as equally, someone involved in marine rescue also has an enormous amount of responsibility. I recall being out to sea a few years ago when a very panicked radio call came in from someone who could not see land, had forgotten their compass directions and, obviously, did not have a GPS, and it was getting very late in the afternoon. The radio controller for marine and rescue was able to calm down that person, get them to trust their compass, and give them directions and over an hour or two, land was sighted and the panic had subsided. There is a lot of responsibility on these people, even on volunteer ambulance brigades. In the country, a lot of people rely heavily on ambulance brigades and, of course, their training is very, very important.

I definitely support this motion. There is no doubt that we have to constantly review training requirements and make sure that we value these people. I received a letter recently—I do not know whether other members received a letter from the same person—from a long-time member of the SES in country Western Australia. One of his concerns, amongst many other things, was about the training that SES members were receiving and that they were not valued. One of the charters of the Rural Fire Division is to try to bridge the gap between DFES and volunteers where there seems to be a bit of a cultural divide. That bridge needs to be crossed not only with volunteer bush fire fighters but also other emergency services. In short, I support this motion and I hope that the government takes on board the need to value volunteers and provide the training required, and makes sure that we constantly review these requirements and that our volunteers are valued, as they should be.

HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [11.05 am]: I thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this motion to the house. I have to say that I am very disappointed with the government's response in that it will not support this motion, especially the first part of it, which calls for the government to review the adequacy of the training of volunteers. I know that the minister in this house is a representative minister, so he would be supplied with notes from the minister's office, with some consultation from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services itself. We can understand, when we call for a review into training for volunteers and the emergency sector, that DFES will have a view on that. That is exactly what we got from this minister's response. It was purely what DFES wants us to believe. In this motion, we are asking for a review into processes that support our volunteers. It is not make-believe. We get representations all the time from volunteers and organisations about the adequacy of training for our volunteers entering emergency organisations. One of the things I think needs to be looked at in particular is—I do not want to make a qualitative judgement—training at a local level to fulfil a volunteer role. When people want to progress from being a volunteer to a professional, which has to be one of the breeding grounds for a DFES professional workforce, we would think that DFES has to think about those pathways. I want to know from a review how those pathways are going. That is a very appropriate question to ask of the government and of DFES. Can we ask DFES itself to do a review into that? I would have thought it would be pretty difficult. It will have a view of the world of how it thinks it is delivering on it.

I want to give an example of how I have come across this in the past. Everyone will remember the unfortunate death of Mr Ward, who died in the back of a prison van in the goldfields. The State Coroner reviewed that death and one of his recommendations was that Western Australia Police review the training that police officers are given on the Bail Act. I was a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, which undertook an inquiry into the transportation of detained persons and the implementation of the coroner's recommendations in relation to the death of Mr Ward. The coroner handed down some findings and people were meant to go off and do stuff. On the basis of a petition, the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs asked how the training was going, so we had an inquiry into the implementation of the coroner's recommendations. One of the recommendations was, obviously, training police on the Bail Act. We got the police in and asked: how did the review go into the training of police officers on the Bail Act? It is on the public record that the senior officer said, "We've done our review." When we asked what that review found, the reply was, "Everything's tickety-boo; everything's all right." The coroner said that a review was needed into how police officers are trained in the Bail Act. They did a review and said, "No; it is all okay." Does it not seem incongruous to members that the police reviewed their own processes and found that they are all right? That just does not add up. That is why this motion asks for a review into how we train our volunteers. However, the minister stood up and gave a response on behalf of the government that it got from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, which is in charge of that. It is incongruous and does not make sense. We should be asking questions based on things that come back from the volunteers and volunteer organisations. DFES should be thinking about how to do training better to promote through the volunteer ranks to the professional circuit. The government's response that it will not do a review is completely unsatisfactory.

I wonder whether there is any appetite in this house to have a select committee to look into the training of volunteers in emergency services. We seem to establish a select committee every second week in this house to look at things. The government is always happy to agree to those. Why not do one of them? I would love to amend the motion to bring that about. Maybe we will put a motion on the books to do that. It would be worthwhile getting an independent review of how volunteers are trained in this state, firstly, to support their own communities in the emergency volunteer work that they do, and, secondly, to provide pathways up into the system to give DFES and

our professional services more capacity. People retire all the time. What is the plan? What is the pathway to take these people through?

This is a really good motion. It is very disappointing that the government has said that there is nothing to see here. Unless the minister wants to correct me, the government got advice from only the minister's office or the department. I wonder whether it got any advice from any of the volunteer organisations before it made the statement that it was not going to support this motion. That would be an interesting outcome. This house should be saying that an independent review is needed to support volunteers and volunteer organisations throughout the state, and especially in regional Western Australia, where we hear that there is inadequate access to training for our volunteers. That is especially so in remote areas. The minister talked about those remote areas, where he would potentially like to put the new Bushfire Centre of Excellence. People in remote areas are the ones who are saying most of all that it is very hard to get accredited professional training in the regions. The minister should go back to the minister from the other house whom he represents and ask those very questions himself. What we have been given today is a response from department-land and minister-land that there is nothing to see here. That is not adequate. We should support this motion. We should think about having a select committee to take this matter further.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.12 am]: I thank Hon Colin Holt for his words and also Hon Colin de Grussa and other speakers for their contributions to this debate. I warn the government that it really needs to take notice. This is a very good piece of non-government business, which One Nation will be supporting. In this non-government business motion, Hon Colin de Grussa has clearly identified three areas of weakness in the system and that things could be done about this. Quite a bit has been said about the rural bushfire situation. There was one vote in that. Members of this place are reflecting what the public are saying. The government really needs to listen to that. Yes, we may have different political views; however, when we speak on issues like volunteers, we are talking about the public of Western Australia. We are not talking about their political views but about their desires and wishes and the things they are telling us. My bit of advice to the government is to listen to this non-government business debate and try to take some action to improve the situation.

The community resource centres luckily avoided some proposed cuts. That is one organisation that could help to provide training or a place in which some of this volunteer training could be done. Maybe it would cost a little more and it would maybe need a little more support from the government to make that happen, but it would be money well spent.

We are having trouble keeping volunteers in all spheres right across Western Australia—it would not matter whether we were talking about volunteers in sport, the rural fire brigade or many different services. I think they are being undervalued. We are now seeing people turn away from being rural fire brigade volunteers. It will not be long before they start to turn away from other areas as well. One thing that is absolutely outstanding about Australian society, and especially Western Australian society, is volunteers. This does not happen in the UK. This does not happen in the US. It does not happen in western Europe. It does not happen in Canada or New Zealand, which are very similar societies to us, but it does happen in Australia and especially in Western Australia. We need to respond to this. We do not want to lose these volunteers.

Hon Colin Holt made it quite clear that this is a good piece of non-government business. The government really needs to stand up, take note and try to look at ways in which the three suggestions outlined in the non-government business motion could happen. I am looking outside the box here. Maybe we could have transportable training units that travel throughout the regions. That has been done before in many different areas. That is maybe one way in which we could make it easier to get training to those remote areas. If not, maybe the CRCs, as I mentioned before, could be a place into which we could put more funding to enable this training to happen. We do need nationally recognised training. It is important that this training is recognised by all states across Australia. We need to get out into regional areas and support them, because we have an enormous number of ageing volunteers. Training and the updating of their work in that volunteer area is needed. A lot of these people started a long, long time ago and need to keep up with current ideas in volunteering and the improvements that have been made. When all is said and done, all we are asking for is that consultation be done. We know what DFES will say. We know what we are saying. Members are just reflecting what the public is saying. We are bringing it to this Parliament and we are asking this government to consider those important issues.

HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan) [11.17 am]: I welcome the ongoing debate around volunteers and how we should support them. I take on board what Hon Colin Holt said about review processes. The Greens all support a good review process and transparency in government, so I look forward to continuing to work with all parties in this place to ensure that our volunteers are supported on all levels. That is even more important when it comes to emergency services, because these people are putting their lives on the front line; they risk everything they have to protect the community, and even more so in the regions.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas spoke about his wish to have the training facility put into the south west, because that is apparently where the majority of the forests and more of the fires are. I do not really have an opinion on where it should be, but it should serve the community regardless of where it is and it should be in a place that is accessible. I am open to ideas around training. I assume that we would have mobile training facilities that would go out to the regions and not have it completely centralised. That is something I will continue to look at to make sure that when it is rolled out, it serves the community in the best way possible.

I would like to go back. The Greens will continue to support measures that ensure all emergency services are properly staffed and funded so that volunteers can be fully trained, supported and equipped with all the equipment that they need. The Greens will also ensure that all volunteers, regardless of whether they are in the metropolitan or rural areas, are supported equally and, as the Minister for Environment mentioned, that they are open to more diversity and that we make sure we encourage people from all walks of life to have an opportunity to serve as a volunteer in our emergency services.

I want to make a couple of quick observations in the time I have left. Currently, the federal public safety training package is being reviewed. Submissions closed in August and they are being reviewed by the federal government. I am looking forward to looking at some of those submissions to see what processes are suggested so that volunteers within Australia as a whole can access diplomas that will be recognised in different states. That is something that has come up in recent times. I had a quick look online to see what positions the Department of Fire and Emergency Services had advertised. Currently, there are 10 level 3 volunteer management support officers needed to help coordinate and manage volunteers. I hope the job definition formats around those positions encompass some of the things that have been mentioned today so that some of the information we have been debating goes down to ground level and is taken on board in that training so that that can be passed on to volunteers and so that they can work with them in a collaborative way.

As I said, I welcome the debate. I welcome the discussion around volunteers. When it comes to money, I am pretty sure that whomever we pay, we will make sure that they do their job and they are well supported. That is even more so for volunteers, because those people give up their time and risk their lives. I continue to support the debate and I look forward to more discussions on the subject in the future.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.22 am]: Very briefly in the time that we have left, I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing on the debate. What a shame he was not in the Parliament when the coalition was in government, because ideas like this would have been great during that time when we had the capacity to carry some of them out. I remember having debates in this house whilst we were in opposition, and bemoaning the fact that the relationship between career firefighters and volunteers had never been poorer than under the term of the last coalition government, to the point where we were losing volunteers in droves and something needed to be done. I acknowledge the member for bringing on this discussion today and throwing his ideas into the mix. It is important that we do that during parliamentary debates. They provide useful pieces of information from time to time for the government.

As the minister said, the government inherited a system that was in very, very poor shape. We have taken steps to address those outstanding issues. The first thing we did was appoint an experienced minister, Minister Logan, who had been in cabinet before, and assigned him to this very important role. The Minister for Emergency Services has listened. He has consulted. We have come up with the concept of a Rural Fire Division—I think that has been very well received by the sector, by the volunteers—and, from that, the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. The important thing to remember is that the Rural Fire Division will be funded predominantly by the metropolitan area—90 per cent of the levies raised to fund the Rural Fire Division will be raised from the metropolitan area and that will be spent in the regions on the Rural Fire Division. I thank the residents and the ratepayers of the metropolitan area who will do that and I think that they will be comfortable enough to provide that important service to regional WA. The minister has listened, and, more importantly, the minister has acted.

I also think that the employment of Commissioner Darren Klemm is a very positive move. One thing about Darren Klemm that I am a little unsure of is that he is a former Claremont premiership player! Except for that, he also spent time in Northam. He was a career firefighter in Northam, working with volunteers. He worked his way through the regional system to the top. We have a very capable commissioner, who once tried to coach me at football, who knows regional Western Australia and understands the importance of all of the things that we have been talking about here today. That is a very good appointment.

I went with the minister and the commissioner to Three Springs a couple of weeks ago to the opening of its first-ever fire shed. Three Springs had never had a fire shed. Now people have a facility where they can put their trucks, train, meet, and do the important work that volunteers do. There is hope that now there is a purpose-built facility in Three Springs, we can attract more volunteers, because their numbers have dwindled over the years.

Members are getting hung up on where the Bushfire Centre of Excellence is going to be, but is it not great that we are adopting that policy and will have such a facility? We have needed that for many, many years. Finally we will have a Bushfire Centre of Excellence. I think that is a very positive thing.

I also want to take the opportunity in this debate to thank, on behalf of the government, all volunteers, whether they are volunteers in bush fire brigades, the State Emergency Service or marine rescue. Has their world not changed under the new funding arrangement? They will get significantly increased funding for the important services they provide as a consequence of the changes made by this minister and this government.

Of course we will continue to have these debates, but I think it is fair to say that the government has been proactive on this issue. We are working to help retain and recruit more volunteers. Many of the initiatives that we have been carrying out have that front and centre. The minister is experienced; the commissioner is competent. I welcome these debates, but I acknowledge that we sat in opposition for eight and a half years while these and many other important issues remained unaddressed. They are now being taken care of. I thank all volunteers right across the state who do this important work. Eighty-five per cent of our regional firefighting capacity is voluntary. We cannot do this without them, so I thank them all and encourage them to be involved and I encourage others to join them. As a government, our door is always open. We are always here to help our volunteer organisations. I believe we are doing that. I thank the member for this discussion and I hope that we can have more; but, in the main, we are getting on with the job.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [11.27 am] — in reply: In conclusion, in the few minutes I have left, I want to thank all members who have contributed to the debate. It is important we have these debates in this place. From the outset I tried to make it clear that this motion was not political; it was not about a criticism of this government or any other government for that matter. It did not take long, of course, for Hon Darren West to make it political and to make it into a political football as usual. Every time Hon Darren West stands, of course, members would be reminded of *Little Britain*. We have all seen Daffyd in *Little Britain*—the only farmer in the Parliament!

Hon Sue Ellery: The difference is that he actually is, and Daffyd is not the only gay in the village.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: As am I. Once a farmer always a farmer, thank you very much! Do not insult me by suggesting that anyone else is more a farmer than anyone else, thank you!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: This motion is about trying to find a way forward for all. It is not about criticising the government. It was not about saying, “This government is not doing the job; that government was not doing the job.”

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Very thin-skinned.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: That is right. The government cannot handle the fact that we have brought something in to debate. The motion is not a criticism of this government; it merely addresses issues that have been raised by our constituents. Is that not our job? Hon Darren West tried to make out that Darren Klemm as commissioner is so good and the minister is so good. If they are so good, why are they afraid of a review? Why are they afraid of trying to make things better when, clearly, our volunteers are saying that they are not better? In fact, things are not better. The minister’s “consultation”, if members want to call it that, when he visits people is not consultation. All the people I have met have said, “We barely get two minutes to talk to him. He flies in and he flies out.” It needs to be better. I am not criticising the minister directly, but if he wants to be serious about consultation he should be serious about it and do it properly.

As I said at the outset, this motion was not intended as a criticism of this government or any other government, but perhaps I should have put in the motion the word “independent”. I think Hon Colin Holt raised a very important point; that is, what Hon Stephen Dawson, as minister representing, trotted out in this place was nothing more than a departmental briefing note: “We’re the good guys. Everything is fine and hunky-dory. Let’s just keep going with what is happening.” It did not address the issue. It did not recognise that volunteers are saying that this is an issue. It did not recognise the fact that those volunteers do not feel that they have been consulted, and certainly the ones I have spoken to have not been consulted in any meaningful way on this issue. The intention was to draw attention to this issue to see whether we can find a way to consult better.

One of the other things that came through in the debate, especially in the contributions from members on the other side, was that it was all about fire. This is not all about fire. I recognise that some good changes have been made in terms of bushfire. There is nothing wrong with that; I am happy to acknowledge that. But, as other honourable members have pointed out, State Emergency Service members are contacting us constantly with issues around

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training and being able to communicate with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services hierarchy and so on. There needs to be some understanding that these issues are real and will not go away.

One of the key points in this motion is the availability of training. To me, that is one of the greatest problems. It does not mean that we have to go to every little town and deliver that training. It is about making it accessible and available regularly so that a training course that should ordinarily take a couple of years does not take eight years, as is the case for some volunteers. We need to try to find a way to do these things better.

Again, the motion was never about criticising any government; it was merely about trying to find a way to do things better. There is nothing wrong with having a review, talking to volunteers and asking them what they need. Unfortunately, it seems to me that the hierarchy of the department has this view, despite what it puts in its annual reports and strategic plans, that the volunteer is somewhat lesser than a paid employee. No, they are not. They are equal. Every volunteer does as much as a paid employee. In fact, they do more, because they also run their own business or do whatever they do outside the volunteer role that they take on. These people need to be highly recognised. I thank all our volunteers for the work they do and for continuing to do all they can to make us safe. I also thank the people of Western Australia, who foot the bill for our emergency services and do not generally complain about it, and why would they? We all want to feel safe, wherever we live. Whether a bushfire is next door or a thousand miles away is irrelevant. We should all contribute to making our state safer. Again, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.