

Division 57: Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia, \$39 647 000 —

Mr P.B. Watson, Chairman.

Mr T.R. Buswell, Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr W. Gregson, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr S. Fewster, Chief Operations Officer, Operational Support and Capability.

Mr D. Caporn, Executive Director, Community Development.

Mr F. Pasquale, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr L. Bailey, Chief Operations Officer, Operations.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the crisis incident management system. There are a number of references to this. They are in budget paper No 2, at page 687, under the heading “Major Spending Changes”, and at page 691; the fact sheet about Keelty; and in budget paper No 3, at page 166. There are different references to how much is involved here. One reference is \$3 million; one reference is \$4 million; one reference is \$660 000 and no money in the out years; and another reference is \$3.34 million. Why are there different amounts? What exactly is the crisis incident management system and is it different from the WebEOC?

[2.50 pm]

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am just looking at our capital spend on page 691. To answer the member’s first question, the major spending changes on page 687 reflect recurrent spending changes, so the amounts listed—\$1.8 million, \$494 000, \$512 000 and \$530 000—are recurrent spend in and around this crisis incident management system. I recall that it was out of Mr Keelty’s first inquiry. The capital component is on page 691, where we have an amount of \$660 000.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So if we add them together, we get the \$4 million. What is it?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will ask Mr Gregson to give the member an overview of the crisis incident management system.

Mr W. Gregson: It is web-based and is called WebEOC, a crisis information management system that improves our capabilities to connect and communicate between what is happening on the fire ground or at any major hazard and a state or regional operations centre. It also allows for interface with other government agencies. It could link with WA Police, Main Roads and the Department of Health, depending on the nature of the hazard.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The \$660 000 is for the capital works, and that should be completed within a year, if these figures are correct.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is correct.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the recurrent expenditure for exactly?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Predominantly, it is for ongoing licensing and maintenance costs for the system.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Will that be ready this fire season?

Mr W. Gregson: Yes.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I refer to “Major Spending Changes” on page 687 and the reference to the response to the 2011 Margaret River bushfire. Over the next four years, \$20 million has been allocated to that situation. Can the minister give us some detail of exactly what will be spent as a result of the recommendation of the Margaret River bushfire inquiry?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Yes, I can. There are two funding streams there, both totalling \$20 million. There is a funding stream that supports implementation of some of the Keelty recommendations in relation to Roleystone–Kelmescott on top of the crisis incident management system. As the member may recall, a range of issues out of the Margaret River fires were identified by Mr Keelty in the first instance. There were also some additional components to that in the government’s response to Mr Keelty’s report. The \$20 million will enable us to do a number of things; firstly, to establish and fund the operation of the Office of Bushfire Risk Management. The Office of Bushfire Risk Management is in its infancy. It has been established but its development will occur over the next little while. It would be fair to say that we have taken a very cautious approach to developing the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, certainly to developing its roles and responsibilities across government. Some of that \$20 million will go to the Office of Bushfire Risk Management.

We also gave a commitment at the time to expand the gazetted fire districts in the Capes region. That mainly takes in the area around Dunsborough out to the west and picks up that Yallingup area and perhaps also the Eagle Bay area. It also deals with the population centres at Gracetown and Prevelly Park. These expanded gazetted fire areas need to have better service delivery, and some of that \$20 million will be allocated to that improved service delivery response. There will also be funding to support increased training and operational preparedness, and also out of that \$20 million some funding to support the revamping, for want of a better term, of the State Emergency Management Committee.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Does that involve any finance towards equipment?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Yes, it will. We are currently working through an internal process within government to allocate that \$20 million across those different areas. Clearly, the expanded service delivery in the Capes region will mean that some of that \$20 million is invested in additional or improved equipment and training for, in the first instance, volunteer brigades that service that area. Some of those volunteer brigades will get additional tankers. This could either be a volunteer bushfire brigade or a volunteer fire and rescue brigade. There will be additional appliances but also additional training. We are working through the final details of that.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Notwithstanding that these things are important, we heard a comment in our committee that the lack of appropriate equipment made the firefighters feel that they could not do the job that needed to be done. Would the minister be able to break up that \$20 million at this point?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Not at this stage; we are still working through it. I spoke to a lot of the volunteer firefighters down at the Margaret River fire in particular. It would be fair to say that if more appliances were available in the region, we probably could put more appliances on the fire ground. At the end of the day, that is a matter for the incident controller to determine. No-one would argue that there was a massive turnout of resources for that fire, particularly on the second day once we geared things up. The Premier gave an undertaking in terms of the gazetted district.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I have a point of order, Mr Chairman. Have you not given an instruction for answers to be brief?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, I am keeping an eye on that. I am sure the minister will be finishing very quickly.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister said there will be some re-gazetted of areas. I am just wondering whether that means there will be a change of emergency services levy categories in certain areas. Has he calculated the extra revenue he will get from that?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It may well impact on the ESL. We have not worked through those issues yet. We certainly do not have any estimates of how that will flow through in terms of an increased ESL.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister mentioned the Keelty inquiry into the Margaret River fires. What is the status of the post-incident analysis? How will the independent oversight of that post-incident analysis be conducted?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will get Mr Gregson to answer that.

Mr W. Gregson: A post-incident analysis assessment report has been conducted under the auspices of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I believe that that draft report is with the department at the moment. I have no doubt that that will come through for consideration by the departments for correction and ultimately be with the Premier for his consideration.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Further to that, Keelty report recommendation 9 specifically talks about independent oversight. I would be grateful for the minister's advice on what that means.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Independent oversight of?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The response operations and that Margaret River be subject of a review with independent oversight.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We have engaged Noetic Group.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is the body that is doing the post-incident analysis but that will not be subject to independent review.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will get Mr Gregson to explain.

Mr W. Gregson: The independent oversight has been provided by the chairman of the State Emergency Coordination Group; that is, the Commissioner of Police.

[3.00 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is the minister aware of whether it is the intention to table both post-incident analyses?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I think the Premier may have made some comments around what he intends to do with those, but, ultimately, that is a question that the member would have to put to him. My recollection is that the Premier has indicated that that may well happen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Will the minister be advising the Premier that he is comfortable with them being tabled?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will wait and see what advice he seeks from me.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does the minister have any idea of the timing?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I would like to get some understanding of the policy on the emergency services levy, which funds fire and emergency services. On page 695 there is reference to regulatory fees and fines. If I am correct, that contains the emergency services levy. But page 268 of budget paper No 3 specifically gives the revenue from the emergency services levy. The point of the question is that the emergency services levy has been used by the current government to milk ordinary householders, because from 2008–09 to the current year, there has been an increase of something like 38 per cent in the amount being collected. According to the forward estimates, it does not slow down. In the seven years of forward estimates since the Liberal Party came to government, there has been a 70 per cent increase in the take from the emergency services levy. We have not seen an increase of that size in the actual expenditure going to fire and emergency services. Is the minister going to continue to shift the burden of cost on to residents through the emergency services levy?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The line item that the member is referring to, which is in budget paper No 3, shows that over the next few years the ESL is anticipated to increase from \$231 million in 2012–13 to \$249 million in 2013–14 to \$258 million in 2014–15 and to \$266 million in 2015–16. That is an increase of \$35 million over a four-year period. I know that volunteer bushfire brigades and State Emergency Service units that receive funding for equipment through the ESL are deeply appreciative of the fact that they have received a significant step up in the funding provided to them by the state government. I know that for a fact. It may well be the case that decisions taken in previous years have resulted in a jump in the ESL. I think that the forecast increases over the next few years are modest.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is in the order of 10 per cent a year.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The increase from \$231 million to \$249 million is not 10 per cent, from \$249 million to \$258 million is definitely not 10 per cent, and from \$258 million to \$266 million is absolutely not 10 per cent. So the increase is not in the order of 10 per cent per annum over the next four years. I might see whether we have any information about where we see the ESL rate going, because the total ESL collection is a composite of two things: it is the number and value of properties multiplied by the rate. I do not think that is a dramatic increase. For a long time SES units and volunteer bushfire units were starved of capital. Unfortunately, I do not have the detail in front of me—I left my little red file upstairs—of what happened from 2001 to about 2009 when a decision was taken to step up the ESL. The member is right in identifying that.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: There was not an ESL in 2001; the member for Midland introduced it.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The funding that flowed through to bushfire brigades and SES units was very static for many years. We made the decision a few years ago to step up the ESL. The member is right; he has identified that.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The point I am making is that the step up in the ESL is far larger than the very welcome step up in the spending for our fire and emergency services and our volunteer services.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am not necessarily sure that that is the case. If the member looks at the grants that have flowed to volunteer bushfire brigades and SES units, he will see that there was a pretty significant jump in the flow of grants through to those bodies.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: There was a number of years ago, and it is welcome that that is continuing. But the point I am making to the minister is that he is putting more of the burden on ordinary householders through the large increases in the ESL and not all of that is being passed through. It is a bit lumpy because of the big capital spend, but if that is taken out, I would like some justification for the continuing large increases in the take from the ESL. Although the take from the ESL has been increased by 47 per cent over the past four years, the government's take from land tax, which has the same basis for calculation—gross rental value—has fallen by five per cent.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: As I said, a decision was taken a few years ago to step up the ESL. There are two points I want to make. Firstly, the member will not find a volunteer bushfire brigade or an SES unit, or even a community that they protect and support, that does not support the provision of additional equipment. Secondly, I think the member is conveniently ignoring the fact that an extra \$44 million will flow to FESA from

consolidated revenue in this year's budget. I challenge him to find a time when there was a \$44 million injection of funds into this agency.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is for the new headquarters, which were funded by the previous government. This government has sat on the money and now it is spending it.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The member for Balcatta's statement is false. I will tell the member what the \$44 million is for: \$20 million is to assist FESA to implement the responses to the Margaret River bushfire, \$20 million is to implement the responses to the Roleystone–Kelmscott fire, and \$4 million is to implement critical incident management support. Not one cent of that \$44 million in funding is going to the new FESA headquarters. That is money over and above the capital appropriation for the FESA headquarters. Find me a time when there has been a \$44 million increase in general government appropriation to FESA to deliver those sorts of outcomes. The member simply will not find one.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I think the minister will, but obviously he is ducking the question about the increase in the ESL and why the government is loading it on to ordinary householders. In our term in government, we put in extra money directly from the consolidated account to meet those larger one-off issues, whereas this government is taking it out on ordinary householders through the large increases in the ESL.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: On page 327 of the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, there is a general reference to the ESL. The answer to this question will probably need to be provided by way of supplementary information. Can the minister provide information about the number of people who are now paying the ESL at the maximum level? I do not know whether that can be provided. There are some areas that pay a category 1 ESL but are not serviced by hydrants. I think Carramar is one area. I would like a list of the areas that pay ESL 1 that are not serviced by hydrants.

[3.10 pm]

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I think we can provide that by way of supplementary information. I just want to point out one thing. The member referred to page 327 of the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, which shows the standard representative householder model. The percentage change for the representative household for the emergency services levy this year is 5.6 per cent.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is not a representative household, minister.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is the representative household model. I understand the questions the member is asking. I am merely pointing out that that is a long way off the 10 per cent that was outrageously claimed.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: No, they changed the base.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, we are talking about the supplementary information. Minister, could you please let us know what you will provide?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The supplementary information will relate to how many properties are in the highest ESL category, and secondly which areas —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I asked for which areas are paying the maximum ESL rate. The second thing I asked for was for the minister to name the areas that are on ESL 1 that are not serviced by hydrants.

[*Supplementary Information No A49.*]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I will ask the minister about future capital works. I refer to the first bullet point on page 689 of the *Budget Statements* that discusses a fourth metropolitan area. There does not appear to be any additional career fire stations.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Yes. I might get Mr Gregson to answer that.

Mr W. Gregson: There always used to be four operational areas in the metropolitan area. A couple of years ago, they cut it back to three. In my mind it made more sense operationally to have four areas, which were much more strategically aligned operationally to other government agencies. We have gone back to that model.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That does not mean that there will be any additional operational staff or front-line staff; it is just an administrative measure. Is that correct?

Mr W. Gregson: No. There are operational officers who operate out of those facilities or areas.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The creation of the fourth metropolitan district will result in —

Mr W. Gregson: — operational district managers being available.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many additional district managers?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Given that we are going from three to four —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: One?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I think there might be one.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is what I thought.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Hang on. I might just seek some clarification.

Mr W. Gregson: There would be one for each discipline, one for each hazard area, so there would be four.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In terms of future capital works, is the minister able to provide by way of supplementary information a schedule of all capital works for the next 10 years?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Five years?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No. I can provide it for the next four years; it is called the forward estimates.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister confirm that in terms of additional fire stations, in the next four years there will be —

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Which page is the member on?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am on page 689. There will be Australind possibly, if the minister is lucky, and Geraldton. What other stations? I think Kiara—maybe.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Just looking out over the next little while, there is Australind, as the member has identified, and Bassendean–Kiara, which is sort of underway. The big chunk of that spending is in this financial year. Geraldton will start this financial year and run through. Down the bottom, we have Butler and some substantive modifications at Wangara. There will be upgrades to volunteer stations in Kambalda and Geraldton.

The CHAIRMAN: Was supplementary information to be provided?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: No; the minister refused to provide it. Are there any plans for Bunbury? The station is of a considerable age. Also, are there any plans for the new cities such as Karratha and Broome?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We are still working through those matters. There is the strategic land acquisition program, known internally as the SLAP. We will work through some issues in terms of how that funding is spent across those competing areas.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: You slap then tickle, then who knows what, eh—a sniff maybe?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I always get concerned when the member goes off on these things. It is not what the member is saying but the wry smile on her face that is getting me very nervous over here!

The CHAIRMAN: Members, the question is that the appropriation be recommended.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Mr Chairman, that table is supposed to protect me from a sword parry!

The appropriation was recommended.