

EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL - NATIONAL MEDALS

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for the Environment) [2.31 pm]: I inform the house that more than 1 400 years of accumulated dedicated service to protecting Western Australians from the devastation of bushfires has been recognised with presentations of National Medals to Department of Environment and Conservation and Forest Products Commission fire crews, officers and support staff. While in Bunbury recently, I had the opportunity to present the National Medals and clasps to staff from the south west region. All up, 52 men and women from the department and the commission were recognised.

The National Medal is awarded for 15 years service and clasps are presented for each subsequent 10 years service. These awards are given to members of groups such as defence forces, police, ambulance services and fire agencies involved in protecting human life and community values. It is a mark of the dedication of the staff that several of them had given more than 35 years service to fire management and protection operations in our state.

There is an expectation in the community that lives and property will be protected from natural and human-caused disasters by well-trained and disciplined crews. However, DEC fire crews, incident management teams and support staff do far more than suppress wildfires. They are involved also in the department's other activities such as nature conservation, wildlife management, tourism and recreation, sustainable forest management and environmental protection.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of staff from DEC and the FPC along with members of the local volunteer bushfire brigades and other agencies, such as the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, the police and local shires, for their efforts over the summer. Between late January and early March this year the department had to suppress 88 separate fires stretching from Mt Lesueur near Jurien in the north to the south coast. Everyone involved in these fires demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and commitment.

The government values highly the contribution of state sector employees and the many hundreds of volunteers who regularly turn out to protect communities from the ravages of bushfires. The Carpenter government has significantly increased resources for DEC's fire management programs and will continue to support the agency in this critical role for community protection and for conserving the nature of WA.