

Ms Wendy Duncan; Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Murray Cowper; Mrs Michelle Roberts

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**Division 63: Fire and Emergency Services, \$16 428 000 —**

Ms W.M. Duncan, Chairman.

Mr J.M. Francis, Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr W. Gregson, Commissioner.

Mr S. Fewster, Deputy Commissioner, Capability Command.

Mrs G. Camarda, Director, Business Services, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr F. Pasquale, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr D.T. Klemm, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Operations.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Good morning everybody. Welcome to the final day of estimates. Minister, can you introduce your advisers, please.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day.

It is the intention of the Chair 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 of the estimates 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. It will greatly assist Hansard if members can give these details in preface to their question.

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 Friday, 19 June 2015. 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 with the Clerk's office.

Are there any questions? Member for Girrawheen.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I refer to page 715, "Relationship to Government Goals", and the line item "Emergency Services". Earlier this year the Pilbara experienced cyclone Olwyn and there were concerns about project operators exposing hundreds of workers to undue risk by not responding in a timely fashion or evacuating them and permitting workers to return onshore. In ensuring adequate protection by communities and resilience, what role does the Department of Fire and Emergency Services have in monitoring and advising industry on cyclone preparation?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I recall the event that the member for Girrawheen is talking about. The main incident was to do with an offshore platform that broke its moorings and drifted some way. I am not quite sure; I think it might have been in commonwealth waters at that time. I ask the commissioner to elaborate on that one.

**Mr W. Gregson:** In the general sense, we provide information to the community. We provide community education programs around all our hazards. We do community engagement programs, advertising, and during incidents we are engaged in advising the community through various media—emergency alert et cetera—about the nature and extent of oncoming hazards. We provide general engagement community education programs around our hazards and operationally advice as and when it rolls out.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** It is certainly my impression that the general members of the public are well versed in what needs to be done, but I am more concerned about industry and the measures that it takes. Are we just supposed to wait until something happens and then it is WorkSafe's responsibility?

**Mr W. Gregson:** You can lead a horse to water. We try to make as much information available to industry as possible. We provide a lot of liaison with industry, particularly in the district offices up north. At the end of the day, the managers and employers are responsible to a great extent for the safety and welfare of their personnel, so on a case-by-case basis they would have to put their emergency evacuation plans into effect. Without wanting to comment in relation to the specific reference that the member made, as a general principle we work to encourage, educate and engage the community before, during and after an emergency.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Given the large number of workers who were involved in the unfortunate incident that followed cyclone George a few years ago, I was wondering whether there is some room to build some sort of formal mechanisms with industry to ensure that communities, such as mining communities, are more resilient.

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**Mr W. Gregson:** The Department of Fire and Emergency Services is always looking for opportunities to expand on the reach and to engage. It would certainly be an opportunity worthy of exploring as to whether we could perhaps further engage industry groups, industry bodies—the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, as an example—to see whether we can get greater market penetration, for want of a better word, around the community messaging.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I refer to the second dot point on page 714 about bushfire-prone areas. Are the bushfire-prone maps completed; and, if they are, are they on the website? Where are they? Where can people find them?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My understanding is that the maps are completed and we are just waiting for the legislation that was debated in the Legislative Assembly just a couple of weeks ago to be signed by the Governor, if it has not already been signed.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** So they are just not public yet?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** They are about to be. They will be published on the DFES website and links from other government agencies as well.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Does the minister have an idea of the estimated time for the maps to be published?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Any day now, is my understanding; it is very close.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Why is there a legislative impediment? Why is it not possible to publish the maps now? There has already been a delay, so why this further delay? There is a sample on the Landgate website, but people have to plan and undertake various matters of consequence from those maps. I would have thought the sooner the maps were up, the better.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My understanding is that the maps were completed only a couple of weeks ago.

**Mr W. Gregson:** My understanding is that I cannot sign them yet because I do not have the legislative authority to endorse them as fire-prone areas. When I have the legislative authority I can sign them as fire prone and then they can be published as maps indicative of a fire-prone area.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** If I can put it in another way, what law prohibits the commissioner from publishing the maps?

**Mr W. Gregson:** My understanding is that when a fire-prone map is published, that brings about other planning imperatives. It necessarily follows that certain activities will need to be taken with respect to planning and development. Those necessary activities do not take place unless they are based on a published authorised fire-prone area. That requires me to authorise them as fire prone and I require legislative head of power to do that, which is currently not in existence.

[9.10 am]

**Mr N.W. MORTON:** I refer to the line item “Fire Crew Protection” on page 713 of the *Budget Statements*. As the minister knows, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services training facility is in my electorate so I take an interest in this portfolio. Can the minister explain exactly what the fire crew protection funding will be used for?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will not take too long to answer this question, but I will provide a snapshot of our crew protection program. This was a commitment at the last election of \$12.34 million to upgrade the existing DFES fleet and new trucks that are coming into the fleet. Initially, the funding was to provide turnover blankets and radiant heat shields. Between 75 per cent and 80 per cent of the fleet has been completed with that rollout. Obviously, this takes a bit of time because every single fire truck cannot be taken off the fireground and be out of service over a fire season. As determined by the commissioner, the areas of higher bushfire risk were prioritised for those particular upgrades. Included in that program will be critical component heat shields and lagging for things such as radio systems, fuel lines and GPS hardware that will enable fire trucks to see where other fire trucks are on the fireground. That will come in shortly. I believe that that has just gone out for tender. It is a different type of technology because we cannot use the GSM mobile phone network because a lot of the places where fire trucks operate are outside mobile phone range. It is a different system that will allow fire trucks to essentially communicate electronically with GPS so that they can know where every other fire truck on the fireground is located. It is exciting stuff. As I said, I believe that 80 per cent of the fleet has been upgraded with radiant heat shields and turnover blankets. It is an ongoing project.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I note that the minister mentioned that there was a fully funded allocation the year before last for crew protection of about \$12 million.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It was \$12.34 million.

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**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Why is there a reference to some \$1.8 million under royalties for regions for fire crew protection? Is that in addition to the \$12.3 million?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask Mr Pasquale to answer that question.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** The figures the member referred to in the table are adjustments as a result of some of the delays that the minister referred to. The \$12.34 million is still the figure that is approved, but as a result of some of the delays, the spending table reflects some cash flow adjustments for those delays. Some of that money is primarily from the consolidated account, and internal funds and balances were also provided by DFES in the early days to do the curtains and the blankets. It does not reconcile with the \$12.34 million purely because it is a cash flow adjustment to reflect the delays. The \$12.34 million is included in the budget.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Why does any of that fire crew protection need to be funded by royalties for regions?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Quite simply, the majority of the fleet as far as bush firefighting capabilities are concerned operate in regional areas. It is fair that the royalties for regions account makes a contribution to the rollout of that.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Is that not what the emergency services levy is for?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** If we can find money from royalties for regions on the basis that it provides a benefit to regional Western Australia under the guidelines of the royalties for regions legislation, it is fair enough that it makes a contribution.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I refer to the fourth dot point on page 714, which relates to staff safety. Where are the presumptive cancer laws for volunteers and Department of Parks and Wildlife firefighters at?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Just so we are clear, we said that we would do this in two rounds. We said that we would do current serving career fire and emergency services personnel first because it was a much more simple amendment and legislative process to tackle. We have done that and it has been passed; obviously, that is in place now. The second round will cover volunteers, retired career fire and rescue firefighters and other firefighters from different agencies. Cabinet approved the draft of that legislation, and it is currently being drafted. I understand that some people consider the time sensitivity of this to be critical. We have stated that it will be backdated so the actual timeliness of the passing of the legislation will not have an impact on the date from which people are covered. The simple answer is that that is being drafted right now.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I refer to the decision last week to close Success Fire Station. Can the minister outline what tests were taken in relation to that site?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will make some general comments and then ask the commissioner to elaborate on the test. The history is that four firefighters were diagnosed with the same type of kidney cancer. It appears from my understanding of the tests done so far—I have not seen a hard copy of the report yet—to more likely be a statistical anomaly. However, we are not prepared to take that risk with firefighters. After a number of conversations between the commissioner and me, we determined last week not to send firefighters back to that station. We considered the fact that the fire station is more than halfway through its life. I think it was originally built in 1999 and significant changes have occurred in the demographics of the south metropolitan region, which covers a part of my electorate so I am pretty familiar with it. We also considered that there is short-term accommodation at the City of Cockburn's co-located South Coogee Bushfire Brigade and SES facility to house the Success crew and equipment until we finalise a way forward with the Success station. I could not put my hand on my heart and say that I would send a member of my family to work at that station, because we just do not know. The only other comparison in history of a statistical anomaly with cancer that we can find is with the ABC studios in Brisbane. The member may remember that a number of female staff at the ABC studio contracted—I am not sure whether that is the right medical word—a similar type of breast cancer. The ABC made the decision for a number of reasons, including morale of the workforce, to not go back to the site and to relocate somewhere else. We weighed up the options and spoke to the firefighters and the union. When we weighed up all the considerations, we made the decision that although there is no evidence to suggest there is something wrong with the site, we just do not know with the best science available.

**Mr W. Gregson:** The environmental testing was done by a commercial and environmental science company. It provided a report and, subsequent to that, a health check regime and study of the antecedents of the firefighters was undertaken by the department concomitantly with a study by the Department of Health. The reports were then provided to a panel of experts that the department put together and made available to the stakeholders. Those reports, with the exception of the final one at this point, are publicly available on our website.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Is the list of those experts also on the website?

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**Mr W. Gregson:** No, I do not believe that it is, but, subject to the minister's approval, I would be more than happy to make those names available. Certainly the stakeholders are aware of who constituted the panel.

[9.20 am]

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I might just to add that. As soon as I have a copy of the report, I will have a look at it. I am not in the business of keeping it secret. I will make sure it is available.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I am just after the advisers at this stage, minister. Can we get that by way of supplementary?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The report?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** The list of the advisers.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Yes, certainly. I agree to provide to the member for Girrawheen, as supplementary information, the list of the expert advisers who did the consultation for the environmental study—whoever it was—for the Success Fire Station site.

[*Supplementary Information No A56.*]

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I have a final question on this presumptive legislation. I refer to page 713 of the *Budget Statements*, under "Spending Changes".

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Just in relation to that question, I have a follow-up question.

**The CHAIRMAN:** No, this is a further question for the member for Girrawheen as well on the same subject, is it not, member for Girrawheen?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes, it is a follow-up question.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Murray–Wellington can go after.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** On page 713 of the *Budget Statements*, under "Spending Changes", there is a line item for "Equalisation of Volunteer Insurance and Presumptive Legislation". I am just wondering what that refers to, and whether the minister is able to itemise what those costs are about?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask Mr Pasquale to answer that question.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** The equalisation of volunteer insurance was an initiative to address the issues of volunteers not having the same level of insurance coverage for injury or loss. In September 2014, cabinet approved the drafting of an insurance bill to provide for consistent and equal insurance coverage across the different volunteer services in recognition that all volunteers face the same level of risk and have the same insurance requirements regardless of which service they belong to. The parliamentary counsel office is drafting amendments to the relevant acts to address this legislative anomaly as we speak.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Girrawheen, that question was not really about Success Fire Station, so I will just quickly give the member for Murray–Wellington his further question, and then we will come back to you.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** It was, actually.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Just in relation to the contracted kidney disease cancer at Success, has that sort of similar condition manifested at any other locality within the organisation?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask the commissioner to elaborate on this. I think the member for Murray–Wellington may have not been in here when we went into this, and I know he is passionate about this for a number of reasons, obviously. My understanding is that it was a statistical anomaly for the same type of cancer to be detected and contracted in four individual firefighters where they had no real common exposure or no real common incident other than the fact that at one stage in their careers they would have been at the academy—every firefighter goes through the academy at one stage in their careers—and they all served at Success Fire Station. I will certainly ask the commissioner to elaborate on that.

**Mr W. Gregson:** No, we are not aware of any further manifestation of this type of cancer anywhere else in the service.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is now back to the member for Girrawheen for a further question.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I was dealing with presumptive legislation. Minister, what I was asking for was an itemisation or some details as to how that figure of \$1.443 million comes about, and what that actually covers.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask Georgina Camarda to elaborate on that.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** The \$1.443 million is made up of a \$50 000 equalisation of insurance allocation for that year, and a \$1.393 million allocation for presumptive legislation for that year. It was anticipated that the legislation

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would be drafted, and we have been funded in 2015–16 in anticipation that the legislation would come into effect and we would have to pay out on those claims in relation to presumptive legislation.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Is the provision for the presumptive legislation of the \$1.3 million-something to do with the legislation already in place or is that to do with the anticipated legislation for volunteers?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My understanding is that it is to do with the anticipated legislation, but, as I pointed out earlier, it was included in the budget in view of the fact that the commencement date would have already been passed at today's date. That is fairly unusual for budget documents, but the fact that it will be predated rather than postdated means any potential claims on it have to be included now.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Did you have a further question on this issue, member for Murray–Wellington?

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** No.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Girrawheen, do you have another question before I go to the member for Murray–Wellington?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes, lots.

On page 713 of the *Budget Statements* under “Spending Changes” there is a line item for “Reinstatement of 15% Procurement Savings (For Essential Appliances, Facilities and Equipment)”. What items are expected to be purchased with this amount?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My understanding is that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is the only department that has had this procurement saving reinstated. That is predominantly because it is funded in a large sense by the emergency services levy, and so it is treated as a different agency, as far as the accounting is concerned, from other government agencies. I am happy to ask Mr Pasquale to provide further information on that.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** The basis of the whole-of-government application of that savings measure was looking at areas of expenditure in travel, equipment repairs and maintenance, communication expenses, and communication supplies et cetera. We engaged with Treasury to undertake a conversation about the impact on the business of those expenditure line items because they are quite critical to our response operations, and, as a result of that, through the budget process, there was approval to reinstate those savings that were originally implemented.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Minister, I refer to page 718 of the *Budget Statements* and the heading “Works in Progress”. I note with interest that work is being done at a number of regional fire stations, including Albany, Geraldton and in particular Bunbury. I note with interest that money is allocated for the completion of the project at Bunbury Fire Station. Going back about five years, with great fanfare we announced a new fire station and a career fire service at Australind. It was going to be situated on the corner of Paris Road and Piggott Drive. There was a problem in relation to the land titles, and I understand there was allocation in the budget for it previously; it appeared in the budget papers. Unfortunately, beyond the government's control, there was a bankruptcy and the land became disputed. A decision was made by the previous minister to reallocate the funding for Australind fire station in favour of Bunbury Fire Station. I was given some assurance repeatedly—I wrote to the current minister—about an application to acquire some land across the road from the original site that is currently invested in the Water Corporation; in fact, it is the old Water Corp treatment plant. That treatment plant has been relocated at Kemerton. There is a whole bunch of government land adjacent to the State Emergency Service, ambulance service and other emergency services on the main road that is going to lead through to the new Millbridge that will connect Australind with Eaton. I am just wondering what work has been done by the department in relation to securing that land, and for the appointment of a new fire station at Australind?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My advice from the commissioner is that no work has been done. I understand that the department allocates resources on a risk-to-resource ratio basis, so, effectively, we spend the money building the resources, whether they be assets like fire stations or trucks or equipment or personnel, where the greatest risk is. The development for that particular area did not continue as fast as was originally planned when that fire station was announced, but I am happy to ask the commissioner to elaborate on it.

[9.30 am]

**Mr W. Gregson:** For me, it is a matter of priorities. If I get an allocation to buy land and build fire stations, then I will buy land and build fire stations. The money that was allocated for Australind was put into Bunbury, as the member correctly observed, for a range of reasons; not just the commercial complications, but also the risk profile of Australind. At this stage, there is no provision for moneys for land at Australind, hence the lack of effort from the department in acquiring the same.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** That therefore makes me very disappointed. I did not complain about losing money in favour of Bunbury, and I can understand and appreciate the reasons for that. My colleague the member for Bunbury, John Castrilli, told me how Bunbury Fire Station needed work, and, given the circumstances, I assented to that decision on the proviso that at some time in the near future land would be acquired. I wrote to the minister's predecessor, giving a positive suggestion of purchase of land already owned by the government. It was simply a matter of transferring from one to the other; it is an asset of the Crown. It would have been a simple process within government that would not have cost a cracker. It is disappointing that in the lead-up to the last election I asked whether we could make an announcement about that and nothing has been done. What is even more disappointing is that no-one has even bothered to follow up on it, minister. I formally invite the minister to come down and have a look. Across the road is a brand-new Bunnings store, a brand-new shopping centre, an aged-care facility, a new Spudshed, the brand-new Mercy Catholic College, about 16 000 homes and a soon-to-be-built \$18 million bridge. I formally invite the minister to come down and look at the needs of one of our fastest-growing areas, at 6.5 per cent, which is probably one of the fastest growth rates in the state. The nearest fire station is 25 minutes away. If there were an incident in that location, the response times would be slow. I noted with interest the commissioner's comments about risk-management issues. If it was a risk five years ago, why is it not a risk today?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I formally accept the member's invitation. If he had asked me yesterday, I would have been able to do it because I drove to Bunbury yesterday to announce Bunbury as the site for the second rescue helicopter. I could have gone to Australind on my way back from Bunbury yesterday, but I accept the member's invitation and I will come down there in the very near future.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Could the minister provide by way of supplementary information a list of the career fire stations planned over the next 10 years? Also, what has been the hold-up with Geraldton?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** There are two questions there. The member would know, if she looked at the list of fire stations that are planned or have been completed, that we have opened a few just in the last 12 months, including one in Butler a couple of weeks ago. They are expensive facilities, but they are well designed so, to a large degree, they are futureproofed as much as is possible. They have a much longer than expected lifespan. The member will see, with regard to new or replacement fire stations that are still to be completed, that we are coming off a fairly large building program at the moment. That will also obviously include Geraldton, which is in that round. As for the timeframe for Geraldton, I will ask Mr Pasquale to comment.

**Mr F. PASQUALE:** The main delay with Geraldton was securing the land. That security was obtained a number of months ago and construction started, I think, last week.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** What was the hold-up with securing the land? I think these are the seventh estimates hearings I have attended in which Geraldton has appeared in the budget papers.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My advice is that the hold-up with Geraldton was that the allocation in the budget from Treasury was deferred on the purchase of the land. My understanding is that it was deferred on two occasions through Treasury and there was an issue with the actual purchasing of the land. Construction has started and it is due to be completed by May 2016.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Other than what is in the forward estimates, can I infer from what the minister said that there is not going to be an aggressive building program after the forward estimates?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I think it would be unfair to come to that conclusion. We have obviously spent a significant amount of money on new fire stations over the last couple of years, and an awful lot of money on upgrading and modernising the entire fleet. There are more than 1 000 trucks and vehicles in the Department of Fire and Emergency Services fleet, of which there are 670-odd that operate in high bushfire-risk areas. They are predominantly new vehicles compared with just a couple of years ago, and obviously it costs big bucks to do this kind of work. We are completing a huge round of building expansions at the moment.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I refer to the volunteer fuel card in the table of spending changes on page 713. How much money has already been spent on the volunteer fuel card, and can that spend be itemised?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The Department of Regional Development is finalising the business case for the volunteer fuel card, so the cards have not been rolled out yet. To the best of my knowledge, I expect they will be by the end of this year. I would have to take the question on notice if the member wanted the exact amount that has been spent so far, but I would hazard that it is probably not an awful lot because the cards have not been rolled out yet.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Can we take as supplementary information how much has been expended on the fuel card delivery and preparation?

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**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I know what the member is asking. I might ask Mrs Camarda to provide some information. She might be able to answer the member's question now.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** This financial year we have spent a total of \$20 000 on engaging a project manager to kick off and develop the business case in conjunction with the Department of Regional Development. That includes graphic design costs for developing brochures for the fuel card project. That is in anticipation that cabinet will approve the submission for the fuel card scheme.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Is that \$20 000 the only administrative cost associated with the fuel card? Are we budgeting for anticipated future costs for the administration of the card?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Certainly; I might elaborate my thoughts on this. We cannot give someone a fuel card without educating them on the guidelines on what the money can potentially be spent on. If we are going to give someone a spending card, or whatever it might be called, for a certain purpose, it is absolutely essential that there be some accountability. Is that what the member is getting at? It was absolutely a concern of mine also. We want to minimise wherever possible the —

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Has funding been budgeted for the administration of the fuel card, and is it associated with FTEs or the anticipated costs of managing and operating the cards? What is the cost?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask Mrs Camarda to elaborate on that, but certainly I am very aware of the potential for the cards to be misused. The rollout will have to include some education for those who receive those fuel cards.

**Mrs G. Camarda:** Yes, there are administrative costs. We will need a part-time manager for six months to roll out the cards and develop an application process for the following year. There are costs associated with graphic design, brochure printing and the website. We also plan to develop a call centre to take any calls. It will probably be in the order of \$70 000 to \$80 000 a year in administration costs. An amount of \$50 a card needs to be added to the cost of FTEs to run the program. It is roughly \$43 000 to roll out the cards each year and to buy the cards as well.

[9.40 am]

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The footnote under the emergency services table on page 717 states that the increase in FTEs in 2015–16 reflects a number of things. One of those is the volunteer fuel card. Is that part of the cost that was just listed, or is that a separate cost?

**Mrs G. Camarda:** It is part of those costs.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** So that is incorporated?

**Mrs G. Camarda:** Yes. It is 0.6 of a level 6.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I congratulate the minister on the introduction of the fuel card for volunteers; I think it is fantastic. My experience is that volunteers do not want to be rewarded or paid for their services—they still want to be volunteers—but it is important that we recognise them and give them an opportunity to cover their costs. I am also interested to know whether other initiatives have been explored. I know there was some talk about tax benefits in other ways, so without paying volunteers directly, they could be recognised and rewarded. As the minister well knows, without volunteers, we would be in a world of pain.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** This is a good question. I do not want to take too long in answering it. This area becomes fraught with danger and every single time a change is made to an entitlement, it is opened up—I am not saying that there is a problem with volunteers—to the potential for misuse and also the flow-on effect. I will give an example, because I know that a lot of people are espousing the benefits of this. This is a bit off-topic, but I ask members to bear with me. Some people are asking why is there not a policy whereby the government per se reimburses employers for the time that employees spend on the fireground, if it is more than a couple of days, for example, and why does the government not concentrate that on small business. The other position is that employers are compelled to pay volunteers for their time away from work, and most businesses do the right thing anyway. The problem with that is that it creates another reason why a potential employer may not want to employ a volunteer if it is going to place an even greater cost on their business expenses. Also, if the government starts doing it for small business and not big business, the appetite for big businesses to employ volunteers will be less than that for small businesses. With every suggestion, there is a reason it is not in the interests of the employers, the volunteers or the state to do it. This card is a small way of giving back to volunteers, particularly in regional Western Australia—it is applied to regions such as the member for Warnbro's electorate—because with the tyranny of distance to and from country towns to attend training, or an incident, a couple of times a month, it costs a lot more than it does in the metropolitan area.

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**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The last observation the minister made is interesting because there is a problem with equity. I agree with the member for Murray–Wellington that it is a great initiative for the fire volunteers in Australind, for example, but why are they any more deserving than those in Baldivis, and do they travel extensively more on a regular basis than those volunteers who also respond to incidents some distance away? Many incidents occur right around the state on a regular basis.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is a very good question, member for Warnbro. I am not responsible for drawing the line as to what is regional and what is metropolitan. I know that this issue has continually been raised with different ministers and different agencies. The member for Darling Range is always at this issue as well. I think the member for Warnbro's electorate is part in, part out.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** My electorate sits entirely in the metro area.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The member for Warnbro's electorate is entirely in. I think the member for Mandurah has an issue.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** His electorate is in the regions, but his constituents are not entitled to a fuel card because Mandurah somehow is a regional area but it is not a regional area.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will not go into the details of this, but I do accept that once we start doing these things, we create an entitlement for one group and not another. I have a very good friend, whom the member for Warnbro may know, who is a member of the Baldivis brigade. He was out again last night volunteering and he is constantly turning out. Although the travel distance may be shorter, the net number of kilometres travelled by some people who are super active volunteers is cumulatively totalled and they will not be entitled to it. I accept that there is the potential for inherent unfairness in this, but this is a debate for another day.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I want to talk a little about communications. I refer to the third hyphen point under the sixth bullet point on page 714 of budget paper No 2. There have been various incidents over the past year in Bullsbrook, Northcliffe and Boddington, although I note that Northcliffe and Boddington are called something else, but if members will excuse me, I will refer to them as that. How many state alert calls were made at each of those incidents, if that is what they are called?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Is the member referring to the SMS messages?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes, the SMS messages. What is that called?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is called emergency alert.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** The minister might not have that information handy. Could he provide that information by way of supplementary information?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Sure.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Also, what is the cost of those? I gather that Telstra is squeezing every last cent out of it.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I agree to provide as supplementary information the number of SMS alerts that were sent out for each incident over the past 12 months.

[*Supplementary Information No A57.*]

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Firstly, I can assure members that the cost Telstra charges the department to send the SMS messages does not influence the decision as to whether the SMS should be sent. However, to my knowledge Telstra does charge the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and every other state agency for sending out SMS alerts. That opens up a whole different issue. I would argue—the government is arguing this at a commonwealth level with other states—that Telstra, as the organisation that controls the majority of the infrastructure and also has the ability to send messages through the infrastructure of other carriers, has a moral obligation and a community service obligation to provide that for free. I will ask the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner to make some comments on this because he was at the last commonwealth department meeting at which this issue was raised. I am confident that the state government is pursuing this issue, because, as I said, Telstra should be doing it at no charge.

[9.50 am]

**Mr W. Gregson:** Arguments are being proffered by and to the commonwealth with respect to how much the various carriers can pass back to the states and/or the commonwealth and whether it ought to form part of the community service obligation of the carrier. Currently, a proposed development of emergency alert will take it to the next stage with respect to technology. That will have a cost. The level of that cost is still being fought out at the commonwealth level with the various carriers. To what extent there is an acceptance of a community service obligation or a charge to the commonwealth that thereby passes through to the states has not yet been made



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clear. There is certainly no current allocation for us to contribute to development costs, but the quantum is not yet known—it is very early days. With respect to the cost of each message, I would like some guidance as to what parameters the member wants to include in the cost. Is it just the cost of the SMS or the total gross cost of providing that service divided by the number of messages? If I can have that clarity, we will be able to provide either pieces of information.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** What I need is just the total cost—what the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has to pay to Telstra every year.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** We will give the member the best breakdown that we can.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Does the minister want to include that in supplementary information A57?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Yes, supplementary information A57 will include the total cost but also the best breakdown that we can reasonably provide.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And the number of SMS alerts and the total cost.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Correct.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. The member for Girrawheen has a further question.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** That sixth bullet point mentions a critical messaging project. Can the minister tell us what that involves?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask Deputy Commissioner Stephen Fewster to answer that.

**Mr S. Fewster:** The efficient and effective delivery of public information during an emergency is a crucial part of our response and management arrangements. One of the recommendations from the Keely review was that we would achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness if we disseminated a one-source-of-message policy for state agencies. This project, with the Department of Parks and Wildlife, is working on providing an information system that produces that single-source message environment for the management of emergencies in Western Australia. We have a request for tender in place at the moment.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I have heard of a few complaints over the Bullsbrook fires that incorrect information was disseminated; either the information came out in an untimely fashion or it indicated wind directions or whatever that were not strictly accurate. How is this being addressed?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask the commissioner to comment on this. I get the feedback sometimes as well. In fact, I had feedback from a member of Parliament who owned a property, just as an example, in the area of the Boddington fire. He continually highlighted for 48 hours that the location of the flame on the DFES webpage for the ignition point was incorrect. It actually turned out that it was correct and he had got it very wrong, but, that aside, there is a limitation to knowledge, and obviously information has to flow up a specific chain so that when it is released to the public it is as accurate as possible, and that does put delays in the system.

**Mr W. Gregson:** I just make the general comment that the nature of emergencies is very dynamic and nothing is constant, particularly the weather, the rate of flame spread, for example, and fuel load. We always have a modicum of guesstimate into which areas households are affected. We often get complaints that we warned people too early. My view is that it is better to warn people too early than too late. We will never achieve 100 per cent accuracy in a dynamic situation such as that. We err on the side of caution. Sometimes we are constrained by timeliness and intelligence from the fireground. Sometimes we are constrained by the technology in terms of specifying with absolute certainty the polygon of those houses that are within the messaging zone or not. All these factors contribute to an error rate and we will never keep everybody happy, unfortunately, but we do our best.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** As part of this critical messaging project, is DFES's Facebook capacity expanding? A number of people have said to me that they were trying to access that during the Bullsbrook fires and found it to be not terribly functional.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I might ask Deputy Commissioner Fewster to elaborate on this, but the member has to also keep in mind the limitations of technology, to the point here that a lot of the people in that peri-urban interface are in and out of mobile phone range, so they are in and out of data coverage and in and out of receiving SMSs, and there are other glitches in the system from the telecommunication companies as well. I have two mobile phones and both are connected with Telstra; the private one I use with my family and I have a work one. During the Banjup fires in January last year, one phone received an SMS 45 minutes before the other one—go figure! I do not know why, but there are certainly limitations in technology. I will ask Deputy Commissioner Fewster to elaborate.

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**Mr S. Fewster:** The single-source messaging, which is part of the objective of the critical messaging project, assists in our public and media response. Our current capability is limited. We will never have a capability to match the take-up of social media in the community—no agency will. We have a social media strategy, and our communications strategy looks at convergence of our information and data to take into account social media such as Facebook and Twitter and a range of others.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I am interested in the minister's remarks about debriefing after critical incidents—for example, after the Boddington fires. The state government has a wonderful program of rolling out additional telecommunications towers under royalties for regions. Unfortunately, I have had some difficulty getting it in my area, specifically around Dwellingup, which is arguably the most fire-prone town in Western Australia. Following a critical incident, does DFES report back to Telstra on the communication issues and black spots? I put the case for Dwellingup, and in particular the Baden Powell reserve, where there are up to 3 500 school kids on any given weekend. There is a real issue there for potential disaster. Unfortunately, the Minister for Commerce wrote back to me, saying that they had never received any complaints from DFES or, for that matter, the Department of Parks and Wildlife. Therefore, I have had to go back to the drawing board and the grassroots to establish the reporting through its internal protocols. I find it stark that a farmer from Mundijong can sit on his tractor and get 4G, but hundreds of kids in Baden Powell reserve on a long weekend when there is a high fire hazard have no communication.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask the commissioner to elaborate on that; he has some information on that matter.

**Mr W. Gregson:** With respect to post-incident assessments or major incident reviews, communications is always an element for consideration. That is often shared with other stakeholders. In Western Australia we have a number of black spots with respect to mobile telecommunication and radio communication coverage. We have a number of methods to provide that, whether it be through mobile repeaters, satellite links or satellite phones et cetera.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I understand that Telstra has two of them based in Belmont. During the fires at Dwellingup, we had one up there and the communications were wonderful. Unfortunately, it was only there for the length of the incident and then it was taken away again.

**Mr W. Gregson:** I cannot help the member with state telecommunications infrastructure, I am sorry.

[10.00 am]

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I refer to page 714 of the *Budget Statements* and the fifth dot point regarding mental health and wellbeing. What has already been specifically done as part of what is referred to as a “significantly and expanded and enhanced peer support program being rolled out in 2015–16”?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask Mr Pasquale to elaborate on this, but we certainly acknowledge that so many professions have ramifications from exposure due to the nature of their service; the member for Warnbro would know this, as I do. I could include so many other people and professions in this category, such as police and prison officers who get to see things that in a perfect world they would never get to see. Both volunteer and career firefighters get to see things that are obviously not the most pleasant things in the world, in fact, they are far from it. I have particular sympathy for those people who have to attend the scenes of road crash rescues. Some of them are quite horrific and confrontational things to observe and be part of. We are committed to ensuring that the mental health of both volunteer and career firefighters is maintained and looked after to the best of our ability. It is a significant commitment. Not only is it the morally right thing to do, but the fact is that for mental health, like other aspects of health, early treatment and intervention obviously tackles things sooner and solves problems down the track. I will ask Mr Pasquale to elaborate on the program.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** The peer support program has been a significant initiative that the organisation has reinvigorated over recent times. We have just finished a recruitment program in which training for peer support officers was undertaken, and we now have more than 60 peer support officers who have graduated from that program. Those 60-plus peer support officers comprise a variety of career staff and volunteers and are distributed across the state. In addition to supporting the peer support program, the organisation has extended its support mechanisms in this space, including another chaplaincy. We now have two full-time chaplains, and we have also extended our network of associate chaplains across the state. We have introduced a mental health first-aid program and have also had the addition of another psychologist with the organisation to assist those programs more broadly.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Have any studies been done to quantify the number of career firefighters and/or volunteers from across all the Department of Fire and Emergency Services volunteer services who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder?

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**Mr W. Gregson:** A working group has recently been appointed under the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council—AFAC—specifically to look at mental health. We have a participant on that working group and it wants to explore a study on the mental health of firefighters. The work will be nationally coordinated under the auspices of AFAC.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Is there not one currently? We do not know definitively the incidence of that type of mental illness or any other one associated with their exposure in the job, but is there any intention to initiate something of that nature, and go beyond the career firefighters that DFES puts into the field?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** As the commissioner said, that will be looked at through the AFAC working group. On the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder generally, we have talked about it in this chamber a lot in the last couple of years and it has certainly come up in the media. There is much more awareness of it today than there was even, say, three or four years ago. To a large degree, it is not like an acute injury; it is much harder to diagnose and I am aware of a lot of work that has been done through the Mental Health Commission on this issue as well. I understand that the working group from AFAC will look at this.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I was just wondering whether there were any studies that could quantify the extent of the problem. That is good. With respect to the full-time chaplain, I think the department now has 100 per cent more than the police, which is probably a good thing as far as full-time chaplains go!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** As I said, we are committed to it. We know it is an evolving issue. There is an increased awareness across the whole community and at all levels of government. I am not an expert on mental health by any means, but I would have thought that early intervention and treatment is the key to doing the right thing by the people who are exposed to some of these things that result in PTSD, so we are very committed to it.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I refer to services and key efficiency indicators on page 716. It is mentioned in footnote (a) that there has been an impact of additional staff associated with the Keelty reforms. The Keelty report obviously came out a few years ago and it has had a significant impact on a range of things, some of which were unforeseen. Can the minister comment on where those additional 24 full-time equivalents are being utilised and what proportion of them have been allocated to reducing and mitigating our fuel hazards in regional parts of Western Australia and right across Western Australia?

**Mr W. Gregson:** The additional FTEs that arose with to fulfil the Keelty recommendations cover the full remit of the department's activities right through the planning, preparation and response spectrum, but primarily around PPR. I would be able to provide through the minister a complete breakdown of FTEs, where they went and what activities they are currently undertaking and what are planned, if that was required.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** That would be helpful.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I agree to provide the member for Murray–Wellington with further information about the breakdown of the 24 FTEs he referred to on page 716 of the *Budget Statements* and where they have been allocated.

[*Supplementary Information No A58.*]

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I seek from the minister a broad comment about whether he is comfortable with the progress of the Keelty report and whether he has been able to cover all the various recommendations or whether they have been covered only partially, and how we are tracking with the Keelty report's recommendations.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Certainly, and I thank the member for that. The government is committed to implementing every single one of the recommendations from the Keelty report into those fires in the Perth hills. I do not have the number on me, but almost all of them have been implemented, with a couple of exceptions. The last one to be addressed was considered by this chamber a couple of weeks ago, which was to give the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner the ability to declare bushfire-prone areas that would trigger a different building standard for new buildings—it is not retrospective—and new developments in those particular bushfire-risk areas, depending on assessments such as the bushfire attack level and essentially the risk provided by the fuel load in those areas. That recommendation was for Planning to have that authority on consideration of advice from the State Solicitor, but the government determined that the best figure of power for that would be the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner. We are fulfilling the intent of that recommendation of the Keelty inquiry as well. The recommendations that were easy to implement were certainly done first and those that were a little difficult have taken a bit of time but we are pretty much there.

[10.10 am]

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I want to ask a few questions about the staffing profile. The seventh dot point on page 714 refers to the “increased diversity amongst the career firefighter workforce”. Leaving aside the Aboriginal cadet

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program, which is an excellent initiative, can the minister provide information on the number of career firefighters from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I can but I will have to take that question on notice. I will say, though, that we are very dedicated, as the member for Girrawheen is aware, at trying to boost the participation rate in the workforce at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, in particular amongst our Indigenous men and women. At the end of last year, the member joined me in the ceremony to mark the occasion of the first intake of those cadet firefighters. As the member knows, we want to set them up to succeed. Being a firefighter is not for everyone but it can be an exceptionally rewarding career, and there is no reason why people from different backgrounds cannot make that contribution. I will, however, take that question on notice.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Further on that note, I think the only reference in one of the annual reports that I could find was the percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse people who applied, not who were accepted. I was a bit concerned about that.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Does the member want to clarify that?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can the member clarify the supplementary information she wants the minister to provide?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** It is the number of CALD employees within DFES, and in particular within the career firefighter cohort.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is, the number of those who identify as being culturally and linguistically diverse?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I undertake to provide that information.

[*Supplementary Information No A59.*]

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** What is the present number of career firefighters for this year and for the out years?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Does the member want the exact numbers?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It might be easier for me to provide that information, unless the member wants me to read it into *Hansard*.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes, thanks.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I can advise the number of full-time equivalent career firefighters. There are 1 143 in the 2015–16 financial year; 1 168 in 2016–17; 1 174 in 2017–18; and still 1 174 in 2018–19.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** My quick calculations suggested that we have about 48 firefighters per 100 000, but the Australian average is 63.5. What is the reason for this quite large disparity?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I might ask the commissioner to take that on board and elaborate on that. I was not even aware of the rate of the Australian average.

**Mr W. Gregson:** I think we would have to look a little more closely at what is being compared, because we have geographical differences from other states. The utilisation of volunteers in Western Australia, particularly volunteer fire and rescue service —

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** It is the highest anywhere in the state.

**Mr W. Gregson:** Sorry?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** It is the highest across Australia.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Yes, so our volunteer contingent—our volunteer fire services—adds to the response capacity of the state. It may well be that in terms of paid career fire and rescue personnel, there is a comparative difference with the other states. We are probably not comparing apples with apples, so I am happy to do some study if it is required.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Given the challenges of climate change and increasingly challenging fire seasons, I just wonder whether we should be looking at or having some vision for not having such a heavy reliance on volunteers in the future.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** As I went through those numbers, it was obvious that there is a projected increase in the next three years in the number of career firefighters. I think the commissioner is on the money when he points out the fact of the geographical challenges of the state. Certainly, we need a flexible and mobile workforce when it comes to fighting and combating large bushfires during the peak fire season. One of the things that works so

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well about the system at the moment is the many great little brigades all over Western Australia that can either come together when needed for major incidents or fight their little ones as required. I do not know that I am necessarily sold on taking away the role of volunteer firefighters, who do such a great job when required, and replace them in more remote regional areas with career firefighters who may get only one call a year. It is about finding a balance. I have not had too much feedback that the balance at the moment is not quite right. We are obviously always happy to look at it, but I think the balance at the moment between careers and volunteers is pretty solid. I would also say that the relationship between careers and volunteers is much better now than it has been in the past. In fact, the relationship between —

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** It is always a matter of opinion and whom we listen to.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is certainly much better now than it has been amongst all agencies. We can go back five years when there were significant issues between different agencies. I think the cultural change that has been led in particular by Commissioner Gregson has been very beneficial to our relationships.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Just in the context of volunteers—the minister might be familiar with this issue—the Bush Fire Service Volunteer Advisory Committee, which I think was established in some legislation that former Minister Buswell brought in, advises either the minister or the commissioner on a quarterly basis of issues that are material to the committee. The Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades WA has indicated that it would prefer to report to the minister rather than the commissioner. I understand that the reason for that may well be that the association is outside of the DFES system and therefore would prefer to report directly to the minister. I understand the minister has been somewhat resistant to that proposition and I just wondered why.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The member is referring in particular to the reporting role of the advisory committees that were established?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Yes.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** In particular the role of those committees is to liaise, consult, report and work with DFES, essentially, on operational issues. I have seen the criticism from the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, but every single one of the other volunteer associations, including the State Emergency Service, has agreed to the reporting conditions and has signed up to them. Those committees are established now, are working and are being briefed by DFES—I know that the commissioner can elaborate on this a lot further as well—to establish that working relationship with DFES, predominantly on operational issues. The office of the minister involving itself in these kinds of issues is fraught with danger. It is not the role of a minister to consult on these issues. It is certainly the role of the commissioner to work with volunteers on operational issues, and even to a large degree resourcing issues. I am happy to meet—I do on a daily basis—with volunteers from all over the state to take up any issue whatsoever, but it is disappointing that the AVBFB has taken the position of wanting to circumvent the system that is in place for all the other associations.

[10.20 am]

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** The system in place includes consulting with the minister and that does not necessarily mean even having meetings but sending the minister the minutes of the meetings. How onerous is that?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is not onerous, but that is not the point. The point is that the committees are established to work with and report to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services on operational issues. In fact, I think it would be healthy for the relationship for AVBFB and DFES if they were to agree to the terms suggested.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I think a couple of weeks ago, a public notice was published calling for the nomination of a prescribed association under this consultative provision of the Bush Fires Act. I wonder what the purpose of that advertisement was.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The short version, member for Girrawheen, is that many of the nominated District Office Advisory Committee members who are meant to be part of this committee to consult with the department want to get on with the job. They want to go ahead with the current proposed terms. Some members are not so warm on it; some are. I am concerned that many volunteer bush fire brigade members at the moment are not having their voices heard about working with DFES on operational issues. If the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, for whatever internal reasons, decides that it does not want to be part of that process, I have an obligation, if required, to look at other options such as nominating a different association.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Is this to replace the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades that represents around 25 000 volunteers?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** This is a whole different debate and there is no line item on it in the budget, but I am happy to entertain the conversation.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** It is about retaining volunteers and that is in the budget.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I am happy to have a conversation about how effectively the AVBFB represents volunteers, the process by which its executives are elected and the process by which its constitution establishes its membership base. A lot of issues are not in any way related to the budget, but I think the AVBFB is doing itself a disservice.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Excuse the vernacular, but if the minister is pissing off volunteers, he will have trouble retaining them, which is an outcome that is within the budget.

As I understand it, the request is to report to both the minister and the commissioner. Can I put it to the minister that this is about plausible deniability? He does not want to have that information because if something happens down the track, he will be able to say, "I didn't know about it." But is it not his job to know about it?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The whole purpose of these committees is to work with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services on a number of issues, but predominantly on operational issues. As I said, any volunteer from any unit from any arm of the service can talk to me and raise issues with me at any time, and they do, as I said, on a daily basis. I take every single one of those issues seriously. I always take them up with either the commissioner directly or someone in the department. This will not in any way stop any volunteer bush fire brigade member from doing that. This is essentially separate to that entire process of government. This is essentially so that elected DOAC members can work with DFES predominantly on operational issues.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** The nominations closed at four o'clock yesterday. Can the minister indicate how many organisations have nominated?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I cannot, but I will try to answer that later today.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Can I take it as supplementary, please?

[*Supplementary Information No A60.*]

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will provide the member for Girrawheen with the names of those who have nominated to be the nominated association.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** I have a couple of related questions. On page 716 of the *Budget Statements* under outcomes and key effectiveness indicators there is a line item "Percentage of metropolitan responses by Career Fire and Rescue Services within target timeframes" and a budget of 90 per cent. The estimated actual is 88.5 per cent. I want to link it to the line item "CFRS Perth West Fire Station" under works in progress over the page. Given the rationale for the new fire station in Perth West, how much has traffic congestion affected emergency response times? I am also interested in the exact location of the Perth West Fire Station. I will probably have a further question, so I will leave it at that for now.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will start with Perth West. The site is in the final stages of the due diligence process at the moment. I understand an offer was placed on the site in Carr Street.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Is that Carr Street, West Perth, the other side of the railway line? It is on the Northbridge side of the railway line.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is correct. I will get the exact date. As I said, it is in the final stages of due diligence I believe, which I think involves just testing for possible contamination.

**Mr W. Gregson:** That is correct. The provisional site is in Carr Street, West Perth. We are currently going through the due diligence phase with a particular emphasis on making sure all the environmental boxes are ticked.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** On the fire station, the *Budget Statements* indicate that the estimated expenditure to 30 June 2015 is \$11 million. Can I have some kind of breakdown of that because that seems to be a big amount for something that DFES has only just identified the site for, by the look of things? Whom has that \$11 million been paid to and for what?

**Mr F. Pasquale:** The allocation is for buying the land. An offer and acceptance has been made and it has been accepted subject to due diligence and we are in the final stages of that process. Whether we get the payment completed by 30 June or it is on the other side of the financial year will be a matter of the outcome of that due diligence, which is just around the corner.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Thank you. I asked how much traffic congestion had added to response times and what the impact of the new station in Perth West will be.

**Mr W. Gregson:** A traffic management study will be done prior to commissioning Perth West, so we should know exactly the extent of the impact of traffic volumes in that area. I do not think any real study has been done

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on the impact of traffic volumes on response times but, anecdotally, as I go around the stations, they all tell me traffic volumes are having an impact on response times. The other reason I am clear about is that some of the response times have not been over the summer period because there were an awful lot of resources at various jobs and that meant there had to be a denigration of some of the response times while some of the appliances were on those jobs.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** The RAC in particular has raised concerns about whether other road users are appropriately mindful of letting emergency service vehicles have free flow in the traffic and for the safety of emergency service personnel in various traffic situations. I wonder whether the minister or his agency has looked at that issue and, if so, does he agree with the RAC that there are issues around emergency vehicles travelling at speed and is he contemplating an education campaign? What does he intend to do about that if he agrees that it is an issue?

[10.30 am]

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The RAC has not raised it with me, but, as a person who drives somewhere every single day, I would say that of course it is an issue. I find it exceptionally frustrating as Minister for Emergency Services. If I hear a siren, it switches on a switch in my brain and I know to look out, to see where it is coming from and to get out of its way—whatever it takes. I cannot tell members the number of times I have seen people who perhaps have their stereo up far too loud and are unable to hear ambulances in particular and other emergency vehicles. The key to this is the time-critical importance of response times, and if other road users do not get out of the way of emergency vehicles, my understanding is—I am not the Minister for Road Safety; Police—that it is an offence to not give way to emergency vehicles. As Minister for Emergency Services, I find it particularly frustrating when other road users do not do it, just as my other pet hate is people who chuck cigarette butts that are still burning out of their vehicle window during summer. Certainly, I think the member raises a good issue, and I am happy to have a chat to the RAC in the near future to hear its thoughts on it and what we can do. I would have also thought that it would be part of getting a driver's licence in any jurisdiction of the commonwealth. I was a transfer from New South Wales many years ago, but I particularly remember, when I was 16 years old and studying for my licence, that one of the key messages in it was the requirement to get out of the way and give way to emergency services vehicles. I would be surprised if that is not still part of the curriculum, so to speak, in Western Australia. But I will have a chat to the RAC again.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I refer to page 719 of the *Budget Statements*. I just want some general comments in and around the total operating cost of the department, which is \$366.2 million. That is an increase of some \$20 million from the previous year, and that increase —

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Page 719?

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Yes; it is the paragraph headed “Income” under “Financial Statements”. There has been an increase of some \$20 million, which has generally been attributed to the \$7.6 million increase in revenue from regional community services and \$31 million from the increase in the emergency services levy. I am interested to note the total contribution the emergency services levy now makes to the \$366 million that allows the department to operate. The history of contributions to the department shows that they started as a minor component—10 or 20 per cent—and now, over probably 10 years, it has crept up to become a major part of the income. I note with interest that the money coming from consolidated revenue, or from the state, has not increased at the same rate as the money from, say, the emergency services levy. Basically, we are increasing the budget by stealth by increasing the levies placed upon incomes. If we were to apply that to other departments and we had, say, a police emergency services levy, I am not sure that that would sit particularly comfortably with a lot of people. Initially, the emergency services levy was instigated to, if you like, top up and look after particularly volunteers; now the department has become almost addicted to the ESL, and it is the major component of the income for the department. In particular, career firefighters are being paid out of the ESL as opposed to consolidated revenue, as teachers, nurses, doctors and police are.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is a good question. I will tell the member where I disagree with him: I do not think it is a levy by stealth. I think as far as the cost of providing services for any government agency is concerned, the ESL is actually a model; it is the most transparent way of raising money, and all credit to the previous government that brought this in. It limited what the ESL can be used for spending on, so there are some services that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services provides that cannot be funded by the ESL, such as volunteer surf lifesaving, unexploded ordnance disposal operations and a couple of other things. The initial legislation contained a limitation. The short answer to the member's question at the moment is that approximately 96 per cent of the department's budget is funded through the emergency services levy. But it is not by stealth; it is the most transparent way of doing it because everyone sees how much they pay when they get their rates notice every single year. We all agree that we need to spend a certain amount of money on providing emergency services, whether it be on fire trucks, crew protection, administration, resources or mental health

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services to firefighters—whatever it may be—and that costs the state money. So it can be paid directly through ratepayers through the ESL so that they know what they are paying or, alternatively, it could be paid by—my word—stealth by indirect taxes, whereby the government has to raise it indirectly and make a contribution.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** “Stealth” and “indirect”—come on; the minister is pinching words.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Sorry; it is 87 per cent, not 96 per cent.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Wait till next year; it is projected!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** So, 87 per cent is funded through the ESL, four per cent through the consolidated account and nine per cent through other sources.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** It started at about 10 or 20 per cent; now it is up to 87 per cent.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Correct. But whether it is funded through indirect taxes that people do not know they are paying or through a very visible amount that they see every single year on their rates notice, I would suggest that the more transparent and less stealth option is the system of —

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** There is a migration, is there not? There is a continuing migration.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is, essentially, limited now because there are a few services left—I do not know whether there are any services now—that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services provides that cannot be funded by the ESL. I think at the moment the member will find, other than legislative amendments, which we are not proposing, that that is pretty much where it is at now.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I want to ask a couple of questions about the Northcliffe fires. I asked Minister Jacob some questions about them yesterday. My question is to do with whether a level 3 incident is dealt with by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services or the Department of Parks and Wildlife. I am told that in Northcliffe it started in a Department of Parks and Wildlife national park, there was some consultation with the commissioner, and the commissioner then delegated it back to the Department of Parks and Wildlife to combat the fire. Is that the case?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask the commissioner to answer that question.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** The commissioner is shaking his head.

**Mr W. Gregson:** The situation is that when it goes to a level 3, DFES assumes command responsibility and hazard management authority, but that does not necessarily mean that we will replace the level 3 incident controller. In that case, I believe the existing level 3 incident controller was from the Department of Parks and Wildlife, and that remained the case. But the job is not handed back to the department until the category of the incident is downgraded.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** There is currently some legislation before this house because DPaW claims that there is ambiguity in that relationship and how roles are divided. I am just wondering whether I can be given a recent example of where that has occurred, because I thought it had been clarified, minister.

**Mr W. Gregson:** I am not aware of why there would be any ambiguity.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** If it is a level 3, minister, the current state of play is that it remains the responsibility of DFES, which may well use DPaW incident controllers.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My understanding is that we use the best person for the job, and the best person for the job was already in that role—it was the incident commander. That is regardless of which agency they come from.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Finally, I know that that incident is subject to a major incident review, but there were reports that one Victorian fire crew was not used on the fireground in that incident. There was also a report that many firefighters were not fed. I also want to ask: as a result of that incident, is the minister looking for a new caterer?

[10.40 am]

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** There is a lot of speculation out there and there is a lot of perhaps criticism of the way some of those incidents were run. We have got to keep this in the context that the state was facing two level 3 incidents at exactly the same time—Boddington and Northcliffe. They were significantly large fires that burnt for a long period. I have had complaints that there was not ham in the toasted sandwiches; I have had complaints that some volunteers drove down from Perth and were told to stand by for three hours rather than being put straight on the fireground. I am not going to go into the detail of the operational decisions of that incident. I am sure other people here can. Suffice to say, perhaps other crews were finishing their shift and maybe the best way to combat the fire, rather than exhaust everyone instantly, was to say to the people who turned up, “Stand by. I know you are here. You can replace this shift when it comes out. That may mean you are sitting around for



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three hours.” The stamina of our workforce must be maintained, whether they are career or volunteers from the eastern states or wherever they come from. I went down to that control centre with the commissioner when we made the call to bring in eastern states’ resources. I remember it very clearly. I called the Premier at the time and we took the view that it is best to be safe than sorry. We decided to throw everything we could get at it as soon as possible from wherever we could get those resources. We are better off having firefighters standing by at the scene and not have to use them straightaway, rather than putting everyone at risk because we did not take actions to gain those resources when we could. I am not sure whether anyone else wants to comment on that—short of waiting for that incident review to come out.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** These incident reviews seem to be taking longer and longer. I looked at the timetable from the State Emergency Management Committee for these two that are currently being conducted. They go to the SEMC in October. One presumes that they will be made public some time after that—maybe November. If there are so-called learnings in those reports, it is getting pretty damn close to fire season to actually implement or manage any change successfully. I want to know: is there any capacity to maybe progress those reviews a bit more promptly in the future?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I am not sure how we are going for time. Does the member want to ask the SEMC?

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I have one more question only.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will have that conversation with the State Emergency Management Committee.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** The other questions I want to ask are: What are the protocols in terms of asking interstate fire crews to come across? Does it go through the Department of Fire and Emergency Services or does the Department of Parks and Wildlife do its own thing? How does it operate?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will ask the commissioner to elaborate on that.

**Mr W. Gregson:** There is an interstate agreement between the fire authorities in each state that was formulated by the respective commissioners from each state. It was an outcome of a Council of Australian Governments requirement for the states to get together and come up with an interstate agreement which was fit for purpose. The commissioners’ agreement was trialled last summer and has now been ticked off by the law and community justice—I cannot remember the name of the ministerial council—satisfying that COAG agenda item. It is an interstate agreement that has now been endorsed by the respective ministerial councils for the utilisation of interstate resources.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** To clarify, who then? For example, DPaW cannot independently request the counterparts in Victoria to come over? Does it go through the commissioner or Minister Francis? What happens?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It goes through the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner.

**The appropriation was recommended.**