

**Division 29: Fire and Emergency Services, \$204 947 000 —**

Ms C.M. Collins, Chair.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr C. Waters, Acting Commissioner.

Ms M. Pexton, Deputy Commissioner.

Ms G. Camarda, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr J. Broomhall, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Operations.

Mr M. Dixon, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr M. Carter, Executive Director.

Mr P. Leach, Executive Director.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers and parliamentary secretaries shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister or parliamentary secretary may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the parliamentary secretary to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister or parliamentary secretary suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Are there any questions? Member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you, and welcome to the parliamentary secretary for her first estimates hearing, I imagine.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Thank you, member.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I hope it does not scar her for life.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I am sure it will!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 453, about halfway down the details of controlled grants and subsidies, and “Local Government—Community Emergency Service Managers”. How many local governments receive financial support for the employment of a community emergency service manager, or a CESM?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I thank the member. The grant scheme is provided to local governments to employ CESMs, as the member said. CESMs provide volunteer support, emergency management planning and community liaison services. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services provides partial funding for 27 CESMs employed by local government and also employs seven CESMs directly. The managers are partially funded by local government.

Acting commissioner, do you have anything to add?

**Mr C. Waters:** Yes; thank you, member. Supplementary to the member’s response, it is 57 local governments in total, because some local governments share CESM arrangements across multiple local governments, as well.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Just for absolute clarity, how many CESMs are employed by DFES and how many are employed by local government authorities?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert the question to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** I thank the member for the question. There are 34 in total; seven of the metropolitan CESMs are DFES employees and the others are employed by a combination of local governments and DFES on varying scales of financial support.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Obviously, there can be a blend of funding. Is there a consistent model? I know that three or four local governments might share one CESM. Do they each contribute as well as DFES? Is it a mixed model?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert the question to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** Yes. There are various models depending on their rate base. There is either a split of 70–30, 60–40 or 50–50. Our DFES-employed CESMs are funded on a 50–50 basis in conjunction with local governments. In

addition, if there are multiple local governments sharing a CESM, it is basically worked out on their individual rate base. It is a percentage of the overall percentage they actually contribute to the program.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What funding has been allocated to increase the number of CESMs available to local governments in 2023–24 and across the forward estimates?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The total amount in the budget for our CESMs for 2023–24 is \$2.713 million.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is there any other source of funding outside the department? Are there no other sources; it is either DFES or the local government and there are no other grants and no ability to fund them from another source?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I do not believe so, but I will divert to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** No; the funding is either from DFES funding or from the individual local governments.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How many local governments have applied for funding to support a CESM and been denied?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I do not have that information in front of me. Acting commissioner?

**Mr C. Waters:** There have been some that have been denied. I could not give the member a definite number, but I would estimate probably around half a dozen.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Would the parliamentary secretary be able to let us know by way of supplementary information which local governments have been denied that funding?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I thank the member; I appreciate that.

**The CHAIR:** Parliamentary secretary, can you please clarify what you will be giving as supplementary information?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Sure; we will be giving information on which local governments have been denied funding for local government community emergency service managers.

[*Supplementary Information No B9.*]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the government doing to address concerns about inequities between CESM employment terms and conditions?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Sorry, can I get the member to expand? What does he mean by inequities between CESMs?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My understanding is that there are different terms and conditions depending on whether someone is in the regions or the metropolitan area et cetera, so what attempts are being made to bring equity to those areas?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert the question to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** Thank you. We have just introduced a new memorandum of understanding for all the CESMs. When a CESM who is currently on an old contract comes up for a new contract, they will be brought in to the new MOU arrangements, which will standardise their conditions and salaries.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I appreciate that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Welcome along, everybody, and to the parliamentary secretary. I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, the list of spending changes, heading “Other” and line item “Aviation Services—Cost Increase”. Can the parliamentary secretary give me some indication of the reason for that expenditure and what is driving that increase?

[2.10 pm]

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Sorry, member—the reason for what?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The increased spending in that period.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** An amount of \$7.18 million was approved for 2022–23 to 2026–27 to cover price increases for aviation contracts, including the emergency rescue helicopter service, critical care paramedics and air operations high-threat period fleet. Does the acting commissioner have anything to add?

**Mr C. Waters:** I just add that they are predominantly consumer price index increases.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The parliamentary secretary mentioned the emergency helicopters. Is there a plan for an emergency helicopter to be based in Geraldton?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The aerial fleet was strategically located at bases in Jandakot, Serpentine, Bunbury, Busselton, Manjimup and Albany to service the needs of metropolitan and regional communities. The fleet also had access to 39 regional bases and various helicopter landing sites. Does the acting commissioner have anything to add?

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 25 May 2023]

p444c-464a

Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Hannah Beazley; Mr Shane Love; Ms Christine Tonkin; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Lara Dalton; Ms Libby Mettam

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**Mr C. Waters:** The question probably needs to be posed to the Department of Health. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services manages the contracts for the aircraft, the pilots and crew and also the critical care paramedics. In relation to what the aeromedical services look like, that is a decision for the Department of Health to progress.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a further question about the stations where the water bombers were based during that period. The parliamentary secretary mentioned a number of places where they might be stationed. Where were they stationed during the fire season?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert the question to the acting commissioner, who may also like to delegate.

**Mr C. Waters:** I will delegate to Jon Broomhall.

**Mr J. Broomhall:** Every day during the recent bushfire season, Western Australia's aerial firefighting fleet of 36 aircraft was on stand-by. There was a mix of aerial fire suppression from light helicopters to large air tankers, and they were deployed across the state. It is the largest single fire jurisdiction in the world at 2.6 million square kilometres. The aerial fleet was strategically located at bases in Jandakot, Serpentine, Bunbury, Busselton, Manjimup and Albany to service the needs of metropolitan and regional communities. The fleet also had access to 39 regional bases and various helicopter landing sites. Jointly funded by the state and federal governments, the fleet could be mobilised within 15 minutes. Additionally, two Black Hawk helicopters added increased flexibility to the fleet with their ability to drop large volumes of water and foam in areas often inaccessible to firefighting units on the ground. Each helicopter is fitted with an Australian-designed and built belly tank that can hold up to 4 500 litres and can remain operational for up to 10 hours, supported by mobile fuel tankers on the ground.

To provide DFES with an enhanced strategic aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability and also to help manage large complex bushfires and other natural disasters, including flooding, the state government provided additional funds of \$8.3 million for a new high-performance aircraft and multispectral line scanner to map a fire in minutes. The line scanner can also determine a range of temperatures within the fire and help firefighters map where the fire is travelling and how to best deploy the resources.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 445 of budget paper No 2 and the total appropriations provided to deliver services. I refer to the budgeted \$104 495 000 for 2023–24. Why is this significantly more than in both the previous budget years and the forward estimates?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The net amount appropriated to deliver services predominantly funds the following ongoing programs in the budget: DFES recovery functions, including the disaster recovery funding arrangements for WA and the costs of the Office of Emergency Management that were transferred to DFES under the machinery-of-government amalgamation in 2018; the annual contribution to Surf Life Saving WA on behalf of the state; the contribution towards the costs of operating the metropolitan emergency rescue helicopter service; Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card contributions; and the holding account for the depreciation of assets. If there are other associated amounts, I will divert to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** I defer to our chief financial officer, Georgina.

**Ms G. Camarda:** We have received significantly more consolidated account appropriations this year. One of the main reasons is that we have an additional \$30 million consolidated account subsidy because the emergency services levy increase was a maximum of only five per cent for the average residential charge for category 1. We have had a \$30 million consolidated account injection, but a number of items that were approved as part of the budget process were also funded from the consolidated account. Some of those items included \$6.8 million in funding for the ex-tropical cyclone Ellie task force and \$6.2 million in funding to create a more sustainable disaster recovery capability. We have also had some additional grants of \$9.2 million. There are some more grant moneys for the recovery efforts in relation to cyclone Seroja. The best place to see it clearly in the budget papers is in the spending changes table. There are a couple of big items in the 2023–24 budget year. I mentioned the \$6.8 million for the task force; that is in the spending changes table. There is also \$9.2 million for the tropical cyclone Seroja community benefit fund and resilience grant program, and \$6.3 million for state disaster recovery capability. The majority of those items in the spending changes table were funded from the consolidated account.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you for that comprehensive explanation.

I refer to page 446 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and the line item "Mitigation Activity Fund", and also to page 453, which details the bushfire mitigation activity fund through the emergency services levy and royalties for regions. It is basically a combination of both pages. First, can the parliamentary secretary provide detail on each of these programs and how they are distinct?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** In terms of the mitigation activity fund referred to on page 446, an expense limit of \$839 000 was approved in 2022–23 to reflect an increase of \$800 000 in the contribution by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and \$39 000 in repayments of unspent grants. The DPLH administers the royalties for regions

mitigation activity fund for mitigation of extreme bushfire and other risks on state-owned land within and immediately adjacent to regional town sites. The royalties for regions funding is allocated between the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and DFES. The 2023–24 budget submission approved an increase in revenue of \$839 000 to recognise that \$800 000 higher than projected DPLH contribution, as I mentioned. There is an additional expense limit of \$839 000 in 2022–23 to contribute towards the 2022–23 mitigation activity fund grant rounds 1 and 2. An increase of \$839 000 in the spending changes table, as Ms Camarda mentioned, reflects the expenditure component of the budget submission. Does the acting commissioner have anything to add?

[2.20 pm]

**Mr C. Waters:** I will refer that to Murray Carter, executive director.

**Mr M. Carter:** Further to the member's broad overview, the royalties for regions money that was referred to, which comes across to Department of Fire and Emergency Services, is directly transferred on to local government through the mitigation activity fund. That forms a portion of that fund as well as a proportion of the emergency services levy money attributed to the mitigation activity fund. It is a really important fund; it has done a huge amount of good for a number of local governments and the crown land for which local governments are responsible. Since 2017, we have put over \$42.7 million directly into local government from a combination of those two to address high-risk mitigation on the ground. It is all for on-the-ground activities within those local governments. We are really pleased to say that, as of the last returns we did, 93 local governments are participating in that program and 73 of them have an endorsed, approved bushfire risk management plan, which opens up access to the mitigation activity fund. That is a key plank of our mitigation efforts on the ground.

It is a combination of the royalties for regions funding and the ESL funding. We administer them. Obviously, some areas are eligible for both or for only one, depending on the funding source, and we try to take out some of the administrative overhead for local governments and manage them under the same set of criteria to make it as seamless as we possibly can to get some efficiency in the program. It is a really important program for us. Four or five years into that program, I have no doubt that it has made a significant difference in lessening the risk from bushfire for the Western Australian community.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is fairly challenging to follow in some ways. The first question is: the mitigation activity fund has obviously ended, as shown on page 446, and it has been blended across, if you like, into the ESL arrangements in the line item on page 453.

**Mr M. Carter:** The royalties for regions component was a three-year funding, and the coming year is the third and final year of that fund. Recently, the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage briefed the State Bushfire Advisory Council, which is a ministerial advisory council, about its plans to conduct an independent review of the cost-benefit of that fund with a view to ask government to further extend that fund. Royalties for regions has been an important component for a number of years, and the ESL remains unchanged and is budgeted through the out years, so that will remain. The difference and why one comes to an end is because the three-year agreement, through the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, for royalties for regions concludes in one more year.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Would the parliamentary secretary's summary be that mitigation activities for this program have actually increased or are they decreasing over the forward estimates period?

**Mr M. Carter:** The amount of activity has certainly increased. That funding has supported planning on its way to getting the approved plans, so on-ground implementation has increased. There is no doubt about that. I think the fact that 73 local governments are now doing on-the-ground work is testament to that, and we are starting to see the benefit of that realised on the ground. The planning support component has eased off a little bit in some ways, but the balance of the funding has then been moved into more on-ground works through the mitigation activity fund. I think that is a good news story for the community of Western Australia.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the quantum of bushfire mitigation works undertaken by DFES or other government agencies in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 to date? I know that is a fairly comprehensive question. Would it be able to be supplied by supplementary information?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes, it can be supplied by supplementary information.

**The CHAIR:** Can you please clarify what you would like to supply as supplementary information?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Can the member please repeat his query?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the quantum of bushfire mitigation works undertaken by DFES or other government agencies in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 to date?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I concur with that except for the other agencies. We can only supply information related to DFES.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

[*Supplementary Information No B10.*]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. There is a line item in the ongoing initiatives section, just above “Other”, for tropical cyclone Seroja; it has \$25 million of underspend expected in this current year, which is yet to conclude, and \$100 000 of underspend next year. I also refer to page 124 of budget paper No 3 and the table “Major spending changes since the 2022–23 mid-year review”, which shows that in 2022–23 a total of \$64.9 million of underspend was expected at that point and another \$5 million underspend is expected this year. The total underspend on that line item is \$69.9 million. I would like to know exactly what total quantum of funds from the disaster funding recovery arrangements remain available for grant applications to access. I have a number of follow-on questions.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes, the member is correct. There is a decrease of \$25.1 million in 2022–23 and \$100 000 in 2023–24 to reflect the reduced forecast spend against the recovery and resilience grants, and the monitoring and evaluation programs. This was largely attributable to individuals and small businesses holding greater than expected levels of insurance and other self-reliant activities. DFES administers the disaster recovery funding arrangements for WA. The significant damage caused by cyclone Seroja resulted in the commonwealth and state governments jointly announcing a \$122 million package. The funding was made available from categories C and D of the DRFAWA. The amount of total spend is reflected in the budget documents, but I will refer that to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** I will refer that to Deputy Commissioner Pexton, who looked after recovery.

**Ms M. Pexton:** The item in our DFES budget papers is a reflection of the grants that DFES has actually delivered. The difference, then, in budget paper No 3 is our role as the administrator of the DRFAWA and the overarching total packages that were established for tropical cyclone Seroja. If I have the member’s question correctly, and I hope he will correct me if I am wrong, the difference is that we are talking about the forecast relating to the resilience and recovery grants in our budget papers, as opposed to budget paper No 3, which is the overarching, entire packages that were developed for tropical cyclone Seroja.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** My question was actually: what is the total quantum that remains available for grant applicants to receive or access?

**Ms M. Pexton:** We might need to take that one on notice, if we can. I just want to make sure. We extended the dates for all the grants programs, as the member may be aware, due to some of the challenges with the workforce being able to deliver them. The DRFAWA is a reimbursement grant; therefore, all the grants have been extended for an additional 12 months. I do not have that re-forecasted figure with me here to answer the member’s question about that grant, so I would need to take that one on notice.

[2.30 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will that be provided by way of supplementary information?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Does the member mean supplementary information regarding how much grant funding is still available for acquittal?

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

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No B11.*]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I asked what funding is still available. Can the parliamentary secretary give me a forecast of what she expects will be handed back as part of that discussion? Sorry, I should have been more specific.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** That is not covered in the budget; therefore, I cannot answer.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Fair enough. Could the parliamentary secretary explain whether there will be any review of the grants program to see why it was under-utilised? I know it is easy to say, “Oh, it’s covered by insurance”, but I know that a lot of people are not fully covered by insurance, simply because they are in a position in which they cannot meet the conditions of the grant. Can the parliamentary secretary inform me whether the government intends to undertake a review of the recovery program and the appropriateness of the grants and the criteria, and to have a discussion with the federal government about that? Tropical cyclone Seroja was in an area of the state where many people do have insurance. The parliamentary secretary has identified that there is an underspend, but I suspect that it is not all due to the fact that there was insurance. A lot of people are unable to rebuild. I think there needs to be a very comprehensive undertaking to get to the bottom of what went wrong and why some people are not covered.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 25 May 2023]

p444c-464a

Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Hannah Beazley; Mr Shane Love; Ms Christine Tonkin; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Lara Dalton; Ms Libby Mettam

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**The CHAIR:** Could the member please clarify with a short sharp question at the end?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I did have it and then I went into more detail. Will DFES review the appropriateness of the grant structure and the reasons why it was underspent? It is very easy to say, “They’re insured.”

**The CHAIR:** Remind me what line item you are referring to.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am talking about the underspend of \$25 million on page 446 of budget paper number 2, volume 2, under “STC Seroja”, and the underspend of \$64.9 million in budget paper No 3.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** We are continually reviewing grants programs and activities, and learnings happen out of every natural disaster or incident. A national review of the DFRA is underway.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will there be a review into the appropriateness of the grant structures for tropical cyclone Seroja?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes.

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** I refer to page 445 and the line item “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie”. Can the parliamentary secretary detail how \$38.3 million will be used by the department to help communities in the Kimberley region recover from tropical cyclone Ellie and the floods?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I thank the member for that question. Western Australia’s ability to respond to and recover from national disasters will be strengthened, with \$38.3 million set aside in this state budget to fund WA’s biggest ever dedicated recovery team. The funding recognises the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters in WA, with flooding in the Kimberley, severe tropical cyclone Seroja in the midwest and major bushfires in the Perth Hills and regional WA in the past two years alone. A \$24.9 million investment will enhance the Department of Fire and Emergency Services’ ability to provide support following a natural disaster. There will be 29 permanent full-time positions created to establish a sustainable state recovery capability. Another \$13.4 million has been committed to fund a task force to manage and support recovery in the Kimberley in the wake of flooding caused by ex-tropical cyclone Ellie. This funding will employ 20 full-time staff for two years, while a further 12 full-time staff will be employed for 12 months. The significant increase in resources from the McGowan government will provide the biggest dedicated recovery team Western Australia has ever had. It will enable DFES to meet the increased demand for state recovery by having more people on the ground, which will help communities recover and rebuild faster. The state government is committed to making sure that communities are flexible and resilient, making it easier for them to bounce back and recover from these devastating weather events.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In regard to ex-tropical cyclone Ellie, the parliamentary secretary just read out some of the response. Will the state government also commit to undertaking a full review of the Kimberley floods and the response to it?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Again, member, that is not in the budget papers. I cannot answer that.

**The CHAIR:** That does not relate to expenditure.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is not in the budget paper. I would have thought that it would be in the ordinary activities of DFES.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes, but we are in budget estimates.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are the ordinary activities of DFES not funded by the budget?

**The CHAIR:** Member, if it is not relating to a specific line item —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We will let that go for now.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a question about the status of the Fitzroy River Bridge. Is the parliamentary secretary aware how long the temporary Fitzroy River Bridge is likely to remain in operation?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Minister Saffioti answered questions regarding the infrastructure work on the bridge yesterday. The bridge is under Main Roads and is not covered by our budget papers. It is a Main Roads’ remit.

**The CHAIR:** Can I please remind members that we are looking at the division regarding the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My understanding was that DFES personnel were originally involved with the Fitzroy River Bridge. Are any DFES personnel involved with the establishment of the new bridge or is it all under the Department of Transport?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** No DFES personnel are currently involved with the bridge.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 450 of budget paper 2, volume 2, and the line item “Primary Fire and Emergency Fleet” under “Vehicle Programs”—the second and third last lines. Noting that DFES has been struggling to deliver replacement fleet vehicles in recent years, how many vehicles remain in service beyond their indicative service life?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** As a result of the recent changes to the vehicle model with more advanced technological modifications, one of the new urban fire trucks experienced an issue that caused the pump within the truck to default. DFES worked with the manufacturer to identify the cause of this issue. The other new fire trucks were taken offline as a precaution. I am pleased to say that the cause of the fault has been rectified and the fire trucks are now back in service. In the metropolitan area we have 139 vehicles across DFES career and volunteer brigades, and a further 130 across local government bushfire brigades. Was the member asking how many appliances were online or offline?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I was asking how many vehicles remain in service beyond their indicative service life.

[2.40 pm]

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I defer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** I will defer to Mr Leach for those numbers.

**Mr P. Leach:** We do not have the exact numbers here. However, a point to note is that none of the vehicles that we keep in the fleet is beyond its operational service life. They are maintained regularly. They are maintained to a standard that is operationally effective. At such time as they become non-effective, they are removed. However, at this point—this goes back to the original question—all the vehicles we currently have are serviceable and operational as part of the fleet.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How many of those vehicles are scheduled to be replaced in 2023–24?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I do not believe that level of detail is covered in the budget papers.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** As far as I am concerned, it is part of the primary fire and emergency fleet, the budget line item I have just spoken about.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Is the member asking how many appliances would be due to end their operational life in 2023–24?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I appreciate the explanation. I asked how many remained in service beyond their indicative service life.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** So that is none.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Are any of those vehicles scheduled to be replaced in 2023–24?

**Mr P. Leach:** Again, that is not something that is readily available given that these vehicles are assessed as they come through for servicing. It is not a number that we have predetermined. It is difficult to say that, for example, we will retire 10 vehicles this financial year. It really depends on the nature of the vehicle and the nature of the assessment that is done at the workshops. It is not a planned schedule; it is done on a case-by-case basis. The rationale for that is that we have a significant number of vehicles across the fleet and across the state. In terms of chronological age, which some people use, some of them still may have quite low kilometrage on them. It really depends on the condition of the vehicle at the time and the purpose for which that vehicle was intended, because obviously we also have a large diversity of vehicles. That also factors into whether a vehicle will remain operational. That is something that is very difficult to predict in advance.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** When a brigade receives a new appliance, what are the protocols around that? Is it the case that the minister or the Department of Fire and Emergency Services advises brigades, including volunteer brigades, not to publicise or photograph vehicles after they have been received until they are officially presented by the minister or a government representative?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Member, that does not relate to any budget line item for spend.

**The CHAIR:** Members, please keep your questions relating to expenditure.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I think it refers to the primary fire and emergency fleet when there is a new appliance.

**The CHAIR:** Member, it is not about the expenditure. This is specifically budget estimates around spend.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is in relation to the expenditure for a new vehicle and its release, or the way the vehicle is presented once it has had its initial opening, if you like.

**The CHAIR:** Parliamentary secretary, would you like to respond to that question or defer to the department?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** It is just not a question about expenditure. Once an appliance is delivered, it is operational.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I will rephrase it: is it true that the minister's office or DFES is asking volunteers to travel sometimes up to hundreds of kilometres to transport new appliances for the purpose of attending media or promotional events, which takes volunteers and resources out of their fire district?

**The CHAIR:** Member, that also does not relate to expenditure.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is related to my concern about taking volunteers outside their district for a promotional appearance for the minister.

**The CHAIR:** I will ask a final time whether the parliamentary secretary would like to respond to that question, and if not, we will move on to a different question.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** No.

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** I refer to page 450 and vehicle programs. How does DFES plan to ensure that its emergency services fleet of vehicles meets the demands of emergency services in WA?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** More than \$32 million was spent in the first 10 months of 2022–23, delivering 91 new emergency services vehicles across Western Australia and bolstering the state’s firefighting capability. This includes two brand new vehicles—the road crash rescue tender, designed to be the primary road crash response vehicle in rural and coastal locations; and the general rescue utility, a land search and rescue vehicle used primarily by the State Emergency Service. The new vehicles are part of the McGowan government’s \$125 million investment in local emergency services manufacturing, which includes new manufacturing works in Canning Vale, Kewdale, Malaga, Osborne Park and Collie. The DFES operational fleet consists of over 1 600 vehicles that are capable of responding to a range of hazards including bushfires, structure fires, cyclones, rescues, storms, floods and HAZMAT incidents.

The full list of delivered appliances, as at 30 April 2023, is: light tanker, four career fire and rescue service projects; 16 volunteer fire and rescue service projects; 12 volunteer fire and emergency services projects; and 20 local government grant scheme projects. For urban, there was a total of 17; urban pump, a total of four; broadacre, a total of 13; general rescue utility, four across VFES and SES; and road crash rescue tender, one in the SES; and one pod carrier in the CFRS. The total number of appliances is 91.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to page 450, asset investment program, and the \$22.4 million for ongoing vehicle replacement programs in paragraph 1.1.2. When the fire units are replaced, are they stripped down and then sold through the normal auction process? How are those vehicles relinquished?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will defer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** My understanding is that they are decommissioned and then go through the auction process.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Has consideration been given to regional people who are very remote being able to purchase those units for their volunteer groups or for farms and pastoral properties to get more units into the region? Is there provision for that?

**Mr C. Waters:** Yes, we are currently looking at a program to enable farmer response capability to have the first opportunity to purchase those through auction.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Thank you; it is a regular question I am asked.

**Mr C. Waters:** Yes, we are just going through the process to look at the governance requirements and what we can and cannot do.

[2.50 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the line item “Australian Fire Danger Rating System” on page 445 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. What is the purpose of this ongoing funding?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will give the member a bit of background to the Australian Fire Danger Rating System signage replacement. On 1 September 2022, WA successfully transitioned to the Australian Fire Danger Rating System—a new and simplified nationally consistent system. In 2022, DFES allocated \$500 000 of commonwealth grant funding to support local governments with the replacement of fire danger rating signage. This funding allowed for the replacement and retrofitting of existing signage and associated freight costs, with DFES coordinating the central signage procurement for the 70 local governments across Western Australia. Local governments are responsible for installation.

The fire danger rating roadside signage usually displayed along major transport routes is only one method of communicating the fire dangers and risks to the community for their preparedness and action. DFES led a formal procurement process facilitated by the WA Department of Finance in mid-2022. Successful respondents were deemed to represent value for money and have sufficient capacity to supply required signs with condensed time frames. All tender respondents were evaluated against the criteria as per the publicly available tender request, and contracts were awarded to six vendors. Local governments and other organisations and departments can use the tender to procure signage for the next two years. By mid-December 2022, all 150 analogue signs had been produced and



dispatched to 46 local governments by two WA suppliers. One other outer-metropolitan government undertook to retrofit its existing 16 analogue signage, which was completed by the start of February 2023.

Anecdotal information received from many local governments is that analogue signage installation is progressing, with 50 per cent complete. However, DFES has minimal influence on when signs will be installed following signage delivery. DFES was advised mid-January 2023 that digital signage previously committed to be completed by the end of 2022 had been significantly delayed due to difficulties sourcing electronic components and manufacturing delays.

As I said, approximately 50 per cent of local governments that received replacement signage have installed it. This is a new fire danger rating service. That is where that money is going. A total of \$1.95 million was approved in 2022–23 in relation to that commonwealth grant to deliver community awareness signage and support local governments to replace the fire danger rating signage throughout the state, as I mentioned. An additional \$1.957 million was approved over 2023–24 to 2023–27 on ongoing system maintenance, including user support, live data analysis and governance arrangements and reporting.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is the state government undertaking any review of the implementation of the AFDRS following the previous high-threat period in the southern part of the state?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Sorry, member, are we reviewing what?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Will the government undertake a review of the implementation of the AFDRS following the first summer the system has been in place?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The answer is yes. I will defer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** Yes, we are doing our own review in conjunction with the national review. The national review will occur because it is a new national system. We will have input into that with our own data and the findings we found from our internal review.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Has DFES received any feedback from government agencies, members of Parliament or local governments regarding the implementation of the AFDRS since September 2022?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** How does this relate to expenditure?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It relates to the implementation of the new system. I think it is important to know whether there has been any feedback.

**The CHAIR:** Does your question relate to feedback on the expense of this program?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am referring to feedback on expenditure and also on the implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Is the member making sure that we are conducting a review of how the money was expended after the season?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** With a totally new system in place, I assume that the government would be getting feedback from local governments and any variety of sources on whether the system can be improved and whether it operated properly over the last summer, considering it was the first summer and a new set-up. It is a general question but I think it is important given that it is a totally new system. I think many of our farmers and people in the ag regions were trying to adjust to it, as well as local governments.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** It is not related to expenditure but I am happy for it to be answered by the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** We have received some correspondence from local governments and other parties on the new system. There have been some anomalies. Obviously, we would expect that with a new system being introduced. The system changed from six ratings back to four, which are colour coded and give simple messaging, and there was also an increase in the number of districts that it was attributed to, rising from 37 to 48. Also, the biggest factor was increasing the different fuel types from two, being forest to grassland, to now incorporate eight different fuel types. Some anomalies have been created in using the new system. That feedback will be taken as part of the review and then used in conjunction with the national review to work on how the system can be improved going forward.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I appreciate that response.

Has there been an increase in harvest vehicle movement bans since the implementation of the new AFDRS?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will defer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** I understand that harvest and vehicle movement bans are imposed by local government. We do not keep those figures. I will defer to Murray Carter as he may have some additional information.

**Mr M. Carter:** Thank you, chair, and I apologise for jumping the gun a bit earlier with my previous response.

The acting commissioner is correct; we do not keep those numbers. It is a matter for local government. I spoke to a lot of local governments as we came out of that early escalating phase, particularly through the harvest period specifically, which this relates to. It was probably a milder summer so it is difficult to compare year to year. Not only are they different systems, but no season is the same. We actually had a reduction in total fire bans—the total number triggered by the AFDRS system. I can tell members that because we get that number. We expect the flow-on effect, triggered by the fire behaviour index, as with harvest and vehicle movement bans, would be the same.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I agree that it was a cooler summer. I do not think we had a day over 40, which was probably good in the world of harvest bans, farming and harvesting.

What detail can the parliamentary secretary provide on the national review into the AFDRS and will DFES prepare a submission to the review?

[3.00 pm]

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Thank you, member.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This is my last question on this.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** It is very unrelated to budget expenditure.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I know it is, but it is important. Given it is the first year of the system, will the Department of Fire and Emergency Services be putting in a submission to the national review?

**The CHAIR:** Parliamentary secretary, would you like to respond to that question?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will, but I will defer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** Yes, we will. Obviously, we are doing our own internal review of our findings and the anomalies that were attributed to Western Australia, specifically, and then that will feed into the national review.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you very much. I want to ask a few more questions on “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie (ex-TC Ellie)” on page 445. The first one is: what quantum of funding and assistance has been provided by the state government in response to the Kimberley floods to date? The parliamentary secretary gave out a list a little while ago, but could the parliamentary secretary confine it to the new amounts outside the budget that, I think, she mentioned.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I know that the member is on page 445, but so I can access my notes, what line item is the member referring to?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The line item is “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie (ex-TC Ellie)” and the clean-up program, et cetera, on page 445.

**The CHAIR:** Under “Spending Changes”.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** An amount of \$1.5 million was approved in 2022–23 and 2023–24 for the immediate clean-up and debris removal from residences and local communities and the disposal of debris to landfill and management of hazardous waste. A total of \$30 million in funding was approved. The state contribution to that was \$15 million to assist with the clean-up, wash out and removal of debris from public spaces, residences and businesses. It includes the pump-out of septic tanks and waste management and a contingency provision for additional landfill or containerisation of waste for removal to Derby. It is to be managed by the Shire of Derby–West Kimberley. The total cost of the assistance package from category C of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Western Australia and the distribution of the costs from responsible agencies in 2023–24 is: DFES, \$500 000; Shire of Derby–West Kimberley, \$17.5 million; and Shire of Halls Creek, \$1 million.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How many people remain displaced from their communities and in temporary accommodation?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I do not have those details because it is not related to budget expenditure. Does the acting commissioner have those details?

**Mr C. Waters:** Ms Pexton does.

**Ms M. Pexton:** We have no further displaced people in emergency accommodation. We have a range of people clearly in temporary accommodation while their properties are being refurbished or repaired.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the weekly cost associated with temporarily accommodating those displaced persons?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** That is the responsibility of the Department of Communities, not DFES.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the expected time frame for the delivery of the Rio Tinto workers camp to Fitzroy Crossing, which I believe DFES has some involvement with?

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 25 May 2023]

p444c-464a

Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Hannah Beazley; Mr Shane Love; Ms Christine Tonkin; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Lara Dalton; Ms Libby Mettam

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**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Can the member please find me a line item so I can refer to my notes? Also, in order to prepare her, I note that I will defer this to Deputy Commissioner Pexton.

**The CHAIR:** Member, can you refer to the specific line item?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, I refer to “Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie (ex-TC Ellie): Clean-up Program—Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFAWA)” on page 445.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes, I will defer that to Deputy Commissioner Pexton.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Can the member just restate whether he was after the date?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the expected time frame for the delivery of the Rio Tinto workers camp to Fitzroy Crossing?

**Ms M. Pexton:** DFES’s involvement has been to transfer that asset from Rio Tinto to the state government. Pre-mobilisation works to the camp have already been completed. Works have commenced at the site, which is to be located at the back of the sports oval in Fitzroy Crossing in the Shire of Derby–West Kimberley. Mobilisation of the camp will commence on 13 June and handover and commencement of operations is expected by the end of June.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you very much. What grants programs or other funding assistance is available to those impacted by the floods?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Thank you, member. There is a range of grants and I will refer to Deputy Commissioner Pexton.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you. The parliamentary secretary has outlined all those in her previous comment and response to this question. The majority of the funding that has been allocated so far, as the member can see from the budget papers, has been around some subsidies and supports. They are not necessarily individual grant line items and they have been outlined previously.

**Ms L. DALTON:** I refer to page 445 and the line item “State Disaster Recover Capability”. I ask the parliamentary secretary: how do initiatives underpin its response to cyclone events such as that experienced in the Pilbara by ex–severe tropical cyclone Ilsa?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The eye of ex–severe tropical cyclone Ilsa crossed the coast near Pardoo about midnight on Thursday, 13 April 2023, as a category 5 system—the first category 5 system to make landfall in WA since 2009. Ex–STC Ilsa brought very destructive winds, as well as heavy rainfall between De Grey River and Pardoo Roadhouse. Before it crossed the coast, ex–STC Ilsa set an Australian record for the highest 10-minute sustained wind speed of 218 kilometres an hour at Bedout Island off the east Pilbara coast. Thankfully, populated areas such as Port Hedland and Bidyadanga, escaped the brunt of the cyclone, with wind speeds at Port Hedland peaking at 70 kilometres an hour.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services closely monitored this system for more than a week before it crossed the coast, and emergency services were well prepared. Accurate forecast track mapping from the Bureau of Meteorology was incredibly helpful in helping us plan our emergency response. The outstanding work of all the volunteers and career personnel who answered the call to action played a pivotal role in ensuring people were well prepared. DFES significantly boosted its resources in the north west to keep the community safe. This included additional personnel, aircraft and equipment.

DFES worked around the clock to keep communities prepared and informed, as the cyclone approached the Pilbara and Kimberley coast. DFES was in regular contact with people inland of the expected coastal crossing, including Aboriginal communities, mine sites, pastoral stations and tourism operations. Aboriginal communities were contacted to ensure they had enough supplies and to find out whether any medically vulnerable or elderly people needed to be relocated. DFES staff were in touch with 17 pastoral and other communities in the Pilbara region to assess their preparedness or whether any assistance was required. Staff also contacted 12 mine sites in the region.

DFES worked with people staying north and south of Eighty Mile Beach to ensure caravanners and campers left the area when a yellow alert was declared. There were additional aircraft on standby in Karratha and one of those helicopters was retrofitted with equipment to undertake medical evacuations if required.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 445 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the budget allocated towards “Bushfire Framework Review”; the forward estimates have no future funding. Why was the bushfire framework review pushed to 2023–24?

[3.10 pm]

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** In 2023–24, \$478 000 was approved. It was funded by consolidated appropriation to extend three fixed-term FTE to continue with the implementation of the bushfire framework review. This included the delivery of the new mapping methodology for bushfire-prone areas in collaboration with CSIRO. The bushfire

framework review is a priority of government. It aims to mature land-use planning arrangements for bushfires in Western Australia and reduce red tape for residential and tourism development. Resourcing for the review has been shared across agencies. The resourcing ensures DFES has the capacity to enable timely revisions of the map of bushfire-prone areas and associated system and policy changes that underpin the bushfire framework review as well as mitigate the risks associated with various activities. I will refer further information to be provided by Mr Carter, executive director.

**Mr M. Carter:** Adding to the parliamentary secretary's comments, members may be aware that the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage is responsible for the *State planning policy 3.7: Planning in bushfire prone areas*. That is out for public consultation now. The temporary staff across agencies, as referred to by the parliamentary secretary, are to deal with the outcomes of that review. There has been a lot of work over the previous two years to get to the point of a new draft policy for public consultation. The map of bushfire-prone areas, which is of course ours as it is the remit of the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, is a critical part of providing the trigger in Western Australia that invokes the requirements for compliance with *State planning policy 3.7*. The three temporary resources, which are for only one further budget year, are to see out the combination of those two projects across three different business areas within DFES, effectively to get us a more nuanced and accurate map of bushfire-prone areas. It is also with the intent that the *State planning policy 3.7* can react to it in a way that is more efficient in handling development in bushfire-prone areas so that high-hazard areas, which need significant amendment, conditions and consideration, are well dealt with. For other areas that are less so, there is not the overhead and the red tape around some of them. The policy example of that is around significant built-up urban areas. It is out for consultation at the moment, subject to the final policy being endorsed by government. We are talking about within the metro area and regional centres such as Albany and Geraldton where we have remnant vegetation within broader town sites. They are obviously not the same bushfire risk as Mundaring in Perth hills, for argument's sake. It is a different policy approach. It is not to say they are not at risk from bushfire but the scale of risk and the way it should be mitigated and managed is very different. We would like to treat that with the respect it deserves with a more nuanced policy approach to development of proposals across those areas.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Will the bushfire framework review also inform prescribed burning for DBCA, or is it just about highlighting and referring to bushfire response?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will refer to Mr Carter.

**Mr M. Carter:** The short answer is no. It refers purely to development in bushfire-prone areas. It is not about the broader mitigation effort or response. All planned burning is a key plank of mitigation across the agencies. It is really about the development of planning approvals and subdivisions—anything that requires building applications—and how they are dealt with. Generally, the decision-maker in those is local government or the WA Planning Commission, depending on the scale and type. That policy space deals purely with those not the other aspects of bushfire management.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What power does DFES have with what we are talking about here for fire risk? Is there the power to veto developments such as the North Stoneville development in relation to fire risk?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** This question is much more policy related than expenditure related, but I will ask Mr Carter if he is happy to answer the question.

**Mr M. Carter:** Thanks. I am happy to answer the question. The short answer is no, we do not have the power of veto, to use the member's words. DFES's role in that planning and development space is purely as a referral agency. Within the trigger mechanisms in that framework, there are certain types of development that have mandatory referral from the decision-maker, again be it the Western Australian Planning Commission or local government, which must be referred to DFES for advice. We provide that advice and then it is up to the decision-maker to decide, based on our advice and of course a whole range of other expertise from other areas as well.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 446 and legislative reform in paragraph 5. It refers to changes in legislative arrangements such as the modernised Work Health and Safety Act 2020. How does the parliamentary secretary think her government's reforms will affect DFES in relation to work health and safety?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The member would be aware that on 10 November 2020, the Work Health and Safety Bill 2019 was passed as the Work Health and Safety Act 2020 and assented by the Governor. The WHS act and accompanying regulations came into effect on 31 March last year. The WHS act includes volunteers and the definition of "worker", essentially providing volunteers with the same level of protection as an employee. There has been a significant increase in workload within the health and safety services team and other operational support staff at DFES as a result of the new legislation that is being covered. The DFES workforce manages the implementation and ongoing day-to-day, business-as-usual activities associated with the WHS act, particularly the increased focus from WorkSafe WA inspectors and emergency services volunteers throughout the state. DFES is revising, expanding and developing training materials and resources, developing operating procedures for local government use and

developing publications to support the implementation of the legislation, and is in the process of contracting a resource to a conduct comprehensive review and update of the DFES safety management system to ensure compliance with the requirements of the WHS act.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is DFES the PCBU—person conducting the business undertaking—in relation to all employees and all volunteers?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will refer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** Local government is responsible for its volunteers so it would be the PCBU for its own volunteers. We would be the PCBU for our own volunteers and staff.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I want to get clarity, if I can. The parliamentary secretary referred to volunteers in her response, which led me to believe that DFES would cover all employees and all volunteers. Is there another substructure below that, involving local governments?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** DFES covers DFES volunteers and local government covers its own volunteers. Local government has volunteers.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Let us say there is a volunteer bushfire brigade in a local shire out in the bush. The local government is the responsible entity. What are the implications for the training that has to be done? We obviously saw the COVID arrangements last year and who could and could not come onto the fireground. What is the responsibility for training under the Work Health and Safety Act?

[3.20 pm]

**Mr C. Waters:** We have always had a duty of care, both the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and local government, to our own volunteers. The implication for us as a department is that if we assume control under a section 13 transfer of control, then we assume responsibility for all volunteers on the fireground. Therefore, we would then assume and become the person conducting a business or undertaking for all volunteers in that situation.

Referring to the training issue, we have been proactively speaking with all local governments and offering our training packages to create a level of consistency with that training so there are no anomalies with the level of training that a person may have in responding. That is to give both the local government and DFES a level of comfort that people are appropriately trained and equipped, and have the correct personal protective clothing to respond to an incident.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Just a final comment.

**The CHAIR:** Is it a question or a comment?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is a comment.

**The CHAIR:** All right, you may have a final comment.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I basically say that I understand why our volunteers in the bush fire brigades are very concerned about these arrangements coming into place last summer. I will leave it at that.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2 and the table “Spending Changes”, beginning on page 445, and the line item “On-Country Planned Burning Training Program”. Is this program in conjunction with and/or delivered within the Aboriginal rangers program?

**Mr M. Carter:** That refers to a specific program that has managed to find itself cut across a couple of years through some of the challenges that have been described today. Specifically, we have a memorandum of understanding with the Indigenous Desert Alliance, and the country it looks after cuts across parts of South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, with a whole raft of traditional owners and, by extension, ranger groups. Through the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, we have joined up in a partnership arrangement through that agreement to bring things together. We are in the process of trialling it now, as we speak, on-country to do some different types of training for on-country Indigenous ranger groups so they can do the types of things and meet some of the desires of back-on-to-country fire management. It is a different type of training from what we would traditionally do in our more structured volunteer arrangements. It is very hands on and field based, with less on the theory side of things, which we try to do in a lot of other work. It is quite innovative and very exciting. There is a lot of interest outside the specific arrangement with the IDA. We enjoy a really healthy partnership with the IDA and I think it will take us ahead further with other traditional owners and ranger groups across the whole of Western Australia. It is a really important piece of work.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I think Mr Carter touched on this, but can the parliamentary secretary detail where the program is being rolled out and utilised? How many FTE are involved in the program?

**Mr M. Carter:** This is not specific to that line item, but I am certainly happy to answer the broader remit of the cultural fire program, which I think the member is referring to. This is managed as a specific time-bound project with the Indigenous Desert Alliance. For the cultural fire program, which is managed by the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, we have two full-time staff dedicated to the program plus another three FTE in the knowledge management function, which are covered in other parts of the budget papers, who deal part-time in that cultural fire space plus perform a range of other functions. Basically, we deal right through. There is a lot of work going on with the rollout of the south west native title claim, so we are doing work with a number of Indigenous groups from the south west and the great southern. Right through from Albany to Esperance is fairly active, and it will certainly be an area of growth for us. We have a small but dedicated crew at the Bushfire Centre of Excellence who basically facilitate. It is about the engagement with the traditional owners and allowing access to the training products that the acting commissioner talked about with our occupational health and safety requirement, but of course it goes much further than that. We want to build in traditional knowledge into our contemporary products and bring them close together. It really is an exciting and expanding area for us. There are a number of dedicated staff. We have a good future ahead of us in that space.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many people have been trained so far as part of this training program?

**Mr M. Carter:** I cannot give a specific number because it is not like the bush fire service training package or a structured package that is aligned to national competencies that people start, finish, do some assessments on and then are awarded a certificate of achievement, and then we can give a number of how many do so. This is basically around coaching and capability building, and people come and go. It is a far more informal and flexible training arrangement. I certainly could not give the member a number. It is not a number we would have.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** After the bushfires over east we heard a lot of commentary about using Indigenous skills in burning and so forth. Are there any examples of implementation? I know Mr Carter said it was being worked towards, but is this being implemented as part of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions prescribed burning program? How is this coming forth in a practical sense?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The member is taking liberties with relating to budget expenditure again, but I defer to Mr Carter.

**Mr M. Carter:** It is a good question; I thank the member. The language gets interchanged bit. We talk about cultural fire, which is about Indigenous people, and we also talk about traditional fire practice. Traditional fire practice is something we have been doing through DBCA, local government, DFES and many others that use fire as management tool. We have employed traditional practice to a degree. We are aware of it and have had practitioners able to do it for a long time. It is around burning at the right time of the year, patchiness, low-intensity fires and all those sorts of things—to give a few examples that many people would be aware of. The shift now is to garner more knowledge, to have cultural fire built into it, so there is a rewarding experience for traditional owners. It also has a flow-on effect of better fuel management. There is clear evidence of a lot of fire in the landscape before European settlement, and, evidently, wildfires occurred. As fire managers, we would all like to manage fires in lower fuel environments, not with very high fuel loads, and more fire in the landscape is better for the safety of the Western Australian community, better for Indigenous people and better for biodiversity, cultural values and for us all, be it delivered through cultural means, contemporary means or hopefully a combination of both, which is really where we are trying to get to. We are trying to get the point at which we harness collective knowledge. I characterise that in the bush fire space there is traditional fire knowledge, science and research, and contemporary knowledge through lessons learned, and if those three things can all be brought together, we are on a really good path. What we are trying to do summarises where we are heading with it.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 446 of budget paper No 2, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” and “Climate Change”. The second paragraph states —

The increasing frequency and intensity of emergencies and climate adaptation policy responses require the Department to enhance the way it works in partnership with the community, the private sector and across Government ...

Can the parliamentary secretary provide examples since ex-tropical cyclone Ellie of what the government is doing to enhance its work with the community, private sector and across government?

[3.30 pm]

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes. As the member rightly pointed out, it is noted within the budget papers that Western Australia has experienced an increase in the frequency and impact of natural disasters over the past decade. A large body of climate change research now exists that indicates the likelihood of more frequent and severe climate-related disaster events in the future. Declining average rainfall in the south and increasing average temperatures are extending the overlap of fire seasons in the north and south of the state, reinforcing the need for

DFES to be poised to respond to disasters and support preparedness efforts statewide. It is also increasingly likely that the state will be required to deal with a greater number of concurrent disaster events, requiring greater capacity to manage recovery needs across multiple diverse communities. In 2023, we have already seen an increased frequency and intensity of exceptional weather events—namely, cyclones and floods. Of course, our emergency services are responding to ever-present bushfires and no doubt will be responding to storms in the coming months as well as other hazardous incidents and rescues. DFES continues to ensure that our emergency services are effectively equipped and trained for all hazards. DFES is increasing bushfire mitigation across the regions, upgrading the state's firefighting assets and capability and strategically placing assets throughout the state based on assessed risk. DFES is also expanding its recovery capability to ensure that it is appropriately resourced to support reconstruction, economic recovery and social wellbeing after a natural disaster or emergency event.

If there are any other particular details that can be provided, I refer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** Thank you, member. Obviously, with the increased incidence of major incidents, we are doing a lot in the pre-deployment stage and actually pre-deploying resources to high-risk areas. WA is pretty unique compared with other regions in that we have two distinct fire seasons—the north west and the southern bushfire seasons. The southern bushfire season also coincides with the northern cyclone season. In recent years, we have seen an overlapping of both the northern and southern bushfire seasons in conjunction with some fairly robust cyclone and tropical low activity that has come down. We participate in the Australasian Fire Authorities Council network groups in discussing ways to get around climate change and be better prepared to respond to and recover from incidents, and also prepare the community. A lot of our community programs are around preparing the community to not only prepare for the actual incident, but also have the resilience to move on after the event has occurred. We are proactive. In high-threat periods, we have operation preparedness briefings, which are communications with all DFES regions, and we have our heightened threat actions, which basically lift the level of actions that each region undertakes based on the level of risk that they have specifically identified within their own operational response areas. Additionally, we bring on additional aircraft in response.

We have changed from using an Air Crane helicopter to Black Hawk helicopters to give us more resilience and flexibility with our aircraft operations. In the last two fire seasons, we have also brought on additional aircraft to support the grain harvest farming community with its record grain harvest. That has been quite effective. I think the 2021–22 harvest season saw a record 20 million tonnes of grain harvested. Last year, we again worked with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, which again requested our assistance in providing that capability. Last year, I think around 23 million tonnes of grain was harvested. We will review that, based on the risk and the forecasted harvest, for the next year as well. It is about being proactive, making sure we have fit-for-purpose appliances and vehicles, that our air strategy is sufficient and that we have the appropriate resources in the appropriate locations when those risks do present themselves.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I thank the acting commissioner for that comprehensive response. I refer to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 448. About five line items down is “Proportion of responses to Emergency Service Levy One and Emergency Service Levy Two incidents within target timeframes”. Can the parliamentary secretary explain to me what that is?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I thank the member. I will divert to Mr Jon Broomhall, acting deputy commissioner, operations.

**Mr J. Broomhall:** My understanding is that that is the response to level 1 and level 2 areas in the target time frames. That is the response to emergency service levy 1 areas.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Sorry; could the acting deputy commissioner repeat that? I could not quite pick that up.

**Mr J. Broomhall:** That is the response to the emergency service levy 1 areas—that is, the metropolitan area—and levy 2 areas.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am still referring to the emergency services levy. I could go back to the delivery of services, if the parliamentary secretary would like me to.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** No; I understand.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** There appears to have been, from memory, about a six per cent increase in the emergency services levy in this year's budget. Can someone provide an explanation of what that increase is actually paying for?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** It was an increase of five per cent, member. The emergency services levy is an annual charge levied on land in Western Australia and is the primary funding source for the state's fire and emergency services. The ESL assessed against a property is calculated by multiplying the declared ESL rates by the gross rental value of the property. ESL rates and charges are determined annually in May according to DFES's funding requirements, as approved through the state budget process, and property data provided by Landgate. The impact of the levy on the representative household as published in the state budget papers is taken as the average residential charge for ESL category 1, or ARC cat 1. During this year's budget process, cabinet approved the annual increase in the

ARC 1 to be limited to five per cent. Accordingly, an additional consolidated account appropriation of \$30 million has been approved to ensure that the ESL funding requirement for 2023–24 totals \$419 million. As the member can see, it goes into the consolidated account as well. ARC 1 is published in the state budget papers. There was an increase of five per cent. Final ESL rates will be calculated in mid-May, again using updated property valuation data. As a result, the ARC cat 1 for 2023–24 may vary slightly from the published figure.

If other members of my team can speak to specific areas in which the ESL funds are utilised—I will refer to this piece of paper!

The ESL raised in 2023–24 will fund most operational expenditure for the career and volunteer fire and emergency rescue services, volunteer fire and emergency services, state emergency services, volunteer marine rescue services and bushfire services, including volunteer bush fire brigades, the aerial firefighting fleet and the rural fire division. It will also fund the provision of specialist services such as fire investigations, building inspections, emergency planning and community safety programs, as well as activities that support the provision of emergency services delivered by DFES.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I thank the parliamentary secretary for that comprehensive response. The five per cent increase through that cabinet process is quite a bit higher than the consumer price index. Is that mainly due to DFES expenses? The parliamentary secretary just quoted a line of various items. Is that increase due to those expenses going up by more than the CPI? Obviously, cost-of-living rates and taxes are all a bit of a challenge at the moment, so an increase of five per cent is quite hefty on our landholders.

[3.40 pm]

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** It is based on the formula that I previously stated, but I will defer to Ms Camarda, the chief financial officer.

**Ms G. Camarda:** Just so we are clear about the total revenue raised from the emergency services levy this year, we are raising \$418.8 million. That is only a \$1.3 million increase in total ESL revenue raised compared with that raised in the previous year. In 2022–23, we raised \$418.8 million. In 2021–22, we raised \$417.4 million. It is a 0.3 per cent increase in total ESL revenue raised, so that is only about \$1 million extra. When the member talks about the consumer price index, the total ESL revenue is not increasing by CPI. In fact, we did the calculations this week with the most recent property data and the impact of raising \$418.8 million through property owners is a four per cent increase in the average residential charge for category 1. It is not linked to CPI in this instance.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 446 and the “Radio Over Internet Protocol” line item in the spending changes table. Can the parliamentary secretary please explain what exactly the \$247 000 allocated to the radio over internet protocol is going towards?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** An amount of \$247 000 was approved in 2023–24 for operating support costs for the recently completed radio over internet protocol communications system funded through the emergency services levy. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services identified a need for a contemporary statewide ROIP communications system that utilises technology to enable volunteers to monitor radio traffic from any location with Telstra 4G mobile phone coverage, thereby spreading the workload and reducing local burden, particularly on smaller volunteer marine rescue groups, and enabling radio assistance through the entire VMR community.

Initial funding of \$1.8 million was approved in 2018–19, and profiled over the 2019–20 and 2020–21 financial years, for the purchase and implementation of the ROIP technology. As I said, this funding is now about operating support costs. An increase of \$247 000 in the spending changes table for 2023–24 relates to operating costs funded through the emergency services levy and includes technical support and the annual software licensing fee, the virtual private network usage annual cost and VPN SIM cards.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 446 and the operational cost pressures. Can the parliamentary secretary please explain the \$2.55 million expended for operational cost pressures in 2022–23 and the \$141 000 for 2023–24?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The amount of \$141 000 in 2023–24 was approved to cover increased information and communications technology costs and an additional \$2.5 million was secured in 2022–23. I will divert to Ms Camarda, the chief financial officer, for further information on the change.

**Ms G. Camarda:** We have had some operational cost pressures this financial year that we made application for. It is predominantly associated with increasing costs associated with information and technology. We have had additional costs in relation to our E5 licensing under the government Microsoft enterprise agreement, we have had increasing running costs associated with Microsoft Azure hosting, and cybersecurity costs have increased. We have some respite in relation to the ICT cost pressures we experienced this financial year.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is there a reason for the cybersecurity cost increase? Have there been any particular threats? Was this a response to any particular concern?



**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Cybersecurity is a priority of government across agencies and there are frameworks for agencies to meet. I do not know whether the acting commissioner or anyone on his team has anything to add.

**Mr C. Waters:** I refer to Patrick Leach.

**Mr P. Leach:** The short answer is yes, in terms of the risk profile and threat profile. I think everyone is well aware that the technology environment from a cybersecurity perspective is changing rapidly and becoming more risky. In relation to DFES specifically, yes, like most agencies and entities, there are active efforts constantly—as in 24/7—to compromise our security. Part of this is an effort to make sure that we are keeping up with the required standard. To give an example of risk mitigation, I am not sure whether people are aware of the incident that Fire Rescue Victoria had in mid-December. It has about 150 specialist ICT cybersecurity consultants on board. The current estimate is that it will take it up to two years and in excess of probably \$100 million just to get back to where it was. Therein lies the risk if we do not invest in cybersecurity. The short answer is yes, at a broader level, the risk environment is increasing—and yes, we have seen that at DFES, as have most other organisations.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What proportion of those additional costs, particularly the \$2.5 million, is related to cybersecurity efforts?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The increased cybersecurity capability costs are \$252 000 per annum.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I see in the table that there is funding just for this year and next. Is there an ongoing commitment for cybersecurity in another table or is that specifically part of the operational cost pressures?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The additional \$141 000 was approved to cover the increased information and communications technology costs and Ms Camarda has already said what the \$2.5 million can cover. I will revert to Ms Camarda again if there is further information.

**Ms G. Camarda:** It was one-off additional funding to us for respite for the 2022–23 year and we can make application again next year. However, there is funding that we were able to secure for an emergency services digital strategy, and that will help inform our way forward with cybersecurity. The executive director, Patrick Leach, certainly has more he can share about that.

[3.50 pm]

**Mr P. Leach:** Yes, absolutely. It is a rather complex story in the sense that as we improve our environmental architecture, potentially the risk reduces, so we require fewer ad hoc security measures—if that makes sense. Part of the digital strategy is how we contemporise or modernise the environment and the architecture that we work with, thereby making it inherently safer in and of itself, requiring less of those post-hoc or ad hoc security measures. Yes, absolutely; we also put in a submission for the WA emergency services digital strategy. Part of that incorporates a whole lot of things—cybersecurity as well, and not just for the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. We work closely with a number of agencies, and we have touched on some of them—the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; Western Australia Police Force; and Department of Justice. The list goes on. Part of that cybersecurity network is not just DFES related, so we will also leverage off the broader efforts across government.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 450 and the service facilities upgrades under the COVID-19 response in the table of works in progress. In the 2022–23 budget, \$3.743 million was allocated for service facilities upgrades. The estimated expenditure for 2022–23 was \$4.048 million. What led to the \$305 000 overspend?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The estimated expenditure for 2022–23 was \$4.048 million. Where is the overspend?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The budget previously was \$3.743 million. That was in last year's budget.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** In last year's budget papers?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That is right. I wonder what the overspend of \$305 000 was for.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** These were COVID-19 boosts to service the volunteer fire and emergency services facilities upgrades. I do not have last year's budget here to refer to to confirm those numbers, but I will divert that to Ms Camarda to see whether she can provide further details.

**Ms G. Camarda:** The member said that last year's budget papers had \$3.7 million in the 2022–23 —

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It was \$3.743 million.

**Ms G. Camarda:** What did it have as a projection for 2023–24?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This was for service facilities upgrades.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 25 May 2023]

p444c-464a

Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Hannah Beazley; Mr Shane Love; Ms Christine Tonkin; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Lara Dalton; Ms Libby Mettam

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**Ms G. Camarda:** Sorry; I do not have those budget papers in front of me. The member has last year's budget papers in front of him, has he not?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, that is my understanding of the question that I have here. The figure is from last year's budget papers. We can let that one go. I will move on to another part of the question about the facilities upgrades. On the same line item, what does the \$3.075 million in the 2023–24 budget relate to? What will that be spent on?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will very happily defer to the acting commissioner to discuss those excellent things.

**Mr C. Waters:** It is basically for the provision of suitable toilets and change room facilities. Obviously, we have had an increase in female numbers in our volunteer cohort. It is also for suitable decontamination areas for clothing and equipment. It includes a clean-up area for our breathing apparatus, minor appliance bay modifications, specific tunic storage rooms and some upgrades in that space for increased volunteer numbers in some of our brigades, groups and units.

*Meeting suspended from 3.54 to 4.07 pm*

[Mr S.J. Price took the chair.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 450 of budget paper No 2 and the career fire and rescue service South East Metropolitan Fire Station. In the 2024–25 out year, there is a large figure of \$8.9 million. Will that complete that fire station and is it predicted to wrap up by 30 June 2024?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The CFRS South East Metropolitan Fire Station is now known as the Cardup Fire Station and it will be the home of Western Australia's newest career fire station as part of a plan to futureproof demand for emergency services in Perth's burgeoning south-east corridor. Architects Iredale Pederson Hook have been engaged to design the Cardup Fire Station, and they boast a proven track record on major government projects, including Manatj Park, Perth City Link and the Kununurra Courthouse. Figures from the 2021 census reveal that more than 32 000 people now live in the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale, with its population rising more than 80 per cent over the past decade. Operational efficiency, workplace safety and firefighter wellbeing are cornerstones of the fire station's design. The site, purchased for \$1.3 million, on an arterial road was strategically chosen to minimise response times in an expansive firefighting district. Construction is expected to begin soon, with an estimated completion date of 2024. Having career firefighters based at Cardup Fire Station will help protect the current and future generations of residents who call that beautiful region home.

[4.10 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I thank the parliamentary secretary for that comprehensive response. I refer now to page 457 and the heading "Bushfire Risk Management" and the department mitigation works. The 2022–23 estimated actual is \$1.2 million for grain harvest aerial fire suppression, but there is nothing in the 2023–24 budget year. What are the plans going forward, especially in relation to mitigation and aerial fire suppression?

**Mr C. Waters:** The initial grain harvest strategy was brought on as a trial in consultation with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions given, as I said before, the forecast 20 million tonne grain harvest expected in the 2021–22 harvesting period. We used funding to source that. We did a risk analysis last year, given the record grain harvests forecast, which I think came out to 234 million tonnes of harvested grain for the 2022–23 season. We will do a risk assessment in conjunction with DPIRD in relation to its forecast grain harvest for next year, and we will look at bringing that on again if the risk is there to support local farmers in the community.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does the department not budget an amount until it has done an assessment of the crop coming up?

**Mr C. Waters:** We have done two for the grain harvest strategies so far—the initial trial, and then the follow-up season for the last grain harvest was based purely on risk. We do not really know what the risk is at this point, but in the next few months, we will again consult DPIRD, local governments and also the grain harvesting areas, in consultation with our partners at DBCA, on how we will introduce that, and we will then seek funding to do that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Aerial fire suppression still remains part of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' budgeting activities alongside DBCA. How is that shared?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** Aerial operations is basically part of our operations. We provide a number of either rotary or fixed-wing aircraft, which is our standard fleet. Last year we brought on two Black Hawk helicopters for a high-lift large capacity capability of 4 500 litres, which replaced the historical Air Crane aircraft we had, which carried 8 000 litres. It gave us a lot more flexibility. We also brought on a large air tanker for the first time last year purely for a WA asset that we had. For a short period of time, we also had a national large air tanker based out of the Busselton Margaret River Airport. Our air operations fleet, including our air intelligence and our surveillance aircraft,

is purely budgeted for out of that. This is a grain harvest strategy in support of our farming community. When the risk is elevated to the level at which we feel we can provide additional resources, we either bring on aircraft earlier or extend them to the back of the harvest period fleet. We brought on two teams for the trial last year—so, four fixed-wing water bombers plus two aerial intelligence supervision aircraft.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What about their use for part of this particular grain harvest, with the likes of private operators like South East Air Ag and other private operators? Are they part of the mix or is it purely these larger water bombers that are brought in?

**Mr C. Waters:** These are existing procurements. We just bring them on early. They are contracts we have in place on a supply-when-needed arrangement. We bring them on early.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My next question relates to unallocated crown land, which is just below the reference to “Grain Harvest—Aerial Fire Suppression” on the same page. There is a fairly constant level of funding through the budget years. Does all of the budgeted amount of \$3 million emanate from emergency services levy funding?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** DFES and the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage have a longstanding agreement to mitigate bushfire risk on unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves. An MOU details the responsibilities of DFES for managing land on behalf of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. I will defer to Mr Murray Carter for further information.

**Mr M. Carter:** I thank the member for the question. The member will see in the line item immediately below that it is \$500 000 year. This is a constant; it was \$450 000 some years ago. It has increased. The MOU in the lands component of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage that the parliamentary secretary referred to splits unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves—hence UCL and UMR—that are within town sites under the management of DFES, which we are accountable for on its behalf, and outside to DBCA. It then provides us with \$500 000 a year and has done for some period of time under its MOU. The rural reforms expanded our bushfire risk management some four or five years ago. We augmented that when the ESL funding was made available in the broad mitigation space, which we have spoken about a fair bit this afternoon. That \$3 million constant figure across the budget out years reflects an augmentation of further work conducted directly by DFES on those UCL and UMR parcels within regional town sites, and metropolitan sites for that matter as well, right across Western Australia. It has been a significant uplift in addition to the money provided by the lands component that we have used to treat the highest risk. Although they are often small parcels of land, they are incredibly important in their positioning—often within the rural urban interface.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** In relation to that, let us use an example of the Fitzgerald River National Park, where the water bomber went down. I assume that was under the DBCA. Is there a blend of funding that funds that type of bomber in that unallocated crown land in the reserve?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will revert to Mr Carter.

**Mr M. Carter:** That particular incident the member referred to was a national park fire. Under the Conservation and Land Management Act, DBCA manages lands. We were augmenting the response capability effort in terms of what we generally do across agencies. It was funded through the normal DBCA operations for its part, and the operation was squarely under its control. It is not at all linked to the two budget items we were discussing.

[4.20 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** If crown land is transferred to the Noongar land estate, would the Noongar regional corporations then pay the emergency services levy?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert the question to Mr Murray Carter again.

**Mr M. Carter:** Really closely related to that question is an undertaking we made with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage that we will continue; we will not drop that. In terms of the south west native title claim, as capability is built up by the ranger groups and the owners of those lands, we will transition out of that. When we are currently funded by Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage for those parcels, we will negotiate an exit strategy when they are up to speed to be able to pick that up. We certainly will not leave the community at risk in the transition phase.

How the ESL is levied across parcels of land is not my area of expertise, so I could not answer that part of the question.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Whose area of expertise is it? This is DFES, so we are talking about the ESL levy. I am happy for anyone else to respond.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** That is unknown at this stage. I am happy to look into that further for the member if he wishes.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Will the parliamentary secretary provide that as supplementary information?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Can you please confirm what you are going to provide, parliamentary secretary?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** It is my understanding that the member wishes to know whether the traditional owners will be responsible for paying the emergency services levy if DPLH land is transferred to traditional owners.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Spot on.

[*Supplementary Information No B12.*]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It looks like I am losing all of my co-members here, but I will press on. I want to go back to page 450. Paragraph 1.2 states —

\$22.4 million for ongoing vehicle replacement programs in line with the Department’s maintenance and serviceable life replacement strategies;

We visited this to some extent earlier. My question is: how many vehicles are due for replacement in 2023–24 and how is serviceable life replacement determined?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Mr Leach answered this relatively comprehensively earlier in terms of how vehicles and appliances are assessed on an ongoing basis. Does the member wish to revisit that?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I felt there was a lack of clarity about how the department determines that the serviceable life is over, if you like. The specific question is: how many vehicles are due for replacement in the 2023–24 year? We have allocated \$22.4 million to it, so there must be a number of vehicles that that will pay for.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** I will divert the question to Mr Leach again to expand further than earlier.

**Mr P. Leach:** Just to reiterate, in terms of the earlier answer, it probably is not accurate to refer to a vehicle replacement program with the sort of modality of one coming in and one going out. The parliamentary secretary earlier went through in quite a bit of detail all the appliances that we have procured and sourced and are becoming operational. That is one side of that equation, but there is not a direct linear correlation to X number of vehicles coming out on the other side. That goes back to the response that I provided earlier. It is a case-by-case basis.

In terms of the mechanism that the member mentioned and how that happens, as I touched on before, we have a variety of different appliances that have different operational requirements. The operational personnel, whether volunteers or career firefighters, do their own vehicle checks and maintenance reports. If they see a fault with the vehicle, they will lodge a vehicle fault report. That goes through either the workshops or relevant specialist technicians who make a determination about whether that vehicle can be repaired and remain serviceable. There is no direct linear correlation between those two things with new vehicles coming into the fleet and vehicles that become unserviceable moving out of the fleet. The characterisation as a replacement program probably muddies the water a bit.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I guess that is where I find it slightly confusing, because it says “ongoing vehicle replacement programs”, so I would have thought that means there are 30 new vehicles for \$20.4 million. That is what I am trying to get to. I understand what the department is saying, but I am just going by the paragraph that says the department has an ongoing vehicle replacement program. I am just trying to ascertain how many vehicles that will add to the fleet, if you like. It appears that we are not really going to progress any further on that one.

I want to go to page 453 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and refer to the line item “Volunteer Fuel Card”. It is the second-bottom line in that table. My first question is: what are the eligibility requirements for this card?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card scheme was introduced in 2015–16. The cards are preloaded with \$1 000 and are sent to volunteer groups throughout WA. The cards can be used to purchase fuel by registered volunteers who actively contribute to either operational or support activities in their community. The cards are small tokens of appreciation for emergency services volunteers, including St John Ambulance personnel who may need to travel long distances in personal vehicles. Under the previous government, there was no sustainable funding for the scheme. The McGowan government reviewed the source of funding and use of the card and extended the program to provide volunteers with certainty. The process has been streamlined so that eligible volunteers no longer need to make applications for the cards, which will be automatically issued.

This government has again secured the funding in the 2023–24 budget and forward years from the royalties for regions community service fund. For 2022–23, emergency services volunteers will be provided fuel cards, with a total value of \$1.07 million. Approximately 930 DFES brigades, groups and units and St John Ambulance units are able to access the fuel cards. In 2022–23, 870 received fuel cards, which was similar to 2021–22. This included 788 in regional areas and 82 in the metropolitan area. These volunteers are driven by a desire to help the community, but these cards provide some assistance as they go about their duties.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 25 May 2023]

p444c-464a

Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Hannah Beazley; Mr Shane Love; Ms Christine Tonkin; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Lara Dalton; Ms Libby Mettam

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In terms of eligibility—I spoke about eligible volunteers—I will defer to the acting commissioner.

**Mr C. Waters:** All active volunteers can use the card and predominantly the captain or team leader of the brigade group or unit will allocate a certain amount based on the active member numbers and either meet them at the garage—which a lot of the brigades do—and do it in bulk so every member gets to fill up their tank or give them the card and authorise them to expend a certain amount of money on fuel.

[4.30 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Very good; thank you for that. Of the funding, what proportion is from the royalties for regions fund versus the consolidated account?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** A sum of \$1 million is from royalties for regions.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Why will total funding for the Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card decrease by \$50 000 in the final out year?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** The out years may change over time and the number will change depending on volunteer numbers and what have you. I cannot give a specific answer on why it is \$50 000 less. I presume it is based on projections.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you. I think that might wrap it up.

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** Before we wrap up, we agreed to provide to the member some supplementary information on grants acquittal and funds, which we may already have for him now. Would the member like that information now?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is it an answer to just one of the questions?

**Ms H.M. BEAZLEY:** It is supplementary information we agreed to provide on the amount of grants still available.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, I am happy to receive that now.

**Ms G. Camarda:** I think the question was on the estimates for the recovery and resilience grants under the tropical cyclone Seroja package. The original estimation for those grants was \$45 million; however, the recent forecast is \$20 million. That \$20 million is forecast to be spent against those grants. Does that answer the member's question?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, that is fine. Thanks to the parliamentary secretary and all the advisers. It is much appreciated.

**The appropriation was recommended.**