

BUSHFIRES — NUMBER, AND FIRE KING HELICOPTER

182. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services:

As we are now at the end of the summer bushfire season, would the minister advise the house on how many bushfires there were this past season and what use was made of the new Fire King helicopter in fighting those fires?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for his question and his strong support for volunteer firefighters. The past summer bushfire season has been very busy, with 3 300 bushfires being reported and more than two-thirds of them being in the Perth metropolitan area. I put on the record my thanks to both our career firefighters and our volunteer firefighters who have been on the ground doing the important work to contain those fires to save people's properties and ensure that people's lives are safe. In a number of instances that was a real issue over the past summer.

We certainly have had added capability in our firefighting, with the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia's air wing, which is in addition to the Department of Environment and Conservation's fixed-wing aircraft. We are now in a much better position to tackle fires. We have added to that air wing the four Helitanks, and this season we had the Fire King, a larger machine that can dump something like 3 785 litres of water. It can also carry 15 passengers if it is required to deploy firefighters to more distant parts of this state. With its range of over 600 kilometres, it can cover most of the south west of the state. It was utilised outside Perth in its first year of operation. The air wing, with air intelligence, attended 148 incidents in the summer just finished. It made a fantastic contribution to ensuring that we were able to combat those fires, protect people's properties and save lives.

Again, I thank all the officers and volunteers involved. They have done an outstanding job. It is this government that has made sure that our firefighters are adequately resourced by putting in place the emergency services levy. The result has been a huge increase in available facilities. The availability of the helicopters, Helitanks and Fire King is an example of how this government has resourced the firefighters to combat fires. I thank those people for the fantastic job they have done over the summer season just ended.