

FIRE READINESS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA — REVIEW

337. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Premier:

I took a big breath, and nothing came out! I used it all up the other day! Following the Victorian bushfires, the Premier committed to conduct a review of our fire readiness in Western Australia.

- (1) When is it anticipated this review will be completed; and will it include a report on the failure of the communications system in the Bridgetown fires?
- (2) Will this review address the lack of wage parity between Department of Environment and Conservation and Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia firefighters, in light of the impediment that the new government wages policy presents to addressing this inequality?
- (3) Will the Premier guarantee to exempt Department of Environment and Conservation fire-fighting operations from the three per cent efficiency dividend and the further round of budget cuts foreshadowed by the Treasurer; and, if not, why not?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

- (1)-(3) Following the tragic fires in Victoria, I asked that a review be conducted of our readiness in this state to deal with such catastrophes. That is being coordinated through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, by the director general. I cannot give the member a date, off the top of my head, as to when that review will be completed. I would hope it would take into account the problems that the member referred to in respect of the Bridgetown fires. The review is not looking at issues of expenditure cuts or wage negotiations and the like. It is simply looking—as is the minister responsible for emergency services—at our preparedness, and in particular at the coordination between agencies. That has often been, as members know, a problem in a crisis or natural disaster. I know from my own experience, in my previous role as a minister, that the issue is often a lack of coordination. Indeed, it is my understanding that there was a similar issue in the Victorian fires. That seems to be a critical issue. From my fairly limited experience, it is essential in these circumstances that someone is clearly in charge and in control. That is what we are primarily looking at. I will get back to the member and give him a date as to when the review will be released.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Will you be addressing those financial issues?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: This was a two-part question. The review is looking at —

Mr E.S. Ripper: Will you answer the second part of the question?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Leader of the Opposition should ask the question himself if he wants an answer.

Mr E.S. Ripper: I am listening for an answer.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The review that I have asked the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to coordinate is looking at preparedness and coordination between agencies. It is not looking at the financial questions. However, I would hope that it would take on board the issue that the member referred to in the Bridgetown fire.