

NATIONAL DISASTER RESCUE COMPETITION

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

I was pleased to witness the National Disaster Rescue Competition held in Bunbury on the weekend of 3 and 4 November. Can the minister advise the house of the success of the competition and the achievements of Western Australia's dedicated State Emergency Service teams?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for Collie-Wellington for the question. It was great to be able to join in at the National Disaster Rescue Competition held in Bunbury two Saturdays ago. Teams from the other states and territories came to Bunbury to compete against Western Australia. It was the first time this competition had been held in Western Australia. New South Wales was the winning team. Unfortunately, the Western Australian team did not do as well as we had hoped it would. We received fantastic feedback from all those who participated. Also, about 70 SES volunteers from different units supported the competition in seven different scenarios around Bunbury. I think they did a fantastic job. SES units not only turn out when they are needed at times of disasters and storms, but also put a lot of time into training so that they are equipped and ready to support their communities. I think our communities appreciate the work that the SES units do. The extra time that those units have given to hone their skills in competition reflects just how professional they are.

I was certainly very concerned when I heard the member for Murray downgrade their efforts and attack them on 6PR yesterday. Not only do they show dedication and commitment, but also there has been a huge increase in their resources under this government with the money provided by the emergency services levy. Some \$16 million in capital and operating grants has been made available since 2003-04 to the 64 SES units across the state. I advise the house that almost one-third of the nearly 400 registered SES vehicles, trailers and boats have been replaced in that five-year period, seven new facilities have been built, and a further 55 improvements or upgrades have been made. Not only do the SES units show dedication, but also they now have the resources. I find it totally unbelievable that the member for Murray said yesterday on 6PR radio -

And some of the trailers that were inspected by the eastern states teams were found to be wanting and didn't pass occupational health, safety welfare conditions, and this has been reported back to me and I just find it extraordinarily embarrassing. . . .

The member for Murray was not there when I was there. I do not know whether he turned up to one of the scenarios that I did not attend, but I do not know where he got that information from. However, I have checked the information with the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia and I have found that it is totally and absolutely without foundation. I find it totally unbelievable that the member would make that sort of attack on these fantastic people who do a huge job.

Mr R.F. Johnson: He was not attacking them; he was attacking you.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: These SES volunteers do the work. He was heard on radio saying this. An SES volunteer rang in afterwards and said how upset he was because it was totally untrue. The member went on to attack our career firefighters. He said -

FESA have got a budget of \$198 million, \$146 million of that comes from our ESL, and unfortunately a great portion of that goes into providing the wages for our career and administration staff. So nearly half of that money goes into administration costs.

The member is saying that the more than 900 career firefighters in Western Australia amount to administrative costs. He is referring to the men and women who are highly trained and who put themselves in danger to protect the people of Perth and in our major towns as administrative costs. I think the member for Murray needs to have a good look at himself and think about what he says before he says things that have a negative connotation for our volunteers and career firefighters.