

FIREFIGHTING RESOURCES — SOUTH WEST REGION

655. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I have a supplementary question. Further to what the minister said, will he undertake to give a definite date for the arrival of this vehicle to Preston Beach; and also for appliances to those brigades in Manjimup, Gosnells, Victoria Plains and Esperance so that they too can understand what they will do this summer?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

Member for Collie–Preston, I think the thing we have to understand is that those brigades were receiving replacement appliances. The appliances they have while we plan to replace, and will replace them, will still be there, so they will still have the capacity to fight fires in their local areas. They are not devoid of firefighting capacity.

Mr M.P. Murray: Just remember what happened in Albany because of old gear! Just remember that.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I think you need to be very, very careful, member for Collie–Preston, when you try to speculate on events surrounding very serious injuries that occurred to a firefighter. We are conducting a review of Albany —

Mr M.P. Murray: Don't make promises you're not keeping.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: For the member for Collie–Preston to come into this place and point his finger and insinuate that the cause of the problem in Albany was an old vehicle is very premature. It is very premature. What happened there was terrible, and we will find out what led to that. I had a meeting at Wooroloo with the volunteer brigades from the Shire of Mundaring the other day, and we discussed some issues that they have with the safety of their cabs. We will look at those issues because we simply have to. This is part of the constant evolution of how we train and resource people to fight fires. I just want to make two very clear points. Those sorts of statements are incredibly irresponsible —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Victoria Park, I formally call you to order for the first time today. I think everybody in this place recognises the seriousness of what occurred in Albany several weeks ago, and I would hope that everybody in this place is sensitive to that issue. Minister, you have been asked a question on a vehicle, and I am asking you to complete that answer.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will, thanks, Mr Speaker, and I will get that information. I think it is important and appropriate information. But I again say that this fire season promises to be a very, very challenging fire season. All the indicators are, as anyone who travels through the bush or lives in the bush would know, especially in the south west, that the bush is dry.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: The great southern.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is dry in the great southern. It is dry in the south west. It is dry across the metropolitan area. Mundaring is on the verge of ceasing controlled burns, because controlled burns in October are starting to crown; that is when the fire goes up into the top of the trees. That means we cannot have a controlled burn, so we have some big challenges. These firefighters—whether they are professional; employees of the Department of Environment and Conservation, as were the two ladies who were injured in Albany; or volunteers—are trained, when they get caught in the circumstance of a fire coming towards them, to sit in their vehicle and to use their fire rugs or fire blankets to protect themselves. We have to do everything we can, and we will do everything we can, to make sure that they have confidence to follow through on the training that they receive. If there are learnings to be taken, which I am absolutely sure there will be from Albany, we will take those learnings and we will act on them.

I just want to make this observation. I will make sure that I get that information to the member and to those brigades. I might not be able to get it today, but I will make sure I get that information because it is important information.

I just want to close on another point. Fires are of their nature in a dynamic, volatile environment. I believe that from just about every single fire event that we attend we can learn something new so that we do something better next time. The commitment that this government gives is that we will have the processes in place to make sure that where there are those learnings to be had, we will take those learnings and we will apply them practically to support our firefighters to protect communities, to protect people and to help them protect themselves.