

**FIREFIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(COMPENSATION) BILL 2016**

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [3.55 pm]: I could not let this bill pass without making some comments about the volunteers in our community, from all walks of life, not just firefighters. We must remember the amount of money that is saved each year as a result of these people spending countless hours protecting and assisting our communities. I am sure that I do not have to convince the Minister for Emergency Services of that. We must look after them in a way that is fair and just in any form, whether it be their vehicles, uniforms or compensation, in view of what could result from any incident that they become involved in, including asbestos dust or a fire that creates chemical fumes. Those are the sort of situations in which we must look after our volunteers.

I am proud to say that in country areas, the volunteers, especially those in the bush fire brigades, are second to none, despite some recent events and criticism from other departments about volunteers, particularly those in the bushfire area. You have had a lot of involvement in recent times yourself, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr M.J. Cowper), and I am glad to see that you have been out there praising those people for the work they have done. Far more lives could have been lost in the Yarloop fire, and far more damage could have been done to our state if it had not been for the volunteers out there. At times, red tape gets in the way, and there was some of that in the case of Yarloop as well, but I do not think it was intentional. It is about people doing their best, recognising the rules and playing by them, whether it be in basketball, volunteer firefighting or football. We have to play by the rules spelled out to us. With this legislation, we have to make sure that the rules are the same for everyone, and that everyone will get a fair go and a fair hearing on such issues as compensation. That has not been the case in the past. The member for Girrawheen, in her capacity as shadow minister, has brought that to the attention of the house on numerous occasions, as well as in our caucus. I also thank her for her advocacy for volunteers; it has been very good.

Particularly focusing on bush fire brigades, the money from the emergency services levy has upgraded the machinery and safety equipment for all firefighters in Western Australia. I remember, with a bit of humour and a bit of angst at the same time, the changes since earlier times, when the biggest arguments in country areas were about what colour the appliance was going to be—whether it was going to be red or white—or which tie to wear to the next function. There were two types of neckties, and they had this argument about what tie they would wear to their official functions. That was about their pride and commitment to their group. Thank goodness, most of that has gone away. Quite a simple solution sorted out the colour of the machines. If brigades did not get their machines painted red, and kept them as white, they got a \$3 000 donation. Most of the brigades took the donation instead of having a red truck. That was debated quite heatedly. I am not sure which tie they started wearing, but those sorts of things have moved on.

In my region alone, there are people who have gone to America, to the east coast, and to many other parts of the world, and have taken their expertise so that they could help with the fires in those areas. A person from my area, fire officer Hunter, went to California to help fight the fires there, and he was certainly recognised for that when he came back.

Another issue is the ownership of bush fire brigades. A man in Donnybrook—I should have his name but I do not have it here—was recognised recently for his 40 years of service as a volunteer. That is amazing.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.