

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

2017–18 ANNUAL REPORT HEARINGS



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2018**

**SESSION ONE
DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Members

**Hon Alanna Clohesy (Chair)
Hon Tjorn Sibma (Deputy Chair)
Hon Diane Evers
Hon Aaron Stonehouse
Hon Colin Tincknell**

Hearing commenced at 10.15 am

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON

Minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services, examined:

Mr MALCOLM CRONSTEDT

Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Emergency Management, examined:

Mr GRAHAM SWIFT

Assistant Commissioner, Country Operations, examined:

Mr RICHARD BURNELL

Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services, examined:

Mr JOHN TILLMAN

Chief Superintendent; Acting Executive Director, Rural Fire Division, examined:

Ms GEORGINA CAMARDA

Chief Finance Officer, examined;

Mr TOM PALMER

Chief of Staff, Minister for Emergency Services, examined:

The CHAIR: Good morning. This is the hearing with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing. Could each witness state whether you have read, understood and signed the document titled, "Information for Witnesses".

The WITNESSES: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. This hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If, for some reason, you wish to make a confidential statement during today's hearings, you should request the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Agencies have an important role and duty in assisting the Parliament to review agency outcomes and the committee values your assistance with this.

Minister, have you got a brief opening statement?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not, thank you, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: We will start off with Hon Rick Mazza.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Minister, I want to ask a few questions around the sponsorship opportunity that DFES is promoting. I understand that the applications for that closed on 8 November. How many applications were received?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, you are not referring to a point in the annual report from 2017–18. I just need to clarify that.

Hon RICK MAZZA: This is not actually in the body of the report but it is something to do with the department—that is for sure.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Those types of questions are not within the scope of this hearing. The hearing is about the annual report. Notwithstanding that, let me see if there is anybody who is able to at least provide some information on that. Because it is not within the scope and you are talking about November 2018, which is after the report, I do not think we are prepared to have that information with us. Is there somebody here who can provide a response?

Mr Burnell: Just a little bit.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In general, yes, we can.

The CHAIR: Maybe we could have some information about what the member is referring to. What is the sponsorship?

Mr Burnell: The Department of Fire and Emergency Services had a sponsorship arrangement, which is coming to a conclusion on 30 June next year, for the rescue helicopter service. What we have had to do under the structure of the Department of Finance's "Sponsorship in Government Guidelines" is to make sure that we go out to seek some replacement of that contract.

The CHAIR: So it has gone out to a tender.

Mr Burnell: That is correct.

The CHAIR: Is it still in the tender process? We need to be very careful because if it is still going through that process, then we particularly will not be inviting questions about something that is still going through consideration of the tender process.

Mr Burnell: The tender closed on 9 November. We are still going through the evaluation process.

The CHAIR: Then you are unable to provide information right now about the number of expressions of interest in that tender process.

Mr Burnell: That is correct.

The CHAIR: In order to preserve the integrity of the process.

Mr Burnell: That is correct.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I will put those questions on notice, minister. Perhaps you can give us an answer at a later date.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sorry, member. I was not trying to be unhelpful but we are just not prepared for that.

[10.20 am]

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is okay.

I refer then to page 45 of the annual report and the commentary on the state-of-the-art CSV vehicles. Can you give me a bit of an overview of what these vehicles are going to be used for—I see in the report that they are there for bushfires—and whether additional vehicles will be purchased?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt to respond.

Mr Cronstedt: One vehicle was purchased, which is illustrated in the annual report, to showcase and trial the use of the latest technology in support of operations. The vehicle has state-of-the-art access to satellite communications and a whole range of communications across the various arms of our service to facilitate better operations in the field and communications back to our command centres and the like. That is allocated currently to what is known as our statewide operations response division. It is a cadre of individuals from diverse backgrounds and services who provide that on an as-needed basis. Currently, we have a range of incident control vehicles located across

the state using current technology. This vehicle is to explore future options for better technology; to trial some of the technologies available, perhaps, to understand fire behaviour and incident analysis; and to provide better communications throughout the operation. The existing resources spread throughout the state cater for that already. This is a trial of a new range of technologies.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In terms of the future—again, the future is kind of outside the scope of this hearing as well—the annual report refers to a rural CSV. The plan is to have one in the Kimberley—is that correct, Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt?

Mr Cronstedt: I might refer to Graham Swift who is our assistant commissioner for country operations.

Mr Swift: The concept has been developed and consideration is being given to whether one will be located in the Kimberley. This is in support of our current communication vehicles and it is operated by volunteers at the State Emergency Service communications unit, which provides support to communications for all operational divisions within DFES.

Hon RICK MAZZA: How long has this vehicle been on trial?

Mr Cronstedt: Since last year, I understand—in 2017.

Hon RICK MAZZA: How much longer is that trial anticipated to go for or have you assessed the value of the vehicle?

Mr Cronstedt: I have not accessed the detailed analysis of its capability and what we might derive from that analysis, but I imagine this financial year we will have a good understanding of what its capabilities are and its potential for employment elsewhere, including in the Kimberley.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So no decisions have been made, obviously, on any further vehicles?

Mr Cronstedt: No.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Okay. I refer to page 55, cost of services and the line item “Accommodation expenses”. There has been an increase of \$3.748 million. I wonder whether you can explain that increase.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I ask Ms Camarda to comment on that one, please.

Ms Camarda: If you refer to note 3.3 within the financial statements, accommodation expenses are broken down into repairs and maintenance and lease rentals. The significant increase is in relation to the repairs and maintenance of our facilities. I do not have with me today the detail as to which facilities had those repairs or maintenance. I am not sure if you would like that level of detail.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes, I would like that level of detail. When you talk about accommodation expenses, are you talking about facilities?

Ms Camarda: It is facilities.

Hon RICK MAZZA: It is not residential accommodation.

Ms Camarda: It is our commercial properties. So, yes, it is our properties—our facilities that we own.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: So it is not residential houses.

Ms Camarda: No, it is not houses.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is what I wanted to clarify. The majority of this increase is to do with repairs and maintenance of those particular facilities.

Ms Camarda: It is the facilities that we own, yes.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We are not talking about the south of France after all!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No; we are not talking about the commissioner's house in the south of France, member, as you mentioned behind the Chair!

The CHAIR: The member would like that information taken on notice and broken down into as much detail as possible?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes—which facilities and how much.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am happy to indicate that we can provide the breakdown of that amount by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No A1.]

Hon RICK MAZZA: With the increase in the ESL that took place in the rates for 2017–18, how much revenue has been collected to date from that increase?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We can certainly tell you about the financial year 2017–18, but we would not have up-to-date figures to today's date. I ask Ms Camarda what she can provide.

Ms Camarda: Sorry; the question is —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: How much has come in from the increase to the ESL?

Ms Camarda: To date, as in this financial year?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: As in the annual report financial year.

The CHAIR: Do you have any data with you at all today about how much has been brought in by the ESL, including how much additional income from the increase in the ESL? Have you got any data with you at all?

Ms Camarda: The ESL raised in 2017–18 is disclosed in the financials. There is obviously an increase in the ESL that we will be collecting for this financial year. Did you want to know what that increase is?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes, if you could find that for me.

Ms Camarda: Sure. We are raising an additional \$38 million this financial year.

The CHAIR: Was that information in the forward estimates?

Ms Camarda: Yes. The budget papers disclosed the additional ESL that we will be raising for the 2018–19 financial year.

Hon RICK MAZZA: All the \$38 million?

Ms Camarda: Yes; an increase of \$38 million. The budget papers published for this financial year disclosed that.

The CHAIR: Can you just give us a page reference, if you have it handy, for the budget papers?

Ms Camarda: Sure. The emergency services levy funding that will be raised this financial year in 2018–19 you will see on page 373 of our budget papers under the "Income" component and "Regulatory fees and fines". In 2018–19, the emergency services levy funding will be \$391 million. It was \$356 million for 2017–18. Does that help?

Hon RICK MAZZA: With the increase in the ESL, will that additional ESL income be hypothecated to the Rural Fire Division and the volunteer marine and rescue services et cetera, which has been published by the government?

Ms Camarda: That is correct.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So it will be separately hypothecated?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I ask Ms Camarda to reply to that.

Ms Camarda: That is being raised to fund the Rural Fire Division, including the bushfire mitigation grant funding, which is \$34.6 million over the forward estimates period. It is raised to fund the extra investment in the volunteer marine rescue service. It is raised to embed the bushfire risk management planning program within the business, because that had not been embedded. It was also raised to commence capital works on the Kensington Fire Station that was approved in this year's budget. There were also flow-on impacts from previous policy decisions where the ESL was to be increased for this financial year.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So that increased ESL will be hypothecated to those matters and separately accounted for?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I think we are bogging down in a technical term of economics. I do not believe it is hypothecated; I believe it is attributed. You need to be aware of what hypothecated means.

[10.30 am]

The CHAIR: Thank you, member.

Hon RICK MAZZA: It will be —

The CHAIR: The member is being very clear that he wants to know how the increase in the levy will be allocated across the department.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think Ms Camarda has been providing that response.

The CHAIR: Is there any more detail to that? No?

Hon RICK MAZZA: So it is separately accounted for?

Ms Camarda: Yes.

Hon DIANE EVERS: My question is on page 147. One of the targets is in terms of the number of accidental residential fires per 100 000 households. Does this include households where a bushfire gets onto the house? Is that one of the accidents?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I might ask Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt if he can provide a response. We might have to throw it over to one of the team.

Mr Cronstedt: It does not generally include fires that are the result of bushfires. A bushfire is an incident in and of itself, which may result in damage to structures and property of various shapes and sizes. That occurs from time to time. This target focuses on structure fires—accidental structure fires, not deliberately or arson related—per 100 000 households. It is focused on residential fires within the residence that are accidentally started.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Would you have a similar target for bushfire-related incidents for structures that is ongoing over the past years?

Mr Cronstedt: No, we do not have a target that relates to the question you asked. Clearly, annual reports will describe the damage quantum and impact from, say, the Waroona fire and the like, but there is no particular performance indicator. There is nothing that relates to structures that are impacted by bushfires.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Is it possible to find the number of houses that have been lost through bushfires for, say, the last five years, just for comparison?

Mr Cronstedt: We have got an extensive incident database. Beyond the KPIs themselves, we track brigade, unit and group activities. They are required to provide extensive reports on attendances and resulting damage and so on. We have got a very extensive database that canvases all of the results of incidents and the emergencies that we attend.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Could I get that on notice—the last 10 years of numbers?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If I could just clarify. Deputy commissioner, is it is easily accessible if we were to provide it by way of supplementary?

The CHAIR: Ten years is a very big ask.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Okay. Five years.

Mr Cronstedt: For 10 years we are talking at least 10 000 that have resulted in some damage of some kind. One hundred thousand incidents—that is a lot of data.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I do not need that sort of thing. I am just looking as to how it compares. If we are saying we are having structural fires in homes of 60 per year, is that more or less than what we would have for bushfires? I was under the impression that it was only some years and only a few.

Mr Cronstedt: We can supply a discrete figure concerning bushfire damage. That would be much more —

The CHAIR: To structures?

Mr Cronstedt: Yes.

The CHAIR: Bushfire damage to homes. Can you break that down?

Mr Cronstedt: There are some technical classifications across different types of properties, so we would have to parse that out a bit but we could certainly provide data concerning bushfire impact to property and classify that.

Hon DIANE EVERS: That is great. It is comparable to what you have got for this other key indicator.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am happy, if the commissioner is saying it is accessible—I do not want the agency spending two weeks going through databases to try to get this information, but if it is easily done, commissioner, noting that we do have two weeks to provide an answer to supplementary information. If you are advising that can be done, we will provide it for the last five years, if possible, by way of supplementary information.

The CHAIR: The best data that you can get.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

Hon DIANE EVERS: That follows over to page 161. It is quite good to see that you have got your target being achieved for structure fires as being confined to the room. I suppose that is quite an important target.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, can I just go back to you. It is the point you are trying to make that there should be a similar target for houses damaged in bushfires? Is that the question?

Hon DIANE EVERS: I think we should be keeping track of it—yes. Whether it is a target—because I know it is much more difficult to address—but I think we should have a comparable number for how many houses we are losing to bushfires.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: By way of supplementary information we might provide an answer to the question as to why there is not a target in that space at the moment. We will take that on board and we will provide an answer to that—why there is not a target at the moment. That is probably helpful to the committee's deliberations.

[Supplementary Information No A3.]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: This is not to be obtuse but I just have to —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I would never accuse you of that, member.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you very much, minister. I do have a question around that first KPI that the previous member referred to, the number of accidental residential structure fires per 100 000 households. When I first looked at that I was unsure as to what proportion of responsibility DFES could ever have for that and how you would disaggregate your contribution to achieving that target from other things, such as building codes, personal responsibility and the like. Nevertheless, I would like to invite the agency, for me to better comprehend how they have achieved that target of 56.2 and how that compares across other Australian jurisdictions. Is this a similar experience? Is this any better or any worse?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I might ask Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt to respond to that, but you will note from the annual report on page 147 it is a significant difference from the year before.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I see that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: As the annual report highlights, there are a number of programs that the agency runs or is involved in—educational campaigns in this space. I might ask Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt if he can elaborate on those.

Mr Cronstedt: This particular indicator is a common one used by jurisdictions across Australia it is useful to compare progress across jurisdictions and fire services. Fire services, and DFES is no stranger here, have a range of programs—for instance, smoke alarms, community education, community engagement—a whole bunch of programs designed to not only engage householders, but also to get them to translate that into action. For instance, having a working smoke alarm, having a plan in case of fire in your home and so on, and ringing 000 at the earliest opportunity so that a response could be effected rapidly. It is useful to compare. There is a worldwide trend for household fires to be declining, ever so slowly. We would like to attribute it to the success of our programs. We are not entirely sure, but I think it is a very useful indicator and it gives you a great comparator across jurisdictions. It is one that is used frequently to assess performance. As to what ultimate control we have over the outcomes, clearly there are other indicators that indicate our capacity to respond quickly, but that, of course, does not take into account the time to notice and then report a fire. We endeavour, of course, to provide a service—particularly in the more urbanised and high risk areas—that is very responsive. When a fire is reported in a residence, they get there quickly and can confine it to the room of origin and, of course, make sure that the occupants are safe. It is a useful comparator. Ultimately, there are things out of our control, but we find it quite useful to guide our programs and guide our endeavours and investment in things such as community education.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Is there a point in the annual report where I can look at the allocation made to those community—broadly speaking—education campaigns. If it is in there, I will dive into it, but I could not.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Probably not so I think you might have to refer to —

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Can I take that on notice? Because I would just like to equate the allocation to the result. It is a great result and I presume it is pretty modest expenditure, but I would just like to have that quantified, if possible. Can I take that as a supplementary?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. We can provide that information by way of supplementary.

[Supplementary Information No A4.]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: And just to be sure, that is how much is spent on those programs that could have an impact on this particular KPI.

[10.40 am]

Hon DIANE EVERS: I was just going to move on to page 207 with the emergency services levy allocations and in particular the volunteer engagement of \$2 million. From what I have heard around the region, this is quite a significant issue for many different areas—trying to keep volunteers in and trying to look at what they can do. I am just interested in whether you can give me an idea of how the department has, or how they have over the past year, maybe improved or increased their engagement and support of volunteers.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt, do you want to start and maybe Mr Burnell might supplement?

Mr Cronstedt: We have always had a unit dedicated to volunteer engagement and in particular aiming for recruitment and retention of volunteers. We have had active involvement. Of course, with our regional structure and our regional involvement and our closeness to customers—in other words, the people who matter, the local governments, the brigades and the units—we encourage volunteer engagement not only in volunteering their services, but also in community programs such as Bushfire Ready and the like. The biggest part of our workforce comprises volunteers, so clearly it is in our interest to make sure volunteers are not only enthusiastic and equipped, but have the wherewithal to contribute usefully in whatever their skills can contribute. Of course, volunteers come in all shapes and sizes and with a whole range of skills, so tapping into those skills can have some huge synergies for our brigades, groups and units in the organisation generally.

This year as part of the increased ESL, there will be some volunteer support managers employed in our regions. This is to reduce the administrative and bureaucratic burden on volunteers, but also to provide dedicated focal point personnel to engage with volunteers, see what weaknesses they have and address some of those areas of need. Brigades across the state and groups and units vary in their ability hugely, so it is important to target their needs in a useful and strategic way and give them the help that they need. Some brigades perhaps need some administrative support and others need pointing them in the right direction concerning training or other programs. So we are quite enthusiastic about this year's endeavour to employ those people in the regions specifically to support volunteer engagement.

In addition, we are employing a couple of people within the office of the commissioner, as volunteer liaison officers. Given that they are the largest part of our workforce, as noted in the annual report, there is a recognition that more emphasis on engaging usefully at the strategic level with volunteers is of great advantage, so we have got two people being employed this year to provide the office of the commissioner with a real sense of what is happening in the volunteer world and a point of contact and coordination across the services and across the state. That is in direct recognition of the fact that we need to better support our volunteers or improve our support of volunteers and engage them more thoroughly.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I just have one follow-up from something you said there. The volunteer support managers that you have employed—I am just wondering how many, how they are distributed and how it is decided where they would be.

Mr Cronstedt: There is one per region. I think our executive director of corporate services knows the precise number.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Perhaps I will ask him to reply to that bit, please, Mr Burnell.

Mr Burnell: We are recruiting 10, for each of the regions, so they will be based in all the regional offices.

Hon RICK MAZZA: In the Pilbara, last year's report showed 727 volunteers. This year there are 664, which is a reduction of 63 volunteers. Is there any explanation for why there would be a reduction in the Pilbara?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Perhaps we might take that on notice. Just generally, member, as a representative of the Pilbara in the Parliament, it is a particularly transient area. What we have seen over the last few years is many people leave as projects have been built. Hopefully now, with what we are seeing with the number of projects on the table, including new lithium facilities, for example, in the Pilbara, BHP's expansion, Roy Hill's expansion, FMG's expansion, and with a focus from this government on ensuring that those companies are actually employing local people, we will see the figures rise again. I am not sure whether we have anything other than anecdotal information, so perhaps we will ask the question and provide that information by way of supplementary.

[Supplementary Information No A5.]

Hon DIANE EVERS: I have another question about volunteers, and I feel a bit unsure about even mentioning it, because I do not want to put anything bad on our volunteers. It has been suggested to me, and it would make sense—I have checked with a few others—that volunteers often really like fire. Does the department address the issues, the emotional needs, of some of the volunteers, and possibly even the professional people, who enjoy the adrenaline, the excitement of it, and therefore may not be making the best decisions about fighting fires? I think I am most concerned with bushfires in this case. Is that okay?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If I can just place on record that we have tens of thousands of volunteers in operation around the state—men and women—and you can look at page 7 of the annual report and see the location and the number of volunteers in each of the regions throughout state. We would not be able to do the work that we do as an agency without those women and men doing that fantastic job, so I just want a place that on record. In saying that, in relation to perhaps the training that goes on of workers, I am not sure how we can answer. Maybe I will ask Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt whether he is able to provide a response.

Mr Cronstedt: Like any organisation, we have got a workforce of 26 000, so they come in with a huge range of skills and attributes, and they largely represent the communities they serve. It is a minority, I guess, who would then tend to use those skills and use that participation in a bad way. Of the 26 000 volunteers, the vast majority, a huge proportion, like any organisation, are there for the right reason. As the minister mentioned, their labour is free and their expertise is free. We provide them with the right training and the right support programs, such as wellness programs and a whole bunch of things in recognition of their particular circumstances and needs. Having a network of regional people who are closest to the volunteers and have their ears and eyes peeled and close to the ground, they very soon get to understand the nature of the volunteers, what motivates them and what particular nuances and what programs need to be employed. Apart from the formal programs, which can be delivered, and this is a toolkit to them, regional people are our eyes and ears, and they all have fantastic relationships with their volunteers and, in the case of bush fire brigades, of course, local governments. There is a swathe of these people who are the responsibility of local government itself, so whatever local government might have in place would also add to whatever we could support regionally.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Mr Tillman, did you have anything you wanted to add to that?

Mr Tillman: Yes. I just reinforce the deputy commissioner's comment that volunteers are there to serve the community and their hearts are in the right place. I think those who work closely with them keep a pretty close eye on how they are operating, whether it is through responsibility for training activities and so on. That certainly does not cause me any concern.

Hon DIANE EVERS: That is great, but I guess I was just checking to see that it is acknowledged that that could possibly be the case with some people and that there is something within the department

to address that. I guess what you are saying is that there would be people who are aware of it and are able to raise an issue.

[10.50 am]

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Just on the matter of volunteers—if you need a page to reference, I suppose page 20. I have been advised that the SES Volunteers Association, for a while now, has been pushing for the employment of a chief officer for the State Emergency Service. I believe a response was given earlier this year by the commissioner saying that the commissioner did not support the appointment of a chief officer. I was wondering if the minister or the deputy commissioner perhaps could give us a bit of an explanation as to the reasoning for that decision and why WA stands out as one of the only states, to my knowledge, that does not have a chief officer for volunteer services.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We do not have one currently. There is not one in this annual report time line. As to conversations that are going on, I understand the minister is meeting with representatives of SES units early next month; I believe December. We certainly value the work that those volunteers do and certainly as a regional MP I have had some of those representatives in my office talking about this issue. But the minister has committed to having a meeting with representatives early in December to look at how we might work and acknowledge the fine work that these SES units do around the state.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: The commissioner has already given an answer of no, but is the minister open to discussing?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The minister is meeting with the SES units in December. It is outside the scope of the report in front of us, but I was happy to indicate —

The CHAIR: Minister, you are noted for your capacity to extend the scope with graciousness.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is all right.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: It is appreciated.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If I can, the meeting is scheduled for December, not necessarily to create a commissioner; purely for the minister to sit down with those SES units to acknowledge the fine work, to hear from them and to work out how we as an agency and as a government can best assist them to do the fantastic work that they do keeping our communities safe.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Looking at page 7 and your two outlying regional offices—these are the Indian Ocean territories, I think. I assume that would be Christmas Island and perhaps the Cocos Islands respectively. Are those two regional offices staffed entirely by volunteers or are they paid staff at those offices?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask the deputy commissioner to respond, but it is my understanding that we service those communities on a fee-for-service basis with the commonwealth—is that correct?

Mr Cronstedt: Are you talking about the commonwealth islands?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, Christmas and Cocos Islands.

Mr Cronstedt: We have an agreement with the commonwealth to provide services. The commonwealth has a range of agreements with the state to provide a range of municipal and state services to that island. Ours is one of those. We provide, on a fee-service basis, a fire and rescue service—volunteer service to those localities.

Mr Swift: I just confirm what the deputy commissioner said that we do provide that under a memorandum of understanding through the commonwealth and support the development of those entities on both Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I am wondering then if you can tell me how many incidents they are dealing with in an average year and what the cost of managing those facilities is to the state—the state's contribution in maintaining those facilities.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: My understanding is there is none because it is cost recovered. For the work we do, we bill the commonwealth.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: It is full cost recovery; is that true?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is certainly my understanding, yes, so it does not cost us. Kind of in my own space, in the environment space, we provide services there on their behalf—a range of state government agencies do—but it is cost recovered so it does not essentially cost the state. I guess at the end of the day we probably have to fill in some forms to recoup some money but it is of that magnitude. Everything else is cost recovered. It is not a burden on Western Australia.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I would be interested in particular the number of incidents they are responding to in an average year, if that could be provided as supplementary information.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. We can provide that information via supplementary.

[Supplementary Information No A6.]

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: By way of starting, can I suggest you have got the other minister's chief of staff beside you; you might want to look at what particular parts of the year sell a hypothecated and potentially clarify that going forward; what is hypothecated versus attributed —

The CHAIR: Thanks, member. Can you give the minister your question?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am getting there, Madam Chair. With the SES, the opposition has a very good policy; you might want to have a look at that one, too.

I refer to page 36, the Rural Fire Division. I am pleased to see that we have got the assistant commissioner for regional operations next to the acting head of the Rural Fire Division because we might be able to pin down a little bit of how this is likely to operate. Can I start —

The CHAIR: Assuming it is within the scope of this annual report, member.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There is a very nice page 36 summary, Madam Chair, which goes into some detail, which I think is good. I could read the whole thing out to reference it, if you like, but —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Or I could read it in response, member, if you like!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: We are all very sure that there is a page 36. You do not need to read it out.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is beautifully written.

The CHAIR: Ho, ho, ho, we want to get back to Hon Rick Mazza.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: In the 2017–18 financial year, during the announcement of this policy the minister indicated publicly that it was his intent to house the two sections that are explained on page 36—that is the Rural Fire Division and the Bushfire Centre of Excellence—at the same location. Can I ask from a government perspective and/or agency perspective whether that is still the case, and that there is still an intent for them to be co-located?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am just trying to find some information on that because it is essentially a political question. It is one for government —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is also operational in terms of putting it together, so whichever way you want to jump at it.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is in a sense. This does not quite give me the answer to the question that you want.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Did you want to take it on notice and come back?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not really need to take it on notice. It is under active consideration by government at the moment. There are decisions that are being made and will be made over the next few months. There is a process. Perhaps I will ask the commissioner to talk about that process; he has a note in front of him. No final decision has been made but I will ask the deputy commissioner what information he can provide.

Mr Cronstedt: I will also defer, if I can, to John Tillman, who is the head of the Rural Fire Division. Budget provision for a Bushfire Centre of Excellence has been provided for and of course that is intended to provide a centre through which people can share best practice training and expertise and research across this very important matter of bushfire response, and mitigation in particular—so how we deal with the bushfire risk. It is a focal point. The actual building itself or the actual facility and decision-making around that is under consideration through a rigorous process aligned with the tenders process, though not a tender. It is simply an expression of interest from interested local governments who are asked to provide their expression of interest and their rationale for that expression of interest. That is under consideration now, and a decision obviously will advise the minister and others about what the recommendations might be. Essentially the centre is meant to address some of the shortfalls and some of the areas of concern that have been expressed in the last couple of years, in particular with Ferguson's report on not having something that could focus on building and maintaining bushfire expertise among our people, but also a centre where volunteers and people from many agencies, such as DBCA, their Parks and Wildlife area, our volunteers, local government volunteers, they can all look to for the best practice and the best advice and the best training and the best research concerning how we manage this risk of bushfire which is so important in Western Australia. That is the intent and that is the process.

[11.00 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Members, for all of your information, a number of members have had a fair bit to say in relation to the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. Hon Dr Steve Thomas has indicated that it should not be north of Pinjarra and Hon Martin Aldridge in his contributions in Parliament has said it should be in Northam. I took the opportunity to lobby the agency when I was getting briefed last week to say that it could be in Port Hedland—I proffered that opportunity. I think we would all like to have it in our communities. It is a fantastic initiative. As the deputy commissioner pointed out, there is a process underway at the moment that is being undertaken by DFES and the Rural Fire Division where they have sought—I cannot think of the correct word—expressions of interest or sought submissions from local governments. Hon Dr Steve Thomas is obviously aware of that because he has been asking some questions in the Parliament on that. That is a live process at the moment. Certainly, I can say with an element of confidence that we might have a decision on the future of it in the next annual report, the 2018–19 annual report.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Come back in a year's time.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, I do not think it will take that long. It is kind of outside the scope, but it is a live issue at the moment. We are very aware that a great number of communities in the south west in particular, but also around the state, would love to have the centre of excellence in their community. We just have to work through a process.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: You are right, minister, in that the so-called tender document is only an expression of interest if you look at it in detail. It is in the tender process, but it is an expression of interest. I agree with that, but I have quite deliberately steered away from that in questioning because obviously that is a live process, and I have asked in the house for detail and that detail has

been avoided. You are generally a minister who tries very hard to provide good and accurate information. I hope that Hansard is not recording that bit; that may cruel my next preselection!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: And cruel mine, too, member!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I have asked a specific question about co-location based on the comments of the minister. Just to summarise, there is effectively no answer on whether co-location is still the intent. Are you suggesting I should take that back to Parliament perhaps and ask that question?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is correct, but I am certainly happy to provide an answer from the minister to you by way of supplementary information.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If there is one available on whether that is still the intent, that would be useful.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I think I have probably answered it, but certainly I am the minister representing the minister with responsibility for this agency, so by way of supplementary information, we will provide an answer to that question

[Supplementary Information No A7.]

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If I could proceed a little on the same general topic, Madam Chair, in relation to the Rural Fire Division—I guess you could use either page 36 or page 12, which is the general structure of the department —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, do you mind? I have just been given some further information about the process that is going on just to clear up the process around —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: You have got a location you are about to announce.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Not about location, but the process. I will place on the record the process. DFES used the request for proposals—RFP—process, based on the Department of Finance “Procurement Practice Guide” to formally register interest from local governments to host and construct the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. That RFP document was released to the market on 21 September; it closed on 24 October. The RFP was advertised on Tenders WA and in *The West Australian* and promoted to local governments through the Western Australian Local Government Association. The RFP was not a tender, as the member correctly pointed out. But the use of Tenders WA ensured local governments had access to the documentation at the same time and in the same manner, thus ensuring openness and transparency in the delivery of information. DFES will review the proposals submitted and assess these against the criteria included in the RFP. The criteria includes suitability of proposed location; demonstrated understanding of DFES requirements as stated in the RFP; and demonstrated experience in organisational capacity, community and economic development, and relationship management. Further, understand that DFES will make recommendations to government regarding the design and preferred location options of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence in December this year. That is certainly the intention at this time. I thought that was helpful.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I think it was the same as my question on notice a couple of weeks ago.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I thought it was actually a bit more. I thought it was helpful just so the committee know, but back to your question. I did not see it earlier, but I thought it was good to provide the committee.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I will still be chasing the government on the use of an independent body like WALGA as an advertising fact.

The CHAIR: Member —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Sorry, Madam Chair. I will get over to the substantive question.

The CHAIR: Member, we are going to keep A7 in there so that if there is any other information, that can be provided.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Moving forward from that, I note the operational structure on page 12. Has the Rural Fire Division completely separated from the operations division? I note that the minister has made on several occasions the comment that the Rural Fire Division will not be operational. My question, then, is: because you have an excellent head of country operations in Assistant Commissioner Swift sitting there, and beside him is probably the best level 3 fire control officer in the state, potentially in the country, if you are not going to use that level of expertise in operations, how do you cover for the loss of that level of expertise if those roles are completely non-operational, or are you intending to pull in those operational capacities not just from the gentlemen sitting at the table here but others who will be in the Rural Fire Division to use that operational capacity? In that case, how do you differentiate and call the Rural Fire Division non-operational?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is a political question, honourable member.

The CHAIR: It is at least a policy question.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I would have thought it was operational, Madam Chair, because you have got two divisions that have to somehow operate together.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: But what you are actually referring to is comments made by the minister previously. I am happy to ask the deputy commissioner and Mr Tillman to provide an answer, but I guess you are questioning comments made by the minister. I do not have those comments in front of me and to provide a proper answer —

The CHAIR: And you are also asking the deputy commissioner to comment on comments made by the minister, which is also beyond the scope.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Not really, Madam Chair, because this is a question purely about how this will operate within the department.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If that is what your question is—how this will operate—I am absolutely happy to ask one or both of the gentlemen to provide a response.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Believe me, I am a big supporter in terms of both their capacities and the system. I just want to know how that is going to operate based on —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: If you are questioning the minister's comments and what he said previously, I cannot give you an answer. If the question is "Operationally, how will the operations division and the Rural Fire Division interact or work together?", I am happy to ask Mr Tillman to provide a response first. Can I say at the outset that, yes, we do fantastic staff or fantastic officers at this agency, so thank you for your comments. We will happily take that. Mr Tillman, if you can reply, please.

Mr Tillman: Yes, thank you, minister.

The Rural Fire Division's primary function is about supporting, building and enhancing rural fire capability across the rural fire sector of the entire state of Western Australia. It is not just about DFES business; it is about supporting the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, local government and all the other non-government players that are in the fire space these days. If you look at the north of the state, the Kimberley Land Council, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, private companies and mining companies all work in fire management to some degree and provide response to bushfires. Our role is about supporting those players in that space to build, maintain and enhance their rural fire capability. In regard to the agency structure, our operations stream, our service delivery model, has not changed. Through our assistant commissioner of country and metropolitan operations in 12 regions, that regional structure has not changed. The key message,

particularly for volunteers out on the ground, is the relationship that they have with their managers, whether they are in DFES or through local government, particularly coming into this bushfire season, has not changed, and that is very important. Our role is to support those regions in developing and maintaining those skills and, of course, all the staff in the Rural Fire Division play a key role on our rostering and making sure that we are available to support response, particularly during the bushfire season. I am still an incident controller on one of the five pre-formed incident management teams, which are made up of representatives of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, local government and our agency as well. All of our staff fill operational roles to support response during those peak seasons.

[11.10 am]

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: So Mr Tillman will be available, if required, as a level 3 fire control officer in the future?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is correct; yes, he will.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I refer to page 131 of the report and to affiliated bodies. The Western Australian Volunteer Fire Brigades Association Inc—who is that and who do they represent?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt to reply to that one.

Mr Cronstedt: That title is a mistake; that is a typo. There was a substitution error and an error in the compilation of the annual report. That should read “Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services Association” in the first line and the second line should read “Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades”. There will be a correction made to that.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thank you for that. So the amounts are obviously transposed, too. The AVBFB will receive \$149 000: is that correct?

Mr Cronstedt: That is correct.

Hon RICK MAZZA: And Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services will receive \$400 000?

Mr Cronstedt: Yes, that is correct. However, it comprises two parts. There is a grant to run their association, similar to the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades. Given that the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Association is part of DFES—it is an integral part of the organisation—we also grant them some money to run competitions, which enhance skills and is part of making sure that people are actively involved in their brigades and as a means of recruitment and making sure they are fit and healthy. The Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades gets \$149 000 in recognition of their contribution to the statewide effort and their key role in advocating for volunteer bush fire brigades, but they belong to local governments. Local governments run and manage their bush fire brigades, and this association, which we give a small grant to, to assist them in their endeavours for local government.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So the AVBFB is under local government and the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services are under DFES. How many brigades have converted from being volunteer bush fire brigades to fire and rescue brigades?

Mr Cronstedt: There are a couple of paths that brigades can take and have willingly taken. It is an option. It is a thorough negotiation process should brigades express an interest in transitioning to a different type of service with greater capability; for instance, from a bush fire brigade belonging to local government to a volunteer fire and emergency service, which is probably the next step up and provides a range of comprehensive services, and brings them closer to the DFES family and away from local government. Of course, some may choose to go to a volunteer fire and rescue service also. The lower south west region is a great example of how that model has worked, in that brigades have chosen, and through negotiation with local governments, to be closer to DFES and have dual

registered brigades in situ, so they can provide a more comprehensive range of services to their community. That model in different forms across the state exists in different places. I do not have the number of those that have transitioned, but I have to emphasise that it is a negotiated outcome and a willingness to do something, because it represents a change and we want to bring volunteers along with us. We do not want to disenfranchise either volunteers or local governments, so when they come on board, we want to be sure that they are happy to do what they are doing. Those that have transitioned from a bush fire brigade to a volunteer fire and emergency service or a volunteer fire and rescue service have done so and the feedback—and others can confirm this minister—has been enthusiastic and overwhelmingly supportive.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Can you take on notice, then, how many brigades have converted from volunteer bush fire brigades to fire and rescue, and where? How many have converted the other way? Did you say that some fire and rescue brigades go into volunteer bush fire brigades?

Mr Cronstedt: No, I do not know of any that have gone back.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So it is only one way. All right, if you could provide that information, that would be —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will just check. We do not have it with us today, so we will have to provide that by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No A8.]

Hon RICK MAZZA: Does the department have a preferred model? Do they prefer brigades to be fire and rescue volunteers?

Mr Cronstedt: No preferred model. It really comes down to what is best to serve the community and what the volunteers want. It needs to be a negotiated outcome. Is the local government happy? Are the volunteers that will ultimately provide the service happy to transition? Then, of course, the department needs to consider resource implications in terms of adequately serving it. It often takes a while to go through that process; it cannot happen overnight. You need to transition and take time to make sure that people are along for the ride and that the resources are in place. No, we do not have a preferred option.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Also on that page there is a note on the bottom that Surf Life Saving WA and the SES Volunteers Association no longer disclose as they do not meet the definition of an affiliated body. We spoke about the SES volunteers earlier. Why are they no longer an affiliated body, and what is the definition of an affiliated body?

Mr Cronstedt: I seek clarity from our CFO. As I understand it, the threshold needs to be that they get 50 per cent of their funding or greater from us to meet the definition of an affiliated body. That is not the case with the SES association, which gets funding that does not meet that threshold.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So is the funding that is given to Surf Life Saving and the SES association documented anywhere in the annual report?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mrs Camarda if she can reply to that.

Ms Camarda: No, not other than on page 131, where it just refers to Surf Life Saving and SES are no longer disclosed. I do have the amounts that we give to Surf Life Saving, which is consolidated account funding. The SES amount—I do not know if I have got that, but I will certainly quickly look up the Surf Life Saving funding. I will refer to our funding sources.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Perhaps, Madam Chair, we might have to take that on notice. Can I clarify: would that information be disclosed in the budget papers, or not necessarily?

Ms Camarda: Yes, the budget papers do itemise Surf Life Saving under our “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” section on page 374 of our budget papers. Surf Life Saving is \$1.3 million last year and \$1.3 million for this year—thank you. That is consolidated account funding.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I guess the point I would make is that not everything might appear in the annual report but it should appear in the budget papers.

Hon RICK MAZZA: It would be handy if it was in the annual report, though.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think that is a policy decision. I am happy to raise that with the agency.

Hon RICK MAZZA: They are volunteer organisations, so it would be handy in there.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I guess, though, that this dot point relates to affiliated bodies. They are no longer affiliated bodies, so they do not fall under this category.

Hon RICK MAZZA: You could always change the definition of an affiliated body, minister. That would fix it straightaway.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I imagine it is not as easy as that. I imagine probably the Office of the Auditor General and Treasury need to be involved. Nonetheless, I hear what you are saying, member.

The CHAIR: And it has also just been brought to my attention that “affiliated body” is defined under the Financial Management Act, so that is not as easy to change.

Hon RICK MAZZA: All right. Just going back to the RFD, following on from some of the questions Hon Dr Steve Thomas asked, where are we at with the functions of the RFD? Is it fully functional or are you still in a process of establishing the operations of the department?

[11.20 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Tillman if he can provide an update on that.

Mr Tillman: Thank you, minister. The establishment of the Rural Fire Division actually provided an opportunity to bring a number of sections that already existed under the agency into a logical structure. Obviously with the machinery-of-government changes, the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, which was previously independent, came under the office of the Rural Fire Division and the bushfire risk management branch, which has been established for some time and manages our responsibilities for mitigating unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves. That now comes under the Rural Fire Division as well and they obviously play a key role in supporting local governments in the development and implementation of their bushfire risk management plans. We have a small land-use planning section, which deals predominantly with development applications within bushfire-prone areas and providing advice to decision-makers and also our bushfire technical services, which again, is a very small section within the agency that focuses predominantly on the technical aspects of bushfire and prescribed fire management, providing guidance as well. It comes under the Rural Fire Division. Those four sections are established. They have had some minor restructuring through the restructuring of the whole department but they are fully established and in place. I can advise that the majority of the positions are now filled. There are a couple of minor ones still to be filled. It is well and truly up and running.

The key announcement, of course, was the establishment of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence with the \$18 million allocated by government. Of that, half a million dollars was allocated this financial year to undertake the planning and refining of the functions and service delivery model for the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. The recurrent funding for the staffing for the Bushfire Centre of Excellence does not come until the next financial year. We are well underway with the planning and, of course, the request for proposal to partner with a local government for location and construction of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence is underway and we are working through an evaluation now.

Parallel to that, we have a very comprehensive project underway to form up what will be the functions and service delivery model for the centre of excellence. A very important point is that the Bushfire Centre of Excellence—the physical building—will be in a location, but more importantly than the functions and service delivery model, it needs to support the entire state of Western Australia. As an example, this Friday, we have a workshop with the fire agencies, representatives from local government, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, and Department of Fire and Emergency Services, coming together to workshop and seek their guidance and provide the ability to inform the functions and the service delivery model. We have made sure that we have representatives, particularly volunteers, coming from very remote regions because it is all fine to put the centre of excellence somewhere in the south west where the majority of volunteers or others that are accessing it can drive, but it has to work for volunteers in particular for the entire state. That is well underway. The outcomes of those workshops will inform our final business case, which will firm up the structure, functions, staffing requirements and of course the ongoing recurrent funding requirements for the centre of excellence.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thank you for that. How many staff are there currently in the RFD?

Mr Tillman: Currently, I am going to say 32.

Hon RICK MAZZA: There are 32 and are there still two positions to fill?

Mr Tillman: There are a number of minor positions to be filled.

Hon RICK MAZZA: There are around 32 to 35. What functions will the RFD undertake that were not previously undertaken by DFES?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Tillman to reply to that one, please.

Mr Tillman: Thank you, minister. It is probably more of an enhancement of functions and sections that already existed within the agency, but broadening their scope. Previously, they were focusing primarily inwards, supporting the Department of Fire and Emergency Services but with the greater remit of the Rural Fire Division, expanding that out to support particularly the enhancement of rural fire capability across the entire state. A very good example is if you think where we have come from in the state, traditionally we have had the three primary fire agencies—fire and emergency services; biodiversity, conservation and attractions; and local governments right across the state. But the landscape has changed. Obviously with the growth in the state, we have a lot of industry involved in fire management now—mining industry, plantation timber companies, the Forest Industries Federation of Western Australia. We also have non-government organisations that are all working in the fire space either using prescribed fire as a land-management activity or providing response on their own lands for protecting their own assets. The question could be asked how they develop their knowledge and expertise. One of our key challenges is to broaden our scope to make sure that we are supporting all of those players who are now in that bushfire and prescribed fire space across the state.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The other point I will make is that the other thing that is new is the \$80 million in funding on top of what was funded previously. That will allow the Rural Fire Division to do that work Mr Tillman spoke about.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I am glad you raised that, minister, because it is an interesting point. A number of functions that the RFD are going to undertake, or are undertaking, were previously undertaken by DFES. With the extra money being raised and put into the RFD, will there be savings with DFES from them no longer having to undertake those functions that are now being taken up by the RFD?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: My understanding is that DFES funding is not going backwards.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is not the question I asked. Will there be savings within the department with now a lot of those functions and costs from them being moved to the RFD?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt.

Mr Cronstedt: In effect, what we have done is we have added to the organisation as it exists. DFES and its operational arm, its service delivery arm, apart from consolidating a range of functions, the RFD and its expanded funding is additional activity—expanded activity—across the organisation. It is, after all, part of the one department.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Firstly, I refer to page 8 where you talk about arson reduction. I notice that you are working on this and it is a great thing. I am just wondering how many deliberately lit fires did the department attend to in the 2017–18 year? How has that number changed from previous years? What is the breakdown between home fires or building/structural fires and bushfire arson?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: A very detailed question, honourable member. I will ask the deputy commissioner if he is able to make some general comments. Then we might have to look at the wonderful *Hansard* to tell us exactly what you asked for and we will make sure we give it to you. Deputy commissioner, could you provide some general comments in relation to that issue, please?

Mr Cronstedt: Certainly. In terms of bushfires, arson activity remains. I cannot comment without reference to the precise statistics but nothing has alarmed me in the last year of any particular trend, although it remains an issue. We work very closely with the police force and with our partner agencies such as DBCA to gather data about fire incidents. The best time to find out and get on top of these things is, when you attend something, to quickly gather the details of the incident so it can be inserted into a comprehensive database, which is shared across those services I described so that the police have access to it and our partner agencies have early access to it. We do not pursue criminal matters, obviously—that is a police matter—but at least they have access to the latest intelligence concerning trends and activity, which they can then focus their attention and resources to. We also have intervention programs for youth, which have been tremendously successful over the past couple of years. As I said, I do not know what the precise trend is without reference to the precise statistics. Certainly, parsing them across bushfires and house fires would require a bit of analysis.

The CHAIR: Can we just check if datasets are available?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Does the data exist?

Mr Cronstedt: Yes, it does, minister.

The CHAIR: What is it—arson by?

Hon DIANE EVERS: It is arson separated by bushfire and structures. I guess I am looking for a trend; a general trend would be good to know if we are having some effect in terms of decreasing this. I do not know if three years might show that. Can I suggest that maybe it would be a KPI for the department? You would think that it would be something that would significantly affect the issues.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Can I just say that if it is a crime it is actually a police matter, so police are responsible for managing that data and policing those issues; we are not. Notwithstanding that, we have some interaction with those issues and with arson that we come into contact with. It is a police matter in terms of KPIs or whatever else. I encourage the member to probably ask those questions of police. In saying that, is there data available in relation to the earlier part of the question?

[11.30 am]

The CHAIR: I understand what you are saying. The word “arson” is actually a crime and so allocating it to that might be difficult, but maybe we could just hear what the deputy commissioner has to say.

Mr Cronstedt: Yes. We can provide data on what we suspect to be deliberate. We do not take the next assumption; that is a police matter—so what we suspect it to be when we have not found a cause. Then, obviously, police have an interest in pursuing it, and we work in partnership with them very actively. But, yes, we do have data on fires that we either have not established a cause or think are suspicious.

The CHAIR: So you have got the general sense of what the member is looking for, minister.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We can provide what the deputy commissioner has said, noting that it is suspected and you cannot take it as gospel.

[Supplementary Information No A9.]

The CHAIR: We will make sure that the data will have those disclaimers on it.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Back to the previous answer you gave me about the volunteer support managers who are employed within each region, I am interested—because I cannot understate how much I appreciate the way the volunteer brigades work and the services that they provide the community. But it says “volunteer support managers”. I am just wondering: does that support the volunteers—the people—or does it support the whole brigade? To have somebody, I guess, almost lobbying on your behalf back through the department would be very useful to these brigades just in terms of making sure that they are properly resourced with sheds and appliances and equipment.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask the deputy commissioner to respond and Mr Burnell can possibly supplement if needed.

Mr Cronstedt: The object of the positions is to support brigades but also tailor their response to the brigade or the individuals. So their primary focus would be brigades because that is the entry point into that community organisation, which we support. But we would be expecting, because one person in a region cannot support every individual, that they would tailor their response to the needs of the region and the brigade group or unit, so that if a brigade needs particular attention on some administrative matters, they would support them. It is not necessarily to go and counsel individuals, which I think is well beyond the scope of their job, but to provide, initially, support to the brigade hierarchy—the officers, the captain, secretary and so on—and, if necessary, fine-tune their approach depending on the needs of the brigade and the region and the priority across that region.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If I could move on and ask a question in relation to the questions asked by Hon Rick Mazza in relation to the staffing numbers of the Rural Fire Division. When the Bushfire Centre of Excellence is developed, is there an expectation that there will be a requirement for additional staff to come in or can that be managed out of existing staffing?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Superintendent Tillman to reply to that.

Mr Tillman: Thank you, minister. The structure for the Bushfire Centre of Excellence is being worked up now—what that model would look like come 1 July—and the majority of those positions are identified as new positions, although we have looked at the opportunity to transfer some positions, for example, from our current training academy where the work they undertake at the moment focuses predominantly on prescribed fire or bushfire training packages. They will move across to the Bushfire Centre of Excellence.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The next question is a little more complicated. I was looking for a reference in the annual report to the volunteer fuel card. It was referenced in last year’s annual report. Have I missed it? Is there a reason why that would not be mentioned in this year’s annual report or is it simply an accounting thing that we wait for the budget process?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Ms Camarda whether she can provide a response to that.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It may not be standard procedure anymore, but I thought it was worth asking.

Ms Camarda: It is just in support of the volunteers, minister.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not think there is a reason why it is not mentioned, so it certainly would be mentioned in the budget papers. As you would be aware, the scheme has been extended to 2020–21 and, more importantly, has been funded to that period of time, too. But, certainly, there is no reason why it is not mentioned.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: So I have not missed it? It is not mentioned in the annual report?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Can I then take you to pages 20 and 21, “Volunteer Services” and the “Performance Management Framework”. If we start at page 21, the “Performance Management Framework”, the third dot point talks about the bushfire risk management programs that are better supporting the cost of local governments to develop bushfire risk management plans. Noting the government has put additional funding in the budget for that process, can I ask what DFES’s role has been and capacity is to ensure that local governments are putting in local emergency management plans? How far through that process are we?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It was the Office of Emergency Management last year and this financial year’s period, and it is us as of this financial year. I might ask the deputy commissioner to respond. In terms of the scope of this report, it was not us. In terms of after 1 July, it becomes us. But I will ask the deputy commissioner to provide a response.

Mr Cronstedt: Improving local governments’ production and maintenance of local emergency management plans is an ongoing feast of work. There has been significant improvement over the last three years—a dramatic improvement—and this year we assume that that will continue now with the support of the greater department’s resources. Given the Office of Emergency Management has been subsumed by DFES, there is now a greater capacity in networks to liaise with local governments and ensure that they meet their emergency management responsibilities.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Through you, minister, just in relation to that, is there a plan to try to boost—the issue will be that the state might get left with the funding to produce all these plans if they are not careful. Is there a plan in place to push local government along and down the line of better emergency management planning? Again, that might be a bit pre-emptive and it might need to be next year that we go to that in some detail.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Certainly, we are very committed to working with and in collaboration with local governments. As a government, the McGowan government has signed a document with the local government association on behalf of local governments to work with them with a consultation framework. We are not going to push them. But in relation to the future, I am not actually sure what the plan is and I think it may well be a question for next year. I do not think we have got an answer yet.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am pretty certain I will come back to it next year.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think you will, too, and I will make sure I have got an answer for you for next year.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Excellent work. If we jump to the top of page 20, “We provide buildings, plant, vehicles and equipment as well as uniforms and protective clothing” et cetera. It is my understanding that DFES has been and will be looking at, over a number of financial years, the list of items that it provides to local fire brigades. Can we get an update on what the intent is and where we are with that?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Perhaps, deputy commissioner, if I can ask you what we did in the 2017–18 financial year; and, if you are able to give any extra information, you are welcome to.

Mr Cronstedt: During the reporting period, we recognised the need to be more flexible in the rules surrounding eligible grants to local governments who run their bush fire brigades. I guess what you are talking about is the manual that encompasses grant programs to local government to run their bush fire brigades in a capital sense and a recurrent sense. We have been actively involved with the local government association and also the volunteer association representing those bush fire brigades and others to see what flexibility and how that could be expanded so that local governments have a great deal more flexibility in applying their grant appropriately to suit their local circumstances.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I guess, member, sometimes ministers have plans for the future that have not been announced yet.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Here is your opportunity to jump in when he is away up north!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: As the minister representing the minister, I think that is probably all we can tell you in terms of this reporting year.

[11.40 am]

Hon RICK MAZZA: I have just a couple of general questions. My understanding is that you now have a GPS tracking system for all of your appliances. Are all volunteer bush fire brigades, fire and rescue brigades all fitted with that GPS tracking system now?

Mr Cronstedt: The GPS system you are referring to is automatic vehicle location, or AVL, as it is shortened to. We have, over the last couple of years, embarked on a program to install those across the entire high-risk fleet, which is predominantly in the south west of Western Australia. Between now and 30 June next year, we will be completing that cycle across the rest of the state, predominantly north of the state. In very short order, we will have a complete rollout of that for all appliances.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So, currently, not every single appliance has it?

Mr Cronstedt: No.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What about the safety devices on appliances, like the burnover protection and that sort of thing? Do all appliances, both department and volunteer, now have those safety mechanisms or devices?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Burnell if he can reply to that one, please.

Mr Burnell: Sure; thank you, minister. Just a point of clarification with respect to the AVL, we actually have installed that in all the vehicles, plus we have 400 portable devices as well, so that if an additional vehicle arrives at an incident scene that does not have an AVL solution fitted, then we can provide the portable unit. They are all stationed out in the regional offices so that we have got full capability across the state.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So the updated information is that they all have it?

Mr Burnell: That is correct. With respect to all of the comprehensive crew protection, which included things like the heat shields, the fire suppression units and the blankets as well, we have installed those in all of the firefighter fleet down in the southern part of the state. There was additional funding provided for this financial year for us to finish off all of the vehicles. There are 80-odd vehicles that we transition between the north and the south of the state which were not fitted prior to this financial year. They are being fitted this financial year. By the end of the year, we will

have all of that comprehensive crew protection fitted across all the vehicles, including volunteer vehicles.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So every appliance will have crew protection?

Mr Burnell: Every appliance.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is there any specialist training that is required for those crew protection assets?

Mr Burnell: Yes. The department has developed all of the comprehensive training information kit that is required. There is a scheduled program which is undertaken every year, predominantly before the fire season, so that all the volunteers and all the career station officers also get training in how to use the crew protection facilities.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So that has not been fully rolled out, though, as yet?

Mr Burnell: We have been training people. As more vehicles are churned out into the fleet, if there is a requirement to go through and train additional people, that is done. We also, in conjunction with local government, agree on when the training should happen for the local brigades, managed by local government.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is that training something for the volunteer brigade or is that something that the RFD will undertake?

Mr Tillman: One of the processes we are working through at the moment is what training packages will come under the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. At this point in time, that training is still rolled out through the regions. I expect that we would need to continue with that model because the state is so big and working with that decentralised model of training delivery. What I will also say is that a lot of that training is actually delivered by the brigade members themselves, and particularly the follow-up drills that Mr Burnell referred to. So, coming into a season, doing what we call a turnover drill, they will often do a without notice-type drill to ensure that they are up to speed with how to activate the systems, the turnover blankets and so on.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I have one last question, just out of curiosity. If someone donates an appliance to a brigade, who owns the appliance and does it stay with that brigade?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is a good question. I think it depends on which brigade, but I will ask the deputy commissioner if he can provide a response to that one.

Mr Cronstedt: Certainly, if they donate it to a local government's bush fire brigade, it would be up to the local government to determine how to deal with that asset and the ownership arrangements, the maintenance arrangements and so on. In terms of our own organisations, we would be generally reluctant to get donated equipment because we would have to be satisfied that the standards of that equipment are appropriate to our needs. If they are, then we would negotiate something with the supplier and go through that. I do not immediately recall any that have fallen into that category, though.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: But, member, we do take money. You will see from the annual report that there have been a number of bequests over the years. One in particular is in relation to Coolgardie, where money was provided by bequest. In this annual report period, you will see that money was accessed from that account to provide equipment for the brigade locally. As per what the deputy commissioner said, we are loath to take on equipment, but brigades, depending on where they are, may well do that. Certainly, if I could just put it out there, if anyone wanted to bequest money to this system, we would certainly look at it.

Hon RICK MAZZA: With the manufacture of appliances, are appliances fitted out and manufactured in Western Australia or are they being manufactured in another state or country?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Burnell if he can reply to that one, please.

Mr Burnell: Certainly, the industry participation program that has been introduced by the government is an example of trying to increase the level of local content in terms of what is manufactured and provided and used by the department. We are going through the tender process at the moment just to complement the final additions to the fleet. That will include an evaluation of their local participation and industry participation. The state does not make any cab chassis, for example, for the major vehicles, but all of the equipment that sits on the back of the vehicle can be or could be manufactured in the state. That will be assessed during the tender evaluation process.

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which highlights the questions on notice, and any additional questions that members may have to you after Monday, 26 November 2018. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. If you are unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. I emphasise “before the due date”. If members have any unasked questions, I ask you to submit these via the electronic lodgement system on the POWAnet site by five o’clock on Wednesday, 21 November. Once again, thank you for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 11.46 am
