

# **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE**

## **INQUIRY INTO WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF ARRANGEMENTS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN  
AT BUNBURY  
TUESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2006**

### **SESSION FOUR**

#### **Members**

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)**

**Mr S.R. Hill**

**Ms K. Hodson-Thomas**

**Mrs J. Hughes**

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**Hearing commenced at 11.35 am**

**WINTER, MR LEWIS RONALD**

**Emergency Management Projects, City of Bunbury,  
Community Emergency Management Officer, Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA,  
examined:**

**KOWAL, MR JOHN BRIAN**

**Manager Community Law and Safety,  
City of Bunbury, examined:**

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form, and did you understand the notes attached to it?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Did you receive and read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** The committee has received your submission. Do you wish to propose any amendments to your submission, and is it your wish that your submission be incorporated as part of the transcript of evidence? Before we ask any questions, do you wish to make an opening statement in addition to your submission?

**Mr Kowal:** I think the information contained in the submission is sufficient.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Are you happy for the submission to be incorporated, Mr Winter?

**Mr Winter:** Yes.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** We have a series of generic questions that we will ask you. Can you give us some background on how the recently proclaimed natural disaster has impacted on this area?

**Mr Winter:** Are you asking about how the disaster in Bunbury impacted on us, and about the recovery?

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Yes.

**Mr Winter:** I guess that, like many local governments, we had to hit the ground running. We had the disaster. I believe we coped with it fairly well. We were very fortunate that we were right at the end of a very intense period with risk management where our emergency services were working together very well at that time because we had gone through a process and a project. Therefore, when it came to the actual response, it worked fairly well for us. Of course recovery is something that I had only just started in. I had had training at Mt Macedon in recovery, but I had never had any first-hand experience. I have been in the fire service for some 26 years. Recovery has always been a bit of a poor cousin to response. Therefore, I guess that doing the actual recovery was a new thing. It was a surprise to the City of Bunbury when we heard in the media - rather than by the CEO or the mayor being contacted by the Premier - that it had been declared a disaster area.

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[11.39 am]

We heard this information at work through the media. From there we had to gather up as much material and forms as we could and find out what the government had to offer in the way of WANDRA. We had to determine what we could offer people and what they were entitled to or not entitled to. We had to hit the ground running. It was awkward at the very start to get that information. The Fire and Emergency Services Authority, which was looking after the recovery at that time, was very good and very helpful. We had a lot of support from FESA. FESA representatives drove down and attended a one-stop shop and a second recovery meeting to answer any questions. However, during that initial time - we are talking about May 2005 - when we were getting the forms so that we could distribute them, there was a real scramble to get things ready, as I think it was for FESA, too, at that time.

As the recovery process progressed, anomalies arose, as occurs with any law, and highlighted that there is always an exception to the rule. We were very much aware that people should insure themselves and look after their own situations. It would be unfair for people to not bother insuring and then put out their hand to the government for recovery when other people have paid a lot of money for insurance. We are very aware of the type of issues that the government must face. Nonetheless, there are always exceptions to the rule. It was difficult at times to determine where to go to address those exceptions to the rule. For example, the insurance of a self-funded 85-year-old lady, who does not draw her income from the government, covered only a portion of her damages. She was left with a shortfall. She could have sold her assets to pay for the damages, but then she would not have been self-funded any more. Those sorts of catchy issues arose. Someone who had developed cancer was trying to organise his life through welfare, community etc to get money coming in. He is the sort of person who could not recoup money. You and I have jobs from which money comes in so that, over the next few years, we can recoup our losses from the disaster. Those types of people did not. We were told that we could make a separate submission to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and that the department might have a look at those situations. However, nothing provides for that extraneous type of situation. People can claim up to \$10 000 for structural damage, food, clothing and temporary shelter. Even businesses can make a claim for a four per cent loan. It is quite well structured but nothing provides for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to consider extraneous conditions. We got over that hurdle, which was a very awkward part of recovery.

I have been involved in two recovery efforts. I worked as recovery coordinator for the City of Bunbury recovery effort and I assisted in a different capacity after the tornado and helped with the recovery effort here in Australind. There is always a scramble from the number of people who want to make donations. As the committee is aware, people want to make donations in these situations. However, the questions arises of what to do with all the stuff they give. If they give money, who will manage it or how it should be divvied out is always a concern. I know of the lord mayor's disaster relief fund but, again, I believe it is a big deal to access it. It is a big deal to establish the lord mayor's disaster relief fund. A private company wanted to give money and to help and asked how much was required, given the special circumstances and those types of things. As a group our recovery committee, the Department of Community Development and I made recommendations to that company. We did not take the money and redistribute it; we made recommendations to the company concerning several people who could not recoup losses. They were elderly or sick and infirm or had disabilities. No; they did not have to go to Premier and Cabinet cap in hand for that money. That private company was able to donate to them to help them get over that hurdle. That company also donated to places such as Meals on Wheels, which was accommodated in a council building, which was covered by insurance. Meals on Wheels delivers several hundred meals all around Bunbury. You know what it does. Meals on Wheels went to an in-town lunch centre for disadvantaged people to supply meals on wheels in the centre's kitchen where electricity and food were available. Again, the private company gave money to Meals on Wheels, not for structural

damage, but to help provide the momentum to get things happening again. Insurance does not cover that side of things. I guess that is a community issue. There does not appear to be any leeway in the arrangements for community issues such as that. I am not saying I have the answers; I am saying that situations arose that made us wonder where we should go to get that extra funding. That private company split it up. The recovery committee made those recommendations for particular people who were unable to recoup adequate funding.

We fielded hundreds of calls from people. It is a bit of an eye-opener when national disaster relief funding is mentioned. A lot of people will make claims for whatever they can get. We just have to very politely and tactfully tell them that if their car was parked on a verge when a tree branch fell off in the storm and dented the bonnet, their insurance should cover it. Then we hear, "Oh, yes, but you said that the Premier said because of the disaster the government would help out, and this is going to affect our no-claim bonus." You can imagine all those people coming out of the woodwork and putting up their hand.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** So there are some misconceptions in the community and it was left to the recovery centre to try to monitor and work out those the best way possible.

**Mr Kowal:** That is correct. Lewis alluded to an important fact; namely, it was not advised to the local recovery committee that the area would be declared a natural disaster area. It caught us on the hop because it was announced without our knowledge. Therefore, all these arrangements came into play and then it was left to the local recovery committee to implement it all. So you can imagine that all those people were coming in and asking what about this and what about that; and asking for funding. We had no information, no application forms and no guidelines or anything like that. We had to take people's details and tell them that once we had all the information and knew the process and the guidelines, we would get back to them and arrange something for them. You can just imagine how it was for those people who had to deal with the disaster. Some of them, rightly or wrongly, felt that we were just fobbing them off because they wanted to get on with things. Right from the onset, it would have been beneficial if there had been prior advice to the local area and all the information provided that was needed. A process should have been in place with a check-list, or whatever you want to call it, indicating what people needed to do and that information had to be provided on our own web site. These are things we had to set up, basically.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** And of course there were no extra hands on deck to monitor a call centre.

[12 noon]

**Mr Kowal:** Nothing at all. As Lewis said, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority was sort of caught on the hop as well. It was working overtime trying to get all the information, forms and procedures and those types of things for us. They attended our first recovery meetings to assist and support us and to get us off the ground, which was a godsend. We were trying to deal with a response to what had occurred and we were also trying to initiate recovery when the government announced that funding was available and that it was doing this and that. There were no further hands on deck, so to speak, to deal with all those types of things.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** You indicated that you became aware of what was available only after the incident occurred and after it was declared a natural disaster. I get the impression - you have sort of answered this question - that you believe that guidelines should be in place for local government to follow ahead of an event so that you are prepared to deal with the recovery.

**Mr Kowal:** Lewis and I spoke about this, as members of the recovery committee, as we went through the debrief and those type of things. You are correct in what you say. There must be guidelines, especially now that local government is aware of its role in not only response, but also recovery. The recovery role is huge. It is much greater than, and can span a longer period, as you would appreciate, than the response role. Given that local government is aware of its role, we believe that a pre-disaster package should be sent to every local government that states what they

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need to do when a certain event happens. That pre-disaster package should explain how to access certain things and how local governments should communicate with their people and so on and so forth. It should also state what the government can help local governments with.

**Mr Winter:** This happened at Australind only months ago. We are talking about a very limited amount of experience in recovery and recovery coordination. I am sure you are well aware that we can expect more natural disasters and events in the future. The disaster relief arrangements do not state that the City of Bunbury will be recouped. Yes, it was recouped for outside contracting. Yes, it was recouped for overtime. However, it was not recouped for the day-to-day eight-hour days. That is part of the work effort. A person might be sweeping roads or cleaning up trees from the roads. On the morning of the disaster, and after we heard that it had been declared a natural disaster and after the recovery had been put into full swing, I talked to the CEO of the City of Bunbury. He asked me whether I would be the recovery coordinator for the City of Bunbury. I said that I would even though I had limited training. I do have a good background in emergency management. The City of Bunbury took it upon itself to employ me as a full-time recovery coordinator for eight weeks. It was a monster job. It tried to give me some administrative assistance. Again, it is very hard for someone to leave their job and their normal duties, which become neglected. I answered phones, liaised with the Department for Community Development and set up meetings. It was a very busy and stressful time. However, my point is that there is nothing in the arrangements about the support offered by the government. The state government gave 75 per cent of those eight weeks' wages back to the City of Bunbury, which is wonderful. We are not complaining about that. However, there is nothing in the arrangements to say that that will happen. The City of Bunbury is fortunate in that many of its employees have a lot of experience. John has been in the fire services for 26 years. I have, too, and I have worked for the state government and other bodies. We had a reasonable handle on the situation. A lot of local governments do not have that depth of experience. Some local government may need someone with expertise, which is what happened after the event in Australind. It helps to have someone not to come in and take on the job as recovery coordinator, but to come in and mentor the local government's appointed recovery coordinator.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** So someone should be available to assist and to offer their experience having dealt with those sorts of events right around the state.

**Mr Winter:** To the credit of the state government and its emergency management services, I had just been seconded weeks previous to the community emergency management job with FESA. This happened two weeks later. They contacted emergency management services and asked whether it could have someone to help. I had just started to work for them. They asked me whether I would go across and assist. I was told that I was to mentor. That worked very well. I assisted by looking at checklists and the way the committee was running. There is nothing in the arrangements to indicate that. If a council says that John Kowal or a good community officer should be brought in to coordinate the recovery effort, there is nothing in the arrangements to say that the state government will pick up 75 per cent of his wages.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** You run a very unique disaster recovery committee. Can you explain how the committee was formed, who is on the committee and how it operates? Was the committee involved in the recovery after the tornado in August? Did it operate effectively?

**Mr Winter:** I can speak on three fronts. The first committee was put together after the Bunbury tornado. Our emergency management arrangements, which we had just completed, included generic talk about recovery. It had probably been kicked around the state during the past few years. It was so generic that there was nothing but paper. People were trying to get a handle on it. The response and risk management aspects were not too bad. We did those things reasonably well. We included a disclaimer in the ones we released - John will verify this - in which we stated that the recovery arrangements were not up to scratch. We stated that they would be reviewed and in place by 2007. Later I will show you the new recovery arrangements. Our recovery committee was

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established straight after the tornado in Bunbury. Many businesses and residences were affected by the tornado in Bunbury. The committee comprised people who specifically represented business and residents. There were a couple of HMAs. It was a bit of a mishmash. We involved people who we thought would be of good value to us. We have put together a workshop for the community to come together to tell us what it wants in recovery. I am not sure how briefed you are on what we have done in the whole recovery effort. Our recovery committee is unique. In fact, it has been recognised as being unique. I will talk about that a bit later. The structure of the recovery committee is very different from the structure that was put in place straight after the disaster. We realised that things slipped through the net that our community needed to be concerned about. We picked up on economic and business factors. The Chamber of Commerce and Industries and the South West Development Commission looked after the interests of businesses to ensure that the community kept running. However, nobody on the committee represented the environment. There was no-one to say that tree replanting was needed in the areas that had been wrecked environmentally. DCD was represented, but there was no-one from the community, such as a community development officer, to hinge back into the community to all those communities groups. There were no critical infrastructure people on the committee. There were loopholes. All those sorts of people should be available to make sure that you do not miss anything when you recover from a disaster. That is the lesson we learnt. That is how we have now set up our recovery committee. The Australind committee was a good committee. I sat on that committee. The Shire of Harvey did very well with the recovery. It listened intently to the advice it received from me, DCD and the SES and it tried to make things happen. It worked very well. Its recovery committee comprised people it believed should be on a recovery committee. With my assistance, thought was given to environmental concerns. I had seen Australind and all the trees that had been wrecked. Thought was given to replanting and to giving people seedlings. It worked fairly well.

[12.10 pm]

If you would like me to talk about our recovery committee that we have set up now, our recovery committee is made up of a chairman, who is the chief executive officer. He can pull strings and make things happen from his level. The spokesman for the community and that recovery committee is the mayor. We have on the side there a public information officer, and the City of Bunbury has enough fat on it to have a communications officer, a media officer. They sit there. Underneath them is the recovery coordinator, obviously, and the HMA of the event is invited to sit in on that, after the event that is. Then we have a chairman of five specific recovery groups. These subcommittees are made up of health and wellbeing, which used to be called psychosocial, if you have ever heard of that term. All these people in that psychosocial field wanted that name. It is not very good to call it that because it just sounds either crazy or a social handout, so it is health and wellbeing. It is their subcommittee and that is what it is called. We have the environmental subcommittee, so that we look after the environment after we recover from a disaster. We have the economic and financial committee, obviously. We have the critical infrastructure committee, which is putting our roads, our water and our electricity back together. All those people are on a big committee, with the port authority and all sorts of people on it. Then there is the community subcommittee. Each one of those subcommittees has a bunch of people. I suppose all in all there are 58 members on our recovery committee, which encompasses our community. When a disaster happens, we will not have 58 people sitting in a room, obviously, but every one of those subcommittees has a voice to say, "We've got this major sporting event coming up; do we cancel it for our community? It will affect so many hundreds of people. Can we get around that? Can you help us make sure we stage that?" The critical infrastructure people might have issues or the environmental people might have issues. It is to make sure that everyone in our community has a voice. We believe it is going to work well. All these people are very keen and very interested. We struck while the iron was hot. You know the old adage that when there is a disaster is when you get the most attention from people; but they are all very keen and interested. We give them regular

updates and we said, "Look, we're not going to impose on you. We don't want you to come to a meeting every month or something like this; maybe one meeting a year to review the arrangements, make sure that you are still doing the job that you are doing, because in all these arrangements are roles and responsibilities that everyone has." So I believe now if we had a disaster next week we would have a very good field of play for our whole community to make sure that they all get a voice and that all those issues are covered.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** The City of Bunbury in the past has also obtained funding through the commonwealth natural disaster mitigation program. How effective was that funding to the city's disaster mitigation planning and how easy was it to access?

**Mr Winter:** It was very hard to access. The reason is that the commonwealth government seemed to be pretty keen to give money away on these things. Our particular local government said, "Yes, we'll be in that; we need that." The state government said, "Who should we go to to get that third partner?" A lot of the national disaster mitigation plans involve a third, a third and a third; therein lies the problem. We did get some funding. It was not very much, but it allowed us to set up a workshop and start on these recovery arrangements. Our biggest funding came from the local community grant scheme where the federal government just said, "Here, go for it," and we did. Even though the City of Bunbury put quite a bit of funding towards it, the federal government funded it like this. So in a national disaster - an NDMP - it is hard; the commonwealth wants to give it away. The local governments put their hands up, but then who in the state will partner us? That is the problem. Maybe some government departments out there would say, "Gee, that's a good idea; let's go in with this." However, they seem to have to budget a long way in advance or they as government departments do not see it as a core responsibility to sort of develop emergency management. So you are left with FESA and, of course, it has its arms full trying to sort of juggle everything it has to do. So it is hard to access that third, third and third. The same thing happened with the bushfire mitigation program, but FESA came to the rescue and said, "We'll go in as a partner with you." The City of Bunbury put in the lion's share, the feds put in some and FESA put in some, too, so we got that happening, but it is not easy. That is the drawback.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** So the total cost of the development of this recovery plan that you put in place has been met by the City of Bunbury.

**Mr Kowal:** Virtually, yes. We have had assistance through the local community with grants in relation to our emergency management arrangements and risk management arrangements, but I suppose the bulk of it has been the city funding it through employment of an officer, administration, venues, in-kind contributions and those types of things basically. However, in relation to funding an NDMP, what Lewis has stated is correct basically. The commonwealth is quite receptive to ensuring that local governments have required funding to instigate certain projects to do with community safety. There does not seem to be that partnership or liaison between the state and the commonwealth. It is as if we have sort of sprung a surprise on the state government by getting this particular funding. What happens is that you are successful in your federal funding, but then it is up to the local government to fossick around to try to find a state partner, if you like. To me that really needs to be done at a higher level. It needs to be said whether it is a reserve fund that certain projects or a certain percentage of projects from a commonwealth perspective will get funding, and then the state provides equivalent funding to that, depending on what their processes are and those types of things.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** So, in essence, when the Premier made the announcement that this was a natural disaster, he should have had an understanding with the commonwealth that it had some funding and it should be jointly funded or funded in a three-tier arrangement, and that it does not matter which agency it comes out of. At the end of the day, it comes out of consolidated revenue.

**Mr Kowal:** Yes, that is correct.

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**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** And there should be some funding there to match the feds, and local government to come in as well.

**Mr Winter:** We are not complaining. I do not know who paid for it, but the state government did pay 75 per cent and it never quibbled. It paid 75 per cent of my wages for eight weeks. That was very good. That was wonderful, except we did not know until the cheque arrived in the post that that was going to be the case. So the City of Bunbury had to carry \$120 000, not knowing that it was going to get it back, but sort of hoping -

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** That it would all fall into place.

**Mr Winter:** Yes.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** I want to ask about your experience of the recovery arrangements, for instance, with future risk mitigation of buildings that are designed in a certain way, but obviously with weather changes and so forth probably are not now suitable to withstand an incident such as a tornado, or whatever. In your recovery period, are you able with the engineers to assess buildings that should not be put back in the same form as they were before, to mitigate future risk? Are you able to include that into your recovery?

**Mr Winter:** We have built that into our recovery arrangements legislatively under the Building Code and our local planning. I guess you would liken it to some houses getting burnt down when a bushfire comes through. Are we going to allow open houses on stilts made out of cedar to be rebuilt back in that area? I guess our planning code says that you can, because it has not been changed. I am not an expert on building and planning. John might have some more details on that. Our recovery arrangements do address that very thing, instead of saying we should just whip in there and build another cedar house in the same spot or another house on the floodplain. I am not sure whether through our planning or legislatively we have the power to change that at this time.

[12.10 pm]

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** I know that it says that you can rebuild only back to what you had before. That does not leave you a great deal of flexibility. I guess what I am saying is that if we are rebuilding, especially for the City of Bunbury, which has so many people who can be affected by a disaster in a very short space of time, to mitigate future risk would be a great help to the City of Bunbury, if it could look into the future rather than be stuck in the past.

**Mr Winter:** Absolutely.

**Mr Kowal:** At the time our building surveyors assisted us. We actually obtained assistance from other local governments within this area to go out and assess damage and give advice on those types of things. Under the BCA, there is no category, if you like, for that to be enforced. I am not a hundred per cent sure, but it was basically restoring the property back to where it was previously. Now, there are guidelines in relation to building in bushfire-prone areas, but there is nothing to cover other disasters in flood-prone areas, tornado alley and those types of things - to my knowledge, that is. Now that we are going through climate change and all those types of things, it may be worthwhile investigating it and maybe addressing it through whatever avenue.

The other consideration - that is why we have an environmental subcommittee also - is that within Bunbury there are large heritage areas, and trying to restore, or change, if you like, the way that they are constructed or repaired involves a very formal process that you have to go through to restore those properties basically back to their former glory. Therefore, we need to be mindful of the processes and all the things required if damage should be sustained to a heritage-listed building and those types of things as well. A classic example is the St Patrick's Cathedral that was ultimately demolished and still has not been rebuilt. There was a lot of debate, discussion and angst in the community, because the first thing that was said was that we are going to demolish this landmark, basically, that has stood the test of time. You can just imagine the community debate in regard to that, and then the Heritage Council got involved, and so on and so forth. There just did



not seem to be a formal process for that to happen either, and that is why we need to take all those types of things into consideration. Local governments and the bodies involved need to take all those things into consideration - all the aspects of the community. I suppose the reason we went down the track of subcommittees was that we tried to obtain all the experts in that field to look at the community - people to look after the recreational side of the community - because we felt that one of the best ways to get a community to repair itself is to allow it to continue to recreate. If we are going to put on a state event, and we do not want to cancel it, what is the best way to go about that to repair the community back to where it was? One of the important things for the recovery committee is that the chairpeople for these subcommittees, or the people who are representative of their organisation on the main committee, are the decision makers. They do not have to go back and report to anyone and say, "Can we do this; can we do that?" It is very important when the recovery committee comes together that a decision is made.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Do the subcommittee people then decide who will be the person to represent them at the committee?

**Mr Winter:** They have already agreed on a chairman. They may have two yearly meetings. We may set up a big recovery exercise. We have the capacity to do that now. There may be a couple. However, generally, let us just talk about the annual meeting. They will determine who their chairperson will be.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** So they are not appointed chairmen?

**Mr Winter:** No, that committee itself, or subcommittee, will determine that.

**Mr Kowal:** The reason we have done that is that we do not want to force anything upon those subcommittees. They will decide the best person to represent that committee. As I said, in the document there are terms of reference for each one of those subcommittees, and they need to satisfy those terms of reference. There are check lists for each of those subcommittees to say, "This is what we need to do as part of the recovery process." We thought it was important again that if you are going to bring all these people in as part of the recovery, they cannot just come in and sit around in a room and say, "Well, what do we do now?" There have to be some clear guidelines as to what overall the recovery committee is responsible for and what its tasks are, and that flows down into your other subcommittees as well. It is very important that they come together quickly, they make decisions on what to do and they are implemented, basically, because we felt that that is what the community expects. It expects decisions to be made -

**Mr Winter:** On their behalf.

**Mr Kowal:** - on their behalf, and basically implementation.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** The City of Bunbury has obviously put in a great deal of effort to look at how its emergencies were dealt with in the past and how they will be dealt with in the future. As far as your committees are concerned, with the council and your planning departments, your conservation departments and so forth, their future decisions will be based on your future recovery plans. Will that be fed in through the policy through local government, or how will that work?

**Mr Kowal:** The situation is that, where relevant, departmental heads are part of the local emergency management committee, and obviously, from there, they make representation on the recovery committee and subcommittees. There was some reluctance, with the workloads that they have and all those types of things. However, it is recognised that it is very important to gather those people in, because we can ill afford during response and recovery to have people department-wise going off on their own tangent doing their own thing. It needs to be a process, basically, and a decision made that this is what we are going to do and this is how we are going to do it. Through the tornado in May 2005, that started to occur. You started to get this fragmentation of certain departments going off and implementing this, which then had an adverse impact on what someone else was trying to do. Therefore, quite quickly we started to gather all that in and say, "No, hang on

a minute. This is a coordinated approach here”, and that is how we have designed the recovery committee and the subcommittees. Heads of department must play a part, or a representative. That is why I go back to the decision makers. We talked today about restoring buildings back to withstand disasters. A classic example would be to ask the manager of development services, “Are we able to do that? Can you implement that?”, so the decision is right there and then: “Yes, I’ll have a look at it. We’ll go away and do something about it.” That is the important role that I suppose local government departments play. We have our own environmental officer. I do not know whether it is easier with smaller local governments, because there are not as many heads of departments, I suppose; one person may look after several departments. Therefore, it may be easier for smaller local governments to implement. I am not a hundred per cent sure. However, that is how we have seen that we have to establish these committees, basically.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** In terms of the assistance provided to local government under WANDRA, are you able to comment on the adequacy of the quantity of assistance received to restore or replace essential public assets, on the efficiency - that is, how quickly this assistance was received and how easy it was to obtain - and on its effectiveness, in terms of how effective this assistance was to the recovery effort?

[12:20 pm]

**Mr Kowal:** I think we may have touched on it with some of those. At the initial stage, as we said, we were going into unknown ground. Obviously, we had to recover the community from damage and from the local government perspective. We were looking at outlaying financially. That was not part of the city’s financial budget for that particular year. I say that we went into unknown ground because questions were being asked about who pays for this and who pays for that and those types of things. It would have been good to have someone with that information and knowledge at that initial stage to say that this is what you can look forward to and I am not going to sign a blank cheque but we make this commitment at this point in time. In saying that, ultimately, to which Lewis alluded, we have great gratitude for the support that was given to recover the community. Seventy-five per cent of the funds were provided. I think that is enormous.

**Mr Winter:** That is eight months later.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** In terms of other things the city did, were you able to provide additional assistance such as deferring rates payments or waiving fees for demolition or building licences?

**Mr Kowal:** We set up several schemes. We waived fees for building and planning development applications. Obviously, we waived the costs in relation to demolition licences. Further to that, there was deferment for the payment of rates. What we did was to go out and identify properties and the category of damage. From there the building surveyors went out and assessed those buildings that required demolition or reconstruction and those types of things. From there they evaluated the level of financial assistance that they could provide. At the initial meeting I do remember that we waived all fees and charges in relation to demolition building licences and all those types of things to assist those people.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Your submission suggests that businesses are not very well provided for under WANDRA. One suggestion that the committee has received is for businesses to receive a similar type of grant scheme that primary producers get, which is to provide professional advice. The grant is \$1 500. Do you believe that there is a need to examine and provide a similar type arrangement for small business?

**Mr Winter:** Absolutely. I think we are fortunate because we have the South West Development Commission sitting up in the top level of the tower. It is very active. They used state government or South West Development Commission money to assist businesses any way they could.

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**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** They were fairly well stretched with their resources on the ground. I think that their funding was limited as well.

**Mr Winter:** Everybody stretched themselves, that is for sure.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** The whole community should be commended for what you did. It is an amazing feat. It is quite clear from what we have heard that you are an amazing group of people that have come together to provide a service

**Mr Winter:** A bloke whose business was wrecked was an auto electrician. He had to find other premises. The financial burden of the whole thing is such that he does not work out of premises any more; he works out of the back of a ute and a trailer because he could not get over that hurdle. These people were physically shattered - psychologically shattered. For some of them the insurance was good but it did not replace the business and the losses for many weeks. Although the loans are only at four per cent the Bunbury Chamber of Commerce has talked a lot about business continuity planning and helping that planning and insuring for such a thing. Some businesses run pretty lean; pretty close to the wind. Again, insurance is a big issue for them. Anything like a grant to help re-establish things or to put out feelers for better loans or assistance to get a better building or talking things through is invaluable. Look at the Australind tornado. There was not one business in the whole thing; it was all just residences. Once businesses are affected the whole community is affected to a degree. I support anything like that that would assist businesses to get back on their feet again because they have not got anything - they have nothing. All they have to do is apply for a loan and get four per cent on it.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** These are primary sole traders, partnerships and those types of businesses?

**Mr Winter:** Yes.

**Mr Kowal:** I dealt with a couple of those businesses that, basically, had to shut down. It is heart-wrenching to have to deal with those types of people. The only thing you can provide to them is that they can get a loan at only four per cent. No way are they going to get a loan.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Because?

**Mr Kowal:** Because they do not have the capacity to repay. There should be something for those people whether it is a one-off grant based on a case-by-case basis. There should be something right at the start to assist those people. Two families that had businesses went off and visited friends and, basically, if it was not for the Bunbury Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Corporation I doubt whether those people would be trading today. They found them premises that they could lease at a reduced rate until they could get back on their feet. The community did come together and some of those great community-spirited people assisted those people to get back on their feet. I believe that we need to cut down on the minefield of paperwork for those people. I know that we really have to allow those people to justify their claims. That needs to be done in a much less bureaucratic way.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Perhaps a one-on-one verbal interview.

**Mr Winter:** Absolutely.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Something where someone can take down the details. That takes the onus off the business owner who has lost his income.

**Mr Kowal:** Online claims. If there could be an officer like the banks have now to say sit down, answer a few questions etc, rather than saying here are 14 pages of forms and go and fill them in. We did provide assistance at our one-stop shop to those people to say that this is what they can claim for and this is what is available, here is some assistance, fill out the forms. It is then up to them to go away and do that process. If you are trying to re-establish your business and all these types of things, the last thing you want to do is a minefield of paperwork to filter through. It will just get left on the backburner.

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**Mrs J. HUGHES:** They get a bit overwhelmed at that time.

**Mr Kowal:** They do.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** They are emotional anyway.

**Mr Kowal:** They really are. We need to get people to justify their claims; that is fair. As you have stated, Judy, if we can have one-on-one or online, then it will be done. That would save a lot of angst in the community.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** I thought your submission was excellent.

**Mr Kowal:** Thank you.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** It brought into account some of the anomalies that we do not hear very often about those individuals who do not fit those pigeon holes. I take that point quite openly and I am glad that you spoke about it. I am very pleased that you are able to fix up some of those things. I agree that they certainly need to be addressed. The other thing I found extremely interesting in your submission was in your recommendations. You talked about disaster relief but not necessarily for weather pattern events. You were talking about technological disasters and civil disturbance. Can you expand on that a bit as to your idea of what your thinking was on those issues?

[12.30 pm]

**Mr Winter:** We really have to wake up and smell the coffee because disasters are probably the biggest issue we face. We are very much a built-up community in which many people live close together. Trucks that carry all sorts of chemicals trundle past our community. A wave of terrorism is sweeping the world. I am not saying that Bunbury is susceptible to it, but Perth is susceptible to it. London and Spain might have once thought they were not susceptible to it either. A major explosion occurred at Coode Island in Victoria in 1991. What would happen to our city if a major explosion occurred that was caused not by a natural disaster but was a technological disaster as a result of a political act or whatever? That scenario does not seem to fit into these types of recovery relief arrangements. This committee is looking into natural disaster relief arrangements. I think that the word "natural" should be dropped and the inquiry should look into disaster relief arrangements. A disaster could be anything. A community could be devastated by many means. I am positive that the state government would not want a community of several thousand people to wither and die and for those people to filter back into the metropolitan area. I am sure that the government wants regional communities to be sustained. The federal government must look at this too. The word "natural" must be dropped. Natural disasters can be huge, but they are not the be-all and end-all of the types of disasters that could affect a community, particularly in this day and age, because chemicals and all sorts of things are being used and also because of the political cycle.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Do you believe that the committee must be all encompassing and include natural disasters and all those other definitions?

**Mr Winter:** Absolutely.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Do you wish to make any other comments?

**Mr Winter:** I have a comment that was probably not in the submission, which I have made a note of. I would like to leave a couple of documents with the committee before I leave.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** I was going to ask if you wanted to table those, so thank you.

**Mr Winter:** I have learned from my studies and from talking to psychologists that recovery is not all about bricks and mortar, although that plays a big part; it is also about community development. Members may have heard that the City of Bunbury had a community development program. However, it is not mentioned in here. As I said earlier, if I was in need of recovery, 75 per cent of my wage would be paid during my recovery. I would be told that I had done a great job and that 75 per cent of my wage would be covered for eight weeks. However, there is nothing in the

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committee's terms of reference about re-establishing community development. I will leave the committee with a document concerning the Australian Safer Communities Award that outlines some of the things we have done. We had a photography and art exhibition of the huge fire that occurred at Bridgetown a few years ago. Whether or not the people of Bunbury were affected by the fire, they took photos of various images and submitted them. The awards were presented for several categories, one of which was best story that went with the picture. Some people wrote poems about their experiences. One person wrote about how his 86-year-old father was affected. The father's house had been knocked over and the story was about how the father survived in the following few weeks. The stories are pretty touching. We took the best pictures from the several hundred applications and many people donated prizes for the various categories. The catch was that the best pictures - I did not bring them all in - were peddled around the community for more than a week and were displayed in shopping centres, the art gallery and the council offices. Thousands of members of the community saw the photos and read the stories. That provided closure on the event and gave it recognition. Communities cope with these types of events in various ways, and this was the way we went about it. Many people voted for what they thought were the best pictures and stories and a prize was presented for the people's choice award. The number of people who saw the photos and the interest it generated was absolutely incredible. That was an example of community development. It provided people with closure and recognised the event. We did that rather than just let it peter out. There is no mention of the community development side of the equation in the committee's terms of reference. I am an emergency manager and a fiery from way back. I am used to holding hoses and feeling the heat from a fire and smelling the smoke. We put out the fires and then we go home. Community development is a whole new ball game to me and I have learned over the past three and a half years that is a huge element of emergency management. That is why we embraced the community. Since I have opened up the big picture of community development and have exposed all facets of it, I have seen that community development is an integral part of emergency management.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Another facet of emergency management is when members of the community give thanks to others in the community. That can be in the form of staging a concert or holding a sausage sizzle or whatever. The community members, business members and the public can be thanked for their contributions. I gather that that is not included in any event either. By displaying the disaster, had people acknowledged it and are they prepared for the next one? Was it a matter of the community accepting that that type of event can happen to them?

**Mr Winter:** That is exactly right.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Have there been any benefits from that?

**Mr Winter:** I think so. We are still doing quite well with emergency management and remain involved with the community. I am still asked to speak to community groups about emergency management. I tell them that we will do what we can to help them but that it is also about them and how they prepare themselves and their families. I tell them that they must be on the front foot when something happens because it does not matter whether the state government or the federal government say that they will provide every cent we need for trucks and equipment. Even if that were the case, we still would not be able to cope with a significant disaster. Everyone must learn to help themselves and be prepared. We have all heard about the fire and evacuation messages etc. We have lingering afterthoughts. I do not think that the community has forgotten it. It was a huge disaster for the people involved and for us.

**Mr Kowal:** The photographic exhibition brought home the gravity of the disaster to the rest of the community that had not suffered. They realised that it could happen to them. It is incumbent on the emergency committee, the sub-committee and the recovery committee to keep those things in the forefront of the community's mind. They must remind the community that this type of disaster has occurred and can occur again at any time. The local government, the local HMAs and the people

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responsible must continue to make the community aware of its responsibilities regarding flood, fire or any other natural disaster or man-made disaster that could occur. We have that opportunity. If we do not keep reminding the community, it will have forgotten about it and will not be prepared.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Thank you very much for your valuable contributions today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of typographical errors or errors of transcription or fact. New material cannot be introduced and the sense of the evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide any additional information or elaborate on particular points, you should submit a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration. If the transcript is not returned within 10 days of receipt, it will be deemed to be correct.

**Hearing concluded at 12.40 pm**

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