

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN  
AT KARRATHA  
TUESDAY, 8 AUGUST 2006**

**SESSION FOUR**

**Members**

**Ms K. Hodson-Thomas (Acting Chairman)  
Mr S.R. Hill**

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)  
Mr M.J. Cowper (Deputy Chairman)  
Mrs J. Hughes**

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**Hearing commenced at 11.30 am****THOMPSON, MR GUY STEPHEN****Director, Technical and Development Services, Shire of Roebourne, examined:**

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Welcome to the hearing today. 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 contempt of Parliament. Have you completed a "Details of Witness" form?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Did you receive and have you read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes, I did.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** We have a series of generic questions. I do not know whether they have been provided to you, but we will just run through those.

**Mr Thompson:** Yes; I was hoping you had questions. I only have some notes, because it was a bit last-minute.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Would you mind giving us a brief overview of your local government area in terms of emergency services?

**Mr Thompson:** Our local government has for a number of years operated a local emergency management committee, which has members from a range of emergency service agencies and from a range of towns within the shire. We are probably somewhat different from many single-town locations in that we have fire brigades and SES brigades in a number of towns and we have a series of plans that are a little bit discrete for different towns. The arrangements are slightly different in each of the towns. Apart from our local regional FESA office, we have no career fire people at all anywhere in the community. So, all of our fire services, our State Emergency Services and our ambulance services are all volunteers. A significant number of people in our community are mining company workers working 12-hour shifts, so the volunteers are placed under a fair amount of pressure. I am certainly aware that a number of our volunteers are in fact fire people, SES people and ambulance drivers all in one, so they are obviously kept reasonably busy. Our prime risks in emergency management, although we have many, relate to cyclones, storm surges, earthquakes and tsunamis, so that is probably the focus, although after the amount of rain we had in the recent cyclone season, fire will be an interesting exercise this coming summer because we have fuel loads that are unheard of. We do not have massive tree canopies and the sorts of things they have in the south west, but certainly the low-level stuff is now head high instead of waist high, so things may be interesting this year.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** What about the industry locations?

**Mr Thompson:** Industry-wise, we now have a sub-group, which is the Burrup Industries Emergency Management Committee - it is an industry-focussed LEMAC. It was started after a study to identify some of the industry-related stuff representing a significant risk. Clearly, if something like Woodside's gas plant has some sort of major emergency, our local volunteers are out of their depth. Resources, training and numbers would not be able to do that. The Burrup industries group, which I sit on as well, is focused on linkages between the various industry groups so that they can support each other, predominantly on the Burrup, but also around the port, and

particularly with the increasing numbers out there. We now have Burrup Fertilisers as well. Although each of the groups has its own emergency plans, as their various regulators require them to have, there is no linkage or connection between the Hamersley Iron plan and the Woodside plan. There are now starting to be some of those synergies.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Is that a concern to the local authority?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes, it is. There have been lots of events, but the *Nego Kym* episode, where we had a ship on fire and a number of people killed, identified for us that industry probably had different expectations of our capability. There was an expectation that the community emergency plan would handle that. It did not, and it will not, because we have no capacity to deal with a shipboard fire, as an example. I guess that highlighted to not only industry but also the emergency people within the community the fact that there are some quite big gaps. One of the things is that council actually operates the airport here. We used to have an airport fire service. One of the huge holes in our current emergency planning is in relation to airport-related accidents. We are asking the Karratha or the Dampier volunteer brigade to respond to a potential aircraft incident involving a 737 with 160 people on board. The aviation rescue fire service we had here before could not deal with that. It was beyond their resources. With non-specific equipment, we are effectively reduced to helping the walking wounded, and we can probably stop the fire from spreading beyond the airport and that is probably about it. It is not unusual for a regional airport, but we have had significant passenger growth here in the past 12 months, moving possibly around 300 000 passengers through our airport this year, which is starting to get back on the fringe again for a rescue and fire fighting service. The trigger in the legislation is 350 000. That is the point at which air services are required to put the service back in. The council here was of the opinion that it did not want to be without a fire service, and we in fact tried to see if we could install our own aviation fire service. It is a very difficult task. The guys at Broome have actually done that. Broome and Norfolk Island are the only two in Australia under the current legislation that can in fact have a private service. The air service has to provide it, and I think the cost here was something like \$1.6 million a year to provide a fire service, which is slightly more than it costs us to run the airport. It becomes an interesting balance. Dealing at the emergency level, even with a fire service here, they still struggle. It makes a significant difference. If there is a major crash here, we will still struggle.

In terms of emergencies generally, our community capacity to deal with anything drastic is limited by our hospital and medical staff. With three or four critically injured people, they are at capacity. That is where they finish. They then need outside assistance, or to transfer people because they just do not have the resources in the hospital to deal with more than three. In a fire, or even in a major car accident, if more than four are injured, the potential for someone to die here is probably higher than elsewhere. That is the stuff we live with.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Where I am coming from is that you obviously have massive industry on your doorstep. We have had a couple of people come before the committee who are concerned that no-one really knows who has got what equipment. Some of that concern has been expressed to us.

[11.40 am]

**Mr Thompson:** It is a fair concern. I guess I would probably have some more of an inside line on that, as I am sitting on the industry committee. That is not organised yet, but certainly the mechanism is now in place for dealing with it, and it is progressing. The problem with a lot of it is that the companies are a bit loath to demonstrate exactly what their capability is, for whatever reason. The sceptic in me says it is probably because they are perhaps not where they think they should be. That is only my opinion on whether that is the case. Certainly it is slow progress. The across-fence stuff is very difficult. Woodside is not all that interested in having anybody come onto their plant, even in an emergency, and even it is just for support and assistance. Woodside is of the opinion that it should be within its gates and therefore contained. Probably the oil and gas stuff

represents what would be a higher risk than obviously the iron ore or the salt. That is likely to be the style of event that we could probably handle - you know, someone gets hurt, gets run over or crashes a work vehicle. It is not a lot different from a community-based injury where you could have a bus crash or a car crash. It is the oil and gas stuff that is certainly different. There is a reasonably widely-held belief that Burrup Fertilisers represents a significant risk. It has emergency plans, and certainly I have been privy to those. It has done as much as it seems to be able to do to mitigate the risk.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Obviously both the Australian government and the state government are concerned, particularly since 2001, about terrorism opportunities. If you look at what you have in your backyard here, if a terrorist wanted to have a major impact, it would obviously be to hit the gas facility or the fertiliser facility. Therefore, you need to look after your volunteers, for one, who would have to go in to try to support that disaster.

**Mr Thompson:** I guess again, being involved with the emergency management stuff at a more finite level than just staying within the community, you probably end up with a different perspective, because you get to understand what is capable of being done and what is not. I would say any terrorist activity, apart from a minor skirmish, is probably beyond our control anyway. If we struggle when three people are involved, then when it is 150 it is not really an issue. Well, it is and it is not, but it is not something we can get our head around and say if we upscale and double our resource capability, then okay, we can handle six, when we cannot handle 150. It is an interesting thing. Nevertheless, clearly we have some critical infrastructure here that is a potential target. Our airport attracts a reasonable amount of attention from DOTARS in terms of our security provisions. Interestingly, we are a security categorised airport and have been for a long time. However, we have not received any funding at all to assist with upgrading that, despite the fact that we have nationally critical assets adjacent to our facility. That is the motivator for saying that we need to do something at the airport, yet there is no funding available at all. It is all resourced by council from funds derived from the airport. We are in the difficult category of airports - there are 39, I think, across Australia - that were already categorised; therefore, we are not eligible for any of the funding for new entrants. That means that with the \$34 million or \$39 million - I always get the numbers around the wrong way - that was made available, we are not eligible for that in any shape or form.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** That is quite amazing.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Yes, it is.

**Mr Thompson:** Yes. So, there are 39 airport owners that are not real happy about it.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Guy, can you just give us the boundaries of the Shire of Roebourne?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes. Size-wise, we are 15 000 square kilometres. Basically, going south we go nearly to the Pannawonica turnoff on the highway, so Pannawonica and Onslow are outside our shire; going north we go just past Whim Creek, so about halfway to Port Hedland; and inland we go out to basically the start of the Millstream-Chichester National Park. In round terms it is about 300 kilometres north-south and about 500 kilometres east-west. As I have said, we have five towns: Dampier, Karratha, Wickham, Roebourne and Point Samson. We also have the historic settlement of Cossack, which is not residential yet but hopes to be soon. That will have some interesting sort of stuff.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Guy, can I just change tack a bit. The coroner and the Auditor General have both expressed concern at the current fire control arrangements in Western Australia. They have both criticised the fact that local government, CALM and FESA could all be in control of a fire at the same time, particularly when the fire is crossing different land tenures. It has been suggested that FESA be empowered to take control of a fire from local government, or CALM, when FESA considers this to be necessary. It is anticipated that the power would only ever be needed to be used

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two to three times per year. CALM and some local governments oppose FESA being given this power. Does the Shire of Roebourne have a view on this issue?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes, we do. We have a memorandum of understanding, which is a standard thing, in terms of handover to FESA. From our organisation's perspective, we would be more than happy to hand over control to FESA. We do not have resources. Another part of my role is that I am the council's chief bush fire control officer. I do not own overalls or boots and do not intend to be out fighting fires. From a management perspective, I am happy to deal with the issue of the resourcing that council can provide to support it, but in terms of being a pure fire manager, we would be more than happy to have FESA take control. We have signed the necessary documentation to allow that to happen, and then effectively it is a management decision at a particular event as to when that actually occurs. We have had events. The most recent bushfires we have had were about 18 months ago, adjacent to the town. Mike, who has just given evidence as the local fire captain, was running that event. I went out to the event and basically assisted him in terms of resource provision. Technically at that point in time I was still controlling the event, because we did not have all this stuff in place.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** But you were happy for him to take control?

**Mr Thompson:** Absolutely. He has appropriate training and the necessary understanding to ensure that where he is putting people is the most advantageous and is also the least risk. I have some knowledge of that through past experience, but I am not necessarily going to be the face that is always the chief bush fire control officer in our organisation. We have had people in the past who have had no fire experience at all. Therefore, someone from FESA who has that ability would certainly be a better choice. That is our opinion. Some of that has to do with the nature of the fires here, but certainly we would not be advocating that we have control. We have one bush fire brigade here that is in Point Samson. That is fairly new. They have only just had their shed completed. They have a vehicle and they have a reasonable number of members. That is the only town that is outside of a gazetted fire district, so we have an understanding that the Wickham brigade will cover Point Samson in terms of a structural fire, but if there is a fire in the town or a scrub fire within the community, then we now have a bush fire brigade that can respond to that. They are driving a fast-attack, so they have 300 litres of water and two people. That is the sum total of the assault capability. They would call on support from Wickham, which has a lot more resources. We would be quite happy for that to happen.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** FESA has suggested that it be empowered to request the development of fire management plans for landowners when the land is CALM-managed land, plantation land, or land used for pastoral or grazier purposes. The fire management plan would be requested only if FESA considered this to be necessary to mitigate the risk of fire to life and property; for instance, in areas of high risk. Do you have a comment on this proposal?

**Mr Thompson:** Only that we would be supportive of planning for any emergency event, and fires would be the same. In terms of land issues, certainly we have pastoral stations here, some of which are run by the mining companies, so they are capable of producing plans and capable of maintaining them. It is not as though they are struggling pastoralists who have 5 000 beasts to sell and that is their only source of income. In my opinion they should be able to do that. Our biggest issue in terms of landholding is probably the unallocated crown land, which in theory we are responsible for, but we have no resources to deal with firebreaks and the like on that sort of land. We can claim up to \$6 000 a year from FESA, which we have been doing, and we use that for strategic firebreaks at various locations. It is a bit grey in terms of who is responsible. It is in theory crown land, yet there is no resourcing to deal with it. Again, in that area we get assistance from the regional office of FESA in terms of where we should technically put the breaks. We have no issue with FESA having control of that.

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**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Is that sum of \$6 000 allocated to all local authorities or just to you in particular? How is that determined? Are there any criteria for the allocation of that money?

**Mr Thompson:** Those are good questions. I do not have the answer to any of those, I am afraid.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Sorry, Guy.

[11.50 am]

**Mr Thompson:** They are good questions. I do not know the answer to any of them I am afraid. I think it is a maximum allocation that is claimable for clearing up crown land and I think it comes from the Department of Land Information, and locally from FESA. Tony Taylor is the manager from whom we get that information. He would be able to provide the committee with information about where that comes from. I am sorry but I do not know.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** I do not know how many pastoralists and graziers are in the Roebourne shire but the Pastoralists and Graziers' Association of Western Australia believes the current legislative arrangements for firebreaks to be impractical. However, it argues that fire management planning should be voluntary because it is concerned that compulsory or mandatory fire management plans could result in an increase in litigation. The committee would be interested in the shire's comments about the concept of voluntary plans for pastoralists. As I said, I am not sure how many pastoralists or leases there are in the shire because, as you indicated, many of them are controlled by mining companies.

**Mr Thompson:** Off the top of my head there are probably eight or nine, of which I think three are the main leases. If we tracked them back, we would find that three or four are actually Hamersley Iron owned.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Do you think the remainder should be compulsory fire plans or voluntary plans?

**Mr Thompson:** That is an interesting question. I would like to think that everything could be done voluntarily and that people would see the merit in doing that. Inevitably, we end up with the hard nut that will not play the game, in which case it is probably reasonable that there should be a fallback position that says we must do something. We have a similar exercise with cyclone risk, and cyclone inspections are undertaken each year. Inevitably, some people do not recognise that the exercise is about their safety and that of their neighbour; therefore, we rely on the legislation. On balance, we probably need the legislation and those administering it need guidance about how it is to be applied so that the big stick is the last resort. I do not think we can do anything without it, although it should not necessarily be the first line of action.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The Conservation Council of Western Australia and the Environmental Defender's Office have discussed the concept of zoning as raised in the COAG report inquiry into bushfire litigation and management. They spoke about this tool applying to fire management plans. In effect, they refer to the primary objectives of the first zone being protection of life and property, the second as a balance between these components and biodiversity and the third probably more of a wilderness area in which there is significant focus on biodiversity. Do you have a perspective on that?

**Mr Thompson:** I am not aware that we have any wilderness areas that represent any major threat, so it is probably not a big issue for the Shire of Roebourne. Fundamentally, something probably needs to be done about fire management from an environmental perspective because effectively it is open slather. I am not sure how we do that. Potentially incorporating some management into a series of management plans is probably the best option. I am loath to say that, having recently struggled with applying some of our own environmental requirements in terms of reporting. They can become onerous and are not necessarily directly applicable to the task at hand. I guess it is a question of getting that balance right.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I am aware that, in New South Wales, fire management plans are prepared by committees whose members represent both environmental, economic and social

concerns. Victoria also uses a system of representative committees with membership from fire authorities, local government, conservation authorities and so forth. In both states this offers the opportunity for fire management plans to achieve the dual objectives of conservation of the natural environment and protection of human life and property. Given that this arrangement is successfully operating in some other states, and that there is good evidence of interagency cooperation here in WA, do you see something similar being a viable option via management planning in WA?

**Mr Thompson:** I think we already have the capacity to do that within the local emergency management committee. We have operated a bushfire committee here unsuccessfully. They inevitably end up with the same set of faces that are at the local emergency management committee. Given that a significant proportion of our people involved in emergencies are volunteers, we struggle with meeting times. Across the spectrum of our local emergency management committee about half are volunteers and half are involved in that role as paid officers, so we ebb and flow between day and night-time meetings. A lot of vollies turn up at night and none of the paid people, and none of the vollies and a lot of paid people turn up during the day. We tried running a bushfire committee but the same three or four faces turned up regularly at our local management committee. As a result, we chose to disband that and basically incorporate all of that within our local emergency management committee. We have developed a strategic plan in the local emergency management committee with significant FESA help and are working our way through the process of emergency risk management for the community, incorporating all the fire planning in that regard. Some of that was self-motivated and some was motivated by the new legislation that has been implemented for emergency management. We are substantially compliant already and dotting i's and crossing t's to get up to speed with the specifics of that. Basically, we run as the new legislation requires. That has not held too many fears for us. Fire is just another emergency and probably not our main issue here.

[11.58 am]

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Guy, you mentioned earlier the gazetted townships you have within the shire. What about the indigenous communities? You have identified some of those communities within the shire. What sort of level of service does the shire provide to support those communities?

**Mr Thompson:** We are fortunate in terms of our communities. We only have three, two of which are within three kilometres of Roebourne, so they are treated no differently from the balance of the Roebourne township. They happen to be a couple of kilometres apart, but we treat them no differently. They are incorporated in all of our emergency plans. The only other community that we have that is outside or not close to a town is on one of the stations; that is probably Cheratta station, and that is -

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Is that pastoral lease controlled by an Aboriginal corporation?

**Mr Thompson:** That is a bit of a grey area at the moment; I think yes. It is in the throes of changing. So that is dealt with as would a pastoral station be dealt with. So we do not have any major issues with Aboriginal communities. I mean that ours in terms of funding attract the remote Aboriginal community status, but remote they are not, and that is a good thing from our perspective because we provide essentially standard town services. They have a weekly rubbish collection service. Our bin truck drives in and empties the bins from each house; effectively all fairly standard.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** I do not think there are too many more questions regarding the pastoralists; you only have a limited number within the shire.

**Mr Thompson:** Yes.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** You spoke earlier about government-controlled lands, particularly CALM. It could be that the Department of Housing and Works has a piece of land and a lot of the time it is exempt from putting in firebreaks. Then you have a neighbouring private landowner who comes to

the shire and says, "Well, why have I got to do it and the government agency doesn't have to?" Does the shire have a comment on that, or would you like to see those agencies come under the same control as private landowners in the shire?

**Mr Thompson:** Certainly. We think we should apply the same rules to all landowners - or persons responsible for land, because often they are not, as in our case it is vested. It therefore needs to be funded within particular agency budgets, or alternatively funded via some central source that says that all government land can access this particular pool of money and if you have a firebreak on Housing and Works' land or on crown land or on a reserve, then you can use the money to deal with it. Central pots of money are obviously big targets and often become the case, and I understand that there are some ramifications for that, but potentially then you say that, in order to access those funds, perhaps you need to have strategic fire plans and identify where they fit in the strategic plan, and therefore you can access the funds. Some hoops are obviously inevitable if you get to that stage, as the agency would have to be jumping through the hoops and the less the better, but I understand you need some controls because otherwise people would just see this pot of gold and go, "Beauty, we can do a whole bunch of other stuff with that."

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Under the current ESL arrangements, local governments must complete an ESL submission on behalf of the SES units in the local government area. Is it necessary for local government to perform this role, given that FESA ultimately decides on how much of the ESL grant funding to allocate to the SES unit? Would it be more appropriate for the SES unit to deal directly with FESA?

**Mr Thompson:** Absolutely. We have an interesting issue in the shire in that our volunteer fire brigade units are all dealt with directly by FESA; and our SES units, of which we have two, provide their submissions to the Shire of Roebourne and we then forward them on for assessment. I can tell you we do absolutely nothing with the information that comes from the SES.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** So you just shuffle paperwork for applications that come in?

**Mr Thompson:** We bundle it into a different envelope, we attach the appropriate forms that we have to fill out, as the ESL allocating body, and we post it to FESA and it is then assessed. If FESA says yes, they get the money; if they say no, they do not get the money. We do not do anything with it at all. It would be infinitely easier if FESA handled that in the same fashion as it handles the fire stuff, because we do not make any assessment - good, bad or indifferent. If FESA says they need eight more vehicles and 500 radios, we go, "Whatever, send it off", and if it is approved, then they get eight more vehicles and 500 radios. We do not have the time particularly, but we do not have the resourcing or the expertise to be saying whether or not the Karratha unit needs two more vehicles. I could not tell you whether they do or they do not.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** But then doing that, Guy, is there some sort of mechanism they should have in place whereby they are dealing directly with FESA, and FESA keeps the shire in the loop to say that there has been a heavy-attack vehicle and other bits of equipment allocated, so that at least the shire then has a clear understanding of what is sitting in the relevant SES unit in the various locations? Is that one way you see it?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes, that would certainly be useful, because I could not tell you now what our SES unit capability is, apart from the understanding I have of where they feature in our emergency plans and, through exercising, I know what equipment they have got; but realistically I could not tell you what their operating protocols are, such as: is this unit responsible for car accidents or is this one responsible for river rescue or search and rescue? They handle that internally and I think, the same as the fire brigade protocols, they should be established by FESA for the location and then resourced accordingly.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** And the shire is just kept in the loop just on an information basis.

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**Mr Thompson:** It would certainly be useful to stay in the loop. It is probably not critical but, given that that would only be an information flow, yes, I think that is sensible.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** As it was a Labor government that introduced the emergency service levy in 2001, what sort of impact has the ESL had on the Shire of Roebourne - the positives and also the negatives, if you have negatives?

**Mr Thompson:** I cannot think of too many negatives. Positives first: certainly it has made the resourcing of our emergency units a lot easier. We used to have an annual healthy discussion, let us say, with our local units about what they should or should not have. We have now got the scenario where at least it is assessed centrally and there is a measure of knowledgeable assessment, if you like. Again going back to the analogy of the radios, we are not in a position to say whether they need them or do not need them. Theoretically, whoever assesses the ESL will probably look at it and say, "Well, there are 20 members in the Karratha thing, why do they need 500 radios? That seems a bit over the top." So that is certainly better. I think the process probably works quite well. You would have the added benefit, in our opinion, if you put SES units in the same category as fire units, that they would all be assessed centrally. Effectively, all local government becomes is a collection house, because at the moment we collect the ESL and send it to FESA. We get a submission from the SES, which we send to FESA; FESA assesses that, and then sends us the money back so that we can pay it to the SES. I am not sure that we need to be in that loop. I think we could quite simply be collecting the money, forwarding it to FESA and then -

**Mr S.R. HILL:** So is the Shire of Roebourne happy to collect the revenue? There are some local authorities that are not too happy collecting rates and taxes on behalf of the Australian government and the state government.

**Mr Thompson:** We have 11 councillors. I would probably get five and six different answers, I would think, if I asked the question. Given that the system is established, talking from a staff perspective, it does not cause us any major grief. Fundamentally, should we be collecting it? There is probably an argument to say no; but we have a lot more other issues to worry about than whether we do or we do not. It is not a logistically difficult exercise. It is a series of payments that comes in, and one payment goes out and an acquittal form is filled in to identify that we collected everything. Again, I think you could probably take us out of that loop completely and we would not be unhappy either.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Under the current system the Fire and Emergency Services Authority pays for the installation, removal and maintenance of fire hydrants in gazetted fire districts. Local government pays for the cost of reinstating pavements. Local government pays for the lot outside the gazetted fire districts. The committee notes that in other states the water body is responsible for the installation and maintenance of fire hydrants. Does the Shire of Roebourne have a comment on this aspect? I know that it is currently a hot issue for the City of Geraldton.

**Mr Thompson:** I do not doubt that. Hydrant maintenance is potentially extremely expensive. Therefore, fundamentally we would like to say it is not our responsibility. As with all things, the shire does not have any issue with doing any piece of work provided it is able to get funding to adequately resource it.

We have an interesting exercise with Point Samson, which is outside the gazetted fire district. Council funded additional hydrants for the town because the Wickham brigade, which provides a coverage on a memorandum of understanding, identified that there were insufficient hydrants to service the town. Council funded additional hydrants and part of that agreement was that the FESA unit would maintain them for it. It is interesting, because lately I have received comments to the effect that the hydrants belong to the shire. It is just a feature of changing personnel in different organisations and retained memory. Fortunately for the Shire of Roebourne I was here when the deal was sorted out, and I can remember that they are not the shire's responsibility. I am able to find the file that says they are not the shire's responsibility.

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It would probably be better to have fire hydrants dealt with by a central agency - be that FESA or even the Water Corporation. I can mount an argument for either one taking responsibility for fire hydrants. The fire service is probably the better authority, given that it has an investment in knowing that they work; the Water Corporation potentially does not. It is not to say that it would not check them properly, but certainly the FESA units have a more vested interest in knowing that hydrant No 26 in that road will actually work. Again it is an issue of funding. I am not sure how many there are, but, from my perspective, if there are 200 fire hydrants within the Shire of Roebourne and one per cent was stuck on top of the emergency services levy to fund the shire to look after these 200 hydrants, it could contract FESA units and a plumber. Options would be available. It is more important to know that they work than to argue about who should be making them work. We will probably get some grey areas and certainly Point Samson is one for the shire. I am sure there are dozens of anomalies around this state.

We have had some interesting things occur in terms of our changing town - its increase - in the current boom cycle. We have had identified deficiencies in fire capability in a number of locations. The shopping centre has just put in a major set of tanks which ups its capacity to the current standard which, from all accounts, it was well below. When the shopping centre was built, it was compliant, but times have moved on.

We cannot have the fire brigade, volunteer or not, not involved. It is a question of how it is funded so that it can be done easily rather than it becoming a chore that it fits in when it can.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Guy, that is the end of the committee's generic questions. Before I close the hearing, is there anything that we have not covered in those questions that you wish to raise?

**Mr Thompson:** I will refer to my notes. The only additional comment I make relates to the local regional office of FESA. I am happy to put on the record our appreciation for its support. From an emergency management perspective, having a number of senior-trained staff based in Karratha serves us extremely well. The local office's resources and its linkage to knowledge within FESA is certainly appreciated by me and the emergency committee. The legwork that enables us to do and council's commitment to it is probably the reason that we are well prepared for the new emergency management legislation.

Primarily, the section of coast from Broome to Exmouth, including Port Hedland, is no different. We get wake-up calls each year on why we should be prepared for emergencies. It happens every year. It is reasonably endemic in most people's operations. The calibre of staff at the local FESA office is really good for us. I put on the record our appreciation for its assistance. That is all.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much. Your contribution has been very informative. Thank you for your contribution to the committee's inquiry. 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 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. Thank you very much for coming.

**Mr Thompson:** You are welcome. Thank you for the opportunity.

**Hearing concluded at 12.14 pm**

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