

# **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE**

## **INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION**

### **SESSION TWO**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN  
AT KOJONUP  
MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2006**

#### **Members**

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)  
Mr M.J. Cowper (Deputy Chairman)  
Mr S.R. Hill  
Ms K. Hodson-Thomas  
Mrs J. Hughes**

#### **Co-opted Member**

**Mr P.D. Omodei**

**Hearing commenced at 1.35 pm****GOULD, MR RUSSELL JOHN****District Manager - Operation Services,****Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA, examined:****JONES, MR ARTHUR BARRY****Regional Director - Great Southern,****Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA, examined:****LOGAN, MR GARY WILLIAM****District Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Authority of WA, examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demands. 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?

**Mr Gould:** Yes, I have.

**Mr Jones:** Yes, I have.

**Mr Logan:** Yes, I have.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Did you receive and read an "Information for Witnesses" briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

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

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

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

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have had a submission from the Fire and Emergency Services Authority itself, not from the FESA operatives down south. Do you have any opening comments?

**Mr Jones:** Not specifically.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Thanks for coming up. Obviously you understand this is a parliamentary committee which will be reporting to Parliament and that the FESA legislation is due for a change. There has been some conjecture about FESA being empowered to take over fire control from local government or the Department of Conservation and Land Management and that has not been universally met with great acclaim. Do you have a view on that situation? Should FESA be in charge of the whole lot?

**Mr Jones:** Paul, if I may and very decidedly so, there ought to be one authority in charge of fire for various reasons. We have a situation at the moment where CALM is able to take control should they wish. We have the situation of fire and rescue in gazetted areas. We have the situation now of the emergency services units which can go across boundaries and move out right across local governments. I think that situation has become confusing, especially when we have litigation and other issues surrounding some of that. Yes, there ought to be one authority, but I would underwrite that by saying that such an authority is one that really comes through mutual agreement and understanding with local governments from a cooperative point of view.

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**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** In the case where there is a fire on or near CALM land, CALM is saying that because they manage the area on a day-to-day basis they would have better knowledge of that terrain etc and should have control of that fire. Should the legislation be flexible to the extent that when a fire is on CALM land, CALM manages that, or should it be decided at the incident management level? Likewise, with local government the local brigades - in Kojonup in particular - have a very organised brigade and they believe that the legislation should be flexible to allow them to continue what is best practice in their area. Do you agree with that?

**Mr Jones:** I think there is provision for flexibility. In relation to the CALM situation, CALM are not likely to take control unless they can, for a start, have a CALM officer present. That flexibility needs to be passed across to the FESA-local government agreements that can be built into legislation. I do not know whether Russell wants to add anything to that.

**Mr Gould:** My personal opinion is that we work very cooperatively anyway at major incidents and as the act reads now CALM can assume control if the fire is threatening. I know that in some instances in the wheatbelt they have made it quite clear that they do not have resources in that area. Therefore, they would be looking in the first instance to local government to manage incidents on their property, on their estate. That is where the flow-on is for them to start working together. Again, as I say, in reality that is in fact what happens.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I will give you a hypothetical: what would happen if there is a big fire in the hills, as there was a couple of years ago - I think CALM was deemed to be in control of that. The scenario is that the weather is like it has been in the eastern states in the past few weeks and we have gone very close to calling in the eastern states to assist us fight that fire. It is a day of 40 degrees-plus with firestorm-type weather and there are six, seven or eight other fires in the south west region. How do you envisage that would be handled given that all of the resources of CALM were virtually focused on the hills close to Perth?

**Mr Jones:** In that situation we would need to carry out our resourcing through the state coordination centre in Perth. That is an innovation that has come about partly because of criticisms coming out of the Auditor General's report and the coronial inquiries. That is a structure that is now in place and we can only go so far before that resourcing should come outside of our patch. The same applies to the CALM situation.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are there any more questions?

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** In regard to FESA's role with volunteers, how would you see your role in coordinating, managing and training volunteers in a real sense?

**Mr Jones:** Our role with volunteers is very much one of support. We work very closely with the local governments, as we should, to provide that support to them as is agreed to be necessary. I use the word "agreed" because it is a consultative process that is working between those local governments and FESA. Initially, that support would come through training for whatever is needed. Certainly there are strengths and weaknesses in training across the board that need to be addressed. We have to work through that. Once having established the training, that same support and cooperation needs to flow through for incident management. I believe it does and it flows pretty well from the regional office to local governments in this area.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Would you propose then that the funding for those initiatives come through FESA or local government?

**Mr Jones:** I think it is a bit of a mix of both at the moment. Certainly within my regional budget there are funds for training. Likewise under ESL there is the opportunity for local governments to obtain funding as well to assist.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Following on from that, Mr Chair: Mr Jones, what sort of impact has the introduction of the ESL had on your region?

**Mr Jones:** I think the introduction of the ESL had a marked upgrade of facilities across the whole region. Russell could perhaps give me better figures from a fire point of view. I would ask Gary to comment on the impact from the State Emergency Service's point of view.

[1.45 pm]

**Mr Gould:** In terms of the provision of equipment, I cannot give you the exact figures at the moment - in fact I am chasing them up for a meeting that we will be having in March - but they highlight to some extent how effective the levy has been in getting some better standard of equipment. Obviously there are some local governments that feel they still are not getting what they should be getting, and no doubt you will hear about that, but essentially what we are trying to do is address the age and condition of the equipment, and also look more strategically at where some of the equipment should go. In that respect we are getting some quite good pieces of equipment now, dispersed throughout the region. As time progresses we are going to try to target the "higher" fire threat areas to upgrade equipment there. In the case of Kojonup we have acquired a piece of equipment for Muradup in recent times that was never on the radar for the ESL, so we see that as a positive. We are trying to address where the major threats are, and that is based around communities and probably diminishes more as you head out into the wheatbelt. In this district we deal with 30 local governments. That is the reason we have presented you with that map, just to give you an idea. It runs from Esperance to Denmark and then through to Boddington. There is a range of different needs within the brigades. However, the short answer is that I think the ESL has been very beneficial, and I can see it increasing our capabilities in the future.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can you give us an idea of the type of equipment that has either been replaced or provided for the first time?

**Mr Gould:** Yes, certainly. As I have said, we have tried to target the areas in which the fire dangers are, and that is generally along the strip where you have timbered country and access has been fairly ordinary. As you get more into the wheatbelt you get more into farmer-dependent type of country that is basically self-sufficient and people look after themselves extremely well. The type of equipment has been more of the heavier type. I am not sure whether you are au fait with the 3.4 -

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have had that explained to us.

**Mr Gould:** Good. We are really looking at the larger style of truck that gives us a bit more water capacity and better pump capacity to deal with the myriad issues that we deal with, from burning trees through to a hayshed or a house that is on fire, and we use those types of appliances in that regard. Also, we see them as a bit of a focal point for the brigade, because we generally find that there will be only one in a particular area, and that will be very well supported by the local farmers and their equipment. That is pretty universal across the region, but perhaps with the exception of somewhere like Albany, which is more brigade focused with not so much support from the local population. That is the range. There are generally not many smaller appliances. They are mainly the larger style.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Obviously the FESA act is due for review, and there is a move to amalgamate the Bush Fires Act and the Fire Brigades Act in new legislation. The perception among some groups is that there seems to be an arm wrestle between FESA and CALM and the brigades. There is also a concern among the volunteer bush fire brigades in particular that if the bureaucracy imposes its will too greatly on the brigades, they will lose volunteers. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr Jones:** In the first instance, I said before that there should be one agency responsible for fire. With regard to the arm wrestle between FESA and CALM, CALM is a land manager. The responsibility for fire should rest with FESA, albeit it should utilise CALM personnel to assist. I can see the potential for an exodus of volunteers should legislation come in from a heavy-handed

point of view. I come back also to the point I made earlier that the implementation of legislation should be through mutual cooperation and understanding. I remember standing at a DOAC - a district operations advisory committee - meeting and speaking to my fire chiefs assembled. There is an old saying that goes, "Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk ahead of me; I may not follow. Walk beside me and be my friend." The principles associated with that were the cooperation between FESA and the local authorities in working together for the betterment of our communities.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Is that out of the *Bible*?

**Mr Jones:** No, it is not. I do not have a clue where it comes from. It is one I have picked up somewhere along the line. With respect, Tony, I think Gary wanted to comment on the impact of the ESL on the SES in particular, so perhaps he could have that opportunity.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr Logan:** From an SES perspective, and from my background as a volunteer for 22 years with one of the units, I must say that the need to do a lot of fundraising was a big issue for us all of the time. The Albany unit is concerned with the operational needs and the fundraising needs, as well as trying to get equipment and facilities and all those sorts of things, and we had to make conscious decisions not to buy equipment and stuff like that. The ESL has enabled the units to buy not so much the big-ticket items such as the vehicles and all of that but the smaller stuff such as the rescue and hydraulic equipment that they need. It has allowed them to focus more on the operational needs, and also to assist their communities by going out and being present in the community without the burden of having to fundraise and go for lots of money through sausage sizzles and all those sorts of things. Therefore, their role has changed over the years since the ESL has come in. I think it has been positive, and it has been positive from the unit perspective as well.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** With regard to the State Emergency Service volunteers, is there an undercurrent of disquiet about Big Brother, being FESA, coming in over the top and perhaps gobbling them up by being involved with the fire brigades and the SES units?

**Mr Logan:** That has not been the case in the great southern. It has been more a case of working hand in hand with the units. My role as the district manager has been to go out to the eastern side of the district, and Lynda, the other district manager, goes out to the western side. We have about half the units each. We have worked fairly closely with those units, and we have a strong rapport with them. From that point of view they do not see it as us taking them over or anything like that. It is more working hand in hand with them and assisting them.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** So there has been no talk of people leaving the volunteer service if there is a restructure?

**Mr Logan:** Not at this stage, no. Obviously there are some loyalties with my being from the SES, and there are some loyalties in some of the units that I have. There are always some personal loyalties. We are actually going through a change with operational services at the moment, and there are some issues with a person who is not necessarily an SES-based person looking after some of the SES units; and it is the same the other way around. However, the majority of the people there see the benefits of that.

**Mr Jones:** I have been regional director here for six years. I was the first of the regional directors to wear all of the hats - red trucks, white trucks, SES and sea rescue. The management within this region is one of trust and delegation to my staff, but also in all the brigades it is an independence and self-management approach so that they are independent in their own management structure, because that same trust is carried through to the management of those people. I think it is fair to say that our SES units are fairly healthy and have been healthy for quite some time. We now have five emergency services units that would probably be the healthiest in the state. As a result of making some tough decisions these units have grown from five to 45. On that sheet, for example, you can

see that there are 208 memberships in five emergency services units. That is an average of 40 per unit. That has come about in the past few years. There is a fair bit of growth in that situation.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can you explain what an emergency services unit is compared with a bush fire brigade?

**Mr Jones:** Yes. Bremer Bay, for example, used to have an SES unit and a bush fire brigade. We brought them together. It now also has a sea rescue brigade. The unit is now a combination of bush fire brigade, SES and sea rescue, and it is about to move into its new headquarters. Jerramungup has a bush fire brigade and SES. Tambellup, which is the newest one that is about to be launched, is a bush fire brigade with a road rescue responsibility. Kondinin is SES and a bush fire brigade. Hyden is also SES and a bush fire brigade, but it can have fire and rescue in there as well.

[1.55 pm]

**The CHAIRMAN:** So they are just combined units.

**Mr Jones:** They are combined units capable of undertaking the appropriate roles for which they have been trained in that community.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** In relation to the ESL, I heard a comment before that you are better funded now than previously. Has there not been an impact of the fact that we have a situation where the replacement program is not continuing?

**Mr Gould:** In the past to my knowledge there really was not a replacement program. FESA initially set up a 16-year replacement based on maybe a half-block where they actually moved appliances around to give it equipment in some areas. Prior to that though, in terms of the bushfire scenario, it was a local government issue. In fact, they actually determined when and how or where they would have equipment and when they would replace it. So this is just a new - I guess as a result of the ESL - 16-year plan that has been developed.

**Mr Jones:** Again, Murray, it has been pretty ad hoc, and whether you like the system or do not like it, at least now there is a system, which is starting to bring things together. If I can refer to the State Emergency Service, there was nothing within the State Emergency Service for a replacement program. About 18 months ago we initiated a whole investigation into resources to risk so that there now will be a replacement program to address the needs of the State Emergency Service. It has been a long time coming; it was not there before and it is essential that there be something there. That is happening.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** Gary, when you apply to the ESL at the moment, it goes through local government, does it not?

**Mr Logan:** That is correct, yes.

**Mr S.R. HILL:** What are your thoughts on perhaps the SES applying directly to the ESL? Instead of the local government preparing a submission, the SES would prepare the submission?

**Mr Logan:** In some areas where the relationship between local government and the SES units is not that strong, then that would be a good move at the end of the day because of the fact that the units themselves come not to us, but basically we are administering them anyway and we deal with them all the time, so that financial step would not be huge. From my point of view, we go out and actually deal with their units and assist them through the ESL process - and also the local governments if they need a hand. Some are really good and some do not necessarily have a full understanding of what the roles of the SES are. So from that point of view, having the ability for the units to apply direct to FESA and then managing the money is a better option for some of the units.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** There is quite a bit of evidence that shows that, as the suburbs creep further out into the brigade areas where bushfire control officers are being replaced by FESA officers, there

is some disquiet among those brigades, particularly where for a long time they have been controlled by the same kind of people who have been there for maybe 20 or 30 years. It seems to be there is the potential to lose volunteers as a result of FESA spreading out into those brigade areas. How would you see that being properly managed so that we do not lose those volunteers?

**Mr Gould:** I am trying to picture it in the case of our area than the metropolitan area.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** It is probably more so in Serpentine, Rockingham and Murray.

**Mr Gould:** Frankly, I have not really worked in those areas. Most of my career has been bush based.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** What is the solution though? Give us a solution.

**Mr Gould:** I think there are a lot of things. It is just talking and actually working at some of it. The communication issues are the same and are important in all this development. Interestingly, talking about issues between CALM and FESA, again I think it comes back to very much sitting around together and formulating some of these things. Egos aside, I mean that is really where it has got to go. I think that is one of the biggest issues we face on a day-to-day basis. It is just sitting down, talking the situation out and actually coming up with some good resolutions.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I think you are right. These guys over here going to be in charge of the new legislation. They are going to have to justify why big brother is wrecking the volunteer system in Western Australia.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Thanks, Paul!

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I was just joking! However, can you see what I mean? The major inhibiting factor with the review of this legislation is the threat that we may lose volunteers and we may lose that volunteering sentiment. Obviously in particular FESA is seen as being big brother taking over the volunteers' domain. So how are you going to guarantee that you can break down that concern?

**Mr Jones:** That is a good challenge, Paul. That is an excellent challenge, and I do not know what the answer is.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** We can sit on this side and criticise.

**Mr Jones:** Yes. Other than the fact that I put a great deal of importance into my management and the management of my staff for what I refer to as the eyeball philosophy - the eyeball philosophy is to actually go and talk to people - we know that Kojonup is a very independent and well organised local authority. It has always been. I taught in the area in 1960 and it was then. It had fire maps in 1960 that would have left the rest of the state for dead because of their efficiency. Those fire maps had windmills, dams and telephone numbers - the whole lot - without the technical expertise that is available now. However, the way that FESA needs to work with Kojonup volunteers is actually to work with them, alongside them, and talk to them rather than legislate to them, because what we need to do has to become an agreed position.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** In other words, it has to be in the legislation to have agreement.

**Mr Jones:** There must be agreements within that legislation, and those agreements must be achieved through consultation.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** I want to follow on from volunteers; the liability issues that relate to private owners with fire equipment, trucks and so forth; how you have your procedures and they have their procedures; and the way that they go about fighting fires and so forth to get a quick response to different fires in different ways according to their locality and their region and the type of vegetation. I would really love to hear your comments on how the public or a private resident could be protected while in a situation in which a quick response is needed. Also, if it were under one umbrella, how would you envisage that protection could work for the private resident?

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**Mr Gould:** Really there cannot be a lot of change because from my perspective on the ground, we are not getting a huge increase in population of firefighters. What is there now is what will be there after the event. I suppose what we see perhaps is that the upper end of incidents - the scale of incidents where organisation is paramount - it is important to not only bring in extra people but also perhaps get some semblance of organisation around an incident. I have been to several along that vein where we will get to a point at which an incident is being managed extremely well locally and only a few factors may need to be changed, and all of a sudden it can become totally different. So from my perspective on the ground I really do not see anything change much up to the point at which the larger-type incidents will need a little more of a formalised and bigger-scale organisational structure; that is, under the AIIMS system. You have probably been aware of the Australian Inter-Service Management System. However, from a community perspective, it really is going to be, particularly in an area like Kojonup or anywhere in the great southern, very much a community-based thing. We are not going to be able to ride in like knights in shining armour, so to speak, to actually put fires out because we provide only the staffing. The equipment we would use would be local. What we would bring to the table or to the incident is perhaps some financial assistance and, hopefully, some expertise in managing the larger-type incidents. I mean, that is what we do for a living and that is, hopefully, what we can bring. Having said all that, irrespective of who is in charge - whether I am in charge - if there is no goodwill, cooperation or if there are other structures to work with when you get there, things will not change because you just cannot magically make things happen just because you may be put into a position of control. It just is not going to happen. It needs to be there from the grassroots up, so to speak. The whole system needs to be very solid and very well coordinated, and you just come in and hope to complement that, as I said, with some advice to the side generally. Normally my guys generally do work alongside the local chief with the incident control and just feed in a bit of information or, as I say, enable outside resources to be brought in to assist. We have done it in many, many instances. Even as early this year at Borden where we in fact were handed control of the incident. I am glad to say that when we got there it was contained, so it was really a matter then of keeping it contained and we were then able to back up and support with additional resources that were not available and were not able to be paid for locally; that is, heavy earthmoving equipment. So, again, in my personal opinion, that is how we need to progress and just get some understandings with the community itself or we will be much the same.

[2.05 pm]

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** At the moment you are not legislative controllers of the situation. Should it be that you become the legislative controllers, of course you would then be open to accepting more responsibility, I guess, should a fire or an emergency situation step up out of control all of a sudden or whatever. Meanwhile, you have had the local community on the ground dealing with the situation. I guess what I am getting to are the liability factors. Should a fire escalate which you had not taken over at a specific time, where does liability lie? Does it lie with the individual because he did not log in through certain procedures or protocols, or does it lie with you because you did not step in earlier? Do you have any comment on the management of it? It is almost a question of when the fire hits the wick. Where does that responsibility lie?

**Mr Gould:** Not really from my perspective, because, again, I will just say to local governments or anyone I speak to, "If you see there is a need" - not down the track - "to get us involved, try to get us involved early in the piece so that we grow with the incident." Quite frankly, there is not much that I or any of my guys can do if it has actually turned really, really bad. You are really there trying to catch up, and it is impossible. No, I would advocate the very early involvement with FESA or with the staff to come along and assist. As the legislation pans out, I do not know how that will actually manifest itself, but I guess up to that point that is the way we like to operate; that is, to actually come along and stand alongside the person who is in control and give him a hand.

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**Mr Jones:** Judy, if I heard you correctly, you were looking for what you might call a changeover mark or something like that.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Yes.

**Mr Jones:** Certainly, they are promoting generic triggers, which might mean that resources are beyond your control, and all of these are very open-ended statements. I think it would be absolutely impossible to set a mark that became the changeover point. Is it 500 hectares? What happens if it goes to 501 hectares? Your legislation would need to be couched in terms of protection for the volunteers and protection for FESA when it came to liability and responsibility, because it would be impossible.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** It is a real balancing act, is it not?

**Mr Jones:** Yes. You cannot have a set of scales that are going to be balanced, because every situation will be different.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** It is going to be very important for community members, if they are in a situation in which they need to become involved, to stop something very quickly, rather than having to go through protocols or procedures, as in the bush they do. They also need to be well protected.

**Mr Jones:** If there is no protection for volunteers, that is when you will get the exodus. There must be protection right across the system, and for us too.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** First of all, in respect of emergency service units, I am very pleased to hear that you have some experiments going on, in particular with the Bremer Bay ones. It is very interesting. I know the committee is travelling to Esperance later this year. I would be pleased to go and look at that one, if that was possible. Just expanding on that further, as you are well aware we have a changing social fabric in regional Western Australia. In fact, a lot of people are moving from the hinterland to the coast. As such, there are always the stalwarts of those towns who seem to be the captains of the fire brigades - the people who go out and look for missing kids. The one that I think has been left out of this - I would like a comment from you, if you would not mind, Barry - is St John Ambulance. Do you see scope in regional Western Australia whereby perhaps the ambulance service could be brought under the umbrella of the ESL and brought into the fold? I know for a fact that ambulance services must go out and raise money for their ambulances and so on. If you like, they are the missing cousin from this quartet.

**Mr Jones:** As a straight answer, I would say yes. If you look at Kulin, for example, it has a co-located facility. In other words, under the one roof you have fire and rescue, SES and St John Ambulance. They are all different; they are all separate. They just share the same building. The people concerned wear all three hats, but they are not an emergency services unit. When they get called out, somebody will put on a fire hat, if you like, and somebody else will put on St John Ambulance overalls. They are still separate but share the same roof, and they have chosen to stay that way. SES and fire could now become an emergency services unit, but St John Ambulance would be left in the cold, and that would be wrong. It would not be effective, if you like, for the community of Kulin. You then go to Jerramungup, where you have, I was going to say, an odd St John Ambulance situation. I do not mean "odd"; perhaps "isolated" is a better way of phrasing it. These are community-based things. There is no reason at all, within that community, that those St John operators should not be part of that particular unit in that particular community. That is a long-winded way of saying yes, but I think there is scope for it, certainly in rural Western Australia.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Has that been canvassed in FESA ranks over time?

**Mr Jones:** I would suggest no, Paul, it has not been canvassed - not to my knowledge. These two guys may disagree with me, but I am not aware of it. However, I think if you were to go to Bremer Bay, for example, again some of the SES people there would also wear St John hats, and they would be happy to be part of the structure. In fact, we actually got some St John funding for the Bremer Bay facility. That in itself is a rarity.

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**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** The situation now with ambulances is changed on the basis that they get so much for every patient they take through to the regional hospital or to Perth.

**Mr Jones:** Yes.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** In some of the smaller towns St John Ambulance volunteers raise money for heart monitoring, bandages and radios, but up the road in the regional centres and in the city they are fully funded. Obviously, it is a St John issue at the moment. However, I think that as members of the community we need to canvass that on a wider basis.

**Mr Jones:** I think it is fair to say that the emergency services unit in Tambellup has largely come about because of the interest of St John Ambulance and the local community. Bearing in mind that it was bushfire and road rescue, they are trying to link the road rescue needs to the St John capabilities to service the community. That is what it is all about really.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I have an issue also with the ambulances, particularly in the rural areas; that is, they are not part of the emergency services or FESA. It is a bit difficult when it is a private organisation and it operates outside. Maybe at some stage we will have to address that. However, at the moment, we are particularly interested in the FESA information and the units. We need to get back to that, because there is not a lot of time left. I have been trying to ask a question about insurance for volunteers. In one of the submissions we have received there is a suggestion that you did not have to insure your full 600, 800 or 1 000 volunteers; you had to insure only a part of them because they are not all on board at the one time. Would you give us an explanation of that, if that is the case? If I turn out 600 or 800 volunteers, will I have half of them running around uninsured?

[2.15 pm]

**Mr Gould:** Essentially, under the Bush Fires Act one of the powers of a fire control officer is that they may call someone who voluntarily put their services forward at an incident. The moment they do that, the shire's bushfire insurance covers that individual. What we are suggesting in our training is to say to local governments, "If you do that, make sure you note names, addresses or whatever you can get of that individual." As you will understand, a lot of the time farmers have visitors from Perth or wherever on board. They jump in the vehicle. They get out there. So that is an issue. Essentially, what we have looked at and indicated is that - I know this in the case of Wagin - when we actually talked about registering a brigade we ended up with about 800 brigade members, which is essentially every able-bodied person in the local government. What we suggest is that they look at the core of people who ordinarily turn out. Personally speaking, I am not sure how it affects things like insurance premiums. I would assume that if you registered 800, that would probably break the insurance bill. Then again, I guess that comes back to risks and all sorts of things. Under the act it is quite clear that if a person is employed, he will automatically fall under the cover of the insurance that the local government carries for bushfires. It is as simple as that. So we just look at saying we will register those people who really need the registration should they be the originating or the first-turned-out person to go to the incident. If they are there and they are not under the direction of somebody, they are exposed a bit.

**Mr Jones:** Tony, I think you have probably targeted a weakness in the structure, and I do not know whose structure and whose weakness it is, but what is happening - if we stay with Wagin and you are insuring 800 people - is that the insurance companies are now taking tremendous insurance premiums for people who are not part of the regular structure within the Wagin organisation. If you insure 400, you are generally addressing the needs of all the proactive people. The person you bring off the side of the road to assist would be covered by taking the name and address and all those personal details. You have a conflict of finance arrangement, I suppose - the insurance of 400 active people and the insurance of 800 people that is encompassing the lot - and straightaway the insurance premiums are skyrocketing to accommodate that. I do not know what the answer is, but it is certainly a weakness in the overall picture.

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**The CHAIRMAN:** Could you maybe spare us a minute to take us through an example? If there is a fire and you bring people in, how do you log them in and log them out, how do you know they are actually covered and all those sorts of things?

**Mr Gould:** This is one of the main reasons that we set up a fairly formal management structure, so you do have people. It does not necessarily have to be just the individual who is a registered brigade member. I should add that even a registered brigade member can in fact employ somebody who has gone through. The main thing is that if you have a good communication system or some sort of instant control set up, that can be relayed back to somebody who could say, "Look, I have X, Y, Z in my car. These people are with me and working with me," and maybe that is done. As long as it is written down as part of the overall management, they are basically on the book, so to speak, for that incident. Then, obviously, after the fire they head back to Perth and that is the end of it. It needs to be quite a formal structure.

**The CHAIRMAN:** From a volunteer's point of view, the more formal it gets the harder it is to be a volunteer. If you have to have paperwork, check ins, check outs and all those sorts of things, that is the sort of thing that puts people off volunteering.

**Mr Gould:** You can make it as hard or as easy as you want really. I suppose if we go to the extreme, I could say that with CALM on the weekend, or last week, we had a major fire in the Stirling Range, that was extremely paper warfare heavy, but it is a requirement that it has in its procedures, as we have within FESA's requirements, to keep very accurate records of what happens on the day. At the time we keep a fairly detailed log of our activities, because you just never know when you are going to need to refer back. Again, as I say, at local government level it is just as simple, I guess, as keeping a log, and we advocate that with all our fire control officers and people at fire, "Just note down important decisions when you make them, and certain things that happened at the time." You do have that to fall back on. God forbid that you actually have to go and refer to that, but quite often it can be very helpful. I guess it is all right until something goes wrong, and that is the essential issue for us. By keeping that record, if it does go wrong, we have something to fall back on that is in fact reality and fact, not supposition.

**Mr Jones:** I have some management cards in my car. I can get some for you afterwards. They are just little. They are called T-cards. If you have some understanding of the incident management structure, then you may be familiar with T-cards. I can make some of these available to you. It just shows you a strategy. It can be used for recording the names of people turning up at that incident and logging them in, so that you know who was there and how many people were there. I will get some to you afterwards if you wish.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you for that. Just to take it a step further, one of the recommendations FESA made in its submission was that it take control of the fire incident. Once FESA takes control, the insurance issue then becomes a FESA issue rather than a local government issue, as you mentioned it is at the moment. If FESA is the body responsible, does it then assume insurance liability?

**Mr Gould:** Under the current arrangements, where we have an agreement with local government that it hands over control, all insurance issues remain with local government. How the new legislation pans out I guess needs to be seen, and whether it is actually incorporated as part of it, I really do not know. As it stands right now, irrespective of who is given control, local government still retains that insurance liability for personnel.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions? I guess that is it unless you have any final comments that you would like to put forward?

**Mr Jones:** No, other than perhaps I should have said earlier that you have all been given a coloured or a black and white copy of our region, I hope. There is a map there, so you can see how active we are. I guess, Shane, regarding ESL, you would be pleased to know that sea rescue, which is a sort

of distant cousin to a lot of this, we now have three Naiad rescue craft on the south coast at Bremer Bay, Albany and Denmark. They are all new and that is all helping. I will go and get you some of that other material, if you want it? Do you want it or not? You would like it.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes. Thank you for coming in.

**Hearing concluded at 2.22 pm**

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