

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PORT HEDLAND
THURSDAY, 10 AUGUST 2006**

SESSION ONE

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**

Hearing commenced at 9.20 am

LOCKER, MR GRAHAM JOHN

Coordinator, Emergency Services, BHP Billiton Iron Ore, examined:

O'CONNELL, MR RICHARD GORDON

Regional Manager, Public and Community Affairs, BHP Billiton Iron Ore, examined:

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: 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 the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Did you understand the notes attached to it?

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: I thank you for the informative site visit we had yesterday, which enabled us to view all the appliances. I understand that you have a document that you would like to table. Perhaps in the first instance you could give us a brief overview of the community and government partnerships for emergency management that you have engaged in, which you provided us with yesterday, so that it can be recorded in the transcript.

Mr O'Connell: Can we perhaps break that into two parts? One part is the area that I look after with the partnerships under our community investments portfolio, and the other is the partnerships that Graham does on a tactical level with the local emergency services.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: That would be fine, Richard.

Mr O'Connell: I will touch on some of the examples of our community contributions and the community investment programs that we run, which we discussed yesterday. BHP Billiton formally has what is called a match-giving program for employees. The funds raised by employees who volunteer time with non-profit organisations in the community are matched by the company and are then paid to that particular organisation. For example, last year the South Hedland volunteer fire brigade received a grant of approximately \$60 000 to support its volunteer efforts. The same funds were paid to the local State Emergency Service, the marine rescue groups and various other groups around town. To complement this, we have a number of initiatives that focus particularly on service delivery in the region. The first example I will give is a memorandum of understanding for health services that we have signed with the state government of Western Australia. It includes funding an emergency specialist to work in the ER of the Port Hedland hospital to deal with trauma and industrial accidents. It is a capacity-building exercise, as well as one to deliver services to the local region. Another example of such a service is the partnership we have with the Royal Flying Doctor Service to service the Pilbara. This comes in two parts. First, we have committed \$1 million towards aeroplanes in the region. Secondly, we fund a caravan that travels for eight months of the year throughout the Pilbara to isolated mine sites, pastoral stations and towns, with, at times, nursing staff and specialists who provide experience and training and also

inspect first aid kits and replenish supplies as required. We think these two examples are important contributions that we make to safety across the region for not only our employees, but also the greater population. I would like to table three documents that give a brief outline of some of those programs. I will mention one last example, and I will table a small flyer on this as well. In terms of our operations and how they impact on the greater community, we put a lot of time and resources into communicating broadly. For example, the increase in our train movements in Port Hedland has an impact at train crossings etc throughout the town, and we work diligently to ensure that communities are aware of changes to these types of things because they have such large safety and community impacts. I will finish with those examples, but I am happy to elaborate further if required.

Mr S.R. HILL: Can you elaborate further on the radio station issue that you mentioned to us yesterday? I understand that your company has a radio station licence in the town and that you can call on that radio station to announce emergencies, and particularly cyclones.

Mr O'Connell: In excess of five years ago, BHP Billiton Iron Ore purchased a radio licence to operate a radio station in the town to be used primarily for community safety. At this stage the radio station is being used by a private operator, but at any time it is required, we can take over that particular frequency and advertise cyclone information or any other safety-related information. Graham and his team have core responsibility for that. I look after the external affairs function, and we are responsible for making sure that the information that we put out is correct. However, that is a 24-hour, seven-day service that is also used at times by various tourism operators to ensure that visitors to the region are aware of conditions across the region.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Graham, would you like an opportunity to expand?

[9.30 am]

Mr Locker: My role is on the other side of the fence from Richard. It is to assist in emergencies and to work with the local organisations, which are FESA, St John Ambulance and the flying doctors, as well as the local emergency management committee in town. We have an understanding and agreement signed by FESA and St John for mutual aid, if required, in or outside our organisation. We are the standby organisations for FESA and St John if they have to go out of town for any reason, and we then look after the towns of South or Port Hedland, whichever one goes, and also with St John. We have been called on a bigger number of occasions to assist St John than we have to assist FESA. When it has been out of town for a number of rollovers, we have looked after the town and attended quite a few situations for it. We also assist the flying doctors if they are not available by transporting patients from the hospital to the airport or from the airport to the hospital. As we said yesterday, before we respond to an outside emergency, our main priority is to make sure that, for our employees, we do not leave our site unattended. That is the focus of that, but on every occasion up till now we have also been out and assisted wherever possible. As to what Richard said about the radio in the cyclone seasons, my role and the role of my group is to plot all the cyclone information that comes down and work with the local State Emergency Service where that is concerned. We also go, on a monthly basis, to the meetings with the LEMC and sit on their committees and represent BHP for all activities associated with that. At the last meeting I also tabled what Richard has tabled there about the movements and the amount of locos that will be crossing the main roads now, because they are increasing, and what we were going to do to reduce that time frame. That has been tabled for all the emergency organisations. What we have also said to them is that if they wish, we can give the local organisations of FESA or St John Ambulance a phone number. If there is an emergency, they can ring the number of the train control that controls the locos, and we can pull a loco up before it gets to a crossing, or they can be given a time frame of movements of those locos. The maximum time that a loco would be going across those road crossings would be around eight to 10 minutes at a time. That has been tabled to the LEMC and also the organisations. It is the same as Richard said; we do accommodate the local people as well, where that is concerned, for emergencies.

Mr S.R. HILL: Has the brochure that you have just tabled gone to every household in the town?

Mr Locker: Every household has received a particular information pack, so to speak, of train movements. We have also been running both print and radio advertising, and we have a number of committee forums, which we chair, and that has been presented there as well, so we have been as extensive as possible. That is just one example of where we see the interface between the company's operations and the community, and we recognise that we need to manage that very carefully.

Mr S.R. HILL: Are there any Aboriginal or remote communities on any of your leases at all?

Mr Locker: Yes, there are.

Mr S.R. HILL: What sort of service is provided to them? Do they have the same sort of access to, say, your company personnel? If you have a community on one of your leases, does the company provide assistance with emergency services equipment?

Mr Locker: What I mean by "on our leases" is that I am on about the ones closer to the track, but I do not know if they are actually on our leases.

Mr O'Connell: I would need to come back to clarify that particular point.

Mr S.R. HILL: That would probably be under the responsibility of the shire and the Town of Port Hedland?

Mr Locker: I believe so, but we will come back to you with that answer.

Mr O'Connell: We do have strong two-way communications with those communities. They generally come forward with requests for infrastructure or materials they require, and in most cases we accommodate those. Examples may be new bedding, vehicles, fridges and those types of infrastructure. I would have to check to be certain what sort of safety or health information and equipment they require. Certainly, the RFDS that I spoke about visits those locations regularly.

Mr S.R. HILL: Graham, just so that we can get it on the record, what are the likely emergency hazards created by your business and what levels of preparedness have you engaged in to counter or address the level of risk? I am looking at the port operations. I would be keen to hear from you what emergency plans would be in place, for example, if there were a fire at one of the fuel reloading depots here.

Mr Locker: As we said yesterday when we were going around and explaining things, we are not the lead conduct authority for the port facilities - it is the port authority there - and the bunkers associated with that come under the port requirements. However, we would attend on their request to go. We have extensive training with the ESOs and the ERTs, which are the emergency backup crews on site, and the teams. They are trained on a regular basis three or four times every month, because we break the shifts up. We have four shifts - A, B, C and D - so that when there are days off, two of those shifts come in. We also do the training at Nelson Point, as well as for the Finucane Island crews, so that is where that is. As for risk factors, we have done extensive work on risks associated with that and what is there. We have tried to eliminate the risks, but on some occasions you just cannot eliminate it. That is why the training is so intense with the fires, especially hot-work fires. That is why every year BHP sends all the ESOs and all the ERT members down to Forrestfield for the hot work. They are down there for three days. That is intense, so that they can get the feeling of really hot fires where gas and running fires are concerned. That will continue. We will not be shying away from that.

As for the risks that we have looked at, we have looked at ship fires alongside the wharf. We did an extensive one on that. I was part of a group that attended workshops in Townsville as well as Port Hedland here with BHP. We brought people over to look at risks in our port facilities. One of the risks was a ship fire alongside. We deemed the risks not so high, because of the amount of training and, shall we say, procedures that they have on the vessels and all the equipment. That is checked

out by the government body, the safety groups on the shipping side of things. To deal with a ship fire is very complex. It is not that you just go down there. What we have in the port to deal with that are four of the tugs, which all have fire equipment associated with cannons etc, and people are trained to use them. If too much water is put onto a vessel, at a certain angle it will tip up. Then we would have problems with it blocking the harbour or collapsing at the wharf. Because the engine compartment is so far down, that is covered by fire detection and suppression systems in a vessel. They would be activated first, where that was concerned, and we would then wait to see, under the control of the ship's master, whether we would go in or we would not go in. With myself personally, if I was not happy with the situation, I would not let any of my crew in there whatsoever. We would prefer to lose a vessel and lose production rather than lose anybody in that situation. The priority for us is the emergency and protection of our people at any scene. They have got suppression systems in there; they can close the hatches and everything like that to extinguish a fire where that is concerned. We do not hold enough foam or anything, even in the Pilbara or Kimberley areas, to mount a massive fire suppression or fill the hole up with high expansion foam. That is why the vessels are on that type of thing. We do go on the vessels and we do look around. We are shown around all the vessels that come in. We pick the Australian ones because it is far easier, because of the language of the situation. We do go on them. We know the layout of the vessels and we know the risk factors of them. Some risks you cannot eliminate; it is just the training associated with that.

[9.40 am]

On the other hand, there is not a great deal of major risk on our site, because we do not carry a lot of flammable liquid. We have got diesel, which is not classified under the legislation as hazardous material. We do not have that. We do mock exercises associated with confined work space with emergency response teams as well as emergency services officers. If a machine is down and we can train on it, we do. When we go for what we classify as level 4-level 5, confined space, we always look at that situation and put a rescue plan in place before the job is physically started. When that kind of operation goes ahead, we go down there at the start of every shift so that we know the movement of the operation and exactly what is going on every day. We attend to that all the time. If we have a major shutdown which will go for about four or five days, we will go to that location where there are confined spaces at the beginning of each shift - that is, days as well as nights. We talk to the supervisor and people there to see what stage they have reached and to look at the progress of the plan.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Fire and Emergency Services Authority cites that it contributes significantly to industry emergency response planning through conceptual, commissioning and operating phases. This includes partnership arrangements, formal agreements, staff secondment and technical advice to industries. Will you let the committee know whether you have received significant support from FESA?

Mr Locker: Where I can say that is that BHP Iron Ore has an agreement and a contract with FESA for the district officer in town. Part of that agreement is that the officer is located at our operation - in our building. He does not operate on site. He is there as an advisory body if required. As I said previously, we go down on a regular basis to Forrestfield for training. We have heard - I would like this verified - that the Forrestfield operation now is being restricted to take industry participants down there. If that is the case, we feel that the Pilbara region will lose a lot of expertise gained from training. We have heard that the Forrestfield operation is getting overhauled and is having problems getting its people through the training. Therefore, it is looking at closing or reducing the activity for us to go down and do. That would be a massive back step for BHP or any other industry in the Pilbara region.

Mr O'Connell: Graham, we have paid for that.

Mr Locker: We pay to go down there. It is fairly expensive. We do not mind that. As I said to the committee, with running fires and everything like that it is a great learning curve for all the ERTs and also the ESOs because they get right up to the face of the flames and they can understand the heat and the sweat. We do it in the evening as well, so they get allocated to night fires as well.

Coming back to what FESA does for us, under the contract FESA undertakes our training associated with breathing apparatus, road rescue, HAZMAT - all that type of thing comes under that. Under our contract FESA provides 157 days of training. The remainder of the time is taken up with training the volunteers, but that comes under the FESA part of the contract, not ours. Yes, we are heavily involved with FESA.

Mr S.R. HILL: Therefore, the partnership has become very successful?

Mr Locker: Very successful. As I said to the committee yesterday, we are in the process now of signing off on another three years.

Mr O'Connell: This is a financially binding contract. We pay for his particular services. It is certainly not a free service; we purchase it.

Mr S.R. HILL: You pay directly to FESA, but the salary is still paid by FESA to its staff member?

Mr Locker: Correct, yes. It is a contract and it pays what it has to pay. We just pay a donation towards the contract.

Mr O'Connell: And we assist with the accommodation.

Mr Locker: Yes, you can get that information from FESA. You can get its contract if you wish to look at that to determine what we actually provide and what it provides. Under the contract we subsidise its accommodation in town.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: And provide an office space?

Mr Locker: That is correct - office space that has a telephone link. People from outside organisations go there to have meetings with him. It is a win-win situation for both sides of the fence. The best part about it is that he knows the ERTs and ESOs as well as others outside.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: FESA recommends the following in documents accompanying its submission to this inquiry -

Provision is to be made to enable privately owned Industry and the Department to enter into an agreement to establish an Emergency Services Unit. The Department is empowered to approve and cancel the approval of the Emergency Services Unit.

The relevant Industry and the Department are to negotiate the terms and conditions related to the establishment and operations of the Emergency Services Unit. If the Industry and the Department do not agree to the terms and conditions, an Emergency Services Unit is not to be established.

The committee is aware that this is about equity of service provision in those areas that are not serviced by state or local government fire units. Is there any comment you would like to make in relation to the question?

Mr O'Connell: There is something I would like to reiterate, and we spoke about it yesterday. As an employer, our emergency services operations are primarily based on our site as a duty of care to employees, contractors and visitors. We would need to be very clear that we can maintain the necessary levels of confidence that we can provide that service to those people on our sites before we move into a formal agreement or commitment. At this stage we have not formally received such a submission to consider.

Mr S.R. HILL: I have a final question, probably for Graham. If, for example, there is a bushfire, what sort of engagement does the company have with the volunteer bushfire people?

Mr Locker: I am a bushfire control officer with the shire. I do that also. We would respond, if requested, to the bushfire. Our little light tender is basically for that type of operation - to go out bush etc. We do go out if requested to do burn-offs with them. Whenever it is possible, we do that. If the fire gets out of control, we are called to assist them. If we are notified by our loco drivers driving up and down the track that a fire has started, they notify me straightaway and I provide that information to the rangers and then they take action. They go out and assess it - that is their domain. We do assist, as I said earlier, wherever we possibly can, unless it affects the safety of our people on site. That is classified as everything. It would be very rare that we would say no to going out to assist anybody outside: We would need to be very unsure about what was taking place if we decided not to attend. A situation in which we would be frightened to go out - there is not one. We would go out there, because the same training is given to FESA outside as it provides to our operation. As soon as they go there or they come to assist us, everything is the same. It is the same as the committee saw yesterday. The fire pumps are fitted out exactly the same as St John Ambulance. All of the people in the town join together, so we all know where to go to look for things.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Graham, just one final question: will you clarify the ESO and the ERT and how many there are on site?

[9:50 am]

Mr Locker: ESO stands for emergency services officer. They are permanently employed and there are 10 of them in my group. ERT stands for emergency response team. They are volunteers within our organisation. They are workers in different departments. It is an advantage for us to have that, because they know certain things that go on in their group area, so it is a lot easier to work with. We call them volunteers, but they are paid to come in on their days off, and they also have the qualifications to operate the same sort of equipment. We have 45 of them in response teams over the site. We will shortly look at increasing that number because of the amount of work that is taking place within the area. More people are coming in now.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Before I make the final closing comments, are there any other matters you would like to include today?

Mr O'Connell: I would like to clarify that the examples we have given the committee today and the explanations Graham has provided are relevant to our Port Hedland operations. We have a new operation, which has another team and another set of staff and employees. We also have satellite mine operations that have separate equipment and people with separate skills. For the purposes of documentation, all the numbers quoted relate to the Port Hedland operation. We also make a substantial contribution to an additional police officer in the town, and we focus on community policing - in particular, addressing anti-social behaviour at Hedland Senior High School. We are also the primary funding source for an indigenous patrol in the town - which operates after hours, primarily in South Hedland - through the Hedland sobering-up shelter, which has links to the police and various youth groups. It is important to understand that the indigenous patrol is part of a broader program and that the indigenous people involved in it also undertake TAFE training to obtain ranger qualifications. It is intended that as they move through the indigenous patrol, they are then able to apply for ranger positions throughout the Pilbara and have a larger career path available to them.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Graham, would you like to have any further comments included?

Mr Locker: As Richard said, the person at Newman mine is equivalent to me, and we operate in the same way. I do not have anything further to add.

Mr S.R. HILL: Richard, would you like to put anything on record about the concerns the company has about the Forrestfield site? Is there anything you would like to place in *Hansard*?

Mr O'Connell: I would like to have a formal understanding about the future of the Forrestfield training facility. If there are to be any moves to reduce industry's access to the facilities, we should have the opportunity to identify other opportunities to maintain the level of training that our people require now and going forward.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming in today. You are doing a great job. I have some closing remarks to make.

Thank you for your contribution to the committee of 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.

Hearing concluded at 9.55 am
