

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE - NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF REPORT

Statement by Minister for Police and Emergency Services

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta - Minister for Police and Emergency Services) [9.06 am]: In 2006, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee began its inquiry into Western Australian natural disaster relief arrangements. It specifically looked into the adequacy of state government assistance under the program for persons affected by a natural disaster. The committee tabled its report, which was the result of intensive, comprehensive and exhaustive consultation and research across the state, in this house on 10 May 2007. I commend the chair of the committee, the member for Joondalup, Tony O’Gorman, and committee members for the priority placed on this inquiry and the thoroughness of their investigations. The committee put forward a report to government making 14 recommendations that are intended to address and resolve any concerns of affected communities. These recommendations are supported in principle and can be grouped around five key themes, being: equitable financial contributions by local governments; improving the dissemination of information to those affected and increasing support to local authorities in time of natural disaster; increasing the amounts available for personal hardship and distress payments; making improvements to enable damaged infrastructure to be upgraded to a more resilient standard; and extra measures, including covering the cost of fencing materials and the secondment of staff to aid local recovery efforts.

The Fire and Emergency Services Authority has already started to work through a number of initiatives, including State Alert and redevelopment of its Internet site, to ensure that comprehensive information is available to the community and particularly those affected by a natural disaster. This includes details of WANDRA objectives, assistance measures, administering agencies, eligibility criteria and application forms.

A response to the committee’s report was due in this house earlier this week and I apologise that it was not finalised by the due date. A number of the recommendations raise significant issues for groups with an interest in our natural disaster relief arrangements, notably emergency service workers, local governments, primary producers and our main state government-body partners. As a result, FESA is still conducting consultations with appropriate agencies and a final analysis of the recommendations. An integral part of this is to consider the implications of changes made this year by the commonwealth government to the natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements, which have direct flow-on effects to Western Australia’s natural disaster relief arrangements. A final response to the recommendations and a report to this house will be forthcoming as soon as possible. Again, I thank the committee for its work and in particular its determination to ensure that Western Australians affected by a natural disaster receive the amounts due to them under natural disaster relief arrangements.