

BUSHFIRE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

41. Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to protecting the community against the threat of bushfires through investment in mitigation, including the \$18 million it is investing to deliver and build Australia's first Bushfire Centre of Excellence.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the work now underway to deliver this nation-leading facility?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how the Bushfire Centre of Excellence will provide valuable research into the prevention and management of bushfires not only for Western Australia, but also for the rest of the country?

Mr F.M. LOGAN replied:

I thank the member for her very, very strong support for the Bushfire Centre of Excellence on Lakes Road in her electorate. She has done extremely great work to get it to where it is today.

- (1)–(2) 30 January this year marked the sod-turning ceremony for the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, the first of its kind in Australia. The contract has been awarded to regionally based Perkins Builders, which the member for Bunbury will be very happy with. The contract to build a state-of-the-art centre is \$18 million in total, including staffing and training. This is really where we should be going. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence came out of our response to the Ferguson inquiry. Members will remember that the Ferguson inquiry was basically left on the shelf for the incoming Labor government to deal with. Nothing had been done in that space. We have addressed all the recommendations and opportunities. Only three opportunities and three recommendations are still being worked on at the moment; the rest have all been applied. One of the ideas that came out of that inquiry was the concept of taking forward the skills, knowledge and capacity of our firefighters, and all the associated volunteers around firefighters, on how to deal with bushfires as the climate dries out and the seasons get longer—basically, how do we go about doing it? The Bushfire Centre of Excellence is all about updating the skills of existing career firefighters and all the associated volunteers to deal with what is a growing problem for the whole of Australia. We have seen what has happened in the eastern states, with enormous bushfires created by years of drought and, in many cases, sometimes failure to mitigate. There are examples of failure to mitigate bush that should have been mitigated. We have never been in that situation. Regardless of which government has been in power, there has always been a commitment to undertake mitigation, particularly through parts of my life, with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and the like. The centre will look at how we can lift the level of skills in the area of mitigation when we are dealing with a drying climate and a lengthening of the bushfire season; how we can broaden out those skills, particularly for the number of people who will be needed in the future to deal with these incidents; and how we can learn from the traditional fire practices of Indigenous people. We will be employing local Indigenous people and others from around the state to incorporate traditional fire practices. Fire has been used as a tool for tens of thousands of years, and we will look at how we can bring those practices and that knowledge into our training program at the Bushfire Centre of Excellence.

The training for mitigation will increase as a result of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. In the mitigation that is done, Western Australia, as I have said in this house a number of times, is spending more on bushfire mitigation than any other state in Australia. The McGowan government committed \$50 million to bushfire mitigation. That is \$15 million for those local governments that undertake a bushfire risk mitigation plan.

Mr D.T. Redman: It started with the Liberal–National government. That's when it started.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It did not start. It started at Jerramungup.

Mr D.T. Redman: It started with the Liberal–National government.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member is a smart bloke, but he just does not get it right sometimes! It started with John Iffla down in Jerramungup. Do you know him? Down in Jerramungup. That is where it started.

The SPEAKER: Minister, through the Chair, please.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The bushfire risk mitigation plan, which is unique to Western Australia and is being rolled out by this government, has now reached 35 local governments, we have awarded 70 grants of over \$14.3 million, and those local governments have undertaken 1 890 activities across Western Australia to make their community safe. That is absolutely unprecedented in Australia. The other \$35 million is for undertaking bushfire mitigation on unallocated crown land. The member for Kalgoorlie raised an absolutely disgraceful —

Point of Order

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: The member's question was in relation to the development of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence in Nambeelup, nothing to do with the district of Kalgoorlie.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Excuse me. I know there are a lot of experts here, but he is still talking about it. You did not even give him a chance to finish.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It was pre-emptive, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: I will pre-emptively say no point of order. Minister, I am sure you will get to the point very, very quickly.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will. It was raised by the member for Kalgoorlie and the Leader of the Opposition in that disgraceful amendment that was brought to this house earlier this morning about the incident out there on the Eyre Highway, about the need for assistance for shires like Dundas and Coolgardie with the unallocated crown land that is in their area and their ability to deal with it. That is what the \$35 million is for. Significant money has already been spent there and I have been working with the Shire of Dundas to try to help it even more. The Leader of the Opposition said, "You never wrote at all to the federal government, you've done nothing. Even you said that." This is what I said to David Littleproud on 29 January.

The SPEAKER: Minister, there are other ministers who would like to get questions up today.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I just want to finalise this, just so the member is aware. I wrote —

Since your Government's announcement,

This is the federal government —

The SPEAKER: Do not make me sit you down, minister.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will get to the end. To continue —

I have had numerous enquiries concerning eligibility criteria for accessing the grants and support. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services Western Australia, has advised me that the support is being coordinated through the newly established National Bushfire Recovery Agency ... and access to the criteria are based on existing Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements ... though there is some doubt as to the precise arrangements given the newness of the agency.

Can you please provide confirmation of the precise eligibility criteria, including whether the Shires of Dundas, Esperance and Coolgardie may be eligible for assistance, including small businesses and interstate transport companies that have been impacted.

The member should not come in here and say that we did nothing. I have already written on behalf of him, and on behalf of those shires, to try to get those businesses, small businesses and the people who are affected, some assistance from the federal government.

Tabling of Paper

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: The minister appeared to be quoting from an official document. I ask that he table it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not care; yes, I will table it. It is a letter to Littleproud. I have no problems at all. The member can get it from him.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: There was more than one paper there.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No—this is it. I was quoting from the letter, smarty.

[See paper [3211](#).]