

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE — STIRLING FACILITY

Grievance

MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta) [9.45 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Emergency Services and concerns the Stirling State Emergency Service unit, which does amazing work in the northern suburbs. I appreciate the minister's strong support for the Stirling SES over the past few years. The Stirling SES unit is one of the busiest SES units in the Perth metropolitan area and has a long history of serving our community over more than 50 years. It is a very active and busy SES unit, with 51 members. There are more volunteers waiting to join, but the current substandard accommodation for the unit means they cannot. For a long time, the Stirling SES has sought to move because its current facilities are not fit for purpose. Let me tell members a bit about them. As it stands, the administration centre for the Stirling SES is located at 33 Carcoola Street in Nollamara and its vehicle and equipment storage is housed on Sylvia Street, a distance of 700 metres away. This presents many problems, as we would imagine. There are no toilets at the equipment shed, and I think there are only two at the administration centre. Having separate facilities also results in slower response times because volunteers or equipment may be required from both sites, depending on the call-out. If that is not enough, the shed used to store vehicles and equipment currently stores five vehicles, but it is not big enough to enable access to all the vehicles at the same time. This means that because of its facilities, the volunteers at the Stirling SES have to perform emergency vehicle tetris just to get the correct vehicle out, further slowing response times. The location is also on a residential street. Given the nature of the work that the Stirling SES does, I do not think it will surprise members to hear that much of that training and work is done at night. I am sure that all local residents support the community service of the Stirling SES, though I would suggest they may also enjoy some peace and quiet.

I know the minister has been working towards a viable, long-term solution for the Stirling SES. That would bring several advantages. Firstly, bringing the administration centre, vehicles and equipment together would result in a more efficient operation and faster response times. A more suitable location could also provide more direct transport linkages to surrounding areas, with key arterial transport corridors easily accessed, making it easier for the Stirling SES to respond to call-outs. In addition to better access, a move to an industrial area would also place the SES unit away from residences and the disturbances that can cause. Bringing all the Stirling SES operations into a single facility will provide better vehicle and equipment access and potentially allow room for some growth within the membership of the Stirling SES. The Stirling SES is already a busy unit and has people waiting to join and be trained. A move could well fix many of the constraints of the current site and also allow for an expanded membership. A new, accessible location would open up a host of opportunities for the Stirling SES, including open days and community engagement.

I want to acknowledge the member for Morley and her electorate office for their commitment to the Stirling SES throughout this process, and her very significant contribution on this issue, along with the former member for Nollamara, who is the current member for Mirrabooka. Although I cannot speak to every individual who has worked for an outcome, I would like to specifically mention the City of Stirling's advocacy on this matter and particularly the manager of community safety, Laurie Crouch; former director Trevor Holland; and my good friends, councillors Keith Sargent and David Boothman and former councillors Kathryn Thomas, Leonie Getty and June Copley.

Minister, the issue of suitable accommodation for the Stirling State Emergency Service has been around for a long time. When I was a City of Stirling councillor, I attended open days that the SES put on in the mid-2000s to highlight problems with its current site. I received many letters and approaches asking the council to work with the former Fire and Emergency Services Authority to resolve this issue. I found a letter that had been sent to me in 2012 that covered nine previous years of the unit seeking help to get better premises, outlining some of the issues it was having. I quote from that letter —

The shed that houses the vehicles is a hazardous area all on its own and trying to manoeuvre vehicles and equipment without causing injury to members and equipment creates a constant safety issue.

The mezzanine that affords us a minimum of storage space is accessed by an almost perpendicular staircase that I personally refuse to negotiate and I would challenge your Council members to do so. To get the equipment from the mezzanine to the vehicles requires dropping it from a height.

The fumes from the vehicles in such a confined space cannot be anything but detrimental to the health and well being of our members.

Our Operations Centre can only be wondered at that the Unit has been able to continue to function as well as it has. However, this is no reason for us to continue to tolerate the situation.

The letter ends with —

You cannot deny that at least 9 years of waiting is more than reasonable on the part of the Unit.

Minister, that letter is eight years old and the former Harvey–Barnett government did nothing to resolve this issue as part of its gross neglect of the northern suburbs.

Thank you for listening to my grievance. I hope the minister can assist the house with an update on a potential solution for the Stirling SES so that we can enable these terrific volunteers to best serve our community.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn — Minister for Emergency Services) [9.51 am]: I acknowledge the member for Balcatta and his continuous lobbying in addressing the issue for the Stirling SES. I thank the member for the work he has been doing over the years. It is a remarkable effort for and on behalf of those people who do such great work on behalf of the community. In particular, apart from the member for Balcatta's lobbying, I acknowledge the lobbying of Ms Jenny Gamble of the SES in Stirling, who has been indefatigable with her arguments for new premises.

I have been to the two facilities at Carcoola Street, which the member for Balcatta just referred to. I think the Carcoola Street facility was a former recreational change room for users of the park there. That is what it looked like to me. It is completely inappropriate. It was built as change rooms and facilities for the local park, not for an SES facility. That in itself is too small. All their equipment—as you probably know, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr I.C. Blayney), the SES accumulates vast amounts of equipment for the work it does—is held 700 metres across the park in a storage shed that, as the member for Balcatta just said, has been identified as being far too small. They literally cannot get all the vehicles, boxes and everything else that contains all their gear into that small shed. To get their stuff, they have to move around a whole series of vehicles and equipment.

As the member for Balcatta just indicated, this has gone on for years. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services got involved with this in 2011, member for Balcatta. This matter has just dragged on since that time. As the member for Balcatta said, it is another issue that the incoming Labor government in March 2017 had to deal with that had been left over since the time of the Barnett Liberal–National government and, really, nothing had been done about it. There had not been any major steps forward in how we address the situation for these poor SES volunteers up there in Stirling.

Immediately upon becoming the Minister for Emergency Services, I worked with the member for Mirrabooka and, subsequent to that period and since the boundary changes, I worked with the members for Morley and Balcatta in trying to bring a resolution to this issue. As the member for Balcatta knows, we looked at crown land on a Western Power site on Balcatta Road in Balcatta. We also looked at a portion of crown land on the Water Corporation site, also on Balcatta Road. As this dragged on, it became obvious to me that we are looking for a block of land, effectively free of charge, that could be ceded from a government agency to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to fix the problem. No government agency wanted to give up their land. The Water Corporation wanted to do other things with a block of land identified and Western Power simply said that it was using its facility and will use the portion of land that had been identified. It therefore became obvious to me that we should look at what SES facilities comprise. They are usually meeting rooms, training rooms and incident control centres within a large complex and a warehouse. I therefore put to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the member for Balcatta: why do we not identify a warehouse? That would be a far better option for the SES rather than worrying about finding a block of land and then building facilities, such as the SES in Geraldton enjoys, Mr Acting Speaker. That is a wonderful new facility. You know exactly what I am talking about, Mr Acting Speaker; the Geraldton SES has a huge warehouse on one side and a meeting facility next door. Given what we needed for Stirling, we thought: why do we not identify one of the existing warehouses that are up for sale all around the City of Stirling? That proposition, member for Balcatta, was put to the City of Stirling. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has been working consistently on identifying the right facility. A warehouse has been identified, and it is being discussed with the volunteers from the Stirling SES. They are appreciative of what has happened and they like the particular facility that has been identified. The funding for the purchase of that property comes via the City of Stirling itself, which will then make an application under the local government grants scheme to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and that money will be allocated. If the City of Stirling finalises a decision to purchase an industrial unit that will be in an industrial park in Balcatta itself, the money will automatically flow. The money has always been available since 2011, so it is not a question of whether funding will flow. The funding is there and available for the City of Stirling.

I encourage the member for Balcatta to continue with his pressure on the City of Stirling to make a rapid decision and bring this whole matter to a conclusion for the sake of the community in his electorate but, most importantly, for the great work the volunteers of the City of Stirling do on behalf of our community.