

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON DISASTER RESILIENCE**

*Establishment — Motion*

**HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural)** [1.35 pm]: I move —

- (1) A select committee to be known as the Disaster Resilience Select Committee be established.
- (2) The select committee is to inquire into and report on —
  - (a) the increasing prevalence of natural disasters in Western Australia, risks posed to communities, infrastructure, the economy and the environment, and the state's preparedness to meet these challenges;
  - (b) the capability of our government, non-government organisations and the private sector, including service delivery models to surge capacity during peak periods of demand;
  - (c) the current model of recovery delivery in Western Australia, whether it is fit for purpose, and lessons learnt from other jurisdictions and models; and
  - (d) make recommendations to improve Western Australia's resilience to natural disasters now and into the future.
- (3) The select committee is to report no later than 12 months after the motion is agreed to.
- (4) The select committee shall consist of no fewer than three members.

At the outset of my remarks today, I want to recognise that today is Wear Orange Wednesday, where we wear a colour that is not usually worn by me, and perhaps other members, to recognise what we refer to as our orange angels—the men and women who serve in our State Emergency Service. I think that it is undoubtedly one of the most diverse and capable emergency service organisations in Western Australia and it contributes so much to disaster resilience in this state. Members who are familiar with the SES will know that it was effectively formed out of a civil defence organisation post–Cold War era into a disaster management and response organisation. I want to recognise the SES today, as we do each year, and recognise that for the first time, thanks to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament, Parliament House will be lit orange in recognition of our State Emergency Service.

What is resilience? I draw member's attention to the definition from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. It states —

Resilience is the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.

From the outset, I want to say that resilience is not something that can be bought, nor can it be legislated. It is a responsibility that belongs to all. Complacency is the enemy of resilience. Western Australia has some 27 prescribed hazards and I am sure that members are aware of some of the ones that we see routinely on an annual basis, whether they be fire, floods, storms, land and sea searches and the like. What about the hazards of a significant interruption to electricity or liquid fuels, or a major earthquake, or one that results in a tsunami?

I have had the pleasure of working in emergency services, both as a volunteer and as a career officer in emergency management for more than 25 years. I know that there are others in this place who have had similar experiences in this field. I remember a report from at least 10 years ago—I am not going to be able to quote specifically from it. It talked about the level, or lack thereof, of self-sufficiency amongst the average Australian household being no more than two to three days. What happens if, for example, food supply or water supply is disrupted for two weeks?

I am not sure that the situation in terms of self-sufficiency has changed. We are moving into an era of great uncertainty, whether it be cyber risks or others. We have seen a significant uplift in investment in the last federal budget on cyber risks, and the risk to our critical infrastructure and critical utility space with power, fuel, water and telecommunications to name just a few. Of course, the other significant risk is climate risk. I quote from the report of a submission of the National Emergency Management Agency to the Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience that read —

As in many parts of the world, Australia is experiencing an increase in the frequency, severity, and impact of climate change-influenced disasters. The seventh biennial State of the Climate 2022 report shows Australia is experiencing ongoing, long-term climate change, and has warmed on average by 1.47 ... degrees since 1910. The report states that climate change interacts with underlying natural variability, and associated with this, increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather, including compound events where multiple extreme events occur together.

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That is obviously not a view unique to NEMA; it is also supported by many other government, non-government and scientific organisations, including the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

I last year attended the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference held in Adelaide, at which one of the keynote addresses really struck me. A presenter talked about climate risk and the impact on emergency management. This speaker said that if every country on the planet were to eliminate emissions today, we would still see the effects of climate change until mid-century. Of course, that will not be achieved today. We know that in this country the government target of net zero by 2050 is the generally accepted target. Adapting to climate change will be key over the course of much of this century.

This brings me to the substance of this motion, which I think is timely in many respects. Federally, a Senate Select Committee into Disaster Resilience is underway. That committee just this week, and, I think, even as of today, is visiting the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The work of the committee is guided by its terms of reference that are largely focused on the Australian Defence Force and its capability and role in disaster resilience. This brings me to the same issue in the Department of Defence's 2023 *National defence: Defence strategic review*, which reads —

Defence is frequently required to make large contributions to domestic disaster relief efforts as well as support to the community, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Defence is not structured or appropriately equipped to act as a domestic disaster recovery agency concurrently with its core function, in any sustainable way.

State and local governments, in partnership with the Commonwealth, must have in place the necessary plans, resources and capabilities to deal with all but the most extreme domestic disaster operations.

The other thing occurring at the moment is that the federal government is conducting a review into disaster recovery funding arrangements. The inquiry that I seek to establish by way of this motion will be much broader but complementary to the activities occurring at a national level. Resilience is more than recovery funding; it is more than the capability of the Australian Defence Force.

This comes at a time when states such as ours are reshaping recovery and resilience capability. Resilience NSW has been replaced by the dedicated NSW Reconstruction Authority focused on facilitating disaster prevention, preparedness, recovery, reconstruction and adaptation to natural disasters. Queensland has the Queensland Reconstruction Authority that was created in February 2011. It is an agency of 90 full-time equivalent staff and has managed recovery and reconstruction programs in excess of \$16.4 billion over 80 declared events. In 2021–22 alone, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority delivered \$5 billion for 25 activated events in that jurisdiction. Of interest from these two examples is that both agencies report in whole or in part to the minister for planning in their jurisdiction.

Closer to home, we saw in Western Australia through the tabling of the 2023–24 budget papers this week, as well as previous annual reports of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, some challenges faced in this space. A budget announcement was made of \$38.3 million for a 70 full-time equivalent-strong recovery team, and an additional 29 permanent full-time positions will be created complementing the nine existing staff engaged in recovery. In addition, a further 32 fixed-term, full-time positions will be created to assist the response to tropical cyclone Ellie and its impact upon the Kimberley region, and all permanent positions will be based in the Perth metropolitan area and deployed as required. All these factors have culminated in me forming a view—hopefully a view that will be supported by the Legislative Council this afternoon—that there is an opportunity for Parliament to undertake the important work set out in part (2) of my motion.

I stress again that disaster resilience is much more than government, and its scope goes well beyond our capability to respond. I draw members' attention to an important submission received by the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience that states under a section titled "Responding to the terms of reference" —

Recent research and discussion papers have highlighted the challenges emergency management workforces face as a result of a changing climate. With the increased frequency and intensity of disaster events, more and more communities are affected. Half of Australia's LGAs —

Which is an abbreviation for local government authorities —  
were subject to a disaster declaration in 2022.

I pause and say that again —

Half of Australia's LGAs were subject to a disaster declaration in 2022. This situation is clearly stretching the response and recovery workforce. This coupled with decreasing number of volunteers leads to calls for a dedicated volunteer or response workforce. AIDR's strong view is that there is a greater need to focus on disaster risk reduction (prevention and preparedness) initiatives, to curb the growing demand on response and recovery workforces when a disaster occurs.

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Disaster risk reduction initiatives aim to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk, by strengthening the resilience of people, systems and approaches. Investing in disaster risk reduction is a national priority to secure a safe, healthy and prosperous future. Greater resilience before an event reduces the need for and pressure on response and recovery arrangements. Australia is heavily reliant upon people volunteering their time and resources, either formally or informally, to help individuals and communities prepare, respond to, and recover from disasters.

That is the end of that quote, Acting President. It is true, certainly from attending the Australia's disaster resilience conference last year in Adelaide, that case studies are often presented. They are wonderful examples of communities building resilience after an event. Earlier in my contribution, I said that the enemy of resilience is complacency. It is often through disaster that we see, I think for a time, communities become more resilient. There are some excellent examples, particularly from the east coast, of community-led initiatives overcoming some of the challenges. Some communities on the east coast have been impacted, particularly by flooding, two, three or four times in the space of just a few years. Obviously, the submission made by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience states the importance of making sure that we balance our investments and focus not just on response and recovery, but also, principally, on building resilience in communities.

We know that natural disasters cause enormous, life-changing effects, but they also have significant economic cost. We know from the budget papers presented last week that there is some \$322 million of support to communities in the Kimberley impacted by ex-tropical cyclone Ellie. Earlier this week, we learnt in the briefing with Treasury that that does not include the cost of the most important piece of infrastructure that was lost in that event, which was the Fitzroy Crossing Bridge—costs unknown. Therefore, I think that we are heading rapidly towards half a billion dollars if not more of economic cost from that event alone. During tropical cyclone Seroja, there was a number of devastating fires. It is hard to quantify the true economic cost of the impact of natural disasters on our state and its communities.

This is an excellent opportunity and moment in time for the Legislative Council to establish the select committee. There is much change happening at the state level in some state jurisdictions, which are reframing their resilience framework, but work is also being done nationally with the Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience and the review into the disaster recovery funding arrangements, which are two discrete aspects of what it is to have a resilient community.

I will conclude my time-limited remarks with a quote from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which I referenced earlier. It released its sixth report earlier this year, which states —

Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred ...

Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. This has led to widespread adverse impacts ... and related losses and damages to nature and people (*high confidence*).

I want members to contemplate the type of event that we would have experienced, or we would be having to manage, if tropical cyclone Ellie or tropical cyclone Seroja had hit a more populated part of Western Australia. Predictions are constantly telling us that we are going to see more regular and severe events, particularly tropical cyclones on a more southern trajectory, impact our state. The impacts will be even far more devastating than what we have already seen. This is a unique opportunity to establish a bipartisan select committee to help prepare our state, its people, its non-government organisations and the private sector contributors to make sure that we as a community are safer and more resilient as one.

**HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [1.55 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge to establish a select committee into disaster resilience. On Wear Orange Wednesday, I also recognise the wonderful people in the State Emergency Service for the work that they do in helping communities and people through times of great need, whether it be through emergencies related to the climate or other kinds of emergencies. We are very grateful for the work you do, so thank you.

In discussing this motion, it is also valuable to look at the work of committees in general. Members who have been here for more than one term or are in their first term will know that committee work is not only the most important work, but also probably the best work that we as members of Parliament do. We have the opportunity on multi-partisan committees to inquire into things, to bring different viewpoints to those inquiries and, as a result, to come up with good recommendations that will echo across all persuasions of government ultimately for the betterment of our state. The value of a committee like this is in its ability to ask questions that others maybe have not thought of, to look more broadly than just honing in on government agencies and, potentially, to create a huge opportunity for Western Australia to improve its resilience in the face of disasters that will not get better in the foreseeable future.

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In his contribution, Hon Martin Aldridge talked about the effects of climate change, the disasters that have occurred and their effects on communities, families, infrastructure and the broader economy. He spoke about some of the recent events, including the Kimberley flooding.

I will turn to some earlier events and talk about some of the things that we learnt from those and the opportunities that a committee of this nature might offer when inquiring into disaster resilience. Of course, the key theme is that word “resilience”. In his contribution, Hon Martin Aldridge said that resilience is not the responsibility of government and it is not the responsibility of one person; it is the responsibility of everybody. Therefore, I think for a committee to look at the resilience piece of the puzzle around infrastructure, response capacity, funding for recovery, government services and families and communities is a huge opportunity that such a committee would have and then report back on what might best be done to give Western Australia the best chance of improving its resilience.

I will go back to a disaster of a different scale than some of the more recent and very large disasters like cyclone Seroja and the flooding in the Kimberley. I will talk about the 2015 fires down in the Esperance region—the cascades fire complex in particular. On the day that that fire really peaked, which was the Tuesday after the lightning strike that started the small fire that became bigger, that area recorded what was then the highest fire danger index ever recorded in Australia at 233. Just for members’ reference, an index of 100 is the highest rating, of catastrophic fire danger. Obviously, this was 133 per cent higher than that. The weather was significant, with 80 to 90 kilometre-an-hour winds in 42-degree heat—not good conditions in which to be fighting a fire. Tragically, four people lost their lives in that fire and there has since been an inquiry and a coronial inquest. I will talk a little more about those things during my contribution today.

The fire occurred under the previous government, a different government from this one. One of the key points of this motion is that it is not about throwing mud at a particular government, it is about looking at the whole picture for resilience. If we look back to 2015, we will see that one of the most frustrating things for farmers and affected people at that time was that they had to commission their own inquiry into how that fire was managed and some of the issues that arose as a result. They had to pay for that themselves, which they did. The inquiry was done by Pacer Legal and it was a very, very good report that identified a number of different issues as well as talking through a timed step of the fire and the various actions that were taken throughout the course of the fire right from the moment of the lightning strike on the Sunday before that deadly Tuesday. Interestingly, again, I do not believe that local community members should be the ones forced to foot the bill for an inquiry into a fire like this, but I believe that every incident like this must be responded to with an independent report. It does not have to be huge or comprehensive, or take years, but we must always look at the way we manage those incidents with an independent eye so that we understand what we can do better next time. I am not making criticisms of any particular agency or whatever. The whole point is that we cannot change things if we do not learn from mistakes made.

A total of 12 recommendations came out of this report. A number of those were around bushfire management risk mitigation regarding dispatch systems and water bombing and so on. I do not want to go into those in particular detail, but I want to talk about one recommendation that is about communications. I will talk a bit more about communications later. I think we can all agree that in times of emergency, communication is one of the most fundamentally important things for communities, emergency responders and others. We must have some resilience and redundancy in the communications systems available to not only our first responders, but also people who might be affected by an impending disaster. From their on-the-ground experience in 2015, we learnt that many people simply were not able to receive communications at the time that they needed to get out of the way of the fire. That was because many of the mobile towers or even the exchanges for the landlines were of course dependent on electricity. The electricity system had failed, or the fire had done damage to the actual units themselves, so people were not able to receive landline calls made by the local government or the text messages sent, advising them to be prepared to evacuate. That is a very dangerous situation. Emergency crews were also unable to communicate with each other, again due to not necessarily a failure of the systems, but inadequate systems in terms of the location of various communications infrastructure and so on. The communication piece of the puzzle came out quite strongly in that Cascade–Scaddan fire review by Pacer Legal. It also came out very strongly in the coroner’s report and recommendation 12 in the coroner’s *Record of investigation into death*. That recommendation states —

... that the state government fund the installation of at least one new repeater tower in the north western sector of the Esperance region to enhance communications during an emergency.

Of course, those sort of towers are great, but we have to remember that they are also dependent on energy. Usually and largely that energy is transmitted by overhead powerlines that are vulnerable in emergency situations like this. I recently had a briefing with Telstra, talking about some of things it is doing to improve the resilience of its network in emergencies. One of the factors is that not all our mobile towers, particularly in many of our regional areas, are physically connected to a fibre-optic line or a phone line, for want of a better term. In fact, many of those towers connect back to a central tower that is connected to that line. If that central tower is lost or loses power, for example, even though it might not be directly affected by the fire, all those other towers will be unable to provide

a service for people. It is looking at how to make those systems more resilient. That revolves around energy, to a large extent, and the ability for those towers to maintain power during a power outage. I know that Telstra has been doing some work on upgrading many of its towers and improving the capacity of the stand-by battery systems that some of them have, but it also has a fantastic project whereby it is installing a dedicated connector that allows an external generator to be plugged in by someone reasonably appropriately trained. That might be someone in local government, for example, who is nearby that would allow those towers to have a backup system installed but reducing the risk of damage being done to the towers, because obviously they require quite significant power, as members can imagine.

There are things that need to be learnt in that space. That is outside government, but it is something that government needs to be involved with and aware of. I am sure that a select committee would take the opportunity to inquire into those sorts of resilience issues as well.

Another example, back to the energy space in 2015 after those fires in Esperance, was the visionary work done by Horizon Power. As members may well be aware, many power poles and powerlines were destroyed in that fire. By destroyed, I do not mean burnt and fallen over; I mean actually vaporised. We would walk through a paddock that contained a powerline, and there was absolutely nothing left. You would not be able to find where those power poles had existed. There was not a trace of them left, it was that hot. Horizon Power, in its wisdom, looked at the situation whereby it was obligated to provide power to its customers and to rebuild that network, and it offered the opportunity for those customers to have their own dedicated solar generator battery backup systems, instead of having the ordinary poles-and-wires system reinstalled. For many customers, that made a great deal of sense. A lot of those producers chose to have that option, including Cape Le Grand National Park. That provided a system that improved the energy reliability for those customers, because it was generally towards the end of those lines' lives anyway, so it improved the reliability and resilience of power for those customers. They still had their normal Horizon Power bills and did not have to do maintenance on those new systems—that was Horizon's problem—so as far as they are concerned, they just got energy the way they did before, only it was more reliable. Looking at those new alternative options and opportunities allows us to create better resilience in an area. Perhaps where there is a mobile phone tower, for example, maybe an energy company such as Horizon Power or Synergy might look at a small system like that that provides that energy for that tower to increase its resilience and improve the survivability of the system in an emergency situation.

The other thing to consider in these emergency situations is some of the unfortunate consequences that occur that people are not aware of before or at the time a fire goes through. The minister will be well aware of the particular issue around the Shackleton complex bushfire in February 2022. A number of landowners had buildings that contained asbestos on their properties. After the fire went through, that asbestos became extremely friable; in fact, if it was touched, it would literally explode and dust would go everywhere. One of the great problems with that was who was going to pay to clean it up. It was extremely expensive for the landowners, who did not know that that would happen if a fire went through. In many cases, they were not even aware of the asbestos. It might have been an old outbuilding that had not been used for decades. The argument was put that insurance should cover those things, but unless someone knew to insure for it, their insurance company would not cover those things. On top of that, of course, if someone has an outbuilding that is not used, it will hardly be something that they have insured. Part of the recovery and resilience process needs to take stock of the potential impacts of a bushfire, a cyclone or whatever on those sorts of structures and how to better manage recovery and clean-up efforts from the impacts of fire and so on in those areas. I will bet my bottom dollar that there are plenty of examples around Western Australia of such infrastructure that would become extremely dangerous after an event like that has gone through. The focus needs to be on the clean-up and recovery, rather than trying to work out who is going to pay the bill at the end of the day.

Again, a select committee would have a real opportunity to talk to the people directly affected and to look at some of the issues that emergency agencies are perhaps not so focused on. Let us face it, they are very much focused on preventing and responding to emergencies. All we are talking about here is resilience and recovery, and I think it is important that we look at all the pictures. The select committee would have a chance to inquire into things a bit more broadly than might otherwise be the case.

That brings me to another common thread in many of the inquiry reports that I have read, including the 2020 report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. One of the key themes in almost all these reports is coordination. This is key, particularly with recovery. It is one of the most important things. I and my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge and, I am sure, other members saw firsthand the lack of the coordination piece of the puzzle for recovery afterwards—the coordination of government agencies and funding mechanisms. We have situations in which one agency does not talk to another agency, we do not know whether an agency is on the ground, and people are trying to get funding from an agency but they cannot get it. It is extremely complex. For people who have been through a terrible disaster and emergency, the confusion and stress that they feel is exacerbated by

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the lack of coordination of those things, which is perhaps why models like those in Queensland and New South Wales that my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge talked about certainly merit further investigation and understanding. There is a big opportunity for a dedicated agency in Western Australia to coordinate those sorts of things.

I think we really do need to find ways to build our resilience as a state. There is no doubt that the threats posed by climate change and the increasing prevalence and scale of natural disasters are not going to go away any time soon. As Hon Martin Aldridge said, it would not matter if we stopped emitting immediately—if we reduced our emissions to nothing right now—we would still be dealing with the effects of climate change for decades to come. That is an incredibly important point to understand. We need to be focused on dealing with resilience for a very good time to come. It is something that governments can invest a great deal of time in, but if we do not take a look at the opportunities for coordination that we have, we really would be doing our community a disservice. It is incumbent on us in this place to push hard to ensure that Western Australia's disaster resilience and recovery is nation leading. In a state the scale of ours, it is very difficult to coordinate these things without an overall agency looking at it. I think there is an opportunity for this select committee. I commend the motion to the house and I hope that other members will support it.

**HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan)** [2.15 pm]: I have no intention of spending a long time speaking to members about this, because this is a motion of absolute common sense. It is our duty to do what we can to prepare the people in this state, and this state itself, for any unforeseen emergencies. It is clear that the reference in paragraph (a) to the increasing prevalence of natural disasters in Western Australia is nothing but a fact. Climate change is in fact already occurring. People can protest all they will about the origins, but it matters not. The fact is that we have an altered climate and the consequences will need to be met.

Part of our duty needs to be to assess what kind of risk it is and where the risk is. It is not just fires, cyclones and floods. What else may happen that we need to be prepared for? I would liken this to a military campaign. It is all very well having soldiers on the ground, but if there is no strategy for dealing with the problem that they are facing, they will be annihilated. We can have all the force in the world to manage something, but if it is not properly prepared for or planned for, we are destined for failure.

This leads on to paragraph (b), which refers to the capability of our government, non-government organisations and the private sector and our resilience. I extend this to the individual. Part of the problem we are seeing is the concept that the government must do something or we blame the big companies and say that the big companies must make a change. In fact, it is also incumbent on individuals to be resilient or to develop resilience. As a father in this community and seeing what else is going on, one of my concerns is the number of people who go into a shell, collapse and blame other people and say that the government or an organisation is responsible for how they behave. Yes, resilience needs to be expanded to the broader government and non-government organisations, but how can we as a population learn to be more resilient? I look at the history of our veterans at Gallipoli and how they were resilient in the face of great hardship. How can we hold a candle to that approach to life? I do not think we can. We have lost that to some degree.

Of course, the people in the regions are very resilient, and they have to be resilient because no-one else is going to help them. But what about those in our cities? What about those in Perth itself, where many people are used to a life of great comfort? When catastrophes happen, they are left bereft and unable to manage. Of course they would be emotional and in panic. How do people develop resilience? How do people prepare to stand up in the face of natural disasters?

The motion goes on to refer to the current model of recovery delivery in Western Australia. As my colleague Hon Colin de Grussa so eloquently put it, we need to work together to coordinate the responses. It is all very well dealing with the emergency as it happens, but what happens after it? We have seen what happened with the floods over east. A year later, people are still waiting for some measure of recovery, because nothing has been done and nothing has been planned. The intergovernmental and inter-organisational ability to coordinate information is simply lacking. This is something we need to be cognisant of, because we can address it at a fundamental level.

The last part of the motion refers to the recommendations we can make to improve Western Australia's resilience to natural disasters now and into the future. What a wonderful way of describing the purpose of this select committee. I put it to all members that I cannot think of anyone here who would oppose it. I heartily recommend it and support the motion.

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition)** [2.19 pm]: Thank you, Acting President, for the largesse and the opportunity to make a contribution to the debate before the house today. I will mostly concentrate on part (2)(a) of the motion. We obviously support the select committee be established, but I would like to talk about the prevalence of natural disasters before moving on to (2)(b) and capacity.

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As a Liberal Party member who believes in climate change, perhaps occasionally to my detriment, it is interesting to watch the debate on this issue. Members who were not in the previous Parliament, were not present for the legendary debates on climate change, usually on a motion moved by Hon Robin Chapple, with some input from Hon Alannah MacTiernan; the now Minister for Emergency Services, who was then Minister for Environment; and me. There were a couple of fantastic ones. Members are welcome to look at those. I occasionally drop them into debate outside this place because I think they were a good example of the level of debate that should be aspired to on issues like this.

It interests me that there are two levels of debate on climate change and preparedness for natural disasters. It always frustrates me when somebody points to a specific natural disaster event and says it was caused by climate change, because, of course, climate change is an issue of trends, not immediate actions. The motion says quite rightly that issue is the trend of increasing emergencies and natural disasters. It is not necessarily uniform because the effects of climate change shift around both north and south. It is interesting that the modelling has been relatively consistent and accurate—more accurate than Treasury’s predictions for the time being, I should say! Going back at least 15 years, the original modelling suggested that the south west land division would become drier and the north west would become wetter and more prone to extreme rain events, and it has been demonstrated that that modelling is relatively accurate. That is not to say that any one cyclone is immediately attributable to climate change, and it is a nonsense to suggest that, as is sometimes done—every time there is a natural disaster and emergency the Greens like to trot out that line and give the event a direct attribution. The reality is we are talking about trends over time, and that has an impact. Impacts of climate change are far slower and more incremental than sometimes the political debate and opportunism would represent.

Many years ago, for my sins, I was a shadow Minister for Emergency Services, would members believe, in the chamber that shall not be named in the Parliament—that other place. I remember the review of the Emergency Management Act came up and the Minister for Emergency Services at that time, who is the current Speaker of Legislative Assembly, moved the first and second reading of the bill. Probably unfortunately for her, the shadow minister already had a copy of the bill and was across it, so when the second reading of the bill came up, we moved that it become an urgent bill. I am not sure that that gets done very often from opposition, and suddenly the minister had to very rapidly drag in advisers from the department, and it was all sorts of consternation. I am not necessarily admitting to pulling a stunt, but I have to say that the impact was obvious, though. I am not generally inclined to do so, but just on occasions it is not a bad idea. That absolutely pulled that in. The review of the Emergency Management Act was well overdue at the time, and there were some really interesting parts. I have had an interest in this area for a long time.

As I travel around the state as a result of the debate on the Emergency Management Act, I frequently find myself turning up at local governments looking for the emergency management plan. There is a state emergency management plan that deals with the very big issues and there is a local emergency management plan. That should be the first document people see when they walk into the reception of a local government, particularly a regional one. I absolutely believe that regional Western Australia is far more at risk from natural disaster than the metropolitan area. The impact might be bigger in a metropolitan area, where there are 1 million-plus people in a small area, but regional Western Australia carries the burden. So we would think that regional governments have a local emergency management plan. I would have it on display. It would be something people could browse while they are waiting to talk to somebody. I think it is a really good idea to be able to browse through one. Some local governments have them. I am really pleased when I find a local government whose local emergency management plan is on the counter or in the display case and made available so when residents come in, they can have a browse of it. It should be on the local government’s websites, but it should be sitting at the front of their offices as well. Some of those emergency management plans are reasonable, and some of them, I have to say, look very much like a cut-and-paste job.

Unfortunately, there is an issue of resourcing or intent around the delivery of emergency management plans at a local level. I think that has been the case for some time. Some of the plans simply list the assets and the population of the area. What I am looking for in an emergency management plan is advice on what the local population is supposed to do if a flood or a fire is coming from a particular direction. How are they expected to respond? It needs to go far beyond simply saying to be prepared or to choose to stay and fight or leave, and choose early. It needs to be a lot more than that. Those local emergency management plans should point out where people need to be, where the safest options are, depending upon the natural disaster or threat faced. Hopefully, with the government support, the select committee into emergency management preparedness response might look into this—that is, how we get a better coordinated emergency management plan. I would think that each local area’s emergency management plan relates to the one next door. Let us pick a town. If someone is in Denmark and a flood is coming from the north, the alternative is to go east and west from Denmark, because if they go south, they will be in the ocean. A fire is probably likely to come from a similar direction. It would be good to see that level of planning across the board, and I do not think it currently exists.

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An issue that an investigative committee needs to look into is personal preparedness versus government preparedness—what is personal responsibility, what is the responsibility of the shire or city, what is the responsibility of the state and what is the responsibility of the federal government? Apart from funding, which is set up through the disaster recovery funds that link state and federal processes, a lot of that stuff is unclear until it happens. People generally do not know where to go to when these things hit, so planning is much more reactive than proactive. The joy of the motion before the house is that it gives an opportunity to develop a proactive approach to the delivery of this planning, so people would know in advance. Being as right wing as I am, I would never take away the personal responsibility component of any part of government, particularly disaster resilience and preparation. A couple of years ago, the same minister and I, who are wearing our glorious orange ties today, which is quite appropriate, debated the Environmental Protection Amendment Bill, and I attempted to move an amendment to allow clearing of vegetation around a house without the need for an approvals process and the regulatory red tape that goes with that in order to create an adequate fire break against the disaster of a fire going through. I still think that was a good amendment, and it is critically important because self-resilience and accepting one's part of the responsibility for the risk is critically important.

That not only applies to regional areas. If we look at the bushfires that went through the Perth hills, holy mackerel! Ministers who flew in helicopters over the area came back and said that where trees were all the way up to the edge of a house, the house had burnt, but those with a proper firebreak tended to survive. It was not universal but absolutely it was the trend. It was said publicly and privately that personal responsibility is vitally important, and that is certainly the case. I drive through the Perth hills on occasion. It burnt terribly last time and it looks like it will burn terribly again because that personal responsibility still exists. I am not throwing rocks at the East Metropolitan Region and the Perth hills because we see exactly the same thing in Margaret River and Dunsborough. In fact, a very good friend of mine, Lindsay, was the secretary of the Dunsborough Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade. He died of cancer some years ago. We went to his wake at his house. Holy mackerel! His place would have been the first to burn, despite the fact he was the secretary of the local bush fire brigade. He was an absolutely passionate supporter of the bush fire brigade but he loved having trees. It was autumn, and the leaves were falling into his gutters as we spoke. It was amazing to see. That personal level of preparation is critically important.

Some local governments do a really good job. Here is a shout-out to the volunteers in the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River. Those vollies are well organised and probably a bit closer to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services than many other vollies who have a more disjointed relationship with the department. I take the view that the further east one goes in the south west and great southern, the more strained the relationship is with the department. But it is really important to develop those relationships. There is great work being done by organisations like the volunteer bush fire brigades around Margaret River, and that is because it is such a high-risk area. Every time there is a controlled burn down there, it is like world war three. It is not a popular event. Whether it is the vineyards or the alternatives, it is immensely problematic, so the role of local government is critically important. The local governments tell residents that under their current set of circumstances they will not send a fire unit to protect their house because it would be unsafe. I think there needs to be a bit more of that and people need to be told to take personal responsibility for such matters.

The role of local government is critically important, and it has to step up. The role of the state needs to be much further defined. I am talking very much about preparedness now, before we get to actual response, because response is equally important. The role of the federal government is interesting. Generally, the federal government's role has been largely restricted to sending in the Army, as it were, and paying out money. Interestingly, depending on whether one is a passionate supporter of the military in battle versus a passionate supporter of the military in domestic service, it is hard to see, under the circumstances, other than the Australian Army, who is in a position to assist. I would have thought that despite the rhetoric that the Australian Army should not assist in these circumstances, who else could be sent in? Who are we going to call in those circumstances? I would say that it remains the Australian Army, and personally I have no issue with that, but I will acknowledge the debate by saying that response is particularly important. Otherwise, I do not know how we would manage it. When the Australian Army and its engineers are used, they are trained in battlefield rapid response techniques, but governments are a little bit loath to do that. The classic example people talk about all the time is the construction of temporary bridges, which the Army can do quickly. I understand that. I suspect if Hon Neil Thomson were not absent on urgent parliamentary business, he might make a contribution about the response in the north west, but, unfortunately, he is on urgent business elsewhere.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Fortunately for some of us.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** I will leave that stand where it may, minister.

The point that Hon Neil Thomson made in the debate last week was whether the levee across the Fitzroy River was an adequate response compared with, potentially, what the Army might have been able to present, versus whatever

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else. It was an interesting debate. I am not interested in politicising it, particularly. I am interested in getting the best outcome for the community. It is valid to say that when a major connection point is disrupted, it has a significant impact. I fully accept that.

In my view, a review of those processes would be incredibly useful. Unfortunately, Western Australia, in practical terms, has a limited number of connections to the eastern states. It is really a couple of roads and one rail line. It is pretty easy at the north and south ends, ostensibly, to disrupt that connection, and we have seen examples of that in both locations over the last decade. A strategic plan could deal with that a bit better. I understand that the government looked at the southern end following the floods and the disruption to the rail line, in particular, because we were unable to get produce into Western Australia. I am interested to know whether that process to work out whether further reinforcement of that infrastructure might be necessary in the fullness of time has concluded or is still ongoing. I think that sort of information would be really useful. As I said at the start of my contribution, the climate change modelling suggests that rainfall will lower in the south west land division and higher up north, and demonstrates that extreme events will occur irrespective of climate change, which is a trend. Individual events will still occur occasionally across the entire country. In our case, across the entire state. Is there a need for additional work and, certainly, what lessons were learnt from the disruption of the rail line? There is some work being done and the first few hundred million dollars for the Australian supply chain resilience initiative is for resilience along the east–west line to make sure it is more flood-proof. “More flood-proof” is one of those things. Is it flood-proof? No, it is probably not. Nothing is ever completely flood-proof.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** More flood resilient.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** More flood resilient is perhaps better wording. I was struggling for the words. Perhaps there is more work that could be done in that particular regard.

I think this will be a long-term debate. In my final couple of minutes, I want to refer to the funding for recovery, in particular. There are two sets here. There is preparation at one end and resilience at the other. It is being able to prepare for and be prepared, in the most part. I think fire would be the obvious example, and people will generally be prepared. Government is better prepared than most of the population. Some people have a reasonably good plan in place, but there is a disjoint in getting that going and out there. The funding afterwards is interesting. Obviously, the majority of government assets are effectively self-insured—some are and some are not. That means, in many cases, when a disaster occurs and there is an enormous demand on resources to repair that asset, that is fine and it is not really much of an issue if a government is as rich as this one. The constraint is probably getting hold of workers and materials to make repairs, but, ultimately, it is not a cost argument right now, but it could be in other years. As the economy corrects and the massive surpluses disappear, we could potentially have this problem of a funding issue that will drag out over a period. There will then ultimately be an argument—which I do not have time to get into today—around government funding for damage on private property, for example, and particularly of those who are uninsured. Some areas for some circumstances are uninsurable, and the insurance industry needs to be a part of the conversation going forward in terms of resilience. We do not want to create a situation in which nobody can afford insurance, but we also do not want to create a situation in which people do not take out insurance because the expectation is that the government will step up and pay for any damages. We have to have a much wider debate, but, unfortunately, I do not have time to get into that today.

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services) [2.40 pm]:** In speaking to today’s motion by Hon Martin Aldridge to establish a select committee into disaster resilience, I acknowledge that today is Wear Orange Wednesday, or WOW day. It is a great opportunity to thank our State Emergency Service volunteers who do amazing work across Western Australia. Western Australia has about 2 000 SES volunteers and in the past 12 months they have undertaken about 2 000 jobs and worked for about 18 000 hours across the state. Many of those helped earlier in the year. About 100 volunteers helped in Fitzroy Valley after ex-tropical cyclone Ellie, and over the past probably 12 months we sent about 120 volunteers to the east coast to help recovery following floods in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. They are amazing people. From conducting emergency repairs on buildings damaged by cyclones, storms and floods to ferrying cargo and passengers across floodwaters, they provide a vital service to the people of Western Australia. SES volunteers have also assisted WA police in land searches. They undertake aerial and cave rescues. In some places in the state they attend road crashes and they assist fire crews during bushfire season. The volunteers come from all walks of life.

It was a pleasure this morning to meet some SES volunteers in Kings Park to celebrate Wear Orange Wednesday. They are from all over the state and are all committed to helping our communities in the best way they can. For SES volunteers, it is not all about using their hands to build or fix things or using chainsaws. There are lots of opportunities in logistics, planning and catering—all sorts of things. I not only encourage people in the community to celebrate WOW day today and thank those volunteers—of course, I am pleased that many people in this place took the opportunity to wear a splash of orange—but also encourage more people to join. Last Friday in Port Hedland

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at the Welcome to Hedland event our local SES had a stall with some boats and flashing lights and it was great to see community members of all ages sign up. I thank those volunteers and note that in Perth tonight a range of buildings, including Parliament House, and a range of important buildings in regional Western Australia will be lit up in orange to acknowledge those fantastic volunteers.

I have followed a number of contributions made by other people on the motion before us. I note that the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience was appointed in November last year to inquire into Australia's preparedness and also response and recovery workforce models as well as alternative models to disaster recovery. The committee is considering the role of not only the Australian Defence Force, volunteer groups and not-for-profit organisations, but also state-based services and the support that is required to improve Australia's resilience and response to natural disasters. That inquiry is live at the moment. The committee is due to present a final report by mid-September this year. As we have heard, hearings have been held in Fitzroy Crossing and Kununurra so far this week. I think there is one in Broome today and there will be one later this week in Perth. That is a live committee looking into disaster resilience for the country and at interstate-based services. That is a live issue at the moment.

Having listened to the contributions that have been made so far, it is refreshing to hear conservative politicians talk about and acknowledge climate change.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** We've been doing it for years.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Obviously, it is a changing environment for many of us who have been in here for years. In previous governments there was not a great deal of acknowledgement of climate change. One of the great many benefits of having an Albanese government federally is that it, too, is focused on climate change. It feels as though the adults are in charge of the country again. It is a priority for the federal government. It is a priority for our community already and it is great that government is leading by responding to climate change.

Let me go through some of the things that are happening in Western Australia at the moment as I canvass the motion before us today. Natural hazards are a fact of life in Australia. They have been for a while, but they seem to be increasing in frequency and also in severity. Of course, over the past couple of years this state has had a significant cyclonic event. Last February, Western Australia had four level 3 bushfires on the same day, which is extraordinary for the state. Our high-threat periods are becoming more prolonged and they overlap. Whereas previously there was a fire season in the north and a fire season in the south, they are starting to overlap and it means that our emergency services are working harder, but that they have to work smarter and more efficient in responding to, but also preparing for, bushfires and other emergencies. It has been pointed out that this is not the problem of just all levels of government, but that the business community and local community also have a role in responding, preparing or being resilient in these types of events. We all have a role to play in responding to these types of challenges. Preparedness and disaster risk reduction is a shared, although not equal, responsibility. In the past few state budgets we have seen more of a focus on supporting our frontline emergency services workers through more resources, better equipment and better facilities so that volunteers and career firefighters have more capacity to respond to emergencies across the state.

Last week's budget contains a significant investment to respond to natural disasters. An investment in the budget of \$38.3 million is set aside to fund WA's biggest ever dedicated recovery team. That funding recognises the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters in the state. We have seen flooding in the Kimberley, severe tropical cyclone Seroja in the midwest and, of course, major bushfires in the Perth hills and regional Western Australia in the past few years. This new investment will enhance the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' capability and capacity to respond and also provide support because there will be a dedicated, ongoing team in the agency that hopefully will establish sustainable state recovery capability. As has been pointed out, a further investment of about \$30 million will allow staff to be appointed to respond to ex-tropical cyclone Ellie in the Kimberley.

Although this is a recovery team, part of the role of the team will be to help communities become more resilient. I am pleased that this is the first time we have had such a team in Western Australia. Until now, extra people have come on for recovery for a particular event, but this investment will allow the department to have an ongoing team to be ahead of these issues where appropriate and to do more work on resilience. Over the past few years, investment has been made by government to the mitigation activity fund. That fund is open a couple of times a year and local governments can access funding from the pool of money. I believe the last round was \$4 million. That allows local governments to do prescribed mitigation burning to be prepared for the upcoming fire season, because that preparedness, as we would all agree, is important for our communities and local government has a role to play in that.

Climate change is a pressing global issue and it creates diverse challenges ranging from declining rainfall and drought to longer, hotter summers, extended bushfire seasons, as I have mentioned, and increased coastal erosion. Climate change modelling indicates that this trend will continue, resulting in more communities, industries and, indeed, ecosystems being at risk of significant disruption. The increasing frequency and intensity of emergencies

and climate adaptation policy responses requires a multiagency response to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from major emergencies. The Western Australian climate policy sets out the McGowan government's plan for a climate-resilient community.

The State Emergency Management Committee has established a strategic focus on climate change. As a state, we are using the lessons learnt from the other states in the development of our recovery program and assistance measures developed in collaboration with the commonwealth. In terms of current emergency management arrangements, the SEMC was established under the Emergency Management Act 2005. It is the state's peak emergency management body. The SEMC released its strategic plan in October last year, which set out strategic objectives related to collaborative leadership, effective governance, capable sector, capable community and adapting to climate change. Each year, the SEMC reports to the state Minister for Emergency Services through its emergency preparedness report. The *2022 emergency preparedness report* is publicly available.

The SEMC, through its risk and capability project, has prepared the Western Australian emergency management capability framework. That framework is nationally aligned and expected to be released publicly later this year. That management framework comprises legislation, policy, plans, procedures and guidelines. It identifies the roles and responsibilities of emergency management agencies and other public authorities and organisations in this state in managing the adverse effects from emergencies across the four aspects of emergency management: prevention, preparation, response and recovery. There are 28 prescribed hazards with hazard management agencies controlling and supporting agencies assigned to manage the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery for each hazard.

Local governments are integral to the state emergency management framework because they have particular local knowledge that needs to be utilised before, during and after emergencies. Local governments have legislated responsibility in this state under existing legislation for recovery. As we know, there are differences between all of our local governments around the state, depending not only on size, but also on capacity. There are various capabilities amongst those local governments to be able to discharge the responsibilities they have under the state emergency management framework.

Under section 21 of the Emergency Management Act, the SEMC can establish subcommittees to advise the SEMC on its functions. In August last year, the SEMC endorsed a review of the subcommittee structure to support a contemporary approach to emergency management in line with its strategic plan. The updated terms of reference were endorsed recently, and the new subcommittee structure will take place from July this year—hopefully establishing an effective and relevant structure that increases the strategic capability of the emergency management sector in this state. The SEMC requires a review of all policies, plans, procedures and guidelines every five years, or as required or directed by the SEMC—for example, in response to a major event. That is why I think the SEMC framework is contemporary, reasonably up-to-date and fit for purpose.

One issue that we are looking at the moment is cybersecurity. Obviously, that is an issue of growing frequency both in Western Australia and nationally. We are starting to see more and more malicious cyber activity in the state. A couple of years ago, we were seeing cybersecurity activity every 30 minutes. The latest information that I have says that every seven minutes we are getting an attack across Australia. It is not only of increasing frequency, but also of increasing scale, sophistication and severity. There is work taking place at the moment by the SEMC now that cybersecurity has been given prominence in our emergency services policy in WA.

At the moment, there is also a community disaster resilience strategy being worked on. It seeks to hopefully develop a shared understanding of disaster resilience; empower the WA community; increase capacity and capability to prepare for, and respond to, and recover from disasters; and focus on investment preparation activities to reduce the cost of recovery. The strategy also acknowledges the critical role of our community and focuses on creating a collaborative effort between the community, all levels of government and the not-for-profit sectors. That strategy is due for consideration by the SEMC in the second half of the year. It is focused on that community disaster resilience effort.

At the same time, we also have a local emergency management arrangements review being delivered as a partnership project with Western Australian Local Government Association in response to the challenges faced by local governments in fulfilling their emergency management obligations. Those obligations include providing clarity around emergency management roles and responsibilities, ensuring alignment between emergency management and their day-to-day business and the financial and human resourcing to support emergency management planning. That work is close to finalisation. I understand that it should be with the SEMC over coming months. The LEMA review, in combination with the community disaster resilience strategy and the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience all have a lot of work happening at this moment in this space.

While I am open to the idea of a state Parliament or Legislative Council select committee on disaster resilience, I will not support the motion today. However, as I have said, I am open to it. I would like to let these other bodies of work finish. Significant effort has been put into each of these bodies of work, and some have been consulting

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for a period of time. The Senate inquiry has happened and is having public hearings at the moment. I would like to see what comes out of each of those pieces of work and then work out what is needed next. At the same time as these pieces of work happening, there is consolidation happening on our three existing pieces of legislation that relate to emergency services in Western Australia. Those are the Fire Brigades Act 1942, the Bush Fires Act 1954 and the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998. All of those acts have probably passed their use-by date in many respects. The intention is to combine those pieces of legislation into one piece of legislation. We are working on releasing a blue bill for public comment, hopefully in the second half of this year. That, too, is another really important piece of work that is happening to enable us to respond to emergency services and management in Western Australia. They are taking priority.

However, we continue to make sure that our various emergency services—be they career or volunteer—are provided with the best assistance, support, facilities and equipment that they can have in Western Australia. Over the last two years, the McGowan government has made a significant investment into new appliances and emergency management vehicles across the state. In the first 10 months of 2022–23, \$32 million was spent delivering 91 new emergency services vehicles across the state, helping bolster our state’s firefighting capability. We are providing vehicles and equipment that the volunteers and career firefighters want and are providing new vessels for our marine rescue volunteers, who obviously have a significant job in terms of dealing with the 13 000 kilometres of coastline that we have in Western Australia—including the Christmas and Cocos Keeling Islands, because we of course have a role there.

We are providing new vessels to groups like the Broome Marine Rescue Service and Jurien Bay Marine Rescue. Just on the weekend I provided the keys for a new marine rescue boat for Marine Rescue Two Rocks. There are more to be rolled out and there are new buildings underway, but all of those need to work together. As I said, the commitment from us is to make sure that we are providing equipment to our volunteers and our career firefighters, but we are also doing other pieces of work such as the *Community disaster resilience strategy*, the reviews being undertaken by the SEMC and the work that is happening in the Senate at the moment. I would like to analyse that Senate report when it comes out, those other pieces of work to be finalised and the three pieces of emergency services legislation combined into one—at least in a draft stage—before I am open to looking into whether there is a requirement for this Parliament to have a select committee into disaster resilience. However, for now, it is a no.

**HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [2.59 pm]:** I rise to make a brief contribution to the motion moved by my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge. As we have heard from others, it is good to be doing so on Wear Orange Wednesday, although there are some brighter versions than mine! Congratulations to everyone who is paying tribute to our volunteers. I will be brief, but I do have a couple of points to make.

I thank the minister for his response and say to Hon Martin Aldridge that I took it as a win; I think we are almost there. The minister suggesting that he is open to an inquiry is a good sign and he gave a very detailed outline of some of the work that is occurring in the space of looking at our responses to disasters in Western Australia and our resilience around disasters. If the minister is willing to look at that work when it is done and consider this proposal, I think it would be a good use of the resources of Parliament to set up this proposed select committee.

Over the past 18 months to two years some lessons have been learnt in this space, with cyclones and storms in the north and bushfires in the wheatbelt, great southern, south coast and south west. I think now would be a very good time to look at how we have performed in those very stressful circumstances. This proposed committee would have that role while these events are still fresh in people’s minds. That is an important point, because that corporate memory, if you like, fades as we get further away from those events.

To give an example, the Brookton fire was in 1997, from memory; it was a very, very nasty event on an awful day and there was sadly a loss of life on that day. My local brigade travelled the 80 or 90 kilometres to get to the Brookton fire and we did what we had to do. We debriefed afterwards, as most small brigades do, and we learnt an important lesson that day. A number of firefighters from our patch were travelling up a narrow country gravel road towing a firefighting trailer with a tanker on the back. They thought that was appropriate; it was a fairly common outfit in those days. You would tow the water tanker, stop, get out, squirt the hose and then get going again. But they discovered that day that there was a lot of smoke around and they could not see where they were going. The road got tight and the fire caught up with them. When you try to turn a trailer around in a hurry and in a panic, you can jackknife the trailer and get stuck, and that is what happened to these three or four firefighters. They got stuck, they jackknifed the trailer and there was no way out. They got out of the vehicle and were saved by the very timely appearance of another firefighting unit in the paddock next to where they abandoned their stuck vehicle. The lesson we learnt from that is that you do not take a trailer to a fire. As far as we were concerned, that was written in stone for decades afterwards.

We then had the Wickepin–Narrogin fire in February last year. I am getting old; I fought the Brookton fire in 1997 and I turned up to the fire last February in Wickepin–Narrogin and there were young men fighting that fire who were

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not around at the time of the Brookton fire, and they turned up towing a trailer. The circumstances were the same: we were driving up a narrow road, it was getting smoky and we were not sure where the flames were. The flames came over the hill and we tried to turn around in a hurry, but this time the trailer made it, thank goodness. The point I am trying to make is that memory fades. While that knowledge is still fresh, it will provide a good opportunity for this committee to look at the way we respond to disaster events.

Speaking of lessons learnt and how we respond, we also learnt a lot in the series of fires last February. Before the minister departs the chamber, he was on the phone to me and vice versa very early in that response, and I thank him for his efforts in bringing people and resources to bear very, very quickly in response to those fires. The volunteers and professionals did an outstanding job.

Hon Kate Doust is away from the chamber on urgent parliamentary business, but she mentioned earlier today during the condolence motion that in the 1990s there were no mobile phones and it would have been a difficult task for members to have been here, trying to call their families in the regions. In the Wickepin–Narrogin fires we lurched back into the 1990s; there were no mobile phone connections because the power lines were down so the phone towers were out. In fact, in Corrigin it was worse than in the 1990s because when the towers went down, there was also no landline. We could not even use the landline for some time during the Corrigin fire. When they tried to prepare for the evacuation of Corrigin, the text message went to some people but not to others and the landlines dropped out. Members can imagine the very nervous, anxious people trying to get the message out that the fire was coming over the hill.

I was in Wickepin and we fought that fire for 10 hours on the Sunday, and for nine and half of those hours there was no mobile phone coverage. I think most of the towers were upright, but there was simply no coverage in those areas. The resilience and ability to deal with these disasters relies heavily on adequate communications, and those systems are vulnerable.

Resilience has been looked at. I am sure other members have, as I have, had meetings with Telstra, Western Power and Synergy about strengthening that resilience. I think there is plenty of work to do in that regard. I am not sure whether, if there were another Corrigin fire next February, the communications would be significantly better; they might be marginally better, but there would still be issues around power supply to communications towers. That is an area of resilience and lessons learnt that the state government needs to look at. I am sure it would be an area of interest to the proposed committee.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Member, just on that, there may well be something in the Senate committee that tackles that issue.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Okay, sure. On that point, minister, I think there is a company in Fremantle that is developing a mobile phone sea container that can be dropped at a site so that in an emergency, communications can be reconnected very, very quickly. Those are the sorts of initiatives that we need to look at to make us more resilient when the worst happens.

I would like to talk a bit about the local government sector and its ability to respond to disasters and how that would form, I assume, a key part of what the proposed committee would investigate. Again, I refer to a recent event. Cyclone Seroja took a long path across the coast around Kalbarri, snuck down across the top of the midwest and almost ended up at the top of the eastern wheatbelt.

**Hon Darren West:** Bencubbin.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Bencubbin, indeed. A number of small local authorities were impacted, obviously. In respect of their ability to respond, not just on the day but in the months afterwards, some of those small local authorities have only a CEO, someone answering the phone and someone doing the accounts, and maybe one or two other part-timers, and that is the extent of their administrative staff. Even in a place like Corrigin, which is a slightly bigger country town, the CEO, Natalie Manton, and her team did an extraordinary job, but they were working for 18 or 20 hours a day. I think a former shire president, Lyn Baker, came back to volunteer at the shire office just to make sure that they had people to keep the doors open.

They do not have the resources to do the recovery work that is necessary. It would be the same situation in Northampton, Three Springs or any of the other small local authorities. They do not have the resources or access to recovery processes, and those are vital things that both state and federal governments need to fund. It lasts a long time; the recovery processes for Seroja and the bushfires are still continuing. I heard today that Blaze Aid is back in Wickepin–Narrogin to help out. Those councils are still doing that work now, 15 or 16 months later, and they will continue to do so. They will draw on their very meagre resources, which will have not only a financial impact, but also a staffing impact. If any outcomes come from changes to the way we react to natural disasters, assist in the recovery and plan for greater resistance, I urge that they include the local government sector, particularly the smaller regional councils.

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In talking about resilience to natural disasters, I would like to close on a pet topic of mine; that is, Australia's fuel reserves. During the COVID outbreak, we saw the great toilet paper stampede. There was a run on toilet paper!

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** Only to be outdone by the RAT stampede.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Indeed.

Apparently, toilet paper was not scarce but people thought it might be so they reacted. I did a quick Google search this morning to find out what Australia's fuel reserves are—this number has been the same for a long time—and found that we have approximately 24 days of petrol under normal circumstances. Let us say that something bad happens somewhere, members can imagine how long that 24 days of petrol would last.

**Hon Kyle McGinn:** Especially with foreign ships, member.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** That is assuming that ships of any kind are travelling, Hon Kyle McGinn, and they might not be.

We have 24 days of petrol reserves. The mining sector uses a lot of diesel. Hon Darren West would not be able to put in a crop this year if we ran out of diesel.

**Hon Darren West:** We use 6.8 billion litres a year in Western Australia.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Yes; so we are nowhere near resilient in our fuel reserves. That is a glaring weakness in our resilience and ability to cope with natural disasters. We have seen what happens when commodities run scarce. There were empty shelves in shopping centres in the north. We have seen the toilet paper stuff. That would be mild compared with our inability to get fuel into this country during a disaster. I assume that that is probably a federal responsibility, but the states can play a role. The Premier makes a great deal about Western Australia being an island within an island, but our fuel reserves are similarly as poor as those in the rest of the country. We need petrol to keep our enormously important mining and agricultural sectors going—and everything else because the place runs on fuel, despite there being a few electronic vehicles in the car park. If this motion is successful in establishing a select committee, I hope that it looks at our fuel reserves.

I close by congratulating the minister on his response and even-handed look at the possibility of establishing a select committee into disaster resilience. I took his response to be a maybe. It is a very worthwhile issue for Parliament to consider.

**HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural)** [3.13 pm] — in reply: I wanted to give Hon Kyle McGinn an opportunity to speak for 20 minutes on coastal shipping, but it would appear that the Labor Party gags continues today. It was Banksia Hill Detention Centre yesterday and natural disasters on Wednesday; what will be the government gag tomorrow?

**Hon Dan Caddy:** You can't even fill your own time.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Hon Dan Caddy, motions on notice is usually a time when members from both sides of the house exchange the opportunity to debate a matter. From my count, I think five non-government members spoke and there was one government response—and this is from members who get up very excitedly when Hon Neil Thomson talks about the Kimberley and I talk about the midwest and cyclone Seroja. However, today they have nothing to say—gagged once again.

I would like to thank the honourable members who did contribute to the motion. Hon Colin de Grussa and Hon Steve Martin touched on common themes, particularly around critical infrastructure, which reinforces the point that I made that resilience is not just driven by—nor is it the responsibility of—government; it is much more. Hon Dr Steve Thomas said that when there is greater opportunity for improvement, it is at the personal level and the local level. Our agencies are significantly resourced and have a lot of people working for them. We have a level of capability and resilience, but we can always argue whether it can be improved or done differently—absolutely. I agree with Hon Dr Steve Thomas's contribution. I am not sure that I share his ambition about having local emergency management plans being the first thing that greets people when they walk into local government offices. He can keep working on that.

I also thank Hon Dr Brian Walker for his contribution and support for the motion. He articulated my concern quite well in that he said that where we need to get to is so far from where we are today. He used words like, "We almost need a military-like campaign to combat the challenges of the future."

I now turn to the government's response, which was not surprising. In two minutes, members of the Labor Party will line up and oppose this motion. I find that quite staggering. The minister said that the government cannot possibly contemplate this issue now—he said that it would contemplate it in a little while—because some things are happening. The minister spent most of his contribution talking about the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience and the extensive hearings that are happening this week, including in Perth tomorrow. He said

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Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Dr Brian Walker; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Steve Martin

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that he looks forward to analysing the Senate report, which is quite interesting because the minister wrote to the Senate select committee on 14 February and said that the state government of Western Australia was too busy to make a submission. It was not until the minister was embarrassed in the Legislative Council of Western Australia in late February that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services found time to copy and paste some words into a letter and send it to the select committee. Today the government has used weasel words on this issue. Government members like to have selfies with volunteers and the government likes to hand over fire trucks, some that pump water and some that do not.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker):** Order, members! There is one minute to go. I do wish to hear this.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Government members love engaging with members of our emergency services. They have plenty of time for photographs and morning teas, but when it comes to the critical issues facing the state of Western Australia—not just this year but this decade and probably for the best part of this century—and when they have an opportunity in 40 seconds to be counted, they will oppose this motion because, once again, this government knows best. It does not want any transparency or critical assessment. It has a glass jaw and it is arrogant, and it will oppose this motion.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Acting President (Hon Dr Brian Walker) casting his vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (12)

Hon Martin Aldridge  
Hon Peter Collier  
Hon Ben Dawkins

Hon Donna Faragher  
Hon Nick Goiran  
Hon James Hayward

Hon Steve Martin  
Hon Sophia Moermond  
Hon Tjorn Sibma

Hon Dr Steve Thomas  
Hon Dr Brian Walker  
Hon Colin de Grussa (*Teller*)

Noes (19)

Hon Klara Andric  
Hon Dan Caddy  
Hon Sandra Carr  
Hon Stephen Dawson  
Hon Kate Doust

Hon Sue Ellery  
Hon Lorna Harper  
Hon Jackie Jarvis  
Hon Ayor Makur Chuot  
Hon Kyle McGinn

Hon Shelley Payne  
Hon Stephen Pratt  
Hon Martin Pritchard  
Hon Samantha Rowe  
Hon Rosie Sahanna

Hon Matthew Swinbourn  
Hon Dr Sally Talbot  
Hon Darren West  
Hon Peter Foster (*Teller*)

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Pair

Hon Neil Thomson

Hon Pierre Yang

Question thus negatived.