

Hon Jackie Jarvis; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Darren West; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Peter Foster; Hon Dr Brian Walker

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Motion

HON JACKIE JARVIS (South West) [11.24 am] — without notice: I move —

That the Legislative Council extends its appreciation to all emergency services personnel and volunteers for their assistance to the state during the summer season.

I thank Hon Martin Aldridge for his non-government business motion on natural disasters. Great minds think alike, I should say, but it is wonderful that we have such bipartisan support. I do not think that it is a bad thing that the house has spent significant time discussing this issue; I think that is positive. Obviously, we have already had lots of speakers on this subject, so I would like to focus on some personal stories from my electorate, and I am sure that other members will welcome the opportunity to add more to this discussion.

My experience of the summer bushfires started on Thursday, 9 December, which was a sitting day, when we first started getting news reports of fires in Margaret River. We had a large fire just south of the Margaret River township in the Boranup area, and there was a secondary fire in Yallingup. I took leave of the house at about 4.30 that afternoon—thank you to our Whip, who granted me the opportunity to return to my electorate. As members would know, sometimes we just need to be in our electorate because we need to be there. We do not necessarily want to interfere or get involved, but it is just important to be back in our communities.

As I travelled south that evening of 9 December, my first stop was Geographe Leisure Centre in Busselton, which is a sports facility run by the City of Busselton. This was where it had set up an evacuation centre. That was quite important, because even though the fire was in Yallingup, which is part of the City of Busselton, and a large number of evacuations was not required, and even though there was a second evacuation centre in Margaret River, the nature and size of the fire by Thursday evening meant that Bussell Highway had to be closed south of Margaret River, which meant that residents in Karridale, Hamelin Bay and even Augusta could not access the Margaret River evacuation centre. Therefore, the Department of Communities, together with the City of Busselton, acted quite quickly to set up the second evacuation centre in Busselton, which meant that those communities south of Margaret River could travel on the inland road to access it. Department of Communities' staff were onsite when I arrived. They did not have any evacuees, but they had certainly been dealing with families. In these situations, it is preferable that people can stay with family and friends and simply register that they are safe. That was my first experience on 9 December.

On 10 December, I took the opportunity to attend the emergency management meeting at the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River as an observer. The Shire of Augusta–Margaret River is well versed in bushfire management and has obviously learnt a lot of lessons since 2011, when 28 homes were lost in major bushfires, so it is very much a well-oiled machine. I thank the shire president, Paula Cristoffanini, and the CEO, Stephanie Addison-Brown, for keeping me in the loop of what was happening and for their amazing organisation skills. As I said, I attended that emergency management meeting as an observer. It was amazing. It was a real exercise in the collaborative approach that we take here in Western Australia. There were shire staff, Department of Fire and Emergency Services staff and representatives from volunteer organisations there. Staff from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions were on the ground. Both fires had started in the Leeuwin–Naturaliste National Park, so DBCA had been first on the scene for both the Boranup and Yallingup fires. We had Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development staff. Of course, a lot of people forget that DPIRD plays an important role, particularly around animal welfare, as, unfortunately, stock have to be euthanised in some circumstances. Western Power was definitely on the scene, providing updates and reports. The Department of Communities plays an important role in providing family support. We have had some discussion about Telstra. Telstra was represented at the meeting and we were told how it had been able to access one of its mobile phone towers in the Boranup region and get a generator there to provide power to the mobile phone tower. Telstra certainly is on the front foot when there is a tower; I think the issue has been about where the towers might be, and I will deal with that another time.

On 10 December, we also had the then Minister for Emergency Services, Minister Whitby, come down to visit. We then took the opportunity to go out to the soccer oval, where a small village had been set up. It was amazing. It was a whole village of temporary buildings. There were volunteer and career firefighters. A whole town had been set up on the basketball courts at Margaret River Recreation Centre, with tents provided by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. They sleep six to eight people on stretchers and there were sleeping bags and pillows. These were being used so that all the brigades that had come in from out of town could get some rest, respite and sleep. They could also have been used, if needed, for evacuation purposes. It was absolutely phenomenal.

There were firefighters and SES members, and other groups were also involved. I was a bit taken aback when I saw members of the Margaret River Volunteer Marine Rescue Group at the fireground, but, as we know, these service groups all come together, and marine rescue volunteers were there to provide logistic and coordination support. There were no boats required, but they certainly were on the ground!

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On 26 December we had a fire at Canebreak Pool, which is a DBCA-managed campsite north-east of Margaret River. This fire was, quite literally, a bit close to home for me; my property was within the watch-and-act zone. It was Boxing Day, and I was actually in Perth with family. It was somewhat surreal to be in Perth watching the billowing smoke from the Wooroloo fire, which was also burning out of control at that stage, when I knew my own property was near the Canebreak Pool area.

Some members spoke earlier about the role that farmers play. My husband, like most farmers across the state, has a firefighting unit, which basically consists of a water tank and a pump, either on the back of a ute or, in our case, on a pallet, so that it can be moved to a ute or ATV vehicle. Like lots of farmers in these situations, we get phone calls from people saying, “If you need it, my firefighting unit is at”—their location. They are kept in places that anyone can access. Anyone can turn up to your property and grab your firefighting unit, if needed.

The local government was also amazing. In my area, including on our property, we have some nature-based camping, which allows people to have caravans. Those people had to be evacuated; it was about 5.00 pm on Boxing Day. The Shire of Augusta–Margaret River opened up the footy oval and a number of caravans went there. Similarly, when we had the fires on 10 January, there were a lot of people who had been evacuated camping at Conto’s Beach, and the Department of Communities was able to provide support.

I believe there were 12 brigades from across the south west and from as far north as Chidlow attending the Canebreak Pool fire. It is also worth noting that we had a much larger number of brigades fighting the fires at Wooroloo at the same time. On 11 January, we had the Meelup Regional Park fire on the outskirts of Dunsborough. Anyone who has visited Dunsborough will know Meelup Beach and the road it is on; they would not recognise it if they were to drive down it today. They were incredibly hot, intense fires. Authorities were alerted to it at about 8.00 pm, and it was in the area of the Meelup Regional Park that leads down to the beach and is not accessible by vehicle, which made the fire quite difficult to fight. That fire occurred on property operated by the City of Busselton, so it was first on the scene. By 3.00 am, local police had had to go door-to-door to evacuate people. This is around the Eagle Bay area, so there are lots of holiday homes and lots of tourists visiting at that time of year. The local police did an amazing job of making sure that people left. One can imagine: if a fire starts at 8.00 pm, by the time there is enough smoke to generate interest from people, they might already be asleep, so the police did an amazing job.

I was lucky enough to join the new Minister for Emergency Services, Hon Stephen Dawson, to visit the brigade a few days after that fire. I note that both Minister Whitby and Minister Dawson, as emergency services ministers, were incredibly mindful not to visit these locations during the heat of the fire, for want of a better expression, so that their visit did not create an extra burden on staff. They actually wait until the fire is under control or contained. There is a fine balance between showing appreciation and creating an event that might take away from firefighting efforts. Minister Dawson and I visited the Dunsborough brigade headquarters, and there were volunteers there from across the south west and across the state. We also had the opportunity to look at a LAT, or large air tanker.

I am reluctant to mention individual brigades and individual people, because there were so many people involved from across the state, but I will make special mention of the Busselton bushfire control chief, Allan Guthrie. I have known “Gus” for many years—25 years; I did not actually know his name was Allan!—and he is a now-retired farmer who has lived in the area his whole life. In June 2021 he was given an Order of Australia medal in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List. His position is a volunteer position, and he certainly led the efforts of the volunteers in Busselton. When we were in Dunsborough, his wife, Jane, who is a retired dental nurse, was doing the catering. It is not her official job, but apparently that goes with the job; it is like being the “First Lady of Fire” in Busselton!

I mentioned the large air tankers. They live in Busselton in the fire season, and that is a joint state and federal project. They are essentially like large passenger planes converted to tankers. They are operated by contract specialist pilots who come in, two at a time, and stay in the region for a period before going on to another state. There were amazing arrangements in place for a COVID quarantine bubble for those pilots. They made the point that they are supported by on-ground staff, volunteers supplied by the local SES, who have been trained to make sure that the LATs are fully stocked with fire retardant. The LATs are incredibly important for building containment lines.

We had the Denmark fire, the Bridgetown fire and the two fires in the wheatbelt in early February; that has been spoken about. They were level 3 fires, but there were also numerous smaller fires across the state at that time. I am incredibly thrilled that I got the opportunity to spend a few days in Bridgetown and Manjimup, where the DFES regional office is located. I met a young SES volunteer in Manjimup who was working out of the DFES regional office, supporting the work of the fire crews. She told me that she had not wanted to join the SES because they were the old guys in the orange overalls! She is an amazing young woman. Her day job is at the Manjimup Visitor Centre, and she was doing logistics work—arranging the movement of heavy earthmoving equipment as a volunteer. She had obviously taken time away from her work, and I would like to mention all the small and large businesses that

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give up their staff at a cost to the business. This particular volunteer is a casual worker for a community-based tourism association that cannot afford to pay volunteer leave, so she was basically giving up a day's income to assist.

I also got to spend a bit of time at the Bridgetown Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, led by fire captain Millie Nedelkovski. She has been fire captain there for many years. I was surprised during the previous motion when a member of the crossbench thought it was necessary to mention that there were five "ladies" in the brigade! Female volunteers have been involved in firefighting for a long time, so I hope people are no longer surprised that we might have a female captain of a volunteer bush fire brigade; they are not all in the kitchen, making the scones.

A member interjected.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: As a daughter of an Irishman, it is slightly racist to pick on someone for their pronunciation!

In closing, career volunteer firefighters, SES volunteers, career and volunteer paramedics and ambulance officers and staff of local government, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, the Department of Communities and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development are all community members. I mentioned marine rescue, but we also see sporting clubs and service clubs such as the Country Women's Association, APEX, Lions and Rotary all getting involved. Farmers and small and large businesses give up staff and time, and fight the fires themselves. Of course, it has an impact on families as partners give up time—this includes my electorate officer's husband, who has been fighting fires for weeks now.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development) [11.39 am]: I thank Hon Jackie Jarvis for bringing this motion to us today and allowing us to have an extended discussion about these issues associated with the natural disasters that we are seeing across our state. I also acknowledge Hon Martin Aldridge's motion earlier. I think this is a very useful discussion for us to be having today. I will pick up on the theme of Hon Jackie Jarvis's contribution, which causes us to reflect on the importance of building social capital within our communities. The rallying of people, whether volunteer or career firefighters, public servants or people from local government, has been a feature of all the contributions that have been made to date. That relies on us having incredibly strong social capital. We have a community that has a strong sense of community, and that is something we must treasure.

I also acknowledge the point made earlier by Hon Wilson Tucker when he reflected on climate change. When I was in Denmark with Hon Sally Talbot last Saturday at an event honouring the firefighters, I was approached by a couple of young women who are firefighters in the State Emergency Service who wanted to make sure it was understood that there was a connection between climate change and the natural disasters that we are experiencing. The government certainly does not need to be convinced that that is the case. We are working on many fronts across government to ensure that we can absolutely reduce our emissions profile. We can also do amazing things within agriculture such as carbon sequestration and deal with the microclimatic issues that are an important part of climate change.

I find the incredible bravery of those people who go out there and fight the fires extraordinary. I have to say that it is not just a young person's game. Particularly in Denmark, I found it amazing to see people like Cyril, who was celebrating his eighty-fourth birthday on that day and was still actively engaged. Roger Seeney, who set up the brigade there 35 years ago, was fighting the fires. He told me that he has had 45 years' experience in fighting fires. A good friend of Hon Sally Talbot and mine, Illya Cenin, was out there with the hose. I will not reflect on Illya's age, but he certainly is moving into the senior phase! Those people are brave. Steve Birkbeck's huge dam was very, very useful. The fire tankers were able to load water from the dam. People described the bravery of the helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft pilots. They went into dense, thick and hot smoke in order to do their bit. I am in awe of the bravery of the people who get out there with the hose or fly the aircraft. We love everyone else, including the scone makers; they are all fantastic, but, gosh, the people like Hon Martin Aldridge who put their lives on the line are pretty incredible.

Hon Darren West and I went to Corrigin last Friday. I had been to Corrigin the week before to meet a group of farmers from the Corrigin Farm Improvement Group. We felt it was pretty important to go back because we had spent a number of very profitable hours with a number of those people in the Corrigin pub the week before who had gone through a pretty hellish time. We met with them again last Friday to get their feedback and work out what we could do. It is interesting that there are always silver linings. A number of farmers and members of the Corrigin Farm Improvement Group indicated an interest in having a look at replanting trees, a number of which had been planted over decades. They asked whether they could plant back better and avail themselves of the incredible opportunities available in carbon farming now that carbon in Australia is \$55 a tonne. They wondered whether we could build back better in that regard.

Another point I want to make is about telecommunications because perhaps people are not aware that since 2014, the state government has been investing heavily in absorbing some of the commonwealth's responsibility in building

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telecommunications. Since we have been in government, we have allocated around \$50 million to various schemes such as the mobile black spot program and the regional telecommunications connectivity program, which is a little more flexible and responsive than the mobile black spot program, and the digital farm grants program. People need to know about an important program that has not been mentioned but which has been worked through with the commonwealth government, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and other federal agencies. Planning started in 2020 on the strengthening telecommunications against natural disasters program. That is an investment program to ensure that we have better and stronger telecommunications processes. In particular, the main focus has been taking battery life from the standard two hours to around 12 hours. We have been working with the commonwealth government to deliver that. Stage 1 upgraded around 108 mobile phone towers right across Western Australia. We are looking at stage 2 of the program and we want to work with the commonwealth to upgrade another 107 mobile phone towers. We have been prepared to add almost \$1 million to the funds that the commonwealth has put forward for stage 2, in order to ensure that we can get coverage. We are now also looking at some other options as to how these things would work. One suggestion has been larger mobile batteries. The advice to date is that a more traditional generator is probably better than a mobile unit. We are continuing to work constructively with the commonwealth to urge it to seize its constitutional responsibilities, but we are very definitely working constructively with it to make sure that we build those telecommunications better and stronger so that they are more resilient in the face of natural disasters.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.49 am]: Again, as has been the theme this morning in this motion moved by Hon Jackie Jarvis and the earlier motion moved by the Deputy President, we are all as one and united in our thanks and appreciation of all those who have taken the time, sometimes paid but in the vast majority of cases voluntarily, to go out and put their lives in harm's way to protect others. That is our volunteer firefighting and rescue services. We all acknowledge and thank them all so much for everything that they have done, especially over the last few weeks, when we have had these particularly catastrophic fire conditions and some particularly nasty fires. I think in our part of the world in the Ag Region we have had some significant damage—40 000 hectares in one case, 18 000 hectares burned in another, some loss of property sheds and a couple of houses—but, miraculously, no lives lost. A slight injury—a broken arm—is about the extent of the human cost in terms of death and serious injury. It was an outstanding achievement to get those fires under control, considering their size and the danger involved. There were some close shaves and we have heard some fairly hair-raising stories about people who have managed to dodge the fire front, but, all in all, we have got through it safely. I think that is the most important thing.

I acknowledge everyone at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services who has been mentioned earlier, the personnel and the volunteer firefighters. We have had water bombers and farmers involved who are not always DFES-registered volunteers but who turn up with their fire units and help put out the fires. We have to take into context that the fire in Corrigin at one point was 35 kilometres long. It travelled 35 kilometres in a very short time, with about 60-kilometre-an-hour winds pushing it. We think about the size and perimeter of that fire, and then, when the wind changed, all of a sudden, that 35-kilometre flank became a 35-kilometre front. People were running along behind that fire, putting it out, to reduce the size of that flank. The cool change brought some relief and they were able to get on top of the fire, fortunately without razing the towns of Wickepin and Corrigin along the way. We had three fires—the Bruce Rock fire, which burned into the Corrigin shire; the Wamenusking fire, which was nearby; and, of course, the Wickepin and Narrogin bushfire. Three fires burning at the same time means an extraordinary strain on resources, but we have incident controllers who are very experienced and very good at what they do. They were able to manage all those volunteer and career firefighters, planes and helicopters and coordinate them into a concerted firefighting event. What a response it was!

From on the ground, as the minister mentioned, we travelled to Corrigin last week. I know that Minister Dawson was also at the fires. The feedback on the ground was overwhelmingly positive, notwithstanding the communications issues, and we know we all have some work to do with the federal government and Telstra. In the case of the Narrogin–Wickepin fire, I toured the fire ground with the Shire of Narrogin president, Leigh Ballard, who is also a firefighter and did a remarkable job in coordinating all the people involved in that fire. He is now continuing on with the response. Their issue was that the location of the fire was equidistant between phone towers, so the service was very patchy in that area, notwithstanding that the phone towers were still operating, but, of course, as we heard in Corrigin, when the power went out, around 200 poles burnt down, so power switched off. There was a very short time that the phones remained in service. That is a great challenge for us right across the country.

We were also in Esperance last week to launch the first standalone power system at a mobile tower site. Maybe in the fullness of time, this will be how we can take this forward. Obviously, it is a very costly exercise, but, as has been pointed out, when fighting a fire that poses a great danger to human life and the fire is getting bigger—we are sometimes talking about distances beyond radio reach with these very long, large fires—it is imperative that we have our phone systems up and operating. We all acknowledge that and I think we all know that we need to go

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and work together with the federal government and Telstra to help manage that. I think that we will look to the federal government to lead the way on this.

I want to personalise this a little bit, members, if that is okay. I think we are all at one with the amazing response. A couple of stories came out of the fire that I just found so Ag Region and so wheatbelt that I am really proud to tell them here. Last week, we met with a stud merino breeder, Steven Bolt, whose farm was particularly affected. It was a 1 620-hectare farm, and only about 60 hectares were not burnt. All his sheds were lost and, heartbreakingly, two generations of stud merino breeding were also all but lost. It is a very difficult and challenging personal set of circumstances to be a farmer and see livestock killed or harmed and needing to be euthanised. The clean-up of that was particularly harrowing for all those involved. It is an awful job to dispose of burnt stock, and it is an awful job to have to euthanise them. I acknowledge everyone who stepped up. That has to be done fairly quickly, as members can imagine. Everybody stepped up before the smoke had cleared and got in and did that. In the case of the Bolts, their stock was destroyed and their stud was pretty much lost. I understand they still have some embryos and some possible way of rebuilding, but that is going to be a long road ahead for that long line—generations' worth—of breeding of magnificent merino sheep.

I want to quote Steven Bolt, because he used some great wheatbelt language in appreciation of Joel and Travis Bell, who are firefighters who actually turned up at the Bolts' house as it was catching fire in a calamitous situation during the height of the fire. These two local farmers saved Steven Bolt's family's house. Steven Bolt's quote was, "The mad bastards saved my house." I am sorry if that is slightly unparliamentary, but I am quoting. That is such a wheatbelt saying. People performed almost an act of madness and put their own safety at jeopardy to save a fellow farmer's house, and I am really proud to see that that is something that still goes on. It could have ended catastrophically, but it did not. Of all the losses the Bolt family suffered, they still have their home. I think that is something to be taken away from all this.

When we met with the Corrigin community, we met with a shire that was at a loss to understand what to do next, and we were able to provide some assurances about the way forward. We also met people who had put themselves in difficult positions and just talked about the significant loss. All those trees that had been planted in the name of land care have now been destroyed. We are going to look at planting them again in the name of carbon sequestration. This community will phoenix out of the ashes. We will work with them. There is a big community event being put together tomorrow evening in Corrigin. I am sure there will be a good turnout at that and people will get around each other and support each other, as we do best. There is often talk about the things we do not have in the regions, but what we do have is love for our communities, support for each other, and going above and beyond for each other. I wanted to touch on that.

There was another story about a young man called Oliver McCleary. He had just moved into a house on the farm that he was looking after and working on, and the house burnt down, but he managed to save the cattle. They were his priority. He put the lives and welfare of those 100 breeding cattle before his own personal circumstances. He lost everything he had in the home. To quote Oliver, again, in true wheatbelt style, he said, "I'll miss that really loud 1970s air conditioner that I used to have on at night to sleep with."

We will get around these communities. We will certainly help in every way we can moving forward. The state government has a responsibility after the event, and we know that the communities will pull together and help themselves, but they also have our support. There was a disruption to schools; there were emergency evacuation centres. There have been fires in other areas that I have not had time to touch on today, but I acknowledge everyone everywhere. Hopefully, the fire season is coming to an end and we do not have any more of these catastrophic days. Fire is something that we have to learn to manage going forward, and when we do it together, we can do it.

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [12 noon]: Like many people who have contributed to the debate this morning, my experience of the last couple of weeks has given me some stories to tell that are both personal and political because I have a house in Denmark. I was on my way home late on Friday, 4 February when I heard about the fire that had started on McLeod Road; that, of course, became the all-consuming story of the next couple of days. I am sure that members would agree with me when I say that one of the most common questions we are asked is what being a member of Parliament is like. I always explain to people that it entails the enormous privilege of being included in events with our communities when they are celebrating the best things that happen to them, but also when the worst things happen to them. For me, those three days over the first weekend in February encompassed both these extremes—it was the best and the worst that had happened in Denmark.

I want to start by saying that it is probably a bit unusual and perhaps a mark of the summer that we are having this discussion in this place on this morning of 17 February, because, as a lot of people in Denmark have reminded me over the last couple of weeks, it is not over yet. I think Hon Darren West referred to that specifically. We have many, many months to go during which we will be hovering on the brink of the next emergency. It will not really be until towards the end of May, when the proper rains come, that we will breathe a sigh of relief, at which point

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most of us will get on with preparations for next summer. That will start as soon as we have survived this one. It is certainly not over, and I hope beyond measure that we will continue to contain the fires that are inevitably going to break out in the way that we have contained these.

It has been said by people around Denmark, and I am sure in other communities such as Bridgetown and the wheatbelt where other members have been actively involved, both personally and professionally, that we have dodged a bullet. Certainly there was a stage with the Denmark fire when the entire town site was under threat. My home, two kilometres outside Denmark, would have been one of 1 500 houses that would have been lost if control had not been regained over the northeast front, which had got away from us late Saturday.

It is worth saying something at this point about climate change. I was very interested to hear from the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, Darren Klemm, when he came to Denmark with the Minister for Emergency Services on Monday, 7 February. He was asked a question about climate change and I thought, “Well, as commissioner for emergency services, he will perhaps sidestep that question.” But he did not. He took it head-on and said that we have to remember that Denmark has a certain set of climatic conditions that we are very used to. I personally have a shared joke with a neighbour of mine; we say that we never go swimming unless it is 26 degrees or over. I can tell members there have been many, many summers over the last 30 years or so that I have lived in Denmark when we did not go near the ocean because it did not get over 26. This year we have already had many days that have been well over 30.

On the Saturday of the recent bushfire, I heard anecdotal reports from people who were out fighting the fire of temperatures of 44 degrees throughout that day. That was not the temperature caused by the fire, but temperatures on the ground being experienced by the firefighters. The point that the commissioner raised specifically was that another feature of the climate in Denmark is that the temperature drops rapidly at night. Residents know that even on days when the temperature approaches 40, they will have to go and get a jumper when it gets to five or six at night. There are very few nights of the year that I do not use my electric blanket. On one of those nights over that weekend, it did not drop below 30. As a consequence of those climatic conditions, the fire doubled in size overnight. According to the commissioner, that is unprecedented in the great southern along the south coast. It simply does not happen. Night-time is when the temperature plummets and the firefighters reduce the size of the fire. Our fire doubled in size that night. There is no question that we are experiencing the effects of climate change and that we need to take remedial action very, very quickly; otherwise, it will literally be too late.

I have heard my colleagues in this place talk about problems with telecommunications. They are very, very real problems and they need to be fixed. I have heard people raise other problems with various aspects of our strategy for fighting bushfires. Certainly, among our local fire brigades, I have heard a troubling number of stories about the lack of compatibility between pieces of equipment. People turn up to reload water and they have the wrong combination of male and female connections, or they have 40-millimetre connections and the appliance takes 50 millimetre et cetera. This is the case when we are using appliances that are privately owned as well as those owned by the state. We urgently need to do an audit of the compatibility of our hardware.

Having attended the three community meetings that we had over that weekend in Denmark, I do not think we can place too much emphasis on the fact that people must have a fire plan, and it has to be a fire plan that people do not just do once and forget about. I heard so many stories over that weekend from people who said that they just panicked and froze, even when their homes were not in the orange zone—orange zone means people have to make a decision about whether they are going to stay or go—but were in the yellow zones or just outside the areas under immediate threat. They could not remember what their fire plan was. They did not know what to do. That is when someone is in real danger. We can have the best telecommunications in the world, the most up-to-date equipment and the most efficient systems, but if individual households are not at the stage at which they can go on autopilot and carry out their fire plan, unfortunately, we will continue to be at risk.

Thirty per cent of the residents of Denmark evacuated on the Saturday night. I joined my voice with those local voices, including the shire president, Ceinwen Gearon, and all the DFES leadership team who thanked those people who left. That tells us that 30 per cent of people had a fire plan and knew how to execute it. They did not freeze. They knew exactly what they had to do. They got in their cars. Certainly from the anecdotal firsthand accounts I heard, people had their precious bits and pieces in the back of their car already and they got out of town. Fortunately, they were able to come back very quickly, but I join in congratulating those people who left. All I say to the rest of the community is: get your fire plan ready and then practice it and practice it again. Get it out two or three times every fire season and make sure that when the moment comes when you have to make a decision, you are not frozen in fear.

We use the phrase “dodged a bullet”. As the owner of one of the 1 500 homes that were not lost, it feels like that to me, but we did lose homes, some people were injured and some people are now in a position in which they will endure ongoing trauma because of what happened that weekend. My heart goes out to them. I know that I am

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joined by every member of this house when I say that we are all thinking of you and we all wish you the very best, and we are here to help you.

I know from previous experiences over the past couple of decades of working as a community leader that some problems are harder to solve than others. We as local members of Parliament are here for them to help them get through those moments. I spoke to the shire president this morning to tell her that this motion was coming up and she asked me to not forget to say that we should not be calling out individuals, but talking exactly about what Hon Alannah MacTiernan talked about—the community spirit that got us through that weekend. We will continue to rally for the good of the community in times to come whenever we are faced with these very frightening events.

HON PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [12.10 pm]: I start my contribution by thanking Hon Jackie Jarvis for moving this very important private member's motion today. Of course, I will be speaking in support of it and showing my appreciation to all the emergency services personnel and volunteers. Across the Mining and Pastoral Region over the summer season emergency services personnel have been kept very busy. We need only look at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' Facebook page and then scroll down to get an understanding of just how many incidents emergency services personnel responded to over the busy summer season. Like every other Western Australian, I am very grateful for our emergency services personnel. They work around the clock, at times in very trying circumstances, to protect lives and infrastructure and to save country. Both the Kimberley and the Pilbara received soakings across January and February, with Broome and Fitzroy Crossing receiving heavy rainfall and requiring an emergency services response. As a result of a seasonal tropical low, Broome in particular received an amazing 568 millimetres of rain in just 48 hours. The Fitzroy River peaked at 12 metres and parts of the Broome–Cape Leveque Road were cracked and even washed away. I thank the Main Roads teams that responded quickly to repair those important roads.

The Gascoyne also received heavy rainfall as well as bushfires and the Gascoyne complex of fires requiring substantial intervention from a number of services. I would like to talk about them for a few minutes. These fires started following lightning strikes on 6 January. There were four fires in total. They burned for a number of weeks, affecting the Shires of Carnarvon, Upper Gascoyne and Shark Bay—all in my electorate. A number of pastoral stations were affected, including Meedo Station, which lost over 80 000 hectares as well as sheep and goats. Other stations that were affected included Gilroyd, Wahroonga, Woodleigh, Yaringa, Wooramel and Carbla. Other stations reported damage, including fencing, and losing farm machinery. In total, over 343 000 hectares were burnt and emergency services that responded did their good work in over 40-degree heat. Heavy smoke cover and difficult terrain ended the ability of firefighters to control those fires and they relied on the local knowledge of pastoralists. I was in Carnarvon for a few days while those fires were burning and I can personally vouch for the challenging conditions that the firefighters faced. It was very hot. I thank and acknowledge the Minister for Emergency Services, who travelled with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services commissioner, Darren Klemm, to the Geraldton incident management centre and also flew over parts of the firegrounds to see firsthand how complex the fires were and to thank those who were responding. Ground crews were assisted by the Coulson 737 FireLiner, which I think a few honourable members have talked about today. This was provided by the New South Wales Rural Fire Service and dropped over 90 000 litres of fire retardant ahead of the fire front to protect pastoral property and livestock. No lives were lost as a result of the fires, which is a reflection of the good work of all those involved as well as the fire management and subsequent response.

I would like to thank everyone involved in fighting the complex fires, including staff from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Parks and Wildlife Service, some of whom travelled north from Perth and Peel and whom I had the pleasure of meeting and thanking in person at the Carnarvon Airport as they were catching their flights home—DFES personnel, career fire and rescue, and fire and rescue volunteers, with a number of bush fire brigades travelling north from Mandogalup, Wanneroo and Kalamunda whose efforts were also greatly appreciated. We were also assisted by state emergency services, local bush fire brigades and, of course, the Shires of Gascoyne, Carnarvon and Shark Bay. I also acknowledge the work of the pastoralists in putting firebreaks on their own properties as well as assisting each other in fighting the fires. I would like to extend the appreciation shown here today to all emergency services personnel who were involved in fighting those complex fires. I am very thankful for their hard work to save property and lives.

I would like to talk about a local incident a little closer to home in Tom Price, where I live. Like many places in the north west we are also subject to cyclones and the severe weather over the wet season, and this year was certainly no different. Recently on 7 February, without warning from the Bureau of Meteorology, Tom Price received a substantial amount of rainfall in just a two-hour window. Although we do not have a weather station in town, which is a little frustrating, the local SES staff tell me they believe we received over 100 millilitres of rain in two hours. The unit did not receive any warnings from BOM. Normally the unit receives an email or phone call from BOM as a heads up so they can be on standby, but for some reason no call was received so the unit was caught unaware. The Tom Price SES is a very small unit. There are 17 members in total; 12 were activated to assist the town. As

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a result of the floodwaters—we received a lot of rain in a short period—17 homes were impacted, with three homes requiring urgent damage as they were flooded. A creek that runs through the centre of town overflowed, which then spilled over into the town and three houses were underwater. The local Tom Price SES was assisted by the Tom Price Senior High School emergency service cadets, who volunteered their spare time after school at the sub-centre, filling sandbags. They later jumped into utes with SES volunteers to deliver and lay down sandbags to protect vulnerable properties and infrastructure. We received reports of more rain in town throughout the week, so the SES wanted to be well prepared.

I told the students that I would give a shout-out to them in Parliament today, so I would like to thank the following cadets who gave up their time: Alisa Church, Emily Flavell, Madelyn Flavell, Kayla Farmer, Andre Bradley, Kye Rumble, Chanel Drummond and Ebony Griffin, who had just joined the unit that day, so she jumped straight in, which was fantastic. I have had a bit to do with the high school cadets over the years. I often go to their presentations and I personally donate to them. I am particularly proud of all the volunteering they do across our community supporting our emergency services.

Following the rain event on Monday the town received further rainfall, which resulted in the SES receiving a further 15 calls for assistance. The weather got a little wilder throughout the week, resulting in more sandbags being required and a number of trees requiring to be removed as well. I am reliably informed that over 1 000 sandbags were filled to protect our little town. They did not work alone and I would like to acknowledge the Shire of Ashburton, Rio Tinto, Sodexo, Bennco Engineering, North West Mining and Civil, and Pure Mechanical, which all provided support to the unit on the ground to enable it to do its job.

We have been talking a little about telecommunications and I want to acknowledge that Tom Price lost all its telecommunications for four hours on Saturday night. As someone whose household relies quite heavily on the internet, it was frustrating. I acknowledge the Shire of Ashburton's IT crew who identified the problem. The exchange is way out at Auski Roadhouse. A wire had tripped there, resulting in the internet being turned off. They were able to identify the problem. They rang the roadhouse, had it switched back on, and the internet was restored, which was great.

To finish up, I acknowledge and show my appreciation to the Tom Price SES unit. I had the privilege of catching up with the unit manager, Sue Davies, on Sunday before I travelled to Perth for Parliament to personally say thank you to her and her unit for all their efforts. As I have said, it is a small unit of only 17 members. The unit responds to a substantial number of calls for assistance each year, from severe weather events such as storms and cyclones—a number of cyclones impact Tom Price—to conducting land searches and gorge rescues at nearby Karijini National Park. I felt this needed special mention. A typical rescue at Karijini National Park can take up to 14 hours. It requires particular skills such as abseiling, with ropes, and physical fitness to be able to navigate the difficult terrain.

One issue that the unit has raised with me, and that I will be exploring for it, is the lack of a local Bureau of Meteorology weather station in Tom Price. The nearest weather station is 80 kays away at Paraburdoo Airport. Tom Price is a town of substantial size, with a lot of mining infrastructure, and we deserve to have a local weather station.

In conclusion, I join with Hon Jackie Jarvis and my colleagues in this place in showing my appreciation to the emergency services personnel who have been kept busy over the summer season protecting lives, property and infrastructure. Thank you.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [12.20 pm]: I have only a few minutes in which to speak, so I will keep my comments short. I am sure that all of us here share the view that we owe a great vote of thanks to all those involved in the emergency services. As a member for East Metropolitan Region, I can ascertain and verify that we are deeply grateful for all the work that they are doing and the dangers that are ever present. I therefore welcome this opportunity to put on the record my thanks to the many, many wonderful volunteers who risk life and limb in the service of others.

There is, however, a bigger picture, and that is the microclimate that we need to be working towards. This was mentioned by Hon Alannah MacTiernan also. That leads me to the question of how we will manage the risk to our environment, in not only the immediate future but also the long-term future. That is certainly something that should exercise our minds. That brings to mind the contribution from Hon Dr Brad Pettitt yesterday about the trees that are proposed to be removed, thus destroying the habitat of a number of birds—I think it was Carnaby's black-cockatoo. That would be ameliorated if we could find other sources to fill the need that these trees currently serve. That would, of course, be the hemp industry, which has a twice-a-year harvest and can provide a lot of the wood fibre that is currently needed by industry, including pressed woods and other such things. That is a discussion that we could certainly have, especially as the cultivation of hemp would be a great way to help the microclimate to change, and also improve greatly the viability of the soil. That is just a by the by in the few minutes that remain to me.

Extract from *Hansard*

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To cut short my thoughts, we need to ensure that the emergency services are provided with adequate funding. Points have been made about the need for equipment. I think that need is being met on all sides. We are always looking at how this can be improved on an ongoing basis. I would encourage the government—as it is doing, I am sure—to look very closely at how we can support these services even more. There have been recent discussions, or disagreements, between the volunteers, who are unpaid, and the career firefighters, and about the difficulty of ensuring that the people in those two different services can work together. That will need to be addressed at some stage as well. I must say, truthfully, that I do not have the details of that, so I cannot comment any further.

There has been an issue about a new residential development known as North Stoneville, in which about 4 000 new homes are proposed to be built in the middle of a bushfire-prone region, with limited egress. That would result in a risk to life and limb, and, indeed, property, for those who decide to build in that area. I am told that at a meeting of the community group Save Perth Hills, the firefighters who spoke had tears in their eyes. I was not present at that meeting, although I believe some members of the Labor government were present at that meeting. Their sincerity could certainly not be doubted, I am told.

I also want to say some words about local government. I listened to the contributions from the Western Australian Local Government Association last year after the recent bushfires and was immensely impressed with the ability of local government to be the first responders in managing bushfires. It took several days for the state government to get engaged. This was a point of note made by the councils of the City of Swan and the Shire of Mundaring. We must give our best thanks to these organisations for the immense work that they are doing. Indeed, I visited the Shire of Mundaring just the other day and the shire commented about the risks that it is facing with the current weather and about its preparedness. I was sad to hear that the shire is quite concerned that it would not be able to manage very well, and it asked whether we in the state government could somehow move to provide more in the way of support, both financial and otherwise, to local governments. That is a point that I would like to make to the Minister for Local Government.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.