

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Steve Martin;  
Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Shelley Payne

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**NATURAL DISASTERS — PREPAREDNESS**

*Motion*

**HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural)** [10.04 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house —

- (a) notes the outlook by the Bureau of Meteorology for an above-average number of tropical cyclones in the 2022–23 cyclone season, and forecasts for hot and dry conditions for the southern bush fire season; and
- (b) notes the failure of the Labor government to complete and release numerous after-action reviews into major natural disasters as we approach the high threat period; and
- (c) expresses concern in relation to our preparedness to combat new emergencies as well as to manage the continuing recovery from previous impacts in recent years.

I hope this motion will be given due consideration.

**Hon Matthew Swinbourn:** I just notice that the time that has been allocated to this motion is incorrect. It should be 80 minutes.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, parliamentary secretary. That was picked up swiftly. We will just wait for the resetting of the clock.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I know the government would not want to have one extra minute of scrutiny on this motion. It would not want one extra minute of scrutiny on this important motion. However, the impetus for this motion —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Settle, please.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** The impetus for this motion is very important. As the motion outlines, on all accounts, on all predictions, we are likely looking at having a very challenging season with not only cyclones and storms, but also fire and other natural disasters. A lot of this is being driven by warmer ocean temperatures and the negative Indian Ocean dipole and an active La Niña, which has been well reported on over the last few weeks since it was declared by the Bureau of Meteorology. We are likely to see an increase of heatwave events. Members will recall only too well how hot and dry last summer was and the significant number of heatwave events that we experienced, particularly in the south of the state, and the impact that that had on not just natural disasters and emergency management, but also other factors such as our electricity network. Of course, I do not have to tell members that this is off the back of two fairly wet winters in which we had a very significant, if not record, crops received or forecast, and so we have quite significant fuel loads in parts of Western Australia.

The Bureau of Meteorology and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council will shortly provide a seasonal outlook on fire, and on 10 October, the tropical cyclone seasonal outlook for north west Australia was released by the bureau. A summary at the bottom of this statement has the forecast of an approximate 70 per cent chance of an above-average number of tropical cyclones in the north west region—the average is five—a likelihood of around two coastal impacts and significant risk of at least one severe tropical cyclone coastal impact during the season. That was the bureau's warning on 10 October, and certainly some of the reporting and the comments from meteorologists from the bureau following the 10 October statement have expressed caution about what is likely to be a more southern trajectory of cyclones this season given the climatic conditions that have been forecast.

The state is well served by more than 27 000 emergency service staff and volunteers, and I would like to acknowledge from the outset that they do an incredible job in almost always challenging circumstances. This motion is no criticism of them. It does, however, ask the question as to how well the government has performed and will perform in supporting not only these people, but also the communities that they serve that will be and have been impacted by natural disasters.

The annual report of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has some interesting data on a number of events that it has responded to. For example, in the last financial year, it received 10 718 calls to 000 and responded to 8 319 fires, of which 4 411 were bushfires, and 2 570 natural hazard events amongst a range of other responses. On page 15 of the report there is a breakdown across the services associated with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, where there are 27 221 staff and volunteers. It is interesting to compare that with the previous financial year, because there is a decline of 1 579 staff or volunteers from 2020–21 to 2021–22. We have actually gone backwards by almost 1 600 staff and volunteers in the emergency services space, which could warrant a motion and debate in its own right, perhaps on another day.

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In 2011–12 and 2012–13, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee produced two reports, the latter of which was titled, *Higher risk, better prepared? WA's preparedness for the 2012–13 bushfire season*. Ahead of the two fire seasons in those financial years, the committee conducted a very succinct inquiry that effectively looked at the questions of: How prepared are we? What is our capability? What are we likely to expect and experience in the high threat period ahead? I think the state government and the Parliament is well served by these kinds of inquiries and examinations, and the committee should be encouraged on future occasions to perhaps provide an annual report to the Parliament on this very question as we head into what will be, on all forecasts and projections, a difficult time.

The Community Development and Justice Standing Committee's twelfth report of November 2012 made a number of recommendations, and I am going to come back to them later. The report was authored by five members of the committee. Three were members of the Labor Party and two were members of the Liberal Party. Recommendation 1 states —

The Minister for Emergency Services must ensure that future post-incident analyses are completed and made public within eight weeks of a natural disaster.

The first recommendation of this report was with regard to a period of reflection and review. I have previously raised arguments along a similar vein in this place—that in effect, all emergencies should be subject to some sort of review. By their very nature, they are challenging; they challenge us, they challenge our communities and they challenge our capabilities. They are often unannounced, and sometimes they are unprecedented. Of course, reviews can come in different forms. We can have informal reviews and we can have more formal reviews.

At this point I might pause and reflect on the fact that even small responses could be subjected to formal review. There might be only a handful of people involved, but for a moment in time they could pause and reflect on what happened and how they might do things differently in future. That would be of enormous benefit to the people involved, be they staff, volunteers or community members. I will come to the important role of community in a moment.

One of the very few reviews we have seen since the election of the current Western Australian Labor government was the review into the Wooroloo bushfire. I remind members that the Wooroloo bushfire destroyed 86 homes and burnt more than 10 000 hectares of bushland on the fringes of Perth. It took some six months for the government to announce a review into the Wooroloo bushfire, and that followed significant pressure from the community, the Parliament, volunteer associations and many others. This review was undertaken by AFAC. It was estimated that the cost of the review was going to be in the order of \$30 000 to \$35 000. It ended up costing \$47 000. The money is not in itself of primary concern, but that gives us an indication of the extent of review that we are going to get. It is also important to note about the two primary subject matter expert reviewers from AFAC that, at the time, we had a closed border. The government appointed two people who could not actually enter Western Australia to conduct the review. That to me is a bizarre decision—to effectively conduct a review of an event as significant as the Wooroloo bushfire via videoconference.

I contrast that with the three special inquiries, akin to royal commissions, that were established by the previous Liberal–National government. The Waroona bushfire special inquiry cost \$354 000; the Margaret River bushfire inquiry cost \$215 000; and the Perth hills bushfire inquiry cost \$363 000. Really, the Wooroloo bushfire inquiry was a very cheap and quick review by reviewers who, as I said, were not even able to enter Western Australia. There are going to be constraints on the quality of the review that is ultimately produced.

As I have said before, I would really like to normalise these types of reviews and inquiry processes so that we do not have to have a big debate about learnings from these types of natural disaster. Since Wooroloo, we have had some other significant events occur, not least of which was cyclone Seroja, which was referred to in the 2020–21 annual report of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services in a section titled, “It has been almost 50 years since we have seen anything like it.” That is how DFES describes cyclone Seroja in its 2020–21 annual report. There was also the Calgardup bushfire near Margaret River and the severe weather event of February 2022. Members might recall that we had four concurrent level 3 bushfires—which is the highest level of incident management under the Australian incident management system—on Sunday, 6 February 2022. There is a section in the current DFES annual report titled “DFES’ capabilities stretched by four concurrent bushfires”.

What has been commissioned in the wake of those two events: cyclone Seroja and the 6 February severe weather events? The government has commissioned what it calls an after-action review. From my point of view, that is nothing more than an internal review. I cannot see how the community and the public will engage with an after-action review. It is led by an internal officer. Generally, from what I have seen of previous after-action reviews, they are led by a superintendent of a particular region—a mid-level officer of the department. That begs the question: what sort of a frank and fearless review and recommendations are we going to get if a subordinate officer within the organisation reviews, reports and makes recommendations for change? If one were an officer who wanted to stay

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with the organisation for a long time and was put in the position of contemplating a frank and fearless report, outlining the deficiencies in the response to cyclone Seroja, for example, one would think that it would be a fairly career-limiting move.

Cyclone Seroja impacted on 16 local governments across 133 000 square kilometres of Western Australia's midwest and Gascoyne regions. That event occurred 564 days ago. We are now heading into another cyclone season and the Bureau of Meteorology, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the minister and the government are all telling people to get ready, be prepared and do better. However, 564 days on from an event that DFES said we had not experienced for almost 50 years, we are still waiting for that after-action review to be finalised; that was revealed in a question asked last week on my behalf by my colleague Hon Colin de Grussa. The response provided by the Minister for Emergency Services on Wednesday 19 October was —

I am advised by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services that all four reports are currently going through the approval process and are anticipated to be completed by the end of 2022.

I will reflect momentarily on recommendation 1 of the majority Labor Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, which states —

The Minister for Emergency Services must ensure that future post-incident analyses are completed and made public within eight weeks of a natural disaster.

In my view, it is very difficult to take a one-size-fits-all approach to these types of reviews. I think there would be some significant shortcomings when providing a review within eight weeks of any type of event, particularly a major event. Certainly, that was the view of the committee in 2012. If we use that benchmark and apply it to the 564 days since cyclone Seroja, we are not doing very well.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** You were talking about a 2012 report. What was the government of the day's response to that report?

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** I am not sure that I have the government's response here, but I will look it up in a moment.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** I seem to remember that you were possibly in government for about four or five years after that.

**Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE:** Yes, and special inquiries were established. This was in relation to an event when a special inquiry was established and reported on. I am coming to that, minister.

We also had the severe weather event that I talked about earlier that resulted in four fires in Narrogin–Wickepin, the Shackleton complex, Denmark and Bridgetown, in which 60 000 hectares were burnt and 40 dwellings lost. It has been 263 days since that event. We are now heading into a high-threat period and the minister has told the house that we will not even know what the after-action review will be until the end of 2022. Notwithstanding the shortcomings associated with after-action reviews and my preference for much more independent and public inquiries for these types of major events, even this internal review will not be known until we are midway through and well into the high-threat period this year, even though the government and government agencies are telling us that we need to do more to prepare and that we need to be better.

I turn now to the last section of my motion, which effectively goes to the issue of our preparedness. Our emergency management sector is facing a number of challenges at the moment. This part of the motion talks about not only our preparedness to respond to new emergencies, but also our ability to continue to recover from previous emergencies. As I said, it has been 564 days since cyclone Seroja. I encourage the Labor government to take its next regional cabinet to Kalbarri and embed itself in that community for a few days to understand what the recovery looks like, or does not look like.

We received an answer in this house this week on the update of the \$45 million recovery and resilience funding that was activated for cyclone Seroja, of which only \$519 000 has been disbursed to date. More than 560 days on from the devastation caused by Seroja, the government has been able to get \$520 000 out the door from a \$45 million fund. I would describe that as a disaster. In estimates recently, the Minister for Emergency Services expressed his frustration at the lack of progress on the recovery from cyclone Seroja. If members spend some time in Kalbarri or other Seroja-impacted communities, they will see more than frustration; they will see hopelessness. After spending two winters, for many, with no roof on their house, members will see the despair and hopelessness of members in that community. I have personally experienced that.

We are well behind in replacing our emergency services fleet in order to combat new emergencies. An answer to a parliamentary question asked in this place shows that more than 230 emergency service vehicles are still in service in Western Australia beyond their design life. We have a significant backlog in replacing our emergency services fleet and keeping it modern. On top of that, we have a problem maintaining them. I pursued the government fairly

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persistently over the issue of fleet mechanics in the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. We are well short of filling the positions needed to maintain our fleet and keep those vehicles on the road. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and other members raised in estimates the issue of the availability of urban pumps. It is not only about constructing vehicles, but also maintaining them. Yesterday, we learnt that we have spent more than \$500 000 flying mechanics in from Sydney to help maintain our fire trucks. This is ahead of a season when concern is being expressed by the bureau, the government and the department. They are saying that we need to do better and prepare.

I think we have reached the point at which the government needs to start to normalise the process of reviews following major natural disasters and also be more frank about our capability and our limitations. I think that is why it is well overdue that we start to see greater scrutiny by the Parliament of Western Australia, perhaps on an annual basis, to assess our ability to manage natural disasters now and into the future.

**HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [10.25 am]: I rise to contribute to the excellent motion moved by Hon Martin Aldridge. I will focus my remarks around the first and third points of the motion in particular. I say at the outset that I acknowledge the hard work of our first responders in emergency situations for the work they do. Whether they be volunteers or paid professionals, we are very grateful for their work. In times of most need, of course, we have the opportunity to reflect on the work they do, and I acknowledge that work.

Hon Martin Aldridge spoke at quite some length about this season's forecasts for tropical cyclones, temperatures and fuel loads. Interestingly, a point that sometimes gets missed in the Bureau of Meteorology's forecasts for tropical cyclones is that although not all tropical lows will form into a cyclone, a tropical low can still bring very strong and damaging winds and cause severe rainfall and flooding. In fact, the number of tropical lows that are likely to form during these La Niña years is typically greater than it would otherwise be. The propensity for strong winds and flooding could also potentially present quite a problem. We are seeing on the east coast the devastating floods that severe weather has caused and continues to cause. We certainly need to be aware of that and be planning and preparing for it here. Given the changing climate, it is likely that we will see more events like that, and our preparedness to respond to those types of events needs to be at its best.

I turn to the forecast for the coming summer period. If we look at the maps on the Bureau of Meteorology's website, we see that they are colourful but that the colour is mostly on the western side of the map. The colour red indicates a significant chance of exceeding the median maximum temperatures, particularly over the December to February period when it looks like much of Western Australia will have a 65 per cent to 80 per cent chance of exceeding the median maximum temperature. The wheatbelt region in particular has had a very good grain season, which, in turn, increases the fuel load due to the big crops. In 2015, I saw the devastation firsthand in Esperance when huge fuel loads, fanned by high temperatures and wind, created an unstoppable firestorm. That is the risk we face and that is why these forecasts need to be heeded and our preparedness needs to be at its best.

I said at the outset that I wanted to focus on the first and third aspects of this motion. The third aspect expresses concern about our preparedness to combat new emergencies and also our ability to manage the continuing recovery from the impact of natural disasters in recent years. I want to focus in particular on an issue that has been continually raised with me by people who suffered through the Corrigin fires earlier in the year. That is around that most insidious substance, asbestos, and the devastating impacts that people were perhaps not prepared for or aware of to any great length before that fire had gone through. As we know, many farmhouses and structures in those communities are old and contain a lot of asbestos, perhaps more than some people had thought, and what some people had thought was fencing not containing asbestos turned out to contain it. There are a great number of fact sheets on asbestos related to bushfires. I want to talk about some of the interesting issues there. The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety website has a note on the frequently asked questions page about what happens when asbestos is damaged by fire. It can become quite friable—in other words, it can fall apart quite easily—but also under the right conditions it will explode, meaning asbestos is spread everywhere. That makes it extremely challenging for someone who is trying to recover things from their home, as it is recommended that people do not return to that site. That of course not only places additional stress and pressure on people recovering from fires that have torn through, but also means inevitably there is a very high cost associated with the clean-up of asbestos, something that people may not be aware of.

It has become evident that some people's property insurance packages are covered for the clean-up of asbestos, but not all policies have the same level of cover or even any cover for the clean-up of asbestos material after an event like a bushfire. That has left many people significantly out of pocket, in addition to the cost to rebuild and the loss of their homes and their livelihoods. To some extent, they have also been left in a situation in which they cannot enter the property because they cannot get a class A clean-up as people who can do that just do not exist or there are not enough of them to do the job. Also, the cost of paying for that clean-up is significant. There is a real missing link in providing that awareness to people that once a fire has gone through and asbestos is involved, people need to be vigilant when returning to their property. We also need to provide enough resources to assess and clean up those

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properties very quickly after a bushfire. It has become abundantly clear that there are just not enough resources or expertise in those regional areas. What can happen with asbestos when a fire goes through is an important issue that we need to look at when it comes to recovery; there is an awareness campaign opportunity. There are some great resources online. The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety website points to a number of resources from other states that provide that information. It would be very timely as part of a bushfire awareness campaign for people to be made aware of the risks asbestos poses in a bushfire and what people should do in order to prepare for it, also making sure that people are aware that when they take out insurance policies, they need to ask about coverage in that situation and whether they would be protected.

The other aspect of the recovery of course is the time it takes for the resources needed to reach that community. Hon Martin Aldridge talked about Kalbarri. I also visited Kalbarri recently and saw firsthand people living in houses with tarpaulins for roofs and all their belongings stuck out on the verandah because that was the only part of the house with a roof. People are still living with buckets everywhere to collect water. A significant period has lapsed since that event occurred. It is tragic to see that people are still living in that situation as though the cyclone happened the day before, because of not only the structural issues with roofs but also issues such as the reconnection of power. People we saw there had their power reconnected only in the last couple of months. It is extraordinary that that issue has gone on for so long and that people have been without the basics that our modern society considers necessary for living. The issue around recovery is an important one. This is an important motion and I commend Hon Martin Aldridge for bringing this motion forward for debate. I look forward to the contribution of other members. I know many are keen to speak on this.

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development)** [10.35 am]: I thank the member for bringing this motion forward. It is very, very important that we have enhanced climate awareness and that we understand the risks that we face. I am thankful that we now have a properly funded Bureau of Meteorology that is able to help us do this. No doubt, right across the world we are facing more challenges and we are very conscious that we constantly have to ramp up our investment in this state. I just have to say, without wanting to be controversial—as members know I loathe to be—there is a certain irony that this has been brought to us courtesy of our National Party friends, when we know that the anti-climate change foghorn was Barnaby Joyce. Barnaby Joyce used his numbers and the National Party's role in federal Parliament in that federal coalition to set us back a decade in dealing with climate change. One might even argue it was longer than that because of the various blocks that the National Party put on legislation during the Rudd government. It goes back possibly 15 years. I think there needs to be a bit of truth telling here in all of the party. But of course all members, and I hope all members of this Parliament, understand that these big systemic changes in our weather system are courtesy of climate change: La Niña, the Indian Ocean Dipole and the southern oscillation. This stuff is very much about the warming of the waters. Although some of this occurs as part of normal variation, it is now well accepted by the science, and hopefully by the National Party, that we have to deal with this fundamental cause. In the meantime, we have to mitigate and adapt.

A big cyclone season is coming up and Hon Martin Aldridge set out the increase of those incidents. Hon Colin de Grussa focused on the bushfire risks. A number of weeks ago the Minister for Emergency Services went out to talk about this to ensure that there was enhanced awareness across communities likely to be affected by cyclone activity so that, as well as career emergency service personnel getting their act together, community members are prepared and have in place what they need to do on their properties and in their homes to maximise the control of the damage if these cyclones come forward. None of us is unaware of that. More resources are going into the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and I will list some of those.

I was a bit intrigued, as I said, by the amount of emphasis that Hon Martin Aldridge placed on a committee report that said future post-incident analysis must be completed and made public within eight weeks. That report was done in 2012, under the previous government. As far as I can see, the previous government, the one with which the National Party was in coalition, although it did not disagree with the overall intent and direction of the report, a member actually said —

... I do not think this report has come up with anything particularly new or even constructive for the upcoming fire season which was not already well known to us ...

It is quite clear that that is not really a document, or a report, that would be central. There is an idea that these incident reports will be completed in eight weeks. If we look at the extreme weather event incident in February this year, there were very complex issues, and it would not have been feasible to release an incident report within eight weeks of the event. That is just nonsense. Often, the effort is very much focused on clearing and doing the recovery, and the analysis comes later.

The member has, as is his want, obsessed about the fact that these reports are not in a form that can be released to him. The important thing is that this work goes on, and it goes on in an iterative way. Those learnings that are coming out of that analysis are constantly being incorporated into the work of Fire and Emergency Services. Minister Stephen

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Dawson has referred to that culture of continuous improvement that is found in Fire and Emergency Services. It is not like we have a report on an incident and then we start making changes; these personnel are constantly learning.

I do not have any information on the issue of asbestos that Hon Colin de Grussa raised. I think that is an important issue. Again, it is important that we recognise that the whole experience of asbestos mining was a disaster. I certainly will refer that issue to the Minister for Emergency Services, but I am sure the department is onto it and, as the member has acknowledged, some very good Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety material is available to help. Certainly, it is an issue worth having a look at.

I do not think members opposite can suggest that the government has not been actively investing in this space. For the first time, Western Australia will have its own state-funded large fire tanker permanently based here and available. That is a fantastic development. Of course, we anticipate, given what has been happening in the eastern states with flooding and water-logging issues, we will have access to the national large fire tanker, which we have accessed from time to time.

Hon Martin Aldridge talked about the equipment that is available. I understand from the member's Facebook post that he had a fire at his place in Bindoon. The member remarked on the response. I understand that 31 appliances were onsite to deal with that fire. Indeed, I believe that the incident was managed through our new station at Gingin, which I think the minister is about to formally announce. But an emergency came up beforehand, and it did not stop us from using that station. We have built new stations at Northampton, Gingin, Trayning, Tom Price, Albany, Julimar and Nungarin. That is very positive. We also have 42 new appliances that were delivered to career and volunteer stations across the state from January 2022—that is just this year. We have 14 light tankers, 15 broadacre tankers, seven general rescue vehicles, a flood boat, two marine rescue vehicles and a series of new urban pumpers type 2.

As members can see, there has been investment in resourcing. We have also been recruiting heavily. The member referred to the capacity to maintain that equipment. We are constantly recruiting. I think that all industries have a problem with recruiting because of the level of mining activity and the tendency for the industry to poach workers, but we are always actively recruiting and there is no lack of preparedness to engage people. In 2022, we recruited and trained 60 new career firefighters; 30 graduated in July and another 30 are due to graduate in December. There is a very high proportion of female firefighters.

The government also made a commitment in the last budget to strengthen the state's defence against natural disasters, and an additional \$17.8 million was allocated for the placement of 36 additional career firefighters in Geraldton, Albany and Kalgoorlie–Boulder. That will increase the number of career personnel on shift, giving more intense support to volunteer brigades. It will bolster staffing ratios from one station officer and three firefighters to one station officer and five firefighters. We are also putting in an extra \$1.2 million to expand the facility at Kalgoorlie. We have seen 12 new firefighters already deployed to Albany, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie, and this will continue as the new recruits come through.

Interestingly, the government has been doing work on WaterSmart Farms to encourage greater reliance on on-farm desalination. We are developing trial sites in Katanning, Dumbleyung, Merredin and Wongutha Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School in Esperance. On-farm desalination will reduce reliance on carted water. The initiative is part of a bigger response to ensure that we are modernising dams and have on-farm desalination so that we have a strong response and capability as the south west land division becomes hotter and drier, and that work continues.

These are important issues, and it is important that we understand that there is a culture of continuously learning from every incident. I assure members that that is happening on an iterative basis. The state bushfire exercises are underway and they ensure a multi-agency response to statewide bushfire incidents in accordance with the plans. I believe even Hon Stephen Dawson was involved in that training. We are constantly learning from every incident and improving our response.

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.50 am]:** I am not filled with a lot of confidence after that contribution by the Minister for Regional Development. I hope that the government will take a bit of feedback from my presentation. It is a great time to be having this discussion about the preparedness to combat major natural disasters, because in my hometown it is the season in which we hear the reassuring hum of chainsaws and see people clearing their yards. People across the north west and down the west coast are very resilient. During this time, they take action and prepare for the cyclone season by stocking up their cupboards. There have been times when shops in towns like Broome had no supplies for several weeks. After tropical cyclone Kelvin in 2017–18, small vehicles could not drive into Broome for six weeks and there was talk about barging food into the area. People in the north are familiar with tropical cyclones and the challenges that they pose, and they have a level of awareness and resilience.

There is a lot that we can say in this space. The government does a good job on a range of fronts, but we need to look at what areas can be improved upon. A fairly informative report was put out by the State Emergency Management Committee, chaired by Dr Ron Edwards, who is, I believe, a very capable person and someone in whom I have

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confidence. It is worth taking note of some of the findings of that report. Agencies involved in the delivery of emergency responses do a self-assessment and the government should look at that. I would like to hear more from the Minister for Emergency Services on what the government is doing in those areas we are not doing well in.

The *Emergency preparedness report 2021*, released in August 2021, includes a foreword by Dr Ron Edwards and also contains the annual capability survey of agencies involved in the delivery of emergency responses. I think everyone would agree with some of the positive areas in the report where we do well, including “Alerts and Warnings Quality”. The Bureau of Meteorology, Department of Fire and Emergency Services and Western Australia Police Force always perform and present information well. I assure members that people in the north use a lot of sources of information. There is always competition among people to see how many weather apps they can have on their phones and there is, of course, always a lot of pinging on their phones from alerts and warnings. I encourage people to be connected in that way because we do that well.

I think that we also do well in the area of “Situational Assessment” and I agree with the self-assessment in the report. Another area in which organisations do well is “Public Information Quality”. But there are some areas that agencies assess themselves as not doing so well in, and this is a challenge. I would have liked the Minister for Regional Development to have presented something on this front and to have examined what could be done better.

An area in which we are not doing so well is emergency management personnel. One challenge facing the regions is in retaining staff. My colleague Hon Peter Collier has interrogated the government about the reduction in the number of police across the state. The number of resignations on a monthly basis—I am sure my colleague will present more on this in a moment—is staggering. This is a worry because police officers play a critical role during emergencies. When I was executive director of the Aboriginal Lands Trust, we would watch the weather map with concern during cyclone seasons. I would not sleep well because I would be worried about something hitting Kalumburu. We knew about the potential problems and challenges that that would pose. But I always knew the local police sergeant based in our town would be out doing his work, making sure that the town was clear and multitasking across the community to make sure that things were picked up and lose items were put away. Their phone calls were reassuring to some extent. I know that police officers do more than policing work and they play a critical role in those communities. If we cannot maintain police personnel in those towns, that poses a risk for people across all the community.

Another area that we are not doing well in is “Sector Information Sharing”. There are challenges in sharing information across the sector. We have seen those problems. I go on in this place about the failure of machinery-of-government reforms. They have not worked. There is no level of coordination across agencies. I know that senior officer groups that play a critical role in coordinating responses do not operate across the agencies in our community as well as they used to.

The last self-assessment, at the bottom of the page 16 of the report, is “Public Information Tools”. We are not doing well in that area at all. Fortunately, there are third party tools, such as weather apps and so forth, that can be used. There is a lot of chatter on great Facebook groups such as “Broome Weather Group” and other weather groups around the state that keep people advised. But I must say we are falling behind in the area of public information. I can give an example of this. The Department of Commerce’s webpage advises —

In accordance with Regulation 3.10 of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996, every employer must develop emergency procedures and plans in conjunction with advice from DFES and other regional emergency planning groups where their sites are located.

That is what the website says, but then when we click on the link, it does not work. I will give the government a bit of gratuitous advice: look at that.

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** Is this the WA government?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Yes, the WA government. The link to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services on that page does not work. If Dr Ron Edwards is listening —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** They trust their IT capabilities.

**Hon Kyle McGinn:** Do you know where the on button is?

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I just gave an example of how completely broken the IT capability of this government is. It just cannot keep it going.

I thank Dr Ron Edwards for his report. I think that the State Emergency Management Committee is great. There is a great level of transparency through this process and it provides informed advice. It is vital that we get this right

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because people's lives can be at risk during emergencies. I speak to the wider community: take note. Parliament is talking about this issue. I hope the media picks up on this debate because it is always good to raise awareness out there. Do not be complacent.

My last comment will be about the poor people of Kalbarri. Seriously, talk about dragging the chain in terms of getting a response and the rebuild going on there! I thank my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge for raising that issue. How slow can one be to get the project dealt with? I do not know what the cause of that is. Obviously some bureaucratic inertia is involved, but the minister needs to get in there and make sure that some of these things are actually delivered. We have seen the media on issues around evacuation centres and so forth. These are basic things that need to be dealt with. The minister opposite has talked about climate change and so forth. It is real and these issues are being faced by those southern towns that are maybe not so used to the tropical cyclones of the north.

**HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural)** [11.00 am]: I rise to make a contribution to this very fine motion moved by my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge. I will confine my remarks to parts (b) and (c) of the motion. I was interested in the work of Hon Martin Aldridge around the after-action reviews and the slowness of the government's response on that issue. The minister responded by suggesting that it was a nonsense to expect a public response in eight weeks and that work might be going on behind the scenes. News of that work is not reaching the ground. I will give members an example —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** If eight weeks is a nonsense, how about nine months? On 6 February we had the Wickepin–Corrigin–Denmark–Bridgetown bushfire. Nearly nine months later, the energy regulator ran an investigation into that fire. It is now nine months later. This morning I spoke to a person whose farm was burnt to the ground. He lost 600 sheep. His life and those of his family were threatened, and nine months later he has not heard a word on the cause of that fire according to the energy regulator—nine months! One of my roles in this place is to ask questions about that. We asked questions almost immediately on 15 February. I did not expect a response, clearly, but I wanted to know what was happening. On 15 February we asked what was happening and the answer provided on behalf of the Minister for Energy states —

In accordance with regulation 23 of the Electricity (Network Safety) Regulations 2015, the Electricity Networks Corporation—Western Power—has provided notification to the Director of Energy Safety.

The answer further states —

Evidence has been retained in accordance with the usual practices of the Electricity Networks Corporation.

Within a week, evidence had been retained, action was taking place and an investigation was launched. After several months I thought I had better check in on behalf of those people who nearly lost their lives, their income and everything else in that fire. On 31 August we asked another question in this place about the status of the investigation. The answer provided on behalf of the Minister for Commerce was —

No. The investigation is complex; however, I am advised it is well progressed.

It is nearly the end of October now. Yesterday I asked the question again and it appears to have become harder to provide an answer. I received a one-word answer yesterday: “No”. The investigation has not been completed; nothing has been done. That is no comfort to the people waiting for the outcome. At the end of August, it was nearly done, apparently. It is a couple of months later and we got just a blank no.

When I had the conversation this morning with a family from west of Wickepin, I just double-checked things because perhaps they had been contacted by the government, the department or other people about the cause of that fire. No, they had not. They had not heard a word from those people. The next fire season is looming. Those people are still recovering from the first fire on 6 February and another fire season is looming. I thank the minister for reminding us that extra money had been tipped into the Bureau of Meteorology or BOM—as I will continue to refer to it despite its extraordinary effort to change its branding. It has come up with the prediction—fair enough—about the above-average number of cyclones; that is good to know. But the forecast is that it will be hot and dry during the southern bushfire season. That is a surprise! It would be more of a surprise if it were to be cold and wet. It is going to be hot and dry in the wheatbelt in summer. That will not be a great shock to the people who live there who will be preparing for the coming fire season. The people who had properties that were burnt to the ground in that Wickepin–Narrogin fire do not know what caused it as far as the government is concerned. They do not know what has been put in place to prevent it from happening again. They are completely unaware if any measures have been taken at all to prevent a repetition of that fire.

In the time that I have left, I will move on to discuss an issue raised by Hon Colin de Grussa about asbestos. Minister, I have spoken to the Minister for Emergency Services about this so he is aware of it. It is a significant issue that has fallen back on local governments and landholders. I will refer to some notes I have written. The CEO of the



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Shire of Corrigin, Natalie Manton, has worked tirelessly with her crew since early February to help the recovery in that town and that community. Asbestos has been their single biggest problematic issue for which no easy solution has been available. This is something that we can do better. The minister has acknowledged this with me in private conversations. How we deal with those largely abandoned farmhouses built out of asbestos in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s is a thorny issue. They are not lived in and they are almost uninsurable. The cost to clean them up is not much when they are not damaged, but if they are damaged by a fire, the cost immediately blows out to hundreds of thousands of dollars, if anyone can be brought in to do the work. In the aftermath of the fire, some specialist licensed contractors were available. But time has moved on and those contractors have become unavailable or left town and moved back to the metropolitan area, and the clean-up tasks remain. Obviously, there is a cost to get those contractors back again that results in a significant cost to local communities. According to the conversations between Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Shire of Corrigin, it is difficult to fund the clean-up of those asbestos-damaged houses unless it leaves someone homeless. If the clean-up involves an abandoned house on a farming property—they are almost all houses; sheds are not made out of asbestos—it is very difficult to access funds for those clean-ups, the responsibility for which has fallen back to the locals. The Shire of Corrigin and others have offered the uninsured or under-insured property owners discounted fees for access to its waste disposal facility, but it is still a significant cost. The other point about the Corrigin response to the fire is that the state government did respond. I was on the phone to Hon Darren West and the minister in the days after the fire and there was a state government response that was much appreciated. But the vast bulk of the workload for the long recovery, which is ongoing, has fallen back on those local communities and local authorities that are very small in terms of staff and resources. In future emergency situations, we need to do a better job of coordinating that response between the state government and those local authorities and local communities.

I will end on a positive note. The state government and our communities do a wonderful job in responding to these emergencies. We know that there will be more of them. One organisation that I would like to pay tribute to is BlazeAid. I am sure that all members have heard of BlazeAid. It was formed in 2009 in response to a fire over east I believe. It is now all over Australia and the second there is an emergency—like the Corrigin fire, the Denmark fire, the fire in Bridgetown or cyclone Seroja—BlazeAid is on the phone. Its people turn up out of nowhere in these communities in enormous numbers. They park in town and they fix and repair fences and, basically, communities. I will quote from someone who was affected by an emergency, and this was their response to BlazeAid. They said —

“We asked you to come help us rebuild our fences but you guys have done way more than that, you have helped us rebuild our broken community.

That is the great work that the BlazeAid workers do. They turned up in my hometown of Wickepin. They were expected to stay for six weeks; they stayed for months. They went away during seeding when the farmers were busy. I just spoke to them this morning and they expect to be back in the heat of summer to finish the task. They do a wonderful job for our small communities. Well done, BlazeAid people. I hope they keep up their work. I hope they are not called on this summer, but I am almost certain that they will be.

**HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral)** [11.10 am]: I thank Hon Martin Aldridge for raising this motion. Emergency event preparation is an important topic; certainly, that is very true for regional WA. I am glad to see that the honourable member is sparking a debate on the issue, leading into what is expected to be a particularly bad fire season here in WA.

Before I begin my comments in earnest, I would like to acknowledge BOM, which is on the notice paper, and its recent attempt to rename itself from BOM to the Bureau of Meteorology or the Bureau. I think that it is a very ambitious move to try to stop Australians from taking things too seriously or truncating the name of something, so I wish BOM well in its attempt to stop the public from calling it BOM!

This motion mentions an above-average number of tropical cyclones that could hit the coast. If we talk about anything above average or extraordinary in regard to weather events, we need to acknowledge that the largest contributor to extraordinary weather events is climate change. With respect to climate change, I was glad to see the introduction of climate measurement targets in the federal budget, which was recently announced by the Treasurer. I think that is a good move. Those climate targets and the measurement of climate-associated events were scrapped from the federal budget under the Abbott government, but now that they have been reintroduced. I think that is a good move. Likewise, I believe there was an announcement that the federal government will look at including wellness metrics in future budgets, which I think is also a good move.

There was another recent announcement by federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers about the flooding events, over in the east coast, in Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria. Those events are expected to have wiped off 0.25 per cent of Australia’s GDP, which is obviously a significant amount. When we see those flooding events, the questions that are typically raised are: Can these events be associated with climate change? Are these events naturally occurring? Are the effects of climate change attributable to those events? A new body of science has emerged, quite recently,

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called extreme events attribution also known as attribution science. It is a study in meteorology and climate science, and it tries to measure how ongoing climate change directly affects extreme weather events. In respect of the floods that we saw in February on the east coast and the floods that we are seeing right now, commentary from climate scientists and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its sixth assessment report, *Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability*, indicates that climate change was not directly attributed to those floods, but that a number of factors caused the floods, and, certainly, the impacts of climate change have made the floods more likely to occur. In regard to flooding events in Australia, the IPCC, in its latest report, mentions —

... we may see small increases in the number of extreme one-day rainfall events, which typically lead to flash flooding, in eastern Australia.

It continues —

... global warming of 2°C this century will bring twice as much flood damage compared to 1.5°C warming. This jumps to 3.9 times more flood damage at 3°C warming.

We know that we are experiencing flood events over on the east coast. We know that WA is not immune from flooding, and we experience extreme flooding events and certainly bushfires as well. We experience large bushfires across the state, and this summer is looking to be a particularly bad one.

As we continue along this path, and as the planet continues to warm up, the expectation is the climate-change-impacts value that is now being measured federally is likely to increase; likewise, the need for emergency preparation at the state level is becoming more important. Therefore, I thank the honourable member for raising this motion today. One suggestion that I will throw out there is that the state government look at measuring climate change-attributed events at the state level. I think that it would be good to give the public some visibility and create some awareness, and allocate some of those funds to the emergency preparation and response to these events, seeing as the likelihood of these events occurring will continue into the future.

**HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural)** [11.15 am]: I am quite pleased to stand to speak on this motion today. If I were still teaching, what I might use to demonstrate my thoughts would be either irony or an own goal. As the minister pointed out, I find it immensely ironic that a Nationals WA member would talk about extreme weather events and tiptoe around the subject of climate change. I have not heard a single person across the floor refer to climate change, and I find it particularly ironic that they talk about preparedness for these extreme weather events yet do not have the capacity to acknowledge the cause of those extreme weather events.

I would also like to discuss one of the more recent extreme weather events that occurred in my area—that is, cyclone Seroja, which is another circumstance that the members across the floor missed. They are all gripe and no on-the-ground action, and that is not from me; that came from the people of that community who constantly said to me, as I turned up, “Thank you for showing up.”

A member interjected.

**Hon SANDRA CARR:** Thank you, honourable member. I will not be taking any interjections. There is no time for that nonsense. Some of us just like to get work done. Members opposite are all gripe and no on-the-ground action. God forbid should we get our boots dirty and do some work!

When I speak to the people in the Shire of Northampton, which is the shire responsible for Kalbarri, they tell me that they are profoundly disappointed at the lack of show from members across the floor. That is not coming from me; that is coming from the community. Go and ask them!

Will the members opposite please tell me what they did do following cyclone Seroja, because I can tell them what I did. I did pop-up offices in the community on a number of occasions. I dealt with people one-on-one to support them with their insurance claims. I dealt directly with the Australian Financial Complaints Authority. I also helped people individually. We ran an online forum where people could call in and learn to address some of the problems that they were having with insurance companies. Some of those people asked us to act on their behalf in dealing with insurance companies and the insurance complaints authority. We were directly helping people on the ground, and the comment that we got over and again was that members opposite were not there.

The whole community joined in addressing and supporting each other following the cyclone, and I feel that the motion is particularly insulting to all those people who were on the ground helping, such as the Department of Communities, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the State Emergency Service, which I feel was given a bit of a backhander when the member talked about the slowness of the clean-up following the cyclone. However, the State Emergency Service worked tirelessly. I met with some of those people at the control centre in Geraldton near the airport. They were working hard, they were tired, but they were there giving up their time for the community. I did not hear the member even once mention those people. The member did not mention the \$25 million or more in relief funding that had already been given out to communities. Members opposite did not mention the fact that

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DFES is still in the community today and has provided on-the-ground community recovery officers who are servicing Northampton, Chapman Valley, Mullewa, Geraldton, Mingenew, Perenjori, Morawa and Kalbarri. It would be remiss of me not to mention the names of the people who have done that amazing work: Samantha Edwards, working in Northampton and Chapman Valley; Anita Kirkbright, working in Geraldton and Mullewa; Deborah Maley, working in Mingenew, Pingelly and Morawa; and Andrea Teakle, working in Kalbarri. These people have done some amazing work, all overseen by the amazing efforts of the DFES's state recovery controller, Mel Pexton. This is all work being done by the government and it is an ongoing effort that has not stopped.

**Hon Martin Aldridge** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members, I note that the member said she would not be taking interjections.

**Hon SANDRA CARR:** Another person worthy of thanking, and with whom I have worked quite closely at the Shire of Northampton, is shire CEO at the time, Gary Keefe. Gary remains the CEO, but it is important to note that he is unwell at the moment, so I would like to take this opportunity to wish him well and all the best, and hope that he recovers well, and to acknowledge his incredible work and the selfless way in which he has supported his community. That has sometimes pushed us to work a bit harder as well, and I thank him for that. I think we all need to be pushed and encouraged to work harder to deliver for people in situations of natural disaster.

Again, I remind members that natural disasters are going to increase as a direct outcome of climate change. It would be really nice if members on the other side recognised that. I find it profoundly ironic that members opposite did not even address the impacts of climate change on agriculture, and all the work that the minister has done to address aspects of climate change, including work on carbon sequestration and efforts to improve agricultural practices and to encourage farmers to be prepared and resilient as we face a changing climate. The impacts of climate change that members opposite are talking about all affect areas that they are supposed to represent, yet they cannot even mention it.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members! Hon Sandra Carr has the call.

**Hon SANDRA CARR:** As the minister mentioned earlier, there has been a lot of delivery of ongoing reviews and improvements throughout the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. One example is the changing, nationally consistent bushfire alert system. I note that one of the honourable members opposite talked about protecting the bushfire plan app or online service. For members like you, Sir, there are also hard copies if you are struggling a little with the technology. You can fill them out with a pen and can even use an old feathered quill, if you like!

There has also been a multimillion-dollar investment into Northampton's emergency services: \$3.9 million for a new station in Northampton. I can tell members that the community of Northampton is very happy with that, as well. I spoke to them and looked at the building. We also used local builders to put it all together. It has a roof on it, member! We have also delivered for Northampton a new light tanker, which has improved technology to keep our firefighters safe. There are some big investments there. They are being delivered across the state also. The review of the process is ongoing and the work is being done on the ground. The boots are getting dirty. Members opposite should try it; they might like it!

**HON SHELLEY PAYNE (Agricultural) [11.23 am]:** In the couple of minutes left I will follow on from some of Hon Sandra Carr's words and talk about some of the great initiatives the government is undertaking. The third part of the motion refers to strategies and initiatives to support the state's resilience. We have not really talked a lot about that, apart from Hon Sandra Carr mentioning the app that is in place, which has been really great for engaging with all Western Australians to help them prepare their properties and houses for bushfires.

I want to briefly mention the emergency services levy, which was put in place by the Gallop government. That has been fantastic. I have seen so many improvements on the ground in our bushfire facilities in the regions, which makes things really great for our volunteers. DFES has put a lot of work into fire response vehicles; Hon Sandra Carr mentioned the delivery of the trucks. We have also delivered seven trucks to Esperance. I will be going there on Monday to deliver another truck. It has been fantastic to have those tailored vehicles as well.

We mentioned the My Bushfire Plan app as well as the Emergency WA website, which is fantastic for informing everyone and keeping them up to date with what is happening. There was funding in the recent budget for PPE, which has been great for all the volunteer firefighters, making sure that they are all equipped and ready to act when necessary. Hon Steve Martin mentioned BlazeAid, and I also would like to acknowledge it and the work it did around the Narrogin fires. I would like to acknowledge Facey Group, which the government helped fund to help with fire recovery. I would also like to mention the bushfire mitigation officers on the ground, particularly the ones at Ravensthorpe, and the work that they are doing. They are getting information out on Facebook from the Shire of Ravensthorpe, showing all the prescribed burns that are upcoming or completed, which is fantastic. Bushfire mitigation officers are really helping communities to prepare their town sites for the bushfire season.

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[COUNCIL — Thursday, 27 October 2022]  
p5104e-5115a

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Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Jackie Jarvis):** Before we move on to the next item, I remind members—and it is disappointing to have to remind longstanding members—that when the President or, indeed, the Acting President is speaking, all other members should cease speaking.