

FIREFIGHTING EFFORT

3. Mr M.J. COWPER to the Minister for Emergency Services:

Before I ask my question, I want to thank the minister personally for coming down a couple of Saturdays ago to show support and leadership to the people of Waroona during a very trying time.

In the midst of what has been a very challenging summer, can the minister please update the house on the efforts of the state's firefighters in protecting our communities?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I start by placing on record, on behalf of every member of the house I am sure, our appreciation of all the career and volunteer firefighters, members of the State Emergency Service, the Salvation Army, and everyone who has played such a significant part in tackling what has been a very challenging fire season in the state of Western Australia. In particular, in the last four weeks, we have had major fires in Bullsbrook, in the electorate of the member for Murray–Wellington and obviously down in Northcliffe and Boddington. Two weeks ago I also visited fires in Northcliffe and Boddington to personally thank the guys and girls working on those fires. It has been encouraging to see so many people from all walks of life coming together to try to tackle what was a significant problem for those communities. Since the start of the bushfire season, there have been 2 500 bushfires, with 103 of them being what we call “significant incidents”, which mean level 2 or above. To put that into context, over the previous four or five seasons, the average has been 83 significant fires each year. This season, the number of fires is way up on the average over the last four years. It is very disturbing when we find out that some of those fires are deliberately lit. That puts significant strain not only on resources, but also on career and volunteer firefighters, particularly those who travel some distance down south and spend four days on and off their rotation shift. They give up an awful lot of their time and, in some circumstances, income to do their bit for the community. We are all very grateful for what they do.

The bushfire season is far from over. I take this opportunity to remind everyone to remain vigilant. We still have some time to go to the end of the fire season and no doubt there will be more challenges. Once again, on behalf of every member, I thank those who have been involved in fighting and combatting those fires. It has been a wonderful effort.

Members: Hear, hear!