

GASCOYNE PASTORAL COMMUNITY EMERGENCY SERVICE MANAGER

**768. Mr I.C. BLAYNEY to the Minister for Emergency Services:**

What are the reasons behind the plans to cease the current funding of the Gascoyne pastoral community emergency service manager position by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:**

I will start by acknowledging Mr Charles Bellow and members of the Local Chambers business network in the gallery this afternoon.

I thank the member for Geraldton for the question. I note that both he and the member for North West Central have a strong interest in this particular issue. Both of them wrote to me a number of weeks ago expressing their views on this particular appointment. I thought it was worthwhile that the house notes why the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is looking to discontinue funding this position. I am sure that the Minister for Local Government will be very interested also.

In 2009, the then Fire and Emergency Services Authority, now DFES, funded the first community emergency services manager in that area under a two-year contract starting in 2009, until 2011. Across regional Western Australia, there are 23 community emergency service managers, partly funded by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services in agreement with a local government or local governments. In this particular case, it cost a bit over \$100 000 for the CESM's wages and car in the Gascoyne. Normally, the position is half funded by the department and half funded by local government. This position has been continually funded for five years by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services because the local governments in that area will not make their contribution and enter into a particular agreement. Of course, the job of a CESM is part serving the local government that pays half their wages and part serving the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Their uniforms stand out; they are generally in a DFES uniform but their rank insignia is for the local government, which contributes to their wages. They kind of serve two masters, but they do a very important job mixing that ground between the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the core responsibilities of the local governments.

When I looked at the local governments in that particular area, I wondered why they could not afford to make a small contribution of about \$15 000 each to the wages bill for that community emergency service manager. The Shire of Murchison, for example, has 114 ratepayers and a total revenue of \$5.5 million, of which \$4.27 million is from government grants. One has to wonder why it cannot afford \$15 000. The Shire of Sandstone has 113 ratepayers and a total revenue of \$3.75 million, \$2.1 million of which is made up of government grants. The Shire of Yalgoo has 405 ratepayers and the Shire of Wiluna has 284 ratepayers. The point is that the total rate base for those four regional councils is made up of 916 individual ratepayers. The total revenue is \$22 million, of which over \$14 million comes from government grants. If ever there is a case of unsustainable local government in regional Western Australia, this is it. The problem now is that the state government and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services —

**Mr D.A. Templeman** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah, sorry to disturb you; I call you to order for the first time. Can the minister come back to the point and wind this up, please.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The point is that the state government, through the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, will find another person employed in that region through DFES to step in and fill the gap because the four local governments in the Gascoyne cannot carry out their core responsibility to look after their emergency services and management. The government is not going to continue to pick up the tab.

**Mr D.A. Templeman** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah, I call you to order for the second time. Minister, have you finished?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is not right for the state government and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to pick up the tab for local governments that are not sustainable and will not carry out their core responsibilities. At this stage, that contract will end in November this year.