

## EMERGENCY SERVICES SECTOR — REFORM

### *Motion*

**HON COLIN DE GRUSSA (Agricultural)** [10.08 am]: — without notice: I move —

That this house calls on the state government to immediately outline its intentions and process for reforming the emergency services sector in Western Australia in light of recommendations of the Ferguson inquiry.

I bring this motion to the house because we in the National Party have very serious concerns about a lack of direction from the government on reform of emergency services in this state. I am sure members will recall the two significant fire events of the 2015–16 summer—one in the Esperance region and one in the Waroona–Yarloop region. The administration of both these fires came under heavy scrutiny from the public, members of Parliament and emergency services groups. As a result, the then Minister for Emergency Services, Joe Francis, commissioned an inquiry into the Waroona and Yarloop fires, which reported on 29 April 2016. The Ferguson report, as it is known, ran over some 236 pages and included 17 recommendations for the improvement of the operation of the emergency services sector in Western Australia.

During the election campaign, both the Labor and Liberal Parties made commitments based on the Ferguson report's recommendations. Recommendation 15, in particular, was put on the agenda. I want to talk a little bit about some of the recommendations and opportunities mentioned in the report. I think it is important to put on the record for the information of all members that recommendation 15 states —

The State Government to create a Rural Fire Service to enhance the capability for rural fire management and bushfire risk management at a State, regional and local level. The proposed Rural Fire Service will:

- be established as a separate entity from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services or, alternatively, be established as a sub-department of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services;
- have an independent budget;
- be able to employ staff;
- have a leadership structure which, to the greatest degree possible, is regionally based and runs the entity;
- be led by a Chief Officer who reports to the responsible Minister on policy and administrative matters; and to the Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Services during operational and emergency response;
- have responsibilities and powers relating to bushfire prevention, preparedness and response; and
- operate collaboratively with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Parks and Wildlife, Local Government and volunteer Bush Fire Brigades.

In creating the Rural Fire Service, the State Government to consider whether back office and corporate support services could be effectively provided by an existing Department, such as the Department of Fire and Emergency Services or the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

The State Government to review the creation of the Rural Fire Service two years after its establishment, to assess whether its structure and operations are achieving the intended outcome.

This is an extensive recommendation. It goes far beyond simply setting up a rural fire service. Although we support the inquiry's recommendations, the rural fire service on its own will not be a silver bullet to improve our state's firefighting capacity. I will not dwell too long on the rural fire service part of the report because I am quite sure that other members in this place will do that.

I want to talk about a couple of other issues raised in the Ferguson report that are pertinent to the debate today, particularly the deficiency of trust between career and volunteer firefighters. A number of submissions to the inquiry outlined the strong opinion that Department of Fire and Emergency Services staff are not appropriately skilled to effectively manage bushfires. This line of thought, whether it is truthful or simply a manifestation of pre-existing beliefs, is dangerous and needs to be addressed if we are to have any serious hope of suppressing major bushfires in the future. Page 238 of the Ferguson report outlines this and expresses the following opinion —

In the view of the Special Inquiry, it is imperative that bushfire skillsets are incorporated into succession planning. In a general sense, in an organisation where the principal means of entry level recruitment into operational positions is through urban fire stations, there will be a resultant effect on the culture and approach of that organisation. In the absence of a clear policy on lateral entry, applicants for more senior

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operational positions are assessed against competencies that are primarily gained through urban career fire experience.

This succession planning deficiency can be addressed by building a broader set of skills and experience into the selection criteria for key rural and general fire management positions. Examples might be to recognise volunteer service, local government fire experience, actual rural firefighting experience and seeking out applicants with a broader range of qualifications, including tertiary qualifications in land, agricultural, forestry and emergency management.

It is worth the government noting this section of the report for its attempt to deliver an outcome in this space. It is absolutely essential that our career firefighters have local knowledge. I cannot stress this point enough: it is incredibly important that local knowledge is used and that our career firefighters have local knowledge because it ensures quick suppression of fires and helps to rebuild the trust between volunteers and career firefighters. That is something we must do. Soft approaches such as this will be an important step towards bridging the trust deficiency. Again, this is a very important point.

I also want to talk about the “Cascade Scaddan Fire Report”. On 15 November in the summer of 2015–16, as members should be aware, a lightning strike started a fire on unallocated crown land near Lake Mendis in Cascade, just north west of Esperance. The fire was contained on the unallocated crown land for the duration of Sunday and Monday, 16 November 2015. On Tuesday, 17 November, the fire escaped the UCL and entered adjoining farmland. By the end of that Tuesday, the fire had travelled a distance of 70 kilometres. I get a little bit choked up when I talk about this because I will never forget that day. The fire travelled 70 kilometres and burnt an area of 120 000 hectares. It caused devastation to the agricultural communities of Cascade and Scaddan, destroying a significant amount of crops, livestock and machinery and a number of sheds. Most tragically of all, the fire resulted in the loss of four lives.

As a result of this fire, a private review was conducted by farmers with some other support from that area. This resulted in additional recommendations, which I also urge the government to consider. I seek leave to table a copy of the “Cascade Scaddan Fire Report”.

Leave granted. [See paper 296.]

**Hon COLIN DE GRUSSA:** A number of factors were prevalent in the spread of this fire, including poorly managed unallocated crown land, weather conditions, temperatures and the unusually high winds on the day. The report also highlights the need for greater collaboration between DFES and volunteer groups, and I draw members’ attention to recommendation 4, which outlines the recommended practice for open communication between agencies.

I want to talk about some of the local issues that fire brigades in Esperance face because I think it is important to highlight the need for an improvement in relationships between DFES and volunteer firefighting brigades. I will talk a little bit about some of the fire appliances we have in Esperance. Between 2010 and 2017, almost the entire Esperance fleet of fire appliances was replaced. The value of that fleet has now reached \$10 million and, as a consequence, insurance premiums have gone up considerably. But there are massive issues with those appliances. Although the firefighting apparatus on the back of the trucks is great, the trucks themselves are a little bit too smart for their own good. When the trucks get too hot, they turn themselves off. This is not very useful in a fire. They also have emissions reduction systems, including diesel particulate filters. When the truck decides that the diesel particulate filters need to be cleaned, the truck does a burn-off. This can be bypassed, I think once or twice, but at some point it will not allow it to be bypassed. Thirty minutes is needed to do a diesel particulate filter burn-off and it derates the truck’s engine power when it does that. I suggest that poses some risk to firefighters. The Esperance fire brigades are absolutely of the mindset that these Isuzu cab chassis trucks are not fit for purpose for fighting fires in the region. They are unsure, though, of the contract that may exist between DFES and Isuzu and whether there is any possibility to change it. DFES has been unwilling to have discussions about it. The brigades have tried but DFES has been unwilling to have discussions to determine alternative trucks, although I am informed that the chief fire officer from Esperance met with DFES last year and discussed the future fleet program. That was some 12 months ago and nothing has been heard about the program since. We do not know what is happening.

I have talked about how the diesel particulate filters on those trucks are dangerous and about the lack of communication. The Esperance fire brigades also have an issue with the purchase of decommissioned fire trucks. When the trucks reach end of life, which is not very long, they are only a few years old and they are in great condition. Local farmers would love the ability to purchase those trucks and keep them in the area, which would improve the firefighting resource available. It is very difficult to purchase those trucks. The department insists they be returned to Perth to be “decommissioned” We have anecdotal examples of farmers who have bought those trucks, which have then been sent to Perth to be decommissioned, and when they come back to the farmer the firefighting equipment on the truck has been destroyed, so the fire truck is of no use to the farmer, who has paid

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a lot of money for, essentially, a cab chassis. We need a better process in this regard. There must be a way to keep these valuable resources in the area.

I now want to talk a little about the summit that is going ahead on Friday this week. As I said, the National Party supports implementing the recommendations in the Ferguson report, and I believe my colleagues in the Liberal Party are also of that mind. Before the election, the current Premier said that the Labor Party was also committed to implementing all these recommendations, but after around 100 days in government, it has already backflipped on a couple of other promises, blaming the previous government for these circumstances. In order to legitimise what I can only assume is the government's intention to break another promise, the Minister for Emergency Services is holding an invitation-only summit on Friday. Yesterday I asked the minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services who would be attending this summit, but I was not provided with the list of attendees or RSVPs, although he confirmed that of the paltry 80 people attending this summit, 14 were support staff. I question how representative that is of the great number of volunteers and others across the state who would dearly like to participate in this summit and to provide some local knowledge and expertise to the government to assist it in making its decisions.

The question on my mind and the key reason I have brought this motion to the house is: what is this Labor government going to do to make sure that our state is bushfire and emergency ready for the coming fire season and beyond? Are we going to see the implementation of the Ferguson inquiry, as the Premier committed to before the election, or is the government going to use this exclusive summit on Friday to create the illusion of consultation to drive a predetermined agenda? An article in the *Countryman* of 13 April titled "Minister dampens fire service hopes" seems to indicate the minister has already made up his mind. It reads —

Regional West Australians can forget about an Eastern States-style rural fire service because of the deterioration of the Budget, new Emergency Services Minister Fran Logan has indicated.

In the article, the minister warns the WA public not to expect the rolled-gold model that would purportedly cost \$400 million. Questions were asked in this place last week about that cost. Under further questioning, we heard that this number appears to be a complete fabrication. I note that the number was also used by the member for Collie-Preston in an ABC online article on 15 March, just a few days after the election. It seems the Labor Party has no idea what a rural fire service would cost and is making decisions based on numbers it has made up. It is saying that regardless of the cost of implementing the report's recommendations, the state cannot afford it. I wonder whether the government is taking this approach to the other recommendations in the report. It does not sound like due process is being undertaken around probably what is one of the most important decisions this government will make. I cannot emphasise enough that that decision is incredibly important and is not one that should be put on the backburner, but needs to be made soon so that we can be fire ready. I can only hope that by the time we get to the summit on Friday, we have some rigour around the projected cost of the rural fire service so that those invited can provide well-informed feedback and the government can make well-informed decisions. This summit is a pivotal point and I look forward to hearing from people attending the summit and from the minister about the commitment of the Labor Party to reforms in emergency services.

**HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral)** [10.26 am]: I too would like to say a few words on this very important motion, which obviously I support. I have asked questions on this in this place, but I will go back a step into the past to the need for this report. The Ferguson inquiry was commissioned in 2016, after the Waroona fire and, prior to that, as the honourable member alluded to, the fires down at Esperance. It is a two-part report, which takes some reading, but basically it comes down to 17 recommendations and 23 agency opportunities. The pressure seems to have come on the government after questions were asked in Parliament about reports in the paper. As a start, I will work through two questions without notice that I have asked on this issue. My first question was on 18 May, and reads —

I refer to recommendation 15 of the "Report of the Special Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire".

- (1) As per this recommendation, will the minister establish an independent rural fire service?
- (2) If yes to (1), what is the expected time frame for its establishment; and, if no to (1), why not?

The answer states —

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question ...

- (1) Options are currently being considered regarding the optimal provision of fire services to rural and regional areas, with due consideration being given to the recommendations of the special inquiry, preservation of life and property, and the state's difficult budgetary position.
- (2) Not applicable.

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I followed that up with a question on 13 June, which reads —

My question relates to a report in *The West Australian* on 10 April in which the minister estimates the costs of a rural fire service at \$400 million.

- (1) Is this costing based on department advice or modelling; and, if so, will the minister table it; and, if not, why not?

The minister's answer states —

- (1) The costing was not an estimate, but a figure used to demonstrate the unaffordability of a Western Australian rural fire service comparable with eastern states models.
- (2)–(3) Not applicable.
- (4) The minister is considering a range of options to implement the recommendations ...

The answer was fairly broad, but what got me a little was the response that we could not afford it. It has been mentioned that lives were lost in those and other fires. I offer my sincere condolences to the families and friends of people lost in the fires at Waroona and Esperance. I do not treat this issue lightheartedly at all. It is extremely important that we start to take up some of the report's recommendations.

How the department sets up the service and how it is structured is debatable; however, we have a summit tomorrow down in Mandurah and I am pleased that has finally come about because that is really important. One of the important things coming through is the importance of knowledge, and Hon Colin de Grussa touched on that as well. I will quote an article in *The West Australian* of Monday, 10 April 2017, titled "Rural fire service plan up in smoke", that demonstrates that local knowledge is being cut off. The article reads —

Veteran Roleystone volunteer firefighter Noel Plowman said the most important factor was to respect and use local knowledge, particularly during major fires, regardless of the management structure.

"They stress that local knowledge is very important but in the larger fires, basically it's forgotten," he said.

"They bring preformed teams in and push aside the locals, rather than keeping them as part of the management team.

"Local knowledge is extremely important for things like where the fire is going, what fuel loadings are in front of it, what tracks and roads you'll use to get resources in to fight the fire — the locals know all that."

The Roleystone Bushfire Brigade captain said he thought it could be done within DFES but they needed to start working with all the volunteers, who often had decades of experience and were "one hell of a resource".

For members who do not know, there are some 26 000 volunteers in Western Australia and 1 100 career firefighters. Bearing that in mind, when reforming how we set up fire control for the whole state, it is extremely important to bring in those local volunteers. In my response to the Governor's speech I spoke briefly about my experience with fires and going with a fire mitigation officer in the Gascoyne to see those fires that started on Department of Environment and Conservation land. It was interesting. I watched the video of the Esperance fire and where that started, and I believe from what I have been shown that that fire could have been put out earlier. The fire in the Gascoyne region was started by lightning on Department of Environment and Conservation land. It burnt for days without anyone having any input into putting it out. It is always difficult to put out fires in the rangelands. However, burn-backs are always the best way to mitigate fires and they seem to work. The fire mitigation officer sat himself in a little dugout, which was the command post, with maps that had GPS signs all over them.

To cut a long story short, I asked to see the fire and organised for a helicopter to take me. When I asked the mitigation officer to attend, he thought it was a good idea. It was not very long until I realised that he had not even been in the air to look at the fire, which had been burning for more than two weeks. He looked out of the window at the terrain very near to the Gascoyne River. Anyone who has been in an aircraft there would know that the river is riddled with playpens but when the officer asked what they were, I realised he had not been in the air to look at the fire. He thought it would be easy to put out the fire and that it could be done in no time. We could have put it out sooner. The environmental effect on that countryside—I was up there recently—has been disastrous, because that was a very hot fire. Fire mitigation needs to take place right throughout the state from the Kimberley down. The different areas are handled differently, of course, but it is extremely important. If major parts of this report are implemented, we can turn around how we look after not only our vegetation but also our people and our businesses.

The types of fires that occur change, so we have to be thinking about the future. In areas such as Esperance, the stubble used to be shorter but now they grow major crops instead of farming major stock. I always used to say that

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if I am to stock a place correctly in the rangelands, I should make sure that there are no fire hazards. Some people, of course, do not agree with reducing the vegetation. I think that it is extremely important that government follows through with this reform. Although we are looking at wet times right now, the seasons will change and we will then be chasing the fires again—Lord help us.

The importance of local knowledge is a message that is coming across loud and clear from everyone who is coming to see me. I stress that in the lead-up to the election, Hon Colin Barnett supported putting a rural fire service in Collie. I do not know whether that is the right place to put it, but I think having a training centre and a centre of excellence for fire is an excellent idea. That could be used to train firefighters from the north to the south to the east. We need to do that and be a little more scientific in addition to our operations on the ground. If we mix those two together, we should get a much better fire service for the future.

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural)** [10.35 am]: Firstly, I thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this motion to the house, particularly as it is his first motion during non-government business. It is a very important issue for the community. As has been discussed, there has been a lot of talk about the establishment of a separate rural fire service, which is one of the recommendations in the Euan Ferguson report. I take on board Hon Colin de Grussa's contention that a rural fire service is not a silver bullet. A holistic approach is needed. I think the benchmark was set in 1961 after the Dwellingup fires and the royal commission that followed. One of the main recommendations in that inquiry was for a 250 000 hectares of prescribed burning a year. As we know, for about 40 years we never really had major wildfires and then about 15 years ago we had quite a number of them at Roleystone, Northcliffe, Esperance, Waroona and Margaret River. There have been some quite major fires in recent years and a lot of that has been put down to the extent of prescribed burning. In estimates hearings it was revealed that some of those prescribed burning programs were under 50 000 hectares, which is quite a long way short of the 250 000 hectares that should have been burnt. We are a long way behind. We have had a lot of major wildfires over the past few years. I visited a couple of areas, including Boddington and Northcliffe, and the extent of the devastation in those forests from the wildfires is unbelievable. It went right to the top of the trees. We can only imagine the intensity of those fires. I have been very pleased to see that the prescribed burning program has been effective in the last few years in particular. They have redoubled their efforts and, as I understand it, over 200 000 hectares have been burnt this year. There was a good window of opportunity for prescribed burning and that was taken up. There have been some complaints about the smoke in the city, but I think it is a small price to pay in reducing the amount of fuel.

One of the initiatives from the Department of Planning was to designate fire-prone areas and put in place new building requirements for properties in those areas. Some of those requirements are quite onerous. Someone might have to spend \$70 000, \$100 000 or even more to comply with the fire-prone area planning requirements. I question that at times. In answers to questions I have asked and at the estimates hearings, the Department of Planning has told me that it will not apologise for saving lives. I do not know whether these initiatives have saved any lives yet and I really believe that prevention is better than cure and that we should be looking at making sure our prescribed burning programs continue.

I asked a question this week about the "Reframing Rural Fire Management" report and the 23 agency opportunities for improvement that were identified and have basically been referred to tomorrow's fire summit in Mandurah. I am looking forward to that and will not comment a lot about it today until I have been to that summit to hear what has to be said. At least some steps are being taken to look at what can be done to improve fire mitigation. I understand Hon Colin de Grussa's emotional reaction when he talked about the Esperance fires, because I had a couple of meetings with people from Esperance who had lost family members. They were so concerned and worried about the whole situation that they even commissioned their own legal inquiry into those fires at great expense. I do not quite know what came of that but a report was published at the end of it. That shows how concerned the community is. I also recall it being said in estimates that there was a move towards putting GPS trackers in fire trucks. At the time I think that related only to Department of Fire and Emergency Services appliances; I do not know whether it was going to extend to all volunteer appliances. That would be a good thing because trucks could at least be tracked during a wildfire and not get lost, and better coordination could be achieved.

A number of recommendations and opportunities for agencies have been made; I think this is about the third inquiry into bushfire-related matters. But it does no good to have these extensive expert inquiries into issues like this if nothing is done by government after them. It is no good ignoring the recommendations and opportunities provided within these reports; government needs to take action. The Minister for Emergency Services suggested it would cost around \$400 million to provide a separate rural fire service. I question that. I suppose that might be revealed tomorrow.

I travelled to New South Wales last year to look at its rural fire service operation. I must say it is very impressive. I do not think the NSW Rural Fire Service costs anywhere near \$400 million. We currently collect about \$360 million from the emergency services levy, and if we were to take a lot of the expenses out of DFES and put

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them into a separate rural fire service, surely there could be an allocation of funding for that. Members know I have a motion on the notice paper—it will probably come on next year—on the establishment of a separate rural fire service.

I will leave it at that. I would like to hear what other members have to say, but, in summary, I am really looking forward to tomorrow, when, hopefully, we will get some idea about what the government will do about making changes to the current emergency services response to bushfires.

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment)** [10.41 am]: It is my pleasure this morning to stand and make a few comments on this motion on behalf of the government. I thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing it to the chamber. It is an important conversation to have. I do not think it is a conversation we will get all the answers to today, but we are certainly committed to having a dialogue on this issue as we move forward. Having represented the Mining and Pastoral Region in the last Parliament, I, too, was particularly affected by the devastating fires in Esperance, and I acknowledge the feelings and sentiments of Hon Colin de Grussa this morning.

Members, we are all too aware of the devastation of the Waroona fires that took place in early January 2016. As members have correctly pointed out, the fires were started by lightning in the state forest south of Dwellingup. I have to say that what followed can only be described as utter devastation. That lives were lost and towns destroyed really is a travesty. We need to make sure that we learn from what has happened in the past couple of years with fires, and we need to make sure that we work to address them to try to mitigate the risks as we move forward.

On that day the forest was incredibly dry. There had been below average rainfall in the preceding winter; in fact, I think it had had the lowest 10 per cent of rainfall ever, so that was obviously an issue. At the time, Dwellingup was also experiencing record temperatures. I think Dwellingup was probably the warmest in 75 years of record keeping. So the lack of rainfall, the weather and the fact that forest fuels were significantly drier than average at that time of year really contributed to the devastation on that day. The fires developed in a forest predominantly made up of jarrah and marri trees, most of which was new growth from 2009. I have been advised that within a few short hours the fire was spreading at over 1 100 metres an hour—a massive speed to bring massive devastation. The rate of the burn drastically increased when the fire spread to recently remediated mining pits that were densely packed with saplings. One of the incident controllers described the scene on the first night. He mentioned the formation of a large pyro cloud above the fire, and that the cloud was easily visible from the Swan coastal plain. One resident described the fire as a rolling wave of flame, which I think is a very apt description.

In his report, Euan Ferguson really set the scene in a very stark way. Having looked at the report again over the last few days, it really reminds us of the true devastation and that the fire burnt on over the next few days to wreak havoc and destruction in the south of the state. The fire went on to burn a total of almost 70 000 hectares, and, as we know, over 181 properties were destroyed. Tragically, some lives were lost in Yarloop during the fire.

I have to say that in this day and age it is difficult to imagine that we do not have the technology and equipment needed to stop people dying in bushfires. In fact, I am not sure we ever will. Even with all the technology in the world, I am not sure that we will ever have the capacity to stop wildfires or the devastation, but we certainly have to do our darnedest to ensure that we are doing all we can within our power. I am not suggesting we do not need new technological advances or equipment—we certainly do—but we always have to be mindful of the fact that nature could well take a similar course in the future. It is definitely vital that we learn from what has gone in the past, and ensure that we do all we can to mitigate the risks.

In January 2016, as we know and members have alluded to, Euan Ferguson was commissioned to report on the fires. His report stated, and I quote —

... the current system for managing bushfire in Western Australia is failing citizens and the government.

That really, really was a damning statement. That is the major reason we need to ensure that we learn from what happened, and ensure that we put the recommendations into practice.

Hon Colin de Grussa's motion mentions reforming the emergency services sector. The special inquiry made 17 recommendations for strategic change. Not too many are in the reform or the purview of emergency services, so I will make some remarks on those. I was trying to listen to the motion that —

**Hon Colin Holt:** There is one particular one that is.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** There are a couple, and I will make some comments around that. I suspect and hope that we will have many more conversations in this place about the full report, and what the state government will do across the board. I am certainly happy to organise briefings for members on that.

Recommendation 4 of the report was to develop options for expanding the bushfire mitigation grant scheme away from hypothetical issues to relevant, on-the-ground mitigation strategies. These grants are designed to reduce fuel loads by creating effective land management practices, to construct or maintain fire trails or to assist in scientific

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research into bushfire mitigation. I can confirm that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is working with my department, the Department of Parks and Wildlife, to expand this grant program to particularly target fuel reduction programs.

Recommendation 5 was for —

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services, utilising the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, to develop a simplified and fast track hazard reduction burn ... planning and approval process to ensure the timely conduct of township and asset protection ...

That, too, is in progress. Improvements are certainly occurring and it is moving along. Recommendation 6 in the report states —

... to adopt, across all hazards, the doctrine of:

- the primacy of life;
- the ‘Strategic Control Priorities’ (as documented by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services); and
- community warnings that are timely, tailored and relevant.

I can confirm that has been completed and now forms an integral part of our bushfire policy. Recommendation 8 has been completed. It states —

The Departments of Parks and Wildlife and Fire and Emergency Services to adopt the policy that all bushfire Level 3 Incident Management Teams in the Perth Hills and the South West will be integrated and pre-formed from the start of the 2016/17 fire season with substantial involvement of both the Departments of Parks and Wildlife and Fire and Emergency Services personnel on all teams.

I have been out to visit a number of regional parks and wildlife officers and I have seen this in operation. I have to, at this stage, pay tribute to the staff in both my department and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and also to the thousands of volunteers in the state who are doing tremendous work in very difficult times and places. I thank them for their work and I acknowledge that today.

Recommendation 9 states —

The State Emergency Management Committee, in consultation with Western Australian Farmers Federation, the Association of Bush Fire Brigades, the Contractors Association of WA, and the Forest Industries Federation of WA, to establish systems for the voluntary registration of:

- farmer firefighting units;
- contractor firefighting resources; and
- forestry industry brigades.

I am also advised that that work is underway. With regard to recommendation 10, I can confirm that the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services are currently investigating an emergency services and resource system to enable effective management and coordination of all aspects of bushfire incidents. It is an enormous task and I am sure all members in here appreciate it. It is also vitally important and work is continuing with that.

Recommendation 11 encouraged —

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services to investigate and adopt a system that will allow the public to opt in, monitor and receive, through a ‘push mechanism’, bushfire and other emergency warnings, maps and information using a wide variety of devices including personal hand held smart devices.

Again, this work is underway. It is an expensive and somewhat difficult task; however, the department is working on it in earnest.

One of the issues that became quite apparent during the January 2016 Waroona fires was the communication of places of last resort in a bushfire. My ministerial colleague in the other place Hon Mick Murray, Minister for Sport and Recreation, took refuge on the beach as a place of last resort. Although it might seem like a natural thought to go to the beach to escape a fire, it is not always the best idea; nor is it always necessarily possible. Mr Ferguson recommended a policy for local governments to identify, register and, importantly, communicate places of last resort in communities where there is a risk to life as a result of bushfires. Again, this incredibly important work is underway.

The special inquiry heard anecdotal evidence at a meeting in Cookernup and with the Yarloop Volunteer Bushfire Brigade that bush fire brigade members were, on a number of occasions, refused passage through vehicle checkpoints when they were travelling in private vehicles to effect crew changes on their bushfire tankers. It is

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a real concern that people on their way to doing their work to help others and change crews were stopped. This was despite brigade members explaining to those who were on the checkpoints that they were on their way to do the work. I am told that in some of these instances, some bush fire brigade staff who were on their way to change crews were in their uniform and protective clothing, yet they were turned away. This is a real concern. There is clearly a need for a system that allows for the recognition of personnel and for vehicles to pass through checkpoints with ease. Although we obviously want to limit the number of people entering bushfire zones, this should not be at the expense of emergency services and equipment when they need to be there in a timely fashion. Traffic management is an obvious concern during events such as bushfires. Unfortunately, it appears there is a large divide between community expectations and current practice in the management of traffic leaving an emergency zone and also traffic returning. It is important that any policy take into account the heightened stress and incredibly emotional state that people may be in and temper that with the potential risk to life at that moment.

Recommendation 14 suggested —

The policy should provide a practical balance between risk to life and the public value of enabling the timely restoration of livelihoods and the movement of critical resources, ... through traffic management points.

Work is being done on this. A review such as this will need to involve a range of stakeholders, including the Departments of Fire and Emergency Services and Parks and Wildlife and others. Work is underway on many of these recommendations. Many of them are very complex. We do not want to rush them if it means that we will get an inferior result. As members have pointed out, the minister has called a bushfire mitigation summit tomorrow in Mandurah and many of these important issues will be raised at that time.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am going to give the call to Hon Tim Clifford because he has tried to seek the call a couple of times. The advice I give to Hon Tim Clifford in this place is that if you want to get the call, you have to jump to your feet very quickly; otherwise, somebody else will beat you to it.

**HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan)** [10.57 am]: Thank you, Madam President. I rise in support of the motion put forward by Hon Colin de Grussa. Many people do not know this, but I grew up in the south west and have worked across the state. I was also in the 11<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Army Reserve in Albany. Many of the local people I served in the reserve unit with said that we might sometimes be called upon to volunteer to help the local community in the face of disaster. I was lucky enough not to experience bushfires, because confronting a wildfire puts fear in the hearts of everyone.

The Greens support a fully independent rural bush fire service, because local knowledge helps develop strategies to mitigate the dangers of fire. A lot of friends near Esperance who run farms tell me that there is a lot of frustration in the community around this because, like many things, there is a bit of disempowerment going on with the city dictating how the country should operate its own emergency services and other services more broadly. It is also important to note that we need to work more closely with our local governments in the face of a changing climate. In recent years, the long periods of drought and drying out, which we have seen in California and southern Europe, has resulted in fires that have just gone out of control. That is due, in part—as most recommendations and reports have stated—to not planning for some of the escalated longer periods of drought that cause areas to turn into fuel dumps ready to go off. When I was working down in the Boddington area on the Newmont mine site, I could see the tall trees rising above me everywhere. Knowing that when the summer period hit, the trees could go up in flames and not knowing where we should go was worrying to us all on the site. Taking on board that climate change is forcing our hand, I think it is really important that we get on board and push through with the recommendations. I note the cost outlined earlier was around \$400 million and that that is a lot of money —

**Hon Colin Holt:** It's a guesstimate.

**Hon TIM CLIFFORD:** It is a guesstimate, but we cannot put a monetary value on anyone's life. When we see communities get wiped out because we are counting a million dollars here and there, it really does not do enough to address the issue. We are here to put the community first. We are not here to not listen to the science. We are not here to push recommendations aside and then revisit them after a disaster has happened. I am attending the summit tomorrow and I look forward to hearing what is said. I look forward to the government's recommendations following that.

**HON COLIN HOLT (South West)** [11.01 am]: I also thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this important motion to the house. I cannot think of a more important issue in the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services than addressing the recommendations of the Ferguson inquiry and the restructure of our independent fire service. I go back to what the motion says. It recommends that the government —

... immediately outline its intentions and process for reforming the emergency services sector ...

I listened very carefully to what was said by the Minister for Environment, who represents in this house the Minister for Emergency Services. He used the first 14 minutes and 50 seconds to talk about every other issue,



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rather than outlining what is going to happen to address that particular part of the Ferguson report and in particular recommendation 15, which states —

The State Government to create a Rural Fire Service to enhance the capability for rural fire management and bushfire risk management at a State, regional and local level.

We did not hear anything about that. No plans were put forward. Here was the opportunity for the Minister for Emergency Services, through the representative minister, to outline to this house and the public of Western Australia how the government is going to approach this issue. No-one expects the government to have answers three months into its term, but we would not mind a bit of direction on how the minister is going to address the very real concern that everyone in Western Australia has. He has not outlined it.

I was very pleased when I heard about the bushfire summit. I read it in the paper on about 3 June so I went and got the minister's press release from 3 June, which outlined that he was going to have a bushfire summit. My office immediately rang and asked to look at the agenda, who was invited and whether I could get an invite. At that point, just as the government had put out the press release, the answer was that there was no agenda yet and they were still working on the invite list. Fair enough. Down the bottom of that press release it says —

**Comments attributed to Emergency Services Minister Fran Logan:**

“There will be a lot of experience in the room and it's a fantastic opportunity for everyone involved in fighting bushfires to discuss what they believe are the best ways to mitigate these devastating natural disasters.

That is a great idea, yet a question in the house yesterday asked who is going to this summit. I know two people who are going to the summit—Hon Rick Mazza and Hon Tim Clifford—because they have actually volunteered that information. When we asked the government who is going and what experience would be in the room to take up the cudgel on behalf of Western Australians and the people working in emergency services, the answer was, “Sorry, we're not going to tell you who is coming.” We have to take on faith that comment in the press release from 3 June that there is going to be a lot of experience in the room to work through the issues. That is ridiculous! I do not blame Hon Stephen Dawson, the Minister for Environment —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Are you going?

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** No, I am not going; I did not get an invite.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Is anyone from your party going?

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** They would be, yes. However, the point I am trying to make is that we do not know who is going unless that information is volunteered by someone who is part of the system or in Parliament. Let me put this to the minister: How do we know that all those people from the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, volunteer bush fire brigades and the Emergency Services Volunteers Association will be represented at that bushfire summit? How will they know? They would not know. There are divisions across the emergency services across this state; we know that. There are differences of opinion between professional career firefighters and volunteer bush fire brigades.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, member! I am just going to remind members that no discussion is to be held at the back of the chamber across the bar. Order! I advise you that there is a standing order that prevents you from having a discussion across the bar. If you wish to have a discussion, I suggest that you take it outside the chamber.

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** We know that there is a lot of division and different opinions across the bushfire industry and sector in this state, yet we cannot find out who is going to represent any of those groups at this very important bushfire summit. We cannot find out who is going to the summit.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Is a National Party representative going?

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** Yes.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** So will they be able to tell you who is there?

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** They may be able to at some point in time. I will not know that until they have been to the summit. My point is: how do people in the sector know who is representing the issues at this bushfire summit? Nobody knows. If the Minister for Regional Development wants to stand up and defend how the Minister for Emergency Services has put together his response to the Ferguson report in the first three months of this government, or even a direction to go forward to address these issues, I would be very pleased for her do that, because it is very difficult. I wonder if some of the minister's own colleagues have been invited. Perhaps Hon Adele Farina, a member for the South West Region who had a lot to do with the Waroona and Yarloop fires, has been invited to the summit. I would not know.

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**Hon Adele Farina:** No.

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** She has not been invited! There we go. I wonder if the Minister for Environment has been invited to the summit.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** I have.

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** Thank you, minister; now I know at least three people who are going. I would have hoped that the Minister for Environment would be invited. He may not be able to make it, but at least he has been invited, as I would have expected. Members can understand the point I am trying to make here. We are trying to move forward in a way that will address the needs of Western Australians in the emergency sector, yet we have a minister who releases a press release on the summit, does not know who he is going to invite, and then will not tell the Parliament, let alone the public of Western Australia, who is actually going to the summit. I find that particularly galling. It is well short of the expectations of this Parliament and well short of the expectations of the people in the community, who are looking for answers and leadership in this space. It is not going to be an easy task, as Hon Stephen Dawson, the Minister for Environment, outlined. It is a task that will involve many hard decisions and discussions to get to a point. When it is done in a vacuum, we will never get there. If the government does not engage with all the players in the sector, how will it address the division —

**Hon Darren West** interjected.

**Hon COLIN HOLT:** Does the member want to talk? I would be happy to hear him stand up and defend the Minister for Emergency Services whenever he likes.

How does the government expect to create a united way forward if it cannot tell people who is coming to the summit and cannot unite all those different views? We have not heard today how the Minister for Emergency Services is going to do that. I suspect that he does not have an idea himself. I will be very interested to hear back from my National Party colleagues and other members from this place who are going to the summit on what the way forward is going to be. I invite any member and the minister who represents the Minister for Emergency Services in this place to come back to us with another plan at some point in the future.

**HON COLIN DE GRUSSA (Agricultural)** [11.08 am] — in reply: Obviously this is an issue that brings high emotion with it and a lot of different views and ideas, but the most important thing is that we find a way forward and do something to ensure that our state is ready to respond to these catastrophic emergencies when they occur. That is the most important thing that we in this place must do. I want to thank those members who have taken the time to speak on this motion today; their contributions have been very important. There was a diversity of views but a common goal in trying to ensure that we move forward with these reforms. This is an issue that is too important to ignore. I really hope the government explains clearly to not just us here but also the broader public and those 20 000-odd volunteers who give their time every year, and will continue to give their time every year, to try to keep all of us safe, but who are frustrated because they do not know what is happening. They do not know what the way forward is; they just know that there must be some change and they hope that the findings of these important reviews, the Ferguson review and the Cascade–Scaddan bushfire review, are used to find a better way forward.

Honourable members in this place today spoke about the extensive local knowledge. One of the most important points out of any of the reviews I have read is that that local knowledge needs to be much better utilised than it is currently. I speak from experience on this matter, having been on the ground in those Esperance fires, both the Cascade–Scaddan fire and the fire along the coastal strip of Esperance. Apart from some blue gum plantations being devastated, the fire was also in a national park. It was incredibly frustrating to be one of the local volunteers on the ground who was supposed to be relieved by incoming crews from around the state. Those crews are fantastic people. They gave their time and came down to Esperance to help us out, but the system they worked within meant that they had to go to their briefing until 9.30 or 10 o'clock each morning. By the time they got to the fireground, the locals were still there from the night before and the peak heat of the day was beginning, but they could only do so many hours before they had to knock off again, so the local crews were still there at night. They were not really being relieved; the system did not allow it. It is incredibly frustrating that local brigades still end up having to pick up the pieces. The guys and girls were exhausted but they were not going to walk away; they had to be there. I reiterate that this is no criticism at all of the volunteers, the incident commanders, the sector commanders and all the people on the ground because they are just doing their job in a system that makes that job very difficult and is part of the reason we need to look at reforms.

Most importantly, what I am hearing today in this debate is that there is no silver bullet. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to bushfire management and emergency management in the state. I mean that not just in terms of the structure of the organisation. We can talk about a rural fire service; that may be important, but how that is shaped or formed is still open for debate in my opinion. There is no silver bullet in terms of equipment. I talked earlier

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about the frustrations that local brigades in Esperance have with the equipment they are provided, such as the set-up of their trucks, which, by the way, have different diameter tyres on the front and rear and that causes all sorts of issues in the event of a flat tyre; again, that is something they cannot change. My point is that the equipment that is needed in Esperance will not be the same equipment that is needed in Yarloop or in the pastoral and rangelands regions in the north. We need a much better approach to determine the most appropriate equipment. And we need to use the local knowledge, by talking to the brigades, the volunteers, the people there who know what will work in their area. The recognition that there is no one size that fits all is important in training as well. Fire conditions are very different across the state in different regions. We must ensure that we have appropriate training for the areas in which people will fight fires. I believe also that in the local knowledge space, in a major incident like the Esperance fire, when outside people come in and become the sector commanders and so on, we need to use the locals. We need to train the locals so that they can do those jobs because they know exactly where that bush track leads and they know that if they take a right at that fork, they will get bogged. They know that, and they can tell people so that, as I experienced in Esperance, we do not end up having to pull no less than four fire appliances out of a bog, one after the other, because those people did not know where to go or how to drive there because the local experience was not used.

I thank members who made a contribution on this important motion, and with that I conclude my remarks.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.