

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

Motion

HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [10.26 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house calls on the government to do more in preparing the Western Australian community for bushfires, including a commitment to —

- (a) increased funds for fire mitigation;
- (b) locating the Bushfire Centre of Excellence in regional Western Australia;
- (c) ensuring all equipment in our emergency services volunteer units are fit for purpose;
- (d) increased recruitment, training and retention of volunteers; and
- (e) increased funding to promote the “Are You Bushfire Ready?” message.

I understand that this is a broad motion and that it has a number of elements, but I hope that members on all sides will want to contribute to this important debate. A number of things have prompted me to move this motion today. The first is that the fire season is upon us and the official start of summer is only two days away, but I have seen very little advertising about being prepared for this year’s bushfire season. Maybe the mild start to the season has driven that, but I am certainly concerned that we have not seen enough advertising. The second is that there are ongoing questions around the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. I know that the expressions of interest, or the request for proposals, process is underway and that an announcement is expected before Christmas, but we do not have very much time to talk about that process before an outcome is announced before Christmas, as indicated in some of the tender documents. The third is that various bush fire brigades around the state are reporting that their equipment is not fit for purpose and that upgrades are required urgently, and, again, because the fire season is upon us right now, they need some answers about those upgrades. There are still questions about the ongoing recruitment and retention of volunteers in our emergency services system, so I was very interested to see that the Western Australian State Emergency Management Committee’s “Emergency Preparedness Report 2018” was tabled yesterday, which I encourage members to go through because it is interesting. We have had debates in this house before about training volunteers. People who followed those debates would have been pretty disappointed with the government’s response at that time because there had clearly been a Department of Fire and Emergency Services response. I flicked through the SEMC report yesterday and was interested to find that the executive summary states —

- As is the case with many volunteer based organisations, the state’s reliance upon volunteers is being challenged as a range of factors are combining to impact on people stepping forward.
 - There is a need for effective sector-wide strategies to address recruitment, retention, motivation and training of volunteers.

That is why that was included in the motion. It is interesting to see how the government’s commentary has changed since the tabling of that report and the debate we had. There is no budget commitment or ongoing funding boost for the enhanced prescribed burning program, which was previously funded by royalties for regions, with \$20 million allocated over four years. Those funds increased the prescribed burning footprint over those years, which was important. That was the motivation for moving this motion. There is probably something in there for everyone.

I would like to talk about being bushfire ready. Are we bushfire ready? As I said, we are two days away from summer. We have had a relatively mild start to summer. It has been mixed across the state. Of course, in a state as big as ours, there will be mixed results. Maybe that mild start, especially in the major bushfire-prone areas like the south west, is building complacency within the government and emergency services. We all know that we cannot be complacent in this space because the next catastrophic fire event is just around the corner; it happens every year. We cannot have complacency. We need to ensure that we continue to promote being bushfire ready.

Yesterday I asked the minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services about the “Are You Bushfire Ready?” campaign, which, as every member in this place would know, ran extensively in an advertising campaign with various high profile Western Australians. It sent a message, over and over again, that it is the responsibility of landholders to be ready for the next bushfire event. Yesterday I asked how much was spent on the campaign in the 2015–16, 2016–17 and 2017–8 financial years. These are the answers I received, for those who have not read the *Hansard*. In 2015–16, \$900 000 was committed by Western Power and \$100 000 was committed by the government to increase that awareness campaign. In 2016–17, the same thing occurred—\$900 000 from Western Power and \$100 000 from the government; \$1 million, all up. In 2017–18, \$212 000 was spent by the government and there was nothing from Western Power. I asked about the budget for this financial year. I was told it is \$1 million.

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I probably should have expanded that question and asked how much has been spent so far and what the plans are to expend the rest.

Seeing that we are at the start of the bushfire season, we would expect the awareness campaign to have absolutely kicked in. Perhaps the minister responsible for replying to this motion will enlighten the house about that. I have serious concerns; I do not know whether anyone else has. I cannot remember seeing an advert to promote bushfire readiness in the lead-up to this bushfire season. I admit that I do not watch a lot of commercial television, but I cannot remember seeing the message anywhere. I also asked —

What other advertising measures has the Department of Fire and Emergency Services put in place to ensure residents are equipped to meet bushfire challenges this fire season?

This is the answer I received —

Other advertising measures DFES has put in place to ensure residents are equipped to meet bushfire challenges ... include proactive media; online news articles; proactive digital content; and communications with staff, volunteers and local government in a range of mediums.

No advertising spend was mentioned in that response to my question. A range of measures have been put in place, mainly around media releases and campaign launches, hoping they get picked up by newspapers and television to put out the story. That falls well short of our expectations in this space. With a \$1 million budget, there is no advertising spend yet to ask people whether they are bushfire ready. The answer refers to online news articles, proactive digital content, new graphics for bushfire advice, watch-and-act emergency warnings and communication with local governments, such as a notice in the Western Australian Local Government Association newsletter, a DFES volunteer newsletter and volunteer portal, staff emails and intranet content. I am not sure that that prepares the community for being bushfire ready. It might prepare some of the people who are heavily involved in it already but I am not sure it meets the needs of the community. I think the house is right to ask those questions at this time to find out exactly where we are going and what is happening with the promotion of this very important issue. It occurs every year. It will not go away. The government has a \$1 million budget to do exactly that, yet it seems that none of that money has gone into advertising to promote the message more broadly. There is a massive gap in preparing our community for the bushfire season, which we know is one of the greatest emergency risks in this state every year. It does not go away. We know how catastrophic bushfires can be. History tells us that we cannot be complacent. As sure as anything, we will have a catastrophic event. We all know about Yarloop. That community is still recovering from the fire that occurred in that area. Those sorts of events take a long time to recover from. I am very pleased to see the progress being made in this community. Again, awareness of bushfires is a major thing that we need to concentrate on.

The second thing I want to talk about relates to prescribed burning. Again, I invite the responsible minister to outline the government's plans to maintain that prescribed burning goal each year. At the moment there is no commitment to improve the enhanced bushfire mitigation process that has been in place for the past two years.

Hon Stephen Dawson: That's the one that's currently in place you're asking about?

Hon COLIN HOLT: There is nothing in the budget. I received a reply from the Minister for Environment to a question on notice, which I will get to, saying that it will go into the next budget process. I guess this is an opportunity for this house to say that it should be in the next budget.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Absolutely, but what I've said is that it is a time-limited thing. It is still in the budget.

Hon COLIN HOLT: I know, and we are helping the minister in his job here.

Hon Stephen Dawson: As long as you understand that.

Hon COLIN HOLT: I understand that. I am just saying that there are some real issues if it does not turn up in the budget. We want to keep that prescribed burning going. The use of prescribed burning is a cornerstone of WA's bushfire mitigation efforts, along with other things to mitigate the risks. It also includes helping landholders clear fuel loads around their properties. It is well documented that prescribed burning is a very useful tool. It has been established over the last 55 years in the south west of Western Australia to enable fire managers to achieve a high level of protection for both community assets and natural values and also those properties near forest managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. Forest fire managers who are directly involved in fire control operations have no doubt about the value of fuel-reduced areas in reducing the intensity of bushfires and in providing safer conditions to apply effective bushfire suppression tactics. In Western Australia there is a large body of scientific and experiential evidence of the effectiveness of prescribed burning in significantly reducing the bushfire threat. That is why it needs to be continued. Well-recognised fire experts want it to continue, bushfire experts want it to continue and no doubt the community itself wants to see it happen because of the catastrophic outcomes that will occur if we do not continue to manage our forest fuel loads.

Extract from *Hansard*

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I was really interested in some work done by Veronique Florec in 2016, and her paper, “Economic analysis of prescribed burning in the south west of Western Australia”. That work emphasises the importance of keeping to a minimum level of prescribed burning each year in the south west forest region. Long-term analysis shows that not doing any prescribed burning for several years can be very costly for the region, with large increases in damage and fire suppression expenditure. Let us do the work now on prescribed burning, in a cost-effective way that means we do not have to spend a lot of money as a government or a community to repair the damage, even in firefighting efforts. That is what will help. If no prescribed burning were applied in the south west forest region, average annual suppression expenditure would be around four times higher than at the current levels and the average cost of damage would be around five times higher. When we get bushfires, they cause a lot of damage. Let us do the work now with prescribed burnings before we have to spend it on fighting the fire. Ms Florec concluded —

On average, the current prescribed-burning program generates AU\$31 million savings per year in suppression expenditures and AU\$169 savings in damages compared to a no-prescribed-burning scenario.

If we take it that the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions’ goal is 200 000 hectares, and that boost of \$20 000 through royalties for regions may have helped it achieve that, which it did, it is obviously money well spent. It provides government with a great insurance policy in that it does not have to spend a great deal of money in the future. That is what we want to see occur.

A question on notice was asked of the Minister for Emergency Services about those achievements and how our prescribed burning has gone. For the benefit of *Hansard* and members, I will go through the last 10 years and round them off to save time. The achievements in prescribed burning hectares was 151 000 hectares in 2008–09; 212 000 in 2009–10; 136 000 in 2010–11; 103 000 in 2011–12; just 23 000 in 2012–13; and just 78 000 hectares in 2013–14. There were some mitigating factors in that year, around the time when there were some fires around Margaret River. I think that is probably most pertinent. There was an inquiry into that, which outlined how to manage risks from prescribed burning. That really stalled the process. Prescribed burning in 2014–15 was 147 000 hectares; in 2015–16, 154 000 hectares; in 2016–17, when the royalties for regions boost came in, it was 247 000 hectares; and in 2017–18, indicative provisional figures to this stage are 219 000 hectares, rounded up. Members can see that when we invest in prescribed burning and we set aside funds dedicated to that outcome, we get to our prescribed burning outcomes, which means we also get to have a greater insurance policy for wildfires and the effects that they have.

A question asked to the Minister for Environment was —

... will the Minister table advice given by the agency on risks of not extending the enhanced prescribed burning program beyond 2018/19 as outlined in the budget; ...

It is budgeted up to the end of 2019; there is nothing beyond that budget. The answer was —

The McGowan Government is committed to prescribed burning given it is the primary means of reducing the level of combustible fuel and therefore the risk of bushfire faced by our community. Future funding, including an extension of the Enhanced Prescribed Burning Program will be considered as part of the Government’s 2019/20 budget process.

There is a commitment and recognition that it works. We are asking that it gets into the budget. I hope that everyone in this house encourages and backs that call. It is a pity that we do not get to have a vote on non-government business, because we could have really sent a message to the budgetary process that this is an important process and program to ensure that our communities stay safe and to help fight wildfires.

I do not have much time left, so I want to quickly touch on the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. Since it has been announced, there have been mixed reviews on how effective it is going to be. All I can say is that it is very useful to have Murray Carter and John Tillman working there, because they come with a great deal of credibility and expertise. I am sure they will be working their hardest to make sure that it is effective.

I have some concerns around the tender process—the request for proposal, as it was put—because it seemed to me that that request for proposal was asking a lot from local governments that were putting in a bid to have that Bushfire Centre of Excellence located within their shires. The tender process was announced on 25 September. It closed on 24 October, allowing just under a month for local governments to get something together for the request for proposal. I do not know whether anyone has looked at it, but it was quite an onerous task to do in a month for local governments outside Perth—often smaller local governments that would see an absolute role for this sort of thing in their local shires and should be considered as part of it. But I tell you what, it was some tall order for a small shire to bring that all together in a very short time. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has given tenderers three months for opportunities for other things that are not as complex. It is a bit disappointing. I hope it does not mean that the government has already made a decision on exactly where the centre is going to go. I will run out of time, but I will start with some of the specifications required. DFES wants to acquire a parcel

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of land from local government and it wants the local government to build, possibly through an outsourced construction company, a new facility or refurbish an existing facility to DFES specifications. That is a huge step. It is a lot of research just to get to that point.

I have run out time, and I may get back to the motion in reply; otherwise, perhaps I will finish it in a member's statement later this evening.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [10.46 am]: I rise on behalf of the government to make some comments on this motion this morning. It is a very well intentioned motion and a lot of the work that is mentioned in this motion is already underway; I will outline that in a couple of ways. I will reply on behalf of the minister for Fire and Emergency Services first, but I will also make some comments as Minister for Environment about prescribed burning in particular.

At the outset, I want to again place on the record my thanks and the government's thanks for the fine work that women and men across this state do keeping our communities safe. We can never say that too much, but on a daily basis, some of these people put their lives at risk to keep communities safe right throughout the state. It is important to acknowledge those people doing that work, particularly in regional Western Australia. I also want to acknowledge the volunteers, those people whose job is not to do it, but after hours, after they have done a shift on a mine or they have worked in a forest or whatever they have done, they then put their hand up to answer the call when there is an emergency in place.

Hon Colin Tincknell: There are 26 000 of them.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There are tens of thousands of community members across the state who help on a daily basis and again I want to place my thanks on the record.

Many of our firefighters have already been battling out-of-control blazes throughout the state, including in my electorate in the north west, with fires destroying more than 1.4 million hectares. To put that into perspective, that is double the size of the Perth metropolitan area.

The Minister for Emergency Services and I have spoken about this numerous times and the minister has made an announcement on the Rural Fire Division before. As we know, on 13 April this year, the state government announced the creation of a Rural Fire Division within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services as part of a package of reforms to the bushfire management sector in Western Australia. These reforms essentially address the recommendations made by the special inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona fire—the Ferguson inquiry. For the first time ever, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has a division dedicated to rural and regional bushfire management that will enhance our capability at a state, regional and local level. The new division, as I mentioned previously, includes the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, the bushfire risk management program and its related activities, land use planning, and bushfire technical services. It also includes a new first of its kind \$18 million Bushfire Centre of Excellence, which will facilitate high-level training and gather bushfire science and knowledge from around not only the state and nation, but also the world. I, too, have an interest in this and I have expressed a view that my electorate would love to have it, but, as Hon Colin Holt alluded to, it is going through a process and we will see where it ends up. I know that many communities around this state would love to have that centre in their locality.

Hon Darren West: Which is an endorsement.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Absolutely it is an endorsement.

As we know, the Rural Fire Division is a relatively new structure within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and the work is already underway. The executive director is in place. I acknowledge Hon Colin Holt's comments about the good officers in the department who are in charge of these areas. They are dedicated, and we are very pleased to have them there. Office positions are being filled. A scoping study into the location of the RFD office and Bushfire Centre of Excellence outside Perth is progressing well.

No-one can deny that this is a major step forward for Western Australia, and it is not the only one. The McGowan Labor government is also embarking on one of the most ambitious reforms ever to the bushfire sector in Western Australia, one that includes record investment in training and mitigation. We have had some debates or conversations in this place previously about that. I see that Hon Colin Holt is shaking his head. We have definitely had that conversation. The member may not agree with my view on the issue, but we have definitely discussed it. The Rural Fire Division has been developed to meet the needs of our geographically diverse state, which comprises one-third of the land mass of Australia. That demonstrates the McGowan government's commitment to improving community safety and also strengthening our emergency services. At the heart of the division is a greater focus on bushfire risk mitigation, led by DFES, and greater collaboration to improve the safety of our communities.

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Of particular relevance to this motion is this government's unprecedented investment in bushfire mitigation, with a \$35 million boost to our inaugural mitigation funding, bringing the total to almost \$50 million. This funding will be targeted to where it is needed most. Let us be clear: we as a government have done this. We have increased our funding for bushfire mitigation more than any preceding government in Western Australia. We are committed to doing that. I am not saying that previous governments have not done good things, but this is a boost to that work. Communities are already benefiting from this funding, with the Minister for Emergency Services having announced just a few months ago the first use of the expenditure under the new \$35 million DFES mitigation fund. This government has also invested \$15 million, in two funding rounds, to enable local governments to treat bushfire risks in their areas. This is significant and certainly is welcome support for those local authorities and communities.

I turn now to the \$18 million Bushfire Centre of Excellence, which is a key component of this government's significant reform of rural fire management in Western Australia. This will be a first for Western Australia. As many in this place know, the support for this centre is very high. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence aims to improve rural fire management through leadership, collaboration and innovation across the sector. The reality is that we cannot do this alone. We need to work in tandem with local communities and local divisions to get this right. We need to do it together to make it work. Innovation is an important part of that. We need to have the most up-to-date equipment and opportunities in this space. The primary focus of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence is to enhance the coordination and delivery of rural fire and bushfire management training across the entire sector in Western Australia. Importantly, this includes the volunteers who are doing that great work.

As members would be aware, the operational planning and design of the centre is underway, with capital funding to support the construction of the facility available from 2019–20. We will eventually see where it is located, but, as Hon Darren West pointed out, many, many communities around the state would like this centre to be located in their region. DFES recently used a request for proposal process, based on the Department of Finance procurement practice guide, to formally register interest from local governments to host and construct the Bushfire Centre of Excellence facility. The RFP process drew significant interest from a range of local governments, which were simply asked whether they met certain criteria. The government has already stated that the Bushfire Centre of Excellence will not be based in Perth. However, as both the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services and I have said previously, the centre will need to be accessible to the volunteers from around the state who will benefit from and use this facility.

I turn now to paragraph (c) of the motion, which refers to ensuring that all equipment is fit for purpose. I can assure members that the government takes this very seriously. DFES has started a new operational fleet project to accelerate and optimise capability and to better service the state's emergency service responders, including volunteers. I am told that the project has re-baselined existing fleet developments under an integrated model to design and deliver a fit-for-purpose operational fleet. There is a comprehensive change management plan, which embraces end users extensively in the model to design, acquire, trial and commission contemporary fleet types. The fleet project has a dedicated team who are focused on meaningful collaboration with volunteers, volunteer associations and other government agencies to enhance innovation in providing a fit-for-purpose fleet. The project commenced in September 2018—so in the last couple of months—and has to date published a fleet catalogue that is available on the DFES website and has gained national interest. A dedicated project webpage is also available to DFES registered volunteers. The webpage provides visibility of fleet types, the progress of acquisitions and an avenue to provide feedback. This Saturday, 1 December, approximately 20 volunteers from across the state will participate in a project advisory team to evaluate the latest build of a 3.4 urban tanker.

Our volunteers across the state play a vital role in protecting our state. That is why we are investing the time and resources to make sure that our career and volunteer workforce are fully trained and equipped and operationally ready. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services is working with the University of Western Australia's school of business and psychology to develop resources and support for volunteers, and to assist the staff who work with volunteers to improve recruitment practices and address retention issues. DFES is also working with Edith Cowan University's school of social work to develop a program that supports the families of emergency services volunteers. As we can all appreciate, one of the key issues for volunteer retention is family pressure. We are trying to provide some support to those who are doing the work and also to the families who provide the support network around them. DFES is also developing a website through which volunteers can be recruited. As volunteers tend not to join up during the busy summer periods, this website will be launched early in the new year in time for the 2019 recruitment period.

DFES is currently engaged in the recruitment of volunteer management support officers to support all volunteer brigade, group and unit leaders; DFES managers; and local government. These new positions will provide support to volunteer organisations to recruit and retain members. The volunteer management support officers will be located throughout the state, which again is a good thing, in Joondalup and Belmont in the metropolitan area, and

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in Broome, Karratha, Geraldton, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Manjimup, Albany and Narrogin. These officers will also help relieve some of the administrative duties so that volunteers can focus on providing vital services to their communities.

I turn now to the importance of bushfire awareness in the community. As Hon Colin Holt alluded to, a budget of \$1 million has been dedicated towards a new advertising campaign for this bushfire season. It is a reality in Western Australia that during the warmer months, there will be bushfires throughout the state, and we have seen that over the past few months in the north west of the state. Therefore, it is essential that people do their part to ensure not only their own safety but also that of their neighbours, by doing the right thing and preparing now. I urge the honourable members in the chamber this morning to do all they can to raise awareness of this important area, make sure that people in their communities are bushfire prepared, and encourage their communities to become more resilient to fires.

Hon Colin Holt: Do you have any details about what the advertising campaign will be?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Watch this space, member.

I turn now to my portfolio as Minister for Environment. Can I say—I have said this before—this government strongly supports prescribed burning as the primary means of reducing the occurrence and impact of summer bushfires. I know some people in this place do not like it, but I will unreservedly continue to say that we absolutely need to carry out prescribed burns to protect our communities. I will not resile from that fact. Sometimes as a minister we have to say unpopular things, but I believe that is the right thing to do. DFES is working extremely hard. We only need to look at the 100-plus bushfires currently burning in Queensland and the recent devastating wildfires in California to see strong reminders of the need to do this work. I am pleased to say that yesterday 22 officers from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and this morning five officers from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions went to Queensland to help with its fires. That is the right thing to do. Of course, we should remember that in 2015–16, when we had devastating fires here, Queensland sent officers over to help us out. When there is a fire somewhere else, whether it is California—I know that some firefighters from the state have gone to America recently—or Queensland, we send our officers to help to save communities and also to gain more skills.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: There are a lot of lessons from California for the east metro region in particular.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Probably, honourable member.

Hon Colin Holt touched on the 200 000-hectare target. I am proud that the department has exceeded the target for the past few years. Last year, we achieved 218 964 hectares, and the year before it achieved even more. That is obviously dependent on the weather. It is not always possible to do it, but certainly we give it a red-hot go, if I can use those words.

We are committed to ensuring greater collaboration between government agencies, local government authorities and industry to make sure that the Western Australian community is protected from the damaging impacts of bushfires. We allocated an additional \$5.5 million of funding in the 2017–18 and current financial years to enhance the program. As I have said previously, I am currently working with my director general to make sure that in the future budget process, we can continue to do this work.

I thank the member for bringing this debate forward. Given how the motion is worded, if there were a vote, I would not vote for it. It is a very important motion. We are doing this stuff. It is important that we continue to have these conversations, we continue to work with our local communities to do the right thing and we continue to mitigate through prescribed burning. We need to work together to make sure it happens. With those comments, I thank the member for bringing the motion to the house.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [11.01 am]: I thank Hon Colin Holt for bringing forward this motion on the burning issue of fire and emergency services.

Hon Darren West: Boom-tish!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The minister led the way!

I will concentrate my contribution largely on paragraph (b) of the motion, which Hon Colin Holt touched on. I will probably come back to it in a little more detail, but I would like to make a couple of broad comments in relation to the contributions so far. First, Hon Colin Holt talked about the focus on and the need for prescribed burning in the south west. That is absolutely true and critical. It is one of the reasons that I have been saying that the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, which the minister has said previously should be co-located with the Rural Fire Division, should be in the south west land division, and I will go into that in a bit more detail in a moment.

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I was pleased to hear the minister talk about the increased efforts in prescribed burning. When I first got involved in the environment sector, I was privileged to be around when we had two very active, perhaps closet, pyromaniac environment ministers in Hon Judy Edwards and Hon Cheryl Edwardes, who both managed to have significant controlled burn programs in place. I often wondered whether that sort of process led from one to the other. It has slipped away a bit, but if the minister wants to join that elite group of suspect pyromaniac environment ministers, we would be very pleased to see him maintain the current level at over 200 000 hectares a year. I think that would be an excellent outcome.

Hon Stephen Dawson: That's certainly what we've done since I've been the minister.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Excellent work!

I would like to focus in a little more detail on the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. It has been very difficult to get information out of the current Minister for Emergency Services. I know that the Minister for Environment does his absolute best to provide good answers to questions in this chamber and I appreciate that, but I suspect that the Minister for Emergency Services, who perhaps is the new Inspector Clouseau of state Parliament, could be a bit more forthright with his answers. Interestingly, I think the last minister we labelled as the Inspector Clouseau of Parliament also had the portfolio of emergency services, so I am a bit nervous about the trend in this portfolio.

In relation to the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, the Minister for Emergency Services said on radio on the day that he made the announcement of the new structure of the emergency services division that the Rural Fire Division should be co-located with the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. I have struggled to get answers to parliamentary questions about whether that is still the intent of the Minister for Emergency Services. In fact, I have struggled to get answers to anything about the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. On 10 October, I asked how the government and the minister went about announcing what was then called a tender but was, in fact, an expression of interest for the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. There was no media release. The public was not alerted. The media were not alerted. It would appear that, with a nudge and a wink, the minister said something to the Western Australian Local Government Association, which is probably not all that keen on being a government distribution service, and that was the extent to which local governments were made aware. As an opposition, we made a good effort to make sure that local governments were aware that they had the opportunity to put forward an expression of interest in this process. As Hon Colin Holt has said, it is an onerous process, but I think it is important that local governments get involved. It is right that it is not a tender process; it is an expression-of-interest process. But the government was very keen not to advertise the fact in any significant way.

A few other things have happened in the meantime. Some excellent work was done in estimates hearings with the agencies a couple of weeks ago, again with the assistance of the Minister for Environment. I have some concerns about the announced structure by the minister of the new Rural Fire Division in that it will have to have an operational role. I have said previously in this place on numerous occasions that the members of the Rural Fire Division will have to have an operational role—to the great dismissal of the Minister for Emergency Services. When we had estimates hearings with the agency a couple of weeks ago and the question was put to it, the agency said that absolutely the Rural Fire Division will have an operational role. The people at the top of that division are some of the best and most experienced fire control officers we have, particularly for a level 3 bushfire. Murray Carter and John Tillman, the director and assistant of the Rural Fire Division, are the best level 3 bushfire managers the state has and they cannot be withdrawn from active service. The agency said that they will not be and that the Rural Fire Division will obviously maintain an active role, which is fantastic. Somebody should tell the Minister for Emergency Services, because he does not seem to understand that. I do not think he necessarily understands his portfolio. He is probably very busy in Corrective Services at the moment.

The other thing that I would like to raise is the location. As mentioned by Hon Colin Holt, we have been very concerned that the government has a preordained outcome for the location of the Bushfire Centre of Excellence and therefore, most likely, the Rural Fire Division. The cat was let out of the bag some months ago after the minister made the announcement, because the United Firefighters Union of WA announced that it was going into Mundaring at the beginning of the year. I do not think the Minister for Emergency Services was aware of that announcement until a question was asked during question time here. That announcement was made and it would not have been made unless the minister had had some conversations, so, with a wink and a nod, the minister has decided that that is where it should go.

I note with some interest that the Minister for Environment, who has the unfortunate task of representing the Minister for Emergency Services in this place, said that it should not be located in Perth. The Minister for Emergency Services probably agrees with that, but does that mean the local government City of Perth? There is some question about what the location means. If, as we keep hearing, the government has predetermined a location in the East Metropolitan Region, what is Perth as a region?

Hon Stephen Dawson: Member, you're jumping at shadows.

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Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We will see. I asked a very interesting question on 20 November. I asked how the McGowan Labor government defines the Perth metropolitan region for the purposes of policy and development, and the answer was that it uses the Planning and Development Act 2005 and that in relation to planning applications, no alternative definition is used. This will be very interesting, because I have schedule 3 of that act. I asked whether the government adheres to the definition in schedule 3, and the answer was yes. Let me go through it in my limited time. Schedule 3, “Metropolitan region”, states that it is from —

... the northernmost northern boundary of the local government district of Mundaring ... along boundaries of the local government district of Mundaring —

So we are going on the eastern boundary —

to ... the easternmost north-eastern corner of the local government district of Kalamunda ... along the easternmost eastern boundary of the local government district of Kalamunda to ... a north-eastern corner of the local government district of Armadale; thence ... on the north-eastern side of Albany Highway, being a north-eastern corner of the local government district of Serpentine–Jarrahdale; thence generally south-easterly ... along boundaries of the local government district of Serpentine–Jarrahdale ...

On a planning basis, the definition of the metropolitan region is an area that is at the eastern boundaries of the local governments of Kalamunda, Armadale and Serpentine–Jarrahdale. If this government tries to announce that a Rural Fire Division and a Bushfire Centre of Excellence will be situated in a non-metropolitan area, unless it does not require a planning application, it is obvious that it cannot be in that region of the metropolitan area, as defined by the Planning and Development Act. I will be very interested to see whether that is the case, because my understanding is that the minister is very keen to call the East Metropolitan Region a regional area.

Hon Darren West: interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Normally, Hon Darren West, I am happy to take interjections, but I have very limited time today.

I have said repeatedly that, in my view, the Bushfire Centre of Excellence should be based in the south west. If the government is true to its word, which is always questionable—not this minister, of course, who is very good, but the Inspector Clouseau version—it is my view that bush firefighting and planning should be based where the population meets the forest. I note that Hon Martin Pritchard on the Nationals WA website suggests that —

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Sorry, I have said Hon Martin Pritchard again. I note that Hon Martin Aldridge suggests that the centre should be based at the Muresk Institute; at least that is in a regional area. Well done to the National Party; that is a good suggestion. I do not necessarily agree with it as a site because it has a very small area of forest compared with the south west regions that are in the —

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: In my view, the prime location is where the forest and the populations meet; that is where the training needs to occur.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.11 am]: I will make this brief because I know that the minister would like to speak. This is a very good motion. I commend the member for this motion and its timing—the timing is very important. Let us be honest, bushfires are a very serious matter. We have seen the damage that they can cause overseas and we are very aware of what has happened in our own state. We must go back and look at the Ferguson report that examined the Waroona fires, and what came out of that inquiry. I had a crystallising moment when I read Euan Ferguson’s comment in the report, which states —

My conclusion, which has been very carefully considered, is that the current system for managing bushfire in Western Australia is failing citizens and the government.

That is a very important statement. I do not want to dwell on the failings of the past. However, I will lean on the government’s promise to adopt all 17 recommendations of that scathing report. That is where I want to focus my time. In May 2018, the Premier was reported as having said —

“Under my Government, we have nearly implemented all of the recommendations of the Ferguson Report and the Rural Fire Division marks a significant shift in how we manage bushfire risks.

It is good to hear about the recent history of that report and what the government’s intentions are. I have a lot of questions for the government. It is a shame that the minister has already spoken, but maybe we can ask these questions later. The government has promised \$80 million to establish a new rural fire service that is independent

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of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, given the criticism of the bureaucracy and the culture hampering its effectiveness.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Sorry, did the member say 18 or 80?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: I said \$80 million. There was \$18 million to establish a Bushfire Centre of Excellence.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Yes, sorry; what did the member say?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: That was for the rural fire service, which is independent of DFES. An investment of \$15 million was also made into the bushfire risk management planning program and a \$34.6 million boost was given to bushfire mitigation efforts.

My questions are: How much of that money has been spent so far? Have all the recommendations been adhered to as promised? Have the long-held cultural issues been resolved between the volunteers and DFES? These are all questions that have come out of the report; it is not me saying this. How much will it cost to implement the Ferguson report's recommendations? Will the projected increase of the emergency services levy over the next two years exceed the cost; and, if so, by how much?

Hon Stephen Dawson: Member, can I suggest you've probably done your homework for next week. You've got a question for next Tuesday to lodge, and you'll get an answer next week as well.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: I certainly do have some questions. Is it true that the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades has not been properly consulted? I will ask that question as well. Based on my records, there will be an increase of 10 per cent to the emergency services levy in 2018–19. That will deliver to the government an extra \$93 million over four years, yet only \$1 million a year will be passed on to the volunteers through the local government's emergency services grants; is that true?

I commend the member for the South West Region who has moved this motion. I have also heard another member for the South West Region speak and I agree with them both: this is a very serious matter and the timing of this motion is perfect. We are asking the government to honour its promises and to make sure that this matter is taken very seriously and its promises are implemented on time. In the past, collective bushfire inquiries have systematically detailed that, at times, volunteer firefighters, including landholders and farmers throughout the regions, feel they have been ignored, disrespected and prevented from fighting fires to a degree. At times, this has hampered fire-reduction strategies. These changes to DFES are big and DFES has a big job. On behalf of the people of Western Australia, we all hope that the changes are carried out and that the government honours its promises.

Firefighting around the world involves many different methods. Hon Dr Steve Thomas, member for South West Region—who is now Acting President—mentioned that the eastern suburbs could be at risk. I notice that no members who have the eastern suburbs in their electorate are standing up to talk on that today, but I agree with him 100 per cent; it is a major area of concern for not only the South West Region that I and others members in here represent, but also the eastern suburbs of Perth. We need to address this issue because it is a major concern for the population in those areas.

I thank Hon Colin Holt for bringing forward this motion; his timing is perfect. I will also be asking the government further questions.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [11.18 am]: I want to make some comments about this wonderful motion brought on by Hon Colin Holt. We need to remember here, folks, that this is a very positive motion. It is a motion that is simply calling on the government to do more. Although I am not saying that anything is particularly wrong, I will point out some of the issues that are faced by us all. I thank those members who have contributed to this debate and I thank Hon Colin Holt for bringing on the motion. I also take the opportunity, as the minister did, to thank those volunteers who every day work hard to keep us safe in our communities.

I want to focus on a couple of key areas within this motion—namely, paragraphs (c) and (d) that focus on equipment readiness and the recruitment, training and retention of volunteers. They are absolutely key areas in which there is a lot of opportunity for improvement. There are many issues in these areas that have been raised by people around the state when I and other members have met with them. I will talk generally about equipment but, in many respects, this is about trucks, particularly in the bushfire space. Trucks in use for a number of years in many areas have been provided by one manufacturer, Isuzu—supposedly off-road vehicles. However, they are absolutely hopeless off-road and are not truly off-road trucks. Not only that, a condition that I believe is a government requirement requires the trucks to meet certain emissions standards. I am all for meeting emissions standards, but I would have thought the fire was doing a little bit more damage to the environment than the

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emissions from a truck would. These trucks are very smart. They have all sorts of systems on them. When diesel particulates filter through to a certain stage, they have to be hot-burned off. They are purged. When that happens the truck de-rates its power and firemen are required to wait for 30 minutes while it does its burn-off. That burn-off can be skipped every now and then, but only a couple of times, then it has to be done. In the middle of fighting a bushfire when the truck's horsepower is de-rated and the truck is doing its burn-off, not only is it dangerous because the firemen struggle to get out of there, the other danger, of course, is that the diesel particulate filter itself is a bloody hot—excuse the French—piece of equipment and it will start a fire if it is near anything hot.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Honourable member!

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: I might have to retract that last slip of the tongue there.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you, honourable member.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: It is very important that we understand that the equipment has to be fit for purpose, which means we must make sure we understand what the purpose is and where these vehicles will be used. Having driven a number of these trucks across stubble in a broadacre crop and through bushland and experienced their inability to handle those conditions, I suggest that we need to make sure we are not locked into contracts with any one manufacturer and can choose the best equipment for the job.

I want to point out another thing. I travel around the state meeting with various volunteer emergency service groups. There is a need to continually upgrade and replace this equipment and there is a schedule to do that. I asked a question on notice about this last week, so at some point I will get an answer to it. I am wondering why the Karratha Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service is still driving around in a 1997 International Acco as its primary truck. A whole bunch of governments have been in power since 1997 but the old Acco is probably getting a bit long in the tooth. Not only that, its new truck is past its 10-year use-by date, being a 2005 model. In fact, when it was built, it was a prototype, so it was not built to the specification of the final version. There are some issues there. Why is that happening? Why have constant requests for upgrades and renewals for them been ignored? It is important that we make sure the equipment is appropriate for its use, that the upgrade and maintenance of that equipment happens regularly and that we are able to retain older equipment as it is replaced in our local areas. This is a time-honoured problem that has been around for many, many years. When a truck reaches the end of its life, it is required to be sent back to Perth and stripped, and cannot be retained. District farmers out there are willing to pay good money for these trucks, but they cannot. A policy prevents them from doing that. Some have brought back those trucks sight unseen from an auction only to find, when they get them back, that they have been completely stripped and disabled of their firefighting ability. I cannot understand why we would not want to retain that capacity within the district, even if they are slightly older.

I want to talk a bit about the volunteer issue and the engagement, retention and attraction of volunteers. I have this great report Hon Colin Holt referred to earlier, which was released yesterday. It is titled "Emergency Preparedness Report: State Emergency Management Committee Western Australia". It contains a lot of references to volunteers. On page 9, it states —

There is a need for effective sector-wide strategies to address recruitment, retention, motivation and training of volunteers.

There absolutely is, and we have discussed that training issue at length in this place. During a motion in non-government business in September we discussed the training issues around some of the emergency organisations and the fact that it was not working for them. A number of recommendations are in this report, such as —

Promote opportunities and benefits available through volunteering such as skills development, career progression and networking.

All those things sound very good. I refer to some correspondence I and a number of members received from a volunteer in regional WA in response to the motion on training that we brought to this house. He responds with a number of points referring to some of the comments made by Hon Stephen Dawson, the representing minister. In particular, he refers to the issue that recognised training is not a priority for the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. In fact, he says that, at a meeting with the commissioner, at which this gentleman was present, he was told that the commissioner —

... did not support National Competency Training and that he was introducing Pathways. National competency was what an RTO —

That is a registered training organisation —

should provide and is what DFES used to, for years, provide.

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Apparently, this commissioner has said that he is not interested in national competency training. He is interested in DFES providing its own training that is specifically DFES-driven and written by DFES. That is a problem because, as this report references, what many volunteers actually want is training that is transferable, that can give them accreditation that they can use elsewhere. If we are failing to provide national recognition or some kind of national standard for this training, we are not giving them that opportunity; hence, it makes it a lot harder to attract volunteers and keep them in the jobs. I can say from speaking with a large number of volunteers around the state that that is one of the biggest issues they identified. It does not matter whether they are with bushfire agencies, volunteer fire and rescue service or in the State Emergency Service, for example, they are all identifying that training is an issue and that there needs to be a standardised process that gives them some national qualifications and recognises their prior learning. In another comment, he goes on to say —

The program known as Pathways is a nightmare for volunteers to actually engage in, as it has for the last two years, obstructed the ability of volunteers to enrol in courses, due to inappropriate and irrelevant prerequisites.

The prerequisites set by the department for training are either irrelevant or inappropriate for these volunteers, yet they have to do them before they can register. A lot of work needs to be done on this to improve the training and to promote volunteering and our emergency services as being very important, which it is, and to attract people into it. We know that people want to get more bang for their volunteering buck and serve their communities. But they want to get something out of it as well. Why should they not? It is a big commitment but we need them out there, so let us hope the government takes notice of this report.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [11.28 am]: I appreciate this motion being put forward today. I enjoy the opportunity to speak on a broad issue when we can debate issues without being adversarial. We all appreciate the need for, and want to encourage, fire awareness and mitigation of any destruction or potential deaths from it. I think, across the chamber, we are all working towards the same end. It is great that these items have been put forward. I will address them in reverse order to end up with “mitigation”, which is the one matter I am really interested in speaking on today. The first one I will discuss refers to “Are You Bushfire Ready?”. It is absolutely necessary to get that message out there, but I do not agree with Hon Colin Holt that television will tell us how this should be done through commercials. I do not think it is the way a lot of people are getting their information these days. I hope the government is working on a plan that finds the most effective way of getting the message out there so that we can assist people with their personal responsibility to address the risks of fire around their home and community.

With regard to the recruitment, training and retention of volunteers, Hon Colin de Grussa spoke very well about the training side. I think it is very important that we listen to the volunteers and the people who are not yet volunteering to find out what they are interested in getting out of it. Training, of course, can be the most useful thing that people get out of volunteering with bush fire brigades. We are focusing on trying to get some young people into volunteering—people who may not have many connections with their communities—and volunteering can provide a social structure that they can be involved in. It can possibly provide activities that will assist in not only their training, but also their enjoyment of being part of this collective group that goes out to protect homes, businesses and the bush from out-of-control fires.

In respect of equipment, I think that is a lovely statement. Yes, I agree that they should all be fit for purpose. Ideally, if we had unlimited funding, that would be fantastic. But as it is, we have financial constraints and it comes down to the question of whether units can get people to fires if they are unfit for purpose. I do not know the full details of this, but I am sure there are brigades that sometimes operate with equipment that is many years old. To take that away from them will limit them. As long as a vehicle is safe and used for the purposes that it was designed to be used for, it should be used. There are funding constraints and we cannot put everything in there right away, but —

Hon Colin Holt interjected.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I appreciate that; that is right. We need to set a plan for what the priorities are and address them, and make sure that we are capable and ready to fight these fires as they occur.

I turn now to the Bushfire Centre of Excellence. In the 25 years I have been in this state, decentralisation and centralisation has been one of the things we have talked about quite often, depending on which party was coming into government and whether it would centralise or decentralise agencies and departments. I am really pleased that, finally, we are talking about decentralising again. This should be one of the most obvious things in regional areas, and the south west is a prime example. That is where many of the fires occur, where a lot of the training can occur and where the research should occur. I am looking forward to finding out where that place will be and I hope it will be in a place that the majority of volunteers and the people who work at the Bushfire Centre of Excellence are happy with.

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In respect of fire mitigation, the best thing about this motion is that it includes the word “mitigation”. We are not just saying “more prescribed burns”. It seemed that the debate began to veer towards prescribed burns: “We need 200 000 hectares done; we want money for prescribed burns; we want to burn, burn, burn.” That left me thinking that we had missed the point. I do not think the point of the process of fire mitigation is burnt forest. I do not think anyone here would say, “Yes, we just want burnt forest because that’s going to keep us all safe.” We have to look at the purpose of fire mitigation, and at the top of the list would be no loss of life. If we can say, 20 years from now, that nobody has been lost through out-of-control fires in WA, it would be a fantastic statement to be able to make. That would be a key performance indicator that would be right up there: “That’s our plan. We don’t want loss of life from uncontrolled fires.” We just want fewer uncontrolled fires. As we all know, some of those prescribed burns lead to uncontrolled fires, so we have to look at how best to keep fires under control. Burning large swathes of forest in which weather changes can take prescribed burns into an uncontrolled state may not be the answer; maybe we need to assess whether that action is the correct action for having fewer uncontrolled fires. That is another KPI that I would look at: how few uncontrolled fires we have and how small the areas of land are that are burnt by uncontrolled fires.

The next KPI would be limiting the destruction of biodiversity. When we carry out prescribed burns, we often lose sight of the fact that if we burn large areas, there will be possible impacts on fauna, flora and insects. It may be the only area in which they can live and it could possibly lead to extinctions. We do not know because we do not have the resources to do the research on all of it to find out what destruction we wreak when we carry out large-scale prescribed burns.

Another KPI would be limiting loss of assets. That is really what we are looking at. Once we have no people dying in out-of-control fires, great, but then it is also the assets—the human assets we have out there that we do not want to have to replace or start all over; we know the damage it does to people when they lose their homes. I am suggesting that to improve fire mitigation, as the Bushfire Centre of Excellence is supposed to be doing, we need to increase funding for research. We need to recognise that times have changed—not just the climate, but also our ability to manage fires, including the equipment we use and the people; we just do not have adequate numbers of people who want to be out there carrying out slow burns across large areas.

Times have changed and we have to look at what we are doing. The ash forests over east were looked at and I have a graph here that I can table.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Do you seek leave to table the graph?

Hon DIANE EVERS: A graph, yes.

Leave granted. [See paper 2268.]

Hon DIANE EVERS: The graph shows the years since the last fire in the ash forest and the likelihood of fire. It shows that once it has been burnt, it is not likely to burn again; sure, but within five years there is already a four per cent chance of it burning, increasing to as much as five per cent by the tenth year. After that, it drops off to year 50, when it is back down to around a 0.4 per cent chance of burning. It is a pretty picture, but we need to look at how that works in WA. We need to do the research so that we can find out what happens in our bush, post fire.

I would also like to look at other issues. If we go in and do a prescribed burn, we have to be sure that we are going to be able to get back there to do it again, because if we do not, the fuel load will build up considerably. We have to look at other things, such as mechanical fuel reduction. I know that a few federally funded tests have been done here; I do not think there was enough research done to be conclusive in any way, but we need to continue with that. There are also perimeter burns. Some forests have not been burnt in a long time and there is pressure to go in there and firebomb them so that we can say they have been burnt and we do not have to worry then because the plan, I think, was to have all of our forests burnt less than six years ago, or something like that. But in some cases, it may have been 40 years since the last burn, so I would like to see a perimeter burn around the outside to protect the assets outside the forests but also maintain the forests for research purposes to see how they manage not being burnt. That research needs to be done, and I am hoping that the Bushfire Centre of Excellence will do it.

The other step would be having very healthy forests. Healthy forests help to create rain, they keep moisture in the forest, and that moisture staying on the floor of the forest helps the decomposition of fuel on the forest floor. We also must keep feral animals out so that the native animals that have been there for some time, turning over the twigs and forest fuel, can help the decomposition. There are other ways. We need to put money into research so that we do not just go out burning and say, “Our KPI has been met. It only costs us a few dollars per hectare, and we’ve done well.” That is wrong; that is not the way it works.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.38 am]: I very briefly wish to acknowledge the motion put forward by Hon Colin Holt, whom I quite like.

Several members interjected.

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Hon DARREN WEST: Yes, I quite like Hon Colin Holt; he is from Goomalling and he is a good fellow!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! I am not going to ask the member to withdraw, but we will continue with the debate.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr Acting President. I quite like you, too!

Only the National Party would put forward a motion that highlights everything it failed to do in government. I reiterate the words of the Minister for Environment; I think he encapsulated the government's position particularly eloquently and well. The government is very serious about this matter. I note that the Bushfire Centre of Excellence is so well endorsed by the opposition that two members were squabbling over it on the floor of the Parliament, so I think the government is moving in the right direction. However, what I did rise to do, other than acknowledge the motion, was to take a moment to acknowledge the good people of Queensland who are currently battling catastrophic fire conditions and events across their state. Gracemere was evacuated yesterday. It is a town of 8 000 people—so think a community the size of Northam. It was completely evacuated because it was in the path of the fire. Thankfully, the great work of water-bombers and firefighters on the ground was able to save that community, but there are other communities at risk. This will be an ongoing issue as we continue to see the effects of climate change in rural Australia. It will continue and it is a real thing. It is caused by increased carbon dioxide in the air. It is something that we will need to talk about more and more and more, and the government acknowledges that. I am very proud that Western Australian firefighters have been able to help the people of Queensland, just as Queensland firefighters came to help us in our time of need. I think that encapsulates what is required here—we all need to pull together and work together.

This will become a bigger, not a smaller, problem for us. I think in times of catastrophic conditions we are getting the message across that people should save their lives: do not worry so much about material things and property, save your life, because it is going to get more and more dangerous as time goes on. To me, the government is on the right track. It is taking the measures that are required. It is not sitting on its hands, as we saw under the previous administration; it is being very proactive. I am pleased that members opposite endorse some of the things that the government is doing. I thank all volunteer firefighters across the state. What a fantastic resource we have. I believe that about 85 per cent of our firefighting resources are voluntary and I thank every single one of them. I know that our volunteer firefighters are facing challenging times, but they certainly have my full support and I thank every one of them for their service to the community. The government continues to support volunteer firefighters and firefighting resources. It is a worthy motion, but I think that for now the government has this issue in hand.

HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [11.42 am] — in reply: I do not have much time, but I will focus on a couple of matters. This motion has given the government an opportunity to put on the record what it is doing and to respond to the particular elements of the motion. However, I come back to the gap that is on the record—that is, the messaging and promotion about being bushfire ready. In taking note of Hon Diane Evers' comment that television may not be the best medium through which to bring about change, I note that the Minister for Environment said, "Watch this space", so we do not know what is happening. We are two days away from summer and we are preparing for the bushfire season right now. There is \$1 million in the budget but we still do not know what the government's plan is to make our community bushfire ready. Today, the representative minister had an opportunity to put on the record exactly what the government is doing, but the answer was, "Watch this space".

Hon Darren West's comments were interesting. He pointed out what the previous government did not do. He would know from my contribution earlier that the previous government spent \$1 million on messaging in 2015–16 and 2016–17, and that in 2017–18 that figure went to \$212 000. So what is going on? Did this government not want to continue that? Who knows? We did not get an answer. There is \$1 million in the budget this year, but we do not know what the government plans to do with it. I would have thought that if the government was going to spend money to raise awareness about the bushfire risk, take responsibility and promote mitigation at the community level, it would have done it way before now. The government should have been not only doing that, but also formulating a plan three or four months ago so that it would know where that would be implemented. Maybe that plan does not need to involve advertising, but I have raised this matter today to raise awareness about it because there seems to be a massive gap. We are heading into the bushfire season, yet the government has not planned how it will spend \$1 million to make our communities bushfire aware. That has to be a problem. I encourage the representative minister, who obviously had to work with the notes that were provided to him by the responsible minister, to go back to the Minister for Emergency Services and tell him that he had better get on his horse because summer is two days away. We should be preparing for bushfires right now. There are some things that cannot be done in the height of summer to prepare for bushfires because vehicle bans and fire bans in paddocks interfere with how we deal with this stuff. This motion gave the government an opportunity to put that on the record. To my mind the debate has raised more questions than it has answered about how the government

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is preparing our community to be bushfire ready. The government has said that the budget is there, so maybe it is going to do it next year. Where is the gap this year? I think it is a big problem.

I would also like to touch briefly on fire mitigation strategies. Yes, there are a broader range of things that we can do for fire risk mitigation than just prescribed burning, but there is a big question about the gap in the budget in future years. I agree; it is not about 200 000 hectares per se, it is about 2 000 hectares of effective burning to protect community and natural assets. Fire risk mitigation has to be done in a very targeted way. Often it is easier to do broad burning, which means that it does not have to be controlled so much. Maybe that is where the expense lies and it needs a boost, because it has to be targeted to protect our community assets, our state assets and our natural assets. Obviously, it is harder to carry out controlled burning around towns and communities and we may need other ways to mitigate fire in those areas, but even prescribed burning of those areas will need more resources and people, which is why we need a funding boost. The plan needs to be targeted, undoubtedly. I still think that we need to meet the hectare expectations. I thank everyone for contributing to the debate. I thank the minister for his response. It gave him an opportunity to put on the record exactly where the government stands on this issue.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.