

ESPERANCE BUSHFIRES — WATER BOMBERS

941. Mr M. McGOWAN to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to the report released today into the Esperance bushfires, which highlighted a phone call between the member for Eyre and the minister on Tuesday, 17 November 2015 requesting water bombers for the blazing fires.

- (1) What actions did the minister take immediately after this request?
- (2) Why was action not taken earlier to send water bombers to Esperance?
- (3) Why did the minister tell the member for Eyre that water bombers could not be deployed until a fire is classified as level 3, when the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has stated that this is incorrect?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

(1)–(3) I thank the Leader of the Opposition for giving me this opportunity.

Mr R.F. Johnson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Hillarys, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I cannot understand the gobbledegook coming from over there.

Let me take the opportunity to make it crystal clear going into this fire season, as I have done in this place over a number of years to all members, how the level 1, 2 and 3 scale escalates, who has responsibility, who has command and control and what assets can be deployed for use. Obviously, a level 1 fire is a very basic fire that is first attended, generally in regional Western Australia, by the local volunteer bush fire brigade; they would be the only ones in attendance normally for a level 1 fire. If they needed support and needed to bring in resources from outside their area, including aerial assets, if requested, that would then be called a level 2 incident. Just two days ago, on Tuesday, when I was speaking in question time about emergency services, I pointed out that about 40 bushfires were burning across the state, none of which were level 3 incidents, but anyone who watched the television news would have seen that a significant number of aerial assets had already been deployed to those fires on Tuesday night. A fire does not have to be a level 3 incident —

Mr M. McGowan: Why didn't you tell the member for Eyre?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Leader of the Opposition, no-one asked me until right now whether that is correct or whether the member for Eyre maybe misunderstood it. Let me tell members something else. I heard the Leader of the Opposition's comments about what he said earlier in a press conference about why the minister did not organise aerial assets. Let me tell members something else—beware the state of Western Australia if the Labor Party ever has its hands on emergency services. I will tell members why, and this is a message for all members of Parliament regardless of which side they are on. I will tell members how it does not work. It does not matter whether a member is a backbencher, a minister, a shadow minister or anyone else with the loudest voice and my phone number; I will never direct the resources of emergency services personnel during a crisis. I will never ring the commissioner and say that he has a well-trained team 24/7 at the state operations centre —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: We are running out of time. I want the minister to address this thing about a water bomber and level 3.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: It is a very, very serious answer because every fire season I get phone calls from members of Parliament on both sides saying things like, "Hey, minister, can you ring the commissioner and get the incident manager to let me through a boundary to go into a fire district?" The answer is no; I will not do that. I will not put people's lives at risk. That is because members of Parliament are no more important than the people whom we represent. We have no more rights on a fireground than the people whom we represent. Another thing I will not do is ring the commissioner and instruct him to advance resources, whether they be tankers or fire trucks —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, I call you to order for the second time. Member for Warnbro, I think you have been very lucky; this is only the first time. I must be sleeping, member for Warnbro.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is not how emergency services are deployed across the state of Western Australia, when professionals who are in the state operations centre 24/7, with a helicopter view of the entire state's requirements, make a judgement call. It does not work like that. If the Leader of the Opposition thinks it works like that, heaven help the people of Western Australia if he ever sits on this side of the house again.

