

SOUTH WEST EMERGENCY HELICOPTER SERVICE

90. Mr G.M. CASTRILLI to the Minister for Emergency Services:

It was a pleasure to join the minister and the Premier in late January as they launched the new South West Emergency Helicopter Service at the Bunbury Airport. Can the minister remind the house how this vital resource will benefit communities in the region?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Bunbury for what he has done to continue to encourage the government's project on the second RAC rescue helicopter. I also acknowledge a few other people from both sides. Firstly, the Minister for Regional Development, who has supported this project through royalties for regions, and the Premier came down, and the member for Vasse and Hon Adele Farina turned up on the day to show their support for this. Of all the things we do in public life and we can achieve as members of Parliament, whether in government or not, what matters more than anything else are the things that save lives. The reality is that we have had one rescue helicopter now for some time sponsored wonderfully by the RAC. Mr Pat Walker was also at the launch throwing in his support for the second chopper. The first rescue helicopter, the Bell 412, has a range of about 500 kilometres, a radius of about 250 kilometres, in flight distance to go out and back. It has conducted about 400 rescue missions a year—as a rule of thumb, that is just over one a day. But we all know that when it comes to saving lives, timeliness of critical care is more important than anything else. Getting a paramedic into regional Western Australia and getting a patient to expert care in our hospital system is so very important. Every single second counts. We committed at the last election to getting a second helicopter into the air. In June last year, I told the house that we would endeavour to do everything to get that second helicopter in the air by the start of February. That time has come and it has been in the air and flown about 14 missions already. Members can only imagine that if we have one helicopter in the air covering the 250-odd kilometre radius around Perth, how much better it will be to have two helicopters that can now cover 95 per cent of the state's population from here all the way down to Albany, and to have them exactly the same helicopters kitted out with all the latest and greatest navigation, infrared and rescue equipment. Our paramedics are all cross-trained so that they can jump between airframes in the air at the same time. I understand that even on last Sunday, both of the RAC rescue helicopters were in the air at the same time covering two different incidents and saving lives. We can only imagine what would have happened if they were not both in the air at the same time; it may well have been a far more catastrophic result for one family last weekend.

We are very proud of our achievements. The one thing that I ask members from any electorate across the state to keep in mind, even the member for Kimberley, is that if people from their electorate travel down to the south west, this is one of the services that will be made available to them. We hope that no-one will ever have to use it, but unfortunately they do. It is a wonderful achievement. Again, I thank the Minister for Regional Development and all the staff from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Health who have made this happen. This achievement is above politics because saving people's lives is so important and we are very proud of it.