

**BUSHFIRE SEASON**

*Motion*

**MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen)** [4.31 pm]: I move —

That, given predictions of a longer bushfire season and the increasingly complex and volatile nature of bushfires in Western Australia, this house asks the Barnett government to disclose —

- (a) those zones and areas considered to be of high risk;
- (b) to Parliament how many appliances will have all-crew protection safety features promised at the last election;
- (c) details of all joint operations conducted with local government brigades and the Department of Parks and Wildlife over the past year; and
- (d) whether enhanced weather prediction and computer modelling tools will be deployed.

It is customary at this time of the year—it has been done in the past couple of years—for the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee to call departmental officials from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Parks and Wildlife and police to a hearing prior to bushfire season to give a report to Parliament effectively on the state of preparedness for the bushfire season. The committee informed itself of what are generally known as lessons learnt—that is, issues that have come up in previous inquiries, including the coronial inquest into the fire at Boorabbin and the inquiries into the Toodyay fire, the Perth hills fire, the Margaret River fire and, of course, last year's fire at Two Peoples Bay near Albany. The inquiries into bushfire preparedness have used the templates of the lessons learnt from those fires to examine the readiness of the agencies for this fire season. However, it was felt that, given that the minister is a new minister and has other portfolios that might distract him from time to time, it might be appropriate to ask him to outline where he anticipates there will be issues and concerns this year. Of course, there has been a lot of media coverage in the last few weeks on various issues of bushfire management. The minister has railed against some of those reports but has not effectively responded to many of the issues that were raised. In fact, the best we could do was to have the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, and also a spokesperson for the minister, respond to some of those issues, but we are yet to understand the minister's views or what he considers are the vulnerabilities for this year's fire season.

We want to make the point, as we always do, that this is not about finger pointing or attributing blame; it is about assessing where the risks are so that we can work out where the greatest level of vulnerability is if something goes wrong—in other words, where we need to act in advance. In fact, that is the current philosophy in emergency response agencies overseas. They look much more towards the risks of where the greatest damage will be caused if something goes wrong, rather than providing for every remote contingency.

People are saying that there is a level of inquiry fatigue after the various fires that I have referred to and that it is probably not necessary to have another inquiry. That certainly was the philosophy put forward in the editorial in *The Sunday Times* of 13 October. It states —

DO we really need any more expert reviews into bushfire management in this state? Haven't we had enough? With every disaster or major incident, we get official inquiries, investigations, departmental reviews and, where there's been loss of life, inquests and coroner's reports, as well.

Although there seems to be considerable agreement on what needs fixing—and has been for some time—the fixing appears to be on hold. Before that fixing actually occurs, perhaps we'll see another review into why we've been unable to fix what we keep paying experts to repeatedly tell us.

But the *Yes Minister*-style procrastination is no laughing matter. It's deadly serious because lives and properties are at stake as WA gears up for another bushfire season on the back of the biggest September downpour in 40 years creating heavy fuel loads.

Had the lessons and recommendations from past incidents been heeded—particularly from the Boorabbin disaster when three truck drivers were incinerated—there's a good chance Wendy Bearfoot —

She is the Department of Environment and Conservation firefighter who perished in the fire at Two Peoples Bay near Albany —

would be alive today.

The editorial goes on to state —

Yesterday a Barnett Government spokeswoman said the agencies had “begun discussions towards further developing common incident management training, procedures and systems”. And “an internal review of current and future needs in this area has been undertaken.”

Enough of the reviews. In a hot, dry state, where bushfire danger is a no-brainer, there is no excuse for not having the answers now.

...

There must be no more avoidable tragedies.

That is the context in which the opposition has put forward this motion today. We all know what the basic issues are—interoperability between agencies, common standard operating procedures, co-locating joint incident management controls, fuel loads, targeting prescribed burning and training. I even hazard a guess that there is some need to maintain the expertise of our volunteers and to keep them motivated. Certainly, I think there are some issues and concerns in some sections of the volunteer firefighting service at the moment.

We have heard that it will be a long season. It is noted in a report in *The Sunday Times* of 13 October by Kara Vickery —

WA has never been more precariously placed ahead of summer, according to a prominent bushfire expert.

Former Conservation and Land Management boss Roger Underwood said heavy fuel loads and a wet spring made for an “alarming” outlook.

The article goes on to quote Mr Underwood —

“WA has a hot, dry summer every year, but I can never think of a year when the fire situation was more critical because of the fuel loads in the bush,” he said.

“The consequence of poor preparation and bad luck will be a massive summer bushfire in the South-West.”

The Department of Parks and Wildlife has only done 10 per cent of its targeted control burns in the South-West.

And last month was the wettest September in 40 years, with the late rains meaning there will be a bigger build-up of dry grass.

Seasonal outlooks released by Bushfire CRC for 2013–14 suggest almost all of WA’s coastal areas will be at an above-normal risk of bushfires this summer.

In fact, I heard last night on the weather forecast that this has been the driest November in 26 years. In addition to the weather and the climatic conditions, which we cannot control, there are a number of ongoing structural issues that are the responsibility of the minister to address and, as I said, we want to give him the opportunity today to do so.

Of course the starting point is the major incident review of the fire in Two Peoples Bay near Albany that occurred in October last year. The report was released in September this year, but has been with the minister’s department since December last year. The minister certainly would have been, or should have been, given a briefing when he became minister in April this year. That report was pretty concerning. The reason it was pretty concerning to me is that those recurrent themes which had occurred in previous inquiries and which we thought were lessons learnt had in fact not been learnt. Basically, the three agencies involved were operating separately; there was a lack of communication of vital weather information, which meant that a wind change was not adequately predicted or provided for; and there were issues about the level of crew safety equipment on the vehicle. I concede that it was the former Department of Environment and Conservation vehicle and not the Department of Fire and Emergency Services vehicle, but it was a joint management review that had clear implications for Department of Fire and Emergency Services vehicles. From what I have discerned in the last couple of months, the Department of Parks and Wildlife has to a great extent expedited the provision of that equipment to its vehicles, but the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has moved with glacial speed.

Having said that, in February this year, as part of the election campaign, the former minister, Minister Buswell, promised to allocate \$12.3 million over four years for crew protection for Department of Fire and Emergency Services vehicles and those of local bush fire brigades. It is interesting to note that the timing of that promise coincides with the period when the government would have had a copy of the major incident review into the bushfire at Two Peoples Bay. The government therefore knew that it would cop it sweet because, as the report found, WA firefighters had the lowest crew protection of any firefighters in Australia. The government thought it

would at least take credit by going ahead before the report was released and committing to that crew protection equipment.

That is the current state of play. I will talk a bit about the current status of crew protection. However, I want to quote from another article, which I think is the one that the Minister for Emergency Services complained about in this place. It is headed “Fire burned, agencies fiddled”. It appeared in *The Sunday Times* on 13 October, and states —

Bickering between government agencies over who would pay for a firefighting operation during a major blaze in Albany last year was part of the bungled co-ordination that contributed to a woman’s death.

It states that the report —

... delivered damning assessments that reveal little was learnt or acted on—after major review into past calamities.

The response mirrored the inter-agency dysfunction and botched operations that were evident during the devastating Perth Hills bushfires and the Margaret River inferno ...

A Major Incident Review found poor communication and weather training meant warnings of “significant wind changes” issued four hours before the firefighters were trapped by the blaze were never passed on to the fire crews.

...

“Despite the recommendation for improvements for the interpretation of this type of forecast following the Boorabbin Fire 2007, it appears there remains a significant need for fire personnel to be trained in this area,” the review stated.

It goes on —

The ... Review also revealed the three agencies tried to manage the fire from three separate locations, with no direct line of control. Incredibly, an incident control van was parked in a mobile phone and internet “black spot”.

It goes on to describe the burn over and the lack of protective clothing and fire blankets. The quote goes on —

A Government spokeswoman said DFES, DPaW and local councils had “begun discussions towards further developing common incident management training, procedures and systems”.

That hardly inspires anyone with confidence, and I will return to that shortly.

The opposition’s motion indicates our concern that high-risk bushfire zone information is no longer being disclosed. As I have said in previous years, in the course of parliamentary inquiries into these sorts of issues that information was ordinarily tendered to the committee and appended to our reports. I understand that journalists have requested that information from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and have been told that that information is no longer prepared. That is even more concerning than the information being kept secret. It seems to me that a fundamental and very basic undertaking for departments, such as the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, is to prepare a list of the high-risk fire zones so that they can deploy their equipment and manpower in those areas. I also think it is appropriate that the public be made aware of the high-risk areas so that they too can take whatever action they need to take and make the necessary preparations. Members will recall from the Keelty report into the Perth hills bushfire that Mr Keelty used the words “a shared responsibility”. How can it be a shared responsibility if the general population does not have access to information that I think is extremely germane to the way in which that preparation should be made?

I come back to crew protection. My issue and the issue that the opposition has taken up is that it was known as early as December last year when that report was given to government that our crew protections were substandard and certainly below those of other states. By February the government had effectively committed to crew protections because it made an election promise that it would be providing that upgrade to the crew protection equipment over four years. One therefore could expect, it seems to me, that at least a quarter of the job would have been done in that time. One would also expect that in the spirit of cooperation and interagency operability there might be a joint tender and certainly joint research done. I accept that some of the vehicles and appliances are different, but it seems to me that the fact that both DFES and DPaW effectively pursue their own tenders for crew protection is another indication that they are still very much doing their own thing. These tenders went out very late and in fact it is only just now that I am getting reports that fire blankets, which are the most basic of all the crew protections, have just been rolled out; certainly there will be no water-deluge systems

this year, as they are still being researched; and heat shields have not been installed in all of the vehicles by any means.

A month ago, Hon Samantha Rowe in the upper house asked —

What percentage of the 667 Department of Fire and Emergency Services vehicles will operate this season with heat shields, in-cab breathing systems, water spray protection and advanced GPS installed?

This is what the election commitment related to. She also asked —

Can the Minister for Emergency Services confirm that fire blankets have not yet been distributed to all DFES bush fire brigades?

That was a month ago. The response was —

In Western Australia there are 981 appliances with bushfire capabilities. On a priority basis, 667 operate in a high to extreme bushfire risk environment. Some vehicles are being retrofitted with heat shields on a priority basis, with those in higher risk areas being fitted out first. To date, 10 per cent have been installed and the process is continuing on a rolling basis over the next three years. Contracts for other upgrades will be awarded this financial year.

It says that fire blankets are being rolled out at a rate of 250 a week, and goes on —

The implementation schedule recognises the complexity of the range of appliance types and the specifications of each element of the comprehensive crew protection system to ensure fit-for-purpose outcomes, as well as the need to maintain the required level of front-line operational firefighting response capability.

That was on 23 October. My issue is that in August, when we asked questions in the budget estimates, there seemed to be no schedule and no time frame, and neither the minister nor the commissioner could enlighten us as to what the plans were and what the schedule was to roll out this equipment. That is certainly very disappointing. It is not only the equipment, but also the training that goes with the equipment. If people got their turnover blankets this week, or are getting them this week, they also require training in how they need to be deployed. Similarly, they need training in when and how heat shields need to be deployed.

I think the minister has taken his eye off the ball. He has responsibility for other portfolios and I know that one of those portfolios certainly would occupy a lot of his time. He has vowed to knock that department into shape. I think that he thinks the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is more functional than one of his other portfolios and he has not given the Department of Fire and Emergency Services adequate attention in a timely manner. That attention extends to getting a reasonable bang for his buck. I have to make the point that in the 2008–09 financial year, the total amount collected by the emergency services levy was \$168.9 million, and this year the government will receive over \$270.9 million, yet it appears that the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner, Wayne Gregson, has had to write to the minister pleading for the government to significantly reduce its planned cuts of \$59.4 million. We have more demand, higher fuel loads and more people on the peri-urban fringe who are in jeopardy. We have seen a massive increase in not only the amount collected by the emergency services levy, but also the percentage it has risen over the last five years, which is in the order of 40 per cent. The fact that there is just not enough money is a problem. This is not an academic abstraction; it has consequences for the people on the ground.

On 20 October 2013, *The Sunday Times* ran an article titled “Locals fight for training funds”, which states —

ON the eve of another potentially deadly summer, the group representing 26,000 bushfire volunteers says it is fed up with the Perth bureaucrats it claims are withholding funds for vital training and resources.

The article quotes the head of the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades of WA, Terry Hunter, and states —

“Restricted access to funding and resources for training via the ESL makes it difficult for fair and equitable skills development in the local government volunteer bushfire service, which provides the state with over 80 per cent of its emergency services ...

It goes on —

Bedfordale Bush Fire Brigade fire control officer Gavin Fancote said local brigades needed to have more control of their funding.

“You never, ever beat local knowledge,” Mr Fancote, who has volunteered with the brigade for 15 years, said.

In response, the minister was quoted in *The Sunday Times* as saying —

... in the past financial year \$25 million was given to local governments in grants to support volunteer bushfire brigades and State Emergency Services units. The remaining \$225 million was used to fund the DFES's operations. He said the ESL was a "transparent process".

That is not what Mr Keelty said; in fact, he recommended that the Department of Finance should administer the emergency services levy. As I said, this lack of funding is where the rubber hits the road, and one could argue how effectively the minister fought for these extra resources that are needed because of the extra pressure and demand.

I draw the house's attention to a number of incident control vehicles that are sitting at Forrestfield when a number of local government areas—Wanneroo, Rockingham, Bunbury, Broome, Mundaring, Serpentine–Jarrahdale, Swan, the Town of Narrogin, Manjimup, Geraldton, Karratha, Kalgoorlie, Boulder and Chittering—are waiting for them. As I understand, these vehicles have been sitting at Forrestfield for some time and I am told that they are still in the build stage and will not be rolled out until early next year. Again, these are appliances that are urgently needed in these particular areas, including a number around the hills area. They are still waiting, waiting, waiting.

The motion also refers to joint operations. All of these inquiries spoke of the need for agencies to be able to work together more closely, to communicate together and have standard protocols and procedures. We have put in the motion a request for the minister to provide information about how many joint operations were conducted in the last 12 months and the location and duration of those operations. It is a key element of bushfire preparedness to undertake those joint operations. It is incredibly important, which has been identified in every inquiry held during the last decade, but I am not sure how many such joint operations have been done in the past year.

The motion also refers to enhanced weather prediction. I refer in particular to an award-winning bushfire warning and prediction system that the University of Western Australia is developing. With regular updates of information about the perimeter of the fire and on the fireground weather information, the modelling system can very quickly use a number of variables and algorithms to find out what the scenarios are likely to be in the next hour. It enables incident managers to predict likely fire behaviour in the light of several variables. This system is being looked at by the South Australian and Queensland governments and there is interest also from Scotland and South Africa. The simulations they have done on past fires such as those that occurred at Margaret River and Boorabbin have proved to be very accurate. The University of Western Australia was funded in the past by the federal government and, I think, for a while by whatever the agency is that relates to broadband and subsequently by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. The model needs to be refined so it can get to a commercial stage. We support government support of this project and think that \$200 000, which is what is being sought, is money well spent. Hon Samantha Rowe asked a question about this matter on Tuesday and the answers seem to be at odds with what I found in my briefing last week. Perhaps some additional information on that system, where it is at and the role of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services would be helpful, minister.

There is a final matter I want to mention, which, although not in the motion, is extremely relevant. The Barnett government has been quite boastful that it has implemented most, if not all, of the recommendations of Keelty from the Perth hills bushfire inquiry. There are two key recommendations that have not been implemented, and they relate to planning. Recommendations 3 and 4 of the Keelty report respectively state that —

The State Government transfer responsibility for declaring bushfire prone areas from local government to the Western Australian Planning Commission.

And —

The State Government give legislative effect to the *Planning for Bush Fire Protection Guidelines*.

That was not done and there seems to be much discussion and not much action in this regard. Hon John Day replied to a question I asked on 30 October as follows —

Yes; there certainly is intention to act, and action is being taken. The issue is not as simple as it may appear at first sight. The response to the Keelty report has been coordinated by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet over the last two years. In relation to the specific questions of declaring areas as bushfire-prone and exactly how that occurs, the main issue is which agency is the most appropriate one to have that responsibility. Obviously, the WA Planning Commission is one clear possibility, but it does not have legislative authority to do so at the moment. Obviously, that could be changed if that is what is considered to be the most appropriate course of action. The Planning Commission would necessarily rely on information and advice from other agencies, in particular the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

I would be very keen to know what advice the minister's agency has given to the Planning Commission. Hon John Day's answer continues —

We need to make a decision on whether it is more appropriate for DFES to have that responsibility or the Department of Local Government and Communities and/or local governments, which have a strong role to play. It is a complex issue. It is certainly being actively worked on at the moment, and I hope we will have a decision within government soon.

That whole answer is very Sir Humphreyesque and it does not inspire anyone. In the meantime, there is probably a lot of additional building activity taking place on the peri-urban fringe, which frankly may well be in areas better off left untouched.

To conclude, the minister can see that there is still very much to do. We do not believe that these matters have been treated with the level of urgency and expedition that is required. We believe that the minister's focus is not there and the minister is distracted by his other responsibilities and portfolios, and that the minister's role needs to be taken extremely seriously. Instead, he is engaged in an orgy of flagrant self-promotion.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale)** [5.04 pm]: I also rise to speak in support of this motion. I come to this matter as a member for a peri-urban area who, of course, lives with the constant danger of fire as does my colleague the Minister for Local Government, the member for Darling Range. Everyone in this house at this moment was in the last Parliament and we all remember 6 February 2011. I had only been the member for Armadale for a few months and we had that disastrous fire in the Kelmscott hills. It is my understanding that there was the greatest loss of property due to a bushfire in the Perth metropolitan area and urban fringes in our history. As we know, the number of homes destroyed was 74. That was a disaster. The fire was accidentally started. There was major wind on the day—a very strong easterly blowing—and of course, there was fuel on the ground, which made it a very toxic environment for the spread of the fire. If there had been a westerly blowing, which often is the case on a February afternoon, I would hate to think of what the disaster could have been. I see the Minister for Local Government agreeing with me. The fire would have gone up the valley to Roleystone. There are only two major roads out of Roleystone, so there would have been a pretty strong chance of loss of life. Because the wind was coming the other way, there was a greater chance to escape the fires. The devastation that that fire has brought onto so many people's lives is still being felt today; it is incredible.

The motion brought to this house by the member for Girrawheen is incredibly important. As we know, in Western Australia we live with the constant danger of bushfires due to our climate and other factors. Ministers responsible for this area have to take the issue very seriously, and when it is brought to the house, they have to consider the views being expressed, even if they do not necessarily agree with them. What is important now is the situation as of 2013 leading into 2014. We have had a very late winter, one could argue, which has been an ideal environment for vegetation growth and predictions are for a very hot summer. The necessary fuel reduction is an incredibly important issue in fighting, preventing or mitigating against bushfires. The professional services supplied by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services are also incredibly important. The member for Girrawheen went through a number of newspaper articles and so forth. I have read the various media releases on the topic, and have had communication with people who are involved in voluntary and professional fire brigades. Is the Minister for Emergency Services still a member of the Jandakot Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade?

**Mr J.M. Francis:** Yes.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** He was involved in the fight of the Kelmscott bushfires back in 2011.

**Mr J.M. Francis:** I was with Forrestdale then.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** He was there on that date, anyway. The minister would therefore be aware of the discontent that has been expressed by some volleys about the way this government is managing its bushfire prevention management strategy. I refer to an article in *The Sunday Times* of 17 November, 2013 entitled "Adding fuel to high risk". The article states —

BUSHFIRE volunteers are so concerned about the build-up of vegetation near homes they are conducting unsanctioned burn-offs.

City of Armadale deputy chief bushfire control officer Gavin Fancote confirmed "off the-books" prescribed burns were happening in his area.

He said volunteer brigades were taking matters into their own hands.

The revelation comes as many brigades complain that bureaucratic red-tape had resulted in too little being done ahead of the imminent bushfire season.

"There is absolutely maximum risk at the moment in the Perth metropolitan area," one southern suburbs volunteer said.

“You could almost list every suburb, from Kwinana to Kings Park, and there are large patches of bush next to urban areas with no risk mitigation.”

That is very alarming and is of major concern. The Armadale deputy bushfire control officer Gavin Fancote is heavily involved in the Bedforddale Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, as are, in fact, the Fancote family.

The member for Girrawheen also referred to other articles that expressed the concerns of volunteer fire brigade people. I have been told that one of the issues is that they believe they are not getting the support from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services that they should be receiving; DFES is trying to have bureaucratic control over anything they do and is also not providing sufficient funding for them to ensure that they can do the work that they are meant to do. The story I have heard is that the way DFES is working does not support mitigation, so it is not reducing the risk of bushfire. What I am hearing is that DFES is funding areas where there have been bushfires; therefore, volunteer fire brigade services that have been doing the right thing by mitigating and therefore reducing bushfires so bushfires do not take place are not receiving the funding they need to continue that process. It is really the case that the more successful a brigade is, the less support it receives from DFES. We understand, of course, that a department would go in and try to fund areas where there are major dangers. Obviously, I can understand that. However, we also need to support the successful fire brigades that do the right things. I will be happy to hear from the minister about his views, because I do not know how true the stories are, although I have heard them from more than one source. The other disconcerting news I heard was that some vollies were very, very scared to speak to the press because certain DFES people were putting the heavy on them not to speak to the media. It will be interesting to know whether that is the case and whether there has been any ministerial —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** Member, you reminded me that I heard the minister’s person rang up one brigade and told them to take down their Facebook site.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Really? If that is the case, member for Girrawheen, that is a really disconcerting practice by the minister. The minister is also, as I acknowledge, a vollie—a volunteer fire brigade member—so he knows the work and the passion of the people in a volunteer fire brigade who do it out of community service and community dedication. Therefore, if the minister is ringing up volunteer fire brigades and asking members to pull down their Facebook —

**Mr V.A. Catania** interjected.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** All the member for North West Central ever does is interject! He never gets up and debates. If the member for North West Central wants to get up and make a valuable contribution, do it; otherwise, just zip it up because he never has anything of use to say.

If the minister is doing that, that is of major concern. Therefore, it will be interesting to see whether the minister will defend himself about that. However, minister, the fact is that I am hearing from a number of sources that pressure is being put on volunteer fire brigade people to not comment to the media. If that has come from DFES and if it is a directive from the minister, that is a major problem. If it is not a directive from the minister, the minister needs to address that issue because, as he very well knows, the fighting of bushfires is a combination of the career firefighters and the vollies. We need them both to work together. The Minister for Environment also has a major role to play and it will be interesting to hear whether he will make a contribution to this debate. However, the Minister for Emergency Services has heard the concerns expressed by the member for Girrawheen that I have also heard, so I am interested to hear his response. I also invite the Minister for Environment to contribute.

**MR F.A. ALBAN (Swan Hills)** [5.13 pm]: I would like to make a very short contribution in response to this motion. Very obviously, my electorate is in an area that is a bit prone to fires. I have a particular dread of fires. Some time ago, the member for Girrawheen may remember that both of us, representing the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, were at a Bassendean 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at Mulberry Farm. I told the story of my experiences with fire 30 years ago when I was a very young man on a property with a young family—two young boys—in the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires. In lots of ways, I am still in a similar predicament with my electorate. The member for Girrawheen mentioned several things such as our state of preparedness and lessons learnt, including those learnt from the Perth hills fires—of course, Perth hills is part of my electorate. The member also mentioned the resources needed, working together, heavy fuel loads and wet springs. It very much sounds like the little area that I lived and farmed in called Mannibadar, some 40 kilometres south east of Ballarat in the western districts of Victoria.

My electorate is the largest metropolitan electorate. It is predominantly a rural electorate within the metropolitan area and I believe we have outpaced Darling Range in size recently. It extends from Aveyley in the west to Bullsbrook in the north, Glen Forrest in the south and Wooroloo in the east. The electorate extends as far as the Shire of Northam on its easterly boundary. The possibility of fire is ever present and always of concern. The

other problem with my hills electorate are the difficulties in event of fire. Those difficulties are that we have pretty poor telephone signals, our power access is not fantastic and, of course, when our power goes out, our water supply goes out. I was alerted to a lot of the problems some time ago. A gentleman called Jim Hoekstra, the fire control officer at Wooroloo, raised the same concerns as have been raised today. The Wooroloo Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade had concerns that it was short of equipment and worried about all the things that we are mentioning here today. My response to that was to invite the then Minister for Emergency Services, Hon Troy Buswell, to a function on 20 October 2012. At that function, a number of volunteer fire brigades, all from my electorate, were arrayed in quite spectacular fashion on the Wooroloo Primary School oval—namely, Bullsbrook, Chidlow, East Swan, Gidgegannup West, Gidgegannup East, Glen Forrest, Mt Helena, Mundaring, Parkerville, Sawyers Valley, Stoneville and Wooroloo. I believe that a neighbouring volunteer fire brigade could not resist and also turned up! That was the Wundowie fire brigade from the Shire of Northam. Members can understand that fire is a big issue in my electorate. On that day, the then minister gave us certain undertakings, which have been rolled out and continued by the current minister.

As a previous member mentioned, in 2011 there were major fires in Roleystone, Kelmscott and the Capes region. Of course, in my electorate of Swan Hills, there was the Red Hill fire but because it had less impact, there was no loss of life or property, it was not quite as high profile. It was mentioned that we must learn from our past experiences; we must put in place strategies that both mitigate and prevent risk. My electorate of Swan Hills is well served by the City of Swan and the Shire of Mundaring. Both these local governments have professional staff and programs in preparation for every fire season and that includes prescribed burning. Effective local planning—as we said, working together—is essential for an efficient response when fire occurs.

I am aware that in the 2011–12 financial year, this government invested an additional \$81 million in agencies statewide to allow for better bushfire preparedness. Preparedness is important. We introduced a wide package of initiatives and reforms, which the minister will later expand on, and we were particularly pleased with the rollout of the equipment. Of most local interest was the comprehensive crew protection system for appliances that is most requested by local volunteer fire brigades. These include burnover blankets, internal radiant heat-resistant curtains, heat lagging and shielding of critical components, in-cab breathing systems, under-body external cab protection with water deluge sprays, and advanced GPS tracking systems.

We have talked about close communities and working together. Western Australia will always face danger in summer. We all need to work together—state government, local government and local communities—and all share responsibility; we all have a role to play. As I said, the minister will expand on some of the larger issues. I am advised, and reassured to know, that there are 27 000 career and volunteer firefighters in this state, and this year they are better equipped and better protected than ever before. Statewide, we have 71 brand-new appliances being prepared. Our aerial fleet has 22 aircraft, which is the highest number we have ever had. There has also been a commitment of more than \$20 million to protect the community. Although the hills communities and the Swan Hills electorate know that they have to live with the constant threat of fire every year, I am sure that they will be reassured that through the efforts of this Liberal–National government and its extensive commitments, we will be well-prepared for the fire season ahead.

**MR I.C. BLAYNEY (Geraldton)** [5.21 pm]: Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister for Emergency Services for spending a little time in my electorate last week. He was not there in his role of having responsibility for fire, but was actually there looking at issues to do with the sea rescue service. We have an excellent sea rescue service in Geraldton. Both the sea rescue service and the Geraldton volunteer fire service until recently had concerns about ageing memberships and dwindling numbers —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** How's the new fire station going?

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Steadily.

It is pleasing to note that both organisations have had very good responses from the community, and I would like to thank the community for that. They each have 30 to 40 new members, and now their issue is training the new members.

I am quite familiar with bush fire brigades. I was a member of my local bush fire brigade for 25 years, and finished up, in the time I was farming, as the local fire control officer. Of course, it is not optional to be a member of a fire brigade when one lives in the bush. I remember going to an awards ceremony one night and someone was presented with a fiftieth anniversary award. Someone said that he did not look much older than 50, and asked how old he was, and he replied “56; they signed me up when I was six years old so that we had enough members in the brigade”. That tends to underline how important it is.

It is very important that we give firefighters the best equipment we can to do their job, because with that comes safety. Of course, the great thing about volunteers is that they know their terrain. It is also important for houses to be built in such a way that they are fire safe, and for people to use commonsense. For example, the fire that

the member for Armadale just talked about was caused by someone using an angle grinder. It was, quite honestly, incredibly irresponsible to use an angle grinder on a day like that. However, if we rely on people's commonsense, the outcomes are usually quite good. In my old shire of Greenough, we did not have fire bans, quite simply because of the effect on farms so close to the coast. Fire bans meant that we could not harvest on the days that were the best days for harvesting, so the fire control officer just told us to use our commonsense, and the interesting thing about that was that Greenough had very few fires. Everyone was fire conscious because we were all responsible.

Our region is well served by our four fire brigades. I have known volunteers from my area to serve as far north as Exmouth and as far south as Cataby. I would like to acknowledge the City of Greater Geraldton's bush fire brigades, which were finalists in the Murray Lang Bush Fire Service of WA award in 2012. The award was won by Peter Summers from the Shire of Irwin. I would also like to give credit to a local legend called Richie Maslen, who was the chief fire control officer of the old Shire of Greenough for some 39 years and who served in the brigade for 60 years. Maybe that is why we have such strong fire brigades—because we have had such strong examples from people like Richie Maslen.

In the midwest, of course, we do not have the fuel loads and the terrain of areas further south —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** Member, can I just tell you, I found out the other day that fire travels quickest in wheat stubble.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** That is quite possible; maybe. I would not swear that on a stack of bibles, but it may be true. Fire creates its own wind when it goes across certain types of fuel.

I am in awe of the people in the southern parts of the state; given the fuel and the terrain, if we add heat and wind to the equation, it is almost explosive when people are fighting fires in those conditions. Every prediction I have seen points us towards a warming climate, which makes it harder to carry out preventive burning, but it also underlines its importance. It is incredibly important that we keep up with that program. I note that we are behind at the moment and I just hope that in years to come we will be able to catch up.

In 2011–12, the government invested \$81 million into the agencies for bushfire preparedness. I think that shows the value of the levy, rather than just relying on the standard tax base, because those funds are there and they are committed. A constant budget means that equipment can be maintained, improved and replaced when necessary. The minister has told me that the state of our fire equipment has never been better. The aerial fleet is also incredibly useful; there are places where that resource can be used where it is very hard to get access for any other appliances, such as in the hills, and it is potentially life-saving. More than anything, it is important that people are fire conscious and that they prepare for the fire season. It is important that our government stands behind our firefighters, providing them with the best equipment that we can, allowing them to be well trained, and doing everything we can to protect them.

**MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Emergency Services)** [5.26 pm]: I thank the member for Girrawheen for bringing this motion to the house. I will firstly go into the short version of my response to her four points, and then I will go into some detail. I will not give the member too much information on the first part of her motion requesting that the Barnett government discloses those zones and areas considered to be of high risk. I will say that I am more than happy to ask the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner to invite her down to Cockburn and give her a very detailed briefing. There is a reason why I am not going to go into too much detail, and I will outline that in a minute.

In respect of outlining to Parliament how many appliances will have all-crew protection safety features, that has been fulfilled, and I am happy to go into those details. With regard to details of all joint operations conducted with local government brigades and the Department of Parks and Wildlife over the past year, I note that there are some questions on notice on exactly the same issue. I do not think the deadline for those questions has been reached. The member will get those answers early next week in accordance with the standing orders and the requirement to respond to those —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** It'll miss this week's *The Sunday Times*; I'm disappointed!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will get to *The Sunday Times* in a minute!

The last part of the member's motion was in respect of whether enhanced weather prediction and computer modelling tools will be deployed; obviously, the answer is yes, and I will give the member some detail about what is happening in that area shortly. I would suggest that members do not believe everything they read in *The Sunday Times*. The poor guy who bought my red ute three years ago sent me a message on Sunday night, saying—he used different words—“What on earth is my ute doing in the newspaper? Have you stolen it back?” Do not ruin a good story with the truth; use a three-year-old photo, by all means.

The member for Swan Hills made a really important comment; he said that Western Australia will always face fire danger in summer. Since I became the Minister for Emergency Services, I have paid a bit more attention to the weather over winter. I saw July and August come and go, and it was still raining, and I saw a lot of grass growing very tall and very green. In September, it was still raining. In October, there was still a lot of rain. I think it was in September or October that I first said that this will be a helluva fire season and there will be some significant challenges this summer, for a number of reasons. The first is that because it rained for so long past the end of winter, there is a lot of tall, green grass everywhere. The second is that the large amount of rain has contributed to, from my understanding, the inability of DFES in some areas to undertake prescribed burning, because we cannot burn when it is raining, as we all know, and that has not helped in easing the fuel load. That is just the lottery of life that is dealt by Mother Nature. We cannot snap our fingers or wave a magic wand and suddenly pull out thousands and thousands of people who can in a very short amount of time do burning. Within the city of Cockburn, as of last weekend, all prescribed burning has been stopped. We only need to drive anywhere in the metropolitan area, and up and down Kwinana Freeway, to see the significant amount of grass that has already dried out.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** Down my way it is really bad.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Absolutely. One does not need to be a rocket scientist to realise that there will be significant challenges this fire season. There is a saying in the Navy—I am sure other people would be aware of it, but I will say it without one of the p's in there—that prior preparation prevents poor performance. In order to ensure that we are doing every single thing we can do, we need to realise that it is not the role of just the Department of Fire and Emergency Services; there is also an individual responsibility, particularly among those who live in bushfire-prone areas, to do everything they can to get their properties ready. Members have heard me go on about this at length. The member for Girrawheen is suggesting that I am trying to pass the buck here in case something goes wrong. That is not the case at all, I promise.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** I am not suggesting that at all.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Can I ask you about the question of preparation?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Sure.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Did you read the first-hand account from that journalist in *The Australian* about the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria? That was a devastating report, because despite all the preparations that he had done, when the moment came, they were all irrelevant, because he was overwhelmed by the extent of the fire. So there is a limit to what responsible householders can do.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is right. We also need to remember that in many cases we are dealing with volunteers. We train volunteers as much as we can. However, it is a bit like training soldiers to go off to war, I guess. No-one can really prepare them for the consequences and what will happen when they are on the frontline and it all turns to custard. It can be a frightening experience. We do not know how individuals will react when they are put in that sort of situation. There are a number of variables here. We are not dealing with binary numbers, we are not dealing with black and white, and we are not dealing to a degree with mechanical machinery, which is essentially reliable if it is well maintained; we are dealing with human beings, and we are dealing with the lottery of Mother Nature. Fire behaviour and fire patterns are obviously very difficult to predict. If we all had a crystal ball that worked, we would not be here; we would all be retired billionaires because we had been selling those crystal balls.

The member for Albany is right in pointing out the challenge that his area faces. The state has two fire seasons—the north and the south. In order to maximise value for money for taxpayers, those assets are moved between the north and the south of the state throughout the year. I was at the Karratha fire station four to six weeks ago, and they had a number of firefighting trucks that they had borrowed from the south of the state during our winter, and they were about to be shipped back to the south of the state; and that makes perfect sense. We are talking today about the challenges that will face the south of the state this fire season. Part of this state is always in a fire season. But obviously the south west of this state will face significant challenges this summer. That includes Albany and other places along the south west coast, and also the Perth hills.

I do not want to go into too much detail about the areas that are at risk, for reasons that I will explain, but I am happy to organise a non-public briefing for the member for Girrawheen. One of the reasons is that about 36 per cent of fires—or one in three—are lit intentionally. Arsonists are essentially terrorists in urban Australia. Setting fire to bushland next to houses and risking people's property and risking, and sometimes taking, people's lives in catastrophic circumstances is akin to domestic terrorism. It is inappropriate to provide a list of high-value targets to a terrorist. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to publicly go through the entire state of Western Australia and single out certain suburbs and certain towns as being at higher threat than other suburbs and towns. I do not want to provide arsonists with a list of targets. The second reason is that if someone was selling a house

in a particular suburb, and the Minister for Emergency Services said publicly that that suburb was at the top of the threat list, that person would be pretty upset with the minister. I do not think it is appropriate to in any way value or devalue certain areas.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** But should people not be given warnings if they are in a danger area?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** My message is that anyone who lives in a bushfire-prone area should consider themselves at risk regardless. Fire does not discriminate, by the way, between high risk and low risk. The other message that I would be sending, if I were to rattle off such a list, is that if I did not mention a person's suburb, everything is cool and they can relax. That is not the case at all, either. That is another reason that it would be entirely inappropriate for me to go through the southern half of Western Australia and rank each suburb and town in order of threat level.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** So why did your spokesperson not say that to the journalist when they asked?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I thought I was taking part in an orgy of self-promotion, but now I am in trouble for not talking to a journalist. The member is trying to have it both ways.

It is highly inappropriate, for those reasons, to disclose those kinds of maps and information. But I am more than happy to organise for the commissioner to give the member for Girrawheen a briefing on those issues.

When the member for Girrawheen gave notice of this motion last night, I thought about it long and hard. I am not in the business of withholding information from anyone. When the member asks a question, I always endeavour to get an answer for the member as quickly as possible. However, some questions are obviously more complicated than others, and we do not have people in every government department who have access to all the information instantly; some of it needs to be compiled. I thought about the pros and cons of whether it would be in the public interest to give the member all this information here and now, and, having thought about it, I do not think, for the reasons I have outlined, that that is an appropriate course to go down.

As I have said, prior preparation prevents poor performance. The one message I want to reiterate before I move on is that people who live in bushfire-prone areas essentially know that they live in bushfire-prone areas and they have a duty to do everything they can to ensure that their property is as fire ready as possible. I have seen some people who live in houses in the hills who have gone over and above—they can never really go over and above—with fire pumps, tanks and spray systems and have cleared certain plants in the garden so that their houses are at far less risk than other houses that have lots of trees growing over the eaves. These people do not have a plan for their home or how to act in case of fire. Regardless of whether or not they are well prepared, I concede that, unfortunately, fire can still discriminate against different houses, and those who do the preparation can be unlucky and those who do not can be lucky. That is unfortunate, but the message still is that people have to take some responsibility; it is a shared responsibility. We as a government are doing what we can. I know people do not like paying their emergency services levy and I know it now raises \$270 million, but the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is a pretty lean ship in very good hands and it spends that money very efficiently.

While I am talking about bushfire-prone zones, I will give some information on what is taken into consideration. Every year there is a bushfire threat analysis. It is a model that is updated annually. It provides standardised methods and approaches to characterise the overall threat based on fire behaviour, ignition risk, response times, potential consequences of bushfire and the high-value targets or—I will get into trouble for using military talk—the more valuable assets. It is developed with contributions from a number of different sources. Local governments, local government agencies and, I am pretty sure, the Department of Parks and Wildlife have a say in it. A seasonal outlook is also prepared and updated every year for the northern and southern portions of Australia and Western Australia. It utilises the Keetch–Byram drought index, which measures moisture in the top layer of the soil, such as leaves and vegetation. The development of the outlook considers issues such as vegetation type, soil moisture at 20 centimetres and again at 1.5 metres, rainfall, the Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook, pasture growth, potential grassfire risk, and the amount of fuel-reduction burning that has occurred. Obviously, we know that some parts of the state have a significantly larger fuel load than others. All that information is put in to create the seasonal outlook. The information is combined and a potential fire list is determined, mapped and summarised. The seasonal outlook is publicly available on the website of the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, which, for members and *Hansard*, is [www.bushfirecrc.com](http://www.bushfirecrc.com). The Department of Fire and Emergency Services also establishes yearly areas of community focus in which to undertake bushfire preparedness awareness and education with the community and stakeholders. These locations are selected using data such as the bushfire threat analysis undertaken by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Also taken into account are recent fire activity, brigade support and vulnerabilities. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has identified a total of 118 areas of community focus within 47 local government areas. Fifty-five of these areas of community focus have been identified as primary locations and the remaining 63 as secondary locations. In determining these ACFs, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services carries out

targeted activities relevant to residents and delivered by local agencies. Activities in these communities are delivered in partnership with local government, community groups and other government agencies to ensure consistent messaging. Essentially, consistent messaging is an important ingredient so that people do not get mixed messages about the threat and doing their bit to get as ready as possible. Community consultation is also carried out to ensure that the activities being developed and delivered respond directly to the community's awareness and understanding of its bushfire risk.

In secondary areas of community focus, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services provides bushfire information to residents through the distribution of publications in visitor centres, local government offices and community hubs. This includes information displays at community events at which bushfire publications can be distributed and discussions instigated with residents about what they are doing to reduce the bushfire risk on their property and in their street. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services uses this information to draft bushfire preparedness awareness and education programs within the community and for stakeholders. This information is used to guide operational affairs and is not released to the media. I think I have outlined why it is best to organise a briefing for the member for Girrawheen rather than make those particular reports known.

As I have said, it is estimated that about 36 per cent of bushfires are lit by arsonists. There are, on average, about 6 500 bushfires across Western Australia every 12 months. That is a significant number. One-third of those fires, or some 2 000 or more, are lit by arsonists in Western Australia every year. That is a frightening statistic, considering that one person with a match or, as someone else pointed out, one person with an angle grinder or a welder can cause so much destruction. While I am on that subject, people who throw cigarette butts out of a car window are my pet hate. I do not want to sidetrack myself but I hate it when I am driving and I see the person in the car in front of me flick a cigarette butt out of the window. When I used to ride a motorcycle, it was doubly my pet hate, because the hot butt or ash would always end up in my face. It is grossly irresponsible, especially during summer on a hot, windy day, to flick a lit cigarette butt out of the window. But that is a debate for another day. I am not sure what the penalties are for that.

**Mr M.H. Taylor** interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The stupidity and irresponsibility of some people never cease to amaze me.

Having said that, I think the opposition supported our bill a couple of years ago to increase the penalty for arson to 20 years and to increase the reward for the capture of arsonists to \$50 000. For example, in 2010 a Kalgoorlie man was sentenced to 10 years in prison for a 10-month arson spree. He lit a number of fires in that area.

As I have said, bushfire preparation is a shared responsibility, not a selective responsibility. Fire does not read a list of high-risk areas. While I am thinking of it, I understand that fire travels fastest not on dried wheat, but uphill. Fire travels some four times faster uphill than it does on the flat. But, all things being equal, wind and humidity can have an impact.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** What happens if it is wheat stubble up a hill?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The member wins; she trumped me! I give up. It will travel eight times faster!

The terrain creates considerable difficulty for firefighting. I do not want to harp on this, but it is worth noting the significant increase in investment in the aerial firefighting fleet—the big guns and the heavy arsenal in firefighting. Although there are firefighters, light tankers, homeowners with garden hoses and those who put the most amount of wet stuff on the red stuff, as they say, the ones who do the most, especially in difficult terrain, are the aerial firefighting fleet. As the member for Girrawheen knows, over the past five years there has been a significant investment by the state in the aerial firefighting fleet; in fact it has gone from \$1.5 million to \$20.5 million. We will therefore go into this coming fire season with perhaps not the most number of aircraft but certainly the biggest capacity to lift water that the state has ever seen. Personally, I think it is something of which we should be proud. The reality of modern firefighting is that we just would not go into the fire season without the Erickson Air-Crane these days.

Does the member for Girrawheen have an updated question on notice on crew protection?

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** I think I have had a number.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I am wary of the time.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** No, no; take as long as you want, minister. What is happening about joint operations? I did ask about that.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The answer to the joint operations question on notice is due next week.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** Don't you know? You've had a day's notice on the motion.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** There is a procedure in this place that is set out by the standing orders.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** No, it's in the motion.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is right and, as I said, these are not —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** You've had 24 hours since the motion came out.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr I.M. Britza):** Thank you, members!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I think the answer is due on Monday or Tuesday.

**Mrs M.H. Roberts:** That's not a due date; that's the maximum time.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Okay. I can spend the next 10 minutes on my feet, deny someone else the opportunity to make a contribution and talk about other things I still have not got to.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** It is paragraph (c) of the motion, so you've had over 24 hours' notice.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Alternatively, I can move on to other things and the member can let that one get answered in accordance with the standing orders. I will do that because in that way I will be able to provide the member for Girrawheen with more information. I will move on to the crew protection issue.

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** If you've got joint operations and you've got a list there, you can table them, if you like.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will move on to crew protection.

In 2012–13, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services allocated \$3.1 million for the provision of burn-over blankets and radiant heat shields for all appliances operating in bushfire environments. In the state budget in August this year we committed an additional \$12.3 million over four years. That was our election commitment and that is what we are moving on with delivering. Those crew protection initiatives included burn-over blankets; internal radiant heat resistant curtains, which are a critical component; heat lagging and shielding; in-cab breathing systems; under-body and strategically positioned external cab protection water-deluge systems and deluge sprays; and an advanced GPS tracking system, so that if a truck gets into trouble we will know where it is. Some of these things are a lot easier to do than others and some of them are less complicated than others; for example, heat blankets. The reason that even heat blanks are not perfectly simple, though, is that my understanding is that when the department went to procure these, there was not even an Australian standard for heat blankets. It is no good, therefore, spending an awful lot of money, provided by the taxpayers of Western Australia, on buying heat blankets that are not going to meet the operational requirements of a basic burn-over blanket.

Some things are taking a lot longer. We know that there are about 1 100 vehicles in the DFES fleet, 667 of which are in medium to high-risk fire areas. Of the 1 100 vehicles in the DFES fleet, 31 still have some issues with their gross vehicle mass—GVM—which is their weight, and the department has appointed an engineer to work through those issues, to update the suspension and to do whatever they can to make sure that the vehicles meet the basic safety standards. It is only 31 vehicles, though, out of the total of 1 100.

Some of these things are challenging and I will tell the member for Girrawheen the reasons for that. She talked about critical component heat shielding. Critical components on a fire truck are appliances such as the fuel tank, the fuel lines, the transmission control wiring and the communications wiring. Communications wiring includes wiring to external speakers so that when someone wearing earmuffs is at the back of, say, a light tanker operating a pump or a hose with people yelling all over the place, they need to be able to hear the radio communications over their broadcast speaker at the back of that truck. Almost all of them now carry their own individual radio with a microphone and earpiece on their lapel so that they can hear things even better. Firefighters need to be able to hear critical bits of information such as red-flag warnings, for example, triggered by a change in fire behaviour, weather or wind patterns. Therefore, all this critical shielding equipment needs to be on even a basic light tanker all the way up to bigger vehicles in the fleet. Of those 1 100 vehicles, with 667 in high bushfire-risk areas, there are 25 different types of vehicles; so we do not have a one-size-fits-all approach. Most of the equipment has to be custom made for which there is no Australian standard. It is a significant mechanical engineering task to start making all of this lagging and all of this shielding to custom-fit different spray systems and different trucks, some of which are already close to the GVM limit anyway. Some trucks need suspension upgrades. Some trucks may be able to address their weight issues by a simple change in operations. As a standard, when the GVM of a vehicle is calculated, the average weight of a firefighter is 90 kilograms. Some trucks do not need firefighters in them.

A whole lot of variables are at play here. The point I am making is that it is not as black and white as some people might like to think. It is my expectation from my conversations with the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner that he understands the urgency and we are getting on with doing this stuff and new trucks are getting rolled out.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 27 November 2013]

p6748b-6762a

Ms Margaret Quirk; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Joe Francis

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I also should pick up the point about the incident control vehicles at Forrestfield. I was at Forrestfield recently, as was the member for Girrawheen, for a firefighter graduation. There was not a whole bunch of ICVs sitting around at Forrestfield. My understanding and my advice is that there is only one, and it is permanently stationed there. There is therefore no great big scandal that all these fire trucks are ready and have not been issued to all the brigades. It does not happen like that. As soon as a truck is ready, it is dispatched. There is no great big secret storage of fire trucks that have not been deployed on stations.

The other issue about updating all these fire trucks with all this protective equipment is that, firstly, our commitment was to do it over four years. That is because it would be grossly irresponsible for a government to pull 667 vehicles out of commission and suddenly employ thousands of people to do it all in one hit. In a perfect world, of course, we would do it instantly. I wish that every single fire truck right now had every single bit of crew protection in it that we could provide. Of course we care about that. But the reality is that new trucks are coming on to replace older trucks. There is an issue with the average age of the fleet. Five years ago, 10 per cent of the vehicles in the firefighting fleet were beyond their use-by date. Now, as we know, it is zero. I have mentioned before that every single old or aged truck in the fleet across the entire state has been replaced with a new truck. Obviously, the new trucks that leave the workshop are fitted in advance with much of this crew protection stuff. Therefore, not only is there a rotation of older trucks with newer trucks, but also older trucks are being fitted with crew protection. It obviously makes no sense at all to spend an awful lot of money fitting out trucks that are close to retirement or trucks that will be retired in two to three years. We are rotating the trucks and concentrating all of this crew protection upgrade on the areas that are most at risk in the state and the ones that possess the greatest fire danger. That is what commonsense dictates we do. We prioritise on need and we prioritise on threat.

I will sit down in a minute, but I want to assure members that if we could, we would do it all at once; however, it is just not feasible. No matter who is in government, it just cannot be done, and it would be grossly irresponsible to ground every single fire truck and have them all sitting outside a factory waiting to be refitted and leaving the state and the people of Western Australia unprotected in the fire season. I will say one last thing before the clock moves over. All crew members are trained on how and when to use a fire blanket. It is basic training and it has been done by every single volunteer. I am sure that in the Minister for Environment's portfolio exactly the same thing happens. Every single crew member is trained to use the equipment so that they are proficient. If they are not trained and are not proficient, they are not allowed out on the fireground. That is the simple, basic rule of safety. We do not want people out in the community fighting fires if they are not safe, if they have not been properly trained on the equipment that they are using and if they do not know how to operate the fire pumps or their protection equipment. Personal protection is essential on the fireground. I am not sure, member for Girrawheen, whether we will continue this debate next week. Either way, she will get the answers to her questions on notice next week.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm*