

INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS DAY

Statement by Minister for Emergency Services

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Emergency Services) [9.07 am]: Last Saturday, 4 May, marked the fifteenth annual International Firefighters Day. Tomorrow I will have the honour of attending the official memorial service to mark the day in Western Australia. The date was chosen as it is St Florian's Feast Day, which commemorates the life of St Florian, the patron saint of firefighters, who was the first known commander of one of the firefighting squads in the Roman Empire. He and his colleagues lost their lives in the service of the ideals that firefighters all over the world share today.

Today there are just over 700 career and volunteer fire brigades in this state. Firefighters are a unique group of individuals. Like many of our emergency services workers, they are motivated by the desire to keep their community safe. Their courage and dedication, developed in their own time, is demonstrated whenever these people go to work. Firefighting can be a dangerous and demanding business. No-one will ever forget the events of 11 September 2001 when over 300 firefighters lost their lives attempting to rescue citizens trapped in the World Trade Center towers. More recently, in Waco, Texas, firefighters lost their lives fighting a fire at a fertiliser factory. Chillingly, five Western Australian firefighters lost their lives in Victoria in 1999, the event that this very day was created to commemorate. In Western Australia, Wendy Bearfoot passed away in November last year after suffering burns whilst fighting a bushfire east of Albany. Wendy Bearfoot was doing what over 30 000 volunteer firefighters and 1 100 career firefighters do in every corner of this state nearly every day of the year—protecting their communities from the threat of fire in any conditions and at any time of the day or night. These are graphic examples of the inherent risk that every firefighter faces whenever they turn out for duty.

The modern-day fire services in Western Australia have evolved over time into adaptable, professional and dynamic organisations with a mix of skills, equipment and personnel who are leaders in their field. Our urban search and rescue teams have been deployed as far afield as Queensland and internationally to Christchurch, New Zealand, where they joined international teams from the United States, the UK and Singapore to assist in the search for survivors after the earthquakes in 2011. Our Hazmat team carried out multi-agency training in the lead-up to CHOGM.

This government recognises the extraordinary hard work and dedication of all firefighters within this state and thanks them on behalf of the people of Western Australia for the continued commitment they make to their local communities and the state as a whole. We reflect on the memory of their colleagues who have given their lives in the line of duty. It is not just the firefighters—to the families of these men and women who wait at home for them to return at the end of their shift and to the family members and friends of the ones who did not come home, we thank you for the sacrifice you have made to keep the communities of Western Australia safe. International Firefighters Day was the idea of J.J. Edmondson, a lieutenant in a volunteer brigade in Victoria. She did not know the firefighters who lost their lives back in 1999 but I will finish with a quote from her —

The role of a firefighter in today's society—be it urban, rural, ... volunteer, career ... is one of dedication, commitment and sacrifice—no matter what country we reside and work in. In the fire service we fight together against one common enemy—fire—no matter what country we come from, what uniform we wear or what language we speak.