

VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES — SOUTH WEST

**129. Mr M.J. COWPER to the Minister for Emergency Services:**

Before I ask my question, I would like to acknowledge chief fire control officers John Twaddle, Phil Penny and Bluey Wilson and all the volunteers and support crews at the recent fires in my electorate.

I understand that the minister spent last Friday in the south west visiting a number of volunteer brigades. Can he outline to the house how those brigades have benefited from the Liberal–National government’s investment in new facilities and equipment in the wake of the very publicised Keelty report?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:**

I thank the member for the question and for his ongoing support of all the volunteer firefighters in his electorate. I know that the member’s electorate has been subject to a number of serious fire events in the last six weeks, not the least of which was the one that occurred last Friday. I was very concerned, driving down there, that something might happen to that wonderful sign on the side of the road with the member’s big smiling face, which I see every time I drive down there.

I was down at the cape near Margaret River last Friday. I opened five new fully revamped volunteer fire stations. This is a massive investment in the protection of the community in the south west capes area. The government has reopened Dunsborough, Yallingup Coastal, Cowaramup, Wallcliffe and Witchcliffe fire stations. Had members seen these stations a year and a half ago, they would have seen that they were very small rundown fire stations—some of them were new, but very small. They are now massive. Four of them have been converted to dual-registered brigades, so they are not only volunteer bush fire brigades but also volunteer fire and rescue service brigades. They have been fully equipped with new or upgraded trucks that have great crew protection, drop-down heat shields, fire-protection blankets and spray bars. The brigades have new, modern facilities and trucks, including a couple of new 34 Urban tankers, which we saw in Dunsborough. The great thing that has come out of this is that when we have dual-registered brigades—four out of those five are now dual-registered—a lot more resources are put into training the volunteers. The really good news about this—we should be commending people for this—is that 40 volunteer bush fire brigade firefighters have stepped up to receive another level of training as volunteer fire and rescue service brigade firefighters. Those 40 people are now trained in such things as structural firefighting and using breathing apparatus so that they can attend not only bushfires but also structural fires. It has been a wonderful investment and has been done very professionally in full consultation with local service volunteers at the Department of Parks and Wildlife. Local government down there has warmly welcomed this and it has been readily accepted by the community. It has been a great investment of \$7 million by this government, which is getting on with delivering all the reforms recommended in the Keelty review. There are lots of wonderful volunteer firefighters in those communities doing a brilliant job in a very high bushfire-risk area. We should be very proud of every single one of them.