

SOUTH WEST EMERGENCY RESCUE HELICOPTER SERVICE

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

I recently inspected the permanent base currently under construction at Bunbury Airport for the new south west emergency rescue helicopter service. How has this service assisted communities in the south west?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Bunbury for his ongoing interest. He has been a passionate advocate for this service in the south west and he should be very proud of what he has helped achieve. I am very pleased to update the house on the first six months of operation of the second rescue helicopter sponsored by the RAC and obviously funded predominantly through the royalties for regions program. The second helicopter has now been operating, as I said, for six months. It has flown about one mission a day. It has flown 150 flights, and 130 of those flights have been primary retrievals—that is, road crash rescue and other accidents in which getting critical care to an accident victim very quickly and getting them to hospital has helped save many lives. Eleven of those 150 flights have been search-and-rescue missions, because these helicopters are equipped with the latest night-vision and electronic mapping technology that interacts with the computer-aided dispatch system for emergency services. Six of those flights have been for secondary transfers, such as situations in which it has been deemed that road transfer of the patient back to Perth was unsuitable. Most interestingly, though, of those 150 flights, 50 have taken place when the Perth-based rescue helicopter has also been in the air. Of course, rescue helicopters are one of those things that people hope they never have to use, but, unfortunately, the lottery of life means that sometimes the cards do not fall our way, and people never know when they are going to have to rely on one of those flights to save their life. Two helicopters were in the air at the same time 50 times and, of course, that would have saved many lives, and we just cannot put a price on that.

As I said, this is something that we are exceptionally proud of and it has been predominantly funded through the royalties for regions program. Once again, it is an essential reason why the integrity of that program must be maintained at any cost. Without something like that, this helicopter would not be in the air. It is very important that we ensure that we do everything we can to continue funding these kinds of services into the future, because they are the things that make an absolute real difference in saving lives in regional Western Australia.