

Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Joe Francis; Mr John Castrilli; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Jan Norberger; Mr Paul Papalia

Division 73: Fire and Emergency Services, \$52 305 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Mr J.M. Francis, Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr W. Gregson, APM, Commissioner.

Mr S. Fewster, Deputy Commissioner, Capability Command.

Mr L.A. Bailey, Deputy Commissioner, Operations Command.

Mr A.J. Jardine, Manager, Funding Services.

Mrs G.J. Camarda, Director, Business Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to page 864 and the line item “Fire Crew Protection” listed under “Spending Changes”. I understand that that implements the election commitment of \$12.34 million for 667 Department of Fire and Emergency Services vehicles and local government bush fire brigade firefighting vehicles. Is that correct?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is correct.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: As I understand it, that will be retrofitting in-cab breathing systems, under-body and external water spray protection systems, advanced GPS and critical component heat lagging and shielding. Is that correct?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is correct.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Clearly, the \$12.34 million will not be spent in one year; I think about \$4 million will be spent this year. How many vehicles does the minister anticipate will be fully fitted out with these protections by the commencement of this fire season?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is certainly a good question, member for Girrawheen. Obviously, this is over four years. There is capacity to do a certain number of vehicles; we cannot open a factory and do them all in one go. We cannot have every vehicle and appliance off the availability list at one time; it has to be done over a certain period. My understanding is that the new appliances being rolled out are already being fitted with these modifications. As to how many will be done by this fire season, I have to refer that question to Commissioner Gregson. As the member understands, in a perfect world we would do them all instantly, but it just cannot be done. If the commissioner has more information, I am happy to ask him to provide that.

Mr W. Gregson: I do not think I could add to that, Mr Chairman; I do not have the rollout schedule of the vehicles. It will be done on a priority basis. A lot of the timings to fit out a vehicle have not yet been approximated. As to how many we will get through, the answer is as many as we possibly can as expediently as we possibly can.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is it possible to fit all these components to a vehicle at the one time, or are all the vehicles fitted with the in-cab breathing system and then brought back to do the water spray protection? How will the fit-out work?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Commissioner.

Mr W. Gregson: I imagine that different components might be fitted by different manufacturers, so I would not think they would all be done concurrently. But things such as the rollout of heat blankets, which has already commenced, can happen because it is simply a matter of the delivery of the blanket and training.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Some of this was initiated because of the tragic death of Department of Environment and Conservation firefighter Wendy Bearfoot last year. I am aware that the minister’s agency sought a tender for a burnout expert to advise the department on what was required both for capital expenditure and training staff. Can the minister explain why that was necessary? Why did that expertise not exist in the organisation already?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will ask the commissioner to answer that question.

Mr W. Gregson: I am sorry; I did not quite follow the question.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A tender was put out for a consultant to advise the department on training and capital expenditure to handle burn-over incidents. I wonder why that expertise did not exist in the department already.

Mr W. Gregson: I am not aware; I would have to take that on notice and get back to the member with an answer.

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Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Does the member want us to take that on notice?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes, please.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I agree to provide supplementary information to the member for Girrawheen about the tender process that was put through the Department of Fire and Emergency Services asking advice on burn overs. If the member for Girrawheen provides me with that tender, it might aid that process.

[*Supplementary Information No B22.*]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The Minister for Environment gave evidence last night that the Department of Parks and Wildlife is undergoing a separate process to fit similar equipment. In the context of estimates and economies of scale and in the spirit of the brave new world in which DPaW and DFES cooperate, why is this not done together—the tenders, purchasing the equipment and so on? I am intrigued as to why two separate sets of civil servants are undergoing the same process.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is a good question. My understanding is that some of the platforms are identical and some of them are different. Some of the Department of Parks and Wildlife platforms would require a different fit-out from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services units. I understand that Minister Jacob has commenced a similar process within his department, but that is a question the member would have to ask Minister Jacob. I have had a few conversations with him about where he is at with the rollout for the parks and wildlife fleet—I keep going to call it DEC! I know that a number of improvement notices require him to update the fleet of units that are available for the parks and wildlife firefighters. I understand that he is getting on with that job and that the department is rolling out the updates as well. As to which units are identical, I am not familiar with the fleet and the appliances that he has on his books for the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Fair enough. I have a final question on this. As I said earlier, this was a government commitment as part of the election. I think the press release was headed, “Greater protection for WA fire fighters”. I am curious about why the minister’s predecessor seems to have consciously omitted from this commitment the firefighters from the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is a question the member would have to ask him. I have no idea why he did that at the time.

[4.50 pm]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: This question is in addition to that of the member for Girrawheen. I refer to the sixth line item on page 864, “Bushfire Risk Management Planning Process”, which I think arose from the Keelty review. Could the minister explain to me how the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is progressing with the implementation of the recommendations from the Keelty review?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I thank the member for Bunbury. I am glad he is on my side of politics with a question like that! I am very pleased with the progress the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has achieved thus far in implementing the recommendations of the Keelty review. There were 55 recommendation and I believe about 11 are left to be ticked off on. Some are obviously taking a little more time as they require a lot more consultation and obviously a bit more effort to achieve, but there is no quick way of ticking them off. However, the government is absolutely committed to achieving all the recommendations from the Keelty review. For some of the outstanding recommendations, as the member knows, eight business cases were developed following certain themes, and each business case is being implemented in line with a schedule that the commissioner and the department have rolled out. The business cases include establishing an office of bushfire-at-risk management, which will include prescribed burning regulations, bushfire risk management planning and the classification of bushfire-prone areas. That latter one is obviously a little more difficult and will require the development of a technical standard from our big bushfire-prone areas, but I understand that is well advanced. It is a matter of taking into consideration fuel load, how long since a fire was burned, moisture levels, prevailing conditions and proximity to infrastructure that may be important to protect. There are a lot of things to consider when we start looking at the definition of a “bushfire-prone area” and start drawing lines on maps to determine on whom a fire will or will not impact, but predominantly protection and safety of the community from bushfires is our first priority. A number of different issues around structural reform need to be considered.

A business case is being developed for incident intelligence and for capes enhanced service delivery. Obviously the risk in the south west is somewhat greater than it is in other parts of Western Australia, not just on fuel load but also to do with the proximity of more densely populated areas and the remoteness of some communities. There is a business case around change management, and around community information, which is an important one. It is very important that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services disseminates as quickly as possible information on risks from bushfires, especially information on live incidents—basically so that people can make

the right decisions to protect themselves. As the member knows, a business case around operational preparedness of the State Emergency Management Committee has been established. I say to the member for Girrawheen that I have allowed the advisers from that committee to go home, and I am sure I can pass on her appreciation for their cooperation on that particular one. There is a little bit of work to do, but I am very pleased with the progress that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has made in implementing the recommendations of the Keely review.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes, that is right.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I ask a standard question about spending changes and the line item on public sector workforce reform on page 864 of the budget papers. Can the minister explain to the committee—or provide supplementary information if he does not have a list with him—the changes that need to be made to achieve the \$11 million savings in the forthcoming financial year and in the out years? Some ministers usually explain that by reference to staffing freezes and redundancies. However, I note that the full-time equivalent staff numbers in prevention and mitigation services and in emergency services remain the same in the forthcoming financial year as they did in the estimated actuals of the last financial year, so it is certainly not a reduction in FTEs. Could the minister or his FESA representatives therefore explain how that saving is to be achieved?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Certainly. The member for Cockburn would know that as part of the public sector reform savings measures, cabinet has capped general government agency salaries, and expenses and growth are projected at the consumer price index rate of 2.5 per cent. For an answer on that, I will refer the question to Commissioner Gregson who is responsible for the operational side of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

[Ms J.M. Freeman took the chair.]

Mr W. Gregson: I am just wondering what line item I am talking to.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am sorry, Mr Gregson; it is on page 864 under “Spending Changes”, three-quarters of the way down the table there at line item “Public Sector Workforce Reform”. An amount of \$11.11 million needs to be saved this and next financial years and \$18 million in the out years. If Mr Gregson does not have a list of specific items, I am more than happy to take that as supplementary information.

Mr W. Gregson: Yes, I will be happy to furnish that. I do have a list of supplementary items that we can either read in or table.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Tabled will be fine.

The CHAIRMAN: It cannot be tabled. It must be done by way of supplementary information.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I agree to provide supplementary information to the member for Cockburn relating to the impact of the public sector workforce reform on the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Is that broad enough?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, thanks.

[*Supplementary Information No B23.*]

[5.00 pm]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer the minister to the second dot point on page 866, which refers to the “State Command, Control, Coordination and Information Systems project”. Could the minister explain how this project will support the delivery of emergency services in WA?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I thank the member for Churchlands for the question. This is a very important issue. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has recently implemented a project to establish revised incident management arrangements and in particular the structure and operations of the state operations centre, the regional operations centre and all hazard multi-agency incident management teams. It is a pretty impressive setup—the technology, the design, the layout and the physical establishment of a location—to see exactly what is happening across the state. Knowing the member for Churchlands’ distinguished service in the military, he would be very impressed. In fact, I encourage him to look at it; he will be suitably impressed with the way the department has gone about changing the way it does business in this area. It is a major project that will provide improvements in command, control and coordination of significant emergency events. It will allow a far more targeted and systematic approach to rescue relief recovery operations. It lets people know exactly what assets are available to be deployed, how far away they are and what state they are in, and also what communication systems are available. From a military point of view, the member for Churchlands would really appreciate it.

Incident management processes and protocols will be reviewed to establish a future operating model. Part of that is doing test runs. I understand that the commissioner had a test run of a major incident this morning to train

people to do their best. The project will provide tangible benefits for emergency services in this state to manage incidents with an increase in the number of trained and experienced career and volunteer personnel to reinforce response operations in hazardous operations. It will ensure uniform operational arrangements and structures across the state, including for the state operations centre, the regional operations centre and incident management teams, no matter which part of Western Australia people may be in. Under the new structure, the department's arrangements at a state level will be in place on a permanent basis rather than being formed at the notification of an incident, and the skills of those staff will be regularly exercised in simulations to test and refine their competencies. It is all happening. It is a brilliant area to watch grow. It is brilliant to watch the Department of Fire and Emergency Services step up to the level it was at a few years ago. The commissioner should be very proud of it. It is a brilliant achievement and it is something that goes that much further to protect the people of Western Australia.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am not quite sure where the subject of my next question is mentioned in the budget papers. We will say it comes under "Prevention and Mitigation Services" under "Relationship to Government Goals" on page 865. The Water Corporation now has a plan to reduce water pressure across the board. I want to know what implications that has for the department.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is a good question. As the member knows, the emergency services levy is determined on the resources that are available to suburbs and communities. Some of them are on reticulated water—for example, in most of the metropolitan area—while others are not. The water pressure provided through hydrants is something I am sure the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has considered. However, as it is an operational matter, I will ask the commissioner to respond.

Mr W. Gregson: All we are aware of is what is rumoured. We understand that the Water Corporation has done some trials, but we have not been involved in determining the difference that may or may not make for us in water pressure or availability.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I understand that some areas are already notorious for having low water pressure. What impact has that had on the capacity to fight fires?

Mr W. Gregson: We always have contingencies in place when the reticulated water supply is inadequate or fails. That involves having bulk water-tanker availability to supply sufficient water to the firefighters.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can Water Corp be contacted and asked to increase the pressure for a short period or the duration of the fire or whatever? It sounds as though Mr Bailey up the back there is saying yes.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I might ask Mr Bailey to add to it.

Mr L.A. Bailey: When we have fires in low-pressure areas, Water Corp is engaged to divert water if necessary.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It has been reported to me that the building inspections branch is taking a fairly risk-averse attitude and is insisting that pumps and tanks be erected in certain buildings at a significant cost to the owners when in some circumstances it could be addressed in the way that Mr Bailey has suggested.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: My understanding is that a particular pressure is required to be maintained in certain buildings because of their sprinkler systems, but I will ask Mr Bailey to provide information on that.

Mr L.A. Bailey: The low-pressure areas are usually residential areas within which the risk of damage is to a single building. In residential suburbs such as East Fremantle, we have had the supplementary response of tankers for probably the past 20 years. The provision of fire prevention or suppression assistance equipment such as pumps and so forth in major buildings is required under the building by-laws. We support those for early intervention. Once we get to the top floors, we need somewhere to plug into and get the water, which is difficult without those pumps.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In other jurisdictions there are minimum qualifications for the officers who do building inspections and make recommendations and issue the fire certificate and fees are levied. That is not the case in Western Australia; why is that?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will have to ask the commissioner that question. I am not quite sure.

Mr W. Gregson: I will have to find out.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Mr Fewster is looking as though he might be able to answer.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will ask Mr Fewster for further information.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the minimum qualification for those who issue fire approval certificates for buildings? Secondly, has consideration been given to charging fees for those inspections or sign-offs?

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Mr S. Fewster: To answer the first question, there is a minimum qualification. We have a fire engineer on the department staff. The certification —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does he personally do all the inspections?

Mr S. Fewster: No. The certification is not a function undertaken by the department. Our fire engineer does not certify. The certifying authority is responsible for certifying the plans. We provide advice and that advice relates to community and firefighter safety in the buildings. That should cover the certification aspect. A project is underway at the moment to look at the validity of a fee scheme, but we are too early in that process to provide any further advice at this stage.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There is reference in the budget papers to looking at the impact of the new building legislation. I understand that the scope of what needs to be looked at in fire inspections is narrower, so would the department anticipate that it could make some efficiencies or changes there?

Mr S. Fewster: No, we would not expect efficiencies. The changes as they stand put more onus on our officers in providing advice to certifiers. We need to work through ways of reducing the bottleneck that they might create.

[5.10 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the work being done in relation to the Building Act?

The CHAIRMAN: Member!

Ms M.M. QUIRK: He did not answer the question. What is the work being done in relation to the Building Act? Why does it need to be looked at?

Mr S. Fewster: I do not understand the question.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The budget papers state that money has been put aside to look at the impact of the new Building Act. What is being looked for? Why is that work being done?

Mr S. Fewster: The changes in the legislation are likely to involve more activity for the department and so we are putting money aside to look at what that activity is.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am happy to provide more information to the member for Girrawheen. On 2 April 2012, the Building Act 2011 and the building regulations came into effect. Under that, property used on behalf of the Crown is required to be compliant with the Building Code of Australia. The Building Code of Australia defines emergency services facilities, including fire and rescue buildings, as buildings that must maintain the highest level of structural compliance. This new compliance requirement impacts on the construction costs of four fire stations within the department alone, they being at Butler, Bunbury, Geraldton and Wangara. It can be assumed that they could be considered for all buildings. To comply with the new requirements within the department's own budget, additional capital funding has been appropriated, and I suspect all buildings to some degree will need that bit more money spent on them to comply with the Building Code of Australia from 2012.

Mr J. NORBERGER: I refer to the completed works under "Asset Investment Program" on Page 869. Could the minister explain initiatives completed to enhance radio communication for emergency services and how this complements the existing WA emergency radio network?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Certainly; this is also a very important issue to do with communication between personnel. Whether they be career or volunteer emergency services officers, fire and rescue or bush fire brigade volunteers, communication is obviously very important to them. It helps maintain stringent command and control requirements. It is also important for safety so that people can make a call when they get into trouble and ask for help. It is vitally important to have the best communications system that we can afford rolled out to our fleet of vehicles. The implementation of both the community safety network and the Western Australian emergency radar network projects will provide dedicated interoperable radio networks for emergency services statewide. It will be the same system across all of Western Australia with the aim of improving front-line emergency radio communications. The WAERN is a joint initiative between the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Parks and Wildlife to provide a statewide analogue radio network, including new dual-band radios for career and volunteer emergency services across the state. We all know that fire and emergency services personnel often work alongside those from the Department of Parks and Wildlife, so it is important that they are on the same frequency and that they can communicate easily with each other, especially when they are in harm's way on a fire ground. The network will be available to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' career fire and rescue services and, as I said, some WA Volunteer Fire and Rescue services brigades, providing improved radio communications. It will be somewhat more encrypted than it is at the moment, and I think that is also vitally important considering that sometimes sensitive information is transferred over the communication system between different appliances and the command and control structure within the

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department. It is all about trying to provide the best radio system we can get, considering the constraints, and also providing that extra level of protection and safety so that if someone gets into trouble, they can rely on their radio signals not dropping out or falling into black spots, and on being able to be in constant communication with the command and control structure of the department.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I refer to “Financial Statements”, “Income statement”, “Income” on page 869 of the *Budget Statements*, which states that the total cost of services in 2013–14 is expected to increase by \$7.7 million or 2.5 per cent, compared with the 2012–13 estimated actual, which is attributable to the increase in the emergency services levy. With the changes in house property values, what is the number of properties now liable to pay the maximum amount under the levy?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will probably have to answer that question by way of supplementary information.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Will the minister provide that answer by way of supplementary information?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We are just looking for the answer. I can tell the member that the maximum number of properties under the maximum emergency services levy charge is 7.8 per cent.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Is that 7.8 per cent of all households?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is right. The number of properties in that maximum category is 84 553.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Could the minister provide those figures for the last four years by way of supplementary information? There is no way he will have this information with him.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The member might be surprised that I can provide that information right now.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is the number of those paying the maximum.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I certainly can provide that information. For 2009–10 the number of properties was 86 529 at 8.5 per cent; for 2010–11, 97 862 at 9.5 per cent; for 2011–12, 72 513 at 6.9 per cent; and for 2012–13, 81 498 at 7.7 per cent. I have already given the member the figure for 2013–14.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: As the member for Bunbury, I have a particular interest in a couple of questions, but I will ask one at a time.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is one of them about the Australind fire station?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: We will just have to wait and see, member for Girrawheen! It is not the first question, anyway! The second dot point under “Significant issues impacting the agency” on page 865 refers to the second emergency rescue helicopter service and access to a first-class aeromedical and search and rescue helicopter et cetera. I am looking at service provision in the south west, the great southern, and the specific characteristics of that. Could the minister explain when the service would be fully operational? I will not ask the next bit of the question!

[5.20 pm]

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am not surprised that the member for Bunbury has a very keen interest in a second rescue helicopter to be based in the south west. As the member would know, it was an election commitment this year that the government would provide for a second emergency services rescue helicopter. The member needs to understand that the current rescue helicopter does a brilliant job. It does over 400 call-outs a year, which is over one a day, but it has its limitations. They are predominantly about two issues. The first is the demand for it—it cannot be in two places at once. That means that if there are two accidents on different sides of Perth, we will have to prioritise which one we will go to. That means that we may not necessarily be able to save everyone. The vital thing when we are dealing with a person who has been critically injured is the time it takes to get medical help and first aid to that person, and then how long it takes to get that person to a hospital for what may be significant treatment depending upon the level of trauma. So the demand for one helicopter is obviously well exceeded. The other limitation is the range. The current helicopter has a circumference range of 200 plus-or-minus kilometres. That helicopter is based out of Jandakot. The RAC and the department have made arrangements for the refuelling of that helicopter outside that 200-kilometre or 250-kilometre radius from its main base. The second rescue helicopter will provide significant opportunities for saving lives in the south west. The other advantage of having a second rescue helicopter is that it will provide a second option for an emergency response if the helicopter in Perth is tied up. I would expect that the second rescue helicopter would have a similar range without the need for refuelling.

The second rescue helicopter will be based somewhere in the south west. The exact location is yet to be determined. I understand that is part of the tender process. It will require a base, with a hangar, an area for staff, and an area for maintenance. So part of the cost of providing that second rescue helicopter will be to establish the

base at which it will be located. I expect the second service to commence in the 2014–15 financial year. That will give us enough time to find a suitable provider. I understand that a few organisations are interested in providing that service. Additionally, it will give us time to establish the base. So the answer for the member for Bunbury, who is very keen to find out when that helicopter will be in the air and available to his constituents, is that it will be in the 2014–15 financial year. It will be done as soon as practical after we have gone through all the correct processes and procedures with regard to tendering and the establishment of the base.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the last dot point on page 865, which talks about how unprecedented population growth and demographic shifts will continue to increase service demand. In this budget, we are finishing off the Geraldton fire station. Will that be finished by the end of the year?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I believe it will be completed by July 2014.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Australind fire station seems to have fallen through the cracks altogether. Perhaps the minister can tell us what new fire stations will be built in the next financial year.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Sure. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has received approval for the Australind career fire and rescue service funding to be redirected to the new co-located career and volunteer station in Bunbury. Approval has been given to construct a single-storey, double-crew career FRS and single-storey volunteer fire and rescue service facility on the Parade Road, Bunbury, site. The site has been provided by the City of Bunbury as part of its emergency services hub. The concept design phase and architectural planning have commenced based on agreed station footprints. It is anticipated that construction of this facility will be completed by September 2014.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Given the increasing demographic demand and population growth, are additional rather than replacement career fire stations being built, and will there be any additional FTE career firefighters; and, if not, why not?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will get the commissioner to answer the second part of that question. But with regard to the demographics and the rollout of fire stations, I would assume that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the commissioner would be constantly reviewing where the demographic shifts are taking place in the population of Western Australia, where people are moving to, where the demand is growing, and where we can best locate a facility, so that it can provide the quickest response times to the greatest number of people. I would think that it would be standard operating procedure within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to constantly review the demographics and projected growth rates.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think the Productivity Commission, or someone, has put a per capita figure for career firefighters per head of population. What is that figure, and are we currently meeting it, or do we need to recruit more career firefighters?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Firstly, I am impressed that someone is actually reading reports from the Productivity Commission! The commission makes a lot of reports; some of them are interesting and some of them are not so interesting. It has even made reports about the deregulation of trading hours in Western Australia.

With regard to the ratio of career firefighters to population, which I guess is what the member is asking, I will ask the commissioner whether he can answer that.

Mr W. Gregson: We model our requirements for FTEs and location of stations based on a capability framework and a risk-to-resource application rather than a comparative analysis with Productivity Commission statistics. I have not seen those statistics so I do not know where we stand relative to the Australian average. It is based upon environmental aspects and demographic aspects, and we also run a risk-to-resource model that tells us how many appliances we need, how many stations we need, and where we need them, and how many personnel we need.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I will give an example, minister. If we listen to the minister's colleague the Minister for Regional Development, Karratha will be a boom town filled with multistorey hotels. Yet if there is a fire in Karratha, there are no career firefighters and there are no aerial appliances. I would not want to be on the seventh floor of the Karratha Hilton if it went up in flames. What sort of contingencies is the minister planning for in regional Western Australia in particular? Will it be volunteers running around with buckets?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I do not think there are any plans at this stage for a fire station at Karratha. But I am sure this is part of the process that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services will constantly review. I would like to assume that if the population of Karratha continues to grow, there will be a strong argument for putting a career fire station at Karratha. There are thousands and thousands of little towns and medium-sized towns all across Western Australia that do not have career fire services provided to them. But there are some outstanding volunteer fire and rescue services across Western Australia that provide services to those thousands and thousands of towns.

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Ms M.M. QUIRK: But if they do not have an aerial appliance, they will not be able to do it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: And they have apartment blocks.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I would suspect that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services would be constantly reviewing that, as the commissioner has said, on an asset-to-risk equation, as the population of Karratha increases.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am just using that as an example, minister. But it seems to me that there has been no real development in at least the last five or six years in providing additional career fire stations. There was the station at Kiara, but that was effectively a replacement, as I understand it.

[5.30 pm]

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am sure that the department constantly reviews the risk-to-resource equation and looks at where it can best present its assets to protect the most number of people, depending on where the risk is. I am sure that Karratha will be considered in that equation. If the weight of the evidence is that the people of Karratha need a career fire and rescue station, it will be considered.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer the minister to the reference to fire crew protection in the table on spending changes on page 864 of the budget papers. Can the minister explain this program and how it will support the safety of emergency services personnel?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We have touched on this issue. We made a \$12.3 million commitment going into the last election to update 667 vehicles.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: This is making an absolute sham of the process, minister.

The CHAIRMAN: Members! I have indicated to the minister that he needs to be short in answering questions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: He is always short!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Member for Girrawheen! I am sure that Hansard recorded that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I can say that!

The CHAIRMAN: Keep the answers short, please, minister. Please proceed. Members, exercise a bit of discipline.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will keep it short. It is really important that we do everything we can with the resources we have to protect all those volunteers who risk their lives to look after us so that when there is a dangerous situation or a fire, they can rely on us having done whatever we could as soon as we could to provide them with equipment that will save lives. These things will save lives; they will make a difference between people living and dying. As we heard before, it is absolutely tragic that Wendy Bearfoot, the Department of Environment and Conservation firefighter, lost her life in a burn over. Will the protection upgrades make a difference in the future? Absolutely. They include suppression sprays around vehicles, and silver heat shields that will help deflect the heat transferring through the glass to the cab of the vehicle. I assure members that it gets very hot very quickly. There are also independent breathing systems so that there is a fresh air supply if the cab starts to fill with smoke and firefighters struggle to breathe; and, very importantly, up-to-date GPS tracking. This tracking is not the same as that on an iPhone; this stuff actually works in remote locations. It is no good giving street coordinates to someone who can come in with aerial support to put out a fire, because they could be 50 kilometres away. This tracking has the exact GPS coordinates so that aerial support can be provided when things start to get ugly and so that they can, as they say, put the wet stuff on the red stuff and help save people. These are very important upgrades that will make a difference between people living and dying.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I refer to the last line item in the spending changes table on page 864, "Workers Compensation—Presumptive Legislation for Career Firefighters". What has changed since before the election, when the government promised to include volunteers in this cover, to result in the removal of volunteers from the proposal?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Does the member have a copy of the proposed election commitment in front of him?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am sure I recall sitting in the lower house and listening to the minister of the day—in fact, it was the Treasurer; I remember a large round man—lecture us across the chamber about how he would ensure that all volunteers were covered.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I do not know that someone's shape is a particularly appropriate way to describe someone.

The CHAIRMAN: We have done that twice so far.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 21 August 2013]

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Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Joe Francis; Mr John Castrilli; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Jan Norberger; Mr Paul Papalia

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am not sure that height is relevant either.

The CHAIRMAN: Member, we do not refer to other members in this house in that way.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Hon Troy Buswell said in the other place that volunteers would be covered. I remember him speaking at length on the matter and berating members on our side of the chamber for suggesting that it might not otherwise be the case.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The important thing is that volunteer and career firefighters are ordinarily covered totally differently under the existing legislative structure. As the member knows, career firefighters are covered under the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981. I give some credit where it is due to the member for Girrawheen for the work she did on this issue last year. I am not above giving credit where it is due. Well done, member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am interested in what has changed the minister's mind in a year.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am talking about the member's work on legislation for career firefighters. I would like to think that she appreciates that the government's version of the bill is a little different from her bill. It includes a couple of things that I spoke about as a backbencher when we debated her bill; that is, provision for the date on which a firefighter is deemed to have contracted cancer, and item 13 of the schedule, whereby the regulations can be amended so that, as medical science and technology evolves—no doubt it will—if someone realises that a different type of cancer is not included, it can be added in the future. Career firefighters are very easy to deal with, because it involves an amendment to the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act. Volunteers are a different kettle of fish. What I think is important is the distinction between the types of fires they face. Career fire and rescue personnel predominantly attend structural fires. Their exposure to toxins and carcinogens obviously will be much higher than that of those who are exposed purely to bushfires.

Mr P. PAPALIA: My memories are flooding back.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Secondly, as volunteer firefighters are not covered by workers' compensation laws, it is important that we do what we can to cover a range of injuries that they may suffer, which is why we have put \$1 million into a fund to help cover them if something happens. I am sure that volunteer firefighters are equally concerned, if not more so, about what would happen if they got run over by a reversing truck, fell out of a cabin or got burnt. The more immediate risks are more significant to them than the long-term risks. There are so many complicated issues that have to be considered for volunteer emergency personnel such as volunteer bush fire brigade firefighters that it is taking a little longer to look at it and put together a package encompassing those volunteers. We just got on with the legislation for the career firefighters first, because it involved a simple amendment to the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act. We are working on a solution and a package for volunteer firefighters. I made it clear in Parliament in answer to questions from the member for Girrawheen in recent times that it will come as two separate tranches, and we will get to it as soon as we can.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I remember now exactly what happened. When the member introduced her private member's bill, which suggested an almost identical response to the one that the minister has made, the then minister, Hon Troy Buswell, suggested that the reason he was not going to do it was that he would include volunteers. He said categorically that that was the reason it was not being done immediately and that was the reason he delayed it until after the election.

[5.40 pm]

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am giving the member my answer because I remember the debate well. I do not remember what the then minister said; I remember what I said. I was not a minister but I remember my position was very clear on this, and I even suggested to the member for Girrawheen what I would have liked to have been included in her version of the bill. It was not included. The government's version of the bill does include that as far as volunteers are concerned. I do not know what the member for Vasse said at the time, but I can say that it is not as easy to formulate a package for volunteers as it is for career firefighters. It does not mean that we are any less committed to it; it just means that it is a much more difficult process. The best thing to do was to get on with the job for career firefighters and to get them covered as soon as possible.

Mr J. NORBERGER: I refer to the item on page 864, listed under the heading "Spending Changes", which reads "Exmouth Sea Rescue Shed". Could the minister explain when the shed will be constructed and how it will support emergency services in Exmouth?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The member should be asking about the volunteer service.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Girrawheen, please let the member for Joondalup continue. There is not much time. Member for Joondalup, have you finished the question?

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Mr J. NORBERGER: I have finished the question.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Can I ask the member to ask the question again.

Mr J. NORBERGER: Listed under the heading “Spending Changes” is the “Exmouth Sea Rescue Shed.” I would like to find out when that shed will be constructed and how it will support emergency services in Exmouth.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is a good question and I am sure that the member for North West would like to know the answer to this one as well. It is an important project. The sea rescue facility up in Exmouth will house a training centre, offices and rescue boats operated by the Exmouth Volunteer Marine Rescue Group. The construction of the facility will commence once the land is transferred to the group and the local shire council approves the proposed building plans. I believe that is the stage it is up to at the moment. I understand the estimated cost is \$700 000, which will provide a very suitable facility from which the volunteers can go out in boats to help people when they get into trouble. Once again, this is an issue that requires attention because Exmouth is a very popular place with tourists, boating enthusiasts and fishermen. Being out at sea when the weather gets ugly—trust me, I know a little bit about ugly seas—it is very important —

The CHAIRMAN: The minister needs to get to the point as we have very limited time left.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Absolutely. It is very important that when people get into trouble, they can rely on a service to come out and help them and save their lives in many instances. The Exmouth sea rescue facility will be a fully secure premise housing a training centre, a lecture room, lockable offices, and room to protect the group’s resources such as the rescue boat during a cyclone event; and it has been designed to complement existing buildings at the Exmouth marina. It will enable the volunteer rescue group to enhance its own marine-related skills and offer an area to conduct training courses for the community to raise community safety awareness. It was expected to be completed this financial year, but, as I said, at the moment it is up to the local council to give it the tick before we can get started on the project.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Very quickly, I want to go back to page 868. I think the member for Girrawheen asked a question that covered a broad range of things and the minister answered some of them —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The new Bunbury fire station.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: — but I am not sure whether the minister covered the sting, because I think there are some issues with the availability of land in Australind and that is why it is co-located in Bunbury. What is the anticipated time frame for completion and what additional facilities and benefits are there for the south west?

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, briefly—take it on notice?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Just read Troy Buswell’s press releases for the past 10 years.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, will you take it on notice?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I understand it may take 14 or 15 minutes. I do not think I can take this further. I will find out for the member and keep him fully updated and involved in the process.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In the spirit of austerity, the Premier announced yesterday that a number of award ceremonies were being either scaled down or abolished. Can the minister advise whether this proposal is in place and whether the number of award or volunteer commemoration ceremonies within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has been changed to save money?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I might refer that one to the commissioner.

Mr W. Gregson: With respect to award ceremonies and recognition ceremonies, they are fundamental for an organisation that embraces a large number of volunteers. Notwithstanding that, it is true to say that we have scaled down the magnitude or expense and tried to be as frugal and responsible as possible while still maintaining these events.

The appropriation was recommended.