

FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES — FIRE CREW PROTECTION

718. MR N.W. MORTON to the Minister for Emergency Services:

In light of alarmist media headlines and claims of government delays in providing crew protection systems to our firefighting appliances, can the minister advise the house on how the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is acting on the government's election commitments in this regard?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Forrestfield for the brilliant question. We are getting on with the job of increasing protection to volunteer firefighters and career firefighters across Western Australia. There are almost 1 000 firefighting vehicles in the fleet, of which 667 are in medium to high-risk areas. We will prioritise those areas first, including areas in the electorates of the member for Forrestfield and the member for Albany. This is a complicated task. It is a very detailed undertaking to provide retrospective custom-fitted mechanical equipment to over 25 different types of vehicles. For example, it is not only the internal radiant heat shields that are being rolled out, but also the heat lagging that will protect critical components, such as transmission lines, fuel tanks, communication lines and external audio systems to the crew outside the fire trucks so that if they are standing at the back of the truck and a pump is running and a red-flag alert is broadcast over the radio, they will be able to hear it. All these things need to be done. There are over 25 different types of trucks. We are getting on with doing that job. In a perfect world, we would magically wave a wand and do them all at once, but it just cannot be done.

It is worth noting that this does not mean that our fire trucks are unsafe. We are just doing that little extra over and above to make sure that our firefighters are even more protected. I cannot talk about the safety of fire trucks without talking about the age of the fire trucks. Fire trucks, like anything else, have a use-by date. For the information of members, a tanker has an expected use-by date of about 16 years and a light tanker has an expected use-by date of about 10 years. I think it is worth looking at the history of fire trucks and those that are past their use-by date. In 2007–08, 15 per cent of the entire fleet was past its use-by date. As members can see, now not a single fire truck in the fleet is older than its use-by date. Something magical happened here. With all due respect, I will give credit where it is deserved. When the member for Hillarys was the minister, he did a brilliant job.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: When the member for Hillarys was the minister, he made sure that we got on with that. When the member for Vasse was the minister, he made sure that we got on with updating the fleet. Of course, I do not need to provide statistics. I can just look at one of the local brigades in my electorate. The truck in this picture was retired from the fleet only three years ago. It was the Jandakot nine-tonne tanker. It was over 25 years old. It spent 16 years with the brigade. It was a former rubbish truck, disposed of by the City of Cockburn, that had a water tank put on the back. It was converted to a fire truck in 1994. It was replaced in 2010 with the almost \$300 000 appliance in this picture. It is a prototype design, custom-built for firefighting, not as a rubbish truck. Four of these appliances are now in service in the metropolitan area, with more being rolled out. The truck in this picture carries more than 12 tonnes of water, with a seven-tonne collar tank for aerial firefighting. If the truck in the second picture is a potential deathtrap, what does the member for Girrawheen call the truck in the first picture? It would not have even passed a roadworthy test. The truck in this picture will be our legacy. The truck in the other picture will be her legacy. She should be ashamed of her comments.