

DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES — ABORIGINAL FIREFIGHTER CADETSHIP PROGRAM

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

Last September, the minister informed this house of the launch of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services Aboriginal firefighter cadetship program. Can he please update the house on that program?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Forrestfield for his interest in this area. I acknowledge that the Western Australian Fire and Emergency Services Academy is in the member's electorate. Hopefully, a number of young Aboriginal firefighters will enter that academy towards the end of the year. The member is correct; on 8 September last year the Department of Fire and Emergency Services launched the Aboriginal firefighter cadetship program. I spoke about it in this house. I believe I emailed every member about it, along with all the advertising that we were putting out that targeted media to attract suitable candidates; I hope members will spread the word. I thank a number of members from both sides—I got that feedback.

To put it into context, a year ago only 0.8 per cent—less than one per cent—of the staff and employees at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services were identified as either Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders. That is clearly unacceptable when we have a population percentage in the state of over three per cent. We are trying to address that issue. In the last 12 months, along with other proactive issues, that number has risen to about one and a half per cent. I accept that we still have a long way to go, but we want to create meaningful and rewarding jobs for young Aboriginal people. On 22 January, along with the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, I attended the launch of the program. We welcomed the first 11 young Aboriginal cadets into the program. It was a wonderful experience and it was great to see them so motivated. I am sure we all wish them the best in getting ready for the selection process to become firefighters. Obviously, some of them need to be brought up to a different level of training or education, but we want to make sure that we can create as many opportunities as possible for young Aboriginals to enter the DFES workforce. If members still know people who are interested, please spread the word. I think it will be a wonderful program to attract young Aboriginal people. If we can attract some young females, that also would be great. I noticed that all 11 of the cadets were males. We want to create as many opportunities within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services as possible to help promote young Aboriginal men and women into the DFES workforce.