

BUSHFIRE SEASON — AERIAL FIREFIGHTING FLEET

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

The New South Wales bushfires over the past 10 days have again demonstrated the effectiveness of aerial firefighting. As Western Australia's firefighters prepare for the bushfire season, can the minister advise the house on the aerial resources that are on stand-by to protect lives and property this summer?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Bunbury. The member will be pleased to know that his electorate of Bunbury will again play a significant role this fire season, because it will be home to one of the operational hubs at which our aerial firefighting fleet will be based. They will also be based at Jandakot, Busselton, Albany and Manjimup. They will give aerial firefighting coverage from as far north as Geraldton to as far south east as Esperance. On top of that, 39 airports and airstrips will provide ongoing ground support to the helicopters and aeroplanes that will make up part of that fleet. In the last fire season alone, the aerial fleet flew 188 times and dropped some 4.3 million litres of water on bushfires and, in doing so, helped to protect firefighters and the people of Western Australia and their assets. Again this year there will be the heavy-lift Erickson sky crane, which can lift 7 000 litres, or seven tonnes, of water in one hit. All up, the commitment this year is for over \$20 million towards our aerial firefighting fleet.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I think it is very important to consider how much this fleet has grown over the last five years. It is worth noting that in the last fire season under the Labor government, the total spend on aerial firefighting helicopters, which the member for Midland claimed she invented last week, was only \$1.2 million, with one heavy-lift helicopter that could lift only three and a half tonnes of water.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I think it is worth comparing that fleet with this year's fleet.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: This year's fleet has \$20.5 million alone —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale!

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park! Member for Armadale, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Member for Victoria Park, I formally call you to order for the second time today. Minister, I have given you permission to show that chart; can you please show it and then put it away?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: An amount of \$20.5 million has been spent on the biggest firefighting fleet ever in the history of the state of Western Australia. It is worth noting that no government has ever committed so much and put so much effort into preparing for a bushfire season as has this government going into this bushfire season. On top of that, an unprecedented additional \$80 million has been invested in more firefighters, crew protection, better fire trucks and more fire stations. When I consider the disgraceful comments over the weekend of the member for Girrawheen, who is also the shadow Minister for Seniors and Volunteering, I think she should be ashamed of herself.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Minister, come back to the answer please.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am a volunteer firefighter. I know a lot of volunteer firefighters and I do not know a single volunteer firefighter who would get in a fire truck if it was not safe. The member for Girrawheen's scaremongering and sensationalism was absolutely appalling and, to be quite frank, if the Leader of the Opposition had any political ticker whatsoever, he would remove her from that portfolio.