

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES — APPLIANCES

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

Can the minister please inform the house of the government's state budget commitment to provide a second helicopter rescue service and greater protection for our firefighters?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Bunbury for his question. Like the member, I am proud to be part of a Liberal–National government that is getting on with the job and delivering on our election commitments.

This morning I had the pleasure of announcing two measures that will make a real difference in saving lives to people in regional Western Australia. It will make a real difference between life and death for many people who live outside the metropolitan area. Firstly, we announced the details of upgraded equipment for crew protection for firefighters. There are some 30 000 volunteer firefighters across Western Australia, and there are some 667 vehicles that will have significant upgrades made to the equipment inside them that will protect our volunteer firefighters, who put their lives on the line and put themselves at risk to look after people in our communities.

A number of key upgrades will be made to the fleet of 667 vehicles. Those upgrades will provide underbody protection from heat. They will provide spray-mist protection around the vehicle so that if firefighters are caught in a fire, they can at least dampen some of the flames. They will provide heat blankets inside the cabin so that if a vehicle is caught in a fire, the firefighters can protect themselves from the radiant heat. They will provide heat shields that will come down and cover the inside of the glass of the vehicle with reflective material, because heat transfers through glass quite efficiently, and that is exceptionally dangerous for firefighters. We all know from the recent unfortunate accidents and events in Albany that these things happen. We want to do everything we can to protect firefighters, because that is the right thing to do. Additionally, some vehicles will be fitted with air tanks so that there will be an emergency breathing source within the vehicles. Lastly, the vehicles will be fitted with modern GPS locaters. It is very important that when a fire truck is out in the bush and in the middle of flames and something goes wrong, the firefighters are able to give exact coordinates and call in some kind of air support and some kind of rescue mechanism so that their safety can be better guaranteed. This government is heavily committed to honouring our election commitment when it comes to protecting volunteer firefighters and to doing everything we can, within reason, to protect the people who put their lives on the line in trying to defend our community.

Additionally, we announced the details of a second rescue helicopter. We already have one rescue helicopter based in Perth. That is the RAC chopper that we all know about. That rescue helicopter conducts over 400 missions every year, or 40 a month, roughly. But it has a range limitation of just over 200 kilometres. It can fly further than that, but it will need refuelling depending on the conditions, the lift load and how long it may need to hover over a particular spot in order to conduct a rescue.

A second rescue helicopter in the south west, in which we have a booming population, will do an awful lot to help free up that resource in the metropolitan area. It will also help to look after the people in the south west, whether they are having some kind of medical emergency or are involved in some kind of accident. The time it takes to deliver medical services to someone who has been injured and get them to a hospital is critical in saving lives, and a second rescue helicopter will help us to do that.

In summary, the \$12.3 million that will be spent over the next four years started the rollout of the crew protection upgrades for volunteer firefighters, and I know this will be welcomed by many of them. Secondly, we will roll out \$15.3 million to provide a second emergency services rescue helicopter in the south west. As I said, I am proud to be part of a government that is getting on with the job of delivering on our election commitments.