

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES CONFERENCE

766. Mr M.J. COWPER to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I understand the Western Australian Fire and Emergency Services conference was held on the weekend and some important new initiatives were announced. Can the minister please advise the house what specifically he has got for our emergency services portfolio?

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Finished? I call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I have not even started. It is one of those days.

I thank the member for his question and for his continued support for emergency services volunteers in his electorate. At the start of this year they had a pretty tough time with some bushfires out there. I know the member was a great support to not just his community —

Mr M.J. Cowper interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is right; I went to Waroona with him. He was a great support to not only the community but also those volunteers. Well done.

Last weekend just gone was the fifth annual volunteer emergency services conference hosted by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services—the fifth one in a row. Over 700 volunteers from across the state attended. I particularly acknowledge those who travelled significant distance to attend from all branches—marine sea rescue, volunteer bush fire brigades and volunteer emergency services across the state. They all came together in Perth over the weekend to get together to learn some practical skills and to share experiences, both good and bad, to teach each other what they had learnt, both right and wrong. It was also an opportunity for us to talk about the future. In particular, we were proud to announce the next stage of the crew protection rollout, which includes not only the water deluge system—the spray bars around the truck—and the critical component heat lagging for fuel and oil lines underneath it, but also the replacement of almost everything plastic on the outside and underneath the truck, such as the rubber mudguards, remade into aluminium. In fact, the plastic mouldings on the doors have been all remade into aluminium panels so that things cannot melt or burn, because we are absolutely committed to implementing our \$15.4 million program to make our fire trucks as modern as possible and as safe as possible to protect the lives of the volunteers who put their life on the line on behalf of the community.

Additionally, we kicked off the \$1 million volunteer hardship fund so that when volunteers from any of the branches of emergency services are doing it a bit tough, they can put up their hand and, hopefully, we can help them out as they help out their community when the rest of the community does it tough. Lastly, we looked at the volunteer fuel card announced last week. Obviously, there are over 850 brigades, groups and units—BGUs—outside the Perth metropolitan fire district and outside the metropolitan area. Unfortunately, on the initial planning, 41-odd brigades, groups and units, including volunteer sea rescue up in Whitfords, down at Rockingham and up at Hillarys, including all the brigades within the Perth metropolitan area, would have missed out—41 of them. I am glad to announce that we will now include every single brigade, group and unit across the state as part of that \$2 000 volunteer fuel card rollout, so we can acknowledge the contribution volunteers make, the cost of training them, the cost of being part of a particular unit and, hopefully, in a small way, acknowledging their particular contribution.