

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE — VOLUNTEER TRAINING

185. Ms M.M. QUIRK to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to concerns expressed by the SES Volunteers Association of Western Australia that several training courses due to be delivered by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to these volunteers were cancelled without consultation with the association.

- (1) Can the minister explain the circumstances of the cancellation?
- (2) Does he concede that it is vital that volunteers who put themselves in harm's way to protect the community should receive frequent and comprehensive training?
- (3) Has he met with the association yet so that he can canvass that concern and the other concerns of its members?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

- (1)–(3) Yes, I have met with the association. I had a very nice and a very long and detailed conversation with its members about a whole raft of issues that they are facing. Yes, I do accept that people who volunteer to serve the community in dangerous causes, such as volunteer bush fire fighters, volunteer fire and rescue crews and State Emergency Service officers, and who undertake a lot of difficult tasks for the people of Western Australia, such as searching for lost people, often in remote and regional Western Australia, manning roadblocks and looking after others in a fire, do a good job. Let me make this point clear: the government obviously has an obligation to ensure that people are safe before they are put in harm's way. There is an argument, and I accept this, that we need to ensure that there is an ability to work together with other agencies. There has to be a level of interoperability so that the SES can work alongside volunteer firefighters, volunteer fire and rescue crews and career firefighters when necessary and that they can trust each other so that if something goes wrong, they know they have a minimum standard of training. I would expect all these people to have done the same course and to have the same first aid qualifications, so that the SES, volunteer fire and rescue crews and volunteer bush fire fighters do not have different levels of training in first aid. That is just an example.

The department and the government are looking at ways to ensure that all the volunteers have the same basic levels of minimum mandatory training before they are put in harm's way. That includes ensuring that the courses are the same. I cannot see why the course for first aid, again as an example, for the State Emergency Service is any different from the course for the volunteer bush fire brigade. It makes perfect sense to ensure that the number of competencies are exactly the same for all the different volunteer organisations, and that is what the government is looking to do at the moment. If there is any issue with cancelling training or training being postponed, it is to ensure that there is consistency in the delivery of those qualifications.