

BASSENDEAN VOLUNTEER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE — DEREGISTRATION

458. Mr D.J. KELLY to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to the state government's decision to deregister the Bassendean Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service from 1 October 2013.

- (1) Why has the government made such a short-sighted decision when the 60-strong brigade has served the community well for over 100 years?
- (2) Why is the government trying to force the volunteers to relocate to Forrestfield when the brigade made it clear that this will lead to the likely resignation of most of the volunteers?
- (3) Will the minister take responsibility for this decision this summer when Perth faces the bushfire season with one firefighting brigade fewer?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

(1)–(3) I thank the member for Bassendean for the question.

Mr F.M. Logan: Who paid for your trip to Sydney?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I did, thank you very much.

The member knows the answers to all of these questions. He has been briefed by the deputy commissioner of the Fire and Emergency Services. But I want to make it perfectly clear for all other members—I also note the members of the Bassendean brigade up in the gallery—that the member is right; the volunteers of the Bassendean brigade have served the community very well for around a century. They have a very fine and proud tradition. These volunteers will be given the opportunity, if they choose, to continue to serve the community.

But let me make this point. The allocation of resources and the location of brigades is not a decision made by politicians. It is a decision that is made independently of us by the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner—and I have complete faith in his ability to make those decisions—so that resources are spent where they will provide the best value for money for the people who pay the emergency services levy. That is very important. He is the guy who is at the coalface of making the decisions as to where resources are allocated—not politicians; not the government. I have complete faith in his ability to independently run that organisation, and also to make those decisions for the benefit of the ratepayers who pay the emergency services levy.

At the moment, the people of Bassendean are serviced by the Bassendean career brigade. That is the first responder. I am advised—I may be wrong—that the Bassendean Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service has not been a first responder since some time in the 1970s. A lot has changed since then. What the member for Bassendean also needs to know is that people pay different ESL amounts depending upon the services that they get. For example, people who live in an area that has reticulated water pay an ESL 1 levy, which is a higher levy. What they get for that is a career station as their first responder, backed up by a career station—not a career station backed up by a volunteer station. That does not mean that the volunteers are any less professional; of course they are professional. But they are not always available to take the call when it comes. The people of Bassendean are paying an ESL 1 levy—a higher levy—and I think they deserve an ESL 1 service. That is a very important factor.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I would have thought also that the job of a member of Parliament is to stand up for the people in their electorate who pay rates to ensure that they get value for money in what they are paying for.

Dr A.D. Buti: So you don't think those people are getting value for money?

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale, if you want to ask a question, put your name down.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: If the member for Bassendean wants to tell the people of Bassendean—I am happy to if he will not—that he thinks they should pay an ESL 1 and get an ESL 2 service, that is his problem. I am a firm believer that the people of Bassendean deserve to get the first-class service that they are paying for. That is a very important factor. The volunteers in Bassendean have a great history and a great legacy. I have seen them at the volunteer firefighter games. They have a great history of contributing to the society that they represent, and to their communities. But I am a firm believer that if they want to continue to contribute somewhere else, at a metropolitan brigade based out at the academy —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Take responsibility! You're the minister!

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: — that is entirely their choice, and I would encourage them to do so.