

ALBANY BUSHFIRE — MAJOR INCIDENT REVIEW

461. Mr P.B. WATSON to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to the release on Friday of the “Major Incident Review: Black Cat Creek Fire”. That incident occurred on 24 December 2012. Firefighter Wendy Bearfoot was killed and her colleague suffered burns injuries.

- (1) Given the nature of the findings and the likely traumatic impact its release would have, why did the minister not contact Ms Bearfoot’s husband beforehand to inform him of the report’s release?
- (2) Given that resources were cited as a sticking point as to who should take control of the fire, can the minister give the people of the great southern an assurance that future fire threats will be better resourced?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank very much the member for Albany for the question. I place on the record my deepest sympathy. I have done this before in this place and out of this place for the family of Wendy Bearfoot.

Ms M.M. Quirk: You couldn’t get on the phone, though, could you?

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, I call you to order for the third time!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I could not think of a —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I put on the record my sincere condolences to her family. It is an absolutely terrible, terrible tragedy.

What the member for Albany should know is that I was not given advance notice as to the date that review would be released, and a number of things were blacked out in that report, such as names and positions that would identify individuals, because it is still to be considered by the coroner. As I understand it, those things were blacked out for that particular reason. A number of things in that report highlighted action needed regarding coordination between the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the City of Albany. I can tell members that I understand that the City of Albany has asked the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner to take responsibility of the emergency services brigades within the City of Albany, but that may not necessarily be supported amongst the brigades down there at the moment. That still needs to be worked out and considered into the future. I understand that there is some division within the Albany community as to how it will move forward on that issue, but I am happy to keep the house up to date on that matter.

Lastly, I raise two other points. Some of the findings, such as updates and crew protection, are already being rolled out as far as emergency services vehicles are concerned. But Ms Bearfoot was a Department of Environment and Conservation firefighter and at the time of the incident was in a DEC truck. Without wanting to sound like I am handballing an important issue, it is really the responsibility of the Minister for Environment to give members the details of the rollout. I understand that the Department of Parks and Wildlife is updating its trucks as well. Some things will take a little longer to put in place than those already rolled out because physical changes are needed to trucks. Some other things are easily done, such as the provision of troop protection fire flame blankets. I know my department has already bought 4 000 sets and is in the process of sending them out to the brigades across the state—if they have not done so already. Questions about the Department of Parks and Wildlife firefighters—the old DEC guys—need to be asked of the Minister for Environment.