

BUSHFIRE SEASON — HOMEOWNER PREPAREDNESS

642. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Emergency Services:

In light of the approaching bushfire season, can the minister please remind the house of what homeowners can do to minimise the impact of a bushfire on their properties?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for his very timely question. This week, of course, is Bushfire Awareness Week.

This is the time of the year when the government encourages every single person who lives in a bushfire-prone area to go and check, double-check and triple-check that they have done absolutely everything they can to prepare their house for the oncoming fire season. Of course, it is no secret that a number of challenges will be coming this fire season after the long wet period, and we just do not know what will happen with the weather. As I have said before, it is a combustible cocktail of human beings and Mother Nature. We only have to look at the tragedy unfolding in New South Wales to know that it is hard to foresee some of the weather conditions that may come, and Western Australia may well face similar weather conditions. The government and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services have released a booklet titled “Prepare. Act. Survive.” That outlines everything people who live in bushfire-prone areas can do to make sure they are doing everything they can themselves, because it is about sharing responsibility, not about shifting responsibility, member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Shifting responsibility! Well answer the question!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I heard the member for Girrawheen’s comments over the weekend and thought I would have a look at the Labor Party’s policy going into the last election on this issue and that of crew protection. I googled high, I googled low—I wore my little googling fingers out! There was nothing! The Labor Party did not even have a policy on crew protection going into the last election, member for Girrawheen!

Several members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Shocking! The member for Girrawheen’s commentary on this issue has been appalling!

We are trying to make homeowners very aware that they have a shared responsibility with the government to do everything we can to protect people and lives during the upcoming fire season. This year alone we will have the biggest lift capacity of aerial helicopters in the history of Western Australia. We have just approved an order for another \$3 million Erickson Air-Crane for the bushfire season. To put that in context, in its last year in government, the Labor Party’s total spend on helicopter firefighting was only \$1.3 million for the entire state for the entire bushfire season.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: We invented helicopter firefighting.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is right, and I invented the internet—come on!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The opposition invented helicopters—okay! The member for Midland invented the helicopter!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We are going out of our way to do everything that we can to make sure the government and volunteer and career firefighters are ready and, as the Minister for Environment said, to make sure that his firefighters are ready. But there is a shared responsibility; people who live in bushfire-prone areas have to do their bit to make sure their houses are ready. As I said, a booklet is available on the Department of Fire and Emergency Services website that can be downloaded and read. I encourage everyone who lives in a bushfire-prone area to take some responsibility and make sure that they are doing their bit to prepare for the fire season.