

AERIAL FIRE SUPPRESSION — KUNUNURRA

896. Hon HELEN BULLOCK to the minister representing the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to reports that the Kununurra community's wish to use an aircraft to put out bushfires has been rejected by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority.

- (1) What reasons were put forward by FESA against the proposal?
- (2) Has the minister met with community representatives to facilitate a solution; and, if not, why not?
- (3) Will the minister undertake to meet with community representatives and specify when he will do this; and, if not, why not?

Hon PETER COLLIER replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) On behalf of the WA government, both FESA and the Department of Environment and Conservation undertook a review of aerial fire suppression in the Kimberley. A trial was conducted in Kununurra in 2007. The review confirmed that aerial fire suppression can be an effective tool when utilised primarily to support ground firefighting crews in the early stage of wildfire suppression. For aerial fire suppression to provide effective assistance, ground firefighting crews must also be on site. Both FESA and DEC determined they could not support aerial fire suppression as a cost effective or realistic option for the control of large-scale remote bushfires in the Kimberley.
- (2)–(3) Yes. On 12 October 2011 I met with FESA CEO Wayne Gregson and the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley council. The shire president requested that the WA government support the funding of aerial fire suppression in and around the Kununurra township. I have requested the local government to formally write to the FESA CEO to request that the use of aerial fire suppression within the Kununurra–Ord River agricultural area be evaluated and further considered as an option for firefighting endeavours in the region.