

FIREFIGHTING RESOURCES — SOUTH WEST REGION

564. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Emergency Services:

A number of my colleagues in volunteer fire brigades have raised concerns about comments on the firefighting capacity and resources in our south west region. Could the minister therefore please advise the house of the status of government initiatives in this area and of the validity of comments made by the opposition spokesperson?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

I will give it a go! Firstly, though, I thank the member for Jandakot for his attendance last week at the opening of the new Cockburn volunteer facility. I did not see the local member there, but I saw the member for Jandakot there, along with a number of members of his local bush firefighting brigade.

Mr F.M. Logan: I was here!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It does not matter; no-one missed the member for Cockburn, but we were out there. Following those horrible fires in Margaret River last year, the government commissioned Mr Keelty to conduct a review, which he did. When Mr Keelty handed down his findings, the government made a number of commitments over and above the recommendations of Mr Keelty. At the time of the budget we committed \$20 million to fund the implementation of those commitments. They included things like enhancing and changing the role of the State Emergency Management Committee, and establishing the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, both of which have happened. They included a thing called the capes enhancement project, which was a commitment of funds to move more resources into the capes area; that is, the area between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin, because clearly it was deemed to be an area of high risk. When we looked at how we would spend that money —

Ms M.M. Quirk: Has that policy been released?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Just hold your breath! When we looked at how we could do that —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will deal with the member for Girrawheen in a minute; don't worry about that! When we looked at the options, one option was to look at building and developing a professional fire station in and around the Busselton area to help service the capes region. However, the government decided to focus on using the existing resources we have, which is the volunteer fire and rescue service in Busselton, Dunsborough and Margaret River, and the volunteer bush fire brigades that sit through that region. Those brigades will receive extra appliances and training, especially those brigades—as is the brigade at Jandakot—that operate on that peri-urban fringe, which is that difficult fringe between traditional bushfires and urban structural fires. It is a major challenge for our firefighters. I suspect there will be announcements around that in the not-too-distant future.

We placed an order with the company that makes our appliances to deliver those appliances. The fact is that we could not get the appliances delivered in the time we wanted, effectively because of complications in getting them out the door. So we have had to make some decisions around our existing order, so that brigades that already have equipment and were receiving upgrades would receive their upgrade a little later but still in the 2013 year, so that those appliances could go down to the capes region.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will now deal with what the member for Girrawheen said.

The member for Girrawheen comes out today, I think, with a media statement containing two major points. Firstly, she talks about the Preston Beach fire brigade in the member for Murray–Wellington's electorate.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Which was promised!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is being delivered.

Ms M.M. Quirk: It is not!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is being delivered in the next couple of weeks.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The fire season starts at the end of the year, member for Girrawheen.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am glad you are all enthusiastic about volunteer firefighting. I appreciate that. All I want to hear at this stage is the Minister for Emergency Services. I do not need to hear further interjections.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That appliance is in Perth; it will be delivered to Preston Beach as soon as possible. I may well drive it down tomorrow, member for Girrawheen. I will take the member with me.

Ms M.M. Quirk: You're on! Tomorrow!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will take the member for Girrawheen with me! The member for Girrawheen goes on —
Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am busy! I am taking the member for Perth to the George Michael concert—certainly not if he is dressed like that, though!

Then the member for Girrawheen goes on and talks about an Australind career fire station. As the members for Bunbury, Collie–Preston and Murray–Wellington would know, there have been difficulties delivering the Australind fire station because of the contract that was entered into for the development of property.

Mr P.C. Tinley: Where has the money gone?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Here is the nub of it. The media release stated that Ms Quirk said there had been another blow to service in the electorate of Busselton. That is what she said. She said that a Busselton station was not included in the budget and that it appeared to have been fast-tracked.

Member for Girrawheen, the reason the Busselton station is not included in the Barnett government forward estimates is that we are not planning to build one. The member has criticised this government for diverting money from a fire station in Australind to a fire station in Busselton, when we have no plans to build a fire station in Busselton. The member for Girrawheen's statement is absolutely false. It is absolutely misleading, and she knows that. The member for Girrawheen needs to be very careful. I am reminded of her performance at Margaret River when she stood up like an emergency services ambulance chaser —

Ms M.M. Quirk: That is an absolute lie! I sat there and didn't say anything!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is what the member is! You go down there to try to stir up the crowd.

Ms M.M. Quirk: That is an absolute lie! Withdraw!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: You go down there to try to stir up the crowd. We know what your approach is like to emergency management.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Withdraw it! That's an absolute lie!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will not withdraw it because it is true!

Ms M.M. Quirk: No, it wasn't!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I sat in front of you and listened to what you said under your breath to the people who sat around you, and it was a disgrace!

This government has an approach to fire management that embraces and respects the role of volunteers. We have given commitments arising out of the Keelty report into the Margaret River fires to provide an enhanced level of services to the capes region and that commitment will be delivered on tomorrow.