

WAROONA–YARLOOP BUSHFIRES — FERGUSON REPORT

424. Mr M. McGOWAN to the Minister for Emergency Services:

Before I ask my question, I acknowledge Mr Euan Ferguson and his work on the bushfire inquiry. I also acknowledge the wonderful work of all of those involved in community safety and fire management.

I refer to today's Waroona fire special inquiry report and the 25 incomplete recommendations arising from inquiries into previous fires, including the reviews into the 2011 Perth hills and Margaret River fires and the 2014 Parkerville fire.

- (1) Why have previous basic and practical recommendations such as a vehicle tracking system and a critical messaging system only recently been tendered or actioned after years of them sitting out there?
- (2) Can the minister explain why the lack of suitable maps continues to be a problem five years after a recommendation for better maps was made?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

- (1)–(2) Certainly, and I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I also acknowledge the work of Mr Ferguson and the team that supported him, and in particular all the firefighters who were involved in fighting those fires, both career and volunteer. It was obviously a significant fire in Western Australia's history. It was probably the largest one and an unprecedented amount of people were impacted, not least those who fought the fire.

I will start with the automatic vehicle location system. Of course, there was a recommendation to do this and it would be very easy for the government to go onto eBay, buy a \$50 GPS tracker and stick it in a fire truck. This has taken some time and I will go into it in some detail so we are crystal clear about why it has taken a few years to go out to tender. It is because rather than throwing good money down the drain, we wanted to ensure that anything we do in this space is futureproofed. Let me give some examples. We wanted to make sure that the AVL, which would transmit in real time to the incident commander and give them a very overall tactical picture of the battle space, for want of better words, does a number of different things and that it is foolproof and futureproof. We have to consider things such as its polling rate. Does it send the information—is it location, is it speed, is it direction? Is it future upgradable to include things like the volume of the water in the water tank and fuel in the fuel tank? Will it poll over the analogue radio network? Can a module be changed so it can poll over the digital radio network? If that fails, will it revert to the 4G network? If that fails, will it then revert to the Iridium satellite network? Can other fire trucks plug an iPad or something similar in to solve mapping issues in order to have real live maps and also to see where other vehicles are located on the fireground? Will it have an emergency distress button so if a crew and fire truck gets into trouble they can press a button and alert the incident management team or the sector commander of what the issues are and where that fire truck is right there at that point in time? Will it also look at the introduction of a future—we are looking at options for this—computer aided dispatch system from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, which we are considering obviously with police and other agencies? Will it allow for the introduction of radio frequency identification cards or near field communication, as we roll out a new volunteer identification —

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am going through all of the possible things that we had to consider before it.

Mr M. McGowan: Four years.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: If you want to go and buy a \$50 GPS tracker off eBay, that is fine, but as soon as you go out of radio range —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Butler, I call you to order for the first time. Through the Chair, a short answer, thank you.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Because we did not want to waste money on something that was going to be outdated straight away.

What about the role of the volunteer and career emergency services identification card? Is that RFID? Is that near field communication? Will that solve the problem? There are many recommendations in that report, such as fatigue management of crews, the observations —

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for West Swan.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The opposition asked the question and I am giving a very detailed answer. The opposition should be happy about that. What about catering, so if a volunteer brigade self-deploys onto the fire —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, a short answer.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: If a volunteer truck self-deploys onto the fireground without the knowledge of the sector commander or the incident management team, will it be able to address issues as to maximising resource use in order to combat a fire? Would we be able to address catering concerns, so we would not see issues with volunteers coming off shifts without being catered for because no-one knew they were there? There are a whole lot of things that will be addressed in a report just for the rollout of an automatic vehicle location system, including the safety of firefighters, and we wanted to make sure that when we went out to tender it addressed every single one of these issues and was futureproofed so we would not have to replace it with more things in the future and see taxpayers' good money being thrown after that.