

“ARE YOU BUSHFIRE READY?” AWARENESS CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

906. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I note the recent launch of this year’s “Are You Bushfire Ready?” awareness campaign, including the launch of the Emergency WA website and the positioning of two water bombers in Esperance. Can the minister please advise the house how these initiatives will better protect Western Australian communities?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Vasse for her continued support, as we all do in this place, for volunteer firefighters and emergency services personnel who, as I speak right now, are attending some 40 fire-related incidents across Western Australia. It has been quite literally straight into the frying pan for many of our firefighters over the last couple of days.

Firstly, I point out that a couple weeks ago we launched the “Are You Bushfire Ready?” campaign for this season. It is important that, no matter whether we are at the start, the midpoint or the end of the bushfire season in the southern half of the state, Western Australia is always under some kind of bushfire season, whether in the north or the south. As we approach the bushfire season in the southern half of the state it is never too late for people to take action around their properties with their neighbours to try to give firefighters every opportunity, in case the worst happens, to save their lives and those of their families, their homes and their assets.

I also acknowledge Mr Steve Angel. Mr Steve Angel lost his house in 2007, and rebuilt it. He nearly lost his son in 2007. He was exceptionally lucky in a horrific situation in which to find a loved family member. This year he has volunteered to be the public face of our “Are You Bushfire Ready?” campaign and tell his story. He has done it a number of times, and he will continue to do it. It is a wonderful act of self-sacrifice to go out there and front the media, which is not always easy for members of the public, to tell a very compelling story about why people should take those measures to make their property as bushfire ready as possible. I want to acknowledge the act of generosity of Mr Steve Angel.

We are doing a lot to try to get ready. I said from the outset that we will do what we can before the bushfire season starts to make as many practical differences as possible. I will not go into the detail, but part of that is the automatic vehicle location rollout that we are trying to get done before the end of the year. This week is also obviously the anniversary of the Esperance fires, which tragically claimed four lives, including a local farmer, Kym “Freddy” Curnow, as the member for Eyre is aware. Obviously, during a harvest season, with a large dry wheat crop, it was exceptionally combustible in catastrophic fire conditions. That is why we have had, for a number of weeks now, two fast-attack water bombers pre-deployed in Esperance during the harvest season, just in case something happens again, so we can try to get on top of it as quickly as possible. We have also pre-formed incident management teams that we can fly around the state, which was one of the key recommendations to come out of Mr Ferguson’s report.

We are trying to get on and do as many things as we can right now that will make a practical difference. Most importantly, as question time started I got a text message from one of my neighbours in Oakford that there was a fire about a kilometre away from our house. To find out what is happening with the fire, the easiest thing is to go straight to the new emergency.wa.gov.au website. Anyone can look at it right now, and it will give the latest, greatest information in real time. I have always pointed out that when we start releasing information quickly, it may be at the risk of accuracy. When we start to try to make it accurate, it will be at the risk of timeliness. It is very difficult to get that compromise right. The emergency.wa.gov.au website will get information out there as quickly as possible. Effectively, it will geotag anyone, anywhere in the state; it will have a person’s GPS location and that will allow people to see what incidents, fires or emergencies are occurring around them—whether it is prescribed burning or a real incident, what level the incident is, whether it is a watch and act or a bushfire advice. It will allow people to have that information as quickly and as timely as possible. I encourage all members to try to spread the word. When they are asked and need to tell people what is happening, the best information I, as minister, and the commissioner can give them will be reflected as quickly as possible on the emergency.wa.gov.au website.