

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT KARRATHA
TUESDAY, 8 AUGUST 2006**

SESSION FIVE

Members

**Ms K. Hodson-Thomas (Acting Chairman)
Mr S.R. Hill**

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)
Mr M.J. Cowper (Deputy Chairman)
Mrs J. Hughes**

Hearing commenced at 1.33 pm

WERTS, MR MICHAEL GERARD

Emergency Response Manager, Woodside Energy Ltd, examined:

ZAZA, MR GINO

**Emergency Response Coordinator, Woodside Energy Ltd,
Karratha Gas Plant, examined:**

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Welcome. We are a committee of five members, and three of our other members are unfortunately unable to be here. Hansard will be transcribing your evidence today. The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes attached to it?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: We are not here to change legislation that would impact on industry. We would like to gain your thoughts. Our primary focus is on FESA and hopefully you will be able to assist us today with the questions that we have prepared here. The first question is that FESA recommends the following: in documents accompanying its submission to this inquiry, provision is to be made to enable privately owned industry and the department to enter into an agreement to establish an emergency services unit. The department is to be empowered to approve and cancel the approval of the emergency services unit. The relevant industry and the department are to negotiate the terms and conditions related to the establishment and operations of the emergency services unit. If the industry and the department do not agree to the terms and conditions, an emergency services unit is not to be established. The committee is aware that this is about equity of service provision in those areas that are not serviced by state or local government fire units. Is there any comment you would like to make in relation to the above?

Mr Werts: Specifically, I would say that FESA and Woodside, in particular the Karratha gas plant, work very closely together. You will notice that my colleague sitting next to me is wearing a FESA shirt.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Yes, I did notice.

Mr Werts: Gino is a secondee from FESA who has been with the Karratha gas plant for 18 months fulfilling the role of emergency response coordinator for the Karratha gas plant. This has given us extremely good working relationships with FESA and an understanding of course of FESA's work methodology. It has given FESA, through Mr Zaza, an understanding of Woodside's work methodology and our emergency response capabilities. I would fully support, as would Woodside, any enhancements that we already have on the current relationship with FESA in any format.

Mr S.R. HILL: What are the likely emergency hazards created by your business and the levels of preparedness you have engaged to encounter or address the level of risk?

Mr Zaza: First, the Karratha gas plant is considered a major hazard facility; therefore, it is required to respond to those risks and threats through a safety case so that we can get our operating licence. We also abide by the requirements of the code of practice for major hazard facilities for the Australian Safety and Compensation Council in accordance with the guidelines for operating a major hazard facility. The next layer down is a requirement to build a set of emergency response plans to deal with those risks and hazard on our site and to build a response capability from an emergency response point of view and also from an emergency management point of view. Given the location of the gas plant and its relationship with the community, we are compelled to put in place emergency plans for the interoperability of mutual aid response to the site.

Mr S.R. HILL: Does that include interaction with the Shire of Roebourne? Does it have any input into that planning?

Mr Zaza: Yes, we have interaction with the Shire of Roebourne through the local emergency management committee and then directly with the emergency agencies themselves - that is, FESA from a fire services point of view and the State Emergency Service.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: What about the volunteers?

Mr Zaza: Volunteers are pro-actively engaged. We consider them a support agency to support our endeavours during an emergency. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to ensure we educate the volunteers in the operations of the plant, the threats, the risks and the methodology we have introduced for an emergency response if we are required to call upon them for their services.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: We have heard that they feel they are out of their depth if you were really relying on them. How do we improve that?

[1.40 pm]

Mr Zaza: The difficulty with educating the volunteers is that they had a normal work environment in which to conduct themselves and their family. For us to engage them at the level to deal with the risk that we would encounter on site, we would probably engage them over and beyond their capacity. We work on the basis that if we require them to respond on site, we will integrate them with our emergency responders on site. We would match them up with people who were qualified to be able to supervise them in that risk environment so that they would not be working in isolation or without knowledge of what they were engaged in.

Mr S.R. HILL: Do they have training with volunteers outside of the site location? Do they come together at any stage?

Mr Zaza: Until recently, until they got out to the site, there had not been a great deal of integration, and we worked systematically towards improving that. We have done that on a couple of forums. We have invited them out on site to give them a site understanding and introduce them to the crews and their responders. We are just trying to get a relationship developing now within the capacity of volunteers. The volunteers up here run a fairly tight schedule. They are required to do all things in the community. To buy into their time is fairly difficult, although they have been very, very supportive. The intent is to systematically build on that relationship so they get to the point where they have the level of skills to be able to deal with the operating environments out there. We have a secondary group of responders on site that we are trying to integrate into the community as well as have the community responders or the FESA responders - volunteers - become an integrated group within our on-site response group. They are a supplementary response group outside of the main emergency responders on site, if that makes any sense.

Mr S.R. HILL: So if a cyclone came in and they were required to support the local SES, they could do that but you would keep the main team on site?

Mr Zaza: Absolutely. We are trying to be proactive and contribute back into the community from a Woodside plant point of view. We draw responders from the non-operational sector of our site contingency. We have our mainstay there, the key critical people who run the plant during the 24-hour operation of the plant. We have a group of people. We school them up to the same level but we use them as our contingency for mutual aid to the community. If we did have a major bushfire that was threatening a community, we would mobilise this group of 12 people to assist the local volunteers. Then we just get an integrated relationship developing there so that if the external responders are ever required to respond on site, they have familiarity, confidence and a level of knowledge of the people whom they are involved with.

Mr S.R. HILL: They need to be congratulated. That is quite unique.

Mr Werts: We would seek to continue to enhance that relationship because Karratha is a major part of Woodside's operations on the North West Shelf and Woodside is a major part of Karratha on the North West Shelf. It is of mutual benefit.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: For the benefit of those of us who do not know, what requirement do you have under the legislation for emergencies?

Mr Werts: Under federal legislation, we have to prepare a safety case whenever we are entering into a venture. That lists the major risks and hazards of the operation. Based on those risks and hazards, we establish our emergency response plans to mitigate those risks. We also have environmental legislation, which I am no expert in. We have a general manager, environment, who looks after all of that. We have to meet certain environmental legislation, both state and federal.

Mr S.R. HILL: FESA has legislative responsibility for a number of hazards across the state. These services are provided by a number of career and volunteer units across the state, excluding the metropolitan area. FESA has the capacity to service general community risk of structure, storm and flood damage, bushfire, road crashes and general rescue. In the state's remaining areas, FESA's capacity is reliant on the industry to reduce the risks and hazards to an acceptable level. It has been argued, however, that many districts still have a reliance on FESA services responding to emergency incidents. Would you like to comment on that aspect? I suppose this is a little different. We were told by Pilbara Iron that a lot of the incidents involved vehicle accidents, with rollovers and things like that. I do not know whether that is of a similar concern to Woodside with some of the incidents that it has on its leases.

Mr Werts: We certainly have concerns about vehicle accidents - anything that places our staff or the community at risk. We have undertaken a number of steps to lessen those risks with the production and distribution of golden safety rules that cover such things as digging holes and driving vehicles etc. We require Woodside staff to adhere to those golden safety rules. They are not negotiable. Whilst it does not remove the risk of vehicle accidents and other such incidents, we hope that it provides our staff with some defence through the minimisation of them.

With regards to the FESA response for industry, as you would have seen yesterday when you toured the gas plant, we have our own emergency response capability within the plant. We have fire tenders, we have ambulance, we have trained first aid staff etc, should there be an event on the gas plant requiring an emergency response. It is a big gas plant, though, as you saw. We are only staffed and resourced to be able to handle an incident up to a certain level. Beyond that, we would expect and we would require assistance from and engagement with the emergency services within Western Australia. I have no doubt that we would receive that engagement because of the relationship that we have with the emergency services. I would like the committee to understand that we will respond in the first instance to anything that happens on the Karratha gas plant. In fact, we will respond in the first instance to anything that happens at any Woodside facility with the trained and competent staff that we have to be able to address that to a certain level. If it is too big for our local resources, we will seek assistance from fire and emergency services to help.

I would also like to flag for the committee that what you saw at the Karratha gas plant yesterday, as big and impressive as it is, is only the start. There is, as you may be aware, considerable development and expansion planned. In the next six to eight years, we expect to see the Karratha gas plant replicated in this area, probably about three times the size that it currently is.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Instead of just five trains, you will end up having somewhere in the vicinity of 15.

Mr Werts: I am not certain about the number of trains. I just know that they are looking at building another Karratha gas plant, but even bigger, in the vicinity of the North West Shelf. That will raise our requirement to increase and improve our own integral response emergency capabilities, but it will also levy a larger requirement on the community and the Western Australian fire and emergency services and other emergency services should something occur, simply by the volume and size.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: You have actually answered this question but I will pose it anyway - you may like to add something to it. FESA contributes significantly to industry emergency response planning through the conception, commissioning and operation phases. This includes partnership arrangements, formal agreements, staff secondments, which you have, and technical advice to industry. You have obviously received significant support from FESA. Would you like to add anything further to that?

Mr Werts: I would like to add that the support that we have received to date has been very much appreciated and acknowledged by Woodside. As I said earlier, I would like to see that support and that relationship not only continued but improved and increased where and as possible.

Mr Zaza: I think this secondment opportunity has been beneficial for both organisations; certainly it has been beneficial for Woodside's continuing business improvement. Up to the point at which I went to Woodside, it had a fairly light-weight understanding of what emergency response contingencies were available outside its gates. It was very proactive internally. However, the type of emergencies that may emanate from a major process failure out there may require the use of external agencies. It was important that we build an integrated relationship or a proposition in which integration was easily achieved. We had a high level of interoperability. From a FESA point of view, the benefits will return to FESA. I have a fairly high level of insight into the mechanics of an oil and gas facility. I was told during conversations with colleagues in the eastern states that they are looking at this quite ardently to see whether it is successful as a standardised model, because traditionally when emergency services respond to a major facility it becomes a bit of a turf war or a battle of egos somewhat about who will take control. I generally tend to work on the basis of integration. We have to integrate because we do not have the level of technical expertise to deal with that. We need the people out there and, similarly, they need the manpower that is available through state-provided emergency services, whether they are local volunteers or in those in career situations.

Mr S.R. HILL: Some people who have appeared before the committee have expressed concern about the level of training they receive, particularly the volunteers. This relates to the ports. Concern has been raised in relation to the reliance on volunteers in confined-space rescues. Obviously this is more suited to you. Do you think that is a valid claim?

Mr Zaza: Absolutely. I guess volunteers have been asked to step up from the traditional role of volunteers, which was a fairly rudimentary urban-type firefighting and rescue response, to a pretty high-level technical response. Sometimes it goes back to what I said earlier about impacting the volunteers beyond their capacity to have a recreational life after their work life. I am very cognizant of that. I will provide the level of exposure that is amenable to their lifestyle and the other activities that they are required to undertake. It is trying to find a balance between the two. Yes, we could skill them up to an extremely high level. However, that would involve some cost,

and whether that is an industry or state government cost is not for me to say. We can skill them up to that level. However, at what point do we stop because we have exceeded their capacity?

Mr S.R. HILL: You skill them up and then they look at becoming skilled fire people.

Mr Zaza: That is right.

Mr Werts: I think it can also come at a cost to the volunteers. There has to be a work-life volunteer commitment balance for the individuals. To skill them to the level that is being discussed here would virtually involve a second full-time job for those individuals. The State Emergency Service and other volunteer organisations that provide this service to the community do so out of the goodness of their hearts and from a commitment to their fellow residents and the people in the community. We cannot afford to push them to a point within their training at which they no longer wish to do the training because it is taking them away from their family life etc. I suppose that is the critical balance. Fortunately, you guys are the ones who have to decide what the critical balance is and I do not. It is never an easy thing. I was present during the Canberra fires and I saw what the volunteers did. Many of them stepped up beyond their level of capability and training to save the residents' lives and properties. I suppose it is part of the Australian ethos to help out a mate. However, the government - whether it is the local, state or federal government - cannot afford to put people in situations in which doing something out of the goodness of their hearts means risking their own lives. It is a very fine balance and a difficult situation. That must be acknowledged.

Mr Zaza: It is important that Woodside acknowledge the contribution made by volunteers and that we make the entry into that site as safe and supportive as we possibly can. Again, that is why I will not push the relationship much beyond what it is. We will take it step by step. We will integrate them slowly so that it feels seamless but there will be major gains. Major gains have been achieved by allowing them through the front gate and allowing them to integrate with some of the people and response groups on site. We will take it step by step. We will never engage them beyond their capacity. It is Woodside's responsibility to deal with its own threats on site and its own emergencies. However, from time to time it may need support.

Mr S.R. HILL: As the industry develops on the coast the government has to decide whether to put career firefighters in Karratha to complement that industry's needs.

Mr Zaza: Absolutely. At some stage it will reach a point at which it is beyond the capacity. I also see that as being an expert level group response as opposed to an urban-type response.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Do you have any arrangements in place with other industries in relation to emergency response and shared training etc?

Mr Zaza: I think we have been proactive. Certainly from my point of view, I have pushed the issue of mutual aid arrangements. I think you have spoken to FESA and know about the Burrup industries emergency management committee. We are committed to that whole process. It is important for Woodside to participate in that. I would like to see other industries step up and make a commitment as far as mutual aid is concerned. It is essential. We have indicated quite clearly what resources we would happily provide to its site. We need a reciprocal arrangement, because at this point in time that will lessen the burden on the community, particularly with some of the equipment components that are endemic to those industry-type environments which the community does not provide and should not have to provide. The risk belongs to the industry, not the community.

Mr S.R. HILL: How would we achieve that?

Mr Zaza: It is difficult.

Mr S.R. HILL: Do we legislate? Should FESA set up an overall structure that fulfils the needs of this part of the state?

Mr Zaza: I think we should keep going down the path that we are going down through the Burrup industries and emergency management committee. If industries are proactive and demonstrate a way, I think the rest will follow. It is a timely process. We expected it to happen fairly quickly, but it lagged for an extraordinary period of time. I probably would not be the best person to ask about legislation because I have two interests.

Mr Werts: I would prefer the government to not legislate in this arena because there is a commitment by industry. After talking with my equivalents in other companies, both oil and gas, and the broader industry community, there is a commitment to foster and assist learning and training and development. There is a sharing of ideas. We are cognizant of the fact that if something goes wrong, if there is an emergency, then it is something that affects everyone in the industry and the community. It is in everybody's interest to be of a like mind and to share training ideas. I see a role for FESA in facilitating that. It has acknowledged expertise. It can call the meetings and share the ideas etc. Rather than doing it on a localised and goodwill basis, it could be done on more of a structured basis. I would support that. If we legislate in this arena, I fear that we will add a dynamic to the goodwill and intentions that may be counterproductive in some instances.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Warren Fish was not able to tell us how many appliances you have on site. Can you provide a general overview of what is out there?

Mr Zaza: We have two designated industrial firefighting fire tenders. However, they are not traditional firefighting trucks as such. They are specifically designed for the hydrocarbon threat on site. They are more of a foam firefighting tender. They are ideal when there is an emergency at a tank farm. I refer, for example, to the tank farm at the Dampier port. Our contingency allows for them to be released from the site so that they can be deployed. They are an ideal purpose-built vehicle for that type of environment. We also have bush fire fighting vehicles on site. In the early days we had a bushfire threat as a result of some coking on a flare stack. They used to fly off into the bush. We have rectified that through engineering controls. We have decided to keep those vehicles for the sole purpose of deploying them into the community. We have two fire tenders for bush fire fighting - a slip-on trailer and a light tanker or a four-wheel drive. That is part of that equipment that will be released into the community if the community needs us to respond. Apart from that we have a few other small apparatus units that are specific to that site and could not be used in a community environment. Some could be used in an industrial environment depending on the nature of the incident.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are there any other matters you wish to raise before the committee hearing today?

Mr Werts: Specifically I wanted to make the point about future developments that are planned for this area and ask the committee and the Parliament to be cognizant of those and the expectations that Woodside can handle incidents only up to certain level and that beyond that we would need help and assistance. I also reiterate that Mr Zaza's comments have been delivered in his capacity as emergency response coordinator for the Karratha gas plant and not as a member of FESA. I certainly appreciate his expertise and support.

The ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your contribution to the committee's inquiry. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of typographical errors or errors of transcription or fact. New material cannot be introduced and the sense of the evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points you should submit a supplementary submission for the committee's hearing. If the transcript is not returned within 10 days of receipt, it will be deemed to be correct. Thank you for the opportunity to see the gas plant yesterday.

Mr Werts: Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence.

Mr Zaza: Thank you very much.

Hearing concluded at 2.02 pm
