

# **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE**

## **INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN  
AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 16 AUGUST 2006**

### **Members**

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)  
Mr M.J. Cowper (Deputy Chairman)  
Mr S.R. Hill  
Ms K. Hodson-Thomas  
Mrs J. Hughes**

**Hearing commenced at 9.53 am**

**FITZGERALD, MS KERRY JANE**

**President, Fremantle Volunteer Sea Rescue Group, examined:**

**GRAHAM, MR MICHAEL JOHN**

**President, Cockburn Volunteer Sea Search and Rescue, examined:**

**HOWELL, MR ROGER**

**Group Liaison Officer, Whitfords Volunteer Sea Rescue Group, examined:**

**PISANI, MR FRANK**

**Fremantle Volunteer Sea Rescue Group, examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you for coming in this morning. I have some information to read to you and there are a number of questions. I ask each of you to answer individually and verbally so that Hansard can report it. I will go through what I have to read and at the appropriate point I will ask you individual questions. 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 a contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

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

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

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

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have only just received your submission; we have not yet had a chance to go through it. We have been travelling around the state. You have a copy of our terms of reference. Your submission should relate to that, I hope. I will now give you an opportunity to make opening comments.

**Mr Howell:** Realising the importance of this committee hearing, we did not wish to simply work from memory or off the cuff, so we have prepared a systematic and chronological address, taking into account the things that this committee is looking into. We also make comment on other evidence that has been received which we feel is inadequate, insufficient or incorrect. We are also including some documents in support of our address. We have distributed to the committee a copy of what I would like to speak about, together with a document that we have called the "Dossier of Evidence". The address will refer to sections of the dossier that are relevant to the topic being discussed at the time. If the committee wishes to ask questions throughout the address, we are quite happy with that. If the committee would rather wait until we have finished and then ask questions, we would also be happy with that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think you can just head off on this.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Yes, that is great. This is a wonderful amount of information; thank you for that.

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**Mr Howell:** The three groups here today - the Fremantle, Whitfords and Cockburn Volunteer Sea Rescue Groups - have a lot in common. I have been asked to address the committee on common matters, and each of the separate groups would like to make comments about their specific groups. On matters common to all three groups, I am also speaking on behalf of a fourth group known as the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group. This group is actually an alliance of the three groups here today. The Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group was born out of an issue between the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and the three groups. The upshot of the dispute was an agreement between the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group and the government, which we refer to as the FESA service agreement. I refer the committee to page 11 of the dossier, which contains a copy of that agreement. This is an agreement that effectively contracts the three groups and government to provide a sea search and rescue service in the areas in which the three groups have traditionally operated. The area contracted to the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group extends from the grain terminal at the southern end of Cockburn Sound to the Alkimos wreck, south of Yanchep. It also extends to the rivers, to Rottnest Island and the surrounding islands. On the next page we have included an aerial photograph of the coastal waters for which the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group has been designated responsibility for first response to sea rescue incidents. Over the past 12 months we have conducted over 712 rescues in this area. We have an area of responsibility contracted to us by government of approximately 4 500 square kilometres of water. Collectively, we own eight dedicated sea rescue vessels. We take approximately 30 000 marine radio transmissions every year and we provide the service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We have been doing that for more than 35 years.

FESA, as we all know, is the government agency responsible for ensuring that all emergency services are in a high state of readiness - not only sea rescue. We have looked at transcripts of some of the material that has been provided to this committee, and we noticed a comment made on 19 November 2005. On page 55 of the dossier, there is a comment made by Mr Mitchell in reply to a question asked of him by Mr Omodei and we would like to quickly speak about that. Mr Omodei said to Mr Mitchell,

“From the point of view of running an emergency services organisation in the state, they should come under the one umbrella. It is all about somebody having enough courage to tell them that.”

In our view, the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group is just like any other government contractor. One has only to drive down the Kwinana Freeway to see the work being undertaken on the railway line. There is no suggestion that the Leighton construction company, which is building part of the railway, or any other contractor on the project should be made part of some government department. The suggestion that the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group and these three groups should in some way be made part of FESA is, in our opinion, unnecessary, serves no purpose, and ignores the relationship that governments of all persuasions have had and will continue to have with non-government organisations and entities. Public transport is a government function. The government relies on private contractors to perform tasks to government specifications. There is a distinction to be made between the services provided by sea rescue and railway construction. However, that is a superficial distinction. They are both non-government entities and provide services, albeit different services - rescue and railway construction - but both entities conform to the specifications of government.

People have asked us many times why we do not come under FESA. In answering that question I would like to elaborate a little further. The transcript I wish to address now is on page 60 of the dossier. There was an interview on 12 April 2006 in which evidence was given by Mr Keith Shadbolt, the President of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association. He was talking about the emergency services levy, and in so doing he touched on the very pulse of volunteering. He stated -

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From the association's perspective, there are some positives and negatives about the ESL. We are very fortunate that all our groups are autonomous, independent and self-constituted, and they hold that status very close to their hearts.

[10.05 am]

In essence, the reason we choose not to join the other 33 groups under FESA is to be found in that statement, recognised by Mr Shadbolt, whom this committee recognised as a person speaking on behalf of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of WA. He speaks with some authority. That association has 33 sea rescue groups as its members. In his statement, Mr Shadbolt tells you a bit about what volunteering is all about. We do not share Mr Shadbolt's perception about independence. Mr Shadbolt has the view that the 33 groups under FESA that he represents are autonomous and independent under FESA. We take a different view about that. We say that coming under FESA would require us to unnecessarily give up some of our autonomy and independence. That is our view and we have reasons for that, which we will go into a little later. Essentially the reason we do not wish to come under FESA is that we share the same sentiments that Mr Shadbolt conveyed to you on behalf of all the other sea rescue groups. The one thing that all sea rescue services in this state have in common is the desire to be autonomous and independent. Where we differ from Mr Shadbolt is whether that can be achieved by coming under the FESA model. It is all just a difference in perception. It also involves a question of our needs, which differ from the needs of Mr Shadbolt's members, many of whom are small, isolated regional groups that need a much higher level of assistance and financial and operational support than we do.

Ever since Captain Stirling first stepped foot on what became the Swan River Colony, the government has used private contractors to provide services to government specifications. We make the point that the FESA service agreement is a contract similar in manner. That has been awarded to the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group. It is difficult to envisage that concept being dispensed with. It is simply not necessary, as the committee member said, that we should be brought into the fold. To understand the differences between those who are under the FESA act and us, it is necessary to understand the differences in what we do. Because we are involved in the metropolitan waterways, we see an extremely high level of activity - we have always seen a high level of activity. On the latest figures, metropolitan sea rescue effects approximately 65 per cent of all the volunteer sea search and rescue operations in Western Australia. That is to say, these three groups do more than double the work of the 33 other groups combined. We have learned a lot because we have had a lot of learning opportunities.

In the dossier between pages 18 to 33 we have taken the liberty of listing every sea search and rescue job performed by these three groups to the 12 months ending 14 November 2005. You will see from those documents the detail that we go into in our administration. That is just one year and just in the metropolitan area, of course. We acknowledge that these small FESA groups have to be nurtured. We acknowledge that there may be difficulties in some cases in maintaining interest in membership. We acknowledge that in some places there may be difficulties in raising the funds to support these sea rescue groups, and that is where FESA has a role to play. FESA's function is to ensure that volunteer sea rescue services under the administration of FESA are resource ready and are efficiently administered. There is reference in these transcripts of evidence given to you by many others. The expression of being "under FESA" has been used a number of times by members when asking questions. FESA's task is to ensure that the groups under its control are efficiently administered and are resource ready. By resource ready I mean this: in the way in which the system operates in this state there are three distinct arms. The first arm is FESA, which has responsibility for administration and to ensure that there are adequate resources for sea rescue at strategic locations around the state and that those resources are in a state of readiness to respond to an emergency. That is FESA's role. The second agency is the WA Police. The WA Police is the hazard management authority. That means that when an emergency or an incident is reported to the police, they have the responsibility for calling out a response team, and they draw on the resources

that have been put into a state of readiness by FESA. That is an appropriate model and it is the model that has been with us for many years. That is not to say there are not any hiccups, but it is a tried and tested model. Its strength lies in the fact that the police force has members on the ground in every significant town in the state and its members can get to anywhere in the state very quickly. They have extensive powers that are not just limited to emergency. They probably have the most efficient communication system in this state and close to saturation coverage on the ground. Traditionally they are a disciplined body. Therefore, it is our view that the WA Police is the most appropriate authority to manage hazards. The police do that by calling upon the resources put into the state of readiness by FESA.

If there is a boating accident offshore at Walpole, for example, the police hazard management authority would quickly take stock of that situation and see what resources are available to it. They would expect to call on the volunteer sea rescue group in Walpole, aware that it is the function of FESA to ensure that there is a group there, that there is an adequate level of training and that the group is adequately equipped to do the job. The police, as the hazard management authority, would call the Walpole sea rescue, which would do the job it was trained to do. It is not a question of "coming under FESA". There is a partnership between FESA, which has a separate and distinct function, the hazard management authority and the metro members. That third aspect is the metropolitan sea rescue, which provides resources to the HMA for operational matters but which maintains administration and management systems. We take the view that it is inappropriate to look at the sea rescue service in this state on the basis that there is some competition between police and FESA, or that there should be some choice about coming under the police or coming under FESA, or indeed, that there ever was. The opinion I refer to now from Mr Shadbolt, yet again, is on page 61 of the dossier. Mrs Hughes asked this question -

Do liability issues for risks and responsibility for what happens on a particular rescue fall to the VMRS, or does it go to the police?

There were a couple of interchanges of vocabulary and then Mr Shadbolt replied -

It is an interesting structure, because there is a dual role of considering who is the hazard management authority in marine rescue. It is a combination, because when an emergency is declared, the water police issue a job number to the particular group that will conduct the response.

The police have always acted as the hazard management authority and the sea rescue groups have always been independent but supported by some government funding. FESA came along to add a new level of professionalism and equipment and assistance where needed. That is where FESA is needed. FESA is responsible for seeing that there is a state of rescue readiness in the groups that are administered by FESA, and FESA achieves that by appropriately administering what is available. That may mean provision of boats to some groups and partial funding of boats to other groups. That is their job readiness. The hazard management authority is the coordinator of the resources. An example of the way in which the HMA coordinates the resources is this.

[10.15 am]

Let us say, for example, that there was a marine accident and, as a result of that accident, a person needed to get to hospital very quickly. The HMA may send out a sea rescue vessel to recover that person from the water. Having completed that, the HMA then has to decide how to get that person to hospital quickly. The HMA has to make that decision. Those of you who attended the launch of metro sea rescue a couple of years ago would have seen the RAC rescue helicopter. It was participating in a presentation with the sea rescue groups. That is because the helicopter is a resource under the HMA that is sometimes used for sea rescue. It is not the responsibility of the HMA to have to be concerned that there are resources on the ground. That task has been assigned by government to FESA. It is the HMA's function to respond to a specific situation and draw upon whatever resources are available to achieve the best response. The police are very experienced in

undertaking that role. We offered our services to FESA, and FESA accepted that offer. We can say this: since the introduction of the metropolitan sea rescue and the introduction of the FESA service agreement, we have invited FESA to assist us to improve our service to the community should it see a need. We are very pleased to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that FESA has not made a single suggestion as to how it wants us to change. We believe that FESA interprets that as complete satisfaction with the level of service we provide.

If you look at page 34 of the dossier of material I have sent you, you will see a letter on FESA letterhead from Mr Philip Marshall. Philip Marshall is the executive director of SES and volunteer marine rescue services at FESA. In the last paragraph the letter states -

**The Service Level Agreement appears to be working well for all parties.**

Members of the committee, we say this: if you have any concerns about the way in which FESA satisfies itself about the adequacy of the services we provide, whether they are provided by us or by the other sea rescue groups, we would say that those concerns need to be addressed to FESA. To the extent that we are asked to modify the way in which we do things or to emphasise certain aspects of our training, we will only be too pleased to cooperate with that request in a practical and sensible manner. Be assured that we work with FESA administration and the HMA in preparing ourselves to deliver the level of service that is required and the level of efficiency that is required. The absence of a request or even a suggestion that improvement or advancement of efficiency is needed we take as an indication that we are more than adequately meeting the needs. That is reinforced anecdotally by comments made by the water police from time to time regarding the performance by various members of the metro group. I think you will find that the water police find us efficient, cooperative, well trained and well equipped. Questions about the adequacy of what we do and how we do it are best answered by FESA and the HMA.

We draw your attention to page 55 of the dossier. A question was asked of Mr Bob Mitchell by Mr Omodei. He asked whether it was proposed that they be compelled to come under the umbrella. Mr Mitchell replied -

Absolutely not. It is their choice, as it is the choice with any of the volunteer marine rescue units. They have the option to opt in and opt out. I am not frightened by that. In actual fact I think one day the whole volunteer marine rescue group will be back and well coordinated again. At this time three groups do not like the model. That is fine. We built the legislation to allow that to occur. It is functioning. The other 33, I might add, would not have it any other way.

We have been through the formation of metro sea rescue and the FESA service agreement. We have been through the distinction between FESA's administrative role and its resource ready role, and made the distinction between that and the hazard management authority. We do not see any point in FESA operating in a parallel function to the police in the hazard management role. It seems likely to cause confusion and uncertainty in the operations room of the hazard management authority during an incident. What FESA offers to the other sea groups is the king's shilling. Many of the other groups, it is fair to say, were under-resourced in terms of equipment. One of the very good things that has emerged from the FESA Act is that FESA quickly saw to an upgrading of equipment for some of those groups that needed upgrading. Having said that, we do not necessarily agree that in all cases the appropriate decision was made. For instance, some very big boats were made available. One has to question that we really do need big boats. We understand that, in dealing with volunteers, FESA may have to strike a compromise between the expectation of the volunteers and their own view about the most efficient vessel and that a compromise needs to be struck in order to maintain the enthusiasm in support of volunteers. We are not here to be critical of that aspect of FESA's operation. The experience we have accumulated in the waters in which we operate is that the type of rescues we cover can be done by boats smaller than some other groups consider is the case in their situation. At the end of the day, it is probably a matter of judgment

based on the different applications. If you want us to elaborate and tell you why we think some resources are inappropriate, we are happy to do so. We repeat: the provision of resources for volunteer groups may involve considerations that transcend just the narrow issue and may go to amending members' expectations in order to encourage participation and make a contribution to sea rescue than just the question of the size of the boat.

To justify our stand in taking a different view of what independence means we look at the others and see what they have in common is limited activity and they are in remote and regional areas. Because they have limited activities does not mean that they should not have government support or a high level of support because the task of FESA is to see that country areas have cover. One could say that it is harder to encourage volunteers where there is limited activity. It is easy for us to encourage new members to volunteer because of the high level of activity and media exposure. Some of the regional centres have special needs, in relation to not only equipment but also support for their recruiting efforts. We do not have a problem with that, generally speaking. They are often remote and regional, and that has implications for their capacity to raise funds outside government funding. They may need quite personalised and specific assistance to deal with that. For those reasons they need support to become operational. That is what FESA does for them. That is why they have chosen to come under the administration of FESA - they want to receive what government offers them through membership of FESA. There are some large groups under the administration of FESA that have the choice to opt in, if that is appropriate to them, just as we had the choice to opt out. We do not criticise that situation. For some of these larger groups, there is a high level of activity and a large boating population in the area of operation from which they could draw funds. We wonder whether it is really necessary to draw on the resources of FESA, but they have chosen to do so. We have chosen not to do so. That is our decision. Our decision makes more resources available to assist groups in remote and regional areas.

It needs to be understood that the 33 groups account for 35 per cent of the state's activities. Although numerically it does not sound a lot, and although their contribution in a state of readiness without being called for long periods of time is commendable and important, it needs to be stated that they account for 35 per cent, and the metro groups do the rest.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Yes, but they account for 95 per cent of the coverage.

**Mr Howell:** Correct.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** In fact, it is 97 per cent of the coverage -

**Mr Howell:** - of the state. That is wonderful because that is FESA's role: to make sure there was that coverage there. What we say is that we do not need administration support from FESA. In fact, we do not want it. We do not need it. That means there is a greater availability of FESA resources to be directed towards the groups that need it. Because of that volume of boating, we three groups have a different approach to sea rescue. We are out on the water and we anticipate, from years of experience, where accidents are most likely to occur. For example, at Rottneest Island on a very calm day on a high tide, we position our vessels near to a very shallow reef. We know that because on a low tide the surface of the water will reveal where the reef is but on a high tide it does not and people hit the reef. We position ourselves accordingly. All of this is based on experience. All three metro groups have local area knowledge and each deploys its vessels strategically. We combine that with offering assistance on marine safety. When our vessels go into a harbour or mooring area, it is common for people to call us over and ask questions. We leave no stone unturned to push the boating safety message and to offer safety advice. We have been doing this for many years. Because we are out on the water anticipating the conditions of the day, we can provide extremely rapid response. Many of the other groups with much lower levels of activity, of course, cannot justify being on the water all the time. What is an adequate state of readiness in our view may be excessive and unnecessary in other areas. It may be sufficient for them to have a vessel penned and a crew ready to man the vessel at short notice. In other locations, it may be

sufficient to have a vessel on a trailer somewhere. The required state of readiness depends upon the location, the level of boating activity, the time of the year and, of course, the sea conditions. We have the highest level of readiness. It is appropriate to the area in which we operate. We would not expect Walpole sea rescue to operate on the same basis. It is just not necessary. Our crews are trained in other areas. Our vessels carry trained divers and trained paramedics. These people are trained by professionals to a professional standard. To demonstrate the level of training that we insist upon, St John Ambulance has appointed these three groups as part of its first responder program. That is why we make the point that the nature of response is determined by the location and the level of boating activity and sea conditions. It is not appropriate for some groups, which would certainly not have the members, to give up their time every weekend to patrol because they have other things to do. We are fortunate to have that capacity and we use it to achieve an objective that is a universal objective that is recognised internationally for all rescue elements. That is the reduction of response time. If you were to ask the police commissioner why he has cars patrolling the metropolitan area, he would tell you that it is to reduce response times in emergencies. That is what we do. We do it so that the HMA can have the fastest response in the circumstances. We do not think that detracts from individuals accepting responsibility for their conduct out on the water. We are able to provide a rapid response. We are able to engage members of the public and to deliver the sea safety message because we are working together with government to promote a safer community. We noticed that Mr Shadbolt did not agree with that. We would like to draw your attention to page 63 of the dossier. Mr Shadbolt made a comment concerning the rescue state of readiness. He said -

I agree that there is a perception in the community that recreational boat users can go to sea and that someone will rescue them no matter what happens to them. We do not like to promote that perception. Most of our groups have a training aspect to them and the association is strongly recommending that the new initiative of the DPI, the recreational skippers' ticket, be implemented.

[10.30 am]

We have been very heavily involved in support of that. The minister requested that I give a talk at the launch of that initiative. There must be more of a push to educate the public that our services are to be used in the event of an emergency; we are not there to respond willy-nilly to every call. The public could be better educated on that matter.

Mr Chairman, we think that people are entitled to know that their government is providing for them the most efficient possible response in any emergency situation they may get themselves into. We think that where it is appropriate that there be a fast response, that fast response should be provided. We do not understand the benefit of that message not being conveyed to members of the boating community to reassure them that their welfare is important to government and to those who deliver services on behalf of the government. If there is an argument to the contrary, we would love to have the details; but we see no benefit at all in not responding as quickly as possible and in not having a public that is conscious of that. Sea rescue is not here to rescue ocean liners. In most areas where there are 30-metre private vessels, there are similar-size private vessels or commercial boats, and they form part of the resource. Therefore, if a vessel is too large for a sea rescue vessel to tow, you get in one of these other vessels. The Volunteer Marine Rescue Association represents one point of view, and it is putting that point of view in support of large vessels. We say the smaller efficient vessel will handle, in our experience, 99 per cent of the rescues that we should focus on; and the one per cent of rescues that are outside that, the HMA will call in the Navy if it has to.

Mr Chairman, these three groups have some specific issues that we would like to deal with. The first is our relationship with the major political parties. We are very pleased to say that the political response to sea rescue has always been one of a bipartisan approach and a willingness on the part of



all parties to consult and listen. We are confident that a bipartisan and consultative approach will continue. Secondly, one could put a very strong case for arguing that the government component of the funding should be based on the service performed; that is, the number of rescues. A different model might be based on the number of hours on the water. There are a number of models which would see government funding allocated on the basis of activity, however activity is to be measured. Historically the allocation of government funds has been based on those types of considerations. Before FESA, government money was administered or distributed through the two associations. The three metropolitan groups have always been a poor relation in that respect; and that, of course, has had the beneficiary effect of causing us to be conscious of things such as fuel consumption. They have seen us develop methods of augmenting government funding; we run raffles, we receive donations. You may be aware that Channel Nine is one of the sponsors of these three groups. We are content with that model, as long as we are able to raise funds in the way in which our experience has led us. We ask for a fair share. We do not ask that government funds be allocated on activity and we take that decision because we are able to augment our funds. That is one of the differences between us and the other country groups. We raise funding as an issue to tell you that subject to certain other things, which we will raise later, we are satisfied on the basis that we continue to raise funds in the time-honoured traditional manner.

Thirdly, insurance is a problem for the groups. It is a huge problem because no-one is able to identify what the insurance arrangements really are. We have had conflicting advice, and experiences that conflict with that conflicting advice. That is a matter that is just as important to every other volunteer, not just sea rescue, under FESA as it is to us. There are a number of notions around, Mr Chairman, that if the police issue a job number, you are covered by insurance. That notion was raised, and I point you again to Mr Shadbolt at page 61 of the dossier -

It is an interesting structure, because there is a dual role of considering who is the hazard management authority . . .

That is because in an emergency the water police issue a job number to the particular group that will conduct the response. To be frank, Mr Chairman, we do not know whether the job number means insurance cover; and that is not a particularly satisfactory state, because the last thing we want is the skipper of one of our vessels to be uncertain of the question of insurance cover when he is making a decision that may put the health, welfare and safety of the crew at risk and the safety of the vessel at risk if the circumstances of that particular rescue calls for him to make that sort of decision. That is one view about insurance. The other view about insurance is that RiskCover will make the decision if the volunteer marine rescue vessel is covered in a particular circumstance; but if that is the rule, there will be discretion on the part of RiskCover or FESA to accept or not accept claims. In the recent past, RiskCover senior management gave us this verbal understanding of insurance protection. It said -

We don't care if the police give you a job number or if FESA tell you that you are covered. We will decide if the incident is a "FESA authorized activity" or not.

There should be clear guidelines circulated to each group so that they can form a view about what subsidiary cover might be needed before we can achieve a saturation cover for all its risks.

We take the opportunity now to correct an assertion made by Mr Fisher to this committee in February this year - it is on page 79 of that dossier, Mr Chairman - when the Deputy Chairman asked Mr Fisher the following question -

Can you give us an outline as to the future of sea rescue?

Mr Fisher said -

There are about 69 000 registered boats in the south west of Western Australia. The tendency with boats is for them to become larger and it obviously means bigger motors.

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The demand for moorings and marinas and things like that in the area will grow, and recently Mandurah just put a 60-foot rescue boat into action.

We would just like to point out to the committee that these figures are incorrect. The Department for Planning and Infrastructure's official figures as late as last night reveal that there are 72 000 registered vessels in the entire state. It was unrealistic to assume that 69 000 of them are in the lower south west. Secondly, the evidence that Mandurah volunteer sea rescue just commissioned a 60-foot vessel is also incorrect, because the builder of that vessel, Legend Boat Builders, is the same builder that built Whitfords new vessel side-by-side and I can say with the utmost certainty that that vessel is 43 feet, not 60 feet.

We would like to correct another misunderstanding, and that concerns government funding. During the evidence taken from Mr Lapham on 23 February this year, page 68 of the dossier, he was asked a question by committee member Ms Hodson-Thomas. She said in that transcript -

You have just touched on the Fremantle sea rescue group. I understand a bit of the history having a bit of a background in water, if you like. There are three groups, I think, that did not want to come under FESA and I think that made it problematic but they have some kind of MOU, as I understand it. Do you think that that has hampered your opportunity to be better funded, because they were digging their heels in and not wanting to embrace the notion of coming under FESA?

Mr Lapham said -

It has caused dissension as far as some of the groups are concerned. I am a committee member of the Volunteer Marine Search and Rescue . . . at a meeting the other night . . . the "West Coast" name with which those three groups were associated . . . is still floating around . . . Fremantle is probably the only group in Western Australia that has a permanent officer - a salaried officer - and it has a lot of funding from the big corporate companies in Fremantle. I would say good luck to them, but I find it difficult to understand why they would not want to go to FESA because all the other groups in the country have basically gone over there now. I am not really sure why they have made a stand.

Our response to that question and to the answer given, Mr Chairman, is this: rather than hampering the funding opportunities of the FESA groups, the establishment of the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group actually created additional funds for those 33 groups. Firstly, the available funding could now be distributed 33 ways instead of 37 and, given that the three metropolitan groups, which I said before perform the majority of the work in this state, would no longer need to share in that funding model, there would be a lot more funds available for distribution. Secondly, when the agreement was finalised, the then Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mrs Michelle Roberts, increased that pool of money for those 33 groups by another \$200 000. Mr Lapham's response should be read in conjunction with the evidence that the committee took from Mr Fisher on 23 February. You will find his very important comment on page 76 of the dossier, Mr Chairman, in which Mr Fisher said the following -

Last year marine rescue received generally in the order of \$1.8 million I think, which has grown from the \$800 000 we received four or five years ago when we started. We have seen considerable growth.

We make the point, Mr Chairman, that the \$1.8 million mentioned by Mr Fisher is not shared by the metro group. All of that \$1.8 million goes to FESA and its groups. Mr Fisher is a member of the FESA board, so we can accept that these figures are accurate. As we said earlier, the metro group performs most of those rescues in WA. Given the fact that we can operate on a grant of \$200 000 between us, it would seem clear to us that rather than hampering efforts for better funding, the metro group has actually assisted the groups to achieve better funding.

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The other comment by Mr Lapham on page 68 that Fremantle “has a lot of funding from the big corporate companies in Fremantle” leaves us somewhat confused. Perhaps if Mr Lapham were here, we could ask him to assist us with the names of those companies, because their cheques have gone astray.

There is one more comment that we would like to make concerning evidence given to this committee, which is on page 71 of that dossier. It was evidence from Mr Bill Forbes, the then acting CEO of FESA, and he states -

If your group holds a comprehensive policy with Club Marine - one similar to the Fremantle Group's - then RiskCover would be precluded from responding to a claim because there is other insurance in place.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am sorry, could you give us that reference again?

**Mr Howell:** I am sorry, it is page 83. It is a letter from Mr Bill Forbes of FESA to Whitfords Volunteer Sea Rescue Group concerning the adequacy of insurance. He mentioned earlier that some groups may need to take gap insurance or additional cover, and that in fact is what these three groups do. We have to, because we do not understand where we are exposed and where we are not. However, Mr Forbes, on behalf of FESA, has said that if you do that, RiskCover will not respond. That is a particular worry, because in the event that a bush volunteer fireman in Karratha - that is, my son - is called on a callout and he drives his vehicle to the fire station and in the process it gets written off, FESA is saying, “Go and claim on RAC; don't come to RiskCover.” That, I am saying Mr Chairman, is a serious deficiency in the insurance covering volunteers, and we believe that it is a matter that requires some immediate and decisive action.

Mr Chairman and members of the committee, our submission today has addressed the reasons for the Metropolitan Volunteer Sea Rescue Group and the relationships it has with others. We have spoken about the service agreement and our relationship to FESA. We have spoken about our relationship with the police. We have touched on the funding model for sea rescue administered by FESA. We have discussed in some detail the problems that exist with insurance cover for volunteers. We have referred to evidence that you have already taken from other sea rescue groups and by FESA and, where appropriate, we have made comments. Before I read the closing paragraph, would either Fremantle or Cockburn like to address the committee?

[10.45 am]

**Mr Graham:** Not at this stage.

**Ms Fitzgerald:** Our concern is about insurance.

**Mr Howell:** There are a couple of other matters that we would like to bring to the committee. As this evidence, which is supported by accompanying documents, will focus on acts of impropriety by officers within FESA, we would ask the committee to take this evidence in camera.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That will require a resolution of the committee. Because only two members of the committee are at this hearing today, we will need to have a quick discussion about whether we agree to go in camera. I have just clarified one issue with the research officer. Normally the committee needs three members in order to deliberate. In this circumstance, because only two members are here today, it will be up to both of us to make that decision.

**Mr Howell:** Before we deal with that matter, I omitted to ask whether the committee has any questions of us.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have some fairly general questions. I think you have covered just about all the questions that I have in front of me. You have covered when the group was established. You have also described the operations of the group; the numbers; the funding; the support from FESA and the police etc; the training; and why you have chosen not to come under FESA, and the impact

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of that decision. We also have a number of minor questions. The first is the level of membership in the three groups. I do not think you gave us a number. It may be in your submission.

**Mr Howell:** You are right; we did leave that bit out, unfortunately. Between the three groups, we have in the vicinity of 160 active volunteers. The number of affiliate members of the groups is in the vicinity of -

**Ms Fitzgerald:** Fremantle has 2 500.

**Mr Howell:** Whitfords has 1 500.

**Mr Graham:** We have about 500.

**Mr Howell:** These are affiliate members of our groups. The actual manpower on the ground to maintain the service 24/7 is 160 volunteers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You have mentioned as well the need to attract volunteers to your groups. That is an issue right around the state, not just for the VRMS but also for the bush fire brigades and the SES - in fact, all volunteer groups. Are you managing to attract new members, particularly younger members? Do you have a program to place to do that, or does it just happen? What is the situation?

**Ms Fitzgerald:** From Fremantle's perspective, one of the things we have recognised is that we tend to have a very young age group. We tend to find that the average age of our volunteers is around 35 years. That is quite interesting given that a lot of the other centres tend to have a lot of retired people. That sort of system has its strengths and its weaknesses. One of the things we have recognised is that we need to work extremely hard to attract volunteers, because there is often a stereotype about volunteers. We need to work very hard to dispel that stereotype. We recognise that we need to have a very high media profile, so we make sure that anything that we put into the papers is really positive. We certainly make sure that we address the community through our web site. One of the things that we have also recognised is that the level of training that we give our volunteers needs to be extremely strong. We also need to expand them in a personal way when they come to us. Our boats never sit at the dock. That means that our volunteers never sit at our headquarters. At every training session on the weekend they have to be out doing something. That helps to ensure that we are giving something back to our volunteers as well so that they feel that they are growing. It has tended to snowball. As we have attracted younger and more interested professional people, it has tended to follow on from that. That is what we have found. However, we recognised that we had to work very hard to get over that stereotype of volunteers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What is the situation in the other groups?

**Mr Howell:** Kerry has pretty well summed it up. I guess it is because of the number of people we see on the water who stop and talk to us and say, "How can I get a job like this?" and we tell them. It is one of those things. We have a larger population. Whitfords would probably bring in three or four new members every month. We do not have a special program, but when we do have new members, we have induction programs, training programs, accreditations and promotional systems so that they can go from trainee to crew to skipper, or whatever. That is activity pursued. We would all love to have more volunteers, but I do not think we would do it any differently.

**Ms Fitzgerald:** That is right.

**Mr Graham:** We find that we do not have a high level of young members. Our members tend to come from people we have rescued who can see the advantage of being in a system that can help others, and from retired people. Therefore, our average age is not as young as 35. It is properly more like 55.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I am interested in what you have said about the training of your staff. Is the training such that it is done at an accredited level through TAFE, or is it just on-the-job training? Do they need to get their masters ticket?

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**Mr Howell:** Some of it you can put down, I suppose, to accreditation. For example, before our volunteers can become qualified to crew a vessel, they need to go through a radio licensing procedure that comes under the Australian Communications Authority. Before they can advance any further, they must be able to satisfy the requirements to hold a licence issued by the Australian Communications Authority to operate certain radio transmission equipment. We also provide training for the paramedics. That is a formal process. As it turns out, tomorrow night the people from St John Ambulance will be coming to Whitfords and we will be reaccrediting our people on first aid and defibrillators. Fremantle and Whitfords carry heart defibrillator machines. That is an official qualification for which people need to be reaccredited every six months.

**Ms Fitzgerald:** We tend to have the same situation. Our volunteers at our senior crew level must have their recreational skippers ticket, which they work through with us. That is a compulsory requirement. They must also do a radio course. We have an affiliation with ERG for firefighting. For the skippers of our vessels, we do not have formal qualifications. However, we have an internal stepping stone. They may start off as crew, and it is many years before they move to our small boat. There are a lot of criteria they need to fulfil, including response to emergency, and their ability to manage crew in a given situation. We have that sort of training. We do not rely heavily on formal qualifications. The reason we do that is people come to us with, say, a master 5 or a master 4, which is a high commercial qualification that has a sea time component. People can gain that sea time by working behind the bar on a ferry. Therefore, it is not relevant experience, because people just need to be on a boat. They do not necessarily need to have work in a deckhand role. Rescue is a unique situation. A rescue skipper is a very unique situation.

**Mr Pisani:** If I may add to that, I have been through the process of obtaining a master 5 and have that qualification, so I can say with some authority that nothing in my master 5 training taught me anything about rescue work. It taught me some rules of the water. It taught me a bit of local knowledge, because I had to get my master 5 through driving dive boats. I had to start from the beginning when I joined Fremantle. Anyone with a masters ticket has to start from the beginning. There is very little practical knowledge of rescue work in gaining a masters ticket.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** So each of the groups has different requirements, or its own set of policies?

**Ms Fitzgerald:** Yes.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** So if I was a member of the Whitfords group and I wanted to join the Cockburn group, I might have some competencies that I could carry over, but there might be some different requirements from group to group?

**Mr Howell:** Definitely.

**Ms Fitzgerald:** We have different boats. Roger has monohulls. We have catamarans. Often there is difference. Also, we respond to different situations. Roger would probably do a lot of on-reef situations. Mike does more manoeuvring in bays. We also have to train our people to respond to quite different situations.

**Mr Pisani:** We are heading towards having common equipment. The groups will now carry the same sorts of fire pumps and salvage pumps for pumping out vessels. We also carry the same first-aid equipment in respect to heart starters. We have the same heart start responder program. We are heading towards having not necessarily exactly the same training, but common equipment.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** When it comes to a large-scale operation when all three groups are involved, do you do any training on water search programs, such as grid searches and coordination between vessels? While I acknowledge that the master 5 level would not give you any rescue capabilities, it would certainly give you an understanding of the vessels. The reason I ask that is because in our litigious society we have an ongoing problem whereby it may be pretty lonely when you are sitting in a royal commission or in a court case subsequent to a disaster. Certainly, having not just the practical experience but also some sort of recognised qualification would be a help. Also, to get

back to the point about how you coordinate between the three groups, do you conduct training between the three groups, and does that continuity of equipment and training also extend to other groups that are on the periphery; for instance, with Cockburn, would it include Rockingham?

**Mr Pisani:** In respect of the certificates, we need to realise also it would be almost an impossibility for a volunteer to achieve a master 5 certificate. It would take about 10 to 15 years of being in a volunteer organisation such as ours to obtain enough hours to get a master 5 certificate. Many of the people who join us with commercial qualifications do not stay because they are obviously using those qualifications to drive boats on weekends for monetary reward. Therefore, to expect volunteer groups to have qualifications as high as coxswain or master 5 would shut down the groups. They would never be able to get the sea time; and those who have the sea time would rather be paid to drive dive boats, charter boats or fishing boats. In respect of the searching, yes, we get together and do several scenarios a year, where we come together and each group becomes the on-scene control for that exercise, and we then go back and debrief. We are lucky in a way, because we deal with the water police more than with any other group, and the water police conduct exercises in which we all come together as well.

**Mr Howell:** Can I add to that? The water police have an operation called search and rescue coordination. It is a SARCO course. They train their officers. Some years ago they expanded that to include volunteers, so most of our skippers are SARCO qualified. As such, when there is an incident - let us say it is in Mindarie - the water police may say that Whitfords will take the on-scene command until they can get a police boat up there. In the one instance when that happened earlier this year off Trigg beach, the water police actually appointed Fremantle sea rescue to take on-scene command of the search, including the Department of Planning and Infrastructure vessel. That was the first time that has happened. What we are saying is that the water police are recognising SARCO-trained people who are capable of running on-scene command and making decisions on spacing, speed, grid searches and all that sort of thing. We do rehearse that, even by sending out some of our members in their private boats and telling them to get lost. Then we go and find them, because it is a real-life situation.

[11.00 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** There is a bit of trust involved there.

**Mr Howell:** Yes. Mr Chairman, there is one thing: I just realised that I flipped a page, and I really need to touch on that one subject. May I?

**The CHAIRMAN:** You can go back to that.

**Mr Howell:** It is a question that Mr Cowper asked of Mr Wille. It is on page 71 of that dossier. I do apologise, but I missed it. Mr Cowper put this question to Mr Wille -

There is the old question: are you there to rescue lives or are you there to be tow trucks?

Mr Wille responded by saying -

We are there to rescue lives. We do tow the boats when the conditions and circumstances permit. We find, however, that when you are out there - say, 20 miles out - and you ask people to come on board so we can run them home, they refuse, because they might lose their craft. It is a big problem. Where do you draw the line?

I can say with the utmost certainty that in my experience with Whitfords, which has been going for 35 years, never have we asked a member of the boating community to abandon his craft because we felt it was unsafe to tow it. I am sure that Fremantle and Cockburn are exactly the same. We agree that we are here to save lives. That is our main goal. However, we are also here to protect property and the environment. To abandon a vessel 20 miles out to sea because it has a flat battery or has run out of fuel causes, in our opinion, unnecessary heartache for that boat owner and a possible huge insurance claim for the loss of that vessel if it is destroyed. It is a navigational hazard to other

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vessels in the area, particularly out that far in the shipping lanes, and there is a possible environmental problem that someone else has to clear up. Therefore, we just want to make the point that the reason some groups are reluctant to tow a vessel is because of the distinction between what is a rescue operation and what is a salvage operation. If you take the people off the vessel, they are no longer in danger, and so the insurance cuts in and people say, "Leave the vessel. You're there to save lives." We are saying it is another example of why some groups need to limit the service they give to the community because of that uncertainty. We have instances now in which we know that boats have been washed up and sea rescue has gone to it. By the time sea rescue gets to the boat that has broken down, it is on the rocks. I know of a case in which the poor people on the boat stood on the rocks, holding the boat off with their hands, but they were told, "I'm sorry; you're on land now - we can't help you", and they turned away and went. The fact of the matter is that there is confusion. The water police have been known at times when that has happened to say, "People are safe. Your job number is withdrawn. You're on your own." I raise that because it is at the heart of this insurance problem that we wish to address.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I want to clarify that point. Are you saying that if it were a case of the safety of your crew and the safety of the people you were rescuing, you would not abandon that stricken vessel?

**Mr Howell:** No. We have a saying that we are all about safety first - our safety first - and we would always abandon a vessel if it meant danger to the crew, to the vessel and to the other people in the community. If that is the risk, no, the vessel goes. However, if it is out there 20 miles on a fine, flat day and it has a flat battery, the moment you take the people off the boat, it then becomes a salvage, technically, and it is this technical definition of the insurance that we wanted to proceed with on the other subject.

**Mr Graham:** While we are on this technical subject, with the uncertainty, I indicate that in an incident maybe a couple of years ago, we went to a good-sized boat owned by a prominent person that had hit the rocks just off Herring Bay. R100 was there, we were there, and the police were there. The boat was on the rock and the people were on the rock. Some of the people had been taken away by a dinghy that had come in on the leeward side that we could not have got to because of the shallowness. The police put a diver in the water to take a rope from a sea rescue boat. We took the boat in tow. We were going to take it through to the ship lifters in Fremantle, and the police said, "You're not going to get it there." Therefore, in conjunction with the police, we took it around and dropped it on sand where it would not get further damaged. Now, this contradicts a lot of the insurance things that have come up in the past. The police officer swam to the boat. He took the Fremantle line, which was transferred to us to tow the boat off, so it was a combined effort. Technically, we do not know now where insurance would have been.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is highlighting the inconsistency.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** And you are saying that no people were on board.

**Mr Graham:** The boat had no people on board, but the police were the instigators of that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am aware of the time and that there has been a request to go in camera. I want to ask one last question about FESA, and then I want to explain some of the issues about closed hearings and in camera hearings. Maybe before you leave you could give us an indication, and we will make a decision on doing that.

One of the things that FESA is proposing, for a number of reasons, is that FESA be re-established as the Department of Emergency Services. That would mean the removal of "Fire" from the corporate name of FESA. FESA's argument is that this removal is appropriate because fire is just one of the many emergencies that volunteers attend to. There has been a fair amount of objection to this on the basis of a claim of loss of identity. Do you have a view on whether the authority should be re-established as the Department of Emergency Services and do you have a view on the name?

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**Mr Howell:** I would be very reluctant to see the name changed without the word “Fire”. It will go further to a loss of identity. I know that the firemen are very proud, just like all volunteers, and I think it would be a retrograde step to simply do away with the individual specification. Personally, I would like to see “Fire” still in there.

**Mr Graham:** Loss of identity was something that we took up with FESA very early in the piece, and that affected us greatly. They come along with shirts that have “FESA” all over them, and nothing with “Cockburn” on them. We refuse to wear their shirts because of this. With this loss of identity, I feel that the bushfire work is the greatest part of FESA’s role and should definitely stay within the name. It is a far greater role than marine rescue, for a start.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thanks very much for that. On the closed hearings and in camera hearings, we can go one of two ways. We can go into a closed hearing, which the committee must resolve to do. Evidence taken in a closed session can be published or disclosed if the evidence has been reported to the Legislative Assembly or if that disclosure has been authorised on a motion by the committee. Therefore, we can publish that information. Evidence taken in a closed session and not previously disclosed or published as above may be disclosed to any person after 10 years if, in the opinion of the Speaker, it is appropriate that that person have that information disclosed to him. Evidence or documents taken or received in camera will not be disclosed unless the evidence or documents have been in the custody of the clerk for at least 30 years and, in the opinion of the Speaker, it is appropriate that such evidence or documents be disclosed. This means that while a committee can take in camera evidence into consideration when deliberating, it cannot quote, refer to or reveal the nature of the evidence or the identity of the witnesses. Therefore, if it is a closed hearing, it means that we could decide to publish the information when we deliver the report, or shortly thereafter. If it is an in camera hearing, the information is for us. We use it in our deliberations, and it does not get disclosed publicly. In effect, we cannot do anything with it.

**Mr Howell:** Mr Chairman, we have nothing to hide, and we are happy to go with the closed session.

**Mr Graham:** The short submission I have does not need to be given in closed session, so if you would prefer to hear that now -

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am very conscious of the time. We will take your submission, Mike, and then we will deliberate and make a decision.

**Mr Graham:** This is a fairly short submission, and I make it on behalf of purely the Cockburn Volunteer Sea Search and Rescue. When we first heard of the concept that FESA was to become the coordinating and administrative body for marine rescue, we were well pleased. We had met with a gentleman, Mr Mike Watters, who had informed us that he was conducting a study for the government to establish the position that sea rescue was in, on a statewide basis. He asked all the right questions and listened to what we had to say, and assured us that he was just completing a survey and would have no part in it once it had been completed. We understood that he came from the ministry of education specifically for this purpose.

We had been under the general coordination of the water police up to that time. Although we were seriously underfunded, we had a very good relationship with the police in general and with the officer who was our coordinator and liaison officer. We were surprised when we found that the person who had been to see us for the study is now the executive director of FESA, with responsibility for the future management of the marine rescue groups of WA. It soon became apparent that he believed that the assets of the groups now became the assets of FESA. This belief led to some harsh words and even a visit to a local group by other FESA volunteers who thought they had access to their equipment.

We were aware that two coordinators were to be appointed to undertake the initial set-up of the system, and were under the belief that they would be there for a couple of years, and then it would



reduce to just one, and the groups would become virtually self-controlled. We were pleased that the appointments made were of two police officers whom we had had very amicable dealings with over several years.

Initially, we were of the understanding that working parties of active sea rescue members, under the chairmanship of a coordinator, would form the direction that we would take to achieve the levels of training that were expected. We were soon made aware that things were not going to be as we were led to believe. The attitude then was dictatorial, with us under the control of FESA, not in the partnership that we had been promised. I wrote to our association secretary expressing our concerns in early September 1999. I expressed my concern at the way we were being treated, and I enclose a copy of that letter for your perusal. That is item 1.

We have always had a good understanding with other FESA volunteers from the State Emergency Service and bush fire brigades. We were informed that there was an ultimate aim of getting the three groups together as FESA units under the supervision of area managers. Long before we left FESA, I attended a meeting with other west coast association members that was held in the executive director's office. There was a map of WA on a whiteboard that had been divided into a number of areas. This tied in with the information given to us by the bush fire brigade members. When we challenged the executive director about this and about taking control of the groups, we were told that it was just a joke, and he rubbed it off the board. This has now happened. That is item 2.

In early 2000 we were looking for a new boat. We had more or less decided on an 8.6-metre LeisureCat - a local vessel. However, we were told that the decision would need to be made quickly as they intended to modify the mould. We had discussions with our FESA coordinator, Mr Lou Hynde, who came down to meet LeisureCat and confirm the urgency and agreed that we could proceed with the purchase, and funding would be approved later. We reached an agreement with LeisureCat and had the vessel started. We were going to finance the complete building of the boat, the fabrication of the trailer and the purchase and installation of the electrics and electronics, and we applied for a small grant from FESA to cover the motors and their installation.

We had our funding refused by the consultative committee. It came to light several years later that our association president conspired with other members of FESA to ensure that we did not get that government grant at that session. This was very embarrassing to us and, I would believe, to Mr Lou Hynde, who had found a country group that was prepared to purchase our original vessel.

[11.15 am]

This held up the process by several months. It was always our belief that FESA coordinators were there to assist us with the more technical things that occur in the running of a group. They are full-time coordinators with access to numerous organisations and government departments, whereas, in general, our volunteers are mainly employed persons with limited time on their hands but who still devote much of their spare time to the volunteer sea rescue. It was at about this time that I was invited by senior members of the local bush fire brigade to attend a meeting with Mr Paul Omodei at Parliament House to discuss the stance that FESA was taking with its volunteers. At this meeting Mr Omodei showed great support for us, a position I believe he no longer appears to hold judging from the remarks printed in previous transcripts.

Our group should have been eligible for funding for the construction of our boatshed and it applied for a grant. The coordinators came down to see us about it and made it very obvious that they were not prepared to assist us with the application, but were there only to make life difficult for us. Therefore, we decided to do it without their funds and the hassles they were creating. This slowed the project down by several months. A couple of years ago a former boson of the Cockburn Power Boats Association saw someone fixing a sign to the club fence where we have our boatshed and our crew quarters. He went to investigate and found that it was a FESA employee fixing a sign for a checkpoint for a car rally that it was organising. They got talking and he was told that our rescue

group would soon be out and that there would be a FESA boat in its place. The FESA employee did not know that the boson was a group member with some 10 years' service.

Several years ago a local sea rescue group discovered that FESA had control of its telephone account, although it does not pay the bills. Recently we tried to make changes to our telephone system and were told that without the consent of FESA, we were not able to do so. This was supposed to have been resolved years ago. We were promised full autonomy. When we will we get that? This must lead me to ask: what other controls does it still have over us? Although I am the first to admit that the initial concept of volunteer sea rescue coming under the umbrella of FESA was great, it was made impossible for us by the total control assumed to be its right with no regard for the fact that we, plus several other groups, had been running very successfully for more than 30 years before its existence. I still believe that it may be right for some of the smaller country groups with limited access to members with expertise in specific areas to rely on the support of FESA if they so wish.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Does your group have a business plan or strategic plan for the future?

**Mr Graham:** We run under a 10-year plan. The plan that we are running under means that our boat is replaced every 10 years and the engine is replaced every five years. This is the general FESA philosophy that runs across the whole system, which we fully support. We have just done our five-year engine upgrade and we will be looking at replacing the boat in possibly five or six years. We need no more buildings. We have no more need for major funding, apart from the normal upkeep of equipment, which is very expensive of course. We cannot project for the replacement of radars and stuff like that; that is done only when they break down.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Do you believe that the Volunteer Marine Rescue Service should be provided for under the emergency services levy?

**Mr Graham:** No.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Why not?

**Mr Graham:** That is a very good question. Most members of the public seem to believe that we are. The people we speak to complain about the cost of the levy. If marine rescue is to come under that, the levy would need to increase and that would alienate the people who are there to assist.

**Ms Fitzgerald:** When the emergency services levy was introduced, there was a direct relationship in some instances with funding. Rockingham has pointed out that the funds it gets from its chook raffle at the local pub have gone down, because people are saying that it is now covered under the emergency services levy.

**Mr Graham:** There is a wide belief in that, but it is not a fact. We feel it should not be. We feel that that was brought in to do a specific thing and it should do that thing.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Following on from that, with the valuation of properties and rates going up right across Western Australia, and the fact that the emergency services levy has gone up by 3.1 per cent in the metropolitan area, which is class 1 of the five classes of the ESL, that gives FESA a lot more funds.

**Mr Pisani:** Again, the problem is that we would lose our ability to raise money through the fundraising we do at the moment. We have finally resolved the issue of people's perception that we are covered under the emergency services levy. They say that we do not need donations because we are covered under the emergency services levy. The big issue is how that money will be distributed. If it is distributed under the same policy that FESA follows now, we will no longer have any way of getting donations because people are saying that we are funded under the emergency services levy. If it follows the same policy, we will get one-thirty-sixth of the emergency services levy and, therefore, we would be further behind financially. There would be a double whammy. There would be some provisos for getting that money, the amount would be

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inadequate and the public would no longer donate to the cause. We would then be seen to be unpaid employees of FESA and government, and that loses the ethos of volunteering.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** You have admitted that there is this great dominion over the sea rescue services on this part of the coast and that you have very good funding arrangements. Other sea rescue groups up and down the coast do not have access to those resources, and you have admitted in your submission that they do not have the same access to resources that you have. The committee must look at what is in the best interests of all.

**Ms Fitzgerald:** They have strong FESA funding. To some extent they are funded 100 per cent.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I will stop that line of questioning. I know it is an interesting issue to get into, but I am conscious of the time. I realise that you want the committee to go into a closed hearing now. Committee members will have a short discussion and make a decision and then we call you back in, so I ask you to leave. We will then have probably 10 minutes at the most, so I hope that will be enough to cover what we need to cover.

**[The committee took evidence in closed session]**

**Hearing concluded at 11.36 am**

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