

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT GERALDTON
THURSDAY, 1 JUNE 2006**

SESSION ONE

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 9.08 am

HENSS, MS ALLISON BETH

Fire Services Station Officer, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

PURVIS, MR GORDON WILLIAM

Fire Services District Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

PARKIN, MR DAVID

Station Officer/Firefighter - Supervisor, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

Mr M.J. COWPER: Thank you very much for joining us this morning. My name is Murray Cowper. I am the vice-chairman of this committee. I would like to introduce the members of the committee, Katie Hodson-Thomas, MLA, member for Carine; Judy Hughes, MLA, member for Kingsley; and Catherine Galvin, senior research officer; and Dawn Dickinson, who is assisting. The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house 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 detail on the witness forms and do you understand the notes attached to it?

The Witnesses: Yes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Did you receive and read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding evidence before parliamentary committees?

The Witnesses: Yes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Before we ask questions, is there anything you wish to say?

Ms Henss: I am on call right now, so if I get a fire call I am going to have to run out of here.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Thank you. To kick things off, could someone give us an overview of operations here in Geraldton and the mid-west - the number of firefighters, volunteers in FESA, representing the brigades as well, so that the committee understands how you operate and function?

Mr Purvis: There are two sides obviously to FESA's arm in the mid-west: the Fire and Rescue Service - that is the career side of the family - and the Volunteer Fire and Rescue, and also the bush fire service. My alignment is more to the fire and rescue side of the operations. My counterparts at the FESA office run the BFS side of the operation. There are 21 career staff operating out of Geraldton Fire Station. They look after all of the Fire and Rescue HMA requirements for the City of Geraldton and outwards into the region for areas such as road crash rescue and HAZMAT. I have nine volunteer stations throughout the mid-west, with approximately 20 volunteer members in each station. They are predominantly in the major townships in the mid-west, Gascoyne and Murchison areas. They have pretty much the same responsibilities as the career fire service in respect of HMAs and generally work in their fire districts as the career fire service, covering all the HMA requirements in those areas. There are approximately 98 bush fire brigades in the region. As I said before, they are administered by other managers operating out of the FESA office. Of course, the local governments have more control over the bush fire brigades than do our managers in respect of the management of those brigades.

Mr M.J. COWPER: FESA is proposing that land owners and land managers, including the state government, be obliged to prepare fire management plans when FESA considers this is necessary to reduce the risk of fire. In particular, FESA wants the power to apply to crown land, pastoralists and graziers' land and plantation land. Do you have any position on this recommendation?

Mr Purvis: My position is that I believe that, yes, FESA probably does require that authority. There are areas in the region where fire management plans have not been detailed, and I would support that proposal in principle because of that.

Mr M.J. COWPER: A number of local governments are proposing that FESA take over part or all of local government's bushfire responsibilities. These responsibilities include those related to supporting and administering bush fire brigades. FESA has suggested legislation that allows FESA to take over bushfire responsibilities, but only when the local government in the respective area wants this to occur. How do you think that may apply, given the fact that you have these outer areas that have been somewhat autonomous for many years? How do you think that will impact locally in those areas?

Mr Purvis: In respect of FESA taking control, I guess from a personal perspective, it is a turf-type thing. They have been under the control of local governments for many years. FESA has probably made a move towards saying, "If you don't want to control the brigades, we will use that." Obviously the legislation tool is not there that allows that to happen. I personally believe that that tool is probably required and it could only further the interests of local government and also the emergency services in respect of controlling the agencies or brigades a lot better.

Mr M.J. COWPER: If that was to occur, how do you think you would manage that change in a changing environment? Do you think it would be fairly well received, particularly with the volunteers?

Mr Purvis: The volunteers are managed per se by a manager out of the FESA regional offices - the bush fire brigades - but it is not an autocratic management. We do not have the legislative power to dictate what they do, like I do with the fire and rescue brigades. We have the power to direct them as to what they have to do. Local government holds all the power in respect of the brigades. The impact for the region, obviously, as I said before, where there are 98 brigades in the region, plus pastoralists, and if FESA was to take control and have that legislative authority, a huge work impost would fall upon FESA.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Do you have 180 volunteers in this area? Is that what you indicated before? Nine stations -

Mr Purvis: Our area covers up to Carnarvon, right out to the Murchison, to Meekatharra, Mt Magnet, out that way, and also down to Jurien Bay.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Are they all under volunteer brigades?

Mr Purvis: That is with all the major townships - Jurien Bay; Dongara; Northampton, which is a bush fire brigade; Kalbarri; Carnarvon; Coral Bay, where there is a FESA unit; Meekatharra; Mt Magnet; Cue; and Mullewa. There are volunteer rescue brigades out in the greater region, the Gascoyne-Murchison region.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Obviously, you cover a huge expanse of territory. If FESA was to take responsibility for bush fire control and so forth, how do you think FESA would manage with those distances should a fire occur in one of the outlying areas - for instance, Meekatharra or somewhere like that? Would FESA be able to be on the job quickly enough to manage to take control?

Mr Purvis: It would depend on the level of management required for the incident. Most of the brigades, to give an example, like the Meekatharra Volunteer Fire and Rescue Brigade, if called out to a road crash rescue, they are autonomous units. They have a leader in charge of the unit and they would handle the situation. They are trained to do that. If, for instance, it was not just a car

smash but it was a bus involving, say, 40 passengers, it becomes a fairly protracted and long exercise. They would be supported from the region and backed up by the volunteers out of either Cue or Mt Magnet.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So the response is -

[9.20 am]

Mr Purvis: It is a staggered response depending on the magnitude of the incident.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Thank you.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Mr Parkin, apparently Western Australia uses fire districts and emergency services levy category areas to define emergency service delivery areas. FESA has indicated that a system of two overlapping boundaries is slightly confusing. It is asking that we remove the two separate boundaries and instead establish a single boundary to be used for everything. If we did this, fire district and emergency services levy boundaries would be dissolved and the emergency services area would be established. The United Fire Fighters Union has criticised this recommendation, citing it as a further attack on the identity of the fire service. Do you any comments on that?

Mr Parkin: No, I do not have a comment on that.

Mrs J. HUGHES: We have quite a few generic questions that we are asking everyone so that we get a general response. We will try to stick to that as well as ask questions in between. Currently the legislation empowers the three bodies - FESA, local government and CALM - to have control of the fire at any given time. The control of the fire is dependent on land tenure. The Auditor General and the coroner have both criticised this arrangement, claiming that one body must be made accountable and responsible for the control of a fire during a multi-agency incident. Both claim that anything less will jeopardise the safety of the community in Western Australia. Do you have any views on those comments?

Mr Parkin: The HMA is generally fairly defined in terms of what the incident is. In this particular case, because of the tenure of the land, it seems to change. My experience has been that when we attend these incidents generally the incident controller is not necessarily the operations officer. They approve the planning and set the objectives for the operation and any operational things are passed down through the incident management team. I believe that in these larger jobs down in Perth - although I am not directly involved in the IMT work - perhaps it comes down to the ability of the agencies to work together other than the system that is implied and used. I am not so sure that is it because of the tenure of the land and who is HMA; it is more to do with the cooperation between the agencies. That is my personal opinion.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Anyone else?

Mr Purvis: I would like to comment on it because the control of the fire at any given time, whether it is by land tenure or happens to be a house, should lie with one agency or one power. That has happened previously in other areas. If a fire starts on CALM land, CALM will set up an incident control system with a number of people and actually start controlling that fire. If the fire escapes onto normal local government property, FESA sets up a like incident control system, so you have two running in tandem. From my perspective, that should not happen. There should be one over-riding body that says, "Okay, we'll set up one incident control system and control that whole fire." If it escapes over here or over there and goes onto other land tenures, that same body is going to have that system of control and control that area, or control that particular incident, that fire.

Mrs J. HUGHES: If it happened in a CALM district and, as you say, went into private land or local government land, do you believe FESA should then come under the umbrella of CALM or FESA should come over the top?

Mr Purvis: I believe FESA should hold an umbrella situation. CALM can set up an incident control management system, but it should notify FESA, being the authority, that it has done so. If the fire escapes onto other tenure, I think FESA would have enough commonsense to maintain that control function that CALM has set up to transfer across and manage that incident. There is no reason, because it has jumped over a line in the sand, to set up another incident management system when one is currently operating unless there are problems with it. If FESA or that body determines there is a problem with the group it has set up to manage that incident, it should make the changes within that group.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Thank you.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: The committee has received numerous submissions requesting that the state government be bound by the same fire prevention legislation as private landowners. For instance, where private property owners are compelled to install firebreaks, state government would be compelled to do the same on crown land. The state government is currently exempt from having to install firebreaks on crown land. Would any or all of you like to comment on that aspect?

Mr Parkin: Yes, I would like to make a comment. I think if it is incumbent on the shires to enforce that on the public, it is also incumbent on them to provide good fire protection for the town and the areas that they control. It would certainly make our life a lot easier, and it would be a lot safer for the public, if those conditions were required across the board. In terms of things that we do in the bush areas in town, for the most part there is provision of firebreaks and the council in this area is very proactive in what it does. But in previous years there have been areas that were not maintained and we have had complaints at the station from members of the public asking, "Why are we forced to do this when there is this big lump of land next to us and it is coming over our fence and there are no firebreaks?" In fairness to the community, everyone should come under the same type of legislation, or whatever is required.

Mr M.J. COWPER: On Monday, we heard that FESA did a lot of the firebreaks in the past. How did that come about? How does that arrangement work?

Mr Parkin: It is like there is a partnership between us and the city council. Part of our management system is to go out and identify problem areas. We then pass those areas on to the council and the council rangers go out and assess them and then go out and do the firebreaks. They are bound by other restrictions that we are not in terms of clearing land that may be under title, or under CALM's jurisdiction, or is a reserve, or whatever. They also have considerations. We can apply our estimation that something is a fire hazard and endangering the community so they can use that to forward the process. We do not go out and clear it; the council will do it.

Mr M.J. COWPER: It is interesting, referring to firebreaks: you have a fairly broad spectrum, so it is important for the committee to come to the mid-west and have a look at the local situation. If we compare this to the south west, where it is heavily timbered, here you have more heath land and grassland. In the Murchison there is the mallee scrub area. When it comes to putting in firebreaks, you have pretty much got the whole spectrum, whether it be a farming property with firebreaks, as they are required to do, or the pastoral country. In relation to the issue of getting the government or the Crown to put in firebreaks, you will be aware of how wide this brown land is and the costs involved. So we are looking for a practical way, on one hand, of ensuring there is uniformity of firebreaks, and, on the other hand, we have to be realistic about the outcomes. From your experience in this area, can you give us any insight into how you think it should be applied?

Ms Henss: I think the need to have firebreaks would only be where the chance of fire spread would threaten property or lives. So if we are talking about out in the middle of the bush, firebreaks are not going to be needed until you get to a point where you would have to attack it from a break side before it reached either farming or houses. It could almost be taken on a case-by-case basis. If there was a controlling committee and somebody thought there needed to be a firebreak, the question is, "Why is it?" Is there enough reason? If there is not, we would not enforce it. I think

the difficult part is the enforcing, where we see a need for it and they are like, "Oh, we don't have to do it." We are not going to ask for it in places where it is not needed. That goes for the private landowners as well. Sometimes it is difficult to get them to do their little part as well.

[9.30 am]

Mr M.J. COWPER: You have some unique conditions here. For instance, there are nice grasslands out on the Greenough flats, and a bushfire with a howling south-westerly behind it would move pretty quickly. So local conditions are different from what you would expect at Manjimup, for instance.

Mr Purvis: If I can you take to the earlier question about fire management planning in the state, with fire and management planning there are indicators as to where you have to put in the breaks. On crown land, clearly the fire management planning will tell you where the problems are, when you need to put breaks in, and, obviously, if management plans are done properly, you can set things up. A lot of that happens already in other areas where real problems on crown land are identified, and some management formulas have to be put in place. Understandably, you cannot cover the whole state.

Mrs J. HUGHES: We had a hearing with people from the Conservation Council who talked about splitting the state into zones that would create different types of management plans for different types of terrain, and thereby being able to create management plans over zones; how to battle fires; the best ways to deal with different parts etc. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr Parkin: No, not really, other than that I know that CALM is an organisation and FESA is an organisation, and one is a proactive organisation and the other is a reactive organisation. I think you will find that CALM has concerns about the environment and the impact of fire and fire tactics on the environment, whereas if we see a fire, we put it out. We see a tree that is hollow and burning, we knock it down; CALM sees it as a place for a parrot to live. There are different concerns within the two organisations. That is something FESA has been working on changing. We now have training that involves that type of recognition of the environment. We try to take it into consideration, but we are reactive and they are proactive. That is pretty much the difference between the organisations.

Mr Purvis: I would be interested to see what sort of formula they are talking about in terms of splitting it into areas. It may be related to what Murray was saying about various types of vegetation and so forth.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Yes, grasslands, and a completely different way to fight fire.

Mr Purvis: We certainly look at that now. We have a department in our fire safety division that has people attached to it with a scientific outlook in terms of how we fight our fires. That goes down to actually reducing fuel loads or putting in breaks, and different methods.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Do you have any comments in relation to how you could improve emergency services in Western Australia? I know that is a broad question, but it would be very interesting for us to hear any comments.

Mr Parkin: No.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: No-one wants to take that up that challenge? It is too big a question - too big an ask?

Mr Purvis: I will have a go. I think the service is not adequately covered with staffing. I certainly believe our country arrangements and structure are not as good as they could be. I think we need more support in the country. I think our metropolitan brothers are well covered. They might be in the same boat; I cannot really comment on that. It is certainly the case in the country, at a management level, and not forgetting that the state relies on a lot of volunteers to do this work. Our country towns have taken a big knock over the past 15 years in terms of young people leaving them.

It is a real problem for the state to face. Getting the management numbers up is fairly critical to maintaining good support for these people who are out there doing the volunteer work. I think we are a bit thin on the ground at the moment.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: So are you really struggling to keep your volunteers, or are you not finding anybody to replace them because townships are growing smaller?

Mr Purvis: Our volunteers are ageing, mainly because there is no employment in smaller towns. The towns are degenerating. Meekatharra is a typical town in the Murchison where the numbers of people residing there have just dropped dramatically. Then you do not have the younger people there, so they do not transfer that interest to the volunteer fire brigade in terms of serving the community. We are finding the numbers dropping off quite markedly around the place. Whether you put career staff on in management - that is, with the management structure that supports those people - I feel it is probably a good move. Whether we can improve the numbers that are going to reside in the areas is another factor. Certainly I think from FESA's perspective the management structure that has been proposed to be put in place is working, but we are very thin on the ground in respect of numbers.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: It has been proposed that FESA go from being an authority to being a department and that there be a re-badging of its name from Fire and Emergency Services to a department of emergency service. Do you have a comment on that?

Mr Purvis: I do not have a problem with that per se. It depends on the advantages of becoming a department, if there are any. The re-badging is an issue for some people who are attached to the different branches of services in the whole organisation. From my perspective, I have been a career firefighter for nearly 30 years. I came through the fire and rescue stream and into the management stream. I think the majority of firefighters attached to the Fire and Rescue Service have a great pride in the badge they wear. I do not think they would like to lose that. I personally believe that if that is the badge I am wearing and I have a department of emergency services sitting at the top of it, that would not worry me as long as there is a clear identification of the service delivery that we provide.

Mr M.J. COWPER: What about taking away your hat as a career fireman? How do you think that will go down with the volunteers out there in some of the regional areas?

Mr Purvis: I think some of those changes have already been mooted. Changes in the management structure have happened already, so bush fire managers are interacting with fire and rescue volunteers. The problem we have is obviously in the competency level in terms of the manager. That is another issue, but we are working on that one. My experience with volunteers has been that as long as you communicate well with them and they have a clear understanding of what is about to happen to them, we have not had many problems with them.

Mr M.J. COWPER: It sort of throws up a paradoxical situation where, on the one hand you have, as you mentioned before, a problem getting young people to come in and take over from the older heads. Of course we have learnt, and no doubt you will be able to reinforce this, that experience of a particular area counts for a lot when it comes to dealing with a fire. If someone knows the area and the topography well, and they are familiar with it, it makes it a whole lot easier when it comes to knowing how to access the area. We have a situation with the problem of attracting young people in smaller towns, and there is a bit of a change of management occurring. We are keen to hear from you any suggestions you might be able to put forward, apart from good management and communications skills, as to how we might be able to get a seamless transition.

Mr Purvis: I think the transition is something that will come about by the mere fact of putting in people that the volunteers have confidence in. Obviously if people are put in and the perception is that they do not have the competencies, it will create some problems. With respect to the amalgamation of FESA towards a one-management-delivery policy where one manager only goes

into an LG, and that is all you see, I have my reservations about that in respect of the competencies of the manager in being able to look after and run three emergency organisations - SES, BFS and FRS. I think we are stretching ourselves a bit thin in terms of the management structure if we think that three guys can manage the three agencies with all of the competencies required to provide for and give confidence to volunteers.

[9.40 am]

Mr M.J. COWPER: Just to throw a blanket over the top of that, there is the impact of the emergency services levy. Can you give us a rundown on how that has been accepted at the coalface, or how it has affected the coalface? I should say fire front!

Mr Purvis: From a volunteer Fire and Rescue perspective it has not had a great effect because we have had processes in place through budgets and so forth. The Fire and Rescue Service has always had a budget to support the volunteers. With the Bush Fire Service, there has been a marked difference in how it has been treated since the advent of the ESL because the budgeting process changed with the emergency levy and vehicles have become a bit more readily available for bushfire volunteers. With that happening, it has given them a bit more confidence in getting equipment. I cannot really speak for the LGs that much because I do not have that interaction with them over the emergency services levies, but I believe from confidential talks I have had with some of them that they have received it quite well. Some of them have found it a bit onerous.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Was there a bit of a differential between some of the local governments and their level of fire readiness prior to the ESL?

Mr Purvis: Yes. That is my personal view. I think it is structured around the emergency management arrangements; that is, the contact they have with the people managing them and also the local government's attitude to emergency management arrangements. If they did not have an interest in it, they obviously took their business somewhere else and left someone else to do that.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Currently the local governments are the people who write the submissions about what equipment and so forth they want, but FESA sets the limitations of what type of money goes their way. Do you believe perhaps that the granting system should work not through the local government but directly with FESA so that you do not have the middleman, being local government, directing what equipment is required and how it is to be issued?

Mr Purvis: I think if commonsense is to prevail at the end of the day, there has to be a decision at a competent level, and that should be a manager in consultation with a local government. That person should be responsible for the fire emergency management plan and the resources that are required to support that management plan. Once there is an agreement between the local government and the FESA representative, that should be transferred to the emergency levy committee and it should be rubber-stamped.

Mrs J. HUGHES: If FESA was in control and command as such, local government effectively would be taken out of the scenario, so would it not be better for FESA to direct its own resources and inform local government of what it has for preparedness and readiness, for its information?

Mr Purvis: From my perspective, that is how volunteer Fire and Rescue works.

Mr M.J. COWPER: A local issue that has popped up since we have been here relates to water mains in Geraldton. We have heard the water pressure is insufficient in the main CBD. There is concern about how FESA would manage a major fire in the CBD. We have heard stories of having to shut off mains. Can you give us an indication of what the local problem is and how we may be able to resolve it, or how it will be resolved?

Ms Henss: Twenty million dollars.

Mr Purvis: I think we have been around this before. I have had contact with the Water Corporation and ministers over this issue in the past.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Over what period have you had contact?

Mr Purvis: This is over about a two-year period. In relation to the resolution of the water flow pressure problems in the CBD in Geraldton, as I understand it the Water Corp has an infrastructure problem. The pipe work is very old and cannot support a re-pressurising or the provision of more volume to this area. In respect of operational issues in firefighting, we are able to direct more water into the CBD area through a liaison with the Water Corp. This obviously is a time line thing for us in terms of response to incidents. My officers will tell you that the water pressure is quite low in the CBD area, but with the management plans we have put in place to deal with a fire emanating in the CBD, I have confidence that while we might not be able to put the fire out instantly because of the water supplies that we have, certainly we will be able to manage the event.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Further to that, I picked up a federal government report that looked at turn-out times and response times - the fiftieth percentile, the ninetieth percentile. Western Australia, by the way, had the worst record of any state, primarily I suppose because of the size of the state. If we had a situation in which there was a fire in the CBD, putting it out would take time. As you well know, minutes can mean the difference between a fire getting a hold or not. If there was a substantial event in the CBD and you had to get Water Corp to run around and switch off valves, would that be a serious impost on your operations in being able to respond to a fire?

Ms Henss: I was at the last fire we had, which was at Toyworld. When Gordon says we would not let it get out of control, that is true, but that would mean stopping it from spreading. Even with the water mains redirected, we still were not able to support enough water to put the fire out as fast as we would have liked. I guess what I am saying is, definitely, time is a factor, but even beyond that the water mains remain the root of the problem.

Mr Purvis: With an event in the CBD, depending on the magnitude of the fire and how quickly the fire developed, obviously it really does not matter what sort of volume of water you have to put the fire out because if the fire develops as quickly as some of saw recently in a factory fire in the eastern states, the factory burns to the ground, even though the water supplies are quite good. You would need hundreds and hundreds of firefighters there and hoses to put enough water on the fire to put it out. Depending on the magnitude of the event, with fire development we would look at defensive protecting exposures; that is, protecting the buildings alongside the building that is on fire if the fire has developed to such a magnitude that you are not going to put it out. Obviously if the water supplies are not very good, it limits how much water you can put onto that fire.

Ms Henss: That is what I was trying to say!

Mr M.J. COWPER: I have noted that in the city, the metropolitan area, we have a situation where firemen have been moved out of the CBD into provincial areas, and one of the things they hang their hat on is that they have modern buildings with firefighting systems. How would that compare in the CBD in Geraldton? Is there a mixed bag or is it of concern?

Mr Purvis: Some have their own firefighting systems. There is very little in the old area of the CBD. I think the local government could probably comment later on the development that is happening on the foreshore, which will get rid of a lot of the older buildings. That may give us an opportunity to do something with that development because if there is new development, under the Building Code of Australia they have obligations to meet some fire safety applications. I think my officers could probably speak about most of the buildings there currently, but a lot of them do not have their own in-built fire systems.

[9.50 am]

Mrs J. HUGHES: Geraldton has been subject to some flooding in recent times due to cyclonic activity to the north. We have talked about fire and the water issues. Is there any information you can give me about management of those issues? Are you equipped to deal with those?

Mr Parkin: Surprisingly, most of the recent flooding did not concern Geraldton; it was from rains further north that came down the Greenough River. We have had localised flooding through heavy rains, through cyclonic conditions etc. Generally it is a fairly isolated case. It may be an area in Leicester Close, or the old hospital recreation centre flooded a few times. That was put down to the fact that their stormwater system was not working as well as it should. We have portable pumps and we assist where we can, but it is really not an HMA for us. It is a local government-SES situation, particularly in the outlying areas, so we do not get heavily involved in it. We assist where we can.

Mrs J. HUGHES: And FESA?

Mr Purvis: Through the SES, as David has just said. The SES side of the family would mobilise. They have pumps. Depending on the severity of the incident - obviously we cannot cater for everything locally if it is very severe - we would get assistance from Perth or outlying regions. I cannot really talk about worst-case scenarios.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Currently ambulance does not fall under any of FESA's emergency services. Does anyone have any comment about whether they believe ambulances should be part of the structure?

Mr Purvis: Yes, I believe they should be. If it is going to be a true emergency service authority or department, or whatever you call it, I believe ambulance would come under that umbrella.

Ms Henss: I actually worked in the United States, where we worked together, and the additional benefit is that oftentimes the incident is going to need both anyway and it is a lot easier to control. For example, with car rescues, the ambulance and we are there. If it is a fire where people get injured, ambulance is there. In a lot of incidents it does work better.

Mrs J. HUGHES: If they are part of the same control?

Ms Henss: Yes.

Mr Purvis: In the country areas there is a difficulty because St John Ambulance has first aid posts and so forth in small country centres. There is a difficulty with numbers in country towns, as I discussed before. For FESA to take the ambulance service under its umbrella creates another problem for FESA. My belief is it probably should be there but it would have to be adequately funded. I believe St John Ambulance in its current situation in a lot of country centres is not adequately funded.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So ambulances in some of those regions become a problem?

Ms Henss: Even the staffing in Geraldton; they have two full-time officers during the day and at night it is one full-time person. The rest rely on volunteers.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So it could be a problem.

Mr Purvis: There is a heavy reliance on volunteers by St John across the state. Fundraising in country centres is often left to them. I feel for them a bit and maybe under FESA, with proper funding, it might run a little better. I think they do a very good job.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Essential.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Could it assist them a little more?

Mr Purvis: Yes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I know that Robert Tee is not available. I had a couple of questions for Robert, whom I have not seen for many years. I wonder if I could throw these questions at you and if you can comment on them, I would appreciate it. I acknowledge that you may not be able to. Under the current ESL arrangement, local government must complete an ESL submission on behalf of the SES units and local government in the area. Is it necessary for local government to perform

this role, given that FESA ultimately decides how much of the ESL grant funding to allocate to the SES unit? Would it be more appropriate for the SES unit to deal directly with FESA as opposed to going through local government?

Mr Purvis: Yes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: If members have no more questions, would anyone like to make some closing comments?

Mrs J. HUGHES: Do you have anything you would like to add?

Mr Purvis: If you are talking to anyone about our wage rise, we would like a big one, thanks!

Mr M.J. COWPER: 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 in the sense that the evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, you should send a supplementary submission to the committee for consideration. If the transcript is not returned within 10 days, it will be deemed to be correct. I thank you very much for your time.

Hearing concluded at 9.55 am
