

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE STATE'S PREPAREDNESS
FOR THIS YEAR'S FIRE SEASON**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2012**

SESSION TWO

Members

Mr A.P. O'Gorman (Chairman)
Mr R.F. Johnson (Deputy Chairman)
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mr I.M. Britza
Mr T.G. Stephens

Hearing commenced at 1.03 pm

GREGSON, MR WAYNE

Chief Executive Officer, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

BUTCHER, MR RICHARD

Program Director, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

BAILEY, MR LLOYD

Chief Operations Officer, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are just going to give the cameras about a minute or two just to take some footage and then they will leave the room. The media will still be here, but not the cameras. I have got something I have to read out, as you are aware—you have been here before. This Committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you please state your full name, address and the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Mr Gregson: My name is Wayne Gregson. I am the CEO of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and the address is now Cockburn. Do not push me for the exact address—

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You have moved there, have you?

Mr Gregson: We have moved; the first day of operations is today.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Fantastic.

Mr Bailey: Lloyd Alexander Bailey, the Chief Operations Officer for the operations command of Fire and Emergency Services Authority residing at Cockburn Central.

Mr Butcher: I am Richard John Butcher, program director, corporate reform, at Cockburn.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Allow me to introduce members of the committee. I am Rob Johnson, member for Hillarys; I am the Deputy Chairman of this Committee. The Chairman is not able to be here, so you are in my hands today. The other committee members are my colleague Margaret Quirk, member for Girrawheen, and Ian Britza, the member for Morley. Before we go any further, I ask the cameramen to leave as soon as they can, please.

I understand you have not actually made a submission. If that is the case, you may wish to make an opening statement.

Mr Gregson: Yes, Mr Chairman, I would appreciate the opportunity to make an opening statement. Would you like me to commence?

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please do.

Mr Gregson: Thank you very much. I again introduce Lloyd Bailey, the Chief Operations Officer, and John Butcher, program director for corporate reform. Bearing in mind the committee's terms of reference, I would like to make some initial opening comments about the state's bushfire preparedness for this season and outline some of the key initiatives and programs that FESA has worked on over the past 12 months.

In line with the community and government's expectation, FESA's focus over the past 12 months has been on ensuring that the remaining recommendations arising from "A Shared Responsibility: The Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review" and outcomes of the report of the special inquiry into the November 2011 Margaret River bushfire, among others, have been implemented. In that time, FESA has undergone significant organisational change to ensure that it is better prepared to protect the community and, above all, to ensure that it is well prepared for the challenging bushfire and cyclone seasons immediately ahead. As you are aware, bushfire preparedness is a shared responsibility and FESA is continuing to work closely in partnership with the state government, the Department of Environment and Conservation, local governments and key stakeholders to enhance the delivery of emergency services in Western Australia.

If I may just outline to the committee some predictions about the seasonal outlook for 2012–13, the seasonal projection for spring is a 60 to 70% chance of above-average rainfall in the South West. This is likely to have a neutral to positive effect to the long-term drought conditions; however, it may hamper fuel load-reduction burning programs and result in increased fuel load. In general, bushfire potential for the south west is expected to be above average as a consequence of reduced overall rainfall, soil moisture deficit and high fuel loads. However, there is early word from the Bureau of Meteorology of some changes to the final predictions and they will be determined in conjunction with the Bureau of Meteorology. FESA will facilitate its annual forum, which will be held on 2 November. This forum will brief stakeholders on the seasonal outlook and preparation activities for the upcoming bushfire season. I extend an invitation to yourself as Chair and all of your committee; you are welcome to attend, should you wish to do so.

Much of our focus, as I have said, has been on the recommendations from the Keelty report, or the Perth Hills bushfire review 2011, and FESA has been working to address, either in partnership with others or at our own behest—we are the lead agency for 25 of those 55 recommendations, and that has been a key focus for us over the last 12 months. In relation to the following items from the above report, in addition to, the Premier announced a number of Government initiatives, which include the fire and emergency services becoming a department, with legislation to give effect to the transition of FESA from an authority to a government department. That has been assented to. With effect from 1 November, we will be known as the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

As a business unit within the new department, the Office of Bushfire Risk Management is now operating independently to assess the risks of prescribed burns and supervise agency bushfire-related risk management during the planning and implementation phases of prescribed burning operations. OBRM sets standards and policy for such burns to enhance the efficient and effective management of bushfire-related risk in Western Australia. There has been a number of additional fire districts, particularly in the south west capes region. I may speak more about that later. Having been established in line with the Premier's statements, FESA already has had considerable discussions with local government, volunteers and DEC personnel regarding an enhanced approach to the capes region. In addition, a number of meetings have been held about zone response arrangements and in-principle agreement has been reached with the key stakeholders. FESA is continuing to work with various bodies, including DEC and local government, in developing better operating procedures and modelling the upcoming fire season.

With respect to our operations, we have done some significant work around pre-identified personnel, particularly for level 3 incident management teams. There are enhanced metropolitan

region operations command arrangements, again, with pre-identified teams—particularly who will fill what roles in IMTs on days of extreme or catastrophic fire weather. There has been a review of the response protocols by FESA, DEC and local government to ensure a more coordinated response to the escarpment area in the metropolitan area and to ensure that that is appropriate to address the risk. Again, identification of appropriately qualified level 3 incident managers from within DEC and/or FESA has been agreed prior to the season. Work is continuing around activation protocols.

We have again secured the Erickson Air-Crane helicopter for this season. We are also enhancing the intelligence platform and even more utilisation on modelling for fire season modelling and enhanced intelligence for IMTs this year. We will have a joint air desk with DEC, so air operations will be jointly conducted from the Cockburn facility—an initiative between DEC and FESA. So, air operations will be co-housed at the new facility. Gnowangerup, Collie and Margaret River airstrips have all had joint FESA–DEC water supply equipment upgrades to enhance fixed-wing aerial suppression operations. The FESA metropolitan area firefighting fleet will be enhanced during the southern bushfire season with an additional 11 light tankers. Additional appliance resources have also been allocated for use in the identified fire risk locations. There will be three additional tankers crewed by career fire and rescue staff to provide for immediate mobilisation into country locations without denuding the metropolitan area. There has been substantial improvement in community engagement. In response to the revised AIIMS structure, FESA has developed a community liaison unit, the primary role of which is to provide two-way communications between the IMT and affected communities during the response phase of an incident. We now also engage volunteers as liaison officers in IMTs at all levels of operations.

In terms of training, there has been skills enhancement programs for career station officers across the State, and will have been completed by 31 October. This program incorporates rural–urban interface firefighting strategies, Bureau of Meteorology NextGen weather forecasting, WAERN radio technology, occ health and safety, and community engagement developments including the community liaison unit that is deployed during major incidents. Five major incident management for incident controllers courses have been conducted during 2011–12, which involved FESA, DEC, WAPOL and also is aimed specifically at level 3 incident controllers and has included a number of local government chief bushfire control officers on the course.

There has been a review of WESTPLAN–Bushfire; however, I might say that I have made a decision to not change that too substantially this close to the fire season this year. There are no substantial changes that require modification and I did not want to make substantial changes that might require additional training as we lead into the bushfire season, and as we are doing a suite of bushfire conjoint exercises, we wanted to have a stable platform on which to operate.

In late 2011, a series of workshops were held to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of bushfire management in the rural–urban interface. These workshops critically analysed current procedures for bushfire management and identified gaps to enable the introduction of sustainable practices prior to this bushfire season.

There has been some significant work around the Capes enhanced service delivery. You would be aware that FESA received some significant funding to enhance the arrangements in the capes area, which included enhanced mobilisation procedures through the Cape zone response arrangements; and new and expanded gazetted fire districts, which include the townships of Yallingup, Cowaramup, Prevelly, Gnarabup and Witchcliffe, with the gazettal of these districts anticipated by 17 December. Additional appliances are being provided to complement existing resources through increased capacity in the capes area and to enhance what is available to them. The manufacture of six additional appliances has been incorporated into the build program and these are scheduled for delivery by mid-December. Fire station modifications required to house these new appliances have been identified. Memoranda of understanding have been developed between FESA and local government to progress the required building extensions and formalise ongoing maintenance

arrangements, and these modifications are scheduled for completion by 17 December, and might I say a mighty effort by local government in that regard.

In terms of our mitigation, FESA receives assistance from local government volunteer bush fire brigades for the majority of hazard reduction burning. FESA has been building capacity with local government through the community emergency service manager program, and this ensures that local government bush fire brigades are regularly engaged and involved in hazard reduction operations. In addition, FESA continues to work with local governments, undertaking tenure-blind community protection focused hazard reduction operations. This has been done specifically in the Kimberley and on the Nullarbor. With regard to the Department of Education, FESA has entered into an agreement with the department to assess, mitigate and report on a specific list of schools located in high bushfire risk areas. The purpose of this project is to reduce the radiant heat and ember attack on school buildings by modifying vegetation at calculated distances from these buildings. In respect of community bushfire risk management plans, FESA has developed seven community bushfire risk management plans in partnership with local government within the metropolitan, South West and lower South West regions. The aim of these plans is to provide a common understanding and an agreed approach to the mitigation of bushfire risks for defined areas within the jurisdiction of local government authorities.

That is just a snapshot of some of the high-profile things we have been endeavouring to achieve over the last 12 months. I am happy to go into greater detail, but I am also cognisant of the time available. I am happy to table that document if it might be of benefit to you, and to give you more time to address matters that may be of direct interest to you.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can I thank you, Mr Gregson, very much indeed for your very comprehensive opening statement; I think it is about the longest one I have ever heard, and I think you have probably saved us a bit of time in relation to some of the questions that we may have been tempted to ask you. I thank you for a very comprehensive opening statement. We will, of course, have that recorded by Hansard, but you are more than welcome to leave your original copy in case there is any difference.

I will lead off with a couple of questions, if I may. I am a fairly new Deputy Chairman, as you will probably be aware, and in looking at some of the correspondence I noticed that there was a letter addressed to you dated 24 September, when you were invited to attend the committee, and in part of that letter the committee gave you the opportunity to put submissions in but also to provide it with copies of any FESA submissions and responses to the Noetic Solutions reports on the Margaret River and Nannup bushfires of November 2011. Have you brought any copies of submissions you have made to that particular report with you?

Mr Gregson: No, I have not brought the submissions with me today. Just as you are a new Deputy Chair, might I say I am a new CEO, and this is unfamiliar territory for me. I do not wish to stand the committee up by any means, but I would like to get some advice on that. FESA has provided significant feedback to Noetic in terms of the incidents, and FESA has also commented on the draft Noetic report, which was referred originally to government, and government, as I understand it, referred it to the State Emergency Management Committee. That is now back with the State Emergency Management Committee to again furnish to government.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is the final Noetic response to the report?

Mr Gregson: That is correct.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I should tell you that DEC has already submitted to us its response to the Noetic report.

Mr Gregson: With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Chair, I am also happy to furnish that to the Committee, but I would like to seek advice on that because I do not want to circumvent any Cabinet process and I just want to get absolute clarity that it is within my remit. The report is not mine; it is

with SEMC, and my understanding is that it is going from SEMC to cabinet, through the minister. Notwithstanding what Mr McNamara may have furnished, I am also happy to furnish it should that be my advice.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think there may be some criticism here, Mr Gregson, because the letter was dated 24 September and we are now well over a month after that date. There may be some criticism that perhaps you should have sought that advice earlier, because the Committee specifically asked for a copy of your response in relation to the submission in relation to the Noetic report, so—

Mr Gregson: I am just not sure whether it is mine to give. I would not think that that advice would be more than a day, so—

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: When can you advise us as to whether or not you are prepared to give it to us?

Mr Gregson: I think within the next day or so I will be able to get that advice. It is not that we do not have the documentation; I am happy to provide it, should that be the advice. Again, with your indulgence, as I am a relatively new CEO, I am sure that an extra 24 hours will not be too much of an indulgence.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I am sure we can go 24 hours, Mr Gregson; I am sure that is not a problem at all.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: If we need to get you back in to talk to you about it, that is fine.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We may have to do that, which may inconvenience you somewhat. We do not want to have to subpoena it; we would obviously prefer to do it this way. The other question I have before I hand over to my colleagues, who may have some questions, even though you did answer a lot of questions in your opening statement, is: in relation to the efficiency dividend, your agency has been subjected to that and the cap on FTEs. Can you tell us whether you have been subjected to that?

Mr Gregson: That is correct; well, yes and no. Yes, we have been subjected to that, but I am pleased to say that it only relates to the contribution from consolidated revenue, so it does not relate to the ESL funding that the agency receives.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What that means, surely, is that it will be paid by the public through the ESL.

Mr Gregson: No, the magnitude of the efficiency dividends that is applied to the Fire and Emergency Services Authority is not as high as what it would have been, had it been applied to my total budget.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I appreciate that, but your total budget includes the ESL, which the public pays for.

Mr Gregson: The two per cent applies only to the contribution from consolidated revenue, not the ESL contribution.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Oh, okay. And the cap on FTEs?

Mr Gregson: The cap on FTEs applies to us in terms of our vacancies, and there is some considerable discussion going on at the moment between me and the minister as to exactly what is in and what is out, because we have a number of recruit positions there that we are not sure were intended to be captured within scope; we have not finalised that yet, but I am working hard with the minister in terms of what that specifically means for FESA.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think most people would consider that your firefighting officers, the cadets that you are training and your recruits are part of the front-line service in a very critical area, and I think certainly on behalf of the committee, we would be very concerned if there were

any reduction at all in relation to the number of firefighters that you are able to employ, particularly with what is predicted to be a very serious, critical bushfire season—probably the worst we have seen, some people say. We would like some assurance that the government cutbacks are not going to affect your agency in relation to the critical area of fighting fires, particularly in the bushfire areas.

Mr Gregson: I do not think the impost from the efficiency dividend is going to adversely affect our capability in terms of taking on board the firefighters that we need to take on board. With respect to where we are going to find the savings, again, there are some discussions taking place between me and the minister in terms of what our priorities are. We will obviously endeavour to meet the government's objectives in terms of efficiency and the expectations on us as an agency in terms of operational service delivery.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can you give us an indication as to where those savings might be?

Mr Gregson: Really, we have not resolved or settled on any of those, so I am really not, at this point in time, able to furnish you with exact specifics in terms of where the savings will be identified, but I will continue to work with my minister in that area, and I am sure that when we have agreed on priorities, as we come up to the mid-term cycle, that all will be revealed at that particular point in time, but the specifics are not yet nailed down, and we do not have enough granularity in terms of where the savings may be coming from.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: When is the deadline for your agency in relation to the identified savings that you have to put forward that will be published in the midyear review? The midyear review is normally done late November, December, so you do not have a lot of time. When is your deadline?

Mr Gregson: I think by the midyear review we will be able to identify where the savings are coming from.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Which is when?

Mr Gregson: I am not sure when that Treasury cycle is at this point.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Does Mr Butcher know?

Mr Butcher: I think it is in November.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I thought it was, so you are probably only a couple of weeks away—the middle of November—so if you have not identified your savings by now—

Mr Gregson: I have a range of options, but I am—

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We would be very interested to hear about some of those.

Mr Gregson: I am sure you would, but I have not yet agreed with the minister in terms of government priorities. Obviously, my priority is to not compromise operational capability or capacity and I think, given the magnitude of the savings that are expected to make, we should be able to meet both objectives, but there is not yet that level of granularity between me and the minister that could assist the committee.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Granularity? Can you just explain what you mean by that?

Mr Gregson: Level of detail.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Thank you very much.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What is the level of savings you have to make in monetary terms? You said it is not going to be taken off the ESL, it is just going to be taken off consolidated revenue, but there is not an awful lot of consolidated revenue paid into FESA's budget these days.

Mr Gregson: No, sadly, and I am glad you recognise that!

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, I do! I recognised it before. There has been a diminishing amount over the last four years, I would say.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is not what you said in estimates!

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I do now, though! I can say that it has been diminishing over the last four years, and the ESL has been responsible for making up a lot more of the funds available to the agency, but I am very concerned that consolidated revenue might be being decreased yet again.

Mr Gregson: Imposed as part of the 2012–13 Budget process, it will result in a reduction in the consolidated account appropriations in 2012–13 of \$431,000.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: How much?

Mr Gregson: It is \$431,000.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Out of your total budget from consolidated revenue. Is that one per cent?

Mr Gregson: That is two per cent.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Were you given any extra funds in this year's Budget?

Mr Gregson: Yes, absolutely. There was approximately \$44 million over the four-year estimate period.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: How much is it this year, though?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That was for you and DEC?

Mr Gregson: No, that was just for FESA. We had \$20 million—

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Because forward estimates are just that—they are just estimates. We cannot guarantee them; as we are told time and time again, they are not guaranteed. All I want to know is the actual figure for this financial year.

Mr Gregson: Just bear with me, I did bring those. I may not have the breakdowns in per annum, but there were eight business cases that were approved—nine if you count the enhanced WebEOC issue. We have around \$20 million for four business cases, \$20 million for the second series of business cases and \$4 million for WebEOC over the four years. It is roughly 25%. In fact, we are probably spending —

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is not always the case, but I am interested to hear whether that is the case. Very often, the smaller amount is allocated for the first year and then larger amounts, which are estimates, are for out years, which can, of course, be changed.

Mr Gregson: It is reasonably in line with what we asked for in the business cases. Some of the business cases referred to capital equipment purchases, so it is probably stacked at the front end. Other business cases refer increased FTE and operational preparedness, which is more evenly spread. Some of the other business cases like WebEOC are at the back end because they are waiting for infrastructure development.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: If you cannot supply those figures today, can you supply them by way of supplementary information? That would be fine.

Mr Gregson: Yes, I would be happy to do that.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: And if you can do that, what it amounts to this year, where it is being spent—that extra money that the Government has allocated to it—and what the forward estimates are showing as well, would be appreciated.

Mr Gregson: Yes, I can give you the global figures over the four years at this stage, but I would be happy to furnish the annual breakdown.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think they make more sense and are more responsible if we have the annual breakdown.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: You just briefly mentioned WebEOC. Is it up and running and have you trialled it?

Mr Gregson: It is up and running and, yes, we have trialled it. It has been used in a number of exercises and I believe also in one or two actual events. We brought in WebEOC from the Western Australian Police. We have significantly modified it and we have now some additional funding to take that to the next level where we are trying to make some of our older systems redundant and use WebEOC more exclusively.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: The presentation was very impressive. Has it kept up to what we thought it was going to be?

Mr Gregson: Yes, I am very happy with it. We have now got it operational in Cockburn—we are just doing some modifications to it there —

Mr I.M. BRITZA: All the time lines will definitely be recorded?

Mr Gregson: All the time lines will definitely be recorded, with or without WebEOC!

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We would very much appreciate the opportunity to come and have a look around your new facility in Cockburn. I saw it in the very early stages, but I did not see an invitation to the official opening, so perhaps at some later date before Christmas the Committee could come and see firsthand.

Mr Gregson: You would be very welcome.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, we will arrange a date and time to come and see the new facility and how it is operating.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Just a couple of questions. I want to get onto some of the looking-forward stuff, but we did hear from Western Power last week in relation to the course of the Toodyay fire. They said the cause was still unknown. I understand that FESA, in conjunction with the arson squad, would have conducted an inquiry into that fire and I would be interested to know, Mr Gregson, what is FESA's assessment, based on the report, as to what started the Toodyay fire.

Mr Gregson: I do not know the answer that, but I am happy to find out for you.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The next issue I want to talk about is moving from StateAlert to the national Emergency Alert system. What is going to be running this fire season? Is there going to be any hiatus between StateAlert and Emergency Alert?

Mr Gregson: My understanding is that they are both running in parallel this fire season. There will be a move towards a national system. Some functionality will be improved with the new system and some functionality will be momentarily lost with the new system until it becomes part of the national system.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Should people still register under the StateAlert this year or is that going into abeyance? Do you see what I mean, because with the national system you do not actually have to register, for the State one you do—what are we doing in interim this year?

Mr Gregson: Are you talking about the specific functionality of opting in?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes. On a StateAlert you will only get a phone call, as I understand it, if you are on the register. No?

Mr Gregson: No; you can go on a register to get —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: For the second and third numbers, yes.

Mr Gregson: Yes, if you have a property somewhere else, you can opt into that. That functionality is not available with emergency alert at this point in time, but it will be coming in the future.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: You were talking about the strategy for the capes this year and you have talked about the number of appliances. Can I confirm that other places such as Manjimup, Gosnells, Victoria Plains and Esperance are not going to be waiting for their appliances, I think, because of sending the appliances down to fulfil the capes strategy.

Mr Gregson: I do not know about the specific locations, but certainly, because of lead time for manufacture and commissioning of the appliances, some of the appliances that were destined for other places have been redirected into the capes and there will be a delay for other areas in getting their replacement unit. It is important to recognise, of course, that this does not compromise their capacities. We have not redirected units; we have just delayed the replacement units going to units that were scheduled —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Am I not getting the appliance they thought they were getting, for example.

Mr Gregson: No; they will still get the same appliance that they were scheduled to get.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is not my understanding in relation of Preston Beach, but I will let you make some inquiries about that.

Mr Gregson: My understanding about Preston Beach is that their replacement appliance is not yet coming, so they have kept their existing appliance and they have had a supplementary appliance, which is not what they are getting replaced, and that is to give them additional capacity over this coming season.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In what information we have about the Noetic report it appears that there has been some suggestion that legislative change is needed in relation to, for example, commandeering appliances. Are you able to tell us anything about how that issue might have arisen in the context at Margaret River?

Mr Gregson: No.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It was recommendation 21. I cannot find it. Anyway, it highlighted, and I gather this has been discussed at the SEMC, of which you are a member, the need for legislative change and that FESA would be charged with that. I am just trying to inquire as to whether you are aware of the what that would be about.

Mr Gregson: No; I would only be surmising or guessing, which I would rather not do.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The recommendation states —

Legislative change may be needed to enable FESA to better manage fire-fighting resources across the state.

That is recommendation 21 of the Nannup fires.

Mr Gregson: I think that would relate to local government and I ask Lloyd to make a comment on it.

Mr Bailey: Certainly. My understanding is that some of the intent of that recommendation is to provide us with rapid access and ability to mobilise local government resources without necessarily having to continue to go back to the chief bushfire control officer to release those appliances to another job.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So, is there some issue at the moment? I would have thought that the legislation that was amended 18 months or so ago involving FESA's capacity to take over management of fire—is that any clarification in terms of that? Will that include, if you like, commandeering resources such as appliances under local government? Is that the issue?

Mr Bailey: Currently, certainly in the metropolitan area, the FESA comm centre can mobilise one fire appliance from a local government area immediately. Subsequent ones are referred to the chief for approval to mobilise and consequent ones after that go back to the chief again, and he may say no. I think we would seek, at the catastrophic end, a greater ability to initially mobilise more resources from a local government immediately.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think the public would find that extraordinary. So, you are saying that if there was a major bushfire somewhere, you can basically grab the first appliance from local government, but there has to be a bit of to-ing and fro-ing about getting the other appliances; is that correct?

Mr Bailey: Something like that, but not that contentious, but that is the current situation at the moment. The chief does authorise the release of appliances from one local government to go into another.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I understand that when your appliances are issued to local governments under the ESL that there is a memorandum of understanding executed between local government and FESA in terms of the issuing of that appliance.

Mr Bailey: As far as I am aware the MOUs are in relation to the bulk water tankers that are currently being put into the area, but the other ones are transferred to the ownership of local government. The bulk water tankers are seen as a regional resource that FESA would have local access to and local governments are entering into those agreements with us to mobilise them where required, rather than them not being issued to the government specifically.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is there not the capacity to do something by way of some sort of contractual agreement rather than having to change legislation to enable FESA to commandeer those vehicles?

Mr Bailey: I would like to work in with local governments overall to say where the demand is greatest we can quickly mobilise the available resources and, if necessary, have another local government cover—a local government that is maybe closer to the fire that may be denuded of resources to some degree. It is an issue that we are still working through, but I just outline the current situation.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Given that this arose in the context of the Noetic report, are you aware whether this was in fact a problem at Margaret River or Milyeannup–Nannup?

Mr Bailey: I cannot say that I am aware of any issues down there. I think there was a very big commitment of local government resources into the area at the time of those fires, but in the context of Noetic I will have to refer back to our commission.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just talking about the Noetic report, it is quite interesting that in the copy we were given by DEC, which refers not just to them, but also to the agency heading as FESA, it says “supported” in nearly all the recommendations and comments. Most of them are supported even once under your agency, so I assuming that that support has come from you and not simply get assuming that you are going to support it. I am just saying that you have seen this document.

Mr Gregson: I am not sure what that document is. I am presuming it is what Mr McNamara has tabled. DEC and FESA have worked very collaboratively in terms of what is required with respects to the learning outcomes that have been articulate by Noetic.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: FESA is changing to a Department, when is that officially occurring?

Mr Gregson: On 1 November.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Thereafter you will be called what?

Mr Gregson: Commissioner!

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Not you personally!

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We know you are going to be called the Commissioner, and do frequently!

Mr Gregson: It will be the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Will there be any change, for example, to the website and, if so, given the short time —

Mr Gregson: There will be a change the website and we are taking a very practical approach in terms of the nomenclature and what is required to be replaced in terms of badges. It will be on a type of use-by first arrangement—use up the stationary before you employ new. At the old website you will still be able to get access to the same information. They are all linked, so it will not matter whether someone goes into the old FESA website.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is www.fesa.wa.gov.au. What is the new website address going to be? Do you know?

Mr Gregson: I do not know. I would say that it will be www.dfes.wa.gov.au.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is not a trivial question; it is if people need to access information this fire season. When will that change of website title be known?

Mr Gregson: They will both be up and both be linked as of the 1 November.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: So as from 1 November, you assume the position of Commissioner, do you, Mr Gregson?

Mr Gregson: That is correct.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Uniform, perhaps?

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I am coming to that. I hope it is an appropriate uniform you will be wearing to show the status of the person you are in this superb agency, if I may call it that?

Mr Gregson: I have been criticised for dressing inappropriately from time to time, but I think you will find the uniform will be appropriate.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excellent. Will you be wearing that on Thursday?

Mr Gregson: I will.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excellent. I will see it best on television, I am sure.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: He is upset that he did not get an invite!

You mentioned about working with schools in terms of safeguarding schools in bushfire-prone areas. I asked a question on notice in Parliament, and it appears that very few schools have actually installed ember guards—in fact, it is a handful of schools out of, I think, around 60 or 80 that should have had ember guards. I am interested to know what sort of work has been done, given this poor response by the Department of Education.

Mr Gregson: We have entered a memorandum of understanding with them to assist them in some of their safety and prescribed burning issues around their schools. I do not know how many schools are up for ember guards. That question—

Ms M.M. QUIRK: No, what I am saying is that the nature of the work is that you are there and you are available to give advice, but it is up to the Department of Education, obviously, to implement the recommendations of Keelty insofar as they apply to them?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is FESA—I can call it FESA for the next couple of days—working to a strategic plan at the moment?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: When was that finished?

Mr Gregson: A strategic futures paper will be launched with the commencement of the new Department. We had a paper that produced when I first took over called a futures paper; that document has served us for this year, but we have consolidated at a more strategic level, and we will be producing a new paper called “New Directions” on Thursday.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In terms of appliances, I think you have given evidence about the time it takes to construct appliances, and so every unit that thinks it requires one does not obviously get one in the time frame they would prefer. What criteria are used to assess in terms of priority of allocating appliances?

Mr Gregson: In terms of resources, they are allocated on a risk basis, and in terms of replacement vehicles, they are allocated on a vehicle replacement program.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many kilometres would an appliance do before it was replaced?

Mr Gregson: The criteria are based on age of the appliance rather than kilometres, because very, very few kilometres are actually done on fire appliances.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So that is why we hear of, say in career fire stations, fire trucks being as old as 18 years old, for example, or 20 years old?

Mr Gregson: Yes, you might hear that; I am not so sure that is absolutely dead accurate. But, yes, often there are complaints that vehicles are aged, but that does not necessarily mean they are not fit-for-purpose.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: One of the recommendations of Keelty was the further gazettal of areas, which effectively then means that they come under FESA control rather than local government control. Is that a correct summary of what gazettal means?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Other than the existing gazetted areas, are there any plans to gazette any more areas; and, if so, where are they and when is that going to occur?

Mr Gregson: FESA makes submissions through to the Minister annually in terms of where we recommend there be expansions to the gazetted areas. There is almost certainly going to be a submission from FESA that where the metropolitan area is growing, we will also expand the gazetted area. Could I perhaps make a comment about gazetted areas? I think they are very much a thing of the past. I do not think they serve much purpose these days. My belief is that in the future we should move away from gazetted areas entirely, and that there should be just two agreements.

One would be a resourcing agreement with local government in that we make a consideration of what emergency service requirements there are in each local government area and we agree on a resource agreement, whether it be so many career stations, so many SES units, so many bush fire brigades or whatever it may, and we sign up to that resource agreement with local government. Then the second agreement should be a response agreement, where at the local level they work out the best means of responding to whatever incident occurs. That way you do not get such artificial silos as this is a career responsibility or this is a volunteer responsibility, and patch protection at the low level can be avoided.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: All right. But I understand some areas are being considered that are not around at the metro area, for example around Margaret River shire and places like that?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What stage are they all at, and can you maybe point to some of the areas?

Mr Gregson: I did make reference to that in my opening address, if I could just go back to that. Yes; new and expanded gazetted fire districts are being established to include the town sites of

Yallingup, Cowaramup, Prevelly, Gnarabup and Witchcliffe, with gazettal of these districts anticipated by 17 December 2012. And I think we are looking at doing more in Capel in the next couple of years. That is in addition to the metropolitan area.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Obviously, in some of those areas career coverage is not applicable because the career stations are too far away.

Mr Gregson: Traditionally career has been placed on reticulated water supply. The whole old-fashioned notion of gazettal is that they go where they can plug in. Now, some of their expertise and operational capability is required outside of those gazettal areas, and that is why it is a nonsense not to have an arrangement whereby the community can draw on career fire and rescue, notwithstanding the fact that they are not in a gazetted area. That is what make the capes response so unique, because we have actually gone down a path of looking at what is the best appropriate response, and then, by agreement, that may include careers in non-gazetted areas, and volunteers in gazetted areas.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So would they be bush fire brigade, local government volunteers, or would they be volunteer fire and rescue service volunteers?

Mr Gregson: They are all.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: All of the above?

Mr Gregson: They have all been drawn into what will I call an arrangement, so that the communities in those areas can get the best possible resources on the ground, and they are drawn from all three.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Once those areas are gazetted, does that mean that the ESL applies in those areas?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Has any calculation been made in relation to those areas of what additional moneys will be required from ESL in those areas currently not covered?

Mr Gregson: I am sure there would have been.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: If you could supply that to the committee, that would be excellent; thank you.

Mr Bailey: Still a volunteer-based levy.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What was that, Mr Bailey?

Mr Bailey: I was just saying it is still a volunteer-based levy.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So it will not be category 1, it will be down the track?

Mr Bailey: No; category 1 is the metropolitan area, which is career backed up by career; bush fires is volunteer—

Ms M.M. QUIRK: But they will be paying money that they currently have not been paying; is that correct?

Mr Bailey: There will be a slight rise, yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A slight rise? Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: In relation to fire hydrants, I know there was a situation where you wanted the water authority to take over the responsibility of fire hydrants, and the maintenance and whatever, and they wanted you to do it. What is the situation with them at the moment?

Mr Gregson: It has gone to them.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: So they are going to do it?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Reluctantly, obviously, you believe?

Mr Gregson: Well, I would have no idea.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It may be the case; I may very well say that, but you could not possibly comment. So it is the water authority's responsibility now for all those fire hydrants to be maintained and in working order, and the cost will be borne by the water authority?

Mr Gregson: There are some areas, of course, that the water authority does not cover; down south there are a couple of instrumentalities. But, yes, the responsibility for fire hydrants is no longer with us.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That must be a relief?

Mr Gregson: Yes. I think it is appropriate that the infrastructure is maintained by the people who own that infrastructure.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No argument from me whatsoever.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Earlier on we talked about the WebEOC, but also there was an issue with radios, and you now have the WAERN radios; have they been trialled or used?

Mr Gregson: Yes, they are trialled and used and in operation. We are doing some enhancement in terms of external speakers on a number of appliances, and some station-based units are also being deployed.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In that context, DEC's comments to the Noetic review say that WAERN radios across emergency services have not necessarily yet achieved all the objectives of the project. I was wondering if you could comment on that remark.

Mr Gregson: I would rather comment if I knew specifically what benefits they believed had not been achieved by that project.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: But it would be true to say that there are still significant gaps in radio communication capability?

Mr Gregson: In Western Australia?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes.

Mr Gregson: There are always gaps in radio communications in Western Australia.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And certainly you would be getting reports back from volunteers to that effect?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is there any particular area where that is more acute than others?

Mr Gregson: Radio communications are at the vagaries on terrain and weather—there is a whole raft of issues in terms of coverage. I do not know whether you want to see coverage maps, but there are certainly gaps in radio communications no matter what system you have, and you can operationally complement that. We can get mobile base stations into position pretty quickly for big jobs so that we can set up trailers with towers et cetera. But you will always have problems with radio comms.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In progress reports there have been lots of comments about, for example, the warnings that appear regularly in the media and on websites and how timely they are. What measures are being taken to improve that?

Mr Gregson: The move to Emergency Alert will give us better capacity to more quickly draw the polygons and get them out, but you will still find some people will get messages with a slight lag, and other people will get messages when perhaps they might think they ought not, because they will be ahead of the game. What I think has to be recognised is that the Emergency Alert, for example, is just one way of getting the message out, and what we are working towards is a whole raft of ways

in which to deliver the message to the community but from a single source. So the same source of the message or the same message, but delivered by a whole range of media, whether it be the website, ABC radio or commercial radio.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I know this is the subject of investigation, but I was a bit puzzled in relation to the incident at Albany, which I do not think FESA took over the management of until about 5.30pm or thereabouts. I was puzzled that at 3.18pm an alert was put out on the FESA website that there was no likelihood of damage to homes or people, I think, at that stage. That was at 3.18pm; in fact, the firefighters from DEC, I think, were injured at about at 3.06pm. But what is more concerning is that that alert or whatever did not change until 6.40pm. I am just wondering what sort of information flow issues arise out of that in that a considerable amount of time passes before alerts are updated or changed or what have you?

Mr Gregson: I would prefer not to talk about that specific case, but in general was there a need to change that message?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Sorry?

Mr Gregson: Well, I am wondering whether there was a need to change that message. Did that change? My understanding—

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Clearly the time that a message goes out saying there is no potential for damage to lives or whatever was at a time when five people were being ferried to hospital. It seems to me that—

Mr Gregson: Yes, but no threat to lives or property relates to the public message. There is always a threat to the lives and property of the firefighters involved. I have had a look through that area, and I do not think there was ever a threat to lives or property. I am just questioning whether or not there was a need to actually change that message. But we change the messages to try to make sure they are as up-to-date as possible.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Probably the relatives of the firefighters injured probably would not like seeing that; that is for sure. But anyway, that is another question.

Mr Gregson: Well then every job would—

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What I am really asking about is what sort of time frame is optimal for you guys in terms of your alerts. How can the public be confident that the information on your system is as timely as possible and up to date?

Mr Gregson: That relies on good command, good control of the communications, and then obviously getting the messages from the incident management team interpreted and put onto the system, as well as delivered to the media in media releases. It is always a compromise between accuracy and timeliness, so you want to make sure the information is accurate, and then you want to make sure that you get it on there in as timely a way as possible to give the public as much advice as we can.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The Office of Bushfire Risk Management comes under FESA, as I understand it?

Mr Gregson: That is correct.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How does it operate within the Department? Is it separate of you, or does it report to you, or how does it operate?

Mr Gregson: It is semi-autonomous. It is a business unit within FESA that reports to me directly.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Sometimes, presumably under the arrangements, they can say to DEC, “You can do prescribed burning there subject to certain conditions.”

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: If those conditions are not complied with, what sanctions are available?

Mr Gregson: I do not think there would be any formal sanctions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In regard to the Two Peoples Bay fire, FESA is conducting a separate investigation or a major incident review.

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And that is in conjunction, as I understand it, with the City of Albany and DEC; is that right?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There is a separate WorkSafe investigation going on as well, I understand; is that right?

Mr Gregson: I believe so, yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Have you got any time frame for when those investigations are likely to be concluded?

Mr Gregson: No.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Going back to the SEMC—just changing the subject—I gather that was currently under the aegis, I think, of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. That is now moving to FESA, is that correct?

Mr Gregson: No. I need to be clear what you mean here. The SEMC is a body established under the act.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes, but isn't there secretarial support for that provided by Premier and Cabinet?

Mr Gregson: No. The secretarial support was provided by FESA under its role as EMWA. That is now changed to the SEMC secretariat, and that at the moment is under FESA, and there is a view that that will become a sub-department in the fullness of time.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In relation to the Noetic report, you are a member of the SEMC?

Mr Gregson: I am

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And that has come before your Committee?

Mr Gregson: Yes; well, yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes? What do you mean "well, yes"?

Mr Gregson: Well, it has come before the Committee, yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes, all right. Do you recall when it first came before the Committee?

Mr Gregson: Well, it was referred to the Committee by the Government. I would have to check the dates.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes, if you would not mind doing that, because what I am interested in that is the report was received by government on 22 June. It appears that there was some delay between that occurring and when the SEMC first looked at it, and I understand they are reporting to government at the end of the month; so, in a couple of days' time. Does that accord with your understanding?

Mr Gregson: I cannot tell you about the delay until I check the dates, but it is certainly the case that the SEMC will be reporting back to the Minister.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: One of the Keelty recommendations out of Margaret River was there should be some formal mechanism for these reviews of incident to be done independently so that we do not have this situation arising every time there is a major incident. What is your view on that?

Mr Gregson: My view is that I welcome any sort of inquiry or post-operative assessment of any operations, because I think that generally speaking, if they are written with learning outcomes in mind, there are always things to be learnt from operations. So I would welcome it. Whether it is an independent investigation or whether it is overseen by another government agency, I do not think you have got anything to fear from that. I think, generally speaking, if they are done with the right spirit and the right intent, they are a good learning outcome. So I would be supportive of that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Just one last question. You would be familiar with the issue in terms of both career firefighters and volunteers being exposed to both bushfire fires and toxins from dealing with structural fires, and the move that in some way this be reflected, certainly in the case of career firefighters, in some workers' compensation changes, which would mean that there was a presumption made that firefighters who acquired one of a certain list of cancers, it would be presumed that they were acquired in the course of the job. Have you given advice to government as to whether you think that change to legislation would be a good or bad thing?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And was that a yes or a no? What was the advice given?

Mr Gregson: My advice is it would be a good thing.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: All right. Are you aware of why there has been a hold-up from the Government perspective?

Mr Gregson: No.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And are you aware of any proposal that any legislation the Government passed would include volunteers?

Mr Gregson: I am not sure what the ultimate resolution of Cabinet may or may not be with respect to Government legislation.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Has any submission gone to Cabinet in relation to volunteers being covered by any legislation involving cancer?

Mr Gregson: My advice to—again you put me in a very difficult situation as to whether or not I should be discussing—

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It could be part of the Cabinet process.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is all right. Do not help him out; he is doing fine by himself.

Mr Gregson: Yes, I am sure I am. But, again, you put me in the same situation as to whether or not I ought to be discussing matters that are discussions that take place between me and my Minister. I do support that; I do support any legislative reform that would lead to a rebuttal presumption with respect to cancer for firefighters and volunteers.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Just on that—and this is the last question—volunteers are not covered by workers' compensation, and as we have heard from you before, a vast majority of volunteers are outside FESA; effectively they are with local government. What logistical difficulties are there about bringing volunteers into that sort of a regime?

Mr Gregson: Logistical difficulties?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes.

Mr Gregson: I would think the challenge would be the creativity of the legislators.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have two very quick questions and I believe them to be the final questions. One is: is there yet a whole-of-government equipment register of the firefighting equipment held by FESA, DEC and LGAs?

Mr Gregson: In terms of a unified register, I do not believe there is.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you think there should be?

Mr Gregson: I think we are aware of the capability and capacity of the other government agencies. I think in the future it would probably be good to have a state-based register of all capabilities and capacities.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: And for FESA, or the Department of whatever you are going to call yourselves in future, to have to be the holder of that register?

Mr Gregson: I think that would be a very good suggestion.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes; you are the lead firefighting agency. The final question, I think, unless there is another one I am being asked to ask, is in relation to this Committee's recent report on the toll of trauma.

Mr Gregson: I am sorry, I missed that.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question is: what are your initial thoughts on the Committee's recent *Toll of Trauma* report? Obviously the report goes into detail about the number of counsellors, and I know you have the chaplain in FESA. But what are your initial thoughts on that particular report?

Mr Gregson: I do not think that I am familiar with sufficient detail to really give you an informed view.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Some issues have arisen and we have heard evidence before this Committee, it does not relate to fire but to the position of the metropolitan marine rescue volunteers. Has that been resolved?

Mr Gregson: No, I do not believe it has been resolved.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have to make a closing statement now. Thank you for your evidence before the Committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for your correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within seven days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the Committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

The Witnesses: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 2.10 pm
