

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT KUNUNURRA
TUESDAY, 4 JULY 2006**

SESSION FOUR

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 1.35 pm

DOWN, MR GRAEME JONES

District Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

CANN, MR PETER CHARLES

Acting Director, Country North, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

STEVENSON, MR TONY JOHN

District Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Have you completed a "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: We have a submission from FESA head office. Do you want to make any opening comments or shall we get straight into questions?

Mr Cann: Just straight into it, I think.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you see a significant impact of the legislation binding the Crown in the Kimberley-Pilbara regions?

Mr Cann: If I can answer first, binding the Crown would give us a consistent approach right across the regions. Fire management does not stop on parcels of land. It is very hard if CALM has fire management plans, for instance, or activities that it does and a pastoralist does but the government does not, then there is no requirement for a fire management plan on those lands. When you look at the size of the Kimberley - even the shire here with 829 000 square kilometres - you have got to have a consistent approach to fire management. We believe that by binding the Crown to it, as it is in the FESA act at the present time, it will give us a whole range of abilities to manage fires and actually reduce fire.

Mrs J. HUGHES: That would then obviously lead to consistency in shared information as well.

Mr Cann: Very much so. Consistency will come about because it is all under one set of rules. Sharing of information through the SLIP, or the shared land information emergency management platform, which we are developing at this time, will allow agencies to share information - such as biodiversity, land tenures and patterns - for a shared platform that will be available right throughout the state. It will also lead to a better plan. I think that better planning is the key result that we are looking for at this stage.

The CHAIRMAN: How do you envisage that the process would work? Would local government remain part of the process in relation to the land types - crown, pastoral, grazier or plantation land - or will FESA manage fire mitigation on these land usage types, with some level of consultation with local government?

Mr Cann: I think that any move towards a compulsory fire management plan will be done in consultation with all landholders. It is an essential part. Also, stakeholders up here include local government, so it is an essential part of the process to involve all stakeholders, including local government, in the planning process. We would see it working at three levels. At the local level, I could imagine of a group of pastoral stations that will share the information, so that you have consistency. We would then shift those plans into what we call bushfire advisory committees, but understanding that not all local governments have bushfire committees. Where they do not, we would furnish the information to the chief bushfire officers. It is an essential ingredient that he is kept in the loop. Then, finally, the whole region plans; we would go through the state emergency management system with them, and they would have copies of the plans. It is essential then that during emergencies of any type we have shared information. Consultation is the key. To do fire management plans should not be seen as threatening; it should be part of our better management for emergencies, and also it can help the pastoralists in planning cooperation for things like aerial controlled burning.

The CHAIRMAN: How much support can FESA provide in the development of fire management plans? Do you have the staff? I know that you have recently had an increase in staff up here, but Esperance has one staff member, so how realistic is it to expect that FESA can provide that support?

Mr Cann: FESA can supply the support. There are many ways that we can do fire management planning. Obviously we can do it through the Internet. We can post or e-mail the documentation. They can fill it out. Our staff - that is, both Brian and Tony - regularly visit pastoral stations, where we can get this information formulated into a program. We would see it happening once every two to three years, depending. It is very hard to get to some land tenures and to contact people because of the seasonal conditions that we have. Not all pastoralists live on their stations. There are large tracts where some stations are vacant for a considerable time. Bearing in mind all those considerations, we believe that there could be between a perhaps two and four-year turnaround for the plans, but one thing that should be noted on these plans is the seasonal conditions. If we have an extremely solid wet season, with large amounts of rainfall, we get a lot of growth. If we have seasons with less, it becomes more important, but we would not have to keep revisiting the pastoral stations. The land is managed by the pastoralists and the other agencies. Hence, tending down to this, it is not a big, onerous task. I think that a little bit of fear gets put into a lot of people about having to do something. Our staff and FESA have the resources to help the staff do the fire management plan.

The CHAIRMAN: Is an increase in staff for FESA envisaged to cope with that extra workload?

Mr Cann: No, I would not at this stage see that we would need an increase in staff, but in saying that, we also receive assistance from Perth for our bushfire environmental protection branch, which has a number of staff who come up and help us if there is a shortfall. For example, we are doing some fire management planning work around Fitzroy Crossing under the Emergency Management Australia local branch scheme. While our staff are participating, they are also supported by staff from Perth.

Mr S.R. HILL: Peter, just getting back to the fire management plan, would local government still be able to issue notices under section 33 of the Bush Fires Act?

Mr Cann: My belief is that they would. It would be done in consultation. Again, there should not be a crossover of whether they should or should not. We would see that large tracts of parcels of land would have fire management plans that would still reserve the right of local government to issue section 33 notices for bushfires in, say, around the towns and where they have control. Of course, it is very different statewide. However, we would see that it is only a matter of consultation between them on fire management planning and the act; it is not issuing notices. We believe that we can forge that cooperation.

The CHAIRMAN: What sort of depth or breadth of information do you believe should be in the fire management plans?

Mr Cann: The fire management plan should, first of all, have a map of the station, which is obviously the first part of it, but it should also indicate significant assets, and those assets should be collectively things such as biodiversity assets and endangered species. I could use rock art and sacred sites as examples. All those things should be on the plans, as well as the tenure and whether it is breakaway country or whether it is pastoral country, so that you get some sort of alignment with the value as well as key strategic assets, like communication towers. Those sorts of things should be clearly on a plan, so that if we have a fire, we know exactly what we are dealing with. It is so important to do that. Particularly with the indigenous folk and the biodiversity issues that we have in the region, we must work collectively together. If they can be highlighted on a plan, when there is an incident we are all talking off the one sheet of music.

The CHAIRMAN: We have been provided with a couple of fire management plans, which we are passing around at the moment. Is that a complete fire management plan or are there things missing out of it?

Mr Cann: They vary, depending, I guess, on the land tenure and the typical structures of these, but, most importantly, we can add sections and take away sections as we need for specific assets or risks that we foresee in these. That is the basic starting point. We ask for information, like contact numbers, radio frequencies, fire equipment and resources, their training and whether they would like to participate in aerial controlled burning. All that sort of key information gathering helps us. Even though the plans we are looking at are not in colour, we would get fire scars. We just have to make sure that we are not burning the same areas every year, which is part of the environmental issues.

Mrs J. HUGHES: In relation to station mapping, significant assets and so forth, if a station were to be mapped and it was found that the station had significant assets, do you also propose that FESA would outfit that area with the necessary equipment to protect those assets?

Mr Cann: It would be more on the fire management planning, not moving towards providing response assets; we would concentrate on the planning issues that would be prevention works. We would ensure that those assets are protected by controlled burning, mineral earth breaks or some other form of protection. It is difficult within an area in the Pilbara-Kimberley that has assets located everywhere. Some of these areas of special interest are in remote areas. Prevention, in our opinion, becomes the key. Then we work with the landholders and special interest groups on better ways to protect those assets. The plan would not include providing additional assets per se, if you are talking about fire engines and that sort of stuff.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Could the fire management plan outline what fire resources would be necessary to protect something like that for landowners?

Mr Cann: We could involve that. In one of the sections of the plan itself we ask what resources are available. We are moving to that area. Under the present arrangements of the Bush Fire Act the landholder is responsible for extinguishing fires, so the issue here is that they have the resources on the stations. When we get to fire management planning, it will be possible to suggest a range of equipment and resources that should be made available. I guess the issue that would come out then is whether the state would pay for it, subsidise it or make recommendations. That would be something I think we would need to explore in consultation with the stakeholders.

The CHAIRMAN: The fire management plans and the location of equipment and so on are based on the bushfire or wildfire threat analysis tool. Can you explain what the tool does and, in particular, how it grades protection of people, property and environmental factors?

Mr Cann: The tool itself is basically being developed within FESA and CALM through, as I understand it, the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. What it does is give us prediction models

of fire behaviour - when it will occur and the rate of spread - and that gives us very big issues then of understanding how fire spreads and what we can do to protect the assets, particularly in remote areas. If we have a certain day, the threat analysis will be able to predict the rate of fire spread, and give us planning for how we can shift resources and what other equipment and manpower we made need, particularly in large-scale campaign fires.

Mrs J. HUGHES: If seasonal changes happen and we have an extremely large wet or extremely long dry, some of those analyses would change on the ground, depending on the time of year, the length of season, whether the creek is running and those types of things. How would you manage those?

Mr Cann: In each situation the climactic conditions on the day, the soil moisture and all those factors can make a fire happen. I think it should be stated further that not all fire is bad. We extensively use fire in the early part of the season up here; that is - depending on the seasons - from February on to about May or June. The fires are slow fires. They reduce the fuel loads and they protect the environment. In fact, in some cases with biodiversity some species of plants require the occasional fire to regenerate.

[1.50 pm]

Fire management planning, and the tools that we are referring to, come into play mainly in the late season. There are extremely hot fires; the average temperature is around 40 degrees, with strong easterly winds, or prevailing easterly winds. There is a huge potential for large-scale fires. Our aim is to reduce large-scale fires.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Would you base the management plans on that season?

Mr Cann: The management plans would be for the whole period apart from the wet. The wet will determine fire management planning because of the rainfall. However, it is most important that we start the plan. The Fire and Emergency Services Authority writes to every pastoralist around December each year, asking them to participate. It is optional to participate in aerial burning; they fund it and we part-fund the process. They actually determine fire management on their land. All FESA does is provide advice and mapping. We actually send them the map, either electronically - by Internet - or in the post, so they can draw in where they wish to have their fire management plans. There is a copy available for the committee to look at. It is all part of the process; we write prescriptions to ensure that fire management is done in a controlled environment. That again leads back to the threat analysis tool, in getting a thorough understanding of when the best time is to light fires so that there is a large probability, particularly in the early season, that when we light them they will go out. They used to go out overnight, but in some pockets they will not. There is no consistency in burning rates across the region. All of the regions are different. In new regions that have been allocated, the vegetation is different. That is why it is important to have a wildfire threat analysis that is flexible and that can give us the information we want.

Mrs J. HUGHES: If, for instance, you are doing a controlled aerial burn in a place where the environment is perfect to do that, but it is also perfect in two or three other locations and you have only one plane, is the plane shared with CALM? How would you manage that process? Would you need extra resources?

Mr Cann: The question of availability of aircraft is a complex one because they are a special type of aircraft. They are Britten-Norman Islander II aircraft. They are particularly stable but slow moving. The two aircraft that we have available to us are run by Golden Eagle Airlines in Derby, and we cross-share them with CALM. There are times when we would obviously need another aircraft, but a lot of it is about planning. It is very rare for us not to complete the programs we have set out to do. One of the issues is that the pastoral sector is sometimes very late. We might be burning on a prescribed burn that has been planned, and the next-door pastoralists might say, "Well, now you're here, I'll do mine." This, of course, will start to throw things out. Redundancy matters

have to be factored into the operation of these aircraft - pilot hours and maintenance issues. If they break down, it is set back. If it can be linked back to the importance of planning and evaluation of when the best time is to do this, the research may open the gap so we can get better times to burn.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I note in the fire management plan that you talk about an equipment grants scheme. There is a question about information on the 50 per cent grant for slip-on units. There has been some controversy about slip-on units. Will you clarify the process and whether there is any likelihood that, given the coroner's comments about slip-on units, it will be ongoing?

Mr Cann: Obviously, the coroner's inquest into the accident that happened at Lancelin made FESA rethink its position under the emergency services levy. At this time, under the ESL, slip-on units are not available. That is the latest arrangement we have come to. However, the primary issue with slip-ons was that they were unstable and they came off the appliance. We are busily trying to prepare a case to put to FESA about the viability of slip-on units for us and the region. I believe it is possible in the future that the grant scheme will reapply, maybe in a slightly different format. There will be issues. To cite the example of the Packsaddle brigade, the issue is that there is one brigade that has gone into the matter of tying the slip-on units down. It has engineered them and they are all bolted down. It is no longer an issue. We have to look at the coroner's finding and then work out or engineer a solution. Slip-on units in this part of the region are probably 80 per cent of what all pastoralists have. It is not a simple matter of having fire appliances sitting around on stations for half of the year. That is why it is viable; it is a better use of resources.

The CHAIRMAN: The Conservation Council of Western Australia and the Environmental Defender's Office have discussed the concept of zoning as raised in the Council of Australian Governments report inquiring into bushfire mitigation and management. They spoke about this tool as it applies to fire management plans. In effect, they talked about the primary objectives of three zones, the first being protection of life and property; the second, a balance between these components and biodiversity; and the third, a wilderness area in which there is significant focus on biodiversity. Could you comment on whether the bushfire threat analysis incorporates this notion?

Mr Cann: The bushfire threat analysis will apply to all regions. The Kimberley region is some 525 000 square kilometres. The three zones that you talked about are largely dependent on having correct information and how we formulate our responses to areas of significance. Bearing that in mind, a lot of areas in the Kimberley region are inaccessible, and so a lot of fires are left to burn out because we cannot get in and it is not practical. In that region there are areas of the Mitchell Plateau that we cannot access. It is just one of the issues that we look at in fire management planning. There are things you can do, but there are areas that are inaccessible. We must have better management practices. The fire management plan and the wildfire threat analysis tool, when applied, will come into play. That will help us to better manage and understand. It may mean that in the more remote areas, where the focus is on biodiversity and endangered species, the earlier controlled burning line will be seen as a prevention that will allow those areas to survive.

[2.00 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Is there room for conservation groups to be involved in fire management planning?

Mr Cann: Very much so. They are very much a stakeholder in our region. The issue of biodiversity is two or threefold, I guess. First, we must know where the endangered species are. We see that as primarily an agency role for CALM to do the research and to understand all those areas. Having gathered all the information, I believe the challenge for us is to bring it all over so that we can work as one. People need to do the research. FESA is not necessarily a research agency, and I do not believe it should be. The other agencies sharing that information freely and willingly for the benefit of the environment is the key for the future.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any proposals for how you would get all that information, for how the whole system would work and for how you would include the conservation groups and all those sorts of things?

Mr Cann: I can answer that in several ways. The first way is that we have recently written to CALM seeking cooperation from CALM to, through a formal MOU, share this biodiversity information. We think that will become a key for us. The second way will be through the shared land information platform. This information will be recorded and be available for fire managers per se in the region. Thirdly, it must be clear that the environment and the biodiversity issues are large enough for all agencies to actively participate in their solution. We need the willingness to share the information we get through research and to implement it into fire management practices once we move on to those. The unfortunate part is that for many years there has been a lack of ability to formulate a strategic plan for northern Australia. That is purely because there are so many people and groups with different opinions on how it should be managed. We believe that by bringing the fire management plans into play, we will start to engage our stakeholders. Once we can demonstrate that these fire management plans work and that there is a benefit and a role for all, I believe we can go to the future. Engaging is the key part. FESA has to consult with and listen to its stakeholders across the board to formulate the best possible plan.

Mr S.R. HILL: Who would you see as being the lead agency that would hold all the data? Would it be DPI through DLI?

Mr Cann: I guess there will be interagency cooperation in the first part. It should be a separate agency. With respect to CALM and all the other research agencies that participate, I can see why it would like to keep all the information. I must say that I have not really thought through who would hold information; it is more that we should all share the information. We can see what is held through the shared land information platform. I do not discount what you have said that it would be possible that it could lead to that.

The CHAIRMAN: In New South Wales the fire management plans are prepared by committees in which environmental, economic and social concerns are represented. Victoria also utilises a system of representative committees with membership from fire authorities, local government, conservation authorities and all that. In that state it offers the opportunity for fire management plans to achieve dual objectives of conservation of the natural environment and protection of human life and property. It seems to operate fairly successfully in some other states, and there is good evidence of interagency cooperation here in Western Australia. Do you see something similar as being a viable option for fire management planning in Western Australia?

Mr Cann: I believe that a model similar to that would be the model that would work. I have said before that we cannot do this unless there is a cooperative approach. This is a big state with lots of different regions. The secret of it all is to engage people. I do not think we will ever get consensus, because there are too many different opinions; however, we have to engage with all the stakeholders in the development of these plans. It will be a big task at the start, but if you look at fire management planning in 10 or 15 years, you will see the benefit of models similar to what they have in New South Wales. I would not be prepared to say that we would use the exact model that is used in New South Wales or Victoria, because I think that the tenures and distances that we have in our state are different. However, key elements of those models will be used in our fire management process.

Mrs J. HUGHES: The pastoralists were concerned about voluntary and mandatory fire planning. They would prefer, of course, to operate under the voluntary scheme of things due to liabilities, litigation and all those types of things. They ask whether, if the plan were mandatory, they would be liable, and how that would fall within fire planning for the state. Wildfires often start on crown land and then sweep across their land. Can you give me some comment regarding those? Of course, you mentioned before that in some areas there is nobody on the stations at all.

Mr Cann: Therein lies the importance of fire management planning. I respectfully understand the pastoralists' position. They have made comments to us that they are too busy running the stations to participate in fire management planning. One of the key issues here is the total cost of fire. From the PGA's, or the pastoralists', point of view, fire in these regions is part of their business; it is a part of their landholdings. However, we must consider the total cost of fire. We respond for a week or two with 20 or 30 volunteers. Those volunteers give up their work to aid and assist the protection of our assets, biodiversity and the pastoral sector. When you add up all the elements of how much support they get, I do not think it is a very big impost on the pastoralists. However, as I have said, the strategy for the pastoralists is for FESA to assist them to do it. The ones that are passed around for Ethel Creek and Mardie station are largely done by telephone calls and us working with the pastoralists at mutually acceptable times to get it done. There is a way around it. I am sympathetic to the pastoralists. They go to land conservation district meetings and things like that, and every government agency wants to tell them how to run their business, and that is something that I think is a bigger issue. From FESA's point of view, if fire management plans were successfully introduced, we would be there to help them through the issues and to work with them. It has to be a cooperative approach. A piece of paper containing a pile of information will be worthless unless we have buy-in from the pastoralists and they feel a part of it and can see the benefit of preventing the huge amount of fire that spreads through the Pilbara and Kimberley regions in particular.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You would suggest a mandatory system with a lot of assistance.

Mr Cann: Yes. I think that is what FESA is here for. Our staff are here for their expertise. It is just the timing that is at issue. From my perspective, we will not have it all done by next week. A lot of pastoralists are already on board. I think that when this is applied throughout the state, some of it will be simple and some of it will be complex. That is because of the different ranges of vegetation, the assets and the protection we are trying to afford. The last thing we want to see is the loss of biodiversity, endangered plants, and native heritage or sacred sites. The benefit of those is for the future. We have to face this issue collectively. It should not be done along terse lines or by one agency, even though I support there being one authority that would have the willing support of other agencies to overcome the difficulties we have.

The CHAIRMAN: The Kimberley fire review, which was undertaken by the EPA, recently noted that the community generally supported the concept of fire management planning but was not sure whether this should be approached from a local or regional level. How do you ensure that fire management plans interlink so that we become more regionally focused?

Mr Cann: I believe that the fire management plans will start off at the local level. Four or five pastoral stations would do theirs individually but link them so that there is some synergy between them. They would then be referred to the bushfire advisory committee, which is an arm of local government; local government would be involved. Each district that has a local emergency management committee and is required to have these plans would also be aware of them. That would lead to the complete regional plans being held by the district emergency management committee. Across the board there would be opportunities to work together and have agency and sector involvement. Under state emergency legislation the police are the district coordinator. Ultimately, it would be information that is available to all emergency responders in the process. Again, I see very little extra effort than what should happen now.

[2.10 pm]

Mrs J. HUGHES: It would be a very handy document for local government as well, would it not?

Mr Cann: In these regions, the transiency and the turnover of staff makes it very difficult. We get a wide range of support. We do not necessarily get a lack of support, but the people who come into some of these positions are inexperienced. It is my view that it is FESA's role to coordinate all this. It is much easier to walk in with a document and educate people. That is why we have people in the

regions. Where possible, FESA is moving to allocate the minimum ratio of local government to manager. In the Pilbara and Kimberley, each manager, such as Graeme and Tony, will have one local government to work with. We believe it is very much achievable to work through all the issues with local government and to have a single point of contact and to resolve the issues in a cooperative way for the benefit of the community.

The CHAIRMAN: What are some of the difficulties of plantations that have given rise to the recommendation of compulsory fire management planning on plantation land?

Mr Cann: FESA, through its bushfire environmental branch, is working cooperatively with industry and the stakeholders on the development of plans. More particularly, we are looking for standards and their application. At this stage, we believe that in the next five or six months we can work with the stakeholders in the development of industry-wide standards for plantations. It is a huge investment and the economic values to the state must be considered. We want the plantations to be protected in a uniform way that applies across the state, bearing in mind that the plantations in the south are a lot different from the plantations up north, such as the plantations at Packsaddle. There is a lot of water around those plantations and they are well protected and have good plans. It is a matter of taking the best of both worlds and making sure we have standards. Plantations in this region, such as the scheduled plantation at Beagle Bay, will be completely different from the other plantations here. The plans and the standards must be flexible to ensure the safety of those products and the environment, which is what we are trying to achieve.

The CHAIRMAN: Currently, there are guidelines for the protection of plantations from fire. Would they become the standards?

Mr Cann: Work is being done to make the guidelines the standards, so that we can achieve uniformity. It is a big task and there will need to be a heck of a lot of cooperation between all the stakeholders on this. It is our intention to make sure that we have appropriate standards in place which give adequate protection to the plantations and which reduce the time that our volunteers spend fighting fires in those areas.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The fire management plans that you passed around earlier are interesting because they are pretty much "tick and flick". One of the problems that I have encountered is that when plans are put together, they are often filed on a shelf and no-one ever reads them. That is primarily because they become too complex and too in-depth. Is there a way to structure these plans to make them workable, as opposed to them being detailed and cumbersome?

Mr Cann: You said they are very simple tick-and-flick plans. We are trying to reduce them to the barest practical conditions so that people will use them. We have all experienced having large documents and plans that no-one ever reads. These tick-and-flick plans are particularly designed for simplicity and can be easily referenced. The plan that I passed around for Ethel Creek is not a large document. It is then possible to talk from the regional coordination centres about a document which is readily available and which the landholder can relate to from the perspective of local districts. We are not completely sold on that format and we want to do more consultation. If we get the plans up into the ranges, it should be a very narrow and succinct document that contains enough information to make them worthwhile and to create a change in people's behaviour so that we can manage fire better across the state.

The CHAIRMAN: We will move on to some of the industry issues. In its submission to the inquiry, FESA has proposed that provision be made to enable privately owned industry and the department to enter into an agreement to establish an emergency services unit. The department is to be empowered to approve or cancel the approval of an emergency services unit and the relevant industry and the department are to negotiate the terms and conditions related to the establishment and operations of the unit. If the industry and the department do not agree to the terms and conditions, the unit is not to be established. That measure is about equity of service provisions in

those areas that are not serviced by state or local government fire units. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr Cann: Under the previous act, the importance of establishing private brigades was essential because that adds to industry participating actively in the community. For example, Argyle Diamonds, which is about 150 kilometres from here, is a long way away and it takes a couple of hours for a unit to respond. If the brigade were adjacent to the highway, it could respond more quickly. The FESA personnel are well trained. FESA sets the standards for training. It conforms to national training standards and it adds better service delivery in an emergency. However, since 1960 in places like Paraburdoo and Tom Price - I will come back to Dampier in a minute - we have had the right to establish units. Those towns would not exist without the mines. Hence the mining companies have a responsibility. In the end, they primarily protect their assets. From 1 July, Dampier has been handed to FESA. That was a private brigade. The nature of the town has changed. Today not only Pilbara Iron people live in the town; it is a mixed town and so the brigade has been taken over. The ESL applies and it is a normal volunteer emergency services unit. The Ravensthorpe nickel deposit is located in the great southern, which has a large amount of industry that will be there for a long time. The Ravensthorpe nickel deposit has its own emergency services. If a major bus accident or a major fire occurred, the state would need the emergency services of the Ravensthorpe nickel deposit. Therefore, it is commonsense to have appropriate standards in place and to be able to move quickly to utilise those services. For example, we have a solid working relationship and an MOU with BHP Billiton in Port Hedland. Just the other day our pump broke down and was out of service for four days, and BHP provided those services because of an arrangement that we have with it. The volunteers will still use the appliances, which are available purely through cooperation with industry. That type of arrangement should be fostered. It is an easy way to go, but it comes back to the community benefit and everyone playing their part.

Mr M.J. COWPER: On that point, we were talking about competencies and training levels of mining rescue groups. Each mining company that one can think of, whether it is Argyle Diamonds, Pilbara Iron, BHP Billiton, Alcoa Australia or Simcoa Operations, has its own team. The organisations have their own competition games, similar to those of the volunteers. How can the continuity of Australian standards be achieved across those various groups?

[2.20 pm]

Mr Cann: National standards apply.

Mr M.J. COWPER: There are national standards, but how can it be assured that they are the same here as they are in Ravensthorpe, for instance?

Mr Cann: I guess it is because they must conform. An issue that FESA is working towards a position on is who monitors industry standards. Generally, through the goodwill of the companies, the companies have adopted national standards. We have introduced in the main companies that the member just talked about - BHP Billiton, Argyle Diamonds, Pilbara Iron - district managers such as Tony and Graeme, who either get seconded or work for those companies. They adopt the FESA standards, which moves those companies towards the national standards. We have working arrangements with the bigger companies such as BHP Billiton, Pilbara Iron, Argyle Diamonds and Woodside. They are seen as the key companies in the region at this time. They are adopting our standards, so there is consistency across the board. We met with BHP in the past few weeks and it is looking at refining its standards for the Ravensthorpe nickel mine.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I refer to the drafting instructions that FESA gave in the submission regarding the installation of a unit. If the industry and the department cannot see eye to eye on different issues, no unit would be put in place. How would we then manage a situation whereby an industry might not have an emergency services unit that may be required for that area?

Mr Cann: For the licence to proceed in remote locations, a company must develop a case for safety, which is sent to DOCEP for approval. The company must explain whether that would be done in partnership. That process is done mostly in key towns and areas or if there is a main tourist road such as that leading to Argyle Diamonds. We do not have agreements with each mine in the state. The reason for that is the mine feels comfortable with its safety procedures. From FESA's point of view, particularly in the regions up here, it has pushed to work with industry collectively because of the remote location of the industries. Some of the areas down south, such as Pinjarra, are adequately serviced by volunteer fire service units.

Mr M.J. COWPER: They are very good units too.

Mr Cann: They are; they do a fantastic job. That combination could lead to some duplication in the more remote areas that I just mentioned, which have small populations. Therefore, it makes sense for industry and FESA to work together for the benefit of the community.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you like to comment on the emergency preparedness of heavy industry, particularly in regard to this region?

Mr Cann: Today Lynn Carter mentioned ammonium nitrate. Special plans have been allocated to that facility, and they are reviewed each year. Some of the heaviest industry in the state are located in the Burrup. Those industries are placed in a group called major hazard facilities and those facilities must have a range of special arrangements in place. Again, they must submit their safety cases, and FESA provides advice to DOCEP and the Department of Industry and Resources on the safety cases. Throughout the construction of the Burrup Fertilisers ammonia plant, which has just had its first shipment, FESA provided the company with advice and gave it direction on fire and safety issues to ensure that a consistent approach was taken. I understand that FESA has told the committee that it would like to review the re-licensing of these facilities as a separate process. That is not under the committee's terms of reference. That would ensure that we have consistency across all sites and that some sites do not fall away because of a change of management. We look at the consistency and preparedness levels that companies have regarding a potential risk. Those guarantees must be in place for the benefit of the surrounding communities, particularly on the Burrup, where hazardous material such as ammonia is being transported. The transportation of ammonia has changed the complexity of the situation. Gas is one thing, but ammonia is another kettle of fish. The agencies, Burrup Fertilisers and the ministerial review into the Burrup set up the Burrup industry emergency management committee. That is a link to industry. It is working on notification procedures and ensuring that community safety is paramount in these matters.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there an increased reliance on people ringing 000 for hazards over and above those normally provided for by fire and emergency services units?

Mr Cann: I will ask the others to comment on this. From a regional perspective, to have a single 000 emergency call makes a lot of sense. It enables emergency services to be coordinated, which means a quick response.

Mr Stevenson: I believe that the 000 number is underutilised, especially in the Kimberley. In country locations people tend to telephone the local chief bushfire control officer and the local brigade. We are conducting an education process during the dry season campaign to make people aware that the 000 phone number should be utilised. There is a reason for calling it. The education campaign will play a big part in the community to get people to use it. One phone line to report to is a clear and easy message to send to the public. It saves a lot of time. Someone is on the end of the line to respond to the call and to dispatch people in a timely manner.

The CHAIRMAN: Many towns are dependent upon volunteers. Are volunteers being placed at an unacceptable level of risk because of an inadequate response to emergency management issues by some industries? Are some volunteers being sent to situations that are over their heads, particularly when dealing with ammonia in the Burrup?

Mr Cann: I hope that we are not. It must be understood that anything dealing with an emergency response is usually an unstable situation. We rely very heavily on our training. FESA is a very strong provider of training, whether it be for vertical rescue or HAZMAT. A major ammonia leak should be perceived in the same category as an LPG gas tanker that was leaking in a town. Basic training must be provided and different levels of support must be offered. Our officers within the region understand the risk assessments. Therefore, there should be no surprises about what is transported through a particular region to ensure that FESA has made the appropriate risk treatments and has ensured that the training is up to speed. Above all that, we get tremendous support from Perth regarding hazardous materials through the hazardous emergency action team. We have high-level contact with FESA if we want information on pluming models which we do not have ourselves but which can be done in Perth. HEAT meets the moment an incident is declared and we get provided with support. That support comes from not only state but also industry sources to help us manage an incident. We believe that no volunteer should be put at risk that would endanger his life beyond what he is trained to do. The volunteers must understand the risks.

Mr S.R. HILL: This is a hot issue in my electorate. Do the volunteers who have been provided with level 2 training tunics have a mechanism whereby they can approach FESA to deal with an issue?

Mr Cann: The issue of level 2 clothing is complex. Level 2 clothing is called protective clothing. However, if it is used in the wrong circumstances and in extreme heat, the person who is wearing it is put at extreme risk through dehydration when the suits get hot. They are there for a reason. It is all about training. Next week we are holding a forum in the member's electorate to discuss better ways of providing level 2 clothing. Each regional office has a surplus of level 2 clothing. If it is needed in an emergency, it is used as replacement clothing when people attend an incident. It is more about understanding and training. Usually level 2 clothing is placed with brigades that use breathing apparatus. However, it has been identified that there are other circumstances whereby level 2 clothing has been worn, particularly in remote areas and in farming sectors that experience hayshed fires. I believe that is what the member is referring to. The issue has been raised with FESA very publicly, and FESA is now working through a range of options. It should not be a given that all bush fire brigades will receive level 2 clothing. There must be a high level of accountability and responsibility on how it is to be used. If we can overcome those limitations at this stage, I believe the clothing will not be provided extensively across the state; however, in certain locations we should be able to come up with a positive agreement. We are talking about the protection of our volunteers. Therefore we must come to an agreement.

[2.30 pm]

One of the dangers that the Fire and Emergency Services Authority can see is that if, in the first instance, we were to give level 2 clothing to some local bush fire brigades, there would be a statewide push for level 2 clothing that would have a huge impact on the emergency services levy. For the committee's interest, I think it is about \$2 000 for the sets. They are not cheap when accountability and training are also thrown in. Traditionally, bush fire brigades do not receive as much training in HAZMAT, road rescue and all that, but they need to do at least one extra day of training on the uses of level 2 clothing. Once it has been introduced, it has to be maintained. I believe these are issues that we can resolve. As I said, FESA sees the danger that it will spread quickly across the state and everyone will think it is mandatory. If we manage it carefully and set the right criteria, we can manage the issue for the benefit of all.

Mrs J. HUGHES: With regard to the issue of training or not training, in one of the areas we went to there were incidents in which the volunteers were told not to enter into a situation - into the port, for instance. Are there any areas in this region your volunteers are unable to go as the result of a FESA directive? The difficulty in this area was that the volunteers were the only aid available, but

they were still not in a position to offer assistance if something arose. It put them in a very difficult position.

Mr Cann: Risks do not usually just appear. Probably the only risks that we feel we cannot get a proper handle on are clandestine drug factories and things like that, where all of a sudden these things just pop up. We train our volunteers to a basic standard. Each station has what we call a profile, and that is for the fire services, the bush fire services and also for State Emergency Service units. Within those profiles, we establish what their risks are. Within those risks, we then develop the training to ensure that they can respond. The most important part of FESA's network is that when a volunteer responds, there are several ways they can get assistance and advice. They can ring our communications centre in Perth and we can find an officer, either SES or locally, to respond; or we can give sound advice as to what to do. If there is an incident that for some reason they feel uncomfortable with, we will dispatch an officer - that is why we have gone to a decentralised process - to try to give them assistance in managing the incident. I am not aware -

Mrs J. HUGHES: It was a port incident. If someone had been caught in a confined space, the volunteers were not trained and the port was not equipped for that particular incident. The volunteers are basically hamstrung.

Mr Cann: I apologise; I was not quite aware, but I am now.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Sorry; I was a bit vague.

Mr Cann: The Kununurra Fire and Rescue Service, with the participation of the SES unit, is our regional confined space rescue unit. They will be decked out. They will finally get their trailer and all the gear to go, but time will be spent in training.

Mr Stevenson: I can confirm that. I concluded their training in April. We have five members in the volunteer fire and rescue service who are trained as confined space rescuers.

Mr Cann: They are our regional response. It is similar in Karratha. A unit comes down to the regions where we have career stations. You will have to excuse my ignorance; I am not sure of the arrangement in Esperance.

The CHAIRMAN: Kalgoorlie is actually the region.

Mr Cann: Kalgoorlie, is it?

The CHAIRMAN: It is a four-hour drive for them to get there.

Mr Cann: We see no reason - subject to volunteers wishing to do it - that Esperance people could not be trained in confined space rescue. In a report I saw, our volunteers were deemed the most efficient in the state in the way they have approached their training and enthusiastically taken on the regional role; likewise at Karratha. It seems to be a bit of an advanced level - pretty much the same as vertical rescue. Vertical rescue is not for everybody, but for those who do it, we have some of the best instructors in this region in Dave and Jackie Campbell, and we are confident that no matter what the incident may be in those areas, the people have the skills. It is particularly difficult, but again, it is support that we can give them. That is why we have gone to the mixture of having FESA officers scattered throughout the state. We believe it is the way to go.

Mr Stevenson: At any time, 24 hours a day, there is always support available to volunteers via our communications centre. There is a communications centre supervisor, who is there 24/7 to answer any inquiries and offer assistance to volunteers. I have been in that position and received phone calls from volunteers in the middle of the night asking for advice and making sure that they are doing the right thing. There is certainly a communication line open to them and they regularly take up the option. If, for whatever reason, they cannot contact their local manager, they will ring through and be given advice from the shift supervisor in the communications centre.

The CHAIRMAN: As I said before, you have quite a lot of indigenous communities in this area. Could you give a rundown on the emergency services response to or within the communities? I know we have heard that as soon as they see a fire, they automatically fire up as well and burn back. From FESA's point of view, what do you provide?

Mr Cann: With reference to indigenous communities, there are state, federal and local government issues that we all recognise, and this possibly leads to some of the issues dragging out because of cooperation. However, it is not only about response; this issue starts with what FESA can do for the community. Our aim is always to provide the same level of service for the communities. There is no distinction. FESA works with local governments and communities to build up their capacity to deal with emergencies. In its formation, FESA was focused on community-centred management, through which communities deal with risks. At this stage we mainly focus on the hub communities such as Jigalong, Oombulgurri and Kalumburu. In the past few weeks the guys have been up there assisting with planning and preparedness so, collectively, it is all not just about response; it is about training, and developing their understanding of risks. We work alongside other management agencies in the emergency field, such as police, community development and local governments, to develop plans and programs that we can introduce. Risk management is a key issue. We have gone to some communities and conducted risk management workshops. As we said this morning, in many cases it is not surprising that things such as access roads, health and other issues come before emergency services. We have to maintain interest in those areas and people have to be willing to participate. We try to build capacities, and we provide a service to the communities through our awareness programs and videos. Prior to the wet season we conduct a large program that looks at indigenous communities and preparing indigenous communities. Mr Chairman, I know that you asked about response, but it is collectively wrapped up in all this.

Graeme, would you like to comment on meteorology and our preparedness facts?

Mr Down: My experience comes from a State Emergency Service background. In essence, we have been involved in the Kimberley and the Pilbara to a great extent, over a number of years and particularly in remote communities, for pre-wet season planning. Over the past seven years we have actually sat down with communities over a period of one, two, or maybe three days, and have written up emergency management plans for the wet season so that the communities are prepared for the isolation risk, and so that food, fuel and all those kinds of things are covered. That is an area in which we have probably moved on quite dramatically. Tony and I were recently in Kalumburu, at its request, to look at some fire management plans, mapping issues and those kinds of things, for the community. That is what we are working on.

The CHAIRMAN: How much of the emergency services levy, in provision of response and preparedness equipment, flows to the communities? Are the current units in and around the towns and around the farmlands set up first? When does it get out to the communities?

[2.40 pm]

Mr Cann: It is all part of a long-term program. I am sure the members of the committee would understand that the ESL has been in for only three years and the significance of the number of vehicles that have been provided. We were caught, I guess, a bit by surprise. We believe that we are at the high end of the wave. For the first five, maybe seven, years, the ESL will struggle to fund all the applications that people are putting in. However, we are getting on top of it and we can see the light at the end of the tunnel in the longer term. We will get replacement programs. It will not be so much about providing an appliance; we have to replace it, and that is one of the key benefits of the ESL. Previously we would provide a vehicle through the bushfire grants scheme and that would stay at the unit technically forever; that is, until the unit applied for another one. Now all the vehicles will be replaced. For example, Packsaddle's light tanker will be automatically replaced - off the record - in about 2008-09. We are getting on top of the issues of keeping our fleet. Instead

of the fleet being about 25 or 27 years old, it will now be around 12 to 16 years old. Our aim is to get the age of the fleet as low as possible.

Once we get on top of that, there will be room to expand to look at remote communities. The ESL is not collected from remote communities per se. As Mr Stubbs said this morning, those communities are not rateable. Fortunately or unfortunately the ESL is collected only from rateable lands. There are issues there, and that is where federal agencies come in. I believe that, in time and given the opportunities, we will definitely look at the hub communities. FESA is supplying a federal rescue trailer to Kalumburu - as we say, we are doing it. There is a need for it. Kalumburu is prone to tropical lows - I think that is what they are called before they develop into cyclones. Those remote communities require a service. I suppose we can also look at what we provide to the communities. Each community is treated the same as the others. This year we evacuated communities from Linga Valley and Ellenbrae station during the wet. There is a significant cost there. Thirty people from the Wiluna community were taken to Balgo this year. Our managers played a significant role, and that again reflects the importance of our staff. We also look at resupply when communities get isolated. That is done through the state resupply act. This year, our people undertook 22 resupply operations for food, supplies and diesel fuel into Kimberley remote indigenous communities. For the record, in the order of \$172 000 was spent on resupply to indigenous communities. Do we supply physical resources to remote indigenous communities? The simple answer to that is not at this time. However, in the long term, the communities receive equal service upon demand as do other communities, and we will always work overtime to protect all our communities. As we said, our officers from Port Hedland go out to the very remote area of Kiwirrkurra and assist in the planning for that community. You have probably gathered by now that from both my perspective and FESA's perspective, there is a high emphasis on planning and prevention. I think that is the way ahead.

The lives of people in emergency services changed in 2001 with September 11. We have to be prepared. We must look at our risks and be prepared to respond. Our staff are some of the best-rated staff in the state. Graeme has been down to Perth to assist in cyclone modelling - we are developing a new computer-based program. Tony was down in Perth for the national exercise last week. That is a significant contribution from the region. It is small in numbers but has such highly skilled staff. I know we appreciate it and I am sure the community does.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How many remote communities are in your patch?

Mr Cann: The figure of 240-plus comes to mind. You have to look at remote communities for what they are. That figure of remote communities includes Kalumburu and a little community whose name escapes me which is not very far out of Karratha and in which only eight people live. There is a huge mix of places such as Jigalong and small and also transient communities - some of these communities are transient in nature.

Mr Down: Officially, the state recognises the existence of 44 Aboriginal communities. I worked in a community in the Halls Creek shire for a number of years. The shire environmental health officer visited 304 communities in the Halls Creek shire. Many of those communities, as Peter said, are transient communities. They are sort of homeland communities or holiday places that people might go to from a bigger community with a more family-oriented group of eight or 10 people. They will then go back to the major community. There is a range of different kinds of communities with different levels of infrastructure, accessibility and so forth.

Mr M.J. COWPER: None of those 240-odd communities contributes to the ESL. A question has been asked of the committee. It has been only three years since the ESL came in, and you say you have a program that will take a number of years to roll out. Is that part of the rolling out?

Mr Cann: It is, but it is important to understand that there is a national strategy for emergency management in indigenous communities. That will be formulated through MOUs and shared responsibility agreements. Although we could look at it as a state responsibility, it is also tied in

with the federal responsibility through this national strategy. As the strategy is unveiled, we will be able to develop a statewide strategy for RICs, and those sorts of issues will come out of it. It is a complex issue, but committee members can rest assured that we provide a great service to the remote indigenous communities. We do not receive, to my knowledge, a great deal of complaints about the service that is provided under the current arrangements. Of course, through continuous improvement, we can do better, and we will, once we get the national strategy. FESA is a key component of that. I am not sure whether members know that the national launch will be in Broome with Mr Ruddock. I think that clearly reflects the solid work that FESA has put in, particularly some of its staff and its indigenous employees. I try not to mention people directly, but Newman has done a great deal. I think it is a reflection of that work that the federal government will launch this national strategy in August in Broome. The federal government has elected to do this in recognition of FESA's work through its EMS and its community safety arm

Mr M.J. COWPER: On that federal strategy, and going on my own practical experience in this matter, what facilities do you have within your patch to deal with a major loss of life? For instance, there might be a storm surge in Karratha, a tsunami in a coastal position or a major flood, cyclone or, indeed, bushfire. If there were a number of deaths - in the hundreds - on a scale that we have probably not seen up this way before, what capacity does FESA have within your patch or realm of responsibility to put in place field hospitals, triage, identifications and such?

[2.50 pm]

Mr Cann: It is a very interesting question. The point is obviously about resourcing. Both cyclone Glenda and cyclone Daryl had been forecast to have a significant impact on Karratha, and we had gone through the process of looking at our ability to manage potential significant loss of life as a result of any of these impacts. We fall back very quickly from local emergency management arrangements to district emergency management to state emergency management. Once it goes to state, we then have access to Emergency Management Australia. I think it was for cyclone Daryl that the Department of Defence offered us field hospitals as part of our planning for Norforce, and the plans were already in place. During the last cyclone season, emergency management staff and administrations in Australia have collectively learnt a lot from the Innisfail cyclone and our ability to respond quickly to these sorts of emergencies. It must be understood that in certain circumstances there will be a delay. I am very confident that under our state emergency arrangements, and through cooperation with defence - particularly with Norforce and the Pilbara regiment - we will have access to additional resources; it will be only a matter of time. If a tsunami hit Karratha, we would struggle, but we would struggle only until we could get all the resources that we need.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I understand the state arrangements to include the local emergency management advisory committee, the district emergency management advisory committee and the state emergency management advisory committee. Are they going to bring them from outside the state?

Mr Cann: As I said, the resources from Norforce were placed on standby during the cyclone and were ready to go. I think it was eight hours' notice to respond with all the emergency resources we would need.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The question is: where are they coming from?

Mr Cann: From Perth.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I know, but are they based in Broome or are they based in Karratha?

Mr Cann: No, in Darwin. Sorry, I was referring to Norforce. Norforce and the eastern states, and also what resources we would have available out of Perth under our state resource coordination plans.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks for that. I am conscious of the time; do you have any closing matters, or any other matters that you wish to throw in?

Mr Cann: Bearing in mind the issues of legislation and the changes to it, all the acts are relatively old, except the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia Act. That is probably part of it. When the FESA act came in, it had a five-year review period, and that is what we are doing. I think it is essential that the coordination of emergency management into a single act is a priority for the state. I place on record the significant importance that our volunteers play in this region. It is all done by volunteers in areas north of Geraldton and in other large areas of the state. Volunteers are responsible for pushing on with adequate prevention plans to minimise risks. They all enjoy it. You can see the passion in some of the people who have been here this morning. The Pilbara-Kimberley region is blessed with good volunteers. The staff that we have up here have truly done a great job. The state should be proud of them.

The CHAIRMAN: I think we should all be proud of them. They do a great job.

Gentlemen, thank you for coming in this afternoon and giving us the benefit of your knowledge. A transcript of the 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 submit a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration. If the transcript is not returned within 10 days of receipt, it will be deemed to be correct.

Hearing concluded at 2.54 pm
