

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE PROTECTION OF CROWDED PLACES FROM TERRORIST ACTS



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
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INQUIRY INTO THE PROTECTION OF CROWDED PLACES FROM TERRORIST ACTS

Members

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis (Chairman)
Mr M.J. Folkard (Deputy Chairman)
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr A. Krsticevic
Mr D.T. Punch**

Hearing commenced at 10.21 am

Dr RONALD FREDERICK EDWARDS

Chairman, State Emergency Management Committee, examined:

Mr MALCOLM CRONSTEDT

Executive Officer, State Emergency Management Committee, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Good morning. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to provide evidence in relation to our inquiry into protection of crowded places in Western Australia from terrorism acts. My name is Peter Katsambanis, and I am the Chair of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee of the Parliament. I will introduce the other members. Mr Mark Folkard is the Deputy Chair, Mr Zak Kirkup is the member for Dawesville, Mr Don Punch is the member for Bunbury and Mr Tony Krsticevic is the member for Carine.

It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. If, in the course of the hearing, you believe that some committee questions require answers containing sensitive or confidential information, you can request that the committee take that evidence in a closed session. You will need to briefly explain why you feel that is necessary to close the hearing. Should the committee accept that explanation, we will receive your evidence in closed session. Hansard will continue to make a transcript but the transcript will not be made publicly available unless the committee or the Legislative Assembly resolve to authorise its release. If that is going to happen, we will have communication with you anyway. We would not want to do anything that puts any of that information in jeopardy. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege; however, this privilege does not apply to anything you might say outside of today's proceedings.

Before we begin the hearing, do you have any questions about the process today?

Dr EDWARDS: Not at all. In terms of guidance, we obviously have material to present but you have questions you would like to ask. In terms of your timing, how long would you like us to do the introductory comments? Did you have a feeling —

The CHAIRMAN: Brief introductory comments—five minutes, I guess, and after that we will probably get into question and answer, and any documentation that you want to provide us with we are very happy to receive.

Dr EDWARDS: Good. Thank you, Mr Chairman and members. I think it is really important this issue that you have taken on and we appreciate the opportunity to come and speak with you. We at the State Emergency Management Committee have read your terms of reference and we think they provide good insight into the kind of issues that the community would be concerned about. We very much welcome this opportunity.

I guess from a point of view in terms of the legislative arrangements, which you would be familiar with, the State Emergency Management Committee is established under a particular act, the Emergency Management Act 2005, and regulations of 2016.¹ The particular role of the State Emergency Management Committee is prescribed under section 13(1) of the act. I could go through all the sections, but I guess in terms of how I describe it, it would be to anticipate and coordinate the way we approach emergencies, and obviously the matter for which you have specific interest

¹ Correspondence from the witness clarifying this part of the transcript can be accessed on the committee webpage.

falls within that category. On our committee, for example, we have Commissioner of Police Dawson, from whom you have already heard, DFES Commissioner Klemm, who has also made a submission. We are very cognisant of the importance of this issue and also that this is a moving field in a way. The kind of things that one might have thought of 10 years ago, one has to look at them in a different way today.

Just to give you some insight into the sort of thinking behind the way we approach this, you would have been furnished with this document, which is the preparedness report. When I took over the role of SEMC last October, I went back and read them all, and what you could see was a transition in the way Mal Cronstedt and his team in the risk preparedness area had changed their approach. Initially, I guess, from 2012 it was, “What have we got and what do we do?” right through to now where we are saying, “Where are we and what can we anticipate down the track?”, which really fits into what you are saying. We have done something else. We decided that really if you want to bring the community along—when you read our documentation and think of somewhere like Optus Stadium or Perth Stadium, really for anything to work effectively requires public consent and cooperation. Our team hears me speak about this a lot. I guess the model of public consent has to be the MCG on Anzac Day when 90 000 people stand in complete silence, not because they are coerced, not because they are bribed, not because anyone tells them to, but because they believe in something—it is about values. It is the same values that caused, in this hard-nosed city of Sydney, hundreds of thousands of people to lay flowers after the Lindt cafe event. I guess we have been saying, “What is that conversation we need to have so that the pillars of our emergency response, which are the police and DFES, are given that support?” This document, which you have also received copies of, I suppose looks at emergencies in a different way. We talk about infrastructure—in this case, say, Perth Stadium—and public administration, which is how government might approach that. One of the things we have been saying to people is, “If you want to acquire assets, having an asset which produces for the economy, to have an emergency management plan around that is not a cost, it is the price of doing business.” If you want to have Perth Stadium and you have 60 000 people for an Ed Sheeran concert, that is wonderful. The price of doing that business, however, is what kind of plans and preparations do you need. Hence, our colleague commissioner Dawson needs support in that regard. SEMC looks at that in that global way.

Then we move on to the area of people and the social context. I think you as parliamentarians play a key role in this, and that is why we welcome the opportunity to meet with you. You are really there saying that you could help us carry the message. I guess the message is: it does not matter which side of politics you fall on, the protection of people and their lives is a fundamental. We look at it from that perspective. You will notice this discussion about values. Right down the bottom is a statement about —

... the broader context in which you as a politician live. We are now able to paint a picture for you of how capable we are of dealing with significant and sometimes catastrophic events. These events can overwhelm individuals, groups and communities alike. We are able to make observations about the things that are important to individuals, families and communities and what is worth fighting for.

What I mean by that is, what is it that causes people to stand in the water for 24 hours holding a dolphin? They believe in something. The statement continues —

Importantly, we can provide information ahead of time as to some of the key areas that individuals, families and communities can think about and act upon to help protect themselves.

We are saying we think that ultimately it is about we as leaders working with communities in addressing the sort of issue you have before you. Obviously, we are sent to deal with 27 different hazards. That is quite extraordinary when you think of things such as space debris, but that is one of them.

The CHAIRMAN: We have a history; we know that that has happened.

Dr EDWARDS: We have a history, and this year we are remembering the Meckering earthquake of 50 years ago. This is an all-of-community thing. I guess, Mr Chairman and members, in introductory comments, I suppose what we are saying is that the team that works with us at SEMC, we are trying to bring to the table a discussion about how we can engage the whole community, which is why we welcome this chance to meet with you. That does not mean there are not going to be questions and gaps, of course there are, but this is a public discussion, which is good. I will use that as some opening remarks. Would you like to hear from Deputy Commissioner, Mal Cronstedt, now?

[10.30 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, if he has a short statement that he wants to make.

Mr CRONSTEDT: Our State Emergency Management Committee chair has already given you a very broad overview of the emergency management arrangements. Underpinning the act and the head of power that gives the committee oversight, there are a bunch of policies and plans that drill down into the detail of what specific arrangements are in place to meet particular hazards. For every one of those 27 hazards that the chair mentioned, there is an equivalent plan, called Westplan, that deals with it. Of course, a terrorist act is one of the central plans that you are interested in, among many others that have serious consequences across the state should they affect our infrastructure or society and the things we hold so dear. I do not propose to go through the detail of the framework, suffice to say that the act, the regulations, and then the policies that are referenced in the act—so they have a degree of force behind them—requires the committee to have an emergency management policy, which, by the way, only recently has been rationalised from innumerable documents that largely sat on shelves to many less documents. We are in the process of rationalising the policy to make them useful, usable and used rather than simply documents that keep doors open. We are quite proud of that rationalisation work to help the users, and one of the fundamental users is not only agencies such as police, DFES, the health department and many others, but local governments. One of the plans that is required by way of policy is that every local government must have arrangements. Over the last two years, using the framework we provide and improved every year, over 80 per cent of local governments have been able to update or improve their plans at the local level. I think it cannot be underestimated the importance of having local arrangements, documented arrangements at the local government level, at the community level essentially, which described the what, where, how and when of emergency management and how cooperative arrangements are put in place. That is the fundamental building block.

The chair also mentioned the preparedness report, which is also a fundamental document and has been in evolution over some time. I point you, when you get the chance, to look at our capability model on which the preparedness analysis is based. Every year we ask agencies and local governments to assess themselves. We use quite clever, statistical techniques—you would be familiar with some of those, I am sure—where, over time, you can test the veracity of that data and assure yourself that what they say is true.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: What page is that on?

Mr CRONSTEDT: It starts on page 42 of the preparedness report. There is a bit of a model and then further in there is much more detail about the specific questions that relate to those capability elements. I think, chair, I will leave it at that for now.

The CHAIRMAN: On that basis, can I start off by asking: how prepared are you as a committee and all of the bodies that you oversee to respond to a terrorism incident in Western Australia?

Mr CRONSTEDT: The State Emergency Management Committee and the public servants that serve its needs are essentially preparedness and planning. The SEMC is focused on setting ourselves up for success rather than actually responding. The response itself, say to a terrorist act, a bushfire, flood or earthquake, is by the agencies themselves and there is a second stream of arrangements parallel—which we still have oversight of, though not involvement in—which coordinates emergency management in a response phase. We need to be clear about the distinction.

The CHAIRMAN: Sure. When you said that there are requirements on local governments to have plans in place—that is a good thing and you said that a lot of them have improved their plans—what mechanism exists to check or audit, firstly, whether those plans are in place and, secondly, whether they are appropriate in the circumstances?

Mr CRONSTEDT: Every plan must come to the SEMC for noting, and before it comes to the SEMC it needs to go through a process of assurance checking against the framework. The organisation, the Office of Emergency Management, checks the plan—does it comply with the framework?—and then it goes to the SEMC for the final tick off.

The CHAIRMAN: Excellent.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: How do we know that that is just not words? How do we know that that has actually been done?

Mr CRONSTEDT: That is a good point. Again, there are two arms to that. One is the preparedness report, which gives us every year a more incisive over time picture of what the reality is: do the plans work? It is full of case studies of success stories. It also points to some of the areas which need a bit of work. That is an annual document that says, “Is the state ready?” Obviously, there is a great deal more detail behind that. The data that supports it is phenomenally large, so we can brief, for instance, government and agencies in much more detail about the detail behind it and ask those questions: “You say you’re ready; are you really ready?” That data really supports our efforts in getting to the bottom of the surface. In addition, the SEMC is taking on a role of assurance. You will recall that Ferguson, in his report on the bushfire disaster at Yarloop, said that there ought to be more focus on assurance and had some recommendations along those lines. The SEMC was well advanced in that in that the preparedness report already existed. It was advanced in that area, though testing some of the claims, perhaps, needed a bit more focus. That is where the SEMC has now got dedicated public support on an annual basis to say, “You tell us this, let’s go and have a look.” You cannot do all local governments—130 of them—every year, but you can choose to examine individual agencies or local governments and say, “Show us how you’re going”.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any data around how often you have done that over the last, say, three years?

Mr CRONSTEDT: No. As I said, it is an emerging piece of work. We have done the preparedness report and we have certainly met with local government. I would say we have met with every single local government and agency and, as part of this, we also have a dedicated staff member meet with agency heads and we have staff in the regions that meet locally to try to help them make sense of the return they are required to put in and the sort of data and the quality of it and so on. It is not a

formal setting. Essentially, we are trying to bring people to the honey rather than—what is the old saying, it is better to —

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Catch flies with honey rather than vinegar!

Mr CRONSTEDT: That is it; thank you. A collaborative approach is our current method.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: You said that 80 per cent have come to the table. Is it that 20 per cent still have not? What do you do about the 20 per cent that have not got emergency management plans? What are the consequences or repercussions for them not following through?

Mr CRONSTEDT: We need to recognise that that 80 per cent represents a dramatic improvement over the last few years. I cannot remember the exact figures, but we can supply them. It is a dramatic improvement in the quality and the ones that are current. Of the 20 per cent that are not, they are either not current, under development or in the process of being approved. They are overdue sometimes only by a matter of weeks or months. The plan is still in place. The current plan for that local government still exists. It may be overdue by a matter of months and then there might be one or two local governments, particularly rural and remote local governments, that have not got a plan at all.

The CHAIRMAN: What powers do you have in those cases where they do not have a plan at all—either they cannot make one or they will not?

Mr CRONSTEDT: We have an escalation process. The first step is we get our local staff to go and talk to them. If that does not work, I can contact them and say, “Listen, what’s going on?” and then we escalate it to the chair and ultimately to the minister. The Emergency Management Act does not give us any punitive powers, but certainly through those mechanisms and publishing the results in our preparedness report and in our annual report encourages people not to be marked in red.

The CHAIRMAN: But there is no penalty or denial of access of information or anything like that to a local government authority that simply cannot meet the requirements.

Mr CRONSTEDT: No, there is no penalty in the Emergency Management Act. But, for instance, if local government want to apply for a natural disaster resilience program grant, to meet the criteria of that grant they have to demonstrate that they have analysed the risk, they have done some work and they are a worthy candidate. Not having taken emergency management seriously or at least demonstrating a willingness—it may just be a resource constraint and the grant will actually fix their problem. I am a bit sympathetic to that cause, but if it is just belligerence, we would look twice at giving them some money.

The CHAIRMAN: Does WALGA play a part in all of this? Do they have standards or capacity building for local governments?

Mr CRONSTEDT: They certainly do. They have a unit that focuses on helping local government do their local arrangements and also exercise their arrangements and, of course, they are represented on the State Emergency Management Committee and are heavily involved in all the discussions that I have just outlaid.

Dr EDWARDS: I think you see, Mr Chairman, we have really decided to improve the conversation. The more we can get to the table, the more we can involve them in the conversation. I guess the other thing is that in this regard, nothing is kind of monolithic. There will be people in the community who will talk to someone else in another local government authority and, as you know with natural hazards, they do not stop at shire or council boundaries. People will complain and say, “Why didn’t you have something in place when the people down the road did?” Being involved in Landcare as I am, I realise that those kind of rural conversations are pretty important. What we have tried to do

is to say, "Let us tap into those where there are gaps." You are absolutely right—where there are gaps of resources, how might we go about addressing that, can we help these people, are there conversations that we can have?

[10.40 am]

The CHAIRMAN: What are the gaps that you have identified?

Dr EDWARDS: The initial gap that Commissioner Cronstedt referred to was some people not having either the capacity or resources to actually respond, and that can simply be due to a fairly small rate base and they just do not have a lot of resources by the time they do their other core businesses. I guess what we increasingly need to understand is that this issue of hazard and management of emergencies is a universally emerging issue.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: I have before me annex C from the act, which refers to the table of hazard management agencies and controlling agencies for each specific hazard. There are 26 of them laid out. Six of them do not relate to local government. I will give you an example. The Coordinator of Energy in relation to interruption of power supplies; the Coordinator of Energy for loss of liquid fuel supplies; and the State Health Coordinator in relation to heatwaves and health epidemics. Over a quarter of them do not fall within local government. How do we know that their plans are up to date? How can we evidence that their preparedness is ready in that space?

Mr CRONSTEDT: There are two parts to that, I think. One is that for every hazard there is an HMA—hazard management agency; there is a lead. For health, they have some responsibilities to lead across the state. That does not mean that the local arrangements at the local government level should not account for all hazards despite who leads at the state level. So, for fire, the Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Services is the HMA for fire, although local government clearly has a role. In the local arrangements, we expect them to have the right people around the table who can contribute to, if this should eventuate—an extended heat wave, and we have people in vulnerable locations and the like—how are we going to deal with them? We are not the lead, but we are the community. They still have a role at the local level to cover off on all of it, and we would expect the local committee to have sufficient input from the right people to cover off on those hazards, despite that they might be led at a regional or state level.

I think the other aspect is how do we have assurance about the effectiveness of plans, so the State Emergency Management Committee, in not only trawling through the detail of the preparedness report, but also getting insights well beyond the preparedness report and into the detail, can get some really good insights into where the gaps are and where people are going and how things are tracking. I think that discussion at the SEMC is absolutely critical. I am sure the chair would agree, because there is more to it than just this published report, and a great deal more detail that the SEMC can take an interest in and examine and pursue. Of course, at the SEMC you have got the director general sitting there who can explain the status.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: If I take from what you are saying that you can pursue particular lines of investigation in relation to preparedness, one of the hazards in here which is of interest to this committee is actually the terrorism act. Have you inquired into that, and do we know that the Westplan is up to scratch, and how is that being audited?

Mr CRONSTEDT: Okay, so you will have received the submissions via the Commissioner of Police and others that the Commissioner of Police is the HMA for terrorist acts, which pretty comprehensively explains the arrangements in place to meet the needs of their particular Westplan. The SEMC not only signs off on that plan, but also hears from the Commissioner of Police on a regular basis as to his concerns and the subject of terrorist acts in crowded places and the recent events.

Every event that occurs interstate or overseas has been subject to discussion at SEMC and a bit of navel gazing about “Well, are we ready, what will we do about it, and how can we help each other?” There is a degree of assurance, I am sure, through the chair and the minister, that it is actively considered, and of course we know and get reports that the plan is exercised and post-incident reports about what has happened. The terrorist act of course is a very sensitive area, so we have got to be quite careful. Neither Ron nor I have the clearance, or whatever it is. With the terrorist act and the HMA thing, the Commissioner of Police and his people, and of course DPC are heavily involved in that and we rely on their assurances at the table that things are in place. An interesting case recently was the presentation on the new stadium. The SEMC got a very thorough presentation by not only the operators, but also the police in company with them about the arrangements to give us assurance. The SEMC wanted assurance that the arrangements were in place, that they were satisfactory and that what is written in a plan, in a real case in a real place, can be effected properly.

The CHAIRMAN: Can I ask around that, first of all, do you believe that there would be value in someone within your organisation having the necessary security clearances to be able to be provided with some of the information that you are not currently able to be provided with in relation to counterterrorism?

Dr EDWARDS: I think the answer to your question is yes, because ultimately, from my point of view as chair, the thing that I am very much animated about is we are accountable to our minister, and from the minister to Parliament and to the community, and I think it is only reasonable that people such as yourselves could ask questions to the extent that we can. I have looked at the transcript with Commissioner Dawson, and I saw how sensitive you were to that, and I think that in a similar fashion we could—me as chair and perhaps Mal Cronstedt—perhaps have that capacity to know that we had gone inside and asked sufficient questions. Our mission is not operational; our mission is strategic nevertheless. Just to give an insight, this is an ongoing conversation at SEMC, and so we have had conversations about what the experience was of last season both on the bushfire front and of the opening of the new stadium, and so we have these questions that we ask, but I think it is reasonable to ask: does it assist the process of Parliament and accountability for the chair and the executive officer to have that clearance so that we felt we could go inside the conversation a bit further? I guess my answer to that is that I believe it would be sensible and it would be comfortable to do so.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think that is an emerging theme in that whole space. In relation to exercising the Westplan, specifically the terrorist act, do you have details of how often it has been exercised at a state level over, say, the last three or five years, or can you take that on notice if you do not?

Mr CRONSTEDT: We can take that on notice, if you like. At least annually, but we know that there are a great deal more exercises of various scales and sizes and shapes within the agency and within the system, so at least once, but we know that they practise their methods regularly in any event.

[10.50 am]

The CHAIRMAN: If you could provide that on notice, that would be helpful, and would you be able to provide us with the post-exercise reports, after each of those exercises? Again, you can take it on notice, and there may be reasons why you cannot. If you can, or even redact them, that would be helpful.

Dr EDWARDS: Yes, we will check that through as to what we are able to do.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Going back to the security clearances, we have spoken of the specific space of the Westplan for counterterrorism, but because you are dealing with commercial-in-confidence in

relation to the fuel supplies and that sort of space, how are you managing that? The other one that comes out is through the health department. I am certain that doctor–patient privilege would be a hindrance to your planning et cetera. How do you get in front of that so that you can get your head across how prepared we are in that particular space?

Mr CRONSTEDT: I think there is some great work being done in what we are calling our state risk project. It has been going for five years now, and essentially it is designed to understand the risk profile for the state, both at the state level, the regional level and the local level, but also to examine some appropriate treatments at those levels as well. In a workshop setting using worst-case scenarios and near worst-case scenarios—bushfire is an easy one for me to outline, but you can transpose that to any other hazards in a worst-case scenario—with the right players in the room representing the agencies and the owners of the hazard and various other people who might be affected by it or have an involvement in it, we can say, “In this worst-case scenario”—a fuel supply disruption or a catastrophic failure in the electricity network—“what is likely to play out in terms of impact on the things that we hold so valuable, which is those elements? What is it going to do to the infrastructure, what is it going to do to public administration and so on, through those things that the SEMC has agreed are the big-ticket items state has got to look after?” That process then reveals that the risk is at this particular level. It comes out with a bunch of risk statements about what the effects might be, and then we can go back to those same players and say, “What are some appropriate treatments. What have we got in place now to mitigate that effect, and what are some appropriate treatments to counter them?” That process has been going now for five years, as I said, and we have not quite completed—we are embarking on the localisation of that, so going to local governments and doing the same thing. If a local government has a particular power outage for three days, what do you have in place now and what do we need to do about it? That reveals all those things. It surfaces the whole lot, and you have got tangible things to actually divert resources to.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: We had the Varanus gas incident where we shut down the gas. In your timetabling of your five-year report about this risk assessment, there were clear learnings out of that. How do we know that those learnings have been implemented and what powers do you have to implement the learnings that come about? Varanus was all about a valve and having a duplicate one on-site that could be changed out. Have they got that in place? How do we know? This is the question—the how.

Mr CRONSTEDT: You could cut across a whole bunch of hazards and ask the same question. Last year, you will realise there have been several reports, in particular on bushfires, but across a range of hazards and disasters in the state. We are building a database of all the recommendations, trying to make sense of them all and say, “Where are they at? Where are all of them at?” We have done some of the work for the preparedness report. Certainly, the State Emergency Management Committee has been privy to the big-ticket ones and been provided with updates. But we need to dig a bit deeper. It is also about comparing recommendations and the things that are in place to fix them. Reports are written over many years in different styles and different ways. You will realise that when you write recommendations, it can be either a very good recommendation or a very verbose one and hard to hang your hat on. We have to make sense of those—what was meant by this and what has been done about it?—put it in a form that we can interrogate and that we can give SEMC assurance that, “You know that report back in 2008 that said this? It’s been superseded by these reports and these recommendations and this is what’s in place today in 2018.”

Dr EDWARDS: I think, further, Mal, the thing I have noticed in my time with SEMC is that this conversation is emerging more and more and people are taking from those learnings. We have tried to not adopt an adversarial position which says, “You’ve done this wrong” but, rather, “How can we

learn from that?" I am particularly impressed, for example, with the resources companies and the role they play in emergency management in Western Australia. But there will always be gaps and what we try to do is, certainly at the SEMC meeting, free up enough time to have those big strategic questions where we literally go around the table, as you would as a committee, and say, "Is there something we are overlooking here? What did you learn out of that? What could we do next time?" We encourage people to bring things to the table, be it in the health area to which you refer or other areas. That is the kind of conversation we are driving. I am hopeful and optimistic that there are a lot of good things coming out of that. That is why this conversation is very helpful too.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In the context of the Westplan–Terrorist Act, specifically, that deals with sensitive information, as we have heard, yet I have a sense that best practice generally relies on safeguarding and enhancing culture, particularly in relation to the lead agencies under the stakeholders. What role would you play in safeguarding or developing culture across agencies and avoiding the risk of lead agencies tending to control and manage, in a very isolated way, the response.

Dr EDWARDS: Thank you for that. The thing that interested me was that in the short time after we produced this—we are particularly proud of this because it cost the taxpayers \$2 200 and the NDIS strategic plan cost \$43.5 million.

The CHAIRMAN: Keep up that level of frugality.

Dr EDWARDS: I am a fiscal conservative. I do not like spending money. It is too hard to get.

It was interesting that in that short time Commissioner Dawson asked us to speak to his top 100 officers at Joondalup and also Commissioner Klemm was facilitating those conversations at Cockburn headquarters for the risk team. You are absolutely right; culture is everything—leadership and culture. If you get those right, all the rules and so on will fall in behind that. We are seeing this as an opportunity. I have been around and talked to all the SEMC members, including the DG of Premier and Cabinet, about this and about our preparedness report. We are encouraged by that conversation, because you have to drive that culture. The worst thing is, on the bad day, for everyone to jump back and say, "I didn't have anything to do with it. It's your fault." We are all in this. We are all Western Australians and Australians. We have a responsibility—in my role, in Mal's role, you as parliamentarians. We see that as all in it, so we are very happy to have that conversation to talk about this. In fact, I have said I want this to be like the AFL fixtures. It has to be up on the board so we are looking at it all the time because it gives us that chance.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Do you feel that it is extending into further stakeholders, such as local government or other agency responses?

Dr EDWARDS: Yes. Ultimately, what we are going to try to do is to run regional workshops. We have a system called district advisers. We have seven in the Office of Emergency Management. We have had workshops with them where I have sat with them and talked them through it. We have encouraged them to go out and talk to local groups. My view is that if you feel there is an area where perhaps you could go and boost the presence a bit, we are open to having that discussion. For example, in the south west Bunbury–Busselton area, we are very open to having that conversation and an open invitation too. If you said, "I would like to have a workshop in Bunbury to have this discussed in preparedness", the answer to that is we are very happy to support that process.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: So you would see the committee very much in a lead role in terms of facilitating that system or that approach of culture?

Dr EDWARDS: Absolutely. The ideal thing would be if we were to come and do a presentation with any member at this table or other members in your local area, that you would bring in people that you thought were key people in the area. You would bring them in and we would come in and help

assist that conversation. If that happened, we would be really pleased because—you are right—it would change that culture.

[11.00 am]

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Dr Edwards, I have some familiarity with SEMC and I think with you, Mal, as well when I was working for the former Premier. Emergency services was one of the areas I looked after. I think I have come to a number of SEMC meetings, especially when a natural disaster had occurred. I am keen to understand your understanding and operations within the existing Emergency Management Act and the structures that exist. A lot of observations from my perspective, certainly now with this committee, seems to be that a lot of emergency preparedness response is largely built on the traditional threats in Western Australia—that is, natural disasters predicated primarily around cyclones, floods and bushfires. A lot of the local government responsibilities that exist that you provide advice to and support with seem largely to be responding to those threats. How do you see this legislative environment that exists? Is it robust enough to help respond or prepare agencies—local governments included—to a terror threat? Do you think there is something that needs to be revised there as part of that?

Dr EDWARDS: There is a specific element to that that Mal can talk about, I think, in terms of the legislative response. There was an amendment before the last election which I might get Mal to talk about. In terms of the overall thing, you are absolutely right in terms of saying and asking me particularly, “How well-equipped are we and where is the world going?”, I think is probably what you are suggesting. From my point of view, I am very impressed with the foresight of those who drafted this legislation, as someone who loves legislation because it gives an authority to what all of us do. That is really a good piece of work—including the regulations. In terms of the foresight and where we go, I think that, particularly in the area of terrorism, this is an emerging field where we need lots of expertise. In my own way, I think my responsibility is to say around the table, “These are the questions that are exercising my mind.” In fact, we will take back some of this conversation today to our team and say, “These are the key issues.” In fact, we have some of our people here specifically. I said to them this morning, “Why don’t you come along and see what the parliamentarians are concerned about, because what they’re concerned about is what we’re concerned about because they are representing the community.” I guess, in a general sense, that would be my general response, but I think as you know, as legislators, you always have to be alert to what is coming down the track. We see that as an open conversation—very open. Mal, in terms of the specifics about the legislative change that was proposed, where is that now?

[11.00 am]

Mr CRONSTEDT: So, a couple of years ago, as part of our planning process, we know there are 27 hazards and we know there are the things that we value across the state and it was an emerging scene out there in terms of terrorist acts and many other events around the world. In the interests of improving our lot and making sure that we are ahead of the game, there was a small gap identified in that, if the hazard is not known, and we have got 27 hazards, including terrorist acts, if the hazard is not immediately apparent or is not one of those 27 hazards—a meteor strike—the chance of it is incredibly remote. I have got more chance of winning two lotto tickets in a row, and I notice someone in New South Wales did the other day. It is incredibly low, but you have got to cover all bases. We proposed a legislative amendment that would allow us to declare any situation a hazard and then invoke the powers of an emergency situation and so on. If it is not immediately apparent, and there is a bit of mystique about it, and there are clearly things bad happening but you are not quite sure what the hazard is, to invoke those powers early. That lapsed at the last government.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: At the last Parliament?

Mr CRONSTEDT: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And that has not been introduced subsequently?

Mr CRONSTEDT: We are working with the minister's office to pursue it, yes.

Dr EDWARDS: I think that is one of the outcomes from the Lindt event—ensuring that the people who work under Commissioner Dawson have the capacity to take action as they see fit. My view of that is I think the community is very firm about that. Their safety is paramount.

The CHAIRMAN: I just wanted to clarify that you report to the Minister for Emergency Services; is that right?

Mr CRONSTEDT: Yes.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I realise this might come out in the future, but you spoke about the cost of doing that review at \$200 000-odd, I think, which was quite cost efficient I would suggest.² Is there a need, or certainly has the case been put from SEMC and OEM or the like, for a larger, better resourced body? I noted in the budget papers just released last week that I think SEMC, or certainly emergency management coordination, gets less funding in the out years than it previously did in the last financial year. Is there a need for more dedicated resourcing for SEMC to get more people involved, more experts involved, in providing that advice and strategic direction?

Dr EDWARDS: I think the general observation is we, of course, were caught up in the machinery-of-government changes, and that involved the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. I might say that Commissioner Klemm has been terrific—it is this culture thing that was referred to earlier—in understanding what our responsibilities are and ensuring that they fit within. So, we are not a subset of DFES, but we have our responsibility. In terms of resourcing, obviously the emergency services levy is an important element of funding. I should acknowledge the role of the commonwealth, which provides particularly for our state risk team. Beyond that, I am comfortable with our resource base. I think we have probably answered that.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Just referring to your strategic vision document that you made reference to and the funding situation, I suppose, in each category there you have got "Future activities/systems". So they are things that still need to be done. I am just wondering with each of those particular activities, have you got time frames, costings and plans on how you are going to make those happen, and what is the level of priority, bearing in mind that we are always behind the game when it comes to these sorts of things? We try to get in front of the game, obviously, but I suppose, looking at the past, there are plenty of examples where we probably thought we were ahead of the game but we actually were not.

Dr EDWARDS: Absolutely.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: So we cannot, I suppose, at any stage sit on our laurels and think, "Yes, we're doing really well; we're on top of this." More so with these future activities, what is the plan?

Dr EDWARDS: I particularly like that question because I follow footy teams that do not always win and the coach always tells me we are ahead of the game, but I do not book tickets for September!

The CHAIRMAN: I hear you loud and clear!

Dr EDWARDS: Pain and suffering!

You will notice on this that we have, because I love the parliamentary process, included the bits of the act that refer to the front page. Then what we have done is we have now got an elaboration, which is, given the goals that we have set out there, the risk team has actually gone ahead and said,

² A letter of clarification about this part of the transcript can be accessed on the committee webpage.

“Okay; what are the outcomes, actions and outputs?” So we have moved that conversation to the next level. I am happy to leave you with a copy of this, which we have elaborated that through, which is really to say, “Ultimately, we ought to be able to put some costings against these items.” This is from about last October. This is about six weeks ago. You are absolutely right; ideally, in terms of forward estimates and so on, you could begin to say, “I think the item on this should be so much.” That is where our planning will head.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to provide that to us?

Dr EDWARDS: This document? Yes.

Mr CRONSTEDT: Supporting that, we go through a process with the SEMC every year. Obviously, now is timely for us to consider in the new financial year what priorities there will be and a business plan for the year—so, the specific this is what we are going to do in the next 12 months.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Do you do that on the basis of what you think you can achieve or what needs to be done? One would suggest that all of these things need to be done as a matter of priority, but are you looking at it from that perspective, saying to government, “These are the things that need to be done; they need to be done today. It’s going to cost X millions of dollars and this much resources and these are the costs to the community of not achieving this”?

[11.10 am]

Dr EDWARDS: It is interesting. We are actually ultimately moving to a scoreboard model. This has not kind of been polished up to the extent we want yet. The thinking behind that is that you, as legislators—parliamentarians, ministers generally—are always faced with the issue of “More resources, but tell us why.” I do think that the extent to which we in our role can make this a public conversation, the public will then help you in your conversations in the Parliament to say, “Yes, that is important. We think to do this is worth a certain extra allocation of resources.” That makes your case in your electorate and our minister and the government’s job easier. That is where I think we need to drive that conversation. The more that the public can become aware of that, the better in terms of where it sits.

The CHAIRMAN: I am conscious of the time.

Dr EDWARDS: Yes, indeed.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I have one very quick question. This is a committee that is really looking down the track at what the future holds and what best practice might look like. How do you develop that sense of learning within the committee and the sense of searching for evidence and being ahead of the game in a sense in terms of best practice?

Dr EDWARDS: Just very quickly because of the time, we have a lessons learned discussion that we do both in terms of major events like Waroona–Yarloop. We also have a conversation with SEMC members, which is “What are the things that you think are on the agenda?” We are now actually having specific items in the SEMC agenda where we have conversations to say, “Why don’t we put this up?” and then SEMC members can come to the table knowing that that is a new item. We go around and ask people. In terms of our business, as you would in your own party meetings, you try to put things on that are looking over the horizon. That is a general observation.

Mr CRONSTEDT: If I might add, for instance, at the last meeting we had a presentation on animals and emergencies and the planning going around that, because it is a very sensitive area and very topical, and spent a third of the meeting just on that to consider what is the best practice, how we are going and so on. In future meetings, we will have things like the disability sector and vulnerable people and so on. Through the meetings, you have one big-ticket item which you consider in depth.

Dr EDWARDS: Yes. The other part I find really enjoyable, apart from the work generally, is the sense of accountability that we have through our minister to the Parliament and also this conversation. I know there are some who think you can outsource this to universities and institutes. My response to that is it is called Cambridge Analytica and we do not want to do that. I am happiest to sit here with you and be accountable and admit to all my flaws, but know that this is an ongoing conversation and come back and report further. That is why we welcomed this chance today. I think it is really important to have that conversation. Certainly, from my point of view, thank you for giving us this chance. I think there are some things we need to follow up.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes. I just have a couple of questions on that oversight, and you are comfortable with oversight; you understand the process of oversight as well as anyone. I think you also understand some of the gaps over time around parliamentary scrutiny. Both Queensland and Victoria have gone down the model of creating an inspector general in the emergency management space. Have you examined that and do you think that is a model that could be applied to WA?

Mr CRONSTEDT: It has been examined and the current stance is that, rather than create a new bureaucracy, SEMC is being given the role of assurance—in other words, developing the preparedness report and assuring itself, getting the evidence that supports it. So, yes, the committee itself, independently chaired, has a role in making sure that the evidence here is accurate and they are satisfied that what it says is true. We are also in negotiation with the Office of the Auditor General to see what he or she can do to provide assurance compliance against the Emergency Management Act. Someone needs to test the SEMC, other than in this sort of forum, and the Office of the Auditor General has been quite accepting that perhaps there is room, on a regular basis, to examine compliance against the Emergency Management Act. Of course, that is an independent office and negotiation is ongoing there, but that neatly deals with that problem without creating a bureaucracy.

Dr EDWARDS: Rather than having another bureaucracy, the thing I most like is if we have a commitment to meet in the community with yourselves and others, they will come up and say, “Do you realise this doesn’t work at all?” or “Do you realise when that happened, they turned up with the big trucks, but they didn’t realise the bridge was burnt out?” I mean, that kind of conversation is really what I think is the most valuable. People without fear or favour come up and tell you. Australians are wonderful. They come up and tell you the truth. I love that. It is better than having a bureaucrat sit there and say, “Why didn’t you do this?” No, they come and tell you, and then we can bring it to the table with fairness and respect to report through to our minister and give you some sense of comfort about that.

The CHAIRMAN: On that issue about reporting, we have already identified that you have agencies that you deal with in the creation of the Westplans and the entire framework of emergency management in this state that do not report to your minister; you have police, health and the like, and local government. What framework do you have to report issues to the ministers that supervise those other agencies? Do you have a capacity to do that or do you rely simply on reporting up through your minister?

Dr EDWARDS: Really, what we do is we report up through our minister, but we will alert to him. For example, after every second meeting, I have a meeting with the minister and I will say, “We talked about this but incidentally this has come up, and my view is I think it would be handy if you talked to this minister and this minister, because I think it has implications for them.” As you do in a parliamentary setting, going through the proper process, I report to the minister. The minister then on his judgement says, “I’d better talk to the Minister for Police”, for example. So we have those conversations.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have oversight or is there oversight of you from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet as well?

Dr EDWARDS: Yes. In fact, the DG of Premier and Cabinet sits on the State Emergency Management Committee, which, from our point of view, has been very valuable.

The CHAIRMAN: There is just one final question from me. You mentioned that one amendment that lapsed with the effluxion of the previous Parliament. Apart from that one amendment, do you see any gaps in the legislative framework or any improvements that could be made to the current legislative framework?

Mr CRONSTEDT: Obviously, I do not have the paperwork with me here now, but there are a handful of other administrative matters that were, as you do, bundled up into that amendment to clarify a few things, but that was the big-ticket item.

The CHAIRMAN: If you do not mind, we have some questions we think might be better handled in writing.

Dr EDWARDS: Yes, of course.

The CHAIRMAN: So, if we could send those to you, along with the supplementary information that we have talked about. We definitely appreciate your time today and we value the work that you do in supporting emergency management and response in our community. We will send a transcript of the hearing to you for correction of any minor errors. If you make those corrections in the transcript and return it within 10 days, we will use that transcript. If you do not return it, we will deem it to be accurate and publish it in due course. You cannot use the correction process to change the nature of your evidence, but if you want to give us new material during the period of this inquiry and before we report, we are actually very keen to receive that material, so feel free to make a supplementary submission. Otherwise, we will correspond with you in the next few days about those matters that we talked about and we will continue the conversation at a later time.

Dr EDWARDS: Good. Thank you, Mr Chairman and colleagues. We appreciate the chance to join you and best wishes with your inquiry.

Hearing concluded at 11.18 am
