

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

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

SESSION THREE

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 11.03 am**CARTER, MS LYNN****Volunteer Officer in Charge, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:****DOWN, MR GRAEME JONES****District Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks for coming in. The committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Have you completed 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: You have not put a submission in to the committee, but would you like to make any opening comments or would you like us to just ask the questions?

Ms Carter: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. When was your emergency services unit established?

Ms Carter: In 2001.

The CHAIRMAN: How many members has it got?

Ms Carter: At the moment, 18.

The CHAIRMAN: How frequently is your unit called out to assist with emergencies?

Ms Carter: All too frequently. We are a very busy unit, especially in the fire season.

The CHAIRMAN: I was going to ask the types of emergencies or risks to your community that you attend.

Ms Carter: We are a very busy unit during the wet season. We have the weather conditions to contend with, such as storm damage and flooding on the SES side of it. Then we pay for the flooding and everything with the excess of cane grass and roads that are inaccessible for a month and a half after the flooding. The firebreaks were not done by the shire because the roads, or dirt tracks, were still bleeding. That became a big issue. It has been an ongoing issue that we have had. In the past two months we have probably had 30 callouts for deliberately lit fires.

Mr S.R. HILL: Would that be through tourism or local factors?

Ms Carter: It is a combination of the two.

The CHAIRMAN: Are they deliberately lit, as in campfires getting way, or are they deliberately lit maliciously?

Ms Carter: It is mischief.

Mr S.R. HILL: Arson?

Ms Carter: Children, yes - frustration. The kids in Wyndham have got a lot of issues. We have started a program. Do I embellish on that?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Ms Carter: We have started a fire prevention program in Wyndham. We have done two school visits to both schools, because it was getting out of hand. I made an appointment and went to both the schools last week and gave a talk to the children on the wildlife that is getting destroyed and the possibility of life and limb, infrastructure and everything else being destroyed through the wanton throwing of matches. Motorbikes are causing a bigger issue, because the motorbikes are throwing sparks and then, whoosh. With the wind we have got at the moment and the dryness that is around, you can imagine what it is like. Yes, we are getting sometimes two and three calls a day. We have had three days without a fire, so we are very glad, but we are very busy at the moment.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you do the bushfires and also the town fires?

Ms Carter: Yes, the whole lot.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Are these fires close to town or in town?

Ms Carter: At the moment they are, but we have some that are out of town as well, which we have to travel to and try to contain through back-burns, which is the only way we can contain them. I have no idea who is lighting the ones out of town. We are running a program, as I said, which we have started at the schools. We also have talks to people in the town. We often go to things like fetes, and we get invited for FESA to go, and we do a waterslide. We do community service all the time; when we are not fighting fires we are out doing community service.

[11.10 am]

Mr S.R. HILL: What about the indigenous community? What sort of interaction do you have with them?

Ms Carter: Close, very close. We have actually got probably eight members now who are Aboriginal, which we have not had before, and they are young, too. We are starting them young. That has had a little bit of an impact on the situation as well because the kids around see those kids. I take them to the school with me when I have the talk and introduce them as firefighters. They stand up and the kids say, "Oh, that's my sister. That's my brother." That in the long term will be an advantage to us. We are holding a competition. I have been to the schools and told the kids that they are to enter. You know the signs that they have up: "We like our lizards frilled not grilled". It is that sort of thing. It is a program we are doing about prevention of fire lighting in the town in conjunction with the regional director. He is really good. He said he would support us with that. The winners get their drawings put on the signs, and they will be posted at strategic spots in town.

The CHAIRMAN: So it is pretty proactive. It is not just fighting fires.

Ms Carter: Yes, exactly. We are getting tired, so we have to do something.

The CHAIRMAN: You are getting tired?

Ms Carter: The kids are all excited. We did have a house fire the other day and I think that shocked everyone in town. Fortunately, it was not the main dwelling, it was the old dwelling that was getting restored. It was out in the bush. We were there within five minutes. Under normal circumstances it would have taken us 20 minutes to get on the track, but we were down the road fighting a fire, so we just diverted straight to the house fire. With the wind, him being up on a hill, and the dryness, there was no hope of saving the house. I think that stopped the kids in their tracks.

Mrs J. HUGHES: With all this activity, obviously you are very busy. Is the impact on people having to earn a livelihood becoming a problem for you?

Ms Carter: It is but we are managing it; we are getting by. It is a strain on the members, a great strain. I am a 12-hour shifter at night-time, so I have to hand over to my second in charge. I have an arrangement with my committee. I work at the domestic violence unit; it is an Aboriginal organisation. They are only too happy, if I have no clients, to let me go for fire call attendance.

Mrs J. HUGHES: How many are you being able to turn out at -

Ms Carter: At each incident? Ten to 11 at the moment, we can have. That is unusual. Normally, it is only four or five, but because we have been so active, they have just gone straight to the station - everyone is there. I have had to let the second in charge take the light tender home because the light tender is our fast attack. In the town area, you just do not want to stuff around. With the wind we have and how dry it is, he takes the light tender home, so if we get a call out he is the first on the scene. Everyone else goes to the station. He picks up a member on his way to the fire and our turnout time is really quick, very quick. It is quite fortunate that we are able to do that.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you provide any level of response to indigenous communities in and around Wyndham?

Ms Carter: What do you mean by that?

The CHAIRMAN: If they have a fire, do you respond, or do you have any firefighting capacity out in the communities themselves?

Ms Carter: We have hydrants out in the communities. Are you talking about Kalumburu and Oombulgurri?

The CHAIRMAN: Any community. They are two of the bigger ones.

Ms Carter: We have two: one in the town and one out at Nine Mile community. Yes, we go up there all the time. We do hydrants. We have a lot of trouble with water pipes in Wyndham. They are actually working on it now, but every time they work on the pipes the hydrants get blocked with mud and rocks and stuff. So we have to do a flush of the hydrants at least four times. Hydrant maintenance is ongoing with us. I think they are working on replacing all the pipes and that will not be an issue soon. We need to have clear lines, which is response time as well. We need to clear the hydrant out before we actually plug it up otherwise it will stuff up our pumps.

Mr S.R. HILL: Is there difficulty then? Should FESA take responsibility for the hydrants or should it be the Water Corporation?

Ms Carter: We are working in conjunction with the Water Corporation. The Water Corporation has been really good this year. Last year when we had the cyclone it was a good way of uniting everybody. We had the local emergency management advisory committee, the Water Corporation, the shire, the hospital and the police. We had everybody there working together as a team. We were pretty well isolated because the road was down; yes, we were pretty isolated. That LEMAC meeting, where we had cooperation between each other, made us work as a team. If I have a dicky hydrant now - years ago it used to be I had to ask them 15 times - they are right on the ball. I only have to mention it and they are there. It is the same with the shire. We have had to work closely in conjunction with the shire this year. They have been excellent, absolutely excellent. It has been really great. I have done a lot of work with the shire on areas where we needed to get some slashing done rather than burning. We have a lot of hot spots in Wyndham that get burnt every year and it is starting to show on the environment. We also have some dangerous areas that are lit every year by the kids. It is always a close call. A house is going to go next time, so there is the constant fear. Because they could not get out on the back tracks, I requested that they come into town and do the inner town area, and they worked really well with us. The new manager is excellent. He works well with us.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You obviously have a lot of youth issues out there. Is that to do with the lack of youth facilities?

Ms Carter: No, we have actually got that -

Mrs J. HUGHES: What is the problem?

Ms Carter: As you know, there is a high suicide rate. There are a lot of underlying issues: the family unit, alcohol, substance abuse - it is all involved. This generation is the generation of the drunks - you know what I mean. The new generation is the drunks' children and it is becoming an issue. I think we are starting to get a handle on it. There are a lot of funds going to Wyndham now to support kids. Programs are being run all the time. I think the kids sometimes light the fires for attention. They stand there, watch us, wave to us and all that sort of thing. After the fire I would go up and say, "You didn't light that fire, did you?" "Not me." You know - the innocent face. They do not realise the ramifications of what they do sometimes. The wind can carry something in a really safe zone into a very dangerous zone.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Is there an age group, or is it huge?

Ms Carter: We had five or six year olds, and then we had teenagers.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So you cannot pinpoint it?

Ms Carter: Then we have some street drunks on the way home, wanting to get warm, so they light a fire. Then on they go and throw a match again with no forethought. There is no malice in it either. It is mischief; something to do. It is hard to contain it. It has never been as bad as it has this year. As I said, there have been a lot of deaths in the last couple of years, a helluva lot of deaths, and a lot of young deaths. We had a lot of road accidents. Not last year but the year before we had probably seven to eight who passed away and three or four of them survived. Some of them were very young. It does take a toll on the population. The kids think, what is the use? Normally, if you have one, then another one will try it.

Mrs J. HUGHES: It spirals.

Ms Carter: It has just become a -

The CHAIRMAN: How does the unit cope with that? Wyndham is not that big a town, so I assume that everybody just about knows everybody else. When you are attending road accidents, the chances are it could be one your own. How does the unit cope with that? Do you get support from anywhere else?

[11.20 am]

Ms Carter: My son has been a member of FESA for as long as I have. I am quite surprised at how he handled two of his classmates who were in a fatal accident when their car wrapped around a pole. Through FESA's training and its support network, he has grown up a lot. I was very proud of how he handled that. We now have a lot of peer support, whereas a few years ago there was not that support. The district managers are in Kununurra and are therefore only seconds away if we need them. I have not rung there once and not had a response. If we have needed them, they have been there. They have left right then and there and arrived within the hour. If I needed any further support, Peter has always been there. We have had no end of support, which helps us get through it. A couple of the people in the unit are trained in peer support.

The CHAIRMAN: People look after themselves but FESA provides additional counselling etc if it is needed.

Ms Carter: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I imagine that that type of incident would have quite a significant impact in such a small town, especially when having to pull out from a car accident people they know.

Ms Carter: Our heart drops each time we get a call. I have known most of the people who have been involved in the accidents.

The CHAIRMAN: I will move on to industry, particularly mining in Wyndham. Does the SES unit provide a heavy industry response?

Ms Carter: We will attend an incident if we are needed. Nitrate is brought in via the port. It is used for explosives at the mines such as the mine operated by Sally Malay Mining. The nitrate is stored in Wyndham, and that has been an issue. Two FESA members attend and the fire unit attend when the nitrate is transported from the ship to the sheds. Our two members are employed by the company for the time they are there. They used to just sit and wait for something to happen and nothing would happen. They take their fire gear and the truck with them. They help loading and offloading the truck. If anything should happen, they would be there ready to go. We house miners, but there are no in-town mines or anything close by.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the industry have an emergency preparedness response? Does it have its own emergency services?

Ms Carter: Yes. The airport and the water authority have their own emergency services plans.

The CHAIRMAN: The emergency services units are relatively new. The Wyndham unit is probably one of the first such units in the state. Is that particularly challenging or is it a better way to work rather than to have separate entities such as FESA and the SES?

Ms Carter: It is better for a small town such as Kununurra to operate this way because small towns do not have enough people to spread the volunteers around. It is the only feasible thing to do - I am sorry about that pun! It has been fantastic. When my sons both joined, they were members of the SES and the fire service before it united. It is better for the younger people because they are busy all the time. Previously the SES was busy only when SES matters were going on and the same applied to the fire service. Now we are busy all year round and so the younger people cannot get bored. Also, it is physically and mentally challenging. They are never bored because of the training they get across the board. They do not get bored waiting for something to happen because they are busy all the time.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Earlier you mentioned the ammonium nitrate coming ashore. Nitropril, which is similar, used to be transported from the Cadjebut mine from the Wyndham port. Of course, that goes to Argyle. Is any training conducted to deal with heavy vehicle road crashes?

Ms Carter: We are HAZMAT trained and we have the support of Kununurra. We do not rush into a HAZMAT incident; we are not foolhardy. We must stand back. We have been trained in hazardous material training with the fire service.

The CHAIRMAN: When we were talking about heavy industry, you said the heavy industries had emergency plans in place. Have you had an emergency response from the heavy industry? Do they have units of their own?

Ms Carter: The mine sites do.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the port?

Ms Carter: It has its own training for specific incidents. A lot of minerals are exported from Wyndham, including zinc, iron ore and bauxite, as well as livestock such as cattle. Many products are exported from and imported into the port of Wyndham. The port authority is constantly training and updating personnel. Fuel is also brought into the port. The port authority personnel are fully trained in what to do should an incident occur.

The CHAIRMAN: I was just concerned that you said "plans". I thought it meant that the heavy industries had plans but with regard to your part of the plan whereby you support them, they did not have a response themselves.

Ms Carter: They have their own plans.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I am interested to know how the LEMAC committee is structured, given that you are wearing three hats. Who is the LEMAC coordinator in the town, and what stage are the plans at?

Ms Carter: The LEMAC meetings are held at the FESA unit, which is centrally located. We invite all the different services such as family support, both Aboriginal organisations, the water authority and Horizon Power. We need to have a good relationship with Horizon Power because we often need it. On previous occasions the shire manager used to chair the meeting. However, the previous manager was not suited to chairing the meeting and so it was chaired by Wyndham's police sergeant. We now have a new shire manager who is quite confident and is proactive in the safety procedures and the operations of the town. He is very good and is champing at the bit for the next LEMAC meeting. It will only get better because of his good attitude. Graham, my district manager, always attends the LEMAC meetings. We have had natural disasters two years in a row. This year we had a huge rain depression that caused massive flooding and the year before there was a cyclone. That has brought together as a team all the services that usually penny-pinch and fight with each other for power. They now work as a team, which is very good. LEMAC is working very well.

[11.30 am]

Mrs J. HUGHES: FESA is proposing that it be empowered to take control of a fire from local government or CALM should FESA consider this necessary. FESA considers that it might be necessary to utilise this power only two or three times a year across the state. CALM supports FESA taking control from local government but not from CALM. Do you have a relationship with CALM and do you have a comment on that statement by CALM?

Ms Carter: We have worked with CALM. I and two other members went to the Purnululu National Park, which is the Bungle Bungles, and assisted CALM for three days with back-burning to prevent disasters from happening there. We worked well with CALM and it knows the areas under its control. Obviously we bow to CALM on CALM-owned land because it knows the roads, the conditions and everything else, so when we are there, we do as the Romans do. We are happy to assist CALM.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Would you favour CALM staying in control of those areas?

Ms Carter: Yes. I would like to see the burning conducted by CALM done in conjunction with our fire service district manager. There have been a couple of mishaps in the past when the fire has encroached on our area when it has got out of control; it then becomes an issue.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Would you like to see a more coordinated approach across the areas?

Ms Carter: Yes. Our district managers should work in conjunction with CALM. If there was any risk that a fire might encroach on to our area or endanger any of the population that we have control of, I would like to see CALM, as a courtesy, keep in touch with us and work in conjunction with our district managers, just so they know. If I ring up and ask whether CALM has done something and CALM says that it had done a drop, at least we would have been prepared.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You would like communications across -

Ms Carter: Yes. That is a good thing; it is a courtesy.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: FESA is proposing that it be empowered to request the development of fire management plans from landowners when the land is CALM-managed land, plantation land or land used for pastoral or grazing purposes. The fire management plan would be requested only if FESA considered this to be necessary to mitigate the risk of fire to life and property; for instance, in areas of high risk. Do you want to comment on this proposal?

Ms Carter: That might be an issue in Kununurra, but we do not have plantations in Wyndham. We have spinifex, which has its own charms!

Mrs J. HUGHES: What about private land abutting public land?

Ms Carter: We do not have an issue with that.

The CHAIRMAN: It is proposed that FESA be re-established as the department of emergency services. This would mean the removal of the word “fire” from the corporate name. FESA’s argument is that the removal of the word “fire” is appropriate because fires are just one of the many emergencies that its volunteers attend to. The United Firefighters Union Australia argues that this is an attack on the identity of the fire service. Do you have an opinion on whether the authority should be re-established as a department? Do you have any view on the name for the department?

Ms Carter: No. I am quite happy to call it the department of emergency services because that covers the whole span of services provided. People like to use the word “fire” and say that they are fireys. It is just a matter of getting used to the way things are said and what people’s expectations are. We are quite happy. We would like to stick with the one name - emergency services. That covers the whole span of services. That is my personal opinion.

The CHAIRMAN: Being an emergency services unit, it must be kind of expected.

Ms Carter: That is it. We used to be FESA, fire and emergency and fire and rescue. “Emergency services” covers it. Our town in particular knows what a FESA unit is, whereas the population of Kununurra does not really know because they have separate identities. Our town is quite proud of the fact that it is a joined FESA unit and that we swing off cliffs as well as fight fires. The kids are right into the FESA unit.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Lynn, I think you have virtually answered this, but just for clarification, are you comfortable with the level of support your emergency services unit receives from local government, FESA and CALM?

Ms Carter: ESL does not really affect us. Yes, I am quite comfortable with the way things are.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the local FESA unit not run under local government? Is it not set up under local government as an SES unit or a FESA unit? Is it directly a FESA unit?

Ms Carter: No. It is a combined unit. It does not have that confusion.

The CHAIRMAN: Does all the funding received flow straight to FESA and not through the local council?

Ms Carter: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: What level of training is provided? You mentioned that FESA does cliff rescues, road rescues and fires -

Ms Carter: We do a span of services.

The CHAIRMAN: A lot of training is involved in that.

Ms Carter: Obviously you will not see me swinging from a cliff! It would not be a nice sight to see anyway. Some things are better suited to the younger people and the older people are better in management. We mix and match because we have either very old people - which in the kid’s opinion is me - or really young people involved in the organisation. The older ones provide support and can calm down the younger ones.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that the attraction? This is one of the few FESA units that has told the committee it is attracting young people to it. Some units around the state are attracting young people, but not too many. Is the attraction of young people to this unit a result of the variety of work done; for example, cliff rescues, road rescues and responding to bushfires?

Ms Carter: That is a big attraction. It started off with a young group. My two boys and another lad who was living with us were members of the unit. That attracted more young people from outside who were curious. That is how the core builds.

The CHAIRMAN: You said there were about 18 volunteers.

Ms Carter: Yes, 18 volunteers are on board at the moment. Probably, as I said, 11 or 12 of those are active; some are inactive due to increased demands on their lives and not being able to attend things.

The CHAIRMAN: You also mentioned that you had some indigenous volunteers as well.

Ms Carter: Yes, we have.

The CHAIRMAN: That is unusual.

Ms Carter: Is it?

The CHAIRMAN: There are many around the state, but to have so many in a unit of 18 is quite a significant achievement in itself.

Mr Down: As part of a CDEP program some of the CDEP participants have been positioned in the Wyndham emergency service unit to maintain the grounds and that kind of thing. They have generally been younger people. In essence, they get to see first-hand the kinds of activities that take place and, as a consequence, some of those people become members. That has been a distinct advantage for Wyndham.

Mr S.R. HILL: That is unique because this is the only structure that does that.

Ms Carter: The unit is open from at least 8.00 am to 12.00 pm every day. On the weekend members float in and float out. We have to constantly maintain our equipment because of the amount of call-outs we get. On the weekends the older members of the unit check the burners etc. The CDEP program has also been a great thing.

[11.40 am]

We run a young people's program; it is for 16 to 19-year-olds. The FESA unit is supporting them. They are based at the unit and we teach them occupational health and safety. It is the pre-program to work. It teaches kids new skills and so on. The children see all our equipment and we teach them what to do with it.

Mr S.R. HILL: Obviously some of these young people are paid CDEP money to participate in the unit.

Ms Carter: They are in a separate program to the CDEP. Only one person is left on the CDEP now. Being part of the unit has also taught the children so many skills that they are becoming more employable. That is a big thing that I have told kids who have made inquiries. I say that this will look good on their CVs. That is what has opened them up to it.

The CHAIRMAN: Particularly on a mine site and in heavy industry.

Ms Carter: Exactly. Argyle Diamonds has a lot of my members - the rotters! They make very employable people.

The CHAIRMAN: What about the administration of the unit? Is a lot of bureaucracy attached to it? Do a lot of forms need to be filled out and things acquitted?

Ms Carter: It used to be but it has calmed down now. It is all coming into its own. If I had to do separate forms for the SES and the Bush Fire Service, it would be a logistical nightmare. However, we have managed to get a uniform reporting system. That has been really good; it has been great.

The CHAIRMAN: Does most of the administration fall to you as the unit leader or is it shared around?

Ms Carter: I have a really good administration officer. I have had her for only a little while, but it has been really good. I do a lot of it, but I work in conjunction with her as well; she is a very efficient lady. The teamwork works out well. The district manager also takes a lot of the load,

because we are really busy at the moment. If there is something that I need or want, I just ring Graeme and ask him to help us. For him it is no worries; he organises that and it gets done. That helps.

Mrs J. HUGHES: The ambulance service does not currently fall under emergency services. Do you have any comments on the ambulance service?

Ms Carter: I have a lot of comments but I do not know whether I can say them! St John Ambulance membership has been an issue ever since I have been in the town. We were asked to offer assistance with drivers three years ago and we said that we would do it for a time. We worked out a roster, although we were pretty busy. I said that we would be happy to help out. However, obviously only the senior members of the unit could be involved -

The CHAIRMAN: Just say more "mature members".

Ms Carter: Yes, that is it. The grey ones! We worked out a rotating three-week roster and gave it to them. They had call-outs and never used us. It is the old ambulance versus fire service competition. I think it is silly, personally; we are all emergency services. If we attend a car accident, the ambulance service is just as valuable on the scene as we are.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I was going to say that your work does depend on them to a certain extent to make sure that your people get to the hospital.

Ms Carter: Exactly. When we heard that the ambulance service was shutting down, it was a big nightmare for us. When we attend a road accident, there might be a couple of mortalities and another person who is trapped but who is still alive. Without knowing that the ambulance is on their way to assist, it is hard. We can cut the person out of the car. We have all done senior first aid; we all know how to use the Oxy-Viva. I have done nursing. That helps a little, but we do not have the necessary equipment. These small towns cannot do without an ambulance service. It is really important. It is scary for us. We do not need that extra responsibility. We have a helluva lot of responsibility as it is, and to think that we may not have an ambulance to back us up is a scary thought.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Have you been able to maintain your ambulance service in Wyndham?

Ms Carter: No. It has been sporadic. A couple of members are holding it together, and they are elderly; that is, in their 60s and 70s.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Would you be relying on Kununurra?

Ms Carter: The Kununurra ambulance service is not really healthy at the moment either. It is a bit of an issue. A lot of people have come into the FESA unit saying that they want to join. I am constantly saying to them that I would love them to join but that if they want to volunteer and be really needed in town, they should join the ambulance service. I have been diverting them to that service. I would be happy for them to join the FESA unit, but it has been such an issue that for the past three years I have been asking people to join St John Ambulance instead because it really needs them. Once they become a member of the ambulance service, I am quite happy for them to join my unit, but the ambulance service really needs the volunteers. It is an essential service.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Mr Chairman, I am sorry; I know this does not fall directly under the umbrella of this inquiry. However, through some of the other inquiries that we have made throughout the state, it seems that funding to these units is a real issue, which is why they are not retaining their members or funding. The impact of that falls very heavily on the emergency services, such as SES and those types of people. Does the same issue exist in Wyndham?

Ms Carter: No, we are funded well by FESA. Our equipment is top of the range.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I meant St John Ambulance.

Ms Carter: With St John Ambulance, the answer is yes. They have an ancient ambulance - it is probably as old as the members! It needs to be cranked up! Although it is not quite like that, it is a pain. They have a good building, but the vehicle is very old. The fellow who is in charge has to tickle up the vehicle just to drive it. If I came off the street from FESA and went to go to a call-out, it would be difficult. The roller doors are difficult to operate. When somebody is in an accident, it is important to be there straightaway, but it takes half an hour to get the roller doors up and then the car has to be kicked in. You have to know the eccentricities of the ambulance just to get it going. It is a bit of an issue. We offered to help them out temporarily with drivers again, but we would have to have an ambulance for which we could turn the key and it would start. That is the thing.

The CHAIRMAN: I know that FESA does not fund ambulances; in fact, they are funded completely separately, and in small towns they are funded almost entirely by the volunteers who run the services. Could your unit cope with having an ambulance service incorporated into the emergency services you provide? Forget the funding and all that. Is it a possibility to provide that service for the town?

Ms Carter: There would have to be a lot of changes for that to happen. Maybe that is what future talks will involve.

The CHAIRMAN: That is what I am alluding to. Maybe in the future it will be the case that St John Ambulance will not deliver a service in these small towns because it cannot get the volunteers.

Ms Carter: They get training once a year if they are lucky and they have to fit in with St John Ambulance's timetable. There are town events in Wyndham only at certain times of the year. Our races fall at the same time every year, and that is when St John Ambulance wants to train the officers. The races are the biggest thing in the town. It is similar to if the Queen came; that is what it is like for us in Wyndham. Our races are the ants pants, or the bees knees, and that is when they hold the ambulance training. There are three days of training once a year, so the officers miss out on that event. My members are keen, but I do not know whether I would ask them to do that. They give up a lot of their time to do the training because it is ongoing. We also do unit training once a week. Sometimes if we have had many call-outs, I say to forget the training because we have done enough in the field. However, we still need to do the training. For the St John Ambulance officers it is a big ask. The members do not have a choice, whereas I do with FESA. I say to FESA that a certain event is happening at this time of the year; please do not organise training. We do not get many good times or happy times. This is an event to bring the town together.

The CHAIRMAN: To celebrate.

[11.50 am]

Ms Carter: I know it is only little, but to a small town like Wyndham it is a big event. It is a big ask to ask anyone to do that. Three years ago I did the ambulance office number one course. On the last day I had to pull out because we got a fire call and I was needed. I could not complete the course. I went back to them and said, "Look, give me the exam and I'll do it." I had done all the studying and had done the three and a half or four days, whatever it was. I was completing the last little bit when I had to go for the fire call. When I came back, it was all over bar the shouting. I asked if I could finish the exam; that was all I needed to do. They said, "No, you left." So that was wasted. I knew everything; it was only a matter of sitting the exam. There is no flexibility.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You are the sort of lady I would like to come out to my emergency, if that is the case.

The CHAIRMAN: I commend your enthusiasm. I think that the success that you seem to be having is probably being powered along by people like you and your unit. The fact that you are attracting not only young people but also young Aboriginal people is also very commendable. Hopefully, FESA can replicate that around the state in areas that are in similar circumstances to Wyndham.

I will read you the last piece, unless there is anything else you would like to add that you think we have not covered. Thanks again for coming in. I know you are a night shift worker and you probably need to get home to get some sleep. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of typographical errors or errors of transcription or fact. New material may not 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 to us within 10 days of receipt, it will be deemed to be correct.

Lynn, thank you once again for coming. We probably should have gone to Wyndham, as you said, but it was just too hard for us.

Ms Carter: It is a shame; you missed out on a great unit. You would have loved it! We could have taken you on the Cook's tour and you would have loved it.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks a lot, Lynn.

Ms Carter: Next time.

Hearing concluded at 11.54 am
