

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2015–16 ANNUAL REPORT HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
TUESDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2016**

**SESSION ONE
DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Members

**Hon Rick Mazza (Chair)
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)
Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Helen Morton
Hon Sally Talbot**

Hearing commenced at 9.33 am

Mr WAYNE GREGSON, APM
Commissioner, examined:

Mr LLOYD BAILEY
Deputy Commissioner, Operations Command, examined:

Ms SUZANNE PATERSON
Executive Director, Governance and Strategy, examined:

Mr STEPHEN FEWSTER
Deputy Commissioner, Capability Command, examined:

Mrs CAROLE DOWD
Director, Risk, Planning and Reporting, examined:

Mr FRANCO PASQUALE
Executive Director, Corporate Services, examined:

Mrs GEORGINA CAMARDA
Chief Finance Officer, examined:

The ACTING CHAIR: Welcome to the 2015–16 annual report hearings of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. Our first session is with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing. Can the witnesses confirm that they have read, understood and signed a document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: I ask each of you to state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee. We will do that and then I will read the rest of the introduction. I ask each witness to talk into the microphone. You might have a little bit of a problem squeezing into that end because Hansard needs to record it and it is also being broadcast.

It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and the transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Although the hearing is being held in public, there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If, for some reason, you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in a closed session before answering the question. Agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting the Parliament to review agency outcomes. The committee values your assistance with this.

We will not start with opening statements because we have such a very tight schedule today and across the annual report hearings. However, commissioner, if you do have a statement that you would like to make to the committee, we would be happy to incorporate that into *Hansard*.

Mr Gregson: I do not have one. We are ready to go.

The ACTING CHAIR: We will start with Hon Rick Mazza.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thanks, chair. On page 17, it talks about the critical messaging system. In the wake of the Yarloop–Warroona fires, there was some concern about the communication and messaging system. Is that up and running now?

Mr Gregson: Yes, it is.

Hon RICK MAZZA: How will it actually operate?

Mr Gregson: It is a webpage called emergency.wa.gov.au. It is open and accessible to all members of the public with internet access.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I suppose in the event of a catastrophic fire, what happens if the internet service goes down? Is there any sort of backup to that critical messaging service?

Mr Gregson: The critical messaging system is just one way of communicating to members of the public. We advocate that members of the public, number one, maintain their own personal situation awareness, and number two, there are a range of things they can rely on: radio, other sources of media, television, local community engagement, SMS systems, emergency warning systems and then the internet. You are correct, sir; if you lose power or if you lose radio base stations, you are likely to have some of those avenues of information reduced.

Hon RICK MAZZA: On page 37, with the automated vehicle locator system—I think we spoke about that last year. It was in the process of being evaluated. Have any of those AVLs been fitted?

Mr Gregson: Yes, they have. We are in the commencement of rollout.

Hon RICK MAZZA: How many vehicles have been fitted to date?

Mr Gregson: Sixty.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Also, with the crew protection system that you have, which is jointly funded with royalties for regions, how many vehicles have now actually got all the burnover blankets, radiator heat shields and all those sorts of things?

Mr Gregson: I know 100 per cent have the burnover blankets but crew protection is a suite of measures taken with respect to vehicles. Automatic vehicle location is the last of the features. With respect to blankets, it is 100 per cent. I can get you the numbers by breakdown; if you would like that as supplementary information, I can provide that.

[Supplementary Information No A1.]

Hon RICK MAZZA: With the appliance protection, have all the volunteer brigade appliances been fitted with that too?

Mr Gregson: Certainly with respect to blankets, then you go to the next phase of cladding—the essential elements such as wiring and those types of things. That is well and truly down the track. The next thing is the showering of the vehicles. Then there is in-cab breathing. They are all at various stages of being fitted. There are other challenges, of course, because of the range of types of appliances that we have and some of the weight-remediation challenges that we have. Also, moving towards a new future fleet, we are trying to make sure that it is appropriately staged. All of those respective elements would be provided in that supplementary information.

Hon RICK MAZZA: The AVLs, are they also planned to be in the volunteer units?

Mr Gregson: Yes, they are.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Okay, fantastic. With the bushfires that are lit—the catastrophic one we had earlier this year was a natural event, but how many bushfires are actually started by firebugs?

Mr Gregson: It is about 40 per cent.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is there any sort of work done in trying to minimise the activities of these people?

Mr Gregson: We do some collaborative work with the Western Australia Police in terms of joint operations. They are obviously focusing on the policing and investigative aspects and we are focusing on investigating the source of the fire.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Moving on a little bit now to some of the legislation that has come in in recent times, with the bushfire-prone areas: have all the mapping and assessments been done for the whole of the state?

Mr Gregson: Yes, they have.

Hon RICK MAZZA: With the assessors for the BAL ratings, how many assessors are currently accredited?

Mr Gregson: I would have to take that on notice to get you the details. The accreditation is done, I believe, through the Department of Planning but we assist them through the Office of Bushfire Risk Management in terms of standards. I could get you those details as to how many assessors there are at each of the specific levels of bushfire attack level.

[Supplementary Information No A2.]

[9.40 am]

Hon RICK MAZZA: So the accreditation of those assessors is done by Planning. What sort of training group does that? Is that DFES people who train on the BAL?

Mr Gregson: Can I refer that question to the deputy commissioner of capability, please?

Mr Fewster: The training is done by the Fire Protection Association Australia under arrangements that are put in place to meet Department of Planning requirements.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Are there different levels of those assessors?

Mr Fewster: There are; there are three levels.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I think I asked how many assessors and you were going to take that on notice. How many levels are there?

Mr Fewster: There are three levels.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Have many of the top level, or level 3, been accredited as yet?

Mr Fewster: I do not know the number.

The ACTING CHAIR: Would you like to take that on notice?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes, I will take that on notice.

[Supplementary Information No A3.]

Hon RICK MAZZA: In your report, you talk about the emergency services levy being some \$273 million in the 2013–14 year, and that is forecast to be \$354 million in the 2018–19 year, so there is quite a substantial increase in the funding that is coming in. Have the allocations to local government increased in line with the increased ESL?

Mr Gregson: If I could refer that question to the chief financial officer.

Mrs Camarda: I am going to ask you to repeat the question, please. Sorry.

Hon RICK MAZZA: You are going to have an increase of about \$80 million over the next few years in the ESL levy. Is the allocation to local government going to increase in line with the increased ESL or has the allocation remained static?

Mrs Camarda: The levy is just one of our funding sources. Our total funding has remained consistent. It is just a shift in our funding sources, so we now receive less CA funding from the government and more levy funding to fund our total cost of services. The profile in terms of funding local governments has remained the same.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So what you are saying is your total budget is the same; it is just the way that the funding comes in.

Mrs Camarda: Exactly; it is just a change in funding source, yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: With the allocation to local government, you also must allocate to marine rescue services and the SES. Are you able to give us a breakdown of what those allocations are to each of the volunteer groups?

Mrs Camarda: Yes. We will take that on notice.

[Supplementary Information No A4.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Commissioner, I must thank you for the comprehensive answers to the questions that came in prior to the hearing. I just want to pick up a couple of points in those responses to ask you to elaborate on. If I can start with your response to the question about improving the relationships between the agencies, this is probably the hoariest old chestnut that we come across in relation to a critique of your operations. We all know the background to this. Every time we have a disaster, we have an inquiry and every inquiry says the relationships need to be improved. So I think it is probably reasonable if the standing committee asks you to give us a bit more detail about exactly what the collaborative process is.

Mr Gregson: All right. It is, I guess, a multifaceted answer. We are where we are in the state of Western Australia in terms of relationships based on different organisations' histories and different organisational cultures. It is recognised across government agencies and, indeed, the non-government sector that the best type of response is a collegiate and collaborative response. Putting that into practice, of course, when you have got competing cultures and competing histories is challenging. How they have been manifested or how that continuous collaboration and cooperation is being manifested is by closer working relationships in terms of standardising equipment; standardising operating processes and procedures; mutual training; collaborative committee work around, for example, safety issues and around interoperations; joint, integrated teams; the sharing of systems, particularly as we move forward with automatic vehicle location, which is one that has been mentioned this morning, and as we move forward on greater investment in ICT, there is much more of a willingness to come together on shared systems for not only economies of scale, but also better integration across government agencies; and combined teams with Western Australia Police and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, with even contributions from the commonwealth, whether it be the Bureau of Meteorology, Geoscience Australia and the Australian Defence Force all coming together, yes, with different cultures but, increasingly, with a better understanding of a common operating picture and also an agreed set of ways of working together, selecting equipment and mutual training and exercising. As I say, it is quite a longwinded answer, but on every front there is a sharing of the view that a collaborative and cooperative endeavour is better than a siloed approach.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I do not think your answer was longwinded. I think we need to drill down into the detail of this because it is a complex problem, as you indicate. I wonder whether you and your colleagues have given some thought to how you would specifically reflect on the last nine months, so that, hopefully, we will get through the next summer without another major incident. What will you specifically be able to point to that has changed between January 2016 and today that will prevent some of those problems about lack of identity cards and lack of resources on the ground and local knowledge?

Mr Gregson: I think that not just going back over the last 12 months, but going back perhaps over the last five years, the level of interagency cooperation and collaboration has never been better. Yes, it is true that there are always post-operative assessments or reviews or major incident reviews or inquiries, and quite often they will thematically report on "You could do better if tried harder". But there is an absolute commitment from all the agencies that we want to work collegiately and

collaboratively. I could point to many specific examples, whether it be automatic vehicle location, the move towards a joint intelligence function, the collaboration and fusing of our respective air fleets over the last two or three summer seasons in a shared air desk, and the fact that we cohabit the state operations centre from all the organisations. I think there is a tremendous will towards wanting to do that. As I underscored, that can be somewhat problematic. I deal with, in certain operational circumstances, 132, or however many there are, local governments that own their respective brigades and groups. It is not until they are operationalised that, in certain circumstances, they come under the direction and command and control, as you will, and supervision of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. There are some longstanding, fiercely held cultural views with respect to some elements of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and some elements of volunteer associations and union bodies, people within my middle management, people within other government agencies' middle management and people within various associations. I do not think there is an immediate magic wand solution to this. It is just about a continuous improvement and a dedication to change the culture towards becoming collegiate, collaborative and cooperative.

[9.50 am]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you. I am going to leave aside DPaW for the time being because I am not sure we have time to go into that relationship. Can you just talk specifically about the other people who sit in those discussions with you? Can we talk about local government? Are there any sticking points as far as the demands and expectations of the local government sector's engagement with you?

Mr Gregson: No, I think we have a very good relationship with local government. WALGA represent the views of local government authorities at various levels. They are a member of the State Emergency Management Committee. They participate in a range of their subcommittees. They work collegiately with us in terms of the grant scheme—in terms of the allocation of funding to the various volunteer associations. I have had no negative feedback from WALGA or local government associations in terms of our relationship with them. In some local government areas, the relationship is you would give it 10 out of 10. In other local government areas, it is not so good, but they are areas to improve on and to work at.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have to say that the feedback on the ground is a little discrepant from that. I pick up a degree of unhappiness, but that might be a conversation that we can have in a different forum. What about the volunteer agencies? How many do you deal with?

Mr Gregson: I have the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, the SES Volunteers Association, the fire and emergency services association, the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services Association—I think that is it.

Ms Paterson: Marine rescue.

Mr Gregson: I beg your pardon—and the marine rescue volunteer association. I hope they are not taking umbrage at me missing them out if they are listening!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am sure Hansard will edit that out so that it reads seamlessly.

Mr Gregson: I get into trouble, you see, even on the order that I mention them, so if I miss one out it is —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you talk about each of the four?

Mr Gregson: Look, there is a tremendously good working relationship with all of the associations bar the volunteer bushfire association. My view, with the greatest of respect to the leadership of the volunteer bushfire association, is that they are quite dogmatic. I do not consider that they are necessarily representative of their entire cohort of volunteer bushfire associations. I probably travel and interact with as many bushfire volunteers as they do. I get quite a range of views. I find the volunteer bushfire association less collaborative and less prepared to be engaged with the

department than the other associations. I have an open door policy with respect to the volunteer bushfire associations. We have endeavoured at every level of the organisation to be as engaging with them as possible. It would be fair to say that that is not always reciprocated.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Just on that issue, following up on a comment that was made on page 18 of the annual report, under the heading of “Volunteers” it talks about —

The impact of demographic shifts across Western Australia continues to challenge the Department’s ability to sustain the volunteer workforce.

Can you, firstly, elaborate on what are those demographic challenges? Are they simply a diminution in people living in regions or is there something else that is going on?

Mr Gregson: Yes. I think there are two things. I think, firstly, there is a shift in demographics from rural communities to metropolitan communities. There are not as many people, particularly in rural farming communities, as there once were. That is with respect to the geographical demographic but there is also an ageing demographic that is presenting somewhat of a challenge. Many of the volunteer cadre—in some volunteer capacities greater than others—are represented by an ageing volunteer workforce. In fact, I think that the demographics show that we are going to be in for some increasing challenges in attracting and retaining volunteers to keep up with the numbers that we currently have.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: What are you doing to change?

Mr Gregson: We have got a volunteer sustainability strategy, which I would be happy to table for you. That articulates a range of initiatives that we are undertaking to endeavour to engage the community more broadly, to glean volunteers, to train them and to retain them. I must say—it is only anecdotally—in my observations, with my experience, that the propensity of the current generation to volunteer is not the same as what, perhaps, the post-war generation was inclined to do. What we are seeing is some very—I am privileged enough to give out 40 or 50 years’ service medals in the volunteer community. I think they will become rarer as time goes on because there does not seem to be the stickiness with volunteers that are drawn from the current generation as there perhaps once was.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Have you done any work —

The ACTING CHAIR: Sorry; just before you go on to that, the volunteer sustainability strategy—do you have it with you to table or shall we take that on notice?

Mr Gregson: No, I do not have it with me but I would be —

The ACTING CHAIR: We will allocate that A5. Thank you.

[Supplementary Information No A5.]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Have you done any work about this stickability? I guess in modern management parlance it would be called exit interviews or something like that. Have you done any work with people who volunteer for a short period of time and then drop out?

Mr Gregson: Yes, we have done a tremendous amount of work. We have done surveys with respect to volunteers. We have done one on volunteers generally. We have also done what we call the volunteer survey of people who have engaged with the organisation for only 12 months—they are newbies—to get their perceptions. We also, in 2015, commissioned a brand survey, which also looked at the relationship issues—what are perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of the department. All of those surveys were used to inform the volunteer sustainability strategy.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Of those various volunteer groups that you mentioned before, are there some that are doing it better than others?

Mr Gregson: What—ageing?

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: No, at keeping volunteers. I think we are all ageing very, very quickly! We would like to think we are doing it really well, but who knows.

Mr Gregson: I will say, with the greatest respect, we are all ageing at exactly the same rate!

Some of the volunteer associations are doing some great work with juniors. We are finding the investment with emergency service cadets is good. We have done some work in the trainee space. There is the engagement of juniors, particularly with the volunteer fire and rescue service, the SES service, trying to parallel social utility around volunteering. By that I mean building that sense of belonging, that sense of inclusion for volunteers. They volunteer not just because they want to be respondents or assist in response, but because they want to be involved and engaged. The SES are doing that particularly well. The volunteer fire and rescue service is doing that particularly well. I would like to see some of that replicated amongst my marine volunteers, which is a particularly aged volunteer group. Again, the volunteer bush fire fighters—whilst I observe, because, as you are aware, they come under local government rather than me, but nevertheless we are very inclusive in our approach—there is something happening in that space with juniors as well.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: That is helpful but, obviously, you have seen the media reports only a couple of weeks ago about, and I quote, “dysfunction among the vollies themselves” and issues such as that. If there is a challenge with attracting volunteers in the first place and then there are these reports about dysfunction within their services, it is not going to end well, is it?

Mr Gregson: I do not think it is a positive contribution to have negative media on any topic. I think they are different issues but if you are having organisations perceived or portrayed as being dysfunctional—whether that is true or not is a different issue—if that is put out there in the public domain, that has an effect on whether or not people wish to choose to volunteer or to contribute in a way to volunteering organisations.

[10.00 am]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: As you point out, it is not in your direct purview, but obviously it impacts on our ability to provide quick and good responses to emergencies as a state.

Mr Gregson: There is absolutely no doubt the response capability in Western Australia would not be as high as it is today if it was not for the contribution made by volunteers, and we very much value that contribution and we are intently focused upon training the volunteers, equipping the volunteers, building the relationship with volunteers, and having a longer-term volunteer sustainability strategy.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: My last question on this issue: is there anything that employers can do to assist in either creating a bigger pool of volunteers or better assisting the current volunteers in situations where they do need to be ready and able and also to attend training sessions, of course, or is that working well already?

Mr Gregson: I think that is working well. We have a tremendous response and support from employers. We indeed recognise that annually. We have a volunteer employer award ceremony where we target, recognise and thank employers that are making a particularly good contribution. Some of the larger employers, particularly in the mining sector, have their own volunteer groups of emergency rescue personnel and they fuse very well and are made available for broader community response. I am comfortable with the contribution that is made by employers. It is quite an impost on employers, particularly where they are a small business or they are indeed self-employed. It is perhaps more easily carried by the larger companies, but employers certainly carry a significant impost by freeing up their personnel to go to training or to go into response mode, and full credit to them.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Definitely. That is why the rewards so important because it recognises that they are making a contribution too, though maybe not actually on the ground, but simply by assisting so willingly with staff; it is a major contribution. Thank you.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Just following on from Hon Peter Katsambanis and Hon Sally Talbot, you said that the relationship between the bushfire vollies and DFES was strained, basically.

Mr Gregson: I think it is suboptimal. It could be improved. I think the question was: how did I view the relationships with them? We still have an open-door policy. We are still talking to them, but I do not think it is optimised in the way in which some of the other volunteer organisations have taken advantage of a stronger working relationship.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Ideally, you would have a good working relationship at all times. I just wonder what things could be done to actually improve it.

Mr Gregson: I am, sorry, sir?

Hon RICK MAZZA: What do you think could be done to actually improve the relationship directly?

Mr Gregson: I think there is a divergence of views on the performance of the bushfire volunteer executive. That is a matter for the members themselves, but I think a change of executive would have the potential to significantly improve the relationship with the department.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Just on page 7, the “Year at a Glance”, you have got there that there were 14 009 false alarms. You spoke about firebugs earlier, but there are also people who ring up and give you a false alarm. What was the nature of those false alarms?

Mr Gregson: We have a false fire alarm—many businesses’ buildings are directly connected to us and, of course, an alarm can go off—anything from steam in the kitchen at an aged pensioners village or a hospital, or it can be a hotel where someone is cooking toast and all of those types of things. I would just make a comment though with respect to those alarms. Earlier this year—I think it was in January—we introduced a false fire alarm policy change. We are now doing cost recovery for false alarms if a particular premise gets more than three false alarms and they have not done the right thing to try and do system changes. It is very early to tell but what we are seeing in the early data is around a 20 per cent reduction in false alarms per month. So, if that trend continues, that will mean we will take 200 to 300 of these alarms off, which is a tremendous saving for us as an organisation in terms of time, not money necessarily, but, importantly, it means there is less risk for our officers attending, there is less risk for other road users because we always attend under fire-call conditions, and it means that the likelihood that we are going to a proper event is increased. It is a challenge for us. Some holders of alarms, private alarms and direct-brigade alarms are inclined to really do the right thing, and this is a bit of an incentive to do the right thing in terms of their systems and processes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thanks for that. Of those 14 009 false alarms, how many would be deliberate troublemakers that were ringing and calling the brigade out?

Mrs Dowd: Very few.

Mr Gregson: I do not know if that is a problem. This is more those that come through from the buildings themselves, so it is an automated response.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That cost recovery, I noticed, was \$750 at this point.

Mr Gregson: Yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: You said that after three false alarms they would be charged the \$750.

Mr Gregson: Within a 12-month period. If you have three false alarms within a twelve 12-month period, we will send you a bill.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Why would it not be after two false alarms? You are saying that that is actually starting to reduce the number of false alarms. If you tighten that up a little bit —

Mr Gregson: After much discussion, you have got to draw the line somewhere. Should it be one, two or three? The three strikes seem to be consistent with interstate policy. It also gives building owners a bit of an opportunity to rectify a system fault. We have some reason flexibility. If your alarm plays up and goes off three times in the one night, if you get that fixed—it is not absolutely black and white, but in terms of the policy, we drew the line at three. We think that is more than reasonable.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Okay. Is the cost recovery of \$750 cost recovery for a single callout or is it for three callouts that add up to \$750?

Mr Gregson: It is for the fourth.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So it actually costs you \$750 every time you get called out to a false alarm?

Mr Gregson: Correct.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I can see some nodding there. So 14 009 false alarms is a very expensive situation for the state.

Mr Gregson: Correct.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I cannot quite read that page; it is all dark. It looks like page 26, “Improving Bushfire Risk Management”. There is quite some commentary on that. What are some of the things that the department is doing to improve bushfire risk management?

Mr Gregson: There is a range of issues where we set standards, publish maps for bushfire-prone areas, a range of mitigation, educational, community engagement strategies in terms of how to approach the whole issue of bushfire risk management. One of the principal things is we are working with each local government so they establish a tenure-blind approach to identifying the risks in their respective local government areas and then having an approach to mitigate those risks in order of priority, which is the central concept that had its genesis in Keelty as to having a tenure-blind assessment of bushfire risk and then working with the owners of those respective landholdings to trust that risk. That would be part of a suite of setting standards identifying bushfire-prone areas and identifying the risk through a tenure-blind approach and then mitigating risk.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I see that some legislation came through in the last few months to give people a bit more certainty about what clearing they can do around their properties to reduce that risk, which is a positive thing because a lot of people were unsure what they could do as far as removing vegetation is concerned. A question that gets asked of me a lot when I am out and about relates to the legal implications of somebody going onto crown land and putting out a fire. Do you know exactly what the legal position is? If someone sees a fire or a brigade sees a fire in a national park, can they just go and put it out?

[10.10 am]

Mr Gregson: Yes, they can. I am quite happy to table a paper with respect to the legislation that allows you to enter crown land to extinguish a bushfire. You are even allowed to do certain types of clearing in crown land, so it is a bit of a myth to think that you have to wait for the fire to leave crown land before you can do anything about it. Bushfire control officers and chiefs of local government areas have tremendous powers to go in and extinguish fire on property full stop.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is good to know. I do not know how this myth perpetuated but there was certainly a lot of confusion with it.

[*Supplementary Information No A6.*]

Hon RICK MAZZA: Just going back to local government again. With the allocation that local governments get for their brigades, are they allowed to use any of that funding for mitigation programs like prescribed burning within their shire?

Mr Gregson: No, that is not funded through the department, not through the local government grants scheme.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Commissioner, can I take you to page 134, where there is a list of committees. I want to specifically talk about the first two on that list. We will start with equity and diversity. Who is on the equity and diversity committee?

Mr Gregson: I could refer that to the deputy commissioner, capability command, because I believe he chairs it.

Mr Fewster: The committee is chaired by me and has representatives from each of the department's commands and business areas.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Which departments?

Mr Fewster: The operations command, our corporate services command and our governance and strategy command.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What are the terms of reference? What is the agenda of that committee?

Mr Fewster: I would be happy to table a document but, in general, the terms of reference looks at the ways the department meets its equity and diversity obligations and our efforts to lead as an emergency service organisation in equity and diversity matters.

[Supplementary Information No A7.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Maybe you could indicate in that document what the objectives are. Do you work with KPIs? How are those objectives determined and monitored? That would be great.

Mr Fewster: Certainly.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you give us a rundown of what you would regard as your current objectives and whether they are being met, in relation to women in particular, people from CALD backgrounds and people with disability?

Mr Gregson: Organisationally, our main focus, particularly in the last two years, has been on Indigenous engagement. We have put in a number of initiatives to increase the percentage of Indigenous employees and Indigenous firefighters in particular. That has been done by utilising a specific section of the act, which allows us to advertise for Indigenous respondents to jobs in the first instance, which we have done, and also an Aboriginal cadetship program, which we have just had evaluated in terms of engaging Indigenous firefighters.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: And that evaluation?

Mr Gregson: We commissioned an evaluation with the University of Western Australia.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do you have the results of that?

Mr Gregson: Yes, I have. I would be happy to provide a copy of that report to you, if you wish.

[Supplementary Information No A8.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What about those other groups I mentioned—women?

Mr Gregson: We have done some work in the gender diversity space. We are currently considering collaboration with the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council. It has a particularly strong program to encourage gender diversity, particularly in fire and rescue. We are considering that at the moment. We have done some work in terms of working with existing female firefighters and seeing what we can do to encourage the application of more females to want to join the fire and rescue service in particular. Our volunteer cadres are well represented by women. Indeed, it is very pleasing to see an increasing percentage of volunteers are female. We have not done much, it would be true to say, in the CALD space, attracting other areas. We are doing okay

with respect to attracting disabled employees. We have done some significant work within our building to make it much more accommodating in that area.

The ACTING CHAIR: I am pleased to hear that, commissioner.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I know that is something that is dear to the chair's heart.

Mr Gregson: It is also good business sense for us. I could give you a couple of examples of when we have had injured firefighters. They are now confined to wheelchairs and, subject to their rehabilitation, we have reaccommodated them as very positive contributors in our communications area, for example.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: As far as the gender diversity plan goes, what principles do you operate on? I can elaborate on the question if you need me to but you are probably familiar with the conversation that goes on behind this.

Mr Gregson: I am inclined not to drop the barriers for entry into fire and rescue service. The principles that I operate on are absolute fairness and equality. We certainly constantly revisit criteria to join the job to make sure that it is specifically vocational and there is not a subconscious or systemic bias built into the evaluation and selection process. But we cannot allow degradation of firefighters' standards to, in a sense, positively discriminate to attract female applicants. We basically operate on the principles of absolute equality in terms of applicants, so a gender-neutral approach to people who are applying for fire and rescue service. Certainly that carries over to attracting and retaining volunteers. We encourage participation equally from the sexes in our volunteer space.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am not sure that I would have chosen the word "degradation" but I do appreciate what you are saying and I think that that approach would be the one that women firefighters support.

Mr Gregson: I am not so sure that the word is entirely inappropriate because if you are not very careful, you can compromise your standards and that does lead to —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I think we are in furious agreement here.

Your annual report is a bit boy heavy picture-wise. You have a picture of a woman on page 142 doing some push-ups and a picture of a female translator on page 28. I just make that point. It was not really a question; it is an observation.

Mr Gregson: I will try next year to be a little more —

The ACTING CHAIR: Reflective of the service.

Mr Gregson: I will perhaps even need to go beyond that. Yes, I will try to address that next year.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I think what is unsaid in your remarks about standards is the question about culture. Of course we know that one of the ways that you can address issues about cultural mores and expectations is to be upfront with your presentation of what a firefighter looks like.

Mr Gregson: I am happy to do that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can I take you now to the second committee, which is about occupational safety, health and injury management. I do not know what the committee is called but you know which one I am talking about. I would just like to ask you a couple of questions here. How much of a difficulty does it present—I would like you, if you can, to link your response back to the way you have responded to the questions from Hon Rick Mazza and me about the relationship between the agencies. We are effectively dealing with a fire and emergency service in which you have some people covered by occupational health and safety legislation and others not covered by that legislation. How much of a problem is that for you now in a contemporary sense of planning and risk management and how much of a risk do you perceive that to be going into the future when we are going to try to look at some different formulation of the current structures?

[10.20 am]

Mr Gregson: I would not like to try to answer the second part of the question, because it really depends upon what ultimately the future holds, but the constant drive for the organisation is for us to consider occupational health and safety. We are in a very dangerous working environment. People regularly put their lives and safety on the line in terms of the response. To optimise the response often requires a compromise of an individual's personal circumstances, depending upon the context, the time, place and circumstances. With the overwhelming majority of the workforce in a sort of global sense, including volunteers, the majority of them are not covered by occupational health and safety, but that does not mean that we do not treat them as though they are covered. The services that we provide are as embracing for them as they are for paid employees.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do you think that it leads to operational difficulties on the ground?

Mr Gregson: No.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Are you aware that there is a body of opinion that sees things slightly differently?

Mr Gregson: No. May I ask, when you say "body of opinion", are you talking research?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No; I think I am relying on conversations, report-backs that I am aware of, in which there is a perception that risk taking operates in a different way—that you have got some people who just have a different perception of risk, and that has partly to do with those cultural factors around our failure as a state to extend those occupational health and safety provisions to volunteers.

Mr Gregson: I would not have thought that people would make operational risk assessments based on whether or not they are insured or covered by workers' comp or RiskCover. Volunteers do what they do because, by and large, they are altruistic; they want to respond. They are part of the community and they are protecting their community, so I do not think they make an operational risk-based assessment saying, "Hang on; I'm going to perceive the risk slightly differently because I don't have the backup and support." I do not think that my career fire and rescue guys either think, "Well, I can now go where angels fear to tread because I'm covered by workers' comp." I think they are two distinct issues that people should make operational-based risk assessments based on their training and their protocols around operational risk assessment, which are well and truly entrenched and ingrained, particularly in the career guys, setting the context of that operational risk. I respect the fact that you may have heard differently, but I would not have thought that people would have tinged their view in terms of the significance or impact of the risk based on their potential coverage if they do get injured.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Would it be fair to say that both professional firefighters and volunteer firefighters are clearly working within the AIIMS system—the Australasian inter-service incident management system's framework?

Mr Gregson: Look, it would be fair to say that both volunteers and career guys operate wherever possible under exactly the same standard operating processes. They get exactly the same training where appropriate and they are indoctrinated in an organisational operational doctrine in exactly the same way, which would include risk assessment. AIIMS is the Australasian inter-service incident management system that relates specifically to the arrangements of interagency response. So, it really just sets the command and control arrangements in a response context. But your point is: is that shared? Yes, it is shared in exactly same way whether they are volunteers or whether they are career guys. That seems to be the emerging—indeed, an embedding—standard across police and emergency services. Police have a slight variation, but ostensibly it is the same conceptual model.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The annual report refers to industrial relations matters. On page 142, you have got comments about the replacement of the Western Australian fire service enterprise

bargaining agreement, and you also refer to the CSA–CPSU log of claims. Can you just talk us through where that is up to and what you are anticipating?

Mr Gregson: I am not sure what I am anticipating, but we are certainly currently in the process of commencing the standard approach to enterprise bargaining with the UFU. We have a good working relationship with them. I have a couple assistant commissioners and others working with them. I think we have logged one of the documents that is required in terms of what the agency is looking for and I think it is next up to the UFU to put forward their log of claims. I believe that will take the usual ordinary course of business. I am sure the union would be cognisant that there is an election scheduled and so that may impact upon the timings of the consolidation of the next agreement.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: June 2017 is the expiry of the current EBA.

Mr Gregson: That is correct, yes. From an agency perspective, we are working under established time frames and protocols. No doubt, as there often are, there will be an element of politics involved, and that will thrash out in the usual way as we hurtle towards June 2017. We have just received a log of claims from the CSA, so we are in similar —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What is the time frame there for the CSA–CPSU?

Mr Gregson: We would have to confirm that with you. I think they are about lined up, but if I could take that on notice and advise.

[Supplementary Information No A9.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Finally, what sort of industrial relation issues are you preparing for in relation to the reorganisation that has been foreshadowed?

Mr Gregson: None at this stage.

The ACTING CHAIR: I just have a couple of questions to follow up in the equity and diversity set of questions. Under the reporting of the targets for diversity groups on page 143, it is noted that for employees with a disability, we are still under the target with that. I refer to the comments about non-operational roles. Within your strategy, are you only employing people with disability in non-operational roles, and why is that?

Mr Gregson: If we are talking career firefighters, for example, depending upon the nature of the disability, they are most unlikely to be fit for purpose.

The ACTING CHAIR: I might accept that for someone with physical disability, depending on the disability, but certainly not all people with disability, so in what way are people with disability excluded from non-operational roles?

Mr Gregson: In what way are people with disability excluded from non-operational roles?

The ACTING CHAIR: Sorry, from operational roles.

Mr Gregson: If you have disability, we would have to look at the nature of that disability and see whether or not you are capable of being, for example, a firefighter. If you have got a physical disability, it is most unlikely that you would be able to be a career firefighter or, indeed, operate in that operational space. I mean, it depends upon the nature of the disability and the extent of the disability, but our targets really relate to employing as many people with disability as we can within the organisation, so our targets are based on the non-operational side of things. You have to be fit for purpose for an operational role.

The ACTING CHAIR: At what point, if someone discloses they have a disability, are they excluded from operational roles?

Mr Gregson: It is the other way round. If they are fit for duty and they can perform the operational role, then they would not be excluded, but if they have a disability—if they are in a wheelchair, for example—we are not going to make them an operational firefighter.

[10.30 am]

The ACTING CHAIR: If they apply and they identify they have a disability, they are not excluded from operational roles; is that correct?

Mr Gregson: They would have to be able to meet the benchmarks that are set for operational firefighting. It does not matter what they present with; if they can get over the benchmarks or the hurdles for evaluation for selection, they can be operational.

The ACTING CHAIR: If that is the case, why is it only reported as non-operational officers?

Mr Gregson: I would have to clarify that for you and work out why it is set out that way.

The ACTING CHAIR: Just to be very clear: people with disability are not excluded from operational roles on the basis simply that they have a disability?

Mr Gregson: If that disability led to them not being able to be fit for purpose, they would be excluded based on their disability. If somebody presents in a wheelchair and part of the selection criteria is they have to be able to run up a ladder, they are not going to be able to do that. You can say we exclude them on the basis of the fact that they cannot run up the ladder, but the reality is the reason that they cannot run up the ladder is they have a disability that does not allow them to do that.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for that description; it is a fairly limited description of a particular type of disability.

Mr Gregson: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: My concern is that people are not excluded on the basis that they have a disability.

Mr Gregson: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: I also want to look at the regional employee assistance program that is currently in pilot stage, as outlined on page 143. It is showing early signs of success. Can you describe what the program is, how many participants there are and what those early signs of success are?

Mr Gregson: I will just have to provide you with the statistics in terms of the performance of those programs.

The ACTING CHAIR: We will take those on notice. Could that also include the terms of reference for the program and other objectives for the program?

Mr Gregson: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A10.*]

The ACTING CHAIR: We move on to Hon Peter Katsambanis.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: At this stage everything I had has already been asked and answered, but Hon Rick Mazza perhaps has a few more questions.

Hon RICK MAZZA: On page 139, I am a little interested in the act-of-grace payments. There is one payment there of \$6 324. What might that be for?

Mr Gregson: From memory, I think that was a gentleman who was a farmer. He had a large piece of machinery. That machinery was damaged and completely written off. No; that is a different one. I can give this example, if you will: his machinery was written off; he was insured to a certain amount. This is an example of the one we are looking at now, so I will have to go back to the other

example. The insurance did not allow him to make good or to get machinery of the same level, so we applied to get an act-of-grace payment to make up the difference, which would be one type of example of an act-of-grace payment. I refer to the one in the report.

Mrs Camarda: The one on page 139 of the report, the \$6 324, was with State Solicitor's advice, and we provided the act-of-grace payment to a volunteer fire and rescue member in Narrogin. He incurred legal expenses to defend a dangerous driving claim through the course of his duties, and he was found not guilty by the courts. He was out of pocket a certain amount for legal expenses.

Hon RICK MAZZA: To clarify that, he was attending an incident and got —

Mr Gregson: A car hit him or he hit a car.

Mrs Camarda: A car hit him.

Hon RICK MAZZA: And he got charged?

Mrs Camarda: For dangerous driving, yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Moving on to page 143, it talks about the piloting of mental health first aid with DFES and its success, with over 200 people. Can you tell us a little more about that particular program?

Mr Gregson: That is the detail that I pledged to provide earlier to the chair in terms of the success of that.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Going back to page 17 under "Significant Issues Impacting DFES", a paragraph there relating to the Ferguson report commences —

This report also raises a range of complex issues ... such as the establishment of a rural fire service.

Can you tell us what sort of impacts you think a separate rural fire service might have on local government, the volunteers and DFES itself?

Mr Gregson: I do not really know, because I do not have an understanding of what the government's intention is in terms of a rural fire service. I will just perhaps give you an indication of the complexity of this issue. What is, for example, a rural fire service? Is it a fire service in totality that looks after all hazards in the rural area? Is it a bushfire service that just covers the rural area; and, if so, what about the rural-urban interface? Does it cover the whole of the state? Is it going to be the hazard management authority? At the moment I am the hazard management authority, not the department—that is, the commissioner. Will it assume responsibilities for the resources in local government or not, or will those responsibilities still rest in local government? It is very hard for me to give an appraisal of what I think the impact might be of a separate rural fire service when the machinery of government conceptual model is not before me. I do not know whether it is intended to have a separate standalone service yet or a separate service within the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and how that separation is articulated. Is it legislative? Is it by my delegation? Is it anything to do with me at all? These are some of the rather more complex deliberations that are with government, and quite properly belong as matters of public policy with government. Until I have a greater understanding of the public policy position, it is very hard for me to articulate what that will mean.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I accept that. There are examples around Australia, though, are there not, of a separate rural fire service, say, in New South Wales —

Mr Gregson: There are, indeed.

Hon RICK MAZZA: —where they would have already determined what responsibility is laid where?

Mr Gregson: If the government's position is: we want to adopt the New South Wales model, it would be more open to me to give you a definitive opinion of what that will mean.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is fair enough. That is all I have, chair, at this point.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Commissioner, can I take you on a little trail of line items and footnotes that start on page 87, "Distributions to owners". I cannot resist asking you about the artwork donated to the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority worth \$158 000. What was that?

Mr Gregson: I think that is part of the memorial to fallen firefighters in Kings Park.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: My question relates to the second line item there, "Return of unspent RfR CSN funding to WA Police", with a reference to footnote (a). Footnote (a) says "See note 20". If I go back to page 75 and find note 20, I assume that refers to "Royalties for Regions Fund", which refers to footnote (f), which says "Unspent funding for Royalties for Regions programs". We have a figure of \$6.8 million. Can you explain what this is about?

Mr Gregson: Yes. There was a project to consider options and, indeed, for the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to move down the digital radio network. Western Australia Police, for a number of years, has been developing a digital trunk radio network and also expanding that into regional areas. There was some funding secured from the royalties for regions funding allocation for the department to go down that path.

[10.40 am]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: This is a digital radio communications system?

Mr Gregson: This was to consider the Department of Fire and Emergency Services moving down the path of amalgamating and joining a digital radio network rather than having the existing analogue network. During the course of the evaluation, or the early stages—the preliminary evaluation of that project—as it was at that time, it was not feasible, so a decision was made, after considerable technical and business evaluation, that we would not at this point in time continue with that project. The project was ceased and the money was returned to the Western Australia Police, because it was unspent on the project. The Western Australia Police had carriage of the overarching project, and so they were custodians of the funding.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: They were custodians of the royalties for regions funding?

Mr Gregson: With respect to the element notionally earmarked for the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it the figure referred to on page 87, the \$1 862 000? That is under 2015. How does that relate to the figure on page 75, which is just over \$6.8 million?

Mr Gregson: Can I direct that to the chief financial officer?

Mrs Camarda: Note 20 of the financial statements on page 75 refers to the total funding we receive from the royalties for regions fund for a number of royalties for regions projects that we have. We keep that cash as restricted—restricted in the sense that it can only be used for those projects. This was just one of those—actually, if you are looking at the 2015 column, I am sorry, there is no restricted cash there because we have returned it.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You gave back the \$1.8 million and so 2015 was zero.

Mrs Camarda: Correct.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You are now sitting on \$6.8 million?

Mrs Camarda: That is for the 2016 financial year.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So 2016–17.

Mrs Camarda: Yes—2015–16.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So you did not spend it in 2015–16.

Mrs Camarda: In 2015–16, we have a number of royalties for regions projects on the go, in addition to the CSN one, which has finished. There is the crew cab fire protection project and the volunteer emergency services fuel card scheme; we have a number of royalties for regions projects, and this is the cash we hold.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It might be appropriate, given the time, if you were in a position to indicate to us whether you could provide that information on notice.

Mrs Camarda: Absolutely.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you tell me about the \$6 816 000, which has not been spent yet or —

Mrs Camarda: It is unspent royalties for regions fund for royalties for regions projects as at 30 June 2015.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Could we have a breakdown of how that \$6.8 million is going to be spent?

[Supplementary Information No A11.]

The ACTING CHAIR: Efficiently chaired, we have finished early.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which highlights the questions taken on notice, together with any additional questions in writing after Monday, 31 October 2016. Responses to those questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible beforehand. The advice is to include specific reasons why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit them to the committee clerk at the close of the hearing. Once again, I thank you for your attendance. I remind members that the deadline for submitting additional questions is midday on Monday, 31 October, as stated in the procedure policy. Thank you very much for your attendance and your information.

Hearing concluded at 10.44 am
