

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT ALBANY
TUESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 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

Co-opted Member

Mr P.D. Omodei

Hearing commenced at 1.40 pm

BROOMHALL, MR GREGORY GEORGE

Regional Fire Coordinator, Department of Conservation and Land Management, examined:

WATSON, MR JOHN RICHARD

Regional Manager, Department of Conservation and Land Management, examined:

LLOYD, MR MARTIN

Regional Leader, Parks and Visitor Services, Department of Conservation and Land Management, examined:

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Your head office has given us a submission. Is there anything that you wish to add to that?

Mr Watson: If it would be useful to you and if you wish, I can give you a two to three-minute thumbnail of what we do from Albany to set the scene for you.

The CHAIRMAN: It would be great if you could do that.

Mr Watson: Then, obviously, you will have your specific lines of questioning.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr Watson: The regional headquarters is in Albany and the region extends along the south coast of Western Australia from the Denmark shire boundary right through the South Australian border at Eucla. We go inland as far as the Stirling Range and the lower portions of the southern goldfields, so we take in the Shires of Dundas, Esperance, Ravensthorpe, Jerramungup, part of Plantagenet, part of Cranbrook and part of Gnowangerup and the City of Albany. In that area we have a large number of protected areas, national parks, nature reserves and outstanding world-class systems, as you are probably aware. In those particular national parks we have a large range and topography. We have the highest mountains in the south of the state; we have the most extensive cave systems on the Nullarbor; and we manage approximately 70 per cent of the coastline, which is quite unusual compared with the rest of the state. We obviously have wildfire threats throughout the whole of that estate, but there are a number of other emergencies that we perhaps more commonly deal with than do other agencies. Of the people who have been asked to give evidence before you today, I sit

on the DEMC - district emergency management committee - for the great southern, Greg sits on the LEMC for Albany and numerous bushfire advisory committees, and Martin is also involved with LEMC and often acts as proxy for me on DEMC. A lot of our DEMC dealings are more to do with other types of emergencies. We have a network of field staff - rangers - that, again, is a little unlike that of some of the regions you might have visited. We have the largest network of field rangers within the CALM system. Approximately one-fifth to one-quarter of our work force is distributed strategically right across the landscape as far as Cape Arid National Park, which is near Israelite Bay. We have a district office in Esperance, which manages all the staff in the Esperance and Dundas areas. There is a district manager there, but we are regional staff who have responsibility for the whole of the region that I have outlined. The significance of the ranger staff is that at a local level they are directly involved with many local bush fire brigades. They are also in some cases involved in local LEMCs. It varies on the situation.

In terms of what CALM does, you are obviously well aware we are the hazard management agency for wildfire suppression within the CALM-managed estate, which is actually vested in the Conservation Commission. We are a support agency for many other emergencies, including bushfire issues outside the CALM-managed estate. Obviously we get highly involved with coastal safety and search and rescue activities because of the terrain in this part of the world and because we often are the people on the scene for those incidents. We operate, and have done for many years, under the ICS system, and we adapt that system for all the emergencies that we might have to deal with from time to time, however large or small; that is, not simply for fires. We use that system for cetacean strandings, which are quite frequent along this coast; search and rescue; and oil spills, such as the *Sanko Harvest* of many years ago. We used a rudimentary ICS for that many years ago.

[1.50 pm]

We have a special MOU in place with the SES and the police for coastal safety in this area, which is now in this eighteenth year. That basically addresses how we will deal with coastal emergencies, because, as you are probably aware, there is a long, sad tradition of deaths along this particular part of the coast - mainly fishermen, but sometimes sightseers as well. There have been some 20 fatalities in the past 30 years, so it is obviously a major issue here.

As a thumbnail and a background of how we see emergency management and obviously our responsibilities under CALM, these issues are dealt with through policy matters, which you obviously have been dealing with at your level. We also have a number of management plans in place for the national parks and nature reserves in the region, and those plans in turn include sections addressing issues like fire management, which includes predicted arrangements over a 10-year period for wildfire suppression and preparations for wildfire. We also in our management plans attempt to address other emergencies of the type I have mentioned. That is an attempt to give you a thumbnail of the varied areas that we get involved with. The area of fire is probably Greg's main area. Greg is an accredited incident controller. He can take that role anywhere within the CALM system in the state. Martin can be an incident controller for a local fire in the Albany area. I was an incident controller many years ago, before it became much more complex. I have a strong background in visitor safety and caving and climbing accidents, so I have an understanding of the principles, but I am not actually a hands-on fire person through my background. Thank you.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Obviously there is a Forest Products Commission office in Albany.

Mr Watson: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: What about a district office? Is there a district office in Albany as well?

Mr Watson: No, we are a combined office in Albany. We, as in three or four of the other CALM areas, have a combination of district and regional staff in the same office. We do not actually have a district manager as such in Albany. I do a bit of that work, Martin does a bit of that work and

Greg does that work in two as do two other officers. We in fact share that role, but we are primarily responsible for the standards, training and strategies across the whole of the region. We do have a separate district.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: What is the manpower and equipment strength for the region?

Mr Broomhall: From a fire suppression point of view, it is fairly limited compared with other traditional CALM regions in the south west. As John has described, the whole region covers a large tract of land. If we want to talk in terms of fire trucks or fire units, I have at my disposal only six heavy-duty fire units across the whole region. Four of those are based in the Albany district and two in Esperance. On top of that, we have something like 14 or 15 fast-attack or light units across the region, which basically double as field staff and ranger transport. I only have one rubber-tyre front-end loader, which is a CALM machine. In those terms, compared with traditional forest areas, we have a fairly limited resource. We work very closely with local government agencies.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: What about bulldozers or graders?

Mr Broomhall: No. We have very close links with a number of large contractors, and we have very in-depth contracts set up with those operators. For example, last week we had the fire issue at the Stirling Range, and we were able to call in half-a-dozen contract machines within three or four hours.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I know we should ask this question of FESA, but what is the FESA capacity in that same region?

Mr Broomhall: My understanding of its position is that it is a management-based organisation, so it does not actually command or have ground troops or ground resources; it obviously works through local government and brigade organisations to facilitate that role if it finds itself in a controlling situation. Traditionally it is a liaison and support agency to us and local government.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Do you see volunteers as being important to CALM?

Mr Broomhall: They are vitally important to us in this region.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So they are not a nuisance?

Mr Broomhall: They are certainly not a nuisance and we work intimately with the local government brigade organisations across the region. I personally attend at least one or two meetings of every local government advisory committee in the region each year, and there are about nine local authorities.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Do you call on the plantation industry resource?

Mr Broomhall: We do. We have very close ties with them. Fortunately, a number of the fellows who work in the plantation industry are ex-CALM employees and staff members, so I actually know them.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Are there any who are not!

Mr Broomhall: Not very many. We have very close relationships with them. All their resources are available to us for fire suppression purposes. They are listed in our response plans and only a matter of two or three weeks ago, when our forces were committed to the Perth hills fire near Dwellingup, we got very good backup from the local plantations organisation and were able to avail ourselves of their resources if needed.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: John, what is the thinking in the region about the current structure regarding the proposals to create one emergency management system? You obviously draw your powers for burning from the CALM Act, unless there is an incident and then they come out of the Bush Fires Act, I presume. What do you think about the proposal to roll all the acts into one act?

Mr Watson: I cannot really comment on that, Paul. That is a question you would really have to ask the senior person. One thing that we did not actually answer, though, was your question about the Forest Products Commission. That might be useful. We share the same building, and it is fair to say that we could not really survive without that immediate cooperation. We are in the same building, and probably half our roster and local immediate forces are Forest Products Commission employees.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Would they do their regeneration burns? Would you contract to them or they contract to you to do that?

Mr Broomhall: In this region, Paul, that style of operations is not generally undertaken. The Forest Products Commission down here is mainly involved in the plantation establishment on private lands - generally softwood now, and a bit of hardwood stuff. I know that the private plantation industry undertakes clearing and regeneration-type burns on some of its blue gum plantations but it has its own staff and resources to undertake that -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So FPC does not burn off a pine plantation or a blue gum plantation?

Mr Broomhall: Not in this region. Not in this area. However, as John said, we work very closely with them, and I rely very much on their staff for their input in both our fire suppression and fire mitigation work.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I will ask just one more question. The coroner and the Auditor General were quite critical of the number of organisations involved in fire management when they looked at Tenterden and a number of other fires, including at Gingin. What is your view about that? Can there be an emergency organisation that has one peak body in control? What do you think about the outcome of those reports?

Mr Broomhall: My view is that there could be some reasoning to go down that pathway, but fire is a very specialised task or function and CALM as an agency has a particular range of tasks and functions for which it uses fire. Fire suppression is not our key aim; it is really the use of fire to prevent those issues, and also it is used in the forestry area for silvicultural purposes. These are very different aspects, whether we are talking about fire mitigation and fire prevention methods, such as fuel reduction, burning or whatever, or the role of fire suppression; and even fire suppression is a very specialised business. It is highly dangerous, as has been evidenced over years with the number of fatalities. The brigade structure, it must be remembered, is a volunteer-based organisation and the community relies a lot on that. Sometimes I think that the community gets very good value out of its brigade organisations, considering they are volunteer based. I think that one of the issues that we need to look at in the future is maintaining or encouraging greater skill level in that organisation so that volunteers do not expose themselves to unnecessary risks.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Finally, you talked about your equipment strength. What about aeroplanes? Do you have any aeroplanes?

Mr Broomhall: I am glad you reminded me! In Albany I manage the aerial water bomber activities and from mid-December to mid-March we have a number of aerial water bombers based in Albany with additional support aircraft. They have backup from Manjimup. That is a joint operation between us and FESA. It works very well in the south coast region. Only last week, it was highly instrumental in suppressing a fire in the Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve, so it is a very valuable tool, but it is merely just another tool.

[2.00 pm]

Mrs J. HUGHES: You spoke about fire being a land management tool and that it is not really in your act or whatever for you to actually fight fires as such; it is more in line with management.

Mr Broomhall: As I said, it is a two-pronged approach. Obviously under the act, and as a HMA for CALM estate, our lead role there is fire suppression. That is obviously what we do. I am

biased, but I think we are very good at it. We also have major input into fire pre-suppression works and using fire as a management tool, whether we use it for biodiversity reasons or to protect adjacent values. This is where things like silvicultural burning, biodiversity and habitat management burning and community protection burns come into play. We carry out a number of those functions right across the region. We use fire for a vast range -

Mrs J. HUGHES: For all sorts of reasons - conservation and all those sorts of things.

Mr Broomhall: CALM, as an agency, needs to have a very strong role in fire management. It is one of our key functional tools.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I am not sure whether you have read the submission that was given to us by your agency, but it talks about the need to have some overarching body to govern it. One of the reasons given was that local government is often not able to commit itself to following through in some instances. The same submission also talks about the fact that CALM is asking to be exempted from the same arrangement. Do you have any comment on that?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: There is a suggestion that the Crown should be bound in relation to requirements that local governments impose on private landholders. I think the organisation has said that that is fairly impractical, but there has to be some other suggestion. Maybe that should be some kind of fire management plan, which you would have for most of your areas anyway.

Mr Broomhall: To make it binding on the Crown would probably be impractical, as has been said. A range of actions could be employed, apart from going through that process. I think a more active role in area management planning for fire and some other issues is the way to address that. Obviously one of the key comments in some of those discussions has been the requirement to construct firebreaks and those sorts of issues. To me, that would be an unwarranted focus of limited resources on something that would not have a great deal of benefit. That is the sort of thing we target in community interface areas, urban interface areas and high-value areas. We are responsible for fire mitigation on something like nine million hectares of crown land and unvested land in this region. I would rather see those resources and values put into more landscape-level strategies than to be used on the boundaries of private properties. Each one has its own place and its own role.

Mr Watson: We probably have not stressed strongly enough the incredible value of aerial surveillance and aerial attack. I think last year was the first year that we had bombers based here.

Mr Broomhall: The second.

Mr Watson: It was the second year. We have had two fires in the past week. As Greg mentioned, one was at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve. There was a lightning strike on Mt Gardner, which is now the most important area for the Noisy Scrub-bird. It also has the Gilbert's potoroo, the most critically endangered mammal in Australia, which would have been threatened. That fire was able to be held by aerial attack, followed up by ground crews. That would not have happened two years ago. That fire would have gone on. I am guessing, but at least half the peninsula would have been burnt, which would have been very serious following the Manypeaks fire of last year, when half of the world's population of Noisy Scrub-birds were burnt. Similarly disturbing was the fire that occurred in the middle of last week. Again, it was caused by the lightning that came through. It slept until I think the Thursday and was spotted aurally, which would not have happened three years ago. Again, the aerial attack was instrumental in holding it within the block. Martin can vouch for this, and Greg and I can remember that if a fire occurred in that situation not so many years ago, we would have had no option but to really deal purely with edge effects - to try to wait for it to come out, and to burn along block boundaries. That frequently led to a fire getting into the next block and then the next block. I think there have been two illustrations in the past week of the incredible value of having aerial surveillance and attack, and coordination of that with the ground.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: How many spotters do you have?

Mr Broomhall: We have one.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: What is that? Is it some kind of special -

Mr Broomhall: It is the same as the other planes that are used in the other forests in the south west region. It is a two-seater scout, single engine light aircraft. It is an extremely useful and adaptable aircraft.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Do you use satellite imagery with some of the bigger fires, like the one in the Fitzgerald River National Park and some of those areas?

Mr Broomhall: We certainly do. There are two processes. Obviously, we have access to the Internet and other facilities, such as the CSIRO facilities, where we can monitor fire development and fire hotspots on an hourly basis through satellite interpretation. That is often how we pick up lightning strikes in remote areas. As I said, we have eight million or nine million hectares of landscape level UCL and unmanaged reserves that we manage in conjunction with local government. However, we also do post-fire analysis of burnt areas and intensities using aerial interpretation.

Mr Watson: Greg alluded to the firebreak issue. I guess we would feel that there are many, many other ways of dealing with fires than by simply having a nominal break on the inside of your property. Balance that against looking down from the sky and being able to communicate to the community at large about any fires, which of course is what happens from this plane, or bear in mind the other fire mitigation work that is done within the reserves system. I guess that is what I was alluding to on that particular question.

The CHAIRMAN: That is where the management plans are coming in rather than strictly using only firebreaks. From my reading of it, they are some of the things that FESA is talking about, for not only CALM land but also private land.

Mr S.R. HILL: The submission from your head office mentions the ESL. The submission stated that you would perhaps like to have access to some of that funding to support the programs that you have in place. That was introduced in 2001. What sort of impact has the ESL had on the south west?

Mr Broomhall: Obviously that submission was made by our corporate directors. The support that the ESL has given to local government has been absolutely brilliant and tremendous. That has flowed on to us as we can operate with brigades that are better equipped, better trained and better facilitated. That has enabled local governments, particularly in this area - the City of Albany and places like Plantagenet as well - to develop their brigade structures in leaps and bounds. It has been tremendous. That has also assisted greatly in the unison between agencies. As I said, we work intimately with the brigade organisations. If those guys have better equipment, better training and better skills, it makes our job so much easier. I mean, it is never easy, but the working arrangement is so much better.

The CHAIRMAN: You rely heavily on volunteers. At what point do you make up your mind to call them in? For instance, would it be if a controlled burn got away or if you had a lightning strike or whatever -

Mr Broomhall: Very few controlled burns escape in this region; I can guarantee that. When I say that we rely heavily on them, it is a mutual thing. It works both ways. They also rely heavily on us. I am not saying that we would be done and dusted without them, but the working arrangement between us and local government is certainly very strong. That is something that we put a lot of time and effort into, and I think we maintain it very well in this region.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So the big fire in the Fitzgerald did not get away?

Mr Broomhall: No.

The CHAIRMAN: That was a wildfire.

Mr Broomhall: There have been no fire escapes in the Fitzgerald when there has been a large fire. I have been here since 1988.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So that big fire -

Mr Broomhall: The 1989 fire?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Yes.

Mr Broomhall: It started from three simultaneous lightning strikes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So it was not a controlled burn?

Mr Broomhall: It certainly was not. It might have been from somebody else!

The CHAIRMAN: When do you decide to call in the volunteer brigades and the local government?

Mr Broomhall: The strategic decision that we make is based on the escalation capacity of the fire, its location, the values at risk and the commitments of local resources. It is a judgment call made by the incident controller, once he is appointed, or by his nominee. That works both ways. We will get requests from local government to assist on a regular basis. One of our strategies here is that, through our duty officers and some aerial surveillance, we will actually pre-empt a possible request from local government and actually supply or initiate a resource response before they even contact us.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Do you also control fires that are adjacent to CALM lands?

Mr Broomhall: Our preference, Paul, is to not take control of any fire that is not on the CALM estate. Some smaller fires occur on the boundaries of or in small areas or patches within the CALM estate. We have some very skilled local chief bushfire control officers. I am quite happy for them to remain in charge of a fire, particularly if brigades are present, because they can command their resources and they have the rapport with their guys. We will come along and purely offer them the resources that they need to deal with the incident. At the end of the day if a fire is on CALM estate, it is our baby, but I am more than happy for local brigades to run smaller-scale fires on CALM estate in this region. They do that on a regular basis.

[2.10 pm]

Mr P.D. OMODEI: And the public liability? Let us say it is a fire on local government land, and then it gets into the CALM estate or CALM takes over. Does the liability coverage change to the new incident manager or hazard manager?

Mr Broomhall: If the fire is on CALM estate, and we are allowing a local authority, FCO or chief bush fire control officer to control it, the liability is ours. It is our choice whom we appoint as incident controller, and my staff work under that incident controller. There have been many occasions when large fires have occurred on private lands, and where brigade organisations have requested that CALM staff fulfil some of the management functions, and they continue to initiate the ground actions. That is the sort of arrangement I am referring to across the region.

The CHAIRMAN: I will just go back to the coroner and Auditor General. I am not sure if you were asked this question directly. Both those people have expressed concern at the fire control arrangements in WA, and both have criticised the fact that local government and FESA could be in control of a fire at the same time, particularly if the fire is crossing different land tenures. It has been suggested that FESA be empowered to take control of a fire from local government or CALM when FESA considers it to be necessary. It is anticipated that the power would only ever need to be used two or three times a year. Do you have a view on this?

Mr Broomhall: I think the coroner might be a little misinformed. From my perspective, it is quite clear that if a fire originates on private land, the local government agency is responsible. If that fire moves onto to CALM estate, we have the option of taking control and vice versa. I have worked in

this region since 1988, and in this region we have never had a conflict of opinion about who is the controlling body of a particular wildfire. We have sorted that out quite amicably at the local level, and the current acts and legislative requirements to me are quite clear. I do not have a problem with that at all. There may be some need for a bit more clarity, but I do not see a real need to change the whole rules of engagement - from where I sit anyway.

The CHAIRMAN: It is also suggested that FESA be empowered to request development of fire management plans for landowners, whether it is CALM-managed land, private plantation land or land used for pastoral or grazing purposes. Do you have a view on that?

Mr Broomhall: I have.

Mr Watson: While Greg is thinking about that, I will give you a bit of an answer. Certainly, the CALM Act requires CALM to ensure that management plans are written for all national parks and nature reserves. They are written in a transparent, public input manner, and they are statutory documents under the CALM Act. They address all the issues relating to the land in question, and the requirements of the CALM Act and Wildlife Conservation Act. Clearly, part of that is neighbour interaction; obviously, because any management plan that is written for a particular area really has to look outside that area to set the context. In terms of another organisation writing management plans determining how fire will or will not be used, I do not see that anyone would have the range of expertise required to address recreational matters, and landscape and particularly biodiversity issues. That has given Greg time to think of the other half of the answer.

Mr Broomhall: John is right. A fire management plan, particularly for areas of our state, is not a simple issue. As John indicated, a raft of values and inputs need to be considered. It is not what some people may view as a simple matter of putting some strategies in place to protect the risk to life and property. Obviously, they are the key values that we are looking at protecting, but there are other values associated with that as well. When we look at developing or implementing some form of fire management plan, and we have a number of those in place across this region already, we look at a whole raft of issues before we consider what sort of action will be taken. In some areas that may be going down the pathway of the use of fire in fuel reduction burning or something else; or, it may be one of not using fire, but of using other mitigation techniques, such as strategic slashing, firebreak development and all those other access developments and the rest of it. A fire management plan does not necessarily mean only the use of fire; a whole raft of other options are part of a fire management plan.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The CALM Act does not give CALM specific authority to burn the forest. I have mentioned that before. Obviously, under the Bush Fires Act you can use fire to control fire. Should there be amendments to the act to allow CALM to burn?

Mr Broomhall: That is something I do not want to comment on, but certainly the one comment I can make is that part of CALM's function under the act is to manage the estate for a range of activities. One of those, obviously, is to maintain biodiversity and other values, and fire is one of the key tools used in that process. It is an integral part of our basic core work.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I think corporate services actually recommended that there be a change to the act. Obviously, it is not exactly needed, for the reasons you just gave. It seems as though if it were made more clear -

Mr Broomhall: There are certainly grounds for making it more clear but, as I said, it is one of the key tools that we use in our core work to maintain all the intrinsic values that we deal with.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: A lot of the people we have spoken to have said that the Bush Fires Act and the current legislation have served the community pretty well over a long period of time and should not be changed. Obviously, you know the ICS policy statement 7. That has been around for a long time.

Mr Broomhall: It is about to be reviewed.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Obviously, in any review of the legislation, if the government proposed to put one act in place, it seems to me that with some sensible drafting instructions you could take all the good bits in the Fire Brigades Act and Bush Fires Act and roll them into one act.

Mr Broomhall: It is certainly a possibility, as long as all the sensible bits were retained!

Mr Watson: I do not know where the committee has travelled outside Perth so far, Mr Chairman, but we are very much on the edge of the forest belt. Once you have gone past Porongurup with its karris and out via the forest, you are really into coastal heath, low mallee scrub all the way out, and much sparser woodlands in Ravensthorpe and the southern goldfields. The point I am making is that if there are to be any overriding changes in state legislation, people need to be very conscious of the landforms and the vegetation, quite apart from the social structure we pointed out here. We work extremely closely with all the other state agencies. That may not be the case in Perth. The kinds of vegetation and the fires we are dealing with are not forest fires, in the main. They are not, generally speaking, highly threatening fires at the area of an interface. There are occasions, but we are not dealing with hills and Darling Range type situations, with a lot of housing. We have a little of that in Porongurup and a little around Albany, but, by and large, we are dealing with a very different system and a fragmented landscape with a number of reserves, and a lot of interconnecting vegetation on private land and road verges. It is a very different landscape. Anyone who looks at trying to combine the legislation must recognise that there will inevitably be horses for courses. We are probably far more advanced - I am guessing here - in social interaction than, say, in the middle of the desert or the far north. They will be different again. We have no idea what happens up there, but I am sure it is very different again.

[2.20 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: It is one of the challenges. This is the committee's first trip out of Perth. Information has been given to us by FESA, CALM, the police and the bushfires groups and we have heard from a range of people in Perth. We came down from Kojonup yesterday and heard from all the various groups from Kojonup and Cranbrook. We have heard all the various views this morning from local government in Albany, SES, the sea rescue groups - that kind of thing. This trip includes Manjimup, Bunbury and Pinjarra. The intention is to go further to Esperance and up the mid west to Geraldton and then up to the Kimberley. I hope we will get a good cross-section of views around the state and put together something reasonable in response that covers all areas. We already recognise the vast array of different things that the committee must cope with. It will be difficult. Paul just mentioned communications, which seems to be an issue across all areas. The coroner raised the matter as well, as did the Auditor General; namely, communications across the agencies and different radios - all these types of things. Have you come across that matter? Is that an issue for you when dealing with the bush fire brigades and the SES? What is your interrelation with your communications?

Mr Broomhall: Look, generally speaking, in this region it has not been an overarching issue. I know it came out in the Tenterden inquiry. I was involved in that incident. Some of the main issues at that time and subsequent to that revolved around the fire structural organisation being able to communicate effectively with the police and some police support agencies. In general terms, the ability of organisations like CALM, the local government brigade organisation and FESA local staff to communicate in general terms is quite sound. We use the same radio system. We use different channels and different frequencies, but we all have the ability to come on one command channel to talk to each other. We do not currently have the ability to talk to some of the outside organisations, particularly the police. That proved to be a shortfall at Tenterden. That is one of the issues that the coroner has picked up on. I know that FESA has an inability to talk to some components within FESA. I refer to sea rescue and that sort of thing. In general terms, from my position, between CALM as a controlling agency, the local FESA office and the brigade organisation, we currently have the capacity to communicate together quite well. We have a range of VHF channels available

to us. As organisations, we act independently in normal circumstances on different frequencies, but we can come together when we need to. As duty officers, I, Martin and two of my fellow staff communicate daily on a regular basis with the local governments of Albany, Plantagenet, Cranbrook and Gnowangerup by utilising their communication systems. We have that ability - it applies even within our office. Even the local FESA office has the ability to switch and change channels.

Mr Watson: Our network is a series of repeaters from Albany right across to nearly Munglinup - between Ravensthorpe and Esperance. We then have a break, and then at Esperance we have a separate VHF network.

Mr Broomhall: We can talk simultaneously on the same VHF channel between Albany to Ravensthorpe, Hopetoun - a whole series.

Mr Watson: The other thing about sharing channels is there must be a balance, as with so many things in life, between clogging up the airwaves, which I am sure you are aware of.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Do you get involved in other emergencies? For example, if there is flooding, do CALM personnel get involved in that area?

Mr Watson: I just sent Barry Jones, the regional manager of FESA, some notes for a flood mitigation plan for Lake Grace a couple of weeks ago. I sit on DEMC. One of the great values of DEMC to me as an attendee is that I learn about foot and mouth disease, flooding and all sorts of other incidents. From time to time, Greg gives an update, and Martin gives one on coastal safety. We feed in as well. It is a very good medium for becoming aware of other agencies' issues. We would be involved if requested. The main damage in our area was really the cutting of the highway at Jerramungup. Yes, sure, if I was activated through DEMC, obviously we would take a role.

Mr Broomhall: We actually gave a presentation at the last DEMC meeting to reinforce to other members the capacity that CALM has to assist in a whole range of areas. Because of the training of our staff, our communication systems, the type of vehicles we use and the various tools and assets we have at our disposal, we can assist in a whole range of issues. Sometimes that is not fully recognised and utilised.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Martin, have all your national parks got management plans?

Mr Lloyd: Not all of them.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Why not? Is it because the government, this mob, will not give you enough resources?

Mr Lloyd: It is because we do a "bloody good job" when we write them and they take time! I did not say that!

Mr Broomhall: It takes time. We are beginning a coastal reserve management plan that will take in several national parks and many nature reserves. That is in a very early planning stage. We are hoping next month to start the advisory committee to start the whole process rolling. That involves public input into the management plan and the writing of our national parks and reserves.

Mr Lloyd: Referring to the earlier question about radio and communications, although I work with Greg on fires as an incident controller on local fires and the duty officer, I get involved heavily with the visitor risk aspect. That is specifically coastal search and rescue involving police. The police recently got our frequency at the new police station, but I think that is only available at the base. When we are actually in the field, we communicate person to person. It does not involve people moving around as much as occurs with a fire. With search and rescue, you may have a group out searching, but a core group of people stay put. The communication is there all the time. I am 95 per cent involved in any search and rescue in terms of being on site for assistance and record keeping. So, the communication is there with the police and the State Emergency Service.

Mr Watson: In the case of search and rescue operations, or anything else that befalls the visiting public in a park or reserve, CALM has a duty of care towards those people. Even though we might be a support agency, one of our roles is obviously to face the fact that there could be an aftermath. That is why we have this arrangement by which procedures have been agreed with the police - that is, we all tell each other if there is an incident at Torndirrup National Park, because it is important that we know and see the evidence in the event that there is some follow-up work required. Remember that we are dealing here with millions of visitors here across the region over the years. We have to be part of the incident, even though we are a support agency, in this instance, to the police, who have the lead role in search and rescue operations terrestrially.

The CHAIRMAN: You referred to that document. It that your memorandum of understanding?

Mr Watson: This is your copy to be tabled.

The CHAIRMAN: It is tabled.

Mr Watson: It is in its eighteenth year. It has evolved and is right up-to-date with the Nathan Drew Memorial Trust or the recent developments.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Martin, excuse my ignorance, but is the Valley of the Giants in your region?

[2.30 pm]

Mr Lloyd: No. It comes under Manjimup. Mr Chairman, I will just add a little bit to one of the earlier conversations and John's description of the region. It is very big, and we have two centres near Esperance and a very small centre in Ravensthorpe. The rangers in the field, in the Fitzgerald River area, Stirling Range, Porongorups, Two People's Bay, and Esperance - Cape Arid and Cape Le Grand and Stokes - actually attend fire meetings at the local fire brigade. Greg cannot get everywhere and neither can his counterpart in Esperance, so the rangers are the ears and mouth of Greg's program when it comes to fires. They go to the local brigade members and to their committees, and they get to know the local people. When they fight a fire they call on that particular ranger because they know him and vice versa; they know him through the committee meetings. There are isolated areas of communication outside the regional offices.

Mr S.R. HILL: What are the FTEs in this area of the state?

Mr Broomhall: From the AWU's award point of view, in terms of what might be referred to as the forest areas in this region, we have six, and four of those are full time and two of those are seasonal firefighters. That is an increase of nearly 100 per cent on what we had last year, and that has come about through the increased funding made available to this region and departmentally for some of the improved fire prevention works through recent funding from Treasury.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: That is in your office, but what about totally?

Mr Broomhall: That is across the region. In terms of AWU employees, who are not ranger staff or CSA staff, and in terms of fire crew guys on the ground they have six full-time employees. They are all very skilled and very good.

The CHAIRMAN: They get a lot of practice! Do you have any other matters you wish to raise with the committee?

Mr Broomhall: Mr Chairman, just one clarification. There was a question earlier on about management plans. I guess I just want to add that we have a range of management plans, 15 across this region and across this area. We have management plans currently in place for Porongorup National Park, Stirling, Fitzgerald, we have the south coast regional management plan and for all the areas outside that we have what we call interim management guidelines which are reviewed on a three-yearly basis. All those documents have a key component of fire management and visitor risk in them, so it is something that is addressed on a regular basis. I actually chair community groups based at the Porongorups, Stirling and Fitzgerald twice a year where we employ the services of

council representatives and chief bushfire control officers to actually give us direction in our fire management practices in those areas; so it is very much a hands-on community involvement.

The CHAIRMAN: It sounds like it is a live document all the time.

Mr Broomhall: Yes.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Those management plans then you would presume then to put forward as fire management plans?

Mr Broomhall: Yes, that is why I just mentioned those. They are committed documents used by the department.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Dual use?

Mr Broomhall: Yes, and they have a key component - a key section which deals with fire management.

Mr Watson: You must recognise that they are a projected 10-year time frame, and that is a long time in fire management. You have to have intent of what you are trying to do, but clearly you cannot predict where the lightning will come or what will happen. That is where the advisory committee comes in, to help maintain the intent but look at what modification might be required.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Also the capacity to actually instigate the plan?

Mr Watson: How do you mean?

Mrs J. HUGHES: If something was to happen and you had to actually initiate the plan, it also encompasses capacity to initiate?

Mr Broomhall: Yes. An example of that would be in 1995-96. We initiated a mid-term review of the Fitzgerald management plan based on some serious fire issues that arose, and we had a community group come together and actually had a review of that plan done. It was endorsed by the Conservation Commission.

Mr Watson: It went through a formal revision process. It was advertised as a revision to an existing management plan, it was put on public notice, comments were received, comments were analysed transparently and it was signed off by a minister and government gazetted.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Yes, I understand that. What I mean, though, is that if you had to initiate that plan would you as an authority actually have the capacity to follow through with those initiatives?

Mr Watson: Are you asking me a resourcing question?

Mrs J. HUGHES: Yes.

Mr Broomhall: It is certainly our task as a region, as a district and as staff to enact those plans and put those proposals in place, and certainly that is what I do from a fire management perspective to ensure that those current existing and reviewed plans are followed through, are endorsed and are put in place.

Mrs J. HUGHES: They are able to be enacted. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, I think we have run out of time.

I thank you for making yourselves available today to the committee and for your information and knowledge that you have imparted to us. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of typographical errors or errors of transcript or fact. New material cannot be introduced and the sense of evidence that you have given cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points you should submit a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration. If the transcript is not returned within 10 days of receipt, it will be deemed to be correct and *Hansard* will get it out to you in the next few days and

you have 10 days to look it over and make sure what you said was recorded correctly. Thank you for coming in.

Mr Broomhall: Thank you very much.

Mr Watson: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 2.36pm
