

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S
NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF ARRANGEMENTS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT LAKE GRACE
MONDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2006**

SESSION FOUR

Members

Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)

Mr S.R. Hill

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas

Mrs J. Hughes

Hearing commenced at 1.30 pm**ELMS, MS LYNDA****District Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia, examined:****TONKIN, MR JOHN GREGORY****Fire Area Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon. 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 the "Details of Witness" form, and did you understand the notes attached to it?

Ms Elms: Yes.

Mr Tonkin: Yes.

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

Ms Elms: Yes.

Mr Tonkin: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: We have received a submission from FESA. I assume a copy of the submission has been sent to you as well. Would you like to add anything to that submission?

Ms Elms: Not as of Friday, no.

The CHAIRMAN: Would you like to make any opening remarks before we ask you some questions?

Ms Elms: No. That is fine, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you provide an overview of the role played by local FESA staff in the provision of natural disaster relief arrangements to the community?

Ms Elms: With regard to the actual arrangements, I did not play a large part in that. I was more on the operational side of dealing with the actual flooding, and in assisting in the recovery program by giving people information about how to go about the recovery, in line with John, and giving them some details on the programs available. That is probably where my involvement stopped.

The CHAIRMAN: What sort of assistance did you give during the incident?

Ms Elms: Because I am based in Albany, it started off that we were advised by a phone call that there was flooding in Lake Grace, and probably about an hour after that we got calls that there was flooding in Kulin and the surrounding districts. Because Lake Grace had told us that they were cut off from all access, we started coordinating it from the Albany-great southern office. We really just provided resources to start with until we could physically get our crews in here, because there is no SES involvement. Although SES is the HMA, there is no SES here, so the local volunteer fire and rescue handled it.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You said that you sent in your resources, because you could not get crews in. What does that mean?

Ms Elms: Once we could get over the actual flooding incident, we tried to get some sandbags from Pingelly down to Kulin and then to Lake Grace. We tried to get the sandbags in via the big fire trucks, which have high coverage, but the water was still too deep, so we basically had to leave them alone until we could get some resources in when the water started to recede. It was probably about Sunday afternoon-Monday before we could start to get things in.

The CHAIRMAN: John, do you want to add anything to that?

Mr Tonkin: Obviously I had an involvement with this flood, but prior to that I had an involvement with the Tenterden fire. I have taken the liberty of having a look at some of the transcripts of previous hearings that we have had in the Shire of Cranbrook and other areas in the great southern. Over the years I have had experience in supporting recovery. A flood is different from a fire. We have procedures within FESA whereby for fires we can hire machinery. If we consider that the local government is contributing adequately to the suppression and has dedicated resources, we can hire machinery and so on. In the case of the Tenterden fire, where the stock had been put down, for example, someone had to dispose of the stock, so we needed dozers and excavators and things like that to dig pits and dispose of the animals that had died from the heat of the fire. That is the sort of tangible assistance that we can provide to people. There was a bill of \$500 for disposing of the stock. Another problem that came up was who was going to pay the bill. People are under enough stress at that stage, so we will support them if we can.

The CHAIRMAN: You say that is in place for fires.

Mr Tonkin: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: But it is not in place for other emergencies, such as floods. A lot of stock might need to be put down after a flood.

Ms Elms: With something like that, we would go through the Department of Agriculture and Food and seek their assistance. We would approach them, and as part of their support role we would normally allocate them the role of helping with the disposal of the stock. In about 1991 we had to do something like that in the floods that came through Elleker in Albany. We passed that project on to the Department of Agriculture, and the senior veterinarian came and assisted with that.

The CHAIRMAN: The administration of the Western Australian natural disaster relief assistance relies on a number of different state government agencies. How closely do those agencies work together at the district and regional levels?

Ms Elms: Certainly from my point of view, all the agencies work together extremely well. We have a very active district emergency management committee. Officially we meet on a quarterly basis. We always have very good representation from all the agencies that are listed on our DEMC. If we need to during an emergency, we will call an emergency meeting, and the relevant agencies always come in and provide an update if DEMC is involved. At a district level we have a fairly good relationship with all the agencies we deal with.

The CHAIRMAN: Some of the people who have given us information have said that Lake Grace and the Shire of Kent seemed to attract all the help in the initial stages. Did you get any support through FESA or any of the other government agencies?

Ms Elms: I made contact with all the local governments surrounding the Lake Grace shire once we realised that it went further than just Lake Grace and asked them for a bit of an update on what sort of damage they had, was there major road damage, and did they have stock losses that they could tell at that stage, because it was fairly early on. We put it all together in a report and we provided that to the state committee. I believe that is when the minister made the decision to call it a natural disaster. We contacted them fairly early and we asked whether there was anything that they needed done at that time, and most of them came back and said yes, they realised that Lake Grace did get quite a lot of media attention, but they did not feel that they needed any help from FESA.

The CHAIRMAN: We are now 10 months down the track from the actual event. Are you still providing any support to those communities, or is it deemed that the event is no longer an issue? Where are you at with the status of the event at the moment?

Ms Elms: We have done a debrief on the actual flooding that occurred in Lake Grace. We did the debrief on 1 March 2006. Apart from some phone calls from the Lake Grace shire saying that yes, they just need a bit more information on some of the funding, we have not had any other requirements of FESA from that point of view.

[1.39 pm]

Mr Tonkin: I guess one of the things with all of this is that recovery is very much a matter for the local government. We came over here and helped them establish the recovery committee and we also prompted other government agencies to be at the first recovery meeting because there was an obvious need for representatives from Main Roads because, as you are aware, under Westplan and roadage, Main Roads has a part to play. The Department of Agriculture people were already here in Lake Grace, so automatically they were going to attend the meeting anyway. There was a bit of prompting on our part to make sure other government agencies were at that initial recovery meeting. At the second recovery meeting we had a phone hook-up with the Shire of Kulin. We also extended the invitation to other surrounding local governments because we knew the water was going to travel north, as it does, and we invited them, if you like, to be part and parcel of the recovery process that was occurring, not only for the Shire of Lake Grace but for the surrounding shires. They participated in the phone hook-up but did not seem to think that there was much problem. Sure they had had roads washed out and the odd bridge washed away and stuff like that but they seemed to have no real requirement for any further services from FESA.

Mrs J. HUGHES: FESA has been administering the WANDRA money for seven years or so. Do you assist local governments in the process of accessing those funds?

Mr Tonkin: When we knew we were coming out here, one of the first things I did with Chris Jackson, who I know from previous days, was to e-mail him the current Westplan recovery and the policy statement on appeals and donations - at that stage I had not come out here so I did not know the scale of the disaster. That information was sent to him. Remember that Lynda and I as field operatives do not administer the actual scheme. That is done by people like Nick Barker, who you will no doubt interview. Nick came down here on about the second or third meeting to address the recovery committee. He was on the spot to answer any of their queries, as were representatives from Main Roads, the Ag department and so on. Insofar as the offers of assistance and how they went through the policies and availed themselves of the funding available, that information was being provided.

Mrs J. HUGHES: During the time of the emergency, did FESA send down extra hands to go out to the outlying shires as well, or was it just the two of you who had to coordinate the whole area that was under the emergency?

Ms Elms: Very early on I found that local governments took the responsibility for their events. I remained in regular contact with the outlying local governments who sort of indicated that they did not require any help from us. Lake Grace tended to get most media attention I think because the local community was actually physically cut off from all areas. I think the media cottoned onto that and I think that is why it tended to get more media attention. We did mainly phone calls, just making sure we were in regular contact. If they required anything, they rang us up. We did not hear from any of the outlying shires. Lake Grace remained in regular contact. John attended a lot more meetings because he is closer, being at Narrogin. He assisted them through the recovery process. They then contacted either John or me on several occasions to ask for letters of recommendation to say that this had physically happened and we recommended that they got the funding, and from various other funding agencies as well. That is really where we helped. Once

the actual operation was over, a lot of it was visiting the recovery committee and phone calls more than anything. I did not physically go out.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So it was two people on deck?

Ms Elms: Yes, apart from the local SES volunteers that were in Kulin.

The CHAIRMAN: Does anybody from FESA or FESA itself provide information to people about WANDRA before a disaster? I mean it is fine after there is a disaster, but does FESA engage in any sort of communication that tells them, farmers or locals, what is available?

Mr Tonkin: I was going to say that if you go back to the actual flood itself, we gave the updated information. With a lot of people, until this is on their doorstep it is useless information, needless information. The point is that the local government, which is in the best position to sponsor and manage the recovery process, was given the information. In turn, that local government, the Shire of Lake Grace, put out a newsletter based on my advice. I said a good way of communicating to people was to start a flood newsletter or something like that. They took my advice and away they went and started producing a flood newsletter to let parents, folk and outlying people know. In that newsletter there were excerpts from the Ag department, DCD and other state government departments saying these are the sorts of things that are available and this is who you contact. It was an information package, if you like, provided at the time which was relevant to people's circumstances. That all happened based on the information we had given them.

The CHAIRMAN: Considering Lake Grace was cut off, how did they manage to distribute that? Is that an e-mail thing, a phone thing or was it a printed thing that got to them eventually?

Mr Tonkin: They had it both in hard form and electronic form. I have copies of some of them here.

Ms Elms: They were lucky enough that the phone lines did not actually go out; neither did the power, luckily. They were able to use whatever method they could. The waters did start receding very quickly internally. It was just around the outskirts of the central business district basically that was cut off for quite a while.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You were saying that the fire and rescue people -

Ms Elms: The volunteers in Lake Grace.

Mrs J. HUGHES: took control during the incident itself. So you had obviously a control command -

Ms Elms: Structure, yes.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Were they acting on their own local knowledge of the area or were they being assisted by FESA?

Ms Elms: From my point of view, they were acting on their local knowledge and really all we did was provide whatever information we could. We gave them weather updates because I was in regular contact with Ray Bird, who is the captain of the volunteer fire and rescue, and asked him what sorts of resources he needed. He gave us an update on a regular basis, and once we could get stuff in there, we got sandbags. Sandbags were all they really needed from us.

Mrs J. HUGHES: How many in that group?

Mr Tonkin: There would be, say, 10 or 15 volunteers. It was all-in. We came up here on the Monday and the floodwaters had started receding then, but the local CBH guys, the local police, it was all hands -

Mrs J. HUGHES: I understand that the local community gets involved. Do some of the other areas like Kulin and Kent have any rescue or emergency groups?

Ms Elms: Kulin has a State Emergency Service unit.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So they were activated out that way?

Ms Elms: They were. They looked after Kulin because they had a little bit of flooding in Kulin, and they averted that. They were also travelling outside the Kulin district to give assistance to some farmers who were saying they had floodwaters rising to their doors, and they went out and sandbagged two properties, I believe. They did not get any further water from there. They did go out as far as they were needed, but Lake Grace tended, because it was isolated, just to look after Lake Grace.

The CHAIRMAN: There has been a fair amount of focus on getting assistance to farmers, people in the outlying regions, but do you know whether many businesses were badly affected and whether they sought assistance through WANDRA?

Mr Tonkin: We did, definitely. The way we got in here is not a prime way of coming to Lake Grace, and we came through water and stuff to get here at that stage. The normal east-west traffic through the town affects things like roadhouses and coffee shops, and those small businesses were definitely going to suffer because the town was literally isolated. That was recognised up front. One of the pressing issues was to try to get the roads open as soon as we could. We had drainage experts here from Main Roads trying to work out schemes to get rid of the water sooner. All of those things went on, but without moving the water there was not a helluva lot you could do.

The CHAIRMAN: Did those businesses qualify, or did they look for assistance? Is there any assistance, financial or otherwise?

Mr Tonkin: I am not aware of that. Again, our involvement was very much operational - to come over here and help them set up the recovery committee and then if they needed something or needed a hand, that was forthcoming. Other than that, the actual administration of WANDRA and all those sorts of things is separate from us.

[1.50 pm]

Ms Elms: We know it is out there and we advise them of us, but from then on it is handled by other people. EMS looks after that.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Do they send people down to assist after a disaster?

Ms Elms: Yes, they do.

Mr Tonkin: Nick Barker came down.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I understand he might have come down to talk to them, but was any assistance given to help them fill out the forms or tell them how the system actually worked?

Ms Elms: I am unaware of that.

Mr Tonkin: There are different facets to this. The Department of Agriculture and Food supplies an element of assistance, as does the Department for Community Development. We look after operational aspects, provide advice on setting up recovery and things like that. Other government departments are involved in vetting, handing out and sponsoring some of that assistance. I am saying that not only FESA representatives but representatives from other departments were here doing their job. In other words, they were telling people what sort of assistance can be provided to farmers, for instance, via certain facets of the scheme, via the DCD net and so on. That is what was going on.

Mrs J. HUGHES: We ask them all the same questions; we are not just asking FESA.

Ms Elms: We understand that.

The CHAIRMAN: How prepared are people for natural disasters? Have they taken into consideration the risks of various types of natural disasters? Obviously, the flood caught people in

this area pretty much unawares. They are prepared for drought, bushfires and lots of other things. In general, are people fairly well prepared?

Mr Tonkin: Hopefully, the Emergency Management Act, which was recently passed by the Parliament, will make a difference. As you know, it puts quite an onus on local governments to have plans in place. That is a good thing because we never know when there will be a fire. In this case, the flood happened very quickly. I think it caught a lot of people unaware. Generally, apathy rules. Unless people have had an event in recent times, people tend to forget that these things can happen. It is a reality of life out here that people are subjected to these natural disasters.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You are the people who have your hands on the deck, so to speak. When WANDRA comes into effect and services are restored and roads etc are rebuilt, they are only rebuilt to pre-emergency standard. Do you see a problem with that type of thinking or should there perhaps be a little more investment so that risks are mitigated?

Mr Tonkin: We live by the PPRR philosophy - prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Recovery is where we come in - right down the far end. If people can prepare, plan and mitigate, it minimises the impact when a flood occurs. We may well be able to mitigate the effects of a flood on the town site of Lake Grace, but there are other outlying rural properties involved. It is a matter of letting people know that they are part of a flood plain and their sheds and infrastructure could be at risk. It is definitely something that needs to be done but it would be a huge task.

Ms Elms: We spent quite a bit of time going to all the local governments under our control in the great southern area to help them write their arrangements and put them through the risk analysis process. Unfortunately, it takes events such as the Lake Grace flood or the storms in Albany in 2000 for them to sit up and take notice, start attending LEMC meetings and say that they need to be involved. One of the things that came out of the Lake Grace debrief was that the arrangements were quite slim. There was no real workable document. Suddenly people started saying that they needed to have a committee up and running and they need to meet on a regular basis. Unfortunately, it takes a natural disaster of this magnitude to really shake people up and let them know that they need to be involved in this type of thing. We can run all the meetings we like and say that they really need to be involved, but until they experience a disaster, they do not understand what we are trying to say.

Mrs J. HUGHES: If FESA, for instance, had control of state emergencies, like a multi-agency, you would not necessarily have local emergency management plans in place.

Ms Elms: We would be pushing for them to have local plans in place. That is what we have been trying to do. We have just been facilitating the local committees through the process, trying to get them to write their own arrangements. We would be pushing for that even more. We could get a consultant in to help them rewrite their arrangements and run them through the risk analysis.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Ultimately, FESA would be responsible. You would be the last port of call if you were given the responsibility of being the major hazard manager of a multi-agency.

Ms Elms: It depends on what it would be. We still play a hazard management agency role. There are a lot of natural disasters that are not covered by a HMA.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Which ones are they?

Ms Elms: The locust plague, for instance. The SES has the HMA role that we have, and the fire services are the HMA for the fire role. There are a lot of natural disasters that we probably would not be a HMA for and we do not see ourselves being the HMA for.

Mr Tonkin: When we talk about WANDRA or any natural disaster relief arrangements, we are all surmising that the disaster has happened, we are into the recovery mode and we are trying to get the community back to where it was prior to the emergency. The best people to organise that, or to be actively involved in it, is the local government. They know their own patch.

Mrs J. HUGHES: With all the reviews that have been happening lately with the FESA legislation and those sorts of things, ultimately FESA may be the last port of call if it was a multi-agency.

Mr Tonkin: I think we are getting a bit confused.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I am not talking about the recovery so much. If FESA was to become the top of the pile, if an agency had no emergency management plans in place and it could not handle the process, it could hand the process over to FESA so it is not so much about recovery but how to manage the situation.

Mr Tonkin: You are talking more about response as opposed to recovery. The Emergency Management Act is all about local emergency management arrangements - state and district arrangements. That has already been enshrined in legislation and the regulations have now been written. It clearly apportions responsibility for these things in some instances to local governments. The emergency services legislation, which is different legislation - it is currently being looked at and covers the Bush Fires Act, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia Act and the Fire Brigade's Act - is more to do with actually responding to the incident.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I think we are on different channels.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there anything that you think should be in WANDRA that is not there? Through the Department of Agriculture and Food, it covers consultants' fees, the loan interest rate rebate etc. Is there anything in WANDRA that you think should be covered? For instance, are businesses missing out or are individuals missing out?

Ms Elms: I personally do not know enough about it. I know there is a local funding scheme and it is handled by our emergency management services people in FESA.

The CHAIRMAN: Does FESA come back during the recovery period or after the recovery period to offer any advice? Bushfires would come under your area. What about other emergencies? Is that done through the LEMC? Was it advised on mitigation issues or the prevention of future problems?

Mr Tonkin: Each LEMC, which is chaired and organised through the local government, has certain representatives on it. The representatives, among others, come from the police service, the agriculture department and whoever else is normally within that community. The best people that should be on that local committee are from the local emergency services. For example, the captain of the local volunteer fire and rescue service would also be a member of that local emergency management committee.

[2.00 pm]

Mr Tonkin: Clearly, if they wanted advice over and above that on fire issues and stuff like that, they could then come to the next level, which is the area manager, or the district manager, or something. We normally get involved at the district level, which, if you like, oversees the local emergency management plans for each local government.

The CHAIRMAN: Lake Grace would have a LEMC, and the Shire of Kent and the Shire of Kulin might have one. I cannot remember any other local shires around here. Would your volunteers be the FESA representatives on those LEMCs?

Ms Elms: Yes.

Mr Tonkin: When you think about it, if they are drawing up plans about responding, who better to be on them than the local people?

The CHAIRMAN: There is no dispute about that.

Mr Tonkin: No, I am just saying it. That is why it is at that level.

The CHAIRMAN: There are a lot of people involved in this, right down through the levels, and with WANDRA, FESA is the agency that governs that. I would have thought FESA would have been feeding a lot more information right down to the volunteers, because that is who people are turning to at the time or immediately afterwards. When the emergency is happening, FESA is there, the SES is there; all those different people are there. All the volunteers are there, and whether they are recognised volunteers under FESA or not, because they come to assist, they get covered under FESA. But there does not seem to be a lot of communication done about the disaster relief arrangements that happen immediately afterwards, coming down from FESA, because they are the administrators of WANDRA.

Mr Tonkin: I am speaking purely on the fire side of it here, but one of my roles is that if a local government gets a large fire beyond its capacity and capability, we exhort it to contact us. We, in turn, go out to that fire, and do not engage in the combat other than providing advice on possible response and mitigation measures, but if any assistance is required - financial assistance for things like machinery, putting up spotter planes, and when crown land is involved - we do that.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, that is the response to the immediate thing, but afterwards, if the event has been declared a natural disaster, there has to be a feedback into how people access WANDRA. In this area, it happened to be the Department of Agriculture and Food because it was primarily farmers that had an issue, but how does that information get out to other people? If you are the FESA people in the area, how do you access that information from FESA in Hay Street, Perth?

Ms Elms: They mention it in all the emergency management courses that we encourage LEMC people to attend. I am aware of that, from the emergency management, and the risk analysis process and the recovery management courses that the local government and the other LEMC people are encouraged to attend. I know it is mentioned, but to what extent, I do not know. I know it is mentioned in the training courses that are given out there for emergency management services.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the issues that seems to be coming up is that people do not know how to access WANDRA properly. There seems to be a lot of misinformation out there about qualifications or criteria for actually accessing WANDRA, or what they can access all those sorts of things for. I was just trying to figure out how FESA actually feeds that down through district officers and people like that. It is starting to become clear to me that FESA, as the administrator of WANDRA, needs to take a much stronger role in educating people about WANDRA, what is available and what is not. What is happening now - it is human nature - is that people do not want to know about it until a disaster happens, and then they want all the information there and then, and all the criteria etc. That is what they want, but FESA has not got a program right down through the district officers of feeding that information out to the district officers, and it is going to be pretty hard at disaster time to get that information out. There has so far been a very small uptake on WANDRA assistance to individuals. Local councils and such things know their 75-25 per cent ratios and all those sorts of things that they need to reinstate infrastructure, but the individual farmers and businesses do not seem to have the knowledge of how to access it. It is just one of those things that we start to find.

Mr Tonkin: There is probably another factor there that you may have come across. Some people do not like asking for assistance. There is a mindset with some that they almost feel as though they have been defeated, if you like, if they have to go and seek assistance from someone. That is another mindset.

The CHAIRMAN: To go back to the flood event, do you think there was anything that could have been done that was not done? Is there anything standing out that was missing that should have been there, from your point of view?

Ms Elms: Not from a response point of view, I do not think. We have ensured that the Lake Grace volunteer fire and rescue now has plenty of sandbags. It is a little bit too late, but should something happen, we knew that they were a little bit low on them, so we have now left sandbags with them,

even though they are not a management agency as fire and rescue volunteers. I believe Lake Grace floods on a regular basis; should it happen again, we have left them with plenty of resources.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Obviously there is a large fire component to managing these areas. Are your volunteers trained in flood and cyclone or tornado relief? Do they get different training other than fire training?

Ms Elms: From my point of view, if they are the SES, they stick to requesting training in their SES roles, and the fire and rescue specifically tend to stick to requesting training in their fire roles. Very rarely do they request training outside of their actual allocated roles.

Mrs J. HUGHES: But there is no SES here.

Ms Elms: No, but if the local fire and rescue now comes to us and says that they would like some training in flood or storm damage, we will provide it.

Mrs J. HUGHES: What about accessibility to boats, and things like that? Does FESA assist flood areas with boats?

Ms Elms: We had a plan in place. We contacted our volunteer marine search and rescue section in FESA, and we had contingencies in place, particularly if we had to evacuate them. If everything had fallen into a big hole in Lake Grace, we had a draft or interim evacuation plan. We had contacts in place with our FESA people who knew the relevant type of boats to get hold of, where we could get hold of them, how we were going to get them in, and how we were going to get the people out. It is not a resource that we hold in every unit. It is only in the designated ones that have the flood role, but in an area like this we are a few phone calls away, and we have all the resources we need.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered, but you think should be incorporated? We are just about to finish up, but this gives you the last word.

Mr Tonkin: I would just like to reiterate the fact that - this is not being defensive or anything like that - you must understand that where Lynda and I fit into the equation is that we do not administer the relief arrangements and stuff like that. We are very much field operatives. We come out here and provide the local governments with the policies and contacts, if you like, to avail themselves and their community of the assistance arrangements.

[2.10 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: In regards to the Tenterden fire, at one of our hearings we had the local coordinator - I cannot remember what her name was -

Mr Tonkin: Sandy Lehmann.

The CHAIRMAN: - and she was glowing in her praise of the efforts that FESA put in to give her information and give her contacts and all those things that she was able to call on to help people out at that time in the Tenterden fire. She now does a few talks around, I think, telling others.

Mr Tonkin: We did exactly the same thing here.

Ms Elms: Certainly from my point of view I felt that the Lake Grace local government took control of the recovery process very, very quickly. In fact, they were almost in recovery phase during the middle of the operation. I felt that they took a very strong lead in it and made sure that their local community was very much involved. We had all the newsletters going out and if they could not get newsletters out they had phone calls and e-mail messages. They had community meetings to get people in when they could physically get them in. They had arrangements in place to get the kids back out to school. I thought that the local government in Lake Grace in particular took control of the recovery very, very well.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Lake Grace said that it paved the way for school buses to get through some lake areas and places like that. None of that appears to be recoupable through the disaster fund. Just

from operatives on the ground, would you consider that they would also be essential to the recovery phase?

Mr Tonkin: What we were saying before about recovery is, by definition, that it is trying to get things back to normal. If that means that a bus has to go some circuitous route somewhere and incur additional expense or whatever it is, I think there should be some financial offset to help people incur normal costs as opposed to extraordinary costs that may well have been forced on them by the disaster.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: If you do not have any other comments, I will read our closing comments to let you know what happens from here. Thanks again for your contribution to the committee's inquiry. A transcript of the hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of typographical errors or errors of transcription or fact. New material cannot be introduced in the sense that the evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, you should submit a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration. If the transcript is not returned to us within 10 days of receipt, it will be deemed to be correct. As such, you have 10 days to look it over. The transcript should be out within a week.

Hearing concluded at 2.14 pm
