

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

SESSION ONE

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT KOJONUP
MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2006**

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 11.27 am

MAGINI, MR STEVE

Farmer, Kojonup Bushfire Association, examined:

GASH, MR STEPHEN

Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Kojonup, examined:

JOHNSTON, MR TIM

Farmer, Kojonup Bushfire Association, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Good morning. The committee hearing is a procedure 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 contempt of Parliament. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form? I actually need you to answer that question so that it can be recorded by Hansard.

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: 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?

Mr Magini: Yes.

Mr Gash: Yes.

Mr Johnston: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, we have received your submission. Do you wish to propose any amendments to your submission?

The Witnesses: No

The CHAIRMAN: Is it your wish that the submission be incorporated as part of the transcript of evidence?

Mr Johnston: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we ask any questions, do you wish to make any statements in addition to your submission?

Mr Gash: Yes. First of all we would like to thank the committee for coming to Kojonup. We view this as important because it reinforces the theme of our submission that one size does not fit all. By your visiting the region, we hope to highlight to the committee the special needs and responses of fire management in the grasslands areas such as Kojonup. It addresses the coastal plains, hills, outer metropolitan and pastoral areas. An understanding of these differences is important because most people's perception of bushfires has developed from images and reports on the hills or forest-type fire, whereas in Kojonup our method of firefighting is direct attack and chasing down fires. I urge the committee to direct questions to Mr Magini, who will elaborate on these methods of fighting fires.

If the proposed legislative changes do not recognise and support all the different methodologies of firefighting and the obvious flexibility required, then the only outcome that we envisage will be a slower response time, with the likelihood of needing to fight larger fires. Furthermore, volunteers will continue to fight fires to protect their property in the most efficient way. Legislative restrictions on operations of these individuals may place them outside the law, uninsured and at a greater personal risk in bushfires. To gain elaboration of the issues of volunteers' attitude and ethos, I urge the committee to direct their questions to Mr Johnston.

We would like to point out that we have a good working relationship with our regional Fire and Emergency Services Authority officers and appreciate the support they give us. However, we are disappointed that FESA did not consult with individual local governments or widely circulate their recommendations to allow stakeholders to adequately consider what they are proposing. It is also interesting that FESA senior management have already taken the opportunity to present to the committee, yet we know there are further submissions planned from Albany and Bunbury regional FESA officers. We hope that this reflects FESA's acknowledgment that there are region-specific issues, rather

than being used as a simple right of reply, as local governments have not been afforded such courtesy with the limited consultation to date.

We note some of FESA's recommendations and are still of the opinion that the existing legislative framework regarding the Bush Fires Act achieves the best outcome in our opinion. In response to the FESA recommendations we would like to address the following points.

Regarding recommendation 1 from FESA, we believe that the Bush Fires Act 1954 is an adequate instrument to achieve the outcomes suggested by the terms of reference of this inquiry. We reiterate our view from earlier written submission regarding the impact of a single piece of legislation.

Regarding recommendation 2, we ask whether this will override other legislation and provisions to allow the clearing of firebreaks through reserves. Our concern there relates to environmental clearing permits etc through reserves and what is the overriding legislation.

Recommendations 3 and 4: given our focus today being purely on the Bush Fires Act, we will defer those to WALGA - the Western Australian Local Government Association - to answer.

Recommendation 5: our view is that decreasing the number of brigades in Kojonup would be unacceptable as the brigades are the functional units with enhanced local knowledge of individual properties or areas. They have already been designed and proven to be the most efficient way to respond to fires.

Recommendation 6: we have no comment at this stage.

Recommendation 7: we believe that exemptions from firebreak provisions in Kojonup are unacceptable as they weaken the ability of the shire to respond to local risks and completely undermine the local firebreak order. Also, for the information of committee members, we would like to table for circulation a copy of the local firebreak order. Also, we would like to highlight, I guess, the organisational structure and resources available to the shire. We would also like to table our emergency contacts and resources, but note that they contain private phone numbers etc of individual members. However, it will be useful to the committee.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we have those pamphlets and document tabled, please, and can the pamphlets be distributed.

Mr Gash: We hope that there will be some questions arising from that sort of information as well.

Recommendation 8: the current legislation already allows for handover of control and for the minister to intervene if required. The handover of control is by local agreement. However, we believe that these local agreements need to clearly state the respective response from FESA to ensure accountability. Kojonup would consider signing an agreement outlining joint control of fire situations.

Recommendation 9: we reiterate our response to recommendation 8 about the current legislation being adequate. We note that recommendation 9 keeps the burden of administering firebreak orders within local government. However, in recommendation 7, FESA is proposing to have right of exemption, and we view this as eroding control.

Recommendation 10: we think there needs to be further discussion about any structure of an overarching body, and probably we will take further questions on that but have no specific recommendations at this stage.

Recommendation 11: we are concerned at the funding levels and the capacity of local government on behalf of the brigades to have input.

Recommendation 12 of FESA: we require further information regarding the structural intention of this recommendation.

We hope that you are able to recall the recommendations from FESA. We are quite happy to take questions on any part of our submission or that brief overview I have just submitted regarding our views of their recommendations. Again, thank you for coming to Kojonup.

The CHAIRMAN: First up, Mr Gash, you have spoken specifically to FESA's recommendations, but some of us are probably not very aware of the services in Kojonup. Would you mind giving us a brief overview of the local government area in terms of emergency services and, in doing that, would you tell us what the high-risk emergencies are, not only bushfires but other emergencies - grassfires in this case?

[11.38 am]

Mr Gash: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I was wondering if I could refer some of the specific bushfire questions about the zone to Mr Magini.

The CHAIRMAN: Sure.

Mr Gash: In terms of other emergencies, if FESA already controls a local town fire brigade that also has a fire and rescue component, it is not under the control of the local government. Within the Shire of Kojonup there is also a local emergency management committee that encompasses all the hazard management authorities, such as the police, the fire and rescue service, the bush fire brigades and also the ambulance and hospital. We try to take a coordinated approach to the overall emergency management. Specifically our concerns, and, as we reiterated, what we wanted to talk to the

committee, about relate to the bushfires. Mr Magini, as the chief fire control officer, will actually be able to give you an idea of the number of brigades and structure and how they actually operate in Kojonup.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr Magini.

Mr Magini: Thanks very much for the opportunity of speaking here today. Kojonup is unique in that it relies on volunteers alone and does not have any organisation helping it. It has developed its own fire protection system over many years and generations, based on volunteers and experience. Kojonup was one of the first shires in WA to pioneer and embrace the radio controls network to support its volunteer firefighters. It now has some 631 registered members and more than 12 brigades. Today's volunteers own and maintain 100 medium to heavy-duty firefighting units and a further 100 to 110 light fast-attack units, plus one -

The CHAIRMAN: Can I just clarify? Do these appliances belong to different farmers and so on?

Mr Magini: They are privately owned. Only one jointly owned FESA-shire unit is in Kojonup, and that is stationed at a small country town at Muradup, which is about 20 kilometres from Kojonup.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Is that a heavy-duty unit?

Mr Magini: Medium.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: A slip-on?

Mr Magini: No, it is a medium unit. This means that around 210 privately owned units are capable of attending any fire in the district at any given time. The firefighting forces are controlled by four senior fire control officers, 12 brigade fire control officers and other deputies who have the local knowledge and are able to rapidly respond to situations. That was demonstrated recently when we had a fire, and 16 units and 28 people turned up without us even having to call them; they phoned us and said they were on their way. Within a very short time - a quarter of an hour to 20 minutes from when the notice came through - the fire was under control. A fire advisory committee has been set up. That has been going for many, many years, and I have been part of that committee for over 35 years.

Mr S.R. HILL: What does the advisory committee do? What is its role?

Mr Magini: It is an organisation that oversees changes and makes firebreak notices and fire management strategies that the advisory committee -

Mr Gash. If I may, Mr Chair. The advisory committee also recommends to the shire council policies, operational procedures and protocols to fulfil the needs of the local government, being a hazard management authority. It is a very coordinated approach. It is also the consultative mechanism. If, for instance, there is any strategic directional discussion on legislation, that is where the advisory committee level is helpful.

Mr S.R. HILL: So, it is pretty unique then because not too many local authorities would have that.

Mr Johnston: In the grassland it is quite common.

Mr Gash: Yes.

Mr Johnston: It is the common method of organising firefighting brigades within the grassland area of the state; so, east of the hills, out through the wheatbelt.

Mr Gash: Surrounding shires would have a similar system.

Mr Johnston: Yes.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Does FESA have a seat on that committee at all?

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: No, it is purely local.

Mr Johnston: It is purely voluntary.

Mr Gash: I will elaborate. We regard FESA as a partner, in that from an operational perspective it assists us with training. Also when we look at our operating and administrative procedures, we get that local support, and that is where FESA comes into it. Rather than being on that committee itself, it actually advises us of administrative procedures and it has indicated that it is quite happy to assist us in any situation. We work well together.

The CHAIRMAN: FESA is one authority. Do you have any interaction with CALM whatsoever?

Mr Gash: No. I think we have only one or two very small reserves where CALM would possibly enter the shire, so it is very limited. The only other interaction from a fire management perspective is that we know about the growing trend towards plantations in the south west of the shire, and I guess one of our concerns is how we integrate our fire management across the whole of the shire.

The CHAIRMAN: I will move on with another question and then open it up for everybody. The coroner and the Auditor General have both expressed concern at the current fire control arrangements in Western Australia. Both criticise the fact that local government, CALM and FESA could all be in control of a fire at the same time, particularly

when the fire is crossing different land tenures. It has been suggested that FESA be empowered to take control - which I think is your bone of contention or your issue - of a fire from local government or CALM when FESA considers this to be necessary. It is anticipated that the power would only ever need to be used two to three times a year. CALM and some local governments are opposing this, and you are one of those. What is your major concern with one authority actually having an overarching view of that?

Mr Gash: It is an issue of capacity. I may ask Tim Johnston to elaborate on that.

Mr Johnston: It is an issue of capacity, as we see it. There have been instances in Western Australia. About five years ago a very serious fire went through Mt Barker. There was one at the Kalgan River on the same day and there was also one at Bunbury. By the nature of this organisation, we are an emergency service organisation and we think it is critical that we have the capacity under certain circumstances to stand alone, because we can see that circumstances will be thrown up when we believe the Fire and Emergency Services Authority will not be able to get here and help us, and if we become too reliant on the Fire and Emergency Services as an overarching body, it will only weaken our capacity to manage our own affairs and protect ourselves. Kojonup is three hours from Perth, two hours from Albany and two hours from Bunbury. If we are in serious trouble, FESA could be tied up in other areas, which it has been in the past and which we can see it will be in the future. We do not want to be overly reliant on it because we need to be able to stand alone.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you think FESA's proposal would necessarily drastically change the current structure? I mean, FESA would still be reliant on the volunteers and on the private operators with their tenders and appliances. Do you think that is going to cause a major problem?

Mr Gash: I guess the issue we see - there currently is the capacity to sign voluntary agreements and other mechanisms with FESA - is to look at the escalation and the handover of control. Our concern is that, again, one size does not fit all; therefore, what is the trigger point for the handover of control? That has to be very specific. For instance, a fire may burn for three days in the Kimberley and not be an issue; whereas it could be catastrophic if a fire burned for more than a few minutes in dangerous weather conditions down here. I guess the whole issue is one of flexibility of the discretion of the chief fire control officer and the local government to decide when to hand over that control. Our issue to date has been that there has not been a lot of solid information not only about those trigger points, because it is difficult to agree as one size does not fit all, but also about what the shire could expect in return from, for instance, FESA. However, if FESA is going to take control, what does that mean? Does that mean it is going to have everything centrally controlled from Perth? Does that mean that we wait two hours while someone drives from Albany? Does that mean that a FESA officer will be employed and sitting in Kojonup? Does that mean, for instance, FESA is proposing to remove the current volunteer fire control officers and replace them with paid people? They are all questions that we are not sure of. However, the answers to them will impact on the suggestion of the continuing support of volunteers, in that the local fire control officers know the capabilities of their people, their units and their response times; and, more importantly, they have local knowledge of the terrain. If the current legislation provides that we already can sign agreements to look at the trigger points for any control, and as well the minister has the ability to intervene in a disaster situation, then it is difficult for me to see the benefit in the change; rather than I guess just reinforcing a level that could be used in a manner that may actually disfranchise volunteers if they see that control is being taken away. I reiterate that we work side by side with FESA. If there is an event, then we can give them a heads up and they know that they have items on standby - it could be a water bomber - or that they can authorise the use of bulldozers or things like that after the shire has committed its own plant. However, even as recently as last week, FESA regional officers have indicated that it is not their intention to actually take over; it is rather to be here and support the people with the existing knowledge, to guide and to assist in any way that they can.

[11.50 am]

Therefore, when we hear the response "not our intention", it still is of concern that there is this ultimate trigger potentially in new legislation that just says, "Look, no, control is here." I guess, from a volunteering aspect, I would really like further questions on the volunteer ethos and what that means to be directed to Tim.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Maybe I can firstly make a statement. The committee is here to take submissions. We have taken submissions from CALM, the police and all and sundry, and now we are doing these trips. It is obvious that the legislation needs review. The FESA act needs review anyway. I think it is up for review. Given the coroner's and the Auditor General's comments and the fact that we are still operating under policy 87, which has been around for quite a while as far as emergency response is concerned, obviously the government intends to revamp the legislation. I hope that that bill will come forward as a green bill so that you will be able to see it before it is discussed in Parliament. We have a double role really. As members of Parliament, we are here to listen to your concerns. Our next role, when the legislation comes into the Parliament, is to make sure that we represent your views. I am interested in the comments you make about volunteering. I see that as a major risk in any new legislation that centralises control. I must commend the Shire of Kojonup and your fire control people. I think you have been a leading light when it comes to being ahead of the game and being a model fire brigade as far as response is concerned. However, on the issue of volunteers and

public liability, at the moment you have a lot of private enterprise gear that is used in a fire. Who covers the public liability now if something goes wrong? Maybe you can respond to that.

Mr Gash: We currently have insurance for our volunteers. However, we are concerned that even at regional DOAC meetings there was a discussion about the level of insurance. What we are concerned about is not only the level of insurance. If we have 600-odd members, because only a certain number are insured at one time, there is a funding issue there. The other concern from a liability point of view is that they are covered if they follow all the policies, protocols and operational instructions. Our brigades are pretty good. They always look after themselves and make sure they operate safely. Tim will touch on the volunteer aspect of it. However, our concern is that there may be too many restrictions placed on farmers, who at the end of the day will be protecting their own property, using their private gear. They are going to go out and put the fire out anyway if they can cut a fence, come from 360 degrees, get to that fire and put it out within 20 or 30 minutes, rather than in another day's time having to go to another shire to stop what could have been put out but was not because they had restrictions on how they could approach a fire or the requirements to follow - sign-in procedures from a central mustering point and those sorts of things. If they become a reality - we are looking at some extremes there - and if our current methodology is not supported from a grassland perspective of "see smoke, come from 360 degrees and put out the fire", then there are going to be issues.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So you are going to lose volunteers.

Mr Gash: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Your insurance cover is through local government insurance, is it?

Mr Gash: Yes, that is right.

Mr Johnston: One of the things that we have with our volunteer system is that in Kojonup, in the grassland areas, as opposed to what you would witness on TV and looking at it in the hills, the people who go and volunteer for those fire brigades are doing that, in a sense, as a hobby or as a way of serving the community. They have another job during the day, and they go along and polish the fire engine on the weekend, and they have weekly meetings and so forth and so on. The volunteers whom we are talking about in Kojonup are reluctant volunteers. They are volunteers through necessity, and they are protecting their own assets. I would suggest that 95 per cent of the people who are volunteers within the Shire of Kojonup in another life and in another place would have nothing to do with bushfire whatsoever. Therefore, whatever we do, we must be careful with legislation that we do not undermine those people. I have personally stated to the shire, and to Stephen and the other members of the Kojonup Bushfire Association, that if CALM comes in and takes over control in Kojonup, I will resign. I have no interest whatsoever in operating under that regime where I do not know where I stand, I do not know when I should hand it over, and I do not know who is going to be pulling the strings. I am quite happy to volunteer and help the shire and help the local people in any way possible, but I just see no need whatsoever for this extra level of bureaucracy to be forced on top of us.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: That is CALM and FESA?

Mr Johnston: As stated earlier, CALM had two reserves in Kojonup. We have very little contact with it. Our main contact is with FESA. We have a great working relationship with the blokes in Albany who supply the expertise to us, and we have absolutely no problem in their having a joint management strategy with the Shire of Kojonup. Only a fool would put aside the expertise that they can bring to the table. However, I cannot see that you can construct a system whereby we are pushed into the backblocks and they come in and take over. I mean Steve has 30 years' experience. Why would you not use that to your benefit and not to your detriment? We are fearful, the way government departments work, that if they come in, it is only the thin end of the wedge, and eventually we will have to do all the training. We can go up to a certain limit of training at the moment, and we can do the job we are currently doing. We can see that if FESA came in and started to manage us even further, I would have to go and do a lot more training to carry on the position that I now hold. I am not interested in doing that, and Steve is not interested in doing that. I have a good fire truck. I will just go and fight fires. However, I will not be interested in the management side of it any more. There will be a certain number of farmers out there who will say, "If CALM is going to take over control, they can bloody well look after me." Ownership of volunteer organisations, and the feeling of ownership, is the most important thing that keeps members there. If they feel that their ownership of their own organisations has been taken away from them and is being run by someone outside the district, they will walk away from it.

Mrs J. HUGHES: They would walk away even though they are landowners themselves. You stated that your volunteers are primarily farmers and landowners.

Mr Magini: They will never stop people fighting fires. However, as we stated before, we will fight fires unprotected or outside the law. That is the worrying part. If we are forced to fight fires uninsured, then I think it will be a very sad day. If it forces an association like this, which has been going for more than 60 years in an efficient manner, to disband because people do not want to be part of a bureaucracy that they are not happy with, and they still fight those fires virtually illegally, if someone happens to be severely injured and is crippled for life, uninsured, I think that is something that we need to be very aware of.

[12 noon]

The CHAIRMAN: You are all obviously very passionate about maintaining your fire brigades and your volunteers, but do you not see that the role of FESA is to provide better coordination across the state? That is what FESA was set up for. FESA does not need to come in and say, "Look, Mr Magini, I know you've been there for 30 years but you're irrelevant now because I've got this you-beaut guy sitting in an office in Albany who can come up and do your job for you." I do not see that as being the role that FESA has taken. The role of the committee is to investigate the 1954 legislation and to make recommendations to improve it, not to make it any worse. FESA has made a submission to us, which contained those recommendations. However, that is only one submission. WALGA has made a submission to us, as have you and a number of other organisations. At the end of the process we will come up with our recommendations, which will not necessarily be those of FESA or of Kojonup, but will be what this committee thinks, as a group, are possibly the best option. We could be wrong, but we will put our best foot forward.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Being the government they can do whatever they like.

Mr Gash: In relation to FESA being a central body to coordinate across the state, that may be correct in terms of high-level fires or emergency situations. We are requesting that there be some recognition of the current methodology and systems that are in place to roll up to the incident control system. We have done initial training on the formal incident control system that FESA has proposed. It has been suggested that the typical types of fires that this will be good for are those where you need to keep track of everyone. In a forest fire environment there is a forward command station where people go to check in their units and get everything that they need before going off. It is all controlled. However, we have highlighted that in the grasslands there is a need to quickly get water on the fires. As I said, because of the terrain, people will come from 360 degrees. They will not need to navigate through large plantations or travel along fire access roads to meet at a central point; they will just cut the fence and drive across paddocks to get to wherever they need to be, if need be. There may be situations that need that escalation and support. We have already indicated that we are quite happy to have that support from FESA. However, because we get water out of dams - we use stand pipes or whatever - we currently have the ability, at the discretion of the chief fire control officer, to escalate to the formal ICS that FESA uses. The chief fire control officer may say, "Look, this isn't going as well as we thought. We've already given FESA a heads up in terms of the support that we need, but we can start escalating that formal ICS process by getting someone at those fast-fill pumps or stand pipes." As people come to fill up with water, their vehicle can be recorded and they can be asked how many guys they have, what channel they are on and whether they have a radio. All those sorts of things are part of the formal ICS. Even FESA says that it never gets 100 per cent cover of volunteers. From my perspective, the issue that the Auditor General raised was about the formal ICS and central control. It is still one control centre here. If a cross-region fire occurs, we can instantly mesh into the formal ICS process and with whoever this committee deems to be the most appropriate body to be in charge, but such a body should not be in charge of the day-to-day business. That is the perception of the volunteers. That perception is not helped when there has been very little consultation from FESA on these issues. We have heard about a lot of these proposed changes through the media. Our concern is that to be able to manage volunteers you have to understand them and their issues. I guess our concern is with the mixed messages we are getting. We are quite happy to consider things, but we would like to know what is on the table, what is being proposed, and we would like the opportunity to consult.

The CHAIRMAN: While you are on this subject I will ask a question about consultation with volunteers. Do you have any suggestions for a method that FESA could use to consult with volunteers across the state?

Mr Gash: The existing brigade network, local government interaction and the regional advisory committees are a logical first step. We realise that some local governments are not as coordinated or proactive as Kojonup, but they would already have the agreements in place; they would have already formalised their arrangements with FESA or another authority to assist them in those areas. If consultation were to occur, there is a natural structure in place through the brigade model and local government.

The CHAIRMAN: You are saying that that is not happening. In your submission you said that you were not aware of a lot of the recommendations that FESA has put forward to the committee.

Mr Gash: No, FESA has not formally discussed them with the shire. I have been in this role for nine months. I note that FESA said in its submission that it had spent six months compiling its submission for the committee. I would have thought that in those six months there would have been a bit more consultation about the recommendations that it was going to put forward. The perception of the brigades is that FESA left it to the last minute to put in its written submission, which has not been widely available. FESA has not actively circulated its PowerPoint presentation on its recommendations to local governments. I guess that is the concern: how good will the consultation be?

Mr Johnston: I refer to a comment you made to flesh out FESA's role in taking over the control of fires. I think you made the comment that FESA envisaged that this might happen only three or four times a year throughout the state. I would suggest, with all respect, that there is no way that a senior manager in Albany would ring us and say, "We're not going to come and take over control." His job would be on the line if something went wrong. If it is written in legislation, he would be legally obliged to take over control, unless it was written somewhere in the legislation that he did not have to do that. There is no way that the blokes in Albany would not come and take over control, as otherwise

they would expose themselves to litigation problems. It is not likely that FESA would do that to itself. I cannot see that they will not pick a point and say, "That fire is getting too big. We're coming to Kojonup and we're taking control."

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is the issue. At the moment it is for the local government to say, "We've got a problem. The fire's getting out of our control. Can you come and do it?" From memory, FESA has suggested that at a point in time it will say to a council, "We're going to take control of that fire now because it's spreading from Kojonup into surrounding areas", or, "It's just getting too big; you're not managing to hold it", and it will bring all its appliances etc from wherever.

Mr Johnston: In my experience of fires in this district, we have never had a fire go past eight o'clock at night. The biggest fire we ever had was stopped by eight o'clock at night. What happens is that the sea breeze stops it anyway. We have never had a fire burn for more than about eight hours, and none has ever got away the next day. We have a pretty good management record. A fire may burn for an hour and FESA may then decide that it is starting to get out of control. It would take FESA two hours minimum to get here, so we would have been going for three hours on our own. In the worst-case scenario we would probably have only another four hours to go before the fire would be stopped anyway. I mean, the Tenterden fire never went for more than seven hours. Once it is put into legislation that FESA is allowed to take over control of a fire, the lower echelons of FESA in Albany, who manage us, will have to come and take control. Stephen, as CEO, is responsible for the Shire of Kojonup. He would have to say to the two of us that FESA has to come and take control. Otherwise, he would be placing the shire in a legal limbo. It is a very big question. We are not, in this document, getting any answers about how it is meant to work and how we are meant to make an informed decision about it.

[12.10 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: It is probably a greater problem for Kojonup, because I do know that you are very proactive in organising and making sure that you have protection out there. A number of councils across the state, quite frankly, do not do anything.

Mr Johnston: Yes, it makes sense for them though. Along the coastal strip and in the hills it makes absolute sense for FESA to take over - we do not argue with that - but it does not make sense in Kojonup. A joint management strategy in this area is the optimum way for us to go. We bring our expertise to the table, they bring their expertise, and we have a joint management arrangement, but simply coming in and taking over control, no. We might have a man or woman come in here who has no idea of how we operate and who we have got out there in the field. It is stripping that power away from the chief fire control officer. It just does not make any sense to me.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is essentially where the problem is arising. Your view is that you are the Shire of Kojonup and FESA is over here, and all of a sudden they come over and sit on top of you. It does not need to be that way, as it involves volunteers.

Mr Johnston: Under joint management it does need to be that way.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I have a couple of questions. I will ask them and whoever wishes to answer may feel free. First of all, just quickly, who is the emergency management coordinator for the Shire of Kojonup?

Mr Gash: I am the hazard management authority for bushfires within the shire.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I am not talking about bushfires; I am talking about emergency management.

Mr Gash: We have a local emergency management committee, and the person responsible for each type of emergency will depend on the delineation within their act, so that is where I was alluding to the fact that if we have a hazard management authority for bushfires, I would be the emergency management coordinator, bushfires would have another person and the sergeant would be for traffic and fire emergency services.

Mr Johnston: The bush fire brigade on that day would be the lead agency.

Mr M.J. COWPER: It would be the lead combat authority?

Mr Gash: Yes, that is right.

Mr M.J. COWPER: So in actual fact you have a local emergency management advisory committee as such, and that LEMAC has a plan?

Mr Johnston: Yes.

Mr Gash: With the plan still being developed, because the other issue that we have is that our current sergeant has just been replaced. Our plan is in process at the moment, because we also have specific issues with a highway running through our town.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Is that a problem, do you think, for shires such as Kojonup and others around the state, where you have, in essence, country police officers or OACs who from time to time get transferred from one area to another? If you are fortunate enough to get someone from another country town, they may have some background in it. Has

there been a problem with that in the past for the Shire of Kojonup; that is, getting someone who has not necessarily got the background in emergency management?

Mr Gash: I would expect that from a police perspective anyone in a sergeant's position would be capable of dealing with traffic and other emergencies like that. That would be an expectation of the job. I have only been here nine months so I cannot comment on the previous experience.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The second question is in relation to the conformity of equipment. I understand that you are privately funded. Do you get any support from the ESL? What sort of ratepayer base do you have that is able to support and maintain your fire units? Is there a minimum standard of equipment that is used; for instance, you might have people coming from the nearby shire to give you a hand on a particular job? Is there some sort of equipment that is common use or is there a standard?

Mr Gash: The ESL funds items. We have a few trailers where we can have a fast-fill pump, for example; but if you are looking at the appliances themselves to actually take the water there, they are privately owned. In terms of standardisation, it is not as big an issue, because people are going to come with their own appliances. If there is only one medium appliance that is currently replaceable under the ESL, and for the Shire of Kojonup standardisation is not possible until there are other resources, the current budget for the ESL for Kojonup is \$40 000 last year.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The other issue is in relation to training. While on-the-job training is acknowledged as the best training you can get, when there is training on offer from FESA or whoever else may be able to help, do you find that that is an issue for your brigade?

Mr Johnston: The shire has a policy, which came from our advisory committee, that any senior fire control officers within the shire have to be trained up to level 5 - is it 3 or 4? They have to do an FCO course, so they actually cannot hold a senior fire control officer's position in Kojonup without having that level of training. Generally, that gent in the brigade would have two other people underneath him, and the normal progression is that they rotate their way up. When they come to the position of going to senior fire control officer, they actually have to get the training 12 months in advance. We take on as much training as is necessary, and generally there are no problems with getting volunteers to do that training. They realise that they have got to take their turn within the community anyway - that is just the way the community works - and we encourage that. When it comes to their turn, they do their bit and they do their training.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Do you have any facilities to send, for instance, new recruits or new people coming through the system off to train elsewhere?

Mr Gash: Every year we have an introduction to bushfires course, which we encourage people to attend. They are free. Within the district we try to take a proactive approach to try to host all of these things; indeed, we are looking at hosting a fire control officers' course for the region as well this year. In trying to encourage people to use it, we take an active stance in trying to get as much training here as possible, apart from the fire control officer training and the introduction to bushfires training. There have been other community groups that have looked at it. I think one of the women's associations looked at that sort of training for other community members. We have also had the introduction to the ICS as well. I know that we may be passionate, but we also know our obligations. We are also quite a professional unit and we are committed to keeping people safe. We recognise that training and supporting adequate standards are the key to that.

Mr M.J. COWPER: One last question. The old chestnut that always comes out at any debriefing is communications. Of course, there is an issue now with FESA and a few other organisations in Western Australia of changing radio systems. Is that an issue for you guys?

Mr Johnston: Can I tackle that one?

Mr Gash: Yes, it is.

Mr Johnston: Basically, the system we have at the moment is working perfectly, and "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". We see one of the greater problems with the introduction of the new radios as the range and the capacity that they may or may not have, which is a bit unproven. One of the key elements to managing our fire responsibility within the Shire of Kojonup and our neighbouring shires is our capacity to communicate via radio to neighbouring shires. We see that this new radio system may have great limitations in that respect. When we put on a harvest, and movement of vehicles is banned in the Shire of Kojonup, we get on the radio and notify all our surrounding shires that we have done so. If a bad day occurs and we start to put bans on, Steve and I will both go on to what they call scan, and we will monitor not only what is happening in our local shire but also what is happening in our surround shires, so that if something does go wrong, we are aware of it very quickly. The new radio system, to the best of our independent knowledge that we seem to be getting, will not be capable of doing that without a great deal more equipment being placed within the Shire of Kojonup. We currently have one tower with 40-odd radios that we maintain. We have a backup system, so if the electrics go out in that tower, we have people trained to go and keep that tower running.

Mr Gash: Reciprocal repeater use.

Mr Johnston: Yes, we have reciprocal repeater use with neighbouring shires, which was brought into play during the Tenterden bushfire. When the Cranbrook tower went down, to the best of my knowledge they went on to the Tambellup frequency and used their tower. That sort of capacity may be limited. So we see that as being a very important part of being able to communicate within neighbouring shires. We are sceptical about whether that will still exist after the introduction of new radios.

Mr Magini: Yes, there are heaps of monitors, too.

Mr Johnston: Yes, sorry. Another very strong string to our bow is that throughout the district at the moment just about every farmhouse in the shire has what we call a monitoring set. It is tuned in and listens to the bushfire frequency. It cannot transmit; it simply listens to the bushfire frequency. If anything ever goes wrong and a fire call goes out over the radio, everybody immediately hears about it in the district, and the ones who are close to it simply react - they do not actually run and say, "It's right next door to me; I'm going." When the new radio frequency system comes in, all those monitoring sets - and I suggest there are probably 150 to 200 of them out there - will be useless. We will lose all that capacity for rapid response. The way we beat fires in Kojonup is by rapid response.

[12.20 pm]

Mrs J. HUGHES: You have said that your capacity is 220 units. Would that capacity still exist if there were a new umbrella organisation? What impact would a new umbrella organisation have on the viability of your operations? Would it make any difference to your operations?

Mr Gash: As the person responsible from the shire's perspective - the hazard management authority - the worst-case scenario for me would be if the volunteers turned away altogether and did not fight the fire. However, you have heard from people who say that they would still do it anyway. There are a few people who may say, "Well, if it does affect me, then it is someone else's role". Capacity is a real issue for us, as we have only one jointly FESA-funded appliance. Our whole method of getting water onto fires quickly would be undermined if we did not have the units or the coordination or communication. The system as it stands works well now, so we are wary of any changes that may impact on the performance of that system. I am concerned from a funding perspective. I am also concerned from a liability perspective. We have an obligation to the community. If there were a reduction in the number of units available, or in the number of registered units that we can control, there would be people out there who were unregistered and putting themselves at risk, and it could become a management nightmare because of the very nature of people and their desire to help and respond, or to exercise their right to protect their property. The issue of capacity also comes back to funding in that we have only just flagged applications for an extra 2.4 tankers in the region. However, we have already received verbals that because of the limited capacity of the ESL there is not a hope in hell. In the 2004-05 application process there was a bit of a replacement schedule. However, in the replacement schedule that local governments have been given for this year - and it has been flagged for the next two years - we note that things that were on there a couple of years ago are not there anymore. Also, we have been asked to agree or disagree only for this year; next year it will be up for discussion again. Therefore, we are concerned at the whole capital replacement program. We are also concerned about the risk to resource analysis. If the risk level changes because of the capacity or the number of units on the ground, then anyone who is involved in the management of it will have a huge resource problem, because they will not physically be able to get units to the area. It may take two years to fund it.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Are all those units funded by private property owners?

Mr Gash: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Including the radios?

Mr Gash: The three or four fire control officers have a radio and a call sign. Those radios are replaced from office bearer to officer bearer of each of the 12 brigades. Those radios have been provided from the ESL funding. However, the issue is that there are 150 monitors out there as well. It is fine to say we only have to replace 48 to 50 radios in Kojonup. However, the reality is that we are making obsolete 150, which is the heart of the quick response at the local area level.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Those 150 are funded by the private property owners?

Mr Gash: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: There is no replacement through the ESL?

Mr Gash: No.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So through the ESL you get \$40 000 to service 12 brigades. I understand that the equipment replacement program has now shot up from 12 years to 16 years. Is that right?

Mr Gash: We are probably not in a position to comment on that, because we had only one second-hand unit to start with, which was jointly funded, and we have not been told when that is due for replacement, so we do not know whether that has slipped from a 12-year to a 16-year time frame. We do know that of the single-axle trailers that we

have to take around some fast-fill pumps and those sorts of things, their replacement was initially planned for 2008-09, but they are not listed on the capital replacement for this year's ESL budget.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So for the Kojonup shire the ESL does not work?

Mr Gash: We will make the most of any resources that we get. However, like any local government we see the need for more, especially if there is any reduction in the current units or capacity that we have. It would be interesting - the shire has not performed this exercise - to see how many other shires have only one second-hand medium-level tanker across the entire shire.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So basically what the shire is saying to this committee is that any legislation needs to be flexible to include your scenario in Kojonup?

Mr Gash: Or at least for what we see as the grassland-type operations, in which there is that vast response that is privately owned, landowner based, because if the legislation does not recognise the incremental approach, or the ability to mesh all of these policies and procedures into the formal procedures, the risk is that volunteers or landowners will be technically operating outside the law and will not be covered by any insurance. Also, even worse, they may be putting themselves at risk because they may be isolated from the communication, which from my understanding was one of the essential outcomes of the Tenterden fire. There may be a risk that because of the current level of Kojonup, Kojonup would go backwards.

Mrs J. HUGHES: What is the average age of your volunteers?

Mr Gash: It would be over 50.

Mrs J. HUGHES: I am just wondering whether a lot of young ones are coming up.

Mr Gash: A lot of young ones are coming through. I suggest that the average age of farmers in Kojonup would be 48 or 50. However, we are blessed in the sense that there is a good pool of young farmers coming on. In fact, quite a lot of them are on the list of fire control officers, and they are happy to take their turn and do their training.

The CHAIRMAN: You have raised a number of issues in your submission that require further clarification. FESA is proposing that it be empowered to request the development of fire management plans for landowners when the land is CALM-managed land, plantation land, or land used for pastoral or grazier purposes. The fire management plan would be requested only if FESA considered this to be necessary to mitigate the risk of fire to life and property; for instance, in areas of fire risk, such as when CALM land abuts private land, or if a eucalypt plantation is located near a housing development. Do you have any comments on this proposal?

Mr Gash: Our plan is basically a local firebreak order. In terms of the ability to provide exemptions, farmland would come into one of the areas that you read out. We already have a requirement for 25-metre firebreaks around plantations and 20-metre firebreaks around housing. We have a strong regime of monitoring to ensure that there is adherence to the firebreak order, to the point that, like similar shires, we do aerial inspections of the entire district. Out of the shire's funding we pay for a plane. We inspect every single property for firebreaks around the houses.

[12.30 pm]

We recognise that we have not required firebreaks on every single paddock or anything like that; we take the approach of what is required for the strategic protection of, for instance, the town and determine whether further breaks are required a bit wider or around reserves etc. Our current local laws, our policies and our current firebreak orders give us the ability to vary that from year to year if required to respond to changing risk scenarios, such as this year when there was a much higher fuel loading because of the wet winter. While FESA has suggested that it wants the ability to request that it can examine the need for them, we are worried that it will provide an avenue through which people can just apply for an exemption. There may be a number of reasons that they may or may not be granted, but that cuts to the heart of the ability of local government to manage and respond to those local risks and really enforce what it needs to do to protect its community. Look, a lot of people will not like different firebreaks but they do it; they realise that it is for their protection. In Kojonup, because we do not do blanket perimeter breaks and we look around houses and strategic areas, it seems there is a good response and also a very good compliance rate to the point that this year I did not issue a single fine or infringement.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: You have a couple of reserves. Should CALM put firebreaks in there? Basically, we are asking whether the government should be bound by any legislation on crown land.

Mr Gash: The issue with reserves is one of conflicting legislation or operational requirements. For instance, if the local government has a reserve that is native bush and then there is a requirement to put a break around it, currently the farmers already try to protect their area by putting in perimeter breaks. If we then have to put a break inside that fence we are potentially taking down a lot of trees. That is where we would like further clarification: if there was a legislative change for this, would the bushfire legislation override all the Department of Environment provisions about the necessity for doing the permits, if they applied to government bodies, when the government bodies have already had to submit a five-year plan for their clearing permits? We submitted one seven months ago and we still have not heard

back. They say that a permit application takes six months. However, if you are actually trying to get a firebreak to respond to a risk and it needs to be done at a certain time, it may take eight months to get a permit to do it if you have to go through another body or legislation. The question for us is: what is the overriding legislative issue?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The point you make is well made. We know that if we are going to bind the Crown, then in the pastoral areas it will need to be flexible because that the cost of putting breaks in huge areas over thousands of kilometres would be ridiculous. In the absence of a break there needs to be some kind of approved fire management plan. If it is in the south west and if applies is a government instrumentality, it will have to get all the approvals through the EPA. We have heard the stories about farmers being prosecuted for felling one limb. The bureaucracy certainly seems to be charging in that direction, where they cannot touch anything that is green or whatever. There needs to be some commonsense in the legislation. Therefore, we cannot have a piece of legislation that refers to the Kojonup bushfire management act; obviously it will encompass a broader area of the state. If government departments can come up with a piece of legislation that gives you the flexibility to carry on what is a proven and successful way of controlling fires, that is the way we should go. I think that is it.

The CHAIRMAN: I just refer to the ESL again with regard to the SES. That is going away from the fire brigade. Currently ESL arrangements for local government mean that they must complete an ESL submission on behalf of the SES units in the local government area. Is it necessary for local government to perform this role, given that FESA ultimately decides on how much ESL grant funding is allocated to the SES unit? Would it be more appropriate for the SES unit to deal directly with FESA? Is the figure of \$40 000 that you mentioned earlier purely for fire and exclusive to SES, and do you get other grants for the SES?

Mr Gash: The shire does not control the SES ESL budget or applications here. That is controlled by FESA.

The CHAIRMAN: We have one about standpipes. I do not know whether that may apply.

Mr S.R. HILL: Fire hydrants.

Mr Gash: Because the town fire brigade comes under FESA, it is also centrally managed there. The implications are that we have to review hydrant locations and adequacy and, yes, we are aware of our obligation. However, we work closely with FESA on that issue.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Mr Chairman, before we go too far I would like to ask a question about question 6, to which you referred. You mentioned that at this particular time you do not put your ESL requirements in but that FESA does it for you. How much input does the local government have with FESA when that is being done?

Mr Gash: For the SES we do not have any input at the moment because of the change. With the bushfires, we put in our submissions and our bids. We get a full listing of all the requirements for replacement and operations from all 12 brigades. On issues where we need to ascertain whether certain things come within the ESL banner, we consult with our regional FESA representatives. In fact they offer a lot of constructive feedback. Indeed, it was the FESA reps who suggested that Kojonup would have a good case for an extra two tankers given the limited number that we currently have. However, again that has to go through the application process.

Mr Johnston: One thing I would add to that is that over the first couple of years of the ESL, basically we used the money buying nozzles, gloves and uniforms. So we could fill out our ESL application by getting that sort of equipment into the shire. You can only get so much of that equipment and we have all got it now. The logical next step is to start getting some big equipment. You just do not want to have a room full of gloves; there is no point doing that because you would be just wasting money. We are now at the point when we need to move to the next step and start getting some serious equipment into the district, but we cannot get it.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: With your equipment, does every volunteer have an orange suit?

Mr Johnston: Yes, we hope they have.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So you have done well from that point of view?

Mr Johnston: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: You refer to heavy duty. When you refer to medium, what is that?

Mr Johnston: Four-two.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you explain, because I do not know what a 4.2 is?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: How many heavy duties and how many mediums?

Mr Johnston: In the shire?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Yes. Please explain to the committee what heavy duty means.

Mr Johnston: What you have to understand is that this is privately owned equipment. A one-tonne utility for a start is legally allowed to have 600 litres of water on the back of it and the fire plant. A one-tonne utility is called a "fast attack" in the FESA legislation. Then we would go to an area where most of the farmers would have a light truck that

would hold about 2 500 litres of water, which they would call a 2.5. Then we would go to some guys who spend extraordinary amounts on their firefighting equipment - it might go up to 6 000 litres of water on the back of their trucks, and a very big pump. I mean, some of these guys out there - and this is privately funded - would have up to \$40 000 worth of equipment that they have funded themselves. All that privately owned equipment does not attract any ESL funding. They will not fund privately owned equipment. We are now in a situation where taxes are being raised against us in the shire each year and the obvious thing that we try to do is get our money back; get our money's worth out of our taxes. The only way we can really go now is to start applying for firefighting units - heavy units - to come into the district. We are looking at that by way of expanding our organisation, not contracting it. We hope to bring those units into the district and place them within the shire. There are people in the town who have volunteered to train to use those units, which means we actually expand the size of our organisation and not contract it. We are being proactive in that sense. You may also note when you read this little Kojonup firebreak order pamphlet that by way of forcing people to have their own firefighting unit, they cannot do certain operations in the Shire of Kojonup without having firefighting plant in their paddocks. In that way, we quietly force people to all have their own firefighting unit.

[12.40 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: That was a question I was going to ask. When you talk about firefighting units, are these dedicated firefighting units? Are they not water tankers?

Mr Johnston: No. You will have a bit of everything there. Some people have a slip-on unit that goes on the back of their utility that they take to a fire. The units you are talking about are a slightly heavier unit. I have an eight-tonne truck with 3 500 litres of water on its back. That is a permanent firefighting unit. There would be about 100 of those within the Shire of Kojonup.

Mr Magini: The majority of the heavy-duty units would be permanent firefighting units.

Mr Gash: Some are even ex-CALM equipment and some are ex-registered firefighting trucks from the eastern states that landowners have brought here to support them.

The CHAIRMAN: Are they maintaining those to a standard?

Mr Gash: The vehicle must meet road traffic authority standards - that is the minimum standard in that it has to be licensed and legal to go on the road.

The CHAIRMAN: From the point of view of fighting a fire, that is the mechanical maintenance of the vehicles. For the purpose of fighting the fire, do you have no method of checking maintenance on pumps and tanks etc?

Mr Gash: No, but everyone is fairly responsible here because they know -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: They have to work.

Mr Gash: Yes, it is a self-preservation.

The CHAIRMAN: I have a few other questions regarding planning. The current legislation gives FESA the power to enter and inspect and ask for the closure of a building if it is considered necessary to protect life and property. The Department of Housing and Works has recommended that this power be restricted to when danger is imminent, and at times when danger is not imminent, local government should be the body responsible for entering, inspecting and closing a building. Do you have a view on that aspect - namely, should FESA or the local authority be the body with that power?

Mr Gash: We have not considered that question in depth because our understanding is that it relates more to a commercial or multistorey-type development, which we do not have in Kojonup to that level. We would need further information, but we would be concerned if it were to restrict the ability for planning approvals and the day-to-day operation of local government. We understand that the WA Local Government Association is formulating a view on that aspect.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I have one question from left field: when you had the big wet with six to nine inches of rainfall last year, how did it impact on the stormwater and sewerage in Kojonup?

Mr Gash: There was some local flooding. We have looked at a flood mitigation strategy and will be submitting an application for funding very shortly. We have done a full drainage catchment survey within the townsite. So, we are looking at our flood mitigation strategies for a lot of local areas. From a planning perspective, we know where some of the issues are in rural areas because some bridges or culverts got washed away twice in the space of a month and a bit. From a planning perspective, we are actively looking at flood mitigation strategies; indeed, we are making an application in a round for funding on that matter.

Mr S.R. HILL: I have one more quick question for Mr Gash. This relates particularly to the development taking place through regional WA. I know that in my area, the City of Geraldton has problems with fire suppression equipment. Do you believe that responsibility should rest with local authorities or with FESA; that is, to say what should be put in place, particularly with a commercial development, showroom or something like that?

Mr Gash: I am probably not in a great position to answer that question because of the limited development applications within Kojonup at this stage. However, if it relates to planning processes that are controlled by local government, we would probably like to keep control of that so it is not bouncing from one bureaucracy to another. That is just from a perspective of keeping things progressing. As long as we know the standards required, then government can -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: One last question from me, when it comes to storms, tempests and floods, which is when you come in, presumably the management and control is with police.

Mr Gash: Yes, when we had the flood in April, it was the first time that our emergency operation centre was utilised - the reception area out there turns into that emergency operation centre. We had all the radio connections for fire, police, bushfire and the UHF, and the ambulance service can match in there as well. The police were the hazard management authority in that regard. The sergeant coordinated the emergency response. With all the planning that takes place with bushfires, it was ironic that the first use of the emergency operation centre was for a flood! It worked well and there was good feedback about its utilisation. Like any emergency response, we had a good debriefing and learned a lot from it.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: How did the police get around in their super pursuit cars in the floods?

Mr Johnston: Actually the bush fire association took on that role because we have the communication within the shire. We took on the role of getting around out there and finding out which bridges had gone and which roads were open and which roads were not open. The bush fire association took on burying all the stock lost. We lost nearly 100 000 sheep that night. I think Steve and I took on the task of burying all the stock lost. Steve and I took on the role of coordinating. The volunteer bush fire association got out and collected all the sheep and got them buried.

Mr Magini: You took on more of the coordinating role - I was busy burying some of my own sheep!

Mr Johnston: So the bush fire association in a sense takes on the State Emergency Service role because there is no SES in Kojonup. The nearest one is in Gnowangerup. We have a dual purpose. Children are sometimes lost in the district. We end up assisting police in using our network to coordinate the search for lost children and such things. We end up wearing a few hats. We are on duty all the time.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: One last question, even though I said my earlier one was the last. How much would the UHF radio have cost - that is, the one that will be obsolete?

Mr Gash: They are above \$1 000. You have to declare them as capital equipment over \$1 000, so I would imagine they are up to \$1 200 or \$1 300.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: So were there 120 of them or fewer?

Mr Gash: From a monitoring perspective, there are different levels. The monitors we had quoted only recently were indicatively \$240 or \$300.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: How many of them would there be?

Mr Gash: There are about 150 of the monitors, and about 50 of the brigade radios that are utilised within vehicles.

Mr Johnston: The radio changeover is a fait accompli - it is done and dusted. We will have a new radio system, and that is it.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Will it be one for one?

Mr Johnston: We have no idea yet.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming in. Do you have any final comments?

Mr Gash: Again, I thank the committee members for their interest in coming to Kojonup, and hopefully as you drive to Albany, you will look at the lovely scenery and reflect on how it is different from many of the forest-type areas and imagine a response in which landowners would be able to respond to a 360-degree feedback. Again, it supports our view that one size does not fit all and we would be in favour of any legislation that actually supports and maintains our current operation within the required framework; it is that flexibility that we seek.

The CHAIRMAN: I thank all three of you for coming in and giving the committee the benefit of your knowledge. I will go through the formalities. Thank you 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, not facts. New material cannot be introduced and sensitive evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on any point, 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. Thank you very much.

Hearing concluded at 12.50 pm
