

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

INQUIRY INTO FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT GERALDTON
THURSDAY, 1 JUNE 2006**

SESSION THREE

Members

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)
Mr M.J. Cowper (Deputy Chairman)
Mr S.R. Hill
Ms K. Hodson-Thomas
Mrs J. Hughes**

Hearing commenced at 11.13 am**JONES, MR MARK EDWARD****Unit Manager, Geraldton-Greenough State Emergency Service, examined:****CHADWICK, MR CRAIG PETER****Unit Manager, Morawa State Emergency Service, examined:**

Mr M.J. COWPER: I welcome Mr Jones and Mr Chadwick. 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 on the witness form? Do you understand the notes attached to it? Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

Mr Jones: Yes.

Mr Chadwick: Yes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Thank you for your attendance today. Mr Jones, when was your SES unit established, how many members do you have and what role do you play? Can you give us an overview of your operations in the district?

Mr Jones: I am not quite sure of the exact date of the start of the SES in Geraldton. I think it was in the late 1970s. We were incorporated in 1992. At the present time we have about 25 active members. It ranges between that and about 32. The main things we help with are storm damage, flooding, and helping police with searches. We also do a little bit of juggling people for the fire department when it has to have people running here and there.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Mr Chadwick?

Mr Chadwick: We are a highly transient unit. The exact time it was formed is pretty well unknown these days because there have been a number of changes of location. We have been going for in excess of 20 years and, like a lot of small country units, we just came into being rather than being formed. We just happened. Our primary role is road accident rescue. We are involved a lot in searches in our area and across the region; storm damage; and one of the main roles is community education, again mostly with storm damage.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I know some units have specialties; some down south have dog handlers and some have field catering abilities. Is there any specific capacity within your units?

Mr Jones: We have cliff rescue; we also have drop masters and air observers. They are the main ones.

Mr Chadwick: Our specialist roles are road accident rescue, and we also have trained air observers as a secondary unit. Because of our location and the size of our town, our unit tends to support a lot of the other mid-west units. We move all over the mid-west. We have been as far north as Carnarvon, out to Meekatharra, and quite often over here in Geraldton-Greenough supporting the units here.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How many units are there in the mid-west?

Mr Jones: Ten, counting Exmouth, and an operational team at regional HQ.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Some of the events you have had recently include a land search on the other side of Meekatharra? Were you involved in that one?

Mr Jones: Yes.

Mr Chadwick: Yes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How did that pan out? Can you give us some background on that?

[11.20 am]

Mr Jones: We got the call and went out as air observers. Meekatharra was already out there. We did quite a few runs searching before they found a missing person. With a lot of the searches, because we have quite a few aircraft we go out doing the aerial search while the closest unit does the ground search. Sometimes we chuck our swags in and stay out on the stations until the job is finished.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The other big event, of course, was the flood.

Mr Chadwick: I think most of the units in the region ended up at Kalbarri or north of Kalbarri for some time over about a three-day period.

Mr Jones: We had the Greenough one to start with. Walkaway was a major concern and the levee bank, which ended up breaking but it relieved a lot of pressure on Walkaway, because with the high tide the water could not get out so it spread over a bit of land but did not create a major problem. Apart from that, Walkaway got cut off but the town helped itself by putting up a nice levee bank, which the local government is considering doing properly off private land. It was done on privately owned land by private contractors. Then we had the one at Kalbarri, the Murchison. We had to do quite a bit of flying and keep checking the way the water was coming because at one stage it was 45 kilometres wide and it narrowed down into the gorges that go into Kalbarri, which brought up the height. There were a few stations where the water was lapping underneath the floorboards. It did not quite go into the houses but there was one that went about 18 inches through the house, and he had had levee banks and everything for about 10 years. We went up and pumped out his little dam, so that he could get back into his house. Everyone worked very well together. One thing about the units around here, we all consider ourselves as virtually one unit although we are all separate. We all work very well together. It is great. If you want a hand, it is only two hours away, or an hour and a half.

Mr Chadwick: We also do a lot of training together, which is difficult -

Mrs J. HUGHES: Because of the distance?

Mr Chadwick: Exmouth is now out of our region. We are now the mid-west Gascoyne, and Exmouth has gone into the Pilbara region. In the past we have been as far north as Exmouth, down to Eneabba, and out to Wiluna at one stage. The region is slightly smaller but there is a lot of time distance between us. We do quite a bit of regional training together.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Currently the ESL process calls for local government to complete an ESL grants scheme application for SES unit funding. The ESL grants scheme committee must then approve or reject applications for funding. If the committee approves the amount requested, the funding is provided to local government, which then forwards it to the SES units. FESA has recommended that the local government be taken out of the ESL application process and the SES units deal directly with FESA in relation to the ESL funding; that is, the SES unit would advise FESA directly of its funding requirements. Do you have any comment in relation to that process?

Mr Jones: Personally, at this stage I would like to see it stay with the local government. I do not have a great deal to do with the ESL. There are certain reasons for that but I have a good treasurer

and others in my unit who help me out on that side of it. I would just like to see it stay with local government. Craig probably has more idea about ESL than I have.

Mr Chadwick: We talked at length about this. My answer to this question would have been completely different four years ago because we had a horrendous local government experience dealing with the first three years of ESL. We had a very uncooperative local government who made it very difficult for us to get any money whatsoever and we did not see a lot of change. We then had a change in CEO. In the Morawa area we have had a complete 180 degree turnaround and we now have a fantastic relationship with our local government. Having spoken to a lot of units about this issue, I think you would probably get 50-50 answers. It depends on how good the relationship is between the local unit and the local government. The only issue I have come across with it going to FESA comes down to how much responsibility that would put onto the local managers - whether we would have to have the money in our local accounts, be audited, and do all the accounting when all of us hold down other jobs and all of us do this as volunteers. At the moment we have very good relationships; our local government handles all the money and if there are any auditing requirements they are the ones who are audited. We both work through all the books with our local governments, so that works very well. For the Geraldton unit it would probably not make much difference if it went to FESA because the building is 200 metres down the road. For a unit like mine and, even worse, units like Meekatharra, we cannot just duck into the local FESA office and get an order form. We have to deal with everything by telephone. For the more remote units, the only way I could see it working if we took it away from local governments would be to have the units do all the finances themselves. That then puts a huge burden on those units. A lot of us see the solution as simply strengthening some of the requirements of local governments. I do not know if they can be forced to cooperate, but in some cases that is what is needed for some units. There are still units with very poor relationships with their local governments.

Mrs J. HUGHES: So you have found that local government's reaction to funding can be as simple as a CEO change?

Mr Chadwick: Absolutely.

Mrs J. HUGHES: That leaves you in a fairly vulnerable position.

Mr Chadwick: If the CEO changed and decided he did not like emergency services, as we basically had with our first CEO, yes, we could go back to the bad relationship we had in the past.

Mrs J. HUGHES: At the moment you report your requirements or needs for your units through the local government?

Mr Chadwick: Yes.

Mrs J. HUGHES: That way local government is informed of what its emergency capacity is as well?

Mr Chadwick: Absolutely. They are part of the local emergency management committee. I usually deal with the deputy CEO of our local government. He has been designated as the contact person for the emergency services, both myself and the Fire and Rescue Service. If we want anything, we go to that person.

Mrs J. HUGHES: If it happened that FESA bypassed local government, is it your view that local government should be informed of any changes to equipment?

Mr Chadwick: Yes. The problem with bypassing local governments is that - especially with the SES - they have always taken responsibility for the bush fire brigades, because in the past they always funded the bush fire brigades. A lot of local governments have not taken responsibility for their SES units and, as was the case with ours, did not actually see the need. They did not believe we did anything because they did not know enough about us; they were not involved with us. From

our point of view, it has taken a while to get there, but at least our local government is aware that we exist now and is very supportive of us. They realise it is one of the roles we have.

Mrs J. HUGHES: You mentioned that some of the other units were not quite as fortunate.

Mr Chadwick: There are still units that struggle with local governments, usually with the handling of the money and how it is to be done - whether they are going to use order forms - or just being able to get hold of people. Local governments are busy as well. The main issue with our local government was the fact that it was not funded an additional staff person to deal with all this extra administration. That was the way they saw it. There could be an easy way to resolve it - use some ESL funding to fund an emergency services clerical officer or administrator for each local government. There are some ways of looking at these things and resolving the problems.

[11.30 am]

Mr M.J. COWPER: My next question pertains to attracting volunteers. I note from your respective shirts that one has the traditional SES badge and the other, worn by Mr Chadwick, is the more updated version. The question relates to a proposal that FESA be re-established as a department of emergency services. This means the removal of "fire" from the operations name. FESA's argument is that this removal would appropriately reflect what volunteers do. There is obviously some resistance to that from the firefighters. However, the SES has, to my knowledge, been a transitional group. At one stage it was called "civil defence" and then it came under the police for a time, and now it is under FESA. It has been a bit of a journey organisation and has struggled with an identity of its own in the community. I would like you to comment on your views and those of the volunteers, and how those changes may impact on trying to attract people to your organisation and keep them.

Mr Jones: All emergency services in the small towns are having a great deal of trouble attracting and keeping volunteers. The ambulance, fire brigade and us are the main ones. We have a great deal of trouble. Our unit used to have about 20 to 30 men and two or three women but for some unknown reason that has changed. We have 20 women and about five men. I am not sure why people will not join and stay. Since it changed to FESA, we are just about non-existent. Everyone sees "Fire" in front of FESA and they all think we fight fires because we wear the orange uniform. It is so close to the fire's yellow that they naturally presume that we also get paid. Even though there are a lot of volunteer firefighters, just because it has the "Fire" in front of it we seem to have lost what little identity we had. I do not think the fire brigades themselves will ever have that problem because they are in the spotlight all the time. They have a great deal more finance than we do; they have always been publicised. We have great respect for the fire's, but we seem to be pushed aside for some reason.

Our biggest problem with getting and keeping volunteers is that we do not really have enough continuous activity or emergencies to keep everyone interested. Once people get trained in all their things, they get bored, especially the people who are more intelligent or find things easier than some others. When they are trained, they get bored and they move on and find something else that has more activity all the time. When you are training every week or every fortnight and nothing ever happens, it does get a bit frustrating.

Mr Chadwick: Not that we want any more emergencies.

Mr Jones: No, we do not want the emergencies, but trying to keep people interested -

Mr M.J. COWPER: Challenged.

Mr Jones: Yes. It is very hard.

Mr Chadwick: As far as the whole FESA issue goes, both of us are friends with most of the fire brigade staff in town as well as a lot of the FESA volunteers and SES volunteers. It has been a bugbear of SES since FESA came into being, but we are all emergency services. I know our

volunteer associations very much support this and that is because it has come up from the volunteers. I am the association rep in the region and the consultative rep as well. We have lost our ability. We have strange situations in our towns where as soon as you say that you are with SES the response is, "Oh, that's FESA, so you fight fires". The Volunteer Marine Rescue Service has exactly the same identity crisis with coming under FESA. We are all emergency services. The fire brigades will never lose their identity. Basically they are taking the argument we have used to take "fire" out and turned their back on us to keep "fire" in. They are in the public eye all the time. I bet they wish they were not; they probably wish they had the problem of losing members through boredom. We are an insurance policy and we need to be out there. At the moment it is a bugbear.

I do not think we lose any members now because of FESA, but certainly when we first converted to FESA we lost a lot of members who were just angry. We lost a lot of experience. Geraldton probably lost 20 to 25 members in the space of six months, each with upwards of 15 to 20 years' experience, because they perceived that SES was going to go down the tube. The creation of FESA units, where they no longer have a fire or SES identity, has added to people's perceptions. That has probably stopped now, but certainly we lost a lot of very valuable skills in the regions in the first six to 12 months.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Did you get any of them back after things settled down?

Mr Jones: Very few.

Mr Chadwick: We got none. Basically we turned over an entire unit. I had been in the unit for 12 months when the unit manager said, "By the way, I'm leaving in a month's time and you're unit manager." There was one person who had been in the unit longer than me at that stage and he and I were running the unit. We have got none of that experience back; we had to build from scratch again. The majority of them left because they did not like the way things were going. A lot of our members had been in civil defence and had built it up. They had seen it build up to SES and they just said, "No, we are not doing it again. If they are going to destroy it, we will get out." To a man, they all have. I say "to a man" because that unit was all men. My wife was the first woman member of our unit and now we are about 50-50, the same as Geraldton. From our point of view a lot of that is that the blokes are working away now. The mining industry is impacting even on emergency services because they are all leaving town to work away.

Mr M.J. COWPER: When the State Emergency Services' headquarters was at Belmont, at the bunker, did you feel as though you had a parent organisation in Perth, and now that it is FESA, do you feel it has kind of been caught up in the wash?

Mr Chadwick: From the discussion I have had over the past three years as the representative, I do not think anybody in this region would now say that the management structure of FESA itself is a bad thing. The upper end part of it is bringing all the emergency services together and trying to get some compatibility of equipment and radio services - all the reasons for which it was originally done, very little of which has actually happened, by the way, although some of it is still in the pipeline. Not too many volunteers here will say it is a bad thing. Where we feel that things have gone wrong is when you get to the regional level. We had quite a bit of discussion on this subject. We have a district manager and above that is a regional director, because there are several districts in this region. Anything above a district manager is administrative. Basically they are people who should be making things happen for the whole organisation, making sure that we all get the same level of equipment, the same level of response to maintenance, the same upgrading of buildings and things like that. Anything from there down is operational.

The problem we have in this region now, which is very much causing problems among volunteers and the staff - I said we were friends with most of the staff - is that that generic structure is being pushed onto what we consider to be operational people. They do not want it as a staff; we do not want it as volunteers. I know as a member of the community that it never went to the volunteer consultative committee. We were told about it after it was implemented. There were two or three

very angry meetings when we found out about it. We believe the main support we get as a large region is from our regional office here. We are one of the few regions that still have a training officer. The operational training officer position has been done away with in all bar two country regions, although there are a couple of in Perth who are operational training officers. That has forced the whole training burden onto the volunteers. We have lots of volunteers who like to train other volunteers but they do not have the time to set up the courses, get the equipment ready and manage the courses. We are very lucky in this region that we still have an OTO who has that role and gets the courses ready so that we as volunteers - Mark and I are both involved in training in the region - can say, yes, we are giving these lessons on these days to these people and we can rock up and do it. I know lots of other regions that no longer have that, and the volunteers and the unit managers are having to take on the role of preparing the courses and doing the training. Our people train for hundreds of different skills.

[11.40 am]

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: So are they not sending anybody out to do that from head office - a roaming training officer? Would that work?

Mr Chadwick: Ultimately, no, because you are dealing with volunteers; you are dealing with people who at the drop of a hat can say, "No, I'm not part of this organisation any more." They do not have to rely on it to feed their kids. Ultimately, if the volunteers do not trust the people they are working with and do not have some level of respect and knowledge of what they can do, they just will not work for them.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: So you think that a training officer should be somebody who is a local identity, has worked with the local community and has knowledge and expertise in that area?

Mr Chadwick: Going back seven years, it is the one part of the implementation of FESA that pretty well every volunteer I have spoken to would fight against and would like reversed. Above district manager level it is a good idea to bring it all together. Once you get into the operational side of things - we are in a situation now where the position of area manager has been created and a fire brigade person is going to become our area manager. We both like and respect the man, but if he starts telling us how to run a search, we will ignore him, because he has no knowledge whatsoever and both of us are far more qualified in search than he is. If our regional manager or our operational training officer gave us advice on a search, we would take it, because we know their level of expertise and we know what they are capable of. We know they are 15-year and 17-year volunteers who have come up through the ranks, learnt the same skills that we learnt and are now simply being paid by the organisation. That is one of the ways of keeping good volunteers, by showing them that the people they are working with used to be volunteers and know the organisation inside out.

We are a very transient region. We have a lot of people come and go. Morawa's member list has sat between 10 and 12 for probably the last 20 years, but it has not been the same 10 or 12 people. Even over the past five years there have probably been 25 or 30 people in the unit and about four have been there all the time and the rest change every couple of years. There needs to be that level of respect, especially in isolated regions. Whoever wins those positions - and we are not supporting any particular person - becomes very much a part of the community. People have to respect the fact that those people know the training and know what they are trying to tell you.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Mr Chadwick, you have just touched on the negative impact on emergency services. Do you have any views on how you could improve emergency services in your local community - and, broadly, in the whole state?

Mr Chadwick: That is something else we talked about. There are probably two main issues: one is stop fiddling with the structure below our regional managers. Cauterise that. SES personnel should be directing SES personnel what to do; fire brigade directing fire brigade; volunteer marine

rescue directing volunteer marine rescue. The volunteers and the staff see that as important. The other part is that because the SES was underfunded for so long, a lot of units are struggling to get funding through the ESL to upgrade their equipment quickly enough. Do not get me wrong. We have both benefited through having funding. We had a very unsupportive shire. Geraldton used to get some shire funding.

Mr Jones: We used to get funding off the Geraldton and Greenough shires; Geraldton gave the major part of it and Greenough contributed too.

Mr Chadwick: Whereas the Morawa unit got absolutely no funding from its shire. We fundraised for everything we have got. We did it ourselves. We are all getting funding under the ESL but because there were so many years of no money, we all have a lot of very old equipment. I know our unit's road accident rescue equipment - it is the same across SES. Fire and Rescue has had a continual maintenance program. It has annual maintenance schedules, people come to the unit and maintain the equipment. That has never happened with SES. Most of our equipment is over 10 years old. It has a lifespan of 10 years. We have never had the same standard of service with people coming out to service our equipment. That has only just been created within the last three months. That is through pushing at the consultative committee level to make it happen. To the best of my knowledge we are still not on a program to replace our 10 to 12-year-old equipment. We are one of the lucky units. We have a new building, which came about before ESL came in. We fought and kicked and screamed and made enough noise and got a new building. Units like Geraldton and Meekatharra in this region, Eneabba, have barely adequate accommodation for the SES unit. A lot of SES units are in very old sub-standard buildings. In Geraldton we were in sub-standard buildings and when they came up for re-lease, the SES was told the leases would not be renewed and they were put in even more sub-standard buildings. Mark can tell that story.

Mr Jones: We went to one of the old building company sheds, which was a mechanics workshop, and it had about 30 years of grease and oil on the floor. With our cliff rescue gear and ropes from general rescue, the raw safety system, we could not take them out of a trailer or cupboard because if they were dropped on the ground they became virtually useless. There was a danger of the acids and oils eating the ropes. You might have to go over a cliff or be tied onto a double-storey building or something. The building leaked very badly. The building has been pulled down now but we shifted to another place. All the places we have been to, for emergency services, especially now we have had a tsunami, are very vulnerable. In a tsunami we would lose all our emergency services straight off, even the police station and the fire station. They told us about three years ago that we were going to move a little bit further out of town and into co-location with the volunteer fire brigade. There has been a bit of an upset with that apparently. I have heard a rumour that there is a possibility it might still happen and we might have a building each. It has gone from saying it would be ready in three years to saying it could be another three to five years. We are just working out of an old building which is not really satisfactory. It has two toilets, no showers, no real training area and it is very low-lying as far as the ocean is concerned. With the possibility of cyclones coming down here and causing bad storm surges it will be bad enough that the whole of Geraldton will go without losing the police station, the fire station and the emergency services.

[11.50 am]

Mrs J. HUGHES: For the sake of clarity, was this all under the direction of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority or local government?

Mr Jones: We were located to a building at the price that we could afford.

Mr Chadwick: We are co-located with the bush fire brigade at Morawa. The co-location building was built seven years ago, just prior to the introduction of the emergency services levy. Probably one of the few good examples of the fire and rescue services, the bush fire brigade, FESA, SES and local government all working together was when that building was provided, but it was mostly pushed by our local government.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Who instigated the original decision to rehouse you?

Mr Chadwick: The decision not to re-lease Place Road was made by FESA. The Geraldton unit was split. A bit was located in the Bill Sewell Complex.

Mr Jones: Yes. Our headquarters were in the old maximum-security prison. I think it was the former Department of Land Administration that owned the building and we leased it from the department at a peppercorn lease. However, the department would not replace the roof. The roof leaked so badly that the ceiling, which was made of concrete, rotted and became dangerous. Someone got a shock one night turning on the lights. It was a fantastic building because it was reinforced so that the prisoners could not escape. It was just the best building that we could get. If it had had a roof put on it straightaway, we would probably still be in there.

Mrs J. HUGHES: It was a forced move.

Mr Chadwick: That was a forced move because the managing agent refused to do the maintenance. The Place Road shed was actually owned by FESA.

Mr Jones: All the vehicles were located at Place Road shed.

Mr Chadwick: That was one of the few locations that was actually owned or leased by FESA.

Mr Jones: I think it was leased from the railways.

Mr Chadwick: We paid only a peppercorn rent. For whatever reason, local government decided to not continue the lease, which forced us to move the equipment.

Mr Jones: It is very difficult to have all the equipment and vehicles in one place and the emergency operating centre about three to five kilometres away.

Mr Chadwick: The reason I laughed is that at the last course we did at Geraldton in the middle of winter, we had five eskies collecting the water that was dripping from the roof.

Mr Jones: It ruined all the carpets.

Mr M.J. COWPER: In your experience, has the amount of time spent filling out paperwork become an impost on the operations? Has this become a process-driven situation whereby the organisation has accountabilities as a result of the ESL? Most people become volunteers to fight fires or to help people who are involved in a car crash. A full-time administration officer is needed.

Mr Chadwick: We struggle with that. The reality is that we will just get a volunteer to do the administrative work. That is something that the unit manager must take on. Apart from having to do the budget for the ESL once a year, which could take a month or so while we sort out the next year's budget, it has not driven a lot more paperwork, because the current paperwork for purchasing is for local purchase orders with the shire. I am used to filling out those forms as part of my work anyway. Instead of using money, we are using purchase orders now. Some of the other paperwork seems to have increased. We are constantly conducting surveys to gauge how people feel about FESA and that sort of thing. That has certainly increased. There is obviously a perception from the upper management that not everything is right, because we are constantly being asked how we feel about things. I do not know how Mark handles that in his unit, but certainly when I give that sort of thing to my members, I make that is very clear to the volunteers that they can drop it in the bin if they wish, rather than fill it out. There is a certain amount of paperwork which the organisation may consider is essential but which we do not.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Have you been asked to name who you are in those surveys?

Mr Chadwick: Generally, the few that we have received can be done anonymously. We took back a couple of the surveys to Phil Marshall when he was the executive director of the SES. That is one of the positions that we have lost. We do not feel as if anyone is in charge of SES anymore. Now that it is an umbrella organisation, we do not have a single person we can go to with complaints. A couple of those surveys were recalled because they were basically sent by overzealous human

resources people who were treating us as though we were employees. They were imposing a heavy workload, which they were told to stop doing. For the past 18 months or so we have not received any nonsense surveys, which is good.

Mr Jones: There is a lot of paperwork and reading for managers to do. My colleague here is very good at reading because he does it all the time, but I struggle with it. If I need help, my members come along and either read it for me or write out things for me because I am not very good at writing things. If I want something translated, I just write it down and my members are only too willing to help. We cannot get someone to do just that type of work; they would rather be out in the field, and so would I, but they put this uniform on me to keep me out of the field.

Mr M.J. COWPER: They might be sending you a message.

Mr Chadwick: He loves it! As a region, we have done a few things off our own bat. There seem to be a lot of order forms and forms for government contracts. A couple of us actually understand computers and are computer literate. We have created copies of the forms FESA sends us and have applied various formulas to them rather than wait for FESA to make electronic copies of them for us. We have sent the forms to all the units, which has started to relieve some of the workload. The only issue I have with the amount of paperwork we receive from FESA is that despite supposedly being in the electronic age, FESA seems to be very paper driven. We all have access an e-mail system; some people do not like it very much, but they will get used to it. We tend to get receive an e-mail from FESA and then a fax and a week later we will also receive it in the form of a letter. FESA is responsible for killing a few forests. FESA does not seem to have the necessary staff or the desire to create the forms electronically so that people can get onto a computer screen and type things out. Literacy is an issue for a lot of members of the SES. Although many of these people are dedicated, it does not necessarily mean they are educated.

Mrs J. HUGHES: Would the training of SES members in that field be helpful, even to promote the simpler mechanisms?

Mr Chadwick: It is not so much the members; the organisation must use those simpler mechanisms first. Currently everything that comes out is a paper wall. We have order forms for uniforms, personal protective equipment and things like that. They all come out in paper form and involve working out the goods and services tax and things like that. It took me two hours one Saturday to create electronic forms for the two main order forms that we use annually and to then e-mail them to the other units in the region. I created the electronic forms for myself because I was sick of filling out the paperwork. I do that at work for eight hours a day, five days a week.

[12.00 Noon]

Mr M.J. COWPER: What is the situation with volunteers, particularly those who are self-employed and who may be called out into the field for a lengthy period? I know from experience that some people who work for government departments or big companies are fortunate enough to be covered.

Mr Chadwick: It is an issue. We have lost members over it. We lost two members in Morawa specifically because we went through a period of having a number of callouts. We are a very low-response unit. We do a lot of training and we are ready in case things go wrong. We went through a period in which we responded to situations in Yalgoo, Meekatharra and Geraldton. For volunteers who are self-employed, not earning money because they are responding to a situation can mean the difference between feeding or not feeding their kids.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Is there scope for some sort of acknowledgement, such as an honorarium or some sort of tax relief, to assist volunteers?

Mr Chadwick: That has been talked about for a number of years now. I doubt you would find a volunteer who thinks that that is a bad idea. There was discussion at one stage about setting up a system similar to the Army Reserve service. I do not know whether the state can afford that.

Mr M.J. COWPER: That would be a federal issue.

Mr Chadwick: You are certainly not going to get people disagreeing.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Minister Roberts announced in the house some time ago that volunteers will receive a one-off payment of \$400 a year. It would be interesting to follow that one through. You referred to cross-training with other agencies and said that you have a close relationship with the police.

Mr Chadwick: It probably varies from town to town and from copper to copper. As new police move into a town, we find that some are more active than others in emergency services.

Mr M.J. COWPER: From my personal experience, I know that there were problems about who would do the road rescues. I heard you say that you have the capacity to use the jaws of life.

Mr Chadwick: We do not have that issue in our region because there is not a huge response. Further, our fire and rescue unit has grown out of the bush fire brigade. Traditionally the SES in our region has always had the role. We have worked with Dalwallinu Fire and Rescue in a support role with one major crash in the past two years. If anything, when we rocked up there was relief on their faces because someone else had turned up. At the bottom-tier level, most volunteers do not care less what uniform you are wearing so long as you turn up and give them a hand. In our region, until you get out to Mullewa and up this way, basically between here and Moora the SES units and the coastal districts are responsible for road accident rescue. I know Eneabba Coastal Districts works a lot with Dongara Fire and Rescue Service on the Brand Highway. Again, there does not seem to be a huge issue - whoever rocks up first does the job.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I thank you for your time today. Do you wish to raise an issue that has not been covered?

Mr Jones: I think most issues have already been covered.

Mr Chadwick: The main issue from my point of view is that, at a representative level for the region, despite whatever changes result from this review, there must be consultation with our consultative committee. There is not much point in having one if it is bypassed when major decisions are made, which is what has happened over the past five to six years. That committee is struggling with its identity. It is trying to get FESA, or whatever organisation ends up coming out of this, to understand that it exists for a reason. It represents the volunteers. If you do not give the volunteers a say, you will lose them. The state cannot afford to pay people to do what we do.

Mrs J. Hughes: God forbid we lose you.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Is there anything else you would like to add, Mr Jones?

Mr Jones: No, I think that is all, thank you.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Thank you very much for appearing before the committee. Your contribution to the committee's inquiry is valued. A transcript of this 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 within 10 days of receipt, it will be deemed to be correct. Once again, thank you for coming in today.

Hearing concluded at 12.05 pm
