

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS RELATING TO THE PORTFOLIO OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Questions asked by the Hon Ian Cohen MLC

QUESTION:

How many bushfires occurred last year?

How many of the fires resulted from hazard reduction burns?

ANSWER:

There were 4,453 bush fires in 2007/08.

139 resulted from escaped hazard reduction burns.

QUESTION:

Would you investigate the clearance of land under the guise of fire mitigation to maximise development on the North Coast?

ANSWER:

In line with my undertaking during estimates hearings, if you have any examples of this occurring I will have them investigated.

QUESTION:

Has there been any development in Northern NSW of prescription for rainforest hazard reduction strategies being different to dry forests in other parts of the State?

ANSWER:

Most hazard reduction burning in NSW is carried out under an approval provided by the Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code. Under the Code no burning is permitted for rainforest. In some cases where the majority of the burn contains dry sclerophyll forest a burn may proceed with a prescription that the potential for burning rainforest is minimised. The Code allows for variations to the fire intervals if identified in the Bush Fire Risk Management Plan. These are currently being reviewed and may vary for northern NSW.

QUESTION:

In terms of hazardous materials incidents, it is noted that the New South Wales Fire Brigades responded to some 12,700 hazardous materials incidents in 2007-08. Would it be possible to provide information to the Committee, or take the question on notice and inform the Committee, on the types of hazardous materials to which the New South Wales Fire Brigades have responded, the location of incidents, and the data on any hazardous material that each emergency unit responded to?

ANSWER:

In 2007/08 the NSWFB responded to 11,654 calls related to hazardous conditions. These included 4,689 defined as hazardous materials incidents during 2007-08.

Hazardous materials incidents are a subset of hazardous conditions. Hazardous conditions include minor petrol spills less than 200 litres, power lines down, arcing from electrical equipment incidents, and aircraft incidents.

Below is a break down of the 4,689 hazardous materials incidents by classification under the dangerous goods categories.

Hazardous Materials Incident Category	Number of Incidents
Explosives	8
Gasses Flammable, non flammable, Toxic, Oxidizing	350
Flammable Liquids	795
Flammable Solids Substances likely to spontaneously combust Emit flammable gas when contact with water	12
Oxidizing agents, Organic Peroxides	23
Toxic and Infections Substances	82
Radioactive Material	0
Corrosive Substance	63
Miscellaneous	104
Hazard not identified or undetermined	3252
	4689

Below is a breakdown of hazardous materials incidents by local government area 2007-08:

Local Government Area	Number of hazardous materials incidents
Albury	37
Armidale Dumaresq	18
Ashfield	29
Auburn	63
Ballina	29
Bankstown	109
Bathurst Regional	32
Baulkham Hills	68
Bega Valley	14
Bellingen	8
Blacktown	216
Bland	11
Blayney	2
Blue Mountains	115
Bogan	1
Bombala	2
Botany Bay	47
Bourke	2
Broken Hill	12
Burwood	28
Byron	17

Local Government Area	Number of hazardous materials incidents
Cabonne	1
Camden	23
Campbelltown	117
Canada Bay	36
Canterbury	74
Cessnock	43
Clarence Valley	20
Cobar	7
Coffs Harbour	31
Cooma-Monaro	15
Coonamble	2
Cootamundra	10
Corowa Shire	18
Cowra	11
Deniliquin	4
Dubbo	55
Dungog	1
Eurobodalla	19
Fairfield	111
Forbes	2
Gilgandra	3
Glen Innes Severn	7
Gloucester	5
Gosford	142
Goulburn Mulwaree	14
Great Lakes	9
Greater Hume Shire	3
Greater Taree	27
Griffith	9
Gundagai	1
Gunnedah	7
Gwydir	2
Hawkesbury	25
Holroyd	61
Hornsby	104
Hunters Hill	11
Hurstville	37
Inverell	11
Junee	4
Kempsey	16
Kiama	6
Kogarah	38
Ku-ring-gai	40
Kyogle	2
Lachlan	4
Lake Macquarie	116
Lane Cove	34
Leeton	4
Leichhardt	38
Lismore	35
Lithgow	16
Liverpool	108

Local Government Area	Number of hazardous materials incidents
Liverpool Plains	2
Lockhart	2
Maitland	43
Manly	33
Marrickville	59
Mid-Western Regional	23
Moree Plains	21
Mosman	22
Murray	1
Muswellbrook	11
Nambucca	21
Narrabri	10
Narrandera	2
Narromine	13
Newcastle	137
North Sydney	36
Oberon	2
Orange	23
Palerang	1
Parkes	19
Parramatta	111
Penrith	129
Pittwater	40
Port Macquarie-Hastings	25
Port Stephens	34
Queanbeyan	30
Randwick	66
Richmond Valley	11
Rockdale	43
Ryde	69
Shellharbour	32
Shoalhaven	64
Singleton	13
Snowy River	16
Strathfield	39
Sutherland Shire	110
Sydney	221
Tamworth Regional	39
Temora	2
Tenterfield	1
Tumbarumba	1
Tumut Shire	6
Tweed	92
Unincorporated NSW	1
Upper Hunter Shire	12
Upper Lachlan Shire	5
Wagga Wagga	55
Wakool	1
Walcha	2
Walgett	3
Warringah	83
Warrumbungle Shire	2

Local Government Area	Number of hazardous materials incidents
Waverley	49
Weddin	1
Wellington	5
Wentworth	1
Willoughby	41
Wingecarribee	33
Wollondilly	17
Wollongong	163
Woollahra	33
Wyong	97
Yass Valley	5
Young	6
Total:	4689

QUESTION:

What strategies has the Office of Emergency Services developed in response to the national strategy for emergency management in remote indigenous communities as outlined in the “Keeping our Mob Safe” paper?

ANSWER:

The State Emergency Management Committee has established a Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of the National Remote Indigenous Communities Emergency Management Strategy. This Steering Committee is chaired by the Chair of the State Emergency Management Committee and includes members of NSW Police, NSW Health, NSW Fire Brigades, Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Department of Community Services, Department of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Aboriginal Affairs and NSW Lands Council.

The seven national priorities are listed below, with NSW implementation strategies:

<i>National priority</i>	<i>NSW strategies</i>
1. Decision-making structures in remote Indigenous communities for emergency management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen links between Remote Indigenous Communities (RIC) and Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) and Bushfire Management Committee (BFMC). • RIC representation on LEMC/BFMC • Partnership agreements between RIC and LEMC
2. Communication and engagement with remote Indigenous communities on emergency management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach/visit program by LEMC/BFMC • Hold LEMC/BFMC meetings at RIC venue • Promote Commonwealth grant scheme applications by Councils on behalf of RIC • Establish community contact data
3. Community emergency management planning for remote Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate RIC in Council Emergency Risk Management (ERM) studies • Review Local Displans’ relationship with and relevance to RIC in consultation with community

<i>National priority</i>	<i>NSW strategies</i>
4. Community resourcing for emergency management in remote Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote appropriate sources of funding, including Natural Disasters Mitigation Program (NDMP) and Working Together to Manage Emergencies (WTTME) programs
5. Coordinated and cooperative approach to emergency management in remote Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review RIC membership on LEMC and District EMC (DEMC) Identify needs for cultural awareness training in emergency management (EM) stakeholders
6. Empowering Indigenous people through emergency management training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote EM training in RIC Customise basic EM courses for RIC and conduct EM training in RIC venues Encourage RIC membership of volunteer EM agencies/partners
7. Education of Indigenous people (in emergency management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop culturally relevant public education materials Identify opportunities to educate RIC through community forums, meetings, conferences, cultural events etc

Questions asked by the Hon Duncan Gay MLC

QUESTION:

Has the Government allocated any funds to the maintenance and upgrading of SES units that are currently substandard?

How many SES Premises have been identified as sub-standard or non OH&S compliant?

How many HQs do you hope to do this year?

What is the time frame for addressing all the SES premises?

ANSWER:

The State Emergency Service Act 1989 requires that the council of a local government area must provide suitable accommodation for the SES to undertake its statutory role. A recent survey indicates that some 75 unit headquarters are in less than optimal accommodation. The SES continues to work closely with local councils to address these deficiencies.

In 2008-09 the NSW Government, as part of a \$5.7 million volunteer support package, has allocated an additional \$1.55 million, raising the total to \$2 million, to assist local councils upgrade SES Unit headquarters.

This funding will be used to assist 31 councils to undertake improvements to their local SES unit headquarters.

The SES will work with councils to upgrade the remaining units progressively.

QUESTION:

Can you provide the actual retention figures of cadets and how many schools and cadets are envisaged to be covered by the budget allocation?

ANSWER:

In 2008-09 the Secondary Schools Cadet Program conducted by the RFS is expected to reach 42 schools averaging 18 students per school.

In 2007-08 632 students completed the Cadet Program and 121 graduates proceeded to join a Rural Fire Brigade unit.

Questions asked by the Hon Matthew Mason-Cox MLC

QUESTION:

In light of increasing concerns in the Camden Haven area with respect to the threat of serious flooding resulting in possible loss of life and property:

- a) *How much has the Government spent in the Camden Haven area on Emergency Services flood response and evacuation planning and procedures?*

ANSWER:

The State Emergency Service has developed a comprehensive Local Flood Plan as a sub-plan of the Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government Area's Local Disaster Plan.

The Camden Haven Unit has developed detailed Standing Operating Procedures which encompass the full range of flood warning and response activities. Both the Flood Plan and Standing Operating Procedures have been exercised and tested on a regular basis. The Unit currently has 25 active volunteers, a further five flood wardens and a network of eight flood gauge readers. The unit is equipped with three modern response vehicles and two flood rescue boats.

The Service has also developed and distributed three area specific 'FloodSafe' Guides for residents of the Laurieton, North Haven and Dunbogan which detail the flood threat, where to obtain flood information and warnings including radio stations, what to do in the case of flooding including how to prepare their property, their companion animals and what to do if told to evacuate.

Since 2003 the volunteer members of the Camden Haven Unit have expended more than 2500 hours in support of community education activities. During 2003 the Unit, supported by State and Region staff, conducted an extensive community education campaign on flooding to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the 1963 flood, which is regarded as the flood of record for the area.

In total, in the period 2003-08 the NSW State Emergency Service has invested approximately \$350,000 to directly support the development of operational capability at the Camden Haven SES Unit.

QUESTION:

Will you provide details of the Memorandum of Understanding between the RFS and the ACT when it is finalised?

ANSWER:

The NSW Rural Fire Service expects that the revised Memorandum of Understanding will be finalised in the near future and will arrange for copies to be provided to the Committee.

QUESTION:

In 2007-08 Budget \$34.5 million was allocated for bushfire tankers, was all the allocation spent or did some of it rolled over into the \$31.3 million allocated for bushfire tankers in the 2008-09 Budget?

ANSWER:

None of the \$34.5 million allocated for bush fire tankers in 2007-08 was rolled over as part of the 2008-09 allocation.

QUESTION:

How many of the budgeted 65 new firefighters have been employed at each of the following stations:

- a. Narellan,*
- b. Coffs Harbour,*
- c. Queanbeyan,*
- d. Kincumber?*

ANSWER:

Narellan –

The additional three Station Officers and 12 Firefighters will commence when work on additional staff accommodation is completed. This is anticipated in early December 2008.

Coffs Harbour –

The additional four Station Officers and 12 Firefighter positions have all been filled and 24-hour full-time crewing at the station began on 22 September 2008.

Queanbeyan –

The additional three Station Officers and 9 Firefighter positions have all been filled and 24-hour full-time crewing began at the station on 12 September 2008.

Kincumber -

Five Station Officers and 16 Firefighters will provide 24-hour full time crewing at Kincumber when the new station is operational.

QUESTION:

In the 2008-09 Budget initiatives \$18 million in capital expenditure was provided for the ongoing program to acquire and replace firefighting appliances.

- a. *How many fire appliances have been funded to date?*
- b. *At which stations have these appliances already been delivered?*
- c. *How many modern fire trucks could have been purchased was it not for the government's flawed oversight of capital works expenditure and allegations of misappropriation?*

ANSWER:

The allocation of \$17.990 million in 2008-09 has provided for the purchase of:

7 Class 1 Tankers,
11 Class 2 Urban Pumpers
15 Class 3 Urban Pumpers
1 Aerial Pumper
Support and Specialist Minor Fleet vehicles

All of the vehicles have been ordered and will be delivered in accordance with the production schedules of the manufacturers.

Programs for the replacement fire appliances supported by funding of \$18 million per year have been in place since 1999. These programs are not affected by the capital works buildings budget.

QUESTION:

What is the estimated saving to the Government of closing from time to time 33 retained fire stations across NSW placing lives at risk and can the Minister guarantee that no lives will be lost as a result of time delays responding to fires?

ANSWER:

The NSW Fire Brigades has estimated that a saving of \$1,495,000 in the Financial Year 2008-09 will result from no longer rostering off-duty permanent firefighters on overtime rates of pay at retained fire stations when sufficient retained firefighters are temporarily unavailable.

The Government is not closing retained fire stations.

As a result of a determination set out as part of the firefighters award handed down in September 2008, the NSW Fire Brigades has identified 34 retained fire stations where, should the availability of retained firefighters at drop below the minimum staffing levels of four, neighbouring fire stations can be respond to emergencies to assist the available firefighters at the retained station concerned to ensure that lives are not at risk.

These revised response arrangements will not be implemented during periods of Total Fire Ban or when there is a major incident in progress at which the station may be required.

QUESTION:

Did the NSW agencies refuse to appear before the Nairn inquiry?

ANSWER:

The NSW Government did not take part in the Commonwealth Parliament's 2003 House of Representatives Select Committee Inquiry into Recent Australian Bush Fires as it was a duplication of previous inquiries.

QUESTION:

What is the estimated cost to the tax payer of the High Court appeal concerning the West decision?

What is the cost of proceedings to date?

What is the estimate of the potential damages claim should Mr West be successful?

ANSWER:

The NSW Crown Solicitor's Office has advised the NSW Rural Fire Service that release of this information could affect the defence case in the current litigation.

Any liability arising from litigation in relation to the ACT fires will be covered by the State insurer, the Treasury Managed Fund.

QUESTION:

Has the Minister been in receipt of any representations from Royal Life Saving to be incorporated under the Department of Emergency Services budget, if so what is the Government's position on this?

ANSWER:

I am unaware of any representation by Royal Life Saving to be incorporated as part of the emergency services.

Tony Kelly MLC
Minister for Emergency Services