

CORRECTED COPY
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 4

Wednesday 18 November 2009

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Committee met at 1.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. J. A. Gardiner (Chair)

The Hon. K. F. Griffin
The Hon. M. J. Pavey
The Hon. R. A. Smith

The Hon. H. S. Tsang
The Hon. L. J. Voltz

PRESENT

NSW Fire Brigades
Mr G. Mullins, *Commissioner*
Mr J. Benson, *Deputy Commissioner*

Emergency Management NSW
Mr S. Tannos, *Director General*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CHAIR: I declare the hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2009-10 open to the public and thank the witnesses who have returned for this supplementary hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Emergency Services. Before we commence I will make some comments about procedural matters. In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs.

In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, members of the media must take responsibility for what they publish or for what interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available at the table by the door. Any messages from attendees in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Witnesses are reminded that they are free to pass notes or to refer directly to their advisers while at the table. I remind members and people in the public gallery to turn off their mobile phones. The House has resolved that answers to questions on notice must be provided within 21 days, or as otherwise determined by the Committee. In this instance the Committee has not varied the 21-day time frame.

Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. As Mr Tannos and Deputy Commissioner Benson were sworn at the initial budget estimates hearings, they will give evidence today under their previous oath. As Commissioner Mullins did not appear at the initial hearing I will ask him to swear an oath or make an affirmation and state his full name, job title and agency.

JOHN BENSON, AFSM, Deputy Commissioner, NSW Fire Brigades, and

STACEY TANNOS, EMS, Director General, Emergency Management, New South Wales, on former oath; and

GREGORY PHILLIP MULLINS, Commissioner, NSW Fire Brigades, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions I should refer to the current serious bushfires in various parts of New South Wales, which explains the absence of some of our expected witnesses as they are attending to those matters. Commissioner, did you want to add anything further?

Mr MULLINS: Yes, if I may. I would like to offer apologies for Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons from the Rural Fire Service. As members would be aware, we have been advised by the Bureau of Meteorology that over the next four days New South Wales faces very serious weather conditions. Last night we were advised to expect temperatures that will break November records in New South Wales. Before I left to come here I checked on the bureau's bushfire site. We already have temperatures in the low forties in the west of the State with strong winds and very low humidity. There is a major fire in Inverell, about which you may be aware, that is causing major concern. We had some minor property and stock losses yesterday. Commissioner Fitzsimmons is working very hard with all the agencies, including NSW Fire Brigades, to plan for the next few days.

I am not sure of the protocol regarding questions on notice, but these temperature conditions are quite unprecedented. Today South Australia is facing a catastrophic fire danger, which is the first time the new ratings have been used. It is possible that parts of New South Wales on Friday and Saturday could face a similar fire danger rating. Commissioner Fitzsimmons and I conferred last night. It is possible that if these conditions continue into the New Year both fire services, National Parks, Forests, Police et cetera will be very much tied up in operational matters. If that is the case, I would ask the Committee to reconsider the 21-day requirement for answers to questions on notice.

CHAIR: Firstly, on behalf of the Committee, I wish everyone associated with fighting the fires and preparing for the next few days every success in keeping things under control. I am sure that the Committee would agree to consider at a deliberative meeting a reappraisal of the 21-day response time frame in light of the circumstances you have outlined.

Mr MULLINS: If I may add that if there was consideration to recall people to this Committee, that may be an issue for us also. I know Commissioner Fitzsimmons intended to attend today, but given the emergent conditions he was prevented from doing so. I may find myself in the same position, as will Mr Tannos.

CHAIR: I cannot speak for the Committee but again I am sure that at a deliberative meeting the Committee will consider what you have said because any danger to life and property has to be respected and dealt with first.

Mr MULLINS: Thank you.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Understanding and respecting that issue, I was talking to my upper House colleague, the Hon. Rick Colless, who lives at Inverell. He said that at 2 o'clock the fire threatened Inverell. He said it is very serious. I am wondering where that catastrophic threat may be over the next couple of days, particularly in New South Wales, given some comments attributed to the Minister in the *Sunday Telegraph* that there is a fear that letting people know where they face the most threat may actually make the rest of the community complacent. I am trying to weigh up those comments against the need for letting communities know whether they face the greatest danger.

Mr MULLINS: Thank you very much for that question. In terms of where catastrophic fire dangers may be faced over coming days, the bureau advised that the danger would probably be in the severe to extreme category, but there is a possibility of going into catastrophic. If that occurs, it will probably be in the far western areas of the State, where it is very sparsely populated and, in fact, there is very low fuel level.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: In the south-western parts of the State?

Mr MULLINS: Not so much the south-western parts of the State where there are some high fuel levels. I do not want to get terribly technical, but there are two calculations we use for grassland and forest. We calculate on both scales for areas west of the divide. On the forest fire danger rating it is likely that places like Tibooburra may technically be catastrophic, but there is no forest there. So it is a bit like saying, "Let's play soccer with cricket rules." It does not actually apply. People should not be overly concerned. Using the grassland fire danger algorithms, which take into account the actual fuel load, it would probably be more a severe to extreme category.

As far as people and communities in New South Wales being at risk, if people live near bushland our public education efforts of decades have focused on them needing to realise that they do face a bushfire risk if they live near the bush and they need to take action in concert with their fire services. When a fire comes, if it is a major fire, there may not be a fire engine to turn up at every driveway. So they need to have their home escape plan, they need to take measures around their homes to ensure their homes are fire safe and they need to make a decision early about whether they will stay to defend their homes or leave. With the new catastrophic fire danger rating, our advice to people is you leave early—you leave the night before—because if the fire occurs in those conditions in forest land, it is likely that the home will burn down and if people stay behind they could lose their lives.

There has been a quantum leap in our understanding following the Victorian bushfires, and following the work of the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. The entire community needs to be aware of that risk. There are areas in New South Wales where periodically we look at the fuel levels, the dryness and the rainfall we have received, and some areas are considered to be at a higher risk. To target that, we target those areas with specific measures like street meets, community fire units, letterbox drops. The entire community, as I indicated, needs to be aware of that risk.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I want to clear up the matter of a representative of the State Emergency Service not being present, when they were given an invitation to be here. Mr Tannos, could you explain that, given they were not at the original budget estimates hearing and given that they cover floods, not fires?

Mr TANNOS: Yes, certainly. Commissioner Murray Kear has passed on his apologies. At the moment he has an annual State conference, a State Emergency Service conference, being held at Rutherford for his divisional controllers. Given the flood activity that has happened over the past 24 months in particular, with back-to-back operations, the purpose of this annual conference is to get them together so they can look at 12-month and strategic planning and general planning for their operational purposes. This is an event he would have liked to have been at today—or at the very least send a representative—but he is not in a position to do that because he has not been able to fill the deputy commissioner's position as yet. But we are happy to take questions on notice in relation to that.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: My first question is to Commissioner Mullins. In relation to the ceiling insulation issues across New South Wales, my information is that 26 fires have occurred up to September 2009 as a result of problems with ceiling insulation and downlights—that is to do with the Federal Government's stimulus package to get insulation into roofs. Have any more fires occurred since then and has anyone lost their homes to fire caused by not very good insulation processes?

Mr MULLINS: We are concerned about the sharp increase in the number of fires involving ceiling insulation. We have been working very closely with the Office of Fair Trading and also with the industry association that represents people who manufacture and install ceiling insulation. With regard to incidents, I will take that question on notice and get you the precise figures, but I think it is more like 45.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Maybe it is 26 up to September and there have been more since.

Mr MULLINS: It could be. There have not been that many; there have not been 20-odd. I am not sure of the exact figures, my apologies.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: It is a major issue.

Mr MULLINS: It is a concerning number. What we have found, and what the industry association has found, is that where these are occurring it is a small proportion of the number of installations. There are tens of thousands or more of installations happening. In relation to that, it is miniscule. However, these fires are occurring. Some of the insulation material is non-flammable, it will not burn. But where we are finding problems is that the Australian standards require, for example, a 200-millimetre gap between the top of the downlight and where the insulation is installed. Some of the installers appear to be not aware of those standards and are not doing that. That is where we are finding problems. Heat will build up and if the insulation does not catch fire, other roofing materials can catch fire. Most of the fires have been minor in nature and people have discovered them quickly.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: So we have not lost any houses or lives?

Mr MULLINS: Not that I am aware of—certainly no lives. I am unaware of any injuries but I will have to take that on notice. There may have been a couple of quite serious roof fires but I do not believe any houses have been totally destroyed. But I will check and if I can take that on notice I will provide a fully accurate answer.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Have you received the Independent Commission Against Corruption report into NSW Fire Brigades yet?

Mr MULLINS: That is in relation to our property services?

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Yes.

Mr MULLINS: Yes.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: So there is one report or two inquiries going on?

Mr MULLINS: There was an inquiry called Operation Myrna, and I think it was 2007. We identified that two external contractors working in our capital works area—

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: That was the Bathurst fire station?

Mr MULLINS: They worked on that. It was not a project they subcontracted out but some anomalies presented themselves. We did some searching and found out that these people were directors of companies receiving Fire Brigades work. We advised ICAC, which mounted a full investigation and then a public inquiry. It has made recommendations about prosecuting some people. We have 28 recommendations, every single one of which we have accepted and implemented. We have a major project in improving our governance. We acknowledged that our systems and processes, particularly in the capital works area, were too lax. We were focused on our largest building project in 120 years and, frankly, it appears to me we cut some corners.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: And the other inquiry?

Mr MULLINS: I understand that ICAC is looking into another matter I referred to it sometime ago. I had some people come to me with protected disclosures. I am not at liberty, as you would understand, to give any details about that, but we are cooperating fully. It is a matter that has caused me a great deal of concern but I am confident that will also help us to improve and learn into the future.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I understand that that report may not be that far away, but you have not yet received it?

Mr MULLINS: I am not aware of where they are up to.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: So you do not have a time frame?

Mr MULLINS: No, I do not.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Yesterday I went to the Queanbeyan fire station and was treated exceptionally well, with homemade scones. The assistant commissioner was also there—and Jim Wells, is it?

Mr MULLINS: Jim Hamilton.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: He made the point that I had visited the two fire stations in recent weeks where there is the biggest problem with the retained brigades situation. The other station I visited was Port Macquarie. He referred to the problems there during a call-out, if there is a call-out, and having retained a turn-up to man the second track. Do you know of other communities where this is a problem, or is it Queanbeyan and Port Macquarie where the biggest problem is?

Mr MULLINS: They are two areas that have been flagged by my officers to me as of some concern. We are mounting efforts to recruit additional retained firefighters in those towns. Periodically there can be problems with retained firefighters who are on call and have their own other employment. Typically the only fire units that can be taken off-line temporarily are in areas that can be covered by a full-time crew very quickly within our response-time standards. They are also in areas where there is additional backup: for example, in Queanbeyan we have a mutual agreement with the Australian Capital Territory Fire Brigade and with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Port Macquarie is relying on the retained brigade at Wauchope to cover the section.

Mr MULLINS: And the Rural Fire Service. We also have a hazardous materials unit at Port Macquarie that is always staffed. On a day-to-day basis, that is managed quite effectively, but we have put a lot of effort into recruiting and retaining our on-call firefighters. Unfortunately, we are finding in some rural areas, due to drought and other issues in the town, it can be difficult to keep retained firefighters. For example, I think last year we recruited approximately 600 and we probably lost approximately 400, so there is a constant issue of retaining, training and getting people. I am not aware of any other stations where there are major issues. There may be a one-off for an hour here and an hour there.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: It was put to me that Queanbeyan is facing a problem because it became a 10-14 station last September and the retained members lost a sense of ownership. Port Macquarie became a 10-14 a couple of years ago. Could it be one of the problems in Port Macquarie that they lack an inspector on the ground?

Mr MULLINS: A lack of?

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: A full-time local inspector. There have been some issues there, have there not?

Mr MULLINS: Okay. I am sorry. There is a zone office in Port Macquarie with a superintendent, an inspector and a training officer.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I understand in relation to the inspector's position that the person is out on sick leave.

Mr MULLINS: He is on sick leave at the moment.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: How long has that been now?

Mr MULLINS: For the inspector, I think it is about two months, but the superintendent has been on long-term sick leave and is on a return-to-work program at the moment. I cannot see how that would impact on the local fire station because those officers administer a zone, the mid North Coast, and have about 18 fire stations they looked after. They are not concerned with the management of any single fire station. That is the job of the station officers and captains.

We find that there can be a range of different reasons in different localities why we may have staffing issues with retained firefighters. One of them could be, for example, in Queanbeyan. You raise the issue of a permanent crew and a retained crew. We are looking at cultural issues where a retained crew has had ownership of the station and then, because of workload, we brought in more full-time firefighters. But it is very complex. It is certainly not one size fits all.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: During budget estimates recently, Deputy Commissioner Benson, you told us that there are 91 staff across NSW Fire Brigades who are on some sort of leave. Is that figure still current?

Mr BENSON: I believe that what I said at the time was that that figure fluctuates. What I did say is that there is no diminished operational capability in those areas. As I said, though, either relieving staff are put into those positions immediately, or they are back-filling someone.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: But obviously that has an impact on the NSW Fire Brigades' budget in the sense that relieving staff is a cost, especially if they had to travel to regional areas from the city, for example. You had a \$10 million cost overrun of running the department last year. How do you expect to make up that \$10 million that you promised the Government you would make in lieu of forward payments?

Mr MULLINS: I will answer that. As you would appreciate, in an operational service we have quite a number of injuries occur. I am just looking at the figures here. I do not have a figure for how many people are off at the moment but we have lost time owing to injuries due to body stressing; falls, trips and slips; being hit by moving objects; pressure; vehicle accident; heat; radiation; electricity, et cetera. We monitor our key performance indicators. We have actually turned around our performance.

PricewaterhouseCoopers has done an independent review of our workers compensation because it is a problem area for us. They have noted the major turnaround due to our efforts and have recommended areas where we can apply resources to better effect. I am sure members are aware of the workers compensation premium arrangements. We are benchmarked against other agencies. Treasury funds the benchmark premium. We then have what we call a deposit premium, which is based on actual experience.

In recent years that has been more than the benchmark premium, so that money comes out of our general discretionary funding. Last year the gap was approximately \$5.4 million. They then go back each year and look at our performance over the previous three and five years and give us what they call a hindsight premium. That is open claims and claims that may not have been clear in the first year how much they would cost but have emerged as high-cost claims. We then have to pay back the insurer. Last year that premium was more than \$7 million. That accounted for our deficit.

Members may be interested to know that in accounting terms our audited figures will actually show a surplus of approximately \$22 million. That is an anomaly from the change in funding arrangements because we received early receipts from some insurance companies. They had to be counted in this year. We had an operating deficit. We are working very hard on a range of efficiencies, not the least of which is the transfer of strategic and corporate services to be shared in the Police and Emergency Services portfolio.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: What sort of savings do you expect? This follows on from the legislation presented by the Hon. John Robertson as Special Minister of State and the new administrative arrangements. How much of that was shared corporate?

Mr MULLINS: We have not calculated it as yet because we are not exactly sure what shape those shared corporate services will take.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: When will you have an idea how shared corporate services will operate?

Mr MULLINS: I would hope we would be well down the track of implementation by the end of this financial year. In July next year we should have a good idea.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: What sort of services will you be sharing? Will it be payroll?

Mr MULLINS: There will be a range of transactional services, such as payroll, such as accounts payable and accounts receivable, which can be readily shared because they are generic. There are property services, property maintenance and things like that. We are looking at contracts, sharing contracts to get economies of scale—information technology, for example, and licensing, to see if we can rationalise licences, communications, telephone, contracts and radio.

There is a whole range of things in relation to which we believe we can leverage efficiencies and get savings, which will go back to the front line. It is very important to note that each of the services retains operational accountability in the name of the organisation. It is very important in this environment that we each play our particular complementary role. The Government has ensured that that is in black and white; that it will not change.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Do you see any future issues in relation to the fact that the Commissioner of Police is up there and you fall under that, and then Shane Fitzsimmons is over here? Given that the Rural Fire Service, because of the volunteer nature of its organisation, mounted a successful campaign to stay separate, do you see any concerns with that arrangement into the future?

Mr MULLINS: I am not exactly sure what you mean by that because I know that the Premier gave undertakings in writing to the Rural Fire Service Association, which applied to the portfolio. Shane Fitzsimmons is a member of the board of Police and Emergency Services New South Wales. Commissioner of Police Scipione is director general of that organisation. We work together and we will be working to get efficiencies across the portfolio, but with those riding instructions that savings go to the frontline to improve service delivery and the autonomy and operational roles and powers, et cetera, of each of the agencies are not in question.

CHAIR: Do crossbench members have questions?

The Hon. ROY SMITH: No, thank you.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The Government does not have any questions at this time but reserves the right to ask some questions at a later stage.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Mr Tannos, I would like to talk about floodplain management in New South Wales—which is particularly why I wanted the State Emergency Service [SES] here today—given that we could have fires today and floods tomorrow. Could you give me an understanding of how much the whole of government in New South Wales is spending on floodplain management in New South Wales this financial year?

Mr TANNOS: No, I am not in a position to give you that, but I am quite happy to take that on notice. That is outside my area.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Could you help me understand the role of the State Emergency Service? Traditionally it has been part of managing floods when they happen. Is there not an increasing need for the SES to get involved in the management process of floodplains? Is that not part of the new direction of the SES?

Mr TANNOS: My understanding is that they have an advisory capacity to local government during the planning processes, particularly surrounding development in new areas in the local environmental plans [LEPs] of councils. They also have a significant role in educating local communities in relation to floodplain issues and

floodplain management. There is also funding available under the natural disaster mitigation program for flood risk mitigation studies. I guess the SES is embedded, not mandatory. It is an advisory capacity but I would like to think that most local government councils take them up on that and use their advice sensibly.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I received a freedom of information [FOI] from the State Emergency Service which showed that the New South Wales SES levee study highlights that there is minimal documentation for a number of levees across New South Wales. The FOI revealed that 95 per cent of levees had incomplete information due to the date not being able to be obtained from the levee owners, that being in most cases councils; that the structural integrity of approximately 80 per cent of levees was either unknown or considered to be inadequate; that 34 per cent of the 59 levees were considered to have insufficient information; and that 30 per cent of the levee owners were uncertain that an operation and maintenance manual existed for their particular levee. Are you concerned about these types of statistics, given that levees save towns? We have seen time and time again that there is genuine concern from our flood mitigation experts across New South Wales that there is a real lack of knowledge with many of our levees?

Mr TANNOS: I am concerned if there is risk with any levees across the State, but I am not familiar with the document that you are referring to or the FOI or the report that is referred to within that FOI. Without the ability to have a look at that and get an understanding of what it actually is talking about and where the information was generated from, I am really not in a position to comment on that.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: It has also been put to me that the level of funding for floodplain management in New South Wales has reduced to around \$7.9 million this financial year. In the last year of the Coalition Government it was around \$12 million, so there has been a very real decrease in the money going into floodplain management across New South Wales. As I pointed out from the FOI I received from the SES in relation to flood levees across New South Wales, we as a community could face some fundamental problems. As you would be aware during the North Coast floods, there were genuine concerns, particularly in the Tweed, with regard to access and egress from some of the peninsulas with the river rising. Did former Commissioner of Police Ken Moroney in his report seek extra information on the levees and floodplain management within the region?

Mr TANNOS: What Mr Moroney did highlight in his report was that the river gauge and the telemetry systems needed to be reviewed because there were deficiencies. He highlighted that the ownership of those gauges were somewhat convoluted and were scaled across a number of different owners and were there for different reasons. They were initially put in for different reasons; some were not for flood warnings but for water quality and the running of the stream. Over the years the information that has been required out of those has changed and morphed into something different. I think I mentioned right at the end of our last estimates hearing that the commissioner of the SES at the last State emergency management committee meeting put on notice that he was forming a high level working group to look at a stocktake of the telemetry gauges across New South Wales to address that very issue.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: When I was at Port Macquarie last Friday during the last big event where Coffs Harbour got another half a metre of rain, I was in the SES control room and one of the volunteers pointed out to me that one of the gauges was not working and they had got a false reading in one of the rivers nearer Port Macquarie. So it is an ongoing problem. What part will Manly laboratory—where a lot of the gauge work is done—play in that process?

Mr TANNOS: The hydrology?

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Yes, the hydraulics, which is through the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water?

Mr TANNOS: The simple answer is that I do not know. I would need to take that on notice.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Because their funding has remained pretty static too for the past 10 years.

Mr TANNOS: Again, that is through the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Yes. Just on another issue in relation to emergency management, I have also received requests from volunteers within the State Emergency Service and the Volunteer Rescue

Association [VRA] concerned about the new police radio system—it has come online in the city and it is about to go online in country New South Wales—and the access for volunteers to listen to incidents across the regions, basically car accident issues where the SES and the VRA respond to incidents. Have you had any representations or has there been any discussion about that within government?

Mr TANNOS: I have had no representations on that at all.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Has there been discussion?

Mr TANNOS: Not to my knowledge, no. The Rural Fire Service, I think, last year just finished a rollout of the digitalisation of their radio communications systems. It was an upgraded digitalised radio. I am not aware of the issue you are raising, but I am happy to follow that up if you could give me the details of that.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: It is the police radio encryption system. I will give you some more details. Like you, I am just responding to genuine concerns raised by volunteers not being able to get out and help communities where there has been an accident.

Mr TANNOS: Okay.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: In relation to Emergency Management NSW and the legislation that was passed last year, I wanted to raise the issue of invoices to councils. Councils throughout regional New South Wales expected to pay a lower amount this year, given the fall in their contributions that was advertised at the time of the mini-budget. Has there been an assessment of the overall bills to local councils? As a whole of local government, has the amount coming in gone up and have you been able to identify the amount for each individual council?

Mr TANNOS: I guess the intent of the change last year as a result of the mini-budget, particularly for local government, was that if the budgets remained the same from 2008-09 to 2009-10 local government councils collectively would not be paying any more in their contributions to the three services as what they paid in 2008-09 to the two services. By and large, that commitment has been met. What has happened is that the budgets of the two fire services have gone up, so therefore contributions would go up accordingly. The commitment to local councils has been met.

With any of the fire services budgets going up—the SES budget is not linked to the fire services; I have to make that point clear—the local government contribution was reduced because there was an acknowledgment by government that they should not be paying any more, if all things are equal and the budgets remain the same. Having said that, their contributions were reduced from 12.3 per cent for contributions towards the New South Wales Fire Brigades budget and 13.3 per cent for their contributions towards the Rural Fire Service to 11.7 per cent. So effectively by default of that they have had a saving towards the contributions to the two fire services as a result of the budgets increasing, if that makes sense.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Again, volunteers within the SES are raising concerns with me that the total council contributions directly to their local SES were around the \$6 million mark last year. Is that correct?

Mr TANNOS: I think that is correct.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Given the financial pressure that many councils are under and their concern about the cost shift from State Government to local government, councils are re-examining their priorities and looking at whether they will contribute as they have in the past, given that they are now paying through the levy system, through your invoicing from Emergency Management New South Wales. Have you had discussions on this issue?

Mr TANNOS: I am aware that that is a concern of local councils, but I think some local councils look at it too simplistically and assume that the \$6 million that they are paying is above and beyond and therefore they should not contribute as they normally do quite generously towards their SES. Through the Minister and the SES, we have tried to make that point to local councils. If we continue to get this information, it is obvious that we need to put out more information to clarify it. If the budgets remained the same, that \$6 million they are paying would have just been \$6 million that would have been contributed towards the fire services. That has

been hived off, and the Government has picked up that \$6 million effectively and paid it in their increase from the 13 per cent and 14 per cent respectively that they were paying. That increased up to 14.6 per cent.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I have some questions for the RFS but I do not think there is any point in me going through them now. I will submit them in writing after the Committee hearing. One concern was that there was a meeting at Brooms Head last night, following the fire that nearly took out that town about six weeks ago. There was a public meeting called by the RFS fire captain to talk about that. I understand that no RFS paid staff attended that meeting and there were still genuine concerns raised about the fire trails and the lack of maintenance of the fire trails. I suppose you are not in a position to be able to comment about that, but if there has been a fire and the community is concerned about it should it not be government policy that representatives of respective organisations attend to hear what the community might have to say.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: Point of order: The member knows full well that she cannot ask about government policy.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Because the Minister is not here.

CHAIR: No.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: I suggest she rephrase the question.

CHAIR: I will rephrase the question. What would be the normal practice if there is a community meeting after such an emergency event? Normally would salaried officers attend, particularly if it is a large meeting like that?

Mr MULLINS: I do not know that I can really assist, and that would have to be a question on notice to Commissioner Fitzsimmons, but I know that the Rural Fire Service takes very seriously its interaction with local communities. It is a community-based organisation made up of volunteers who come from those communities. I know that Commissioner Fitzsimmons in particular makes sure that his salaried officers back up the volunteers. I can only assume there was some sort of misunderstanding, because I know that it is unusual that they would not have a salaried officer at a meeting like that.

CHAIR: So in the case of the fire brigades that would apply? Normally there would be someone who would—

Mr MULLINS: Absolutely, which makes me think there has been some sort of misunderstanding.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: How many brigade officers have a complaint lodged about them to the professional standards and conduct officer currently? I presume you will have to take these on notice.

Mr MULLINS: I will. I am sorry, I cannot answer that. I do not know.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Further to that, how many complaints are currently being investigated by the Internal Audit Bureau [IAB]? How many complaints have been lodged with the Internal Audit Bureau over the past five years and how many of them resulted in disciplinary action being enforced? How many allegations that have been investigated have been found to be breaches of the New South Wales Fire Brigades harassment prevention policy? How much is it costing New South Wales Fire Brigades in relation to officers of brigades where other officers are absent due to being unfit for work, et cetera? They are the costs associated with replacing people while investigations are going on into issues of harassment.

Mr MULLINS: May I take those on notice—

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Yes.

Mr MULLINS: —because they are very detailed questions. I just point out that IAB is actually IAB Services. It used to be the Internal Audit Bureau. We engage them to assist us with investigations on a commercial basis. They provide consultants or staff investigators to whom, when we have a large workload with investigations, we outsource investigations. We do not actually lodge complaints. Nobody lodges complaints to IAB, but I will take that as asking how many investigations have we engaged the services of IAB Services for.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Can the SES provide me with information in relation to reports that the SES did on the ground after the floods in New South Wales, say, over the past year since January, and recommendations to government for flood plain management and flood mitigation works? Have there been any internal reports or recommendations for particular communities from divisional controllers in relation to better flood plain management into the future?

Mr TANNOS: This is post flood reports?

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Maybe not post flood reports; maybe things were done during or before the flood report from Ken Moroney that may have been sent to the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water or other agencies, or may even have been sent to local councils, such as Coffs Harbour, for example, given that they have just had two major storm events and there has been some recommendations in the community there for a number of years for better flood mitigations projects. Can you provide any reports to do with flood plain management in the region following the severe storm events that the North Coast has faced?

Mr TANNOS: I am happy to take that on notice.

CHAIR: Thank you for being here. We will take your earlier requests into consideration in our forthcoming deliberations.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
