



Climate Health WA Inquiry

Inquiry into the impacts of climate change on health in Western Australia

Inquiry Lead:
Dr Tarun Weeramanthri

Witnesses:

Mr Darren Klemm AFSM
Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Services

Mr Malcolm Cronstedt AFSM
Deputy Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Services

Ms Jill Downard
Director Media and Corporate Communications, DFES

Thursday, 3 October 2019, 9.00 am

HEARING COMMENCED

5 DR WEERAMANTHRI: Commissioner Klemm, Deputy Commissioner
Cronstedt, Ms Downard, I'd like to thank you for your interest in the Inquiry
and for your appearance at today's hearing. The purpose of this hearing is to
assist me in gathering evidence for the Climate Health WA Inquiry into the
impacts of climate change on health in Western Australia. My name is Tarun
Weeramanthri and I've been appointed by the Chief Health Officer to
10 undertake this Inquiry. Beside me is Dr Sarah Joyce, the Inquiry's Project
Manager. If everyone could please be aware that the use of mobile phones and
other recording devices is not permitted in this room, so please make sure that
your phone is on silent or switched off.

15 This hearing is a formal procedure convened under section 231 of the *Public
Health Act 2016*. While you are being asked to give your evidence – while
you're not being asked to give your evidence under oath or affirmation, it is
important you understand that there are penalties under the Act of knowingly
providing a response or information that is false or misleading. This is a public
20 hearing and a transcript of your evidence will be made for the public record. If
you do wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you
should request that that part of your evidence be taken in private.

25 You've previously been provided with the Inquiry's terms of reference and
information on giving evidence to the Inquiry. Before we begin, do you have
any questions about today's hearing?

MR KLEMM: No.

30 DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. For the transcript, could I ask
that each of you state your name and the capacity in which you are here today,
and could I also ask that throughout the hearing, you briefly state your name
prior to speaking. Commissioner?

35 MR KLEMM: Yes, Darren Klemm, Commissioner for
Fire and Emergency Services.

MR CRONSTEDT: Mal Cronstedt, Deputy Commissioner for
Fire and Emergency Services.

40 MS DOWNARD: Jill Downard, Director Media and
Corporate Communications, Fire and Emergency Services.

45 DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you, all.

Commissioner Klemm, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

MR KLEMM: Yes, if I could. Yes. So, Darren Klemm.
50 Can I thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Inquiry today and also for
the opportunity to provide a submission. I won't go through the submission in
terms of what we've provided, however, I'm more than happy during today's

proceedings to expand on any or all of it. DFES is an open book in terms of being here today, and we're extremely comfortable sharing whatever you would like to gather from us, in terms of us sharing with the Inquiry the experiences that we've been through in managing emergencies over a significant period of time.

What we know about what we're seeing in a changing climate is, in terms of the risks, or the hazards, if you like, that DFES is responsible for, we see changes in those. So we see them more frequent, we see them more intense, and we see them more challenging, from our point of view, to manage. And that experience that we've had is not just here in Western Australia, but all three of us, in fact, are members of various national committees, and also I'm a member of a committee that shares resources across Australia and New Zealand. And we're frequently sharing response-type resources across both Australia and into New Zealand.

DFES is currently going through a transition from being very much a response-focused organisation to becoming a broader emergency management organisation that sees us putting greater effort, if you like, or equal effort, into preparation prevention phases and recovery, rather than just continually trying to throw response resources to deal with the various hazards that we have to manage. That is, we see that as the future. We cannot consistently continue to just respond to 000 calls to manage various incidents without putting some effort into what many see as the more difficult piece, and certainly it is, is the education of community and getting the buy-in to their understandings of the risks that they face in a changing climate.

What we know about people and communities is that they're vivacious consumers of information. And I think if I was to talk about the hazard of bushfire, or fire more specifically, it is very much part of the culture of Australia, bushfire. And many people have opinions about bushfire. And we know that it's often reviewed, in fact, probably the most reviewed, inquired and Royal Commissioned hazard in Australia. And that, while it is not always pleasant, it does provide us with significant opportunity to improve the way that we do business. And that's just not here in Western Australia, it's across the whole country with like fire emergency service agencies.

So what we've learned from that over time has been very broad, but some of the key things, and one of the reasons I've brought Jill along today, is public information and the importance and the thirst that's out there in the community for information from us during emergencies. And we've had some great learnings out of that, that if it's required by the Inquiry, we're very comfortable to share in terms of what we've learned along the way. In my experience, some 29 years, it wasn't too long ago, perhaps 20 years ago, when we used to go and put bushfires out, and we didn't tell anybody about what we were doing. We didn't close roads, we didn't put out warnings, we just went out and put it out. And that, as I'm sure you're all aware, has changed significantly. And very much the focus of our organisation is certainly the response, protecting the

community is paramount, life is paramount. But making sure that we're adequately warning the community has become a significant part of our business. And that has been driven by the community wanting to know the various pieces of information that we're duty-bound to provide.

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So we see public information, which sits with Jill's area of the business, as one of the great challenges that we see going forward. We feel like we're in a pretty good place with it now, but we know it's going to be very difficult for us to keep up with the growing need for information. I see that as being rather similar, if you like, to climate change. So we have to convince the community that climate change is real, and they have to buy into it, they have to believe in it. And they have to believe that they can actually make a difference to the climate. Much the same as the challenge we have with public information is getting people to understand the risks that are associated with bushfire. So what we find is that people understand that bushfires are a risk to them, but they actually think that it's going to happen to someone else. And Jill will be able to share with you the various stats and work that we've done from a communication point of view and a preparation point of view for every bushfire season in recent times.

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So the public has a role to play in the hazards that DFES is responsible for, certainly storm flood, fire, we talked about that, cyclones, tsunami. The public has a role to play in that. And we've talked often about shared responsibility, but there's much work to be done in that area to get people in communities to understand that they have a role to play in managing their own safety. And if you go back 20 years ago, we're paying the price now for a mantra of saying, "Just ring 000 and someone will come and save you". And we're trying to unwind that now, and that's not a simple piece of work.

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DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. So I might just stay with bushfires for the moment, if that's okay. And recently, after the Queensland bushfires, I think one of their Commissioner of Fire and Emergency Services spoke around the extreme season now becoming the new normal. What are you currently seeing and dealing with in 2019? What is now becoming normal for you as you approach each fire season? And what are you predicting you'll see over the next decade?

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MR KLEMM: Yes. So if I went back to perhaps 2015–2016, the period where we had the Esperance bushfires and the Yarloop bushfires. So the Esperance fires were in late 2015, where lives were lost, and then lives were lost again in January in Yarloop in 2016. So what we've seen since that period is a lengthening of the bushfire season. So what used to be the period of summer, December, January, February, is now November. So the Esperance fires where lives were lost were in November. And then we've seen, in the last two years, we've had significant bushfires in May in the last two years, and these are indications of a drying climate. We track the soil dryness index and that is provided through the Bureau of Met; it's used by us as a trigger to go to a higher state of readiness in preparation for the bushfire

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season. And what we're seeing with that is that over time, that things are drying out earlier and then they're staying dryer for longer, which is why you end up with fires occurring in November and then again in May.

5 I don't know if you want to add anything to that, Malcolm?

MR CRONSTEDT: Thanks, Commissioner. Mal Cronstedt. Yes, I think the records show that over the last number of years, that there's a dramatically declining rainfall in the southwest of Western Australia, which therefore leads to not only a larger bushfire season where fuels that are available to bushfires are available for a longer period of time, and an extension of the season, but also a narrowing of opportunities for people like our partners from Parks and Wildlife to do prescribed burning, and our own people, volunteers and others. So lengthening a fire season, extending into what were traditionally winter periods, where prevention methods might have been employed, and making it more hazardous generally.

But I think extending that argument beyond that – or not argument, but the trajectory beyond just bushfire, as the climate changes, I think there's a drying trend in the southwest of Western Australia, but there's also, as the climate heats, there's more energy in the weather system generally. I'm certainly not a meteorologist, but from what meteorologists tell us, that given more heat in the system, we're going to expect them. We have seen less frequent cyclones, for instance, but more intense weather. So the intensity of events are dramatic and really quite incisive. They really cut through the community and cut into the values we hold so dearly across our communities.

So I think that's the emerging scenario that's playing out in reality. You know, bushfires where we didn't expect them, cyclones which will be perhaps less frequent, but certainly much more intense. And extremes of weather which, if you look to the east coast of Australia, you know, there's record after record being broken, and people constantly being, I guess – there's an expression of surprise, but perhaps we shouldn't be quite so surprised – is that these events that are playing out are quite dramatic and unprecedented. So that's the kind of scenario, I guess, Commissioner and Chair, that's playing out. And that's, I guess, what we need to prepare for.

MR KLEMM: If I could also add, these events manifest themselves in communities. So DFES is – we're trying to educate our people and change our focus from being an organisation that's seen as an entity that just manages emergencies. Yes, sure, we do that, that's our core role. But sitting at the front of all of that are the people, and they're the people that work for DFES, they're the people that exist in communities, they're the people that are dealing with emergencies when they first happen before we arrive. And whether they're cyclones – and you can reflect on the Veronica cyclone earlier this year where, sitting behind all that are the communities of Karratha and Roebourne and Port Hedland, and they're the people that we end up dealing

with, as we should. And so they need to be very much at the forefront of our considerations when we're dealing with emergencies.

5 So that is the great challenge, of course, because we need the community to buy in to the risks that they face. And we know that we can't put a fire truck on every house, we know that we can't put SES volunteers on every house in Port Hedland and Karratha to protect them during a cyclone. And so this changing climate and the intensity of the events that we're having, and perhaps the effect of compounding events, where we've got like events happening at the same time, and a good example there would be if there's going to be a heat wave, then there's more than likely going to be fires occurring at the same time. And those effects, I guess, in the context of this Inquiry, they roll up to an effect on health.

15 DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you so much. Let's stay with that theme. And could you speak about how you are working to build community resilience?

20 MR KLEMM: Yes.

DR WEERAMANTHRI: The role of volunteers with DFES, and then possibly go into some of those communication aspects that you've raised.

25 MS DOWNARD: Yes. Jill Downard here. I can speak to that. So starting with that first question around community resilience and the role of volunteers and what we do. The way in which DFES engages with the community, as the Commissioner just spoke about, is absolutely critical to the way we do our work. So we have a community preparedness program, which works to empower local people in local communities to reach out and do direct engagement. So the way that works is we have regional staff but, of course, a wide network of regional volunteers. And what we do is we empower them to engage directly with the community through things like street meets, bushfire-ready groups, community forums, property walk-throughs, direct conversations and door-knocking, and a whole range of other initiatives that just leverage that local credibility of our volunteers.

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45 What we've found in our research is that if people have had a direct conversation with a DFES staff member or with a volunteer for one of our emergency services, they are significantly more likely to have a perception of personal risk as opposed to just acknowledging that risks exists. They see them as personally relevant. They're also significantly more likely to take action. So that volunteer engagement for us is incredibly important for communities. DFES also sees supporting volunteers and supporting volunteer service growth as really important. So that's something that we've been looking to support our brigades, groups and units in local communities to grow their membership, to reach out to younger demographics, and bring people along into these emergency services which will be so pivotal as our incidents and the severity of incidents grow.

5 So to touch on the point about communications and the role that
communications plays with communities, as the Commissioner spoke about,
DFES works across the entire spectrum of a hazard. So we work before,
during and after emergencies. And for us, in the before phase, that's really
where we can actually make one of the biggest impacts. So that working with
community that I spoke with, to build a sense of personal risk. So it's about
that face-to-face engagement on the ground, but also what we do at a mass
communications level, to help people understand that risks are relevant in their
area, and that these risks can impact people directly.

10 So we do that on a hazard-specific level, and an example that I'll reference is
our fire campaign. So I'm not sure if anyone saw our advertising campaign last
year that will be rolling out again this year, but it's quite a hard-hitting message
around what fire can do, how unpredictable fire is, and we work to incorporate
15 local messages and local targeting into that advertising campaign, to make it
clear to people that it's a local risk, they can be impacted. Before emergencies,
another consideration that's becoming more and more important is looking
above the specific hazard, and empowering and enabling communities to
identify risks proactively, and to take action rather than wait to be told. So
20 that's a piece of work that probably is yet to be done holistically and has so
many inter-agency opportunities to work together to get the best possible
impact with our community in Western Australia. So in DFES, we refer to
what's needed as shared responsibility. We need the community to understand
that we're all working together, we all have a role to play in managing what
25 hazards look like, and again in managing the impacts of climate change.

30 So the next phase, which is during an incident, that's where public information
comes into play. So that is across all hazards, and often hazards interlink, so
public information can become very complex as you work through how to
deliver information to allow the community to make decisions to look after
their own safety and their family's safety, when you've got hazards overlapping
and rapidly changing scenarios. So DFES has a platform called Emergency
WA, which issues alerts and warnings to the community through a range of
35 channels. So we use Emergency WA to publish incident information to a
website where people can access it on a map. We also notify the traditional
media, and we also publish that through social media and a range of other
ways, including a telephone line. So that platform is really critical to us in
emergencies, because it enables us to be very efficient in how we deliver that
information.

40 You mentioned reviews. One-third of the findings of all inquiries and reviews
relate to public information. So it's highly scrutinised, it's absolutely essential,
because, you know, the response agency can only do so much. So information
is what enables the community to protect themselves. So Emergency WA is
45 actually on a journey of evolving to what it needs to be to meet our challenges
with climate change, to meet these ever-increasing hazards, and to meet the
way people consume information. We actually, last week, hosted a workshop
session with inter-agency stakeholders who have a role to play in public

information, and Department of Health was represented at that workshop. And what we asked agencies was, “What do you need from public information and how might you like to see this platform evolve into the future?” So it was wonderful to see Department of Health represented there.

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And then finally, after an incident, the next phase is, of course, recovery. And there are so many health impacts when it comes to recovery, not just physical health in the aftermath of an incident, but of course, mental health and well-being. And so much of that is linked to resilience, and so much of that resilience is built in that before phase that I spoke about at the beginning. So just to give a few very quick examples around that personal risk recognition and what it looks like currently in Western Australia, we have done some research and we identified that across some key hazards, fire, cyclone, flood, storm and extreme heat, we found that people recognise these as hazards. For fire in WA we have over 90 per cent of people recognising that as a hazard. And the same goes for extreme heat, we have over 70 per cent of people who recognise that as a hazard. But that drops to half of those people who see fire hazard as a personal risk that can impact on them.¹ So government, collectively, across agencies, has a body of work to do to help people understand you know, what their impacts can be from climate change, and what they need to do to address that personal risk. Did you have any other communication questions?

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DR WEERAMANTHRI: So that's very helpful, Ms Downard, thank you. So my question, we've had, through the written submission process, quite a few people suggest that telling the public about the health impacts of climate change is important, that people still don't quite get that it is a health issue. And they've certainly recommended that the Department of Health run some kind of public awareness campaign about the health impacts of climate change following this Inquiry. So my question to you is, that could be a general public awareness campaign, but you're also talking about the importance of local messaging and hazard-specific messaging.

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MS DOWNARD: Yes.

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DR WEERAMANTHRI: As a communications expert, do you have any advice to the Inquiry about how to pitch that message?

MS DOWNARD: Absolutely. First and foremost, I think it's important that agencies think about climate change and the hazards that climate change pose and think about what we can do collectively. So I think that there's a danger that we could all potentially be working to our own portfolios and delivering differing messages to the community, where there's an opportunity to think strategically here around what we need from community resilience to deliver the action needed to address climate change. So I would say holistically, working collectively would be very important. In

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¹ The number of people who see extreme heat as personal risk that can impact them is also significantly lower than those who recognise it as a hazard.

terms of localising the message, there's a few considerations that need to be brought to bear. It's about finding ways to use the people, of agencies and volunteers that agencies have in communities, to deliver those messages, and also to use targeted communications to tailor the message for local content. So
5 referencing the specific place, referencing the number of times a hazard has impacted on a specific place, and leveraging when a hazard does impact, following on from that hazard with communications, helping the community understand, next time, what they can do to mitigate that impact. So those are probably the two key recommendations I would make.

10 MR KLEMM: Yes, Darren Klemm. Can I just make – I don't think we can put too fine a point on the importance of this. So our experience with bushfire, as Jill said, communications makes up a third of recommendations that have come out across Australia. People want the
15 information, they want to be warned. They want to be able to make a decision, "Do I leave, do I stay? Where's the fire?" People want to know that the house that they're living in, in the street that they're in, "What's the impact going to be on me?" And I know the hazards that Health face are slightly different from fire, but the same principle applies. So we talk about climate change. People
20 want to know, or need to be told, what does it mean for them, what's their buy-in. What's their responsibility to do something about this? Because at the moment, people know that the climate is changing, but it's such a big elephant that they don't know, "What can I do that's going to make a difference?" And what they default to, and what our experience is, is – and the stats that Jill's
25 just spoken about support – is that it's going to happen to someone else. "I understand that fire's a risk, but it's not going to happen to me, it's going to happen to the person next door".

30 And getting the message through on climate change and the various hazards that fall out the back of it is the same principle. It's the public information and communication of the call to action, if you like, for people to actually own that responsibility of – not looking after themselves, we're not necessarily asking
35 for that – but what we're asking for is a shared responsibility, and that means that, actually, we're all in this together. DFES can't do its job without other government departments. It can't do its job without members of the community. And the same applies to climate change, we are all in this together. And that means that if there's a heat wave, then my expectation is that DFES will be helping Health to deal with that, because we're in it with
40 them, and vice versa.

45 DR WEERAMANTHRI: Okay. So the message I'm taking from what you're saying is that if we were to recommend any kind of communication or awareness campaign, it actually needs to be linked with other messages across government, and not just be awareness-raising, but also a call to a specific action.

MR KLEMM: Yes, is that fair?

MS DOWNARD: Absolutely. And personal risk recognition, as you've just spoken about, Commissioner, is the linchpin there. That's what drives action. And once people recognise that personal risk, they almost invariably take action from there.

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DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. We might move on to a few of the other topics I've foreshadowed prior to the Inquiry with you. You mentioned in your written submission, the DFES emergency management Intelligence branch and various other data – analytic capacity you've got inside DFES, and the importance of reliable data. And we're very well aware of how, you know, well you respond to specific hazards. So my question is a little different, it's about how good are the early warning systems for the hazards you're dealing with, fires, heat, cyclones, storms and floods?

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MR KLEMM: Yes. So perhaps I'll give a brief overview and then I'll pass to Mal. Darren Klemm here. So the many hazards that DFES is responsible for, they are all unique in their own way. And certainly bushfire, which gets a lot of press, a lot of media, are difficult to predict where they're going to occur. We know that large areas of the state is bushfire prone, and so we tend to take a broader communication piece and data collection piece with bushfire in terms of vegetation and predicting, based on rainfall and soil dryness index and the like, which – we have all that data. Now, that's distinctly different to cyclone. So cyclone occurs, and we actually have pretty good information in the lead up to cyclones in terms of strength, wind speed, rainfall totals, and potential impact areas. And then that allows us to put out a whole range of warnings.

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Now, storm is exactly the same in terms of that ability to track it, understand that it's coming and put the various warnings out to the community that it's going to occur. And flooding, the same, there's a whole raft of flood-measuring infrastructure throughout the state of Western Australia that allows us to predict and communicate the effects of floods over time. We're able to do that with the placement of a Bureau of Met employee within the DFES State Operation Centre, which has now been in place for over six years or so, and that is because so many of the hazards that we're responsible for are driven by the weather. And so we have that expert in there five days a week, and then a call-back capability to assist us during high threat periods. Now, that feeds directly into our Intelligence branch, which I'll perhaps now hand over to Mal and he can talk about that.

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MR CRONSTEDT: Thanks, Commissioner. Mal Cronstedt here. So it's a bit of a journey, this gathering, you know, starting with just raw data. I mean, turning that into, you know, something ultimately that's intelligible and usable and – useful, usable and used, I guess, at the end of the day. And there's several temporal dimensions to that. Of course there's the, you know, the daily stuff. So we have internal expertise in the form of a Bureau of Meteorology person. We have our own technical experts who are specialists in the particular hazard impacts and nature of the hazards

themselves, and they're regionally distributed as well as centrally located. So we have a good network of expertise that can inform a daily outlook of what's likely to happen. And then as you get closer, quality improves, and you have greater insight into the potential impacts and vulnerabilities.

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Now, if you take that out – so the closer you get, the better the information gets. But, of course, then the temporal, sort of, urgency becomes more acute. But if you take a yearly snapshot – so working in partnership and DFES now supporting the State Emergency Management Committee, of course, there's a very broad set of data. And using our Intelligence branch, we can, on a yearly cycle, get an understanding of what the trends are nationally and more locally. So, for instance, we can contribute to a bushfire outlook which was released by the Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC. So that gives a broad, quite a rough guide as to what's impending in terms of bushfire hazard. And we can do similar things across a range of other products and give people insights through, you know, workshops and forums and pre-season briefings on an annual cycle.

But, of course, the annual cycle has its challenges. We've just been through – the Bureau of Meteorology has given us – they've gone through with our federal counterpart, Emergency Management Australia, a national pre-season briefing, where they attempt to forecast what's going to happen over the next six to 12 months across the hazards we've touched on. And then that – they're about to go on a Bureau of Meteorology tour of the northwest and illustrate more accurately the impending cyclone season. So that annual cycle continues and gets better over years as the science improves, and we get better data and insight into what might happen. And then, of course, we have monthly products and weekly products and then daily products, which inform our decision-making and resource allocation, and what we do, and things like communications programs and the like.

You know, nothing is perfect. We understand that. There's always room to improve, the science improves over time, and our capacity to gather data from a huge variety of sources, make sense of it, and then turn it into products that are intelligible to users is quite a challenge, but we're getting much better at it, and DFES is quite proud of its capacity to do that across the hazards it manages, but also provide SEMC with support across all of the hazards, including, of course, heat wave. So one of the strengths we have, I think, is that impact data. So through the Bureau of Meteorology and other sources, we might forecast that over the next fortnight or month or whatever, there's likely to be a heat wave episode. And then as you get closer, you get more accurate. Say, "Okay, well, the next four days, we're going to exceed 40 degrees in the Perth Metropolitan area, whatever might be". So that would then inform our strategies and working with our partners, what we might put in place and preposition.

So one of the strengths, as I said, is increasing capacity to work out what's impacted in terms of infrastructure, working with partners who own that

infrastructure. But one of the gaps, I think, is clearly identifying and addressing the more vulnerable in our communities. So we have some insights, but with our partnerships with the health sector or the community sector, truly understanding where vulnerable people are and what we might put in place before anything bad happens, to address the needs of those people. And I guess it all starts way back in trying to build resilience. But when you have an impending heat wave, what are we going to do here and now about identifying vulnerable people and say, placing elderly people in a rec centre with adequate air conditioning, just sort of grasping at something there. So I think, going back to the Commissioner's point about the partnership aspect, it's so critical that we can't work in isolation. We've got the stuff, we can help inform decision-making, and we can, together, work on strategies to address some of our more vulnerable. But the partnership has to be there and has to be really well-connected.

15 DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. So I just might say, we'll take up some of those issues of vulnerability and risk in a little bit more detail with the State Emergency Management Committee when they come and provide evidence, so thank you for raising that issue. We've got about 20 10 minutes left. I've got two or three questions. So maybe to that first one around partnerships, since you've raised it. And so you mentioned again, in your written submission, the importance of DFES and the Department of Health partnering together in future. And so can I just ask, are there any specific priority areas for such a partnership, Commissioner?

25 MR KLEMM: Yes. I think Mal – Darren Klemm – Mal spoke to the issues of perhaps the elderly and the infirm. So if we put it in an emergency context that DFES is responsible for them, life is our key priority and always will be. So we're looking to deal with those people who are the most vulnerable, the most at risk. And we don't always know where they are. And that's why that local piece around the community taking responsibility is really important. And so partnerships around us having a better understanding of sharing of data, if you like, that we've got, when we do an impact assessment of – you know, we can forecast where a bushfire's likely to go once it starts, if we were able to gather data in that impact area to say, “Right, these 35 a hundred houses here, they have people who are infirm, their illness is being managed at home”, you know, “They're elderly”, then we've got a greater chance of being able to manage those people.

40 And I think if you reflect on the Yarloop bushfire, where the two gentlemen lost their lives, they were elderly gentlemen. Now, what we would like to see is, I guess, we have a mapping system that identifies critical infrastructure, for instance. And in that same vein, then, then wouldn't those people be our main focus in terms of understanding that we need to protect that piece of critical 45 infrastructure, if it's a hospital, but then also the people that exist in those home. If we knew where they were, then there's an opportunity for us to impact their well-being.

DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. It's a pretty big question, but could you just comment, to what degree is it desirable to devolve planning and response to a regional level, and what is the role of local government in emergency response planning and response?

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MR KLEMM: Yes, so I'll briefly answer that, and then I'll perhaps pass to Mal. Darren Klemm here. I think very much the thread of what we've been talking about today has been the message that we're trying to portray, is that the importance of local messages and local involvement in managing people's safety and people's own safety is absolutely critical to the success of it. And we've been often criticized in the past, as many fire and emergency service agencies have, for coming down and telling local people how it's going to be. And so the involvement of local knowledge in these decisions, certainly in an operational context when we're dealing with emergencies, but also in the pre-planning, it's the question, is absolutely critical, because they are the people that know that local area best. We can help facilitate, and it's our role to make sure we're supporting and providing whatever assistance required, but that importance at the local level, through the various mechanisms in emergency management structure, which I'll get Mal to talk to – he's well-placed to deal with those at a local level. So perhaps I'll get you to expand on that, Mal.

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MR CRONSTEDT: Thank you. Mal Cronstedt. So the Emergency Management Act provides for a whole, you know, structure of emergency management planning, and gives local governments a statutory responsibility to have local emergency management arrangements. So in keeping with the Commissioner's comments about local is best, so we'd expect local emergency management arrangements to be inclusive of all hazards and recognise the peculiarities of the local government and the local area. It'd be fair to say that some arrangements are better than others. I mean, you'd expect that, given the diversity of local governments in Western Australia. But that's where you get the best value, because the local understanding is there. If you can commit that to paper, you can document it, you can create the connections across the critical people in that local community, and then link up through the other systems such as the health system and community sector, you have a very powerful forum which then is already pre-positioned to take advantage of what they've already thought about and planned for and connected and talked about, and then turn that into operations in reality.

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So that local emergency management committee, which I'd expect Health to be party to, and the arrangement which documents the outcomes of their deliberations, is absolutely critical to understanding what's best for their local circumstance. Aggregations of local emergency management committees and arrangements to the regional level, through the district Emergency Management Committee, another statutory body, can also help, because often – or certainly, heat waves wouldn't be confined to an administrative boundary. So they'd be pretty artificial and affect one or more regions. So having that next network up is also critical, so you can aggregate local knowledge and best

place the discussions and your deliberations to best effect, when it comes to actual decision-making. But I guess the point I'm making is, the more you do upfront, it's reasonable, isn't it, that the more you do upfront, the connections you have, the networks you have, the people you know, and how well you've documented and thought through those issues, the better placed you are to be better prepared once something does happen.

DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you. Just the last question, I was just struck by DFES developing a climate change white paper, and I just wanted to ask, Commissioner, what are you hoping to achieve through that process?

MR KLEMM: Yes. I'll get Mal to respond to that.

MR CRONSTEDT: So you'll know that the State, through the Department of Water and Environment Regulation, has released a climate change paper – I can't remember the exact title of it – but for public consultation. The Commissioner is party to a steering group at the DG level, and I'm party to a working group which resulted in the paper that's been released. So we're party to the State's approach to addressing this issue. The white paper is DFES's approach to getting on the front foot. So there's two parts to this. We need to – as an agency, we need to do our bit to reduce our carbon footprint and to, you know, meet the state's needs and be party to adaptation. But we also need to think about what is it across our hazards that we need to address and resource allocate for mitigation. So the white paper, really, at the beginning, at the starting point, are getting on the front and saying, "As an agency, what do we need to do to meet the needs of the state, and where we're clearly going, and what do we need to do better in mitigating and addressing some of the issues that we've talked about earlier?"

MR KLEMM: I think – Darren Klemm – it's an issue that, I guess, there should be some comfort to the Inquiry, that fire and emergency service agencies across Australia and New Zealand are all working out where they fit in in the climate change piece. Not only, as pointed out, do we have a role to deal with a – you know, we have a fleet of over 1200 diesel trucks, for example. What are we going to do about that? We have a responsibility to look at that and do that differently. And I know in the ACT they've recently ordered electric trucks. So we're very interested to see what the outcome of that will be.

But also, the actual climate change impact on our business and our operating models and how we structure ourselves. You know, we're all very similar across Australia and New Zealand in terms of how we're set up, and how we respond, and our various response components, and how they work, how they need to change. And maybe that's not going to suit the future of how we need to deal with things. And perhaps one example I could give you is that climate change will mean that fires that used to go for three days will now go for two

weeks. And I think we can safely say that. We've seen it throughout the world in the last five years or so, of extended, more intense events.

5 So we have a very efficient volunteer model across Australia that responds to bushfire, and we share resources across state and territory boundaries to support that. But is that going to suit what the future holds for us? You know, are we going to continue to expect volunteers to leave work for two weeks to go and deal with a bushfire? And I'm not saying we're going to change that right here, right now, but the white paper, in terms of an industry, as a sector, 10 we need to consider these things, because the future – the expectations of community and government will be that we'll be expected to manage these things. And we can't keep – in 20 years' time, expecting volunteers to be dealing with events that are going for two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, when they used to go for two days.

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DR WEERAMANTHRI: That's an appropriate place to close.

MR CRONSTEDT: Yes.

20 DR WEERAMANTHRI: Commissioner Klemm, Deputy Commissioner Cronstedt, Ms Downard, thank you very for your attendance at today's hearing. The transcript of this hearing will be sent to you so that you can correct minor factual errors before it is placed on a public record. If you could return the transcript within 10 working days of the date of the covering 25 letter or email, otherwise it'll be deemed to be correct. While you cannot amend your evidence, if you would like to explain particular points in more detail, or present further information, you can provide this as an addition to your submission to the Inquiry when you return the transcript. Once again, thank you all very much.

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MR KLEMM: Thank you.

DR WEERAMANTHRI: Thank you.

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