

Question on Notice No. 1138, Thursday, 30 September 2004

Mr ROWELL asked the Minister for Emergency Services (Mr Cummins) -

With reference to aerial fire fighting capabilities –

- (1) What is the estimated and actual budget allocation for each of the last two financial years and for the year to date, including equipment and contingency funding?
- (2) Has the department called for tenders for providers of aerial fire fighting capabilities; if so, on what date did this occur, what was the criteria and will he list the successful parties?

Mr CUMMINS:

We have formally budgeted for air operations in 2003/2004 with the formation of an air operations project team and establishment of formal training for specialist air operations personnel.

Because of the varying nature of the use of aerial appliances there has been no specific budget allocated and services have been provided on an as needs basis. However, I am pleased to announce that the Beattie government has now allocated more than \$600,000 for an enhanced bushfire response initiative.

We've always had the capability to deploy aircraft whenever necessary. The decision to use aircraft in support of firefighting will always be based on an objective assessment of the contribution the aircraft will make to overall operational effectiveness. Our firefighters are the operational experts and therefore they decide what equipment is used to respond to bushfires

Historically, Queensland has not placed great reliance on the use of aircraft as part of its fire suppression strategy. Our continued fire management focus is on an integrated prevention/mitigation strategy supported by an effective ground based suppression capability.

QFRS is actively involved with the National Aerial Fire Fighting Centre, set up through the Australasian Fire Authorities Council. This involvement is facilitating and ensuring that our programs and activities are developed and are consistent with national best practice.

The Department is working closely with the other land management agencies in the State with the intention of establishing a fully integrated Air Operations Unit.

The QFRS has recently called 'Invitations to Offer' from the aviation industry interested and capable of supplying aviation services for fire operations. This was advertised in the Courier Mail on 18 August 2004, The Australian news paper on 13 & 14 August 2004 and on the Queensland Government Market website at the same time.

The purpose was to establish a "call when needed register" of suitably qualified suppliers, their location, contact details, and capacity and cost of service provision. The process was intended to be inclusive and contractors would only be excluded if mandatory requirements were not met. Details of this invitation are publicly available through the QFRS Air Operations Unit. Most of the contractors identified on the

Queensland register are also listed on interstate systems and meet both industry and agency standard requirements.

In fact, during October firefighters called in aircraft to water bomb a fire they were fighting near Kenilworth. The QFRS were reported doing at least 40 passes dropping thousands of litres. We have also used aircraft for the Springbrook and Oceanview fires, plus observation flights have been done on a daily basis and we have aircraft on standby if needed.