

## Hansard

### Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates Committee B

2 June 2010

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** I refer to dot point 5 on page 543, which refers to revised bushfire guidelines. Could the minister explain what the guidelines do and their focus?

**Mr J.H.D. DAY:** Obviously, in some parts of the state, including parts of the metropolitan area, there is a high fire risk, particularly where there is proximity to residential and other developments. It is essential that we do what we can to minimise that risk. Certainly, as a representative of a hills electorate and somebody who has lived in the hills for a long time, I do not think we should be unduly frightened about bushfire risk; it is simply a matter of managing properly and ensuring that adequate responses are available when fires occur.

Of course, from the planning point of view, we must ensure that we take into account the particular topography and vegetation and ensuring that road design, road width and other requirements are in place in relation to building approvals that will provide a sufficient degree of assurance that if a major fire occurs, it is more likely to be controlled and that people are able to escape if necessary or be able to protect themselves from a major fire.

That is really the essential point of the bushfire planning guidelines that have been put in place. They have recently been updated and a revised edition of the guidelines published. That is an interim document and will be reviewed once the report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission is published. If there are additional changes to be made taking into account the experience in Victoria, they will be incorporated.

That outlines the overall purpose of it. The guidelines are available on the internet or in hard copy and they are expected to be taken into account by local governments and the other decision-making authorities in relation to approving subdivisions and other approvals in high fire risk areas.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** Will it restrict the development of residences in areas that are highly prone to fire or does it also affect the building code, which is an issue that came out of the Victorian inquiry today?

**Mr J.H.D. DAY:** I will defer to Mr Lumsden in a moment. I cannot recall whether it directly affects the building code; it probably has some impact on that. Certainly, it is intended to ensure that where housing is going to be approved in a high-risk area that if it is excessively high risk, it will be less likely to be rezoned for urban development; but where it is rezoned or where a subdivision is being considered under an existing zoning, it is intended to ensure that adequate protections are put in place. I ask Mr Lumsden to respond on the other details, partly based on his experience as a CEO of the City of Swan and previously in the Shire of Mundaring, where obviously these issues are faced.

**Mr Lumsden:** Thank you, minister and through you, Madam Chair, to the honourable member. The guidelines have been developed in conjunction and liaison with the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and the Department of Environment and Conservation because a number of these issues relate to national parks as well as to what I call generally bushfire risk zoned areas.

The guidelines basically are picking up and proposing a risk management policy, which is then reflected in the consideration of subdivisions, whether they are rezoning to urban or to small rural holdings. The guidelines will restrict, where appropriate in high risk areas, the formation of small rural holdings in terms of their intensity and the nature of whether subdivision will occur.

Where development can occur, the guidelines also ensure that the interface between, for instance, a national park and future residential development is taken into consideration through the guideline framework. The issues relating to the buildings themselves, as the minister has outlined, fall under the Building Code of Australia.

Those aspects are administered by local governments through their building control policies. Obviously, that is an issue we have also raised with the Department of Local Government, which is responsible for the administration of the Local Government Act. That aspect still needs to be developed further in conjunction with local government to recognise that although areas for subdivisions can be planned, it is critical to ensure an integrated approach that takes into account the development on the land itself.

That needs to be addressed through the Building Code of Australia. I have expectations that significant aspects will come out of the royal commission in New South Wales that will result in amendments to the Building Code of Australia. Until we see that, we cannot really do much more than what we are doing as a planning agency.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** Do you think it will significantly reduce the potential, particularly in the south, for building holiday homes in enclosed woodland areas adjacent to national park?

**Mr Lumsden:** I do not think one can say that it would reduce significantly. I think what it would generate is more judicious consideration of where they would go on the site and what are the preventive measures that need to be taken from a risk management perspective. I think the application would give far stronger guidance to the general allocation of rural smallholdings, which may be very vulnerable. I would quote the issue in the Shire of Toodyay, which occurred in this state not so long ago.