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## Government must invest in community safety

Now is the time for the Barnett Government to truly take responsibility for the community safety and properly resource the Department of Environment and Conservation and other public sector agencies.

That is the view of the Community and Public Sector Union after the Keelty report into the devastating Margaret River fires was tabled in State Parliament today.

Branch Secretary Toni Walkington said previous reviews had identified substantial funding and resource shortfalls and this was again identified in the Keelty report.

The report highlighted insufficient progress towards implementing reviews tabled in the Ferguson report after the Boorabbin bushfire in 2009, with DEC only able to implement some recommendations within its limited funding capacity.

“The message is clear – the government has to do something about it now,” Ms Walkington said.

“This latest report clearly highlights that more needs to be done and highlights the need to retain staff through better pay rates, alleviating onerous conditions and fill much-needed vacancies.

“Today Mr Barnett said the government would adopt all the recommendations and this means additional funding for DEC and the proposed Office of Bush Fire Management.”

Ms Walkington said DEC staff were under enormous pressure to improve prescribed burning procedures and respond to more fires with less people on the ground.

“It is important that everyone understands the DEC is completely understaffed and didn’t have adequate resources to do the role they were expected to deliver.

For example there are 27 staff in the Walpole area but only three are in full-time fire management roles.

In the Blackwood district key positions are vacant and others are undertaken by people on a temporary basis.

When fire work escalates then other staff are required to pitch in.

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“This workload is not really recognised with evidence that some have worked between 20 and 36 hours straight when responding to fires.”

Ms Walkington said most DEC staff were willing to volunteer for firefighting duties on top of their regular duties but many felt they were copping unfair criticism for their trouble.

“DEC’s staff turnover rate of 11 per cent in 2010/11 is also a major concern and another reason the Barnett Government must provide more incentives for people to stay.

“More needs to be done to retain that fire planning and fire fighting knowledge.”

**FOR COMMENT:**

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