



Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2021-2022 **ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**

Asked by Mr James Milligan MLA on 3 November 2022: Mr Wayne Phillips, A/g Commissioner took on notice the following question(s):

Reference: Hansard [uncorrected] proof transcript 3 November 2022 [PAGE 83 - 84]

In relation to:

MR MILLIGAN: Yes, thank you. My question is in relation to the number of firefighters. 2020/2021 there were 348 male firefighters, but only 22 female firefighters. The following financial year there were 372 men, yet still only 22 women firefighters. So, my question is just in relation to what is the government doing to attract women firefighters, what are some of the barriers or reasons why that number is as low as what it is?

Mr Gentleman: Thanks, Mr Milligan, it is a good question. We are trying to do our very best to attract more women, both in emergency services but across government as well, on our frontline responses, and we have been working with new applicants to ensure that they can get their physical fitness up. In particular that is generally some of the challenges for women firefighters getting into a structure. So what we are saying to people in their first application is be prepared for these physical challenges that you will see and physical tests that occur. Women tend to be just as smart, if not smarter than men when it comes to working through the application, but the physicality of it is a little bit different sometimes.

One of the challenges I found when I was doing my recruiting course was the beep test and the ability to be able to keep that rhythm and speed up. So we are saying to people, be prepared and we are actually assisting them to train for that physicality. If a woman, for example, is not successful in the first application, we are encouraging them to stay fit and help train for the next year, so the next year when we might do recruiting. With that though I might pass again to directorate officials to give you some more information.

Mr Phillips: Thank you minister, and thank you Mr Milligan for a great question. Personally I am involved in the Australasian AFAC body in regard to how we can attract and better represent women within urban fire services across Australia. It is a challenge that every urban fire service is finding difficult. So to give you the exact answer would be speculative at this stage, but let us say that a number of women applying across Australia for urban fire services is around about approximately 25 per cent, give or take some percentages, depending on the state, which—and we would, like all fire service, like that to be raised up of course.

So attraction is the first hurdle we have got to address with regard to bringing a better gender diversity into fire services. Currently Fire and Rescue ACT is undergoing a recruitment process and it would be unfair to speculate with numbers and let you know numbers right now in respect of that process, because we have applicants who are in the middle of the process itself, but as those numbers come out regarding how many women we attract, how many women get through the process and eventually how many women we recruit, we would be happy to share those numbers, but I think at this stage there are people sitting on the sideline waiting for the next stage of however they are going. Further details around the national champions have changed in regard to how we attract-retain woman. I can take that on notice and give you a lot more details about that if you would like.

Mick Gentleman MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

ACT Fire & Rescue (ACTF&R) strongly encourages people from a broad range of backgrounds to apply to be a firefighter, including females. ACTF&R continues to focus on ensuring a balanced and supported recruitment and selection process, with the aim of increasing female participation based on merit. In this regard, and consistent with previous processes, ACTF&R continues to monitor the progression of female applicants through the recruitment and selection processes, with a view to enhancing information and support activities.

Further details on the AFAC Fire and Emergency Champions of Change Coalition is publicly available at: <https://www.afac.com.au/initiative/diversity-and-inclusion/fire-and-emergency-male-champions-of-change>.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Signature:



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By the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mick Gentleman MLA