

# Petition puts heat on fire management

MORE than 2000 rural residents from across WA have signed a petition questioning the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' (DFES) fire management practices.

The petition, which has been circulating for just over a month, was organised by Waroona beef producer Raymond Hull and presented to parliament last week by Shooters and Fishers Party MLC Rick Mazza.

It was also the topic of discussion when Liberal MLC for the South West Nigel Hallet raised the subject in Private Members Business.

The petition calls on the Legislative Council to "conduct a parliamentary inquiry into the operations of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services as they relate to the management of recent bushfire emergencies".

"In particular, communication of imminent danger to the community; the limitations imposed on bushfire personnel and the community to make on the spot judgements for applications such as back burning or the use of appliances to immediately take action to control the threat of fire; co-ordination between government departments and volunteers and once the emergency threat of fire is over the ability for people to obtain supplies for themselves and stock and return to their properties."

Mr Hull said his concerns about the handling of the Waroona and Harvey

bushfires were shared across the State.

"You wonder when they don't get off the roads to engage a grass fire what's going on?" he said.

"Then you hear stories that they're told not to engage a grass fire.

"Well the end result of that was simply a bigger fire."

Mr Hull is calling for DFES to be removed from managing fires in rural areas and to leave it to the people who know the land.

"The outcome I'm hoping for is to apply more political pressure to get things changed," he said.

"I think the rural community would rather see a stronger alliance with the Department of Parks and Wildlife, to better equip the volunteers, and for DFES to be removed from rural fire fighting.

"They're really good at static fires but they lack the training and the ability to handle a running fire."

Mr Hull started the petition in January after a volatile community meeting in Pinjarra where residents claimed authorities failed to give them adequate warning of the fire's approach.

The residents said they appreciated the efforts of fire fighters and emergency personnel, but some had concerns over the policies DFES staff work under.

They also raised issue with fire ground access ahead of the fire as farmers evacuated stock and after the fire as they attempted to access their



Member of the South West's Fire for Life group and veteran Manjimup Shire fire control officer Tom Muir (left) and Waroona beef producer Raymond Hull present Shooters and Fishers Party MLC Rick Mazza with a petition signed by more than 2000 concerned WA residents over the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' bushfire management.



A group of concerned WA rural residents attended Parliament House last week to hear South West MLC Nigel Hallet raise his concerns over the Department of Fire and Emergency Services' bushfire management policies.

properties and manage stock and provide care for injured stock.

"The unnecessary road blocks were nightmarish to say the least," Mr Hull said.