

8 January 2016

Our Ref: GP/CA
File No.:

Mr Todd Buttsworth
Secretary
House of Assembly
Parliament House,
HOBART 7000

Dear Mr Buttsworth

Parliamentary Inquiry into the State Fire Commission

Thank you for providing the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) with an opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the State Fire Commission. Due to the tight timelines for submissions, LGAT has not been able to consult broadly with its member councils in developing this submission. It should be noted that LGAT has two representatives on the State Fire Commission.

We understand that the Terms of Reference for the review are broad in scope and include:

- the transfer of the State Emergency Services (SES) to the State Fire Commission/Tasmanian Fire Services;
- the structure and corporate services review of the Department of Police and Emergency Management;
- funding for the fuel reduction unit;
- community safety programs;
- fire fighter numbers;
- the protection of the community; and
- the future funding arrangements for TFS and SES.

Although LGAT and its member councils have an interest in many of the issues to be examined as part of the inquiry this submission focuses specifically on funding of the SES.

Currently, under Division 5 of the *Emergency Management Act 2006*, Councils are responsible for the effective operation of municipal volunteer SES units and for the storage and maintenance of the equipment and the provision of other facilities and resources necessary for those units to perform their functions, including adequate accommodation. The amount provided by councils to support the SES volunteer units varies depending on the council's capacity and does not necessarily correspond to the risks present within the municipality.

During consultation, as part of the Justice Review into Emergency Management Arrangements and the 2012 Review of the *Emergency Management Act*, there has been general consensus from council officers that resourcing of SES volunteer units should be centralised, potentially through an extension to the Fire levy. Such a move would ensure that SES volunteers and resources could be coordinated strategically and allocated in a prioritised manner during an emergency and not constrained by municipal boundaries. It should be noted that there was concern within Local Government regarding the collection of the Fire Levy, specifically it being perceived by community members as a Local Government Levy. Any extension to the Fire Levy for SES funding needs to be accompanied by an education program to ensure the community understands what it is being collected for.

A move to a more centralised model is consistent with the Tasmanian Government's strategic alignment between the Tasmania Fire Service and the State Emergency Services. A centralised model for SES volunteer units under the new TFS/ SES structure could allow for significant efficiencies. These may include:

- servicing and maintenance of vehicle and equipment for both SES and TFS;
- collaborative purchasing agreements for equipment and resources; and
- integration of headquarters and operational units.

In order to fully consider such a proposal, a working group, chaired by TFS, and involving members from LGAT, TFS, SES and TFS Corporate services has been convened to explore options for the centralisation of SES volunteer services and the funding of these services. In order to fully assess the merits of centralisation an audit of the current funding for SES volunteer units is being undertaken by Wise, Lord and Ferguson Chartered Accountants. This includes understanding council cash and in-kind contributions as well as the current value of the capital assets. This audit is almost complete.

Council support for a centralised model would be dependent on ensuring that the new financial model didn't result in the state cost shifting their current budget responsibilities.

In addition the new model would need to ensure that:

- mechanisms were established to ensure that there is a strong link between SES volunteer units and the Municipal Emergency Management Committees (MEMC). e.g MOU's and representation on the MEMC;
- funding distribution to municipal units be based on a standard levy per property;
- arrangements were in place associated with the transfer of plant and equipment;
- Council ownership of SES volunteer unit Head Quarters and future lease arrangements were resolved; and
- concerns in relation to the State reducing recurrent funding of the SES in lieu of establishing a Levy are resolved.

In addition to the centralisation of the SES volunteer units, councils have consistently advocated for more recurrent funding to be provided to SES to support a planning unit. Such a unit would be able to provide expertise in emergency management planning and risk management at the State level as well as expert advice and support for Municipal and Regional planning. It would also ensure consistency of approach across the three levels of planning at the local, regional and State level.

If you have any further questions about the submission please contact Georgia Palmer, Senior Policy Officer, Local Government Association on 6233 5965 or georgia.palmer@lgat.tas.gov.au

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dion Lester', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dion Lester
Policy Director