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**THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART, ON WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH 2016.**

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### **INQUIRY INTO THE STATE FIRE COMMISSION**

**Mr GAVIN STUART FREEMAN**, ACTING CHIEF OFFICER, TASMANIA FIRE SERVICE, AND **Mr TODD RAYMOND CRAWFORD**, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES, DEPARTMENT OF POLICE AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Barnett) - This is a proceeding of the Parliament so what you say is protected by parliamentary privilege, an important legal protection that allows for the best information to be shared so we can make the best decisions based on that information. It is not accorded to you if statements are made outside the Parliament and also if any defamatory remarks are shared. I want to also note that if people have mobile phones they should be switched to silent or turned off. Also this is a public hearing and the media are here; they have been invited and are welcome, so that evidence may be reported.

Thank you very much for being here; we really appreciate it. On behalf of the committee I would like to express a sincere and deep gratitude to Tasmania Fire Service and all the firefighters and emergency service personnel for the work that has been undertaken over the past summer. This committee expresses our deep gratitude in that regard. I want to put that on the record and pass that on to you and your service personnel

**Mr FREEMAN** - That is appreciated; it has been a long campaign.

The submission is comprehensive and no doubt members have had an opportunity to peruse it. I guess one of the main things I want to cover in my opening remarks is to address the issue around the combined or integrated approach between Tasmania Fire Service and the State Emergency Service. Australia generally across emergency management has adopted that kind of integrated approach and I think it makes very good sense for Tasmania to follow along those lines. There are so many synergies between Tasmania Fire Service and the State Emergency Service in Tasmania in that we are both largely volunteer-based organisations. We work side-by-side in so many areas now and the recent bushfire campaign has been a classic example of that, with SES personnel embedded alongside our volunteers in management support, staging area management and incident management teams. We share a lot of the same people, of course, with people who volunteer for both agencies, so to take it a step further to allow for more formal alignment and integration is the right thing to do, in my belief.

There are certainly some opportunities there for reducing duplication. There are opportunities for us to provide a better service to the Tasmanian community than we already do, but there need to be some things that come into train before that can occur in a holistic sort of way. There are already a lot of areas we have identified where we can make some efficiencies, provide better service and share our resources, but there clearly needs to be a sustainable funding model going forward if something were flagged as being very important to make full integration a reality and there will need to be some review of legislation, I would suggest, as we go forward,

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around that alignment or integration, particularly around reporting lines and those sorts of things and responsibilities. There is nothing we can't work through but it would just make it neater if the legislation reflected that.

The Tasmania Fire Service Act, in any case, is from 1979 - it is quite old - and there are a number of things in there we have already identified, not just in relation to what we are talking about here but things like fire permit systems and those sorts of things that would need to be reviewed in any case. I would suggest that at some time over the next two to three years we would need a full and comprehensive review of the Tasmania Fire Service Act.

That is really all I wanted to touch on. The terms of reference are quite broad so rather than sit here and try to cover off on all of those I think it is probably better if I just respond to question from the committee, if that is all right with you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - That is appreciated. Perhaps I will just kick it off and then pass to members of the committee. In terms of your observations and opening remarks about the need for a review, in terms of some of the specific areas I will just drill down a little bit. It is legislation from 1979, so 37 years in the past. It need updating, review and reform, so that is what you are sharing with us. Can you just drill down in some of those areas that need reform in terms of that review? I would like you to address the issue of the reporting lines between Tasmania Fire Service and the commission. Obviously you are appearing as a witness very shortly on behalf of the commission as chair so that is a matter I would like addressed in your response.

**Mr FREEMAN** - Perhaps I could deal with that one first. I have acted as chief since July last year and my predecessor, Mike Brown, and I had a lot of discussion around the potential for conflict, because when you are chief of the organisation and also chair of the State Fire Commission it sometimes can be very difficult. The State Fire Commission is a representative board and that can put the chief officer as chair in a compromising position, in my view, from time to time where the views of the representatives of the board may differ from that of the Government. As a Senior Executive Service person, as the chief, I think there is potential there for a blurring of the lines. It is my belief that a chair of the commission other than the chief officer - and that could be either an independent chair or one of the elected commission members - should chair the meeting. That occurs on occasions when the chief officer is unable to attend and it works quite well but it would need some legislative review for that to be enabled.

**CHAIR** - Witnesses have put forward the merit of having an independent chair of the commission so that in terms of reporting mechanisms there would be an independent objective view. Is that a view you would support or are you open to the structure and nature of the commission? Can you tell us your views on the important role of the commission, how necessary it is and the broad nature of the representatives on the commission? Can you just flesh that out for us?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I do not have a fixed view on whether it should be an independent chair or a member of the commission. At times, as I have mentioned, members of the commission chair meetings and that works. As to the role and responsibilities of an independent chair, I would reserve my decision on that until we flesh that out a little bit. It could work. We have the State Fire Management Council which is a separate body under the act which has an independent chair at the moment and that works very well. It has very clearly defined responsibilities and probably a fairly limited scope for the State Fire Management Council compared to the responsibilities of

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the State Fire Commission. In answer to your question, I do not have a fixed view on that but all options could be considered.

**CHAIR** - When it comes to the different representatives on the commission, is there a possibility of conflict of interest from time to time when you have particular stakeholders? The union is represented on the commission but they represent members of the service. So how does that operate at the moment?

**Mr FREEMAN** - There is a potential there for that and the success of any of these things is about relationships. While they are working okay, it is okay. If you have an individual representing a body on the commission and that body had a different view to where the Tasmania Fire Service were going at a particular time, there could be some conflict there.

**CHAIR** - I will pass to other members but there are a lot of questions I am sure we are very interested in. Drilling down to the review of the legislation reporting lines via permits, are there any other areas you want to flag with us in terms of needing reform?

**Mr FREEMAN** - There are a number of specific areas we have identified which I do not have in front of me at the moment. I would be happy to share those with the committee in writing, if that is okay with you. We have been collating some areas over the last two or three years. Fire permits is one. When we talk about the SES alignment, the Emergency Management Act, I suggest, would need some review. It would need to be reviewed in concert.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - What about the operational arrangements within the service right across the industry - the Tasmania Forestry Services, Parks, yourselves, volunteers and permanent officers?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I think the act provides quite well for fire-fighting operations and the responsibilities the Fire Service have at present. It is clear that the chief officer has responsibility for fire services across the state. TFS led the response to the recent fire campaign which is across land tenures. We have a tenure-blind fuel reduction program and I think the act provides sufficiently for all of that. That is not to say that with a full and comprehensive review, we should make sure there are no sticking points around that subject.

**CHAIR** - As somebody who is getting my head around how it all works, I consider it a challenge because you mentioned the sustainable funding model going forward. I can see the merit of that and need to drill down on that in due course during this inquiry. You are the key part of the fire service but you have Parks and Wildlife, Forestry Tasmania, and a host of volunteers who operate. Is there a snapshot summary of how we fight our fires in Tasmania that you want to share with us to give us the global picture?

**Mr FREEMAN** - The Fire Service Act provides for responsibilities for parks, forestry officers and police officers, as it does for the chief fire officer and his or her delegate. That is clear. We have interoperability and cooperative arrangements across two of our management agencies and the fire service that I believe are the envy of other countries. We have an interoperability protocol which fleshes out the finer detail of how that works in response.

**CHAIR** - An MOU or just a protocol between the different agencies?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Interagency protocol is the name.

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**CHAIR** - Between each agency?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes, it is across the three agencies. That is reviewed on a needs basis and kept contemporary.

**CHAIR** - Can we get a copy of that?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Probably one of the main reasons for establishing the committee was to look at the whole question of the integration of the SES and fire service the funding arrangements which then were reduced from a police budget point of view. The Tasmania Fire Service was asked to pick up those funding arrangements. They have been dealt with in the report in a fair bit of detail. However, it has put a fair bit of pressure on the Tasmania Fire Service from a funding point of view. I know there are moves to try to address this issue and to put it on a sustainable basis into the future. It is two years ago since that happened and we have not sorted those issues out. I would like to ask questions around the issue of what problems or pressures the Fire Service has been put under as a result of that and when we can expect that to be addressed.

**Mr FREEMAN** - The SES came across and, reporting-wise, we shifted. It includes the funding, as you've highlighted. The Tasmania Fire Service and the State Fire Commission accepted that we would, through some efficiencies and eating into the cash surplus we had at hand, be able to fund the emergency service for the short to medium term. We have always said right from the outset that that will not be sustainable in an ongoing way, and that has been widely acknowledged. We have done a lot of work on what it costs to fund the State Emergency Service. At the moment, we fund it to the tune of \$2.5 million, which was the Government contribution. However, there is a very complex funding model for the State Emergency Service which includes local government and a range of other stakeholders. We have some work being undertaken at the moment to identify what that total cost is to inform our decision-making going forward.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I think you said in the report that that was more likely to be, with all the inputs, a bit over \$5 million.

**Mr FREEMAN** - I have not seen the report from the consultants yet, but the indications are it would be around \$5 million in total.

The TFS had a pretty comfortable cash position a number of years ago. We were under pressure to utilise that, which we have done. At the same time, our expenses increased a bit around the presumptive cancer legislation that was pushed through and a couple of other areas. Tod may be able to elaborate if you need more detail on that. While we are able to pick it up for a year or two - and we also made some operational savings - it is not sustainable going forward. Our cash flow situation is reducing, which may cause a problem.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Fire conditions, particularly what has happened in this recent year, have put a lot more pressure on the fire service. Although government is there to step in and provide additional funds, it all goes to reducing the capacity of the fire service if they don't have adequate funding to do their job.

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**Mr FREEMAN** - I am very comfortable that we have had adequate funding for the last couple of years since the SES has come across to deliver our service. I think we deliver a very good service. The recent fire campaign is an example of where the Government supports us. We are funded for what we call 'level 1' type operations, which is day-to-day business. No jurisdiction or emerging management agency across the world is funded for an out-of-scale event such as we have experienced in the last 51 days.

**CHAIR** - Can you put that on the record for us and confirm that the Government does fund that separately over and above your normal day-to-day operations?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes, that is correct. Funding over and above our normal budgeting for extensive bushfire campaigns, such as the one we have just experienced, is reimbursed by government. Government also assists with the standing costs for our contracted aircraft, which is a standard thing across the bushfire season. That is outside the normal TFS budget as well. That is a shared arrangement between the state and Commonwealth governments.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - I am also interested in the integration issue because I think it is key to make the most of the money and resources that we have. I would like to explore a little bit in relation to the federal integration and also with Parks and Wildlife obviously with what has been happening in the last month to five weeks. It is really around those issues of timeliness when we request resources and what the method of requesting resources is, and what action we take early enough so that we make sure we don't end up with a very big situation as we have found ourselves in. Could you outline for us what the process was for requesting the resources that came and when you actually made the request and what you asked for at the time?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes, I can. Can I just say from the outset interagency protocol in Tasmania covers our initial responses very well. We have some trigger points around fire danger days where we stand up multi-agency incident management teams; we stand up aircraft, we stand up strike teams of fire fighters and they will be multi-badged. You will see all sorts of different coloured shirts from Forestry, Parks and TFS, and indeed State Emergency Service and some private forest contractors as well.

If we talk about 13 January when the lightning band came through, our pre-emptive arrangements we were in place prior to that. We knew we had some warm fire weather. The lightning band came through on the 13th. There were 1 997 recorded ground strikes of lightning in that event and as standard we responded immediately to a lot of those that were apparent, particularly around the back of Mt Wellington on the outskirts of Hobart. There were also some on the East Coast where people live and reside that were reported straight away and they were responded to straight away.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** -How do you determine the exact number of strikes? Is that an automatic process?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes. The Bureau of Meteorology has an excellent program that does that. You can see the lightning band coming across from the north-west. As it occurred just before dark it is standard practice - and dry lightning is not an unusual event for Tasmania - we have spotter flights the next day and they are multi-agency as well: fire behaviour analysts, Parks and Forestry and TFS get involved with that. We plot where we have fires that are evident. We did that and worked out a priority plan for responding to those.

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Over the next two to three weeks some of those became more - sometimes in the south-west wilderness, in particular, where you have peat or deep understorey a lightning strike can occur and it is not immediately evident through the naked eye or through using thermal imaging that there is a fire there. Sometimes it could be days or weeks. For example, it was the nineteenth before the Lake Mackenzie complex fire near Cradle was detected and we had spotter flights up every day around there. It is quite complex. Once we knew we had a number of fire starts -

**CHAIR** - Are you saying that the fire started before the nineteenth?

**Mr FREEMAN** - There was no recorded lightning after that and we have eliminated any other cause so it would suggest it was a number of lightning strikes or one lightning strike in there somewhere, but it was undetected.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Are you saying that you hadn't detected any fires in the south-west until the nineteenth?

**Mr FREEMAN** - No, we detected quite a number of fires in the south-west immediately afterwards and started dealing with those. I used the Lake Mackenzie complex as an example because it was six days before it was detected. It wasn't because we weren't looking. It just smoulders in the peat under the ground and it takes some air or another hot day to bring it out and that is quite common.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Is it your approach that when you detect fires in the World Heritage Area or other park areas that you would apply the maximum possible response to extinguish, curtail or manage the fires as you possibly can?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes, that is right. That is exactly what we do. Particularly in the middle of summer we know that they will cause us issues if we don't get on to them early enough.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - At the time I think there were other fires happening around the state that you were putting a lot of resources into and required to expend a lot of resources. There was a question raised early on about the timeliness of getting into the fires in the south-west?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I don't think there is a question around that. Once we identified the fires that were there we responded to them. We had remote area crews on them. Some of them were difficult to contain. We had crews on the Maxwell River South fire, for example, and it took a big run but more crews wouldn't have made any difference. It's just the way bushfires work and the nature of the job. It is very dangerous terrain. I've said on many occasions it is as unforgiving as it is beautiful in that part of our state. When we have fires that burn under button grass or peat that can't be detected and pop up and take a big run under weather conditions, I am not prepared to put firefighters in front of that. We do the best we can but to suggest -

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Just getting back to the Commonwealth and the relationship with the Commonwealth and the integration of services, what was the request for assistance? I think it is a matter of record that Victoria and South Australia asked for assistance within a couple of days of the 13 January lightning strikes, because it was a storm that went across southern Australia and they were also affected. In Tasmania, as a matter of record, you didn't make a request until -

**Mr FREEMAN** - We have very solid interstate and international support arrangements across the country, and including New Zealand. The way they work is that if state resources are

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extended then a state will request support, and that's exactly what I did. I had a teleconference - and the date escapes me now but it was within two to three days after that event. The Commissioners and Chief Officers Strategic Committee is a formal committee and consists of all the fire chiefs around the country, and Emergency Management Australia is part of that committee as well. We had a teleconference and I gave them a heads up that we had a number of fires and were likely to detect more and if it ended up being an extended campaign it was likely we would be requesting interstate resources. That request went through on 19 January that we would require support.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - I am just reading here from the Senate Estimates transcript in the Commonwealth Parliament and Mark Crossweller, the Director General of Emergency Management Australia, said he didn't get any formal request from Tasmania until 21 January. He also said that although the offer was made the chief fire officer said there was nothing the Commonwealth could offer that would be advantageous in this theatre of fire, even though he outlined the Commonwealth assistance and its capability in providing support, including through the Australian Defence Force and the Commonwealth Disaster Plan. He says offers were specifically made but were turned down.

**Mr FREEMAN** - Let us be very clear here: the request to the Commonwealth and the request to other states are two totally different things. The arrangement and request went to other states and other commissioners for firefighting resources on 19 January and they were forthcoming. The discussion I had with Mark Crossweller - and he sits on the committee - was, 'Is there anything else the Commonwealth can offer?'. At that point we were getting enormous resources and support from other states, mainly New South Wales, the ACT and Victoria, but we had offers from Western Australian, South Australia and Queensland. We subsequently took up Queensland and South Australia's offers as we needed them. All the resources we needed and could deploy safely were available to us through the state arrangements. The Commonwealth arrangements are a different thing. The discussions we had ongoing with Defence - and we have had a Defence liaison officer imbedded in our state control centre since the outset - and the perception that Defence can send us a battalion of soldiers to put fires out is incorrect. If we put Australian soldiers into that area, with all due respect to them, they are not trained firefighters and would have put their lives in danger. They don't have firefighters. They have some aircraft that could be used for observation and some photography work but we had all the aircraft we needed through our domestic arrangements. To be quite honest, there was not a lot the Commonwealth could offer us in defence that was going to be of any value or could be used safely. Ultimately we used air force assets to fly down to base camp when we required that, when we exhausted available accommodation in Tasmania.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - They were fantastic; that was amazing. Is this something you're looking at, providing additional budgeting in the future for this situation? It seems we know now from climate change projections that the whole of Tasmania, but especially the World Heritage Area because of lightening strikes, because of the increased drying, are going to be more affected in future, there is going to be a greater risk. In terms of making a decision about which assets to protect and when, is this the sort of planning that you have done or are thinking of doing now? What are the budget implications? Have you had a chance to think about that yet? It is a busy summer.

**Mr FREEMAN** - Absolutely. We have been thinking about this for a number of years. We are embedded through the Australasian Fire Authorities and Emergency Services Council and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC. There is a lot of research being done across the country into

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the impact of changing weather and changing environment and what that means for fire agencies. We have been thinking about this for quite a while and in fact there has been a number of arrangements put in place.

In terms of budget implications for response, as I mentioned earlier, I do not think any jurisdiction can afford to have a lot of resources funded and sitting there for 'what if' and 'maybe'. I think that throwing more money into response resources is admitting defeat before we start. I do not think that is the right approach. If we have very solid interstate arrangements, I think that is the right way. The surge capacity then comes in when it is required from other states, and indeed New Zealand, and that works well and has worked for a number of years.

In terms of preparing and preventing, we have already invested quite a lot into the fuel reduction burning program, which is only in its second year, but that will help. It is yet to be seen what impact that might have in areas like the World Heritage Area because that sort of terrain is very difficult, if not impossible, to do fuel reduction burning in.

It is around prevention and we have also invested in community engagement. I think that is where the future is. That is where we will make a real difference, with our Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhoods program. Our community engagement officers are attached to the Fuel Reduction Unit. There are people on the ground interfacing with the community and educating them how to react and how to respond when an event of the magnitude of this occurs. That is where we will make a difference and we have got some resources into that.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - You have got more resources planned for the future given that we have got an increasing threat that we need to respond to, because that is really the situation, isn't it? We know we are going to have more risk of fires, more risk of extreme fires and also flooding. We had fires and floods in the state at the same time that you were going out to. We have had 1.8 degrees hotter than average this year so we know that risk is getting a lot more extreme. I guess the average person on the street is thinking we need to have a bigger response. I accept what you are saying. It is not all about response. It is in the education side of things which would seem to suggest we need more money in that area because it has been fairly low funding.

**Mr FREEMAN** - The Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhoods program and the fuel reduction burning program are only a couple of years old, both of those, and I think they are making great headway. My position would be that I would like to see how impact they have and measure that impact before we say we need to throw more at it. I think they have had a great impact. If you look at the Temma Rocks area where there were some shacks and houses impacted upon, it was quite dramatically reported in the media that everyone evacuated to the beach but that was planned. That was planned three days in advance because of the community engagement people we had in there. That is where we need to make a difference.

I suppose anything is possible but it really depends on how much the community wants to put into something like that. At the moment, I think we are resourced adequately to deliver the service that we deliver and it is a good service. We have got pretty good outcomes if you look at our response and what happens there - the fact that in 2013 and this year no lives were lost. That is a pretty important measure, in my view.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - And it did extreme damage to World Heritage assets.

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**Ms COURTNEY** - I have one more question on a similar front, from what we have been talking about. I understand that there will obviously be some kind of review post the fires that we have had recently. Are you comfortable with the response that the TFS and other agencies had, particularly with the prioritisation of resources for different fires?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes, I am. I am very comfortable. As acting chief fire officer you lay awake at night thinking about these things. I brought in a number of my counterparts and asked them to be brutal about what we are missing here - this was earlier in the piece - and they have all been very positive with their feedback.

Every job we go to is different. We are probably our own harshest critics and we will review it and no doubt find some things we can improve upon for the future, but we will also find many things that were a great success and we need to keep that balance. We want to celebrate the successes but not dismiss the things we can learn going forward.

To answer your question, I am very comfortable with the response. We had a comprehensive state planning cell set up that went through very robust prioritisation planning right from the outset and that worked well. It has stood up to the rigours over the last 51 days and our regional and state arrangements for command have been outstanding. The firefighters we have on the ground have been outstanding and have showed us some tremendous stories of great human endurance and courage that have already come out of this. I am very comfortable with the response we have had.

**Ms COURTNEY** - Excellent. Going back to our conversation from the beginning with regard to the SES and the TFS, could you talk about the cultural implications? As a member of parliament I speak to both organisations and spend time with them, but can you give me some reflection on the cultural integration?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes, I can. As I mentioned, there are many synergies between the two organisations. We are largely volunteer based and we work side by side in so many areas already. Any change is significant and the approach I would suggest going forward is that we don't tamper with the operational arms as such because they have a proud identity and have strong cultures in their own right. It is our responsibility as leaders, however, to create the opportunity for them to work more closely together. If we do that right, eventually they will come to us and say maybe they want to wear the same shirt or something, but that is something for the people to decide. They are certainly best placed to identify other opportunities for us to work more closely together but we need to get that leadership right at the top.

We have had a lot of discussion in the last year or so with SES and our people around how this could work and I have only experienced enthusiasm for it and refreshingly so. I was a bit nervous about what that might look like and it would probably be a good question to ask the director of SES later so you are not just getting it from me, but certainly in the discussions I have had with SES personnel and discussions I have witnessed between our volunteers on the ground, they see it as an opportunity. The key to that is not to try to push those people together but let them come together, which I think will work pretty well. That is the line we have been taking and the discussions we have had and everyone is really positive about the opportunities, which is unusual for a significant cultural change. Often people can focus on the negatives but it has been positive so far, which is encouraging.

**Ms COURTNEY** - Good to hear.

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**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Following up on that question, you seem to be indicating your future desire would be for the two organisations, SES and TFS, to come together completely. I am not sure what happens with the name then, whether you call it Tasmanian Fire Emergency Services or something?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I don't know. We have to be really careful about with things like uniforms and names of agencies because people need to own those. My personal view is that there is an opportunity for us to become fully integrated at a point in the future but I have to stress that I am the acting chief officer and there is a new chief officer about to commence and I do not want to pre-empt anything he might want to do.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - No. Getting back to the Wise Lord & Ferguson report, I looked at your report quickly and it was \$5.4 million they highlighted as the integration costs and proper operation of the State Emergency Service and to put it on a sustainable level into the future. You also mentioned you have been digging into your reserves somewhat for the last couple of years and are now, I believe, at straining point, from that point of view now, so how quickly do we need to address that issue of the \$5.4 million?

**Mr FREEMAN** - It is something that needs to be addressed as a matter of priority, obviously, because as I have said a couple of times now it is not sustainable to continue along the path we are. I guess we are all waiting to see what the outcomes of this inquiry are to allow us to go forward on that. There has been some planning and discussion around how we can fix that and take it forward. I know our minister is very interested in that, but I can't comment or speak for him. I haven't been given authority to speak on his behalf but I am sure if you wanted to talk to him he could identify some areas of how we are going to go forward.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - He says he is not coming to talk to us anymore; someone else is coming along.

**CHAIR** - To correct the record, there has been advice that he has Cabinet and other responsibilities so he is unavailable today. He wanted to come and speak with us but that was not possible and he is unavailable. Obviously questions can go to you on matters related thereto, which I think Mr Llewellyn is fully aware of.

**Mr FREEMAN** - In terms of the detail of funding, perhaps Todd has something to add.

**Mr CRAWFORD** - As we highlighted in our submission, I think it is reaching the point where a resolution to the funding model needs to be reached in a reasonably short term, I suppose.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Would that be in time for this year's Budget?

**Mr CRAWFORD** - I would hope so. We see significant fluctuations in terms of our cash flows, which we highlighted in the report, and that is largely due to the timings of our component of revenue derived from the TFS contribution. However, I suppose those have been exacerbated recently with the bushfire campaign and we have been working with the Department of Treasury and Finance to secure additional funding earlier than we would previously. With our wildfire reimbursements, the previous process was that we carried those expenses until the end of the financial year, but we have put in interim arrangements with the Department of Treasury and Finance now to ensure we can continue to operate in a financially sustainable fashion.

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**Mr LLEWELLYN** - On the issue of fuel-reduction burning, \$28.5 million over four years, a bit over \$7 million a year, you seem to indicate that that \$7 million is probably adequate for the time being, but given the hot summer we have had this year no amount of fuel reduction burning would have altered some of the aspects of this year's fires, particularly in the west. I think the community are looking to make sure that many potential fires that may occur in the future do not because of adequate fire reduction arrangements and so on, and \$7 million doesn't go very far.

**Mr FREEMAN** - The fuel-reduction burning program has been successful but it is only one tool and you obviously cannot fuel reduce the whole state every year, as you pointed out. Some parts of the south-west are difficult to fuel reduce and there would be some polarising community views if we did, I would suggest, in those areas. It is difficult because it is wet rainforest most of the time. There were successes around the Temma Rocks-Arthur River area where we have done fuel reduction burning and it altered and slowed fires enabling us to combat those, so that is a positive. That proves fuel reduction burning works. Just to re-emphasise, we can't do the whole state. More money at this point in time towards that would be difficult to expend. Just to reinforce that, this year due to the high summer activity we have had and our planners being involved in response, we probably won't be able to execute all of the fuel reduction burning plans this autumn. There are small windows.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - What effect does that window of opportunity have on the fuel-reduction program?

**Mr FREEMAN** - With the window, we are literally in the hands of the gods because of the weather and the need to fuel reduce under the right weather conditions, so if it is too hot, too dry or too wet, clearly that is an issue. The planning that goes into this is meticulous because it is multi-tenure. It is the only fuel reduction program of its kind in the country that is multi-tenure and there are some intricacies around that with multiple landowners, private versus public et cetera, so it takes a lot of planning. Much of that planning has been delayed because of people being involved in operations. The outcomes we deliver on our fuel-reduction burning program this year will be reduced. More money at this point won't help us because we won't be able to get it done.

**CHAIR** - You mentioned that there was a positive impact already through the community education effort and you gave an example. Are there any other examples? You talked about the difficulty in measuring it. Can you outline some of the positive impacts to date with those initiatives and how we can measure that? We want a return on funds invested. We know it is positive, but how positive and how significant is it? Can you flesh that out for us?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I will address the community engagement first. The fact we haven't had loss of life in the last couple of significant campaigns tells me that the community is listening and working with us. They know how to respond and how to look after themselves, which is so pivotal to this program. I think that is a real positive and we need to continue to do that.

In terms of the fuel-reduction burning program, we have examples in the north-east where there were fires in the last couples of years that have pulled up when they have hit fuel-reduction areas. Over on the west coast there were some areas in this campaign where fuel fires pulled up because they hit fuel-reduction burning; so it does work. Equally, you could find some areas where we haven't done fuel-reduction burning and fires ran, but that's just a scale thing - you can't reduce the whole state every year. There are good, solid examples to show it works. This is a

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question we are wrestling with nationally. Fire services report our successes mostly on how much damage was done, and that is completely flawed logic. Going forward, we need to be starting to measure what we have been able to prevent through fuel-reduction burning through community engagement. That is where we are starting to move to. We are starting to get some evidence of that now.

**CHAIR** - And you will keep building that evidence up so that there's a better understanding and knowledge of that benefit?

**Mr FREEMAN** - That's right.

**CHAIR** - I noticed a number of submissions have come in which you may have seen on the website, including the union's submission which was accepted by the committee. It arrived late, is quite substantial, and made a number of comments and observations as well as allegations. I would like you respond now to some of those allegations. I will draw your attention to a couple of them shortly. If, post the hearing, there is any evidence you hear today or that you would like to follow-up by providing information or feedback to the community, we would welcome that because there is a volume of information there.

**Mr FREEMAN** - I appreciate that it is quite comprehensive and we have not had a lot of time to consider it.

**CHAIR** - In the union's submission, they have made a few allegations about the TFS, particularly in their conclusion. Would you like to respond to any of those? Specifically, they say the budget inadvertently or otherwise usurp the role and function of the State Fire Commission and the chief officer of the TFS. They say, 'The Government must understand that a minister or the Parliament cannot, by administrative instruction, alter or amend an act of Parliament or issue an instruction contrary to legislation and regulation'. I am aware of section 107 of the act which does provide considerable discretion. Do you want respond to that, and any other matters they have raised?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I believe the alignment and subsequent integration of the TFS and SES is the right direction to go in. I believe the Fire Service Act under section 107 does provide the ability for the chief officer to expend funds for other purposes, providing it is approved by the minister. It is open to interpretation. I cannot speak for the UFU; they will speak for themselves. At one point, that section had a dollar figure on it but that was repealed or in the Reform Bill 1995. Whether there is some confusion about how much can be extended under section 107, I am not sure, but there is no dollar figure attached to that now.

**CHAIR** - Are you happy that the role and function has not been usurped?

**Mr FREEMAN** - For the chief officer?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Mr FREEMAN** - No. It is quite clear in the act what the role, function and responsibilities of the chief officer are.

**CHAIR** - They say the community fire safety funding has been slashed by \$200 000 on page 45 their submission. What is your response to that?

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**Mr FREEMAN** - As a matter of normal business, we often review our budget and we are able to identify an opportunity to save \$200 000. It was on the television campaign and research has shown us that is not a very effective way of getting the message out. It is one way, but not a very effective way. As I mentioned, our Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhoods program, which we have invested money into, is having a better impact, in our view, in the community engagement area so we felt it unnecessary to continue with the television advertising campaign.

**CHAIR** - And the truck rebuild program?

**Mr FREEMAN** - For the truck rebuild program, it is a correct statement that the number being built was reduced. That doesn't mean those trucks won't be built; what that does is reflect the capacity of our engineering workshops. To meet our targets they were working overtime and spending too many hours on it. We said okay, it's not we've cut the trucks and they won't be built. They will be built, they just won't be built this year because of the capacity of the workshop was becoming exceeded. Those trucks will be built. The operational need didn't dictate to us that they all had to be built in the first year.

**CHAIR** - Are you still meeting your objectives and requirements?

**Mr FREEMAN** - We are still meeting the overall objectives, correct.

**CHAIR** - The cancer mitigation program has been delayed - you made reference to that in your opening remarks. Is there a view you have about the rollout of that? The presumptive legislation for firefighters that was passed in, I think, 2013.

**Mr FREEMAN** - We have met all our requirements in regard to that. The main sticking point was the recording of exposures, and that has been addressed. Clearly we want to continue to eliminate any exposures to our firefighters, as much as they possibly can be. That is an ongoing program. Part of that was the identification of the extent of diesel particulates within stations and we have conducted a monitoring research program to inform our decision making going forward. There are a number of stations, in fact all new stations that are built include segregation of the personal protective equipment the firefighters wear to ensure that we minimise cross-contamination from anything from the fire getting into the living area and, conversely, also any potential of contamination from diesel particulates into the protective clothing. That is happening. A number of stations have been retrofitted and continue to be retrofitted to ensure we minimise all that exposure as much as possible.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. There was an incident earlier in the summer with a union ban on New South Wales firefighters coming in and the Hobart fire brigade not being able to operate. Can you outline what happened in that instance and how that affected the operation of the fire service?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Through interstate arrangements we had prior to that a number - around 400 - interstate firefighters at that point. There have subsequently been about 1000 in. In other states, New South Wales has been into Victoria career stations, Queensland has been into New South Wales. It is a common practice that occurs.

When it was flagged with us at the state control level that our career firefighters were becoming fatigued to the point where they were struggling to get backfill to maintain the crews in the career stations and people were working too many hours in the bush, we thought this was an

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opportunity to bring in 16 qualified senior career firefighters out of Sydney head station and provide some relief for the Tasmanian career firefighters, or if they were all rested well enough, to go out and develop their own professional development in terms of things like the air base management and those expert roles.

That was instigated; I was sent advice by the secretary of the UFU in writing on the morning they started that bans had been escalated because of my failure to consult with the UFU secretary. I will correct that, the statement said with the UFU, not the UFU secretary personally. Those bans weren't saying that the New South Wales firefighters couldn't work, but they restricted or prevented the Tasmanian Fire Service firefighters from doing the induction program which, on the first day clearly there were a couple of hours that needed to be done - this is the way our trucks work, et cetera. We were going to put one person on each crew in the back seat. It wasn't like they were going to run the whole state on their own. There were some bans put in place.

I had a subsequent discussion with the UFU and we were unable to make any resolution in a short time frame. It had already distracted two of my senior people for the afternoon previous, trying to work through it, and it was starting to distract, in my view, as senior commanders at our state level, so I cancelled the deployment and said we would work around it another way, and we just requested more remote area fire fighters from interstate to cover it, so we didn't have to use TFS people as much. We got around it. It was unfortunate. It was disappointing and I have to say it was the only time I felt ashamed to be part of the organisation in 30 years. It was poor form, but it happens so we get on with it.

**CHAIR** - So what happened to those New South Wales firefighters?

**Mr FREEMAN** - We sent them home back to New South Wales.

**CHAIR** - How many were there?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Because of the way the shift system works there were four coming in to work and then two days later there would be the next four, because of the rotating way the shift works, so there was only four of them in the state, plus their liaison officer. On the first day, inductions were commenced in the Hobart fire brigade but then when the union bans became apparent they were ceased. I had no option but to say sorry and pack them off home.

**CHAIR** - You felt you needed to do it obviously for safety, health and other reasons.

**Mr FREEMAN** - That was the only reason we made the call because it was flagged with us that people were becoming fatigued to the point of where it was becoming an impact on their safety.

**CHAIR** - Noted, so you were upset and disappointed big time by that?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I was, yes. From my personal point of view it was a sad indictment given that we have now had about 1000 other interstate firefighters doing different roles.

**CHAIR** - How many interstate firefighters have been in use, as it were, and operating over the last -

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**Mr FREEMAN** - In totality in excess of 1000. At any given time I think 300 was the highest number we have had of interstate firefighters on any particular day. Obviously some of those have come back and some have only had the one trip.

**CHAIR** - The other question I have is about your fire service officers. You operate with Parks and Wildlife fire officers and Forestry Tasmania and you mentioned the police, what is the totality of it? I have your figures here in terms of numbers of service and then the huge numbers of volunteers in the order of 5000, from the way I read it. What is the totality of the effort that we have in Tasmania?

**Mr FREEMAN** - For this campaign? I don't have those numbers in front of me, but I can provide them if you would like that detail. There have been over 1000 interstate firefighters. We have had, in total, about 80 tankers from interstate. At one time we had a peak of 47 aircraft and there have been thousands of firefighter movements between Tasmania Fire Service, Parks and Forestry across. The Tasmanian firefighters have been so pivotal in this whole campaign because they had the local knowledge and experience and were able to lead the interstate crews as they come in.

**CHAIR** - Your protocol allows for a really close working relationship with Parks and Forestry fire people?

**Mr FREEMAN** - It does. As I said earlier, it is the envy of other states and we are very proud of it. Any level 3, which is the highest level, incident management team you will see will have all of those agencies, SES and police embedded in them. On the ground, Forestry and Parks firefighters work shoulder-to-shoulder with Tasmania Fire Service firefighters as a matter of course.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I will pick up some of these other issues with the UFU when we have the UFU presenting before us. Just coming back to the fundamental issue of the adequacy of the funding for the Fire Service given the integration of the emergency services department or area, during the Budget Estimates I talked to the minister about this issue and he did on one occasion admit, before he put in place the Wise Lord & Ferguson report, that it may be necessary to address the issue of the fire service levy. It appears to me to be the only area where one would make up that amount of money in all its aspects, the \$5.4 million, would be by increasing the fire service levy. But the fire service levy is a generic term because it is made up from a number of other issues, the MAIB and all the rest of the other inputs and insurance and so on associated with it. Where do you think it is best for the Government to address this issue in regard to that levy?

**Mr FREEMAN** - The fire service contribution is one obvious area, as you have identified, that we could be able to absorb. It needs to be noted that local government under different arrangements already contributes a significant amount of money, so it's just a matter of how it is collected and where it is attributed to smooth that out. The issue with the mixed-up funding model we currently have - and I want to make this point for the record - doesn't provide for regional allocation according to risk. It depends which local government has the money to put into any area, so it is not necessarily addressing risk or providing the best outcome. A centralised funding approach, I believe, would provide the best outcomes for all concerned, and most importantly the Tasmanian community, because your risk would be addressed.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - When you say that, do you really mean the Government ought to chip in an additional amount of money from consolidated revenue?

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**Mr FREEMAN** - That is an issue for Government. I am saying we need a centralised approach to the funding - a fire service contribution plus the funding for the State Emergency Service would be a logical place to start.

**CHAIR** - Just for clarification, when you say 'a resource allocation according to risk', at the moment isn't it based on rateable area and that municipal area?

**Mr FREEMAN** - For SES?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Mr FREEMAN** - That is my view. The fire service was in that position many years ago and since we've taken a statewide centralised funding approach, we are able to assess the risk and provide resources relevant to that risk. I think we need to take that approach with all our emergency management.

**CHAIR** - Is the SES still based on that historic approach?

**Mr FREEMAN** - That is a question for the director of SES. I am not saying it is not addressing risk but I think you could address risk better. There are situations where local government might have more money invested into an area and it would provide better resources but is that because the risk is there?

**CHAIR** - I make the observation that the Local Government Association report talks about a more centralised approach and using it more cleverly.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - That might be so but on every occasion when these issues have been addressed there has always been a reluctance from local government to make appropriate contributions. Some areas of local government do and some don't. That seems to be unfair and not in keeping with what you were talking about with a centralised funding approach.

**Mr FREEMAN** - A lot of work needs to be done with local government to work through any changes. There has been some preliminary work done already in the form of discussions with local government. They are in agreement that a centralised approach would be a better approach. What that looks like is yet to be determined. There is very wide agreement that a central funding model is a better way to go.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - If we're going to get to the situation where you agree, we would hope it was resolved by the budget cycle that happens in May or thereabouts. There is not much time to talk to local government and other areas about alternate funding. It seems to me the only option left would be for the Government, either on a temporary or permanent basis, to make some sort of contribution out of consolidated revenue to address the issue.

**Mr CRAWFORD** - Just to pick up on a point before, Mr Llewellyn, on the fire service contribution. You highlighted the insurance levy and the MAIB component of that. They are separate components under the legislation. The fire service contribution is the local government side of that component levied on ratepayers. An option for developing a sustainable funding model would be looking at that, but it is a long-term option. Other options around more immediate ways to address funding of SES within the TFS environment would be a contribution

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through the consolidated revenue. That is a matter the commission and the department will need to work through as part of this budget process with Treasury.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I understand it would be a matter of government policy, and you are not in a good position to talk about government policy. I think what you have said certainly outlines the alternatives there.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - I want to go back to the discussion about the future and your comment earlier about money in response and money in protection plans. What I see, and I was not here in Tasmania in 1967, but what I observed from my electorate is that there has been an increase in the number of approvals by local councils of people living in high-risk bushfire areas, down single roads. There has been an increase in the population of people living in the foothills of Tolmans Hill and Dynnyrne and all the places where we know that fire funnelled through with winds - Waterworks, Cascade Road, all those areas - and there are more people and there is a greater bushfire risk because of climate change. Clearly we have a big job ahead of us and it seems that, for political reasons and for reality reasons, it will never be possible to put fuel reduction burns and all the protections around people's houses. Therefore, the only thing really left to us to make sure that people are protected is their ability to know what to do and when to leave.

Could you talk about the part of the budget that is dedicated towards bushfire protection plans and community education? It seems to me, in the context of the whole of the Budget, to be a small component but it is hard to disaggregate it and find out what it is. You talked earlier about how there has been a lot of hard work done on the ground. What are your performance measures for success in this area? Do you conduct surveys in communities to find out how many people actually have a bushfire plan and know what to do, know where to go? Do you do those sorts of random surveys?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes, we do.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - What is that telling you?

**Mr FREEMAN** - We have done it a couple of times outside of emergencies and we have done it immediately following emergencies such as Dunalley. We bring a research team in from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC to undertake that type of research. What it tells us is that more people are developing a bushfire plan. Unfortunately, some of the earlier indicators were too that people tend to discard their plan at the last minute, change their minds, which is an issue for us, so we have been focusing our education in the last year or two around addressing that issue. People will have a plan, they have discussed with their family. Some of them have written it down but not all. What happens is, occasionally people think they are prepared to stay and defend and their house is defensible, but are not ready for the traumatic experience that is a bushfire coming through under severe weather conditions. That is when they change their mind and leave. That is when people get killed.

We are focusing on ensuring that people understand what it means. We have also shifted our messaging quite clearly to re-emphasise that the only way your safety can be guaranteed in a bushfire situation is to not be there, which is a bit of a shift from where we have been.

I have not got the budget figures - Todd may have - otherwise we can get them to you around the Bushfire Policy and Planning Unit. That is a unit that we have restructured within TFS in recent times. There have always been elements of TFS that were focused on planning

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developments in bushfire areas and the development of community protection plans. We have recognised the synergies in those areas, pushed them together to get more efficiency and developed the Bushfire Planning and Policy Unit. They work very closely with developers, architects and town planners to ensure that the code is complied with when building in bushfire-prone areas. They work hand in glove with our people that develop the community protection plans that inform the community what to do should a fire impact on their specific area. There are three components of those: The community aspect of it for the householder; the brigade aspect, which guides the brigade in their response; and the mitigation component, which then feeds into the Fuel Reduction Unit. If mitigation includes fuel reduction burning that is all tied in. There is significant effort going into that and I have already mentioned the Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhoods program, which works with those more at-risk and more vulnerable communities to ensure that they understand the plan that has been developed for them and understand and how to execute their own bushfire survival plan.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - I understand, from your figures, only 40 per cent of high risk communities have such a bushfire-ready plan and there is 60 per cent still at risk. With the schools, it is less than half of Tasmanian state schools have been assessed in terms of their in structure to determine whether they are safe. This is according to your report. Of 238 Department of Education schools, 159 have been assessed and detailed plan, 109 schools have had detailed plans that mean they have been assessed as being able to be used as shelter during bushfires.

**CHAIR** - Clarification, which report is that?

**Ms WOODRUFF** - This is from Fire Service submission, Protection of the Community, page 37. There is half of our schools where people in the community do not know if they can go to them and be safe. If students are there during a bushfire, they have not been assessed as being safe. I am reading from the report: 238 Depart of Education schools -

**CHAIR** - You have asked the question and we need to allow the commissioner to answer the question.

**Mr FREEMAN** - If you read that on the conjecture that it is 159 have been assessed with detailed plan, but if you add the 50 that are low risk, they do not require plans. That takes it up to 209.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Only 109 schools have detailed plans?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes and 50 do not require them because they would be in areas where there is no fire risk.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Yes, but of the ones in fire risk areas? There are still schools outstanding that we do not have this information about.

**Mr FREEMAN** - There are some but 238 is the total number; 159 have detailed plans because they are in at-risk areas and 50 do not need them. That 209 less 38, so that is the difference.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - 79 schools?

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**Mr FREEMAN** - No; 238 from 209; that is 29.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - An additional 109 schools have been assessed. So the 159 plus 109, is that what you are saying? Can you check that for us? If we go back to the previous page with the bushfire protection plans.

**Mr FREEMAN** - We have a really strong partnership with education.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - The point I am making is, I think this is a political issue and that is why I am asking it. We think the work that has been done at the community level is excellent. My concern is that it is not well funded enough. What budget would it take to get every school in Tasmania assessed by the next bushfire season and every high risk community with a bushfire protection plan?

**Mr FREEMAN** - I am happy to provide that information and clarify those number but I am extremely confident that by the next bushfire season every school will have been assessed. There is significant work going on, really solid partnership with education, they have been fantastic in working with us and we are making great progress on that. The restructure they talked about is providing us more resources to be able to focus on those areas.

**CHAIR** - Are you happy that there has been an adequate assessment over the past summer of those schools?

**Mr FREEMAN** - Yes.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - With a lot of these people, by the Department of Education's own assessment, people living in rural communities, there is about a 75 per cent, in some areas, functional illiteracy level. Tasmania overall is about 52 per cent. In Tasmanian rural communities it is as high as 75 per cent. I would like to hear from you about the focus of the community education programs because a lot of it rests on written material, things on the internet and in newspapers. There are community meetings but often the people who are most in need of the information don't get to them. I would like to hear from you about the difference between a community plan and an individual plan going back to that checking you were talking about before. How do you check to make sure what proportion of people living in the Derwent Valley or the Huon Valley know what to do and have a plan?

**Mr FREEMAN** - We recognise the issues around literacy levels in some areas and that is why we are shifting our focus more away from television campaigns and printed literature - which is still important - to more face-to-face engagement so we can ensure the message is being received and understood. One thing I haven't really covered, and something we should never underestimate, is the amount of work brigades do on this. We don't record it very well but we need to get better at it; we need to record it. They do a significant amount of work in their local communities. They know where the at-risk and vulnerable people are. They talk to them and that is why I believe we have a high level of success in people reacting in the appropriate way.

**Ms COURTNEY** - Going back to the fuel-reduction burns, how do you target where you are going to do them? Ms Woodruff has referred to ones around her electorate, but how do you decide where those are going to be targeted?

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**Mr FREEMAN** - A comprehensive risk assessment was undertaken which included vegetation risk using the Bushfire Risk Assessment Model, or BRAM. It overlays across the state and takes into account where people live, the fuel type, the usual weather patterns, and works out the probability of ignition and fire extent. That report is available if the committee would like to see it. It is quite comprehensive and quite solid reading but it needed to be done. It was the first task our fuel reduction unit undertook and we based our fuel reduction burning program on that risk assessment across the state. Most of the initial fuel reduction burning was done in the dry sclerophyll-type forests in the east and south-eastern part of the state and across the north-east. Having said that, with areas such as Sisters Beach and Arthur River, the fire history tells us they are impacted by fire quite frequently so areas there were targeted specifically as well.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I want to talk about integration inter-operability with communications and the work being done to try to resolve those longstanding issues, particularly between the police and others. I think the TFS and Forestry relate together fairly well and National Parks as well. That is an important long-term issue that hasn't been properly addressed.

**Mr FREEMAN** - There are a couple of programs underway to go towards addressing that. The whole-of-government radio network project that is underway will help with that. There is also the ESCAD - Emergency Services Computer Aided Despatch - system, which will tie in all the despatch systems we use and will improve that. As an interim measure, there has also been the inter-operability gateway developed that allows radios between police, fire, ambulance, Forestry, Parks, and all the responding agencies to be patched together so they can talk to each other should the need dictate.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - My final question is about the demise of the numbers in Forestry Tasmania, the capacity it provided in the past for the follow-up of bushfires and the like. I think there some 35 or more people have gone out of the system. Not all have gone totally out of the system; some went to Parks and are still involved in the fire service from that point of view, but it must have created a big problem from a resources point of view.

**Mr FREEMAN** - I have to say I was worried about that at a certain point, but this season demonstrated to us that that worry was unfounded because Forestry engaged private contractors - a lot of whom are people who used to work for FT - to undertake firefighting. From where I sit I haven't noticed any impact on our operations at this point. It has been good.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Do they operate on a voluntary basis or are they remunerated?

**Mr FREEMAN** - They are remunerated, and that is an arrangement between Forestry Tasmania and those contractors. I am not privy to all the details but they are paid and contracted to do specific tasks. I have to say we used some of those contractors for fuel reduction programs in spring as well, and that was quite successful. There have been a lot of those private contractors involved the firefighting effort.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Under the current policy, the Government wouldn't be providing Forestry Tasmania with any money to remunerate those people, so it must be an additional impost on FT.

**Mr FREEMAN** - As you quite rightly point out, I can't speak on government policy or on behalf of Forestry Tasmania.

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**CHAIR** - Thanks very much for that. The Victoria and New South Wales firefighters - who pays them?

**Mr FREEMAN** - There are quite clear interstate support arrangements in place, and the vast majority of interstate crews that have come in this time requested that we reimburse them for additional costs. It doesn't include salary. There is an exception for some Victorian personnel in that because of their own state policies. Their salaries are covered by their providing state. We cover all their accommodation, additional costs and transport and that is then reimbursed to us by the state Government.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, that is much appreciated. I thank you for your time today. Please feel free to respond in any way you wish in terms of witnesses and evidence given today and submissions made. You will be providing a report on the areas where you think there should be a review of the legislation and a copy of the protocol for the committee.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - And the amount of money that is spent in the budget on community education and acute committee engagement.

**Mr FREEMAN WITHDREW.**

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**MS ANDREA HEATH**, ACTING DIRECTOR, STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - This is a proceeding of the Parliament and subject to parliamentary privilege. Whatever you say here is obviously important because it assists us in gaining the best evidence available. That protection is not accorded to you if you go outside the Parliament and the hearing. If there are any other questions please feel free to ask them. We welcome you to the inquiry. Thanks for your submission on behalf of the SES and we look forward to some opening remarks before we have some questions.

**Ms HEATH** - There are a few things from the submission I want to highlight. First, the organisation has a dual role in supporting Tasmanian communities. We have an operational workforce comprising 530 committed and very skilled volunteers to provide frontline emergency services but we also have emergency management functions. The focus there is on building community resilience, and that is provided through supporting MIS management, emergency management planning and education.

As we have been talking about this morning, there are new reporting arrangements for the director of the SES and that position now directly reports to the chief officer and the resourcing for the SES has been incorporated into the State Fire Commission budget. To date, these arrangements have been working very well. Both TFS and SES are volunteer-based organisations and have always worked closely together, so this is a formalisation of what we've been doing. An example of that is that 13 of our units are co-located with TFS.

The alignment provides further opportunities for emergency service workers from the SES and TFS to work more closely together, whilst still maintaining our own identity and our volunteer numbers.

Whilst the TFS and SES alignment is welcomed, there has been broad acknowledgment for some years that the SES funding model is not sustainable into the future. It is a mixture of state, commonwealth and local government contributions. The SES funding arrangements are provided in detail in the submission, but there are a couple of points I would like to highlight. There is not one single funding stream. There is the funding provided now through the State Fire Commission. Some of our non-operational activities are supported under the National Partnership Agreement for Disaster Resilience. That is \$135 000 to conduct the emergency management framework, which is really a grants program to support building community resilience. The MAIB provide funding to support road crash rescue activities. Under the act, the councils have responsibility to establish and maintain SES volunteer units. In the submission we talk about a strategic asset review in 2012 that was updated in 2014. It was revealed that, on average, each council contributes around \$20 000 per annum to a unit each year. That level of funding varies significantly from council to council.

In most of these arrangements, whilst we enter into a memorandum of understanding around the funding that is provided to those units, the SES doesn't have a lot of direct control over those funds. They are managed through the council.

These arrangements are negotiated through a memorandum of understanding. This approach makes it very difficult for the SES to ensure consistent standards across units. Also, we do not

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have responsibility for maintaining the fleet or the units. I think page 7 of the submission gives some examples of that.

We are working very closely at the Tasmanian Fire Service on looking at a model going forward. The first step for us has been to identify the true cost of running the SES. That means working with local councils to find out what they are contributing. We have been working with Wise, Lord and Ferguson to get them to come up with a figure. Whilst we had the previous report back in 2013, we want to quantify what those costs are by working with councils. We're in the process of doing that.

Then, we will be working together to identify a model that will consider what funding is required and where we can work more closely with the Tasmanian Fire Service. We will look at opportunities for collaboration between both organisations to support communities in a more holistic way.

That was probably my overview of the key points from the submission, but I am very happy to take questions.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much and thank you for your submission, which is really comprehensive. I will kick off with a couple of questions on your submission and on your opening remarks regarding ongoing funding arrangements and the merit of the co-location arrangements. The funding arrangements are based on the Wise Lord & Ferguson report. However, that was based, at least in part, on the 2013 options paper, which was under the previous government, was it?

**Ms HEATH** - Yes, it was.

**CHAIR** - Those options were set out in that 2013 report. Can you outline the sustainable funding arrangements that were considered back in 2013? Are they still live today, and how relevant are they?

**Ms HEATH** - Certainly. As I've said, it is not a new issue for us. We developed an options paper back in 2013 that looked at SES funding and that was prepared and presented to the minister at that time with a view of consideration from Cabinet. Then there was an election, so that wasn't progressed, so it has been revisited with the current Government. I don't know if there is anything you want to add to that around the submission back then, Todd?

**Mr CRAWFORD** - No, I suppose it highlighted the same issues that we're working through now - the variability of the funding model and the adequacy of the funding to cover the costs associated with the SES. It proposed that there was a difference there that needed to be addressed by the government at the time. As Ms Heath has said, the election then occurred.

**CHAIR** - That is not a new issue. It is a matter that has been with us for many years in the past.

**Ms HEATH** - Yes. We have just been gathering more evidence so we can demonstrate what the costs are of running the organisation. Part of the issue has been this hybrid funding that we've had. It is very difficult to quantify, so we're in the process of doing that now.

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**CHAIR** - The complex funding arrangement is being carefully assessed and reviewed. How far through the process is the Wise Lord & Ferguson report and your consideration of it? Where are things at?

**Ms HEATH** - I'm expecting a final report within the next couple of weeks; so it is very close. They've been working very closely with all the councils to get the information we need.

**CHAIR** - You have outlined the merit of the reporting arrangements and how it is formalising what has been occurring, at least in part. Is that a positive outcome?

**Ms HEATH** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - If you would just reflect on that and on the co-location of the various units. I think you mentioned 13 units. Can you see some merit in that and perhaps even cross-savings as well?

**Ms HEATH** - Definitely.

**CHAIR** - Can you reflect on those two issues please?

**Ms HEATH** - Firstly, I will talk about the co-location. When our volunteers turn up to a job, it is quite often alongside other emergency services workers. The fact that they are co-located means there are opportunities to do joint training and to get to know each other so that when they attend an incident, they are used to working together and can support each other. It is also a reduction in cost because there is the one facility. Basic things like training rooms can be shared. It just makes sense that where possible within communities, we can co-locate and share resources.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - It has to be said that sometimes it will be the same people; they just have different uniforms.

**Ms HEATH** - Yes, quite often it is, particularly in the smaller communities. It means that they are just going to the one facility.

**CHAIR** - That is commonsense, in a way. Just going back to the reporting arrangements, are they working well?

**Ms HEATH** - Definitely. I report to the chief officer and leadership has become embedded within the TFS leadership forums. That is particularly useful. Instead of us or TFS looking at an issue in isolation, we can combine our resources and come up with a solution that might be suitable for both of us.

**CHAIR** - You have made a reference in your submission to the volunteer numbers. How are they at the moment? Are they holding, and what are the volunteer numbers like going forward?

**Ms HEATH** - At the moment we have 530 volunteers. That enables us to have a workforce to service the state. We are working with the University of Tasmania to look at the demographics of Tasmanian communities and overlay that with the impacts of climate change to plan for our workforce. At the moment, we are well positioned to respond, but we are also planning for the future.

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**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I will concentrate on the issue that is upfront and foremost with the committee - the adequacy of ongoing funding within SES. You and the acting chief officer of the fire service have mentioned that that arrangement is not sustainable. Wise Lord & Ferguson at the current assessment put that at about a bit over \$5 million. There is a need to address this quickly, hopefully in time for this year's Budget if the state Government is going to make a contribution. That seems to me the most logical and likely outcome. Do you agree with the point of what I have been putting to you about that?

**Ms HEATH** - Going forward it is something I have to work through with the chief, the Fire Commission and government and Mr Crawford with Treasury and the department. My first step is to identify the true costs of running the State Emergency Service and from there we will look at options. As I said, some of them may require additional funding but others could be done through alignment, but this will take a little bit of time.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - If it is going to take a little bit of time it is not going to be resolved this year and that is inherently the problem we see, because it certainly has not been adequately arranged in 2014-15 and in 2015-16 it is not adequately sorted either. The solution in those two years has been to take the money from reserves the Fire Service had. We need to get to the bottom of this question and sort it out so that it is finally resolved in this year's Budget. Wouldn't you agree with that?

**Mr CRAWFORD** - I think, Mr Llewellyn, you are highlighting a couple of issues there that are starting to blend together a little, one of which I think from an SES perspective as Ms Heath has touched upon is the adequacy of funding for the SES to maintain its current operations. One of my observations there is that some of the perceived shortfall at the moment is largely around -

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - That is being independently assessed, isn't it?

**Mr CRAWFORD** - Yes. That is where this figure in the vicinity of \$5 million comes from because at the moment SES is not funded to that amount. I suppose the shortfall in funding is largely attributable to vehicle fleet at a cost of \$15 million or thereabouts at a depreciation of approximately \$750 000 to \$800 000 a year which we are not funding, so there is a liability being created there. As to the issue around the mechanism for funding the SES and the need to address that through the budget, I think you are correct. That is where we would like to be but there is a lot of moving parts in that analogy at the moment that we need to align.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I am happy with that response.

**Ms COURTNEY** - I want to touch on a question I asked Mr Freeman with regard to the cultural aspects of the two working more closely; 'alignment' I think was the word used. From your perspective from both leadership and also from a volunteer level, culturally do you think that that will work well? What is the feedback you have got from people within your organisation? Could you please elaborate on that?

**Ms HEATH** - Sure. The SES has a long and proud history and that is something we want to maintain. Last week we had a meeting of all staff to talk about this issue to see if there were any concerns about potential loss of identity or any cultural issues, and every person in attendance was fully supportive and only see this as creating opportunities for the State Emergency Service. There was no negativity. Our volunteers are very supportive on the whole. They have been heavily involved in supporting the Tasmanian Fire Service with the recent fires and it gives them

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an opportunity to use their skills. They are there to support the community and that is what they want to do. I do not see it being an issue going forward in that all of the staff and volunteers I have spoken to are fully supportive and see the opportunities for us going forward.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - In here you have mentioned that the absolute number of volunteers has dropped since 2013-14. It is only a small amount but they are dropping, even though the numbers are increasing, so fewer people are doing more work. That's a familiar story with volunteering in general. It sounds like that is really being partly influenced by councils' varied management of SES volunteers and their expectations about management and inconsistency across the sector. Clearly centralisation of that is a great idea and will be reaping lot out of it. Also in terms of the funding there is a lot of inefficiencies in terms of wasted time where individual units have to do form-filling and funding applications. Getting rid of that is also a sensible idea so that people can volunteer doing what they want to do, what they love to do.

I wanted to talk about climate change. You talked about doing some modelling with the university. It is clear that you don't have a lot of resources at the moment. I am wondering how you are pegging with the TFS in terms of your ability to model changing hazards from climate change that are affecting the work you do.

**Ms HEATH** - The first step is the project we are doing with the University of Tasmania looking at our current workforce - and it is not just across SES, it is across the Tasmania Fire Service as well - then overlaying that with the demographic of communities and the trends and then putting the climate change layer over that. I have had one discussion since I've returned to the SES with the researcher doing the work and he has been able to identify communities where we need to look at our resourcing and reconsider. I suppose some other work that is being done in parallel with this is that SES has also received some funding to support communities to look at risk and assess risk. This comes back to what the chief said in relation to the resource-to-risk model.

At the moment we are funded through geographical boundaries but we want to be able to overlay these two projects around the risk and get councils to work together to look at the risk to a particular region rather than just their municipal area - and we will support them to do that - and then overlay that with the work we are doing around volunteers, trends in communities, and the impacts of climate change, so that we are planning out for our workforce.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Is the evidence you're getting that there is an increase in risks and the hazards you are managing, or is it too early to say from what you've said?

**Ms HEATH** - I think so. It is work we are just starting on to plan for the future.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Is that something volunteers are talking about, having seen the change over time in recent years?

**Ms HEATH** - I haven't had those discussions with volunteers.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - I've never been clear about the difference between volunteers from SES and council staff. I know council staff often come out as well, so how do you see that working under a centralised model? Will it be at the regional level and that sort of function will still be able to continue, or do you think there's a compromise there?

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**Ms HEATH** - I take you back to my opening comments where I said we provide the two services to the community, so we have our volunteer workforce but we also have our emergency management arrangements. The council staff are the municipal coordinators who have a role in an emergency that is structured through a committee through the local communities that go up to the regional level. Going forward, I think it is something we would want to be looking at. I am saying to my staff, 'I don't want to go straight to solutions. I want us to work through a process to get the best outcome and consult with as many stakeholders as we can and then we'll get the right solution'. It is something we will work through as part of this but how that will look is something I would want to consult quite broadly on. In emergency management the stakeholders are numerous. Numerous organisations are involved and I think we need to get that input. To date we don't have that but that is the plan for the future.

**CHAIR** - Are you satisfied you are meeting your objectives as an organisation currently?

**Ms HEATH** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are you satisfied you will continue to meet your objectives as an organisation into the future?

**Ms HEATH** - In the current funding model there would be some issues around the sustainability of what we are doing, so I think in future it can be enhanced.

**CHAIR** - Subject to working those issues through and with the advice you've provided today, are you confident you will meet your objectives into the future?

**Ms HEATH** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, we appreciate your evidence today.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

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**Ms KATRENA STEPHENSON**, CEO AND **Ms GEORGIA PALMER**, SENIOR POLICY OFFICER, LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - These are proceedings to the Parliament, so parliamentary privilege will apply to allow to get the best information available from the hearings and also it allows for parliamentary protection what you say and the statements you make. If anything is defamatory and repeated outside the Parliament that is a different matter.

Thank you very much for being here and we welcome your submission. I understand your president, Mayor Doug Chipman, has an apology.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Unfortunately he had a conflict in that the minister is attending the Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority meeting today and he needed to be at that. He sends his apologies.

Thank you very much for inviting the association to present to the committee, we appreciate that. We are going to focus largely on the aspect we drew out in our submission, which was the funding of the SES volunteer units. I think I need to preface it by saying that given the time frames, we really were relying on some existing consultation we had done at an officer level. This is not an issue we have canvassed with our elected members at this stage. I will highlight some areas where I think our elected members might differ in some of their views.

At an officer level and I think generally in the sector, there would be support for a move away from the funding of the SES units at the municipal level to a more centralised model. Historically we have had a variety of arrangements in place, differing funding levels, differing loss of control, largely through MOUs and other agreements. It has meant there has not been the ability to reflect the different capacity of councils, the differing risk levels in different municipal areas. It also has provided different levels of control to SES in managing their resources and functions. The alignment is not there. It seems to make sense that you align your resources where your risk is and that is a very modern and practical approach to such governance.

The timing of such a move would be opportunistic, given the movement of SES to the Tasmania Fire Service. The benefits, we believe, include cost efficiencies with servicing and maintenance of vehicles and equipment, collaborative purchasing agreements for equipment and resources, integration of headquarters and operational units as well as managing resources on a risk-based basis.

The area where I do not think there would be consensus across our sector is in how you fund the centralised model. One of the suggestions on the table is an extension to the current fire service levy. Historically local government has had issues of being the collector of the fire levy because of the perception that it is a council tax, not a state government tax. But even in relation to the collection of the levy we don't have consistency across our sector. Some councils make some small amount of revenue as collectors of the fire levy. That would be something we would have to test with our members.

If there were to be an extension to the levy, clearly the process would need to be transparent and cost-neutral to ratepayers. What we would not want to see is a continued expectation that local government provides funding in some form or other as well as an extension to the levy. It

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should be one or the other so that ratepayers pay only once, not twice. The levy should not be seen as an opportunity by government to reduce their recurrent funding for emergency services or as a mechanism to meet current shortfalls in funding.

LGAT is working with Tasmania Fire Service and SES at the moment through our working group to establish the current real costs of volunteer SES units to councils. Wise Lord & Ferguson have been engaged to undertake that work and the results of the audit should be available soon and we'll have a much clearer picture at that point.

Once the data is available we will work again with Tasmania Fire Service and SES around the modelling of potential funding models and take those options to our members for their input.

**CHAIR** - When is that report due?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Do we have a firm time yet?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, they were hopeful that it was going to be available at the end of February, but it is still not available, so hopefully any time soon.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - It started at the end of last year, didn't it?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Who is the author of that report?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Wise Lord & Ferguson have been commissioned to do it.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - That's the report that in its preliminary arrangement has identified \$5.4 million to be the funding quotient of the SES to put it on a sustainable basis.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Maybe, we haven't seen it. At the moment the only funding information we have is the existing funding arrangements to SES and that ad hoc information that we got from councils, but we haven't yet seen that report that provides that complete picture.

I am happy to take questions but in conclusion I would say that we have been very happy with the working arrangements and the collaborative approaches taken by the departments working with us on this matter. We are hopeful that the working group can identify options that are acceptable to all parties. That will result in better long-term outcomes for our common communities.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for your opening remarks. We now go to questions and if I can kick it off. In terms of the working group, can you outline who is on that working group?

**Ms PALMER** - LGAT is represented on the working group by myself and Rod Sweetnam from Launceston City Council, TFS and also SES, and TFS Corporate Services. We have only met once, though.

**CHAIR** - Can you outline the role of the group and the timing of the report out of the group or the options that you are looking just to flesh that out a bit more?

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**Ms PALMER** - No, we haven't really outlined that. The initial meeting was we need to get a costing for the SES volunteer units and once we have that costing then we will be in a position to look at future funding models. TFS briefed Wise Lord & Ferguson on that work and since then we haven't received anything from Wise Lord & Ferguson. I'm of the understanding that they have all the information they need from councils. They were waiting on some information from SES last time I heard.

**CHAIR** - I am just trying to get a feel for that, so thank you. You are working collaboratively and co-operatively and with the same objective going forward?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, as far as I can see at this stage.

**CHAIR** - Apart from one meeting.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Until you really have a model on the ground and understand what is being proposed, we are limited. We agree and understand the reason for promoting a centralised model, but how the funding for that centralised model eventuates and how you unravel the existing arrangements, all of that detail is to be worked through.

**CHAIR** - I have an observation and a question. The theme of a more centralised funding model came up this morning in evidence, and support for that approach rather than based on municipal boundaries; something more centralised where it could adapt to the risk before it.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - For example, if you are well-resourced council and you have a high capability and you are also injecting considerable resources in that partnership, but you do not have a high fire risk, is that a value-for-money proposition compared to how you manage a small poorly resourced that cannot afford to keep equipment maintained to the level that SES want? Maybe some sort of redistribution to align risk and investment is needed.

**CHAIR** - You mentioned the cost efficiencies with the use of equipment, collaboration, integration of services.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Even things like how you approach procurement. If you are a centralised model you can garnish savings because you are not having separate tender processes. You can do things collectively so you are not duplicating administrative costs. There are efficiencies that can be gained.

**CHAIR** - Excellent. I am interested to know about arrangements in other states. I am not sure if you are familiar with that.

**Ms PALMER** - I don't know how other jurisdictions manage it.

**CHAIR** - That's fine. We can make further enquiries elsewhere but I just thought I would check.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - This morning we have heard from both Tasmania Fire Service and the SES. I think I am correct in my summary here, and I will certainly be pulled into order if I am not, but the general consensus was that the sustainability of funding of the SES was critical and had to be resolved in future. For the past two years we have seen the fire service fund the SES

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through their own reserves but they are now no longer there so there is a need for some sort of solution to the whole issue on an urgent basis.

To fit into this current or new financial year - the 2016-17 Budget will be brought down in May or whenever - we are running out of time effectively. I think the comment from both parties this morning was that that had to be addressed and perhaps one way of addressing it was for the Government to provide some money out of consolidated revenue for that in the interim.

**CHAIR** - I don't think they used word 'urgent', they used the word 'priority', so I will pull you up on that. I am sure you will allow the witnesses to respond to your observations shortly.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Are you prepared to address the issues as quickly as I am thinking they ought to be addressed in order to resolve the matter?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - I don't believe we can resolve the complexity of unravelling the MOUs by this budget period. Certainly if there is a shortfall it can't be resolved through any of these mechanisms for next year.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - That would leave one alternative, wouldn't it?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - My understanding too is that the problem is not just about the council relationships with SES but that they have had quite odd sort of funding arrangements that are not very stable. Currently the MAIB-type model is related to incidents rather than a revenue stream that they can project on. They have had pockets of Commonwealth money in the past. They have not had a very secure -

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - They do have the flood litigation money that has always been there and all councils are a third contributor to that in genera - state Government, Commonwealth Government and local government.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - With things like the MAIB road crash rescue, my understanding is that it is paid on a recovery basis as opposed to a broad projection basis. Those sorts of things would need to be resolved as well as their arrangements with councils.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - So the answer to my question really is that local government is not in a position to - this is what I think you said -

**Ms STEPHENSON** - No, because it has to be negotiated with 29 different councils.

**CHAIR** - It sounds like you're answering your own question, or you are attempting to.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - No, I am eliciting a response from the witness and I thought I heard her say - and she will confirm - that local government is not really in a position to address the issue as quickly as I was indicating earlier.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Not only local government, but I don't believe the state Government can address it that quickly because they have to set up their structures to receive a centralised fund as well. If you're asking, 'Can it be ready by July?', no.

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**Ms WOODRUFF** - I want to follow up on your thoughts about cost-shifting concerns. Could you talk about the specific concerns?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - At the moment councils effectively manage their SES commitments through their various sources of revenues, including rates, and the quantum and form of that contribution varies from council to council and has been negotiated based on their capacity.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - And that is for maintaining facilities and equipment?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Yes, and purchasing trucks, et cetera. Some councils hand over a contribution of funds directly and SES makes all the decisions around that. In other instances, councils will make the purchasing decisions and determine when maintenance or replacement programs happen according to their budget capacity. You can see it is very difficult to then move everyone quickly to a centralised model because you have to assess the impact for a particular community to determine whether their contribution will be greater or less. I don't believe there would be support for a situation where you increase the fire service levy, which is perceived often as a local government tax anyway, even though it's not because we collect it -

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - The Government does that every other year and local government squeals and then pays it.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - I can only reflect the position of my members over a few governments in relation to this. We do not like collecting a fire service levy and I don't believe there would be widespread support amongst the sector for increasing that. The other issue is that even if you got that support, is there then an expectation that councils still contribute the equivalent amount they have been contributing? That is double-dipping to the same rate base in a way so it becomes not a movement of the money, not just about centralisation, but about additional funding.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - This could possibly be one situation where local government gets some administrative burden removed from them rather than placed on them. I am thinking this is a TasWater situation possibly, where you have different amounts communities are paying. A centralised model means standardising that so it does mean ultimately, if it's going to be reflected evenly across the community, that there will be some people paying less and others paying more.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - That's right; there will be winners and losers. In managing those perceptions about communities that might feel they are hard done by as a consequence of shifting the funding based on risk, where they've had a high level of investment but are not a high-risk community, they may feel -

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Presumably what we're talking about is a system where everyone might be paying the same amount of money, so some communities will be getting more because they need it.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Yes. That is why I think it is complicated to work through. I don't think it is the wrong answer to move to a centralised model but I think there are a lot of stakeholders at play.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - One other thing you mentioned was that you thought there should be more recurrent funding to SES to support emergency management planning in general.

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**Ms STEPHENSON** - Yes, it is an area we know we have limited capacity for in our sector. We have traditionally looking to the SES for support in that regard but their ability to do that is diminishing because of their funding constraints.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - What's your view about the ability, for example, to prepare for climate change and changes in the hazard landscape that we are seeing?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - The SES role?

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Is that the sort of thing you're referring to?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - No, more about the emergency management responses - planning for bushfires, floods and those sorts of direct events.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - But given those things are likely to increase or change in some places, that is part of that picture too.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - I don't know who does that - whether that is an SES role to take that bigger picture look or whether that sits elsewhere. For us, I think the SES role was more about that direct emergency response planning.

**Ms PALMER** - Councils are required to do a municipal emergency management plan under the Emergency Management Act. They are also required to do risk management, and different councils obviously have different capacities. So to have that expert support from SES will be very well received. At the moment, they don't have the capacity to support councils ...

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Okay, you don't have the capacity to do that.

**CHAIR** - David, do you have a supplementary on that matter?

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I think an example of what Rosalie is saying is wave surges and the sorts of things which might occur due to climate change. They affect the local government areas and would elicit support from SES in some cases. The planning around those sort of areas would be important.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - In a broader land use planning sense, do you mean?

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Just for an emergency.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - We have received federal funding to plan for climate change, including adaptation and mitigation strategies. We would like to some better security and investment in the long term. Whether that is an SES role, I don't have a particular opinion on. That there is a role for it - yes, I agree on that.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - With flood mitigation issues and so on, there is a Commonwealth funding source, together with a state Government and local government source, to prioritise those sorts of issues. I heard on the radio the other day that Railton is applying for some relief for their flood issues. Just recently we have had an event at St Marys where the whole of the town was flooded because of the river perhaps not being as open as it should be. So there will be a priority

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call on that money there. Someone is going to have to make a decision about that in the future, but the SES are vital in that process.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Yes. Through the National Disaster Resilience Management Funding, a lot of our councils do apply for funding for proactive planning in that regard. That includes data collection around likely flood events and sea level increases. They certainly have been successful in the past and that funding round is managed through SES. At the moment it is still ad hoc; there is a 'connect the dots' approach to the data. The way that seems to me likely to happen in the near future is through the planning codes and applying the mapping in a centralised way. I would expect some of that work being picked up under the planning reform agenda.

**CHAIR** - I have a supplementary question. The MOU mentioned in place -

**Ms STEPHENSON** - Most councils have their own MOU in place at SES and they have those historically different arrangements reflected in their MOUs.

**CHAIR** - Are they all different, or slightly different, depending on the council?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - I think they can be quite different, from my understanding. Some are just about handing over some money and others are about making decisions on equipment purchases and the like.

**CHAIR** - Would it be possible for this committee to receive maybe one or two standard MOUs to enlighten us on the types of arrangements that are in place?

**Ms PALMER** - I presume that Wise Lord & Ferguson would have collected the MOUs to do their report.

**Ms STEPHENSON** - I presume so. I would hope that that data has been part of the process of the Wise Lord and Ferguson study. If it's not, I'm happy that we would ask a couple of councils.

**CHAIR** - Do we have any MOUs to your knowledge?

**Ms STEPHENSON** - If it transpires that they are not part of that report, I would be happy to approach some councils and seek some MOUs. It is not something that we have to hand at the moment.

**CHAIR** - That is all I have on your submission and evidence - I appreciate that. Thank you for your time today.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**

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**Mr ROBERT MATHER** WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for being here today. This is a committee of the Parliament and so subject to parliamentary privilege. That allows us to get the best information available to make the best decisions possible. You have privilege and protection here in this room, but if you go outside and make comments that are defamatory or inappropriate, then that is a totally different matter.

**Mr MATHER** - Thank you for inviting me here today to talk about council's submission. I think council has made a relatively brief submission which is really focused on bushfire management. The submission supports the continuation of the fuel reduction program model as a way of achieving greater fuel reduction outcomes. It recommends the consideration that greater emphasis be given for the role of fire breaks or asset protection zones in the fuel reduction program and also supports continuing community education initiatives.

By way of context, the City of Hobart has land management responsibility for over 4600 hectares of bushland and that contains a significant residential-bushland interface. As a result, council is well aware of the risk bushfire presents to the community and the city has put in place a regime of planning resources so that we have overall fire strategy and reserve-based fire management plans. We also have field operations and our field operations are responsible for 40 kilometres of fire trails, and around 35 hectares of fire breaks - asset protection zones. We also issue and maintain the hazard abatement inspection process of private properties and undertake hazard reduction burning. We are quite active for a council in this area.

We have had recent advice through the review of our fire management plans that we need to undertake more burning to achieve good fuel reduction outcomes. One way of doing that is to burn larger compartments. There are efficiencies in burning larger areas than smaller areas in terms of planning and the resources that go into conducting a burn and making the most of the limited windows of opportunity we have to burn. Often the weather dictates that it is either too wet or too dry; so it is that period in between. Being close to residential areas smoke management is also a major issue as is the protection of the assets. There are quite a lot of land tenure issues and properties that we have to work around as compared to maybe a more remote-type area.

The result is to move to these larger compartments involving anywhere between 20 and 60 hectares. They require a different scale of resourcing than council currently has. If I can just give an example, over the past 10 years council in a quite active capacity has averaged about 30 to 35 hectares of burning per year. Our burn sizes are around one to five hectares. That is based on our in-house resources - a dedicated, small team with equipment. We are not a fire suppression agency so we don't have the access under the previous arrangements to the sort of equipment, personnel and systems that the fire suppression agencies, the TFS, Parks and Forestry have. We have gone from an average of 30 to 35 hectares per year. Last year, with the advent of the fuel reduction program and engagement with the fuel reduction unit, we achieved, in spring, 100 hectares and two burns. That gives an indication that working collaboratively can achieve good results. The benefits of the fuel reduction program is access to trained personnel, the equipment processes, planning and stakeholder management. Importantly, it provides a regional oversight, so we are looking at regional priorities rather than us, as land managers, having our own priorities, but there can be better protection offered at regional levels by looking at where fire travels and those things. An example is burning within the Glenorchy area is going to afford protection to

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Hobart but we have no control over what happens in Glenorchy. This regional approach is strongly supported.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I thought you were going to take them over at the council.

**Mr MATHER** - We are waiting to hear what happens.

In terms of fire breaks, we see fire breaks as working with a fuel reduction program. Fire breaks are generally maintained close to assets at risk. Within Hobart's context, most of the assets are residential properties. They are highly valuable in that their maintenance is guaranteed. You can have the best intents to burn areas, but if the weather conditions are not suitable you can't effect those plans. With fire breaks you are basically guaranteed you can maintain those on an annual basis and have them in the state for the fire season that is suitable.

We currently maintain 35 hectares. Some work we have been doing on our fire management plans suggest they need to be expanded. There is currently no recognised standard for fire breaks.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - When you say you maintain 35 hectares, this is priority areas that you clear?

**Mr MATHER** - They are normally strips along residential boundaries. They can be 10 to 15 metres wide.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - This is not fuel reduction; it is other mechanisms for clearing.

**Mr MATHER** - It is fuel reduction, but it is not burning. It is fuel reduction by mechanical means.

**CHAIR** - Is this in addition to the 100 hectares that you said has been taken out in the last 12 months?

**Mr MATHER** - That is right. These strips of land are maintained on an annual basis. They are static. There is a program we go through every year in preparation for summer and we maintain them. The greatest amount of work is when you initially go to modify an area and fire breaks generally have a reduced number of trees in them and you take out the shrubs and fuel. It is grass and some trees but not interlocking canopy. There are some prescriptions but there is no standards for them.

We started doing some work on what a likely standard could be or aligning to the Australian standards for bushfire protection for buildings. Some modelling along those lines suggests we would be in the order of 100 hectares, almost a threefold increase in what we maintain at the moment.

Councils decided to seek further advice on the issue of the standards. We have been advised the Tasmania Fire Service is doing some work and will shortly have some standards. We really look forward to that. Indications are that we need to maintain the bigger areas in the fuel reduced state and that comes with significant resources. It also has the same issues as the fuel reduction burning in that some of the firebreaks are best to be on council land. It could be on private property and a tenure-blind approach would be an advantage. Council's submission is calling for

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the consideration of fire breaks to be thought of along side fuel reduction burns by the fuel reduction program.

The third point and it is probably a smaller point is that of community education. We strongly favour the ongoing support for the programs that are in place. We recognise that preparedness of properties is critical to the chances of survival and they are critical regardless of the measures undertaken on council land. By that I mean that we may undertake fuel reduction burning. We may have a fire break in place but if a private property adjoining that regime is not adequately prepared, it is all at risk of burning down. You can only gain the best benefit if continuous maintenance is undertaken from the back door of the properties into the bushland. Through our work maintaining and augmenting fire breaks, our advice has been that we really need to engage with the community so that it is a combined and collaborative effort. That is where we see community education as critical through the Fire Service.

**CHAIR** - You seem to have a very focused and considered view with respect to these matters. Is it based on the fact that there is a history in Hobart with the 1967 bushfires or has it been in more recent years that you have been more focused? Is there a history of special consideration in this regard?

**Mr MATHER** - Council is cognisant of the risks posed. It is definitely recognised in Council's strategic risk register as the number one risk. We have had dedicated resources for the past couple of decades looking at that. We understand the issues posed by fire in the Hobart community and 1967 is an example.

**CHAIR** - I commend you and the council for the efforts. You mentioned 30-35 hectares per year. Has that been consistent over the past few years and is that what you are looking at into the future as well in terms of fuel reduction?

**Mr MATHER** - Our planning at the moment is reserve based. As we update our reserve based fire management plans we look at the current issues and applicable standards. I think over time we have seen the amount of fire breaks increase. The latest review of fire management plans take into consideration recommendations from Royal Commissions and other recent fire events. I think our information base is building. There has been a paradigm shift with fire management and we recognise that we have to be quite active and proactive in that area.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - While we are on that question can I just extend the question? Do you consider your physical mowing as fuel reduction? The Government is providing some \$7 million a year for fuel reduction burning. Is the physical aspect considered within that component?

**Mr MATHER** - I would say that we have had the focus of the program on burning. We understand that fuel reduction could incorporate the mowing and slashing and I guess we are here to say we do not want that aspect of fuel reduction lost in the desire and need to just burn. There are other mechanisms and other mechanisms should be considered.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Following up on that then, the 100 hectares that you were able to burn last year as a result of tapping into the fuel reduction burning program and getting some expertise. You would hope that that would continue into the future?

**Mr MATHER** - Absolutely. We're undertaking the planning now with the fuel reduction unit on the next suite of burns that will be undertaken in autumn, spring and next year. There is a

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lot of dialogue and a decision being made about allocation of areas and who will be the lead agency. That is continuing but it is early days. We certainly benefited last season -

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Could you give me a financial figure on how much of the \$7 million was used in your case?

**Mr MATHER** - I wouldn't be able to. We're not privy to that information from the program, but presumably they would have that cost there. The burns are undertaken collaboratively so we send our crews along to work with the crews of TFS, Parks and Forestry. The challenge will be in providing the level of service councils received last year on an ongoing basis across the state. That's not something I can comment on, other than we appreciate -

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - That's what I was getting at - \$7 million is a small amount of money when you're trying to put it right across the state.

**Mr MATHER** - That's right.

**CHAIR** - I have a question about the regional approach, which you referred to in talking about Glenorchy and neighbouring councils. Do you have MOUs in place with them or agreements and protocols in place as to how you work together in a collaborative way?

**Mr MATHER** - For fire management there is the Hobart Fire Management Area Committee. They have been tasked with developing fire management plans, which are broad plans identifying risk. That would be the main mechanism for that.

**CHAIR** - And that covers all of that area?

**Mr MATHER** - Yes. The fuel reduction unit can then implement some of those burns which are potentially outside the ambit of Hobart City Council but benefit council.

**CHAIR** - You mentioned in your remarks there was no standard currently that you are operating to. Can you elaborate on that?

**Mr MATHER** - Currently the firebreaks we have in place are based on the expert advice of the author of our fire management plans. There is no definitive standard to indicate exactly how wide firebreaks should be. The width of firebreaks is generally determined by the vegetation type, the aspect and the slope of the land. It is understood there are various variables but there is no definitive standard we can hang our hat on to say, 'We are meeting AS3959' or whatever.

**CHAIR** - Should there be?

**Mr MATHER** - We believe there should be.

**CHAIR** - And there is no national standard or guidelines?

**Mr MATHER** - No. We commenced the process with our recent fire management plan, the Knocklofty plan, looking at an applicable standard. That AS3959 has some applicability but wasn't designed for the purpose for which we were looking to use it. We have been advised by the TFS that they are doing this work. We were about to commission a body of work to look nationally at what is out there and develop our own standard. Thankfully the TFS has advised it is

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onto that as well and I believe there is some work being done by the New South Wales fire brigades, so everyone has realised there is a need for this.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - You said earlier that Hobart City Council understands the severity of the threat posed by bushfires because of the 1967 experience. I suppose there are quite a lot of people in the community who think there is a bit of a disconnect between that view and the numbers of approvals made by council into areas since 1967 such as Tolmans Hill, Dynnyrne and the Hobart Rivulet area, which are very high-risk bushfire areas which were burnt in 1967. There is obviously a continual tension operating within the council, with one arm looking to manage the threat of bushfires and the other approving more houses putting people in areas of risk. I don't know if you have any comments about that, but it is an ongoing problem and I don't quite understand how the council is managing that. Is there a proposal to call a halt to developments in these areas? We're getting complaints from rubbish collectors that you can't even get up these slopes because they're so steep, so how will it be possible for bushfire trucks to negotiate some of the roads that your council has approved? This is creating problems that we're trying to play catch-up to fix. There are resourcing issues, not to mention threat to life and property. Is this something which council is looking at in its bushfire management?

**Mr MATHER** - I understand your question. I'm primarily here in a reserve management, land management capacity, however I can say that with the issue of private development there is a regime of accredited fire practitioners who need to sign off on any development and there are standards applied to developments and that has progressively improved in recent times.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - You talked about the sorts of standards you're trying to bring in in terms of fuel reduction burns. Are you satisfied that the standards in place for bushfire management plans for new approvals are adequate or do they need to be reviewed as well?

**Mr MATHER** - I think they're quite stringent now. There are some complexities in applying those to existing residential blocks as opposed to new subdivisions and often that requires some clearance within the council reserves to provide the protection to the standards. The standards require a certain level of building construction and then a certain setback from bushland. In that regard that is a fairly well advanced and established regime.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - You're right that with the new subdivisions they can keep pushing further up the hill which is taking more chunks out of the bush, and the way they manage the bushfire hazard is by clearing more bush around it. That has a whole range of other problems which are addressed on an issue-by-issue basis, but I think it still remains that we have places where no amount of fuel reduction burn is going to remove the risk or even mitigate the risk up to a substantial level, just because of where they are in terms of wind patterns and those sorts of things. It comes back, in my view, to preparedness. What is the relationship between Hobart City Council and the TFS in terms of the bushfire-ready neighbourhood program, for example? Has the council done any assessment of how many people in the community have a bushfire management plan? Do they have one that is operational in those high-risk areas?

**Mr MATHER** - I will have to take that question on notice and provide that information to you.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Thanks, that would be good. I am interested in trying to tease that out, because I know the Tas Fire Service is doing this work but I am wondering how much council is doing in partnership or on its own.

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**Mr MATHER** - I can state that we partner the TFS in those initiatives for the many at-risk properties adjoining council bushland. In those meetings with residents we are there with the TFS so that information is provided to the residents, both about their preparedness and what council and the fire service is doing. We regularly hold community meetings or neighbourhood meetings along those lines.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Are there developments which have been proposed which have been recommended for not being approved to council in areas which council staff have considered to be high bushfire risk? Has that happened?

**Mr MATHER** - That is not an area of council I am involved in but I would be happy to take that on notice.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - That would be helpful, thanks. I am trying to get a sense of whether this is a discussion of concern because it has big implications.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for that and thank you Mr Mather for your evidence today.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

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**Mr RODNEY SWEETNAM** MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - This is a proceeding in the Parliament, so parliamentary privilege will apply. What you say here attracts that privilege but if you are outside it does not. Also to indicate what is said outside is entirely a matter for you.

Thanks for being here today, we very much appreciate it and welcome you to share some opening remarks and to clarify the basis upon which you are sharing today as a member of the public, as a person on the commission or in what respect.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - I am representing myself as a member of the public and wanted to present to the committee a couple of my thoughts about the issue in question.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. We have your submission and we are appreciative of that submission and thoughts and look forward to your opening remarks and then we will have some questions.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - I have focused on a few things out of a broad range of issues that you have to deal with. I indicate that I support the idea of the SES being part of the Tasmania Fire Service under the State Fire Commission. I see there are operational efficiencies associated with that. A lot of the activities are like in relation to management, training, supply and maintenance of equipment. They are both first order response agencies. Bringing the SES under the State Fire Commission gives it a level of governance that probably has not occurred in the past. I have mentioned a few things there that you can read at your leisure.

The funding of the SES at the moment and previous people have spoken about it, is with 29 councils. I believe, there is 29 different arrangements. A lot of that funding, the requirement of managers at SES is for them to negotiate that on a year by year basis often. That does not encourage good, long-term planning and budgeting, in my mind, when you have to rely on a yearly basis for your funding or a significant proportion of your funding, and you cannot be clear about what level of funding that is going to be year in, year out.

I believe that that model of funding also drives a level of ownership with the local government units or the municipalities. If you are directly paying for a service you would have a fair bit of ownership of it. Then that to some extent leads to the units that have been raised by municipalities to be contained within those municipalities for their activities. In my employment experience, albeit a long time ago now, I had to deal with a wind storm that went through Launceston. I found at that time that I had to ring up neighbouring councils to try and get assistance from SES units in neighbouring councils.

I recognise that that is a long time ago and times have changed, the Act is changed. Under the act the director now has direct directions of the units. If the units are being funded by a municipality, the coordinator in that municipality will have influence over their level of funding that those units are going to get through their councils. I think it makes it hard for the regional managers and the SES then to have the autonomy that is the intent of the legislation. I think the reality is different from what the legislation intended. That is my position on it. I know other people have a different position. I have not had to test my position since 2000 but I am not convinced that things have changed that much as a consequence of the change in the act.

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Hence, I believe that the central funding model would be a much better arrangement for the SES, for the units and for management so that they can manage on a longer term basis. They can budget on a longer term basis and they can be accountable for all of their funding. At the moment a good proportion of the funding is off the balance sheet of the SES. It is with the municipalities that fund it whether it be in kind or in cash. They cannot be held accountable for money that they do not control.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - What you are saying is this is funding with local government involvement.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - Yes. Local government directs funds and in kind. There is a fair amount of in kind goes on in supporting the SES units at a local government level.

I should point out too that there is a typo in my submission under funding for SES. The second last paragraph should say 'the transition to be more reliable and more direct funding' not 'less direct funding'.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - These are my views. The transition needs to be cost neutral to local government. Otherwise I think local government would object. Secondly, funds ultimately come out of the community. There needs to be, once the inquiry into the level of funding of SES and local government is finalised, an idea on what the value of the funding is. The transition would need to be cost neutral to local government across the state which may mean that some local governments that have been under funding will have to pay a bit more in the context of statewide costing.

You mentioned community safety programs; I think there has been some advantage with the SES coming into the TFS. TFS has been very active in the community education field for quite a while and has won national awards for some of its programs. The learnings from that have to be of value to the SES in dealing with an all-hazards approach to education and building resilience within communities. There are some real advantages in that, so I will leave it at that so far as my submission is concerned.

As to the future funding of the SES, the obvious thing to go to is the fire contribution and whether that can be reconfigured to accommodate the shift from a local government funding model to a central funding model. There is a bit of work associated with that. The actual cash component should be relatively easy but it's the in-kind component that is going to be difficult. The extraction from that would be over a number of years, not happen within a 12-month period because we are talking about physical assets. There has been a movement to shared facilities - TFS, SES and Tasmania Ambulance in some areas - and that seems to be working very well. It makes sense that in a small community you don't have a fire service building, an SES building and an Ambulance Tasmania volunteer building all lined up in a row, that they all come together in the one building and get some economies in that way. Moving from what we have at the moment to something like that on a statewide basis is going to take some time. In any transition such as that, the TFS funding needs to be preserved within the whole gamut of things because there are pressures across the board on all emergency service funding, as you would appreciate.

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**CHAIR** - As to the synergy referred to in regard to the TFS and SES, can you elaborate on that? You're talking about efficiencies that will deliver cost savings but also efficiencies that will improve productivity and outputs.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - This is in no way an attack or any reflection on the people or volunteers at the ground level who deliver the response. They do a terrific job but I think the systems and management processes they have to work under to some extent could be more efficient and probably hinder some of their activities. Going back to local government, the act requires that each municipality will have an emergency management plan. The scope to do that on a regional basis - my understanding is generally that is done on a municipal basis - and that doesn't necessarily recognise natural catchments so far as the risk is concerned. The other thing that pops up out of that is that in two or three municipalities all planning in close proximity to, hypothetically, a riverine flooding situation, they all do their plans around the personnel and resources available within the region - through Tasmania Police, TFS and all those - but by the time the flooding gets down to the bottom of the municipality a lot of those resources could have been used up, but the plans stand alone. That is one of the challenges with the funding arrangement at the moment and the way it is written around emergency planning.

**CHAIR** - Where I am getting to is that you can see efficiencies in a whole range of areas. It is not just cost savings, but it's in terms of productivity and getting better outcomes; is that right?

**Mr SWEETNAM** - Training: in road accident rescue, SES provides the response in the rural areas, TFS responds in the urban areas, but the training requirements are the same for both organisations. I am not saying there is not training going on together, but if they're in one organisation then obviously all the infrastructure above those groups can be brought into one infrastructure, one training process and things like that. In recent times with the extended fires some of the fire officers have moved into the SES offices to assist with some of the SES activities and vice versa, so those sorts of things could be more formalised. The training and management streams can be more formalised.

**CHAIR** - A slightly separate question regarding the commission because you have been a member of the commission.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - I still am.

**CHAIR** - You still are, and you are a former chair, I think.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - I have chaired the meetings.

**CHAIR** - What I want to ask about is your thoughts on the role of an independent Chair and the merit of that, and also the makeup and merit of the commission. I am interested in your thoughts on how that could be operated better. We've had two separate witnesses this morning, the fire service and then the commission represented by the same person. There are clearly issues there that I can see at least and I am interested in your thoughts on how we can improve that in certain terms of reform.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - A couple of things on that. I am happy to give the committee my thoughts, but they're my thoughts, they are not representative of TFS or the commission. I've purposefully stayed away from the issue of an independent chair because I thought I was a little bit close and it could be perceived that I am a little bit conflicted in that sense. From a good

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governance point of view I think an independent chair would be a healthy step forward for the State Fire Commission. In talking about conflicted, the chief officer in having to run the operations of the organisation and manage the organisation and then step in to running the governance of the organisation is a pretty broad church. I should be careful with my words I suppose, but modern governance doctrine would say that is not a good model. To separate the two, the CEO of the fire service operations focuses on fire service operations, reports in and becomes part of that governance group, but doesn't have to worry about the governance arrangements associated with it; that is picked up by the chairman.

**CHAIR** - Do you think it should be a skills-based commission or board, do you have views on that? You don't have to share them, but I know you are representing yourself.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - I have exercised my mind around that, I must admit, and I haven't come to a conclusion. There are fundamentally four bodies with the Local Government Association, but the volunteer organisation, the retained organisation and the union all are representing a different level of employee. I think the answer to your question as far as I am concerned is, if the act stays relatively the same in relation to the commission then the representation as it stands is probably okay. Not probably okay, it is okay.

If there was a significant change towards the commission becoming a fully operational board in the commercial sense, then I think yes probably the skills-based board would be more relevant. But that would take a significant shift away from where we are at the moment.

**CHAIR** - Where we are at the moment, just focusing on that, do you think there is a potential conflict of interest with respect to the various stakeholders represented on that commission, or does that get managed as best as possible?

**Mr SWEETNAM** - Not within the context of the act as it stands at the moment and the activities the commission has to deal with, because they are fundamentally around those groups and, to be blunt, there are other levels of governance above it that mean it is not as independent as a commercial board.

**CHAIR** - Can you see merit in a review of the legislation which is over 30 years old - from 1979?

**Mr SWEETNAM** - Yes, it needs to be brought up to reflect where the SES sits within that because at the moment the reporting arrangements are not reflected in the act. This is just an opinion with no qualification around it, but it seems to work okay from an operational sense. It has been tweaked as time goes on so the operations can operate as they need to and it has the authority it needs to deal with wildfire in bushland areas and structural fires and those sorts of things, but the governance side of it seems to have lagged and definitely needs a relook at.

**CHAIR** - Finally, you may or may not be aware, but what about interstate comparisons and how they operate compared to us? Do you want to shed some light on that?

**Mr SWEETNAM** - I think there are six or seven states with six or seven models, so comparison is fairly difficult. One of the strengths of the TFS is that there is only one fire service in this state. You see challenges in other states where they have two significant fire services and the emergency services commission that was created in Victoria in the last few years is

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symptomatic of the fact you have different groups that are all different and politically doing different things.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I will start by saying it was not easy to get them together at the time.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - It was a good job, though, with good consequences.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Yes. You probably would have heard from the back of the room the questions I was asking with respect to the amount of money needed to sustain the SES into the future. You made comment that you hoped any future arrangement does not erode the capacity of the Tasmania Fire Service from funding itself.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - I think the word was 'mustn't'.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Yes, that's right. If the figure of \$5 million, which is being bandied about a bit, that came from Wise, Lord and Ferguson is the figure required for the sustainable operation of the SES into the future without imposing on the TFS or money that needs to go to the fire service in order to fund the SES, that is large change to what has happened in the past. Some \$2.5 million was funded via the police service originally before this current integration occurred. It may well be a tall ask on local government to put that amount of additional money into the system.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - There are two things, if I understand what you are saying. As to the \$4 million or \$5 million, I had not heard that figure but I haven't seen a figure yet for what local government across the state is, but if it is of that order, that is what I mean by being cost-neutral to local government. If you pick that up and put it into a central funding arrangement by whatever means but then local government does not have to pay it per se, it takes all those costs off its books and it comes through as an emergency levy, fire levy, extended, whatever it looks like, to the community at large, that is not an issue as long as it is cost-neutral. But \$2.5 million is a different kettle of fish; that is an issue.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - That has been taken out of the reserves of the Tasmania Fire Service in the last couple of years.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - That's right, and that has to be addressed somehow because that is not sustainable going forward at the moment. I think we're talking about two different things: bringing the money from local government and collecting it in a different way and then local government not having to rate for it, which is what they're doing at the moment, because unlike the fire levy which, as the local government representative said before, local government does not like collecting, but it is a levy on and above the rates. The SES costs are currently rated for so they are part of the rating costs.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - You mentioned the value of in-kind support which is provided by councils in addition to the financial support. Are you concerned that there would be a loss of that with the centralised funding model and there would be some diminishing of community engagement or that in-kind council support? Do you think it needs to disappear? Is it a burden which is not financially recognised or is there a problem with it?

**Mr SWEETNAM** - My view is that in-kind still costs because if it's a shed in the corner of the depot where the unit sits or something like that it will be depreciated on the books of local

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government and the electricity will have to be paid for and all those sorts of things. In-kind is still a cost and, to me, Wise Lord & Ferguson should be building that into a bottom-line cost. In that scenario if hypothetically that SES unit gets picked up and put into a combined facility somewhere, the council does not need to maintain its shed anymore so it can use it for its own services or get rid of it. There still should be a reduction in the bottom lines of the council but that will take a long time because if it is a good quality shed if they cannot sell it they won't knock it down. There is a long tail to the extraction of the in-kind where the cash is probably easier, as I said earlier.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - So it is about proper accounting in the handover transition.

**Mr SWEETNAM** - Yes. I think the accounting is proper but it is identifying those costs with the context of the exercise it is put through at the moment. The quid pro quo should be that the SES then can fund to risk. If a lot of resources are needed because there is a high risk in this area they put some funds there and less funds where there is less risk. At the moment that does not happen because it is all based on a municipality-by-municipality basis.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Mr Sweetnam. We appreciate your evidence today.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

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**Mr TONY FERRALL**, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - I know you are familiar with these parliamentary proceedings. I need to check that you are satisfied and familiar with the guidelines relevant to this hearing. It attracts parliamentary privilege so what you say here is protected by that privilege but if you go outside that is a whole other matter.

**Mr FERRALL** - The fire commission does not receive an appropriation directly. Rather, the government contribution is provided through Finance-General. There isn't a direct appropriation to the State Fire Commission; it goes through Finance-General. That is one of the outputs of Finance-General.

In 2015-16, there is a provision of \$2.8 million made in respect of the State Fire Commission. There are various components within that \$2.8 million. The majority of the State Fire Commission's revenue is sourced from other state taxation sources which go directly to the Fire Commission. The fire service contribution, the insurance fire levy, the motor vehicle fire levy, total approximately \$65 million of the roughly \$80 million annual budget of the State Fire Commission. It is a significant budget and represents substantial expenditure by the Fire Commission of what is ultimately community funds. Unlike other general government entities, the State Fire Commission isn't subject to the same budget determination through the normal budget process as other entities. Its budget is basically developed and designed by itself and doesn't go through a scrutiny process either through budget committee. It has limited parliamentary scrutiny compared to how other government agencies or entities might operate.

From a Treasury perspective, the special funding arrangements of the commission have some implications in a financial management sense. The commission doesn't have unlimited revenue; it is a defined source of revenue. Not having the same requirements to achieve budget savings or constrain expenditure, it is an ongoing issue that, from a Treasury perspective, we have reviewed and looked at over a number of years. From a Treasury perspective that different scrutiny and level of discipline may have implications, or may have had implications, in the level of discipline internally the commission may have imposed on its own expenditures. Again, that is a 'may', it is not a definitive because it is not open to the same level of scrutiny. Treasury's view is that wherever the committee moves to it would be better or best if the commission was under the same sorts of disciplines as other government agencies. I will not go into commentary around governance, but in financial management requirements, given it is ultimately a significant component of taxpayer funds, we believe it should be subject to the same sort of disciplines and scrutiny as other funding within the budget.

**CHAIR** - Do you have a view about governance arrangements that are appropriate for the commission and the fire service and how they interact, noting we currently do not have an independent chair?

**Mr FERRALL** - I was the Treasury representative on the commission some 20 years ago and it would have changed since then. But it is an unusual governance arrangement. If you looked at government businesses or state-owned companies, you would generally have a board which is skills based, independent and doesn't represent individual groups. It is an unusual model in that sense and there are a lot of good reasons why that is how boards are normally structured.

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**CHAIR** - Can you see merit in reform of the legislation which is from 1979, dated back that far? Do you have a view on that that you would like to share?

**Mr FERRALL** - Not in detail, but there are components of it which I can appropriately comment on. On the board there is effectively what you would call a Treasury representative, or there is an individual whom I appoint. In a sense, people would be viewing that individual as having a Treasury input into the State Fire Commission. Yet the reality is that, as with any individual who goes onto a board, they act in the best interests of the State Fire Commission. You should not confuse the presence of a Treasury employee as in any way indicating that Treasury has any particular insight or scrutiny of the State Fire Commission through that representative. He or she acts in the best interests of the entity.

**CHAIR** - It is fair to say there is a consensus that it is a complex financial and funding structure under the current arrangements and based on past experience over many governments. Do you have a view on the merit of a more sustainable, more streamlined and less complex funding structure?

**Mr FERRALL** - Over a number of years there have been various differences in terms of funding that have been presented both through the Commission's corporate plan and through the annual budget process. I note that even as the submissions have gone to this committee, there are variations in those numbers compared to the audited financial statements. Without unpacking the detail of all those, the complexity of the funding arrangements means that the budget development process and the overall managing of the budget by the Fire Commission is probably more complex than it needs to be.

**CHAIR** - Do you want to share, from your understanding or observations interstate or elsewhere, as to models that perhaps are less complex or more amenable?

**Mr FERRALL** - I have not studied interstate models. I would be happy to get some information for the committee through my counterparts in other jurisdictions. From a Treasury perspective, we have not looked at what might be an alternative model from another state or certainly not in recent years.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I will continue on from that. The reality is that fire services are composed of mainly volunteer personnel. As such, over the years, they have wanted to have some role in the process of the wherewithal of the service itself, and funding comes into that. It might go to the reason why the board structure is as it is at the moment. What you are suggesting is that at the moment the arrangement is very similar to funding from Legislature-General but as a 'reserve by law' situation which occurs with the Parliament and other things. You are suggesting it may be more appropriate to have Treasury involved in the normal way, with an allocation from consolidated revenue, as it were, together with all the other collection, and Treasury applying the funding discipline that it does in other departments, is that right?

**Mr FERRALL** - What I was highlighting is that the model is different to what is applied across a number of areas. No doubt when the model was designed people would have had good intent in putting that model together in terms of representation and other things. My comment was really to state the obvious - that the model leaves the State Fire Commission in a situation where it has less public scrutiny of a significant component of public funds than other entities. Again, from a Treasury point of view, we believe that a better model is one where there is more

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open and public scrutiny of the decisions that are being made where the same disciplines are applied across all entities.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I have been hammering on the point of adequacy of funding with regard to the Tas Fire Service. Indeed, there has been an admission by the service not only today but previously that they did have some reserves that were able to be used to offset the integration of the SES into the Tas Fire Service. Prior to that integration it was being funded by the Police department. The submitters are saying that there really needs to be some more coordinated approach to that funding arrangement overall with respect the SES component within the Tas Fire Service and that it is urgent that we provide additional funding. I think it was mentioned that it would be disappointing if there were not some changes in this year's Budget in regard to that aspect because the service cannot sustain another year of absorbing the costs of the SES. What do you say to that?

**Mr FERRALL** - Ultimately, in terms of what is in the coming Budget will be a matter for the Government to determine. It would be inappropriate for me to make comment in terms of what I believe or think ought to be appropriate levels of funding at this point.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - You have been giving your opinion on a number of other aspects.

**Mr FERRALL** - Yes, but they do not go to Government policy.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - I think I might get the same answer. It was really with respect to the couple of areas that have been identified - the community education side of things and vehicle fleet upgrades into the SES. The other area which was flagged in this season right now is that we are the only state without a fixed wing aircraft and that there are these other big Erickson air crane heli-tankers. There are six in Australia, with three in Victoria. Why don't we have one in Tasmania? These are big costs; obviously they are not something that the Fire Commission can fit into their annual budget and they are big statewide costs for us to grapple with. That falls within the policy domain but I suppose it is flagging that this wider than just a Fire Service issue in terms of state protection.

**Mr FERRALL** - It is. I suppose I could make a comment that is not delving into Government policy. Tasmania is a relatively small state and there are limits in terms of what a small community can effectively fund. There are lots of areas where we have arrangements with other states to work cooperatively and collectively with them to help minimise or mitigate costs in things like fixed wing aircraft.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Ballarat has one.

**Mr FERRALL** - Ballarat is starting to head towards being as big as Tasmania. In terms of catchment, we are half a million people. Unfortunately there is not the capacity to fund every single service across the board; it is not just the Tasmania Fire Service. It works with police and in many areas of public sector in terms of training and development, and a whole range of other things, where we work with other jurisdictions to try to mitigate or minimise our own costs.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Given that we are responsible for managing a World Heritage Area, it is the sort of conversation that we need to be having considering the fact that we are only half a million people. We can fill those obligations effectively by getting support when we need it.

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**Mr LLEWELLYN** - The fact that the state Government provides its own insurance, as it were, or its -

**Mr FERRALL** - Tasmanian Risk Management Fund.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - TRM funds arrangement. Obviously this year has been a particularly bad year from a fire point of view. Fire service has a limited amount of money that operates from an administrative point of view. Is that going to create any issues from a government point of view?

**Mr FERRALL** - It won't impact on the TRMF but it will impact on the budget. This is the way it operates for higher than normal bush fire costs. The state would fund it through requests for additional funds through the normal process. There are also arrangements through the National Disaster Relief arrangements where, depending on the nature of the disaster, we can claim back on those arrangements.

In broad terms - and these are very broad terms - up until the first, approximately, \$10 million, the state would bear the cost. From approximately \$10 million to \$20 million there is about a 50:50 sharing. In other words we can claim half of that cost back. Over \$20 million I believe it is about 75 per cent. Those arrangements do mitigate the extent that a bush fire might cause difficulties for the state in a funding sense. The arrangements tend to be lagged so we tend to get the money in the next financial year rather than the current financial year but that is just a cash flow management issue.

**CHAIR** - Thanks for your evidence today. It is appreciated.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

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**Mr GREG COOPER**, BRANCH SECRETARY, UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA, TASMANIA BRANCH, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - Welcome, Mr Cooper. Being a hearing of the Parliament, parliamentary privilege applies. What you say is appreciated by us and we want to get the best information available to make the best decisions possible. If you depart this place and make comments which may or may not be defamatory, that is a matter for you. Thank you for your submission and appendices to the submission.

**Mr COOPER** - What I did was to put a small document together. I asked if I could provide a slide show but wasn't able to do that. We have put together some dot points as part of a presentation we made 12 months ago, so the information in this document is relevant for the whole of our campaign. That campaign started on the back of the 2014-15 budget of the new Liberal Government.

As you are aware, the biggest issue for us was table 7.10, the Department of Police and Emergency Management being section 7 of that. At table 7.10, output group 4, Emergency Management, there was an amount appropriated from consolidated revenue for the Department of Police and Emergency Management of \$2.446 million for funding the SES. The line item says that the decrease in state emergency management services was because of the transfer of state emergency management to the Tasmania Fire Service. You will see recurrent funding for 2014-15 and 2015-16 disappeared. They are the state government budget papers.

The whole reason we raised that as an issue and a precursor to our submission is because in May that year the State Fire Commission had approved its own budget. The budget processes for the State Fire Commission, as understood by the Fire Service Act, is that the State Fire Commission must project a budget of three to four years which must be approved by the minister of the day and that minister, once they have approved the budget, sets it in May and it becomes part of the state government budget papers. The Government, for whatever reason, decided in August it would unilaterally alter that document to the tune of nearly \$3.5 million, \$2.5 million of which was appropriated from the Tas Fire Service budget for running the SES and another \$770 000 for the fuel reduction program set-up costs.

There are a number of other things that budget did but having tabled that document I don't need to labour it unless you want me to take you through it point by point. It sets out the issues and risks in that Tasmania has a different demographic to the rest of Australia. We have more elderly and disabled people so the fire risk increases as a result of that. We also have one of the lowest funded fire services per capita by government in the country and we have more fires per capita than the rest of the country. On the productivity report on government services, which is a report that is done every year, on the key indicators Tasmania doesn't perform very well. We have the highest rate of insurance, usually the highest number of deaths, or second highest, the highest number of fires and insurance claims are huge. There is a whole range of reasons why that is and I don't need to belabour them today, but you then introduce a government fiscal initiative that impacts on the Tasmania Fire Service to the tune of \$3 million without any consideration for what that impact has on the TFS other than you can take that out of your cash reserve without identifying it.

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We say in our submission that it was a backdoor budget cut, and I hope that you don't find those terms offensive but that's how we see it. We saw that \$2.446 million was ripped out of the Tas Fire Service in year one and then another \$770 000 to set up the fuel reduction unit. There are probably some good synergies with SES being with the TFS, but it would be the cart before the horse. It is a good plan but not properly thought out and due diligence wasn't undertaken, in our submission.

There are other things that happened as well. There was the corporate services integration project where the whole of government says, 'We need to look at our agencies to see if they can deliver on all these services', and there are four key points to that. They decided to do that. We have only just realised in the submission by the Fire Service today the cost of that Wise, Lord and Ferguson report and everything else. The difficulty with that, and again one of the concerns we have, is that the department through the police commissioner and secretary of the department initiated that Wise Lord & Ferguson review into corporate services integration. That report was commissioned in August and made available in November that year, in record time and with no consultation from anybody.

**CHAIR** - What year was that?

**Mr COOPER** - In 2014, at the same time the Budget was being introduced by the Government after the delay, because they delayed this Budget on the basis the Treasurer was doing some resource risk analysis of the budget situation, which was actually not as bad as was first made out and no adjustments were made, but that's another story. The implications for the Fire Services have impacted on us. The corporate service review has impacted big time. There has been property acquired by SES and Police that is Fire Service property and that is in the Fire Service report, and there has also been an impact on key issues for us that are unanswered. We have written to the secretary of the department and spoken to the minister and we have the minister's letter in here where he says, 'We're going to give you back \$1.5 million' - which he should not have taken - 'we're going to review the Fire Service Act, but the only issue we want to review is the chief officer's role as an independent chair because there is probably some corporate governance around that'.

They haven't answered some key issues for us and part of our submission to this inquiry is about an incorporated body, not a state authority. The TFS is incorporated under the act and the Tasmanian Fire Service is the operational arm of that. It has an independent board that is appointed by the Government and the chief officer has the power to run that fire service. The minister under the act can direct the TFS, but he cannot direct it to the extent that he makes it an agency of the Crown. The limitations the minister has to direct the fire service are in terms of really academic things, such as, 'I want you to put a report together and have it ready in time; I want you get your budgets prepared.' In terms of directing otherwise, there is an issue.

The Government has decided that section 107 of the act is a relevant part of the act to appropriate moneys to the Fire Service, bearing in mind the Fire Service must appropriate money for the purposes of running brigades. The cost of running brigades is defined in the act and tabled in our submission, so it is all related to fire. All of sudden you have the minister directing the fire service to spend \$2.5 million under section 107 on non-fire-related activities. Our concern is that you have a budget process that allows you to appropriate money under the Fire Service Act for fire service activities. You then say, 'We're going to drop \$2.5 million recurrent funding out of the budget', so that is a direct saving to police, 'and we think that is good synergy for the TFS so you can pick it up but, by the way, we're not going to give you any money, just find that money.'

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Tasmania Fire Service can't appropriate that money so they have to lose it. They have to find that in their budget. The budget that has been allocated for trucks, for station rebuilds, for new fire fighters, for accident mitigation programs and training has to be drawn upon to fund this new direction from government. Further to that, the Government introduced a fuel reduction burns program which is a good tenure-blind program, the best in the country, but they said to the Fire Service, 'You need to help set that up'. In year one of that program the Fire Service had to find another \$770 000 to fund that program, and that is in addition to the \$2.5 million, so we are up around \$3.2 million now. The TFS had no way of appropriating that money because it already had its budgets done. These are direct hits on the budget that the TFS has just had to wear. It has meant they have lost income as a result of less cash and they have had to borrow and are paying interest on borrowings. The TFS is basically \$8 million behind where it should have been had it not been for these initiatives.

There are some significant issues we want to raise and they are, in the back of the slide show: how can this happen, who has the authority to do it and what do we need to do? What we need to do, in our point of view, is maintain the independence of the State Fire Commission as an independent incorporated body under an act of parliament. We need to maintain the independence of the chief officer, who is the executive of that Tas Fire Service appointed by the Governor under that act. It is not open to government, in our submission, by administrative instruction to alter or amend an act of parliament.

I want to correct an earlier observation that was made by me that the Fire Service Act was made in 1979 as a result of the bushfires. There were a number of inquiries preceding that but the Fire Service Act also went through significant reform in 1995. Dr Frank Madill was the minister of the day and I can quote you a part of *Hansard* where he said that these reforms are basically designed to make sure the Fire Service does have independence from government in terms of its funding and it follows government guidelines in terms of reporting of budgetary requirements.

The 1995 reforms were significant. That 1995 reform also dropped from section 107 a \$1 000 limit per year spend by the chief with the permission of the minister on non-fire-related activities. You had an act designed to create a spend out of your \$50 million or \$60 million budget of up to \$1 000 per year on non-fire-related activities. The Treasurer and the Government now are saying that section is okay to be used to spend upwards of \$8 million now on non-fire-related activities. That is significant. It will be if you don't fix the SES funding model; it will be \$2.446 million, \$2.5 million, \$2.7 million plus the \$770 000 for fuel reduction that was not able to be appropriated. It is over \$8 million. We think there is a huge problem with that.

That is basically where we are at. We have given you a detailed submission and I am happy to speak to that. I am happy to answer any questions but I do want to remind the committee that the minister, and we have had several meetings with him, has written to us and he has said in terms of the Government's position that the State Fire Commission is not subject to government policy to reduce boards and committees and therefore will not be abolished under that policy or any others that I am aware of. I am pleased we could agree the appropriate governance arrangement that would allow for the chair to be an independent person. We have agreed with that, minister.

**CHAIR** - Do you support an independent chair?

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**Mr COOPER** - Yes. We have got that in our submission. We do. We think it is a good governance arrangement for a number of reasons. The chief officer is appointed by the Governor under the Fire Service Act but he also complies in the main with the State Service Act and guidelines in terms of behaviours. Therefore he is bound by government policy per se and if you say something as a government to him he cannot really stand up and say 'I do not agree with that', whereas an independent chair could do that and the chief officer could concentrate on his activity of being the chief officer - looking after the money and the role of running fire stations. I do think that is a good model.

**CHAIR** - We will move to questions and I will kick it off. We appreciate your submission and your remarks. Obviously a number of your remarks and allegations in your submission are not supported by Tasmania Fire Service. They responded this morning when I put the question to them. They did not agree with some of the allegations made in your submission, in particular the first one about the budget in your conclusion, inadvertently or otherwise usurping the role and function of the SFC and the chief officer of the TFS. They did not agree with you in that regard and also with respect to a number of other matters which are set out in *Hansard* and you are welcome to peruse those. I think you were here during the day. Please feel free to respond to some of those comments that they made. That is not a problem.

I did want to ask you specifically about section 107 because you have brought it up and it has been referred to today. That change did go through in 1995. Do you support a cap that was on there before? There was a \$1 000 cap that was removed and I think, as far as I am aware, other members of parliament and the opposition supported those changes in 1995. Are you now supporting a cap that was there previously?

**Mr COOPER** - My view is that the cap was removed to allow for more flexibility in the spend. I do not think it was ever the intention of Parliament and I cannot read the minds of the parliamentarians, but I do not think they would remove a \$1000 cap all up, accumulative for a year, to allow it to be replaced with upwards of \$7 million. My view is that that cap was there for a purpose and it was designed to stop people spending money appropriated for a specific purpose on other things. It might have been flowers or gifts to people or something like that they were buying.

**CHAIR** - Do you still support a cap?

**Mr COOPER** - I do support a cap in that sense. I think it is wrong of government to use that section the way it has been used. I am opposed to that.

**CHAIR** - You have made a number of other assertions in your submission which the Fire Service didn't support. They also expressed concern about the New South Wales firefighters coming over and the ban imposed at the time. The acting fire commissioner felt, using his words, ashamed. How do you look back on that? Do you want to share your perspective on that incident? It caused some concern at the time.

**Mr COOPER** - I appreciate the fact you have extended parliamentary privilege to me which allows me to speak openly and frankly. I can confirm that Gavin, the acting chief officer, said to me that he was disappointed and felt I had acted abhorrently that week. We've had that discussion, and we are allowed to do that. The issue was that it was an ill-conceived plan that was going to fail from the day it was conceived. It was conceived on a misnomer. You are fighting fires and there is a huge problem in fatigue management up the coast. Prior to the bushfires, in

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the north-west coast you had five officers short as a result of the Fire Service not acting appropriately, prudently or in a timely manner on vacancy control. I don't know if you understand a rotation, but a rotation in the Tas Fire Service is two 10-hour days, two 14-hour shift nights, four days off. Your first night shift is off and then you have three more days off and then you come back and do 10 and 14. Before the bushfires broke out, officers in the north-west region were working seven out of eight days, so having one day off in a rotation because they were short of officers. That is where the fatigue problem came in. They identified a problem in Hobart which was on the basis of trying to manage an overtime roster that is out of kilter and needs to be tidied up, and there have been proposals to fix that. They got somebody to have a look at that but they didn't manage it very well and said, 'I think there might be a fatigue problem'. They thought the fatigue problem stemmed from RAT deployment - remote area teams. There are 47 firefighters out of 112 in Hobart trained in that discipline. They take them out and they do the hard yards - they cut the tracks and do all that work. On the basis that they were going to pull out up to 19 RATs at any one time, people said, 'This could be a strain on the Hobart fire brigade', so the duty officers - who are officers who sit in the station to look after the 112 firefighters on shifts - did an availability [analysis] and they found out they had between eight and 12 firefighters available every day of a day off they could call on, so there was no problem once they were identified. The fatigue management was suggested as a problem, but it wasn't a problem.

On Friday, the fire service wrote to New South Wales and said, 'We need some firefighters down here', with the understanding they would like to send them up the coast and to other areas. New South Wales said it would be better if we sent them all to one place. The best place to accommodate them on the basis of one on a truck was Hobart, which had five crews. They didn't tell us about that. They have an obligation under their industrial instrument to tell us about that. Not only tell us about it, tell the firefighters. They said it was an emergency situation. The emergency was in the bush, not in the fire station. There were no fatigue management problems in the fire station. They inducted these firefighters and confirmed at 5 o'clock on Tuesday night that these firefighters were coming in on Hobart station at 8 o'clock the next morning as part of the Hobart response crew.

There are a couple of things you have to understand as to the Hobart fire station and Burnie and Launceston. The Tas Fire Service must have a complement on station at the start of each shift. At 8 o'clock in the morning when the shift starts they have to have the complement. They have to have two crews in Hobart, a crew at Glenorchy, a crew at Rokeby, a crew at Clarence and Bridgewater. What they decided to do was bring this New South Wales crew in, untrained and uninducted, on station as a crew - so they had already dropped a crew. Because there was four in that crew and no officers, they had dropped two crews. So they had to run night shift on two crews until 11 o'clock the next morning - that was a 17-hour shift they gave Hobart crews to run on so they could get these boys inducted. You need to understand induction. The only thing the New South Wales firefighters and the Hobart firefighters had in common was the backplates that hold their BA together. A BA is the breathing apparatus, a cylinder. For training for a firefighter he does a 16-week intense program and goes on shift. If he comes off shift for anything over six months to a year, to get back on shift they do two rotations - two days, two nights, two days, two nights - to familiarise themselves again with the trucks and they do another BA refresher, a road crash refresher, and make sure they are confident. Somehow magically the fire service decided they could, in three hours, induct these New South Wales firefighters onto the back of our big red trucks. It was never going to work. It was fraught with danger and the reason they went home at 10 o'clock was because the overtime ran out at 11 o'clock and they would have had to recall two more crews to allow the inductions to continue. There was no way known they could have had those firefighters inducted, ready, in three hours to respond.

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Mr Freeman said this morning that they were going to be on the back of a truck. They weren't going to be an officer and they weren't going to drive. That's true. I don't know if you are aware of what the people in the back seat of the truck do when you go to a structure fire. They are either first or second in on the branch. They go into the building and they squirt the water around and put the fire out. They call it painting. It is a process they go through to make sure they maximise the amount of water to steam ratio to put the fire out.

These people had to be fully conversant with our BA, had to be fully conversant with our gear, lockers, stowage and they had to be disciplined in road crash because we do road crash, haz-mat, technical rescue, vertical rescue, trench rescue, and it goes on. There was no way known that this plan was ever going to work.

The other issue we had with the Fire Service that they wouldn't answer was that the Fire Service Act allows for an industry brigade to be created for the purpose of responding to bush fires and other areas. It doesn't allow for people to be incorporated upfront into a fire brigade. To be a member of the Hobart Fire Brigade, you have to be a member of the Tasmanian Fire Service and we asked the question, 'Are you going to join them up in the Fire Service?', 'Who's going to pay them?', because if you want to employ people there is a merit principle. That merit principle is that this was an emergency. It was not well thought out. The duty officers said, 'This is just thwart with danger. I don't know if I can safely manage people in a structure fire by giving them a minimum three hour induction, I need longer than that'. It was never going to work, chair.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. I wanted you to have that opportunity to respond.

**Mr COOPER** - I hope I wasn't too brutal.

**CHAIR** - You have advised that you support the restructure in terms of the Fire Service and the SES and that line of communication in working together. Just to clarify your position, you support it but you feel as though that's an initiative that is acting in advance of what should be occurring.

**Mr COOPER** - In advance of a transparent funding model, if you wanted to fund SES to the tune of \$5 million on the Tas Fire Service contribution. The fire service contribution is about \$33 million to \$34 million. If you want to whack another \$5 million onto that, that's a 12.5 - 15 per cent increase on the fire service levy. The fire service levy for my daughter who lives in West Hobart is about \$380-\$390 a year. For me - I live at Mangalore - I pay \$40. That's \$5 for me but it is another \$30-\$40 for fire service contribution, that's not actually fire services. It needs to be sorted.

There is a complicated intermix with the Fires Service Act and the Emergency Management Act in terms of how the SES functions and the 29 regional councils, - local plans, regional plans, statewide plans. The synergy of having the SES under fire gives you a statewide response. It takes away the boundaries, it takes away the old 1967 arguments when the bush fires were on - that brigades not going over there because that's not our district. It is a good model, but it needs to be funded and appropriately governed.

You will see in our submission we are saying that consideration needs to be given to all the assets and that includes the trucks and the bill to the trucks. You will notice in the SES submission they said they spent two years of funding on a heavy vehicle response for the Circular

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Head area. The fire service already have 2 x 8.1 units on the coast. Questions like that would probably go away.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I think you have been articulating today things I have been mentioning at the budget committee meetings over the last couple of years. It hasn't been adequately answered by the minister at the time. The issue of the Forestry department actually borrowing money in order to make up their shortfall is new to me. I understood that they had a reserve initially and that reserve has been utilised by paying for what the consolidated revenue is not now funding, SES through the Police department. I didn't realise that they have been asked to borrow money in order to make up that. Can you elaborate on that for me?

**Mr COOPER** - I understand the cash negative is to the tune of \$8 million and they had to borrow money to keep that afloat. I understand from a report we initiated through the University of Newcastle that at the time they did the report in January, the cost of servicing net debt was around \$90 000. Yes, they had to borrow money to keep themselves in front, and that's in the budget papers.

**MR LLEWELLYN** - With respect to funding in the future, you talk about it in terms of a 12 to 15 per cent increase in the fire service levy to make it up. How otherwise do you believe that should occur? There are obviously a number of other funding mechanisms that provide money to the Tasmania Fire Service. Each of them have their pluses and minuses.

**MR COOPER** - The difficulty in answering that question is that prior to August 2014, SES was funded by consolidated revenue to the police force. They had to make \$7.5 million in savings; \$2.5 million went straight to fire and fire funded that.

The difficulty for Government and the fire service is that the Government can give the fire service money to defray the operating costs of the brigade. The SES is not part of the brigades. They cannot even give them money to help with that because the act does not allow for it. It is a very deliberate fiscal strategy that is effectively hamstringing the fire services. By this year, when they do not have the budget fixed, it will be over \$8 million that the fire service had to find that would otherwise have been funded out of consolidated revenue to police force. That is wrong. The best thing the government could do was recognise that was wrong. They have already given \$1.5 million back as a result of a campaign we ran. They should make the shortfall. They should get back the other \$6.5 million, give it to the fire service, apologise to them so they can fix their truck re build program and then continue to fund SES as it was funded out of consolidated revenue. Until they do all the due diligence they should have done before they made this initiative happen. That would be the way to fix it, in my view.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - We have already previously talked about the situation with fire fighters coming from New South Wales. What are your thoughts on all the people we have had coming from interstate, fighting in the World Heritage Area? Are there any issues that have arisen from or has that been a fairly seamless process? Do you think there are financial implications? We have just had Treasury telling us that there are things we cannot afford to spend money on because we are a small state. Presumably that is an indication that their view is that we are going to have to seek elsewhere for resources. If that is the case, it would mean people, plant and equipment coming in from interstate. How do you think that is going to play out in terms of fire fighters here and budgetary issues?

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**Mr COOPER** - I will answer that from the back first. The question about fixed wing aircraft is an interesting question. Do we need to invest in the asset of fixed wing aircraft when we have an arrangement that is very cost-effective for us. There is an hour, and you have a fixed wing aircraft and we have arrangements in place for them. We do not have any aircraft at all. We contract all of them. It is an efficient way of doing things.

Similarly, in each state there is an arrangement that if you need to deploy people, you can. No fire service, no matter how big it is, would have had the capacity to respond to the west coast fires that have just happened. The acting chief said it had over 1 000 fire fighters. There are no dramas with that because they come in as part of an industry brigade. A lot of them are volunteers. There were some issues with some rosters. The New Zealanders worked a 7-2 roster which we thought was fatigue management waiting to happen. We wanted to deal with that.

In terms of bushfire fighting capacity versus a fire rescue capacity it is a different skill set. Bushfire fighting is easier to manage. You have your incident management team set up, you have your debriefs and you have your analysis going on all the time. Every bushfire has a detailed plan that is upgraded every day. Everybody gets the plan and is briefed on it. Everybody knows what they have to do. To go out and assist in a bushfire situation versus a response in an urban 'pump up' is a completely different skill set. It works well and it works well between agencies.

The other thing that you need to understand is the suggestion that New South Wales fire fighters go to Victoria and vice versa. They brought all the satellite fire fighters in from New South Wales. They sent MFB in their own vehicles with their own crews and their own gear. All they do is make sure the standpipes work and they deployed them as a unit. There were no problems with familiarity with gear, no problems with response and no problems with pump configurations or lockers; they knew it. A little bit of a different thing there. It is a little bit misleading to portray that.

The arrangements we have in terms of shared response is a good arrangement. The difficulty we are going to have long-term is standardisation of gear. When our firefighters go to Victoria or their firefighters come here and they are operating out here, it is different. We do need to standardise that and it is a big issue.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Has that been happening nationally?

**Mr COOPER** - I know that the fire service and AFAC are talking about it, but that is a big-ticket item. We have made several submissions on that in terms of response capacity and climate change and the impact that will have. To answer your question, could we resource a Tasmania Fire Service up to fight every bushfire that ever happened? The answer is 'no', but we could do better. The fuel reduction unit is going to put six fire-fighters in there and that is part of our submission for the last inquiry. We should have a dedicated crew for putting down the burns; so that is pretty important.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - When you talked about the lower funding that we have per capita than other states in Australia, was that before the budget cuts that you were referring to?

**Mr COOPER** - No, it's because of the model.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Is it because of them? Before that we were pretty much on par?

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**Mr COOPER** - No, it is because of the model. Treasury gave their submission that it is public moneys. Fire Service money is not government money; it is Tas Fire Service money. It might be coming from a taxpayer base, but it is predominantly ratepayers. They are people who own houses or pay land taxes and rates. Those rates are collected at whatever level the Fire Service sets and that provides nearly half of the State Fire Commission's fund. It is not a tax from government; it is a tax on ratepayers to have a fire service. For everybody who insures their house, I think up to 9 per cent of that house insurance goes to the Tas Fire Service. Then you have an MAIB component, the road crash component, and defrayed costs from state governments and federal governments for campaign fires. Say this campaign fire cost \$50 million. There is no way known that the fire service can fund that, so the Government will kick in on that. That will be a transparent cost to defray of costs of such a big campaign. You could not expect the Tas Fire Service to do that. Tasmania is low and funded less by Government because of the funding model we have in place where ratepayers, house insurance and MAIB pay - not Government directly; so their contribution is lower.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - In other states that doesn't happen that way?

**Mr COOPER** - They have different models. We are the only state that has one Fire Service. Every other state has two or three.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Regarding the submission that Mr Freeman made earlier on, I asked about the reduction in manpower caused when a number of people disappeared from Forestry Tasmania, especially specialist fire fighters. I asked what difference that made to the outcome and he said it didn't make any difference at all. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr COOPER** - I was a little bit put off by that comment because you are always struggling for resources on the ground. Forestry not only had resources in the bush, it had plant and equipment that you could use. It had spotters and towers. They were there. They are all gone. For him to say that they never had a drama would mean, I think, that he was probably making people not worry about it; but there was a concern with resourcing. I've only been in this job for four years, but I've never seen a thousand people deployed. I think 300 or 400 in any one day from interstate is massive. It was huge, so finding resources to fight on the ground is a problem. Without resources - that is, bodies - in Parks and Forestry you have to rely on either interstate people or your volunteers. There is an issue.

**Ms COURTNEY** - I just have one point of clarification. From your conversations earlier on when you were talking about section 107 of the act and the \$1000 on fire-related matters, were you inferring that the Fire Reduction Unit is not a fire related matter?

**Mr COOPER** - Not at all. In the first year, the budget was made and then they had to find 4.3 people or something - \$770 000. There was no way of appropriating that money because the budget had already been approved. In the second year, the Fire Service contribution was increased to fund the ongoing arrangements with the Fuel Reduction Unit. The Fire Service has four people that they pay - TFS on payroll - and all the rest is acquitted through, 'we've done this and we've done that' and the Government, out of the \$28.5 million, gives it back to the Fire Service.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Mr Cooper for your evidence today. It is much appreciated.

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**Mr COOPER** - There is lots more I would like to say. I could speak for an hour. I would really like to take up the issue of the disagreement between us and the Tas Fire Service. I think in part that is because of the Government's arrangements. A public servant cannot really speak out publicly against you blokes. I can. I don't have a problem with doing that.

**CHAIR** - In short, if you want to forward any supplementary letters or correspondence to the committee I am sure the committee would look at that in a positive way to accept it as a supplementary.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - We might need to meet again.

**CHAIR** - It is just usual committee procedure. If you would like to share something further with us, please do so. That applies to every witness; it is not a special commendation.

**Mr COOPER** - We did spend a significant amount of time and money and we've commissioned a number of reports that are significant. We haven't even touched on them today. I feel disturbed that we are not properly entertaining all the information that we have provided. You have raised a couple of points you disagree with and I am happy to have a disagreement on issues, and with the chief. But if it wasn't for us campaigning against him in 2011, Rokeby Station would have been shut, planning capability would have been gone, TFT would have been sold off and the recruit course would not have happened for two years. They are all still in place and still functioning well, but we do have the capacity to influence the decision-making because we are on the board. We are different to normal unions in the sense that we want the Fire Service to be the best in the country. Sometimes the decisions that are imposed on them by Government are right and I would like to explore that issue more openly and transparently at a table; we can have a debate about it. If we end up disagreeing, at least we've had the debate. I feel cut short today. I feel like I have much more than I can contribute to this debate.

**CHAIR** - To clarify, the committee has agreed to an agenda. We have an agenda and we're past the due time for that.

**Mr COOPER** - Yes, I appreciate that.

**CHAIR** - In fact, you have had well over your allocated time to allow you to say what you needed to say. We've received your submission and we have your appendix. Although it was received late, we have accepted it and we've been through it. This has been agreed by the committee. I appreciate your feedback and that is a matter for the committee to consider in due course. Thank you for that and we will move to the next witness.

**Mr COOPER** - Thank you.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

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Mr ROBERT ATKINS, STATE PRESIDENT, TASMANIAN VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES ASSOCIATION, AND Mr ANDREW TAYLOR, PRESIDENT, TASMANIAN RETAINED VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER ASSOCIATION, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - This is a committee hearing so it is a proceeding in Parliament. What you say will attract Parliamentary privilege and that will allow us to get the best information available to make the best decisions possible. If you depart from here, then you are outside of that protection and what you say is a matter for you. Just drawing that to your attention. Thanks again for being here. This is an important inquiry and we look forward to hearing some opening remarks and then we can go to some questions after that.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Chair, do you mind if I ask whether at the start you could clarify the slight differences between the organisations to make that clear for me?

**CHAIR** - Yes, if you could indicate who you are representing. We have that on our agenda but if you would like to share those differences that would be terrific.

**Mr ATKINS** - I am state president of the Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigades Association which represents some 200-odd brigades. This is all new to me so bear with me. We found out about this last week and I've been down at Stanley doing that and thinking about this and that. Thanks for the opportunity to come down.

**CHAIR** - We really appreciate your being here and I indicated on behalf of the committee at the beginning of the hearing, right at the start, our sincere and deep appreciation for all the work and effort of the firefighters and emergency service personnel over the last few weeks, particularly in the north and north-west. It is sincerely appreciated.

**Mr COOPER** - Thanks. It hasn't been a real good session. It's been the longest duration fire we've had in Tasmania so it has stretched resources but thanks to our mainland counterparts we've got there.

**Mr TAYLOR** - I am the brigade chief of George Town as my substantive volunteer role and I am also a unit manager for the SES. Both those roles I have had for 33 years. I am also the state president of the Retained Fire Brigades Association which I have been for 16 years. We represent in round figures 700 volunteers. The fundamental difference between retained volunteers and volunteers is that we are partially paid. We are paid \$11-odd an hour at normal tax rates. Anything outside our gazetted area of responsibility is at volunteer level, so no compensation. Our people who have been up to the north-west or the north get the same remuneration as the 4 000 volunteers that Bob has received. We're only paid for those calls directly within our gazetted areas. In George Town's case it is pretty much the water districts, which goes back to the old urban fire brigade areas.

**CHAIR** - I know David has had a lot of familiarity in this space over many years as a former minister and so on, but for those who haven't, can you explain why there are different arrangements and how that came about?

**Mr TAYLOR** - It is a legacy pre-1979 when the two fire service agencies came together, the old Rural Fires Board and the Urban Fire Service. In those former days we had red trucks and

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white trucks and the merging of those in the late 70s-early 80s saw the red and white combination and Tasmania Fire Service coming together. The difference for that was because arguably in those days there was significant increased training for those urban brigades. Their risk profile was higher and so therefore there was this nominal compensation which at that stage was about \$4.50 an hour. That is the legacy and we have maintained that. There has been a number of reviews by the State Fire Commission in terms of volunteers versus retainers. The officers within those retainers also get a nominal retainer fee because of the additional workload and risk profile they are maintaining.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I think it was in 1991 when the country and urban brigades came together as a whole and made the Tasmania Fire Service as it is today.

**Mr TAYLOR** - It was essentially in 1981.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - I was minister at the time and I was not a minister in those days. I was not even in parliament in 1981.

**Mr TAYLOR** - I have been a volunteer for 33 years and it has been the Tasmanian Fire Service all that time.

**CHAIR** - We are looking at the Tasmania Fire Service and how it can operate into the future and any reforms or suggestion on improvements. We have been looking at funding models for the Fire Service and budgetary arrangements. We've been looking at the relationship between the Fire Service and the commission, the important role of volunteers and how they have supported the service over the years, currently and going forward. One area we would be interested in your thoughts on is the level of support for the volunteers, if you think that will stay the same, continue, or increase, and what we can do to support the TFS and therefore volunteers. You are an incredibly important part of the overall fire service and we would be interested in how you work with the TFS, Parks, Wildlife, Forestry Tasmania and Tasmania Police. Any other observations in that space would be welcome.

**Mr ATKINS** - If we take the incident up the far-north-west now, from where I was in the staging area talking to brigades as they went out and came back in, I think our numbers might increase because of what has happened. If nothing happens for the next two or three years, it will level out or go down. I understand that is the nature of volunteerism. We're always looking for volunteers. There is a level-through there; it peaks down on the low side and you have problems keeping volunteers with the different age groups. You'll find you get the junior cadets come through and they're keen until they find out there is something else happening and life changes. A certain percentage will come back to the system after they've got married and had a family. It is a very big balancing act keeping that level there. There are some programs in place in the Fire Service that is helping that happen. The junior cadet programs are running reasonably well and it helps brigades through the system.

**CHAIR** - Are there training programs in particular?

**Mr ATKINS** - There are training programs to train the trainers - they are called junior cadet coordinators - so they can go back to the brigades and deliver that and bring the junior cadets through the system. We have had people who have gone somewhere else and someone else has come in and then we have the issue of changeover.

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**CHAIR** - We often talk about volunteers and there is an assumption that they're out there doing their job, but can you outline the average volunteer and the time commitment and training they undertake?

**Mr TAYLOR** - Just before we do that, can I go back to your terms of reference question? The Fire Service as we know it is on the cusp and the treatment by the government of the day and the previous government is why we are in a fragile space right now in relation to funding. We have concerns about funding. Nothing is realised in any change of behaviour or response to the organisation that we have personally seen at a volunteer level but some of the terms of reference, if we get to those core points, will address that for the future. With the likes of SES being funded through the current TFS budget without any compensation it is not a fire service that can maintain its current build program, whether it be vehicles, stations, support structures for the likes of volunteer training, which is excessively high on the organisation. Those sorts of key points in the terms of reference are critical for us as associations to make sure it is sustainable going forward.

We also don't see the State Fire Commission being broken, so we don't want to see that being eroded in its conditions. Likewise, in the model around DPEM and the State Fire Commission there are some fundamental flaws in the current legislation, as I understand it. Whether they are auspiced appropriately, whether that is a legislative change that can happen in five minutes to reflect what the responsibilities are, having the secretary of the department as the head of agency is also something we have concerns about. It is the fox in charge of the hen house, and we have shared that with the commissioner and the chief. As to having a true head of agency, we don't have that anymore with the current configurations of DPEM and the State Fire Commission.

**CHAIR** - Who do you think it should be?

**Mr TAYLOR** - We understand there is an independent review which we have not seen the results of. Other states and other models have an independent secretary and that is something, without knowing all the ins and outs of that, would be more favourable to us in terms of the model, so we have appropriate governance and insurance practices.

We have a recent MOU, for instance, as a good example in terms of the recent work that Wise Lord and Ferguson did. They put forward the new corporate services structure. There is this MOU, which is fundamentally flawed. I have had not answered yet, from the department that if there is any disputing around any finances or decisions, that goes back to the secretary of the department, which happens to be the Commissioner of Police. We have the current Chief and the Assistant Commissioner as the two heads of agencies for the figure of this MOU but in terms of transparency and fairness, the secretary -

**CHAIR** - Who is the MOU between?

**Mr TAYLOR** - Between the three agencies - SES, TFS and Department of Police. That is an example of where we believe there are some flaws. We see some value and benefit in bringing together some of these aspects of the agency. We are in 2016, we can't have independent pay systems, we can't have independent other administrative systems. We understand and support that.

**CHAIR** - So you see that marriage of the SES working within the TFS but you would like to see the relationship -

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**Mr TAYLOR** - I would like see a clinical relationship with clear lines of accountability and responsibility, which then doesn't threaten the current structures of the State Fire Commission. As it is now, even with the Fire Service Act and the roles and responsibilities with the Emergency Services Act, if we have a state disaster, who does the director of the SES report to? That director reports to the state controller, who happens to be the Commissioner of Police, yet the line of reporting is through the chief officer. There is some housekeeping that needs to be done.

**CHAIR** - So you can see the merit in a review of the legislation?

**Mr TAYLOR** - Yes, as long as it doesn't compromise, in our opinion, the role of the State Fire Commission. The funding model - if it is to be a different funding model we need to be brought along as to why it's different, what the opportunities are, how that can be different. Fire Services have certainly been open and transparent with us in all of its practices and customs -

**CHAIR** - So you have had an open and transparent relationship?

**Mr TAYLOR** - Absolutely. We meet regularly with the minister, with the chief and with the commissioner, for the that matter.

**CHAIR** - Another positive relationship?

**Mr TAYLOR** - Absolutely, good relationship, yes.

**CHAIR** - That's good. That's helpful feedback and much appreciated. I know others have questions but could you very briefly summarise the role of the average volunteer in terms of their training and in terms of their time commitment so that we have our heads around that because we have thousands of them out there.

**Mr ATKINS** - That varies. Personally I am self-employed as a farmer and semi-retired. I spend a lot of time as a volunteer with fires. You will find an ordinary volunteer works for a boss for wages. It all depends on the boss whether he can get time off. Take the fires on the north west earlier, there were a lot of holidays taken because they were due for them. They took their holidays, extra days and then the boss said, 'Well, you've had your holidays', so we had to look at different crews, which did work. But an ordinary volunteer is just an ordinary person like everyone in this room. They have jobs.

**Mr TAYLOR** - It does depend on the nature of the brigade.

**Mr ATKINS** - Yes, different brigades. There are a lot of rural brigades - they are all farmers.

**Mr TAYLOR** - They might get a dozen calls a year but then there are the long duration instances like Rob's talking about -

**Mr ATKINS** - So they get called into long durations and are there for four weeks, on and off.

**CHAIR** - Let's say there's no incidence, what time commitment is required for a volunteer and what training is provided?

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**Mr TAYLOR** - All the training is provided for by the Fire Service at no cost to the volunteer, including transport if needed -

**Ms WOODRUFF** - By the TFS?

**Mr TAYLOR** - By the TFS, yes. If you are starting out as a career firefighter there is a nominal 40 to 60 hours to start with your induction and then your basics training. That is done in-house as well as supplemented sometimes, depending on the region, within the training framework with the respective region. In addition to that, there is what we call firefighter level 1. Some people will stop at that and they will just want to help at the station and do bits and pieces. That is fine, they are non-operational.

For an operational firefighter there is a level 1 training which is a suite of additional training courses that the person will need to do and typically they are managed at a regional centre. This is not any training at the station, the fortnightly training, this is still getting your pips on the shoulder if you would like to be able to go and fight a fire.

At a basic level you can go in supervised but then there is probably another four weekends. Typically they are a one night and weekend type of training that the person would do to be a firefighter level 1.

**CHAIR** - You mentioned fortnightly training.

**Mr TAYLOR** - Some brigades have weekly training and that is a couple hours of a night. Some brigades have two-hour training and some brigades have a Saturday training. In my case, we are there for six hours on a Saturday.

**CHAIR** - Once a month or once a fortnight?

**Mr TAYLOR** - One a month and then supplementary training during the week for specific information sessions. It is very varied across the state and it is varied amongst the nature of the brigades. The larger, urban brigades train quite regularly and have a varying range of things to train against compared to the local, smaller brigades which are primarily focused on vegetation firefighting.

**Mr ATKINS** - Some of the smaller brigades, especially on my side, would probably only train once a month. There might be one or two who go to the station every week and make sure the truck starts and check the gear and do that, but they probably only officially get together once a month and they have five to 10 called a year. But they are there, prepared to do what they can for their local area.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much. That puts a few things in context for me, so I appreciate that.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - How long does it take to get a person ready to operational level 1? If it takes 60 hours plus the four weekends, plus the nights, how long does the 60 hours take to achieve?

**Mr TAYLOR** - Six to 12 months. You have to align that with their shift work, their day work. Sometimes it can be quicker than that. It also depends on the training available. If we start

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someone late in the calendar year, some of that initial training is more difficult to access because of the training calendar that TFS put forward. They are very accommodating. If we had a number of people, we would try to get that happening and the training division try to do that.

**Ms COURTNEY** - As you seem to have experience on the SES and the fire side, you mentioned the word merit, the men coming together - an alignment of efficiencies and co-housing, as a lot of them already are. From a cultural perspective, and I have asked this of the SES and the TFS, how do you think that will happen culturally? From your experience at George Town, have you seen people enthusiastic about that idea?

**Mr TAYLOR** - That is at either end of the gambit, to be honest, and there is a lot of legacy with the Tas Fire Service and SES which is not positive in historical terms, not from current day, and I am talking about 10 to 15 years ago. George Town is not a good example because it works perfectly, in my opinion, but I am a bit biased. Having said that, there is a changing attitude towards -

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - Don always had a different opinion, though.

**Mr TAYLOR** - Don still does, David, as you are well aware. To be honest, I think it is logical and I am not here representing the SES, so please, my colleagues may not be happy about that. We have been co-housed since 2009 and it works incredibly well. Sixty per cent of our SES members are TFS members. It's 'What colour outfit do you put on?'. There is never any confusion or arguments, but I think there are still some opportunities. I think the way TFS has been trying to communicate, including SES communicating, has been positive. The language, the direction and the communication strategies have been positive. There will always be the diehards who will say they never want to - they have never said we're changing to blue as opposed to orange and I think that is respected at every level. I think it makes sense. My personal feeling is that it makes a lot of sense. There is so much synergy. The dispatch systems, we don't dispatch in SES for floods, we do road crash through the Fire Service. There are some real logical changes. I qualify that by saying that cannot happen, if TFS is the parent organisation, without appropriate compensation for that.

**Mr ATKINS** - I think I back up what Andrew said, a lot of TFS SES are 'cross-dressed', if I can put it that way. It is supporting one another. You do not have to decide whether you are going to that station or that station, we will make up our minds when Andrew gets there and says that is where we're going.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Just back to what you were talking about earlier, the legacy issue of retained firefighters getting a payment whereas volunteer firefighters not. Are there any rumblings about that amongst volunteer firefighters? It is obviously a huge commitment that people make on a personal level of their time, but also their money. Do they get any reimbursement for petrol? I assume not.

**Mr ATKINS** - The brigade chief gets a phone reimbursement.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Right. But in terms of all the driving that people do?

**Mr ATKINS** - That is an annual reimbursement, home line rental, you get that paid each year and that is it.

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**Ms WOODRUFF** - Is there any sense in this kind of discussion that there would be any change, or is there any call for payment where there hasn't been or for an increase in the retained - how is that established?

**Mr TAYLOR** - That is CPI. Rob and I sit on another board of a national scheme and I am the director of what is called CAVFA, which is the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations. Collectively we represent 270 000 volunteers. One of the things we are looking at is lobbying the federal government to a compensation. Volunteers are very passionate volunteers that don't want payment. We accept and acknowledge that. To answer your question specifically, no, there are no rumblings I'm aware of that people want to get paid that aren't currently being paid. To be honest, I don't think that if the profile was that you're not getting paid tomorrow I don't think George Town Fire Brigade would stop. That is just the legacy and the history of retained versus volunteer.

There is an opportunity, and certainly if there are out-of-pocket expenses then there is compensation. We were given access to a vehicle today to come here. If we claim a meal then we will probably get that paid as well if we were to ask for it. Certainly in a fire sense, if there was unreasonable -

**Ms WOODRUFF** - With respect, you are at the top of the tree and presumably everyone who comes to volunteer thing isn't getting any reimbursement.

**Mr TAYLOR** - The Fire Service Grants gives our association grants, though, and those grants are shared, in the case of the associations.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - This matter has been discussed a number of times and has come up on a regular basis. On most of the occasions, it is the volunteers themselves who say, 'We are volunteers, we don't want any money.'

**Ms WOODRUFF** - I am not proposing it, I am just asking the question.

**Mr ATKINS** - I think it came up where I was at the staging area at Smithton, River Bend and Stanley. I was working beside one of Greg's fellows. He was getting  $x$  dollars and I was getting none, it didn't worry me. I am there as a volunteer because I want to be.

**Ms WOODRUFF** - Then the important thing for volunteer is to get community recognition. I was on the Huon Valley Council for six years and I know how important the volunteers were and how they were recognised in different ways. Do you think there is any risk of moving a model where councils with SES - that that gets shifted to a centralised model, that there might be a sense in the community that all of that is taken care of by the Government now and it is not so much owned by the community? Or do you think that the tradition of where people come from and the reasons they are volunteering for their local community will be maintained? There is a lot of support. It is not just the shared. It is in small grants and different fundraising things people put in.

**Mr TAYLOR** - I don't think it will change. I was on council for five years and deputy mayor for three years in George Town. I got a certificate from David and was appointed as the deputy municipal coordinator, which is still current to this day. I honestly believe the models within councils are flawed. George Town Council has an excellent record with the George Town SES but there are a number of councils around this state which do not have such positive

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relationships. Our municipal coordinators are the linchpin between the volunteers and the community. If the municipal coordinator and/or deputy are doing their job, we should not lose that recognition or the role the SES is still performing in the community. I don't see that that would be compromised if the marketing and communication strategies were effective and considered. George Town does it well in terms of being looked after by council. We still have to submit everything we need, whereas in other councils some of our SES units are screaming for support and aren't getting it. A model that is far more equitable with a different funding model to what we have now - appropriately resourced and funded - would be a huge benefit to the majority of the units that exist within this state.

**Mr ATKINS** - The fire service came across that, too. Even for local brigades in local areas, the local shop will provide something that is the same as what the council is giving to SES. If it came over, I still think they would do it because it's their community thing.

**CHAIR** - It's a fair assessment to say that the role of our volunteers is under-recognised and undervalued, but we say thank you for your service; we appreciate it. I often ask the question: where would we be without our volunteers? Thank you again for coming along today. We really appreciate it.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**