

Submission to House of Assembly Standing Committee on Community Development
Enquiry into State Fire Commission and State Emergency Services

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In relation to the terms of reference the House of Assembly has referred to the Committee. I would like to provide comment to the Committee on the following:

(1) (a) (i) the transfer of the State Emergency Service - SES reporting responsibility to the SFC/TFS

- There are obvious synergies between the TFS and SES in responding to large scale emergency events within the Tasmanian landscape.

- The transfer of reporting responsibilities will enable a number of economies and cost savings for example:

- Single joint facilities for volunteer units, as has occurred at a number of locations around the state already.
- Efficiencies in the allocation and maintenance of vehicles.
- Greater integration of Road Accident Resource(RAR) response teams (training, management, equipment and resources).
- Common training venues and courses ie RAR, First aid, urban search and rescue etc.
- Enhanced coordination of incident management and on ground resource deployment at emergency events.
- Scrutiny of accounts and WH&S procedures through a third party body (ie State Fire Commission)

There will potentially be greater opportunities for training and development of both career and volunteer personnel with the broader suite of operational activities across both organisations.

There will also be potential for economies with office space, administration and provision of facilities. Common needs for skills

development can be addressed through provision of a single training providers and dual use of training facilities.

No doubt other areas where cost savings can be made without impeding the quality of services provided will manifest over time.

(1) (a) (ii) the funding of the SES

- Under the Local Government Act, Councils where they choose to establish a SES unit, are responsible for the provision and maintenance of SES Volunteer Unit facilities.
- The SES management is currently required to negotiate with each Council individually the level of resourcing (cash and in kind) the Council will provide. This varies dependant on capacity of Councils to contribute and/or perceived need within the Community.
- This funding model hinders the SES's capacity to plan, resource and respond on a risk/needs basis. Where a Local Government body is directly supporting Volunteer unit, there is an element of 'ownership' and an inclination for units to only be deployed within their respective municipality, or alternatively being retained in case of local need.
- SES management are often required to deal through Local Government Officers to mobilise units for operations outside municipalities adding a layer of complexity to the process. The above is a result of the direct funding model that currently exist.
- A transition to a more reliable and less direct funding model would better enable SES management to develop long term business planning and apply funds on a needs basis, with better service delivery outcomes for the community.
- The transition of funding arrangements from local government should be cost neutral on a state wide basis.

(1) (a) (vi) community safety programs

- The inclusion of SES within the auspice of the State Fire Commission should enable community safety programmes to take an all hazards approach to community education. Communities exposed to fire, flood or other threats could be provided education programs at single forums.

This should result in less demand on community member's time and greater consistency regarding messaging and education of community members to threats and actions required.

The TFS currently has a strong community education component in their operations, with programmes like Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods, Community fire plans delivered into at risk communities. SES will be able to utilise the learnings acquired by TFS on effective delivery of programmes.

(1) (c) the future funding arrangements for TFS and SES

- SES and TFS require predictable and reliable funding streams at a level that sustains the organisations and enables effective service delivery to the Tasmanian community. Reliable funding enables for formal budgeting to occur, providing the necessary tension between organisational expenditure and available funds, ensuring management focuses on efficient and effective application of funds to achieve operational and strategic outcomes.
- With the current ad hoc funding arrangements between SES and local government a significant percentage of funding is off the balance sheet of the SES. Cash and in kind expenses provided at the local government level is expensed within the accounts of the municipality that provides the particular revenue or facilities.
- This proportion of the SES revenue and support needs to be transitioned to a more predictable, transparent and accountable funding stream.
- Increasing the Fire Service Contribution through the State Fire Commission may be one way of achieving this. This however, would require detailed analysis of the current value of cash and in kind provided by local government to SES and any necessary changes to legislation enacted.
- The above should not in any way jeopardise the sustainability of the TFS and its ability to deliver the range of services currently provided in particular response to fire threat within the Tasmanian community.
- With the onset of climate change and the changing nature of wild fire threats within the landscape, funding for TFS activities will come under

continuing pressure. The areas of response and prevention will be critical to minimising the risk to life and property. Equally people need to be educated on how to protect themselves and their communities from wild fire. To achieve this Governments and the community need to provide adequate funds for the level of protection desired and affordable.

Yours faithfully

Rod Sweetnam