

#21

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The Hon. Tony Piccolo MP  
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Sir,

I start by declaring my conflict of interest in this matter. I am a Retained Station Officer employed by the SA Metropolitan Fire Service and I am proud to serve and protect the City of Port Augusta.

I wish to take this opportunity to commend you on looking at the accountability, restructuring, efficiency and service delivery of the Emergency Services of South Australia.

It is my opinion the review has been limited by the Government restricting themselves to retain the 3 emergency services within this great state. The retention of the services in their current form on the ground will still have a dividing affect in the emergency services sector. The only way the sector can be made accountable and deliver the service of which is not only required but is demanded by the public of South Australia is to have every one of the services wearing a common uniform with a common name and have the common goal to preserve Life, Property and the Environment, not build empires to protect. A volunteer will continue to serve their community no matter what the name on the uniform. The volunteer Associations should be encouraging the volunteers to protect their community rather than trying to play politics with peoples lives and property. It should not matter what colour the uniform or truck is. The funding and budget allocations should be distributed to the areas that are required and needed. The current staff responsible for the existing budgets and expenditure are more than capable of ensuring the money is directed to where it is required.

The single service may actually increase the number of volunteers by being able to give a possible line of progression from Volunteer, to Retained and eventually into the fulltime side of the service. This then reduces the overall cost of training recruits as the people being employed already have the majority of the skill sets equivalent to that of a fulltime fire fighter.

As stated in my original submission the name of South Australian Fire Emergency Rescue Services (SAFER Service) is a strong and accurate name which would enable the public and the employees of the services whether they be employed as a Fulltime, Part time retained or volunteer capacity to show exactly who and what they are doing for the community they are living and working in.

The total combining of the services would allow a single Emergency Services Act to encompass all emergency responses to be implemented. This would then have all services work with a common goal of Protecting Life, Property and the Environment of South Australia and remove the empire building of some within the current format of protecting our state.

The reform of only upper management still allows for the building of empires which will be of detriment to the public who we protect. Having a single service will allow common practises throughout the sector. This includes the important areas of Training, Incident Management, resource allocation, asset construction and maintaining, employee support, Fire safety inspections, regulations for building protection and the removal of Fire Gazetted boundaries.

The removal of the Fire Boundaries will enable the public to receive the nearest and most appropriate station and crew that is available at the time.

This empire building of the boundary issue must stop. This review must remove the Fire Gazetted boundaries and give the public the best and most efficient emergency service sector of which we all pay for via the Emergency Services Levy. The current practise of responding a volunteer station and a fulltime crew to a bin fire because the fire is 100 metres outside of the boundary of the MFS is not only a waste of resources but a monetary cost to the government of which could be used more efficiently. Why respond a volunteer crew to a bin fire when a full time crew is being paid to be at the station. Have the permanent staff work for the money they receive. Allow the volunteer crew to remain

at work or resting at home and stop over burdening the employer and putting extra stresses and pressure on other staff to cover the position until they return to work. It is becoming more common that employers are not allowing volunteers to leave work due to the businesses loss of wages, efficiency and productivity. Employers of SAMFS retained fire fighters are more likely to allow the person to respond to a callout as the business is no longer responsible for the payment of wages, Work cover or superannuation to that employee whilst they are on the callout. In some cases the company will hire casual staff to be called in due to the almost cost neutral affect. This way the company does not suffer from the loss of productivity and is able to maintain its efficient work environment. This also gives the opportunity of employing casual staff to cover the retained fire fighters during any protracted incidents. This then also affects the unemployment rate.

I am fully aware the state is not able to fund multiple emergency services. The State must maintain the three levels of emergency services personnel that are employed. The fulltime staff is a must within the Metropolitan and fringe areas of the state. Major communities such as Mount Gambier, Victor Harbour, Murray Bridge, Renmark, Berri, Loxton, Kapunda, Tanunda, Kadina, Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Whyalla and Port Lincoln must remain being staffed by retained fire fighters. A possibility of upgrading the staffing to full time staff in future years may need to be assessed. Other communities such as Mount Barker, Roxby Downs and Port Wakefield, just to name a few, are areas which should be looked at to upgrading the level of service delivered to the areas. Having these communities with a retained fire service ensures the level of protection and skill sets are within the area and are able to be responded to nearby communities to assist knowing a crew is available to respond at any time and are Breathing Apparatus, Road Crash Rescue, Hazmat and Pump Operator trained and qualified. They would then be assisted by the volunteer stations if they become engaged at an incident and require assistance. This would also be the case for the full time fire crews in the Metropolitan area. Once the incident becomes of a size beyond the capacity of the full time crews then the volunteer crews are responded to assist. This then opens up for the possibility of a volunteer base pool to be established within the Metropolitan area to assist with the covering of these stations with relief appliances from engineering whilst the full time and active volunteer crews are engaged at the larger type incidents. The volunteer bank would also be able to assist with campaign incidents. These volunteers could be assigned to fire stations within the area they live to enable them to have a home station they could train at and respond to for deployment in the event of a call up to assist. Full Time Fire Fighters, Retained fire Fighters and Volunteer Fire Fighters are all essential and all have a role to fulfil in the Emergency Services sector.

The fulltime and Retained firefighters are able to be controlled by the state and be instructed to have the required level of training for that specific roll in the community. The volunteer can train to whatever level they feel comfortable with. If they wish to progress from volunteer to retained to fulltime, then they will need to ensure they have the required level of qualifications.

This will also reduce the required number of recruit courses to maintain the level of fulltime firefighters to protect their areas of responsibility.

Having a single service will also improve the ability for the emergency services to respond together to larger campaign incidents rather than either fire service having to make a written request for assistance. The single service will give greater flexibility to cover areas not being covered during larger incidents by the way of Change of Quarters and moving appliances more freely around the state to cover until the situation has been normalised.

Other departments will also benefit by the merger and the state will become better prepared and protected.

The CFS have a number of regional based Community Engagement staff who deliver educational material and other preventative based talks, programs and liaisons throughout the state. However, as they are not employed by the MFS the area of Domestic fire safety and evacuation plans are rarely covered unless the MFS conducts the sessions. This practice is not of help to protect the people of our state. If there are people trained in the area why not utilise their skills. Education and Prevention is an area which could be improved on to assist in the safety of our communities.

The same can be said of the Building Fire Safety. The MFS have 15 staff to maintain and inspect their areas of responsibility. The CFS has 2. How can 2 staff inspect each building in the regional and rural areas the ensure the level of fire safety is as is required. Combine to 2 departments and you now have 17 staff to cover the state. This does not include the Regional Officers of the CFS and MFS who could also assist with these audits. It is essential the regional offices remain as a coordination resource with existing MFS/CFS/SES full time staff remaining to assist in the controlling and training of emergency service workers in their region. The Coast Guard could fall under the area of response

ability of the SES Officer as the two roles perform similar functions. Of course all would belong to the single named service.

The MFS already cover the entire state in the role of Fire Cause Investigators except for the outbreak of grass, scrub or bushfires. On many instances volunteers perform the role of Bushfire Investigators. Would it not be more appropriate for paid staff, of which the CFS have, be responsible for these tasks so they are a little more accountable for the findings.

The volunteers are consistently talking about the MFS being paid to do the same job as they. Well for their information so do they. The Regional Offices are staffed by fulltime paid employees of the CFS. While the volunteers are on the frontline the paid staff are in the coordination roles in the office alongside of some volunteers. I am also reasonably sure that the volunteers are paid by their employer by the way of emergency services leave also.

With all of the services being combined it will also assist with the Training of the sector. Why have one service attend an area of the state to teach basis wildfire suppression and someone else attend the same area four weeks later to conduct the same training in a different station because they wear a different uniform.

Having the Volunteer Coast Guard fall into the State's Emergency Services Department would also give the more efficient use of volunteer skills. The Coastguard skills in the use of communications could be used as an extra asset during the larger campaign incidents. They also would be an extra asset during water rescues or searches.

Why are we wasting money and resources on the maintaining of 4 emergency services. The current proposal will then give us 5 departments to maintain. Five different uniforms, five different logos, five different letterheads etcetera. All of this expense can be better utilized by being a single service. The combining of all of the services which includes the Volunteer Coast Guard will ensure the money spent is at its maximum efficiency and give the Chief Officer greater flexibility and greater resources to be available during any specific incident.

In my opinion it is time the Emergency Services leaders became leaders and started protecting this great state of ours and stop the building of their own little empires to protect. The public of this state not only should be given every opportunity to have their assets be protected but they should demand it be protected by the best emergency services sector of which the rest of the nation would be envious of.

I urge the Government to reconsider the suggested model and make it one service which protects our great state.

Your Sincerely

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