

## South Australian Emergency Services Sector Review

Submission 20 October 2014

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(further to my submission of 11 July 2014)

### ISSUE

As part of the process of responding to the Holloway Review into the *Fire and Emergency Services Act, 2005* the Minister for Police and Emergency Services announced a series of roundtable discussions and other consultative forums with key parties involved in the Emergency Services Sector. The meetings were designed to identify restructuring opportunities and deliver cost savings across the CFS, SES and MFS sectors.

### BACKGROUND

Over many years, there have been a number of reports prepared, suggesting how the three Emergency Services could be restructured / rearranged.

Some of the recommendations made in these reports are now not relevant, account they have been implemented ( "000" being located at the MFS is an example) and others are not now necessarily relevant, again because of technological advances in call receipt despatch and the introduction of AIIMS as an operational incident management doctrine within the CFS.

Some recommendations are relevant, which having been implemented have proved disastrous from a volunteers perspective, particularly the collocation / amalgamation of corporate support services in SAFECOM, which we have seen gutted of staff over time and resultant lack of support for volunteers.

It was suggested at the roundtable discussions, that the Minister has heard from volunteers that a review is necessary and savings can be achieved!

Of course this statement is very broad and volunteers can see waste and unnecessary expenditure, eg very costly building of CFS stations, but were told at these meetings that this is unavoidable account a range of issues.

A fob off, but then it was put to attendees that by "*assimilation / integration*" of some components of each of the services, then savings can be achieved.

Examples such as training resources, purchasing, standardisation of operations, duplication of management structures were discussed.

### DISCUSSION

It must be said that volunteers have little or no input into how the respective services are structured or managed, but are vitally interested in what might be proposed, as there is a very real risk of further alienating volunteers and losing support for delivery of frontline services to the community.

What we do know, is that the CFS has grown significantly over time, since the inception of community based people getting together to provide, originally, a principally bushfire response service to their community and which has now evolved into a multi hazard response agency in a very cost effective, highly efficient arrangement, respected by peers from other States in Australia.

This cost effectiveness and efficiency, goes to the heart of CFS paid staff, who have multiple roles in administration, training, and specific operational responsibilities in support of volunteers and freely give of their own time to make things work for volunteers.

Following the Wangary bushfires, the method of incident management using the AIIMS system of incident management has allowed for again, a very cost effective and demonstrable effective incident management system, which utilises paid CFS staff, volunteers and other Agency Staff in a variety of roles. The last fire danger season was an exemplary example of the CFS managing multiple incidents across the State during a period of fire activity not seen since the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983!

I would dispute whether any other Agency could have pulled this off, without the ethos derived from the current form of the CFS staff and volunteers and great care needs to be taken not to damage this ability in the future with any changes.

The AIIMS methodology, is an international system that is based on role not rank. The MFS relies on rank via command, control and leadership through operational doctrine to manage incidents, which will again potentially disenchant volunteers and disrupt the current good process that the CFS has managed to embed into incident management. The current approach adopted by the MFS will fail to engage volunteers in the provision of the service and incident management.

With the introduction of SACAD, operational response issues have reduced particularly around "boundaries", as once the location of and type of incident is made into SACAD, automatically, the appropriate response agency is dispatched by the software system.

There are however issues around the operation of SACAD by the MFS and there is merit in having an "independent" separation of MFS operations and Computer Aided Despatch of resources for the Sector, as the despatch function is required across the MFS, SES and CFS.

These issues go primarily to the management of SACAD, whereby MFS management / culture directives are in place, which may or may not suit an effective interface with a volunteer agency, which is largely country based not an urban paid industrial workforce environment.

Each should establish and operate separate Operations centres, as the needs of each organisation does not lend itself to a common operations centre.

I was given to understand that there would be a series of agreed "principles" that would be applied to any restructure and much work was done early in the restructure process to establish an initial list, but they have not been widely disseminated or discussed in the roundtable conferences that have been held and more importantly a proposed structure was tabled at the final roundtable conference, which pre-empted final submissions.

This is of concern, as it seems the Governments mind is made up!

The CFS has developed a defensible framework for Standards of Fire and Emergency Cover (SFEC's), which have proved to be effective in establishing resource levels and location of resources.

Before any changes are proposed to the Sector, it is imperative that a more forensic review of the structure, operations, resourcing and funding of the Sector be undertaken, to ensure that where best most cost effective practices are already in place, that they not be lost and the focus is on those areas

/ functions that can be identified as less than best cost effective practice are properly restructured / integrated.

There is opportunity to rationalise management structures, but not to the detriment of volunteers or employees wages and conditions, but there should be a focus to ensure maximum productivity / efficiency of all is apparent.

If these SFEC's were used as a basis for establishing resourcing for all Agencies who receive funding from the ESL, based on identified community risk, then we could be assured that funding would be more appropriately utilised and duplication or over / under resourcing would be identified and managed across the sector, ie the whole sector would have a transparent, agreed understandable and defensible basis for resourcing response capability and there would be a higher level of confidence in the allocation of funding.

It would be proper, if the standard setting was not the responsibility of the service deliverers, but they can have input into the standard, but others are responsible for setting the standard of fire cover and emergency service cover and performance.

The service deliverers would then look to the most cost effective method of delivering the service and the community ability to support the chosen methodology.

There is a real concern that the hierarchical structure of the urban service with its command, control and leadership through operational doctrine, will be to the detriment of the CFS and volunteers, where advantages of the current CFS empowerment at the local level for finding a practical outcome to issues and management of incidents, along with a greater understanding of the local community needs is paramount in retaining volunteers interest and their support, in any changed model.

Whilst there are a number of current MFS employees volunteering with the CFS, it is considered that volunteer management is "missing" in the current MFS structure of metropolitan operations which does not have volunteers and therefore senior MFS staff do not develop the necessary skills in volunteer management across their careers.

There is a real risk that volunteers may feel disenfranchised if the current management and structure of the fire service because it is exclusively managed and run by metropolitan based staff if it were to become the model under a "one fire service" model.

The MFS, SES and CFS should retain their own identity and management structure, with a common Commissioner, who can manage further, the change process.

More importantly though, can be responsible and accountable for practices, both efficient and inefficient and address same across the sector.

The retention of the current CFS Regional and Adelaide based management support structures must be left in place, as we know it works, is cost effective and efficient.

If anything, as identified in the Ernst and Young report, more support staff are required to ensure industry best practices are observed.

It is acknowledged that there is a current close working relationship between volunteers and metropolitan MFS staff across the State. There is opportunity to enhance that further with better integration of SOP's and further underpinned by a strong Memorandum of Understanding to minimise issues between a volunteer based service and a paid service.

This working relationship, must be based on mutual respect and understanding at a local level and should not be managed from a centralised function, which may be located several hundred kilometres from the community it is serving.

There should be a greater understanding and appreciation between volunteers and paid metropolitan based firefighters of their respective skills and abilities in dealing with fire and other emergencies and a responsible appreciation of the differences in culture between paid metropolitan based firefighters and volunteers.

Any "new" model must ensure an operational organisation with a strong emphasis on integrated service, collaboration and consistent doctrine and training, while also retaining individual core operational roles and honouring respective service and volunteer cultures.

It is strongly considered that there should be one stream organisation that is volunteer centric ( with paid contract employee where full time crewing is required) and the other stream a paid metropolitan based service.

The volunteer centric stream should be in two parts, recognising the SES and CFS roles, although there may be opportunity in some smaller communities to further integrate the roles, minimising any duplication of resources.

What is vital to effective volunteer support is the current arrangement of CFS Regions, which are seen as the local "shopfront" for volunteer support and keeping in touch with the local community, along with local operational management and flexibility of paid staff in their job structure.

These could also support current SES Units along with larger town centres currently managed by the MFS. Note that any full time persons working as fire fighters would be covered by an appropriate industrial agreement.

It must be restated that the Regions are currently understaffed in support for volunteers and any savings should be directed to improving the Regional staff support for volunteers.

It is considered that the current arrangements from Volunteer Chief Officer, Paid Urban Chief Officer and CFS Deputy Chief Officer and SES Deputy Chief Officer down should remain in all aspects "as is" as this arrangement has proven itself over time and will continue to develop further as an evolution process, rather than a restructure process. This will minimise volunteer disenchantment, as it is at this level that most volunteers participate.

The current CFS Group structure could be enhanced by including SES units as part of the structure along with country town fire services and evolve into a more structured and integrated management system again continue to be supported by the CFS Regional "shop fronts"

There seems to be something missing from this whole process, as in any good "business", the first objective should be to look at the highest cost and look for savings there, as it most likely and easier to obtain small changes and potentially gain the biggest savings.

In the case of the Emergency Services, the MFS is by far the most costly service to fund and will continue to be if changes in service delivery, industrial agreement's etc are not addressed. It is considered that without some change, if the current MFS model of service delivery is maintained, then the State will continue to struggle to fund the services.

For example, in say a town like Mount Barker, where currently CFS volunteers provide an appropriate level of service against the CFS SFEC's, and this were to be in the future delivered by the current MFS approach, the cost to the State will be great.

An alternative, is when volunteers are no longer able to provide for example day time crewing, then the current volunteers could be taken on by a suitable "contractor" to continue to provide the services, using the same CFS equipment and facilities.

This avoids the need to invest in new capital infrastructure and equipment and provides employment opportunities for volunteers who have demonstrated their capacity to deliver the service.

By changing how the service is delivered, is but one example of real and sustainable cost savings into the future, whilst not detracting from the current CFS structure and ethos.

It should be noted that the contracting of such services is not a new concept as all defence air bases are now contract operated for fire services.

I commend these comments to you and sincerely hope that any changes to the Sector will not disenfranchise volunteers.