

Spencer, Julie (SAFECOM)

From: John Lawrence <johnl@live.com.au>
Sent: Saturday, 4 October 2014 10:17 PM
To: DCS:Minister Piccolo
Cc: Beattie, Chris (SES); 'Susan Caracoussis '; 'Warren Hicks (SES:MET)'; Palmer, Wayne (SES); Halleday, Derren (SES); 'Kain Neale'; Mat Brooks; 'Leesa Vlahos '; 'Lee Odenwalder'; napier@parliament.sa.gov.au
Subject: A Safer Community, Discussion Paper - September 2014 - Feedback
Attachments: Sector Reforms - Notes from Roundtables.pdf

Minister,

I have read the "Discussion Paper", twice, and find it to be a most disappointing document.

The main issue that I have with it is the lack of evidence presented in it. In Appendix 3 one of the "Guiding Principles" listed is "*Make decisions based on evidence*", but this document is devoid of evidence to support the proposed model. And you are aware that the evidence is not in the document. In your "Message" you state, "*I envisage that this (i.e. the improvements required) can be achieved by establishing a single agency delivering different frontline services.*" After all of the work that has been done, all the meetings, all the discussions, you are in a position only to "envisage" (i.e. to contemplate, visualise – Macquarie Dictionary) a structure. You are not prepared to state, "*The evidence shows that...*". Is this because the evidence does not point in the direction in which you wish to go?

Your overall goals are admirable, but does the evidence support the structure that you are envisaging?

I have not had the opportunity to have the breadth and depth of investigation that you have, but I have found some evidence. In the August 2014 edition of the SASESVA *Frontline* magazine, the Chairperson states in his report, "*Other States have gone through similar restructures, none of which have benefitted the SES volunteers in those states. I know this from meeting with the Chairs of the Associations...*". I do not have the specifics, but I am sure that they can be provided.

Whilst at the AFAC conference in Wellington recently, I had the opportunity to talk to two officers of the WA SESVA. They told me that you were due to be in WA the following week and that a meeting had been arranged with members of the WASESVA. I assume that they would have told you the same things that I was told. Both SES volunteer numbers and morale are down since the restructuring in WA. Structural fire-fighters have slowly been appointed to most of the paid positions and they do not have respect for the volunteer ethic. Apparently a structural fire-fighter was incident controller for the fire in the Perth Hills 3-4 years ago and this led to a number of issues. I have had a quick scan of the Keelty report into the fires (*A Shared Responsibility – The Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review*) and found the following quotes:

"Unfortunately, the main agency with responsibility for bushfires in WA, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority appeared to struggle in their approach to the Special Authority (i.e. Keelty). This is reflected in both the detail of the report and the recommendations that follow." – p2

"Fire brigades identify the severity of a fire by allocating a 'number of alarms'. For example, the draft MIR (Major Incident Review) described the situation at Roleystone:
At 12:13 a request to upgrade the incident to a 3rd Alarm was made along with aerial resources and additional appliances.....by 13:08 ...the Incident Control Point (ICP) relocated to the Roleystone Fire Station and the incident upgraded to a 4th Alarm.

The Special Inquiry received evidence from various witnesses that there is no correlation between the terminology used by fire brigades in respect to an Alarm Number and the Incident Levels used for Emergency Management purposes as discussed in Chapter 2.

During inter-agency operations it may be confusing having alarm levels and incident levels that do not correspond." – p88

" All of these officers described the Roleystone-Kelmscott fire as being significant but offered alternative suggestions as to how it was handled. **There is a strong feeling amongst the volunteer brigades that their experience with bushfire is quite different to the fighting of 'structural fires' by career fire officers at FESA.** As Mr Gossage stated:

"...they're trained to handle structure fires and that sort of thing, so their understanding to tackle a bushfire isn't there." – pp88,89

"Claims were made to the Special Inquiry about favouritism afforded career fire fighters as opposed to volunteers in the call out system. Claims were also made about the delays involved in the tasking of units using the 'T Card' system.

The 'T Card' system applies to all emergency service personnel signing on at fire incidents and signing off so a record is kept of all those who are within the fire ground. This is not simply a resource issue, it is also important in terms of occupational health and safety. The Special Inquiry heard that some volunteer Brigades waited up to 40 minutes while trying to register their 'T Card' at the Incident Control Centre.

The claim was made to the Special Inquiry that, while the fire was burning out of control, volunteers were getting frustrated at not being deployed to deal with sections of the fire. The point was made that **career firefighters are processed more expeditiously** because their details are already known to the Incident Control Centre. FESA needs to look at other options for registering people attending the fire incident that comply with occupational health and safety requirements while at the same time, allowing firefighting resources to be more swiftly to allocated areas of responsibility and tasks." – p 107

"The Special Inquiry simply makes the observation that **breakdowns in relationships between FESA and volunteers need to be managed to ensure that they do not cause widespread dissatisfaction.**" – p108

"The Special Inquiry sought clarification about how the diversion of the critical resource was made but the decision appears to have been made 'on the run' with little regard to the critical nature of the decision. The incident will add to the lack of trust and confidence volunteer brigades have in FESA, which is contrary to the assertions made in FESA's submission to this inquiry.

Mr Harris summed up by saying:

I guess it's frustrating. Coming from, again, my background with CFA against FESA is frustrating. I've been involved in major bushfires in the past where we've had bulk water tankers sitting in streets purely just doing asset protection and have saved 100 per cent saved homes because they've had bulk water, and I guess coming here and seeing light tankers are pretty useless in a situation like that. They, you know, they only have, you know, 600 litres or 800 litres of water is just no use. It can't do anything. By the time the fire hits you you're out of water.

The Special Inquiry appreciated people like Mr Harris coming forward to give evidence rather than comment in the background. The importance of volunteers was repeated many times to the Special Inquiry. The Special Inquiry hopes that their evidence is heeded and that they are treated appropriately for having taken the responsibility to come forward." – pp112, 113

"The MIR (Major Incident Review) sought to identify strengths and weaknesses in the operational response to three major bushfires in January and February 2011, including the Roleystone-Kelmscott fire on 6 February 2011. The draft MIR made 14 findings and 14 recommendations, some of which were not consistent with the information presented to, or findings of, the Special Inquiry. Points of difference are discussed throughout this report.

Having said that, the Special Inquiry learned that **the MIR did not consult the volunteer brigades** who attended not only the Roleystone-Kelmscott fires but the other fires that were the subject of the MIR. Understandably, because the MIR was looking at Lake Clifton, Red Hill and Roleystone fires there may have been a limit to the depth of penetration of the review on any one fire.

Had the MIR engaged with the volunteer brigades in more detail, which may not have been within its remit, it would have discovered anomalies that the Special Inquiry finds difficult to reconcile. For example, there were allegations of panic and lack of planning in the Major Incident Team about which the Special Inquiry received specific evidence that is covered in Chapter 4. The MIR would also have learned that a volunteer brigade was redirected from the Roleystone fire to a 'scrub' fire

at Ferndale where its 12,000 litre water tanker was not utilized for the 36 hours it was directed to remain at Ferndale. This event is covered in detail in Chapter 4.” – pp9, 10

“The initial FESA submission stood out as not adding significant value to the Special Inquiry and was more in the style of self-promotion and gratuitous advice rather than a constructive address of the terms of reference. Indeed, parts of the FESA submission were found to be inaccurate or untrue as will be discussed in later chapters. The Special Inquiry found this regrettable and was concerned about the amount of resources used to prepare the Submission.

Several witnesses who came forward to the Special Inquiry asked not to be identified. Provision to protect the identity of witnesses was made in the Premier’s announcement of the Special Inquiry. However, it was noted that written public submissions may not be afforded the same protection and so a warning to this effect was provided with the template for submissions on the Special Inquiry website. It is regrettable, but it is a fact, that some witnesses feared retribution from those in authority for having assisted the Special Inquiry. **The culture of fear and intimidation felt not only by volunteer firefighters but also by residents** is examined further in Chapters 3 and 4.” – p9

I’m sure that there are more quotes that I could find, but I think that this provides enough evidence that this structure does not provide the results that you state are your aim. Is there evidence that you have to counter this?

I have recently heard a rumour that you came away from your visit to WA believing that the WA FESA structure was not the way to go. Is this the case?

I would now like to address some of the specific statements in the paper.

In the Executive Summary (para 4) the following statement is made, “face to face contact with over 1,500 volunteers and staff.” Does this take into account duplications? I, personally, attended two of the roundtables and there were several others who attended the same two. I have heard of some people attending several. There were also SAAS and SAPOL people in attendance at some. Have these been taken into account or is 1500 just a sum of all of the names on the attendance lists?

The Executive Summary also states, *“It is important to stress that there are no intentions to diminish frontline services and service delivery will continue as it does today. The message has been clear from staff and volunteers, ‘just let us get on with our role’.”* Yet the message from both SES and the Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (VBFB) in WA is that the proposed structure does not do this.

Also in the Executive Summary (para 8) is the following statement, *“Throughout the engagement forums a preferred model, (see figure 3, page 22) has been presented where frontline services would remain the same but **one organisation would be created from regional level up to a new Chief Officer...**”* (My bolding.) On page 22, under the heading Proposed Structure the following statement is made (para 2), *“Throughout the consultation process a preferred option (Fig 3) has been proposed. The option has the following characteristics:*

...

– *A fully integrated agency from the regional-level to executive management.”*

I beg to differ. At both the Gawler and Mawson Lakes roundtables you were at pains to point out that there would be one CO and the three services on the ground. You said that people think that the regional structure should be retained, but emphasised that the point in the continuum where the services joined was still to be determined, that a preferred structure had not been determined and that is why you were having the consultation. I have attached my notes from the Gawler meeting, where I have made the statement, *“at what point in the continuum does this combination occur?”*. This is a direct quote from you. Frankly, the more cynical amongst the group thought that it was probable that you would not be doing any consulting unless you did have a preferred model. It now looks like they were correct and you did have one even though you stated that you did not.

I have given some thought to what it would mean having the integration starting from regional level. At the moment SES has a number of Districts to each Region, but figure 3 in the paper shows “Region/Zone” immediately above the Frontline Units, which suggests that what are now “Districts” will become “Regions

or Zones". One of the AIIMS principles is span of control, which should be between 5 and 7. My SES district has 6 Units to one District Officer and I will assume, for the sake of argument, that the same span of control will be maintained. In my SES Unit area of responsibility I have 9 CFS Brigades and 3 MFS stations. Based on the AIIMS span of control, my area would be divided into two "Regions/Zones". So I would probably be grouped with 4 CFS Brigades and 1 MFS station. At the moment we have Unit Managers' meeting every 6 weeks to discuss common issues. Under the new structure there would not be much discussion about SES matters; it would all be fire, particularly bushfire, matters. It is likely that I would be in danger of being marginalised.

There is an anomaly in the paper regarding this tier immediately above the frontline units. Despite the statement that the organisation would be integrated from the regional level, the following statement is also made (p23, para 2), "The CFS service delivery will continue to include their current group level structure and processes." I am not sure what this means for SES Units and MFS stations if the organisation is supposed to be integrated at this level. Does it mean that SES and MFS will be integrated into the CFS group structure? I am sure that the UFU would have something to say about that as would the SASESVA.

On p 23 (para 5) the following statement is made, "*It is envisaged that the following functions will be coordinated centrally but delivered both regionally and statewide*". Again, it is only a vision, not something supported by evidence.

On p26 of the Discussion Paper you call for comments and suggest some things that we may like to consider, such as:

- What should the Regional offices look like?
- Which functions should be included at the regional level?
- Where could regional offices be located?

This makes it sound like the structure is a *fait accompli*, and that people commenting on the paper should concentrate on the *minutiae* of what happens at the regional level rather than looking at the bigger picture and structure.

The last paragraph in the Conclusion states, "*It is important that the cultures of our emergency services remains (sic), but that a sustainable model for the future is created to continue to serve our communities in the most effective way possible, well into the future.*" I note that the word "cultures" (plural) is used. This means that the separate, and somewhat distinct, cultures of the SES, CFS and MFS are to be maintained. This cannot be done by combining the services at the regional level. It would be very hard for individual, isolated SES Units/CFS Brigades to maintain their culture when the culture at the regional level is different. As a Unit Manager, I would want the person to whom I report to understand the SES culture and for me to be able to meet with other SES Unit Managers. The only way to maintain the individual cultures is for the combination of the services to be done at a higher level. I suggest the following:

Chief Officer

Deputy CO – SES Deputy CO – CFS Deputy CO – MFS Deputy CO – Services

Appropriate structures underneath each DCO.

In this way the culture of each service can be maintained, but there will be savings in the joining together of services, i.e. accounting, training, strategy, governance, HR, IT, etc.

In Appendix 3, where the proposed model is compared against the Guiding Principles, against the fifth principle, "*Acknowledgement of the centrality of volunteering to the emergency services*" the comment is made "*Yes – culture will change over time*" (my underlining). But the paper emphasises that the cultures should be maintained, not changed. This is inconsistent.

I would like to finish by commenting on the rise in the ESL. There is an anomaly with the figures that you presented at the Gawler roundtable. You said that prior to 1 July the ESL funded approximately 50% of the funds dedicated to ES and that from 1 July the funding would increase to approximately 85%. This equates to an average increase of 70%. Mine went up 185% and I read in the paper that the average increase in the metropolitan area was 160%. Apparently, in regional areas the increase was more. These

figures do not correlate with the 70% increase that you implied. Either the initial funding from the ESL was much less than 50% or we should now see a significant increase in funding for the ES sector.

The Paper says that comments must be received by 5pm on Friday 24 October. At the Gawler roundtable you said that you would have a proposal to Cabinet before Christmas. What would be appreciated is that you put out another paper for general public review/comment, presenting the evidence from your research and including comments received, with your responses. Think of it like an Environmental Impact Statement, where the research evidence is presented, comments from the public are addressed and appropriate solutions presented, based on the evidence and comments.

The big question remains, "Will the new structure be based on the evidence with the frontline people in mind, or will it be based on convenience and cost savings?" I hope the former, but fear the latter.

Sincerely,

John

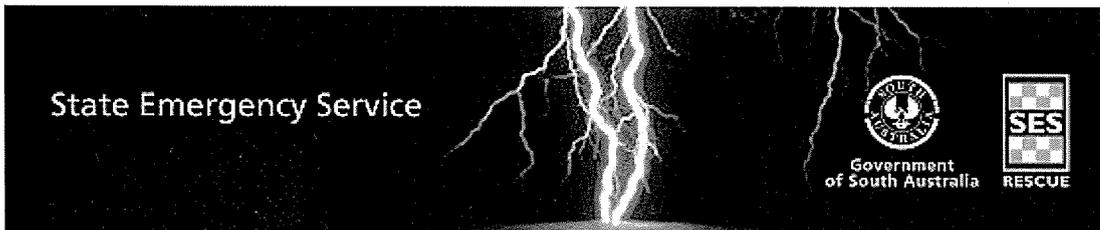
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