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**EMERGENCY SERVICE SECTOR REVIEW - Discussion Paper
October, 2014**

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Discussion Paper.

Summary:

I agree that there is a requirement to have single organisation with one person who has control and authority to implement change as required.

As I mentioned in my previous submission people must not forget that the EFS/CFS was formed by people from local communities because there was no coordinated organisation to combat the annual threat during summer – bushfires.

The CFS has now evolved into an organisation which provides a “complete” fire service. i.e. road crash and structural now form a significant portion of the organisations responses.

The community expectations have also changed. In the urban fringe of Adelaide and many towns there is an expectation that a fire appliance WILL arrive in a timely manner and not on a best effort basis some time after a 000 call has been logged (and maybe after a brigade or two have defaulted and added another 10 minutes to the response).

Most people expect a fire appliance to arrive in a timely manner and with an appropriately trained crew (e.g. BA to a “structure domestic”).

It is also unfortunate that much of the feedback that I have seen appears to be focussed on US ... i.e. the volunteers, volunteer culture, the CFS, etc., and not the one and only reason for a fire services existence – **protection of the community**.

Equipment and Resources:

There is far too much differentiation between equipment used by both fire services to the point that one could well form the opinion that decisions appear to be based more on being different and financial considerations than anything related to actual operational efficiency.

Why do the services still use different Breathing Apparatus equipment and hydraulic road crash rescue equipment? A CFS appliance cannot even attend a house fire with MFS crews and use the same BA tally card – they don’t fit in the ECO boards.

There isn’t enough time to even start on appliances so I’ll refrain.

These are but two examples of what is known as the “silo” mentality.

Volunteers:

Again the numbers quoted (e.g. 13,500) are completely misleading. This is just a total of everyone who has their name on a membership list.

The actual number of people who are active FFs is significantly less than this and it will continue to decrease for a variety of reasons some of which have been mentioned in the discussion paper.

People will join an organisation for a variety of reasons however once the decision has been made the organisation has a responsibility to ensure that they are "engaged" and provided with the appropriate resources and training. If a brigade requires crew trained in road crash and breathing apparatus for example (because this constitutes a significant portion of responses) and this training is not available then many new members will wonder what is the point of joining?

This is and has been a significant problem in CFS and I have seen nothing to suggest anything will change (except of course lots of meetings).

There is no one single "volunteer culture" in the CFS. There are many different opinions as there are in most organisations but again – this is not some sacred entity that requires protection – our reason for existence is providing a fire service and the CFS model as it is needs to be changed – the very people we are protecting would expect nothing less.

Operations:

There should be no boundaries. We all seem to agree that no one cares who arrives and what colour the truck is, so it is time to put this into action.

The comments on incident controllers are interesting but need to be into perspective.

In the CFS rank up to Group Officer is based on election. I for example hold the position of captain and whilst I consider it a privilege, my sole qualification is 51% of the vote a brigade AGM (and for a GO the same).

Let's contrast that with the MFS. There is a period of service required and then promotion courses after selection, etc. The point here is that one actually has to demonstrate the ability to perform the function. That's why a station officer takes command on first arrival and subsequently on escalation a commander assumes control – they have proven their ability to perform incident control.

That's why it's based on rank. It may well be better for CFS to engage selected people in both organisations and set up a system so they can be sent in quickly to set up incident management with local input.

As someone who has liaised with various MFS station officers at incidents, my primary focus is not who's area it is, it's how do we get the job done as quickly and efficiently as possible.

As I have mentioned previously having dealt with many SOs and CMDRs I have always been impressed by their professionalism and I'm not sure why there cannot be more interaction between the services.

Training:

As the report mentions there are three registered training organisations in this sector which given the common ground that many of us work on seems difficult to justify and I would agree it leads to "inconsistencies between the three ESOs with regard to training requirements and approaches; with limited regard to other ESOs performing similar roles."

When a brigade hits the minimum SFEC requirement it is almost impossible to get people on courses and it doesn't matter how busy a brigade is.

Thank you again for the opportunity and I'll end this feedback with another short summary.

The CFS unfortunately is perceived as the summer bushfire service just as the MFS is perceived as the house fire service and we know that neither is correct.

The public expect "a fire service" to arrive and are not interested in the CFS / MFS issue. Those of us on the inside may see this as significant but I don't think many outside the organisations would share this view.

This is an opportunity to significantly revise the existing model with perhaps a combination of full time career AND retained AND volunteers – all of whom could work together for one reason – the protection of the community.

Yours Sincerely,

Tom Fairbrother
Stirling (Captain)

[NB: this is a personal view - I am not presenting a whole of brigade view]