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From:
Sent: Monday, 20 October 2014 10:23 AM
To: DCS:Minister Piccolo; |
Cc:
Subject: Comments Regarding Emergency Services Sector Reform

Dear Minister Piccolo,

I have been a member of the SA SES State Emergency Service for 13 years. I have been watching the progress of the Sector Reform with interest with the understanding that changes will be made, but hoping that the affect on front-line services will not be too great.

Having seen the proposed model, I understand there are a number of similarities with the Western Australian model. Whilst I think there are a number of positives with an amalgamated model, it is my understanding that the SES in WA is suffering greatly since their reform, and are lagging in both training and resources. My hope is that these issues in WA are not ignored here in SA and we learn from this and that the SES actually is given the opportunity to flourish out from behind the high profile fire services and be held highly in its own regard for what we accomplish and the skills our volunteer members present.

The SES is unique in its core skills and the services it provides to the community that the fire services do not. How can we be assured that in the proposed model this continues to be the case and our training needs are met so that we continues to be able to effectively provide these services to community?

I understand that the UFU currently has a signed agreement that means that its members will not be trained by volunteers - if this is the case, it is disappointing to think that they do not hold our skilled volunteers in high regard and concerns me that in the amalgamated model, the risk becomes that all training priorities will be given to MFS and the volunteer services will lag behind.

Whilst I can see some excellent benefits to cross and shared training, and perhaps a greater access to resources, I do wonder whether this may start to "fuzz" the clearly defined core skills and roles the services have - for example, CFS doing vertical rescue (SES). How will the training be structured to ensure appropriate training courses are run and that it is delivered frequently enough to meet the needs of the services?

Another concern is that front-line services will be compromised unless equal representation of SES, CFS and MFS occurs in the Regional Management level to provide a well informed team that best understands the services needs, particularly on the volunteers. If, for example, there ends up being a very top heavy MFS and/or CFS staff base in the Operations Streams, it could take them up to a year to recognise the needs of the SES volunteers, in which time there may be a drop in training, resources and potentially under skilled volunteers. This could lead to discontent amongst the volunteers and the loss of members.

It is difficult to expect that the current play between services will be put aside and that the services will be treated equitably. I think that certainly in the first stages, that there will be a degree of "looking out for ourselves" mentality that currently unfortunately exists as a friendly (or not so friendly) rivalry between the services.

One hope I have is that the proposed structure will mean more equitable access to funding for community awareness campaigns. SES has never had the funding to generated TV media campaigns like the CFS and I hope this will be possible in the future - it would certainly have a positive impact on the recruitment numbers.

In chatting with my volunteer colleagues there is also some concern that with only one CEO/CO that none of the services will have adequate representation to the Minister.

Finally, a request of sorts. I am not sure if a name for the amalgamated department has been thought of or presented, but wondered whether it possible to just use something like the Dept of Emergency Services. Once the word Fire comes into the title, it once again gains a higher profile and SES tends to fall by the wayside as the forgotten Agency. The number of community that do not recognise what we do let alone that we exist at all is disappointing. I also think that by separating SES and the Fire Services in the title, it will continue to sustain that "Us and Them" mentality.

I think ultimately, the biggest suggestion that I have would be to ensure that the communication and consultation continues to be as open and transparent as possible so that the volunteers are clear about what is going on, and that there is equitable representation of ALL services at the Regional Management level.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments, and good luck with moving forward with the Sector Reform

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