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Pomario, Leigh (DCS)

From:
Sent: Wednesday, 8 October 2014 9:52 AM
To: DCS:Minister Piccolo
Subject: A Safer Community Discussion Paper Response
Attachments: A Safer Community Discussion Paper Response.pdf

Dear Minister,

Please find attached a letter containing my comments on the "A Safer Community" Discussion Paper for your consideration.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you require clarification on anything contained in my response,

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*Cliff -
This is a submission
to the discussion
paper!
Nick*

#7

Hon Tony Piccolo MP,
Minister for Emergency Services
GPO Box 668,
Adelaide,
SA5001

6th October 2014.

Dear Tony,

"A Safer Community" Discussion Paper 2014"

I have been involved with CFS for over thirty-six years, both as an active volunteer and as a member of staff. I believe that I have a good understanding of how the agency functions and the culture that underpins it.

Having read the discussion paper several times I remain concerned about the proposed structure as it fails to recognise the cultural and operational differences that exist between a career agency and volunteer agencies and also fails to address how the disparity in wages and conditions that exist as a result of the sector operating under two different awards will be resolved. As a result I am of the view that combining both career and volunteer agencies into a single agency will create issues that are difficult if not impossible to manage leading to operational difficulties and disenchantment as has been the case in Western Australia and Queensland where similar models have been implemented. Consequently I would like to propose an alternate model that I consider workable and one that would meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Proposed Alternate Model

SA Metropolitan Fire Service, (MFS)

Currently MFS uniformed personnel perform a range of non-operational roles including community engagement, specifying and developing fire appliances, personal protective equipment, (PPE), and operational resources/stowage etc. They also manage the MFS workshops and store. Under the model proposed in the discussion paper these roles would be transferred to the new entity, (Commission), and undertaken by Commission staff. A previous attempt to do so under the original Emergency Services Administration Unit, (ESAU), model failed because MFS personnel carrying out these roles operate under a different award and have a separate superannuation fund both of which provide enhanced benefit compared to those employed under the Public Sector Management Act. Consequently MFS personnel declined to transfer. Under the model proposed in the White Paper the same issue would exist making it unworkable at least in the short term.

Under the model I am proposing the key difference is that the MFS would continue to operate as a separate entity under its own award but purely as an operational response agency with all of its personnel fulfilling frontline operational response roles.

To overcome the issue of MFS uniformed personnel declining to be transferred to the Commission an independent benchmarking exercise of Australian fire services would be undertaken to identify appropriate staffing levels for a frontline operational response agency. Based on this exercise the appropriate staffing level for MFS would be determined and a Full Time Employee, (FTE), cap set. Uniformed MFS employees that undertake administrative roles would be given the opportunity to transfer to the Commission but if the offer is not taken up the FTE cap on staffing levels would be achieved via natural attrition with the FTE positions in excess of the FTE cap and associated funding being lost to MFS and transferred to the Commission. Commission employees would be employed under the PSM Act.

Under my model MFS's only responsibility as a separate entity would be operational response with all other roles and functions centralised in the Commission. The MFS Chief Officer would be

responsible for managing the funds allocated by the Commission to cover the operating costs of the agency and be accountable to the Minister for their expenditure.

By taking this approach the cultural differences that exist between volunteer and career agencies are isolated and the perceived threat to volunteers of union power and influence over the sector is negated. The issue of wage parity would also become a non-issue, at least in the short term, as Commission staff would continue to be employed under the PSM Act whilst MFS employees would continue to be employed under the SAMFS Award.

Volunteer Emergency Services

Under the model I am proposing the remainder of the Commission would remain largely intact with that proposed in the discussion paper. The key difference would be that volunteer emergency response agencies would be managed by a single Chief Officer under the South Australian Volunteer Emergency Response Services, (SAVERS), banner. Each of the agencies would retain their own identity but under the SAVERS model resources could be co-badged so enabling better use of resources which would lead to enhanced and more-timely provision of services to the community. Undertaking this approach would also assist in breaking down the silo mentality that currently exists in volunteer emergency services agencies and in doing so stop the duplication of effort that currently occurs.

Region/Zone

CFS, as the largest volunteer agency in the State, started as a community based fire service and for many volunteers it remains that way. Most would understand what the role of their Region is but for many the role of CFS Headquarters remains a mystery. Consequently it is proposed that services directly related to volunteers and the community they serve are based in a Region/Zone rather than centralised in Adelaide.

Under my model the following resources would be based in a Region/Zone:

- Region/Zone Manager;
- Frontline Operations Manager(s);
- Volunteer support officer(s) (incorporating current business support officer role);
- Community Engagement officer(s);
- Operations Planning officer(s);
- Training Co-ordinator(s);
- Administrative support staff.

Work Health and Safety support would remain as a State based resource with services provided to the Region/Zone on a needs basis by the Commission.

Under this model business administration and frontline operations are separated with the Region/Zone Manager being the senior manager on a day to day basis except for operational response activities which are managed by a Frontline Operational Response Manager.

Regions/Zones would report and be accountable to the Operations area of the Commission Executive Team and work with staff in the functional areas to deliver outcomes.

Reporting Relationships

Under my model the MFS Chief Officer would report directly to the Minister of Emergency Services on the operational and financial, (operating costs only), performance of the MFS. The Commissioner would report to the Minister on the operational performance of the sector's volunteer agencies and the overall business performance of the Commission.

This approach would reduce the Minister's current reporting relationships from four to two whilst still ensuring that the Minister is kept fully briefed on agency operational and financial performance,

functions for which the Minister has ultimate responsibility. It will also ensure that all business management issues are dealt with and managed by the Commission rather than by individual agencies.

Asset Management

Under my model the Commission would take control and be responsible for all of the fixed and mobile assets used by sector agencies and also be responsible for planning for their replacement at the end of their operational life. Capital funding would be controlled by the Commission and allocated on a needs basis rather than by agency. A transparent and bi-partisan business planning approach would be utilised to ensure equitable use of the limited funds available.

The Commission

Apart for the two amendments to the proposed structure which advocate, (1) the continuance of MFS as a separate operational agency that continues to operate under its own award and command and (2), the proposed operation of volunteer agencies under a single command, the remainder of the structure proposed in the discussion paper is sound and should be adopted. The original ESAU and current SAFECOM models were similar in concept but couldn't be adequately implemented due to:

- Sector agencies operating under two separate awards;
- The different culture and motivators that exist in career agencies when compared to volunteer agencies;
- Agencies having separate funding streams so restricting the ability to allocate funds on a needs basis;
- The protectionist mentality that has and continues to exist within each agency.

By adopting my two proposals in conjunction with the structural change proposed in the discussion paper:

- The issue of agencies operating under different awards and the associated issue of wage parity is overcome;
- Separate reporting relationships for career and volunteer agencies will ensure that the different cultures and motivators that currently exist in career and volunteer agencies are embraced and maintained and the perceived threat created by trying to merge them into a single agency is negated.
- Centralisation of business and finance functions under the Commission including the Commission taking control of all capital funding will ensure funds are allocated on a needs basis rather than by agency. This, if underpinned by good business practices and transparency of process, will ensure that best possible use is made of the limited funds available and negate any perception of bias or favouritism in the allocation of funds;
- Having a single Chief Officer who has control of all "SAVERS" volunteer response agencies will ensure that the agencies work together for the greater good of the community as opposed to protecting their vested interests.

It is not my intent to comment on the structure of the new Commission or where Regions or Zones should be located as this will be determined by the processes identified in the discussion paper. One thing that does need to be recognised and understood is that CFS would be unable to function during major incidents if its staff did not fulfil both administrative and operational roles. This would need to continue and be enhanced under the Commission as even with current staffing levels CFS struggles to maintain around the clock operational capability at Regional and State level during major incidents.

I am aware that some interstate agencies that have adopted similar models to that being proposed in the discussion paper consider the current SAFECOM model as best practice as combining career

and volunteer agencies into a single structure hasn't worked for them. It is also unlikely to work here in SA.

I applaud and embrace the move towards sector reform and the efficiencies that can result from it. What I do not support is the model proposed in the discussion paper as it fails to address the issues that have prevented both ESAU and SAFECOM from reaching their full potential. Adopting the two simple changes I am proposing will allow sector reform to progress with minimal disruption and in doing so unlock all of the potential efficiencies and savings that have been identified.

In closing I thank you for being given the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper and hope and trust that you will consider the two key proposals I have put forward as I believe implementation of them will overcome the concerns that agency staff, volunteers and their representatives bodies have with the structure proposed in the discussion paper.

Yours sincerely,