



Local Government Association
of South Australia

The **Voice**
of Local
Government

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Local Government Association of South Australia
Submission to:

A Safer Community Discussion Paper

October 2014

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Introduction

The Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA) is recognised as the peak representative body for the 68 Councils in South Australia. The Association provides leadership and representation outwards to State and Federal Governments and other key stakeholders.

The LGA appreciated the opportunity to be able to attend the Minister's Roundtable on 13 October 2014 and to provide comment on the *A Safer Community Discussion Paper*.

Consultation

The LGA acknowledges the Ministers regional consultation process and the readiness to engage with communities and stakeholders.

Feedback from the LGA's Regional Network is reflected in the LGA submission.

Additionally the LGA has incorporated comment received during the course of consultations with member Councils on proposed amendments to the *Emergency Management Act (2004)* and the Review of the *Fire and Emergency Services Act (2005)*

Greenfields approach

The LGA was encouraged to hear the Minister state that all issues related to the reform process were open for consideration and has accordingly framed its response in this context.

Operational arrangements

The LGA has declined to comment in detail about what it sees as operational issues. However the LGA has been made aware by its regional constituents that the proposed operational model is causing concern among CFS volunteers.

Summary

The LGA generally supports a reform process, providing it:

1. is developed in an open, transparent and consultative manner;
2. adequately recognises the Regions and is not city-centric and centralised;
3. is developed by a 'greenfields' approach that encompasses the **Prevention Preparedness Response Recover (PPRR)** framework and not just focused on Response;
4. supports and addresses volunteer concerns, in particular:
 - a. training;
 - b. administrative support; and
 - c. procurement.

Recognises that Councils:

1. commit to and spend a considerable amount on prevention (**P**) each year e.g. flood mitigation and bushfire prevention;
2. have an important role in **Response** by supporting the emergency services in emergencies;
3. are critical to the **Recovery** success of disaster impacted communities; and
4. are important stakeholders in the reform process.

Provides appropriate funding for:

1. Prevention activities when related to a direct statutory responsibility such as the employment of an FPO or the management of land from the perspective of bushfire prevention;
2. Response activities for which Councils incur costs; and
3. Recovery costs borne by Councils when supporting their communities to recover.

Produces a regional model that:

1. removes the duplication of Zone Emergency Management and Bushfire Management Committees; and
2. provides adequate administrative, financial and planning support for the Regional committees.

Open Transparent and Consultative Process

The LGA is supportive of the approach so far taken by the Minister.

It is noted in the Report (p25) that a project team will be established to advance the reform process. The LGA advocates as broad a representation of stakeholders as possible so that a comprehensive view of the needs of the sector is gained and the resultant model reflective of them.

Regional Recognition

The LGA member rural Councils have expressed concern that there may be a shift to a centralised management model that will lead to a reduction in regional autonomy and decision making. The LGA notes that the Report (p21) identifies this issue through '*a strong regional presence supporting frontline staff and volunteers*' and recommends this approach be recognised as a key principle in the review findings.

PPRR Framework

The review should look outside purely a response focus which appears to be a concentration of the current discussion paper. Prevention and preparedness should receive greater emphasis and be recognised as the keys to community disaster resilience.

Ultimately any review process should have the objective of producing a more resilient community, it's not just about 'safety'.

Volunteers

Rural Councils have been emphatic in their support for volunteers with the expression of a common theme that the attraction of volunteers to frontline services in rural communities is a major issue. This extends to the SES, VMR and Ambulance and not just CFS:

- training needs to be regional and accessible and structured in such a way that it allows volunteers in full time employment to be able to participate;
- administrative support that takes responsibility for this function away from volunteers (volunteers want to fight fires not fill out bureaucratic forms); and
- integrated and representative management that encompasses a model that ensures volunteer input.

Procurement

Concern is that centralised models are inefficient and slow to respond to brigade needs and are not supported by volunteers.

Council Involvement

Legislation

A Council is given the function of taking "measures to protect its area from natural and other hazards and to mitigate the effects of such hazards" under section 7(d) of the *Local Government Act 1999* (LG Act).

Councils are involved in all aspects of emergency management although they do not have a direct response function like that of a control agency with the possible exception of flooding

which is less clear. Section 298 of the LG Act allows a Council to take such action as it deems necessary to avert or reduce danger to life or property from the threat of flooding.

The South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) is the hazard leader and control agency for bushfires, but Councils play a particular role in bushfire prevention as defined in the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (FESA), which is to:

- assess the extent of bushfire hazards within their Council areas;
- provide advice and information to bushfire management committees; and
- provide advice to owners of property about bushfire prevention and management.

Additionally, Councils are required to adopt adequate fire prevention measures on land they have the care control and management of and are required to inspect land belonging to private landowners who have a responsibility to take reasonable measures to:

- prevent or inhibit the outbreak of fire on land;
- prevent or inhibit the spread of fire through the land;
- protect property on land from fire; and
- minimise the threat to human life from fire on the land.

Councils play a compliance role to ensure that private landowners meet these requirements and they also issue permits to light fires in the fire danger season for the purpose of land clean up and the control of pests and weeds on farming properties. The issuance of permits requires considerable resourcing and work systems and carries with it considerable risk from the duty of care perspective.

Prevention

As indicated above, Councils commit considerable resources to bushfire mitigation as well as flood control. Increasingly the cost of mitigation is being borne by Councils. A sustainable funding model and partnership needs exploration and agreement.

As an example it is estimated that Councils expend upwards of \$10 million annually on bushfire prevention. Bushfire prevention planning emanating from Bushfire Management Committees is identifying various treatments to reduce bushfire risk that invariably assume Councils will play a lead role without due regard to the cost of their implementation.

Councils contend that this approach is unrealistic and not sustainable.

Response

Councils provide vital support to emergency services during emergencies on a case by case basis, ranging from supply of plant and operators, to participating in the activities of the Emergency Operations Centres. Considerable collaboration and work lead by the LGA has occurred over the last twelve months to develop Joint Operating Guidelines that will provide a clear and concise framework for emergency service agencies to access Council resources. The framework addresses the establishment of a policy base, risk assessment and decision making processes and integration with incident management related to an emergency response.

The District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula can be used as example of the support Councils provide to the emergency services. Council has supplied equipment and employees to fight six major fires that have occurred on the lower Eyre Peninsula since 2001. The last bushfire that occurred was the Coomunga fire which was started by lightning strike and subsequently threatened Port Lincoln. The Council committed approximately 500 man hours to constructing containment lines over a two week period.

Recovery

Councils invariably become involved in Local Recovery Committees set up to assist communities recover from the impacts of disasters. The LGA in co-operation with the State Recovery Office is developing a Council Recovery Resource kit, which will assist Councils to lead the recovery effort of communities.

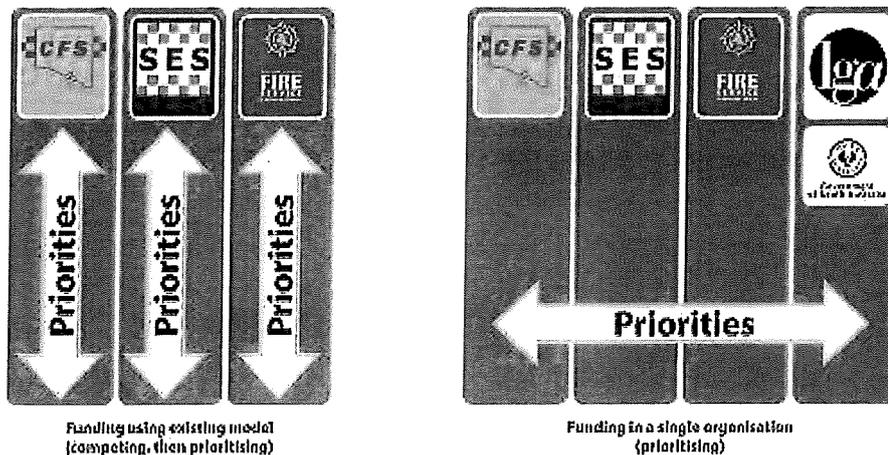
The LGA has also worked closely with the South Australian Government to develop the Local Government Disaster Recovery Assistance Guidelines that will assist Councils access Government financial assistance to restore disaster damaged road infrastructure using a consistent and structured methodology

Additionally the LGA has released a damage and assessment App EARS (Emergency Assessment Reporting System) to assist Councils rapidly record and map damage caused by disasters. A more detailed tablet based on-line engineering damage assessment tool has also been developed in parallel with EARS. The systems are complimentary and will provide a highly efficient damage estimating system.

Funding

The LGA reiterates that an examination of funding for the sector needs to be far broader than just considering the financial requirements of the three emergency services as it relates to response activities. A holistic approach is sought by the LGA that recognises and provides support to all agencies that play a role in emergency management.

The LGA proposes that the suggested funding model in the Discussion Paper includes Local Government and other State Agencies that have direct obligations for community safety and could look like:



The LGA is not suggesting equal funding and understands the differences between the agencies, but it does however suggest that there is a funding need for all agencies that have an emergency management role which should be recognised in any proposed model.

In particular the funding model should include support for the Zone Emergency Management Committees if they are to continue as key regional links in the State Emergency Management Arrangements. The LGA regards the current approach of supporting the Zones

through annual grant funding programs as unsustainable. If the Zone structure is to be retained and made relevant then it should be appropriately funded.

Regional Model

Duplication

The LGA supported the introduction of the current two tiered bushfire management system and has encouraged Councils to actively participate on the regional bushfire management committees.

Similarly the Zone Emergency Management Committee (ZEMC) structure in South Australia is heavily dependent on participation by Councils. Many of the committee Chairs are either Council Members or Council staff. The LGA has supported the concept of zone emergency management planning as it is an important networking opportunity that builds relationships that are important in emergency situations.

Councils have however been vocal about supporting two independent regional committees with emergency management functions contending that the duplication is extravagant and unnecessary.

Support

Councils expressed concern to the LGA that resourcing of the Zone Committees is an ongoing issue that restricts adequate long term development and planning. Currently much of the planning support has been provided by project officers dependent on annual grant funds made available for the Zone Emergency Risk Assessment Project. The engagement of Zone project officers has been instrumental in progressing zone emergency management planning. The finalisation of the project will see this valuable resource disappear with reliance for administrative support and emergency planning reverting to the SES which is not separately resourced to adequately discharge the function.

Conclusion

The LGA is supportive of the Minister's objective to improve community safety providing a holistic reform process occurs that takes the concerns of all stakeholders into account.