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The Hon Tony Piccolo MP
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Re Sector Reform Discussion Paper

Dear Minister

As a CFS member for over 30 years and Group Deputy Officer in the Mid Murray CFS Group, I work very closely with the CFS volunteers who provide the on ground service you mention briefly in your white paper. I also work closely with regional and headquarters staff so that we can achieve the goal of protecting and serving our community.

The discussion paper that has been presented has given a very simple overview of how an emergency services structure could look. The preamble has been written in a way to support this model and lacks a true description of the current situation. What many volunteers have said is that the paper tells them nothing and has made them very nervous of what the end result could be as the detail that is required to make an informed comment has not been presented and according to your paper is still to be worked out. As one Brigade Captain said to me, "This is scary".

I would agree that the outcome of this paper achieves many of your guiding principles. I question the direction of these principles. The core structural achievements being, a single integrated organisation with a departmental structure. It must be asked if this direction is of benefit to delivering a better service. A departmental structure provides a bureaucratic consequence, where little to no input and contact from the grass roots is accepted. The other fear I have with a single department structure is the ability to easily make cuts to services at the whim of a Ministerial decision that can happen when government runs out of money again just like happened with SAFECOM. I do not support this direction.

The discussion paper has put so much emphasis on a structure of employment that it has lost the true focus of what is acceptable to those who provide the majority of the on ground service delivery. It must be clear what the priority service delivery is; emergency action at an incident, not peripheral parts of the business dealing with issue such as community education, bushfire prevention or planning.

What the discussion paper misses is the understanding of how the CFS and SES and other volunteer organisations function and why they have been successful for so long. There is a culture that has been developed since the instigation of these organisations that can only be understood by being a member. The relationship between volunteers and staff is special and cannot be explained, just

lived. The proposed model will destroy this ethic as it will break a long held bond of mutual respect. The reason this bond will be broken is because the volunteer and staff are no longer a part of the same organisation. This reform process has made many CFS staff nervous of their future and we as volunteers do not accept that our friends and colleagues are being hurt because of a process. You are likely to lose some of the best minds in the CFS through this process which is not going to make the community safer. The function of having volunteers providing direct input into various levels of governance or being a part of various aspects of the business creates an organisation which is delivering an effective service. The volunteer's knowledge of their area is not recognised as a major asset, something no paid staff could replicate. Involvement of volunteers at decision making levels are a cost effective mechanism as you are drawing on a wealth of knowledge from the community at a very low cost. Your proposal will lose these aspects.

Another characteristic that has not been considered is that emergency services are made up of two parts, the business and financial side and the delivery of "emergency" service. A departmental structure will not work for this scenario. The emergency services are a para-military based organisation for a reason. First and foremost we are combatant authorities. That means that every time we are called, we may be at war. In a fire situation, we are battling an enemy that is not predictable that is imposing a threat to our lives and is invading and destroying some-one's property just like any war. If we lose our chain of command we are at risk of our lives and protection of the public. The emergency services sector must be like any other military organisation for it to function effectively. There have been operational management guidelines devised by ancient army's which are still used by the services today which does not fit into a departmental structure. The Army, Navy and Air Force all have the same aim, to protect Australia from invasion. They all have their own chain of command and business sectors but work together collaboratively. You cannot put the three main emergency services in South Australia together and expect it to work, as they have differing functions in delivering an emergency response for the public. The CFS must maintain its own operational chain of command through to the CFS Chief Officer as should SES and MFS. The Chief Officer cannot have an interagency operational person above them.

The proposal of having only one sector advisory group is not acceptable as they will have little input to the decision making process. There must be independent groups gathered from the sectors to have input into varying areas of management just like we have now.

I have discussed this paper with a number of older CFS members, those who have been in the service for 40, 50 years and more with a number of these people having been awarded an AFSM. They cannot see how the proposal you have put forward will work for the betterment of the emergency services. As a community, we have more and more pushed aside the wise words of our elder generation. In my business the elder generation is an asset. In many cultures around the world they have elders in their communities who are noted for their wisdom and are listened to for their guidance. This is one time we must take note of our elders and be guided by their knowledge, experience and wisdom and take heed when they say not to change a structure that is serving well.

The paper is entitled "A Safer Community". The proposed changes as outlined in the paper have no explanation of what system has failed or no basis to why such a dramatic change is required. Operationally, the events of last summer showed that the system in place is functioning well even under that level of duress. The community was as safe as could be under the circumstances. Each sector had its differing roles to play; MFS structure protection, SES support and CFS wildfire combatant authority. They all worked collaboratively together. I don't see the proposal increasing public safety or greatly improving a management system that has been moulded over a very long period of time to achieve what is a very workable and robust system.

The paper outlines that the business or financial aspects are not functioning as good as they should. This may be right in some circumstances, but has this been brought about because of government interference since SAFECOM was set up? This is the only area that requires some tweaking, not wholesale changes. I will accept that a CEO be appointed to oversee and equitably distribute funds to each organisation. This CEO must only have financial responsibility not operational responsibility. The CEO should also have an independent committee who oversees the standards so equality is maintained for each sector. The sectors are working collaboratively now in many functions so why do you need to change a whole structure or introduce service level agreements? Neither will work effectively. The SACAD implementation phase highlighted that a service level agreement where one sector takes responsibility is not the answer. The sector that is managing the function still has control and will still do as they wish.

When the sector reform discussions were first being held, I agreed that some reform could be achieved to improve efficiencies and maybe reduce some costs. Since reading your paper I have come to the conclusion that these idealisms can't be achieved in a simple cost effective manner. The best result would be to encourage collaboration and further build the relationships.

I totally reject the restructure proposal and changes you have presented. Merging of the CFS, SES and MFS management structures will not work. Each organisation must maintain its individual chain of command and management of its business. Volunteers must be involved at decision making levels as they deserve the right to control their own destiny. The volunteer must maintain ownership of and a belonging to an organisation. Without that, the volunteer will walk away.

The current system is delivering a safe community, so don't try to fix something that is not broken.