

South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Sector Reform

Background

The current structure of emergency services delivery in South Australia is based on historical and archaic principles that have a considerable focus on the needs and wishes of each ESO as opposed to sustainable and practical needs of the community. Whilst it is recognised in the various reports e.g Dawkins and Holloway that the front line services work well together, this is only reliant upon the goodwill of the personnel present to ensure this is the case. Each organisation has distinct tribal influences that have grown over significant periods of time and cultures of self preservation. This in itself is not unnatural particularly when a sector review is being undertaken, Maslow's hierarchy of needs clearly identifies base human physiological needs such as food, water etc followed by Safety which includes security of employment, property etc. Any review which threatens the Safety of the individual in this context will produce a response that will not necessarily follow what the Governments intent is, which is to say or more importantly for the individual concerned to ask "why would I recommend making my own employment and redundant?". Therefore on this basis, is the information provided to these reviews by personnel (whom are likely to have their basic human needs as described by Maslow threatened in some manner) able to be considered as reliable and valid?

In terms of service delivery each of the ESO's have had a very traditional role within our society. SAMFS have been regarded as urban (multi storey) or structural fire fighting specialists, the SACFS have been regarded as rural (bushfire) fire fighting specialists and the SASES have been specialists for responses not covered by the other two agencies. Traditionally only the SAMFS have had career (paid) personnel undertaking their primary operational roles and as such has a strong culture and representation within the United Firefighters Union (UFU). The SACFS and SASES traditionally have had volunteers undertake primary operational activities and both are represented by government funded Volunteer Associations.

This model has served the South Australian community well for many years, as it has traditionally held a small capital city and outer metropolitan area surrounded by rural enterprises. Larger urban centres and those with "special risks" have also been serviced by the SAMFS through its retained station model, however this is a compromise solution. Many of the special risks that these stations were founded for have long since disappeared from these areas e.g Peterborough, yet the retained stations have remained. These stations are often in competition for the already limited number of personnel within the local community in order for them to operate and provide services that are also being conducted by SACFS and SASES volunteers. The vast majority of these retained stations currently attend significantly less (>100 less) emergency incidents than the 10 highest responding SACFS brigades in South Australia, yet they require a significant higher rate of funding than each of these SACFS Brigades This model does not serve and has not kept pace with a rapidly expanding population in the one major city, or a shrinking population and decline of major industry in major rural areas

Whilst the SAMFS has maintained a high degree of specialisation in urban type fire and rescue incidents, its history has never required it to gain the technical and critical skills that are needed for rural type incidents. Due to its historical pedigree it has neither sought or is unlikely to seek to gain these. The SAMFS currently has no formula for the location, qualification or deployment of its assets.

The SACFS has maintained a high degree of specialisation in rural type incidents, due to the nature of these types of incidence and their impacts on a great number of human beings, rural based agencies Australia wide have been and are subjected to many more Coronial and legislative reviews than their urban centric counterparts which in turn leads them to the development and maintenance of these technical skills sets. However the SACFS has a legislative responsibility to provide an urban response in rural centres and as such also provides a high degree of urban (single storey) type fire and rescue specialisation. Even to the point where it was SACFS personnel that researched Australasia and the world and introduced Compartment Fire Behaviour techniques (urban fire fighting techniques) to the South Australian fire fighting community and commissioned the only Compartment Fire Behaviour training facility based in South Australia. SACFS personnel have (and continue to) train not only SAMFS personnel in these techniques but other fire services from Australasia. Whilst the SACFS has the technical knowledge and physical capability to deliver it to the community, due to the current funding model SACFS has not had the fiscal ability to fully develop their urban capability beyond a single storey building response, and in many areas utilises rural type fire appliances for urban type operations. The SACFS currently has its Standards of Fire and Emergency Cover (SFEC) and capability statements, which are risk assessed, based to attempt to deliver the correct service, with the correct training to the community. However this still has its limitations as some communities (Brigade's) have the ability to reject skills sets and training which therefore make equipment redundant. The further ability for the SACFS to develop any considered urban capability into a fulltime capacity in its legislative area of operations is limited by the MOU undertaken between former Emergency Services Minister Carmel Zollo and the SAMFS and UFU which made the basis that the SAMFS (and thus UFU members) would be the only fulltime (career) fire service within South Australia.

Currently the SACFS operations are structured into 6 regions consisting of multiple groups within each region. Some state level and regional staff are required to undertake on call operational roles in addition to their daily activities. Some of these staff have a limited operational background and are placed into these on call roles based on their official job description and theoretical qualification and not on operational experience base. Staff are accountable to the Regional Commander for their daily work outputs, with liaison with functional stakeholders e.g Training Officers also reporting to Director of Training. Where conflict abounds between the regional need and the state need, the Regional Commander remains in control of the staff member and work direction. A reduction in the number of administrative staff dedicated to volunteer support services has declined and been removed to SAFECOM level, this has impacted volunteer officers and members in particular Group Officers and more predominantly brigade Captains, who can undertake up to an additional 10 – 15 hrs per week outside of regular brigade operational activities undertaking administration.

Volunteers with suitable operational experience and qualification currently undertake a significant proportion of Incident Management roles including state level operations.

SACFS Brigades are managed via the Group Structure which report to the Regional Commander. The group structure is responsible for the allocation of brigade and group budgets, along with day to day administrative affairs. The Groups themselves require funding to operate, which draws money from the operating budgets allocated for frontline services. Group structures in their current form replicate much of the work that is required by brigades and regions. Group formations date to pre ESAU and ESL and typically centre on council boundary formations and council and self funding which required self administration. Their current purpose and legislative authority are no longer relevant in the modern SACFS. Depending on their brigade of origin many Group Officers do not have the experience, qualification or currency to manage incident types e.g. Hazmat, RCR outside of major rural incidents. Group Officers are not required to maintain currency or skills, as they are considered to be on leave from brigade activities.

The SASES has maintained is general and specialist response capability, but continues to suffer from low volunteer membership when compared to both the SACFS and SAMFS retained models, which severely limits its ability to bring to bear those skills and resources in times of critical need with the gaps often filled in periods of medium to high workload by the other two ESO's.

In many areas of the state there is a duplication of services provided by each of the ESO's as each of them vies for control of "turf". No singular body has the capability and legislative authority to provide direction and oversight to the ESO's to ensure services are delivered to the community in not only an appropriate and timely manner, but also a cost effective one.

Sector Reform

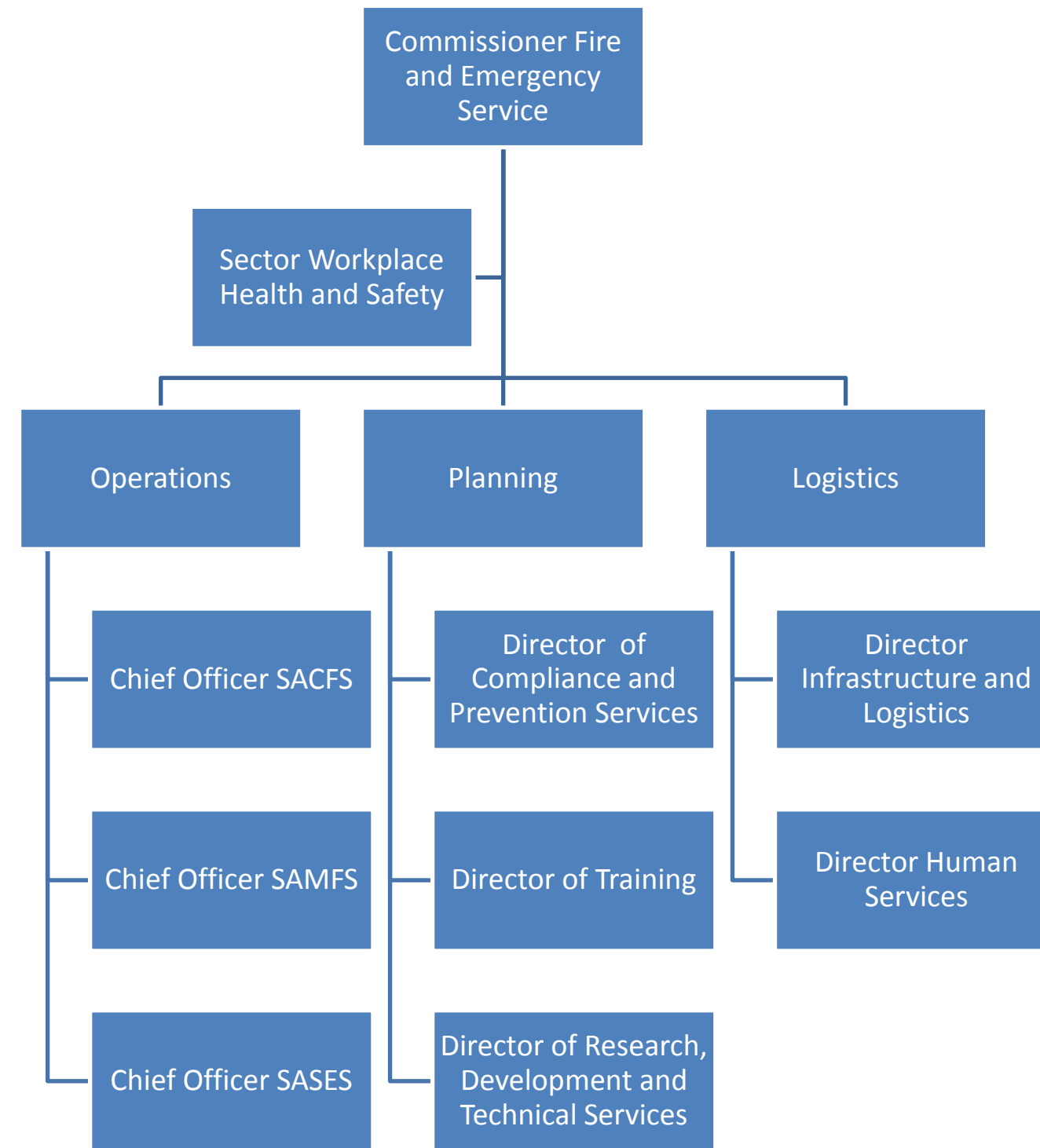
History has clearly shown that previous attempts at sector reform (ESAU and SAFECOM) when left to each ESO to drive and manage (either individually or as a collective) has not produced a reform of the sector which will remove duplication of services and deliver cost savings to the community whilst maintaining an appropriate standard of emergency response.

A singular statutory independent body (Commission) with the authority to make policy, direct and govern the three ESO' should be established. The three ESO's should in effect be the authorities whom deliver the operational services as directed by the authority.

The ESO's subscribe to and practice the Australasian Interservice Incident Management System (AIMS), which is an effective and proven method of managing emergency incidents. The commission should be structured on this methodology to drive the required reforms and deliver the required efficiency and cost savings See **Error! Reference source not found.**

I have included an example of the SACFS solution only, a SAMFS and SASES Operational stream would be similar but roles would be appropriate to those organisations.

Figure 1 Fire and Emergency Services Commission (AIIMS Structure)



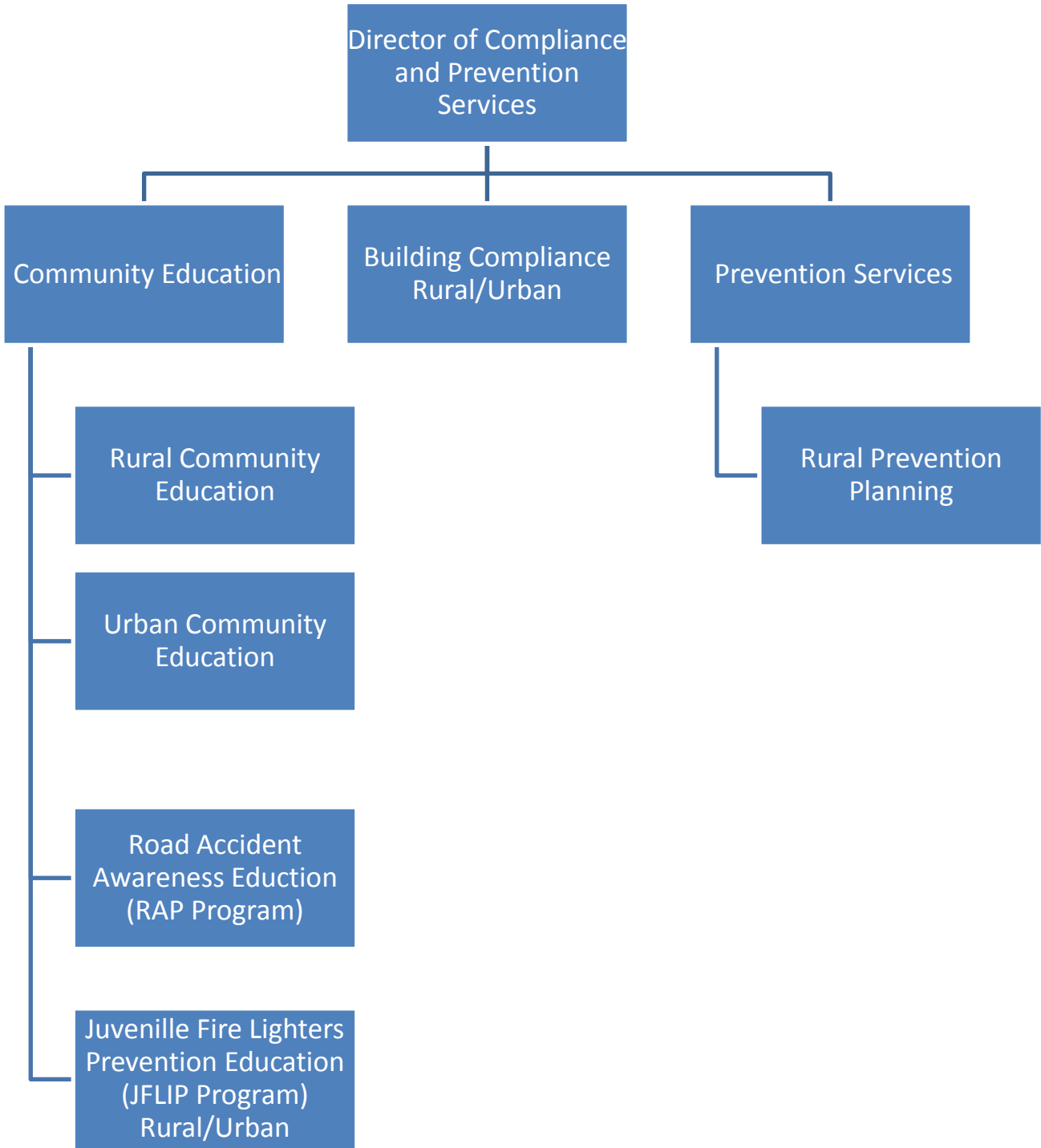
Commission and Agency Scope:

The agencies are accountable and responsible for the operational activities assigned to them under the Fire & Emergency Services Act SA 2005 and as directed by the Commissioner. Directors within the Commission are responsible and accountable for providing policy and services across all three agencies and are not assigned operational rank nor ESO alignment. Positions within the portfolios are permanent head count positions assigned to the Commission and may be filled either by:

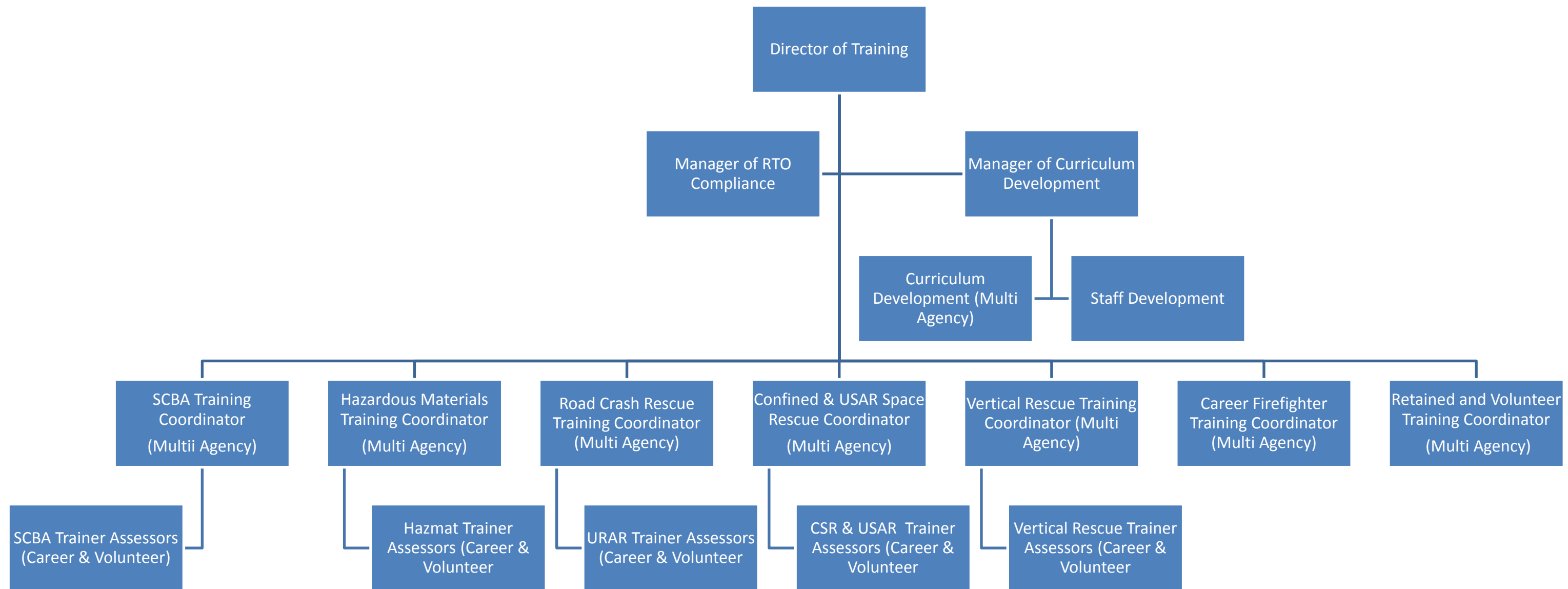
- Direct appointment (As an employee of the Commission)
- Secondment from within the Operations stream, which may or may not be on a rotational basis to promote professional development, and provide technical and operational knowledge. Operational Rank (If any) will be maintained but carry no weight in regards to the position being filled. Personnel seconded from the agencies not to be disadvantaged from promotion etc due to the secondment
- The commissioner shall retain the authority to choose secondment candidates after a recommendation from the ESO Chiefs.

Each directorate would then be filled with the positions and functions as appropriate to remove service duplication. See **Figure 2 Compliance and Prevent Example**

Figure 2 Compliance and Prevent Example



Vacancies filled via career personnel (Either appointment or on secondment from an agency)



Both the SACFS and SAMFS operate agency specific specialist training centres along with the staff to man these. With the SACFS and SASES operating some smaller regional based centres. A multi agency training approach was attempted with Road Crash Rescue, but without an authority to direct agencies to act in a particular manner in line with the Minister's intent the concept was not realised. SAMFS accepted the material but consultation with the UFU never resolved the issue of Volunteer Specialist Trainer Assessors delivering training to Career SAMFS personnel, with SAMFS never participating in Multi Agency training courses. The SASES could not resolve issues with its own team of Volunteer Trainer Assessors and likewise has not fully committed to the Multi Agency concept.

Operational and Specialist Training is conducted by a mixture of Career and Volunteer Trainer Assessors. Trainers and assessors for each specialisation can consist of:

- Career personnel (Either appointed or on secondment from an agency)
- Volunteer personnel
- A mixture of both

With the consolidation of all training functions of the ESO's into the commission, the SACFS and SAMFS training centre's would be disposed of and the construction of a new purpose built training centre that meets the needs for all specialist training conducted by SACFS, SAMFS and SASES be developed with the proceeds. This site would also house multi agency (Infrastructure and Logistics) fleet management and maintenance, and research development and technical services.

South Australian Country Fire Service Proposed Model

Scope:

The South Australian Country Fire Service is accountable for the management of emergencies as defined by the Fire and Emergency Services Act SA 2005.

Area of Operations:

- **Any area outside of the Adelaide Metropolitan Area up to and including areas that are adjacent to this area, which presents a risk to either the impacted or adjacent community from any rural type fire.**

These areas would be loosely defined as:

- North of the City of Elizabeth
- Any area immediately to, and adjacent to and including the Mount Lofty Ranges
- South of the City of Morphett Vale

Composition of Operational Services:

- Volunteer Firefighter
- Retained Firefighter
- Career Firefighter
- Managerial and administrative Staff

Service provision may consist of:

- 100% Volunteer personnel
- 100% Retained personnel
- 100% Career personnel

Operational service delivery may consist of a mixture or combination of any of the above as recommended by the Chief Officer of the South Australian Country Fire Service. All SAMFS Country Command services to be absorbed into the SACFS

SACFS Groups:

- Disbanded in their operational current form with all of their administrative functions undertaken via regional administrative staff supporting Brigade Captains
- Group Incident Management teams formed for the management of all major rural incidents

Regional Operations Commander's undertaking the duties of equivalency to a SAMFS Commander (former District Officer) to be employed in each SACFS Region working a rotating roster, to undertake the legislative operational roles previously performed by Group Officers.

