



**The Country Fire Service
Volunteers Association**

"Representing the interests of CFS Members"

Working together with CFS REGIONAL COMMITTEES

BULLETIN

18th March 2015

CFSVA CONCERNS JUSTIFIED

Issues and concerns raised by the CFSVA during the sector reform process are now beginning to emerge. The Minister continues to meet with individual groups in an attempt to quell volunteer concerns, however the CFSVA has noted some inconsistencies in information provided to volunteers and asks volunteers to be aware that when meeting with the Minister ensure that the Minister understands your issues and does not leave the meeting thinking that you are satisfied with the process, if in fact you're not.

The CFSVA Executive team is receiving an unprecedented number of calls from concerned CFS volunteers, and whilst we would like to allay your concerns reality is that your concerns are justified.

The CFSVA is extremely concerned that the term "agreed position" is starting to frequently appear in document coming through ESRO, and when raised with ESRO it is explained as the perception obtained during the round the state presentations was that in general people seemed to agree. The CFSVA has difficulty accepting this response as "agreed positions" must reflect considered decisions based on discussion and not just loose comments without follow up or debate.

The CFSVA is concerned that critical matters, with the potential to impact on the safety and protection of CFS volunteers and South Australian communities, can so easily be defined as "agreed positions" after such limited discussion. Further lack of comment does not reflect agreement.

The CFSVA first raised concerns in January 2015 in relation to comments made by the Minister which stated that Stage 1 of the sector reform would look at the corporate functions of the agencies while Stage 2 commencing in July 2015 would review the operational structure of the agencies. The Minister has maintained that each agency would retain operational independence, so what is the intent of Stage 2 - review of the operational structure?

The Minister's stated position is also at total odds with the scope of Working Group 3 - Workforce Planning which during Stage 1 will review the 6 functions of the corporate structure, whilst Stage 2 will review functional facilities of the "operational structure", and only at this stage will costings for the new structure be considered.

The CFSVA strongly believes that it irresponsible for Government to move forward with such a radical corporate and operational change without a business plan; costings; and the identified efficiencies that sector reform will deliver.

The Minister has also been unable to delineate between non-operational functions critical to CFS as opposed to non-operational functions which are across agencies.

The fundamental sustainability of each of the agencies is highly dependent on the level of non-operational support contained within each agency, and will reflect on the level of support CFS will be able to deliver to volunteers in the future. South Australia already has the highest volunteer to staff ratio in Australia, yet, Government is unable to define the impact of sector reform on this already unacceptably high volunteer to staff ratio.

Commissioner

The Minister remains firm in relation to the appointment of a Commissioner for Emergency Services which again reflect another of Government's "agreed position". The Minister is unable to provide any reason or justification for the appointment of a Commissioner as opposed to a Chief Executive Officer (as is currently the case) but is adamant that a Commissioner will be appointed by July 2015. The CFSVA does not support the appointment of a uniformed Commissioner and the creation of a fourth uniformed agency which will replace SAFECOM. SAFECOM staff are currently non-uniformed and provide support services to CFS / SES / MFS. Over time SAFECOM has become restricted in the level of support it has been able to provide to the emergency service agencies due to severe funding cuts by Government. The underfunding of SAFECOM was a key factor identified in the 2014 Ernst and Young report.

The Minister insist that the rationale for sector reform is to respond to the recommendations of the Holloway Review 2013. Recommendation 1 of the Holloway Review is as follows:

Holloway Review 2013

"Recommendation 1

That the MFS, CFS and SES be incorporated into a departmental structure under the direction of a **Chief Executive** based on interstate developments over the past two decades, which establishes this arrangement as the benchmark for the governance of Emergency Services in Australia. The MFS, CFS and SES would operate as separate units under the ultimate direction of the CEO."

Note: No mention of a Commissioner!

Working Groups

The ESRO office has now commenced the call for interested members of the emergency services to form part of a series of working groups which will meet over the next 12-18 months. Nomination forms and other relevant information relating to the working groups have been emailed via the CFS Portal. It is anticipated that the working groups will be formed in stages commencing with Standards, Legislation and Workforce Planning (phase 1 – corporate areas).

The CFSVA has written to the Minister reminding him of the SACFS Volunteer Charter signed by Premier Weatherill in April 2013. The intent of this Volunteer Charter is to ensure consultation with volunteers on all matters that might reasonably be expected to affect them, and on this basis the CFSVA has asked that CFS volunteers be included on all working group.

On numerous occasions the CFSVA has indicated to the Minister that CFS volunteer come from all professions and have much to contribute. This experience must be harnessed and not dismissed, and further to ensure that the emergency services thrive CFS volunteers must be the masters of their destiny. On this basis the CFSVA encourages CFS volunteers to apply to be part of the working groups.

Boundaries

Working Group 5 – Service Delivery Boundary/Zones

The CFSVA is concerned by the proposed realignment of Emergency Service boundaries in line with state boundaries without justification. This realignment has the potential to impact on the location of regional headquarters, group centres and CFS stations. Under the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005, the State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBCC) is the legislated body to oversee bushfire management. On the recommendations of the SBCC, and based on nature and the natural environment; local government boundaries; and areas of natural resources risk assessments are made and state bushfire boundaries are declared. It is inconceivable that Government would consider the shift of state bushfire boundaries for no other purpose than to achieve uniformity.

Select Committee

The CFSVA has been asked to provide evidence to the Select Committee on Thursday 2nd April 2015. A reminder that closing date for submission to the Select Committee is Friday 27th March 2015.

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