



"Structural Reform Fears"

Background

The SACFS is a 14,000 strong emergency workforce supported by a staff of 100 people, that represents over 80% of the emergency workforce in South Australia. The SA Government started a Structural Reform process in July 2014 with the view to create a new structure embracing CFS, MFS & SES. To this point, each of the agencies has operated autonomously with the linking piece being SAFECOM which supplied shared administrative & support functions to the three agencies. The reform idea was based on a report by Paul Holloway (2013) that highlighted issues with what was then ESAU (SAFECOM's predecessor) but also highlighted that the three agencies operated well autonomously & also when working collaboratively on the frontline.

Flawed Process

The CFSVA has worked tirelessly within the agenda & direction of the Emergency Services Minister to this point but has serious reservations about the process & its consequential outcomes in terms of support for & the functioning of the SACFS. Issues within the process include –

- No business case – Premier Weatherill & Minister Piccolo have no case – either financial or efficiency – for the reform;
- Poor consultation – the Minister has attended meetings around the state with volunteers & paid staff. At the majority of those meetings the most that was presented to the audience was a hand drawn diagram on the whiteboard with himself at the top, regions at the bottom & an empty inverted triangle in the middle representing a merged department to provide support to regions. With virtually no detail, no one could present an argument for or against the process nor offer constructive feedback;
- Despite having no business case or proper consultation the SA Government has moved to dissolve the positions of Chief Officer for each of CFS, MFS & SES;
- Lack of transparency – of the three major players (CFS, MFS, SES) we have seen opinion (submissions) from staff & volunteers of CFS & SES as well as staff from MFS. The CFSVA & SESVA have made their submissions public but there has been absolutely no comment publicly by the UFU & nor has anyone seen a submission from the UFU. The Minister advises that the UFU did not put in a submission.

Risks

The SACFS operates highly efficiently with a minimal budget, covering over 90% of the state, has over 80% of the state's emergency workforce & operates at one twentieth of the cost per head than its paid counterpart (MFS). CFS volunteers contributed conservatively over \$ 30M of labour to SA last fire season. As a result of a flawed process, the following risks exist –

- By meddling with a service that has proved its worth at Bangor last year & more recently Sampson Flat fires, there is potential to place SA communities at significant risk;

- Any action that erodes the effectiveness of CFS will likely result in increases in cost to run the service & cause further increases in the ESL as well as increasing risk to South Australians;
- By dissolving the positions of Chief Officer for each of the agencies (without agreement on the model & use of a flawed process) Premier Weatherill & Minister Piccolo are both compromising the identity of the CFS & destroying a well functioning organisation – without reason;
- A lack of transparency, particularly in relation to the UFU which has a national reputation as a hard union, is a significant risk to CFS volunteers. Recent interstate experiences (particularly Victoria) back this up.

Action

The CFS volunteers (via the CFSVA) are asking that Premier Weatherill & Minister Piccolo –

- Cease the Structural Reform process including the dissolution of the positions of Chief Officer until firm agreement & understanding can be reached;
- Produce a business case including costings, identified benefits if they exist, a workforce planning model for the process;
- Transparently provide all documents relating to the reform as supplied by the respective agencies;
- Ensure maintenance of the CFS operational structure as a single identity from the newest fire fighter to the Chief Officer;
- Refocus the reform as per the Holloway report to address the proper functioning of the administrative & support functions of the three agencies.

How You Can Help ?

We need to galvanise the public of South Australia & members of the SACFS to send a clear & direct message to Premier Weatherill & Minister Piccolo that in its current form the reform process is dangerous & stands to place the public of SA at significant risk. We ask that you write letters, lobby your local politician, galvanise community groups, spread the message via social media & make your point known on talkback radio.

Action is required urgently as the SA Government is moving rapidly to implement its flawed plan.

If there are any questions or you need help to help us, contact details are provided below.

Sonia St Alban
 Executive Director
 Country Fire Service Volunteers Association
 Email: sonia.stalban@cfsva.org.au
 Mob: 0408 133 349

Media Contact:
 Robert Styling AFSM
 Mobile: 0411 701 529