



**The Country Fire Service
Volunteers Association**
"Representing the interests of CFS Members"

EMERGENCY SERVICES SECTOR REFORM

CFSVA OFFICIAL POSITION

February 2015

Background

The CFS Volunteers Association represents some 13,500 volunteers across South Australia. The Association is well aware that the size and diversity of our organisation allows for and respects differing opinions. The CFSVA needs to promote, engage and resolve issues that impact or have potential to impact on volunteers and their operational capacity.

It is a requirement to respond to situations like the current Sector Reform based on opinion of the majority of our membership.

Process

The CFSVA agreed to participate in the Sector Reform process with an open mind and the intent of improving services to the South Australian community through the CFS and its volunteers.

It was made clear by the Minister at the first stakeholder meeting that "I want to conduct an open and transparent reform process". During the course of the consultation process, CFSVA representatives accompanied the Minister to all state wide roundtable meetings at which the Minister presented the concept and process. Two key drivers were identified by the Minister which had been selected by Cabinet and in turn would form the catalyst for endorsement by same. The identified drivers were:

- Respond to the Holloway Review
- Ensure financial sustainability of the sector.

To date the journey since mid 2014 has been very time consuming and challenging. The workload is considerable for a volunteer representative body with the situation changing constantly. Due to the nature of the issue, the situation has been difficult for some volunteers to follow and as a result, this document has been produced to clarify the current situation and then clearly communicate the CFSVA position.

The CFSVA actively and constructively engaged within the parameters laid down by the SA Government as represented by Minister Piccolo for the period June 2014 up until December 2014. In December 2014 it became clear that despite concerted efforts to influence the Minister as to changes in the base model being proposed, little notice was being taken and it

appeared that the Government was forging ahead irrespective. Throughout this period, frequent requests were made for more information but nothing was forthcoming. Through this same period, serious concerns were being raised by operational volunteers and pressure was building to take considerable action.

It was as a result of this position that the CFSVA moved to highlight the flawed process and actively lobby the Government to fix the process before proceeding. The CFSVA has deliberately chosen to remain in the process itself so as to maintain any potential internal influence.

Points that support the CFSVA view of a flawed process include -

- The stakeholder meetings have been conducted with no official minutes being provided at the conclusion of any meetings. There has not been sufficient record provided as a result of any other meetings either
- There has been no opportunity for any voting on any matters that have been raised within the stakeholder group. In the main these meetings have been more along the lines of presentations
- Equal input of information has not been achieved among the stakeholders as the United Fire Fighters Union have provided no input or submission, this in itself has compromised the reform process. The CFSVA has only obtained information in relation to the UFU position from information external to the stakeholder group. This information is published in the spring edition of Fire-fighter magazine 2014 and also in their Wordback publications. The Minister stated that this was to be regarded as just speculation from the UFU.
- There has been no discussion regarding Key Driver “Respond to the Holloway Review”. This review in its first recommendation suggested an “Executive Officer” & not a Commissioner. There has never been an opportunity to discuss the decision by the Minister to appoint a Commissioner or CEO. This has been included without agreement of the stakeholder group
- There is no demonstrated evidence of Key Driver “financial sustainability of the sector” (required for Cabinet endorsement). No business case has been presented supporting this or any other aspects including efficiency or functional performance
- Based on the lack of information and transparency, the CFSVA (as instructed by its membership) declined to sign a statement of agreement, prior to the Minister seeking Cabinet approval. Consequently, the statement of agreement was reduced to a “letter of intent” by the Minister. In other words, the Minister’s response to cabinet for approval was not approved by the stakeholders
- To further exacerbate the issues & despite the flaws as highlighted above, the Minister has continued to implement his model by announcing that the three Chiefs are to be sacked and a Commissioner appointed. An advertisement appeared in the Advertiser in January 2015 for the Commissioner’s position.
- Throughout the process, there have been a range of media reports that present contradictory or incorrect information on CFS business. The Minister continues to refer to AIIMS as the “operational structure” as opposed to “operational principles” that are implemented by the operational structure. Further, the CFS operational structure extends from the newest fire fighter recruit to the Chief Officer, with many staff playing crucial operational roles between the Chief and the Regions.

Position

Given the rapidly changing situation, the importance of dealing with the Structural Reform issue and the need to inform and engage CFSVA members, the CFSVA is taking the following position –

The CFSVA remains engaged in the reform process and submits the following:

- The current reform process cease and in doing so the Chiefs retain their positions, a Commissioner is not appointed and the current CFS operational structure is retained.
- An independent chair be appointed to the SAFECOM “Board” and the reporting relationship between the current Chiefs and “Board” be redefined to ensure equality and governance of sector resources and as a legislated protection mechanism for volunteers.
- SAFECOM be restructured as indicated by the Government commissioned Ernst and Young report in order to provide appropriate levels of corporate and administrative support to the sector and provides a level of protection and scrutiny for the agencies. This will include a review of the composition of SAFECOM and sector functionality including response of most appropriate resource, training, procurement, information technology, resource duplication (based on risk) and volunteer support.

Conclusion

Whilst the CFSVA acknowledges the need to review some areas of sector functionality, it also acknowledges that the SA Country Fire Service operates a very lean and efficient agency which has been identified as a superior working model when viewed on a national basis. Despite this, the association also understands that there is room for improvement internally within CFS and that those changes are best managed within the current structure and not by the SA Government dismantling the service with no plan or functional knowledge.

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