



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

**Working together with
CFS REGIONAL
COMMITTEES**

BULLETIN

16th April 2015

UPDATE: EMERGENCY SERVICES SECTOR REFORM

The CFSVA invited Minister Tony Piccolo to its General Meeting on Wednesday 15th April 2015. Prior to the Minister's arrival a briefing was provided to the members and delegates present which outlined the CFSVA's position in relation to the Structural Reform.

It was made abundantly clear that the CFSVA is not against reform itself but has issues with the manner in which the process is being managed.

The briefing also highlighted that under the current proposal potentially only around 12% of current staff (of 135) may be retained in the section of the organisation ranging from the Chief Officer down to the Region. Considering that a large proportion of the staff are also operational members, this would place the operational structure and experience levels under direct threat as a result of the Structural Reform.

Minister Tony Piccolo addressed the CFSVA General Meeting, and whilst delegates appreciated the Minister's attendance, it was unanimously agreed that the Minister did not adequately respond to questions raised by volunteers.

The Minister indicated that the aim of sector reform was to reduce duplication and re-invest resources into frontline services, and understands that the agencies are very lean, but is asking the sector to do things better.

The Minister referred to the Holloway Review as the catalyst for the appointment of a Commissioner, however the Holloway Review refers to a Chief Executive Officer. On further questioning the Minister suggested that the title was irrelevant and conceded that it was his decision to have a Commissioner. The position of Commissioner was advertised in February and the Minister is currently at the interview stage.

The CFSVA is of the opinion that, given that SAFER is an administrative agency, it would be more appropriate to appoint a Chief Executive Officer as opposed to a Commissioner as this would avoid the creation of a fourth uniformed agency. Without a ranked Commissioner, this then alleviates any direct operational impact on the CFS Operational chain (including all staff from Regional level up) preserving Groups and the capability of volunteers to do what they do best – fight fires and respond to local incidents.

The Minister indicated that there was no business plan or cost analysis as the process would be defined as it evolves, and that the working groups would come up with concepts that can be trialled and may be implemented. The Minister is convinced that the process will be tried and tested as it unfolds which he believes allows flexibility.

The CFSVA indicated to the Minister that based on this methodology that the process will be defined as it evolves, that no administrative changes, staff transfers, changes or appointments should be made until the working groups have delivered their recommendations. The Minister did not respond to this statement.

CFSVA representatives also raised their concerns at the lack of documentation, lack of a business plan, lack of identified efficiencies and lack of identified duplication of services. The Minister again indicated that this would be developed as the process evolved.

The issue of changing boundaries was raised with Minister and it was indicated to him that a review of the emergency service boundaries had occurred a few year ago, with findings indicating that the emergency services boundaries are effective and should not be changed. The Minister was also reminded of the vast pool of talent and skills amongst CFS volunteers as well as the number of reviews and other studies that have previously undertaken and should not be overlooked.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO STRESS AGAIN THE CFSVA DOES NOT OPPOSE SECTOR REFORM, BUT ASKS THAT REFORM BE CONDUCTED IN AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT MANNER WITH CLEAR DIRECTION AND DEFINED OUTCOMES.

The CFSVA has asked the Minister to halt the reform process so that clarity, transparency and definable outcomes can first be achieved. At present the massive uncertainty created within CFS is having a significant destabilising effect. CFS volunteers are concerned that this destabilising effect will in its own right have potential negative consequences for community safety in relation to ability to respond appropriately.

The Hon Holloway makes the following statement in his Review:

“South Australian can feel secure in the knowledge that their three ESOs comprise well-managed, professional, dedicated, highly trained and well equipped staff and volunteers who provide fire and rescue service and is the equal of any in the world.”

This is the Holloway Review that the Minister has indicated that he needs to respond to as part of sector reform. If the Holloway Review already indicates high levels of performance then why is the sector being progressed along the path of radical change, and potentially moving away from “best practice”?

CFS operates under Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Chain of Command which must not be compromised by unsupported trials which should not be initiated prior to establishing appropriate Terms or Reference, cost analysis and targeted outcomes.

This dysfunctional approach is seriously impacting on volunteers as well as creating issues amongst volunteers as speculation, innuendo and gossip run rife.

In March 2015, the CFSVA wrote to Minister Piccolo seeking clarification of the trial being conducted at Mt Barker CFS Brigade so as to factually respond to queries raised by CFS volunteers. To date the CFSVA has not received a response, which has only served to increase speculation and discontent amongst volunteers, leading to many volunteers questioning the transparency of sector reform.

The direction to the CFSVA by Branch Presidents and delegates at the CFSVA General Meeting was clear in that the Minister must immediately stop progressing sector reform until such time as an open and transparent analysis of the current system is undertaken and efficiencies and future direction clearly identified.

The CFSVA Branch presidents unanimously passed the followed motion:

“The CFSVA moves a motion of no confidence in the Minister on the basis that he continues to progress a flawed sector reform process, lacking in clarity, transparency and with no definable outcomes.

Through this flawed process the Minister has demonstrated a lack of respect for volunteers and community safety and has the potential to impact on the safety of South Australian communities.

The CFSVA calls for an immediate halt to the sector reform process until such time as an open and transparent analysis of the current system is undertaken and efficiencies and future direction clearly identified.”

Public Service Association

The Public Service Association representing SAFECOM, SES, CFS and MFS staff last week also passed a motion of no confidence in the Minister in relation to the reform process, and are seeking “an immediate return to meaningful consultation and negotiation”.

The PSA like the CFSVA support in principle an efficient and effective emergency services sector. The PSA further states that “a reform process should include an appropriate cost benefit analysis, followed by a comprehensive range of change management strategy”, and “that it is also important that any legislative changes be addressed prior to the implementation of any new roles”.

The CFSVA urges volunteers to communicate the message contained in this bulletin and to actively express their concerns to their local member of parliament. If we fail to act, and based on the manner in which the reform is currently being progressed, not only your identity as a volunteer may be lost but the function of CFS itself may well be compromised resulting in serious consequences to your local community.

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