



Submission on the Review of the Fire Service Act 1979

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Summary

AFAC was invited to provide a written submission in response to the Issues Paper released that explores issues that affect the delivery of fire and emergency services in Tasmania. AFAC is the facilitator and custodian of contemporary fire and emergency service knowledge and practice, for the benefit of our members and through them, the community. This submission highlights the work being done by AFAC in Australia and New Zealand that has direct relevance to the questions raised within the Issues Paper.

About AFAC

AFAC is the Australian and New Zealand National Council for fire, emergency services and land management. Our members support preparedness, mitigation and response phases of emergency management across multiple hazards and the transition to recovery. AFAC Council represents 31 member organisations, comprising 37,000 permanent, 6,000 part-time and 257,000 volunteer personnel. AFAC also has 20 affiliate members.

AFAC Doctrine

AFAC doctrine articulates collective emergency management knowledge aligned to our strategic goals. It is for the benefit of members and, through them, our communities. AFAC publishes a suite of positions, guidelines, frameworks, specifications and training resources structured in a way that enables its adoption and implementation by practitioners.

Publications developed by AFAC's collaboration groups result in relevant and timely member-consulted doctrine applicable across Australia and New Zealand. In specifying good practice, AFAC doctrine does not mandate action: while there exists strong imperative for members to adopt, implementation remains discretionary and member specific. Where adoption or implementation has not occurred, we would expect agencies and jurisdictions to be able to explain why not.

Reflecting Industry Activities

The legislation should reflect the contemporary role of fire and emergency management agencies to contribute to the development of community resilience through risk reduction for the hazards for which that agency has a legislative responsibility. By better reflecting contemporary practice, it would further assist in validating the delivery of the range of non-fire specific services being provided to the communities.

For example, currently Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) deliver a range of risk reduction programs from prescribed burning, to building community connectedness and preparation through their Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program, to working with schools to implement the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction comprehensive School Safety Framework.

Industry Professionalisation and the Role of Chiefs

AFAC agrees that the legislation should not limit the Governor's discretion to appoint the person whom she or he considers to be best qualified for the job. However, the legislation should provide some guidance to ensure that the person appointed is a person who appears to the Governor, having regard to their knowledge and experience of public administration and fire and emergency management, to be qualified to perform the role as described in the Act.

AFAC Council has endorsed industry doctrine in relation to the *Role of Chiefs* in the context of AFAC. This guideline does not detail the functions of positions, the specificity required of agency appointments, address leadership qualities or propose a formal succession model. It does, however, identify industry expectations for individuals filling these positions and identifies five key areas of interest: operating environment, key functions, interrelationships, preparing people for the role and how the AFAC Secretariat can assist. A copy of this doctrine can be provided to the Committee on request.

Emergency Medical Response and Emergency Management Arrangements

In relation to Emergency Medical Response (EMR) and whether firefighters have a role is entirely a matter of policy, rather than being specified in legislation. However, the legislation should allow for additional functions that fire and emergency services may perform consistently with an overarching responsibility for public safety, property and the environment.

AFAC Council endorsed a joint Guideline between AFAC and the Council of Ambulance Authorities in 2015 on EMR. This guideline informs fire agencies of what an EMR role could entail and details the overarching operational and good practice principles that member agencies should consider when planning and responding to incidents involving EMR. A copy of this doctrine can be provided to the Committee on request.

More broadly with respect to command and control arrangements it is commonly found to be less specific in legislation. It would be helpful to have some clarity around whether police are deemed to be the overall control agency of an emergency with other agencies performing the role for which they are technically qualified; or whether fire/SES controllers are the control agency depending on the hazard identified.

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) is the manager and publisher of the Australian Emergency Management Arrangements Handbook. The purpose of the Australian emergency management arrangements is to provide the Australian public with a high-level overview of how Australia addresses the risks and impacts of hazards through a collaborative approach to the prevention of, preparedness for, response to and recovery from emergencies. It is the authoritative and trusted source of knowledge of the emergency management arrangements in Australia, providing clarity on the nationally agreed emergency management principles.

As the handbook reflects nationally agreed principles, its primary purpose is not to guide emergency management in a response to a disaster. However, this does not rule out the potential support the handbook may provide in this environment.

Community Engagement and Warnings

Engaging with communities should remain an explicit function of fire and emergency services. AFAC believes it is important that the legislation also reflects that community engagement is a core role of modern fire and emergency services personnel, as most of the workforce capacity to deliver these programs will come from paid operational staff. The effective communication of public information and warnings is a critical element of emergency management, with the power to save lives. The legislation should be explicit about the responsibilities of fire and emergency services to issue warnings during emergencies and disasters.

AIDR recently published a Public Information and Warnings Handbook, a new Handbook in the Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection for which it is custodian. The Handbook incorporates current research and industry good practice, in addition to consolidating the information contained within Australia's Emergency Warning Arrangements and the Best Practice Guide for Warning Originators. A copy of the Handbook can be provided to the Committee on request.

Nationally agreed principles for the provision of warnings were first established in 2008. As part of the development of the Handbook, revised principles were developed and adopted by Commissioners and Chief Officers Strategic Committee (CCOSC) in May 2018.

These ten principles guide the development and use of warnings in Australia. They outline why warnings are important and how warnings are provided most effectively. The National Warnings principles will ensure greater consistency in the provision of warnings and information to the community during emergencies and disasters and can be provided to the Committee on request.

Fleet and Procurement

Lastly, in relation to the question of whether SES centrally manage and fund its volunteer unit facilities, its fleet and its operational expenses, AFAC is of the opinion it is always better to centralise funding, in particular fleet, equipment and personal protective equipment, which ensures that available funds can be directed to the most needed area. It also gives the SES the ability to forward plan and submit submissions for funding that addresses the greater needs of the organisation.

An outcome of this is that by centrally managing resources including funding, will ensure the standardisation of equipment across the organisation and ensure that these meet current requirements. Such a position should be well communicated and the benefits of such a change will deliver greater operational capability.

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