

To whom it may concern

Subject: The Introduction of a Rural Fire Service in WA

As a result of the Ferguson Inquiry recommendations, WAFarmers, Pastoralists & Graziers of WA Inc., State Emergency Service and the Emergency Services Volunteer Association have formed an alliance and which has met on many occasions to map a new way forward for Emergency Services in WA. The alliance groups consult on a regular basis with their stakeholders across WA. As a result, the groups have agreed on a simple, effective and economical structure for the future of Fire and Emergency Services in WA.

It is very clear from the Ferguson Report and numerous other reports in WA, that the existing model for managing Fire and Emergency Services in WA requires major reform in the area of bushfire management and natural hazards. A Rural Fire Service (RFS) and the restoration of the State Emergency Service would restore confidence right across the Emergency Management sector and provide recognition of the contributions made by volunteers in all aspects of emergency services at very minimal cost.

Lessons learnt from previous fire reports have been ineffective. Government needs to implement the changes recommended in the Ferguson inquiry, not simply leave things as they are at present. Without change there is a high risk of disastrous consequences for communities in the future.

Volunteer groups have a long history of working closely with governments to provide advice and cost effective changes for consideration in mitigation and structural change. On many occasions this advice has been accepted and used by government. The volunteers are and continue to be a valuable source of knowledge and experience in all aspects of emergency management throughout Western Australia, but volunteers are growing impatient with the slow pace of change as we progress towards another fire and cyclone season.

Community expectation is a major driver for all fire and emergency services in terms of their effectiveness, efficiency and public value. As the Emergency Management sector in WA continues to evolve, it is essential that the emergency services meet the expectation in an integrated and cooperative manner to ensure communities are protected from various hazards.

The problems that exist in WA do not relate to just one agency. All government agencies, local government and private land owners have their roles to play in bushfire management. If every agency committed to their responsibilities in bushfire risk management, communities in WA would be a lot safer from the impact of major bushfires.

Furthermore major reform changes will take a period of time to implement across the state. It is envisaged that a step by step process would be put in place to ensure the model is effectively implemented to meet the needs of all Western Australians.

Why Change?

The current Fire and Emergency Services Structure in WA lacks uniformity, commonality and consistency due to differing cultures and the number of fire agencies in WA. The existing structure of 124 separate fire services, Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW) and 122 separate Local Governments clearly does not work in many areas of the state, due to a myriad of reasons.

Since the development of the way forward for emergency services model by the alliance group, WA has had a change of Government with a new Minister Mr Fran Logan. Minister Logan has already

established a Bushfire Mitigation Summit in Mandurah and has agreed to consider all options in this complex environment. He is to be commended for this approach to reform.

In addition, the Economic Regulation Authority has completed a review of the Emergency Services Levy. Whilst all groups acknowledge this in depth report into the ESL, the modelling for a new rural fire service has provided some guidelines to potential projected costs of an independent RFS and a smaller version RFS similar to the old Bushfire Board. Whilst the group welcomes this information it is important to note an RFS can be set up under DFES for with shared facilities for an affordable figure.

The figures mentioned in the ERA Report are yet to be substantiated by any agency, but appear to be based on employing more career fire fighters and building more stations. The costs of these changes would have massive financial implications for the Government budget.

The alliance has developed a structure which is conceptually simple and cost effective but will provide significant improvements to the Emergency Service Management arrangements in WA.

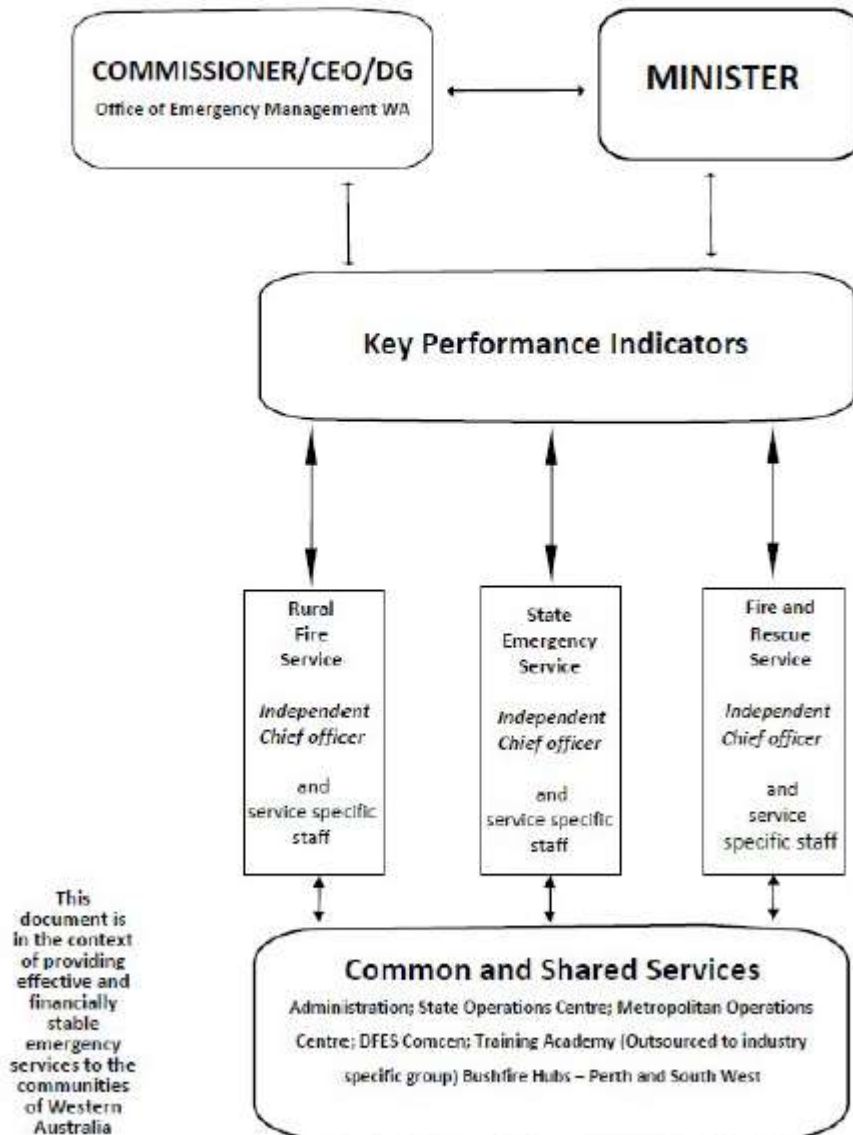
The New structure

1. Each of the three services, Rural Fire Service, Fire & Rescue Service and the State Emergency Service would be established on an independent basis with its own Chief Officer as Hazard Management Agencies. All Chiefs must come from their particular service background.
2. The Local Government Bushfire Brigades would be afforded an opportunity to opt into the RFS to reduce the number of fire agencies in WA and standardise all processes.
3. The Bushfire Brigades that opt in to the RFS would maintain their own existing structures, for example Chief Bushfire Control Offices, Bushfire Advisory Committees and the reintroduction of the Bushfire Consultative Committee. All BFBs would be part of the RFS along with the VFES and other volunteer groups.
4. The Local Government would retain their responsibilities for fire prevention,
5. All three services would have their own responsibilities through KPIs, that are transparent and will ultimately be accountable to the Minister,
6. The transformation to this new structure would cause little disruption, be on minimal cost and subsequently return the state to a community centred emergency management (prevention. Preparedness, Response and Recovery) that embraces volunteerism, community resilience, capability and capacity at the local level
7. All agencies would share existing facilities and administration: e.g. Cockburn Admin building, Training Centre, State Operations Centre, Metropolitan Operations Centre (major cost savings to the state)

Benefits to the State

- More transparency and accountability for achieving bushfire risk management planning in high bushfire prone areas across the state
- Interoperability would improve amongst all agencies (working together),
- Consistent policy, direction and accountability against agreed outcomes across the state,
- Added focus on accountability for bushfire risk management planning and treatment options of the bush in high bushfire prone areas,
- Sustainable and measurable focus and on volunteer development,
- Volunteer recognition and respect would be achieved
- Recognition and support for the existing Community Emergency Services Program(CESM)
- Less focus on response and more on focus on Prevention, Preparedness, and Recovery.
- Reduction of Fire Services from 124 to 3.
- The State Emergency Service volunteers would be provided with an opportunity to do what they know best and that is to manage numerous hazards in a timely and professional manner.

Concept Structure for Future Emergency Services



The financial implications for the state on the above model would range from 20 million dollars to approx. 30m, but this would be dependent on the cost of insurance for the BFB volunteers. Financial factors would include an additional 20 bushfire risk management officers over a three year period and conversion of a number of CESM positions to Area Officers and District Officers. Many of these costs could be absorbed under the current ESL funding arrangements.

Major reform in the WA Fire and Emergency Services Structure is needed to restore confidence within communities, respect and recognition of volunteer's knowledge and skills when dealing with hazards in WA. To do nothing will see emergency service wandering aimlessly in the future with more major reports.