

Submission to Consultation on the Tasmanian Fire & Emergency Services Bill

Circular Head Council is pleased to provide the following in response to the above consultation.

Funding Model

Of the two funding options proposed Council supports Option One, whereby all residential properties pay a fixed amount of 1%, recognising that the actual amount will vary depending on AAV.

Council notes that under this model different rates will be applied to other land classifications. We accept that this recognises that the fire and emergency response at commercial or industrial premises are often of greater risk or complexity than residential property.

Council also makes comment on the following issues of concern:

The need for sustained State Government funding for the TFES –

The Levy must not form the majority of the TFES base funding. The State should commit to appropriations in the annual budget to minimise the need for increases to the Levy.

Assurance on ring fencing of levy funds –

The Bill should contain provision that restricts the *State* from diverting Levy funds to other priorities.

Retention of the fee paid to councils to administer the levy

Councils currently receive a 4% administration fee to manage levy collection. This should not be removed or reduced.

Clarity on current SES funding

Councils currently fund SES Volunteer units via MOUs. It is our understanding that on becoming part of the TFES these units will be centrally funded, however the Bill is not clear on this point. The Bill must explicitly state that these MOUs will be abolished under the new funding model.

Clarity on SES asset ownership

The Bill does not clarify how Council owned assets will be treated as the SES units merge into the TFES. Circular Head Council owns the SES Shed and has provided significant assets to the local unit and other councils will be in a similar position. The Bill should recognise the need to address this appropriately and not leave it to the new TFES management to resolve.

The timing of any changes in the levy determined by Treasury need to be advised well in advance of councils setting annual budgets.

Section 50 of the Bill determines that the Treasurer will publish the AAV rate for each land classification by 31 May for the next financial year starting 1 July. This is quite late in terms of Council budget preparation. As much notice as possible will be appreciated.