



**Submission**

**False Alarm Reduction Project**

**3 November 2023**



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### **Who we are**

The Australian Institute of Building Surveyors (AIBS) is recognised nationally and internationally as the peak professional body representing building surveying practitioners in Australia.

### **Our Mission**

AIBS is committed to ensuring a safer Australia through continuous improvement and development of the profession of Building Surveying. The overarching objective of the Institute can best be summarised as follows:

*To achieve the highest standard of professionalism through Professional Development, such as education pathways and training, and Advocacy in representing the profession and establishing standards.*

### **Professional Standards**

The Australian Institute of Building Surveyors (AIBS) Professional Standards Schemes for Building Surveyors operates across all states and territories and is a legislative instrument that obliges AIBS, to monitor, enforce and improve the professional standards of members under the Scheme, thereby reducing risk for consumers of professional services.

The AIBS Professional Standards Scheme upholds the professional standards of Scheme Members, who are building surveyors, and ensures that clients have access to appropriately qualified and skilled building surveyor practitioners for representation and advice.

### **Australian Institute of Building Surveyors – Submission Principal Contact**

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## **Preparation**

This submission has been prepared in response to the request to provide comment on a consultation paper examining Tasmania Fire Service's False Alarm Reduction project.

## **Overview**

In principle, efforts to reduce the incidence of false alarm generation should receive widespread support, noting that frequent false alarms are associated with elevated levels of occupant complacency regarding the sounding of an alarm which can be highly detrimental in the event of a threat to safety necessitating orderly and timely evacuation. Appropriate steps taken to mitigate the public safety risks of false alarms is supported by AIBS.

AIBS notes that the need for detection and occupant warning systems in Tasmania exceeds that of other jurisdictions as a means of addressing brigade response times that are may be extended in some areas of Tasmania compared with other jurisdictions. This inflates the numbers of premises that are prone to false alarm compared with other jurisdictions, a matter not adequately addressed in the consultation paper. If additional brigade stations were able to be established to reduce response times, the numbers of premises that need early warning of a fire to be transmitted to the local brigade could safely be reduced.

AIBS also notes that Tasmania is relatively unique amongst Australian jurisdictions regarding the lack of choice for building owners regarding how detection systems are monitored. This can be used by some to criticise the Tasmanian Fire Service where it looks to increase fees, increase the numbers of buildings that require monitoring, or like measures that would cause preservation or growth in revenue for the Tasmanian Fire Service from the monitoring fees it charges.

AIBS believes that there is not likely an undue cost of this service and we have no view that the proposed changes have any sort of revenue motive, only raising this point because there are opportunities for this criticism from building owners and others owing to the opaque nature of fee setting and the like.

AIBS recommends that further consideration of the broader opportunities for fire alarm reduction occur in addition to consideration of the detailed comments on the consultation paper following.

## **In detail**

AIBS has identified a number of detailed points that arise in response to the consultation paper as follows:

1. Firstly, to reduce the number of False Alarms is to also reduce the number of operational training opportunities for brigade intervention. Although a false alarm these callouts offer an unpredictable opportunity for firefighters to review the passive and active fire suppression systems in a building and conduct familiarity training and review of building footprints.
2. TFS needs to manage the perceived conflict of interest within TFS when providing the following services:
  - TFS has a Statutory role in the installation of smoke detection and alarm systems
  - TFS is the only service provider for alarm monitoring charging a fee for the monitoring service
  - TFS is proposing to establish a further call-out fee for brigade attendance at spurious alarm calls.

Where the TFS has a role in installation requirements followed by connection to a monitoring service not subject to any competition and now possible further revenue stream by charging for brigade intervention to false alarms the potential for a conflict of interest is clearly established. For this reason, a FULL Risk Analysis and Economic Impact Analysis should be undertaken on the entire service delivery from Statutory, monitoring, and call-out fees.

3. Spurious Alarms could be reduced by minimising the number of buildings attached to the FireCom monitoring system.

TFS could contact building owners with “Non-Required Systems” connected to FireCom monitoring and advise of their options to remove non-required monitoring and revert to a Local Alarm. Many owners are not aware that monitoring is optional.

Some of these are legacy monitoring systems that TFS has no interest in disconnecting as it would be a loss of revenue to the bottom line of the service. (Perceived Conflict of Interest).

4. Undertake a review in consultation with the Director of Building Control and Industry of the **National Construction Code (NCC) Tas Appendix Section E** regulations that require the installation of Smoke Detection and Alarm Systems in a greater number of buildings than is required of buildings in other states. The need for these monitored systems in some circumstances is over-regulation and overreach.
5. If the TFS is to implement a service fee for False Alarms then the fee MUST be TRANSPERANT and be APPLIED EQUALLY and FAIRLY across the building stock of both the PUBLIC & PRIVATE Sectors.

This means whether the brigade attends the Launceston General or Hobart Hospitals or a privately owners Factory or Warehouse the false alarm fee applies equally no matter who the owner is. Further, if it is to be charged for 1 call-out the fee should be charged for 10 callouts. If the intention is to have building owners reduce their false alarms through penalty and subsequently those building owners eventually invest in having their alarm systems upgraded and or repaired to prevent false alarms then the fee has to apply across the board and no matter the number of callouts.

(Any such fee for false alarms invoiced to the Launceston General Hospital will break them over time)

## **In closing**

AIBS is committed to working with industry associations industry and key stakeholders to continually improve the building regulatory system throughout Australia.

Please contact us for any clarification or further information that may assist.