



TASMANIAN VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES ASSOCIATION

"As the representative body of members the Association will advance and support their interests, well-being and skills."

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Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigades Association second submission to the Fire Service Act Review

December 2021

As one of the most significant stake holders within the Tasmanian community in relation to fire and emergency response, the Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigades Association (TVFBA) provides this submission as additional comment to its original submission ([click here](#)) of September 2018 to the Fire Service Act Review. The TVFBA represents almost one percent of the total Tasmanian population, being those who are volunteer firefighters within their local communities across the entire state.

The TVFBA acknowledge and support the State Government's commitment, as per its media release of 22 April 2021, to retain the State Fire Commission and that funds collected by the Commission will continue to be 'ring fenced' into the future. The TVFBA recognise the significance of retaining the Commission as a statutory authority and view this as the key to the TFS' success on a national scale in terms of being a fully integrated fire agency with a comparatively modern fleet and leading PPE across the volunteer workforce.

Recommendations 1 and 2

The TVFBA generally support the integration of the senior management structure into a single entity as a mechanism to reflect current practice within the two individual organisations. The TVFBA support the retention of the two individual identities in terms of service delivery however as time progresses if there were broad community and volunteer support for a complete integration then PPE and Vehicle branding changes would be considered if the need were to arise.

Recommendation 3 - 7

In relation to the governance arrangements, discussed in further detail below, the TVFBA strongly submit that it is imperative for the future of the agency that the existing heads of power be utilised to better effect in retaining some form of volunteer input or oversight in the form of an independent statutory authority. The retention of the power of that authority provides not only significant volunteer buy-in to decision making but also enshrines a form of respect to volunteer firefighters across the state. While it is not contentious that the emergency operations element of the role continue to remain with the

Chief Officer, the overall control of the agency ought to remain in an improved version of its current mechanics. It is noted that as the largest and most diverse stakeholder group a variety of volunteers have the requisite skill base and ought to continue to be able to provide strategic oversight, with a sound volunteer understanding, at the Commission level from within the volunteer workforce.

The TVFBA support the Chief Officer retaining responsibility within the chain of command and for corporate governance with responsibility to report to the Commission, the Secretary and Minister. To that end the TVFBA believe that the present model, with better definition, is effective in the context of emergency management within a state service agency.

The TVFBA support the current separation of duties between Parks and Wildlife Service and Sustainable Timber Australia and the Tasmania Fire Service in relation to firefighting capabilities. However, the TVFBA do support addressing the gap in the current Inter-Agency Fire Management Protocol but note that such instruments need not necessarily be included in any future Act. It is acknowledged that the lead role in recovery is best suited to a whole of government response and the Department of Premier and Cabinet is the most suited agency to take that lead

Recommendation 8

While it is acknowledged that State Government have provided some surety to its position in regard to this recommendation, the TVFBA again reinforce the importance of maintaining the Commission as a statutory authority with a continued 'ring-fencing' arrangement.

Recommendation 9

The TVFBA in general terms support the continuation of the role currently undertaken by the State Fire Management Council.

Recommendations 10 - 25

It is acknowledged that there ought to be a broader definition in relation to 'brigade costs' under the current funding arrangements but it is recognised that there must be some limitation as to what those activities may be.

The TVFBA enthusiastically supports an improved funding model in relation to current State Emergency Service funding models and a consistent funding model for the Commission.

At this point the TVFBA notes that as the largest stakeholder we have conflicting interests in terms of our volunteer firefighters also being property owners. While the TVFBA support an improved funding model for the Commission as a whole, the TVFBA acknowledge that a significant number of our members are primary producers, small business owners or at least property owners who pay a premium based on their holdings which they are encumbered to pay rates on. As pillars of their local communities in providing emergency response in isolated and remote communities, the TVFBA is torn between advocating for improved funding to support volunteers and the significant burden placed on a large number of volunteer firefighters as individuals. To that end and after significant consideration of the Treasury options paper the TVFBA at this point in time are unable to provide any more clarity as to how the funding model ought to be improved moving forward.

Recommendation 26

One of the most fundamental proposals in the view of the TVFBA, which is strongly and wholeheartedly supported, is recommendation 26 which aids the recognition and future protection of volunteer members of the agency well into the future. The TVFBA would welcome the opportunity to have input into the draft legislation particularly on this point and would relish the opportunity to assist in the development of a Volunteer Charter.

Recommendation 27

In regard to the expansion of 'first responder' capability for medical emergency, it is submitted that in the event that volunteer firefighters are given responsibility as first responders to emergency incidents, there is a need for buy-in from the volunteer members themselves. An option may be for a brigade, or subset of a brigade, to opt in for first responder capability for medical emergencies, however the TVFBA feel it is important not to force this onto existing volunteer members who may not wish to pursue this capability. While we acknowledge that we already, by default, result in being first responders to events such as heatwaves and counterterrorism, we understand the significance in being acknowledged in that capability and it is imperative that volunteers are provided the correct training to deal with these type of events.

Recommendation 28

It is a significant matter of concern for volunteers currently that not all tasks that are performed, or indeed expected of them from the community, have a legislative basis to not only empower them in certain situations but also to ensure protection from liability. As recommendation 28 identifies, a contemporary Act will need to be enabling but in being 'principles-based' will still need to ensure that volunteers are protected from the political whim of any government of the day.

Recommendation 29

The TVFBA welcome a contemporary Act which will allow the conferral of power on interstate and international firefighters providing assistance in the event of a major fire. As mentioned previously the TVFBA does not fully understand the need for a head of power to develop protocols for relationships with other agencies. In relation to any increase in authority, such as that suggested of regulating traffic, such a function would need adequate training to the requisite standard and only utilised in the event of no Tasmania Police presence.

Recommendation 30

While the TVFBA do not have any concerns with this recommendation, the TVFBA would support an improve in support for the large number of volunteer fire permit officers across the state.

Recommendations 31 and 32

The TVFBA have no comment in relation to these recommendations.

Recommendation 33

The TVFBA in general terms support an extension of the existing head of power conferred on the Commission under the current Act in regard to any expanded functions as an outcome of the review.

Recommendations 34 - 38

The TVFBA support the notion of these recommendations on face value.

Recommendation 39

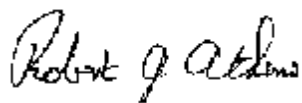
It is respectfully submitted that a clear and succinct chain of command is already in place under part three of the current Act and to that end the TVFBA are conscious of not eroding volunteer responsibility under the current arrangements within a defined brigade area. While it is acknowledged that there is a need for improvement in relation to escalated major events and within Incident Management Teams, the TVFBA do not support the current head of power being able to be changed easily based on political whim.

Recommendations 40 - 45

The TVFBA do not have anything further to comment in relation to these recommendations at this point in time.

Conclusion

As indicated above, the TVFBA have chosen not to make specific comment on the options put forward in the Treasury Options Paper due to the impacts some options may have on our membership in contradiction to others. In broad terms the TVFBA acknowledge the need for an improved and sustainable funding model that adequately meets the current and future needs of volunteer firefighters across Tasmania not only in the response capabilities but also in their ongoing wellbeing and improvement in basic brigade facilities.



Robert Atkins AFSM

State President

On behalf of the State Council of the TVFBA