



HUON VALLEY COUNCIL

HUON VALLEY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service (TFES) Reforms: Establishing the State Fire and Emergency Services Commission

29/01/2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Position Paper regarding the establishment of the State Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SFESC). Huon Valley Council welcomes the chance to contribute to this important reform process.

General Support for Reform

Huon Valley Council supports the below key aims of the reform:

- Establishing the TFES in legislation to bring together the TFS and SES under one organisational banner, whilst maintaining their individual operational identities, roles and responsibilities.
- Establishing the role of Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner (FES Commissioner) in legislation as the operational lead of the TFES.
- Establishing the State Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SFESC) as the statutory authority in charge of TFES, with a skills-based board.
- Establishing a volunteer charter in legislation.
- Replacing the existing Act and regulations with contemporary, principles-based legislation.

Huon Valley Council acknowledges that the current legislative framework requires modernisation and supports the broader reform agenda. We recognise that climate change is impacting the risk and hazard profiles for local governments and communities, where more frequent and extreme weather events are intensifying the risks posed by existing natural hazards. This increasing complexity demonstrates the necessity for appropriately resourced and coordinated emergency management, including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Governance Structure Comments

- We support the move toward a skills-based board structure, provided that adequate local government representation is maintained.
- Given local government's role in emergency management and social recovery, a requirement for local government expertise should be included in the skills matrix.

- The subcommittee structure needs to ensure local government representation is maintained.
- The proposed subcommittee structure should include clear mechanisms for incorporating local government perspectives in strategic planning and risk management decisions.
- The proposed subcommittee structure should include mechanisms to ensure representation of rural, regional and remote emergency service delivery is maintained.

Climate Change Adaptation

- The skills matrix should explicitly include expertise in climate change adaptation and risk management.
- The SFESC should have clear obligations regarding climate change preparedness and adaptation.
- The SFESC should adopt a “precautionary principle” leading to bold and decisive action on climate change adaptation and risk management.

Outstanding Matters Requiring Clarification

SES Funding and Asset Arrangements

- This Position Paper does not address the future funding arrangements for the SES.
- It does not confirm if the current council funding of SES Volunteer units will cease under the new structure.
- Clear transitional arrangements for funding need to be outlined.
- Provisions for the treatment, transfer and management of council-owned SES assets under the new structure need to be outlined.

Funding Model Concerns

As per Huon Valley Council's Previous Submission on the Draft *Tasmania Fire and Emergency Services Bill 2023*

- Council supports the funding of essential services through consolidated revenue, not levies.
- The proposed levy model places unnecessary burden on local government and ratepayers with the risk of council bearing unpaid levies.
- More consideration is required as to Council's role as levy collector, noting State already has systems in place through land tax collection.
- Many current council systems are not compatible with proposed changes and a substantial investment would be required for system modifications.
- Increased risk of council staff receiving abuse from frustrated ratepayers, increasing the risk to our staff's mental wellbeing and workplace safety.
- Additional administrative workload on Councils.

Emergency Management Unit

- This Position Paper does not address the Emergency Management Unit (EMU). Council would like to see the EMU positioned within the TFSE while maintaining a distinct operational identity separate from TFS and SES.
- Existing relationships with local government and emergency response agencies must be preserved and strengthened.
- Dedicated EMU staff and resources should be retained to maintain specialised emergency management expertise and capabilities.
- EMU's distinct role in emergency planning and coordination should be clearly defined within the broader TFSE framework.

Huon Valley Council supports the broad direction of the reforms while emphasising the importance of maintaining strong local government representation and involvement in the new structure.



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