



Tasmanian Retained Volunteer Firefighters Association

Retained Volunteers Proudly Protecting Tasmanian Communities

ENDORSED SUBMISSION

Relating to the

**Position Paper – “Establishing the State Fire and Emergency
Services Commission”**



Introduction: -

The TRVFA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on this critical subject for the future of our agency.

It notes the importance of this aspect however also has concerns regarding the “in isolation” context of this position paper.

This includes matters such as:-

- Instruments for the Commissioner
- Instruments of the “board” into the future

Notwithstanding that, there have been assurances by the Reform team, these will be similar to existing arrangements in the current act, and of course will be considered in the revised bill and regulations to follow.

The TRVFA understands, a draft “Bill and Regs” will be released post this aspect of the review for further consultation.

The introduction of Volunteer Charter, whilst sound, there is much evidence as exemplified by Victoria and the Andrew’s labour Government as to what it has done to 60 000 volunteers to suggest it wasn’t as beneficial as was first thought. It is another tool subject to the whims of government. Whilst the TRVFA would endorse such a process, its not blinded by the fact, it is subject to change and not always through a rigorous engaging process.

Statement :-

The TRVFA, fully supports the concept of “TFES” and the inference of real integration between the 2 key agencies of TFS and SES as a principle

General observations:-

Prior to providing direct feedback to the position paper there are some points the TRVFA wish to make.

Of concern is the following: -

- The constant referral to TFES as an entity as it stands now. That is not the case, nor can it be with the Act and authority, within the existing legislation.
- Similar in theme to above, the integration of TFS and SES into TFES without acceptance of the open and transparent cost to manage and run such a department.
- Related to above is the potential integration of TFS and SES into TFES without a sustainable funding model to support such an integration. This remains the core



issue and potential road block for a success integration approach in the view of the TRVFA

- As a result of above the potential for reverse engineering of Organisational structures and the like as the “funding model” does not allow for such blue sky thinking to create the contemporary structure and model the new legislation is aiming to address.
 - A backdrop of cost saving by the State Government and Department Secretary, hence FTE reductions within the broader DPFEM further compromising a clinical review of the future structure for TFES v improvisation ie the shuffling of personnel and potentially duties to “make do” with the new TFES agency. Are we getting the right people for the job? The TRVFA notes the limited exposure to TFS and SES directly, at tis time however, notes the impact on SLA’s potentially for those service providers from BES and the like.
 - Notwithstanding the assurance of future forthcoming drafts of legislation there are real concerns about what that might look like, the timeliness for that and consultation processes attached to that.

Position Paper Feedback

Background

The TRVFA have previously provided feedback on 2 other occasions – 2020 The Blake review and of course the 2023 Draft Bill including funding model. The TRVFA also actively participated in the working party established, by Minister Ellis, to search for a way forward with a “revised funding model” which did not manifest into anything sadly, nor has it been resurrected.

Many of the sentiments contained in those submissions remain current, however where that is changed or not previously covered, it will be contained here in this submission..

Those submissions both supported an independent Chair. our position remains unchanged with that particular matter.

The TRVFA continues to express real concern about the fact that out of the TFS and SES headcount including volunteers, this sits at ~7000, with ~6000 of those being volunteers, we see no real evidence of how this is being considered and what in the model legislation referred to / discussion paper, (other than the sub-committee) actually takes that into account. Let alone the board composition and or modus operandi of the board.

The suggestion in the discussion paper, based on the Blake revie and other references reflects on GBE’s referring to Accountabilities and Governance as precursors for effective



transparency and oversight, with an inference that is not the case now with the SFC, however, as already verbalised in a number of forums by the TRVFA, we are not sure that is something that the government or the GBE's could really hold against a current degree of credibility, namely TT Line and Tas Ports particularly. Evidence alone, in media would suggest there is significant room for improvement, a situation agreed to by the current Liberal Government, hence a review currently underway concluding late April as its understood.

Contemporary Board:-

The TRVFA in principle supports a Representative Skills Based Board.

The TRVFA would expect the following key stakeholders to be the minimum representative bodies on such a skills based board.

- TRVFA
- TVFBA
- SESVA
- UFUA

Notwithstanding the Discussion Paper suggesting a board composition of 3 – 8 the TRVFA would again highlight the difference in board function made up of a 80% volunteer v a traditional ASX type board looking at return on investment for its shareholders. A very different model in our view.

The TRVFA fully accepts the business acumen and assurance and governance processes required, as well as acknowledge the public purse that the board indeed does manage, however there is a significant point of difference in our view overall. Further commentary will be provided later regarding “skills based” board considerations.

The reference to sub-committees held no legitimacy with the TRVFA as they are not enshrined in any mandatory process hence may or may not be included by the board as was referenced in the discussion paper. Even if incorporated into the regs that was not seen to be binding in our view. The other matter was “for matters that affected” was the catch all statement, again another risk in terms of interpretation as far as the TRVFA was concerned.



Skills Based Board:-

As previously referred to, the TRVFA principally support a representative skills based board with the following considerations:

- A review opportunity to consider the “skills base” so that there are clear understandings of the criteria.
- Is the criteria complete? Are there factors of such a board that are not included or surplus to requirement. Is there something glaringly missing.
- Point 8 the discussion paper Attachment 1, The opportunity to review this ensuring representative bodies are not prejudiced to still meet the intent of a board representing >6000 volunteers. Has this attachment been considerate of that?
- The points above are also relevant for dot point 9 attachment 2 – Examples Skills Matrix.

Conclusion:-

On behalf of the TRVFA I'd like to express our thanks for the opportunity to provide such a submission. I'd also like to acknowledge the work Sophie Bannon has undertaken as well as access she has provided including attendance at our executive meeting.

I look forward to ongoing discussions and feedback

Yours sincerely

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State President
Tasmanian Retained Volunteer Firefighter Association

