TFS-SES CULTURE REVIEW REPORT

Building Positive, Respectful and Inclusive TFS and SES Cultures

A Review of culture within the Tasmania Fire Service & State Emergency Service

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Contents

Glossary of Abbreviations

Tasmania Fire Service (TFS)	The TFS is established under the Fire Service Act 1979. It is the operational arm of the State Fire Commission (SFC). The TFS is staffed by paid employees and volunteers.
State Emergency Service (SES)	The SES is established under the Emergency Management Act 2006. The SES is staffed by paid employees and volunteers.
State Fire Commission (SFC)	The SFC is the statutory authority that controls the TFS. It is a representative based Commission with membership prescribed in the Fire Service Act 1979. The SFC consists of an independent chair, the Chief Fire Officer of the TFS, and representatives from key stakeholder groups, including the United Firefighters Union (Tasmanian Branch), the Tasmanian Retained Volunteer Firefighters Association, the Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigades Association, the Department of Treasury and Finance, and the Local Government Association of Tasmania (with two nominees).
Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM)	A Department of the Tasmanian Government, consisting of The Tasmania Fire Service, State Emergency Service, Forensic Science Service Tasmania and the Tasmania Police.
Tasmania Fire and Emergency Services (TFES)	The intention to formally unite TFS and SES into the Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service (TFES) within DPFEM, with a skills-based Commission.
Critical Incident Stress Management Program (CISM)	The CISM's purpose is to lessen the impact of critical incidents, to minimise potential long-term effects and to promote a healthy, supportive work environment.

1. Executive Summary

The Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and the State Emergency Service (SES) are two of Tasmania's key emergency response agencies, responsible for fire, flood, and storm event management. With a rich history and a dedicated workforce comprising career professionals, volunteers, and State Service employees, these organisations play a critical role in protecting Tasmanian communities. Recognising the importance of a strong and inclusive workplace culture, a comprehensive cultural review was commissioned to assess and enhance the working environment within the TFS and SES.

A strong, supportive, and respectful workplace culture is essential for emergency services operating in high-pressure environments. With increasing climate-related disasters, evolving community expectations, and challenges in workforce attraction and retention, fostering a positive culture is not just a moral imperative—it is a strategic necessity. The review's findings and recommendations provide a roadmap for the TFS and SES to enhance workplace culture, drive operational excellence, and ensure long-term resilience.

The announcement in January 2023 to formally unite the TFS and SES under Tasmania Fire and Emergency Services (TFES) within the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM) marked a significant step toward a more integrated emergency response framework. This transition provides an opportunity to align organisational strategies, strengthen collaboration, and enhance operational effectiveness while preserving the distinct identities of both services. The ongoing unification process underscores the necessity of a strong workplace culture built on trust, respect, and inclusion.

The Review: Objectives and Approach

To ensure that the TFS and SES continue to serve the community effectively, the State Fire Commission (SFC) initiated an independent cultural review led by Elizabeth Broderick AO. The review aimed to gain a deeper understanding of workplace culture, focusing on:

- Diversity, inclusion, respect, and trust

- Harmful behaviours, including bullying and sexual harassment

- Everyday sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination and exclusion

The review did not investigate individual complaints but rather examined broader cultural themes. The evidence base for the findings and recommendations was drawn from engagement with approximately 1,250 TFS and SES employees and volunteers through multiple methods, including:

- A survey of 1,057 employees and volunteers (22% of the workforce)

- 140 confidential one-on-one listening sessions

- Eight small group listening sessions

- Six key leader briefings

- 24 confidential written submissions

- A review of relevant literature, policies, and organisational documents

1,057
employees and volunteers completed the survey

140
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24
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8
small group listening sessions

1. Executive Summary

Key Insights

A time of transition

TFS and SES are undergoing significant change, including the implementation of the Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service (TFES) Reforms, which will bring the SES and TFS together as the operational pillars of the new TFES, alongside other transitions such as mission changes (with a stronger focus on prevention and community resilience), and workforce changes (including greater diversity across age, gender and cultural background). These transitions have created both turmoil within the organisation and an opportunity for modernising culture, policies and practices.

Divides across different teams, ranks and regions are hurting culture

A strong workplace culture requires cohesion across all teams, yet there are clear divisions between career firefighters, volunteers, support employees, and different regional units. These divisions create inconsistencies in safety, inclusion, and overall workplace experience.

Persistent exclusionary practices and cultural barriers to an inclusive workplace

Despite growing awareness of the importance of inclusion, exclusionary behaviours and cultural resistance remain significant barriers within the TFS and SES. The data reveals ongoing challenges related to psychological safety, employees and volunteers feeling undervalued, favouritism, and a reluctance to embrace change. Looking specifically at gender equality: while progress has been made in increasing the representation of women, leadership roles remain overwhelmingly male, and cultural myths about women's capabilities persist. Women in operational roles are more likely to experience exclusion, disrespect, and barriers to advancement.

Workplace harm is a pervasive issue across the TFS and SES

⚠ More than one in five (23%) respondents indicated they had experienced bullying in the last five years, and just under one in six (15%) respondents had experienced bullying in the last 12 months.

⚠ Almost one in six (15%) respondents indicated they had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years and one in ten (10%) respondents had experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months.

1 in 5 people

23%

experienced bullying in the last 5 years

1 in 6 people

15%

experienced bullying in the last 12 months

15%

experienced sexual harassment in the last 5 years

1 in 10 people

10%

experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months

⚠ Different cohorts within the TFS and SES have very different experiences of workplace harm, and differing levels of confidence that change will happen, with only 31% of people confident that the TFS and SES will address bullying and 39% confident that the organisation can reduce sexual harassment.

1. Executive Summary

Key Insights

Leadership sets the tone but is inconsistent, including in relation to accountability

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping workplace culture, yet experiences of leadership within the TFS and SES are highly variable. While some leaders are recognised for fostering inclusion, collaboration, and psychological safety, others exhibit outdated command-and-control leadership styles that undermine trust and morale. Many employees and volunteers feel that the quality of leadership depends on individual leaders rather than a consistent organisational standard. Moreover, there is widespread concern that leaders do not effectively address workplace issues, including harmful behaviours, favouritism, and poor performance. Many employees and volunteers feel that problematic leaders are protected or promoted rather than held accountable, contributing to a culture of mistrust.

Psychological safety and trust in reporting systems are weak

A safe workplace is one where individuals feel comfortable speaking up about concerns, yet many employees and volunteers lack confidence in formal reporting mechanisms. Fear of retaliation, a history of inaction, and a culture of silence prevent people from addressing harmful behaviours.

Volunteer leadership and management challenges need to be modernised

Volunteers form a significant part of the workforce, yet many feel undervalued and disconnected from leadership. Poorly managed volunteer leadership structures, including brigade chief elections based on popularity rather than skills, create inconsistent leadership experiences.

Policies, training and reporting mechanisms need urgent reform

Currently, there is a significant disconnect between policy intent and lived experience of reporting (of harmful behaviour) mechanisms within the TFS and SES, with low confidence in the reporting process, and limited protections against retribution. Strengthening these mechanisms, accompanied by modernising the policy framework, and strengthening investment in training on workplace behaviour, inclusion and psychological safety, will contribute significantly to improvements in employee safety and experience.

2.Introduction

About the Tasmania Fire Service and the State Emergency Service

The Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and the State Emergency Service (SES) are Tasmania's expert emergency prevention, preparation and response agencies for fire, flood and storm events.

The Tasmania Fire Service (TFS)

The Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) has a long and proud history of protecting communities across the state of Tasmania. Since its origins in 1827, the organisation has evolved into a diverse and dynamic service, made up of career firefighters, volunteers, and State Service employees. At its core, the TFS remains committed to safeguarding lives and property through emergency response, fire prevention, and community education.

Today, the TFS operates as the frontline arm of the State Fire Commission, operating 365 days a year to serve and protect Tasmanians. From bushfire response and structural firefighting to emergency management and public education, the TFS plays a critical role in keeping communities safe. Collaboration is central to this work, with strong partnerships across Tasmania's emergency services, including the State Emergency Service (SES), Tasmania Police, and Ambulance Tasmania. The TFS also works closely with Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) and the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) to ensure a coordinated approach to fire prevention and bushfire resilience.

The TFS operates 217 brigades across the state, with 600 employees and approximately 4,000 volunteers.

The State Emergency Service (SES)

For more than 75 years, the Tasmania State Emergency Service (SES) has played a vital role in protecting and supporting communities across the state. Its origins trace back to the Civil Defence Legion, established during World War II, which initially focused on civil defence before gradually evolving into a dedicated emergency response and disaster preparedness service.

The State Emergency Service (SES) delivers essential emergency response services, including support during severe storms and floods, road crash rescues, and a broad spectrum of general rescue and community support roles through its dedicated volunteers.

The SES works closely with Tasmania Police in search and rescue operations and provides critical support during major bushfire events. As a key advisor and coordinator for emergency management activities, the SES leads initiatives such as emergency management planning, risk assessment, and the management of Tasmania's Natural Disaster Resilience Program and Emergency Volunteer Fund.

The SES operate 37 units statewide, with 38 employees and 759 SES volunteers.

A united TFS and SES

In January 2023, the Premier of Tasmania announced the intention to formally unite the TFS and SES under the banner of Tasmania Fire and Emergency Services (TFES) within the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM). While consultation on draft legislation to support the proposed structural change is ongoing, the TFS and the SES are aligned behind a shared vision and mission and a unified strategic plan. Much work is underway to unite the organisations in practical ways, as two of Tasmania's most valued emergency response agencies.

2. Introduction

> ❝ In developing and implementing our strategic plan, we are taking positive steps to unite our organisations and our people behind a shared vision, mission and the strategic priorities that we have collectively identified. That doesn't mean losing our organisational identities and purposes; it simply means making the most of the ways in which we know we can work better and more seamlessly together to serve the community, leverage new opportunities and achieve shared goals. ❞
>
> Jeremy Smith,
> Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner[1]

> ❝ As two of Tasmania's most trusted emergency service organisations, we are united by our strong and unwavering commitment to keeping our communities safe and resilient to the threat and impact of emergencies. ❞
>
> Mick Lowe,
> Executive Director SES and Volunteers

Tasmania Fire Service

SES TAS STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

Building a strong roadmap for the future

As the TFS and SES embark on the evolution of a unified service, the need to review and reset cultural expectations has never been more critical. Organisational excellence is built on a foundation of strong workplace culture, and for frontline emergency services, this is not just important – it is essential. Operating in high-pressure, high-stakes environments, the TFS and SES rely on high standards of teamwork, trust, and leadership to perform at their best. Beyond emergency response, both organisations must also uphold modern workforce standards and expectations to foster a positive culture which allows all employees and volunteers to use their skills in the service of Tasmanian communities.

With increasing demands from climate-related disasters, evolving community expectations, and the ongoing challenge of attracting and retaining a skilled and diverse workforce, a strong, inclusive, safe, and supportive culture is not a 'nice-to-have'.

It is a strategic imperative. Now more than ever, reviewing, strengthening, and aligning cultural expectations will both drive operational excellence and ensure that TFS and SES are future-ready, resilient, and reflective of the communities they serve.

A cultural review of the services at this pivotal time offers a valuable opportunity to gain deep insights into the lived experiences of both employees and volunteers. It enables the organisations to celebrate and build upon what is working well, address challenges proactively, and reinforce the core values that define the TFS and SES. By fostering a workplace culture that prioritises wellbeing, collaboration, and adaptability, the TFS and SES will be well-positioned to meet the evolving needs and expectations of Tasmanians, both now and into the future.

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1   'Our Strategic Plan 2024-2024', page 1

2. Introduction

Methodology

The findings and recommendations in this report are supported by qualitative and quantitative evidence obtained through engagement with approximately 1,250 TFS and SES employees and volunteers through a wide range of methods, including:

- An online survey of TFS and SES employees and volunteers, completed by 1,057 people (representing 22% of the collective workforce)

- 140 confidential one-on-one listening sessions, with a broad range of TFS and SES members

- 8 confidential small group listening sessions

- 6 key leader briefings; and

- 24 confidential written submissions.

In addition, EB&Co completed:

- A desktop review of relevant Australian and international literature;

- A review of all relevant TFS and SES policies and strategies.

All participation in the Review was voluntary and participants could choose if, when and how they engaged with the Review. These options were communicated through the EB&Co website, direct communication with TFS and SES employees and volunteers, newspapers and social media channels. Informed consent to participate was obtained verbally from each participant, and participants were informed that any information they provided would be anonymised before being used in the final report.

The Review did not investigate individual complaints or review past investigation outcomes, nor did its scope extend to making findings about any individual incident or allegation in this report.

Survey

An independent online survey was administered to all employees and volunteers over the age of 18 years to understand their experience of the TFS and SES workplace culture. The questionnaire was developed collaboratively by EB&Co and the Social Research Centre (a leading social research institution affiliated with the Australian National University) with advice from the TFS and SES. The survey focused on the experience of unacceptable behaviours relating to bullying and sexual harassment.

The survey was administered from 30 September 2024 to 11 November 2024. An invitation email, followed by four reminders was sent out. Employees received unique survey links and volunteers were provided with an open survey link to account for incomplete contact details. To address concerns about limited internet access and literacy challenges, all TFS and SES employees and volunteers were offered the opportunity to complete the survey with support via a phone call.

Internal communication was undertaken by the State Fire Commission and the TFS-SES Executive to encourage employees and volunteers to check for emails from the Social Research Centre and complete the survey. This included communication via toolbox talks, flyers, posters in stations and promotion across the TFS and SES social media pages.

1,057 employees and volunteers completed the survey

140 confidential one-on-one listening sessions

24 confidential written submissions

8 small group listening sessions

2. Introduction

A total of 1,057 employees and volunteers completed the survey, representing an overall response rate of 22.18%. All survey responses were de-identified and aggregated with the responses of other survey respondents to ensure the confidentiality of survey respondents. All analysis was reported at the 'group level' and differences between these demographics have been reported when the base size for each group was at least 30 respondents. Due to the low number of respondents who identified as non-binary, we are unable to report on their experience.

Survey Numbers

Survey Cohort	Number of survey respondents invited via email	Number of surveys completed
TFS employees	640	226
SES employees	42	29
TFS volunteers	3,567	643
SES volunteers	517	159
Total	**4,766**	**1,057**

Participants were asked for demographic information, and the survey responses were weighted to the employment and volunteer profile of the TFS and SES. This accounted for differences between those who completed the survey and the entire employees and volunteer group, with percentages quoted in this report reflecting the estimated weighted prevalence among all TFS and SES employees and volunteers.

Due to the small base of SES employees, there are very few data points where we can report on survey data specifically for SES employees.

Survey responses were analysed by characteristics such as gender, role and location. Differences in experiences which were found to be significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ have been reported in our analysis of the data.

Due to small sample sizes, it was not possible to disaggregate the data to understand the experience of some population groups including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Due to the small size of some cohorts for various questions, in some cases only the total figure has been reported throughout this report to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents.

Listening Sessions

Participants self-registered for confidential one-on-one or small group listening sessions through a secure online platform. Group cohorts were designed to include a range of combinations of gender, rank, employees and volunteers, TFS and SES groupings.

18 group listening sessions were offered but very low attendance at each group was recorded, with only 8 groups having attendees. In total, 25 people participated in group listening sessions.

An EB&Co Review Team member conducted each one-on-one and group listening session using a trauma-informed methodology. With the consent of participants, members of the EB&Co Review Team took notes during each session; all notes were securely stored. Notes from these sessions were then coded to identify themes.

Confidential one-on-one listening sessions

140 one-on-one sessions were completed, with people sharing their experiences of the TFS or SES and their insights for strengthening culture. The EB&Co Review Team spoke to a diverse range of people from all parts of the TFS and SES, including administration employees, career firefighters, volunteers and geographical locations. Sessions included people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, genders, and ages.

2. Introduction

Confidential written submissions

TFS and SES employees and volunteers were also invited to contribute to the Review through written submissions. Participants could either complete an online submission form or directly email their experiences, observations, and recommendations to the EB&Co Review Team. A total of 24 written submissions were received, offering valuable perspectives and insights.

Leader Briefing Sessions

A total of 6 senior leaders participated in one-on-one meetings during the establishment phase of the review. The purpose of these sessions was to more deeply understand the context in which the TFS and SES operates and to inform the development of the Review methodology.

Desktop review of literature

The EB&Co Review Team comprehensively analysed relevant literature, guidelines, and policies, incorporating research specific to the emergency services sector.

Review of policies and other organisational information

The EB&Co Review Team conducted a thorough analysis of relevant TFS and SES policies, strategic plans, data, and other organisational materials. A substantial volume of information was reviewed, reflecting the complexity and breadth of operations.

Under 18 Review engagement

The Review also sought to include the TFS under 18 cohort of juniors, cadets and active under-18s (in total, a group of approx. 318 young people). There was considerable consultation and research undertaken into best practice in engaging young people, including advice from the Tasmanian Child Advocate.

A child behaviour specialist was appointed to engage with under-18s who wanted to take part in the Review. An engagement strategy was designed for parents/caregivers and young people, to provide a safe and welcoming way for young people to share their experiences and feedback.

Easy-to-read communications, including an invitation to participate and a fact sheet, were specifically designed for young people. While the original plan included co-designing these materials with under-18s through a focus group, there was no uptake for this opportunity, and engagement through confidential conversations was minimal. Despite the low response, the project adopted a valuable best practice methodology for engaging this cohort, providing a strong foundation for future initiatives the TFS and SES may consider.

3. Why safety and inclusion are essential in the workplace

A safe and inclusive workplace culture is not simply a 'nice to have'. It is a strategic asset that drives performance, innovation, and employee wellbeing. Research consistently demonstrates that organisations prioritising safety and inclusion are better positioned to attract and retain talent, enhance innovation and productivity, and improve overall organisational success.

Reaping these rewards requires attention to diversity, inclusion and psychological safety.

For the TFS and SES, this means:

- having a workforce (including paid employees and volunteers) which reflect their communities – that is, diverse in "inherent characteristics" such as gender, race, age, sexual orientation, physical and cognitive abilities, and nationality, and with different life experiences, skills and knowledge

- having a culture which creates a sense of belonging for everyone (inclusion); and

- having a culture which encourages people to speak up and share their perspectives, insights and concerns, take risks and admit mistakes (psychological safety).

The strategic impact of a safe and inclusive workplace

Improved overall performance

There is a significant organisational dividend associated with safe and inclusive workplaces.

Organisations with a safe and inclusive workplace culture experience lower rates of absenteeism, fewer workplace injuries, and reduced workers' compensation claims.[2]

Conversely, harmful and disrespectful behaviours undermine team and organisational performance by eroding trust, reducing collaboration and impeding effective communication. When individuals engage in harmful behaviours, it creates an atmosphere that is more likely to be characterised by conflicts and decreased morale, which negatively impacts both individuals and teams by increasing stress and reducing job satisfaction.[3] This can result in a breakdown of team cohesion and team performance, as members become less willing to contribute ideas, suggest improvements or support each other.[4]

Inclusive teams also improve performance by up to 30% in high-diversity environments, contributing to enhanced productivity and morale.[5]

When teams consist of individuals with varied backgrounds and thought processes, they bring unique tools to analyse and approach problems, leading to more innovative solutions. This advantage is especially evident in complex scenarios, where the challenges require creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability— traits that are amplified in diverse groups.[6] Unlike simple problems, which may only need efficiency and expertise, complex problems like climate change, systemic inequality, or technological innovation demand a mosaic of insights and approaches.

Increased innovation and agility

A diverse and inclusive culture fosters a work environment where different perspectives are valued, leading to enhanced problem solving and innovation. Demonstrating how inclusion contributes to organisational agility, research by Deloitte found that inclusive organisations are six times more likely to innovate and adapt quickly.[7]

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2   Ibid.
3   Pauline Schilpzand, Irene De Pater and Amir Erez, 'Workplace incivility: A review of the research and directions for future research' (2016) 42(1) Journal of Management 171–198.
4   Christine Pearson, Lynne Andersson and Christine Porath, 'Workplace Incivility' in Benjamin Schneider and Karen M Barbera (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Climate and Culture (Oxford University Press, 2020).
5   Gartner, Diversity and Inclusion Build High-Performance Teams (2020). https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/diversity-and-inclusion-build-high-performance-teams
6   Page, Scott E. The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.
7   Deloitte, The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution: Eight Powerful Truths (2018). https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/deloitte-review/issue-22/diversity-and-inclusion-at-work-eight-powerful-truths.html

Conversely, when workplaces lack diversity, they risk falling into the trap of groupthink, where individuals in a homogenous group prioritise harmony and consensus over critical evaluation and innovation. Groupthink can lead to poor decision-making, hindered creativity, ineffective problem solving, decreased employee engagement and organisational stagnation.[8]

Improved employee engagement and retention

Inclusive and psychologically safe workplaces create a sense of belonging. Resulting in improved employee satisfaction and retention, reduced staff turnover, and greater attraction and retention of talent.[9]

Better decision-making

A safe and inclusive culture encourages open dialogue, reducing the risks of groupthink and enhancing decision-making quality. Research indicates that diverse teams are more likely to re-examine facts, remain objective, and achieve better outcomes.[10] As a result, diverse and inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87% of the time, demonstrating the value of diverse perspectives in strategic processes.[11] When employees feel safe to express their views without fear of discrimination or retaliation, organisations benefit from more effective and strategic decision-making.

Employee wellbeing

Workplaces with high levels of psychological safety and a strong culture of inclusion and belonging, enable individual employees to thrive. Research shows that a positive, healthy culture delivers significant benefits for individual employees, including improved mental health, and enhanced resilience.[12] This in turn is associated with higher job satisfaction and increased participation in the workplace.[13]

Culture is critical in the emergency services

A safe and inclusive workplace culture is essential in any organisation, but in emergency services, it is critical.

Nationally, the landscape of emergency services is undergoing a significant transformation. Traditional roles of firefighters and emergency responders are rapidly evolving, expanding beyond immediate incident response to encompass a broader spectrum of prevention, preparedness, incident management, and recovery[14]. This shift is a strategic pivot that necessitates new and diverse skills and capabilities within the workforce. To remain effective and resilient, emergency services must adapt to these new demands by building teams that are as diverse and capable as the challenges they face.

However, current workforce representation within the emergency services sector tells a different story. In 2021, women made up only 25% of the overall emergency services workforce.[15] This gender imbalance highlights a critical gap in how the sector attracts, retains, and advances diverse talent. The ability to draw from the full spectrum of available talent is crucial for robust workforce planning and sustainability, particularly in an environment where the roles and responsibilities of emergency personnel are diversifying.

The strategic case for change extends beyond workforce planning. As outlined above, research consistently shows that inclusion and diversity drive enhanced organisational performance. When emergency services reflect the communities they serve, they are better positioned to build trust, foster inclusive relationships, and strengthen community resilience—core objectives for today's TFS and SES.

8   Sunstein, C. R., & Hastie, R. (2015) "*Wiser: Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter*" (Harvard Business Review Press)

9   Diversity Council of Australia 2022 *Mapping the State of Inclusion and Mental Health in the Australian Workforce*. The state of inclusion and mental health – Diversity Council (dca.org.au)

10 Harvard Business Review, *Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter* (2016). https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter

11 Korn Ferry Institute (2018) T*he 5 Disciplines of Inclusive Leaders, Unleashing the Power of All of Us*.chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://chairs.provost.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs6016/files/downloads/Korn-Ferry-The-Inclusive-Leader-5-Disciplines.pdf

12 Diversity Council of Australia 2022 *Mapping the State of Inclusion and Mental Health in the Australian Workforce*. The state of inclusion and mental health – Diversity Council (dca.org.au)

13 ComCare Australia 2023 *The Benefits of Safe and Healthy Workplaces*, Australian Government 2023. Benefits of safe and healthy work | Comcare

14 *Effective Diversity in Emergency Management Organisations: The long road* (2019) Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub. https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-april-2019-effective-diversity-in-emergency-management-organisations-the-long-road/

15 *Emergency service workers (2025)* Jobs and Skills Australia. https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-and-industry-profiles/occupations/441211-emergency-service-workers

The key to this transformation lies in creating a workplace culture that champions respect, encourages a wide range of perspectives, and ensures everyone feels valued and supported. This involves not only revising recruitment and talent development strategies but also embedding inclusive leadership and fostering a psychologically safe work environment. It means challenging outdated norms, dismantling barriers to entry for underrepresented groups, and creating pathways to leadership for diverse talent. By committing to this cultural shift, emergency services can unlock new potential within their teams, enhance service delivery, and build a legacy of trust and excellence within the communities they serve.

Positive perceptions of current culture

The group and individual listening sessions, along with the results from the online survey, identified that there are clear strengths in the current workplace culture, together with several areas that require strengthening.

This chapter draws on the voices and lived experiences of employees and volunteers of the TFS and SES. It identifies those aspects of the culture which are positive and can be built upon, as well as examining those areas requiring attention. The insights and findings contained in this chapter provide a strong evidence base for the recommendations that follow.

Collective goals, shared purpose

At the heart of the TFS and SES is a deep and unwavering commitment to community safety. For those who serve – whether as career firefighters, employees or volunteers, – there is a collective purpose that drives their work every day: protecting Tasmanians from fire and emergencies both now and into the future. This shared motivation can create a strong sense of belonging and connection. As a community-based organisation, the service does not just protect people—it is an integral part of the lives of those it serves.

One of the most positive aspects of my role is the shared motivation within TFS to build safer communities. There's a collective sense of purpose around creating awareness and safety, which keeps me energised.

It is a community-based organisation. We are here for the community. We are also here for ourselves, we meet people, we learn things. You meet lots of very interesting people.

We are there for one thing. We are there to help the state.

For many, this shared purpose is what makes working within the TFS and SES so fulfilling. Employees and volunteers alike speak of the pride they feel in their roles, knowing their efforts directly contribute to saving lives and strengthening resilience across the state. The clarity of purpose within TFS and SES—particularly in bushfire prevention and response, and broader emergency response—helps focus efforts, ensuring that every person understands the impact of their contribution.

A big part of my coming to the TFS was the focus and the clear objective related to community safety and everything related to that. In my previous role, purpose was torn in lots of directions. Here, I really appreciate the focus on bushfire prevention. There's a sense of focus. That's a big bonus. It makes doing your job much easier. You're working on good things, clear community benefit.

I have a very clear sense of purpose and have always had that in my career and that's because of my commitment to public service.

"It's a lot to ask 5,000 volunteers to respond and save lives and communities. It's a very big credit to the organisation to be able to maintain that level of volunteering."

3. Why safety and inclusion are essential in the workplace

The power of connection

Alongside a deep sense of pride and purpose in serving the community, review participants also highlighted the strong connections within teams, brigades and units, and the ethos of looking out for one another. This sense of camaraderie goes beyond teamwork. It is a fundamental part of the fabric of these services.

These bonds were particularly evident in challenging and high-pressure situations, where trust, support, and resilience are essential. Participants spoke about the brotherhood and sisterhood that develops within the service, creating a unique environment where teammates[16] become more than just co-workers – they become family. This culture of mutual care and respect is a defining strength of both organisations, reinforcing the strong values that underpin their mission to protect the Tasmanian community.

> There is a real sense of looking out for each other and a dedication to service amongst us. There's a very strong sense of responsibility for the person next to you. We trust each other with our lives.

Other members are supportive and no ridiculing of anyone for not knowing the answer. Everyone is helpful. I have not had a bad experience with any other unit or within my own unit. Plenty of permission to ask questions and great intent to support.

Recognition that culture is changing

There is growing recognition among TFS and SES people that the culture within both organisations is evolving, and a new generation of leaders are emerging - leaders who are collaborative, open, and committed to transformation. This shift is reflected in a move away from rigid, hierarchical structures towards a culture that values psychological safety, learning, and adaptability.

Where once mistakes were feared, there is now greater acceptance of growth and development, fostering a more inclusive and resilient workforce.

> Transformational leadership is now visible in the next generation that's coming through. There's a commitment to diversity, transformation, and that's great. We're beginning to break through that hierarchical structure so you can make mistakes, focus on psychological safety, etc.

I feel good about the journey we've been on with regards to changing a blokey culture. I feel proud of how we've handled the challenge.

There's an acknowledgement that we have a problem. In the past I used to see really damaging stuff and I would hear leaders go on about how great we were. Our bosses shouldn't be just cheerleaders.

I am starting to see that old way change. I think that is a positive thing.

I have been encouraged to access mental health services because of the stress of my job. That's a positive. That wouldn't have happened years ago.

The TFS has taken a massive step in the last five or six years. We've had a lot of leadership changes. It all started with the merger with DPFEM. Now there's one corporate entity—police, firefighters, SES, and that has been a massive boost. There have been some bumps in the road but it's improving.

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16 'Teammates' or colleagues refers to both employees and volunteers, except where the Review specifically refers to either group.

Positive support for mental health and wellbeing

The implementation of best practice mental health and wellbeing support within the TFS and SES received notable positive feedback through the Review, highlighting its significant impact on employees and volunteers. There has been a clear shift towards openness and acceptance of mental health support, particularly among newer employees and volunteers. This change reflects a growing cultural acceptance and understanding of the importance of mental and emotional wellbeing in high-stress environments.

> *There has been a growing openness to mental health support, especially among the newer staff.*

> *The Wellbeing Support team has been excellent in implementing their policies.*

> ❝ **The initiatives taken by the Wellbeing Support team have led to real change.** ❞

Many Review participants acknowledged the real, positive change driven by the initiatives introduced by the Wellbeing Support team. Support services, including access to a psychologist, helped them regain confidence and improve their overall mental health. The ability to confront the issue directly, supported by the Wellbeing Support Services, made a meaningful difference. The Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) program, in particular, has been identified as a standout element of the mental health support framework.

> *Although I didn't report the bullying formally, Wellbeing Support Services helped me gain confidence to work through the situation.*

> *One of the strongest aspects of the service is the support available for mental and emotional wellbeing. The Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team, for example, has been exceptional. I've received numerous follow-up calls from them, which reassures me that support is there when I need it.*

> *My experience with the Wellbeing Support team has been excellent. The initiatives taken by the Wellbeing Support team have led to real change.*

Progress made, but work to do

Despite an overwhelming sense of purpose and pride in the TFS and SES, and a broad acknowledgment of cultural shifts within the services, participants' lived experiences varied widely. The Review's qualitative and quantitative research revealed several recurring themes, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges within the organisational culture.

Psychological safety

Overall, few participants within TFS and SES used the term psychological safety or were familiar with the language. For the purposes of this Review, the team used the following definition: *"a shared belief held by members of a team that it's OK to take risks, to express their ideas and concerns, to speak up with questions, and to admit mistakes — all without fear of negative consequences"*[17].

For the most part, participants in the Review felt that psychological safety is highly variable, and often dependent on the tone set by the local leader. They described an environment in which they feared retribution for instigating courageous conversations, acting as a bystander or upstander, or admitting mistakes. Many felt that the organisation has significant work to do to strengthen belonging and safety.

> ❝ There's lots of fear about making mistakes currently and that means there's not enough psychological safety. There's a fear that if I speak up, I won't progress in the organisation. ❞

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17   Gallo, A. "What is Psychological Safety?" Harvard Business Review, 16 February 2023. https://hbr.org/2023/02/what-is-psychological-safety

We need to be better bystanders. I've definitely let things go cause of not wanting to upset people, but we all have to get better at calling it out. And then it will have a much faster impact.

People just think that they're jokes, and they don't realise that it's sensitive and has an effect. Some people are not too sensitive. I'm not saying people should be walking on eggshells. Their sense of humour is a problem.

[Othering] doesn't make people feel good. People don't perform their best – you get more out of people when they feel included. You get better outcomes when people feel safe to show up. There is a line to be walked here, there is a reason we are a paramilitary. We need one plan. But when not under fire, we need everyone to feel safe to speak up and see how we can do better. Emergency is not a democracy for a reason.

Why so much turnover—generational group of chiefs that are retiring and lots of new guys coming through and haven't the experience and knowledge. Those with experience get shut down. I walk away from meetings every week disappointed by the interactions—rude, aggressive, adversarial and people demanding respect without having earned it.

" **(When people get jumped on for raising a question), they won't speak up in future. If you're not able to voice your opinion, that's not acceptable.**

When I first started, there was intimidation because I was quieter from quite a few people, and I sort of accepted it. I don't go to work feeling unsafe, but I do feel at times that I've been held back in ways because I'm more of an introvert. There have been a few officers who have been quite aggressive to me. I've been ignored by (people). I've tried to address it with management, but they've blown it off.

Several people spoke about being largely or fully disconnected from the TFS and SES in response to what they perceived as poor culture and limited commitment from the organisation to address safety.

I also don't show up anymore. I'm going to call outs but avoiding trainings and they generally just chit chat and "talk crap". I enjoy the call outs.

Exclusionary practices are holding back TFS and SES culture

Participants in the Review highlighted a persistent "boys' club" mentality within the TFS and SES, contributing to exclusionary practices and a culture of manipulation and division. This sentiment was echoed by all genders, demonstrating how the 'in-group vs. out-group' dynamic affects various demographics. Participants described an environment where those within the inner circle received opportunities for training, advancement, and inclusion, while those on the outside faced isolation, limited opportunities, and a lack of support.

There's a lot of history of people being progressed because of how long they've been there. It felt like TFS is still stuck in that approach and like they are twenty years behind. Inevitable progression because of length of service. Some people have been put into positions that hold the organisation back.

Across the TFS organisation there is an in group and an out group. If you are in the in group, great. People in the out group miss out on opportunities – training, driving trucks. Once you are not in the 'in' crowd, it is not tenable to be in the brigade.

This exclusionary culture was often justified by historical norms and a lingering belief in operational experience as the sole measure of value. Many participants felt that while overt bullying has decreased over the years, subtle forms of discrimination and bias have taken its place. Favouritism, nepotism, and an 'old school' approach to leadership have contributed to a culture where decisions are often made by a select few, leaving others feeling disempowered and disconnected.

Some women and men commented that this places significant pressure on women to behave in a particular way in order to 'fit in', with many women reporting feeling a lot of pressure to be 'one of the boys':

If you are a little bit different than the men, it is hard to fit in.

❝ If you are basically not like them (uniformed firefighters), they place no value on you (despite the qualifications you might have). ❞

There is very little diversity in thinking, and the culture remains dominated by an "alpha male" mentality. Any individual perceived as slightly feminine is often marginalised or bullied, and there's a need to address this to foster a more inclusive environment.

The concentration of power, particularly in Hobart, has intensified feelings of exclusion among those in other regions.

Many participants shared experiences of being overlooked for promotions, witnessing unfair advancement based on tenure rather than merit, and feeling silenced when challenging the status quo.

The influence of mateship and nepotism

While mateship was seen as a strength, for some it had become a double-edged sword. While camaraderie and close bonds within the TFS and SES fostered a supportive and resilient environment, there was a 'shadow' side where this mateship veered into nepotism and favouritism. For some, bending the rules seemed commonplace – decisions appeared to be influenced not by merit or fairness but by personal connections and loyalty. This culture of 'looking after your own' led to perceptions of a 'boys' club', where opportunities and promotions often felt like a popularity contest, and those outside the inner circle struggled to be heard or advance.

❝ Bending the rules does happen for some people and for some decisions. For some people, it's a bit of *do what suits them*. Sometimes it appears that it's about mateship rather than the best person for the job. ❞

It's a boy's club – a popularity contest. You need the right coloured eyes. There are some people who are in the right mould of our organisation into football, or trades, typical firefighter tough mode. They get advantages over others.

Participants shared experiences where cliques within upper management created barriers to raising legitimate concerns, with complaints met by stonewalling and a lack of accountability. Traditional processes, such as volunteer election protocols were seen as lacking transparency and being open to manipulation. Many felt excluded from decision-making, with critical choices made behind closed doors by a select few.

While changes to recruitment processes in recent years were acknowledged – shifting from informal practices to a more structured, merit-based approach- there remained a lingering sense that old habits die hard. The imbalance of power and influence continued to erode trust and fairness, leaving some to question their place within the organisation.

There is a clear hiring and appointment process, (but) the metrics are often mismatched and the criteria not followed. I applied for a job and someone much less qualified got it. People speculate about why that person was hired and they think it was strategic nepotism to hire the people who won't challenge existing leaders. They don't follow the hiring process and the criteria and, in the process, alienate everyone. It alienates the people who are overlooked and all the people who don't have a chance to apply.

I have experienced lots of cliques and have felt excluded – trips, dinners, events that I haven't been invited to when others have.

Many people felt a strong lack of accountability across the organisation, and that this was due, at least in part, because there has been a focus on loyalty to 'mates', sometimes at the expense of loyalty to the organisation, its values and purpose.

People told us:

Previously cliques and nepotism allowed people to get away with sexism without being held accountable.

He's part of an upper management group that's tight and there's no way we can make a complaint to our superiors. If you try and push it up the chain of command it just gets stonewalled. They're not family but they act as though they are.

"
In my experience, people were parachuted in (to leadership roles) without any of the required skills or criteria. (It led to) favouritism, subtle bullying and isolating and undermining, playing people off of each other, putting people into key positions that they weren't qualified for. It nearly broke me, and I was looking for jobs elsewhere, as were lots of other people.
"

One person felt that increasing culture and processes around accountability would be transformative for the organisation. They commented:

"
All it takes is for people to see accountability and that poor behaviour won't be (tolerated), and then people will recognise what the consequences are.
"

Adapting to a multigenerational workforce

The TFS and SES are experiencing significant challenges in navigating multigenerational workplace dynamics, with distinct differences in attitudes, expectations, and behaviours between older and younger employees and volunteers. Many participants noted a struggle within the organisation, with some people resisting cultural and operational changes. While the younger cohort is seen as critical to driving future change, this shift has exposed deficiencies in traditional leadership structures, where experience and tenure outweighed innovation and fresh perspectives.

The influx of millennials in the past five years has brought new energy and strong opinions, challenging the status quo. However, this generational shift has also created friction, with some struggling to adapt to new voices, leading to instances of bullying and the emergence of toxic behaviours. These challenges are compounded by an 'old school' group who remain isolated from change, often engaging only within their established circles and perpetuating a 'boys' club' mentality.

Younger people feel confident these days to speak up early. Older people look at this as over confidence. Diversity should require that the new and the old people both adapt to each other. But that hasn't been the case. We're expected to make the changes. I don't feel the TFS gave the tools to the older generation to deal with this.

Coming in at the other end of the food chain, we are dealing with a different generation of people. At the end of the day, we need to recognise that this generation brings a new dynamic, and we must learn to manage them better. They are more likely to call things out, but it's important to understand that on a fireground, when people are being blunt, they are not bullying you.

I've witnessed some officers struggling to adapt to these new voices. Unfortunately, this has led to the emergence of poor behaviour.

Generational differences also extend to communication and management styles. Older employees and volunteers may view younger colleagues' confidence as overconfident, while younger employees and volunteers expect more regular feedback and recognition.

Some participants highlighted the difficulties of balancing respect for the experience of senior staff while ensuring newer members feel valued and heard. Concerns were raised about senior leaders being overlooked for promotions in favour of younger, less experienced individuals, leading to frustration and a perceived lack of value for years of service.

District officers all around me feel they're belittled by people who are their juniors in experience and age—demeaned and dismissed and not being engaged or receiving bad advice.

How do we still show the older guys on the shifts that they are well valued, and at the same time, the newer people are feeling valued? We need to keep empowering our senior firefighters and not just focus on new people's needs. It is easy for more senior people to feel they are being put to the side; a lot of energy goes into new people.

Overall, participants emphasised the need for leadership to recognise and adapt to the distinct needs of each generation. There is a clear call for training and support to help leaders manage a multigenerational workforce effectively, ensuring both seasoned employees, volunteers and new recruits are empowered, respected, and integrated into a cohesive, forward-thinking team.

A divided organisation

Across the TFS and SES landscape, the Review revealed a widespread sense of feeling undervalued and lack of genuine respect among various groups within the organisation. Notably, this sentiment was not confined to a single demographic but resonated across multiple divides, including operational staff and management, paid employees and volunteers, career firefighters and volunteers, and even between different locations.

This pervasive feeling of disconnection highlights a broader cultural issue, where respect, recognition and appreciation are not consistently felt, regardless of role, status, or geography.

> ❝ Because we are not operational, we're not seen as valuable. We get nothing in terms of progression or opportunity. ❞

There is poor culture between the firies and non-firies. We don't get any respect because we are not firemen. We are excluded from conversations, and they behave as though we are not part of the complex operations.

The culture is just a power play with the full-time staff looking down on volunteers.

Culturally TFS and SES are very much set in the late 80s. If you are not a career firefighter, you are very much on the outer. It's like your opinion doesn't matter. They are taking actions to change that mentality but its culturally ingrained. It's very hard to break into. If you didn't get these skills or qualifications through this service – it means nothing to this service.

'Support' not the right word for our "support staff". They have very considerable expertise and are not admin support. They are fire experts and other similar roles that require serious education and training.

The distinction between operational and non-operational roles is not helpful and not hard and fast. The distinctions tend to be brought up when people are trying to jockey for power and influence.

I don't take it lightly that people think we are just volunteers, and we are not needed. The rest of the system relies on us.

It's made clear that you don't have rank if you're with SES and not TFS.

My manager would constantly remind me in front of others that I wasn't a firefighter. They would refer to staff as 'bureaucrats' when they weren't listening.

> [As a volunteer] you take that plunge, you answer that call, and you are willing to do anything that is necessary. You want to feel like they respect that. Sometimes you do not feel that respect.

Valuing the workforce and volunteer base

Some felt that the divisions had been emphasised due to poor communication about the move to a more inclusive workplace. Summing up this perspective, one person commented:

> *The message isn't sold well but I think it's important.*

Many men reflected that the visible push for gender equality had left them feeling under-valued and questioning the service's commitment to and care for them. Several men raised this in the context of communication and messaging, but many others spontaneously spoke of feeling like the organisation no longer valued them and no longer had their back.

People told us:

> *While it's important to target women who are genuinely interested in and suited for this role, the approach of saturating social media with 'we need females' messaging isn't the answer. This job isn't for everyone, and we've seen situations where women were hired but weren't the best fit for the role.*

> I know what the organisation wants to hear—there's a massive push for gender equality, aiming for a 50/50 balance between males and females. But over the last 15 years, I haven't seen a white, male career firefighter featured in any of the organisation's materials. The pendulum has swung too far the other way.

As firefighters, it can get frustrating; you think, 'God, give me strength.' Every time there's a fire, there's a photo of two women on the hose for the camera, or a female firefighter on the front page, while so many incredible men in this job never get recognised. It's creating a divisive effect between male and female firefighters, which ultimately doesn't benefit the team or the organisation.

The main crux of this is about feeling valued – It's ok to be a white male firefighter, we just don't feel valued. Unless you are a female you just don't feel valued. That's not a conversation you can have within the organisation.

Many white men feel that they are no longer wanted in the organisation. The last time I applied for a career firefighter position, leadership openly stated that they were looking to recruit a more diverse workforce. I took that as a signal that I wasn't what they were looking for, so I stopped applying. I know I'm not alone in feeling this way—many of the guys out there are white, male, and come from trade backgrounds, and they're questioning where they fit in within this push for diversity.

Survey insights: respect, safety, inclusion and belonging

Perceptions of respect, safety, inclusion and belonging

The findings of the survey indicate that overall, more than three quarters of respondents (77%) agree (either agree or strongly agree) that 'people are respectful towards others within the TFS and SES', and 77% also agree with the statement 'I feel like I belong'. Additionally, 76% of respondents feel that the TFS or SES is a 'safe and respectful place to work or volunteer', and 73% of respondents agree with the statement 'I rarely feel excluded'. Meanwhile, fewer (68%) agree with the statement 'it is a diverse and inclusive environment'.

However, the survey insights highlight differing perceptions of safety, respect, inclusion and belonging across different cohorts in TFS and SES.

Tasmanian Fire Service

Perceptions of respect, safety, inclusion and belonging varied between cohorts at the TFS.

Volunteers were more likely to agree with the following statements compared to employees suggesting a more positive experience among the volunteer cohort:

- **'TFS is a safe and respectful place to work or volunteer'**: 78% of volunteers agreed with this statement compared to 61% of employees

- **'People are respectful towards others'**: 78% of volunteers agreed with this statement compared to 69% of employees

- **'I feel like I belong'**: 78% of volunteers agreed with this statement compared to 73% of employees

- **'I rarely feel excluded'**: 75% of volunteers agreed with this statement compared to 60% of employees

- **'It is a diverse and inclusive environment'**: 70% of volunteers agreed with this statement compared to 56% of employees.

	Total	Gender		TFS / SES	
	Total (n=1,057)	Man (n=773)	Woman (n=249)	TFS employee / volunteer (n=869)	SES employee / volunteer (n=188)
People are respectful towards others	77%	79%	72%	77%	81%
The TFS or SES is a safe and respectful place to work or volunteer	76%	78%	72%	75%	81%
I feel like I belong	77%	78%	76%	77%	80%
I rarely feel excluded	73%	77%	62%	73%	76%
It is a diverse and inclusive environment	68%	71%	60%	68%	70%

Figure 1: Total perceptions of respect, safety, inclusion and belonging (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

3. Why safety and inclusion are essential in the workplace

Differences between men and women's perceptions of respect, safety, inclusion and belonging were also evident among both employees and volunteers.

Among TFS employees, women were more likely to agree with the following statements compared to men: likely due to their concentration in support roles rather than frontline service delivery:

- **'TFS is a safe and respectful place to work':** 76% of female employees agreed compared to 56% of male employees.

- **'I feel like I belong':** 86% of female employees agreed compared to 70% of male employees.

The picture is quite different among volunteers that largely reflect an operational workforce. Male volunteers are much more likely to agree with the following statements:

- **'People are respectful towards others':** 81% of male volunteers agreed with this statement compared to 68% of female volunteers.

- **'TFS is a safe and respectful place to volunteer':** 80% of male volunteers agreed compared to 69% of female volunteers.

- **'I rarely feel excluded':** 79% of male volunteers agreed compared to 60% of female volunteers.

- **'It is a diverse and inclusive environment':** 73% of male volunteers compared to 59% of female volunteers.

	TFS employee	Gender		Career Firefighter			Other employee		
	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Firefighter	Officer and above	Total	Band 1-5	Band 6-9
	(n=226)	(n=165)	(n=51)	(n=125)	(n=59)	(n=62)	(n=101)	(n=61)	(n=38)
People are respectful towards others	69%	66%	80%	72%	81%	58%	65%	69%	57%
The TFS is a safe and respectful place to work	61%	56%	76%	61%	67%	52%	60%	61%	59%
I feel like I belong	73%	70%	86%	75%	80%	69%	70%	72%	66%
I rarely feel excluded	60%	60%	58%	62%	70%	50%	55%	57%	51%
It is a diverse and inclusive environment	56%	55%	57%	56%	61%	50%	57%	65%	37%

Figure 2: TFS employee perceptions of respect, safety, and diversity and inclusion (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

3. Why safety and inclusion are essential in the workplace

	TFS volunteer	Gender		TFS volunteer role			
	Total	Man	Woman	Brigade Chief / 1st officer	Fire fighters	2nd 3rd 4th Brigade officers	Op. support / TFS museum / Social member
	(n=643)	(n=506)	(n=123)	(n=73)	(n=413)	(n=111)	(n=36)
People are respectful towards others	78%	81%	68%	82%	78%	86%	69%
The TFS is a safe and respectful place to volunteer	78%	80%	69%	71%	77%	85%	77%
I feel like I belong	78%	80%	73%	79%	76%	91%	72%
I rarely feel excluded	75%	79%	60%	76%	74%	84%	70%
It is a diverse and inclusive environment	70%	73%	59%	73%	67%	78%	78%

Figure 3: TFS volunteer perceptions of respect, safety, and diversity and inclusion (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer role	
	Total	Man	Woman	Unit / Deputy manager	General volunteer
	(n=159)	(n=90)	(n=62)	(n=35)	(n=118)
People are respectful towards others	83%	86%	79%	77%	83%
The SES is a safe and respectful place to volunteer	82%	86%	79%	74%	84%
I feel like I belong	82%	83%	83%	84%	81%
I rarely feel excluded	78%	83%	75%	73%	79%
It is a diverse and inclusive environment	73%	77%	67%	73%	71%

Figure 4: SES volunteer perceptions of respect, safety, and diversity and inclusion (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

State Emergency Service

Overall, SES volunteers reported more positive perceptions of respect, safety, inclusion and belonging than SES employees:

- **'People are respectful towards others':** 83% of SES volunteers agreed compared to 59% of SES employees

- **'It is a safe and respectful place to work or volunteer':** 82% of SES volunteers agreed compared to 59% of SES employees.

- **'I feel like I belong':** 82% of SES volunteers agreed compared to 55% of SES employees.

- **'I rarely feel excluded':** 78% of SES volunteers agreed compared to 48% of SES employees.

- **'It is a diverse and inclusive environment':** 73% of SES volunteers agreed compared to 41% of SES employees.

There were no statistical differences between men and women's experiences among SES volunteers, and the sample of SES employees is too small to enable disaggregation by gender.

Confidence in change

Those surveyed were asked how confident they were that the TFS or SES will make a meaningful difference across the areas of bullying and sexual harassment in the next two years. Concerningly, it reveals low levels of confidence in change. Almost one third (31%) of respondents believed the TFS or SES will make a meaningful difference towards bullying and nearly two in five (39%) towards sexual harassment.

Overall, TFS and SES volunteers were more likely to be extremely/very confident than TFS employees in relation to:

- **Bullying:** TFS volunteers (34%) and SES volunteers (34%) compared to TFS employees (13%)

- **Sexual harassment:** TFS volunteers (41%) and SES volunteers (42%) compared to TFS employees (26%).

Men were more likely than women to be confident in change in relation to sexual harassment (42% compared to 33% of women).

There were no statistically significant differences between cohorts within TFS employees, TFS volunteers, SES employees and SES volunteers.
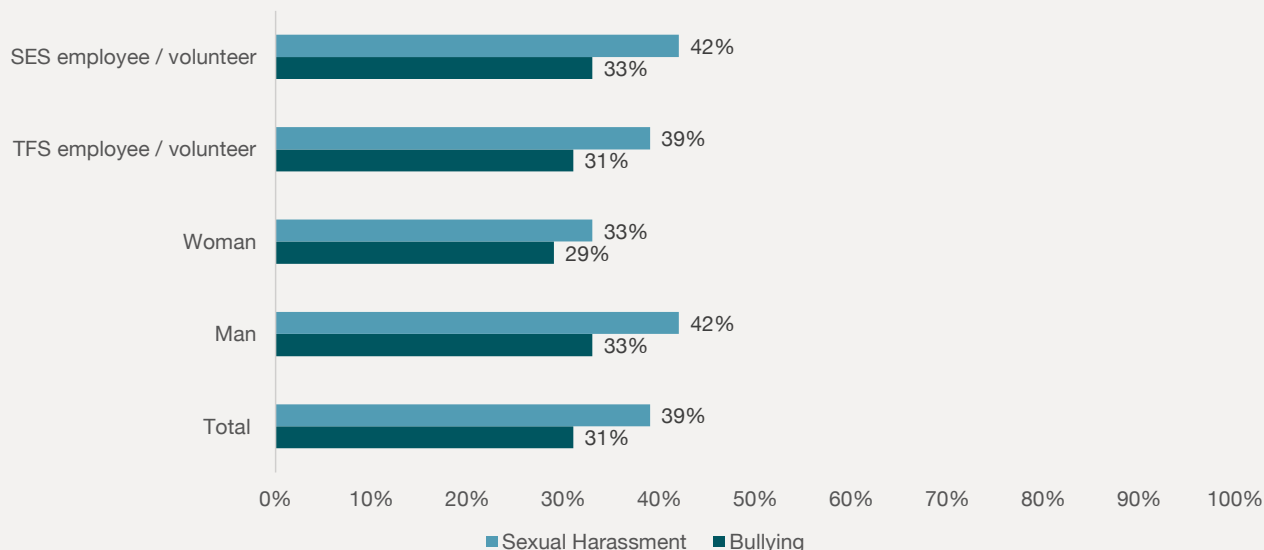
Figure 5: Total confidence that the TFS or SES will make meaningful change (% extremely confident / very confident)
CHANGE. What is your level of confidence that the TFS or SES will make a meaningful difference in each of the following areas in the next two years? Base: All respondents

	TFS employee	Gender		Career Firefighter			Other employee		
	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Fire fighter	Officer and above	Total	Band 1-5	Band 6-9
	(n=226)	(n=165)	(n=51)	(n=125)	(n=59)	(n=62)	(n=101)	(n=61)	(n=38)
Bullying	13%	13%	13%	10%	11%	9%	16%	21%	6%
Sexual Harassment	26%	30%	19%	26%	27%	25%	26%	31%	14%

Figure 6: TFS employee confidence that the TFS will make meaningful change (% extremely confident / very confident)
CHANGE. What is your level of confidence that the TFS or SES will make a meaningful difference in each of the following areas in the next two years? Base: All respondents

	TFS volunteer	Gender		TFS volunteer role			
	Total	Man	Woman	Brigade Chief / 1st officer	Fire fighters	2nd 3rd 4th Brigade officers	Op. support / TFS museum / Social member
	(n=643)	(n=506)	(n=123)	(n=73)	(n=413)	(n=111)	(n=36)
Bullying	34%	35%	33%	33%	34%	30%	43%
Sexual Harassment	41%	43%	37%	42%	39%	43%	47%

Figure 7: TFS volunteer confidence that the TFS will make meaningful change (% extremely confident / very confident)
CHANGE. What is your level of confidence that the TFS or SES will make a meaningful difference in each of the following areas in the next two years? Base: All respondents

|	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer role	
	Total	Man	Woman	Unit / Deputy manager	General volunteer
	(n=159)	(n=90)	(n=62)	(n=35)	(n=118)
Bullying	34%	40%	26%	26%	34%
Sexual Harassment	42%	50%	31%	46%	40%

Figure 8: SES volunteer confidence that the SES will make meaningful change (% extremely confident / very confident)
CHANGE. What is your level of confidence that the TFS or SES will make a meaningful difference in each of the following areas in the next two years? Base: All respondents

3. Why safety and inclusion are essential in the workplace

Conclusion

A safe and inclusive workplace culture is more than just an aspiration—it is essential for the wellbeing, performance, and sustainability of any organisation, particularly within the fire and emergency services sector. This chapter underscores the profound impact that inclusive and respectful workplace environments have on employee engagement, innovation, decision-making, and operational effectiveness. For emergency services, the stakes are even higher.

The nature of fire and emergency response demands deep trust, effective teamwork, and a shared commitment to mission success. When individuals feel valued, respected, and supported, they are more likely to contribute fully, collaborate effectively, and uphold the highest standards of service. Conversely, cultures characterised by exclusion, favouritism, or harmful behaviours undermine morale, create barriers to retention, and weaken overall team effectiveness.

While there are positive developments with the TFS and SES – including stronger mental health support, emerging inclusive leadership, and a growing recognition of the need for change – challenges remain. Issues such as exclusionary practices, perceptions of favouritism, and divisions between different workforce groups continue to impact workplace culture. Survey data and qualitative insights reveal that while many employees and volunteers feel a strong sense of pride and purpose in their roles, others experience barriers to full inclusion and respect. Women, in particular, report higher levels of exclusion and lower confidence in meaningful cultural change.

Addressing these issues requires a continued and sustained effort to embed inclusive leadership, strengthen policies on workplace behaviour, and foster an environment where all individuals—regardless of gender, background, or role - feel safe, valued, and empowered to contribute. Confidence in the ability of the TFS and SES to meaningfully address issues like bullying and sexual harassment remains low, highlighting the urgent need for transparent and accountable action.

The challenge lies in ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just aspirational goals but are actively integrated into workplace structures, leadership practices, and everyday interactions. Creating a truly safe and inclusive culture requires both systemic change and individual commitment. By building on existing strengths, addressing areas of concern, and prioritising respect and fairness, the TFS and SES can foster a more inclusive, resilient, and high-performing workforce – one that is fully equipped to meet the evolving challenges of emergency response and community protection.

4. Leadership

Leadership is central to building high-performing, safe and innovative organisations. Leaders define the culture and standards of behaviour through their own actions – what they model, reward, and tolerate. Their choices signal what is acceptable and what isn't, shaping the organisation in powerful and lasting ways.

The following discussion is a snapshot of the experiences of TFS and SES employees and volunteers as told to the EB&Co Review Team. It draws upon the lived experiences shared in the listening sessions and survey and identifies both positive and negative experiences.

Across TFS and SES, employees and volunteers look to leaders to set the culture, to model the TFS and SES values, to support and stretch the organisation's people, and to hold people accountable when they don't align with the organisations' values and expectations.

One person described it as:

> ❝ Culture is best set by leadership at the top; it makes everyone feel more comfortable. ❞

People have high expectations of leaders and take any shortcoming to heart. One person commented:

> *The sense of letdown we experience from the leaders is compounded by the fact that we're so close with each other as rank and file or mid-level management. It makes any disappointment or experience of being let down feel even worse.*

Shifting expectations and roles of leaders

Consistent with the themes outlined in chapter 3, the TFS and SES is in transition. Many people who participated in the Review believe that this includes a significant reset in relation to leadership, including new leaders stepping into roles; shifting expectations of the behaviour and capability of leaders; and a re-balancing of technical and people leadership. People are divided on whether these changes have been positive or negative for the TFS and SES.

Some people reported a perception that there has been a positive transition in recent years, with a stronger emphasis on people management and enabling teamwork.

Some who felt that the change had been largely positive, albeit a work in progress, commented that current leaders are more aligned with the organisations' values and have a stronger focus on culture, people leadership and collaboration.

People told us:

> *There's also been significant change in leadership recently. In the past, the culture was very toxic, with a lack of strong leadership, especially at the higher levels.*

> ❝ It's a rank-based organisation. Chain of command is drilled into you from the very beginning. Two years ago, the chain of command was broken, and people didn't respect it. The new leadership have fixed that, and they have empowered the station officers and shift managers to do direct management. They refer you back to your immediate manager. ❞

4. Leadership

> The organisation has finally recognised that they need people with managerial expertise in managerial roles and can't just appoint firefighters. We've now started talking about culture and how it works in a brigade.

Back in the day, there were lots of turf struggles and contestations over who was in charge of the different brigades (i.e. conflict amongst different brigade chiefs and other leaders). Now we're seeing more cooperation, and more joint trainings which allows for much better work.

(The organisation is going through) the slow teething process of professionalising the senior management and moving away from the more nepotistic appointment processes of the past—moving away from hiring people from the trades to people who have more business and people management skills. The organisation hasn't built people up for the senior positions that they occupy. There's a wrong fit of person but the fire service is doing something to address that. Slowly, better equipped people are moving through the ranks.

I think (the organisation) is trying very hard to improve the culture but don't think that's filtering down….It's the band 7 or 8 managers who seem to resist the change.

Recruitment is very structured now. Previously it was more a formality but over the last ten years you have to prove that you're the right person for the job.

Others, however, described past leaders as being very effective and felt that the organisation has been diminished by their departure. People commented:

There's a mistrust with our senior leadership emerging from lots of difficult experiences. It's cumulative. For whatever reason, all the good senior leadership tend to leave. I've had some fantastic people, but they've all moved on.

The previous Commissioner (2013) built an excellent culture. (They were the) most joined up times. He was an exceptional communicator, approachable and collegial, great decision maker, listened to advice, travelled extensively to engage with all the workforce, ran group sessions to explain where we're going, what we need to do – particularly effective after the crisis of the 2013 Dunalley bushfires, leveraged off this to bring volunteers and career officers together, all working to save Tasmanians. Highly respected for his knowledge and experience.

Sadly, there's not as much trust in leadership as in the past…(the organisation) doesn't value others with the expertise, they've just appointed yes men to senior roles (to) make their lives easier.

Regardless of whether people considered the changes positive or negative, most agreed that leading through this transition is a challenging task, with one person commenting:

There's only two things firefighters hate. Things that change – and things that stay the same.

A mixed experience of leadership

Against the backdrop of this transition, most people told us that they had had mixed experiences of leadership within the TFS and SES, calling out both positive and negative experiences. They observed that there is not a 'singular' experience of leadership within the organisation, with district, regional and state leaders having very different roles, and there being significant variation in individual capability and mindset.

My manager on shift level is fantastic but the further up you go in the food chain, the less skilled they are.

I've had a mixed experience. The higher management is wonderful but the local brigade and management (is where) things start to fall apart.

4. Leadership

I have a different experience of leaders on different levels. At the base level we have our Deputy Unit manager and they're great. After unit manager, deputy and trainer, the crew leader is the person who needs to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the crew. Our Crew leader: is inclusive and aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the crew which allows everyone to feel safe. Deputy Unit Manager: should know our unit dynamics and provides good support to our crew leader and providing parameters. Regional: the role should be supportive and affirming and providing feedback and doing that by showing up for dinners and conveying their appreciation. That's what they should do. They bumble along. They don't always get it right. Rumours are sometimes a problem, and they should think more about how they communicate and provide feedback. I think it's because the newer leaders don't understand the people they're dealing with and what motivates volunteers.

In some areas there are Brigade Chiefs with leadership skills but it's not common.

At the management level, TFS leadership is generally very good, but at the district level, leadership can be inconsistent. There are noticeable differences in how leadership is applied depending on the district, and this inconsistency impacts the volunteers' experience.

Positive experiences of leadership

Several people told us that they have had very positive experiences of leaders within TFS and SES, variously highlighting leaders' technical expertise, their people leadership skills, and their ability to build strong teams oriented to delivering for the people of Tasmania.

People commented:

My direct manager and our station officer do a fantastic job of managing the different personalities. He does a fantastic job. He sets a really good tone.

Operationally we have a great cohort of leaders. They know their stuff. Especially the younger leaders are quite progressive in how they see things. The newer cohort is great. They have a common goal. Our new leader has been a breath of fresh air. He is new to the area. He is approachable, respectful, and always willing to listen.

> ❝ It's a tight knit work group, and that's testament to the senior firefighters who set the tone for how the shift operates and support. I've never seen anything negative from our managers. ❞

Speaking specifically about the SES, one person commented:

There's lots of space for innovation and it's not overly hierarchical and command and control. We get the balance right between structure and innovation.

Some also perceive that their managers and leaders are champions for inclusion and cultural change:

I think the management level at the district office is fantastic. They have been focused on DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) and they're always very vocal and transparent about what is happening within the organisation. They're very proactive about communicating about developments.

Our fire brigade chief is quite exceptional. I struggle to see how you maintain a strong culture if you don't have a good leader. If you're a new person, he's always checking in and he finds time to have one on one sessions and reminds us of the support services available. The officer team below him are watching and learning. The previous chief and the old folks have been like that too. There's always consultation to doing things. He manages to juggle the blokey blokes and the respectful culture.

4. Leadership

Some leaders believe that there is now a stronger culture and infrastructure for leaders. Commenting on their own experience of leading, people told us:

The other thing that's been beneficial, I take the leadership really seriously, I've taken lots of trainings. I was the first person to take one of the trainings. When I came back, I was able to take some new steps. I was able to develop a leadership statement of values. They weren't previously pulling up unacceptable behaviours and weren't working together. The new leadership statement has been incredibly helpful. The people lower down have put them up on notice boards, possibly to hold us accountable. I sent an email out recognising that we were not perfect and were open to feedback and being held accountable. It seems like some of the more junior staff are now internalising the values we articulated.

That statement of intent has been an outstanding example of what we can do as a leadership team. For example, yesterday there was gossiping, and we were able to go back to our lower-level leadership and we put it to them that it was an opportunity for them to show leadership and take action. We were able to point to the values statement. It's becoming second nature.

Some people also commented that there has been a welcome move to focus more on leadership development, and mentoring for leaders across the ranks:

I'm proud of our investment in and training and mentoring of firefighters to become officers and senior officer.

“ They've brought in external training on leadership which was unheard of in the past. It was very ad hoc. Now they're doing professional development days for station officers. ”

Negative experiences of leadership

Conversely, many people told us that they had had largely negative experiences with leaders within TFS and SES, with several people describing what they saw as inadequate people and strategic leadership capabilities; communication and engagement skills; integrity; and accountability within the organisation. People told us:

“ It's a complete failure of leadership – promotion is related to technical expertise and popularity. There's poor workforce planning and no agreed strategic direction, a 'framing the future' strategy document exists but leadership have openly declared they're not following this but haven't replaced it with anything. People don't know where they're headed. Where is our new direction? Currently just reactive…Leaves people with too much autonomy and no accountability. ”

I don't have anything to offer you that's positive about our current leadership. We feel that they're incompetent in how they're dealing with people. They have no empathy with the volunteers.

Leadership is about consistency, good communication, understanding that people are different and may have different expectations. Need to give support to your crew. Communications and consistency are big for me—as well as understanding your procedures well. How is leadership doing? Not as good as it should be.

People have historically moved up without the skills and personal qualities that are needed and without attending to people's reputation as bullies or harassers and that sends a message about how we're meant to treat each other.

4. Leadership

Leaders' behaviour

Several people believe that leaders themselves are modelling harmful behaviours rather than creating healthy cultures:

> *In the last 18 months it has changed a bit for me and I'm finding it harder to do my job. The job satisfaction has dropped a bit related to that. At times it feels like I'm prevented from doing my job by exclusion, ignored, not provided direction and I wonder whether I fit in anymore. For example, I prepare (documents), and people don't even read or respond to me.*

> *Leadership issues are a significant factor. The leader is very authoritarian, and the junior manager has a controlling nature, often bordering on bullying. While I'm not sure the manager fully realises the extent of their behaviour, they've been told about it. They make demeaning and insulting comments and often ignore people, including me.*

> " Unfortunately, after many years of service my circle of trust only extends to those people I work with and have shown themselves. I have little trust in the senior leadership. That's how we all feel collectively: the lack of support.

> *Some chiefs need to retire. They're behind so many of the problems. It's very difficult to see how we move on if they're still with us. TFS have never tapped anyone on the shoulder to leave and move on. That doesn't happen within TFS. With (one individual), it's all about his power… he pushed the good people out the door.*

> *I had a close look at the TFS values, and my senior leader is definitely not meeting these values.*

Leaders' understanding of their people

Several people who live and work in regional areas felt that the central leadership of the organisation has a poor understanding of the specific needs of and dynamics within regional areas, and thus organisation-wide initiatives often lack relevance to regional teams.

One person told us:

> *I don't think they understand the realities of life outside of Hobart. They tar everyone outside of Hobart with the same brush and assume that if there's a problem in Hobart then it must be a problem elsewhere and that the solutions in Hobart are the solutions.*

Leaders' commitment, courage and integrity

Many people expressed a fundamental lack of trust in the commitment, courage and integrity of leaders and indicated that they are not confident that current leaders can and will provide the direction and support that the TFS and SES needs at this time.

In describing what they saw as a lack of commitment to leading for change, people told us:

> " There just doesn't seem to be any will from management to improve (performance). I just feel like there is a bunch of self-serving people in leadership positions – if there is something hard and it doesn't serve an agenda (people aren't willing to do it). Senior managers say things like "I am retiring in a year so it's not my problem". We have leaders with a foot out of the door.

4. Leadership

We feel a lack of trust in our senior management. Lots of different power plays. For women there's lots of undermining, lots of sexual harassment, feedback from workers has not been well received unless it's positive.

Once they're out of the operational work, they forget how it was and what the challenges are. Not a lot of consultation so definitely a gap between staff and leadership. Significant gap between the management out of the room at the coalface and those in the room.

Several people highlighted aspects of the leadership culture which they felt demonstrated a lack of integrity, with some calling out what they saw as a lack of courage, and a tendency to gossip rather than leadership:

When leaders and managers in high positions openly talk about other staff members especially over drinks at the pub on a Friday night—it completely erodes trust…It's a pure lack of professionalism and sends a clear message that confidentiality and respect aren't valued in the organisation.

> ❝ I'm (very respectful of confidentiality) but senior managers openly discuss confidential information and then complain that we are a leaky sieve, when they're the sieve themselves. ❞

There's no courage in the leadership – leaders don't call people out for bad behaviour.

Building on the themes of integrity and commitment, several people perceive that leaders are motivated by self-interest rather than the interests of the workforce and the agency, commenting:

The whole structure of how it works – it is geared to pay increases, promotion, move up a peg, that is how it feels. (People want to do things if they get them closer to a promotion. The mindset is I am striving for a higher banding job. (I'm only interested in doing) what makes me look good, don't do (the rest).

What is getting in the way of a strong, positive leadership culture?

Review participants identified that there are a range of personal and organisational factors that can be a barrier to developing an organisation-wide positive leadership culture. Key factors included: the mental model about what makes a good leader – and in particular, the persistent stereotype that only firefighters can provide leadership within the organisation; the limited valuing of and investment in people leadership capability; variable capability in having courageous conversations, and in the specific skills of leading and managing volunteers; a weak and inconsistent accountability culture; and structural and process issues, including the mechanisms for electing brigade leaders, too high a proportion of people in acting leadership roles, and under-resourcing relative to the increasing complexity of the role of each organisation. Together, these dynamics enable significant variations in leadership approach and dilute the organisation-wide experience of leadership. In turn, this has significant personal and organisational impact, including affecting recruitment, retention and employee and volunteer wellbeing. The following section looks at each of these issues, recognising that shifting to a more coherent and positive leadership culture will require shifts across multiple domains.

The mental model about what makes a good leader

Several people expressed a view that the mental model of what makes a good or 'strong' leader within the organisation, and the leadership paradigm (which they variously described as paramilitary or command and control) is no longer a good fit for the nature of the challenges facing the organisation and indeed, the state.

Some feel that the organisation has a very particular mental model of leadership – that a 'strong' leader is one with a dominant or authoritarian style – and can marginalise those with different styles.

The TFS is based on hierarchies and military chain of command. It's useful in emergencies but appalling as a people management tool. It reinforces toxic masculinity.

4. Leadership

One of the things that needs to change is the outdated paramilitary command-and-control structure. It's too rigid… that doesn't always translate to the best or safest approach for our operations. At some point, a tough decision might have to be made.

We need to explore the benefits and costs of the Command and control versus other ways of working. There have been other commissions across Australia which can be drawn on. They need to realise that the whole community can be mobilised... the current model isn't working with regards to retention, a sense of belonging. Command and control great in battle and on the fireground but not when you want to support and nurture the services.

❝ We've got leaders with lots of great operational leadership expertise in a fire emergency but we're talking about leadership here and not just emergency management. ❞

I want people like me to feel comfortable even if you're not seen as an aggressive leader. I've always been seen as the nice guy and that can make it hard because people expect that you're just nice all the time. Some kinds of leaders within TFS don't see my style as strong.

People leadership capability is not valued and prioritised

Many people commented that the different roles within the organisation require vastly different forms of leadership, with operational leaders needing strength in firefighting, emergency management and team management; and senior leaders skilled in adaptive leadership, able to strategise for and mobilise the entire workforce. Many felt that the organisation has strength and depth in technical expertise but is patchier in strategic and performance leadership.

People commented:

People in these roles are often more like firefighters than managers, and not everyone is cut out to be a manager—it takes specific skills and a willingness to make tough decisions, even against your mates or the status quo. In a tight-knit community, where relationships run deep, it becomes challenging for individuals to hold their peers accountable, leading to decisions being influenced more by camaraderie than by leadership principles.

❝ Many managers and staff members lack the confidence to effectively apply conflict resolution policies, leading to poor implementation. ❞

While the performance management process does exist, its application is weak, particularly regarding Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs).

Performance management remains a significant challenge. Difficult conversations about performance rarely occur, and this avoidance perpetuates problems.

Recognising issues early on, before they escalate, is not happening as often as it should.

Some highlighted that recruitment processes are reinforcing this dynamic:

❝ The poor follow through reflects the fact that people are often promoted above their ability; people haven't had the time to do the trainings they need: on leadership, management, etc. They apply a limited and inadequate set of skills. Poor training and poor practices of promoting. ❞

4. Leadership

There is a clear hiring and appointment process, and the metrics are often mismatched and the criteria not followed. People have been brought in from a background in firefighting and they don't understand leadership and don't have the background... there is a lack of strategic maturity.

Communication, including courageous conversations

Many people also highlighted that there is variable capability in communication and engagement among leaders across the organisation.

One senior leader commented that strengthening communication is a work in progress but is central to the service's ability to build shared understanding and shared priorities across the TFS and SES:

The firefighters are in brigades and that's who they spend time together. That's their whole view. We in leadership have a bigger view and pay attention to a whole range of things. We need to be able to provide the big picture (and) communicate the things we're working on across the organisation so that they understand why (things happen or don't happen)... We're getting better at that but there are a lot of promises or statements that are not being closed off, there's no end dates on any of that, and there's little report back on progress.

Still on communication, many particularly called out a lack of capability in having difficult conversations, providing performance feedback, accepting accountability and holding others to account. People told us:

The other thing culturally, I've noticed is the tendency to hide mistakes at the leadership level. We had a fire and even though volunteers worked hard on this event, they were not included in any operational analysis because we made some bad decisions, but it was still very much "we don't want to talk about that job." It was stupid because how can we learn if we close ranks and slap each other on the backs?

The aftermath was not well managed. It was just... Let's pretend this didn't happen.

(When difficult issues are raised), it feels like they're trying to shut the conversation down.

> " We're our own worst enemy. You don't want to speak up or rock the boat. You don't want to cause friction or trouble. That's the biggest challenge. It's partly loyalty. It's been really hard to have those conversations. "

In my situation, my manager tried to just avoid the problem by waiting for the problem person to leave. That manager has now been promoted with the logic that they would be further from direct supervision.

Leaders lack skills in managing volunteers

Many volunteers expressed disappointment and frustration with how the TFS and SES approaches volunteer management. Many volunteers told us that they feel dismissed and under-valued:

I often work with middle management from TFS, and they are entitled and very arrogant towards their volunteers. Much worse than the SES. They are a larger organisation with a larger influence of older male firefighters who have been there a very long time.

Leaders aren't proactive in dealing with the issues that matter to us. We quite often send feedback and don't even hear back.

Many also told us that they feel that leaders within the TFS and SES lack specific understanding of the different approaches to leading volunteers (compared to those required for leading employees) and lack skills in doing so. As such, they perceive that the organisation has fallen behind contemporary expectations regarding supporting, developing and enabling volunteer workforces.

4. Leadership

People commented:

> **The people in the higher positions are not skilled in dealing with volunteers and any HR issues. There needs to be people who are trained and skilled.**

> *They bumble along. They don't always get it right… They (leaders) should think more about how they communicate and provide feedback. I think it's because the newer leaders don't understand the people they're dealing with and what motivates volunteers.*

> *(I am very experienced in managing) volunteers. I don't see TFS meeting any of the national standards re volunteers.*

One person commented that this dynamic is exacerbated by policies and a volunteer handbook that is out-dated and reinforces a siloed approach:

> *There is a volunteer handbook that they consult and use for guidance but that's so old.[18] There's a funny use of terms like "career-land" and "volunteer-land" and that shows up in the policies: corporate policies, career policies, and volunteer policies and never shall the three meet. The policies are still in place today even though we're now trying to break down the silos.*

An intentional approach to supporting and developing leaders

Ensuring that leaders have the mix of skills required to lead in this complex environment requires a deliberate developmental approach, one which is built on a deep understanding of the capabilities required of leaders, provision of tailored training to develop the skills and knowledge required for leadership roles, and ongoing support for leaders as they grapple with operational and strategic challenges.

Many leaders told us that the organisation has not yet reached a point of maturity with either the training or support provided to leaders.

In relation to leadership training, people commented:

> *There's not a focus on developing leaders.*

> *There needs to be far more leadership training for SES leaders. Many have no leadership capability, and they really need training in people management.*

> **There's lots of technical training in the onboarding process and maybe there's space for more on "softer skills", including (people leadership), what behaviours are okay and what are not ok. That aspect of development could be strengthened.**

This then has ripple effects through the organisation, with senior leaders less equipped to support leaders reporting to them. People told us:

> *There's a lot of people who have never been trained on people management and have no experience and they don't support their managers. It's a funding thing. 97% of the TFS budget is operational.*

> *We are not supported adequately by our senior leaders, and I sometimes feel broken and excluded and like I've done something wrong or offended someone. It becomes very hard to maintain my momentum and difficult to (support others).*

> *My district officers are also not feeling supported. When they share their expertise, they feel attacked and undermined by people in acting management positions.*

> *There is a perception that anyone with experience and knowledge is being undermined and put down because of insecurities on the part of new people.*

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18 Please note, a new Volunteer Handbook was launched in October 2024.

4. Leadership

Weak accountability culture

For the most part, people consider that the TFS and SES has a weak accountability culture, with a limited appetite for addressing either under performance or harmful behaviours.

Several people told us that Brigade Chiefs in particular have too much power with little accountability. One person summarised it as follows:

Brigade Chiefs are a law unto themselves with complete control of the brigade. Within the brigade they are absolute – they give the orders and everyone follows – if you don't, you're out.

In relation to performance accountability, people told us:

It's our lack of accountability that's the main issue. It's totally acceptable to come to work and not do any work. I know of a number of examples where people use their time at TFS to conduct their extra-marital affairs. What they do is up to them, but they shouldn't be doing it on TFS time with TFS resources. It's completely acceptable to not do your job. There's no performance review. There's not a single job that has key performance indicators. Zero accountability. People just don't come to work. I manage my own time. If I wanted to, I could just not come to work and no-one within the TFS would know or take any action. There are people who take advantage of this.

People get to know that the leaders will move on so that no one will hold them accountable.

> **I don't think we have formalised feedback sessions enough or created enough accountability. If that person is underperforming and continues to underperform, where is their accountability?**

Many people also told us that the TFS and SES shies away from holding people accountable for poor behaviour. People commented:

Poor behaviour is enabled from the top down – people get looked after when they shouldn't get looked after.

> **If you want to be a senior leader, stop sweeping things under the carpet and start managing. Stop protecting the people who are the problem and start taking action.**

Structural and process issues

Whilst many of the challenges facing the TFS and SES are cultural in nature, almost all participants in this Review agreed that there are significant structural and process issues which exacerbate and perpetuate the cultural dynamics. Participants particularly identified the following as key contributors: the structure and hierarchy of the TFS and SES; resourcing allocations, including the limited budget for organisational infrastructure and development; human resources policies which have resulted in too-high a proportion of leaders being in acting roles for an extended period of time; and leadership progression mechanisms (in the volunteer brigades of both the TFS and SES) which are reliant on popular vote not assessment of leadership capability and potential.

Hierarchy and structure

Many people – although not everyone – consider the hierarchical culture and structure an obstacle to establishing the TFS and SES as a modern, innovative and high performing organisation able to address complex challenges.

People told us:

There are so many bloody ranks – however, in my unit, satisfaction is relatively low. The hierarchical structure makes it difficult to function as a cohesive team.

4. Leadership

> " The hierarchical structure works well in emergencies but fails as a management tool in day-to-day operations. There's a power dynamic at play, with some managers exhibiting outdated, authoritarian approaches. "

If you are in a low place (low ranking role), your input does not get valued.

The hierarchical nature can make it a bit bureaucratic, and you can almost see people scanning your shoulder to see how many pips on your epaulette. …. I think it's unintentional and a bit baked into the language used: career, volunteer, support.

I never want to leave the fire service; I absolutely love the whole aspect of our brigade coming together and volunteering. But it is getting to the point where I am thinking about leaving because we cannot get any change. We are so limited to what we as a brigade we can do because of the structure of the fire service.

The Director of the SES is now also the Director of Volunteers – that is all volunteers – the SES and the TFS. That is an unmanageable workload and not good for the vollies.

Some particularly believe that the current structure creates challenges in maintaining connection and two-way communication between front line and corporate leadership, with one person describing the limitations of the current approach as follows:

At the operational level, the leadership is strong. We're well-trained and the teams are reflective, particularly during post-emergency debriefs at the station. However, issues arise when it comes to leadership at more senior levels. There is a practice of sending senior firefighters to desk jobs for two years, which has caused frustration among many of us.

Colleagues have expressed that they hate being taken away from the firefighting work they love. I share this sentiment, as the desk job removes me from the work I love and the work I'm good at. When these senior firefighters return to active service, they often come back having lost some of the skills they previously mastered. In some cases, they seem emotionally drained or "broken" after their time away. It's evident that this system is problematic, but no viable solution has been proposed. Furthermore, many of these desk jobs don't even require fire service expertise, which makes the situation more frustrating. There is also pressure from the trade union, as the desk jobs are seen as desirable options for some.

Many also considered that the amalgamation with Tasmania Police into the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management had shifted the TFS and SES to a more bureaucratic organisation, at the expense of leadership, cohesion and performance.

People told us:

> " I'm not a fan of the departmental model. Previously the chief operator had the mandate. Now, HR makes the decision and ... they get to tell the operational leaders what to do. It's not leadership. They absolve themselves of any responsibility when they make decisions. "

In the change from the departmental model, we went away from a focus on what the fire service needs to what government needs. The police culture has bled into/infiltrated into TFS. Now we hide behind inactivity and briefing papers and memos. Our senior people wouldn't come to an emergency because they wouldn't know what they're doing.

4. Leadership

Election of leaders

Looking specifically at structure and hierarchy in the volunteer brigades, many feel that the leadership challenges are exacerbated by a model in which leaders (for example, Brigade Chiefs) are elected based on popular vote rather than a skills match. Many felt that this incentivised 'gaming' the system, with leaders focusing on relationships at the expense of development and accountability, and that it tended to devolve to 'a popularity contest'. People commented:

The elections process that's handled by the first officer. All the nominations should be digitally handled but they have to be sent to the first officers' home, so it's heavily influenced by the first officer and tradition and is sometimes toxic. All the decisions are handled by a certain group of people. We are often left behind and not aware of the decisions that have been made which I'm not okay with. They're not family but they act as though they are.

Becoming a Brigade Chief is a popularity contest – you are supposed to be re-elected every 3 years but some brigades hadn't held an election in 16 years, with the same person in place throughout that time.

I have never been to an election where 2 people are put forward for a position – it is all stitched up beforehand.

People who are not part of the in-crowd don't get a look in for leadership roles, even if they have the best skills match for the position. Sometimes people get put into roles that they don't want to do, just to block people from the out-crowd from taking them on.

The roles should be skills-based, with minimum criteria, and more oversight from central management.

Leadership churn due to acting arrangements

Regardless of people's experience of leaders, there was shared concern about the proportion of people in leadership roles who are currently acting, and the associated churn in leaders:

Things have improved under the current leader. That said, our current leader is in an acting position, and the uncertainty about future leadership means we could see changes again. I hope the positive direction continues.

I've been with TFS for some time, there's a massive amount of change even if a lot of it is just changing chairs so it's hard to assess the structure when it's changing. I wish I could talk more positively about the org but it's hard to do so given the experiences that I've had.

In our workplace, people are constantly in acting roles, shifting from one position to another every three or six months, which means we're always starting the dialogue over again; nothing feels settled within the hierarchy, and if the next person stepping in lacks motivation, progress simply stalls.

Leadership? It's a revolving door which doesn't help. A person is in a job for six months and then they move on, they are not in their substantive role.

There is no stability so when there are all these people in acting roles, they are stepping stones for them, they don't want too much hassle, complaints don't look good on their CV.

Churn in paid leadership means issues don't get resolved. With TFS everyone is always acting up in positions, there is not a lot of stability within the management structure, so nothing gets addressed or sorted out.

4. Leadership

When there are so many people in acting positions, your chain of command is gone, and it goes above to other people, and they are already stretched.

Some people believe that this has a profound impact on the organisation and is a key barrier to progress. One person commented:

The leadership is paralysed, and decisions are avoided.

Insufficient resources to deliver on the mission

As mentioned above, many consider the TFS and SES to be significantly under-resourced given its wide remit, and the increasing prevalence of weather and fire-related disasters. Of specific relevance to this chapter is the concern that managers and leaders who are over-stretched are then less able to support the staff (including fewer senior managers) reporting to them, creating knock-on effects across the organisation.

People told us:

I've never done anything like this (participate in the Review) in my life. It is my chance to speak openly and honestly, because I don't know what else to do. We are here for the community and at the moment, we are not delivering the best we can deliver, to ourselves or our community. We lack the basic equipment to do the job properly.

There's never any money to service stuff properly.

At the regional manager level, we are totally under resourced. I try to have biannual meetings with each of my Unit Managers and every quarter have a Unit Managers meeting but I run out of time.

During events, we can't really switch off. Calls at 4AM to deal with emergencies even when I'm not on call. Calls on the weekend even when I'm not on call. All of us are working long hours.

I'm really strict with my team to make sure they track time and take time off/time in lieu or overtime. I don't think all the overtime is sustainable. We work 12-13 hours a shift and are expected to only work six days in a row. But that often isn't possible. We put 210% in. We're really committed … I can manage the stress but it's really hard to turn off. If I have a new team member then I just can't turn off. What explains the overwork and short staffing? It's a very specialised set of skills and the level of details and knowledge of how emergencies unfold is significant. There just aren't the resources needed to bring on the personnel that is needed.

Why aren't there the resources? For one, TFS doesn't understand what we do and can't always do what we need done. Pay between SES and TFS are not equivalent, and it requires TFS staff to take a pay cut. Even for emergency pay for events, TFS get paid better. It needs to be consistent if we're to acquire the right staff.

> **We've got issues here where we're short-staffed and we know people are going to get jobs who just don't meet the minimum requirements at all. We're so short staffed that people can earn more by working overtime than shifting into a different job.**

Many feel that the resourcing has only been further constrained by the amalgamation of corporate services with Tasmania Police.

One person summed it up as follows:

We are now outsourcing business services that we used to have internally and its costing way more. We're subsidising the police essentially and it's only going to get worse as budget cuts go into effect.

Leadership has an impact on organisational performance and individual wellbeing

In describing the challenges outlined above, participants expressed significant concern about the organisational and personal impact of poor or under-developed leadership, highlighting the link between leadership and recruitment/retention, the impact of leaders on safety culture and practice (including reporting harmful behaviours), and the personal cost borne by staff, managers and volunteers.

Several people commented that the poor leadership culture has had a negative impact on the organisation's ability to recruit new staff and volunteers and has also contributed to staff and volunteer turn-over.

People told us:

There are younger people looking to join but if this is what they get, this negativity then they are not going to hang around. New recruits just finding their way and an officer rips into them, they are crapping their daks. It's not done constructively.

> **There's lots of turnover and many (vacant) positions that haven't been filled in ages.**

They're a few people who have given up and left. I don't know how much longer I can keep it up. I've got a (family), and I've got a mortgage so I can't easily leave.

People also told us that they felt they had been put in risky physical or psychological situations by leaders who either lacked capability or lacked care.

With regard to physical safety, people told us:

One day I was out on the fire ground and the brigade chief turned up still intoxicated. Totally against the rules.

I once had a brigade chief leave us on an active fire ground and we had to get someone to pick us up. Obviously hugely risky.

People also believe that the deficiencies in leadership create significant psychosocial hazards for staff and volunteers.

People told us:

It's hierarchical and you do what you are told. (Our leader) did not value frequent training for newcomers and so new recruits were put into stressful situations, and when they didn't conform to (their) expectations, (they) then berated and humiliated them... The service kept (the leader) on even though they were the reason people were leaving.

There's borderline bastardisation.

Several people commented that leaders lack the skills and mindset to catch issues early, meaning that issues become more widespread and entrenched, creating both more divided teams and more human harm.

People told us:

(Our town) was always a great place to work. But this changed for the negative. We didn't deal with things, didn't nip things in the bud early. (Issues) went unmanaged, then things went out of the workplace bubble, and they have turned into very big things…

There were a couple guys in senior roles who knew what was happening but failed to address poor behaviour. Failing to address it endorsed the behaviours (and it became a widespread issue). It didn't have to get this big.

Several people commented on the impact the harm experienced by middle managers, who are often caught in the nexus between front-line staff and senior leaders.

4. Leadership

People told us:

> ❝ The impact on middle management is immense. There are currently (a number of) [staff] in my region off on stress leave. The massive workload and inflexible deadlines lead to burn out. ❞

Finally, people saw a direct connection between harmful leadership behaviours and low reporting rates. They shared a perception that the weak accountability for leaders lowers confidence in formal reporting systems, and many shared experiences of retribution from leaders against whom complaints have been made.

People told us:

> *It's dependent on the leader (if you can report harmful behaviour). People would feel very confident taking anything to one leader—he ran an open door—you could speak your mind. But when you don't have a leader like that, then it's more of a social barrier.*

> ❝ He's part of an upper management group that's tight and there's no way we can make a complaint to our superiors. If you try and push it up the chain of command it just gets stonewalled. ❞

> *I don't know who else I'm authorised to go to. My rank is too low to make contact with any of the departments. Recently, the officers between me and (him) are shielding me from his abusive conduct.*

> *I think it's because they worry it'll come back on them if it goes to the integrity commissioner. We've also had a lot of our station officers moved into day roles, so a lot of the officers now are senior firefighters who know what it's like to be targeted.*

Survey insights – leadership

The employees and volunteers surveyed were asked about their perceptions of hierarchy and seniority at the TFS and SES. The findings highlight how different cohorts perceive leadership behaviour, the ability to address inappropriate conduct, and expectations for appropriate behaviour.

Overall, the majority of respondents agreed with the statements:

- Everyone is expected to behave appropriately (88%)
- My team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying (80%)
- People in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful behaviour (75%).

Nearly half (48%) of those surveyed agreed that it is hard to call out wrong behaviour when the behaviour comes from someone more senior than them, suggesting there are barriers to be addressed.

However, the survey insights highlight differing perceptions of safety, respect, inclusion and belonging across different cohorts in the TFS and SES.

Tasmanian Fire Service

The data shows that TFS volunteers have a more favourable perception of leadership than TFS employees. TFS volunteers were more likely to agree with the following statements compared to TFS employees:

- Everyone is expected to behave appropriately (89% of TFS volunteers agreed compared to 83% of TFS employees)
- People in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful workplace behaviour (78% of TFS volunteers agreed compared to 54% of TFS employees)

4. Leadership

Conversely, TFS employees were significantly more likely to agree with the statement 'It is hard to call out wrong behaviour when the behaviour comes from someone more senior than me' (65%) compared to TFS volunteers (46%).

There were no statistically significant differences in TFS employees' and TFS volunteers' agreement with the statement 'My team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying' with 76% of TFS employees and 80% of TFS volunteers agreeing.

	Total	Gender		TFS / SES	
	Total (n=1,057)	Man (n=773)	Woman (n=249)	TFS employee /volunteer (n=869)	SES employee /volunteer (n=188)
Everyone is expected to behave appropriately	88%	89%	87%	88%	88%
My team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying	80%	81%	78%	79%	86%
People in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful workplace behaviour	75%	76%	71%	74%	80%
It is hard to call out wrong behaviour when the behaviour comes from someone more senior than me	48%	46%	55%	48%	45%

Figure 9: Total perceptions of hierarchy / seniority (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

	TFS employee	Gender		Career Firefighter			Other employee		
	Total (n=226)	Man (n=165)	Woman (n=51)	Total (n=125)	Fire fighter (n=59)	Officer and above (n=62)	Total (n=101)	Band 1-5 (n=61)	Band 6-9 (n=38)
Everyone is expected to behave appropriately	83%	82%	89%	83%	89%	76%	82%	83%	77%
My team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying	76%	75%	85%	76%	87%	60%	76%	77%	74%
People in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful workplace behaviour	54%	49%	73%	49%	53%	44%	62%	64%	56%
It is hard to call out wrong behaviour when the behaviour comes from someone more senior than me	65%	64%	69%	65%	69%	59%	64%	62%	68%

Figure 10: TFS employee perceptions of hierarchy / seniority (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

4. Leadership

	TFS volunteer	Gender		TFS volunteer role			
	Total	Man	Woman	Brigade Chief / 1st officer	Fire fighters	2nd 3rd 4th Brigade officers	Op. support / TFS museum / Social member
	(n=643)	(n=506)	(n=123)	(n=73)	(n=413)	(n=111)	(n=36)
Everyone is expected to behave appropriately	89%	90%	87%	96%	87%	96%	93%
My team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying	80%	82%	72%	86%	77%	87%	84%
People in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful workplace behaviour	78%	80%	70%	81%	74%	84%	90%
It is hard to call out wrong behaviour when the behaviour comes from someone more senior than me	46%	43%	53%	45%	46%	42%	47%

Figure 11: TFS volunteer perceptions of hierarchy / seniority (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

Among TFS employees, women were more likely to agree that people in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful workplace behaviour (73% compared to 49% of men).

Career firefighters in a firefighting role were more likely to agree that their team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying (87% compared to 60% of Career firefighters not in a firefighting role).

Responses were relatively consistent among TFS volunteers with no significant differences recorded.

State Emergency Service

Similar to the TFS, the data shows that SES volunteers have a more favourable perception of leadership than SES employees. SES volunteers were more likely to agree with the following statements compared to SES employees:

- Everyone is expected to behave appropriately (90% of SES volunteers agreed compared to 69% of SES employees)

- People in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful workplace behaviour (82% of SES volunteers agreed compared to 62% of SES employees)

Conversely, SES employees were significantly more likely to agree with the statement 'It is hard to call out wrong behaviour when the behaviour comes from someone more senior than me' (69%) compared to SES volunteers (43%).

There were no statistically significant differences in SES employee and SES volunteers' agreement with the statement 'My team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying' with 93% of TFS employees and 86% of TFS volunteers agreeing.

The sample of SES employees was too small to disaggregate, and there were no significant findings evident among SES volunteers.

4. Leadership

	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer role	
	Total (n=159)	Man (n=90)	Woman (n=62)	Unit / Deputy manager (n=35)	General volunteer (n=118)
Everyone is expected to behave appropriately	90%	93%	87%	95%	89%
My team leader / manager / supervisor understands the difference between giving constructive feedback and bullying	86%	85%	89%	76%	87%
People in leadership roles promote and encourage respectful workplace behaviour	82%	86%	76%	80%	82%
It is hard to call out wrong behaviour when the behaviour comes from someone more senior than me	43%	39%	52%	46%	44%

Figure 12: SES volunteer perceptions of hierarchy / seniority (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

Conclusion

Leadership is the foundation upon which workplace culture is built, shaping the values, behaviours, and overall effectiveness of an organisation. In the case of the TFS and SES, leadership plays an even more crucial role in ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and inclusion of all employees and volunteers. This chapter highlights the dual realities of leadership within the services – on one hand, there is a growing recognition of the need for cultural change, with emerging leaders demonstrating a stronger focus on people management, inclusion, and collaboration. On the other hand, there remain persistent challenges, including inconsistent leadership quality, a lack of psychological safety, and an entrenched hierarchical and exclusionary culture in some areas.

While some leaders are driving positive change, many employees and volunteers report feeling let down by leadership, with concerns about favouritism, weak accountability, and an inability to address harmful behaviours effectively.

The Review identified widespread concerns about a lack of trust in leadership, ineffective communication, and an outdated command-and-control leadership model that does not align with the evolving needs of a modern workforce. The data and lived experiences shared in this chapter reinforce the need for a leadership reset – one that prioritises transparency, accountability, and people-centred leadership.

Psychological safety is another critical factor in organisational performance, yet many employees and volunteers expressed concerns about raising issues, particularly when they involve senior leaders. The lack of confidence in formal reporting systems and the perception that some leaders engage in or enable poor behaviour highlights the (urgent) need for leadership accountability and cultural reform. Employees and volunteers must feel safe to speak up without fear of retaliation, and leaders must be equipped to foster environments where inclusion, respect, and safety are embedded in everyday practices.

The path forward requires a deliberate and sustained commitment to leadership development, cultural transformation, and structural reform. Investing in leadership training, embedding clear accountability mechanisms, and addressing structural barriers such as hierarchical rigidity and inconsistent leadership capability will be essential to creating a workplace where all individuals feel valued and supported.

Ultimately, the future success of TFS and SES depends on strong, ethical, and inclusive leadership. By fostering a leadership culture that prioritises integrity, fairness, and respect, the TFS and SES will not only enhance their operational effectiveness but also build a workforce that is engaged, resilient, and prepared to serve their communities with excellence.

5. Workplace bullying

Workplace bullying is a pervasive issue

Workplace bullying is a severe and pervasive issue affecting employees and organisations worldwide. It is estimated that bullying affects at least one-third of workers through direct exposure or indirect witness exposure[19]. For individuals, the repercussions of bullying are profound leading to damaging health impacts including poorer mental health and increased stress-related disorders which can adversely affect job performance and overall wellbeing. For organisations, the impact manifests in increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, and heightened turnover rates, and can lead to substantial financial and reputational costs. Men are twice as likely as women to be bullies, and in 65% of instances the bully outranks the victim.[20]

In male-dominated organisations, research suggests that workplace culture often encourages men to compete for power, status, and recognition[21]. In these organisations, culture is built around strict hierarchies, valuing physical strength and endurance, and discouraging signs of weakness. Seniority and experience usually determine authority rather than teamwork or new ideas, with success often measured by toughness and resilience, with those who show the most endurance gaining higher status.

Competitiveness may be reflected in the pursuit of promotions, high-risk assignments, and leadership positions. Social gatherings may reinforce the divide between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. People who don't fit this workplace culture may be excluded or find it harder to advance. While male contest culture has historically shaped emergency service organisations, there is now increasing recognition that changing such a culture is critical to improve wellbeing, diversity, and operational effectiveness.

What is workplace bullying

Workplace bullying includes a range of behaviours and can be experienced verbally, physically, and/or through body language. Bullying can be identified in both direct action and a lack of action.

It includes:

- Repeated hurtful remarks or attacks

- Making fun of someone's work or someone as a person (including any aspect of their identity)

- Excluding someone or stopping them from working with people or taking part in activities that relate to their work

- Psychological harassment including intimidation, belittling or humiliating comments

- Holding back information which someone needs in order to do their work properly

- Pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing someone

- Initiation or hazing – making someone do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted

- Physical, verbal or written abuse, including via email or social media

- Continued dismissal of someone's contributions

- Limiting someone's career progression, despite strong work performance, or failing to appropriately recognise someone's contributions

- Aggressive conduct towards someone, including threats or attacks; and

- Victimisation or retaliatory action, including for making reports about wider bullying behaviour.

19 Hodgins, M., MacCurtain, S. and Mannix-McNamara, P. *Power and inaction: why organizations fail to address workplace bullying*. International Journal of Workplace Health Management 2020; 13(3), 265-290.

20 Namie, G. WBI U.S. *Workplace Bullying Survey*. Workplace Bullying Institute. 2021 https://workplacebullying.org/2021-wbi-survey/

21 Angela L. Workman-Stark. *Exploring Differing Experiences of a Masculinity Contest Culture in Policing and the Impact on Individual and Organizational Outcomes*. 2020 Police Quarterly; 24 (3).

5. Workplace bullying

In general, a single incident of unreasonable behaviour does not constitute workplace bullying. However, it may represent broader cultural or organisational issues and should not be overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant. While bullying is often considered an individual or interpersonal issue, more often broader systemic factors, such as poor organisational culture and inadequate leadership are key risk factors. Necessary management action, carried out in a reasonable way, is not workplace bullying. This includes directing and controlling the way work is carried out and performance reviews and disciplinary action undertaken after a transparent process.

The nature and prevalence of bullying in the Fire and Emergency Sector

Bullying in the fire and emergency services sector has remained largely unaddressed with most research conducted in the US fire services. While early studies of bullying in the US fire service found that over 50% of women firefighters experienced bullying behaviour such as shunning and isolation[22], recent US studies suggest that even regardless of race or gender, bullying prevalence rates remain high with over 37% of first responders having experienced or witnessed bullying[23].

Adverse health impacts from bullying occur to those in the fire service. Research has demonstrated that women who experienced harassment or discrimination in the fire service report more poor health days, a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, higher alcohol consumption, and lower levels of job satisfaction[24]. Research specific to men's experiences with bullying in the fire service is sparse, although recent work has taken a deeper look into hazing and initiation behaviour through the lens of bullying.

What people told us – bullying

While the majority of review participants highlighted workplace bullying as one of the most significant challenges the TFS and, to a lesser extent the SES, faces, there was a small group of participants that held a contrary view, believing that bullying was not an issue. They suggested that their co-workers were overly sensitive, and that bullying was not widespread given that people lived in small communities and needed to get on well with neighbours and friends.

> " There's a strong sense of professionalism, and bullying is not an issue. Communication is highly valued, especially given that we all live in the same community—it's crucial that we maintain positive relationships. "

Several participants thought that others were too sensitive and that it was just harmless banter:

> *We often had a banter with each other, sometimes it went too far but people were taught not to react, the only way to survive was not to react, you needed to fit in.*

> *So much of it is how someone receives it. Hand to my heart, my intention is to make things better. That's where I think it's grey. Plenty of people are keen to be victims. There needs to be some training around empowerment and education around resilience.*

However, the predominant belief among participants is that bullying is widespread and persistent, across all seniorities and ranks, with a predominance in those that 'drive the trucks'.

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22 Hulett et al. *Enhancing Women's inclusion in Firefighting in the USA*. The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations, 2008; 8(2) pp 189-207.

23 Titan Group. *Organizational Climate Review Report. Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department*. 2017. Cited in: Koeppel M. et al. Trying to Eat an Elephant: The Complexities of Bullying Training in the Fire Service. 2022; *American Journal of Qualitative Research* 2022, 6(3) pp. 155-167 https://www.ajqr.org/article/trying-to-eat-an-elephant-the-complexities-of-bullying-training-in-the-fire-service-12533

24 Jahnke et al. *The prevalence and health impacts of frequent work discrimination and harassment among women firefighters in the US fire service*. BioMed Research International, 2019, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31016195/l

5. Workplace bullying

There is a culture of widespread bullying – both from senior staff and from direct line reports who put pressure on their supervisors. Middle managers end up stuck in the middle and it gets to be too much. It's part of why people leave. There have been five managers in the last ten years.

" Bullying can take the form of people lobbying others against you and just generally poor behaviour: people talking over others in meetings, shouting, being very childish. In online meetings we have on MS teams they just laugh and talk over others. "

I managed many staff in my previous job. In my entire time in that work, I've never seen what I've seen at TFS. [the bullying] it's been some of the darkest and most inhumane behaviour I've ever experienced. It's been damaging.

Some participants spoke about the difficulties with generational change where questions from millennials are being misinterpreted as challenges to authority.

I witnessed severe bullying at various levels, and there was a vacuum in leadership when it came to addressing the issue. Middle management, in particular, has been ill-equipped to handle the changing dynamics, often interpreting millennials' questions as challenges to their authority.

Others believed that nepotism, where there was clear preference towards certain colleagues or friends, was firmly entrenched in the TFS and to a lesser extent the SES. As outlined in Chapter 4, some people observed a culture of a 'boys club' where you were either 'in' or 'out' and where the workplace culture was one dominated by male camaraderie that often resulted in exclusionary practices and a resistance to change. Decisions were made by a select few, leaving others feeling disempowered and disconnected.

" The culture within certain parts of the organisation is corrosive, damaging people's integrity and morale. I've seen instances where individuals were bullied to secure positions for their friends, and even serious misconduct was overlooked. "

There's a boys club mentality that is partly historical but still around today as many leaders came through in that boys club era.

I've seen direct bullying in the past—people throwing things across my office. More people step up now and so the overt bullying is happening less. But the discrimination and exclusion are taking different forms. Discrimination is now more based on nepotism especially at the most senior levels.

Worryingly we heard of people who changed their whole identity to try and fit in. Part of this 'fitting in' resulted in them perpetrating bullying behaviour on others as they rose in seniority. New recruits were socialised into a culture of workplace bullying.

You watched people's whole identity change after a stint of 15 weeks on a training program. They did this to fit in.

" The person who was bullied is now doing it to others and no-one does anything about it. I don't understand. "

The impact of bullying was significant leading to many health issues for people.

The bullying had a significant impact on my wellbeing. I began to dread going to work and wasn't sleeping or eating properly.

5. Workplace bullying

Survey insights – bullying

As can be seen in chart 13 below, more than one in five (23%) respondents indicated they had experienced bullying in the last five years, and just under one in six (15%) respondents had experienced bullying in the last 12 months.

Across both the TFS and SES, employees were more likely to report they had experienced bullying in the last five years (39% and 38% respectively) compared to TFS and SES volunteers (20% and 22% respectively). Similarly, TFS and SES employees were more likely to report they had experienced bullying in the last 12 months (28% and 34% respectively) compared to TFS and SES volunteers (12% and 15%). This aligns with the survey finding that volunteers were more likely to agree with the statement 'bullying is not tolerated' (74% TFS volunteers and 75% SES volunteers) than the percentage of employees agreeing with this statement (48% of both TFS employees and SES employees). Details are below in charts 13 –16.

Differences were evident between different cohorts within the TFS and SES as detailed below.

Tasmanian Fire Service

As noted above, overall, 39% of TFS employees reported experiencing bullying in the last 5 years, and 28% in the last 12 months.

Across TFS employees, those aged 55 years and over were more likely to report experiencing bullying in the last 12 months than younger employees (46% compared to 27% of those aged 35-54 and 16% of those aged 18-34). Seniority also increased the likelihood of experiencing bullying. Career firefighters with a role as an officer or above were more likely to have experienced bullying in the last 12 months compared to those in firefighting roles (38% compared to 21% of those in a firefighter role).

No significant differences were observed in the incidence of bullying across the TFS volunteer cohort with regards to gender, age, volunteer role or region.
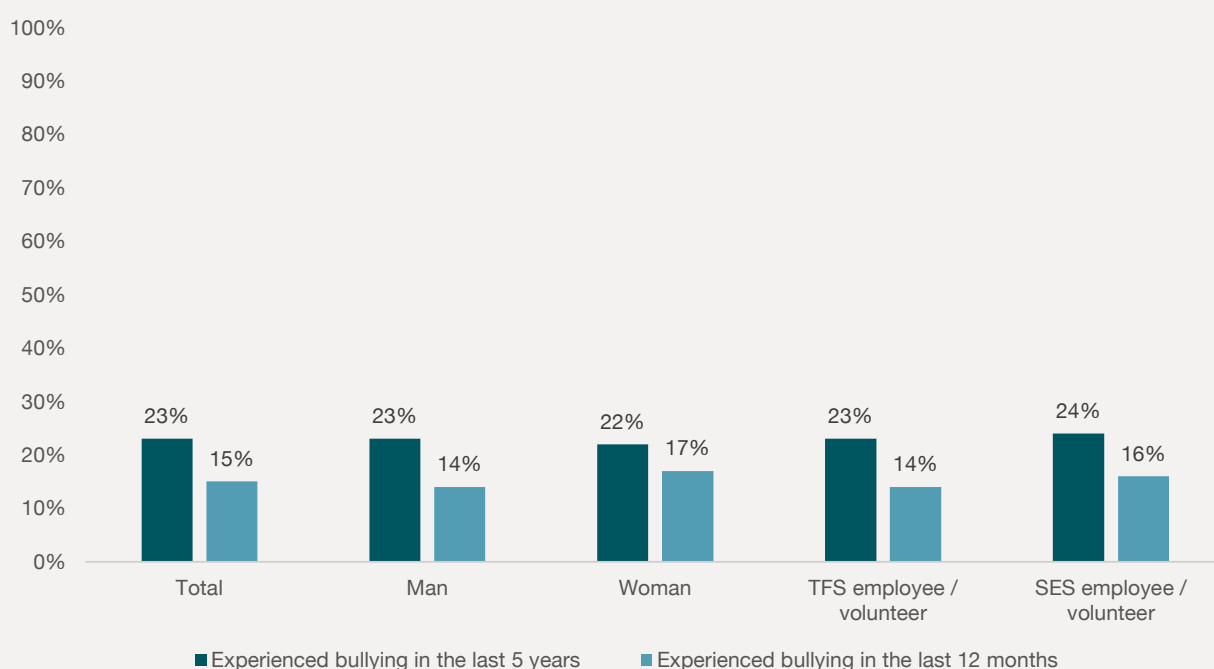

Figure 13: Total incidence of bullying (%)

Q:B_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced bullying while working or volunteering or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the TFS or SES? BB_12M. Did any of these behaviours happen in the last 12 months at the TFS or SES? Base: All respondents

5. Workplace bullying

	TFS employee	Gender		Career Firefighter			Other employee		
	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Fire fighter	Officer and above	Total	Band 1-5	Band 6-9
	(n=226)	(n=165)	(n=51)	(n=125)	(n=59)	(n=62)	(n=101)	(n=61)	(n=38)
Experienced bullying in the last 5 years	39%	43%	29%	42%	40%	44%	34%	29%	46%
Experienced bullying in the last 12 months	28%	29%	27%	28%	21%	38%	29%	27%	34%

Figure 14: TFS employee incidence of bullying (%) Q:B_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced bullying while working or volunteering or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the TFS or SES? BB_12M. Did any of these behaviours happen in the last 12 months at the TFS or SES? Base: All respondents

	TFS volunteer	Gender		TFS volunteer role			
	Total	Man	Woman	Brigade Chief / 1st officer	Fire fighters	2nd 3rd 4th Brigade officers	Op. support / TFS museum / Social member
	(n=643)	(n=506)	(n=123)	(n=73)	(n=413)	(n=111)	(n=36)
Experienced bullying in the last 5 years	20%	19%	22%	22%	18%	19%	27%
Experienced bullying in the last 12 months	12%	11%	15%	19%	11%	11%	11%

Figure 15: TFS volunteer incidence of bullying (%) Q:B_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced bullying while working or volunteering or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the TFS or SES? BB_12M. Did any of these behaviours happen in the last 12 months at the TFS or SES? Base: All respondents

State Emergency Service

As noted above, SES employees were significantly more likely to report they had experienced bullying compared to volunteers, with 38% of SES employees reporting they had experienced bullying in the last 5 years, and 34% in the last 12 months, while 15% of SES volunteers reported experiencing bullying in the 12 months, and 12% of TFS volunteers in the last 12 months.

Among SES volunteers, Unit managers and Deputy managers were more likely to have experienced bullying (41% compared to 18% of general volunteers in the last five years and 32% compared to 13% of general volunteers in the last 12 months).

5. Workplace bullying

	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer role	
	Total (n=159)	Man (n=90)	Woman (n=62)	Unit / Deputy manager (n=35)	General volunteer (n=118)
Experienced bullying in the last 5 years	22%	24%	19%	41%	18%
Experienced bullying in the last 12 months	15%	16%	12%	32%	13%

Figure 16: SES volunteer incidence of bullying (%)
Q:B_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced bullying while working or volunteering or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the TFS or SES? BB_12M. Did any of these behaviours happen in the last 12 months at the TFS or SES? Base: All respondents

Types of bullying behaviour experienced

Survey respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS or SES in the last five years were asked a follow-up question about specific bullying behaviours. SES employees have not been included in the table as the base size for this group is below 30.

Close to three quarters (71%) of respondents reported they had their opinions or ideas ignored, while 61% had been treated in a way that made them feel scared, small or embarrassed. Around half reported experiencing the following types of bullying:

- Not being told information they need to get their work done properly (54%)

- Repeated hurtful words or comments, or making fun of their work or them as a person (52%)

- Excluding them or stopping them from working with people or taking part in work or volunteer activities (50%)

- Spreading rumours about them (49%)

- The bully treating them unfairly because they spoke up about the bullying or made a complaint (47%).

Other bullying behaviours experienced by these respondents included:

- Spoken or written abuse, including via email, SMS message or social media (39%)

- Stopping rewards or promotions despite good work (36%)

- Threatening or attacking you (26%)

- Being made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted (12%)

- Pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing you (8%).

Differences were evident between genders for the following types of bullying across all survey respondents:

- Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small, or embarrassed: 76% of women compared to 57% of men

- Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work or volunteer activities: 68% of women compared to 44% of men.

Some differences were evident between cohorts across TFS. The sample size was too small to report in relation to SES responses.

5. Workplace bullying

	Total	Gender		TFS / SES	
	Total	Man	Woman	TFS employee / volunteer	SES employee / volunteer
	(n=283)	(n=209)	(n=64)	(n=234)	(n=49)
Ignoring your opinion or ideas	71%	69%	76%	72%	64%
Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small, or embarrassed	61%	57%	76%	63%	51%
Not telling you information you need to get your work done properly	54%	53%	52%	55%	49%
Repeated hurtful words or comments, or making fun of your work or you as a person	52%	50%	60%	53%	48%
Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work or volunteer activities	50%	44%	68%	51%	43%
Spreading rumours about you	49%	47%	51%	50%	44%
The bully treating you unfairly because you spoke up about the bullying or made a complaint	47%	46%	47%	48%	44%
Spoken or written abuse, including via email, SMS message or social media	39%	38%	40%	38%	43%
Stopping rewards or promotions despite good work	36%	35%	39%	37%	30%
Threatening or attacking you	26%	27%	16%	28%	10%
Being made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted	12%	11%	10%	12%	10%
Pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing you	8%	9%	5%	9%	2%
Any other form of bullying	42%	43%	37%	43%	39%

Figure 17: Total incidence of specific bullying behaviours in the last five years (%)
BB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of bullying at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

Tasmanian Fire Service

Among TFS employees, those not in Career firefighter roles were more likely to have had the bullying perpetrator withhold information needed to get their work done properly (87% compared to 52% of Career firefighters). Career firefighters were more likely to report experiencing a perpetrator of bullying who was threatening or attacking them (40% compared to 19% of non-Career firefighters).

Among TFS volunteers, women were more likely to report experiencing the following treatment from the bullying perpetrator:

- Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small, or embarrassed (82% compared to 52% of men)

- Repeated hurtful words or comments, or making fun of your work or you as a person (76% compared to 46% of men)

- Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work or volunteer activities (76% compared to 40% of men).

5. Workplace bullying

	TFS employee	Role	
	Total (n=91)	Total Career firefighter (n=54)	Other employee (n=37)
Ignoring your opinion or ideas	81%	76%	90%
Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small, or embarrassed	72%	72%	74%
Not telling you information you need to get your work done properly	64%	52%	87%
Repeated hurtful words or comments, or making fun of your work or you as a person	53%	52%	55%
Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work or volunteer activities	58%	55%	65%
Spreading rumours about you	62%	65%	58%
The bully treating you unfairly because you spoke up about the bullying or made a complaint	59%	64%	50%
Spoken or written abuse, including via email, SMS message or social media	42%	45%	35%
Stopping rewards or promotions despite good work	48%	45%	56%
Threatening or attacking you	33%	40%	19%
Being made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted	17%	16%	18%
Pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing you	6%	7%	4%
Any other form of bullying	52%	51%	55%

Figure 18: TFS employee incidence of specific bullying behaviours in the last five years (%)

	TFS volunteer	Gender	
	Total (n=143)	Male (n=108)	Female (n=32)
Ignoring your opinion or ideas	69%	66%	80%
Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small, or embarrassed	59%	52%	82%
Not telling you information you need to get your work done properly	52%	51%	50%
Repeated hurtful words or comments, or making fun of your work or you as a person	53%	46%	76%
Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work or volunteer activities	49%	40%	76%
Spreading rumours about you	45%	42%	51%
The bully treating you unfairly because you spoke up about the bullying or made a complaint	44%	39%	56%
Spoken or written abuse, including via email, SMS message or social media	37%	33%	45%
Stopping rewards or promotions despite good work	33%	31%	43%
Threatening or attacking you	26%	26%	20%
Being made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted	10%	8%	12%
Pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing you	10%	11%	8%
Any other form of bullying	40%	40%	34%

Figure 19: TFS volunteer incidence of specific bullying behaviours in the last five years (%)

Figure 18 /19: BB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of bullying at the TFS in the past 5 years? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS in the past 5 years.

5. Workplace bullying

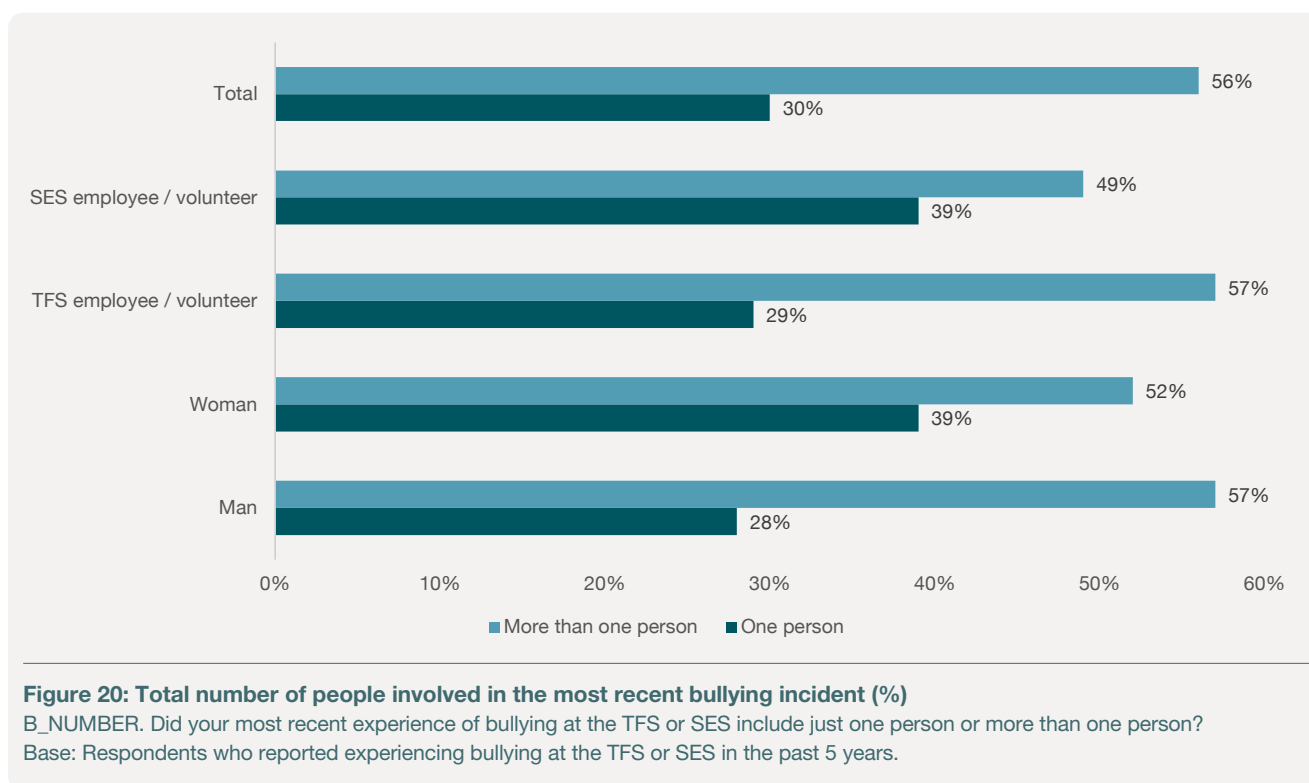## Details about the most recent experience of bullying

Survey respondents who had experienced bullying in the last five years were asked a series of follow up questions about their most recent experience.

More than half (56%) of the respondents who had experienced bullying in the last five years attributed their most recent experience of bullying to more than one perpetrator, while nearly one in three (30%) attributed the bullying to one person. TFS employees were more likely report being bullied by more than one person (73% compared to 52% of TFS volunteers).

Respondents who reported experiencing bullying in the last five years were asked about the gender(s) of the person(s) involved in the incident of bullying. Three in five (60%) respondents attributed the bullying incident to a man. Just over one in ten (12%) reported the incident as involving mainly men (and some women).

Respondents from the TFS were more likely to indicate they were mainly bullied by men (and some women) (14% compared to 2% of the SES), while TFS employees (15%) and TFS volunteers (14%) were more likely than SES volunteers (1%) to attribute their bullying to this gender mix. Respondent from SES were more likely to indicate they were bullied by a woman (15%) compared to TFS respondents (5%).

Among TFS employees, Career firefighters were more likely to report having experienced an incident of bullying which was perpetrated by a male (76% compared to 29% of non-Career firefighters). On the other hand, TFS employees who are not Career firefighters were more likely to have experienced their most recent incident of bullying by equal numbers of men and women (17% compared to 3% of Career firefighters) and by a female (21% compared to 1% of Career firefighters).

Figure 20: Total number of people involved in the most recent bullying incident (%)
B_NUMBER. Did your most recent experience of bullying at the TFS or SES include just one person or more than one person?
Base: Respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

5. Workplace bullying

Survey respondents were asked about the role of the perpetrator(s) from their most recent incident of bullying. Almost three-quarters (71%) of respondents reported experiencing bullying from a person in a more senior role. Just over one third (34%) of respondents experienced their most recent bullying incident from a team member and just over one in ten (12%) reported being bullied by somebody more junior to them. Few (1%) attributed their most recent bullying experience to a visitor or guest at the workplace.

Those who were bullied by someone more senior were more likely to be TFS employees (92% compared to 64% of TFS volunteers and 68% of SES volunteers). Those with caring responsibilities indicated they were bullied by a team member (50% compared to 30% of those who do not).

Being bullied by someone more junior was more likely to be reported by those who identify as neurodiverse (23% compared to 8% of those who do not).
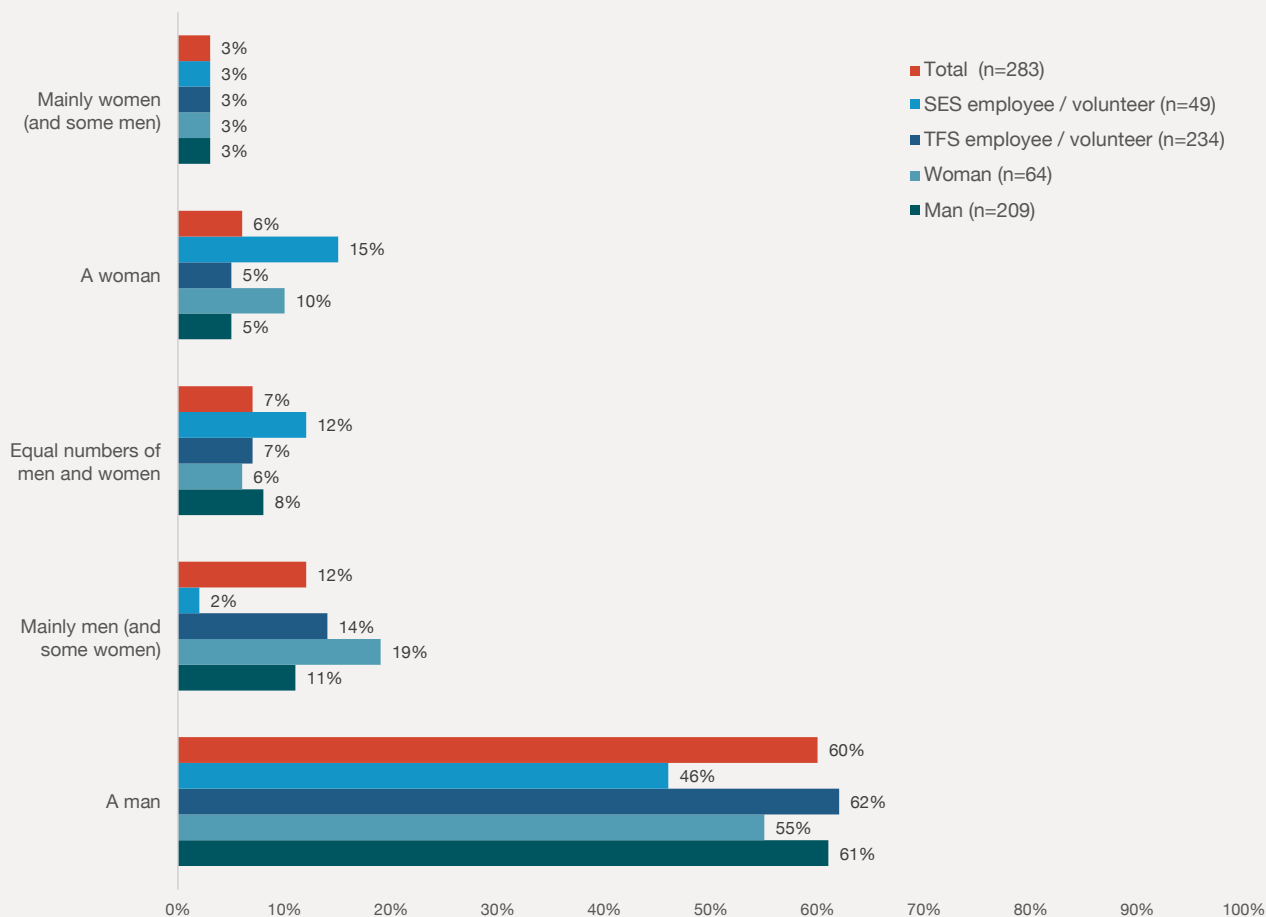
Figure 21: Total gender(s) of person(s) involved in bullying incident (%)
B_GEND. What was / were the gender/s of the person/s who bullied you most recently? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

5. Workplace bullying

Figure 22: Total role(s) of person(s) involved in bullying incident (%)

B_ROLE. What was / were their roles or positions? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.
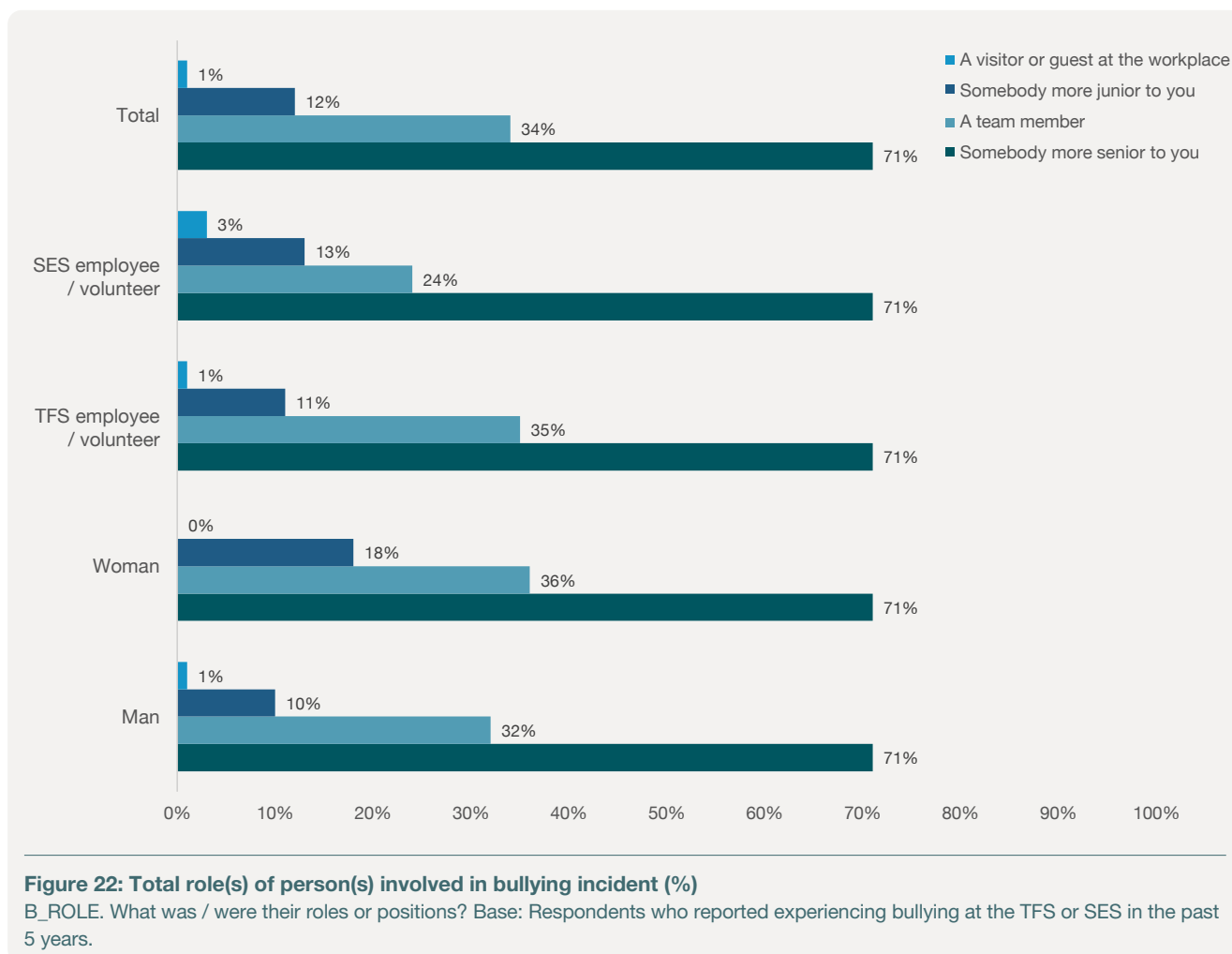
Respondents were also asked to report the length of time their most recent experience of bullying occurred for. Almost two in five (38%) respondents reported the bullying incident as occurring for a year or longer. More than one in six (17%) reported the bullying as occurring for less than one month. Less than one in six (14%) reported the incident as lasting between seven and 12 months, one in ten (10%) as between one and three months and less than one in ten (8%) as between four and six months. TFS respondents were more likely to experience their most recent bullying incident for between one and three months (10% compared to 3% of SES respondents).

5. Workplace bullying

Figure 23: Total duration of the most recent experience of bullying (%) B_LENGTH. How long did your most recent experience of bullying at the TFS or SES go on for? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

Conclusion

Workplace bullying remains a pervasive and deeply ingrained issue within the TFS and SES, with significant consequences for individuals, teams, and the broader organisation. T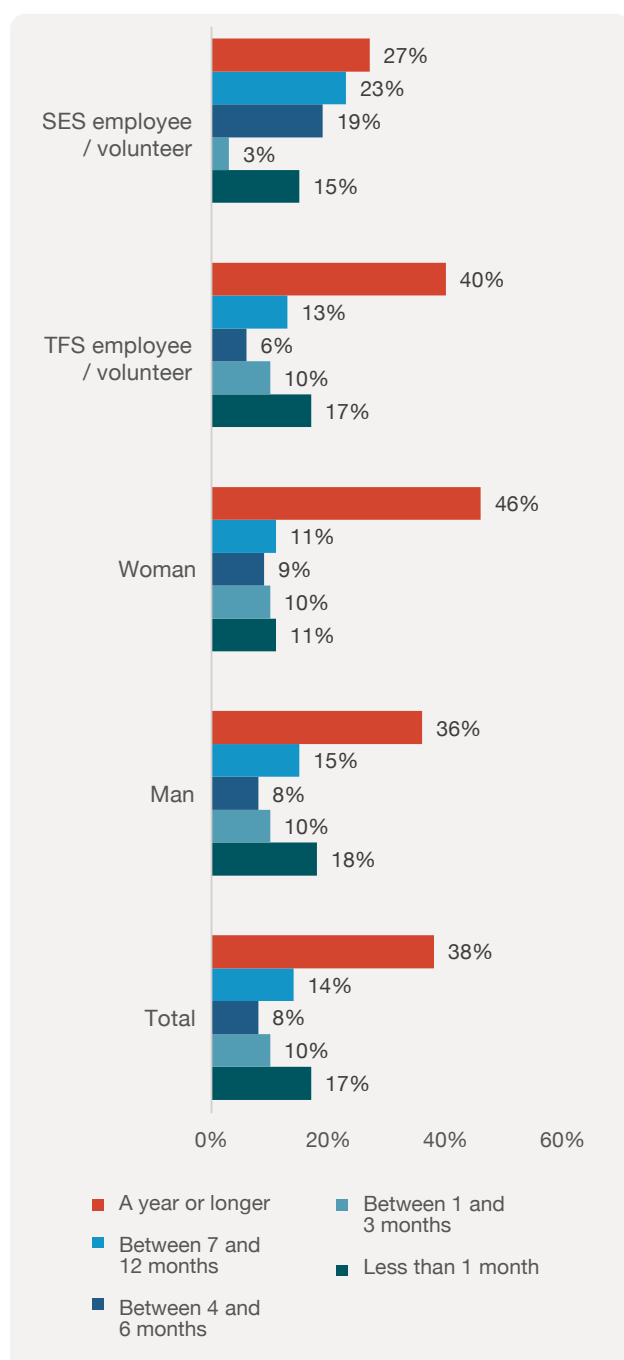he data presented highlights the widespread nature of bullying, the serious health and wellbeing impacts for those affected, and the systemic cultural factors that allow it to persist. The prevalence of bullying, particularly among senior leaders and within male-dominated structures, suggests that it is not simply a matter of isolated incidents but a reflection of entrenched power dynamics and cultural norms.

The findings also reveal stark differences in experiences based on gender, seniority, and other identity factors, with women, LGBTQIA+ people, neurodiverse individuals, and those with disabilities disproportionately affected. The culture of exclusion, hazing, and 'boys' club' mentalities continues to create barriers to equity and inclusion, limiting career progression and contributing to turnover rates.

While some TFS and SES people perceive bullying as harmless banter or a matter of individual resilience, the overwhelming evidence suggests that bullying is a serious and systemic problem that cannot be ignored. A culture of silence, fear of retaliation, and lack of effective leadership intervention have allowed these behaviours to persist.

Addressing workplace bullying in the TFS and SES requires a fundamental cultural shift – one that moves beyond reactive measures and individualised solutions to systemic change. Leadership accountability, clear policies, and robust reporting mechanisms (discussed further in Chapter 8) must be coupled with genuine cultural transformation that prioritises psychological safety, inclusive leadership, and respectful workplace behaviours. Without decisive action, the cycle of bullying will continue to undermine the effectiveness, morale, and long-term success of the organisation.

6. Gender equality and safety

Achieving gender equality and ensuring workplace safety are fundamental to fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment. However, persistent gender imbalances, experiences of bias, and incidents of sexism and harassment continue to shape the realities of many people, particularly women, in male-dominated industries.

Within the TFS and SES, gender equality has been a focal point of recent initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive and respectful workplaces. Historically male-dominated, the TFS and SES have recognised the imperative to address gender imbalances and create environments where all people feel valued and supported.

Gender demographics in focus

The analysis of gender demographics within the TFS reveals a persistently male-dominated workforce, with leadership roles remaining almost entirely occupied by men. Despite a notable increase in the recruitment of women over the past four years, the majority of these appointments have been in lower-level positions, resulting in only a modest 4% overall increase in women's participation. This incremental progress highlights the slow pace of change. The Review heard entrenched myths surrounding women's participation including that roles were awarded to women by sidestepping the usual recruitment processes or that the available roles were disproportionally being awarded to women. These myths continue to influence organisational culture and attitudes, potentially hindering more substantial advancements toward attracting and retaining more women to the services.

> " There are a lot of double standards in so many aspects—females come in with lack of experience but holding quite senior jobs. "

Gender distribution – TFS

TFS Employees

As of June 2024, women constitute 22% of the employed[25] workforce within the organisation, reflecting a small increase from 18% in 2020[26]. Despite this growth, the gender distribution remains heavily skewed towards men, particularly in leadership roles. The top leadership positions, including Senior Executive Service and District Officer roles, are exclusively male, with no female representation. Women are notably underrepresented in senior roles, accounting for only 8.5% of the senior firefighter cohort. Similarly, the Station Officer/Communications Supervisor role has a minimal female presence, with women comprising only 1.4% of this classification. This pattern of gender imbalance is consistent across other senior roles, such as Senior Firefighter, where women make up only 8.5% of the cohort. The highest concentration of female employees is found in lower-level roles, such as Firefighter/Communications Officer, where they make up 32%, and in Tas State Service Bands 1-3 and 4-6, where they represent 59% and 45%, respectively.

TFS Volunteers

The gender breakdown across the TFS volunteer membership reveals a significant imbalance, with males comprising the vast majority of the total cohort. Of 4,581 individuals, 79.04% are male and only 20.96% are female. This trend is consistent across all geographic regions, with the female proportion ranging from 20.43% in the Southern region to 21.88% in the Northern region.

Role-specific data further emphasises the disparity in operational positions, where only 16.24% are female. In leadership roles such as Brigade Chief, First, Second, and Third Officer, female representation drops even lower, often below 11%. Conversely, gender distribution is more balanced in support roles, particularly in Operational Support and Probationary Operational Support, where female participation reaches nearly 50% or more. Interestingly, female representation is relatively higher among Junior/Cadet members at around 40%, suggesting a more balanced gender pipeline in younger cohorts.

25 Note, no demographic data on volunteer base was available.
26 This analysis of data is based on headcount data provided to EB&Co by TFS.

This presents an opportunity for targeted development and retention strategies to improve gender equity in operational and leadership roles over time.

Gender distribution – SES

SES Employees

Between 2020 and 2023, SES headcount data reveals a fluctuating trend in both overall membership and gender distribution. Total membership declined from 39 in 2020 to 32 in 2022, before increasing slightly to 36 in 2023, reflecting a net decrease of 3 members (–7.7%) over the four years. Female representation experienced a notable dip during this time, dropping from 23 in 2020 to 15 in 2022 (a 35% decline), before increasing to 19 in 2023. In contrast, male representation remained relatively stable, fluctuating only slightly between 16 and 18 members across the same period.

The current (2025) SES headcount of 37, comprising 14 males and 23 females, reflects a clear female-majority workforce, with 62% female and 38% male representation.

SES Volunteers

There are currently 711 SES volunteers deployed across 37 units throughout the state. Approximately 35% of these volunteers are female, with regional variations noted: 38% in the Southern region, 27% in the Northern region, and 36% in the Northwest.

Experiences of gender inequality and everyday sexism

While the TFS and SES has made important steps to increase women's participation and to advance gender equality in the workplace, the Review heard that experiences of everyday sexism remain.

Gender inequality remains a persistent issue across all Australian workplaces.

In 2024, the Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reported that women across Australia are still under represented in leadership: although women make up 50% of the Australian workforce, only 21.9% of CEOs are women.[27]

Gender inequality in the workplace manifests in many ways, including barriers for women to progress their careers and attain leadership roles, barriers for people with caring responsibilities, the gender pay gap and occupational segregation. Everyday sexism is the subtle, seemingly harmless interactions involving language or actions which perpetuate and normalise gender inequality.

Examples include:

- Insults masquerading as jokes

- Devaluing women's views or voice

- Gender role stereotyping, for example a woman being asked about marriage and having children, or that a woman with caring responsibilities will be unable to progress in her career

- Preoccupation with physical appearance

- Double standards applied to women and men, such as an assertive woman being called 'pushy' while an assertive man is considered 'ambitious' and promoted; and

- The use of gendered language such as women being called 'good girl', 'darling', 'sweetie' which infantilises women, can be condescending and suggests that women are not professional actors.

While this behaviour may be viewed as harmless, as 'banter' or 'how things have always been done', everyday sexism contributes to a workplace culture in which women feel undermined or less valued and it normalises behaviour that creates a permissive context for more serious misconduct, such as sexual harassment.

The Champions of Change Coalition writes:

> *[this] continuum of behaviours and norms … reflect unequal gender power dynamics in the workplace. These behaviours can vary in how they manifest and can occur in isolation or concurrently. Workplace cultures that normalise, tolerate and excuse disrespectful behaviour at one end of the continuum may lead to more serious issues at the other.*[28]

27 Workplace Gender Equality Agency. *WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2023-2024*. https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality-scorecard, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2024.

28 Champions of Change Coalition. *Disrupting the System: Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.* Sydney, Champions of Change Coalition, 2020.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Further, the impact of everyday sexism can be both significant and lasting, causing harm to women's self-esteem, their personal relationships, their career aspirations and general health and wellbeing.

A workplace culture that tolerates everyday sexism perpetuates negative and outdated gender stereotypes and undermines efforts to advance gender equality. The presence of everyday sexism perpetuates gender inequality in the structure of organisations and increases the likelihood of more serious forms of sex discrimination or sexual harassment occurring in the workplace.[29]

In December 2022, a new positive duty was introduced into the Australian Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth). One part of this positive duty is an obligation on businesses, to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate, as far as possible, their workers from experiencing sex discrimination, sex-based harassment, sexual harassment, hostile work environments (that is, environments which are hostile to women even if conduct or language is not directed at a specific woman) on the ground of sex, and some acts of victimisation.

In Australia, work health and safety laws also operate to protect workers from harm by requiring employers, to identify, manage and control risks[30]. Risks to health and safety arise from people being exposed to hazards. These include psychosocial hazards such as bullying and sexual harassment. This means addressing risk factors for harmful behaviours such as everyday sexism is critical.

While everyday sexism was not a universal experience of women participants in the survey and listening sessions, it was a recurring theme in the Review's discussions and was identified as a key barrier to women's inclusion and progression in the TFS and SES.

What people told us – everyday sexism

Teams and the service benefit from having a diverse workforce

Employees and volunteers across the TFS and SES told us that they personally had witnessed the individual and organisational benefits of having more women involved in the service.

Many people commented that the women who have joined the TFS and SES are often of a very high calibre, bringing skills and capabilities to the team and the TFS and SES.

> *Here at (location) we are only just now at the point where we have a spread of ladies across the shifts. (The new female recruits) are well received now. They get good feedback from recruit courses.*

> " Historically, we've not had many women (firefighters), but community fire safety has allowed many more women to come in as scientists, management, etc. and that crossover and change in people and skills has been really good for organisational culture. "

> *What I do notice within our unit and within SES is a lack of diversity. It's very Anglo-white. The gender balance is improving. It's about the demographics of Tasmania and the socio-economics of who can afford to volunteer.*

Several people also commented that the increased recruitment and participation of women had led to positive shifts in how people treat each other, and a greater emphasis on work life balance. They felt that these shifts benefited everyone involved in TFS and SES and ultimately led to a stronger organisation, better able to serve the Tasmanian community.

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29 Bobbitt-Zeher, D. 2011 "Gender Discrimination at Work: Connecting Gender Stereotypes, Institutional Policies, and Gender Composition of Workplace" Gender & Society 25(6), 764-786 at https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211424741

30 Safe Work Australia "Model WHS Laws" at https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/law-and-regulation/model-whs-laws

6. Gender Equality and Safety

People told us:

The females do add that bit of a good mix. There are times when it needs a bit of female finesse. Blokes have a bit of a bust shit up attitude. Women bring a different perspective and a different view to your team. They are a bit of leveller.

(Having more women involved now) has contributed to a much better work environment —less bullying, more work-life balance. There's greater fairness, more opportunities. Still not great but it's come a long way.

> **Over time, the culture has shifted to become more inclusive, and many have had a positive experience**

As outlined above, increasing the diversity of a workforce brings improvements in organisational performance, innovation and safety, but the full benefits are only realised when an organisation builds an inclusive culture – that is, a culture which values and welcomes the different perspectives within its workforce and volunteer base.

Some participants told us that they could see the efforts being made by the TFS and SES to be more inclusive of female employees and volunteers, citing both the increased recruitment and participation of women across the service, as well as a cultural shift to more inclusive attitudes.

Reflecting on whole-organisation shifts, people told us:

> **Recently, the service has made an effort to be more inclusive, which is a positive step forward.**

I feel good about the journey we've been on with regards to changing a blokey culture. I feel proud of how we've handled the challenge.

I see more women on shift and better leadership of women. When I came on, professional women were on an oddity.

Several people also commented positively on attitudes from local leaders and local peers, describing examples of local teams that had successfully built an inclusive and positive culture:

In my immediate team, everyone is pretty open and inclusive. I haven't seen or heard anything difficult within my 15 person staff in the office.

> **We have members of different cultural and religious backgrounds, different ages and walks of life (nurses, welders, former TFS career folks, some retirees. I've never seen anyone bullied, singled out, excluded on the grounds of any identity. Government organisations now pushing for workforce to represent their communities, and if I look around, [place removed] the diversity matches the community.**
>
> **Slowly more women coming to the role. Only one woman on our shift currently and we have 5 or 6 women out of fifty or so firefighters. The recruitment seems to be working and it's better than it would be if we had a quota. The women we have are fantastic. It's all pretty much Anglo-Saxon and that's pretty much the community.**
>
> **Eventually it'll become more diverse.**

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Sex discrimination, sex-based harassment, and hostile working environments for women

Despite many positive experiences, sexism continues to be part of women's experience of working in the TFS and SES.

Mindsets and attitudes

Both women and men told the EB&Co Review Team that they witness or experience negative attitudes towards women and non-binary people, and negative attitudes towards gender equality.

Several participants commented on the way that women are spoken to and about within the service. This included sex-based harassment, which people had either personally experienced or witnessed:

> *I witness poor attitudes to diversity and inclusion…some of it is everyday sexism and inappropriate comments. Sexual jokes or being a bit pervy when we are out and about.*

> *There is a culture where bullying and misogyny is tolerated. During a training session, for instance, one of the male drivers was honking and shouting at young girls on the street. There's also frequent inappropriate behaviour.*

❝ **For women there's lots of undermining, lots of sexual harassment.** ❞

Respect for women's capability

People also shared examples that they felt indicated a lack of respect for women's contributions and capabilities, and undermined women's commitment to the role:

> *One of the challenges is that it is very male dominated, at least 30 years behind in thinking, and because they are 'uniformed' it brings with it certain levels of power relationships.*

> *We're too easily painted as over-emotional bitchy women.*

> *I was patted on the head and belittled in front of others.*

❝ **One of the worst experiences I had ... was when I offered to assist but was told to assist with the catering and data capturing.** ❞

> *Sexual harassment is not overt but there is a lot of bias against women. Nasty comments made about your ability when you're out on the fireground.*

> *We get extra training on power tools, despite men who are not tradies also being part of the team. They don't get the extra training.*

> *There is that thing where it's male dominated. We do include women, but I have seen women not get a fair go in brigades. They are trained on a different level, and I don't think that is fair. A guy on that brigade said, "there's no place for her here", it's really sad.*

Some people also told us that some employees and volunteers are fundamentally unsupportive of women's participation within the service:

❝ **There is a culture of misogyny.** ❞

> *There are a cohort of people who just don't get it and won't get it no matter what. That's why having a set tenure for unit managers is important so we can turn them over and bring in younger people and women who understand better.*

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Several people shared stories that they felt reflected women being targeted and actively undermined because of gender dynamics within the service:

There was a woman who got a promotion and then received constant attacks from someone who thought he should have got the job and has a problem with women. Other women don't want to advance within the ranks because they see the bullying. There was absolutely nothing done. No one wants to do anything. Many people have a very good heart but don't want to hurt anyone. No one wants to call anything out.

There was a woman in leadership who people did try and undermine. It felt like the men undermining her thought they could do her job better than she could.

Opportunities for women to progress

Several people commented that one result of these mindsets and attitudes was that women were under-represented in the leadership ranks of the TFS and SES. They felt this meant that the service was drawing from a smaller leadership cohort than was truly available to the organisation. One person commented:

Women have found it hard to advance through the ranks. One colleague couldn't access the professional development. Not selected. Women are generally last on the list. I don't think there's ever been a woman on the senior station officer course.

Several women commented on how discouraged they were by the lack of opportunities for capable women to take up leadership roles, highlighting a perception that women were often overlooked, and that the lack of visible women leaders can be interpreted as a lack of faith in women to lead. This in turn further discourages women from seeking promotion and other opportunities.

People told us:

As a woman I am completely uninspired about the lack of women in leadership, I am so uninspired it hurts. There has been great potential for leadership opportunities to be created for women and we haven't seen that happen. I think that the leadership doesn't appreciate the skillsets that exist in the Dept, they are overlooked.

If you were a woman in the organisation and something really bad happened to you, or even if something really good happened to you, you look up and what do you see? There is nothing to look up to.

Structures, policies and processes

In addition to the mindsets and attitudes about gender equality and women's participation and inclusion outlined above, people also perceived that the structures, policies and processes of the organisation reinforce the dominance of men and contribute to a perceived sidelining of women. People particularly highlighted the challenges or barriers created by recruitment and human resources policies and practices, uniforms, facilities and shift rosters.

In relation to recruitment and human resources policies, people told us:

> While diversity and inclusion efforts have been positive, with more women joining, human resources practices remain outdated in some areas. HR policies have not kept up with the positive changes. The implementation of outdated policies … perpetuates discrimination.

I don't think our recruitment processes have changed forever – there is a huge lack of diversity.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Discrimination, overtly I'd say no but behind the scenes I wonder how appointments are made…We're supposed to be merit based and I think that's how it should be, but we know that's not always the case. It would be good to see more women.

Women and men both highlighted the poor access to flexible work conditions as a particular barrier for female employees:

One career firefighter was happy to work day and night shifts but asked to job share and was told 'No' by her Senior Officer, and if she did that she was not committing to the role, and would negatively impact team culture etc.

Few flexible Return to Service options exist. It's not in the interests of the boy's club.

(We had) two females who recently resigned. There was no work flexibility for those with kids, one agreed to an exit interview, the other said 'why would she bother?'

For women wanting more flexible work it's difficult as if you work part-time, you won't be able to fit in all the skills training that keeps you effective in your job.

Looking specifically at shift rosters, several women commented that they are often the only woman on their shift, even when there are other women employees and volunteers. One woman described it as follows:

They seem to spread women across shifts rather than keep together. It would make (the job) a lot more enjoyable if women could also work with other women. Even between trucks they try to spread the females out. They are so scared of putting women together.

People told us that women's uniforms are often a poor fit, which can create a safety issue. They perceive that again this reflects an orientation to male employees and volunteers as 'the norm'.

One person told us:

> I spoke to a female in fire-comm she showed me the shirt they gave her – it came down to her knees. It could have been a dress. It's all for show. Let's get all these women in the organisation but let's not actually make their experiences actually inclusive.

People told us that the physical facilities, particularly toilets and change rooms, are often inadequate for women (and others) and fail to meet basic standards of comfort, privacy, and accessibility. These spaces urgently need upgrades to ensure they reflect and respect human dignity for all people:

Facilities – there are maybe two toilets with sanitary bins. A lot of the bathrooms at the stations are like public bathrooms with cubicles. There is no privacy.

There is nowhere safe and appropriate for women and girls to change. It isn't suitable. [...] No female changing facilities. We have one toilet.

These findings point to the significant work to be done to build a shared understanding of the changes occurring in the TFS and SES, and why those changes will strengthen the organisation's response to the needs of Tasmanian communities. It's important to note that these views reflect the range of views regarding gender inclusive workplaces across the nation: in Australia, with some 66% of people supportive of gender equality; some 17% are 'rejectors'' of gender equality (characterised by views including a perception that gender equality is no longer an issue and that gender equality has gone too far; and that men are discriminated against because of gender); and12% of people are ''conflicted' about gender equality (that is, supportive of gender equality but also aware that they personally may have benefited from the status quo)[31].

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31 Plan International Australia, 2023. Gender Compass: A segmentation of Australia's views of gender equality. https://www.plan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GenderCompass_Report.pdf Plan International Australia. Melbourne.

The personal and organisational impact

Together, these attitudes, structures and systems exact a significant toll on individuals and the service.

Female employees and volunteers expressed deep hurt and frustration at the enduring nature of these attitudes.

A few years ago, I wouldn't have spoken up (about how women are treated), but now I'm just so angry, I just think fuck it, I will not tolerate it.

I know it's just banter but its shit.

> I've worked with a lot of the women firefighters and a lot of them have been quite damaged — PTSD from the job but compounded by the comments and treatment of women.

In addition to the personal impact, participants told us that these attitudes have a negative impact on recruitment of female employees and volunteers, and a negative impact on opportunities for progression:

70% of volunteers are white middle-aged males, with these being 90% of Unit Managers and Deputy Managers [...] Few females in Unit management.

Everyone is welcome to apply, but we still don't get applications from the ladies. And (from people from diverse cultural backgrounds). We need to ask ourselves why they are not applying.

Speaking about gender and other forms of discrimination, one person commented:

The discriminatory environment has deterred others from joining. In fact, 7 or 8 people I know have decided against joining due to the toxic culture.

Survey insights – everyday sexism

Across all survey respondents, approximately three quarters of all respondents agreed with the statement 'sexism is not tolerated' (74%). Women were significantly less likely to agree with this statement (62%) compared to men (77%).

Significant differences across different TFS and SES cohorts were evident.

Employees of both the TFS and SES (56% and 55% respectively) were less likely to agree compared to TFS volunteers and SES volunteers (76% and 78% respectively).

TFS volunteer women were significantly less likely to agree (63%) compared to TFS volunteer men (80%).

There were no significant differences between men and women employees at TFS or among men and women volunteers at SES.

Sexual Harassment

Australian law states that sexual harassment occurs when:

A person makes an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to the person harassed; or engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the person harassed.

In circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated the possibility that the person harassed would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

In determining whether an advance, request or other conduct may be sexual in nature, the intention of the alleged harasser is not relevant. An advance, request or other conduct may be sexual in nature even if the person engaging in the conduct does not have a sexual interest in that person or is of a different sexual orientation to the person harassed.[32]

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32 Respect@Work. (2022). Defining workplace sexual harassment.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Sexual harassment can take many forms. It is not always obvious, repeated or continuous. It can include one-off incidents, or it can include a pattern of behaviour that makes the working environment uncomfortable or threatening in a sexually hostile way.

Examples of sexual harassment include:

- inappropriate physical contact
- intrusive questions about a person's private life or physical appearance
- sharing or threatening to share intimate images or film without consent
- unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing
- repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates
- sexually suggestive comments or jokes that offend or intimidate
- requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts
- sexually explicit pictures, posters or gifts
- actual or attempted rape or sexual assault
- being followed, watched or someone loitering
- sexually explicit comments made in person or in writing or indecent messages (SMS, social media)
- phone calls or emails—including the use of emojis with sexual connotations
- sexual gestures, indecent exposure or inappropriate display of the body
- unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that occurs online or via some form of technology – including on virtual meetings
- Inappropriate staring or leering
- Repeated or inappropriate advances on email or other online social technologies.[33]

Positive Duty in the Sex Discrimination Act

Positive duty legislation, introduced in December 2022, places a legal obligation on organisations and businesses to take proactive and meaningful steps to prevent unlawful conduct in the workplace or in work-related contexts. This significant shift requires employers to actively work to prevent harassment, rather than waiting for complaints to surface. Employers must now take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate sexual harassment, sex discrimination, sex-based harassment, hostile work environments and victimisation. For businesses, this involves embedding best-practice policies, conducting regular risk assessments, providing comprehensive training, and ensuring strong leadership commitment to eradicating sexual harassment is evident throughout the organisation.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has powers under the Sex Discrimination Act to investigate and enforce compliance with the positive duty.

> *The introduction of positive duty does not change the illegality of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and it was never meant to. It rebalances the weight of responsibility and challenges workplaces to be better informed and answerable for their practices.*[34]
>
> Dr Anna Cody, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission

The 2022 Australian Human Rights Commission national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces found that 1 in 3 people had been sexually harassed at work in the previous five years (41% of women and 26% of men), with most sexual harassment in Australian workplaces carried out by men.[35]

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33 Ibid.
34 Law Society Journal. (2023). New positive duty powers for Human Rights Commission.
35 Time for Respect: Fifth National Survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Impacts of workplace sexual harassment

The Time for Respect report highlighted the profound impacts of workplace sexual harassment, which include psychological, emotional, and physical harm to those affected. Such harm often manifests as anxiety, depression, and trauma, leading to reduced job satisfaction, lower productivity, and increased absenteeism. The report also underscores the broader organisational consequences, such as reputational damage, decreased employee morale, and financial losses stemming from staff turnover and legal expenses.

Supporting these findings, broader research revealed that women who experienced sexual harassment faced nearly three times the risk of developing depressive symptoms compared to those who had not.[36]

Workplace Sexual Harassment Drivers Risk Factors

While sexual harassment, sex discrimination, and other unlawful behaviours can occur in any workplace, research has demonstrated that sexual harassment is more prevalent in workplaces that are organised by a rigid hierarchy, where men are over-represented in the workforce and/or over-represented in senior leadership roles, and in which the nature of the work is considered non-traditional for women.[37] Additionally, isolated or remote working conditions also pose higher risks for sexual harassment[38] alongside workplace environments that lack strong policies and enforcement regarding workplace behaviour exacerbates the risk.

Male dominated workplaces and masculinity

Firefighting and emergency services more broadly are notably male dominated, both in Australia[39] and internationally.[40] This is not a new phenomenon: historically, firefighting in Australia has been made up of mostly or only men.[41] The first women to become full-time firefighters for Fire & Rescue NSW, for instance, did not join until 1985.[42] Gender composition – specifically, significantly higher numbers of men at all levels of employment – is a significant driver of sexual harassment.[43] Higher levels of discrimination and harassment in fields such as firefighting, law enforcement, and construction has been attributed to their male-dominated nature.[44]

It is important to note that greater numbers of men than women in a workplace are not enough to explain gendered harassment, discrimination and hostility. Historically male-dominated fields, professions and workplaces may develop and protect strong cultures of masculinity, in which a harmful view of masculinity can be normalised and idealised.[45] This is particularly common in workplaces and fields in which workers experience significant risk, and/or must engage in physically demanding labour.[46] Such workplaces value strict hierarchy, power and strength – values particularly prevalent in firefighting services, and particularly Australian firefighting services, which tend to follow increasingly militarised structures of operation and command.[47]

36 Thurston, R.C., Chang, Y., Matthews, K.A., von Känel, R. and Koenen, K. (2019). Association of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault with Midlife Women's Mental and Physical Health. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, [online] 179(1), p.48.

37 *Workplace sexual harassment (2021) The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector*. https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/baseline-audit-report-2021/workplace-sexual-harassment

38 Factsheet Series: *Positive Duty – Causes and Risk Factors of Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Other Unlawful Behaviours, August 2023*

39 Champions of Change Coalition, *Going beyond 'It's the right thing to do': Gender balance in fire and emergency* (Report, 2020);

40 Tamika Perrott (2016), 'Beyond "Token" firefighters: Exploring women's experiences of gender and identity at work', *Sociological Research Online* 21(1); Thomas Thurnell-Read and Andrew Parker (2008), 'Men, masculinities and firefighting: Occupational identity, shop-floor culture and organisational change', *Emotion, Space and Identity* 1(2), 127-134; Corinne Bendersky, 'Making US fire departments more diverse and inclusive', *Harvard Business Review* (Article, 07 December 2018) https://hbr.org/2018/12/making-u-s-fire-departments-more-diverse-and-inclusive

41 Ruth Beatson and Jim Mclennan (2005), 'Australia's women volunteer firefighters: A literature review and research agenda', Australian *Journal on Volunteering* 10(2), 18-27.

42 Women's Electoral Lobby, *More than fire* (Blog post, 2018) https://www.wel.org.au/more_than_fire

43 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Causes and risk factors of sex discrimination, sexual harassment and other unlawful behaviours* (Fact sheet, August 2023); Kimbely Riddle and Karen Heaton (2023), 'Antecedents to sexual harassment of women in selected male-dominated occupations: a systematic review', *Workplace Health and Safety* 71(8).

44 Kimbely Riddle and Karen Heaton (2023), 'Antecedents to sexual harassment of women in selected male-dominated occupations: A systematic review', *Workplace Health & Safety* 71(8).

45 Amandeep Saini, Saranya Srikanthan, Maureen Saha, Lathusha Sritharan and Runisan Natheeswaran, *Reviewing best practices for gender-based violence prevention education in hypermasculine workplaces*, McMaster University Office of Community Engagement, Interval House Hamilton (Report, 2024); Babatunde Akanji, Chima Mordi, Hakeem Adeniyi Ajonbadi (2024), 'Confronting social dominance ideology: How professional women manage career stereotypes in male-dominated occupations', Employee Relations 46(4).

46 Mary Stergiou-Kita, Elizabeth Mansfield, Randy Bezo, Angela Colantonio, Enzo Garritano, Marc Lafrance, John Lewko, Steve Mantis, Joel Moody, Nicole Power, Nancy Theberge, Eleanor Westwood, Krista Travers (2016), 'Danger zone: Men, masculinity and occupational health and safety in high-risk occupations', *Safety Science* 80, 2013-220.

47 Melinda McDonald (2024), 'Addressing gender inequality in firefighting: the role of Women and Firefighting Australasia', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 40(4); Meagan Tyler, Lisa Carson and Benjamin Reynolds, 'Are fire services "extremely gendered" organisations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia', *Gender, Work and Organisation* 26(9), 1304-1323.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

The influence of militarism and the adoption of militaristic forms of governance, organisation and operation in firefighting services has been identified as a key contributing factor to the discrimination against and exclusion and harassment of women, particularly given the prevalence of gendered violence in the military.[48] The combination of driver and risk factors present in the emergency services creates a heightened vulnerability for various groups, particularly women, making it essential that each workplace implements proactive measures to mitigate these risks to meet positive duty obligations now in force on employers.

The nature and prevalence of sexual harassment in the emergency services sector

Sexual harassment within Australia's emergency services sector remains a significant concern, impacting both the wellbeing of employees and volunteers and overall workplace culture.

A 2022 report on the Victorian public sector found that 1 in 8 women working in police and emergency services experienced some form of sexual harassment in the preceding year.[49] While the report found sexual harassment to be prevalent across the Victorian public service, it was particularly high among frontline sectors including emergency services. 12% of women working in the police and emergency services reported experiencing sexual harassment in the same period.[50]

Specifically, the prevalence of sexual harassment in firefighting is alarming, with studies indicating that approximately 21.7% of female firefighters report experiencing sexual harassment.[51] The impact on female firefighters is profound, as these common experiences of harassment tend to take place in male dominated workplaces that do not take misconduct seriously. As such, they face a culture that minimises their experiences and discourages reporting.[52]

One study of women firefighters found that 37.4% of those surveyed experienced sexual harassment, while 5.1% experienced sexual assault.[53]

What people told us – sexual harassment

Despite compelling evidence demonstrating that sexual harassment is a pervasive issue across most Australian workplaces - and acknowledging that the emergency services sector carries significant risk factors – the Review uncovered a concerning belief among some participants that such incidents do not occur within the TFS and SES, or that their occurrence is relegated to the past.

Sexual harassment is one area (that's) maybe not as bad as you might expect. There are inappropriate comments made but not usually made directly to the person. Most of the men are married or attached.

You have to be much more aware of your behaviour, because if sexual harassment happens – it will be your fault.

" I have faced sexual harassment, including crude jokes that show a complete lack of awareness or concern for those who might be affected by such comments. "

Sexual harassment has decreased by 90% at least. The bullying and harassment between people continue. Overall, most people are good.

Even when incidents were acknowledged, there was a tendency to downplay their seriousness or fail to fully grasp their impact.

48 Melinda McDonald (2024), 'Addressing gender inequality in firefighting: the role of Women and Firefighting Australasia', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 40(4); Meagan Tyler, Lisa Carson and Benjamin Reynolds, 'Are fire services "extremely gendered" organisations? Examining the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Australia', *Gender, Work and Organisation* 26(9), 1304-1323.

49 Adeshola Ore, 'One-in-eight women working in emergency services experienced sexual harassment, Victorian report says', *The Guardian* (Article, 5 September 2022).

50 Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, Baseline report – 2021 workplace gender audit data analysis (Report, 2022)132.

51 Melanie A Hom, Ian H Stanley, Sally Spencer-Thomas, Thomas E Joiner (2017), 'Women firefighters and workplace harassment: associated suicidality and mental health sequelae', *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 205(12), 910-917.

52 Shelby Perket and Mrista McQueeney (2023), 'Harassment, discrimination, and assault: The unseen crisis in fire service professions', *Journal of Student Research* 11(4).

53 Sara A Jahnke, Christopher K Haddock, Nattinee Jitnarin, Christopher M Kaipust, Brittany S Hollerbach and Walker S C Poston)2019), 'The prevalence and health impacts of frequent work discrimination and harassment among women firefighters in the US Fire Service', *BioMed Resarch International* 1.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Participants who had experienced sexual harassment shared their sense of futility in reporting such incidents as they believed they would not be taken seriously or covered up.

They claimed I was intoxicated and wouldn't have known what was happening to me.

" She told the leader [about sexual harassment] but the perpetrator was good friends of this person, and the leader said, *'he would never do that'*.

A female colleague was asked who she slept with to get her job; the woman didn't want to raise a formal complaint because she didn't want to rock the boat and didn't trust that it would go anywhere.

A colleague was told she should do pole dancing in his office for him. It's ridiculous. But nothing happened. Later, she was approached by the same man who knocked on her door and came on to her. This behaviour continued for some time, but they said, 'no, he said he didn't do it'.

Survey insights – sexual harassment

Prevalence of sexual harassment

Across all survey responses almost one in six (15%) respondents indicated they had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years and one in ten (10%) respondents had experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months.

Gender differences were present with women more likely to report experiencing sexual harassment in the last 12 months (22% compared to 6% of men) and in the last five years (33% compared to 10% of men).

Figure 27: Total incidence of sexual harassment (%)
SH_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced sexual harassment while working or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the TFS or SES? SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years? SHB_12M. Did any of these behaviours occur in the last 12 months at the TFS or SES? Base: All respondents

Differences were also evident between different cohorts within the TFS and SES as detailed below.

Tasmanian Fire Service

Experiences of sexual harassment varied between cohorts at the TFS.

Among TFS employees, women were significantly more likely to report sexual harassment in the last 12 months (22%) compared to men (8%).[54] Consistent with the increased prevalence of sexual harassment among female TFS employees, the survey showed TFS employees not in career firefighter roles were more likely to experience sexual harassment in the last 12 months (18%) compared to those in career firefighting roles (8%).

Further, employees in Band 6-9 roles were more likely to experience sexual harassment in the last 12 months (33%) compared to those in Band 1-5 roles (12%).

Among TFS volunteers, women were also significantly more likely to experience sexual harassment, with 37% of women experiencing sexual harassment in the last five years compared to 10% of men, and 24% of women volunteers experiencing sexual harassment in the last 12 months compared to 7% of men.

TFS volunteers aged 18-34 years were also more likely to experience sexual harassment:

- In the last 12 months 18% of those aged 18-34 experienced sexual harassment compared to 6% of those aged 55 years and over

- In the last five years, 21% of those aged 18-34 years experienced sexual harassment and 19% of those aged 35-54 years, compared to 9% of those aged 55 years and over.

	TFS employee	Gender		Career Firefighter			Other employees		
	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Firefighter	Officer and above	Total	Band 1-5	Band 6-9
	(n=226)	(n=165)	(n=51)	(n=125)	(n=59)	(n=62)	(n=101)	(n=61)	(n=38)
Experienced sexual harassment in the last 5 years	16%	13%	24%	13%	9%	20%	21%	16%	33%
Experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months	12%	8%	22%	8%	8%	7%	18%	12%	33%

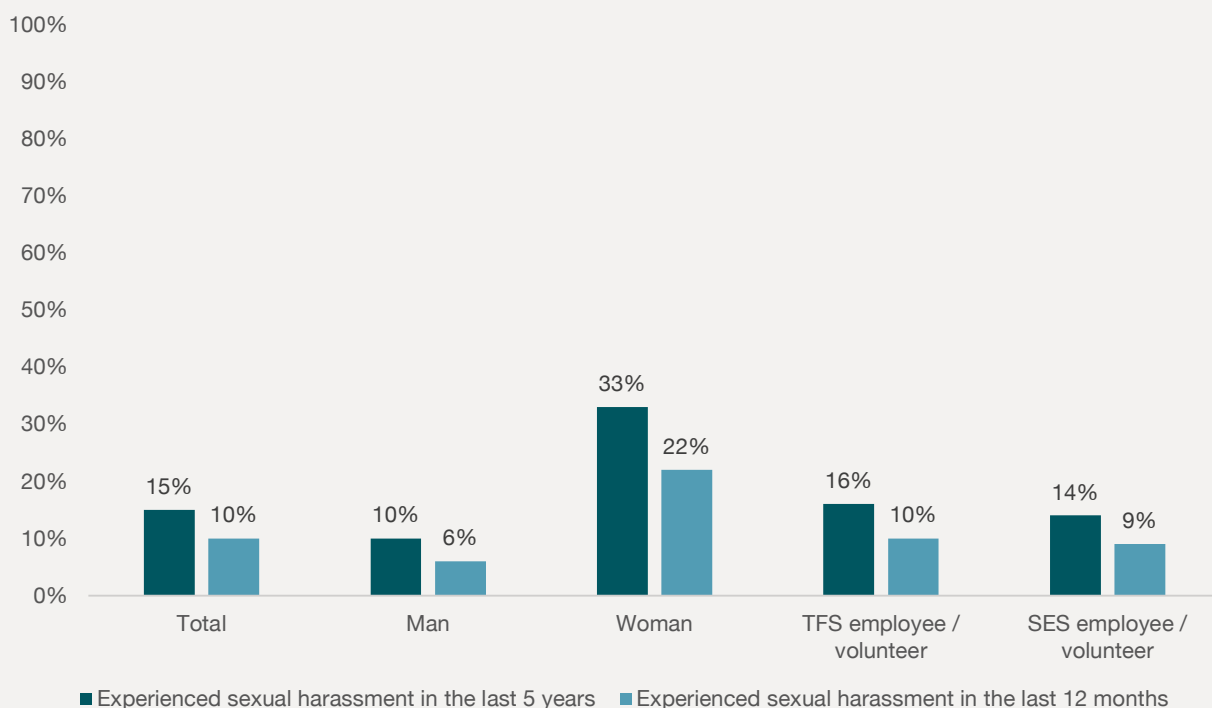**Figure 28: TFS employee incidence of sexual harassment (%)**
SH_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced sexual harassment while working or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the TFS? SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the TFS in the past 5 years? SHB_12M. Did any of these behaviours occur in the last 12 months at the TFS? Base: All respondents

	TFS volunteer	Gender		TFS volunteer role			
	Total	Man	Woman	Brigade Chief / 1st officer	Firefighters	2nd 3rd 4th Brigade officers	Op. support / TFS museum / Social member
	(n=643)	(n=506)	(n=123)	(n=73)	(n=413)	(n=111)	(n=36)
Experienced sexual harassment in the last 5 years	15%	10%	37%	14%	17%	11%	17%
Experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months	10%	7%	24%	5%	11%	7%	14%

Figure 29: TFS volunteer incidence of sexual harassment (%)
SH_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced sexual harassment while working or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the TFS? SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the TFS in the past 5 years? SHB_12M. Did any of these behaviours occur in the last 12 months at the TFS? Base: All respondents

54 Note, the difference in male and female TFS employees' experience of sexual harassment in the last five years is not statistically significant.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer role	
	Total	Man	Woman	Unit / Deputy manager	General volunteer
	(n=159)	(n=90)	(n=62)	(n=35)	(n=118)
Experienced sexual harassment in the last 5 years	14%	7%	26%	16%	14%
Experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months	9%	4%	17%	11%	9%

Figure 30: SES volunteer incidence of sexual harassment (%)
SH_5Y. In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced sexual harassment while working or engaging in work-related or volunteer-related activities for the SES? SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the SES in the past 5 years? SHB_12M. Did any of these behaviours occur in the last 12 months at the SES? Base: All respondents

State Emergency Services

10% of SES employees reported experiencing sexual harassment in the last five years and 12 months (no disaggregation available due to small sample size).

Across SES volunteers, women were more likely to experience sexual harassment in the last 12 months (17% compared to 4% of men) and in the last five years (26% compared to 7% of men).

There were no statistically significant differences across other groups within SES.

Sexual harassment behaviours experienced

Survey respondents were asked about the types of sexual harassment behaviours they experienced.

Women were significantly more likely than men to experience sexually suggestive comments or jokes (23% vs. 6%), intrusive questions about their private lives or comments on their physical appearance (15% vs. 3%), and inappropriate staring or leering (12% vs. 1%). Female respondents also reported higher instances of being followed or watched (7% vs. 1%), exposure to sexual gestures or indecent exposure (5% vs. 2%), and inappropriate physical contact (5% vs. 1%).

Further disparities were evident in experiences of unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering, or kissing (6% vs. 1%), inappropriate advances through digital platforms (6% vs. <1%), and requests or pressure for sex or sexual acts (4% vs. <1%).

Women were also more likely to receive repeated or inappropriate invitations for dates (4% vs. <1%). Additionally, 8% of women experienced other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature compared to 1% of men. Across all survey respondents, 1% of women reported experiencing actual or attempted rape or sexual assault compared to <1% of men.

Tasmania Fire Service

Among TFS employees, differences in the types of sexual harassment behaviours experienced were recorded by gender, employee role and region.

Women were more likely to report experiencing:

- Intrusive questions about your private life or comments on your physical appearance that made you feel offended (19% compared to 5% of men)

- Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated (8% compared to 1% of men).

TFS employees in a Band 6-9 role were more likely to report experiencing:

- Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering, or kissing (6% compared to 0% of those in a Band 1-5 role)

- Inappropriate commentary, images or film of you distributed on some form of social media without your consent (4% compared to 0% of those in a Band 1-5 role)

- Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine (4% compared to 0% of those in a Band 1-5 role).

6. Gender Equality and Safety

	Total	Gender		TFS / SES	
	Total	Man	Woman	TFS employee / volunteer	SES employee / volunteer
	(n=1,057)	(n=773)	(n=249)	(n=869)	(n=188)
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended	10%	6%	23%	10%	7%
Intrusive questions about your private life or comments on your physical appearance that made you feel offended	6%	3%	15%	6%	6%
Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated	3%	1%	12%	3%	4%
Seeing or being sent sexually explicit images and videos, cartoons, drawings, photographs, or jokes that made you feel offended	3%	3%	5%	4%	2%
Being followed, watched, or someone loitering nearby	3%	1%	7%	2%	4%
Sexual gestures, indecent exposure, or inappropriate display of the body	2%	2%	5%	2%	2%
Inappropriate physical contact	2%	1%	5%	2%	3%
Sexually explicit comments made in emails, SMS messages, or on social media	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering, or kissing	2%	1%	6%	2%	2%
Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites, internet chat rooms or other online platforms	2%	<1%	6%	2%	1%
Requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts	1%	<1%	4%	1%	1%
Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	1%	<1%	4%	1%	1%
Inappropriate commentary, images or film of you distributed on some form of social media without your consent	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	1%
Actual or attempted rape or sexual assault	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	1%
Sharing or threatening to share intimate images of you without your consent (e.g. images or video of you involving sexual activity or nudity)	<1%	<1%	0%	<1%	0%
Any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature	3%	1%	8%	3%	3%

Figure 31: Total incidence of specific sexual harassment behaviours in the last five years (%)
SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years?
Base: All respondents

TFS employees in the North-West region (9%) and those in the South region (12%) were more likely to report experiencing sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made them feel offended compared to those in the North region (1%).

Among TFS volunteers, women were significantly more likely to experience sexually suggestive comments or jokes (29% vs. 6%), intrusive questions about their private lives or comments on their physical appearance (15% vs. 3%), and inappropriate staring or leering (13% vs. 1%). Female respondents also reported higher instances of being followed or watched (8% vs. 1%),

exposure to inappropriate physical contact (5% vs. 1%) and unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing (7% vs. 1%).

Further disparities were evident in inappropriate advances through digital platforms (7% vs. <1%), requests or pressure for sex or sexual acts (5% vs. <1%) and inappropriate commentary, images or film of you distributed on some form of social media without your consent (2% vs. <1%). Women were also more likely to receive repeated or inappropriate invitations for dates (4% vs. <1%). Additionally, 8% of women experienced other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature compared to 2% of men.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Among TFS volunteers, 1% of women reported experiencing actual or attempted rape or sexual assault compared to <1% of men.

Some differences were also evident between volunteer roles:

- Inappropriate commentary, images or film of you distributed on some form of social media without your consent, with higher levels of agreement among Brigade Chiefs/First officers (3%) and Operational support/TFS museum/Social member (3%) compared to those in a volunteer firefighter role (<1%).

- Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine, with higher levels of agreement among Brigade Chiefs/First officers (1% compared to <1% of those in volunteer firefighter roles).

- Sharing or threatening to share intimate images of you without your consent (e.g. images or video of you involving sexual activity or nudity), with higher levels of agreement among Brigade Chiefs/ First officers (3% compared to 0% of those in all other TFS volunteer roles).

	TFS employee	Gender		Career firefighter			Other employee		
	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Firefighter	Officer and above	Total	Band 1-5	Band 6-9
	(n=226)	(n=165)	(n=51)	(n=125)	(n=59)	(n=62)	(n=101)	(n=61)	(n=38)
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended	10%	9%	11%	8%	6%	13%	12%	9%	20%
Intrusive questions about your private life or comments on your physical appearance that made you feel offended	8%	5%	19%	5%	4%	8%	13%	11%	19%
Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated	3%	1%	8%	3%	4%	2%	3%	3%	3%
Seeing or being sent sexually explicit images and videos, cartoons, drawings, photographs, or jokes that made you feel offended	4%	4%	1%	4%	3%	5%	4%	3%	4%
Being followed, watched, or someone loitering nearby	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%	1%	2%
Sexual gestures, indecent exposure, or inappropriate display of the body	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%	2%
Inappropriate physical contact	1%	1%	0%	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%	3%
Sexually explicit comments made in emails, SMS messages, or on social media	2%	2%	0%	2%	2%	4%	1%	0%	2%
Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering, or kissing	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%	0%	6%
Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites, internet chat rooms or other online platforms	2%	1%	6%	3%	4%	2%	1%	0%	2%
Requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	2%	1%	6%	2%	4%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Inappropriate commentary, images or film of you distributed on some form of social media without your consent	2%	3%	1%	3%	3%	4%	1%	0%	4%
Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	0%	4%
Actual or attempted rape or sexual assault	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sharing or threatening to share intimate images of you without your consent (e.g. images or video of you involving sexual activity or nudity)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature	3%	2%	6%	2%	0%	4%	4%	4%	5%

Figure 32: TFS employee incidence of specific sexual harassment behaviours in the last five years (%)
SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the TFS in the past 5 years? Base: All respondents

	TFS volunteer	Gender		TFS volunteer			
	Total	Man	Woman	Brigade Chief / 1st officer	Firefighters	2nd 3rd 4th Brigade officers	Op. support / TFS museum / Social member
	(n=643)	(n=506)	(n=123)	(n=73)	(n=413)	(n=111)	(n=36)
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended	10%	6%	29%	7%	11%	7%	13%
Intrusive questions about your private life or comments on your physical appearance that made you feel offended	6%	3%	15%	7%	6%	3%	8%
Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated	3%	1%	13%	4%	4%	1%	0%
Seeing or being sent sexually explicit images and videos, cartoons, drawings, photographs, or jokes that made you feel offended	3%	3%	6%	4%	3%	2%	7%
Being followed, watched, or someone loitering nearby	3%	1%	8%	4%	3%	1%	0%
Sexual gestures, indecent exposure, or inappropriate display of the body	3%	2%	7%	4%	3%	1%	2%
Inappropriate physical contact	2%	1%	5%	4%	2%	2%	4%
Sexually explicit comments made in emails, SMS messages, or on social media	2%	2%	3%	3%	2%	0%	4%
Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering, or kissing	2%	1%	7%	5%	2%	2%	2%
Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites, internet chat rooms or other online platforms	2%	<1%	7%	1%	2%	1%	0%
Requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts	1%	<1%	5%	3%	2%	0%	0%
Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	1%	<1%	4%	3%	1%	2%	0%
Inappropriate commentary, images or film of you distributed on some form of social media without your consent	<1%	<1%	2%	3%	<1%	0%	3%
Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	0%	0%
Actual or attempted rape or sexual assault	<1%	<1%	1%	1%	<1%	0%	0%
Sharing or threatening to share intimate images of you without your consent (e.g. images or video of you involving sexual activity or nudity)	<1%	<1%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%
Any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature	3%	2%	8%	3%	3%	0%	4%

Figure 33: TFS volunteer incidence of specific sexual harassment behaviours in the last five years (%)
SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the TFS in the past 5 years? Base: All respondents

State Emergency Service

Due to the small number of SES employees no statistically significant differences were evident.

Among SES volunteers, women were significantly more likely to experience inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated (11% vs. 0%), intrusive questions about your private life or comments on your physical appearance that made you feel offended (14% vs. 2%), being followed, watched, or someone loitering nearby (10% vs. 2%), inappropriate physical contact (9% vs 0%). Female SES volunteers were also more likely to experience any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature (9% vs. <1%).

SES volunteers in the North region were more likely report experiencing inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated (12%) compared to volunteers in the South region (1%). SES volunteers in the North region were also more like to report experiencing any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature (10%) compared to those in the North-West region (1%).

Concerningly, 3% of female SES volunteers reported experiencing actual or attempted rape or sexual assault (0% of male SES volunteers reported this).

6. Gender Equality and Safety

	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer	
	Total	Man	Woman	Unit / Deputy manager	General volunteer
	(n=159)	(n=90)	(n=62)	(n=35)	(n=118)
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended	7%	4%	12%	10%	7%
Intrusive questions about your private life or comments on your physical appearance that made you feel offended	6%	2%	14%	11%	6%
Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated	4%	0%	11%	3%	5%
Seeing or being sent sexually explicit images and videos, cartoons, drawings, photographs, or jokes that made you feel offended	3%	2%	3%	6%	2%
Being followed, watched, or someone loitering nearby	4%	2%	10%	2%	5%
Sexual gestures, indecent exposure, or inappropriate display of the body	2%	2%	3%	8%	1%
Inappropriate physical contact	3%	0%	9%	0%	4%
Sexually explicit comments made in emails, SMS messages, or on social media	2%	1%	3%	0%	2%
Unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering, or kissing	2%	0%	7%	0%	3%
Repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites, internet chat rooms or other online platforms	2%	0%	4%	0%	2%
Requests or pressure for sex or other sexual acts	1%	0%	3%	0%	1%
Repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	1%	<1%	2%	2%	1%
Inappropriate commentary, images or film of you distributed on some form of social media without your consent	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Indecent phone calls, including someone leaving a sexually explicit message on voicemail or an answering machine	1%	0%	3%	0%	1%
Actual or attempted rape or sexual assault	1%	0%	3%	0%	1%
Sharing or threatening to share intimate images of you without your consent (e.g. images or video of you involving sexual activity or nudity)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature	3%	<1%	9%	2%	4%

Figure 34: SES volunteer incidence of specific sexual harassment behaviours in the last five years (%)
SHB_5Y. Have you experienced any of the following types of sexual harassment at the TFS in the past 5 years? Base: All respondents

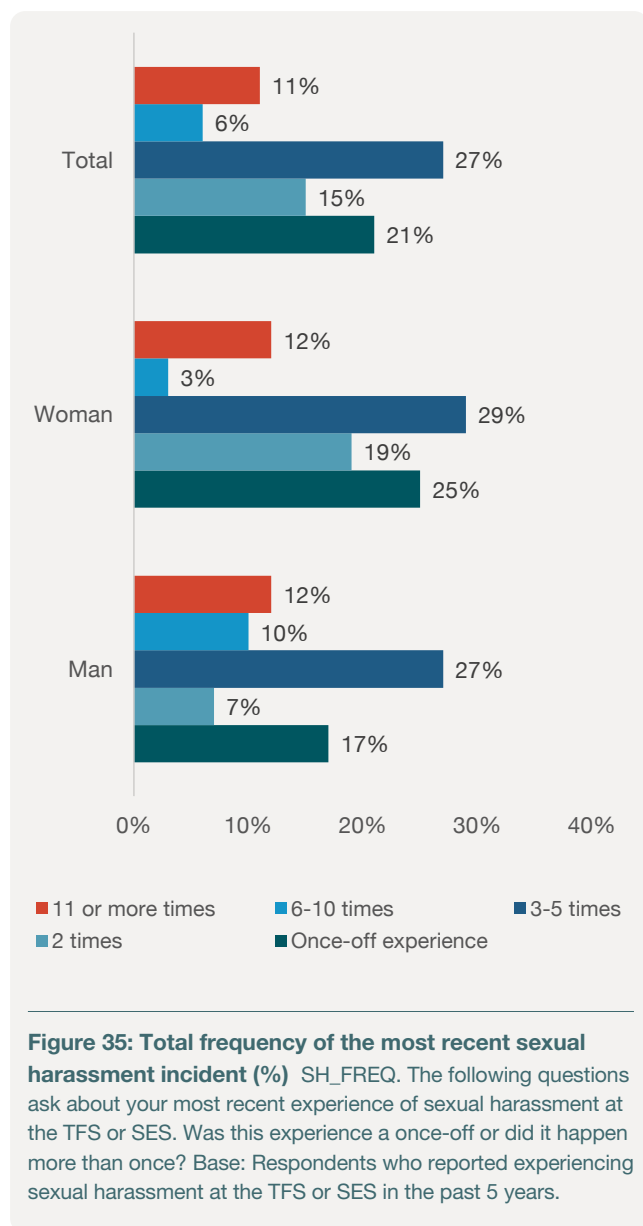## Details about the most recent incident of sexual harassment

Respondents who had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years were asked about their most recent incident of sexual harassment. This included information about the perpetrator(s), whether it was a once off or occurred multiple times, and the duration of the sexual harassment.

Respondents were asked whether their most recent incident of sexual harassment was a once-off experience or an incident which occurred multiple times. Just over one in five (21%) respondents reported their most recent incident of sexual harassment as a once-off experience.

Almost one in six (15%) recorded the incident as occurring two times. Over a quarter (27%) reported the incident as occurring between three and five times. A small portion (6%) stated the incident occurred between six and ten times and more than one in ten (11%) noted the incident as occurring for 11 times or more.

Among SES employees/volunteers (note small base of less than 30) who experienced sexual harassment in the last 5 years, the frequency of experiencing sexual harassment among this cohort was similar to that of TFS employees/volunteers, with a once-off experience and 3-5 times the most common responses.

Figure 35: Total frequency of the most recent sexual harassment incident (%) SH_FREQ. The following questions ask about your most recent experience of sexual harassment at the TFS or SES. Was this experience a once-off or did it happen more than once? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

Figure 36: Total number of people involved in the most recent sexual harassment incident (%) SH_NUMBER. Did your most recent experience of sexual harassment at the TFS or SES involve just one person or more than one person? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

Respondents were asked about how many people were involved in their most recent incident of sexual harassment. Equal proportions of respondents reported their most recent incident as perpetrated by one person (42%) and more than one person (42%). No differences between sub-groups were recorded.

Among SES employees/volunteers (note small base of less than 30), they more commonly reported one person being involved in their most recent experience of sexual harassment.
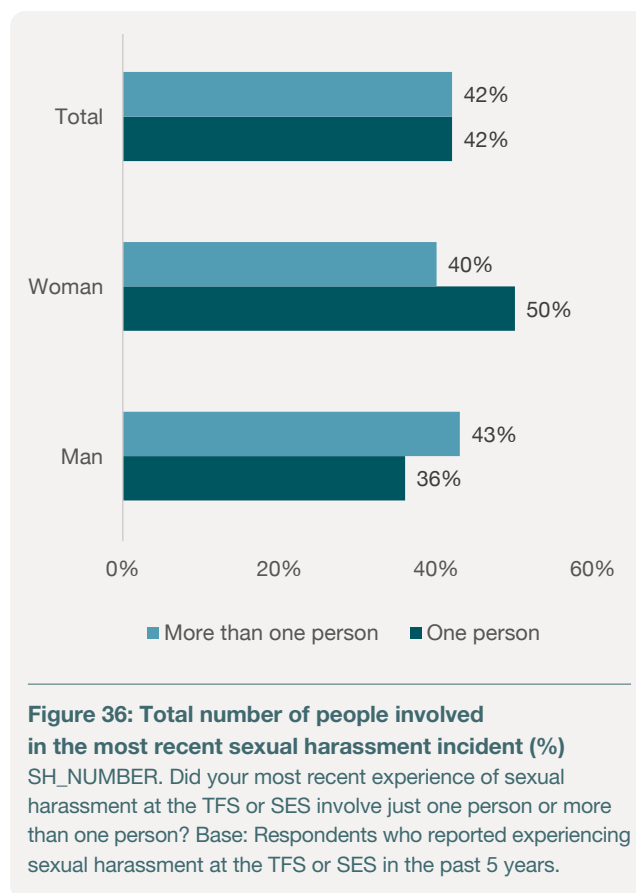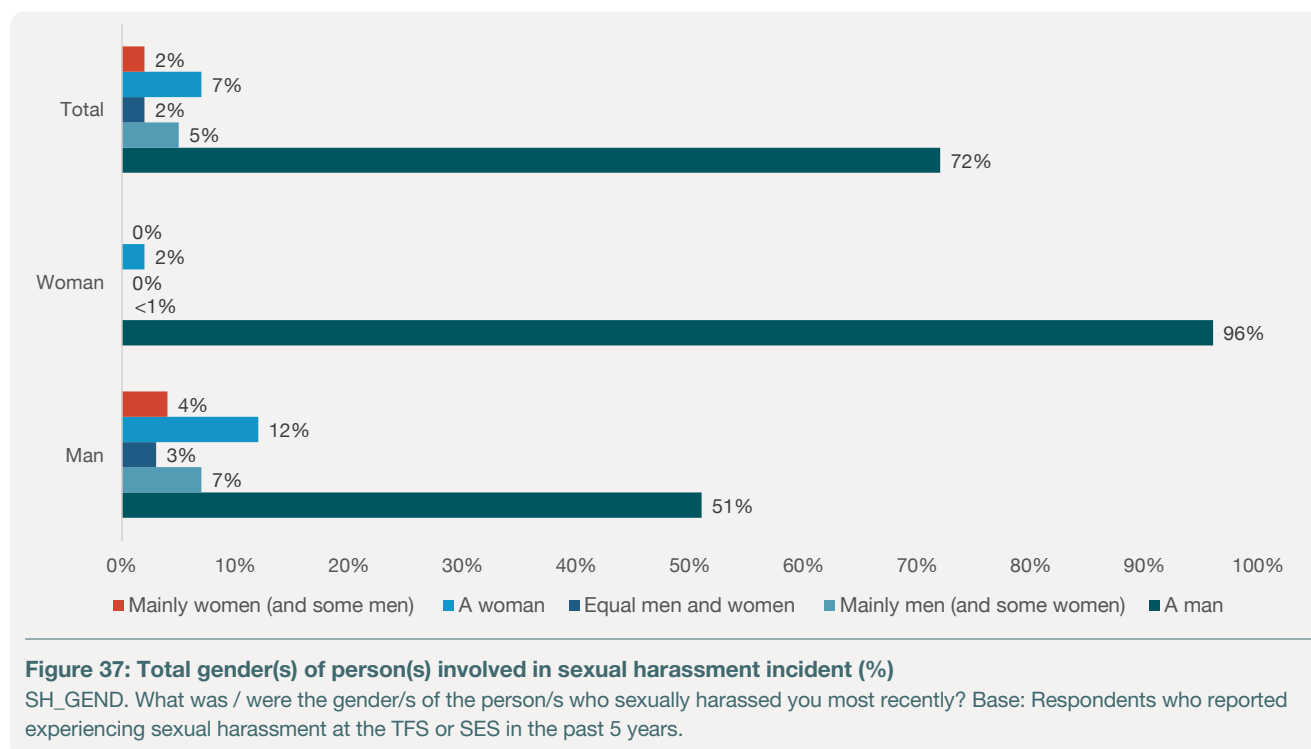
Respondents were asked about the gender(s) of the person(s) involved in the incident of sexual harassment. Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents reported the incident as perpetrated by a man. Close to one in ten (7%) reported a woman as perpetrating the event and a small proportion (5%) said the event was led by men (and some women). Very few (2%) recorded the incident as being instigated by equal numbers of men and women, or mainly women and some men.

Among SES employees/volunteers (note small base of less than 30), the majority indicated the person who most recently sexually harassed them was a man.

Women were more likely to report being sexually harassed by a man (96% compared to 51% of men), while men were more likely to identify a woman (12% compared to 2% of women) and mainly men (and some women) (7% compared to <1% of women).

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Figure 37: Total gender(s) of person(s) involved in sexual harassment incident (%)
SH_GEND. What was / were the gender/s of the person/s who sexually harassed you most recently? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.
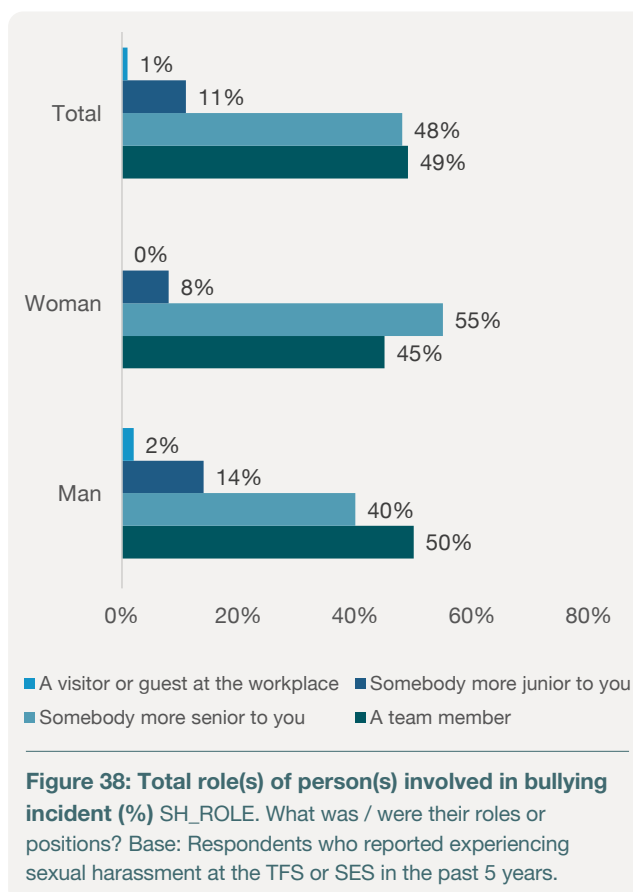
Survey respondents were asked about the role of the perpetrator(s) from their most recent incident of sexual harassment. Nearly half (49%) said a team member was the harasser. Again, close to half (48%) of respondents reported the incident as being led by someone more senior to them. Just over one in ten (11%) said the incident was directed from a person in a more junior role and barely any (1%) said the incident came from a visitor or guest at the workplace.

Among SES employees/volunteers (note small base of less than 30), around half reported being sexually harassed by someone more senior to them, while others identified a team member.

Among those of different ethnic backgrounds, a duration of 1 to 3 months was more likely to be reported by those with a mainly Anglo ethnicity (7% compared to 1% of those with mainly non-Anglo ethnicity).
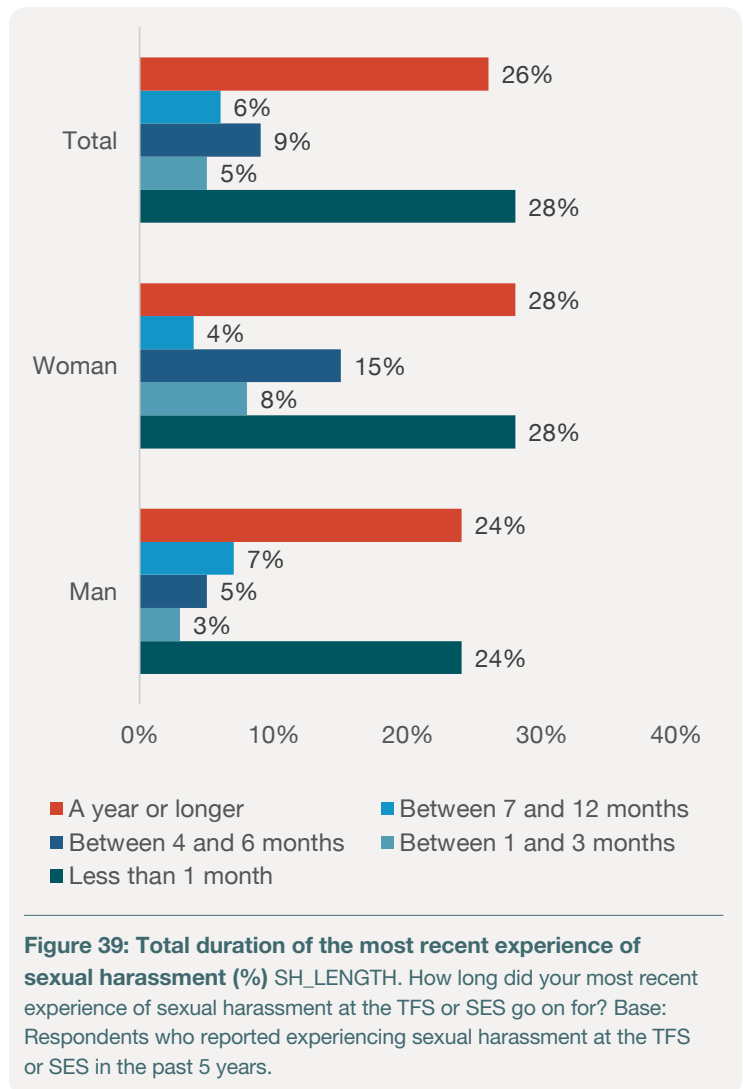
No differences between sub-groups were recorded.

Figure 38: Total role(s) of person(s) involved in bullying incident (%) SH_ROLE. What was / were their roles or positions? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

Respondents were asked to report the **length of time** their most recent experience of sexual harassment occurred for. More than one quarter (28%) recorded the incident as lasting for less than one month. Just over a quarter (26%) reported the incident extended for a year or longer. Almost one in ten (9%) of respondents reported experiencing an incident for between four and six months. A small portion of respondents (6%) recorded an incident which lasted between seven and 12 months and likewise few respondents (5%) experienced their most recent incident for a duration of between one and three months.

Among SES employees/volunteers (note small base of less than 30), the duration of their most recent incident of sexual harassment was similar to that reported by TFS employees/volunteers.

Figure 39: Total duration of the most recent experience of sexual harassment (%) SH_LENGTH. How long did your most recent experience of sexual harassment at the TFS or SES go on for? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

6. Gender Equality and Safety

Conclusion

The findings outlined in this chapter paint a mixed picture of gender inclusion within the TFS and SES. On one hand, there has been notable progress – many participants acknowledged the positive impact of increasing women's participation in both career and volunteer roles. They described benefits such as improved team dynamics, a greater focus on work-life balance, and cultural shifts towards inclusivity. Some also highlighted local leaders who are actively working to foster an environment where diversity is valued and respected.

However, it is equally clear that significant barriers remain. Despite broad agreement that sexism is "not tolerated," the lived experiences of many women within the TFS and SES suggest otherwise. Everyday sexism, negative attitudes toward gender equality, and ongoing structural barriers continue to shape their experiences. Some women report being undermined, overlooked for opportunities, or subjected to inappropriate behaviour, while men in the service have expressed concerns – often unfounded – about women's capability and the perceived impact of diversity efforts on merit-based selection.

While some participants believe sexual harassment is a thing of the past or not a significant issue, the lived experiences of many – particularly women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people with disabilities – tell a different story. The data confirms that sexual harassment remains prevalent, underreported, and often minimised by those in positions of influence.

Despite progress, many individuals still feel unable to report incidents due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in the process, or concerns that their complaints will not be taken seriously. The reluctance to acknowledge or address these behaviours perpetuates a culture where inappropriate conduct is tolerated, creating harm not only for individuals but for the overall effectiveness and reputation of the TFS and SES.

These challenges are not unique to the TFS and SES; they reflect deep-seated cultural and systemic issues seen across traditionally male-dominated professions. Yet, the fact that some teams and leaders have successfully fostered inclusive and respectful workplaces demonstrates that change is both possible and beneficial. The next step is to build on these successes by ensuring that cultural and structural reforms are not just pockets of progress but embedded across the entire organisation.

True inclusion requires more than increasing representation; it demands a cultural shift where all people, regardless of gender—feel equally valued, supported, and empowered to contribute. Addressing these challenges will not only benefit women but will strengthen the capability, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability of the TFS and SES as an organisation dedicated to serving the Tasmanian community.

Racism

As outlined in Chapter 3, there are significant benefits associated with having a diverse and inclusive workforce, including at an employee level, enhancing human dignity and also significant performance benefits for organisations. Creating a culture where everyone feels respected, safe and empowered to contribute requires cultivating inclusion and eliminating racism. In recent years, movements such as Black Lives Matter, have shone a light on the prevalence of racism across society, including in the workplace.

In Australia, under the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) racial discrimination and racial hatred is unlawful. According to the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the term 'racial discrimination' refers to:

> *"any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life".*[55]

Racism in Australia manifests at the interpersonal level (between people) and at the structural level (in organisational policies, practices and systems). It is important to note, that racism can be overt or subtle, including being embedded in the structures and system of an organisation where people who do not fit the dominant group lack access to opportunities and networks, and do not thrive to the same extent. It can also include a failure to acknowledge the lived experiences of certain groups, through for instance, bias and stereotyping.

Racism in the workplace can take many forms, such as jokes or comments that cause offence or hurt, name-calling or verbal abuse, harassment or intimidation, and commentary that reinforces negative stereotypes or inflames hostility towards racialised groups that are marginalised. Racism can be intentional, or unintentional, conscious or unconscious. It can also take the form of unfair treatment of people on the grounds of race.[56]

The 2020 Diversity Council of Australia's research report on Racism at Work included a survey of 1,547 workers from various sectors and organisations across Australia.[57] The survey found that 93% of respondents believed that Australian organisations needed to take action to address racism and only 27% said that their organisations were proactive in preventing workplace racism.[58]

Like other forms of discrimination, racism is rooted in systems of unequal power relations and privilege. Power is about who has access to resources, rights, opportunities, and influence. Privilege, in this context, refers to the advantage, benefits and power that individuals or groups acquire because of their relative social position or identity.

Everyday racism

Racism does not always target a specific person and is often not intended to cause any offence or harm. The lack of intent, however, does not minimise the impacts of racism which can be significant and long-lasting. For individuals who experience racism, it can affect their physical and mental health. For organisations, racism left unaddressed creates a lack of psychological safety, erodes trust and stifles creativity and innovation.

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55 United Nations General Assembly 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination at https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/UNTS/Volume%20660/v660.pdf
56 Australian Human Rights Commission" Racism" at https://humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12083
57 Diversity Council of Australia 2020 "Racism at Work: How Organisations Can Stand Up to and End Workplace Racism" https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/infographic_racism_at_work_final_1.pdf
58 Ibid.

For example, it can relate to, and be expressed as, racism about someone's appearance (such as noting that an Indigenous or First Nations person has fair skin), racist slurs and jokes, assumptions and stereotypes (such as assumptions about work ethic; assumptions that a person only has a job because of their race; assumptions that a person is not assertive or ambitious because of their race or ethnicity) not being taken seriously (such as someone being treated as less capable) someone being seen as a threat or dishonest someone being looked down on (including their performance being more highly scrutinised).

The nature and prevalence of racism in the Fire and Emergency Sector

Recent reports have demonstrated that racism within the fire and emergency services sector is a persistent issue both in Australia and internationally.

In 2021-2022 the UK Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) uncovered widespread issues of sexism, racism, homophobia, bullying, and harassment within a quarter of the United Kingdom's fire services[59]. Similarly, in the US, the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) has faced multiple allegations of racial discrimination. Notably, in 2014, the city settled a lawsuit for $98 million following claims that FDNY's hiring practices were biased against minority applicants. Further incidents include reports of racist messages and behaviour among firefighters, leading to significant suspensions and highlighting deep-rooted cultural challenges within the department[60].

Racism within Australia's fire and emergency services has been a significant concern, particularly regarding the treatment of Indigenous communities. In response, emergency service organisations have taken steps to address racism and promote inclusivity.

In 2014, all four emergency service organisations in Tasmania jointly pledged their support for the "Racism. It Stops with Me" campaign, emphasising that racism has no place in their operations or service delivery.[61]

Despite these initiatives, challenges persist. A 2019 Australian study highlighted that efforts to promote diversity and combat racism within emergency management organisations often encounter resistance, confusion, and perpetuation of stereotypes.[62] The research found that people feel unsure about how to respond when a difficult situation arises with a person from a diverse cohort. For example, one study interviewee was concerned that they might be regarded as racist or sexist if they had to discipline someone who was from a diverse cohort, with researchers recommending that managers at all levels of the organisations need to have sufficient training so that they can conduct conversations without the risk of the conversation becoming 'toxic'.[63]

What people told us – racism

Many Review participants commented on the lack of diversity within the TFS and SES workforce but justified this by explaining that employees and volunteers are primarily recruited from Tasmania, which has a racial diversity markedly different from other states in Australia. However, while Tasmania has a higher proportion of Australian-born residents and English-only speakers, reflecting a less diverse demographic profile than other Australian states and territories, the state has a comparatively higher representation of Indigenous Australians (5.4%) compared to nationally (3.2%)[64].

We don't have much cultural diversity, but it reflects the community.

Tasmania is very white, so race doesn't really come into consideration.

59 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. *Values and culture in fire and rescue services*. 2023, March 30. https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services/

60 https://www.nydailynews.com/2014/03/18/new-york-city-to-pay-98-million-to-settle-case-alleging-fdny-discriminated-against-minority-applicants/

61 https://www.police.tas.gov.au/news-events/media-releases/racism-it-stops-with-me-emergency-services-say-no-to-racism/

62 Young C. et al. Effective diversity in emergency management organisations: the long road. Australian Journal of Emergency Management. 2019 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333023887_Effective_diversity_in_emergency_management_-_the_long_road

63 Ibid.

64 https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/snapshot-tas-2021#country-of-birth

Some participants shared with the EB&Co Review Team that they had not experienced or witnessed racism while working in the TFS and SES.

I haven't seen discrimination against anyone. We've got a few people from different backgrounds, and they're involved and accepted and there's nothing against them and they're now part of the family. I've never seen anyone make a racist remark.

We are largely white. We only have one guy here who is not white. I feel like we are very respectful to each other here. We don't have a slant on any other race.

However, other participants commented that they had experienced direct and/or indirect racism whilst working with the TFS and SES.

> We are at a point where it [racism] just used to happen, but now we know about it, and apologise first then do it anyway. It happens every day with name calling derogatory terms. All in jest, "*oh I was only joking*".

We had a [culture removed] person in our brigade who was really laid back and a nice person. But behind their back there were a lot of nasty racist comments made. This person let it wash over them, but I felt it was very wrong.

One of the volunteers said they were leaving the area and the brigade because of the racism they were experiencing.

The [manager] used derogatory nicknames about others in the office, including senior managers. They used clear racist comments despite the excellence of the immigrant. This person didn't want to raise any concerns.

Participants also reflected on the reduced opportunities given to those who were of a different race, including less generous provisions in relation to staff housing, training and progression.

Survey insights – racism

While the survey did not measure experiences of racism, it provides important insights about the TFS and SES employee and volunteer perceptions of inclusion for people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Across all survey respondents, only 49% agreed with the statement 'TFS and SES is welcoming for people from non-English speaking backgrounds'.

While 70% of survey respondents overall agreed with the statement 'TFS and SES is welcoming for people from different ethnic backgrounds' and 'TFS and SES is welcoming for people with different religious beliefs', agreement was lower among TFS employees (61% and 62% respectively), and SES employees (59% and 52% respectively) compared to TFS volunteers (71% and 72% respectively) and SES volunteers (78% and 74% respectively).

Experiences of exclusion for specific groups

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australia's fire and emergency services has been a longstanding concern. Increasing the active participation of First Nations people in the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and State Emergency Service (SES) is critical to fostering strong, meaningful connections between these services and Tasmanian First Nations communities.

First Nations employees and volunteers offer invaluable insights that can guide the development of culturally sensitive and appropriately tailored resources for Indigenous communities.

Importantly, First Nations people bring traditional knowledge of fire management practices, contributing to sustainable land management and risk mitigation. Their diverse perspectives also drive innovation, enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of emergency management strategies and ensuring that services are better equipped to meet the needs of all communities.

During the 2019–2020 "Black Summer" bushfires research indicated that First Nations people faced discrimination and neglect. Instances were reported where First Nations individuals were turned away from evacuation centres, with staff allegedly stating that they had "*helped enough of your people today.*" This mistreatment exacerbated the trauma experienced by these communities during the fire crisis. Having First Nations employees as part of the TFS and SES workforce could greatly assist in minimising this.[65]

What people told us – specific groups

Many Review participants suggested that they did not know any First Nations co-workers so had few comments to make.

> *Little knowledge of racism but little ethnic diversity. Mostly white Caucasian males. Can't think of any Aboriginal people.*

> *We didn't readily have any examples of a senior Aboriginal man. So, we just accepted these (racist) jokes were kind of normal.*

However, we heard significant concerns from people, that there was little effort to include people from First Nations in the TFS and SES.

> *I'm one of very few people with an Aboriginal background. When the Aboriginal Liaison team raises our concerns and makes recommendations we are simply ignored.*

> *Aboriginality is hidden. There's no meetings of Aboriginal employees and volunteers, no networking, no celebration of NAIDOC week, no connecting you with your people. Same with many of the different cultures and religions here – there's no celebrating of traditional festivals, nothing inclusive of different cultures. They celebrate volunteer's week and get time to go and support the volunteers but not done for NAIDOC week or other cultures. It's hard to feel included or valued.*

Survey insights – specific groups

The survey revealed that overall, 66% of TFS and SES employees and volunteers believe the TFS and SES is a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with higher levels of agreement among men (68%) compared to women (58%).

Among TFS employees, 60% agreed with this statement overall, however there was lower agreement from women (45%) compared to men (63%) and from non-career firefighting employees in Band 6-9 (35%) compared to Band 1-5 (62%).

Among TFS volunteers, 68% agreed with this statement overall, with higher agreement among '2nd, 3rd and 4th Brigade Officers' (82%) compared to 'Firefighters (64%). There were no statistically significant differences for Brigade Chief/1st Officer (71%) and 'Op Support/TFS museum/Social member' roles (68%).

Among SES employees only 48% agreed with the statement 'it is welcoming for people from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background', while 60% of SES volunteers agreed with the statement.

Unfortunately, due to the small number of survey respondents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander we are unable to disaggregate the data to understand their perceptions of the above.

65 Williamson, B. Aboriginal community governance on the frontlines and fault lines in the Black Summer bushfires (Discussion Paper No. 300/2022), 2022. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University. https://doi.org/10.25911/V482-AE70

Experiences of harmful behaviours – specific groups

LGBTQIA+ people

There is growing recognition globally that fostering an inclusive workplace where individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) feel valued and supported, strengthens team cohesion, morale, and overall value for organisations.[66]

While progress has been made in advancing human rights and workplace equality, the LGBTQIA+ community continues to face discrimination and exclusion, including in the workplace, even in jurisdictions with legal protections.[67]

Recent surveys indicate that LGBTQIA+ people in Australia experience significant workplace challenges, including higher rates of discrimination and harassment. National data shows that 45% of LGBTQIA+ employees report experiencing workplace discrimination, compared to 23% of non-LGBTQIA+ employees. Additionally, workplace sexual harassment is more prevalent among LGBTQIA+ workers, with 46% reporting incidents compared to 31% of their heterosexual colleagues.[68]

The experience of being an "only"—the only lesbian, trans person, or another LGBTQIA+ identity—can lead to increased feelings of anxiety, isolation, and various other disadvantages. One notable challenge is the lack of accessible role models for LGBTQIA+ individuals in the workplace who can provide guidance and support based on shared experiences and identity.[69]

While there has been both international and Australian research into the discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals within the fire and emergency services sector, this research has mostly focused on the LGBTQIA+ people in communities as the recipients of fire and emergency services.

In these instances, research findings suggest that LGBTQIA+ people are at greater risk of discrimination during emergency events and that there is therefore an urgent need for emergency management sectors to better understand the needs of LGBTQIA+ people and to adopt more inclusive practices.[70]

What people told us – LGBTQIA+

The EB&Co Review Team heard from LGBTQIA+ working within the TFS and SES, but also from non-LGBTQIA+ people who were asked about their perception of the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people within the organisation.

While very few participants reported they thought the TFS & SES cultures were inclusive of LGBTQIA+ individuals, there was an overwhelming view that it was not safe to disclose this identity at work.

It's a pretty homophobic society, which I've come to realise across-the-board. There is resistance to change amongst the old guard.

" **It's definitely not a safe workplace for people who are trans, non-binary.** "

We do have someone who is non-binary, but it is not safe for them to be out.

People say things like "why don't you just make up your mind?" to the non-binary person.

There's systemic discrimination within the organisation. There's no space for gender-non-binary individuals. The paramilitary structure makes it incredibly difficult to advocate for change.

I think we have a transgender person in the brigade, but it's not openly declared, it's not safe to do so.

66 Hossain M. et al. *Do LGBT Workplace Diversity Policies Create Value for Firms?* Journal of Business Ethics 2019: 167; 775-791. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-019-04158-z

67 Bailinson, P., Decherd, W., Ellsworth, D. and Guttman, M. 2022 "LGBTQ+ Voices: Learning from Lived Experiences" McKinsey and Co. at https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/peopleandorganizational-performance/our-insights/lgbtqplus-voices-learning-from-lived-experiences

68 Diversity Council Australia 2022 Inclusion@Work Index 2021-2022: Synopsis Report. https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/synopsis_2021-22_inclusionwork.pdf

69 Bailinson, P., Decherd, W., Ellsworth, D. and Guttman, M. 2022 "LGBTQ+ Voices: Learning from Lived Experiences" McKinsey and Co. at https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/peopleandorganizational-performance/our-insights/lgbtqplus-voices-learning-from-lived-experiences

70 Leonard et al. *Under pressure: developing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) inclusive emergency services.* Journal of Emergency Management. 2022 at: https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-january-2022-under-pressure-developing-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-and-intersex-lgbti-inclusive-emergency-services/

The EB&Co Review Team heard that even senior leaders failed to model inclusive behaviour.

A guest lecturer was invited to come and educate us about this issue. Halfway through the session, a Senior Leader just got up and walked out.

During the interviews the EB&Co Review Team heard distressing stories from LGBTQIA + firefighters who had hidden their identity, closely guarding their sexuality for many years. They had felt compelled to present themselves as straight to fit in. We heard of instances where they disclosed their identity only to find their employment subsequently terminated.

I was immediately told to leave the brigade and never to come back and that an investigation would begin. I was so, so ashamed. I felt ashamed of who I was. The shame of being gay. The shame of being kicked out of the TFS. I didn't make any grievance report. I wanted to come out on my own terms. It was such a shame as I loved the TFS and would still be there if this hadn't happened.

Survey insights – LGBTQIA+

Overall, only 55% of survey respondents from the TFS and SES agreed with the statement 'TFS and SES is welcoming for people who identify as being part of the LGBTQIA+ community'. Overall, there were higher levels of agreement among SES (64%) compared to TFS (53%).

While 73% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I rarely feel excluded', when examined by survey respondents self-disclosed sexual orientation, agreement was lower among those that identified as LGBTQIA+ (59%) compared to those that identified as heterosexual (75%).

Furthermore, the survey revealed differences in the experience of bullying and sexual harassment for those that identified with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

In relation to bullying behaviours, those who identified as LGBTQIA+ were more likely to report they had experienced the following:

- 'Treating you in a way that made you feel scared, small or embarrassed' (93%) compared to those who identified as heterosexual (61%)

- 'Excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in work or volunteers' activities' (85%) compared to those who identified as heterosexual (47%)

- 'Stopping rewards or promotions despite good work' (62%) compared to those who identified as heterosexual (33%).

In relation to sexual harassment, those who identified as LGBTQIA+ were more likely to report experiencing sexual harassment in the last five years (37%) and last 12 months (25%) than those who identified as heterosexual (14% in the last five years, and 9% in the last 12 months).

People with disability and people who are neurodivergent

People with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to inclusion in the Australian workforce, with many employers citing challenges in hiring, accessibility, and workplace accommodations. Despite nearly 40% of employers having hired someone with a disability in the past year, misconceptions about capability, perceived costs, and a lack of knowledge about disability remain widespread.[71] As a result, people with disabilities often experience exclusion, discrimination, and harassment at work, with women with disabilities facing particularly high rates of sexual harassment.[72] While data on disability employment within the Australian fire and emergency sector is limited, there is greater awareness of the risks faced by people with disabilities in emergency situations.

71 https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/employment/employing-people-with-disability
72 https://www.dca.org.au/research/disability-data-at-work

7. Experiences of harmful behaviours – specific groups

Notably, individuals with disabilities accounted for nearly half of fire fatalities in Australia between 2003 and 2017[73], highlighting the need for accessible emergency services. Recognising this, some fire and emergency agencies[74] have begun implementing policies and initiatives to improve inclusion within their own workforce, ensuring they can better serve the broader community. However, stigma, discrimination, and overlapping inequalities continue to present challenges, underscoring the need for systemic change to create genuinely inclusive and supportive workplaces.

What people told us – disability and neurodiversity

Within the TFS and SES, the EB&Co Review Team heard about the demanding nature of the frontline work and the difficulty in finding qualified people with a disability who could do such work.

> *It's a very physically demanding service so there are not many people with disabilities, which is a bit disappointing.*

Participants also talked about the lack of knowledge about people with disabilities that leaders and coworkers had.

> *Neurodiversity isn't acknowledged well. When I mentioned my disability I got laughed at. I can talk with other people about neurodivergence, but few people can relate to this and there's no interest in it or understanding.*

> *My [child] has dyslexia, and they get additional periods of time to complete tasks. If we were serious about that in our workplace, our training and work processes would respond to neurodivergent needs and organise our work accordingly. There must be people who could come in and train us on how to do this better. I've learned how to manage these issues, but I've done that alone – without support.*

Survey insights – disability and neurodiversity

Across all survey respondents, agreement with the statement 'I feel like I belong' was lower among those that self-identified as having a disability (67%) compared to those who did not identify as having a disability (79%).

Furthermore, across the services, there was a perception that the TFS and SES was not very welcoming or people with disability and for people who are neurodiverse. Only 49% of survey respondents from the TFS and SES agreed that the organisation 'is welcoming for people with a disability', and only 46% agreed that 'the TFS and SES is welcoming for people who identify as neurodiverse'. These two statements had the lowest levels of agreement of all the diversity and inclusion statements.

Some differences across cohorts were revealed.

TFS employees were significantly less likely to agree with the statement 'it is welcoming for people with a disability' (35%) compared to TFS volunteers (51%) and SES volunteers (49%) (with no statistically significant difference for SES employees (45%)). Similarly, TFS employees were significantly less likely to agree with the statement 'The TFS and SES is welcoming for people who identify as neurodiverse' (29%) compared to TFS employees (48%), SES employees (62%) and SES volunteers (53%). Among TFS employees, Career firefighters were significantly less likely to agree the statement 'TFS is welcoming for people with a disability' (27%) and 'TFS is welcoming for people who identify as neurodiverse' (20%) compared to employees in other roles (47% and 45% respectively).

Among TFS volunteers, the only statistically significant difference was higher agreement among women for the statement 'TFS is welcoming for people who identify as neurodiverse' (60% compared to 45%).

Within the SES volunteer cohort there were similar levels of agreement with this statement independent of gender, age, employee role, and region.

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73 Craig et al. *Having a seat at the table: disability and disasters*. Australian Journal of Emergency Management. 2023 at: https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-october-2023-having-a-seat-at-the-table-disability-and-disasters/

74 For example – https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/accessibility

Differences in experience were also revealed for people with disability and who identified as neurodiverse in terms of their experiences of bullying and sexual harassment.

In relation to bullying behaviours, the following bullying behaviours were more likely to have been experienced by those with a disability:

- Spoken or written abuse, including via email, SMS message or social media (57% compared to 35% of those without).

- Being made to do humiliating or inappropriate things in order to be accepted (33% compared to 9% of those without).

Further, respondents who identify as neurodiverse were more likely to have experienced:

- Not being told the information they need to get their work done properly (77% compared to 50% of those who are not)

- The bully treating them unfairly because they spoke up about the bullying or made a complaint (63% compared to 43% of those who are not)

- Spoken or written abuse, including via email, SMS message or social media (58% compared to 34% of those who are not)

- Stopping rewards or promotions despite good work (51% compared 32% of those who are not).

Furthermore, being bullied by someone more junior was more likely to be reported by those who identify as neurodiverse (23% compared to 8% of those who do not).

In relation to sexual harassment, survey respondents who identified as having a disability were more likely to report they had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years (28%) and 12 months (23%) compared to those who did not identify as having a disability (14% in the last five years and 8% in the last 12 months).

Similarly, survey respondents who identified as neurodiverse were more likely to report they had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years (23%) and last 12 months (19%) compared to those who did not identify as neurodiverse (13% in the last five years and 9% in the last 12 months).

Conclusion

The findings outlined in this chapter highlight the ongoing challenges related to inclusion of all people within the TFS and SES. While legal frameworks provide protections, the experiences shared by employees and volunteers suggest that exclusion and bias – both overt and subtle – persist across various groups, including culturally and linguistically diverse individuals, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities and people who are neurodivergent.

Survey insights and participant accounts illustrate that while some employees and volunteers perceive their workplaces as inclusive, others report experiences of racism, exclusion, and inequitable treatment. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and volunteers noted a lack of visibility and cultural recognition, while LGBTQIA+ individuals described challenges in feeling safe to disclose their identities. Similarly, people with disabilities reported barriers to inclusion, with limited workplace adjustments and a general lack of awareness about neurodiversity. The experiences documented in this chapter underscore the need for ongoing commitment to foster a workplace where all individuals feel respected, valued, and supported.

8. Systems, policies and processes

Reporting harmful behaviours in the workplace

Robust systems, policies, and processes are fundamental to building safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces. While policies often serve as a necessary safeguard for legal compliance, their influence in the workplace extends far beyond this. Well-crafted policies set clear behavioural expectations, promote awareness and understanding, shape organisational culture, and vitally, need to offer clear pathways for accessing reporting and support mechanisms.

When implemented effectively, a strong policy framework ensures a consistent approach to addressing issues, nurtures a supportive environment, and builds employee trust. However, traditional approaches in many organisations have centred around managing harmful behaviour reactively, focusing on formal complaints and investigations, often with limited emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

This reactive focus not only risks harm to individuals but also erodes confidence in the reporting system, leading to underreporting and a lost opportunity for organisational learning. When responses to harmful behaviour fall short, they can stifle the implementation of proactive and targeted prevention strategies.

In contrast, well-designed systems and processes, reinforced by transparent policies and clear communication, help create a culture where harmful behaviours are unequivocally unacceptable. When reporting and response systems are grounded in the principles of zero harm, support for wellbeing, and a commitment to healing, organisations are more likely to foster trust and engagement. Such systems not only improve outcomes for individuals, teams, and the organisation, but also facilitate continuous learning and improvement.

This chapter shares insights about the experiences and views of TFS and SES people regarding the reporting and complaints processes, and the support that is available to both employees and volunteers. Additionally, this chapter provides a review of policies and documents that directly relate to harmful behaviour as well as offering suggestions for strengthening the policy environment.

What people told us – reporting harmful behaviour

A very small group felt that the environment was safe to raise issues commenting:

> **I know how to report, and I feel like I have a very supportive and empathic manager and feel confident I could raise it and that I would be supported.**

> *I would not be surprised to hear that there are barriers but for me I know what's right and wrong and how to report. I experienced lots of harassment as a younger woman and I now know that I can stand up and speak. I make sure that I'm connected to the right people so that I can talk to them if needed. If someone were to take me on, I would be able to deal with it. People know that I have a direct line to the most senior people and have lots of connections.*

> *The support mechanisms for SES are good. They advertise themselves well and we know where to go.*

While some individuals felt comfortable raising concerns about harmful behaviour, a significant number of participants highlighted substantial barriers to safe and effective reporting. Many expressed confusion and uncertainty surrounding the complaints process, often unsure of how and where to report issues.

8. Systems, Policies and processes

This not only hindered their ability to take action but also contributed to a sense of vulnerability and frustration.

I don't know the fire service in and out, so I don't know where to go to complain. It's very difficult to find the contact details of who to talk to.

❝ The information is very difficult to find. Hidden away on Conexus. It's all under D&I section which doesn't make sense if it's bullying. ❞

This lack of clarity, combined with experiences of drawn-out timelines to reach resolution in many cases, created a reporting environment where individuals were reluctant to come forward and contributed to a sense of vulnerability and frustration. Many felt that the process prioritised convenience and bureaucracy over doing what was 'right,' reinforcing a perception that reporting mechanisms were more focused on procedural compliance than on achieving meaningful resolutions. This misalignment between process and principle erodes trust and discourages people from reporting harmful behaviour, ultimately undermining the creation of a safe and respectful environment.

HR people do come and talk to our people and explain how to report but that relies on people coming to the training. You can only lead them so far.

The orientation process did not include any content on reporting mechanisms. No training in orientation on DEI. It's a recent concept within TFS. When I joined there was nothing locally.

❝ Everyone is told to talk to their brigade chief but as a brigade chief I can tell you that I have no idea about how to address these issues. ❞

I know a grievance process exists, but I don't know the process for lodging a grievance.

I completed an online course on reporting but that didn't improve my understanding because I hadn't had a need to use the system at that time.

❝ No one could tell me the process. I asked my supervisor, and she couldn't tell me for a week. In the end, I had to go to the Union. They were able to tell me immediately. Why didn't my supervisor know this information? ❞

There would not be consequences [for the bullying] but someone would speak to the person, although they wouldn't be disciplined. It would not be entered into their HR file. No way. It's just easier to do what's easy rather than what's right.

Alarmingly, a pervasive belief emerged among Review participants that reporting harmful behaviours would lead to no meaningful action. This sentiment was not a fringe view but was held by many participants interviewed by the EB&Co Review Team.

For many, this belief was grounded in their past experiences of reporting complaints, where issues were often mishandled or not addressed at all. These past experiences had eroded trust, leaving participants with little faith that the processes or outcomes had improved. The widespread perception that reporting would be futile highlights a critical gap in both the effectiveness and credibility of existing complaint management systems, underscoring the urgent need for reform.

I have no idea where [the complaint] goes to – nothing happens.

I have never had a response to a complaint that I found satisfactory.

❝ There is no trust that anything will be done, it goes into a deep dark hole. ❞

There's a perception that no one is genuinely listening, nothing gets done.

8. Systems, Policies and processes

As a volunteer, I don't feel as though there is a formal mechanism that genuinely addresses concerns. For instance, after I reported inappropriate behaviour, no steps were taken, and my complaints were essentially ignored.

> I wasn't confident (when bullying happened) that I would be supported by senior management and that it would make it harder for me. The cons of escalating it outweighed the pros.

It's [the process of reporting] long and hard and won't get you anywhere.

People will only use reporting mechanisms if they receive feedback and see that it leads to action and accountability.

In my brigade, there was conflict between two people, so they just moved them into different areas, and they didn't deal with it at all.

> We accept that it takes so long to resolve grievances. Everyone is concerned to make the wrong decision, but it has such an impact. We are up to 12 months for one grievance. We are told it is "*on the bosses' desk*".

Many participants expressed a belief that it was not safe to make a complaint, sharing personal experiences of significant retribution after doing so. For those who had engaged with formal reporting processes, the journey was often fraught with stress and emotional exhaustion. The energy required to navigate these processes, particularly when outcomes were unsuccessful, proved devastating for some. Participants spoke candidly about the lasting negative impact that making a complaint had on their physical and mental health.

Many described heightened anxiety, stress-related illnesses, and a diminished sense of well-being. These experiences underscored the urgent need for a safer, more supportive complaints process that not only addresses harmful behaviours effectively but also protects and upholds the well-being of those who speak up.

> Retaliation, victimisation, inaction, things hang over your head for years because no one is prepared to manage.

If I reported either of the people involved in the affairs I would be accused of abusive conduct.

Whistleblowers are not protected.

> The experience (of making a complaint) traumatised me – I had sleepless nights, anxiety attacks.

It's had a huge impact on my life: both personally and professionally. It has felt like the toolbox is empty and there's nothing to fix what's going on. It's had a massive impact on my confidence and how I conduct myself in the workplace and my levels of certainty.

There's lots of fear about making mistakes currently and that means there's not enough psychological safety. There's a fear that if I speak up, I won't progress in the organisation.

> If I spoke up, it would be career ending in the sense of no promotions.

Many people are afraid to raise these concerns. Tasmania is a small place, and many people are connected by family, marriage, friendships etc.

Survey insights – reporting harmful behaviour

Perceptions of reporting culture

TFS and SES employees and volunteers were asked about their perceptions of reporting culture at the TFS and SES, in particular their level of comfort and competence when it comes to recognising and reporting bullying and sexual harassment. The findings highlight significant differences in how TFS and SES employees and volunteers perceive the support provided and the handling of inappropriate behaviour.

Overall, almost seven in ten of all respondents (68%) feel safe, supported, and protected from reprisal when speaking up about bullying, sexual harassment, and inappropriate workplace behaviour. Fewer respondents (60%) agreed that complaints about bullying and sexual harassment are taken seriously. Just over half (52%) felt that action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person.

Tasmanian Fire Service

TFS volunteers had a more positive perception of reporting culture than TFS employees with significantly higher agreement among TFS volunteers with the following statements:

- 'I feel safe, supported and protected from reprisal to speak up about bullying and sexual harassment': 71% of TFS volunteers agreed compared to 48% of TFS employees

- 'Complaints about bullying and sexual harassment are taken seriously': 64% of TFS volunteers agreed compared to 44% of TFS employees

- 'Action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person': 56% of TFS volunteers agreed compared to 31% of TFS employees.

	Total	Gender		TFS / SES	
	Total	Man	Woman	TFS employee / volunteer	SES employee / volunteer
	(n=1,057)	(n=773)	(n=249)	(n=869)	(n=188)
I feel safe, supported and protected from reprisal to speak up about bullying, sexual harassment	68%	70%	67%	67%	75%
Complaints about bullying and sexual harassment are taken seriously	60%	62%	55%	61%	58%
Action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person	52%	55%	44%	52%	49%

Figure 40: Total perceptions of culture (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

8. Systems, Policies and processes

Furthermore, differences in perceptions of culture were evident among several groups of TFS employees with significantly higher levels of agreement towards feeling safe, supported, and protected from reprisal to speak up about bullying, sexual harassment, and inappropriate workplace behaviour recorded by:

- Women (62% compared to 44% of men)

- Those aged 18-34 (70%) and 35-54 years (49%), compared to 26% of those aged 55 years and over.

Career firefighters were more likely to agree with:

- Action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person (39% compared to 21% of career firefighters in officer/director/chief roles).

Among TFS volunteers, differences were recorded between volunteer roles and regions. Significantly higher levels of agreement to the statement 'action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person' were recorded by:

- Second, Third and Fourth Brigade officers (73% compared to 52% of volunteer firefighters)

- Those in the North-West region (71%) and North region (59%) compared to those in the South region (47%).

Those in the North-West region were more likely to agree that complaints about bullying and sexual harassment are taken seriously (77% compared to 56% in the South region).

	TFS employee	Gender		Career Firefighter			Other employee		
	Total	Man	Woman	Total	Fire fighter	Officer and above	Total	Band 1-5	Band 6-9
	(n=226)	(n=165)	(n=51)	(n=125)	(n=59)	(n=62)	(n=101)	(n=61)	(n=38)
I feel safe, supported and protected from reprisal to speak up about bullying, sexual harassment	48%	44%	62%	46%	47%	47%	51%	53%	46%
Complaints about bullying and sexual harassment are taken seriously	44%	44%	42%	47%	46%	49%	38%	40%	32%
Action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person	31%	31%	22%	32%	39%	21%	29%	32%	22%

Figure 41: TFS employee perceptions of culture (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

	TFS volunteer	Gender		TFS volunteer role			
	Total	Man	Woman	Brigade Chief / 1st officer	Fire fighters	2nd 3rd 4th Brigade officers	Op. support / TFS museum / Social member
	(n=643)	(n=506)	(n=123)	(n=73)	(n=413)	(n=111)	(n=36)
I feel safe, supported and protected from reprisal to speak up about bullying, sexual harassment	71%	73%	65%	72%	71%	77%	63%
Complaints about bullying and sexual harassment are taken seriously	64%	66%	57%	73%	61%	72%	67%
Action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person	56%	59%	49%	55%	52%	73%	65%

Figure 42: TFS volunteer perceptions of culture (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents

State Emergency Service

SES volunteers were significantly more likely to agree with the statement 'I feel safe, supported and protected from reprisal to speak up about bullying and sexual harassment' (77%) than SES employees (55%).

Knowledge and confidence in making a report

Survey respondents were asked about their level of knowledge and confidence in making a report or complaint in relation to bullying and sexual harassment.

Three in five (60%) respondents reported knowing how to make a report or complaint. One third (33%) indicated that while they did not know, they felt they could easily find out how to. A small proportion (4%) believed they could not make a report and would not know how to find out. Differences emerged between genders with men more likely to state they knew how to make a report (63% compared to 50% of women).

On the other hand, women were more likely to express they did not know how to make a report but could easily find out (40% compared to 30% of men).

	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer role	
	Total	Man	Woman	Unit / Deputy manager	General volunteer
	(n=159)	(n=90)	(n=62)	(n=35)	(n=118)
I feel safe, supported and protected from reprisal to speak up about bullying, sexual harassment	77%	80%	75%	70%	78%
Complaints about bullying and sexual harassment are taken seriously	58%	61%	56%	61%	57%
Action is taken against anyone who bullies or sexually harasses others, even if they are a senior person	50%	54%	43%	61%	49%

Figure 43: SES volunteer perceptions of culture (% agree and strongly agree)
CULTURE. Thinking about your current experience at the TFS or SES, how much do you agree or disagree that…? Base: All respondents
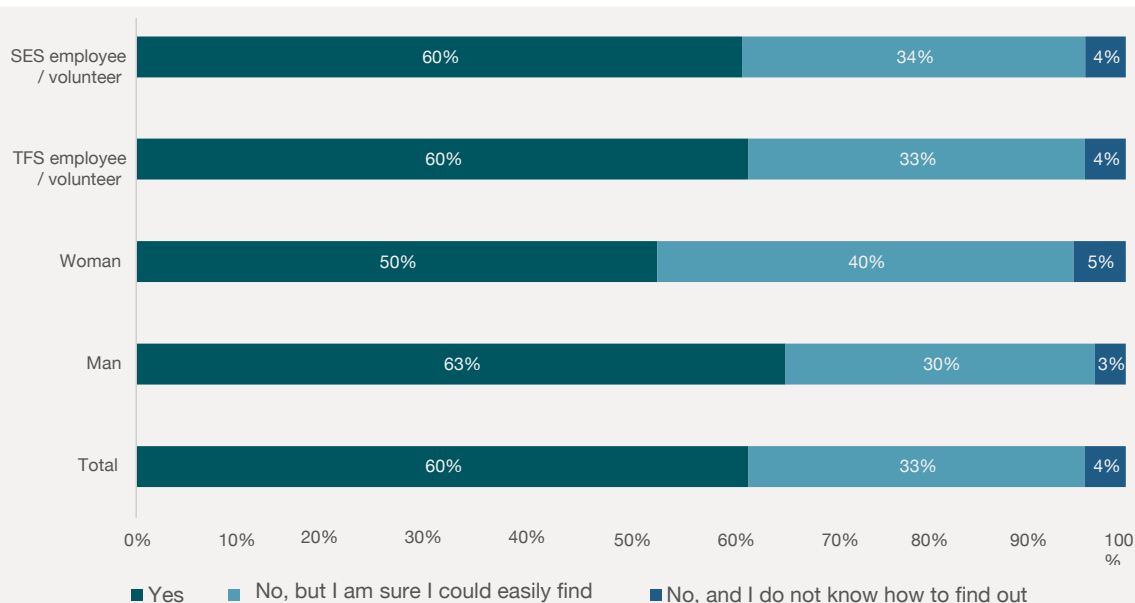

Figure 44: Total knowledge of how to make a report or complaint in relation to bullying and sexual harassment (%)
TE_REPORT. Do you know how to make a report or complaint about bullying or sexual harassment at the TFS or SES? Base: All respondents

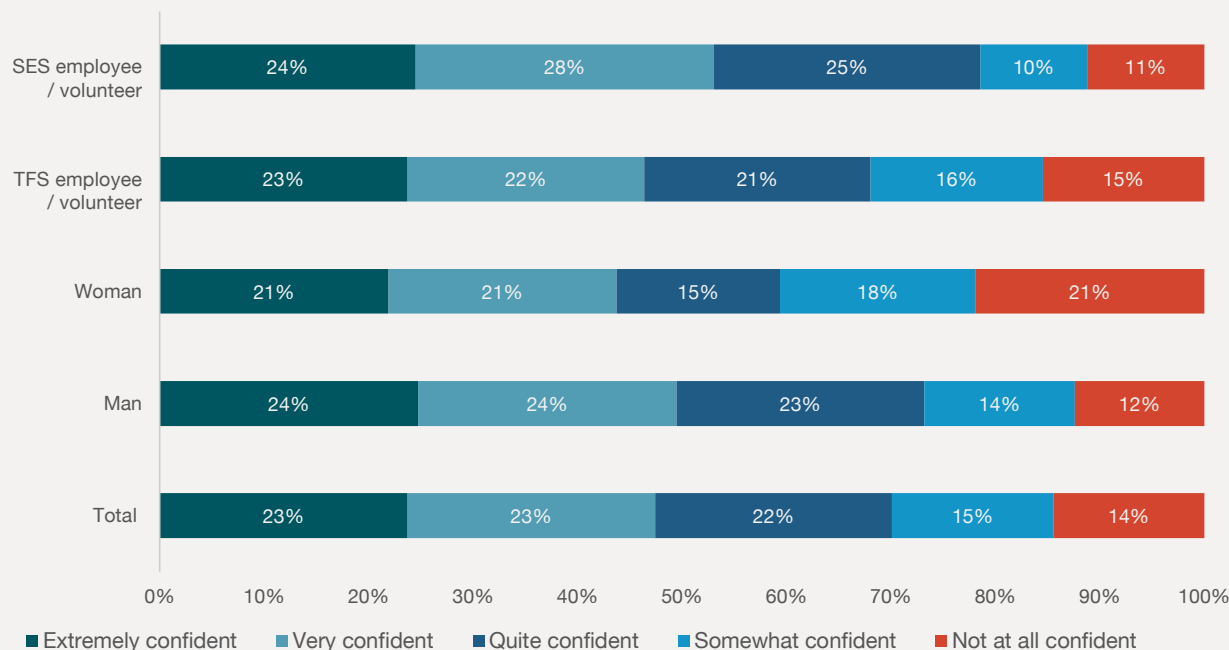# 8. Systems, Policies and processes

Figure 45: Total confidence to make a report or complaint in relation to bullying and sexual harassment (%)
TE_CONF. How confident would you be in making a report or complaint of bullying / sexual harassment? Base: All respondents

When asked about their level of confidence to make a report or complaint about bullying or sexual harassment, similar proportions of respondents felt extremely confident (23%), very confident (23%) and quite confident (22%). A further 15% were somewhat confident and 14% were not confident at all.

TFS volunteers (25%) and SES volunteers (24%) were more likely to be extremely confident compared to TFS employees (10%).

Men were more likely to be quite confident (23% compared to 15% of women), while women were more likely to not be confident at all (21% compared to 12% of men).

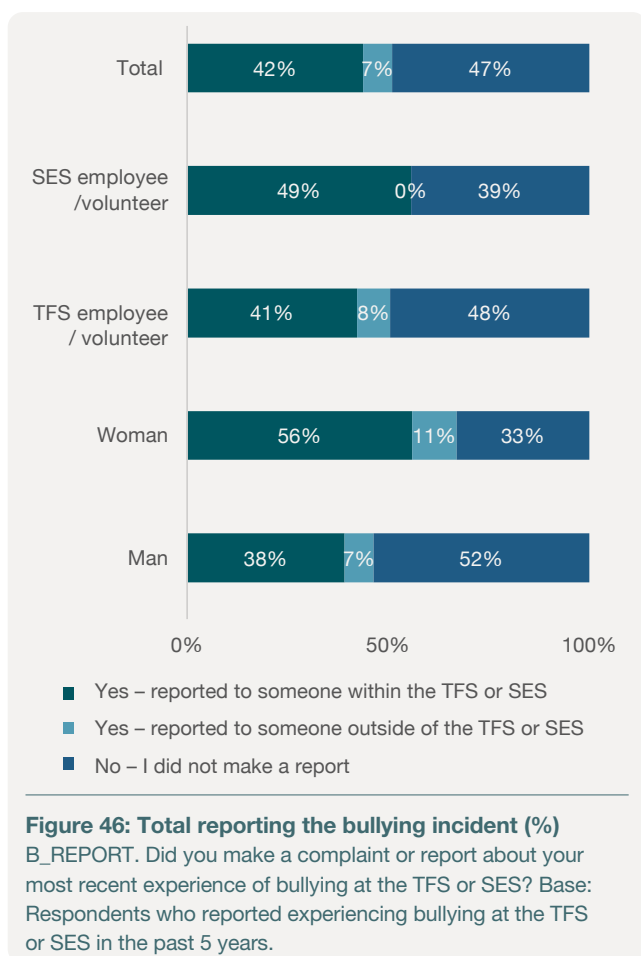## Experiences of reporting harmful behaviour

Survey respondents who had experienced bullying or sexual harassment in the last five years were asked whether they made a complaint or report about their most recent experience and if so the outcomes of the complaint/report.

Reporting bullying

More than two in five (42%) respondents who experienced bullying in the last five years reported the most recent incident to someone within the TFS or SES. Less than one in ten (7%) decided to report the incident to someone outside of the TFS and SES and almost half (47%) of respondents decided not to make a report.

Making a complaint or report to someone inside their organisation (either TFS or SES) was more likely among women (56% compared to 38% of men), and men were more likely to not have decided not to make a report (52% compared to 33% of women).
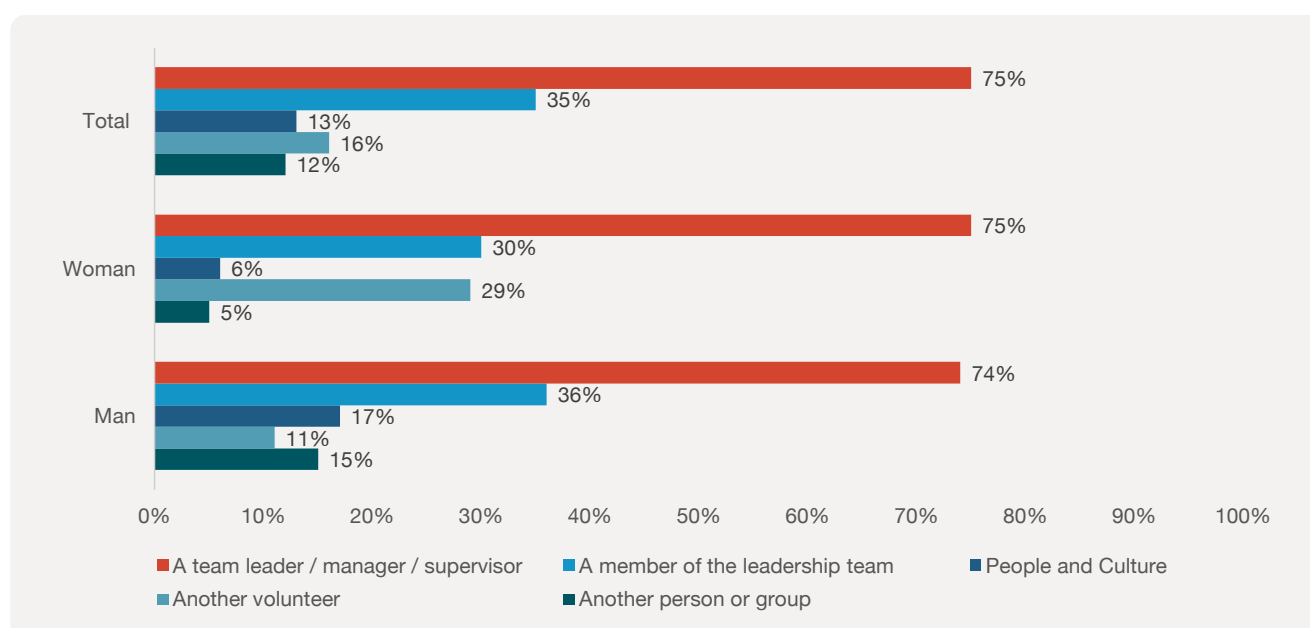
Figure 46: Total reporting the bullying incident (%)
B_REPORT. Did you make a complaint or report about your most recent experience of bullying at the TFS or SES? Base: Respondents who reported experiencing bullying at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

Respondents who reported their most recent incident of bullying internally were asked who they made this report to. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents made a report to a team leader/manager/supervisor. More than one third (35%) of respondents made a report to a member of the leadership team.

Respondents who experienced bullying and made a complaint or report to a person or group external to the TFS or SES were asked who they reported or made a complaint to. As less than 30 respondents had reported or made a complaint externally, only high-level results have been discussed to ensure anonymity and privacy of respondents. The main external organisations these respondents had contacted were WorkSafe Tasmania, Equal Opportunity Tasmania and a lawyer or legal service.

Respondents who reported their most recent incident of bullying were asked about the consequences which arose from making a report. More than half (56%) of these respondents stated nothing happened after making the complaint/report. Just over a quarter (27%) recorded negative consequences for themselves and over one in ten (12%) recorded positive outcomes for themselves. No significant differences were found across cohorts.

Figure 47: Total who the bullying was reported to at the TFS or SES (%)
B_REPTO_IN. Who was the person or group within the TFS or SES you made your complaint or report to? Base: Respondents who reported their most recent incident of bullying to someone within the TFS or SES.
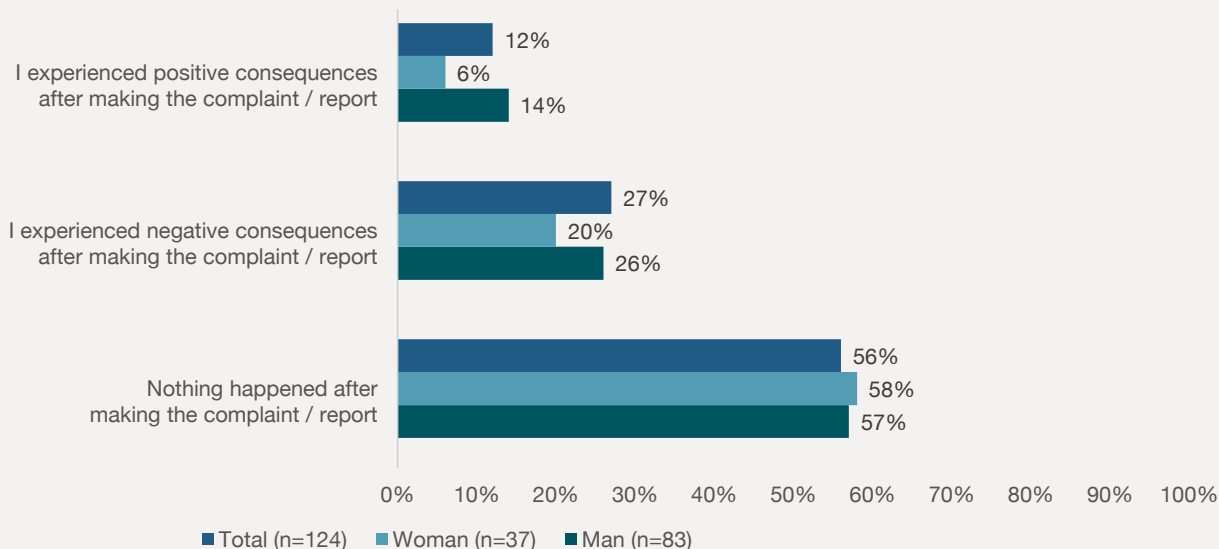
Systems, Policies and processes

Figure 48: Total consequences of reporting the bullying incident (%)
B_REP_ACTION. Did any of the following things happen following your complaint or report? Base: Respondents who reported their most recent incident of bullying.

Respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with the process of dealing with a complaint/report for their most recent incident of bullying and the outcomes of the complaint/report:

- Satisfaction with process of dealing with complaint/report: A small proportion (4%) reported being very satisfied with the process, over one in ten (13%) were satisfied, almost one in five (18%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, almost a quarter (23%) were dissatisfied and nearly two in five (37%) were very dissatisfied. No significant differences were recorded between groups.

- Satisfaction with outcomes of complaint/report: As less than 30 respondents had their complaint or report finalised, only high-level results have been discussed to ensure anonymity and privacy of respondents. More of these respondents were dissatisfied then satisfied with the action taken to finalise their complaint or report, while a few were indifferent.

Survey respondents who reported experiencing bullying in the last five years and who did not make a complaint/report about their most recent incident of bullying were asked about their reasons for not making a report.

Almost three in five (58%) respondents said they did not report due to the belief it would not change things, or nothing would be done. Just over half (52%) felt it was easier to keep quiet and 46% believed that making a report would make the situation worse. Two in five (40%) were worried about lack of privacy and how many people would find out. Approximately one third of respondents attributed their decision to the following:

- I thought I'd be blamed, or people would treat me like the wrongdoer (35%)

- I thought my reputation or career would be damaged (34%)

- I was worried it would get back to the person or people who bullied me (34%)

- I thought people would think I was over-reacting (33%).

Approximately one quarter of respondents selected the following reasons for not making a report:

- I didn't think it was serious enough (26%)

- I thought making a report would be embarrassing or difficult (25%).

Reporting sexual harassment

Respondents who experienced sexual harassment in the last five years were asked whether they made a complaint or report about their most recent experience of sexual harassment. Almost one in five (19%) respondents made a report to someone within the TFS or SES. Very few (1%) respondents made a report to someone outside of the TFS or SES. The majority (67%) of these survey participants did not make a report.

Among those who made their complaint or report to a person or group within the TFS or SES, the majority (77%) contacted their team leader/manager/supervisor. Other avenues of raising a complaint or report about sexual harassment included a member of the leadership team (39%) and another volunteer (28%).

	Total (n=136)
I thought it would not change things or nothing would be done	58%
It was easier to keep quiet	52%
I thought it would make the situation worse	46%
I was worried about lack of privacy and how many people would find out	40%
I thought I'd be blamed or people would treat me like the wrongdoer	35%
I was worried it would get back to the person or people who bullied me	34%
I thought my reputation or career would be damaged	34%
I thought people would think I was over-reacting	33%
I didn't think it was serious enough	26%
I thought making a report would be embarrassing or difficult	25%
I feared negative consequences for the person or people who bullied me	21%
I thought I would be dismissed	20%
I thought I would not be believed	17%
I took care of the problem myself	16%
I wasn't aware of how the complaint process worked or who to report to	13%
I was too scared or frightened	8%
I was told not to make a report by someone more senior than me	5%
My co-workers told me not to make a report	4%
Prefer not to say	3%
The person or people who bullied me were already being dealt with	2%
My family or friends told me not to make a report	2%
I thought my hours or shifts would be reduced	1%
I thought I would be transferred to another worksite	1%
Some other reason	19%

Figure 49: Total reasons for not reporting bullying incident (%) B_NOTREP. Which, if any, of the following were reasons why you did not make a complaint or report about your most recent experience of bullying at the TFS or SES? Base: Respondents who did not report their most recent incident of bullying.
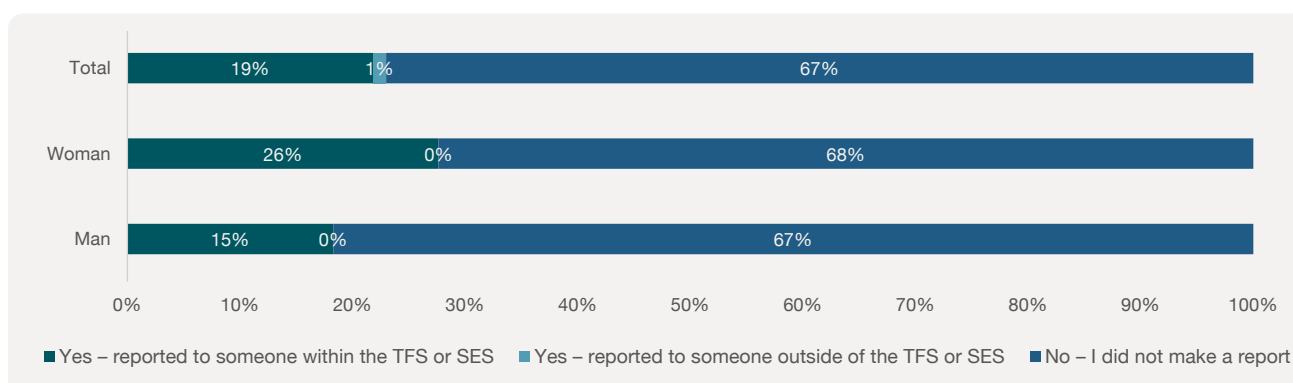

Figure 50: Total reporting the sexual harassment incident (%)
SH_REPORT. Did you make a complaint or report about your most recent experience of sexual harassment at the TFS or SES?
Base: Respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment at the TFS or SES in the past 5 years.

8. Systems, Policies and processes

Figure 51: Total who the sexual harassment was reported to at the TFS or SES (%) SH_REPTO_IN. Who was the person or group within the TFS or SES you made your complaint or report to? Base: Respondents who internally reported their most recent incident of sexual harassment.

Figure 52: Total consequences of reporting the sexual harassment incident (%) SH_REP_ACTION. Did any of the following things happen following your complaint or report? Base: Respondents who reported their most recent incident of sexual harassment.

Respondents who reported their most recent incident of sexual harassment were asked about the consequences of making a report. Close to half (48%) of those who raised a report or complaint indicated they experienced a positive outcome because of making this report or complaint, while for 45% nothing occurred. A further 14% experienced negative consequences.

Those who had reported the sexual harassment incident were asked how satisfied they were with the overall process of dealing with their complaint or report. Responses were mixed, with 29% indicating they were satisfied overall, while 32% were indifferent and 33% were dissatisfied.

Respondents who indicated their complaint or report was finalised were also asked how satisfied they were with the action taken to address the complaint or report about the sexual harassment they experienced. As less than 30 respondents had their complaint or report finalised, only high-level results have been discussed to ensure anonymity and privacy of respondents. Most of these respondents were satisfied with the action taken, while some were indifferent and very few were dissatisfied.

Respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment in the last five years and who did not report their most recent incident of sexual harassment were asked about their reasons for not making a report. The top reason cited by more than three in five (63%) respondents for choosing not to make a report were due to concerns that people would think they were overreacting.

More than half (56%) of respondents thought making a report would not change things or nothing would be done, and similarly over half (53%) felt it was easier to keep quiet. Almost two in five (37%) respondents thought they would not be believed. Approximately one third of respondents attributed their decision not to make a report to the following:

- I didn't think it was serious enough (34%)

- I was worried about lack of privacy and how many people would find out (31%)

- I was worried it would get back to the person or people who harassed me (31%).

8. Systems, Policies and processes

	Total	Gender	
	Total (n=110)	Man (n=58)	Woman (n=48)
I thought people would think I was over-reacting	63%	70%	55%
I thought it would not change things or nothing would be done	56%	46%	63%
It was easier to keep quiet	53%	52%	57%
I didn't think it was serious enough	34%	20%	49%
I was worried about lack of privacy and how many people would find out	31%	29%	33%
I thought I would not be believed	37%	36%	36%
I was worried it would get back to the person or people who harassed me	31%	26%	38%
I thought my reputation or career would be damaged	22%	18%	23%
I thought I'd be blamed or people would treat me like the wrongdoer	27%	18%	34%
I thought it would make the situation worse	26%	22%	30%
I thought making a report would be embarrassing or difficult	20%	13%	25%
I took care of the problem myself	16%	11%	23%
I wasn't aware of how the complaint process worked or who to report to	17%	19%	13%
I thought I would be dismissed	14%	13%	16%
I feared negative consequences for the person or people who harassed me	15%	7%	20%
I was too scared or frightened	14%	8%	18%
I was told not to make a report by someone more senior than me	8%	10%	1%
I thought I would be transferred to another worksite	3%	3%	3%
My co-workers told me not to make a report	3%	2%	1%
I thought my hours or shifts would be reduced	1%	2%	1%
The person or people who harassed me were already being dealt with	1%	0%	1%
My family or friends told me not to make a report	0%	0%	0%
Some other reason	5%	9%	2%

Figure 53: Total reasons for not reporting sexual harassment incident (%)
SH_ NOTREP. Which, if any, of the following were reasons why you did not make a complaint or report about your most recent exprience of sexual harassment at the TFS or SES? Base: Respondents who did not report their most recent incident of sexual harassment.

Over a quarter of respondents selected the following reasons for not making a report:

- I thought I'd be blamed, or people would treat me like the wrongdoer (27%)

- I thought it would make the situation worse (26%).

Just over one in five (22%) respondents thought their career or reputation would be damaged.

One in five respondents (20%) thought that making a report would be embarrassing or difficult.

Differences were recorded between genders as women were more likely to state they did not make a report due to thinking the incident was not serious enough (49% compared to 20% of men). Alternately, men were more likely to state they were told not to make a report by someone more senior than them (10% compared to 1% of women).

Policy Review

As part of the Review, the EB&Co team conducted a thorough analysis of more than twenty policy and strategy documents to assess their effectiveness, alignment with best practices, and ability to support a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace culture. This analysis aimed to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement within the existing frameworks, ensuring they not only meet legal compliance but also actively contribute to preventing harm, promoting wellbeing, and fostering a culture of trust and accountability. The Review analysed the following policies:

- Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement
- Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines
- Professional Conduct Policy (Draft)
- TFS Volunteer Code of Conduct
- DPFEM Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy (2021)
- TFS Resolution Procedure
- Grievance Management Guidelines Final Draft

Strengthening the current policy environment

The TFS and SES and the broader department have a significant range of policies and procedures and handbooks that cover different areas of the workplace. Most policies are clear and well-defined. This said, there are significant gaps, both within the policies themselves, and in the suite of policies and processes available. Overall, the suite of policies and procedures would benefit from being rewritten to align with best practice standards, not only enhancing clarity and effectiveness but also promoting a unified approach across both the TFS and SES as cohesive organisations. By embedding best practice principles, such as person-centred and trauma-informed approaches, clear and inclusive language, and robust reporting and support mechanisms – these policies could serve as powerful tools for education and cultural uplift.

This redevelopment presents a valuable opportunity to set consistent behavioural expectations, reinforce a culture of safety and respect, and proactively drive positive change across both services. Taking this approach would not only strengthen compliance and accountability but also help cultivate a shared understanding of values and behaviours that support a thriving, inclusive workplace for all.

Set out below are considerations arising from the analysis.

Integration of leading practice recommendations into a standalone sexual harassment policy

The largest gap is the lack of a dedicated sexual harassment policy, or a dedicated anti-harassment policy. Both appear to be subsumed into the larger '*Diversity and Inclusion Policy*', and these behaviours are also briefly covered in the *Professional Code of Conduct*. However, best practice is to have separate policies on both sexual harassment and discrimination. Further, the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty* recommend that employers have a dedicated policy on respectful behaviour and unlawful conduct, which is accessible and clearly communicated to all workers.[75]

A comprehensive sexual harassment policy serves multiple critical functions. It clearly communicates a zero-tolerance stance on sexual harassment and a strong leadership commitment to preventing sexual harassment, outlines the responsibilities of both management and staff, and provides a framework for reporting and addressing incidents. By defining what constitutes sexual harassment and offering relevant examples, the policy helps to educate employees and prevent misunderstandings. Additionally, it ensures that all parties involved in a complaint are treated with fairness, respect, and confidentiality.

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75 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) (Guidelines, 2023), 48.

Within the current policy, the section on sexual harassment is relatively brief, and further development in a standalone policy could add significant value. Expanding this information to provide more detailed guidance on workers' obligations concerning such behaviour, as well as clearly outlining the reporting pathways available to those who experience or witness sexual harassment, would enhance its effectiveness. Additionally, incorporating expectations for how workers should respond when witnessing workplace conduct and reinforcing the department's commitment to fostering a 'speak-up culture' would help cultivate an environment of accountability, transparency, and support.

Policy accessibility

The analysis of policy documents, coupled with insights from the Review's qualitative interviews, suggests that a significant proportion of individuals associated with the TFS and SES – particularly volunteers – may face barriers to accessing and understanding written policies. These barriers could stem from speaking English as a second language, limited digital literacy, or other factors that make navigating online policies in English challenging.

Currently, there is little clarity around how these policies are made accessible to workers and volunteers. Critical questions remain unanswered: Are physical copies of policies provided when individuals join the TFS and SES? Are policies only available online, via email, or through an intranet system? Are translations available, at least for the most commonly spoken languages within the TFS and SES workforce? Beyond written documentation, are policies communicated through other means, such as verbal explanations during staff meetings?

If these practices are not in place—or only partially addressed—it is an important area for TFS and SES to consider further work. Ensuring policies are fully accessible to all, regardless of language proficiency or digital skills, is vital for promoting understanding, compliance, and engagement. A more inclusive approach could involve offering translated materials, providing policy information through a variety of channels, and utilising non-written communication methods to enhance accessibility and inclusivity.

Adopting a person-centred, trauma-informed approach

The current policies do not explicitly adopt a person-centred and trauma-informed approach. This gap is evident in the design and execution of specific policies and has tangible impacts on their effectiveness. More broadly, this points to a lack of organisational understanding and commitment to embedding person-centred and trauma-informed principles into policy development and practice.

Taking a trauma-informed approach involves recognising the diverse experiences of individuals, particularly those who may have been impacted by trauma, and ensuring that policies are not only accessible but also sensitive to their needs. Without this foundational understanding and commitment, policies risk being procedural rather than transformative, potentially missing opportunities to build trust, enhance wellbeing, and foster a genuinely supportive workplace environment.

Person-centred and trauma-informed approaches are not only supported by evidence and considered best practice (including by government departments in other states, such as NSW, Queensland and Victoria), they are explicitly identified by the Australian Human Rights Commission as expected practice in their *Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty*.[76]

Contemporary language use in policies

Some of the language and terminology used within the current policies appear outdated and may not align with best practice standards. For example, referring to reports as 'grievances and labelling individuals who make reports as 'complainants can carry negative connotations and potentially discourage reporting.

Best practice language prioritises neutrality, respect, and support. For instance, terms like 'reports' instead of 'grievances' and 'reporting parties' or 'reporters' rather than 'complainants can help create a more inclusive and trauma-informed environment. These seemingly small shifts in language can significantly impact how individuals feel when engaging with reporting processes, contributing to a culture where people feel safe, heard, and respected.

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76   Australian Human Rights Commission, *Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) (Guidelines, 2023), 22, 51.

Intersectional approaches

There is not a lot of evidence to suggest that an intersectional approach was taken in the development of TFS and SES policies. It is particularly important to consider intersectionality when developing policies that concern sexual harassment, discrimination, hostile workplaces and bullying, as factors such as gender, sexuality, race and disability influence workers' risk of experiencing these forms of misconduct and their needs from employers and support services if they do experience misconduct. As with person-centred and trauma- informed care, intersectionality is one of the guiding principles of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty* and features significantly in the recommendations to employers made by the Commission in the same document.[77]

What people told us – training and support

Training & development on TFS and SES policies, as well as training to support people identify and better manage harmful workplace behaviours, appears to be inconsistent and, at times, ineffective. Some employees report that training on policies has been conducted, but those who would benefit most from these sessions tend to dismiss or disengage from them.

Additionally, concerns have been raised about the training environment itself, with some individuals avoiding sessions due to their perceived exclusionary or harmful nature. A lack of understanding of diversity and inclusion further compounds these challenges, with many unaware of the processes or policies in place. Given that much of this work is handled at the local level, awareness and engagement with diversity and inclusion efforts vary widely, making it difficult to ensure consistent and meaningful change across the organisation.

One significant challenge identified in the Review is the inconsistent access to online resources.

Some individuals are unable to engage due to limited internet access, while others are reluctant to participate in an online format.

> *In terms of training concerning diversity and inclusion, there hasn't been any formal instruction yet. I've been told there is an online course, and for those who can't access it, there will be a half-day training session. It seems a little disjointed.*

" There have been trainings on gender equality and diversity but the people who really need those trainings are dismissive of them. "

> *There is training but I'm trying to avoid trainings because of how exclusionary and toxic it has become.*

Survey insights – training and support

Knowledge of policies, processes and practices

When survey respondents were asked how knowledgeable they are about the policies, processes and practices in relation to harmful workplace behaviour (bullying and sexual harassment), few respondents (3%) indicated they knew everything about these topics. Nearly one in five (19%) reported knowing a lot and more than half (56%) stated they knew something. Over one in ten (14%) respondents knew very little about these topics and few (5%) stated they knew nothing about them.

Men were more likely to know something (59% compared to 49% of women), and women were more likely to know very little (22% compared to 11% of men).

Some differences were evident between cohorts across the TFS and SES. SES employees/volunteers were more likely to know a lot (27% compared to 18% of TFS employees/volunteers).

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77   Australian Human Rights Commission, *Guidelines for Complying with the Positive Duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) (Guidelines, 2023), 22.

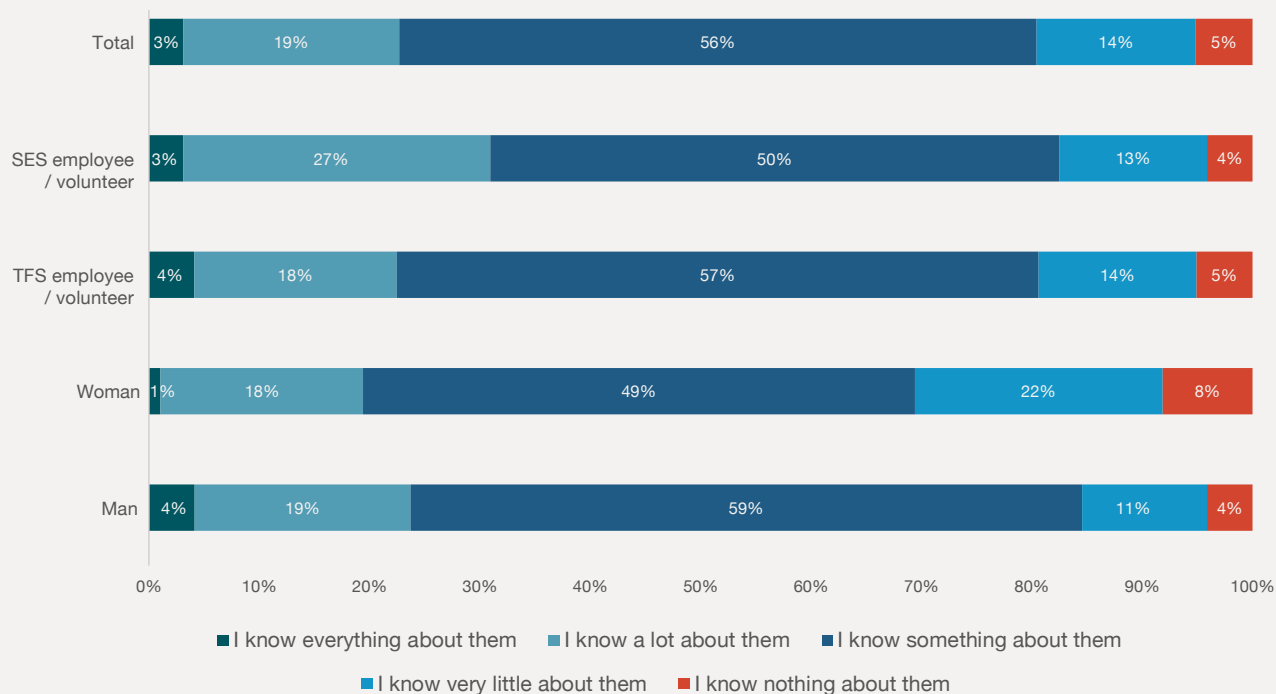# 8. Systems, Policies and processes

Figure 54: Total knowledge of policies, processes, and practices in relation to bullying and sexual harassment (%)
TE_KNOW. How much do you know about the policies, processes and practices at the TFS or SES about bullying or sexual harassment?
Base: All respondents

	SES volunteer	Gender		SES volunteer	
	Total	Man	Woman	Unit / Deputy manager	General volunteer
	(n=159)	(n=90)	(n=62)	(n=35)	(n=118)
I know everything about them	4%	3%	4%	0%	4%
I know a lot about them	27%	27%	27%	36%	23%
I know something about them	51%	55%	41%	55%	51%
I know very little about them	14%	12%	18%	8%	15%
I know nothing about them	4%	3%	6%	2%	5%

Figure 55: SES volunteer knowledge of policies, processes, and practices in relation to bullying and sexual harassment (%) TE_KNOW. How much do you know about the policies, processes and practices at the TFS or SES about bullying or sexual harassment? Base: All respondents

Training and support

Those surveyed were asked if they had received training on preventing and/or responding to bullying and sexual harassment while working or volunteering. Just over half (51%) of respondents indicated they had received training on bullying. Just under half (48%) reported receiving training on sexual harassment and less than one third (32%) stated they did not receive training on any of these.

Those in the following cohorts were more likely to report receiving training on bullying:

- SES employees/volunteers (61% compared to 50% of TFS employees/volunteers)

- TFS employees (69%), SES employees (72%), and SES volunteers (60%) compared to 46% of TFS volunteers.

Respondents in the following groups were more likely to report receiving training on sexual harassment:

- Women (50% compared to 38% of men)

- SES employees/volunteers (60% compared to 46% of TFS employees/volunteers)

- TFS employees (57%), SES employees (76%), and SES volunteers (59%) compared to 44% of TFS volunteers.

Those more likely to indicate they had not received training on bullying and sexual harassment included:

- TFS employees/volunteers (33% compared to 23% of SES employees/volunteers)

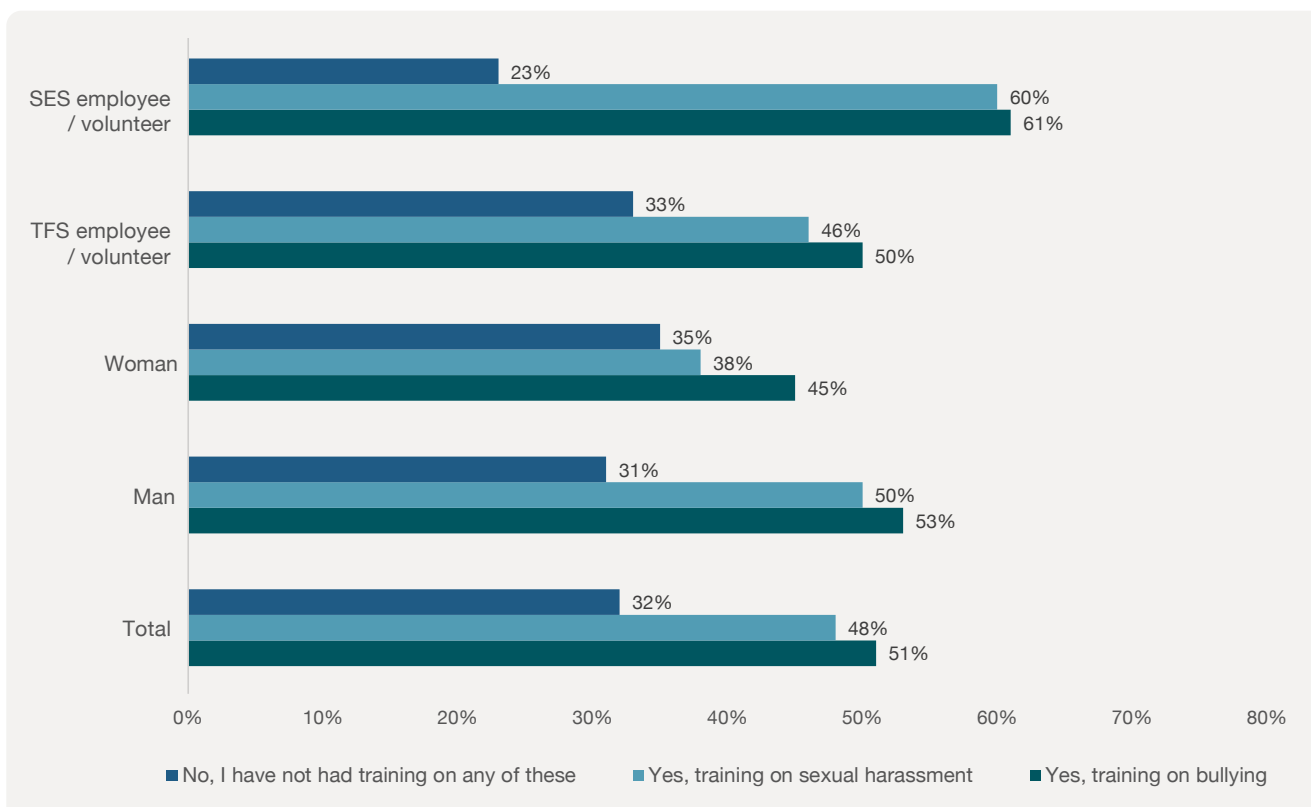- TFS volunteers (36% compared to 17% of TFS employees, 7% of SES employees, and 25% of SES volunteers).

Figure 56: Total training on bullying, sexual harassment (%)
TE_KNOW. How much do you know about the policies, processes and practices at the TFS or SES about bullying or sexual harassment?
Base: All respondents

Conclusion

The policy environment plays a crucial role in shaping workplace culture, establishing expectations, and ensuring safety, respect, and inclusion for all employees and volunteers. Policies serve as more than just compliance tools – they are fundamental in creating clear pathways for addressing harmful behaviours and fostering organisational trust. However, the findings in this chapter highlight a significant disconnect between policy intent and the lived experience within the workplace.

Despite the presence of policies and reporting mechanisms, the overwhelming feedback from employees and volunteers indicates that current reporting processes are unclear, ineffective, and do not inspire confidence. Many individuals described experiencing confusion about how to report concerns, a lack of transparency in the handling of complaints, and prolonged resolution timelines. A recurring theme was the perception that complaints, once lodged, disappear into a bureaucratic void with little or no meaningful action taken.

The belief that reporting harmful behaviours leads to no tangible outcomes has created an environment where many feel discouraged from speaking up. Some employees and volunteers reported fears of retaliation, career stagnation, or social exclusion because of making a complaint. For others, the emotional toll of engaging with the complaints process was significant, leading to stress, anxiety, and a sense of disillusionment with the system.

Survey insights further reinforce these concerns, with responses reflecting low levels of trust in the organisation's ability to manage complaints effectively. While many respondents reported feeling safe from reprisal when speaking up, far fewer believed that complaints were taken seriously or that action would be taken against those responsible for harmful behaviour, particularly if they held senior positions.

The policy review conducted as part of this chapter also identified key gaps in accessibility, inclusivity, and clarity within the current frameworks. While some policies are well-defined, there is inconsistency in how they are communicated and applied across the organisation. In particular, the absence of a standalone sexual harassment policy and limited alignment with best practice principles such as trauma-informed and intersectional approaches suggest opportunities for strengthening the existing policy framework.

Overall, these findings highlight the critical need for reform in the way policies are implemented and how complaints are managed. While policies are necessary foundations for workplace safety and accountability, their effectiveness is ultimately determined by how they are enacted in practice. Without clear, transparent, and trusted reporting mechanisms, the goal of creating a safe and inclusive workplace is significantly harder to achieve.

9. Framework for Action

Insights from the review highlight key areas for improvement across six critical domains. These domains are interconnected and essential for fostering a workplace that is inclusive, high-performing, and accountable.

Leadership plays a foundational role in shaping workplace culture. While there are strengths within the current leadership structures, inconsistencies in accountability, exclusionary practices, and a lack of confidence in leadership have been identified. Ensuring leaders at all levels are equipped with the skills, accountability measures, and pathways for inclusive leadership development is crucial for cultural transformation.

Workplace Safety extends beyond physical hazards to include psychological safety, protection from harassment, and fostering an environment where all employees and volunteers feel secure. Current training programs vary in effectiveness, and there is a lack of broad awareness about the importance of diversity, inclusion, and proactive safety measures.

Cohesion and Recognition are vital for fostering collaboration and trust across the organisation. Divisions between operational and non-operational staff, as well as between employees and volunteers, have contributed to fractured workplace relationships. Addressing these divides through structured recognition programs and cultural change initiatives will help build a more unified workforce.

Transparency and Accountability is critical for trust and fairness. Current perceptions of decision-making and reporting processes indicate a need for clearer communication, structured selection criteria, and independent review mechanisms. A lack of accountability for misconduct has also created a culture of silence, reinforcing the need for independent reporting pathways and consistent enforcement of workplace standards.

Addressing Systemic Barriers is essential for creating an equitable workplace. Women, people with disabilities, and underrepresented groups face physical, structural, and policy-related challenges that limit participation and career progression. Strengthening workplace policies, ensuring accessible infrastructure, and embedding inclusive practices will enable greater workforce diversity and retention.

Data-Driven Insights are necessary to monitor cultural change, track workforce trends, and ensure proactive interventions. Strengthening data collection, analysis, and reporting mechanisms will enable informed decision-making and greater accountability.

9. Framework for Action

To drive and sustain meaningful change, performance must be measured consistently and transparently. This framework provides a structured approach to addressing the identified gaps and implementing best-practice strategies. The following sections outline specific actions to create a safer, more inclusive, and high-performing organisation, reinforcing a long-term commitment to cultural change.

Leadership (capability, assessment, pathways) and leading volunteers

Rationale	Recommendations
Leadership sets the tone for workplace culture, yet inconsistencies in leadership accountability, exclusionary practices, and lack of confidence in change have been identified. Many leaders are appointed based on operational expertise rather than leadership skills, leading to gaps in inclusion and psychological safety. Many volunteers feel undervalued and disconnected from leadership, with concerns about poor leadership skills in managing volunteer teams. The workforce remains overwhelmingly male, particularly in leadership. Women in operational roles report greater exclusion and disrespect.	**Leadership capability:** • TFS and SES Executives to publicly commit to cultural change, setting clear expectations for leadership behaviour and holding leaders accountable for workplace culture improvements. • Implement mandatory leadership training for all people leaders (targeted at emerging, mid-level and senior leaders), broadening training scope to include adaptive leadership, emotional intelligence, and change leadership. • Implement a "Leadership on the Ground" Program, requiring TFS and SES Executives and senior leaders to spend time in regional stations, brigades, and units to better understand frontline challenges and build trust. **Leadership assessment:** • Introduce leadership accountability metrics tied linking leadership performance appraisals to demonstrated progress in inclusion, psychological safety, positive duty, and respectful workplace practices. • Require 360-degree leadership assessments for all leaders, providing employees and volunteers an opportunity to provide confidential feedback on leadership effectiveness and workplace culture. Link promotions and development opportunities to demonstrated inclusive leadership behaviours rather than tenure or operational experience alone. **Leadership pathways:** • Increase gender and diversity representation in leadership: actively work towards more diverse leadership teams to challenge traditional power hierarchies and broaden decision-making perspectives, through mentoring, sponsoring, and developing women, First Nations people, people from CALD backgrounds, younger personnel, and non-operational staff into leadership roles. • Develop targeted retention strategies to increase representation of women in leadership roles and ensure their sustained career progression. • Ensure consistent recognition of volunteer contributions, including structured feedback, awards, and leadership acknowledgment of the value volunteers bring.

9. Framework for Action

Embed workplace safety as a shared responsibility for all employees and volunteers	
Rationale	**Recommendations**
Workplace safety extends beyond physical hazards to psychological wellbeing, protection from bullying and harassment, and the creation of a secure environment. Existing training programs are inconsistent, often dismissed by those who need them most, and perceived as exclusionary by some. There is also a lack of widespread awareness of the business case for diversity and inclusion, and practical knowledge of how to build safe and inclusive cultures.	**Embed capability across all employees and volunteers** • Revamp training programs to be more practical and engaging by incorporating real-life scenarios, industry-specific challenges, and interactive discussions in addition to online modules. • Introduce mandatory, evidence-based training for all employees and volunteers that builds a culture of psychological safety, inclusion, and respect. This program should be tailored to the organisation's context and go beyond compliance, addressing the underlying attitudes, behaviours, and cultural norms that drive lasting change. It must include focused modules on inclusive behaviour, conflict resolution, respectful communication, and sexual harassment prevention. In addition, mandate bystander and upstander training to embed a 'speak up' culture, equipping all employees and volunteers with the skills and confidence to safely intervene when witnessing inappropriate behaviour.

Cohesion and recognition	
Rationale	**Recommendations**
There is a notable divide between operational and non-operational staff, employees and volunteers, and various regions, leading to fractured workplace relationships.	• Establish a cultural transformation team to drive the implementation of culture-related initiatives across TFS and SES. This team will lead key actions, including those recommended in this report. To support their work and ensure initiatives reflect the real experiences of members, launch a culture advisory group — a small team made up of diverse representatives from across the TFS and SES to provide ongoing feedback and insights into cultural challenges and opportunities. • Introduce a workforce recognition program that acknowledges contributions across all roles and regions, ensuring that support staff and volunteers are recognised and feel valued for their impact. • Use regular communication and awareness campaigns to reinforce zero-tolerance policies, highlight support services, communicate how inclusive workplaces strengthen TFS and SES, and showcase positive role models. • Improve Inter-Regional and Inter-Brigade collaboration by introducing cross-training opportunities, knowledge-sharing initiatives, and standardised processes across all regions.

9. Framework for Action

Increase transparency

Rationale	Recommendations
A 'boys' club' culture, hierarchical decision-making, and favouritism were identified as barriers to fair treatment and career progression. The various divides must be addressed.	• Strengthen fairness and trust in leadership pathways by introducing clear, consistent promotion and appointment processes for all employee and volunteer (brigade) leadership positions. Standardise selection criteria across brigades, use diverse and independent selection panels, and provide transparent information on eligibility, application steps, and development opportunities to support all members in navigating leadership pathways.

Reporting

Rationale	Recommendations
A lack of accountability for misconduct has contributed to a culture of silence and fear around raising concerns.	• Establish a zero-tolerance policy for workplace misconduct, ensuring that all complaints are investigated independently, and appropriate actions are taken. • Improve confidential and safe reporting systems, implementing trauma-informed human-centred, independent reporting mechanisms (including anonymous pathways) with accessible and transparent avenues for reporting and resolution and clear protection for those who come forward. • Ensure timely and transparent Investigations: Implement clear timelines for investigating complaints and ensure outcomes are communicated transparently while maintaining confidentiality. • Providing access to specialist counselling and advocacy services for individuals who experience bullying and sexual harassment.

9. Framework for Action

Address systemic barriers

Rationale	Recommendations
Physical and structural barriers limit participation Isolation of female employees increases the risk of exclusion Policy frameworks must evolve to support inclusion	• Strengthen safe workspaces for women: address the physical and structural barriers, including inadequate facilities, poorly fitted uniforms, and isolation of female employees across shifts. • Strengthen policy frameworks for inclusion: review and modernise policies which create inappropriate barriers to women's participation, including flexible working conditions and pregnancy-related policies. • Establish a formal network to connect women working and volunteering across the services, creating space for peer support, mentoring, and collaboration. This initiative should be designed to strengthen relationships, build leadership capability, and foster a sense of belonging by enabling women to share experiences, challenges, and opportunities in a safe and supportive environment.

Using data-driven insights to strengthen culture

Rationale	Recommendations
To upgrade data capabilities to more effectively monitor workforce participation trends, with a particular focus on volunteers. Strengthening data collection, analysis, and reporting mechanisms will improve decision-making, enable proactive interventions, and support safety and inclusion strategy.	• Implement a centralised data management system, adopting a platform that integrates workforce and volunteer data in real time. Ensure the system allows for automated data capture, tracking, and reporting. • Expand data collection parameters, capturing demographic and participation data across key diversity dimensions (e.g., Gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic background). Track engagement levels, retention rates, and reasons for volunteer departure. • Enhance data analysis and reporting, developing dashboards to visualise workforce and volunteer trends over time. Benchmark internal data against industry and national trends to identify gaps and opportunities. • Monitor and track trends: regularly collect and review workplace data (including regular pulse checks to seek employee and volunteer feedback on cultural change) to track trends, identify high-risk areas, and measure the impact of interventions.

9. Framework for Action

Towards successful implementation – a recommended approach

Successfully embedding cultural change benefits from a structured, phased approach that balances immediate impact with long-term sustainability. Based on best practices, the following framework offers a recommended pathway to guide implementation through three key stages: **Essential Foundations**, **Embedded Practices**, and **Cultural Maturity**. This approach ensures that improvements are introduced and reinforced over time, creating the conditions for sustained, systemic change.

Phase 1: Essential Foundations
(Short-Term: 6-12 Months)

1

The initial phase is designed to establish the necessary groundwork for meaningful cultural change. Key priorities include clarifying and effectively communicating policies, reporting pathways, and expectations so that all employees and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities. Early actions – such as procedural refinements and visible leadership commitment – can generate momentum and signal the organisation's dedication to change. Introducing baseline accountability mechanisms will help lay the foundation for longer-term progress, while leadership visibility on cultural issues will reinforce the importance of inclusion, safety, and respect in the workplace.

Phase 2: Embedded Practices
(Medium-Term: 12-24 Months)

2

Building on the foundational efforts, the focus in this phase shifts to fully embedding inclusive behaviours and accountability into everyday practice. Leadership development programs should integrate cultural expectations to ensure sustained behavioural change. Enhancing access to policies, training, and digital resources will enable employees and volunteers to engage more effectively with support mechanisms. Strengthening reporting mechanisms is key to fostering trust and transparency, while refining response processes for complaints and misconduct will help ensure fairness, consistency, and timeliness. Establishing clear and measurable progress indicators will support accountability and continuous improvement.

Phase 3: Cultural Maturity
(Long-Term: 24+ Months)

3

The final phase prioritises embedding cultural change at a systemic level, ensuring that inclusion, safety, and respect are deeply ingrained in TFS and SES operations. The shift from a compliance-based approach to values-driven leadership will be central to sustaining progress. A trauma-informed, person-centred approach should be integrated into policies and practices to ensure all employees and volunteers feel supported. Long-term initiatives to promote inclusion and equity will help create opportunities for underrepresented groups. A strong speak-up culture will be fostered, encouraging safe and meaningful reporting. Finally, continuous improvement mechanisms will allow TFS and SES to assess progress, identify emerging challenges, and refine strategies to maintain cultural excellence.

By considering this phased approach, the TFS and SES can take a structured yet flexible path toward meaningful and lasting cultural transformation. This recommended framework provides a roadmap for integrating change efforts in a way that is both strategic and sustainable, while allowing for adjustments based on organisational needs and ongoing evaluation.

9. Framework for Action

Key Priorities for Phase 1

1

In the initial phase of implementation, the focus is on establishing the essential foundations necessary for driving meaningful cultural change within the TFS and SES. This phase is critical for setting the stage for long-term transformation by addressing immediate needs and laying the groundwork for future progress.

A primary priority is the **establishment of essential foundations** for cultural change. This involves clarifying and effectively communicating policies and expectations to ensure that all employees and volunteers are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Clear communication will help eliminate confusion and foster a shared understanding of the organisational values and standards.

Introducing **baseline accountability mechanisms** is another key priority. These mechanisms will serve as the foundation for holding individuals accountable for their actions and ensuring alignment with the organisation's values. By implementing these mechanisms early, the TFS and SES can begin to build a culture of accountability that supports long-term cultural transformation.

Enhancing Executive and senior leadership visibility and commitment to change is also crucial in this phase. Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping workplace culture, and their visible commitment to cultural change will signal the organisation's dedication to creating a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment. Leadership engagement will help generate momentum and reinforce the importance of cultural change initiatives.

Overall, Phase 1 is about **creating a solid foundation for cultural change** by addressing immediate needs and setting the stage for sustained progress. The successful implementation of these priorities will pave the way for the subsequent phases, where the focus will shift to embedding inclusive practices and achieving cultural maturity.

2

Key Priorities for Phase 2

Phase 2 focuses on embedding inclusive behaviours and accountability into the daily practices of the TFS and SES. This phase is crucial for transitioning from foundational efforts to sustained cultural transformation.

Key priorities include **developing and implementing leadership programs that incorporate cultural expectations**, ensuring that leaders at all levels are equipped to drive and model inclusive behaviours. This involves broadening the scope of leadership training to include adaptive leadership, emotional intelligence, and change management, thereby fostering a leadership culture that prioritises psychological safety and respect.

Strengthening reporting mechanisms and response processes is another critical priority. This includes enhancing confidential and safe reporting systems, implementing trauma-informed, independent reporting pathways, and ensuring timely and transparent investigations. These measures aim to build trust and transparency, encouraging staff and volunteers to report misconduct without fear of retaliation.

Additionally, **establishing measurable progress indicators** is essential for continuous improvement. This involves developing clear metrics to track the effectiveness of cultural initiatives, enabling the organisation to assess progress, identify areas for improvement, and refine strategies as needed. By embedding these practices, the TFS and SES can ensure that cultural change is not only initiated but also sustained, paving the way for the final phase of achieving cultural maturity and systemic change.

This structured approach will facilitate a transition into Phase 3, where the focus will be on integrating a values-driven leadership approach and promoting inclusion and equity for underrepresented groups.

9. Framework for Action

3

Key Priorities for Phase 3

Phase 3 focuses on achieving cultural maturity and systemic change within the TFS and SES. This phase emphasises the integration of a values-driven leadership approach, ensuring that inclusion, safety, and respect are deeply embedded in all aspects of the organisations.

A critical priority is to **promote inclusion and equity for underrepresented groups, creating opportunities for diverse voices to be heard and valued**. This involves implementing long-term initiatives that support the advancement and retention of women, First Nations people, and individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in leadership roles.

Fostering a strong speak-up culture is essential, encouraging safe and meaningful reporting of issues without fear of retaliation. This requires the establishment of robust support systems and clear communication channels that empower employees and volunteers to voice concerns and contribute to a positive workplace environment. Continuous improvement mechanisms will be integral to this phase, allowing the TFS and SES to assess progress, identify emerging challenges, and refine strategies to maintain cultural excellence. By embedding these priorities, the organisations will transition from a compliance-based approach to one that is driven by shared values and a commitment to sustained cultural transformation.

The successful implementation of these priorities will ensure that both organisations not only meet but exceed their goals for an inclusive and high-performing workplace.

Feedback mechanisms will be integral to the evaluation process, providing a platform for staff and volunteers to share their experiences and insights. This will include confidential surveys, focus groups, and 360-degree feedback for leadership assessments. By actively seeking and incorporating feedback, we will be able to identify high-risk areas, measure the impact of interventions, and adjust strategies as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

Reporting and accountability structures will be established to maintain transparency and ensure that all stakeholders are informed of progress and outcomes. Regular reports will be disseminated to key stakeholders, highlighting achievements, challenges, and areas for further development. These reports will serve as a basis for accountability, ensuring that all parties are committed to the shared goal of building a positive and inclusive culture within the TFS and SES.

By embracing this framework, TFS and SES have the opportunity to lead by example, setting new standards for cultural excellence, strengthening trust within their ranks, and delivering even greater positive impacts to the communities they work with and serve.

TFS-SES CULTURE REVIEW REPORT

Building Positive, Respectful and Inclusive TFS and SES Cultures

ELIZABETH BRODERICK & Co.