



# ***COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Ms KE Richards MP—Acting Chair

Mr MA Boothman MP

Mr SSJ Andrew MP (virtual)

Mr JR Martin MP (virtual)

Mr JE Hunt MP (virtual)

Mr JM Krause MP

**Staff present:**

Ms M Westcott—Committee Secretary

Mr R Pelenyi—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2024**

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**TUESDAY, 26 MARCH 2024**

**Brisbane**

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### **The committee met at 9.00 am.**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. My name is Kim Richards. I am the member for Redlands and I am acting chair of the committee today. I am substituting for Peter Russo, the member for Toohey. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate in this country to have two of the world's oldest continuing living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all now share.

With me here today are Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore and deputy chair; via teleconference, Stephen Andrew, the member for Mirani; Mr Jon Krause, the member for Scenic Rim; via teleconference, Jason Hunt, the member for Caloundra; and also via teleconference, James Martin, the member for Stretton, who is substituting for Jonty Bush today. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. If everyone could please turn their mobile phones off or to silent that would be terrific.

### **CHOVEAUX, Mr Justin, General Manager, Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland (via videoconference)**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Good morning and thank you for joining us, Justin. I had the privilege of being with the Russell Island Rural Fire Brigade on the weekend to be part of the commending process on the great work that they have been doing across Russell Island over many years. Welcome and thank you for being here today. If you would like to make a brief opening statement that would be terrific.

**Mr Choveaux:** I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to appear before it today. The Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland is the representative organisation for the 1,400 rural fire brigades and brigade members who defend 93 per cent of Queensland. Australian and Queensland community defence is built by volunteers and most operations are run by volunteers. It has been the Australian ethos. It is one of the greatest things about our country. All sides of government and government agencies bemoan the falling volunteer numbers across agencies and set up committees of paid people to develop strategies to attract new volunteers and reduce barriers to volunteering.

The RFBAQ, since 2014, has been repeatedly saying to the fire service and successive governments that the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990 needs to be completely rewritten. It was cobbled together from two even older pieces of legislation. The RFBAQ was promised that there would be a full rewrite of the legislation post the KPMG review into the QFES to empower communities across Queensland and this has not happened. The amendments to the old legislation make this draft completely unacceptable and not fit for purpose. As such we will not be referring to sections of this legislation and attempting to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Our belief is that the current legislation as it stands should be kept until a proper conversation can be had post the 2024 Queensland general election.

There has been no information or consultation with any rural fire brigade or brigade members that this draft legislation will result in the loss of their unincorporated association status—none. There has been no consultation with any rural fire brigade that this draft legislation will result in substantial changes in their working conditions and environment—none. This is due to the QFES not being industrially required to share any information or gain agreement from the unpaid workers in rural fire brigades before change is imposed upon them. The QFES would never do this to a unionised workforce. Look at the way blue card was implemented and the disruption it caused due to the ham-fisted way the paid fire service imposed it on volunteers. This failed process of engagement exhibits how the QFES is inwardly focused.

This draft legislation exemplifies the need for a completely separate Rural Fire Service with its own legislation and direct budget from government as the QFES and QFES senior officers are ramming major change through that benefit themselves at the expense of brigades and the communities they defend. The QFES were internally aware that the changes they proposed would substantially change every aspect of volunteering and there were a number of different models tabled by former senior QFES staff to achieve policy objectives—models that have been successful in other states in supporting volunteers. These were not the models chosen. In every instance the QFES has chosen the most directive and controlling way of trying to achieve their internal objectives.

The initial proposal from QFES had a rural fires board. This was included in the RFBAQ's submission to the committee. This has been watered down to such a level that the RFBAQ needs to provide five candidates' names and the minister will choose who they like best for the one RFBAQ position. Section 130(5) states—

To remove any doubt, it is declared that the RFS advisory committee is not a decision-making body.

Section 130(5) certainly leaves volunteers in no doubt that this new rebrand of QFES, under the same fire and rescue senior officers, does not care what volunteers want.

The QFES has failed to engage with rural fire brigades and brigade members for the content of this draft legislation. Much of the substantial changes to brigades has only been revealed after the very short time allowed for submissions had closed. This is completely unacceptable and if this draft legislation proceeds to legislation the major changes will not be able to be undone. The current state of rural fire, with a shrinking fleet of overweight trucks, dwindling volunteer numbers and poor handling of the previous fire season, which has led to AgForce's call for a parliamentary inquiry into the QFES handling of the bushfires, is a direct result of a succession of absentee landlords sent by fire and rescue to administer the Rural Fire Service in the last 15 years—people who have no experience or understanding of rural fire, which is sociologically different to fire and rescue. The reason for the dysfunction within rural fire is directly related to the psychometrically aligned leadership team of middle-aged male fire and rescue senior officers. Rural fire staff are different to fire and rescue. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission decision B 2009/17 found that—

The Bench accepts that a rural fire officer then, and now, has a separate and identifiable area of activity and has different responsibilities and accountabilities to service as a non-rural fire officer. In this regard we have accepted the evidence of Messrs Cifuentes and Edwards to the extent that the major differences between rural and urban operations are clear—these include, for rural officers:

- fire prevention;
- the type of fire;
- building inspections;
- the volunteer bases of the Rural Fire Service;
- conflict resolution;
- funding;
- use of private equipment by volunteers;
- working times;
- negotiation between interest groups; and
- the fire warden system.

And for urban operations:

- response and training.

This draft legislation will cement the control fire and rescue will have over every aspect of rural fire and the amount of dollars that go into the rural fire budget forevermore. The RFBAQ has written to every political party and Independent representative of Queensland parliament seeking a written commitment, prior to the 2024 state election, for a fully independent Rural Fire Service with its own funding and legislation should that political party form government. The successful volunteer support organisation models are those that are separate, empowered and sociologically focused on the brigades and brigade members. These models support volunteer firefighters to provide response to road crash rescue, internal/external structural, swift water and bushfire. That is what we would like to transition to in the next term of government.

Please do not support this bad draft legislation as the changes to the status of brigades cannot be undone. There are other ways to achieve the outcomes sought if the outcome is to enable and enhance community defence across all of Queensland. Again I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to appear today.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** In your opening statement you alluded to the fact that there was no consultation with your organisation and there was no consultation with any brigades about this new legislation; is that correct?

**Mr Choveaux:** No, none whatsoever. That is correct.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** The individuals who would be affected more than pretty much anyone else had no consultation whatsoever about this legislation?

**Mr Choveaux:** No, specifically not in relation to the change of their status or the substantial change in the way brigades operate.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** In your opening statement you mentioned there was a potential review by KPMG about the legislation going forward. You stated that was promised to the association. Can you elaborate what that rewrite of legislation post a KPMG report was going to do?

**Mr Choveaux:** We started this whole process in 2020 by writing to the premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, at the time. It was in August after a special general meeting of all the elected representatives across Queensland. It was a unanimous resolution that we write to the premier and we ask for the QFES to be dismantled and for a full investigation and restructure of the fire services. That is what led, we believe, to the then minister, Mark Ryan, bringing about a review into the fire services to find if there was a better way to achieve community defence throughout Queensland. In none of those conversations ever was it tabled or put to brigades that there would be a change in their status of being unincorporated associations because brigades were comfortable with it.

A statewide conversation was held in 2017, 2018 and 2019 where the brigades were directly engaged in relation to their unincorporated status, their relationship as third-party providers to the fire service and what that meant for them. That then led to—and I can supply these documents to the committee if they would like—the *Legal Status of Rural Fire Brigades* summary in 2018 that clearly stated that brigades were predominantly comfortable with their current legal status and brigades wished to have a simple legal structure that allows them to function effectively while ensuring their membership operates within a legal framework and provides the appropriate level of protection. There were also six documents produced by the QFES in 2019 and they were information notes on legal statuses of brigades. The one in relation to an unincorporated association, which I can supply, is that while being an unincorporated association poses a number of challenges for rural fire brigades there are also a number of benefits.

Brigades were of the understanding that the conversation had been had and that they and the government and the fire service were comfortable with their position. None of them have been engaged in this process since the KPMG review came down and then deputy commissioner Gollschewski was running the writ. None of them were engaged in relation to a change of the status of the brigades.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** If you are no longer an unincorporated association, what happens to all the fundraising in those accounts? For instance, I know on the Gold Coast city council has a levy system through the rates and gives money to the rural fire brigades directly. What happens to those accounts? How does that work?

**Mr Choveaux:** We do not know. There is no overarching incorporation so each rural fire brigade—being an unincorporated association, we have 1,400 individual identities, so faith communities. Each one of those faith communities has a written agreement with the Commissioner of the fire service where they say, 'You can be a rural fire brigade. Here is your registration number. Here is a map. You need to abide by the terms and conditions which are set down in the brigade manual.' A brigade being unincorporated means that each member is an equal owner of everything the brigade has for a common purpose. If the brigade has 100 members and there is \$100, theoretically each brigade member gets a dollar.

Brigade money can be broken down three ways. There is state money which brigades do not get. There is council money and, as you said, when a rural fire levy is raised by a local government—and last time that was collated statewide it was between \$4 million and \$6 million a year—that is money that the brigade is accountable to the council for. When a brigade does fundraising or someone makes a donation to a brigade that is called community money and the brigade, being unincorporated, is responsible to the community for the expenditure of that money. As at 1 July, if this legislation goes through and the unincorporated organisations no longer exist because a brigade will then become part of the state, that money will then belong to the state. How that will actually function we do not know.

We found out about this post the closing of submissions to the committee from the QFES attending our general meeting over 16 and 17 March. We posed a number of questions to them: firstly, is it true and then how is it going to work? They were unable to answer those questions. I have also since then written to the senior QFES person who presented at our committee with a series of questions

about how this will work, specifically also in relation to local government money. We agreed the current piece of legislation says a local government levy is an agreement between brigades and council, not the fire service and council, and I have not yet received a response so we do not know.

**Mr HUNT:** Justin, you talked about your association and membership numbers in a large and expansive organisation. How many members do you have currently?

**Mr Choveaux:** The RFBAQ represents all the brigades and brigade members in the state. That is in the object of the RFBAQ, which is the start of our constitution. That is acknowledged by the fire service and by the state government as well as through the Volunteer Charter.

**Mr HUNT:** How many?

**Mr Choveaux:** All of the brigades and all of the members.

**Mr HUNT:** You do not have a number, but every single one of them?

**Mr Choveaux:** Yes, that is right. We say 1,400 rural fire brigades. It is a bit of a moving feast because some brigades are amalgamated, some brigades get deregistered and new brigades are being formed. A number of years ago we sat down with the fire service and said that we have to pick a number. Sometimes it is more than 1,400, sometimes it is fewer than 1,400. Once a year when we do our statistics for our magazine on the state of rural fire, which is in around October, we write to the Fire Service and ask for the membership numbers. The membership number I will be giving you would be the one we received in October.

**Mr HUNT:** Is that opt in or opt out?

**Mr Choveaux:** It is not like other states and territories. In Victoria, a brigade chooses to join the association and then has to pay a subscription fee. In New South Wales, brigades or members could choose to join the association. Here in Queensland, it is deemed that we are the representative organisation.

**Mr HUNT:** If someone does not want that, do they then have to opt out; is that the case?

**Mr Choveaux:** They could. I have been doing this job for 13 years and no-one has done that yet.

**Mr HUNT:** That is okay. Just to clarify: out of all of that vast number of members, there was no consultative process at all or was there just no consultative process around certain aspects? I am a little bit confused. Was there no consultation whatsoever or was there consultation about some things but not other things?

**Mr Choveaux:** There was no consultation in the changing of the structure of the rural fire brigades and how a brigade would change in its relationship to the fire service. Chief Superintendent Alan Gillespie from the Rural Fire Service Queensland went around the state and spoke to brigades in relation to the staffing uplift and what brigades wanted. I will be able to also supply the review of his report to the committee. In that review of his report, at no stage were brigades engaged with losing their incorporated status or changing their legal position.

**Mr HUNT:** So there was some consultation?

**Mr Choveaux:** There was consultation. Again, I can provide you with the details—

**ACTING CHAIR:** I am sorry, Mr Choveaux: I thought you said there was no consultation. To be clear, there was some consultation?

**Mr Choveaux:** In my statement I said there was no consultation in relation to the legal status of brigades.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I was referring to the line of discussion with the member for Theodore in regards to his questions. It sounded like there was no consultation. It is good to have that clarified, thank you.

**Mr Choveaux:** I can upload the document if you would like.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr HUNT:** Are the brigades primary producers?

**Mr Choveaux:** There is a number of different classifications of brigades. We have primary producer brigades, which is a group of landholders who generally do not have a truck and they do not collect a levy. There are broadacre people. There are also the cane brigades, which come under primary producers because fire is a very important part of primary production. Then we have a number of different classifications—rural, izone, village and special service delivery brigades. They would be what we would generally classify as a truck brigade. Sixty per cent of rural fire brigades are primary producer brigades and they would not have a truck.

**Mr HUNT:** That was my next question. You have nailed it in one.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Mr Choveaux, before I ask you some questions I have to make a declaration that this bill will directly affect me as a volunteer rural firefighter attached to the Allandale Rural Fire Brigade. However, I do not consider this interest in the bill affects my ability to ask questions and participate in the hearing. Obviously, the feedback you have provided to us on behalf of the association and volunteer fires is quite negative in relation to the bill. How do you consider it will impact the number of volunteer rural firefighters in Queensland?

**Mr Choveaux:** I believe it is going to be a negative response because that is what we have been receiving from across the state. The rural fire brigades have been treated very poorly over the past number of years. I refer to blue cards. There have been a number of failed processes imposed upon them without any consultation and many of them have just had enough. We were very blessed in the last fire season in that when we do have a big fire season they come out of the woodwork. We have never ever run short of brigade members previously, but we did see a number of instances of overgiving by brigade members where, to fill the gaps, they just had to be stood down because they were giving too much. In all the feedback I have in relation to this—and reading through the submissions to the committee as well—the vast majority of the responses have been negative.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Thinking back to a significant bushfire event in South-East Queensland in 2019, how would that event have been dealt with in the event that there were not sufficient volunteers to deal with that bushfire? Obviously with negative feedback from this bill and possibly more volunteers walking away, how would events such as that be dealt with if there were not enough volunteers to deal with it?

**Mr Choveaux:** The vast majority of anything that happens across Australia is dealt with by volunteers, whether they be SES, rural fire, Marine Rescue Queensland. In rural fire or volunteer firefighting, there are over 200,000 brigade members across Australia. That is the vast bulk of people who do everything across this country.

**Mr KRAUSE:** The heavy lifting.

**Mr Choveaux:** If they start leaving you will see impacts across the board because people volunteer for more than one organisation.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Moving on to something slightly different, from your understanding what type of training do urban and auxiliary firefighters do to equip them to fight rural fires? I know from my experience there was probably 10, 20 or 30 hours of training just to get to the minimum standard as a rural firefighter. What do urban firefighters do?

**Mr Choveaux:** I am not able to comment on fire and rescue training because I am not aware of it.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Mr Choveaux, you mentioned the loss of unincorporated status and what effect that might have on funds held by rural fire brigades after 1 July if this bill becomes law. Why should local brigades continue fundraising from the community if that money potentially is going to be state money after 1 July?

**Mr Choveaux:** That will be a conversation the brigades and the communities need to have. In our role as the charity that raises money and buys equipment for rural fire brigades, in the last four years we have supplied over \$3.7 million worth of equipment to rural fire brigades across the state. I have already been receiving emails from our supporters saying that, while they are very happy with what the RFBAQ has been doing with the money, if everything we supply now becomes property of the state they will stop giving because they want to give to a brigade, not to the state of Queensland.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I understand. Mr Choveaux, I go back to the consultation point and there have been a couple of questions about this. Can you tell us whether RFBAQ or, to your knowledge, any other volunteers were given a pre-introduction copy of this bill before us? Did you see the bill in a draft form before it was introduced?

**Mr Choveaux:** We did. We received the bill earlier this year and we were given seven working days to provide comment on it. We wrote back to the Premier and the minister saying, 'Please don't provide the right to the authority to introduce through cabinet, because it is not in the best interests of the brigades.' Last year in conversations with the then deputy commissioner Gollschewski, we had an understanding that the draft legislation would be available for distribution, before the authority to introduce was put forward to cabinet, to all the brigades in the state. That was the undertaking we sought. We said that brigades need a lot of time to be able to give their feedback on it. While we were given that undertaking by then deputy commissioner Gollschewski, in January a piece of paper came from the minister that said, 'You can only share it with your executive.' We saw that to be the state executive, which formed the elected representatives, but not to the wider brigade population which we had been promised.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mr Choveaux, my understanding is that QFES has given assurances that local assets will remain local assets. Is that not the assurance you have been given?

**Mr Choveaux:** We never said they would not be. We said they would be property of the state and the state could take it away. We said the money will—

**ACTING CHAIR:** You have been given that assurance, though?

**Mr Choveaux:** We have.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Great, that is terrific. The other understanding I had was that the legal status of rural firefighters would be in line with our other volunteer emergency services like the SES and Marine Rescue; is that your understanding?

**Mr Choveaux:** No. It was a conversation that was never had.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr HUNT:** I go back to the consultation issue again. I am sorry to sound like a cracked record. When did you get a copy of the bill?

**Mr Choveaux:** We got a copy of the draft bill in January. I will draw that up from my emails, if that is alright? Would you like me to take the time now or provide the email to you?

**Mr HUNT:** No, an approximation at this stage is perfectly fine. Were the 114 FTEs coming your way the subject of a consultative process between QFES and rural fire?

**Mr Choveaux:** Yes. The first we heard of that was when Minister Mark Ryan made the announcement in October 2022 at parliament about the uplift and the changes that were happening across all emergency services in the state, and we welcomed that.

**Mr HUNT:** Excellent. You talked about the tight time frames around the response to this. Were you forced to get an extension to provide your feedback to the committee?

**Mr Choveaux:** We asked for an extension. I believe on the Friday after the minister did the first reading of the bill in the House, the parliamentary committee said that submissions would be open for just under a week. They would close on the next Friday at 10 am. On that Monday I wrote to the committee and asked for an extension, citing the extension that we were given for the cancer coverage in 2015. Brigades take extra time to formulate a response, know what is going on, get someone to write it and make the submission. I received a phone call from a very nice person who was an employee of the Queensland parliament saying that the time the government had given the parliamentary committee to process this would not allow that to happen and that the committee would meet on the Monday after submissions closed on the 10th to consider my request. Then I received a letter back following the committee meeting saying that, while it had closed, they will accept late submissions.

**Mr HUNT:** Because of the tightness of the time frame, did you just slip in with five minutes to midnight to go or were you actually early?

**Mr Choveaux:** We lodged a couple of days early and we put it on our timeline.

**Mr HUNT:** The time frames were tight, but you lodged early. How early were you?

**Mr Choveaux:** I think we lodged on the Wednesday and it closed at 10 am on Friday.

**Mr ANDREW:** Mr Choveaux, what amendments or changes to the bill do you think would mean that everybody has fair and equitable representation going forward?

**Mr Choveaux:** My personal belief is, with the draft legislation, you would not be able to achieve that.

**Mr ANDREW:** What can we do to change that? What instrument can we use or what changes would you put forward?

**Mr Choveaux:** I believe it would be to start the whole engagement process with the brigades, have an honest conversation with them, as happened in 2017, 2018 and 2019, about who they are and what affects them and then collate those responses. The brigades are the ones that actually do the work. They are the ones that go forward for free and give their time to their communities to make the whole of Queensland safe. I believe the legislation should be parked until that can happen post the general election.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time today, Mr Choveaux. I note that no questions have been taken on notice.

**DAVEY, Mr Michael, Group Administration Officer, Maroochy South Group of Rural Fire Brigades**

**KEMP, Mr Nigel, Group Officer, Maroochy South Group of Rural Fire Brigades**

**O’SULLIVAN, Mr Kevin, Chairman, Dayboro and District Rural Fire Brigade**

**ACTING CHAIR:** I now welcome the Maroochy South Group of Rural Fire Brigades. Thank you for the service that you provide to all Queenslanders. Our rural fires are absolutely amazing. I invite you to make an opening statement before the committee has some questions for you.

**Mr O’Sullivan:** Good morning, Chair and committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. We wish the committee well in its deliberations on the bill. I am Kevin O’Sullivan, chairman and third officer and speak on behalf of the Dayboro and District Rural Fire Brigade, which operates within the minister’s electorate. Our 15 March submission made the point that the timetable established by this committee for inviting submissions is, from a volunteer brigade viewpoint, unreasonable. This is why: Dayboro RFB holds its monthly general meeting on the second Wednesday of the month. This month it was held on the 13th. Under general business, we discussed the introduction of the bill, introduced six days earlier, and were alerted to the deadline for submissions of 17:00 hours on 15 March. At that point, no member had read through the complete bill, let alone understood its implications. Nevertheless, we got busy and made the submission by the deadline.

Saturday, 16 March was our monthly station and appliance maintenance day. After checking the appliances, running the pumps, changing the radio batteries, mowing the station lawns, whipper-snipping, weed spraying, mopping the floors and cleaning the toilets, we had a further discussion on the bill and decided to appear before the committee, if invited, to tell you what we think. Our maintenance and cleaning duties are, of course, secondary to the primary functions of the brigade as set out in the bill and the amendment to section 82. We undertake these duties willingly and cheerfully—there is no whingeing here—and we are typical of the volunteer brigades throughout the state where there is an enormous reservoir of goodwill, camaraderie and community spirit. Our message, therefore, is please do not be careless in the manner in which you deal with your 25,000 volunteers and 1,400 brigades. The legislative timetable around this bill risks giving the unfortunate impression that our input may be neither valued nor respected. Having said that, we wish to comment on three areas of the bill.

Firstly, the eligibility requirements for key roles: there is a well-known quote attributed to many people that it is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future. Parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 in particular are narrowly prescriptive as set out in clause 83, ‘Amendment of sch 6 (Dictionary)’, and the eligibility for key roles. We do not know the circumstances that may arise in the future when it would make sense for the minister to seek a skills and experience set and an appointee outside of the parameters of clause 83. To be constrained by legislation from doing so, based on current understandings of the organisation’s needs or other motivations, in our opinion is unnecessarily restrictive and should be reconsidered by the committee.

Secondly, concerning brigade financial management, the bill understandably does not delve into how brigades are run. For that we currently rely on version 5.4 of the Rural Fire Brigade rules, dated 13 October 2023. On 19 March 2024, we received an email from the Acting Chief Officer, Ben Millington, with a helpful, plain-English summary of the changes we can expect to see from the legislation and what will not change when RFSQ becomes its own entity within the Queensland fire department. The FAQ section of Mr Millington’s email did, however, reveal a change in the way brigade finances will be managed. These changes are unwelcome, unnecessary and will lead to brigades losing control of their own finances.

We are assured that funds held in brigade accounts pre 1 July 2024 may continue to be managed as per the current RSB management rules. RFSQ will not, they say, seek to take these funds. However, post 1 July 2024 is a different story. Brigades will not bank and manage their own funds as it is proposed that RFSQ will ‘hold funds on behalf of and for the benefit of 1,400 individual brigades’. If we wish to make a purchase post 1 July, we will need to make an application through ‘a process of appropriate delegation which will be as simple as possible’. If that statement does not make the hair stand up on the back of your neck then nothing will.

We are advised that RFSQ will have 114 positions filled to support volunteers. How many of these additional positions will be dealing with applications from 1,400 brigades to access their own funds? How will funds belonging to 1,400 brigades be identified, separated and accounted for? How will we know the value of levies and other income we currently receive, which post 1 July 2024 will go directly to RFSQ? How will RFSQ account to brigades and with what frequency? Are we expected to use our pre 1 July 2024 funds before we apply to access our post 1 July funds held by RFSQ?

This adds up to an unacceptable loss of brigade financial independence and reliance on the RFSQ administration system, which we all know currently is overburdened with slow response times and a policy of pushing more and more responsibility onto brigades, particularly for the delivery of training programs. The new structure holds great promise and we hope it delivers on its objectives. We want to be positive, but handing over brigade financial independence to a bureaucracy is a chilling thought.

The current RFB management rules clearly define brigade money, community money, council money and state money, and we know how to manage this. Our financial management systems and independent auditing regime, which are not onerous, have and will provide the assurances that meet the requirements of the Financial Accountability Act 2009. There is no justification for the proposed management takeover of brigade finances. To the extent that this committee can amend the bill to enshrine the financial independence of brigades, every effort should be made to do so.

Our third point relates to clause 62 and the establishment and membership of the RFSQ advisory committee. We think the establishment of an advisory committee is a good idea. The draft document setting out the background, function, objective et cetera is comprehensive. The only change we suggest to the draft document relates to the position of chair.

The role of the committee is to provide advice to the RFSQ chief officer. The draft document proposes that the RFSQ chief officer chairs the committee, advising himself. Here is a great opportunity for RFSQ to signal to its 25,000 volunteers their importance to the organisation by appointing one of the eight volunteer district representatives as chair. There is no reason a volunteer cannot perform the role of chair as defined in the draft document. The chair briefs both the commissioner and the minister after each quarterly meeting. How refreshing it would be for the commissioner and minister to have direct contact with a member of the volunteer community performing such an important role. That chair would also be well supported by the RFSQ secretariat, with the chief officer and his subordinates making up the other members of the committee. We strongly encourage the committee to consider a simple drafting change to clause 62 to implement this suggestion. Thank you for the opportunity of addressing you.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Mr Kemp or Mr Davey, would you like to make an opening statement as well?

**Mr Kemp:** Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address your committee. I make this submission to you in my position as Group Officer of the Maroochy South Group of Rural Fire Brigades, with the support of the first officers of the group. There are 10 member rural fire brigades in our area on the Sunshine Coast and our group represents 460-odd volunteers who serve their brigades. I am also First Officer of the Bli Bli Rural Fire Brigade and have been in this position for eight years and a member of the brigade for 25 years, holding several management and officer positions.

I would like to point out to the committee that QFES, for some time, has had a major distrust from the members of the Rural Fire Service: firstly, how QFES manages many elements of the Rural Fire Service; and, secondly, QFES and this government's handling of this recent piece of legislation. We also have at the moment calls for an inquiry into QFES's handling of discrimination within the organisation. We have calls from AgForce for an inquiry into QFES's handling of the management of the bushfire crisis in the last few years. We have had the blue card requirement and the handling thereof that saw thousands of RFS volunteers leave the organisation, whilst others were not even asked to obtain a blue card and remain to this day as part of the Rural Fire Brigade, that is, fire wardens and primary producer brigade members—so, discrimination within that section of the blue card.

A recent hastily arranged town hall community meeting with QFES management saw only 350 out of the 26,000 volunteers respond, and QFES could not even get that right on the night as they sent out the wrong links for our members to be able to listen in on that meeting, which was to discuss many of the points in this legislation. With the apparent rushing through of this legislation, and the lack of meaningful consultation with brigades, volunteer firefighters may have their work seriously impacted and externally controlled, removing what needs to be a community-driven decision-making process. I recognise that QFES has started to provide long needed financial provision to ameliorate this issue, but I ask the committee: would you have held today's meeting in a rural fire brigade shed that has no toilets and no power? QFES expects its volunteer labour source to do so whilst they promote moving their headquarters from Kedron to a multimillion-dollar, purpose-built redevelopment. We surely all need to recognise that volunteers are the backbone of our state in all facets of every community and they deserve higher recognition.

My written submission to the committee addresses the four specific areas of our concern. They are: the chief officer appointment. It is very positive to note the clear reference to rural firefighting in the legislation, but there is not enough detail asking how much rural fire experience is needed for the person to take on that position.

The second part is the appointment of rural fire brigade members. It says in the act that the commissioner may appoint a person as a member of a rural fire brigade. At the moment, with the way the system is, the brigade appoints members to the brigade and the commissioner approves that appointment. We send in paperwork. Somebody in the system looks at it and the brigade person is accepted. Where this causes me distrust is that the commissioner can appoint anybody he likes into a brigade. He may decide to appoint a first officer for whatever reason and to take control of a brigade. A brigade is a volunteer organisation run within the community, so we do not need the minister appointing his or her own people.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Do you mean minister or commissioner?

**Mr Kemp:** In the legislation, I believe it is the commissioner; my apologies. Clause 49, on the appointment of a person in charge of operations, again the wording is inconclusive. It does not actually state specifically that a person must have rural fire brigade experience; it just suggests that they could do. It allows for the commissioner again to step in and appoint whomever he or she feels like it to run an operation. At the moment, we have very good guidelines that we have been able to manage for years and we do not want to see other organisations or other parts of our organisation being able to step in and take over rural fires when they may not have the experience.

Moving on to the advisory committee, we are very happy to see such a committee. We think it is an excellent idea to back up both the chief officer and the minister, but there is nothing in the legislation to say who would be a member of that committee. We have received, as you alluded to, an email stating a list of who can go on the committee, but under the legislation there is nothing to state who will be on that committee. Our concern is that the government or the chief minister could put in whomever they like, they do not have to have rural fire brigade knowledge and, basically, they could stack that committee to suit their own causes. I would ask that the committee looks at making sure all members of that committee are rural fire brand, either serving or background.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that there are some aspects of the proposed changes to legislation that may improve the Rural Fire Service. I would, however, respectfully ask that this committee, after considering all the written submissions, especially those from the frontline volunteer firefighters serving their communities, make changes and conduct further meaningful consultation involving all rural fire brigades. This would go a long way towards redeveloping trust and confidence from rural fire brigades and, more particularly, reflect the stated QFES values of respect, integrity, courage, loyalty and trust, which have severely diminished over the last few years. Thank you for allowing me to present.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for your submissions. It is disappointing to hear that there is such distrust amongst fellow frontline emergency services workers. It is not a great thing to hear.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** You mentioned incident controllers and their role. I note pages 67 and 68 of the bill refer to 'rural incident control expertise' and 'incident control expertise'. I know there are multiple levels when it comes to incidents—is it one to three, or something like that—but can you explain your concern when it comes to incident control and potentially other individuals coming in from other parts of the service to take over?

**Mr Kemp:** Yes, no worries there. If a brigade gets called out to a basic or level 1 fire in their own backyard, they respond with one or two vehicles and they take control of the fire, they manage the fire, they put the fire out and they go home. Everything is happy. We step up a little bit higher and there is a possibility that we might have a couple of brigades involved. Neighbouring brigades have come in to help. Generally the process is that the first brigade responding or the brigade that owns that patch will take control of the fire, operate it, they will work together, the fire is put out and they go home. The next stage of fire is where there is a structure involved and we may need to call in the red trucks—the urban stream.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Hopefully you will work well together. There is trust when you are on site?

**Mr Kemp:** Let's just say that what you just said hopefully would be the best way to describe it because it does not always happen. Our concern is that in many instances in my particular patch—I may not speak for every patch, but I certainly know my patch—there have been many times when those trucks have attempted to take over the fire and boss us around to the point where I have seen dangerous things happen because they are telling personnel and trucks to go to areas where we, as a

rural fire brigade, would not go because we know there is going to be a wind change. We know that that grass is going to burn quicker than another patch. We see inexperienced people taking over experienced.

We like to call ourselves professional in what we do; we are not amateurs who just throw on a bit of PPE for a bit of fun, run out and throw some water on the fire. I have seen it even worse in larger-scale fires where the red trucks have come in, taken control and we have had fires lost because of the control that has been issued. I do not knock them in any way as they are experienced in their fighting of fires in building structures, their car firefighting and all of that, but most urban response vehicles do not have bushfire experience. There appears to be a trend—and I believe this could be part of what is happening in this legislation—that they are forcing it all through so fast that certain aspects will get missed. I am bringing up things like there is no identification as to who can run fires. If that is allowed to be swept through as a broad piece of legislation, anybody can just come along, take over, take control. I do not want it to get to the point where, at some stage—

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** As an example though, to be a level 3 controller there would be a fair bit of education and certificates required as part of that? Does it also include practical experience?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** Yes. We undertake formal training under the AIMS system in terms of incident management. Quite a number of trained incident controllers have crew leadership, divisional commander and sector commander qualifications built up over the years and are more than able to handle larger incidents. Just to add to Nigel's point, at times where the red trucks do get involved with a bushfire where there may be, say, a risk to a structure—the structure is not necessarily engulfed, but there is a risk—generally they will get there first because their firefighters are sitting in the station waiting for a call. We arrive and we have immediate communication problems because the urban fire brigades prefer to operate on direct channels, as opposed to the incident and TAC channels that we operate on, and you find there is no communication. They say, 'If you want to talk to us, you have to go to a direct channel.' We are trained on the GWNs, but 99 per cent of the time we are using TAC which is provided by Fire Communications. There is an arrogance there. We are all there with the objective of putting the fire out safely and getting home, but it does create ill feelings. I would support what Nigel and Michael are conveying here, that there is a creeping takeover of the Rural Fire Service.

**ACTING CHAIR:** When you talk about incident controllers, in the minister's introductory speech she was pretty clear that the purpose of being able to appoint one was when there was not a first or second officer available. It was about providing protection back to you guys as volunteer rural firefighters. Did you see the introductory speech?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** I did read that.

**ACTING CHAIR:** That did not resonate with you?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** There is a hierarchy—

**ACTING CHAIR:** My question is: that clarification did not resonate with you in the introductory speech?

**Mr Kemp:** No

**ACTING CHAIR:** Right, okay.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** There is also the charge of operations. For instance, from my understanding of the bill, the charge of operations will normally go to the first officer. If he is not available then the commissioner can appoint somebody else, so to speak.

**ACTING CHAIR:** If there is not a first or a second officer there, and it was about providing protection.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** When it comes to incident controllers, there is obviously a different level of qualification from level 2 to level 3. Level 3 is obviously the highest. I do think we have very many level 3s in Queensland, do we?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** Not a lot.

**Mr Kemp:** Not a lot, no. If I may add further to that, in my brigade my past first officer is now a fourth officer. He has as much experience as I have. He was my mentor. If the first, second or third officers are not available, why can't the fourth officer take control?

**ACTING CHAIR:** Given there are 1,400 brigades across the state, I do not imagine that every one has the same structure as your brigade. I think that is a pretty reasonable position to state, knowing the five I have in my area.

**Mr Kemp:** I would disagree slightly because I do believe a lot of first officers step down slowly and stay in until finally they get to the age where they have decided—

**ACTING CHAIR:** Not the case in every brigade, though.

**Mr Kemp:** Not in every one, no.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Definitely not

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Most brigades would have eight officers?

**Mr Kemp:** Six to eight. I do know of a few brigades that have eight.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mine are quite large. Mine are in excess of eight. In regards to the GWN, I note that that is in South-East Queensland and the rest of the state is still on analogue. The incident controller actually chooses that channel?

**Mr Kemp:** Correct. Can I add to that, please?

**ACTING CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Mr Kemp:** As Kevin alluded to, if the red truck was to turn up first and they say they are going to take over the fire and they stick to Direct 1 then that means that Fire Com. cannot record the conversations, but if we go to the TAC and IC channels then Fire Com. records all conversation. Therefore, by working on Direct 1, the incident controller is denying us the safety of being able to have all of our conversations recorded in case something goes wrong. This is, as Kevin alluded to, the arrogance that we are seeing creep in constantly—that they won't. There have been directives come out from many superintendents saying that, on the rural fire ground, IC and TAC channels are to be used, and certain people just will not do it.

**Mr MARTIN:** I wanted to raise the issue of consultation, which you touched on and the previous submitter from the RFBAQ also touched on. The RFBAQ advised the committee that all brigades were deemed to be covered by them. We also had a draft bill back in January. I wanted to know from either of your brigades, were you contacted back in January by the RFBAQ?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** No.

**Mr Kemp:** No.

**Mr MARTIN:** That is disappointing. I listened to your submissions intently and you have covered finances, positions like the chief officer, the advisory committee and membership. Can I put to you that a lot of the issues you raise seem to be about who is in control of an operation. The public, which all members here represent, quite frankly, would want to know that community safety is at the forefront of everyone's mind, whether an operation is being controlled by QFES or yourselves. In practice then, as a result of this bill, what changes do you think will happen to the ordinary brigade functions? Do you think there are any community safety issues?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** No, I could not specifically point to any provision in the draft legislation to that effect. Also, we would point to Dayboro's submission. Here we were on 26 March and the first we heard about this draft bill was on the 7th. We discussed it on the 13th at our brigade meeting, which is on Wednesday night, and we had to put that submission in by Friday.

**ACTING CHAIR:** To be clear on the member for Stretton's question, you do not think anything in this legislation will affect community safety?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** I think in the time we have had to evaluate the proposed legislation and the impacts it might have, we have not yet identified any. It is not to say they do not exist. If we had a little bit more time we could give a more comprehensive response.

**Mr ANDREW:** It sounds like there is a fair bit of interchangeability, or maybe not enough. Are rural fire brigades in the red trucks fully interchangeable and able to swap all their gear across so that if they are at an actual fire then they can actually address the fire by using each other's equipment—hoses, whatever?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** For example, in our community we have the Dayboro auxiliary brigade. They have red trucks so they attend structural fires and road traffic crashes et cetera. We train with them at least once a year to ensure we understand how their trucks work and vice versa. We will support the auxiliaries at a structural fire by transporting water to them—we carry more water than they do—back and forth so their trucks can stay onsite and continuously address the structural fire. We definitely work cooperatively with them so we have a good understanding of what they—

**Mr ANDREW:** I am sorry, I meant down to a mechanical level. Can you take a hose off a red truck and put it on a yellow truck and vice versa? Is everything coordinated—

**Mr O’Sullivan:** Yes, we have the same fittings. It is not like interstate where you would have a problem.

**Mr KRAUSE:** This question is to anybody, really, but perhaps Mr Kemp. When it comes to the rural fire sphere, level 3 incidents are generally very widespread events. The 2019 bushfires in south Queensland would have been a level 3 event, and that covered thousands of hectares.

**Mr Kemp:** Correct.

**Mr KRAUSE:** It does not normally involve an urban scenario, does it?

**Mr Kemp:** What often happens is that, due to the brigades being so active on the fireground, you may get an area office that becomes involved where the staff from the area office—

**Mr KRAUSE:** The Rural Fire Service.

**Mr Kemp:**—which is the Rural Fire Service area office. Depending on the magnitude of that fire, the commissioner may then start to send in more staff and those staff are quite often out of the urban stream. Bear in mind that at the moment we have very few officers and very few staff in the Rural Fire Service. I acknowledge that is going to change soon, which is good, as long as they are not tied up in paperwork, as Kevin said. Because of the manpower and that the length of some these fires goes on, they do have to involve the urban stream firefighters to come in and help—

**Mr KRAUSE:** Is that for the protection of structural assets?

**Mr Kemp:** No, it is just in the management of those fires. They will bring the urban stream in, as I say, because of the limited capacity of staff numbers from the rural paid staff. They have to have days off.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I understand.

**Mr Kemp:** They work a 12- or 14-hour day and there may not be another staff member involved, so they bring in other people from other regions.

**Mr KRAUSE:** With those widespread events across rural areas, across large areas of land, the guiding hand about how that fire is managed has appropriately always been from the rural perspective, hasn’t it?

**Mr Kemp:** You are correct: it always has been. I would like to say that that has been changing a lot in the last couple of years where outside influences are directing rural fire on how to do things, even to the point where I have heard of cases where National Parks have been overridden in what they want to do in their own patch by outside influences.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I can certainly say that I have experienced that as well in another role. Mr Kemp, the basic proposition that I am trying to put to you is that shouldn’t there be rural expertise and rural experience managing those larger events rather than an urban perspective, where they do not have experience in dealing with those events?

**Mr Kemp:** Yes, 100 per cent.

**Mr KRAUSE:** In your view, what does this bill say to you as a volunteer—you are a volunteer—about how your government views your volunteer service to the community?

**Mr Kemp:** Looking at some aspects of it, I would say that they do not care about us. Looking at the speed and the haste with which they are trying to run all of this through, without the due diligent processes to all of us to have consultation, I would say that the government or the minister is running another agenda that we as the volunteers obviously do not know about and are not going to be told about. The feeling amongst the brigades and the members is that they are absolutely disgusted. One of the main comments I had in the last week is, ‘What are they up to? They’re in an election year and they’re trying to alienate 27,000 volunteers. There’s something else going on.’ We don’t believe this legislation is fully designed to look after the volunteers.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I would like to place on record that I am extraordinarily disappointed with that sort of comment. I have five rural fire brigades in my area and I cannot tell you how much I absolutely value and love the work that they do. I find that statement very disappointing if it is being reflected across the state.

**Mr Davey:** Could I say in support that if you actually look at the volunteer Queensland annual survey, which is conducted with all of the volunteers, over the past two years there has only been a three per cent return from volunteers to the QFES survey, so this last year that is 788 from 26,500 volunteers. You might discuss why that is, because you are talking about trust. The thing is that not one of those surveys has been fed back to the members with regard to what the emerging issues were, what the fire department had decided to do about it and in what sequence. You can only find those surveys if you actually search for it.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I am reflecting on the comments made and that is certainly not the case—

**Mr Davey:** But that—

**ACTING CHAIR:** That is certainly—as a member of the government, that is certainly not—

**Mr Davey:** I appreciate that, but you are asking about the view of members.

**ACTING CHAIR:** No, I was not. I was actually making a statement back. We will throw to the member for Caloundra for a question.

**Mr HUNT:** Could I just put on record as well that I have nothing but the utmost respect for the rurals in my community.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Absolutely.

**Mr HUNT:** They have done an absolutely magnificent job—

**ACTING CHAIR:** Incredible.

**Mr HUNT:**—very recently, in fact, around the Landsborough and Beerwah area. It is no exaggeration to say that there are parts of land around Beerwah that are still standing thanks to our rurals. To be honest, any talk about some sort of secret agenda from the government is maybe a little bit off base, but we will leave that there. Are urban firefighters trained initially in wildfire fighting and fighting bushfires and brush fires and keeping small fires small?

**Mr Kemp:** At one stage some years ago I was a rural fire instructor for the service as a part-time paid position, and I did a reasonable amount of training. One of the things I noted with the auxiliary firefighters as they came through the ranks—I may be a little bit out with the figures; it was some years ago. But let's just say that of their six weeks of intensive training, they had only four hours training in rural fires.

**Mr HUNT:** Who trains them in rural fires?

**Mr Kemp:** At one stage I was doing it within the Caloundra area.

**ACTING CHAIR:** So it is the RFB.

**Mr Kemp:** The RFB, yes.

**Mr HUNT:** So they get trained in wildfires by rural fires?

**Mr Kemp:** Correct, but they only get four hours worth of training in six weeks.

**Mr HUNT:** I circle back to the earlier comment about control of finances. Do the primary producer brigades manage their own finances or is that only brigades with treasurers?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** I do not know what primary producer brigades do. I cannot answer that question, I am sorry.

**Mr Kemp:** No. I am sorry, I am the same.

**Mr HUNT:** There was a concern about maintaining control of finances.

**Mr O'Sullivan:** Absolutely. It is a major concern.

**Mr HUNT:** If we accept that a lot of brigades are primary producer brigades, we don't know what they do with their finances currently?

**Mr O'Sullivan:** No, we do not. But what about the brigades that do control their own finances?

**Mr HUNT:** No, that is all right.

**Mr O'Sullivan:** I cannot speak on behalf of one of them.

**Mr ANDREW:** Just quickly point out to us, please—and this is probably not known by a lot of people who watch committees—the difference between urban fires and rural fires as they actually happen. I know you guys fight a lot of moving fires. You get in front, you do a lot of stuff. Can you quickly show the difference? I know you have helped us out immensely here in Mirani with massive fires. I take food out to you guys. Just give us a quick run-down on the difference—you have four-wheel drive trucks and everything else—and the way it all works.

**Mr Kemp:** An urban appliance basically attacks and defends a house or structural fire, car accidents, cats out of trees, basic jobs where they are static. The rural fire brigade could be involved with a small grass fire that is only going over 100 metres by 20 metres and we may be able to control that fire being static ourselves. Our fires can go right up to fires that are burning hundreds of thousands of hectares, and we could have 30, 40 or 50 appliances running along various fronts fighting either the side of the fire or the front of the fire, whichever way. We are running up and down hills. We are going through gullies. We are constantly on the move chasing the fire or getting into position to put in back-burns to attempt to stop the fire. We are certainly not static. We are very much a mobile source for firefighting.

**Mr ANDREW:** We have a lot of remote areas in the electorate and it is hard to understand how some of this stuff can come into play, especially with looking after fires. Coming forward from 2024, from what I can understand the big concern here is that you will have lost control of all the funding for the rural fire brigade that comes from the community. That is your biggest concern or one of the biggest concerns, yes?

**Mr O’Sullivan:** Yes, from a financial management viewpoint. The guidelines provided by the acting chief fire officer are quite opaque in terms of what the processes will be for brigades to access our own money post 1 July. It will all sit in RFS. They describe it as being quarantined and being held ‘for and on behalf of’, but we have to ask for it. If we want to buy something, we have to go through some as yet undescribed bureaucratic process and there has to be somebody available to do that. I do not know where the staff are going to come from to do it. With the additional 114 positions being put in place to try to improve the fire services, surely they are not there in administrative roles, taking on administration roles that the brigades currently handle efficiently themselves? I am not aware of any breaches of the finance act, which really is being used as a segue for taking control of brigade finances. I had a look at the act. As a layperson, I cannot see any provisions in that that would justify the move that is being made. I do not understand why the move is being made.

**ACTING CHAIR:** To be clear, you do not want the extra 114 personnel?

**Mr KRAUSE:** Point of order, Chair. He did not say anything like that.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I was just clarifying.

**Mr KRAUSE:** You are trying to put words in his mouth.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I just asked a question, member for Scenic Rim.

**Mr O’Sullivan:** That is a good thing, if there are more resources there and they can improve the services to volunteers. Maybe they could do more of the training, just like they used to. Brigade support officers would come in and do the training for us, run training programs over weekends. They have pushed that all back onto the brigades now. It has been a requirement that our members get ‘train the trainer’ qualifications. To their credit, they have spent hours and hours getting these formal qualifications. On top of that, the training syllabus has been significantly expanded. The time now required to take members through even basic training has gone from weeks to months. In our own brigade, the first officer sitting behind me and the training officers are training new members every Tuesday night of the year. In addition to that, there is a monthly meeting and a monthly maintenance day. They are forever back and forth.

They do this willingly. This is why we say to you: do not send the wrong signals to your volunteers. They are doing an awful lot willingly, but there is a breaking point. As my colleagues here are saying, we do not really understand what is driving this legislation. Why is it being done in this particular way? The legislation is silent on the financial management of the brigades, but these guidelines by the Acting Chief Officer are very detailed. Somebody sat there and worked this all out but provided this information only on 19 March.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Under these changes, will your brigade still have a treasurer?

**Mr O’Sullivan:** Yes.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** I come back to the training of incident controllers. Thank you, Mr Kemp, for enlightening us that professional firefighters—the paid individuals—receive about four hours of training. The whole premise of my question is about making sure we have the right people in the right places doing the right jobs to ensure the most efficient way of going forward in dealing with bushfire situations. Most level 3 incidents involve large areas outside the urban footprint. How much training is available for rural fire brigades? How much training do our rural fire brigade officers or any recruits coming through the system receive in dealing with these fire situations?

**Mr O’Sullivan:** There is training involved under the AIMS umbrella.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Is it easy to get?

**Mr Kemp:** It is delayed.

**Mr O’Sullivan:** It is delayed, yes. On recent experience, the divisional commander training courses—it sits below the incident commander but is all part of the overall structure—were run by an outside organisation that came from the ACT, I believe. They were very good, but these training courses are few and far between. To progress through the stages whereby you could take on the role of incident controller takes time. There needs to be continuity and practice in doing that; otherwise, the benefit of the training is lost. Everyone makes a big investment of time in that, including QFES, but if it is not used it is lost.

**Mr Kemp:** The minimum skills are what you can get when you first join an FMS. That generally takes two to three months. Then you have to wait two years before you can go to your FAS, firefighter advanced skills. Then, correct me if I am wrong, it is another two years before you can do crew leader. Then you can step out and become officers. At the moment, we are looking at six years for a volunteer to be able to get that training.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** That builds expertise up.

**Mr Kemp:** And confidence. Confidence is a lot of it to deal with fire.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. I note that no questions were taken on notice. Thank you for your time today.

**Mr Kemp:** Thank you for hearing us.

## **ADRIAN, Mr Fergus AFSM, Private capacity**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Welcome. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, after which the committee will have some questions for you.

**Mr Adrian:** I thank the committee for this opportunity to present to the committee. The contents of the 2024 bill and consequential implications will be considerable to the rural fire brigade, volunteer fire wardens, their networks, brigade volunteers and future volunteering in general. From 1946, your rural fire brigades—and I say ‘your’ rural fire brigades—and volunteer members were operating with autonomy in partnerships with their communities under similar regulations in the context of primary and secondary legislation and sub operational and administration policies. Now, after 78 years of operation, your volunteers had only seven days to comprehend the bill. They have been working for 78 years and then had only seven days to understand the bill. With the extensive changes through law and subsequent unknown policy, your volunteers are now comprehending the impacts and the consequences of proposed controlling management, ownership, ambiguous protection, operational administration and interrogation of volunteer skills and capability.

I repeat what other people have said: there was no consultation with rural fire brigades or volunteer members regarding the 2024 bill. Contrary to the QFES response to the submissions, the only consultations with RFB members were in relation to the outcomes of the KPMG independent review. I was present at one meeting at Caboolture and we were asked what we did good, what we did not so good and what we could improve in. That was all it was about; it was nothing about the bill itself.

I mentioned in my submission that the bill falls short in terms of respect and value towards volunteers. I will give an example of that. The introduction of the chief officer for the Rural Fire Service should reflect role eligibility to include—if you are going down that pathway—under clause 287Q(2), ‘(d) proven volunteer coordination and motivation expertise’. You have around 25½ thousand volunteers—I take that from Productivity Commission information—representing more than probably 75 per cent of the number of personnel associated with QFES. Those cohorts are directly affected. I feel that a raft of actions of the Queensland Treasury best practice guidelines in 2023 were not followed or communicated to volunteers prior to or in development of this bill. As volunteers we are governed by a lot of brigade rules and a lot of operational rules, yet I could not see where, in the development of this bill, we went through the guidelines presented to us from the Treasury department.

Volunteers did not have an opportunity to view and comment on any impact assessment, nor were consultation times sufficient. Consultation times for IASs are around 28 days and up to 60 days, just looking at the impacts of the bill. Also, we were not introduced to any alternatives to the bill on the controlling systems in relation to legal status and support protection. Nothing was openly discussed. The bill does not completely address the legal status and relationship of the brigade to the QFD even after 1 July 2024. Functions within the brigades still have to reflect administration practices needed prior to 1 July 2024 and then administration and operational management post 1 July 2024. These requirements are exceptionally relevant to the financial accountability process. Brigade funds will be separated pre 1 July 2024, held by the brigade, and post 1 July 2024, held by the QFD. Brigade members including the management committee may be still be exposed to risk and consequences for matters pertaining to brigade management of funds, resources and equipment accountability.

I note that brigades in the community will lose their status and connection regarding membership. The way this bill is going, the state will be a recipient of a more dependent population rather than a self-supportive one, with local capability and capacity. Social capital will be lost. Rural fire brigades will transition from a community, frontline-based, operational perspective to a Queensland Fire Department organisational controlled base, impacting negatively on the volunteer network.

The command hierarchical approach in determining who, where and the number of members in the brigade, even by definition of delegation in the legislation, will not provide benefits to a rural or semirural community regardless of the brigade classification. The arrangement or control or agenda will augment further large loss of volunteers in this organisation. There is decline in volunteer numbers already, as the Productivity Commission report 2023 states, of some 27 per cent over nine years, 2013-14 to 2022-23, from 35,000 volunteers to 25½ thousand volunteers. How is it socially practical that a commissioner or numerous delegates can assess the suitability of a person to volunteer? How socially practical is it? This form of autocratic control may encourage community to sanction towards the QFD and could result in a freelance community fire management environment. In other words, people will leave and do their own thing.

The committee needs to ask QFES the following. Was there any consideration of independent, community-based rural fire brigades to comment or vote on the advantages or disadvantages of being encapsulated into the QFES or QFD? Were there any alternatives to address the issues of concern?

Why are there two standards in the brigade and commissioner in setting the brigade management rules? The brigades have to go through a process in setting their rules, but the commissioner can hand them straight down to the brigades. The committee's membership—I am talking about you now, and I appreciate the empathy you have with rural fire brigades; it is important—has a direct connection to some 90 brigades. It is even more now that the acting chair is with us. I think you have about six brigades in your electorate.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Five.

**Mr Adrian:** Five? What about the one at Mount Cotton?

**ACTING CHAIR:** No, that is not in my electorate. That is in Springwood.

**Mr Adrian:** What a shame. You have over 1,500 members. They will be affected considerably. All brigades collect a fire service levy—Mirani and all of the electorates that have a rural fire brigade. There could be up to 300 brigades statewide affected by the funding arrangements discussed earlier today.

Our RFB members have participated in hazard reduction, have responded to wildfire and have increasingly attended flood and storm recoveries in electorates without connections to rural fire brigades. The rural fire brigades of the minister's electorate went to the Brisbane Markets during the floods specifically to clean the markets down to get the supply chain running again for the state. There are brigades out there that think really strategically in that approach to doing things. In closing, I have a question for this committee. Was due process followed in the review and the development of the 2024 bill?

**ACTING CHAIR:** I might stop you there, because that has been nearly 10 minutes and we want to ask questions.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Thank you for your service. Having an Australian Fire Service Medal is something to be very proud of. It is a great honour to have you here today. You alluded to membership issues. Currently, with a rural fire brigade, a person comes in and shows an interest; they put in their forms, which then go through police checks et cetera; and they are voted on, I believe, by the brigade to become members.

**Mr Adrian:** Yes.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** You are concerned that this will change under the bill. What happens when an individual becomes an issue for the brigade and causes problems? Does the brigade have the ability to remove those individuals or does it have to go to an executive officer in the department in order to remove those individuals? How does that work?

**Mr Adrian:** It depends upon the complexity of the problem that is in the brigade. Nine times out of 10, the brigade will solve that problem within itself. Other times there might be formal complaints made through to the organisation, and I can tell you that they do not handle them too well.

The problem with the commissioner now being able to appoint people in the brigade is that they do not have the understanding of who this person is and what their intent is in joining the brigade for the purposes of looking after the community. After the 2019 fires, we had people from Rooty Hill in New South Wales wanting to join our brigade. Not at the moment but in the new scheme of things, the commissioner could say, 'Yes, go and join this brigade.' We are there for the community, to support the community.

You need to understand that the communities are different throughout Queensland and you are right at the front of it, just like the volunteers and the brigades are at the coalface of it all. Our brigades are all different. We have a diversity of primary producer brigades, cane brigades, pastoralists, grain growers and then we have peri-urban brigades and peri-urban living. All the brigades have to look after that and understand how the politics works within the community itself. Having other people coming in and dictating to the brigades who can be a member of the brigade or who cannot be a member of brigade and the numbers of people in the brigade is pretty daunting. I say it is socially irresponsible in that sense. I hope that answers your question.

**ACTING CHAIR:** We will close this session out with one last question, seeing as we are well over time. Member for Caloundra?

**Mr HUNT:** Thank you very much for your submission and for your service in the industry. You spoke about consultation time frames. Were you aware of any consultation that occurred around May of last year?

**Mr Adrian:** No. Was that in relation to the bill?

**Mr HUNT:** One moment; I am finding it here. Also, while we have circled back to that, you talked about industrial bias and funding arrangements. Can you unpack that a little, please?

**Mr Adrian:** A large part of this organisation is influenced by an industrial organisation. You need to unpack some of the policies that have come into the organisation, especially the operation policies. It seems operation policies are influenced by a part of the Fire and Rescue Service responding into rural areas for that purpose. That is what I am unpacking there. There is an industrial bias towards volunteers in this organisation. My brigade will sit there while a fire and rescue truck passes through two or three rural response areas to a grassfire that is impacting on a house, but the other rural fire brigades are not involved because the policy that is sitting behind the whole call-out system is biased towards a certain element of the organisation that may or may not have the ability to do that work—in other words, fight the fire in the paddock.

**Mr HUNT:** Keep a small fire small; is that it?

**Mr Adrian:** Yes.

**Mr HUNT:** I am really asking for supposition here, Fergus.

**ACTING CHAIR:** You need to be quick with this question, member for Caloundra, and a quick response.

**Mr HUNT:** What do you suppose is the source of that bias, Fergus?

**Mr Adrian:** You have a volunteer organisation as a threat to another part of the organisation. That other part of the organisation has a big influence on what is happening at the moment. That will be the permanent paid senior people of the organisation. I will try to be more diplomatic than that but that is what you are looking at.

**Mr HUNT:** That is right. I am out of time, Chair.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you so much for appearing before us today. No questions were taken on notice. We will take a brief break.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.36 am to 10.49 am.**

**ACTING CHAIR:** We will now resume the public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. For the benefit of those who were not here before the break, my name is Kim Richards. I am member for Redlands and acting chair of the committee. I am substituting today for Peter Russo, the member for Toohey. With me here are: Mr Mark Boothman, member for Theodore and deputy chair; Mr Stephen Andrew, member for Mirani; Mr Jon Krause, member for Scenic Rim; Mr Jason Hunt, member for Caloundra, on videoconference; and Mr James Martin, member for Stretton, also on videoconference, who is substituting today for Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. If everyone could turn their phones off or switch to silent, that would be terrific.

### **COOKE, Mr Anthony, Senior Industrial Officer, United Firefighters Union Queensland**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Good morning and thank you for joining us here today. I invite you to make an opening statement.

**Mr Cooke:** I represent the UFUQ at the proceedings today. I do have an opening statement to make, but I hope to commence by tabling some additional documents for the benefit of the committee.

**ACTING CHAIR:** There being no objection, leave is granted.

**Mr Cooke:** There are three documents. One is a cover letter but the other two documents that the committee will not have an opportunity to see yet are a response to submission 60 by the Human Rights Commission and a reply to the QFES departmental response. That is additional information that I hope the committee gets the opportunity to have a look at in consideration of the bill. I may refer to it today and, if I do, we will have to work out if I need to pick out a bit or not. I have my own copy.

I want to start by saying that we consider that our original submissions and the two further documents with the cover letter we have provided today fairly adequately articulate our position on the matters that we are going to talk about today, but I thought I would take this opportunity to cover off on a few key themes.

The UFUQ has for some years considered reform of the QFES, as it is, or was, necessary. To put it simply, we thought there were too many square pegs in round holes. I think some of my colleagues from the other services have said something very similar today and submissions have said something similar already. There is too much deviation from what we thought should be a fire services response department. SES and the other non-fire services are being transitioned out. We are entirely supportive of that. We note that the committee considering the legislative amendments for that process has recommended that that bill pass.

It is our position that the remainder of the QFES disestablishment process must drive a return to the new Queensland Fire Department focusing on the core business of operations and operational outcomes. Given the department is a fire and rescue and bushfire rural brigade department, operations are the reasons for the department's existence.

Contemporary professional firefighters do not just put wet stuff on hot stuff—which is the phrase that is often used. There is an ever-growing list of qualifications, training, competency, proficiency and expertise expected of professional firefighters and those engaged in all four phases of disaster management and fire and rescue response.

On training, I thought I might take this opportunity to respond to something that was being discussed earlier about training for professional firefighters, be they auxiliary or full-time. I have had someone send me some quick information about what the training is that they receive.

Recruits to the professional fire service full-time receive an induction into wildfire by rural firefighters over two full days. In year 1 of Q-Step they complete map reading and navigation understanding training. By year 3 they have also completed a round of suppressed wildfire training. Those qualifications are part of the certificate III that all firefighters receive after three years of training.

Continual learning, which is what is called 'Core skills maintenance in professional fire', includes three subjects—I will not go into the technical names of them. They are: further work on wildfires; further work on structural protection in izone areas, which is the interrelationship zone between rural and urban areas; and further training on identification and treatment of heat related illnesses in people. Those core skills are then completed in a recurring 18-month cycle. Throughout a professional

firefighter's life, that is the sort of training they are receiving. There was a comment earlier about four hours of training. I do not have the auxiliary training information in front of me. That may or may not be the case. I am not really sure. I am talking about the full-time professional firefighter training regarding bushfires.

Our firm position in our submissions has been and remains that only those who do the job know what the job requires. It is clear from my rural colleagues that they are saying the same thing. It is clear from commentary from others that a lack of understanding of what our firefighters actually do drives a lack of understanding of how some of the amendments in the bill actually are. The amendments the bill proposes assist the legislation to support the return to operational outcomes, and we strongly recommend the bill.

We note there have been many comments regarding the mandatory criteria to become a senior or executive officer in the fire and rescue stream. We think that the detail in our original submissions and further detail in the information I have tabled—which I hope the committee has an opportunity to look at—further enhances what we believe are quite clearly sound reasons for those mandatory requirements in fire and rescue being the case. We say again that those who have done the job are best placed to know how to do the job, and no-one else in Queensland but for professional firefighters has actually done those jobs. I am happy to take questions on that today if there are some.

We put into our submissions that we requested that the committee considers recommending regulations be made. We note the fire service has responded to that. We think it would be very useful to have regulations in the area of professional and rural uniforms, insignia and other identifiers; regulations for standards for professional rural qualifications and expertise requirements and a register of individuals who have attained those standards; and also regulations for standards for the duties of each of the fire services in each of the services, assisting with clarifying matters such as collaboration and cooperation, and command and control matters.

There has been commentary on command and control. Our position is that the bill clarifies these matters rather than clouds them. We want to note the comments made by Minister Boyd in response to a question on notice of 7 March—

Statements that RFSQ members will need to wait for a "red truck" to attend ... before responding to the type of incident they would usually respond to are false.

We support that statement by the minister.

Command and control is very important. Our safe systems at work are practised every single day by our members at every incident they attend, regardless of the type of call-out it is. They have a range of professional skills and expertise that are called on. We cannot accept that this bill is going to go close to addressing those matters without addressing all of them, so we really do recommend that the bill passes as it is proposed but with some further enhancements that we proposed in our original submissions.

We can inform the committee that our comrades from other jurisdictions have already reported to the UFUQ that they have reviewed the bill and they have expressed their desire to move to something providing similar clarity in other Australian jurisdictions. In this regard, the UFUQ's position is clear that we support the ALP government passing the legislation as proposed. It is already the envy of other firefighters around Australia. I am happy to take questions about that.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** In your submission you speak about clause 32 and the amendments to section 8B. You state that it would 'create potential unintended consequences regarding confusion and potential misunderstanding of functions, roles' et cetera. I happen to agree with you. When I was reading through the legislation, it was one of the key points I noted. Can you elaborate on why you think this would create potential misunderstanding of functions and roles?

**Mr Cooke:** I mentioned in my verbal submissions that we also have a recommendation that a regulation is made about this. We think the professional qualifications and expertise that professional firefighters hold to be able to perform certain tasks create a risk control when those people are performing those tasks. Rural fire brigade volunteers also have a range of tasks for which they can become very experienced.

There are two problems. One is the potential breach of the act around the mandatory qualifications of senior officers and the other is the unintended risk consequence. Without clarity about who is to do what, when we get into incidental and other functions it comes down to what that means.

What would the incidental and other functions mean? I think one of the earlier speakers talked about rural support at a structural incident, things like water tankers et cetera. That is an obvious, natural and very useful way in which collaboration and coordination of functions incidental to the services would be useful.

To answer the question, our concern is that, in the absence of a clear set of rules about who is responsible for what and who can do what and when, there is a chance of a mistake being made that someone can do something when really they cannot. Not only can they not do it but they should not be doing it because the act says they should not be doing it, and the act says that for very important reasons.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** As you alluded to earlier in your statement, when it comes to the training of these individuals, if they are performing a task that they are not trained to do because the act says they can get a direction from a senior officer to do something which technically they may not be trained to do, who is liable for that? What would your opinion be?

**Mr Cooke:** From the risk perspective? Liability for a risk of injury or illness?

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Yes, by somebody doing something—

**Mr Cooke:** Health and safety. The health and safety legislation is quite clear on that—person in control. The duty falls to an escalating person in control depending on how high that person in control goes. When someone senior gives an instruction to someone to do something that that person is not trained, qualified or experienced to do, there is a risk that that person has done something that contravenes this act.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** If the commissioner themselves appoints an individual who then takes control of that situation and then they give a direction which technically those individuals are not trained to do, would the buck stop at the top or the individual in control of the incident?

**Mr Cooke:** That would depend on what the outcome was.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** I know it is more hypothetical.

**Mr Cooke:** Yes, it is. The buck is going to stop somewhere there. I think it is very important that the commissioner of the Queensland Fire Department is a professional firefighter because if we are talking about a bushfire incident at which there was no person available to take command and control, so the commissioner appointed someone—and that is part of the act—and that person was someone with a professional firefighter background, if that person provided direction to someone to do something that they were not qualified to do, that person is potentially liable, yes. I agree.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Thank you.

**Mr HUNT:** Thank you very much for your submission. Some of our submitters have expressed nervousness around the requirement for a professional fire service. There has been some nervousness around the requirement for a professional fire service and the idea that that might be limiting. You seem to have a different view. Why do you think the requirement for the professionalisation of the service is important?

**Mr Cooke:** The three years that a firefighter takes to become a qualified first-class firefighter includes a significant amount of training. As I said, they do not just show up and put wet stuff on hot stuff; they respond to a significant array of incident turnouts—and the union provided examples of those in our submission. On pages 11 and 12 of our submission there is a range of dot points that list the sorts of incidents that professional firefighters respond to. When a professional firefighter is responding to those incidents and that incident escalates to the point they require command and control to be provided by a senior officer or an executive officer, the union absolutely believes that that senior officer or executive officer has to have done the job to understand what the job requires to ensure that the command directives and decisions and directions that they give are done in a way that best protects the people responding to any of those incidents. That is on pages 11 and 12 of our submission. We cannot see that it is anything but very obvious that a person who is in command of that type of job has done that type of job. Until those sorts of jobs do not exist and they do not require a response in those ways, we cannot see that anyone else can be in command or control of them.

**Mr HUNT:** On the back of that, do you see any threats to community safety coming out of the passage of this bill?

**Mr Cooke:** The short answer is yes. I am concerned about giving a longer answer because I do not want to get into a discussion where I am talking about the differences in skills of people other than the professional firefighters that we represent. Absolutely the answer is yes. In a very large-scale incident such as a large-scale structure fire, as the bill proposes to define, multiple people and multiple

properties are at risk. Therefore, I absolutely believe that the safe system of work that professional firefighters have is required to be followed and decisions should not be made by people outside of that knowledge. I think that would create a risk to community safety, yes.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Thank you for your submission and evidence. I noted at the start you spoke about square pegs in round holes, which is an interesting way of putting things. I have your supplementary submission here, which was tabled earlier. I have had a quick look at it, and I realise not everyone has that. On page 1 the UFUQ states in relation to the appointment of executive and senior officers, 'We in no way intend to assert that RFS senior officers and executive officers ought to be prevented from commanding control capacity at bushfires and other rural incidents.' You would have seen some submissions and heard some evidence expressing just that concern. In your view, why are those concerns being raised and being raised quite emphatically given that is your position about the bill?

**Mr Cooke:** All I can say in response to that is that I believe the bill assists to clarify that where structures are at threat then the command and control for that sort of response should fall to people with structural experience. Where structures are not at threat, obviously the command and control falls to people who have that sort of experience.

I think the submissions are about the historic confusion and the historic—I do not want to put words into people's mouths, so I want to be careful what I say. There has been a history of different people from different services expecting to take control of different parts of the job. I am being as diplomatic as I can. That meant that sometimes rurals wanted to take control of what urban firefighters consider to be urban firefighting jobs and professional firefighters wanted to take control potentially of jobs that may not have had structure fires on them. This bill resolves all of that. It says rural bushfire-fighting experience, rural incident control experience—you are the incident controller for those sorts of jobs. I cannot speak to why individuals have said certain things. All I can say is that we think the bill clarifies who will be in control of what and why.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I think you said earlier that you have to have done the job to direct the job, to control the job. Maybe we are revisiting old ground, but is it your position that a rural firefighter or a rural fire officer will be an incident controller for a rural fire?

**Mr Cooke:** One hundred per cent. We have never resiled from that.

**Mr KRAUSE:** There is no confusion in the bill about that position?

**Mr Cooke:** We do not believe that is the case.

**Mr MARTIN:** I want to touch on one of the things you mentioned in your submission about a return to core business. I was wondering if you could expand on that and, in particular, if you had any examples from your members that you have dealt with over the years that highlighted some of the issues the bill is trying to address.

**Mr Cooke:** I certainly can. Throughout the life of the QFES, what started as a professional fire service and a rural fire service was joining in with a new agency or department—whatever you want to call it—combining SES and a range of other smaller services. That culmination of services required a seat at the table, as it were, in consideration of the strategy, direction of funding et cetera of the agency. I can certainly report that our members' very strong view was that professional firefighting and rural firefighting do not need anyone else involved in making decisions about their work. The burgeoning—I have to be careful how I say this. The size of the Public Service administering QFES grew by many, many hundreds throughout its life—many, many hundreds. I am very supportive of permanent Public Service employment; I am not resiling from that. The Public Service side of the business got bigger and bigger. A natural potential unintended but negative consequence from our perspective was that that turned the agency into a Public Service agency that was running a rural fire service and a professional fire service rather than a professional fire service and a rural fire service running their own department with public servants that assisted them as required. We seek a return to an operational focus and operational outcomes where we would expect that any public servant working within the Queensland Fire Department acknowledges that the reason they are there is to provide that service to the professional firefighters and the rural firefighters to ensure they can do their jobs professionally and safely.

**Mr ANDREW:** I notice in your submission there is a lot to do with experiences, qualifications and training, and a lot of the volunteers have a lot of like experience. The problem we have is that there are people in far-reaching places in my vast electorate of 72,000-odd square kilometres. What are we going to do and what is your proposal to fill the void of these volunteers if they walk away from some of my remote locations in the Mirani electorate?

**Mr Cooke:** I cannot speak to the motivations of an individual person about why they are going to volunteer for a fire service. I can say that we recommended a regulation that establishes that in certain locations rural fire services are the only service that is available and we acknowledge entirely that in many parts of Queensland that is the case. Occasionally when something gets out of hand, professional fire services are called in; there is the common refrain that the red trucks will show up. Yes, they will show up if they are absolutely required. However, in locations perhaps in your electorate where there are large areas that are only represented by rurals, the amendments that this bill proposes will make them decide that they no longer want to provide the community service of fighting fires in their rural communities.

**Mr ANDREW:** Some of the other witnesses have said that a lot of people do not feel like they are being taken seriously or continuing in a way they normally would. I am asking because I am hoping we do not see a fallout. With reference to the lack of consultation that a lot of the brigades are talking about, how much consultation did you guys get as the union? Did you get a fair consultation about the bill?

**Mr Cooke:** Everybody who received the advance copy of the bill for confidential input received it on the same day, in January. We received nothing prior to that day. We have had exactly the same period. We think it was adequate. I have spent every day since then working on this. We have managed to get there. I cannot speak for the consultation requirements of the rurals, nor can I speak for—a substantive number of the submissions, in my light reading of the rural submissions, had to do with matters of autonomy, self-control, budgets and those sorts of things. We have not made any submissions with regard to any of that. Our submissions directly relate to the impact of the bill on professional firefighters. I have no comment on rural autonomy or rural volunteering that I can add, I am sorry.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** When it comes to incident controllers and managing fire fronts, section 8B is quite fluid with what it is mentioning there. It is non-specific. If a bushfire goes into an area where there potentially are structures, using your expertise, would that mean that it goes to the red trucks or, because it is still a bushfire situation, do you feel it would stay under the arching powers of the Rural Fire Service? What is your opinion when it comes into more urban properties?

**Mr Cooke:** I can perhaps mischaracterise the state of Queensland as having three areas: one being urban or suburban; one being what the fire services call the izeone, which is that interplay area between professional firefighting response, auxiliary response and rural response; and then a true rural response. The answer to that question is: it would depend in which three of those very rudimentary examples—given as an industrial officer, not a professional firefighter—it was in. That would depend on the circumstances. There are cases where the time taken to get red truck assistance to fight a structural fire is beyond the point of attempting to do so: the structure is gone. Historically, the other thing that occurs is that right now what the rural response will do is something that I believe is called sectoring, where the rural commander and controller will sector off a part of the fire where the structures are involved and provide control of that part of the incident to the professional firefighter service—the red trucks. Again, that depends on how far out we are getting. There are circumstances that we have referred to in our submissions where right now we acknowledge, and we continue to acknowledge, that the rural service at the moment is the only service that can provide a response and there are rural services in the state that have specialist skills that almost none of the other rurals have and they are able to perform structural attack and responses like that because of the tyranny of distance.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Thank you. I was just making sure we have the right people doing the right job. I can understand why there is a lot of confusion in the bill about the processes. You have situations where there are large structural fires and bushfires. When we are looking at incident controllers and a level 3, which is a catastrophic situation where you have a major disaster, those disasters normally are outside the urban footprint. I am wondering what type of expertise you feel those individuals should have.

**Mr Cooke:** If they are large-scale fire disasters they usually are, but the sorts of level 3 disasters you are talking about—

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** It could be a cyclone.

**Mr Cooke:** Exactly, and they are potentially not going to be outside the izeone or the true urban area. UFUQ's position is that in those scenarios a professional firefighter would be the incident controller of those jobs because they involve the sorts of responses that professional firefighters are going to have to provide.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Mr Cooke, do you think the changes in the bill are going to create more or less work for your members?

**Mr Cooke:** We have had some contact from members in places in regional Queensland who are a bit nervous about them being required to do more work. That means we need more firefighters recruited to the professional stream and placed in those locations. The formal answer is: no, I do not think so. The definition of 'building' and the definition of 'structure' as proposed in the bill provide clarity around when our members would be required to be engaged and respond. It is not far from the reality. What we are attempting to do is support that that is written into the legislation rather than left at the doctrine level. We support the changes in the bill because they provide a legislative standard rather than a sublegislative standard, as it were.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing before us.

**DRUMM, Ms Liz, Disaster Management Lead—Assist, Local Government Association of Queensland**

**SMITH, Ms Alison, Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for joining us here today. I invite you to make a brief opening statement before the committee has questions for you.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you very much and thank you for inviting the LGAQ to present to your hearing this morning. I would like to firstly acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. As you know, the LGAQ is the peak body for all councils across Queensland. We have all 77 as members. We have been in existence since 1896. Our role is to provide support, advice and advocacy for every council in Queensland. We are very pleased to be given this opportunity to provide and speak to our submission on this bill.

Our member consultation indicates general broad support for these reforms. We note that our members' previous feedback has already been considered and incorporated into the review's recommendations and the subsequent working draft that went out for consultation, and we thank the state for its continuing work with LGAQ as well as Queensland councils regarding the five recommendations that we have made in our submission. When you look at local government and how it holds that locally-led responsibility for coordinated disaster management in Queensland, our five recommendations therefore primarily relate to the Disaster Management Act and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Act. However, because disaster management is locally led and coordinated in Queensland, our top-line ask is that, as these reforms are progressed, councils are appropriately funded, trained and resourced, that local disaster capacity remains a focus of the state government and that there is continuing engagement with councils with communication as this progresses. I think this year's summer weather has really identified and brought to bear why Queensland's local disaster management capabilities are critical and thus the need to keep investing in them.

Further, you have our five recommendations, and all of these are focused on continuing to improve the disaster management system across Queensland and to continue to support the development of resilience in their local communities. We look forward to your questions. However, I would say that our submission also includes a resolution from last year's LGAQ annual conference. That was a resolution that called for further amendments to the Fire and Emergency Services Act. Specifically, it was a call for some reforms to the administration and the collection of the Emergency Management Levy because there are some complexities for councils in how they collect this on behalf of the state. It can often lead to incurred costs to those councils—a form of cost shifting, as we would say.

Queensland, as you know, is Australia's most decentralised state. We are the most disaster prone state. However, member councils of the LGAQ across Queensland want Queensland to become Australia's most disaster resilient state. That is why our recommendations are written the way they are. It is designed to help to do just that. It is designed to have a continued focus on improvement to ensure that Queensland's disaster management remains aligned to best practice provisions and mitigations and that we continue to respond to lessons learned from each and every natural disaster and incorporate the years of practice that Queensland has in this space. That is why appropriate training, funding and resourcing is always a key ask of councils. With that, I will complete our opening statement and invite the committee to ask any questions that it may have.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you. I do not think we have ever seen Queenslanders be more resilient than we have in the last four months, that is for certain. Member for Theodore?

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** In your opening statement you talked about resilience and disaster mitigation and strategies. You say that you feel that how we are doing it in Queensland is insufficient. Can you give examples of other jurisdictions that are working closely with their councils to come up with initiatives to better prepare communities?

**Ms Smith:** I thank the member for the question. Just to clarify, Queensland is the leader in relation to disaster management, so my comments were about recognising that and then stressing the need to continuously improve. Every time there is a natural disaster there are learnings. When you look at, for example, Tropical Cyclone Jasper, after it hit the far north of Queensland there was a big depression of rain that then led to huge flooding—circumstances like what occurred in Wujal Wujal, where you had an entire community evacuated. They have not yet been brought back. What that did is expose that community and everyone who worked in response to that disaster to a brand new circumstance that led to an extended recovery period. Of course, they are still working through that

and that recovery will continue a long time after that community is brought back and they get back to BAU. My comments were really that every time we have the opportunity to further improve. Queensland is a leader in this space already.

**Mr HUNT:** Alison, thank you for your submission. Some of the submitters have contended that the bill takes away or disincentivises the importance of local experience on the scene of an incident. Your submission talks about the local council being best placed to make these responsible decisions around disaster management. Is there a tension there between the concern from some of the submitters, largely in rural fire, about disenfranchising the knowledge of local volunteers and the contention that council is best placed to make some of these decisions?

**Ms Smith:** I thank the member for the question. I might start with a few words and then ask Liz for any subsequent comments in response to your question. When you have a look at our five recommendations, a couple of them are about recommending that some local government roles in that locally-led response and recovery process be recognised in the legislation. Understanding that this is state legislation and state roles are indeed enshrined in that legislation, we believe that it would actually help with further clarity to have some of those local roles—for example, the disaster management officer role, the DMO as we call it—enshrined. We think that would actually really clarify the role, its criticality, and have that really well understood. We also make recommendations in terms of how we could enhance the communication that happens between the LDMG up to the district level. I will throw to Liz for any additional comments. Thank you.

**Ms Drumm:** Thank you, Alison, and thank you, member, for the question. My comments really would reinforce what Alison has said: locally-led response, recovery and building resilience is key to success. Queensland disaster management is built on that arrangement: locally led, state supported and then supported, of course, by the Commonwealth.

As Alison said, the recommendations we have made strengthen those relationships and great practices that are already occurring. They highlight the importance of local government and the local disaster management group, the specific roles they play and their responsibilities. By including them in the legislation, it highlights that but builds on and matures the framework that already exists—not so much relying on those great relationships but having that in place as a foundation that relationships will support, rather than rely on.

**Mr ANDREW:** What advances are councils making in relation to firefighting capacities for their region?

**ACTING CHAIR:** Member for Mirani, could you repeat that question? It came through very broken up.

**Mr ANDREW:** I was looking at the capacity of the technologies that are currently being developed to support firefighting in the regions through councils. Could you give me some indication of what is being done?

**Ms Smith:** I thank the member for the question. It was a bit hard to hear so I will respond—

**Mr ANDREW:** I am sorry; it is the phone. It is more to do with the digital response capacity.

**Ms Smith:** If you are talking about the volunteers, certainly councils have a great relationship with the volunteer firefighting brigades. In fact, many of our members are indeed volunteers themselves. Those volunteer brigades provide an invaluable service in their community. They are critical, and we are really pleased with the great relationship they have with councils in times of need. LGAQ itself has a very proud and longstanding relationship with Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland. I am not quite sure what else you were alluding to in your question.

**Mr ANDREW:** It was mainly to do with digital capacity with the emergency response.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Member, are you referring to digital capacity in the sense of councils' websites and their disaster dashboards?

**Mr ANDREW:** That is correct.

**Ms Drumm:** Perhaps I can add some comments that might assist. In terms of sharing information from the local disaster management group or the council, both playing a vital role in providing comms and warnings to the communities, there are mechanisms. The local disaster management group is a coordination group in itself, and sharing those comms may be through the disaster dashboards that you may have heard of. Most Queensland councils have that externally facing. It is used not only by the community and the local disaster management group but also by agencies in the field who are providing response.

There are a lot of mechanisms. Certainly, Queensland councils are looking to digital solutions to improve communications for response and during recovery and relief. There are lots of different initiatives out there. LDMGs have their members based on their risks. Fire, of course, would be a member—and if not all councils then the majority—of LDMG groups. As such, they would be sharing information to those groups and with the group can look at solutions that might be best for their circumstances to address their risks. There certainly are mechanisms.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Thank you, Ms Smith and Ms Drumm, for your submission here today. I like the recommendation you have made about the local recovery coordinator. As somebody who represents an area that had a significant natural disaster occur over Christmas, I know that there has been a focus on that at that level.

I want to touch on the aspect of your submission which relates to the guidelines and to the composition of local disaster management groups and ask a question about the structure of those groups. I have been through a few of these now and I know that in diverse areas you need a lot of local input. The Scenic Rim is a small council by area when you compare it to some rural and regional councils, but it is still very diverse. Not all councillors are members of LDMGs and I wanted to ask your opinion about whether you would see it to be beneficial if they were, to ensure all of that input that comes through local councillors from the community is actually heard within the LDMG. Perhaps this is a question best directed to Ms Smith.

**Ms Smith:** I will start, and I am sure Liz will have a few things to add. Two of our five recommendations reflect on your question. One is around reviewing the district boundaries so we can have the opportunity to look at how many are in districts—whether it is appropriate and whether there is the opportunity to leverage sufficiently in a district or whether it is opportune now to make some smaller and some larger.

The other recommendation we have is around the guidelines themselves. They were last reviewed and published in 2018. As I said in my opening comments, every time there is a natural disaster it gives us learnings and the ability to respond and to further improve upon what we are already doing. Our suggestion with this recommendation is precisely that. It has been quite some years since they were published and reviewed. It is probably time now to have a look at this with an emphasis on not just the response but also the recovery. As I mentioned before, recovery seems to be a growing piece, particularly when you have the scale of events such as we have seen in the Far North, Wujal Wujal in particular—how we might revamp those guidelines to not only ensure there is always the appropriate adequate response at the immediate response time but also deal better with recovery.

**Ms Drumm:** The local disaster management groups are formed to best address the risks that are relevant to the group. The chair within the legislation is a councillor, more often than not the mayor. The deputy, of course, may be a councillor to support that role. Councillors and council, as well as managing a response, also need to maintain or resume business operations, so the role of councillors is vital in providing information about what is happening in the community. Councils may currently elect to have them as official members or advisers or observers. There are many ways to do it; it is not currently within our submission or within the act. The group is best placed to decide what is appropriate for the group and how the councillors can best support their chair, or their mayor, for those multiple functions that they have. They have vital roles in providing information about what is happening in the community—those needs—and that is exactly what the local group and the council would be looking to understand to make their decisions.

**Mr KRAUSE:** To clarify, it is not your position that all councillors should be on an LDMGs at this point in time?

**Ms Smith:** Not currently, no.

**Mr ANDREW:** What role does geospatial intelligence and aerial surveillance data play in local government preparing to respond to bushfires, floods and severe weather events? Could you touch on it?

**ACTING CHAIR:** What role does data play in bushfire mitigation in local governments? Is that—

**Mr ANDREW:** Yes, disaster management groups, rural fire brigades and so on. What role does aerial surveillance and even some of that AI data play in helping local governments to prepare for and respond to bushfires, floods and severe storms?

**Ms Smith:** While the LGAQ is here to provide support, advice and advocacy for our council members, one of our big roles is also to be a body that can help to build the capability of our councils. You raise a really good question because we have a chief digital officer, we have an innovation lab and we are busy taking on problems that councils have to develop what can be locally-led technology

responses. Yes, the use of artificial intelligence is certainly something that we are working with and have installed on flooded roads up in Carpentaria and in other parts of the state. We had one of my teams out in Paroo last week looking at doing some similar work. Liz was up in Wujal Wujal recently looking at another technology solution for them as well.

**Ms Drumm:** We were. The digital team were looking at low-cost, innovative ideas on how we can understand risk better, because it is certainly critical for decision-making when it comes to preparing for and responding to disasters in Queensland.

**ACTING CHAIR:** There were no questions taken on notice, so thank you for your time today.

**PLANT, Mr Jason, Chief Executive Officer, Caravan Trade & Industries Association of Queensland, Caravanning Queensland**

**WESTON, Ms Michelle, Chief Executive Officer, Caravan Parks Association of Queensland Ltd, Caravanning Queensland**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Welcome. I invite you to make a brief opening statement, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

**Mr Plant:** On behalf of the Caravan Parks Association of Queensland and the Caravan Trade & Industries Association of Queensland—referred to collectively as Caravanning Queensland—we appreciate the opportunity to make a submission and appear today before the committee into the inquiry into the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, particularly as it applies to smoke alarms in caravans and motorised caravans.

As the peak bodies for the caravan and recreational vehicle industry and caravan parks industry in Queensland, Caravanning Queensland encourages and advocates for initiatives designed to enhance safety and standards for users of recreational vehicles. The inclusion of division 5B, 'Smoke alarms for caravans and motorised caravans', is a positive step in enhancing consumer safety. Since the introduction of the mandatory smoke alarms in houses, it has become apparent that gaps exist in fire safety regulations concerning caravans and motorised caravans. Currently, the QFES provides guidance rather than mandating fire safety measures in these dwellings. As caravans and motorhomes are a dwelling in which people sleep, the introduction of this amendment recognises the importance of ensuring safety in all types of dwellings and provides clear guidance for the manufacturers of, dealerships that sell, caravan parks that rent out and customers who purchase these dwellings.

As an industry we can report that the majority of RV manufacturers are already installing smoke alarms in their products; however, before finalising installation and positioning requirements under QFES regulation, it is important to ensure any such inquiry considers all recreational vehicle types including their size, design and material make-up. RVs comprise caravans, motorhomes, campervans, slide-ons, camper trailers, tent trailers, fifth wheelers and rooftop tents. These products are all unique in design and are made from a range of materials including canvass, aluminium and fibreglass composite, to name a few.

The size, design and material used in the manufacturer of specific RVs may impact the ability to install smoke alarms in accordance with the subsequent requirements provided under regulations. The Caravan Trade & Industries Association would welcome the opportunity to work with the committee in drafting installation and positioning requirements. Caravanning Queensland also stresses the importance of implementing an adequate transition period to allow RV manufacturers, dealers and owners sufficient time to comply with new regulations. A phased approach incorporating education will facilitate a smooth transition without unduly burdening stakeholders or compromising consumer safety. Where this relates to caravan parks, it is critical that clear guidance is provided on those RVs which are not registered but rather remain onsite as long-term accommodation—both those owned by the caravan park owner and those owned by the individual living in the RV.

In terms of specific installation methods and devices, CQ supports the use of wireless nine-volt or lithium ion battery operated photoelectric smoke alarms. These devices are more suitable to the nomadic mobile application of an RV, providing reliable and flexible installation without compromising safety. Mandating smoke alarm installation will enhance fire safety standards for RVs and mitigate the risk of fire related injuries and fatalities.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today and provide feedback. We urge policymakers to consider our recommendations and collaborate with industry to develop legislation that prioritises safety for users of RV products.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** As a point of clarification—you mentioned it before and I read in your submission—can you explain your concerns around permanent non-registered caravans or RVs? Will they be included? I am trying to get my head around how this works. Do you have a concern that they are not included?

**Ms Weston:** Based on our reading of the amendment, we do not believe they are included at this stage. It appears to us that the trigger points are when a caravan becomes registered or is sold. Therefore, with something that is already onsite, whether that be in a caravan park or on a private property, there is a reasonable chance that it may not be registered and there may not be a trigger event that causes it to be registered and as a result—

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** I wanted to double-check that with you because that is how I read what you were saying in your submission. Thank you for that.

**Ms Weston:** When we are speaking to caravan parks, we advise that best practice would be that everything within their caravan park does have a smoke alarm installed. However, in many cases the dwelling or the caravan or the motorhome that is staying onsite is actually owned by someone other than the caravan park owner and they have no ability to require that to have a smoke alarm.

**Mr HUNT:** Thank you for your very concise and well-presented submission. Pardon my ignorance, but is Caravanning Queensland a membership-based group, an advocacy group or both?

**Ms Weston:** Caravanning Queensland is comprised of two industry associations. We are both membership-based organisations and a major part of our responsibility is advocacy for our sectors.

**Mr HUNT:** So column A and column B.

**Ms Weston:** That is correct.

**Mr HUNT:** On the strength of that, what consultative mechanisms did you undertake when you were formulating your responses?

**Mr Plant:** On the trade side, we have a board that I answer to and refer to for advice. I also have committees sitting under me. I have a group of service and repair members who specialise in exactly what that is—servicing and repairing caravans—and they see a lot of products come through. We will install after-market or repair smoke alarm installations in caravans. We also have manufacturers we refer to when we are drafting submissions such as this to receive their feedback on their installation methods, what they do as best practice and what they are seeing. Obviously, given the nature of the product, while they are manufactured here in Queensland they do travel across boundaries, so a lot of our members deal with legislation from other states as well. There is consultation with those members in all of those regards.

**Ms Weston:** From a caravan park point of view, this is as a result of ongoing conversations with our members over probably the past two years as it relates to fire safety concerns.

**Mr HUNT:** That is probably what I was driving at. You have undertaken a broader consultative suite with the 240,000 registered RV users in Queensland?

**Mr Plant:** No, with the 240 member businesses that I have under the Caravan Trade & Industries Association and then Michelle with her 335 members under the Caravan Parks Association of Queensland.

**Ms Weston:** In saying that, we do have a database of consumers who have engaged with the industry through things like caravan shows and the VANSafe program. We are able to communicate with them on an ongoing basis. While the consumer base is not a group that we did consult with in terms of this particular submission, it is a group that we have the ability to communicate with in the future.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I am thinking back to 2016, when a law was passed to mandate photovoltaic or photoelectric smoke alarms be put into residential dwellings by a particular date in 2017, I think, or upon sale or rental. This has a very long lead time—2027. What is your view on whether the installation of smoke alarms should be mandated in a more timely fashion than just upon sale and registration? For context, I know that there have been fatalities in dwellings that would have been subject to the position that I just outlined if it had been taken on board by the government of the day. That is the context in which I am asking your opinion.

**Mr Plant:** As I mentioned in the opening statement, the majority of caravans already come with smoke alarms. I could not put a figure on it, but out of the 240,000-odd registered caravans and recreational vehicles registered in this state a fair percentage of them would come with smoke alarms. With access to our database of consumers, we could certainly advocate for a more pressing installation or transition period. Given the number of registered and unregistered recreational vehicles that we have in the state, I think an extended transition period is warranted to make sure we get across to each of those owners of those products and make sure the installation methods being advised or adopted are correct.

**Ms Weston:** I think the challenge will actually be more around the unregistered RVs. With the registered RVs there are multiple touchpoints where those owners can be educated. From the point of view of those unregistered vans, we have no idea of the quantum. There is the risk that the most appropriate smoke alarms may not be available in the quantity that we need to achieve a particular time frame. We ask that that consideration be included as part of your decision-making.

**Mr MARTIN:** Am I correct in saying that all new RVs and caravans sold in Queensland have smoke alarms in them?

**Mr Plant:** I would say that the vast majority do, the reason being that over 90 per cent of caravans are manufactured interstate. It is my understanding that it is mandatory in Victoria. Most caravans come out of Victoria and it is mandatory in Victoria to have smoke alarms installed in recreational vehicles—also New South Wales, is my understanding.

**Ms Weston:** South Australia, definitely.

**Mr Plant:** South Australia, definitely. WA and Northern Territory could be different. Where the majority of vans are manufactured it is mandated, so they come fitted with smoke alarms already.

**Mr MARTIN:** I imagine there would be a fair amount of consumer demand for that as well?

**Mr Plant:** Certainly. We not only advocate on behalf of our members; we also run consumer events. Through those consumer events and road safety initiatives, for example, we communicate with owners of recreational vehicles and safety is front of mind.

**Mr MARTIN:** In your submission you mentioned that there is probably a slight difference with RVs and caravans and then things like camper trailers or rooftop tents. Can you expand on that for the committee? Why do you say that those things should be treated differently?

**Mr Plant:** We just need some clearer definitions within the legislation so that no product types are missed that should be incorporated into that. In the opening statement I mentioned the different type of recreational vehicles. There are caravans, pop-top caravans, camper trailers—camper trailers themselves can be a wind-up version or they can be a fold-out version which is predominantly canvass in make-up—motorhomes, campervans, rooftop tents. I think we need to be very clear on the definitions that are contained so that we capture the majority of recreational vehicle products and also consider how that device is to be installed within that product. For example, with a rooftop tent or something with a canvas roof it would not be possible to install smoke alarms. We are more than happy to work with the committee in developing this further to make sure we come up with a solution for most recreational vehicle types.

**Mr ANDREW:** I will quickly touch on the smoke alarms. Is there a wi-fi component in that area where the smoke alarms are interconnected? I know that they are connected physically. Can you elaborate on that, for places where wi-fi is patchy and so on?

**Mr Plant:** I did not pick that up clearly.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I think he was asking about wi-fi connectivity.

**Mr ANDREW:** I was talking about the wi-fi connectivity with photoelectric smoke alarm installation. Are they very reliant on wi-fi, do you know?

**ACTING CHAIR:** Is your question: are smoke detectors that are fitted in caravans reliant on wi-fi?

**Mr ANDREW:** Yes. Is there a wi-fi component there?

**Mr Plant:** I will have to come back to you on that. I am more than happy to.

**Ms Weston:** And does that relate to having interconnected smoke alarms? Due to the size of caravans, that may or may not be something that is relevant.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Do you mean that the size of the caravan might require more than one smoke detector?

**Ms Weston:** Or the size of the caravan is smaller than a single room in a house. A single room in a house does not require multiple smoke alarms so would it actually be appropriate to put multiple smoke alarms in something that size?

**ACTING CHAIR:** Is that your question, member for Mirani?

**Mr ANDREW:** That is where I am going with it, and also the reliability of wi-fi in certain areas. I know in my area wi-fi connectivity can be really sketchy. I am just checking on that.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** For instance, Swagman makes some very luxurious motorhomes that actually have enclosed areas. I know it is set by regulation, but what would you like to see happen in that type of situation? Some of Dave Suttor's motorhomes are amazing. You are looking at a \$1 million house driving around. Through regulation, how do you think that would be deemed appropriate to ensure there is proper coverage in those type of vehicles?

**Mr Plant:** The smoke alarms that are installed at the moment are connected wirelessly. I will get some information about the wi-fi connectivity.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** I think he is talking more about wireless connection.

**Mr Plant:** In that instance, I have not seen too many but in the larger A-class style motorhomes there is a separate sleeping area sectioned off from another sleeping area. I have seen instances where there will be smoke alarms installed in two different areas. Keep in mind that recreational vehicles are quite small. It is a contained space. Some of the specific smoke alarms for recreational vehicles come with a hush function as well. Because it is such a contained space, if you in there cooking toast and you burn the toast it will go off immediately. There is a hush function just while you are cooking to save your ears, I guess, in that instance. On the larger products there could be the opportunity to install multiple alarms that are connected wirelessly.

**ACTING CHAIR:** My understanding is that the legislation says one smoke alarm per caravan or RV. There is always the opportunity to put more in if you want.

**Mr Plant:** I think it is also a recommendation from RFES that you install a smoke alarm within the RV itself and then another within the annexe.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Swagman motorhomes do make very good motorhomes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. If you are to provide a little more detail around the smoke alarms, as we have just discussed, that would be terrific. Thank you very much for appearing.

**The committee adjourned at 11.59 am.**