

Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Dayboro and Districts Rural Fire Brigade

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Dayboro and District Rural Fire Brigade submission on the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024.

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed amendment to the Fire and Emergency Act 1990.

Dayboro and District RFB held its' Monthly General Meeting last night, Wednesday 13th March 2024, when the proposed legislation was discussed, and the decision taken to write to the Committee.

Members present at the Monthly GM were completely in the dark about the proposed amendments to the Act let alone what impact, if any, positively or negatively, the amendments may have on the brigade.

For many months QFES has provided updates on the numerous meetings/workshops etc. it has held around the state to work out how to translate the high-level recommendations of the KPMG report into a structure that will be better than the existing one operating under the 1990 legislation.

Whilst QFES is to be complimented on providing commentary on the hive of activity within the organisation related to the new structure, little detail, apart from reassuring comments, that volunteer brigades will be better off, has been forthcoming.

Understanding volunteer brigades

The 1,400 rural fire brigades comprising more than 25,000 members throughout the state represents a monumental reservoir of goodwill, community spirit and self-sacrifice.

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Each brigade is unique in the composition of membership, length of service, experience, terrain and wildfire behaviour in its area of responsibility.

Some brigades are very well resourced and equipped and include personnel well qualified to manage its 'relationship with QFES, which can be complex in complying with ever changing requirements, particularly in the area of training, which has been pushed back onto volunteer trainers along with longer and a more complicated syllabus.

Other brigades really struggle to keep up and operate on the smell of an oily rag while still turning out to do the hard yards when the community calls on it to do so.

Consultation

The question in the minds of our brigade, is why given the extended time taken by QFES to digest the KPMG report and the thousands of man days that must have been expended to develop the structure which these proposed amendments seek to create, have we been given an impossibly short amount of time to absorb and understand how the brigade may be impacted and offer feedback to your Committee to affirm the changes or offer suggestions on how the legislation may be improved?

Knowledge and Respect

The above wordy rhetorical question raises the suspicion, surely unintended by the Minister, that the input of her volunteers is neither valued nor respected.

Knowing how brigades operate, the time allowed by the Committee makes it impossible, in our opinion, for volunteer brigades to make considered submissions.

Narrow selection criteria

In the short time we have had to look at the proposed amendments one issue does stand out.

The appointment criteria for Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Fire Officer appears designed to limit the pool from which qualified candidates may be drawn.

The proposed wording is narrowly prescriptive.

An organisation of the size and complexity of the new QFES may from time-to-time benefit at senior leadership level from an alternative view learned from experience outside of fire services.

In our view the Minister should not be constrained by legislation from exercising her discretion to make appointments as she sees fit based solely on merit and to meet prevailing circumstances at the time.

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Suggestion

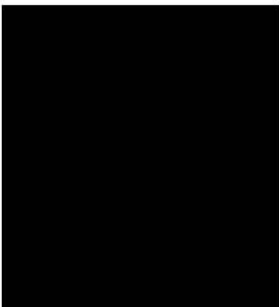
As a service to the RFS volunteer community we suggest QFES be directed to provide a plain English summary of the proposed amendments, why they are necessary, how they will impact brigades and their members, what rules, guidelines, procedures, if any, will remain unchanged, including but not limited to the election of our officers, the role of the First Officer, control of our finances etc.

A reasonable time, say two months, should be allowed for brigades to meet, discuss and formulate a reasoned, unrushed response which may well provide sensible grassroots suggestions contributing to a better structure to serve the Queensland community.

We all share that objective.

In the event the Committee does not take up our suggestion to provide a plain English summary of the amendments, which will require an extended submission period, you have on record the disrespectful signal we believe this sends to the 25,000 RFS volunteers.

Yours faithfully



Kevin O'Sullivan

Chairman

On behalf of Dayboro and District RFB