

Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Dear Chair Person,

Re: Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

As an active Rural Fire Brigade member with 20 years service, and a current Rural Fire Service employee with 8 years of service, I am very interested in the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. After reading the Bill I am quite comfortable with the changes proposed and support these changes with the exception of two the amendments, as follows:

Clause 25 (page 22) Amendment of s 5 (Appointment of commissioner)

I note in this clause that to be eligible for appointment as Commissioner the person must have

- a. Professional fire fighting experience, and
- b. Incident Control Expertise, and
- c. Fire Prevention expertise

The criteria above severely limits the pool of eligible candidates who could apply for this role and may mean that future possible highly capable candidates are not able to be appointed as they don't meet this criteria. Under the proposed criteria the government would not have been able to appoint Katarina Carroll, as the first female QFES Commissioner, a role that she excelled in. It is my understanding that Commissioner Carrol was appointed to address the issues of sexual harassment and workplace bullying identified in the Allison Review. So, it could be seen that the proposed legislation could prevent a future government from adequately addressing future cultural issues.

In addition to this the largest component of the new QFD's workforce will be Rural Fire service volunteers. The proposed criteria does not require the Commissioner to have any experience in volunteering, or bushfire experience. This seems an unbalanced situation and may mean a future commissioner does not understand or relate to a large component of their workforce. This could in turn lead to poor morale and ongoing unrest between the two services, Fire and Rescue and Rural Fire Service.

I note that the current Director General of Queensland Health is not a Medical Doctor, yet the Director General is successfully running a much larger organisation. Applying the logic of the proposed amendment to Queensland Health would mean the Director General of Queensland Health should be a Doctor, however this could upset the nurses as they constitute the larger component of the workforce. The Commissioner's role is a strategic administration role with attached powers that oversees the administration of a department. The Commissioner has appropriately qualified and experienced staff to whom they delegate their powers, the staff know how to manage and prevent fires. If a commissioner is on the ground running a fire then the State is in real trouble. The Commissioner requires significant administrative skills, these are not skills learnt fighting a house fire or inspecting fire safety systems and therefore may not be held by candidates that do meet the proposed criteria meaning QFD could miss out on much better leadership.

The second issue that I have concern with is:

Clause 28 (page 25) Division 1 Appointment of Chief Fire Officer

I note that the section 7G Functions paragraph (a) states the function of the Chief Fire Officer are to *provide advice to the commissioner about the fire services, including matters relating to service delivery, operational culture, best practice and innovation and research.*

I have no issue with above function as stated, however when coupled to the eligibility criteria for the Chief Fire Officer there exists a significant risk that the functions of the Chief Fire Officer may be compromised or take a slated perspective. A person is eligible for appointment as chief fire officer only if the person has:

- a. Professional fire fighting experience, and
- b. Incident Control Expertise, and
- c. Fire Prevention expertise

The above criteria severely limit the pool of available candidates for appointment, when coupled with the functions such as innovation and research the available pool would be further reduced. This could lead to the appointment of a Chief Fire Officer who is meets the eligibility criteria but has limited experience in the functions because there are no better candidates.

Further to the above, one of the functions of the Chief Fire Officer is to provide advice around service delivery and operational culture. The eligibility criteria automatically creates a perceived bias that Fire and Rescue Service will prevail in “us and them” scenarios. For the role of Chief Fire Officer to function as intended by this proposed legislation amendment really requires the role to have significant independence or balance. Ways to achieve this could be by making the role a non-operational role and renaming it to be more of an inspectorate or alternatively consider the role to be rotating role set to defined time periods, with the role being alternated between Fire and Rescue Service and Rural Fire Service Queensland. However, I note that this second alternative option does not address the limited pool of candidates issue I previously discussed.

Kind regards

Mark Saunders

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