

Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Response Submission

To

Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee

“Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024”

1. My general concerns are directed to amendments to the “Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990”. There have been numerous reviews undertaken while the 1990 Act has been in place. Each of these reviews has set out to enhance the ability of “Rural Fire Brigades” to better support their communities and build a more Resilient Queensland. Unfortunately, each of these reports have been undermined by a “covert group” within the Senior Leadership of “Fire and Rescue” with assistance of political involvement and other outside factions. With the proposed amendments to the “Commissioner Powers” I can only see a further deterioration in Rural Communities where they solely rely on the local Volunteers of a Rural Brigade and in many cases these same Volunteers represent State Emergency Service. Since 2012 QFES support to Rural Volunteers of both groups has been diabolical, Area Staff in acting positions and transferring continually. When a position has become permanent, the applicant has not had the suitable skills and knowledge, or volunteer experience, in dealing with Community Based Organisations, such as SES or RFB’s. Generally, seen as “Jobs for the Boys”
2. The recommended changes to how the “Commissioner” having the right to appoint or dismiss a member of a Rural Fire Brigade is a complete slap in the face of why these brigades were first organised and implemented across the state many years ago.
Community as a group should engage their preferred members to maintain these brigades with the necessary support from the organisation. Interferences from outside sources (Commissioner) will only further destroy the fabric of, and current level resilience of these communities. Further to this issue, the process that this type of action would take could easily be by means of, a vendetta by a RFSQ employee against an individual that doesn’t have the same particular view of that paid employee. This has happened in the past and took many months of brigade turmoil, before it was eventually sorted, however that officer was never reprimanded for his actions.
3. Again, there appears to be NO reference to HOW the “Commissioner” is appointed, only the requirements of which I believe is a positive, requiring a level of knowledge and skills to manage the new Queensland Fire Department. The Commissioner when duly appointed should be fully supported by the Minister, and not allowed to be UNDERMINED by outside sources as has been in recent times.

4. The proposed changes with respect to how the “Commissioner” deems a suitable person to be a “Chief Fire Warden” or “Fire Warden” (the term appropriately qualified) is a very broad term. We firstly need to fully understand the role of the “Chief Fire Warden” when it was first introduced in the 1940’s. In that period the position was given to “Clerk’s of the Court” and Police Officers” Currently via delegation, Area Directors of RFSQ hold that role, and some of the current appointments in my view don’t have the necessary skillsets. Q? What authority would they have to intervene in a dispute between a “Fire Warden” and a “Landowner” if it was likely to get out of hand as it did in 2009 Christmas eve, unfortunately the “Fire Warden” died as a consequence. This then became a Police Issue. Also, Clerk’s and Police Officers generally, had no real qualification in Fire or Hazard Reduction but could write a permit in the absence of the “Fire Warden”.

I do agree that Fire Wardens should have suitable skills to “assess the application” for a permit, prior to a permit being issued.

Currently the “Fire Warden Network” and processes being used across Queensland is, working efficiently and appears to be envied by most other jurisdictions. There will always be shortfalls to the system when the diversity of the state is being applied.

5. Statement that allows the “Commissioner” to stand-down a First Officer during a fire event if he deems necessary, and appoint a suitable person, this is a very wide ranging view that the Commissioner could consider. I believe that (s81,s82,s83) need to have the full consideration of the committee of what again, might well destroy the fabric that communities across Queensland, rely heavily on in times of Disaster.

I refer to the 2020 Fire event on Fraser Island (k’gari), QFES for many days had very little or no plans for the fire impact on “Happy Valley”. The Incident Management Team was located at Howard IMT on the mainland, and Divisional Commanders from both Fire and Rescue and Rural Fire Service were managing crews and other resources, although they had no experience, of the conditions and topography in which crews were working attempting to manage the fire, that was currently in the landscape. For some managers this was their first time on the island. Numerous times I asked what was the daily plan, and plans for the days ahead, with no quantifiable or suitable answers that would minimise the impact on the township in my experienced view.

I along with the local RFB members, also community members, developed a plan to protect Life and Property in the township, I then sent this plan to the Commissioner, at the time, who then directed the IMT to implement my plan and allow myself to manage the oncoming situation of 7th December 2020 now known locally as “Happy Monday”. This is why Local Rural Fire Brigades need to be SUPPORTED not MANAGED by people who do not fully understand the local environment, fuels and topography. This particular fire and our brigades efforts, prior to and during that event are well documented both state-wide and nationally, including being a “Case Study” within the IGEM report to Parliament.

My concerns are that what processes that were set out in October 2022 Minister's announcements, now appear to be two very different discussions. I spent 16 years working QFRS/ QFES and have seen first-hand how the organisation manipulates systems, and Fire and Rescue very much does not support major change, unless it is in their best interest.

From 2006-2012 under Assistant Commissioner, Steve Rothwell the Rural Fire Service made great progress with upskilling of the Volunteer workforce, leaving behind Fire and Rescue antiquated training practices. Since 2012 there has been a concerted effort by Fire and Rescue to gain the upper hand in the management of Volunteers. The proposed amendments bill 2024 will strengthen their processes to achieve their goal of overall control. What needs to be considered by the committee is that 93% of Queensland land mass and Fire Risk is managed by Locally based Rural Fire Brigades. The volunteers of these brigades fully understand thier area of response, while the supporting organisation very much lacks knowledge and skills needed for operational responses.

Fire and Rescue generally attend Static type incidents, where Rural Fire Brigades work with more Dynamic and Fast Changing situations.

My Background:

7 years Auxiliary Firefighter (1970- 1977)

Self Employed Building Contractor (1973 – current)

SES Volunteer (1992- Current)

SES Training and Support Officer Central West Longreach (2000 – 2003)

RFS Training Officer Barcaldine (2003 -2006)

RFS Project Manager-Special Projects (Ministerial Funding) (2005 – 2008)

RFS Manager Rural Training Delivery – State-wide (2006 – 2016)---- Resigned due to constant bullying and harassment, not being allowed to be investigated externally. This is something that is still happening today.

Returned to Self Employment


Currently – 2nd Officer Goodwood RFB

2nd Officer Happy Valley (k'gari) RFB

Fire Warden (Goodwood)

Fire Warden (Farnsfield)

Regards, 



Winston Allan Williams,



Dated 15th March 2024 0900hrs.