

Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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14 March 2023

Committee Secretary CSLAC@parliament.qld.gov.au
Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

VOLUNTEERING – is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain (Volunteering Australia’s definition 2015)

I write on behalf and at the request of the Kogan & District Rural Fire Brigade. We held our Monthly Meeting last night and this legislation was on our agenda.

We received the link to this Bill on 7 March 2024, and submissions close on 15 March 2024. You will understand that isn’t much time to read and fully comprehend the implications this Bill will have on our lives as volunteers. We have taken the approach that some communication to your Committee would be preferable than saying nothing and you assuming that we have no concerns.

Our Brigade sees great advantages with the Reform Process and indeed the formation of the Queensland Fire Department. The additional personnel, smaller Regional Office Areas, more money and resources are all excellent.

Queensland Fire Department (QFD) establishes two distinct and very different fire services – Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) and Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ) under one Commissioner. Kogan & District RFB members see no reason for the Commissioner and Chief Fire Officer of this new identity (QFD) having mandatory qualifications only available from one of the Services. We have no issue with an application process and an appointment by merit, we want the best person for the job. Restricting the application field to persons with ‘professional firefighting experience’ ensures the lead of ‘our’ collective organisation will always be a former Fire & Rescue firefighter.

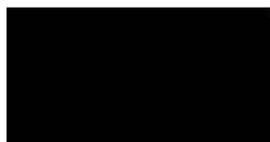
Minister Boyd stated in her Introduction when she presented the Bill to parliament that mandatory requirements firefighting experience, incident control experience and fire prevention expertise are necessary to reflect the level of command and control and that the workforce must have confidence that leaders intimately understand the hazards and the risks.

Recent fires in our Tara district saw Incident Control undertaken by many officers from both F&R and RFS, experience does count but local knowledge and local expertise are far superior.

Rural Fire Brigades being Unincorporated Associations have always regulated themselves via their Management Committees regarding membership behaviour. At no time during discussions on the reform was this issue raised. New powers in this Bill give authority to the Commissioner regarding suspension, dismissal and disqualifying persons from holding any office or being an office bearer of a Rural Fire Brigade. Our Brigade believes this is an overstep into our local affairs.

With this legislation, the Commissioner, Chief Officer and additional Executive Officers may have the responsibility to ensure RFSQ performs its functions effectively and efficiently. It's the volunteers, that are at the 'coal-face', in the fire trucks, performing the training, attending community functions, at the end of a drip torch or hose, fundraising, educating the community, being the public face of the organisation. We have been losing volunteer numbers for multiple reasons; work life balance (family, job commitments, time poor, young people moving from rural areas to the city); blue card issues and age. Can this organisation afford to disregard the people they rely on every day, to push through this legislation when we have concerns?

Yours faithfully



Vicki Searle
1st Officer/Brigade Secretary
Kogan & District Rural Fire Brigade