

## Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

**Submission No:** 50  
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### Submitter Comments:

I am an active RFS volunteer Firefighter. And I see several glaring issues with the draft amendments to our legislation, most of which stem from the most important error - ensuring the Commissioner (And our Chief Officer) must have Fire & Rescue (FRS) qualifications. It will never be possible for a Volunteer, for example, to rise through the (paid) RFSQ ranks and onto Commissioner or even Chief Officer. The only career path to either of these positions will be through the FRS. No-one will convince me that even if it were possible to gain FRS qualifications whilst serving in the RFSQ, that this person will successfully compete with a career FRS member for either of these positions. It simply won't happen, which leaves the RFSQ with two career leaders from the FRS. Leaders who will undeniably be biased towards the FRS whether intentionally or not, and the RFSQ will not have a direct leadership path to the Minister. We have been assured that the RFSQ will become its "own entity" under the new legislation however, the most we will ever be is another arm of FRS. The legislation will provide the FRS with a Deputy Commissioner whilst RFSQ and Corporate Services each have a Chief Officer? So, the RFSQ doesn't even have a Deputy Commissioner? That in itself is ludicrous - blind Freddy can see what's going on here. This arrangement shows how little regard the authors have for the RFSQ. The RFSQ will have the same level of leadership as Corporate Services. At the very least, and to fulfil expectations, the RFSQ must have its own Commissioner reporting to the Minister. A Commissioner who has Rural Fire Service qualifications. AND, the RFSQ must also have its own Corporate Service. This is the ONLY way the RFSQ will be its "own entity". This draft was no doubt written by lawyers from a brief given them by the Government. I am not a lawyer but I am still concerned about the way in which the Incident Controller (IC) function has been treated in the wording of this document. We have been assured that the status-quo has been retained however, the wording, in my opinion, leaves a concerning gap in interpretation. The draft needs to make it clearer that an IC can be ANY suitably experienced RFS member, and that an IC cannot simply be removed from that function for any reason. Two things are important during a Rural Fire Incident; Local Knowledge and continuity of leadership. Local knowledge also includes personal networks with community members and landowners/managers. The Commissioner, through delegated powers will have the power to replace an IC with a paid member from the FRS in a town many kilometres from the incident area, Losing valuable time and local experience, not to mention putting a strain on the relationship between paid and volunteer firefighters through apparent disregard for our expertise and leadership skills. No amount of rhetoric or spin doctoring will convince me or many other volunteers that this draft amendment will be good for us OR OUR COMMUNITIES. The authors and drivers of the direction this draft will take us all should be ashamed of themselves and know that they will be judged by their actions. All we are asking for is what was promised - to be our own entity. Not some watered down version that you think will appease us, and still leave you with all control and power over us. The lack of respect for RFSQ members is apparent in the speed with which this draft is being pushed through. 7 working days for the RFBAQ to respond and then 6 working days for the public to see, discuss, formulate opinions and respond? That is just downright dirty, disrespectful behaviour.