

CORRECTED VERSION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Marine Rescue Services in Victoria

Frankston — 17 March 2014

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Australian Volunteer Coast Guard

Commodore Raymond Campbell, ESM, National and Victorian Commodore

Hon. Ron Bowden, FAICD, Patron Commodore

The CHAIR — Welcome to the hearing of the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. All evidence taken today will be protected by parliamentary privilege, but any comments made outside this hearing will not have such privilege. Could I ask you both to state your full names and positions, and whether you are representing an organisation?

Commodore CAMPBELL — I am Raymond Arthur Campbell, [REDACTED] and I am the National Commodore and State Chairman for Coast Guard Victoria.

Mr BOWDEN — I am the Honourable Ron Bowden, JP, FAICD, former member of Parliament, Patron Commodore of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard for Victoria.

The CHAIR — You are appearing on behalf of organisations?

Commodore CAMPBELL — On behalf of the Coast Guard organisation, yes.

The CHAIR — Both of you?

Mr BOWDEN — Yes.

The CHAIR — Fine. Could I now ask you to make a verbal submission, and we will possibly ask some questions on the way through and at the end.

Commodore CAMPBELL — Firstly, thank you very much for the opportunity to make a presentation, and I would like to acknowledge the government's initiative in actually, for the very first time, taking a serious look at marine rescue in this state. I think it is long overdue, and I think it is a golden opportunity for the industry to come together to make something solid and worthwhile for the community of Victoria. It is important, because it is an industry that has lacked real funding and real support and acknowledgement over the many years that it has existed, and as an organisation we have existed for about 55 years now. As much as I feel we are quite advanced and very capable, there is lots more support and initiative that could be shown. I certainly hope this committee and its recommendations can build on what we submit to you today.

If you will be a little indulgent with me, I will read a few pages that will give you an outline and pretty much an overview of where we are, I suppose as quickly and as closely as possible, because the actual report runs to 89 pages. I am absolutely certain you do not want to hear that.

The CHAIR — Probably if we do not go through it all, that would be good.

Commodore CAMPBELL — I will give you the executive overview in any case. The Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, the AVCGA Victoria, welcomes the inquiry into marine rescue services within Victoria, and hopes the inquiry will help to rectify a number of long-term deficiencies in the recognition, definition, structure, resourcing, accreditation standards and assigned responsibility for marine rescue in Victoria. This submission focuses on the important issues, aligned as much as is possible to the terms of reference for the inquiry. AVCGA Victoria is the largest and best-equipped volunteer marine rescue service in Victoria, with affiliation to a national confederated organisational structure. As such, AVCGA Victoria is best-equipped to provide robust advice and support to the inquiry on the historical nature and future arrangements for marine rescue within Victoria.

As will become apparent throughout its submissions, AVCGA Victoria believes there is a clear and identified need for stepped change within the marine rescue environment in Victoria to: remove existing overlap and duplication and establish an enduring process to ensure efficient and effective service delivery into the future that avoids duplication and overlap; establish a system that maximises the most effective and efficient use of current and future resources and available funding; align with the current reforms to emergency management arrangements in Victoria and implement reforms within marine rescue that facilitates an all-hazards, all-agencies approach, builds community resilience within the marine context and establishes a shared responsibility for marine safety with all participants; embed a new consolidated organisational structure and system-wide approach to marine rescue built on the principles of community, collaboration and capability; establish the foundations for a viable, professional, agile and financially sustainable marine rescue system and organisation for the future; manage marine risk in a planned and structured manner built around a single state

marine rescue plan, standards, accreditation and structured resourcing arrangements; enhance and support volunteerism, including the engagement of youth through a structured cadet program; and introduce a contemporary communications and monitoring system for the marine environment and Coast Guard.

With approximately 700 active operational members within 19 flotillas across the state, AVCGA provides essential statewide support to the Victoria Water Police and the commercial and recreational boating community. AVCGA's statewide capacity is strategically positioned to maximise coverage and capability. The majority of the flotillas are located in coastal centres, but two are located inland — one at Lake Eppalock, which also services Lake Eildon, and one at Lake Hume. In the following table — which you cannot actually look at, and I did not bother with a PowerPoint presentation to make it easier — the flotillas are split into waterborne and transport infrastructure. I will just read the locations from which the Coast Guard operates. That is: here at Frankston; St Kilda; Hastings; Lake Eppalock; Safety Beach; Carrum; Geelong; Queenscliff; Werribee; Lake Hume; Sandringham, being the state headquarters for the organisation; Mallacoota; Warrnambool; Portland; Lakes Entrance; Port Albert; Port Welshpool; Marlo; and Paynesville.

With the exponential increase in boat ownership and boating activity across Victoria, and with almost 170 000 recreational vessels registered in 2012, the consequential need for assistance has also steadily increased, with the majority — approximately 85 per cent — of these incidents being disablements of the vessel. Recreational marine incidents have risen at a faster rate — 8 per cent per annum — than the increase in boat registrations, being 1.2 per cent. Recreational boating incidents reported to Victoria Police are increasing and totalled more than 1500 in 2012. Police coordinated and responded to 588 marine incidents in 2012 and coordinated a volunteer agency to respond to 961 marine incidents, 63 per cent of the total in 2012. During this period, AVCGA activated 554 times, involving approximately 80 000 man hours of volunteer time, which was spent assisting vessels with an equivalent value in excess of \$51 million. The following table in the report indicates the increased trend in marine incident activations since 2008. In short, over that period it has probably increased about 50 per cent.

AVCGA Victoria is the largest marine rescue service provider in the state, supporting the Victoria Water Police as the control agency for water rescue beyond the shoreline and the provision of swimmer and beach-based patrolling and rescue, which is the primary role of Life Saving Victoria. Despite this, AVCGA Victoria is not listed as a key support agency within the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* for water rescue, although it is mentioned as a key support agency for fire, which is clearly its secondary role, in support of its collaborative arrangement with the Country Fire Authority. Moreover, the role statement for AVCGA contained within the same section of the emergency manual clearly recognises AVCGA's roles as:

Rescue of persons endangered by:

Vessel disablement at sea due to mechanical or electrical failure

Foundering

Fire

Person falling overboard ...

and as the support agency for Victoria Police, marine search and rescue. The lack of consistency in the state's own emergency management arrangements creates a level of ambiguity and is a clear example of the need for greater clarification and definition being assigned to marine rescue in Victoria.

AVCGA believes clearly that the delineation of responsibility for the marine rescue and life-saving risk segment would establish a solid foundation upon which the required statewide capability necessary to manage this risk, accreditation systems and response standards can be evolved. AVCGA believes a differential in definition between swimmer and beach-based patrolling and rescue — that is, lifesaving — to that involving marine rescue is necessary, and AVCGA proposes the definition for marine rescue should be 'the locating and assisting of vessels in distress, whether on inland, enclosed or coastal waters, and bringing the vessel and its occupants to safety, or if not feasible, recovering and bringing the occupants to safety only'.

AVCGA believes this would be a useful starting point for rectifying the current ambiguity that exists. This delineation and clarity will support more efficient and effective service delivery and alleviate any duplication, overlap or confusion that may currently exist, which is clearly a major component of the inquiry's terms of

reference. Of course this does not remove the need for ongoing collaboration between lifesaving and marine rescue organisations and activities. In fact AVCGA believes a greater level of collaboration is both possible and desirable, despite each agency's different roles.

AVCGA assets are valued at \$4.3 million with approximately \$150 000 of liabilities. Funding for marine rescue within Victoria, with the exclusion of Victoria Police, primarily relies on and is almost entirely dependent on grant programs. AVCGA does not receive any regular funding from either federal or state governments. By nature grant funding is for specific purposes, relies on the grant program being made available, is not guaranteed and therefore cannot be relied upon as a regular income stream. This is evident in the differences in grant income received by AVCGA in 2010 to 2011. In 2010 it was \$950 000; in 2011 it was \$1.18 million. The variation in grant funding occurs despite increasing boating activity, activation levels, general operations and training and accreditation requirements, as required by national and state regulations to maintain currency.

AVCGA receives reimbursement for fuel for activations by Victoria Police upon the generation of a marine incident report. This does not cover fuel usage involved in AVCGA-initiated activations or training and general operational use of vessels. This reimbursement process involves the submission of an invoice to the Department of Transport, with reimbursement processed and received approximately 6 to 8 weeks after submission. This lag in reimbursement time relies on AVCGA being able to cash flow fuel usage in order to maintain business continuity and service delivery to the community. In 2012–13 operational fuel usage totalled in excess of \$160 000, with only \$70 000 being reimbursed through the MIR process. This is an outdated and resource-intensive process that does not support contemporary marine rescue practices and is out of step with government-supported funding arrangements applicable to other major emergency management agencies and activities. Moreover, this process does not cover the reimbursement of fuel costs associated with training to maintain seamanship accreditation, which necessitates approximately 7000 hours per year across the state.

For its future sustainability the Coast Guard must move from an annual, hand-to-mouth existence dependant on one-off single-purpose government grants, and we submit that a key outcome of this inquiry should be the initiation of discussions with the state government over a regular funding agreement — say on a triennial basis. Such a funding agreement could: replace some of the grant funding currently being provided by state agencies — funding for the acquisition of new vessels should still be made via the grant process, be subject to a business case; provide funding for essential, recurrent items including equipment, but excluding vessels, and also including uniforms, fuel, equipment, vessel maintenance and volunteer training; include funding for paid staff to support members; be tied to a contract with performance measures and targets and an annual review.

Excluding the acquisition of new vessels, marine rescue funding for all volunteer-based units and the establishment of a consolidated and resourced entity is estimated to require around \$4 million per annum. AVCGA believes consideration should be given to allocating a proportion of existing revenues collected through boat registration fees and/or boat licence fees for this purpose. Alternatively, a small increase in these revenue streams could be consolidated to provide regular funding for marine rescue. Additionally, consideration could be given to introducing user charges, either on a full or partial cost recovery basis.

The introduction of a single, integrated marine rescue agency would enhance the ability to channel financial efficiencies and capitalise on alternative revenue generation opportunities. With Victoria's emergency management arrangements rapidly shifting to a genuine all-hazards, all-agencies approach — as outlined within the *Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper* released in December 2012 — it is timely for marine rescue activities to be examined and integrated into the broad initiatives arising from the white paper reform process.

AVCGA has a demonstrated history as a leader in this collaboration space and already operates a confined all-hazards, all-agency approach within a collaborative relationship with the CFA and SES under the provisions of memoranda of understanding. However, this approach relies upon a series of relationships and does not formally embed any of the policy directions being implemented as the outworkings of the white paper. AVCGA totally supports the new policy directions and strongly advocates through this submission that these should be inclusive of marine rescue at the beginning of the reform processes.

Whilst AVCGA recognises that marine rescue is not as prominent as other risk types and activities, such as bushfire, it does believe integration of marine rescue and its elements present an ideal platform from which the following activities, which are strategically aligned to the white paper, can easily be achieved and in doing so

will rectify a number of current deficiencies in marine rescue — clarification of ministerial responsibility for marine rescue, and implementation of a simplified system, involving a consolidated single statewide integrated marine rescue agency responsible for: greater community involvement in emergency management and a focus on establishing community resilience within the marine environment through the promotion of safer boating facilitated by a coordinated community engagement and education program in consultation with Transport Safety Victoria; development and delivery of common training and operating platforms to ensure better delivery systems for emergency services, including accredited marine rescue, boat and personal watercraft licensing, safety and seamanship training and development; accreditation of marine rescue units; development of statewide — not agency specific — marine rescue capability requirements for the state, in consultation with the Victoria Water Police; provision of volunteer-based marine rescue services and support to Victoria Police and the boating community; initiatives to retain and grow the volunteer sector and encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers to support marine rescue activities, including the engagement of youth through a structured cadet program; centralised procurement and asset replacement strategy; and centralised and prudent financial management for marine rescue, incorporating the coordination and endorsements for grant funding applications based on a structured and prioritised statewide strategy and identified need.

Coast Guard submits a level of consolidation is necessary to achieve this single agency approach and the delivery of more efficient and effective marine rescue services within Victoria by removing current levels of overlap, ensuring the provision of services is fit for purpose, commensurate with risk and is streamlined and coordinated without any level of parochialism. Coast Guard proposes the organisational structure needs some paid staff support, as well as once-off seed funding to establish the organisation and a commitment to ongoing recurrent base funding to cater for essential need, such as minimum skills training and accreditation, insurance, fuel and provision of uniformed minimum safety equipment.

Fundamentally, AVCGA believes this inquiry needs to determine what level of marine rescue service it wants for the state into the future, how much it is willing to resource this service and how it is to be administered. AVCGA recognises the finite resources available to the state and the pressures on the state economy, but without answering these hard questions and the provision of this level of support, marine rescue will unfortunately continue to falter and operate on a hand-to-mouth basis with no stepped change, which AVCGA believes is necessary for the provision of professional and contemporary marine rescue for the future.

I am sorry that is a big mouthful — —

The CHAIR — Not at all.

Commodore CAMPBELL — but it covers most of where we feel we are and where we think the committee has a real role to play in determining a good outcome for marine rescue in its entirety — not just this Coast Guard, but incorporating all of the organisations together.

The CHAIR — To save time, Ron, do you have anything to add?

Mr BOWDEN — I fully support the proposal as outlined, Chair, and as state patron of 20 years standing I have seen a continual, incremental change in capability and sophistication of the organisation.

One of the important points that should be made to the committee is that we believe sincerely that the community at large respects the work of the Coast Guard, and we believe our standing in the community is good and that we have a good strong history of service to the community. I recommend to the committee for their consideration that the points made by our National Commodore are such that here is a chance to take a stepped approach, and a considered stepped approach through this timely action here of this committee's work, to further enhance safety in the community, particularly with the number of registered vessels now approaching 200 000 or thereabouts in the community itself.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Ron. We will now ask some questions. I have one that I find interesting. You noted that the incident rate has increased dramatically, far in excess of the registration rate. Do you have any idea why that would be?

Commodore CAMPBELL — To be quite honest, I do not think there is a very clear ability to define why or how, but the percentages float. It is almost seasonal: you can have very safe years and you can have very dramatic years.

The CHAIR — Have there been any studies to look at why that is the case?

Commodore CAMPBELL — By different universities — I think Monash has carried out a couple of inquiries of research into what is behind the incidents and where they are. Very classically, our inland waterways have suffered in the last couple of years since we have had water back in the lakes. People have gone absolutely crazy, and a lot of it is a lack of education, which is the fundamental thing about what we carry out as part of our activities in the community.

That is one that really comes to mind. Other than that, I personally could not put a finger on it, but our inland waterways have suffered and have suffered loss of life, and that is mainly because people have suddenly found that they can get back on the waterways. There is no slow pace towards doing anything; it is flat out.

The CHAIR — So that was a period of inexperience.

Commodore CAMPBELL — Absolutely. It is something we are mindful of within our education systems. We are a registered training organisation, so we provide formal and informal qualifications to people. Through the RTO people can use our classes and our teachings in the marine environment commercially. In the community we try to educate; we support TSV, Transport Safety Victoria; and we conduct boat licence courses around the state, we do several thousand a year. That is about a 4-hour course, but during that course we try to encourage people to make further contact with us to do some of the safe boating courses that we offer. If they want assistance in learning how to launch the boat, we are happy to present and give them that experience.

The CHAIR — Do you have a view on what strategies could be adopted to assist with the reduction of the incidents?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes. Quite frankly — once again really it is a personal view, but after 30 years of experience I think it counts for something — I think there should be a greater level of education.

The CHAIR — Prior to use?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes, I really do. It is time-consuming now. People do not want to come and sit through a 4-hour course for a boat licence. They go away with very little, towards nothing. A boat does not have a braking system on it. You have got an accelerator and that is about all you have got, and then you have got to use common sense for the rest of your activity.

A boat does not stop on a sixpence, it continues to travel and it is a lethal weapon. I think the education aspect needs to be there. I think a reinforcement also, as part of licensing procedure, is a practical course to go with that written and verbal course that takes place now. It is one way of imparting more knowledge. One of the problems in ramp rage and other activities around the place is the fact that people get licensed to buy the boat, they get down there, they pull up on the ramp — to stop anyone else getting in, in one sense — and then they unload the boat. Rather than just going straight down the ramp, taking the boat off and then taking it across to the side and anchoring it — no, they do everything there, and everybody else gets irate.

Another aspect of the difficulties that are experienced is the fishing seasons. Once that snapper bites — and it applies to us; we operate 24/7 because of it — they are never off the water.

The CHAIR — Once they start to bite?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes, and I think the other rescue organisations would find exactly the same. Through our state centre at Sandringham we operate 24/7 during those seasons because people do not come off the water. When they hit the quay or pull the cord and want to come home, they have either run out of fuel or the battery has decided it does not want to fire up the engine, so who gets call? We do, and out we go.

I honestly feel that a lot more education and practical experience is required. Part of it should be a part of the actual licensing process. It should have not just the classroom and a whole host of slides and DVDs but a real — as other states do — practical application to it.

It is amazing how many people launch boats and do not put the plugs in, so she fills up with water pretty quickly. There are just general things about how you operate it: what to check before you leave home, what to

do when you get to the ramp, how you look after your family as well and, more particularly, the wearing of life jackets. You could be knocked out, but a life jacket can save your life, and people still do not wear them.

The CHAIR — You mentioned ‘as other states do’?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes. Queensland particularly has an element of practical examination as well. You go through the processes of launching, retrieving and tying the boat up. It really is essential.

Mr McGUIRE — Just to follow up on a couple of those aspects, I will ask you some questions on the issues you are talking about now, and then I will come to the systemic issues. Just give us a feel for this. What sort of practical exam do you have to go through, or is it just theoretical? Is that what you are saying?

Commodore CAMPBELL — No, the practical is to bring your boat along — needless to say, somebody who is licensed to bring it along — on the trailer and you are run through the coupling/uncoupling, the checking of the tyres, the checking of the bearings and then launching the vessel and then retrieving it.

The CHAIR — That is in Victoria?

Commodore CAMPBELL — No, that is in Queensland, but that is what I believe we should be doing here in Victoria.

Mr McGUIRE — I am trying to establish this because I do not have much experience on boats. What is the current state of play, and what should we do?

Commodore CAMPBELL — All we do currently is that we sit in the classroom and we run a series of slides and DVDs. We run through the practical and legislative requirements of the boat licence.

Mr McGUIRE — Are you telling me that there is no practical on-water test if I am allowed to use it on water?

Commodore CAMPBELL — None.

Mr McGUIRE — In the state of Victoria there is no practical test to get your licence to go out with a boat. What about a jet ski?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Same thing; it is all on paper, tick the boxes.

The CHAIR — Amazing.

Mr McGUIRE — Am I the only one who seems amazed by this? The Chair is saying he is amazed as well.

Commodore CAMPBELL — No, we are all amazed. I will give Transport Safety Victoria credit: it has over the last couple of years talked about introducing a practical aspect of the licence test, but nothing has really progressed beyond that.

Mr McGUIRE — Which would be the best case model that we should look at? Which would you recommend as best case practice that you have seen, either here or abroad?

Commodore CAMPBELL — I would honestly suggest that you look at the Queensland model. There has been a lot of work and a lot of research. It frustrates the community, but it makes them safer.

Mr McGUIRE — If we were looking at it and we said, ‘There is no practical test; this is no longer sufficient’ — and you were saying there are a number of people using boats and a number of call-outs for rescues — there would be a greater emphasis on your getting the licence, and then would there not also be something about what you do in emergencies, rescue operations and that sort of thing? Then I would presume there would necessarily be a higher cost for that.

Commodore CAMPBELL — It would be an additional cost.

Mr McGUIRE — But would that not also help fund the rescue services and maybe be a source of revenue for you?

Commodore CAMPBELL — It is, because we do commercially operate that for people. People can ring into the Coast Guard and say, ‘I’ve just bought a boat and need help’ — and this has happened. RACV have recommended people to Coast Guard to get experience. Just one example was over at Williamstown where a chap bought a 50-foot luxurious cruiser, but he had never seen the inside of a boat. He just fancied having a boat, so he bought it and his wife rang and said, ‘He’s got the keys, but I’m not letting him on board. Can you come and help us learn what to do with this boat? I can’t see him taking it anywhere’. And that is true; that is an exact case.

Mr McGuire — What happened to him?

Commodore CAMPBELL — We actually dispatched people from our St Kilda unit, and they spent a weekend with the family, at no cost, over a Saturday and Sunday, to make them familiar with the boat and all the aspects of the boat, and the most important parts were undoing the ropes, letting them go and tying them back up again so it was still there when they went back the next morning.

So we ran them through those things; we ran them through starting the engines safely to ventilate the vessel, because it was an inboard; we ran through all the safety procedures; we encouraged them very much to wear life jackets while they were walking around the vessel — when they are in the cabin it is fine; we taught them how to use the radio to call for help if they needed it; and we provided one member to actually stay with them to take them out of the marina at Williamstown onto the bay and give them a 4-hour cruise.

The CHAIR — At no charge?

Commodore CAMPBELL — No. In that instance we certainly did not charge. It came to us through the RACV, and we just thought we would look after it.

Mr McGuire — Surely that is unsustainable. How would you sum up this set of circumstances and the dangers inherent in it?

Commodore CAMPBELL — To be honest it is ludicrous. I have been around for 30 years so I see it as silly, but other people do not. They understand very clearly that they have an obligation to get a boat drivers licence, so they actually do that and they get the course, but they do not do anything about learning to navigate and they do not learn anything about the hazards that are around the bay. There is a reef running the entire length of the bay; depending on which side of the reef you are on, you can be in big trouble. So there is no real awareness of what goes on. It is not like getting on a bicycle and if you fall over you are not really going to get too hurt — you might just get the knees skinned. On a boat it is a very different kettle of fish. It is ignorance, but I think in some respects people are fearless and they think the bigger the boat, the better and safer it is. But, no, it is not. The bigger it is the more trouble you are going to get into.

Mr McGuire — Thank you for that description. If I can go to the systemic issues, you are saying that your organisation does not have ongoing funding — it is hand to mouth; you have to raise your own money — and then you said we have an all-hazards, all-agencies approach yet you are not really factored into that as a main-game player. Can you succinctly tell us, as we are looking at what level of marine rescue is necessary, how we can achieve that? What advice specifically would you give this parliamentary committee on how we can do that? I am saying this in the knowledge that there are silo mentalities, there are turf wars, there are institutional egos, there is bureaucratic inertia — all those things happen. If you had the chance right now to write the policy, what are the key propositions that you would give us?

Commodore CAMPBELL — That would be a lovely opportunity.

Mr McGuire — This is it. You will never get it again. I am inviting you to give us your best proposition.

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes. It is very difficult to say what it should be. There needs to be a level of consultation with the other emergency service players, as in Water Police, as in Transport Safety Victoria and as in Public Transport Victoria. From our own perspective — and I very clearly picked up the parochial situation that exists — this has been experienced in New South Wales by the amalgamation of the organisations, and that is not 100 per cent successful. There is a very big disappointed group of people in there, for what that has achieved. I want to do away with the parochialism, in all honesty. If I could achieve for our organisation an absolutely fabulous funding agreement, I would say to people, ‘Join us, because if you don’t, you’re not going

to get it'. I think to a degree we need to develop the level of a cooperative between the organisations. Forced amalgamations do not necessarily work.

Everyone is proud of the badge they have got, but there is a formula, I believe, by which we could all come together, and I think if the state is going to look at us seriously as an industry and give the appropriate funding that is truly necessary for it to happen, then we have to find that medium where we can forget the parochialism and other silly things that go on, get together and discuss it with the appointed authority — the Water Police, because the Water Police in every state are the RCC, so that is the control agency for any form of rescue.

So we need to start there. That is the commencement point. We need to bring the organisations together — and there are not too many independents in Victoria. Coast Guard by far outnumbers the others about three to one, so there are about seven or possibly eight independent groups operating in the state. They all do a very good job. They are all needing of that support and funding that we seek, and we seek it as an agency, but we also in our document give that as possibly a collective to create something new out of it. It is a new game for us to think about because that is not where we have sat on the page before. I have experienced personally the New South Wales arrangement, and I was heads-up in that for the entire process.

The CHAIR — You are not recommending it?

Commodore CAMPBELL — I am not recommending it. I still have members in New South Wales, I still receive emails and telephone calls from our ex-members but also members of the opposing organisations as well, and they are very unhappy with it. It has built a bureaucracy that has become a dictatorship rather than a cooperative of the organisations. It is something that I did suggest to government at the time in New South Wales — that if you are going to create a single organisation, the members of the board and very senior management positions should not come from the opposing organisations because it is not going to work.

The CHAIR — Would you be prepared to put a further submission to us on that basis?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Absolutely. To be honest there are 89 pages and I am sorry to say you are going to have to read it, but you will very clearly see where we are going. We have made reference to all of your points of reference, but we have added in where we could come together as a collective.

The CHAIR — So you have already identified very specifically the plan you are talking about?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes, we have in real terms. I would like to go a bit further on that. The Coast Guard organisation is fairly national; the only place that does not operate is Western Australia, because that is conducted under FESA, but they are volunteers and it is a huge well-run, well-organised organisation, whereas in all of the states — including Darwin — we are a registered training organisation, we have expended a lot of money on achieving that and we have very qualified people willing and able to train other groups and agencies.

With the advent of AMSA taking over responsibility for marine training and endorsement of standards, where the states are no longer theoretically involved in it - it is now a national standard, and that is a huge impact on all of us. But we as an organisation are actually working with AMSA to develop some of those packages that will go out to the entire marine industry, to be supportive. That is the expertise we carry within our organisation. We see ourselves as leaders, but we do not see ourselves as the one and only or the best.

I think we are certainly on the top of the tree but we are equal in our activities with other organisations, and one that comes to mind is Volunteer Marine Rescue at Mornington — a fabulous organisation and well set up.

The CHAIR — In Hastings.

Commodore CAMPBELL — I must admit some years back we talked about all trying to get together and because of parochialism it never happened, but we could have done more if we could actually sit at the table and not worry about who is carrying the spear and who is not, because I think the opportunity is there to bring others into it. It is important that we do this collectively or it is a waste of space.

Mr McGUIRE — Just one other question: if there was funding there, and the funding was tied to a proposition that organisations did have to drop the parochialism, as you call it, and actually coordinate better, do you think that that is one mechanism, or does it have to be done in a different way?

Commodore CAMPBELL — That is one.

Mr McGuire — Do you think that would be something that we should look at?

Commodore CAMPBELL — I think it is a part of the equation; yes, I do.

Mr McGuire — And then there are cultural issues between organisations and hierarchical issues, are there not?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes.

Mr McGuire — Thank you very much.

Commodore CAMPBELL — We are extremely structured. I suppose in some sense you could call us paramilitary — and we look it. We have world affiliations. I am a regular visitor to the US Coast Guard in this capacity. I attend their conference every year.

Mr McGuire — Do you benchmark internationally? Can you give us an international view of where we sit? Is that easily done or — —

Commodore CAMPBELL — I can, almost in a nutshell. I will be insulting my friends in the US, but in real terms we are light-years ahead of them in lots of ways. When I say the US Coast Guard, you have two aspects: the US Coast Guard itself is a 36 000 military force but it undertakes civilian activities, not military activities, other than in times of war. Alongside that it has 33 000 volunteer members as well, which is the auxiliary. We in this country, universally, are light-years ahead of them in how we conduct, how we educate internally and how we, on a shoestring, provide the necessary things.

You saw Sandringham this morning. That is the statewide control centre in reality, which is backed up again by Paynesville and also again by Portland. Those three are the state operations. American Coast Guard officers come and visit and I take them through that facility and then I take them to some of our units, and they are blown away.

Mr McGuire — So the rescue operation you are saying is topnotch. There are parochial issues about collaboration, but you can get a boat licence without getting your feet wet?

Commodore CAMPBELL — Absolutely.

The CHAIR — Without seeing the water, frankly.

Commodore CAMPBELL — Yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. We really appreciate your time and your expertise. It has certainly been educational for me, and I am sure it has been for the other members of the committee. We are very grateful for your time here, and within the next couple of weeks you will receive a transcript of today's proceedings. Please feel free to make any changes where you think there have been grammatical or punctuation errors, but nothing to the substance of the document itself. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.