

# CORRECTED VERSION

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Marine Rescue Services in Victoria

Melbourne — 24 March 2014

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Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association

Mr Richard Burgess, Business Development

**The ACTING CHAIR (Mr Ronalds)** — Richard, thank you for coming to the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. This is an all-party committee looking into marine rescue services. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Comments you make outside the hearing are not protected by such privilege. Could you please state your full name, whether you are representing yourself or an organisation and who that organisation is, and your residential address.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — My name is Richard Mark Burgess. The organisation I am representing is the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association. My position is business development, as a volunteer. My residential address is [REDACTED]

**The ACTING CHAIR** — A good Gippslander — that is excellent. Please go ahead with your verbal submission.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Thank you for the opportunity. The Australian Volunteer Coast Guard has welcomed this review into marine search and rescue, as we did in 2002 when Victoria Police and Marine Safety Victoria commissioned a review, which was conducted by Ernst & Young.

#### **Overheads shown.**

**Mr R. BURGESS** — I thought this opening picture was fitting. This was 40 years ago. This was the Maribyrnong floods. This was our vessel, *CG I*, which is a rescue vessel based at Frankston. It was called upon by police to assist in the rescue of those who were overcome by the floods 40 years ago. Today the Coast Guard in Victoria, and indeed in Queensland and other parts of Australia, has grown. With that growth we have tapped into synergy with other emergency services agencies. We are a service provider for the police. Our flotillas are units where members gather and raise funds for safety equipment as well as vessels. Those flotillas are now also classified as brigades, so under that banner we provide the CFA's 3 nautical miles to sea firefighting response. We are well spread, border to border. The vessels operate in inland waters, they operate in close quarters and they also operate in coastal waters.

We did go back and review the Ernst & Young report in 2002, and some of the outcomes of that report were very positive as a result of it basically coinciding: it was the Ernst review and also licensing was introduced in Victoria at the same time, so there was increased revenue available. Through the good office of Marine Safety Victoria at the time there was increased funding, which was particularly important at that time for modernising our fleet, which as you saw in the previous photo was no more than an 18-foot swift craft recreational boat that the volunteers would harden to make it fit for purpose.

The increased funding was welcome, and it was significant. That has modernised our fleet. It has modernised it to standards of survey, and along with that our members also had to increase their training competencies to meet those required by survey standards. At that time they were set by universal shipping law standards. The other outcomes of the report relate to non-affiliated units — some affiliated with AVCGA and others affiliated with Life Saving Victoria, which gave them protection; I will cover that shortly.

Australian Volunteer Coast Guard's membership increased significantly; new flotillas were chartered, namely, in Portland and Warrnambool on the west side of Victoria. And in Gippsland the independents there were Port Albert, Port Welshpool, Paynesville, Lakes Entrance, Marlo and Mallacoota, which all came across to AVCGA. Mallacoota is actually a limited coast radio station, operated by a volunteer.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Sorry, so it does not have a vessel?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — It does not have a vessel.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Is there another vessel there owned by another organisation?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Life Saving Victoria has a memorandum of understanding with the State Emergency Service, and they operate a vessel there, I understand in closed waters. Ernst & Young set an assessment criteria in order to be able to assess the standards of each of the units, and I have put those up there in case you are not familiar with them. Category A basically said that the units are fit for service; category B that they are adequate for assisting in respective circumstances; from then on there were units that did not meet the standards. I have

taken the Ernst & Young report here, but I have extracted data that the organisation believes is not really relevant to the terms we are referring to today, just to give a representation of where we were then and where we are now.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So this is 2002?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — This is 2002, and just as an example, if you compare that to the report, in category A there is a total of 43 units in the Ernst report. Thirty of those are State Emergency Service units, so I have extracted them from the data because in terms of marine rescue response this paints a more accurate picture of where we were then.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So there were 13 A and 68 B?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Yes, so the interesting information that came out of the report is that in terms of units that were fit for service, there were 13, and that covers most areas of Victoria, except as you can see there were none on the east coast or the west coast. Life Saving Victoria's were all categorised as B, so they were fit for service but given the types of vessels that you have seen in the presentation we have given — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — They cannot do the whole broad run; it does not make sense.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Correct. So that is category B. The deficiency there was category C, the ones which were non-affiliated and also basically not fit for service at that time. I have not worried about their category D, because it was a lot of yacht clubs and things like that, again to paint a more accurate representation of what we are here today about.

All in all what Coast Guard looked at were the areas that needed assistance from our organisation, which was the east coast and the west coast, and as a result of that today you will see that Coast Guard still has the same number of inland flotillas. There are nine at Port Phillip; there are two affiliated with Life Saving Victoria, as far as we know.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So that is VMR? You are referring to VMR there?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — I believe that is VMR Mornington and also Southern Peninsula Rescue Squad. With affiliation we are not 100 per cent sure what the size of that is, but we presume that that gives them insurance and perhaps a mechanism to access funding. From Coast Guard's point of view, we have one unit at Western Port. The east coast, because of the amalgamation of the unaffiliated into a chartered flotilla, now has six units; those are the units in the areas I detailed in the previous answer.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Lakes Entrance and so forth.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Essentially, it is all of Gippsland. There is a State Emergency Service vessel that operates out of Inverloch.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — When you say those are chartered, they are not full Coast Guard; is that what you are telling us?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — They fall under the banner of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association, so they are chartered flotillas.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — The difference being?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — If they are not affiliated? The units that are not affiliated at the moment are affiliated with someone else.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — No, no, sorry. The ones on the east coast, you mentioned, are different to the other Coast Guard vessels elsewhere — or not? Perhaps I am misunderstanding it.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — They are exactly the same?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — They are, yes.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Sorry, I misunderstood.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — A chartered flotilla at Portland is equal to a chartered flotilla at Lakes Entrance. Essentially the number of Coast Guard units has doubled, and the membership has also increased. But from out of point of view what came out of the Ernst & Young report was an accurate assessment of where the risks and exposures were across the state. By bringing those unaffiliated organisations that were not fit for service under the Coast Guard banner, also with the support of Marine Safety Victoria and the Department of Justice at the time, access to the funding meant that we could get the right assets and also use the training funding to get their members competent to be able to operate those vessels.

I have a priority 1 in an area that is exposed, and that is still Mallacoota. Of course there is a new boat ramp that is being constructed as we speak.

**Mr EIDEH** — Whereabouts in Mallacoota?

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Bastion Point.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Mallacoota — Bastion Point. We participated in the risk assessment that was conducted by Transport Safety Victoria, and we suggested that it is a high-risk area because it is enclosed waters and there is a bar crossing into coastal waters. We would encourage Transport Safety Victoria to look at a Coast Guard flotilla there so that a substantial boat could be located there to be able to respond as required.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — When you are talking about a substantial boat, what are you talking?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — The vessel we have recommended is exactly what we are operating at Lakes Entrance and Port Albert. It is a 3100 Noosa CAT. It is still trailerable. It is a very large vessel — it is 6 tonnes — but you can still trailer it. We launch ours by trailer at Port Albert but it has a seagoing capability, where you can take a coxswain and three or four crew — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — And the cost?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — The cost of a vessel like that today is about \$400 000 fitted out with navigation agreement and safety equipment and built to a 2 C survey, so that could legitimately go up to 15 nautical miles to sea with a coxswain. We still see that as an exposed area. We would certainly be interested in supporting the local community and rallying our volunteers to form a flotilla.

Again, the outcome of the Ernst & Young report was that Portland was exposed. Again through assistance from the local police this vessel now operates out of Portland and obviously has quite a capable seagoing ability and is able to stay at sea for at least 10 hours, cruising around at 20 knots, so it can cover quite a distance in a search operation. It is also a very good training platform for the volunteers. Exactly the same vessel exists at Warrnambool.

The data presented here is the average monthly assist, and it compares the average data taken between 2000 and 2003. It is from the marine incident records, and it is work that we are actually doing. In 2002 when you spread the activity over the year you can see that boating in Victoria is very seasonal. I always preach that it is tied to the AFL footy — nobody goes boating until the siren has gone, but once the siren goes 170 000 registered boats hit the waterways, and the majority of those are hitting Port Phillip and Western Port. What is interesting, though, is that when the activity during those periods — during the AFL finals season — is finished, the increase is quite significant.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — What are the numbers?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — That is average numbers per month of assists.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — That is percentage increase, though, isn't it?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No, what they are saying is that is 80 in January. On average our units are doing 80 assists per month.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — That is not what the graph says.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — I am sorry. I modified that at 6 o'clock this morning.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Okay, I just want to be clear. So it is actually 80 assists in January.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Correct.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — For all of Victoria.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Across the state, yes, with the majority of those events occurring on Port Phillip or Western Port.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — When you look at an assist, is that very broad? Whether that be a breakdown, whether that be a rescue, does it include all things?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — It does, yes. We rely heavily on the MIR data, the marine incident reports that we submit. Unfortunately we do not have access to that database, so in order to produce this information we had to obtain it through freedom of information. We were only able to get the data that we had submitted, and when I received the data I got it in about 60 A4 pages.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So you cannot get your own data?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No, and that is a problem to us. The event is that you have a Coast Guard rescue vessel that is activated by police. At the end of the assist they fill in a document that is submitted back to our office in Sandringham and then goes over to Transport. But once the data is in that database it is not —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — And what is the rationale?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — I am not sure, to be honest with you. It is just that we do not have access to the database.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Did they give you the information?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — They gave me the information through the freedom of information office. It was not all the information we wanted because we want to see how much work we were doing as far as totals and what other organisations were doing. We were not so much interested in what other organisations are doing, but because where they are located geographically tells us these levels of activity and then we can make decisions about whether we need to gather the local community to say that we believe. Mallacoota is a perfect example. I would not be able to get data on the activities of Mallacoota because it is work that has been done by SES and Life Saving Victoria. It is a gap that we would appreciate being closed just to help us do our forward planning. There is quite an increase between 2003 and 2012.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Why, in your opinion?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — It is an increase in the number of registrations.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — But you have also got more chartered organisations.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Yes, we have, but still the majority are on Port Phillip and Western Port, so we have always been attending to assists on Port Phillip and Western Port. The number of assists as you move out to the east and west reduces significantly because the number of registrations reduces as well. Port Phillip in particular is well renowned for having very good snapper fishing, and a lot of boaties are chasing the snapper.

The point I was going to make on the increase is that this is becoming fairly demanding on some flotillas. It is not that they are not capable of delivering, but it means we have to be extremely vigilant when it becomes about managing fatigue, given that most of the volunteers have probably already done an 8-hour day and then have to respond, at times four or five times a day, to assists during these periods. We manage that because we are Coast Guard flotillas and Frankston, Carrum and Safety Beach can back each other up, so there are some benefits of the alliance.

The Gippsland one has probably been the most successful move. As I said, from the Ernst & Young report there were areas of risk there, and working with Marine Safety Victoria and the water police we were able to convey public meetings and form these flotillas and bring these over to the Coast Guard. It was things like being able to give them protection through insurance, to protect individuals and property and assets, as well as obviously protecting the association.

As an association under the Corporations Act we have to conduct annual financial audits. That has in the past been done by KPMG. It is done at a flotilla level, so all receipts and expenditures and donations received are presented to state council on a monthly basis and, at a national level, that forms a concise annual report. To go back to that, the advantage of information also is that it does help us to be able to respond to this review in the sense that we have fairly accurate records of what it does cost to run a flotilla and certainly where the gaps are, and that is tabled in our submission.

We are a registered training organisation, which means we can train our own people. We have trainers and assessors, and they are certified to deliver certificate I and II, which is basically the deckhand standard leading all the way to coxswain.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Do you do a special coxswain? We have heard conflicting evidence, it would be fair to say, about what is available for coxswain training.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — We have to deliver to this standard, so we do meet transport and distribution but we also include the public safety units.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — You do it to the standard commercial level and then you add things to it.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — We do, and that sort of fits in — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — There is no special one. That is my understanding, but we are getting conflicting evidence here.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — It is not a special qualification, and usually how it works in reality, because the trainers are volunteers, is that at the time when funding was available we would send our members to some of the private providers. Some would choose to take two or three weeks leave and they would undertake that training.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — But do you do it now internally?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — We can do it all internally. At the moment it is all with volunteers, so you can imagine that to get through some of the 60 units takes longer than being able to go to a school and do those in a two or three-week period full time.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — But they are the same qualifications that you provide, plus some additional that is available commercially. The person who does your course can then go on and drive a trawler, for argument's sake. Is that correct?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — That is correct, and we sell to the public — 'Join the volunteer Coast Guard'. As an example there is a member of my flotilla at Port Albert. He is a volunteer; his full-time job is in the paper industry. He joined the flotilla. He was a very keen, enthusiastic 28-year-old. He took three weeks off work and did his coxswain's course full time so that he got assessed — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — With you guys?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No, with a private provider, but with the certification he got he came in and became a Coast Guard coxswain. But the same can be said for an individual who is an active member of Coast Guard and spends the required sea time and completes the units as assessed by the volunteers. They then have a qualification they can transfer into industry.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Do you feel that the qualification situation as it stands is appropriate for marine rescue?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — For marine rescue, yes.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — You feel that it is okay. You do not feel that it is over the top requiring someone to do a coxswain's licence, a qualification, given that the vessels are obviously of a completely different standard, if you like.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No, we believe it is the appropriate standard. Across the state obviously there are vessels, such as the one you saw — a 13-metre vessel — that go 15 nautical miles into Bass Strait. The organisation does want to know that the coxswain is indeed competent.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — I guess it is more to do with that; that makes logical sense. But when we are talking about some of the smaller vessels that are still in survey, the requirement is still to have the same qualifications. Do you feel there is an opportunity for maybe some sort of mid-level qualification? We have heard evidence that some of the lessons you have to learn in order to gain a coxswain's licence are probably not completely relevant to driving a rigid inflatable.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — I think it is more a case that if there are units that are operating on similar lines to Life Saving Victoria and they have a 6-metre RIB that is in 2 C survey, it is the survey condition that dictates the qualification of the master. In those situations, if it is a vessel that is similar to what Life Saving Victoria might operate and they are operating in an environment that is similar and the restrictions are that they may only go 2 to 3 nautical miles, there would be some room through a committee of qualified assessors to be able to make it fit for purpose, if you like.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Does that exist now?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No, not in the Coast Guard.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Does it exist in other areas that you are aware of?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — I believe Life Saving Victoria for their off-the-beach RIBs do not require a coxswain's ticket for their master. That is only my belief. But as far as the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard is concerned, the vessels we acquire do the job, and that is mainly because the majority of our work is towing large vessels in various conditions, which means it is a hazardous situation and we need to ensure that the crew is competent — at least the coxswain is competent — to carry out that task.

Some of the units there which are appropriate, particularly as a service provider to the water police, use the 'observe safe work practices' method. The coxswain on board understands how to carry out a risk assessment and job safety analysis. Through that curriculum the coxswain has the ability to make a sound decision on measuring risk and whether to take a vessel to sea in certain circumstances. Some of the training is survival at sea, which is always a popular exercise during the winter. These are some of the public safety units. Then there is communicating in the workplace, conducting briefings, conducting meetings and providing services. There are other units that volunteers can transfer into their work environment.

On the communications front, with the increased funding that was available to us and with the creation of new flotillas across the state, we worked with Marine Safety Victoria, the water police and Telstra to extend VHF communications across the state. So you understand, these are public frequencies, so when a boatie buys a VHF radio they have access to these repeaters. Vessels that are tracking along the coast currently report to their local Coast Guard flotilla. They will also be monitored from Sandringham, and I believe you visited the facility at Sandringham. There is also a limited coast radio station at Paynesville that caters for the eastern side of Bass Strait. Also at Portland and Warrnambool the flotillas operate what we call limited coast radio stations. The qualifications of the operators are endorsed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority to operate a coast radio station.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — There are a few shadows. Is that the light green there?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Yes, this particular mapping was put together by Telstra. It actually comes from a Marine Safety Victoria brochure, as you can see in the bottom left-hand corner. That was a media flyer that went out to the public. The light green, our experience tells us, depends on the weather situation at the time. If you are in the green it is pretty well guaranteed that you will be able to call through those repeaters.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — On channel 81 that would go straight back to Sandringham. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — That is correct.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — If you were at Mallacoota, for argument's sake — —

**Mr R. BURGESS** — That is correct. If you are boating in Mallacoota you can call Coast Guard, and that call can either be picked up by Paynesville or Coast Guard Melbourne at Sandringham. That is linked through the World Wide Web.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Do you feel that this is adequate coastal coverage? Obviously there are a few little bits there, but do you feel this is reasonably sufficient?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No. I will try not to confuse you, but these are VHF channels. Every boatie has access to these, but they are not the frequencies that are designated as distress and emergency calling, which are channel 16 and channel 67. Every ship that passes along our waterways, every small commercial operator and the majority of recreational boats are increasingly carrying VHF radios that use those frequencies. If they call mayday on channel 16, there could be a ship that is in the vicinity that could pick that up, a commercial operator or a Coast Guard vessel. They have a better chance of being picked up.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So why is there a repeater done on these channels?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — These channels are basically public domain. They are talk-through repeaters. It receives the signal, it boosts it and it retransmits it. The advantage of repeater channels is that — looking at Wilsons Promontory, which is 523 metres above sea level — if you are a vessel that is in trouble on the east side of Wilsons Promontory, a vessel on the west side can hear you by talking through the repeater.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So channel 81, essentially by going through these repeaters, will be heard all the way along to Portland.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Yes, that is how we have it linked at the moment. Coast Guard Melbourne, Portland and Paynesville can monitor all those frequencies.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — As an offshore boatperson, do you need to be aware of the channels?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Yes. As you are transiting, yes.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Which makes sense. Thank you.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — What we have been working with — obviously you have been there — for the last six years with Telstra, Transport Safety Victoria and the Department of Justice is to build a marine distress emergency monitoring system. This will cover the frequencies of channels 16 and 67, which are the international designated emergency, distress and calling frequencies.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — But will that not create a lot of chatter?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — If all traffic goes onto these channels, yes, but what we have asked for is that we maintain the repeater network as well. Where people are fishing and they might be talking about best fishing locations that would be okay to use the repeaters, but it would not be okay to have that sort of circuit discipline on channels 16 and 67.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Excuse my ignorance here, but if I am calling another vessel, I would use channel 16 and swap to, say, 72 or so forth to talk?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Yes.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — If I am sitting at Portland, that will then go all the way through to Mallacoota. Is that correct? Therefore all vessels on 16 will be able to hear — —



**Mr R. BURGESS** — The difference is that channels 16 and 67 are simplex channels. By analogy, it is like a torchlight — as far as you can see the beam go is as far as the signal will go. Whereas, as I explained, with the repeater channels, they boost the — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — But are you not talking about changing it to 16?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Yes, and in the design there will be a number of stations at different locations, such as Arthurs Seat, such as Mount Tassie, that will pick up these signals and then, through the SMR network, will route them back to water police in Melbourne and, we are proposing, the Coast Guard.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — So not repeat them, route them back?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Correct, yes.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Okay, quite different.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — It needs linking. This project has gone out to tender, and I believe they are about to award the contract, which also includes the operations. That is the vessel at Port Albert, and that is the type of vessel we are recommending at Mallacoota.

The future — recreational boating activities, it is about 170 000 registered vessels at the moment. Of course yachts do not have to be registered if they are sailing vessels, so the numbers are above that. It is increasing at a rate of about 1.5 per cent per annum. Technology is encouraging vessels; the trend is that vessels are going into coastal waters, because they have got a GPS, because they have got a plotter. It is encouraging to be able to get from A to B. The challenge for us of course is that, as I explained before, we have to manage fatigue, to continue to update our fleet and equipment. Fundraising is becoming extremely difficult for us, and those funds are often used to keep us compliant. We are fundraising for insurance, we are fundraising to keep our vessels maintained et cetera.

As outlined in our submission, we believe that the model is that we fall under the emergency management sector. The emergency management sector, through the white paper, recognises volunteers. We do sit on the volunteer consultative committee, chaired by the fire services commissioner at present. We believe in an all-agency, all-hazard approach. We know that we are sharing our expertise with the CFA, and we have extended an MOU with the SES so that we can share our resources, people and assets. We want to remove the overlap. There is overlap; that is particularly on Port Phillip and Western Port.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — What do you think the answer is to that?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — The answer is that there has to be a direction, and it has to be a direction that is based on managing fatigue, better management of funding. It just makes sense to make decisions based on risk of a particular area.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — How would you deal with that in a situation like Hastings, where you are both on the side of the jetty?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Hastings is an interesting one — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — I do not think that is the only example either.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — I am not sure, but I think that that is one of them.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — In many respects, when it actually gets down to it, it is like telling a Carlton supporter he has got to go and join Collingwood. But most volunteer organisations, when they are actually called upon, when they are tasked to an event, they work together.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — What do you think is the best outcome for a situation like Hastings where there are obviously two vessels right there with similar capability?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Our recommendation would be that the unit there comes under the umbrella of a Coast Guard flotilla. I know that sounds arrogant — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Would you need two vessels there?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — That is a response that needs to be undertaken by the police and probably Transport when they assess the risk. I think that there are opportunities to rationalise, but those decisions of rationalising really have to be based on what the activity of the area is. What needs to happen is that we need to ensure that those volunteers, regardless of what their badges are, do have the correct competencies, that they have the correct protection in place for their assets and for themselves and that we are operating to standards and being able to provide that service to police.

The other advantage of being under the one banner, as we have experienced in the last 10 years, is that we have a marketable brand name. When we are fundraising there are companies that want to tag themselves to offer sponsorship. BCF is an example of that; they do sponsor the organisation, and the benefits are across the country. But also it is important that we have audit systems in place. That is fairly simple today given that we are operating survey vessels. We are under national standards now. In our proposal that is the organisation we see as the central, western and eastern regions. We have put dotted lines around areas where discussion should take place about rationalisation or amalgamation of units.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — And in Paynesville and Sale your idea is?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Sorry, what was that?

**The ACTING CHAIR** — In Paynesville and Sale your thoughts are?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — The units that the SES is operating are really built for flood rescue. There is opportunity there for Paynesville to assist in the area, say, of Lake Wellington. They are classified as enclosed waters, so most of the flooding that SES is responding to are inland or around river estuaries et cetera. So as we see the volunteer role, Transport Safety Victoria is the regulator. They enforce the safety standards, particularly for recreational vessels. Coast Guard volunteers are those that slip through that safety net.

That was an incident that occurred off of Port Albert; it was a commercial vessel that took on water off Flinders Island and did not quite make it to the — —

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Nearly made it.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Nearly made it. But we recovered the occupants from the life raft, and then it was a joint exercise between Life Saving Victoria and their small vessels to get the floating debris out of the water, because obviously things floating around are navigation hazards, so there was some synergy there among the agencies to make the area safe.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — That is the end of that?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — That is the end, yes.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — That is all right. Thank you.

**Mr EIDEH** — If you can provide us now with some information about the vessels used by your organisation. For example, are the vessels usually supplied and owned by the volunteers or are they purpose built for marine rescue?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — What we have been doing — and again CFA have assisted us with this — is when a particular flotilla wants a vessel we go out to tender and we specify the sort of sizing that we need to support crews for durations at sea, and then the decision on which way we go is based on covering all those requirements. It is very rare today — and I cannot recall of any flotilla that has done it — to actually build from a keel and then design it themselves. We obviously work closely with the water police and we seek advice from them. Now we seek advice from the CFA so that we have platforms to carry pumps and extra firemen et cetera. When it comes to writing a specification, the CFA has assisted with that so that we get a more detailed

description of what the particular unit requires, and we usually find something that is available, not necessarily off the shelf but close.

**Mr EIDEH** — How do you monitor compliance with safety standards in terms of your vessels?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — In terms of the vessels, they are in survey, so Transport Safety Victoria, and obviously due to the changes under the national regulator now annual audits are conducted so we basically maintain our vessels to the survey standards and if there are any deficiencies there, that comes back from the inspection and we seek funds to correct.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

**Mr R. BURGESS** — No, I think I have covered it all.

**The ACTING CHAIR** — In that case, thank you very much for coming. In about a fortnight you will receive a transcript of today's proceedings. Please have a look at it and correct any typographical or grammatical errors but do not change any of the content or substance. Thank you very much.

**Mr R. BURGESS** — Thank you.

**Committee adjourned.**