

CORRECTED VERSION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Marine Rescue Services in Victoria

Apollo Bay — 16 April 2014

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Victoria SES, South-West Region

Mr Matt Maywald, Regional Manager

Mr Steven Tevelein, Volunteer Coxswain

The ACTING CHAIR (Mrs Millar) — Welcome to this public hearing of the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee. We thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. This is an all-party parliamentary committee, and it is hearing evidence today on its inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. We welcome you to this hearing, and we would like to acknowledge that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege; however, comments you make outside the hearing are not afforded such privilege. We are going to ask you to introduce yourselves in a moment. We would like you each to state your full name and address, whether you are attending today in a private capacity or whether you are representing an organisation. If you are representing an organisation, please also state the position you hold in that organisation.

Mr MAYWALD — Certainly. Thank you. My name is Matt Maywald. I live at [REDACTED]. I am the regional manager for SES in the south-west region, and I am here in that capacity.

Mr TEVELEIN — My name is Steven Tevelein. I live at [REDACTED]. I am here as a volunteer for Victoria SES and to pretty much have a look and listen to what you have to say.

The ACTING CHAIR — Thank you very much for that. Just to let you know, the evidence you provide today will be taken down and will become part of public evidence in due course. I now invite you to make a verbal submission on behalf your organisation, and after that we will ask you some questions.

Mr MAYWALD — Lovely. Thank you. Please correct me if I am wrong — my assumption is that you are aware of what SES is.

The ACTING CHAIR — Yes.

Mr MAYWALD — As I said, this is our south-west region. It covers, roughly, the area from Geelong through to the South Australian border and 100 kilometres or so inland. Within that we have a number of lakes, rivers and obviously coastal areas. We have quite an interest in marine search and rescue. SES is a diverse organisation. Obviously we have core responsibility for the management of floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and storms, but we also provide what I consider a crucial service to the other agencies — CFA and fire support, and more importantly in this regard, Victoria Police during search and rescue activity, both marine and land-based.

Particularly in this part of the region, we have all of the inland search and rescue capability as far as marine vessels goes. To that end, we have nine vessels across the region. They are located in Balmoral, Dartmoor, Hamilton, Warrnambool, Colac, Camperdown, Bellarine — on the Bellarine Peninsula — and in Geelong itself. Most of the vessels are what we would deem inland vessels, so they all have a fairly shallow draught. Most, except two, are aluminium, and most do not enter the sea as such, although Geelong staff might do a little bit of training in the bay. The exception to that is Warrnambool, which is regularly called upon to undertake work on behalf of Victoria Police on the bay or search and rescue. We try to limit their activity to about a kilometre from shore. They have a twin engine. Did you visit Warrnambool?

The ACTING CHAIR — Yes.

Mr MAYWALD — So you saw the vessel?

The ACTING CHAIR — Yes.

Mr MAYWALD — That is the only vessel that would go into the sea for operations. Since July last year we have received 66 requests, of which a number required marine search and rescue capability. This is search and rescue for missing people. There were two events near Dartmoor: a missing child who was believed to be drowned in a dam and a missing pregnant female on the Glenelg River. There was one event on Lake Colac, in which a male who was trying to self-harm was in the water, and there was one event on the Bellarine Peninsula in which there was a missing male. They were opportunities where we were formally called in, but our vessels are quite often deployed as part of a search team as well, so if there is a search in an area where there is water, then the vessels will be called in.

Most of the reporting of marine search and rescue events is out to sea and does not get captured for those types of events inland. Our volunteers are quite often called to support searches for missing persons and lost vessels.

Recreational activities are quite frequent in this area — kayaks, swimmers, hikers, yachts and what not — so we do get called in to search for them as well.

We, as an agency, have a very strong relationship with the police in the area, and I think that reflects the way we are activated from time to time. The activation of SES resources can be quite ad hoc — sometimes it can come through formal channels, through the Water Police, possibly through ESTA or from local arrangements and local understandings. That has its pros and cons. We have a great relationship with local police, but then that short-circuits some of the call-out arrangements, and we rely on our units to then bring us back on track.

Obviously the Coast Guard provides the majority of offshore rescue. We do have a memorandum of understanding with them covering operations, and we tend to work more particularly in the Warrnambool area with the Coast Guard to support some of their operations. We have a number of challenges, and volunteering, full stop, is becoming a challenge. The standard expected of volunteers is ever increasing, and the amount of time they have to provide to the community in volunteering is decreasing.

We train our people, particularly in marine operations, to a very, very high standard, much more than you would get if you just held a boat ticket. Our primary operations concern flood waters, which require very skilled operators, often operating in challenging and difficult waters. The fear for us and the volunteers I have spoken to is that if we are to move towards commercial coxswain licensing, as suggested by DOTARS, that will severely hamper the number of volunteers we can put out to do the work required of them.

Maintaining skills is obviously the next difficulty. It is hard enough now, let alone moving to that formal environment. We conducted a review of our rescue vessel flotilla late in 2012, and we are quite comfortable with the range of vessels we have and the location of the vessels in the south-west, but we would like to look, perhaps in the longer term, at what we do with, say, the Warrnambool vessel, particularly if it continues in the role it plays, and we will be looking at the outcome of hearings such as this, and I would like to drive some of that.

I guess, like any organisation, we will put it to you that funding is an issue for us. Vessels are not cheap, particularly having vessels that can work in all sorts of conditions at any time of the day or night. They need to meet certain survey standards, therefore vessels quite often run up towards the \$100 000 mark, so having replacement capability within our budget is a challenge and is perhaps an opportunity in the future to look at how we fund that more generally across the state. That is probably all I would like to say at this stage if that is okay.

The ACTING CHAIR — Excellent. Steve, would you like to add anything to that?

Mr TEVELEIN — I think Matt has covered it very well. He has taken the words right out of my mouth.

The ACTING CHAIR — Good. I should note, in starting, that we have also read the submission put forward by the SES at a Victorian level, and we will touch on that today as well. You touched upon the memorandum of understanding with the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association. Could you outline broadly the terms of that memorandum of understanding and how effective you find it to be?

Mr MAYWALD — I have very little to do with the memorandum of understanding at the moment. The new memorandum of understanding is just that — new — but it does clearly identify the support arrangements and the co-training and that interoperability of opportunities that we have available. I think one of the risks with volunteer services is that we oversupply or over support something, and each agency is trying to do the best it can in that space, so that memorandum of understanding maximises opportunities that we already have without risking duplication of resources and services.

It also provides for the likes of Steve, who is one of our coxswains, to provide his services to the Coast Guard, and again that closes some of the short gaps we have from time to time. Inland we have less opportunity because we do not have the mix, but certainly when we look at Warrnambool, Geelong, potentially Portland for us Port Campbell, where we have a strong volunteer presence, that means that we have the opportunity to bolster both services quite substantially, and I think that is a good thing for the community.

The ACTING CHAIR — You touched there on duplication. How do you find the communication between the SES and the volunteer Coast Guard? Do you find duplications for call-outs? Or are the channels of communication clear as to who will respond to what type of incident?

Mr MAYWALD — I think they are clear in this part of the world because we really only have one area where there is a degree of interoperability or crossover and that is Warrnambool. Those relationships are very good between the two parties, and that is thanks to local level engagement, which certainly has bolstered it at that level, but it is thanks to our volunteers as well as both ends getting together and having an understanding. In terms of Geelong, we have also conducted some cross training, so I think generally the local arrangements are very good.

Mr EIDEH — Could you describe the SES crewperson and coxswain qualifications that are provided to SES volunteers who attend marine incidents? The committee notes that the SES coxswain qualification requires two to four days of training, whereas the commercial coxswain qualification required by marine rescue services can take up to three weeks to complete. Do you consider the SES coxswain training appropriate for its intended purpose?

Mr TEVELEIN — It is more than appropriate, given the fact that we are trained on inland waters rather than marine coastal waters. We are trained in search and rescue, in body retrieval — whether it be dead or alive. We have four days of constant training — that is 10-hour days, not 6 or 8-hour days, so it is 40 hours straight up. If you are deemed not yet competent, then you will naturally go on and do more and more training, but through the south-west we hold two or three full weekends a year where we invite all of the coxswains and their boat crews and vessels along, and we undergo day and night training for those weekends to keep our competencies up. Along with many hours in the Colac unit alone, we would do numerous hours throughout the year on different lakes and rivers, just to keep our competency level up.

The ACTING CHAIR — I was particularly interested in your comments about training requirements impacting on volunteers. Could you outline how you feel this might impact your ability to attract new volunteers and to retain volunteers?

Mr TEVELEIN — Being a volunteer and a local business owner myself, it is hard to stretch the hours between both to just maintain the competency without putting your volunteer service into action 24/7. So if you were to go along the lines of a commercial coxswain ticket, I strongly believe you would lose at least half of your coxswains that are already there. To find three weeks out of our lives — and I am guessing that will not be Saturday and Sunday — is expensive; three weeks away from our family is even more expensive. As a volunteer service, to expect three weeks you would be a commercial coxswain on something that you are not going to utilise is not quite right.

Mr MAYWALD — I come from South Australia. I spent 10 years with SES over there. We ran a lot of bluewater vessels — offshore vessels — and the prerequisite for any coxswain was a commercial ticket. All the vessels were surveyed, and as such they all ran to full coxswains. We really struggled to get people to do that, and we were fortunate that we had a number of commercial skippers from the fishing industry and whatnot come in to support that. To accommodate that we changed our minimum operating standards to be an SES volunteer. We had an exemption for marine skippers from everything else — they could come in and drive the vessel, and that was it — because we could not get enough volunteers to do that.

Having high standards is great where they are needed. I think we need to train people accordingly for the environment that they operate in. If someone is working 30 nautical miles to sea, then a coxswain or a master 5, or whatever the ticket is, is appropriate. Where they are working on shallow, confined waters — confined lakes, rivers or floodwaters — a coxswain's ticket is not going to provide them any great benefit at all. There are no — or very few — navigation markers in Lake Colac, so having them spend 16 hours learning about nav markers is irrelevant.

What we need to do is focus on training being relevant for the environment they operate in. That may mean that we need different tiers of training, but for the frequency that they operate in those environments, the challenge of attaining and maintaining that will certainly damage our ability to get good volunteers to operate there. The risk then is that we do not have services in Balmoral. We have a vessel sitting there — it probably goes out three times a year — but we have a large lake with lots and lots of tourists there, so we can still provide that

rescue capability there. If we make it too hard, we will not have it, and the rescue capability will come from Warrnambool, Hamilton or wherever. That is the risk.

The ACTING CHAIR — Other than training requirements, are there any other barriers you see to attracting volunteers into the SES?

Mr MAYWALD — I do. I think it is a sign of the times. We have a changing population base in rural and remote areas. In my experience, which comes from a number of years in the SES, people have two motivators to be a volunteer. Some people, particularly urban people, do it for the challenge, life experience, get some skills, social interaction — you name it. When you get more remote and rural — Colac and out, perhaps — people do it because no-one else is there to do it. They do the road crash rescue, the marine rescue or the search and rescue, because if they do not do it, no-one else will.

The challenge that we have is finding the balance between having suitably and appropriately trained people who do not put themselves or someone else at risk and who can maintain a high level of standard, versus overdoing it, and still having it relevant. As Steve said, he runs a business, has a family and is a volunteer. It is getting harder. There are a number of compliance requirements, be they health and safety or registered training organisation requirements, and it is all getting harder. They are a challenge, and the challenge for us is to make training readily deliverable, near to home and relevant to what they are doing.

Mr EIDEH — The committee has received evidence that Victoria's eastern and western coasts are undersupplied in terms of rescue services. This is in contrast to Port Phillip and Western Port bays, where there is a perceived oversupply of services. In your opinion, is there an undersupply of marine search and rescue services along the western coast of Victoria?

Mr MAYWALD — I do not know if I am qualified or in a position to give you a qualified answer on that. My opinion is not — because we have Portland, we have Warrnambool, we have Port Fairy, and I would suggest that at every major hub along the western coast we have a rescue capability. That rescue capability would then be where the majority of recreational or commercial fishers go. If you are talking about the commercial fleet that operate 50 to 100 nautical miles to sea, that takes a very specialised rescue resource. That might be under catered. Port MacDonnell, just on the South Australian side of the border, does not have anything, and I know that it has got a big commercial fishing base. I am not certain that Portland can support that. My suggestion is we might be slightly underresourced, but for the conditions that vessels are expected to operate in in these waters we are probably looking at a far more specialised resource than we are provided through volunteer marine search and rescue.

Mr EIDEH — In your opinion you are not undersupplied?

Mr MAYWALD — I cannot give an honest, informed opinion on that because I have not looked at the figures that say, 'We have X amount of rescues'. I do not know what the boating population is. I do not know if a lot of people go where we do not have resources. From an inland perspective I am very comfortable that we are well catered for. We have the vessels in the right place to do the right thing. We do not have an offshore responsibility as such, so I do not spend a lot of time looking at our response capability for offshore. So I really cannot answer that — not with any qualified sort of answer.

The ACTING CHAIR — There has been some evidence before the committee which has suggested an apparent inconsistency in the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria*. While Victoria Police has the overall responsibility as the control agency for marine and water-related rescue incidents, the responsibility for flood responses — and you touched on this in your opening comments — resides with the SES. Can you comment on whether you are aware of any potential instances of conflict with regard to one agency attempting to override the other?

Mr MAYWALD — The risk comes from not having a consolidated database for deployment, and that is right across the board for rescue. For example, road crash rescue operates on an agreed product: we have an agreed dispatch; we have an agreed scale ability; and it is all run through a central database managed for the services by ESTA. The general principle is that the nearest, fastest and most appropriate resource gets the job. That is not the case with marine. It does still rely on largely a pushed pin on a map. That relies on local knowledge, and if that local knowledge is not around, then the outcome is likely to be quite different. That could

be the same for Water Police as well. If you have a different operator sitting in Williamstown, you are likely to have a different outcome.

I would say there is a risk, and the solution to that is to have a consolidated database where we use the principles, similar to road crash, of nearest, fastest, most appropriate. That could well mean that the inland waters at Warrnambool become an SES dispatch, because we can get the vessel in the water quicker. That is great, but once you go past the mouth, then it becomes not an appropriate vessel. But the dispatch — the way we get to that point — is the same. It is done by a set of questions that identify the vessel. We have all the vessels located in the database, which is displayed in the CAD system, and it is dispatched accordingly. Who owns that does not matter. If you look at search and rescue generally, it is done by police, and road crashes are in the same boat, but we have a management system for that. What is lacking with marine rescue is that management system.

The ACTING CHAIR — Thank you. You have answered my next question as well, so that is very good. We did touch briefly upon fundraising and some of the particular challenges — and various other organisations and marine rescue organisations have outlined this. Are there any specific challenges for the SES in regard to marine rescue and fundraising?

Mr MAYWALD — Would you like to talk from a unit level?

Mr TEVELEIN — Certainly. Fundraising in any organisation is tough — that is a given — but a lot of the public see SES units as road crash. The majority of people in the community relate storms and road crashes to SES and not so much to water search and rescue. It is very underrated when it comes to publicising. You can be really pushing the button to raise money for search and rescue for water. For instance, a new vessel or simple drysuits to keep us warm on a cold, frosty day — because they are usually the days we are out — seem to be very, very hard to get hold of. It is simple things, like a drysuit, that are really, really needed, because we are going to get wet — it is as simple as that. But to ask the public to donate money or businesses to donate money for water rescue seems to be tough, whereas it does not seem to be as tough if you are hunting money for road rescue and stuff like that.

Mr MAYWALD — The SES has, compared to, say, CFA, a unique funding base. CFA receive their funds now through the levy. We still rely on match funding with local government, so we provide local government with the subsidy and they match it. Our accommodation is largely dependent upon the goodwill of local government. We do have a very small but, dare I say it, insufficient capital replacement program. But again, as I said before, with the cost of a vessel or a rescue truck a couple of million does not go very far when you look at the size of the organisation in Victoria. So units are reliant upon fundraising for the additional things that they need.

We provide the vessel with the life jackets and the flares and the mandatory operating equipment, but a lot of the additional operational training, some of the niceties that they have that go with it, are reliant upon the unit to fundraise for. Local government see us as being an agency that supports them in storms and floods and that sort of stuff. The community, as Steve said, largely see us as a road rescue organisation, and marine is not something that we are profiled highly for. Fundraising directly is at times a challenge, but I think generally it is just the environment we need to look at, and again it is about planning. Yes, it is difficult, but it is difficult on a day-to-day basis, not just for marine.

Mr EIDEH — A last question from me. As the regional manager for south-west region — and that comprises 23 units — is there any reason why Apollo Bay is not one of them?

Mr MAYWALD — It goes back to duplication of service. We had a unit at Anglesea, and we still currently have one at Port Campbell. So currently we have Lorne and Port Campbell — that is probably the easiest way to explain it. CFA conduct road crash rescue here, and we have a good working relationship with them as far as storm and flood support, so frankly it would be a duplication of effort to put a unit here. We have one at Beech Forest, so we do have units around here. SES is a little bit different to the fire service; you know, 7 minutes is a critical time for a fire, but the way we operate we do not have that criticality of time. We can stage a lot more, we can plan, we can take 20 minutes to get somewhere to do the job. Having that spread of units is fine, and you will see that we have 23 units in the region. We have just over 500 volunteers. It would be nice to have a few more volunteers, but our points of presence are about right for the jobs we do. I do not see the need to have a

unit here, to be frank, when the services that we could provide are provided in the first instance by someone else and are done very effectively, very efficiently and we can support them from there.

Mr EIDEH — That is fair enough. You have got them in Port Fairy and Warrnambool, you know, so you could suggest why not Apollo Bay?

Mr MAYWALD — I think if you had a green field and you started again and you put push pins on the map, you would look at Apollo Bay, but you would not go back and do that because, as I said, we are fine. But it would be nice to come to Apollo Bay occasionally.

Mr EIDEH — It is a nice place.

Mr MAYWALD — Yes, it is nice. It is lovely.

The ACTING CHAIR — Is there anything further you would like to comment on today?

Mr TEVELEIN — No, I do not think so. Pretty cruisy.

Mr MAYWALD — Thanks for the opportunity to put our case forward. It is not necessarily out of the scope, but I think inland search and rescue is a little bit of a forgotten rescue service. As I said, I come from a state where everything is marine. But inland waters — we have got big lakes, big rivers and flood risks, and it is an important thing that we do.

The ACTING CHAIR — Thank you for that, and thank you very much for your attendance and contribution today. We also thank the volunteers of the SES for all that they do in their communities and for the state of Victoria. You will receive a copy of the transcript from today in about a fortnight's time. You will have an opportunity to correct any typographical errors that may be in that transcript but not to change any matters of substance. We thank you for your time today.

Witnesses withdrew.