

# CORRECTED VERSION

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

### **Inquiry into Marine Rescue Services in Victoria**

Melbourne — 24 March 2014

#### Members

Mr N. Burgess

Mrs I. Peulich

Mr K. Eideh

Mr A. Ronalds

Mr F. McGuire

Chair: Mr N. Burgess

Deputy Chair: Mr F. McGuire

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Mr N. Bunt

Research Officer: Mr M. Newington

#### Witness

Country Fire Authority

Mr Steven Warrington, Deputy Chief Officer, Emergency Management  
(*via teleconference*).

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee, which is an all-party parliamentary committee inquiring into marine rescue services in Victoria. All evidence taken at this hearing will be protected by parliamentary privilege; however, anything you have to say outside this conference will not have such protection. Do you understand that?

**Mr WARRINGTON** — I do.

**The CHAIR** — Can you state your full name and address, whether you are representing an organisation and your role in that organisation.

**Mr WARRINGTON** — My name is Steven Warrington. I am a deputy chief officer with the Country Fire Authority. My address is [REDACTED]

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. The evidence you give will become a public document at some point, so I give you that caution and ask you to proceed with an oral submission.

**Mr WARRINGTON** — Certainly, and can I say from the outset, thank you, gentlemen, for allowing me to present via telephone. It is obviously a busy operational year for us, and there is still a fair bit happening within the CFA. In regard to the question at hand, CFA's position is that we do not have a great deal to do with marine response and rescue. There are two elements to our business. One is we have taken the opportunity to register the Australian Coast Guard flotillas as CFA brigades for the purposes of extinguishing fires in the country area of Victoria, which is in Port Phillip Bay, Western Port Bay and the seaboard around the Victorian coastline. The second area is we have a fire boat on Lake Eildon that serves its purpose to extinguish fires but we built it from a point of view that we can provide services for Ambulance Victoria should it require us to transport people in and around Lake Eildon. You would also appreciate that all of these people are mutually involved in cooperative approaches — interoperability if you like — between the agencies, so if a search and rescue was requested, we could participate in that. From the outset, CFA's involvement in this area is not great.

If I may, I will make a couple of observations, and our experience in this space allows us to provide these thoughts. One is our opinion that there is some merit in considering the new Emergency Management Victoria as a means for future governance arrangements, or a future lead, for marine response across the state into the future in lieu of the current arrangements with Victoria Police. Two, we would also recommend or give thought to an agreed funding arrangement. We say that on the back of being aware particularly of our Coast Guard brigade. They rely heavily on donations or support they receive from our agencies. Three, I notice your terms of reference talk about communications. I point out that CFA or Coast Guard have issued 100 pagers to our Coast Guard brigade and indeed they have bought another 100 pagers, so there are 200 pagers. We have installed CFA radios in all the Coast Guard flotillas as well.

On the back of that, unfortunately ESTA see that, albeit these Coast Guards are registered as CFA brigades, as an additional service, so it would be smart to have ESTA as the responding agency for all — whether it is search and rescue, fire or emergency events — marine activities in Victoria, which could be easily done. It is simply a matter of costs for us — for the state, I guess. Those are the only issues we would bring to the table.

In saying that, we would recommend — there are, I think, three agencies involved in this marine area and there are some private operators; I will not name them, I think the committee members would know who they are — and it would seem to make sense from CFA's point of view that they be required to at least register themselves with one of the organisations that is a registered training organisation to ensure training standards, interoperability and communications are all met as well.

I think I can save you a fair amount of time and leave my CFA submission at that. In summary, we do not have a big area in search and rescue. Our game is obviously fire. Having said that, we support as requested in search and rescue, if requested. We have registered all the Coast Guard brigades in Victoria as CFA brigades so they provide that service for us, and as such we provide them with in kind and everything from assistance for volunteers, to sustainability, to finances, to communications-type equipment, and we also have the boat at Lake Eildon.

One more point, if I may, just in finishing up. The other issue for us, just reflecting on Lake Eildon, is that the new coxswain or the new training requirements regime has caused us some problems in trying to maintain the training requirements to operate the boat at Lake Eildon, given that it is a volunteer service.

**The CHAIR** — Is that a timing thing, Steve, or cost?

**Mr WARRINGTON** — Both — it is the workload involved to achieve a ticket in that space and also the cost involved to do it in what is a volunteer-based organisation at Lake Eildon. That would be it from me, gentlemen.

**The CHAIR** — Can I ask you on that, what do you think is the solution for that as far as the coxswain's qualifications are concerned?

**Mr WARRINGTON** — We have had discussions with people such as the SES. The bottom line for us is that we believe we have delivered this service for some time and some of the requirements being brought into place now are quite onerous on our people, both financially and in time, to be able to continue to provide that service.

Perhaps there is an opportunity — I do not think we would support a double standard for volunteerism, but we say that the workload required on a location such as Lake Eildon is quite significantly different than if you are operating in the channel of Port Phillip Bay, for instance, which has major shipping. Ostensibly a place like Lake Eildon is effectively recreational craft. It is also about the fact that we are able to land on a service and pick up patients. I think we have designed that within the boat collaboratively with Ambulance Victoria, to pick up a patient and transport them to a more mobile ambulance. We would argue that it should be almost risk-based competency, and as such Lake Eildon for instance, in our case, would have a lot less risk compared to, as I said, the main shipping channel of Port Phillip Bay.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Steve. I believe the Deputy Chair has a question for you.

**Mr McGuire** — Steve, thank you very much. If you could understand that we are looking at what would be a better coordinated systemic model and what would be a more efficient and effective way of doing things. I know you have put it that your game is fire, but as you do have some role in this area I just wanted to get your views. This committee has heard evidence from some members of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard regarding the benefits of co-location of CFA bases, such as the creation of emergency response clusters. Is there anywhere you think that could be of benefit, just to better coordinate?

**Mr WARRINGTON** — Absolutely, and off the top of my head I will not know them because I do not have that at my fingertips but we have already had a couple of co-located facilities. We do that with SES and where we can with Coast Guard. It is an approach we are taking right across Victoria.

Interestingly enough, I think the parallels here would be in road rescue where you have three agencies providing road rescue in Victoria. There are road rescue arrangements that have a coordinated approach to make sure that there are not just standards set but interoperability between all the agencies. Effectively a CFA truck could turn up on scene at an MFB-type incident or an SES vehicle could turn up in a CFA area and work collaboratively together. The response arrangements now are not based on the old geographical boundaries but on what we call radial search, for which ESTA is able to provide us with the quickest and most effective service to the community irrespective of the badge or banner you wear.

We would argue that there could potentially be a similar approach taken by virtue of providing these services through ESTA and that the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority is able to take the call and dispatch, using a recognised pager system that is already available — certainly the SES have access to that, and MFB and CFA have access to pagers, and when I say CFA I am talking about the Coast Guard — and that could then do communication. Again, through that one common approach it would ensure that best service delivery is provided to the community.

**Mr McGuire** — Are you totally in favour of that one common approach strategy?

**Mr WARRINGTON** — Again, I qualify all this. Marine search and rescue is not our field of expertise, but we do see good cooperation between the agencies in the road rescue arena. It was in a similar position to this some years ago, and there was some work done to produce a document that the agencies all signed up to. Now there is a degree of consistency and that continues to improve through a common doctrine that is occurring — under the fire services commissioner, admittedly — but it is bringing the agencies together. We see that work continuing in Emergency Management Victoria, in the new emergency management arrangements. There is a good opportunity for us to continue that work with the new organisation.

**Mr McGuire** — Is that a blueprint for this committee to examine?

**Mr WARRINGTON** — I think it is an exciting opportunity that, certainly from our agency's perspective, we would be keen to support.

**Mr McGuire** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Any other questions?

**Mr WARRINGTON** — I thought I would save you some time.

**The CHAIR** — Steve, you have done very well. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for taking time out of what must be an extremely busy day. You are doing very important work on behalf of the state. Thank you very much for having taken this time and for the information you have provided to us. You will receive a transcript of the hearing, in the next few weeks. Could you just look through it, and let us know if you believe there are any mistakes, but please do not make any changes to the substance of the document.

**Mr WARRINGTON** — No worries. Thank you, and have a good day.

**Witness withdrew.**