

CORRECTED VERSION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Marine Rescue Services in Victoria

Inverloch — 9 April 2014

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Inverloch State Emergency Service

Mr Angelo Chiodo, Controller

The CHAIR — Welcome to the hearing of the Economic Development Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee. This is an all-party parliamentary committee which is hearing evidence today on the inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege, but anything you say outside this forum will not be afforded the same privilege. Could I ask you to state your full name, address and whether you are representing a particular organisation.

Mr CHIODO — I am Angelo Chiodo, and my address is [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I am the controller of the Inverloch SES.

The CHAIR — Excellent, thank you very much for that. The evidence you give today will also become a public document, so anything you say today will become public as part of the evidence presented to this inquiry. I invite you now to give an oral submission.

Mr CHIODO — My main concern here is the bar, which has sanded up, and I do not think anything can be done about it. If they dredge it, the sand will just come back.

The CHAIR — What is it causing? What is the effect?

Mr CHIODO — If we got a call out here at dead low tide, we would not be able to get out.

The CHAIR — Right. How long has that been the case?

Mr CHIODO — About 9 months or 10 months it has been like that.

The CHAIR — If there was call out here, you would be called to go out, say, 3 or 4 nautical miles?

Mr CHIODO — We should be.

The CHAIR — The SES.

Mr CHIODO — SES, yes. We would handle it.

The CHAIR — Why not the Coast Guard?

Mr CHIODO — It is too far away. They are at Welshpool and we are here.

The CHAIR — How long does it take them to get here?

Mr CHIODO — It would probably take them 2 or 3 hours on a calm sea.

The CHAIR — Okay. Do I understand it that you perform the marine rescue from the SES's perspective in this area because there is no Coast Guard?

Mr CHIODO — Yes. We started off years and years ago here. We were all volunteers and it was called Anderson's search and rescue group. I was a foundation member of that. Then the SES came along and they had money and we did not have any.

The CHAIR — Money talks.

Mr CHIODO — So we changed. We switched over.

The CHAIR — Now you are the Inverloch area SES.

Mr CHIODO — Yes.

The CHAIR — And you fulfil the same task as VMR or the Coast Guard does in other areas?

Mr CHIODO — Yes, as well as going out and cutting up trees and helping out.

The CHAIR — Of course, everything else the SES does.

Mr CHIODO — We secure roofs and things like that.

The CHAIR — How many members do you have?

Mr CHIODO — We have about 18 at the moment.

The CHAIR — Right, so 18 members. How many of them are qualified in marine rescue?

Mr CHIODO — We have two coxswains who are qualified to take the large boat, the Stabicraft.

The CHAIR — How many boats do you have?

Mr CHIODO — We have two. We have a RIB, which is an inflatable boat with a solid bottom, and we have the Stabicraft.

The CHAIR — How long is it?

Mr CHIODO — I think it is 9.5 metres

The CHAIR — And you have two coxswains who can take that?

Mr CHIODO — They can take that, yes. I am not qualified to take it. I served six years in the Royal Australian Navy, the seamen branch. I was behind the helm of a lot of boats and ships — —

The CHAIR — Big boats?

Mr CHIODO — But the SES do not recognise the navy qualifications.

The CHAIR — Do they not?

Mr CHIODO — No. That is strange, but that is what they are like.

The CHAIR — You have 18 — —

Mr CHIODO — I am a crewman; I can go out as a crew member.

The CHAIR — Do all of the 18 qualify to be crew?

Mr CHIODO — No.

The CHAIR — How many?

Mr CHIODO — We have got five crew.

The CHAIR — There are two coxswains and five crew?

Mr CHIODO — Yes.

The CHAIR — So seven, with two boats?

Mr CHIODO — Yes.

The CHAIR — Where do you get your equipment from? Do you have to fundraise for that?

Mr CHIODO — Yes, we do a little bit of fundraising but we get help from the shire, Bass Coast, to help us out and various Lions clubs and things like that.

The CHAIR — And the state government?

Mr CHIODO — And the state government, yes.

The CHAIR — What about insurance?

Mr CHIODO — The SES has got us insured.

The CHAIR — Okay, that is interesting.

Mr CHIODO — I do not know how that happens, but SES has got us insured. That is why we have to do all these courses, I think. We have chaps there who are virtually arborists but they have to go and get a chainsaw certificate from the SES. That is a two-day course.

The CHAIR — And the people from the navy have to go and get a coxswain's certificate?

Mr CHIODO — Coxswain's, yes. I had to get a coxswain's to take the RIB out.

The CHAIR — Is the coxswain's that you are asked to get a commercial one?

Mr CHIODO — No.

The CHAIR — It is a Coast Guard — —

Mr CHIODO — No, for the big boat it is commercial.

The CHAIR — But not for the little one?

Mr CHIODO — Not for the little one. Because the big boat is registered commercially.

The CHAIR — Okay. Is the big boat in survey?

Mr CHIODO — Yes.

The CHAIR — Every year?

Mr CHIODO — Yes. It is under survey. That is why those two can take it out. They went and did the course. SES paid for the course.

Mr EIDEH — Angelo, I want to ask you: how closely do you work with other nearby rescue services, such as Phillip Island Marine Rescue, the Waratah marine rescue service and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association?

Mr CHIODO — We were called out recently down to Kilcunda. I do not know if you saw the news where a boat disappeared at night. We worked with — there were six boats down there: the Coast Guard, the police and us. We all worked together, we all got on well.

The CHAIR — That is good.

Mr EIDEH — You work closely, that is good.

Mr CHIODO — One thing that worries me is: do people know we are here?

The CHAIR — I am probably not in a situation to be able to answer that.

Mr CHIODO — Sometimes we get a call pretty quickly from the police and at other times things happen and we think, 'Hey, why weren't we called out?'

The CHAIR — Do your call-outs always come from the water police at Williamstown?

Mr CHIODO — Mostly. We have got a pager system and when that pager goes off we get — —

The CHAIR — Do you get paged from marine rescue as well?

Mr CHIODO — No, we only get paged from the SES. It goes through the SES.

The CHAIR — Does your marine rescue all come from the water police at Williamstown?

Mr CHIODO — Sometimes one of the coxswains knows somebody, and he will get a call.

The CHAIR — That is more of an informal way.

Mr CHIODO — Somebody will ring him, and he will put out a page for us to attend the headquarters.

The CHAIR — How does that get back to the water police? Or does it not?

Mr CHIODO — We can talk to them via radio.

The CHAIR — Do you always contact them to tell them when you are called out?

Mr CHIODO — No, we do not, not until we have come in.

The CHAIR — Do you do that then?

Mr CHIODO — Yes.

The CHAIR — Is that mandatory?

Mr CHIODO — Yes, we have to notify. We have got a little book there we fill in, and then we go to the pager service and tell them we have done the job, the job has been completed.

The CHAIR — They do not even know the job exists?

Mr CHIODO — Who? The water police?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr CHIODO — Yes, they would know.

The CHAIR — But if that came through — —

Mr CHIODO — See if we do a job for the water police —

The CHAIR — Yes, but otherwise — —

Mr CHIODO — we get allowance for the fuel. The water police pay for the fuel.

The CHAIR — So if it comes via one of your officers rather than the water police and you go out and do it and let them know when you come back, do you still get reimbursed?

Mr CHIODO — That is a good question. I am not really sure on that. We generally get a job number; the water police will give us a call-out number.

The CHAIR — Which goes on your documentation for reimbursement?

Mr CHIODO — Yes, and then we get reimbursed.

The CHAIR — Is that reimbursement done by fax?

Mr CHIODO — I do not know. We have got a good treasurer, and he handles all that.

The CHAIR — That is the way. Is there a potential for times when you are notified by somebody else that there is a problem out on the water, you go and attend to that, and when you come back you report that as a matter of course to the water police, tell them you have been out and done that, and sometimes that can be the first they have heard of that job?

Mr CHIODO — Yes. Normally we would not report it. In the inlet, if somebody is stuck on a sandbar or something, we will whip out and bring them in. We just notify ESTA — that is, SES — and we will not bother with telling the police.

The CHAIR — So the water police would never know that happened?

Mr CHIODO — No, possibly never.

The CHAIR — At the moment we have got an issue with the bar getting sanded up.

Mr CHIODO — Yes, we have.

The CHAIR — Has that happened before?

Mr CHIODO — No, not in my memory it has not. We have always been able to scrape through. There has always been a small channel there to get through.

The CHAIR — And there is not now?

Mr CHIODO — It is local knowledge that comes through, and GPSs are really good, but sand moves and you can get it on the GPS.

The CHAIR — We were looking at Waratah, up near the mouth today. The mouth there has moved completely; it goes in a different direction.

Mr CHIODO — This is a nightmare when the floods come. When the Tarwin River is flooded, the water turns brown. We can read the water when it is clean —

The CHAIR — But you cannot see?

Mr CHIODO — but you cannot read it when it is muddy. But local knowledge again, we have got a fair idea where we are going.

The CHAIR — You go out and do a little bit of touch parking?

Mr CHIODO — We have got sounders on the boat, and we can watch that it is coming up shallow. It is an ‘Aha! We’re going the wrong way’ sort of thing, and we can turn it around and find our way that way.

The CHAIR — Would different equipment allow you to go out over the bar?

Mr CHIODO — No, it will not make our boat go shallower, that sort of thing. We have got that weight. We only take 4 feet of water. We can get through — —

The CHAIR — And you still cannot get out?

Mr CHIODO — No, we still cannot get out. If it is rough weather, we may be able to get out by waiting for a wave to lift us —

The CHAIR — Take you over it?

Mr CHIODO — and move a bit, but that is a dangerous manoeuvre to do that.

The CHAIR — And also you have got to get back.

Mr CHIODO — If we are out there for an hour or so and the tide is going to move, it is coming in and we come in easily. It is quite safe coming in as a rule, because you get on the back of a big wave — —

The CHAIR — And go straight across the top?

Mr CHIODO — No, you just follow it in. You sit on the back, you follow it into the bay and then it is smooth. Going out is a different question.

The CHAIR — Angelo, the issue you wanted to talk to us about today was the bar?

Mr CHIODO — The bar is our main concern, yes.

The CHAIR — Do you have others?

Mr CHIODO — No, not really. We are quite happy.

The CHAIR — All right. If you needed new equipment such as a new boat, how would you go about that?

Mr CHIODO — I do not know how we would get on there. The boat is not that old at the moment, but it would be nice to have a new boat one day. This boat is very stable, but in rough water it is very hard on the people in it.

The CHAIR — Jolting?

Mr CHIODO — Yes. With some of the things we have done with that boat, it has taken us a week or so to get over it.

The CHAIR — Has it? It jars you, does it?

Mr CHIODO — Yes. When you come back in you get shook up, jarring, yes.

The CHAIR — That must be very difficult.

Mr CHIODO — Yes. It is a bit hard. My concern is that if we were out there and had to bring somebody in who was injured and had them laying down, I think we would be doing them a lot of harm.

The CHAIR — Yes. I can understand that. We will certainly consider what you have had to say today, Angelo, and particularly the circumstances. There is a concern at the moment, as I understand what you are saying, that given the right circumstances or the wrong circumstances of weather and tide, you could be locked into a situation where people could be in real trouble out past the bar and you cannot get to them.

Mr CHIODO — That is a bit of a shame, but we have not struck it yet, and hopefully we will not.

The CHAIR — There is still potential there though, isn't there?

Mr CHIODO — There is a potential, yes.

The CHAIR — It is really good of you to envisage that and be able to bring it to our attention. We really appreciate that, and we really appreciate your time today and the evidence you have given us. We are very grateful to you for coming, particularly at such a late hour.

Mr CHIODO — I am sorry I was late.

The CHAIR — That is okay. You are doing us a favour by being here, believe me. What will happen now, Angelo, is that you will receive a copy of the transcript in a couple of weeks. Have a look at it and if you think there are any grammatical errors or anything like that, by all means point them out to us; otherwise there can be no change to the substance of the document. On behalf of the committee, we are very grateful that you do what you do, and you obviously do it very well, and that you have taken the time to be here today to see us.

Mr CHIODO — Thank you.

The CHAIR — It is our pleasure.

Mr CHIODO — We get our reward by feeling good when we do something.

The CHAIR — Good on you. The community is very thankful to you. Thank you very much.

Mr CHIODO — Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.