Our Ref: BS | LR

28 February 2025

Mr Jeremy Smith
Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner
Department Police, Fire and Emergency Services
Tasmania Fire and Emergency Services Reforms

Via Email: tfes@dpfem.tas.gov.au

Dear Jeremy

Tasmania Fire and Emergency Services Reforms – Establishing the State Fire and Emergency Services Commission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the establishment of the State Fire and Emergency Services Commission. This submission has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) on behalf of Tasmanian local government in collaboration with our members; all 29 councils.

LGAT is incorporated under the *Local Government Act 1993* and is the representative body and advocate for local government in Tasmania. Where a council has made a direct submission to this process, any omission of specific comments made by that council in this submission should not be viewed as lack of support by LGAT for that specific issue.

Local government is broadly supportive of the reforms, providing that the sector's perspectives and interests are integrated into the reforms, given the critical role that it plays in risk reduction, emergency management and recovery. We would also strongly encourage the continued work on developing a sustainable funding model for fire and emergency services.

We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Tasmanian Government and key stakeholders to shape a fire and emergency services framework that is effective, resilient, and responsive to community needs.

If you have any questions or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact Senior Policy Advisor, Bec Stevenson, bec.stevenson@lgat.tas.gov.au, or (03) 6146 3748.

Yours sincerely,

Dion Lester
Chief Executive Officer

LGAT Submission: Establishing the State Fire and Emergency Services Commission

Introduction

LGAT has been actively engaged in Fire and Emergency Services reform consultations since the 2020 Blake Fire Service Review. Local government has a strong interest in these reforms, particularly regarding the operations of individual services and their broader impact on emergency management. In particular, funding SES volunteer units and broader emergency management efforts, including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

The local government sector supports combining the SES and TFS into a single agency. This integration will improve coordination in responding to increasingly frequent emergencies such as floods, storms and bushfires.

Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, heightening risks for councils and communities. This growing complexity underscores the need for a well-coordinated, skilled and properly resourced emergency management capability.

General Comments

A skills-based board is a step forward

Establishing a skills-based board for the State Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SFESC) is a strong step toward enhancing leadership, governance and strategic decision-making.

A skills-based board will reduce conflicts of interest, promote objective decision-making and align governance structures with best practices. The proposed model fosters a focus on expertise in areas such as governance, risk management, financial reporting, and strategic planning, crucial for the effective management of fire and emergency services.

It is important to local government that there remain strong links with the sector given our role in collecting the levy, emergency management, supporting community preparedness, building community resilience and at a community level the single body that is present before, during and after an emergency. There will need to be a particular focus on strong engagement with councils to ensure improved coordination in responding to increasingly frequent emergencies. There should also continue to be related local government industry/sector experience in the SFESC skills matrix.

The inclusion of disaster risk reduction (DRR) expertise in the governance structure aligns Tasmania with international best practices. A proactive approach to risk reduction enhances preparedness, minimizes vulnerabilities and strengthens community resilience. Elevating this as a core focus within the skills matrix will help to ensure risk reduction remains a sustained priority embedded in strategic planning and governance.

Local government subcommittee representation

It is essential that the proposed subcommittee structure retains local government representation to ensure this perspective is integrated into strategic planning and risk management. The establishment of subcommittees should consider the existing committees, their functions and roles to ensure there is clarity of purpose, limited duplication and maximised representation.

The City of Hobart has suggested a DRR Advisory Subcommittee to provide technical input and support risk management. This subcommittee could complement those for volunteers, employees, and the State Fire Management Council, ensuring DRR principles are consistently applied across government agencies.

Other matters requiring future consideration

Future Funding Model

The current funding model is overly complex, highly prescriptive, and relies on multiple sources, including local government. Reform is necessary to ensure sustainable funding.

Our position and response to the 2023 Bill remains current – increased funding is essential, as the current model is unsustainable for adequately resourcing fire and emergency services.

We look forward to working with the Tasmanian Government to establish a fire and emergency services funding model that is fit for purpose to support the SES and TFS under a single agency.

Local fire and SES volunteer units are important to communities, they play essential roles in in responding to incidents, as well as supporting local community events. Funding allocations for volunteer units should be included in the development of future funding models for the new single agency.

As part of TFES reform, centralising funding arrangements will be a critical step. This includes developing a transition plan for all SES asset transfers from councils and updating councils' legislative responsibilities.

Conclusion

The proposed reforms to Tasmania's Fire and Emergency Services represent a significant step toward a more integrated, efficient, and well-resourced emergency management system. Local government plays a crucial role in emergency preparedness, response and recovery, and it is essential that the sector's perspective continues to be reflected in governance, funding models and strategic decision-making.

A skills-based board, strengthened by disaster risk reduction expertise and local government representation, will enhance leadership, engagement and long-term planning. This will help to ensure that emergency services are equipped to meet the evolving challenges posed by climate change and increasing disaster complexity. Critically, a sustainable and equitable funding model is needed to support both professional and volunteer emergency services.