Local Government Association Tasmania

Our Ref: TB |LO'L

2 October 2026

TFES Reform Submissions
Strategy and Support
Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management

tfes@dpfem.tas.gov.au

Dear TFES Reform Team

Draft Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service Bill 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Draft Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service Bill 2026. 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 the LGAT for that specific issue.

Please contact Tim Boyle if you have any questions or would like further information, at tim.boyle@lgat.tas.gov.au or 0437136798.

Yours sincerely,



Dion Lester

Chief Executive Officer

LGAT Submission: Draft Tasmania Fire and Emergency Service Bill 2026

Introduction

We have 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 how individual services operate and their broader impact on emergency management. In particular, funding SES volunteer units and broader emergency management efforts, including prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Following the release of the draft Bill, we consulted Tasmanian councils to test and refine our existing policy positions. While councils were broadly supportive of the overall reform direction, feedback identified several areas where stronger clarification, safeguards or implementation arrangements are required. This submission reflects these issues throughout.

Many councils have made their own submissions to the state consultation. This submission is on behalf of the sector as a whole and does not necessarily represent all individual council concerns.

General Comments

LGAT's overall position

We broadly support the direction of the Tasmania Fire and Emergency Services (TFES) reforms and recognise that the draft Bill reflects several positions consistently advanced by local government over several years. However, council feedback identified five key issues.

1. Councils support the proposed governance reforms but consider local government expertise should continue to inform strategic decision-making, particularly in relation to disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate adaptation.
2. Councils consider the Bill should place greater emphasis on prevention, preparedness and resilience, recognising the increasing frequency and severity of natural hazards and the important role local government plays in reducing disaster risk.
3. Councils support integrating SES and TFS functions but need greater clarity on the future role of local government, including responsibilities for facilities, assets, funding and volunteer support.
4. Councils are concerned about the potential for new obligations, liabilities or costs to be transferred to local government without appropriate consultation, implementation planning and funding arrangements. Particularly, clauses 40 and 55 require amending to reduce this exposure to councils.
5. In general, we support a principles-based legislative framework with councils suggesting that matters with significant financial, operational or governance implications should be clearly articulated in legislation (rather than guidelines) and supported by ongoing engagement with local government.

Specific comments

Governance and strategic decision-making

We support the transition to a skills-based State Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SFESC) and believe it should collectively maintain expertise in emergency management, local government, disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, resilience, and volunteer workforce management. Local government remains a critical partner in Tasmania's emergency management system, and appropriate mechanisms should be established to ensure councils continue to contribute practical, place-based perspectives to strategic decision-making.

We also support legislated advisory and subcommittee arrangements that enable stakeholder expertise to inform the SFESC's work. Given the increasing frequency and severity of natural hazards, consideration should be given to establishing dedicated advisory mechanisms focused on disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate adaptation.

The reforms should also strengthen integration between Municipal Emergency Management Committees and Fire Management Area Committees through improved information sharing, joint planning processes and alignment of risk priorities

Recommendations

1. Ensure the SFESC governance framework and appointments process maintain expertise in emergency management, local government, disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, resilience and volunteer workforce management.
2. Establish formal mechanisms for local government participation in strategic decision-making, advisory structures and subcommittees.
3. Consider establishing a dedicated advisory mechanism focused on disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate adaptation to support long-term risk reduction and community resilience outcomes.

Resilience, disaster risk reduction, and climate change

Councils strongly supported greater recognition of disaster risk reduction, resilience-building, mitigation, community preparedness and climate adaptation within Tasmania's emergency management framework. Local government plays a key role in reducing disaster risk through land-use planning, infrastructure management, community engagement and place-based adaptation initiatives.

The Bill's objectives reflect community resilience and preparedness; however, the proposed reforms focus on governance, operational powers, and emergency response arrangements. We see an opportunity to place greater emphasis on how disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and resilience outcomes will be achieved in practice, particularly in the context of increasing climate-related risks.

Councils also noted that responsibility for disaster risk reduction is often devolved to them, despite significant variation in capability and resources across the sector. The State Government should play a stronger role in supporting resilience outcomes through statewide risk assessments, preparedness programs, technical guidance, data sharing, training and capability development.

We also see merit in establishing dedicated advisory arrangements focused on disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate adaptation. This would help ensure strategic oversight of future risks, strengthen cross-sector collaboration and provide an ongoing mechanism for local government input into resilience planning.

Recommendation

1. That the TFES governance, planning and advisory framework include an ongoing focus on disaster risk reduction, resilience, community preparedness and climate adaptation.
2. That local government expertise be incorporated into relevant disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate adaptation advisory mechanisms established under the TFES framework.

SES responsibilities, funding, and transition arrangements

Councils expressed concern that the Bill does not provide sufficient clarity regarding future responsibilities for facilities, equipment, assets, volunteer support, operational funding and ongoing municipal support obligations.

We note that SES support arrangements currently vary across Tasmania, resulting in differing levels of financial and in-kind contributions from local government. While councils recognise the value of maintaining strong relationships with local SES volunteers and municipal emergency management structures, many indicated that they need greater certainty about the future role of local government under the proposed framework.

In particular, councils require certainty regarding:

- facilities ownership and maintenance responsibilities
- equipment ownership, replacement and lifecycle responsibilities
- compliance and service delivery expectations
- funding obligations and financial implications
- future governance and accountability arrangements.

A recurring theme in council feedback was that SES is a state emergency service and that the reforms should provide a pathway towards more consistent statewide funding and support arrangements.

We also note that the Bill continues the requirement for councils to support municipal SES volunteer units. Local government does recognise the important contribution councils make to local emergency management capability, it is important that any future standards, directions or requirements established by TFES be developed in partnership with councils and accompanied by appropriate implementation support.

Recommendations

1. That the Government develop implementation arrangements affecting councils in consultation with local government and provide clear guidance on future roles, responsibilities and funding arrangements.
2. That a transition plan be developed to clarify future SES funding, asset ownership, facilities management and support responsibilities.

Council obligations, cost-shifting, and accountability

We do not support provisions that may impose new obligations, liabilities or costs on councils without adequate consultation, implementation planning and funding arrangements.

Several councils raised serious concerns regarding clauses 40 and 55, which may enable TFES to direct actions, establish standards or impose requirements with significant operational and financial implications for local government.

Councils were particularly concerned about the risk of unintended cost-shifting from the State Government to local government. Feedback emphasised the need to ensure councils are not required to assume additional responsibilities for emergency management, land management, facilities, assets or volunteer support without appropriate resourcing and legislative clarity. Sufficient notice (at least 1 year) should be provided to councils to allow for budget cycles.

Several councils also sought stronger accountability mechanisms for decisions that could impose significant obligations or liabilities on local government.

Recommendations

1. That clauses 40 and 55 be reviewed to ensure councils are not subject to unreasonable or unfunded obligations arising from TFES directions, standards or operational requirements.
2. That any new responsibilities imposed on councils be accompanied by appropriate consultation, implementation support and funding arrangements.
3. That the Bill provide clear accountability, consultation and review mechanisms where decisions have the potential to impose significant obligations or costs on local government.

Fire levy and Funding Arrangements

Councils also provided feedback on funding arrangements, beyond the scope of the consultation paper, highlighting a range of concerns about the current fire levy model and councils' continued role in levy administration.

While councils expressed differing views on the equity of current arrangements, administrative burden, and preferred funding alternatives, they supported further examination of levy arrangements. A consistent theme was that councils should not bear the costs of administering State funding arrangements. Where councils continue to collect property-based contributions on behalf of the State, full cost recovery should cover all associated administrative, systems, staffing, reporting, customer service and debt management functions.

Recommendations

1. That the Government review the equity, transparency and administrative efficiency of existing fire levy arrangements.
2. That local government be consulted on any future changes to emergency services funding and levy administration.
3. That the ongoing role of councils in collecting and administering emergency services levies be considered as part of future funding reforms.

Legislative certainty and protection from future regulatory change

Councils expressed concern that many important policy, operational and financial matters are proposed to be addressed through regulations rather than the Act itself. While a principles-based approach is supported, councils noted that reliance on regulations increases the importance of transparency, accountability and stakeholder engagement, particularly where future changes may create new obligations, liabilities or costs.

Councils preferred that matters with significant financial or operational implications for local government, including funding arrangements, council responsibilities, compliance obligations and exemption provisions, be clearly articulated in legislation wherever possible.

We consider that legislative certainty is essential for effective governance and long-term planning.

Recommendations

1. That matters with significant financial, operational or governance implications for local government be prescribed in the Act wherever practicable.
2. That councils and key stakeholders continue to be consulted on regulations, policies and implementation arrangements developed under the TFES legislative framework.
3. That any future regulations affecting council responsibilities, liabilities or funding obligations be developed transparently and with appropriate sector engagement.

Volunteers

We support the inclusion of a legislated Volunteer Charter and recognise the critical role volunteers play in supporting Tasmanian communities before, during and after emergencies. We support measures that recognise volunteer contributions, promote volunteer wellbeing, provide appropriate protections, support recruitment and retention, and maintain strong community connections.

We also support efforts to strengthen leadership capability within volunteer units. However, implementation should continue to recognise the importance of volunteer participation, local knowledge and community connections. Changes to leadership arrangements should strengthen operational capability while preserving volunteer engagement and ownership.

Recommendations

1. Retain a strong Volunteer Charter that supports volunteer wellbeing, recruitment, retention and recognition.
2. Ensure volunteer leadership reforms are implemented in partnership with volunteers and maintain strong local engagement and community connections.