



EMERGENCY SERVICES VOLUNTEERS ASSOCIATION INC.

REVIEW OF EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY

FEBRUARY 2017

Introduction

On behalf of the Emergency Services Volunteers Association Inc (ESVA) I would like to thank the Economic Regulation Authority for affording the ESVA the opportunity to provide comment on the Emergency Services Levy review.

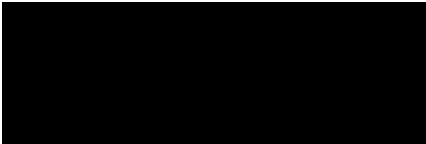
The ESVA understands and appreciates the importance of the ESL funding and the political ramifications surrounding the distribution of the funding to Emergency Services organisations within Western Australia.

This report will outline a number of opportunities to enhance the ESL system to ensure it is equitable for all Career and Volunteer emergency service personnel across WA.

The ESVA will respond to the questions framed in the Issues Paper.

If you seek clarity on any of our responses please contact the undersigned.

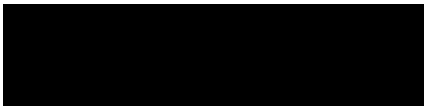
Yours sincerely,



MICHAEL QUINLAN

PRESIDENT

Emergency Services Volunteers Association Inc.



QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. How should funding be allocated across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery?

ESL funding should be allocated across prevention, preparedness & response by analysing the major risks across Western Australia and allocating the appropriate funding to the risks.

Recovery should be covered under the disaster relief funding.

The greatest risk to WA rural & urban interface communities is bushfire. Prevention (mitigation) programs to protect these communities needs to be funded through the ESL.

At AFAC 2016 Conference speakers from around the world and Australia emphasised the importance of all 4 factors of PPRR not just response. The speakers suggested emergency service organisations need to focus more on prevention, preparedness and recovery, so communities can be better protected from major hazards.

All speakers suggested the cost implications for response would be significantly reduced and emergency responders would be a lot safer if there was a shift of focus to prevention. This would assist in reducing the response costs therefore lessening the burden on ESL funding.

All organisations receiving ESL funding must show clear, transparent & accountability for the funding.

2. What should the ERA consider in assessing whether the current method for setting the ESL is appropriate for current and future needs?

The current ESL funding needs to be assessed to ensure enough funds are collected and to ensure the funds are being spent effectively, with clear accountability.

If/when the Rural Fires Service is established the ESL would need to be reviewed carefully as there will be duplications with the running of 2 Emergency Service managements, therefore extra costs.

The current procedure for collecting the ESL seems to be working well, however may need to look at amounts being collected from the different categories and maybe introduce a new category for those choosing to live in a “bushfire prone area”. This could also apply to some areas under Category 3.

Whilst ESL Category 5 residence pay a small amount, consideration may need to be given to the cost of an incident in these areas, given the remoteness of some of them.

It may seem under the current system the Metropolitan is also funding the Country towns and rural areas but, it must be remembered that the cost of a Career fire station is considerably more than the station manned by volunteers in smaller towns.

3. What emergency service expenditure should be funded by the ESL?

All expenses associated with emergency services should be covered by the ESL.

Buildings (a simplified building footprint for all services) Refurbishment & Rebuild

All emergency vehicles – supplied “fit for purpose”

Personal protective equipment

Personal protective clothing

All training

Logistics

IT

Administration

Management

Bushfire risk management planning

Mitigation / Prevention

4. How are emergency service expenditures likely to change in the future?

The advent of climate change is already having a major impact on emergency services with the size, complexity and duration of incidents such as storms, bushfire and flooding events. Experts are predicting these will all increase in frequency and size/strength in years to come.

These changes place a burden on emergency services in terms of PPRR. There will need to be a greater focus on PPRR so all emergency services are ready for any type of emergency.

If a proper Mitigation program is in place and enacted there would eventually be no need for major increases in the ESL, other than the usual CPI increases.

5. How could the method for setting the ESL be improved?

The only way it could be improved is to assess the risk in an area and by fully costing all requirements and allocating the ESL Category it fits into, instead of the type of emergency response in the area. Introduce a 6th Category for bushfire prone areas. Eg: A bushfire prone area in the Urban Metropolitan area is a higher risk than a regional city or a country town with good bushfire management strategies in place.

6. What information should be made public about the administration and distribution of ESL funding?

All information needs to be clear and transparent in a simplistic manner so all stakeholders can understand where the funding is being spent.

7. What process should be in place to ensure accountability in the expenditure of ESL funding?

An appropriate Risk to Resource model needs to be implemented.

Transparency and accountability for decision making is critical to the success of any system otherwise people will speculate the pros and cons of funding allocations.

The Annual DFES Report should disclose the breakdown of funding allocations and be Audited by an Independent Authority. They also need to undertake activity based costing for more accurate reporting.

If this was done there would be no need for reviews and enquiries.

8. Which agency should be tasked with distributing ESL funding from the ESL?

DFES, as the HMA for emergencies in WA should be distributing the ESL, with the above criteria. This would allay all fears that the ESL funding allocations are being managed appropriately.

9. If a Rural Fire Service is established should it be funded by the ESL?

Yes, within DFES. To do this there would need to be a review in the way the ESL categories and levies are set, as in question 5.

10. How much would the Rural Fire Service cost and what effect would it have on the ESL?

The ESVA together with Association of Volunteer Bushfire Brigades, State Emergency Service Volunteer Association, WA Farmers Federation and the Pastoral and Graziers WA have developed a sustainable cost effective model for a Rural Fire Service within WA.

In our view our RFS model would have minimal impact on the ESL.

Under our model the RFS would utilise and share many services already within DFES such as; Training Centre, State Operations Centre, Metropolitan Operations Centre, Administration.

The proposed RFS cost estimates are unknown at this stage however, it is suggested that under the current ESL arrangements and with a slight increase there would be sufficient funding for the RFS.