

Submission regarding Alternative Arrangements for Disaster Response.

I apologise for the late response, but only became aware of the call for submissions for alternative arrangements for emergency response. These comments are provided from a full-time paid emergency management (EMA 1991- 2006) and an SES volunteer (2007- 2023) perspective.

Observation- Declining Volunteer Base.

It is recognised that the nature of volunteering is changing. The number of emergency service volunteers is declining due to factors that have been well researched and documented. Unless this arrested our declining volunteer numbers will only get worse.

Suggestions

Combine volunteer functions (SES- Rural Fire service). In some cases, several personnel volunteer for both SES and Rural Fire service functions, Formalize the process where an SES and Rural Fire service groups are combined, better utilizing the existing volunteer base. This will require additional cross training, however, there is a degree of skills and training common to both functions. This is a stop-gap solution until volunteer numbers can be increased.

Increase focus of Volunteer Recruitment on Retirees. This often an untapped resource. Many retirees (over 55'S) having left the workforce have the time to volunteer for SES/RFS. Depending on their fitness, it is possible they could provide 5- 10 years of volunteer service. Which is good for a Volunteer.

Supplement Volunteers with paid trained personnel on a fee for service arrangement.

A system where trained personnel would be paid on a fee for service arrangement to supplement volunteers. This could be used when volunteers are overwhelmed or unavailable. This is in effect a backup to our volunteers. Personnel would need to provide an undertaking to:

- Be available for short notice callout over a specific timeframe
- Conduct periodic continuation training
- Be available for deployment intra and interstate

Funding for this program could be a joint Commonwealth state arrangement. States would be responsible to raised, train and maintain with financial support from the Commonwealth.

Improve Local Operational Capability

Provide Direct Funding to Groups/Brigades. Frontline agencies are normally aware of what equipment and facilities they need to **EFFECTIVELY** carry out their operational/functional role. In many cases when a need is identified, the group/brigade need to go and seek funding through grants to purchase items. This is just 'not acceptable.' If groups and brigades need equipment to carry out their functions then this should be provided and should not involve a *long- long- long frustrating bureaucratic* process to bid for the equipment, only to have turned down a year later. Emergency Management Australia in the 1980-90s provided a very useful program of directly supporting front line agencies with funding to purchase equipment, so long as it accorded their overarching organisational policies.

Local Government Emergency Operations/Coordination Centers

Local Government will be in the forefront when disaster impact their communities. They require an established Emergency Operations/Coordination (EOC/ECC) facility staffed with trained personnel conversant with Incident Management (AIIMS) procedures to manage the incident. While some well-resourced local governments, have established facilities that are staffed with full-time trained emergency managers, with facilities that are set-up for immediate activation, this not the case for many local governments due to inadequate funding.

The days where local government can quickly set up an ad hoc EOC/ECC to manage a major incident requiring IT/GIS integrated communication systems are gone. Properly set up facilities with appropriate IT/GIS and communication systems that allow for immediate activation under the management of a fulltime emergency manager will improve Local Government resiliency and disaster coordination. A Commonwealth/State jointly funded program that directly supports Local Governments with their EOC/ECCs should be considered.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these suggestions and Good Luck!

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