

.....
REVIEW OF THE EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY

Q1 More funding definitely needs to be allocated to Local Government and other land holder Government Agencies to improve fire prevention activities, especially hazard reduction burning in rural areas.

Q2 The ERA needs to have an in depth look at the current performance and productivity of the administration of the staff in both Cockburn Central and Regional Offices of DFES.
The current method of setting the ESL Levy is appropriate but it cannot keep increasing at the rate it has over the past 13 years (rural levy has doubled per rate assessment).

Q3 ESL funding should cover all operational aspects of DFES and the Rural Fire Service, except for a component of administration which should be Government funded as all other Government bodies are.

Q4 Expenditure should not change greatly with the creation of the Rural Fire Service if the reduction of staff and assets of DFES is managed in an appropriate manner. Many current positions may not be able to justify their existence.

Q5 No comment

Q6 There is very little knowledge of how the ESL is distributed. Rural Shires have to justify every dollar they get, whilst enormous amounts of money are wasted on unjustified positions in country and city offices of DFES. These offices should have a public budget to justify their existence.

Q7 If you receive the levy and set your own budget what accountability is there?
DFES should have to apply to an external body for funding and justify its bureaucracy before receiving allocation each year. Some appliances may also be redesigned to a more user friendly, fit for purpose, lower cost appliance.

The ESL Levy cannot continue to increase at the current rate.

Q8 This should be done by a board of knowledgeable people or the ERA or at worst State Treasury. With the pending creation of the Rural Fire Service the allocation of funding must be removed from DFES immediately to set appropriate levels of funding for each organisation. Staffing levels, offices and vehicles all need to be addressed with outside input.

Q9 The Rural Fire Service must be funded by ESL. DFES is currently claiming funding to operate rural fire management and support Local Governments. Even though they have failed in this roles, a huge amount of money has been absorbed by DFES that must be reallocated to the Rural Fire Service. Local Government grants also need to be extracted along with truck replacement funding. This needs to be managed by the Rural Fire Service.

Q10 If the restructure of DFES and the establishment of a Rural Fire Service is done with a performance based and cost effective structure plan, then the overall cost increase should not be significant. The reduction in expenditure in the operation of Cockburn Central office if reduced to an appropriate level will be very significant.
The State Government may need to partially fund the administration of both DFES and the Rural Fire Services if justified. The ESL rate is currently high enough in rural areas where many of us contribute thousands of dollars a year in labour to bush fire control.

.....
Kevin M Forbes AM
Chief Bushfire Control Officer - Shire of Plantagenet

13th February 2017