

ESL review – submission to draft report

Howe, Mr Jeff

Volunteer Marine Rescue Western Australia [Inc]

I write this email as the Commander of Volunteer Marine Rescue Western Australia (Inc) (VMRWA) the organisation recognised as the peak representative body for Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) in Western Australia following comments passed following the draft report's release.

Historically

VMR was previously funded directly from an allocation by Treasury until recently when the then WA Liberal Government saw fit to change that process and "insert" VMR into the ESL bucket but effectively "silo" us so that we had no access to increase funding other than to, through DFES, submit a Business Case which has been done to this current Government as it was to the previous Government. We certainly did not ask for this change.

VMRWA understands the way that the ESL is raised through rates and not every rateable property has a boat but the vast majority of ratepayers have at some time played beside, fished from or simply just entered the water for a swim and mercifully exited without any problem or need from us.

Community commitment is not "purely" marine based

One only has to go back to the recent Yarloop fires when multiple VMR Rescue Vessels were deployed to recover people trapped by the fire from the beach.

Go back even further to the Northcliffe fires Windy Harbour was placed on standby to do the same.

What about the countless rock fishermen that enter the water, they don't have a boat yet our volunteers spend countless hours searching to recover the deceased for their families.

And that is without those that have chosen to "end it all" the same VMR volunteers are there for their families too.

VMR Groups have previously saved several West Australian icons from destruction by fire that was inaccessible by land such as the Carnarvon jetty.

There is no way that VMR cannot be considered a community based service, sure predominantly we service mariners however I can reliably assure everyone that the sheer cost (both human and monetary) of these recoveries mostly of deceased persons theoretically with no water connections is huge. The toll it takes on volunteers is immense and to hear that we are not a community emergency service is disheartening to say the least.

VMR under the Fire and Emergency Services Act [Sect 18J (c)] we are designated to carry out assistance operations to any other emergency service as defined in Section 3 of the Act.

Benefits to the State and Community

VMR volunteers are saving the State hundreds of millions of dollars because if we weren't here the State would be at the forefront carrying out these tasks. That is the State's responsibility as prescribed Federally VMR is simply the combat agency that performs 95% of the Marine Search and Rescue events and a significant number tracking Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBS) on land as generally our Groups have the only local tracking devices.

What are we seeking

What we are seeking is a sustainable funding source to allow the Groups to continue to service the community of Western Australia.

VMRWA is reliably informed that the Department of Fire & Emergency Services (DFES) has submitted a Business Case for Volunteer Marine Rescue which is seeking funding to bring the Groups in Western Australia up to an appropriate level to ensure our service delivery and ongoing safety won't continue to be degraded largely due the rampant demands being placed on the service by the regulatory authority, Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) as part of COAG's Domestic Commercial Vessel rationalisation.

All levels of Government both State and Federal are imposing ever increasing charges, compliance regimes and continually increasing training standards on marine rescue volunteers which we comply with and to hear that we are not considered to be a community based emergency service is categorically wrong. Our charter is first and foremost to save lives, in our case at sea. Bringing back their vessels is the bonus if you like although many times it is too dangerous to effect transfer so it is safer to bring them home together.

Conclusion

Funding from recreational boat registrations has been considered and is used to fund the Department of Transport's Maritime Safety programs and other critical infrastructure.

Consider this recreational boating is no different to many other sports that have impact on the community albeit they are on land. Things like hiking, parachuting, rock fishing, camping in the bush, horse riding, trail bikes, etc are all recreational pastimes that are regularly serviced by the other emergency services and not questioned yet they are not fire related. The commonality is that they are all community recreational activities and so too is recreational boating.

All we are asking for is a funding stream that allows our volunteers the best chance of providing a life line to those that need it yet at the same time allowing the same volunteers a safe working environment. After all as I have previously alluded to is the fact that we are providing this service at what is very minimal cost to Government and the community at large. Everyone, and I mean everyone would be all the poorer without us.

I am not that removing VMR from the ESL is consistent with our role in emergency response.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this submission.