



Submission to Fire Services Review

Introduction

The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) has a strong connection with local communities and volunteers since its inception as the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation in 1950. Volunteerism has been at the core of the organisation from this time right up until today, where 5,045 volunteers are providing a breadth of emergency services to their communities.

There are 142 local headquarters (VICSES units) across the state from which volunteers operate and support their local communities, in addition to eight support units located at regional offices.

All members of VICSES units are volunteers and provide emergency response and education to their communities throughout the state. In Victoria, VICSES volunteers have traditionally and historically been dependent on local government for VICSES unit accommodation and funding.

As part of the current multi-agency operating environment, VICSES works closely with the fire services agencies on a range of emergency response services.

The purpose of this submission is to outline the current and future service direction of VICSES. Our submission also emphasises the importance of volunteerism and the support that is required to maintain a well trained and skilled workforce. VICSES delivers key service outcomes that are mandated in legislation.

This however is only a small component of the services that will be required by our communities into the future. VICSES has delivered in an increasing accountable environment a range of services for today's needs but also with an eye to the future. VICSES has embraced the new Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) environment and has acknowledged the unique qualities our service brings to local communities.

As a service that is reviewing its future directions VICSES see a need to work more closely with our colleagues both in terms of sharing physical resources and tapping into our collective skills and experience that is evident across all emergency management organisations.

Municipal subsidy

Day to day operational costs for VICSES units is provided by the municipal subsidy from the State Government with an understanding that local councils will match the state's subsidy. There is no legislation compelling local government to contribute to the municipal subsidy.

In 2010, local councils owned 89 percent of volunteer unit buildings and 80 percent of the land on which VICSES units are built. The balance is owned by other emergency services such as the Country Fire Authority (CFA) or the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), with six owned solely by VICSES.

VICSES future direction

VICSES is soon to complete its service delivery strategy which has seen an extensive consultation program with employees and volunteers across the state. The 'Planning the Future Together' strategy will lead into phase two of the program which will examine the possible implementation models for the delivery of service to

Victorian communities. It is clear from early feedback VICSES members are embracing the need to change to meet community demand and expectations.

Without pre-empting the outcome of the implementation strategy, thought will need to be given as to how VICSES will set a future direction for the service, whilst acknowledging the history and culture of volunteer units within their communities. This acknowledgement will need to address the unit's unique or niche services that have been established to meet local demand. Equally, VICSES will need to address common services and skills that are required to not only meet local need but in times of large scale events, units can be deployed across the state to deliver services that are required for a sustained period.

The attraction and retention of volunteers is a multifaceted issue which includes the link between recruitment, training, support and service delivery. Volunteerism is also a critical issue in understanding the community connections and social capital that is required for a community to be resilient and sustainable. VICSES units play an increasingly important role in establishing and maintaining community connection and social capital resources, that are critical in sustaining communities – particularly in rural and regional Victoria.

Service delivery model

VICSES has in recent times looked carefully at the future direction of the organisation given the changing nature of the emergency management environment in Victoria.

The critical aspects of the reform agenda for VICSES is that it formalises the philosophy that sees the whole sector working together to achieve outcomes for the community. This philosophy has been embraced by VICSES members who are developing stronger alliances between agencies with an emphasis on shared responsibility in an all hazards all agencies approach. The success of these changes can be seen in all SES units across the state.

Co-located facilities

An opportunity exists to exploit the potential for co-located VICSES and fire agency facilities. This can support further interoperability and maximise the use of public funds applied to emergency services infrastructure. Some good progress is being made in this area and ongoing co-operation and support from the fire agencies should be encouraged/required to deliver new opportunities in this area.

This includes local VICSES unit and Brigade stations, Regional Offices and Incident Control Centres. Currently there are a number of areas in the state where facilities are co-located. Fire service agencies and VICSES host over 40 Incident Control Centres. There is a potential opportunity to review the number and locations of Incident Control Centres and ensure that future facilities are based on a thorough risk assessment and are capable of providing an all hazards environment (e.g. fire, flood, storm, etc).

Rescue

The range of rescue activities undertaken by the fire agencies include Road Rescue (RR) and Technical Rescue (TR). Technical Rescue is the common doctrine term for rope rescue (e.g. over cliffs, from silos), trench, confined space and urban search and rescue (USAR) and animal rescue.

The formation of a Road and Technical Rescue Working Group reporting to the State Capability and Response Subcommittee could support effective governance over a range of rescue activities undertaken by the fire agencies and VICSES.

1. Road Rescue

VICSES is the largest provider of Road Rescue (RR) in Victoria with 102 VICSES units delivering services. CFA (25 brigades) and Metropolitan Fire Brigades (MFB) (five stations) also provide RR and the RR arrangements have been overseen by Victoria Police. The State Capability and Response Subcommittee has agreed to review the governance arrangements. VICSES believes that it is well placed to lead the sector on RR based multi-agency providers. The governance structures need to ensure that duplication of service provision is limited and that response methodologies and practices keep pace with growing communities and modern vehicle designs.

The RR arrangements provide for the closest responder to be activated to motor vehicle accidents involving trapped victims. CFA and VICSES operate under the closest responder model utilising ESTA Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) to provide the most appropriate response. To this point, MFB do not utilise the closest responder model. There is an opportunity for this anomaly to be addressed as part of a review of the closest responder arrangements now that CAD has been enhanced by recent upgrades. This has the potential to improve patient outcomes for the community. For example, if crews are already attending other incidents, the closest responder could respond and vice-versa.

VICSES believes a road rescue capability will continue to be part of our service delivery in the future.

2. Technical Rescue

VICSES has developed strong capabilities in a number of these activities, provided by volunteer responders. The capabilities (including skill sets) for these activities are complimentary or build upon like capabilities. VICSES and CFA have worked closely together on a regional capability model for technical rescue. The joint regional service delivery model is crucial for regional Victoria where these incidents are few in number but still provide a necessary capability. VICSES leverages from the capability of instructors provided by the fire agencies in this specialist capability. It is critical that the state maintains this instructor capability. The model needs to remain achievable for volunteer responders.

VICSES would see this as a critical service that is delivered by its members in the future.

3. Urban Search and Rescue

VICSES currently has over 500 Category 1 operators (defined as performing surface searches for casualties after an event such as structural collapse) and is identified to maintain 25 Category 2 operators (defined as working sub-surface at an event such as structural collapse) to ensure there is regional capability for initial Category 2 reconnaissance in the event of a major earthquake and/or structure collapse.

The maintenance and growth of Category 1 operators is within the capability of VICSES, however the training and skills maintenance burden for VICSES volunteers in Category 2 Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) operations is significant and opportunities for deployment is rare.

The MFB have the instructor base and specialist unit to maintain the state's capability. For VICSES to maintain a base of 25 Category 2 operators, the costs for training and skills maintenance needs to be affordable and a joined up approach to training, exercising and funding should be adopted that is flexible and achievable by volunteer responders.

4. Training

With the formalisation of EMV oversight of training facilities operated by both CFA and MFB across the state, there is an opportunity to consider improved and more affordable access for other organisations including VICSES.

Currently the costs for VICSES to access these facilities under the pricing model developed are considerable. There has been a view that VICSES cannot access these sites without fire service presence, although VICSES is not utilising props that require their specific expertise. This acts as a disincentive to use these state of the art facilities opting for cheaper and sometimes less effective alternatives.

There is an opportunity to review the costing model for training facilities to ensure that consistency applies to fee structures and overheads are minimised wherever possible by removing restrictions that do not compromise site safety or security of the facilities.

Of recent times some facilities have been closed. VICSES would support the replacement of these facilities and encourage an affordable model to meet the needs of emergency service organisations.

Community Connection Strategy

One of the main priorities of VICSES is to educate the community to be more resilient and better prepared when emergencies occur. VICSES volunteers and staff have of recent years placed a high priority on this aspect of our service.

“Community engagement is a process of stakeholders working together to build resilience through collaborative action, shared capacity building and the development of strong relationship built on mutual trust and respect”

(National Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2013)

VICSES Community Education Strategy 2011-2016 was released in 2011 to provide direction and guidance in the development of regional and local education programs.

Key partners provide the community with consistent safety messages and increase awareness about floods, storms, tsunamis and earthquakes and the impact these types of emergencies can have on their lives. In acknowledging ongoing community change and diversity, and taking into consideration the changing emergency management landscape in Victoria.

VICSES is a key leader in the sector working with community, business, industry and government to develop the next generation of community connection programs. These programs will strengthen collaborative and integrated planning and engagement approaches that support clear, targeted and evidenced based actions for all hazards before, during and after future events. These initiatives will build on the capacity and capability of the emergency management workforce and key partners to support the practical application of resilience principles in delivering community supported actions and outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise the unique and localised service delivery mechanisms of VICSES. The delivery model is currently under review, however the submission outlines the key services that the organisation sees as critical in support of local communities during emergency events.

VICSES looks forward to planning its future around the EMV reforms and greater co-operation between emergency service organisations.



Appendix 1

History

Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) has been involved in most major emergency responses in Victoria since it began as the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation in 1950. It is still the lead agency for flood, storm, tsunami and earthquake response today.

The Victoria Civil Defence Organisation was originally established in 1950 to act as a volunteer based civil defence agency, which could quickly be activated in the event of war.

To support the development of the organisation, the Commonwealth Government set up the Civil Defence School at Mt Maceon in 1956. By 1961, there was a Civil Defence Office in the Victorian Premier's Department and efforts were being made to form a civil defence unit in each municipality around the state.

In 1962, disastrous fires caused substantial damage in the Dandenongs and the Premier directed that a state plan be created to manage peacetime disasters. The plan was finalised in 1968.

By 1972, around 100 voluntary Civil Defence Units had been established in municipalities across Victoria. The same year, Parliament passed the State Emergency Services and Civil Defence Act which formally legislated the role of the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation.

In 1973, the first Civil Defence Organisation headquarters was established at 31 Queens Road Melbourne and in 1975 the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation was renamed the Victoria State Emergency Service to conform with other states.

In 1979, the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services was created. Its branches included Victoria Police, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Country Fire Authority and Victoria State Emergency Service.

In 1981, the Victoria State Emergency Service Act was passed. This act formally recognised VICSES as a general emergency management agency.

On 1 November 2005, VICSES was established as an independent Statutory Authority. As a Statutory Authority, VICSES is governed by a Board, which is accountable to the Minister for Emergency Services.



Appendix 2

VICSES - Who we are

Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) is made up of professional staff and dedicated volunteers from all ages and backgrounds. Their common link is a desire to work as part of a team that gives back to the community they live in.

Approximately 5,000 volunteers from all ages, professions and backgrounds serve in both operational and administrative roles across the state. Every one of our volunteers receives comprehensive training to enable them to respond to emergencies.

From road rescue and flood response to community events and logistics, volunteers continually develop and update their skills through the various courses and training programs provided by VICSES.

VICSES volunteers are supported by approximately 175 full-time staff based in the organisation's offices across Victoria, and the Victorian Head Office in Sturt Street, Southbank.

The roles and responsibilities of VICSES staff members are backed up by a wealth of knowledge and experience in emergency management, education and response.

Our vision

Safer Communities - Together

Our purpose

Partner with the community and other agencies to provide timely and effective emergency services whilst building community preparedness and resilience.

Our values

- Integrity
- Respect
- Trust
- Responsiveness
- Innovation



Appendix 3

VICSES – What we do

The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) is the control agency for flood, storm, tsunami and earthquake in Victoria, managing responses to these emergencies and helping communities to prepare through planning and education.

As well as operating the largest road rescue network in Australia, we also assist the Victoria Police in search and rescue operations and play an important support role during major bushfire responses.

For a detailed overview of the ways VICSES responds to the community view the VICSES list of emergency response services fact sheet (Appendix 4).

Emergency Management

Coordinating emergency preparedness and response for flood, storm tsunami and earthquake is the organisation's primary role. SES Victorian Head Office works with the regional offices to prepare and warn communities with public safety advice and emergency plans.

Flood response

SES units sandbag to protect property and infrastructure from floods, as well as assisting Victoria Police with evacuations.

Storm response

Following severe storms, SES units can provide temporary repairs (like tarping) to damaged structures, and clear fallen trees and branches so that they no longer pose a danger.

Tsunami response

SES units provide warnings and public advice, along with assisting evacuations and undertaking search and rescue following tsunamis.

Earthquake response

Along with assisting in evacuations and temporary repairs, SES units undertake search and rescue following earthquakes.

Road Rescue

VICSES are the largest provider of road rescue in Victoria, and SES units provide aid in some outer metropolitan suburbs of Melbourne and most of the state's country areas.

More than 100 SES units across the state are approved road rescue providers, and volunteers undergo rigorous training using specialised vehicles and equipment.

Community planning and education

VICSES works closely with municipal councils throughout Victoria to develop emergency management plans, providing advice, information, education and training. VICSES are also required to audit Municipal Emergency Management Plans every three years.

VICSES also engages directly with communities, educating Victorians on how to prepare for natural hazards. Programs are aimed at building resilient communities that are less affected by flood, storm, tsunami and earthquake.

Appendix 4

VICSES list of emergency response services

Fact Sheet

Control Agency for

- Flood
- Storm
- Tsunami
- Earthquake



Swift water rescue



Storm



Alpine



Flood



Flood



Fire support



USAR



Driver reviver



Search



Road rescue



Water rescue



Fire support



Community Education



Storm response

Support Agency

Police – search / rescue / Road, Air, Industrial, Rail

- Road, rail and aircraft – vehicle extrication. VICSES has 102 road rescue units state wide
- Structure - Industrial incidents and Urban Search and Rescue (Category 2) – under the rubble buildings damage or collapse
- Land – missing persons, evidence search, crime scene protection, lighting (crime scene, vehicle accident area), lighting points during traffic management
- Lakes / Rivers / Caves – missing persons, evidence search, marine rescue
- Alpine Rescue – missing persons
- Vertical Rescue – steep and high angle incidents involving missing or injured persons (specific locations only)
- Swift Water Rescue (land based)
- 1 unit provides Marine/Offshore Rescue – VICSES Inverloch Unit only.

Fire

- Structure – lighting, tarping
- During major fires – logistical support, lighting (fire scene), establish base camps to house fire fighters (people/tents), staging area management, delivery of resources/equipment/meals, moving transport vehicles, cutting up trees to clear access for emergency service vehicles, traffic management points, distributing community warning pamphlets, support operation of relief centres

Ambulance

- Patient carry outs, mass casualty support

Interstate Assistance

Deployment to other states to assist SES operations

Appendix 5

VICSES – Board & Executive

Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) is governed by a Board of Directors accountable to the Victorian Minister for Emergency Services, and is run by the executive management team.

The Board

After VICSES was established as a Statutory Authority on 1 November 2005, a Board was appointed to govern the organisation. The Board meets monthly and reports directly to the Minister for Emergency Services. Between them, the Board members possess a wealth of experience in the emergency services, finance, local government and other business industries.



Peter Akers
Board Chair



Bernie Cronin
Board Director



Ev Duke
Board Director



Helen Dyson
Board Director



Claire Higgins
Board Director



Laurie Russell
Board Director



Barbara Yeoh
Board Director
Deputy Chair

Executive Management Team



Stephen Griffin
Chief Executive Officer

Stephen Griffin commenced with VICSES in May 2014.

Stephen has been employed in various local government roles including community services, corporate services and as Chief Executive Officer. His involvement with local communities and various advocacy programs complements his formal qualifications in management, business and education.



Trevor White
Chief Officer Operations

Operations
Regional management
Unit management



John Casey
Director Corporate Services

Assets & Infrastructure
Finance & Administration
Information Services incl. IT
Projects & Grants



Katrina Bahen
Director Human Resources

Human Resources
Health & Wellbeing
Training
Peer Support & Chaplaincy
Work Health & Safety

Vacant (as of 27 August 2015)
Director Emergency Management
Planning & Communication

Emergency Management services
Media & Community Information