

# Memorandum



*EU7 27/3 - See signing page*

**To:** Chief Officer

**Copy to:** D14 Operations Manager  
Captains - South Morang, Mernda, Doreen, Yarrambat, Plenty, Epping Fire Brigades  
VFBV D14 Council President,  
Operations Officer – Whittlesea/Diamond Valley Catchment  
Whittlesea/Diamond Valley Group Officer

**From:** NWMR Regional Director

**Subject:** RECOMMENDATION TO COMMENCE INTEGRATION OF SOUTH MORANG BRIGADE

**Date:** 26 March 2014

## Purpose

To recommend the integration of South Morang Fire Brigade within the scope of Project 2016

## Background

1. The Plenty Road Growth Corridor is serviced by three CFA volunteer brigades (South Morang, Mernda and Doreen) with support provided by adjoining CFA brigades (primarily by Epping, Wollert, Whittlesea, Yarrambat, and Plenty) and MFB stations at Mill Park and Epping.
2. The Plenty Road Growth Corridor is experiencing rapid urban growth, with population in the three suburbs increasing by 150% from 16,165 in 2006 to 40,417 in 2011. Population is projected to increase by another 56% to 63,249 in 2016, and plateau at 73,068 in 2021. Adjoining areas of Epping North and Wollert are experiencing similar growth.
3. The number of primary incidents attended by the three CFA brigades in the Plenty Road Growth Corridor grew from 107 in 2005 to 255 in 2011, an increase of 145%, which is in correlation to the growth in population of 150%. If the increase in primary incidents continues to grow at the same rate with future population growth, it is projected that there will be 399 primary incidents in 2016 and 461 primary incidents by 2021.
4. Customer SDS for the three brigade areas within the Plenty Road Growth corridor has varied over time. Customer SDS fluctuated between 75% and 82% from 2005 to 2008, and then increased to 87% in 2009 based on improved performance by Mernda Brigade.
5. Customer SDS improved again to 92% in 2010. The improvement during this period appears in part to be attributed to significant efforts at the brigades to recruit members and undertake other actions to improve brigade response, and the brigades are to be commended for this achievement. In addition, the improvement at South Morang in 2010 appears to be significantly driven by a significant reduction in the number of Hazard Class 2 incidents reported, and a corresponding increase in the number of Hazard Class 3 incidents. This suggests a change in approach to hazard classification at South Morang in 2010 with a dramatic shift from Hazard Class 2 incidents to Hazard Class 3 incidents at that time. The reasons for this change are unclear. The region is commencing a project for all brigades to ensure that hazard classifications are known and consistently applied across the region, and that they are updated to account for urban growth and other changes in risk.

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6. South Morang Fire Brigade was identified for integration in the early 2000s, and a purpose built fire station was constructed in 2003 with future integration in mind, with only dormitories needed to be added when required. The brigade was identified for integration under Project 2016 in 2010. After discussions between the brigade and you in July 2011, you advised the brigade that you would be to place integration "on hold" for two years and review in mid-2013. This decision was based on apparent satisfactory SDS figure at that stage, and an ability to defer the decision within the Project 2016 framework due to the relatively lead time for integration at South Morang due to the limited addition infrastructure that needed to be constructed.
7. Unfortunately, customer SDS for the Plenty Road Growth Corridor has been declining every year since 2010, and is currently at 84% in 2013, despite ongoing efforts by all brigades to recruit members and undertake other initiatives.
8. In 2012, you and members of F&EM met with Plenty Road Growth Brigades and regional staff to discuss alternate locations for an integrated brigade in the corridor. The decision that South Morang was the preferred location for integration in the Plenty Road Growth Corridor was confirmed at that meeting. At that meeting, Lex De Man, Executive Director Operational Training & Development offered to undertake a project within the corridor to assist brigades with recruitment, retention and other initiatives. It is assumed that Lex was referring to potential project capability under the then recently announced Volunteer Support Program.
9. Regional and Headquarters Fire & Emergency Management staff met with the South Morang Brigade Management Team on 9 October 2013, and discussed SDS figures provided by HQ that had been "modified" based on assessment of the reported Hazard class against the Hazard Class assessed by HQ based on spatial analysis. This led to a significantly reduced reported SDS for South Morang Brigade. The BMT requested the opportunity to further analyse the data as presented at the meeting to gain a level of confidence that it was accurate, but despite the best efforts of regional and HQ staff this has not been able to be achieved, in part due to the high level of operational activity in the last three months. As these modified SDS figures have not been validated and agreed with the brigade, I have not based my decision on these figures.
10. Regional Staff met with South Morang BMT on 13 March 2014 and outlined the population growth and CFA response data as described above (excluding any discussion on modified SDS). VFBV District 14 President was also present. I advised the meeting that I had formed the view that integration was needed due to declining SDS, and the likely further deterioration in SDS as a result of projected population growth. I advise that this decision also took into account the current availability of funding to address response issues, but that if this funding opportunity was not taken at this time and service delivery did deteriorate in the short to medium term future, CFA would have no capacity to address this issue with integration, and this would lead to lower service delivery to the Plenty Road Growth Corridor community. I sought information or feedback from the brigade that may influence or change my view. The BMT were understanding and accepting, but have expressed disappointment that little appears to have been achieved on the project offered by Lex De Man in 2012. They believe that, had these initiatives been implemented, the declining SDS figures over the recent period may have been moderated.
11. The BMT requested time to brief the brigade and forward any additional views and this briefing has occurred with no additional information provided.

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12. On 24 March Regional staff met with Whittlesea/Diamond Valley Group Officer and Captains from Epping, Mernda, Doreen (who is also VFBV D14 President), and Plenty. Also present was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant from South Morang. Yarrambat were invited but did not send a representative. I presented similar information to this meeting as the earlier meeting with South Morang BMT and similar discussions occurred as at the previous meeting, with no substantive issues raised that would influence my decision.

## Discussion

1. Should integration be further deferred at this stage, it is my understanding that the funding within Project 2016 will either be reallocated to another project or returned to the government, providing no immediate ability for CFA to subsequently make a decision to integrate South Morang in the short to medium term (potentially up to 6-8 years).
2. The timing of the integration is of considerable interest to the region and brigades. I have not formed a detailed opinion on the pathway and timing to integration (e.g. is Day Manning implemented initially with an eventual transition to 24/7 when required) as I do not believe it is solely my purview to do this, and I believe this requires substantial more investigation of the underpinning data and consultation with brigades. I have advised the brigades that some decisions may, at least in part, be driven by financial cash flow requirements or availability of staff to deploy for integration.
3. The brigades are particularly interested in the early appointment of an Integration Officer with suitable communication and engagement skills that can assist South Morang and surrounding brigades in a smooth transition. They are also keen for this person to continue as the OIC of the integrated brigade.

## Recommendation

I recommend integration of South Morang Fire Brigade based on deterioration of Customer SDS below 90% in the last three years, the likely further deterioration in SDS as a result of projected population growth for the Plenty Road Growth Corridor, the current availability of funds under project 2016, and the lack of certainty of any alternate funding in the short to medium term,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Esnouf".

Greg Esnouf AFSM  
Regional Director

✓ APPROVED  
*Alan A Ferguson*  
Chief Officer  
27 March 2014