



**Tim Whetstone MP**  
Member for Chaffey



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## **Submission**

# **Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 Review**

**April 2013**

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*Member for Chaffey*

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## **Introduction**

As a Member of State Parliament and Chaffey, I would like to add comment to a review of the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005.

Chaffey has a number of State Emergency Service, Metropolitan Fire Service and Country Fire Service stations and makes up a significant number of the 1600 emergency service volunteers across South Australia.

The State Emergency Service has stations at Blanchetown, Barmera, Loxton, Berri and Renmark and Paringa. There is also the Riverland Operations Co-ordination Unit based in Renmark and Berri.

In Chaffey, Loxton, Berri and Renmark have Metropolitan Fire Service stations, while Country Fire Service stations are present across the Riverland and Mallee.

State Emergency Service volunteers are trained to carry out rescue and/or damage alleviation tasks. This includes vehicle accident victims, search operations for missing persons, industrial accidents, cliff and other rescues from heights. The SES also responds to storm and flood damage containment. The CFS and MFS also play a vital role in fighting fires and assisting in emergency situations.

## **Volunteer numbers**

The Chaffey emergency services are predominantly made up of volunteers who staff the services and commit to providing immediate assistance in emergencies and disasters.

State Emergency Services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Funding and resources are vital to the strength of our emergency organisations and as a result of this review, there must not be any negative impacts on current funding arrangements or technical services.

Volunteers require extensive training but can receive many benefits from volunteering for an emergency service organisation. In Chaffey, our emergency service personnel work tirelessly for local communities.

The region has often struggled to find enough volunteers to staff emergency services and this has had an impact on frontline services.

During a flash flooding event in November 2011, only three volunteers were available at the Berri SES to attend call outs for help. This highlighted the pressure put on volunteers when there are not sufficient personnel numbers available. The station conceded that it needed 20 members to run efficiently and the lack of volunteers during the event meant certain equipment and vehicles could not operate. Volunteers were forced to take on leadership roles that they were not qualified for.

## **Funding**

Funding to the region's emergency services is critical so there are incentives to keep volunteer numbers sufficient and provide adequate training and education programs.

Recent survey results show that less than 15 per cent of CFS brigades met minimum training standards in 2009, which is certainly of concern.

As another example, in 2010 the CFS Volunteers Association expressed concern about funding shortages and as a result held talks with the State Government.

A lack of sufficient funding can impact on volunteers and how they provide a very important service to the community.

### **Communication**

Communication is also a vital role in emergency services. While communicating with the media is also very important to providing information to the public, it is crucial the message put across is correct.

In 2011, during a high river event in the Riverland, continual flood watch alerts were put out to the media by authorities, portraying that the region was underwater. The potential for tourism was undone by what was touted as a flood watch: the alerts issued by SA Water.

I think a lot of this was exacerbated by the unfortunate floods that happened in Queensland and Victoria. People were almost traumatised by what they saw on television, what they read in the media and what was portrayed happening to the people of Queensland and Victoria, but that was not happening here in South Australia. People were given the perception that there was a flood, and I believe the flood watch message was almost entirely to blame.

### **Accreditation for volunteers**

Many farmers in the Chaffey electorate are volunteers for local emergency services and we need to ensure these volunteers are provided with all the necessary accreditations.

### **Conclusion**

The emergency services in Chaffey are vital to the region and volunteers play an often underestimated but incredibly important role in disseminating information, preparing communities for imminent natural disasters and helping people in severe times of need.

As an outcome of this review, we must not see any reduced services and we must see a continued support base for volunteers.

### **Recommendations**

As part of the review, my recommendations are:

- **There must not be reduced services for emergency service organisations**
- **There must not be a reduction in funding to these organisations**
- **Actions must be taken to continue supporting volunteers and encouraging volunteers to join an emergency service organisation**
- **Volunteers fighting fires must have access to appropriate accreditation opportunities**
- **Adequate training and education programs must continue to be provided**

I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to provide a submission to the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 Review and I hope you take my recommendations into consideration.