



Response to Summary Report
ESA Roundtable Meetings
Conducted during January – March 2017

31 July 2017

Minister's foreword

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous support emergency service personnel give our community. You all do a great job that contributes to the ACT being one of the safest places in the world to live. Your contribution is recognised and appreciated by the entire Canberra community.

I was delighted to address the opening session of the ESA Roundtable Meetings in January this year and pleased to see so many of you there, ready to offer your ideas, opinions and questions.

These Roundtable Meetings were important in providing your feedback to the Emergency Services Agency Executive so that your practical, operations-based experience can be used to plan future operations and initiatives within the ESA.

The report from the Roundtable Meetings demonstrated a wide diversity of opinions on current operational activities and initiatives planned for implementation. There were many good ideas on how the ESA could operate more efficiently and effectively. You also expressed your concerns, especially in the area of welfare and a set of initiatives is underway to address these.

I am assured that all of your suggestions and input are being considered. The ESA Executive have told me that they have already started to implement some of your suggestions, and that they are committed to ongoing consultation.

I am confident that the ESA, its staff and volunteer members, and the wider Canberra community will benefit from your input to the ESA Roundtable Consultation meetings.

I thank all of you for supporting this opportunity for consultation and engaging in it so positively.

Yours sincerely,




Mick Gentleman M.L.A.

Minister for Police and Emergency Services

25/8/17

1. Introduction

The commitment to hold Emergency Services Agency (ESA) Roundtable consultations was made as part of the Parliamentary Agreement for the Ninth Legislative Assembly for the ACT: to 'progress jointly-committed investment in firefighting equipment, personnel and facilities, and establish a rigorous ongoing consultation process, including through a roundtable meeting, to discuss wider resourcing, structural and organisational reform, and increasing diversity in the firefighting service'.

The ESA Roundtable consultations were held over four days, each with a separate morning and afternoon session. They were scheduled on days that took into account the rosters of the ESA's 24/7 workforce and availability of volunteers, to enable opportunities for all interested staff, volunteers and other stakeholders to participate. The meetings were conducted according to the agreed Terms of Reference.

Roundtable consultations were held on:

- Wednesday ,18 January 2017 (Sessions 1 and 2)
- Tuesday, 7 February 2017 (Sessions 3 and 4)
- Sunday, 5 March 2017 (Sessions 5 and 6)
- Friday, 17 March 2017 (Sessions 7 and 8)

All ESA staff and volunteers received invitations and reminders before each of the consultations. The Unions representing members of the ESA workforce and other stakeholders were also invited.

Each session was facilitated by an independent facilitator, Annebelle Davis, and there was a consistent presence of ESA executives at all of the sessions.

2. What has happened so far?

The ESA executive members have deliberated on the report on the ESA Roundtable consultations and identified in detail which issues and suggestions will require further action.

The action will take a variety of forms:

- Some will be adopted and action will be taken to implement the suggestions. The decision to implement these actions will be communicated to all staff and volunteers. Progress on implementing these actions will also be regularly communicated.
- Some will be considered and inform future policy and operational decisions, and inform the review and update of the ESA Strategic Plan.

The ESA executive members were pleased to hear the strong desire from staff and volunteers for more information, and will consider ways to ensure everyone is kept informed of ESA plans and activities. The consultations identified several issues that require further information to be communicated to staff and volunteers. In response to this a:

- Frequently Asked Questions document is attachment to this report, covering the questions and issues that were most frequently raised during the sessions
- new intranet site has been developed, under the SRA Programme, which will report progress on initiatives stemming from the Roundtable Meetings.

While the ESA may not implement all the suggestions made, based on other input and evidence, the feedback provided by staff and volunteers has been very helpful and will strengthen future activities. All of the suggestions and discussions have been heard, and are being considered to inform future decisions and plans.

3. What the ESA is doing and how the roundtable discussion will affect future services

Issue 1: Communication Centre (ComCen)

The ComCen Project is developing a model for the future operation of the ComCen.

The Emergencies (Communication Centre) Commissioner's Guideline 2017 was published and took effect on 1 July 2017. This guideline states how the ComCen will operate and be managed, and how the ComCen Project progressed with ongoing consultation.

A Workplace Consultative Committee (WCC) with the United Firefighters Union has already been established and the Terms of Reference agreed in-principle.

A ComCen Manager has been appointed for a period of six months to lead ComCen operations while work continues with designing and sharing the future way in which the ComCen will operate.

Issue 2: Equipment and procurement

The need to standardise equipment was described by many people as essential for efficiencies in purchasing, training and maintenance of equipment.

All purchased equipment needs to be ratified by the Procurement Committee, which contains representatives from each of the services. The committee ensures standardisation of equipment and best procurement practice but does not introduce an additional level of bureaucracy. This process will be applied regardless of the relevant funding sources, including normal procurement, donations and grants to ensure that a standard approach is taken.

Requiring the purchase of all equipment to be approved by the Procurement Committee will identify opportunities for joint-purchasing of equipment.

As the Procurement Committee will have middle management representatives from each of the services, one of the roles of the committee members will be to share and disseminate information about equipment within their services and across services.

Individual services will continue the practice of considering and assessing service-specific equipment, but will submit any recommendation to the Procurement Committee before proceeding.

ACTAS is currently reviewing and assessing the issues associated with manual handling and ergonomics to make staff less prone to injury whilst delivering emergency assistance. A trial of new powered stretchers will take place in August 2017.

Issue 3: Equipment investments create opportunities to invest in personnel and service delivery

This issue was noted and the linkage between equipment and staff costs will inform planning for future major equipment investments.

Issue 4: Welfare

A number of welfare measures are already in place, or are under development that address issues raised at the roundtable meetings. The main issues raised were on return to work, support programs and flexible work arrangements.

The ESA Graduated Return to Work Management Panel is being trialed as a forum to provide advice, guidance and accountability for ESA management of matters relating to compensable injuries for staff returning to their workplace. The focus of the discussion of any individual cases referred to the panel will be on the organisation's response and actions taken to support the injured worker. The panel will not discuss the individual's circumstances of injury or their personal situation. The panel will support a case management approach to managing injured workers in the workplace.

ESA, in conjunction with Beyond Blue, are developing a range of support mechanisms to be delivered across the ESA. ACTAS has achieved success with SupportLink and ACTFR with the Peer Support Program. In addition, all ESA staff and volunteer members have access to the Employee Assistance Program provided by the ACT Government.

Flexible work arrangements are an element of the Blueprint for Change Project within ACTAS and the Women in Emergency Services (WIES) strategy. Work is being done to examine flexible options to support a full-time and permanent part-time workforce that retains its focus on providing full operational capability. Knowledge and learnings from the ACTAS implementation will be examined for their applicability to other services in the ESA.

Issue 5: Volunteer recruitment, administration and training

The views expressed showed that many of the issues facing ESA volunteers were not service-specific. This creates the possibility of a generic approach to supporting volunteer services for common issues. The ESA will investigate whether or not more could be done collectively and which issues need to be addressed at the service-level.

Some of the areas that will be investigated include volunteer recruitment, volunteer administration and volunteer training and access to a common SharePoint site.

Issue 6: Middle management co-ordination within the ESA

Proposals were received for the establishment of cross-service committees for matters such as training and equipment to allow cohesion across the whole agency. This will be considered against the need to minimise administrative growth.

In future, managers at all levels will work within a framework in which the organisation's expectations of them is clear and communicated. Expectations for all managers will be reinforced through the Performance and Development Plan (PAPDs) process.

Issue 7: Increasing diversity in the ESA

There were many views offered on diversifying the ESA's workforce profile and volunteer base. The WIES project has made a good start and the Station Upgrade and Relocation project has already delivered improved privacy and dignity arrangements of facilities. Both projects will continue to make the improvements upon which the ESA and its services will become an employer of choice for a broad range of employees from all parts of society.

Issue 8: Communications within the ESA

The effectiveness of communications as an issue was noted. More will be done in future to create better understanding of ESA's plans and activities among staff, volunteers, stakeholders and the public. This will include performance data and briefings.

It is of concern that so many of stakeholders seemed to be unaware of ESA strategies and plans, or entirely opposed to their content. The [SRA Programme](#) intranet site has been developed to ensure that all ESA staff have access to information about the SRA Programme and the six projects that form it.

Improved communications will be considered in more detail, to ensure that communications extend through all layers of management, staff and volunteers within the ESA. It is clear that this is an area that requires more focus.

Issue 9: Bushfire Abatement Zone

Concerns were expressed around the designation of certain land areas and how that process would be affected by the urban growth within the ACT. The ESA has considered these concerns and will ensure that the boundary of the Built-Up Area and the rural area are refreshed to ensure that the most optimal resources are always responsible for managing incidents across the ACT.

Issue 10: Opportunities for joint working and training between ESA Services

Views were offered that more could be done to work across services when planning and delivering exercises and training. The ESA executive agree with those views and, in future, will expect that all services involve their counterparts at the earliest stages when planning training and exercises. The proposal to establish a cross-service committee to look at opportunities for joint working and training exercises will be considered.

Issue 11: Personal appraisal and development

The need to better utilise PADPs and, if necessary, to adjust the process to “fit” our staff at all levels and circumstances is recognised. The first element of such a strategy will be to develop PADPs for as many staff as possible. Initially, all staff with managerial responsibilities will be expected to have a functional PADP developed in consultation with their supervisor.

Issue 12: Consultation with staff, volunteers and stakeholders

A number of contributors expressed views about the adequacy of consultations within the ESA. Some stated that consultation may only be conducted in accordance with the arrangements prescribed by the relevant enterprise agreement. The ESA executive recognises the terms agreed within the Enterprise Agreements but also undertakes less formal, best practice consultations such as those conducted for the SRA in 2016.

As the ESA develops new policies, stakeholder views will be considered and compared with other evidence such as counter views, data sets and experience from other jurisdictions.

If staff or representatives do not offer views when consulted, a risk exists that their views will not be taken into account. The ESA executive wish to avoid such a situation in all circumstances and reminds all staff and volunteers of the need to be engaged in such processes. Like the Roundtable Meetings, good consultation ensures a diversity of views and information is considered.

4. Attachments

ESA Roundtable FAQs.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: ESA Roundtable Meetings

These FAQs cover the questions and issues that were raised most frequently over the eight sessions.

Culture and Identity	Are there plans to change the culture of any of the services in the ESA?	ESA personnel are extremely resilient and skilled in adapting to change in their everyday work. Change to an organisation does not necessarily affect the culture. We hope to continue to foster a culture that focuses on improving our services and what they offer to the public. The ACT Public Service has a clearly defined set of values and expectations. These set the culture for all public services including the ESA.
Culture and Identity	Are there any plans to change the role of the Rural Fire Service?	The <i>Emergencies Act 2004</i> clearly defines the roles and responsibilities for the delivery of emergency services in the ACT. Each staff member and volunteer needs to establish their own clarity on the role of their organisation and, if they work with other services, to find out what their responsibilities are.
Culture and Identity	Will RFS volunteers be allowed on appliances managed by ACTF&R?	There have been no proposals, and there are no future plans, for RFS volunteers or staff to work on appliances managed by ACT Fire & Rescue
Culture and Identity	Does training of RFS volunteers in village firefighting indicate a plan to create a retained service?	The ESA has no plans to create a retained firefighting service. Under WHS legislation, it is mandatory to take reasonable and practical steps to ensure worker (including volunteer) safety. Since structure fires outside the Built-Up Area may be attended by Rural Fire Service personnel, they need to have training in village firefighting.
Culture and Identity	There is an impression that the Justice and Community Services Directorate is not that interested in the ESA. Is that true?	The ESA is an integral part of the JACS Directorate and the ACT Government. Our interface with JACS is managed through the ESA executive, who ensure that JACS is very aware of the achievements and services delivered by ESA staff and volunteers. ESA staff and volunteers are regularly recognised and rewarded within the JACS Directorate.

Consultation

Are there plans for more effective communications and consultation with staff and volunteers?

The ESA executive appreciates the views of staff, volunteers and stakeholders for more effective communications. The ESA commits to share, as openly as feasible, plans and ideas for the future. The SRA Programme website is the first step in addressing this. The ESA executive encourages open communication channels both within services and across the ESA and sees this as very important for the effective operation of the ESA.

Consultation

Why wasn't there any consultation when the Deputy Chief Officer positions were abolished in 2016?

The ESA did consult prior to the Deputy Chief Officer positions being abolished. The ESA will continue to consult before any changes occur that affect staff and volunteers in the ESA.

Consultation

Why haven't I been consulted?

The ESA regularly consults with staff and volunteers. In the first half of 2016, the ESA held more than 40 face-to-face meetings attended by 247 staff and volunteer members with more than 300 feedback comments and suggestions recorded. The Roundtable Meetings in 2017 also provided a forum for consultation, with around 60 participants at each of the eight sessions. In addition, there are regular consultative forums through the Joint Consultative Committee and Workplace Consultative Committees. Staff and volunteers are also encouraged to raise issues via their line supervisors/managers.

Consultation

If I have made a suggestion, how can I find out if anything is being done about it?

All suggestions are considered, but not all can be progressed or implemented. A staff or volunteer member should follow-up with their manager to ascertain the status of a reform they have suggested. The same process applies to other reforms. One of the roles of managers and the line of command is to elevate questions of this nature to the relevant executive member who will provide explanations of the reason for the reform.

Organisation

Are there plans for organisational change in any of the services in the ESA?

The ESA executive understands the need for stability within the services and the need to ensure that change is managed so as not to affect operational efficiency. Consultation is conducted before any organisational change. Service improvement and finding better ways of working is a requirement of all public services. Organisational change to constantly improve how we deliver services to our community is part of this process.

Organisation

Can we use community events and networking to recruit more - and more diverse - volunteer members? (Include good news stories, ACTF&R replacing smoke alarms, SES cleaning gutters, etc.)

There are already many activities in place to raise awareness. Community Education does need to be across all the services and it is accepted that more can be done in this space. A new position, Manager, Community Engagement has been created to specifically work in this area across the ESA.

SRA Programme

What is the SRA?

The Strategic Reform Agenda evolved due to factors. These include the views offered by staff and the government's commitments. It also enables the ESA to deliver greater cohesion in operations and service delivery, more collaborative management and a unified executive. It saw the launch of an executive restructure, the Blueprint for Change in ACTAS and the development of the ESA Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

SRA Programme

Why do we have the SRA Programme?

The decision to form the SRA Programme was based on the need to formalise many aspects of the SRA into a structured programme and projects. Its agenda is to improve the services and value we offer to the public. The six projects that form the SRA Programme are:

- * CAD/TRN Upgrade
- * Blueprint for Change for ACTAS
- * Women in Emergency Services
- * ComCen Project
- * Station Upgrade & Relocation Project
- * Strategic Bushfire Management Plan

SRA Programme

Is the SRA Programme different from the SRA?

The SRA was an initial review to enable the ESA to set strategic directions. The SRA Programme is a formal methodology to allow the ESA to better manage project risks and interdependencies, make better use of resources between projects and to track progress and benefits realisation.

Welfare

What is being done to support frontline employees who are pregnant or require operational relief?

There are opportunities for both men and women who are unable to fill an operational frontline role to perform meaningful and appropriate work in other areas of the ESA and the wider JACS Directorate. The ACT Government supports all staff in this situation.

Welfare

Why doesn't the ESA fund a welfare program? It is better to invest in prevention rather than pay compensation.

ESA is putting considerable effort into rehabilitation and return to work programs. ESA is also introducing a number of welfare programs to reduce the incidence and impact of mental and psychological injuries in the workplace. See the Roundtable Response paper under 'Welfare' for a description of the ESA Graduated Return to Work Management Panel and support programs. The Manager, Welfare Programs – ESA position was created to ensure ESA staff and volunteers have access to coordinated, high quality welfare-related services.

Welfare

What arrangements are in place to deal with mental or psychological health injuries for frontline staff in the ESA?

There are programs in place for all staff within the ESA, whether in operational frontline roles or in support roles. The Employee Assistance Program is available to all ESA staff and volunteers. In addition, the Blueprint for Change Project will be delivering mental health awareness training to managers in ACTAS and the suitability of this training will be reviewed for delivery across the ESA. The WIES Project will deliver training to enhance leadership capability across all people with management responsibility, both staff and volunteer.

ComCen

Why are we reforming the ComCen? It works well the way it is.

The intention to use our CAD system to its maximum functionality is endorsed by the ACT Government. Current ComCen staff of both ACTF&R and ACTAS do a great job, but as a government agency, we are obliged to explore ways of improving how we deliver our services to the ACT community, in pace with increasing demand. This involves making better use of existing resources. The experience of existing ACTAS and ACTF&R operators and supervisors will be instrumental in making the reforms. The ComCen Workplace Consultative Committee (WCC) is in place for formal consultation.

ComCen

Is the ComCen a communications centre or an operations centre?

While some staff have awarded the ComCen various titles due to the fact that it provides a number of supporting functions during incident command, the fact that it is a communication centre is unchanged. A number of the activities claimed by contributors as command functions are not prescribed within either the AIIMS or Bluecard systems. The title of 'ComCen' for the ESA Communications Centre is established in tradition as well as industrial agreements.

Volunteers

What arrangements are in place to deal with PTSD or other injuries sustained by volunteers in the course of their volunteer duties?

ESA volunteers have access to the same support mechanisms as the ESA paid workforce and can access the Employee Assistance Program provided by the ACT Government. Volunteers will also be able to access other support programs that may become available across the ESA. Volunteers are also covered by the ESA's workers' compensation if they are injured during assigned volunteer activities. Details of this cover are provided to volunteers when they join the volunteer service.

Volunteers

Why can't volunteers access the same information at the same time as ESA staff?

Communications with volunteers takes many forms, for example, weekly emails, working groups, google drives, etc. ESA recognises there is a need to gain a better understanding of expectations and channels of communications and then continue to work to find the best balance.

Volunteers

Do volunteers have access to training in MDT and ComCen to assist with large scale incidents?

Yes, this training is already in place. Each of the ESA services ensure that a sufficient number of personnel have current training and qualifications at any time.

Volunteers

Volunteers can have considerable out of pocket expenses. Are they able to claim these?

Volunteers are able to claim reimbursement of their reasonable expenses. The volunteer service can provide the information you need to submit a claim. The volunteer services are looking at ways to simplify administration and communications for volunteers.

Recruitment

Do we have any plans to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff?

ACTF&R is working with Fire & Rescue NSW to increase workplace diversity and the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in ESA. Inclusion is a key priority of the ACT Government.

Strategic planning

Does the ESA have a strategic plan for escalating events?

The ESA has an Incident Management Plan for escalating critical incidents. This plan is tested regularly through planned exercises. The ESA has targets, which are tracked and reported, on the proportion of staff trained in the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS IV) methodology for incident management.

Strategic planning

How do services advise that resources are reaching a critical point?

Staff levels and overtime are monitored by the ESA executive to inform planning for recruitment activities. It is the responsibility of Chief Officers and the ESA Director – People and Culture to monitor and report on resources. Any concerns should be raised with your Chief Officer in the first instance.

Strategic planning

Is the ESA planning and preparing for the risk of escalating weather events?

The ESA does considerable work on mitigation for the escalating risk of extreme weather events due to climate change. The ESA maintains the Territory Wide Risk Assessment which seeks to highlight and mitigate the main risks we face. The ESA's RFS section has ownership of the ACT Strategic Bushfire Management Plan and works in conjunction with other agencies, such as the Parks and Conservation Service to deliver the outputs of the plan. The SES performs planning for other emergency situations due to extreme weather events.