

Addendum: The Strategic Reform Agenda: an antecedent

1. In the second half of 2014 the Emergency Services Agency (ESA) initiated a “Review of Enabling Support Functions” (“The Review”). This Review stemmed from an ACT Treasury Expenditure Review that analysed the ESA’s budget, expenditure, performance and other data and concluded there was some duplication occurring.
2. The Review initially focussed on three areas as follows:
 - a. Training and Volunteer Management;
 - b. Logistics; and
 - c. Risk, Planning and Spatial Services.
3. The first phase of the Review was referred to as the ‘As is’ phase and was designed to collect data in different forms to develop a picture of how each operational service (ACT Ambulance Service, Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service) and the ESA functioned and performed in delivering support. The stated intention was to then analyse and critique this data to establish a current baseline. It was also stated that by understanding and articulating the ‘As is’ in terms of resources, activities undertaken, services/outcomes delivered to stakeholders, rationale and accountability drivers, management and governance, costs, and work flow, the options developed during the ‘To be’ phase could be assessed. This assessment would look at operational, legislative, industrial, scalability, HR, risk, and sustainability issues.
4. The ‘As is’ phase took over 5 months to collect, collate and present the data from each service and business unit in a common format. An invitation was issued to staff from the ESA and each of the services (ACTF&R, ACTAS, SES RFS) to attend a meeting at Fairbairn to receive presentations on the ‘As is’ phase. Attendance from ACTF&R personnel was only from day work positions: firefighters on the 10/14 roster which the ESA refers to as “frontline firefighters” were not invited.
5. Up to this point, for Fire and Rescue at least, there was a high degree of rigour in the collection and collation of the data, but it was often pointed out to the coordinator of this review, Andrew Baker, that there were issues and limitations to some of the data, and that in many cases, significant additional explanation from Fire and Rescue subject matter experts would be required at the time that such data was presented.
6. During this time an unexplained yet pivotal change to the structure and scope of the review occurred. Senior ESA personnel unilaterally decided to change the grouping of functions from 3 (see para 2 above) to 6 areas as follows:
 - a. Training;
 - b. Volunteer Management;
 - c. Workforce Planning;
 - d. Logistics;
 - e. Property Repairs and Maintenance; and
 - f. Risk and Planning.

7. It was also determined by Senior ESA personnel that ‘advisory committees’ (aka working groups) would be established to analyse the ‘As is’ data and determine options for change, and the impact of these options. These advisory committees were structured along the 6 headings set out above.
8. Concerningly, the language used by ESA Executives during the course of the review was inconsistent. On the one hand Andrew Baker (the review project manager) consistently referred to the “Review of Enabling Support Services” and avoided drawing any conclusions until as much data as possible was collected, collated, and analysed. On the other hand, ESA Commissioner Dominic Lane mostly referred to the review as the “integration project”, and did so from as early as August 2014. Mr Lane’s constant reference to integration when referencing the review created concerns, particularly within ACT Fire and Rescue, that the review was a sham, and was not about finding efficiencies. It was suspected that instead of being an open consultation process with no pre-determined outcomes, the Review was intended to group all “non-operational” functions under the ESA, irrespective of whether there was any evidence or data to support such an outcome. This possibility was seen as potentially disastrous to firefighter safety insofar as it would place functions such as training, logistics, communications and building approvals in the hands of personnel with no Fire and Rescue experience or situational awareness. As a consequence, cynicism about the change process grew within Fire and Rescue leading to disengagement from and distrust of the ESA leadership.
9. Nonetheless, the process continued, and during December 2014 and January 2015 each operational service or functional area provided 30-minute open presentations on the ‘As is’ for their area. There were fifteen presentations in all with four provided by Fire and Rescue as follows:
 - a. Community Fire Units (CFUs);
 - b. Technical and Operational Support Services (TOSS);
 - c. Community Resilience; and
 - d. Training.
10. Despite the caution provided by ACTF&R personnel about the need to qualify any data presented, each group was given only 30 minutes to present. This led to concerns that in the context of 15 half hour presentations to a forum drawn from across the whole of the ESA:
 - Presenters were told that because of time limitations each service/area was only allowed to list 4 to 6 outcomes within each presentation;
 - Nuances of detailed technical data would be lost;
 - There was limited time at the end of each presentation for questions from the floor;
 - The volume of the material presented was difficult for participants to absorb; and
 - There was limited time for participants to test any arguments advanced.
11. While Fire and Rescue had a considerable amount of data to support its presentations, but no opportunity to present the data or explain it, Fire and Rescue personnel were concerned that claims made in other presentations were not supported by any comparable evidence. As an example, a presentation by ESA Training claimed that one of its ‘services/outcomes’ was to provide Human Resources advice. Prior to the presentations being delivered when Andrew Baker as the ESA Manager responsible for ESA Training was pressed to provide an explanation of this he explained that ESA Training provided 2 to 5 minutes of Human Resources advice per week. The fact that it was included in the presentations made it clear to many in Fire and Rescue that

there were many questions about untested assertions made in a number of presentations, and that there was little to no opportunity to discuss relevant data or evidence.

12. By the time the advisory committees were established for the 'To be' phase, most Fire and Rescue members involved were of the strong opinion that the 'consultation was a sham and that JACS and the ESA were going to do what they liked anyway.' This attitude was based upon:
 - The 'As is' phase having been a rigorous process over many months, while the 'To be' Phase took place sporadically over a period of two months and lacked any such rigour;
 - Fire and Rescue personnel being the single largest staffed emergency response component of the ESA, but were outnumbered in some cases by as many as 12 to 1 in the advisory committees; and
 - The approach of the advisory committees in preferring majority opinion to situational awareness, experience, skill and specialist knowledge.
13. **Attachment A** is an email dated 18 February 2015 from Darren Cutrupi sent to all ESA staff and volunteers on behalf on Dominic Lane. The email makes clear that:
 - The 'As is' phase of the Review had taken 5 months;
 - A total of 422 responses were received for an online survey;
 - Volunteer organisations had made input to the Review via the Minister for Emergency Services;
 - A "special wall presentation will be erected at the ESA Training Centre to display information collected across the whole organisation in the 'As is' phase of the review and comments from the online survey";
 - "Staff and volunteers are encouraged to take some time to visit the presentation";
 - "Post it Notes will also be available for you to make comments and pin them against the relevant area. These will all be collected and feed into the Review";
 - 6 advisory committees would be established (see para 6 above);
 - The advisory committees would "have approximately three weeks to complete the identification and assessment of options; and
 - The input would be used to "help frame recommendations in the final report".
14. By the time the 'To be' phase was concluded, most advisory committees had only met a few times, and while there were ideas proffered and discussed for 'To be' options there was often little interest, little or no analysis applied, and a feeling that the process was being manipulated and the whole exercise was tokenism.
15. At this point, the exercise very quickly morphed into the Strategic Reform Agenda, along the timeline set out below:
 - On 26 February 2015, 47 identified individuals were invited to participate in a workshop to initiate the advisory committees from 9 am to 2 pm at the ESA training centre at Hume (see **Attachment A**);
 - On 13 March 2015, Union representatives and ESA managers attended a "ESA Review of Enabling Support Services consultative forum" from 11 am to 12 noon (**Attachment B**);

- On 25 March 2015, a “recall day” was held from 9 am to 2 pm for participants of the 26 February “workshop”. The agenda for that day shows that the ESA Commissioner conducted a welcome to the day for 20 minutes, and some closing remarks for 10 minutes. There was no mention in the agenda of any intention to initiate the “Strategic Reform Agenda”, rather the workshop was to be devoted to “advisory committee group work” and “next steps” (**Attachment C**);
- On 26 March 2015, the ESA Commissioner sent an all staff email (**Attachment D**) stating:
 - Yesterday we held the second workshop for the advisory committees that were established to consider options for the ‘To be’ phase of the “ESA Review of Enabling Support Services”;
 - “The outcomes of this second workshop will help to inform the reforms to our enabling services”;
 - “I (the Commissioner) hope to meet with unions and volunteers organisations in the near future to consult further”; and
 - “Yesterday’s workshop was also an opportunity for me to present on the Strategic Reform Agenda that the ESA will be embarking on in coming months”. (A copy of the 9-page presentation, with someone’s handwritten note of 24/2, appears as **Attachment E**).
- On 1 April 2015, a second “consultative forum with unions” was held from 11.45 am to 12.45 pm;
- On 2 April 2015, the ESA Commissioner wrote to the UFU attaching a further 16-page presentation, foreshadowing a 2-day planning workshop for 15 and 16 April 2015 (**Attachment F**). The final page shows a schematic diagram of the “ESA Strategic Reform Agenda 2015 – 2020” dated 1 April 2015 prepared by an “ESA Internal Review Team”.
- On 7 May 2015, the ESA Commissioner wrote to the new Secretary of the UFU, Paul Swain, about the “ESA Review of Enabling Support Functions Review”. The letter (**Attachment G**) stated:

“The review has been completed and I have received the final report. I am considering the findings and recommendations of the review report. Given the review is one of several conducted recently, I will bring forward the actions from this review under the ESA’s Strategic Reform Agenda (SRA), which I announced to staff on 25 March 2015”.

16. The above timeline demonstrates that the ESA Strategic Reform Agenda (SRA) was:

- incubated in secret by the ESA for some time prior to 25 March 2015;
- hatched in a presentation by the ESA Commissioner at a workshop where staff were pre-occupied with a “ESA Review of Enabling Support Services” about which ACT Fire and Rescue staff at least already had concerns about transparency and manipulation of process; and
- up and walking before the ESA had concluded the ESA Review of Enabling Support Services in May 2015, which had been in progress since as early as September 2014: a period of some 8 months.

17. To put it another way, while staff were engaged in “busy work” concerning the “ESA Review of Enabling Support Services” for eight months, the Strategic Reform Agenda emerged rapidly in a period of 7 days: from 25 March 2015 when slipped into a presentation by the ESA Commissioner with no prior notice, to 1 April 2015 when an “Internal Review Team” produced a schematic diagram hailing it as a rubric for change for the coming 5 years to 2020.
18. As a postscript, it is telling that the full results of the staff survey undertaken as part of the “Review of Enabling Support Functions”, and the report of that Review which the Commissioner referred to in his letter of 7 May 2015, were never released.
19. The above process took place in an environment where hostility towards fire and rescue as a business, and its personnel as professionals, had been cultivated through a number of documents and public statements. For example:
- The Emergency Services Minister, Simon Corbell, stated to the Canberra Times in May 2014 that there were reports and an investigation of bullying and sexist behaviour in ACT Fire and Rescue. Subsequent media reporting continued until February 2016. No report was ever released, and the allegations were never tested;
 - A report (March 2015) by ex-Chief Officer of the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, Mark Jones, which was provided to the ACT Government Expenditure Review process stated: “There is seemingly considerable scope to take some costs out of the managerial arrangements of ACT Fire and Rescue with no detriment to service delivery or increase in risk” (**Attachment H** page 4).
- The statement was not supported by any financial or risk analysis. The author, Mark Jones, was subsequently appointed to manage the Strategic Reform Agenda in November 2015.
20. In this context, the “Review of Enabling Support Functions” rapidly morphed into the “Strategic Reform Agenda” and provided an organisation structure which in large part mirrored the preconceived structure of that Review.
21. **Attachment I** is an organisation chart for the “Realigned Executive Structure – July 2015”, which shows:
- Three new executive management roles of “People and Culture”, “Risk and Planning” and “Logistics and Governance” which correlate directly to the 3 groupings of the ‘As is’ function of the “Review of Enabling Support Functions” (see paragraph 2 above);
 - A conceptualisation of the Chief Officers of ACT Fire and Rescue, Ambulance Service, State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service as being responsible only for the “operations” of their respective services. The implication is that the “Shared Services” are to reside with the respective executive managers; and
 - The impending removal of the Deputy Chief Officers of each of the services, contrary to assurances given during the “Review of Enabling Support Functions” that there would be no loss of the Deputy Chief Officer Roles.
22. By 15 December 2015, the ESA had determined a reshuffle of functions from the respective services to the new “Executive Manager” roles. In addition, a new role was created for the Director of the Strategic Reform Agenda (SRA), which is shown in **Attachment J**, an organisation chart provided to the UFU in December 2015. The organisation chart that currently appears on the ESA Website is for the most part the same. Of note is that COMCEN is included in “Risk and Planning” although COMCEN was never discussed in the “Review of Enabling Support Functions”. Of note also is that Deputy Chief Officer roles had been removed.

23. The new structure in fact duplicated pre-existing functions within ACT Fire and Rescue, and the ESA cultivated a narrative that while demand for Ambulance was growing (see the final page of **Attachment F**) ACT Fire and Rescue was over-resourced; it was subsequently shown that the ESA had used false information to argue this narrative.
24. **Attachment K** is the “Information paper on the proposed changes to the ACTF&R Structure” circulated by ESA Commissioner Dominic Lane in January 2016. In it, he claimed that:
- there had been a decline in response to fire incidents of 10% per annum since 2008–09;
 - there was a higher than average rate of automated fire alarm calls in the ACT; and
 - ACTF&R was not highly utilised due to the relatively low number of fire emergencies (and) ... there is scope for reform and improvement.
25. Subsequent analysis of Productivity Commission data released by the UFU showed that there was never any data to support these claims.
26. The example of the “Review of Enabling Support Functions” shows that the ESA has a prior record of embarking on “consultative” processes in which it does not explicitly propose a particular outcome, but through manipulation of process creates the illusion of consultation while secretly developing and pursuing its own agenda for change.

Attachments

Attachment A	Email from Darren Cutrupi of 18 February 2015 re “ESA Review of Enabling Support Services”
Attachment B	Agenda for “ESA Review of Enabling Support Services - Consultative forum - 13 March 2015”
Attachment C	Agenda Highlights for “Recall Day” on 25 March 2015
Attachment D	Email from ESA Commissioner of 26 March 2015 re the ‘To be’ phase of the “ESA Review of Enabling Support Services”
Attachment E	Copy of ESA Commissioner’s 9-page presentation of 25 March 2015 “ESA Strategic Change Management Process”
Attachment F	Correspondence from ESA Commissioner to UFU with 16-page presentation of 2 April 2015
Attachment G	Correspondence from ESA Commissioner to UFU Secretary of 7 May 2015 re “ESA Review of Enabling Support Functions Review”
Attachment H	Mark Jones report of March 2015
Attachment I	Organisation chart for the “Realigned Executive Structure – July 2015”
Attachment J	Organisation chart provided to the UFU in December 2015
Attachment K	“Information paper on the proposed changes to the ACTF&R Structure” circulated by ESA Commissioner Dominic Lane in January 2016