

UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA



Analysis of Emergency Services Agency Roundtable Process March 2018

Executive Summary

This document, by the United Firefighters' Union (UFU), presents a critical analysis of the establishment, conduct and the reporting of the outcomes of the Emergency Services Agency's (ESA) Roundtable process.

A series of "Roundtable" meetings were convened by the ESA from January to March 2017. The origin of the roundtables was the Parliamentary Agreement for the 9th Legislative Assembly which committed the ACT Government to:

"...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.**" (our emphasis).

The analysis reveals that while there may be much useful information contained in the reports and documents prepared by the ESA, the roundtable consultation process was fundamentally flawed in both design and implementation, from its inception through to completion.

This is a great pity and represents a time consuming and expensive lost opportunity to hear from key stakeholders, discuss issues on a focused and thematic basis, and use the Roundtable process to build a consensus around the future of emergency services.

The UFU is concerned that the entire process was compromised at the outset by not being conducted independently of the ESA and has become a case study example of self-justification.

Analysis of the ESA's conduct of the roundtables, and its preparation of reports on the outcomes and on its response to those outcomes, demonstrates it has manipulated the process and outcomes to suit its own pre-determined agenda, as contained within the pre-existing Strategic Reform Agenda (SRA).

The consultation process has been disingenuous and does not meet the very purpose intended for it by the Parliamentary Agreement. Rather than allow the process to run of its own accord, and potentially question, challenge and contest some of the 'reform' objectives and rationales of the SRA, the ESA Executive Management has doggedly pursued its own preferred and pre-existing agenda for change.

The ESA appears to have deliberately interpreted and used the roundtable process as a means to prosecute and implement its "business as usual" approach to the SRA, rather than consider that changes and improvements to the reform agenda may be desirable. The views of participants seem to have had little or no bearing on the outcomes documented by the ESA in its "Summary Report" and its "Response to Summary Report".

The notion that the call in the Parliamentary Agreement for discussion of "wider resourcing, structural and organisational reform, and increasing diversity in the fire-fighting service" should be construed in this narrow way by the ESA seems little more than self-serving.

The abuse of process exposed by this analysis is not novel. The Addendum concerning the genesis of the ESA's Strategic Reform Agenda describes a propensity of the ESA to treat staff and volunteers as passive subjects of consultation processes, rather than active participants in those processes. Put simply, for the ESA consultation is something done to people, instead of something that is done with people.

Ultimately, cynical manipulation of process leads to disengagement of stakeholders. In this instance such disengagement is evidenced by concerning results obtained from the "Justice and Community Safety Directorate Staff Survey", which was administered at around the time that the ESA Roundtable process was conducted.

The UFU seeks a consultation process that genuinely and rigorously addresses the intent of the Parliamentary Agreement. The UFU recommends that a renewed, properly constituted, roundtable process be instigated, overseen by a body independent of the ESA, with terms of reference and a modus operandi to be developed in consultation with key stakeholders.