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Response Due By

Louca, Chrisoula (DCS)

From: Hassouros, Connie (CFS)
Sent: Tuesday, 21 October 2014 12:26 PM
To: DCS:Minister Piccolo
Cc: Grantham, Cliff (DCS); Karanikos-Mimis, Spiro (DPC); Hoppe, Peter (DCS)
Subject: Sector Reform - Media and Communications reform
Attachments: Media and Communications - Sector Reform.pdf

Dear Minister and staff

I would like to put forth suggestions on the **Media and Communications Unit** functioning most effectively under a new integrated emergency services model.

Background

Under the previous SAFECOM model, the media liaison function was delivered with CFS, SES and MFS each having dedicated media and communications staff for their respective agencies.

The exception to this was the operational on-call function for the after-hours media liaison service, which was delivered collectively (i.e. the media on-call staff member was responsible for all three agencies after-hours).

This proved to be ineffective and unsustainable from both a service delivery and staffing perspective. For CFS alone, between the years 2000 and 2009 there were 25 people who were employed in media roles and subsequently departed the CFS, which was a significant turnover and in stark contrast to the general workforce stability in CFS. Exit interviews revealed that intolerable working hours adversely affected job satisfaction and significantly impacted personal relationships.

Current structure

It is important to note that all three ESOs have dedicated media and communications staff in substantive positions, with a Media Coordinator operational after-hours rostered function. The rostered roles are substituted with staff from other areas within the organisations.

CFS – 2 x FTE dedicated media comms staff

(Operational a/h roster includes an additional 2 x FTE from other substantive roles)

Note –

CFS has 2 x media lines:

- > 1 x external media line (specifically for media – operates 0700-1800 Monday to Friday. Outside these hours is diverted to an after-hours message. Provision of media services is not impacted during significant emergency or operational incidents, as the media line is opened as required).
- > 1 x internal media line (specifically for staff only - for operational purposes, available 24/7 with this service functioning as part of an after-hours media rostered system)

MFS – 1 x FTE dedicated media comms staff

(Operational a/h roster includes an additional 6 x FTE from other substantive roles)

SES – 1 x FTE dedicated media comms staff

(The SES Duty Officer assumes the media on-call function in addition to their duty officer role)

Corporate vs. operations

It is critical to recognise that a Media and Communications function in the emergency services sector cannot be regarded the same as a media unit in a non-ESO government agency.

The media and communications role in an ESO is dynamic and fluid due to the emergency environment that it operates within.

The corporate and operational function of these roles is inextricably linked. For media and communications staff (across all three ESOs), the role can become operational long before any other role in the organisation is, or even before regional staff are aware there is a going incident. Similarly, the operational aspect can finish as quickly as it began and the role reverts back to its corporate function.

This role differs from other operational roles in that the operational aspect is ongoing, and not just when the State Coordination Centre is activated. This applies during core business hours and after-hours. To effectively undertake this role an intimate knowledge of CFS operations and key messaging is required. This is to ensure critical public information delivery, satisfying a demanding media thirst for information and importantly recognising the volunteering ethos.

Current CFS communications structure

The CFS has a dedicated communications functional area, where the media and communications unit is located. Other roles in this area include:

- > Web/Social Media Manager (1 x FTE) – this is a dual role
- > Principal Communications Officer (1 x FTE) – marketing/advertising activities

The model allows for consistent information delivery by consolidating online, public relations and marketing efforts into a dedicated communications functional area. This highly effective structure sees the roles inter-relate to deliver key information to the media and public through combined communications channels.

Proposed structure

If all three agencies (CFS, MFS and SES) are brought together as one team it is critical that agency specification is maintained. Allowing for staff to continue providing a dedicated service to CFS, SES and MFS is paramount. Without this consideration, the media liaison function will be severely impacted and unsustainable, posing a significant risk to public safety.

This model can be achieved by creating a Strategic Communications Unit (SCU).

The SCU would comprise:

- > Media and Communications Unit
- > Web Development
- > Social Media
- > Marketing Communications

The areas indicated above would be responsible for and reflect the collective communications platforms utilised by all ESOs, and their integration would offer the most pragmatic and effective solution.

It would be appropriate to have one Manager or Director to govern the team as a whole, with the above respective roles reporting upwards within this management structure.

Media function

Maintaining the 3 separate media lines per agency for the media function is essential for media to have a dedicated contact number to seek information regarding the respective incident. Combining all three to a singular media line would be problematic and unsustainable for the following reasons:

1. It would be unmanageable

Having one media line for three agencies would be ineffective and unsustainable. It would place an unreasonable expectation on one person to manage this heightened demand. If simultaneous incidents occurred (which has happened) e.g CFS had a major bushfire incident, MFS had a

significant structure fire and SES experienced demand due to heatwave or flood, it would be near impossible to manage the media for all agencies with one media line.

2. Expertise would be diluted and incident notification overwhelming.

Trying to consolidate all ESO media lines would require a single agency representative to have knowledge of three areas and all incidents occurring per agency at any given time:

- > CFS who respond to bushfire and structure fire, hazardous material, road crash rescue, tree down, and rescue incidents;
- > MFS who predominantly respond to structure fire and hazardous material;
- > SES who predominantly respond to tree down/flood salvage activities.

Rather, it would be more beneficial to maintain specialised knowledge with an awareness of the business of other ESO's.

3. Media enquiries from other ESOs would go unaddressed.

As a CFS media staff member it is fair to say the CFS receives significantly greater media attention than the other ESOs, particularly during bushfires. During the 2014 January and February fires the CFS was mentioned in a total of **25,959** reports in Australian media. These reports reached a total potential cumulative audience/circulation of **172,970,875**.

In the last financial year, the CFS fielded 1173 media enquiries (excluding calls during the Jan/Feb fires which were not able to be captured due to the excessive demand).

During a bushfire operational campaign, the CFS stops all other media enquiries and focuses on public safety and the incident, particularly if the State Coordination Centre is activated. Therefore, other media enquiries for other agencies would go unaddressed as in such a situation they would be regarded as a lower priority.

4. Risk to public safety.

Addressing bushfire enquiries (and similarly for MFS and SES) requires specialised knowledge for effective public information delivery to ensure community safety. This requires an acute understanding of the relevant key messages. It also involves building on pre-formed relationships within regions to maintain information flow up from regional through to the state level.

It is reasonable for each agency media representative to have an awareness of what the other agencies business involves, particularly to provide inter-agency support as required during periods of high operational demand.

Yet, to mitigate the associated risk with keeping a threatened community well informed it is important to maintain agency specific knowledge, achieved by preserving dedicated roles to cater for the CFS, MFS and SES.

Internal communications function

The CFS provides a media and communications function, which incorporates publications. A bi-monthly electronic publication is issued to CFS volunteers, with a hard-copy annual glossy publication being produced mid-year. These publications are valued by volunteers and it allows the CFS to connect our geographically dispersed organisation (state, regionally and at the volunteer level) and offer well-deserved recognition for volunteering efforts.

Internal staff communication is also undertaken but is at times hampered by the media liaison function of this dual-role.

Social media

The relationship between the media team and social media staff is critical in both a day-to-day sense and during operational peaks, where the roles inter-relate and messaging disseminated via the media team amplified on social media channels. It is essential that these roles continue working closely together within a common team to ensure the use of online platforms for both public relations activities and operations are maximised. Maintaining these close linkages will yield a continued efficient exchange of information between the emergency services and the community.

Marketing/advertising

The media and communications team amplifies campaign messaging to ensure consistency and increase message exposure to the public. These roles must maintain a strong and integrated relationship to continue delivering targeted and relevant safety and preparedness information to the public, and consequently the media who are important emergency broadcast partners.

I trust you will find this input useful. Please do not hesitate to contact me on 0407 972 611 or via email if you require any clarification or wish to discuss anything further.

Best regards,
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Media and Communications Officer

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Sector Reform

Media and Communications

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