

Assistant Clerk Committees
 Department of the Legislative Council Fire Services Bill Select Committee
 Parliament House, Spring Street
 East Melbourne Vic 3002

Dear Committee members

I take this opportunity to raise some of my concerns about the fire services legislation which the Victorian Government has pushed through the Legislative Assembly and has attempted to push through the Legislative Council

I am a proud CFA member with the Mount Martha Brigade on Mornington Peninsula I have been a member for 37 years and have served as Captain for 5 years and as Secretary for 26 years and 4 years as Community Safety Coordinator . I have had a term as President of the Victorian Rural Fire Brigades Association and as a State Councillor VFBV I had a time as President of the Australasian Assembly of Fire Brigade Associations

I raise my concerns as the very experienced member of CFA . I served as a fire fighter locally and at major events e.g. Ash Wednesday , NSW fires and Black Saturday but have now stood down as a fire fighter to deliver community safety to my community. I believe I have a strong understanding of CFA and its relationship with the community . I have a Paul Harris award from the local Rotary Club although I am not a rotary member they believe I meet their conditions for service to the community

I am concerned that the Presumptive rights (Cancer) legislation does not treat paid and volunteer fire fighters equally . Under the legislation a paid fire fighter with one of the 12 cancers prescribed gets automatic access to treatment and compensation . A volunteer Fire Fighter has to be considered by an unspecified panel prior to maybe being provided coverage Having observed the process endured by members at Fiskville , I believe volunteers need to be provided the same rights as they fight the same fires as paid staff and often alongside them. The current proposal makes volunteers second rate citizens

The South east of Australia of which Victoria makes up a major component is recognized worldwide as having the most risk of bushfires in the world and as such needs the best fire firing capacity in the world .

This legislation splits up the fire fighting capacity of Victoria and has the potential to put all Victorians at risk when the next Ash Wednesday or Black Saturday occurs . Current global warning pundits predicts more and bigger fire events .

When the next major fire event occurs will the State have the surge capacity to meet the challenges? Will brigades which are in FVR areas become deskilled or sidelined

Another of my concerns is that without consultation with volunteers as prescribed under the Volunteer Charter the motive for this legislation and its potential effects on CFA volunteers does not address why there is a need to split up CFA

The Black Saturday Royal Commission actually lauded the integration model of CFA operations . this has recently been stated by the Counsel assisting the Royal Commission Jack Rush QC It is not clear how CFA volunteers are supposed to work with FRV a separate organization with different priorities and operational standards to CFA . How are a FRV crew and CFA volunteer crew supposed to work at an incident . Who is in charge?

How can an organization, a statutory authority operate without full control over its staff. If all staff are under FRV control will volunteers have former CFA staff come to assist them or get former MFB union orientated staff to push them around

My brigade operates alongside an integrated station where we have had good relations with most of the members both volunteers and staff. The working arrangements currently are very

amicable but under FRV will harmonious relations continue when two organization try to work together ?

A further concern is the financial and budget implications of the proposal . In a political move the Government has frozen th fire levy until after the 2018 election . Funding for the massive pay increases and need for new and expanded stations and new vehicles and equipment will require massive funding increases . The current fire levies will only rise , but this fact has not be outlined .to the public

Many brigades like my own have brigade owned vehicles and equipment funded day their communities and bank balances to allow them to replacement such items when they reach their economic lives end . The preservation of these assets must stay with CFA volunteers . In Integrated Brigades it has been the volunteers who have collected the funds not the paid staff.

Finally due to Victoria being the world's most fire risk areas this legislation will affect every Victorian household which leads to consideration of these questions

1 Do you consider that the Victoria community has been adequately consulted on this legislation such that it can supports it

2 Do believe the CFA's 60.00 volunteers have been treated fairly by degrading their value in protecting the community, such that numbers of them will continue

3 Is the Government confident that the legislation will not restrict and curb the surge capacity for major fires

4 Does the Government believe that this short inquiry is not an insult to the volunteers and people of Victoria for such a significant charge

Thank You for allowing me to make this submission
The submission may not be placed on the Committee website

Yours faithfully

[Redacted signature]

Bruce Conboy

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