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From: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 3 July 2017 2:51 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Mr Robert Woolley
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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Submission to Parliamentary Committee - Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

This Bill should be separated into two pieces of legislation. It is disrespectful to firefighters and of no administrative benefit to combine these two very different agendas into one Bill, with the adoption of one being conditional on the adoption of the other.

Firstly it is clear that this Bill is intended to deliver to the United Firefighters Union some agreed and negotiated agenda between the UFU and the Victorian Labor Party.

The concept of a fire service that is Volunteer based, but supported in busy areas with paid career firefighters has served the community well, providing both a professional service and one that can be cost effective to service delivery in the community.

The whole system works well, and has in the past and is at this moment working well. The only problems that occur is with the staff interface with the Union and their Employer. The staff work with Volunteers and the Volunteers work with staff. The issues are only to do with industrial demarcation and domination. The Union with the help of the Labor Party have a self serving agenda to rid the fire service of Volunteers.

This Bill was introduced by stealth with faceless bureaucrats cobbling together some legislation to assist the UFU on their mission. There was no consultation, and there were no government reports that suggest this course of action.

If the Victorian fire services are to be dramatically changed there should have been extensive consultation with the community and both employees and employers. Yet there was none.

The Bill lacks any details of the change. Indeed the Enterprise Agreement has not been produced or

finalised for the proposed new fire service. Having regard to the previous extensive and detailed Enterprise Agreements, they are an instruction manual about how to run the organisation.

impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

The impact of the delivery of fire services is at this point unknown. Unlike other pieces of legislation there has been no Regulatory Impact Statement produced or contemplated. This would seem to be a dangerous way to proceed. To not have some idea how this major structural change will impact the community and its ability to be resilient in one of the most fire prone area of the world is ridiculous. To not have the structure of the change and the agreements with the UFU known is potentially leading to a reduction of the capacity of the state of Victoria to deal with fires and other emergency situations. Where is the cost benefit analysis to show how this change will produce a benefit to those living in Victoria? There isn't one.

The current Bill suggests that those leaders within the organisation will be appointed, by the new fire services body and be employees of them, yet answer to the CFA. How could this work when they are beholden to the unknown rules and clauses of an unwritten enterprise agreement. If an organisation is autonomous then it should be able to employ people with suitable qualifications and experience to fulfil the roles it requires.

effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

We used to as Volunteers feel vital and valued within the community, this Bill diminishes that view. Nobody knows what role will be played by the Volunteers in the stations where there are career staff, this has not been worked out yet, the Enterprise agreement has not been sorted out. It seems likely that these Volunteers will be driven out of Volunteering. They will not be integrated into the new model or paid and Volunteers. A wedge will be driven between the two fire services. Whereas we used to work and function together in the new model there is no detail how this will work or even if it is able to work. Previous versions of Enterprise Agreements between the state government and the UFU have excluded volunteers, or any relationship between volunteers and staff. So within a new organisation who would know what a new deal will be negotiated.

There has been no consultation with any of the stakeholders.

short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

It would seem rather short sighted to introduce a Bill that there are little or no costing for. To accept a major and strategic change to the delivery of fire services within Victoria with no idea how it will work, or what it will cost, or how it is to be delivered and what demands from the UFU in regards to staffing are still unknown.

underlying policy rationale

There is no rational explanation to the introduction of this Bill other than for the government to appease and pay back an arrangement they had with the UFU to deliver both power and resources to a trade union. The Bill combined two separate policies to railroad those in parliament to implement their deal with the UFU. Such that you cannot agree to presumptive legislation without agreeing to a complete structural change of the fire service with no appreciable benefit.

This should not affect the presumptive legislation designed to compensate firefighters, whether they are career staff or volunteers to the effects of cancer presumably caused by their role in the community. This legislation should be the same for staff and volunteers, not some complex maze of words to diminish the rights of volunteers. The current Bill has two paths to compensation for staff and volunteers.

How would a fire service look in Victoria, if everybody worked together and there was not the capitulation to a trade union to return a favour for services already received? How would it be if staff and volunteers respected and valued each other? There is only one thing influencing a harmonious relationship, and that is the attitude that is promoted by the UFU to its members in respect to volunteers and the organisations as a whole. If change is made in Victoria to the delivery of fire services it should come out of detailed and rational consultation with the community, volunteers and staff. No government commissioned report has recommend such as change as is detailed in the Bill.

Once the change is made it cannot be unravelled or the clock turned back. The future of the fire services in the state of Victoria rests in the hands of those who make the decisions. Make those decisions carefully, without undue influence, and with a detailed knowledge of the effects that this change could cause.

Regards,

Robert Woolley

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File1:

File2:

File3: