



27 June 2017

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

RE – Submission to Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Committee as addressed,

I am writing to you, to make my submission with regards to the Fire Services Reform Parliamentary Inquiry.

I am a Country Fire Authority employee, I have been a CFA employee for almost 18 years, I am currently an Operations Officer, Officer In Charge - Springvale Fire Station. I am also a CFA volunteer, with Pearcedale Fire Brigade and have been a volunteer for 31 years, having been a volunteer at Pearcedale, Sorrento and Frankston.

In my role as an Operations Officer, I work in District 8, based at Dandenong South. My role requires me to perform the role of Rostered Duty Officer, which encompasses the area from Springvale to Bunyip, to Wonthaggi, taking in Phillip Island and the Mornington Peninsula. Included in this area is the growth area around Cranbourne, Clyde and Pakenham.

Springvale is a heavy urbanised area in Melbourne's south-east, with a population of around 50,000 people and we are responsible for a majority of the commercial / industrial area of Braeside. As the Officer In Charge of Springvale, we sit on the western boundary for CFA District 8 and are supported by MFB stations at Mentone, Clayton and Wheelers Hill. To our east we have Noble Park and Keysborough Fire Brigades, both are volunteer.

I wish to address each of the criteria.

A. Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria;

- For the CFA Brigades in most Victorian towns, large and small, there will be no impact of the reform. The volunteers in these Brigades will continue to train, go to meetings and be paged to attend emergency calls, these people will sustain no impact.
- A majority of the rural CFA people who are making a lot of noise about the split of CFA, are reacting to the propaganda of VFBV. In fact most of these people have either never worked alongside CFA staff, or only ever see the

Catchment Officer maybe twice a year. The only story these CFA volunteers are getting, is the half-truth story being told by VFBV. A series of half-truth stories to scare and propagate hysteria.

- If we were to discuss the “power of veto” that was a focus of VFBV, the power of veto was a misconstrued interpretation of the consultation clauses that had to be written into EBA’s as a result of the poor performance of CFA to consult. CFA was not the best to come forward, come to the table and negotiate and consult, CFA took the stance of we will tell you what to do, without consultation or discussion. Therefore the reason the consultation clauses were included in EBA’s.
- With Operations Officers (Catchment Officers) moving employment to Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and then seconded to CFA, these people will continue to provide the same level of service as they have done with CFA, again having no impact on volunteers.
- CFA BASO’s remain as PTA staff of CFA, therefore the administration support to Brigades, goes unchanged and will have no impact on volunteers.
- The main cause of impact will be felt in CFA integrated fire stations, where CFA volunteers and FRV staff will co-locate. This however is no cause for alarm, as it has been touted, there will be an increase in the number of appliances available to volunteers, which in turn increases the service provided to Victorians and FRV staff can continue to train and work alongside CFA volunteers, if this is what they want.
- In the future, the Emergency Management Commissioner should look to working with CFA, into developing CFA Brigades in the current inner Melbourne metropolitan area (MFB area), with a view of developing surge capacity for the fire danger period (summer time). This could include a model similar to Army Reserve, where people are trained during the year, have no need to respond to emergency calls year round and are called upon on hot days, or when a large scale event is happening. Call this an enhancement of the so called surge capacity.
- We currently work under two streams for combatting fires and emergencies in metro Melbourne and the country area of Victoria. We have differing management structures, differing equipment, differing communications and differing work ethics. To combine the two fire services, just makes sense. The staff of the current two fire services respond to about 80% of calls made to Victorian fire services, imagine streamlining these into one service and the efficiencies that can be achieved, through training, prevention, response and recovery.
- As a volunteer, in a Brigade adjacent to the growth area of Cranbourne, I do not envisage any negative impact, quite the opposite, staff from Cranbourne or Frankston will continue to support my Brigade when required.
- Under the CFA Act, CFA people will continue to manage incidents in their own areas. Same as what occurs today, if a FRV appliance responds to a CFA incident, the FRV Incident Controller will control the incident until a CFA person arrives, hand over control or continue to control the incident on their behalf. There will be no FRV taking control from CFA regardless of the type of incident.

- The adaptation of 7 staff on the fire ground, is to ensure safety of all persons responding to an incident. When a FRV appliance is responded to an incident, depending on the type of incident, one or two appliances will be responded. This is to ensure safe fireground operations are implemented and appropriately resourced. Should the incident be in a CFA Brigade area, the CFA Brigade will have the authority to determine either one or none of the FRV appliances is required to attend.
- As detailed above, both Noble Park and Keysborough (adjacent to Springvale) regularly struggle to respond with adequate volunteers to emergency calls, especially during the daytime, Monday to Friday, with many of the volunteers working out of the area. We are reliant on support to emergency calls, to come from CFA staff at Dandenong. Many of these failures by are masked in data, with ourselves or Dandenong meeting the required Customer Service Delivery Standards of 8 minutes and therefore the failure data does not show up as being a failure to respond.

B. Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery;

- VFBV have touted that volunteers will leave in droves, in fact there is large turn over in the outer metro area of Melbourne each year. Those in smaller towns have an emotional attachment to the town in which they live and to say they will leave in droves, if managed well, with care and with good communication and stop the political demonising of all fire fighters, then volunteers will continue to do what they do today.
- CFA volunteers do what they do, because they have a sense of belonging and to give something back to their community, it has no price tag. It is a matter of doing something to help your neighbour, it is simply a hobby they love and take seriously, it is important to them. They will not leave because the staff are removed, in fact many will celebrate this move.
- The surge capacity of 60,000 volunteers, that VFBV have hung their hat on, is a fallacy. There are in fact only about 20,000 active volunteers and the surge capacity in outer metro, is not the force VFBV make out it to be. The proven fact that volunteers cannot go on for weeks, and in most cases only a few days at the most, before family and work commitments become the greater priority. The most recent example of this was the Morwell Open Cut Mine fire, Victoria was so depleted, it bought in support from around Australia.
- Volunteers will continue to have a voice and will be engaged through the avenues open to them today, whether it be to the Catchment Officer, via VFBV or VVFA and will have a focused ability to engage by being a part of a pure volunteer organisation in CFA.
- There is an opportunity to strengthen volunteer support, by bringing a number of Brigades together, this is especially highlighted in the Brigades with small or dwindling numbers, or those that have suffered with growth or major spikes in call rate. To combine two or more Brigades into one larger Brigade, reduces operating costs, enhances the ability to engage the community and provide greater support to each other and dare we say to be supported by staff from FRV.

- The change to CFA is a huge opportunity to modernise its thinking, its processes and the way it goes about supporting its people. It appears VFBV is afraid of any change and wants to hold CFA in the 19th century. What representative body wouldn't grab on with both hands and drive change, instead VFBV wants to rule the direction in which FRV and UFU should be steered. The time is now, for VFBV to stand up and represent the people it is expected to represent and engage with CFA in the way forward.

C. Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision;

- There is always going to set up costs associated with setting up FRV, uniform, badging, communications and alike, but this is short term.
- The long term list of savings starts with no MFB Board, one management structure, one uniform, common appliance design, interoperability of the services and even a change to the Fire Services Levy – to having the same levy applied across the State
- The cost savings for CFA alone, with no operational staff, allows true savings to be directed into training and equipment, a big win for all volunteers. Volunteers could directly feed in to how CFA Brigades should be supported and what training is a priority, without interference from operational staff.
- Other long term savings should come with a large workforce being capable of reducing operating costs, including overtime. Significant amounts of money are spent on maintaining staff levels across both organisations, by combining the numbers and with an increase of numbers available, a lot of this overtime should be knocked out, creating a significant savings.
- With a move to a new organisation, with a new look and develop a new culture, there should see a new approach to interaction between the organisation, the Union and its people. This alone will come with long term benefits and savings and improve the relationships between all concerned. This will hopefully eradicate the distrust that currently exists between operational employees and the employer.

D. Underlying policy rationale;

- One of the big wins from the formation of FRV, will be the combining of EBA's for MFB and CFA staff. No longer will there be a need to negotiate with two parties, but simply dealt with as one. This alone has great benefit and cost savings for the management of FRV and for Government and ultimately the tax payer.
- An opportunity exists for Government and the management of FRV to start fresh and develop a new approach to consultation and negotiation and develop a new culture for staff, one without malice or fear of negotiation. This new lease, will also need to flow into UFU, as they have the history of having to fight with organisations and Government to protect the conditions of employment. Without getting everyone onboard and singing from the same hymn book, it will be a one sided affair.
- As previously stated, a review of the Fire Services Levy should be made, with a view of treating the whole State fairly and applying a consistent model of payment, regardless of which fire service a Victorian land owner is situated.

- Changes to the FRV Act and CFA Act are required to ensure appropriate legislation is in place, to identify how both fire services will interact and support one another.

In closing I wish to make the statement that without the change, there is no way forward. Volunteers will continue to do what they do, but how does an employee of a fire service continue, without having working conditions enshrined in an EBA, if an EBA cannot make it over the line?

This whole process of either body, UFU and VFBV, aligning to Government parties has not been good for anyone. In fact it has been very destructive to relationships. It has pitted staff against vols and vols against staff. Everyone has wanted to have their say on their opinions, some informed and some ill-informed. But nothing good comes of not having an outcome.

Therefore I make this submission in the hope that an end is bought to this whole process. I favour the combining of the fire service staff into Fire Rescue Victoria, as I can see the good and the opportunity that it will bring. It will make FRV a strong, dedicated and respected fire service and an emergency service dedicated to protecting Victorians.

I wanted my submission to enlighten you to the real world facts. I wish for my submission to remain confidential, or at least remove any details that could identify me as working in District 8 or being the Officer In Charge of Springvale CFA. For I fear the backlash the content could cause sensitive people.

Should you wish to discuss this confidentiality, please call me.

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