

Submission to Upper House Select Committee Inquiry into Fire Services Restructure Proposal.

Date: 3 July 2017

“Firefighters’ Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017”

From Volunteer Fire Fighter - Rodney Beale – Ex-Captain Phillip Island Fire Brigade.

Dear Committee Members, as addressed,

Please accept my submission as outlined below.

I am a Volunteer Fire Fighter with 48 years experience with the Country Fire Authority of Victoria.

I have studied the proposed restructure and would recommend that this be withdrawn immediately as it fails to service the needs of both the community of Victoria and the fire service as a whole.

My argument is as follows:

- **The proposed Presumptive Rights Compensation legislation for Fire Fighters definitely discriminates against Volunteer fire fighters.** i.e why is there a separate panel to investigate their entitlement to claim, when there is not for paid fire fighters?
- **Why has separate legislation now being proposed for DELWP firefighters for the same type of compensation?** Surely this indicates that the bill under review should have been split so that it covers all firefighters, without discrimination as to whether they are “Paid” or “Volunteer”? i.e. A bill for Presumptive Rights and a separate bill for Fire Service Reorganisation.
- **The proposal to transfer all operational paid fire fighters to the new “Fire Rescue Victoria” organisation and then to contract certain officers back to manage CFA does not make any business sense.** It is like employing your opposition to run your business, potentially there is only one outcome, and you won’t have a viable service. If you wanted to destroy the volunteer service, then this is a sure fire way to do so.
- **There is no detail and no implementation plan outlined in the proposed bill, so how can it be passed when there has been no consultation with those that are intimately involved in providing the fire service.** I am referring to Volunteers that are supposed to be consulted as per the **Volunteer Charter and CFA Act** . I have also noted that in discussion with senior CFA staff at briefings (to VFBV and Local Fire Brigade Group) that they have little knowledge or awareness of the issues involved.
- **Currently communication to the CFA CEO (Ms Francis Diver) is being intercepted by a CFA committee that is implementing the changes before the bill has passed in Parliament,** surely this should not happen at this stage?
- **Information being presented to CFA Volunteers by both CEO and Chief Officer is incorrect – the “the Facts” do not line up with what has been presented in the proposed bill.**

- **For a “proper” restructure of the fire services, then this bill should be rejected and all involved be employed in producing a new bill and doing the task correctly.** What has Victoria to gain from splitting the CFA and MFB? There is no financial justification at this stage. I would venture to suggest that a proper Fire Rescue Victoria Service replaces both MFB and CFA and has a volunteer component for all districts. I have seen this done in the USA in Fairfax County, where both Paid and Volunteer fire fighters work shifts together. This is similar to the Integrated Fire Brigades that currently exist in the 35 CFA stations; this could then be extended to the current Metropolitan fire district. From this the surge capability for the fire service in times of need would be greatly enhanced.
- **Volunteer Fire Fighters save the Victorian Community great expense for protection of the community, to insult them with the current proposed bill, would cost all dearly.** A consequence would be a lack of trust competing services and a loss of Volunteer numbers. You must equally treat all who are involved in the Fire Service; otherwise the State will suffer accordingly.

I could cover many other points, but I will leave that to others that will also be submitting to you.

Thank you in advance, for your consideration of this submission,

**Rodney Beale, Volunteer Fire Fighter, ex-Captain Phillip Island Fire Brigade
CFA 1451782**

Mail address - [REDACTED]

Service Background:

- **48 Years Volunteer Service with CFA**
- In that time I have served in Carisbrook Urban Fire Brigade, Hoddles Creek Rural Fire Brigade, Mooroolbark Urban Fire Brigade and now Phillip Island Fire Brigade. Also I have served in CFA Health Support Team, CFA District 13 Headquarters Brigade, and as a CFA employee for 2 years on the technical implementation of radio upgrades for the Rural Radio Despatch Service (RRDS).
- I have served as Brigade Captain for 2 years at Phillip Island Brigade, Lieutenant in several brigades, Deputy Group Officer in Upper Yarra Fire Brigades Group, Communications Officer, Volunteer Trainer and Assessor in Districts 13 and 8.
- I have been awarded Honorary Life Membership of the CFA, Chief Officers Commendation (2003 Campaign Fires), Fire and Emergency Medal (2009 Fires) and the National Medal with clasp for service to the CFA.
- I am an ex- National Serviceman (Royal Australian Signal Corps 1970-1971) , and have extensive experience in Telecommunications and Information Technology for over 50 years
- My fireline experience, for example includes 1983 Ash Wednesday Fires , 2003-2006 Campaign Fires and Coal Mine fires and 2009 Black Saturday fires. I also include extensive local structural and wildfire experience. I have also spent time with Fairfax County Fire Service, Virginia USA when I was working over there for Telecom (now Telstra) during 1986, 1987 and 1995.