

3rd July, 2017

Attention the Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Dear Committee Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to raise some of my concerns about the Fire Services Legislation which Premier Andrews has rushed through the Lower House. I am pleased there has been a pause in the Legislation's passage through the Upper House. I trust the Select Committee will be able to gather important information and report meaningfully to the Upper House to help bring about an informed decision-making process.

I have been a member of the CFA for 25 years and currently serve as Captain of the Molyullah Brigade. I raise my concerns as an experienced firefighter with some understanding of the importance of CFA and its role in and relationship to the Victorian Community.

My concerns are as follows:

- Firstly, there has been no consultation with the Volunteer Services in the matter. We would like that opportunity and see it as mandatory in any process toward an agreeable outcome. Any attempt by government to undertake reform of this scale without reference to the Boards and executive officers of the service bodies it will impact, shows contempt towards those bodies and a fear of hearing alternative possibilities. VFBV, who represent us as volunteers have also been shut out of a consultative process. There also needs to be a genuine asking of questions to the CFA District Groups for their input. The rationale is to find a suitable outcome, not to frame and present a bill for a particular outcome. This lack of consultation is not in line with the Volunteer CFA Charter and the CFA Act. There has been a clear lack of process to engage the whole firefighting Community in considering options. Holding meetings after legislation is tabled and passed cannot be classed as proper parliamentary and democratic procedure.
- Where is the logic in splitting an important and functioning services organisation in the name of reform, if there's no blueprint and details as to how it will all work? None of the reviews into Victoria's Fire Service has recommended such a degree of restructure, when acknowledging the need for reform of services. I believe it is an unsubstantiated claim by the Government that 8 reviews of Fire Services are all calling for restructure of this magnitude and nature. Where the reviews do concur, is disagreement with the EBA terms. All of these EBA sticking points need to be removed from any legislation proposing reform of this scope and breadth, so they can be debated and voted on separately. It is both wrong and unnecessary to combine Presumptive Rights Legislation and Fire Services reform in the one Bill. I would urge the review Committee to recommend these portions of the Bill be separated

If all of the original sticking points (from the CFA's perspective) were removed, the need for separation into two different bodies would disappear. My concern still is that the CFA will lose control of its volunteer members and that the volunteers will lose faith in, and interaction with their own support systems.

- The concepts and scope of change in this Bill are too important and far reaching to be rushed into Legislation. It will be a costly exercise with uncertainty for volunteers being the prime outcome. Potential for ongoing disunity will also be a likely outcome.
- Finally, I would like to suggest that there is no need whatsoever for a reform to fire services of the extent proposed in the Bill. I urge the Review Committee to take these points onto consideration. I also urge the Committee and all Members of Parliament to be thoroughly conversant with the proposed legislation and its effects on the risks to Victoria's fire safety before voting. I trust your research leads you to see the unnecessary need for, and hurtful nature of this Bill and are able to pass that sentiment on to enable this Bill to be defeated.

Thank you for considering my submission

I give consent for this submission to be listed on the Committee's website.

Yours faithfully,

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