

Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017

Chair – Mr Gordon Rich Philips

4 July 2017

Via email to LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

6 July 2017

consultation@dpc.vic.gov.au

13 July 2017

LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

Final Final Submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017

Dear Chair and Committee Members

I wish to assist in your endeavour to make a recommendation to the Legislative Council about this bill and its particulars

In general I would like to ask why the Fires Services Reform Bill was lumped together with the Presumptive Cancer Legislation. I feel both should have been discussed separately on their merit and in detail, but not one to be used as carrot and/or stick for the other.

I am writing this submission in **qualified support for the proposed reform of the fire services** and refer to the terms of reference as follows:

Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

Everyone working in the Emergency Management sector would support as priorities on the ground the optimal measure of service delivery to the community and the principle of working together to achieve that outcome.

A lean fire service integrating all agencies with one clear responsibility/ accountability command and control/reporting line would no doubt be the preferred reform. But at present that would seem to be a quantum leap reform which the administration is likely not to be able to implement without undue risk of implementation failure. However, streamlining existing traditional arrangements and agencies towards that ultimate goal is a criterion that should be laid on every fire service reform suggestion.

The bill before us amalgamates permanent firefighters from MFB and CFA into the new FRV; it promises to put on a new flexible basis integrated arrangements between permanent CFA firefighters and CFA volunteers at now integrated CFA fire stations and puts all CFA volunteers into the volunteer only CFA.

This would seem to promise an improved structure to manage the unionised part of the fire service, one EBA negotiation between Management and Union instead of two, one management structure for permanent firefighters instead of two different ones. It provides for an environment where never again an operational EBA should be able to aim at regulating everyone's affairs, or vice-versa.

On the other hand, established integrated working relationships between CFA permanent and CFA volunteer firefighters get disbanded, and new flexible arrangements need to be found. Where these arrangements work well this is not ideal, but solutions on a case by case basis can be found. Weighting the constructive impact of all suggested changes in my opinion favours the proposed reform to secure service delivery in population centres and high response areas long term.

A 24/7 available firefighting force is required in city environments and growth corridors to ensure that, which FRV promises to deliver. To align existing volunteer capability in these areas with the new FRV setup will require cooperation from all involved. With leadership from all to support working together this must be possible.

Returning CFA as an organisation to its origin as a volunteer organisation only, should give the volunteers in general an organisational entity back they can fully identify with and enable the Brigades optimal local autonomy within the modern day regulatory requirements to serve their local communities. That FRV operational staff have to be seconded back to CFA to support the volunteer Brigades has to be seen as an organisational anomaly, but can be accepted given the general outlook of this reform, which may become clearer when discussing the underlying policy rationale.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

Detail has to be worked out for continuing volunteer engagement in FRV territory, elsewhere there should be relief in volunteer country that undue interference from third parties not operating in these grounds would seem less likely. Where volunteer numbers are trending downwards the volunteer only CFA can focus better and use its leverage to find solutions and assist the communities affected.

Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

Fire service provision through volunteers cannot be beaten when you look at cost. Where it is judged that the guarantee and maintenance of fire service provision is not possible without a 24/7 permanent and paid firefighting force, it comes with its price tag and there is no way around that. I have not got the know how in detail to put dollar figures to periods of time, I would suggest however that more flexible work arrangements, e.g. daytime manning by permanent staff in numbers required on a case by case basis, should replace inflexible 24/7 only roster arrangements.

Underlying policy rationale

While consultation was terrible and rolling this reform out to all interested parties well before discussion in parliament could have averted some parties to revert back into their silos, but overall I would classify this reform as a workable solution under difficult circumstances.

One point is very clear, not doing anything is just not good enough any longer. Some trenches along political fault lines have been dug that deep that certain people don't see each other in the eye anymore and don't talk, so how should they be able to work together?

The bill presented provides the volunteers and the unionised permanent firefighters each with their own patch, from which, we hope in the near future already new pathways to work together can be found for people in the sector that find this hard these days. Everyone has to be called to account to respect each other, work together constructively and aim for that optimal service delivery to our communities as the one and only imperative in measuring what we do.

Implementation will find the devil in the detail, no doubt, but that can be overcome.

It is time to throw political considerations to deal with the fire services reform over board totally. Who wants to wedge political profit for their particular interests out of this reform is manoeuvring themselves into a dead end, while the fire services do their job and aim at all times to improve service delivery together as one, ultimately.

With best regards

Confidence and Hope

ps: must see below and apply to this bill, just click the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCVzWZ6n66Y>