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I make the following submission to the Victorian Parliament Upper House Select Committee inquiry into the Fire Services Restructure Proposal:

I write as both a resident of a rural area in Central Victoria and as a CFA volunteer of 30 years with various leadership roles at Brigade and Group level. I have attended a number of the Government promoted briefings. These have been attended by the EMV Commissioner – C Lapsley, Min - J Merlino, CFA CO – S Warrington. I have also participated in delegations to my local MP attended my District VFBV meetings.

***Consultation Process** – Under the current CFA Act & Volunteer Charter the Government is required to consult with CFA volunteers. This has not occurred and has unnecessarily exacerbated the tensions & frustrations resulting in delays to find a solution to the current political & industrial catastrophe that is seeing the rapid decline of an organisation that was once held in highest regard internationally. Good change management process can make all the difference in the uptake of new ideas & buy in. Poor process can destroy the outcome before there is a chance to find common - ground. The approach taken by the current Government & CFA Boards are self- defeating and insult volunteers who give their time & expertise freely to protect their communities. Direct, Open & Respectful consultation on a wide range of matters needs to be restored immediately between the VFBV, CFA Board & the Government of the day.

***Presumptive Cancer Legislation** – This issue has been a high priority for Volunteer & paid Fire Fighters for many years. Volunteers in small communities are often at greater risk as they do not have the luxury of full protective equipment in the event of exposure to hazardous Materials eg MVA's, older rural properties with asbestos or multiple chemicals. Surely an approach that treated ALL Fire Fighters equally & respects the volunteers would be the morally, ethically & respectful way to progress this piece of legislation. An expert panel that does not outline the skills required of panel members and does not require that their recommendations are adhered to is a sham & dishonest. Not worthy of volunteers who put their lives on the line to protect their communities.

***CFA Staffing** – The “Secondment/ making available” of FRV employees to undertake various roles within CFA appears to only complicate & continue the ongoing industrial divide. Currently there are many CFA staff who understand & respect the volunteers who work for CFA, a volunteer based Emergency Service. The future issues that are highly likely to arise and increase as a result of ONLY being able to gain paid staff, to support the work of volunteers, will in my opinion make a smooth & seamless operation more unlikely. The ability of the CFA Chief Officer to task FRV employees without impediment is a question that needs to be carefully considered as the implications have the potential to be very far reaching.

***Costing** – To date there have been no costings released of the projected increasing costs which will result from reducing the number of volunteers in urban areas (despite the offers of Co-location for volunteers in Integrated Brigades there appears to be little interest in this option). The cost of station builds, appliances & associated facilities that are part of the current arrangements will surely escalate but do not have been factored into the decisions to destroy the integrated model of Fire Service delivery. The capacity for the community to pay for these increases through the Fire Services Levy will be stretched.

***Surge Capacity** – As one of the world's most fire prone regions Victoria has a great need to have an in built & immediately available surge capacity for the extreme risk periods that we have had in the past and will have again in the future. Large scale fires in regional Victoria as well as Interstate events have benefitted and indeed relied on the services of CFA volunteers in the metropolitan fringes of Melbourne. This loss of capacity, as a result of changes to the current integrated model of fire service delivery & proposed implementation of the FRV model needs to be very seriously investigated as there will without doubt be large scale fires in the future & we do not want to be short of support because there was a lack of consultation and lack of respect for the important role provided by volunteers in our metropolitan areas.

I hope that your Committee appreciates the skills & passion freely given by Emergency Service volunteers to protect the community across Victoria and do more than “go through the process” of conducting an inquiry into this most important issue.

A bad solution won't fix anything. The Victorian fire service – with our mission of protecting lives and property ... is too important an issue to get it wrong.

Yours Sincerely

Sue Bull