[redacted]

Tuesday, 4 July 2017

Attention the Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Dear Committee Members,

The proposed legislation to reshape the organisation of Victoria's fire services should not be passed. It is based on a deception and contains a major discrimination against volunteers.

There may or may not be a need to undertake such drastic and far reaching changes. However, no convincing arguments or reasons have been established.

A number of recent enquiries, including a Royal Commission, have been held into the provision of these services.

None of these has identified or suggested that the current arrangements are deficient or need significant alteration.

The Royal Commission findings confirmed that the Victorian situation was one of the best in the world and specifically advised that alterations similar to the current proposal should not be considered.

The Government is arguing that the changes are necessary to improve the safety of the Victorian community.

This is a clear deception. To anyone who has followed the progress of this matter it should be clear that the real intent is to allow the United Firefighters Union EBA to be implemented.

The reasons for this obsession of the Andrews's government are murky and hard to identify. The most likely is to ensure the political support of the UFU in a number of at risk metropolitan Melbourne seats.

This is pure expediency and not good governance.

For that reason alone the legislation should be rejected.

However, the legislation contains another serious and fatal flaw.

The inclusion of fire fighters Presumptive Cancer provisions is illogical.

It is separate issue and should be dealt with as such in a standalone Bill. It has clearly been included to encourage support for an otherwise dubious proposal.

It also contains a discriminatory condition in that volunteer and career firefighters, despite being exposed to identical risks, have different eligibility criteria to access compensation.

Again, this is sufficient reason the reject the legislation as it stands.

The volunteers of the CFA do have due regard for the safety of the communities they serve and would welcome any changes that genuinely aim to improve that.

If changes were to be recommended as the result of a bipartisan enquiry, producing well founded and objective evidence, based on real and not confected concerns for the safety of all Victorians, it is likely those changes would be supported and embraced enthusiastically.

This legislation falls well short of that and should be rejected in total.

Yours faithfully

Ian Ashcroft
Volunteer Firefighter
Lakes Entrance CFA Brigade
[redacted]