

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Michael and Beth Treacy [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 5 July 2017 11:28 AM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission for The Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

5th July, 2017

Dear Senate Committee,

My concern in this proposed legislation concerns the effects on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery and the short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision.

Firstly, the culture of the volunteer brigades was formed many years before CFA was established in 1945. It was based on self-sacrifice of time, money and personal risk for the sake of the community. Mateship and community bonds nurtured this spirit of sacrifice which enabled volunteers to get on with the job, regardless of hunger, weariness and other work commitments (in the case of those who carried on their own businesses or those who were running a farm). For most of the volunteers, their relationship and moral leadership with CFA came from their captain and from other respected mentors in the ranks. For many decades, the volunteer culture strengthened independently of any other influences.

The MFB culture has a vastly different foundation and direction. The United Firefighters Union (UFU) in Victoria was established in 1911 and has played a very active role in determining work ethics and social and political attitudes in the paid firefighter culture. As a union, the UFU's primary responsibility was, and still is, for the pay and conditions of its members. However, in recent times, it has demonstrated a heavy handed political approach, seeking to control and manipulate for its own purpose. As the CFA career firefighters are compulsorily obligated to be under the control of the union, their culture is more aligned to MFB culture, traditions and loyalty.

There has always been a difference between CFA career firefighters and CFA volunteers, but the differences have been suppressed in the past and tolerated by both entities to enable the fire service to maintain delivery expectations. Due to recent political events, the distinct cultures are now laid bare and are growing in their incompatibility. This is an undeniable fact and must be resolved peacefully for the sake of our communities. A peaceful resolution is definitely to divide the fire services, but to maintain equal and acceptable financial support for both with their own independent leadership. A non-partisan fire commissioner would be able to work with both entities in the case of state emergencies.

If the fire services are to be divided into career division and volunteer division, it would be necessary to have non-unionised leadership of the volunteer brigades to maintain confidence in the organisation. Any UFU involvement in the volunteer sector would dramatically affect volunteer engagement and subsequent fire service delivery. Victoria, at the present time, would not be able to maintain fire service delivery in the event of a mass resignation of the 35,000 operational volunteer firefighters.

As the cost to replace the 35,000 volunteer firefighters with rotating paid staff would be prohibitive, the volunteers need to be recognised and supported by the Victorian Government as a vital and necessary firefighting force that they are at present and have been in the past.

I trust that the Senate Committee will value the historical and cultural positions presented here as a way forward to establish a new paradigm for both career and volunteer brigades to work effectively in their own areas of responsibility.

Sincerely,

Michael Treacy
Volunteer Brigade Member (21 years)

