

Submission to the Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Reference: Parliament of Victoria Submissions on Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform)Bill 2017.

Introduction : I am 3244008 Captain Rick O'Haire of the Glenaladale CFA Brigade. I have been a member of the CFA for 27 years and have fought numerous Fire Campaigns over this period , I suppose the most notable being the Black Saturday Complex Fires of 2009. I have seen during these years the most outstanding examples of dedication to community by the Volunteers of the CFA, my First Lieutenant lost his house to a bush fire whilst he was on the fire line protecting others, whilst his wife was collecting his 80's plus mother and moving her to safety. This is the crux of the volunteer CFA Firefighter, unrelenting service to YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR REGION and WIDER YOUR STATE. This service is not just on the Fire line but the hundreds of hours of training, maintaining equipment and most importantly building a sense of trust within your community; and we do it willingly and freely. You cannot cost this commitment as it surpasses just time.

THE BILL : I make the following points that I as a Volunteer find disturbing.

- **Consultation:** There has been no real consultation with us the Volunteers; yes we had a presentation on 13 June from CFA Career Fire Fighter DCO Tony Day on what he knew or imagined what was in the proposal but this turned out to be he knew nothing and answered questions with "I don't know "or trust me it will be OK. Similarly the CEO and Board of the CFA issued letters and emails with reassuring statements that it will be OK. That's just not good enough; if we are going to change Fire Services in Victoria we all need to know ,"How,What,Where,When and Why" before we go down this path. On a Fire line I don't send a Tanker and Crew down some unknown track without very detailed examination of the information available and with specific instructions. My first priority is the crew's safety and by inference the CFA's first priority is the safety of the Victorian People. The adage "Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread" is most appropriate with the manner in which this Legislation is being addressed.
- **Implementation:** This Legislation is a major Strategic change to every aspect of firefighting in Victoria. For any Strategy to succeed you first have to decide what you want to achieve (You can only have one aim) and then implicit in this is the steps/intermediate goals you need to achieve along the way for this success. These intermediate steps need to be achieved in the correct sequence, must be fully resourced and understood by all participants. Human history is littered with Grand Stratagems that failed to adhere to these dictums resulting in failure at a terrible cost ,ie Gallipoli but also success D Day (The planners of D Day looked at all the mistakes of the Gallipoli Landings and Learnt) To be told "we don't know, trust me" just does not make the grade when the consequences of failed planning on the

people of Victoria could be catastrophic vis- a-vis , Black Friday 1939 and Black Saturday 2009

- **Presumptive Rights Compensation:** There should be no connection between “The Duty of Care” of the Victorian Government in regards to Firefighters rights to treatment and compensation for cancers that are caused by exposure to “Substances” at fires and the passing of this total Bill. The Parliament of Victoria either believes in the Presumptive Rights Compensation in its own right or it does not. Don’t use it as wedge.
- **Skills /Response Time:** The required skills to man a Tanker to respond to a fire in CFA areas of Melbourne are the same whether you are a Volunteer Firefighter or Career Firefighter; end of argument. Response times for those “On Call” are the same, end of argument. The very derogatory ad programme being shown on TV sponsored by the UFU; which implies the people living in CFA areas where Integrated Brigades operate are living in danger and further only Career Firefighter can remedy this is untrue and is counter- productive to harmony between Career and Volunteer Firefighters. As a Rural Firefighter I hold the skills of the MFB and CFA Firefighters (Both Career and Volunteer) in awe.

Conclusion: Victoria is served extremely well by its Volunteer CFA Fire Service, considered an outstanding model anywhere in the world, why change it without the most detailed and objective examination possible. If I may paraphrase a line from Abraham Lincoln’s “ Gettysburg Address” A CFA of the People, by the People, for the People shall not perish from the earth.