

Submission

To: The Fire Services Bill Select Committee

From:

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Terms of Reference:

a. Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

- In future arrangements it is imperative that the CFA Chief Officer retain their current operational power and authority to ensure emergency services can still be delivered by volunteers.
- CFA volunteers make an enormous cost effective contribution to fire services across Victoria. If the structure of fire services changes and Fire Rescue Victoria is established, CFA volunteers need to continue to be supported in the long-term in their role, by sufficient paid staff such as Operations Managers, Operations Officers, Brigade Administrative Support Officers, District Mechanical Officers, Training Officers and Administrative staff, etc. much as exists in the present CFA structure.
- Volunteers and paid staff must be able to work alongside one another and show mutual respect for each other during operations. We need a written Agreement or Contract between CFA and FRV and perhaps Forest Fire Management Victoria that is legally binding (not just a Memorandum of Understanding which is not) that outlines how the fire services will work together and show mutual respect for one another.

b. Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

- The qualifications, skills and experience of volunteers must continue to be recognised. Sometimes their training and qualifications may be similar as career firefighters, but one gets paid for their work while the other doesn't. For example, in the command structure at an incident, a volunteer Incident Controller must have the same authority as a career Incident Controller, over both career and volunteer workers who respond to the incident (at all levels, from a Level 1-3 incident). The command structure needs to apply irrespective of whether the roles are carried out by volunteers or paid staff. In the previous proposed EBA, there was a clause that made career firefighters only answerable to other career firefighters which would completely undermine the current command structure.
- Currently, whoever arrives first on scene sets up the Control Point and acts as Incident Controller. Volunteer firefighters wouldn't want the situation where career staff automatically 'take over control' when they arrive. Nor should volunteers be left until last in integrated stations when prioritising who is included in the crew. Areas of operation such as these need to have protocols in place, covered by the written agreement or contract.
- Training must be made more readily available and accessible to volunteers.
- CFA needs funding and support from paid staff to help continue to recruit new volunteer members and re-energise current members.
- CFA volunteers must continue to be consulted with if changes are implemented and in the CFA organisation in the future.

c. Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

- CFA volunteers need to have ongoing support and funding for maintaining buildings, infrastructure, equipment, PPE and vehicles etc. that continue to be updated and replaced in line with FRV. The worry is funding will be heavily weighted to FRV because of union pressure and CFA will come out as the poorer cousin which will quickly lead to outdated equipment.
- CFA urgently needs a much improved alerting system from the current pagers, that will be user friendly for volunteers, e.g. a smart phone app that includes a map and GPS coordinates, job description, can indicate firefighter availability and responding etc.

d. Underlying policy rationale

- I have concerns over how a duplication of structures and management roles will work together if FRV is established. For example will there be two Operations Managers per District, one CFA and one FRV, as well as the officers that operate under this level? Which positions will be senior, FRV or CFA?
- Will the positions of secondment to CFA be seen by career firefighters as a less desirable position? If so this will have ramifications for the filling of these positions. Currently officers appear to be able to move between positions of career firefighting and operations officers seamlessly.
- Will there be separate operations officers for CFA and FRV?