

Sharron Jones

5th July, 2017.

Dear Members of the Select Committee,

I am an active fire fighter and accredited Crew Leader with the Tolmie and District Brigade which is part of the Mansfield Group in North East Victoria. I am also the Secretary/ Treasurer of the Mansfield Fire Brigades Group, a position I have held for six years. I hold Level 2 certification for Logistics for the Local Command Facility when we have a larger fire in our area.

There are many questions that need to be answered relating to the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Bill and the Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) 2017 Bill. I have posed only three but I sincerely hope that these and the many others that will be raised will be answered when you have finished your investigation.

The questions, below, are followed by brief observations to give them context.

1. By what mechanism is the Legislation and its application going to guarantee the independence of decision making of the staff seconded as middle managers from FRV for the CFA organization and for the volunteers who respond to the needs of their communities?
2. What recourse will the volunteers have should the dichotomic opinions regarding the equality of Presumptive Cancer Legislation prove that the claim that it is discriminatory be correct?
3. Will the Government split the two pieces of legislation which are related only in the inclusion of the words "fire fighters" so that each can be examined on its merits without fear of being considered negative about supporting the cancer legislation?

The context for these questions is:

1. With the current version of the Legislation establishing the secondment model for staffing the administration and training of CFA members, there is a very real fear that similar discriminatory clauses to those presented by the UFU /CFA EBA that Fair Work Australia rejected will be imposed "through the back door". Those seconded would be employees of FRV and members of the UFU and under the same conditions as the employees in FRV working in the fire stations. Already, impact of the attitude of paid CFA (UFU) firefighters is being felt on morale – reluctance to attend the integrated station for training, volunteer crewed tankers being returned to station in favour of less well equipped and more distant tankers crewed by paid staff, interruption of volunteer meetings being held on the premise of integrated stations. We need to be reassured that the model for staffing the CFA's administration will not disadvantage our volunteer members before we, as their leaders, can help them to come to terms with the changes that are being imposed. There is and has never been difficulty adopting changes that can be understood and be seen to improve our service to our communities.
2. Legal opinion from Jack Rush QC, a person well known to and respected by volunteer members of the CFA, especially in the North East, has condemned the Presumptive Legislation out of hand. His legal opinion is that it is discriminatory against volunteer access to the benefits when compared with the salaried firefighters. The Premier, Minister and others have all written to members stating in bald terms that they are telling us the truth when they say it is not discriminatory and the same as the Queensland model. If this

legislation does go ahead in its present form not only will we have to fight the discrimination but those in need of the support will have to struggle to have justice when they need their strength to fight their illness.

3. The motivation for the Government in binding the two pieces of legislation appears cynical in the extreme. Those who are not versed with the issues within the Legislation are vulnerable to this tactic. Both pieces require examination and time for robust debate – combining them reduces that time by half.

The Brigade is very important to my community and to many like it where the fire shed is the place where the community meets and the Brigade is the fabric that holds it together, not only in times of danger, but throughout the year. The CFA, through the Brigade, gives opportunities for learning through its training programs in firefighting, management and leadership that many would not have otherwise. For these reasons, the answers to my questions and those of others are of vital importance to us.

I shall still turn out when the pager goes off. I shall also go down to the Local Command Centre when the trigger to open it – “make tankers five” – is heard. I shall still work to protect my community and neighbouring communities but the loss of morale experienced as a result of the actions of the Government over such a long period is being felt acutely.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Sharron Jones

