

Patron: The Honourable Alex Chernov AC QC, Governor of Victoria

**Morrison's &  
District  
Brigade**



5<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Assistant Clerk Committees  
Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Services Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

### **Submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee from the Morrison's Brigade Management Team**

To give some much needed perspective to this submission and the whole issue of reforms to fire fighting services in Victoria, please consider the following points from the recent update to the *Climate Change and the Victorian Bushfire Threat* report (<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/vicbushfires>).

- Victoria has sustained around half of the Australian economic losses from bushfires despite comprising only 3% of the continent. By around the middle of the century these costs could more than double. The Black Saturday fires affected about 30% of catchments supplying Melbourne's drinking water, with estimated recovery costs totalling more than \$2 billion.
- Fire severity and intensity is expected to increase substantially in coming decades in Victoria. The fire season will continue to lengthen.
- Melbourne's rural-urban fringe is among the most vulnerable in the world to bushfires. The population of Melbourne is continuing to spread, encroaching into surrounding bushland, increasing risk to life and property from bushfires.
- An increased likelihood of dangerous fire weather and a lengthening fire season will strain Victoria's existing resources for fighting and managing fires.

Undertaking major reforms to the delivery of fire services without consulting the majority of the people who undertake the delivery is both condescending and reckless. CFA volunteers and the rural communities of Victoria are the ones who will bear the brunt of any failures in service delivery during the next fire season because the changes have not been well considered or assessed for their potential impact.

Volunteers are willing to commit their time, expertise and prodigious local knowledge to the task of controlling bushfires and in the future we will be called on to do this more and more. To continue to do this and sustain and build an adequate force of volunteers, we must be adequately **supported and appreciated** by the agency that was set up for this purpose; not just in a token manner, but by the ongoing demonstration of professional respect from all CFA employees. The proposed arrangements under the bill would still leave union members in charge of CFA volunteers.

Volunteers are protecting lives, property and the environment across most of rural Victoria and any reforms to the CFA must help us achieve that. Victoria is one of the most fire-prone regions in the world and our fire fighting services need to lead the world in responsiveness, professionalism and surge capacity: undertaking major reforms thought up by a committee inexperienced in emergency management is asking for disaster.



We urge the Select Committee to recommend the following:

- That the bill in its current form be rejected.
- That the presumptive rights compensation and fire services reform acts be separated.
- That an expert panel be appointed with representation from all emergency services to scrutinise any proposed reforms to ensure that fire fighting and other collaborating emergency services in Victoria are organised and resourced to meet current demands and will be able to meet future increased requirements.
- That any reforms to fire fighting services have the main goal of improving volunteer support and resourcing, not of conceding control of volunteers to union members with different goals.
- That the government undertakes full and meaningful consultation with all people, paid and volunteer, who will be affected by any fire services reform.

Yours,



Colin Cook  
Secretary/Treasurer

For the Morrisons & District Brigade BMT