

Title: Mr

First Name: Jeff

Last Name: Harbourd

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

To add some context to this submission, I am married with children and an active operational firefighter, currently 1st Lieutenant with Sassafras and Ferny Creek CFA, providing emergency services to communities in the Dandenong Ranges and throughout the state of Victoria and interstate via my involvement in strike teams, during the last ten years.

Along with many other firefighters, both paid and volunteer, I was awarded a National Emergency Medal for my work during the 2009 Black Saturday bushfire emergency.

There are a number of issues that I have with what the state government is proposing in regards to the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.

1. I am concerned that the state government has not lived up to its legal requirements regarding the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017, as it has not consulted with CFA as required by the CFA Volunteer Charter Act 1958.

It appears that the state government has also actively sought to remove and silence those opposed to the original EBA including former minister Jane Garrett, the entire CFA board, former CFA Chief Officer Joe Buffone, former CFA CEO Lucinda Nolan, former MFB Chief officer Peter Rau, and former MFB Deputy Chief Officer David Youssef.

2. I am worried about the lack of detail currently in the Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 and feel that politicians can't honestly vote on this bill in its present form. I have heard from one Labor and 2 Greens members concerning what they think they are voting on and am astounded by the lack of knowledge that they will be basing their decisions on. The devil is in the detail, so work out all the details and have these in place so that politicians and the public will be fully aware of the consequences of their decisions when they vote.

3. Linking the presumptive cancer legislation to this bill is a mistake. Presumptive legislation is important in its own right to the firefighters that protect our communities (and by extension their families, friends, communities and work colleagues) whether they are paid or unpaid. Paid and volunteer firefighters fight the same fires, often side by side. One cancer law for all. Separate the presumptive legislation from the bill, get it right from the outset so that firefighters who contract cancer due to the fires that they respond to, are all equally and fairly treated.

5. The Victorian Budget 17/18 states that there is an expected operational loss of volunteer firefighters of around 10%. I am anxious that this legislation will negatively impact on volunteers and decrease Victoria's ability to provide surge capacity in times of need and local ability to provide security to our communities when required.

6. In regards to the fire boundaries, fires and other emergencies, and the people being affected by them, do not care about boundaries. The boundaries are irrelevant. Fires don't care if the firefighter is a volunteer or paid, MFB or CFA and neither do the people that we are helping, they only care that someone is there to help them.

The current position of responding the closest fire and emergency service to the emergency, works. If it's a volunteer station then send them, if it is a paid station then send them, if it is in the middle then send them both. If Fire and Emergency services are regularly not turning out to the emergency in a timely and professional fashion, then address that issue at the location that it is occurring at.

7. Chain of command and veto clauses are issues brought about by the proposed Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. There is concern that parts of the legislation, however worded, will simply allow the power of veto to be given to the UFU. I am not a union basher, however, chain of command and decision making needs to be for the best interest of all and not just a select group with union ties.

I strongly urge that the state government:

- i. produces a separate Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation act that is fair for all firefighters.
- ii. refrain from making decisions on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 that appear to be designed to cater to the whim of the UFU.
- iii. after thorough consultation, provide a Bill that is well thought out with all the 'I's dotted and T's crossed' that truly represents the state of Victoria.

Regards

Jeff Harbour