

**Kirra Vanzetti**

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**From:** Rod Laidlaw [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 6 July 2017 8:14 AM  
**To:** LCSC  
**Cc:** Rod Laidlaw  
**Subject:** Submission to the select committee

**THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT**

**Select Committee - fire services bill**

SUBMISSION

Rod Laidlaw

Group Officer

Westmere Fire Brigades Group.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the select committee examining the fire services reform bill.

I have been a CFA volunteer for nearly forty years. I have held a number of positions over that time both at brigade and group level.

This planned dismantling of the Country Fire Authority is totally unnecessary and very harmful to one of Victoria's most effective and efficient emergency service networks.

I would like to make the following points:

1. Lack of consultation. From the outset nearly twelve months ago, and despite constant attempts, there has been absolutely no consultation with volunteers via their representative body, the VFBV. With such a massive change on the planning table, one would expect all stakeholders to be involved in the consulting, negotiating and implementation process. Instead the premier and minister have blatantly ignored the views of volunteers and the communities that they serve.

Indeed, the minister recently told fire fighters at a policy promotion that he didn't recognize the VFBV as being the volunteer representative body. "Who are they?"

Because of this lack of consultation, we now find the Victorian fire service in absolute disarray.

2. The split. The volunteer/career firefighter model has worked very well for CFA in the past and will continue to do so in the future. We have worked side by side with training, administration and at major incidents. We have always respected each other's roles and worked together amicably. Separating the two is divisive and does nothing for morale and confidence. All it is achieving is the weakening of CFA and will cause confusion on and off the fire ground. Confusion at any serious incident will slow decision making due to more than one chain of command and could ultimately cost lives. The notion that our valuable career firefighters will be taken from CFA and redeployed with the new FRV and then contracted back to CFA is damaging, confusing and divisive. Who will

be in charge at an incident? There will be two bodies doing the same thing under different chains of command.

3. Loss of surge capacity. The issue around the 35 integrated fire stations is also very scant for detail and confusing. Where will the volunteers go who are members at these brigades? During large and extended campaigns like black Saturday and the Grampians fire, these armies of volunteers could turn out immediately and be integral in all stages of the incident. If we were to lose these volunteers, numbers on the ground would be depleted drastically often with dire consequences. According Mr. Jack Rush QC, (who joint led the Black Saturday Royal Commission), the integrated brigade model worked very well and was an effective and efficient force. The minister has ignored this advice and used that as an excuse for the proposed changes.

4. Funding. The premier has promised \$100m for CFA over the next two years, What about beyond that in the medium to long term? With an ever diminishing source of Fire service levies around integrated stations there will also be an ever diminishing source of funds for CFA. There has been no discussion re-funding or budgets going forward.

5. Presumptive rights legislation. The linking of the two bills together in an attempt to force them through the upper house is a cynical act of desperation designed to use members' consciences to force through the reform bill.

6. The presumptive rights legislation should treat all firefighters the same whether paid or not. We have legal advice that says the bill in its current form does not do this. Contrary to the government claim that it is based on the Queensland model, it is indeed different in one major way. IE volunteers have a much more difficult pathway to compensation than their career counterparts under this proposal whereas in QLD, all firefighters are treated as one.

7. Impact on rural brigades. For the Government to say that these changes will not impact on rural groups and brigades, demonstrates the total lack of understanding and in fact ignorance of how the CFA operates. It appears that the understanding is that rural brigades operate independently and only in their own areas. This view is far from the truth as we have seen demonstrated countless times in the past. Brigades, groups and districts work together and are on call to travel anywhere in the state when required to do so. Volunteers and career firefighters working together for the same cause and the same service under the same chain of command.

I am not against reform that is designed to strengthen our fire service so that it is in a better position to deal with the increasing fire threat that will be driven by climate change and population growth.

Conversely, changes that are driven by ulterior motives, and made without consultation with the two largest stakeholders ie the volunteers and the community should be rejected outright.

We should be striving to continually strengthen and improve the CFA with its unique blend of volunteer and paid firefighters. Breaking it up and dismantling it will only weaken it and this will be very dangerous for the Victorian public.

Thank you.

Rod Laidlaw

6<sup>th</sup> July 2017

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Regards

**Rod Laidlaw**

