

Upper House Select Committee

Dear Select Committee Members

Re Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.

My name is John Morris; I have been a volunteer fire-fighter for 33 years. Serving at Ferntree Gully, Scoresby, Hastings and Tyabb brigades.

I was Captain of Tyabb Fire Brigade for 14 years. My qualifications include, Strike Team Leader, structural crew leader, wildfire crew leader, breathing apparatus operator, aviation and marine firefighting, Hazmat, trainer and assessor.

I have been incident controller at structure fires, motor vehicle and plane crashes, grass and scrub fires and petrol tanker roll overs. Working with both CFA and MFB paid fire fighters.

Over the years the working relationship has been eroded away between volunteers and paid fire fighters.

I write this submission to try and stop the senseless weakening of the CFA and fire service to the community.

Why change the proven fire service

I am having trouble understanding why the changes to the CFA act will benefit the community. There was no mention of the fire service not working properly until the Government could not get the EBA through.

Why change one of the world's most recognised volunteer organisations and bench mark for excellence.

Not one of the Royal Commissions or fire reviews recommended splitting the CFA.

In the 2009 Bushfire Royal Commission it said expanding the metropolitan fire district boundary would probably decrease the critical surge capacity of the CFA through a reduction in the number of volunteers available to deploy elsewhere in the state.

How can a State Government have a blatant disregard for the Volunteer Charter which the Premier is a signatory and the CFA Act?

No detail and no implementation plans, no impact analysis or cost benefit/analysis and no justification for the proposed changes other than spin and motherhood statements

Training

There is a concern the training grounds will be managed and staffed by FRV and volunteers will not be able to use them because the FRV will be given priority.

Integrated Fire Stations.

Over a short time volunteers in integrated brigades will just disappear due to lack of support and opportunities to help the community. The reason they volunteer and train to their highest level.

No one can explain what volunteer's role will be or how they fit into the fire service structure. "This will all be worked out when the legislation is passed". Once the legislation is passed it will be too late to find out it will not work.

False and misleading advertising

The Union should be call to account for their false and misleading advertising of the "Surge capacity" and "boundary alignment".

The union stated communities such as Springvale, Hoppers crossing, Melton, etc. were not protected because they were classed as "Country". These communities are protected by paid firefighters.

Fire Service Levy

The Government has made a commitment to freeze the Fire Service Levy for two years. After the two years I believe the levy will need to rise by at least 200%. New trucks and fire stations, additional fire fighters, senior station officers, Operation officers etc.

Surge capacity

If the splitting of the CFA is implemented the surge capacity to any large incident will be dramatically affected.

Western Port Fire Brigades Group, on Black Saturday fires, supplied 224 personnel, 361 tours between one day and three days (average of 2 days). Equates to two years of free service to the State.

2009 Black Saturday fires, Mornington Fire Brigade supplied 24 members, 36 tours. Last fire season 2016- 2017 the brigade at times were not able to supply members for strike teams. Volunteer numbers have dropped significantly since becoming an integrated station.

Presumptive Legislation

What the Liberals did with the Presumptive legislation was totally unacceptable. Not passing the legislation when they had their chance.

The Premier linking the Presumptive Legislation to the fire service changes is unethical, underhanded and goes to his credibility of a broken pre-election promise. How can you trust a Premier who has these values towards emergency services, the community and forces his own Minister to resign?

The legislation discriminates against Volunteers. If the legislation doesn't discriminate against volunteers why doesn't the same legislation cover all firefighters?

Future

There is a grave concern in my area that a number of volunteer brigades will close due to the extended area of the Fire Rescue Victoria.

For example, Mount Eliza is in between Mornington and Frankston paid fire fighter station. What will happen is Frankston and Mornington will support each other and Mount Eliza will not be required.

The union has already identified areas such as Somerville fire station to upgrade to a FRV station. This will decimate the Western Port area to assist with the surges the community relies on.

These changes will leave the Victorian community vulnerable during major fires and local incidents.

The CFA cannot employ their own staff, all Operations Managers, Operations Officers and Training Instructors are to be hired and managed by FRV, then seconded back to the CFA. **Conflict of interest?**

I commend you to consider all the facts, disadvantages and advantages when making your recommendation.

The Premiers own Minister, his own hand pick Chief Officer and Board disagreed with the direction the Government is heading.

These changes are not for the benefit of the fire services or the community.

I thank you for taking my submission

John Morris

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