

Fire Services Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

## **Submission on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.**

As a senior Volunteer leader from District 23, and Group Communications Officer for the Moyhu Group, I am writing to express my dismay and deep concerns with the proposed legislation which restructures Victoria's Fire Services.

My submission relates to 2 of the Terms of Reference:

1. Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery.
2. Underlying policy rationale.

### **1. Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery**

Until about a year ago, the CFA badge was a source of pride in my small local community. It was our own "red badge of courage", and demonstrated the commitment of the wearer – whether a Volunteer or career Firefighter – to saving lives and protecting the community. It was a centrifuge for our community – we were family, we all rallied to the occasion if the family or the community was threatened by fire or flood, and did so with no thought of recognition or thanks. This, as I have heard hundreds of volunteers say at different times through the years, "is what we do".

Now, following the turbulent months of CFA/UFU EBA negotiations, which saw the resignation or sacking of so many exemplary leaders, and with the new level of chaos and uncertainty since the announcement of the Fire Services split, this pride and commitment has taken a massive blow amongst volunteers in my area. They feel undervalued and disenfranchised, abandoned by their leaders, and the level of morale is indeed very, very low.

In the past, Brigade members and leaders of the Moyhu Group have worked well with the CFA career Firefighters with whom they have been in regular contact. The catchcry has always been "We work as One", and I have seen this time and again on the fireground and in Incident Management teams. I feel positive this will no longer be the case if and when FRV members are seconded to the CFA in support and leadership positions. As has been stated so often, none of the inquiries into the Victorian Services over the past decade have recommended the dismantling of the integrated fire services model; to the contrary, this model has been highly praised and held as a shining example. So why dismantle it? We acknowledge some reforms are necessary, but this is a prime case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

### **2. Underlying policy rationale.**

I cannot find any convincing policy rationale for the separation of the CFA and the development of the FRV. Repeated scouring of all the documentation from the government, and the CFA Board, CEO and Chief Officer, only serves to baffle me as to WHY???. How can government reach the momentous decision that the changes are long overdue and an improvement to the way fire services are delivered, WITHOUT CONSULTING any of the stakeholders.

Members of cabinet, behind closed doors, cannot possibly understand the massive ramifications of such a decision. The recent, and rushed, meetings between the CO and selected (usually career) firefighters, SINCE the legislation was first announced, do not qualify as consultation. One does not have to be a cynic to classify these meetings as briefings and spin. And again one does not

have to be a cynic to see this further political and industrial interference in the CFA as an attempt to circumvent the provisions of the Fair Work Act to implement an EBA for the benefit of one industrial group. The Federal Government amendments to the Fair Work Act related only to issues which would AFFECT VOLUNTEERS. Has the Victorian Government attempted a test case in the Fair Work Commission? Or is its apparent reluctance to do so evidence that the EBA was fundamentally flawed, and that the proposed Fire Services split will achieve the same objectives: a reduction of the autonomy of the CFA, diminished role of the Volunteers, and a strengthening of union power within the Fire Services.

We need more time to consider all these issues, and to examine in detail all the ramifications of this proposed legislation.

Thank you for reading this submission.

Claire Griffiths, 