



District 7 Council
President – Robert Clark



Attention the Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Dear Committee Members,

The VFBV District 7 Council offer this submission for consideration in your review and recommendations regarding the **”The Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 “**

VFBV District 7 Council represents 49 CFA Brigades across the Greater Geelong Region including Bellarine Peninsula, the Surf Coast and parts of the Golden Plains Shire. There are currently 4 integrated stations in our District with Lara to be integrated by the end of 2017.

Our major concerns are around the joining of the reforms to the Fire Services and the Cancer Legislation into one Bill. It is our belief that both these pieces of legislation should be consider separately.

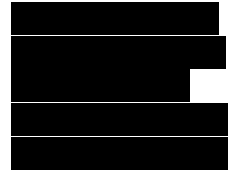
The Presumptive Rights (Cancer) Legislation does not treat paid and volunteer firefighters equally. Under this new legislation, a paid firefighter with one of the 12 nominated cancers will automatically get access to treatment and compensation. A volunteer firefighter will have to be “considered” by an unspecified panel and then may be granted coverage/treatment /compensation. Our concerns are supported by respected Legal Counsel Jack Rush QC who has highlighted in his commentary around the legislation and its discrimination against volunteers.

Our second concern is the lack of consultation undertaken by the Government in the introduction of the Fire Services Reform legislation. The government have completely ignored the Volunteer Charter and the CFA Act in making of their decisions. There has been no consultation with either the CFA Volunteers or CFA management in the making of this decision, which is against the law. There has been no impact analysis or cost benefit analysis undertaken. We are concerned at the end of the day is their going to be any money left to support CFA volunteers.

Our third concern is the effect this legislation will have on Volunteer Brigades in the Geelong area. If we can safely assume that if this legislation is passed, the Geelong Region will become a Fire Rescue Victoria Zone, and we will have CFA Volunteer Brigades in the middle of that Zone with presumably no response areas. This will lead to the underutilization of experienced and qualified volunteer firefighters, and concerns this could potentially lead to these members resigning. These members currently cover the surge capacity when there are larger urban/industrial/ commercial fires in the Geelong Region as well as the formation of strike teams for larger bush fires.



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Finally, should this legislation go ahead, this would lead to a dramatic change to the provision of fires services to Victoria. Do you believe that the Victorian community has been sufficiently consulted and supports this legislation, and are you confident that this legislation will not harm CFA’s surge capacity.

If the Government believes that, the current arrangements are out of date and no longer optimum, this Council would welcome and support a targeted public review, involving all stakeholders, to identify deficiencies and recommend improvements.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours faithfully,

The Executive

VFBV District 7 Council