



VFBV District 11 Council
5 Willis Street
Lakes Entrance
Victoria 3909



Thursday, 6 July 2017

Fire Services Restructure

Dear Committee Member

The District 11 Council of the VFBV, representing the volunteer fire fighters of East Gippsland moved the following in respect of the announced changes to the provision of fire and emergency services in Victoria.

1. The Council recognises that the current arrangements and structure were established some time ago and that there may be a case for alterations to be made which could result in improved service provision.

However, in recent years there have been a number of reviews held, including a Royal Commission, and none of these recommended anything approaching the current proposal.

2. The changes proposed have been designed behind closed doors and without any significant or meaningful consultation with any stakeholders.

This approach will inevitably lead to conflict and may even be in contravention of the requirements of the existing CFA Act.

Such wide ranging and potentially divisive changes must only be made after genuine consultation and open and transparent public discussion.

3. The proposed changes are being put forward as a long overdue improvement to the way fire services are delivered.

This is disingenuous at best. They are, or will be perceived to be an attempt to circumvent provisions of the Fair Work Act to implement an EBA for the benefit of one industrial group.

4. There is strong anecdotal evidence that member numbers have been falling in volunteer brigades adjacent to currently integrated stations. These changes are likely to increase that trend.

Despite assurances, this will inevitably lead in a significant reduction in surge capacity and the ability to deal with long running major fire events.

5. Including the implementation of presumptive cancer provisions within the proposal should be seen for what it is, a cynical attempt to encourage the passage of a contentious and divisive change by embedding a popular and well supported measure within it on a "take it all or take none" basis.

The matters are separate and should be dealt with as such.

The CFA volunteers of East Gippsland are not opposed to change, providing it can be demonstrated that the change will be beneficial to the communities we serve. At the moment that outcome is not evident and the reverse may be likely.

If the Government believes that the current arrangements are out of date and no longer optimum, this Council would welcome and support a targeted public review, involving all stakeholders, to identify deficiencies and recommend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

We strongly oppose the proposed legislation as it has been presented and believe that the committee, having the regard for the best outcome for all Victorians, will find that the Bill should not be supported by the Legislative Council.

Ian Ashcroft
Secretary
VFBV District 11 Council