

## **Submission to the Fire Services legislation**

Whilst the Government's fire services restructure is currently under the consultation period there are many things about the restructure that need to be better understood by all parties before informed decisions can be made.

As you are fully aware, both career and volunteer firefighters provide a vital service to the state of Victoria. Therefore, it is imperative that everyone plays a role to ensure that any change to the fire services are made for the right reasons with proper consultation. Regardless if you are a career or volunteer firefighter, we seek an assurance that the changes are clearly explained so that informed decisions and rational arguments can be formed. At present there are many vital operational and non-operational questions that need answering before any of the new legislation can be implemented and unfortunately without this clarity it is clouding opinions.

Whilst most of the CFA split has concentrated on the negatives, I can see real opportunities for the CFA if this process is open and able to be discussed.

Please find below an overview of some of my concerns.

### **Lack of consultation.**

One of the main concerns is that the majority of the CFA volunteers are not fully aware of the impacts the changes themselves within the legislation are too complicated or not clearly explained. We are constantly being reassured at a face value that the new changes will not greatly affect volunteers. Unfortunately, this can only be taken on face value as the true implications are not explained and with the promise of additional short term money being the answer leaves many with a very uncertain outlook on the new role of volunteers.

There is a call for the consultation and it's restructure to be discussed/formed between CFA, MFB, VFBV only. It appears that the management and large operational items such as the FRV locations and who may be transferred to CFA are being explained, but there are many 'on the ground' items that need sorting before we have faith in the new structure.

One of my main concerns revolves around budgeting issues and the long-term effects through a lesser amount of funding to regional Victoria. In particular less capital for the building of new stations, building maintenance, trucks, equipment and other infrastructure. Both career staff and volunteers rightly deserve to be funded so that we can perform our duties to the same efficiencies regardless where we live. Unfortunately, the true cost of the new model is not being advertised and funding arrangements for the future provides us with real concerns that the cost associated with forming and running the new model will leave a deficit in the CFA's budgets. The flow on effect will see a down turn in capital and money available to volunteers across Victoria leaving us with a forecast vision of the CFA ending up like the SES and being poorly funded and poorly resourced.

### **Operational**

Equipment - As mentioned above the replacement of equipment to service the needs of volunteers will become a major issue within the near future. We have already seen a cutback in funding for vehicles to the CFA. There is real concern that once the \$44 million for infrastructure is exhausted

there will be further reduced funding for volunteers. There are currently many CFA buildings that are either outdated or have structural issues that will remain desolate due to funds being funnelled towards FRV and the new co-location volunteer stations. Therefore, we seek a reassurance that the \$44million will be spent Victoria wide and not the lion share be spent on the co-location of the city based fire stations?

Serge capacity –It is foreseen and many firefighters are mentioning that there will be a lack of volunteers to assist others during large complex fires especially around metropolitan areas. Many are now moving away from being willing and able to cross the state to fight fires for many days but will focus on their district and protect their neighbours. This needs to send alarm bells to all sectors of Victoria especially for the outer metropolitan brigades and communities. If there are not sufficient volunteers to battle the large campaign fires who will undertake this role? I can assure you the FRV model won't allow for the flexibility and responsiveness that thousands of volunteers have provided.

As above the role of the Strike team will see a major reduction in volunteers willing to serve across Victoria. Feelings amongst members are they will most likely stay in their Districts or neighbouring districts.

There is a belief that Operational Officers and Operational Managers should be kept as CFA staff instead of not seconded to CFA from FRV. Additionally all staff within the current CFA need to be explicitly outlined to where and who they will be assigned. At present, the only knowledge of who will be in the CFA after the reforms include the Chief officer and some of his subordinates. We seek a clear outline on where all administration sector and operational jobs are positioned. Are they either FRV or CFA?

### **Administration**

FEM – there is an understanding that Fire Extinguisher Maintenance (FEM) could be transferred to FRV. Concerns have been raised about the future of the FEM and its major impact for CFA brigades. Right across Victoria many volunteering brigades undertake FEM as a means of fundraising. If this means of capital is lost there will be added pressure on brigades and their community to fundraise. Currently my brigade undertake FEM to replace our brigade funded Forward Command Vehicle. This vehicle is fundamental in managing large fires and providing a command point. If the FEM were to be lost, the brigade would have no other option but to eventually lose the funds to replace this important vehicle.

Should the BASO's and administration staff be transferred across to FRV the issues associated with FRV administration staff dealing with CFA correspondence and financial details raises real concerns. I have a strong objection to FRV employees regardless if they are seconded to CFA auditing Volunteer brigade books, either minutes of meetings or financial.

Fire services levy – The levy and the way it is divided into the different emergency organisations needs to be fully costed and clearly explained where the funds are coming from and going. There is growing tension that the funds collected within regional Victoria are not being channelled back into the country. This model needs to be examined and costings explained.

There are many other “big questions” that still need answering but will not be covered her. One in particular is the Urban and Rural championships. Will the proud history of CFA championships be swept aside due to a reform and loss of funding?

## Presumptive Cancer legislation

The Presumptive Cancer legislation should never be bundled with the CFA reform measures. Both are two separate issues and must be dealt with as such. Therefore, the Cancer Legislation must be withdrawn from the Fire Services Legislation and fully examined to outline the rights and options available to both career and volunteers alike.

## Opportunities

The re-establishment of the Lateral entry to Volunteers to operation officers.

Allowing Districts to recruit and training Volunteer instructors to deliver qualified courses.

Volunteers training volunteers in a friendlier manner. - Future CFA training needs be aligned with CFA volunteers meeting their needs, time constraints allowing for the differences in terrain and districts needs. Training needs to be more District specific having the ability to tailor and deliver when it's most needed. Currently the CFA's model is based on career training expectations and is inflexible. There are many opportunities within the new structure to make training volunteer friendly.

In closing, I applauded you to oppose this legislation on the understanding that the model is to be fully examined, costed and a clear picture provided for all involved. Whilst most volunteers and I are not opposed to change, change needs to be conducted in a respectful and professional manner. In its current format this legislation and the manner in which it has been presented does not and will not meet anyone's interest except for the career staff who make up a small percentage of Victoria's firefighting population.

I thank you for your time and efforts examining this piece of Legislation.



**Cameron Whelan - Captain**

CFA Location – Warracknabeal  
Po Box 162 Warracknabeal Victoria 3393



Protecting lives and property



[cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au)