

I lodge this submission to the Fire Services Select Committee regarding the proposed restructure of the Victorian Fire Services adding my voice to those who request that any decision about restructure **be put on hold until fair and proper consultation takes place.**

I write as a passionate CFA Volunteer of long standing joining in 1977 as a young family man wishing to make a contribution to the community where I was to live and work for a large part of my life. I have seen the CFA change, develop and grow into the a modern fire service that it is today – considered by many to be one of the best Volunteer Fire Brigades in the world. Great facilities, modern equipment, combined with great leadership and continuous training have placed the modern CFA in that position. Saying that however, I acknowledge that any organisation needs to continue to grow and develop in order to meet the challenges of modern times and I do not have any issue with that.

We all know that 'The Country Fire Authority Volunteer Charter is an agreed commitment by the State of Victoria, CFA and VFBV (on behalf of CFA Volunteers) to each other. It ensures the State of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with Volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect Volunteers'. This Charter, which is enshrined in law, has been totally ignored - the State of Victoria has not kept its commitment to volunteers but rather has treated them with absolute contempt. I cannot tell you how sad and disillusioned that makes me feel. I feel undervalued and that my long time volunteer service has been for nothing.

Consultation with **all parties** involved in any proposed restructure, despite advice to the contrary has definitely not taken place. A clear and transparent process seems to be missing - Country Fire Authority (CFA), Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and representatives of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) have not had fair or adequate consultation. I belong to District 13 and it was only as recently as 10 June (Saturday of the Queen's Birthday long weekend) when were invited to attend a meeting called by Emergency Services Minister, Mr James Merlino on Wednesday 14 June to discuss the proposed restructure – hardly what is considered normal consultation. The Legislation had already been voted on in the Lower House by that time and was pending before the Upper House. This is clearly just an example of the regard in which the State of Victoria holds its 'valued' volunteers.

Despite all comments, due process has not taken place and this proposed restructure is clearly and simply a means of bypassing the CFA and Fair Work Acts. This restructure has clearly and brazenly been introduced, not in the interests of community safety, but rather to appease the unreasonable demands of the United Fire Firefighters' Union (UFU) and circumvent the long running Industrial Dispute. Prior to the Federal Government introducing this new Legislation to protect CFA Volunteers no such planned restructure was proposed – Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley himself being a firm supporter of the CFA Integrated Stations.

What has been the most despicable outcome in this whole 'political' situation is that the Andrew's Government has tied the Cancer compensation to the new proposed legislation. Compensation which should be the right of all firefighters, career firefighters and also volunteers alike, something not to be used as a 'trade off' for dismantling the CFA. We should all be totally outraged – it should never, never have been tied together – the Cancer legislation should have been stand-alone legislation.

Clearly the information/advice we are receiving about the Presumptive Legislation from various sources including the esteemed Mr Jack Rush QC does not gel with the information provided by the State Government about it – we need time to be able understand what is correct clearly untruths are being told.

The cost to Victorians of this proposed restructure is also a huge concern to me as there has not been sufficient time to provide adequate costings and budgets – they have not been adequately assessed Whilst the government indicates that there will be no increase in the Fire Services Levy for the next two years the huge costs in establishing and continuing this proposed new fire service will be a burden on the Victorian taxpaying community for years to come.. The additional funding announced for the CFA and also the 'sweetener' of the Cancer Compensation which has now 'magically' been offered also has to come from somewhere.

As a volunteer of long standing, all I am asking is that:

- the fair and proper thing be done and that this very much rushed proposed legislation be delayed until adequate consultation (something which will impact on all Victorians) with all parties involved has taken place.

- I ask that the Presumptive Legislation be a stand alone legislation and that it is separated by any proposed restructure
- I ask that any vote by Members of the Upper House be allowed to be a conscience vote and not tied to party lines.

Submission from:

Name

Derek Reed



I am not seeking confidentiality in his submission.