

District Chairperson: Len Balfour (Mooroopna)


VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA DISTRICT COUNCIL 22
Secretary: Bill Stockdale (Tatura)
**Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation & Fire Services Legislation
Amendment (Reform)**
**SUBMISSION TO UPPER HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO FIRE
SERVICES RESTRUCTURE PROPOSAL**
Introduction

The VFBV District 22 Council Represents over 1500 volunteers from over 72 Brigades & Groups in the Shires of Moira, Strathbogie & the City of Greater Shepparton.

This submission is prompted by concerns over the manner in which this legislation has been introduced without the level of consultation such major changes demand.

Press releases from Government Ministers & incomplete & contradictory briefings from CFA Senior Management on what is presented as a *fait accompli* does not provide any confidence amongst our members that this represents a sound model for the future.

Our Volunteers do not oppose progressive, consultative & constructive change, but support a considered process, with a focus on improved service delivery & enhanced community safety.

Overview Summary

Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world.

The government has put forward a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation that has very little detail, is vague, and raises more questions than answers.

The process has been undertaken with no consultation with parties involved in the emergency management sector and with no transparent research around how the reforms will improve service delivery.

A bad solution won't fix anything. Implementing changes to the Victorian Fire Services, with the mission of protecting lives and property, is too important an issue to get wrong!

 District Secretary: Bill Stockdale

INQUIRY CRITERIA

Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

- The peak body responsible for planning & coordination of Emergency Services, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) has not been consulted or had any input in the development of this Legislation. This represents a critical omission in the required process by Government.

EMV plays a key role in the emergency management sector leading and facilitating key initiatives focused on system-wide reform with integrated policy, strategy, & planning.

EMV was created by parliament with bi-partisan agreement. It is therefore indicative of the lack of objectivity in the process when EMV has been ignored & has had no input into this re-structure.

- The rushed manner in which this Legislation has been rolled out, based on a single Industrial & political motive, without consultation, has resulted in a proposal lacking purpose & support across the emergency services sector.

This lack of consultation extends beyond EMV to include CFA volunteers, SES & Search & Rescue Organisations.

Further, the lack of a broader community consultation leads to genuine anxiety that the safety needs & expectations of Victorians have not been taken into account.

These failings are indicative of the narrow focus behind this Legislation & its lack of depth needed to create sound long-term reform.

- Under the secondment model, the ability of the Chief Officer to appoint, control & manage staff is severely curtailed. This adds additional complexity to the running of CFA & the ability of the Chief Officer to effectively carry out his vital functions as the organisations leader.
- The secondment model will result in FRV staff being largely trained & experienced within an Urban Fire Service Environment. This will lead to all key personnel on secondment, with inherently different skill-sets to those required in CFA Wildfire Operations.
- The elimination of the integrated approach with Volunteers & Career Staff working as a team, so fundamental to the success of the CFA Model, will be a major loss to Fire Service delivery if the Legislation is passed.
- With the anticipated Industrial influence through any Inter-agency Memorandum between FRV & CFA, lateral entry of staff with particular skills, from say DELWP or SES, to enhance the skills base in CFA for training & Operations will be prevented. This scenario represents a major reduction standard in CFA's Operations & Training.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

- The management model presented, designed solely to facilitate the rolling out of the staff EBA, represents a risky experiment in Emergency management, being untried & without precedence.
- Memorandums of Understanding between FRV & CFA will almost certainly be controlled by a Consultative Committee under the UFU EBA. Resulting in undue influence on virtually all facets of CFA/Volunteer Operations & Management.

Concerns regarding the indisputable political nature of this Legislation & its future impacts has led to increased anxiety, uncertainty & poor morale amongst CFA Volunteers.

- Volunteers are extremely cynical at the nature of the proposed structure, relying on seconded staff from FRV, & are concerned it will result in lack of independence of CFA & the way it can be independently managed.

Further, seconded staff from FRV will not have the basic experience in Wildfire necessary to lead & train Volunteer Service who will be in the frontline in such events.

- These concerns are heightened by the fact that the Legislation does not appear to reinforce or strengthen the provisions of the CFA Act, especially in relation to FRV's obligation to support, maintain and strengthen volunteerism.
- The elimination of integrated brigades, being an important training ground, where volunteers & career staff work together without barriers or hindrance to share knowledge & skills will severely effect future engagement, morale & participation.

There appears to be no contingency for the anticipated loss of volunteer surge capacity through the loss of Integrated Stations, which will particularly effect response to major bushfire or flood events.

Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

- The cost implications both in the set up and ongoing operation of the proposed new structure, have not been defined. This includes the potential increase in the Fire Service Levy and the resulting impact on communities.

Further it is not clear how the Fire Services Levy will be apportioned between FRV & CFA.

- We hold great concern that, that CFA, as the subservient organisation to FRV under the legislation, will bear the brunt of any future necessary cost cutting when budgets blow out.

District Chairperson: Len Balfour (Mooroopna)

We have no information on how the staffing model costs between FRV & CFA will be shared.

This anticipated financial impact scenario is potentially unequitable, & will mean that the communities served by CFA will suffer the most.

- The proposal & supportive legislation, does not appear to consider the impact on Joint Standard Operating Procedures and procedures for the issuing of Permits to Burn by Local Government to protect local communities. There are many other statutory areas where the Legislation is not clear how CFA will interact with Local Government or other Authorities.

Underlying policy rationale.

- This is not a Reform of Fire Services.

This is evidenced by the omission of a broad a consultation process necessary. to provide strategic focus & to ensure goals & aspirations are being met.

Rather the Legislation represents a shallow & crude re-structure, designed to provide separation within an Emergency Service to meet a particular short-term Industrial agenda & to get around a current political impasse to gain support of the Governments allies.

This approach will not & cannot bring about a “best practice” Fire Service model to protect the community of Victoria.

- There is a genuine anxiety & concern at how a third party, through an EBA in particular, will influence equipment, staffing, training & operations of CFA through any Memorandum of Understanding.
- Finally, the Presumptive Cancer Legislation is a completely separate matter and should be split from the Bill. This & all Legislation should be non-discriminatory between paid staff and volunteers.

VFBV D22 Council has no objection to this submission being made publically available. We would welcome the opportunity to make a direct presentation regarding this submission to the Committee.

William Leonard Stockdale
VFBV District 22 Secretary

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

6th. July 2017

District Secretary: Bill Stockdale [REDACTED]