



4/7/17

## Parliamentary Select Committee Fire Services Review

Victorian State Parliament,  
Treasury Place,  
Melbourne, Vic. 3000

Dear Committee Members,

### Fire Services Reform Bills

On behalf of the Dundonnell Rural Fire Brigade I wish to protest the manner in which the Government has sought to impose substantial change on the structure and operations of the Country Fire Authority without regard to due process and appropriate consultation with related agencies and stakeholders, in particular the Volunteer Fire Brigades Association of Victoria who represent the overwhelming majority of CFA members.

In acting as it has the Government has shown scant regard for the tens of thousands of volunteer members across the state who have and continue to serve their communities with great dedication and efficiency. By refusing to acknowledge the VFBV as the principal advocate for CFA members, the government demonstrates the scorn and contempt it has for volunteers and their views and its inability to appreciate the anger and dismay members feel at this time.

Members concerns are well founded. The Premier, Minister for Emergency Services and others who defend the government's approach to date demonstrate a disturbing lack of appreciation or understanding of the operation of the CFA, the effective collaboration between salaried and volunteer personnel and the serious decline in morale and trust that has occurred as a result of this unnecessary conflict.

There remain fundamental issues unresolved and/or unexplained:

- The financial sustainability of the proposed model,
- Interagency operability and coordination,
- Training and professional development,
- Surge capacity/ capability in dealing with larger "campaign" incidents

The fact that the government has persisted in pursuing such fundamental change to the CFA despite such overwhelming criticism and frustration expressed by CFA members, salaried and volunteer, reinforces the widely held view that the government doesn't understand the long-term ramifications of the change it is driving, particularly on the sustainability of effective incident response, especially in regional and more remote areas of the state.

Nor does it seem to appreciate the immediate and long-term cost to the taxpayer of the change it is apparently determined to implement – apparently at any cost...

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As a brigade we urge the government to withdraw the legislation and decouple the two Bills. There is no legitimate reason for them to be put to the Parliament together – the “Pre-emptive Right” legislation will pass once the discriminatory distinction between “professional” and volunteer firefighters is corrected. The governments assurances that it values and respects volunteer firefighters fall on deaf ears when its actions, ie discriminating between salaried and volunteer firefighters in terms of eligibility re the “pre-emptive right” Bill, suggest otherwise.

We respectfully urge the Committee to give due consideration to these arguments, reiterated here but replicated in many if not most submissions received by the Committee from CFA members across the state and recommend the Government withdraw the Bills.

A commitment to genuine dialogue and consultation to work through the issues and broker a positive and sustainable resolution would be welcomed by all parties and the wider Victorian community. Such a resolution is necessary to restore the disaffection and distrust so widely held by CFA volunteer and salaried personnel.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy Hill  
Captain, Dundonnell RFB