

Attention the Fire Services Bill Select Committee.

Dear Committee Members,

I'd like to take this opportunity to raise my concerns about the new Fire Services Bill.

I've been a CFA volunteer firefighter for more than 30 years, and feel the dramatic changes being proposed for Victoria's fire services are very concerning. Creating a new fire service by amalgamating all MFB and paid CFA staff, but leaving CFA volunteers separate, and then contracting FRV staff back to work with us, seems incomprehensible. I don't understand why we need to dismantle two organisations, MFB & CFA, which both have long and illustrious histories. None of the inquiries suggested splitting up the CFA, and the Bushfires Royal Commission praised the integrated model of paid and volunteer firefighters working together.

Another of my concerns relates to the State Government's 'Fire Services Statement' May 2017, pg 7, *Fire Services Challenge*. The following statement is made: "there are workplace culture issues, including low morale and lack of diversity, as well as a fundamental disconnect between management and firefighters". Surely separating management out to a different fire service will only increase this sense of disconnection between volunteers and paid management? Particularly when our Operations Managers, Operations Officers, instructors, etc. will be contracted back to work with CFA volunteers, but won't actually be CFA staff any longer.

Also, from the same document, pg 20 *Priority 4 – Looking after Victoria's firefighters* : "The Government will also adopt new diversity targets for our fire services. ... In CFA, we will commit to increasing the number of women in brigade leadership roles to 15 per cent, from 265 to 909..." Surely brigade leadership roles should be filled by whoever has the appropriate skills, experience and expertise to fulfil those duties, regardless of their gender? A fixed quota system doesn't seem like a logical process to use, especially in a fire service, where members can be exposed to quite challenging and dangerous situations in the course of their duties. I certainly don't have any issues with females being encouraged to take on brigade leadership roles, or encouraging more females to join the fire service, but it's a bit concerning if there are fixed numbers being suggested, which could potentially see some female firefighters in roles that perhaps they aren't quite ready for yet.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours faithfully,

Anne Stewart

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