

Submission to Upper House Select Committee on Fire Service Reform

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

I have been a CFA volunteer for 29 years at a busy “all volunteer” outer metro station and, whilst there has been talk of placing career staff at our station for some time, no-one knows when... that I know of. We attend approximately 260 calls per year and I figure only the current high standard of response of our Brigade has kept us off any immediate plans to locate staff here.

Given the areas risks and increasing population, I have no problem with the addition of more career firefighters to the CFA BUT, they **should be deployed where directed by the Chief Officer of the CFA**, on a practical and cost effective needs basis, and not simply where the UFU dictates.

At the moment, it appears the Union wants to push for full time manning of stations on a 10/14 roster (2 x 10 hr days and 2 x 14 hr nights) for all stations. At a busy station, this is understandable but for stations with lower call rates, how cost effective is this model ?

Consider the deployment of 20 firefighters. This would “man” only **one** station on a full 10/14 roster. (4 firefighters per shift, 4 shifts, plus relievers). This same number would “man” **four** (volunteer) stations with day time manning only. (4 firefighters per shift plus relievers).

More stations could be covered if “manned” with 2 or 3 firefighters.

On a “what’s best for the community” basis, implementing day time manning for the busier “all volunteer” stations would not only improve delivery and be more cost effective, volunteers would also retain some sense of “ownership” of their station, maintaining their membership of the CFA thus preserving the states “surge” capacity in major events.

Over time, as a town grows and its risks increase, I would expect that full 10/14 staffing would be implemented. Any progression should of course, be at the Chiefs direction - not come from a Union.

My point is, a one size fits all approach is not practical or cost effective. Unfortunately any alternative model would need the approval of the UFU. Yes, we need to obtain permission from a union to implement positive change and improve fire service delivery to the state.

Whilst I do not have time to go into print on other issues surrounding the proposed “reform”, I am extremely concerned that the intent of this change is not to improve fire service delivery, but to increase the power of the UFU. Outwardly, it is advertised as “improving fire service delivery” but in reality, it is increasing their own power so that they can further dictate terms and conditions.

The CFA’s Chief Officer has the legislated responsibility for fire protection in the country area of Victoria - he/she should be given the authority to resource areas accordingly.

Finally, in any case, the presumptive legislation part should be separated from the Fire Service reform. Given the significant consequences of any reform, time should be taken to properly identify issues and practical, cost effective measures implemented to genuinely improve fire service delivery to the State.

I am sure that the ongoing viability of volunteer firefighters will play a large part in that.

Thank you

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