



TATURA FIRE BRIGADE

SUBMISSION TO UPPER HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO FIRE SERVICES RESTRUCTURE PROPOSAL

Introduction:

Tatura Fire Brigade consist has 50 members supported by a Ladies Auxiliary. Tatura is located in the Goulburn Valley, West of Shepparton. The Brigade protects a thriving residential area as well as 4 major export food processing facilities, 2 Regional Government Department Headquarters, a Hospital, a Prison Facility & the surrounding mixed farming area.

The members of the Tatura Fire Brigade are not opposed to change in state-wide arrangements for Fire Service Delivery.

However we want an innovative & co-operative approach built on respect, flexibility & empowerment for volunteers targeted primarily on what is best for community safety.

We are opposed to the current Legislation & express deep concern at the minimal timeframe for consultation, necessary for such radical change. We also submit that the structure is fundamentally flawed & unworkable & as such may represent a real threat to efficient emergency services management & the protection & safety of Victorians.

Together with these basic concerns regarding this process, the Brigade urge that it be extensively reviewed, taking into account our following comments:

Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

- ❖ This is not an exercise in Fire Service Reform. Rather it is simply a re-structure with the sole aim of meeting Industrial (EBA for Career firefighters) & a political end for the government.

This legislation has no strategic modernization aspirations other than an attempt at restructure to meet a current day desire of a particular Government to meet a narrow Industrial & political agenda.

As such, this package, lacks investigative rigor, & does not analyse in detail the current situation or provide logical pathways for the future.

The review lacks a holistic, strategic, consultative & rigorous approach necessary to achieve meaningful Reform necessary to build efficient Fire Service Delivery across the State.

Captain Trevor Franklin

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

- ❖ The process ignores the legal (& moral) obligations under the CFA Act to consult with volunteers & therefore lacks acceptance by Volunteers & their Community. It is devoid of sound logical & responsive outcomes necessary to achieve credibility & ownership by Volunteers.
- ❖ Broad consultation assures all relevant information is gathered & considered to give a sound basis, direction, purpose & credibility to any reform of Fire Services.

Of great concern is the fact that this lack of consultation extends across the whole emergency management spectrum, from Emergency Management Victoria to SES Volunteers & Search & Rescue Units.

- ❖ The Legislation provides for the provision of a staff structure, which is not supported by modern management practice, other than to create a barrier to meet an Industrial objective.

This unprecedented & convoluted Management Structure, dependent upon “secondment” of all key management staff from FRV to CFA, will lead to lack of continuity, commitment, ownership, & control of CFA, a factor directly impacting on organisational integrity with flow- on to Volunteers.

Further, the Legislation is unclear what powers (if any), the Chief Officer will have to appoint, direct & control his managers. This is a totally unacceptable arrangement in any organisation, let alone a modern Emergency Fire Service.

- ❖ Officers will be seconded from what will be largely an urban firefighting environment to a volunteer fire service with critical role to play in major Bushfires. This requires a totally different skill-set & puts in doubt their ability to control, train & lead a Volunteers who have extensive local knowledge, experience & skills in combatting Wildfire events.
- ❖ With the elimination of the Integrated Station model, which have served growing communities well, the resultant reduction of volunteer numbers, will result in loss of Surge Capacity in the event of major disasters. The legislation put forward takes no account of this inevitability or how this problem will be overcome.

Integrated stations, where Volunteers & Career staff work in a unified & coordinated fashion, are to be replaced with a “Co-location” arrangement. This is a vague term to simply describe a separate accommodation arrangement, is designed to meet an Industrial objective, & will not lead to required coordination or cooperation, so vital in emergency management environment.

- ❖ Under the Memorandum of Understanding between FRV & CFA, clauses which impact on the Staff/Volunteer relationship, will need to be approved by a Consultative Committee under the UFU EBA. As a result, all matters relating to organising, training, operations & managing generally will be subject to Industrial Controls. Volunteers will have no say or influence on these fundamental matters directly effecting them. This is totally unacceptable & unworkable in any modern organisation.

This all-controlling influence of EBA matters upon CFA, will result in lack of control & ownership, leading to low morale & potential loss of volunteers.

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Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

- ❖ This re-structure has no strategic basis & as such is devoid of any financial analysis & projections of costs to each of the services & the community.
This includes such fundamental items such as staffing levels at FRV Stations, cost of providing Volunteer Stations & Equipment in FRV areas & cost arrangements between FRV & CFA in providing managerial support.

- ❖ The model lacks any assessment of quantifying, acquiring, resourcing & funding required to support volunteers required now & into the future, to meet major disasters including wildfire & flood.

- ❖ •Volunteers have very real fear that FRV will control finances at the expense of CFA which clearly becomes dependent on FRV for managerial support, planning future direction & goal –setting.

There is no indication of how finances will be shared or what other arrangements will be made to account for the cost of administering CFA both during the transition & into the future.

Any mis-calculation in the budget as a result of this inadequate planning, will almost certainly mean cost cutting in the most vulnerable area – the CFA volunteer organisation.

Underlying policy rationale.

- ❖ As emphasised above, this is not a rational Reform process but rather a re-structure, designed, not to meet any rational strategic objective, but to meet a short term industrial & political agenda.

This is clearly evidenced by the omission of a broad a consultation process & the fact that it has been presented as a *fait accompli*.

The lack of planning & rushed nature of the reforms was evidenced by the fact that Senior CFA Officers & District management were unable to provide consistent explanations of the structure model. This created uncertainty & anxiety amongst CFA staff & Volunteers alike.

- ❖ With such critical shortfalls in process this legislation will not, & cannot bring about a “best practice” Fire Service model to protect the community of Victoria.
- ❖ The Presumptive Cancer provisions clearly discriminate against volunteers as compared with Career firefighters. This is despite the fact that many volunteers have in excess of 40 years exposure to contaminants on the fire ground. It was not what Volunteers were promised.

The combination of this Legislation with the Presumptive Cancer provisions is inappropriate & this should be separated from the Reform Bill

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Tatura Fire Brigade 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.

5th. July 2017


Captain Trevor Franklin