

Submission from:

Name Josephine Marie Reed

[REDACTED]

I am not seeking confidentiality in his submission.

I lodge my submission to the Fire Services Select Committee regarding the proposed restructure of the Victorian Fire Services adding my voice to those who request that any decision about restructure be put on hold until fair and proper consultation takes place - something which has not happened at this point in time.

I ask where is the voice of reason in this whole thing – I ask why such haste, in the words of Emergency Services Minister Mr James Merlino, to pass this legislation and establish Fire Rescue Victoria as soon as possible so that all new arrangements can be in place prior to the next fire season. How can you destroy the long and rich history of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and dismantle the Country Fire Authority (CFA) with over 60,000 members as it stands within a few months/weeks without proper investigation, consultation and consideration. I have family members in the MMB as well as in the CFA (paid staff and volunteer) and I can see the impact this will have on them.

What has been overlooked, ignored and discounted is that 'The Country Fire Authority Volunteer Charter is an agreed commitment by the State of Victoria, CFA and VFBV (on behalf of CFA Volunteers) to each other. It ensures the State of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with Volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect Volunteers'. This Charter, which is enshrined in law, has been totally ignored - the State of Victoria has not kept its commitment to volunteers but rather has treated them with absolute contempt. I cannot tell you how sad and disillusioned that makes me feel. The CFA has been treated very badly in this whole sorry saga. The forced loss of its Chief Officer, Mr Joe Buffone, it's CEO Lucinda Nolan and previous Board 'have been sacrificed for some political ends. This is the time for the Upper House to say enough is enough and put the brakes on.

Little consultation has in fact taken place but clearly some degree of misinformation has been taking place and we need to stop and examine what is best for Victoria and its Fire Services in the future. Mr Merlino acknowledges that he heads the CFA Performance and Policy Consultative Committee established by the State Government which has met a number of times since January 2017. From the reports available clearly a number of Working Groups have been established and whilst their brief was to investigate such topics as Modernising brigades and Stations, Enhancing Volunteerism, Service Delivery, and Training no dismantling of the current CFA was clearly part of that brief.

Documents say that the 'Committee is committed to engaging directly with CFA members, the broader sector and the community it serves to guide its operation'. I ask where has this consultation supposedly taken place? The Committee was to produce an Interim Paper by August 2017 which would go out broadly to stakeholders for consultation. All CFA members and other stakeholders would be encouraged to participate and provide feedback - the Committee would then analyse the feedback received and release a final report by the end of 2017? **All of this pretence happening when in fact other plans were secretly being made.**

What has brought this about I ask? In reality this hastily arranged proposed restructure is not about what is best for Victorians; it is a means of bypassing the CFA and Fair Work Acts. This restructure has clearly and brazenly been introduced, not in the interests of community safety, but rather to appease the unreasonable demands of the United Fire Firefighters' Union (UFU) and circumvent the long running Industrial Dispute.

Prior to the Federal Government introducing its new Legislation to protect CFA Volunteers no such planned restructure was being proposed – Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley himself being a firm supporter of the CFA Integrated Stations suggested they should be supported and extended. Our CFA Chief Officer acknowledges that targets for arrival at fires have been met – sadly CFA volunteers at our current integrated stations will be the big losers if this planned restructure proceeds. But then of course they could move out of their area and bolster numbers elsewhere – why would they do that?

All organisations should review, modify and change as times and circumstances move forward and no one is adverse to continuous improvement. This however need to happen by means of consultation - consultation with **all parties** involved in any proposed restructure and despite advice to the contrary has definitely not taken place. In a personal email to me recently from the CFA Chief Officer, Mr Steve Warrington, acknowledges that he had not been consulted. What we need is a clear and transparent process which seems to be missing - Country Fire Authority (CFA), Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and representatives of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) have not had fair or adequate consultation.

I belong to District 13 and it was only as recently as 10 June (Saturday of the Queen's Birthday long weekend) when were invited to attend a meeting called by Emergency Services Minister, Mr James Merlino on Wednesday 14 June to discuss the proposed restructure – hardly what is considered normal consultation. Over 400 people attended this meeting – it was however a meeting where we were told what was happening rather than having any input into anything. The Legislation had already been voted on in the Lower House by that time and was pending before the Upper House. This is clearly just an example of the regard in which the State of Victoria holds its 'valued' volunteers.

Despite all comments, due process has not taken place and this proposed restructure is clearly and simply a means of bypassing the CFA and Fair Work Acts. This restructure has clearly and brazenly been introduced, not in the interests of community safety, but rather to appease the unreasonable demands of the United Fire Firefighters' Union (UFU) and circumvent the long running Industrial Dispute. Prior to the Federal Government introducing this new Legislation to protect CFA Volunteers no such planned restructure was proposed – Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley himself being a firm supporter of the CFA Integrated Stations.



What has been very worrying is the linking by the Andrew's Government of the Presumptive Cancer Legislation to the new proposed restructure. Compensation which should be the right of all firefighters, career firefighters and also volunteers alike, something not to be used as a 'trade off' for dismantling the CFA. It should never, never have been tied together – the Cancer legislation should have been stand-alone legislation. Clearly the information/advice we are receiving about the Presumptive Legislation from various sources including the esteemed Mr Jack Rush QC does not gel with the information provided by the State Government about it – we need time to be able understand what is correct clearly untruths are being told.

The cost to Victorians of this proposed restructure is also a huge concern to me as there has not been sufficient time to provide adequate costings and budgets – they have not been adequately assessed Whilst the government indicates that there will be no increase in the Fire Services Levy for the next two years the huge costs in establishing and continuing this proposed new fire service will be a burden on the Victorian taxpaying community for years to come.. The additional funding announced for the CFA and also the 'sweetener' of the Cancer Compensation which has now 'magically' been offered also has to come from somewhere.

The CFA is a highly respected organisation worldwide. As a volunteer CFA Member I ask that the Committee ensure that:

- the fair and proper thing be done and that this very much rushed proposed legislation be delayed/put on hold until adequate consultation (something which will impact on all Victorians) with all parties involved has taken place.
- I ask that the Presumptive Legislation be stand-alone legislation and that it is separated from any proposed restructure legislation
- I ask that any vote by Members of the Upper House be allowed to be a conscience vote and not tied to party lines.

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