

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

The below submission has been written by the follow people who make up all of the staff at the Portland Fire Brigade

- **Station Officer Peter Egan**
- **Leading Fire Fighter Natalie Brindle**
- **Leading Fire Fighter Paul Chapman**
- **Fire Fighter David Van Helden**
- **Fire Fighter Cooba Dylewski**

Leading Fire Fighter Paul Chapman has submitted this on behalf of all these members.

CFA Requires Reform

Most fire services in Australia have completed or are conducting reform to their services to meet the changed and evolving environment, social and economic conditions of the 21st century.

It is often quoted "Change is always ongoing, it's only the rate that varies." Yet members of CFA and government are actively curtailing any attempt to adjust to these changing conditions.

Over the last five years there has been robust and at times confrontational discussion regarding CFA/UFU EBA. These discussions now include the proposed FRV Reform package.

There have been many discussions and meetings over this time, which are the basis for our submission.

A comment often cited by people opposed to the proposed EBA and now Reform Package is "There is no need for change." Eight major reviews over 10 years doesn't suggest an organisation and system that does not require change. On most occasions lack of acceptance of reform measures or poor implementation and review has led to no substantial change to the operating model of the CFA. During this period there has been little innovation within CFA. In previous periods there has been the adoption of ICS, introduction of minimum skills and Safety First culture and greater emphasis on community safety. However, even with all these reviews, CFA has remained stagnate. The rallying of members has led to an organisation not willing to adopt new processes and modes of operation, in fact steadfastly fighting to halt reform and maintain an outdated organisational system.

CFA for many years were considered at the forefront with operations; application of technology, including appliance development; and management of a large volunteer and increasing career personnel organisation. Unfortunately CFA has not adapted to change and failed to progress forward. With such as large number of stations and members to manage the ability to spend time working on adapting to a changing environment in both our residential areas and country/vegetation areas has been limited. The CFA is part of a global network of fire services and we believe that there needs to be time spent looking outside of the organisation for innovation and evaluation. There is much to be learnt from other fire services both inside and outside of Australia.

Another comment is "The \$5 million for changeover of labelling to re-badge is a waste of money." However cost is no issue when paying for court case appearances, at an estimated cost of \$21 million or the greater long term cost of continuing to operate with an out-dated system.

We constantly drive past CFA stations with sign writing stating "Proud to serve, 100% volunteer" (see attached photo below) and have had volunteers state to us that they don't want CFA staff in their areas. This appears to be a contradiction to what CFA volunteer members are saying at meetings and in the media, where the sentiment is we don't want FRV, we want to keep career

members with the CFA. There are plenty of brigades and communities with “Hands off CFA” signs still prominently displayed, the message is clear to us as staff members, they don’t want us to be part of the CFA, its theirs and they don’t want staff involved in what’s theirs. This has had a negative effect on moral for staff here at Portland and across the state, wanting to leave the CFA (an organisation some of us have been a part of for over 30 years) isn’t an easy stance to take but we now feel it’s necessary to move forward and create an effective and positive fire service in Victoria.

On commercial radio there are still interviews that contradict the statements of CFA volunteer members. Comments are made that volunteers do not want involvement with career fire fighter wages and conditions and state “It’s about the organisation”. However Simon Ramsey (Liberal member), as one example, was still critical that CFA would not be involved in FRV EBA negotiations. This could be interpreted as CFA still wanting control of career fire fighter entitlements. Is this the real goal of creating road blocks and instigating continual court action?

Politician’s long term career is based on performance and populist vote. Their ongoing employment is rated by the public on a 3 or 4 year basis. However politicians do not have their wages and conditions determined by the public or interested parties. Politician’s wages and conditions are determined by an independent panel. On this basis it is difficult to comprehend why many members of organisations, State and Federal Government and the public have such substantial input causing subsequent delay with the content and approval of an EBA between CFA and career members. Career members have fielded numerous queries and antagonistic remarks about their career and conditions both on duty and off duty. We find this situation frustrating where people consider that it’s their right to directly influence our work agreement. Fire fighters here at Portland have receive comments including “Get a real job” and “You’re destroying the volunteer system.” Politicians are regularly subjected to this type of public criticism and interrogation. Historically whether rightly or wrongly this has been seen to be part of the job of a politician. However there is nothing in the job description of a fire fighter that covers this and until recently we were never subjected to behaviour at our workplace or in private lives.

The effect of this ongoing dispute has been:

- CFA brand has been tarnished. The longer this issue remains the harder and longer it will take to restore the reputation of CFA;
- Splintered CFA volunteer and career member relationships. Example from one Portland staff member; ‘at the height of this dispute I had members that I considered colleagues for over 30 years, some I had been a volunteer with, not wanting to speak to me due to the dispute. I would exit an appliance at fires and incidents not knowing what response I would receive and whether there was going to be a productive work environment.’
- The CFA volunteer/career member relationship is still constantly being tested. At some functions or incidents the dispute is the ‘elephant in the room’. Ongoing negotiations are only causing greater confusion and angst. The use of social media has been damaging to relationships within and beyond CFA.
- Public perception of an organisation lacking control and direction;
- Morale within CFA has drastically lowered during the period of the EBA negotiations. It has solidified different sections of CFA, however the overall organisation is now disjointed.

The reform policy does not appear to affect most CFA brigades. 35 integrated brigades are directly impacted; however many other brigades consider this will directly affect them which is not correct. Those 35 brigades have been offered many opportunities to implement changes as suits their needs.

The Portland area contains a number and variety of risks that require sufficient resources in the case of an incident. In the last few years two major long duration hazardous materials incidents have occurred at the Port of Portland. The introduction of FRV may increase the number of specialist roles and operators in this area.

From a Portland FB career member perspective the change to FRV would increase the number of people that could seamlessly transfer from the current MFB to FRV Portland. The current staffing of Portland is a shift of 4 staff members working 10hr day shifts from Monday to Friday. The goal has always been to have 24/7 staffing and the CFA has been trying to achieve this since 1996. If back in 1996 there was FRV with a pool of staff from both what was CFA and MFB we believe (as there has been enough MFB members expressing interest) that the station would have been fully staff straight away back then. Due to the long process of aligning skills and competences between the services, we have been told that the MFB members (who want to come and fill the gaps we have here in Portland) won't be able to work here until the end of 2017. This is years after the need for 24/7 staffing has been recognised and agreed on.

The issue of Incident Control between CFA volunteer and career staff has been a concern for a number of years. With the establishment of FRV, alongside CFA, incident control will be clearly defined. This is coupled with the issue of CFA staff members not being effectively used, due to volunteer bridges not wanting us to turn out to jobs in their areas. By created FRV it could take out the emotion, personalities and politics and work towards a system that would always sent the people and resources that are going to arrive first and be able to provide the best service.

There are currently resources, knowledge and skills within both the CFA and the MFB that would be shared between the services if staff were combined into FRV. From a CFA staff members point of view there is a lack in opportunities within the CFA in areas such as light duties, specialist courses and career progression beyond climbing through the ranks. MFB staff have more options in these areas and the creation of FRV could allow CFA staff to access these options as well as benefiting from programs such as health monitoring at incidents. MFB fire fighters equally would benefit from everything the CFA has to offer such as greater training in bush fire fire-fighting an area that Victoria needs more resources in.

We have noticed that, aligned with the wider population, younger members in the CFA aren't as committed to staying in the same career for 30 years as past generations have been. The fire fighting work force is changing as well as the families that they are a part of and with this change there needs to be modernisation so that we can hold onto the people that we invested in. This progress, change and modernisation isn't happening with the current CFA model. The administrative/management arm of the CFA is managing one of the largest volunteer bodies in the world and alongside it a growing number of staff fire fighters. This is becoming way too complex and the result has been a fire service struggling to operate in its current form let alone move with our changing times.

It's the opinion of the staff members at Portland Fire Station that it's time to simplify and modernise the fire services in Victoria, we want to get back to work serving the Victorian community the best way we can with the backing of the well-resourced, world class fire service that Victoria needs.

CFA cannot stay with the 'status quo'. The organisation must take this once in a generational opportunity to progress the fire services in Victoria.

"People don't resist change. They resist being changed." -Peter Senge

