

Assistant Clerk of Committees
 Department of the Legislative Council
 Fire Services Bill Select Committee
 Parliament House, Spring Street
 EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

6th July 2017

Dear Sir / Madam,

We write to you with serious concerns regarding the way the **Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017** is being introduced to parliament.

Despite serving our community as volunteer firefighters for over 35 and 18 years respectively, please don't think that these concerns are based on nostalgia and emotional ties - we agree completely that there is a need for a review to ensure all Victorians receive the best possible fire service. However, legislation of this importance relating to the most fire-prone area of the world requires careful consideration of the needs of all Victorian communities.

We have many concerns about this legislation, but our main objections are:

1. A total lack of detail on how this legislation will actually work.


Without details, the Government is 'flying by the seat of its pants' as we head into another fire season. We have asked questions of the Minister and his representatives and were often responded to with, "*I can't answer that yet*", or "*I'll have to get back to you on that*", neither of which are acceptable answers. How can the Parliament vote on legislation without sufficient content to know what they are voting on?

2. Impact on fire service delivery

If this Bill is passed in its current form, we will lose our effective integrated model, which is still the best method of providing a reliable fire service to Victorians and maintaining the surge capacity we are renowned for during significant emergencies. Changing a logo and re-branding of appliances does not improve the fire safety of our communities. Discord in CFA integrated stations is certainly not across the board as some may be lead to believe. There are many integrated brigades that are respectful and outstanding workplaces. ***We need to counsel, educate or remove people who do not believe in and follow CFA values, not change our very effective system.***

Co-locating of FRV and CFA Volunteers is not conducive to strong Volunteer retention. In the very near future when the Fire District Review Panel increases the number of Fire Rescue Victoria stations, more and more career firefighters will be from non-CFA backgrounds and have no understanding of the Volunteer culture at all. We foresee this lack of appreciation of Volunteer capacity and skill to initiate a dwindling of Volunteer interest and, consequently, a serious impact on surge capacity and the speed at which Volunteers respond to large emergency events.

If this Bill is passed in its current form, it is highly likely that an EBA will be quickly signed off on that is very similar to the UFU/CFA Agreement our previous Board, CEO and Chief Officer were opposed to. From our perspective, the UFU uses employment models that have no flexibility to meet the needs of the hundreds of unique communities around the state, particularly those on the urban/rural interface like Emerald. This defies their constant cry of putting community safety first and highlights the political motivation behind this legislative change. Fire service delivery needs to be adaptable to community requirements.



3. Lack of consultation

This concerns us greatly. As per the CFA Act and the Volunteer Charter, consultation with CFA and Volunteers is a legal requirement and this has been totally disregarded by the Government. This is totally unacceptable. Talking casually at station openings and other photo opportunities is not consultation. Legislation this important requires considerable discussion to ensure what is being introduced meets all the expectations of the stakeholders, has had its impact and cost analysed and, once again, meets the needs of all Victorians.

4. Inequity with Presumptive Rights Compensation

To us, this issue is very important. The Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation component of the Bill does not offer a simple process for Volunteers and does not provide equity between career firefighters and Volunteers. It is not the same as the Queensland model and is not what Volunteers (through Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria) have asked for. If you have not already done so, I would encourage you to read the advice from Jack Rush QC regarding Presumptive Rights.

We find it offensive that such an important issue is being used as a 'sweetener' to push a speedy path for this reform Bill.

Consider all the financial savings made by the Government over many decades through Volunteer firefighters and then consider the support a Volunteer struck by cancer might need. Surely our service is worth at least that.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Yandle Captain and **Jody Yandle** Firefighter, Emerald Fire Brigade

