

6 July 2017

Assistant Clerk Committees

Department of the Legislative Council

Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Parliament House, Spring Street

East Melbourne Vic 3002

To whom it my concern

My name is David Stephens and I am writing this submission because of my concerns about the Fire Services Restructure – Presumptive Legislation.

For your information I have been a CFA volunteer for 35 years and have served in many roles in my brigade and group and participated in many campaign fires as a strike team leader and sector commander and have a great deal of experience in structural and urban fire suppression, I have also worked with and alongside professional staff and firefighters.

I will list my concerns as following

- 1 The Fire services Restructure and the Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation must be separated as they are two totally different subjects and need to be addressed as individual issues in an open and transparent way.
- 2 The Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation as it reads is flawed and discriminatory to volunteer fire fighters in the way that it doesn't cover them to the same level as professional fire fighters and they will still have to face scrutiny to prove their claims. We all fight fires to different degrees and level both permanent and volunteer there is no difference.
It is not the same as the Queensland Legislation where there is no time out clause and there is no difference between permanent and volunteer fire fighters.
- 3 Volunteer qualifications, the following are specialised roles that volunteers perform on the fire ground, urban and rural.
Crew Leader
Strike Team Leader
Sector Commander
Divisional Commander
Local Command Facilities Operators
AIMS qualifications
Level 2 and3 Incident controllers
ICC operators, Operations, Logistics, Planning, Public Information
Staging Area Manager

Ground Observer
 BA Controller
 Hazmat operators
 FOV operators
 Fire Ground Safety Officer
 Road Rescue
 High Angle Rescue

As you can see these roles vary greatly and require time and commitment to perform them. The question needs to be asked whether these rolls will be supported with the proposed changes to the CFA or will it just be ignored and the volunteer's rolls dumbed down. The other question that needs to be asked is how the volunteers in integrated station will be treated if they have these qualifications, will they be able to put them into practice and their qualifications recognised by the permanent staff and allowed to grow and flourish as an asset or be stifled and left to wither on the vine.

- 4 Integrated stations, in my time in the CFA I have seen some very good examples of this when both parties agree to work together and have good leadership from the volunteer members and the permanent staff. The other side of the coin is where there is a toxic culture to the volunteers and they are treated as second class, have restricted access to equipment and the stations. There are places where volunteers have their turn out gear in store rooms because they are not allowed to be in the station. At one station the volunteers ended up buying their own tanker because of the restriction placed on them by the permanent staff. I would say this needs to be investigated a great deal more to get a true idea as to how integrated stations operate good and bad. There is a lot of unknowns in the present environment and I must point out that if the volunteers do not maintain their independence and are incorporated into FRV I see a very good pool of volunteers being left exposed to the toxic culture being created by the UFU's more radical members, it has already happened at Geelong, Mildura and Shepparton stations. I am not against unions and member representation but when a small number of its members have a negative impact on a much larger group of people (Volunteers) their rolls and what they do in their communities this is where the leadership of the CFA must stand up and be counted. This is what happened and they were all sacked and replaced with a government nominated board just to tick the boxes.
- 5 Surge capacity, There has been a lot of talk about this and I agree that with the volunteers in our state it is a great asset and in a wildfire incident or campaign fire they have always shone, I have expressed my thoughts on integrated stations and maintaining the volunteer's independence which is very important. We also need to put focused on when volunteers back up permanent staff in an urban environment, this is a proven fact around outer Melbourne but you also need to look at the other permanent staffed stations away from Melbourne in the country. These are islands and they all have some very high fire risks that need to be looked after. There have been many times where there have been large incidents where volunteer fire fighters and their pumpers and tanker from nearby urban and rural brigades have backed up the local permanent staff brigade and made a huge difference

remembering that these islands are isolated and have limited resources and personal. They need these volunteers with their equipment, leadership, skills and additional personal.

- 6 Structure and Finance, The proposed structure to me is politically driven to appease a small number of members of the UFU and has nothing to do with operations. If there is a need for additional permanent fire fighters or support staff I have no problem with that if it is justified. This can be achieved without any effect on volunteer ranks, if anything more staff would mean additional resources to help volunteers with training, support and building the CFA's volunteer capacity as well as permanent staff levels. The current model allows for permanent staff and volunteers to work side by side with minimal disruption. Volunteers are trained by permanent staff already so changing their name and putting a different badge on their shoulders is really just a waste of money. To seconded staff back to the CFA from FRV in this manner will just increase administration cost and create another layer of management at a lower level as well as up the chain of command. This will affect the command and control at large incidents where things should be kept clear and simple for the flow of information and orders. The amount of money that will be wasted seems insulting to me when last week at a meeting with District 20 leaders they informed our brigade that their budget had just been cut by another 100 thousand dollars. How is a district meant to train and support its volunteers and staff when this sort of thing is happening? Through this whole episode there have been no firm costings of what the government wants to do; I see this as a major piece of the information that needs to be disclosed to the public and the volunteers of the CFA.
- 7 In finishing I would like to mention that after the Black Saturday Royal Commission it was stated in its findings that the integrated station model worked extremely well. I now see it under attack from forces within the CFA and MFB. I am not against looking at how our organization works and can be improved for all its members both staff and volunteers but not for a political means and a small minority of antagonists trying to benefit themselves at the expense of others. It is well known that the CFA is recognized worldwide as a model organization and people come and see how we do things, yes we have things we can improve on but on the hole we make it work. With all the former heads of the CFA that have been forced to leave because our government has refused to listen I feel I must do my part in defending this great organization and hope our politicians make the right decision in the end.

If you require any further information or comment please contact me on

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Yours Sincerely

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David Stephens /CFA Volunteer