

7 July 2017

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

via e-mail: LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au
Attention the Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Dear Committee Members,

**Presumptive Rights Compensation
and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some thoughts about the Fire Services Legislation passed by the Legislative Assembly; I am pleased the Legislative Council is taking a thoughtful approach through the Select Committee process.

By way of background, I am a CFA volunteer of over 40 years standing, almost 20 of which have been in leadership roles; I have recently stepped down as Group Officer of the Mitchell Shire Fire Brigades group.

Clearly, the legislation will have far reaching effects and thus deserves close scrutiny to enable:

- Fire and Rescue Services to best meet the needs of all Victorians;
- Members (paid and volunteer) to contribute appropriately; and
- Unintended consequences to be identified and avoided.

It should be stated that whilst there are some dislocations and inefficiencies, the current arrangements continue to broadly meet the needs of the community. Thus, urgent action is not required; rather, now is the time for calm consideration.

Firstly, combining presumptive rights compensation legislation with the creation of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) is at best a distraction and at worst an affront to all fire-fighters. All sides of politics have expressed support for this measure; it needs to be separated and dealt with. Importantly, paid and volunteer fire-fighters need to be treated equally.

Secondly, the legislation lacks a clearly expressed goal against which its success will be measured over time. My engineering work (>45 years) has taught me that the way to resolve issues is to:

1. Define the problem or need, preferably in a sentence or two;
2. Establish the criteria against which success will be measured;
3. Identify all possible solutions that may meet the need; and
4. Evaluate each potential solution against the agreed criteria.

So, if the aim is to provide a Fire and Rescue Services to best meet the needs of all Victorians taking account of (say) hazard profile, cost and community attributes, then it is likely that a number of service delivery models should be considered. These may range from:

- Full-time paid staff to protect the most densely populated and/or high hazard areas;
- Volunteers to protect the least densely populated and/or lower hazard areas; and
- A mix of paid staff and volunteers for the 'in-between' areas.

This leads to the conclusion that a single state-wide agency may be best fit; a further advantage of this arrangement is the ease with which the service delivery model could be adjusted as population density and/or hazard profile changes.

The relationship between CFA volunteers and staff is paramount. Over many years, volunteers have chosen to join the ranks of both MFB and CFA, in a number of instances returning to their roots in roles such as operational, community safety, training, etc. This has proved advantageous to both their own development and their communities. The proposed legislation will make this transition more difficult.

Unfortunately, the proposed legislation further fragments Victoria's fire services when all recent reviews have said fire service modernisation needs to be about joining up effort.

It is yet to be explained what public safety improvement will occur in communities currently serviced by the Integrated Brigades. Their location in the peri-urban areas around metropolitan Melbourne and major regional cities provides increased protection to their communities as well as a significant amount of the 'surge' capacity so necessary to manage large incidents. The benefits of this capacity were evident locally in recent years at both the 'Black Saturday' and Mickleham-Kilmore fires.

Notwithstanding the above comments, it is likely that if the criteria in relation to hazard profile, cost and community attributes were applied to a number of these integrated brigades, they are likely to be fully staffed stations.

Thanks for the opportunity to make this submission. There are many other potential unintended consequences in the proposed legislation and I would be pleased to discuss it further if desired.

John Dixon

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For Comment