

**Attention the Fire Services Bill Select Committee.**

Dear Committee members

I am taking this opportunity to raise some of my concerns about the Fire Services Legislation which you have been appointed to inquire into.

I am a volunteer CFA firefighter with Lara Fire Brigade, and have been a member for 4 years. I am raising my concern as a fire fighter and member of a regional community that has a high fire risk.

Although reform and modernisation of the fire service has the potential to improve fire response capability to the Lara area, elements of the proposed reform may leave my area, and many other areas of the state with a less effective fire service. If volunteer numbers decline because they become disenfranchised with the new legislation, this will seriously affect our surge capacity to enable us to respond to large fires across the state.

For our situation in particular, a second station is proposed – one staffed by volunteers and one with career staff. Two stations in appropriate geographical locations in the Lara area may allow us to respond to certain locations in a more timely manner than is currently possible. However the community also needs a vibrant and active, highly trained volunteer force to allow this to be achievable. Restriction of the volunteers' ability to put our local knowledge and training to good use, such as declaring fire danger periods, planning hazard reduction burns and monitoring the issuing of permits for burning off will only harm our standing within the community and decrease the aim to continue to improve service delivery to our community.

I am intensely concerned about the ability of our volunteers to continue to provide excellent community programmes if our station undergoes the current proposed model of change into a combined FRV/CFA area. Our ability to raise funds for brigade improvement will also be impacted.

I have grave concerns about the independence of the proposed CFA structure, which will be using members seconded from the FRV in its higher management positions. I believe that there is no way that people in these positions can be seen to be working independently of the organisation that they have been seconded away from, however good their intentions. The C.O. of the new organisation will have no ability to hire or dismiss staff, and other important decisions will not be under their control.

I believe the Victorian Government has rushed this legislation through the Lower house and attempted to rush it through the legislative Council. Previous inquiries have not advocated for a restructure of the CFA, other than to support the current model. I am concerned that we are being forced into manufacturing a new fire service because of an industrial argument leaving small stations like Lara and many others throughout the state with no avenue to contribute to the implementation of the new service. I feel that the modernisation and reform of the fire service could be achieved much more successfully if the process was slowed to allow for full community consultation and a more in depth process.

Although not listed as one of the terms of reference for your inquiry I must express my dismay at the proposed Presumptive Rights Legislation as it currently stands. There is absolutely no reason that a volunteer should have to follow a different process to a career firefighter to be approved for compensation. As it stands, if a volunteer and a career firefighter attended exactly the same events and got cancer, the career firefighter is automatically given presumptive rights compensation and the volunteer is not. This is wrong and there is no other way to state it.

Thank you for considering my submission.

As long as my name and contact details are suppressed I am happy for this submission to be listed on the Committee's website otherwise I do not wish it to be listed.

Yours Faithfully