

**Submission**

To Fire Services Bill Select Committee

From Peter J LUCAS AFSM

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I am submitting this as private citizen, albeit an employee of CFA for 43+ years, and CFA member for 47+ years

Signed

[Redacted Signature]

Peter J Lucas AFSM

## A. Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

STOP. LOOK. LISTEN.

Change is needed, but to ratify a vision, a dream, a concept, a back of the envelope idea, is foolhardy at best, criminally negligent at worst.

Fire-fighting is serious business, and as such it must be designed, developed, run and measured as a business. Yes we need change, but consult and communicate what's involved in the change, evaluate every option, [not just the Union approved ones], then outline the business case, get professional input and buy-in from all the players to help build this model for the future.

FRV

The impact on fire service delivery will be catastrophic if the FRV structure and operating environment are not fully designed, costed, and consulted prior to implementation. It can't be designed, unless the key expense, that is labour costs and workforce restrictions are not known and accordingly built into the business model.

The fire service builds their success through planning, and the key to planning is to determine the facts. In this case there are no facts, just a "vibe", a concept, a vision. This is not good enough when the community expects a professional response to every threat, every minute, everywhere across the State, NOW as well as into the future.

CFA

The deliberate introduction of such a fracture into [an integrated] CFA on the cusp of a fire season – especially this one which is showing the early signs of severe drought - is sure to lead to an avoidable tragedy, that can and WILL be sheeted home to those who forced through this "back of an envelope" idea.

The fire service is a "can do" organisation which learns from their mistakes and grows stronger with every challenge. The fire service also places the greatest weight on planning. The key to planning is determining the facts – they are not there, they won't be there in the short and probably the mid-term.

The impact on fire service delivery will be catastrophic if the CFA structure and operating environment are not fully designed, costed, and consulted prior to implementation.

Because there has been no planning around what FRV will look like, it is very hard to determine what the forecast / foreseeable benefit to any Victorian community served by an integrated station by their inclusion into FRV will be?

At present the only foreseeable effect is changing their employer, their uniform and swapping the station name to a number.

How will CFA career members be better served by this yet to be built reform [except in a pay deal]?

How will the community served be better served by their co-located Brigade apart from different employers, the renaming of their Brigade to Dandenong Volunteer Brigade / Station 81

How will the community be impacted by the new risk environment delivered by the deliberate fracturing of CFA into two elements, which would introduce different operating protocols into a previous united workplace?

How will this change benefit anything, let alone service delivery, safety, and everything else in those areas currently served by the integrated model. If there is no benefit then why is it being done? What purpose does it serve, except to get a pay deal through?

The FRV model must be built first, not worked out on the run, especially that aspect which impacts Integrated Brigades and the communities they serve.

#### THE NEED FOR CONSULTATION

We come from a political and industrial background built on consultation. Everyone in the community at large, and those who form Trade Unions have fought countless battles over its' absence The lack of consultation here is profound. The obligation to consult is enshrined in all Fire Service agreements. Now, when consultation is most needed, there is none – just an appeal to “trust us it’s needed,” we’ll work out the details later”, “she’ll be right mate”. We’ve never accepted such assurances in the past, why should we trust this absolutely unprecedented approach now?

There is no hope for the Reform if it delivers a “a dog’s breakfast”. There must be something to see, a foundation on which to build, a fully thought through Fire Service behind which we can all declare our allegiance

### **B. Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery**

The supplementary monies are welcome, but will surely be exhausted in the preparations for, then the repair of this re-birthing process.

This support must be guaranteed beyond every election cycle. It must be recurrent thus allowing CFA to identify, resource, capitalise and support every initiative to build volunteerism into the future

It is clear that volunteer response is most tested during weekday work hours, and strongest on weekends and nights. The key to future volunteer engagement is to capitalise on the volunteer strengths now and into the future,

The FRV / CFA co-location model must be expanded to allow for day-time staffing.

A co-operative fire service of career members serving during week-days, then predominately volunteer response at night and weekends [either volunteer only or a mix of volunteers and a lesser number of career staff] would guarantee like for like service, at an affordable and long term cost effective basis, whilst bolstering volunteer engagement and participation.

This would maximise career costs to where and when they're most needed, and directly allow for more communities and stations to be serviced by this realistic model. Put simply, FRV would provide true cost effective service if the career members only staffed some stations 8-6, Monday to Friday.

This would allow for more stations to be opened, especially in the growth areas, and have a profound and positive effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery to the Victorian community as a whole

### **This would be true reform !**

What political courage does the Government have to support this obvious, and proven positive initiative which would directly serve the Victorian community, CFA in its' nurturing of the volunteer ethic, and FRV in its expansion to growth areas

### REAL AUTONOMY

If the CFA is to be "strengthened" by a newly guaranteed autonomy, how will it be achieved whilst there is a Chief, CEO and Board, each claiming the high ground on and of "autonomy".

CFA must be led by a Commissioner.

This too MUST be included into the reform model at its inception

## **C Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision**

### BEFORE SHORT TERM

Considering the catalyst for the reform is and will always be the EBA, then it is clear the true cost impact cannot be determined until the EBA is signed. It will be this act that will directly determine what FRV and CFA look like in the short and long term.

### LONG TERM

The long term impact will be directly reflected by the success of the utopian "accord" and its ability to balance [or remove] the decades old and ingrained continual battle to rationalise labour cost and work force restrictions spawned by the EB.

### AN EQUAL PLACE FOR VOLUNTEERS

Anyone who has ever been involved in any major incident in Victoria's history understands that none have been resolved without volunteers direct, massive and sustained input.

The contribution of volunteers will forever be the lynchpin. Their inclusion in successive change models must remain within the highest of priorities, both in the short, but especially the long term.

The cost of two different training standards being openly or "accidentally" created will lead to disaster.

Volunteers training opportunities, standards and skills recognition must also be dramatically augmented. This is intrinsic in this new fire service provision.

This training must always be inter-operable, there can be no difference between CFA, and FRV in the competencies at every level, forever.

We must enshrine “Work as One” across all emergency services, especially CFA and FRV, even to over-stating the obvious, we “train as one” forever

Look what happened when a career army exercised the will, attitude and capacity to recognise, nurture and elevate the volunteer John Monash into their ranks?

Our new Fire Services must be built on like thinking and principles, both short and long term.

#### **D. Underlying policy rationale.**

The Policy of combining Presumptive Legislation and Fire Service Reform is wrong.

Presumptive Legislation must be separated from the Reform Bill, as it is a [near] fully worked Policy that is receiving bi-partisan support, and is needed now.

Whilst Presumptive Legislation should be enacted, Mesothelioma MUST be included into the “specified cancers” list. There is little further need to justify the tragic impact of Asbestos exposure in Australia, but we are dealing with a volunteer and career workforce that is still dealing with unstable asbestos at many incidents, especially rural. We also have many long serving members, like myself, who used to clean, use, handle and maintain asbestos gloves and blankets, which co-incidentally were also stored in the breathing apparatus lockers. Like many cancers, Mesothelioma has a long latent period.

Whilst the Policy for Reform calls upon “an action”, it is not accompanied by any blueprint, scheme, programme, schedule, guidelines, and more. It is no more than a vision, a dream, a concept, a back of the envelope idea in its current form.

The complete FRV and CFA Reform must be worked through, developed and designed, then consulted appropriately and properly before any decision for implementation is made.

The Government Policy that details “consultation” needs serious reform also. If the speed at which this amalgam of a Bill was introduced, combined with the short time for submissions can be considered true consultation, then this consultation policy need serious reform first. What consultation ethics did the Government use that saw the Union receiving advance and extensive consultation long before the workforce they represent and other key stakeholders. That is not, nor ever will be considered consultation. That process must change, if cooperative change is ever to happen.

The Reform Policy and strategy is completely upside-down in suggesting the formation of FRV before labour costs and work force restrictions spawned by the EB are fully detailed, and understood. How can any business, let alone both CFA and FRV be run if the major costs, that is, labour cost and workforce limitations, are not fully understood and built into the business plan?

### **STOP LOOK LISTEN**

We need change.

Do it properly and everyone will buy-in.

Do the obvious things first, that is, build it first and show us what you want us to change to. ,