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6 July 2017

To Whom it May Concern

Submission: Fire Services Bill Inquiry

Fire service delivery across Victoria has historically been the Country Fire Authority volunteers working with Metropolitan Fire Brigades to put out fires. This has worked well as many previous enquiries have pointed out – the surge capacity of over 60,000 volunteers efficiently and effectively heeding the call to arms is well documented.

The on-going dispute between the CFA and the Union has driven a wedge so deep between these two organisations that the ability for both to work together appears almost impossible. Two separate and at times antagonistic groups (now) cannot possibly have the same shared vision and goals. Members of my local brigade, myself included, have been subject to such rude and abusive communications by some of the “professionals” at our local district office that we could never work willingly with, or trust, them.

My main concern now is that the Andrew’s Government is so intent on delivering on promises to the union that they will do anything – even if it risks Victorian lives and property.

How can the Bill work? Clause 27 states that the “new” Fire Rescue Victoria will provide operational and management SUPPORT to the CFA as reflected in the new powers outlined in clause 38. My interpretation of this was that the CFA could request support from FRV – where support is defined as helping and assisting. Clause 38 indicates that the CFA cannot exercise a power in respect of an officer or employee of FRV. So now we have the impossible situation where the CFA may request support but the CFA is unable to direct the person(s) providing the support?

My question is “what good do these proposed changes effect”? Will bushfires be fought better? NO – without mutual cooperation between the two organisations the reverse will happen. If the purpose is not to combat the threat of bushfires why are these changes even being proposed?

Essentially the CFA wishes to remain free from union influence – for a volunteer organisation this does not appear an unusual desire. We have been smeared, belittled, harassed and threatened but that does not negate the fact that we – the CFA put out bushfires and save lives and property.

The Andrews’ government is endeavouring, through the passage of legislation, to place all CFA members under the control of paid-up union members under the guise of area coordinators. Certainly this will provide the UFU with more influence, power and potentially funds than it has ever had at its disposal before.

If the proposed legislation is passed and enacted CFA volunteers will be committing an offence if they continue to combat bushfires as the currently do. Worse, many CFA areas and volunteers had decided in desperation that they would cease their CFA membership and create their own private area brigades. With the passage of the proposed legislation this will not be possible as again we

could all end up as jailed criminals by stepping on to the fireground! Further there will be no compensation for us in the event of injury as we will be non-CFA members.

The Andrews' government appears intent on creating a "super" union for reasons that are incomprehensible to us as it involves smashing the morale and spirit of CFA volunteers. We desperately want the paid firefighters to receive their entitlements. We desperately don't want to be controlled by the UFU – directly or indirectly.

If you have any questions or require any further information please feel free to contact me. Surely everyone's sole desire is for a safer community – this cannot occur whilst the Andrew's government and the UFU are intent on furthering their own aims.

Yours sincerely

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