

**Fire Services Restructure**

Dear Member the Parliament of Victoria

I am writing to you on behalf of the members of the Beaufort Fire Brigade. Our brigade was established in 1874 and has a long and proud history of serving the Beaufort community, the local surrounding areas, the State of Victoria as well as communities interstate.

As a brigade we have concerns regarding the restructure of the fire services in Victoria. Our main concern is that the bill has not had proper consultation with the CFA Executive, the CFA Chief Officer, MFB Chief Officer, the MFV Executive and certainly little or no consultation with CFA volunteers or our volunteer representative body the VFBV.

We accept that there is a need to review and possibly re-align the boundaries within the Melbourne area, but we believe that careful consideration has not been made as to the retention of CFA Volunteers at Integrated stations. Up grading facilities and giving them a new truck is not the way to help deal with the uncertain future these volunteers face. The volunteers from the 35 integrated stations are vital to CFA to help with major campaign fires in all types of roles at these major fires.

The takeover of FRV into Regional Victoria will alienate a lot of CFA volunteer brigades who are on the fringe of these proposed new boundaries. The term Professional firefighters should be discouraged as we believe we are all professional when it comes to our service delivery to the community. It could erode public confidence if volunteers are continually referred to as amateur or hobby fire fighters it could also lead to volunteer firefighters being treated as second class firefighters to the professionals. We believe that this was not the case when we were all CFA members.

No evidence coming from the numerous enquiries into our fire services after major fires or the Royal Commission into the Black Saturday fires has ever been made available to the public stating or supporting a recommendation of a formal break- up of the CFA into Paid and Volunteer fire services.

We have grave concerns regarding the inclusion of the Presumptive Cancer Compensation for Firefighters Legislation being included in the Fire Services Reform Bill. To combine the two totally separate issues into the one piece of Legislation is not fair to CFA volunteer firefighters as we don't have the same access to compensation as the paid firefighters do.

We have concerns that in the future Operation Staff who are seconded to CFA from FRV will not have had any experience working with and alongside volunteers. If CFA is to be volunteer only then our Operational Staff must have an understanding of how volunteer brigades operate and the time commitments given by volunteer members in serving our communities. What is unclear is how Operational Staff will be appointed. Who makes the appointment and will volunteers have a voice in the selection process. It is vital that volunteers have the chance to be involved in selection of staff.

We believe that this proposed Bill contains Government to conduct serious and extensive community consultation regarding this very important issue for the state of Victoria.

Yours Sincerely

Colin J Gerrard

Captain

Beaufort Fire Brigade

