

Please find below a few salient points in reference to the Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.

1. Up until three years ago, before the start of EBA negotiations between the CFA and the United Firefighters Union there was absolutely no disharmony between the paid firefighters and the volunteer workforce.

This changed dramatically when the UFU hierarchy made a masterstroke political decision to support the Labour Party at the last State election on the premise that should the Labour Party take Government, then the Union would receive favour for that support.

Once the current Government was elected, an EBA proposal document was disseminated by the UFU that contained both odious and illegal demands that even to this day have not been agreed upon by any organisation or the Minister and so followed the most blatant political interference into a service and model that was once the envy of the world.

2. It is interesting to note that all CFA recruits signed up as part of their employment conditions to join the CFA as paid firefighters, a part of whose role includes "supporting a volunteer organisation".

Slowly but surely the Union has reversed that position and now the paid staff believe that volunteers are there in support of paid firefighters.

Why has this been allowed to happen? The Volunteer Charter enshrined in Victorian Government Legislation says that "in order to participate in an integrated fire service through a practical partnership based on mutual respect for CFA, people employed by CFA, and people of other organisations, to ensure that community safety needs are met to the best of their collective abilities."

The significant words here are "integrated fire service" and "community safety needs are met to the best of their collective abilities". These do not suggest an urban and rural service as proposed in the Fire Services Legislation.

3. Many years ago the CFA was split in to Urban and Rural Brigades with, in some cases, fire stations that had a white line down the middle separating the two services. However, some years ago in the belief that having two separate groups was inefficient and a source of disruption, the CFA management at the time streamlined the organisation and merged the two branches into the one.

The proposed Legislation takes the fire services "back to the future" by proposing that stations with career staff and integrated stations should be

hived off into a separate organisation - rural and urban - promoting the same old dangers in command and control disciplines and structural and financial management inefficiencies.

It is interesting to note that the management of the Victorian Ambulance Service have recently emphasised the significant gain in efficiencies in both operations and management through having merged the Rural service and the Metropolitan service.

4. The costs attributed to the proposed Legislation only seem to address the financial costs and little or no thought has been given to the social cost of such a divisive move.

The Minister for Emergency Services repeatedly says that the proposed legislation will not effect volunteers in any way. This is patently fallacious. The volunteers, although they have their own ranking hierarchy rely in large part on paid operational staff for support and in some cases leadership.

How can volunteers have trust in an organisation, that although we are assured will be run on similar lines to the police with a commissioner in charge, is heavily unionised - far more than the Victoria Police.

The yellow overalls of the CFA volunteers are the most recognised brand in the state. There are reportedly 50,000 volunteers of whom only a very small proportion approve of this legislation. The vast majority number of Members are upset by it and the government interference. Simply multiply this by members' families and their local communities - of whom the CFA are a major part and do the maths.

5. The United Firefighters' Union has successfully managed to sway public opinion into believing that the volunteers have been denying the career staff their terms and conditions.

Nothing can be further from the truth. No volunteer has ever interfered with negotiations for career staff achieving any pay and conditions.

The Union has turned down successive pay offers for staff in order to further their own ambitions thus disadvantaging their own membership.

It is patently untrue that the UFU EBA cannot be negotiated in front of the Fair Work Commission because of legislation introduced by the Federal Government which shields the CFA volunteers from unfair and aggressive negotiation tactics by other parties.

I commend these thoughts to you. It is all very well to introduce an idea, but there is little or no planning in that idea. The idea is being introduced with inordinate and unseemly haste to satisfy a grateful government and the long term consequences be damned.

I am disappointed in the extreme that the Premier and the Minister have ridden roughshod over this whole process and the only thing that has been achieved so far is intense distrust that the whole episode has engendered between career staff and volunteers and the consequent very low moral for both sides.

I thank you for your time.

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