

Prue Purdey

From: B & J Brewer [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 2 July 2017 7:29 AM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission to Fire Services Restructure - Upper House Select Committee

Members of LCSC

Fire Services Bill Select Committee,

Parliament House,

Spring Street,

East Melbourne VIC 3002

June 30th, 2017

Dear members,

Please accept this submission as a written response to the Upper House Select Committee inquiry into the proposed Fire Services Restructure from VFBV in CFA District 9. We represent every brigade in CFA District 9 which covers essentially all west and south Gippsland.

Even though there are no integrated brigades in our district the proposed legislated changes will have an enormous impact on our district and the volunteers at our 43 brigades are extremely concerned.

It is extremely worrying that this latest development has been instigated to resolve a particularly problematic industrial situation for the State Government and to appease the United Firefighter Union.

For the last 12 months there has been no meaningful dialogue between the CFA and the volunteers and this has continued, a situation that is not acceptable in a volunteer based emergency service.

The proposed legislative changes will have enormous impact on fire service delivery across the state and it is vital to remember that Victoria is one of the most fire prone areas in the world. Volunteers at integrated

stations in the outer metropolitan area and in regional cities will be greatly affected and their enthusiasm and lack of ability to recruit will eventually see many of these brigades wither and die. We have been informed that co-located volunteers will not have the same service responsibilities as other volunteers essentially creating a “second class” CFA in these FRV locations. Their role will be agreed in arrangements (between FRV and CFA). This involvement will be determined by the EBA between the UFU and FRV. This will greatly impact the “surge capacity” of the CFA out of these areas in times of greatest need.

The obvious financial impact on the community cannot be discounted with fire service levies having to rise due to changes in what were previously integrated CFA stations. There obviously will be two layers of management and a double up everything from equipment and appliances to mechanics and radio infrastructure. This will cost money and this simply cannot be denied.

With the proposed changes to the management structure of the CFA the entire service will essentially be accountable to the UFU. Senior management at every CFA district will be employed by FRV and it is not inconceivable that “broken down” FRV senior station officers from inner Melbourne could “retire to the country” and become Operations Managers at fully volunteer CFA districts even though they have absolutely no background in volunteers. Such a situation would result in extremely poor management and morale with obvious negative impact to brigades and volunteers.

The prospect of all training grounds and trainers being the responsibility of FRV is also fraught with danger. Quite clearly the training requirements of firefighters in metropolitan areas is dramatically different to that of rural CFA firefighters. The appliances are different, the equipment is different, the members are different and the training must be different. The trainers should be accountable to the CFA and drawn from the CFA. In the past volunteer trainers have been used and this has worked well as there is an enormous requirement for trainers when the volunteer workforce is so large.

The “Bundling up” of the presumptive cancer legislation and the reform bill is inappropriate and unethical. The importance of firefighter health must be dealt with independently. The presumptive cancer legislation also must be truly non-discriminatory something that the current proposal is not.

The proposed legislation is very poorly and loosely worded and open to interpretation. There is little detail and it is largely these details that have major impacts on the volunteers.

The CFA is a world recognised and admired fire fighting force that should be protected at all costs. It is not something that can be used, manipulated and negatively impacted by a government intent on solving an embarrassing industrial problem at all costs.

Protect the CFA.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Brewer

(VFBV D9 President – for and on behalf of VFBV D9)