

Submission – Fire Services Bill – 5th July 2017

As a member of the CFA (2nd Lieutenant and Training Officer), I have attended a number of briefing sessions and meetings in regard to the Bill.

The following is a brief, but albeit not exhaustive, list of my major concerns with the Bill :

- The Bill has been produced without consultation with CFA Management (including the Chief Officer and Board), CFA members, or the members' representative body (VFBV). My experience in discussions with a large number of volunteer CFA members is that this lack of consultation has caused great anxiety and uncertainty amongst volunteers, as well as a negative effect on volunteer morale. Volunteers sacrifice family time, their families are often subject to anxiety when volunteers are on the fireground, and they are often in physically dangerous situations and subject to psychological stress when performing what is a vital service to the community. Many volunteers feel they have been treated with a total lack of respect by this lack of consultation, and because of this I fear the effects on volunteer numbers in the future.
- I am concerned at the consequences of converting CFA integrated brigades in to predominantly Fire Rescue Victoria brigades. I believe that the result will be an inevitable loss of large numbers of CFA volunteers at these stations. These volunteers are likely to be placed in a position of diminished import at these FRV stations, and under those circumstances future recruiting of volunteers will become more difficult. Difficulty in volunteer recruitment is already a major issue for the CFA, we do not need a system that will have further negative effects on recruitment. The potential effects on public safety from such a loss of volunteer numbers is of major concern, as much of the 'surge capacity' of the CFA when responding to major campaign fires (e.g Black Saturday) relies on the large number of volunteers currently existing at integrated brigades.
- I believe that the Bill compromises the chain of command in the CFA emanating from the Chief Officer. The Bill negates the ability of the Chief Officer to control or manage those FRV employees made available to the CFA. Clause 38 (2) (5) of the Bill, when referring to those FRV employees that will be made available to the CFA , states

(5) Nothing in this section or the Country Fire Authority Act 1958—

(a) empowers the Country Fire Authority, under section 17 of the Country Fire Authority Act 1958, to exercise a power in respect of an officer or employee made available (whether on a full-time, part-time or other basis) to the Country Fire Authority under subsection (3);

I urge the Committee to seek legal advice re clause 38.

