

The Secretary
Legislative Council Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Secretary

We would like to submit the following to the Fire Services Bill Inquiry.

We would like to submit the following as active volunteers with a combined 70 years service with 9 Brigades across the state

(A) Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

- We at CFA are about to undergo the largest change to this organisation since its inception in the 1940's and the full impact on volunteers or the fire service delivery is not yet understood.
- We anticipate there will be a significant reduction of volunteers in integrated fire brigades across the state greatly reducing surge capacity for urban and rural response especially long duration campaign fires and incident management.
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(B) Effect on Volunteer engagement and participation in Fire Service delivery

- Volunteers are already feeling disengaged from the CFA as a result of the poor handling of the current negotiations and experienced long serving volunteers have already resigned from integrated brigades leaving these brigades short on surge capacity.
- Particularly in integrated stations the reduction of volunteers or reduction in volunteer capability could have an impact on community safety in the event of level 2 or 3 incidents. The role of the Volunteer has been diminishing in integrated stations for many years as the career staff have been increased in line with the UFU agreements with the Government. As manning of the stations increases to the expected levels there will be even less for volunteers to do resulting in exodus of volunteers leading to less surge capacity and as experienced volunteers leave there is reduced capability.

(C) Short term and long term cost impact on Fire service provision

- The proposed model will impose a massive cost impost on our community due to increase career staffing where volunteers could easily provide an efficient service to regional centres. Consideration should be given a model of career stations with a volunteer capacity to back them up in the times of need.

(D) Underlying Policy rationale

- Total segregation of career and volunteer fire service into two autonomous fire services.
- In order to maintain volunteer engagement and surge capacity integrated stations should be split accordingly with a totally independent station.
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The glue that has always held the CFA together and made it such a great organisation is the Culture which has evolved over many years. This Culture was the envy of Fire Services across the globe. There was a sense of community, mate-ship, commitment, connection and loyalty that inspired so many to freely; give up their time to provide a valuable service to our communities locally and even interstate. Unfortunately over the past few years this has eroded to the extent that many volunteers have become disengaged from the CFA due to political and union pressures.

The above points support a move to have a paid (career) fire service with an independent volunteer organisation which can support the career brigades. In remote areas like Mildura, Warrnambool, Shepparton etc. The new fire service will have no support from other career stations and a well trained volunteer brigade will be the most cost effective structure to protect the community.

The size of the career station should not be a one size fits all. The career brigades should be proportional to the risk and brigade call outs. The independent volunteer station could also be taken into account for this assessment.

The new career stations should specialise in urban incidents and any rescue component determined. Career brigades should not take over any SES responsibility. Rural fire fighting should be the responsibility of the CFA with any career brigades supporting by providing asset protection much the same way as the MFB provides in campaign fires. This way the separation of duties is clear with defined command structures.

With this in mind we need to create two separate autonomous organisations so we can rebuild the CFA culture to once again become the envy of all Fire services and more importantly provide an efficient cost effective and professional service for our community.

Yours Sincerely

Stephen O'Keefe

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Brendan O'Neill

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