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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
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Subject Fire Services Reform

My submission attached.

Regards

Owen



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A submission

Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

By Owen Gooding, Team Leader Vegetation Management, CFA Headquarters East Burwood.



Submission Context

This submission to the inquiry is written in the context of the provision of bushfire risk mitigation services, with an emphasis on planned burning for fuel reduction. It focuses on the inquiry Terms of Reference (a) *impact on fire service delivery across Victoria*.

The submission draws on my professional experience in leading CFA's Vegetation Management Program. It does not represent the views of CFA, program staff or line management.

Background

Bushfire Risk Treatments

Fuel management (primarily fuel reduction burning) is a treatment used by fire services around the world to mitigate the impacts of bushfire (unplanned fire) on life and property.

By itself fuel management does not stop bushfire occurring or eliminate its impacts. It works in concert with other risk mitigation treatment such as land use planning, building regulation, community development and fire suppression. Under severe bushfire conditions the effectiveness of planned burning reduces and the risk to life and property increases. Community members need to prepare and maintain their property and manage vegetation to help reduce the risk around their homes and assets and act on their personal bushfire survival plan.

Role of Fuel Reduction

Reduced fuel decreases the impact of bushfire by lowering the intensity of a bushfire. Low intensity makes it easier for fire-fighters to control a bushfire.

Fuel reduction is conducted at a board scale remote from settlements to reduce embers that on bad fire days start new fires some distance away from the main fire (up to 36 kilometres). This fuel reduction slows the rate of spread of a bushfire. It also increases the likelihood of suppression at the early stage of a bushfire.

Fuel reduction within 150 meters of a house significantly increases the likelihood of house survival by minimising the impact of radiant heat and ember attack.

Impacts of the Reform

Victorian Agencies Responsibilities

Planned burning on public land including National Parks, State Parks and other crown land reserves is undertaken by Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) a division of Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, and its partner agency Parks Victoria. Planned burning is conducted by CFA brigades on behalf of and at the request of private land owners or managers of other reserves such as roads rail corridors, council reserves and water authority land.

FFMV, Parks Victoria and CFA fire-fighters routinely work together on planned burns. This integration of the fire services has progressed significantly with the emergence of the risk-based, cross-tenure approach which has now been codified in policy under the Victorian State Government bushfire strategy known as Safer Together.

In the bushfire risk environment, CFA and its public land management partners hold the state's bushfire capability. The relationship between CFA (including its forest industry brigades) and public land management partners is of critical importance to the management of bushfire risk and the conducting of planned burning operations.

FFMV manages bushfire and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade does not. Whereas CFA covers both structural and bushfire risk environments.

The proposed fire services restructure has the potential to strengthen the connections between bushfire management agencies and therefore the state's bushfire and planned burning capability.

Agency Relationship to Structural and Bushfire Capability

Fire services mitigation and suppression capability can broadly be divided into structural and bushfire streams. This division arises from differences in skill sets of fire-fighters, legislative and jurisdictional boundaries, organisational culture, treasury funding arrangements and the industrial setting. In the Victorian context the division is also reflected in the differences between a largely volunteer workforce and a fully paid workforce. This division is further reinforced by differences between metropolitan and rural/semi-rural risk environments.

There is a natural and practical alignment of Fire Rescue Victoria to urban settings dominated by structural risk, and between CFA and public land management partners in rural and remote settings dominated by bushfire risk.

The proposed restructure would enhance this alignment.

Reform Risks

CFA relies heavily on a volunteer based workforce for bushfire suppression and planned burning services. The volunteer workforce is currently at or near capacity for delivering planned burning services, and there are many significant pressures on volunteerism overall which impact response capability.

A key challenge for the restructure of fire services will be in the implementation phase. Specifically there will need to be resources and mechanisms in place to ensure that there is adequate CFA operational and non-operational staff with bushfire and planned burning expertise in support of its volunteer workforce.

Conclusion

Bushfire and structural fire fighting, while sharing some fire fighting attributes, has important differences in terms of skills, knowledge, service delivery, enabling legislation, industrial context and workforce capability requirements.

The restructure provides a better alignment between the fire agencies and risk environments than the current situation provides.

The proposed restructure has the potential to increase capability in structural and bushfire settings by enabling agencies to focus on a primary risk environment and better utilise the strengths of their respective workforces.

The reform is also be expected to enhance the state's bushfire suppression and planned burning capability overall by reinforcing the linkages and between CFA and its public land management partners.