

Esubmission – Select Committee

The Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill

Dear Committee

My Name is Andrew Russell. I have been a volunteer firefighter in the Rutherglen District for the past 20 years. I am a past Captain of the Browns Plains Fire Brigade and now currently hold the position of Lieutenant. I am also the Group Officer for the Rutherglen Group of Fire Brigades and Member of the District 24 planning Committee.

I wish to state clearly that I understand there are many perspectives involved regarding The Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill. I have enjoyed a very respectful and productive relationship with every CFA staff member that I have encountered in my time within CFA.

There is no doubt that aspects of this bill will be of benefit to the CFA Volunteers and to the Victorian Community. Reducing the indirect interruption of service delivery, due to industrial actions and union requirements, will be a major benefit. On another note more paid firefighters is certainly a benefit. The only occasion this would not be a benefit is if it is at the expense of the greater number of firefighters (volunteers).

1. **Impact of Fire Service Delivery across Victoria**—I am hearing mixed messages regarding the Integrated Stations. Some say volunteers are happy with the proposed changes. Some say they are not. There is no doubt that loss of volunteers from Integrated Stations will affect surge capacity. However we will not know the full extent of this until the next campaign fire. I believe that the biggest impact upon Fire Service Delivery will be due to lack of morale and a reduction of and lack of dynamic leadership.
2. **Effect on Volunteer Engagement and Participation in Fire Service Delivery** – As I have stated above, the effect I see this bill having upon Volunteers will be mostly felt by the CFA Volunteer Leaders. Today's world does not bode well for volunteering in general. Families are busy. Saturday's and Sundays have become working days or 'catch up on the jobs' days. Unfortunately our world has also become bound by red tape and procedures designed to keep us safe from harm and to prevent litigation but also eat away the valuable time that a Volunteer can afford to give. The effect of these is that Volunteer engagement is a tough prospect. CFA Volunteer Leaders are working harder than they ever have to keep their members engaged and active. The ideal of the CFA, being a family that worked hard together, sometimes played together but certainly

achieved together drives many volunteers. Unity of all members of CFA from the Chief Officer down is key to success. How can this possibly be achieved with a management structure that is seconded from another organization ? It is certainly not about seconded FRV members simply having a new name on their pay cheque. This is about a group mentality that cannot reconcile with the view of members that deliver for no pay. It is clear that the views of either party will never align. I see the danger being that many CFA Volunteers Leaders, who are currently facing an uphill battle, will now face a battle that is insurmountable. Without these leaders many of the remainder of the contributing members will simply fade away from their roles in CFA over a period of time. The events of the last 12 months have volunteers questioning their commitment. Trust and unity need to be built again to maintain Volunteer Engagement and Participation in Fire Service Delivery.

3. **Short Term and Long Term Cost Impact on Fire Services Delivery** – Short term and long term I see that there will be a need to increase support for CFA for volunteers in the future. More Brigade Administrative Support Officers, more Trainer Assessors, more Operations Officers. Staff will need extra training that will assist them to deal with volunteering in general, people managers that provide the correct support for today's volunteer. The self-supporting volunteers will diminish. Money spent on morale building exercises in CFA will be required. However without a doubt the greatest cost impact, will be lack of volunteer, unpaid, free labour. How can this be measured ?
4. **Underlying Policy Rationale** – There is significant concern across the state regarding the secondment of FRV staff into CFA. As outlined above this is due mostly to a lack of trust and a lack of unity. It would seem that the United Firefighter Union members believe that community safety is at the forefront of their push to gain greater control of the destiny of CFA. I find this very difficult to swallow. Pay, conditions, more jobs, and so more members simply come to mind in this volunteer. All of which I support the union members to gain, but not at the detriment of an already depleted and disengaged volunteer workforce. The state of Victoria can simply not afford it.

Best Regards,

Andrew Russell

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