

Upper House Select Committee

Review ('The Firefighters Presumptive rights compensation and Fire Service Legislation amendment (reform) bill 2017)

As an active volunteer fire fighter with the CFA for some 47 years, 20 years as a captain and a member of both an integrated fire station and a fully volunteer fire station I feel compelled to write to this committee and make some comment on the fire services bill currently before parliament.

Firstly I have been unable to find anywhere in recent commissions or reviews into the fire services in Victoria that state the volunteers and career staff within the CFA need to be separated a career staff only or volunteer only fire service. It appears that this split is required so that an EBA that has been shown to be unfair to volunteers can be implemented. I cannot see how these changes will improve the fire services in Victoria. I do however support change to our fire services where the safety and financial improvement to all Victorian's is clear for which in this bill does not and will if passed in its current form effect CFA's surge capacity and be a greater financial burden for all Victorian's.

I do not believe there is any doubt that the presumptive cancer compensation should not be in this bill and should be presented as a separate bill. The presumptive rights compensation should be equal to all volunteers and career staff, a person's pay rate should not decide how an application scrutinized as all fire fighters are faced with the same hazards. If the committee believes that all are being treated the same then swap the word volunteer with the words career staff in the bill and wait for the outcry from the UFU. We have been told that what is being presented in the bill is the same as the Queensland model; this is incorrect information and should be treated as such.

There appears to be no detail of how the Fire Rescue Victoria model is going to work with volunteers from CFA that may not even be housed in the same fire station, under the current integrated system it is one CFA brigade with an assignment area and integrating with MFB when supporting into their area, the proposed model will have two separate fire services attending callouts in the same area. I feel the volunteer system is bound to fail over time which will greatly affect CFA's surge capacity from the outer metropolitan area. The idea that a small committee will review and decide the operational area for FRB based solely on risk will see a huge expansion of the FRV operating area which will require a massive amount of ongoing funding for new multi-million dollar fire stations, trucks and staff. There appears to be no funding allowed for in the bill or a cost analysis preformed for which I find quite alarming as this will run into hundreds of millions of tax payers money.

Another area of great concern to me is that CFA will not be able to employ its own staff to take up the rolls of middle management, training etc. as the bill requires these positions to be filled by personal from FRV by contract with the CFA chief officer having restricted powers over these contracted employees of FRV. Future recruitment into these positions will only come from a pool of maybe 2000 employees of FRV compared to several million across Victoria and Australia if CFA was able to employ their own staff instead of accepting whoever is made available from FRV.

The lack of respect shown so far to volunteers over this issue is a very bitter pill to try and swallow or is the volunteer charter not worth the paper it is written on? This committee is the first real opportunity for volunteers to have some meaningful consultation and express their concerns about this bill. There have been quite a number of briefings delivered by politicians and CFA management but this is not consultation and has left volunteers with more questions than when they started.

There are many other aspects of this bill that need clarification and a total rethink. I sincerely believe that this bill should be totally rejected and sent back to the drawing board and start again with a clear understanding of the outcomes to be achieved and not done in secret but with open consultation with all with the aim to improve our fire services not tear them apart and destroy what is a world renowned service.

Gary Parlby

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