

6 July 2017

Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

To the Committee

I am writing to contribute my views to the considerations being made by the committee regarding the Fire Services Bill, including the Presumptive Legislation for Firefighters.

I am concerned that consultation by the Government with CFA volunteers which is required under the Volunteer Charter and CFA Act has not taken place. I believe that there is a lot of frustration and anxiety as a result.

I am concerned that the Presumptive Legislation has been bundled with the FRV legislation, even though I strongly support that the presumptive legislation is needed for both career and volunteer firefighters. There is also a condition in the presumptive legislation as before the parliament that limits claims to 10 years after the ending of employment/volunteer activity, and I believe that this condition should be removed. Some cancers may not be evident for a period of time and to limit the presumption to only 10 years after the end of employment/volunteering will be an unnecessary burden in the event of a related cancer in later life.

I am also of the view that the proposal to split the service into two - FRV and CFA - has been done in haste, without proper consultation and to divide the service just for the primary purpose of getting an EBA agreed and resolved. This is not a good reason to make such a change.

I do support change, as some is definitely needed, but I believe that because the legislation is being rushed some important issues will not be adequately addressed. Further consultation will assist in identifying the significant areas for concern.

Some that come to mind are:

- The cost to Victoria, and taxpayers, of this change as no cost benefit analysis has been provided to support making the change;
- It is difficult to see how this will benefit fire service delivery, as the on ground delivery points are not being changed;
- Impact of setting the proposed FRV/CFA boundaries as indicated in the legislation;
- Impact on infrastructure when it is split across CFA/FRV, and the equitable allocation of resources (and into the future);
- Impact of the changes on the distribution of Fire Services Levy funds and CFA/FRV funding;
- Impact on the surge capacity that CFA volunteers in the outer metropolitan area currently provide;
- Impact on loss of the current integrated stations to the CFA as centres of excellence and training for surrounding brigades and districts, particularly in the Latrobe Valley where I am based.

I am also concerned for the future of the support CFA provides its volunteers through FRV providing Operations Officers and Operations Managers, as we believe that the FRV culture and a non-volunteer

environment will impact on the quality of volunteer focused operational staff to support CFA operations in the districts in future years.

In any consideration, this is proposing a substantial change even though I expect that in reality it will have hardly any impact on brigade operations in terms of response to fires and incidents due to the passion and commitment of both most volunteers and staff alike. However, given that it is expecting to set the direction of fire service provision for the future, I believe a much longer and more transparent consultation process should be undertaken before making an administrative change of this magnitude.

Yours sincerely,

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Group Officer, CFA Merton Group
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Steven Barling

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