

Members of LSCS
 Fire Services Bill Select Committee
 Parliament House
 Spring Street
 East Melbourne, Vic, 3002



I am a member of the Dumbalk Fire Brigade, in the CFAs District 9, which is in South Gippsland.

I have been a member of the CFA for 37 years, Dumbalk is my 3rd Brigade. I am a Strike Team Leader, Crew Leader, Structural Fire fighter, Level 1 Incident Controller, A Welfare Services Peer for 20 years. I turn out regularly for the Brigade, as I have for all my time in the CFA.

Opening Comments

I am enormously proud of being part of this great Emergency Service Organisation, and the place it holds in the Victorian Community. We deal with the smallest of incidents, to the largest.

The CFAs strength is the combination of well trained and professional Volunteers, working with Paid Fire Fighters, Strong Management, competent support personal and a capable administration.

Unfortunately the Government is seeking to change a strong and powerful CFA, without any consultation with Volunteer or Paid Fire Fighters, Operation Officers, Operation Managers, Chief Officer and other Senior Management, the Board or other staff.

The Government is also avoiding any consultation with the many Communities that we serve.

As a result this legislation has many weaknesses in it. It doesn't seem to make any effort to address some areas in the CFA which need strengthening.

This has been brought about by the lack of consultation with the many stakeholders within the CFA, and the communities it serves.

Unfortunately the CFA has been badly let down by a Chief Officer, and CEO who have been selling a Political parties policy, parts of which they do not seem to understand well.

Impact on the Fire Services delivery across Victoria

All Training instructors, Operations Officers and Operation managers, and other staff, need to be employed directly by the CFA. Under the proposed Legislation, all these people would be employed by FRV, and either seconded, or contracted to work within the the CFA. I believe this to be a bad arrangement.

Over time it will become increasingly difficult for the CFA to meet its staffing needs. What happens then? Does the CFA just battle along short of Paid Trainers, and Operations Officers. Both crucial to supporting Volunteers.

Why, over time, will getting staff out of FRV, to work in the CFA become increasingly difficult. It will be a bit of the need to relocate, the pay and the increasing culture differences between the 2 organisations.

Already the cultural differences between the MFB and CFA are large. I expect that the larger numbers of MFB FFs will mean the new FRV will be more similar to that agency, than the CFA. The CFA Paid FF going into the FRV are probably in for a shock.

Good support to Volunteer Fire Fighters across the state is crucial in maintaining a professional and well trained, multi faceted and flexible community based Emergency response organisation.

Our Operational Officers, Operational Managers and Paid Instructors play a crucial role in training our people, advising us and mentoring.

Clearly, for people to be effective in their CFA roles, they need a good understanding of Volunteer Fire fighters, the difficulties that they face and the skills they need. The problem is that over time, as the cultures of the CFA and FRV head in different directions, people out of FRV will not have that understanding.

Example, the FRV will probably develop a strongly hierarchy leadership style and control style. The control and command within the CFA will be based on AIIMs, where the trained person takes command. This person may not be an Officer, even though an Officer may be present on the Fire ground.

The other difficulty, is getting enough people to fill all the positions within the CFA. Currently the CFA doesn't have enough Operations Officers. There are many vacancies around the State. These people are critical support for Volunteer Officers and Brigade Management teams.

Paid Training Instructor roles are hard to fill out of the Paid Fire Fighter ranks now, it will only be more difficult in the future.

In summary, the CFA will need to be able to recruit people from a much bigger pool than paid fire fighters for both of the above positions. eg other Fire/Emergency agencies both in Victoria and interstate, Volunteers and overseas. These options will not exist under the current Legislation, which forces the CFA to use people out of FRV for all these positions.

Shortages of Paid Instructors and Operations Officers will impact on Brigades being able to respond crews to local jobs, and further afield.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

There are many different levels of Volunteer involvement in responding to Emergency service delivery.

- Volunteers who - get on Fire trucks and are first responders.
 - attend these jobs to support the Incident controller
 - work in Local Command Facilities or Incident Control Centres to support the above .
 - don't go to jobs, but support their Brigades in admin roles, fund raising, catering, community engagement etc

I fear without a good CFA employed staff of paid trainers and Operations Offices, that the support for the above will not easily be available. This in turn will

have a negative effect on our ability to train , recruit and retain Volunteers.

These issues need to be addressed by the new Legislation. But without consultation with Volunteers and other CFA stakeholders, the Government seems unaware of the problems. this legislation needs to be blocked until a proper conulative process has been completed, and appropriate ammendments made to the Legislation.

Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

Because of the complex nature of the changes to the Fire Service agencies, more time is needed to evaluate both costs.

It is clear, though, that many Volunteers in the proposed colocated staions, will want to move down the road to a seperate facility, with their own vehicles. Not a bad idea.

But this, and upgrading the existing staions to accomadate greater numbers of paid staff, will mean many 100s of millions dollars of new infrastrucure, in the short to medium term.

On top of this, the CFA shortage in Operation Officers may get worse, the current overtime bill of \$26M per year, will also grow.

Future EBAs, negotiated between the Paid staffs Union, and FRV will also have cost implications on the CFA, for which they will not have a say in.

The hasty development of this Legislation, without any consultation with stakeholders in the CFA, have led to the Government not appreciating the cost of the proposed changes. This may lead to underfunding to particularly the CFA. Which could very quickly become the poor cousin in Victorias Emergency service.

Underlying policy rationale

This restructure of the CFA, from an Intergrated model to a Volunteer only model is the biggest change to Victorian Emergency reponse since the 1958 CFA Act was established. And it was done to appease the Paid Fire Fighter Union.

No Public inquiry has established the need for this. And the believe in Government that the Fairwork act will make it difficult to get future EBAs through is questionable. The CFA is working very well as an integrated model. Over time the number of career Fire Fighters being utilised is increasing as the State population is growing.

The worst aspect is not consulting with the Volunteers who make up 98% of the CFA workforce, the paid fire fighters , CFA Operation Officers, Operation Managers, Trainers and Other support staff, and Administration staff, plus no Community input about the changes that the Government wants to make.

End

Robert Martin Auchterlonie, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]