

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

My name is James DULLARD and I am CFA (Country Fire Authority) Operations Manager Training Delivery.

My employment with CFA commenced in 1988 as a recruit firefighter and through continuation training and promotional assessments over the past 29 years, I have progressed through the ranks of Qualified Firefighter, Senior Firefighter, Leading Firefighter, Fire Officer, Senior Instructor, Operations Officer and Operations Manager.

I have undertaken a secondment to Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) in the role of Fire Services Enhancement Officer.

I also spent time as a Volunteer prior to commencing as a career firefighter

As a Firefighter in the CFA, I have responded to over many and varied incidents and have gained significant operational exposure to provide an efficient and effective incident management response to the Victorian community.

I am a representative on the OO/OM consultative committee and a representative on the training development joint committee.

I fully support the reform that is proposed for the Fire Services in Victoria. Emergency response of the fire brigade should reflect and respond to the needs of the community and perform to its full capability. Career firefighters want to be able to provide the highest standard of protection to the community. Community expects that a response is received and acted on without delay; this is not always the case under the current arrangements

I believe most firefighters (volunteer and career) are community minded and subscribe to a philosophy of making a bad situation better, whether that be an incident, house or bushfire.

Impact on Fire Service Delivery across Victoria

The new legislation will enable the government to put in place a framework that has a focus on the rural risk to Victoria and at the same time develop the larger urban risks that have evolved in what has been traditionally the Country Area of Victoria. The current statistics show that CFA attends more urban incidents than rural incidents which is a good indication of what CFA has evolved to.

As staff we see the constantly increasing reliance from Volunteer Brigades within our District for Career Staff to ensure their communities are protected. This consequently results in

reduced service delivery being provided elsewhere, impacting on community safety. It is inevitable that with increased community need there is an increased reliance on emergency services and it is simply unrealistic to expect this need to be fulfilled by volunteers. But the resulting requirement to increase staff into some of these areas has historically been resisted and even stopped altogether to placate a small but vocal and influential group of VFBV aligned volunteers and brigades. This is an insult to the community who have no capacity to understand the complexities and consequences of the current fire services arrangements.

The combining of the MFB and CFA Career Staff into one Career Service will provide a properly responsive and far more flexible workforce to support metropolitan, outer-metro and regional cities. It will also ensure the ability for surge capacity with the required specialist skills, knowledge and equipment to provide safer communities and a more fit for service model. This has been shown to be needed for many years and we are at the point where it must be progressed if we are to have a fire service in this state that truly reflects the community's needs.

Effect on Volunteer Engagement and Participation in fire service delivery

The proposed legislation, if accepted, will result in an objective overview of service delivery to the Victorian communities.

Whilst there will be some who will claim that the reform would impact Volunteer engagement and participation, I hold a converse view. The reform provides a new and comprehensive funding model for the CFA that would enable the organisation to properly focus on the needs of the volunteers in a way that has not been done before. Given this increased capacity to engage, recruit, retain and support volunteers there is no grounds to suggest the volunteers would be diminished in any way. The vast majority of volunteers aim to provide a service to the community and will benefit and thrive in this new environment. To suggest otherwise is simply misrepresenting the facts.

The ability for volunteers to be able to focus on their own communities and reducing the reliance on them in the busy urban environments will result in a system that provides an increased service standard for both volunteer brigades as well as professional firefighters. It is not uncommon for volunteers to articulate the pressure they feel at having to manage their personal responsibilities and their own work requirements, and their relief in the knowledge that the staff are there to respond to jobs to which they are unable to respond.

I am supportive of volunteers, and in my view, it is unreasonable, and beyond community expectation, to rely solely on volunteers to deliver service in larger populated areas. There are some volunteer brigades that deliver service very well, however there are others brigades that suffer with availability of time for volunteers due to work, family and other commitments.

While there has been a progressive effort to get emergency services in Victoria to be more interoperable and those efforts have been positive, there still exists a divide between

Metropolitan Melbourne and Country Victoria. The proposed legislation will have positive influence in focusing all firefighters in Victoria on service delivery rather than on historical areas of responsibility. In the absence of the political/industrial fight the natural focus is on firefighting and the community.

Short term and long term cost impact on the fire service provision

The introduction of this reform will enable a single and transparent response system to be established for all professional firefighters. This will also benefit volunteer responses as volunteer brigades will be able to focus on their own areas and on surge capacity as required.

There will also be important cost benefits from the reduction and elimination of duplication that currently occurs. Eg: appliances, training, equipment, PPC, research, technology.

Volunteers will be consulted on issues that affect them and career firefighters will be consulted on their issues, reducing the duplication and difficulty in reaching mutually suitable outcomes.

VFBV has for many years now advocated that the UFU is “taking over the CFA” and that the Operational Staff Enterprise Agreements struck with the UFU and CFA have resulted in a “veto” of the Chief Officer’s powers. This argument has continued to be made despite it never proving to have any validity. The conflict that has resulted has led to significant stress on firefighters and to increased sick leave and workers compensation claims. It has also lead to huge litigation costs. This needs to end.

Firefighters’ Presumptive Rights Compensation is a fundamental right for firefighters that are exposed to carcinogenetic products .The evidence is overwhelming in support of this legislation and as in many states and countries around the world, similar legislation provides firefighters (both professional and volunteer) and their families important piece of mind that they will not have to spend the years in which they are fighting an illness, also fighting for their right to compensation for that illness.

The reform will support the volunteers and staff to ensure we build and provide the best possible service. Our communities will benefit with a safe, consistent and effective force, particularly in urban and industrial areas and where technical/ specialised skills are needed.

Yours Sincerely

James Dullard

