

To the Select Committee into changes to the CFA Act and Fire Fighter Presumptive Cancer Legislation

My name is Owen O'Keefe. I am a CFA volunteer with in excess of 40 year's experience. I have held many volunteer positions at both brigade and group level. I am endorsed up to the level of Divisional Commander.

I have grave concerns that the proposed changes to the CFA Act will destroy the integrated model. This model is the envy of other states. No enquiry has called for its destruction. In fact, numerous enquiries into the CFA have endorsed its effectiveness and called for its enhancement. We currently have one standard for training, communication and equipment. Dismantlement of the current CFA will eventually erode this commonality and lead to two standards across Victorian fire services.

The proposed changes a) have not been costed, b) have not been seen as a priority by the Victorian community (unlike increased police numbers) and c) appear to set up FRV to thrive and the CFA to fail.

The proposed changes are being promoted by CFA staff who are direct beneficiaries even before the changes have been passed by Parliament. That is presumptuous, hurtful and demoralising.

Volunteer brigades adjacent to proposed FRV brigades will be weakened by the proposal because FRV stations will turn out to incidents outside their primary response area and eventually erode the viability of those brigades. This will have a direct impact on the surge capacity of the CFA.

To include presumptive cancer compensation legislation in the same debate is a distraction as it has bipartisan parliamentary support. It should be part of a separate debate because it discriminates against volunteers.

The Victorian Govt is rushing this legislation through parliament to satisfy the demands of a militant trade union. They have invented a crisis to solve a problem which does not exist.

I call on the committee to advise the Government to put the legislation on hold.

The Government should then immediately involve CFA volunteers, CFA staff and the MFB in meaningful and genuine consultation. I am not against change but I insist on being part of the debate leading to a workable, affordable and effective outcome.

Owen O'Keefe

