

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Geoffrey Blyth [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 4 July 2017 11:03 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: The Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Dear Committee Members

I wish to raise my personal concerns about the Fire Services Legislation which the Victorian Government has rushed through the Lower House and its attempted endorsement through the Legislative Council.

I have been an active member of the Connewarre Fire Brigade for in excess of 40 years and served as secretary / treasurer for nearly 20 years. The Connewarre Fire Brigade is a relatively small rural brigade which is rapidly changing with the expansion of the urban and rural / residential periphery of Geelong. Consequently, I have a reasonable understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of nearby integrated brigades and the impact upon volunteers and community safety issues.

My primary concern with the proposed Bill is the deliberate linking of The Presumptive Rights legislation with the significant change and breakup of the CFA. The Presumptive Rights legislation was a commitment to CFA volunteers at the last State election and I am disturbed by the proposal to restrict a volunteer's access to cancer treatment or compensation in comparison to that available to CFA career fire fighters. There appears to be significantly more parameters for volunteers to substantiate compared to career staff for the same disease.

In relation to the proposed legislation to restructure the CFA and to transfer the career fire fighters and management to Fire Rescue Victoria, it seems incredible that the volunteers who make up the bulk of the CFA membership have not been consulted despite being significantly impacted. I am genuinely concerned surrounding the uncertainty of many details and workings of the proposed split and the likely impact upon volunteers. I am unaware of which Bushfire Royal Commission or other inquiry which has supposedly prompted the Government to restructure the CFA. The recent Royal Commission actually commended the current CFA model with career and volunteer fire fighters working together.

Another concern with the proposed restructure is the inevitable loss of volunteers from proposed integrated fire stations on the urban periphery, particularly Melbourne but also Geelong. The volunteers from these areas have provided a much relied upon surge capacity to meet the challenges of larger event fires or incidents which regularly occur both throughout Victoria and interstate. The community safety benefits of this surge capacity from volunteers in the form of strike teams cannot be underestimated but it is unlikely to be available to the same degree if the proposed restructure and formation of integrated fire stations with Fire Rescue Victoria proceeds.

An associated issue with the restructure is the uncertainty of future funding for CFA after two years. There has been no indication how the Fire Services Levy will be apportioned in the future and how this will impact upon both capital purchases, upgrades, replacements, but also to future training and cost of management supposedly contracted from FRV and the potential conflicts of interest between CFA volunteers and FRV employees. There is no apparent imperative for the Government to rush the proposed CFA restructure until details of future consequences upon volunteers and community safety are clarified, and above all, the volunteer base is appropriately consulted.

Many thanks for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely
Geoff Blyth

