

6/7/2017

To members of the appointed Senate Committee into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017,

My name is Greg Archer. I have been a member of the Little River Fire Brigade since 1995. I was elected 1st Lieutenant in 2003. I have also served as Anakie Group Secretary / Treasurer since 2007.

I find it hard to stand by and watch what the State Labor Party / UFU have and are doing to the CFA. When I say CFA this includes all paid and volunteer positions. Every so often I say to myself that this is not happening and is only a fabricated story being forced upon us. I cannot believe the CFA management is pushing through these reforms without proper community consultation. In District 7 we have an Operations Manager whose answer to the Volunteers and news reporters is that there is no problem and everyone is happy with the changes. Of course he will state this as he is high up in the UFU management. I was a union member for a number of years and know how it works. Don't get me wrong I fully believe unions have their place in society. But what we are witnessing is dictatorship and bullying by a minority wanting to push their own agenda. A bad taste in my mouth has been with me for a while now and like many of my fellow members will be very hard to remove. I fully believe the changes be pushed by the UFU will affect the future capability of the CFA.

A good example of the bloody mindedness I have witnessed which affects the local community safety and brigade morale was when my Captain and I visited Point Cook Station 18 months ago. We had been invited to bring the Little River Bulk Tanker across for the Brigade to see. Point Cook Brigade had been very generous with a donation towards the purchase and build of the tanker. After we had had a meal with them we were looking over the tanker when their pagers went off. 4 of the Volunteers went off to turn out their Tanker to a Strike Team. A couple of them came back telling their Lieutenant that the Tanker was gone. The Lieutenant and a Station Officer that had stayed back from dayshift to meet us tried to contact them. Eventually they did and were told that the paid staff were not coming back and were on the Strike Team. I said to one of the guys does this mean you guys now man the pumper for any calls. He said they could not even though they had done more than 2 years training on the pumper. The Perms would not sign them off. I then said that I guess the MFB will step up into the Station. He said they will not as a couple of weeks before a car had run into the station and damaged one of the bedrooms and this will prevent the MFB stepping up. This then meant Point Cook was not covered with a local Brigade. There are other stories like this which I have heard of but not witnessed.

This last summer I attended a grass fire off Bulban road. When we arrived we witnessed the Hoppers Crossing Pumper sitting beside the road. We got told they would not take the Pumper off the road. They were trying to run the fire from the Pumper on the road without much success and were only complicating it. The fire was not visible from the road and was about a 1000m south. The Hoppers Crossing Tanker arrived and the Perms told the Volunteers to get off and hand over the Tanker to them. The Pumper then returned to the Station where it remained unmanned. This example showed that Volunteers are more than willing to work with Perms but if you strike the wrong shift it can be very hard. Nothing is done by their management and nothing can be done as they are all union who will not counsel their members.

How can anyone believe a new system will work with attitudes like this? The UFU must not be allowed to dictate how a new system will operate and then be the ones to implement it. The fact is the UFU does not want volunteering in the emergency services. I fully believe that this will only be the beginning of the end to volunteering. Why volunteer to do something if you do not enjoy it.

The monetary cost will be huge. I have seen numerous examples of waste around the emergency services. Appliances sitting idle for months and years. In the future communities are not going to fund raise for stations manned by permanent staff. They don't now for MFB stations. So Governments are going to have to pick up the costs and of course this will be passed on through the fire service levy. Communities will also become more disconnected. When the Volunteers are bullied and pushed out of the FRV stations the community is also being pushed away.

Looks like the Kiwi's are more successful than us with their changes to their service. I lived and worked in Texas for 18 months. Volunteering with the emergency services is quite big and successful. I found it was not only the fire service but the police and ambulance services depending on volunteerism. It was indistinguishable most of the time between volunteers and paid staff. Interestingly a way of telling the difference was the word volunteer that was proudly worn on their t-shirts or caps. I remember a story that hit the news in Werribee a number of years ago was some of their Volunteers were also MFB and the UFU were trying to get them stood down. Why? How does the UFU gain from this? How does the community gain from this?

The amendment bill needs to be split. The presumptive rights and the fire service legislation cannot be voted on as a whole. To do so is wrong in so many ways. It is only a political ploy by the Labor Party and UFU to get their fire service amendments through. If somehow the amendments do not go through a brave group of people are going to be needed to turn things around and get back to a respectful, cohesive system again. The damage that has been done is criminal. The community deserves better.

Sincerely yours
Greg Archer
1ST Lieutenant Little River Fire Brigade