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**Submission to Upper House Select Committee Inquiry into Fire Services  
Restructure**

I wish to particularly address the Terms of Reference B: the “effect on  
volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery”.

The one issue I feel passionately about is the effect all this is having on my and others’ morale.

The Labor Government, with its manipulative and deceitful politicising of the CFA has certainly left me feeling that we – the Volunteers - have been taken for fools and sacrificed to the UFU. I have always believed in the principles of Unionism, am a member of the AWU in fact, but the UFU is run by a man who appears to be a common thug, has seemingly gotten Daniel Andrews backed into a corner and can demand anything he wants. I’ve seen better, more “grown up” behaviour in the kinder sand-pit.

This has lead to policy “on the run” without due, legal, respectful and moral consultation with any stakeholders.

We- the Volunteers – are the pawns in the game. We will pay the price should the worst case scenario come to fruition- that this legislation is passed in the Victorian Parliament in August. It goes without saying that we will all still do our best to make sure our Communities don’t suffer for it, too.

The blatant deceitfulness of the Government combined with the fact that this legislation has even got this far leaves me incredulous and disillusioned. The tying of the Presumptive Cancer Legislation to the Restructure of the Fire Services is a disgrace.

How could the Victorian Government treat such an honourable and respected volunteer organisation as the CFA in this way? No matter what the outcome of the Select Committee and how the final legislation is passed and enacted upon, I feel that so much damage has

already been done. And the Andrews Government reliance on our dedication to our communities to continue to be unwavering no matter what the outcomes leaves me very angry, frustrated and feeling used. I am bitter about being taken for an idiot. I am struggling with feeling so disenfranchised.

And our Communities are sick of the whole issue, leaving us feeling just a little more abandoned.

Volunteer angst is only exacerbated by the justified fears and doubts about the outcomes should it pass. FAQs, news releases, public meetings, etc etc, don't make me feel in the slightest reassured as there has been so much misinformation thus far that I don't accept or trust anything we are being told. Much of it is "bureaucrat-speak" – shallow, patronising, opportunistic rubbish. Even now, the Government will come to boast that it has, in fact, consulted with everyone by having this Parliamentary Select Committee established – completely ignoring the fact that it has actually been forced upon them.

There is just so much wrong with both aspects of the bill; it has been poorly thought through in terms of costing, detail and implementation. Conflict between Volunteers and Career staff will be exacerbated rather than diminished in the integrated Brigades, nothing is clear about who is in command in any given scenario, who reports to who, who uses what equipment and when, who finances what an when, and on and on goes the list of concerns.

To add insult to injury, the Andrews Government claims that this is what repeated Bushfire Reviews have recommended. Absolutely not, the complete opposite in fact. The 2009 Bushfire Royal Commission supported the current model whole heartedly. Jack Rush QC said that it is "the nations' pre-eminent fire fighting organisation."

Yes, there are areas that can be improved as there are in all organisations but this wholesale breaking down of the system is not the answer. Best case scenario is the Legislation is voted out.

If not, then the bill should be at the very least split into two: Restructure of the Fire Services and Presumptive Rights Cancer Legislation - and dealt with separately. Much longer is required for proper consultation than allowed for the review by the Select Committee to get it all right.

It's very hard to feel any long-term enthusiasm, motivation and direction to keep developing my role and contribution to the CFA as an organisation. For now, like many, I won't look past my own little patch nor for any longer than the next fire season. And just hope that common sense, respect and integrity will still save the day in August.

Melanie Green.