

29 June 2017

Assistant Clerk Committees  
Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Services Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Delivered via email to: [LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

As a CFA volunteer of nine years, having been at both an integrated brigade and a fully volunteer brigade, I am totally disheartened at the complete lack of consultation and opportunity to comment provided by the State Government.

It is my opinion that the current proposal is designed with the sole intent of satisfying the needs of a very noisy and inefficient union, the UFU.

I have attended several meetings in regard to the proposals and none have given me any comfort that the proposed changes in any way make the community "safer".

I am not from a small rural brigade and have been part of the urban firefighting community from my recruitment. The brigades I have been a member of respond to an average of 750 calls and 300 calls respectively. At both brigades, I have been a part of a dedicated, well trained group ready and willing to respond to community needs. I have seen healthy recruitment and vibrancy in the volunteer bases at both brigades.

The current information justifying the need for reform is just not true. It is a total fabrication pushed through by a government that had a hidden agenda that does not withstand open and transparent scrutiny.

There are issues that need resolution, including gender inequality – more a staff issue than volunteer and internal moral and leadership, however a split down the centre goes absolutely nowhere in addressing these issues.

I have seen firsthand poor relations between staff and volunteers in an integrated brigade. How does putting a wall down the middle of a shed resolve this? This is a "mocked up" solution to force through an EBA that is inefficient, divisive and restrictive. No discussion or consultation has been made about thoughts on the model or alternates to the same, including workplace flexibility for part-time workers or other cost saving initiatives. The entire process has been rammed through to meet the needs of a very small vocal group.

It also raises major concerns with me about interaction on the fire ground during responses. There are some strained relationships already with integrated models. This does absolutely nothing to address this.

I have also heard concerns from volunteers at current integrated brigades that they feel they are being "phased out" with no allocated turnout areas and no idea of what assets and appliances they may be left with. Moral for many in CFA is at an all-time low, but especially for fellow members at integrated stations.

It is also interesting that while the bill has not been passed and this enquiry is being conducted, it is "full steam ahead" for the changes regardless. It seems it is a fait accompli as far as the government is concerned.

I believe I am in the mainstream of volunteers who understand that all organisations need and should embrace change, but only change for the better – not a ramshackle proposal forced on us without any buy in or ownership.

It also seems along the way the staff at CFA have lost their purpose for employment. They were employed to "assist the volunteers" when the load got too heavy. It is now somehow a case of the tail wagging the dog, with 900 operational staff dictating the terms for an organisation with 35,000 operational volunteers? How does that happen?



Interestingly, we have seen no correspondence on how the additional paid firefighters, who ARE pushing out volunteers, will be funded. As volunteers we already fundraise and operate on lean budgets. Are Victorians now expected to pay a higher Fire Service Levy ongoing to replace a service that we are getting for free? Where are all the cost build ups around this?

The government seems to have conveniently found some extra “sweetener” funds that will quickly be expensed given the infrastructure changes required for this non-essential segregation. There is a definite information void regarding ongoing funding and costings.

We were informed on the news that Presumptive Legislation would be introduced for all firefighters on a level playing field. My understanding is that this is far from the truth. There is quite a difference between the staff and volunteer versions. Again, we have been misinformed and treated differently for doing the same job, but by doing it for free, are disadvantaged.

The proposed secondment of staff from FRV is a very interesting and disturbing proposal. This takes any and all control of the culture, relationship building, staff interactions and ongoing management style away from CFA as an organisation and puts it in the hands of an entity with very different values. It is basically an unworkable situation.

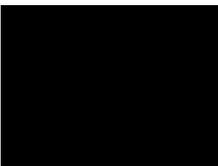
There also seems to be a perception that we can “leave the staff to handle the urban fires and the volunteers to run bushfires”. I know I for one, offer my services to bushfires as a secondary consideration to urban firefighting. If my ongoing interaction with the brigade through urban response was removed, I would not become a “summer firefighter”. It would mean my exit from the organisation. There are many volunteers that take the exact same position as myself. I believe our surge capacity would be greatly diminished, leading to greater overall danger to the state during fire season.

For the government to try to force through this legislation, avoid talking or consulting with volunteers or their organisations and start undertaking changes without giving full details of the arrangements, while expecting all of us to continue to give our time freely and in good spirit has totally undermined my sense of value.

I believe I am a well-trained firefighter with skills I freely offer for both turnout response and the training of fellow volunteers, services that would cost the community dearly if there was a pay component. The current upheaval and lack of communication and transparency on behalf of the government has left me feeling quite undervalued and worthless. This is the first time I have felt this way in 9 years with CFA.

I really do hope there is serious consideration given to rejecting, amending or slowing this whole process in line with feedback from all stakeholders.

Yours faithfully



Steven Forbes