

Dear Committee Members,

2/7/2017

Re: Enquiry into the Fire Services 2017

I wish to lodge the following objections to the proposed Firefighter's Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.

Firstly I object to the fact that the Fire Services Legislation Amendments have been tied to the Presumptive Rights Compensation Bill. This would appear to be a form of "blackmail"; if you want either of these you have to take them both.

The Presumptive Rights Legislation has been touted by the Government to be the same as the Queensland Legislation and treats both Volunteer and Career firefighters equally. It also claims that it is what the Volunteer Association wanted. A quick look at the proposed Bill indicates that it does not meet any of these criterion, nor has the VFBV been approached for any comment.

This Bill needs to be separated from the Fire Service Amendments and negotiated properly with the VFBV.

The Fire Services Amendments fall short in a number of areas. These amendments are not a 'modernisation' of the Fire Services. It creates less flexibility to adapt to community changes.

What public safety improvements will be created by splitting the 35 integrated CFA brigades from their support by the rest of the CFA brigades in the state? It will create 35 separated islands in the midst of regional Victoria. This will create a complex chain of command as well as complex communications.

The Government has tried to mislead us with "fake news" that recent enquiries have recommended splitting the CFA. This is not true. Recent inquiries have recognised the importance of keeping the CFA in its current form, as a pre-eminent firefighting organisation.

The Government have said this will return the CFA to a fully volunteer organisation, however the administration of volunteer brigades will now be carried out by the Metropolitan (FRV) organisation whose officers will then be sub-contacted back to run the CFA.

I don't know how you feel, but this sounds pretty confusing to me.

The Government have also been spreading misinformation on "old" equipment. This is far from the truth. CFA appliances are very up to date, mainly because they do not pay a lot on wages. Most of the CFA money goes toward new equipment. This is particularly the case in the CFA areas close to the metropolitan area.

Volunteers are essential for the Victorian Community. By sidelining these 35 integrated brigades with 1,000 odd members who are a valuable resource for the surge capacity of CFA, we will see these numbers gradually dwindle away because the union do not want them.

When they are gone, they are gone. You cannot go and get more off the street. Well trained firefighters take years to become proficient in all aspects of brigade activities.

We need to stop this Bill in its tracks now. The whole modernisation of the fire services needs to be properly reviewed as this proposal has far too many flaws in it. It has not been thought through and has tried to be foisted onto us in an effort by the government to score political and ideological points.

Yours Sincerely,

Robert Bethell.

Member, COLDSTREAM FIRE BRIGADE.

