



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

## News Note

**NOTES FOR VOLUNTEERS – 24 September 2015**

### **VFBV'S SUBMISSION TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S FIRE SERVICES REVIEW**

VFBV has lodged a detailed 48 page submission with the State Government's Fire Services Review (FSR), with considerable contributions from VFBV Delegates and individual volunteers. It has been lodged alongside many more submissions from District Councils, Brigades and volunteers.

Our submission draws upon the work we have done on 11 other inquiries and reviews since 2008, including data from the annual *VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey* and issues already being raised through VFBV's extensive consultative networks.

Volunteers have noted the Minister's statements at the time of the announcement of the Review, that an amalgamation of CFA and MFB "is not on the Government's agenda" and that "Victoria's fire services and their boundaries will remain intact".

Volunteers see the retention of CFA, the CFA Board and its statutory autonomy as important to continuing volunteer support. There is a strong desire for the retention of the powers of the CFA Chief Officer and for these powers to be able to be delegated to the local level to empower volunteers to undertake their roles.

There is strong concern from volunteers about the potential for any proposal for an overarching Board or overly centralised emergency management bureaucracy to;

- cause a loss of identity;
- decision making becoming too remote from community based brigades;
- lose focus or water down attention to agency-specific issues;
- cause a loss of existing resources, and
- create a breadth of issues that is too big to deal with effectively.

VFBV's submission to the Review has raised a number of issues familiar to volunteers:

- The need for more direct brigade support roles such as community education support, Brigade Administrative Support Officers and training instructors/assessors

- Industrial interference in CFA's operational decision making
- Industrial interference in volunteer training, administrative support and the utilisation of volunteers
- Concerns at government announcements of hundreds of additional paid firefighters without any funding to train, equip or accommodate them - additional paid firefighters are a welcome support when and where they are required, but the process for determining resource support solutions and resource allocation should sit with the CFA Chief Officer
- The lack of understanding of CFA's surge capacity – the ability to field large numbers of trained, experienced firefighters to deal with major incidents at short notice – and how it needs to be supported
- The need for sufficient funding to maintain CFA's fleet of emergency vehicles and provide sufficient facilities, even those as basic as toilets and change rooms at fire stations
- The need for a range of flexible support for volunteer brigades, including; recruitment, training assistance, administrative support, leadership support, smart volunteer alerting systems, infrastructure and equipment community/industry partnerships, and operational response arrangements
- The short and long term impacts of the cessation of training at VEMTC Fiskville; and also the need for safe water treatment facilities at all hot fire training facilities to return confidence to the people who work and train at these facilities
- The need for volunteer skills and performance in Incident Management and fire ground roles to be recognised and accepted by all agencies
- The need for Victoria to catch up with other States on introducing presumptive legislation to provide CFA volunteers and their career colleagues with a fairer and simpler path to compensation for firefighters who contract typical firefighter cancers.

VFBV's submission to the Review also addresses the importance of CFA's integrated model, interoperability between the agencies, and the absolute necessity of encouraging, maintaining and strengthening the volunteer resource that gives CFA its large scale surge capacity.

We have advised the Review team that volunteers are particularly concerned about:

- Erosion of CFA's ability to govern, manage resource decisions and allocate appropriate priority to resourcing/supporting the capacity of volunteers to deliver CFA services
- Erosion of the CFA Chief Officer's statutory powers and operational decision making ability
- The need to improve consultation with volunteers and/or the representation of volunteer knowledge and expertise at key decision forums in any future arrangements
- Erosion of the obligations, intent and authority of the *CFA Volunteer Charter* and/or the practical application of the *CFA Volunteer Charter*
- Any decision making processes at CFA, EMV or Government that impact on volunteers but block volunteers out of the process

- Any cuts to CFA budget relating to volunteer support and volunteer capacity building forced because of the need to pay for externally imposed or new commitments
- Any failure to fully additionally fund externally imposed or new commitments for the life of the commitment
- Ensuring adequate investment in resources for training of volunteers and for volunteer equipment, facilities, personal protection, service related injury/illness compensation etc.
- Any diversion of funds raised through the Fire Service Levy and the Government's related share to other cost areas
- Continuation of industrial agreements that establish power of veto that overrides legitimate CFA decision making or block CFA progressing volunteer support initiatives, resource allocation and CFA organisational structure
- External direction to CFA Board or management that is not transparent, justifiable and consistent with legislation
- Resourcing priorities and funding allocation decisions that ignore more cost effective and reliably beneficial opportunities to encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers to deliver CFA services (specifically referencing section 6i of the CFA Act)
- Any discrimination in the roles volunteers can perform, training opportunities for volunteers or recognition of volunteers' skills/expertise simply because they are not paid
- Failure to positively advocate the essential nature of, benefits and professional capacity of the CFA volunteer based system.

Volunteers have made strong representation to VFBV that the period set for the Review was unreasonably short and not consistent with the spirit or obligations of the CFA Volunteer Charter. VFBV formally raised these concerns with the Review leader Mr David O' Byrne and with Minister Garrett in the days after the review was announced.

VFBV has offered to assist the Review in whatever way we can and we look forward to the opportunity for volunteers to be further engaged in discussion prior to decisions being made.

With the recently announced two week extension, the Review is now due to report to the Minister by 14 October, and it is now up to all volunteers and delegates to be ready to assess and respond to its recommendations and the State Government's response.

VFBV will provide as much information to volunteers as possible via State and District officials and on our website [www.vfbv.com.au](http://www.vfbv.com.au)

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