



Wednesday, 22 June 2016

MEDIA RELEASE

Statement by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria

The Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) injunction on the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to prevent furtherance of a union industrial agreement until there has been meaningful consultation on that part of its content that affects the state's 60,000 volunteers, has been replaced by a legally binding undertaking by CFA to the Supreme Court.

The undertaking read to the court by CFA lawyers and adopted by agreement between VFBV and CFA provides that:

- There will be no action to further the union industrial deal until on or after 20 July 2016
- No action will be taken to further the deal on or after that date without three business days' notice to VFBV by CFA
- A copy of the proposed agreement (as amended several times and adopted by the State Cabinet on 10 June) will finally be provided to VFBV by close of business 24 June 2016 to enable the consultation that VFBV has been pursuing through legal process since 10 June after earlier written requests failed.
- An agreement to formal consultation meetings between VFBV and CFA beginning 8 July or such other time as may be agreed.

We are pleased that the CFA's binding undertaking was adopted as the logical follow-on legal arrangements to our injunction which expired today.

The process of meaningful consultation will enable us in conjunction with CFA to precisely identify details of the issues that affect volunteers, develop remedial proposals to address them and for the CFA to genuinely consider such proposals with an open mind for incorporation in any final industrial agreement.

It is our strong view that any future final deal should not override or side-step the organisational and operational arrangements set out in the Victorian CFA Act, particularly regarding volunteers and the maintenance and strengthening of their capacity to deliver CFA services to the community.

In regard to volunteers, the CFA Act among other things:

- recognises that CFA is first and foremost a volunteer based organisation in which volunteers are supported by employees in a fully integrated manner;
- requires the CFA to develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of CFA volunteers to provide CFA services;
- requires the CFA (and Victorian Government) to meaningfully consult with VFBV representing Victoria's 60,000 CFA volunteers on any matter that may affect them before relevant decisions are made.

'Meaningfully consult' means genuine consultation where, in this case, VFBV and its members can help shape the final decision by CFA (and Government where relevant).

These longstanding CFA principles were specifically inserted in the CFA Act by legislation in May 2011 supported by all of the major political parties in the Victorian Parliament, including the Labor Party led by Daniel Andrews.

VFBV is very disappointed by the Victorian Government's media and online attempts to misrepresent today's events at the Supreme Court. Our injunction was not lifted, it expired and was replaced by a different type of directive legal remedy, a binding court undertaking that carries severe consequences if the CFA fails to abide by it. Furthermore, to characterise volunteer concerns as nothing but a political football is as obscene as it is wrong.

The one part of their media release they do get right is that volunteers want the facts and it begs the question why the Victorian Government have consistently failed to be honest with VFBV and the 60,000 CFA volunteers we represent by not disclosing the clauses in their union deal that affect volunteers and asking volunteers what they think.

Despite this political PR blip, we hope and expect that the Andrews' Government will allow CFA to abide by the letter and spirit of today's Court order and that the process of meaningful consultation can proceed without political interference.

Ends...

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