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MEDIA RELEASE

FIREFIGHTERS' CANCER LAW ISSUE NOT FINISHED - VOLUNTEERS

A proposal for fairer compensation for Victorian firefighters with cancer has failed in the Victorian Parliament, but the CFA volunteers' association says the issue is definitely not finished.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) CEO Andrew Ford said CFA volunteers are extremely disappointed and concerned at the way an issue that is so important to them has been treated.

He said the vote in the Upper House of State Parliament this week just raises the question of what the State Government plans to do next.

"Volunteers are seeking a fairer and simpler path to cancer compensation for all Victorian firefighters, and the Government say they are not ruling out this kind of legislation," Mr Ford said.

"However, Coalition MPs voted against sending the proposed legislation to the Lower House of State Parliament this week, so the legislation has lapsed, which means the ball is now in the Government's court," he said.

"The issue won't go away, volunteer and career firefighters are still more likely to get cancer, current compensation law still forces them to prove a connection between the cancer and a specific date or event, and that is still very close to impossible."

"How do you prove which fire and which toxins might have caused your cancer when the incident might have been 10 or 15 years ago and just one of the hundreds you have attended?" Mr Ford said.

The legislation had been proposed by the Greens and supported by Labor MPs, it was the vote of Coalition MPs that ended its run in the Upper House on Wednesday.

"Now there is no legislation before Parliament and the State Government has already said it is not ruling out support for this type of legislation, we are in the hands of the Government as to when it will come to Parliament for consideration," Mr Ford said.

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“Volunteers want to know what the Government plans to do now.”

The proposed legislation is presumptive – it would accept that firefighters are more likely to get certain types of cancer and it would presume those cancers to be work-related.

“Presumptive cancer legislation would mean a firefighter with one of those typical firefighter cancers could concentrate on their treatment and recovery instead of a court case.”

In 2011, the Australian Parliament passed presumptive legislation for federally-employed firefighters (including the fire crews at Melbourne Airport) with the support of all of the major parties, after a Senate Inquiry examined the scientific evidence and recommended it go ahead.

Since then, the WA, SA and Tasmanian Governments have accepted the existing scientific evidence and begun work on presumptive legislation for their firefighters.

VFBV and the United Firefighters’ Union are campaigning for presumptive legislation for Victorian firefighters, both volunteer and career.

“We are not asking for any new or extra compensation, just the removal of an unfair barrier to sick firefighters obtaining the compensation to which they are already entitled,” Mr Ford said.

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