



# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

## News Note

**NOTE TO MEMBERS – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018**

### **GOVERNMENT FIRE SERVICES REFORM LEGISLATION UPDATE**

#### **SUMMARY**

Yesterday the Victorian Upper House voted to reject the Government's Fire Service restructure legislation. This is an extremely good outcome for CFA, Victoria's Fire Services and all Victorians.

Despite the Government's spin - the proposed restructure provided no additional resources, capacity or flexibility to Victoria's fire services than exists today and in fact the proposed changes proposed to dismantle the CFA integrated model, further fragment the fire services, erode the CFA Chief Officers' powers and ability to manage CFA operations and posed a dire threat to Victoria's future capacity to deal with major fires and sustain the volunteer surge capacity required for major fires and emergencies.

#### **BRIEF RECAP**

To recap, this proposed legislation change was announced by Premier Daniel Andrews and Minister James Merlino in May 2017 and subsequently received wide spread condemnation for being ill-conceived, driven by an industrial interference agenda, diminishing and discouraging volunteer capacity, dismantling the CFA integrated model and eroding the CFA Chief Officers' power and control of CFA resources.

Despite Government spin, the proposed legislative changes provide no additional service capacity or service interoperability than exists today and in fact the proposed changes further fragment the fire services. During the past year, the Government's own messaging indicates the proposed changes were motivated by a Government and United Firefighters Union desire to find a way to push ahead with an over-reaching EBA that limits how CFA supports, equips, recognises, respects and consults with volunteers.

People will recall that the proposed legislation was introduced in May 2017 without consultation with volunteers, and without involvement of representatives from Emergency Management Victoria, the Country Fire Authority or the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

#### **PRESUMPTIVE LEGISLATION**

Appallingly, the proposed legislation combined two totally separate issues, one being firefighter's presumptive compensation rights for cancer illness caused by firefighting duties and the other being

the proposed fire services structure and arrangements changes that essentially carve up CFA, one as a ransom note for the other.

There was a motion put by Daniel Young on behalf of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party to split the Bill and appropriately separate the firefighter's presumptive compensation rights for cancer illness aspects of the Bill from the proposed fire services restructure, allowing the presumptive compensation aspects of the bill to proceed, and be put to a vote. This motion was supported by the Coalition and Vote 1 Local Jobs member, James Purcell.

This motion was defeated by one vote, with Labor, the Greens and Reason Party MP's voting against a motion that would have allowed Presumptive Legislation for firefighters to have been passed this week.

### **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ALL-NIGHT SITTING**

Yesterday's final vote in the Upper House came on the back of an unprecedented all night sitting of the Upper House on Easter Good Friday. The Legislative Council began at approx. 0930am on Thursday morning, and was forced to sit for almost 26 hours, with the all night sitting forced to push through to continue sitting well into Good Friday, and was heavily criticised by many MPs and was clearly driven by the Government seizing on the misfortune of a sick MP, Dr Rachel Carling-Jenkins and thinking that without her vote opposing the Bill they could sneak the vote through.

Once again, the rejection of this ill-conceived legislation is well received and volunteers and communities across Victoria have already started actively voicing their gratitude for the sustained effort and support from those MPs who rejected the Bill and prevented the destruction of CFA.

### **NEXT STEPS**

There will be further information forwarded during the coming week, with more details of the debate and next steps.

VFBV officers have received dozens of calls from volunteers asking for their comments of appreciation and thanks to be passed on to MPs, particularly to the MPs from the Coalition and independent MPs James Purcel (Vote One Local Jobs), Jeff Bourman and Daniel Young ( Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party) and also to Dr Rachel Carling-Jenkins, who has previously made public comment on her concerns and opposition to the proposed fire service restructure legislation, and despite being unable to attend the Upper House committee debate released public statement confirming her position with regard to the Bill had not changed. People wishing to pass messages to these MPs are encouraged to this directly with them.

Volunteers are also encouraged to contact Labor, Greens and the Reason Party MPs who were pushing for the Bill to be supported, to see what can be done to build their understanding of how CFA actually operates, the professionalism and first class services provided by volunteers and to correct numerous incorrect comments they made during the Upper House committee debate. VFBV will be reviewing the Upper House committee debate transcript in detail and will provide volunteers with further briefing as soon as possible on some of the comments, assertions and propositions that need follow up.

### **THANK YOU**

Thank you to the huge number of volunteers and supporters who are tuned into this vitally important issue. It is unclear what the Government will do next but for now the flawed legislation to carve up the CFA has been rejected by Parliament. Great news for all Victorians.

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It is also worth reflecting on the fact, that whilst the Upper House was debating the carve up and destruction of the world renowned fully integrated CFA, volunteers along with our paid colleagues, were out selflessly raising money for the Royal Children Hospital's Good Friday appeal.

In an outstanding result, CFA is reported to be the biggest contributor to a record breaking Good Friday appeal, with CFA members raising in excess of \$1.67 million dollars for the appeal. CFA members have been participating in this appeal for 67 years, with over \$30 million raised over the years by CFA members for the Royal Children's Hospital.

Werribee Fire Brigade, celebrating the raising of over \$1 million for the appeal over the last 40 years, presented the CFA cheque for \$1,677,628.35 to this year's appeal during the Channel 7 live telecast.

In closing, please be respectful to one another, including those who were driving an agenda that we disagree with. For now, our focus should be about everyone getting on with keeping CFA the great organisation it has always been, making it even stronger into the future and continuing to do what we are all motivated by, serving and protecting our communities.

Have a safe and happy Easter.

Andrew a Ford.