VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

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MEDIA RELEASE

Statement by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria

SUPPORTS CALL FOR STATE GOVERNMENT TO WITHDRAW FIRE SERVICES RESTRUCTURE BILL – PROPOSES WAY AHEAD FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria welcomed today's release of the Legislative Council's Fire Services Bill Select Committee report of the Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 and accompanying recommendations.

VFBV is pleased that many of the recommendations made to the Committee in our detailed submission of 7 July have been adopted.

We accept and support all ten recommendations of the Committee and endorse the Committee's recommendation that the Government withdraw the Bill or failing it being withdrawn that the Legislative Council of the Parliament should reject the Bill.

If the Bill is withdrawn or defeated, VFBV maintains its commitment to continuous improvement in our fire and emergency services.

In our submission we proposed a way forward to the committee to achieve continuous improvement and the framework for incremental reform that will have long lasting, effective and tangible community safety outcomes front and centre, unlike the current Bill.

The first step is to develop a transparent and evidence backed understanding of the problems to be fixed, then independent and robust analysis of any reform proposal to ensure it is a way forward with no pitfalls or unintended consequences so that we end up with a better outcome for all Victorians.

VFBV believes it is critically important that a proper and transparent process of community, agency, volunteer and union engagement and consultation is part of any process in developing and considering reform policy and legislation well before any decisions to proceed are made.

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This approach is consistent with recommendations of the committee. It would ensure reform proposals which do nothing except the creation of angst and argument or worse still, take us backwards as is the case with the current Bill, could be avoided.

In respect to the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation section of the Bill, it is our very strong view that it should provide for equality of treatment for volunteers and career firefighters.

After forming the view that the proposed legislation was discriminatory towards volunteers we sought a legal opinion from the Honourable Jack Rush QC.

Amongst other concerns Mr Rush made the following telling comment:

> *"The Bill discriminates against volunteer firefighters, is inequitable to them, has been drafted in a manner that is prejudicial to volunteer firefighters' entitlements and rights to claim for specified forms of cancer when compared to the claims process created by the Bill for career firefighters for precisely the same cancer conditions."*

We are pleased that the Committee has recommended that Part 2 of the current Bill covering Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation should be reintroduced to Parliament as a stand-alone Bill – and VFBV fully support this approach.

But we will be seeking amendments to the Bill to remove differential treatment between paid staff and volunteers.

Ends…

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