



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

News Note

NOTE TO MEMBERS – 1st March 2018

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2018

SUMMARY

This note seeks to bring to your attention some legislative amendments currently before the Victorian Parliament seeking to amend amongst other things the Emergency Management Act 2013 and consequential amendments to the CFA Act 1958, which for the most part are restricted to aspects relating to Regional and Municipal Fire Prevention committees and planning.

At a fundamental level the proposed legislative amendment removes the Regional and Municipal Fire Prevention Committees from the CFA legislation shifting the powers, responsibilities and arrangements previously assigned to CFA to now come under the EM Bill and Emergency Management Victoria (EMV).

VFBV became aware in recent days that this amendment Bill has now been introduced for consideration to the Victorian Legislative Assembly (Lower House) by Minister Merlino last week by way of a first reading speech on the 20th Feb 2018. Debate on the amendments is expected to resume on the 7th March before then proceeding to the Upper House.

HISTORICAL ISSUES

Following the introduction of IFMP (Integrated Fire Management Planning), arrangements surrounding Regional and Municipal fire prevention committees has been a topic of discussion amongst volunteers, CFA and within communities for quite some time.

For many years volunteers have been raising concerns including;

- The weakening of formal local engagement between Brigades/Groups, CFA and the Municipal fire prevention committee's
- A reduced focus on wider community engagement in the development of Municipal fire prevention plans
- changes in volunteer representation to the Committee's, and changes to meeting times and days that sometimes hinder volunteer/community involvement
- A reduced focus on the coordination and planning of fire breaks, and strategic fuel reduction plans for areas located within the municipality (but not located on public land)

These concerns have been discussed at length following changes to the composition and process of Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees since about 2014 and both CFA and VFBV have previously identified that these and several other issues should be considered in any future legislative arrangements.

It would appear these concerns and previous input may have been lost along the journey, as they do not appear to have been addressed in the proposed legislative changes.

PROPOSED ADVOCACY

Having reviewed the amendments now outlined in the proposed Bill and consistent with concerns previously raised by volunteers with regard to Municipal Fire Prevention Planning and Municipal Emergency Management Planning it is VFBV's intent to continue to advocate for:

- Ensuring the regulation/enforcement, audit and quality control arrangements are adequate and not eroded;
- Strengthening of formal arrangements to support local Brigade/Group engagement
- Ensuring that there is sufficient prescription and legislatively backed requirement for Municipal Emergency Management Plans to identify fire risks and drive mitigation treatments to address and prioritize the reduction of fire risk including land use, and the construction of fire breaks and fuel reduction on private land/and road/rail corridors within the municipality (The proposed new arrangements are silent on these matters)
- Effective arrangements to support compliance and accountability for the treatment of risks identified
- Ensuring mandatory volunteer and community engagement/consultation and representation

NEXT STEPS

The proposed legislation is still before the Victorian Parliament and will need to be considered by the Upper House before it can be adopted. Although timing is impossible to predict, given that the proposed Bill is already before the Lower House, further debate and deliberations are likely to be within the coming weeks.

Given that there has been a long gap between the initial introduction of IFMP arrangements and initial discussions about changes to Regional and Municipal fire prevention committees you are encouraged to revisit this issue amongst your local networks; stocktake how the current arrangements are working and/or how they could be strengthened; and provide feedback as a priority if there are other issues you wish to raise regarding the proposed legislation.

Although the amendment Bill is already before Parliament, VFBV will continue to explore opportunity for consideration for amendment to the Bill. You are encouraged to engage in conversation at local MP level to ensure volunteer issues are understood.

* * *