



VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

News Note

11 September 2019

FIRE SERVICES REFORM UPDATE # 1

VFBV is committed to providing factual and timely information on Fire Services Reform as it becomes available. As information comes to hand, we are committed to fact checking and verifying details and then communicating this information to members as regularly as possible.

Reform Timetable

The Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019 is the full title of the Act. It was passed by Parliament on the 20th June 2019.

The Act is made up of eleven (11) parts.

Only Part 1 (Preliminary) and Part 2 (Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation) come into operation on the day after Royal Assent. Royal assent was given on July 2nd 2019. All other remaining parts only come into operation when they are proclaimed. Proclamation is done by the Governor at a future date - acting on the advice of the Minister.

In effect – this means the only part of the Act in operation today is the part dealing with Presumptive Legislation for firefighters with cancer.

Minister Neville MP has publicly indicated the Government's intent is to not implement the reform until next year – following the fire season. It is envisaged the reforms and new model will then be progressively implemented during 2020 in time for the 2020/21 fire season.

However, as early discussions have progressed, it has become apparent that planning for the reform is difficult to progress without a FRV Commissioner having been appointed, as technically FRV will not exist until further parts of the Act are proclaimed. Therefore, it is likely that the process of appointing the new FRV Commissioner will be expedited so that a person can be appointed to the role and be active in early conversations.

To this end, in late July the role of Fire Rescue Victoria Commissioner was advertised by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, with applications closing on Friday 23rd August 2019.

It is VFBV's view that this position will likely be filled this year, so that FRV can be represented in early reform discussions and planning. The exact timetable of this appointment is unknown.

Fire Services Reform Governance Structure

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) in close cooperation with the Department of Justice and Community Safety is currently leading the Fire Services Reform process on behalf of the Government.

Within EMV - Emma Catford has been appointed as the Chief Implementation Officer and Anthony Lawrie the Executive Director Fire Services Reform.

The Government is now in the process of establishing an IDC (Interdepartmental Committee) and other related strategic governance groups that will report directly to the Minister.

VFBV has been seeking representation in the Governance Structure to ensure that any volunteer impacts are well known and understood and to ensure volunteer charter obligations for consultation are met.

Today, Minister Neville has formally confirmed VFBV's appointment to the **Volunteer Reference Group** that has been established to formally engage with VFBV on implementation of the reforms, share progress and seek volunteer feedback. This will be a small and highly strategic group that will meet with senior officials and receive implementation updates and discuss strategic opportunities and issues. This will also provide an avenue for VFBV to discuss feedback on key issues or concerns relevant to reforms, and for VFBV to escalate any unresolved reform concerns/issues important to volunteers.

VFBV CEO Adam Barnett has commenced early discussions with Government and EMV on the workings of this group and has been encouraged by initial discussions.

Two other reference groups are also being formed, a **Career Reference Group** and a **Support & Technical Staff Reference Group** which will involve employees and their associated unions.

Sitting under the strategic governance groups will be Operational Governance Groups which deal with the detail and are more subject matter / work streamed focussed. The Minister has committed to VFBV and the Unions that **Liaison Groups** will be established to provide mechanisms for stakeholder technical input and consultation to these working groups that will also be supported by the agencies. (CFA, MFB & ESTA)

Volunteer Feedback and Escalation

Critical to good governance will be to ensure that the views of grass roots are well canvassed and understood, and any negative impacts are identified early in the process for appropriate escalation. Members are reminded to ensure they are engaging with VFBV's existing consultative structures, especially District Councils where all Brigades/Groups are encouraged to regularly send representatives.

State Council is currently developing a streamlined escalation process for Fire Services Reform impacts and feedback that will assist with issues to be raised to State Council. This will better support District Councils with their local discussions as well as helping to identify trends or issues of state-wide significance.

Early piloting of these processes will begin in earnest following this months State Council, and we will keep you apprised of progress.

Presumptive Legislation

As indicated earlier, the Presumptive Legislation portion of the reform is operational now – and all CFA firefighters now have access to presumptive legislation for any diagnosis that occurs from now on – or was diagnosed after the 1 June ~~July~~ 2016 which the legislation was backdated to.

CFA volunteers have a choice on if they wish to lodge a claim with CFA through the normal Volunteer Compensation Scheme, or through Worksafe to access presumptive legislation for one of the 12 types of cancer listed in the Act.

Any member contemplating lodging a claim are encouraged to contact the VFBV Office on (03) 9886 1141. VFBV is currently working with CFA and Worksafe on the claims process – and we are committed to assisting and supporting any members who may need advice or help with their paperwork or the whole claims process.

Next Steps

VFBV will continue to monitor developments and communicate facts as they become available. Members are encouraged to stay connected with VFBV consultative structures, especially District Councils and continue contributing to ongoing discussions that assist us being informed of your views.