



**MEDIA RELEASE**

29 May 2019

## **Disappointment that damaging legislation back on agenda**

The Victorian Government has today re-introduced legislation that will have a major impact on the fire services in Victoria. CFA volunteers across Victoria will be very disappointed to hear this and to hear that the Government has not taken on board their concerns about how this legislation will reduce Victoria's firefighting capacity.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) expressed disappointment that the proposal to restructure the fire services was being re-introduced, especially after the controversy and agony of the previous legislation devastated volunteer morale and numbers.

VFBV Chief Executive Officer Adam Barnett said VFBV had not yet seen the legislation to be tabled, however he was of the understanding that it will be very similar to the previous legislation that was defeated last year.

VFBV has consistently raised the concerns voiced by CFA volunteers, cautioning Government that the proposed changes weaken rather than strengthens service delivery capability for urban growth areas, and surge capacity support to regional Victoria and major state-wide disasters. It will institutionalise further division across Victoria's fire services. It is also a direct contradiction of the learnings and findings from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and will undo the good work that has been driven as a priority since then to bring the fire services closer together working as one.

"One of the Government's stated objectives is to strengthen the role of CFA as a volunteer firefighting organisation, yet it has so far ignored the very clear advice from the volunteer firefighters' themselves that the legislation would be extremely damaging to those objectives." Mr Barnett said.

"VFBV has provided very clear feedback and advice that the previous legislation would be highly damaging to Victoria's volunteer firefighting capacity, weakens the role and autonomy of the CFA, and will risk the effectiveness of the world-respected CFA operational model and broader community safety."

"There is currently no analysis or evidence to support claims that the legislation will benefit servicing in urban growth areas. However, there have been a large number of unknowns

**VFBV Media Contact:** Megan Lane - 0431 671 999

and ambiguities raised about how the fire services would work together and the role of volunteers under the new model,” Mr Barnett said.

The existing CFA model can already supplement volunteer capacity with paid firefighters wherever and whenever they are needed and at the same time can keep the vital volunteer capacity. To de-integrate and fracture the CFA model without transparent analysis of the impact and for no clear case for change or demonstrated service gain is dangerous and irresponsible.

CFA volunteers will now look to the Victorian Parliament, and Upper House MPs in particular, to test the legislation in a more robust and open manner and to either amend or reject it.

In its response to the Select Committee into Fire Services Reform in 2018, the Government made a number of commitments including to clarify a range of concerns of volunteers. VFBV will be analysing the new legislation package to determine the extent to which these have been resolved.

“VFBV welcomes any reforms that improve the way Victorian fire services work, and I have today reaffirmed my commitment to working with Government in shaping the strongest CFA for the future.”

“However, these reforms need to be developed collaboratively, openly and most importantly – transparently.” Mr Barnett said.

“VFBV will continue to advocate for a modern approach, focussed on all people working together to maintain and build volunteer and community safety; a respectful culture focussed on empowering and supporting local volunteer brigades and communities with the flexibility and agility to enable CFA to tailor resources and support to local communities need” he said.

VFBV Submission to Fire Services Bill Select Committee –

<http://vfbv.com.au/index.php/component/k2/item/589-vfbv-submission-to-the-fire-services-bill-select-committee>

Government Response to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee Final Report – Tabled in Parliament on 7 September 2017 –

[https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/Fire\\_Services\\_Bill/Final\\_-\\_Revised\\_Fire\\_Services\\_Bill\\_Select\\_Committee\\_-\\_Govt\\_Response\\_-\\_240817\\_frN0kqxZ.pdf](https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/Fire_Services_Bill/Final_-_Revised_Fire_Services_Bill_Select_Committee_-_Govt_Response_-_240817_frN0kqxZ.pdf)

**VFBV Media Contact:** Megan Lane - 0431 671 999