

Fire Services Review (CFA-MFB)

Gentlefolk,

A bit of background. I am a volunteer of some 40 years standing and have occupied engineering management roles in a number of organisations over my 40+ year career as well as a number of roles in CFA and other volunteer organisations.

Whilst I have discussed these issues with Group and Brigade personnel, these are my personal views and not those of the Mitchell Shire Group.

I am troubled by this inquiry for a number of reasons. Most concerning are:

- The lack of any background paper identifying deficiencies that would indicate a need for an urgent review/inquiry into the matters raised in the Terms of Reference;
- The engagement of a person who was a previous Minister for Emergency Services (had greatness thrust upon him?) and trade union official in an unrelated discipline rather than a subject matter expert in emergency management;
- The very apparent skew towards paid staff without due recognition of the overwhelming number of volunteers that provide the bulk of the service;
- The very short time frame indicates that the desired answers may already be known and we are just being 'consulted' to tick a box;
- This is yet another distraction for volunteers.

I am not convinced of the necessity for an inquiry yet alone its urgency. How many inquiries/reviews do we need? In the past 6 years, there have been four (4) inquiries/reviews:

- Bushfires Royal Commission,
- The Governments Jones Inquiry,
- The Victorian emergency management review (Green paper),
- The Vic Auditor Generals reviews into CFA support of volunteerism
- The Fire Service Levy review

Have their recommendations been tested and implemented?

The Royal Commission into the Feb 2009 fires led to the establishment of an Essential Services commissioner and emergency services Victoria to address a number of the Terms of Reference;

However, we are where we are, so I offer the following comments on the Terms of Reference:

(a) An assessment of the resourcing requirements necessary to ensure Victoria is appropriately equipped and fire ready

How many enquiries, submissions, media articles, etc, does it take? If previous recommendations were implemented, this question should not arise.

(b) How CFA and MFB staff can be best supported in protecting communities, taking into consideration operational needs, as well as Occupational Health and Safety best practice and best training methods

CFA, DELWP and MFB have staff capable of developing good models to demonstrate risk-aware practices to prevent and suppress fires; existing structures to develop closer working relationships should not be beyond the capability of good managers.

(c) The interoperability between the CFA and MFB

A key role of the Commissioner was to develop a structure to enable the fire services to better combine resources and structures so as to better manage emergency situations. Are their impediments to appropriate implementation? Maybe there is one at least.

A new training facility has been established at Craigieburn; its purpose as I understand it is to train MFB and CFA personnel. It would be an obvious choice for brigades in our district. However, I am informed that because of the way it must be staffed, it is unaffordable through the District training budget!

(d) the interoperability across fire agencies responsible for preventing and suppressing all types of fire in Victoria, whether on public or private land

A key role of the Commissioner was to develop a structure to enable the fire services to better integrate so as to better manage emergency situations; See not above.

(e) CFA and MFB management structures and management work practices

I learnt early that if the word 'manage' is in the position description, then one is expected to manage; we shouldn't need an inquiry to address. People should be empowered to do what they are paid for.

(f) Enhancing workplace culture, including fostering greater respect and cooperation between management and its workforce, as well as enhancing workplace innovation and diversity

I have also concluded from experience that workplace culture is developed at senior (Board and Executive) level, inculcated throughout the organisation and sustained at first line supervisor level; Leadership and commitment are required; again, no need for an inquiry, just provide the environment to enable people to thrive. The appropriate environment includes accountability.

(g) Options for the establishment of a Career Fire-fighters Registration Board

This reference indicates that a Career fire-fighters Registration board is a fait accompli; where is the justification of need? where is the volunteer recognition?

(h) The best mechanism to provide support for volunteer fire brigades and to ensure their viability in providing emergency services

Finally, we talk about volunteers! This question recognises volunteers; I think it was an afterthought and shows that the Government (and probably others) are not interested in implementing the Volunteer Charter or recommendations from other reviews.

There are a few things that could be done:

- Provide better screening of calls so that volunteers are not disturbed for activities such as:
 - Children locked in cars on cool days - are we known thieves who break into cars in our spare time?
 - Oil/fuel spills that are the responsibility of others.
- Using paid staff to sit around at protracted incidents such as Hazmat and some 'police incidents' that go on for hours (and sometimes days) thus enabling volunteers to:
 - Provide appropriate initial response; and then
 - Get on with their lives

So some good could yet come of this inquiry.

Discuss as necessary.

John Dixon
Mitchell Shire Group Officer