



# YEA FIRE BRIGADES GROUP

District 12, North East Region

## RESPONSE BY YEA FIRE BRIGADES GROUP MANAGEMENT TEAM

### REVIEW OF THE FIRE SERVICES

By Mr David O'Byrne

The Management Committee of the Yea Fire Brigades Group (District 12) has spent considerable time in considering the Terms of Reference announced by the Minister for Emergency Services on 29 July 2015 as "a review of the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board and Country Fire Authority" and formulating its response.

We have concerns about

1. The time frame allowed for a review which could have significant structural change to the fire services and the delivery of their operations
2. The terms of reference especially the apparent lack of real commitment to the views of volunteers and respect for the role of volunteers within the fire services
3. The manner in which the review is to be conducted.

#### 1: TIME FRAME

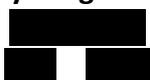
The Management Committee of the Yea Fire Brigades Group strongly questions the time frame which has been announced with this review. We believe there is undue haste given the very significant structural, management, operational and cultural outcomes which could occur as a result of this review. The Minister announced her review in a letter dated 29 July 2015 with the formal review to be delivered to the Minister **by** 30 September. The whole review process from the consideration and writing of submissions, thorough consideration by the one-person formal review and the formulation of their conclusions and recommendations is a small and inadequate two month time frame. We are of the view that this time frame:

1. Does not allow enough time for volunteer Brigades and Groups and other volunteer stakeholders, including individuals, to fully consider the review and its terms of references and to make a thorough submission.

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**GROUP OFFICER**

Gary Fitzgerald



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2. Does not allow enough time for the formal review to be conducted in accordance with the manner it considers appropriate. We are concerned that Mr O'Byrne as the Review Chairman will not be able to fulfil his task within this short window of time without compromising the review by eliminating some of the inputs normally available in a review process and as outlined by the Minister in the Attachment announcing the Terms of Reference.
3. Ignores the time available to volunteers and resultant impact it has on work, family and other commitments to adequately address the issues raised in the Terms of Reference
4. Ignores the current time volunteers are committing to planning for the forthcoming fire season given the long-range weather forecasts which have been provided by the Bureau of Meteorology for a 'drier than normal' spring
5. Ignores the fact that some Brigades and Groups do not meet as regularly as would be required to consider making a submission within what would be a reasonable amount of time in which to consider and formulate a submission

## 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Given the issues the Yea Fire Brigades Group has with the lack of sufficient time to prepare a thorough response or submission to the Review, the Group offers the following comments on the Terms of Reference:

1. In general, we are of the view that the Review duplicates many of the issues and points raised in previous inquiries conducted over the past five years including the extensive Royal Commission into the 2009 Bushfires, the Jones Inquiry and the review into the Fire Services Levy amongst others. The recommendations contained in the Jones Inquiry are still being implemented. The review conducted by Mr O'Byrne may take into account the evidence and the findings of some or all of these but it can only be a superficial assessment given the time frame.
2. The Group is of the view that the urgency of the review has not been identified nor can it be justified on any reasonable ground unless it is purely political. Given the number of inquiries or commissions referred to in 2.1 above, there has been no event or emergency in the life of this government which warrants the urgency of such a review. The Group is supportive of any review which will lead to the improvement and better delivery of services to all Victorians from their emergency fire services but such inquiries need to originate for good reason, lead to better outcomes and be conducted without undue haste and urgency.
3. The Yea Group is concerned that the Terms of Reference do not fully recognise the value or the role played in fire management and suppression by volunteers despite the fact that the great bulk of the State's firefighters are volunteers. Too many of the Terms of Reference pay no attention to the volunteers who are the core of the CFA and fire-fighting across the state and it is not until the final Term of Reference (H) in which the word volunteer is mentioned despite the fact that volunteers and their role could and should have been included in several of the other Terms of Reference. The Terms of Reference make mention of "CFA and MFB staff", "management structures", "workforce" and "career firefighters". In none of them is there any hint of respecting and appreciating the role of the volunteer in the "resourcing, operations, management and culture of ... (the "fire services")".
4. The Terms of Reference refer to MFB and the CFA as "collectively the "fire Services" and ToR (d) directs the Review to consider the interoperability across the fire agencies to suppressing all types of fire whether on public or private land. There is no mention of Forest Industry or Plantation Brigades, DEWLP Brigades and other volunteer agencies. The Group is concerned that one of the outcomes will be the division of the fire agencies into a paid, professional agency and one comprised of volunteers. Volunteers need to be recognised as

an integral part of any amalgamation of agencies and properly recognised by their inclusion in any joint management structure including Board level.

5. The Yea Group is concerned at the complete lack of reference to volunteer in Term of Reference (B). The CFA is a respected and admired community based organisation comprised of paid professional personnel and volunteers and any input into the OH and S of personnel, training and operations must have volunteer input at all times and at several levels.
6. The Yea Group must question why ToR (g) only refers to options for the establishment of a Career Firefighters Registration Board. It could and should be interpreted from this Term of Reference that volunteers not considered professional enough to be entered or recorded on a 'fire-fighters registration board'. There must be a facility to include the registration of all firefighters regardless of whether they are paid, professional, seasonal or volunteer.

### 3: MANNER OF THE CONDUCT OF THE REVIEW

Any organisation, irrespective of whom or what it is, should welcome a review from time to time. From such reviews, improvements can be identified and implemented leading to better service delivery. Whilst it is valuable to have any such review conducted by someone from outside the organisation or the locality in which the organisation operates, it is impossible for this review to be openly and thoroughly conducted within the time frame. Mr O'Byrne's background allows him to have knowledge of the nature of the review but given the size and scope of the review and its Terms of Reference, no individual can conduct and complete this review within the time allowed. Further, there is no urgency to complete the review within the time frame.

This review has been imposed on the volunteer community with no clear purpose or justification for its conduct. Reviews need to have a statement of purpose. In this instance, that is statement is lacking. There is no clear explanation as to why is being held and what the sense of urgency is about. This needs to be clarified and a more reasonable length of time allowed permitting full consultation with all stakeholders including the in excess of 50,000 volunteer who may wish to individually or through their Brigades and/or Groups participate in the review process.

There is no clear announcement as to whom submissions are to be made whether by email or postal address.

This submission was formulated by the members of the Yea Fire Brigades Group Management Team at a meeting held on Tuesday 11 August 2015. The nine members of the Team met for almost 2 hours to consider the stand the Group would take and any subsequent actions to be undertaken. Having agreed to formally make a submission, the Group Secretary spent over three hours drafting and producing this document. In total, 21 hours of volunteer time.

Prepared and Submitted by:

David Anderson

Yea Fire Brigades Group

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