

Mr David O'Byrne  
Fire Services Review  
Level 19  
121 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne 3000

8 -8 -15

Dear David.

District 17 Council met recently to discuss and compile a list of concerns in regards to the Fire Services Review. The items listed below reflect the collective view of the Council's executive. There are many issues covered within the criteria but the one main concern is the very limited timeframe given to Volunteers to not only collate their views but establish the reasoning behind many of the main points.

Please find below the District 17 Councils response.

**An assessment of the resourcing requirements necessary to ensure Victoria is appropriately equipped and fire ready.**

Members raised concerns that this was or could be a review of the fire service levy? Would changes enable a fairer system of funding for rural Victoria and not see the bulk of the monies being distributed to Metro areas, but, a more equitable system based on needs not location.

There was a strong feeling that, there isn't enough funding reaching rural Victoria and what were the options available to the volunteer stations, members & equipment into the future.

At present it doesn't seem a fair system and many brigades and Districts are disadvantaged simply due to their location.

For example, within District 17 there are still fire trucks and equipment of 20+ years in service and some stations requiring the basics such as toilets.

Therefore, if a review into the fire service Levy was up for evaluation and/or the State Government's model of funding, what would it look like and would it be a fairer system for Volunteers?

---

**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.**

Address correspondence to the District Council Secretary - PO BOX 55 Apsley VIC 3319  
*All opinions in this letter are only the views of the VFBV District Council and not those of the State.*

A major point of concern and discontentment within this term of reference was the fact that there is no reference to the Volunteer. This highlighted and heightened our concerns with the status of the Volunteer and the sheer fact more time is needed for proper consultation and feedback.

If only MFB & CFA's staff are referenced, there is a view that the paid staff would be the main force within the outer metro areas and further squeeze out the Volunteers.

If this were to happen where would the members come from to form the strike teams and back up for the major incidents such as Black Saturday or other major incidents in and around major centres?

We suggest lateral entry into the service for volunteers to manage volunteers. This would enable more regional based instructors who would fill the gap in areas such as training that desperately need to train the Volunteers especially in structural brigades.

Whilst this review seems to be focussing on the possible negatives related to Volunteers we recognise and wish to acknowledge that there have been some improvements in recent times. These include improvement in technology and their integration and better communication between the different organisations.

Finally, we felt it a timely reminder that the paid CFA staff are there to support the Volunteers, not the reverse as this review could possibly be focused towards.

### **The interoperability between the CFA and MFB**

Rural Victoria has a high demand for paid CFA staff to either have the opportunity to train Volunteers or allow a review of their structure to enable more firefighter training to occur across Victoria.

Is it the time to reintroduce the system where paid staff can train, instruct, or revisit the structure of the EBA so that the above can happen?

The New South Wales model of fire service delivery created a rift within their ranks causing large issues within brigades throughout NSW. We have strong concerns that if their model were introduced into Victoria not only would it create the same hostile environments but it would erode the ethos the Volunteers have created over the past centuries within Victoria.

We also acknowledge since Black Saturday interoperability has improved in areas such as Communications, BA upgrades and some facility improvements.

Whilst these improvements are satisfactory and progress is being made more improvement can be done in this area.

### **Interoperability across fire agencies responsible for preventing and suppressing all types of fire in Victoria, whether on public or private land**

An interesting and important point that needs to be considered, is the ageing population of Volunteers and decline of younger members staying in the service. Many young members in rural Victoria have no other choice but to move from their homes due to work or educational needs.

---

Whilst there are many merits in regards to CFA & SES alignment there is a concern as to the structure of one agency and how we would manage where we live not to mention the additional responsibilities and time factors is a concern. If additional workload were to be placed on an already over loaded CFA commitment, many members will simply walk away

## **CFA and MFB management structures and management work practices**

Below are the major points in relation to the above criterion.

We need to have:

A management board that has strong Volunteer voice and a majority that reflects the % base of its members and/or structure. Or, equal representation of all services (VFBV, CFA ,MFB) and no less.

The Board must consist of skilled based member's and not professional, non-Volunteer Union based views and perspective.

A board that has Volunteers as their main focus.

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

The Council felt that the current system had an adequate system for fostering cooperation and enhancing innovation and diversity but, one main concern again was in the wording of workforce and workplace. Does this term of reference make mention to the Volunteers or simply paid staff?

To successfully operate, the Council felt that following is required and made reference to past exemplary examples.

Cross view of multicultural, women and diverse thinking.

Most of the improvements and recommendations come from the Volunteer

It's through the actions that paid staff does which gets respect from the Volunteers.

Volunteer leaders are elected from their own.

CFA must provide adequate training to Volunteers in a timely manner and not when it suits the paid staff.

---

Emphasis must be placed on the Volunteer Charter.

### **(g) Options for the establishment of a Career Firefighters Registration Board**

What is the purpose and definition of the registration board?

To what level is the board to cover, include and what are the benefits?

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

Firstly and most importantly, this is the only point of reference where the volunteers are mentioned.

There are vast and wide ranging situations effecting Volunteers in rural Victoria and especially CFA volunteers. These range from climatic conditions through to the lack of career opportunities for our young. If we are to be a viable service in years to come many hard and maybe costly decisions need to be made so that rural Victoria remains in a state of preparedness.

Below are a range of ideas and systems that can support Volunteers better. These include:

Listen and act upon advice from the Volunteer level not from a top down model.

Closely analyse brigades and their viability looking at the volunteer numbers and their availability. Is the Standard delivery standard only suitable to model larger urban brigades? Maybe a new model for fire suppression in relation to fire reporting and concentrating on the positives and analysing the savings not costs? I.e. The brigade saved this amount of property or saved this amount of dollar loss?

It also needs to be based on Australian conditions with input from volunteers. Not based on the British system.

Boarder volunteer brigades need to work closely without intervention.

A fairer allocation of BASO to support the volunteers. District 17 has only two BASO's for the whole district

Section 29's adequately cover a brigades viability and gives an annual review and/or possible future improvements.

In closing we would like to reiterate our disappointment in the lack of time and information distributed to Volunteers in relation to this review. We feel that the Volunteer could be further disadvantaged and have a lesser voice if larger metropolitan or regional centres receive the majority of funding or the CFA board becomes restructured. Our concerns are highlighted by this review where the Volunteer is mentioned only once in the terms of reference and many statements are referred to as workplace. This is a perception that it is geared towards a non-volunteer consultative approach.

---

Should you wish to discuss these matters further please do not hesitate in contacting myself or the District 17 Council.

Yours sincerely,

**Ian Plumridge**  
**Secretary**

---