**Hillcrest
Fire
Brigade**

"3 Communities

2 Stations

1 Brigade"

CFA

28 August 2015

Fire Services Review

Level 30

121 Exhibition Street

MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Via email:

Dear Mr. O'Byrne,

Re: Fire Services Review

I write on behalf of Hillcrest Fire Brigade with is within CFA Eastern Metropolitan Region – District 13. Hillcrest Fire Brigade has over seventy (70) years of serving the local communities of Don Valley, Launching Place and Woori Yallock. Over the years the fire risk has shifted from bushfire to include industrial and commercial risks and interface risk as the community has grown over the years. The area has seen a number of large bushfires over the past 70 years which have had devastating results on the local community.

Our Concerns:

1. The review Terms of Reference (ToR) affords all emergency services personnel and community members a completely inadequate timeframe to convene and discuss concerns. The limited review period of 21 days for feedback will only allow for hastily compiled submissions. We are concerned this could lead to recommendations which are not achievable or funded and which do not have broad support within the emergency services community.
2. The Volunteer Charter is enshrined within the CFA Act and is clear that volunteers should be consulted on matters which affect them. We respectfully request that a more significant period of time be allowed to conduct more robust and thorough consultation with CFA volunteers.
3. That the Minister undertake appropriate levels of consultation with all affected parties once the review recommendations are completed <u>and</u> prior to their implementation by the Government.

Terms of Reference:

(a.)**Assessment of resourcing requirements**: any consideration of resourcing requirements by CFA and MFB cannot be considered in isolation of our partner emergency agencies such as DELWP and SES. Resourcing is clearly linked with interoperability across fire agencies and we submit that there needs to be a very broad view of resourcing including but not limited to, fire appliances, station buildings, maintenance and development of new training grounds, community safety/education

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materials and IT investment and platforms for new methods for training delivery and skills maintenance. Equally important as a 'resource' is research and development for firefighting equipment; incident investigation which leads to safer practices and a commitment to support learning platforms such as those that exist overseas where best practice can be shared between all agencies.

The review makes no reference to financial considerations and costing around resourcing requirements. With significantly declining budgets in recent times, ongoing financial commitment to deliver resources is an important component of this review point.

Lastly, CFA responds to more than just fires and provides an enormous surge capacity to the Victorian community during large scale prolonged emergency events. Any resourcing discussion must necessarily include a consideration of this surge capacity. CFA capacity includes incident management roles and response roles which are often undertaken in an all hazards environment either in its primary or support role under the emergency management arrangements. This surge capacity also extends to recovery support to the affected communities.

We would ask that the review consider the current limitations on the use of Career Firefighters (24/7). This is a current impediment to staffing arrangements where daytime volunteer capacity is reduced. A more flexible use of career staff including day-time only manning would provide a long resourcing solution to the service delivery standard while maintain vital volunteer capacity and links to the local community.

(b.) OHS best practice and training methods: OHS best practice need to be applied to all firefighters – there cannot be different standards for fire fighters who do the same job as each other irrespective of whether they are paid or volunteer.

Training methods should be delivered in the most efficient and effective way including utilising new technologies for delivery of training, especially over an organisation as large as CFA where distance often inhibits access to training. Investment by government and CFA in IT access including internet coverage and availability coupled with training being delivered in new formats such as eTraining would enable greater access to more training opportunities. We would support initiatives which utilised eTraining where appropriate, to increase the skills base and skill maintenance opportunities for all volunteers.

(c.) Interoperability: Our brigade does not have any boundary with MFB from a response perspective and therefore we cannot speak on behalf of those that have mutual response arrangements in place with MFB. Interoperability between MFB & CFA is integral to achieve a harmonious working relationship. It does seem ludicrous that each agency has different types of radios, different escalation arrangements and different incident command structures and different equipment. While interoperability is about more than just equipment, it would be great place to achieve some efficiencies.

(d.) Interoperability across fire agencies: both this and the previous ToR are intimately linked. Prevention of fires has been a key legislated responsibility of CFA since 1944. Prevention is a key responsibility and one where greater focus by government, the community and the fire agencies working together can deliver a safer outcome for the communities of Victoria. The prevention lens should be viewed wider by all parties and must not be limited to just bushfires – house fires cost many Victorian lives every year.

Innovative programs that have been tested overseas such as compulsory smoke alarms retrospectively fitted to all homes; change of building codes to enforce sprinklers system installation in new homes should be examined in greater detail. Compulsory primary and

high school fire/emergency training to educate and develop resilience to emergency events – this type of program is a long term commitment to safety where the benefits will take years to be seen, but may have the greatest impact on our safety for the long term future.

Different vehicle typology, equipment, radios and even down to hose couplings means that the differences are there in everyday common operations across agencies. Just as in c) above, achieving uniformity in some of these areas would aid efficiencies in training, purchasing and reduce the differences.

(e.) M**anagement structures and workplaces:** CFA and MFB both have a proud history and their members are rightly proud of their agencies achievements. We would not support one agency by amalgamating MFB and CFA, we believe that would be detrimental to the fire service delivered to rural Victoria and we were pleased to see the Minister categorically state that was not an outcome of this review, nor being sought by the Government.

This review provides a process for modernisation of management structures and workplaces across both agencies and to align to modern business practices.

(f.) Workplace culture and diversity: we would support on the face of it any review outcomes which foster greater respect within and between all emergency response agencies and which encourage and support greater diversity in all facets including age and gender. There is clearly no detail around this aspect of the review and no specific direction provided in the ToR we support outcomes which provide the necessary means for this to occur.

(g.)Career Firefighters Registration Board: we struggle to see the purpose of the Registration Board, except that it would create a greater divide between career and volunteer fire fighters. We submit that a firefighter is a firefighter – we all turn out to the same type of incidents and all face the same type of risks and exposures, irrespective of the uniform that we wear, or the badge on our sleeve. Until there is further information around this review term we are unable to provide any further comment.

(h.)Support to volunteer fire brigades and viability: volunteer recruitment and retention is an issue for all volunteer agencies, not just CFA. Volunteerism as a culture within society is generally declining. We do not advocate a paid retention model such as those in NSW or QLD.

We encourage the Review to consider innovative and alternative options for the use of CFA fire stations which would support both volunteers and enable service delivery simultaneously. For example a fire station could act as a hub whereby those who are self-employed/work from home are empowered to work from the 'hub fire station' to provide a defined response capability and capacity within a geographic area. This option has a number of potential benefits including cost efficiencies, efficient utilisation of existing facilities which are often vacant during day time, enhanced community emergency response, improves and consolidates SDS times and may provide a method in which to retain volunteers.

We would hope that the review will achieve positive outcomes for all fire agencies and therefore the Victorian community also. This is an opportunity to achieve real efficiencies and interoperability between agencies – but the building blocks need to be established to enable this to truly achieve its potential. Getting the little things right such as same equipment, radios and training would be a great place to start.

We trust that volunteers will be consulted in keeping with the Volunteer Charter and the intent which is implicit in it. Volunteers want to be part of shaping their future and have ownership over changes and solutions which lead to improvements – to have that ownership we need to be involved and consulted along the way.

Our submission is by no means comprehensive given time constraints for feedback. We do not really feel that we have had our opportunity to thoroughly address our concerns, or be adequately heard at this point in time. We will wait with interest the outcome of this review and what recommendations the Government will adopt into the future and what it may mean for the future of volunteers.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Burns
Captain
Hillcrest Fire Brigade