



Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations

Submission to
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
In regard to

Inquiry into the Fair Work Amendment (Respect for Emergency Services Volunteers) Bill

The Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA) is a collaboration of eleven volunteer fire brigade associations within Australia. The Council was established to give volunteer fire-fighters a united voice in discussions and negotiations with government and key stakeholders.

CAVFA's member Associations, together, represent more than 250,000 volunteer fire-fighters and operational support volunteers across Australia.

At a recent meeting (29th August 2016) in Brisbane, there was significant concern from all of our members about the developments in Victoria, where Federal legislation (Fair Work Act) is being used to override state legislation (CFA Act).

If the proposed Victorian UFU industrial agreement succeeds in being registered with the Fair Work Commission, under current Commonwealth industrial law its provisions affecting the organisation, operations and support of CFA volunteers replace those in the Victorian CFA Act

Whilst it's Victoria in the gun today, this same approach can be used against other emergency service volunteers where their organisation come under the Fair Work Commission, and that is unacceptable, and untenable for any volunteer organisation serving their communities across Australia.

Another serious consideration is that if the UFU are successful in registering this industrial agreement, it will set a precedent for other branches of the UFU or industrial bodies to get state legislations changed to reflect the federal act, causing significant issues for volunteer services across Australia.

The proposed Federal legislation would make a simple change to the Fair Work Act, making it objectionable for workplace agreements to restrict or limit the emergency service organisation's (in this case CFA) ability to:

- engage or deploy its volunteers;
- provide support or equipment to those volunteers;
- manage its relationship with, or work with, any recognised emergency management body in relation to those volunteers;
- otherwise manage its operations in relation to those volunteers;

The legislation will also provide an ability for volunteers, through their associations, to make submissions to Fair Work Australia in respect of these issues if there are any concerns.

Having followed this issue closely, I am personally concerned that the Victorian Premier and the current Victorian Emergency Services Minister, have not taken advice from the CFA Chief Officer, CFA Chief Executive Officer, the previous CFA board, the previous Emergency Services Minister (Jane Garrett) and have allowed all these to resign or be sacked due to the proposed industrial agreement being unworkable.

Now the Chief Officer of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade has also advised that a similar agreement would be unworkable even in the fully paid service.

These people have to manage the situation on a daily basis, and when they aren't willing to continue in their positions, then that must point to some significant issues.

CAVFA call on all political parties and independent MPs and Senators to support this legislation \to recognise and respect the role of emergency service volunteers and protect their capacity to provide efficient, community based public safety services.

Yours Sincerely

Roger Flavell

Chairperson, Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations Limited

Board Member, South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission

Vice President, Country Fire Service Volunteers Association