



Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations

19 May 2016

The Hon Bill Shorten MP
Leader of the Opposition
PO Box 3002
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: bill.shorten.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Shorten,

**RE: Use of Commonwealth Fair Work Legislation against Volunteer Emergency Service Workers
and specifically Victorian Country Fire Authority volunteers.**

My Board has asked that I write to you and bring to your attention a matter of significance that has the potential to badly affect the nation's emergency response capacity.

As you would be aware our nation's emergency response capacity is largely based in state and territory jurisdictions and in each case is highly dependent on emergency service volunteers, particularly volunteer firefighters and members of the SES.

The importance of volunteers being trained, suitably equipped, enabled to use their skills and qualifications free of industrial and political interference sits at the core of that emergency response capacity in each jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, it is increasingly evident that Victoria's emergency volunteer capacity is to be marginalised and many thousands of trained and qualified volunteer firefighters are to be pushed aside by a proposed industrial agreement between the Victorian Government and the United Firefighters Union (UFU).

The actual respondents to the subject industrial agreement are Victoria's Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the UFU.

The CFA is an independent fire authority covering 60% of greater Melbourne suburbs, all regional cities and towns and all rural areas of the state. Of its 61,000 members including paid staff, 97% are

CAVFA Chairman Roger Flavell
roger@lenswoodwater.biz
38 Ironbark Avenue, Flagstaff Hill SA 5159
Telephone: 0499 995 311

volunteers – some 40,000 are trained and qualified firefighters and the remaining volunteers work on logistics, administration, communications and other vital support duties.

Around 40% of CFA's volunteers are urban volunteers located at brigades in Melbourne's outer suburbs. They provide the state with a core surge capacity to simultaneously fight multiple major or long duration fires anywhere in Victoria (and often interstate) as well as deal with other major emergencies. At the same time CFA's volunteers are able to provide local fire and emergency services to their community because of their numbers and the distribution of local brigades.

A very important aspect of CFA operations is that paid staff are fully integrated with volunteers in CFA organisation and operation. This aspect and the maintenance of volunteer numbers and capacity is directly threatened by the proposed industrial agreement. This is particularly so in regard to urban volunteers.

In effect, the nation's industrial laws are being used to override Victoria's state legislation which established and empowers the CFA to operate in the manner described.

If the UFU succeed in concluding their proposed industrial agreement we are also concerned that it will become an industrial model for similarly overriding relevant volunteer emergency service legislation in other jurisdictions over time.

We note that the Victorian Minister for Emergency Services and the Board of the CFA are strongly opposing the UFU's push; unfortunately, we are aware that other elements in the Victorian Government are solidly behind the UFU's push.

We believe that the incoming Federal Government elected on 2 July must act to ensure that our nation's industrial laws cannot be used in the manner outlined to marginalise or push aside emergency service volunteers.

I attach to this letter a copy of my letter to the Premier of Victoria which incorporates further details of our concerns.

Yours Sincerely,



Roger Flavell
Chairman