

MFB, CFA SLAMMED BY FIRE SERVICES REVIEW

ANDREWS GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO ACCEPT/IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHANGE THE “TRENCH WARFARE” MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Today (16/03/16) the Fire Services Review was released slamming the MFB and CFA for the politically driven ideological attacks against firefighters and staff resulting in the lowest morale in decades.

The Review characterized the “*enormous divide*” between senior management and firefighters as “*trench warfare*”.

“With the current state of morale and strategic and operational leadership, the fire services appear to be in an extremely unhealthy state; a situation that must not be allowed to continue.”

The review made two specific recommendations to rectify the “*fundamental collapse in trust and goodwill*” .

The Government has accepted all other Recommendations except the two that will address the fundamental damaging structure that is at the core of the key issues raised in the Review.

- **Recommendation 13** recommends that the CFA and MFB be restructured to reinstate the role of the Chief Officer as head of the organization to be supported by an executive of which one member would be responsible for managing corporate services.
- **Recommendation 14** recommends that a single Board be established to as the single governing body for the CFA and MFB.

“Significant change is required to create more harmonious fire services that work collaboratively with their key stakeholders to ensure their firefighters are as equipped and operationally ready to meet the needs of the community.”

The Review highlighted that the politically driven litigation by the CFA and MFB against their own staff has hit morale hard:

“The aggressive approach then taken by the MFB to industrial relations was demonstrated by a number of ill-conceived decisions. These included:

- leasing a locked-down, dedicated space – described by firefighters as the “pit” or “bunker – for the litigation team*
- engaging security guards to accompany that team and senior management in a very public procession to the Fair Work Commission hearings, implying that firefighters might resort to violence*
- spending millions of dollars on an unnecessary litigation process.”*

The MFB President and the MFB Board have endorsed the disgraceful behavior of the Senior Leadership Team reported in the Review by renewing their contracts, which was endorsed by the Minister.

The report confirms that firefighters feel betrayed by their employers who have campaigned in the media to portray firefighters as greedy and lazy; and that the previous government deployed a deliberately ideological attack against the United Firefighters Union and effectively encouraged the CFA and MFB to go to industrial war with their respective workforces.

The Report refers to blame on all sides, but in particular criticises the MFB in for the fundamental collapse in trust and goodwill in the industrial context.

Unfortunately the UFU and its members are facing similar attacks by the Andrews Government with the reneging on agreements, refusing the Fair Work Commission’s draft recommendations to settle the CFA UFU Operational Staff Agreement and forcing the UFU into litigation to protect the standards of the recruitment selection process.

“It is abundantly clear that the workforce has had enough of this negative environment and simply wants to work in safe, harmonious and supportive workplace and where its efforts are acknowledged and there is clear and fair accountability.”

Bullying

The Review also addressed allegations of bullying, previously referred to the Human Rights Commissioner by Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett. The Review says it did not have sufficient information to comment on the prevalence.

The UFU and career firefighters are concerned that their experience is being lumped with Victoria's 37,000 volunteer firefighters.

“Career firefighters report positive relations among crews, but frequent harassment from some management.”

Gender and diversity

The Review says efforts by the fire services to attract and retain women are inadequate, inappropriately targeted, and not given sufficient priority.

Had the CFA and MFB acted to recruit women over the past decade, we wouldn't be going through the current farce.

A copy of the 20 Recommendations can be viewed via <http://goo.gl/nGSNMO>