



**RURAL FIRE BRIGADES ASSOCIATION  
QUEENSLAND INC.** ABN. 37 417 474 709

25 January 2024

Hon Steven Miles MP, Premier

Hon Nikki Boyd MP, Minister

Dear Premier and Minister Boyd,

The Rural Fire Brigades Association Qld Management Committee met 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024, and it was the unanimous vote of the Committee that I write to the Premier and Minister rejecting totally the draft amendments to the *Fire Service Act 1990*.

The current Act is out of date and does not empower Rural Fire Brigades. It is however preferable to an unprecedented legislative power grab by a small clique of Brisbane-based senior Fire and Rescue bureaucrats.

The RFBAQ President Ian Pike AFSM was given 7 working days from the receipt of the draft legislation to consult with the Association's membership and supply our response by the 29<sup>th</sup> January. This is completely at odds with the assurances we received that there would be time for the RFBAQ to share the draft legislation with all registered Rural Fire Brigades in Queensland.

Our initial conversations and meetings with Deputy Police Commissioner Stephan Gollschewski and the Legal Director / Office of Special Coordinator were positive in intent to empower Rural Fire Brigades and volunteer firefighters, and to increase brigade capacity and functions in achieving a higher level of community defence across the 93% of Queensland that the 1,400 Rural Fire Brigades defend.

Since the departure of the permanent QFES Commissioner Greg Leach in late 2023 and the appointment of an Acting Commissioner from Fire and Rescue, the draft legislation has substantially and drastically changed.

The new draft legislation for the first time stipulates that the only person qualified to become Commissioner of the new Queensland Fire Department (QFD) that comprises both the Fire and Rescue Service and the Rural Fire Service, must be from Fire and Rescue. This is like legislating that the only person who can be the head of Queensland Health is a surgeon.

This Fire and Rescue Commissioner will for the first time be able to directly sack a member of a Rural Fire Brigade and decide who can or cannot be a brigade chairperson, treasurer or elected office bearer.

This is completely unacceptable and is not legally supported, as brigades are unincorporated associations that moderate their own membership.

The QFES has been adamant in their pursuit of being able to sack a brigade member since the botched introduction of Blue Card and previously attempted to amend the legislation to achieve this end.

The draft legislation has a new role of Chief Fire Officer. This person reports directly to the Commissioner on service delivery, integration, best practice, innovation and research. Again, this person's qualifications can only come from Fire and Rescue.



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The draft legislation states that an incident controller in the future can only come from people with expertise in large scale structural fires and bushfires, specialist and technical rescue, response to disasters and hazmat. This means that going forward all incident controllers can only come from Fire and Rescue; not Rural Fire, where most large incidents happen.

This one section completely disempowers landholders and brigade members who understand how fire moves through the environment.

One of the commitments to the RFBAQ from Minister Mark Ryan MP was a Rural Fires Board. This has also been watered down to an advisory committee. More significant changes made by Kedron since the departure of Commissioner Leach.

The KPMG Review into the QFES found that 86% of corporate services went to the Fire and Rescue Service, and only 6% went to RFS. KPMG also identified that this happened as corporate staff identified with the Fire and Rescue Service and that this was a cultural challenge that needed addressing. This draft legislation flies in the face of the Government's own report and policy.

*2021 KPMG review into the QFES, page 105.*

There is much, much more in the draft legislation that clearly identifies a power grab, and this will be to the detriment to the defence of all communities across Queensland.

Before this terrible draft legislation is presented to Parliament, it needs an Authority to Introduce from Queensland Cabinet. We urge you and your cabinet to not sign the Authority to Introduce.

The current out-of-date *Fire Service Act 1990* is far preferable to this draft legislation. This draft legislation will lead to upheaval and discord similar to that fracturing the Fire Services in Victoria.

In the coming weeks the RFBAQ will write to each political party asking them for a written commitment to Rural Fire becoming independent, and getting away from the toxic culture of entitlement that can produce such self-serving draft legislation.

The motion introduced by Ian Pike AFSM to the full meeting of the RFBAQ State Executive 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023 was:

*That the RFBAQ write to every registered political party in Queensland prior to the 2024 State Election calling for a commitment in the next term of government for a fully independent Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ).*

*For the RFSQ to have a Chief Officer, from a brigade background, who reports directly to the Minister. For RFSQ to have a separate legislation and budget and for the reformed RFSQ to be comprised of rural fire brigades, Fire Wardens and rural fire staff.*

*Rural Fire Service staff are to provide support and training to the brigades and their members. These brigades and support staff help landholders mitigate risk from bushfire, respond to fires and other emergencies, provide education to Queenslanders relating to fire and perform other rescue functions as delegated by the Chief Officer of the RFSQ.*

This was passed unanimously.

Yours faithfully,



Justin Choveaux

