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New flare-up looms in CFA dispute

Tuesday, August 09, 2016, 4:57pm

The dispute at Victoria's Country Fire Authority is set to flare in coming weeks as the new [CFA](#) board considers whether to sign-off on a controversial enterprise agreement.

The Victorian Labor government sacked the former [CFA](#) board over its refusal to agree to a new enterprise agreement with the United Firefighters Union, which covers about 800 employee firefighters,

The Minister for Emergency Services, Jane Garrett, the [CFA](#) chief executive and chief fire officer resigned over concerns that the new agreement would encroach on management decision-making and the role of about 55,000 volunteers.

The new [CFA](#) board met yesterday without announcing whether it would sign-off on the new agreement, which has been suggested in non-binding recommendations by Commissioner Julius Roe in June.

The new board is due to meet again on Friday, as the Victorian Opposition and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria have queried whether there are further concerns over the agreement.

UFU Victorian secretary Peter Marshall today argued it was not unusual for the new [CFA](#) board to conduct due diligence on the enterprise agreement, after lengthy delays under the former Liberal government.

"The UFU has a good relationship with this government and we look forward to a productive relationship with the new [CFA](#) board," Marshall said.

If the enterprise agreement is approved it will be put to a vote of UFU members before going to the FWC for approval.

But the Turnbull government bought into the dispute during the recent federal election and promised to protect the role of volunteers if re-elected.

Last week, Employment Minister Michaelia Cash said the government would amend [s12](#) of the Fair Work Act so that "enterprise agreements cannot be misused to undermine the effectiveness of emergency services" (see [Related Article](#)).

"In terms of the government's policy response, we're going to expand the definition of objectionable terms in the Fair Work Act's section 12."

"This would mean that an enterprise agreement could include terms that restricted the right of management to deal with emergencies, and would prohibit terms that are inconsistent with any state or territory laws."

However, Minister Cash has also pledged to intervene in proceedings before the Commission if a new [CFA](#) agreement comes up for approval.

The Minister has indicated she could apply for leave to appear before the Commission when it sits to consider the [CFA's](#) new enterprise agreement.

The Opposition has asked the Victorian Ombudsman to investigate the proposed [CFA](#) deal, which the government says will cost \$160 million over four deals.

However, claims have emerged that put the total cost of the deal at \$670 million after taking account of capital costs and training.

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