

Prue Purdey

From: Dean Opie [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 27 June 2017 1:13 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Support for Fire Services Reform

To the Fire Services Review Select Committee,

My name is Dean Opie and I have been a professional Firefighter for over 32 years and am currently stationed at Hoppers Crossing Fire Station with the CFA. I hold the Rank of a Senior Station Officer and have many qualifications which include Juvenile Fire Awareness & Intervention Program facilitator, Urban Search & Rescue Operator, Workplace Trainer & Assessor, Australian Maritime Safety Authority Marine Fire Fighting, Road Rescue qualified, EMR qualified and I have been on working parties amending and implementing new Standard Operating Procedures within the Fire Department. I have also completed a 12 month International Firefighter Exchange in Canada also spending time with the NYC Fire Department in the Bronx prior to 911.

I feel I am in a good position to comment and give an informed view on why the Fire Services Reform is crucial as I was employed by the MFB for the first 31 years of my Firefighting career, working in Urban areas being supported by full time professional Firefighters. Since December 2015 I have been employed permanently by the CFA working in the same role but now in areas that in the past were services solely by CFA Volunteers but due to population and industrial growth these areas now also need the support of full time Professional Firefighters.

One such incident that comes to mind was in October last year in Sunbury when we received a call for a house fire with an elderly disabled lady trapped inside. The call was received at 1806 hours and the full time staff Firefighters were on the Pumper and turning out within 60 seconds and on scene at the house less than 3 minutes later. My crew were immediately searching the smoke logged blazing house in fully protective structure Firefighting gear with Breathing Apparatus and a Thermal Imaging Camera. They located the semi conscious lady and carried her to safety. Another Professional Firefighter then used his trained EMR skills and administered oxygen. This went on for at least a further 10 minutes as the Ambulance was coming from Melbourne. This lady would have surely died had it not been for the rapid response, the skills, and the protective equipment that all Professional Firefighters possess.

Whilst the Volunteers at Sunbury did eventually arrive on scene, I could not utilize them fully as none were capable of administering oxygen and only some of them were trained in structural firefighting and therefore did not have structural firefighting uniform and were not internal breathing apparatus certified. The Volunteers and Staff Firefighters at Sunbury and outlying Brigades work extremely well together but

the lack of consistent levels of training, response times and attendance put considerable strain on the Professional Firefighters and at times places I have had grave concerns for their safety. At this fire I could not be sure if I had certified structural Internal Firefighting and breathing apparatus back up Firefighters in the case of something going dreadfully wrong whilst I had 2 Firefighters inside carrying out a rescue. This was never a concern when I was Firefighting with the MFB or in North America as a minimum of 7 fully trained Firefighters are dispatched to every call and will be on scene in a maximum of 7.7 minutes in 90% of the time.

The need for back up is a two way street. Due to a slow response or a no response, professional Firefighters have been able to be on scene in a support areas very soon after the Volunteer Brigade has been on scene and many times before anyone was on scene. One such time was in November last year when a light aircraft had crashed landed and caught fire at an air show at the Wangaratta Airport in Laceby which is nearly 9 kms out of town. There are four nearby Volunteer Brigades in Laceby, Oxley, Milawa and South Wangaratta. Due to the rapid response time of Professional Firefighters from Wangaratta, we were the first appliance on scene. We shut down the airport, extinguished the aircraft using foam, triaged the pilot and passenger and directed on coming Brigades to safely enter the airport and extinguish a resultant spreading grass fire. The outcome was a good one as the public can be assured of a rapid response no matter what time of day or night.

The Fire Service Reform will have no negative impact on the CFA Volunteers as the Volunteers that I have spoken to and work alongside only want what is best for the Community and acknowledgment for what they do. They will once again have ownership, continued pride and ongoing support from their Professional brothers and sisters.

Regards Dean Opie

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I request that my submission be kept confidential as myself and my family have been unfairly targeted by uninformed people during this dispute. This certainly has taken its toll and I hope the facts will prove why this reform is the best outcome for all stakeholders and we can all move ahead.



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