

27<sup>th</sup> June 2016

I wish to make a submission supporting the proposed Fire Service Reforms.

My name is Simon Scharf, I am employed by CFA as a Senior Station Officer based at the Geelong City Fire Station. I joined CFA in 1984 as a volunteer and joined the professional ranks in 1987 as a Fire fighter.

I have over 30 years experience in the firefighting service. I have seen CFA grow at an enormous rate in the last 30 years with major population expansion in the Metropolitan and Regional areas of Victoria.

I have been deployed interstate on numerous occasions and have specialist skills sets in Aviation Fire Fighting as an Air Attack Supervisor along with specialist skills with Road and Technical Rescue.

My station attends around 2450 calls per year with a small but inclusive team of Volunteers that provide the necessary service delivery that we are required to perform. In 1998, I was appointed to Geelong City as a Station Officer and our fire call rate was around 1300 calls per year.

I have seen our workload increase each year along with our support to Volunteer areas who are experiencing difficulties attending to calls on a more regular basis now than previously. This is no fault of our Volunteers as the system has not kept pace with the expansion of population and increasing call numbers.

By and large Volunteers strive to do the best that they can, however I have experienced instances where I have been required to support a structure fire in a Volunteer Brigade area with No response from the Primary Brigade. Again, I don't seek to demean the work of Volunteers however, Volunteer availability is declining and this has an effect on my health and safety whilst attending calls without adequate backup.

I have had to rescue a person trapped in a fire on my own, with my fire fighter operating the pump, so that I could enter the structure without backup, knock down the fire and rescue the occupant. Partial structural collapse occurred as I entered the structure, but being cognitive of the risks, I managed to save that persons life. On this occasion the Volunteer brigade did respond eventually, but arrived well after I had rescued the occupant.

Having spent almost 30 years as a professional fire fighter, I have been involved in several EBA disputes with CFA and the Victorian Government. The constant attack on Professional Fire Fighters has to stop. The involvement of Volunteers in my EBA negotiations is un Australian and frankly disgusting. The representatives of the VFBV no longer actually properly represent the interests of main stream Volunteers. I have had several of my Volunteer colleagues express dismay at the VFBV's sustained attack on professional fire fighters.

The out dated view propagated by VFBV is that Professional Fire fighters are there to support Volunteers is so far off the mark at my station simply due to call volume. This out dated mantra is part of the reason CFA is continually held back by the Volunteer Association who will not adjust to the changing environment in Victoria.

Fire Service Modernisation is vital to continue to grow our State and maintain the high expectations of Service Delivery that we provide to the public. I take pride in being a fire fighter and uphold the standards of professionalism that make our personnel so valued in our community.

Getting to help people who are experiencing the worst day of their life is an exceptional occupation and the reason I go to work every day.

The constant attacks on us by elements in the Media and Lib/Nat Opposition parties and a small element of Volunteers will never waiver my commitment to my team and to my community, standing side by side with them during emergencies.

The claims made that if these reforms pass through, and FRV is created, that surge capacity of CFA Volunteers will be affected are False and will not occur. CFA has a proud tradition of serving people in need and this will not stop. Scaremongering is the only weapon left to VFBV now that the light is shining of the Victorian Fire Services.

My work alongside Volunteers will not stop if the reforms pass through. I will always continue to value the effort that they make, assist them when required and treat them as I have always done in a manner of professional courtesy.

I sincerely urge the members of the committee to **SUPPORT** the legislation as it is VITAL to remove the politics from the Fire Service and provide for a Modern, Adaptive and Relevant fire service for all Victorians.

Please feel free to contact me to discuss the content of my submission

Kind regards

Simon Scharf