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From: Peter De Maria [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 28 June 2017 10:39 AM
To: LCSC
Subject: PUBLIC SUBMISSION - FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE 2017

To the Fire Services Bill Select Committee

My Name is Peter De Maria, I am currently a Level 2 Fire-fighter with the CFA, stationed at South Warrandyte Fire Station, one of the 35 integrated stations within CFA. I also volunteered with the CFA at Doreen Fire Brigade for 11 years and held the rank of 1st Lieutenant. Within this period I was privileged to gain the qualification of Strike Team Leader, a pivotal role when deploying for "Surge Capacity" and was the recipient of the Emergency Services Medal for duties performed during the 2009 Black Saturday campaign.

I write this submission with great support of the Fire Services Reform. Having been on both sides of the fence, that of volunteer and career Fire-Fighter, I have seen first hand the issues arising with the antiquated Fire Services that we currently operate under.

Volunteers do an amazing job. That is when possible. There is no doubt, with my vast experience, we need change. Timely response for volunteers is and will continue to be an issue for volunteer brigades, especially in the highly urbanised outer fringes of Melbourne. This is by no means the fault of volunteers, but the very fact they are volunteers means they have other commitments during day time hours and often after hours, jobs, careers, university, school, families etc.

I have seen first hand in the area I live and volunteered, Doreen, how many times volunteers were stretched to respond. Often I would turn out an appliance with just one other volunteer, often only having minimum skills training, no Breathing apparatus or even Structure qualifications. Doreen is just one prime example how growth in the community has far exceeded the antiquated system our Fire Services work too, and our outdated Boundaries.

In many areas of the outer fringe of Melbourne, communities deserve a guaranteed, timely, experienced response from a Fire Service. The current system needs to be overhauled and is long overdue, the only way to achieve this is by reform. To think that suburbs like Dandenong, Springvale, Hoppers Crossing, South Morang etc. fall under the area of "Country" Victoria is outstanding in 2017, this may have been acceptable 40 or 50 years ago but certainly not acceptable in the modern era.

My experience as a volunteer highlighted the extreme pressures placed on volunteer brigades to deliver an efficient, timely service to the community. Again I stress, this is of no fault of volunteers, but the undoubtable fact of growth and expectations in the communities.

A lot has been mentioned about "Surge Capacity" and how some believe a reform would have a negative impact on this. Again as an experienced Volunteer and a career fire-fighter who works closely with Volunteers at an integrated station, there is no evidence how "Surge Capacity" would be affected negatively if at all. It is not affected now and would not be affected under a reformed Fire Service. A stand alone, volunteer only CFA, could and will only have a positive impact, this is strongly reiterated from volunteers at the cold face at integrated stations. To say that volunteers would not provide that capacity, or worse, too irresponsibly say that volunteers will walk away from their communities is an absolute insult to all volunteers and is unfounded.

The impact the current, ongoing industrial disputation is having on my colleges, volunteers and myself, is at best draining. It has continued for too long and is having quite a negative impact on mental health and morale is at an all time low. We have and will continue to provide the best service to communities, but this is not to say it can't be vastly improved. Reform will achieve just that.

I urge all parties involved to look past the rhetoric and spin that has been portrayed in certain media circles and by people or groups that are just not well informed or don't have the experience of others to comment. Fire Service Reform, the implementation of FRV and having CFA volunteer only will impact our State and communities positively and bring the Fire Service into the modern era.

Regards

Peter De Maria
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