

**Kirra Vanzetti**

---

**From:** Stewart Stephens [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 28 June 2017 4:23 PM  
**To:** LCSC  
**Subject:** Inquiry Into the Firefighter's Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.

I am Leading Firefighter Stewart Stephens and have been working for the Country Fire Authority for nearly 11 years.

During my time with CFA I have gained numerous qualifications on several different firefighting appliances as well as specialist rope and confined space rescue qualifications. In addition to that I am a Certificate 4 Workplace Trainer and Assessor and an Advanced Driving Instructor. I am currently stationed at Corio, in Geelong northern suburbs. We have some major complicated risks in our response area that requires specialist appliances and many qualified operators. Just an example is the VIVA Refinery, Terminals Chemicals, MC Heard Abattoir, a large health care facility at Barwon Health, major shopping centres, support into Geelong and St John of God Hospitals and Deakin University.

I currently live in Torquay, Victoria and work at the Corio Fire Station. I have read much about the Fire Services Review and from my point of view it is change that is long overdue. After all, I joined the CFA after 5 years' service with Victoria Police. Serving the community is my passion and it is why I turn up to work each day and perform my roll to the best of my ability. For too long we in the CFA have been able to just "get by" with the way we crew stations and respond to incidents. I will explain what I mean by "get by" by use of an example that I was witness to. This is not a criticism of our volunteer members, but an example of how the current system is potentially dangerous. A fully volunteer brigade not far from Corio was responded to an undefined fire. In his wisdom the Captain of that brigade decided to turn out in an appliance by himself. On arrival to the incident he has come across a grass fire threatening structures, vehicles and other assets. He then called for 3 additional appliances. Other Brigades were then paged as per the pre-determined response tables. I was on duty with 6 other staff members at Corio, listening to the radio traffic. As the incident escalated, eventually pumpers were called for (approximately 1 hour into the job) and responded to the incident. At one point the Incident Controller reported to Vic Fire over the radio that he "just didn't have enough appliances" and that he would "just have to let it burn". Meanwhile, there were 7 on duty staff at Corio manning 3 appliances, within a 10-15 minute response standing idly by while assets were lost. To me this is not providing the best protection to our community who now all pay the Fire Services Levy as part of their rates. There has been a push to get staff into the area north of Corio for some time which has been met with great resistance from volunteer members in the area. It is my opinion that if staff were responded as support to the initial call that assets would have been spared as they would have responded in 90 seconds and been on scene within minutes.

As far as I can determine, the role of the CFA Volunteer will not change. As Fire Rescue Victoria employees at Corio, we would continue to work alongside and support the surrounding CFA Volunteers Brigades exactly as we do now. Volunteers will still be required to respond especially during the summer months to provide the surge capacity that they always have. The extra funding from the FSR can only improve the numbers by assisting volunteer recruitment and training. On a personal note, for my entire career to date, I have happily worked with volunteers at the brigades I have been stationed at. I have taken extra steps to assist with driver training and also with personal problems. I admire their commitment and fully support them.

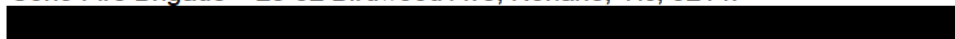
However the current pay dispute/EBA negotiations/Fire Services Review has taken its toll on the relationship between volunteers and career staff. I can honestly say that morale at work has never been at a lower point. Not only do we have to put up with almost daily articles in the papers, letters to the editor expressing clearly uninformed viewpoints, being branded as "union thugs" but even local politicians are spreading lies and rumours in parliament to fight the FSR (A.Katos). At my own father's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations just recently, I had to field an hour of questioning from relatives who live in country Victoria about the "union takeover" and the government trying to destroy the CFA. We are simply sick and tired of being used as a cheap political point scoring opportunity. This issue needs to be addressed and put to rest.

At the end of the day it's not about protecting peoples' rights to volunteer, it's about providing the best emergency response to the Victorian community that all pay a Fire Service Levy.

We have already started to see change in the way the fire services are funded and also an increase in staffing levels after the Black Saturday Royal Commission. However, further change is needed to move the fire services forward. The main point being that we need to better protect our communities. As far as I can see the Fire Services Review is taking the next step.



**Stewart Stephens** Leading Firefighter/ADI  
Corio Fire Brigade – 20-32 Birdwood Ave, Norlane, Vic, 3214.



Protecting lives and property



[cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au)



This email is for official use only. The information in this communication is privileged and confidential, intended only for the use of the individual or entity named. If you are not the intended recipient, any dissemination, copying or use of the information is strictly prohibited. Any personal information in this email must be handled in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and applicable laws. If you have received this transmission in error please inform us by return email and then delete it immediately from your system.