

Prue Purdey

From: HARRIS, David [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 29 June 2017 3:37 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Support of the Fire Service Reform and Presumptive Cancer Legislation.

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

My name is David Harris, I have been a firefighter with the MFB for the past 32 years and currently hold the rank of Commander. I am currently the Commander of Operational Training Development at VEMTC Craigieburn. Prior to joining the MFB in 1985 I was a volunteer at Eltham CFA for 2 years.

I am writing to you to give my perspective on the proposed fire service reform and to offer my support of both the reform and the presumptive legislation laws.

Victoria's two main fire services (MFB/CFA) were created over 125 years ago when it was decided we needed a professional urban service and a volunteer country service. Boundaries that were set then have not seen significant change in 60 years despite significant change to our population, urban density, major infrastructure and risk. No one would still consider Dandenong, Craigieburn or Melton to be classed as country and neither should people expect our fire services to still reflect this classification.

In 1984, as a Volunteer at Eltham, we persuaded the CFA to provide career staff at Eltham as it was identified that during week days we did not have sufficient volunteers available to respond to fire calls. This was due to the fact that the majority of volunteers at Eltham did not work in the area and in fact most worked in or close to the city. I am confident that with the urban spread of Melbourne this would be the case for the majority of urban growth areas now. The stress of not being able to provide fire cover was significant on the members and some actually took time off work to enable a response capability prior to career staff being stationed at Eltham.

I live in Greensborough, the boundary between MFB and CFA runs through Greensborough and therefore half of Greensborough is protected by a full time professional service and half protected by a fully volunteer service. Despite the best efforts and unquestionable community service by the volunteers, those living and working in the CFA area cannot be guaranteed a timely response. This response is more critical now than ever due to the changes in how our homes are built and furnished. Structure fires now grow much faster than years gone by and create more toxic smoke than before due to the building and furnishing materials we now use. Without a timely response of firefighters a fire will rapidly spread which will cause significant risk to the occupants, firefighters and the community in general. This also increases insurance premiums due to a greater loss.

Full time fire services are also able to provide emergency medical response which is the case with MFB firefighters and being implemented throughout the CFA career firefighters. This saves numerous lives and is a great service to the Victorian community.

Some of the main points I consider to be positives of the proposed reform are;

- Modernisation of the fire services to bring them in line with our growth and community expectations.
- The ability to increase Fire Rescue Victoria stations through review by a committee looking at urban growth, population density and risk.
- Safer response conditions for firefighters and the community.
- Surge capacity of volunteers being maintained by volunteer numbers not being changed. In fact, surge capacity over the last number of years has been better enabled by MFB firefighters covering CFA areas allowing the volunteers to attend campaign type fires without leaving their homes and communities unprotected. This would potentially increase.
- Volunteer roles would be enshrined under law,
- Pressure on the demand of volunteers in urban areas would be reduced.

Along with the reform the Government is also looking at introducing Presumptive Cancer Legislation. Due to exposure of the toxins I discussed earlier, firefighters have been proven to have an increased risk to a number of cancers. This legislation has been too long coming and I have seen too many work colleagues succumb to this hideous disease and have to deal with the financial burden of medical treatment on top of their health fight.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide my thoughts and respectfully urge you to support the proposed reform and presumptive cancer legislation.

I am more than happy for you to contact me directly should you like any further information of my personal experiences during my career or clarification around my email.

Kind regards,

David.

David Harris AFSM | Commander | Operational Training Development

Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board

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