

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

1. I am Brendon McKay

- Qualified Firefighter Hallam Fire Brigade
- CFA
- 5 yrs 6 months employed
- EMR , CBR Detection , Heavy Hazmat, USAR 2

2. I live in San Remo and work in Hallam.

3. I have volunteered in firefights in my community although I am not registered as a volunteer with my local brigade.

4. I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

I believe reform sets the community up better for the future in terms of adequate fire cover.

I currently live in a growing community that is completely reliant on a volunteer service. I have family members that are volunteers. My community and others in the Bass Coast area are seeing increased numbers of people living permantly in the area. In the holiday periods, population can swell tenfold. Major infrastructure in the area includes the Desalination plant, Penguin parade, schools, Wonthaggi Hospital, numerous accomodation venues.

Unfortunately numbers of suitably attributed and minded people seem to avoid volunteering. The local brigade relies upon a small core group to attend fires and other incidents.

The demographic of this group is of later years, has differing physical abilities and is of limited fire fighting experience in some cases.

I have volunteered as a firefighter at 2 separate incidents in the last 2 years. Both incidents were house fires. Both incidents started in 1 house that was completely destroyed then spread to adjoining properties.

At the first incident on 25 December 2015 the appliance (San Remo Tanker) that I drove to the incident was second on scene directly behind the San Remo pumper. This incident was in another brigade's area. There was a delayed response from this brigade. The drive from San Remo to the incident is approximately 15 mins. Fortunately all occupants had got themselves out of the dwellings.

The second incident was in my local community and I volunteered once again. Operations were hampered by poor knowledge of local water supplies, poor pumping

operations, inexperience with structural firefighting by crews, and a disregard for command.

Fortunately all occupants had got themselves out of their dwellings once again.

I compare this with the experience I have as a professional firefighter stationed in the outer east of Melbourne where fires are quite often extinguished in the room of origin, primary searches performed for occupants and adjoining properties rarely burnt. I have concerns that this current situation in volunteer only areas will not get better without reform. I have seen no evidence to counter my thoughts.

The independent district review panel is required so that deficiencies in a volunteer or staff system can be addressed in terms of firefighting performance and brigade support. After all, rate payers are paying for a service with the fire service levy. The type and level of service is so varied across the state. The Victorian community needs consistency. In volunteer only areas the volunteers (often the rate payers) are the ones providing the service. They are providing this under greater pressure than ever with increased risks due to population growth and at the scrutiny of the public for which they provide the service. I find this ironic, they are paying a levy for themselves.

Another point of concern I have is the level of divide between professional and volunteer firefighters. I believe it does exist, to different levels in different places but it does exist. As a professional firefighter that takes pride in my work I have found the last 2 years quite disheartening. To be labelled generally as a 'thug, lazy, overpaid, over rated, lucky, and greedy' to quote just a few within mainstream and social media, has offended me. I worked hard to get this job and I work hard at my job. To work alongside a volunteer fraternity that has made such comments, (and I know they are the minority) has and will continue to be a challenge.

I find it uncomfortable to become registered as a volunteer and know of other professional firefighters in my area that feel the same. I believe the proposed reform will help difuse current attitudes on both the volunteer and the professional sides of firefighting organisations and people can get on with their work or volunteering activities without the distraction they currently have.

Yours sincerely

Qff Brendon McKay

