

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

Good morning, my name is Cameron David McGregor and I am a Senior Station Officer with the Country Fire Authority.

I have been affiliated with CFA my whole life but have served 25 years with CFA 10 of these as a volunteer (Mildura, Paynesville and Bairnsdale Brigades) and 15 as a career firefighter/officer (Predominately but not limited to Doveton/Hallam, Dandenong, Morwell and Patterson River Fire Stations).

I am qualified as an Incident Controller, Operations Officer, AAIMS Level 2 Planning Officer, Level 2 Sector Commander, State Assistant Driving Instructor (ADI), LPG Response Specialist, Mobile Communications/Control Unit Supervisor, Emergency Medical Responder.

In my various positions I have been the Brigade Co-ordinator of Training and Development and Community Safety as well as supporting the role of Finance and Administration co-ord. I have also undertaken reviews of brigade management and undertaken a 2 year process to re-structure a brigade that was suffering from a lack of structure.

I am the recipient of the;

- National Emergency Medal 2009 Fires
- National Medal
- CFA Long Service Medal 20 Years

I have been involved with (in a firefighting or Co-ordinating role) the following major/large fires;

- Longford Gas Plant Explosion 1998
- Sydney Fires Deployment 2000
- 2002/3 Alpine Fires
- 2006/7 Great Alpine Fires
- Coopers Creek Fire
- Tri Tech Petrochemical Storage Fire – Dandenong South
- 2009 Black Saturday Fires
- Kilmore Fire
- Hazelwood Mine Fire

I reside locally to my appointed station (Patterson River) having been a resident of Bonbeach for the past 3 years and living locally for a further 12 months and take a deep personal approach to my community.

I also volunteer in my community with the Bonbeach Surf Lifesaving Club when I am an Active Life Saver, Student Educator and Parent Helper. In the recent past I have also been involved on the committee which established the Bonbeach Farmers Market which assists with fundraising for the Bonbeach Primary School where my daughter was a student until the end of last year.

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

- I was one of the original 12 members of the CFA/MFB exchange program. Established as a result of the Black Saturday Fires Royal Commission it was the duty of this group to begin the process of breaking down barriers of the “Silos” that existed within the organisations. Through hard work we began this process and have seen the resulting continuation of this from further exchange programs and strategic decisions being able to be made to suit both organisations. Furthermore the slow but continuing process to match equipment and work process to best serve our community was a key aim of this group. My aim as a change agent within this was to be able to harmonise the professional workgroup of CFA and MFB to be able to work across the existing boundaries as if they didn’t exist. This included reporting to the then Fire Services Commissioner (now EMV) and the Chief Fire Officers of both agencies and/or their Deputies. The Bill proposed will resolve many of these issues or bring to a head those which are still to be resolved.
- I have worked within or commanded those attending structure fires where I had no guaranteed support or worked outside SOP to attack fire where persons have been reported within the structure and placed my life and the lives of my crew in a precarious position. I have had to “work around” or delay operations due to members not being suitably qualified to undertake the tasks required for basic structural firefighting. Furthermore I have had operations hampered or delayed due to the failure of volunteer brigades to respond, including at one of Victoria’s listed Major Hazard Facilities. This is why I support the minimum requirement that two trucks with at least 7 career firefighters will be dispatched within 8 minutes.
- The alteration to Fire Rescue Victoria and the re-establishment of the referral panel will allow the state to reflect appropriately about its level of service to the community without the hang ups of pride held by either organization. The reflection through the eyes of community backed up with facts will take much of the pressure off the relationship between Victoria’s Professional Firefighters and Volunteer Firefighters. Furthermore, the roll out of Emergency Medical Response and Enhanced Rescue Capability will provide better outcomes to the members of the community involved in road trauma or suffering from an immediate health condition.
- Having worked with or been an active volunteer for 25 years, only 7 of these not at an integrated brigade, it is my honest opinion that the separation of the workgroups will only serve to advance the improvement of the CFA and their ability to provide Surge Capacity and continuing volunteer turnout. For most of my career industrial disputation has had the agency and its employees miss-directed from its core aim and disrupted the entire workforce, either volunteer or paid. Without this distraction the focus of what is best for CFA as a wholly volunteer organisation following the removal of the career firefighters from CFA to FRV will allow CFA volunteers to re-gain their autonomy and re-focus on how they best see fit to provide services to the community on their terms without unwanted distractions.

- For me personally and professionally, I am excited with the opportunities that come with the move to a FRV model. I have worked for both CFA and MFB and think that this is the best way forward. To harmonise the workforce and combine the collective professional attitudes and desire to reach world best practice as a Fire and Rescue agency will be the focus of many of those who take this journey. I believe that we will achieve a change in culture with the clash of the two agencies and this will require us to ask the hard questions of what method is best not just easiest.
- The past 6 years of dispute and attack on my livelihood and profession has tested my character and my desire to continue in this profession. It has caused stress, depression and disputation in my home and workplace, it has seen my workmates and volunteer members, who I work with daily, at loggerheads and friendships and working relationships tested to the brink and unfortunately beyond. It has seen me distracted from what should be important and that is my family and community and maintaining my health, both mental and physical. Up until recently it left me feeling like I was not wanted by my employer, where I was told at one point by a senior manager that all career staff are a “necessary evil” and would be happy to see the back of all of us.
- I could continue to write from hours, but I wish to keep this brief. I implore to your attention that this is a once in a generation opportunity to change how we support those who provide our emergency response capability. But more important we are able to review how we as a state provide emergency response to our community. I urge with my strongest recommendation for the committee to endorse the bill and allow the Firefighters and Emergency Responders of the state to get on with the business of providing the best service they can to the people who they choose to serve.

Yours sincerely,

Cameron David McGregor

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