

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is Tim Van Den Driest and I have been a professional fire fighter with the Country Fire Authority for 16 years, prior to my employment with CFA I was a CFA volunteer for 3 years. I am currently a Senior Station Officer with CFA and I am based at Rowville fire station, 1063 Wellington Rd Rowville.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

As previously stated I am based at Rowville CFA which is an integrated fire station consisting of both paid fire fighters as well as volunteers. In 2012 I was selected by CFA to assist with the transition of Rowville CFA from a fully volunteer fire brigade to the Integrated model of paid fire fighters supporting volunteers due to the increase in population and infrastructure in this suburb. My role as integration officer involved assisting Rowville volunteers through this transition period by training and preparing them so together we could serve our community and meet the challenges of an ever increasing workload.

I have been supporting Rowville now for a total of 5 years & in this time our call rate (the number of fires and incidents we attend) has doubled with this trend forecast to continue in the future. This increase in workload has had a significant impact on both volunteers and paid fire fighters. Volunteers, who are already busy with their own lives are being asked to contribute more and more putting added strain on their families as well as their own mental health.

Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this out dated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Rowville is one of these areas wrongly zoned. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the other 35 'country areas'.

These areas need to be modernised as they are now highly urbanised areas as part of the reform of the fire service. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career fire fighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

All Victorians, professional fire fighters and volunteer fire fighters, deserve a modern fire service that meets the needs of our growing communities to ensure safety for all stakeholders.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me and my team as fire fighters, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our rapidly growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our fire fighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed upon volunteer fire fighters.

I also respectfully ask that you give consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees and volunteers. This legislation ensures that all fire fighters are protected in the event of contracting specific cancers through protecting the community. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. This is very important to me and my colleagues.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to talk further about my experiences as a professional fire fighter and why this reform is so important.

Thank you for your time

Kind regards

Tim Van Den Driest
Senior Station officer
Country Fire Authority