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From: Glenn Mitchell [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 30 June 2017 12:36 AM
To: LCSC
Subject: Proposal that seeks to increase the CFA surge capacity

Ladies and gents,

I hope you are all well. I am an Army Reserve Major (ex-Australian Regular Army) who specialises in Logistics and Operations Management. I am also a career Leading Firefighter with the MFB. I have significant involvement in Victoria's Fire Services, stemming from my involvement in OPERATION VIC FIRES ASSIST, where I undertook a key role within the Australian Defence Force's Joint Task Force HQ which was responded to assist Victoria following Black Saturday and saw firsthand the CFA surge capacity deployed.

Having read the final report into the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, as well as a multitude of other documents released over the past few years indicating the requirement for organisational change, I feel adequately abreast of the issues currently involving the fire services (including the requirement for a surge capacity) and those which have plagued it for a number of years now.

There are many that feel as though a restructure of the fire services will destroy the ethos, integrity and independence of volunteer firefighters across Victoria, and would include a mass exodus of volunteers, particularly from the outer Metropolitan regions. What the VFBV and other issue motivated groups are doing is opposing the reforms without giving factual evidence or providing an alternate concept which would seek to improve the fire services. Essentially they are being obstructionist to positive change and are not working with other entities for the betterment of Victoria.

There has been a real push by some groups over a number of years to see the amalgamation of the CFA and the MFB into one service, despite the Royal Commission stating that this could undermine the strengths of each agency. Back in 2009, the Royal Commission cited Mr Bibby's comment that 90% of the people who work under the integrated model work well together. I wish this was still the case, however you will likely find this number significantly decreased today as a result of in-fighting and the politicisation of the fire services over the past 18 months. As a result of the politicisation, many in the fire services now see the integrated model as an unworkable solution fraught with unnecessary litigation each time an EBA is proposed (thanks to Federal changes to the Fair Work Act). This proposed restructure should seek to align similar fire services with each other. That is, the CFA career firefighters (who have become urban firefighting and emergency response specialists) will be amalgamated with the MFB (urban firefighting and emergency response specialists) to create FRV, and the CFA is to remain as the pre-eminent rural, country and bushfire specialist organisation. This will create two very distinct organisations each with specialist and complimenting skills to combat a range of emergencies throughout Victoria, thereby creating a safer Victoria, also taking into account the differing risks that urban and rural areas face. This model is a world class system that would modernise our Fire Services.

There has been considerable urban growth in Victoria since the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission was published, yet even back in 2009, it was noted that the population exposed to fire on the urban fringe is growing and the demographics are changing. It also noted that the shortcomings identified in connection with Black Saturday cannot be overcome simply by doing more of the same and that focus should not be on refinement of existing arrangements, even if done better (most would read this to say 'change in some form in the fire services is required' and the current model cannot continue to be used given the expanding metropolitan boundaries). With this in mind, the proposed legislation seeks to improve overall response to emergencies, and through restructure, will improve operational capability for a large majority of incidents and for the majority of Victorians. This will largely be achieved through the re-drawing of MFD boundaries (critical to providing the services required by the community), a role recommended by the Royal Commission to be undertaken by the Fire Commissioner with responsibility for providing periodic advice to the government on the basis of triggers, frequency and criteria approved by government. To date,

this has not occurred as per previous recommendations and community expectations, however, this legislation will seek to finally address this recommendation.

There cannot be any reasonable argument to state that the boundary changes are not long overdue. It was however noted by the Royal Commission that such boundary changes would lead to a significant increased cost to the community due to following the MFBs more costly funding system. You may have a sufficient understanding of the funding models currently employed, and if so, would be aware that those residing in the MFD actually pay a significantly lower fire services levy than those like myself who reside in the current CFA area. So going by this evidence, a change of boundaries would lead to those in the urban fringe likely to come under an FRV area actually paying less than they currently do, as long as current MFB funding models are followed with the future FRV. As some have often stated, 'a better service for less'.

The redrawing of boundaries was opposed by the Royal Commission as it was perceived that this redrawing would remove the urban CFA stations altogether, and with it, the strong integrated model and large urban volunteer base which is one of the main strengths of the CFA and comprises the critical and cost-effective surge capacity that Victoria requires. However, the state government's proposed legislation stipulates that all 1220 current CFA Brigades will remain, albeit with some likely to fall within the future FRV area of responsibility, once a review of boundaries is conducted.

It is all well and good to say this, however there is the inherent risk that if those Volunteer Brigades located within a future FRV area are mismanaged, it may well lead to some volunteer firefighters feeling as though their service is no longer required, as FRV firefighters would have responded to calls they would have previously been managing themselves. Despite the community being provided with a more responsive and guaranteed service, as well as the increasingly important EMR capability, some volunteers may feel as though they are no longer looked at in the same regard by the community and therefore may be unhappy with the changes and leave. At the end of the day, everyone should want the best possible emergency response for their community, and a career service (such as the proposed FRV model) definitely delivers on this. We shouldn't let egos and nostalgia in the way of what is best for the community.

As a Defence Logistician, who also has a working knowledge of the fire services, in particular the critical capabilities and vulnerabilities of the respective services, I have looked into the viability of the following CFA model for those Brigades which may fall within a future FRV area and its measure in increasing Victoria's surge capacity. My proposal seeks to take the positives from the Defence Reserve capability of pooling like-minded personnel from regional centres and metropolitan cities to create capability for Australia, and plug it into a future CFA construct that my forecasts indicate would actually increase volunteer numbers and not reduce it like is being reported by many. Granted the volunteers would not be doing the same as they are now, but with FRV covering those area's needs, it would free them up to focus on their surge capability. As an ADF Officer, I am often tasked with solving complex problems involving manning and capability and instead of merely pointing out flaws in other's plans, seek to look at alternative changes that would seek to enhance service delivery.

The proposal seeks to create CFA Training Brigades, much like an Army Reserve unit, dotted around urban areas of Victoria which would likely fall within a future FRV area. These Training Brigades would seek to pool resources from neighboring existing CFA Brigades in areas covered by FRV and do away with the current requirement to have volunteers reside or work within 4 minutes of the station in order to meet current Service Delivery Standards and therefore volunteer as a firefighter. This will open up the ability for someone who resides or works outside of this 4 minute window to volunteer as a firefighter. For example, a Training Brigade at Bayswater (Eastern suburbs of Melbourne) could pool resources from current Brigades at Boronia, Mooroolbark, Lilydale, Chirnside Park, Wonga Park, South Warrandyte, Warrandyte, Montrose and The Basin and allow those willing to drive the distance (say from Blackburn, Box Hill or as far away as Collingwood or Hawthorn) to parade at Bayswater on a Tuesday evening and Sunday morning (much like the volunteers currently do) and train in the CFA's specialty capability of Bushfire firefighting. There are many citizens who reside in the current Metropolitan Fire District and would love to be able to volunteer as a firefighter, and such a construct would allow for these individuals to give back to the greater Victorian community through volunteering in one of these Training Brigades. By focusing on the core capability of the CFA, and not on every aspect of firefighting as is currently done, the future urban CFA would have an even greater Bushfire firefighting capability that if effectively managed and overseen by suitably trained and knowledgeable individuals, would create a better trained and better equipped surge capacity for all Victorians.

When a day is anticipated to be of a high fire danger rating, as designated by the CFA Chief Officer, available personnel from the Training Brigade could place their name on a Strike Team list and muster at the Training Brigade (in this case at Bayswater) on the morning of a high fire danger period and take their place on a Strike Team truck. This would also ensure a planned response will include an even spread of skill levels so as to provide a greater response capability, better harnessing strengths and mitigating weaknesses of individuals to create effective teams. When/if a fire requires Victoria's surge capacity, these Training Brigades could deploy these Strike Teams within 90 seconds to anywhere in Victoria in order to support the firefighting efforts of those rural/country CFA Brigades, whilst also acknowledging that those urban areas they are deploying from are being provided with sufficient protection from allocated FRV firefighters. It will also ensure that a roster could be managed amongst all the available volunteers to ensure an even spread of individuals throughout the campaign, and not a mass surge at the start, petering out to a small dedicated group with no other commitments as is often the case today (the Hazelwood Mine Fire is a perfect example of this).

The current system of a surge capacity often has the most senior, knowledgeable and qualified Brigade personnel from these urban Brigades deploy on Strike Teams (often en mass), thus leaving their suburbs with a reduced level of protection and often without sufficient capacity to conduct an internal attack and rescue within a structure fire. The current model also does not have great levels of control over this surge capacity, with many self responding from their towns to fight at the big fire. The proposed model above is one of many ways that the CFA could ensure Victoria's surge capacity is developed and managed effectively to create a world-renowned fire service for the betterment of all Victorians, whilst not neglecting those urban areas. Whilst this model does not have the CFA volunteers in those FRV areas responding to Firecalls on a daily basis (an area covering up to 10 current CFA Volunteer Brigades could be covered by a few FRV trucks who are able to have a larger turn out area and also provide guaranteed response and the minimum expected capability required to protect the community with no training shortfalls), it does give the community a greater level of protection through having career firefighters with minimum and known qualifications and standards attending calls in their designated areas.

At the end of the day, I, like many others, trust the opinions and recommendations of the MFB and CFA hierarchy and the Fire Services Commissioner over any issue motivated group or political party. With Craig Lapsley, Steve Warrington, Paul Stacchino and their senior staff all in support of the reforms, I trust that the proposals are both warranted and in the best interest of all Victorians. These reforms will also enshrine the CFA as a volunteer organisation and in my opinion and the opinion of many others, will only seek to enhance the ethos, integrity and independence of volunteer Firefighters across Victoria.

Regards

Glenn Mitchell

