

Good day committee members and thank you for this opportunity to input into the reform of Victorian Fire Services.

I am Jason Halls, I am a Leading Firefighter with the CFA. I have been a member of CFA for 23 years in both Volunteer and Career capacities. I have been awarded a 20-year service medal and the National Emergency medal for the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. I have also been awarded a Chief Officer's commendation for the rescue of 14 elderly residents from a nursing home fire July 2004.

I Volunteered at Mooroolbark Fire Brigade from 1994 until 2002. I was an extremely active member in all facets of the brigade from operational response to committees for new trucks and equipment and open days/community engagement activities etc. In those days Mooroolbark was a medium urban area that was doing around 300+ emergency calls a year. It was supported by MFB station 26 at Croydon in some parts of the brigade's assignment area and Volunteer brigades supported the other areas such as Lilydale, Montrose and Mt Evelyn.

In 2001 I joined the career ranks of the CFA. I started my employment at Fiskville state training college for an intense 16 week recruit training course where I lived on site Monday to Friday and went home on weekends. The recruit course was not a 'clock on at 0900hrs and clock off at 1700hrs' type of course.

We lived and breathed Firefighter training the entire time we were on site at the Fiskville College. We would generally be training from 0630hrs, for physical fitness training, then starting theory and practical Firefighting training at 0800-1730hrs. After dinner we would generally find ourselves either studying for exams or doing more 'out of hours' practical training to better our understanding of what we were being taught and to hone our new craft.

Just before I started my training at Fiskville I was of the opinion that because I was already a Volunteer for CFA that my training and knowledge was already at a very high level, and found myself questioning what will they be able to teach me, I've been doing this already for years.

How wrong and naïve I was. I am now a Leading Firefighter, I have had to complete 57 competencies to allow me to then be assessed by exams and practical demonstrations in emergency management to obtain this promotion.

My Volunteer counterpart, a Lieutenant, only has to complete 10 competencies and then obtain that position by way of a vote at the Fire Station. There is no exam/assessment undertaken to see that the person can actually fulfil the role and now having been on both sides of the fence the training is not the same and sadly nor are the standards.

The differences are worlds apart. This is no fault of the Volunteers but the fault of the outdated CFA system. VFBV proclaim our Volunteers are trained to the same level as my colleagues, and myself that they are just unpaid professional Firefighters. This is not true and is evident in the amount of competencies required plus the additional exams etc required by professional Firefighters.

After graduating from Fiskville I was stationed at Springvale Fire station where I spent the first 18 months of my career. I was then transferred to the Doveton Fire station for six months before successfully completing a competitive selection and interview process to gain a permanent position at Dandenong Fire station as a Firefighter.

In my previous 16 years as a professional Firefighter I have gained many qualifications, some of which are as follows:

- Leading Firefighter Promotion after a rigorous training and assessment process
- Heavy Rescue operator qualification
- Ladder Platform 42m qualification
- Teleboom 18m qualification
- Urban Search and Rescue qualification
- Confined space qualification
- Steep angle rope rescue qualification
- Chemical Biological Radiological qualification
- Trench rescue qualification
- EMR Emergency medical responder qualification

**I believe that there will be no impact to the current fire service delivery with the implementation of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) based on my following reasons.**

It has been proposed by the Government that there will be no change to the current response arrangement for Professional and Volunteer Firefighters. The only impact will be a positive impact in the long term for the people of Victoria.

On a regular basis I am witness to many Volunteer brigades failing to respond to emergency calls. I hear it on the radio in all parts of District 08 Southern Metropolitan region, where I am stationed and sadly I am affected by it personally when I respond to calls in my own, or in supporting areas.

Dandenong fire station is the busiest CFA fire station attending more than 2,500 calls every year. Our nearest other CFA stations are Noble Park (Volunteers), Keysborough (Volunteers), Springvale (Integrated), Hallam (Integrated) and Rowville (Integrated) stations.

Dandenong is also supported by 58 Volunteers, however there are only about 5-6 members who would respond to more than 5 of the 2500 calls per year. Of those members, qualifications in rescue, breathing apparatus, Hazmat response and structural fire fighting etc. are lacking.

Sadly, with the ever-increasing population boom occurring in our state there is an ever-increasing strain being put on our Volunteer Firefighting service. Noble Park is rarely able to respond to calls in their own area due to falling member numbers and crew availability. Keysborough is in a similar position.

I have been to two calls in the past twelve months that were reported fires across the road from the Noble Park Fire Station, however, Noble Park failed to respond before ourselves at Dandenong and Springvale arrived on scene to deal with the emergency. We both travelled more than 8 minutes from our stations to attend to an emergency where the local brigade could not attend across the road.

In January of 2016 I was on nightshift when we were called to a car accident with persons trapped at Cheltenham Rd Dandenong South. This was a very complex and traumatic event to respond to.

When I arrived on scene in the Rescue truck I saw that there was a car wrapped around a tree, it had impacted at a very high speed. There were three female occupants trapped, another had already been ejected from the vehicle.

We had Keysborough responded to this call as standard practice, however they failed to respond. We needed to respond another pumper for Firefighting support. Given the seriousness and scale of the rescue we also needed rescue support.

Dandenong Volunteers were responded at the same time as we were, however they too failed to respond. It took another 2 pager messages to be sent out and 45 minutes later before they could muster a crew to respond to support us in the extrication.

One of the trapped occupants was already deceased however in order to remove the other two trapped occupants we had to extricate the deceased victim first. This was a time consuming and difficult extrication.

We removed the deceased and rear seat passenger and got to work on removing the front passenger. We worked frantically with limited support in an extremely difficult situation.

It took a further 50 minutes to release the front passenger, she was still alive when released but she was very, very sick. Sadly a day later she passed away.

The reason I am citing these calls and going into detail is that sadly it highlights some of the current failings our outdated fire service delivery is providing to our ever-increasing population in Victoria. What is even more disappointing is that these outer metropolitan areas are still being deemed as country areas of Victoria.

Our Volunteers do a wonderful job in protecting our community, but to a certain point. Our Volunteers are being overloaded with expectations that they will respond to every emergency. When CFA first started, places like Keysborough would have been called out around 20 times per year. That call rate is now in the many hundreds and our Volunteers cannot keep up with the demand.

Most people used to work in the same area they lived in; this is now a thing of the past for the most part and is having a major impact on the availability of Volunteer response. Family responsibilities, work commitments and general day to day pressures are affecting our Volunteer's ability to provide a first world fire service.

Worldwide Volunteering is being heavily impacted upon, CFA is not immune to this and something needs to be done to address this outdated situation we find ourselves in.

Part of the proposal is to have a reference board that will investigate Volunteer brigades that have a high call rate/large and increasing population/extensive risk and give them and the community the service and the support they deserve by establishing FRV stations where required.

A prime example here is Narre Warren Volunteer Fire Station. They are an extremely busy brigade and are sometimes overwhelmed by a very high call rate. They are however refusing to allow career staff to operate from their station on a 24/7 basis.

They expect their members to stay at the station on a roster based system so they can try and meet the demand of some 1000+ emergency calls every year, even sleeping at the station which has no provisions for sleeping. They sleep on camp stretchers in the meeting room just to try and meet community expectations.

This reference board will have great impacts on reducing the fatigue put upon Volunteers to have to respond to hundreds of emergency calls every year but will allow for them to still serve their communities and to provide the surge capacity needed in times of large scale fires/emergencies.

Opposition leader Matthew Guy recently announced that population growth is our greatest challenge and he wants to manage and relieve the stress of Melbourne's exploding population by enticing people out to regional parts of the state.



**Matthew Guy** ✓  
11 April 2016 · 🌐

Victoria's population growth is our greatest challenge and our greatest opportunity.

We've launched our Victorian Population Taskforce to look at how we manage this growth and provide the job opportunities, infrastructure and services we need in the years ahead.

Tim Smith, my Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Population Policy, will chair this taskforce.

Every year, Victoria's population grows by around 100,000 people, with 92 per cent of that growth in Greater Melbourne.

Victoria needs a whole of government approach to regionalising our population growth, taking pressure off Melbourne and its infrastructure, and growing all of our state through an incentive-based Victorian population policy.

This is about jobs, infrastructure and the way we live. We cannot continue to grow the way we have the last 30 years for the next 30 years.

We look forward to hearing your views.

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By his own admission he acknowledges that our population and high density living is growing at an alarming rate, why should it be the responsibility of a Volunteer Fire service to protect these people. Our Volunteers have jobs to hold down and families to care for. It's about time Victoria took a step forward in a positive direction to provide a better fire service model.

There will not be any effect on Volunteer engagement or participation with the proposed Fire Rescue Victoria. If anything, it will strengthen what we currently have, to not support the restructure of Victorian fire service will however impact dramatically on the morale of both Staff and Volunteer members of CFA and it will allow the continuation of an outdated 1950's fire service model that doesn't live up to modern community expectations

The Government has promised \$56 million to assist integrated brigades with the changes that will come with the FRV introduction plus a further \$100 million for extra training, equipment and facilities for all of CFA. If this proposal gets voted down, CFA Volunteers miss out on \$156 million extra funds, but more so the ability to access presumptive legislation for firefighting cancers.

For the last 18 months I have witnessed the campaigns for 'Hands off the CFA'. The Government of the day has acknowledged the issues and is offering to do exactly that, take 'Hands off the CFA' and restore it to its former glory of being a world class Volunteer Firefighting organisation, protected from union interferences and the added costs associated with having to renumerate its Professional Firefighting members.

Volunteers in the 1165 brigades (non-integrated stations) will not be impacted by the introduction of FRV in the immediate, near or distant future. The CFA Volunteers at the 35 CFA integrated stations will not be impacted by the introduction of FRV in the immediate, near or distant future.

What Fire Rescue Victoria will do is create a better working environment for the CFA Volunteers in rebuilding the original identity of CFA. Current relationships at Dandenong fire station between Volunteer and Professional members will not be impacted. We have very good working relationships both on the fire ground and around the station and I know that this will not change.

In closing, I cannot recommend the introduction of Fire Rescue Victoria enough. It is long overdue! Victoria's fire services are operating under a model that is over 70 years old and in that time our population has increased by nearly 2,897,000 people. We need a modern day fire service to be able to protect and better support our modern day Victoria.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Regards

Jason Halls

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