

30 June 2017

Fire Services Bill Select Committee

E: [LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au)

Dear Fire Services Bill Select Committee Members,

**RE: Victorian Fire Services Reform and Legislation**

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission and allowing me to express my support for the Proposed Fire Services Reform and associated legislation, as recently passed by the Victorian State Government in the lower house.

My name is John Cappellano and I have been a professional firefighter with the MFB for 28 years. I am a Senior Station Officer and I am currently based at Sunshine Fire Station.

The fact is that Victoria's fire service is operating under a dated and fractured model. The boundaries have not changed in 60 years.

This outdated system has 35 areas that are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite the fact that they are now heavily urbanised residential as well as commercial - Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some places that are still currently zoned as "country".

The urban sprawl has significantly moved outwards and will continue to do so. It is quoted in the recent 2016 census results that "Melbourne is set to overtake Sydney as the country's largest city. The latest data shows the Victorian capital grew by 1859 people per week between 2011 and 2016."

Many of these highly urbanised areas desperately need this new reform where a rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks, is the minimum standard needed.

I believe that the main aim of this new reform is to deliver the best service possible for our community now and for the future and to keep the people of Victoria safe. Fixing and modernising the fire service, in consultation with all major parties, is a positive step forward.

It will also ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls .

I value and respect all the work that volunteers do for their communities. I have personally worked closely with volunteers in the past, but through no fault of their own, and at times not having the right qualifications, prevents them from being able to help career firefighters in the initial stages of an incident.

I have personally experienced this situation when confronted with a house fire in Caroline Springs a few years ago where volunteers were on scene but were not able to assist the crews that were already inside the burning house.

While crews were performing an internal search as well as attacking the fire, they needed to be relieved by other firefighters as soon as possible. Unfortunately the volunteers that were on scene did not have the required Breathing Apparatus qualifications and informed me that they could not enter the building. I then had to send a request for extra MFB crews, which took further 10 minutes for them to attend, in order to have enough personnel to mitigate the house fire safely.

Volunteers do what they can when they can but with family, work commitments and age, at times are not in a true position to keep up with today's Emergency Service demands.

In saying this, there is absolutely nothing in these reforms that will stop volunteers responding to emergencies, as they do now whether rural or urban. However, in an urban environment with a large volume of calls, their appropriate and timely response cannot be guaranteed, this fact is evident in call data where 'failed to respond' and 'delayed' responses are common.

I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the Proposed Fire Services Reform. All Victorian firefighters, whether they are professional or volunteers, deserve a modern fire service that will meet the needs of our growing communities. This is very important to me and my colleagues, so I respectfully ask that you give serious consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect all fire service employees.

This will mean to have the resources to fight fires faster, not having to work as a single appliance crew for an unsafe and unacceptable amount of time and limiting the time all firefighters are exposed to the fire toxins as appropriate resources will be at the fire.

These reasons go to the heart of what brings about the need for presumptive legislation in the first place.

The reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of the people you represent and all communities in our growing state. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. We are all entitled to a modern, realistic and professional fire service. It is the core responsibility of any Government to provide basic services such as Health, Education and SAFETY.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of my submission further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

John Cappellano