

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

Inquiry into the Firefighters' presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment (reform) bill 2017.

My name is [REDACTED] and I have been involved with the CFA for just under 20 years, including 18 as a volunteer and just under 2 as a career firefighter. During this time I have spent 10 as a Lieutenant, including 8 as the Brigade Training Manager responding to over 2000 calls during this time, I am a recipient of the National Emergency Medal for the 2009 campaign fires but the majority of my response has been to local brigade calls.

I live in Cranbourne, a part of Cranbourne that cannot be supported within a time critical 8 minute response due to the location of surrounding brigades.

I request that my name is withheld for this submission.

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

- We require 7 on the fire ground for our own work place safety, this consists of an Incident Controller, a Pump Operator, a Safety Officer and 4 x BA operators. The station I work out of is regularly supported by fully volunteer brigades, and unfortunately too often they cannot respond the appliance with suitable crewing if they respond at all. After waiting for them to confirm this (between 6 and 8 minutes) we have to respond another appliance, normally another integrated station) to get the required crew to the fire ground.
- The 2 career appliance response guarantees this right crew mix on the fire ground, this means the community can be better protected, the most dramatic example of this is having 2 crews in BA searching for missing persons, but the more common scenario is we have 2 crews working in BA to reduce the amount of damage caused by fire a lot quicker. This means fire contained to a kitchen stove top or room of origin instead of a whole house being destroyed by fire.
- Having all career firefighters in FRV will have no impact on volunteers reported surge capacity. If we look at what surge capacity is, this is an ability to respond to a major fire generally requiring long distance travel for 3 to 5 day deployment, it is not to do with day to day response to calls.
- Volunteers will still be supported in the same way they are now, there will not be any change from this unless it is requested by volunteers to relocate from integrated stations, and we will continue to support their training and development.
- Areas that currently have career firefighters are not country areas, they are major suburbs or regional centres and face the same risk as metropolitan Melbourne, the link of MFB and CFA career firefighters will enhance the community safety through improved training and service delivery, a link that is far more aligned than that of a CFA career firefighter to a volunteer firefighter.
- The reform will allow the CFA to focus all of its funding on improving volunteers experience and training, they will no longer be subject to surviving off the funds that flow through after running costs are met at career locations.
- At present there is no formal guidelines to determine what suburbs have career firefighters outside of the MFB boundary, this allows for political interference into where career

firefighters are despatched to, as an example, one of the largest growing municipalities in Victoria is Casey, it only has coverage from Cranbourne and Hallam, this leaves a major hole in the areas of Beaconsfield, Berwick, Lyndhurst, Narre Warren North, Cranbourne South and Clyde North. The residents in this area, the business owners in this area and the public that pass through it deserve to know that the emergency services in the area has been established without prejudice from political parties. If volunteers service this area and meet the service delivery requirements, fantastic, but at present there is no process on what occurs when this does not happen.

- Finally, the most critical reason I support fire service reform is the political interference from the Federal Government, supported by the VFBV, who amended an Act under the false banner of protecting volunteers from union take over. The keys points that Minister for Employment, Senator Cash wants to use this amended Act for as per the correspondence sent to the CFA from Ashurst Australia have large sections that has nothing to do with volunteers, only used to attack the rights of career firefighters. These rights include rostering, minimum manning, consultation, dispute resolution, classifications, career paths and opportunities, road accident rescue capability and the training framework that takes us from Recruits to Operations Officer. I want to be able to have a fair and reasonable ability to negotiate without spiteful interference from political parties. The interference from political parties has gone on far too long, this reform will end it.

I have also listed below some examples of my personal experiences which demonstrates the failures of the current system:

- Change has not been something that has been accepted by the volunteer body in the past, I have experienced first-hand with the below examples:
 - I was a volunteer at Cranbourne when it was a volunteer only station, the brigade management team at the time had started to look at the long term needs for the brigade, this had included recent responses that did not meet community requirements by either not responding or not responding with a crew that would be able to attack the fire when on scene. Our first avenue for assistance was to contact the CFA and VUFBA (later merged with VRFBV to form VFBV), a meeting was set up at Amstel Golf Club to discuss. Main context of the meeting was how as a BMT we needed to do everything possible to avoid any discussion of integration at Cranbourne as this would inevitably lead to the removal of volunteers in the area, they would never get to hold a hose line or wear breathing apparatus again. Strategies were set up to avoid any discussion of integration, this included Doveton (now Hallam) being responded to calls during the day (who could not possibly be on scene within 8 minutes) and a suggestion that members discuss taking rostered sick days from work or using some annual leave to provide coverage. This lasted for 6 months before some of the BMT, myself included, had enough, we had to push hard but eventually sought integration at Cranbourne, taking a further 5 years before manning started at Cranbourne. What eventuated was not the end of volunteers in Cranbourne, it developed well, gaining a reputation of being one of the best integrated stations in the organisation, skills went up and we still maintained frontline firefighting and regularly provided crews for the “surge capacity”.

- After the Linton enquiry due to the disastrous situation that led to the death of 5 volunteer firefighters, a minimum skills training package was developed for volunteers, this was also responded to by the volunteer representative body that it would be the end of volunteers in the CFA, yes some volunteers did leave, but only because they did not want to complete training to a suitable standard but not anywhere near the numbers projected.
- As mentioned earlier, I live in Cranbourne an area that has an integrated station, however we are essentially in no man's land between Langwarrin and Cranbourne stations, neither could get to our house in 8 minutes, a proper review panel would be responsible for this and making sure the right level of coverage is available in the right areas.
- Surge capacity in the context of this reform has no relevance, surge capacity as emphasised as the core of the VFBV's argument is simply about having people available to respond to campaign fires, it holds no relevance in a discussion of fire service delivery through suburban Melbourne and regional centres, in actual fact, if surge capacity was an issue, this could simply be protected by putting a station in a municipality with a couple of tankers in it available to respond as required to these events. Standard response (over 98% of calls) does not involve surge capacity.
- Surge capacity is also something of a myth, there are a lot of people on CFA records that do not actually respond to any calls, even though they are listed as operational members, what reported information does not reveal is the crewing of responding appliances. Often the surge capacity response is only of 2 or 3 members and at times only a driver responding. These crews then have to be cross crewed with other appliances to meet a safe working environment.
- We hear a lot that volunteers do the same training as career firefighters, this is a loose version of the truth, the training that volunteers do does have the same minimum standard as what career firefighters do, however they do not complete anywhere the amount of training subjects that a career firefighter will do. After 18 years as a volunteer, my training would not cover requirements of Certificate II Public Safety (Firefighting Operations). When I have completed my 3rd year as a career firefighter I will be at a level of Certificate III Public Safety (Firefighting Operations) and moving into Certificate IV

As a final word, political parties need to seriously look at the below and determine why they know more than experts if they vote down this reform:

- Chief Officer Warrington of the CFA is in support of this, he acknowledges the change will have a few issues along the way that will need to be ironed out, but it is still a positive move for the community
- EMV Commissioner Craig Lapsley is in support of the reform
- CEO of AV has come out in support of the reform
- A number of volunteers in urban areas are in support of the reform, publically questioning why the VFBV is not listening to them.
- This reform is not going to affect the community in an adverse way, there will undoubtedly be some minor changes to volunteers in the areas that will become FRV, but what will not be affected is their ability to train and respond to calls.

I do thank you for taking the time to read this submission, if you require any further information, please feel free to contact myself on [REDACTED]

Regards

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