

David Gibson

Qualified Firefighter (MFB)



My name is David Gibson and I am a full time professional firefighter for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. I have been with the MFB for four years and am currently stationed at FS30 in Templestowe.

I love my job, I worked extremely hard to get into the brigade, it involved a four year “interview process” before I was accepted to join recruit course 112. This was one of the proudest moments of my life. Everyone in this job has gone through a similar process, we are all aware of the personal sacrifices we have made to become fire-fighters, but I have found comfort in speaking to my colleagues knowing they too made sacrifices and had to prove themselves again and again for what is, when broken down, a job interview.

When I started in the MFB I lived with my parents in Wantirna, about a five minute drive from Knox City Shopping Centre, Knox Private Hospital, the East link freeway and a multitude of local primary and secondary schools. So you can imagine my surprise when I looked up my house on the MFB boundary map which revealed we lived in a “country” area. How can my suburb and the neighbouring suburbs, where my friends and family live be considered country? I was shocked and still am today to think that if my loved ones called 000 for a fire, that they may not get the same instant despatch of two crewed pumpers that I respond with every single day. Or if that emergency happened on a public holiday or a busy Saturday night, that there was potential for only one trained crew to arrive with no back up.

Professional fire fighters are a unique mix of people from all walks of life. I work with tradespeople, doctors, CEOs, office clerks and defence force service people. But the one thing we all have in common is the love of our job, to help strangers at their lowest lows and try to help right the wrong that has caused the emergencies we respond to every shift. I say every shift because it is a 24/7, day and night profession and at any permanent fire station a fully trained crew in medical, hazmat, fire and rescue is ready to answer any call for help at a moment’s notice.

Currently at Templestowe I work at what the MFB call a district border station. We share boundaries with CFA professionals and CFA volunteers. This means that if an emergency occurs we can respond with anyone from MFB, CFA, SES, VICPOL and Ambulance Victoria depending on the emergency. The majority of the time this interoperability works well as each service knows who is “incident control” at different points of the emergency. For example, at a house fire the fire brigade will be in control of the scene until deemed safe to hand over to police for evidence. I have seen firsthand when this has not worked and when an MFB appliance has responded and arrived on scene into a CFA volunteer area before the CFA volunteer appliance has even left the station. I am certain that the person whose electrical transformer box that was on fire did not care that we arrived first. I know they did not care that the CFA volunteers covering their house failed to respond. All they cared

about was that after dialling 000 for help they got the fastest and best trained response possible. If this fire then spread up the overhanging tree and proceeded to the neighbouring property we had the potential for a fully involved house fire in a suburban area with three fire-fighters on scene to deal with it. This is not enough; we most certainly would have lost that house and then potentially all neighbouring properties that become exposures to the fire. This is unacceptable.

The current fire service boundaries are out of date. The current response times can be improved. The way we are currently structured, risks lives and properties every single day this drags out. We have the people in place, we have the stations already manned 24/7. What we are delaying is the improved training capabilities and the increased response from a unified brigade. We need every fire-fighter on the same page so that in an emergency we can concentrate on our task at hand and potentially save both life and property.

When I first joined the job four years ago, I completed basic training and was given fair warning of the pranks or tricks people may attempt when we eventually got to our first fire station. These help to build comradery between crews and it also helps us deal with forgetting the trauma and suffering we can be exposed to every shift. Nobody warned me about the need for fire service restructure and the effect it may have on me and my colleagues. Slowly over four years I have watched colleagues become jaded and frustrated with the process and the over politicising of our workplace environment. In this job we have and will always see things that I would not wish upon my enemies. I have witnessed firsthand the mental toll this has taken on some of my strongest colleagues. I do not want recognition for what I have seen nor done, I know what I signed up for. I just want to know that whilst I risk everything to help others that I am also being backed up the fastest and safest way possible. I want to know that a minimum of seven trained and qualified fire-fighters are being responded to every emergency so that I can do my job without having any thoughts in the back of my mind about who is or who is not going to turn out for this emergency.

We as the state of Victoria need fire service reform.