

Kirra Vanzetti

From: HALLORAN, Thomas [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 30 June 2017 3:25 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Fire Services Reform Committee submission. LFF Halloran.

Leading Fire Fighter Tom Halloran

Relevant qualifications including Long Duration BA, UAV, Structural Fire Fighting Instructor, Cert IV Training Assessment.

[REDACTED]

Please accept below my submission for consideration by the Fire services reform committee.

I do not require Confidentiality.

I would prefer if the MFB and CFA stay as independent entities.

It might be considered hyperbole the value fire fighters place on the work family, or "brotherhood" as Hollywood depicts it, for me however our family is real.

The name 'MFB' that we work under is a symbol of our organisation, but far more importantly in my eyes the work and sacrifice of our team that it represents since its incarnation. The same applies to members I know in the CFA both professional and volunteer.

It seems shallow but to lose this is not just losing a name but the history that it represents. All the amazing achievements and feats that have been accomplished under this name will go with the old name. 'War stories' as they're most affectionately known and recounted, that define us as fire fighters and allow us the right to stand alongside those who have christened themselves through fire, giving us exclusive membership to our family. I, like many fire fighters would not want this changed. Through pride of achievement, I do not want change; I'm a Fitzroy fan, not a Brisbane fan.

There are currently just under 30,000 fire departments in the USA. In Australia, we have far less, around a dozen. The fire departments in the USA, both professional and volunteer, have rich histories that have developed since the bucket brigades of 1678. All, like Victoria, started with volunteers. However as communities grew, so did the need for professional fire fighters.

Changing departments or brigades if you will is a very difficult situation as many have multi-generational members who, like me, would prefer not to give up the name and what it represents. People generally reject change on a whim - the older the traditions the harder the change regardless of the industry or club. Without getting into specifics, the American professional fire fighting staff has operational roles that were effective in the 1950s yet are now considered out of date in the current day due to changed fire behaviour. Many American fire fighters, even those in the New York Fire Department, still take pride in the fact that their father, grandfather or great grandfather was a 'Hook and Ladder' man or a Rescue man

or a Hose man. These roles and the lack of flexibility they offer in the present day dynamic fire environment without doubt have led to multiple fire fighter fatalities in the USA over the last 20 years. Only recently are we seeing American fire departments change their basic approach to fire fighting, yet, even this is an extremely difficult task and one met with much opposition.

What I am highlighting here is that the culture and tradition within fire departments and brigades, although key to forming a great team and instilling purpose within a group also poses a great challenge for the ability of that group to evolve and change away from its roots.

Professional fire fighters obviously ensure that you will have a response when required regardless of what is occurring in the world. During and after the 2008 recession, Virginia, like many American states, saw a reduction in Volunteer active membership due to increased financial stress on the individual. I visited the Prince William Fire Department last year and spoke at length with a Fire Captain who described their current state of affairs. They found that with the recession volunteers who once were able to spend time responding to emergencies were now unable to due to work commitments. The knock on effect was stations that were once Volunteer became staffed by full time fire fighters to ensure reliable coverage. We have now, and for the recent past been blessed with a reasonably prosperous economy. What happens if this changes? Would a recession affect volunteer response in Australia? What happened if physical requirements to volunteer changed? Even though you can generally guarantee a Volunteer fire fighter's heart is in the right place, you cannot guarantee they will always be. Melbourne and Victoria are growing as indicated in the census during the current "demographic tsunami". Our police force is rapidly expanding; our paramedics are being refined and expanded as well. Can you say the same honestly about the professional fire service? Is it really growing in a manner equivalent to the population and infrastructure development?

Bushfires will continue to be fought effectively by our existing CFA volunteers who have the ability to escalate preparedness levels based on advances in weather forecasting. Bushfires, especially in Australia are uniquely intense due to the nature and evolution of our vegetation. We have evolved as a community a significantly unique fire fighter base in the country to counter this. I grew up in the country and understand that the CFA evolved from fighting bushfires to urban fire fighting. The MFB is no different. We specialise in structure fires and do our best to assist with bushfires. We are not equipped or trained to fight bushfires the way Volunteers with water tankers can. In the same instance you cannot expect Volunteers to fight structure fires the way we can. Structure fires are time critical. The change in fuel loads from cellulose based household items to ones predominantly with hydrocarbon bases has been critical in the accelerated level of fire development. As depicted in the Grenfell Tower fire in London, The Address Fire in Dubai, or the Sofa Store blaze in Charleston to name a few, contents and buildings have changed, reducing the 'window of opportunity' for fire fighters to make a difference.

I work in between Ascot Vale fire station and as an Instructor at the Victoria Emergency Management Training College in Craigieburn. I have been exposed to the MFB recruit process as well as the CFA recruit process. There are significant differences in our professional services. There are also significant differences between the attitude of their operational staff and ours. There are differences between how they perform and we perform on the fire ground. In the end though, the job gets done. Is it possible that if we merge that perhaps we could do our job even better? Sadly, yes. Will a merge be challenging? I am sure of it. The truth is it needs to happen. We both have great ideas and combined I firmly believe Fire Rescue Victoria operating at an amazing training facility in VEMTC has the ability to be a world leader not only in service delivery but research as well. As I said before I do not want change and I know there are many like me in the MFB and CFA, both permanent and volunteer who feel the same. Circumstance dictates however that the time now for unification of these two brigades is overdue. The change is needed not because I want it to, but as Melbourne evolves it needs its' fire service to as well.

Sometimes the wants of the few are outweighed by the needs of the many, and in the end, I am a professional fire fighter, a public servant.

If change is what they deserve, then change is what they should have.

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