

## INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017.

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is Luke Burns, I am a career firefighter based in district 7, currently stationed at Corio, however up until last week I was stationed at Belmont Fire Station for the last 12 months, working primarily there and Geelong City.

Prior to my employment as a career firefighter I was also a professional lifeguard and volunteer lifesaver with Surf Life Saving Victoria and have experienced first hand how professionals and volunteers under the same banner can deliver a quality community service.

Unfortunately during my time in the CFA I do not feel that the current integrated system works in the large regional centres such as the Geelong Region where I currently work. The sheer number of incidents we respond to (Belmont >1000, Geelong City >2000 calls per year), places an unrealistic and unfair burden on volunteers. While it is great they are prepared to give up their time, unfortunately the reality is through work, family or other commitments, the volunteer stations surrounding Belmont often have difficulty responding in time, and Belmont is often the first appliance (sometimes the only appliance) on scene. Further to this the varying skill and experience level which arises from a volunteer response means that it is not guaranteed they will have qualified Breathing Apparatus operators to safely undertake all firefighting tasks, or a qualified driver to drive the appliance. Further to this, some of the specialised equipment these urban areas require (Aerial Appliances at Geelong City and Corio, Heavy Hazmat Appliance at Corio), take months to become qualified to operate working and training full-time as a career firefighter. To expect a volunteer to sacrifice that much time away from their family to become qualified in these areas is unrealistic and unfair!

The proposed Fire Service Reform which will guarantee a response of two trucks with at least 7 career firefighters in these busy urban areas will reduce the unrealistic expectations on volunteers, and allow career firefighters to do the Job more efficiently, but more importantly, more SAFELY.

The media attention this proposed reform has received has been inflammatory, and more reminiscent of a tabloid magazine article. The so called "destruction of the CFA", regularly fails to mention that only the regions surrounding the 35 integrated stations will become FRV stations under the proposed changes. The CFA consists of over 1200 stations. So less than 3 % of stations will initially become FRV stations under the proposed reform, the remaining stations will continue to be proudly run by volunteers, as they always have.

The notion that the change will have a detrimental effect on the surge capacity of the CFA, in my opinion is not at all accurate. All volunteers who joined with the good intent of serving their community will still answer the call in times of major emergencies such as Black Saturday. Any volunteer who implies they will not respond because they don't want to work with FRV, or because they are bitter over

the reform does not reflect the values which CFA volunteers stand by and will be a very minute minority of the Volunteers around Victoria. If anything by reducing the reliance on Volunteers for ever increasing demands of growing urban centres, it will make volunteering far more appealing knowing that you will not be expected to leave work, or lose important family time several times a DAY as is happening currently in busy urban regions.

All these arguments aside, I feel all the attention this has received is based on emotion, rather than what is best for the community. This issue is in regards to an emergency service. Unfortunately under the current model in todays ever growing urban areas, an integrated service can not guarantee an immediate or suitably qualified response to all calls due to every day restrictions placed on members at volunteer brigades. It would not be accepted if Ambulance or Police relied on the availability of volunteers, an availability which in life can not be guaranteed...and it should not be accepted in a modern fire service either. A 90 second response from highly trained, professional firefighters on duty 24/7, with a guaranteed 7 firefighters and two appliances is what the people of Victoria deserve.

I hope this committee looks honestly and impartially at the facts and recognises that in no way can **more** professional firefighters, responding quickly to **more** incidents make Victorians **less** safe.

Yours Sincerely,

Luke Burns

