

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

Inquiry into the firefighters presumptive rights compensation & fire services legislation amendment (reform) bill 2017

I am Malcolm Stepnell

Current rank, Leading Firefighter (Station Officer Qualified)

3 years volunteer service Mt Buninyong Rural fire brigade

34 years' service as a career firefighter with CFA

Recipient of CFA 30 year Long Service Medal, National Medal, National emergency Service Medal

State endorsed Technical Rescue Instructor for CFA

I live in Geelong & work at the Geelong City Fire Station

I volunteer in my community as a Red Cross Blood donor & have volunteered for Blaze Aid

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

During my long involvement with CFA, I have witnessed the change in community standards & expectations in regard to volunteering for CFA. Once employers would let their employees take leave to attend fires & incidents during work time. Now due to financial pressures they can't afford to allow this. Self-employed persons faced with similar situations also can't drop tools & go to fires.

More & more people work far from where they live so they can't volunteer their services because they just don't have time.

And less people now in the community seem willing to volunteer for whatever reasons.

This puts more pressure on those that do volunteer trying to do more with less people. This is no one's fault, the communities expectations have changed. They expect a fire truck to arrive as soon as possible when they dial 000.

Having worked at numerous integrated stations across the state I have seen these similar issues. Career firefighters in these communities are picking up the extra work load. As these areas are now highly urbanized the service they get should meet that profile.

I worked for many years turning up to fires with 2 career firefighters on a truck & not knowing if & how many volunteers would turn up at a fire. Which is neither safe for me nor best service delivery for the community we serve.

I now find myself due to increased career firefighter manning (7 on the fireground) being able to do my job safer & better. This is due to knowing the skill level of those I work with plus knowing when I go inside a burning structure that there is someone outside to back me up if something goes wrong. Also if first aid is needed, it can be provided to someone at the call. This can be done at the same time as putting out the fire as there are enough personnel to do both jobs at the same time.

I see this Fire Service reform as a positive move forward, not as some would suggest who would like to see the CFA going backwards in time. The CFA chief Officer in his briefings on this subject explains in plain English that this is a positive move forward & he see's many benefits for the organization. One of these is that the organization can focus just on volunteers without the need to devote resources to managing career staff & the issues this brings.

By having all career firefighters employed by one organization, this will benefit the community by:

Standardization of training, uniforms, vehicles, equipment

Provide a bigger pool of personnel for hard to fill locations

This has to be a big plus for the state's financial resources as it will save money.

I ask that you, members of the committee take a fresh, independent view of this Bill. Put aside the politics & misinformation. Look at the benefits it will bring our State & support the Bill.

Yours sincerely;

Malcolm John Stepnell

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