

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY FIRE SERVICES BILL COMMITTEE

Sanath Dhammapala



29th June 2017

To the Parliamentary Committee,

I am a Station Officer with 26 years of experience with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, currently stationed at the Clayton Fire Station, located at 529 Clayton Rd. Clayton.

I am writing to inform you of my pro stance with regards to the amalgamation of the CFA and MFB full time staff and the rezoning of the 100 year old boundaries.

The current situation of having two separate brigades with a volunteer response in urban areas does not work. Please understand that volunteers are needed in *country areas*, but not in urban areas, as a delayed response could cost lives and much damage.

An example of what I am talking about happened at 12:26 on the 18th November 2016 in Springvale. The Springvale Bank fire received tremendous amounts of media exposure at the time. It involved a person walking into a bank, pouring petrol on himself, and then igniting himself.

This article has pictures and a few Twitter videos of the scene:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-18/people-injured-after-man-sets-fire-to-commonwealth-bank/8037608>

This article is probably the best in terms of the number of pictures it has:

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/27-hurt-after-man-sets-himself-on-fire-in-melbourne-bank-branch/news-story/06213b67a47024b4e10311d88e7bcb35>

A further 27 people in the bank were inadvertently caught up in the situation, with 6 people being taken by Ambulance for serious life threatening burns.

This happened in CFA area, so Springvale CFA full timers responded. The MFB truck at Clayton, which regularly responds with CFA Springvale, to a Shopping Centre, only one street away, and would have been on scene only about 30 seconds

behind CFA Springvale. However, it sat idle at Clayton Fire Station due to different boundaries and response protocols!

Instead, a volunteer truck at Noble Park was despatched but did not get on scene for approximately 40 minutes due to lack of volunteers!!! This is a completely unacceptable response in an urban area.

The MFB truck at Clayton could also have beaten Dandenong CFA full timers, who were also responded to this call. Again, due to the different boundaries and protocols a truck with greater proximity sat idle at Clayton, when it could have been responded without haste to an incident that needed prompt and critical attention, not a 40 minute wait for a second truck.

Serious situations, like the Springvale Bank fire, are going to happen and people's lives should not be put at risk by having a volunteer response in urban areas.

Another problem with having two separate brigades is communication. Currently, there are two different radios used which compromise direct communications. You might have, as has happened, a situation where one MFB and one CFA firefighter enter a building fire together, but cannot talk with each other due to different radios. This is an unacceptable situation which denies a coordinated and positive end-result.

Thank you for taking the time to review my submission. With your help, let's give Victorians the fire service they deserve.

Sincerely,

Station Officer Sanath Dhammapala #10001