

Assistant Clerk Committees

Department of Legislative Council

Fire Services Bill Select Committee

Parliament House, Spring Street

EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is Robert Byrne.

- Leading Firefighter
- CFA
- 11 years service at Warrnambool ,Ballarat City and Geelong City.
- Awards: National Emergency Medal, 10 year service award.
- Qualifications: Road Rescue, Trench Rescue, Confined Space Rescue, High Angle Rescue, Steep Rescue, Bronto Crew Leader, Aerial Pumper Crew Leader, Teleboom Crew Leader, Ground Observer.
- I have attended major incidents such as Black Saturday, Hazelwood Mine Fire, Wye River fire, Portland ship fire. I have attended over 1,750 incidents in my career.

I live in Hamlyn Heights and work at Geelong City Fire Brigade.

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

- For the safety of all in my profession it is imperative that we have a guaranteed 7 firefighters dispatched to every incident. When I was originally stationed at Warrnambool, we had minimum staffing levels of 3, with the nearest professional brigade over 2 hours away. I attended house fires such as Saywell Court (2/07/2008), where we were the only appliance on scene and volunteer response was delayed or non-existent due to volunteers work commitments. At this particular incident there were concerns that people were still in the house, however due to lack of staff, I was required to set a hydrant to get water into the truck, set the pump into automatic mode, get hose lines out to protect myself and the Leading Firefighter, before donning breathing apparatus and entering the house to begin the search. These actions take up valuable time and would be the difference between life and death if there is someone inside a burning building. It is an unacceptable risk to the safety of both firefighters and the community for such a low number of personnel to attend a fire. This is a common theme that occurs throughout the CFA. The stress and strain of attacking a fire with insufficient staff is immense.

- In my current location at Geelong City, we are located in Region 7. Within this region is Lara, the Surfcoast (Torquay) and Bellarine Peninsula (Ocean Grove, Queenscliff, Portarlington etc). Professional firefighters are currently required to attend every call on the Surfcoast, a 20km journey, due to local volunteer brigades having trouble meeting their response times. On weekdays between the hours of 0600 to 1800 we are also required to support into incidents on the Bellarine Peninsula, a journey of 31km, again due to local volunteer brigades failing to meet response times. We are also required to attend every incident in Lara, a journey of 15km, again due to local volunteer brigades having issues meeting response times. Not only does this give the community delayed response, it also leaves the major city of Greater Geelong with appliances and professional firefighters out of their brigade area. This occurs on a daily basis. It is no fault of the volunteers who live in the area, it is just a fact that they are unable to attend every incident due to work and family commitments.
- I am a family man, I have four children. I work hard to provide for my family and was proud to call myself a firefighter and the fact that I serve the community. However, the past few years have taken a toll on both me and my family. I do not read newspapers any more due to the lies and propaganda put out about my profession. I have been approached while picking my children up from school and been asked what are the issues that I have with volunteers. It hurts me to have been questioned like this. I have worked hand in hand with volunteers, not only from the CFA but also the SES and have had a great working relationship with them. The on-going dispute needs to end. The strain of this dispute only adds to the stress of the many horrific incidents I have attended over 11 years. The reform will help put an end to the unwarranted attacks on my profession.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Byrne