

## Submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017

Select Committee, I write to express my support for the Fire Services Reform Bill. I have been involved with the CFA for over 20 years, first as a junior Firefighter starting at 11 years old, then moving to the senior ranks at 16 years old, in my time as a volunteer I have also served as Lt, I then made the progression to Career Firefighter and am currently stationed at Pakenham integrated station.

***-impact on fire service delivery across Victoria:*** By any logical measure the creation of FRV will increase fire service delivery in FRV areas and the areas supported by FRV, FRV would offer a guaranteed response, responding in under 90 seconds, something that volunteer only brigades are unable to guarantee due to volunteers having other commitments and being unavailable to respond. Quite often volunteer only brigades fail to respond entirely or respond with crew members who do not hold the correct qualifications such as Breathing Apparatus, in the area I work we have no immediate support from another integrated station, meaning that we cannot rely on help from neighbouring brigades, on some occasions you will have good support from well qualified volunteers, on others our neighbouring brigades will fail to respond, leaving us with no support. I am baffled how this is acceptable from a workplace safety perspective let alone public safety.

***-Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery:*** There are over 1200 brigades in Victoria, not including the MFB response area, of those 35 are integrated brigades with staff and volunteers, the vast majority of CFA volunteers would never have worked or had anything to do with career firefighters. This would not change under FRV, with the extra funding for volunteers offered with this package it would increase if managed by CFA correctly.

***-short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision:*** The Fire Services Levy is less in areas covered by the MFB as compared to the CFA, assuming a similar structure to the current MFB, in the short term cost would remain the same or decrease in line with the MFB level.

**-Underlying policy rationale:** The MFB/CFA boundary was established over half a century ago and has not been adjusted to account for population increases, the current CFA model does not account for changes in volunteering, gone are the days where people worked in their home towns and could give up time easily to volunteer, volunteer brigades are struggling more and more to meet their responsibilities, you only need to look at response time/ fail to respond data to see this. In busy areas the volunteer model does not function as it was designed to. The urban areas of outer Melbourne are not currently receiving the coverage they should be, this needs to change.

The establishment of an independent body to decide what areas are covered by career firefighters or volunteer firefighters is merely common sense, it removes self-interest and people protecting “their patch” from the equation. Hopefully this would allow better working relationships to be established between volunteer brigades and staff brigades than currently exist by removing the sense that one group is trying to take over the other.

This Bill provides a ‘circuit breaker’ of sorts to both volunteer and career firefighters, we both need this desperately, the uncertainty has to end, volunteers are concerned what will happen to their communities (mostly through misinformation) and if they will still have a role. Career staff has seen themselves and their career vilified and dragged through the mud, the morale of career firefighters is at rock bottom, this must end.

The presumptive cancer legislation for both career and volunteer firefighters is well overdue, the current model where I need to identify which fire I attended 20 years ago gave me cancer to access support is clearly ludicrous. The reverse of onus of proof is only fair.

In closing, I would urge the select committee to endorse the bill and let both volunteer and career firefighters get back to protecting the community.

**Lee Cunningham Fire fighter**

CFA Pakenham – 780 Princes Hwy, Pakenham, VIC, 3810



