

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

1. My name is Troy Cleverley. I am a Station Officer with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) appointed to Warrnambool Fire Station in the South West of Victoria. As of May this year I have been a Professional Firefighter with the CFA for 16 years. Prior to that I served with New South Wales Fire Brigades (now New South Wales Fire and Rescue) for 3 years as a Retained Firefighter at 338 Station Jindabyne.
2. In addition to holding the rank of Station Officer I hold the below listed qualifications, increments and endorsements:
  - Tanker increment
  - Heavy Pumper increment
  - Aerial Pumper increment
  - Protective Equipment (PE) Van increment
  - Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Operator, category 1
  - High Angle Rescue Operator
  - Confined Space Rescue Operator
  - LPG Emergency Response
  - Ground Observer Team Leader
  - Strike Team Leader
  - Sector Commander
  - Juvenile Fire Awareness and Intervention Program Practitioner
  - Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment
  - Certificate III in Firefighting Operations
  - Certificate IV in Firefighting Operations
3. In 2013 I was awarded the National Emergency Medal for my work during the 2009 Black Saturday fires (presented by the then Premier of Victoria, Dr Denis Napthine) and in 2016 I was presented with a CFA 15 year Service Medal.
4. I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the Victorian fire services for the following reasons:
  - First and foremost let me say, we NEED this reform. The CFA today isn't the same CFA I joined sixteen years ago. The tension, angst, and in some cases outright hostility that currently exists between career staff and volunteers is unbearable and can't be allowed to continue. I know it should never have come to this but the sad fact remains that it has. My career colleagues and I have been referred to as thugs, bullies, stooges and scum, and most recently on social media as Daleks (a Dr Who fan perhaps?) and Peter's puppets,

presumably in reference to Peter Marshall, the UFU Branch Secretary. The damage that has been done to the relationships between professional and volunteer firefighters cannot be undone. With no pun intended, those bridges are burnt. There has been an ongoing and relentless smear campaign from the Liberal Party, the mainstream print media and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) to denigrate and demonise professional firefighters. To what end I don't know, but it is clear that at the very least they are seeking to lower our standing in the public eye and hammer home a wedge between career staff and volunteers. It beggars belief, but the Herald Sun has run more front pages about professional firefighters, our union and our EBA negotiations than they did about 9/11 and the war on terror. It really is that out of control.

- Our last Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (the 2010 EBA) expired in 2013. If there is no resolution in the meantime, by September of this year we will have been a full four years without a new EBA. Ours is now the longest running industrial dispute in state history, even though we're not actually in 'dispute' with the State Government at the moment per se. As things currently stand, and this is primarily due to the Federal Government's amendments to the Fair Work Act and intervention in a what is unarguably a state matter, it will be nigh on impossible to progress an EBA through Fair Work if professional firefighters are to remain a part of CFA. This is because there are clauses in our EBA that we will not and cannot afford to remove such as the consultation provisions, minimum safe staffing chart and schedule of personal protective clothing (PPC) and uniform. These are just three examples of clauses that have a DIRECT impact on the health and safety of professional firefighters at work and have absolutely no negative impact on volunteers, yet have been deemed to be 'objectionable'.
- Moving all CFA professional firefighters across to Fire and Rescue Victoria (FRV) will not only mean the VFBV can no longer interfere in staff EBA negotiations, but will see volunteers serving in a fire service totally free of the United Firefighters Union. The VFBV (and Liberal and National Parties) have called very vocally for "Hands off the CFA". These proposed reforms will deliver exactly that.
- The implementation of the proposed reforms will have a significant impact on the way regionally based career staff operate and respond to fires. It will mean as a minimum two appliances and seven career firefighters are dispatched to all calls. In and around Melbourne in areas serviced by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) this is a standard, guaranteed response. It is deemed world's best practice and ensures both firefighter and public safety. In the country areas of Victoria however, this is not always the case. Professional firefighters at CFA's 35 integrated stations might respond with another staff crew in support, with volunteers in support, or in some cases, with no support at all. If the Fire Services Reform Legislation is passed, Warrnambool's (as will all of CFA's 35 integrated stations) primary assignment area/fire district falls to FRV and we would respond as per the way the MFB do now.

In no way, shape or form is this a slight on the dedication, passion and commitment of volunteers in responding to fires and incidents. Victoria relies

heavily on the commitment and goodwill of volunteers and could not be kept safe without them. Family and work commitments however mean that volunteers are not always available to respond within the timeframes that the communities they serve would reasonably expect. Professional firefighters have a service delivery standard of being mobile within 90 seconds of receipt of call and on scene within seven minutes. Volunteers have a full four or six minutes just to respond to their station.

- Despite the media and LNP hype of a CFA 'carve up', I honestly believe that there is nothing in the proposed reforms that negatively impacts upon volunteers. Volunteer Brigades will in fact ultimately become stronger as the CFA returns to its roots as a legislated, purely volunteer fire service. Stand-alone volunteer brigades will continue to operate just as they always have done. At the CFA's current integrated stations, volunteers will be in charge of their own destiny. They can choose to stay and co-locate with FRV, move to neighbouring brigades or in the specific case of Warrnambool volunteers, move in to their own fire station. Added to that is a one off funding boost of 100 million dollars for equipment, infrastructure upgrades and volunteer recruitment and retention. Surge capacity will be unaffected, and anyone who says otherwise is either scaremongering or has no faith in the commitment to serve and community spirit of CFA volunteers. Volunteers will continue to be supported by the same Instructors, Operations Officers and Operations Managers that are currently in place. They will see the same faces and work with the same staff that they already have built relationships with. Those staff may be under the employ of FRV, but they will be seconded back to CFA where they will continue to work within the scope of the CFA Act and Regulations and follow CFA policy, procedure and guidelines. They will for all intents and purposes remain 'CFA people'.
- Merging all professional firefighters from the CFA and MFB just makes sense. It means a standardisation of training, equipment, uniforms, procedures, appliances and response standards. Since 2009 the key word for the Victorian fire services and in particular the CFA and MFB has been *interoperability*. There can be no better way to achieve this than to bring the staff from both services together under one banner.
- Presumptive Legislation is long overdue for Victorian Firefighters. It has already been enacted Federally for ACT, Northern Territory and Aviation Fire and Rescue Firefighters, in South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia and Queensland. The link between cancer and firefighting is undeniable. Please don't make us wait any longer.

5. Below is just one example from my own personal experiences which I think clearly demonstrates the failures of the current structure:

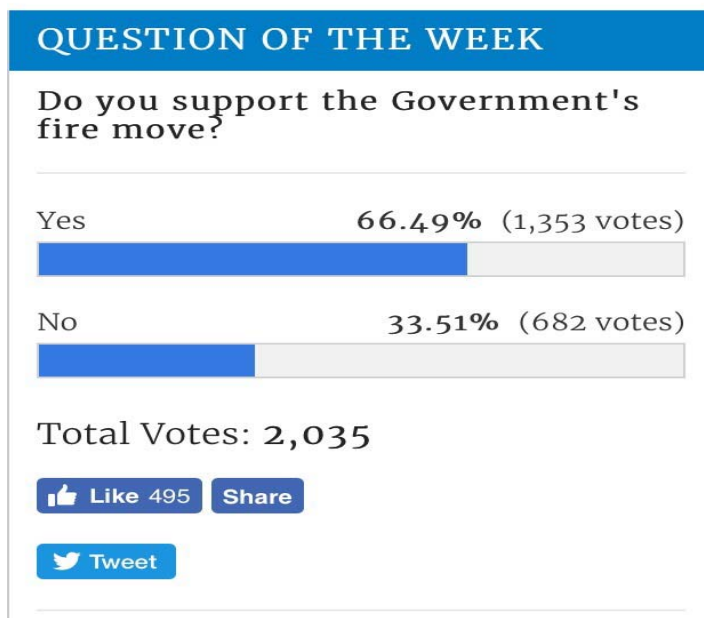
Up until a little over a year ago Warrnambool Fire Stations minimum crewing was only 3 staff per shift. As such that meant one firefighter to drive the appliance and operate the pump once on scene, one firefighter to don breathing apparatus (BA) and actually fight the fire and one Station Officer to control the job. We were then reliant on a volunteer response in support as even the Chief Officers SOP's require a minimum of four firefighters to be on scene before an internal fire attack can be conducted.

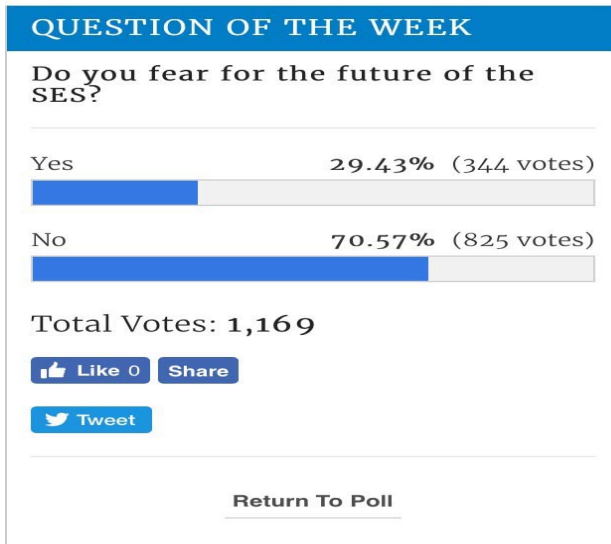
One particular night we received a call to a confirmed structure fire in McKiernan Road Warrnambool. On arrival the attached garage of the house was fully alight and extending through in to the lounge room. The driver was busy setting a hydrant and sourcing water, the Officer was conducting his 'size up' of the job and I was left to don BA and run a hose line. Due to a voice being heard coming through the house it was the Officers obvious conclusion that a resident was still inside. As there were still as yet no volunteers on scene, the Officer and I were placed in the unenviable moral dilemma of whether I was to enter the house alone to conduct a search and if necessary perform a rescue, or follow SOP's and wait for a second BA wearer to enter with me.

What did I do? What probably every career firefighter would do if he or she thought a life was in danger. I entered. I put my own life in jeopardy to save the life of another because that's what firefighters do. Does that make it right? Not for a second. Would the CFA have supported me if the structure collapsed and I was caught somewhere I shouldn't have been on my own? That's questionable. Would I have been able to hold my head up as I walked down the street in the community where I choose to live, work and raise a family had I NOT entered? Absolutely not. But the simple fact remains that I should never have been put in that position in the first place. The volunteers weren't at fault, they responded as fast as they could. It just wasn't, and to this day still isn't, fast enough.

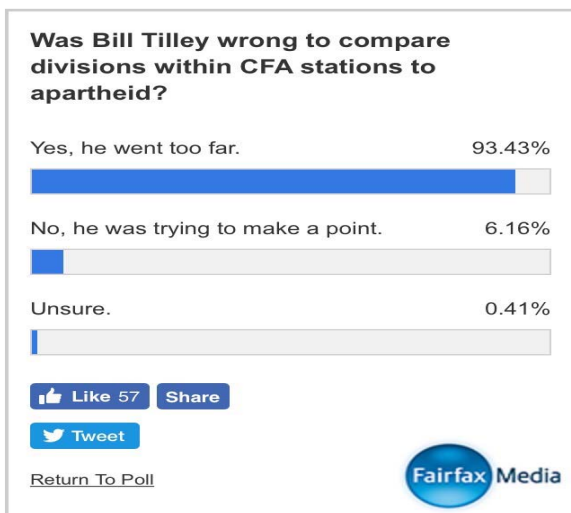
It's the current, outdated CFA system that's at fault. But it can be fixed and the formation of FRV will go a long way towards fixing it.

- Directly below are three polls relating to the proposed reforms. Two appeared in the Weekly Times and one in the Wangaratta Chronicle. Both are publications read by country people fiercely protective of CFA volunteers yet as you can plainly see, the results speak for themselves.





(The above poll was published in the Weekly Times with yet another false accusation regarding the proposed reforms, this time that FRV would assume all responsibility for road accident rescue).



Professional firefighters deserve safe systems of work. The community deserve a guaranteed minimum safe response. And both professional and volunteer firefighters deserve an end to the turmoil of the last four years. Change is within our grasp but we need, the CFA needs, and our communities need these reforms.

Yours sincerely,

Troy Cleverley

