

By email: LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

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

To the Inquiry Committee,

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

My name is Michael Wade; I am a professional MFB firefighter (Station Officer) and have been for the last 17 years. I am qualified in Road Accident Rescue, Urban Search and Rescue, Trench Rescue and Wild Fire Fighting (Level 2).

In 2003, I responded to Swifts Creek in Gippsland as part of a joint MFB/CFA task force to combat the Omeo fires. I responded to Yea during the 2009 Black Saturday fires as part of a MFB strike team for which I (among many others) was awarded the National Emergency Medal (Victoria Bushfires 2009). I have also been awarded the Victoria Police Service Medal, the Australian Defence Medal and the National Medal.

I am currently based at North Laverton fire station and I live in Newport.

- In my work area of North Laverton (which borders Caroline Springs) I frequently turn out with members of the Caroline Springs CFA. The CFA career and volunteer firefighters work hard to ensure the safety of all Victorians. Volunteers are essential for fire cover in Victoria, but the volunteers deserve to be supported by timely response from professional, career firefighters so their lives are not endangered on the fireground. All Victorian professional and volunteer firefighters deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities.
- Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this out-dated system, 35 areas are incorrectly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Werribee, Melton, Caroline Springs, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'. Don't residents on the outskirts of Melbourne and large regional centres deserve the same measure of response that the rest of Melbourne enjoys?
- These area's fire cover needs to be modernised as part of the reform of the fire service because they are highly urbanised areas. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the **minimum** standard needed in highly urbanised and large regional areas.
- Reforming the two now disparate fire services into one service will initiate the standardisation of equipment and procedures across the service that can only benefit the community of Victoria as a whole. Recruiting practices in particular can be streamlined to ensure the level of cover across the state is standardised.

- . The Fire Services Reform Bill also guarantees a massive boost to the CFA, which promises to deliver \$100 million to assist in retention and recruitment of new volunteers as well as some station upgrades. This will ensure that there is no effect on the CFA's surge capacity and that the CFA can continue to provide response to major fires or incidents both locally and across the state.

I've seen first-hand what happens when there are insufficient resources at a fire or incident that requires immediate action. As a Rescue Operator at Sunshine Fire Station, I was responded to a car accident with possible persons trapped on the Calder Highway well outside the MFD (Metropolitan Fire District). I turned out from Sunshine to the CFA area near Diggers Rest. Although CFA staff were in attendance, there were no suitably qualified Rescue Operators and they had to wait for our arrival. Fortunately in that case there was no loss of life.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of all Victorians. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteers. Unprecedented urban growth (1800 people per week moving to Melbourne's outer fringe according to the 2016 CENSUS) has resulted in increased emergency calls and although volunteers give a lot of their time, they cannot be prevailed upon 24 hours a day 364 days a year.

In my workplace at the MFB, I volunteer as a member of the peer support team. Without breaking the confidentiality of my work colleagues, I can assure you that this dispute has been the source of a large amount of anxiety and stress among them and has contributed to the deterioration in the health of some. It has dragged on too long and must be settled.

I respectfully submit that you give consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament before the commencement of the fire season. This is extremely important to me and my colleagues.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider and support the proposed fire services reform.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael Wade
Station Officer, "C" Platoon
North Laverton Fire Station.

Contact Details:

Home:



Mob:

