

Mr Justin ELLIOTT



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

To whom it may concern,

I am a resident of the South Gippsland community, father, a Farmer, a local community volunteer and a career fire-fighter with the Country Fire Authority. I am currently appointed as a Leading fire-fighter at Morwell fire station, one of CFA's regional "Integrated" stations.

I have grave concerns for the future of fire fighting in the country where I live and work if this legislation is not passed.

I started out as a career fire-fighter stationed at Frankston for the first two years before being appointed to Traralgon in 2003.

At this point the country stations had one Fire-fighter appointed at any one time with volunteers, and regularly failed to respond to emergency's due to the lack of volunteers.

The numbers were increased to two when I was appointed, still vastly understaffed for the workload.

At this time we answered all 000 calls and ran the radios for emergency incidents as well as responding, however volunteer numbers continued to decline. We were constantly trying to recruit more volunteer members but over all the numbers continued to decline.

Currently our staffing on a primary appliance stands at 3. A long way from the internationally recognise safe crewing level to achieve 7 fire fighters on the fire ground.

I am currently stationed at Morwell fire station. Our volunteer response by CFA statistics is sitting around 0.5 per call out.

That's not even one volunteer per call.

I have been in many situations as a fire-fighter in the country where not only has it been very difficult to perform my role of providing an effective fire fighting service, but my own life has been in danger because of the out dated, parochial two tired system we currently have.

I have entered burning buildings on my own to search for missing people, operated in hazardous environments with insufficient back up and support, and received help and assistance from volunteers at incidents where the qualifications, training and experience was so lacking as to be a danger to themselves as well as others and the public.

As it stands today, I can at any moment be expected to respond to support a neighbouring brigade with the knowledge that on arrival I will have no guarantee that there will be anyone there with the requisite skills and abilities to assist me to do my job safely.

And this will continue into the remainder of 2017 and beyond if change is not implemented.

CFA has come a long way since its early inception as the Country Fire Brigades Board, and later evolution into the Country Fire Authority.

Through the last century CFA has used the integration model of staff and volunteers working together as a means to continue to maintain and reinforce the role of volunteers in our community's and maintain an emergency response at an achievable financial cost as the Victorian community continued to grow.

There has been no change to this model, the CFA, since 1958

Yet we have seen towns, infrastructure and population double, and double again, and again.

Time has now come to continue the improvement and development of emergency response for our rapidly growing regional centres and recognise that the role of the CFA volunteer is as important as ever, but that the role has evolved into one that relies on our volunteers not being exhausted and over loaded with the burden of day to day ever increasing emergency response workloads.

Our volunteers need to be available to provide a service to their community's when in real need and to provide the surge capacity for large 'campaign' type incidents that are now becoming the norm rather than the exception. The smaller regional towns and community's outside of the major regional cities not effected by these reforms will continue to operate and receive the support from their local CFA volunteer brigades as they do today.

This will not change and will most likely be improved when CFA, as a volunteer only emergency service, can focus on providing support and improvements to the volunteer brigades.

I would be happy to be contacted to discuss my submission and provide further support for the proposed bill.

Regards

Justin Elliott 