

FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE 2017 – SUBMISSION

Honourary members of the parliamentary committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider the views of this submission. Whilst there will be a significant amount of information that is put before you, I truly hope that the information you gather in your time will be factual and relevant to what is the ongoing and continued position of the fire services in Victoria. There are many views that are held within this subject matter, some of those may have a personal bias and some have their own political agenda, I hope that you find the below submission pertinent and relevant in its context to assist you in your decision making.

My name is Shaun Pacher and I am a Senior Station Officer with the Country Fire Authority. I am in my 14th year with the service and am a proud and supportive member of the CFA and the service it provides. I am not a volunteer, nor have I ever been one. I am currently based at Craigieburn Fire Brigade and have been for approximately 7 years of my career. My role as it stands is:

- To manage the station as the Duty Officer each shift, responsible for the responses to emergency incidents inside and outside of the primary area depending on the manning levels and resources that are available in the event of that emergency. This may include managing large numbers of personnel and multiple agencies at some scenes.
- I facilitate significant payroll administration, shift coverage and training for both volunteers & staff.
- I conduct pre-plan development and familiarisation of facilities within our area.
- I manage a crew of four including myself and enable career development of the staff I work with.
- I facilitate relationships between volunteers and staff, engage with the community on a daily basis, provide and organise community education and ensure safety requirements and workplace laws are met under the relevant legislation.
- There is the normal administration that goes with the role and engagement with supporting brigades in other areas of the district.
- I provide coverage when staffing levels are short at stations around Victoria and generally I believe I provide the highest level of coverage and response that I believe currently we can offer the people of Victoria with the manning and resources we have available within the CFA.
- There are many other responsibilities that fall under this role as well but this hopefully highlights in brief, some of what my role is.

At this time, I do believe that Fire Services reform is greatly needed and can provide a greater degree of stability and a strong platform from which the emergency services in Victoria can build upon in the future. Having been a Senior Instructor most recently for CFA at the VEMTC facility, I have been required to teach the recruits about many subjects including the history of the CFA.

That history tells us that the boundaries established in the formation of the CFA and MFB were enacted almost 70 years ago and have not been amended to reflect the huge population growth that has been occurring in this state for some time. Along with that, risks have increased with changes in design, technology, manufacturing and growth that see so many industries and issues that were not a part of the thinking when those organisations were founded. While I am proud of this fire service and the job we do with the resources we have, the path for the forward progression of this organisation has now been blocked and having worked on the outer metro boundary for 9 years, supporting both the MFB in its own area and the CFA volunteer brigades around it, there is now a lack of ability to see where growth for both organisations can occur both operationally and non-operationally.

Everyone can acknowledge that CFA has now lost the ability to have an agreement between themselves and their workforce of career firefighters. Naturally, this has had a debilitating effect on the moral of its employees, both in management and at the ground level. After many years and far too much money being spent, much of which is out of the pockets of the firefighters and taxpayers, an ability to align all career staff under one umbrella and provide a suitable FWA agreement that is between the employer and the employees only is now within reach. This is what the FWA laws were designed around but unfortunately through the most recent Federal Law amendments as sought by the VFBV and approved at the Commonwealth parliament, third party intervention in our job roles within CFA is now a viable prospect. I am sure that all sides of parliament would agree that this is not what the creators of the EBA laws and processes had in mind when they instigated the legislation to assist in the creation of workplace agreements in this country. As a consequence, morale amongst my peers unfortunately is very low, mainly due to the inability of our negotiating body the UFU, to come to an agreement with the CFA under now successive governments. While the effect is hidden from the public because we turn up every day to do our job, which many of us are intensely passionate about, out of view is the constant negative feelings and disappointment in this whole process which the FWA laws were designed to assist. When this is a constant over a four year period then the build-up of this negativity is inevitable. We have always kept quiet on the advice of our representative body, we do not defend ourselves very often but rather allow others to defend us in the public forum. We have been the receivers online of intensely negative comments as well as in the media and at many times, statements made about us are unjust, incorrect or simply untrue. Our current Chief Officer who ultimately should have the complete control of the organisation as he is legislated to under the CFA and EMV Acts, unfortunately does not and is a target of abuse by the people that he supports, that are supposed to report to him. These are the people that have agreed to join the organisation of their own volition and are supposed to work under the Chief Officer who is in place to lead at all times, especially in times of crisis. The combination of this misinformation and the rhetoric it creates can only really be dissipated by ensuring the volunteers have their own organisation and the career staff their own, with the mutual support arrangements put in place for the necessary inter-operability. For what it is worth, when the specialists in emergency response and management in the state of Victoria are not being listened to, then are we truly listening to the right people? When the Emergency Service Commissioner Mr Craig Lapsley, the MFB Chief Officer, The CFA Chief Officer, the CEO's and the relevant boards along with representative bodies of the fire service employees notwithstanding the current State Government all state that this is a positive instrument of change, a necessary

change and in the best interest of the State of Victoria, should we not be listening? The voices that are being heard more often are those that are of a political nature or are a representative body that do not speak for all volunteers, only those that are financially paid up to their organisation, whose leader is possibly seeking pre-selection in a future role and had been asking for some time for the CFA employees representative body to have a decreased input into the fire services. Now that this is possibly occurring with the introduced legislation, the position of the Volunteer Associations has changed again and now the those associations want to keep the employees of CFA who are covered by the UFU as their representatives, so the question should be..."Who is acting in the best interest of this state?"

Currently my work role exists in an area that is supported by volunteers and who we work with and support to on a daily basis. While it is in our current manning that there is a need to have four on an appliance when we respond from this station and that is the current manning levels, that has not always been the case. In some circumstances during my career, I have known responses regionally to have only had one career member on them. I myself have been a part of a system that responded just the two of us for many years to emergencies around the state. And whilst during that time, the Chief Officers SOP's stated that full firefighting operations are to occur when there are four members on the fireground, previously we were only provided with half that as the manning levels. I have been at incidents where I was the only operator qualified in Hazmat and CABA and as such, have been de-contaminated three times, assessed by the ambulance three times and sent back in three times to isolate leaks from valves/pipes. Normally this would occur only once in most safe situations. I have been the only CABA wearer in a crew of two who turned up to a house fire in Sunbury and when arriving on scene I was expected to engage the pump, run hose, find water and wear a CABA while an 80 year old man stumbled out of the front door of his house with smoke billowing out behind him. Even then, those SOP's still stated that 4 personnel were required on the fireground but it was incumbent on the firefighters on scene to make the moral choice themselves as to whether or not they would put their own life at risk to save another when insufficient manning was there, naturally time is critical in life threatening circumstances. Fortunately, this has changed for those of us currently in CFA, however the support is still not guaranteed. The failure by volunteer brigades to respond still occurs and in most cases, it is not through any fault of their own. People have families, they have lives, they need incomes, they work and they have businesses. They are not always available so when they are unable to respond in their volunteer capacity due to these circumstances, those of us that do are still required to make the most of the resources we have available. Reporting structures mean that these failures of "Primary" brigades sometimes are not reflected in the reporting. CFA's reporting system uses a reporting structure that if I as a "Support" brigade turnout and get on scene at an incident, even if the "Primary" brigade fails to respond it is considered a success. It may take myself and my crew up to 15 – 20 minutes to get on scene in varied support areas around the state. The primary brigade may only be minutes from the incident location, but their failure to respond does not get recognised in the service delivery models due to the support brigade being on scene. The unfortunate situation in this instance is that every minute can be critical in an emergency event and that reporting should reflect that a brigade further away, such as where I work, was on scene first due to a failure of the closest brigade. Again, this is not in any way trying to be detrimental to the volunteers who are willing and trying to do their best for their community, but rather that we do not accurately

reflect our failures to respond by saying as long as a brigade from somewhere got there in the end, then that is sufficient. Increasing that support and ensuring that seven firefighters are responded in such cases can only be a benefit to the community. It will improve the safety of those responding, provide a guaranteed service to the area and ensure full firefighting operations can begin. There is no doubt that the volunteers of this state do an amazing and important job, but as volunteers they cannot always be there. The need for them to cover 58% of the metropolitan area as well as the rest of the state out to Victoria's borders, means they are stretched and this effects service delivery. Based on the advice from EMV, CFA, UFU and the State Government, I am told none of those volunteer stations would shut, their service is still required. I will and many others will continue to work with them to provide the best service we can to Victoria's community. There are so many misnomers that have been created in this space and people have their beliefs that they will be worse off but I am yet to see any solid proof of this. An enhanced service by the expanding of the metropolitan boundary in the new legislation for FRV would reflect the needs of the Melbourne area, along with the independent review committee to determine when new stations are required and where. For those that volunteer the time to serve and their station is determined as an area for career staff to start in, this is not an insult, it is an acknowledgement of how much they have been doing, a view that they have provided so much of their own time to support their area that it is impacting upon their families. Any forecast or determined changes that introduce career stations into volunteer areas means that those areas will have a faster, more regularly trained and more proficient service to the community.....a community that the volunteers own families and friends live in. Most people in this state when asked would they prefer a firefighting appliance out the door in 90 seconds guaranteed or possibly out the door in up to 8 minutes, when considering the welfare of family, friends and community would opt for the 90 seconds.

CFA will still exist and so will its service to the state, why is it that people are so against this legislation? I am yet to comprehend why when the opportunity for reform exists that is based on other models within Australia and internationally and that has been so highly successful elsewhere, that members within the CFA are against it? Many volunteers I speak to at operational incidents or at stations do not understand why their association is against the FRV model as they themselves are not. To improve the service to the community, increase the skills that the fire service can provide to the citizens of this state, while still supporting the volunteer brigades around the staff stations as we have always done seems to be all positive but somehow the negative seems to drive some opinions more so.

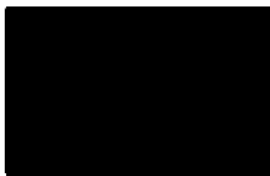
Currently CFA in the outer metropolitan areas, have 3 of the top 10 growth corridors in Australia. While risk is continuing to grow along with the size of communities that are rapidly expanding into unpopulated areas, there is existing risk as well. Craigieburn alone has expanded by tens of thousands of homes in the past few years with increased risk on many types of emergencies. The population has been and is forecast to grow even more in the Hume council by thousands in the immediate years. At the same time, new areas such as Beveridge, Kalkallo, Merrifield in the near vicinity are being released. In fact, the developers in those areas are 10 years ahead of their projected land releases determined only a few years ago, basically due to the high demand of housing in those areas, driven by the massive population growth. Add to this potential risks such as the light industrial areas marked to go up the Hume Hwy, a possible

container facility for the Sydney to Melbourne rail line, new townships and centres along with the existing risks such as at Note Printing Australia where Australia's and 26 other countries money is produced, Dulux opening a factory in Kalkallo recently, the Reserve Bank having a new facility for storage in Craigieburn, the new Quarantine facility for Australia being opened on Donnybrook Road, Innovia who produce the film for the currency that is made by Note Printing Australia, the \$100 million worth of trains that are stored on a nightly basis at Metro's maintenance facility in Craigieburn, OTST – training facility for Vicpol and many many other existing township risks and light industrial risks as well as arterial transport risks, the demand for change and new boundaries becomes evident.

For a number of years under the guidance of EMV, policies and operating structures have become aligned across the emergency services. The combining of the MFB and CFA career staff stations has already had many hurdles jumped through the consistent policies that have been produced. Equipment purchasing has become aligned to better serve the fire services, training is organised and runs at similar facilities, SOP's are aligning with time, Recruit courses are now joint and service departments are similar between both organisations. The change that is believed to be required between the services to fall under one banner will no doubt be significant to begin with but over time, will be an acceptable standard as the changes become the normal. While not wanting to see the history that has been achieved within this organisation erased, a new history can be made and the characteristics and dynamics of CFA along with its standards and internal respect models facilitated in the new organisation. Those of us that have an appreciation for what occurs on a daily basis, the possibilities that exist and the change that is possibly coming, do not fear this change of model but rather are prepared to embrace the change and ensure that it is not just the State Government, the members of parliament and the emergency service managers that are facilitating it, but also those on the ground that are the ones who are the direct proponents of the fire service we provide in this state.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission, I hope for what it's worth, I have been able to provide some small insight into the role I facilitate and the service that I work for and am proud of.

Yours Sincerely,



Shaun Pacher
Senior Station Officer
Craigieburn Fire Brigade – CFA



Postal Address:



TERMS OF REFERENCE

A Select Committee of eight Members be appointed to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 8 August 2017, on the restructuring of Victoria's fire services as contemplated by the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 and, in particular, the —

- impact on fire service delivery across Victoria
- effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery
- short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision
- underlying policy rationale