

Assistant Clerk
Committees Department
Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne, VIC, 3002

Committee Members,

My name is Philip John Taylor and I have been a professional MFB fire-fighter for 38 years. I have worked in Operations for a significant part of those 38 years and I am currently the Commander for Work Health and Safety for the North West Metropolitan Region. I have been a resident of Ascot Vale for the past 31 years and am therefore fortunate to have the safety benefits of a professional fire-fighting and emergency medical response service in my neighbourhood.

My family has an extensive history with the MFB with my father, uncle, brother and brother in law all being long serving professional fire-fighters. In addition, my father served as a volunteer fire-fighter for the CFA in the Trawool Fire Brigade for 15 years eventually holding the position of Group Officer.

I hold the following formal academic qualifications:-

Advanced Diploma in Public Safety
Diploma of Health and Safety
Diploma of Project Management
Associate Diploma of Fire Technology

I was also awarded a Chief Officers Commendation in 2007 for successfully providing emergency CPR to a civilian that had suffered a cardiac arrest in Brimbank Park, Keilor.

I was a member of the Standards Australia Committee SF 049 between 1999 and 2010 that developed the first minimum safety Standards for fire-fighters protective clothing and equipment. I am also an advisor to the Interoperability Committee for personal protective clothing and station wear which is tasked with the alignment of these items for professional fire-fighters in the MFB and CFA.

I am writing to you to highlight the importance of the Fire Services Reform legislation to the safety of fire-fighters and the Victorian Community.

As you would be aware Victoria's fire service boundaries have not changed significantly in the last 60 years despite the massive urban growth within that time. The fire service boundaries no longer have any relevance to the inherent risks and population distribution of Victoria, particularly around the outer suburbs, growth corridors of Melbourne and large regional centres.

Volunteer response data in these areas clearly demonstrate that volunteer fire brigades can no longer meet the ever increasing public safety demands of these highly populated urban, commercial and industrial areas of the state.

When I was in the role of Operations Commander in Western District I saw first-hand the inefficiencies of the current response arrangements. It was not unusual to come to work in the morning and deal with requests to supply fire trucks and crews into the CFA border stations for the day or night shift due to lack of professional CFA fire-fighters being available. In addition, the MFB routinely reports the number of calls into CFA areas to support CFA professional crews which is often well over 20 calls every week.

A guaranteed minimum response of 7 professional fire-fighters in 2 appliances within 8 minutes is world's best practice and is critical to fire-fighter safety. I have attended numerous fires and emergencies within the bordering CFA areas to support professional CFA crews. MFB crews would often arrive and be fighting a fire well before any volunteer response arrived on scene. When they did attend, it was not unusual for volunteer crews to not be equipped or trained in the use of breathing apparatus resulting in professional fire-fighters being exposed to the fire toxins multiple times.

I recall attending one particular house fire in Caroline Springs where both CFA and MFB crews were involved in suppressing the fire. On arrival MFB and CFA professional crews had exhausted their air cylinders successfully knocking down the fire, however it was still burning within the roof space. A crew in breathing apparatus was required to enter the structure, go to the second floor and remove the ceiling plaster to completely extinguish the fire. It took over 15 minutes to assemble a suitably trained and qualified team in breathing apparatus to undertake that task.

In the meantime the fire had been extending through the roof space causing significant unnecessary damage to the building. During the night the CFA crews had to attend the scene again due to the fire reigniting in the building again causing further damage. In the Metropolitan Fire District an MFB crew stays on scene overnight or several days if required where there is a risk that the fire may reignite and cause further damage. The CFA does not have adequate professional staffing for this task and volunteer fire-fighters are not compelled to be available for this important fire duty task.

Responding with volunteer crews that do not have the same prerequisite training, skills and equipment as professional fire-fighters places great strain on crews responding to fires and they would often be completely exhausted by the end of the incident. This is not intended to denigrate the great work done by volunteers but simply to highlight that these areas can no longer be safely serviced with the current volunteer arrangements in locations of high demand.

It is also critical that the Reform legislation incorporates the Presumptive Cancer arrangements that will benefit all fire-fighters whether they are professional or volunteer. Provision of the required response of 7, 2, 8 will significantly reduce the exposure time or dose of fire contaminants and toxins that each fire-fighter will be exposed to whilst fighting fires. Fire Service reform is therefore essential to reducing exposure times and will hopefully result in fewer fire-fighters developing an occupational related cancer.

I note that Fire Rescue Victoria will not have a Board or Chief Executive Officer and will have a Fire Commissioner leading the organisation as recommended by the Fire Services Review. Currently, the Chief Fire Officer of the MFB is only one of many Executive Directors under the existing corporate structure of the MFB Board and Chief Executive Officer. The establishment of Fire Rescue Victoria will enable the Fire Commissioner, supported by a strategic advisory committee to focus upon the delivery of contemporary fire safety objectives as the main priority.

The appointment of a Fire Commissioner as the head of Fire rescue Victoria would be a significant improvement on the current MFB structure as the fire safety objectives of the Commissioner would become the paramount drivers of strategies and organisational decision making. Since the introduction of CEO's as the head of the MFB the organisation's strategies appear to be driven by the objectives of senior corporate executives with little operational understanding and a focus upon short term personal objectives and KPI's.

The reforms proposed in the legislation address all of the concerns previously expressed by the VFBV, the Liberal/National Parties and some volunteer fire-fighters. These organisations are stating that the Premier *“wants to hand control of the CFA to the United Fire-fighters Union (UFU). This deal will give the UFU control over CFA operations and remove the rights of volunteers and CFA management.”*

This is clearly untrue as there will be no professional UFU fire-fighters in the CFA under the proposed legislation. The CFA will become a **volunteer only** organisation under the control of the VFBV dominated CFA Board and will not be subject to any union influence whatsoever as all professional fire-fighters will transfer to Fire Rescue Victoria. The proposed reforms of the services will significantly benefit volunteer fire-fighters and they will not be impacted by any requirements of the enterprise bargaining arrangements of professional fire-fighters. For example:-

Volunteer fire-fighters will not be impacted by union requirements for personal protective clothing and equipment, station wear, fire-fighting appliances or station design as they will negotiate their requirements directly with CFA management.

Volunteer fire-fighters can remain at the 35 integrated stations if they wish to remain at those locations or move to an adjoining all volunteer brigade.

Volunteer fire-fighters will be covered within this legislation for cancers that are as a result of exposures at emergency incidents.

Volunteer fire-fighters will be provided with significant government funding via the CFA Support Fund to strengthen volunteer recruitment, training, retention, capital works and equipment.

All Victorian professional and volunteer fire-fighters deserve a modern fire service structure that meets the needs of our growing communities. The model proposed by the Andrews Government delivers greater safety outcomes for all fire-fighters and an effective emergency response model for the growing community. The current structure that has two separate fire authorities providing different levels of fire protection and emergency medical response into metropolitan Melbourne and regional centres duplicates resources and is inefficient.

I also strongly believe that fire service reform will finally stop the high levels of stress and industrial disharmony that has persisted within emergency services in Victoria for at least the past 25 years, and let us get on with the job of protecting all Victorians equally. The Accord between the FRV management and fire-fighters will commit to an inclusive and modern workplace allowing fire-fighters to direct their energy into providing a world class professional fire service and provide enhanced community safety rather than constantly being distracted to defend their workplace rights.

Kind Regards

Philip Taylor

**Philip Taylor | Commander Health & Safety
Dip. OHS | Dip. Proj. Mgmt | A.Dip. Fire Tech.
North West Metro Region**

Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board

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