

Sean Doherty.



Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is Sean Doherty and I am currently a firefighter at Sunbury Fire Station, where I have been employed by the Country Fire Authority for eighteen months.

I have lived in Geelong my entire life which itself has witnessed enormous growth since 1958 when the CFA act was created. It is worth noting that my current work location of Sunbury is poised to triple its population in a very short time frame, however we have not effectively reformed our fire service to reflect this population growth and I believe this is to the detriment of the community that relies on us.

**I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire service for the following reasons:**

- With an increased urban interface the metropolitan boundaries need to expand and must reflect a fire service to deliver internationally recognised emergency response standards to the community.
- The fire service levy must reflect a safe, fast and effective fire service delivery for all.
- Historical boundaries should not jeopardise emergency response requirements.
- A merger of the fire services will standardise our safe working practices thus providing a benefit to the community and will have no effect on the surge capacity of volunteers.
- A merger will allow for efficiency of the fire service by providing standardised communications and response expectations.
- Interoperability of two career fire services providing the same service delivery is required in the modern era. These fire services must be streamlined to form a coherent fire service for the communities unto which they serve.
- The reform will assist with standardisation of career training, specialist response and response standards.

- Politics should not be at play when public safety is jeopardised.
- Political alliances should not and must not dictate a logical conclusion to reform the fire service.
- The proposed financial monetary injection into the volunteer brigades can only have a positive impact for the communities they serve. This financial support can provide vital equipment and brigade infrastructure to the value of \$44million.
- Financial support of the volunteer brigades can assist in retention, training and recruitment of additional volunteer staff and supporting staff to the value of an additional \$52Million.
- Victoria's future must be taken into account and any political strategy for rejecting a logical reform must be held to account.
- The reform will only affect 35 integrated stations primary response areas with no negative effect on other volunteer brigades.
- Volunteer support will be maintained with operational staff by continuing their roles through an arrangement with CFA.
- No longer can we rely on emotion or alliances to dictate public safety terms and conditions, we need reform.
- This lack of initial response minimums is a direct attack on my colleagues and I as it places our lives in jeopardy.
- Personal safety as a firefighter is drastically reduced by not dispatching guaranteed numbers of suitably qualified firefighters to a fire ground.

My final noted point was highlighted by a fire call I attended on the 7/10/2016. Myself alongside B platoon members were dispatched to a structure fire where we arrived on scene within three minutes of receiving the call. Upon arrival we were informed that an occupant was still inside the burning structure, hence I was tasked to rescue the occupant alongside my Leading Fire Fighter. We located the occupant and proceeded to extract her from the premise and due to her size the Leading Fire Fighter sustained an injured back upon exit of the townhouse. I then had to suppress the fire by myself due to the injury sustained to my colleague. At this stage of my career I was a Level 1 Fire Fighter with minimum skills and knowledge and this lack of experience again put me at risk without additional qualified support. If the structure of the townhouse had been compromised I would have had no guaranteed support to assist and/or rescue me. We were fortunate to have a secondary response of volunteers to assist in the final stages of the fire suppression, which goes to highlight the inclusive and appreciated volunteer capacity which will remain throughout the reform process. Volunteers are vital in providing a safer community, however with growing demands on work life balances within a growing community and the availability of volunteers and suitable skill sets on a daily basis means there will be times when a response from volunteers is simply unobtainable.

This potential lack of initial response minimums is therefore a direct attack on the safety of myself and my colleagues as it places our lives in jeopardy. The reform of the fire service will ensure we must have 7 firefighters dispatched to the fire ground to guarantee firefighter safety. Our workplace is dangerous and dynamic and therefore requires an appropriated risk mitigation strategy which can be obtained via fire service reform.

Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation for cancer is underpinning the associated risks faced by fire fighters and will provide a foundation to ensure all firefighter, career and volunteer alike and supported in a time of need. I believe this presumptive legislation is vital in recognising the concerted efforts to protect the community.

The disputation has had a graven effect on moral, through misinformation and a political smear campaign the once revered 'fire fighter' has been rendered second class for fighting for their workplace safety. The hypocrisy and the personal strain must end. We need the support of the communities unto which we are serving and this can be obtained by you providing us with the necessary tools and staffing to combat our task in a proficient manner. We need urgent Fire Service Reform now.

I plead with you to take into account the facts driving the need for reform, response times and capabilities are paramount to provide Victorians with necessary projections to ensure their lives are not jeopardised for a political agenda now and into the future.

Yours Sincerely

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Sean Doherty.