

Luke Irving

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Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

My Name is Luke Irving. I currently reside in Benloch Victoria, just north of Lancefield, with my wife and 18 month old daughter. I have witnessed first-hand the amazing work Volunteer Firefighters do in Rural Victoria. My house came under attack recently during the Lancefield fires in 2015. My property sustained severe damage during this fire, where we lost 2 large sheds, an Historic cottage, tractor and a substantial amount of fencing. If it wasn't for the commitment and dedication of my local and surrounding Volunteer brigades I fear the outcome may have been much worse. I am extremely grateful to all personnel who took part in this incident at all levels including the recovery process and have immense respect and a good relationship with my local brigades.

I joined the CFA in 2003 where I worked as a Volunteer Firefighter for 5 years. During this time I was able to obtain my increment on the Medium Pumper and 3.4D Tanker, I was also part of the EMR Program when it was rolled out to the volunteer stations in 2006. This was a very rewarding stage of my firefighting career and I feel paved the way for my role as a Career Firefighter with CFA . However during this period I was working as a Self Employed Carpenter and at times found it to be very difficult to maintain my skills and also fulfil the huge commitment of responding to calls for assistance in my home town. I also strongly believe that the burden placed on me as a Volunteer EMR responder was quite daunting as I have a large network of friends, family and loved ones in this area and I struggled with the possibility of responding to a call for help from someone close to me who had suffered a cardiac arrest. Although this is still a possibility through general Firefighting duties, with the EMR program there is a greatly enhanced risk of this occurring and as a Volunteer I believe this is a huge burden to carry.

I joined the CFA Staff Ranks in July 2008 where I undertook an intensive 16 week Monday to Friday recruit course at Fiskville in a squad of 20 like-minded people who had all completed a very stringent selection process who I now call close friends and work colleagues. I am currently serving as a Leading Firefighter at Sunbury CFA where I have been appointed for approximately 18 months. Prior to that I spent 7 and a half years working at various stations within district 8, such as Cranbourne, Frankston, Springvale and Mornington. I also worked at Dandenong Fire Station for 5 years where I was able to obtain my Heavy Rescue, 37 and 42 meter Ladder Platforms, Teleboom, Hazmat Detection Vehicle, 5 different Pumper increments, 4 different Tanker increments and I was also part of the initial EMR Program when it rolled out as I was appointed to Dandenong at this time.

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

- CFA plays a very significant role in the lives of many, it runs in the family history for generations in some cases. It will continue to do so. However I strongly believe that through population growth, urban sprawl, generational and cultural change and the demands on people with their work/life balance, volunteerism has taken a back seat in many instances.
- CFA is the heart and soul of many communities throughout Regional Victoria. Having married into a fourth generation farming family in the Wimmera region, I have a great understanding and respect for this fact. The hysteria that has been created politically in recent years has been unwarranted and only served to distract people from what we all joined the CFA to do and that is "Protect Life and Property", this will continue to happen

after the reforms take place, in fact I only see positive outcomes for all parties involved including the community.

Some examples of these outcomes are:

- CFA will have autonomy
 - CFA will have a huge increase in funding, this being a \$52 million dollar CFA Support Fund to provide greater training opportunities, increased brigade support and improved health and safety and \$44 million dollars towards a CFA Station Building Program. Both of these will provide greater opportunity for growth and improvement of brigades and individual's skillsets alike.
 - Building these strengths within individual brigades will assist brigades with not only response, creating a safer working environment but also recruitment, which can only have a positive outcome for the community.
 - Access to Presumptive Rights Cancer Compensation for Firefighters both Career and Volunteer alike.
 - These Reforms will also provide a safe workplace for Career Firefighters, with guaranteed support and guaranteed skills within responding crews to ensure safest possible outcome for the community and to ensure all Firefighters involved return home safely after their shift to their loved ones.
- Coming from a building background I know firsthand that building construction has changed, re-constituted timber products such as MDF and chipboard not to mention greater amounts of plastics and also manmade fabrics containing high levels of Polar Solvents are being used, leading to much faster combustion rates and fires reaching flashpoint up to 10 times faster than the 1950's when the current CFA act was created. The Proposed Reforms will enable Career Firefighters who have a 90 second response capability from the time of call, to undertake an aggressive initial attack which in most cases will minimise damage to property, hopefully containing the fire to the room of origin and most importantly be critical for the protection of life. These reforms will also provide comfort in knowing that guaranteed support with the appropriate qualifications is also on the way. This not only provides a safe workplace for Career Firefighters but also improved safety for the community.
- I strongly believe these disputes have gone on far too long and it is imperative for the health and wellbeing of all parties involved that they are brought to a close as soon as possible. Career and Volunteer Firefighters will continue to work together for the protection of the community, however the toll not only on the working relationships but the mental health of Emergency Responders is being diminished.

In closing I would like to say that I firmly believe that this Fire Service Reform will not have a negative effect on Volunteerism or Surge Capacity for Bushfire Response. I only see it as a positive for the Fire Services of Victoria and the Community alike.

I thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Sincerely



Luke Irving