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**Assistant Clerk Committees**

Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Services Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

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

Dear Hon Members

My name is Brian Scown; I am a Career Firefighter with the Country Fire Authority. I have been a proud member of this organisation for 13 years as a Volunteer and Career Firefighter. I am currently assigned to the position of Station Officer at Sunbury Fire Brigade.

During my time in the organisation I have been involved in various roles across the agency including: Volunteer Firefighter, Brigade Secretary, Career Firefighter, Leading Firefighter, Recruit Instructor, Station Officer and Acting Officer in Charge of Brigades. I have attended many fires and emergencies at a local and state level as well as across the border to assist our sister agencies during their time of need.

My current role is the Station Officer responsible of the fire brigade when I am on duty. My role is to provide leadership and professional management of Integrated (career/volunteer) Fire Brigades, I am accountable for ensuring Brigade operational readiness and for the provision of efficient and effective service delivery of CFA services. My work has me managing the day to day running of the Fire Brigade; ensuring efficient and effective incident management skills, whilst being responsible for Brigade management, preparedness and execution of key service delivery outcomes whilst delivering effective risk management within the Brigade.

In 2014 I was awarded the 10 year service medal as well as the National Emergency Medal for my sustained service during the tragic 2009 Black Saturday Fires.

I am writing to you to show my in principle support for the **Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017.**

It saddens me to think that this long overdue implementation of fire services reform and presumptive rights has come from years of political sabotage, point scoring, vilification, media smear campaigns and public criticism based on half or un-truths. Those members of politics, the media (print, radio, and social) and representative bodies are all guilty to varying degrees of sanctioning and supporting this behaviour at one time or another. In particular I would like to mention the Shadow Emergency Services and Environment Minister Brad

Battin. Mr Battin has been influential in inciting community dislike and bitterness towards my colleagues whilst standing behind his parliamentary privilege. I have experienced verbal confrontations from members of my community reciting the fabricated untruths and rhetoric spun by the printed media. I have experienced animosity from my own volunteer partners for nothing more than the unknown, and whilst I have done my part trying to set the record straight, it is difficult when I am competing against multiple front pages of print media, and hours of conversation on talk back radio.

I support the bill put forward by the Victorian Labour Government. I have taken the time to read the Bill on numerous occasions whilst also being aware of the relative support, infrastructure and implementation sub committees which have been identified by the government and emergency agencies at the forefront of these changes.

The presumptive rights component of the Bill is long overdue. I have witnessed and am acutely aware of the potential for firefighting related cancers, and am satisfied that this form of compensation rights will lead the way forward for the rest of Australia whilst giving our members the best opportunity for access to health services and financial protection which we deserve. This presumptive rights legislation is the best form reasonably available for volunteer and career firefighters in this country, and the current government should hold their heads high for putting this version forward. I would also like to take this opportunity to personally thank the Hon Colleen Hartland for your dedicated support over this matter for what now feels like an eternity... Thank you.

I live and work in the community I serve. I am aware of the urban sprawl that this community is about to endure, and am conscious that a modern fire service is required to help support the growth, change, and safety needs for this brigade and those who work and volunteer here.

As a Station Officer and Incident Controller of the Country Fire Authority, I'd be lying if I wasn't envious of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and their response arrangements. Whilst it is our responsibility to recruit, train and develop our volunteer members so they can support us during an emergency, the reality is from time to time our members are simply unavailable... and that's ok, they all have jobs, families and personal commitments, and on occasions are simply not available to assist.

As a consequence of the unknown volunteer response, I can recall times I have had to respond and operate outside of agency guidelines, industry best practice, and operating procedures.

I would like to provide an example where this was the case:

It was the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013, a hot summer's day, we had already responded to two other calls that shift. It was 1930hrs and we received a call for a house fire at a property in Sunbury (inc #48501) at the time I was a Leading Firefighter, and I was a part of a crew of 3 (Station Officer, Leading Firefighter and Firefighter). I was the driver/pump operator at this event. En-route we received acknowledgement of multiple calls and unknown if persons were trapped inside. We had heavy smoke showing from the vicinity and were met with a house 40% involved, partial structural collapse, fire heat intensity ~450DegC, electricity popping and zapping, glass breaking, roof tiles falling, cars in the carport, neighbours yelling and screaming... they thought someone was inside. The Firefighter exited the truck and

deployed a hose line to begin an internal fire fight and conduct a primary search. As the pump operator it was my job to establish pump pressure and source an adequate reticulated water supply as the on-board water tank was insufficient for this fire. My next role was then to enter the building and provide support to the Firefighter inside the building in searching for the missing person whilst containing and extinguishing the fire. I met up with my colleague and continued the search. The temperature in the building was hot, visibility was poor, I was unable to see a foot from my face; we contained the fire and searched the house hoping the owner was not home as we knew the alternative was grim.

Whilst this story may seem extreme, it is by no means uncommon. These types of fires occur daily in areas around Victoria, in particular the densely populated locations such as metropolitan and outer metropolitan Melbourne as well as regional Victoria. The difference between this fire and those which occur in the current MFB area is that those crews will have a guaranteed response of a minimum 7 dispatched firefighters to the fire within 8 minutes, all with the appropriate skill sets and resources to perform the tasks necessary to complete the objective. In the example I provided above, my truck was on scene at the fire before we knew if our volunteer support truck was coming, therefore the OIC needed to make a conscious decision to send her two firefighters inside in an attempt to perform a rescue, not knowing how far away the next truck was, and if something unexpected was to occur and we became trapped or injured that she would run the risk of being reprimanded all because we worked outside of operating guidelines when all we were trying to do was save a life of an unknown person possibly trapped inside... that is however, the job you would expect a Firefighter to do, you would expect us to protect life and property at the sacrifice of our own wellbeing; and we do, we do it now, we do it well, but we could do it better.

Reform of our fire service will ensure the safety of your constituents and all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of enormous urban growth, increase in emergency calls and the increase in community expectation.

1<sup>st</sup> July 2013 saw the fire service levy removed from the insurance companies, standardised and re modelled to be collected via the council rates. When this occurred a formula comprising of a fixed charge and capital improvement value multiplied by the levy rate was introduced.

It just so happens that within the country area of Victoria the community is contributing more cents per \$1,000 of capital improved value across all property sectors than those within the metropolitan area. Whilst the property value in some locations of the Country area of Victoria are less than the Metropolitan area, there are those in the Country areas of outer Metropolitan Melbourne, Geelong, Bellarine and Mornington Peninsulas that do rival, and in some cases surpass that of the Metropolitan fire district.

The Levy does not discriminate against the level of service in which you may receive, in fact some members of the Country area of Victoria are already paying more for a modern fire service (based on value comparisons to the Metropolitan area), and whilst the response they are currently receiving is dedicated and meaningful, unfortunately it can fall short of the minimum standard displayed within the metropolitan boundaries.

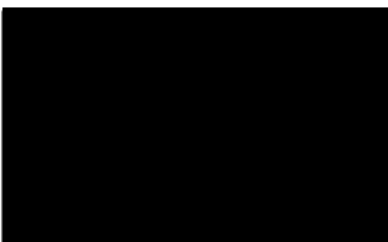
As a former volunteer member of the Country Fire Authority, I respect and support volunteers within this organisation. I appreciate their want or need to volunteer; I understand and value the ideology of 'Farmers helping Farmers' and the value of the community based organisation which CFA is known for. The brand, the awareness of the logo, the sense of calm and reassurance it brings to members of the community during their time of need. There is still a place for it. The reality is though that Victoria's fire service boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. As a consequence, there are 35 identified locations which currently warrant a review. Those areas are communities which are rapidly expanding, growing and are becoming modern suburb centres. With that growth comes an evolution of community expectation, and that expectation is a world leading modern fire service.

I welcome the prospect of fire service reform. I can see the benefits that a modern fire service will bring to our communities. I am excited for the CFA brigades who can have the "fear" of union takeovers removed from the rhetoric of their representative body so they can get on with the job, a job in which they do well. The mechanism of change will be large and complex, at times it may be a bumpy ride, at times it may be smooth sailing and at times it will need to be handled delicately but if we focus on what is best for our growing community then we will always know that what we are doing is right.

I acknowledge that my submission is not broad, wide-ranging or all-encompassing, but I do hope it provides some of the insight required for this very important consultation period.

I respectfully submit that your consideration to my request to modernise the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by parliament before the commencement of the fire season.

Yours Sincerely



Brian Robert Scown