

DEAR FIRE SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE,

My name is Matthew Ivan and I reside in Lilydale in the Eastern Suburbs of Melbourne.

I am currently employed by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) as a Leading firefighter.

I joined CFA as a career firefighter in 2003 and entered into what I thought was a safe and fulfilling career. Unfortunately over time these thoughts are changing. I have seen many changes in my time with CFA to the equipment, vehicles and especially the training demands to be a firefighter. The one thing that has not changed is the Fire Service boundaries that differentiate between the Metropolitan and Country areas of Victoria. This may not seem like a major problem, however the flow on effect of these boundaries not changing has had significant consequences!

When we look at how services are provided and brigade areas within CFA are established, monitored and evaluated there is a major downfall that leaves the community we protect exposed including us as Career firefighters. Factual CFA response data is available. This data provides facts that do not lie about the downfall in response capabilities. I urge you all to obtain and analyse this response data and see firsthand just how dire this situation is. When a brigade boundary for emergency response is established it should be decided upon many things including, but not limited to population, risk, number of calls and brigade membership. Within CFA these factors appear to be overridden and can change at any time because someone doesn't like or want another brigade in "their patch".

As a resident living in the "Country Area of Victoria" which in fact in many areas is now heavily urbanised and knowing how our current system lets our communities down, I am disappointed that a process such as this has had to be established to gather facts (that are readily available) to make the changes that will finally give the State of Victoria a modern and reliable Fire Service.

When it comes to providing a fire service we should **always** have the two closest, appropriately trained and crewed fire trucks responding to emergencies within the specified time. In the country area of Victoria this is not happening and it is occurring on a regular basis.

In the past few weeks I can recall an instance where a volunteer brigade in the outer metro area had been paged to a fire. The first appliance they responded was a 4WD with no firefighting capability. The other brigade paged to the call failed to turn out a truck. A third brigade was paged but had to come from a further distance and did not get to the fire, as the caller advised he had extinguished the fire himself. A career fire station was located close to this fire but was not called even after a brigade failed to turn out. This is not acceptable.

CFA records this response data that includes how long it took brigades to respond to calls, if in fact they actually responded at all. The public would be shocked to see just how bad things currently are.

I have a number of friends who are Volunteer members with CFA and I also work alongside Volunteers at Dandenong Fire Station. I understand the demands of being a Volunteer and can see how the expectations are always growing. New equipment, new skills, ever increasing numbers of callouts are putting a strain on volunteer members across the state of Victoria. The above doesn't even factor in their work commitments, family life and general wellbeing requirements outside of volunteering their time with CFA.

I think Volunteer firefighters do a great job in the state of Victoria and they will continue to do so into the future, however I think it is time that we start making the protection of our communities a priority that is based on fact, not one that is made on emotion, pride or an Act that is nearly 60 years old. It will certainly upset some people when these changes occur and I understand this, they are proud members of the community who have done and will continue to do a great job. Reality is that our Volunteer members need to put the community first and see that these changes are necessary to provide a better fire service model for all involved.

I have been to numerous emergencies and am happy to discuss further where volunteer brigades have failed to turnout, have responded with insufficient crew numbers or skills or bought an inappropriate vehicle because they didn't have anyone who could drive the truck. These failures have compromised the safety of the community, myself and my crew in these instances. I am bewildered how anyone can see this is acceptable in any situation.

This is not an attack on volunteers but facts are facts, if they are at work, at a family event or have other commitments and are unavailable to respond a fire truck, who will get the truck to the emergency?

In saying this getting a fire truck to an emergency is critical but is only the first step. We also need to ensure that the firefighters on the truck are trained appropriately and that there are enough crew to safely combat the emergency.

Slow response times not only jeopardise our community's safety, it has a financial impact also. Fires that are attended too and stopped from spreading quickly cost all parties involved less money.

If someone calls 000 for a fire truck they expect one to arrive that meets the above criteria. I wonder how it would be received if our Police Force or Ambulance Service was operated under the same structure.

To ensure we provide the best service to our communities we need to;

- Have the current fire service boundaries changed to reflect the current population
- Have an independent committee review performance of brigades around the state and implement appropriate changes to make sure the community is best served
- Ensure a minimum of seven professional firefighters respond to calls in the metro area and large regional centres within 8 minutes.
- Ensure future decisions are made on fact not emotions or political agenda.

I look forward to seeing a progressive decision made by this committee that highlights the shortfalls in our current system and introduces a modern fire service that exceeds our community's expectations.

Best Regards

Matthew Ivan
Leading Firefighter
Dandenong Fire Station