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From: Murray Sutton [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 2 July 2017 10:39 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission - Fire Services Bill Select Committee

I support the Fire Service Reforms

I followed my father in to the CFA as a volunteer firefighter on my 16th birthday; 15 years ago. Upon completing high school I became a firefighter for FFMV (formerly Department of Sustainability and Environment) and I remained in that role until I joined the CFA as a career fire fighter in 2013. I remained an active volunteer during that time and I currently hold the rank of Lieutenant (leadership role) with the Colac Fire Brigade. My career rank is Qualified Firefighter.

Additional to qualifications required for my rank (which I won't bore you with) I hold these additional endorsements;

- Aerial Pumper increment
- High Angle Rescue Operator (vertical rope rescue; cliffs, buildings etc.)
- Confined Space Rescue operator
- Trench Rescue Operator
- Ground Observer (gathering emergency information and relaying it to an Incident Control Centre)

I worked every day of the Great Divide Fires 2006/7. When I wasn't rostered on duty, I served as a volunteer. I was working for DSE in Marysville during the 2009 Black Saturday Fires. I was awarded a National Emergency Medal for my work leading up to, during and after those devastating and deadly fires. In 2015 I worked Christmas Eve night at the Warrnambool Fire Station and then spent Christmas Day and night as a volunteer crew leader at Wye River. I then spent New Years Eve in Wye River as apart of a Ground Observer Team.

In this job you can't un-see what you have already seen. To this day I can still vividly remember the look on my Mums face as a result of Black Saturday.

For all of us, volunteer and career; what we see and experience as a part of our service gives us enough to think about.

The last 4 years has seen a relentless campaign of bashing, demeaning and defaming of career firefighters, yet through all adversity, Career Firefighters have continued to do their job of serving their communities. Imagine as you are doing CPR on a person, desperately trying to save a life. You look away for the slightest of mental breaks, yet the first thing you see is the front page of the Herald Sun attacking you and your career colleagues... Bludgers, thugs, dogs, and puppets are just some of the things we've been called. We've been lied about, criticised, and accused of bullying. It's not right! No other section of the community would have to put up with this so why should we?

The last two years have seen an incredibly large wedge driven between volunteer and career firefighters. It saddens and disgusts me the amount of blatant lies, utter mistruths and divisiveness that is being peddled by the VFBV, their representatives and the Herald Sun.

This needs to stop. This MUST stop!

Victoria deserves a modern and progressive fire service. The time is now for Victoria to press the reset button. These reforms will stand us in good stead to best meet the needs of a growing population.

As a part of the select committees inquiries please go to the effort of talking to the Victorian Volunteer Firefighters Association (VVFA). They are a newly formed volunteer association who have service delivery to the community at the forefront of their thinking. Get the vocal minority of VFBV indoctrinated volunteers off to one side and you'll find that the views of the VVFA are shared with the vast majority of silent, yet passionate and dedicated CFA volunteers; Volunteers who care more about the community than their own egos.

We need the proposed legislation to be enacted.

The longer the political use of firefighters continues the more likely volunteer and career firefighters are to leave. This legislation is the best and fairest way forward. It is the light at the end of the tunnel that was needed many, many years ago. Anyone that says differently is putting their ego and/or their political agenda ahead of public safety.

Surge Capacity WILL NOT BE AFFECTED!

This myth perpetuated by the VFBV needs to be called out for what it is, a myth, a fairy tale, a scary story designed to put fear in to the hearts of everyday Victorians and it needs to stop!

When the pager sounds a volunteer leaves the dinner table, doesn't pick up the kids from school or leaves work many times a week; how likely is it that their partner or boss is going to let them respond to a major incident or long running campaign fire? NOT LIKELY!

If they have career firefighter support nearby they then don't have to respond to non-time critical calls at 3am or leave work for false calls. They can stay at work, put food on the table and pick the calls they feel that require their attendance. As a result their partner or employer will be VERY LIKELY to allow them to respond for an extended duration when the state or local area is on fire.

Skill Sets - ensure we are comparing oranges with oranges

As a Career Firefighter my recruit course was five days a week for 16 weeks, then 3 years of on the job training and study before you become a Qualified Firefighter. For a volunteer to become a bush and grass firefighter (for CFA that is minimum skills) it is a 5 day course. There is a massive difference between the skills and proficiencies of these two very different types of firefighters.

If your paddock is on fire; Minimum skills is probably going to be all that is required.

If your house, hospital, business, school or factory is on fire you need the most proficient, highly trained firefighters to respond in the shortest time possible. Career firefighters respond within 90 seconds of receipt of call. Volunteers at Urban stations have 6 -8 minutes to respond. Rural stations have 15-20 minutes to respond. Fires don't discriminate and they don't wait. Please look at CFA's own dollar loss reports.

The need for Career Firefighters

Where I work we respond into neighbouring towns and areas. Why the response into the surrounding areas? Because people travel to work in the bigger centres there is often not enough people left that can respond to fires and incidents within their own local area. More and more times we are seeing volunteer brigades failing to respond (their truck never leaves the shed). The commitment of volunteers in these brigades can't be questioned however the realities of life mean they need support from firefighters trained in urban firefighting who are able to provide a rapid, 24/7 response. Outside of the larger centres (urban/city type brigades) the skill sets of volunteer brigades (rural/grassfire) are adequate for grass fires but nowhere near where they need to be for urban fires where Breathing Apparatus is essential for safe firefighting. This is reality.

Modernisation of the Fire Services - Value for money

We had the CFA Chief and Emergency Services Commissioner at the Warrnambool Fire Station to present to the brigade about the reforms. The Shift Boss's pager sounds at 1427 (it gets all of the calls for the District); he looks at it with a concerned look on his face. He says quietly to us (as to not interrupt the meeting) that there is a structure fire out of town. We continue listening to the Chiefs.... our pagers finally alert at 1459, half an hour later. It took us 11 minutes to get on-scene. Why weren't we dispatched at 1427? The answer to that is the system is broken. Lines on a map and ego's. This is repeated across the state.

If we were dispatched at the same time as the initial brigades we would have been the second truck on-scene. There is no reason why we shouldn't have automatically been called. The 'truck' we take to these calls is specially designed for structural firefighting. It has a 19 meter high nozzle, two thermal imaging cameras, 4 sets of breathing apparatus, three fully qualified and competent structural firefighters. It is the only truck of its type in the any of the adjoining Districts. Would the outcome have changed if we got the initial call? Yes, yes it would have. There would have been less damage caused by the fire and less water damage because we would have gone inside the structure and put it out. We are paid the same whether we are sitting in a meeting or risking our lives doing what our job title suggests; firefighting. The truck is paid for; the only cost is a few litres of fuel. How is this getting the most value for money??? How is this the best value for the person who's house was on fire? They pay the FSL and aren't getting a service they are well and truly entitled to! What happened to the house? Well, a complete rebuild. The fire services are broken. The services must be modernized. The community deserves better.

Presumptive Legislation is great. It is long overdue and desperately needed.

I implore you, please endorse these reforms.

All Firefighter need this. For literally years now we have seen Firefighter pitted against Firefighter. It isn't healthy for us and it isn't making an already difficult job any easier. It's mentally and emotionally draining and it's taking its toll. It isn't helping any of us protect our communities. This is the best possible opportunity to reset Victoria's fire services and progress towards a positive future.

Murray Sutton

