

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I am a Leading Firefighter with CFA and have been employed with the organisation for over sixteen years. My career has been served at the Frankston Fire Brigade and I have also live in Frankston for the past six years of my service to the Frankston community. During this time I have worked side by side with all members of the brigade including professional and volunteer Firefighters working as one for the safety of our community. With these members I have been awarded the National Emergency Medal for my efforts on Black Saturday 2009.

At the time of the CFA/MFB boundary setting and well after (CFA Act was enshrined in 1958) Frankston was a seaside holiday destination that attracted residents from Melbourne for their summer holidays, as a child my father would spend his school holidays in Frankston with his family. One could say that the City of Frankston was a seaside country town of 20,600 residents (estimate in 1958 Victorian Year Book- Australian Bureau of Statistics). As of 2011 the City of Frankston had a population of 137,424 (Frankston City Council Website quoting 2011 census results) however it is still categorised as "country" in terms of firefighting resourcing and management. Frankston and directly neighbouring suburbs are home to 118 monitored fire alarm premises with direct notification to the brigade in the event the fire alarm monitoring equipment operates within those premises. It is home to numerous child care facilities, primary schools, secondary schools and two major tertiary education facilities: Chisholm Tafe & Monash University. Frankston is the home of three major hospitals and two major shopping centres. It has significant bushfire risk, 19 locations, with potential for direct impact onto residents and essential infrastructure; these can be found on the Victorian Fire Risk Register (VFRR). With all this growth and risk it is still classed as "country Victoria" relying on a fire service that was fit for 20,000 or so residents in the 1950s but is that model still fit for the expansion of residents, infrastructure and assets?

With this progressive suburb and greater workload it is putting more pressure on CFA valued volunteers, which I have witnessed first-hand in the sixteen years I have worked at Frankston. With current work/life balances people just don't have the time to give they did years ago which no one can criticise. I have utmost respect for our volunteers and support them in every way that I can, but I have seen the extra stresses and demands placed on them as the population growth continues. The proposed reform will not affect volunteer brigades but rather provide them with additional funding for equipment, training and resources. Volunteers at integrated brigades will continue to work alongside career Firefighters as they currently do. But with extra resourcing for career Firefighters, through the restructure, it will help relieve some of the pressures on volunteers as they face balancing work, family and CFA commitments. It is an outcome that supports both career and volunteer Firefighters but more importantly the community by providing a world class fire service.

At Frankston we have one of our fire trucks support neighbouring volunteer brigades with only two career Firefighters on that truck. Potentially those two members are faced with structure fires, car accidents, chemical spills and medical emergencies with no guaranteed support or back up due to the unavailability of volunteers. Through no fault of their own but due to the extra workloads or other commitments. I can personally testify to this fact as I have experienced this on many occasions and am willing to testify to these claims. This can result in members having to operate outside

Standard Operating Procedures/Standing Orders/CFA Policy working in unsafe environments placing themselves and the community at risk. This response also reflects on the coverage for Frankston leaving only three Firefighters available for the duration of the other trucks absence, again placing those Firefighters in a position where they must operate outside CFA Policy placing themselves and the community at risk. Frankston and surrounding suburbs are no longer “country” but rather part of the urban sprawl of metropolitan Melbourne (2016 census results quote Melbourne’s growth of 1850 people per week).

My example of Frankston is not an isolated one; there are 35 integrated fire stations that suffer the same manning and management issues and all exist in the sprawl that has become metropolitan Melbourne. These 35 fire stations are the only CFA stations that will be directly impacted by the changes proposed by the government despite what the media or opponents to change will have you believe. The volunteers at integrated stations will still be given the opportunity to give to the community as they do now, working alongside professional Firefighters, as they do, given full support from staff, as they do. The 1200 or so fully volunteer fire brigades will not be affected by the changes which has been widely communicated in government publications, by Emergency Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley and CFA themselves. The opponents to the changes are the ones with loud voices who have influenced many people to believe that an out-dated fire service model is still the right one for our expanding state.

The continual attacks and lies propagated by the VFVB and Victorian Liberal Party, not just about the proposed changes in legislation but also the attack on my profession and character has seen morale on station the lowest I have seen in my sixteen years’ service. These attacks have been going on way too long! The proposed changes to the fire service should see an end to the attacks as CFA will become a 100% volunteer organisation, the way it was intended to be. Mental health is a real issue and needs to be addressed, by making CFA 100% volunteer and FRV 100% professional will end the ongoing disputes between political parties, UFU and VFVB and allow the two fire services to work more harmoniously addressing mental health for both services.

I please ask that emotion be taken out of any argument and facts are the guiding factor when making a decision. Victorians deserve a modern fire service not one that was developed in the 1950s. Victoria has grown, Melbourne has grown and will continue to grow and the community is the main priority here. Victoria needs change for the future and that future is now. The safety of the Victorian community is what is important here not the egos and self-importance of some individuals.

I thank you for the opportunity to submit to the committee and trust that evidence and fact will overrule myths and unsubstantiated emotion.

Yours sincerely,

Samuel McDonald

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