

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Ben Reynolds [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 3 July 2017 10:49 AM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission fo the Parliamentary Select Committee - Fire Service Reform Bill

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

I wish for my submission to be confidential.

My name is Ben Reynolds, I live in Buninyong Victoria and I am currently a CFA Station Officer at Ballarat City Fire Station and have been a career firefighter since 31st March 2003 and was previously a volunteer at Werribee Fire Brigade.

I am writing this submission in support of the fire services reform. I have many reasons for wanting the bill passed and I will try my hardest to explain my position on these matters. My submission will be based on facts and personal experiences. It will be truthful, it will have taken into consideration the effect the Bill will have personally, locally with surrounding Volunteers and for the state of Victoria. Mostly my support for the bill comes from a safety point of view for incidents in outer metro and large regional centres and also from a community service point of view.

ABOUT ME;

I started out with CFA as a junior member (non-operational) at Werribee Fire Brigade. I moved on to becoming a senior firefighter (operational) at Werribee for approximately 2.5 years before applying to become a career firefighter with CFA in 2002. I completed the application and testing process at the start of March 2003 and was offered a position starting 3 weeks later with CFA. After an extensive 16 week recruit training course at Fiskville, I graduated as a Level 1 Firefighter and was posted to Shepparton Fire Brigade where I spent my first year in the job. Although I have relieved at stations for extended periods since like Hoppers Crossing, Sunbury and Mildura, I transferred to and have been stationed permanently at Ballarat City since I left Shepparton in June/July of 2004.

In my time within the career ranks, I have been trained in many specialist roles including Confined Space Rescue, Steep Angle Rescue, High Angle Rescue, Urban Search and Rescue (CAT1), Crew Leader, Sector Commander, Staging Area Manager, Protective Equipment Van operator, 37 meter and 42 meter Bronto Hydraulic Ladder Platform operator, Teleboom operator, Ground Observer, I am qualified in HAZMAT and Monitoring Hazardous Atmospheres, also Chemical, Biological and Radiological aspects, and I also hold all current career station Tanker and Pumper increments and Off Road driving qualifications. I also Instructed at Fiskville on 3 separate Recruit Courses in 2012 and 2014. My current development plan is to complete all training courses and further education modules for the next career progression rank by the end of this year. Add to that, Emergency Medical Response training to occur in October which the station is planned to go 'live' with in November this year. I am also trained as a Fire Service Communications Controller for CFA and work out of Vicfire Ballarat (ESTA 000 Centre) in Mount Helen when they are short staffed.

RESPONSE IN MY AREA;

My brigade is the only station with career staff in Ballarat. The City of Ballarat has well over 100,000 population plus 1000's more in the greater Ballarat area. We have a wide variety of risk including 2 major hospitals, clinics and elderly housing, major industry and commercial properties, a HWY and rail, airport, mine shafts, an aged population and historic buildings among other risks.

We attended 1650 calls last financial year as the only career station in our District. Our call rates are slowly increasing each year but will rise by an estimated 200-300 calls per year once the Emergency Medical Response comes into service later this year. Our next closest career stations are Melton (144km) and Corio (156km). After many years of lobbying we are getting a second career station at Lucas to the west of the city to cope with the urban and commercial growth westward and areas of the city that cannot be accessed within service delivery response times currently by career or volunteer brigades. The Officer in Charge was appointed today. It will be a temporary station (a warehouse) that has been identified and is hoped to be operational by the end of this year responding a

Pumper with a crew of 4. It is quite possible that the actual station will not be completed and operational until the end of 2018 which will house other appliances (yet to be finalised) and more staffing for these appliances.

At my integrated station, we have a good relationship with our volunteers. We work and train together effectively. This will continue, as it always has. We have (as do most integrated stations) many volunteers 'on the books', we have a handful that respond to incidents, we have a few that are only interested in performing specialist Staging Area crewing. The only way that I see the volunteer capacity changing at Ballarat City is that if anything it will strengthen. If the volunteers had their own truck and a 6 minute turnout, they would certainly respond more often (as they don't usually work or live in an area that allows them to jump in our truck within 90 seconds). The Officer in Charge Anthony Pearce has been advocating they look at where they see the future of the brigade if FRV starts. He has asked if they want to be a co-located brigade or separate to us. He asked that they consider if they want to be a fully operational brigade or a support brigade offering Breathing Apparatus Support Van and Staging Area only, taking the operational firefighting out. He has given them food for thought which I think is great, it may get some more people interested and more so active within the brigade. If they are their own entity, they can run the brigade as they see fit. At the moment with limited numbers of our volunteers responding to calls, surge capacity and retention will not dwindle. If anything, it should be boosted which is a win for the members and the community.

In the Eureka Group, as stated earlier we are the only integrated brigade (here at Ballarat City), then we have Ballarat, Sebastopol, Wendouree and Buninyong Volunteer Brigades (Mount Helen station is a volunteer satellite station also in our group). My working relationship within our group with Volunteer Captains, Lieutenants and Firefighters is a productive and generally good one however, some brigades that don't interact with us often in surrounding groups seem to have a dislike of career firefighters and often cancel us attending their primary calls even before getting on scene and assessing the situation. I see the issue compounding the longer the EBA dispute and the uncertainty of FRV continues. In our group, there has been a steady decline over the years in volunteer response to incidents.

An example of struggling turnouts for volunteers - This week, we responded as a support brigade to a reported Structure Fire in Ballarat Fire Brigades area (our neighbouring volunteer brigades primary) where they did not respond an appliance at all. This call was at 0938 hrs on a Wednesday morning. This type of issue is becoming more and more frequent. The pressures of normal life, employment, hobbies, families and the time constraints that come with those are having an impact on the day to day responses of our local Volunteer brigades. This is proven with the Service Delivery Standard (SDS) statistics I have seen for the Eureka Group. It is apparent in most areas when speaking to Station Officers and Operation Managers in other Districts. In the past week there have also been volunteer stations asking for pagers to be resent requiring drivers as the crew were stuck at the station without a qualified driver. These occurrences are not uncommon in the Eureka Group.

Interaction between staff and volunteers has been hit and miss in the last couple of years and even become almost non-existent in some cases (mostly with brigades that have very little do do with us) due to the fighting that has occurred and involved the CFA, VFBV, UFU and political parties from both sides and peoples alliances to any of those groups. Morale of staff is at an all-time low. Motivation is low. Pride in the organisation and with the uniform that people used to be so proud to wear has been diminished somewhat. Relationships have suffered within volunteer and staff ranks due to the misinformation that is being pushed on the community and to Volunteers by some parties about the impact that Fire Rescue Victoria (and our EBA) will have on CFA.

The impact I can see is only a positive, for the community, for our safety, for relationships between CFA and FRV. To have 7 firefighters responded to an incidents in 90 seconds is a win for the community because there is a quick response ensuring the incident is resolved as quickly as possible. Damage to the structure would be minimised, which lowers repair costs, quick response of Breathing Apparatus wearers increases likelihood of survivability for occupants. Consider also when FRV starts, Rescue gear on the Pumpers at all staff stations allows faster access to patients for Ambulance Victoria, only improving chances of survivability. Consider Emergency Medical Response trained firefighters will be out in 90 seconds to assist those showing no signs of life, providing CPR as quick as possible in these circumstances allows the best chances of success until handover with Ambulance Victoria. Another example of how FRV will benefit the fire services is that with CFA and FRV being separate, the bickering will drop right off. If VFR looks after only VFR with the EBA, it will not and cannot affect CFA Volunteers. This is where most of the scare mongering has been based. Hopefully when VFR is introduced and the Volunteers see no difference in command and control responsibilities at incidents they attend, their fears will be released. Hopefully when they

respond and deal with their local primary calls and are supported by VFR staff who treat them no different to usual, their anxiety levels will come down.

Some safety issues we deal with locally would be fixed by having the FRV model introduced; An example of this is that on many occasions our internal structural firefighters have had to use multiple Breathing Apparatus cylinders (hot changing cylinders) because we haven't had enough replacement crews qualified to perform this role. Not only is this extremely fatiguing for the crews working in these fires (especially due to metabolic heat being contained due to the turnout gear we wear and dehydration), there often is no back up crew that can locate and extract those guys if something happens to them in the fire fight. We need a crew available for this, it is imperative for our safety. The fire service reforms and Fire Rescue Victoria will insist we have 7 members guaranteed of attending the fire, allowing qualified backup Breathing Apparatus crew at these incidents.

An example of where staff/volunteer relations, the EBA/Hands Off campaign impacted me personally; I attended a community question and answer session pre-election in Ballarat with the Federal members last year. I was interested to see some Volunteers in yellow Bushfire Turnout gear from Morrisons Brigade approach and ask if the members supported the *UFU takeover of the and destroying of the CFA or the 60,000 CFA volunteers* (this is not a direct quote as I didn't record it, but it was what one guy asked). With other brigades within our group, if we turned out to an incident with them, we offered after the job that they come past for a coffee and ask any questions they had of our proposed EBA. This had worked quite well and all reports were positive, the volunteers actually thanked us for allowing the conversation in a non-confrontational environment (why we still have a good working relationship currently). So I approached the volunteer members and offered them the same, an invite to the station for a coffee and that they could ask any questions they liked of the EBA in a non-confrontational setting. Without any warning, I was called a UFU thug, a piece of shit, a liar and to top it off... a unionist c&t. I said I was only trying to allow the opportunity for conversation and that I didn't go to them to be verbally abused. I turned to walk away and one of them physically grabbed me and started dragging my arm outside saying "I've got something I want to f*&king say". I stopped, asked him to let go of my arm and he replied "that's right, you're one of those untouchable unionists", I said "No, I just don't like being verbally and physically abused". He let go of my arm but followed me outside with a group of approximately 7 others and over the next couple of minutes I continued to cop verbal abuse. One of my colleagues was outside, saw the commotion and came over to see I was alright. Eventually, they calmed down and asked some questions, but I kept getting told I was a liar by one guy. I let you know of these experiences, not to try to tug at your emotions in support of me and to sway your decision, but in the hope that it gives insight into what we have been subjected to over the last couple of years. I have personally had volunteers turn their back when I was trying to pass on vital information to them when attending and combatting incidents, been cancelled when supporting brigades out of area before they have even booked on scene and assessed the incident... This has to stop and with FRV and CFA being separate organisations, these occurrences will hopefully stop. I am a proud employee, I love being a firefighter. I bring a lot of experience to my position, I and proud have accomplished what I have.... But these examples of being attacked because of scaremongering has taken a mental toll on me. I want to get on with my job and I want morale and motivation to raise. I want full cooperation with supporting brigades. Until this VFR reform is complete, I can't see it ever happening and I can only see relationships getting worse.

MY OPINION;

The way forward is to modernise the boundaries of what is classed as metropolitan area and country area. Let the Country Fire Authority deal with Country Fire Area as was set in the CFA Act 1958. Let FRV deal with highly urbanised places and high risk areas. The community in built up areas will be better covered. FRV will still support CFA with response as CFA will support FRV incidents. There will be no actual change to operational command as it sits under the AIIEMs system which is rolled out across all services by Emergency management Victoria. Again, 7 on the fireground improves firefighter safety and reduces damage caused by fire or other hazardous risk incidents. Rescue gear on the pumpers helps survivability of trapped occupants at a motor vehicle collision. EMR trained firefighters give a quick response to start CPR and advanced medical assistance until the Ambulance crews get there.

Please take my submission into consideration. I hope that you can understand that this reform needs to happen, surge capacity won't dwindle, the UFU aren't trying to 'take over', they are trying to get a modern fire services that better services the community and ensures a safer workplace for us employees, the public will get even more capacity from career staff and finally we may be able to move forward and start to mend broken relationships and

get morale on the up. Modernise the fire service in Victoria, vote for the split of volunteers and career firefighters into separate organisations CFA and FRV.

Sincerely,



Ben Reynolds Station Officer and CFA Fire Service Communications Controller
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