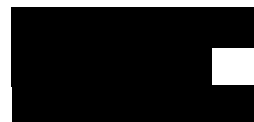


Richard A. Gili



Dear Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017,

RE: FIRE SERVICES REFORM SUBMISSION

My name is Richard A. Gili and I am a Commander with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB).

Background

I have been employed as a firefighter by MFB for over 32 years and currently hold the position of Commander in charge of Operations in Central District. Prior to this role, I held the position of Commander Emergency Medical Services department where I managed the MFB's successful Emergency Medical Response (EMR) program and Commander Operational Communications where I worked extensively at Emergency Management Victoria's (EMV) primary network hub, the State Control Centre (SCC). There, I worked with other Emergency Service Organisations (ESOs), improving interoperability and expanding MFB's capacity and capability at State level as well as supporting that the Emergency Management Commissioner, ensuring that the State control priorities and objectives were met.

I have acquired a number of skills and qualifications, including the Graduate of the Institution of Fire Engineers and numerous Certificates, Graduate Certificates, Diplomas and Associate Diplomas in Fire Science, Leadership and Public Safety Management. I have also been the recipient of a Chief Officer's Commendation for being the Incident Controller (IC) of MFB crews during the 2007 CBD shootings.

I have participated in and operated during numerous large and protracted incidents and events in and around Victoria, including:

Black Saturday Fires 2009

Kinglake
Kinglake West
Flowerdale
Marysville

Post Black Saturday Fires 2009

Healesville
Lysterfield (Bird Land)

Victorian Floods 2011

Kerang (Divisional Commander)
Swan Hill (Safety Officer)

Coal Mine Fires 2014

Hazelwood
Morwell

Issues for Consideration

Service Delivery Standards

The CFA currently use a response model referred to Service Delivery Standard (SDS). This model requires a CFA appliance to be on scene within 8 minutes of receiving the fire call. There is ample anecdotal evidence that clearly demonstrates that CFA volunteers cannot meet this standard. As an experienced firefighter and Incident Controller, I can state that it is vitally important that in order to effectively save life and property, a modern fire service must respond within 7.7 minutes as well as having 7 firefighters fully trained in BA on the fire ground. MFB data substantiates this and proves that in most occasions, MFB are able to keep the fire to the room of origin. Pressure on CFA volunteers to meet this and other standards of fire cover are enormous and continue to grow as the urban areas expand. They are continually relying on career firefighters to support them to meet the needs of the community.

Dandenong Ranges

I reside in a suburb located in the Dandenong Ranges. This is an area covered by CFA volunteers only, which means that response by CFA to my home or any other home in this area, unlike a resident living within the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD), cannot be guaranteed. If there was a response, there is no assurance that they will respond within the SDS, if there will be sufficient firefighters to commence firefighting or if any of the crews are trained in Breathing Apparatus (BA). A failure to provide firefighters within the SDS or with BA qualifications makes it impossible and dangerous to attempt an internal fire attack, a rescue or salvage activities. As a resident, I find this completely unacceptable.

The Dandenong Ranges contains sites like Skyhigh Observatory and restaurant, which I believe is the second most popular tourist attraction in Victoria, Puffing Billy railway and associated structures, the Rhododendron Gardens and many other famous and historical landmarks, again, to think that this great area is only covered by CFA volunteers with no guaranteed response is completely unacceptable and dangerous.

Cost

There has been much debate regarding the cost to the State to operate fully crewed fire stations as opposed to all-volunteer stations. Living in the Dandenong Ranges essentially means that I am covered by CFA volunteer only and yet, the Fire Service Levy fee per annum and home and contents insurance are more than that of someone who lives in the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD). I do not understand why it costs me and others who live in CFA area more for the Fire Service Levy and for home and contents insurance than it does for someone living in the MFD. There is also the cost to the employers of volunteers who might respond during working hours. Apart from the disruption, a small to medium sized business owner who employs one or more CFA volunteers could find themselves in financial difficulty if they had to pay for their wages whilst they are out attending short of protracted incidents. I believe that this is a silent cost and that the State should not impose this on employers.

Irrational Responses

On many occasions, during my time at the SCC EMV I witness inappropriate and irrational requests for assistance by on-scene CFA volunteer officers during major fires in CFA residential, industrial and commercial areas. These requests were for additional appliances (trucks) to areas that were severely affected by fire. Instead of asking for these additional appliances to come from adjoining and much closer MFB appliances, they opted to and requested appliances from CFA volunteer stations that were approximately 40-50km away. I constantly brought these situations to the attention of senior EMV staff that noted them but were unable to stop this practice. This behaviour is not conducive to good firefighting practice and demonstrates the parochial methodology that currently exists amongst some CFA volunteer officers.

MFB and CFA Acts 1958

The MFB and CFA Acts were proclaimed and introduced in 1958 and apart from a few minor changes, the boundaries have not changed. To put 1958 in context I offer the following:

- Total population in Victoria was 2.2m
- The cost of a house in an outer suburb was approximately \$5000
- Average wage for a female per annum was approx \$300
- Average wage for a male per annum was approx \$600
- The price of a loaf of bread was 10c
- Suburbs in Sunshine and Box Hill had unmade roads and surrounded by farmland

It is evident, that what was appropriate and suitable for 1958, is no longer pertinent, including the current fire service model.

Population Growth in Victoria

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in 2016 the population in Victoria was approximately 6.25m and grew by approximately 74,000 residents. It is estimated that by 2050, the population in Victoria will be approximately 8m and overtake NSW and become the most populated state in Australia.

Almost half of the top 20 fastest growing Local Governments in Australia(LGA) in 2015-16 were located in Victoria. The majority are outer suburban areas, with just Melbourne and Yarra representing the inner city areas. Interestingly, Melbourne and Wyndham grew at the same rate, but are vastly different areas.

Rank	Local Government	State	Population 2016	Growth rate 2015-16 (%)
1.	Serpentine Jarrahdale	WA	25,943	7.7%
2	Camden	NSW	77,504	7.5%
3	Botany Bay	NSW	49,284	5.8%
4	Melbourne	VIC	136,336	5.7%
5	Wyndham	VIC	222,656	5.7%
6	Cardinia	VIC	95,992	5.5%
7	Whittlesea	VIC	204,643	4.7%
8	Kwinana	WA	38,790	4.5%
9	Melton	VIC	138,641	4.4%
10	Armadale	WA	83,488	4.0%
11	Hume	VIC	201,304	3.9%
12	Casey	VIC	304,071	3.8%
13	Swan	WA	138,160	3.7%
14	Mitchell	VIC	40,595	3.2%
15	Wanneroo	WA	195,697	3.2%
16	Lane Cove	NSW	36,996	3.1%
17	Ipswich	QLD	198,590	2.9%
18	Parramatta	NSW	235,981	2.8%
19	The Hills Shire	NSW	164,802	2.8%
20	Yarra	VIC	91,300	2.8%

Industrial Dispute

The current industrial dispute has taken its toll on me, my family and many of most of my colleagues. The constant referral to MFB firefighters as Union Thugs by members of the Liberal Party both State and Federal backed by News Corp Australia and 3AW's Neil Mitchell is unwarranted, unprofessional and have found them personally and professionally damaging. I have been abused, had my car spat on and lost friends who are CFA volunteers.

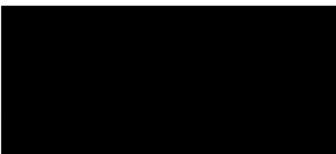
I found the recent comments by Brad Battin, where he suggested that no career firefighters were present during the first 5.5 hours of Black Saturday the most disturbing and hurtful and I can honestly state that after hearing what he had to say, I felt gutted. What I witnessed on that day and subsequent days will haunt me for the rest of my life.

Conclusion

It is evident that the present fire service model is outdated and does not cater equally for all Victorians. The existing model also clearly reflects one that was designed during the 50's without consideration for the future or taking into account the rapid population growth and vast expansion of many of Victorian suburbs. Maintaining the current model and asking CFA volunteers to keep up with the growing demand is unfair to them, their families and employers. It is also a risk to the communities who depend on these volunteers.

I have found many volunteers to be professional in their attitude and applaud them for giving up their time and for what they provide to the community, subsequently, I am not blaming them for the failings of our current system. You have to capacity to change this, please support the Fire Services Bill and help modernise the fire service. This will bring Victoria in line with every State in Australia.

Sincerely



Richard A. Gili
03/07/2017

NOTE: *The views, comments and opinions expressed in this letter are those of the author, and they do not reflect in any way those of the MFB or any institutions to which he is affiliated.*