

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

I am a professional fire fighter for CFA at Wodonga fire station and currently hold the rank of Qualified Fire Fighter. I would ask you to support the Fire Services Reform bill. In my 4 years as a professional fire fighter in CFA I have known nothing but industrial dispute. Over that time I have watched staff/volunteer relationships become more and more toxic to the point that it is not repairable within the current integrated model.

However this reform isn't just about resolving the ongoing industrial dispute but moving Victoria's fire services into the 21st century. No one is questioning the commitment and selflessness of CFA's volunteers but commitment and selflessness aren't the only things that save lives and property. Having properly trained and equipped personnel on scene quickly is what makes a difference. Here in Wodonga we have four staff on a shift, the next integrated station is in Wangaratta, 70 km's away, also with four staff on a shift. That means the only guaranteed second truck we have is 45 minutes away.

If I worked for the MFB in Melbourne I would not be allowed to enter a burning building unless there were at least seven fire fighters present. This is for safety reasons. By having seven fire fighters present there is a rescue team to back up the fire fighters inside the burning building should they require assistance. Currently in Wodonga and other isolated integrated CFA brigades the expectation is that this role will be carried out by volunteers. But if a building is on fire and there may be people inside requiring urgent assistance the professional fire fighters are not going to stand around outside waiting for some volunteers who may or may not be coming. In my time at Wodonga there has never been a second truck on scene at the time I have first entered a burning building. By separating staff from volunteers it would enable easier review of staffing numbers on a needs basis without fear of stepping on toes.

The 35 response areas that will be affected by the proposed Fire Services Reform Bill are built up urban areas, not rural Victoria. A suburb in Wodonga is exactly like a suburb of Melbourne. The risks to Wodonga's residents are the same as Melbourne's residents. We have medium and high density residential areas, industrial estates, major road and rail infrastructure and large volumes of hazardous materials all within the town. The residents in Wodonga pay a fire service levy the same as residents of Melbourne, so why are they expected to accept a lesser standard of response should their homes or businesses catch fire?

The vast majority of CFA's volunteers will in no way be affected by the legislation. CFA's bush fire fighting capability and surge capacity won't be adversely affected by removing 35 of the 1200 response areas. The volunteers in those response areas will still be part of CFA, still be turning out the trucks and still supporting other brigades at major incidents. None of the Wodonga CFA volunteers I have spoken to are thinking of leaving CFA if the legislation goes through. Some have said they will join a surrounding brigade, whilst others have expressed their eagerness to be co-located with a future FRV brigade.

Reform of fire services in Victoria is desperately needed – not just to finalise a long-running industrial dispute which is becoming more and more toxic, but to ensure the safety of fire fighters like myself as well as the communities we serve. Rural and regional Victorians deserve a standard of response equal to that of their Melbourne counterparts, and to be served by highly trained and well equipped professional fire fighters who receive adequate levels of back-up when required. For this reason I am supportive of the Fire Services Reform Bill, and I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

Shaun McManamny

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Ph: [Redacted phone number]