

Malcolm Hayes

Phone:

Friday, 30th June 2017
Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MEELBOURNE VIC 3002
LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Fire Services Bill Select Committee Members,

Re: Fire Service Bill

My name is Malcolm Hayes. I would like to lodge the following submission for your consideration.

I have extensive fire-fighting experience throughout Australia, with many qualifications. I have listed them below to give you a brief overview of my fire services history.

Fire Service Back ground

- Started as a junior Volunteer member of the CFA in 1987
- 1994 – 1997 Royal Australian Air force as an Aviation Firefighter
- 1997 – 2001 Australian Capital Territory Fire and Rescue service
- 2002 - 2005 Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service
- 2005 - Country Fire Service (instructor)
- 2007- present Senior Station Officer Country Fire Authority Mildura

Specialist qualifications

- Structural Fire Investigator
- High Angle Rescue Technician
- Hazmat 2
- Advanced Driving Instructor
- Confined Space Rescue Instructor
- Trench Rescue

Awards & Commendations

- Queensland Fire Rescue Service Chief Officers Letter of Commendation
- Letter of Commendation NT Commissioner of Police
- CFA Chief Officer Unit Citation

I have almost 30 years of experience as a firefighter, 23 of those as a Professional firefighter. I am sure every submission to the select committee will state some long term commitment to their time with the CFA. However, I am one of the few people that can honestly say they have worked for other fire services in an operational firefighting role. I sincerely believe this gives me a unique ability to offer the select committee an insight into how other Fire Services around Australia operate in comparison to the current day CFA.

If I was to offer a short appraisal of the current day CFA I would have to say it's a Fire Service that has failed to evolve with the current expectations of what a modern Fire Service should deliver to the community. We seem to spend more time making glossy brochures telling everyone how good we are instead of looking inwardly to make sure we can deliver on our legislated requirements. In my submission I will give some examples of things I have witnessed while in the CFA which will support the need for the reforms.

Volunteerism

Like most volunteer organisations CFA is struggling to find and maintain its volunteer membership. This is not the downfall of the organisation, or of those who do volunteer, but instead a reflection of the change in society that has seen a steady decline in numbers of people that are available, to not only give up their time to respond to emergency incidents, but also put in countless hours to obtain specialist skills and maintain base level skills that are expected of a firefighter today.

This does not mean that our volunteers are not committed to what they do, because they most definitely are. However, they also have lives outside of the CFA which include commitments to their employers, families and social lives. So this means they are not **always** available to respond in an emergency, which is fully understandable. This does not, however, negate the need for a reasonable response to protect our community at ALL times. The new fire service reform will give us a model that allows a fire service that is not tied down by boundaries that were laid out approximately 50 years ago but instead a reactive fire service that will travel to where the community needs it and to also offer support to volunteer brigades if they need it.

Below is one short real life example of why the fire service needs to be reformed.



This particular incident is just one example of the difference a 90 second response can make. The incident came in early on New Year's morning with two vehicles hitting head on. The initial report was that one car was on fire and the other had rolled over, landing on its side. In car one there was a family of three; Mum, Dad and a baby in the rear of the car (the car is hidden behind the flames). The second car was a drunk driver whose car was now situated to the right of the first car on its side with the driver unconscious and trapped inside. This crash was not in our primary response area. In fact it was two volunteer brigade's response areas, out of our primary response area. However, due to the known "fail to respond rate" we also get dispatched to any code 1 incident in these areas. The staff from Mildura were the first arriving fire appliance and at the time only had 3 crew members. The Crew was made up of a Station Officer (incident controller) a Leading firefighter and Firefighter (pump operator). We were told via radio before we arrived that people were trapped in the vehicles and that one vehicle was now on fire. The photo above was taken just after arrival and you see a hose line in front of me which my Leading firefighter was using to push the fire off the car that was on its side with the male trapped inside.

At the time I thought that the first car still had people inside but only had enough crew members to deploy one hose line so I made the decision to save the most viable person first. The crew managed to knock the fire down very quickly and it was at this point I noticed the husband, wife and baby on the side of the road to the rear of the car. The husband had dragged the wife from the car as she had broken both of her legs, then also removed the baby from the rear seat. I was very happy to see them out of the vehicle but it still haunts me to know that I had to make a life and death decision based on a lack of crew numbers to effect a safe firefight and rescue. With 7 firefighters on the fire ground that decision would have been unnecessary. Thankfully, in that instance, no one was killed or injured further.

The Volunteer brigades did respond to this incident in the quickest time possible but you must remember that they first have to be available to respond and secondly have to travel from home at the speed limit then wait for a crew to arrive before they even leave the station.

So what does the future hold for us?

First I think we should reflect on what the past 4 years has been like for Professional firefighters. Somehow, a normal EBA negotiation has turned into one of the biggest and most heart breaking disputes any fire service has ever seen. While the focus has all been on the impact of this on volunteers, you may also like to take some time to consider what the impact has been on the men and women that have chosen to protect the community as their careers.

- We have been called Union thugs
 - Thieves
 - Puppets
 - We have received hate mail that has been sent to our stations
 - Our children and wives have been verbally attacked
 - Members have been verbalised while in uniform when in public
 - One member was handed a bullet while collecting money for the Royal Children's Hospital
 - We have had more front page media coverage then Afghanistan war
 - We get attacked on social media
 - We are vilified and degraded by all other forms of the media
 - I have personally received threats of violence from VFBV members for supporting the Reform
- The person below saw fit to protest outside our station and follow us down the street with his sign. I politely asked him if he would like to come into the station and have a talk about any issues he had with the UFU or if he could tell me what the issues were for him. He could not tell me what the actual issues were but only that the UFU members were bad. I told him that he was welcome to come in and have a chat, and see if we could allay his fears and correct all of the media misinformation. Instead he "flipped me the bird" so I gave up and just left.



As stated I have been a professional firefighter for 24 years and I have never witnessed or been exposed to this type of treatment. The effect has been that we now want the reforms to happen so we can rebuild a fire service free from conflict.

So how has all of this happened and how do we move on?

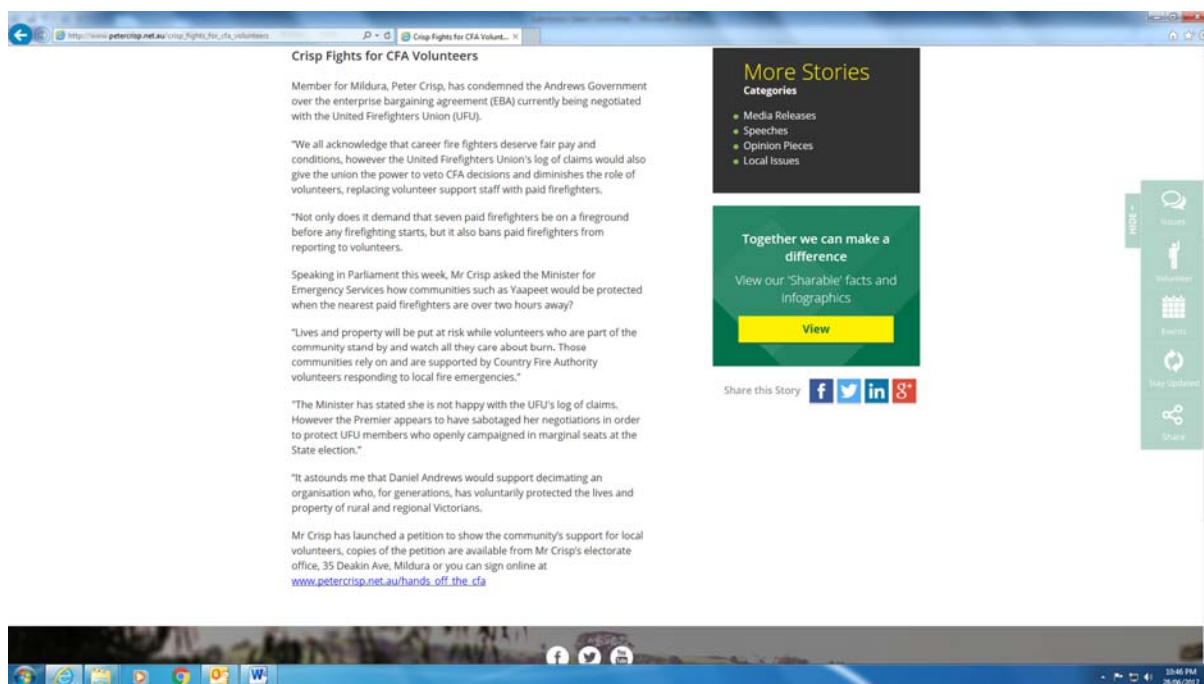
It seems Firefighters make good political footballs. Below are some examples of why the public and our volunteers have become so confused about what is correct information and what is not.



Opposition Leader Mathew Guy meets with CFA volunteers yesterday. (Picture: Carmel Etacover)

The Opposition Leader Mathew Guy visited one of our local brigades and proudly stood in front of them and the media and told them how badly they would be effected when the alleged takeover of the CFA by the UFU took place. What Mr Guy did not realise was this brigade is a classic example of why reform is needed. The brigade has the highest fail to respond rate in the area and in fact the night before his visit failed to turn out to a fire directly behind their own fire station. That fire was extinguished by the career firefighters from Mildura who attended, put the fire out and returned to station without sighting any of them.

Our local member Mr Crisp is helping to spread the word of how bad things would be. Telling people in rural areas that their homes and communities would burn. This is simply untrue and based on no facts what so ever. Mr Crisp has been advised of the facts on numerous occasions, by many different people, but persists in spreading his "fake news".



In conclusion, as I see it you have two defined courses of action. One, you can vote the Bill down and the conflict continues, with the fire services slowly being destroyed and ultimately the lives of the community being put at risk by an out dated and dysfunctional fire service.

Or we could embrace the change and build two very good fire services. Both with different cultures but both with the same ultimate objective and that is to serve and protect the community.

IT TIME TO PUT THE CONFLICT TO A STOP.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Malcolm Hayes

