

Russell Edwards
3rd July 2017

Attn: Members of the Fire Services Bill Select Committee

My name is Russell Edwards. I have been a firefighter with the MFB since 2013—currently stationed at Broadmeadows—and prior to that was a CFA volunteer, beginning in 2009. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with my perspective on the restructuring of Victoria’s fire services as contemplated by the *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017*.

I **support** the Bill in its current form. Restructuring our fire services will improve:

1. **Public safety**, by providing a reliable and uniform standard of fire and emergency service delivery in all areas of appreciable population and urban fire risk density;
2. **Firefighter safety**, by ensuring the timely arrival of adequate numbers of fully qualified firefighters at all fires in the FRV area
3. **Firefighter morale**, for career firefighters and volunteers alike, by taking the heat out of the toxic political dispute that has poisoned the emotional well-being of firefighters in recent years.

I do not believe the reform will negatively impact upon fire service delivery, volunteer engagement or volunteer participation. If anything, they will improve in line with the morale boost this reform is likely to deliver.

1. Public safety benefits of the reforms

1.1 Response times

Our fire services respond to a range of highly time-critical emergencies, including of course, fires. Building fires and car fires can grow within just a few minutes from a small area of smouldering to total involvement in flaming fire, preventing a severe hazard to life and causing the rapid loss of valuable property.

Every second counts when it comes to fire response. This is illustrated by statistics compiled on the rate of containment of structure fires to the object or room of origin. The 2015-16 MFB Annual Report lists a figure of 88.1%. The corresponding figure in the 2015-15 CFA Annual Report is 77%. Spread of the fire beyond the room of the origin is almost twice as likely in the CFA area, compared to MFB. Fire spread is only stopped when firefighters enter the structure and suppress the fire. There is only one reason why that can take longer to happen in the CFA’s urban areas: it is because, at a sizable fraction of its call-outs, CFA relies upon volunteer response.

The risk of delayed fire suppression is inherent to volunteer response. I know from my own experience as a volunteer that this does not reflect any lack of effort, skill, commitment or other virtue on the part of volunteers. It happens because when the pager goes off, not everyone is within

a 2-minute drive of the fire station and able to immediately drop what they're doing and head to the station. It also happens because not all volunteers are willing and able and have had the opportunity to undertake the necessary training to be capable of conducting internal structural firefighting wearing breathing apparatus, or to drive a fire truck under emergency conditions, or to operate a pumper, or to be the incident controller.

That's just how it is and how it will remain. Volunteer response serves its purpose in most areas, but in major urban areas we can and should do better, through the provision of a full-time professional fire service.

A professional fire service means at least two fire trucks are on the road within 90 seconds, like clockwork. It means if the fire trucks in one area are tied up, trucks from surrounding areas are moved to ensure the area maintains fire coverage. It means everyone on the truck is fully trained and competent in structural firefighting, and there is a qualified incident controller on board, and a pump operator. It means that an effective fire fight can reliably commence within a few minutes of a Triple Zero call: in 8 minutes at worst and frequently in under 5 minutes. This level of service provides the community with the best possible chance of avoiding loss of life or property in the event of a fire.

The public benefits from rapid, professional response not only to structure fires but to many other types of emergencies. In particular, many, many lives have been saved by the Emergency Medical Response program which has operated in the MFB for over 15 years and is currently being rolled out to CFA professional firefighters. These saves are only possible because the rapid response of professional fire crews often puts them at the scene several minutes before paramedics arrive.

Unfortunately, whilst CFA operates with a service delivery standard of 8 minutes for structure fires in dense urban areas, in many of those areas volunteer response regularly fails to meet that standard. The statistics I have seen are of great concern. (For an example, see Appendix 1.) I urge members of the Select Committee to obtain and scrutinise CFA service delivery data in detail.

As worrying as these statistics are, in many cases the reality is worse. The data records the time taken for the primary appliance to arrive, with no regard for whether or not the truck was carrying one firefighter or four, or for whether those firefighters had the necessary qualifications to do what was needed at the incident. (Appendix 2 shows some data on crew numbers and qualifications that illustrates this problem.) Neither does it record whether or not a second truck of adequately qualified firefighters arrived in a timely manner so that a safe and effective fire fight could proceed. Furthermore, if a brigade fails to respond at all to an emergency call in its primary turnout area, this is not captured in the statistics for that brigade.

Communities in our inner suburbs enjoy reliably rapid fire response, because they are serviced by a full-fledged professional fire service, as are most but not all middle-ring suburbs. There is no reason why communities in *all* suburbs and major regional centres should not be provided with the same standard of service. This is what the reforms would deliver.

1.2 Training and skill sets

Central to the reliably effective response of the professional fire service is the breadth and depth of the skill sets of professional firefighters. For most volunteers it goes without saying that both the skill set and the highly competitive, aptitude-based recruit selection process that applies to career firefighters means that the quality of service delivered by professional firefighters is of a

consistently high standard. This was certainly the attitude that prevailed among the people I volunteered with. But unfortunately the Committee is likely to hear from a certain hard-core faction within Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria that is in the habit of trying to devalue professional firefighters.

I would prefer not to have to blow my own trumpet, but let's be straight about this: the skill set of all professional firefighters is both broader and deeper than that of the majority of volunteers. I know this from personal experience, having been a CFA volunteer before entering an MFB Recruit Course. Upon starting the recruit course, I decided to put aside what I had learnt as a volunteer and be open to learning the MFB way from scratch. This decision was repeatedly proven sound.

Those skills I had been trained in as a CFA volunteer, I re-learnt in my career firefighter recruit course to far greater depth and with much more practical experience than was possible in the limited time available in courses delivered to volunteers. After all, most CFA volunteers have a full-time occupation they can't simply drop to spend weeks training. It may well be that the qualifications are the same on paper, but in practice they are not. In addition there were numerous topics covered in my career firefighter recruit course that are very rarely delivered to volunteers. I finished my 17-week intensive training program with a far higher level of competence than I had gained through 4 years as a CFA volunteer.

I have heard the same story time and time again from MFB and CFA professional firefighters who volunteered before entering a full-time recruit course. Furthermore, despite the high skill levels attained, as a newly graduated recruit, you and the fellow members of your recruit squad are the least knowledgeable, least trained and least experienced firefighters amongst the professional ranks. In the years that follow, skills gained during recruit training are constantly consolidated, maintained and expanded by regular formal and informal training and regular attendance at emergency incidents, with a frequency that very few volunteers are able to maintain.

1.3 Response model and doctrine

Having been a CFA volunteer in a medium-sized country town and having worked as a professional firefighter for the MFB, I am very familiar with the similarities and differences between the volunteer response model and the full-time professional fire service model. There is no doubt in my mind that a professional fire service offers a significantly more reliable and effective response to emergencies in busy urban areas. At the same time, a full-time fire service is both less financially viable and less necessary and in quieter rural communities.

We need both: a full-time professional service for major urban centres, and a volunteer service for country areas. The Victorian Government came to that realisation in the late 1880s and founded the MFB and CFBB (forerunner to the CFA) on that basis. However, as the *Final Report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission* (VBRC) pointed out, the MFB's geographical boundary has lagged behind urban growth. Although the legislated responsibility for CFA remains limited to the "country area of Victoria" (*Country Fire Authority Act 1958*, s. 6(1)), its jurisdiction now includes 60 per cent of metropolitan Melbourne and several major regional cities.

CFA has attempted to meet its responsibilities for emergency service delivery in those areas not by rolling out an MFB-like full-fledged professional fire service, but by augmenting its volunteer fire service with professional firefighters.

This is called the ‘integrated’ model. It does not uniformly deliver the same community safety benefits as a fully professional fire service, because it still relies upon volunteer response, and as such it encounters problems with reliability, timeliness, crew numbers and crew qualifications.

Put simply: if a fire station is provided with one or two full-time firefighters—as was often the case until recently—response times cannot improve significantly, because they still have to wait for volunteers to arrive to fill out the numbers on the truck. And, if a fire response consists of one truck of full-time firefighters and one truck of volunteers—which does still occur routinely—the professional firefighters are likely to find themselves under-crewed at the scene for an unpredictable period of time until the volunteer truck arrives, and if/when it does arrive, it may not be carrying adequate numbers of suitably qualified firefighters. This means both the effectiveness and the safety of the emergency response are compromised.

Like bolting a motor on to a pushbike, integrated response both fails to perform as well as would be desired, and places strain upon a structure being used outside its design parameters.

In theory it would be possible for CFA to adopt a full-fledged professional fire service model in dense urban areas. In practice, this is not politically viable, because it is seen by some as contrary to the purpose of the CFA. Efforts over the years by professional firefighters to enhance their workplace safety and community safety through increased staffing levels have been consistently resisted by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), and portrayed as an attack upon volunteers or volunteerism.

That reactionary stance was formalised in the *Country Fire Authority (Volunteer Charter) Amendment Bill 2011*, introduced by the the previous Coalition government and drafted with the assistance of VFBV. This bill amended the *CFA Act* to explicitly subordinate professional firefighters to volunteers (emphasis added):

6F Recognition of Authority as a volunteer-based organisation

*The Parliament recognises that the Authority is **first and foremost** a volunteer-based organisation, in which volunteer officers and members are **supported** by employees in a fully integrated manner.*

This statement is **not a factual representation of the CFA as it actually exists** in major urban areas today.

I respond regularly with the MFB into nearby CFA suburbs such as Greenvale, Roxburgh Park, Craigieburn and Epping. On the vast majority of occasions, only professional firefighters are on scene, at least for the critical first few minutes. Often there is no volunteer response at all, and if there is, on many occasions volunteers are few in number, arrive after the fire has been extinguished, are not wearing protective clothing (PPC) designed for structural firefighting and/or are not qualified to use breathing apparatus (BA). (Apparently this is not prohibited by the CFA. For what should be obvious safety reasons, all MFB firefighters must have access to clean structural PPC and a functioning BA set, or their appliance is marked as unavailable to respond until this is rectified.)

As noted in Section 1.1, these shortcomings are simply inherent to volunteer response and are no reflection of any lack of dedication on the part of volunteers. Even when they arrive late and/or without a complete skill set, often there is useful work for volunteers to do, and their help is gratefully received. But it is certainly not accurate to characterise the response, in line with Section 6F of the *CFA Act*, as a volunteer response supported by employees. In fact, despite representing

just 3 per cent of CFA’s operational workforce, career firefighters carry roughly two thirds of the workload, in terms of statewide call volume. That’s not a “support” role.

Section 6F of the *CFA Act* represents not the necessary reality of the CFA in 2017, but rather the backward-looking aspirations of the VFBV. Their ideal is volunteer response, and the introduction of full-time professional response is resisted on that basis, despite the clear public interest imperative.

Resistance to professionalisation as a supposed affront to volunteerism reached a flash point in response to the 2016 proposed Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA). Former CFA Chair John Peberdy succinctly articulated that ideological perspective and its emotional underpinning in pride:

What they're trying to do is fundamentally change CFA and make us a career fire brigade supported by volunteers and I think that's an insult to every volunteer in Victoria. (ABC News Online, 1st June 2016)

Inflamed by party-political exploitation of the dispute and unhelpful commentary – for example from Jack Rush QC, who explicitly appealed to Section 6F of the CFA Act in opposing the EBA (*Herald Sun*, 22 June 2016) – this kind of push-back against professional firefighters within the CFA exploded.

It’s clear from the intensity of this push-back that CFA is not the appropriate agency to deliver the full-time professional fire response needed to prioritise community safety in our urban centres.

The simplest way to roll out a professional fire service in those areas where CFA falls short would be to expand the geographical jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. This is what the *Final Report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission* called for. It proposed ‘revision of the geographic boundary delineating Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board and Country Fire Authority areas of responsibility’¹, noting that ‘urban growth around Melbourne has far exceeded the metropolitan fire district boundary’. To this end, Recommendation 63 provided for the appointment of a Fire Commissioner (since transitioned to Emergency Management Commissioner) who should have responsibility, among other things, for:

providing to government periodic advice on the metropolitan fire district boundary on the basis of triggers, frequency and criteria approved by government

Unfortunately this part of Recommendation of 63 was not implemented. (As far as I have been able to discover, *Hansard* gives no indication as to why not, and neither does the *Explanatory Memorandum* to the *Fire Services Commissioner Bill 2010*, despite quoting this recommendation in full.)

The reforms currently under contemplation by the Committee would achieve the same objective, and offer several advantages over a straightforward boundary realignment. The most relevant advantage in the present context is this: no volunteers will be displaced by these reforms.

The VBRC report stated that continuing review was needed concerning ‘the question of whether the CFA integrated model remains suitable in an urban environment (including in larger regional cities),’ before noting the concern of the State that by displacing volunteers, boundary reform could

1 It concerns me that Jack Rush QC has misused his association with the VBRC to argue publicly for a position contrary to this recommendation (*Herald Sun*, 13 June 2017; *Weekly Times*, 14 June 2017, in which Rush is incorrectly described as the ‘chief investigator’ of VBRC). I believe his conduct in this regard is improper.

impact upon surge capacity. By retaining existing CFA volunteers within the geographical footprint of Fire Rescue Victoria, the present reforms avoid this pitfall entirely.

2. Firefighter safety benefits of the reforms

Firefighters' lives are in the hands of their colleagues, when responding to fires. Safe operations on the fireground depend totally on having an adequate number of suitably qualified people assigned to each of the necessary tasks. Professional firefighters are adamant about this, and all other matters of safety, because we each enter risky situations on a very regular basis². Our longevity and our long-term health depend upon not cutting corners on safety, as does our psychological wellbeing.

When we enter burning buildings to rescue occupants and extinguish the fire, for safety we enter as a pair, both firefighters wearing structural PPC and BA. Because the hot, oxygen-deficient, toxic smoke inside a burning building presents an immediate danger to life and health, those firefighters face extreme peril if anything goes wrong: if their BA stops functioning, if they become entrapped, if the building collapses, and so on. For this reason, a second pair of firefighters must stand by outside the structure, also dressed in full PPC and BA, ready to intervene if required. This is the standard procedure in MFB and many fire services worldwide. In the US, it is mandated by law under Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards.

In combination with other safety-critical roles—pump operation and incident management—the minimum number of adequately qualified firefighters needed to safely tackle a structure fire is seven. The first-arriving fire crew (typically 3 or 4 firefighters) can start preparing to enter with reasonable safety if and only if they know that a second crew of adequately qualified firefighters will arrive imminently.

Firefighters face an unacceptable risk to their safety if this condition is not met. That condition is easy to meet in the context of a full-time professional fire service. Simply ensure that the appliances initially dispatched carry at least seven crew in total. This is the procedure within MFB. All crew are adequately qualified and all appliances are guaranteed to turn out in a timely fashion.

The CFA integrated response model cannot reliably meet the 7-firefighter condition, because neither timeliness nor crew qualifications can be guaranteed when volunteer response is relied upon. The only way to achieve it is to stipulate the dispatch of sufficient numbers of *professionally crewed* appliances. That stipulation was included in the proposed 2016 CFA EBA.

As noted in Section 1.3, the EBA received a strongly negative reaction from some quarters, and the 7-professional-firefighter dispatch term was seen by some as contrary to the purpose of integration and contrary to the desired character of CFA as a volunteer organisation. Prompted by this reaction, the passage of the Turnbull Government's *Fair Work Amendment (Respect for Emergency Services Volunteers) Bill 2016* renders it impossible to secure safe crewing and dispatch protocols as terms in an EBA for CFA professional firefighters.

Because MFB always dispatches at least two appliances to all reported fires, I have not been in the situation of facing a fire undercrewed for an extended period. Unfortunately, my CFA career firefighter colleagues cannot say the same thing, and I have heard numerous hair-raising stories of

2 In my 4 years of volunteering in a medium-sized town as a moderately active volunteer, I only attended three house fires. In my role with the MFB I estimate I would average one house, shop or factory fire per week, plus numerous fires contained to the object of origin before they could spread to involve the structure. My tolerance for preventable risk has decreased as my rate of exposure has increased.

dangerous situations they have been placed in as a consequence of the integrated response model. I expect that the Committee will receive many submissions from CFA professional firefighters containing accounts of such peril. I urge the members of the Committee to read these accounts carefully and consider how wrong it is to place these firefighters in unnecessary danger.

The reliable, timely arrival of adequate numbers of suitably qualified firefighters is vital to the workplace safety of professional firefighters. Since this has proven impossible to achieve under the umbrella of CFA, in the interests of workplace safety, it is now essential that professional firefighters are employed under the banner of a separate, full-time professional fire service.

The reforms under contemplation would achieve that, through the creation of Fire Rescue Victoria.

3. Morale benefits of the reforms

3.1 Morale will be improved by ending disputation

The morale of firefighters is in terrible shape, as a result of the pall of disputation that has hung over the fire services for years.

The report of the 2015 *Fire Services Review* found that ‘morale in the fire services was at its lowest ebb in decades’, due to the adversarial relationship between management and career firefighters. The *Review* highlighted in particular the ‘profoundly damaging effect on morale’ caused by the previous government’s decision to launch ‘costly and legally aggressive cases across both CFA and MFB’. The *Review* argued that this decision was ‘clearly inflammatory and designed to portray firefighters in a poor light,’ and was seen by firefighters both as a ‘management-prompted negative media campaign against them’ and a ‘personal attack on their pay and conditions.’ In other words, firefighters felt systematically and publicly bullied by management, in the service of the then-government’s ‘deliberately ideological attack’ on their union. I can certainly confirm that this is an accurate representation of my own experience.

The *Review* noted that to remedy this hostile stance, ‘significant change is required and a new chapter should be launched’. I am looking to the proposed reform as the circuit-breaker we so desperately need, to build a new fire service that is free of the adversarial culture that has poisoned the morale of career firefighters for many years.

But if morale was low in 2015, by my estimation it is far lower now. Shortly after the *Review* was completed, in late 2015, negotiations between the then-Minister and the United Firefighters Union around the CFA EBA began to break down. The anti-firefighter media campaign that had already been running at high intensity in the *Herald Sun* and on 3AW went into overdrive. The *Herald Sun*’s saturation front-page coverage in particular must surely go down as one of the most intense and sustained gutter-press hate campaigns in living memory.

However, it would only get worse from there. Beginning in May 2016, interest groups including the Coalition, the VFBV and the CFA Board began to frame the firefighter safety and community safety elements of the CFA EBA as an attack upon volunteers, a narrative that the *Herald Sun* and 3AW were only too willing to amplify and embellish. A constant stream of emotive, inflammatory rhetoric and outright lies (Appendix 3) emanated from the Coalition, serving the dual purpose of demonising professional firefighters and inciting unfounded mass panic and anger among volunteers. As a result, the morale of professionals and volunteers alike took a further nosedive.

The morale of either group hasn't improved since. The Coalition's *Hands Off CFA* placards and the *Herald Sun's Back the CFA* bumper stickers remain on prominent display, and the Coalition / media fear campaign continues, now under the guise of opposing the proposed reform. Morale won't be allowed to improve for so long as there is an opportunity for political gain by manufacturing feelings of insecurity and defensiveness.

Volunteers who opposed the EBA asked for an end to union influence ('control' / 'takeover') within the CFA, and this is what the reforms under present consideration will deliver: as they said, Hands Off the CFA! The CFA will be restored to the ideal espoused in Section 6 of the CFA Act, of a volunteer fire service for the country area of Victoria. Those volunteers who saw the EBA as an attempted 'takeover' of 'their' CFA by career firefighters will surely be reassured by the security of full volunteer 'ownership' of the CFA, which these reforms will deliver by removing career firefighters from the CFA. If the presence of career firefighters in CFA made these volunteers feel disenfranchised, the roll-out of this reform should reverse that feeling and make a positive contribution to their engagement and participation.

My sincere hope that is the reform will proceed, and as a result of the security of distance, all future attempts to provoke tensions will fall upon deaf ears. Once that is in place, morale can be rebuilt, and volunteers and professional firefighters alike can consign this toxic, unbecoming saga to history.

Then we can all just get on with what we joined up to do in the first place. It's not just professional firefighters and union sympathisers who want the bickering to stop, and see this reform as the way forward. Pragmatic volunteers do, too: see Appendices 4 and 5.

3.2 Volunteer engagement and participation

The terms of reference of this Inquiry refer to possible effects upon volunteer engagement and participation. Presumably this relates to the inflammatory suggestion made by some politicians that volunteers who are currently members at integrated brigades will become disengaged because they will be taking a supporting role rather than being the first line of response.

The first point to note about this claim is that it overstates both the significance of the change and the number of volunteers involved. The change only affects 35 of CFA's 1180 brigades. And, in my experience it is already the case that the response in these areas is led by career firefighters and supported by volunteers (Section 1.3).

Secondly, based on my experience as a CFA volunteer, I feel this claim is rather uncharitable towards the motivations and character of volunteers. Why would any volunteer oppose better service delivery? It's as if these politicians believe volunteers are in it not for the benefit of the community, but for themselves—out for the supposed thrill of urban fire response, or the glory that comes with playing hero, or the pride of presiding over an empire. Perhaps there are some who fit this description, but they are a small minority, who in any case are probably not psychologically suited for emergency response. Their wants must not take precedence over the needs of the community.

None of the fine men and women I volunteered with were oriented this way, and neither are the volunteers I have worked with as an MFB firefighter. Like me, they were pleased when the truck turned out before they got to the station, because it meant the community was receiving the quickest possible response. Like me, they were happy to take on decidedly unglamorous work for

community benefit, such as hosing out the stables at the racecourse to raise money for equipment. Many volunteers don't turn out at all—these are CFA's 18,935 non-operational volunteers who provide essential support to 35,595 operational volunteers. These people don't manage the books or make sandwiches or run fundraisers for the glory. They do it because they want to help.

These are the real volunteers, who put the community first. They are the majority by far, and I don't think they would oppose any reform that is clearly in the public interest.

Conclusion

Based on my experience as an MFB firefighter and CFA volunteer, I commend the *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017*, on the basis that it will-

- deliver clear community safety benefits;
- eliminate the unacceptable safety hazards currently posed to CFA career firefighters; and
- deliver lasting, much-needed improvements to morale by ending the era of disputation that has marred the fire services for the past several years.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the bill.

Appendix 1: Response data relating to Epping CFA, the closest volunteer brigade to the MFB stations I usually work at. The data shows that in 2015-6, Epping volunteers exceeded the 8-minute response standard to calls in their primary response area on 49 per cent of occasions. Source: UFU presentation to Parliamentary Inquiry into Fire Season Preparedness.

Epping

Fireground Performance

Response Percentile		Primary Incidents	Primary SDS Incidents	Customer 50th Percentile (mm:ss)	Customer 90th Percentile (mm:ss)	Primary Turnout Time Compliance		Primary Travel Time Compliance		Primary SDS Compliance		Customer SDS Compliance	
Hazard Class	No					%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
1 - High Urban (6:00)													
2 - Medium Urban (8:00)	268	208	6:06	8:59	137	66 %	91	44 %	107	51 %	167	80 %	
3 - Low Urban (10:00)	32	22	8:25	14:23	15	68 %	12	55 %	14	64 %	17	77 %	
4 - Rural (20:00)	3	3	3:59	18:41	1	33 %	3	100 %	3	100 %	3	100 %	
5 - Remote Rural													
Total	303	233	6:17	9:31	153	66 %	106	45 %	124	53 %	187	80 %	

Business Rule(s)

Primary Report Status: Complete

Primary Report Status: Complete; Emergency Status: Emergency; Call Type(s): 0 - 921

Year

2015-2016

FAILED

49%

Epping brigade failed to achieve the required 8 minute response time 49% of the time.

Appendix 2: Data collected on Scoresby CFA turnout times, crew numbers and structural firefighting qualifications. NB: “turnout time” is the time taken for the appliance to leave the fire station. For volunteer brigades, the compliance standard is under 4 minutes. (For career brigades it is 90 seconds.) This data illustrates that even if a timely response is achieved, the crew on-board may not be adequate in numbers or qualifications.

SCORESBY CREW COMPOSITION RESPONDING WITH ROWVILLE REVIEW					
JULY 2016 ONGOING					
		D N W	TURNOUT TIME MINS	CREW NUMBER	STRUC QUAL
5/07/2016	1112	DAY	4	3	2
5/07/2016	2154	NIGHT	FAILED TO	0	0
5/07/2016	2300	NIGHT	5	4	4
8/07/2016	2354	NIGHT	5	3	2
12/07/2016	1049	DAY	6	3	3
13/07/2016	1845	NIGHT	5	2	2
14/07/2016	0747	DAY	FAILED TO	2	2
15/07/2016	1748	DAY	6	2	1
17/07/2016	0003	W/END	6	3	2
20/07/2016	0951	DAY	5	2	2
22/07/2016	0801	DAY	6	3	1
25/07/2016	0812	DAY	6	3	2
30/07/2016	1041	W/END	5	2	2
31/07/2016	0428	W/END	6	3	2
31/07/2016	1306	W/END	6	3	2
1/08/2016	1210	DAY	5	2	1
2/08/2016	0922	DAY	FAILED TO	1	0
6/08/2016	0938	DAY	6	2	1
6/08/2016	2047	W/END	7	5	4
8/08/2016	0648	DAY	6	3	1
12/08/2016	0955	DAY	3	3	2
12/08/2016	1819	W/END	7	3	2
15/08/2016	1159	DAY	4	3	3
18/08/2016	0125	NIGHT	6	4	3
18/08/2016	1114	DAY	FAILED TO	1	0
18/08/2016	1154	DAY	FAILED TO	1	0
22/08/2016	1353	DAY	9	2	1
23/08/2016	0857	DAY	5	2	1
23/08/2016	1013	DAY	2	2	1
23/08/2016	2333	NIGHT	5	8	6
26/05/2016	0429	NIGHT	6	3	1
26/08/2016	0829	DAY	9	2	1
26/08/2016	1011	DAY	NOT REQ AT BIO WASHAWAY	3	2
29/08/2016	1130	DAY	6	3	2
29/08/2016	1159	DAY	2	3	2
29/08/2016	1223	DAY	2	3	2

Source: Tabled at Senate Inquiry Hearing, 19th September 2016

Appendix 3: A complete inventory of all of the lies and smear told in aid of the Coalition’s ideological war on firefighters would run into hundreds of pages, so here I will highlight just the single most egregious example: the suggestion that under the proposed EBA, volunteers would have to stand and watch fires burn while waiting for 7 paid firefighters to arrive. This is a blatant lie, designed to make professional fires seem recklessly attached to self-aggrandisement and power games. The actual text of the 7-firefighter *dispatch* clause was publicly available prior to Guy’s article. Unfortunately the lie spread and was repeated and embellished many times by the media, other coalition MPs and volunteers appearing on TV news stories. This lie more than any other led the public and CFA volunteers to support the Coalition’s anti-career-firefighter smear campaign and drove the toxic, morale-destroying dispute to new lows. (*Sunday Herald Sun* 5th June 2016)



CFA members in a rally at Treasury Gardens. Picture: David Crosling

Opinion

Playing with fire by giving United Firefighters Union control over CFA

Matthew Guy, Herald Sun
June 5, 2016 12:00am
Subscriber only

WHERE would Victoria have been on Ash Wednesday or on Black Saturday without the CFA? Where would we be every summer without those CFA volunteers — men and women who know their communities, live in the areas they protect and do it all for nothing.

When tragedy hits, it is the CFA that stands between millions of Victorians and potential oblivion. They protect our towns, our homes, our lives.

The word hero is thrown around a lot today, but our CFA volunteers really are true heroes, in every sense of the word — they risk their lives to protect ours.

So it's not an over statement to say that all Victorians owe so much to the CFA and its 60,000 volunteers for the lives and homes they protect every single day.

And for all their hard work and sacrifice, the only thing these brave volunteers ask is to be treated with respect.

That is why it is so inexplicable that the Andrews Government appears set to give the green-light for the United Firefighters Union to take over the CFA.

What kind of thanks is it from the Premier to the brave men and women of the CFA to rip up 70 years of CFA volunteerism for a post-election payback to a greedy, power-hungry union.

Who would have thought after Ash Wednesday, after Black Saturday or even after the fires over summer along the Great Ocean Road last Christmas that the thanks from Daniel Andrews to the CFA would be to carve the authority up and undermine its volunteers.

At the core of this controversial issue is an attempt by the United Firefighters Union — a small union of 800 members — to negotiate a new workplace deal with the Labor Government.

Their pay claims, which are estimated to cost Victorian taxpayers about \$1 billion, have been previously described by the Mr Andrews's own Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett as "crippling", and also include provisions for the union to take over control of the CFA. The union is demanding the right to veto all MFB and CFA management decisions and nobble the role of volunteers.

Among their claims, the union is demanding that CFA volunteers not fight fires unless at least seven unionised firefighters are sent to supervise them. That means a volunteer cannot do a single thing until a unionised firefighter arrives.

Insanely, volunteer firefighters would have to stand and watch a house burn until seven unionised firefighters arrive to watch over their work. This will clearly compromise public safety.

Can you imagine what would have happened on Black Saturday or Ash Wednesday if CFA volunteers were forced to stand around waiting to be supervised before tackling deadly bushfires?

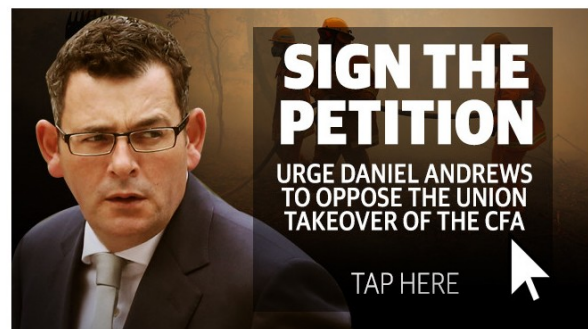
If the Andrews Government caves in to the union, the CFA expects tens of thousands of volunteer firefighters across Victoria to resign.

The result would be that the millions of Victorians and the approximately 80 per cent of our state that the CFA protects, would suddenly be at greater risk next bushfire season.

This issue is not about a political powerplay between unions and board members, this issue is about standing up for volunteer firefighters who risk their lives to protect our lives, ours families' and our homes.

Of all the things Mr Andrews has done since coming to government, smashing up the CFA and selling out its 60,000 volunteers is by far the worst and most damaging.

Matthew Guy is Leader of the state Opposition



Should Daniel Andrews back the union's CFA takeover bid?

- Yes?
- No?

Vote! View Results

Is CFA in terminal decline?

I accept this is a provocative question, but it should be asked. What was once regarded as the world's greatest volunteer fire service appears to be suffering from an identity crisis. I believe CFA is in grave danger of losing its original and primary focus as the firefighting organisation for country Victoria.

It pains me to make this assertion, because I have been an active member for over 40 years, and my loyalty to my local Brigade and Group remains undiminished. However the current bitter CFA-UFU dispute has highlighted some very concerning developments. In my view the problems run far deeper than the conflict over the EBA.

CFA was set up as a volunteer fire service, and for years the volunteers called the shots. There was clear leadership, much of it from men with distinguished military records. CFA Board had considerable clout, and fought successfully for the needs of volunteers. Unlike in recent years, the concept of the Board being rolled by Governments with political agendas was unthinkable. Remember the formidable Brigadier Eason? He was Chairman during much of the Bolte era, and Premier Henry Bolte was not exactly a shy violet. I know who I would have backed in a blue between Eason and Bolte.

On the operational side, there was no question who ran the show. It was the Chief Officer. Until recent years, every paid CFA officer, from the Chief down, had prior experience as a volunteer. That was once a prerequisite for employment as a Regional Officer.

How times have changed! Now the position of Chief Officer has been progressively weakened, being overshadowed at one level by the CEO (an administrator) and at another by the Emergency Services Commissioner. Operations' staff, many of them with little understanding of or empathy with volunteers, normally come to the job from urban fire stations.

From the perspective of the rural volunteer, CFA is now an amorphous bureaucracy - high-handed, dictatorial, remote, and obsessed with Greater Melbourne. It is a totally different organisation from the 'extended family' it was in the past, when its original purpose was to support volunteers.

I can remember Region dinners in the 1980s, when a senior CFA officer would invariably address the gathering by saying 'You are the CFA'. Contrast that with the comment, 'out there in volunteer land', made by a very senior CFA officer a couple of years ago at a VFBV meeting. Apparently that is on another planet somewhere. Now there is a designated separate section in the CFA behemoth called 'Learning and Volunteerism', in what is supposedly a volunteer organisation! That speaks volumes to me.

At the same time, the spin doctors are constantly bombarding us with slogans, such as 'One CFA' and 'working together as one.' To me, this is meaningless jargon. The truth is, rural firefighters and those in Greater Melbourne inhabit different worlds, and it is about time CFA recognised that.

A few years ago, CFA insisted that there would no longer be rural and urban brigades - just brigades. I believe this was a mistake. There is even 'one VFBV' these days. Now I am not suggesting there is serious animosity between brigades in rural and urban communities. Rather, there are differences in culture and approach. That is inevitable, as the tasks facing the firefighters are different, and the equipment is different. Even the CEO stated recently that 'one size does not fit all.' How true! Yet this was in the same breath as repeating the tired old slogan of 'one CFA.' We are told, ad infinitum and ad nauseum, that change is inevitable and must not only be

accepted, but embraced. I am not averse to change if it can be clearly demonstrated as change to something better. But I reject change for change's sake - it just promotes instability and confusion.

CFA has been reviewed to death. Navel-gazing is a very expensive epidemic. We are asked all the time where we want to be in 10, 20 or 30 years. CFA files must be bursting with review documents. There has also just been a Government review of the fire services, but it is interesting to note that none of the reviewers bothered to travel any further west than Ballarat to seek input!

A wise man said once: "Circumstances change, but principles don't." And really, fires, and the ways to extinguish them, do not change much either. You still have to put the wet stuff on the red stuff. OK, equipment has got bigger and generally better, fires in bushland areas are more intense and dangerous due to long years of neglect in fuel reduction, and people continue to insist on living in incredibly high-risk locations.

But one thing will never change. In rural areas, volunteers will always turn out when there is a fire and will immediately throw everything at it, using whatever equipment is at hand - including many private tankers. The objective is to put the fire out, go home and get on with life - end of story.

Of course I know it is not always quite that simple. But the needs of rural volunteers are pretty simple. You need a reliable tanker (preferably one not requiring a pilot's licence), plenty of water, a good pump, protective clothing and a communications system that works.

It is also nice to obtain support from local CFA officers, with provision of resources as and when required - but NOT being dictated to by some bureaucrat in a remote incident control centre who has no idea what is happening on the ground. Sadly, the 'bureaucratisation' of fire management has developed into a monster, and monsters tend to be clumsy and threatening. But that is another story.

What puzzles me is that, despite all the changes imposed upon and by CFA in recent years, there is one change that continues to be strongly resisted. Calls for it are continually ignored or dismissed.

The elephant in the room is the issue of geographic boundaries between CFA and MFB areas, which have not changed since the CFA was formed in 1945, as the Country Fire Authority. In those days, places such as Springvale, Dandenong, Cranbourne and Melton were country towns or villages in a rural environment. Today, they are all part of the Greater Melbourne population explosion. Is it any wonder that UFU wants to expand its traditional metropolitan base to reflect the current reality? Conversely, CFA wants to maintain and expand its empire. That seems to be its major priority. Is it any wonder there is friction?

Yes, there are now so-called integrated stations in outer metropolitan areas, staffed by both paid and volunteer firefighters. We are told this model often works quite well, but it is inevitable that the different cultures will sometimes clash.

In rural Victoria, volunteers will continue to operate as they always have, whatever UFU does to CFA or vice versa. Still, we do have to look at the big picture. Perhaps it is time for a radical change in CFA-MFB boundaries, with CFA reverting to its traditional country role and leaving Greater Melbourne to MFB - and UFU.

One recent suggestion is to combine CFA and MFB, creating one organisation responsible for all towns and cities with over 20,000 people, a completely unionised environment. A new volunteer and completely non-unionised fire service would serve the rest of Victoria.

I can almost hear the horror in

some quarters about such an idea. However, if the current situation continues to fester, rural volunteers will become more and more disillusioned with the CFA's pre-occupation with Greater Melbourne, as they see ever more of CFA budget consumed by salaries, and a hike in the levy to pay for them. This is a double whammy for country people, especially farmers, who as well as paying more, commonly fight the fires themselves anyway - often using their own equipment - as members of local brigades.

I do not profess to have a magic solution to this seemingly intractable problem. My plea is simply for a calm, reasoned and open debate about the future of CFA - encompassing the issues that really matter to the forgotten army who were once the reason for CFA's existence.

Otherwise there could be a real danger of that army voting with their feet.

PETER FLINN
Dunkeld

June 2016

Appendix 4: Letters published in the VFBV publication, Fire Wise:

February 2017

A secret plan to carve up fire services?

I was intrigued by a recent report in the Herald Sun which suggested that the Andrews Government was secretly investigating "a radical plan to divide Victoria's fire services into volunteer and career forces... in a desperate bid to end the CFA saga." Could it be true that, at last, the Government is listening to what many rural CFA volunteers have been saying for months - and some for years?

In my article in June 2016 edition of what I grudgingly refer to as 'Fire Wise', I pleaded for an open debate on the future of CFA. However, apart from numerous private expressions of support for the idea of CFA reverting to its roots and once again becoming a rural-based fire service, with a major reappraisal of the hopelessly outdated CFA-MFB boundaries established in 1945, there has been a deafening silence from the emergency services bureaucracy.

This seems to be a common tactic nowadays. Rather than engaging in a serious and constructive debate - or even dismissing the idea out of hand - CFA prefers to ignore the matter altogether and just hopes it will go away. VFBV has done the same. They just want to deprive it of oxygen. Why? I can only surmise that it is all about 'empire.' CFA has become a large, unwieldy, remote, unresponsive and self-perpetuating bureaucracy. To many rural volunteers, it may as well be located on another planet. Today it would be totally unrecognisable to the impressive volunteer leaders who founded it more than 70 years ago.

Of course CFA's pre-occupation with Greater Melbourne is understandable, given that this densely populated area, much of which is still CFA territory, accounts for so many complex incidents. Out in the bush, the problems - and the culture - are radically different. Rural firefighters would be out of their depth dealing with fires in multi-storey buildings or industrial sites. Conversely, urban firefighters would struggle with fast-running grass and bushfires. Sadly, that has been proved in the past.

Why do the bureaucrats keep denying this reality, and insist on glib slogans like 'one CFA' and 'all communities, all emergencies'?

It will be interesting to see whether the 'secret' proposal mentioned in the Herald Sun will progress or not. Is it really radical? Hardly. A similar structure has been in place in New South Wales and South Australia for years, and the former CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson, recommended a new "rural fire service" in his report on last summer's fires in Western Australia.

It could even be a 'win-win' situation. Just imagine it: the long-running and ugly stand-off between volunteer and paid fire-fighters could be defused. Maybe representatives of the UFU, the Government and rural volunteers could even meet in the same room at the same times and shake hands on a deal! Impossible? Perhaps not. It just needs some political will.

Of course, it would not be easy. An 'unnamed source' in the Herald Sun article identified issues with volunteers in the urban fringe areas, potential problems with surge capacity and the cost of recruiting many extra career firefighters.

But let us at least talk about the issues instead of ignoring them. Bring it on!

PETER FLINN
Dunkeld

Appendix 5: Transcript of talkback interview on Mornings with Jon Faine, ABC Melbourne, May 19th 2017.

Faine: Rod in Colac. 'Morning Rod, welcome to The Wrap.

Rod: Yeah, G'day John. Look, I'm just sick to death of hearing everybody talk about us volunteers. I'm a 35-year CFA volunteer, and I plan to stay that way until I bloody die. I do not see anything that is going to alter my volunteering. If there's a fire, an accident, a rescue, anything, we will go. It's got bugger-all to do with us at the bottom on the ground. My thoughts are that the likes of Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong stations should be under MFB, and MFB should encompass the whole of metropolitan Melbourne. It's bloody ridiculous the way things are going, and this has just become a political football. People who are talking about it don't even bloody well, ah, they're not even in the organisation!

Faine: Rod, there's clearly divisions within all the different factions of this now very politicised debate, so there are all sorts of allegations and counter-allegations. From the point of view of the general public, surely all we care about is that the turf wars are put aside and people get on with modernising the system and providing better protection for the community.

Rod: John, we are going to be there. When your house catches fire, we will be there. I don't give a rats who's standing at the top of the pile, because that's one thing the CFA's very good at, building piles and then protecting them. But, as volunteers we will be out there doing the job. This political fight is only making all of us agitated, and it's just a bloody joke. Just get on with it! Every other bureaucracy in the country is supposedly streamlined. This is one that's ridiculous. It's all over the shop. If it's brought down to one organisation for the paid, one for the bloody volunteers, it makes complete sense.