

To be private and confidential.

To whom it may concern,

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is [REDACTED], I have been employed as a professional MFB firefighter for 32 years, attaining the rank of Leading Fire fighter, and I am currently based at the Sunshine fire station.

I write to you to express my support for the proposed fire services reform.

In my career, I have witnessed firsthand what happens when there is a time delay or little response to an emergency call for assistance. Can you imagine being trapped in a motor vehicle or industrial accident, maybe a loved one having a major medical event, or standing there watching your house being engulfed in fire?

Now look at the clock, and watch the second hand rotate for just THREE minutes (trust me it will seem like forever), three minutes at best is what the difference between a full time brigade and a volunteer brigade would most likely be, this is a conservative figure, as it may even be longer. This could be life or death time. It's not a game or a hobby, and every second counts.

I don't think most people think about the emergency services, Police, Ambulance, SES, Fire Brigades and others. The time they do, is when they need them urgently, and then they want them five minutes ago. Again time and urgency is paramount.

Fire fighters, whether full time professional or part time volunteer, must not be used as political footballs.

People need to be held accountable for reporting and disseminating misinformation. Whose job is that? Who is responsible for checking the facts in media reports etc...? E.g. Politics seem to be using this issue as political point scoring, using firefighters as political footballs against each other. This has to cease before someone is seriously injured, both physically and mentally. I have been personally confronted by hostile person/s, because of misleading, antagonistic media reports, leaked from whatever group, for whatever reason, and I must say that I and my family have had enough, it has taken its toll on me, and sadly will most likely be shortening my career. My Family and I currently reside in a CFA volunteer area and this is why I'm asking for privacy and confidentiality.

I would like to comment about the; "seven on the fire ground", myth. MFB has used the two trucks, seven on the fire ground principle for decades. No we don't turn up and wait until seven of us are there before we start firefighting operations! What this means is MFB always responds two crews, the two closest fire stations, trucks with crews, to the location of a reported fire. When the crew of three or four in the first truck arrives, they immediately get to work. This may require entering a building to attempt the rescue of a trapped person/s, or to start extinguishing the fire, or both. The situation could be that a single firefighter can be inside a burning structure by them self initially, but a guaranteed second truck and crew (of three or four also), upon their arrival (usually within seconds of the first truck), will enter the building to back up and secure the initial firefighters safety.

I would not enter a burning structure under any other circumstances, even though I could be there by myself, I know it's guaranteed that a second fully trained and equipped crew will have my back ASAP. This procedure is absolute non negotiable as a safety factor within the MFB. This is not procedure with CFA full time firefighters? Who are left to rely on the volunteer system, e.g. the closest CFA station with a crew of full time career firefighters are responded, and volunteers are paged to respond to the station as the second truck and crew. The career firefighters arrive at the structure fire and they also immediately get to work, this may also require a single firefighter to enter a building to attempt the rescue of a trapped person/s, or to start extinguishing the fire. Again the situation could be that a single firefighter can be inside a burning structure by them self. This first crew of career firefighters are now waiting for the volunteers to arrive as their second back up crew, the system is relying on volunteers being :- available, turning up, how many, where from and how far away, then the next problem can be who has what training? Is the responding volunteer qualified to enter a burning building, to assist and help secure the safety of the initial career firefighter! This system may have some of the most dedicated volunteer in the state, but it is still not the best practice. The safety of all firefighters, both volunteer and full time career is paramount and a priority.

This enquiry cannot be about who is the most dedicated, or who is better, or who has the most traditions. And it should be free of emotional bias and false misleading statements and points of view. It must be what is best for the people of Victoria and visitors to our state at an acceptable cost, and ensure the best possible safety to the firefighter, using world's best practice and equipment. It should put in place a system that indicates the time when a full time professional emergency service is required for reason of: -population size, risk factors, amount of 000 calls to name a few, and should remove political and emotional bias. So that it becomes a formula that is initiated automatically.

This shouldn't mean that the volunteer brigade is push out or tossed aside, as they should remain as a vital part of the emergency services system, with their own roll and responsibilities.

I should have written this request to the person in your position at the time, ten years ago. But as the opportunity has revealed itself now and times have changed which includes things like terrorism, here it is. Here is the chance to change things for the better, to better meet the needs of the people in trouble calling for assistance and also aiding the safety of the firefighters guaranteeing a timely, professional support and back up. I believe that all communities in Australia should have a full time emergency service; sadly we all know that this is impossible and unviable, but here is a chance to provide some of the larger expanding communities the service that they deserve, already pay for, but don't receive. Please don't miss this opportunity. This is vital and important now.

As has already been reported, Victoria's fire service boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this outdated system, 35+ areas are zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanized and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35+ country areas. It's these areas that need to modernize ASAP as they are highly urbanized areas as part of the proposed reform of the fire services. A rapid 8 minutes response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanized areas, this is best practice. All Victorian, professional and volunteer firefighters, deserve a modern fire service that meets the needs of our growing communities.

To ensure the safety of all Victorians- Including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire service reform.

I have over the past few years noted, that we (MFB), have been required, more and more frequently, to maintain an emergency response presence at the CFA stations of Sunbury, Caroline Springs, Point Cook, Melton, Werribee, Hoppers Crossing, Greenvale and even Ocean Grove, to name a few. This takes a fire vehicle and its crew away (in our case from the Sunshine Area), to support or in most cases to provide emergency coverage into these other areas, leaving the area of Sunshine and others less supported if a major large scale emergency should happen. Each time I believe we are all rolling the dice for a terrible outcome. MFB also seems to be responding for assistance into outer rural areas of Victoria more and more frequently, for asset/community protection.

Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, and all communities in our growing state. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing and unrealistic demands being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls to triple zero.

Some questions I would like to propose, you seek answers to, to gather information for your enquiry are: -

\*Why has the CFA model got a full time professional career path? Was it because the areas that they were responsible for had grown in population and risks to the point that a volunteer brigade could not guarantee a timely reasonable response?

\*What was the size and population of these areas when a full time brigade was put in place?

Even by the CFA's own standards, it recognizes that a full time professional fire service is required by some measure, at some time. Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo to name a few at some stage, started with a volunteer fire service, but eventually this had to be replaced by a full time service.

Having 3+ fire fighting /Emergency organizations does not make sense to me, especially when all three have different equipment, procedures, communication equipment/ protocols etc...

At the very least, I believe that all should be standardized, so all have and use the same. Same Equipment, same training, same communication and protocols etc...

The MFB model includes a first responder medical response to assist and back up Ambulance Victoria. Imagine adding that service to these larger outer suburbs/cities.

Presumptive Legislation. I will not comment too much on this subject as I believe that this is a no brainer and should be put in place. It exists in all other states and territories of Australia, so why not Victoria.

As a firefighter, one of the many hazards of the occupation, both career and volunteer, is exposure to Carcinogens, Asbestos and Toxins to name a few. These cancer causing conditions are out of our control and the modern building/ structure is full of materials that when burnt are a risk to the firefighters health. We do have procedures and safety protocols including OH&S standards to minimize exposure, but in the unfortunate situation when a firefighter is diagnosed with cancer etc... this is a big enough burden to deal with without having to consider the monetary cost as well. Please pass this legislation for the benefit of all.

I respectfully submit that you give consideration to my request to modernize the fire service along with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service employees. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament. This is important to me and my colleagues.

Thank you for taking the time to read and considering my request.

Yours Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the author.

MFB- Leading Firefighter-

A black rectangular redaction box covering the contact information of the author.