

Leading Firefighter Andrew Carew  
Springvale Fire Station

Assistant Clerk Committees,  
Department of the Legislative Council,  
Fire Services Bill Select Committee,  
Parliament House, Spring Street,  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

### **Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017**

My name is Andrew Carew and I am a Leading Firefighter with the Country Fire Authority. I have been a career Firefighter since 21 July 2003 and currently hold the rank of Leading Firefighter. A rank I have held since October 2009. I am currently stationed at Springvale Fire Station.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

#### *a. impact on fire service delivery across Victoria*

I firmly believe that the fire services in Victoria need modernising, to bring them out of the 1950's and 60's into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The public of Victoria deserve the fire service that they pay for and not an antiquated model reliant on band aid fixes to a broken system.

We have a radio message sent by our dispatchers at ESTA when a brigade does not turnout in time to a call. "XYZ brigade has not yet responded", what this means to me, as a career firefighter is that our backup has not responded to a call, this message comes after a delay of 6 minutes. That is made up of 4 minutes to turnout plus an additional 2 minutes before the Computer Aided Dispatch System (CAD) alerts the dispatcher and prompts them to inform any appliances responding that XYZ brigade has failed to turnout and if an additional brigade is required to be responded.

Unfortunately this is a phrase heard broadcast several times a day.

Imagine if it was your house the was on fire and you called 000 only to be told 6 minutes later that one of the two fire trucks, called to come to your house was not coming.

The residents of the current Metropolitan Fire District are not exposed to this situation. They call 000 and two MFB trucks are responded with a minimum of 7 professional firefighters from the two closest fire stations.

In CFA areas serviced by career staff in integrated brigades, career staff respond in the same 90 seconds that the MFB are measured by. Their back up may be from fully volunteer brigades who, in urban areas have 4 minutes to respond or it may be from career fighters at a neighbouring integrated brigade. If the support is from career staff, they are coming with a known skill set and abilities. If it is a volunteer brigade that skill set is unknown.

Many a time I have been to calls in Springvale Fire Stations area that have had a volunteer truck turn up without the members of the crew holding appropriate skills and knowledge to combat a structure fire. In some sections of the fire stations area we have career staff respond as initial support. In other sections we skip the next closest brigades, Keysborough or Noble Park Fire Brigades because they have a documented history of either completely failing to respond, responding with insufficient crew numbers or responding with crews with skill sets inappropriate to the type of call they are responded to, i.e. wildfire skill set members turning up to structural fires. We overcome this by responding Dandenong Fire Station. There are many integrated stations in CFA that do not have the ability to achieve this.

I would like to highlight the failings of the current system by using a garage fire that I recently attended

Tuesday 13 June 2017 at 7:39 am Springvale Brigade (staff and volunteers) and Dandenong staff pagers were alerted for a call – Smoke issuing from roof, corner of Athol Rd and Harmony Crt Springvale Sth. Springvale Pumper responded 1 minute and 11 seconds (71 seconds) after being paged Dandenong Pumper2 responded at the same time and radioed their turnout message immediately after Springvale Pumper's. Springvale Pumper arrived on scene at 7.42 am and immediately commenced suppression and containment activities on a well-developed garage fire with immediate threat to neighbours house and the occupiers own house. 5 minutes later Dandenong Pumper 2 arrived and supplied an additional Breathing Apparatus (BA) crew. During this firefight there was only 1 volunteer member from Springvale brigade respond. This sole member is new to the brigade and only possesses wildfire qualifications, essentially meaning this member is next to useless at a structure fire.

On this particular morning both attending pumpers were crewed with five personnel, 10 in total. The usual crewing for these pumpers are 4 on Springvale's and 3 on Dandenong Pumper 2.

On this occasion the lack of response by Springvale Volunteers was overcome by having crew numbers higher than what would usually be on the two responding pumpers.

This is only one occasion out of many where Springvale's own volunteers have failed to respond in a timely manner and with appropriately qualified personnel.

This highlights the major failing of the current system in urban areas, volunteers now days have many more pressures placed upon them, home life, work life commitments result in volunteers selecting not to respond to calls and relying on the career firefighters to protect the community. Sometimes without back up ever arriving.

One of the positives of the proposed reforms will be a standardised response model to emergency calls for assistance. Joe Public doesn't care whether the truck that turns up to his house on fire is crewed with full time professional career firefighters or volunteers, he cares that a truck turns up as quickly as possible and the crew on board are appropriately qualified and equipped to deal with the situation at hand.

Unfortunately, at the moment in CFA areas this is not the case.

*b. effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery*

In the 35 integrated fire stations, which will transfer to FRV, there will be some effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery, but not to the levels currently being scaremongered by the Victorian Liberal Party and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV).

Volunteers in these 35 stations will still have a place in a fully volunteer firefighter CFA, whether they choose to remain, transfer or resign is a decision made by the individual volunteer.

The Volunteers in the remaining CFA station will suffer no adverse effect of the career staff moving to a newly formed FRV other than an improved service to the communities that FRV stations will border similar to the very same support arrangements that are currently in place. The CFA stations that do not currently have any interaction with career staff will continue to do just that, have no interaction with FRV Staff.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Carew

