

**Kirra Vanzetti**

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**From:** Aaron Worcester [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 3 July 2017 3:54 PM  
**To:** LCSC  
**Subject:** INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I am a Senior Station Officer with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) at Traralgon Fire Brigade. I have been a career firefighter for the last 16 years, and first joined the CFA as a volunteer firefighter in 1995 (I resigned as a volunteer a few years ago due to competing family priorities). I have numerous specialist qualifications within the fire services, including Pumper, Tanker, Ladder Platform and Breathing Apparatus Appliance Operator. I am qualified in Rope Rescue, Hazmat, confined space and numerous other qualifications - many of which I also instruct Staff and volunteers in.

I am also the spouse of a Volunteer, my Wife recently resigning as the local CFA Captain of Rosedale Fire Brigade. My wife continues to serve a volunteer in a firefighting capacity.

I live in a small rural community of Nambrok in Gippsland.

I have spent over 15 years as a CFA volunteer, before resigning due to commitments with family, work and Army Reserve. Despite formally resigning I have spent many hours supporting and training with local brigades in my own time.

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

The current model is outdated, and no longer serves the community to the level of service required of an emergency service. Developments in building materials, and more scientific understanding of the non-visible risks of fires (carcinogens etc...) have increased the complexity and time critical nature of emergency response.

CFA Volunteers do a great job, and many are well trained and serve their communities to the best of their ability. However in many of the larger urban areas they cannot, not can they be expected to provide 24/7 service to communities that have many hundreds of emergency responses every year. This is not a reflection on the volunteers - however they have lives outside of CFA, and the requirements to train and maintain the level of skills demanded of firefighters in today's environment is not achievable by the majority of volunteer (recognising that there are a minority volunteers that do have the time and train to a good level). In my local district many of the basic core training courses fail to meet target numbers and are cancelled as a result.

The number of brigades that fail to respond, or have unreported "near misses" are numerous - both in driving CFA trucks and firefighting operations. Locally our career stations support these brigades with additional firefighters and skills that we apply more often in a guiding and mentoring role that displacing

volunteers from leadership roles - something that is a common concern to volunteers yet rarely occurs locally.

I ask that in considering your position you consider the following:

- What are the communities expectations of an EMERGENCY SERVICE & can these be met by the current model now and into the future?
- Is the CFA really as strong a force as is publically claimed - the statistics (from CFA themselves) indicate that we do not have 50,000 active volunteers. Whilst we have many members of brigades the number of actively responding firefighters is likely 20,000 or less. The age demographic of our membership is increasingly over 55, with significant over 65 - it is becoming more and more difficult to recruit members. CFA's statistics, similar other volunteer agencies demonstrate a steady decline in numbers, and difficulty recruiting - where will we be in another 10 year ?
- The "Hub and Spoke" model of Career stations supporting outwards from regional centers in support of volunteer brigades works well - both in serving the community and supporting CFA brigades. this would be further supported by FRV.
- The amalgamation of MFB and CFA career staff will streamline training, appliances, SOP's etc...
- There are countless statistics of brigades failing to respond - this is no reflection on the individual brigade members (with lives, family and work commitments) however also results in significant delays to emergency response.
- It is not uncommon to arrive at an incident scene with a crew of 3 and be working for a period of time with no support - and restrictions of the level of risk I can accept to my crew in attempting a rescue until I have further crews on scene - this is the basis for the push for 7 firefighters to be DISPATCHED - so that we have an assured response. This is in no way intended to displace responding volunteers that may be available when an emergency call is received.
- The misinformation - particularly in the local papers in regards the proposed arrangements in unheard of and deliberately misleading. Brigades that are hundreds of kilometers from career locations are being mislead into thinking they will be sacked, or unable to fight a fire unless career staff attend. Unfortunately this misinformation is often originating from organisations intended to represent the brigades interests.
- There are many and varied reasons for members to be volunteers - and a discussion with outer metropolitan volunteers and rural/regional volunteers reveals often very different motivations - I encourage you to speak to the different groups. I small portion of vocal volunteers have demonstrated they are more concerned with "who" is running a fire and "who" gets to the fire first - this is clearly a significant risk to the individuals experiencing an emergency where career firefighters are often available to respond - but are not requested. This is happening now with some response tables reflecting brigade "ownership" of areas and exclusion of integrated brigades responding. Fortunately the Chief Officer has recognised this and is addressing response tables as we speak !!. My experience with the majority of rural volunteers is they are more concerned with rapid resolution of the emergency regardless of who got there first and who is running the incident.
- I encourage your enquiry to actively seek out volunteers and discuss the current matters and FRV proposal with them. Unfortunately the current system of information & Q & A sessions attract a number of volunteers that are politically motivated, or have concerns with the current CFA management or union members. There are hundreds and thousands of volunteers that have no concern (either way) with the current proposal & neither the time, or interest to attend these information sessions of campaign either for or against the proposal - in most cases it will not impact them and is not of concern !!

Victoria and its people deserve the best emergency service on offer.

The current model has served Victorians for over 50 years, however is not capable of supporting us into the future without change. We have seen change in our police forces, Ambulance, SES..... yet we are persisting with a fire model that is showing signs of fatigue with an increasing age demographic, difficulty recruiting, increasing inability to meet response times to name a few.....

Yours sincerely,  
Aaron Worcester



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