

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

I am writing to the parliamentary subcommittee with my submission into the above bill.

My name is Robert Berrie and I am a Senior Station Officer in the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and currently work at Point Cook Fire Station. I have been employed by the CFA as a career Fire Fighter since January 2002 and was a Volunteer Fire fighter for 6 years starting from 2001.

My qualifications include;

- Certificate iii in Public Safety (Firefighting & Emergency Operations) PUA30601
- Certificate iv in Training and Assessment TAE40110
- Leading Fire Fighter
- Station Officer
- Senior Station Officer
- Operations Officer level 2
- Level 2 Planning Officer
- Level 2 Operations Officer
- Level 2 Logistics Officer
- Sector Commander
- Strike team Leader
- Ground Observer
- Steep Angle Rescue Instructor
- High Angle Rescue Instructor
- Confined Space Rescue Instructor
- Trench Rescue operator
- Engulfment Rescue Instructor
- Rooftop Safety Instructor.

I have also been awarded the national Emergency Medal for the 2009 Black Saturday Fires.

I live in Wallington on the Bellarine peninsula and work at Point Cook Fire Station.

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

- As a Senior Station Officer on shift it is my responsibility of the safety of all crew both career and volunteers at any incident / fire that I am managing as the incident controller / CFA Commander. The importance of ensuring two fire appliances and a minimum seven crew trained in all equipment on the appliances is greatly needed to ensure the safety of all crews attending. As much as the CFA volunteers do a great job there is no guarantee that they will respond and how long it will take. There is also no guarantee with what qualifications the arriving crew will have. This can and does lead to situations where the initial crew have

donned Breathing Apparatus (BA) to enter a building and the arriving CFA volunteers have not been trained in BA. This not only places the original BA crews at Risk but can also prolong the search of the premises for any occupants and restricts the ability to perform an internal fire attack therefore causing more damage to the property. Due to the requirement of career firefighter responding in 90 seconds this also ensures a rapid response to all fire and emergencies.

Volunteers due to other family, work and life commitments are not guaranteed to respond and another brigade is only then paged to respond once the original brigade has failed after 4 minutes. This then is another delay in appliances getting on scene.

As an incident controller not knowing what resources and qualifications are guaranteed of attending means I can only plan for the initial stages of the fire until I see who turns up on scene. This lack of being able to pre plan also can cause uncertainty in crews therefore putting them at risk and potentially causing further property damage.

- In the growing outer metropolitan area where the population is growing at an extremely fast rate it is vital that as a fire service we move to ensure that the growing communities are protected by a modern fire service that can move and adjust with the growing population.
- This reform will ensure that the most appropriate appliances and crews are responded to incidents with a minimum of 7 trained career firefighters in the growing areas of Melbourne and Regional Victoria. The current model is becoming unworkable with CFA areas that are highly urbanised relying on volunteer response.
- The proposed reforms of all career fire fighters employed by one agency will enhance community safety by ensuring all career firefighters are trained in operating the same equipment and ensure a better response and coordinating training in these growing areas. This reform and moving career firefighter into one service in no way will affect the ability for volunteers to turnout or the surge capacity. Volunteers at the 35 integrated stations will still continue to operate as they currently do while co located with FRV. The other CFA stations will not change and will continue to operate as they are now.
- If anything these changes will be of a great benefit to the CFA volunteers due to increased funding and not having to compete with the career firefighters within for any of the budget for training or equipment.
- The Operations Officers, Operations managers and Instructors that are currently employed by CFA will be maintained by secondment / contracted from FRV to CFA to ensure the management structure of CFA can continue to run smoothly.
- This reform will assist in the standardisation of specialist equipment, appliances and training required for response including HAZMAT, rope rescue Confined Space Rescue.

- These reforms are urgently needed to remove the negative people from creating this friction between staff and volunteers. Due to the intervention of the Federal Liberal Party we are unable to get an EBA signed that affords us the protection required to operate safely on the Fire ground. This will then prolong without an end in sight the tensions between staff and volunteers. This reform will allow all parties to move on without any party interfering in how each operates at incidents. This ongoing dispute and constant attacks by some parties and the media have led to anguish and stress at both home and work for myself and many of my colleagues. The damage done to the reputation of career firefighters and the CFA in general by this is only eroding the confidence of the community in the fire services with the only way ahead a major reform.
- This reform will allow the CFA to better manage the volunteers and ensure they are able to better recruit, train and retain the volunteers through the extra funding and allowing CFA to become what was intended originally as a volunteer only organisation.

Below are examples from my experiences which demonstrate the failures of the current system.

1. While working at Craigieburn Fire Station we were paged to a farm accident possible person trapped underneath a quad bike in Kalkallo.
Upon arrival at the scene the paramedics were treating a patient. Kalkallo failed to respond therefore leaving only a Firefighter, leading Firefighter and myself on scene with the paramedics. The injured person had possible spinal injuries and had to be treated extremely carefully when being placed on the stretcher. Due to Kalkallo's failure to respond this left us under crewed to effectively be able to assist the paramedics with the lift. This then placed the casualty in an increased risk of causing further injuries and also placed the paramedics and our crew at risk of causing ourselves an injury.
2. At a support call to MFB to a factory fire in Hoppers Crossing I was placed as the Sector Commander of a going sector that required numerous BA crews and an aerial appliance. The MFB Incident Controller called a third alarm under the GARS response with the expectation he would receive further pumpers and all BA qualified. Due to the close proximity to CFA area we received numerous CFA Tankers with crews untrained in BA. These crews and appliances were not able to be utilised and led to the scene being cluttered up with people and appliances that were not going to be effective in fighting the fire. This led to an under resourcing of BA wearers meaning the BA wearers on scene had to don multiple cylinders to effectively extinguish the fire. Due to metabolic heat build-up when wearing BA and turnout gear it is preferred to have a rest between cylinders. As the sector commander of the incident also trying to maintain discipline in BA procedures with volunteers not clearly understanding the requirements of the MFB Safety Officer and BA entry person was difficult. These are in no way their fault just the differences between SOP's and procedures between agencies.

I have attached the following document in the failed responses of volunteers at point Cook Fire Station.

This spreadsheet is for the primary calls that Point Cook Volunteers were paged to when I was on shift at Point Cook.

The yellow areas indicate a failure to either respond at all or with either inappropriate numbers or not required skill level.

Yours Sincerely

Robert Berrie

[Redacted signature block]