

Monday 03/07/2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

I am a career Firefighter with the CFA stationed at Corio in CFA district 7, I have been employed since August 2015. I live in Jan Juc on the surf coast. I am writing this letter in support of the proposed reform of the fire service for the following reasons.

Victoria is a growing, we strive for state of the art services and the public have a high expectation for service delivery especially from the emergency services. The public hold those in power accountable for the management of these services. The huge population growth and urban sprawl that has happened in outer Melbourne and almost every regional town in Victoria has not been met with an adequate change to the Fire services which protect these communities. These community members have the same high expectation of the Emergency services in their community that Melbournians do, and they too pay for the same "Fire Service Property Levy" yet they do not have the guaranteed support of their local Fire service. The gold standard of guaranteed response of two complete crews (seven firefighters) rapidly dispatched to a structure fire does not occur with certainty. This number is essential for a safe initial entry and rescue, and for an offensive fire attack, but time and time again it does not occur outside inner Melbourne, delayed response or failure to respond is a common occurrence.

Areas such as Wyndam Vale in Melbourne's South West was shown in the recent Census to have now exceeded the population of inner Melbourne yet there are only Three Career CFA stations that respond into this area.

In the greater Geelong Area my own experience has seen numerous occasions where the surrounding Volunteer stations have not met their minimum turn out time, have turned out in the truck with half a crew and or have failed to turn out at all. The unknown of whether the volunteer crew will have adequate numbers of the correct level of training means the high potential for delays in conducting search and rescue and undertaking offensive fire attack this leading to significant safety issues for Fire crews and the community.

An example from my own experience: I have personally been at a house fire supporting the neighbouring Volunteer Brigade and whilst I was inside the burning structure the water flow stopped on the hose I was using. This potentially serious safety incident was due to poor training of the operator of the Fire Truck. The operator was a volunteer fire fighter and was using the volunteer fire truck under the command of the volunteer Incident Controller.

Changes to the Fire service model will ensure the current career Firefighters are all working together to a high standard, improving the specialty response such as Road Accident Rescue, HAZMAT, Emergency Medical Response and much more. The aligning of the services will remove confusion and make firefighters identifiable by their emergency service counterparts and accountable for their actions. In the context of a large scale emergency with multi agencies it is crucial that all services involved are confident with the skills and expertise and professional standards of the Fire service, including standards such as their training, their confidentiality regarding the incident and accountability for their actions.

“Fire doesn’t wait” and although I value and appreciate the dedication the volunteers have in urban areas there is no way of guaranteeing the turnout time, which is the biggest factor in survivability for a person inside a structure fire. There is also no guarantee of the numbers available or the skill mix or training of the volunteers. Delays can and will mean life is at risk and damage to property is potentially increased every minute of delay. This panel has the ability to mitigate this risk by reforming the Fire services and allowing it to continue to meet the needs of this growing state. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely

Marcus Williams