

3rd July 2017

Dear Members of The Select Committee,

My name is Josh Hurley and I am a Qualified Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

I believe that the proposed reforms to the Fire Services in Victoria are necessary in order to future proof the Victorian Fire Services.

Melbourne: The Expanding City

Melbourne has seen significant growth, both in terms of population and area covered, since 1958, when the fire service's boundaries were last set, and will continue to see significant growth into the future.

The population of the Greater Melbourne area was 4,485,211, as of the 2016 Census, showing a growth of 12.1% since the 2011 Census. The population of Greater Melbourne makes up 75.7% of Victoria's population.

Consider the Wyndham Local Government Area. As of the 2016 Census, the Wyndham LGA had a population of 217,122 people. In comparison, the Greater Geelong Local Government Area had a population of 233,429. ("ABS Census Quick Stats." *2016 Census Quick Stats*. ABS, 27 June 2017. Web. 28 June 2017.) The Wyndham LGA currently has two Career Fire Stations: Point Cook and Hoppers Crossing. MFB Stations 40 and 46 do turn out into the eastern parts of the Wyndham LGA. The Greater Geelong LGA currently has four Career Fire Stations: Geelong City, Belmont, Corio, and Ocean Grove. This includes specialist aerial, HAZMAT and rescue appliances. In modelling done for the City of Wyndham, .id, a demographics consultancy, has forecast that by 2036, the City of Wyndham will have a population of 424,476 people. This is an increase of approximately 88% from 2017. By 2036, .id are forecasting the City of Greater Geelong to have a population of 320,791. ("Welcome to the City of Wyndham Community Profile." *Community Profile | City of Wyndham | Profile.id*. Id, n.d. Web. 28 June 2017.) ("Welcome to the City of Greater Geelong Population Forecasts." *Population Forecasts | City of Greater Geelong | Forecast.id*. .id, n.d. Web. 30 June 2017. <<http://forecast.id.com.au/geelong>>.)

Consider a development like the proposed Australian Education City, which has been slated for vacant land in East Werribee. This development is being proposed to house 80,000 residents and 50,000 students. It has also been proposed to have 30,000 dwellings, medium-high density buildings, universities and schools. Currently, no decision has been made on this development, but these are the sort of developments that are being proposed for Melbourne's growth corridors. (Manauskas, John. "Australian Education City One Step Closer in Melbourne's Western Suburbs." [Http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/future-melbourne/australian-education-city-one-step-closer-in-melbournes-western-suburbs/news-story/de7f28255d509ed632b14d329b8b0d17](http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/future-melbourne/australian-education-city-one-step-closer-in-melbournes-western-suburbs/news-story/de7f28255d509ed632b14d329b8b0d17). Herald Sun, 21 June 2017. Web. 28 June 2017.)

In the 2014-2015 financial year, Greater Melbourne led Australia with the largest number of residential building approvals. 56,657 new dwellings were approved. Melbourne – South East followed by Melbourne – West led the way in terms of new house approvals. The largest number of approvals was for Melbourne – Inner, which had 16,606 new approvals, of which approximately 95% were for New Residential – Other which includes unit, townhouse and apartment developments.

Coleman, Sarah. ("Livability: Housing." <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/built-environment/topic/2016/livability-housing>. Department of Environment, 2016. Web. 28 June 2017.)

Not only is Greater Melbourne's population expanding rapidly outwards, established suburbs are becoming more densely populated.

Modern Structure Fire's: Burning Faster and Hotter

Due to the materials that modern day buildings are constructed with, and the materials that modern furniture is manufactured from, structure fires now burn much faster and hotter than they did previously.

In an episode of ABC TV show "Catalyst" that aired on the 15th July, 2014, a simulation was conducted to show how quickly a room with modern furnishings could flashover. Flashover is the near simultaneous ignition of most of the directly exposed combustible materials in an enclosed area (effectively the whole room becoming involved in fire). The room flashes over in just over two minutes. The show then goes on to explain that in simulations conducted with Fire and Rescue New South Wales and the CSIRO, it was found that rooms furnished with items from the 1950's flashed over in 17-20 minutes, whilst rooms with current day furnishings flashed over in 2-3 minutes. ("Catalyst Home." *Catalyst: House Fire - ABC TV Science*. ABC, 14 July 2014. Web. 28 June 2017. <<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/4046289.htm>>.)

Firefighting Basics

Fire Services worldwide use an acronym – RECEO, as a way of sequencing firefighting operations.

R – Rescue

E – Exposures

C – Confine / Contain

E – Extinguish

O – Overhaul

Modern structural firefighting relies on the use of Breathing Apparatus (BA) to perform rescues and operate in close proximity to the fire. Seven on the fireground has been found to be the minimum number of firefighters for safe systems of work. (*Out of the Line of Fire: Modernising the Standards of Fire Cover: Report of the Joint Committee on the Audit Commission Report to the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils*. London: Fire and Emergency Planning Directorate, Home Office, 1998. Print.) The positions are:

- Incident Controller
- Safety Officer
- Pump Operator / BA Entry
- Two BA Crew in or near structure
- Two BA Crew on standby

Bringing Growth, Fire and Firefighting Together

Melbourne is a rapidly growing city, not only in terms of population and area, but also in terms of population density. Fires burn with more intensity than they previously have due to the materials fuelling them being more flammable. The requirement for smoke alarms and detectors in premises has no doubt saved lives.

But quicker burning fires and increased density of population and dwellings means that a quicker response is required. In an average house fire, if the smoke alarm has worked properly, all occupants have evacuated and no rescue needs to be performed. Your next concern is protecting neighbouring structures, whether it is the neighbouring houses or the carport etc. These are your exposures. Rescues and Exposures are the two most time critical elements to structural firefighting. This is where time is precious and the matter of even a minute can be the difference between someone losing their life or having fire damage to multiple properties, rather than the fire being confined to the structure or even room of origin.

The Greater Melbourne Area deserves to have a modern fire service, where a response to a fire has a guarantee of a minimum of two firetrucks, not a fire service response that is stuck in the 1950's and can in parts, be patchy, due to a volunteer response that either doesn't even respond, responds with inadequate crewing or can respond with firefighters without the appropriate qualifications, such as BA operators. This endangers not only other firefighters, but the community as a whole. This is not meant to be a criticism of the volunteers themselves, but of a system that is nearly 60 years old and in dire need of reform. The independent Fire District Review Panel will mean decisions will be made in the best interests of all Victorians and will not allow the system to go unchanged for 60 years due to political turf wars. It will put the appropriate level of coverage where it is required.

Victoria

Any Victorian knows that Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone places on the planet. I grew up in CFA areas that were protected by volunteers, and will be moving back to such an area very soon (out of the Greater Melbourne area). The last thing that I, or any other Career Firefighter would want to see is the CFA's ability to respond to incidents in the country being hampered, but we also want to see the urban areas have a modern fire service with appropriate coverage, one that is safer not only for firefighters, but for those living in the densely populated, ever expanding urban areas.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Josh Hurley.