

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is Julian Seri (employed by the Country Fire Authority) and I hold the rank of Station Officer at Morwell Fire Station in the Latrobe Valley. I have been involved with CFA for 17 years, both as a volunteer and an employee. I have been a volunteer at both Phillip Island and Drouin where I now live. I hold all the general on station increments, as well as specialist qualifications such as Hazmat Technician, Technical rescue operator, and am heavily involved in aviation operations both locally and state-wide.

I wish to write this submission in support of the proposed fire service reform for the following reasons:

- Safety is paramount in any workplace, however, when we respond to a structure fire where people are reported trapped within the structure, we send 1 or 2 fire fighters inside with no rescue available. Fire ground world standards show that there are 7 fire fighters required to conduct operations safely. It is both dangerous and frightening as an Incident Controller to expose my crews to these ongoing situations, as well as heightened risks for those persons trapped.
- In the past the model resulted in accolades for the great work of our volunteers, but times have changed. The existing structure supports an antiquated, broken fire service. As I work at my current location where I have been for 11 years, I peruse letters of commendation from previous Chief Fire Officers applauding the great work of our volunteers. Unfortunately today, the increased level of service put upon our volunteers is untenable. I cannot imagine employers allowing their workers to leave work regularly to respond to calls many times in one day. Pressures placed upon both employers and employees today is far greater than 20 years ago, and I believe it to be disgraceful that Governments today expect that volunteers across Victoria still endeavour to provide a far greater level of service than in the past.
- A reformed fire service will provide a model that guarantees a highly skilled level of response to all current CFA areas that support integration. The benefits to volunteer brigades across Victoria will be countless and should be embraced as such.

I have taken the time to read the new legislation that supports the reform, and nowhere within that literature can I see where it will have any impact or change on our volunteers. The reform solely affects the 35 integrated stations around metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. The continued relationship with Career staff and volunteers should remain

positive with the new model, thus increasing standards of service delivery to the communities of Victoria.

- I remember during my final interview with the CFA panel asking them a serious question, “How is CFA coping with the rapid growth of regional Victoria?” The panel laughed it off - as if nothing would change, however very definitely should change. I have since learnt that the continual battle (divide and conquer attitude) with Governments and the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) would always be a barrier towards positive change.
- I strongly believe that reform will bring standardisation amongst one fire service, from training recruits to senior management. One central location for all management and logistics for example has to be a big win for reducing costs, and inter-operability will benefit the state. As a brigade where specialist response is provided to the entire area of Gippsland, the standards of service and the equipment, can only improve under a reformed fire service. This will also allow a strong and unbiased focus on the operations supporting Volunteers across CFA .
- This long protracted dispute has had an effect on myself and my family. I can no longer volunteer within my community as the poison that has spread from the VFBV down through its channels has divided myself from my fellow volunteer members at Drouin. It is very disappointing when I am attacked for being a “Union thug”, and for supposedly not wanting to get onto a volunteer crewed truck because career staff won’t “cross crew”. Then we have the unprecedented situation where the National Liberal Party becoming involved and change legislation-for whatever reason it saw fit! The venom and misinformation dished out early on by politicians, various media outlets, and members of the community has left opportunities for comment and attack on both myself and members of my family. Although, it was refreshing to hear social commentators finally broadcast the facts when understanding the truth behind the proposed EBA.
- Sadly I continue to hear of failures to respond by volunteer brigades, especially when these incidents are continually being hidden or covered up by senior management and Government. As I sit here writing this submission, I listen over the radio to Warragul fire Brigade failing to respond to an emergency at their local service station. A request by a single brigade member who has responded has asked to continue to repage until we eventually get a crew is nowhere near satisfactory-especially in a community that has a greater population of approximately 40,000 people.
- To hear buildings burn to the ground because brigades have failed to respond is not acceptable!!! To hear and be part of road accident rescue where people are relying on the chance that volunteers may be able to turn out to cut them free from their vehicles is not acceptable!!!

The constant frustration shown by our Paramedics waiting for volunteer response to possibly extricate a casualty is not acceptable!!!

In summary, I would just like to add that times have changed. Pressures on individuals and their employers are far greater than ever. Outer metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria are also expanding at an unprecedented rate. The increased number of calls and the need to provide specialist response to a wider area also places greater pressures on volunteer brigades.

There comes a point in time when things must change in reflection of a modern world, and a modern and updated standard of fire cover is provided to the people of Victoria. This is a reflection on society today not on the wonderful people who make up CFA.

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