

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Mick Burns [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 3 July 2017 9:01 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission from Station Officer Mick Burns MFB/CFA

Dear committee,

My name is Michael Burns and I am a Station Officer with 30 years firefighting experience. At the start of 2017 I was approached to undertake a secondment with CFA in Eltham, after 29 years with MFB at numerous stations including 12 years at Carlton and 15 at Thomastown. I have Cert IV Public Safety Training Package including Incident Controller, Road Rescue trained for 25 years, EMR, Atmospheric Monitoring, Cert IV Workplace Trainer, Fire Investigator plus many other supplementary skills. During my career I have gained much experience and attended numerous significant incidents, the Coode Island fire, hundreds of house fires, several multiple fatality crashes, industrial accidents, cardiac arrests, chemical incidents, many other emergenciestoo many to mention, many I would rather forget. My transfer to CFA Eltham has been a stark reminder of the failings of fire coverage in Metro Melbourne and the safety risks to firefighters across greater Melbourne area. Eltham is on the urban fringe and responds with many neighbouring brigades, including Research, Warrandyte, Plenty, Diamond Creek (all CFA) as well as MFB Greensborough and Templestowe. I have attended numerous incidents where the abovementioned CFA brigades have either ;

- * failed to respond entirely.
- * responded in a brigade utility 1 out
- * responded in a truck with only 2 crew.

These shortfalls occur particularly during normal working hours where volunteers are at their fulltime employment.

In any of these incidents I have been placed in a position where I have had to put my crew of four at risk with little or no backup, back up with a limited skill set (not B.A qualified) and/or insufficient numbers on the fireground as a bare safety minimum. (As I am sure you are aware minimum best practice is 7 qualified crew on the fireground to undertake safe operations).

In CFA, Incident Controllers are not trained to a standard skillset, and there are varied levels of experience and often the crew leader is a 2nd or 3rd Lieutenant. It is my understanding that these ranks are elected positions by popular vote, not acquired knowledge or skills. It is standard practice in CFA that the Incident Controller remains the senior person from the appliance on scene from the local brigade, not the highest ranking Officer on scene, as in MFB. This makes no sense to me.

I was particularly concerned at a recent house fire in Greensborough, an area that comes under Plenty CFA's jurisdiction, even though the Greensborough MFB are very close by. I attended the fire from Eltham CFA and when we arrived the house was well alight, Plenty CFA were in attendance but the fire had caused roof collapse and taken a real hold. I was astounded that MFB Greensborough were NEVER responded. MFB aerial appliance was not responded for 45 minutes, the \$1m home was destroyed. One of the quirks of CFA is that the local brigade get to decide who responds in "their patch". This is in my opinion an indictment on an organisation struggling to move into the 21st century and with individual brigades own parochial interests ahead of that of the local community they are tasked to serve, a community that has grown tenfold since the CFA boundaries were determined so many years ago.

This fire was only 500m from the Apollo Parkways Primary school fire, also in Greensborough, also another major loss fire where MFB were not called upon until the fire had well and truly taken hold almost an hour after the initial response. I also attended that fire, which was approximately 10 years earlier, sadly there were no lessons learned, nothing has changed.

I would like to stress that I have no resentment towards volunteers at all, in fact I am very mindful as Eltham CFA Duty Officer to thank them for giving their time and attending any given incident. I do believe however, that the interests of the community we serve would be much better served by a single, streamlined

fire service with a modern multi skilled workforce and a standard minimum response of nearest available resources without prejudice. Currently this does not happen in CFA jurisdictions.

Firefighters will continue to work together without fear or favour, that is what we are trained to do without prejudice. I have been on many task force assignments over the years and I cannot see how any of the proposed changes will effect the surge capacity deployment Victoria needs. The simple fact is that volunteers don't have the time to be available 24/7, they have fulltime work and families like all of us.

I hope the committee views my submission as an honest appraisal of the need for major reform not only for the benefit of firefighter safety, but for the benefit of the community we proudly serve.
Its time to stop the politicisation of the fire service and look at what is best for the people of Victoria.

Without prejudice

Michael Burns

