

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

Re:-

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

My name is Michael McGuinness. I am a full time employee of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and hold the rank of Operations Manager for CFA Fire Control District 7.

I have been employed by CFA for over 30 years, with having served as a Volunteer with CFA for a number of years. I commenced full time employment with CFA as a Recruit Career Firefighter and I have worked my way up through all Ranks to the current Operations Manager Rank. I have been awarded The Emergency Services Medal and National Medal.

I hold a number of specialist operational qualifications such as Level 3 Incident Controller (provisional), Level 3 Operations, Planning and Logistics Officer, technical qualifications such as Fire Investigator and a number of academic qualifications such as Diploma in Management.

CFA District 7 encompasses Geelong and surrounding suburbs (City of Greater Geelong, including the Bellarine Peninsula), Queenscliff (Borough of Queenscliffe), Surf Coast Shire which covers from Torquay to Lorne and inland through the Otways to Winchelsea, and a significant portion of Golden Plains Shire which includes from Rokewood/Dereel East through to Meredith and South through Maude, back to Anakie, The You Yangs and Little River. District 7 has approximately 2,500 CFA Career Staff and Volunteers operating through 50 Brigades, including two CFA/Coast Guard flotillas.

CFA District 7 is a busy operational District which has a significant number of risk environments including bush and rural risk, major transport risk including ports, roads, rail and aircraft, residential, commercial and retail risks, aged care and health risks including four major hospitals, light through to heavy industry risk and a number of Major Hazard Facilities including Viva Oil Refinery in Corio.

Impact on Fire Service Delivery across Victoria (specifically District 7 – Geelong)

The proposed reform is a reflection on what is already been partially occurring in CFA!

That is, in many locations the risk environment has significantly increased within the urban built-up areas and a transition from a rural CFA has been happening independently and inconsistently throughout the State. This is being restricted by an out-dated, inflexible and an under-resourced CFA service delivery model, along with antiquated and inadequate legislation that requires a complete review. The current service delivery model of CFA being “A Volunteer Service that is supported by Career Firefighters” is no longer representative of the response and other broader service delivery requirements needed to make safe our outer-metro and regional city communities.

Presently, District 7 (Geelong) responds to thousands of incidents per year in heavy urban areas and this is beyond the capability and capacity of the current CFA model. For example, statistics clearly show District 7 Career Staff response is being provided and is increasing to support communities where Volunteer Brigades are struggling or unable to provide the response required to meet current CFA Service Delivery Standards and community expectations.

The stripping away of current Career Staff from busy urban areas to constantly support Volunteer Brigades subsequently increases significant risk to the communities they have left behind and creates a risk to Firefighters health and safety. The workload, complex skill requirements and skills maintenance for heavy urban area technical/specialist response requires significant Career Staff involvement and this expectation of Volunteers is now far too onerous.

Volunteer Brigades within our District are requesting more and more response from Career Staff to ensure their communities are protected, with a consequence of reduced service delivery being provided elsewhere, impacting on community safety.

The combining of the MFB and CFA Career Staff into one Career Service will allow a far more flexible workforce to support metropolitan, outer-metro and regional cities with surge capacity of specialist skills, knowledge and equipment to provide safer communities and a more fit for service model.

Effect on Volunteer Engagement and Participation in fire service delivery

The proposed new model will benefit Volunteers, especially in heavy urban areas, to make individual and Brigade decisions as to their personal and Brigade commitment and participation with CFA. This also allows the State to provide service delivery in these areas based on “risk” rather than “volunteerism,” as required by the current inadequate and antiquated legislation.

This will allow CFA to focus on current and future Brigades at risk with regards volunteerism, sustainability and viability, to deliver more tailored and structured training, equipment and more capacity and capability to deliver the appropriate services to their communities.

Reducing expected significant commitment of CFA Volunteers in busy urban areas will allow them to contribute more to their communities, have greater control over their time and work interruptions, will improve their family life balance, increase retention of CFA Volunteers and increase the likelihood of greater surge capacity when needed.

Short term and long term cost impact on the fire service provision

The proposed legislation enables the coming together of all Career Firefighters to provide a seamless, modern, efficient, cost effective urban fire service to the State of Victoria. This provides immediate significant “across the State” resource sharing, standardised training, equipment, operating procedures and response arrangements, a single response framework to emergencies in heavy urban areas, streamlined prevention, preparedness, response and recovery arrangements, enhanced skills sharing throughout the State and an ability to provide an appropriate technical surge capacity response. In District 7 (Geelong) the greater utilisation of metro resources to assist with crewing requirements and risk mitigation provides significant cost savings to the community.

Further, the ability for the State to have one Staff workplace agreement will provide long term advantages and cost savings. The introduction of enterprise bargaining has resulted in CFA becoming a political battle ground, impacting on the welfare and morale of Staff, Volunteers and their families and ultimately service delivery capacity, capability and interoperability. The reform will provide long term focus on the important issues facing the State to refocus on the appropriate fire service delivery, therefore creating safer communities.

Underlying policy rationale

New proposed legislation reinforces the Volunteer Charter and returns CFA to its Volunteer and community beginnings. The new proposed CFA legislation will enshrine the critical importance of the Volunteers in maintaining service delivery, with the CFA Chief Officer shaping the future of CFA, engaging with their local communities to build resilience and ensuring the needs of the Volunteers are considered and consulted.

The Fire Service Reform will build capacity, flexibility and the ability to build best practise into the delivery of services throughout the State and especially in heavy urbanised areas or where technical/specialised expertise is required.

Currently CFA and MFESB operate under different legislation, training programs, processes and procedures. All Career Firefighters operating under the same procedures, with the same training, within the same enabling and governance arrangements will provide seamless service delivery across the State.

The fire service reform will enable Career Firefighters across the State the ability to focus on improving the depth of knowledge in defined and required areas, to move away from being “a Jack of all trades and master of none” and to specialise in areas of need and increasing risk. The ability to provide detailed work, study, engagement, relationship opportunities and to build resilience in communities is where the focus is critical.

The risk environment throughout the heavy urbanised areas is developing at a speed that is difficult to keep pace with. The ability to work in areas with our local Municipalities to maintain relevant relationships, consolidate the relationship and be involved in the planning and implementation of the growth is paramount.

Currently CFA District Officers find it difficult to complete and dedicate the time required to meet the growth occurring now and into the future.

The ability of fire services to respond to the changing environment and increasing risk will be achievable in a reduced time frame. Our communities expect a high level of service and an adaptive fire service. The new legislation will reduce the time spent on consultation with numerous stakeholders, allow for input from Subject Matter Experts, ensures the ability to implement new initiatives and policy in an expedient manner.

FRV will be able to quantify the capability of its service at any time, understand its staffing situation and its ability to provide accurate and skilled teams when called on to service the state or operate on behalf of the state nationally and internationally.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael McGuinness
Operations Manager - CFA District 7 (Geelong)

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]