

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

1. My name is Rhys Woods AASM
  - I am currently a Qualified Fire Fighter with the CFA (Country Fire Authority) at Springvale Urban Fire Brigade.
  - I have been with the CFA for 4 years
  - Certificate IV In - Training & Assessment  
Leadership & Management  
Government (Management)  
Military Leadership  
Warehousing
  - Certificate III In - Fire fighting Operations  
Government  
Military Operations
  - Awards
    - Australian Active Service Medal
    - Australian Service Medal
    - Afghanistan Campaign medal
    - Defence Force Medal
    - Timor Leste Campaign Medal
    - NATO Medal

2. I live in McCrae, on the Mornington Peninsula. This area is classed as Melbourne Metro Area in all things but the fire services boundary, but only has one career staff Fire Brigade (this being Rosebud). As such if there was an incident in my area of residence we would only get a guaranteed response of 1 truck with a possible 4 fire fighters. Under the current model we 'hope' to get a response from the volunteer brigade, providing they are not at work, out of town, had a drink or just are too tired to respond to this call. Then still volunteers will have to stop what they are doing, drive to the station, wait for others to get there and then respond to the job, how in this day and age is that accepted in a modern civilisation.

3. Prior to joining the CFA, I was in The Australian Defence Force for 7 years, deploying to Afghanistan and Timor Leste. My experiences from my time in the military were the government gave us the best training possible and equipment to get the job done correctly to the community expectations. No back and forth, no worrying about who wants to do it or if some gets to do their

hobby, the best people for the task does the task. Reservists are a lot like volunteers, but with the Defence Force reservists don't get a look in first up, if there is a dangerous job to be done with high expectations you send in your best and highest trained people to get it done correctly and to the community's expectations.

**2. I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:**

- My view and reasons as a fire fighter on the ground seeing it in person:

1. Victoria is a wonderful state that prides itself on its sport and beautiful landscapes and is growing all the time. The Australian Bureau of Statistics annual population growth rate puts Victoria as the highest in the country at 2.4%, the next closest is ACT at 1.7%.

Victorian population as at:

- March 1976 was 3,741,500
- 2016 Census 6,244,200

That is an increase of almost 3 million people in 30 years.

There are a number of 'growth areas' outside of Melbourne, such as

- City of Cardinia
  - 2011 population 74,176 to 90,880 in 2016
  - Forecasting a growth of 81.78% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 180,308 in 2036
  - 1 career fire brigade
- City of Casey
  - 2011 population 252,382 to 292,211 in 2016
  - Forecasting a growth of 65.26% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 514,021 in 2036
  - 2 career fire brigades
- City of Wyndham
  - 2011 population 161,675 to 209,847 in 2016
  - Forecasting a growth of 88.59% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 424,476 in 2036
  - 2 career fire brigades

- City of Melton
  - 2011 population 109,259 to 140,408 in 2017
  - Forecasting a growth of 166.87% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 374,700 in 2036
  - 2 career fire brigades
- City of Mitchell
  - 2011 population 34,637 to 43,005 in 2017
  - Forecasting a growth of 107.45% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 89,214 in 2036
  - No career fire brigades
- City of Whittlesea
  - 2011 population 154,880 to 202,731 in 2016
  - Forecasting a growth of 81.40% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 379,342 in 2036
  - 2 career fire brigades
- City of Ballarat
  - 2011 population 93,501 to 106,288 in 2017
  - Forecasting a growth of 36.61% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 145,197 in 2036
  - 1 career fire brigade
- City of Bendigo
  - 2011 population 100,617 to 115,025 in 2016
  - Forecasting a growth of 35.75% over the next 20 years
  - Forecasting a population of 156,151 in 2036
  - 1 career fire brigades

*All data taken from Australian Bureau of Statistics, council websites and the population forecast website.*

2. How and why are we the only state in Australia throwing money away by having 2 completely separate fire services, with two boards all trying to achieve the same purpose?

We are the only state that has 'integrated brigades' (staff and volunteers together) is that because in 1958 when this was first put in place, were we forward thinkers? and no other state has caught up? Or is that because we, Victoria have been unable to evolve with our growing population and have people that are scared of change or are holding on to the past. Victoria is getting left behind and is no longer providing the community with the best possible service. The current service can be easily

be improved to serve the community to the expectations by removing the reliance on 'hoping' volunteers will show up and add in a guaranteed response from professional fire service.

*Definition of 'professional': engaged in a specified activity as ones main PAID occupation rather than as an amateur.*

The surge capacity which people seems to be worried about... why don't we look into how Western Australia used there 'surge' capacity. They have a volunteer only service which has volunteer only stations, they have 2,250 volunteers at those stations, and a separate bush fire service which contains their 'surge' capacity of 22,000 volunteers.

*06/02/2014 – I was deployed to a large bushfire in Far East Gippsland (delegate), after our so called 'surge' capacity could only be sustained for 4 days.*

### **Some common questions:**

- **Reasons why as a fire fighter that it is important to have guaranteed backup – guaranteed that two trucks with at least 7 fire fighters will be dispatched.**

As professional career fire fighters, this is our workplace and we are asking for a safe work environment. Having the knowledge that guaranteed back up is on the way, with the correct gear and skill set takes away some of the stress professional career fire fighters have. Volunteer turnout is limit around Springvale and this being a highly urban area we have the added problem of getting volunteers turnout and are only 'wildfire fire fighters' (which means they only have the skill set and clothing to fight wild fire incidents and cannot be used at structure fires). Once we do have a volunteer crew turnout that has the correct training and gear, we have to ask ourselves, have these members maintained their skills? When was the last time they have worn BA? Do they have the correct skill set? Who has documented the skills they have obtained? Or are they just saying they have the correct skills? And you might say as long as they can get the job done, but if something was to go wrong who gets asked the questions and who does the fault lie with? The incident controlling and/or the career staff members. Their does not seem like volunteers have any accountabilities.

*05/05/2014, 1/6 Frank Street, Noble Park – Reported house fire with persons reported inside. This address is one street away from the Noble Park Fire Station. Springvale was there with 3 members and Noble Park failed to turn out at all, leaving Springvale with no backup or help.*

*15/06/2017, 51 Buckley Street, Noble Park –Apartment building alarm operating. This address is a couple down from the Noble Park station. Springvale was first on scene. When Noble Park did turnout, they responded with two trucks which blocked the road. There incident controller had incorrect skills to run the incident – as he stated that he does not know how to read or work a fire alarm panel.*

*I see Springvale volunteers, which are our 'back up', at about 10% of the incidents I have been called too.*

- **What guaranteed back up and 7 fire fighters dispatched means for better community safety and protection?**

This means the community will receive a guaranteed response from 2 fire fighting vehicles within the time critical frame, which will help contain the fire and effect rescue. Professional career staff has 90 seconds to turnout to an incident giving an almost immediate response. Were volunteers are given 6 minutes to give a response before we can ask for another brigade to be responded. 6 minutes can pass plus then driving time before volunteers can be on scene, the time critical frame to affect rescue has passed by that stage.

- **Employing all career fire fighters in one fire service will not affect volunteer turnout or surge capacity.**

The only affected members in this whole process are the ones that are located at integrated brigades, and to be honest it's really only the career staff that is affected as we are changing our practises, policies and changing to FRV. Volunteers in these locations will still be there and still respond as they always have. CFA states that they only have career staff to support the volunteers, if you go and visit integrated brigades you will find that it's the volunteers that support staff.

**Volunteer turnout and surge capacity will continue to be and always has been dependent on if that volunteer member wishes to turnout; none will be told not to turn out.**

- **The areas affect by the reform – 35 integrated stations, has no effect on any other volunteer brigade or bushfire response.**

There are zero changes to volunteer only brigades or bush fire response. Again it comes down if the volunteer member wishes to turnout or not, and if the members choose not to turnout and or quit because or something that has no effect on him/her or their brigade, maybe that member should already rethink why they became a member in the first place.

- **The reform will assist with standardisation of career training/specialist response/response standards and equipment.**

Being from the military, I have seen how standardisation of training and equipment makes everything run smoother and easier.

One training package for all members, everyone trains off the same standard. You know what skill and standards every member has, you know their capable level. No questions on their skill level or who has trained them, no matter the location.

If we had all the same equipment and vehicles, there would no need for members to continue do new training package because each station has different equipment of vehicles.

How much money does the CFA spend on parts and equipment for the number of different vehicles it has?? It's a joke the number of different trucks the CFA has. Having a standard Heavy pumper and

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a Heavy tanker would make the process of servicing and maintenance 100 times easier and to mention the buying power it would have when updating or just for parts. The DMO job would be easier and more productive. Vehicles would get back on the road quicker instead of having lingering problems.

- **The damage the disputation in the workplace has had on your workplace and any additional strain that has had on you and your family.**

I have had this dispute occurring for my entire CFA career, and it is morale killing. When I business/workplace starts to lose the morale of its workers and it gets bad enough, you will lose employees. In this current environment of mental health, businesses need to look after its workers on the front line, the workers who are the face of the company/business in the community. In this case the fire fighters are the ones working in the community, and honestly I feel like the government does not have my 'back'. It feels like our reputation in the community has been smashed by the herald sun and their news articles. Most of the herald suns articles are twisted and not correct, but there has been no defence of the fire fighters from the government or the CFA and MFB. Is anyone going to hold the Herald Sun accountable for the twisted stories and directing of public opinion down incorrect information?

**In conclusion I would like the following points:**

- Springvale is an integrated fire brigade and in a highly urban area. But yet no parliament member came to speak to us on the changes, this is where the changes happen.
- The current fire services boundaries were created in 1958 the urban footprint has greatly increased from then till now. The boundaries have not changed to represent current community needs and expectations.
- Put yourself in the shoes of having your house on fire and ask yourself who you really want to come and how soon. Do you want to have a guaranteed response from fire fighters who will have the correct skill set and clothing and will immediately respond to the call.

Yours sincerely,

**Rhys Woods Qualified Firefighter**

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