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To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to show support for the long overdue fire services reforms and give you some examples why this change is needed. These changes need not be about political parties or unions, or even about the romance of history or service, these changes need to be about the community and the community only.

My background, I have been involved with CFA for over 17 years now, firstly as a junior in the small country town of Strathmerton in North East Victoria where at the age of 9 I started with the junior running team and at 16 years old I signed up to be an operational member and am still a volunteer there today. CFA has been my life and I worked tirelessly after completing an apprenticeship to make firefighting my career and in 2011 I was successful in achieving that and am currently a Leading Firefighter at the Frankston Fire Station where I reside and am still volunteering when home visiting in the country.

These reforms are broad and cover a large amount of areas but I want to just highlight just one to you. I will add before I start CFA have always had issues around territory. Brigades fighting over what area is considered 'theirs', what brigades can support into another brigade's area and so forth. It is a game that is played out on a daily basis. Now one of the fantastic parts of this reform is the ability for all heavy pumpers to now perform basic rescues at car accidents when people are trapped which has always been the role of the SES, 'their' job.

The way it currently works is when a car accident occurs the fire brigade is responded along with a rescue unit. Here in Frankston that rescue unit is the Frankston SES who are a fully volunteer unit. The fire brigade is responded to provide fire protection for any persons trapped in the vehicle while they wait for the SES to arrive to extricate them. As you could imagine this takes time, at no fault of the volunteers responding their units is always going to take time as crews must stop what they are doing then drive to the station first before any truck can be advanced. The bizarre thing for the public to understand is the fire brigade carry all the basic tools needed to perform the majority of rescues including the 'jaws of life', but we are unable to use them because the cutting of cars in 'their' job. This can be frustrating to crews as all we want to do is help these poor people but we must wait on others to arrive to fulfil their role, something that could have been already done and

the casualties safely on their way to hospital before a rescue unit arrives. From personal experience, it's hard not to imagine your own mother or father, partner or even children in the place of those patients and not get angry knowing they are not getting the full care they should be because of old outdated arrangements.

Currently under the Road Rescue Arrangement Victoria document the fire brigade in a very few circumstances can use their equipment before any rescue unit arrives such as extremely time critical patients that are deemed so by Ambulance Victoria. But if this is done it is seen as stepping into the territory of the SES and the Officer in Charge of the fire brigade afterwards must then write a three-page statement to the Divisional Emergency Response Coordinator, a high-ranking member of the police force explaining why we did the job that only the SES is assigned to do. As you would understand most Officers are hesitant to allow their crews to perform these tasks as it just feels we are doing something wrong especially having to write statements afterwards.

An example of this territory mentality was recently at a two-car accident on Ballarto Road Frankston North where an elderly lady was trapped in her vehicle and the Ambulance Victoria crews deemed her time critical. Upon that the officer in charge ordered the crew which I was a member of to start setting up the forcible entry tools to do a simple door pop to allow access to the elderly patient. When the tools were ready and work was about to commence a member of the SES arrived in a car and stood in front of the patients' door not allowing the fire brigade to perform the simple door pop. This member protested that this was not the role of the fire brigade but the role of the SES and we must wait for the rescue unit to arrive which had only then just left the station and was still 6-8 minutes away. This mentality has no consideration for the public's needs, and especially when these members of the public are in a critical time of need. On this occasion, the officer in charge of the fire brigade after several minutes managed to persuade the SES to step aside allowing the door pop to be performed and AV access to their patient. Precious minutes were lost.

But the new reforms will do away with this old mentality and put the public's needs at the foremost. Under the new agreement heavy pumpers will be allowed to perform simple rescue roles allowing for the public to get the quickest care required. At no point will this take away from the volunteers either as stated in the media. Rescue units will still be responded to every accident they are now as they carry more specialised equipment but if the role has already been done successfully they will be turned around, isn't this the best thing for the patient and community? These discussions need to be an honest discussion about what's best for the community and not about making people feel good about themselves for the roles they perform in the community.

You have an opportunity to fix a broken system and fix it properly so it is the same great system running in a hundred years' time. This is not an easy task as there are so many emotions and misinformation out there, but I plead with you to look at the facts, not the stereotypes or romance around public service, this is about what the public needs and deserves. And this is what the new reforms will do, they will look at the community's needs independently in every area of Victoria and give the community what is best for them away from any career/volunteer or agency/agency bias.

Unfortunately, the CFA over many years has been hesitant to make any significant changes due to the fear of upsetting volunteers and the territories that are so vigorously defended, but the time has come to look at all of the emergency response and see if it's the best we could be doing. At no point am I taking away from volunteers as I am one myself and at no point to I believe these changes will affect volunteers, why would I hurt the people that are the ones that look after my family in the country?

I could go on and on with examples of where these territories are defended by volunteer brigades with no consideration on what is best for the community. Brigades that complain about too many career firefighters on a truck in 'their' area or getting upset if certain appliances are responded into 'their' area but I will only be repeating the same vibe with every example. This is now up to you, don't think of it as agreeing with the union or siding with the volunteers see the facts and make your own judgement or better still visit us on station and see what things are really like out there in the community.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Stuart Powles