

4th of July, 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is David Klink and I reside in Wantirna South, Victoria. I am currently a professional firefighter with the MFB and have been employed in this role since 2007. My current rank is Leading Firefighter and I am currently stationed at Ringwood Fire Station on D Platoon. I have a specialist qualification as a Heavy Rescue Operator which I attained approximately three years ago.

I believe that I have a right to make this submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017 as the outcomes determined by the terms of reference may significantly impact upon my employment conditions, my personal safety whilst performing my duties and the safety of all persons subject to their requirements of the service provided by any firefighting authorities. I am making this submission in the knowledge that it will be protected by Parliamentary Privilege should it be accepted by the committee.

I support Fire Service Reform, specifically combining all professional firefighters currently employed by the MFB and the CFA into a single service, mainly on the basis of creating uniformity within service delivery. Please note that this is not a new concept and it has been recommended by numerous enquiries since Black Saturday. All professional firefighters from both organisations have always viewed it as something that will happen one day however, when that day happens was always the unknown.

Firstly, there are significant differences between the equipment of the two agencies making our compatibilities challenging when we are required to work together. An example of this is something as basic as the use of different types of connecting systems between hoses. The MFB uses stortz couplings and the CFA uses threaded couplings. Adaptors have to be used to make each agency compatible with the other when working together which adds time to effective firefighting actions. This is only one simple example amongst many. A single service would bring all our equipment and procedures into line with each other and minimise our action times when responding together as separate agencies. It would streamline operations.

Secondly, we are the only state in Australia whereby the professional fire service is split across two separate organisations. One professional fire service would mean a single management and administration structure rather than two separate ones and this would have to financially be better than the current total cost of running two separate services. It also would provide more

opportunities for us employees in training, locations of work and promotion opportunities. All the other states have a professional service and a separate volunteer service. For example in NSW, NSW Fire and Rescue services all urban areas both within Sydney and regionally, with professional full time and part time firefighters, depending upon the risk classification whilst the NSW Rural Fire Service services all other areas with a volunteer service. In SA, the SAMFS service all urban areas both within Adelaide and regional centres whilst the CFS services all other areas with a volunteer service. These are just two examples.

Thirdly there are significant differences between our responses to emergencies. Within the Metropolitan Fire District which is the MFB's maintenance area, we have the fortune of following worldwide best urban fire fighting practices with an 8 minute response for every call received with two trucks being dispatched, both delivering at least 7 fully qualified structural firefighters in total. This is the minimum number of personnel required to fulfil all roles that need to be performed in an initial attack at a structure fire and ensure the safety of responding crews. This has recently (within the last 12 months) been implemented in the responses of only some CFA Integrated stations along the MFB boundary. From Ringwood, we now respond into Boronia's response area to premises such as Knox City as the surrounding volunteer brigades of Bayswater and Scoresby can't guarantee a second truck with fully qualified firefighters within 8 minutes. Boronia is an Integrated CFA station.

Fourthly, an EMR response is provided throughout the entire Metropolitan Fire District however it is very patchy in the urban areas of the CFA. Although some integrated stations and two volunteer stations provide an EMR response within their maintenance area, where I live, I am not covered by this service. This is because where I live is within Scoresby Fire Brigade's maintenance area and they do not provide an EMR service. Wantirna South is best described as a middle eastern suburb of Melbourne. One would generally expect such an area would receive the same service as any other suburbs in Melbourne including an EMR response. Hopefully with the creation of a single service, EMR response will be provided to all highly urbanised areas within the state.

The only two arguments I have been made aware of that are against a merger of the professional firefighters of the CFA and the MFB is concerns that the VFBV has that the surge capacity of the CFA will be affected in times of large bushfires and other natural disasters and that the VFBV have not been consulted.

The CFA Board is comprised of 9 members, 4 of which are VFBV representatives and 5 others. The UFU has no representation on the board. As this is the composition of the board and has been for a number of years, it would be extraordinary if the VFBV weren't consulted on every matter before the CFA as they represent such a large proportion of the CFA Board.

In my submission, I make no request that volunteer stations be closed and my union, the UFU has never made mention of this either. They are a highly valuable asset to the state and to their communities and are essential in providing an emergency response in areas where a professional fire service isn't a financial option. I'm sure as in other states such as NSW, the volunteer brigades

that currently exist in the integrated stations will remain part of the CFA. I also understand that money has been promised to facilitate these volunteer brigades through the transition. Most CFA volunteers I know, do it on the basis of serving their community and as such, I'm sure would still be proud to serve their communities under fire service reform. The ethics of the majority of serving volunteers would ensure there is no effect on surge capacity.

Finally, the combining of the two professional fire services will serve to assist in resolving the long running EBA dispute between the UFU (professional firefighters) and the government. The final say on my employment conditions by the VFBV will be removed from the equation and vice versa, the VFBV would assume full control of the CFA without any UFU association whatsoever. If it is viewed objectively, it is crazy that a volunteer has to agree with and can determine the conditions of employment of a professional whose means of employment and livelihood is the volunteer's hobby. The disintegration of both services and the use of professional versus volunteer by both major political parties in their respective political campaigns is well documented and does not require any input from me. What has been left is an absolute disaster. From my perspective, I have a good working relationship with some volunteer brigades that I respond with such as Chirnside Park and Warrandyte South. Others such as Bayswater, Lilydale, Mooroolbark and Warrandyte, the relationship is very frosty at best. I am a professional and I understand that under the conditions of my employment as a public servant, I have to put up with the lies, insults and accusations. However, to say that I and all my colleagues have not been affected by this dispute is an understatement!

The current fire service model has not moved with the times and has remained in the 1950's. Urbanisation has significantly expanded and whilst all other states have adapted to the times, Victoria has not. The merger of all professional CFA and MFB firefighters into one single fire service has been recommended many times in the past however it was never implemented. This is the first occasion that actions have been initiated to modernise our fire service so please give us the modern fire service that we deserve. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a submission.

David Klink

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Ph: [REDACTED]