

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Wenczel, Andrew E [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 4 July 2017 12:37 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Fire Services Reform Submission
Attachments: Fire Service Reform Submission.docx

Hi,

My name is Andrew Wenczel and I reside at [REDACTED]. I wish to make a non-confidential submission in relation to the proposed Fire Services Reform Bill.

I am a member of the CFA Beaconsfield Fire Brigade and I have been actively providing fire protection, response and prevention services to my community for over 34 years. I am a recipient of the CFA National Medal, National Emergency Services Medal (Black Saturday) and the CFA Life Membership Award.

The roles I perform in the CFA can be briefly summarised as follows:

- I am an active operational firefighter in my local brigade and I attend brigade training, brigade community events and all types of structure and non-structure fires right throughout the year.
- I am a Deputy Group Officer in the Cardinia Group of Fire Brigades and I perform a Bushfire pre planning, assistant operations and a coaching / mentoring / support role for the 16 brigades in the Shire of Cardinia.
- I am a qualified and endorsed Level 3 Planning Officer for Grassfires and Urban / Rural interface fires and a qualified Sector Commander.
- I am a District level volunteer instructor in Wildfire Suppression and I develop and prepare a Strike Team Leader and Sector Commander Skills Maintenance day every year focussing on one of the Cardinia or Casey Group high fire risk communities for both the Cardinia and Casey Group of fire brigades.
- I am a qualified and endorsed Strike Team Leader and I make myself available for this role both locally and in support of communities right across Victoria and interstate on most high fire risks days every summer.

In relation to the proposed Fire Service Reforms, I am very concerned for the ongoing viability for over 150 volunteer brigades in the outer metropolitan areas and major regional centres. I believe that the proposed Fire Services Reforms will significant reduce the provision of CFA surge capacity into both the Outer Metropolitan Urban / Rural interface and Country Victoria in a very short period of time. It is not only the 35 integrated CFA brigades that will be impacted by the Fire Services Reform, but most CFA brigades located north, south, east and west of the 35 integrated CFA stations that will also be significantly impacted.

I am opposed to the proposed Fire Services Reform and attached is my submission which addresses the points of reference.

I can be contacted on [REDACTED] if you have any further queries. Thank you for considering my submission.

Regards,

[REDACTED]
 Andrew Wenczel
 [REDACTED]

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"We choose what we see, and we see what we choose to believe"

This communication may contain confidential information. If I have sent it to you by accident, please delete it immediately.

Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria:

Loss of CFA Surge Capacity - Many of the 35 CFA Integrated brigades destined to move across to FRV will lose their Pumper and Tanker appliances. In many situations this will mean that there is no Tanker for the remaining CFA Volunteers at these 35 brigades to train with, or respond to fire calls over the fire danger period. Apart from this having an immediate effect on the strength and depth of CFA surge capacity, there will also be a longer term effect associated with the ongoing viability of these CFA Volunteer brigades who do not have a Tanker.

Decrease in the Standards of Fire Cover - CFA Volunteer brigades in urban areas are currently measured against an 8 min response time and most CFA brigades are meeting their standards of fire cover. Under the Fire Services Reforms, I believe that a 10 min response time is going to be adopted which will extend the reach of FRV further than currently publicised. If this occurs, then there will be a reduction in fire service delivery in some parts of our communities as the FRV appliances are likely to be slower to arrive on scene into the areas 8-10 minutes away than the local CFA Volunteer brigade. This just does not make sense to me and is reducing the level of fire response in our community.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery:

Loss of Response Area - The Fire Services Reform will result in at least 35 CFA Volunteer brigades and many others not having a primary fire response area. Therefore the ability for these Volunteer brigades to respond to fire calls is very limited as the co-located FRV brigade will still support their neighboring CFA brigades (as they do today). I can't see how these 35 CFA Volunteer brigades will be able to keep members interested and continue to make them feel part of a team. I fear that these CFA Volunteer brigades will lose their skills and members quite quickly to other community organisations and that there will be a significant loss in CFA surge capacity when we experience the next serious bushfire season.

Loss of Local Knowledge & Bushfire Emergency Management Skills - It is not widely known that the level of participation of our own CFA career staff in Emergency Management positions is extremely low. I cannot remember the last time I saw a CFA career paid fire fighter on a high risk day working on a tanker Strike team, or as a Strike Team Leader / Sector Commander, or in the local Incident Control Centre. The fact of the matter is that since Linton and the Bushfire Royal Commissions, our CFA career staff are reluctant to work in these positions and do not make themselves available to do so. It is generally left to the CFA Volunteers to respond and co-ordinate large scale bushfires in the field alongside our CFA Operations Officers. As volunteers will have less to do and have minimal need to get together over the winter period, they will start to lose interest and leave the system. Valuable local bushfire history, knowledge and leadership skills will potentially be lost.

Extension of FRV Response Area - I am concerned that FRV will implement a 10 min radial search response zone at each of the former 35 integrated CFA stations which will extend their response area further into CFA Volunteer brigade areas. This is easily achieved via the 10 min Emergency Medical Response boundaries that are already in place. Many more CFA Volunteer brigades will lose parts of their fire response areas. In our Group, this means that 2 additional brigades will completely lose their response areas and be significantly impacted by the proposed Fire Services Reforms. As soon as this happens, Volunteer engagement and participation at these brigades would rapidly decline. Three out of the sixteen brigades in Cardinia Group would be effected 100% by this change.

Training & Assessing - With the move of all CFA Instructors to FRV and the impending signing of an EBA with their collective bargaining agents, I am concerned that after hours CFA Volunteer instruction and courses will be reduced due to overtime costs. CFA Volunteers need to retain access to the same level of after hours courses and training. If CFA Volunteers can't attend training courses in times that are suitable to them, then CFA Volunteer participation and engagement will decline.

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

Short & Long Term Reductions in CFA Funding - I am concerned that a large component of the current CFA Fire Services levy will go towards funding the 35 CFA Integrated stations moving over to FRV. Investigation and analysis conducted by The Weekly Times has estimated that the likely amount of funding involved is approx. \$200 - \$240m. This is a significant amount of money out of the CFA budget and it will only lead to older facilities and appliances for CFA Volunteer brigades. Volunteer brigades will have no choice but to conduct additional community fund raising to fill the funding gap. This will place an additional financial burden on members and their communities.

Long Term Increases to the Fire Services Levy - The additional career firefighter labour costs and the need for building alterations to support min manning requirements at many of the 35 integrated CFA brigades moving over to FRV will need to be paid for somehow. My concern is that there will be no choice but to significantly increase the Fire Services levy post the next state election over many years to cover these ongoing costs. This will place an additional cost burden on the community.

Underlying policy rationale:

Career Staff Stations - Why do we need to have 7x24hr coverage with career firefighters in geographical areas that do not have a high number of fire calls? This is called over servicing in the corporate world and a waste of valuable funding.

Why can't we have daytime career staff in some stations in the outer metropolitan area to support volunteers with weekday responses? Is this not a good solution that offers flexibility in moving to a career staff model whilst maintaining a balance between policy rationale and funding?

The UFU campaign talks about 7 firefighters and 2 appliances in 8 minutes but they don't mention what happens after that and how long it would take for additional resources to arrive to a going fire. If I look at my local brigade and support area I would suggest we would be providing 4 firefighters and 1 appliance in 8 minutes, 9 firefighters and 2 appliances in 9 minutes, and 13 firefighters and 3 appliances in 10 minutes. I can't see how a FRV station at Pakenham or Cranbourne can achieve the same level of fire service if they adopt the MFB model with only FRV resources which is what is in place today.

Training Instructors & PAD Operators - I am struggling to understand why all CFA Instructors & PAD Operators are transferring over to FRV only to have them contracted back to the CFA? I work with a lot of contractors in my day job. Contractors are loyal to the people who are paying their wages (FRV), and not necessarily loyal to the people they work for (CFA). I foresee many management issues and unnecessary overheads associated with this arrangement.

Andrew Wenczel
4th July 2017