

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees:-

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

From:-

[REDACTED], Station Officer, Metropolitan Fire Brigade (27 Years of Service).

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I live in Riddells Creek, and currently work in Sunshine.

I also volunteer at the Riddells Creek CFA Brigade, and have for the last 30 years.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services.

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Bill.

I am a career firefighter with the MFB with over 27 years of service, currently holding the rank of Station Officer, stationed at the Sunshine Fire Station. My role as a Station Officer includes the supervision of operational firefighters both on and off the fireground. On the fireground, I am responsible for incident management and the safety of the people working under me. At the station, I am responsible for the overall management of the workplace, including the personnel stationed there. On top of my role as Station Officer, I am a specialist operator in Marine Response, Swift Water Rescue, Urban Search & Rescue, Fire Investigation and Trench Rescue. These specialist roles have seen me respond across the state to various types of emergencies.

I am also a volunteer firefighter with the CFA, and have been for over 30 years. I have held various leadership roles, including 12 years as a Brigade Captain. I am currently a Deputy Group Officer in the Mount Macedon Group of Brigades, and qualified as a Strike Team Leader, Sector Commander and Divisional Commander.

I believe it is well over-due that the current system of fire service delivery be reviewed. Whilst volunteer brigades are providing the best level of service that they can, it is NOT a guaranteed response, as you never know how many volunteer members are available, or what level of training/qualifications they possess.

I have on many occasions, whilst responding in my capacity as a volunteer with the CFA, been the only one qualified to drive a fire appliance, or with qualifications to use Breathing Apparatus and able to conduct internal fire operations. I have also witnessed the lack of qualified CFA volunteers attending fires and incidents whilst responding in my MFB capacity on the border between CFA and MFB areas. Whilst there may be a CFA fire appliance responding, it may only have a crew of 2 (CFA Chief Officers Minimum) on board and there is no guarantee what skills/qualifications they possess. There has also been the scenario when there has been NO response from brigade volunteers, as they are not available to respond due to a multitude of reasons (family, work, illness etc).

In the last 10 to 15 years, typical CFA membership has become more of a short-term commitment for members of the community as life gets much busier, and family takes precedence over volunteer duties. This creates a great impost on the remaining members of brigades, who must pick up the extra work as well as recruit and train new members, which can take several years to get them to a standard to combat a fire inside a typical house.

My local Brigade is somewhat fortunate having an integrated (staffed) brigade adjoining our area that is responded to most of our emergencies, however, they are still 15 to 20 minutes response time away. On the reverse side, we are responded to many of their emergency calls as they only have 1 crew, and need extra personnel to ensure safety on the fireground. This puts considerable extra load on our volunteers at times.

Whilst there is less workload for a Brigade in a rural setting or small township, a Brigade in a suburban area can be doing multiple calls on a daily basis, therefore disrupting their members work and home life, which is not healthy for them or their families to sustain long-term. It is also dangerous to the members due to the fatigue caused attending incidents day and night, then going to their normal workplace.

I feel that the time has well and truly come to standardise the fire coverage across the built-up areas of Victoria and address the antiquated boundaries that are currently in place. A standard assessment of the risk and activity of an area should dictate whether there is the need to provide a career based service. The only thing that matters is the provision of an effective service to the community.

Having read the proposal, I can see no adverse effect on volunteers. On the contrary, I see the CFA being freed up from the constraints of working around workplace legislation that has impacted on volunteers previously.

Personally, I see the Governments planned restructure as a good move forward for the sector, however, there are a couple of small things I would like to see considered.

Firstly, the plan to second Operations Officers back to the CFA from FRV, seems a very ineffective way to staff the CFA management. The CFA needs to be able to employ their own Operations Officers and Operations Managers to effectively manage the volunteer brigades.

Secondly, the review of the areas that should be covered by FRV needs to be done more often than the 5 years as suggested, it is something that should be done on an on-going basis. It

should also be carried out independently and based on facts, as this issue can and will be clouded by emotion.

Taking the above points into consideration, I support the proposed restructure of Victoria's fire service.

Yours Sincerely,

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