

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

Inquiry into the Firefighters presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment reform bill 2017

My name is John Churchill and I am a full time professional Firefighter with the MFESB, I am a Leading Firefighter and have been in the Brigade since 1975 some 42 years. I have worked at over 15 different fire stations all around the metropolitan district, including outer suburban stations.

The current dispute that we are in has gone on for over 4 years and has taken a great mental and emotional toll on myself and my workmates. All professional firefighters have been attacked and derided by the media and public, in all this we have continued to protect the public and I would ask that you do what you can to end this dispute.

I ask that you recommend the proposed fire service amendment and presumptive legislation to the parliament. I have seen many of my friends who are firefighters, who have contracted cancers and PTSD from doing their duty as firefighters, and yet have to spend years in courts fighting the insurance companies trying to prove what should be presumed, that is, that firefighters get cancer at a far higher rate than the public, from fighting fires. I have also lost friends to suicide as a result of PTSD and cancer.

My record shows I have attended hundreds of fires covering every imaginable circumstance including house fires, car fires, factory fires, high rise building fires, hospital fires, plane crashes, car crashes and hundreds of EMR calls.

I have saved many lives, but have seen many lives lost at all those calls including children from accidents and drownings. I attended a plane crashing into a house where the whole family was killed. I have attended many EMR calls for all reasons including heart attacks, drownings, overdoses, hangings, suicides, and murders. I have attended many car accidents with multiple deaths and people hit by trains.

I also attended LPG explosions in both cars and factories resulting in injury and death. I attended the Coode Island fire, one of the largest in the Brigades history. I believe I am well qualified to comment on your inquiry as I have seen the vast growth of the population of Melbourne and the suburbs over more than 40 years.

When I started in the Brigade in 1975 some of the stations I worked at were on the edges of Melbourne's suburbs and the population was low. I have seen both the population and suburb's grow massively to the point that suburbs I worked in now extend out some 30 kilometres in both the north and west where I have spent most of my career.

I have seen those suburbs gain hospitals nursing homes and vast industrial estates that now require a modern urban full time professional Firefighting service with all the specialist fire appliances such as large pumpers, ladders and specialist rescue appliances all with the ability to attend calls with the aim of at least 7 firefighters dispatched within 8 minutes fully equipped and trained to best protect the public's life and property.

When I started in the Brigade there was a time honoured difference between the CFA and the MFB, the CFA were mainly volunteers turning out to grass and bush fires in rural and semi, rural areas, some turned out into areas that were starting to build up. The MFB were, and are today full time professional firefighters turning out in the city and suburbs of Melbourne.

Today the CFA have had the suburbs encroach and take over the areas that were mainly rural and they, the CFA, are attempting to fight fires in these massive suburbs with well intentioned, ill equipped volunteers, who have to, in many cases, leave their usual employment before attending emergency call outs. I have personally attended, and was in charge at a fire in a CFA station on the urban fringe because of the fact that the volunteers were at their normal jobs and were unable to attend to save their own station, after we had put out the fire one CFA volunteer turned up on their own in a private vehicle.

Through no fault of their own they have found themselves in circumstances that are no longer applicable to their circumstances and equipment.

I believe the time has come for the people of Victoria to be fully protected by one Fire service employing all career firefighters that would cover the 35 integrated stations that are now highly urbanised with vast populations.

This would not affect the volunteers ability to turn out or have any effect on their surge capacity, it would also benefit the volunteers as they would be retained and in fact enhanced by more funding and have their volunteer stations upgraded.

The new organisation in my opinion, would make a far more cohesive, better trained, better equipped firefighting force to protect all Victorians life and property.

Regards

John Churchill

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