

To whom it may concern,

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

My Name is [REDACTED]. I have been a career staff firefighter with CFA for four years and currently hold the rank of Qualified Firefighter. I am stationed at Corio and I live in Waurm Ponds, Geelong.

In addition to my firefighting qualifications, I am further trained and qualified in;

- Chemical, Biological and Radioactive detection (CBR)
- Hazardous materials mitigation and de-contamination (HAZMAT)
- Aerial appliance (Teleboom)
- Ground Observer (as per AIIMS)
- Protective Equipment support

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

The Corio fire brigade area is a large urban area that includes dense population, commercial and heavy industry areas and significant infrastructure.

Corio Fire Brigade are responsible for;

- Four Major Hazard facilities including Viva Refinery and Gas plant (formerly Shell) that supply a large portion of the state's gas and fuel, Terminals toxic chemical bulk storage and LyondellBasell Polypropylene Plant.
- Geelong Ports, with berthings for 15 ships (of state importance)
- Barwon Health Grace McKellar centre (a major health facility).
- Geelong Grammar School (a world renowned boarding school)
- The fire protection and potential rescue of every person who travels on the highway or railway line between Geelong and Melbourne through the northern suburbs of Geelong
- Numerous other nursing homes, shopping centres, businesses, and heavy medium and light industry
- A large population of medium to low sociol-economic residences.

In addition to the above, we provide support to 3 major hospitals, 3 Prisons, University campuses, major roads and highways, major rail lines, Avalon airport and much more.

**My point is that the Corio fire district is most definitely not what I would describe as being a "Country" area.**

This area is still being serviced by a "Volunteer based" organisation that sees all of the greater Geelong area as "country", and relies on well-meaning Victorians to give up their time to train and become educated to an appropriate level and be available at a moment's notice, to potentially respond to some of the most high risk facilities in the country.

The Volunteer based system asks of these men and women to not only respond to these risks, but to work under legislation and operating procedures that were set out almost 60 years ago for a state that was very different to the one we live in now.

The demands of this system are too great for the people of the Corio area. Evidence of this is that we don't have any volunteers at Corio fire brigade who hold up to date qualifications to; Drive/Operate Corio Pumper, Heavy HAZMAT/CBR or the aerial appliance (Teleboom). These are all primary appliances that are required to respond to initial calls in the Corio fire district and beyond. I point this out not to criticise the men and women that volunteer their time for the community, but to highlight that a "Volunteer based" system is no longer adequate for Corio or the urbanised areas of Victoria. *"The Corio area needs a fully professional service"*.

This means that even in an area of such high risk as Corio, we have to jump from one truck to the next depending on the type of call we get because we don't have enough staff for all of our appliances. If we have to take an appliance out of area for a call (we respond all the way to the South Australian border), there is no guaranteed of any back up coming for the next call. In these circumstances, there is no guarantee that Volunteers will come to make up numbers, and in the unlikely event that they do, they simply don't have the required skills demanded of the Corio area.

I have personally had my safety compromised on many occasions in conducting tasks such as internal fire attacks, without the safety measure of having a second proficient crew available on scene should anything go wrong.

Recently myself and that of two of my others colleagues had our health and safety compromised whilst supporting our neighbouring Lara (Volunteer) fire brigade at a structure fire. Whilst there were members from Lara present, they didn't have the skills or ability to be used in roles important to safety, such as operating a pump or back up breathing apparatus crew. Had we had two full crews of professional firefighters we could have conducted our operations safely for all firefighters, staff and volunteer.

The people of Victoria live under the assumption that if they are in a built up area, they will have the right amount of professionals coming to help them in their time of need just like if they called the Police. Sadly, the truth is that in their time of need in "Country" areas of Victoria it is uncertain what help will actually come. If they live in an area that has career firefighters, then they will get a guaranteed response but they may be surprised to know that those firefighters may well be faced with having to take guesses with their own health and safety because they don't know who else (if anyone) is coming.

The ongoing industrial dispute that has so far spanned my entire career as a firefighter, has had a significant impact on myself and my family.

I have a wife and three young daughters that I support through my work as a firefighter. Whilst I love the way I am able to work in a job that helps the community in their times of need, I also have a responsibility to provide for my family.

**For my entire career so far, I have not been able to tell my wife with any certainty what my future employment and conditions are going to be like.** We have all ridden the rollercoaster of an uncertain future whilst constantly being attacked in the media and from people in the public. This has had a significant effect on morale, mental health and wellbeing of myself, my colleagues and my family.

**I just want to go to work, do my job serving the community, feel safe and be able to assure my family that my job is secure.**

The proposed fire service reforms would mean that the community where I live and work can have more security of guaranteed response, with guaranteed numbers having guaranteed skill levels, as well as still having volunteers doing the same good work they have always done.

The reforms would not impact Volunteers in any negative way, and in fact with more professional firefighters dispatched to fires and emergencies in urban higher risk areas, a safer environment will be created for the community and for firefighters both staff and volunteer.

The reforms would allow for an end to the industrial disputes that have gone on far too long, and let all firefighters focus on serving their communities to the best of their abilities.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. In closing, I leave you with this,

“The fire service in outer Melbourne and regional centres in Victoria cannot go on the way it is indefinitely.”

“What are we waiting for to modernise our fire services”?

“Do we really need to wait for some major catastrophe before we make change”?

We have an opportunity to change things for the better right now, a change that will see better service to all Victorians well into the future.

Yours Sincerely,

[Redacted signature block]

[Redacted contact information]