

3/07/2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is James Burke. I am currently a level 3 firefighter with the Country Fire Authority. I have worked for the Country Fire Authority since March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015, and was also a volunteer for roughly 2 years.

I live in Lysterfield, Victoria, 3156 and work at Springvale fire station in Springvale South.

I am writing this submission in support of the fire service reform because as an above strength firefighter I have the opportunity to work at different stations across multiple districts even though my work location is Springvale.

When responding to structure fires, I feel a lot safer working in Springvale as I know that I am guaranteed support from surrounding stations such as Dandenong, Patterson River, and MFB stations 29, 31 and 33.

The reason for this is because when responding to a structure fire the risks involved can be extremely dangerous. Working with a minimum crew of 4 means we will only have 2 x BA (Breathing apparatus) operators that will go in to the structure to perform rescue/extinguishment.

Without 7 professionally trained firefighters being responded within 8 minutes, the risk involved for the 2 BA operators becomes a lot more dangerous. This is because if something were to happen to the crew inside a structure, without those extra 3 professionally trained firefighters we risk not having the sufficient crewing to be able to provide support or render assistance.

As professional firefighters we are guaranteed to respond 24 hours a day, 7 days a week within 90 seconds provided we are not already committed at another job. We are trained to the highest standard in structural firefighting, wildfire firefighting and Emergency Medical Response. And are all endorsed to drive and operate our primary appliances proficiently.

Volunteers are not always guaranteed to respond, and if they are responding, they may not have the appropriate training or qualifications that are required to complete the job, which is protecting the community.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2016 I was working at Pakenham fire station when we were responded to a structure fire at 2 Seaview Rd, Cockatoo, 3781. The call came through at approximately 15:49hrs with further information from VICFIRE informing us that it was a kitchen on fire. Cockatoo tanker 1 arrived on scene at the 9 minute mark (15:58hrs) their station being approximately 1.8km from the job. They gave a word back 1 minute later of a structure fire, not yet under control, house fully involved. Gembrook tanker 1 arrived shortly after at the 16

minute mark (16:05hrs) followed by us (Pakenham pumper) at the 19 minute mark (16:08hrs). Upon arrival we saw the house fully involved with the heat and flames impacting the house next door.

There were roughly 6-7 volunteers on scene from the 2 tankers. They were standing at the back of their appliances watching the house burn, failing to get any water on the fire or any exposure lines to protect the house that was under threat from the main fire. None of these volunteers had BA or seemed to be BA qualified as they were all in wildfire gear at a structure fire. 10 minutes from being on scene to when we arrived and nothing was done apart from bowling out 2 lengths of 38mm hose which had no water in it.

My BA partner and I had to split up with him in the front yard and myself in the backyard protecting the house next door with an exposure line while also performing an external direct attack to extinguish the fire.

As professional firefighters we are constantly told by many volunteers that we are not required, they can handle their own areas themselves. All because they feel like we will take away their jobs. As firefighter's, career or volunteer our mission is to protect life and property. We are responsible for protecting our community.

By changing the boundaries our communities will have a better response and more protection especially in the highly urbanised growth areas and areas of high risk. Volunteers will still continue fighting fires and providing a service to the community. They will just have more support when responding with career firefighters.

At the end of the day, we should all have the community's interest as our priority. Not whether or not we got to be the one who put the fire out or got on scene first.

Yours sincerely,

James Burke

