

To the Fire Services Reform Bill Committee,

I wish to make a submission in support of the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017, in particular addressing:

- the impact of fire service delivery across Victoria
- effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery
- Underlying policy rationale

I am a Station Officer with the MFB, with 15 years of service, and prior to that I served as a volunteer at two CFA brigades in Melbourne's Southeast. My father also fought in the Ash Wednesday bush fires. As such I am able to speak to you from perspective as a career firefighter and volunteer.

Underlying Policy Rationale

The full rationale behind such reform is hard to sum up very succinctly, but I firmly believe the following benefits will rate highly on the rationale behind such reform.

- **Consolidation of Career Firefighting Workforces**
The consolidation of MFB and CFA Career personnel into FRV will streamline the recruitment, training and deployment of Victoria's Career Firefighting Workforce. This will generate immediate budget savings, improve interoperability between operational regions and improve resourcing capabilities when large numbers of specialist skills are required.
- **Presumptive Rights for all firefighters**
The legislation addresses the scientifically acknowledged risks associated with firefighting and the increased likelihood and risk of known cancers. The support, available for both career and volunteers, will allow those unfortunate enough to be affected to focus on fighting for their health – instead of fighting in court
- **FRV boundary review**
One of the most important aspects of the legislation is the introduction of a systematic and structured review system to ensure that Victoria's growing populations can be adequately protected as they grow. (Please see below for more detail on issues facing volunteers) Service delivery improvements, such as the introduction of Emergency Medical Response, are important additions that would also propagate outwards with any increase in FRV response area. A system where property asset value, population, call volumes and proven (in)ability to meet service delivery standards are routinely assessed and used to determine the requirement for FRV expansion should be seen as the very least that Victorian's deserve.

Effect on Volunteer Engagement:

In the last several decades Melbourne has undergone significant population growth. This is a trend that shows no sign on diminishing in the coming years. The two volunteer brigades I have served with (Keysborough and Narre Warren) have both seen a huge impact of that growth in the last 25 years. My parent's house in Narre Warren had cows at their back fence when they moved in. In their place there are now acres and acres of housing, a shopping centre and a Prep to 12 School. As population increases so have call volumes. As of mid May 2017 Narre Warren CFA where posting they had attended more than 300 calls already for the year, nearly double what I recall from the late 90's.

Much like any club or organisation (whether it be a sporting club or in this case fire brigade) the responsibility for carrying the workload often falls to a few. This applies to both the emergency response, behind the scenes operations and brigade administration. As a volunteer I knew (and are still in contact with) many keen enthusiastic, dedicated and passionate individuals that not only did their best; but were determined to excel with the resources and training supplied. I also saw many struggle with the increasing demands of the extra workload, marital issues,

and missing quality time with their children. This was exacerbated when an individual stepped up for the increased responsibility in the brigade leadership group.

As a career firefighter I have been able to attend several AFAC (Australasian Fire Authorities Council) conferences, where volunteerism and volunteer engagement always appears on the agenda. Nationally there is a trend away from volunteering. Papers and research submitted to AFAC list multiple reasons, but primarily:

- Changing demographics:
Aging populations and some immigrant groups have distinctly lower rates of volunteerism in firefighting organisations.
- Increased work travel times:
Often those leaving early or getting home late are less likely to participate in after work activities, particularly when they can be deprived many hours of rest.
- Daytime availability :
People often no longer work locally, and even if they do pressures on small businesses to have leaner and more efficient business structures often means people cannot be released during the day – especially in high call volume brigades.

It is unrealistic and unreasonable for volunteers to be expected to carry such large call volumes, where “on average” the pager will go off at least once day. On a bad day it might be three or four times, or maybe 3 or 4 times overnight – and then expected to maintain their employment and family life balance.

The FRV / CFA Model

The proposed model of a career firefighting force (FRV) and volunteer CFA represents a great opportunity to modernise urban Victoria’s firefighting capabilities, while still addressing Victoria’s risk as one of the world’s most bushfire prone areas.

- All communities throughout the state to be protected by a workforce relevant to their risk and workload.
- Greater surge capacity. The expansion of the FRV area will enable more volunteers to be deployed to large events – as their “home” location will retain FRV coverage.
- Reduced workload/stress on volunteers in built up areas. By removing their requirement to attend high volume “mundane” calls like automated alarms, bins fires, “smell of smoke”. This means we only call on volunteers when they are really needed.

I thank you for your time, and encourage any of the committee to contact me to discuss the matter further.

Regards,

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(MFB - Oakleigh)

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