

To the members of the Fire Service Bill Select Committee,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a career firefighter currently stationed at Pakenham FS. I have been a career firefighter for 3 years. In my submission I wish to address two of the Terms of Reference.

- a. Impact of fire service delivery across Victoria
- b. Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

Previously I was a CFA volunteer firefighter for 7 years and in addition worked for CFA in major projects for 3 ½ years. My previous employment working with CFA as a non-operational employee saw me travel the entire state working and engaging with both volunteer and career firefighters. In those 3 ½ years I had some form of engagement with all 1220 CFA fire brigades, which in turn gave me a very good understanding of volunteerism, the different motivators for people to volunteer and the issues facing CFA with volunteerism both now and in the future.

Through my experiences I gained conducting this work and talking to senior volunteers and operational staff, I found that the same themes to do with volunteer response kept coming up. Volunteering is becoming more and more difficult for current members and less and less possible for those who may have considered it 5 or 10 years ago. The reason being people these days often need to travel further for work, they work longer hours, and have more home commitments. All of these factors equate to having less time available to volunteer for CFA. Volunteers who were able to give up 6 hours a week 10 years ago now might be only able to give up 2 hours per week. The flow on effect of this for CFA is non-guaranteed volunteer response.

CFAs own data will show you that more and more volunteer brigades are failing to meet their Service Delivery Standards which they are required to meet. We are also seeing more and more occasions of volunteer brigades failing to respond completely when paged to emergency incidents. On a regular basis when we respond to emergencies the dispatchers at VICFIRE (ESTA) notify us that 'X Brigade' has failed to respond to support you, do you require us to page the next closest brigade? When there are areas within CFA boundaries as densely or even more densely populated than areas within the Metropolitan Fire District and to not have the same level of guaranteed fire coverage in the year 2017 is ridiculous.

Whilst on shift at Traralgon Fire Station one day we were paged to a fire at Latrobe Regional Hospital (Gippsland Major Hospital), which is located in Traralgon West Fire Brigades area. Only one volunteer from Traralgon West Fire Brigade turned up to the fire and it was approximately 45mins after they were paged. At that particular fire, 'man power', specifically 'man power' with appropriate levels of qualifications for structural firefighting was a major issue particularly in the early stages. Ultimately it wouldn't have made a difference to saving the suite of medical clinics which were totally destroyed, however having insufficient firefighters with the appropriate skills at a fire makes it incredibly hard to manage and makes our job unsafe.

I wish to be clear that I understand that this is no way the fault of volunteers or CFA management. The dedicated volunteers who give as much time as they can, do a great job for their communities, and for most of the state of Victoria communities would have no fire protection without them.

The proposed Fire Service Reform will go a long way to solving these problems, as –

1. The government has committed \$100m of additional funding for CFA to go towards many things including volunteer support and recruitment.
2. Improved training for volunteers.
3. Areas of high urban growth will have an increased guaranteed response by full time firefighters. The same standard of fire coverage that metropolitan Melbourne receives will now be delivered to areas that weren't classed as metro in 1950 when the current boundaries were established. Suburbs such as Melton, Caroline Springs, Eltham, and Boronia as well as highly urbanised regional areas such as Bendigo, Ballarat, Shepparton and the Latrobe Valley will now also receive that same level of coverage.

All of these reforms are of benefit to the people of Victoria as well as to all Career and Volunteer firefighters of both CFA and MFB. So much of what has been argued over the last few years has been emotion driven as opposed to fact driven, and the facts are these;

- No volunteers will have their roles removed or diminished by these reforms. Volunteers will still do the same work both operationally and non-operationally once the reform has gone through.
- Highly urbanised outer metropolitan areas as well as major regional centres already covered by career and volunteer firefighters, will have an improved response which will be to the same level as what metropolitan Melbourne currently receives.
- Volunteers currently at CFA Integrated brigades will be able to continue to volunteer at those locations and won't be asked or forced to volunteer elsewhere.

Yours faithfully

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