

Submission to Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

My name is John Dakis and I am currently the Acting Commander – Operational Training Delivery-Recruits, which now incorporates the new Victorian Recruit Firefighter Courses consisting of career firefighters from both the MFB & CFA aligning to a single recruit course.

I have been employed by the MFB for 12 years. My substantive rank is Senior Station Officer. I am a Graduate Member of The Institution of Fire Engineers.

I hold the following nationally recognised qualifications:

- Certificate II & III in Public Safety (Firefighting & Emergency Operations),
- Certificate IV in Public Safety (Firefighting Supervision)
- Diploma in Public Safety (Firefighting Management)
- Certificate IV in Training & Assessment

I hold the following specialist qualifications:

- Hazardous Materials Technician
- Long Duration Breathing Apparatus
- Strike Team Administration officer
- Emergency Medical Responder (EMR)

This submission is a personal submission and I would like to make it clear that I am expressing my own view and not that necessarily of my employer. I base this submission on twelve years' experience as a firefighter, Station Officer and Senior Station Officer.

I strongly support the bill for firefighter's presumptive rights compensation and fire service legislation amendment (reform) 2017 and in particular, the need to modernise the service delivery model outside of the metropolitan district and larger regional cities and towns. The Victorian government currently, now has the opportunity make fire service reform happen and position itself to deal with the population growth expected over the next 30 years.

Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

Disparity between levels of fire service

Currently, if you live within the Metropolitan District (the boundary designating MFB and CFA boundaries), you can be assured of have a fire truck on scene within 7.7 minutes on 89% of all occasions. You also have the additional benefit of having the lifesaving service provided by career firefighters of Emergency Medical Response (EMR). I believe this is a fantastic service delivery model that provides value for money for Melbourne residents within the Metropolitan district in relation to the Fire Service Levy that they contribute.

However, the same cannot be said if you live outside the Metropolitan District. Home owners pay a higher fire service levy in these areas, but cannot be assured of the same level of service. You could live in a highly urbanised area of Greater Melbourne or regional city or town and not be assured of

have a fire truck arrive within 10-15 minutes while your house burns and you are not afforded the same lifesaving EMR service that people within the Metropolitan District currently have.

The disparity in levels of fire service delivery between residents within Metropolitan District and those outside, needs to be addressed and provide all Melbournians and Victorians a consistent level of service and value for money from the fire service levy contributions.

Response times and Containment to room of origin 7.7 mins

The MFB have a benchmark of containing fires to the room of origin for 90% of all structure fires, with actual performance of 88% last financial report.

Containment to the room of origin has a direct relationship to on scene times. Evidence shows that fires will spread beyond the room of origin after 7.7 minutes causing more damage to the property and increasing the recovery process after the event.

From my experience as a senior officer I have great confidence knowing I will have a fire truck on scene within 7.7 minutes and a second truck shortly afterwards to provide seven professional firefighters suitably qualified to initiate a safe internal fire attack to be able to contain a fire to the room of origin on 9 out of 10 occasions.

The same cannot be said for areas outside of the Metropolitan District. Brigades outside the MD do fail to respond on occasions and it takes a further 8 minutes before another truck will be responded. Volunteer brigades also, quite often, fail to meet the Service Delivery Standards (SDS), for their on scene times (8 mins for Medium urban).

The fire service reform model under Fire Rescue Victoria will produce better outcomes for the residents of Victoria when effected by fire, minimising the emotional and financial impact if more structure fires can be contained to the room of origin. It also provides for greater safety for firefighters with a minimum of seven suitably qualified firefighters.

Seven on the fireground

Under the current fire service delivery model outside the Metropolitan District, there cannot be any guarantee that there will be seven suitably qualified firefighters on scene to commence a safe fire attack to achieve the benchmarks outlined above.

Seven firefighters is recognised globally as the minimum number of firefighter required to commence safe operations for a structure fire.

The requirements are task related and is underpinned by the Incident Management System framework as outlined by Australian Interagency incident Management System. It also is expressly embedded into procedures that firefighters must adhere to.

The following tasks/roles outlines the need for seven firefighters:

1. Incident controller
2. Safety Officer
3. Pump Operator
4. 2 in BA for internal attack (must work in teams of 2 as a minimum, as outlined by procedures)
5. 2 in BA for relief/emergency purposes

Training and competency standards

Under the current recruit training model, career firefighters are fully trained during 19 week recruit course, in Breathing Apparatus (BA), structural firefighting and continue training in their first twelve months and are all qualified drivers and pump operators at 12 months. As an officer in the MFB, I know with certainty that I will have seven firefighters on scene that are all capable of commencing an internal attack.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for officers in the CFA. When they turn out to a fire with a volunteer brigade they cannot be guaranteed that those volunteers will be trained and qualified in BA and structural firefighting. This results in safety being compromised and potential for procedures not to be adhered to. It can also has the potential to delay commencing safe fire firefighting operations until there are seven suitably qualified firefighters on scene.

This places enormous pressure on officers, when dealing with critical life and death emergencies. Career firefighters do a dangerous job and they have a right to ensure safe guards are in place to ensure they go home to their families each night.

The additional funding offered in the fire service reform package will allow the CFA to refresh their training to volunteers and allow them to focus on volunteer training.

Population growth

Melbourne's population has increased by 27% in 12 years with an additional 108,000 in the 2015-16 financial year and the projection is to increase by 97,000 per year for the next 30 years. This population increase has dramatically contributed to urban growth of Melbourne. The current service delivery model outside to Metropolitan district cannot adapt and grow with the population increase and urban sprawl in its current state.

The proposed fire service reform will better place the fire services within Victoria to respond and adapt to the increasing risk that comes with increased population and urban sprawl. This will be specifically dealt with by the proposed Independent Fire District Review Panel

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

In relation to surge capacity, there is no evidence to suggest that surge capacity will diminish. There has been a lot of scaremongering around this issue, but with approximately 1200 brigades unaffected by the reforms I would suggest most volunteers will continue to provide the service they are currently providing to their communities.

A lot has changed since the Royal Commission into Black Saturday and the emergency management arrangements. Lead by the Emergency Services Commissioner, there is an expectation that the MFB will be more agile and provide support into CFA areas in a timely response. An example of this was the Hazelwood mine fire where MFB had up to 100 staff there on a daily basis.

Short and long term cost impact on fire service provision

There will be long term cost benefits in aligning all career staff under Fire Rescue Victoria. Currently, many senior positions, departments and services provided to support career firefighters are duplicated and long term cost efficiencies will be realised.

Underlying policy rationale

I see enormous benefit in aligning all career firefighters under Fire Rescue Victoria. Although both fire agencies are working towards improving interoperability we still have many issues and this reform will fast track the changes required to bring consistency and uniformity in many aspects of our work.

We currently have two different radio systems between MFB and CFA making it difficult to communicate on the fireground. A lot of our equipment is different and not interchangeable, such as fully encapsulated chemical suits, hazardous materials detectors and various other equipment stored on trucks.

Both fire services and working under different policies and procedures.

Training frameworks are also different and need to be aligned between MFB and CFA career firefighters and this fire service reform will provide a pathway for this to happen.

Finally, this fire service reform will see an end to the long drawn out industrial dispute that has taken a great toll on all career firefighters and will provide a solution to the current state of unworkable acts of parliament at state and federal level.

I thank you for the opportunity to detail my submission.

Yours sincerely

John Dakis

