

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Ross Graham [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 4 July 2017 8:32 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Submission to Select Committee regarding Fire Services Reform

Dear Fire Service Bill Select Committee,

My name is Qualified Firefighter Ross Graham, and I support Fire Services Reform. Since completing my CFA recruitment course at Fiskville, I have been stationed at Wangaratta, Craigieburn, South Morang and Springvale as well as having relieved at many other stations. Obviously I have attended many fires (structure and bushfire), road/industrial accidents, fatalities, EMR's and other incidents in my career. During this time I have worked collaboratively with volunteers of CFA and SES, as well as staff from MFB and DELWP, not to mention other emergency services organisations. I consider myself community focused, which is why I made the career decision to join CFA.

At this point in my submission, it is important to underline my strong belief that optimal and affordable fire and emergency protection for Victoria relies on professional career services as well as dedicated and well trained volunteers, working together. I also cherish the time and relationships forged with volunteer brigade members at stations I have worked in. Many have been very understanding and sympathetic to the way our profession has been dragged through muck of late and I know some very competent volunteer firefighters who bring wide skillsets to their brigades.

I am concerned about admitting this information publically, as this is the kind of information that seems to have been historically either not reported on, or ignored, perhaps in the hopes of not insulting certain factions within certain organisation(s) or groups. I can only hope that this forum represents a democratic right, for people such as myself to speak up on issues that directly affect our safety, employment and service to community. I am trying to be brief, but with so much scare mongering in the media during my whole career, it is difficult to know what to include and what to leave out. Hopefully others will cover why we need; 7 on the fire ground; protection from political football games in the future; protection from being dragged through muck in media campaigns as pawns; protection from people who would hide Fiskville contaminations; protection and assistance for industrial cancers; protection from VFBV who have repeatedly lobbied throughout history against career firefighters (remember also, there were VFBV members on the CFA board during Fiskville cover-ups); and many other issues, including skills gaps in some volunteer services and training, resulting in inconsistent standards and unreliable support at times.

So I will focus on only one aspect.

Why do I want service reform? To improve community safety. We desperately need an impartial and professional committee to manage which appliances get responded to certain calls. Currently the volunteer brigades manage the tables of response for their primary areas. I believe this needs to be handled by a professional and centralised committee.

During one of my stints at a recently integrated station, I was dumbfounded to find that a volunteer lieutenant at our brigade was about to enact a brigade operating procedure whereby, in the case of running grass and scrub fires, staff from our station would sit idly by when the call comes in and wait for the volunteers to turn up to the station (from home/work? 15 minutes to arrive?) to respond the fire appliance, hopefully with enough trained crew, and hopefully with a qualified and competent driver. Obviously this wastes valuable time and doesn't utilise a resource (us) who are already being paid to train daily and man the station – luckily this operating procedure didn't get through.

Sometime after, my platoon was responded to a structure fire in Yarrambat late at night. Due to the response tables not initially calling our station, there was a considerable delay before we were paged, due to having to wait until primary and supporting assigned volunteer brigades to both failed to respond in time. Had there been any deaths due to this discretion, I'm not sure who would be held accountable, if anyone, perhaps? The point is, this system makes no sense and is inefficient. These examples are everywhere, but illustrate a serious and troubling concern with the current system.

I have read VFBV delegates (not all) complain that career firefighters will negatively impact volunteerism if reform is approved. It will NOT negatively affect volunteerism; there is NO justification for such a case. There are a small number of narcissistic people who hijack the CFA for what appears to be empire building in the community. I have seen the struggle of officers trying to utilise paid staff who are already on stations – struggling to get staff appliances out the door in initial page of an incident – only to be stone walled because of stubborn people who don't want staff to attend "their" incidents, as they won't be as valued – they feel they won't play as big a role in the management of the incident because they won't get there before the staff. This sentiment has no place in community safety. It is not "their" incident. It is somebody's property, house, wife, life, and if there is a staff appliance within reach it needs to be dispatched, and needs to have the appropriate composition of crew!!! There needs to be scrutiny on the service delivery standards being delivered in Melbourne's growth corridors to ensure residents are getting what their fire levy pays for.

Reform will overcome this obstruction to community safety, and many others, so I urge you to see past the rhetoric you are likely to encounter. Having my career and the community's safety in the hands of people who say "we've done it this way for fifty years, why change" is a frightening situation, personally. As is having my industrial dispute weighed in by the same people who actively stonewalled staff from attending "their" incidents, like there is some kind of perverse possession. I strongly feel that reform will also go a long way in moving forward to better working relationships between career staff and volunteers, as there will be exponentially less lobbying and political point scoring engineered to divide us. It will also facilitate volunteers at urban locations being able to continue training, continue to turn out to local jobs, and even more importantly, continue to be invaluable to surge capacity when it is needed most, such as major bushfires around our state.

Please keep community safety and emergency services at front of mind when making your decisions, not tabloid headlines. Please support fire services reform.

Regards,
Ross Graham

