

Fire Services Reform Submission

To the Fire Services Reform Committee,

My name is Adam Hanger, I am currently employed by the CFA as a firefighter and work at Patterson River Fire Station in District 8. Patterson River is located between the current MFB boundary in Mordialloc and the heavily urbanised areas of Frankston and its surrounds. Before joining the CFA as a career Firefighter in Feb of 2016 I was previously employed by the CFA as a District Mechanical Officer working out of the Cranbourne workshop. I spent 5 and half years doing this. I was also a volunteer at Cranbourne Fire Brigade which is currently one of the 35 integrated stations within the CFA.

I support the fire services reform for many reasons, none more important than the proposed safety upgrades which will be put in place to ensure not only my safety on the fire ground but also the safety of my colleagues, the community and co-responding volunteers. There have been many other valid points raised by politicians, members of the CFA/MFB, members of the UFU and members of the public which support the need for reform but for me my main focus is on safety.

In my times as a volunteer at Cranbourne I attended approximately 850 calls, on the majority of these occasions I was responding to support the staff at Cranbourne and to assist them. However as the community grew there was more occasions when we the volunteers would be responding to separate incidents then to what the career firefighters had responded to. I recall one particular occasion when the staff were committed at an incident and the brigade was paged to a structure fire. On arrival to the station only one other member and I had arrived by the time our 6 minutes to respond had elapsed so we decided to turn out to the fire. On arrival we found a fire in the kitchen which was spreading rapidly and had to make the decision to send a crew inside to extinguish the fire. With their only being two of us on the truck and one person required outside to run the pump and to be the Incident Controller it meant that I had to enter the structure alone even though that was in direct contradiction of SOP's set out by the CFA Chief. We were stuck in the position that if we wanted to serve the community then we had to put ourselves at risk, alternately we would have to wait outside until the next truck arrived from Hallam which was approximately 10 minutes after we arrived on scene. Had we have waited we would have lost the whole house and not just had damage to the kitchen, this type of scenario where members are forced to choose between our own safety and delivery a service to the community happens far too often. I got lucky on that occasion that nothing went wrong but we should not be relying on luck.

I think back on that call now and realise not only did we need more crews available but we also needed more training and those two things are often what is lacking when volunteers respond during the day. Rarely are enough crews on the truck to do the job safely and even more rare is having the correct skills mix. However in saying that the proposed fire services reform includes funding for the CFA to provide more recruitment and more training for its volunteers to help prevent this type of scenario happening. Another great reason for the reform.

I go forward now to my time in the CFA as a career firefighter which began at Traralgon Fire Station in the east of the state. As a brigade Traralgon has a minimum staffing profile of 5 career firefighters on shift at all times, generally with 3 on the Pumper and 2 on the Ladder Platform. This meant that any call the Traralgon responded to in areas which were not supported by Morwell could result in

only 5 people ending up on scene if the local volunteers failed to respond. If we look at the proposed safety requirements of 7 career firefighters responded to calls then even with all staff from Traralgon responding we still fall short. It is simply unacceptable to knowingly have response arrangements set up that mean that less than 7 career firefighters are being responded.

I have now moved on from Traralgon and am stationed at Patterson River in the outer metropolitan area of Melbourne. Although I know work in an area of the state with many more integrated fire stations in a closer proximity, we as a crew at Patterson River are still often faced with the reality that we may be on scene for some time before we get any support. For many of our calls we rely on the support from volunteers from surrounding brigades such as Edithvale and Carrum Downs as well as the volunteers at Patterson River. This means we are still faced with the issue of not knowing if we will get support, if the crews that do arrive will be able to bring the appropriate appliance due to driver availability and if the crew that does arrive will have enough members with appropriate skills to be an asset once on scene.

The issues I have raise come back to one point, that the CFA as an organisation are hamstrung in being able to guarantee the appropriate number of people on scene, with the required skills to perform the role expected by the community. The CFA have done a good job by integrating 35 stations and increasing manning levels at those stations to try and assist the volunteers to provide a service to the community. However gone are the days of being able to say that the CFA is a volunteer based organisation supported by staff. We need to recognise that career firefighters respond to the majority of the calls that the CFA attend. It is now transitioning into an organisation where career firefighters are being forced to rely on volunteers which is opposite to how the CFA has historically run.

The time has come to implement this reform so that the CFA can go back to being a solely volunteer organisation with new funding for training to allow the members to gain skills and provide a service to the community. With the merging of all career firefighters to one service and the implementation of new response tables the community will be able to receive an enhanced response ensuring 7 career firefighters on the fire ground whilst still being assisted by the volunteers from the CFA. This move should only be seen as a positive as it will increase safety levels for the community, myself and my colleagues as well as for the volunteers who we will be working alongside.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Regards Adam Hanger