

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017 [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 4 July 2017 8:49 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

MR PHILLIP BENCRAFT
[REDACTED]

Senior Station Officer, Patterson River Fire Station
[REDACTED]

SUBMISSION CONTENT:

--

My name is Phillip Bencraft and I am currently on secondment to the CFA from the MFB as a Senior Station Officer in Charge of the Relieving shift at the Patterson River Fire Station. I have been in this position since early March where prior to my secondment I had been employed by the MFB for the past 27 years.

As the Officer in Charge it is my role to ensure the station continues to function in accordance with CFA protocols and procedures and to manage the fire ground when responding to an Alarm of Fire and determining the firefighting/rescue/incident tactics to be deployed to effectively and safely mitigate any emergency.

I am also responsible for the training of our volunteers at the fire station on their weekly training night when on duty.

The suburbs that the Patterson River Fire Brigade respond in to include: Patterson Lakes, Carrum, Seaford, Frankston, Carrum Downs, Bangholme, Chelsea, Chelsea Heights, Edithvale and Aspendale.

These suburbs are primarily residential that include some light industry/commercial, nursing homes and other aged care facilities, however our biggest risk is the Eastern Treatment Plant at Bangholme.

I am pleased to be able to make this submission to the committee as I believe that having come across to the CFA from the MFB in March, I am able to give a balanced view of my experiences, albeit very few with the question of volunteer response to fire calls.

When I first commenced with the CFA my initial intention was to show respect to my fellow firefighters, whether they be career or volunteer and to make up my own opinion of the volunteers system and not be swayed by the negative thoughts of others.

First of all I would like to say that my experience with the volunteers at Patterson River and surrounding Brigades such as Edithvale and Carrum Downs has been exceptional. I have come to admire the commitment they have shown to providing a service to the community.

However, whilst I admire their individual commitments, I also see the flaws in the volunteer system and how it provides no guarantee of which stations or trucks will or won't respond, how many volunteers will

respond, what are the qualifications or skill set of those volunteers responding, have they attended regular training session to ensure current competencies/skills are maintained.

An example of this is soon after I started at Patterson River FS, a call was received for the Mobile Control Vehicle (MCV) to respond to a factory fire at Rowville at approximately 01:30hrs. The MCV which is manned by the volunteers failed to turn out after the initial page (6 minutes) as the required number of operators did not respond. After speaking to the Rostered Duty Officer (RDO) I was requested to have the volunteers paged again. It was only after this second page that another operator responded thus allowing the vehicle to turnout, so from the time of initial page to turnout was approximately 15 minutes.

If I was the Incident Controller in charge of that fire, I would have found it very frustrating that the MCV or any other vehicle requested to respond has taken so long to get on scene as these time delays can significantly affect my ability to mitigate the incident as quickly and safely as possible thereby reducing the risk to the community and the firefighters currently on scene.

This is why I am a firm believer in the minimum of 7 career firefighters at a fire call as being the Incident Controller I know that I will get 7 firefighters who are qualified in all aspects of firefighting and are able to complete any task assigned to them on the fire ground. Sadly and unfortunately, this cannot be guaranteed with the current system that is in place.

There have also been other calls where the volunteer pumper tanker has been unable to respond due to either lack of numbers or qualified personnel to drive or operate the vehicle. On one occasion the volunteers who had responded to the station were unable to turnout as a qualified operator did not respond. To their credit they responded in the brigade Forward Control Vehicle (FCV) but if it had been a large fire or incident they would not have had any firefighting equipment on hand to deal with the situation.

I would like to state that as a fire fighter for over 28 years, I do support the proposed reforms as this is what I believe will be best for the people of Melbourne and the large provincial towns. It is wrong that boundaries within the Metropolitan Fire District have not been allowed to change with the increase in the population and spread of Melbourne. These reforms allow for this to happen now and in the future. Greater Melbourne and its residents deserve a Fire Service that is staffed by career firefighters as this guarantees a response to a fire call, unlike the current system where there may or may not be one. All residences now pay the fire service levy and they should be entitled to the best system.

I hope that you take the time to read this submission and see it as one that is not personally against any volunteer or individual as I genuinely admire their commitment to serving the community but against the system that doesn't provide the best for the people of Victoria.

Regards,

Phillip Bencraft

--

File1:

File2:

File3: