

To the Fire Services Bill Select Committee,

My name is Erik Houttuin, I am a Leading Fire Fighter for the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board and I have been a Fire Fighter for six and a half years, during which time I have also become a Heavy Rescue operator.

I live in the suburb of Oakleigh South and I currently work from the Oakleigh Fire station. I am not normally a person who gets involved very much in politics of any kind, other than to register my vote at elections, but I feel the time has come, I can no longer sit idle with everything that has been said and done to the fire services recently.

With this submission, I want to express my support of the proposed reform of the fire services for some of the following reasons.

- Although I am currently stationed well within the borders of all career staffed fire stations and therefore I can be reassured that any calls I go to in my area that I will have the immediate support of at least 6 other career fire fighters, all with the minimum of a 4 month recruit course of intensive training and in most cases well beyond that, but I am on occasion called upon to work from more outer fringed stations, where it is not uncommon to turn out with volunteer brigades. I would like to express my concern with this by pointing out that I have been to fires with volunteer brigades where there have been no breathing apparatus operators on the volunteer brigade appliances that have attended as we have fought a fierce factory fire, only found out when we asked for assistance from their crews to don breathing apparatus(BA) and to be told we are not qualified to wear BA, after which they stood watched us work. So in the initial stages there were only 3 qualified BA operators on scene, something which quite frankly dangerous and unacceptable. This is nothing against volunteer brigades, but I am highlighting the fact that we never know how many fire fighters we are going to have turn up when we turn out with a volunteer brigade, let alone do we know what qualifications they are going to have.
- Being part of an Emergency service, it has always been my strong belief that the community comes first, after all, to help those in need is why I decided to become a Fire Fighter. To me that means giving the best possible service we can give, and I do realise that there are a lot of considerations that need to be taken into account in order to get the right balance of “best possible service” vs “economics”, but as nothing has changed with the Fire Services way of operation since the days the borders were drawn between CFA and MFB and the community we serve has done nothing but change and expand, I feel it is only warranted that the Career staff of CFA and MFESB become one professional fire service to cover the Metropolitan fire district of today, and

have the CFA cover what is now the country, not what was the country 50 years ago.

- Having the reform go through means that all career staff will have exactly the same training and expectations from them, making for a much more efficient and safer fire ground.
- What was the urban fringe many years ago, is now as densely populated as any other inner Melbourne suburb, and the residents there deserve to have the same response times as their inner suburb counter parts, they should not have to wait for a volunteer to leave work, a barbeque or some other function to then make their way to the fire station to pick up an appliance and other crew members before even heading in the direction of the Emergency, this will undoubtable cost lives in such highly populated areas, every minute counts at a fire, car accident, chemical spill, cardiac arrest and any one of dozens of other emergencies we attend.
- The CFA started out as an all volunteer brigade, and they saw the need to employ full time Fire Fighters as the urban fringe grew, because they could not meet acceptable turn out times for emergencies, this alone should have been a red flag decades ago that the fire services were ready for a reform

I could write a book on all aspects of why we need a reformed fire services after so many decades of living with an “out dated” model, but I feel having read the many submissions from my colleagues, you as a committee already know that the right thing is for the fire services reform to go ahead.

I would also like to point out about the damage that has been done by politics and the media of late.

All Fire Fighters, both career and volunteer are being affected by the fact we have been used in a political tug of war, the morale has noticeably dropped around the stations, and although we keep a professional face to the public, this is sometimes hard when some of the public we serve have a diminished view of us after reading and hearing some of the numerous untruths about their fire services through certain outlets of the media.

I hope you will consider carefully not only mine, but all my colleagues submissions

Yours Sincerely,

Erik Houttuin

