

Dear Members of the fire services bill committee

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

My name is Lachlan Butterfield and my background is as follows:

- Joined CFA as a volunteer firefighter March of 2005
- Brigade member at Mt. Martha and Frankston Fire brigades
- Junior brigade leader
- 10 year service CFA medal
- Professional CFA firefighter since August of 2016
- Resigned as a volunteer firefighter in October of 2016
- I have responded to over 700 fire calls

I live in Frankston and work in Rowville.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services.

1. Response

Starting as a volunteer in the outer metro are of Melbourne, where my former brigade could easily fill three fire trucks with crews of suitable qualifications and be able to respond within four minutes.

These days, talking to current brigade members they tell me it is now struggle to respond a vehicle with a driver, let alone a full crew of qualified structure firefighters. This is due to factors such as brigade members now having to find work out of the area and being upwards of over an hour away daily and not being able to respond. Another reason is brigade members are finding it harder to give up time at work to respond due to financial strain and work stress. The simple fact is people just don't have the time to volunteer as much as they use to, I can personally attest to this from my background.

In my past as a volunteer I have witnessed inadequate responses such as:

- Being on the first arriving appliance to a support call that was 12km away and over an 14 minute drive after taking 5 minutes to respond, resulting in a time of over **19 minutes** before we arrived on scene, the next fire truck that arrived, which was from the primary brigade, only had the driver as crew.
- Waiting over **6 minutes**, before having to tell Vicfire that we won't be responding a truck and to page another brigade in our place because no driver was available, I have had to do this numerous times in my years as a volunteer.
- Having to ask Vicfire respond call for another brigade to be responded to a child locked in a car on a hot day as we had no drivers available.
- Responded as a volunteer with Frankston fire brigade to a house fire in Carrum Downs with a crew of another volunteer and 2 professional firefighters. It took us over **12 minutes** to arrive on scene at the support call and we were the **first full crew of BA operators** into the building to do a search for possible casualties.
- Being the incident controller at a spreading grass and scrub fire because I was the most senior person on scene besides the driver. I was only a volunteer firefighter for less than a year and had minimum wildfire qualifications.

- Responding with only 2 crew members to a fully involved building fire at a pistol club and relying on the professional firefighters from the neighbouring brigade at Mornington arriving on scene at the same time as us. Following volunteer crews from my brigade were minutes behind but I was extremely thankful there was a professional response from Mornington or else it would have been only us two initially on scene for several minutes until other crews arrived.

These are not uncommon occurrence's that have happened in the past and still happen to this day, this is just a small collection of incidents from one person's experience.

In my current employment as a professional firefighter I have witnessed inadequate responses in the last 6 months such as:

- Responding to a 5 car motor vehicle accident that was located 500m away from Scoresby fire station, it took us 7 minutes to arrive on scene and we were the first appliance to arrive as Scoresby had failed to respond. There was still one person in a car complaining of neck injuries and the collision causing traffic hazards being on the corner of two arterial roads. MFB pumper 31 and Dandenong rescue had arrived on scene before Scoresby attended, they only had 2 crew members on board when they did arrive and 1 more volunteer responded on foot.
- 04/04/2017 responding to a grass and scrub fire spreading rapidly in Upper Ferntree gully's assignment area. We were able to locate the fire, knock it down and stop it spreading before the primary brigade and other support brigades were able to get on scene.

These situations above clearly show that in outer metropolitan Melbourne, residents are not getting the fire service and response that they deserve and require in such a built up area. Some of these brigade assignment areas have stayed the same or very similar for the last 50+ years, but these areas have changed from paddocks to now being residential estates.

For Mount Martha, there were **11,595** residents living there in 2001, there is now **18,548** residents as of 2016, this is an increase of about **37.5%** over 15 years, but the assignment areas have barely changed in that time and the number of active volunteers responding has decreased.

The active volunteers in the area are doing the best they can but due to work and family commitments, people in the outer metropolitan area just can't provide as much time as they used to. This is common in most areas, not just Mount Martha.

Areas such as Caroline Springs in 2001 had a population of **2,823**, in 2016 it now had **24,205** residents and this is almost ten times what it was 15 years before. These areas need a modern fire service, rather than one that is operating on a 1950's based system.

2. Training

Having completed both volunteer and professional firefighter training, I feel I have a sound knowledge and understanding of the levels of training and what is expected from each role.

My recruit course as a volunteer firefighter was two weekends with half a day allowed for assessments. This covered basic bushfire behaviour, how to operate a pump on a tanker, how to use a knapsack and a rakehoe. In total we spent about 40 hours to achieve minimum skills and then active to respond to incidents the brigade was called to.

My recruit course as a professional firefighter was 19.5 weeks with ongoing assessments. This covered topics such as health and fitness, building construction, structural fire tactics, hazmat

incidents, enhanced forcible entry, operating pumps, foam operations, advanced bushfire tactics, fire safe kids (teaching children about fire safety), as well as equipment maintenance and legislation. Included with this were 3 beep tests and 3 physical aptitude tests, as well as a minimum of 5 weeks of hot fire training sessions to learn and hone these skills.

To obtain my breathing apparatus with search and rescue qualifications as a **volunteer**, I attended four Wednesday night training sessions, then going back for an assessment session. I used **about 5 air cylinders** for this training. In no way did I feel comfortable with this level of training and to be entrusted to perform this role, then to possibly be partnered up with someone of equal or even lesser experience than myself. The only other way to gain more experience facing hot fire training was through the 2 annual training sessions we could do at the training grounds and may only get one or two scenarios, this is if I was available to attend.

To obtain the qualification just to start using breathing apparatus as a **professional** firefighter, it was 4 x 10 hour days of intensive training, for which I used **21 air cylinders**, I then used **34 more air cylinders** during hot fire training drills, in total I used **55 air cylinders** before graduating and responding to incidents.

These are just some of the vast differences between the level of training and skills mix that a resident living in areas of outer metropolitan Melbourne and regional centres are currently receiving.

3. Surge capacity.

In my 12 years of volunteering with CFA, I have seen how well surge capacity can work for long duration incidents, such as Black Saturday, Hazelwood open cut mine and even smaller incidents such as the 2014 Mornington Peninsula freeway fire or the Mount Martha park fire.

One thing I have noticed over the years is that there are quite a few volunteers who are more than happy to only respond during the summer bushfire season and outside of this time spend more time with their family and work, instead of responding to day to day fire calls. If that's all people can allow then that should be encouraged as this can help increase surge capacity, instead of not utilising them just because they can give more time.

My opinion is if anyone says that the fire reforms will negatively affect surge capacity, then they have an ulterior motive and using this as an excuse. Volunteers will still have full use of their fire trucks and equipment with the freedom to move crews when and wherever they are required.

If anything, there should be a discussion to open up the volunteer membership to people who live outside the brigade areas who would like to join, be trained up and able to respond during major incidents, even if it's in a support role or as another pair of hands with qualified people crew leading them and overseeing them.

4. Benefits to volunteers

As a part of these fire reforms, the government has included a **\$56.2 million** CFA Support Fund to strengthen volunteer recruitment, retention and training options, expand brigade support and develop leadership. This gives volunteers an opportunity to develop their firefighting and leadership skills and qualifications to provide better assistance to their community, they can then pass on to other volunteers and help develop their skills.

The government will also make \$44 million available to provide new volunteer fire stations, facilities and equipment where needed.

Overall this will only improve the facilities, training and support to CFA volunteers, as well give them the flexibility to change things such as equipment, vehicles or training that would suit their needs without having to consult professional firefighters.

5. Personal note

I have been a member of CFA for all of my adult life. I have committed more of my time to CFA than anything else that I have been involved with (I didn't even stay that long at school!) and it's been a big part of my life that has helped me develop into the person that I am today and I'm eternally grateful for the skills and experiences it has provided to me as well as the lifelong friendships I have gained and couldn't recommend it enough for anyone who has the time to do it. Volunteers do a great job of protecting Victoria and are very committed to help to the best of their abilities in any way they can.

I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to make it my full time career so I could further develop my skills and provide that skillset to help the community in any way I can. Even though I don't live in Rowville, I still see it as a part of the community of Melbourne and Victoria. No matter which station I work at, I will still see it as the community that we all live in.

With this personal and long attachment, it will be sad to be leaving it and working for another organisation, FRV, but even though I won't have the same name on my uniform and fire truck, we will still be doing the same role and assisting the community anyway we can and that's what I am more concerned and that's why we are all here, rather than some arbitrary emblem.

One piece advice someone gave to me when I first started as a volunteer firefighter was *"This organisation is like a bucket of water, you put your hand in it for as long as you want then you can take it out, but the bucket was there before you put your hand in it and will be there after you leave"*.

While I couldn't work out why anyone would randomly put their hand in a bucket of water, the analogy of the CFA always being there rings true to me. It was there long before me or anyone else in CFA has been here and it will be here for a long time after anyone of us leave.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and I honestly believe these reforms will only bring positive outcomes for the community and us in the fire services.

Regards,

Lachlan Butterfield

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