

Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017

My name is Andrew David Strachan and I am a career firefighter with the MFB residing in Mitcham. I have been a member of the MFB for over 13 years and hold the rank of Station Officer, currently stationed at South Melbourne, and am qualified as a Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Technician, Breathing Apparatus service operator and Strike Team Administrator (managing the logistical requirements of a Strike Team).

I fully support the Fire Services Reform Bill and provide the following reasons for my support:

- As a firefighter and an officer, I have been stationed at several MFB stations on the outer boundaries of the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD) where I have turned out with CFA brigades, both career & volunteer. The standard response for MFB is to dispatch a minimum of two appliances so as to ensure that there is a minimum of 7 firefighters attending the fireground. This is to meet OH&S obligations and ensure the safety of all firefighters. When a call is received in a CFA area, the status of the CFA brigade is taken into account when determining the response. If the CFA brigade is a career station, then one MFB appliance is dispatched as the specified minimum number of firefighters will be attending. If the CFA brigade is a volunteer station, then a minimum of two MFB appliances will be dispatched as there is no guarantee of numbers of volunteers attending or their qualifications.
- I fully support the CFA volunteers, as my father was a CFA volunteer and fought a number of major campaigns in the 1960's to 1980's and I, also, have been a volunteer in another state. As the population of Melbourne increases and the urban area expands, the reliance on volunteers becomes more complex. Gone are the days where most people lived and worked in the same area. It is now more common for most people to travel significant distances to their place of employment/education, etc, and as a result are often not available to respond to an event in their local area. As the outer urban areas expand, there is an exponential rise in the risk factors, for example, schools, shopping centres, medical centres, industry, etc, that require a more appropriate response, both time and resource related.
- Some CFA brigades have recognized that there are times when they will not be able to provide a satisfactory response and have arranged for MFB to respond into their area. For example, MFB turns out to Wonga Park brigade's area during business hours on week days but it

reverts back to CFA response at night and weekends. I have attended calls in volunteer CFA brigade areas where additional MFB appliances have been unavailable, and there has either been no response from the volunteer brigade or a volunteer has arrived in their private vehicle. This results in the safety of firefighters and the public being put at greater risk and increased likelihood of greater damage to property. One significant anomaly I find is the enhanced response system between the MFB and the CFA. In the MFB, if an incident is large enough to warrant extra resources, their response system is to dispatch the nearest appliances, regardless of whether it is MFB, CFA career or volunteer. If the incident is in CFA area, particularly CFA volunteer brigades, they will dispatch the nearest CFA brigades only, irrespective of whether an MFB appliance is closer or more appropriate. There have been occasions when I have become aware of significant incidents just outside the MFB boundary where CFA appliances have had to travel significant distances to attend the incident, but MFB appliances have been closer but have not been responded.

- This reform bill will not affect volunteers in the rural areas of Victoria where there is no justification for career firefighters. In the major regional centres and outer urban areas of Melbourne, the volunteers will still form a vital part of the emergency response, particularly for larger scale events where an enhanced response is required.
- Finally, I believe that the Fire Services Reform Bill will alleviate any conflict between volunteers and career firefighters and allow both groups to move forward so as to protect their communities to the best of their abilities and not have to worry about whether anyone is being undermined. It will also bring Victoria into line with the majority of other states, where similar fire services operate effectively and cohesively.

I make this submission in the hope that you will give it due consideration. I also hope that the committee will make its deliberations, taking into consideration the safety of the community and the health and safety of state's firefighters, rather than political aspirations or party guidelines.

Yours sincerely,

Station Officer Andrew Strachan

