

Brett Hamill

Tuesday 4th July 2017.

To the Victorian Fire Services Review Committee,

My name is Brett Hamill and I am writing to you today in my support for the restructuring of Victoria's Fire Services and the inclusion of Presumptive Rights Compensation.

I am currently employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade as a Station Officer. I have 14 years of service in the Brigade. I am currently in Operations at the Ormond Fire Station. Throughout my career I have been stationed at 13 different stations and worked in the Hazmat and Operational Training departments. Over the last two years I have been attached to the Victorian Recruit Firefighter Project, the joint venture between CFA and MFB to standardise and implement common recruit training. During my career I have attained many specialist skills including Rescue and Hazmat Technician qualifications as well as endorsements on specialist appliances. My nationally recognised qualifications that I have attained through my role and studies are Certificate II and III in Firefighting Operations and Certificate IV and my Diploma in Firefighting Management. I am also currently studying a Masters of Business Administration on a scholarship that I was awarded by the MFB. I have also earned my Long Service and Good Conduct Medal and the National Emergency Medal for my work during the Black Saturday Bushfires. I have also had the honour of being a Volunteer firefighter in the CFA when I lived in Geelong for three years.

I believe that through serving both as a Professional and Volunteer firefighter, and now working on the joint CFA/MFB project I have a unique perspective on our current fire services and the potential ones in the future. Our current model is broken in both Services due to it being out-dated and antiquated in both systems and areas of responsibility. Also as highlighted in the Victorian Fire Services Review that the cultures of both Organisations, professional and volunteer are at their lowest point. A fair proportion of this can be attributed to the reluctance and resistance to modernise our current fire services.

Where I and my family currently reside is well within what is these days referred to as metropolitan Melbourne, however it is still serviced by a Country Fire Authority that is mainly volunteer based. I have the greatest respect and honour for those that volunteer their time and efforts to protect and serve their local communities. It really

is an Australian tradition and part of our fundamental make-up to help those in our local communities. However, there is too much expectation and requirement of time on volunteers in urban areas to maintain skills and coverage. It is simply not achievable which has forced many to 'staff stations' or set rosters which goes against the CFA Volunteer Charter and reasonable expectations from both the Organisation and the community. It also highlights the need for these areas to be serviced by career firefighters that are rostered to 24/7 and 365 days a year to adequately protect life and property.

In March of 2015 I was the Officer-in-Charge of Mentone station when we were responded to a house fire in Aspendale. This is outside of the MFB's area and is serviced by a volunteer Brigade. Knowing that the brigade has four (4) minutes to respond I was somewhat surprised not long after us turning out to hear a word back given of structure fire under control by that Brigade on scene. I quickly realised that this was not the case when their appliance turned into the street in front of us with no other fire truck on scene. This is a massive safety breach and against rules and regulations. Upon arriving on scene I quickly obtained some information from the owner of the house which at this stage only had a small fire in the roof space at the front of the house. I quickly liaised with the crew leader on the CFA appliance (Not an Officer) as to whether he wanted me to take charge, which he declined. At this stage I offered my assistance and gave suggestion to an initial course of action. Both of these were also declined. The fire intensity had grown by this stage and had started to impinge on the property next door. I then ordered my crew to protect this property and get water on the fire. It was at this stage that I again approached the CFA crew leader and informed him of the fire spread and the need to internally attack the fire which would require crews to work in Breathing Apparatus (BA). He then informed me that only one (1) of his crew was qualified to wear BA. This meant that my crew were potentially in danger if entering the property as they had no backup or relief crews. The recognised work standard is seven (7) on the fireground with a minimum of four (4) BA wearers ready to work for safe operations. I then realised at this point that the crew leader was utilising a mobile phone to get advice on what to do next. I later found out that he was on the phone to his Captain to get directions who was at his place of work, not on the fire ground. Eventually the fire was brought under control and extinguished when another MFB crew arrived on scene to assist my original crew. The small fire that should have been contained to the area of origin had spread throughout the whole roof space, gutting the property. This example is not used to denigrate volunteers, it is merely to highlight that they are only able to work in the limited scope of practice that they are able to achieve as a volunteer. It is also to highlight that if two (2) professional firefighting crews had been initially responded (as is the standard in the MFB) then the damage to the property would have been significantly reduced, and if there was a rescue to be performed it could have been completed by a crew that had the appropriate skills and training in a structural environment. It also highlights the limited capacity and skills/knowledge that a crew leader may have in a CFA volunteer brigade and not

appreciate or understand the responsibilities that come with the role on the fire ground and in the community. I believe that on this day, and many others that I have witnessed that the community did not receive the service delivery that it requires nor pays for in its Fire Service Levy. This had put the community, the home owner and property at greater risk of damage/loss of life.

I strongly believe that Volunteer firefighters are required in the state's fire services but it should be as it was originally intended, to assist country communities and operate in bushfire campaigns and be utilised for surge capacity when required. I know that the proposed changes will not negatively affect volunteers as it is enhancing the service delivery currently been provided to that which is required in a densely populated, built-up and industrial metropolitan Melbourne in 2017, not 1950's Victoria.

I also see these changes being beneficial to both the CFA and MFB which currently both have quite negative cultures which were highlighted in the Victorian Fire Services Review. These proposed changes will ensure that a fully volunteer CFA can return to what it was originally established for and a positive newly formed Fire Rescue Victoria which will protect metropolitan Melbourne (2017, not 1950) and the major regional centres.

Thank you for your consideration.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Station Officer Brett Hamill

Metropolitan Fire Brigade

