

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

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

I wish my submission to be private.

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a Leading Firefighter employed by the CFA. I am currently stationed at Geelong City Fire Station. I also live in Geelong. I started as a volunteer Firefighter at Geelong city in 2004 and started as a career Firefighter in May of 2011. When I graduated I was stationed at Melton. In 2012 I gained a position at Ballarat City Fire station. I then gained a position at Geelong City in 2014. I am currently starting as a recruit course instructor on the new Victorian Combined Recruit Course program at VEMTC Craigieburn.

I have the following specialist qualifications:

- Heavy Rescue operator
- 37m and 42m Bronto operator
- Protective Equipment van operator
- Teleboom operator
- Aerial Pumper operator
- CBR qualified
- Steep Angle Rope operator

I have a 10 year service award and a national emergency medal for being deployed to the Black Saturday fires.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

When I started my service I remember how well I was treated by CFA's management. I was an asset to their organisation. I was a highly regarded community member who was doing their part as a volunteer. Being at an integrated station I obviously had a large exposure to Career staff. I remember looking up to these guys and thinking how lucky I was to be trained by professional fire fighters.

I made close bonds over the 7 years I volunteered. In around 2010 I started thinking I could do more with my life. I was a qualified mechanic working at a local dealership and I felt unfulfilled. I decided literally overnight that I would change my hobby and community work into a career.

I applied and 12 months later was accepted into CFA in May 2011. It was the happiest moment of my life. I then completed my recruit course and went out on station to Melton and again had a great relationship with the volunteers but now from another perspective.

What I soon found was our relationship with our management was in fact terrible. We were a burden to the organisation. Why should they want to look after us? In their eyes we seemed to be a financial hassle and they felt our work could be done for free by volunteers. We are militant, we are uncompromising, we are thugs, we are money hungry and we don't care for the community. These are all things I was labelled. I can assure you I have never changed. I am as passionate about serving my community as I was when I joined at 16 years old.

It doesn't matter what title we hold, Volunteer or career, we all do it for the same underlying reasons, because we want to contribute to society. And let me assure you we do it well. We are professional people who take pride in what we do.

I am currently just beginning as an instructor on the first ever joint CFA/MFB recruit course. Let me tell you the fact that we aren't amalgamated in beyond belief. We have two professional services that do the same job but yet have so many pointless differences. Our hose is different, or trucks are different, our PPC is different our policies are different and the list goes on.

We are getting slowly aligned but it is well overdue. We are brothers and sisters with our MFB companions but yet we can't be at one because we don't want to change an outdated model because it my upset people.

When it comes down to it the fire services reform is the best thing that can happen to Victorians in relation to fire services. We need to move past egos and people claiming territories and look objectively at how we can best serve the community. When can you ever say that is a bad thing? How can having a guaranteed response of 7 firefighters be a bad thing? What if it was your family? Would you care what badge is on the shoulder of a firefighter? Or would you just be happy that enough people turned up in under 8 minutes to help save your family? That is what truly matters.

Volunteers will still continue to serve the community no different to how they do now. How can improving staff response change that? If the surge capacity drops it is because volunteers don't want to turn up anymore. And if they don't respond because they are unhappy that career staff are "taking their role" they are surely in it for the wrong reason. Gone are the days of this is our area we are in charge. The community deserves better than that. They need what's best and passing this bill is the best thing for Victoria.

I work with some great Volunteers and that won't change because it's who I am, I will try my hardest to get along with anyone regardless of who they are. One thing I cannot accept, however, is the way we have been dragged through the mud and hung out to dry. I take personal offence when someone who has never walked in my shoes or seen the things I have seen tries to criticise me. I would never do that to anyone and all I want is to be actually valued and respected the way I respect others. I live by the saying treat others how you want to be treated.

We do an absolute power of work at Geelong City and anywhere I have worked to be the best we can in our work and to be leaders in our community. We train constantly to hone our skills and we drive it on shift all the time. We don't deserve the reputation we have been given by some members of the public and it needs to stop as the damage on our morale and mental health is only getting worse, not to mention the effect on our families.

This bill also gives us the rights to have legislation in place if we ever get sick because of the work we do. The bills need to be together because they are equally important as each other. Not to mention being blocked multiple times by the opposition in parliament. We aren't stupid and we see through the petty tactics that have been employed. I'll be honest in my opinion the opposition think we are a burden to the state. They hate unions and they hate that we fight back and they hate that we won't back down. They didn't believe that there is a link between firefighters and cancer. Anyone with half an idea can see what we are exposed to dangerous chemicals at every fire we go to, more so than any member of the

public. Unfortunately when you work in a high stress dangerous job you need to stand up and say enough is enough.

Volunteers directly benefit from this legislation with presumptive legislation and with a large injection of funding to ensure they continue to strive as an organisation. So in essence we all win. We end the disputes have and we can go back to doing our job. That's all we want to do.

Look at the Ambulance crisis for example. There was as much hype about it as with us but do you here any news on them? They are happy as they have ever been. Their board was sacked and their dispute was resolved and now they are happy and their standards are only getting better.

In closing I thank you for reading my submission and I hope you appreciate it comes from the heart and isn't scripted.

The community benefits from having a modern standardised service with complete interoperability. Its 2017 and we need to move away from outdated models. You only have to read the multiple enquiries and studies to prove that change is needed. It's all been documented and studied. The evidence is there and it shouldn't be ignored.

The time is now and you have the power to make a fantastic change which provides the community with a great service and in the end of the day we all want, to go home safe at night to our families.

Yours sincerely,

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