

**Kirra Vanzetti**

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**From:** ARCHIBALD, John [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 5 July 2017 8:46 AM  
**To:** LCSC  
**Subject:** Submission to Fire Service Reforms.

John Archibald  
[REDACTED]

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is John Archibald of [REDACTED]. I have been an MFB firefighter since 1990 and a volunteer firefighter with limited involvement with Glenburn CFA since 2008. Since 2012, I have held the rank of MFB Station Officer and am currently rostered to Ringwood 'C' platoon.

I am writing to urge your support the planned reforms for Victoria's fire services and believe this to be an extraordinary opportunity to modernise Victoria's fire service ensuring the safety of Victorians and its firefighters in the rapidly changing landscape of emergency response, now and into the future.

With more than 26 years with MFB, I have worked at many of Melbournes Fire Stations. Promoted to Station Officer in 2012, I have worked as a Station Officer at Melbournes Eastern Hill as well the outer Northern suburbs (Somerton) working closely with CFA career staff and volunteers at Craigieburn, Epping and Greenvale. At my current work location (Ringwood) also find myself working alongside CFA staff and volunteers at South Warrandyte, Bayswater, Mooroolbark, Montrose and Boronia.

An important concern for me as an OIC when responding to fire calls is, *do I have adequate response and support for this emergency I am attending?* Under the current arrangements, and if responding with CFA volunteers, the answer to this question is unclear. I understand not every location in Victoria can be serviced by paid professional firefighters however it is clear that much of Victoria is inadequately serviced and have been for a long time. I see these reforms as a golden opportunity to correct many issues that have accumulated over time.

In my home life and as a committed and respected member of my home town and the broader Yea community I frequently find myself engaged with CFA volunteers and others socially and at school and sporting events etc. Yea is around 90 km North East of Melbourne in an area entirely serviced by CFA volunteers. Many of these associates know of my position as a career firefighter. Lately discussion regularly gravitates toward firefighting and the proposed reforms. With the delicate nature of the perceived negative impact on volunteers, one thing has become very apparent to me. The vast majority of CFA volunteers, members of the public and even my own family have a completely different view of what firefighting looks like than I do. Firefighting to me does not have a "busy season" and is more than putting "wet stuff on red stuff" or "helping a mate out". These quotes are typical responses from people who lack full understanding. Even close members of my family need to be continually reminded of the complexity of my occupation. I do not think less of anyone for thinking this way.

*To understand the deeper complexities of modern firefighting, you need to be immersed in our industry fully to appreciate what is actually involved. Few people other than firefighters are immersed in this way.*

Please take the time to read some key points I would like to raise:

- Modern work environments have greater emphasis on OH&S. Employers and employees have greater responsibility to provide, implement and document safe work practices and potential risks. Firefighters need guaranteed support when combating emergencies.
- Building construction. As an example, modern low rise residential buildings are constructed of lighter materials than they were decades ago. The use of softwoods and web/truss type construction has replaced hardwoods and heavy slower burning materials. Aside from burning faster, modern structures lose their integrity faster when burning and contain many more hazards. Dwellings are larger, built closer together and contain a vast number of hazards compared with decades ago. An example of a typical risk to firefighters is entanglement in data cable, ducting and electrical cable. Firefighters need guaranteed prompt and suitably qualified support when attending incidents such as these in order to follow our *documented procedures* for fighting structure fires internally. Not all CFA volunteers meet this criteria.
- Building contents and fuel loads. Nylons, rayon, synthetics etc. have replaced natural fibres such as cotton and wool etc. as furnishings, floor coverings, bedding, clothing, linen etc. in modern houses. These contents emit toxins *hundreds of times* more toxic than they did decades ago. Firefighters can protect their airway using Breathing Apparatus and structural firefighting uniforms however toxins can still enter the body through skin contact under the structural firefighting uniform. Firefighters need the proposed presumptive legislation.
- Population density. Our population is increasing and expanding. Housing affordability is driving people outward into areas which currently have inadequate fire cover. Victoria needs the ability to review its boundaries for permanent fire cover.
- Are we keeping pace with modern expectations? Victorians are paying a Fire Service Levy. Are they getting what they are paying for? Paid professional firefighters are proven to be extraordinary value. Publicly available MFB annual reports support this. As I recall, this was further illustrated as far back as with the *1994 Public Bodies Review Committee enquiry into the MFB* which compared two similar population/industry/risk profiles. One serviced by CFA volunteers and the other by MFB professionals.
- Ageing community. More older Victorians will be living in care facilities. These facilities will be driven outward and follow housing affordability as the aged are obviously unsuited to high rise living. These facilities are likely to be constructed using the afore mentioned modern building techniques and furnished with modern furnishings. It is possible many aged care facilities are already poorly serviced by inadequate fire coverage leaving these people vulnerable.

These are just a handful of points. I believe there are many more.

As a resident and landowner in country Victoria, at least an hour from any paid firefighters, I consider myself a stakeholder in CFAs performance. After all, it will be CFA volunteers that are protecting my wife and children at home and our family farm when I am at work. Do I feel more exposed by these proposed reforms? No. I don't believe anything will be different.

I see these proposed reforms having only a positive affect on CFA volunteers in my local community. As it stands now, I have solid relations with CFA volunteers locally. Our family farm is on occasions used for CFA training. I expect that over time, CFA volunteers will have access to potentially 3 times as many FRV secondees bringing 3 times more experience to CFA. Unboxing and re-packing Victorias fire services will enable CFA volunteers to continue the work they have always done uninterrupted. They will also be able to begin capturing data and statistics that truly reflect the work they do as an exclusively volunteer organisation and carry on protected by the proposed presumptive legislation. I also acknowledge and respect that change may be hard for some individuals with deep connections with their CFA past but emotion needs to be removed from the important work firefighters do. I am excited to be on board with modernising Victorias fire services and bringing them into a contemporary era. Hopefully this will also bring an end to the disharmony that has existed for an extended period of time across so many levels of both organisations.

I look forward to being involved in FRV and CFA should these proposed reforms be passed.

Regards

John Archibald  
Station Officer  
10003

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