

Submission to the Fire Services Reform Select Committee

I AM SEEKING CONFIDENTIALITY ON THIS SUBMISSION

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I have been a career firefighter with CFA for 17 years and have previously been a Volunteer for 18 years. I have worked at numerous integrated locations across Victoria at both stations on the outer metropolitan and Regional centres. I believe I have a good understanding of the organisations operations from both a volunteer and career perspective.

From my experience working at integrated locations it is clear that career staff are not utilised as effectively as they could be. At the location I work, we travel up to 10min radius from the fire station to perform emergency medical response activities assisting Ambulance Victoria, however for some fire events we will only travel 2min from our fire station as the response boundaries currently designate the area as a neighbouring Volunteer brigade only response. This prevents the community from receiving the best possible fire response, even when they are paying (via the fire service levy) to have staff within the CFA. Due to the increased time pressures and limited availability of volunteers on occasions fail to respond within the allocated response time and only after 6mins of time has passed will the career staff from the neighbouring brigade be responded. This is a significant delay and could make a considerable difference to the outcomes of an emergency incident.

The standardised training conducted by career firefighters ensures that all members of the crew are both trained and proficient in all the required areas of emergency response attended by the fire service. The time pressures on volunteers, increasing call rate due to population growth and the ever increasing complexity of the fire fighters role mean that volunteer only response is becoming increasingly challenging, particularly on the outer Melbourne fringe. To effectively resolve emergency incidents, both suitable numbers of crew and suitably trained crew need to respond. Due to the nature of the volunteer system both the quantity and skills mix of a responding volunteer crew cannot be assured. Within the Knox area increasing population density and numerous new multi-story residential units is meaning a rapid response of crews with suitable skills is required, the current service delivery standards measures the response times of appliances and do not consider the skills mix of the crew on that appliance. This skills mix can severely limit the ability to effectively resolve the incident and often requires multiple appliances to be responded in order to obtain a mix of suitably qualified people.

Several years ago a trial of radial response was conducted in the Knox group area, this trial would respond the two closest appliances, based on travel time as well as the brigade who's area the incident was located in. During this trial there were numerous examples where the two quickest appliances on scene were clearly two appliances responding from career locations (both MFB and CFA). This concept gave the fastest possible response time and also ensured that an initial response of seven crew with suitable skills to resolve emergencies and undertake search and rescue and firefighting operations inside structure fires. However at the end of this trial period it reverted to the

previous response arrangements based on the fact that they are volunteer brigade areas. I feel that an independent group to consider response boundaries, as proposed by the fire services reform will ensure the community is receiving both the best possible response but also the best value from the firefighting resources they are paying for.

The relationship between volunteers and career staff has been strained at times, but has suffered considerable damage recently. The proposed reform offers the opportunity to 'draw a line in the sand' and move forward with rebuilding a more harmonious and productive relationship. The opportunities for current integrated brigades to have co location within existing facilities will ensure that volunteers will continue to be able to serve their local communities and remain part of CFA, many have indicated their support for the plan as it is the opportunity to move forward.

In conclusion I believe the fire services reform to currently to be the only effective way forward and provide a long term solution to resolving the current challenges in the fire service.