

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

My name is Brendan Mifsud and I am a professional firefighter with the Country Fire Authority, currently stationed at Dandenong. I have been employed by the CFA for 3 years and hold the rank of Qualified Firefighter. Prior to being employed by the CFA I was employed by the Royal Australian Air Force as a Firefighter and by the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue service as a Retained Firefighter. I have also previously been a Volunteer firefighter in the CFA and with the Katherine Volunteer Bushfire Brigade.

Victoria's fire services are well overdue for reform as we operate under the most out dated and ineffective model of fire service delivery in the country. Speaking to members of the community they have no idea that their standard of fire coverage varies significantly depending on where you are. This is not a reflection of the level of commitment or dedication of either volunteer or professional firefighters, it is a reflection of a fire service model well past it's used by date.

There is no other state in the country where professional firefighters are split over two organisations and where the fire service boundaries are along a single line.

The current CFA/MFB boundaries were set in the 1950's but had changed very little since the 1890's. Back then Dandenong was a country town with a population of approximately 1000 people. Fast forward to today and Dandenong has a population of 28,484 which is forecasted to increase to 43,295 by 2024. It has a number of high rise buildings, apartment blocks, hospitals and one of the largest industrial areas in the country, yet is still classified as "country area of Victoria" for the purposes of fire coverage. It may be tempting to rationalise this as out dated in description only as the Dandenong Fire Station is staffed 24/7 by professional Firefighters, however the system these firefighters work under is woefully inadequate.

The CFA describes itself as a "volunteer based emergency service, supported by career firefighters" and this doctrine underpins the management and culture of the organisation. The CFA would say that at Dandenong our role is to support the volunteers there, implying that it is the volunteers shouldering the workload and we are just there to help out. The reality is that we respond to emergencies and are supported by the volunteers at significant incidents. Dandenong responds to around 2500 calls per year and it would be unreasonable to expect volunteers to respond to all these incidents. What occurs is that we have a small group of dedicated, active volunteers who provide additional support at large fires, strike team deployments and Total Fire Ban day crewing. This would not change under the proposed fire service reform but we will be able to work under a system that provides us with a safer workplace and a service for the community.

The CFA's ideology creates an country fire service or that reluctantly masquerades as an urban fire service covering 60% of metropolitan Melbourne but desperately attempting keep its focus on rural firefighting. This is why the CFA is the only fire service in the country to not conduct Compartment Fire Behaviour Training (CFBT) for structure fires. It does not follow industry best practice it terms of minimum staffing at incidents, High rise firefighting, Breathing Apparatus (BA) accountability and the provision of a BA safety team or Rapid Intervention Team at incidents where BA is utilised.

The CFA still operates a system of "primary" areas, where each brigade has an assigned area and it is up to the Captain of the brigade who decides what other brigades respond to incidents within "their" area. This may have made sense in a rural setting with large distances between towns and brigades but is completely inappropriate within an urban setting or large regional town. These areas are based on historical boundaries that haven't changed as stations have moved or professional firefighters assigned there. In Dandenong the boundary between our "primary" area and Noble Park Volunteer fire brigade's area is 1.3Km from Dandenong Fire Station. Now if your house was on fire on the Dandenong side of the boundary we could respond all our appliances, being two pumpers, a heavy rescue and a 42m Ladder Platform. However if your house was on fire on the other side of the road you would just get one pumper, that up until earlier this year was crewed by only two firefighters. This would mean that we would regularly attend fires without the ability to perform rescues and extinguish the fire until we received backup from Springvale or Noble Park or we would do so at extreme risk to ourselves. This is because Noble Park's captain does not want too many Professional firefighters responding into "his area" and putting out the fires before their volunteers can arrive. This is even though Noble Park regularly fails to respond and when they do actually respond they rarely have firefighters who are trained in BA. This was demonstrated at the Commonwealth Bank Fire in Springvale which despite being a mass casualty incident with multiple people trapped in the burning bank Noble Park took more than 40 minutes to respond and when they finally did they had no one who could drive the truck under lights and sirens or anybody qualified in BA. We are being placed at unnecessary risk due to this policy and the public are not getting an appropriate service from its fire service.

The problem of allowing brigade Captains to determine response tables was highlighted by an incident I attended in Narre Warren North (see attached for incident details). At 1505 on 14/10/2016 Dandenong Rescue and Narre Warren North rural fire brigade were paged to a car accident with a possible persons trapped on Belgrave-Hallam Rd in Narre Warren North. This incident was 1.4km from Narre Warren North Fire Station. At 1518, 12 minutes after the initial call Narre Warren North had still not yet responded so Hallam Fire station, crewed by professional firefighters were responded. We arrived as the first emergency vehicle on scene 15 minutes after the initial call with Hallam arriving two minutes later at 1522. Usually Hallam would be automatically responded to that incident alongside Narre Warren North to ensure there is a guaranteed response, particularly given Narre Warren North's poor Service

Delivery Standard performance. However, not long before that incident the brigade's Captain or Lieutenants had changed their response tables so that Hallam was not responded. This is certainly not an isolated incident and one that occurs every single day across Victoria. **How can a system allow individuals hold their communities to ransom to protect their petty little empires?**

The current fire system in Victoria is broken and it needs to change. This reform will allow a more consistent firefighting approach across Melbourne and large regional centres. It will allow the CFA to focus on engaging, retaining and training volunteers across Victoria rather than distracted by industrial issues. Victorians deserve a fire service that will respond the quickest and most appropriate resources to their emergency. Professional Firefighters deserve to work under safe policies and procedures and Volunteer firefighters deserve an organisation that can focus on their requirements.

It's time to take emotion out of the debate and focus on the facts. It's time to bring our fire services into the 21st century.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Mifsud

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District	Inc No	Incident Name	Incident Date
08	1596667	BELGRAVE-HALLAM RD	14/10/2016 15:05:00

Date	Type	Comment
14/10/2016 15:05:34	SC:	SC: * CAR ACCIDENT - POSS PERSON TRAPPED
14/10/2016 15:08:11	MG:	MG: DANDR ACK FURTHER
14/10/2016 15:08:29	MG:	MG: DANDR PROCEEDING UNTIL FSV ON SCENE CONFIRM NIL TRAPPED
14/10/2016 15:18:57	SC:	SC: NNTH STATION - PAGE THAT ADDITIONAL CREW REQD / DANDR - PAGE HALLAM /
14/10/2016 15:18:57	SC:	SC: HALLAM STATION ACK AND RESPONDING
14/10/2016 15:19:15	MG:	MG: HALLP1 ACK FURTHER
14/10/2016 15:20:05	MG:	MG: NNTHT1 - ACK FURTHER, ONE UP
14/10/2016 15:20:49	MG:	MG: DANDR - BELGRAVE-HALLAM RD CONTROL, HALLP1 COME ON, NNTHT1 TO CANCEL
14/10/2016 15:23:01	WB:	WB: CTRL - SSO CALIGARI INC STOP

District	Inc No	Incident Name	Incident Date	Form No	Total	Entry Date	Shift Date	Shift Time	Shift Type
08	1596667	BELGRAVE-HALLAM RD	14/10/2016 15:05	1	1	14/10/2016 15:08	00/00/0000	00:00 - 00:00	

Resource Details

Category	Resource Type	Resource Name	Count	Enroute	On Scene	Returning	In Station	Out of Service	Location
PUMPERS	HEAVY	HALLAM PUMPER		14/10/2016 15:19	14/10/2016 15:22	14/10/2016 15:39	14/10/2016 15:43		
RESCUE	CFA HEAVY	DANDENONG RESCUE		14/10/2016 15:08	14/10/2016 15:20	14/10/2016 15:25	14/10/2016 15:46		
RESCUE	SUPPORT	DANDENONG SUPPORT		14/10/2016 15:12		14/10/2016 15:23	14/10/2016 15:37		
TANKERS	3.4D	NARRE WARREN NORTH TANK		14/10/2016 15:20		14/10/2016 15:21	14/10/2016 15:27		