

**\*\*\*PERSONAL DETAILS AND SUBMISSION TO REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL\*\*\***

**\*\*\*NOT TO BE PUBLISHED ON THE INQUIRY WEBSITE\*\*\***

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

My name is [REDACTED], I am a Leading Firefighter with CFA and also a volunteer member with CFA. I have been a volunteer for over 25 years and a career staff member for over 15 years.

Aside from normal rank related qualifications, I hold specialist qualifications in Trench and Confined Space Rescue, Emergency Medical Response, Ground and Air Observer, and recently undertook IMT training in the role of Situation & Analysis Officer.

I hold increments on various appliances, including Heavy Hazmat. I am currently studying towards undertaking the Station Officer Development course to gain my next promotion.

I have been awarded service awards and in particular, the National Medal and the National Emergency Medal.

I have attended over 4700 incidents during my time in CFA, including rescues, structure fires, motor vehicle accidents, medical response calls, hazardous materials incidents and grass & scrub fires. I have attended numerous campaign fires and flood events in various roles including fires before, during and after the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009. Sadly, I have also witnessed a number of fatalities, including significant multiple fatality incidents in the Lynbrook/Lyndhurst areas.

I support the proposed legislation for the following reasons and have included some examples from my own experiences:

- *Service to the community will be improved*
- *Firefighter safety will be improved*
- *Short and long term cost impacts*

*Service to the community will be improved*

In our areas of high populations and high risks, time is of the essence when dealing with emergency incidents. Whilst it is generally acknowledged that the public 'don't care who comes, as long as a fire truck does come', the reality is, at times some of those trucks are either delayed, have insufficient crewing, or worst, don't respond at all.

Having crews available with 90 second response regardless of time of day or what they are doing gives both the public the best opportunity to survive an incident, and for responding crews the best opportunity to apply their skills and effect a rescue or reduce the impact of an incident.

This response should also be free of the traditional 'boundaries' and be based on time and resource type arrangements. Why disturb 20 or 30 volunteers in the middle of the night for a minor fire or incident, when you have a station nearby that you can respond a career crew of four who don't have

to be concerned with issues of fatigue, etc that the volunteers face going about their normal lives the next day.

A number of years ago I was on duty and we were sent to assist at a suicide involving a number of vehicles on a freeway. It was in another brigade's primary area. It was determined that by sending us to the incident rather than the locals brigade, any impact from the nature of the incident would be reduced to only the three of us in the crew, and not up to 15 or more volunteers.

Another example was more recent whereby a vehicle was involved in an accident and it was reported that the driver was trapped, necessitating not only the local brigade but also a rescue appliance as well. This incident occurred close to our traditional boundary with the other brigade. As time went by, the local brigade failed to respond, and eventually informed dispatch that they only had one crew member and could dispatch please re-notify their brigade. The crewleader on the rescue appliance advised dispatch to instead respond our station. Despite the fact that our station was notified over 10 minutes after the initial call, our appliance still arrived on scene before the local brigade eventually responded. Fortunately the person involved only suffered minor injuries.

A few months ago my shift was responded to a motor vehicle accident whereby the passenger of the vehicle bore most of the impact from the collision. Heavily pregnant and losing consciousness, the ambulance crew deemed it critical that the passenger be released from the vehicle. Fortunately the nearest Rescue appliance was only a few minutes away and the passenger was released from the vehicle. Follow-up information shortly after was that both mother and child survived, however both suffered serious complications from the collision. Both appliances came from staffed stations.

Now imagine this event occurring only 15-20 minutes northeast of this location. Except this time due to the dispatch arrangements, the response is 1 staff appliance, 3 volunteer brigades (2 fire, 1 rescue) and 1 volunteer rescue unit. Bearing in mind that the staff and rescue resources have further to travel. It's in the middle of a workday, and it's well known that availability of volunteers during this time can be limited, no fault of theirs, it's simply the way it is.

On board the staff appliance is a set of portable hydraulic cutting equipment and associated fittings. Under current work practices, can only be used for forcible entry. This means that the equipment can be used for forcing open doors, etc in buildings, and for opening bonnets etc of vehicles that are on fire. We can also use the equipment for forcing apart doors or other fittings to assist in rescuing people, namely the likes of elevator doors, balustrading on handrails. The equipment does have some capability for use in vehicle rescue, however our training is only limited to forcible entry, non-Road Accident Rescue (RAR).

In the above scenario, again the responding ambulance crew determine the patient to be time critical. However, the nearest rescue units are some distance away, with no guarantee of response.

Under the current Road Accident Rescue (RAR) arrangements, if the patient is deemed time critical or there is a significant threat to the safety of the trapped person/s, then in the absence of a RAR crew/appliance, a non-RAR crew can effect a rescue.

In our proposed EBA, there are clauses included that allow us to undertake appropriate RAR training, and make further use of the portable hydraulic cutting equipment carried on the appliance. Under the current arrangement, the staff appliance could effect a rescue, however, under the proposed

EBA, they would have received additional training, and be able to effect a rescue more confidently and safely.

It is important to understand that the Rescue appliances that would be notified of this call would still be dispatched. It's not about taking 'jobs' off people, it's about improving service delivery to the public.

### *Firefighter Safety will be improved*

In my time with CFA I have attended numerous calls where the numbers and skillset of personnel varies from low to high. When I first started as a career firefighter the minimum crewing on our truck was just two, an officer and a firefighter. And at the time, this truck was going to over 1500 calls per year. I recall my OIC of the station at the time commenting that some sort of audit had been done by an external business and they highlighted that given the workload we had, it would be acceptable to have one firefighter killed per year, and we would still be 'efficient'.

Just over a year later I attended a shop fire and was struck by bricks and steel when a section of wall collapsed. There were only two of us on that side of the building at the time. Despite how I was feeling at the time, fortunately my injuries were minor. After a short time off work I was able to return to normal duties.

Christmas day 2015, and we were responded to a garage fire. Only three of us on the first appliance and I was tasked with stopping the fire from spreading to neighbouring houses and cars, and to try and cool down the fully involved garage housing three cars and various tools etc.

We were the only personnel on scene for a period of time and had to contend not only with the fire itself, but also have a member of the public decide to drive over our hoses in-order to get past our truck, thus endangering anyone near the truck and also myself with potentially losing my water supply whilst in an area involved heavily with fire.

Unfortunately, due to having to manoeuvre hoses etc myself and the awkwardness of the incident scene, I sustained a back injury that put me in hospital and off work, barely able to move for three months. During my recovery I developed further complications and wound up being off work for another six months, with multiple stays in hospital and extended in home treatment.

I then spent nine months on light duties, before finally being able to return to normal operational duties less than a month ago.

This has had a severe impact on my personal and work life, causing great stress to myself and my immediate family. It has affected relationships with some work colleagues, and has impacted some of my workmates (caused them stress witnessing the process I have gone through during my treatment and recovery. I am still recovering from the mental and emotional impact as well as the physical.

This is why we need to ensure that appropriately trained and appropriately resourced crews are responded to these types of events. It ensures that we do our jobs more efficiently and effectively, and we reduce the risk of hurting ourselves, or worse, not going home at all.

*Short and long term cost impacts*

I'll be honest, I don't have the financial training and knowledge required to create budgets and forecast costings for an organisation like a fire service, but I do know that by restructuring the fire services, improvements can be made in how money is spent.

Understandably, there will be some upfront costs, particularly with 'rebranding' and associated activities. That's a given, and how many times have other government agencies gone through a rebranding process. Whilst I haven't seen any figures, there generally hasn't been any sort of outcry about the cost associated with it.

And with the restructure, we are simply moving two groups of personnel together from two existing organisations. Any recruitment is associated with current recruitment programmes already in place.

Over recent times both fire services have been progressively matching or aligning with each other items such as, uniforms, appliances, protective equipment, communications technology etc. We use common suppliers, undertake joint acquisition programs as per government policy, thus achieving more cost effective purchasing both upfront and over the service life of the equipment, uniforms etc.

The growth of the fire services, and in particular any paid service, should be aligned with increased population and risk/activity growth. This generally means that there is a larger pool of money collected through the Fire Services Levy.

Properly planned and designed fire stations, incorporating future needs upfront, and environmental credentials, make the long term running costs more efficient. I work in a station that has had three major renovations in the last six years, renovations that should have been incorporated in the original design.

The proposed Infrastructure Committee, if managed properly, can make effective savings by ensuring our facilities are designed and built taking into consideration concerns such as those mentioned above.

*I thank the committee for considering my submission.*

