

My name is Rodney Mitchell and I have been a professional MFB fire-fighter for 30 years. I am writing to express my support for the proposed fire services reform. I have been pleasantly surprised at the number of parliamentarians that have supported this fire sector reform agenda and the notion of a progressive fire sector.

I am currently an Instructor at the Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre, in Craigieburn. A matter that is related to fire service reform and interoperable fire agencies is the new Victorian Recruit courses, I have seen the changes already brought about by seeing joint recruit courses maximising interoperability, capacity, capability, resilience and sustainability through training that harnesses synergies and improves consistency of practice;

- A hazards-specific approach to training that capitalises on knowledge and expertise of the collective, which reduces duplication of effort and keeps our personnel safe; and
- An innovative and flexible training model for the collective that meets evolving community needs and expectations and examines the most effective way for fire and emergency agencies to train, maintain skills and undertake professional development.

All Victorian, career and volunteer firefighters, deserve modern fire services that meet the needs of our growing communities. Indeed, with all state governments under such pressure to ramp up construction of dwellings in the built environment, these pressures for change will only become greater, hopefully not at the cost of lives and livelihoods. To ensure the safety of all Victorians - including me as a firefighter, I ask you to please seriously consider your support for the proposed fire services reform. Reform of our fire services will ensure the safety of your constituents, who are taxpayers and all communities in our growing state. The rapid growth rate of population density and urban growth has been a challenge for governments over many years. The challenges of resourcing all facets of infrastructure needed to respond to this increased density of urban areas include building fire stations and attracting volunteers. This is a real challenge in an era when people have to work long days and weeks to support their families. Finding time to devote to worthwhile community support activities can be challenging for all concerned. Additionally, it will ensure the safety of our firefighters and stop the ever increasing, unrealistic and potentially dangerous demand being placed on volunteer firefighters because of the sprawling urban growth and density, resulting in inevitably increased emergency calls to ESOs. Improved resourcing for career and volunteer firefighters will make these emergencies safer.

Arbitrary boundaries and artificial lines drawn on maps don't stop fire. Policies and procedures that support emergency response need to be clear, logical and transparent by design to meet or exceed society's emergency needs. Government and Emergency Service Organisations (ESOs) have a statutory authority to ensure that this is the case. Take for example the baffling and disparate approach to fire service levy applied to CFA and MFB areas within the state of Victoria. By any definition, the amount of fire service levy paid by ratepayers living in CFA areas is greater by percentage than those living within the MFD (Metropolitan Fire District). Also, having already paid more in fire services levy, those ratepayers also receive a lesser service (using current delivery models) than those within the MFD. [Containment to room of origin – MFB 88% - CFA 75% , 7.7 minute response time and seven firefighters on the fireground]. What this means, is that firefighters responding in 'Country areas' areas have to wait longer for additional firefighting resources that back up all of our safe work practices and give firefighters a sense of relief when support resources are on the way. The Incident controller (IC) will execute a plan of strategies and tactics to bring the emergency to a safe conclusion. This will be drastically altered and much more defensive, if back up resources aren't BA trained (as is the case in many volunteer responses) or within a reasonable

travel distance (7.7 minutes). The strategies and tactics will be even more defensive if seven firefighters aren't available on the fireground before the fire escapes the room of origin.

I believe the Victorian State Government should be congratulated for recognising and embracing the current drive for fire sector reform. They have shown the leadership and vision lacking in recent Victorian Governments. The very old delivery model that relies on the timely arrival of volunteer firefighters is sufficient in areas that have minimal infrastructure, commerce and industry. The simple fact is that waiting for volunteer response is costing a fortune in damage from fire and other emergencies and lost productivity due to resultant loss from preventable damage.

I also respectfully ask that you give consideration to my request, to further support the fire services with the introduction of presumptive legislation laws to protect fire service personnel in the case of occupational cancer. In my 38 plus year career with MFB, I have sadly attended the funerals of too many colleagues (many of whom were friends) who have died from various occupational related cancers. Both are needed to be endorsed and implemented by Parliament as soon as possible. A days delay, could cause the unsupported death of another firefighter. This support is important to me and my colleagues, career firefighters and volunteers.

Victoria's fire services' boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this out-dated model, 35 areas are incorrectly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised, commercialised and or industrialised. Plenty, Eltham, Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia, Caroline Springs and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas'. These 'country areas' desperately require a modern fire service delivery model as part of the current fire service reform agenda, as they are highly urbanised areas. This structural change will facilitate a rapid eight minute fire response, with seven professional career firefighters on two fire trucks, which are the minimum standards needed in highly urbanised areas.

Thank you for your time.

Rodney Mitchell