

To whom it may concern,

My name is Brenton Smith. I am a Leading Firefighter (Station Officer Qualified) at Ballarat City Fire Station. I am acting in the role of Station Officer Recruit and Continuation Training. I have been employed by CFA for 10 years. Previous to that I was a volunteer at Ballarat City fire Station holding positions of Lieutenant and Group Communications Officer of the Eureka Group. I took on the role at the age of 16 and did so for seven years. My father is a long time CFA Volunteer and is currently an operational volunteer at the age of 70. I have been involved with CFA for almost all of my life, with my father being employed by the CFA as long as I can remember as a motor mechanic.

I spent a lot of my youth spending time in rural regional cities such as Ararat and Stawell. During this time I was exposed to the vital role CFA volunteers play in the community.

I thought best to explain my point of view on the fire services reform, to simply share my observations of the last 17 or so years.

During my years as a CFA volunteer at an integrated station the volunteer component of the brigade was very active. I would usually respond with my father and it would be very uncommon to not see another volunteer at the fire or incident working alongside Career firefighters. I noticed this slowly decline over the 7 years. When I was successful in obtaining a position within CFA I was stationed at Bendigo for 2 years. When I returned to Ballarat I was shocked at the rate of decline in volunteer numbers and more importantly attendance both within Ballarat City and the entire Eureka Group.

I have since seen this decline even more. It was once an expectation that the volunteer appliance would be on scene promptly, now as an incident controller I need to plan for the fact it is unlikely the appliance will attend in a timely manner if at all. I

Now that I have a family of my own I can understand why this is the case, time is precious and our busy lives consume more of it. The level of commitment at busy urban brigades is extreme. This is no fault of any volunteer but rather the unrealistic expectation placed on them. This is evident in a fatal fire I attended in Mount Helen. On this occasion the second appliance on scene was from Ballarat City (career) and it was second by only a few seconds. The distance travelled was about 15 kilometres. The closest fire station (volunteer) was 500 meters away. This lady in my opinion was never given a chance of survival. This occurred in Mount Helen (Ballarat). Prior to this we used to speak about service delivery amongst my peers. The statement was that it will take someone to die before those in positions of power will listen. That fatality occurred in September 2014 and things have not changed. Decisions on service delivery are still made with the feelings of Volunteers at the forefront instead of community safety. An example of this is support to calls for alarm within the Ballarat City Primary Fire District. These calls were once a 2 brigade response. This was Ballarat City and one volunteer brigade. The response was shared amongst the volunteer brigades however they continued to fail due to the high call rates. The decision was then made and is recorded in the Eureka Group minutes to make these calls a single brigade response. This was purely to reflect the brigade Service Delivery Standards maintain a positive image, when in reality where there were two brigades and numerous Ballarat City Volunteers responding to some of the biggest risks in Ballarat (hospitals and nursing homes) there is now one brigade and very limited volunteer response from Ballarat city Volunteers.

I have friends who are volunteers at rural brigades which respond to around 3 calls per year. When this occurs they respond as usual and do a wonderful job. Based on this I do not believe surge capacity will be influenced by any restructure to Victoria's Fire Service. The volume of calls is not what keeps volunteers at stations.

I want to stress the decline in service delivery in my opinion is through no fault of any individual but rather the current CFA structure. With the proposed restructure I feel in my experience that volunteerism would in fact increase due to the reduced workload in larger areas.

Kind regards,

Brenton Smith

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]