

Chris Whelan


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Dear Parliamentary Committee,

My name is Christopher Whelan; I work as a staff member for the CFA at Cranbourne Fire Station and hold the position of Qualified Firefighter.

Before joining the CFA I worked for the UK Fire and Rescue Service for 15 years and Victoria SES in a number of different roles within Melbourne CBD and rural Victoria.

I support the Fire Service Reform for a number of different reasons as follows;

Having worked for different agencies both in Victoria and overseas I have a wide experience with different service delivery models and the issues they face.

The current service delivery modal delivered by the CFA is a patchwork version running on from 60-year-old legislation, which was designed for covering "Country Victoria". This is fundamentally not a serviceable model at its basic roots due to the area it serves no longer being "Country Victoria". The state has undergone massive growth in this time transforming these areas into heavily populated outer metropolitan areas and large regional city's.

To deliver a first class service to these areas the service delivery needs to be updated without delay.

It goes without saying that the volunteers within all agencies do an amazing job with the time they give to these organisations and the dedication they show to protecting the public in their local area. However, you also have a responsibility to protect these volunteers by not asking them to give too much and put stress on their own jobs and family lives as their local call rates grow. Cranbourne's local volunteer brigades are already asking for their call rates to be cut back.

Volunteer's current incident response will remain and they will have the full support of the staff crews responding alongside delivering them a safe working environment.

I could give you different examples of incidents that I have seen while working for the CFA and SES with regard to inconsistent volunteer response but I don't feel that this would achieve anything productive and I am sure you have many examples.

The simple point is until you have been on the wrong end of an emergency situation you will never understand the feeling of being trapped and desperate for help to arrive. I can assure you that if it was you or a family member in this situation you would give everything you have to get a response on scene as soon as humanly possible and have that response being as rapid and effective as can be.

Decisions were made in this industry within Victoria a long time ago that are not allowing the Fire and Rescue organisations to deliver a world class service to the densely populated areas they serve.

This is your chance to turn this around and make Victoria's Fire and Rescue Service one of the best in the world.

In the modern world of Fire and Rescue you need to have minimum numbers of personnel on an incident ground for command and control, crew safety and effective operations. Coming from overseas where we have had many firefighter deaths over the years this is something I would highly recommend that you learn from other's tragedies and not wait until it happens here to start the learning process afresh. A minimum of 7 on the fire ground is an absolute minimum.

The standard response time to get fire appliances on scene is also a very important factor to note. This is not only due to the obvious time requirements to save lives and property at an incident but also it is vital to get crews onto the incident ground within this time frame as rapid intervention will prevent extended escalation of the incident and it will stop putting firefighters lives at risk as they will be able to take effective action before extreme fire behaviour phenomenon such as backdraught and flashovers have time to build.

As a final note, I'm concerned there are staff stations that are currently not allowed to respond beyond a very short distance away from their station due to volunteers choosing who goes into their response area. As we are dealing with life or death situations and seconds count, I feel all staff stations should have a standard timed response footprint. If volunteers are unavailable to respond then saveable lives could be lost by continuing with the current ego driven response arrangement.

Should you have any questions in regards to the above please feel free to contact me to discuss further.

Yours Faithfully

Chris Whelan