

Dear assistant clerk committees,

Inquiry into the firefighters presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment (reform bill) 2017

I am a leading firefighter and have been employed by the Country Fire Authority since 2006. Before this I was a volunteer at the Belmont fire brigade. I am currently stationed at Geelong City Fire Brigade where I have had the pleasure of working for the last six years.

Some of the specialist qualifications I have attained since graduating are; Rope technician, High and steep angle rescue, confined space rescue, road rescue, 42m Bronto.

I would like to start my submission by expressing some of my thoughts regarding the current situation being faced by many career firefighters. It took me over five years to successfully become employed by CFA. I wanted to become a firefighter so bad that I put my previous career on hold to focus my efforts into doing anything possible to assist me in my dream. When I was called by CFA and told back in 2006 that I was a successful applicant I literally trembled and got very emotional. This was the best moment of my life! I use to be filled with so much pride when telling someone what I did for a living. I use to love filling out forms at places such as the dentist, doctors etc when they ask you to write your occupation. FIREFIGHTER I would write, feeling so proud of the occupation that is so well respected in the community - or at least it use to be. When asked what I do for a living now, I tentatively explain what I do, just waiting for the inevitable negative comments in reply.

Over the past 5 years I have seen more negative press articles, Facebook posts, and attacks from Politicians than anyone could possibly imagine – and it is still going on as I write this submission.

The biggest problem is that when it comes from politicians (especially those who use such aggressive language), it validates the belief in the public eye that it is ok to do the same. Very little of this is based on fact. It's as if winning an argument is more important than facts and truth.

Has the attack on my profession and colleges had an impact on my life? YES...

I have been abused by the public, followed into service stations and grocery stores and confronted by people demanding an explanation! I have been called a thug, a dinosaur and list as long as my arm of other obscenities that I do not feel comfortable putting in print.

It has sadly gotten to the point where I refuse to wear my name tag whilst working and I ensure I am not in uniform outside of work. By far the worst repercussion of these attacks is that it has caused a fracture inside my family.

Are these reforms needed? I believe absolutely, it will be a positive for both organizations.

There have been countless instances where the appliance I have been on has arrived at a fire scene first - during these events there is no guarantee of a volunteer response. Most recently my brigade responded to a house fire with a reported persons missing in Geelong West - only one volunteer was able to respond to the fire. As this was the case the Station officer had to request additional resources from full time brigades, which intern draws needed recourses out of the area they are designated to protect. Whenever issues like this are raised, it gets called an attack on Volunteers - It is NOT - It is simply the way things are; where everybody has less time than they once did.

The workload expected on CFA volunteers in highly urbanized areas is completely unreasonable. Not having a guaranteed support crew respond being able to ensure safe levels on the fireground is quite simply not good enough. I have the right to feel safe at work whilst doing a dangerous job. I should have the knowledge that there is help on its way if I find myself in trouble. These reforms will go a long way in ensuring adequate response of numbers and appliances to incidents to protect firefighters, and more importantly the community.

I'm sure you will be bombarded with facts and figures regarding many issues, but please keep these thoughts in mind. CFA is a proud organization and prides itself on being a volunteer based organization, it always has done. But is has also struggled with the fact that the organization is changing and becoming more reliant on Career firefighters. To be completely honest I have never really felt appreciated or accepted by the CFA - It feels as if it's more of a need to have me, rather than want to have me. I strongly believe that for the CFA to flourish in its own right it should become a standalone 100% volunteer service.

The benefits of having one Career service is also very obvious - Instead of having career firefighters split over two services, with different SOPs, Procedures, regulations, appliances, uniforms, training packages etc, the efficiencies and effectiveness that will be gained if aligned cannot be ignored. Flexibility will also be increased. With more firefighters trained to the same standards and training packages members will be able to fill shortfalls much quicker than they are today. This can only be good for the community, which is why we are all here in the first place.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission and if you have any questions please feel free to call me.

Dallas Gill

Leading Firefighter

