

I am Matthew Duda, Station Officer from Mildura FS. I joined CFA as a volunteer in January 2007 and became a career fire fighter in July 2008.

While I was a volunteer fire fighter I was running the family farm and if there were fire calls this had a doubling effect on time. As the time that I was away from the business I the work was not getting done which meant that I had to either work longer hours or extra days to catch up.

Since transitioning from a volunteer to a career fire fighter, I see a huge difference in the level of proficiency in the operation. This is of no fault of the volunteers, it is a simple fact of the level of training at a career fire fighter is able to undertake in the time that they are at work and the level that is expected of the career fire fighters during the increment process which once completed endorses that fire fighter to drive and operate at incidents. The increment process requires the fire fighter to

- Understand and operate all of the systems and features on the appliance, to be able to pump water in all the different ways that the appliance can.
- The operator to know where every piece of gear on the truck is from memory and know all the capacities and dimensions of the appliance.
- The operator must also be able to give lessons on the theory of pumping about how the pumps work which will help them fault find when operating the appliance.
- They must also pass a driving test with a CFA driving instructor to ensure that they drive the vehicle to the Hendon system of vehicle control.

As a volunteer I was not put through a process that rigorous. The process was basically you have a truck licence and know how to drive the appliance then you were given the authority to drive the appliance. No checklist or checks and balances.

The level of proficiency allows the career fire fighters to operate effectively under the most trying circumstances and under the pressure of emergency situations. These tests are carried through our careers. The testing to become a leading Fire Fighter and a Station Officer is also very rigorous and occurs over a period of at least 3 months.

The state will never be able to have a 24/7 career fire fighter response from all of the fire stations across the state and I do not believe that this is the intent of the legislation. It will ensure that in busy areas where volunteers are limited in their response capability for a number of reasons such as family commitments, work commitments, difficulty accessing the station due to how busy the traffic in the area is or even time and distance to travel to the station.

The formation of the committee to review the coverage of the FRV stations will also be a big step forward for the State of Victoria, it will take the issues of kingdom building and stopping a better service delivery to the community out of the equation.

I believe that both pieces of legislation are a positive step forward for the State of Victoria.

The presumptive legislation will give security to the fire fighters that protect the community of Victoria. No matter how good our hygiene practices are the fire fighters that attend the incidents are still being exposed to the chemicals that are known to cause the cancers in the proposed legislation. In the time that I have been in the fire service I have seen a huge cultural change in the way that by products of combustion contaminated PPC/PPE is treated. Previously dirty PPC was worn as a badge of honour. Now that the dangers are known dirty PPC it is very rare that dirty PPC will be worn.

Even with these advances in cultural practices fire fighters will never be able to protect themselves completely from these chemicals. The presumptive legislation will provide a safety net if a fire fighter was to contract any of the listed cancers.

The proposed change to Fire Rescue Victoria will have a number of advantages.

1. Autonomy of both services within legislation and organisational policies and procedures.
2. Clear delineation of funding of services. Removing the concern that volunteers are missing out to pay for the career staff.
3. Smoother negotiations for EBA. Government will no longer have to negotiate the CFA and MFB agreements and there will be minimal involvement even with the federal legislation to reduce the likelihood that the issue will not get dragged into the public arena and media.
4. Better service delivery to the community by having more professional fire fighters in the areas that require specialist skills or the volunteers are unable to keep up with the call rate.
5. Cost savings with unification of structures and systems between the MFB and the Career staff from the CFA.
6. Less implied impact on the volunteer component with all EBA negotiations.
7. VFR to operate same platform appliances across the fleet, giving access to spare appliances across the state and more operators when required for long protracted incidents eg Hazelwood mine fire.
8. Availability for career fire fighters from across the state to transfer around the state as well as into and out of inner Melbourne. The only option previously was for a secondment program.
9. Economic benefits to for the community with volunteers not having to leave their places of work.

There will be difficulties in the transition, although the legislation has been proposed there are many questions about how this will the final structure will work. How the co-location of the current intergrated CFA stations will work and how the response areas will work.

These difficulties in the long term will be minor; I believe that there will be no change in the CFA surge capacity. I also believe that the volunteer members that are making the noise about being affected by this legislation don't fully understand the changes that are being proposed and the benefits to the community or are worried that their hobby will be taken away from them.

I hope that the committee looks at the facts and take the emotion out of the legislation and realise the benefits to the community of Victoria.

Regards.

Matthew Duda.