

My name is Paul Foster and I hold the rank of Commander in the MFB. In my current role I am responsible for ensuring that our Fire Fighters conduct skills maintenance and skills acquisition training in the South East Metro Region of Melbourne.

Over nearly 30 years of being a professional Fire Fighter I have always strived to protect the community I have worked in but also, on many occasions the Victorian community at large. This has involved me working with members of every Emergency Service Organisation in this state.

I have held functional positions in many Incident Control Centres [ICCs] and have also been deployed as an Incident Controller at times. This has involved emergencies such as fires, floods and storms.

I have worked with professional and volunteer staff on countless occasions at ICCs and I have always found that in my experience we all work together seamlessly irrespective of whether we come from an MFB background or a CFA volunteer background.

It is only when I have held the role of an On shift Operations Commander that I have found the divide between professional Fire Fighters and volunteer Fire fighters to be problematic at best and a threat to life and property at worst. When volunteers are responded with professional Fire fighters, a situation is created whereby once the volunteers have arrived on the Fireground I, as Incident Controller are unable to use them effectively. In an emergency situation I require all Fire Fighters to be competent in the use of Breathing Apparatus in order to perform a rescue or just to protect themselves from smoke in order to extinguish the fire. With a volunteer Fire Fighter arrives on scene I usually find that I am unable to use them in any meaningful way as they cannot, in most cases perform the basic Fire Fighting tasks that are required to protect the public and just as importantly look after their own health and safety.

Some of the volunteers that arrive are as professional and as well trained as the Fire Fighters from my organisation but they are in the minority. When I have a Fire appliance with professional staff arrive at a job I know exactly who and what their capacities are and that they can be deployed in a timely and efficient way to effectively save life, protect property and protect their own health and safety.

With a volunteer Fire appliance arrives it is hit and miss to what Fire fighters will arrive and the levels of their competency they possess. This results in a loss of valuable time in getting crews to work and therefore placing the public and other crews in danger.

In an ever increasing urban environment with its population increases and the resulting increase in infrastructure, I believe that it is a requirement that Victorians have a Fire service that is highly trained, prompt and effective in saving life and property. This is only achievable by the creation of one professional fire service to better service the ever increasing demands of the ever expanding metro Melbourne and our Regional centres.

The support of the CFA as a volunteer only Fire Fighting service is also a necessary part of the proposed plan.

The skills and dedication of many of our volunteer Fire Fighters should be harnessed and concentrated so they can still play an effective and vital role in helping to protect fellow Victorians.

In closing I am in support of the creation of one professional Fire Fighting service and volunteer Fire Fighting service in the rural and country areas of Victoria. It's about time we had the fire service that all Victorians deserve.

Regards

Paul Foster

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