

## Submission in support of the Fire Services Reform Bill

My name is Luke Whittaker and I have been employed with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) since February 2016. I completed recruit training in June 2016 and have since been stationed at Hihett and Mentone fire stations and currently stationed at the Windsor Fire station.

I am fully supportive of the Fire Services Reform Bill currently before the committee. I believe this reform is a great opportunity to significantly improve public safety and firefighter safety.

During my brief career I have with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade I have attended numerous fires/incidents involving high-rise buildings, industrial premises, restaurants, houses, apartment buildings, car/truck accidents and hazardous materials.

My family and I have lived in Mt Eliza on the Mornington Peninsula for more than 20 years until I moved to Richmond late last year. In my opinion, Frankston and Mornington should no longer be designated as 'country' areas. The same can be said of Springvale, Dandenong, Rowville, Boronia, Cranbourne, Craigieburn, Melton, Geelong and many other areas should also not be zoned as 'country' areas. The population and infrastructure in these areas is significant and these communities should have the appropriate fire service. The Victorian public cannot accept 'non-attendance' or 'delayed-attendance' when they call an emergency service. This is critical in the event of fire, the scientific fact that fire will reach 'flashover' (point of no return) of a typical urban structure in approximately 8 minutes and place occupants at risk cannot be ignored.

The fact that the boundaries currently used throughout the MFB and CFA were introduced 60 years ago and not changed despite a significant growth in Victoria's population shows how outdated these boundaries are. The estimated population of 4.82 million at the end of June is more than triple the estimated population of 1.5 million in 1956 when the boundaries were introduced. With the proposed changes, a Fire District Review Panel is to be established which will be critical in changes for the future and ensuring the community have the highest standard of fire service available to them.

The 'urban fire response' model includes an 8 minute response time and 7 professional firefighters on two fire trucks - this is the minimum standard needed for emergency response to maximise the potential to save lives and minimise damage to property, this is also critical in regards to firefighter safety. The requirement of 7 professional firefighters on-scene has been established due to the roles/tasks each firefighter must perform. Being undermanned at any kind of job puts firefighters at

a much greater risk of injury, as well as causing a significant amount of stress for those on the fire ground as well as members of the community directly involved. Currently this response model is only guaranteed in Melbourne's metropolitan fire district. In this area, specially trained professional career firefighters are in fire stations that have been strategically located to be able to respond within 8 minutes.

The Fire Services Reform Bill provides the opportunity to bring together the career firefighters into one organisation (FRV) and have volunteer firefighters remain in the CFA. This would have enormous benefit to each organisation and the firefighters.

Career firefighters currently train to similar standards, operate under slightly different operational procedures and operate different equipment. If employed by the one organisation there is no reason that career firefighters cannot be operating identically to ensure consistency, efficiency and safety.

The CFA would be more independent to manage their volunteers firefighters, stations and resources, without the complications of also meeting the needs of managing career firefighters that operate in a completely different manner.

In conclusion, I again state that the Fire Services Reform Bill would be a significant improvement in public safety for Victorians and the safety of firefighters.

Yours sincerely,

Luke Whittaker

