

## Submission to Fire Services Reform

Ian Robert Morris

I would like to thank the select committee for allowing me to make this submission.

I'm a career Firefighter with 35 years experience.

I was a Firefighter/Senior Firefighter for 6 years on MFB appliances before advancing to the position of Station Officer, a position I held for 24 years.

I have been awarded MFB and Commonwealth Service medals for good conduct and years of service, received recognition from the coroner and received a unit citation for work done at the Kew Cottages fire.

I have qualifications in Breathing Apparatus, Hale Pump, EMR and Certificates 4 in Workplace Training and Assessment and other MFB qualifications.

On two occasions I have trained firefighters in Cambodia as a volunteer for an organisation called AFIRE.

My current position is Fire Services Communications Controller (FSCC) for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB). I have a number of times acted up as the Manager Operational Communications. I moved to my new role in MFB communications approximately 5 years ago.

My responsibilities in the role of FSCC are:

- To oversee Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) on the call taking and despatch for Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), to oversee the despatch of resources both within and outside the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD) and to ensure that ESTA complies with current MFB and EMV procedures as well as State and Federal legislation and procedures.
- To provide advice to Senior Command as to the relative status of MFB resources during times of high work load and endeavour to maintain the high standards of fire cover for the MFB in the metropolitan region .
- To assist where possible with the despatch of specialised resources into CFA area.

As an FSCC I'm in the unique position of being able to watch and listen to all MFB communications and most if not all the CFA communications within the CFA metropolitan regions. The MFB and CFA use totally different means of despatch and communications systems. They also use different word-back and field management systems which sometimes leads to confusion for both services.

The MFB use either a direct system to the Station to turn out the crew or they turn them out via radio if they are out of the station. The CFA, on the other hand, use a system of pagers.

The MFB automatically despatches appliances based on the location of the nearest appliance most suitably equipped for the incident.

The CFA, on the other hand, have a system that is manually configured and despatches brigades rather than individual appliances. CFA despatches could involve a number of appliances and not necessarily the nearest best equipped.

At times the CFA procedure causes some confusion for both MFB and CFA as the CFA cannot guarantee who will respond and with what qualifications.

Also we have had situations where a CFA brigade has submitted an escalation table requesting a particular MFB resource such as a Teleboom or a HART team be despatched to assist in an incident. The MFB is unaware of this request until after that unit has been despatched by the operators at ESTA.

With a prescribed response that the MFB have with a system (GARS) that has been in place for many years, MFB staff know exactly what and who will be responding to any particular event. The CFA on the other hand will respond brigades and will not know who, how many or with what skill set they will be responding.

Not an ideal situation when you have crews involved at various types of incidents requiring back up.

This reform will improve service delivery from ESTA as there will be a uniform set of despatch protocols and policies to follow. It will allow us to have a common platform for the despatch of resources across the state.

Thirty five years ago we wouldn't have been talking about reform of the fire brigades. In fact there was a "them and us" attitude, to some extent even a hostile attitude towards each other.

But we have evolved. Just as Melbourne has evolved, matured and grown, so too has the fire services and this should be allowed to continue.

Breathing apparatus and uniform have improved dramatically, appliances are bigger, more effective, faster and have a greater water capacity.

Computer Aided Despatches (CAD) to both exchange calls and automatic alarms are just some of the changes I have witnessed.

The Fire Services reform will be the biggest innovation since I joined the Fire Brigade.

As the metropolitan area has grown and the population density has increased, the area the MFB have been asked to cover has not changed. In other words the standards of fire cover have not grown with Melbourne.

The areas abutting the MFD have had huge increases in population and density but have not had the increase in stations, appliances and manpower necessary to keep pace with this growth.

Many of the CFA areas now fall into the same population density model as the MFD but they do not use the same modelling to determine response.

The model that the MFB use to determine location of resources is that in 90% of calls received, an appliance should be on scene in 7.7 minutes. This model has not been extended or modified for a number of years, although a review is currently in place.

If such a modelling and despatch processes were used by both services this would result in improved response times and accordingly improved outcomes for the urban fringe areas.

People who live in the urban fringes now pay a fire levy such as I do in metropolitan Melbourne but they do not receive the same level of fire cover such as that described above.

The CFA use a model that has not been changed and relies on station input and not a statewide response delivery service model that caters for the urbanisation of areas.

As communities grow and their populations increase the services they require are also increased. Just as utilities are increased to service these growing communities, so also should the availability of emergency services.

Please accept this submission as an honest personal and professional response. I believe that reform is necessary to provide the people of Victoria with an efficient and effective world class fire service.

Respectfully Yours

Ian Morris (FSCC)