

SUBMISSION TO THE FIRE SERVICES REFORM

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

My name is Stuart Radley I am a resident of The Patch in the Dandenong's and I am a Leading Fire-fighter with the Country Fire Authority currently stationed at Dandenong. I have been employed by CFA since March 2003 and was a CFA volunteer for a short time prior to my appointment as a recruit fire-fighter based at Fiskville. I have been awarded a 10 year service medal, National Emergency medal for the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and a Chief Officers Commendation for the Search and Rescue efforts of 3 people in a burning apartment.

I have been stationed at Dandenong, CFA's busiest station since 2005 and prior to that I was stationed at Corio one of the busiest stations for structure fires. I have worked at the Majority of CFA stations whilst relieving around the state including spending a lot of time at the Mildura CFA station. CFA's most remote station.

I have a thorough understanding how CFA operates across the state.

The current proposed Bill to reform the states Fire services will have many benefits and is one that is well and truly overdue. There are many deficiencies in the current model that the reform and introduction of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) will fix.

Some examples I would like to share with you that the reform will fix,

- Currently CFA and MFB career fire-fighters work on different communications system although we support each other every day at Fire calls around the metropolitan ring and on other deployments around the state such as the Open Cut Mine fire in Morwell.
- Currently CFA and MFB career Fire fighters work off different command structures.
- Currently CFA and MFB career Fire fighters complete different training.
- Currently CFA and MFB career fire-fighters work off different Fire ground practices.
- Currently CFA and MFB career Fire-fighters use different equipment and trucks.
- Currently CFA and MFB career fire fighters wear different uniforms.
- Currently CFA and MFB career Fire fighters have different promotional training.
- Currently CFA and MFB career Fire-fighters have different dispatch systems.

The list could go on and on. Reform is vital for the protection of the Victorian community. This is not what should be happening in a modern day 21st century Fire service in Australia's projected biggest and most populated state. Having one completely fulltime professional fire service will bring all of the above together for Victoria's Career Fire-fighters. Fire Rescue Victoria will enhance response to inner and outer Metropolitan Melbourne and large

regional cities. In this day and age of terror and large scale emergency events in Urban areas it is vital to have a well trained, well-funded and united Career Fire service.

Currently the antiquated system does not allow for CFA career Firefighters to work in MFB stations and MFB Fire fighters to work in CFA stations. It's because of a boundary drawn up over 60 years ago and hasn't been updated to adjust to the pressures of urban growth and development.

If there is a vacancy at a fire station in CFA area that needs to be backfilled by a relieving Firefighter CFA have to search the state to find one. That Officer or Firefighter may come as far as Mildura to work at let's say Dandenong. That's travelling over 600km to fill a shift whilst 7km up the road in the MFB fire District there are many firefighters performing the exact same role but cannot be used because there are 2 career services. It does not make sense to have this arrangement here in Victoria. No other state in Australia runs this model and no other state has the problems we are facing here.

Over half my 14 years as a fulltime professional fire fighter I have been in dispute over my right to bargain with my employer for a fair enterprise agreement. Every time my legal right to bargain in good faith with my employer through my union it is interfered with by Volunteer Fire brigade Victoria who claims to represent 60,000 volunteers. We know that this is completely incorrect although they continue to spruce that figure in attempt to blur the public and politicians view. Over the years they have taken out full page advertisements telling the public that my enterprise bargaining agreement is going to destroy volunteerism and threaten the safety of Victorians. Many EBA's have been signed and I have not for one minute found any evidence suggesting that it has put the public at risk or destroyed Volunteerism. Their continual attack on my right to bargain with my employer has got to a point where our relationships between staff and volunteers are somewhat volatile at times. It has left me thinking that if this reform does not come to fruition what our fate will be in terms of careers because a lot of career fire-fighters are at their wits end, emotionally and mentally. These ongoing disputes over many many years have caused emotional harm to so many good people both career and volunteer. Marriages have broken down, families have been torn apart and lifelong friendships destroyed. This is reality, it's happening. Reform is the only way forward.

The benefits of this reform far outweigh any negatives. Of course some will not like it and will try and prevent any way they can using emotional non-factual scaremongering like I have seen over the many years. I beg you to look past that rhetoric and look at the facts, the figures and the positives. If this reform does not proceed I really fear for Firefighting agencies in Victoria. It's a sad sad situation we all find ourselves in and not one I thought I would ever see when I joined the fire brigade.

CFA will be once again a fully Volunteer organisation and it will be able to dedicate its time and resources to their number one assets. The Volunteers.

Again I would plead that the facts be examined and the political rhetoric and spin be put aside for the sake of the most important people in this whole state of affairs and that is the community. Victoria is the fastest growing state in Australia and we need to modernise our fire service to be able to adequately protect the people of Victoria. I hereby pledge my support for the Reform to Victoria's fire Services.

Regards

Leading Fire fighter

Stuart Radley