

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017.

My name is Mark Holt and I am a Senior Leading Firefighter with the Country Fire Authority. I have been a CFA member for about 22 years and been employed as a Firefighter in 2 different Fire Services for almost 21 years. I joined the staff ranks of the CFA 17 years ago in the year 2000.

Along with the rank of Leading Firefighter and all the qualifications that rank requires I also hold the following current additional qualifications; Emergency Medical Responder, LPG Response Specialist, Mobile Communication/ Command Van Operator, Trench Rescue Specialist, Ground Observer and Grassland Curing Observer. In the past I have also performed the role of SMR Co-ordinator for Ground Observing and SMR Co-ordinator for the Grassland Curing Observer Network.

I am the recipient of a CFA 20 year service medal and the National medal.

I live in South Frankston and currently work at Patterson River Fire Station. I have also held positions at Rosebud, Cranbourne, Hallam and Doveton Fire Stations.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the Fire Services for the following reasons:

I have had to work at stations in the past where the manning is only 2 on a truck, having experienced the moral blackmail firefighters are put under having to work outside of our own safety guidelines (SOP'S) in order to perform search and rescue at the initial stages of a structure fire and having experienced the stress, frustration and injuries sustained due to the lack of fire fighters on scene and not knowing if you will get help or not. Having 7 firefighters dispatched to all calls will make it much safer for all who respond and provides those that do need them (the general public), the best possible chance of surviving whatever emergency is taking place.

In this day and age people expect a lot from our emergency service workers. The system currently in place is inconsistent. Some areas are over-serviced some under-serviced and the closest truck or the truck that can get there quickest, is not always responded. This reform will at least try to provide a form of consistency to all calls within the radial search of our current integrated Fire Stations. That is using your work force and equipment to the best of your ability and in doing so provides a better service to the community.

All career firefighters' in one Fire Service will have no effect on CFA's surge capacity and to state otherwise is ludicrous. Why would the badge on my arm changing, effect volunteer response?

These reforms are centred on the 35 integrated Stations and to the best of my knowledge will only affect the area around those stations. These stations are integrated as a result of the growth and risk within these areas, such things as a change of landscape, population increases, urbanisation and a history of the communities need for increased emergency response. Highly urbanised areas are

busier, which equates to more trucks and more firefighters requiring responders to have more specialist skills and carry more specialised equipment.

Having 1 Fire Service for career firefighters in the state of Victoria just makes sense and I believe over time people will ask, why was this not done sooner? Having career firefighters wearing different uniforms and protective equipment, driving different trucks and using different equipment, being trained at different facilities under different regimes, talking on different communication equipment using different dialogue is crazy. Having to duplicate the infrastructure for a staff only and a staff and volunteer service must be more costly, than to separate them. Not to mention the cost to whatever Government is in place at the time, the negotiating of 2 separate Enterprise Bargaining Agreements for 2 separate workforces who do the same job. One of which must placate an additional influence.

In all my years as a firefighter, I cannot believe it has come to this. That I feel the need, this strongly to put my thoughts down to share with those who will ultimately make the decision to change or not the Fire Services in Victoria. If you could see through my eyes what I have seen, you would not need to ask. If you could feel the emotions I have felt, you would not need to ask. Because you have not asked, I have volunteered to tell you that the system we have now and most of the workforce employed, are broken. My brothers and sisters have been hurt by years of conflict and disputation and are hurting still. The gleam in their eyes is gone and that is so sad to see and the pride they once had in wearing their uniform, is not the same. I will finish this letter by saying I have never known a workforce so small to be attacked so severely by so many because they willing put up their hands to do more. This reform will increase the workload of every career fire fighter at every station, yet we are attacked by all forms of the media, the shadow government, some members of the general public and interest groups. Why? for wanting to provide a better service to the community. I just want to do my job, let me do it better by passing the reform bill. People trust me with their lives every day, all I'm asking you to do is take me at my word.

Yours Sincerely,

Senior Leading Fire fighter

Mark Holt

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