SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMEDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

- My name is Patricia Pereira and I am employed by the MFB as Fire Service Communications Controller. I have been employed in Operational Communications for 34 years and in this role for 12 years. I commenced work as a Communications Operator on the 2nd May, 1983 after successfully completing the first Communications Centre Operator Recruit Course undertaken in Australia, I was later promoted to the ranks of Senior Communications Centre Operator, and Fire Services Communications Controller.
- In addition to the aforementioned courses, whilst employed by the MFB courses successfully completed include, but, are not limited to:
    - Degree in Human Resource Management
    - Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training
    - Firefighter Occupational First Aid,
    - Internal Quality System Audits
    - Diploma of Business Management, Certificate of Management,
    - Health and Safety Delegate.
- As a FSCC my role is to monitor the service delivery and performance of the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA), oversee emergency response and take action as appropriate to ensure resources responded to emergency calls meet operational requirements, monitor MMR, CAD and MFB dependent systems and take remedial action as required, advise Senior Command Staff on matters relevant to Operational Communications Service Delivery, review various Commonwealth and State Legislation and Regulations to ensure MFB Operational Service delivery complies with legislative requirements, work with CFA, ESTA, AV, VICPOL and SES to ensure services delivered to Operational Firefighters and the Victorian Public are world best practice, review third party Communications contracts to ensure the services delivered to Operational Firefighters meet the agreed contractual deliverables, review response data, rules and mapping to ensure the response of MFB resources meet the needs of Operational Firefighters and the general public, review Communications Standard Operating Procedures to ensure the services delivered by ESTA meet the requirements of Operational Firefighters, work with ESTA on current and future Communications systems development.

- In 2007 the then Commander responsible for Operational Communications and myself noted resources responded to events in both the MFB and CFA were not always the most appropriate or the closest, at the direction of both the CFA and MFB Chief Officers we commenced working with the CFA.
- Whilst both agencies acknowledged the need for the work to be undertaken, due to competing priorities, the project was not realised.
- In 2015 the MFB tasked me with undertaking a review of the current response data, mapping and criteria, which found the Operational response data and protocols currently adopted by both the CFA and MFB did not deliver the closest and most appropriate resources to any incident, and recommended a project be undertaken to review all response data, rules and mapping and take action to ensure the most appropriate resources are dispatched to all calls for assistance in the state of Victoria. In my time in this role of FSCC I have observed and I am aware numerous problems with the current response system, in particular, the different systems employed by MFB and CFA.
- In December 2015, the MFB further tasked me with managing the MFB's Improved Incident Response Project which is aimed at identifying and ensuring MFB response data, response rules and mapping accurately reflect the Operational requirements in meeting the MFB's legislative responsibility, and that the ESTA CAD data and protocols reflect MFB's requirements. This is to ensure accurate and timely MFB appliances/resources to all calls for assistance.
- The Project has now completed the First Phase which has included:
    - reviewing all existing data and ensure the map segments within the Metropolitan Fire District (MD) and around the CFA and MD boundary aligned with features required for the ESTA CAD systems to accurately recommend resources for dispatch and modify the map base where anomalies occurred
    - reviewed all of the dispatch rules to ensure they reflect the operating requirements of the MFB and recommend change, model all of the responses to address points across the MD and review to ensure the closest and most appropriate appliances were recommended in existing MFB and CFA tables (CFA tables were only reviewed where an MFB appliances was nominated in the CFA table).
- Phase 2 of the project is currently being undertaken and involves addressing all matters highlighted in Phase 1 of the Project. As part of this project the following problems have been highlighted:

- For MFB firefighters responding within what is referred to as the mutual aid areas or the boundary area between the CFA and MFB, MFB firefighters do not know how far away their back-up (second appliance) is from getting on scene where they are co-responded with the CFA. CFA respond Brigades. Brigades are made up of a variety of appliances from a Pumper/Pumper Tanker to a station car, and only staffed appliances have a regulated response time. Meaning the officer on the appliance cannot be certain if he/she are getting a volunteer response or career, and when that brigade will be dispatched. This can make it very difficult for the MFB firefighters on scene or on route when determining how to delegate necessary tasks on the fireground as you do not know how firefighters, with what qualifications, you will have available to you when determining what action to take.

- This problem is further compounded by the fact the CFA radio system around the boundary is an old analog system, and the ability for the Firefighters to hear the radio is severely compromised, the ESTA Operator must follow the CFA Standard Operating Procedure and receive transmission on the CFA radio system so using the MMR system is not an option for the MFB Firefighter (often the ESTA Operator also has difficulty hearing what is being said over the system), lack of compatibility between MFB and CFA radio systems means Firefighters are not always able to directly communicate with each other both on route and on scene which presents a risk to both firefighters and the general public as both agencies cannot rely on the radio system for information whether that be fireground risks, situation updates, how many firefighters are responding, their estimated time of arrival or indeed what skills sets they have.

- Further the lack of interoperable fireground management systems leads to further confusion when firefighter arrive on scene as both CFA and MFB professional firefighters operate to different fireground management systems. In particular the escalation systems are extremely different. For example, the MFB escalate emergency events via a Greater Alarm Response system, this is a documented and automatic response based on clear escalation points meaning that firefighters all know that depending on what level the job is, they will know exactly what appliances will be responded to the event and therefore what resources they have available to them. The CFA on the other hand use complex escalation tables that are not necessarily mandated across the entire CFA but are developed by each individual brigade.

- A key issue when it comes to reliance on volunteer response. Along with the potential for delayed or uncertain response, is also the uncertainty in relation to training. Unfortunately, not all volunteers are trained in structural firefighting and/or the use of breathing apparatus meaning that it is often not until they are on scene that the OIC will know whether the firefighter can be used at all in relation to a structure fire. This scenario can put the firefighters on scene at risk as they rely heavily on back-up firefighters, ready and able in breathing apparatus to be available outside a structure fire to swap over crew with them and to respond to any duress alarm by a firefighter. Without this critical back-up not only are the firefighters at risks but members of the public as the OIC may be less inclined to perform an internal attack if there is concern about the number of back up firefighter or their training. Likewise, there is concern that the volunteer themselves may find themselves in danger simply due to a lack of experience and./or training.
- Another issue with the difference in response systems is the process for determining when an appliance is not available. Because MFB dispatch via an automated system, from the moment an appliance is dispatched to a job it becomes unavailable for other calls until such time as it is returned in station. Unfortunately, in the CFA case, as it is not an automated system as to what actual appliance, rather than what brigade will be dispatched, the brigade remains online despite potentially being dispatched to an emergency event. This can be the same brigade is dispatched for different events and only such time as the brigade notified it is unavailable are they taken offline. Further, the process the CFA has of allowing them to remain available continually means that despite it being the nearest brigade to a job, it may not always be the physically closest appliance. For example, if an appliance is sent to the boundary of its turn out area to response to an emergency event, it may then be called on to respond to another event right on the other side of its turn out area where in fact a neighboring brigade may be closer by virtue of that appliance being at the boundary of its turn out area.
- The concerns with the turn out systems also go so far as to impact what type of appliance you might get. As you can imagine there are different types of fire appliances used to perform different roles on the fireground. Unfortunately, in the case of this unknown response there is no guarantee that the appliance type that is needed will be that which arrives on scene. Further you do not have certainty as to the number of appliances so you may end up with too little or too many appliances.

Having to many appliances can also be an issue as this can leave gaps in the overall fire coverage with multiple appliances responding on scene to events where they are not required.

- In the case of specialist response or hazardous incidents in particular the lack of necessary skill set and training can lead to very serious exposures as specialist skills are necessary as can sending the wrong appliance type.

- The response system utilised by CFA volunteers is not the mandated 7.7 or 8 minute response which MFB and CFA career firefighters are required to meet. This means CFA volunteers have a "delay value" on their response. Because CFA volunteers require time to leave work, get to the station and get the appliances, they are given four minutes to dispatch (in comparison to the 90 seconds given to career firefighters). The ESTA CAD system therefore waits six minutes before there is no response from a volunteer brigade before dispatching the next closest. This six-minute delay can continue to repeat itself over and over again compounding the delayed response. In a time critical situation this is not acceptable.

- Other more technical problems happen as a result of the two separate systems operating side by side. For example, when an MFB appliance "steps up" to a CFA station (this is the process whereby an MFB appliance is used to cover a gap in the CFA systems and moves to the CFA station to provide coverage there), while it will be picked as the primary response, i.e. first out the door, it will not be picked up on any secondary response as a support appliance because in the CADF system is still utilised its MFB ID code and the CFA tables are so specific in who is called that it does not recognise if there is an MFB appliance in station.

- The specificity of the CFA's escalation tables can also lead to basic errors whereby if an appliance is not exactly correctly referred to in the table by its code, the CAD system will not pick it up and will move on to the next leading to further delays or sending an incorrect appliance. For example, one problem we discovered was that a CFA escalation table referred to Ladder Platform 43 (a reference to a specific MFB appliance). This was an error as there is no Ladder Platform 43 and in fact should have been referring to Ladder Platform 47. As a result, instead of the ladder platform from Footscray being responded to incidents in the west of Melbourne and instead the Ladder Platform coming all the way from Geelong as the next closest. This is an example of how a simple error can lead to delayed response simply

because the system is not set up to automatically select the closest appliance but instead relies on dispatch tables populated by individual brigades and members of brigades.

- In urban areas with significant structural and human risk a lack of automated response is simply unacceptable.
- All of these problems are ultimately compounded by the fact that in Victoria we have two separate agencies within the urbanised, built up areas, both with career firefighters, both operating very different and no requirement on ether agency to consult with each other on any changes. This can lead to ridiculous situations where, for example, MFB appliances can be completely written out of CFA response tables and they are not even informed.

- These problems go some way to highlight the issues faced when different response models are used due to the differing natures, histories, structure and governance of different fire services. I believe that issues such as these will begin to be alleviated when all career staff are brought under the umbrella of one firefighter organization as intended by this legislation.
- I believe that making this change within the reform areas as proposed will ensure that the critical responses systems are standardized across the urban areas of Victoria which can only be a positive for the Victorian community and Victoria's firefighters.
- I thank the Committee for taking the time to consider this submission.

Patricia Pereira

MFB FSCC