

Date: 4 July 2017.

Re: Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk of Committees.

I wish to enter the following submission for consideration by the above inquiry,

My name is Lewis Amos, I am a professional full time Firefighter employed by the MFB. I have been employed by the MFB for 32 years. I'm a Leading Fire fighter and hold all the basic Qualifications required to fulfil my role as part of a team of firefighters, including Qualifications in Long duration BA, EMR, Teleboom, Hydraulic Platform, Water Tankers.

Due to the nature of my role I am expected to be competent in all facets deemed necessary by the MFB at all times and thus am under a regime of ongoing training.

My present duty station is at Oakleigh No.25 Station. For a long period of time I was stationed at Ringwood No 22 Station as well as Stints in Croydon No26 and Nunawading No.27 in the present outer MFB Eastern District, It is surrounded by CFA Stations at Bayswater, Mooroolbark, Montrose, Boronia and South Warrandyte which are a combination of Integrated and volunteer only stations. However when fire strikes, it knows no boundaries and we attend "Calls" in these areas which is known as mutual aid.

I want to preface my comments by some higher level practical observations and then some practical fire related "on the job" experiences.

My only interests in responding to this inquiry are in the practical aspects of my job which are the protection of life and property and anything which impacts on those two most important factors.

At the higher Level, the fire services boundary in Melbourne has stayed in the same place since it 1958, but the Population of Melbourne has generally spread out into original Country fire Authority areas with the same density of housing as the rest of Metro Melbourne. The Board which was responsible for the boundary was abolished in 1970.

This has led to the creation of two fire services which predominantly and generally deal with two different fire hazards, Structural fires and Bush Fires.

Presently, according to the Latest annual reports, the MFB has 2300 employees (1938 Operational) which cover an area of 1000 square kilometres. The MFB responded to nearly 38,000 calls in the 2015-16 year.

<http://www.mfb.vic.gov.au/Media/docs/MFB%20ERRATUM%20Fin-c386d7fb-afcf-4278-92e8-5de48d8350b1-0.pdf>

The CFA has a fulltime operational Staff of 1,086 with 35,796 operational volunteers, spread across 1,180 brigades. Page 5 of the Annual report 2015-16 says

“For our volunteer and career firefighters in the 60 per cent of Melbourne serviced by CFA, or in any of our regional cities and rural towns, this meant turning out day after day to a range of emergency situations, from bushfires to structure fires to car accidents and more.”

https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwilhs2K-u3UAhVC2LwKHUocCmgQFggtMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cfa.vic.gov.au%2Fm_files%2Fattachments%2FPublications%2FCFA-Annual-Report-2015-16.pdf&usq=AFQjCNFzAgcLvlxiTyke9cK3COD6DRV9bg&cad=rja

The key point of this statement is that 60% of Metropolitan Melbourne is covered by the CFA and therefore 40% is covered by the MFB. But the 40% is covered by 2300 employees, whilst the 60% is covered by 1086 CFA employees. (Probably less because of full time brigades in regional Victorian towns).

Given that the nature of the growth of Melbourne is a similar density of housing as the inner suburbs, we could reasonable assume that the CFA coverage is probably inadequate. Certainly when I worked at Ringwood (100% coverage fulltime) there was no difference in the value and density of property to Bayswater which is a volunteer only Station/brigade.

This poses a question. Are the residents of Bayswater to be afforded a lesser service than the ones in Ringwood? That is not a reflection on the fine work that volunteers do at that brigade. Rather a question of equity for the residents who live in an equally dense but less safe fire service area (due to reduced/inadequate fire service coverage). This is highlighted by Insurance. Even though the same fire service levee is paid via the council rates, One side of the road could pay a much higher insurance premium because they are in the CFA Volunteer area rather than a Professional one.

So in my view it is time to change these dynamics and where there is a density of population and structures which are similar to the MFB areas, to give them the coverage required by the proposals before the committee.

Having covered the higher level of need, it is important to understand the level of service required in dense and highly populated areas. The main characteristic at the lower level is the existence of many structures.

These structures are inherently unsafe if not governed by a raft of regulations such as building materials, type of architectural construction and Electrical regulations to make them as safe as possible. Then of course there are the additions (contents) in the house which can cause further complications in their storage and use. Chemicals used in cleaning and materials used in furniture and bedding can also be inherently unsafe when fire is added. The smoke caused by burning of new materials has increased in toxicity over the last few years.

So structure fires are very different beasts than bush fires and need a completely different approach to bush fires and a different and more complicated set of competencies with which to fight them. I submit that this set of competencies can only be gained and retained by full time professionally trained personnel.

Full time personnel have competencies in the following areas

- 1/ Breathing Apparatus (Structure)
- 2/ Knowledge of different types of fire and how to deal with them.
- 3/ Different chemical hazards
- 4/ Different smoke hazards caused by different chemical hazards.
- 5/ Associated first aid required for different chemical Hazards.
- 6/ Operational and procedural experience.
- 7/ Ongoing high level of training.
- 8/ A high level of Physical fitness.
- 9/ A high level of mental fitness.

It is just not possible to provide a volunteer brigade coverage for these hazards and associated competencies in an urban environment without having a severely degraded service.

Other areas of training that would be extremely difficult for volunteers to achieve and maintain is E.M.R initial training is very involved once completed there is an ongoing maintenance as well as new and up dated techniques.

High Angle rescue, Hazardous Materials (Haz Mat) training Specialists trained in the handling of hazard materials spills etc. , Building Inspection compliance, High competence in Fire structure Safety, Road rescue Port of Melbourne Authority With Fire Boat 1 and Fire Boat 2 .

The purpose of a high level of training is for the safety of the people involved in fire and other associated tasks such as vehicle accidents. Importantly the adequate staffing of fire response teams is to make sure that they are safe as well (including suitable Personal Protective clothing and equipment), in order to do their job protecting others and themselves.

Response times are of vital importance in fire response. Full time personnel can respond quicker (Turnout 90 seconds from time of notification alarm) than volunteers who have no obligation, other than their fine public service attitude, to respond at all.

Full time staff reduce the damage an accident does (in a life threatening way) by responding promptly and reduce the damage a fire does in the case of injury to persons as well as reducing the value of property damage.

I have mainly talked about the Practical aspects of fire fighting and how a well trained brigade can provide the main aim of all Fire services, the protection of life and property.

To highlight these points I would like to share with you a "Call" which I attended a few years ago. My MFB crew were tasked to attend a report of a 2nd floor fire in a shopping strip in Bayswater. The Premises which was alight with a large quantity of smoke emanating from it. The premises was a Karate School. Below were several Shops in the same street complex.

The CFA Volunteer crew were in attendance but they could not enter the building to fight the fire because, even though there were plenty of them in attendance, none of them had the requisite qualifications in Structural Breathing Apparatus.

On arrival at the scene the CFA crews were waiting for suitable BA trained staff to come from Dandenong. They were unable to enter the premises to ascertain if there were any people inside.

Meanwhile the fire was progressing and in those circumstances there is always a risk of "flashover" with considerable damage being done to adjacent property.

After speaking to the CFA controller and having help declined, our Station Officer decided to order our crew to suit up with BA and enter the building via a ladder and enter through a side window, check for persons and then knock the fire down.

The MFB crew did this and put out the fire. Fortunately no persons were inside the burning building.

The incident took approximately 60 minutes and when we left the scene the BA qualified persons from the CFA Dandenong Station had not yet arrived.

This highlights the need for suitably trained and qualified personnel at a structure fire. To search for injured persons and to mitigate the property damage that might otherwise have been caused.

The use of undertrained crews (not their fault) actually put life and property in danger. This highlights the need for a properly staffed fire fighting response in built up area of suburban Melbourne. It also places trained staff in danger through lack of fire ground protocols which trained staff know and use i.e. Two personnel in BA enter a building Two others must be ready dressed and ready enter the building in case of emergency.

Every recruit Fire fighter is trained in wearing Breathing Apparatus. Recruit training takes 16 weeks which BA training is a major part. Training is ongoing after the recruit training stage. It's very difficult for volunteers to accomplish this level of training on a part time basis. Lack of Co Operation between

the CFA and MFB in this case put Life and property at risk. The changes to the act would stop such petty disputes.

I would also like to make some comments about the presumptive rights compensation and the proposed Act.

There is no doubt that leadership in this area has been sadly lacking for many years. To highlight this statement all you have to do is to read the Fiskville enquiry report, where a litany of poor decisions in training for both MFB and CFA, Volunteers and career staff was cobbled together and which exposed staff and volunteers to hazardous toxic chemicals.

The MFB used to be an extremely world class organisation, designing and building award winning fire appliances until that arm was sold off in the 1990's. With the building of a new fire training ground at Craigieburn, the MFB is once again capable (given good leadership) of being in the forefront of innovative fire fighting techniques which keep up with changing material and building circumstances. A good example of this is the current Protective uniforms and Breathing Apparatus which we have. They allow us to enter the fire training areas at Craigieburn in temperatures which reach hundreds of degrees centigrade. These uniforms were provided and sourced as a result of consultations between the Union and management of the MFB. They keep the wearers safe and allow fire fighters to enter hazardous fires to knock down and contain incidents much quicker. With the potential to save lives, reduce injury and minimise property damage. These uniforms then are also issued to the CFA volunteers so that they can be safe as well.

It is sad to see politics enter into the fire services area in such a virulent recent fashion. Fiskville is a classic example of a failure of leadership by all sides of Government. For the CFA board to refuse to produce its board papers to the Fiskville inquiry is one of the worst examples of Leadership failure and dishonesty we have seen in many a long year. The politics and lies told about the UFU and the EB negotiations show how toxic and immature Australian politics has become.

It is time to get both parts of this legislation passed and to move on to a new model of real Leadership of the fire services in Victoria. I think the membership of the services and the general public are sick of the politics. They just want to know they are safe.

In closing I would like to say to the committee that the UFU is made up of the rank and file of the fire services. The officers bearers are not the union. They are the servants of the Union. Just like Members of Parliament are the servants of the Public.

Lewis Amos

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