

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is Daniel Finucane. I am a career fire-fighter with CFA and have been for just over 5 years. I'm currently a Leading Fire-fighter at Caroline Springs fire brigade. I have also spent over 12 years as a CFA volunteer fire-fighter within the Macedon Ranges.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

In my short time as a CFA career fire-fighter, I have seen firsthand how CFA relies heavily on volunteer members. There are calls requiring emergency response at all hours of the day and night in heavily populated urbanised areas which go unanswered or have a delayed response time. Over the years I have noted how this is becoming more apparent and is not sustainable or indeed reliable.

As a former volunteer, I was of the understanding that when I was available, I would respond. I also was from a small rural brigade which didn't have many calls per year. Unfortunately for volunteers in heavily urbanised areas, the call rates are in the many hundreds if not thousands and many calls require volunteers to respond to pager messages. This means, that the demand on volunteers is taxing and unreasonable. As a result, one can understand why volunteers do not turnout to all calls when paged. Quite simply because they cannot. Volunteers are people. People who have family, work, friends, functions, things to do or just life in general. They are also people who fatigue and need rest and leisure time.

It is unfair on volunteers to be expected to pick up the slack of years of government or organisational inaction where fire boundaries have not changed, but workloads have increased significantly. It is equally unfair for CFA career firefighters to have to respond in outer metropolitan Melbourne or built up regional areas with limited support. Often career staff turn out to calls uncertain of the conditions in which they will be working. Factors such as knowing if or how many volunteers are going to respond, the skill level of those who turn out and the time in which it takes for volunteers to arrive on the scene are very real questions career crews ask themselves when responding to or requiring further assistance at incidents.

Clearly having a fire service dedicated to responding to urban incidents in a timely manner and in numbers adequate to do the job safely and efficiently is a positive for the Victorian community. In our current system, a staff crew will respond in 90 seconds of receiving a call and having a second truck respond is the great unknown. Even if a volunteer crew does respond, there is no guarantee the responding crew are suitably trained for the tasks they would be required to undertake at an urban incident forcing the Incident Controller to call for a further truck and hoping that one has adequately skilled crew.

Part of the debate has centred around the redundancy of current volunteers within the CFA and a feeling that they will no longer be needed or required if these changes proceed. This in fact is unfounded as there is a vital role for these trained members in our communities. The CFA relies on its members to respond in waves to large incidents which CFA refers to as "surge capacity". In the model proposed, CFA volunteers will still have a place in their brigades and will still be able to provide the numbers to respond to large incidents e.g. bushfires as required, which is reassuring for the Victorian community.

Having a full career service that will be trained to one standard and use the same equipment across the service is also a huge benefit to both career staff and the community as emergencies will be managed more effectively and cohesively. Currently this is not the case between CFA career fire-fighters and MFB fire-fighters. Although both services are highly trained, there are differences in equipment, operations and even terminology which can become confusing when the two agencies work together at the same incident. Having one career service where these differences can be bridged and new recruits trained to one standard would make fire-fighting operations more efficient.

Having a fully volunteer service and a fully career service is also a benefit for all fire-fighters staff and volunteer alike. When workplace agreements take place, industrial negotiations should rightly be between an employee and employer. Unfortunately, in recent times with media hype and political interference, CFA staff and volunteers have been hurt and relationships have soured to a point where the working relationship may not be repairable. This is never a good thing when working in any emergency service and I see a separation of staff and volunteers as a solution.

The ongoing industrial dispute has been very difficult for all fire-fighters. The toll it has taken on me, my family and my colleagues is something that should not be overlooked or dismissed. Once again, if a reform does not take place, this tension and hardship will be ongoing in the future for all the CFA members, both staff and volunteer. I dread to consider what impact this will have on all members and the CFA brand going in to the future.

I believe CFA as a fully volunteer service will be a stronger and more harmonious organisation that will flourish with better funding for equipment and amenities, programs to assist recruiting and retaining volunteers and will not place volunteers under pressure to meet unrealistic call rates. Similarly, it would be more beneficial for career staff to be in one service for safer, uniform and reliable working conditions ensuring safe working numbers on the fire ground responding quickly and with the appropriate skills to combat our urban emergencies.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to read my submission and would like you to consider what is the best fire services model for keeping the Victorian people in a growing State safe.

Kind regards,



Daniel Finucane

