

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

I have been a professional CFA firefighter for 7 years. I am currently based at Hallam Fire Station and hold the rank of Leading Firefighter. Hallam Fire Station is a very busy outer metropolitan fire station and attends approximately 2,000 emergency calls each year. In addition to the emergency response services provided by other fire stations, Hallam Fire Station provides a hazardous materials response through a dedicated heavy HAZMAT response unit and a response service to the most time-critical medical emergencies.

In addition to my service as a career firefighter, I was a volunteer with the Manningham (previously Doncaster) unit of the State Emergency Service (SES) for over 12 years. During this period, I attended hundreds of emergencies and community service/public relations activities in a volunteer capacity. I also held the position of Crew Leader/Team Leader for many years.

I have been awarded a long service medal for 10 years' service with the SES and the National Medal for 15 years diligent service to the community in hazardous circumstances.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform by way of this submission.

As an operational firefighter at a very busy outer-metropolitan fire station, I understand how crucial it is to have a guaranteed response to emergencies. Numerous times I have been inside burning structures or in other adverse situations by myself due to a delayed or absent response of surrounding brigades. A specific example of this occurred at a factory fire, in which I was inside a burning factory conducting a search for casualties and suppressing fire in a very hot and smoky environment for at least 10 minutes when a volunteer support brigade failed to respond. Also present was a live DC electricity feed from a solar array on the roof, which presented a serious safety and had to be isolated. This is one of numerous examples where a guaranteed response would have provided a much greater level of safety for firefighters and the public and a more efficient response for the community.

By no means is any of this an attack on volunteer firefighters' dedication or sacrifice. I work regularly with volunteers from my brigade and surrounding brigades (both operationally and in training) and have a very good relationship with them. I was myself an emergency service volunteer with the SES for over 12 years. It is a fact however, that volunteer firefighters have other important priorities (such as work and family commitments), which makes a guaranteed response uncertain (particularly during weekdays). As urban growth continues, greater strain will be put on volunteer firefighters. It is the current outdated system that is at fault, not the volunteer firefighters who give their time to help the community.

Another important point to note is that this reform affects the 35 integrated fire stations in outer metropolitan areas of Victoria and large regional towns, not the rest of the state and the volunteer brigades that service these areas. This will not affect these volunteers or will in any way inhibit 'surge capacity' or the ability of firefighters to respond to major bushfires.

Victoria's fire services boundaries have not changed significantly in 60 years. Under this outdated system, 35 areas are wrongly zoned as 'country', despite being heavily urbanised and residential. Frankston, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Craigieburn, Melton, Springvale, Boronia and Geelong are just some of the 35 'country areas', which need to be modernised as part of the reform of the fire service. A rapid 8 minute response, with 7 professional career firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas.

Also essential is the need for presumptive rights legislation to protect both career and volunteer firefighters who, through the nature of their job and the sacrifice that they make for others, are

more prone to certain types of cancers. This is important for every firefighter and every firefighter's family and loved ones.

I love my job and I love being able to help the community. Indeed, I have dedicated almost 17 years of my life to doing so. I welcome anything that can be done to make the community, myself and my fellow firefighters safer.

Yours sincerely

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