

Submission to the Fire Services Reform Parliamentary Inquiry

Submitted by:

Stephen Richard Greene



I, Stephen Richard Greene, would like to make the following submission to the Fire Service Reform Parliamentary Inquiry.

I am a Leading Firefighter with the MFB, having joined in August 2008. I am currently stationed at North Balwyn Fire Station, but have spent time at a variety of stations such as South Melbourne, Ormond, Oakleigh, Box Hill, Nunawading and Glen Waverley.

I have obtained a range of qualifications across a number of areas during my time in the Brigade including:

- Hazmat Technician
- Breathing Apparatus Service Technician
- MK 5 Pumper, MK 5 Pumper Tanker, MK 4 Pumper and MK 4 Pumper Tanker Driver and Pump Operator
- Emergency Medical Response qualified
- Compartment Fire Training qualified

Prior to joining the MFB, I obtained a Bachelor of Science (Computer Science) and a Bachelor of Commerce (Finance and Economics) and worked at the ANZ Bank and Deloitte for over 8 years.

I am also married to my wife Briony and we have three children aged 4, 7 and 10.

My first point of my submission relates to the out of date border between the MFB and CFA. While I am currently stationed at North Balwyn – I live in Vermont South, about 500m away from the MFB / CFA border. It concerns me greatly that there is a stark difference in classification and therefore fire brigade response between my house and houses less than a kilometre away. While my house is considered urban – houses less than a kilometre away are considered ‘country’ – despite being in a heavily developed area. Both areas are heavily populated with high residential density housing. The supposed ‘Country’ area includes high risk buildings such as Knox Shopping Centre and Knox Private Hospital to name just two as well as other industry.

And with this difference in classification – comes a stark difference in responses from emergency services. I know if I have a fire at my house – I am guaranteed a 2 truck response from a fire station crewed 24/7 365 days a year with all fire fighters on those trucks trained in structural fire fighting and able to use Breathing Apparatus to make an internal attack on the fire and potentially rescue my family and I. This is compared to those a kilometre away who would get 1 truck from a career station with support to come from a volunteer truck that may or may not turn out and may or may not have fire fighters trained in structural fire fighting and Breathing Apparatus. It’s simply an inadequate response in a heavily urban area.

This really reinforces the need for the boundary of the Metropolitan Fire District to move in to the 21st century and be realigned with how Melbourne and regional centres now look. The boundary hasn't changed significantly in 60 years and Melbourne was a very different place back then. These heavily urbanised areas need a guaranteed response from its fire service. This is about improved community safety through a guaranteed response from a minimum of 2 trucks.

I'd also like to make it very clear that I am passionate about the value volunteers make within the CFA. I have many friends who are volunteers and I think their ability to sacrifice their own time for the community should be applauded. However ultimately in these heavily urbanised areas - a more appropriate response from the fire brigade is needed and these Fire Services Reforms will deliver that. This should not be seen as an insult to volunteers – but simply a better outcome for the community which I know every fire fighter – both career and volunteer – wants.

Further to the improvement to community safety, an improvement to firefighter safety is a key component to why these reforms are so important.

When I commit myself internally to a house fire in North Balwyn, which I have done numerous times – I do so with the reassurance that back up crews will already be on their way if something goes wrong. If I was stationed at Boronia in the CFA and had a house fire - I would not have the same reassurance. While other CFA Volunteer trucks would be responded – due to the nature of volunteerism – there is no guarantee that they can respond with sufficient, appropriately trained firefighters in time to help if something goes wrong. As I said before – this is not a criticism of volunteers – but is the reality and nature of volunteerism. The proposed reform to the fire services will deliver a much needed improvement to firefighter safety to support the improvement to community safety outlined above. It is not an attack on volunteers or the death of the CFA – it is an improvement to safety of the community, the safety of firefighters and an improvement to the Fire Services in Victoria.

And further to those improvements – the other aspect of the Reform means so much to fire fighters themselves, both career and volunteer who will benefit from the protection the introduction of presumptive legislation will bring to them. This is so important to every single fire fighter and is long overdue. The risk we all face to cancer as a result of the carcinogens released from plastics and other man made products is only increasing. The reassurance that my family would be looked after and not face giant medical bills should I contract one of the listed cancers means so much to me.

During this inquiry, please consider the value of the Fire Service reforms to your community and your constituents and those across all of Melbourne and Victoria. The issue of reform in the Fire Services has gone on too long and is well overdue. As a firefighter, I am exhausted by the constant undue negativity and scrutiny that has been placed on career firefighters. It has been very difficult for myself and my family to constantly be exposed to the unjustified and often misleading attacks from the media, political parties and members of the public on career firefighters. We simply want to get on with the job at hand which is to have the best fire services in the world and to protect the community as best we can. I urge you to please resolve these issues and support the Fire Services Reforms in front of you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards

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