

Alec Draffin

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Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

I have been a member of the Country Fire Authority for 22 years, both as a volunteer (10 years) and career fire fighter (15 years). I started out as a volunteer at Monbulk in 1995, where my family has been involved, now for 40 plus years. I was a very active member and was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt when I became a career firefighter in 2002. I have since been stationed at Dandenong, Patterson River and now Rowville, as a Station Officer.

As well as working on fire stations I also spent 2 years working as an Instructor delivering training in Specialist Response subjects. This included Rope rescue, Confined Space rescue, Road Accident rescue, Trench rescue and Hazardous Material incident response. In the 2 years I worked across the entire state with both volunteer and career fire fighters, and also with other emergency organisations eg SES and MFB.

In the past 22 years I have been involved in some of the States most notable Fires and Incidents, which includes;

- 1997 Mt Dandenong Fire (vol)
- 2003 Nth East bushfires. (career)
- 2006 Nth East bushfires.(career)
- 2009 Black Saturday fire (career)
- 2014 Hazlewood mine fire (career)

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

In urban areas there is a higher population and also larger industrial areas. This leads to a higher likelihood of an incident/fire occurring and potentially a much more serious consequence if one does occur. Currently our fire service has been overgrown by the urban growth of Victoria, particularly in the outer Melbourne areas. What would have been market gardens is now housing and industrial estates. In a lot of cases volunteer brigades cannot respond appropriately to these calls, which means they either fail to respond, respond with inadequate crews with inadequate skills.

For half of Rowville Fire stations calls we respond with Dandenong CFA and MFB station 31. In both these cases we have a response ensuring 7 qualified fire fighters on the fire ground which means community and fire fighter safety.

For the other half of our area we respond with volunteer brigades which are Scoresby, Ferntree Gully and Upper Ferntree Gully. Sometimes these brigades respond with an appropriate crew, but for the most part they either fail to or have a delayed response with not enough crew (1 or 2) who don't have appropriate skills.

Some examples of this are;

- Fire in service station, Ferntree Gully Rd Scoresby. Rowville respond in 90 seconds with a crew of 4.(1 Station Officer, 1 Leading Fire Fighter and 2 Fire fighters). After a delayed response Scoresby respond with 1 in a car. This meant at best a 5 minute delay in responding another pumper to ensure adequate response.
- Alarm at the William Angliss Hospital, Upper Ferntree Gully. This is a high risk premise and has a 5 brigade response. Boronia and Rowville respond within 90 seconds, both with 4 crew. After 4 minutes Upper Ferntree Gully respond with 2, Ferntree Gully respond with 2(with no pump operator) and Upwey and little time later with 2. Rowville pumper is then down-graded to code 3. When Boronia arrive they find that there are no other BA wearers, the Incident controller didn't have the skills to understand and locate the alarm that was operating. If there was a fire this lack of crews and skills meant that it could not have been dealt with safely.
- A house fire in Lysterfield. Rowville respond within 90 seconds with a crew of 4. After 4 minutes Upper Ferntree Gully respond. The Station Officer from Rowville decides once the support appliance arrives he will commit a BA crew to an internal attack on the fire to save a portion of the structure and contents. When Upper Ferntree Gully arrive the crew were not physically fit, didn't have the skills and adequate crew numbers. This meant the Station Officer could not commit a crew to the internal attack and subsequently the entire structure and contents was lost.

The reforms will have a process to ensure the most appropriate and closest appliances are responded, which will increase community and fire fighter safety. In the MFB fire district there are no brigade areas and boundaries, they just respond the closest and most appropriate appliances to deal with the incident/fire. This is not the case in CFA, currently each of the 1220 brigades has their own area/patch which they control and are primary responders. They also decide which brigades support them and the order they respond. This is usually based on tradition, and in most cases hasn't been updated even if the station has moved or if one station has become integrated. This means that it is not always the closest appliance responding, and also not the most appropriate either.

One example is Kallista Fire brigade, a small volunteer brigade in the Dandenong Ranges. At one stage the Captain had a disagreement with someone from the Monbulk brigade, which is a neighbouring volunteer brigade to the East. Because of this the Captain changed the response tables to ensure Monbulk were not the supporting brigade even though they were

much closer, preferring to bring a brigade from further away. This type of behaviour is not uncommon and does not put community or fire fighter safety as a priority.

Another example of this is Pakenham Fire Station; it is located on Princes Hwy in Pakenham. When it became an integrated station the response areas were not changed, this is despite the fact that they moved location and also became a 90 second response. On the opposite side of the Hwy is a large shopping precinct including Bunnings and other large premises. This is in Toomuc brigade's area, a rural brigade with only a tanker. They are further away, don't have an appropriate appliance and are not trained to the same standard as the career fire fighters at Pakenham. There is a culture within management of not changing boundaries based on 'not wanting to upset the volunteers', despite being better for the community.

There are other benefits with the reform which will lead to a more efficient service resulting in cost savings. Having all professional fire fighters under the one service means standard recruit courses, better access to training and instructors, ability to move appliances around and release crews for training, a pre-determined move –up system ensuring all areas have response coverage all of the time, one EBA saving the government time in negotiating and not doubling up on specialist response.

For a long time we have tried to integrate professional fire fighters and volunteers at the same location. This has proved problematic and unworkable for a very long time and will continue to be this way unless something changes, which it needs to and can with this bill.

We should be aiming to have integrated fire/incidents grounds, where responders from different agencies work together to achieve the objective, ie FRV, VICPOL, AV, SES, CFA, DELWP. The reform will merge two workforces who are essentially the same, return CFA to its grass roots as being fully volunteer service. This makes sense from a management point of view as well as service delivery to the community. As happens now we will continue to work together on a fire ground and at incidents, this will not change with the reform.

**In summary I support the proposed bill and believe it is the best thing for the Victorian fire services and the community that they serve, which is and has to be the priority above all else.**

Yours sincerely

Alec Draffin