

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Tim Liew [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 12:38 AM
To: LCSC
Subject: Support for the Fire Services Reform

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

My name is Tim Liew, currently I am a resident of Thornbury and I have lived within the metro boundaries of inner-metro Melbourne my entire life. As a majority of metropolitan Melbourne residents would be, I was completely ignorant of where the MFB/CFA boundaries were – assuming that CFA coverage only began in rural areas with rolling hillsides and grasslands, with MFB covering all urban developed areas - and didn't even know that the CFA had career staff until I began researching on how to become a Firefighter when seeking a career change.

Now as a career Firefighter with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) who has worked throughout the greater Melbourne area for over five years, whenever I speak to somebody about my profession, everybody is just as astounded as I was about where the MFB/CFA divide actually lies and how living in certain CFA areas means you are not entitled to the same level of service – despite some of these people living in said CFA areas.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services, as:

1. Nobody can deny that the 35 CFA areas that will be affected by the reform have developed beyond the current model and need better community safety and protection.
2. Having all career staff under one organisation makes sense as it will streamline management and administrative support resources, whilst standardising training, equipment and response standards; and
3. Bolster volunteer efforts by providing additional funding, recruitment support and retention across the CFA without affecting turnouts or surge capacity capability whilst receiving a higher level of standardised training support from FRV members.

Throughout my time working within the CFA I have experienced a number of instances which have highlighted how the current structure is failing. Whilst I will never question the commitment, heart and generosity of volunteer members with their time, on several occasions I have seen personal/political agendas, a lack of suitability, training and accountability actually compromise the operational efficiency of emergency incidents and the safety of the community whilst putting themselves at great risk. Such instances include but are not limited to:

- Whilst attending a house fire I was the only career firefighter who was working directly alongside 5 volunteers conducting the initial attack. Afterwards all operational members were required to visit with Ambulance Victoria (AV) members to get a welfare check conducted to determine if they were able to re-enter the premise to continue working. Once my vital signs were recorded the AV personnel asked if I was a staff member, I said I was and asked why they had asked, to which they replied "you're the only person who has come through who wasn't in a state of *Tachycardia* (elevated heart rate) at risk of potentially having a heart attack". As a result I was the only member allowed to continue work immediately with new volunteers having to be sourced or members having to rest for 20 minutes before being allowed back to perform light duties, which increased the amount of time it took to fully extinguish the fire.
- At a confirmed factory fire the incident controller had called for additional resources to conduct a multifaceted structural fire attack. The nearest volunteer brigade arrived with only 1 out of 5 members on board with structural firefighting qualifications, that 1 member also being their sole truck driver and operator. Given that our operational guidelines state that structural firefighters must work in pairs as a minimum, the incident controller could not use them at all and had to ask for another brigade to respond delaying operational activities by several valuable minutes.

- At a grass fire, a volunteer incident controller required more assets and specifically requested a type of vehicle that they knew only volunteer brigades could respond, despite these volunteer brigades being 20+ minutes away. All because they did not want staff attending which would've seen at least 3 additional trucks arriving in under 10 minutes.
- I have seen and heard of several volunteer members involved in motor vehicle accidents en route to emergency incidents either in their personal or brigade emergency vehicles which were caused due to members taking risks unnecessarily.
- At a residential alarm call, when 2 volunteer members were tasked to lower and pack away a ladder. By sheer chance I heard one volunteer say that they were not tall or strong enough to lower the ladder, to which the other responded "how about I just swing it down on top of you so you can catch it" to which the other agreed. Upon hearing this I immediately told them to stop and assisted them in their task preventing a situation where a volunteer would've been seriously injured.

It saddens me that the Victorian fire services has become a martyr for political gain as this game has fractured the CFA beyond repair. If the reform is turned down I want to ask all of you what the alternative is? What kind of culture do you think an organisation will have after two sides have been manipulated against each other but then are forced to unite?

Regards,
Tim



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