

Andrew Picker



*Assistant Clerk Committees  
Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Service Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Sprint Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002*

### Fire Service Reform Select Committee Submission 2017

I Andrew Picker am a Leading Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. I am a Heavy Rescue Operator specialising in response to train, tram, industrial and motor vehicle accidents, currently stationed at Carlton Fire Station. I wish to express my ideas for improving Victorian fire services into the future. Such views are solely my own from operational and off duty volunteer experience since 2006, and do not represent any organisation, body, union or other person.

#### Terms

AV – Ambulance Victoria  
VICPOL – Victoria Police  
CFA – Country Fire Authority  
MFB – Metropolitan Fire Brigade  
FS – Fire Station  
FRNSW – Fire Rescue New South Wales  
NSW Police – New South Wales Police Force

The need for a improved, modern and adaptive fire service exists to better service the needs of Victorian community, local council and fellow emergency services.

#### **Two Key Needs**

##### **Clear transparent state wide road rescue arrangements**

Clearly define boundaries of services and allow from professional firefighters, heavy rescue operators, alongside are rescue and specialists to be called on by AV, VICPOL without fear or reprisal from any side. Need to strengthen ties, inter service training and relationships between all services that provide road rescue in Victoria. The ability to train together regularly, understand each services strengths and weaknesses alongside building positive relationships will benefit guests and residents of Victoria with better, more timely and professional outcomes.

### **Centre for care and rehabilitation**

A huge dream and accomplishment would be to create a centre for care and rehabilitation of all first responders. Similar to NSW Police, driven by Mick Stierli. Where Firefighters would have the ability to attend treatment with physios, psychologists and more in one location. Rather than have monetary based goals as that of private external treatment services, exist to support and promote recovery and return to work. NSW Police has experienced numerous benefits from such program including reduced loss of time injury, reduced redundancy and decreased worker's compensation premiums. Dream would be to have a large central based location which also provides 24 hour gym facilities for all first responders, and several smaller sites to cover staff state wide.

### **Other needs or suggestions**

#### **Modern fire service dispatch and communication**

Adaptive service with a state based service wide dispatch and communication system that allows for data to be quickly pooled, shared and transferred between services. Sadly current outdated dispatch system that has regular failures and no cross pollination from CFA, VICPOL or AV data, mapping that does not include directions or traffic data. Work could include regular situation updates or sharing between services. I.e. Incident at x address please avoid area due to water on road, no need for concern. Or AV currently operating in boundary of X please avoid area due to large traffic congestion.

#### **Self reliance**

Creation of a service that is able to operate on its own 24 hours per day without the need to wait for local councils or other services. At times current fire service relies on others to assist in delivery of sand, or tree lopping/removal which is often long delayed due to communication, time of day and weather conditions for example. The creation of facilities to store, transport and distribute consumable goods used throughout the work of emergency response will improve the timeliness and quality of services to the state of Victoria.

#### **Firefighter Exchange Program**

Creation of the ability to exchange Firefighters interstate and overseas to develop working relationships, exchange knowledge and experience far beyond operational training, to include new technology, medical fire response, mental health, wellbeing and fitness.

#### **Ride along with Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police**

Develop an inter service development and knowledge program for staff to train, operate and work together. Example would be each Firefighter, Police Officer and Paramedic to spend one day every X years on shift as an observer to better understand the work of each organisation and therefore better assist the community of Victoria in a time of need.

#### **Appearance and Name new fire service**

Currently MFB – often confused and misreported as Melbourne Fire Brigade or other variations. Fire Rescue Victorian needs a name and logo that represents a fire service rather than appearing like a corporate body. This could also be reflected in professional

uniform that is positive and bright in colour rather than a dark tone, giving similar appearance to police, security or military services. Please be mindful fire services are operated by military in other countries as such tourists, immigrants and new residents are often apprehensive or scared of dealing with fire service due to previous poor experiences and cultural stigma from other military based fire services. It is crucial that fire service remains a positive, caring service for the community.

### **Community engagement**

Creation of a media desk that releases regular/daily press releases on operations, campaigns and staff achievements. New York Fire Department do an exceptional job with media and press, something that could be looked towards.

### **Regular knowledge sharing**

Little or no knowledge sharing exists between fire services post incident. Ideal situation would be creation of a knowledge database or publication similar to FRNSW which has detailed post incident analysis of incident. No need to be critical of Firefighters actions but simply learn from and hope to improve in the future.

### **Off Duty Volunteer**

Post Black Saturday myself and many other MFB firefighters volunteered at a relief centre in Kinglake Victoria. Whilst driving MFB marked vehicles throughout the area we were often targets of verbal abuse and rude gestures. I will not go into further details but we need to work on building relationships and understanding which has only been further destroyed over the past few years. I understand EBA disputes, regular attacks in the media and need for changes to professional fire services boards have further eroded relationships. We need to be strictly professional and this could be supported by an independent commissioner or body that has the power to investigate actions and create remedy for such good or poor performance, independent of employer or volunteer organisation. We all work with the best intentions but sadly things can go wrong. If this was to occur other staff need to be reassured actions are noted and assistance was provided to members involved to acknowledge and improve from actions or behaviours in the future.

Please be it noted Professional staff also regularly volunteer their time for the community though association with the fire services yet are not titled volunteers, just off duty firefighters at that time.

### **Turn out and turn back**

Sadly, concern exists where appliances have the ability to call off other services when this may not be the best case or situation for the community. I have experienced examples on boarder areas, between boundary of both services where appliances booked on scene before their actual arrival and then called for other branded service return home as not required, yet such appliance was on scene and others where was not.

A modern dispatch system would eliminate such problems with the ability to dispatch the nearest appliance, track messages and cross reference with GPS data.

**Population based fire service growth**

As you are aware Victoria has experienced much urban growth and development in the past century. Many believe the current MFB and CFA boundaries are outdated and not reflective of a Metropolitan and Country Fire areas.

Other state based fire services operate on a model where once a town or community reaches a threshold or defined number the community is then supported by a professional fire service. This is the apparent need for the community of Victoria and something that would only work to benefit the local community. I believe examples of this model currently exist in Western Australia for example and could be further investigated I view as to best service the growing community of Victoria.

**Industrial Dispute**

Sadly, moral has been crushed, my love for the fire service has dwindled and community respect has been eroded. Please. There is an urgent need to resolve all industrial disputes and regain the focus on being the very best fire service we can be. For you, for me, and the whole Victorian community please help to resolve the disputes, stop the negative media and attacks on the great work firefighters do each and every day. We shouldn't have to go home worry about our conditions, if I will have a job in the future. I want to spend my time and thoughts on being the best we can be, not worrying about if and when the dispute will end. Since 2006 half my career has been spent in EBA dispute. Please help to resolve the dispute for every firefighter in Victoria.

I thank you for your time, and assistance to grow the fire service of Victoria.

Please accept these comments as constructive ideas only. These are solely my personal views, ideas and experiences. Such submission does not represent any organisation, body, union, association or person other than myself.

Thanks and best wishes  
Andrew Picker