

06/07/17

To whom it may concern,

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

- My name is Anthony Leddin, I am a Senior Leading Firefighter and have been with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade for 30 years.
- I am a life long resident of the Western Suburbs of Melbourne and have been stationed at most stations in Western zone, including in recent times, Newport, Spotswood, Sunshine, Footscray, and most importantly, 15 years ago, at Deer Park, for eight years which is on the border with the Country Fire Authority. I am currently stationed at Newport which has the highest concentration of major hazard facilities in Victoria, primarily petro-chemical manufacture and storage, but we also have factories and businesses, residential areas, schools, nursing homes and a very busy freeway and roads network.
- MFB members are also qualified emergency medical first responders.

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

Today, Victoria's population is booming - the state is home to more than six million people. Melbourne has seen massive development over the past century. When Victoria's fire service boundaries were established in the 1890s our population was smaller and concentrated around Melbourne. It is now home to heavily urbanized growth corridors and sprawling suburbs which continue to grow.

As previously mentioned, I spent eight years at Deer Park Fire Station, This area is a great example of how urban sprawl and Industry growth has affected Fire Service boundaries and response capabilities. Victoria's antiquated fire service boundaries do not meet the needs of our state today, in fact, they put lives and property at risk.

Today, there are 35 highly urbanized areas that are still wrongly zoned as 'country Victoria' under these antiquated fire boundaries - these areas require a rapid urban fire response.

I feel strongly that we require immediate reform to modernise the fire service. The heavily urbanised areas of Victoria should have a modern fire service with an eight minute response time and seven professional firefighters on two fire trucks - this is the minimum standard needed for emergency response to maximise the potential to save lives and minimise damage to property. Fire crews must respond in eight minutes because after that, a fire reaches the flashover point – the point of “no return” where the property and people inside are at a very real risk.

Response under eight minutes is only guaranteed in Melbourne's metropolitan fire district. In this zone, specially trained professional career firefighters are in fire stations that have been strategically located to be able to respond. It is imperative that all of Melbourne suburbs have a standard response time to maintain safety. People who live in, Ballarat, Melton, Sunbury, Greenvale, Craigieburn, Hoppers Crossing, Point Cook, Rosebud, Ocean Grove, Warrnambool, Portland, Pakenham, Cranbourne, Traralgon, Morwell, Springvale,

Dandenong, Hallam, Boronia, South Warrandyte, Eltham, and South Morang should also be entitled to the same standards which a unified service can provide.

Regardless of the amazing job CFA volunteer brigades do, the fact remains that they cannot be available 24/7 365, as they are community members with jobs and families. With our outer Metropolitan growth rapidly expanding (1800 per week settling in Melbourne according to CENSUS 2016), particularly in the West, the volume of calls is increasing as is the need for a professional modern fire service that can respond to this growing demand.

I have personally been to calls in the Deer Park area, called on only after the volunteer backup has not responded (within four minutes). This alone puts the community at a huge risk as well as the firefighters attending the call as a lot can happen in four minutes.

I have been to dozens of calls including emergency medical response in the past when stationed at Deer Park and have not seen the volunteer CFA Units respond. This is not a criticism of the CFA, it is a failure of the current system and a massive failure to the residents and workers who occupy these areas.

With operational staff under one banner, covering these outer metropolitan areas, the people that live there will be guaranteed two fire appliances with minimum seven fire fighters (two teams of two wearing breathing apparatus, two pump operators and one incident controller). They will receive the fire coverage that they deserve and the volunteer response will not be altered, they will still be responded which is also great for us should we need additional support.

Bringing the two professional fire services under one banner will eventually standardise everything with the exception of speciality equipment and can help to ensure a better level of training for all professional firefighters.

The ongoing dispute where firefighters have been used as a political football has taken a huge toll mentally on me and my colleagues. We simply wish to go to work and serve our community. This can be difficult with the constant barrage of negative and false reporting by media outlets with vested political interests.

There is an opportunity with this proposed Legislation to bring Victoria into the 21st Century and to end conflict and mistrust. I implore you to pass this Legislation for the good of all Victorians moving forward.

Yours sincerely,

Leading Senior Fire Fighter Anthony Leddin

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