

FIRE SERVICES BILL SELECT COMMITTEE SUBMISSION

6<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I am writing to express my support for the proposed Fire Services reform and Presumptive Rights Legislation Bill.

I am pleased to hear that the committee into the Fire Services Reform will be evidence based, allowing the data and facts to speak for itself.

This inquiry must not allow itself to become emotion based, as all sides have extremely emotive arguments for either wanting or not wanting change.

I believe though that the outcome the committee should be striving for, should not only be a Modernised, improved Fire Service Delivery Model, but an outcome that will benefit most of all, the improved safety of the communities that we represent, and the improved safety for all firefighters, whether Professional or Volunteer.

I also believe that Presumptive Rights for all firefighters is long overdue.

My name is Darren Milburn and I have been a Professional firefighter with the MFB for 12 years. I currently hold the rank of Leading Firefighter. I have gained extra specialist qualifications as a Modular Transporter Operator, Teleboom Operator, and Heavy Rescue Operator, along with the constant training, skills maintenance and Medical training we receive on a daily basis.

I have also gained a Cert 4 in Training and Assessment, which enables me to conduct Workplace Emergency Management training courses for the MFB to Business clients and the general public. These courses include Warden Training, Extinguisher Training, Initial Emergency Response and Practical Evacuation Drills. I have also been the Western Zone Health and Safety Representative for the past 6 years after completing a Health and Safety reps course.

I believe in the Fire Services Reform Bill because Victorian Fire Service boundaries have not changed in the past 60 years.

- In 1950 when the CFA and MFB boundaries were last revised, Melbourne had a population of 1.3 million
- At the end of 2016 the figure from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed the population of Melbourne to have climbed to over 4.5 million

Has Victoria's Fire Services Boundaries changed and adapted to meet not only Melbourne's, but Victoria's growing population? No it hasn't. The committee has the chance to act in the best interests of the community that it represents, by accepting that our Fire Services need this reform.

I live in the CFA area of the City of Melton. Melton is the 3<sup>rd</sup> fastest growing LGA in Victoria, and ranks in the top 20 in Australia. Its area covers 527sq.kms with a population of 143,000, with this figure expected to explode due to the countless new estates opening up, more and more industry coming into the area, and some major infrastructure projects allowing for the population to increase, due to decreased travel times and better train services.

What sort of Professional firefighter response should our community expect in one of Victoria's largest and fastest growing areas? A minimum of 2 Professional Fire trucks, with suitably qualified, trained and resourced personnel in under 8 minutes to allow the mitigation of fire spread from the room of origin to a fully involved structure fire. A minimum of 2 Professional Fire trucks, with suitably qualified, trained and resourced personnel to ensure not only the safety of all firefighters is paramount, but also the safety of the occupants of the premises, and the safety of our community.

This is the response you would expect, but in reality this is not the response that is currently given. At present in a CFA integrated area, a Professional truck and a Volunteer truck is responded. Through no fault of their own the Volunteers cannot guarantee a response, or a response of suitably qualified, trained and resourced personnel in a timely manner.

This is not a good enough outcome in a large urban area, for a Modern Fire Service. Once again the committee has the chance to act in the best interests of the community that it represents, by accepting that our Fire Services need this reform.

It is fact that in 1950 a room that was on fire did not reach flashover for 15-20 minutes. In this era of hydrocarbon based products the time to flashover in a modern premise is now around 3 minutes. Due to construction methods used these days, structural collapse occurs more often, making fire responses more time critical, to ensure again, not only the safety of all firefighters, but the safety of the occupants and the community that we serve. Again, through no fault of their own, this time critical response cannot be guaranteed by Volunteers. CFA's own data shows time and again how many Volunteer responses do not meet CFA's own criteria.

This again, is not a good enough outcome in a large urban area, for a Modern Fire Service. Once again the committee has the chance to act in the best interests of the community that it represents, by accepting that our Fire Services need this reform.

Additionally while many would argue volunteer and career firefighters are trained the same, that is simply not true and to argue otherwise is disingenuous. When a volunteer truck responds the qualifications of each firefighter is unknown and inconsistent, placing the community and firefighters already committed to an emergency in unnecessary danger.

This is the reality of a volunteer response in a high risk urban environment and it is unacceptable that this risk has not been adequately mitigated.

Under the reforms all high risk urban environments will receive a streamlined and highly structured initial response under one response system. A rapid 8 minute response, with a minimum of 7 Professional Firefighters on two fire trucks is the minimum standard needed in highly urbanised areas. Furthermore there is absolutely nothing in these reforms that will stop volunteers responding to emergencies as they do now whether rural or urban.

One of my favourite parts of the fire service reforms is the introduction of an independent Fire District Review Panel which will remove the protectionist behaviour when it comes to boundary review. The panel will use actual Triple 000 data, projected population figures and urban development when determining the necessity for a professional response. High growth and high risk areas can be critically analysed by prioritising community safety rather than the emotions of turf wars that belong in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

All Victorian, professional and volunteer Firefighters, deserve a Modern Fire Service that meets the needs of our growing communities. The proposed fire service reforms are vital for the safety of all Victorians including me as a Firefighter. The reforms will also address the ever increasing and unrealistic demand being placed on volunteer Firefighters, because of the enormous urban growth resulting in increased emergency calls. A 'failed to respond' or a 'delayed' response is simply unacceptable in high risk urban environments. The current protectionist, obstructionist and turf war mentality shown by a vocal minority serves no purpose and is a blight on Victoria's emergency services, hindering any improvement in service delivery.

Myself, my colleagues, my family and numerous other people that I have discussed this topic with have had enough of those opposing every change or announcement for Victoria's fire services. Victoria's emergency services must be free of ego, spite, undue media hysteria, hidden agendas and political interference, the

community deserves better, and the community deserves a modern fire service and a positive change from the current situation.

Thankfully I have heard that this select committee into the fire service reforms will be evidence based, the data and the facts will speak for themselves and the emotion must be put aside.

The fire service reforms are vital for the safety and future of a rapidly growing Victorian community, they are important to me, my family and my colleagues. The proposed Fire Service Reforms have mine and my family's full support.

Kind regards

Darren Milburn  
MFB Leading Firefighter

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