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For:

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

From;

**James Harris**  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**It is requested that this submission be treated as “STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL”.**

**Disclaimer:** *This submission is made by me as a concerned private citizen whose profession is fire-fighting. This submission is not being made in any capacity as a public official and any views expressed are personal and do not necessarily represent the views of my employer, being the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB).*

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is James Harris. I am a Qualified Firefighter in the MFB and have been a firefighter for almost 4.5 years. I currently work at South Melbourne Fire Station (FS38), but have spent most of my time in Eastern District bordering on CFA area. I come from a Firefighting family, as my father, Colin Harris worked for 40 years in the MFB and reached the rank of Commander. The Fire Service has been a big part of my life.

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

- The standardisation of equipment and training for Career Firefighters (MFB and Career CFA). It simply doesn't make any sense to have career Firefighters working side by side, doing the same job using different appliances (CFA and MFB Urban Scania Pumpers with completely different layouts), different equipment and procedures (radios, hose couplings etc). Surely even from a cost standpoint, why are there two separate agencies essentially doing the same thing, but doing everything a bit differently. Think of the research and design wastage that has gone into developing both MFB Pumpers and CFA pumpers, when surely one appliance could have been developed by both agencies. All of this 'doubling-up' defies all common sense. Everything from station design, appliances, equipment, procedures, uniforms etc.
- Our Community Safety and Firefighter safety. This is the most important reason why I support the proposed fire services reform. As an employee of the MFB, when responding to a reported fire, there is at least 7 firefighters dispatched. Firefighters undertake a dangerous

job and our own safety is greatly enhanced by having support from a guaranteed second appliance, giving us a minimum of 7 on the fireground. At a fully fire involved house fire, even 7 firefighters is by no means sufficient resources required.

In Croydon (an outer Metropolitan Fire District Eastern Suburb with a population of 23,553 in 2011 census data) there will be 7 on the fireground within 8 minutes as this area is protected by MFB. This provides the community peace of mind knowing that their lives and property are protected with this cover.

Boronia (an outer Metropolitan Fire District Eastern Suburb with a population of 20,825 in 2011 census data) on the other hand does not have the same cover as Croydon, despite it's similar population and infrastructure. This area is protected by an integrated CFA station that relies on both Career CFA and CFA volunteers. When responding to an incident, the career firefighters rely on the volunteers to respond, however being volunteers with other life commitments (employment, family obligations etc), there will be occasions where there could be insufficient firefighters available to respond to support the career CFA firefighters. This is by no means a denigration of volunteer firefighters, it is simply an inevitable consequence of this current antiquated fire service delivery model. Volunteers do a fantastic job for their community and should be praised for their commitment, however as population density increases in areas such as Boronia (and many other CFA areas) fire service delivery should be revisited. As Firefighter, I could not imagine not knowing whether or not another appliance would be able to be responded or how long this could take. Surely Career CFA firefighters deserve the same level of workplace safety as their current MFB counterparts? Why should a house fire in Croydon have a difference in fire cover protection than a house in Boronia? This discrepancy in both the community and firefighter safety should not exist.

- An end to ongoing political games and negativity. Firefighters should be concentrating on firefighting and the other roles we undertake for the community. Myself and colleagues both in the MFB, CFA and friends/family who are CFA Volunteers are well and truly sick of the unrelenting victimisation that has been playing out in the media. Morale is extremely low at the moment. We don't need this added mental pressure. Our jobs can be difficult enough as is. Without a resolution, there seems no end in sight. A restructure combining both MFB and CFA career firefighters as FRV and a purely volunteer CFA seems a logical way forward to do this. FRV EBA negotiations in this model going forward would have no effect on volunteers, as the CFA would be entirely volunteer. This would be a good outcome for both career firefighters and volunteers. The current makeup of volunteer and career firefighters in the one organisation is convoluted and messy. It appears that much of the public still doesn't understand that there are career CFA firefighters, so a clear separation of career and volunteer would clear things up.

Please consider my views, as this is an opportunity for an improvement in the Victorian Fire Service. I see the creation of FRV and the change back to a volunteer only CFA as a positive step for all Victorians. The model we currently have needs a serious shake up. Thanks for taking the time to read my submission.

Yours sincerely,

James Harris.