

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

First off let me thank you for the opportunity to put in a submission for this committee and allowing me to support this vital bill.

I currently live in Humevale and have been involved with the CFA as both a volunteer and professional firefighter for approx. 16.5 years. I started as a junior at Kinglake west, before moving to an operational volunteer firefighter at Whittlesea Fire Brigade at the age of 16 and serving the community during the Feb 2009 Black Saturday fires. I became a Professional firefighter in February of 2010 and am now serving as a Leading firefighter appointed to Boronia fire station. My past career service has been at stations such as Warrnambool, Greenvale and South Morang whilst also relieving at numerous other stations across the state, I have received a Chief Officers Unit Citation For Courage and National Emergency Medal for service during the Black Saturday fires as well as a service medal for time. My qualifications include Cert 3 Firefighting and Emergency Operations, Cert 4 in Training and Assessing.

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

There has been much conjecture about the implications of the proposed fire service reforms, having grown up in the CFA and witnessing much change over the years I am positive that the changes will not only enhance firefighting capability in Victoria but also enhance both community and firefighter safety.

The changes that have been proposed I believe will largely only affect current CFA integrated stations and MFB stations, 99% of the Volunteers won't see any change in day to day operations, the small changes that would occur would be at current integrated stations where volunteers would undertake a support role, such as what occurs in the fringe areas at the moment where there are fire calls within the Metropolitan fire district, the proposed changes would see current integrated stations become Fire Rescue Victoria with Country Fire Authority co-located, what occurs largely now at integrated stations are that career firefighters are dispatched first to jobs and support in either a small or large foot print and when in primary area are generally responding first and supported by volunteers who mutually work together for the end goal of protecting the community, moving into the future I do not see this changing and whilst some relationships might change I largely see relationships improving and the community in a better position and help the organisations heal after prolonged attacks!

Interoperability is already occurring within the CFA and MFB with career firefighters doing secondments between the 2 services, with future equipment in development being standardised across all services.

The recruitment process and training processes are different for volunteers to career firefighters, with potential career firefighters undertaking a vigorous recruitment process, including written exams, physical aptitude and fitness tests, psychological profiling, a full medical, and several interviews. Then on a recruit course study for 19 weeks to be a proficient firefighter, with continued on the job learning, with 3 years until Qualified, and then a further year as a qualified firefighter and study before you are able to undertake the leading firefighter development course and subsequent exams. This is followed by further study and a year minimum at the rank of leading firefighter before you can undertake Station officer progression. For volunteer recruitment, it is a case of attending a brigade on a training day or night, get voted into the brigade, start wildfire minimum skills on a night a week or a day a week depending on the brigade, with continuing courses as they become available. This can take several months or several years to become a structurally qualified firefighter, and as a comparison for volunteer ranks it continues to run on a popular vote system that doesn't rely on any qualifications to take a rank such as Lieutenant or Captain and the criteria ranges from brigade to brigade and is not standardised across the CFA. By joining career firefighters into one agency it will allow standardised training, recruitment and selection, appliances and allow greater flexibility in the work force and enhance skills and training in the metropolitan and major regional centres.

Given that the reform is only to affect the current CFA integrated stations I find it deeply concerning that a fear campaign has been launched stating that career firefighter's industrial representatives are destroying the CFA, representatives who are also career firefighters. Many of the areas being letter dropped by the liberal party include areas with no career firefighters in close proximity and as such will see no impact on the proposed changes.

The scare campaign that has been developed stating that volunteers will be pushed out of integrated or co-located stations is false and completely inaccurate for the most part volunteer's roles will remain unchanged, and as they do now they manage their own business. Where expansion of the fire rescue Victoria response areas might occur (subject to an independent board of reference) surely this can only be good for the community, a guaranteed response of 90 seconds with a truck of 4 structurally trained firefighters, with training in emergency medical response and other specialty skills. Emergency medical response that the MFB have been delivering for nearly 2 Decades has only been rolling out in to the CFA under the current government under the previous government it was in the process of being dismantled. I can personally vouch for the effectiveness of emergency medical response with my partners father having a cardiac arrest and working on him myself and having the back up from a crew of MFB firefighters who delivered 2 shocks from a defibrillator prior to Ambulance Victoria arrival, he is here with us today because of all of these services. All these services are currently available in MFB area but still being rolled out in the CFA area. This is but one item. Volunteers will always be needed in Victoria to say otherwise is laughable, but as the metropolitan area of Melbourne expands the fire cover needs to adapt with these changes, the 4 minutes a volunteer may have to respond and distance they can cover in an area outside of a busy residential/commercial/industrial area could be 5km whilst in a busy area could be as low as 200m with light sequences and other traffic, and that is just to get to the station let alone getting turnout gear on and responding in the appliance.

This is compounded again by antiquated response arrangements in the CFA where it's not the closest or quickest truck that will be responded to emergency incidents, decided by brigade Captains

and Operations Officers, with Integrated fire stations working on closest and quickest trucks and some volunteer stations assign preference to attending incidents to friendly brigades whilst career firefighters are not responded until one or all of these brigades fail to respond. One of the issues career firefighters face is the perceived threat that career firefighters will take jobs away from the volunteers, and that it will stop volunteers responding, such as I witnessed during my time at the South Morang CFA station where brigades would fail and then request further volunteer brigades be responded despite a staffed truck being able to respond, we would often be bypassed even for jobs where our truck would be either the closest truck even for the primary brigade or the 2<sup>nd</sup> closest truck. At one point during my time at South Morang the brigade was the 12<sup>th</sup> truck to be responded into another brigade's area 7km up the road. It is demoralising when emergency incidents occur and we are forced to sit idle as people are calling for help. These are all jobs where career firefighters are underutilised and the volunteers are made to leave work, their families, and social functions. Volunteers are being repeatedly called out in the middle of the night which also has implications with their work life due to increasing fatigue and lower productivity in their work place, increased sick days and increased strain on family relationships. As the urban sprawl pushes out further volunteer brigades will be faced with increasing call numbers, increasing traffic and time in travel to the station. The other issues we see particularly in the outer suburbs are volunteers having to travel further for work, this also reduces the number of volunteers available for turnout.

The proposed changes will see career firefighters being given a guaranteed support where possible when responding to incidents where our lives are at risk and we need back up, where we can guarantee that the responding truck has both the required equipment but also appropriately trained crew to provide the necessary support. It has only been recent (last 2 years) that we have seen the manning increase on CFA Pumpers to allow for 2 BA operators to enter a structure, during the early days of my career we had to fight to be able to have 4 on a truck, I would often go into a structure on my own not knowing if back up was coming in order to make sure no one was inside. but this is a fact of life as any volunteer may or may not respond to fire calls they can choose when they respond and the volunteer responding could be one that has spent 6 months in the CFA and has only completed wildfire response or one that has completed 20 years of service and has structural firefighting qualifications. The simple fact is that due to work, family, and other personal life commitments volunteers cannot guarantee their response and they cannot guarantee that each time the truck responds it will have BA operators that are internally trained. This is by no fault of the volunteers and they aren't to blame for this, some brigades might turn out 100% of the time and some brigades might only turn out 50-80% of the time, 20-50% of these failures are normalised and accepted, it is called the normalisation of deviation factor where because it hasn't gone wrong previously the practise is allowed to continue, and as such is widely accepted as "its ok", the problem lies with when eventually it does go wrong the consequences can be catastrophic.

Normalisation of Deviation is the term referred to when you make a deviation from normal or accepted practices or take short cuts, and is continued because nothing goes wrong it becomes the new normal and the shortcut or change in practices are allowed to continue. The issue becomes as more and more shortcuts occur the deviation becomes great and when an incident occurs the results can often be catastrophic.

I have attended multiple incidents in the last 18 months where back up was either not coming, delayed, or insufficient skills mix, or incorrect vehicles for the incident occurring.

- 04/07/2017 – 1038 – Fire alarm Nursing home – South Morang staff – we received a call for a alarm operating at a nursing home, and responded from a previous call, 2 other volunteer groups were also responded, both brigades failed to respond and not turn out at all. The life risk for this area is massive as it is a largely non-ambulant group with mixed mental states, and we only had 4 members to assess whether it was a false alarm or a fire scenario, if it was a fire scenario the outcome could have been catastrophic. We got lucky!
  
- 21/12/2016 – 10:12 – Car fire – Epping CFA (fully volunteer) primary area, I was on a staffed support truck, the volunteers turned out in their Tanker with 1 member who had BA training and 2 members in wildfire clothing, the member driving their tanker was the only one BA trained and as a result only one safely able to combat the fire. The car was on LPG and needed to have the gas tanks isolated which could only be done with crews in BA under the car, Luckily we arrived on scene first and knocked down the car fire. This illustrates that even though a brigade may turn out does not guarantee crew composition or the right vehicle turning out.
  
- 16/12/2016 – 07:03 – Car Fire – Doreen CFA (fully volunteer) primary area, as a support brigade we were second on scene to the Doreen volunteers and they only had 1 Ba operator on board who was the incident controller, and had tasked 2 volunteers with wildfire minimum skills to advance on a car fire that was on LPG with no BA or protections from Smoke or possible gas flash. This again illustrates crew composition and not having a guarantee of getting the correct crew to turnout, this isn't an insult to volunteers or criticising their work ethic but a reality we face.
  
- 5/12/2016 – 15:30 – Stove Fire – Epping CFA (full volunteer) primary area, I was on a staffed support truck and the volunteers didn't turn out due to a lack of drivers available and were standing out the front of the station as we drove past, this has potentially compromised safety by having no back up BA crews. Another reason why career firefighters have requested 7 professional firefighters be responded to incidents.
  
- 4/11/2016 – 08:59 – Car accident – Epping CFA (full volunteer) primary area, Brigade turned out in 6 minutes, requested an additional brigade due to lack of members, and took 11.5 minutes to drive 1.5km and then requested a volunteer truck who also failed to respond, rather than the

closer staff appliance. Subsequent volunteer appliance from epping turned out in 14 minutes and took 6 minutes to drive the 1.5km, this highlights the antiquated response arrangements.

- 8/9/2016 – 08:36 – Car accident – Epping (MFB Area) call came in as in CFA area, the Epping Volunteers failed to respond within 10 minutes and as a result South Morang CFA (integrated) were responded, who on receiving further information advised it was MFBs area and had the MFB respond who made it on scene in 2 minutes.

*I have included the incident below as an example, this was prior to having a 4<sup>th</sup> firefighter on CFA trucks and not having a 2<sup>nd</sup> firefighter to back up in Ba something that was resisted as taking jobs away from volunteers.*

- 7/2/2012 – 22:05 – Shed fire spreading to house – Greenvale (CFA Staffed primary area) Greenvale primary call came in for a house fire, on arrival on a Staffed CFA pumper with a crew of 3 we found a shed next to a house on fire spreading into trees and next door property, I was in Breathing apparatus on my own for 5 min, and trying to stop spread of fire I injured my shoulder and continued the firefight, a rapid response stopped us from having the fire develop further and spread beyond the area of origin, the issue with this fire was the delay in support to assist with getting inside the shed and putting out the flammable liquids stored in the shed. I ended up having an AC joint separation as a result of my injury and required surgery, an injury if I had have had back up or a 4<sup>th</sup> member on the truck would certainly have prevented my injury and subsequent surgery.

These are just a few incidents that I have attended and have used as factual based incidents and it is not meant to be a criticism of the volunteer firefighting efforts. Volunteers for the most part do a great job, but the areas of largest amount of growth and risk are being abandoned and have no guaranteed response, the risk of having such a response places increased stress on career firefighters as we don't know if the truck coming is going to be able to back us up if we get in trouble, for the community it also means the chances of keeping a fire to the area of origin is reduced. These mentioned jobs are just a snapshot of what commonly occurs every day in Victoria.

There is and always will be a place in Victoria for volunteers, the simple fact is that you can't put career firefighters everywhere, some stations in Victoria some years would not receive a single emergency call. The point of career firefighters going into stations are to reduce the impact of volunteer firefighters being relied up on for high volumes of calls, taking them away from family, work, and other commitments. The risk in an area justifies a 90 second response with guaranteed minimum of 4 structurally trained firefighters, or the heavily urbanisation of areas prevents volunteers from meeting compliance times.

Surge capacity has been targeted as being destroyed should these reforms occur are nothing short of fear mongering as only the career firefighters will be merged together and CFA volunteers continuing on as they do now, with standalone CFA brigades being called up on to assist in large scale incidents. Given that the reforms only affect the MFB and 35 Integrated CFA stations I don't understand the argument for surge capacity being destroyed in the CFA and putting Victoria at risk, as anything but fear mongering.

The talk about cost blowouts and massive increases in fire service levy funding is an interesting argument given that essentially all we are seeing is career firefighters being merged in to one service, using existing infrastructure and equipment, any future advances would be through the normal process that we have seen previously for either new vehicles or new equipment such as the Heavy Pumper program, or the Emergency Medical response program or the current Breathing apparatus replacement program.

The opposition to this much-needed reform seems to be purely political to score cheap points at the expense of community and firefighter safety. It is my hope and why I support these changes that it will provide an end to ongoing and future attacks on all firefighters and the division that it has created.

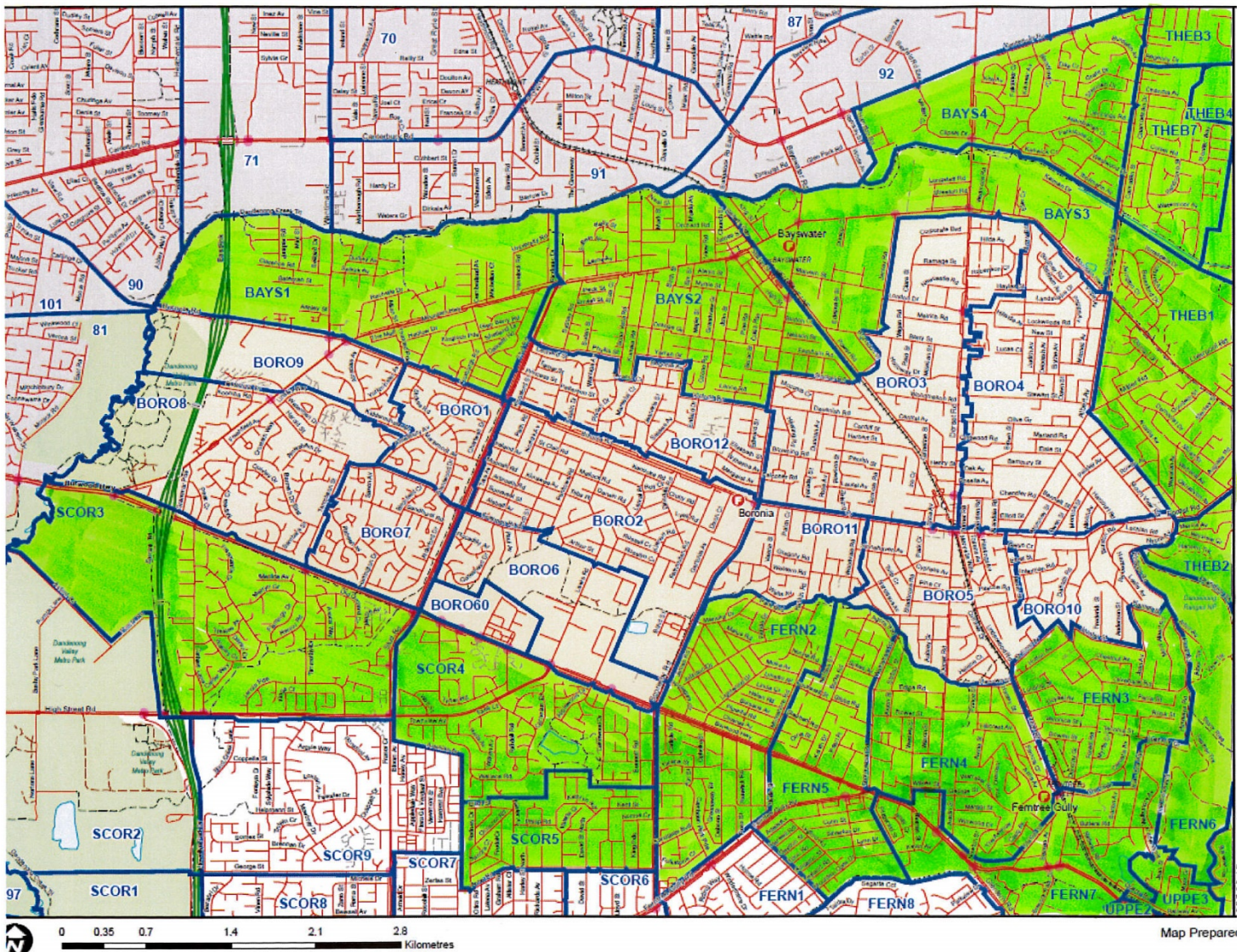


This is intersection of Stud road and Burwood Hwy in Wantirna 50 years apart highlighting the growth that has occurred despite any boundary changes occurring.



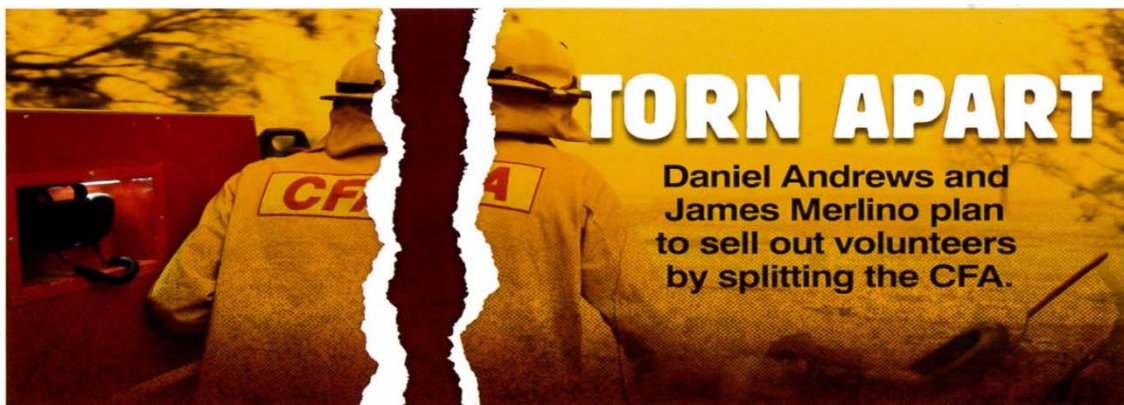
Knox Westfield – primary response is Boronia career firefighters, Boronia Volunteers, 1 MFB truck, CFA Scoresby and CFA Ferntree Gully. Of Which only 2 trucks are guaranteed for an incident here.

I have attached a response map, shaded in green is Boronia fire brigades potential support response area, surrounding Boronia's Primary response area. In the green support areas we respond for a 10minute emergency medical response, however we might not get responded for any other Emergency. In Boronia's primary area we have several hospitals, multiple primary and secondary schools, large commercial shopping centres including Westfield at Knox, and a large commercial and industrial precinct, a large number of aged care and residential living, and this is also reflective in the surrounding areas.



We have seen continued and prolonged attacks on firefighters for over half of my career in the fire brigade, from attacks aimed at preventing getting a 4<sup>th</sup> firefighter on a truck, rejection of presumptive legislation, targeted attacks on career firefighters EBA's, targeted mailing out into areas of propaganda material claiming career firefighters are destroying the CFA, putting the community at risk, News articles claiming career firefighters won't turn up in an emergency, adversarial management that have wanted to take away conditions that provide a safe workplace for firefighters, the Fiskville training college which was the subject of a cover up, or most recently where career firefighters failed to turn up on Black Saturday, comments intentionally made to slur career firefighters and create anger in the community. These comments hurt me personally and whilst we have yet to see a public apology, I along with my colleagues continue protecting Victorians.

I wanted to end on the note of the public attacks we have seen on firefighters, the attacks have been created to destroy relationships between volunteer and career firefighters and career firefighters and the community. Attacks led by the liberal party with the hands off CFA campaign, the Murdoch conservative press namely the herald sun. This is not a new tactic or unfamiliar territory for the Murdoch press or conservative press with similar attacks occurring in the United Kingdom.



**EXPOSED:**  
**Daniel Andrews and James Merlino's plan to sell out volunteers by splitting the CFA.**

**Daniel Andrews' and James Merlino's attack on the CFA is relentless.** Their plans are designed to tear the CFA apart, which could see the loss of thousands of volunteers protecting Victoria.

**This is further evidence Daniel Andrews and James Merlino are more determined to destroy the CFA, protect their union mates and put Victorian families at risk.**



**I support our wonderful CFA volunteers. Please show them your support too.**  
**EDWARD O'DONOHUE MP** | Member for Eastern Victoria Region  
 ☎ 5941 1112 | ✉ [edward.o'donohue@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:edward.o'donohue@parliament.vic.gov.au)

Our CFA volunteers are always there to protect us in times of emergency but they are being sold out by Daniel Andrews' deal with his union mates.

**Now, more than ever, our CFA volunteers need your support.**

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False and misleading campaign material dropped into letter boxes that do not provide facts, and only provides statements that are designed to instil fear in to the community, and create tension between firefighters.



The media both in Australia and over in the United Kingdom have featured headlines such as:

- **Fireman sham Fury at strike over £26k pension- 'Misled by cynical union bosses'**
- **Firefighter strike over pensions dispute**
- **As they walk out on strike again today... Firemen are heroic but the emotional blackmail of their union hides the fact they're very underworked**
- **Fireys strike: Bushfire safety fears as UFU agrees industrial action**

3 of these headlines are from the United Kingdom 1 is from Victoria to illustrate my point.

These attacks have led to increased strain and stress on firefighters on the ground, combined with the Fair work legislation amendments introduced federally which led to an unprecedented petition from the majority of career firefighters calling for us to be allowed to leave employment with the CFA and be employed under the MFB banner.

The toll these attacks have placed on firefighters is taking a toll with stress at all-time high and personal relationships under strain due to media coverage and asking at social events why we hate volunteers and are greedy, why we want to destroy the CFA. I personally have avoided social gatherings even some family dinners because of the questions I get asked and accusations that come with that.

This inquiry needs to focus on facts, and remove the emotional aspect, many members both career and volunteers of the CFA have long memories within the service, with many good memories and unfortunately some not so good, nearly all were proud to join the CFA and serve in the CFA.

The time has come and most career firefighters I have spoken to all support the changes and agree that the time is now to merge all career firefighters into one body, the Volunteers will remain in the CFA and continue to serve their communities as they do now, the community expect a fire truck to turn up to their emergency's and this will continue in to the future, whether it's a Fire Rescue Victoria truck or a Country Fire Authority Truck they won't care as long as it's there in their time of need.

At the end of the day firefighters want to go home to their families and friends just as much as the rest of the community does, and these reforms are aimed at improving both firefighter and community safety!

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[REDACTED]