

Submission in support of the Fire Service Reform Bill

To the Fire Service Reform Bill Committee

My name is Brendan John Angwin and I have been employed with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) since 1981.

I currently hold the rank of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) and the positions of Director Regional Community Resilience South East Metro Region as well as ACFO Director Sothern District Operations.

Formal Qualifications

Over my 36 years of service with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, I have completed all promotional courses from Recruit to Commander in accordance with the MFB agreed Training Framework. In doing so, I have attained all required qualifications from Certificate II of Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations) to the Advance Diploma of Public Safety (Firefighting Management).

In completing these qualifications I have achieved extensive training in a range of emergency service disciplines, these include but not limited to fire, incident management, Hazmat, rescue, fire safety, Community resilience emergency medical response.

This training has provided me with the ability to adapt and apply the knowledge and skills to effectively deal with a wide and diverse range of emergencies at a state and national level.

Key achievements include:

- Deployed to significant incidents as part of the incident management teams including recent fires interstate and major floods within Victoria
- Establish partnerships with other emergency services and learning organisations
- Implementation of innovative work practices including risk management systems for operational training including VEMTC
- Mapping of the Public Safety Training Package into a new training framework
- Chief Fire Officer Awards for contributions to Wildfire as well as HAZMAT
- Invited to review New Zealand Fire Service Training And Promotional System
- Board Member Government Skills Australia
- Public Safety Industry Reference Committee member

These achievements have required me to work closely with CFA career staff and volunteers in both in Incident Management Teams and on the fire ground. These interactions have in the main been positive although at times they have been challenging due to some significant differences between the organisations.

Support for the Fire Services Bill

I support the Fire Services Bill as there is a need for a new approach to reform and modernise Victoria's Fire Services and bring them into the 21 Century. Without this reform neither organisation will be able to grow and reach their full potential.

The Bill will allow both the new Fire Rescue Victoria and the existing Country Fire Authority to adapt to the challenges and changes needed to deliver exceptional service and work seamlessly together. This reform of Victoria's Fire Services will achieve a high level of confidence with other Emergency Service Organisation and the community that the Fire Services serve.

The Bill will also create clearer pathways that will support all firefighters to safely undertake their roles whilst when protecting the community. It will also allow agencies to better manage the fire services and focus on their statutory responsibilities.

The Bill would allow for the modernisation of the fire services and create an environment that would expedite these changes that would lead to improved diversity, more respectful culture, efficient use of all resources as well as providing more training and better equipment, timely resourcing of all staff due to increases in efficiencies.

The change would create the opportunities for standardisation of training systems, equipment, communication networks, and appliances as well as the standardisation of Operational Procedures and Emergency Response guidelines.

Victoria is currently supported by two different Fire Services that provide coverage across urban, suburban, peri-urban and regional areas. As Victoria's metropolitan area has rapidly expanded the metropolitan fire district has not changed markedly for many decades and now approximately 50% of the metropolitan area continues to be classified as country area of Victoria under existing legislation (MFB act 1958). Currently areas such as Dandenong, Boronia, Craigieburn, Melton, Hoppers Crossing, Caroline Springs and Point Cook operated under an integrated fire station model with both career and volunteer firefighters supporting selected areas of the metropolitan area. This would not change under the new model but will improve response times that will provide better community outcomes. Integrated stations would continue to provide the same service to the community as it has successfully done for many decades in provincial cities such as Geelong, Bendigo, Warrnambool, Wodonga, Traralgon, Shepparton, and Mildura.

This model will also ensure that when responding to a fire call within the metropolitan district that the correct number of suitably trained and qualified firefighters will arrive in a timely manner to allow firefighters to safely perform their duties.

In the built urban environment that supports the majority of complex buildings and infrastructure firefighters require a diverse set of qualifications consisting of 31 units of competency from the Public Safety Training Package (Fire Sector). To achieve this career firefighters are employed full time and required to complete over 750 hours of face to face training delivered over 18 weeks prior to commencing firefighting duties. This training allows firefighters to respond to house fires, large structures including high-rise, vehicle accidents, incidents in tunnels, chemical spills and leaks, respond to Wildfires, and assist at Emergency medical response calls.

For a volunteer to qualify the minimum skill set is the requirement to complete 6 units of competency from the Public Safety Training Package (Fire Sector). To achieve this they are required to complete 27 hours of training part time training delivered face to face over 3-6 months. This training prepares volunteers predominantly respond to wildfire although they can still be responded to any type call in the urban environment.

This creates significant risk when managing incidents and having volunteer firefighters on scene in the urban environment that do not have the correct skillsets to safely perform the required tasks and support other firefighters in carrying out their duties safely.

Effect on Volunteer engagement

I believe that the new model will enable greater volunteer engagement. It would provide greater support to volunteers and allow for volunteers to receive training that meets their community needs based on risks. It would also allow them to develop surge capacity models with the support of DWELP, FRV and interstate fire services. It would also free up volunteer resources to support interstate deployments over the high risk Fire Danger Period.

Underlying policy Rational

The policy rational considers the roles that both agencies will responsible for in providing better expertise to meet the needs diverse range of communities that we serve.

The new model will put in place solid and stable leadership to fill the void that has occurred in both organisations in recent times.

Victoria will still rely on career and volunteer firefighters. This is a new and better model of fire service that will allow both organisations to grow and develop and meet the ever changing challenges that lay ahead.

In conclusion, I support the Fire Service reform Bill as it will enhance and modernise both fire services and also provide a better service to the people of Victoria.

Kind regards

Brendan John Angwin

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