

SUBMISSION via email to: LCSC@parliament.vic.gov.au and consultation@dpc.vic.gov.au

For;

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

From;



It is requested that my name and identity in regards to 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 has not been 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 [REDACTED] and I am currently employed as a Leading Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), I am currently stationed at Fire Station 38 in South Melbourne on "C" Platoon. I have been a fire-fighter with the MFB for over 6 years and I have worked in both "Central District" and "Southern District" which interfaces with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) boundary. I was also a CFA volunteer at the Mornington Fire Brigade for 11 years. I would like to add that my family has a combined service history of over 100 years with CFA.

As a MFB Leading Firefighter, I hold the following qualifications:

- Cert II and Cert III in Public Safety (Firefighting and Emergency Operations)
- Emergency Medical Response First Responder Course
- Hazardous Materials (Hazmat) Technicians Course
- Breathing Apparatus (BA) and Service Pods Course
- Command and Control

I have also performed the following roles:

- General Firefighting
- BA Officer and Operator
- BA Service
- Hazmat Officer and Technician
- Emergency First Responder
- Fire Education

In my time with CFA as a volunteer I was trained to Wildfire - Low Structure level and served a term as an officer holding the positions of 3rd and 4th Lieutenant. My time at Mornington Fire Brigade was served as a member of both a fully volunteer brigade and as an integrated brigade working with CFA career firefighters. In 2013 I was awarded the CFA 10 year service medal.

I live in Bittern on the Mornington Peninsula whose fire cover is provided by volunteer CFA fire service model.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed fire fighters presumptive rights compensation and reform of the fire services.

I would like to address the follow points in regards to the committee's points of reference:

- Proposed firefighters presumptive rights compensation legislation
- Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017
 - *Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria*
 - *Underlying policy rationale*
 - *Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery*
 - *Short and long term cost impact on fire service provision*

Proposed firefighters presumptive rights compensation legislation

Internationally it has been accepted that presumptive legislation is a tool that can help firefighters access entitlements and compensation as they can for any other work-related injury or illness, hereby reversing the onus of proof by presuming the cancer is an occupational disease, unless proven otherwise.

There is a large amount of accepted Australian and international research that has proven that career firefighters have a significant increased risk and incidence of specific cancers.

In 2014 the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) commissioned Monash University to undertake such research and in their report,

("Australian Firefighters Health Study"), it was found that their findings were consistent with other international research and demonstrated a significant increase in the incidences of cancers for career firefighters.

For reference here is a link to the report:

<http://www.coeh.monash.org/downloads/finalreport2014.pdf>

In Australia, presumptive legislation recognising the same 12 cancers with the same qualifying periods of service for each cancer has been enacted in Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, and the ACT. Federally employed Aviation firefighters are also covered.

Tasmania, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland have structured their legislation to give certainty to volunteer fire-fighters as opposed to bogging them down in a legal battle to obtain their rightful benefits from the cancer contracted when protecting the community.

The model proposed by the Victorian Government is based on that of the Queensland model. Under such model volunteers can provide information to a committee to show that they qualify for presumption. The Victorian Bill extends the presumption to protect volunteer firefighters, and like career firefighters, they have to demonstrate that they have served as an operational firefighter for the relevant qualifying period for the particular cancer.

In addition the Victorian Bill also introduces a new provision which provides the option for the committee to give special consideration for exceptional exposures for career and volunteer firefighters who do not meet the relevant qualifying period, but can demonstrate they have attended an exceptional event.

Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

The current structure of the states fire services is as follows, the CFA protects Victoria through a network of 1,220 mostly volunteer brigades including 35 integrated brigades where career firefighters and volunteers work side by side. At the same time, the MFB operates in the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD) which covers built up areas of Melbourne through a network of 47 stations staffed by career firefighters. The area deemed the MFD has changed little since its conception last century.

Currently, Victoria fire services operate under antiquated systems and structures that have not undergone significant change since the 1950s. Many areas, especially those on the urban fringe and around regional centres, have experienced massive growth in the past 60 plus years. Under the proposed reforms parts of these areas that are currently covered by 35 CFA integrated brigades will become Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) stations. These are areas that due to population, geographic location and

increased urban fire risk will require an improved fire response that ensures 24 hour a day, seven days a week, professional fire protection.

The 2016 Census showed that Victoria had the greatest increase in population in the country, growing by over 10 per cent from 2011 to an estimated 6,244,227 people and revealed that Melbourne as a city was the third fastest growing region in Australia.

For reference here is a link to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Report: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/C508DD213FD43EA7CA258148000C6BBE?OpenDocument>

A number of reviews and inquiries have made clear, particularly the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, that our firefighters and the community are being let down by an out-dated structure. The proposed fire service reforms will improve the fire service response framework across what is now considered metropolitan Melbourne and the major regional centres across Victoria. Providing Victoria with a more responsive, better equipped more reliable and most importantly, safer response model for both the community and firefighters.

A key change that will occur as a result of the reforms will be that at the 35 integrated stations there will be guaranteed backup, guaranteed that two trucks with at least 7 firefighters across both will be out the door in 90 seconds and on scene within 8 minutes. What that response means is enhanced community and firefighter safety and protection. This is critical for breathing apparatus procedures and is a best practice model. At the 35 integrated stations, this is currently not always the case. Through no fault of their own, volunteer brigades cannot always respond in the designated timeframes, or with appropriately qualified structural firefighters required for internal firefighting and rescue operations. Whilst I was a volunteer firefighter I witnessed this first hand. On many occasions I was unable to respond due to work and family commitments and was also sometimes limited in the roles I could undertake as I was not suitable qualified. In some cases, we would have to wait over 8 minutes for a fellow volunteer who was qualified to drive before we could leave to attend an incident.

As a former volunteer I cannot see how volunteer engagement will be impacted in a negative manner. There are 1220 volunteer brigades, and the vast majority of CFA volunteers will be unaffected by the proposed reforms. There are 35 integrated stations which will be impacted in that there will be an enhanced career staff response. This is what's best for the communities they protect and for the safety of all firefighters responding to incidents.

Volunteers at these integrated stations will still have the ability, with staff support from FRV, to train, exercise their skills and respond to incidents. Just as before, as part of a joint response They may not be required for as many calls due to an enhanced response from Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), however, this is a positive for the community, who will be receiving a faster response, which will save lives and property, reducing the cost to the community.

The government has committed substantial funding to the CFA, for training, facilities, assets, recruitment and retention, which will now be a fully volunteer organisation which is what Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) has been asking for during *their* Hands of the CFA Campaign.

The proposed reforms will also assist with standardisation of career training, specialist response, standards and equipment. It will lower costs by reducing duplication between services and create a more efficient and capable service delivery model.

Importantly, the reforms will promote industrial harmony, something which I have not experienced my whole career. This will reduce unnecessary litigation costs and promote a new healthy organisational culture free from the weight of past disputes. Creating a new fire service that is ready to adapt to ever changing risks such as terrorism, hostile acts, growth in complex infrastructure, a fast growing and aging population and the development of any unknown future risks such as the use of combustible cladding in construction.

The damage that the current EBA process, not to mention the negative press that certain media are constantly running in a totally biased fashion, has had on career firefighters and the emotional strains that it has placed on firefighters and their families. It is time to move ahead and support firefighters in protecting the community they serve and love.

Finally I would like to close by asking this. If you or a loved one needed assistance from the fire brigade what would you prefer, a guaranteed number of firefighters with suitable qualifications responded in a standardised response time arriving in 8 minutes or relying on volunteers, who through no fault of their own, may be unavailable, delayed in responding and not qualified to perform the task required to save you, your loved ones or your property?

Yours sincerely,

