

## Kirra Vanzetti

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**From:** April Picton [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 6 July 2017 5:10 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Fire Services Bill Select Committee 2017 - Submission

My name is April Picton, I am 32 years old. I work as a career firefighter with the Country Fire Authority. I undertook the CFA recruitment course from August to December 2016 and have been a career firefighter since December 2016. I hold the position of Level 1 Firefighter at Rosebud Fire Station on the Mornington Peninsula. I was a junior volunteer firefighter from the age of 12 to 16, and continued as a senior volunteer firefighter till the age of 19.

I reside in Berwick, located in the City of Casey, where I am an homeowner. There are a number of CFA brigades in the surrounding area - Berwick, Beaconsfield and Narre Warren South - however the nearest integrated stations are Hallam, Cranbourne and Pakenham all of which are more than 10 minutes away.

### **I am writing this submission in support of the proposed bill for Fire Service Reform for the following reasons:**

- The acceptable standard of response in urban areas is at least two trucks, with a minimum of 7 firefighters, dispatched within 8 minutes. This of which is not occurring which is putting communities, lives and properties at risk.  
 Currently the minimum number of career firefighters responding on a primary appliance to an incident is 4 which is not considered acceptable or safe for me, my colleagues or our families. In areas such as Rosebud and other regional integrated stations there are no other integrated stations nearby to support into our areas, this means there is a huge reliance on volunteer stations for backup and support. Unfortunately there is no guarantee that the backup and support will come, and if it does there is no guarantee when they will arrive on scene, how many members will arrive or if they possess the necessary competencies to undertake specific roles/tasks on the fireground such as Breathing Apparatus operation, Search & Rescue, Structural Fire Attack, etc.  
 Having a minimum 7 career firefighters respond means that there will be sufficient firefighters on scene to commence Firefighting operations safely and effectively, all of whom will possess the necessary competencies to undertake any role/task.
- An 8 minutes on-scene response time is considered critical for community safety and protection, because after that a fire reaches a flashover point which drastically increases the risk to life and property. Career staff will turn-out within 90 seconds and will be on scene within 8 minutes. However those backup or supporting volunteer brigades have a turnout response time of 6 minutes and will be on-scene between 10-15 minutes. This timeframe however could be more depending on whether the members responding have approval to drive under Code 1 conditions.  
 Safe and rapid firefighting operations can commence quickly if a minimum of 7 career firefighters on at least two trucks are dispatched in urban areas. This will also ensure the safety of the firefighters on the first arriving appliance as they know that 3 more fully competent career firefighters will be right behind them.
- Brigade captains have the power to set the response tables for all types of incidents in their primary area which determines what supporting brigade will attend. In some areas a nearby volunteer brigade has been selected over a closer integrated brigade to support. If calls are of a significant nature, career firefighters are often responded but in a much delayed timeframe than if they were responded in the initial callout, or are only dispatched when another brigade fails to respond. The community don't care if career or volunteer firefighters are responded as long as they are receiving a response from the closest brigades.  
 The reform will establish a Fire District Review Panel which will review the boundaries between fire services. This will ensure that the community will receive the most appropriate and closest brigade.
- Highly urbanised areas on the outskirts of Melbourne as well as Major Regional Cities do not receive the same level of response as Metropolitan Melbourne. The current system only provides for one crew of career

firefighters to attend a fire, backed up by volunteers, if they are available. This isn't enough to successfully protect lives and properties. In some areas they don't even receive a crew of career firefighters. The City of Casey is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia with a population of approximately 300,000 residents. The population growth is approximately 7,600 per year, forecasts indicate that by 2041 the number of resident will increase to 492,457, and the number of households will rise to 171,430. In terms of infrastructure, City of Casey has two major shopping centres, two major hospitals, a major Freeway and Highway, two train lines and much much more which is all deserving of the acceptable standard of response of 7 career firefighters over two trucks responding in 8 minutes.

**Below are some examples of my experiences which demonstrate the failures of the current system:**

- Recently I spent a number of months on light duties, meaning I was allowed to continue working on station however was not allowed to attend any incidents. During this time when the career staff turned out for a job in which our volunteers were also paged to, I was witness to the activities of our volunteers turning out. Majority of the time between 2-3 volunteers would arrive at the station within 5 minutes, none of whom have Structural Uniform/Breathing Apparatus approval/Search & Rescue approval /Structural Fire Attack approval/Endorsement to drive the truck (whether this be under Code 1 or Code 3 conditions). Therefore they would have to wait around until a driver arrived. Another 1-2 members would arrive at the station within a few minutes, both have Structural Uniform, however it is uncertain if they are Breathing Apparatus approval/Search & Rescue approval /Structural Fire Attack approval. One member in particular has a beard therefore ruling him out of Breathing Apparatus operation.
- On 21 April 2017 the career firefighters were attending a gas leak incident when another job came through, an alarm had gone off in Rosebud Plaza which is approximately 1km from the station. As the career staff were tied up they could not attend therefore the volunteers would have to respond as the primary brigade. Three volunteers showed up at the station, none had approval to drive the truck. Presumably after waiting for an approved truck driver to arrive they turned out in the Brigades Support Vehicle, which has no firefighting equipment/capacity, 12 minutes after the job came in. The three volunteers did not have Breathing Apparatus approval/Search & Rescue approval/Structural Fire Attack approval, and most likely wouldn't know what to do with a Fire Indicator Panel.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed fire service reform. As a member of the community in a highly urbanised area and a career firefighter I believe the proposed reform brings positive and long overdue change to the fire service. I respectfully ask the committee to please support the reform and help bring the states fire service into the 21 century.

Yours sincerely,

April Picton



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