

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is Matthew Carew and I am a Leading Firefighter employed by CFA. I currently work at Hoppers Crossing and have previously held positions at Geelong City and Point Cook since beginning my career as a Professional Firefighter in 2011. I have obtained specialist rescue qualifications in Road Accident and Step Angle Rescue. I've also obtained specialist aerial qualifications on a 42 metre Ladder Platform, Teleboom and Aerial Pumper.

Prior to 2011 I was a Volunteer Firefighter for approximately 6 years, most of which was at Belmont. As a volunteer I obtained a Breathing Apparatus (BA) qualification, Wildfire Crew Leader and held the position of 3<sup>rd</sup> Lieutenant. I responded to around 60 calls per year as a volunteer including local incidents such as structure fires and accidents, as well as strike team deployments to major fires including Black Saturday.

I am writing to express my full support behind the proposed fire services reform.

In my opinion these reforms are long overdue. A common talking point at fire stations is the statement "if only the public knew." For too long the interest in many outer metropolitan and urban areas has not been about what is truly best for the community, however it has been one of pride and tradition.

### **Fire Service Delivery, Population Growth and Boundary Changes**

In the media and everyday life Victorians constantly hear about and witness our population growth, plans for new cities and further urban development; yet fire boundaries and response arrangements barely change. In some cases CFA stations have become integrated, however these are traditionally in the wrong location (either on the MFB boarder or near a CFA volunteer brigade area) and have a very small area of responsibility. Although the proposed reforms don't go as far as restructuring existing brigade areas, some specific examples are below of how out dated the current response model is:

- 1 kilometre from the integrated Hoppers Crossing Fire Station is Werribee Fire Brigade's primary area. This same location is 2.5km from the Werribee station. The initial reason for this was due to a railway crossing which has been removed for almost 20 years, but the response area hasn't changed. This is also the start of the area that the East Werribee development is taking place, with a proposed 80,000 residence as well as existing hospitals, universities and industry. Responsibility for developing pre incident plans, risk inspections and response to minor incidents is an unnecessary workload on the already busy Werribee volunteers, rather than the much closer and fully staffed Hoppers Crossing brigade. It also means that the volunteers from Hoppers Crossing are not called, even though they are by far the closest volunteers.
- Less than 2km from the Geelong City Fire Station is Geelong West's area, yet it is over another 3km to the Geelong West station. Although Geelong City has multiple appliances

and could respond sufficient crew into this area, it is a support area therefore only 1 truck from Geelong is meant to respond.

- Point Cook CFA station is just 400 metres from the MFB boundary, almost 10 times the distance closer than the nearest MFB station.
- Waterhaven Boulevard in Point Cook is located between Skeleton Creek and the Princess Freeway. As it is over the creek, it is considered MFB primary area as clearly shown in Melway Map 207, Ref D2. MFB appliances literally drive past the fire station at Point Cook to service this area. To make matters worse, this area is supported by Hoppers Crossing CFA and MFB Altona, not Point Cook CFA. There have been at least 2 occasions this year where Laverton, Altona and Hoppers Crossing have responded to fires in this part of Point Cook, without Point Cook being called even though they are fully staffed and over half the distance closer than the others called.
- For a large portion of Point Cook Fire Brigades calls, they are the second appliance on scene behind Hoppers Crossing. For Point Cook to get to these calls, they are required to drive through MFB, Truganina or Werribee's areas. The fact that they respond through another area of responsibility, yet are still the next closest appliance, shows just how wrong and out dated these boundaries are.
- In the new suburb of Williams Landing in the area around Forsyth road, for a car accident one side of the road will get a response from CFA Truganina, Hoppers Crossing and Werribee rescue. Yet the other side of the road is CFA Point Cook, MFB Laverton and MFB Sunshine rescue. The response into these areas can have up to 6 different brigades called, all depending on what side of the road the call is made from.

The above examples highlight how out dated and irresponsible the current fire boundaries are. It is public expectation that the closest guaranteed emergency services should be dispatched to incidents with the appropriate support arrangements in place. In all of the above cases, an imaginary line dictates the difference between getting a 90 second response by either fully crewed appliances, an appliance that is not the quickest to arrive or a complete unknown response.

### **Volunteer Response and Participation in Fire Service Delivery**

The proposed reforms will not impact on volunteers' ability to respond to fires. Rural brigades will operate exactly as they currently do and current integrated brigades will still get alerted to calls in 'their' area.

The only difference will be that professional firefighters from that station will have another brigade with a guaranteed response called on to assist keep them, and members of the public, safe. If volunteers turn out with the appropriate crew numbers and have the required skill set they will be utilised exactly as they are today, however the new model will ensure certainty of people and skills arriving to assist the first crew.

For a large part of the area I currently work, at least 7 professional firefighters are already responded to incidents due to the foresight of people in the local area. Unfortunately many of my other colleagues don't have this same response. Point Cook and Hoppers Crossing are both responded to structure fires in the suburbs of Point Cook, Hoppers Crossing, most of Truganina and approximately half of Werribee. However the remaining parts of Werribee and Wyndham Vale, Hoppers Crossing responds with no guaranteed support.

The need for a minimum of 7 fully qualified firefighters responded to fires is critical. I have experienced this first hand. At a House fire in 2013 both Hoppers Crossing and Point Cook responded to support a volunteer brigade. Point Cook Pumper arrived with Hoppers Crossing immediately behind. The first crew entered the house and began the fire fight whilst myself and another firefighter put on Breathing Apparatus (BA). Our first task was to help the first 2 firefighters out of the building and extinguish burning embers on them as the ceiling had collapsed as they entered the building. This all occurred before the primary brigade was on scene. This would have been a much different outcome had it of been a few kilometres down the road without the same level of response.

### **Benefits for Volunteers**

Separating Volunteers from Career Firefighters will benefit Volunteers in a number of ways. It will allow Volunteers greater autonomy, will reinstate brigade Captains at these locations and allow for greater training opportunities. It will also return CFA to the volunteer only emergency service that it should be. After all CFA's vision is "a volunteer and community-based fire and emergency services organisation. Our vision is to work together with communities to keep Victorians safe from fire and other emergencies."

Whilst volunteers at current integrated brigades have great access to informal training with professional firefighters, they often miss out on group/ district and state wide training. This is due to the skills of professional firefighters (who are not all on duty at the same time) at the brigade masking the actual skills obtained by volunteers. For example, an Integrated brigade who has 30 professional firefighters will show that there are 30 qualified BA wearers. Volunteers from these brigades can be given lower priority to get on courses as a piece of paper indicates that the brigade has more than enough members already qualified, yet only 4 will be on duty.

I have firsthand experience before I started my firefighting career being a volunteer and sustaining a day to day profession. Over a 5 - 6 year period I was able to consistently respond to about 60 incidents per year. This was as much as I could contribute without having an adverse impact on my family, work commitments, or working fatigued.

The reality of our modern society is that people simply do not have the availability they use to. The areas in which Fire Rescue Victoria is proposed to be located typically receive 500 to 2000 emergency calls per year, prior to the introduction of Emergency Medical Response. Volunteers at these locations, in sufficient numbers, with the adequate qualifications and experience are not available to respond to several calls a week, complete training and community safety activities whilst meeting life's demands and safely managing fatigue.

In support of this, last year the Volunteers at Point Cook recorded and displayed the turnout numbers for each of its members. Of the 30 members on the list; 16 responded to less than 10 calls (less than 1% of the Point Cook workload) and the 2 top responders attended just over 100 calls, still less than 10%. This is no reflection on the commitment of these people, however a reflection of the modern world.

Further to this, I attended a factory fire in Moolap (Geelong) in 2015. The call came through in the early hours of the morning and the factory was the workplace of one of the brigade's volunteers. The volunteer who worked at the location turned up to work to find the factory had been on fire for hours. He had turned his pager off as he was too busy with work to give up time to respond to fires. Again this is no reflection on this volunteer's commitment; it is a reflection on the modern world we live in.

### **Financial Impacts**

I understand you are also investigating short and long term costs of the proposed changes. Whilst I am no finance expert, having a single career and a single volunteer service should reduce costs. It would allow for a single professional firefighting uniform, rather than the current 2 different arrangements. Rather than 2 services each investigating and sourcing new or replacement equipment, this can be done once to increase productivity. It will allow Fire Rescue Victoria to look after urban issues, and CFA to look after rural. I am also able to provide some insight into ways in which I believe CFA could save significant amounts of money.

- CFA should have requirements for minimum response that are made very clear when recruiting new members. CFA invest in training and providing Personal Protective Clothing (PPC) yet often do not get a return on this investment. There are people that have been issued thousands of dollars of PPC, attended hundreds of hours of training, yet are unable to respond to 1% of a brigades required calls.
- Brigade funds should be pooled centrally, unless they are fundraising for a specific and approved item. If members of the public knew the figures in some brigades' bank accounts they would be shocked. In my career I have witnessed:
  - For an extended period of time, a brigade trying to raise tens of thousands of dollars to replace a much needed emergency vehicle, yet the neighbouring brigade, who covers most of that suburb had more than the money required.
  - A brigade started a fundraiser to raise \$2000 to buy a training aide. They then purchased the training equipment for under \$900. They could have purchased almost 100 of these units without fundraising using existing 'brigade' funds.

### **Impacts on Morale and Wellbeing**

The damaged caused from the past few years and the impact it has had on morale I feel is irreparable in its current form. The orchestrated attacks on professional firefighters have resulted in an integrated model that is beyond repair. At fires and incidents crews are able to work together, however there is unfortunately an undeniable tension on and away from the fireground.

Professional firefighters have been clearly discriminated against based on their union association. There has been so much political interference which has left me one of only around 1000 Australians who cannot have an enterprise agreement due to an external party. Lies in the media have been ruthless without any facts or accountability.

The misinformation around the dispatch of 7 professional firefighters is one example that went on for far too long with people telling the public those in rural areas would need to wait hours for the closest firefighters to arrive whilst volunteers had to wait and do nothing. Other insults include repeatedly being told no professional firefighters attended Black Saturday and we have even been outrageously likened to apartheid.

I have been approached in my local supermarket whilst off duty and given a pamphlet instructing me to support a campaign to protect CFA from being taken over by people he referred to as “union bullies.” After I listened to all of this fear speech, he was shocked to find out that I was one of the people he was labelling a bully and I was able to provide this person with actual facts. It turns out this person lived 2 hours away from the supermarket and his closest professional firefighters were an hour from the small rural brigade in which he volunteered. Clearly this had no impact on him however he was continuing to push an agenda based on lies and misinformation.

I sincerely believe that having separated professional and volunteer services will allow relationships to be rebuilt and provide a much improved culture to boost morale. This will also allow the Victorian public to no longer hear about this issue that they are also sick of hearing about.

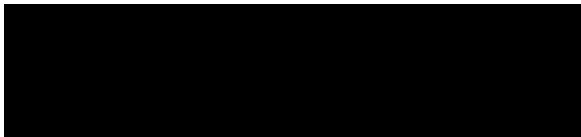
**Presumptive Legislation**

Finally, I would also like to express my full support for the presumptive legislation.

As someone who has a father that has over 35 years’ active service as a volunteer, a brother who is a professional firefighter, and myself, a professional firefighter whom attended Fiskville as a recruit (after CFA was aware of and covered up issues) I unfortunately feel that my family will need to call on this overdue legislation in the future.

I appreciate your time in considering this submission and I eagerly await the proposed changes. These reforms will benefit all parties involved and most of all the people of Victoria. If you require any clarification or further information, please contact me via the details below.

Regards,



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 Hoppers Crossing Fire Station, 119 Derrimut Road, Werribee, 3030

