

6 July 2017

Peter Martin  
 Leading Firefighter  
 Morwell Fire Station  
 Country Fire Authority



Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

**INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT 9REFORM0 BILL 2017.**

I am writing to express my support for the proposed Presumptive Rights Compensation and the reform of the Victorian fire services.

I have been a member of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) for the past 10 years, starting as a Volunteer with the Skye Fire Brigade in June 2007, where I held the positions Fire Fighter as well as the role of Brigade Secretary (July 2009 to June 2010) and 4<sup>th</sup> Lieutenant (June 2010 to December 2012). In August 2012 I was successful in gaining a position on CFA Recruit Course 3/2012 and graduated from Fiskville in December 2012 as a Career Firefighter being stationed at Morwell, where I have progressed from Level 1 Firefighter to Leading Firefighter over the past 5 years.

As a Volunteer I attended on average 120 calls a year, attending all manner of calls from Grass, Car and Structure Fire to Motor Vehicle Accidents and Hazmat incidents as well as the events of 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009 where I undertook numerous strike teams into the King Lake area over the week following the 7<sup>th</sup> February. As a Career Firefighter I attend a large variety of Fire Calls which now include Emergency Medical Response (EMR). Fires of significance include the Hems Oak Fire which threatened Morwell during February 2014 and the following Morwell Open Cut coal fire of which I undertook 60 hours per week over 5 shifts per week for the 6 weeks of the mine fire.

It is for the above reason I support the proposed Presumptive Rights Compensation as the number and variety of calls I have attended have and will continue to expose me to caseinogens of which I would not normally be exposed to outside of firefighting.

My time within CFA has been both rewarding and distressing. Being able to assist members of the community in their time of need is both rewarding and challenging, however in recent years the Industrial atmosphere brought about by past Governments, current opposition members, the Media and the Volunteers' association (VFBV) has created an environment which has brought stress and anxiety to myself, my colleagues and much worse my family. I have needed to resign as a Volunteer from Warragul Fire Brigade due to this ongoing dispute, my son at the age of 7 was bullied at school by older children whose parents are volunteers and the bullying based on my employment as a Career Firefighter. My crew have been abused verbally while at the local shopping centre and relationships with volunteer friends and extended family have been strained to breaking point. Believe me, having to justify my employment and existence to my In-laws based on Neil Mitchel interviews and attacks against the UFU have not been fun for me or my wife.

One thing I have learnt over the past 10 years is the CFA is broken with regard to the way it is run. The biggest point, there is not 60,000 active volunteers waiting to respond to an emergency. Volunteering is slowly dying not just within CFA, but all services. SES are struggling, even Lion's, Rotary and local Football/Netball Clubs are struggling to form committees. Which brings me to 'Surge Capacity', at Skye we had 26 members, however of the 26 members, 90% of the fire calls Skye attended had a crew made up from a group of 6 to 7 active members, and depending on the time of day you may have only 2 members turning

out or a full crew of 5. It was and still is a lottery with regard to crew numbers and skill sets/qualifications. So that left 19 other members who had an average turn-out rate of 10 or less calls per year for a Volunteer Brigade which attends 250 to 300 calls per year.

A prime example was the 2009 Fires of Black Saturday. Over a period of a fortnight, Skye undertook 59 staff movements, all of which were undertaken by only 9 members. On top of this Skye had approximately 26 local Fire Calls for the same period and again undertaken for the large majority by the same members who had been on Strike team deployment. So the question needs to be asked 'where the Surge Capacity for this Brigade is?' If out of its 26 members at the time 15 to 19 of them only responded to one or two of the calls or not at all.

The fact is CFA does not have a surge capacity of 60,000 Volunteers as that number is made up of Junior Firefighters (11 to 16 year olds), Auxiliaries (Non-Operational), Running Team Members (CFA's own private sporting club) and Firefighters who have not been active for many years and then your active members which CFA cannot even confirm the true numbers, however it is far below 60,000 as the VFBV would like you to believe...

Only 2 weeks ago I received my 10-year service award, on the same night a number of the running team members also received their 5, 10, 15 and 20+ years services awards all of whom I have never seen at the Fire Station for training or fire calls and all of whom are only members for the purpose of the Running Team and not the attendance to emergencies within Morwell or further. So again, I have to ask 'where is the surge capacity we are being told we'll lose?'

Skye and Morwell are not alone in this predicament; there are a lot of Brigades struggling to meet recruitment needs, response needs and training needs for their Volunteers. The time it takes to get on courses and the culture of the old boys club is difficult to break for new and younger volunteers and as such CFA and Volunteerism is slowly decaying. What is needed is change and a fairly rapid one at that. Funding increase and a direct and constant focus on volunteers and their needs is required.

This reform brings about the opportunity for CFA to focus solely of the Volunteers; it provides funding for cultural change, recruitment programs and improved training opportunities and infrastructure all of which is currently restricted due to the funding needs of both Staff and Volunteer Firefighters.

From a personnel point of view reform will bring about positive change, yes my EBA will hopefully get signed; however beyond that the service we provide to the community will improve. To date Brigade Captains dictate who/which neighbouring Brigades support into their area and this at times has meant certain Brigades are left off the response table based on ego's and past confrontations and in the case of Integrated Stations, some are left of the response table purely because we are "staff" and no thought is given to the fact we respond in 90sec and at times can be on scene before the local Brigade has responded.

Within this reform the responsibility of Brigade Response tables will be removed from Captains and will be based on response times and road networks etc, removing ego's and personal grudges from the decision. The decision to introduce career firefighters into towns will no longer be based on the volunteer system failing, which is the current process and very degrading of the volunteers. In place will be a governing committee who will determine this as towns grow and infrastructure expands.

The above is just a few examples of the current issues within CFA and a few benefits of the proposed Legislative changes. Our current fire service system in CFA and the MFB Fire District boundary is based on a Volunteer fire service supported by staff which when established in 1956 was a great system and the staff were Management and administrative etc and very low in number. I do not believe when the CFA Act was established in 1956 the thought of 1000+ career firefighters in CFA was a consideration.

60 years on we've had a growth in population and community infrastructure which in turn has bought a need for more career firefighters in CFA resulting in a system changing in some way to the needs without the required Legislative changes, which in turn has bought us to ongoing Industrial Disputes over the past 20+years, Volunteer protests in Melbourne with operational appliances against the CFA Chief's directives, an Us v's Them mentality by many within the Firefighting ranks and a anti Career Firefighter/Union campaign in the media.

Separating the career firefighters from CFA and still maintaining a support system for Volunteers via regional office staff, Operation Officers and Managers will return CFA back to its original concept of a Volunteer Fire Service supported by administrative staff and Management.

In conclusion, I see this bill is not about destroying CFA or it's Volunteers, it is about returning CFA back to its original concept and delivering a modern fire services to the growing population of Victoria.

Yours sincerely

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