

The Fire Services Reform Select Committee

Victorian Parliament

Dear Sirs/Mesdames

IN CONFIDENCE

I write to you regarding the legislation seeking to amalgamate the CFA and MFB Fire Services into one body, called Fire Rescue Victoria, and to state that I support the legislation and strongly urge you, the committee, to do the same.

My name is Alex Faris and I am a Senior Station Officer with the MFB, having been employed by the MFB for some 14 years. In that time I have seen the Metropolitan Fire District (the area serviced by the MFB) undergo significant change, with population increases, urban density and structural demographic changes at the forefront, precipitating the need to consider changes to the fire services in Victoria. People residing within the Metropolitan Fire District can expect a full time service to respond to any emergency or call for assistance that they might make within 7.7 minutes of their call, and such a response will guarantee that a minimum of 7 fully trained firefighters will attend the call. As the urban landscape has changed, areas that once might have been considered to be rural or semi-rural areas (such as Werribee and Caroline Springs) are now sprawling metropolises, where houses are no longer geographically isolated as they once were, and the density and population development demand a full time response from a fire service.

Even supporting this is the fact that some volunteer stations have chosen to take up residency in makeshift "stations" close to their trucks, meaning that even their own actions support the need for change to the present services that supply the areas they have traditionally serviced.

This legislation seeks to address all of these issues by way of considering, for the first time in some 40 or so years, the great growth that has occurred both within Melbourne as well as the outer corridors. It's hard to believe that government and the services haven't seen fit to consider issues like staffing numbers, more appliances, standardisation of training, better location of fire stations and the replacement of some volunteer stations with permanent full time staff, and provide amelioration of said issues, given the outcomes of Black Saturday and the change to the funding model for fire services within Victoria in general.

Revamping the fire services should have been actioned a long time ago, and such oversight could be considered tantamount to negligence by both the government and the services themselves; one can only wonder why it hasn't been done, why it's taking so long to do so at present, and why people have taken such a rational issue and immersed it in both political and emotional coils by which delay after delay has occurred.

Surely the very simplest of questions should be: "Do we want a first rate fire service for all Victorians?", to which the answer should always be a resounding "Yes".

Such a reform will provide for one manageable fire service with fully trained personnel providing a first class fire and emergency response service within Victoria, backed up by the CFA in the rural sector and some fringe areas.

I urge you to consider supporting this legislation, and deliver to all Victorians the fire services that they should be able to take for granted. The funding model is in place, the time for change and change management is present. Let's not politicise the excuse used to divide the people of Victoria by denying them the right to have a fire service that will best serve their ever evolving needs into the future.

Yours sincerely

Alex Faris

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