

*Assistant Clerk Committees  
Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Service Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Sprint Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002*

27<sup>th</sup> June 2017

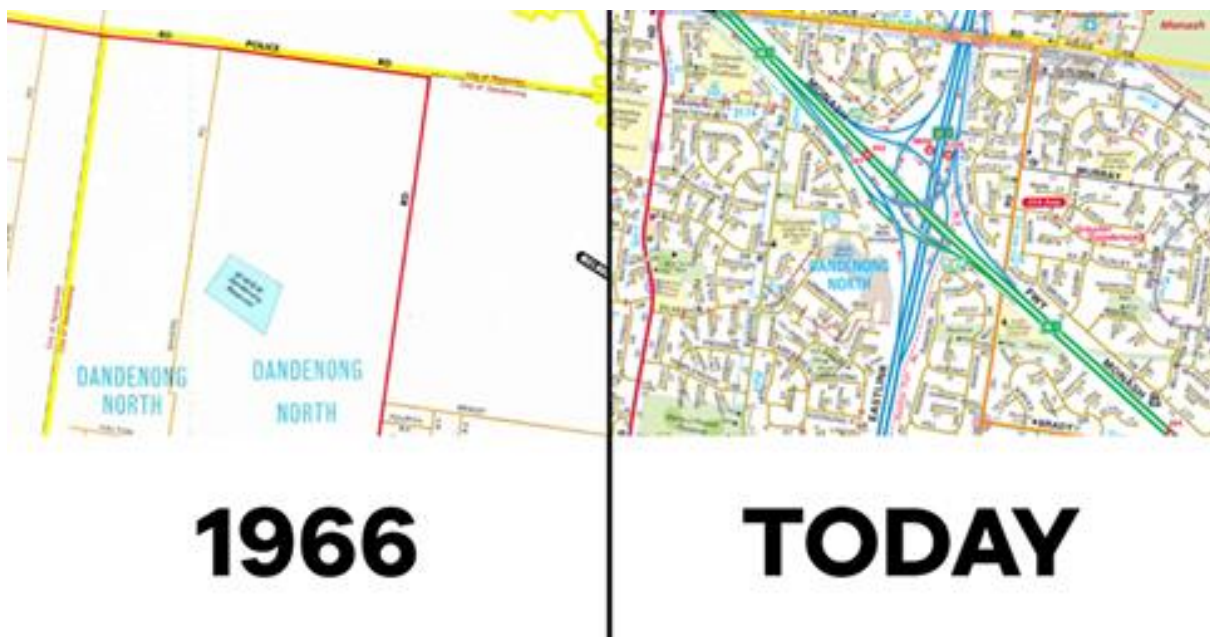
Dear committee,

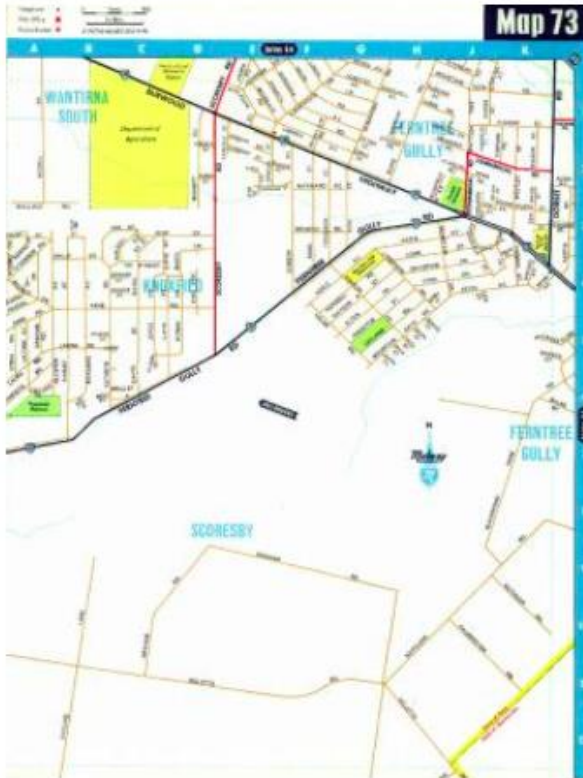
I write this submission as being a CFA member for over 20 years. I was a volunteer for 17 years at Pakenham Fire Brigade prior to becoming a career firefighter with the CFA in 2012. As a career firefighter I am currently stationed at Dandenong which is the busiest CFA fire station attending approximately 2500 calls for help a year despite falling within the 'country area' of Victoria.

I thank you for the opportunity to have my submission regarding the Fire Service Reform in Victoria be heard. Although the fine details of how the Fire Service Reform will work in practice are limited at this point in time, I would like to state my support for the legislation as it stands.

Regarding terms of reference point (a)

I believe this legislation will have a positive impact on the community. The current boundaries haven't changed in over 60 years. In 1960 the population of Victoria was 2.857 million ([ABS Stats](#)) where as today the population is 6.03 million ([population](#)), yet our fire services haven't kept pace with this growth. We have some of the best firefighters in the world, but we currently operate under systems and structures that have not changed since the 1950's.

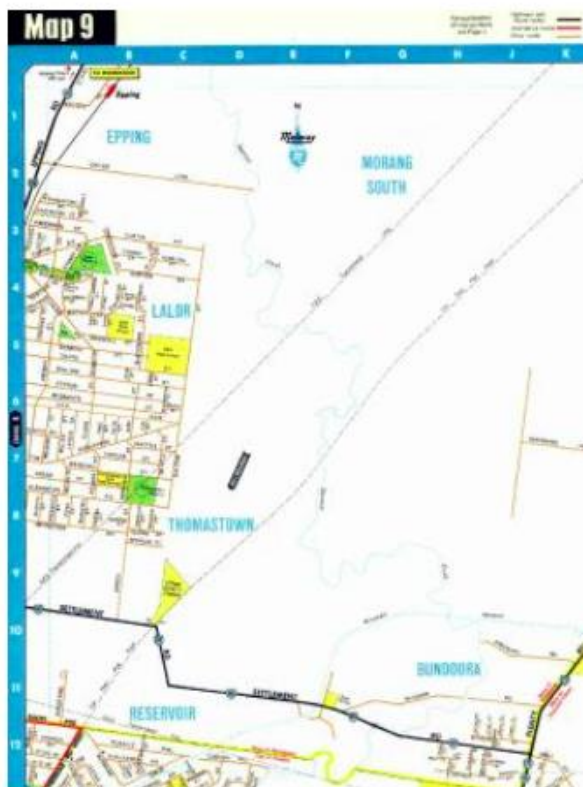




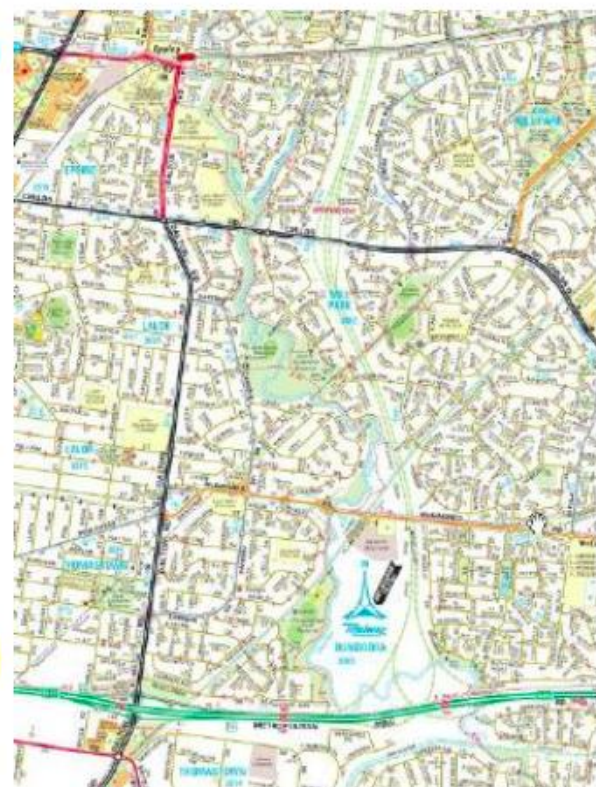
📷 Ferntree Gully, 1966. Picture: Melway



📷 Ferntree Gully 2016. Picture: Melway



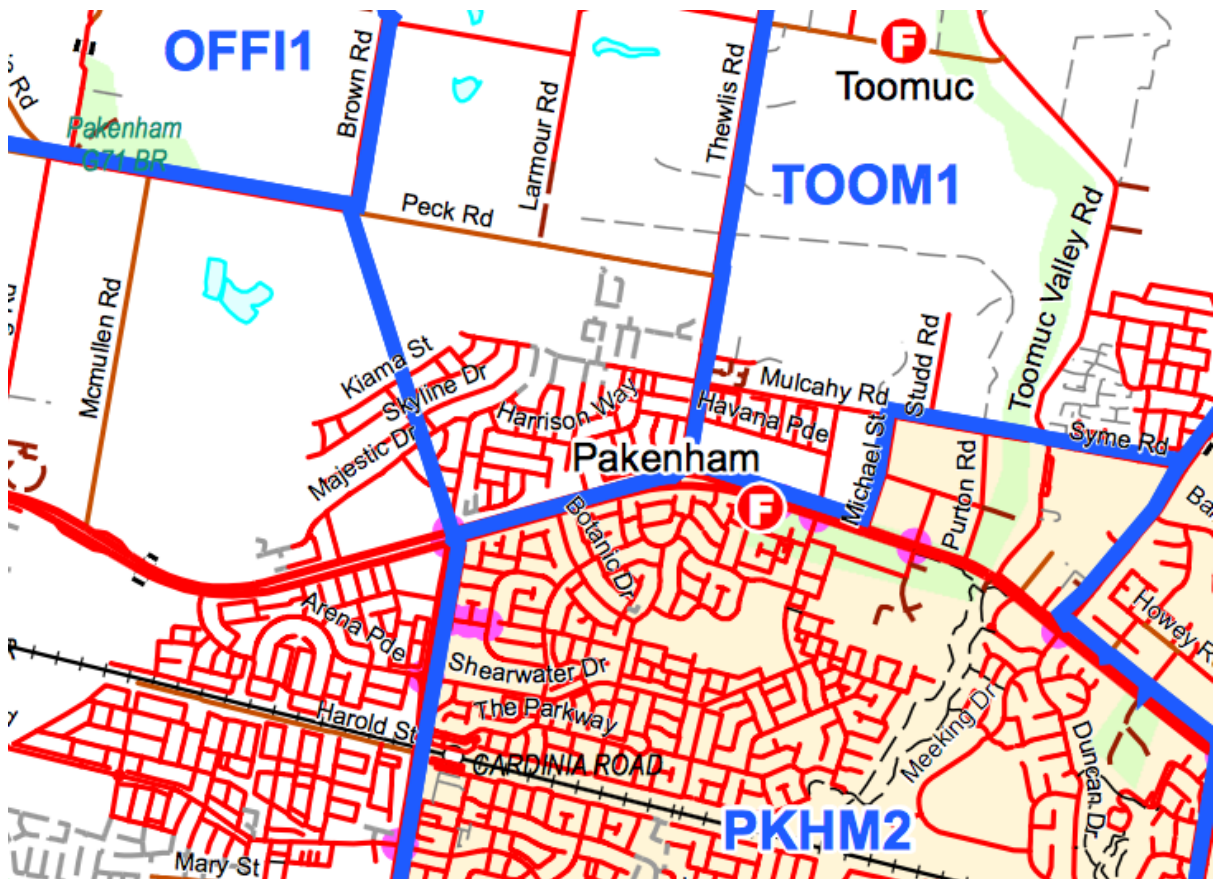
📷 South Morang 1966. Picture: Melway



📷 South Morang 2016. Picture: Melway

The above examples illustrate how areas that are deemed 'country' have experienced a massive growth that ultimately puts stress on volunteers and the community. The volunteers do an extremely good job but they struggle to keep up with the demands of this growth. During my time as a volunteer my station experienced a massive increase in our local population and ultimately the calls for assistance increased. We went from 200 calls a year to 400 calls a year. During this expansion we experienced the increase in workload and the decrease in volunteers availability due to work and family commitments. It became a regular occurrence to attend calls with one or two firefighters. We pleaded for assistance from our members but they were unable to meet the demands of such a busy station due to other commitments. The current system means that changing from volunteer only to integrated stations is a long drawn out process that puts peoples lives at risk. Brigades have to regularly fail over long drawn out time frames. With a new independent board they can receive all the data and make an independent assessment and arrange for things to happen a lot quicker.

The independent board will remove the current turf wars over whose area is whose, when it should be all about service delivery to the community. During my time as a volunteer I witnessed Captains not wanting to change assignment areas due to it being their original response area. An example is in Pakenham, where despite being across the road from the fire station, on the left is Pakenham Fire Brigade area, on the right is Toomuc Fire Brigade area.



During my time as a volunteer we couldn't change these boundaries despite appliances regularly failing to attend events and Pakenham being paged 6 minutes after the event. If you add the standard response of 4 minutes we have a delay of 10 minutes. This is unacceptable to the community and it has continued despite integration. The career firefighters have been campaigning

for changes to boundaries to ensure the same response of EMR within a 20 minute radius, despite this, they're still not being used for the 20 minutes response. Only an independent panel can remove this abnormality and have the best protection provided to the whole community.

I've been stationed at Dandenong since 2013. I've witnessed the decline in volunteer response in not only local incidents but also strike teams (surge capacity) and road accident rescue. Dandenong currently has 53 operational volunteers. They are relied upon to assist in manning the 6 appliances. Previously 2 career firefighters would respond to road accident rescues and be assisted by volunteers. In the last 2 years we've been put at risk by the lower numbers of volunteer turnouts and have had to deploy other appliances or remove appliances from being available to assist these members on scene and create a safe environment. An independent panel would ensure that adequate operators would be manning the rescue and allow other appliances to remain available.

With the change of career firefighter under Fire Rescue Victoria and volunteers under CFA, I can see the positives for both sides.

Positives for career firefighters:

- The same training
- The same appliances
- The same equipment
- The same conditions of employment
- The same procedures
- The same policies
- Ability to move stations

Positives for volunteers

- The same training (currently volunteers at integrated stations are trained differently)
- Autonomy of their own service
- Focus on providing a service to the community and not politics.
- Funding increase of \$56.2 million

Regarding terms of reference point (b)

During my time as a volunteer I witnessed 2 EBA negotiations in 2006 and 2010 (Letters attached). I was told by the VFBV that my ability to volunteer was being put at risk. Yet that never eventuated and this has led me to question their ability to be standing up for 60k volunteers. Upon investigating I have found that they show a history of causing angst among volunteers and career firefighters. The negotiations eventually finish, the EBA is signed and everyone moves on and the community ultimately benefits with better protection and a safer environment for all firefighters. During the current prolonged negotiations I have witnessed the mental health of career firefighters and volunteers decline. I believe that the prolonged EBA negotiations have turned firefighters against firefighters and caused volunteer members to leave. This is not what's in the best interest of the community. With the division of career firefighters and volunteer firefighters, I believe that both parties will focus on delivering the service to the community and not about what each other is doing

in their space. This will lead to a better service delivery to the community as people will be on both sides focussing on what's better for the community.

After discussing with volunteers that I previously volunteered with and volunteers at current integrated stations, I have not seen any indication that their dedication to the CFA or their willingness to respond as part of CFA will be adversely affected by the proposed bill. While there currently may be a level of angst regarding the unknown and the lack of detail released to date, I don't believe there will be a negative effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery as a result of this bill. I believe that removing the EBA negotiations from a UFU vs VFBV war will actually increase the willingness of members of the public willing to volunteer and in fact increase the 'surge capacity'.

Regarding terms of reference point (c)

The short-term impact on fire service I believe will be positive. We will see both volunteer and career firefighters asking lots of questions about what we currently do and whether it could be done better. Ideas will flow up the chain and we will see a positive impact on how we deal with emergencies. They can include how crews are responded, equipment that is provided, safety of all personal and more importantly how to better deliver services to the community. The mental health of both career firefighters and volunteers will improve dramatically, as will their pride in the service they represent.

The long-term impact will be that career firefighters can be deployed into communities faster and provide more enhanced services. Allowing incidents to not escalate will lower the cost of emergencies to the community. The volunteers will also be available more often for 'surge capacity' during local and state wide emergencies. This will ultimately benefit the community with firefighters concentrating on what they do best. The time and money currently wasted every 4 years by government, VFBV, CFA, MFB, UFU and brigades will be a massive cost saving to the community. This will allow money to be better focused on the community protection in long term.

Regarding terms of reference point (d)

This new policy will bring the fire services in Victoria into the modern era. This will ultimately provide a safer workplace for career and volunteer firefighter by maintaining crew levels at an incident, guaranteeing levels of support to enable firefighters to perform their task and protect the community. It will stop the war on career and volunteer firefighters allowing both sides to work together at incidents yet have their autonomy to fight for what is required to help them better serve the community.

We need to stop looking at what individuals will lose and look at what the community and fire fighters will gain, with an improved service model. We need to replace the squeaky wheel with a new one that is better for the people that respond rather than continually spending good money patching and oiling the wheel that no longer works. It will allow both sides to concentrate on providing the service required whilst an independent board will decide on what should be provided to better serve the community. No more emotions getting in the way of service delivery.

These reforms are the first real look at the fire service in Victoria in the last 60 years. I believe that this is long overdue. These reforms will also bring the fire services in line with other emergency services in the country.

Lastly, I would like to convey my disappointment as to how this issue has been treated, used, abused, sensationalised and politicised by our media outlets, political parties and representative bodies. Constant attacks from all angles aimed at all sides have been tiring, degrading and draining for morale. I encourage the committee to see these reforms for what they are truly for, improving both community service delivery and firefighter safety. I hope that with your review the proposed bill is passed and enacted without further delay.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be heard and I look forward to a positive outcome for all Victorian fire services.

Yours sincerely,

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Melways pictures ([HeraldSun](#)) & ([Facebook](#))

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20<sup>th</sup> July 2006

Dear Captain/Secretary/Group Officer/Group Secretary,

You will be aware that CFA has been negotiating an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) with the UFU for over 12 months. This EBA contains clauses that seriously impact on the autonomy of CFA to make decisions, including some related to the relationship between CFA and its volunteers. On this basis, and because it undermines the statutory responsibilities of the CFA Board, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Officer, the CFA Board has refused to sign the agreement.

Volunteers in Victoria are very concerned with the implications of this EBA on CFA's ability to support them in providing the highest level of emergency services to Victorian communities. As such, we have unanimously supported the CFA Board's position in refusing to sign this agreement.

At a mass meeting held in Melbourne last week, volunteers agreed that action must be taken to increase public awareness of the threat to our capacity to do our job, and agreed to stage a public rally within the next few weeks; we have deferred this rally for the reasons mentioned below.

Since this meeting, VFBV has set up a Task Force with representatives of rural and urban volunteer associations to draw public attention to this issue. We believe that to be successful, a public campaign needs to be carefully developed and coordinated to ensure that the right messages are reaching the right people at the right time. Accordingly, we have developed a multi-pronged strategy which will be implemented over a sustained period and which will culminate in a major rally in Melbourne involving a greater number of our volunteers.

This strategy will have a local and regional focus, and will be expanded on a State-wide basis to highlight what VFBV sees as issues most affecting fire protection services to Victoria. Our campaign will include media, meetings with MPs, and mass public rallies. Within the next few days we will be appointing five volunteer coordinators at each Region. Their role will be to make sure all activities are coordinated and that we speak with one united voice. With 100 coordinators supported by 58,000 volunteers, we will send a strong message that this situation must never arise again.

We will let you know details of this arrangement shortly, and details of how you can help.

In the meantime, it is important you understand that the issue we have with the EBA is not a campaign against our career firefighters. In fact, we strongly support their rights to negotiate pay and conditions of employment. We are all professionals, and we must continue to work as a team with our career firefighters to achieve the best outcomes for public safety. It is important that we maintain our professionalism and avoid being led into any reaction that may undermine the relationship with our career staff and CFA's overall operational effectiveness.

Could you please ensure that all members of your Brigade receive a copy of this letter or are fully briefed on what will be a major campaign in reinforcing the vital role of volunteers within CFA.

Gary Lyttle AFSM  
 Chairman



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# VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

## News Note

Attn: Victorian State MPs - Thursday, 9 September 2010

### CFA union deal a setback for volunteering

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) representing Victoria's 60,000 CFA volunteers is concerned that the CFA's newly signed enterprise bargaining agreement with the firefighters' union is a major setback for Victoria's volunteer fire fighting resource.

This industrial deal significantly disadvantages volunteers and was concluded without reference to them, departing from the CFA's signed commitment to involving volunteers in decisions that affect them.

The industrial agreement goes beyond normal union matters such as pay and conditions, and seeks to regulate CFA operations and management of other staff and volunteers.

In making this deal, CFA has committed itself to processes and practices that should relate to the 1% of their workforce the agreement covers, yet inextricably impacts heavily on another 97% (the CFA volunteers) who have had no say and, it would seem, no rights.

The CFA's deal with the union puts restrictions on volunteers by:

- Controlling and restricting volunteer training arrangements
- Including a clause designed to prevent volunteers making submissions on issues involving them
- Preventing the use of paid firefighters on day shift allocation to support volunteer brigades, unless it is part of a progression to a 24 hour staffed fire station, whether the community needs it or not
- Blocking experienced volunteers and other suitable industry candidates from entering paid employment with CFA in jobs they are qualified and experienced to do.

The industrial agreement represents another hurdle in the path for access to and adequacy of training for volunteers, endorses a push towards more paid staff firefighters simply to



add to union membership and is a departure from the *Volunteer Charter*, in which Government and CFA agreed to involve volunteers in any decision which affects them.

The *Volunteer Charter* was signed the Premier, Police and Emergency Services Minister and CFA Chairman in October 2008 to much fanfare.

VFBV wrote to the CFA, Minister and Premier in February 2010, listing 12 points of concern with the enterprise bargaining negotiations that were then under way, but volunteers were still excluded from having their voice heard.

CFA's vast volunteer fire fighting resource has proven itself to be both professional and irreplaceable.

VFBV stresses that if the state is to retain that protection, there must be greater priority and investment given to maintaining and building CFA volunteer capacity, not just in numbers but in levels of training and equipment of brigades.

The CFA's newly signed enterprise bargaining agreement is a setback for that vital community resource.

VFBV contact: Peter Beaton