

Parliamentary Select Committee

Hello, my name is Greg Hunter, my address is [REDACTED] and my phone number is [REDACTED]

I have worked as a full time employee of the MFB since 1977, including the last 32 years as a Station Officer. Over this time, I have worked extensively with CFA fire fighters, both career and volunteer, in many and varied arenas. Due to this experience, my carefully considered opinion is that all Victorians, now and in the future, will gain many benefits from the creation of the FRV, especially those Victorians that are career or volunteer fire fighters.

Impact on fire service delivery

Interoperability between CFA and MFB has been pushed by Mr. Lapsley, and prior to him, Mr. Esplin. Yet, after all the work done to date, the following scenario still occurs – if an MFB truck is taken to a CFA station, (such as Sunbury) a CFA fire fighter is still required to stay behind from their truck, in order to get on the MFB truck and act as the CFA liaison for the MFB truck. This situation also applies in reverse if a CFA truck moves to a MFB station. The FRV would ensure that standardisation occurs at a much faster rate. This, amongst many other factors, would make FRV a much improved service over the system described above, that we have now.

The creation of the FRV would also ensure an overhaul of CFA assignment rules. I am aware of a fire in Greensborough four weeks ago, at which a house was severely damaged. The trucks that responded to the fire using the current system did not include an available MFB truck with four very experienced fire fighters. If the call had been transmitted to the MFB Greensborough station at the same time as the volunteer and career CFA stations, then they would have been on scene very early in the fire and the result for the home owner may have been less devastating. At the same fire, the CFA Captain in charge asked for a specialist appliance – the CFA were going to send this appliance from Dandenong (45 minutes away), when a truck with much the same capability was ten minutes away at the MFB Thomastown station.

Countless examples of the above can be referenced in my time as a firefighter, one being when the MFB attended a fire call to a nursing home in Templestowe. The home was in a CFA assignment rule area. I responded from Templestowe MFB station and was on scene in less than five minutes. Ten minutes after I was on scene, a CFA volunteer captain arrived in a four wheel drive station wagon by himself. The situation resulted as a false alarm, but if there had been a fire, then my crew and I would have been in far more danger than if the assignment and despatch protocols were in place.

The CFA career fire fighters are required to have a focus on bushfire, sometimes to the detriment of the service they provide, in already heavily urbanised and

industrialised areas. The areas they are responsible for will only increase in size and complexity in the future.

What I see as a pretty severe indictment on the CFA as it is at present, and more so in the past, is the appallingly slow take up of emergency medical response. The MFB have been providing this service for over 15 years with hundreds of lives saved to date. An FRV model would have had this service in outer metropolitan and regional areas as soon as it started and going forward would ensure a rapid provision of this service.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

In light of the politically based scaremongering - there are so many examples of this, including M.Guy stating (in print) "*insanely, volunteers will have to watch a house burn down while they wait for seven career fire fighters to arrive*" or, B. Battin stating "*for the first five hours of Black Saturday there were no career fire fighters on the fire ground*", or M. Cash's uninformed, deceptive and inflammatory interview with D. Speers. There have been over 30 front pages of the Herald Sun in support of the liberal party campaign to demonise career fire fighters, which has not really stopped since the days of Jeff Kennett. Being subjected continuously to this unrelenting propaganda, I can understand a volunteer's reticence and resistance to any change.

Volunteer fire fighters that I know personally, as friends, sporting team mates and as other acquaintances, are generally supportive of the concept of the FRV, but due to some of the issues listed in the preceding paragraph, they are indeed wary but hopeful.

Some other volunteer members of the CFA, and in my experience these are very few, have concerns other than community safety. A turf war mentality, lack of reason, envy and self-interest seems to motivate them. Unfortunately, I am sure that you will be hearing from more of this type of volunteer than the ones motivated by community safety. It is also unfortunate, that these few members are used to present a case to the public which is far from reality, and considered valuable pawns in the game of political point scoring.

I sincerely hope there will be an effect on volunteer participation. My guess is that some of the turf warriors will leave. Probably not enough. The impact of the few leaving will be a greater participation by reasonable and community minded members.

The capacity to provide large numbers of trucks and crews in a short time frame will not be diminished by the FRV.

Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

Initial costs will be accumulated but, I believe, will be recovered within a short time due to the joining of various expenses caused by current inefficiencies in running two

career fire services. More than dollars need to be considered however. How do we measure a life saved through having a more widespread and effective emergency medical response, road accident rescue response and an assignment and despatch system based on reality and community - not as it stands now, based on the case of a 1950's turf war mentality.

Underlying policy rationale

Despite cries from some of - "It has been working well for years and years, why change it" - experience and statistics show that it is not actually working well at all. I have only listed one personal example in my submission but I could cite many more. Most of the shortfalls in the current system are due to the system itself being rolled over by massive population growth and a refusal to acknowledge any failures or problems. I commend volunteers for struggling to maintain a service despite the impact on their family and work lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. If any or all of you would like to contact me, please do.

I request that you support the FRV bill.

Yours sincerely

Greg Hunter