

Kirra Vanzetti

From: Daniel Nelms [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 7 July 2017 8:20 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT Submission Daniel NELMS

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

I am a currently employed as a fire-fighter by the MFB, I am presently stationed at West Melbourne Fire Station, I have served 3 years within the MFB, stationed at a variety of stations across the metropolitan fire district. I live just outside Castlemaine in Central Victoria and commute to West Melbourne for work. I also volunteer with my local CFA brigade in Fryerstown where I hold the position of 3rd Lieutenant, having a total of 5 years' service (split between Fryerstown and Warragul CFA down in Gippsland where I previously lived)

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services as I believe I have a unique insight into both organisations having lived and worked in both MFB and CFA districts.

Three years ago I was fortunate enough to be part of the first ever combined recruit course of MFB and CFA run out of VEMTC Craigieburn. Going through a recruit course forges intense bonds and I am lucky now to call both career fire-fighters from both organisations as brothers.

I have now been stationed with CFA officers on secondment to the MFB who were instructors on my recruit course and I know that the learning of both organisations has continued to grow and prosper from those initial bonds.

It was my experience in that initial recruit course that there were differences between the MFB and CFA in culture, operational delivery and equipment, but that they could all be overcome to create an elite group of 24 recruits. I take pride in knowing that some of the inter operational issues that were highlighted in the 1st joint recruit course have now started to be actioned including but not limited to the Multi agency protection replacement program for the Drager BAs and the implementation of 38mm hose on MFB appliances. I understand the reform will assist with completing the standardisation of career training/specialist response/response standards and most importantly equipment. It heartens me that allegedly from the end of this year all future recruit courses will be of a combined/unified model, hopefully under the Fire Rescue Victoria Banner.

I am currently stationed at Fire Station 2 in West Melbourne, this Station has two primary appliances housed there, the 'A' being a four Fire-fighter crewed appliance under the direction of a Senior Station Officer and the 'B' a three fire-fighter crewed appliance usually under the direction of a Station Officer, the majority of the time when only a 3 or 4 manned appliance is on scene initially, the crew are usually able to hold the fire and stop it getting worse, it is not until the subsequent appliances arrive till the fire-fighters can contain the fire and make the situation better.

Fortunately within the MFB you are safe in the knowledge that another truck and four fire-fighters is just a minute behind you to back you up! Unfortunately for my CFA career brothers and the public they serve they are not afforded the same luxury at the moment.

It has been my experience crewing an MFB appliance into a CFA district, that even if a volunteer CFA appliance is dispatched you are not guaranteed a certain number of fire-fighters on that truck or that the fire-fighters crewing it have BA qualifications or qualifications to enter the structure. (This puts added strain on the MFB fire-fighters, as differentiating the subtleties between the CFA career and volunteers identification comes down to different reflective strips and small decals on the helmet, where as with all career fire-fighters we know that they have completed a uniform recruit course and have been judged by their peers to be of standard.) This presents an issue for career fire-fighters from both MFB and CFA as although there may be technically seven fire-fighters on the fire ground some of the volunteers might not be able to perform the necessary tasks to successfully combat the fire and ensure the safety of initial fire-fighters.

With the house affordability epidemic, ever increasing numbers of young people and families are forced to move further out from the city to be able to afford a house. While this is not an issue at the moment for Castlemaine, if the growth continues as forecast it has the potential to become like one of the 35 highly urbanised areas now covered by the career fire-fighters. Areas that formerly were farmland that are now high residential in the middle of one of the highest risk areas in the state.

Moving from the inner city to rural living myself I find I am constantly asked to explain to new homeowners accustomed to inner-city living that Castlemaine and the surrounding areas are protected by a fully volunteer response. They wrongly assume because they pay a comparable fire service levy to when they lived in the city (sometimes more) they are getting the same response. I explain that in the city the career fire-fighters have 90second turnout time and a 7.5minute time to on scene and that in a majority of cases it can be up to 7.5minutes for volunteers just to turnout a truck, let alone to then getting to the job. They naturally expect the same service delivery from their fire-fighters that they have come to expect from growing up in the city.

In Castlemaine I am surprised by the number of residents that don't realise the fire-fighters that turn up aren't paid, they understand the outlying brigades in the tin sheds are volunteers but they assume that the fire-fighters in town with the new truck and all the gear are professionals, and rightly so they don't really care, they just want their problem solved, they don't see the pay check just the uniform and the red truck.

I believe we need a legislated trigger point for the introduction of career fire-fighters into larger country towns not the current system where the volunteers have to fail in there delivery standards,

as I believe this is just dangerous for the town's residents and demeans the volunteers that are only trying their best.

I know how hard it is too recruit and retain volunteers for the CFA. The Fryerstown Brigade is made up of older volunteers and it is hard to attract the younger generations as there seems to not be the same sense of volunteerism and the ones that we can attract predominately commute or work some distance from where they live and are predominately unavailable through the day, gone are the days of working the farm and being able to respond quickly to local fires. I can appreciate the needs of these new highly urbanised areas to have career fire-fighters stationed 24/7 as the desire for people to be CFA volunteers wanes.

As a CFA volunteer I cannot see how employing all career fire-fighters from the CFA and the MFB in one fire service will affect volunteer surge capacity. I personally foresee no effect on the Fryerstown volunteer fire brigade in the turnouts or bushfire response and have constantly reassured the brigade members and local residents of this fact, while reminding them of why we volunteer in the first place, that being to look after our little community.

As a volunteer I know how lucky all CFA volunteers are to have ridden the coattails of the UFUs advocacy on PPC and PPE safety. The only downside to this whole campaign that I can see is that the association purporting to represent volunteers the VFBA will need to dramatically improve and take a more active role in fire-fighter safety and welfare to care and protect for the volunteers. For my part I don't believe that the VFBA has the autonomy from the CFA or leadership within its sector to do this presently and sincerely hope they can step up once the career fire-fighters transfer to FRV.

Recently through a mutual acquaintance I met a new CFA Career fire-fighter who lived in Southbank, Melbourne and commuted out to work in Springvale, where I was in the opposite situation living in Castlemaine and commuting into West Melbourne, we both had a laugh at the situation where we were locked into the same profession, doing the same job, in two similar organisations but with limited prospects for movement due to boundaries and legislation drawn up in the 1950s. I am sure this wouldn't be an isolated case, as I personally know at least 6 other fire-fighters living in Castlemaine and surrounds from the MFB. I envisage that in the future of FRV fire-fighters will be given greater flexibility to work nearer their own homes if they so choose.

In summary I believe the fire services of Victoria have been fragmented by the politicizing of this drawn out and nasty vilification of Career fire-fighters. I truly believe Victoria is in an enviable position that we have the opportunity to bring together the best elements of two world class fire-fighting organisations and combine them into a new world leader known as Fire Rescue Victoria. I know that with the career fire-fighters can do spirit and your help we can make this a reality.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Nelms



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