

Comments on past and current organisation of Fire Services in Victoria

There is no doubt that there is a need for a complete overhaul of Victoria's Fire and emergency response structure

History is always the guiding light in consideration of the required changes.

Fire Brigades of various structures commenced following the settlement of Melbourne in 1835 – e.g. Insurance, Industrial, Volunteer Community Groups, Hotel & Social Groups

Fire Fighting techniques became complemented following the Gold Rush of the 1850's with the influx of overseas gold seekers

Fire Fighting Completions were regularly held between Brigades

These were between what could be best described as the Urban Area Brigades, i.e. Suburban Fire Brigades in the Melbourne area and Country Fire Brigades in the settled towns outside the Melbourne

There appears to have been no attempt to formally organize Fire Brigades in the rural farming areas and this does not appear to have occurred until 1926 with the formation of the Bush Fire Brigades Association

The creation of an artificial boundary that defines the Metropolitan and Country area of Victoria was first established by the Fire Brigade Act of 1890 **and is still in place today**

Prior to the implementation of the 1890 Act there was one Organised Fire Service for Victoria – *Victorian Fire Brigades Association*

Due to the different personal and community attitudes, when comparing the so called suburban Fires Brigade e.g. Collinwood, St Kilda, Prahran etc - with the Country Fire Brigades e.g. Geelong and the Gold field areas at the time and as is currently a strained relationship – there has always been an undercurrent of animosity by the Country Brigades towards the Metropolitan members

Lieutenant/Col T.S.MARSHAL – successfully lobbied for the creation of a separate Metropolitan and Country Fire Districts.

The formation of the Country Fire Brigades is listed in Marshall's Memoirs – prior to and after the 1890 Act - commencing with Geelong in 1854

T.S.MARSHALL became the Chief Fire Officer of the Country Fire Brigades Board for the next twenty six (26) years

See : MARSHALL MEMOIRS – Published in 1930 – copy provided

Thus some one hundred and twenty seven (127) years later the suburban area of Melbourne Fire Fighting response is still clearly divided between two (2) separate agencies, with approximately 60% of the Melbourne suburban area being outside the M.F.B. boundary, thus the responsibility of the Country Fire Authority

During the time that the CAIN Labor Government was in power in Victoria, submissions were made to establish a State Fire Service.

The proposed structure that was submitted at the time was for a State Fire Service that would be administered and controlled by

Three (3) Commissioners

- Chief Commissioner - being the overall Commander)
- Deputy Commissioner – responsible for Volunteer Firefighters
- Deputy Commissioner - responsible for Career Firefighters

- The State overlay of Fire Control would be an extension of the Current Country Fire Authority Zones and Regions Fire Control and would embrace the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade area

- The proposal would have seen the reintroduction of Volunteer Firefighters within the current M.F.B. area

- *Volunteer Firefighters were discontinued during the 1950's when the M.F.B. Chief Fire Officer was concerned the Volunteers who were members of their own employment Union would use their Union Membership to assist the United Firefighter Union during times of industrial disputation.*

- *under the powers of the Chief Fire Officer who overnight terminated the services of the M.F.B. Volunteers, without consideration or consultation*

Fire Brigades with the Country Fire Authority mounted a campaign to prevent the proposal of a State Fire Service - with the emphasis being it was a **take over by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade** and together with Politicians in marginal seats being concerned for their parliamentary career - saw the Proposed State Fire Service being shelved .

The publicity, miss information and emotions the proposal generated was unbelievable

Some forty five (45) years later history is being repeated