

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

Timothy James Eccles



**It is requested that this submission be treated as “*STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL*”.**

**Disclaimer:** *This submission is made by me as a concerned private citizen whose profession is fire-fighting. This submission has not been made in any capacity as a public official and any views expressed are personal and do not necessarily represent the views of my employer, being the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB).*

Dear Inquiry Committee,

My name is Timothy Eccles, I'm employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade where I hold the rank of level 2 firefighter. I have been a firefighter for over two years now and am currently stationed at fire station 49 (Laverton North) in Melbourne's West on D platoon. We have many major hazard facilities in our area, primarily chemical manufacturing and storage warehouses, there are numerous factories, residential areas, schools, nursing homes, multiple freeways and road networks that also make up our turnout area.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed fire fighters presumptive rights compensation and reform of the fire services.

The proposed fire service reforms will strengthen and enhance the fire service response framework across metropolitan Melbourne and the major regional centres across Victoria. It will provide Victoria with a more responsive, better equipped and most importantly, safer response model for not only the community but firefighters too.

Victoria's population is booming, the state is home to more than 6 million people and according to the 2016 Census results, Victoria's population has grown by 10.7 per cent since the last Census in 2011. Victoria has seen massive development over the past 60 years. I say 60 years because that is how long it has been since the firefighting boundaries between 'country' and 'metropolitan' have been in existence without review. When Victoria's fire service boundaries were established in the 1950s our population was smaller and much more concentrated around Melbourne.

In 2017, there are many regional cities and towns boasting huge population numbers such as Geelong and Ballarat, which can hardly be classified as country anymore. Under the proposed Fire Rescue Victoria model, these cities will receive not only the same level of fire coverage as metropolitan Melbourne, but the standardized staffing, the standardized resources and the standardized training of career firefighters in Victoria under the one

banner which makes for a more efficient, effective, and manageable service delivery that these cities deserve.

This is not just limited to major regional town centres. On the outskirts of Melbourne's West, the city of Wyndham, which according to the 2016 Census was the State's second fastest growing region (behind only to the City of Melbourne), with its population increasing by 56,000 people to 222,000 people (up 34 per cent since 2011). This area is of particular significance to me as it is where myself, my family and 90% of my extended family live including my grandparents, parents, sister, numerous aunts and uncles & cousins. Whilst I leave my family for work each shift, protecting the people within the Metropolitan Fire District, I do so knowing that my family do not receive the same level of fire protection. Every fire call that I attend with my crew, I do so knowing that there is a second appliance dispatched at the same time as us meaning that when arriving on scene we know backup is only minutes behind us. This backup, which results in at least 7 firefighters being present on the fire ground, allows us to efficiently, effectively and most of all safely carry out our role as firefighters (2 teams of 2 wearing breathing apparatus, 2 pump operators and 1 incident controller). Unfortunately, the same cannot be said as it currently stands for my family in Hoppers Crossing. If my house were to catch fire tomorrow, there would be one appliance dispatched from Hoppers Crossing which would respond within 90 seconds as it is a staffed station. The next supporting appliances would then come from volunteers at Hoppers Crossing, Truganina and Werribee. Keeping in mind that volunteers have jobs, family commitments, hobbies, sporting activities, and holidays amongst other things just like the rest of us, which is by no means having a dig at volunteers, it is just a fact of life. Should one of the volunteer brigades fail to respond within 4 minutes, Point Cook CFA fire station, which is a staffed station also, would then be responded. This delay could potentially result in the first appliance on scene being without backup for over 10 minutes.

Under the proposed FRV model, two appliances would automatically be dispatched from FRV stations (Hoppers Crossing & Point Cook) which are manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with support from the local surrounding CFA brigades.

I cannot see how volunteer CFA firefighter's engagement will be impacted on in a negative way. There are roughly 1220 volunteer brigades, and the vast majority of these brigades will be unaffected by the proposed reforms. There are 35 integrated stations which will be impacted in that there will be an enhanced career staff response. This can only be good for the communities they protect and for the safety of all fire-fighters responding to incidents.

Unless large numbers of CFA volunteers leave the organisation, which I believe to be an unlikely prospect, there will be no impact to Victoria's surge capacity. The fact that the vast majority of volunteer brigades will be totally unaffected by the reforms, and the fact that the CFA will be better resourced and funded as a result of the reforms, makes me question the motives of anyone suggesting they would leave the CFA if the proposed reforms came into effect.

During my short career as an MFB firefighter, I have only seen dispute and political games being played with the profession of firefighting for self-gain and an egocentric philosophy, that has attempted to leverage off the dissemination of mistruths and defamation of firefighters no matter the psychological cost or toll it has on firefighters and their health.

Finally, I believe these reforms promote industrial harmony and is a positive thing for all Victorians. Without the weight of these issues on our shoulders it allows us to focus on important things such as being ready to adapt to our ever changing environmental risks such as terrorism, hostile acts, growth in complex infrastructure and consequence management, a fast growing and aging population and the emergence of any unknown future risks such as the use of combustibile cladding in construction.

Yours sincerely,

Firefighter Timothy Eccles

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