

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

1. My name is David Blundell. I live in [REDACTED] and my contact number is [REDACTED]
2. I am a Leading Firefighter having been employed by the Country Fire Authority for 17 years.
In this time I have gained various specialist qualifications such as
 - Heavy Rescue
 - Confined Space Rescue
 - High Angle rescue
 - Trench rescue
 - Aerial Appliance operator
 - Emergency Medical Response EMR

all of which are technical/specialist skills that I have used and continue to use serve the people of Victoria

During my career I have received a Chief Officers Commendation for my role in the extraction of a trapped Grave Digger at Springvale Necropolis from a collapsed grave and I have also been awarded a National Medal for Service to the Victorian community

3. Prior to be employed as a Professional Firefighter by CFA, I was a volunteer Firefighter at Ferntree Fire Brigade
4. **I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:**

In my career I have seen many beneficial changes such as modern fire appliances and improved personal protective equipment to assist and protect firefighters. In 2005 working at Eltham Fire station my Officer and I respond alone to a kitchen fire in Eltham arriving on scene alone with further information being provided that the elderly home owner was missing. Leaving the truck running alone in the street with no water connected and no other support, we made entry to the house to search for the lady and contain the fire, hoping that another fire truck would arrive at some point to back us up.

Moving forward to 2014 I attended a house fire in Coolaroo, supporting the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, from Greenvale fire station. Again at this fire, of which half the house was engulfed in flame, we made entry to conduct a primary search as it was uncertain if the occupants were all accounted for. Having 2 fire appliances from MFB on scene along with our appliance from Greenvale CFA, we had 10 firefighters on scene within 8 minutes, combating the fire and searching the house for occupants.

I was inside the house with 3 other fire fighters from the MFB when the floor I was standing on collapsed and I subsequently fell through. At this point the section of the house we were in was on fire, the roof had started to give way and I was unable due to the weight of my equipment and the area of collapse to free myself from the floor. It was my MFB colleagues who pulled me up and out of the floor to free me.

This event fractured my right knee, bruised my elbow and damaged the left hand thumb joint. I ended up seeing a knee surgeon for treatment with resulting significant time from work. To this day it is likely that my left hand will require surgery.

From this one example of many that I could describe, I reflect back to when I attended the kitchen fire in Eltham – if the same event had of occurred it would have been impossible for my colleague – the only other firefighter on scene to have been unable able to physically remove me from the floor and take me to safety. Yet because my incident occurred in MFB response area there was a minimum of 7 firefighters on scene, this enabled crews to work safely with assurance that backup was at hand if firefighters became trapped.

It is a reality that in CFA areas where volunteer response is not guaranteed or that the skill/qualification mix is unknown creates unnecessary stress and delay as that we as responding professional firefighters don't know if the responding volunteer firefighters are qualified to enter a burning structural fire. My example to rescue people from a house fire, may have meant life may have been taken if it had the collapse had of occurred without the support from professional and structurally qualified firefighters on scene.

Please see image below of where floor collapsed where I fell through in 2014 and subsequent CFA Safe Report as a result of my injuries suffered at this fire.





Incident Summary Report [Ref: 15580]

Date Printed: Thursday, 29 June 2017

Details

Internal Reference Number:
 Incident Type: Lost Time Injury (LTI)
 Status: Closed
 Date of Incident: Thursday, 21 August 2014
 Time of Incident: 1:47 AM
 Date Logged: Thursday, 21 August 2014
 Time Logged: 8:57 AM
 Assigned To: David Harris
 HSR notified: Mark Coleman
 Did an injury occur: Yes
 Proportion of hours/shift worked: 51%-75%
 Person Workplace: GREENVALE (30197666)

Risk Assessment

Inherent Rate: Significant
 Residual Rate: Significant

Description

Undertaking internal fire fight inside involved structure when section of house floor gave away, unexpected and unusual given lack of obvious damage to surrounding floor at the time. Section of floor about 1mtr X 500mm gave way.
 I fell through floor hitting my left arm just below elbow on floor joist and my right knee on same floor joist.

Environment Impact

Environmental Impact: No

Classification

Identify what occurred: Structural collapse
 What was the most significant cause: Fire Unspecified
 Identify the type of Injury or illness sustained:
 Muscle/tendon/tissue disorders
 What part of the body was/is most affected: Knee/Patella
 What side of the body was affected if applicable: Both

Incident Location

The Incident is located: GREENVALE (30197666)
 Location Category: Fireground
 Location Details: At House Fire 13 Rocklands Rise Meadow Heights
 Incident No F140808292
 Greenvale call No: 78

Work/activity Being Performed

Work/Activity Category: Structural Incident
 Activity Being Performed: Suppressing fire inside of house
 Responding to Emergency: Yes

This is a still a very real reality where I work today in 2017. We can respond in support of volunteer CFA stations such as Doreen from South Morang Fire Station and due to modern work practices and family life requirements, volunteer response is unknown. Frequently, surrounding volunteer brigades of South Morang Fire Station fail to respond to emergency calls, and often, the ability for those volunteers that do manage to respond, to undertake **internal Structural Firefighting** is unknown.

I and ALL firefighters, both professional and volunteer have the right to be able to expect to be able to return home safely and without injury after attending an emergency incident.

Therefore it is imperative that *antiquated CFA Service Delivery Boundaries* and arrangements are modernised with this proposed reform to ensure that a MINIMUM of 7 professional structurally qualified firefighters are dispatched to an incident automatically to ensure that:-

- an appropriate Fire Appliance i.e. a Heavy Pumper IS responding
- ALL firefighters responding are proficient and endorsed Structural Firefighters
- on scene firefighters are provided with **guaranteed back up**
- support to Volunteer Brigades is provided whose members have to work away from the brigade and or whose brigades are struggling to attract members due to demographics and/or Melbourne's expanding Metropolitan area
- volunteers work life balance is maximised by not having to respond to trivial minor incidents that can be covered by surrounding professional firefighters
- the Victorian community in the growing areas of Metropolitan Boundary can be reassured that they will receive an efficient and effective response that keeps pace with the growth of Melbourne and community expectations.

Another recent example of how the current system is failing Victorians, was of a recent Structure Fire that occurred on Thursday 25th May 2017 at 38 Sunnyridge Drive Mernda CFA Event Number F170518474.

This event was paged to South Morang professional firefighters at 3:54pm, in support to the volunteers at Mernda. The following chronology of the event highlights the failings of the lack of boundary change in the fire districts, antiquated "escalation tables" and the risk subsequently caused to both professional firefighters, volunteers own safety on the fire ground.

This also highlights the absolute unnecessary risk that the outer metropolitan Victorians face every day due to the lack of actual firefighters with full Structural Qualifications and EMR training arriving within 8 minutes to an emergency event

3:53pm Mernda Volunteer Fire Brigade Paged to a reported Kitchen Fire, as was Wollert Volunteer Fire Brigade

South Morang Professional Firefighters paged at the same time to support Mernda

7 people reported to be evacuating the House by VICFIRE

South Morang professional firefighters turned out the to call in 80 seconds and arrived on scene at the fire 10minutes and 2 seconds later with 4 professional Structural Qualified and EMR trained firefighters

However:

7 Minutes after the initial pager message, at 4pm Vicfire advised South Morang Pumper that BOTH Wollert and Mernda Volunteer Fire Brigades had

Failed to respond at this point.

Vicfire had also stated to South Morang Pumper that Ambulance Victoria had been asked to respond as 2 patients were suffering smoke inhalation.

The Officer In Charge of South Morang Pumper then requested TWO additional Brigades to be responded to the call

South Morang professional firefighters confirmed that there were in fact

Two 50 year old patients' one male and one female one of which with possible burns

Also that there was one 30 year old male with smoke inhalation

At this point 3 confirmed patients in total with 4 firefighters on scene.

The next appliance to arrive on scene to assist the firefighters from South Morang was Mernda after taking

7 minutes and 53 seconds to respond from the time of being paged, and arriving on scene at the fire 13 minutes and 2 seconds after being called to the fire,

5 kilometres from their station

The appliance that arrived form Mernda arrived with only 2 firefighters

The 3rd appliance to arrive on scene was Doreen taking 15 minutes and 31 seconds to arrive on scene

Wollert Volunteers failed to respond

This fire was actually caused by fuel being added to the wood heater in an attempt to get it to light. Considering that ALL the volunteer brigades that were paged to turn out to this call they all failed to respond within the Volunteer Brigade 4 minute response time, yet they are given another 2 minutes before Vicfire state to the responding appliances that a Brigade has failed to respond, or what is now called "*not yet responded*".

The volunteer brigades all failed to arrive on scene at the fire within the accepted 8 minute response mark

South Morang Professional firefighters responded in 80 seconds

Closest supporting MFB Pumper from Epping fire station was NOT called automatically in support NOR the closest CFA professional crew from Craigieburn

South Morang professional firefighters arrived on scene alone; knowing that Volunteer Brigades were failing to respond

They had uncertainty of who was going to respond to support them, and their skill/qualification level.

It is just sheer luck that this fire was not worse with people suffering worse burns and or that the fire had not already grown in size. It is appalling that what is now a suburb of Melbourne that people living in these growth areas paying more for fire protection through the Fire Service Levy, are expected to receive an unknown level of response.

It is also wrong to expect that both professional and volunteer firefighters alike are expected to arrive on scene without definitive back up crews.

Both volunteer and professional firefighters should have the basic right to be able to return home to their families after serving their communities and events like this occur far too frequently across Victoria. If our fire services are not reformed, the antiquated 'escalation tables' that cause Vicfire to continually state that "XXXX Brigade has **not yet responded**" Victorian firefighters will continue to be uncertain that there are two appliances responding providing a minimum of 7 Structurally Qualified firefighters at the scene of an incident within 8 minutes

Then it is only inevitable that at some point a life will be lost, either a firefighter's in a structural collapse or that of a member of the public, who could not escape their burning home.

I will also state the dispatchers at Vicfire are dedicated professionals that sadly have to work with in rules and procedures that are a legacy of an antiquated system. I can and feel for the emotional stress that they would suffer at times seeing firsthand the failures in emergency response.

It is time to modernise and provide certainty to emergency response to the expanding population of Melbourne and ensure the safety of Victoria's firefighters

5. Surge Capacity and Valuing Volunteers

It has widely been alleged by some that the much needed reform of Victoria's Fire Services would see a impact on Surge Capacity in CFA

I find this comment interesting and in my opinion misleading.

The proposed fire service reforms are to amalgamate the MFB and CFA professional Firefighters. CFA Volunteers stay with CFA.

Currently there are 35 CFA Integrated Stations in Victoria with the majority in areas like Dandenong or Craigieburn that by nature, can no longer be called or treated as "Country Victoria". Along with the growth of Melbourne into outer areas like Melton, Wollert the *growth corridors*, families have to travel longer to work impacting on brigades ability to have personnel to respond within 8 minutes from time of call or with an a functional crew per pumping appliance consisting of a:

Crew Leader

Pump Operator

Two Firefighters

4 BA Wearers

Yet with an efficient modernised fire service, Fire Rescue Victoria, certainty will be provided in response ensuring that a minimum of two Heavy Pumper appliances are guaranteed to respond with a minimum of 7 Structural Qualified Firefighters to incidents within the area that FRV covers.

This not only ensures that the community receives a response when they call for assistance, they won't be subject to waiting for another brigade to respond when the local brigade fails to respond adding avoidable delays. Yet for the majority of small incidents that they are dealt with quickly, limiting damage and importantly allowing volunteers clarity, certainty and value to their family time, by not **having to** respond because they know that the majority of small incidents will be dealt with quickly and that their time will not be wasted.

From this that it flows that for the major incidents that the State of Victoria faces particularly during Bushfire season that volunteers can contribute more time, be more productive and be key integral part of Victorias emergency response in times of major emergency events.

Relying on a volunteer brigades to respond to a rubbish bin fire at a football oval 3am in the morning midweek, when a professional fire station and crew is 3 kilometres away who are not called to respond as is the case now, with antiquated Escalations Tables that CFA currently use,

is NOT valuing volunteers and their families.

During the Black Saturday fires there were approximately in round figures 1000 professional firefighters off duty or on annual leave at the time. Whilst Victoria was dealing with a catastrophic fire event, volunteers and on duty professional firefighters were working extended hours in trying conditions to combat such a large fire, whilst being supported by interstate crews.

However in the respective CFA & MFB EBA's there is an ability for the Chief Officers to declare what is called the Emergency Roster. This effectively recalls everyone to duty working 12hrs on and 12 hours off.

This was not done.

There was a large and skilled Victorian workforce off duty and whilst some of those people were either away on holidays or already volunteering with local brigades who they were members with, the point is there is another Surge Capacity available to assist both professional and volunteers fighting one of Australia's worst bush fires.

So whilst the VFBV project to the media and the greater Victoria communities that Armageddon will occur and Surge Capacity will be gone under the proposed reforms, it would be more productive if they and worked in unison with all firefighters and question why a Surge Capacity of highly trained Victorian Professional Firefighters of approximately 1000 in number was not used to support not just Volunteers yet the Victorian Public at this time.

Therefore in my opinion, the misleading information about Surge Capacity is just that – scaremongering rant from the VFBV driven by political ideology. When Victoria has a huge number of professional firefighters from MFB, CFA, DWELP and other industry brigades, along with Volunteers available, reforming the fire services and creating Fire Rescue Victoria will streamline the emergency co-ordination of resources, remove parochial historical barriers and ensure that when Surge Capacity is called for, that the maximum workforce is engaged in *unison, not cloaked in hysterical subjective misleading information implying that Victoria will burn if Fire Rescue Victoria is created.*

Such accusations in the media are misleading and degrading to Victorias Professional Firefighters, who in unison are a significant Surge Capacity in their own right. Victorian public must demand that the Professional Surge Capacity be allowed to compliment Victorias Fire Fighting Force in times of Campaign Fires at maximum potential.

In closing the forming of Fire Rescue Victoria will bring together 3000 professional firefighters that will enhance and compliment and long duration campaign fire simply from removing bureaucratic red tape and current interagency parochial politics, increasing Surge Capacity and complimenting the effective interstate and international firefighters whose own Surge Capacity capability successfully and effectively contributed to the combat of the Hazelwood Fire when Victorias Volunteers had to be relieved or return to work.

Surge Capacity will not be lost in CFA – it will be enhanced.

6) In closing the economic benefits to Victoria of the amalgamation of MFB and CFA professional firefighters cannot be ignored. The removal of duplication in uniforms, appliance development, training regimes and soon will be of immense cost savings to the Victorian economy. An example with be that Fire Rescue Victoria firefighters could at last have a radio system that allows each firefighter to communicate to each other.

Currently that is not the case – MFB & CFA use totally different radios to communicate.

Two significant professional workforces will be brought into one servicing the predominant expanding area of metropolitan area of Melbourne and the major regional towns.

There cannot be a negative when the efficiencies are maximised and historical, antiquated restrictive practices in service delivery are removed.

CFA can return to being what it should be CFA serving their local communities as it was originally intended to be – in support of Fire Rescue Victoria when required, collaboratively.

Thank you for ability to be able to make a submission and be assured that Victoria's professional firefighters want to be able to fully serve the people of Victoria unhindered and unrestricted. We just want to get on with our job and do what we do best.

Respond to people in times of need.

Dave Blundell

Leading Firefighter CFA.

Encl.

CFA Professional Fire Fighter Recruit Graduation Competencies – Detailing Structural Fire Fighter with BA & Search and Rescue Qualifications

CFA Professional Recruit Firefighter Competencies from Graduation 19 week Recruit Course at VEMTC 2015

Code	Competency
CFA042	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT
CFA076	HAZMAT AWARENESS
CFA080	EMR QUALIFIED
CFA146	EQUAL OPPORTUNITY INTRODUCTION
CFA174	COMMUNITY EDUCATION FIREFIGHTERS (PART)
CFA374	OPERATE ENHANCED FORCIBLE ENTRY EQUIPMENT
END ADV PUMP	ADVANCED PUMPING ENDORSEMENT
HLTAID001	PROVIDE CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION
HLTAID002	PROVIDE BASIC EMERGENCY LIFE SUPPORT
HLTAID003	PROVIDE FIRST AID
HLTAID007	PROVIDE ADVANCED RESUSCITATION
OP MSA SIRIUS GAS	OPERATE MSA SIRIUS GAS DETECTOR

Extract From CFA Professional Firefighter Enterprise Agreement 2010
Detailing ability of Chief Officer to enact the Emergency Roster

78. CHIEF OFFICER'S EMERGENCY ROSTER - FIREFIGHTERS AND STATION OFFICERS

78.1. When so determined by the Chief Officer, employees may be required to work an emergency roster to cover protracted major fires or incidents.

78.2. The following general conditions shall apply:

78.2.1. The hours of duty shall be twelve hours on and twelve hours off.