

SO Matthew Anderson



Friday, 7 July 2017

Assitant Clerk Commitees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring St.
East Melbourne, Vic. 3002.

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees.

Please accept the following submission in consideration of the restructuring of the Victorian fire services, and in the inquiry into the Firefighter's Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment Reform Bill 2017.

My name is Matthew Anderson. I am a Station Officer with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, with whom I have been a firefighter since 2005. During this time I have served in both in my capacity both as an Officer, and previously as a Firefighter in Central District and Outer suburban stations in Southern and Eastern Districts. I have also qualified with Bachelor's Degree in Emergency Management, a Diploma in Fire Technology and am a Graduate member of the Institute of Fire Engineers (GIFireE).

I feel compelled to write this submission in support of overarching restructuring of the Victorian fire services based on my experiences on the fireground, and concern for the safety on my community, my crews, my CFA colleagues and myself.

With the increasing urbanisation of the fringes of Melbourne it no longer seems fair to rely on a model of fire service which relies on the generosity of volunteers to perform potentially dangerous and time critical work in addition to the demands of domestic duties, personal work commitments and recreational time.

I am a father. My boys are two and four. Most days it is a challenge to gently extricate myself from home life in order to attend my regular, rostered shifts, for

which my children have been painstakingly prepared. It is difficult to imagine the hysteria that would ensue to have to drop everything and disappear for an indeterminable amount of time to attend a fire at the expense of spending time with my family. There would no doubt be screaming, tears and cursing. Things would be thrown. And that would just be my wife.

Yet this is what we demand from our volunteers. And even that is assuming that they never play sport, drink alcohol, go to the movies or just would rather spend the night at home. Please understand that none of this is intended to disrespect volunteers. They are entitled to their downtime as much as the next person. Which means that a firefighting model, or a model of fireground safety which relies on the assumption that sufficient numbers of appropriately trained volunteers will always be available to support paid staff in a climate of extraordinary urban growth and increasing call volume is overly demanding and recklessly irresponsible.

A minimum of seven on the fireground is absolutely essential for the safety and wellbeing of all firefighters. It means we can operate quickly and confidently, without undue concern for our safety, which ensures a better outcome for affected persons. I have been caught short too often at calls where the volunteer support has been too little too late. I guess they were too busy having lives.

A model of fire services which supports the safety of everybody by ensuring that the 'Seven on the fireground within 8 minutes' model is unfailingly practiced is essential. Any volunteers who respond in addition to this core response would be welcomed. No officer ever has complained about having too many hands.

The blatant and systematic politicisation of the fire services notwithstanding, please understand that the essential nature of the role of the state's CFA volunteers has never been in question. Any arrangement affording the restructuring of the fire services pertains chiefly to already integrated stations in rapidly growing urban centres. As a state, our ability to respond to major bushfires would in no way be diminished; the proposed models suggest *increasing* resourcing to the CFA to combat just such emergencies.

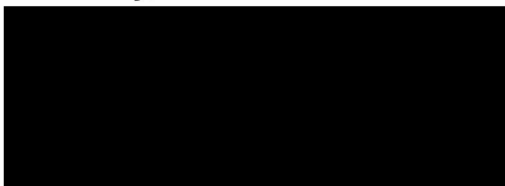
In fact, with careful restructuring, aligning and harmonisation of our current training our capacity to deal with major emergencies would increase markedly. Once the

toxic, malignant disputes which have dogged both fire services during the course of the last few years have been put to bed, we can get on with the job of protecting Victorians (importantly *not* just the city of Melbourne) from fire and other emergencies.

It has all gone on long enough. No firefighter, professional or volunteer wants this dispute to drag on longer than it has, the impact has been felt for too long, adding another layer of stress to an already stressful career. Please try to see through the political fear mongering proliferated by those who only benefit by the uncertainty and bad will that necessarily result. The proposed model is an elegant and logical solution that benefits all Victorians, not merely firefighters.

Thankyou for your time in considering this submission.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

SO Matthew Anderson (MFB)