

Dear Assistant Clerk Committee,

I wish this Submission to be Confidential.

I am [REDACTED], I am currently a Career Fire-fighter with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and have been since starting my recruit course last August. I have been a Volunteer and involved with the CFA for over 12 years. My family has a History with the CFA going back since its formation in 1958.

I currently live in Mildura and am Stationed at Mildura Fire Station.

I also volunteer and have done so in the South West region as a firefighter for over 8 years.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons.

1. Vital service improvements of the Fire Services in Victoria.
 2. Why I believe surge capacity will not be affected.
 3. Safety of Firefighters, essential backup of 7 firefighters being dispatched.
 4. The benefits for Volunteers with the proposed reform.
 5. Why reform to one career fire service has benefits for both volunteer and career Firefighters.
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1. In my time as a volunteer I have been to over 400 incidents in an area encompassing both urban infrastructure and rural landscape. In this time I worked with other volunteers from neighbouring brigades and was involved in various leadership roles both in the brigade itself and on the fire ground. The brigade I was a part of does between 225-275 calls per year for a fully volunteer brigade. Although our brigade has a rich history it is evident to me that the nature of volunteering is becoming harder to do with the pressures of modern life. Too many times it would be a guessing and hoping game that should a call come in the necessary people would turn up and possess the relevant qualifications and skills to be able to safely combat an incident. I have many experiences where the brigade would be caught short handed at an incident and serious safety issues have arisen. As a volunteer and career Firefighter our Mission Statement to 'protect lives and property' has been affected by a willingness to accept that more Career Firefighters are needed to ensure that response times are met and that a safe amount of adequate personnel are there to carry out their duty. As a volunteer myself I believe that Career Firefighters aren't taking anyone roles or jobs they are but improving and ensuring the proper service is achieved and community safety is the highest priority. To think that this reform may not go ahead because it might affect a volunteers is false. If you are volunteering to 'protect lives and property' you do so in a manner that is irrespective of what badge you wear and you should want what is the best service for the community. If it was my family member involved in a life threatening situation I would want the best trained people on scene in the most timely manner with the adequate skills to perform the task regardless of badge or organisation.

2. Surge capacity of volunteer firefighters will not be affected in this reform. Volunteer brigades will not disappear or decline in numbers. If a volunteer was to leave the CFA due the reform taking place I would question whether they were putting the community first or whether pride or ego was driving this decision. Currently Career firefighters and volunteers turn out to 000 calls together, nothing will change in this reform. Career firefighters might be called FRV but essentially we should all be there to achieve the same common goal. No where can I see this roles for volunteers 'surge capacity being diminished' volunteers will continue to do the great role they perform when a major incident takes place. As a volunteer myself I believe this will only be enhanced if the reform takes place as volunteers would be able to keep their identity as a volunteer organisation and highlight the great role they do.
3. No other job in this country I can think of do we expect members of the workforce to carry out tasks that are unsafe in nature. This role as a firefighter is so dynamic and poses risks that are far different from other employment. At a structure fire as a volunteer too regularly did I have to go into a structure fire with no assurance of backup. Too often did I wonder whether the next volunteer brigade or brigade member would arrive with the qualifications and training to be able to enter a burning building with the correct PPE and training. With 7 career firefighters being dispatched I can ensure that all these career firefighters are trained with the necessary skills and qualifications to carry out this task. This is not a knock on volunteers, many of which are well trained and capable, but not all these members are available 24 hours a day and not all have the qualification and training to carry out what is required safely. To me I think it is reasonable to expect that I could turn out knowing I would get a guaranteed response of 7 firefighters to a call of this nature and I could carry out my role safely without the possibility of volunteer brigades failing to respond in the required time or attend the incident without the necessarily skilled people to combat an incident.
4. Volunteers should be able to have an identity as a completely volunteer organisation, it would enhance the profile in the communities they serve and greater drive the possibility of volunteer recruitment. For example the brigade I was a volunteer at had to put up an large sign indicating they were all volunteers as the community were largely unaware or uneducated. Volunteering as a model is becoming increasingly difficult due the rise of work pressures and family commitments. It is very hard to expect people to donate their time and take it away from family or impact on the working life. With the CFA moving to an all volunteer organisation it will enable them to apply all focus to recruiting and streamlined training without the need to focus on career staff and their needs. The VFBV will be able to advocate for change where they see fit instead of worrying about the pressures or unique problems that arise for career staff. I think it is also important to remember that the average volunteer has their own beliefs of struggles of the role they perform and very little does the role of career staff play a role in hindering the roles of volunteers, in fact career staff whether they be CFA or MFB supplement and help out our volunteer partners.

5. In my time as a volunteer I had nothing but respect for the work career firefighters do and see how vital they are in what they do to protect the community. Since becoming a career firefighter I have affirmed these beliefs and can't understand why EBA negotiations get portrayed in such a way that can be so detrimental to the roles we perform. The impact the media has had and the strain this dispute period has had on me and that of my family has been unforeseen and disappointing. We do a job that is stressful enough at times and should not be used for political gain. Bi partisan support should be expected when it comes to the betterment of our emergency services workers. We have sustained such damage in this current structure that vital reform is needed to improve service and return trust between all parties both volunteer and career staff. Change is unfortunately driven usually by learnt mistakes. We have an opportunity here to provide Victoria with a 21st century fire service and an opportunity to make a fire service which can cater for our growing outer suburbs and major regional centres.

I don't expect everyone to understand the unique challenges we face in the fire service but I do hope that we are making a decision to reform so that the community gets the best service. I hope that it gets through so that in the future we are not looking back and saying we should of reformed earlier. The reform has so many positive outcomes for Victoria and should not be rejected for fear of being unpopular. This should be looked as a new exciting chapter and not as a division. I thank you for taking time to consider this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted contact information]

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