

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

My Name is Ian Beswicke and I am employed by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) as an Operations Officer, OIC Ocean Grove integrated brigade and Bellarine Catchment. I have been employed for 40 years with a further 5 years as a volunteer with the CFA

- Operations Officer level 4. OIC Ocean Grove and Bellarine Catchment
- Country Fire Authority.
- 45 years,
- Level 3 Incident Controller, Level 3 Operations Officer
- Fire investigator (structural), Near Miss investigator, Vehicle collision investigator, High angle rescue, Trench rescue, Confined space rescue, Heavy rescue, Assistant Driving Instructor on road and off road, Aerial appliance operator
- Certificate IV in training and assessing
- Qualified Builder/Joiner
- Diploma in Business Management (Frontline Management)

I have been awarded the following service medals whilst working for CFA

- 45 year service medal
- National Medal and 2<sup>nd</sup> clasp
- National Emergency Medal

I currently live in Mount Duneed which is located between Geelong and Torquay. I lived in a remote rural community in Western Victoria, Beeac, as a child. My father was involved with CFA for many years and held many different positions.

My current position is Operations Officer District 7 (Geelong Area). I am appointed as OIC of Ocean Grove integrated station, which has 25 staff and 45 volunteers. I am also Catchment Officer for the Bellarine Group of Brigades, which also has a Coast Guard Brigade. The staff appointed to Ocean Grove station respond to all calls for all brigades in the Bellarine Group (This is known as a hub and spoke model). This ensures a response of an appliance and crew to all calls. The staff provide expertise and specialist skills in support of the volunteers. There is also some specialist equipment that is on the Ocean Grove Heavy pumper that provides additional resources at fires etc. that was not originally available i.e. Thermal Image Camera (TIC), CIRIS gas detector, Gas suits and enhanced forcible entry tools.

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

Broadly, across Geelong volunteer availability is continuing to decline and this is also evident with the Bellarine Group of brigades. This is no fault of the individuals, but is due to factors such as work pressures, life style and family activities/commitments. This coupled with an ever increasing requirement for emergency response across the District and within the growth areas, which includes most of the Bellarine Peninsula. This along with increased expectation and demand that CFA expects from volunteers, sees an increasing reduction of response capability from volunteers. Again this is not a slight on volunteers or their commitment or desire to provide a service to their community, however it is reality.

Current CFA legislation states words to the effect of “CFA is a volunteer service supported by career fire fighters”. This may have been the case back in 1958 when this legislation was drafted but it is clearly not the case now. In the Geelong area career fire fighters respond to and manage approximately 80% of the incidents that CFA are called to. The response of volunteers is not always guaranteed to any call. Again this is a fact, as Catchment Officer and Rostered Duty Officer (RDO) I am seeing an increase in failures to respond by brigades. The brigades in the Bellarine Group have a strong relationship with the staff and appreciate the knowledge and expertise that the staff bring with them to calls. I continually hear brigades requesting that the staff continue on to calls to provide that support and mentoring to them.

The proposed reform will allow for CFA the continued ability for co-located CFA volunteers to respond within Fire

Rescue Victoria (FRV) areas ensuring CFA volunteers will continue to support their communities. The proposed FRV legislation will standardise the way in which the CFA career Fire fighters and MFB respond to fires and emergencies to the benefit of the whole community. The support to the Bellarine Group of brigades will not be hampered by having the Career staff as part of FRV, as my expectation is the things we do today we will still do tomorrow in support of the volunteers. The interference from outside influences that drove wedges between the volunteers and staff will not be there and we can start to mended relationships. This is because no longer will other people be able to interfere with an EBA that should be negotiated between an employee and their employer without interference from other people including Politician’s.

Surge capacity of volunteers has been widely spoken about in recent times. My position is that with the introduction of reform the capacity for this focussed and sustained response will only be enhanced. In FRV areas, where the expectation of response from volunteers has been reduced, CFA volunteers will have the ability to commit more time and effort around training for and responding to large and protracted incidents. It should also be noted that this is not limited to, as the current public focus is around, bushfires but also incidents such as the Hazelwood mine fire and the recent ship fire at Portland.

Surge capacity of volunteers has been widely spoken about in recent times. I believe that with the introduction of reform that this will only be enhanced. In FRV areas, where the expectation of response from volunteers could be reduced, CFA volunteers will have the ability to commit more time and effort around training for and responding to large and protracted incidents. The current public focus is around bushfires, but this should also be focussed on other incidents such as specialist response and large urban incidents where this surge capacity it vital.

Under the proposed reform I see no change to the service I provide to both staff and volunteers in my current role as an Operations Officer and Rostered Duty Officer for District 7 with CFA will, or the areas I am responsible for in specialist support i.e. collision/near miss or fire investigation. I will still be providing the leadership, support and advice to the volunteers at the 10 brigades in my catchment and across the District. This includes both fully volunteer and integrated brigades. The only thing I can see that will be different is the organisation that will be providing my fortnightly pay will be FRV.

Please feel free to contact me on the below mobile for further information or clarification if required.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

Full Name: Ian Beswicke

[Redacted contact information]