

## **Fire Services Reform submission**

Matthew Blandford

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a Senior Station Officer employed by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and would like to make a short submission to the select committee.

My experience in the State's fire services has spanned 23 years including:

- 9 years service as a volunteer firefighter with the Upwey and Ferntree Gully CFA Brigades.
- Project Firefighter with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (now DELWP) for the 1996/97 fire season. I worked out of the Yarra Junction Depot.
- Career Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade since 1998, currently holding the rank of Senior Station Officer. I have served the community at a number of stations during my career, from stations along the MFB/CFA boundary to the busy city stations. I am currently stationed at Carlton Fire Station.

Serving communities in the above capacities has given me a broad understanding of the fire services in Victoria.

I believe that reform is long overdue and the proposed model is the best option for all parties, and most importantly the community.

The move to Fire Rescue Victoria will allow streamlined services for all career Firefighters. This will ensure all career Firefighters are trained to the same competency standards and work with the same equipment. The benefits to the community will mean they get a greater response from their fire service. Having a minimum of seven fully trained Firefighters on the fireground means that firefighting operations can be conducted in a safe and efficient manner, enhancing their chances of survival should they be trapped in a fire or have a medical emergency.

Every CFA Brigade will remain as it is meaning our wonderful volunteers will still serve the areas they currently do. The move to a fully volunteer CFA means they can concentrate on what they do best and also enhance their autonomy, free from the restrictions of having part of their workforce paid and working under an EBA and the rest being volunteers. This will allow the CFA to grow and flourish, and attract new members who could've previously been put off due to concerns surrounding industrial issues. Importantly, the fact that all CFA Brigades remain means that the State's surge capacity for bushfires remains intact.

I cannot ignore the industrial issues that have dogged the fire services for decades. This is not confined to the recent dispute, it has been rumbling for a long time. Every EBA negotiation period I have endured in my career has been confrontational and included protests from the volunteer bodies about the conditions in successive EBAs. Splitting the career and volunteer Firefighters will remove any perceived preferential treatment towards career or volunteers. The CFA volunteers retain their autonomy and will work the same way they always have and the career staff can move on from the environment of constant hostility.

In closing, I fully support the Government's proposed reforms and respectfully urge you to too.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like any further information.

Matthew Blandford  
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Metropolitan Fire Brigade