

My Submission for the Fire Services Reform Select Committee

Name: Greg Eleftheriadis

Occupation: Firefighter with the MFB

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I have been a professional firefighter with the MFB for 17 years and hold the rank of Leading Firefighter. I hold the base level of qualifications that all operational firefighters hold which include wildfire training, CBR-Chemical Biological Radiation, EMR-Emergency Medical Response, numerous series of Pumper qualifications, CFBT-Compartmentalised Fire Behaviour Training, etc

I also hold numerous specialised qualifications including:

Teleboom – Aerial Appliance

HART – High Angle Rescue Techniques, Technician

WER - Waterway Emergency Responder, which includes deckhand on the fireboats and Swift Water Rescue

Prior to joining the MFB I was employed with the Victoria Police for 6 years, having worked on the Divisional Van at Flemington for 4 years and 2 years with the Traffic Management Unit.

My initial career path started in the aviation industry having completed a Certificate of Aircraft – Aircraft Technician, before transferring across to RMIT's Aerospace Engineering Degree course. After completing 3 years of that course I realised that my true desires lay in a career where I could help people and serve the community hence the change in direction that I took in 1994 and the 23 years of service I have had the satisfaction of providing within my capacity as an employee of Victoria's Emergency Services.

I am sure that you will be inundated with lengthy submissions and examples from parties that are for and against the proposed changes.

I for one am in favour of the proposed changes to the model that makes up the fire services response in Victoria. Even though I don't know the full extent of the proposed changes and the exact details of how it will be implemented I know that change is well overdue.

There have always been issues between career staff and certain elements within the ranks of volunteer members. Having said that I can vouch from my own observations that relations between career staff and volunteers was at one point the best I had seen it in years. I had the honour of attending an emergency call to a Fire Lookout Tower in Mt Macedon in my capacity as a high angle rescue technician to

assist with lowering two personnel from the tower after one of them had sustained an injury. We had the assistance of both volunteer firefighters and the SES and there was nothing but cooperation and mutual respect from all parties towards each other.

In my view this relationship that was finally moving in a positive direction was brought to an abrupt stop through a political campaign which was instigated through the VFBV and supported by numerous elements within the Liberal Party.

It was a campaign that left me astounded at the degree of misinformation and lies that were being propagated about my profession and the people we elected to represent us in our Enterprise Bargaining process.

The callous use of the term UFU thug! The irony of that reference is that every member of the UFU is a professional firefighter, the same people that will enter a burning building to help people, no matter what their background, beliefs or political preferences may be, to assist them or members of their families!

It is a career that I love and rewards me with great satisfaction through the honour of being able to help people in need.

A lot of people have died and relationships have been strained under the banner of the current arrangement that exists between the services provided through the CFA career staff and volunteer members as well as the flow on effect that has been felt through to MFB staff.

The independent outcome that was drawn from the Review of the Black Saturday Fires was clear about the shortcomings within the CFA's staffing arrangements and recommended that more professional staff were needed to meet current and future needs. The other major finding that stands out for me is the need to change the boundaries of the CFA. This is an aspect of the current arrangement that is well overdue and needs to be addressed. People within the expanding urban sprawl regions are paying full fire services levies but are receiving a combination of professional career and volunteer coverage.

I believe the separation of both the career firefighters and the volunteers will be of a major benefit to the people of Victoria. Operational staff will be able to perform their tasks unimpeded and the volunteers will receive the autonomy they have been striving for.

We have an opportunity to move forward and change a system that has been in need of change for decades.

I hope the members of the committee have the courage to see the need for these changes that are so desperately needed.

Kind Regards

Greg Eleftheriadis

