

Assistant Clerk Committees
Department of the Legislative Council
Fire Services Bill Select Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

5th July 2017

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

We are writing to you to express our thoughts on the proposed fire services reform in Victoria. We are a group of five employed by the CFA who are known as C shift and work at the CFA fire station in Melton .

We have had much discussion on the proposed changes and we believe that our thoughts are unbiased and are based on what we believe is the best possible fire service delivery model available in Victoria. Why we say it is unbiased is that firstly we pride ourselves on our relationship with CFA volunteers and have taken their concerns and position into account foremost. Secondly, several of the C shift members have over 46 years' experience as volunteers both prior to becoming a career fire fighter as well as while being currently employed. Based on this the views we express are those of both a career fire fighter and of a current serving volunteer.

While many people will tell you that the current integration model is the best available to service our communities, we can tell you from our experiences that integration is not the success that we would like to believe it is. Integration commenced at the Melton Fire Brigade in 2008 and at that time there were only two staff members on duty to support the brigades 60 volunteers. The relationship between the staff and volunteers was excellent and everyone was united as one in providing an effective fire service for the community. Volunteer members were very proactive in the day to day running of the station, being heavily involved in management, responding to emergencies and participating in brigade activities.

We move to 2017 and we now have five members on duty and some days this increases to six. The increase in staffing has come about due to the increase in work load on the brigade that is the result of massive population growth and associated infrastructure in the area. While the increase in staffing may be a positive for the community of Melton it can have a detrimental effect on the brigade's members. When you have a fire station that has five members on duty 24 hours a day the amount of work and necessary contribution by the volunteer members is greatly reduced. This is in no way the fault of the volunteers, it is fact, but not only has their work load reduced but more importantly they start to lose ownership of the brigade and in our opinion this is one of the most disappointing parts of integration that we need to address. It would be easy to say they should be included in more decision making and have more involvement in brigade management and try as much as we do, it simply is not that easy or practical.

Allowing the proposal to progress will provide many benefits to both CFA's volunteers and the community. Volunteers would be responsible for management of their brigades and this is something that has been lost recently. Morale amongst the volunteers has been quite low in recent times and this has shown in the number of members we are receiving at training and to calls. Returning the responsibility of management will increase morale and have the following benefits

- Higher attendances at incidents and community events
- Better retention rates for volunteer brigades
- An increase in our surge capacity due to higher volunteer numbers
- Providing a guarantee of fire fighters attending every incident in a timely manner.

A concern that we have is the lack of foresight that the current fire service has with strategic planning for urban growth in the outer metropolitan areas. We are experiencing unprecedented growth and are not able to meet service delivery standards. In some instances it is taking thirteen minutes to arrive at incidents and fires which are well outside of the eight minute standard. The extended times are due to expanding boundaries and increases in population that bring increased traffic congestion with it.

Our neighbouring brigade has been experiencing a lack of availability of members for quite some time and this is having an effect in their ability to respond to calls. In most instances there is no response from the neighbouring volunteer brigade and the community is relying on two integrated brigades to respond and deliver a fire service. As a result of this the two integrated brigades that respond are required to travel a long way out of the area they are responsible for which then leaves their own community vulnerable. The proposal will include a committee that will be proactive in the planning and delivery of a fire service rather than the reactive one we currently have.

In closing we would like say that the fire services in Victoria are long overdue for change and we certainly want to, and need to keep working alongside our volunteers. The model that has been proposed we believe is the best model that will allow us to continue to do this and at the same time benefit both our community and our volunteers.

Yours Sincerely

Senior Station Officer Robert Mitchell
Leading Fire Fighter Mark Cauchi
Leading Fire Fighter Steven Lewis
Qualified Fire Fighter Isaac Dewis
Fire Fighter Ben Wallace

C Platoon
Melton Fire Brigade