

Alan V. Richards AFSM
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[REDACTED]**ALAN V. RICHARDS MFB CHIEF FIRE OFFICER (Rtd)****SUBMISSION TO THE FIRE SERVICES REFORM SELECT COMMITTEE****ATT: Honourable Members of the Fire Services Reform Select Committee**

I am writing, respectfully, in support of the *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017*. I understand this committee will be considering this proposed legislation and its impacts based on the following terms of reference:

- Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria
- Effect of volunteer engagement and participating in fire service delivery
- Short term and long-term cost impact on the fire service provision
- Underlying policy rationale

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

My career with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) began as a recruit firefighter in 1964. Throughout my thirty-eight-year career with the MFB I progressed through the ranks to the most senior rank of Chief Fire Officer, serving in that role between 2000-2002. I have been awarded the:

- Australian Fire Services Medal
- National Medal along with two clasps
- Centenary Medal
- Brigade Long Service and Good Conduct Medal
- Fellowship of the Institution of Fire Engineers

In 1988 I was fortunate to attend the Brigade Command Course at the United Kingdom, Fire Service College where I graduated as dux. Graduation from this, the most senior, course is a prerequisite qualification for an Officer to be appointed to Chief Fire Officer of a United Kingdom Brigade.

I have been involved in countless emergencies and large-scale fires in my time including Coode Island where I was the Incident Controller.

I consider a number of my major achievements in the MFB to be some of the progressive initiatives which were implemented to assist with modernising the fire service in order to continually strive for better community protection.

I was responsible for implementing Emergency Medical Response (**EMR**) in the MFB, a lifesaving program whereby firefighters respond to the most time critical of medical emergencies to maintain life.

I managed the introduction of Computer Aided Despatch (Firecom) into the MFB in the early 1980s which was computer based technology built for the MFB and designed to provide for a more automated despatch of appliances in order to hasten the process of appliances leaving station. I was also significantly involved in the subsequent integration of this technology with that of Victoria Police, Ambulance Service Victoria and the CFA under the auspices of Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority. Following my retirement I had the privilege of serving ESTA on the Board.

I was responsible for the development of the plan for the Strategic Location of MFB Stations and resources. This plan was based on providing an equitable standard response time for the Metropolitan Fire District of first Fire Appliance on scene in 7.7 minutes at the 90th percentile. Underlying the plan was International research regarding growth of fire and the estimated time that fire takes to extend beyond the room of origin.

I have had a long history of involvement with the MFB. My grandfather joined the brigade circa 1910 and my father was an Assistant Chief Fire Officer with the Brigade having joined in 1942. I now have a son who is a Leading Firefighter with the MFB. My history with the MFB therefore spans four generations and the vast majority of the lifespan of the MFB itself. My commitment and passion for the MFB is therefore deep rooted and I have a strong sense of history and relationship to the organisation and the vital role it has in protecting the Victorian community.

Despite this strong connection to the MFB and its history, and some angst at the demise of the MFB, I still write in support of this reform which will result in its abolishment. This is because I see this as natural and long needed progression long needed for the appropriate protection of the Victorian community as our modern and urbanised society grows across Victoria.

I write in support because I believe that the benefits to the community far outweigh the personal attachment we may have of the organisations and our past.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Below I seek to address some of the matters raised in the terms of reference for this Committee and to provide a perspective on these matters given my personal and professional background.

1. BOUNDARY REFORM

The boundaries between the MFB and CFA have not altered significantly since 1928 when the Borough of Ringwood and the township of Croydon were included in the defined Metropolitan Fire District (Fire Brigades Act 1928).

The original Fire Brigade Act of 1890 and subsequent Fire Brigades Act of 1928 provided an excellent mechanism for the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD) to expand in unison with the urban growth of Greater Melbourne by request of the Local Council of a municipal district and as both the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board and the Country Fire Brigades Board were both funded similarly, that is one third contributed by each of the State Treasurer, the Municipalities and by the Insurance Companies, there was no disincentive for such a request. Subsequent governments changed the funding provisions, including the removal of the requirement for municipalities to contribute to the funding of the CFA so as to make it financially unpalatable for municipalities to seek inclusion into the MFD. This was, I believe, the greatest inhibitor to the original concept of the progressive expansion of the MFD.

Throughout my career there were frequently boundary issues with the Country Fire Authority. As an Executive Officer of the MFB, I would meet regularly with my CFA counterparts to discuss conflicts that were happening as a somewhat regular occurrence between CFA volunteer and MFB (career) stations. These conflicts concerned issues such as MFB appliances not being responded despite their availability to turn out, being advised not to attend calls or leave calls despite no other firefighters being on scene. These issues were occurring in particular boundary areas between the Metropolitan Fire District and the Country area of Victoria. Unfortunately, these boundaries have still not changed since my time and from what I understand these problems persist.

I therefore support boundary reform and also the ongoing commitment through this legislation to continually review and consider the boundary based on independent assessment through the Fire District Review Panel established by this legislation. This should alleviate any future Commissioner needing to go through the issues that I experienced as Chief Fire Officer.

Such boundary reform being proposed currently by this legislation will ensure the boundaries of the MFD expand to encompass the now urbanised areas surrounding the current District and integrated brigades of the CFA.

2. URBANISATION

The areas which have been selected for inclusion in the area serviced by the new Fire Rescue Victoria are, I believe, the thirty-five integrated stations where there are CFA career staff that are integrated with volunteer brigades. These are areas such as Point Cook, Rowville, South Morang, Dandenong and regional areas such as Ballarat, Bendigo, and Mildura. I understand that these areas have been selected because they no longer conform to a typical, indeed any, definition of a country area.

They are now heavily urbanised with fast growing populations. Along with the increased population comes increased infrastructure including hospitals, schools, transport, industry and so on.

For firefighters and fire services of each these localities there are increasing risks. In particular as areas move from being country areas to urban environments the type of firefighting changes from a wildfire/bushfire and moderate structure fire response to an often major structure fire capability which requires specialist training and skills. A basic example of this is the need to be trained in the use of breathing apparatus.

In these growing areas, there is also an increased need for specialist responses such as high angle rescue, urban search and rescue, HAZMAT (Chemical Biological Radiological

Nuclear Exposures), Heavy Rescue, Confined Space Rescue. In order to respond to these significant and specialised threats, highly specific training and expertise maintenance is needed for firefighters to be fully and adequately equipped in these particular skills. It is, I believe impractical to expect Volunteer Firefighters to obtain and effectively maintain these skills to the degree required for their own safety.

An additional benefit would be the introduction of Emergency Medical Response into these areas, which should be rolled out fully in an integrated manner across these locations where there is now much higher density population and increased need.

3. POLICY RATIONALE

The reform, and the creation of one career firefighting service under the banner of Fire Rescue Victoria will provide for a much more streamlined service to the community. It will also ultimately reduce duplication across the sector whereby both CFA and MFB are frequently doubling up on multiple areas of service such as procurement, HR, training and so on.

This streamlined model, I believe, should provide better service to the community whereby all career staff would operate to the same training standards and systems of work including response models and can fully integrate with volunteer response as necessary.


CONCLUSION

I wish to thank the Committee for providing me with the opportunity to make this submission and thank you for taking the time to consider it.

I believe that the legislation proposed is a not to be missed opportunity to reform the fire services to provide a modern fire service which properly reflects the growing needs of the Victorian Community.

Yours sincerely,


Alan V. Richards AFSM
Chief Fire Officer (Rtd)


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