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Sent: Thursday, 6 July 2017 2:23 PM
To: LCSC
Subject: Cranbourne Submission for Select Committee

Submission
by 1st Lieutenant Denis Latchford

Cranbourne
Fire Brigade

Select
Committee Inquiry into;

*Firefighters'
Presumptive Rights and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017*

My name is Denis Latchford
and I wish to submit my support for the *Firefighters'
Presumptive Rights and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017*.

I have been a volunteer firefighter at
Cranbourne Fire Brigade for 9 years. Cranbourne Fire Brigade is an integrated station
with both volunteer and career staff working together to provide an emergency
service capacity to the Cranbourne community, state of Victoria and on occasion
interstate.

My role as 1st Lieutenant is the highest ranking volunteer officer at an integrated station. Under the proposed reform this role will revert back to Captain.

Cranbourne Fire Brigade became integrated in 2004 after the brigade struggled to meet community and brigade expectations to provide emergency response to the community. In 2005 Cranbourne Fire Brigade responded to 470 incidents. Today the brigade has more than doubled this figure, responding to 1083 incidents in 2016/17.

Population growth is significant. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released figures in 2014-15 stating Cranbourne East increased by 4,600 people, the largest growth of any area in Australia, and second-fastest nationally, increasing by 32%.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/3218.0Media%20Release12014-15#Victoria>)

More recent figures by the ABS in 2015-16 demonstrate this trend with Cranbourne East second largest growth area of Australia (26.2%) and sixth fastest nationally.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3218.0>

Population and urban growth increases demands on local volunteer brigades as emergency response rates increase, timely response to the station with increased traffic congestion is affected, community education and engagements increase and other factors.

Cranbourne Fire Brigade is fortunate that our station is staffed by career firefighters that are able to reduce the pressure on brigade member's availability to meet these demands. We have a fantastic relationship with our career staff and work/train well together to serve the community.

When I go to work, a few suburbs away, I feel at ease in the knowledge that my family and community are protected by the career staff that are rostered at Cranbourne ready to respond to emergencies in 90 seconds. Like all volunteers at Cranbourne and across the state we have jobs, families and other commitments that make us unavailable at times to respond with career staff to incidents.

These reforms bring many opportunities for Cranbourne. With the career staff going to the new fire service Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) it comes with the working practices and operations of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. This brings practices such as a second career staffed truck being dispatched into Cranbourne.

If the incident is deemed by the Incident Controller as not requiring this second career staff truck, it is cancelled and returned. This ensures that not only a second truck is dispatched, but it also ensures that all the crew is qualified in Breathing Apparatus Search and Rescue if required. This does not diminish the roles of volunteers; it assists us in achieving our role to protect the community.

As an integrated station we are one of the 35 brigades that this reform has an impact on. Within two days of the announced reform, the government and CFA began the consultation process with us. The Emergency Services Minister James Merlino, Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley, Francis Diver and two local Members of Parliament Jude Perera and Judith Grayley all attended Cranbourne Fire Station to discuss the reforms.

Consultation has since continued through our CFA District Operations Manager and Brigade Operations Officer and Officer-in-Charge. Discussions have centered on the future role of Cranbourne CFA Volunteers. We see this reform as strengthening and supporting our role in the community.

One of the issues that they will be looking at in the reform is the Presumptive Legislation. My opinion on the Presumptive Legislation is it should be a separate issue whatever the outcome of the FRV. Volunteers and Staff Firefighters should be able to do the job they do in the knowledge that if they were to be diagnosed with Cancer they would automatically be covered.

With this reform comes opportunity for Cranbourne. Cranbourne Fire Brigade has voted in principle to separate from career staff and co-locate either in the adjoining allotment, or remain at our existing location with the FRV station to be relocated further west to service gaps in our area in Cranbourne West. As these reforms are implemented we continue to expect consultation to continue to address local solutions for Cranbourne.

These reforms also come with a CFA Support Fund that will be used solely for volunteers. CFA can now shift from trying to balance career staff workforce requirements to focus on volunteer training, equipment, and infrastructure.

There has been commentary that this reform is “tearing apart CFA,” “breaking up CFA,” “puts lives at risk as thousands of volunteers will leave and surge capacity is destroyed.” This is alarmist, irresponsible and untrue. As a volunteer officer of one of the 35 CFA impacted stations I wish to reassure our community Cranbourne CFA volunteers are going nowhere. We remain committed and will continue to serve our local community and the wider Victorian community with surge capacity under this reform.

Volunteers at Cranbourne have tried to isolate themselves from this but as an integrated station with career staff this has been difficult. We have great respect and relationship with our career staff, but unavoidably the industrial issues do impact on us. Something we look forward to being resolved with this reform as CFA genuinely becomes volunteer based once more.

CFA has become increasingly more industrialised with more and more career firefighters that are required to be employed to service population and urban growth. These reforms will revert CFA back to a volunteer only organisation and we can focus on matters important to volunteers. The industrial issues that have previously impacted on CFA volunteers will now become the issue for FRV and CFA volunteers can be isolated from it.

I, like many CFA volunteers are exhausted from the many inquiries and reviews in recent times. We look forward to seeing this Bill revert CFA back to what is intended to be 60 years ago – a volunteer based fire service.

I respectfully request the committee to consider my submission as evidence to support the passing of this Bill.

Yours sincerely,

Denis Latchford