

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

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

**INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND
 FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017**

My name is [REDACTED] I am a Senior Station Officer within the Country Fire Authority of Victoria, and currently on a Secondment with the MFB. Thank you to the committee for allowing me the opportunity to submit this to you for your consideration.

I have been a career firefighter for 17 years this June and joined the CFA in a fulltime position in 2000. Prior to this I was a volunteer firefighter in CFA for 4 years with the Doveton Fire Brigade which now is Hallam from 1996 to 2000.

I have been a Senior Station Officer for 10 years and fulfilled numerous operational roles at many CFA integrated stations. I am currently stationed at West Melbourne No.2 in Melbourne's CBD as part of the MFB/CFA Secondment Program.

I currently hold a Certificate III in Firefighting Operations, I also hold Certificate IV's in Training & Assessment; and Qualified Operations Officer Level 2 (Commander) also USAR Cat 2 Operator, Strike team leader and a Sector Commander. Recruit Instructor and worked at Fiskville.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons & given examples. I will expand on some of the personal experiences below later in my submission.

1. I have been in the CFA in two capacities as both a volunteer & professional firefighter for the past 20 years.
2. In my time to date I have seen the organisation, the communities and the outer metropolitan and regional centres we protect grow enormously. This model is now dangerously outdated in many heavily urbanized suburbs and towns in Victoria. This expectation is unrealistic in 2017 and beyond.

I've attended numerous fire and rescue Incidents in the CFA areas where I have been confronted with how the current system and continued reliance on a volunteer response fails to meet consistent standard.

3. When I joined the CFA as a volunteer we wore woollen turnout coats that were second hand, still had petrol powered pumps, and little to no training was required to respond on a vehicle.

4. When I joined the CFA as a professional firefighter in 2000 we still wore the same woollen turnout coats, were working on station with minimum manning of three at best, but at worst with two people on an appliance, and there were stations such as my current station Eltham, that only had one Fire Officer (Station Officer) working at it both day & night.
5. I have worked at stations in the North Western suburbs such as **Point Cook, Hoppers Crossing and Craigieburn** that have had enormous growth that have seen them placed in the top rating urban growth areas not only for Victoria but also in Australia. I have also worked in regional Victoria (Wangaratta, Shepperton, Wodonga) which also has had huge growth both population and industry.
6. I have seen and bore witness **many times** to the failings of a system that has not changed since the 1950's, this includes but not limited to operational skill set deficiencies, delayed response, inadequately equipped, inexperienced and firefighters in extremely poor physical shape to complete a task.
7. I have not only my safety but that of my fellow firefighters put at risk, but more importantly the publics too when critical support appliances have failed to respond.
8. I have been involved in fighting internal structure fires and severe motor vehicle accidents with only myself, two other firefighters with no support for over 20mins + examples below.
9. I believe that the community and all Victorian's deserve to have the very best fire service, this should be regardless of if the firefighters are paid or volunteer. It should also not matter what badge is on the side of the fire truck too.
10. As a previous volunteer within the CFA I cannot see how the changes to CFA being reverted back to purely volunteer brigade and the formation of FRV will be either a safety issue to the public, or a disadvantage to volunteers.

I only see positive reform that will firstly and most importantly benefit all Victorian's across the state by providing a modern and adaptable model that will allow expansion of full time professional firefighters to growth & high residential, commercial and industrial suburbs and provincial cities. Along with protecting the vital volunteer surge capacity for Victorian's.

I worked co-operatively and collaboratively with Volunteers in each of the areas highlighted above for most of my career and am reassured that the proposed FRV amendments will ensure that continues.

Operational experiences and the need for the Fire Service Reforms.

The two examples below are given to highlight the need for reform, and the situations that existed when I first joined, and continue to the present day.

These are actual incidents that I have responded to personally and contain information to the best of recollection that occurred.

During my time, as on station as an Officer at Eltham we only had three on the fire truck, which is a OHS danger not having two in breathing apparatus and not knowing if

surrounding Volunteer brigades would turnout as they had their own lives, families and work commitments. This would be a great pressure on myself regarding the safety of my people.

At this time, Eltham was receiving anywhere between 350 – 450 calls annually.

On one day, we were paged to a reported Motor Vehicle Accident Plenty brigade primary response area. Volunteer Brigade only, we were the support.

Upon arrival were confronted with a two-elderly people trapped in their vehicle one, male, one female.

Due to our manning of just three, these are the actions that we all had to perform:

1. My role as the officer was to assess the scene attend to the casualties and call for a Volunteer rescue crew to respond as my crew made the scene safe.
2. Crews rolled out two lengths of 30 metre hose and connect hose branch up to the vehicle.
3. Return to the pumper and remove three (3) lengths of 64mm hose, connect one end of the hose into the water inlet for the pump, then grab a standpipe (used for getting water out of the main) and hose key, and then proceed 100 metres down the road to the hydrant located in the street nature strip. Connect the standpipe to the water main, connect the hose, and turn the water on.
5. Return to the pumper and open the inlet for the water to go into the pump, perform a changeover so that our water supply is now from the water main.
6. At this stage police and ambulance are on scene and the Volunteer rescue brigade have failed to respond now which was some 5 minutes plus.
7. The elderly male was in serious need of help and severely trapped by his legs and the ambulance wanted him out urgently.
8. Police had asked if I had responded rescue and I stated the Volunteer brigade failed to respond and I've called on rescue 7 Thomaston MFB fulltime crew which is some distance and it was time critical.
9. At this stage, the elderly female had been removed from the vehicle and being attended to in the ambulance, but the male was still trapped and being treated but was not doing too well due to blood loss.
10. As the Volunteer brigade failed to respond and has done on numerous occasions or to many times I can recall, if we had some rescue equipment on the truck at the time we could of a least opened the door and made better access for the ambulance crew.

This Incident had had a fatal outcome as the gentleman had passed away, all this contributed to a Volunteer rescue truck did not respond and this had happened to me twice both times fatalities. Also, if we had rescue equipment or a rescue truck manned by staff at Eltham it could have been a different outcome.

I made a report which went on deaf ears as I was told the rescue truck could not be taken off the Volunteer's and it was too political. I wonder if those people that lost their love ones would like to hear that excuse. This has haunted me and to this day has been on my thoughts thinking what if....

These actions were not reminiscent of a modern-day fire service.

My next example happened, in Diamond Creek, again a fully Volunteer Brigade, we were responded to a reported Structure Fire.

This premise is in the Diamond Creeks brigade's primary response area that Eltham provide support into.

Upon arrival, we found a large structure well alight and burning well. There was one Volunteer standing out the front on scene responded in his own vehicle which is not standard operating procedure, as they should respond to the station. He was in Rural firefighting gear which does not allow him to enter the premise, but told me also he was not qualified to wear breathing apparatus. My thoughts why are you here then!!!!

What was more worrying a woman was standing out the front of the property in the rain crying holding a new born child whilst her home was burning looking to this Volunteer for help but could do nothing but stand there as he had no equipment, thus why Volunteers should respond from station. I have been to too many Incidents where Volunteers respond one up no equipment why the public look on, as they look to them for help but cannot assist

We set to work donning Breathing Apparatus, setting up a charged hose line, cordoning off the road and public and formulating our tasks & tactics. This was just my crew with little support from surrounding Volunteer brigades.

After being on scene for several minutes we were notified by our communications that the additional supporting volunteer brigades had failed to respond, and another Brigade was paged to respond and all in this time more pressure is put on my crew not having back up (7 on the fire ground) and this owner watches on as we try to do our best, without putting my crew at risk and try to save their property.

This means that the brigades had failed their obligated time to turnout, which is 6 minutes.

We had four fire fighters on Eltham Pumper (One Station Officer, One Leading Firefighter and two fire fighters).

Finally, some volunteer appliances turned up; they had taken an extra 20+ minutes to arrive on scene after we had already arrived and began working.

This meant that we had no adequate support if the structure fire had caused collapse or threatened exposures. Upon the support brigade's arrival, we noticed that they had mixed skill level and very apprehensive to get involved. A lot of standing around and don't get me wrong there were a handful of volunteers that assisted on the outside of the structure with hose dragging, but we didn't have any qualified internal BA wearers at this stage.

I truly believe if we had had 7 professional fire fighters at the scene there would have been capable people to share the work load and safety issues, and possibly save the structure to the best of our ability.

Again, this is not reminiscent of a modern-day fire service and why reform is needed.

Our priority must always be the protection of life & property, if the system is failing and placing the community and firefighters at risk then change is needed.

My personal view and how I relate these important Fire Service Reforms to my family:

There are some extremely important safety issues and core community issues that affect every Victorian's basic rights to modern emergency services and the protection of life that they should be offered to every Victorian.

Please do not feel that I am in anyway anti-volunteer, I still work with (as a career firefighter for 17 years) CFA volunteers and was myself a volunteer for 4 years. I've been in the CFA for over 20 years now, I have lived both sides of this fence.

I believe we need the ability for an independent panel to decide if a fully volunteer brigade that currently looks after areas of Victoria were struggling to provide the response to that area or the risks or growth were greater than what they could provide then that area should then be staff with full time Professional Fire Fighters, ***not integrated***, an Independent Panel could implement it. Again, the reforms allow this.

Also, if a medical emergency was to occur dual response of medically trained firefighters and paramedics to the call to assist and provide lifesaving care. This is also another initiative that would expand under the reforms. I am involved in many EMR calls with the MFB and I truly believe all Victorians deserve to have this care.

My point is that there are some very important initiatives that are in the fire service reform legislation, most of this has not been mentioned or reported. It's very important it's about the safety of our children, our most vulnerable and all Victorian's not just a few in some areas.

This legislation may cause some to be upset, and I'm sure there have been many emails sent to you covering the political nature, the perceived issues, and some about the loss of identity. These are all valid points and worthy of consideration but they aren't to do with our core business. Victorians pay a fire service levy for a reason!

As a volunteer and now as a career firefighter my duty is and will always first and foremost be to protect life & property. And that duty also extends to ensuring that morally we ensure that all Victorian's are protected regardless of badge, fire truck colour or if paid or volunteer...

I'd be more than happy to explain further with any of you my experiences if you wish to discuss this submission, you can contact me anytime on [REDACTED].

Note: I clearly indicate that I am seeking confidentiality re my submission.

Thank you sincerely for taking the time to read this, and for considering this submission.

Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Senior Station Officer
MFB/CFA Secondment Program

