

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 Mark Coleman** I am a Senior Leading Firefighter within the Country Fire Authority of Victoria. 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 12 years this July and joined the CFA in a fulltime position in 2005. Prior to this I was a volunteer firefighter in CFA for 4 years with the Plenty Fire Brigade from 2001 to 2005.

I have been a Leading Firefighter for 7 years and have worked at several outer metropolitan stations throughout my career. I have also completed a twelve month secondment with the MFESB in 2016.

I currently hold a Certificate III in Firefighting Operations, I also hold Certificate IV's in Training & Assessment; and an Advanced Diploma in Fire Investigation and Forensics.

I am currently stationed at Eltham Fire Station and have been here for the last two years. I live in Montmorency with my wife Rachael (Who holds the rank of Snr Sergeant with VICPOL) and two daughters Taylor and Charli.

**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 16 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.
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 2005 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 **Greenvale 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 (Bendigo) 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.
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, one other fire fighter and one Fire Officer with no support for over 10 mins.
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

### **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 factual information to the best of recollection that occurred.

When I joined the CFA in 2005 I was stationed at Boronia Fire Station after completing my 16 week recruit course.

During my first two years on station as firefighters we would be sent to relieve at Eltham Fire Station. At this time Eltham was staffed by one Fire Officer (Station Officer) both day & night.

To assist the Fire Officer (FO) firefighter would be often posted on dayshift at Eltham to drive the pumper and provide support to the FO. At this time Eltham was receiving anywhere between 350 – 450 calls annually.

On one particular day we were paged to a reported House fire in Eltham's primary response area.

Upon arrival were confronted with a semi-detached garage fully involved and threatening the house and a neighbouring property.

Due to our manning of just two, these are the actions that I had to perform by myself:

1. Roll out two lengths of 30 metre hose and connect hose branch up the driveway to near the garage.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Charge the smaller hose running up the driveway.
5. Go and place a Breathing Apparatus onto my back and perform the required safety procedures, whilst doing this do a quick visual size up of the fire location, access points and to see if I can see the FO for a briefing before I enter the structure.
6. Proceed up the driveway and get briefed by the Fire Officer for the required tactics to be deployed.
7. Enter the fully involved garage fire by myself and begin an aggressive internal attack.
8. Whilst performing the attack try and relay the information that I am seeing back to the Fire Officer.
9. Checking on my dwindling air supply as I have just performed all of the above actions by myself, checking to see if any signs of structural collapse and also checking for extension into the house and/or neighbouring property.
10. Hoping and listening for the second support appliance as I am working by myself in a structure with only one person to rescue me if I become trapped or injured.

This incident occurred in the late 2006 and was a regular occurrence for many firefighters such as myself. It placed me in a position of enormous risk; it also placed a huge burden on the officers in charge of these fires.

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

My next example happened recently in February 2017. Whilst on nightshift at Eltham we were responded to a reported Structure Fire in Kangaroo Ground.

This premise is actually located in the St. Andrews brigade's primary response area that Eltham provide support into.

Upon arrival we found a large structure/shed well alight and burning well. There was one Volunteer tanker on scene – Certainly not the right appliance to tackle such a fire.

We set to work donning Breathing Apparatus, setting up a charged hose line, cordoning off the road and public and formulating our tasks & tactics.

After being on scene for several minutes we were notified by our communications that the additional supporting volunteer brigades had failed to respond.

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 16 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 brigades arrival we noticed that they had mixed skill level and very apprehensive to get involved. A lot of standing around and personal photo taking; don't get me wrong there were a handful of volunteers that assisted on the outside of the structure with hose dragging etc.. But we didn't have any qualified internal BA wearers at this stage.

During this fire; due to my own fire fighter fatigue and huge work load I lacerated my finger very badly and was transported to hospital to have micro surgery and subsequently had three months off work.

I truly believe if we had had 7 professional fire fighters at the scene that my injury wouldn't have occurred as there would have been capable people to share the work load and safety issues.

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

**Our first 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 12 years) CFA volunteers and was myself a volunteer for 4 years. I've been in the CFA for near on 16 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 life saving care. This is also another initiative that would expand under the reforms. I was involved in many EMR calls with the MFB last year 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 Victorians 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 Victorians are protected regardless of badge, fire truck colour or if paid or volunteer...

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

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

***Yours Sincerely,***

Mark Coleman  
Senior Leading Firefighter  
Eltham Fire Station