



[REDACTED]
07/07/2017 10:05 AM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject fire services reform submission

1 attachment



Submission.pdf

Hi,

Please find attached my fire services reform submission.

Please keep my name and identity confidential.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

PLEASE KEEP MY NAME AND IDENTIFY CONFIDENTIAL

I am writing as a resident of the Dandenong Ranges/Yarra valley area to give the viewpoint of a member of the community towards the fire services reforms and to indicate why I fully support the proposed fire services reforms.

I have listened and read widely the debate over the fire service over the past few years and noticeably lacking was any real reference to community safety and the needs of the community. There has been a great deal of press coverage over the needs and wishes of the volunteers and the needs and wishes of the professional career firefighters but very little referring to the safety of the community.

As a member of the community we have expectations about the fire services. We expect that when we ring 000 for a fire or accident, the appliance that can get to us the quickest will be the one that is sent. We expect that the people on that appliance, volunteers or professional fire fighters, will have the skills and equipment to help us when they get to us. These two expectations I would have thought form the very basis of a fire and rescue service and are so obvious that they should simply be a given. I have been horrified as I came to understand that neither of above two points necessarily occur, and in fact, very regularly don't occur.

Any fire service that does not deliver on the above two community expectations needs fixing and I believe these proposed fire services reforms will help fix this critical issue.

As a member of the community we do not mind what badge a fire or rescue person is wearing. We do not mind whether they are SES, CFA volunteer, CFA professional firefighter, MFB professional firefighter or DSE professional firefighter. We are just grateful that someone came to help us and we would like that person to be the quickest available to be sent and to be appropriately trained and equipped to help.

I will address these two 'expectations' separately.

Expectation 1 - We expect that when we ring 000 for a fire or accident, the appliance that can get to us the quickest will be the one that is sent.

From my discussions with various members involved in the CFA it has become apparent that this is not what occurs. The CFA stations have designated areas they respond to. The stations within these areas nominate which other nearby brigades will support them into their area. They can nominate based on whatever reason they like: it isn't who is the closest and quickest to respond, it might just be who they get along with the best or work with the best, or it might be which station is closest to most of the houses in their area. Where our home is located, we are only 2-3 minutes from a CFA volunteer station. Unfortunately we are in a different station's designated area and are probably 6-8 minutes from our designated brigade. That brigade has nominated as its support brigade the station

on the other side of them which is probably another 8-10 minutes from us. So if my home catches fire and my children are stuck inside we don't get the brigade that is 2-3 minutes away, we wait an extra 5-10 minutes for the station further away to respond, and those minutes are critical and could be the difference between my house burning down completely or just being damaged or my children escaping a house fire or dying in a house fire. Frankly, that is a system that is not using its resources correctly and is not working properly for the community's safety.

I understand the problem is even more prevalent where the integrated CFA stations (ie those with both volunteers and professional fire fighters) are located and turn out alongside volunteer brigades. The turnout areas are rarely adjusted to allow for the quicker response time of the professional fire fighters so you might be somewhere where a professional career fire crew could get to you more quickly but they won't be called out because the job is in a volunteer stations area. It is only after the volunteer station has sufficient time to turn out based on their longer turnout time allowances that the career staff would then be called if no crew turned out. Again those minutes are critical and the members of the community frankly do not care who is called and whether they are career staff or volunteers but they certainly do care if someone could have got to them quicker and they weren't called because it wasn't their 'turf'. If my child is in a car accident and could have been cut out of the vehicle and transferred into an ambulance 2 minutes quicker by turning out the career staff into a volunteer area or vice versa then frankly I expect it to be done. You do not let community safety be sacrificed for the sake of 'boundaries'.

The volunteers at these local brigades are community minded, dedicated people who just want to help their communities out. It is not them who have done anything wrong, it is the system behind them is what is flawed. The volunteers on the ground should not have to make decisions about who turns out to what and which brigade supports where. They should be allowed to focus on ensuring they are trained and ready to turn out when they are called and know that above them an independent body is ensuring the total pool of fire services resources are being used and allocated more efficiency in the interests of community safety.

Who is called to what and where should be decided and overseen by an independent body who ensures that nothing is preventing the fastest available appliance to be sent to the job. The new fire services reform make provision for this independent body to fulfil this critical role of ensuring community safety is what guides decision making, not any other factors, and removes this decision from any of the other involved parties who may have other influences or interests.

Expectation 2 - We expect that the people on that truck, volunteers or professional fire fighters, will have the skills and equipment to help us when they get to us.

As a member of the community if I'm in trouble and need to call for fire or rescue services I don't mind who comes, I don't mind what badge they wear or whether they are career staff or volunteers, providing they can do what I need then I'm grateful.

There is a base level of training standards required by all volunteers. There are then a significant number of additional areas of training they can choose to undertake. The base level is substantial and time consuming and generally more than enough of a commitment for most volunteers. Career firefighters are required to have completed training in far more of the skill set areas – as would be expected. When a crew of career fire fighters turn out they know what skill set is in that crew as it is

standardised. However when a volunteer crew turns out no one at the call knows what skill set is on that truck because they don't know which volunteers have responded until it arrives at the call – they know they will have the base level but they don't know about the extra areas of specialisations. If the job needed particular skills and they aren't on the truck then additional crews need to be called for, and all the while critical time is going by. Breathing apparatus (BA) is one of the key areas of these extra skill sets. BA operators can go into a house fire and search and rescue survivors or fight the fire from inside. Those without BA cannot. They can only fight the fire from outside.

In areas of higher density living like the suburbs and industrial areas with significant factories, there is a high likelihood of needing BA skill sets at most jobs. These areas generally have integrated CFA stations (those with career fire fighters & volunteers) within or nearby. However, these stations will not be called if its not their 'turf' or they aren't the supporting brigade. OR if they are called the support truck might come from a fully volunteer brigade who may or may not have BA operators on the truck that day.

For example, your house is on fire. The career staff truck turns up with a BA crew, the second truck turns up from a volunteer crew and when it arrives there are no BA operators. A third crew is then called but won't arrive for some minutes. At that point the incident controller of that job has a choice to make: do I have sufficient BA operators to undertake an internal fire fight or can I only do it from outside? If they are restricted to an outside only fire fight, then the house will be more badly damaged to completely destroyed. This is a horrifying scenario to contemplate and even more so because this has actually occurred. Now it might be bad enough to just have extra damage to your home but lets add in the scenario that your children are trapped inside that home, one in a bedroom at one end of the house and one at the other. Now that incident controlled has a truly horrifying decision to make, which child shall we try to save because we don't have the crew with the required skill set to search for both? Or even worse, they can't even go in and search for either child because they don't have sufficient BA operators to do this safely. That is a truly horrifying scenario to contemplate and even more so because all I added to a scenario that has actually occurred is the possibility of trapped children. This highlights the danger to community property and lives if this situation occurred again with people trapped inside.

What is even more horrifying is that a second career fire fighter crew with the required skill set could have been called from the beginning and been onsite in time but they weren't called because it wasn't their area and they had to call the volunteer crew first and wait to see whether it was a crew with BA operators or not. As a member of the community do you think that is acceptable? As the parent of children in a house fire would you think that is acceptable? I am absolutely horrified at the idea that anyone in our emergency services would think it is acceptable to not call appropriately qualified fire fighters to a job just because you need to call the volunteers first and wait and see what skill set you get. I think most volunteers would be horrified at that concept also.

Just to highlight I am not disrespecting those volunteer fire fighters at all. I am grateful they have done the training they have done and turn out to help and I don't expect them to hold training in all the same skill sets as the career fire fighters. They are volunteers and should not be expected to sacrifice all of their free time to training and serving their community. Once again, it is not the volunteers that have done anything wrong, it is the system they are operating in that is flawed.

The fire services should use the resources they have and call sufficient qualified fire fighters to jobs. If they end up with too many qualified crews because the volunteers that turn up do have BA (for example), then by all means, turn some of the career fire fighters back, but don't not use the resources you have available that could save lives and property. As a member of the community we expect that our fire services will turn out those who are available that hold the specialisations and qualifications and skill sets that are needed.

There is clearly something very flawed in an emergency service that does not do this and there is clearly a need for an overriding independent body to overseas the fire services.

Further to this point, many volunteer brigades are often short of the training and equipment they need to fulfil their role and are very frustrated at having to fundraise to fill the gaps. They should not have to fundraise for equipment and safety gear. They already dedicate time and energy to train and serve the community. The equipment and safety gear they need to do this should be provided to them by the CFA. If the fire services reform is passed I think this will focus the CFA solely on supporting their volunteers and ensuring they have the training and equipment they need for their role. I also think it will help ensure that funding is sent where is it needed and the extra funding providing as part of the reforms would help these volunteer brigades receive the equipment and training they need to fulfil their role and keep them safe.

In summary, I am not a career fire fighter or a volunteer fire fighter however I personally know many volunteer CFA fire fighters, and I personally know many CFA career fire fighters and I know many people who serve in both of these capacities. All of these people are there to serve their community. They want their skills used and they want to help. The system needs to allow this to happen and the current system does not do this.

Above all the CFA is a fire service. It is about community safety and community safety should be what guides the decision making.

I therefore strongly support the fire services reforms to be passed in the interest of community safety and fire fighter safety.

Kind Regards

PLEASE KEEP MY NAME AND IDENTIFY CONFIDENTIAL

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