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To Consultation/DTF@DTF,
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cc
bcc
Subject Submission for the Fire Services
Reform Select Committee - Andrew
Creasey

1 attachment



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Please find attached my submission to the fire services reform select committee
Andrew Creasey

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ATTENTION FIRE SERVICES REFORM SELECT COMMITTEE

I am a leading firefighter with the MFB. I have been employed full time in this service for the past 17 years. During this time, I have gained through course work and study the following qualifications EMR, teleboom, transporter, HART (high angle rescue), USAR (urban search and rescue), Wild fire and of course my previously mentioned leading qualifications. I submit this document acknowledging it to be my personal beliefs and not necessarily those of my employer.

I believe your committee has two ways to look at the changes to the Victorian Fire Service model as proposed by the Andrews Government.

One way is as a contest between Unionists v Volunteers. This is the pathway that those opposed to the proposed changes would like you to take.

The second way is as an opportunity to modernise what is presently an antiqued service based on a model that supports a two-tiered fire prevention/fire suppression delivery system. A model which discriminates against Victorians based on geographical boundaries formulated on population forecasts from the 1950's. Figures that do not adequately account for the expansion of Melbourne's/Victoria's Urban growth corridors nor Melbourne's/Victoria's massive population growth.

Under the existing structure there are 2 different fire service models for Victorians living in Urban settings. These services are delivered by the MFB (through full time career firefighters) and the CFA (using a combination of career and volunteer staff).

The MFB model is based on full time staff;

- being centrally located in their turnout areas;
- turning out of station within 90 seconds (a key performance indicator);
- arriving on-scene within 7 and half minutes (kpi);
- containing a fire to its room of origin (kpi);
- being qualified to perform internal fire suppression and extinguishment using BA (Breathing apparatus);
- having sufficient qualified personnel to respond to any call to guarantee the safety of both the attending crews and the public they serve
- being first responder qualified. Providing initial on-scene medical response both as first aiders and as providers of resuscitation (air management and intervention, use of defibrillation etc.).

Although the CFA model provides a replication of this model through its career staff, it does not make the same qualification demands, or require the same key performance indicators of its volunteers. This is wholly understandable as the training opportunity for volunteers are limited compared to that for staff (training for volunteers becomes an additional time burden placed on their busy life schedules). Volunteers have the right to continue with all the normal aspects of their daily lives (work, rest and play etc.) without being disadvantaged by their community service.

Under the CFA model volunteers;

- turn out from their places of employment or their homes and as such are not conveniently centralised within their turn out areas. This often delays their response times.
- are not required to be situated in close-proximity to fire-fighting appliances. This also delays their response times. Acknowledgement of this is built into the mechanisms that record their turn out times. These same mechanisms are not built into the career model as career staff are stationed with their gear.
- are busy elsewhere and as such arrangements for their training are more difficult to both organise and deliver. This may result in a diminished expectation of their level of qualification (this is best highlighted by there being 3 levels of BA qualification amongst the Volunteers – none, external and internal). Having no BA qualification would be unthinkable for career staff yet many Volunteers have no such qualification and as such cannot enter any smoke-filled environment without endangering their own health.
- as per the above dot point are not required to have a uniform Urban firefighting qualification and may in fact not receive any urban firefighting training at all (they may not be able to drive code 1 (for emergency conditions), they may not be able to operate the fire appliances pumps, they may not be first aiders or first responders etc.)
- have no minimum number of suitably qualified personnel dispatched to an alarm of fire hence creating a situation where the OIC of the fire-ground is unsure of the number of qualified personnel he/she has at their disposal on-scene or in transit.
- may fail to respond at all

Due to these differences an integrated response to the alarm of fire does not guarantee the coverage offered under the Career model (MFB and CFA). There are times when it is the equal of the Career response but it is more likely than not that the integrated response, through its reliance on volunteers will fall short of that of the Career model. This creates a two-tiered fire suppression/fire extinguishment service in Urban Melbourne/Victoria, the top tiered career model (MFB and CFA) and the lower tiered Integrated/volunteer response.

This committee must ignore the phoney/faux war that some in the community have tried to ignite between career and volunteer firefighters and should instead acknowledge and assess the strengths and weaknesses of each system. The committee must assess whether the

proposed changes are a better mechanism from which to deliver the quality of service that the community both expects and deserves.

The volunteer firefighting model is vital to rural and country Victoria and is the one that is most financially viable to the Victorian taxpayer, but it has limitations. Limitations not because of the good people that make up its service but by the very nature and reason that it exists at all, the financial constraints one has placed on a community spending.

This committee must ask itself 'Is this the time for the modernisation of Melbourne's/Victoria's Urban fire services?'

In making this decision, consideration must be given to the following:

- The residents of Melbourne already pay for a fire service through their fire levy though that levy is not subject to the quality of service they receive;
- that communities covered by or supported by Volunteers have assets within them that demand Career model protection (industry, hospitals, nursing homes, high rise housing etc.). Industries/businesses/services that require the quickest possible response, without delay ensuring the preservation of life and/or asset protection;
- that having two classes of services create two classes of people. A situation where one class, one people is/are deemed more deserving than another. This is a concept foreign to the tenets of our society yet exists unknowingly to most under the existing model.
- that the Career model of service delivery is vastly superior to the other and
- the over-arching fact that in many areas of Victoria there has been little to no change to our Urban fire response for over 50+ years even though the Urban sprawl has extended into what was once typically considered rural Victoria.

Regardless of where in Urban Melbourne your friends and family live, the question remains as to which fire coverage model do they deserve? That is the question being asked of this committee. Filter out the 'white noise' of politics that surrounds this issue. Are the people of Urban Melbourne/Victoria deserving of the premier Career model or are some expected to accept a lesser service because of their geography while politics and egos are placed before life, property and the environment? To serve life, property and the environment being the cred of all Firefighters.

Please support these changes. Bring the Victorian fire service model into the 21st century and deliver to Victorians not only a service that the public deserve but one that they would demand if they sat in your place.

Yours truly




