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06/07/2017 07:01 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Victorian Fire Services Review

1 attachment



Fire Service Review Submission Sandy Bourke.docx


To whom it may concern,

Please find attached my submission regarding the Legislative Council's Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) 2017.

Kind Regards,

Sandy Bourke.

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4th July 2017

Fire Services Bill Select Committee

RE: Victorian Fire Services Reform and Legislation.

Dear Fire Services Bill Select Committee Members,

My name is Sandy Bourke and I have been a career firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) for Six years and Ten months, holding the rank of Leading Firefighter with specialist qualifications in High Angle Rescue. I am a Deputy Health and Safety Representative and also have Bachelor Degrees in Arts and Business Management. I am writing to you in support of the Fire Services Reform and associated Legislation as proposed by the Victorian State Government and thank you for your time in considering my submission. I would like to focus upon the need for realignment of the current Urban / Rural interface, response capacity of volunteer brigades and consistency of operational procedures.

Every day of the year, an average of 300 people move to Victoria and particularly Melbourne according to Royce Millar and Ben Schneiders of The Age (1st July 2017). New estates are being opened up, new apartments constructed and infrastructure to accommodate the increased demand on housing is being installed. "Victorian in Future 2016" Produced by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning projects that the population of Melbourne will be over Eight Million people by 2051 and Victoria as a whole will be over 10.1 Million people. It is imperative that the Fire Service be modernised and is structured in a way that reflects this population density and new risk profile of these growth areas throughout Victoria. The current boundary of the MFB is not far beyond where I live in Mitcham. The result of this is that big, densely populated areas of outer East Melbourne including Chirnside Park, Lilydale, Mooroolbark, Montrose, Bayswater and Scoresby are classified as country and fall under the coverage of the Country Fire Authority and as such have rely upon Volunteer Brigades to respond to any emergency. These boundaries were drawn up over 40 years ago and are no longer truly representative or relevant to the population that reside in these now urban areas. Beside paying more in the Fire Service Levy, there is no reason that an arbitrary line on a map drawn up years ago should dictate if you receive a 90 second emergency response provided by career staffed stations or an unknown time frame due to the changing nature of volunteer responses.

Volunteer fire brigades in the state of Victoria are an invaluable and scarce resource that performs a vital service to the community. They are faced with a range of issues, however, particularly in the urban areas that limit the efficacy of response a volunteer brigade is capable of supplying. The pool of people who are willing and capable of giving their time in service as a volunteer firefighter are very closely correlated with gaining and maintaining full time employment. This can have adverse effects upon the capacity to respond to emergencies in a timely manner, if indeed at all, particularly during business hours. A

volunteer who works some distance from their brigade may not be able to respond due to work commitments or their physical location. Similarly, an inability to respond suitably qualified personnel to incidents may, and has hampered response times and capacity. 'Despite each Brigade having an Operational Skills Profile, which provides a minimum breakdown of skills and qualification required with in its' ranks, there is no capacity to specify the ability to actually respond these individuals at particular times or days' (Victorian Auditor Generals' Report, Managing Emergency Services Volunteers, 2014, p 23) Many Brigades have difficulty responding a driver for fire appliances and Breathing Apparatus qualified firefighters at certain times. Regardless of how many others have responded to an incident, a lack of critical qualifications can lead to less than ideal outcomes for the community they are protecting despite the best of intentions and through no fault of their own due to strategic and structural deficiencies in the response matrix for many areas under CFA governance.

The CFA along with SES, according to the Auditor General John Doyle's report "Managing Emergency Services Volunteers", 2014, 'do not have a sound understanding of how many volunteers they need to respond to emergencies and that both organisations tend to overestimate their respective response capability. Due to this issue, neither of these organisations can be assured of their capacity to respond to incidents when they occur.' An expansion and modernisation of Victoria's professional fire services will go a long way to alleviating these issues. By moving integrated stations to a fulltime, professional response; a guaranteed turn out with in 90 second, comprising fully qualified firefighters who all possess Breathing Apparatus qualifications and a designated driver to safely and efficiently respond to emergencies will be afforded to many more people in the urban regions of Victoria.

The current interface of CFA and MFB borders, along the Metropolitan Fire District comprise of a mixture of full time and volunteer brigades. In my time as a career firefighter, among many others, I have been stationed at Templestowe, Nunawading, Ringwood and Croydon stations, all of which respond alongside CFA crews. In my experience, I have not perceived any cultural issues nor had anything less than positive experiences in responding with the CFA, however, there is a range of interoperability issues inherent with these combined responses that are not ideal for the safety of crews or the community. Radio systems and communication protocols are not aligned; equipment including Breathing Apparatus are not compatible between services, meaning that we are unable to perform internal searches of a structure with CFA and MFB crews due to safety protocols and emergency procedures being incompatible. Even right down to having differing fittings on hoses, there are elements across both brigade structures and equipment which would benefit firefighters' safety and community outcomes from combining professional firefighters into one organisation.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to provide my insight and experience for your consideration and decision making process. I would like to reaffirm my support for this legislation and hope that you too back the proposed Fire Service reforms. If you seek any further clarification regarding my submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards,

Sandy Bourke.