



Andrew and Jane

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
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Subject Submission in support of the Fire
Service Reform Bill

1 attachment



Dear Assistant Clerk Committees.docx

Please find attached my submission in support of the Fire service reform

Regards

Andrew Thorn

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

I am a Senior Station Officer with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), currently stationed at Windsor Fire Station (Station No. 35). I have been employed by the MFB for 17 ½ years.

Internal Specialist Qualifications: Heavy Rescue Technician (Road Accident Rescue (RAR), Industrial Rescue), Teleboom Operator

I have instructed on MFB Recruit Courses, Developed Wildfire training programs and Facilitated MFB Heavy Rescue Courses

Previously I was employed as a Project fire fighter with Department of Environment, Water, Land Planning (DEWLP) formerly Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) for 5 fire seasons 1994 to 1999 based at Woodlands historical park and Macedon depots,

I also served as a Volunteer Fire Firefighter with Macedon Rural Fire Brigade from 1991 to 1999.

External Qualifications: Diploma of Public Safety (Fire Fighting Management), Certificate 4 in Fire Technology and Certificate 4 Workplace trainer and Assessor.

Awards: National Emergency Medal 2009, National service medal

I live in Seaford Victoria

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services for the following reasons:

In my 25 ½ in the fire services, I have been involved in many preparedness and response roles within the three major firefighting services in Victoria, this includes firefighting operations at major incidents and fires across Victoria with all services. Fire agencies are not only responding to fires the response roles are many and varied such as:

- Waterway response (fireboat) pollution control shipboard firefighting and water rescues.
- USAR - Collapsed building search and Rescue.
- HART – Rope Rescue from buildings, pits and tunnels.
- Confined Space Rescue – Rescue from shafts, grain silos and sewers.
- Road Accident Rescue
- Swift Water Rescue – Major Flooding rescues.
- Juvenile fire awareness program.
- Fire Ed: fire awareness for grade preps and grade 6 students.
- Fire warden training
- Hazardous material response.
- Terrorist response.

With this in mind, I have witnessed many changes in the fire services from the introduction of standardized training qualifications for Volunteer fire fighters after the Linton inquiry 1998, introduction of Emergency Medical Response (EMR) within Metropolitan Melbourne and the introduction of Career staff (integrated) Country Fire Authority Brigades in the outer metropolitan areas such as Point Cook, Caroline Springs, Craieburn, Greenvale, South Merang, Paterson River and most recently South Warrandyte .

In this time the Metropolitan and Country fire boundaries of Melbourne have not changed yet the population of the greater Melbourne, however the Australia Bureau Statistics data shows Melbourne having an average growth rate of 3.22% over 6 years from 2011 to 2016 (3.85 million 2011 to 4.67million 2016) making population density at 453 people per square kilometre, which is ranking the most populated state capital city in Australia. (Source: <http://www.population.net.au/melbourne-population/>)

Terms of reference

1: impact on fire service delivery across Victoria

1.1 The proposed reform will bring Victoria's fire service in line with the majority of states in Australia. Vitoria is the only state that has the control of the service in the hands of a CEO and not a Chief Fire Officer or Fire Commissioner (page 64 Report of the Victorian Fire Services Review) This will allow the Chief Fire Officer/ Commissioner to have greater control of the Prevention, Preparedness and response objectives for FRV, in reflection of the Recommendation 13 of the Fire services review and the EMV strategic action plan 2015-18

1.2: Greater protection for heavily urbanized areas of Melbourne. Currently the MFB responds to 90% of call outs and on scene in 7.7 minutes (KPI 15: MFB Annual Report 2015/16) and with this timely response crews are able to contain structure fires in 88% of cases to the room of origin (KPI: 5 2015/16 MFB annual report).

1.3 having 2 crews of 7 Firefighters on the fire ground within 8 minutes will reduce the risk to life and of further damage to properties. Providing a timely response also greatly reduces the life risk to firefighters due to the early fire fighting intervention. This is also reflected in the MFESB annual report, which shows that 88% of structure fires are contained to the room of origin.

1.3.1 7 on the Fire ground practice for initial response roles include but not limited to:

- 1 Incident Controller
- 1 Pump operator / Breathing Apparatus (BA) Entry
- 2 Fire fighters in BA to conduct Fire fighting
- 2 Fire Fighters in BA for Search and rescue
- 1 Safety Officer

1.4 The proposed restructure will allow for a boundary changes to take place ensuring that service delivery is enhanced in the greater metropolitan areas of Melbourne and also the regional centers across Victoria and adopting best practices when bench marked against other fire fighting standards i.e.: National Fire protection Agency (NFPA) 1710: The goal in 1710 (for career firefighters) is as follows: 60 seconds to turn-out, 4 minutes for the first engine company to arrive, and 8 minutes for the full first-alarm assignment for at least 90% of all fire calls. (<http://www.nfpa.org/codes-and-standards/archived/safer-act-grant/nfpa-1710>)

1.4.1: The rationale behind this is the fact that a room fire will reach a critical stage in fire development (point of flashover) in about 8 to 10 minutes. NFPA 1710 response times are meant to ensure that flashover is prevented through fire control. (Automatic fire sprinklers are intended to control fire development to prevent flashover, thus keeping the fire to the area or room of origin.) With a good response time and adequate available water supply, fully staffed fire departments stand a much better chance of minimising fire damage.

1.5: the restructure will have scope to roll out EMR services across the greater metro area with all FRV stations providing services in conjunction with Ambulance Victoria (AV), to provide vital early intervention for life threatening Medical issues (i.e.: Category 0 call out Cardiac Arrest). The adoption of this program by the MFB has provided great outcomes for the community over the 20 years of the program being implemented in Metropolitan Melbourne. Currently, EMR response time of 9.2 minutes (on scene time) is met in 94.6% of cases. (KPI 17: MFB annual report 2015/16)

1.6 In my specialist role in RAR, I have an understanding of the importance of early access and medical intervention in motor vehicle accidents (MVA) is critical to having successful patient outcomes from major entrapments. This timely response enhances the ability for critically injured patients to receive advanced hospital care in a shorter time frame. The Road Accident Arrangements of Victoria states the time for response to a Motor vehicle accident is at 20 minutes. Currently the MFB responds to MVA's in 13.5 minutes and meets that target 80% of cases (KPI 16: MFB Annual report 2015/16) The proposed reforms will enable FRV to provide timely response to these incidents in the FRV area whilst building strong working relationships with AV. Also meeting the legislative requirements of the Proposed FRV act section 55.

1.6.1.“ A delayed response can have life-changing health, welfare and economic consequences. Citizens expect a prompt response to an emergency call and want to know how long the response is likely to take. Therefore, the public takes a strong interest in the responsiveness of Victorian's emergency services.” (Victorian Auditor-general's report Emergency services response times March 2015.)

2: Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

2.1: Better allocation of resources for Incident Controller, there will be less need take appliances from primary areas as the Volunteer brigades that fall under the FRV boundary can be utilised without denuding areas of full time coverage. The initial response to be professional, then once the OIC has completed the size up the appropriate resources can be utilised i.e.: the use of Volunteer as support rather that removing Career staff from their primary areas for extended periods.

2.2 Utilising Volunteer resources will provide excellent opportunity to develop strong working relationships and maintain worthwhile participation in response roles in FRV primary areas. Thus keeping to the EMV strategic Action plan shared Goal of “A sustainable and efficient emergency management system that reduces the likelihood, effect and consequences of emergencies” and “We work as one” (EMV strategic Action plan 2015-18)

2.2: The current Enhanced “Surge Capacity”; Surge capacity is the ability to mobilise large amounts of resources to any part of the state in a timely manner. In my experience with DEWLP, the organisation is a great example of how having capacity within the fleet can enable large amounts of resources to be deployed to fire/incident in a timely manner. The strategic locations of DELWP allow the mass mobilisation of resources the Victoria without leaving areas unprotected.

2.3: Currently the CFA has great capacity within it own fleet as there are many Brigades across victoria have multiple appliances available allowing this “Surge Capacity” to be enhanced under the Preposed FRV model. As the CFA brigades that fall under FRV boundaries will be able to be responded en-mass to any incident or fire in Victoria and interstate without stripping vital resources from FRV primary areas, which will be covered by 24 overage by Career Fire fighters thus maintain the continuity of fire protecting in Urban areas. There are over 1600 tankers in the fleet (not including Pumpers and Pumper tankers) with in CFA (CFA annual report 2015 -16)

2.4: Greater focus on Volunteers and Volunteerism with the proposed model. Anecdotaly the greatest complaint from CFA volunteers is the lack of structured and meaningful training provided to volunteers. Although Volunteers are skilled, there is a requirement to keep volunteers competent and skills current, as to the requirements of the National training framework. The proposed restructure would allow engagement of volunteers with the allocation of the required training resources to enhance and further develop the skills. As training packages will be solely tailored to the needs of Volunteers

3 Short term and long term cost impact on fire service provision

3.1 The proposed restructure will have great cost saving by reduced costs negotiating on one enterprise agreement for Career fire fighters. Industrially there are duplications of resources. Both MFB and CFA have teams that negotiate EBA's for their staff with the representative body. These recourses could be utilised in other areas. This reduced industrial process will see less time tying up Fair work Australia tribunals.

3.2 The proposed restructure with give great opportunity to streamline the services and reduce the duplication of resources, currently there is a joint training program about to be rolled out, yet there is still two training development departments organising training (MFB and CFA). Having a single training development to standardise training for Career fire fighters, and one focusing on CFA developing Volunteer training requirements.

3.3 The standardisation Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Vehicles and Equipment would allow the proposed FRV to streamlining of the procurement process will in turn, provide opportunities to reduce costs around the purchase of these items.

Conclusion

I have a unique insight into the services, as I have been involved in the three fire services in Victoria. In my experience in the Fire service reform is much needed to service the expanding population and risks currently in Victoria. As Victoria's Projected population in 2051 is 10.1 million people, the emergency service sector needs to evolve to meet this projected growth and risk associated with this growth.

(https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/14036/Victoria-in-Future-2016-FINAL-web.pdf)

The proposed reform will bring Victoria's fire service in line with the majority of states in Australia. Allowing the Chief Fire Officer / Commissioner to have greater control of the Prevention, Preparedness and response objectives for FRV. It will provide excellent service to the community in the new FRV boundaries and provide meaningful roles for volunteers in these 'new' areas, while still providing Surge capacity to the state in the event of a major fire or incident.

The formation of the Review panel will allow the fire Consistent with Recommendation 63 of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. An independent Fire District Review Panel will also be established. The Panel will conduct future reviews of the boundary between fire services, based on population growth, urban development and the volume of Triple 000 calls and will allow the expansion of FRV boundaries to provide 24 hour 365 day guaranteed response in these areas with the support of skilled Volunteers.

With the past industrial climate in the fire service the proposed reform will provide a great opportunity to change culture and attitudes as per the recommendation 8 of Fire service review. The Review recommended; "The Review recommends that committed and sustained effort be made by the senior leadership of the fire services to reset its relationship with firefighters and their representative bodies, through adopting a genuine, collaborative and consultative approach in place of the adversarial, win/lose dialogue. The immediate focus must be on restoring a cohesive work culture and addressing firefighter operational and safety concerns."

The passing of this important legislation will provide access for Career and Volunteers Fire Fighters to presumptive rights for compensation for illness that are contracted from our field of work. This will help support Fire fighters and their families if they fall ill from their service to the communities of Victoria

Andrew Thorn

