

06/07/2017 03:54 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission to the LCSC Committee

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

Please note: I would like my identity and contact details to remain confidential

1. I am Qualified Firefighter [REDACTED]

Employer: CFA

Length of service: 6.5 years

Qualifications: Firefighter, incremented in heavy pumper, tanker, ladder platform (37 and 42m), high angle rope rescue and BA Van.

2. I live in Bannockburn and work in Geelong.- Geelong City Fire Station

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

What is going on now is untenable...the misinformation, the perversion of fact to suit a political agenda. The essential services – the first defenders; those who run in while everyone else is running out, should not be made (as it is) a political football. Lives are at stake, here, while politicians score points. Essential infrastructure is at risk while the relationship between career and volunteer firefighters are put at odds with each other, and for what? This is about safety for the community, not the egos of politicians or any other person or organisation who wants to turn this into anything else: we fight for lives...nothing else.

There is no doubt that the history of the CFA is a proud one where career and volunteer fire-fighters worked together to battle fire-fronts successfully. However, times have changed and it is essential that there is a recognition that this is the case. Volunteerism is on the decline and, respectfully, volunteers fit their fire-fighting around their lives and work and are not held to the same rigorous standards as career firefighters. Far fewer employers are willing to release volunteers to fight fires. At the same time, our rural, regional and metropolitan populations have increased exponentially and the areas in which they live have become more and more densely utilised. This is a perfect storm – increased demand, decreased capacity to serve need. What is clear is that this new historic need must be met by a dedicated, single, fire-fighting service: the combined MFB and career CFA.

Career firefighters are there, on call, turning out in 90 seconds when the alarm rings. We are uniquely positioned to serve our communities by protecting lives and buildings and systems. WE have NO OTHER function when on shift and for this reason, we need to be prioritised in the areas in which we are located. There is no doubt whatsoever, that our volunteer brothers and sisters have a vital role to play in protecting our state in areas where the career forces are less present. We applaud and support them in the work that they do. This is not about denigrating any volunteer force. It is about realising that in these built-up areas, where populations are

dense and infrastructure is central, a vibrant, viable and dedicated career firefighting force needs to work as their training teaches them to do.

IN my short career with the Country Fire Authority I have witnessed the operations in rural, regional and metropolitan fringe areas. In all these locations I have seen the tension between the career and volunteer forces taking its toll on all involved. In all these areas I have seen dysfunction and stress. Make no mistake, for some this is their livelihood and this political points-scoring is adding to what is already a stressful job. Remember, when your house is on fire – when your loved ones are in peril, don't you want to be able to rely on a team that is has, as its sole function, to turn out in 90 seconds *to save your life, their lives, your property, your neighbours* . In reality, the career fire fighters have no other purpose than this...no other job than this...no other priority than this. In all these areas, the tensions are the same: what is the most effective strategy for saving lives and property? The answer is simple: a firefighting force that is on call, twenty four hours a day, every day of the year – *without* any conditions at all. ONLY by giving authority and autonomy to a combined MFB/career CFA force can we restore functionality and focus in the career fire-fighting force.

ONLY by separating the career from the volunteer forces can we offer the volunteers the agency and authority to perform in their own right.


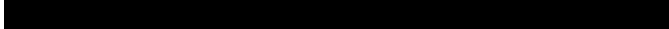
ONLY by authorising the combined MFB/career CFA fire fighters can we establish protocols, systems and operating procedures that can ensure the safety of the population, the infrastructure and the fire-fighters themselves to the highest occupational health and safety standards required.

ONLY by ensuring seven on the fire-ground can we be assured that there are sufficient fire-fighters to protect each other and therefore, conclude the job to which we have been assigned.

To continue this debate for political points-scoring is socially irresponsible...indeed, selfish. If your task is to work out what is best for Victoria it is simple: combine the career CFA with the MFB, give the volunteer CFA its own areas of responsibility and support them in their essential role and realise the times have, indeed, changed and that to protect the community, the CFA has to change too.

Yours sincerely,




Ballarat City Fire Station – 1120 Sturt Street Ballarat 3350


This email is for official use only. The information in this communication is privileged and confidential, intended only for the use of the individual or entity named. If you are not the intended recipient, any dissemination, copying or use of the information is strictly prohibited. Any personal information in this email must be handled in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and applicable laws. If you have received this transmission in error please inform us by return email and then delete it immediately from your system.