



Ben Murphy [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Services Reform

1 attachment



Fire-Services-Reform.docx

Please find attached my submission to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee.

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

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

I am a Level 2 Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), currently stationed at Pascoe Vale Fire Station in Melbourne's northern suburbs. In my relatively brief time with the MFB I have been stationed in a number of locations, including Station No.9 Somerton on the northern border of the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD).

During this time I had the opportunity to turn out regularly with CFA professional staff and volunteers to grass, car and factory fires. At smaller incidents we regularly worked in close cooperation with the CFA professional staff from Craigieburn and Greenvale brigades, and at more significant protracted events with volunteers from integrated stations and surrounding areas.

At all times I felt we worked efficiently alongside each other, but the differences in communication and firefighting equipment, appliances and standard operating procedures meant that we were never able to truly work together seamlessly as MFB personnel are able to within the MFD, and I imagine CFA personnel do outside the MFD. This is in no way a reflection on the men and women on the fireground, but purely a consequence of two disparate organisational histories and structures.

While firefighting organisations will inevitably develop procedures that reflect the specific threat environment within which they operate, it seems counter intuitive to have two distinct organisations operating differently, with different equipment, within the same environment, which ultimately is what has gradually occurred as Melbourne has sprawled outward. Many of the CFA's response areas are now indistinguishable from a firefighting perspective to the most densely built up areas within the MFD. The consequent duplication of effort, expenditure and organisational development seems at best wasteful, and at worst potentially dangerous, and manifestly undermines both agency's ability to provide an optimal service to the community when working in cooperation.

There is no shortage of data, which I'm sure will be explored extensively by more informed submissions, which demonstrates that while a volunteer service is absolutely essential to protecting the wider Victorian community, the demands of a growing Melbourne and highly populated regional centres are now such that they place immense strain on, or simply outstrip the capacity of volunteer services. Further, high density complex urban areas with, to name a few, public transport, hospitals, aged care facilities and industry, require a guaranteed and timely response. Volunteer brigades, and I suggest this with the utmost respect to their work and efforts, simply cannot, and the evidence demonstrates, do not provide this. The recent multi-casualty incident at the Commonwealth Bank in Springvale is a grave example of the volunteer model's failure to deploy appropriate skill sets in a timely fashion.

The proposed reforms I believe represent a unique opportunity to bring Victoria's professional fire services into the 21st century and ensure they reflect Victoria's contemporary urban geography and the community that we serve. It is an opportunity to revisit service boundaries that are an historical anachronism, in which one side of the street receives a guaranteed Emergency Medical Response to a cardiac arrest, while the other does not. It is an opportunity to improve the utilization of existing resources by eliminating the current situation where appliances and crews are regularly not called upon to cross agency boundaries despite being geographically closest to a given incident. And critically, it is an opportunity to ensure that into the future when these crews and appliances do

arrive on scene, they are able to work rapidly and effectively together to deliver the best possible service to our community.

The proposed legislation represents a once in a generation chance to fundamentally rethink how Victoria's fire services operate. To improve service delivery in an already world class service, as well as be the catalyst for cultural change, improving diversity in the workforce, and breaking the adversarial and antagonistic industrial climate that has been so corrosive to morale. I note also that this legislation includes the long overdue regime of presumptive rights in relation to the proven causal link between specific cancers and firefighting work. This committee has a great opportunity to look dispassionately at the issues at hand, to set aside the misinformation and confusion that has characterised much of the public debate, and conceptualise a modern, responsive and professional fire service that the Victorian public deserve and already pay for.

I thank you for your consideration of this submission, and hope that you will find in favour of the proposed legislation.

Ben Murphy

Firefighter, Metropolitan Fire Brigade

