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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
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Subject INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS'
PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS
COMPENSATION AND FIRE
SERVICES LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017

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

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services. I ask that my name and personal details remain confidential.

I am a Firefighter with the CFA at Morwell fire station in the Latrobe Valley. I joined the CFA in February 2016 when I completed a CFA recruit course. My wife daughter and I live within the local community in which I serve.

During my 12 months here in Morwell I have attended a large number of calls where due to low / no attendance at fire calls from our volunteers, we have been left under supported on the fire ground in a wide range of call types. This is in no way meant as a slight on our volunteer members, but it is unfortunately a fact of life that a large number do not work in the local area and this leaves them unable to attend for large parts of most days. The fire services reform and subsequent implementation of 7 appropriately skilled Firefighters on the fire ground would enable us to ensure that we have adequate resources available to respond in under 8 minutes to all calls and not face the uncertainty as we currently do. In our Job, seconds can save lives and uncertainty can have disastrous consequences. Morwell supports into two major power stations which are critical infrastructure for the state of Victoria. The Power station at Yallourn is approximately 17kms from Morwell and I have attended a number of calls there where there has been low / no volunteer response. Appliances from Morwell are regularly first on scene at such calls and often the only operators available to wear breathing apparatus. Once again this is not meant as a slight on the volunteers as I fully appreciate the pressures on people's valuable time, but if the community was aware that such a vital piece of Victoria's power supply was so under serviced then I believe they would be rightly concerned.

I believe that the joining of the fire services will be of great benefit to the Latrobe Valley and the whole of Victoria. The CFA has a proud history and I believe that this can be continued if the staff were to be removed from the CFA. I know that there has been a large amount of scaremongering by a very vocal few who think that CFA volunteers will not have the opportunity to attend all calls as they do at this time but through discussion with local volunteers within our group, I can assure you that this is not a universally held opinion. The reform as currently proposed will only affect the 35 integrated stations and surrounding areas. The career staff have a fantastic relationship with the volunteers in the Latrobe Valley and the majority support the fire services reform and the opportunity to receive more support from us. The fire service reform will not stop staff and volunteers working together on the fire ground when required as they currently do. Those in rural areas will likely not be affected and those in

urbanized areas will receive a greater level of staff support when they need it. If the worst should happen and you need the assistance from emergency services, you wouldn't care if it was a staff member or volunteer member who came to help you, you just want someone to come and help you as quickly as possible. Having an enhanced staff response with the backup of volunteers when available can in my opinion only be a benefit to the community.

I have recently moved from Melbourne, Victoria which is in the MFB area to Traralgon, Victorian the CFA area. When considering my move to a country area it was a large factor in my decision that the town I moved to had career Firefighters available to respond as required. Although I appreciate not all areas of Victoria require coverage from career Firefighters from my work over the last 18 months, I have seen what happens in urban areas when fire crews are not on scene within the critical first 8 minutes. We support a number of surrounding brigades which can take up to 10 minutes for us to get on scene at an incident. I know when attending these calls that if there is a fire, we will more than likely not be able to contain it due to the amount of time the fire has to spread. All Victorians pay their fire service levy and all should have the certainty of having a timely response available to help them when they need it most. As Traralgon and Morwell are the only towns in the Latrobe valley which have Integrated fire stations and can guarantee this response its made the decision quite simple as the safety of my family was paramount in my mind.

As it currently stands the moral level on my station is at a very low level as our industrial dispute has been a constant feature in the media. Career Firefighters are being portrayed in a very negative light and this has over time, worn down even the most resilient of us. The media manufactured tension is a constant weight on the minds of both the volunteers and the staff and makes our ability to continue in the same organisation very difficult if not impossible. All career firefighters are very proud of the CFA, some staff here at Morwell have been within the CFA for 30+ years and the fact that they are prepared start fresh after all this time should speak volumes towards the level of abuse that they have been subjected to. Even in my short time with the CFA, I have had members of my extended family ask me about a number of news stories which have featured in the media and I have had to correct a number of outright lies that have been told about my colleagues and our union. The media in its many forms is ever present in people's lives and whilst this uncertainty in our fire services continue, we will not be able to fully concentrate on the reason that we joined an emergency service in the first place – to serve our community. Staff and volunteers alike want to put this behind us and move forward with improved fire services that we can be proud of once again.

In conclusion, I fully support this bill as proposed and hope that you can see through the outside interference of the media. This fire service reform is about better service delivery to our communities and I believe that anyone who does not support it, may not have this as their first priority.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Firefighter
Morwell Fire Station

[REDACTED]

