



Clint Mark [REDACTED]

07/07/2017 12:08 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Service reform Submission

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Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

I am a qualified firefighter employed by the COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY. I live in Leongatha and work at the Morwell fire station.

I have been employed for a period of 3 and a half years, in this time I have completed a recruit course at Fiskville and completed other specialised training that is required to deal with some specific risks associated with the LaTrobe valley and specific to Morwell brigades response requirements.

This additional training includes, steep angle rope rescue training, Aerial pumper training, coal firefighting training and Emergency Medical response training

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

Since working at Morwell fire station, i have witnessed, first hand failures with the current structure of the fire services.

I am passionate about providing a high level of protection and assistance to the community, which is one of the main reasons I joined in the first place. Unfortunately I feel this service provided to the community is currently lacking and could be greatly improved with a re-structure of the fire services. I believe that the community has a right to exceptional service, particularly given that they pay for this service through the fire services levy.

Some of the proposed changes that I particularly support include the dispatch of seven firefighters. In all training I have received, 7 is the minimum number to carry out safe operations on the fireground. So, this is particularly important for fire fighter safety as well as effectively and efficiently combating an incident with minimal impact to those affected. Unfortunately, This number on the fireground is currently not guaranteed, particularly within the allocated time frame, because through no fault of their own, volunteer response can not be guaranteed. Meaning those affected and the community suffer. I understand that volunteers may feel like they are not required if additional Career staff are responded to incident, (which I have witnessed volunteers say), but it will mean a better result for the community, which ultimately is more important than offending volunteers.

There will always be a place for volunteer firefighters within Victoria, particularly with large scale incidents such as bushfires and protracted incidents, and also their skills are required at everyday incidents. Again, the deployment of 7 career staff is about providing best service to the community within a timely manner.

I believe under the proposed changes, volunteers actually stand to be better off and able to have more input within their community, if doing away with integration and working under two different services. Not only has the government promised additional funding for the volunteers with the changes, it would also enable the volunteers to be more involved and require more ownership of

their brigades. Currently at integrated stations staff carry out the majority of all station duties and community engagement and education sessions. Working under different agencies would enable volunteers to be more involved in these day to day activities. They would still be supported effectively by Operations Officers and Operations Managers seconded back to the CFA.

For the entire period I have been employed by the CFA, we have been in industrial dispute. Over this time I have seen tensions on station built between the volunteers and staff. I have witnessed un-necessary attacks by the community and volunteers toward staff regarding this dispute. With staff having the communities best interests at the fore, these attacks are unjustified, and fuelled by the Media and volunteers and their representatives. I look forward to this being resolved so we can go about our job effectively and un-inhibited.

Since the announcement of the reform there has been words spoken by some volunteers that, if the reforms were not to go ahead, would create an un-workable environment in the form of integration.

I see many advantages of combining all Victorian career staff into one agency. It would standardise training, enabling more firefighters with the same qualifications, meaning they have the same objectives and same operating procedures. It would also pool all equipment and resources, providing greater response capability across the entire state. It would also pool government funding, providing financial advantages to the agency, with one bigger budget more effective than 2 smaller ones.

As previously stated I believe the community is entitled to the highest possible level of service. With the current structure I have witnessed many failings of this with the current structure. Two examples that stand out that absolutely astonish me I will outline below.

We were responded to a 2 car motor vehicle accident with one person trapped in each car. We as CFA career staff were first on scene with rescue capability. Once on scene and my officer conducted a size-up and liaised with Ambulance Victoria, we were directed to begin extrication of the two patients. We completed our set up, had a plan in place and were about to perform the extrication. At this point the SES arrived on scene. In our area the SES are the control agency for road rescue. They directed us to pack up our equipment and they would conduct the rescue. They then had to formulate their own plan and set up their equipment, wasting a large amount of valuable time. By the time their controller had briefed their crew and the rescue was conducted considerable time was wasted. I found it astonishing that this could take place, I estimate approximately 30 mins was wasted un-necessarily, a crucial amount of time in this situation. This was incredibly frustrating for myself and the rest of the crew, and certainly did not result in the highest level of service for those involved.

The second incident I would like to outline occurred when we, as career staff had been responded to an incident at Loy Yang power station approximately 15mins away from Morwell fire station. A second page for a house fire approximately 500m from the station was received. With a delayed response due to being at the other incident the volunteers at Morwell were paged numerous times with only one person and one truck arriving just prior to the career staff. Due to this lack of response by the volunteers, it resulted in the entire house being damaged. This is not an attack at the volunteers, it just outlines flaws with the current system and shows that their response can not be relied upon, nor should it.

As stated I believe the community is entitled to a certain level of service. I feel the above outlines just examples of what only I have witnessed first hand. I fully support a reform of the fire services and hope that it may result in a greater level of service to the state of Victoria.

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Clint Mark

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