



Craig Kneeshaw

07/07/2017 12:54 AM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Fire Rescue Victoria submission.

To whom it may concern,

Please find attached a submission regarding the formation of Fire Rescue Victoria.

Regards,



Craig Kneeshaw Senior Station Officer

Corio Fire Station – 20-32 Birdwood Avenue Norlane Vic 3214

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To whom it may concern,

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

My Name is Craig Kneeshaw. I have been a career staff firefighter with CFA for seventeen years and currently hold the rank of Senior Station Officer. I am stationed at Corio and I live in Leopold.

On top of my firefighting qualifications I am further trained and qualified in the areas of;

- Road Accident Rescue
- Chemical, Biological and Radioactive detection (CBR)
- Hazardous materials mitigation and de-contamination (HAZMAT)
- Aerial appliance (Teleboom)
- Protective Equipment support
- Assessor for both HR management and Fireground Command at state level for Leading Firefighter and Station Officer on Board of assessments
- Incident Management team member and team leader for Warnings and Advice for major incidents within the AIIMS ICS structure
- Incident Management team member for the Planning team at major incidents within the AIIMS ICS structure etc.

I was a Volunteer for 13 years before becoming a Career firefighter in a family that is still heavily involved in the CFA. I am also extremely proud of my association with the CFA, my time as a volunteer and the service that the CFA provides.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reform of the fire services.

The Corio fire brigade area is a very urban area that includes dense population, commercial and heavily industrial areas.

We are responsible for

- Four Major Hazard Facilities including Viva Refinery and Gas plant which supply a large portion of the state's gas and fuel, Terminals chemical bulk storage and LyondellBasell Polypropylene Plant.
- Geelong Ports x 4, with 17 berths (Shipping port of state importance)
- Barwon Health Grace McKellar centre (a major health facility)
- Geelong Grammar school (World renowned boarding school)
- The fire protection and potential rescue of every person who travels on the highway or railway line between Geelong and Melbourne through Geelong
- Numerous other nursing homes, shopping centres, businesses, and heavy medium and light industry.

On top of that we provide support to 3 major hospitals, 3 Prisons, University campuses, major roads and highways, major rail lines, Avalon airport and much more.

Corio fire district is not the “Country” area of Victoria.

This area is still being serviced by a “Volunteer based” organisation that sees all of the greater Geelong area as “country”, and relies on well-meaning Victorians to give up their time to train and become educated to an appropriate level, and be available at a moment’s notice to respond to some of the most high risk facilities in the country.

The Volunteer based system asks of these men and women to not only respond to these risks but to work under legislation and operating procedures that were set out almost 60 years ago for a state that was very different to the one we live in now.

The demands of this system are too great for the people of the Corio area. Evidence of this is that we don’t have any volunteers at Corio fire brigade who hold an up to date qualification to drive or operate, Corio pumper (the main appliance for Urban firefighting), Corio HAZMAT/CBR or Corio Teleboom (large ladder appliance). I point this out not to criticise the men and women that volunteer their time for the community, but to highlight that a “Volunteer based” system is no longer adequate for Corio or the urbanised areas of Victoria. **The Corio area needs a fully professional service.**

This means that even in an area of such high risk as Corio, we have to jump from one truck to the next depending on the type of call we get, as we don’t have enough staff to respond all of our appliances. It was only recently that I had to respond in three different appliances to the same incident where we required specialist equipment to the same incident. To do this, I had to be driven back to Corio each time, to take another specialist appliance to combat the incident at Terminals Chemical storage plant which is a Major Hazard Facility in Corio Fire District.

Whenever we are required to take an appliance out of our primary response area (normally several times a week, as we respond all the way to the south Australian border for specialist response) there is no guaranteed of adequate coverage for the next call in our primary district. This is both a risk to the community, and also an OH&S risk for us as firefighters. There is no guarantee that Volunteers will come to make up numbers, and it is unlikely that if they do come that they have the required skills demanded of the Corio risk profile.

The people of Victoria live under the assumption that if they live in a built up area, that they will have the right amount of professionals coming to help them in their time of need. Sadly the truth is that in their time of need in “Country” areas of Victoria, it’s uncertain what help will actually arrive, if any. If they live in an area that has career firefighters, then they will get a guaranteed response but they may be surprised to know that those firefighters may well be faced with having to take guesses with their own safety because they don’t know who else (if anyone) is coming. On a weekly basis, I travel to support other neighbouring fully voluntary brigades and quite often they don’t have anyone attend from their brigade (turnout failure).

The ongoing industrial dispute has had a significant impact on my mental health, and also on my family.

I have a wife and two young sons that I support through my employment as a firefighter. Whilst I love the work that do, and I’m able to work in a job that helps the community in their times of need, I also have a responsibility to provide for my family. I recent years I haven’t been able to tell my wife with any certainty what my future employment and conditions are going to be. We have all ridden the rollercoaster of an uncertain future whilst constantly being attacked in the

media and from people in the public. I have been accosted several times over recent years by the public, and am now afraid to wear my uniform in public, something that until the last few years, I have been extremely proud of. The constant attack by the media, opposition governments both state and federal have made it difficult to feel proud of what I do, and has now made it impossible to have a workplace agreement with my employer. This is a basic right in our wonderful country that has been eroded for political gain.

I want to be proud of the work I do in the community. I want to be safe, able to assure my family that my health and safety is protected (along with my colleagues) and that I can support our family unit.

The proposed fire service reforms would mean that the community where I live and work can have more security of guaranteed response in guaranteed numbers with guaranteed skill levels, as well as still having volunteers undertaking the same noble work they have always done.

The reforms would not impact Volunteers in any negative way, in fact with more professional firefighters dispatched to fires and emergencies in urban higher risk areas, a safer environment will be created for the community and for firefighters both staff and volunteer.

The reforms would allow for an end to the industrial disputes that have gone on for too long and let all firefighters focus on serving their communities to the best of their abilities.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission, I leave you with this,

Fire service in outer Melbourne and regional centres in Victoria can certainly go on the way it is now. However, to move into 2017 and beyond we must change. We have changed dramatically as a society in population, socio-economic demographic, society structure, but our service has stayed in the same form. The time has come to change. And although there is a perceived reluctance to do so, several studies have shown that we need to change.

We have a unique opportunity to change things for a more modern service that fits the needs of Victoria right now, a change that will see better service to all Victorians well into the future. A change that better represents society and that doesn't denigrate volunteers, but to the contrary, gives more support to them and the community.

Yours Truly,

Craig Kneeshaw