



Damien McLean [Redacted]

06/07/2017 01:44 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission for the Fire Service Bill
Select Committee

1 attachment



Submission by Damien McLean.pdf

To whom it may concern,
Attached is a copy of my submission to the Fire Service Bill Select Committee. Please ensure that it is forwarded on to the Assistant Clerk of Committees for consideration.

Regards,
Damien McLean

--

Damien McLean
[Redacted]

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

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

I am Qualified Firefighter Damien McLean, employed by the Country Fire Authority, stationed at Dandenong Fire Station. I have served the CFA since 2004, as a Volunteer at North Warrandyte fire brigade, before joining as a career firefighter in 2011. I was stationed at Ballarat City fire station, before transferring to Dandenong in 2013. I have also provided relief at 13 stations across CFA. As part of my role as career firefighter I hold the following qualifications and endorsements:

- Heavy Pumper operator
- Heavy Tanker operator
- Emergency Medical Responder
- 42m Bronto Ladder Platform operator
- Teleboom operator
- Aerial Pumper operator
- Road Accident Rescue, Heavy Rescue operator
- Steep Angle Technical Rescue operator
- Offroad 4x4 Driver
- BA Support operator

All of the above experience has given me a good understanding of where CFA currently is, the issues that it faces, and how the proposed amendments will better help serve Victoria into the future.

My reasons for supporting reform are simple. Victoria is growing at an enormous rate. According to the latest Census results, Melbourne is on track to overtake Sydney as largest city in Australia. Victoria grew by 146,600 people in the last year alone. If this is happening in one year, imagine the change in Victoria over the last half century. There has been no fundamental change in CFA or MFB since 1958. The fire service that was designed then does not reflect the Victoria that we know today, and the fire service that Victorians expect today. The expectations placed on volunteers, especially in outer metro and regional centres, is now overwhelming. This is not to say that volunteers are not suitable for roles in emergency management in outer metro and regional areas, just simply acknowledging there are less and less people who are able to give large amounts of time to protect their community, while at the same time, demands on emergency services are increasing. Many people no longer work in the area they live, and pressures on family and budgets mean we are all working harder and longer than ever, all things that mean we set our expectations too high on what we can reasonably expect people to volunteer for.

Dandenong Fire Station is located right on the border between CFA and MFB. Most people I speak to are surprised that Dandenong is not in the MFB district, and it is an easy mistake to make. Dandenong is the busiest CFA station, responding to an average of 2400 calls per year. Our immediate primary and support area house nearly 150,000 people, predicted to grow by 22% by 2024¹. The city of Greater Dandenong; of which Dandenong fire station responds to almost all of, accounts for approximately 2.34% of Victoria's total businesses, despite making up just 0.057% of Victoria itself². The suburb of Dandenong; the brigades primary response area, has two major freeways and three major highways running through the area, a major train station, a large and

¹ Statistics sourced from <http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/10768/summaries-of-social-information-cgd>

² Statistics sourced from ABS via <http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/information-portal/home>

expanding CBD with numerous highly populated office complexes, three hospitals, numerous aged care facilities, 22 primary and secondary schools, a major TAFE campus, two large shopping complexes (Dandenong plaza and Dandenong Market), two local courts (magistrates and family court) and a performing arts centre. There are more and more high rise buildings going up every year. We manage nearly 300 premises with monitored fire alarms and are responsible for three listed major hazard facilities. Our Road Accident Rescue unit is one of the busiest in Victoria for response to road accidents and work performed at road accidents. All of this is occurring in the "Country area of Victoria" according to our fire boundaries, and it places it under greater risk than if it was five kilometres up the road in the Metropolitan fire district.

Currently Dandenong Fire Station's minimum crewing is 11 per shift, to cover four appliances. We support, and are supported by a mix of integrated and volunteer brigades. This provides us with uncertainty when responding to emergencies on our initial response into volunteer areas, and if a call escalates, on what support we are likely to receive. I have experienced, on a number of occasions, the stress of waiting to hear if the support brigade will respond, and in situations where the focus should be on the task at hand it is an unwanted distraction. While career staff and volunteers are able to complete the same training, the minimum level that is required to get on a truck is massive. The mix of unknown response and unknown skills mix on the responding appliance makes setting strategies and tactics on the fireground very difficult. Attached to the end of this submission is a comparison of the minimum skills for a career firefighter and a volunteer firefighter, just to get on a truck. Also listed are the minimum skills for a career Leading Firefighter and a volunteer Lieutenant, where a leading firefighter is the lowest rank in the career service that can act as a crew leader or incident controller, and a lieutenant would normally be a crew leader or incident controller at a volunteer station.

An example that I have experienced of the points raised above would be the Commonwealth Bank fire on Springvale road in November 2016, where the volunteer brigade paged for support failed to respond. We required firefighters with breathing apparatus to assist with the search, and firefighters with first aid to assist with treating a then unknown number of casualties. After six minutes of waiting, the incident controller was advised they had failed to respond and asked if he needed another brigade to replace them, which he confirmed. Dandenong Pumper 1 was then responded with three firefighters with breathing apparatus and first aid qualifications. The volunteer brigade eventually responded, and arrived on scene 42 minutes after they were called, despite being stationed just three kilometres from the incident. All five firefighters on that truck had no structural firefighting qualifications, no breathing apparatus qualifications, no search and rescue qualifications and no first aid skills. They then informed the Incident Controller that the driver had to be at work in 20 minutes, therefore they had to return. At an incident where 29 people were treated for injuries by firefighters as well as by Ambulance Victoria, and a heavily smoke logged building had to be thoroughly searched for further casualties, the delay in response and lack of firefighters with appropriate skills stretched the resources on scene that day to the limit.

Under the proposed legislation changes, the support that was required that day would have been immediately responded. Discrepancies in dispatch systems between CFA and MFB meant that an MFB appliance that was closer than both the volunteer brigade and Dandenong Pumper 1 was not recognised and not dispatched at all. One career service providing response to highly populated areas like this would eliminate discrepancies and oversights such as this, and provide an appropriate level of response for emergency situations such as the one I experienced that day.

One career service will ensure into the future common training, procedures and equipment. This will lead to a far improved ability for career staff to work more efficiently together, but over the long term will reduce costs, as there will be no need for separate consultation, separate training, separate contracts for laundering PPE, separate maintenance contracts and departments, modified common equipment and trucks to suit two services, the list goes on and on.

What of the effect of volunteer then? The proposed legislation does a number of things to ensure that the CFA will still be an important part of emergency response in Victoria, while assisting

brigades in areas that grow beyond what any reasonable person would expect volunteers to have to deal with.

The legislation would recognise 35 areas that are already covered by the primary response area of integrated brigades as Fire Rescue Victoria. That means that out of the 1,220 current CFA brigades, 1,185 brigades would retain their primary response area. Volunteers at current integrated stations will still have the option of remaining at their stations, co-locating with FRV, and money has been set aside to help brigades if they wish to move to another location.

Response into areas that are on the boundary between CFA and FRV would be a dual response, however FRV would ensure that two FRV appliances are responded initially to provide the seven on the fireground that is a recognised standard around the world, and currently recognised in the MFB. When the CFA brigade responds, they would have the option of cancelling any appliances they no longer need, in exactly the same way as they do now. If FRV arrives on scene first, they will exercise the powers under the CFA Act (CFA Act 1958 S.33) as MFB currently do when responding and arriving first in CFA areas. All of this will ensure the best response for the community as well as improving safety of all firefighter on scene.

The notion that CFA 'surge capacity' will be eroded or destroyed is wrong. The only risk to that is if CFA volunteers resign, and when 97% of current CFA brigades will see no change to their day to day work, I don't understand why they would. Seemingly the most public of reasons CFA volunteers are upset has been perceived interference by the UFU. Under the legislation changes, CFA will no longer employ career staff, meaning the UFU will no longer be involved in CFA and the focus of CFA can be to improve volunteer engagement, retainment, and training. Under the proposed changes FRV would provide Operations Officers through an arrangement with CFA to assist volunteer brigades in their day to day management. Some people have sought to have this perceived as FRV oversight of CFA. However, as these managers will be employed by FRV but working for CFA, their only job will be supporting and improving volunteerism. CFA will be free to set whatever KPI's and standards they wish, indicators that they can insist will be met.

A large percentage of CFA career staff, including myself have come from volunteer backgrounds. I certainly do not wish the destruction of CFA, or the lowering of the high esteem that it is currently held in the eyes of the community, and I know many other feel the same way. However I certainly feel we have reached a point in time where we cannot continue the way we have been. Every time a CFA EBA expires, the same arguments are rolled out regarding the destruction of CFA through career staff and UFU meddling. These continued arguments have taken a toll on many people in the organisation, including myself. Moral on fire stations is as low as I have ever seen, and I know of many friendships that have ended or been damaged between career staff and volunteers. The proposed changes will lift this cloud of anger and resentment, and the working relationship will return to what it has normally been, a very healthy and respectful one.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight a few points that I believe go to the heart of these legislative reforms:

- There has been no significant change to the fire services since 1958. Think about how much Victoria has changed in this time
- This is not just a fix for a problem of the present, it is a chance to establish a modern fire service for the future of Victoria
- Future changes to Fire Service requirements will be managed by an independent committee, allowing more open and considered management of Victorian communities fire protection standards
- These changes bring Victoria's fire services into line with all other Eastern Seaboard states, and establish similar structures to Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police
- CFA is, and will continue to be an important part of emergency management in Victoria
- A fully volunteer CFA will be able to refocus on providing maximum support to volunteers
- Ultimately, your decision should be based on what is best for the community at large

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission, I hope that I have helped provide some evidence and clarity to why I believe that these proposed amendments are a positive step forward for the fire services in Victoria.

Yours sincerely,

QFF Damien McLean



APPENDIX 1 - SKILLS COMPARISON

MINIMUM SKILLS VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER VS LEVEL 1 CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Volunteer Firefighter

Wildfire Firefighter Qualification (Q0002)

- PUAFIR201A: Prevent injuries
- PUAOHS002A: Maintain safety at an incident scene
- PUATEA001A: Work in a team
- PUAOPE002A: Operate communication systems and equipment
- PUAFIR204A: Operate pumps
- END TANKER (G): Operate pump on a tanker

Minimum skills Profile:

The minimum skills and knowledge required by a CFA member to enter the fire/incident found and operate safely, effectively and efficiently as a member of a team under supervision.

**Source: Brigade skills profile*

Career Firefighter Level 1

- 1.01 Health and Fitness
- 1.02 Preparation and maintenance of Equipment, Appliances and Facilities
- 1.06 Occupational Hazards
- 1.07 Personal Protection 1
- 2.05 Personal Protection 2
- 1.08 Occupational Stress
- 1.16 Casualty assistance
- 1.22 Fire Agency Awareness 1
- 1.24 Writing Skills for Work
- 1.04 Driving Vehicles 1
- 1.05 Alarms and Sprinklers
- 1.09 Map Reading 1
- 1.10 Building Structures 1
- 1.11 Fire Suppression 1
- 1.12A Wildfire Behaviour 1
- 1.12B Wildfire Suppression 1
- 1.13 Vehicle Rescue
- 1.14 Search and Rescue
- 1.15 Breathing Apparatus (Open Circuit)
- 1.17 Emergency Care
- 1.19 Communication Systems
- 2.02 Inspect and Test Equipment
- 2.04 Operate Pumps
- 2.05A Emergency Life Support Techniques
- 2.07 Occupational Hygiene
- 2.24 Fire Agency Awareness 2
- 2.03A Drive Vehicles on Road (Legislation)
- 2.05B Operate Life Support Equipment
- 2.06 Personal Protection 2
- 2.15A Salvage and Overhaul

- 2.15B Ventilation
- 2.16 Dangerous Substances 1
- 2.20 Describe the construction and use of the appliance
- 2.32 Fire Science - Intro B
- 3.74 Enhanced Forcible Entry

**Source: CFA operational Staff Skills Profile - by Rank*

CFA VOLUNTEER LIEUTENANT VS CFA CAREER LEADING FIREFIGHTER

CFA Lieutenant

Skills

- Wildfire firefighter qualification (Q0002A) - Mandatory
- Wildfire Low-Structure firefighter (Q0003A) - Desirable
- Crew Leader qualification - Desirable

Knowledge and experience

- Demonstrated ability to lead and manage diverse groups in a changing environment
- Demonstrated high level of interpersonal skills and effective presentation and oral communication skills

No minimum membership time requirements, elected by popular vote within the brigade.

**Source: Brigade Membership Classification Role Description Lieutenant*

CFA Leading Firefighter

All Career Firefighter Level 1 competencies plus:

- 1.20 Computer Skills
- 1.21 Workplace Communication
- 2.04 Operate Pumps
- 2.25 Present Information (Public Education)
- 2.03 Operate Vehicles (A)
- 2.20 Specialist Appliances (I)
- 2.08 Detection and Suppression Systems
- 2.09 Building Evacuation Systems
- 2.12 Fire Behaviour (CFA)
- 2.21 Fire Prevention 1
- 2.28 Wildfire Behaviour 2
- 2.29 Wildfire Suppression 2
- 2.33 Map Reading 2
- 2.10 Mechanical Venting and Air Handling
- 2.11 Building Structures 2
- 2.13 Fire Suppression 2
- 2.22 Administration 1
- 2.30 Introductory Maths for the Fire Industry
- 3.01 Occupational Health and Safety
- 3.09 Workplace Trainer Category A
- 3.11 Public Speaking
- 3.15 Supervise Teams
- 3.04 Fireground Operations
- 3.05 Building Fire Safety 1

- 3.14 Leadership

**Source: CFA Operational Staff Skills Profile - by Rank*

Assessment Standard for Leading Firefighters

- Minimum of 48 months full time employment
- Completion of all above competencies
- 3 week full time development course
- 2 months station development and personal study
- 1 week of assessment including:
 - 2 exams covering Operational legislation (CFA Act, Regs, SO's SOP's etc) (4 hours total)
 - 1 exam wildfire operations (1.5 hours)
 - 1 exam Inray and Administration (1 hour)
 - 1 Delivery of a short lesson (15 minutes)
 - 1 HR scenario practical assessment
 - 1 Rural Command and Control TEWT assessment (Tactical Exercise Without Troops)
 - 2 Command and Control Practical Drill assessments

All of these assessments are pass or fail assessments

Leading Firefighters must be endorsed by the Chief Officer