



06/07/2017 07:09 PM

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

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

From:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

It is requested that my name and identity only, be treated as “*STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL*”.

Disclaimer: *This submission is made by me as a concerned private citizen whose profession is fire-fighting. This submission has not been made in any capacity as a public official and any views expressed are personal and do not necessarily represent the views of my employer, being the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB).*

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am employed as a Leading Fire-fighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB). I have been a fire-fighter with the MFB for over 28 years and am currently stationed at South Melbourne Fire Station on “C” Platoon.

During my 28 years as a professional fire-fighter I have been stationed at various stations in both Central and Eastern Districts, covering area's ranging from the CBD in Melbourne to the outer suburbs, where we would at times attend fires/incidents with CFA volunteer brigades. I also served as volunteer fire-fighter with my local CFA brigade prior to and during the early

years of my employment with the MFB.

As a Leading Fire-fighter with the MFB I am qualified in all aspects of standard fire fighting plus the following specialist qualifications:

- Hazardous Materials Technician
- Breathing Apparatus Service Technician
- Long Duration Breathing Apparatus
- Emergency Medical Response (EMR)
- Ladder Platform aerial gear
- Fire Investigation and Analysis

I currently reside in Port Melbourne where, as a resident, I am fortunate enough to have full service of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in the case of an emergency. I also have family and friends that live in the outer metro area of Melbourne as well as in some of the larger regional areas such as Bendigo. These areas, whilst initially rural in nature when the boundaries were drawn up in the 1950's, have developed into significantly urbanised areas.

I believe it is imperative that the residents living in these areas be afforded the same level of fire coverage that is provided in other urbanised areas.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed fire fighters presumptive rights compensation and reform of the fire services.

Addressing the committees terms of reference:

Proposed fire-fighters presumptive rights compensation legislation:

- There is an enormous amount of evidence gathered from Australian and international research proving that career fire-fighters suffer a definite increased risk and incidence of certain types of cancer.
- States and territories such as Queensland, Northern Territory, Tasmania, South Australia, ACT and Western Australia have already enacted presumptive legislation recognising twelve different cancers with appropriate qualifying periods of service for each.
- In 2014 the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) commissioned a report titled "Australian Fire-fighters Health Study", which was produced by Monash University. This report found that there was a significant increase in the occurrence of cancers in career fire-fighters, which was consistent with other international studies.

<http://www.coeh.monash.org/downloads/finalreport2014.pdf>

- Under a proposal by the Victorian Government, volunteer fire-fighters would be

given the opportunity to provide evidence to a specialist committee to demonstrate they have served the appropriate qualifying period for particular types of cancer.

Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017

Terms of Reference

- ***Impact on fire service delivery across Victoria***
 - ***Underlying policy rationale***
 - ***Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery***
 - ***Short and long term cost impact on fire service provision***
-
- Victoria's fire services currently operate under structures and boundaries that were drawn up in the 1950's and have remained largely unchanged since then. Clearly the state of Victoria has experienced an enormous population increase over the last 60 years.
 - The Royal Commission into the 2009 bushfires made it clear that the community and fire-fighters were being let down by the current system.
 - With the proposed fire service reforms we have the chance to make improvements that will not only benefit the community, but will also provide safer systems for fire-fighters to operate under.
 - Victorians are currently served by either the CFA or the MFB. The MFB operates in what have been the more "traditionally" built up areas of Melbourne through a network of 47 fire stations staffed by career fire-fighters in what is known as the Metropolitan Fire District.
The CFA operates across the rest of Victoria through a network of 1220 volunteer brigades which includes 35 integrated stations, where there is a mix of both career staff and volunteers. These integrated stations are located in the outer suburban areas of Melbourne, for eg. Dandenong, Springvale, Boronia, Frankston, and also in the larger regional centres, eg. Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat.
 - Under the proposed reforms the 47 MFB stations and the 35 integrated CFA stations would combine to become "Fire Rescue Victoria" or FRV. The CFA would then become a completely volunteer organisation. CFA volunteers would still operate out of the current integrated stations, but they would be co-located rather than integrated.
 - A major change that would be implemented with these reforms would be a guaranteed backup for the 35 integrated stations when they are responded to an emergency. That is currently not the case for these 35 stations. This guaranteed backup would mean that at least 2 fire trucks with a minimum total of 7 career fire-fighters would be dispatched to calls within their area. This response is internationally recognised as best practice and is required to carry out critical breathing apparatus procedures. This will not only provide a greater level of protection to the community but will also enhance

fire-fighter safety. Unfortunately volunteer brigades cannot always respond in the required timeframes or with enough personnel that are suitably trained in structural fire fighting to allow internal fire attack and rescue.

- These reforms will NOT impact volunteer fire-fighter involvement in a negative manner. Of the 1220 CFA brigades the vast majority will be unaffected and will operate as usual. The 35 integrated stations will only be impacted in a way that enhances career fire-fighter response, which would be entirely appropriate for the heavily urbanised areas they would be servicing. This can only be viewed as being beneficial for the community and for fire-fighter safety.
- Volunteer fire-fighters will still be responded from these integrated stations, as they are now, as a joint response. Again the only difference will be an enhanced response from Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) which will ultimately save lives, property and the environment and result in less cost to the community.
- The government has committed substantial funding to the CFA, which will once again become a fully volunteer organisation after these reforms are implemented. This funding will be used for assets, facilities, recruitment and training of volunteer fire-fighters, including those volunteers at integrated stations.
- I do not believe that the states surge capacity in times of major bushfires will be negatively impacted by these proposed reforms. It would take vast numbers of volunteer fire-fighters to leave the organisation for this to become a problem. Despite the unsubstantiated claims of some, I strongly doubt that this will happen. As a former volunteer myself and personally knowing a large number of volunteers, they are generally a dedicated group of community minded people. I think anyone that quits as a volunteer because of reforms that enhance community safety would have to have their motives questioned.
- Introducing these reforms would reduce costs by standardising training of career personnel, standards and equipment. A more efficient model would be produced by reducing duplication between the services.

<https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/news/future-change-in-the-fires-services>

- Finally, after 28 years as a career fire-fighter, I fully support these proposed fire service reforms. With the population of Victoria tipped to hit 8 million in the not too distant future and an ever increasing variety of current and future risks such as hostile acts, terrorism, major buildings with combustible cladding, aging population etc. the time is right to introduce this new legislation and vastly improve the fire service provided to the Victorian people.
- It's also a chance to promote industrial harmony, something that has been lacking for too many years. Throughout my 28 year career I have dealt with many horrific incidents, too many of them involving unfortunate victims that have been literally torn apart. To then be referred to by some parts of the media and general public as a

“money grabbing thug” or “scumbag” and constantly used as a political football gets a little hard to take and causes a significant mental and emotional strain on all fire-fighters. No one takes on a career as a fire-fighter to get rich...it just doesn't happen. We do it because we are genuinely interested in helping the community. These reforms offer the chance to create a new fire service free from the industrial disputes of the past, allowing us all to get on with the job of protecting the community and providing the appropriate level of cover.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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