



"David Pitcher " [REDACTED]

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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc <io3@ufuvic.asn.au>
bcc
Subject Fire Services reform Submission -
David Pitcher Senior Station Officer
26722

1 attachment



fire services reform submission David Pitcher.pdf

Hi Team,

Please find attached my submission to the inquiry.

Regards

David Pitcher

My full name is David Michael Pitcher I am a Senior Station Officer employed by the Country Fire Authority. I am stationed at the Melton Fire Station which is an integrated station in Melbourne's rapidly expanding western suburbs.

I have been a career fire fighter with CFA for eleven years and hold the following educational qualifications:

Diploma in Public Safety (Policing)

Certificate 4 in Training and assessment

Certificate 2 and 3 in Fire Fighting Operations

Year 12 VCE

In addition to the above external qualifications I possess the following internal qualifications:

High angle rope rescue

Steep angle rope rescue

Confined space rescue

Road Rescue

Ladder platform (Bronto 37m)

Teleboom aerial appliance

Hazmat

Protective Equipment

Staging area manager

My previous employment includes: Aviation Fire Fighter, Police officer and Customs Officer.

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

1.

Fire service reform in my opinion is long overdue, as has been discussed publicly through the media the current system is not working to provide the best fire service coverage for the community. I will provide some examples of why urgent change is needed.

In my current role, I am constantly cautious when attending significant fires including structure fires and similar events posing a risk to public safety or that of my team. This concern is created by the delays in getting a minimum of seven firefighters on to the fire ground at these events.

The allocation of Career fire fighters at Melton is one station officer two leading fire fighters and two fire fighters. This crewing is spread over two appliances generally a pumper and a road rescue truck.

To achieve the preferred safe crewing level of seven on the fire ground I must await the arrival of our volunteer members or support from career fire fighters from Caroline Springs some 15 minutes away.

On numerous occasions throughout my career with CFA I have commenced firefighting operations to perform a rescue or primary search of a building involved in fire with less than the ideal number of fire fighters present. This has had the potential to cause injury to myself and other fire fighters and importantly delays in getting to victims and seats of fire. The unwritten CFA ethos or motto is that "we do more with less people" something which I feel is very unsafe.

I wish to point out though that the performance of the volunteer members of the Melton fire station have been excellent. Their diligence and commitment to the community and organization is second to none. It is apparent that due to work commitments, time and space they cannot always be available when emergencies arise. This is particularly true during business hours and some public holidays. This comment is not a negative reflection on their commitment just how things are.

So, in many cases I will put my crews to work knowing that we do not have enough initial resources to combat the fire or incident and this plays on my mind constantly. I have a deeply personal and professional obligation to my career firefighter and volunteer colleagues to ensure their safety and get them home to their families at the end of their shift or fire call.

2.

With the proposed reform model, I feel that my ability to discharge my duties will be greater. I will have the luxury of knowing that I have a certain number of crew attending the incident and then can plan my response to the emergency appropriately.

With the current model I am faced with uncertainty as to how many if any volunteers can attend an emergency to assist, this as detailed earlier puts undue and unsafe pressures on my crew.

Importantly the end user will receive a better service from the fire brigade. This service would include more firefighters on scene within a shorter space of time than what many communities covered by CFA currently receive.

In 2017 there is a user pays mindset within the community, community members have an expectation that through their fire service levies they will receive a rapid and professional fire response to their emergency. This community demand is often not met within the CFA fire area.

3.

I feel that the proposed reform will not negatively affect volunteers from CFA. For members of brigades that are solely volunteer I foresee no change to the way they currently conduct operations. I can foresee advantages going forward in relation to autonomy and self-resilience. These brigades will be able to perform their role without the oversight or perceived oversight by professional career fire fighters. This perception on many occasions has led to indecision and delays in providing the best service to the community.

In relation to volunteers at integrated brigades it is my opinion that it will be 'business as usual' with some improvements. These improvements for volunteers will consist of more autonomy and accountability and better training outcomes.

4.

I am fully supportive of combining all career professional fire fighters under the one umbrella. This should have occurred many years ago. We have one Victoria Police and now one Ambulance Victoria but yet two major fire agencies employing career fire fighters. The current system is antiquated and does not work, the community deserves better.

I am willing to provide further information to the inquiry if required.

I thank you for your time and attention.

Yours sincerely

David Pitcher

Senior station Officer 26722