



Doug Tonks [REDACTED]
07/07/2017 04:35 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission to Fire Services Reform
committe

Hi.

Please find attached my submission to the Fire Services Reform committee .

Regards.



Doug Tonks **Leading Fire Fighter**
Hoppers Crossing Fire Brigade – 119 Derrimut Rd, Werribee Vic 3030



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Doug Tonks

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By email: consultation@dpc.vic.gov.au

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees

Inquiry into the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) bill 2017.

My name is Doug Tonks, I am a Leading Firefighter currently employed by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) at Hoppers Crossing Fire Station. I joined CFA in February 2012 when I did a 16 week recruit course at the Fiskville Training ground. Prior to joining the CFA I served 5 years as a professional Firefighter with the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS).

I write to you in support of the proposed reform of the Fire Services.

I have a lot of points that I would like to make but I will explain the most important one for me that is safety. The safety of the Victorian public, my colleagues, and myself.

This will need a bit of an explanation for anyone who doesn't have a firefighting background.

It is accepted by Fire Services all over the world that we need a minimum of 7 firefighters to operate safely.

With a crew of 4 on a pumping appliance everyone has a role. The Station Officer (SO) is the Incident Controller (IC), has overall responsibility, and directs operations. The driver operates the pump and supplies water. The remaining 2 Firefighters are the Breathing Apparatus (BA) crew who enter the building to attack the fire and carry out any necessary rescue.

An additional 3 firefighters arriving on a second appliance provide a second BA crew that is able to carry out any tasks identified by the IC. And more importantly provide assistance to the BA crew that is already inside the building should the situation change, as often happens.

Without this additional BA crew, should the first crew become trapped or injured they are left on their own inside a burning building with no one available to help them.

When I first began work with the CFA the crewing was 3, a SO, Leading Firefighter (LFF), and Firefighter on our Pumper. That meant that when we had a structure fire the SO would be filling the role of IC, the LFF or Firefighter would be running the pump, and the remaining person was left as a one person BA crew who had to enter the building, attack the fire, and conduct search and rescue on their own.

This actually meant that we had to operate outside of the CFA's own Standing Order 11.00. This states that we can't conduct unrestricted operations until there are 4 firefighters on scene.

I have lost count of the number of times I or one of my workmates has conducted an internal fire attack alone and without a backup BA team.

When I talk to colleagues from the NZFS they are astounded and can't believe that a supposedly modern fire service in a first world country operates in such an unsafe manner.

Things have improved slightly since I began with the CFA in as far as we now have a crew of four. However at Hoppers Crossing and a number of other CFA integrated brigades we are still not meeting the requirement of a minimum of seven Firefighters for safe operations.

In some parts of Hoppers Crossing we are supported by the professional crew from Point Cook, which guarantees us eight Firefighters on the fireground.

However if we are responding to a fire in Werribee, Truganina, or Wyndhamvale we don't always have the Point Cook crew responding. This leaves us relying on a response from the local volunteer fire brigade.

In the five years that I have worked at Hoppers Crossing I have seen the volunteer response, from these local brigades, become more and more unreliable, particularly during the daytime. This is through no fault of the volunteers it is just a fact of life in these outer suburbs, where the vast majority of residents commute into the city for work, meaning the local brigades have very few if any members available to respond.

These local volunteer brigades are under increasing pressure from the rapid population growth in these areas and are very keen to be seen to be meeting their Service Delivery Standards (SDS).

Unfortunately this has led to a practice, that I have witnessed numerous times, at both Werribee and Truganina brigades. Where the first person to arrive on station sends a turnout message (this is supposed to be done when the appliance leaves the station) they then have to wait, an unknown amount of time, for the remainder of the crew to arrive before responding.

This practice has two effects. It makes CFAs statistics unreliable, as it shows an appliance has been responded within the allocated time when it actually hasn't. This is hiding the fact that more support is needed in these areas.

Secondly it is downright dangerous because the SO on our pumper is making decisions on how to attack the fire and whether to commit a BA team inside the building based on the belief that the volunteer appliance is on the road and only a few minutes behind us, when unfortunately this may not be the case. And we are left in the unacceptably dangerous position of having only four Firefighters on the fireground to manage the incident.

Talking to my colleagues at other CFA integrated stations it appears that this practice is widespread.

It is only through good luck that we haven't killed a firefighter as yet. But if we continue to respond without a guarantee of a minimum safe number of seven it is inevitable that we will kill someone.

Relying on luck is not an acceptable way to manage our fire services.

Victoria's fire services are running on an outdated, decades old system. I believe this legislation is a once in a generation opportunity to bring our fire services into line with world best practices, and with other fire services all over the world. I believe this legislation will set up Victoria's fire services to provide modern and efficient fire fighting for decades to come.

I implore you to pass this legislation.

Sincerely.

Doug Tonks.

Leading Firefighter.

Hoppers Crossing Fire Station.