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06/07/2017 10:33 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF  
cc  
bcc  
Subject Fire Services Reform Select  
Committee

1 attachment



Submission by Geoffrey Barker Select Committee Inquiry into Fire Service Reform.pdf

Please find attached my submission to the Fire Services Reform Select Committee.

Please reply to confirm receipt of this submission.

Kind regards,

Geoff Barker  
[REDACTED]

Assistant Clerk Committees  
Department of the Legislative Council  
Fire Services Bill Select Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE  
VIC 3002

*Firefighters' Presumptive Rights and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform)  
Bill 2017*

My name is Geoffrey Barker, I am a Country Fire Authority (CFA) career firefighter and hold the position of Leading Firefighter. I wish to submit evidence to support the passing of the *Firefighters' Presumptive Rights and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017*.

I have been a CFA firefighter for 20 years in the capacity of both a professional and volunteer firefighter. I grew up in the country area of Victoria and engaged in a number of volunteer groups in my community, having a sound understanding and appreciation of volunteerism and CFA.

I am currently stationed at Cranbourne Fire Station, but I have worked at many CFA stations across Victoria. I have 20 years experience including major bushfires such as 2003 and 2007 Alpine Fires, 2009 Black Saturday Fires, Grampians Fires and other smaller campaign fires. I have been deployed to fires across Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. With my service predominately in urban growth areas I have attended thousands of incidents of all incident types and bring my experience and knowledge of the fire services in this submission.

I submit with regard to all the terms of reference. The impact on fire service delivery across Victoria will be positive and will establish effective fire service delivery now and into the future.

Numerous previous inquiries have reported on the current fire service delivery and it's failings. Despite minor changes there still remains a key obstacle in achieving a standard of fire cover across greater urban Melbourne, the Metropolitan Fire District (MFD). This invisible boundary acts like a wall that separates safer and more efficient response arrangements than that can be achieved on the other side of the boundary, the Country Area of Victoria where CFA is the statutory authority.

In the MFD it is guaranteed that two trucks with at least 7 career firefighters will be dispatched within 8 minutes. In the area outside the MFD, the country area of Victoria, this is not guaranteed. There are some areas of CFA where two integrated stations border each other and this can be achieved, but for the most part there are significant urban areas of Melbourne that rely on CFA volunteer firefighters.

Having been a CFA volunteer I understand the demands that were placed on me to acquire skills, maintain skills, prepare training, maintain the station, appliances and equipment, engage in community safety activities and brigade administrative tasks, and make myself available for emergencies when I can. The demands in significant

urban areas are even greater. I had to do all this and balance my work, family and social commitments. I have great respect for volunteers, as I have not forgotten the sacrifices it demanded of me.

As population increases and urban growth expands so too does the workload on volunteers. It has been evident for some time now this is impacting on CFA's capacity to meet community expectation and service delivery. Cranbourne CFA volunteers and neighboring volunteer brigades volunteers are not always available to respond. When there is a fire in Cranbourne, I don't know if our volunteers or neighboring volunteers will respond, will respond quickly, will respond with a full crew, or will respond with a full crew with required qualifications for the incident.

I have been inside countless structure fires working on my own; this is unsafe for not only me, but also the occupants I search for. Other times I have been paired up with a second firefighter inside, but this firefighter was the pump operator that is supposed to source and maintain adequate water supplies for my protection and suppression activities. Other times I have been paired up and achieved four firefighters to start internal search and rescue, but no second Breathing Apparatus (BA) crew were outside to rescue me if things go bad.

Just recently I was at a structure fire in Cranbourne West with a crew of three, I was the only BA wearer. A neighboring volunteer-only brigade supported us. There were six crew members on their truck but not one qualified BA wearer. This is at a reported structure fire where it is almost certain to require BA wearers. After working hard on my own inside the structure fire my cylinder was empty but the tasks not completed, as working alone is slow, inefficient as well as unsafe. I had to quickly exit, replace this cylinder with a full one and go back inside alone again.

If this was a fire in the MFB area, there would have been at least 2 crews in 8 minutes, all with BA qualifications, upgraded to a 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm with a further 3 more crews, each with 3 or 4 crew members each.

It was fortunate no occupants were required to be rescued, but if there were, the success of rescue would have been compromised. Additionally, as previously mentioned there were no other BA wearers outside to rescue me in the event of structural collapse or other tragedy. Let me be clear, this is the current fire service delivery experienced outside the MFD. Anyone who suggests this CFA service delivery is comparable to that currently in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) area is not a firefighter or is in complete denial of these regular occurrences.

In the MFD all firefighters responding to structure fires are qualified to attend structure fires. There is no requirement for CFA firefighters to have structure fire qualifications to attend a structure fire. This was confirmed during the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC). Counsel Assisting the Commission John (Jack) Rush QC questioned CFA's Lex De Man if CFA required personnel with proper qualifications to attend structure fires. The following exchange took place;

*DE MAN: The best I could say in answer to that is it would be – you would expect that with the brigade profile there would be people on the appliance that would have that training level.*

*RUSH QC: so the answer really is no*

*DE MAN: If you put it that way, correct.*

*(2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Organisational Structure, Submissions of Counsel Assisting, Page 48)*

Even Jack Rush QC found this unacceptable and submitted to the VBRC;

*4.79 These circular answers are troubling. It is submitted that it must be 'expected' that the CFA personnel (whether volunteer or professional) who attend structure fires are adequately trained and qualified for that role. Any distinction between expectations and requirements is semantics.*

*(2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Organisational Structure, Submissions of Counsel Assisting, Page 48)*

Currently, CFA still does not require CFA firefighters to have structure fire qualifications to attend a structure fire. Under these reforms Cranbourne would become a Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) area and the fire cover response arrangements of MFB would be adopted. This means at least 7 career firefighters (all with structure fire qualifications) would be dispatched initially to ensure I work in a pair with another BA crew ready outside to rescue me or assist with rescue of occupants. This increases safety for not only my colleagues and I, but increases the safety of the occupants of the premise.

These reforms are essential to ensure that the inner Melbourne standard of fire cover extends to the urban growth areas of 'country' Melbourne. I work in one of the fastest and largest growth areas in Australia. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released figures in 2014-15 that stated Cranbourne East was the largest growth area in Australia, and second fastest in Australia as it increased in population by 32%.

Further figures by ABS in 2015-16 reveal this urban and population growth to continue as Cranbourne East was the second largest growth area and sixth fastest in Australia.

This growth impacts on the call rates and workload of not only Cranbourne Fire Brigade, but also our neighboring volunteer only brigades that respond to support us to these incidents. In 2005 Cranbourne responded to 470 incidents, for 2016/17 Cranbourne responded to 1083 incidents.

The urban growth in Cranbourne is extraordinary. We now have 18 schools and TAFE, 13 sport and entertainment facilities, 15 shopping complexes, 11 aged/health care facilities and more and more development continues every day.

ABS Census data for 2016 Cranbourne State Electoral Division, that closely resembles the Cranbourne Fire Brigade response area, has a population of 97,040. These institutional risks and the nearly 100,000 residents in Cranbourne deserve the same standard of fire cover and response as the 65,552 residents in Caulfield (ABS Census data 2016 Caulfield State Electoral Division).

Cranbourne

[http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SED22105?opendocument](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SED22105?opendocument)

Caulfield

[http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SED21906?opendocument](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SED21906?opendocument)

The barrier to this standard of fire cover is the Metropolitan Fire District boundary that has barely changed in 60 years. Responsibly this government's proposed reforms will transfer the 35 integrated stations like Cranbourne into the new Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). This will expand the standard of fire cover to these highly urbanised regional cities and 'country' areas of Melbourne.

Additionally, the reforms introduce the establishment of the Independent Fire District Review Panel. This panel will make recommendations on future boundary changes based on population growth, urban development, response volumes and performance data. This evidence based decision-making process to determine career staffing has been missing in recent decades.

During the VBRC Organisational Structure and reform was discussed in some detail. John (Jack) Rush QC in his capacity as Counsel Assisting the Commission recognised the need for a body to have powers to determine boundary adjustments. In his submission to the VBRC Rush proposed the Victorian Fire Services Board have this power. Regardless of what governing role this body would have it has the same effect of what the government bill has proposed. Rush submitted the following;

***Boundary alignment: planning for growth***

*15.15 Counsel Assisting propose that the provisions of the MFB Act which currently deal with boundary alignment between the MFD and the country area of Victoria be repealed. The current "opt in" model has a number of limitations and disincentives. It does not admit of consideration of relevant, objective criteria. Further, the current model is unlikely to provide a suitable framework for dealing with the changing needs of Victoria's expanding population. There is a real need to implement a system now which will be capable of coping with Victoria's changing urban profile and predicted growth in its major regional centres. Counsel Assisting propose that the Victorian Fire Services Board ought also have the power to determine boundary adjustments, subject to the obligation to take into account a number of important criteria (which are spelled out below).*

(2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Organisational Structure, Submissions of Counsel Assisting, Page 144 & 145)

As Counsel Assisting the VBRC Rush recommended the following of the Victorian Fire Services Board, it should have the following function and power;

*s) To review periodically the boundaries of the MFD and the country area of Victoria and, if it considers it appropriate, to make a recommendation to the Minister concerning the adjustment or re-alignment of the boundary between*

*the MFD and the country area of Victoria, including designating areas which are not contiguous with the MFD (eg satellite suburbs and large regional towns) as falling within the MFD, such recommendations must be based on the examination of the following criteria....*

*(2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Organisational Structure, Submissions of Counsel Assisting, Page 154)*

The consequence of Rush recommending boundary changes of the MFD would mean CFA areas such as the 35 integrated stations would fall within the MFD. I now find it extraordinary that Rush does a complete back-flip on his position in a recently published VFBV letter dated 13 June 2017. Rush is now highly critical of the State Government for adopting his own recommendation. This is quite staggering. In his letter for the VFBV he says;

*“The Bill abolishes the CFA’s 35 integrated brigades, those stations in outer Melbourne and the larger regional centres of Victoria operated by CFA volunteers and CFA operational career firefighters. This integrated station model was noted by the Royal Commission to have worked extremely well.”*

*“The introduction of this Bill was surrounded by the usual spin and propaganda of the political process. At the forefront of the misinformation campaign are the statements that the findings of the Royal Commission support this restructure thrust on the CFA by the Andrews Government closely supported by the United Firefighters’ Union. Premier Andrews justified the comment “our firefighters are let down by outdated structure” by reference to findings of the Royal Commission. This is nonsense.”*

Rush in his capacity as Counsel Assisting clearly recognised that MFD boundary changes were required, he recommended it as referenced above. His recommendation would have ‘abolished’ the 35 CFA integrated stations into the MFD and now says these reforms are surrounded by spin and propaganda by referencing statements and findings of the Royal Commission, such as those made by Rush himself.

One can only come to the conclusion that the motivation behind Rush’s comments is political. By inserting himself into recent commentary about “spin and propaganda of the political process” Rush has denigrated his opinion to the same level, a political opinion. This should not come to any surprise, he was after all the Liberal Party candidate for the seat of Richmond in the 1976 Victorian State Election (‘Rush for Richmond’). A former Liberal Party candidate would oppose a State Labor Government proposal.

If we disregard Rush’s political opinions and focus on his opinion in his capacity as John (Jack) Rush QC Counsel Assisting the VBRC, the government has proposed reforms that reflect the recommendations of Counsel Assisting the VBRC Jack Rush QC;

***Conclusion: new system for boundaries required***

*14.70 Counsel Assisting submit that the resolution of geographical boundaries and the coverage of our fire services should not be reliant on*

*councils determining to “opt in” to a system where such an election attracts a financial impost.*

*14.71 Rather, the system ought be based on objective criteria, designed to provide the best possible safety outcome for the community...”*

*(2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Organisational Structure, Submissions of Counsel Assisting, Page 141)*

I urge the committee to support the reforms and find with Jack Rush QC’s professional opinion to support the government’s proposal that puts Rush’s VBRC recommendation to effect.

One of the findings of the VBRC is that ‘surge capacity’ of CFA volunteers is important to sustain short and long term campaign fires. This is true, however the extent of surge capacity is grossly over exaggerated. The Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) argument relies heavily on threats to the surge capacity. This was raised during the Inquiry into fire season preparedness, but instead was exposed for misleading the parliamentary inquiry.

At a parliamentary inquiry hearing on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2016, I was present in the Legislative Council Committee Room where VFBV representatives CEO Andrew Ford and Executive Officer Adam Barnett were sworn in and played a short video on surge capacity. I was absolutely shocked at the “evidence” presented in this video. The video opened with a voiceover stating the following;

*“You are about to view evidence based modeling from Victorian Fire Brigades Victoria and the University of Melbourne’s Centre of Disaster Management and Public Safety, showing how CFA uses its huge volunteer capacity to handle any size of incident anywhere, anytime.”*

The video then provides a graphic and date to identify a period between 14-18 January 2014, the voiceover continues saying;

*“The spatial modeling looks at 5 days in January 2014 during which 1600 incidents **required** 30,000 personnel, over 95% of them volunteers firefighters.”*

The Parliamentary Committee, media and public like myself would conclude that 28,500 CFA volunteer firefighters responded to 1600 fires in those five days. I take a very close interest in CFA data and I knew immediately this was completely false.

In July 2011 a report by His Honour David Jones AM titled *Inquiry into the effect of arrangements made by the Country Fire Authority on its Volunteers* was released. The report uses data provided by CFA. It states the following;

*“The number of distinct turnouts (operational volunteers that turned out at least once in the relevant period) for 2008 and 2009 are recorded as follows:*

- *In 2008, 22,069 turnouts representing 62.6% of operational volunteers at that time.*

- *In 2009, 26,690 turnouts representing 72.5% of operational volunteers at that time.”*

*(Effect of arrangements made by the Country Fire Authority on its volunteers, Report by His Honour David Jones AM, July 2011, Page 35)*

I wish to emphasize that the fires of Black Saturday occurred in 2009 and that the number of turnouts were for the entire year. The presentation by VFBV, purports to provide evidence that 28,500 CFA volunteers responded in a five-day period. This figure exceeds the entire yearly figure in 2009 that included the dreadful natural disaster of the Black Saturday campaign fires.

I immediately raised my concerns with CFA regarding the misleading information at such an important inquiry. CFA eventually conducted a review of these figures. This review was conducted by a data analyst working in the Business Intelligence Unit of CFA. The review looked at how many unique individual firefighters responded in this five day period.

In a letter to the Standing Committee on the Environment & Planning CFA CEO Frances Diver corrects the misleading ‘evidence’ by stating the following;

*“Preliminary analysis of CFA data indicates that approximately 6,497 volunteers were dispatched during that period. This is consistent with previous CFA estimates of volunteers’ attendance at major incidents.”*

This is accurate and correct. Well before Ms Diver’s time as CEO many would recall the campaign fires in 2003, a fire I was significantly involved with. In a CFA publication titled *The Campaign Fires North-East/East Gippsland Fires 2003*, operational statistics were provided. This documents references this fire as the longest campaign fire in CFA history lasting 71 days. It was the second-largest fire in area burnt totaling 1.127 million ha. The number of CFA firefighters involved was 6,075. This includes career staff firefighters. So I agree with Ms Diver that the reviewed CFA analysis of the 5 day period in 2014 is consistent with other campaign fires.

*(The Campaign Fires North-East/East Gippsland Fires 2003, Lyndel Hunter CFA, Page 114)*

In an extraordinary act of defiance VFBV CEO Andrew Ford wrote back to the Standing Committee standing by his evidence. However, in doing so Ford further struggles to justify his ‘evidence’ and makes contradictory statements. Ford now claims the data he used in the Bushfire Preparedness Inquiry includes dates before and after the five days at question.

*“A limitation with the CFA data is that extracting information for this five day period does include incidents that started before the five day sample period or continued after the five day sample period”*

Ford then goes on to demonstrate his own unique volunteer firefighter numbers;

*“The CFA CEO’s letter to your committee indicates that CFA calculates 6,497 unique volunteers were dispatched to fire during the five day sample*



*period. Whilst VFBV data analysis suggests that the actual number is more like 11,909”*

This figure is far from the required 30,000 personnel he gives as ‘evidence’ in the Bushfire Preparedness Inquiry. Ford claims the data is drawn directly from CFA, but no where does Ford provide documentation or reference to this mystery data. He just claims it is CFA data, hardly substantial.

Ford further misleads the Bushfire Preparedness Inquiry in his letter;

*“The visual modeling provided to the Standing Committee referenced 30,000 ‘personnel’. For the sake of clarity this number represents the number of ‘personnel deployments’ not unique individuals”*

This is untrue, the graphic and voiceover presented to the Inquiry stated the five day period “**required** 30,000 personnel.” It absolutely made no mention that the 30,000 figure were deployments. Ford only changed this graphic and voiceover on 14 September 2016, after the presenting these misleading figures as ‘evidence’ to the inquiry.

There is massive difference between stating these fires required 30,000 personnel and the actual 6,497 personnel deployed a number of times. To demonstrate the misleading attempt by Ford I use the following example. Cranbourne Fire Station requires 4 career staff every day, these career staff are deployed to five incidents that day. Cranbourne does not require 20 personnel every day, it requires 4 personnel to respond to a number of deployments that day. By using the same method that VFBV presented at the Bushfire Preparedness Inquiry Cranbourne Fire Station requires 4,332 full time career firefighters every year (4 x 1083 annual incidents).

I acknowledge the ‘country’ area of Melbourne is important to provide surge capacity, and it is necessary that it does. It is submitted that VFBV CEO Andrew Ford and Executive Officer Adam Barnett have deliberately mislead the Bushfire Preparedness Inquiry to exaggerate the extent and threat of reduction in surge capacity.

Regardless of the true extent of surge capacity VFBV and opposition parties have made unfounded representations that this Bill will erode surge capacity. This Bill ensures volunteers currently at integrated stations continue to service their community as CFA firefighters. Within 2 days of the announcement of this Bill Emergency Services Minister James Merlino, Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley, the two local Members of Parliament Jude Perera and Judith Grayley were at Cranbourne Fire Station consulting with career staff and volunteers.

It was clear at this meeting that the Cranbourne Integrated Volunteers would have a range of choices to continue serving the community. They could remain co-located with FRV staff, have a new station built for them close by or remain where they are and have FRV move to a different location. Either way, Cranbourne volunteers are committed to remaining and serving their community.

Talking to many Cranbourne volunteers they are staggered that there are people, including other CFA volunteers completely remote and unaffected by these reforms,

suggesting they will disappear. These are real committed people that will remain serving their community and not a number to be scratched off a book somewhere.

It is staggering that Jack Rush in his letter for VFBV says of integrated volunteers like those at Cranbourne “*their role and status diminished.....a role effectively ended by this Bill.*” Jack Rush is not, and never has been a volunteer at an integrated station and does not speak with any understanding of the culture of volunteerism at Cranbourne or other integrated stations. Cranbourne CFA volunteers role will not be ended, they are committed and will be supported to continue under these reforms.

On a personal level this reform will bring a sense of hope to volunteer and career firefighters. Hope that there will be a separation between industrial and volunteer cultures. For many years the workplace of career firefighters in CFA is at odds with some volunteers. Career firefighters are a workforce and by nature bring industrial matters to what is supposed to be a volunteer based organisation. These reforms will isolate CFA volunteers from the industrial environment. The current model has historically and will always be the subject of politicization. This is apparent more than ever as VFBV has effectively become an industrial body under the Fair Work Amendment Bill.

The politicisation of these differences has been extraordinarily damaging. The impact of the 2016 Federal election was profound and represented an all-time low in CFA. VFBV collaborated, assisted and campaigned with the LNP to use the career staff EBA as an election issue. The VFBV and LNP misrepresented clauses designed to increase safe working conditions and community safety to incite rank and file volunteers into believing their capacity as a volunteer was under threat.

Conservative media outlets such as the Herald Sun, and 3AW Neil Mitchell, the VFBV, LNP and some right wing CFA volunteers ferociously attacked my integrity as a professional firefighter. I was labeled greedy, a thug, bully, a terrorist, misogynist and many more. This was because I am a member of a union that was maintaining and pursuing safe working conditions for firefighters and the community safety.

Firefighting is inherently dangerous and extremely stressful. On top of managing these stressors I felt the full force of a nasty, hatred filled attack. I will never forget a night shift were I attended an EMR event involving the death of a three-month-old baby, my shift mates and I were deeply affected. On the mess room table was a front page Herald Sun article that told the world how greedy and thuggish I was. I drive home and then listened to 3AW’s Neil Mitchell saying exactly the same. My mental health was driven to the edge, where I had to see my doctor, and ended up on a mental health plan with a psychologist.

These false misrepresentations continued on for months on end as my EBA is seen as political opportunism. This is continuing to this day. My mother lives in Beaufort and recently received a survey/petition from Louise Staley MP for Ripon filled with factually incorrect and misleading information.

In the petition Staley has distributed throughout the electorate she states “*Premier Daniel Andrews wants to break up the CFA in Ripon.*” There are over 90 CFA brigades in Ripon, and not one is an integrated brigade affected by these reforms.

Staley then states, “*plans are designed to tear apart our local regional CFA Brigades who are volunteer-only bodies.*” The Fire Service Reform does not make any change to volunteer-only brigades. The only CFA brigades that are affected are 35 integrated stations that comprise both volunteer and career firefighters, where as I stated earlier volunteers will choose the best solution for them.

In the most irresponsible of statements Staley states, “*This means that our local brigades could face closure or union takeovers.*” This alarmist suggestion that 90 all-volunteer brigades could close is reckless and puts fear into vulnerable members of our communities. I was born and bred in Beaufort and there is no chance in 100 years this small town will ever have the urban and population growth that requires professional firefighters.

I had to reassure my elderly mother still living in Beaufort, that the Beaufort Fire Brigade is not going to close. Politically based statements are putting unnecessary fear in the community. Absolutely nothing will change for the 90 all-volunteer CFA brigades in Ripon. Staley has either little comprehension of the Bill or demonstrates exactly how political opportunism is damaging CFA career and volunteer firefighters and confidence in the community.

Under these reforms my employment will be moved to FRV. Industrial issues will then be a matter for the FRV Commissioner and the CFA can concentrate on issues for volunteers. Many volunteers I have spoken to embrace the idea that CFA will return to a volunteer only organisation. The focus of CFA and the Chief Officer will be 100% on strengthening and supporting volunteers without the industrial issues of career staff. Funding for CFA will be for volunteers only.

It beggars belief that VFBV oppose what many volunteers desire; a volunteer only organisation, free of the industrial issues plaguing CFA for decades and increasingly more so in recent years. During the Federal election the LNP and VFBV maintained the “Hands Off CFA” on the premise of maintaining CFA as a volunteer based organisation. It now seems VFBV want to continue subjecting CFA volunteers and career staff to more and more future division and turmoil. Neither career staff nor volunteers want this. This reform benefits career staff, volunteers and most importantly the community we serve.

I commend this Bill to the Fire Services Bill Select Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey Gordon Barker



Office of the CEO  
Headquarters  
8 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East Vic 3151  
Phone: [REDACTED]



Our Ref: FD:cp

16 March 2017

The Hon David Davis MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on the Environment & Planning  
Level 4, 55 St Andrews Place  
**EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002**

Dear Chair

### **INQUIRY INTO FIRE SEASON PREPAREDNESS (INQUIRY)**

I refer to sworn evidence of Mr Andrew Ford, Chief Executive Officer, and Mr Adam Barnett, Executive Officer, of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) taken by the Inquiry on 2 August 2016. During that evidence Mr Ford played a video to the Inquiry and confirmed it was similar to the version available on the VFBV website.

The video employs footage of spatial modelling developed by VFBV in conjunction with University of Melbourne's Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety, analysing incidents over a five-day period in January 2014.

The voice-over comments:

*"The spatial modelling looks at 5 days in January 2014 during which 1600 incidents required 30,000 personnel over 95% of them volunteer firefighters."*

The views appear to convey the message that 28,500 volunteers responded to 1600 fires in those five days. I am concerned that the presentation of this data in this form may be misleading.

Preliminary analysis of CFA data indicates that approximately 6,497 volunteers were dispatched during that period. This is consistent with previous CFA estimates of volunteers' attendance at major incidents.

It is also important to note at page 24 of Attachment 7 of the VFBV written submission to the Inquiry that VFBV relies heavily on such statistics.

*"Incident statistics are available to demonstrate the initial dependence on being able to mobilise and sustain high numbers of trained volunteer firefighters and also volunteers in incident management roles during peak load situations."*

CFA is concerned that the Inquiry and the public generally is provided with accurate data and analysis of that data which appropriately reflects the important contribution of volunteers during emergencies.



It is unlikely that CFA will be in a position to provide the outcome of our research into the data within the next weeks. I will however endeavour to expedite this work. We will provide our findings to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

In the meantime, if we can assist further please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely



**Frances Diver**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

cc: Andrew Ford, CEO VFBV



26<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

The Hon David Davis  
Chair  
Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning  
Level 4, 55 St Andrews Place  
East Melbourne, Vic. 3002

Dear Chair

**Re: VFBV Submission to the Parliament of Victoria Inquiry into Fire Season Preparedness 2016  
Response to CFA Rebuttal Submission**

I am writing to you in response to a rebuttal submission made by CFA CEO in letter dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017 to the 'Parliament of Victoria Inquiry into Fire Season Preparedness 2016'. In that letter the CFA CEO referenced spatial modelling developed by VFBV in conjunction with University of Melbourne Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety, analysing incidents attended by CFA over a five day period in January 2014. The letter (16<sup>th</sup> March 2017) claims VFBV submission appeared to convey a message that 28,500 volunteers responded to 1600 fires in those five days and that this message is misleading. The letter goes on to state CFA is concerned 'that the Inquiry and the public generally is provided with accurate data and analysis of that data which appropriately reflects the important contribution of volunteers during emergencies'. I am seriously concerned to ensure the Standing Committee does not interpret this inference by CFA as suggesting VFBVs claims about the essential role CFA volunteer capacity provides to Victoria's capacity to respond to major incidents is somehow incorrect or overstated.

It is wrong to suggest the VFBVs presentation of the data is misleading and it would be wrong for the committee to discount the importance of the observations made by VFBV and/or the strength of the data and evidence supporting this observation. I wish to make the following formal response to the CFA CEO letter.

- CFA incident statistics are readily available to demonstrate the dependence on CFA being able to mobilise and sustain high numbers of trained and experienced volunteers to perform firefighting, incident management, support and other roles.
- CFA incident and response data shows evidence of an increasing need to rapidly deploy and sustain large numbers of trained volunteer resources and a need for this surge capacity not just for high profile events such as the Black Saturday fires but each year for the numerous days when thousands of trained CFA volunteers need to sustain both local service delivery and also deploy to major emergencies throughout Victoria.
- In Victoria there is an intrinsic relationship, particularly in the context of CFA, between the approach to fire service delivery in outer metropolitan Melbourne and sustaining the volunteer capability required to prepare for, respond to and recover from major fires/emergencies. The vital importance of volunteer capacity from outer metropolitan Melbourne was well recognised by the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission and all major recent inquiries/reviews. Council Assisting the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission advised

that emergency management arrangements in Victoria should be managed cognisant of two key and interdependent aspects, these being how the changes improve Victoria's ability to (a) manage bushfire prone areas (including preparing for and responding to major fires); and (b) service Victoria's expanding urban fringe and growing regional towns.

- The CFA volunteers currently servicing outer metropolitan Melbourne contribute the large portion of Victoria's vital volunteer surge capacity that is required for peak load, high consequence major emergencies.
- With regard to the VFBV submission to the Standing Committee referencing a five day period in January 2014 (January 14<sup>th</sup> – January 18<sup>th</sup>):
  - The visual modelling provided to the Standing Committee referenced 30,000 'personnel'. For the sake of clarity this number represents the number of 'personnel deployments' not unique individuals. For example if an individual was deployed three times during the five day sample period this counts as three personnel deployments. The video of the sample five day period presented by VFBV to the Standing Committee is available on VFBV website and the voice over and text now clarifies '30,000 personnel deployments';
  - The actual headcount of unique individuals attending incidents captured in this five day time period is 11,909. A number of individuals attended multiple incidents during the five day period. 98% of these individuals are volunteers; just under 30% of personnel deployments were by volunteers from greater metropolitan Melbourne ;
  - The data quoted by VFBV for this five day period understates the actual volunteer activity in that it does not count volunteers who turned out to fire stations in response to the incident alert and ready to activate to the fire ground instantly if required. Nor do the figures count volunteers on standby at fire brigades throughout the state, a typical occurrence during periods of high fire activity.
- This data is drawn directly from CFA provided information. A limitation with the CFA data is that extracting information for this five day period does include incidents that started before the five day sample period or continued after the five day sample period; this complexity should not overshadow the core message which is about the reliance of Victoria's emergency management arrangements on the CFA volunteer based and fully integrated service model; the importance of being able to mobilise large numbers of trained and experienced volunteers to multiple large incidents at the same time being able to maintain service capacity back in the local brigade service area; the large reliance on volunteers from the greater metropolitan area to provide Victoria's essential surge capacity; and the reality that this is five day sample time period is typical of many busy periods each year.
- The CFA CEO's letter to your committee indicates that CFA calculates 6,497 unique volunteers were dispatched to fires during the five day sample period. Whilst VFBV data analysis suggests that the actual number is more like 11,909, rather than focus on the difference between these numbers, the point that must not be lost is that the evidence shows that sustaining large numbers of trained and experienced volunteers is essential to Victoria's emergency management capability and fire season preparedness. Maintaining and building CFA's volunteer capacity is essential for public safety. Anything that discourages or erodes Victoria's volunteer capacity now or in the future will jeopardise Victoria's fire season preparedness, diminish Victoria's capacity to deal with emergencies and will put the safety of Victorians at risk.
- It is widely accepted, and able to be evidenced by CFA incident data, that the CFA volunteer based service model including the integrated volunteer/paid CFA service model in Melbourne's growing urban fringe is fundamental to Victoria having the capacity to mobilise

the large numbers of highly trained volunteer firefighters required for peak load and surge capacity associated with major state level emergencies, including bushfires. Major incidents can occur at any time of the year and are more frequent during the summer months or 'fire season' as referenced in this inquiry.

- In response to evidence I have read and various public comment recently, VFBV is concerned that there may be plans afoot to make changes to the current CFA volunteer based and fully integrated service model, the structural arrangements between CFA and MFB and/or the service model to be applied in the greater metropolitan area and provincial centres. Any such planning would affect Victoria's fire season preparedness and therefore is directly relevant to your Committee. It would be extraordinary and extremely concerning if such planning was occurring without formal consultation with VFBV in accordance with the CFA Act. It would also be disturbing if such change was being contemplated without involving experts such as the CFA Chief Officer and the Emergency Management Commissioner. Sworn evidence to your Standing Committee by Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley stated that he is not doing any work on changing the CFA service model or boundaries or work on amalgamations between the CFA and MFB and that there is nothing on his remit to look at changing legislation or changing organisations. I am hopeful that your Committee is abreast of these issues and can provide assurance that the current system is to be maintained. Any change that discourages, displaces or erodes volunteer capacity and capability will jeopardise the safety of Victorians.

Yours Sincerely



Andrew Ford  
Chief Executive Officer





Louise Staley MP  
 Reply Paid 89759  
 MARYBOROUGH VIC 3465

Dear Resident,

**Daniel Andrews' attack on the CFA is relentless.**

His plans are designed to tear apart our local regional CFA Brigades who are volunteer-only bodies.

This means that our local brigades could face closure or union takeovers.

**This is further evidence Daniel Andrews is more determined to destroy the CFA, protect his union mates and put Victorian families at risk.**

Our CFA Volunteers are always there to protect us in times of emergency but are being sold out by Daniel Andrews.

**Now, more than ever, our CFA Volunteers need your support.**

If you support your local CFA, please fill in this survey and return to me via the reply paid section and let me know your views.

Louise Staley MP  
 Member for Ripon

Herald Sun, 6 May 2017

# Premier's fire secret

## Ministers slam hidden taskforce

A NEW split in Premier Daniel Andrews's Cabinet has emerged after ministers broke ranks over a secret taskforce set up to overhaul Victoria's fire services.

Changes to the CFA and VFD are being considered after federal law blocked Mr Andrews's UTE-friendly EBA being signed off last year because of the impact it would have on volunteers.

"Any such change involving volunteers would put a massive hole in Victoria's... capacity for fighting what are often multiple simultaneous emergency events around the state, by doing anything that..."

**EXPOSED:**

**Daniel Andrews plan to sell out volunteers by splitting the CFA.**

# TORN APART

Daniel Andrews' plan  
to destroy the CFA  
and its volunteers

## Premier Daniel Andrews wants to break up the CFA in Ripon

Do you support the forced break up of the CFA?  No  Yes

The Andrews Labor Government is of the view that you are unsafe if your local area is protected only by CFA Volunteers.

Do you agree?  No  Yes

Comments:

First Name

Surname

Address

Mobile

Email

I am a CFA Volunteer

I am a Career Firefighter

Brigade:

### Issues

Whilst all of these issues are important, please number (from 1 to 4) the four most important issues to you.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economy                | <input type="checkbox"/> Seniors                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roads & Infrastructure | <input type="checkbox"/> Environment              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law & Order            | <input type="checkbox"/> Water                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Transport       | <input type="checkbox"/> Taxes & Charges          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost of Living Pressures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Planning Decisions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jobs/Employment        | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Services       |



How to return this survey:

SMS a pic of survey to 0438 857 740