



James Beard [REDACTED]
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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
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Subject Fire Services Reform Select
Committee submission - James Beard

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Fire Service Reform Submission - James Beard.doc

Dear Fire Services Reform Select Committee,
Please find attached my submission for consideration by the committee. I hope it proves helpful.
Kind regards
James

Fire Services Reform Select Committee Submission

James Beard



Dear Fire Services Reform Select Committee.

I am a Leading Firefighter (LFF) working for the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, and have been part of the organisation since 2009. Please find below my submission to your Select Committee. I see this as a valuable opportunity to share why I believe reform of Victoria's fire services is necessary.

A bit about me

In addition to the substantial qualifications required to be an active professional firefighter, I hold specialist qualifications in the following:

- Control Unit Operation
- Ultra Large Pumper Operation
- Transporter Operation
- Rehabilitation Officer
- Emergency Medical Response

Before joining the brigade I worked in the Information Technology field in technical and management positions in both the private and public sectors.

Why I believe fire services reform is necessary

As a firefighter who has worked almost exclusively in the city and inner suburbs, I don't have a lot of experience with the urban fringe which is where the majority of the reforms are most desperately needed. I can, however, comment on the fact that to many MFB firefighters the situations regularly experienced by our professional CFA counterparts are difficult to comprehend.

Working in the city, we know that no matter what we are facing, there is always another appliance just a few minutes behind us. There is no substitute for having sufficient numbers of sufficiently qualified firefighters on scene. Be it to act as emergency relief for firefighters undertaking an internal attack or a rescue, or taking on secondary tasks (such as covering exposures or disconnecting gas and electricity supplies).

The alternative, that there is no guarantee that more help is on its way, would be unthinkable for city firefighters. Yet that is the exact situation CFA career firefighters on the urban fringe are facing regularly; appliances arriving with an unknown number of BA qualified crew, with just a driver, or not being able to turn out at all.

Volunteers do a tremendous job within the community, and I know many who are well trained and enthusiastic. They themselves will acknowledge though that there are limitations to what they can do. They experience difficulties being available during business hours, especially in areas where call out rates are increasing. As a result, residents in these populous areas are being provided a fire service that includes an element of uncertainty.

That this is the situation in built-up areas in Victoria in 2017 is an anachronism. With the prevalence of modern combustible materials, having ample firefighters on scene those few minutes earlier can make the difference between a fire being manageable, and the loss of a structure or even loss of lives. To think that situations like the Grenfell Tower incident could only happen in the Melbourne CBD ignores the increasing prevalence of medium rise residential sites on the urban fringe.

Victoria needs modern fire services that are aligned with the population growth of the areas they serve. Ensuring we have processes and resources in place to ensure that fire protection keeps pace with Victoria's changing needs and demographics will save lives and property. I believe these reforms are our best chance to address the issue in a tangible and meaningful way.

To conclude

I wholeheartedly support these reforms. Thank you for the opportunity to voice these issues that I believe are vitally important to the safety of all Victorians.

Kind regards
LFF James Beard