



**Joff van Ek**

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

1 attachment



INQUIRY INTO THE FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT

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

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

Please find attached my submission to the committee reviewing the fire service reform  
in Victoria.

Yours sincerely,

Joff van Ek

[Redacted signature line]

[Redacted contact information]

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

Dear Assistant Clerk Committees,

I am Leading firefighter Joff van Ek (registered number 10423) of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. I have been with the Fire brigade as a professional firefighter for over 10 years and have just completed a certificate IV in Public Safety (Firefighting supervision) and will be promoted to the rank of Station Officer on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017 and hold a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. I specialise in road rescue and have represented the MFB as a technical assessor and trainer with the Australasian Road Rescue Organisation teaching professional and volunteer firefighters from all over Australia, New Zealand and Asia. I have also represented the MFB and all emergency services in Victoria when I was awarded the Emergency Services Foundation scholarship to investigate "Rapid extrication of time critical patients involved in vehicle collisions" working with emergency and trauma services in Norway, The Netherlands and the United kingdom.

I currently live in Buninyong just south of Ballarat in western Victoria with my wife and two children. I have worked at Sunshine fire station for the past 10 years and recently at the Victorian Emergency Management Training Complex completing a 16 week promotional course to the rank of station officer. I will now be stationed at Eastern Hill fire station in the Melbourne CBD.

I am a proud member of my small community and have volunteered with my local CFA brigade for 5 years and before that served another 5 years in other CFA brigades at Mernda and Doreen. Recently I had to quit the CFA as a volunteer due to having a young family and work commitments as a career firefighter. I was no longer able to provide the time and commitment to volunteering locally which is very hard because any firefighter always wants to help their neighbour in the time of need. I left the brigade at the rank of 3rd Lieutenant and sadly since that time 18 months ago other leaders have followed. The Captain has stepped down from his position due to recently being married and having a young baby now, the 1st Lieutenant has also stepped down due to now having a fiancé and young baby, 2nd lieutenant has left as he took up a position as a career firefighter with CFA and has a young family now and the 4th Lieutenant has left due to having a terminally ill wife. Other senior members of the brigade including an ex CFA board member have left the brigade due to their work and family commitments and this is just my experience in my small country town. What I would like you to reflect on is this happens in every CFA brigade particularly ones in built up urban areas and small towns where work is no longer available and members have to travel for work. Brigades are falling apart everywhere not because people don't care but because other commitments in their life takes priority like providing for your family, paying the bills and

putting food on the table, being a volunteer is very rewarding but doesn't provide this. The claim of surge capacity has always amused me because in a large scale event everyone always chips in and helps out, but the day to day response suffers terribly and my local brigade is lucky to get 2 people under the age of 60 respond during business hours and if it wasn't for the support and guidance of the career staff in Ballarat city we would be in a very challenging space as a community.

I was selected in 2015 to be seconded from the MFB to the CFA as a Leading Firefighter and was stationed at Sunbury integrated fire station. During the 18 months I was also required to fill shifts across the state and work in most of the 35 integrated stations in the CFA. There are a lot of positives in the CFA and having been a long-term career firefighter with MFB and volunteer of similar time I am qualified to comment on the differences between the MFB and CFA. In the MFB I go to work and know that no matter what emergency call I respond to I will have a minimum of 7 career firefighters respond with me to ensure my safety on the fireground. When I worked at CFA it became evident that depending on the time of day, week or year would alter the response to emergency calls and there was never a guarantee of back up from volunteers in our own fire station and then surrounding stations that were purely volunteer stations. The volunteer firefighters at Sunbury were good people but like any volunteer they all had family, work and general life pressures that kept them away from the brigade sometimes for long periods of time and were unable to attend any training nights or emergency calls which lead to dramatic drop in skills and ultimately their safety and the safety of all firefighters at an emergency.

An example of how important it is to have career firefighter with a 90 second response time and a guaranteed second fire appliance with adequately qualified career firefighters is a house fire I attended in Sunbury. At 1807 hours just minutes after my platoon came onto night shift we were dispatched to a kitchen fire in Sunbury. The Sunbury Pumper was on scene at 1810 hours. The building was part of a complex that contained 5 free standing separate units. There was smoke billowing from the front of the unit and we were informed by other residents that there was an elderly disabled wheel chaired bound lady still inside the burning structure. Luckily we had 5 career staff firefighters aboard Sunbury Pumper. Myself and another firefighter stage had donned Breathing Apparatus (BA) and entered the smoke logged house to conduct a search in zero visibility. Another firefighter began an external firefight using a fire hose and the driver was getting a water supply from the street mains to our pumper. We located the elderly lady in a semi-conscious state on the couch noticed the phone near her hand, we were later informed that the elderly lady had called 000 at 1806 and the 000 operator had kept the line open to comfort her until we arrived. The rescue was performed at 1812 hours meaning that within 2 minutes of being on scene, both Fire fighters had donned BA, had a charged fire hose lines run out, conducted a search and located the victim. The reality of the incident was the victim was a very large disabled lady and being semi-conscious could

not assist us with her rescue. We managed to get her to the front door and were unable to go further as I suffered an injury to my back whilst attempting the rescue. My officer and another firefighter who were both medically trained took over care of the patient who was saying she could not breathe. Oxygen and a medical assessment was carried out on the patient until the ambulance arrived. We had to then re-enter the structure to continue the firefight when we had two more volunteers arrive to assist us. Although there were 4 fire appliances on scene at the fire we never had any other spare firefighters who were qualified in BA able to act as a rapid intervention team (Safety team) which we should have at any structure fire and no replacement teams for firefighter rotation and fatigue management. This was one of many emergencies where I can show similar circumstance of poor response and support for CFA career staff, which would never happen in the MFB area.

I have no doubt if it weren't for the quick response time, experience and skills that the elderly lady would have been a fire fatality statistic.

I returned to the MFB in January of 2017 to complete my studies as a Station Officer. I enjoyed my time and got a lot out of the experience and knowledge sharing but had to prioritise my safety as a firefighter physically and mentally so returned to serve with the MFB. I could not risk further injury to myself and the constant attack on my profession as a firefighter caused me and my family significant stress that was not healthy.

Going forward I hope you take all submissions into account and make the best decision for the Victorian community moving forward into a bold new direction to ensure the community and firefighters are protected.

Yours sincerely,

Joff van Ek

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