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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject fire service restructure

1 attachment



I support the proposed changes to the Victorian fire service.docx

To whom it may concern,
Please find attached my submission.
kind regards
Matt Mee

I support the proposed changes to the Victorian fire service.

I have outlined a few reasons for my support using my own personal experience. I have tried to keep my submission as short as possible. I could spend a long time explaining many reasons why I support the restructure. Here are my key reasons.

My introduction to CFA

Following in my grandfather and uncles' footsteps, I joined the CFA in January 2000 as a volunteer. The officers and members at the brigade I joined had a lot of respect for the knowledge and skills of career firefighters and that respect was reciprocated for the career firefighters for us giving up our time to help the community. I also feel that I need to mention that the brigade captain at the time impressed upon me that each member should make sure we put our own families first before the CFA, something that has stuck with me to this day.

I completed minimum skills training for wildfire, as well as low structure, breathing apparatus (BA), chainsaw operation. And service fuse pulling. After 2.5 years, I became a qualified crew leader.

During this time, I attended many emergency calls, both local and some as far as NSW.

Time-poor volunteers

What became apparent to me after I had moved on from my first employer was the lack of time I had to commit to the CFA and to my local community as well as the lack of support offered by my next few employers. I was working away from town and the few requests for late starts or time off were often refused by my employer due to work timeframes and costs of me not being around.

This was not a problem that I alone faced. The brigade as a whole struggled to get a truck out the door at all during the day time and often failed to get a crew qualified in BA, pump operations, driver, and a crew leader at any time.

The brigade took a few different approaches to attempt to overcome this problem including many different types of recruitment drives. Each recruitment drive attracted members however they also struggled with home and work commitments with most of them leaving within a few years.

One solution was to get the closest integrated station to respond to our calls, even though they were 20 minutes away, it was at least going to guarantee someone was coming.

The brigade also decided to ask the CFA if they could integrate the brigade next to us. Our brigade as well as other brigades in the area, including the brigade to be integrate, wrote to the CFA requesting the integration.

It took over 7 years from the time the first request was made until that brigade had 24hr career firefighters, with the final decision only coming after a fatal house fire.

This is unacceptable.

No one should have to die before change is considered.
Requests for help from volunteers should not be ignored

Differences in skills and knowledge

In 2011, I started as a CFA career firefighter

One thing that I immediately noticed was the difference in training. I was astounded at the amount of skills and knowledge that had not been expected or even offered to me in 11 years as a volunteer.

Having spent 6 years as a career firefighter I have recently been promoted to the rank of Leading Firefighter (LFF). This promotion only comes after an intensive 3-week course followed by 3 months of exhaustive training, then you must pass a week of 8 practical and theoretical assessments.

Some people compare LFF with Volunteer Lieutenants (LTs). Although volunteer LTs often complete a crew leaders course (which I completed as a volunteer) the two don't come close.

8-minute response time

There has been a lot of talk regarding the 8 minute on scene time.

From my personal experience, I can tell you that having a crew of 4 properly trained and experienced firefighters on scene within 8 minutes is crucial. Having a further 3 crew arrive increases the safety of the firefighters significantly.

I have been to many house fires where we were the first crews to commence the fire attack due to late arrival of the volunteer crews, or lack of appropriate qualifications of the volunteer crews (mostly BA and pump operation). Majority of the house fires I have been to where the arrival time has been greater than 8 minutes have resulted in either a fully involved house fire or damage so significant that that survivability of any occupants still inside has been unsustainable. I feel it is insensitive to the families affected to give specific details about these incidents.

I will however give a list of personal examples of times where the 8-minute arrival time have been integral to the fire being contained and the life of the occupants being saved or kept safe. The examples I have given would not have been possible with a greater response time.

- kitchen fire Meadow Heights, fire was contained to the kitchen
- bedroom fire Roxburgh Park, fire had just begun to spread into the roof space, the occupants were evacuated and the fire extinguished containing the damage to the room or origin and the immediate roof area above
- roof fire Craigieburn, the early arrival of crews enable the fire to be contained to a small portion of the roof space. The fire had begun to spread though the ducted a/c system
- laundry fire Geelong, the fire started in the laundry and was able to be contained to the laundry and the adjacent walls. The fire was seconds from spreading to nearby rooms

- kitchen fire Point Cook, a pot had caught on fire on the stove, when we arrived fire had started to spread from the range hood into adjacent wall. The fire was contained to the stovetop and range hood
- garage fire Williams Landing, fire was contained to the garage
- kitchen fire Caroline Springs, the range hood and a pot on the stove had caught fire, we managed to contain the fire to the kitchen
- bedroom fire Laverton, the fire had fully involved the room of origin upon arrival, we were able to contain the fire to that room
- house fire Sanctuary Lakes, house was fully involved upon arrival. We were able to rescue the 2 occupants from the second story balcony any later and they would not have survived
- garage fire Point Cook, the fire was able to be contained to the garage
- oven fire Point Cook, the oven and surrounding cupboard had caught fire, upon arrival we were able to evacuate the occupant and her children as well as contain the fire to the kitchen.
- Shop fire Point Cook, the fire was able to be contained to a single tenancy at the shopping centre
- House fire Point Cook, the fire started in the walk-in robe, it was able to be contained seconds from involving the entire bedroom.
- Kitchen fire Point Cook, a young boy had put a pot on the stove and forgotten about it, once it caught fire he attempted unsuccessfully to extinguish it. We were able contain the fire to the kitchen.
- Bedroom fire Deer Park, the fire started in a bedroom, the first arriving crews were able to rescue an occupant from inside the building and EMR was given. The occupant survived and the fire was contained to 2 rooms
- Kitchen fire Caroline Springs, the fire was able to be contained to the oven and the wall and cabinet adjacent to the oven
- Roof fire Caroline Springs, a flare had accidentally been shot into a roof space, upon arrival the flare had started fire to 2 roof timbers. The fire was contained to those 2 timbers
- House fire Newtown, a house fire that had multiple ignition point was able to be contained to the rooms of origin

Step-up arrangements

A step up is relocating manning and appliances to best cover gaps left due to appliance being committed at another emergency.

The CFA does not currently have a standard step up arrangement across the state.

From my personal experience step up arrangements vary greatly. From predetermined effective step ups which happen regularly in Geelong, to nothing at all.

I have personally been the first crew at a house fire that destroyed the entire house, threatened neighbouring residents, and required BA crews to search for fatalities rather than casualties. This fire would have been contained to a single room if appropriate step up

arrangement were in place. Enroute we watched the smoke column and fire develop, powerless to do anything as we were still a long way away. The fire when first reported would have been contained by the career firefighter that should have been stepped up to the station only 2.5 minutes away. Instead it took our crew 17 minutes to arrive first.

Road accident rescue

I have seen multiple occasions where early extraction of trapped patients would have seen them have a better chance at surviving. The current arrangements, with a 20-minute (often failed) response time are not acceptable. Firefighting appliances should be able to extricate trapped patients if Ambulance Victoria (AV) determine they need immediate extrication.

Fire district review panel

There is currently no black and white process for reviewing or deciding when a brigade needs to go from fully volunteer to being allocated career firefighters. I believe the proposed review panel will be responsible for saving lives

There is also no CFA state-wide process for placing fire stations in the most appropriate location to ensure full coverage of an area and the most efficient use of the asset.