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To Consultation/DTF@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject fire service reform submission

1 attachment



fire services submission.docx

To whom it may concern,
please find attached my submission to the standing committee on fire service reform .
please treat is as confidential .

regards

Paul Brislin



To whom it may concern,

I have been in the fire service since May 2005 as both a volunteer and career firefighter and still perform both roles today.

As a volunteer, I have performed the role of a firefighter but also have been part of the Brigade management team, which I have contributed countless hours to the ongoing management and running of the brigade. Over the past 12 years it has given me a great insight to the issues around recruitment and service delivery to the community from my brigade.

I have been a career firefighter with CFA since 2007 again delivering the core responsibilities of that role. I'm currently performing the role of Leading Firefighter with CFA.

These above roles have some similarity, though far from being the same, the core role of service delivery to community is the same, yet the demands and expectations are quite different.

As a Volunteer I am expected to respond to incidents when available, yet as a career firefighter of course I have no choice but to respond when called.

I 100% support a mixed model of volunteer and career fire fighters supporting communities across the state. It is without doubt a very cost effective model and proven model.

Fire services must be reliable, effective, cost efficient and accountable for service delivery to the community.

To this end, I support major reforms to our current model for fire service delivery in Victoria. The current model is out dated and in need of a fresh outlook.

Fire services must change and evolve to service community expectation. Volunteerism is not as prevalent in society as it once was, small farming communities have become suburbia and those communities have grown in population, yet the same fire service model remains.

The adversarial industrial environment that has existed for the entire time I have been a Career Firefighter has had a negative effect on morale and culture within CFA.

In my opinion fault lays across all stakeholders, but this must be resolved once and for all to foster positive working relationships between all in the interest of the broader community.

I would like you to consider my point of view / opinion on the following issues that are outlined in your terms of reference re the proposed fire service reform in Victoria:

Impact on fire service deliver across Victoria

- I believe the proposed FRV and CFA model will have potential to increase service delivery to the community through better use of resources through consolidating all career firefighters into one entity. It will also empower the 35 integrated Brigades, which will become CFA volunteer brigades in their own right. In my view this is a positive for volunteers.
- FRV must take the best from CFA and MFB career fire fighting practices and deliver in a new organisation.
- Any change in fire service model for Victoria must introduce some in dependant oversight for service delivery to community. In the past patch politics have compromised service delivery to the community and still do to this day. We must get the closest and quickest resources to community members in need. I've seen numerous examples fire trucks closer by time not responded to events based on outdate response models that rely too heavily on human decisions in determining response.
- Fire services must be flexible to respond to the dynamic nature of emergencies. Surge capacity from volunteers must be encouraged, but it is not a given and is not sustainable in the long term campaign events.
- All fire services in this state should come under one controlling entity. The head of any fire service organisation must come from an operational background. The proposed FRV commissioner role would seem appropriate.
- Any change in fire service model must retain for both FRV and CFA appliance capability typology as exist today. For example all regional FRV stations should have dedicated appliance capability to enable response to grass and bushfire events separate to any CFA response, and conversely CFA brigades that are supported by the proposed FRV retain structural response capability. This will mean no loss if service to the communities and in some cased potentially even increase capability. Interoperability must be retained between the two services.
- It must be enshrined in legislation that an ongoing review process is in place for service delivery needs of growing communities. If not we may find ourselves in the same situation as we are in now in some 50-70 years.

Effect on volunteer engagement and participation in fire service delivery

- I don't see a major change based on the limited information provided so far, if anything there may be a positive effect on volunteerism and those wishing to participate in fire services.
- Under the proposed changes current integrated brigades will be split into FRV and CFA. This will allow the volunteers at those brigades to regain their identity in my opinion. They will again have the position of captain available to them and be in charge of their own destiny so to speak. The FRV firefighters (previously CFA) will in my opinion continue to work and respond with these brigades as happens now only that we will be separate entities.
- Volunteerism appears to be in decline due to a range of factors. (Work life balance, cost of living pressures, demand on volunteers time for compliance and training)
- In my volunteer brigade due to these pressures and peoples availability, it is difficult to guarantee a response during work hours. Even more difficult is to guarantee a defined skill set on the fire ground from volunteer brigades. More career firefighter support is a good thing for communities to help support the volunteer brigades in response as well as supporting the businesses that support volunteers whilst at calls. It should be a key consideration to return volunteers to their families and workplace as soon as possible by combating incidents efficiently.
- Over use of this volunteer resource can have negative social effects such as impacts on relationships, negative employer/employee relationships. Volunteer brigades should be better support by career staff when workloads increase with growth.
- I personally, will still support my local brigade as a volunteer when my free time allows, but I cannot guarantee my response to emergencies.

Short and long term cost impact on fire service provision

- Potential back of office savings should be explored in the medium to long term.
- Short term cost impact for change of livery and uniform.
- Asset re-allocation cost in relation to appliances?
- Asset acquisition costs for replacement or new appliances, stations for 35 CFA brigades?
- Commonality of equipment should present savings and efficiencies.
- Better buying power for equipment acquisition with one large organisation, though CFA and FRV must work together to present savings to the state in expenditure.
- There needs to be a study on the cost to the private sector economy on what emergency service volunteerism is costing in lost productivity etc. and hopefully get a clearer picture of the cost benefit of career firefighters verses volunteers. The point I'm trying make, is that volunteers do have a fiscal and social cost associated to their activities, whilst many argue the cost of career firefighters is high, we need to understand the full picture.
- Employers of volunteers whom they allow to respond to incidents must be better supported with career firefighter responded where possible to facilitate efficient fire-ground operations. Every volunteer response the employer supports comes at a fiscal cost to their business.

Underlying policy rationale

- It is imperative to community safety and service delivery that independent oversight must be given in determining response areas as demand grows to meet community needs.
- The industrial environment around EBA negotiations has been toxic for a number of years and cannot be allowed to continue. In my view I believe fault lays on all sides, state politics, organisational issues, volunteer representative bodies, unions and now Federal politics.
- The politicisation of fire services cannot be allowed to continue. Community pay for this service and expect governments to provide an efficient seamless model giving the closest and most appropriate response to incidents. In my opinion this could be done better.

These are my person views and not to be reflected as a view of the organization I work for. I would like my confidentiality protected but am happy for the content of this submission to be discussed at the Standing Committee into fire service reform.

Regards
Paul Brislin
Leading Firefighter



