



"Paul ." [REDACTED]
07/07/2017 01:31 PM

To Consultation/DTF@DTF,
io3@ufuvic.asn.au
cc
bcc
Subject Submission for Firefighters'
presumptive rights compensation and
fire services legislation amendment
(reform) Bill 2017

1 attachment



SubmissionPaulconforti.pdf

I wish to make a submission for the Inquiry into the firefighters' presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment (reform) Bill 2017. Please find attached my submission. I wish not to publish my address or phone number on the submission, but will attach to my email for contact if required

Paul Conforti.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Vic.

Thankyou most gratefully.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to you today in regards to your;

Inquiry into the firefighters' presumptive rights compensation and fire services legislation amendment (reform) Bill 2017

My name is Paul Conforti and I have been a Career Firefighter with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade for 2 years. I am currently based at East Keilor fire station.

I write to you to voice my unique experience of being;
 a CFA Volunteer for ~7 years (both at an all volunteer station that worked with integrated stations, and later at an integrated station);
 a Project Firefighter with DSE (now DELWP) working along side several other fire services from South Australia (RFS and Forestry SA) and CFA Volunteers;
 a private company Firefighter with Transfield, (now called Broadspectrum);
 and now a Career Firefighter with the MFB working along side CFA Career Firefighters, and CFA Volunteers.

I am extremely proud of all of these positions, even if I have found that in my current career sometimes this history can make me the butt of a joke or two. My interest in firefighting has always been aimed at the protection and care of the community, and I feel extremely lucky I can do this while also calling it my career. My family has always had a strong community focus, my mother and two uncles in nursing, my late step father a paramedic, and my grandma the chief medical advisor for Victoria.

I write to express my support for the proposed fire services reform. My reasoning and points I would like to highlight include;

While it is not always apparent to the community where and how firetrucks gets to them, it is however important that they arrive. The importance of an appropriate number of firefighters at a call is also paramount. I feel blessed that I always know that when I arrive on scene, normally within 5 to 8 minutes, that the most time I ever have waited for a second crew has never been longer than a couple of minutes. That has always guaranteed that I have at least three more firefighters to support me in my duties, allowing safe searching of a building (with two firefighters entering together and always together incase either is hurt or lost), and an additional two outside able to assist if a patient is to be rescued, or if a firefighter is hurt or injured. I also know that as soon as my Officer reports that I have gone inside that structure a third truck and crew have been dispatched and are only minutes away to support me. Or if the officer has deemed it required they will ask for more trucks and crews and we will receive them. I know that if as the driver I am delayed by a train crossing, bad traffic or just some driver who has no idea to get out of the way, that a second truck from another direction is always on its way and will arrive in a more timely manner.

I feel it is not acceptable (and it is NOT internationally acceptable practice) to have 3 firefighters arrive at a fire scene and be put in the situation to be required to attempt a rescue when one is responsible for the operation of the Pumper (fire truck supplying the water), one is the Officer (running the job) and the third is responsible to enter a burning structure, where visibility is near nothing, drag a hose, recover an unconscious patient and extinguish a fire all in one giant feat of selfless courage. I feel it is only fair that CFA Career Firefighters receive the same safety considerations as I do, and the community in CFA areas receive the same fire protection as those in my area do. For crews to know that 100% of the time another crew is only minutes behind them, or barely in front of them, and the community can expect 7 firefighters minimum within a timely fashion so as to be able to implement a rescue, contain and extinguish a fire and minimise damage and trauma. NOT that when after 6 minutes and the closest volunteer brigade has not responded that another volunteer brigade is again paged and may, or may not respond leaving 3 firefighters to continue to battle a fire, which may be worsening, and be forced (morally) to put themselves at risk, when entering a structure to search it as a single firefighter.

Another point of concern is the safety issues that arises due to differing equipment (levels and types) amongst the different services. Simple matters like CFA and MFB using different couplings (joiners) on fire hoses. Using different brands of radio that can not communicate with each other, requiring the duplication of radios on trucks. The requirement to respond two vehicles and crews to supply Compressed Air Cylinders to a job that both CFA and MFB are at (as we use different types of cylinders). The complicated way in which fire trucks are responded which has resulted in several jobs that a specialised truck (a Ladder Platform) from Geelong is responded to Werribee when the same truck with an MFB sticker is idle at Footscray, or a type of truck (Teleboom) from Corio is responded that is also located at Sunshine, responding to Werribee/Hoppers Crossing area. The response of seven crews, two MFB trucks, four CFA trucks and a CFA vehicle to a "Gas bottle fire, now out" call. These are not isolated occurrences.

As a volunteer I feel for those volunteers that also support their local career staff, they work hard in their jobs, and maintain their family obligations but are also asked to respond to hundreds if not thousands of calls a year (at the stations I volunteered at, that was in excess of 3 a day at an integrated station and once a day when at an all volunteer brigade), attend brigade training weekly, and attend social/community commitments. I ask, would your employment allow you to leave work this often? Would you be able to attend the local station in under 6 minutes from your work? Would your family be happy to loose you several days a week? Is this acceptable in todays day and age? I am of no illusion that we can supply paid firefighters to every corner of the state, but maybe we can implement a trigger point that results in consideration for this? Density? Call numbers? Risk?

It is my opinion that separating Career and Volunteer services will actually help improve volunteer response and operation. If a call comes in and it is a minor fire, or a false alarm, why utilise the Volunteers unnecessarily? Why not respond the volunteers when a job is a job? let them get on with their life when its a nothing call, and when we need numbers, bring them onto the job. Make their contribution meaningful and realistic. There will always be a need for Volunteers, but it should not be at the expense of their welfare nor should it be an unrealistic expectation. It is not the same to expect a volunteer to attend 1000 calls a year, many a waste of their time, versus organising and dedicating a week in advance to be on a strike team fighting a bush-fire or attending a going structure fire.

I would like to make it clear that as both a volunteer and a Career Firefighter, I have not seen any evidence that this merger will affect any part of the volunteer service of the CFA. I find it difficult to hear the constant complaining from some volunteer corners that threaten the community and state with leaving CFA when I know as a volunteer, for every one person in a brigade several others are on a waiting list happy to be trained and turn out. While Career Firefighters have been the brunt of Boys Club accusations, I have more often seen this in volunteer brigades where officers and captains are selected via votes and popularity, not by skill, experience or knowledge. What frustrated me during my time as a volunteer, prior to any service in any paid firefighter role, was the way older members of brigades held onto positions, making it impossible to recruit more members, while themselves not contributing as an operational firefighter. These were same firefighters that spend their time complaining that the brigade attends less calls due to staff, or complains that staff members only want volunteers to turn up to pack up a job. Well let me tell you, as a staff member I pack up EVERY job I attend, I have no choice and as a volunteer, I have NEVER seen a staff member stand by as others packed up a job. These constant attacks on Career Firefighters makes for a toxic environment where career and volunteer interact, but those launching these attacks, those with the aforementioned attributes are in fact those that live in areas that have no staff contact at all. These attacks also diminish the public's trust and faith in Victorian's Firefighters both career and volunteer.

I thank you for the time, and am most gratefully for your consideration of my submission,
Yours, Paul Conforti BSc (Hons).