



Philip Grey [REDACTED]

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

2 attachments



FRV Submission.docx



ATT00001.htm

Please see attached.

Sent from my iPad

By email: consultation@dpc.vic.gov.au

Dear assistant Clerk of Committees,

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

I am Philip Grey. I am a Station Officer employed by the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB), Melbourne. I have been employed as a career firefighter for fifteen years.

Qualifications:

- Bachelor of Applied Science
- Certificate IV in Training and assessment
- Certificate IV in Firefighting Operations

Specialist MFB qualifications:

- Specialist firefighting appliances
- High angle rescue
- Confined space rescue
- Urban search and rescue (building / structural collapse)
- Trench collapse rescue
- Initial impact assessment
- Fire investigation and analysis

Awards:

- The National Medal – for diligent and long service to the community
- The National Emergency Medal – for sustained service to the Victorian community during the 2009 Black Saturday fires
- Metropolitan Fire Brigade Long Service and Good Conduct Medal

I reside in Glen Iris and I am currently working at Hawthorn Fire Station as the Officer in Charge of “A” Platoon. Previous positions held within the MFB include being a firefighter at Eastern Hill Fire Station (2 years), a firefighter and specialist rescue technician at Richmond Fire Station (7 Years), recruit instructor and specialist skills instructor (3 ½ years) and full time fire investigator (2 ½ years). I have held the rank of Station Officer for the last 6 years.

Prior to my employment as a career firefighter, I was employed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment as a forest assessor and forest firefighter for 9 years. I was also a State Emergency Service Victoria volunteer for 10 years.

I am writing this submission in support of the proposed reforms to the Victorian fire services, and to explain how these reforms will have a positive and important effect on the fire investigation arrangements in the State of Victoria.

All fire services in the State of Victoria are obliged (under legislation) to determine the cause of fire, specifically for structure fires and fatal fires. This responsibility is delegated to the Officer in Charge (OIC) at a fire scene. If the OIC is unable to determine the cause of a fire, or the fire involves a fatality, qualified fire investigators will be responded to the scene to determine the cause.

Fire causation data is used for many important community safety initiatives. The results of fire investigations have a direct influence on community fire safety campaigns, fire safety education, community and aged care standards and regulations, building codes and regulations, materials safety standards, dangerous goods storage, electrical safety standards, appliance recalls and more. Fires that remain 'undetermined' are detrimental to the community.

The MFB is the only Victorian fire service that employ's nationally accredited firefighters and officers in a dedicated Fire Investigation and Analysis Unit. This unit maintains a 24 hours, 7 days a week response capability with three fully equipped response vehicles. The MFB's Fire Investigation and Analysis Unit currently determines cause for over 95% of fire scenes that it investigates. The MFB Fire Investigation Unit currently investigates in excess of 200 undetermined and fatal fires per year. All other fires attended by the MFB have the cause determined by the OIC.

In the metropolitan fire district, two fire investigators respond to large fires and fatal fires immediately. Two fire investigators respond to undetermined fires immediately during daylight hours or at first light for overnight fires. Responding to a fire scene with two fire investigators offers advantages. Fire scenes are very dangerous workplaces and working with a partner offers increased personal safety. Two qualified investigators facilitate a more robust determination and fire investigation report, reducing the level of scrutiny should any determination be challenged in legal proceedings. Two fire investigators on a scene also enables the MFB to closely align its investigation processes with Victoria Police Forensic Services Arson Chemists.

Fire cause determination may be accidental, electrical, undetermined or suspicious. A fire cause determination of suspicious means the relevant OIC or fire investigator has reason to believe a crime was committed in relation to the fire starting. The fire scene is then declared to be a crime scene and when the fire is "cold", control of the scene is handed to Victoria Police for investigation by Victoria Police Forensic Services. In the metropolitan fire district the responding fire appliance or the responding fire investigators will remain on the scene to maintain scene continuity and maintain evidence until a police guard is established or until Victoria Police Forensic Services arrives on scene. MFB fire investigators will also remain on scene to assist Victoria Police Forensic Investigators to process the fire scene however we will not write a fire investigation report as a suspicious fire is the jurisdiction of Victoria Police. This maintenance of scene continuity and evidence integrity is vitally important for Victoria Police when trying to secure a court conviction.

Responding two qualified fire investigators to a fire scene at short notice places an almost impossible strain on volunteer fire investigators. Volunteer fire investigators are required to source vehicles and equipment prior to responding to a fire scene. As a result, volunteer fire investigators often have a delayed response and work alone. This is physically dangerous, and exposes the volunteer to greater scrutiny should their determination be challenged in legal proceedings. Processing a fire scene alone is also significantly more time consuming. The time, danger and consequential stresses involved in processing a fire scene alone, is unfair on a volunteer fire investigator, their family and employer.

Nationally accredited Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) career firefighters, working as full time fire investigators, would be better placed to support volunteer investigators, thereby reducing the strain on their families and employers. Career fire investigators will be available to respond 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to any fire within FRV boundaries. Career fire investigators would also be well placed to provide on going training opportunities and operational support to volunteer fire investigators.

The families and employers of volunteers already bare an enormous emotional and financial cost so volunteer firefighters can do their valuable work. Expecting a fire appliance crewed by volunteers to spend more time maintaining scene continuity and preserving evidence is unreasonable. Volunteers have their own families and businesses, or have obligations to their employer. As a result, fire scenes are left unattended for varying periods of time prior to the arrival of a fire investigator. FRV career firefighters will be well placed to reduce this strain and inconvenience on the families and employers of volunteers within FRV boundaries, and at the same time, increase service delivery outcomes to partner agencies like Victoria Police.

This reform will help standardize the fire service fire investigation response across the greater population of Victoria. Standardizing the fire investigation response across Victoria will produce more robust investigation results, and more accurate data to feed into various standards, regulations and legislation. This will help increase public and firefighter safety in the longer term. Highly trained and experienced career fire investigators will have the opportunity to provide a greater level of training and operational support to volunteer investigators. Career and volunteer fire investigators, working together, will be able to provide a greater and more reliable service to the Victorian community and partner agencies like Victoria Police.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Grey.

