



Rob Jones [REDACTED]

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

1 attachment



reform submission.rtf

Please find attached my submission in support of reform into the fire service.

Regards

Rob Jones

Dear members

Thank you for the opportunity to have input and show my support for the reform of the fire service in Victoria.

I am a Station Officer in CFA and have worked for the organization for over 16 years. In this time I have worked predominantly in Geelong, Corio and Belmont. I have also spent 12 months as a recruit instructor. I am a qualified driving instructor and assessor (volunteers and staff), qualified aerial assessor (external), and qualified Workcover Elevated Work Platform assessor (external). I also have qualifications in Road Rescue, High Angle Rope Rescue, Urban Search and Rescue, Confined Space Rescue and Trench Rescue. All these qualifications mean I work extensively with staff and volunteers.

One of the biggest factors I see and is necessary in the fire service reform is the minimum of 7 members on the fire ground. This is something that has been wrongly interpreted in the media and by some parties in an attempt to anger volunteers and the public. The fact is that 7 members are required on the fire ground for safe structural firefighting operations to occur and under our current structure does not happen. The break down being -

1 x incident controller

1 x pump operator

2 x 1st breathing apparatus crew (BA)

2 x 2nd breathing apparatus crew/ Rescue crew

1 x exposure line operator/ external assistant = 7 qualified members

These numbers are essential to safe fireground operations.

I am heavily involved in the physical component of CFA career firefighter recruitment. One of the entry test requirements is dragging a 72kg 'dummy' (the Australian census has the average female weight at 71kg). I recently had discussion with stakeholders as to the necessity of the dummy drag component as it has been suggested it is removed. I explained that it is more that a firefighter would need to rescue their BA team member, therefore leaving 1 initial rescuer. For me, I am 100kg, plus 20kg of equipment, that means my partner would need to drag out a lot more than 72kg and would in all probability need the 2nd BA/ Rescue crew ready outside. 7 is a critical number.

I highlight this because of the way our current dispatching system works and will provide you with a recent example. Whilst working at Geelong City Fire Station we received a call in the middle of the day to support Geelong West volunteers to a house fire in the their area, it was believed the resident was still inside and there had been multiple calls from the public. As per local arrangements only, Geelong City responded 2 appliances with a total of 5 firefighters (still short of 7), most areas are only asked to respond 1 appliance (3 or 4 firefighters) and it is hoped that the volunteers will respond the rest of the firefighters to make up the required numbers. On this occasion only 1 volunteer responded for the

entire incident and he didn't respond in a truck only a 4WD with no firefighting capability. Due to this lack of response a 3rd brigade had to be paged which happened to be Corio staff and they provided the back up crews. The problem with this is that the accepted standard time to prevent a structure fire 'flashover' (the point where the house/room becomes fully involved and survival virtually impossible) is less than 8 minutes. The Geelong City appliances were out of the station in 90 seconds, 4 minutes later they were told that the Geelong West volunteers had not responded and asked if a further brigade was needed, had the next responding brigade also been a volunteer brigade they would be given 4 minutes to respond plus travel time, taking this well outside the 8 minutes. As it was with the Corio Staff crew they were the 4 delayed minutes, plus 90 seconds to respond plus travel time. Fortunately for the crews nobody was inside and the Corio support was nearby, in too many instances this is not the case. Under the fire service reform, 7 qualified career firefighters would have been responded in the first instance, without delay to all jobs staff attend.

A further example of this is on the Bellarine Peninsula. The Bellarine Peninsula has a population of approximately 55,000 people, many of whom do not work in the area during the day and therefore draining the number of volunteers able to respond to calls. The senior volunteers in the area have identified this and requested that an appliance from Geelong City (30km away) be responded to assist the Ocean Grove staff who are also responded to calls in their area. This is a credit to those volunteers for truly putting their community first, unfortunately this arrangement is not the norm. Under the proposed fire service reform this dispatch arrangement would be automatic. Volunteers are increasingly working and moving away from many of these locations to be closer to the city, therefore increased staff response is becoming more critical. However under current CFA conditions this will never happen.

There has been a concerted effort throughout the last few years from certain media outlets and political parties to demonize professional firefighters, we have been lied about in all arenas, we have been branded 'union thugs', 'scum' and 'dogs' amongst other things, I am none of those things. I am a professional firefighter, I am a father of 3, I work hard to support my family. I have an uncle that has a cancer, most probably as a result of his career as a firefighter. I concede that I have an increased chance of also getting cancer because of my chosen career. What I don't accept is being hamstrung in attempting to make an unsafe, dynamic workplace as safe as we can by people with other agendas.

This saga has been fueled by emotive and false statements by people in power that should know better. It's time to deal with the facts. My local member, Andrew Katos MP, has sent out a flyer with statements like, 'Torn Apart – Daniel Andrews plan to destroy the CFA and its volunteers' 'His plans are designed to tear apart our local regional CFA Brigades who are volunteer-only bodies. This means that our local brigades could face closure or union takes over', these are bold face lies being sold to the public by a politician! This is wrong and the community deserves better from their elected. My question to Mr Katos is, how is this happening? A question he has been asked but can not answer. Brigades in his area such as Highton will not have staff put in them, they do not attend enough calls to warrant staff and they have 2 neighboring staff stations that support them where necessary. It is time to fix this service, to eliminate the lies, to work on the facts not the emotion. We need to be a modern fire service that the public deserve and not just the one they THINK they are getting.

Thank you for this opportunity and your time

Rob Jones, Station Officer, Corio Fire Station, [REDACTED]